

Arts Groups Worry About Visa Fee Plan

A proposal by the **Department of Homeland Security** (DHS) to raise visa application fees is facing opposition from arts organizations in Pittsburgh and across the country.

DHS has proposed that the application fee for a P visa (which is for acts arriving in the US to perform temporarily) will be increased by 251%, from the present rate of \$460 to \$1,615.

“For the overwhelming majority of artists, [these changes will make] touring the US now impossible,” reggae record label executive Adam Gross told Dance Hal Mag’s Claudia Gardner. “You already have to pay for all these

flights; you already have to pay to get your crew around, for a bus or some sort of vehicle; for hotels. You have to pay 30 percent withholding taxes. So, when you get paid per show, they have to withhold 30 percent for the US government before whatever you are getting.”

International artists are often employed by the region’s arts groups, including seven dancers with the **Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre** (PBT). The fee increase “would affect the vibrancy of the arts in general and [specifically] the vibrancy of our company,” PBT’s Kathryn Giggler told James Reynolds of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

A division of DHS called the United States Citizen & Immigration Services (USCIS) processes overseas visas. The USCIS relies on processing fees for most of its budget. The application process can take months and involve appeals.

Even though the increase hasn’t yet been approved, just announcing the plan has had an impact. “The Leicester band Easy Life cancelled their upcoming US tour due to the increased prices,” reports MXDWN.com’s Cait Stoddard.

Read Reynolds’ full article by clicking [here](#).

Local Author & Florida Book Banning

The culture war being waged by Florida Governor and presidential aspirant Ron DeSantis briefly included the work of a Pittsburgh author.

The writers’ organization **PEN America** continues updating its list of books being [banned in Duval County, Florida](#). PEN America was formed in 1922 as Poets, Editors & Novelists of America. Its mission is to support free expression through the advancement of literature and human rights. Duval County is home to Jacksonville.

In December 2022, PEN America alerted author Jonah Winter that his book, [Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates](#) was included in the ban. Published in 2005, it is a children’s picture book about Clemente’s groundbreaking baseball career and hu-

manitarian efforts. Winter speculated to [WESA-FM’s Bill O’Driscoll](#) that references to the racism Clemente faced may have been the reason for the banning. The book returned to the shelves by mid-February.

On April 22, 2022, DeSantis signed the Individual Freedom Act into law. Often called the “Anti-Woke Law,” the act regulates what is taught in schools particularly regarding race, sex and national origin. A federal judge struck down aspects of the law in August 2022, but certain provisions remain.

“Of the books removed from Duval County,” reports [NBC News’ Nicole Axevedo](#), “more than 30 were by Latino authors and illustrators or centered Latino

characters and narratives. Among these were *Celia Cruz, Queen of Salsa* by Veronica Chambers and Julie Maren, *Sonia Sotomayor (Women Who Broke the Rules Series)* by Kathleen Krull and Angela Dominguez and Winter’s Clemente book.”

Supporters of the bans include the Miami-Dade chapter of **Moms for Liberty**. Its leader, Eulalia Maria Jimenez, called one book designed to teach teen girls about having a health body image and understanding sexuality [[Let’s Talk About It](#) by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan – ed.]

Continues on Page 3



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Public Names New MD

Shaunda Miles McDill has been named the new managing director of the **Pittsburgh Public Theater** (PPT), the board announced on February 2/

“We conducted a comprehensive regional and national search and Shaunda’s extensive experience in arts administration and the non-profit sector coupled with her innovative, strategic thinking made her an outstanding candidate,” the PPT’s Angela Blanton said in the press release. “She is committed to



advancing the arts both locally and nationally and we’re confident her exceptional leadership will guide The Public to a successful future.”

McDill has an undergraduate degree from **Dartmouth College**, where she studied under Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson, and a Master of Fine Arts degree in theater management from **Yale University**. She has worked for various theater companies from New York City to Pasadena. Most recently, McDill has been a program officer at the **Heinz Endowments**.

Art Fest Settlement

A settlement has been reached between billionaire Thomas Tull and an event company over last year’s Maple House Music & Arts Festival, reports WESA-FM’s Bill O’Driscoll.

The single day festival took place May 2022 at Hartwood Acres. The parties cross-sued each other over allegations concerning the budget and missing funds.

Additional information is available in [O’Driscoll’s article](#).

City Art Groups Take Shape

Mayor Ed Gainey’s changes to the city’s public art supervision [[See Pittsburgh Applause, January 2023](#) – ed.] is moving forward, reports Bill O’Driscoll for WESA-FM.

