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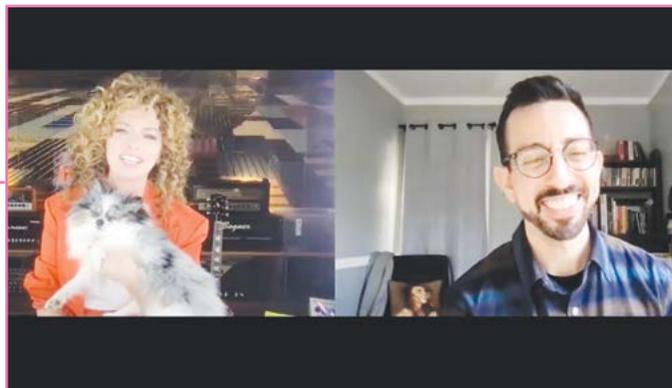
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Find **Pride Source** on YouTube to check out all of our latest videos, including interviews with Jasmin Savoy Brown, Shania Twain, Cara Delevingne, Drew Barrymore and Billy Porter.



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It was gonna be May. And then it was, and here we are. Switch things up this month with one or five brand new adventures, from hitting the dance floor at a new queer club, to listening to Taylor Swift played by a string quartet and snagging tickets for a queer-focused walking tour. Or, spend some time at home with LGBTQ+ film music lovers on Zoom.



Visit a New Queer Club in the Heart of Detroit

Looking for a fresh space to work it out on the dance floor? The Detroit LGBTQ+ nightlife scene is showing signs of renewed growth with Flaming Embers, a new endeavor on the first level of the Broderick Tower in Corktown. The queer-centered space, a new vision in the Detroit Sports Bar & Grille location on Woodward, is billed as an all-inclusive queer dance club that Robert Guzman told the Detroit News is a safe space “for women and marginalized communities first, and then everyone else can come later.” Stop by for a drink and a dance and help get this new queer space off to a strong start.

Flaming Embers, 1850 Woodward Ave., Detroit.



Masonic Crystal Ballroom Candlelight event. Photo: Fever

Experience Your Favorite Music By Candlelight

Fever’s “Candlelight” tributes, featured in cities across the country, offer a, well, lit way to enjoy a special night out. Detroit Candlelight events are held at the iconic Masonic Crystal Ballroom downtown and feature the Kalkaska Quartet, a group of four local stringed instrument players, who play instrumental versions of songs made famous by artists like Adele, Taylor Swift, ABBA and Queen. The hour-long shows take place in a darkened theater setting lit only by hundreds of candles (don’t worry — the candles are battery operated).

Learn more and reserve tickets for upcoming performances at feverup.com/en/detroit/candlelight. Various dates and times. Detroit Masonic Temple in the Masonic Crystal Ballroom (500 Temple St., Detroit).



Jeff Montgomery. Courtesy photo

Catch the Documentary ‘America You Kill Me’

Learn about the late Michigan gay activist Jeff Montgomery’s often troubled, always fiercely honest life at a free showing of the documentary, “America You Kill Me,” winner of the 2022 Freep Film Festival Spirit of Detroit Award. Montgomery was spurred to political action when his boyfriend was murdered outside a bar in Detroit in 1985 and he realized the police weren’t going to investigate because it wasn’t worth their resources. He went on to found the Triangle Foundation, which later became Equality Michigan.

May 16 and May 30, 7 p.m., Ford House (1100 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe Shores). Reserve your free ticket at bit.ly/44PLwZp. Presented in partnership with Ford House, WE GP, Between The Lines Michigan, MotorCity Pride, Ferndale Pride and Macomb County Pride.



Get Moving at a Detroit Pride History Walking Tour

Reserve your tickets now for the June 2 Detroit Pride History Walking Tour. The adventure includes a guided, two-hour tour of Detroit locales related to the city's early LGBTQ+ communities. You'll pass by the locations of historic bars and bathhouses, learn about the unique history of Detroit's early Black LGBTQ+ community and what life was like before Palmer Park and Ferndale rose to queer prominence. You'll also walk along part of the raucous 1972 Christopher Street march, Detroit's first Pride event. Tour guide Michael Boettcher says in a news release about the tour, "We hope you'll join us as we investigate where LGBTQ Detroiters first began connecting publicly, fighting the battles that have given us the freedoms to live, love, and be ourselves."

Friday, June 2, 6 p.m., Detroit History Tours (meet at corner of Griswold St. and W. Congress St. — navigate to 500 Griswold). Reserve tickets at bit.ly/42kepeA.



Study Film Music in an Online LGBTQ+ Workshop

Film buffs and casual watchers alike are invited to a new series of virtual LGBTQ+ film music workshops, set to debut May 19. Each LGBTQ+ Film Music Club event focuses on a different film or TV show (chosen by the facilitator before the session). You'll dive into topics like instrumentation, texture and harmony led by a professional musician and get to know the other queer participants along the way.

May 19, 2:30 p.m., Zoom. Register at bit.ly/3LZNBuo.

Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.

Dr. Ziyad Iskenderian, MD, is an Internal Medicine physician with the Ascension Medical Group in Ferndale and Lathrup Village.

He provides primary care with a focus in weight loss, obesity management, diabetes, hypertension, and congestive heart failure.

He focuses on LGBTQ+ health and advocates for health equity.



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Sidetrack Bookshop owners Jenny Carney (left) and Jen Brown. Photo: Andrew Potter

The Little Michigan Bookshop with a Heart Big Enough to Combat Right-Wing Hate

Sidetrack Bookshop Saw a Spike in Business After Drag Storytime Protest

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When hundreds of counter-protesters showed up to confront an anti-drag contingent that had threatened to disrupt a drag queen storytime at Royal Oak's Sidetrack Bookshop in March, they were the ones sashaying away. Co-owner Jenny Carney says the packed-to-capacity sidewalk lined up outside her store represented a groundswell of community support that hasn't waned since the store opened.

"From the start, people were telling us 'We're so glad you're here,'" Carney recalls. "We were really looking for a way to build community, and it really seems like that feeling is shared by a lot of people who are coming to

Royal Oak."

The story time in question, which featured local drag queen Mimi SouthWest, wasn't Sidetrack's first event featuring drag artistry and, Carney says, it won't be the last. After all, these events are at the heart of the store's mission, and it doesn't hurt that the spectacle created by the would-be disruptors has been financially beneficial.

"Our business is booming," she tells BTL.

Visibly supporting community members who come from wide-ranging backgrounds is a key part of how Carney and her wife and Sidetrack co-owner, Jen Brown, promote inclusivity. There's just something magical about connecting

readers, including the youngest readers, with the creators of stories that take them on journeys, expose them to new ideas and offer authentic representation. Take "Batcat," for example, a graphic novel series written and illustrated by non-binary Michigan creator Meggie Ramm, a recently featured special guest.

"It doesn't talk about the batcat being nonbinary, but it's just such a cool representation, right?" Carney says. "Meggie spent so much time with each one of the kids, encouraging their artistic efforts, and the kids were so engaged — this wasn't an author here signing books.

"And that's the real beauty of that whole experience of the protest and the response and the support from it.

We are able to turn the spotlight on people who are doing amazing work," she says. "We can really highlight and lift that up, which is really part of what we wanted to do from the start. And now — because of these wackadoodles — we're able to do even more, which is just so cool."

