

# BERKS WEEKLY

**VOL. 1 NO. 2**

**RICK PEREZ**



**"Our mission  
is recreation,  
education,  
and fun"**

## FROM CLUB KID TO CEO OF OLIVET BOYS & GIRLS CLUB



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## Inside This Issue

- 03** A pressing piece of Pagoda history finds a new home at City Hall
- 04** A Life in Motion: Kelly Barber's Journey from Berks Ballet to Artistic Leadership
- 06** Tom Voelker: Leading with vision, community, and heart at Daniel Boone Area School District
- 08** Full circle: Rick Perez's journey from club kid to CEO of Olivet Boys & Girls Club
- 10** WCO Shane Casey: Protecting Pennsylvania's waterways with passion
- 12** David Anspach: Building community, one project at a time
- 14** Making a splash: How Jean Esther's ocean-inspired mural brought new life to Schlegel Park Pool

## Editor's Note

Our Print Edition is quickly becoming a new way to share the stories that define Berks County. This second issue offers another collection of people and places making a difference — from classrooms and community centers to waterways and public art. Inside, you'll find the journey of Rick Perez from Olivet club kid to CEO, a glimpse of Pagoda history now at City Hall, and the voices of leaders, educators, and artists shaping our region. Each story adds to the larger portrait of life in Berks. Thank you for continuing to support local journalism in print and online.

— Jason Hugg, Editor

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## A pressing piece of Pagoda history finds a new home at City Hall

**HOMETOWN FOCUS**



While the lights atop Mount Penn remain dark during renovations, a popular Pagoda souvenir continues to shine from a new home. The Pagoda-themed Penny Press machine, long a favorite for visitors, has been relocated to Reading City Hall.

The move was prompted by the city's construction project, which required removal of items from inside the Pagoda. "Because the press belongs to PSI and generates some income, the decision was made to move it somewhere the public could still access it," said Kevin Lerch of Pagoda-Skyline, Inc. (PSI). "City Hall was chosen for its accessibility and expediency."

PSI, a nonprofit formed in the 1970s, owns the press and helps maintain the Pagoda, the William Penn Memorial Fire Tower, and Skyline Drive. The Foundation for the Reading Pagoda, a separate group, focuses solely on the Pagoda.

The penny press, estimated to date back to 2008, offers four designs: the Pagoda,

the Fire Tower, the Duryea Hillclimb, and a Reading Railroad locomotive. "One boy submitted both the Pagoda and Tower design," recalled PSI secretary Mark Ray. "I made the hillclimb design because no one submitted something like that."

Though modest in revenue, the press provides symbolic value. "It's a way to create souvenirs for visitors," Lerch said. With the U.S. Mint no longer producing new pennies, he added, the keepsakes may become even more meaningful.

Funds collected support minor upkeep, while larger renovations—such as electrical and HVAC upgrades—are funded through sources like the American Rescue Plan Act.

Both PSI and the Foundation continue seeking community support through donations, memberships, and volunteer opportunities. As Lerch noted, "There has been a great deal of public interest since the renovations were announced."

# A Life in Motion: Kelly Barber's Journey from Berks Ballet to Artistic Leadership

## ARTS & CULTURE



For Kelly Barber, ballet has never been just an activity—it has been a calling. The Reading native's journey from a young student at Carol Ennis Dance Arts to the Artistic Director of Berks Ballet Theatre (BBT) is a testament to her dedication to both the art form and the community that nurtured her.

"I honestly don't remember asking to take dance classes," Barber said. "My mother just put me in them when I was four. It felt natural. It was what I was supposed to do."

What began as childhood ballet lessons eventually grew into a professional career, with Barber dancing leading roles in classics like *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. After training at Carol Ennis's studio and performing with BBT as a soloist, Barber joined Ballet Theatre of Maryland. There,

she found herself immersed in a close-knit company where opportunities to perform were plentiful—a formative experience that shaped her understanding of the dance world.

"It was a full-time job," she explained. "We'd take class every day, rehearse all day, perform, and do lecture demonstrations at schools. You're not just a dancer—you're an athlete."