On Tuesday, February 14, the city council approved the initial seven

nominees to the newly created Art & Civic Design Commission. These included acclaimed painter Tom Mosser and architect Lisa Carver.

Details are available by reading [O’Driscoll’s full story](#).



PP Cans Performances

The Pittsburgh Playhouse was forced to cancel performances of the musical “Newsies” after a portion of the scenery collapsed followed by water damage caused by the sprinkler system.

Attendees and other ticket buyers have been offered refunds. No cause has been released at press time.

Continued from Page 1

as “pornographic” in an interview with [WFTS-TV](#). “The public school system is not the platform to be exposing [teens] to this, much less without the parent’s awareness.”

Also on the list is the picture book [The Boy of a Three-Year Nap by Dianne Snyder](#) about a Japanese boy’s dream of being a cartoonist; [Daddy, Pappa and Me by Leslea Newman](#), a board book about a gay couple and their son; and [At](#)

Author & Book Banning

[the Mountain’s Base, a historical fiction by Traci Sorell](#) about Native Americans.

It isn’t just books about race, gender or sexuality that are on the list. [Martini Salkin](#) reports for the Religion News Service (RNS) that among those banned is [Chik Chak Shabbat by Mara Rockcliff](#). The book explains the Jewish Sabbath to preschoolers.

You can see PEN America’s full list by [clicking here](#).

NEP Debuts Virtual Tech

Dutch media conglomerate **Talpa Network** has debuted a unique new television series with the help of Pittsburgh-based technology firm **NEP Group**.

That series is “Avastars,” which debuted February 24 on Talpa’s flagship channel, SBS6. A press release explains that “the real and virtual world are brought together in a spectacular way through the combination of live motion capture technology and augmented reality.”

“Avastars” is a music and dance talent show in which the contestants wear a special suit and helmet to capture their movements and facial expressions which are then translated live on screen as an avatar. More than thirty cameras are utilized.

“What started as a wild idea has grown into a spectacular entertainment program with its own unique production process,” Tapa’s John de Mol told *Variety*. “We have not only developed a new format, but also a new technique. This allows us to develop multiple formats with this technology.”

For more information, read NEP Group’s [official announcement](#).



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Pittsburgh Sports Net’s Future In Doubt

Regional sports networks (RSNs) were once among the hottest properties in the media and entertainment world. No more.

The most prominent of these is AT&T SportsNet, which is owned by **Warner Bros. Discovery** (WBD) and includes a regional network serving Pittsburgh. *The Hollywood Reporter’s* Alex Weprin reports that on Friday, February 24, the parent company “sent a letter to the sports teams whose games it carries that it does not have the cash to pay upcoming rights fees, and that WBD will not fund the shortfall. The company proposes to hand control of the RSNs over to the teams and leagues and warns that if it can’t execute on a transfer, Chapter 7 bankruptcy is on the table.”

What is now AT&T SportsNet can be traced back to 1979 and the formation of SportsChannel. Over the decades it has undergone mergers, ownership changes and rebranding.

The decision puts local teams in a challenging situation. *Sports Business Journal’s* John Ourland reports that the **Pittsburgh Pirates**

“bring in an average of around \$60 million per year from” the RSN. “It’s a real and significant risk,” team owner Bob Nutting told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. “Have no idea where it’s going to end up.”

AT&T SportsNet isn’t the only company in trouble. In mid-February, **Sinclair Broadcast Group** (SBG) announced that its Diamond Sports Group division is skipping a \$140 million debt interest payment. The news was reported by Etan Vlessing for the *Hollywood Reporter*. SBG owns to Pittsburgh television stations. Vlessing writes that the decision “is being seen as a possible prelude to a prearranged Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing.” This comes as Diamond continues to lose both subscribers and money.

The business model for these once popular networks is no longer considered sustainable. As regional networks, they have limited scalability, streaming services are becoming involved and local television stations are expressing renewed interest in carrying their hometown games.



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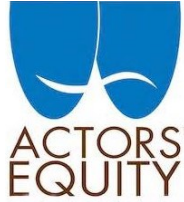
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Actors' Equity Ponders Name Change

What's in a name? That's the question being asked of **Actors' Equity Association** (AEA) members.

AEA was formed in 1913 to represent actors, actresses and stage managers. Over the next century, the union has grown from just over 100 members to nearly 51,000 members. Several hundred live and work in the Pittsburgh area.