Before launching Sidetrack, Carney and Brown worked together at Carney's law practice full time. These days, the couple splits their time among legal work, raising their family and managing the shop, which Carney calls the couple's "pandemic baby."

While on an extended family vacation in Florida in 2021, Carney says the couple started to reevaluate their lives, asking questions like,

"How do we want to move forward in this world?" and "What's really important?" Ultimately, their answers centered on coming together in community and sharing joy and laughter. "That's what's really important to us," she says.

"We wanted something different than what we were doing before, and we are a family of readers, so it somehow stumbled into this idea of opening a bookstore," Carney remembers.

At first, the family considered setting up shop in Florida, where Carney's parents have a winter home, but ultimately it made more sense to

See *Sidetrack*, page 24

Behind the Motor City Pride Talent

How Organizers Lined Up MCP's 2023 Entertainment Roster

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It's something you've probably not given a lot of thought to: How do Pride festivals like Motor City Pride (MCP) select the entertainers who will take the stage and bring the crowds to their feet?

It might surprise you to know that behind the scenes at MCP, set for June 10 and 11, there's a team of only two tackling the challenge of filling all four stages in Hart Plaza. It's a monumental task, but it's in good hands.

Darius Wheeler is MCP's entertainment director. This is Wheeler's seventh year working on the entertainment committee and this year, for the first time, he's head of it all. Wheeler and MCP entertainment coordinator Alex Delavan, who first volunteered for MCP in 2018, work in unison to make it all happen.

The process begins in January. Right after ringing in the new year, Wheeler and Delavan meet for the first time to start talking about this year's lineup. They begin going through submissions and decide, first of all, whether the acts fit in with the overall theme of Pride and, then, what stage they'd fit best on.

"We typically have an idea of how we want the stage to sound," Wheeler told BTL.

The Pride Stage is for the biggest name acts — this year, MCP welcomes pop singer-songwriter Jordy, whose new album "Boy" is out now; Detroit native and up-and-coming pop artist Siena Liggins; The Robyn Party, a tribute to Swedish dance-pop artist Robyn, and local drag favorite Sabin. You'll also find "RuPaul's Drag Race" stars like Robin Fierce and Jasmine Kennedie on the Pride Stage. The Riverfront Dance Stage is usually where the DJs like John Collins spin. The Festival Stage, where you can catch a performance by "poolside glitter punk" band Hayley and the Crushers, is predominantly punk, rock 'n' roll and folk. Finally, the Pyramid Stage is for up-and-coming talent — don't miss Robert Bannon on Saturday night.

"It's for those acts that may not have a large following on social

media," Wheeler said about the Pyramid Stage. "They're really just trying to get themselves out there, so we try to give them the opportunity. The Pyramid Stage really has the most eclectic acts. You can go from blues to live bands to a rap group to drag queens. You really do have a large variety on the Pyramid Stage."

Wheeler and Delavan work simultaneously on programming all four stages. But it all begins with watching and listening to submissions.

"I think some people don't believe that we listen to every single individual that submits," said Wheeler. "Out of 198 people, I have watched probably double or triple the amount of videos. I actually go through the Rolodex, I look at their YouTube, I listen to their Spotify. We really do dig deep on the artists."

Wheeler said that sometimes he or Delavan actually go out to see potential acts perform and witness how they work the crowd. "We really do take time out to get to know people when we select them," he said. "A lot of people think we sit behind a computer and play Russian roulette with our choices, but we don't."

The biggest challenge for Wheeler is, he said, keeping a balance between his MCP commitments and his day job in banking. Wheeler is, like all MCP staff, a volunteer.

"I have to find that balance of making sure that I respond to emails for our entertainers and try to get those requests processed while at the same time do my normal job."

Entertainers are often up late at night. Wheeler



See MCP, page 8

Jordy (left) and Robin Fierce (right) will perform at Motor City Pride in Detroit, set for June 10 and 11. Photos courtesy of MCP

Anti-LGBTQ+ Group Claims Anti-Catholic Sentiment

Church Militant Org Calls on Ferndale City Council to Fly Sacred Heart Flag During Pride Month

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Church Militant (CM), a conservative organization that operates a news website, is demanding that the Ferndale City Council allow a religious flag to be flown outside Ferndale City Hall during Pride Month. The group is accusing the Council of anti-Catholic discrimination, though it is not affiliated with the local Catholic Archdiocese or any other.

CM is registered as a 501(c)4 corporation. They are not a church and have no meeting place in the city. Further, CM has long been forbidden by the Archdiocese of Detroit from portraying itself as an official Catholic organization or, for that matter, even using the word Catholic to promote its activities. A letter from the Archdiocese to the group can still be found online.

“They are not a church,” said Oscar N. Renautt, a Ferndale resident. “They don’t have a parish, there are no priests, there are no services. They have 501(c)4 status which is not a non-profit classification for churches.”

Despite this, several individuals connected to CM spoke out at the city council meeting alleging they had been discriminated against by the city for their anti-gay views. For what their website says was the third

time, members asked the council to fly the Sacred Heart flag in June. June is, of course, Pride Month and the city traditionally flies the LGBTQ+ Pride flag during that time.

According to Angelus Press, which bills itself as the premier source of information on the Traditional Latin Mass and the practice of an integral Catholic Faith in today’s world, the Sacred Heart flag is traditionally flown in June, which, Angelus Press says on its website, “follows the month dedicated to His Immaculate Mother, whose role ever remains to give Him to the world and lead men to the pierced side of Her divine son, in order that they be cleansed by the waters and fortified by the blood flowing therefrom.”

One CM member, who identified himself as only Jeff (no one speaking in favor of raising the Sacred Heart flag gave a last name), “implored the members to comment on the hate and discrimination coming from the LGBT community against Catholics, Christians and conservatives,” as reported by churchmilitant.com.

Renautt said that CM members know that the religious Sacred Heart flag cannot be flown in front of City Hall. “This cannot be implemented on the grounds that flying a flag on the flagpole is in fact a government speech, not private speech — and therefore the city must refuse any

requests to fly non-secular flags on its flagpole,” he said.

The group has approached the council at least twice before on the issue. They use their continued rejection as a way to portray themselves as victims and drum up financial support.

“They are craving attention and [will] use any reactions from the community as justification of their martyrdom,” said Renautt.

CM points to a case in Boston, where the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a Christian activist who asked that the city fly a Christian flag. But in that case, it was shown that Boston had no real criteria for flying guest flags. In fact, the city had approved 284 consecutive applications to fly flags, including those of other nations, before it turned down a Christian flag. In a unanimous ruling, Justice Stephen Breyer wrote for the Supreme Court last year that “the city’s lack of meaningful involvement in the selection of flags or the crafting

“They are craving attention and [will] use any reactions from the community as justification of their martyrdom.”



The Catholic Sacred Heart Flag.

of their messages leads us to classify the flag raisings as private, not government, speech — though nothing prevents Boston from changing its policies going forward.”

Here, in Ferndale, things are different, according to Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBT Project. “The City of Boston had sponsored an open forum allowing all kinds of flags to be flown,” Kaplan explained. “This has not been the case with the City of Ferndale, which did not create this

open forum.” Kaplan added that when the government is speaking for itself, the government may decide which views it wishes to express and that “the First Amendment does not demand airtime for all views.”