Returning to Reading after her time in Maryland, Barber continued performing with Berks Ballet Theatre. Though teaching wasn't part of her initial plan, a chance opportunity to give private lessons sparked a new passion. Over time, she took on more teaching responsibilities, eventually stepping into the role of Artistic Director following Carol Ennis's retirement.

"Initially, I resisted the idea of becoming Artistic Director," Barber admitted. "But after a few years, I realized how much I loved it—keeping BBT alive, maintaining the legacy Carol built, while also infusing my own ideas."

During her 17 seasons leading BBT, Barber choreographed original works, coordinated community collaborations, and guided generations of young dancers. Highlights of her tenure include performances with the Reading Symphony Orchestra and Reading Pops, as well as taking the company to regional festivals, even as far as Montreal.

"Collaborating with other arts organizations in Reading was something I was always proud of," she said. "One of my favorite projects was 'Peter and the Wolf' with the Reading Symphony Orchestra for local elementary school students. Seeing kids light up during performances is incredibly rewarding."

While Barber has recently stepped down from her post at BBT, she remains deeply involved in the dance community. She currently teaches at Wayne Ballet and serves as Artistic Coordinator for Ballet 180, working with student companies and sharing her expertise with new generations of dancers.

"I've been fortunate to have a long career where I've danced, choreographed, directed, and taught," she reflected. "Now, I'm excited to meet new dancers, work with different schools, and focus on teaching, which is where my heart is."

Barber's teaching philosophy emphasizes

positivity, strong fundamentals, and the life lessons learned through dance—discipline, perseverance, and teamwork. She finds joy in watching her students grow, whether they pursue professional dance careers, become teachers themselves, or apply what they've learned to other paths.

"I've had students go on to perform professionally, create their own companies, or pursue careers in musical theater," she said. "But even those who don't stay in dance carry the experience with them. That's the most rewarding part."

Looking ahead, Barber plans to continue teaching while also exploring personal interests she put aside during her demanding years at BBT.

"For a long time, I worked seven days a week. I'm looking forward to a little more balance—having Sundays off is exciting," she laughed.

Though the dance world has evolved, with social media and increased competition shaping today's landscape, Barber believes its core remains the same.

"Ballet is still ballet. It's still beautiful, still demanding," she said. "But what's encouraging is seeing more women in leadership roles and more recognition for female choreographers. That's progress."

As Barber moves into this new chapter, her influence on the local arts community continues to ripple outward—an enduring legacy built on passion, dedication, and a life in motion.

# Tom Voelker: Leading with vision, community, and heart at Daniel Boone Area School District

## IN THE CLASSROOM

In the Daniel Boone Area School District—where Birdsboro, Amity Township, and Union Township intersect—Superintendent Tom Voelker is working to inspire students, engage families, and strengthen community ties. A familiar face in local education, Voelker blends passion, local roots, and forward-thinking leadership that is shaping the district's future and leaving a meaningful mark on those he serves.

For Voelker, returning to Daniel Boone feels personal. He grew up nearby, attended Wyomissing schools, and studied at Shippensburg University. After beginning his teaching career in the Reading School District, he moved to Daniel Boone, where he taught sixth-grade math and science and discovered the joy of connecting with students in the classroom.

"I absolutely loved it," Voelker recalls. "But I wanted to challenge myself in administration and moved back to Reading before taking a leadership role at Brandywine Heights. When the opportunity at Daniel Boone came up, I couldn't pass it up. This is where I started my educational journey in a meaningful way, and the chance to return felt right."

Outside of work, Voelker is a family man. Married to his wife, Jennifer, for 20 years, they share two daughters, Claire and Allison. Music and chess are favorite pastimes, and he enjoys playing guitar whenever he can, but family always comes first. "Family is priority number one," he says. "Being a husband and

father is what grounds me and shapes everything else I do."

Voelker's route to teaching was less direct than most. He once considered the Marine Corps and changed majors several times in college. "I kept finding that I loved helping people," he explains. "Tutoring gave me joy in those 'aha moments.' My mom, a lifelong teacher, always said I'd make a good teacher. She was right." That realization set him on a path that has spanned decades and countless student interactions.

