

## COVID Continues To Hit A&E Hard

Gross domestic product collapsed to a 32.9% annualized rate last quarter, the deepest decline in output on record. As July came to a close, approximately 8,000 people in Allegheny County have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and well over 240 people have died.

Several businesses, primarily restaurants, have closed permanently.

“Tens of millions of workers have lost their jobs over the past few months and remain unemployed,” Reuters economic journalist Lucia Mutikani quotes Gus Faucher, chief economist at **PNC Financial** in Pittsburgh. “The pace of improvement in the labor market has slowed.” The end of the \$600 supplemental unemployment insurance could cost the region about \$300 million per month, according to an economist cited by WESA-FM’s Margaret J. Krauss. (Lucia Mutikani wrote an extensive look at the national situation; read it by clicking [here](#)).

The creative industries continue to be among the hardest hit, including Pittsburgh.

While some Pittsburgh’s cultural assets like the **National Aviary** are cautiously reopening, others like the **Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh** (which won’t reopen before January) and the **Mattress Factory** remain closed (a July 8 reopening had to be scrapped). The pandemic is causing serious financial damage to similar institutions nationwide. A recent survey by the

**American Alliance of Museums** (AAM) reports that 56% of all respondents have less than six months of operating reserves. [Read the full report by clicking the graphic below - ed.] In a statement, AAM’s Laura Lott said that “costs will outweigh revenue and there is no financial safety net for many museums. The distress museums are facing will not happen in isolation. The permanent closure of 12,000 museums will be devastating for communities, economies, education systems, and our cultural history.”

The stages at **City Theatre, Pittsburgh Public Theater** and others remain dark for the near future. This has caused another concern facing performers: the risk of losing health insurance. Actors, for example, commonly get coverage through a union. “For months, the theatre industry has been shut down, closing the door for too many workers looking to obtain

and maintain their health care coverage,” said Mary McColl, Executive Director of **Actors’ Equity Association** (AEA) in a July 14 press release. “The House has already taken action. The Senate should move quickly to pass [an insurance] subsidy so that no one in the arts and entertainment industries worries about losing their health care in the middle of a pandemic. The nature of this pandemic and the need for social distancing means that many of us in live arts will also be among the last to return to work, making it critical that Congress acts now.”

Even the offices of the **Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council** (GPAC) remain closed. Film and television projects are largely in limbo.

CONTINUES ON  
PAGE THREE



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## COVID Continues To Hit A&E Hard

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

On the July 22, White House coronavirus task force coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx identified Pittsburgh as one of the nation's eleven cities at risk of being the next COVID hot spots. "Until you can see that explosion, it's hard for people to understand how deeply you have to clamp down," Birx said. "That's why we called out the next set of cities where we see early-warning signs."

The news has put all fall and winter events in serious doubt. Annual film festivals like Three Rivers and Reel Q appear unlikely to happen. In an email to *Pittsburgh Applause*, the **Pittsburgh Down-**

**town Partnership's** Richard Hooper concedes that "Light up Night is currently TBD with the status of the COVID19 crisis likely dictating the final decision in the coming weeks." Light-Up Night has formally launched the city's holiday season for some six decades.

Musicians and singers have been hit especially hard with the cancellation of spring and summer festivals along with the closing of venues. While some have non-music jobs to sustain them, many rely on live performance as their primary revenue stream.

*Next Pittsburgh's* Michael Machosky recently delved into

the situation [read his article by clicking [here](#) - ed]. He quotes Leigh Yock, the co-owner of the **Spirit** nightclub, that "we had to close down our building . . . lay off our entire staff of 30-plus employees, donate all of the food in our kitchen that would have gone bad, attempt to downsize our bills as much as possible and had to cancel over 100 events including concerts, fundraisers, weddings."

Several local music businesses have joined the **National Independent Venue Association** to lobby Washington for help. [See the article below - ed.]

For the time being, artists and entertainers continue to scrounge to keep themselves afloat.

## Save Our Stages Act Picks Up Steam

The recently formed **National Independent Venue Association** (NIVA) is actively seeking support for the proposed Save Our Stages Act.

NIVA describes itself as an organization of "nearly 2,000 independent venues in 50 states that are banding together to ask Washington for targeted legislation to help us survive." Local members include **Drusky Entertainment, Opus One Productions, Elko Concerts and Grey Area Productions**, among several others.