Still, Renautt said he fears CM may try to launch a lawsuit against the city. That is, he said, part of the reason he is speaking out. “We must educate our community about this group and what they stand for. They are not an oppressed religious group as they are trying to portray themselves. But they are agitators, instigators, a hate group that is spewing lies. They are a religious militia promoting violence.”



The leaders of the Robyn Party. Photo courtesy of MCP

◀ MCP

Continued from page 7

is not. So he stops responding to calls and emails in the evening and gives himself a 24-hour window to respond.

“The key is to keep my personal life personal and to maintain relationships outside of MCP so that I don’t feel overwhelmed,” Wheeler said.

For his part, Delavan said the biggest challenge is working within the entertainment budget.

“Some Prides have absolutely huge budgets and can have really big names. As for us, our entire organization is volunteer based and our entire budget is based off of donations. So trying to land

the biggest and best acts I can all within those constraints is the most challenging aspect of what I do.”

And why do they do what they do?

“I have a lot of fun doing this, and it’s a great place for me to volunteer and be involved,” Delavan said.

Wheeler said it may sound cliché, but the best part of the job to him is watching the festival come together and the crowds enjoying it. “It’s very therapeutic. It revives you when you see it. It’s like all of your hard work has not been in vain. So I think that’s the best thing about it: Actually seeing everyone enjoy themselves.”

For more information on Motor City Pride, including the full lineup, visit their website at motorcitypride.org.



Advice to Be Well

From Dr. Mark Bornstein and Dr. Paul Benson



AB: Hi Doctor. I know we spoke last visit about your recommendation to start a statin medication to prevent cardiovascular disease, but when I went home to research the medication you gave me, there is so much negative information on the internet. I no longer want to take this medication. Is there anything else to take?

Hi AB. I'm glad you are bringing this to me for a conversation rather than just not taking the medication. You are right, there is so much negative information on the class of medication I prescribed you, statins. Before you make your decision to take it or not, let's do a dive into statin medications. Like everything in medicine, there is a lot of info on the internet and it can be confusing to know what is the truth.

Indeed, there is a very large campaign against statins and I honestly am unsure why. That being said, let's talk about what I do know about statins, including the negative side effects, its mechanism of action and the scientific studies that support the safety and efficacy of this class of medications.

First, one possible negative side effect of statins that is true is muscle aches. This occurs in about 2-8% of patients and is dose dependent. This

means that the risk is much lower at smaller doses. This has been shown in multiple studies and is a reason that we monitor your symptoms and bloodwork when on the medication.

Now let's talk about the mechanism of action of these medications. Statins inhibit an enzyme involved in the synthesis of cholesterol. They also are involved in reducing inflammation at the site of plaque in arteries and even stabilize existing plaque in arteries. When someone has a heart attack or a stroke, it is typically from a piece of plaque that breaks off of already formed plaque, migrates its way through arteries until it gets stuck in smaller arteries in the heart or brain. This cuts off the blood supply to these areas which then causes someone to have a heart attack or a stroke as they are no longer getting blood supply to these vital organs. Statin medications will stabilize the plaque so that there is less of a chance of the plaque breaking off.

Next, study after study shows that statins decrease all forms of dementia. There is a recent 2022 meta-analysis (looking at multiple studies at once) that shows that a commonly prescribed statin, rosuvastatin, will cause a 20% decrease in all causes of dementia and 41% decrease in Alzheimer's Dementia. Another commonly prescribed statin, atorvastatin, decreases

dementia by 18%. These numbers are huge and leave no question. Statins are helpful for brain health and longevity.

I hope this helps you make your decision to take your statin medication. At times it can be good to be skeptical of medicine and I agree that there are many examples in our past that may leave one to be not as trusting of medicine. I can assure you that this is not one of those instances. I hope this was helpful. Please reach out if you have any more questions.

RM: I'm a 50 year old man. I'm in seemingly good health and not on any medications. Over the last couple of months I have noticed that I wake up 3 to 5 time a night and have to urinate. I'm not having any discomfort, however the sleep deprivation is having an effect on me. Reducing fluids in the evening hours before bedtime makes little difference. Is this something I have to live with or can something be done about it?

Hello RM. You need to have this medically evaluated by a medical provider. Many men have urinary problems like this as they get older from an enlarged prostate. This condition makes emptying the bladder difficult if not impossible. This can be a benign condition, however it can

also be a symptom of prostate cancer. Benign Prostatic hypertrophy can usually be treated with medication. There are more than a few to choose from. Sometimes it requires a surgical intervention going through the urethra with a cystoscope and shaving out the overgrown prostatic tissue to relieve your symptoms. You did not mention if there is a family history of prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is hereditary. Regular prostate exams and a blood test PSA (prostatic specific antigen) can detect prostate cancer. This is a very slow growing cancer and if detected early, there are several options to successfully treat it. Depending on one's age and symptoms, sometime it is just watched and not treated. The short answer is go see a medical provider so you can have piece of mind and a restful night of sleep!

Since 1980 Dr. Paul Benson's Be Well Medical Center has been an inclusive medical center celebrating diversity. Do you have a health related question for Dr. Paul Benson and Dr. Mark Bornstein? Submit your questions to bewelladvice@pridesource.com. This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Be Well Medical Center. Between The Lines's journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Be Well. Learn more about Be Well from their ad below.



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Florida Republicans Working Overtime to Make the State a Hellscape for Trans People



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Things for trans and non-binary people in Florida, especially kids, are just getting worse and worse by the day.

Republicans have a supermajority in Florida and the governorship. And they have been hella busy passing anti-trans bills that Gov. Ron DeSantis is sure to sign.

If you were to believe Florida Republicans, they are heroically preventing kids from becoming transgender. Gov. DeSantis keeps talking about genital mutilation of minors as if there's some kind of mutilation epidemic (there isn't) but also as if that's all there is to trans and non-binary people. That is, of course, not surprising considering that LGBTQ+ people have been reduced to our private parts in order to dehumanize and vilify us for decades.

So in Florida we have the "don't say gay" bill, which prohibits discussion of LGBTQ+ people or topics in grade school and is resulting in a purge of diverse books from school libraries.

They've also banned any kind of gender-affirming care for minors and deem that kids receiving such care should be taken away from their families.

According to CNN, lawmakers passed "a bill that prohibits transgender children from receiving gender-affirming treatments, including prescriptions that block puberty hormones or sex-reassignment surgeries. Under the legislation, a court can intervene to temporarily remove a child from their home if they receive gender-affirming treatments or procedures. The bill treats such health care options, which are supported by the American Medical Association, the same as it would a case of child abuse."