As a teacher, Voelker created lasting memories. He fondly recalls annual rocket launches with students, a favorite unit that combined science lessons with excitement. "Most launched well, some ended up on roofs—it was always a blast," he laughs. He also remembers organizing dodgeball tournaments, rock band competitions, and Rubik's cube lunches. "You never know what will connect with a student, but those connections last a lifetime," he says, noting that it is often the smaller, more personal moments that resonate most.

Now in his second year as superintendent, Voelker leads a district spanning 39 square miles and serving more than 17,000 residents. One of his main priorities has been rebuilding trust and communication. "When I came back, I felt like transparency wasn't where it should be," Voelker says. "We've implemented public budget workshops and forward-facing communication so the community knows what's going on. It's about building trust and focusing on

positive thinking rather than dwelling on the negative."

Like many leaders, Voelker faces challenges in a divided climate but remains focused on what unites the community. "Our biggest challenge is finding ways to bring people together," he says. "We all want the best for our kids. Misconceptions about what happens in schools can cloud that, so our job is to keep communication clear and work toward unity."

A self-described "data nerd," Voelker has guided the district in developing a multi-year strategic plan. His first year was spent listening to staff and community feedback, identifying areas for growth, and laying the groundwork for consistent progress. "A lot of the work we're doing is back to basics—focusing on instructional practice and building meaningful relationships with students and families," he says. "It all starts and ends with those relationships."

Beyond academics, Voelker champions programs that build belonging. From arts and clubs to emerging programs like esports, his goal is to ensure that every student finds a place where they can thrive. He emphasizes that school is about more than test scores—it's about preparing young people to feel valued and connected.

Personalizing his role comes naturally. "The only person I know how to be is me," Voelker says. "My favorite part of the day is visiting buildings, seeing learning in action, laughing with kids, and joking with staff. I've found the most success when I identify talent and then get out of the way. It's about trusting people and letting them do what they're



great at." His leadership style is rooted in authenticity, collaboration, and respect for the talents of others.

This approach has helped foster a culture of appreciation and teamwork across the district. Teachers and staff feel supported, students feel seen, and families know their voices matter. Over time, Voelker believes this culture of trust will lead to sustained success.

Voelker's optimism about the future is clear, and his energy is contagious. "I'm excited about the path we're on for the next five years," he says. "We're becoming the district we all know we can be. Our staff, students, and community are on board, and I can't wait to see where we go."

In a district as diverse and dynamic as Daniel Boone's, Tom Voelker's leadership is proving to be a beacon of positive change. He draws from his personal journey, professional experiences, and family values to guide his decisions, always keeping the focus on students. With trust, community engagement, and a deep commitment to the success of every child, Voelker is shaping a brighter future for the district and the communities it serves.

For Rick Perez, CEO of the Olivet Boys & Girls Club of Reading & Berks County, the journey from wide-eyed club kid to community leader has been anything but conventional. A Reading native, Perez's connection to Olivet began during a pivotal time in his childhood, and over the years, that relationship has grown into a lifelong commitment to youth development, mentorship, and community service.

"I was born in Reading, grew up right in the city, and started going to Olivet around the age of 11," Perez recalled. "At the time, my parents had just divorced, and the Club became a place of refuge and fun. It introduced me to sports, friendships, and a sense of community that I hadn't experienced before."

That early exposure to Olivet's programs was just the beginning. After high school stints at Muhlenberg and Wilson, and playing collegiate basketball at West Chester University, Perez's path remained uncertain. A return home led him back to Olivet—not as a member, but as a staff member. What began as a job opportunity soon revealed a deeper calling.

"I never intended to coach. Honestly, I didn't know what I was going to do," he said. "But being around the kids, I started to feel empowered. Coaching happened organically, and it ended up transforming my life."

That transformation culminated in a remarkable coaching career, most notably as head coach of the Reading High School boys basketball team, where Perez led the Red Knights to three PIAA Class 6A championships. Today, he continues to coach at Muhlenberg High School while leading Olivet into a new era.

Perez's appointment as CEO was not some-



FEATURE STORY

## Full circle: Rick Perez's journey from club kid to CEO of Olivet Boys & Girls Club

thing he actively pursued. Instead, it was the encouragement of community leaders like Dr. Khalid Mumin, Angel Helm, and P. Sue Perrotty that propelled him into the role. "They told me, 'You're going to be the CEO of Olivet.' I thought they were joking. But they saw something in me that I hadn't seen in myself yet."