The organization is seeking elements in COVID relief packages to aid performance venues that have been closed due to the pan-

dem. The hope that such assistance will allow them to survive until the crises has waned enough to reopen. the proposed Save Our Stages Act introduced by Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) was introduced on July 22.

If enacted, the Save Our Stages Act would establish a grant program for live venue operators, promoters, producers and talent representatives through the Small Business Administration.

An online petition expressing support is available at <https://www.saveourstages.com/> " It's now time to act," Mike Elko of Elko Concerts urged in a NIVA press release, " so the country can

continue to see music in so many wonderful venues."

## Hotline Ring

On July 16, the **Kelly-Strayhorn Theater** led a coalition of arts groups in an online fundraiser called "Hotline Ring." The theater's partners were **IHood Media, BOOM Concepts, Braddock Carnegie Library Association, Dreams of Hope, The Legacy Arts Project and PearlArts Studios**.

The groups hope to raise a collective \$100,000 although the actual amount was unavailable at press time.

## PCT Updates Public on COVID

An email sent by the **Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's** (PCT) president on July 31 to update supporters on the PCT's activities during the pandemic.

"We miss you terribly in the Cultural District," Kevin McMahon writes. "Our once-bustling streets are emptier, ghost lights stand as sentries in our beloved theaters, and virtually all of our current programs have moved to the digital stage.



"The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust does not have a date set to reopen our theaters, galleries, and venues and given the uncertainty of when it will be safe to gather again, we are proactively working with national tours and presenters to realign all 2020 season programs into the 2021 calendar year.

"The curtain will rise again and until then, be well."

## COVID Closes Apple Hill

One of the region's most storied stages has gone dark permanently, reports Shirley McMarlin for the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*.

That stage is the **Apple Hill Playhouse**, a renovated barn dating back to the U. S. Civil War (1861-1865) that has served as performance venue since the 1950's. The building was acquired in 1982 by current owner Pat Beyer.

"I cannot see this structure being brought up to speed in today's [pandemic era] climate. They still haven't worked out yet how theaters will operate," Beyer told McMarlin. "If they can't figure out what to do at Heinz Hall and the Benedum, how do they expect me to figure it out?"

The decision leaves the resident **Orchard Performing Arts Company** without a home. [Read McMarlin's article for details.](#)

## Local Film's Virtual Debut

Red carpet movie openings haven't entirely vanished, at least where **Row House Cinema** is concerned.

The Pittsburgh-shot film "An American Pickle" will make its virtual debut on August 6. Filmed during 2018, it stars comedic actor Seth Rogan as both a Brooklyn computer programmer and his great grandfather who has been brined in pickle juice for 100 years.

"We were so excited to show this movie at Row House, because it's our theater's big Hollywood debut," said Brian Mendelssohn, owner of Row House Cinema, in a press release. "In-person screenings aren't happening now, so we adjusted a bit and it's going to be pickley and awesome."

Row House will host a special virtual Q&A session with "An American Pickle" director Brandon Trost via YouTube followed by a watch party. For more information, visit <https://rowhousecinema.com/>





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## Post-Gazette Reporters Brace For Strike

A strike against Pittsburgh's leading newspaper seems very likely, reports Melynda Fuller for Medi-aPost.com.



On July 31, the executive committee of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh (part of the **Communication Workers of America**) voted unanimously to send strike authorization ballots to its 120 members.

This is the latest incident in a long line of clashes between management of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and its journalists. It was precipitated by a story published by the newspaper claiming that new contract has been implemented --- something that Guild president Mike Fuco told *Pittsburgh City Paper's* Ryan Deto is not true.

The last few years have been difficult ever since **Block Commu-**

**nications** revealed in 2006 that the paper hadn't had a profitable year in more than a decade. But the situation was worsened when the editorial departments of the *Post-Gazette* and the *Toledo Blade* were consolidated under the leadership of Keith Burris. A staunch conservative, Burris is a long-time Donald Trump supporter who has shown little hesitation to use his position at the traditional liberal newspaper. Burris has even claimed (in official editorials) that "the current press in the U.S., often, is [President Trump's] enemy. And he is right about that. Much of the press has been at war with Mr. Trump since his first day in office."