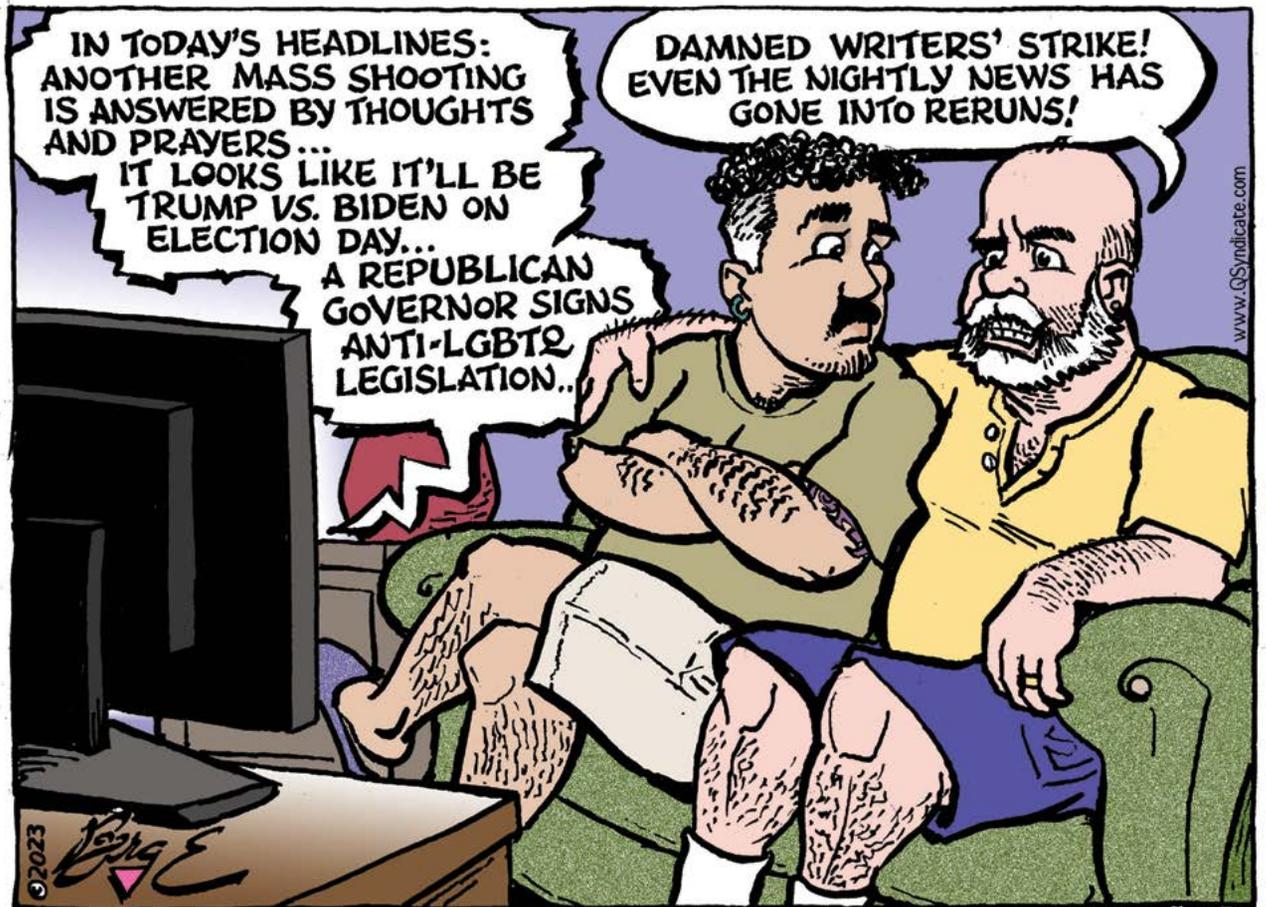
This pisses me off a great deal. Child abuse is a real thing that happens to far too many kids. I have yet to see Republican lawmakers as up in arms about actual child

abuse as they are about the existence of trans kids. By claiming to be protecting trans kids from the "abuse" of medical care, they're actually making any kids who actually are being abused less safe by taking attention and resources away from the real problem.

The Florida legislature also banned pronoun use at schools. Or, at least, personal pronouns.

The bill, according to CNN, "restricts teachers, faculty and students from using the pronouns of their choice in public schools. That bill declares that it must be the policy of all schools that 'a person's sex is an immutable biological trait' and 'it is false' to use a pronoun other than the sex on a person's birth certificate."

It's a dumb law addressing an imaginary problem. The number of people who use pronouns that don't match the sex on their birth certificate is, in the grand scheme of things, pretty small. But Republicans would have you believe that kids are changing their pronouns on a whim left and right. It just isn't true. But it's pretty easy to target a small group in the minority when you're the big bad Florida government because said group doesn't have political power to fight back. This pronoun bill also isn't in the service of protecting children from the "abuse" of gender affirming care. This is intended to erase trans and non-binary people, full stop.



“

Where is that backlash now? States that single out transgender people for harm need to experience economic consequences.

So is the bill they passed "that prohibits transgender people from using a bathroom or changing room that matches their gender identity while in government buildings, including in places like public schools, prisons and state universities," as reported by CNN.

Again, the claim is that transgender sex perverts are running amok in public bathrooms putting women and children in danger. And again, it just isn't true. Transgender people do not pose a bigger threat than people who are not transgender. Again, targeting trans people ignores the fact that sexual assault really happens and this is taking attention and resources away from the actual problem.

The end goal of these bathroom bills, as we've seen in other states, is to drive transgender people out of public spaces. It's erasure.

I remember back when North Carolina passed a bathroom bill in 2016 there was a lot of backlash. The state experienced some pretty serious economic consequences. The NBA decided to hold the 2017 All Star game in New Orleans instead of Charlotte. Performers like Bruce Springsteen and Nick Jonas refused to perform there. Big companies like Adidas and PayPal reconsidered expanding in the state. It was a huge clusterfuck.

Where is that backlash now? States that single out transgender people for harm need to experience economic consequences. It's the only language Republicans understand.

And hey, looking for a fun family vacation this summer? There's this great place where Mickey Mouse and Goofy hang out. It's called Disneyland, and it's in California. Protect your family. Stay away from Florida.

That Night I Posed with Billy Porter



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

I like to think I've always been ahead of the times. Contemporary. Progressive. In the know. And I certainly was when it comes to the multi-talented star of FX television's "Pose," aka Mr. Billy Porter. I was onto him long before he became a runway icon, Grammy winner or even Tony winner.

Now all these Johnny-come-latelies are coming out the woodwork to profess his brilliance. I first scooped it nearly 30 years ago. The year was 1996, and I was living in the Sunshine State. This was back when there was a Democrat in the governor's office, Anita Bryant had long been vanished and Ron DeSantis was barely out of high school, where he no doubt served as president of the Racist Republicans Club and the Anti-Homosexual Union.

But I digress. It's just that life was good in the Magic City known as Miami. I was living on the 30th and top floor of a downtown high rise — then the tallest residential building downtown and now dwarfed by buildings twice its height and higher — with a view of the Port of Miami. I used to walk from my apartment to the nearby and long shuttered Omni Mall. It was my favorite place to see a movie, and "The First Wives Club" would prove to be one of my favorite films. In a weary scene wherein Bette Midler and Goldie Hawn reconcile after a frivolous fight, a song starts to play in the background.

From the very first somber and melancholy notes, I was hooked. When a luxurious and velvety voice sang the first line — "Waking up alone in a room it still reminds me" — I was moved. The lyrics to "Love Is on the Way" spoke straight to my lonely heart. The song was actually a prayer I whispered every night.

And the voice. Oh, that voice! Soft and delicate at the start, a powerful vocal freight train at the song's climax. Then gentle again at the end. I ran straight to the music store after the movie and bought the film's soundtrack just for that song!