Under Perez's leadership, Olivet is focusing on reopening key club locations, enhancing partnerships with local schools, and expanding its reach to support more of Berks County's youth. Immediate goals include revitalizing the Powell and Mulberry clubs, which had been closed due to maintenance issues.

"Our mission is recreation, education, and fun," Perez explained. "We're not here to replace school. We want to support kids through programs that build leadership, provide academic support, and offer a safe, engaging environment after school."

With an average daily attendance of 350 children and a growing membership nearing 700, Olivet's impact is evident. But Perez is determined to reach even more. "There are nearly 19,000 students in the Reading School District. We want to find ways to reach every single one of them—whether that's through our club locations, partnerships with schools, or even virtual programs."

A defining aspect of Perez's leadership is his personal connection to the kids Olivet serves. "I was one of these kids. I get it. I know what it's like to race your bike to the club after school. That relatability helps build authentic connections."

But Olivet's success isn't just about one person. Perez is quick to credit the dedicated staff, board members, and volunteers who keep the organization moving forward. "When I started, I walked into summer camp and saw 80 kids bursting with energy. That told me everything I needed to know—Olivet is alive and well because of the people who believe in this mission."

Looking ahead, Perez envisions Olivet as a hub of inclusivity and opportunity. Whether it's expanding sports programs, fostering leadership development, or collaborating with community partners, his goal is clear: to create a positive, lasting impact on the lives of Berks County's youth.

"I always ask the kids, 'Who's the next CEO?' Because I see myself in them. This role isn't about the title—it's about giving back to the place that gave me so much."

For those interested in supporting Olivet, opportunities abound—from volunteering and mentorship to financial donations. "We need people. We need volunteers. Our kids benefit from seeing people from all walks of life who are willing to invest in them."

Rick Perez's story is a testament to the power of community, perseverance, and coming full circle. As he leads Olivet into its next chapter, his focus remains steadfast: empowering the next generation, one child at a time.

For more information or to get involved, visit [www.olivetbgc.org](http://www.olivetbgc.org) or follow Olivet Boys & Girls Club on social media.

# WCO Shane Casey: Protecting Pennsylvania's waterways with passion

## FIRST RESPONDERS

Pennsylvania's waterways are more than just picturesque escapes for anglers, boaters, and nature enthusiasts—they're thriving ecosystems that require careful protection and management. Behind the scenes, Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) play a crucial role in conserving these aquatic resources. These officers aren't just enforcers of fishing and boating laws; they're educators, community liaisons, and stewards of the environment. Shane Casey is one of these dedicated officers, patrolling the waters of Schuylkill County and Northern Berks County to ensure they remain safe and vibrant for all who enjoy them.

For Shane Casey, the job is more than just a career—it's the perfect blend of two lifelong passions: law enforcement and the great outdoors. "I am passionate about law enforcement and passionate about the outdoors, so it's the best of both worlds," he says. "I feel very fortunate to have this position." His role as a WCO allows him to protect Pennsylvania's waterways while indulging in his love for nature.

Growing up in Waverly, Pennsylvania, Shane's fascination with the outdoors began early. After earning a degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Environmental Science from Lycoming College, he found the ideal path that united his interests. This background now serves him well as he navigates the diverse challenges of the job, from law enforcement to community engagement.

WCOs wear many hats, often finding themselves on the frontlines of both environmental protection and community interaction. "We're tasked with multiple things, from stocking trout in the spring



time to boat law enforcement in the summer," Shane explains. "We're always working closely with the community." His work involves checking fishing licenses and boat registrations, but also educating the public on safety and conservation. "Whether it's enforcement or just a conversation, I aim to educate people about fishing, boating, and hunting," he adds.

Outreach is an important part of the job. Shane and his colleagues lead fishing programs, promote watercraft safety, and speak on environmental stewardship. Still, he notes, many people aren't aware of the role. "I don't think a lot of people know who we are all the time. From our standpoint, it's that we can see you, but you can't see us. There's a reason for that—we're making sure you're doing the right thing. We try to engage with the community as much as possible, not just making quick inspections and leaving."

