



Guernsey Memorial Library offers several programs for kids, which are transitioning back to in-person after the pandemic. All programs are free and most do not require registration. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

What's That I Smell? Is it... Progress?

Connie Dalrymple
Guernsey Memorial Library

Even if we didn't understand it for what it was, almost all of us have experienced the Proust Phenomenon at some point in our life.

It comes out of the blue; we detect a vague odor and are yanked abruptly out of our everyday lives and transported back to a vivid memory from our past.

The scientific community is utterly fascinated by these Proustian rushes, and a quick Internet search can lead you down a rabbit hole that can keep an intellectually-curious mind occupied for many blissful hours. It isn't always the same for everyone. It doesn't happen often for me, but when it does it is a jarring, unexpected, and overwhelmingly nostalgic experience.

Many report that the smell of books in particular brings them such a Proustian rush; taking them back to times when they spent pleasant hours being read to on parents' laps or curled up with a book in a window seat in their childhood library. This must be a fairly universal experience as evidenced by the widespread availability of book-smelling products like candles and colognes which folks can use recreate the experience in their everyday lives.

Bibliosmia is the technical term for book smell, reportedly coined in 2014 by Dr. Oliver Tearle.

It is such a common phenomenon that a plethora of scientific research has been devoted to breaking it down. The use of low-tech "human sniffers" and high-tech mass spectrometers has resulted in the somewhat vague findings that book smell is composed of notes of vanilla flower, almond, chocolate, wood, smoke, earth, coffee, and "old."

This last is probably because the older the book, the more book smell it releases since it is the slow death of books, book decay, that results in the release of the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that we experience with our noses and minds as book smell.

Some libraries are richer in bibliosmia than others, especially those that focus on being archives making available predominantly historical materials.

Chenango County libraries aren't particularly bibliosmiatic because we focus more on newer books of current interest to contemporary readers and information seekers. In fact, if you haven't

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Serenity Hobbies: A place of imagination and friendship



Serenity Hobbies at 10 South Broad Street in downtown Norwich is owned by Eric and Courtney Cunningham. Above Eric poses for a photo following a gaming night at the store. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

Tyler Murphy
Sun Managing Editor

NORWICH – When you step into Serenity Hobbies, you may likely encounter the typical mold of any great hobbies and gaming store.

There is hardly any independent gaming and hobbies store that isn't run

by an extremely dedicated owner having a special appreciation and love for their trade, and co-owners Eric and Courtney Cunningham are no exception.

The retail space at 10 South Broad Street in downtown Norwich is filled with colors splashed across shelves of cards,

models and board games. For almost all of it, unlike video games, electricity is not required. You will need imagination, though, and probably some dice.

"Our hopes for 2022 include bringing in new customers to enjoy the services we provide. We don't sell video games in

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"We want to focus on getting people to sit across a table from one another and enjoy each other's company," – Serenity Hobbies owner Eric Cunningham.

Big things in store for the Earlville Opera House in 2022

Sarah Genter
Sun Staff Writer

EARLVILLE — The historic Earlville Opera House Arts Center (EOH) will be celebrating several anniversaries and making many major developments this year. From galleries and gift shops to performances and renovations, 2022 is sure to be an exciting year for the organization.

Perhaps the biggest cause for celebration is the Earlville Opera House's 50th year as a multi-arts center.

"So the Earlville Opera House has traditionally been known as a presenting organization, meaning

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Visitors attending the Lucy Tower Funke gallery opening at the Earlville Opera House. In 2022, the EOH will be displaying artwork in their three galleries by artists who have shown their work at the opera house in the past, as part of their year long 50th anniversary celebration. (Submitted photo)

Serenity Hobbies: A place of imagination and friendship –

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the store, although we get many calls asking if we do. We want to focus on getting people to sit across a table from one another and enjoy each other's company," said Eric.