The resulting chaos became very public very quickly. In a commentary for *Pittsburgh Current*, that weekly paper's editor Charlie Deitch wrote that owner John Robinson Block has "been building the coffin for years through questionable editorials, ridiculous firings and, today, an even more ridiculous hiring. Fresh off a newsroom tirade in which he terrorized not only his own employees, but his own pre-teen daugh-

ter, Block on Monday promoted Keith Burris to executive editor of the entire paper."

Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist Rob Rogers was fired in 2018 for a cartoon critical of Trump. Earlier this year African-American journalist Alexis Johnson was prohibited from covering civil rights protests in the city. The backlash prompted Burris to publish a blazing essay on the paper's front page calling the objections of his own staff as "propaganda."

On June 11, grocery chain **Giant Eagle, Inc.**, --- probably the paper's most important distribution platform --- would no longer sell *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* in its stores. "It is critical that we uphold the values that have defined Giant Eagle for nearly 90 years," Giant Eagle president and CEO Laura Shapira Karet said in an online post adding that the ban "will remain in place until the publication demonstrates an equal commitment to all those in the communities it serves."

Ryan Deto's extensive article is available by clicking [here](#).

## Carnegie Museums Respond To Union Talk

As reported in last month's issue of *Pittsburgh Applause* and scroll down to page 8 -ed.), an effort is underway to unionize employees at the **Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh** (CMP).

However, the CMP's new president, Steven Knapp is urging staff to reconsider. WESA-FM's Bill O'Driscoll reports that Knapp send a letter to them claiming that

"unionizing could mean more restrictive job descriptions and



less flexible scheduling. " He also asks for" a bit more time . . . for you to get to know me and for me to get to know you and demonstrate what I know we can do to-

gether." But union organizers are cautious as O'Driscoll [explains in his article](#).

In other news, Sohrab Mohebbi has been named curator of the next Carnegie International. Mohebbi most recently curator at New York City's contemporary art museum **SculptureCenter**.

## Attorney Threatens “Good Fight” Lawsuit

Famed attorney, legal scholar and university professor Alan Dershowitz is threatening a lawsuit against **ViacomCBS**, Cynthia Littleton reports for *Variety*.



ViacomCBS owns two Pittsburgh television stations and (through its stake in **Entercom**), four radio stations.

The issue is a recent episode of CBS All Access' "The Good Fight." In it, actor David Alford

portrays an attorney who represented convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein until Dershowitz signed him as a client. There are several references about the two men. "Probably about the time he ditched me for Dershowitz," Alford's character says. "At least I didn't get a massage, like that shyster. And for the purposes of any potential lawsuit 'shyster' is just my opinion not a statement of fact."

Dershowitz is demanding an apology or a lawsuit may be filed.

"The idea that a fictional character can get away with defaming somebody is really a new one," Littleton quotes Dershowitz.

"You either have to have an entirely fictional account in which they make up the names of everybody or a truthful account. You can't mix the genres. When you do mix the genres, the law of defamation applies."

However, ViacomCBS attorney Jonathan Anshell responded in a letter that "as one might explain to a small child, the Series, its characters and the things they say are all make-believe. People don't watch the Series for factual information about Professor Dershowitz or anyone else."

Littleton's full article can be read by clicking [here](#).

## “Rub & Tug” Goes To TV

The scrapped film "Rub & Tug" may be resurrected as a television series, reports Mike Fleming for *Deadline*.

"Rub & Tug" is the true story of transgender Dante "Tex" Gill (1930-2003), who owned three Pittsburgh massage parlors in the 1970's. He later served two years in federal prison for tax fraud. Gill's story was originally planned as a feature starring Scarlett Johansson. But many LGBTQ activists criticized the choice of a non-trans person.

Emmy-nominated transgender writer and musician Our Lady J has been chosen to pen the pilot

## Margot B Joins “Dead” Cast

*Deadline's* Anthony D'Alessandro reports that Pittsburgh actress and singer Margot Bingham is joining the cast of the hit cable television series "The Walking Dead."

Premiering in 2010, "The Walking Dead" is an adaptation of the

---

script and producers have committed to casting a trans actor to play the lead.

There was no word at press time whether the series will be shot locally. Read Fleming's full article by clicking [here](#).

post-apocalyptic comic book series of the same name. It's the story of survivors of a zombie-dominated world who are under the near-constant threat of attack.