On February 16, AEA requested proposals to guide stakeholders through a process of determining a potential new name for the union" with the goal of creating an identity that includes all its members, not just actors.

This inclusiveness is now being extended to how people become members. The union's temporary Open Access policy is to become permanent. For years, eligibility for union membership had been limited to those working for an Equity employer. Open Access was introduced in 2021 to allow almost any theatrical worker to join.

"Open Access is doing exactly what it's supposed to do," said Actors' Equity Association President Kate Shindle in a press release. "Of course, strength in numbers is a cornerstone principle for any union. But this was never a simple numbers game. Every worker who wants a union deserves a union. Open Access is about providing a pathway to Equity membership that

doesn't depend on our employers, or on our industry's hiring practices. In the 18 months since we launched, we've seen a significant increase in the diversity of our new members. Joining a union is a deeply personal decision, and I'm proud that Open Access has moved that decision into the hands of actors and stage managers themselves."

In related news, the union has published its most recent study on hiring bias and wage gaps in professional theater. You can download the report by [clicking here](#).

Crabtree-Ireland Renews With SAG-AFTRA

The national board of **Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists** (SAG-AFTRA) announced an agreement to keep Duncan Crabtree-Ireland as the union's National Executive Director for the next four years.

Held via videoconference, the new pact was approved by nearly 88% of the vote.

"Duncan is a strategic thinker and an extraordinary executive whose stewardship of our operations has been stellar," explained actress and union president Fran Drescher in a press release. "He is also the tough and effective negotiator we need! We are fortunate to benefit from his leader-

ship and I look forward to rolling up our sleeves and having an innovative and effective negotiation of the TV/Theatrical contract."

In other news, local as well as national members of SAG-AFTRA are being warned about two talent agencies. **Capital Talent Agency, LLC** and **Light & Salt Model and Talent Agency, LLC** are no longer recognized as franchised agencies.

This means that "no member of SAG-AFTRA may hereafter engage, use or deal through"

these agencies. Each agency may retain and collect any commissions earned under contracts prior to the surrender but SAG-AFTRA members under no obligation to pay commissions to the agents on any money earned after the surrender.

Members with any questions may call the local office at (412) 281-6767 or the SAG-AFTRA Professional Representatives Department at (323) 549-6745





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PSO A Hit With Audiences

Booking major stars and creative programming has given the **Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra** (PSO) a major boost, reports the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's* Jeremy Reynolds.

Reynolds writes that “the orchestra [has been] completely selling out the 2,700-seat Heinz Hall multiple times already in 2023 and generally filling the hall more consistently than it has in years.”

Hoping to build on this success, the PSO will soon be introducing



a new program called [PSO Disrupt](#). The pitch is “let’s do classical . . . differently” with shorter concerts (often as little as an hour), musicians dressed informally, extra visuals and a host offering insight.

“We’re debunking the idea that classical music is for some specific group of people,” the PSO’s Mary Persin told Reynolds. “This series will make sure you know about the human side of the music, a bit about what inspires the composer, what instruments play a special role, a few moments to listen for in the music.”

You can read Reynolds’ full article by [clicking here](#).

Paramount Sticks With Plans

Despite the high costs and heavy losses, *The Hollywood Reporter's* Caitlin Huston reports that **Paramount Global** remains committed to its multiplatform streaming strategy.

Paramount Global owns two Pittsburgh television stations through its flagship television network, CBS. The subject arose during a February 8 earnings call when an analyst queried the company's direction as other media conglomerates revisit their strategies.

“Our multi-platform strategy and franchise focus ensure we can build a [unique] content slate,” Huston quotes Paramount Global CEO Bob Bakish, “and simultaneously create a compelling” return on investment.



The company’s streaming service, Paramount+, posted a record 77 million subscribers thanks in large part to the popularity of the film “Top Gun: Maverick”. However, the service saw increased expenses while the television units saw a drop in ad revenue. Reuters is reporting that it may increase subscription fees in some markets to compensate.



Black Arts Grants

More than a dozen African-American arts and cultural organizations are to receive grants through a shared initiative, reports Patty Tascarella for the *Pittsburgh Business Times*.

The initiative is called Pittsburgh Cultural Treasures and is being financed by **The Heinz Endowments**, the **Ford Foundation** and the **POISE Foundation**.