Inside the store a griffin and steampunk zeppelin dangle from the ceiling. A Tyrannosaurus Rex stares down a galactic stormtrooper near the counter. Mind boggling anime creations and Pokemon cards fill almost an entire wall.

There are fascinating depictions of sci-fi and fantasy filling every space, and be warned: to look closely at any one of these things is a thread into an entire experience that may cause you a handful, if not thousands of hours of fulfilling enjoyment.

You might even make a friend, because the business doesn't just sell the games, they are a gathering place for people to meet and play them. This is often through organized events, but also by players organically coming together on their own. There are tables and separate rooms to play in, and all are welcome.

"It makes it easy to make a bunch of new



On Monday nights Serenity Hobbies offers \$5 tournaments for Yu-Gi-Oh! and have an open "board gaming night", where anyone can come in and bring a game to play or play anything they have in the store. On Fridays the store runs "Friday Night Magic," which are unopened booster pack draft tournaments for \$15. On Saturdays there are usually special events. Sundays the store offers drop-in Role Playing groups. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

friends if you're willing to come in and give it a try, and most all of our regular customers feel welcomed and 'at home' in the store because of that," said Courtney.

As is often the case, on the night I happen to visit, there is some sort of tournament or game night taking place and the room is filled with visitors. There is a wide range of people, from pre-teen players making bold moves, to a few gaming geezers just waiting for the right moment to strike.

There is a lot of noise

and laughing. An occasional shout of uncontrolled triumph or an eye-rolling gasp makes it feel like a sporting match is taking place in a book store.

People are relaxed and having fun. In fact, this barely feels like a store at all.

As I went to the counter, a head from one of the tables of card players glanced up. The owner, Eric, laid down his hand and came over to greet me.

I had wanted to visit the store ever since I heard about a fundraising event they had sponsored for a

customer who eventually became a regular player and friend.

Eric said the event was actually one of his fondest memories since opening the store in Norwich three years ago.

"We had a regular customer who had just been diagnosed with a hard-to-treat form of cancer," Eric explained.

"We ran a special event to support him, boost his morale, and send him home with a bunch of products to take his mind off of everything for a while. That event was one of the larg-

est events we've ever run in the store, and it shows what a great community we have."

Of course, many of the regular hours and events have only returned in the last year as the COVID-19 pandemic and government shutdowns dramatically interrupted the previous routines.

"Since COVID began, we have customers that were regulars who were hesitant to come back once everything opened back up," said Eric.

He said, "We are stronger now because we have maintained a lot of community support to stay open throughout the pandemic. We know most of our regular customers by name and try to keep their tastes in mind when suggesting new items that come in."

Courtney explained, "Although this did lead to a drop in sales for us at first, and we missed seeing some of those people, it pushed us to really expand our online store offerings to the point where now every item in the store is listed for sale on our website and is updated regularly. We've seen a huge number of people contact us from all across the

United States, as well as internationally, to purchase our products since doing so."

The store continues to offer curbside pickup and hopes to keep a strong online offering, but is also working to entice customers back to the brick and mortar.

Eric said, "A year ago our largest challenge was keeping inventory in stock; the supply chain has been disrupted for us as much as many other businesses. For example, Pokemon cards were impossible to find, and we completely sold out of every item we had – and were unable to restock for months."

Most recently progress was slowed by a January surge in cases and the state putting restrictions in place.

"The largest challenges at the moment is the spike in COVID numbers. Many local customers have been ill or in quarantine several times and that has kept them from coming out and participating in our weekly events," said Eric.

With mandates being imposed on businesses over health concerns, there have been addition-

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What's That I Smell? Is it... Progress? —

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been in the public library for a while, you might be surprised to find that we're not even all that focused on books anymore. Books have become just one of the many things that we do.

You might not think it, but libraries have always been all about the march of progress. For thousands of years, we've kept pace with and often led the technological and societal change.

We moved from recording, storing, and passing on information in stone, metal, and clay to papyrus and parchment, then on to wood-pulp paper, then microfilm, and then magnetic, and most recently digital media.