"While the network nor sources won't comment on who Bingham will play," D'Alessandro writes, "odds are that we'll finally see Bingham as Stephanie, a character she's done the voiceover for in the season 10 episodes 'Bonds' and 'Morning Star'. Stephanie is an enigmatic survivor of the zombie outbreak in Charleston, West Virginia, who connects via radio with Josh McDermitt's Eugene Porter."

Read more by clicking [here](#).

# Teen Defies COVID To Stage His Musical

Creativity continues, even in this coronavirus age --- and by artists of every age.

On August 31, *Pittsburgh Applause* received an email from a fifteen-year-old high school student hailing from a tiny rural town in Westmoreland County named Lanigan McCulty.

The young Mr. McCulty announced that he has written and directed a new musical debuting this month at the **Diamond Theatre** called "Greece Lighting: The Musical." The show re-imagines the stories Greek writer Homer (born around 750BCE) with elements of the 1970's stage and film musical "Grease."

These stories are *The Iliad*, which tells of the exciting climax of the

Trojan War (which happened circa 1200BCE) and the fanciful sequel, *The Odyssey*. The latter is the tale of King Odysseus' adventurous travel home after the war.

McCulty announced that he "is taking care of all aspects of running a live production! Stage lights, costumes, choreography, as well as designing and building sets all while dealing with a pandemic! With the help of a friend, Landen Laskoski, this show is set to take place on August 7th @ 6pm, August 8th @ 3pm and 6pm, and August 9th at 3pm." at the Diamond Theatre in Ligonier.

"The mighty Gods of Mount Olympus know how to have a good time and get into plenty of trouble! Between Zeus' escapades

and Dionysus' love of wine it's not surprising that this story goes awry and causes plenty of commotion! With parodies of some classic songs you'll be sitting on the edge of your seat clapping along and singing!"

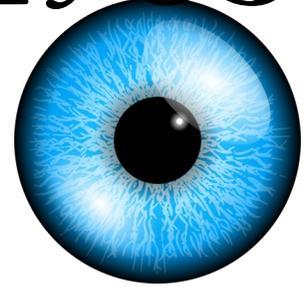
The theater's Facebook page states that social distancing will be practiced by pre-selling tickets.



## Images

*Channel Pittsburgh streams a special two hour edition of "Moments in Time" about the historic 1968 election. Its scheduled for August 19 at 9:00 p.m.*

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## SAG-AFTRA's New Pact

By a vote of 74.22% to 25.78% percent, the members of **SAG-AFTRA** have approved the new, three-year contracts covering motion pictures, television and new media production.



Actress and union president Gabrielle Carteris posted the following online message:

"In addition to codifying meaningful wage increases, improvements to funding for the benefit plans and significantly improved residuals for streaming video, the agreement includes new protections governing nudity, simulated

sex scenes and sexual harassment prevention.

"We want to thank the negotiating committee and many members who got involved and used their voices to help set the priorities for this contract. This is a forward-thinking agreement that builds on the changing realities of the streaming business and positions our union to continue the fight for a safer workplace for all.

"We also want to recognize the incredible dedication and commitment of our staff who worked so diligently throughout this negotiation."

The agreement is in effect until July 3, 2023.

## New CBS Network Pact

An agreement has been reached to bring **ViacomCBS'** new lifestyle network to **Comcast** and **Verizon** subscribers, reports Deadline's Dade Hayes.

ViacomCBS owns two Pittsburgh television stations and (through its stake in **Entercom**), four radio stations. Comcast operates the city's cable television franchise.

"The agreements cover 13 top markets on both platforms . . . mirroring the places where Dabl (pronounced as "dabble") already airs on digital spectrum programmed by CBS-owned stations. At the start of this year, CBS said the ad-supported network was cleared in 90% of the country."

Read Hayes' full article by clicking [here](#).

In other news, the web site Pittsburgh Radio & Television Online ([www.pbtv.com](http://www.pbtv.com)) reports that KDKA-TV is adding a 7:30 p.m. weeknight newscast. It will replace the syndicated "Extra" and will apparently take a relatively light tone. The company has also selected Johnny Green Jr. has been named Vice President of news services at CBS News. Green's impressive career includes a stint at Pittsburgh's WPXI-TV. The African-American professional also sits on the CBS Diversity Council.