Challenges come with the territory. Not everyone welcomes the presence of a conservation officer, and Shane admits that "dealing with the not-so-pleasant people can add some difficulty." Yet, he finds satisfaction in dialogue, whether with seasoned anglers or first-time boaters. "Professionally, it's opened up doors to different resources and a lot of great connections," he says. "Personally, I enjoy what I do because I get to work outdoors. Even though I'm patrolling for violations, I'm also out there recreationally. I often go hunting, fishing, and boating myself outside of work, so it's the best of both worlds."

Off-duty, Shane remains deeply connected to the natural world he protects. He spends his free time hunting, fishing, kayaking, and enjoying nature walks with his wife and dog. "I'm a humble person and don't like to brag," he says, though his passion is clear. He also emphasizes the importance of continual learning. "The best advice I can offer is to challenge yourself and try new things, because that's the way you're going to learn. Using your own experiences, you'll have better conversations and understand it a lot better than just learning it out of a book."

WCOs like Shane Casey are often unsung heroes of Pennsylvania's environmental efforts. They patrol lakes, rivers, and streams not just to enforce the law, but to educate people and preserve resources. As Shane points out, they're not always visible, but they're always present—quietly watching, teaching, and protecting.

His dedication reflects the mission of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission: "To protect, conserve, and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities." It's a responsibility he doesn't take lightly. By fostering stronger connections between the public and the environment, he and his fellow officers ensure Pennsylvania's waterways remain vibrant and accessible for generations.

In a time when natural resources are increasingly under pressure, the role of a Waterways Conservation Officer is more vital than ever. Through a blend of law enforcement, education, and passion for the outdoors, Shane Casey embodies the spirit of conservation—an effort to protect, respect, and celebrate Pennsylvania's waterways.



# David Anspach: Building community, one project at a time

## PUBLIC SERVICE



David Anspach is a man on a mission. As the Capital Project Manager for the City of Reading, his passion for transforming and rehabilitating the city's infrastructure is evident in every word he speaks and every project he takes on. Anspach's journey to this crucial role has been one of dedication, hard work, and a commitment to improving the community he calls home.

Born in Maryland but raised right outside Reading on Route 10, Anspach grew up with a deep connection to the city. "I grew up enjoying Angelica Lake, back when it was still a lake," he reminisces. His drive to serve his community has roots in his early experiences and was further honed during his time in the Marine Corps. It was there that he first dabbled in infrastructure work, building critical facilities overseas as part of the civil affairs team. "We were rebuilding government centers, wastewater treatment plants, water treatment facilities," he recalls.

Upon returning to the U.S., Anspach's commitment to public service led him to a position with Reading's wastewater treatment facility, where he quickly rose through the ranks to Plant Manager. His expertise in managing a \$148 million upgrade to the facility caught the city's attention. "The city saw that we were rather successful in doing that and tapped my talents to come over to the Capital Projects Department," he explains. Now, nine years into his career with the city, Anspach is instrumental in overseeing the projects that shape Reading's landscape.

Anspach describes himself as a "concrete person," one who finds satisfac-

tion in tangible achievements. "I like physical structures. I can't play music; I can't paint," he admits. But what he can do is build, rebuild, and rehabilitate the city's infrastructure. It's this drive that keeps him going every day, despite the challenges that come with the territory. "I want to spend every day I can trying to rebuild or rehabilitate anything that's deficient and bring functionality back to those locations for the citizens."

The work of a Capital Project Manager involves a delicate balance of coordination, planning, and hands-on site inspection. "We take all of our projects from concept through dedication," Anspach explains. His responsibilities range from coordinating contracts and engineering to overseeing site inspections and ensuring the projects are built to the city's specifications. "It can be feast or famine some days," he says, noting the cyclical nature of construction work. While winter is spent in planning phases, the summer is all about "shovels in the ground."

What drives Anspach the most is seeing

the community benefit from his work. He takes immense pride in the projects that have brought joy and functionality back to the city, from skateparks to playgrounds. "Making those facilities available and seeing citizens access them and enjoying them is the best feeling," he shares.

One project, in particular, stands out for Anspach: the Lance Place Playground. Originally, he envisioned the small, neglected lot being turned into a parking area, believing it would better serve the community. But then-Managing Director Frank Denbowski, with his Parks & Rec background, pushed Anspach to reconsider. "He said, absolutely not, you will find a way to fix that playground and give it back to the community," Anspach recalls.