That's the moment I discovered the

terrific talent that is Billy Porter. Fast forward four years. I was back in the Motor City and writing for *Between The Lines*. The paper had sent me on my first trip, to Washington, D.C. to cover the Millennium March for gay rights, and I was ecstatic. I flew out of City Airport on a plane along with my friend and soon-to-be-frequent traveling partner, the late BTL columnist Charles Alexander.

There were tons of events taking place in the nation's capital that long weekend beside the Sunday march. There was a Pride festival, a huge concert at the massive outdoor JFK Stadium featuring the late George Michael, Melissa Etheridge, k.d. lang, Chaka Khan, Garth Brooks and many others. Then there was a banquet hosted by Rita Moreno and Charles Nelson Riley that featured a keynote address by Judy Shepard, the mother of the late Matthew Shepard who had been strung up on a Wyoming fence to die for allegedly making a pass at a straight man.

I was excited to find out that multi-octave vocalist, Broadway star and "Star Search" winner Sam Harris would be among the featured talent performing that evening. However, Sam, it was soon announced, was unable to make it and was being replaced by none other than Billy Porter. As if the trip was not wonderful enough already, hearing and meeting Billy was the absolute icing on the cake. It was a marvelous night!

I spoke to Billy and his manager about doing an interview for BTL. They agreed. Less than a week later I was sitting at my kitchen table when Billy called for our phoner. We spoke about his first album and how it had highlights, such as "Love Is on the Way" and a few others incredible standouts. Commercially, the album hadn't done terribly well. Billy had also just shot the independent film "The Broken Hearts Club," which tugged at my heartstrings. The film was released in 2000, at a time when independent gay films rarely

crossed over into the mainstream.

In short, Billy's career wasn't exactly taking off at the speed of lightning. Call me Miss Cleo, but I knew big things were in store for Billy. And I was right. His talent was too incredible to be contained. He was going to bust out and into the big leagues eventually.

He continued to work on Broadway and recorded sporadically. Then, more than a decade after we met, he won a Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical for playing Lola, the lead in "Kinky Boots." He would go on to win a Grammy for the play's soundtrack. He racked up three Golden Globe nominations and



(Left) Billy Porter, above, with writer Jason A. Michael in 2000. Photo: Jason A. Michael

won the 2019 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his work on the television series "Pose." This made him the first gay Black man to be nominated and win in any leading category at the Primetime Emmy Awards.

Yes, the list of Billy's accomplishments is long, and I take great satisfaction in knowing that for once one of my predictions came

EGOT. He's become a true superstar, though he was already that to me when I met him back in 2000. His song "Love Is on the Way" will always be my anthem. (And make no mistake about it, it is his song. Not even Celine Dion's cover could compare!)

But I digress — again. The point is I knew Billy Porter was brilliant way back when. I'm glad the rest of the world finally caught up.



true. He's just an Oscar away from becoming an

Billy Porter will be appearing in his Black Mona Lisa Tour: Volume One at the Fisher Theatre in Detroit at 8 p.m. on Thursday, May 18. Tickets are available through the Fisher Theater box office or through ticketmaster.com.

Jason A. Michael is senior staff writer for Between The Lines and the Pride Source Media Group. He has been writing for the paper since 1999. Jason is also an Essence bestselling author. He may be reached at jason@pridesource.com.

Look Out, New York and California



Michigan May Be the Next Best State for LGBTQ+ Equality

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Hilary Murmers readily admits she didn't have a lot of faith in Michigan.

When Murmers and her spouse moved here in 2021, "We felt like, OK, we'll go try this out. We'll give it a year or two and get out as soon as we need to," Murmers recalled, laughing. At the time, they were relocating from Buffalo, New York solely for her job opportunity as LGBTQIA+ coordinator at the University of Michigan – Flint.

"When we were looking for a place to rent," Murmers explained to BTL, "we specifically looked only in towns and municipalities that had anti-discrimination clauses and didn't look in others." At the time, Michigan mostly offered a

patchwork of municipal-level ordinances. They settled on a rental in Fenton, largely for lack of options.

Today, they're in the process of buying a house in Swartz Creek. And it's the positive consequences of the last election that sealed the deal.

It is Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, after all, who likes to say, "Bigotry is bad for business." The newly reelected state leader has been vocal about the expansion of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) having both social and practical benefits, including attracting and retaining Michigan residents.

"The political shift in Michigan made me feel a lot more confident in Michigan as the long-term place for us and ultimately made us feel confident enough to put down serious roots and buy a house,"

Murmurs said. She specifically named the expansion of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act and the reelection of Gov. Whitmer as deciding factors.

Murmurs said now, as a couple, they feel safer and more protected than in other states. Her spouse is trans, and they are both keenly aware of the anti-trans legislation and executive actions sweeping the nation. She also noted that in a state like Florida where Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work is being eradicated from higher education, she wouldn't have a job.

Not only does Murmers have personal experience as a queer person choosing Michigan these days, she said she hears from students who are feeling safer, too. "I definitely hear, especially [from] my

trans students who I serve, that they have thought about going elsewhere for graduate school or [are] wanting to live in other places, other states, just to have more adventures," Murmers said. "And they now feel like, 'The number of places where I will be safe is a lot shorter of a list.'"

While Murmers is pleased with the signing of the ELCRA amendment and Whitmer's leadership as an ally, she's especially concerned about the trans community. "The weight of what is happening nationwide, even though it is not actively touching Michiganders, is bearing down on my students every day," Murmers said.

Murmurs would like to see Michigan become a sanctuary state for trans families escaping states hostile to their wellbeing, as

has occurred recently in states like Minnesota and New Jersey.

It remains to be seen whether Michigan becomes a sanctuary state, but one could argue that Michigan is a brand new option for certain college-seekers because of the state's newly progressive policies in general. That was the case for the son of a state lawmaker in Illinois, whose niche college major left him with options for studying in states like Florida and Texas in addition to UM's main Ann Arbor campus. That student's mom, Rep. Kelly Cassidy, is an openly LGBTQ+ legislator in Chicago.

While Cassidy's twins were college hunting, the lawmaker was her chamber's lead on addressing the

See *Equality*, page 22



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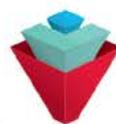
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Look Beyond the Big Pride Fests for a Memorable Michigan Road Trip

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

“Big name” Pride Fests might grab more headlines, but small-town Prides dot the Michigan map from top to bottom, including areas where holding Pride events in 2023 is a courageous act, given the currently raging anti-LGBTQ+ political climate.

These smaller events deserve your support, and they offer a respite from crowded, large scale events. You’ll find drag queens sashaying, local music and food offerings, and unique perspectives from feisty, small-town activists who seem to harken back to the days when Pride Fests were acts of defiance. Enter: The Michigan Small-Town Pride Road Trip Guide.

Load up the tank, go on a shopping spree for snacks like an unsupervised fifth-grader, crank up the tunes and hit the road.



Central Michigan

In addition to a fun Pride event on June 17 in Michigan’s capital city, Lansing, you’ll find events in the tiny towns of Lowell, east of Grand Rapids, and St. John’s, just north of Lansing. Sandwiched between Lansing and Kalamazoo, don’t miss Battle Creek’s annual event, which features an evening parade on July 21 and a family-friendly festival on July 22 at Leila Arboretum.