## WGA's New Pact

Both branches of the **Writers Guild of America** (WGA) have ratified a new, three-year deal with the **Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers** (AMPTP).

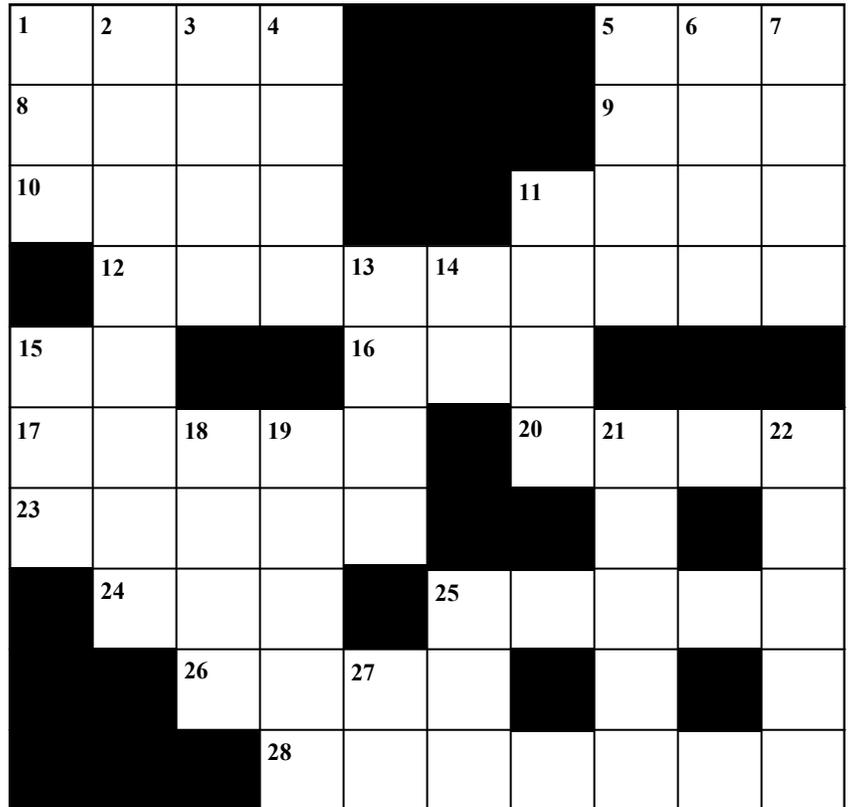


A July 29 announcement lists the gains made: "needed funding for the WGA Pension Plan; increases to writers' minimum compensation rates; increased residuals and lowered budget breaks for High Budget Subscription Video on Demand (HBSVOD); a first-ever Portable Paid Parenting Benefit Fund; eliminating 'new writer' discounts for screen and television writers and the writers' training program that disproportionately impacted writers in under-represented groups; improved options, exclusivity and span protections; a higher script publication fee; and strengthening the right to meet with employers about their inclusion and equity programs and anti-harassment measures."

The membership voted 98% in favor of the new contract, which expires on May 1, 2023.

## Across

1. Messy man
5. Actress/director Lupino, to pals
8. French cartoon skunk Le Pew, to pals
9. Morning moisture
10. A really big continent's really small name
11. Coke or Pepsi but not 7-Up
12. Pittsburgher connected with 2-Down, 28-Across and 21-Down
15. 2001 Spielberg film
16. Classic stereo knob
17. Exchange
20. A common function word needed in the English language
23. Ms. DeGeneres, to pals
24. Mr. Mineo, to pals
25. See 21-Down
26. Shock
28. 1945 "Aweigh" movie



## Down

1. Baden-Baden is famous this
2. 1957 Cole Porter movie
3. Ronny's TV role
4. Common soup ingredient
5. TV's "American \_\_\_\_\_"
6. Popular computer company
7. 1992 Cruise film "Far and \_\_\_\_\_"
11. An Indo-European person
13. Tied
14. Boxing outcome, briefly
15. Consumed
18. Shakespearean lament
19. Actress Burke, to pals
21. 1969 matchmaker movie musical (with 25-Across)
22. Belonging to Mr. Diggs
25. A major U.S. pol. party
27. The most global of global organizations, initially

### Last Month's Solution

G	O	O	D	N	E	S	S		B
H	A	D			L		A	L	E
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