“These organizations already provide valuable cultural experiences to their communities, but they want to do more,” Tascarella quotes POISE’s Lucille Dabney. “Through learning opportunities, coaching, peer exchanges, the planning process and the finished plan, this phase of Pittsburgh’s Cultural Treasures will enable the groups to meet their current goals and prepare them to make a lasting impact on our regional arts and cultural landscape.”

Learn more about the initiative and read the complete list in [Tascarella’s article](#).

Local Museums Rate High In National Poll

A pair of local museums are being recognized (again) by the newspaper *USA Today* in a reader poll: the **Senator John Heinz History Center** and the **Children's Museum of Pittsburgh**.

The process begins with initial selections by *USA Today* editors in various categories. Readers are then invited to vote online. Both the Heinz Center and Children's Museum came in second in their respective categories.

"As the largest history museum in Pennsylvania . . . the History Center is committed to inspiring and educating our visitors with exhibitions, programs, and memorable experiences. This national recognition is a reflection of that commitment," said the center's CEO Andy Masich in a press release. "We want to extend our sincere thanks to members, supporters and community partners in Western

Pennsylvania and beyond that voted."

In a separate press release, Children's Museum spokesperson Max Pipman declared that "we're very excited to receive this honor and grateful for the show of support it represents from the many families, friends and supporters" throughout the region.

The various lists can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

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Images



Evelyn Hernandez is among the cast of "Native Gardens" opening at City Theatre this month.

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Patron's New App

The parent company of Pittsburgh-based Showclix, **Patron Technology**, has announced the launch of a new app with Varsity Spirit.



Varsity Spirit is a division of **Varsity Brands**, the global leader in cheerleading, dance teams, band apparel, camps, and competitions.

"Over the past few months, Varsity Spirit has worked closely with Patron Technology to build, design, and launch our Varsity Spirit Events app to enhance the customer experience at our competitions," said Varsity Spirit President Bill Seely in a press release. "The Varsity Spirit Events app is designed to make sure our parents, families, athletes, and fans are getting the most out of our competitions."

The app provides the ability to personalize the attendees' experience with custom schedules and content based on their expressed interests.



County Acts On City Violence

Allegheny County is responding to the continuing violence in Downtown Pittsburgh [see [Pittsburgh Applause, February 2023](#) – ed.] and other city neighborhoods, reports Eric Heyl for Patch.com.

The county is committing to \$50 million over five years on violence reduction efforts.

"With this financial commitment, we are approaching this issue broadly while also coordinating efforts to ensure that our approach is a comprehensive one," Heyl quotes Allegheny County Chief Executive Rick Fitzgerald. Read more by [clicking here](#).

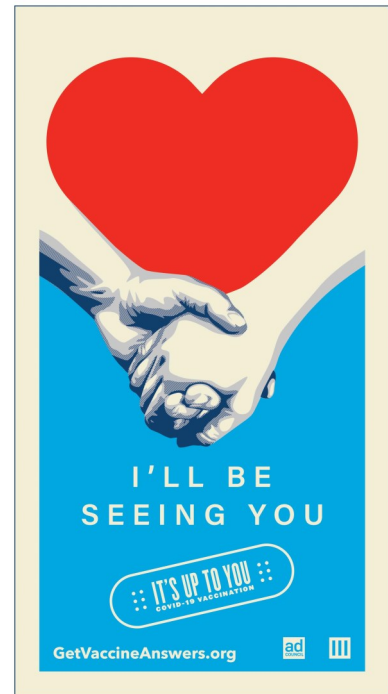
Art Dealer Pleads Guilty

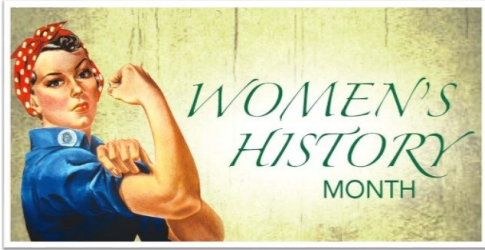
Florida art dealer Daniel Elie Bouaziz has pleaded guilty for his role in a scheme to sell fake Andy Warhol paintings, reports the Associated Press.

Bouaziz, 69, pleaded to a single count of money laundering in exchange for federal prosecutors dropping 16 other fraud charges.

Prosecutors say that Bouaziz sold counterfeit Warhol paintings, including those he falsely claimed were signed by the artist. At one customer gave him \$200,000.

Sentencing is scheduled for May 30. Bouaziz faces up to ten years in prison.





IL TROVATORE



Opportunities

Auditions for [various musician positions](#) at the **Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra** are being held later this month.