JUNE

Lowell, June 3
St. Johns, June 3
Battle Creek, July 20-23



North of Muskegon and the Upper Peninsula

Events north of Muskegon are harder to come by, and that's why these destinations are perfect for a far-flung road trip. In Traverse City and Mackinac Island, you'll find the latest dates on the Pride Fest calendar, making them the perfect way to wrap up a summer of fun celebrating Michigan's newfound notoriety as a queer-friendly blue state driven by grassroots activism.

JUNE

Bay City, June 24
Big Rapids, June 25

SEPTEMBER

Mackinac Island, Sept. 14-17
Traverse City, Sept. 27 - Oct. 1

Southeast Michigan

This lively corner of the Mitten offers three of the largest Prides in the state in June and July: Motor City Pride, Ferndale Pride and Hotter Than July. Look a little further, though, and you'll find several events sprinkled throughout Oakland, Genesee, Wayne and Washtenaw Counties.

JUNE

Trenton, June 1 (5:30 p.m. Trenton City Hall - 2800 3rd St.)
Ypsilanti, June 2
Ortonville ("Abigail's Pride"), June 3
Holly, June 10
Grosse Pointe, June 17
Flint, June 24
Berkley, June 25

AUGUST

Royal Oak, Aug. 4 and 5
Ann Arbor, Aug. 5
Hazel Park, Aug. 13

See **Small-Town Prides**, page 26

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The Best Places in the World to Hook Up

Bisexual 'Boyslut' Author Zachary Zane on Sex Around the Globe

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Sex writer Zachary Zane's first book, "Boyslut," wasn't even on shelves when we recently connected, but the author was already thinking about his next.

"I might just transition more into sex travel," says Zane, who has had sex in dozens of countries. "I would love for that to be a thing, where I could just travel the world, having sex in various countries and writing about my experiences."

For now, think of "Boyslut" as an introduction to Zane, where the author lays the groundwork for his next essay collection. In his book debut, a self-proclaimed "memoir and manifesto," he celebrates sex without shame as a "perpetually horny" polyamorous, bisexual man. Zane explores growing up with intrusive thoughts and guilt around sex, which manifested as OCD, where those thoughts cycled through his mind in vicious, unhealthy ways. Society's shaming of queer sex didn't help any. "My OCD was the ultimate drag queen — reveal after reveal," he writes.

Though this is Zane's first book, the Brooklyn-based author and columnist is a familiar name in the sex writer community. He currently has two columns, including "Sexplain It," a sex and relationship advice column at Men's Health, and "Navigating Non-Monogamy," where he writes about his polyamory journey for Cosmo. Dan Savage has called Zane "one of the best sex writers working today," and Billy Porter said he's doing the "Lord's work by promoting bi-visibility."

In a recent interview, the "Boyslut" author mentioned people ask him all the time why he's not on OnlyFans, thinking he's some kind of "sex god." "I'm not," Zane says. "I have good sex. I enjoy it. I'm communicative. I'm open. I'm sexually shameless. I honestly think if you actually saw it, you'd be underwhelmed."

"I like when the words speak more," he adds. "They say a picture is worth 1,000 words. We need an

opposite phrase, where it's '1,000 words is worth a 1,000 words.'"

What have you learned about the differences in sex culture from around the world?

It's underrated how much sex influences the dynamics of a culture and a society. I really do think it gives me a better sense of how people treat each other, how people view themselves, how people view their relationships. Is this a culture that tends to have more, let's say, discreet men? Is it a culture that tends to have more people that tend to be cheating than not cheating? Again, I don't want to stereotype an entire country based off of one person I had sex with there, but I do think it really can help you better understand aspects of a society in a country. That's pretty cool.

Selfishly, I have to ask: Where are the hottest men?

I love Central and Latin America. I think also there's a lot more bi guys there, and there's certain cities and countries I've been to where it's like, "Oh. If you are a top and masculine, you are straight," and I'm like, "Well, no. I think objectively not." But there are certain cultures where it's honestly more accepted for men to have sex with men in that way, as long as they're top, dominant and masculine. I'm like, "Fine, you can be a dom, top and destroy me and call yourself straight. I don't give a fuck. I still came my face off." But I think I have the most fun in a lot of Central American and South American countries, sexually.

Also, the bi element of me... even if it's not even a super LGBTQ-friendly country, they still don't mind the fact that I'm effeminate. I don't know if they consider me metrosexual. I don't know if they're like, "Well, so many other guys in our culture are bi but fuck women, and they're considered straight," so I'm



"Boyslut" author Zachary Zane in Switzerland. Courtesy photo

See **Zachary Zane**, page 20

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◀ Zachary Zane

Continued from page 18

considered straight even though I fuck men quite often. I think really what I'm saying with all of this is I need to get my ass back to Colombia.

When were you last in Colombia?

Little over a year ago? It was my only time there, and I fucking loved the sex culture there. I loved the bi boys there. I loved the prostitutes there. There was also just a lot more queerness in Colombia and a lot in Central and Latin America.

Here, it's like we have gay bars. We have straight bars and very few in between, versus I'd go to gay bars and there'd be a lot more women there in a fun way, where either they're supporting their gay friends or they are themselves, and it wasn't as just strictly gay or straight. As a bi person, I actually like when women are in spaces as well. I enjoy that immensely and have a lot of fun, assuming they are queer women, faghags or whatever you want to call it.

Best hotel sex experience?

So this was in Colombia, where I went to this after-hours at 5, 6 a.m. It was just a strip club, but you can hire the sex workers, and literally, it's connected to a hotel, so then you can go and hook up in the hotel. I did that with a couple of sex workers. It was closing down at, like, noon. I'm just having sex with a sex worker, and she's like, "Do you want to stay up? I have more girls," so she took me to this hotel that was literally a sex hotel, where outside, I remember the security with guns, very prominent machine guns, and each room had a gate. So they all have those metal gates, and you go in. There's no one in there, and you have to call to get room service, and it comes through this little room, and it had a stripper pole, beds, condoms and a little jacuzzi. She comes over, and she invites her girlfriends so we can just party and have fun. It was so much fun. Midway through, we're all having sex and she's like, "Do you like guys too?" I'm like, "Yeah." She's like, "All right. I'll invite some guy friends too."

Which modes of transportation have you had sex in?

"Zachary Zane is one of the best sex writers working today."

—DAN SAVAGE

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A Memoir and Manifesto

ZACHARY ZANE



I've had sex on a plane. I've definitely had sex in a car. I've blown my Uber and Lyft driver. I've gotten blown in the backseat of an Uber and Lyft. I've had sex on boats. I've never had sex on a subway or train. Wait, I'm trying to think if that's true.

No motorcycle sex?

No motorcycle. It'd be so funny if, not in the motorcycle itself, but that little side seat that they have, if that's where you were doing it.

What language gets you the horniest?

Ooh. It's Spanish. Even though not all Spanish accents are created equal, and I think some are sexier than others, but I like Spanish. I like Italian. I think there's such a very sexy vibe to those languages that I find very hot.

Host or travel?