We've moved from being local collections for specific communities to being worldwide systems and hubs to provide access to shared digital and physical collections.

We've similarly moved from being the realm of the wealthy and privileged, to being available for free to everyone.

Being free is one of the most important factors concerning libraries, so it deserves a few words. Democracies function best when their citizens are educated and have access to a free flow of information. Libraries are the most democratic of institutions.

Everyone is welcome to walk into their local public library and take advantage of all we have to offer. Over the past several years there has been a growing realization amongst the library community that the tradition of monetary fines for late materials is a barrier to library use. Large accumulations of fines often trigger a bar on library use and some individuals refuse to even sign up for a library card

or take out books for fear of accruing fines that they cannot afford to pay. One more recent movement in the library world, therefore, has been away from charging fines for overdue materials. We want to encourage, not penalize, the use of libraries.

Congratulations to Oxford Memorial Library for being the most recent local library to vote to go fine free later this year at their January 2022 board meeting! Now that's what we call progress!

Most of us recognize the importance of being able to access medical information, or used car reviews, or legal information, for example, but might view reading, listening or watching for pleasure or entertainment as a waste of time.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Research shows that reading builds vocabulary, empowers empathy, improves brain connectivity, slows age-related cognitive decline, and encourages learning about other cultures. The same goes for watching and listening. I can't even begin to tell how much I've learned about a myriad of topics from my latest binge — Paramount+'s Yellowstone — and I've had a heck of a good time doing it.

Another growing trend in libraries is as physical spaces for learning and community. It used to be that libraries were mostly about the shelving and the books.

You came to the library, picked up your books and quickly took them home, partly out of fear of getting "shushed" by library staff. But, in spite of the recent pandemic, people increasingly want to learn and work together. People want space for tutoring and for working on group projects and, more than ever,

they want to learn from each other. The people in our community are a vast store of knowledge.

Dr. Ed Erickson's recent Guernsey Memorial Library lectures about history, government, and the military have been vastly popular, as have the library's maker classes, the most recent being a crochet class featuring local gem Pat Horton.

Many libraries are making changes to become more people-friendly. Guernsey Memorial Library in particular will be embarking on a renovation project starting this year in order to provide for more comfort and space for library users. We'll be fostering learning together, we'll just be doing it wearing masks.

These days library users are as likely to come in to use our free WiFi, stream some music or videos, or have us help them with their phone's ebook app as they are to borrow physical books to read. People are increasingly using library-supported apps for ebooks, digital audiobooks, database access, streaming music, and streaming videos since the advent of COVID and our time spent socially-distanced at home.

This trend will likely continue as people come to realize that a book is a book and reading is reading, regardless of whether it is obtained as a hardcover in the library at three o'clock in the afternoon or as an ebook on your tablet, or as a digital audiobook on your phone at three o'clock in the morning.

But if you're one of the many set on getting your bibliosmia fix, just come in to one of your Chenango County libraries, find the nonfiction section, select the mustiest, dustiest tome, and fasten your seat belt.

Serenity Hobbies —

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al expenses for both the business and customers in addition to lost patronage.

"As for the government, it would be nice to see either donations of N95 masks for customers who come in without one, and/or supplying us with some cleaning and sanitizing supplies," said Eric.

Serenity Hobbies has been in business for almost three and a half years, and at the current 10 South Broad St. location for about the last two years.

The store is open from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Monday and Thursday; from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Friday; from noon to 8 p.m. on Saturday; and noon to 4 p.m. on Sunday.

The business offers an array of new and classic board games.

Perhaps most popular are the trading card games like Magic: The Gathering, Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh!. The store sells a wide range of single cards for Magic as well.

The shop also hosts war-gaming, which are games that predominantly feature building and painting your own army of models before playing with them, such as Warhammer.