With a quick sketch and a resourceful mindset, Anspach and his team transformed the space using relocated equipment and added swings and shade trees. The result? Not just a revitalized playground but a revitalized community. "When we do a little project like that, it becomes a step up for the community," he says proudly. Seeing neighbors start to improve their homes and surroundings in response to the playground's transformation cemented his belief in the power of community projects.

Anspach's job is far from smooth sailing. As he puts it, "The Project Management field is largely about rolling through the punches." Challenges are a daily occurrence, from last-minute malfunctions to unforeseen complications. But for Anspach, every problem is simply "something that hasn't found a resolution yet."

He recalls a particularly tense moment before the dedication ceremony for Centre Park, where the fountain, a key feature of the event, stopped working.

"We had to immediately troubleshoot the problem," he says. With quick thinking and teamwork, they fixed the issue, but such challenges underscore the resilience required in his role. "problems and complications can happen, but by working together with public works and other support, we come together and find a resolution. It's always forward progress."

Anspach has no grand plans beyond his current work, but that doesn't mean he's not thinking ahead. His department is expanding, adding a new Project Coordinator to better serve the city's growing needs. Personally, he's still driven by the need to prove himself. "I wasn't the one the mayor selected for this position initially," he reveals. "Because I wasn't that first choice, I spend every day trying to make it very apparent that I was the right choice from the beginning."

His dedication to Reading is unwavering. "As long as the city will have me, I'll continue to work for them," he says with determination.

Outside of work, Anspach is an outdoor enthusiast, enjoying activities like kayaking, biking, and fishing with his wife. It's this love of nature and the community that makes his work so meaningful. However, he wishes the public would see the city's potential the way he does.

"I wish the public would allow the city an opportunity to prove that it isn't what it once was and it can be much better," he says. He's aware of the negativity that sometimes follows city projects in the media and public comments, but he's hopeful that perceptions will change. "I've been in the city every day, walking, going to projects, and I haven't been shot, stabbed, or mugged," he points out, emphasizing that there's so much more to Reading than its stereotypes.

# Making a splash: How Jean Esther's ocean-inspired mural brought new life to Schlegel Park Pool

PUBLIC ART & MURALS



On the face of the Schlegel Park Pool building, a vivid underwater world has emerged — one not filled with water, but with color, creativity, and community spirit. The expansive mural, painted by local artist Jean Esther, transforms the pool's entrance into a portal to the deep sea, teeming with marine life and imagination. It's a piece that now welcomes visitors not just to swim, but to pause, reflect, and admire.

This is not just a mural; it's a story — and Jean Esther is its author.

Originally commissioned to paint a smaller mural at the rear concession stand inside the pool gates, Esther's work quickly drew attention. When city staff saw what he created behind the scenes, they had a simple idea: why stop there? What began as a contained art project evolved into a sweeping 23-hour transformation of the

entire front of the pool house — a first-of-its-kind piece for the artist and the city alike.

"This is my biggest mural thus far," Esther said during a recent interview. "I'm just excited to be able to share what I do with my own community."

The mural stretches across the entire exterior of the Schlegel Park Pool building, immersing visitors in a vibrant underwater world. A massive red-orange octopus unfurls its tentacles between rocky outcroppings, while a sea turtle glides through a gradient of aquatic blue. On another panel, dolphins swim toward the viewer and orcas drift through what appears to be the ruins of an underwater city — complete with columns, silhouettes of submerged architecture, and coral-covered pathways.

Esther's use of color and motion draws the eye across the building. Layers of marine

life — jellyfish, schools of tropical fish, seaweed, coral, and anemones — give the wall a sense of movement and story. Even the snack stand windows are integrated into the mural, surrounded by reef scenes and playful dolphins, turning a functional space into part of the artwork itself.

It's not just an ocean scene — it's an imaginative reimagining of what a public space can feel like. The effect is immersive, joyful, and reflective of Esther's style: fluid, bold, and community-oriented.