Well, if I'm in New York, I prefer to host because I have my setup. I like to get throat-fucked, so I'll do blindfold and then have my head over the bed. I leave the door unlocked, and I fucking love that dynamic, which you can only do while you're hosting, but obviously in foreign countries, travel, because I want to see where people live and I'd prefer to not have people to my hotel. I'd much rather see where people live, and what the deal is and what their dynamic is, which is not in my English-speaking hotel.

Uber or Lyft for an out-of-town hookup?

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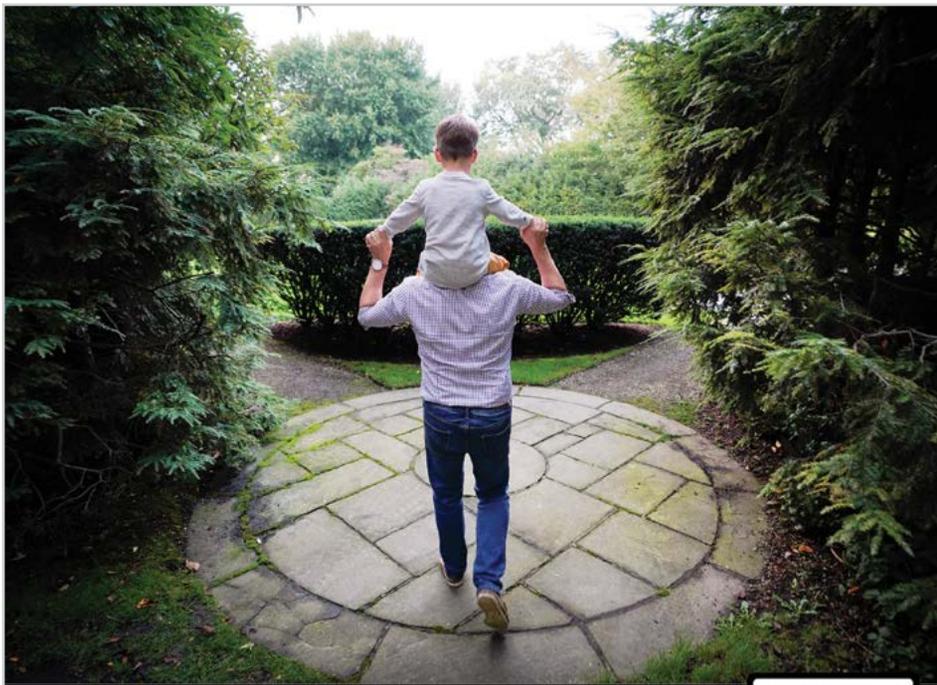


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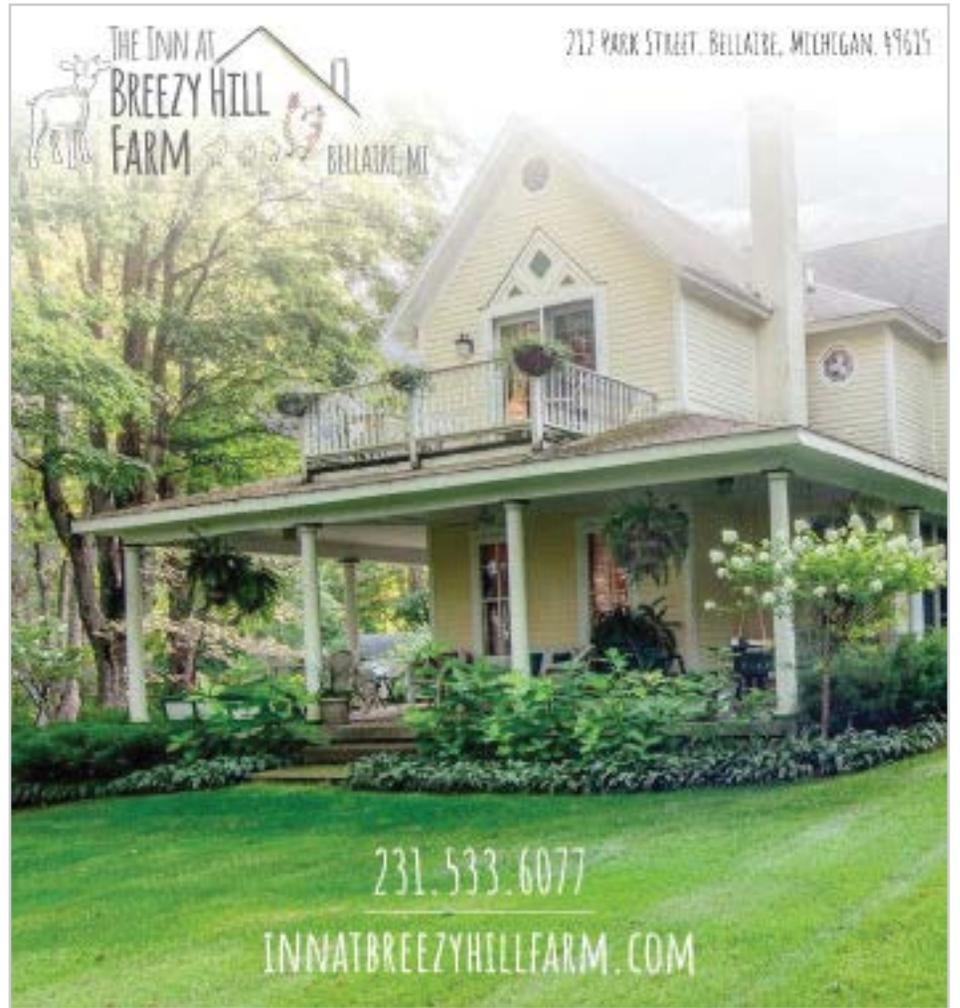


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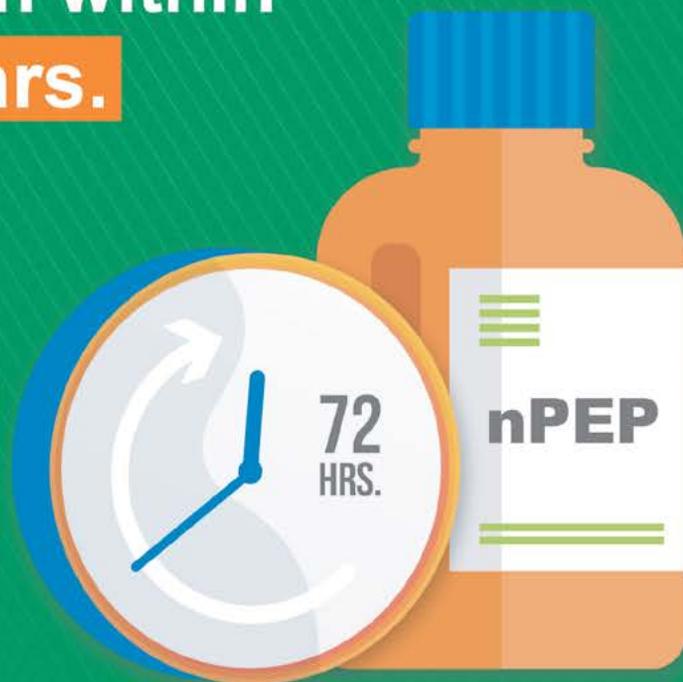
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◀ Equality

Continued from page 12

impacts of the Dobbs v. Jackson decision on her state's laws and those of the rest of the country. That Supreme Court ruling effectively overturned Roe v. Wade. While she was steeped in the issues that returned abortion rights back into the hands of each state, both of her sons were looking at schools where she didn't necessarily feel safe sending them. She spoke of hard conversations they had about the values they share as a family.