Role playing games are a



Perhaps most popular at Serenity Hobbies are the trading card games like Magic: The Gathering, Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh!. The store sells a wide range of single cards for Magic as well. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

staple, including Dungeons & Dragons, Pathfinder and many more. Along with these types of games, you can also find the gaming accessories, such as miniatures, paints, deck boxes, card sleeves, storage containers and other supplies.

There are events held weekly. On Monday nights Serenity Hobbies offers \$5 tournaments for Yu-Gi-Oh! and have an open "board gaming night," where anyone can come in and bring a game to play or play anything they have in the store.

On Fridays the store runs

"Friday Night Magic," which are unopened booster pack draft tournaments for \$15.

Players begin the tournament with packs of unopened cards, and then all the players build decks from them and play each other.

On Saturdays there are usually special events, from tournaments to birthday parties to extra board game days.

On Sundays the store offers drop-in Role Playing groups.

Unless stated above, there is no cost for the events.



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Big things in store for the Earlville Opera House in 2022 -

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we present music. The fact that we have three gallery spaces here and we do workshops makes us a multi-arts center, meaning we have multi-disciplines happening here," said EOH Executive Director Michelle Connelly. "With the addition of us taking on the State Community Regrant program, we're also now a cultural service provider on top of being a presenter and a multi-arts center ... meaning that we help a field in the tri-county area, through grants and technical assistance and that sort of thing, to help them emerge."

While the historic and hulking opera house has stood tall in the Douglass Block in Earlville for 130 years, the organization was not incorporated as a multi-arts center until 1972. Now, 50 years later, the EOH is still doing what they do best: bringing the community together through music and the arts.

50th year celebration

To celebrate this milestone, EOH officials are planning an entire year of performances and events to take a look back on the



last 50 years of music and art.

"We're excited for 2022 being that it is our 50th. We have a great performance season lined up reflecting past favorites mixed in with some new performers to our stage, who are very highly accomplished," said Connelly. "We've got fourteen awesome high-caliber performances lined up, and on top of that we're going to be having a year long 50th anniversary retrospective gallery exhibit."

The opera house is home to three art galleries, which will be packed for the entire year with featured works by artists who have displayed their art at the EOH in the past.

"We have three gallery spaces here: the East Gallery, the West Gallery, and the Arts Cafe. And with a 50-year history and showing the artists, we're going to have to limit it to one piece per artist. I mean, this place is going to be filled with spectacular

art for the year," Connelly explained. "We're going to ask these artists to come to different events so they can chat with people, and also ask them to write a little blurb about what their experiences with the opera house have been, maybe highlighting their favorite one that we will probably put up underneath their piece of artwork."

In addition to the 50-year anniversary, it is also the 25th anniversary of the EOH Holiday Gift

Shop. Connelly said she expects to plan some fun and exciting things to celebrate.

"This year is also the 25th anniversary of our infamous and coveted holiday gift shop, which I'm sure we'll have some fun things happening for that," she said. "I remember when it was our 20th, we were like, the 20th person that walks through the door gets all this stuff kind of thrown at them, and gifts and prizes and all that kind of stuff. So we'll find some fun things to do with that."

While 2022 will be a glimpse into the history of the Earlville Opera House, Connelly said she also wants to spend the year looking to the future, to plan and prepare for the opera house's next 50 years.

"We'll be having special things throughout the whole year to recognize the achievements of the past, and again focus on our future vision for the next 50 years," said Connelly.

Rounding out the year will be a blowout celebration of the decades of work to provide music and arts to

the community. Performer David Bromberg will take the EOH stage, and Joey Skaags, a political activist also known for saving the Earlville Opera House, will be returning to join in on the festivities.

"Later in this year we have a special concert in September. David Bromberg, who is a very big name, is coming and we're actually going to have the savior of the opera house, Joey Skaags, come back to celebrate with us," Connelly explained. "He's the one that saved this building from demolition. He sold it to a group of dedicated, passionate volunteers for a dollar, who then, you know, started everything the Earlville Opera House multi-arts center related."

"He's just so thrilled that we're still in existence and that we're thriving, and he's so happy to come back up here and celebrate with us," she added.