Two learning programs are being offered by the **Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council** (GPAC). The first, scheduled for March 8 via Zoom about how to [present an artist's work](#) at an exhibit; the other is a series of in-person seminars learning [American Sign Language](#) basics.

The parent of WTAE-TV, **Hearst Corporation** is seeking a [coordinator](#) who can help execute on the overall programming and scheduling strategy for the streaming platform Very Local.

A full-time [exhibition installer](#) is being sought by the **Mattress Factory**.

WDVE, one of the local iHeart Media stations, has an opening for a [morning show producer](#). They want someone creative and good with people.

Positions are available in a [variety of departments](#) at the **National Aviary**.

Dates have been set by the **Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre** for [local auditions](#). Dance artists of all ranks and experience are welcome.





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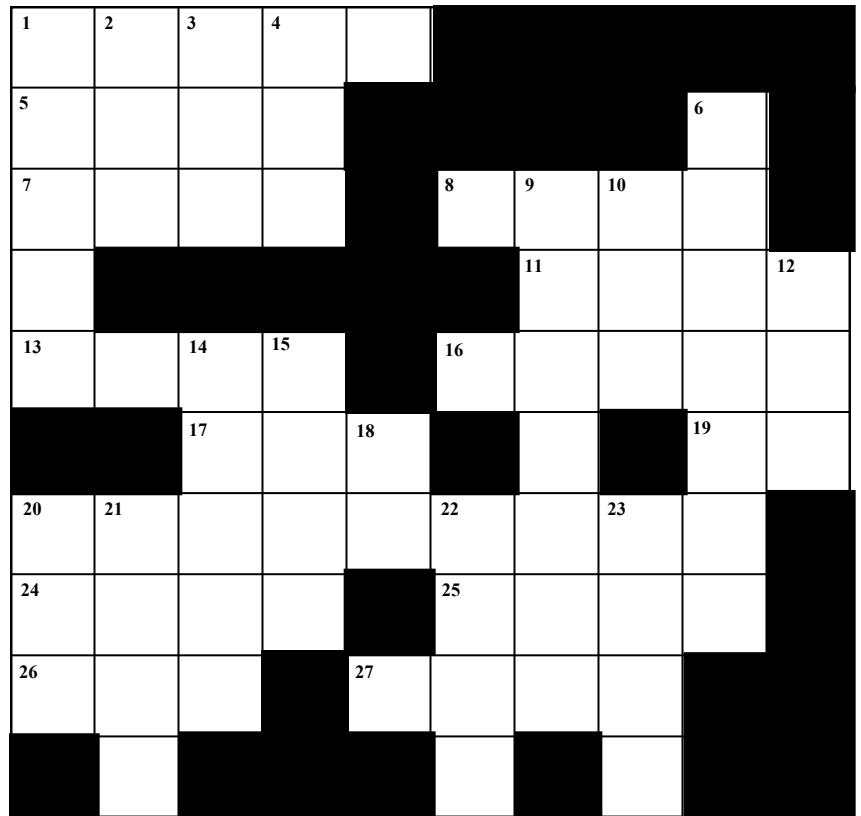


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Across

1. The most common word heard on
20-Across
5. America's biggest little gambling city?
7. Rim or border
8. Famed Roman architectural innovation
11. David Bowie's model/wife
13. Big brass instrument
16. Fright
17. Baseball stat
19. US Air Force rank below Capt.
20. Classic TV show that featured 1-Down,
6-Down, 9-Down, 14-Down
and 22-Down
24. Performs
25. Aphrodite's son
26. One of the five basic
journalism questions
27. Pop artist Warhol, to pals



Down

1. Actress Somers, to pals
2. Took charge
3. "Wedding Banquet" director Lee, to pals
4. "Love" director Gaspar
6. Actor and director Reilly, to pals
9. Actor and host Dawson, to pals
10. Nashville honors org.
12. Com or org alternative
14. Beloved actress White, to pals
15. Curves
18. What to say when the doc instructs you
to open your mouth
20. Crude word for the human stomach
21. Pain
22. Actor, announcer and host Rayburn,
to pals
23. Irish folksinger Brennan, to pals

Last Month's Solution

I	H	A	V	E		S	T	A	R
	A	T	O	M		T	H	O	U
M		R	I	B		E	O	N	S
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BARBARA BOSSON
1939-2023

GREGORY L. CALL
AKA CHARLIE MITCHELL
1957-2023