Jean Esther may not hold an official city title, but to many, he's already Reading's resident artist. "He works for the Reading Area Water Authority, and in his spare time, he creates masterpieces," said Daphne Klahr, executive director of the Reading Recreation Commission. "He's amazing with our kids. He comes down to the rec center, shares his talent, and teaches them to paint murals of their own."

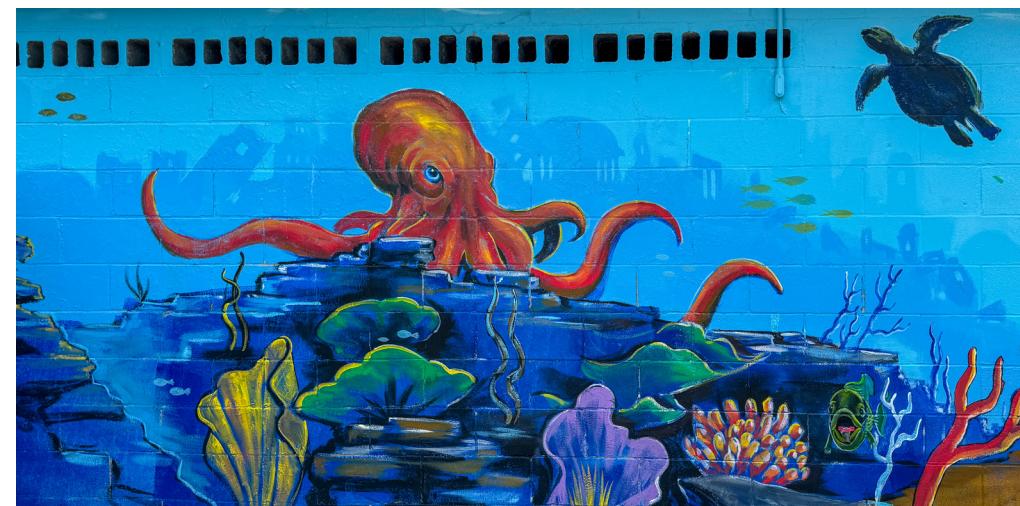
His small studio, affectionately known as "The Art Corner," is where he cultivates his vision and inspires the next generation of artists. Esther is self-taught, though he credits his early years and time at the GoggleWorks for shaping his approach.

"I've been doing this for over 20 years," he said. "I teach kids, seniors, my peers. I paint, draw, host events. I'm just constantly creating."

The mural at Schlegel Park Pool marks a turning point — both for Esther and for public art in Reading. What started with one wall has sparked a broader movement. According to Esther and city officials, he's already been tapped for at least three more mural projects across the city's parks.

City leaders see Esther's work not only as beautification, but as part of a larger cultural revival. "There's a real correlation between the proliferation of the arts and the city on a rebound," said Council President Donna Reed. "This mural shows the sheer amount of talent we have right here in Reading."

Mayor Eddie Morán echoed that sentiment, calling the project a symbol of collaboration between city departments, local artists, and civic leadership. "When we work together, this is what happens," he said. "We're going to do everything in our power to beautify each and every one of our communities."





District 1 Councilor Vanessa Campos, who represents the neighborhood where the pool is located, praised Esther for his contagious energy and heartfelt commitment to the city. "The pride you have in your work is what we need," she told him. "This is about bringing the community together."

For Jean Esther, the mural is both a milestone and a beginning. His passion for art — and for sharing it — shows no signs of slowing. In addition to future murals, Esther continues to teach, mentor, and promote the arts through his platforms, including his brand Art Corner Crew and his animation and graphic novel series Meta Sabian.

He's also documenting his process, sharing behind-the-scenes videos and updates on social media to inspire others to create. "I live to do art and to inspire,"

he said. "Anything I can do to beautify any part of this city — I'm here for it."

As Reading continues its creative resurgence, it's clear that Esther's work is not only making a visual impact — it's shaping a cultural one. And if the Schlegel Park Pool mural is any indication, the city's future looks as colorful as the coral reefs now dancing across its public walls.

#### **Follow Jean Esther and his projects:**

Website: [artcorner.net](http://artcorner.net)

Social Media: @ArtCornerCrew on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube

Graphic Novel & Animation: Meta Sabian

#### **Visit the mural:**

Schlegel Park Pool

100 E. Wyomissing Blvd

Reading, PA 19611