Getting through COVID

With so many exciting plans on the horizon, it's hard to believe that the Earlville Opera House just got through a pandemic.

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The facility was closed for nearly 16 months, from March 16, 2020 to July 31, 2021.

“We were dark for a considerable amount of time,” said Connelly. “However, we were on the front line trying to sustain our mission that whole time, and thanks to a loyal patron base coupled with local foundations that really care about the mission of nonprofits in our communities, we have been able to remain vital with our programming.”

Being forced to close up for so long was a serious blow to the organization in many ways. Connelly explained that the opera house relies mainly on admission sales for income. Without admissions, they also lose out on revenue from several other sources.

“When we were closed we didn’t have shows. Which, admissions is our number one income source. [If] we don’t have shows we don’t have corporate sponsorships, we don’t have ticket sales, we don’t have sales in our gallery, we don’t have sales in our gift shop, we don’t have concession sales, we

don’t have merchandise sales. So that’s everything to us,” she explained.

Additionally, being unable to host community members is against the grain of what the arts are meant to do: bring people together.

“Our purpose of what the arts do is forming social bonds. Audience building, being a center for the community to gather. Those are the things that have been the heartbreaking thing that we haven’t been able to do. Which, what the arts do is connect people,” said Connelly.

Weathering COVID-19 and the subsequent closing of the facility was no easy task for the Earlville Opera House. But, Connelly said they got creative and adapted their programs and functions to fit this new world. Then, when they were able, the facility reopened and got right back into the swing of things.

“We immediately switched to virtual programming when it was needed, and then when we opened again on July 31 of 2021,” Connelly explained. “Since that time, we have been back to live programming, we’ve had a num-

ber of shows since that timeline. Performances, bringing Grammy Award winning musicians to our stage. So we have been very fortunate.”

The Earlville Opera House also implemented COVID safety guidelines to protect their patrons and employees. Luckily, visitors to the facility have been supportive and understanding of the measures, according to Connelly.

“Since August [of 2021] we’ve been vaccine-only entry, with masks worn inside. We have not had any negative repercussions from this. Rather, we’ve had our audiences thanking us for being due diligent and keeping everybody as safe as possible, because our 1892 theater does not have ventilation, and the seats are very small and close to each other and that sort of thing.”

“So people have been very supportive and kind to the opera house during this whole experience, which truly has been unprecedented,” she added.

Fortunately, the Earlville Opera House is getting closer to normal operations and doing well, according to Connelly. She said she hopes conditions continue to improve, and if they don’t, they will find



The infamous Earlville Opera House Holiday Gift Shop will be ringing in its 25th year in 2022. EOH Executive Director Michelle Connelly said she hopes to plan some fun surprises to celebrate the milestone. (Submitted photo)

new ways to adapt.

“Compared to a year ago this time, we are much better. We are open, we are doing activities on site and in person, which is definitely a huge step forward. We want to, in 2022, if the climate allows, to pick back up our youth arts ini-

tiative and art education, which is something that we haven’t been able to fully execute because of the pandemic,” she said. “So, you know, fingers crossed moving forward things will get better, or we will learn a better way to live and work and operate under

these conditions.”

Connelly added that the Earlville Opera House was able to pull through the worst of the pandemic because of the support and kindness of their patrons.

“We still are experiencing COVID fatigue just

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Reyna and the Rustics Courtyard Show. (Submitted photo)



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Big things in store for the Earlville Opera House in 2022 -

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from trying to survive. But the fact that people and our patrons are still with us and supportive, and appreciative of how we have navigated the pandemic, it absolutely boosts our morale," she said. "Knowing there's such a call for what we do, and that it's appreciated and valued, definitely puts the wind underneath our wings to keep us going."

Renovations, expansion, and developments

In addition to the festivities planned for 2022, the Earlville Opera House will also be working on expanding and renovating areas of their facility, updating aspects of the theater, and obtaining permits for alcohol sales.

"It's been hard, not only the pandemic, but we've been having to compete with a lot of local breweries that have been popping up and presenting the same type of music we do. You know, our kind of folk music," said Connelly. "So we've actually been getting permits to serve alcohol here. Beer, wine, cider, and that sort of thing, too. So we're trying to keep in the game, you know?"

Expansion efforts are well under way as well. An additional portion of the



EOH volunteers preparing the walls of the west gallery for painting. (Submitted photo)

opera house building was recently purchased by the organization, and renovations are currently in the works.

"We just purchased more of our building. It used to be the Little M ... and there's a residential apartment upstairs," said Connelly. "We are so lucky to have a crew of retired experts in fields such as engineering, construction, plumbing, electrical, that sort of thing, who have put their skills to the best use. And what we intend to do with the space is rent out the downstairs as another commercial entity that would add some, hopefully, some food services to downtown Earlville. That's our number one focus that we're looking for."

According to Connelly,

the renovations are being funded by grants. The purchase of the building section was made possible by a private backer, and will be paid off by the EOH by renting out the residential area on the second floor.

"The renovations have been done and are being done with grants. We actually have a private backer holding a mortgage for us, that we are paying off via renting the residential space," she explained. "So it's worked to our favor, and a win-win situation where we can cover our costs through the rental income. And we'll have a little extra left over to pay for helping us renovate the downstairs portion."

There are also plans to switch the 1892 theater from

analog to digital systems, and the EOH is also finishing up a building condition report that was funded by a grant through Preserve New York. The report will highlight areas of the building that may need work or renovations, and will help to preserve the historic structure.

"We did get a grant from Preserve New York to do a building condition report, which is just about wrapping up, that is highlighting areas of this building that may need attention," Connelly said. "[We're] putting priorities first so we can address them, in order to meet that part of our mission that would keep this building for future generations to use for cultural purposes."

Sustaining the mission

The mission of the Earlville Opera House is "enriching the community through the arts, while preserving our historic building for future generations," according to Connelly. Through the dedication and effort of EOH staff, it's no doubt that the mission is being well fulfilled. The organization provides musical performances, art shows, plays, and more.

That being said, it doesn't mean things are

always easy. The pandemic presented a unique set of challenges, and being in the rural area of Chenango County can present its own difficulties as well.

"We are in a rural area, so there's not a real lot of industry corporate support at this current time. And especially in our rural community, a lot of just regular businesses and families are still experiencing their own economic hardships from the COVID pandemic," said Connelly. "So, of course one of our challenges is always future sustainability of our mission with local support. So that's something that never changes for the arts, we're always worried about sustaining."

"But the arts actually are the foundation of our civilization, so they will go on. We always persevere," she added. "Like I continue to say, out of bad times comes good art, which is true."

Despite the challenges, the Earlville Opera House Arts Center has remained strong, and continued to provide cultural and artistic enrichment to the Chenango County community and beyond for 50 years.

"This opera house truly is and has been referred to as the gem of Central New York. In my short four and

a half years with this organization, I definitely have seen this place as a treasure, for sure," said Connelly. "Our advantage of being in Chenango County, we are at the northernmost entrance way, the gateway into Chenango County, which we are very proud of. We are one of the oldest cultural organizations in Chenango County."

Expansion, improvement, celebration, and more are all in store for the Earlville Opera House in 2022. Through continued community support and involvement, the multi-arts center will only continue to thrive and sustain their mission.

"Keep your eye on Earlville, because we are up and rising, and we're trying to revitalize the village center," Connelly said. "We think it's going to be a wonderful thing for the community. And the opera house as well, but overall the village itself, with all the new things we have going on, the spaces we're renovating, and the people with creative ideas that are going to be coming in with the new services and opportunities for the residents here."



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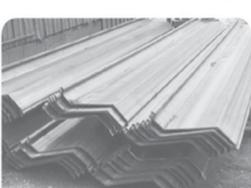
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