"As a parent, I'm concerned for your safety and wellbeing there," Cassidy recalled saying to them. "And I'm concerned for my safety and wellbeing as a queer person there."

Cassidy had heard of Michigan's Proposal 3, which would enshrine reproductive freedom in Michigan's Constitution. She questioned her friend Michigan State Sen. Jeremy Moss.

"I'm a little nervous," Cassidy recalled sharing with Moss about Proposal 3. "Is Michigan still gonna be in play for us?" She was thinking of her son's options for college. She called the ballot initiative's passage "a huge comfort for me and very much a driving factor" in her family's selection of UM.

Cassidy feels heartened that Michigan is

finally passing positive legislation, including the ELCRA amendment (SB4), which added LGBTQ+ anti-discrimination protections to state law, and getting bad bills off the books.

"It's been a really fulfilling experience knowing that some real harmful things have been taken out of play here in Illinois," Cassidy said. "I certainly am excited to see Michigan continue to advance and help us grow; it's nice to have some company in the Midwest."

Cassidy's sentiment echoes Michigan Gov. Whitmer's oft-repeated invitation to LGBTQ+ community members living outside the state. As Gov. Whitmer said before signing the landmark ELCRA legislation:

"To all of the young people and families who love them all across this country, if you're looking for a place that will respect you and protect you, it's time to come to Michigan."

Cassidy, who introduced a bill in Illinois that would provide tax credits for in-migration from hostile states and for people bringing medical licenses or teaching licenses to her state, believes LGBTQ+ people should move where they're wanted. "I think that there are great opportunities for states like [Illinois] and like Michigan to really take bold steps to not just protect and reinforce our values," she said, "but to create safe space for folks who need it."



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Raised in the Neighborhood
Puzzle on page 33



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Jenny Carney (left) and Jen Brown. Photo: Andrew Potter

◀ Sidetrack

Continued from page 6

look at Southeast Michigan. Carney noted the lack of an independent bookstore in bustling, walkable areas like Royal Oak or downtown Birmingham and Ferndale and got to work researching options.

The possibilities were dizzying, but in a moment Carney calls “kismet,” Sidetrack Bookshop found a home — a busy corner in Royal Oak where her mother operated a plant store in 1975 while pregnant with her. “I actually grew up in the space where the bookstore is now,” she says. “It felt meant to be.”

Kismet or not, Carney and Brown took care to conduct some market research before hanging up the open sign, sending out a market feasibility survey to hundreds of people they connected to on a Royal Oak neighborhood Facebook page. “And basically, everybody was like, ‘Oh my gosh, please bring a bookstore to downtown Royal Oak.’ And that’s been the response every step of the way.”

During the store’s soft opening in April 2022, the couple set up temporary tables, made a small investment in inventory and invited the local community. “We were immediately slammed. Everybody was so excited, and we had people walking up from their homes in Royal

Oak, or riding their bikes in,” she recalls. “And so far, that has continued every single weekend.”

Carney says support from patrons has been incredible, but Royal Oak has been supportive in other ways, as well. When the store and the storytime queens were being targeted by a conservative hate group (the Grand New Party) and the Oakland County GOP, the Royal Oak Downtown Development Authority released a statement expressing its support. “Downtown is a place where LGBTQ+ people are celebrated and people from all walks of life are welcome,” the statement read. “We applaud Jen and Jenny of Sidetrack Bookshop for their commitment to the LGBTQ+ community and we will continue to support them and all of our business owners in downtown Royal Oak who are doing good and meaningful work.”

Still, in the days leading up to the event, Carney and Brown were concerned enough to touch base with Royal Oak police twice. “It was a little unnerving because, you know, I feel a lot of responsibility for the safety of our employees, our customers and our community,” Brown says. “The rhetoric we were hearing from some of the people organizing the protest was really threatening.” Brown says groups from as far away as California were connecting with Sidetrack to warn them about some of the online chatter. Royal Oak police took her and Carney’s concerns seriously, showing up at the event with what she describes as a “social worker” mentality, which helped to maintain a safe atmosphere for everyone.

Ultimately, Brown says, the protest felt like a

“sea of happy, glittery rainbow love.” Walking outside to join the crowd after the event (the store closed early for the day to give staff a break after the emotionally exhausting experience) felt amazing. “I just felt enveloped in this sea of love — it was so empowering and so validating and lovely. I had so many hugs that day, and despite all the anxiety leading up to what was going to happen, it wasn’t bad at all. It was actually a beautiful, loving event and I’m really, really glad we didn’t change our plan in any way.”

Carney said groups like the Royal Oak Democrats, the ACLU and others helped to organize the massive turnout. Ultimately, the anti-drag crowd consisted of around two dozen protesters versus several hundred counter-protesters.

“They were able to make a lot of noise on the internet, but when the time actually came, it was a few here objecting and then 1,000 people in support,” Carney says. “It was just like the feeling of love and support, messages of ‘We are so glad you’re here, and we’re so glad you’re doing what you’re doing.’ It was 1,000 to one, and it was amazing.”

“So, we continue on,” she adds. “We’re just going to keep building this community.”

Visit Sidetrack Bookshop (sidetrackbooks.com) at 325 S. Washington St. in Royal Oak. Two upcoming book launch events feature queer Michigan authors — Amanda Woody on May 13 (“They Hate Each Other”) and Frank Anthony Polito on May 23 (“Rehearsed to Death”).

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◀ Small-Town Prides

Continued from page 17

Southwest Michigan

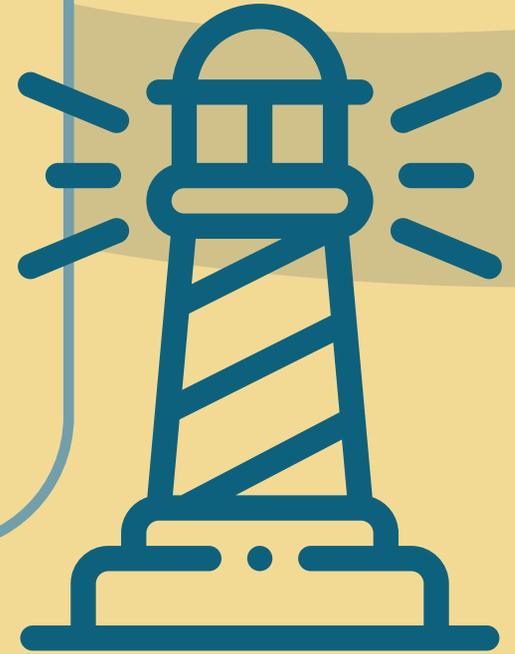
Head west to check out Grand Rapids' big city Pride event, but consider worthwhile destinations beyond, too. Pride organizers in this part of the state have faced an onslaught of opposition in places like Holland and Allegan, where local Republican groups have pushed back against drag performances and LGBTQ+ reading materials in public libraries and schools. Shower these courageous groups with your support!

JUNE

Saugatuck/Douglas, June 1-5
Muskegon, June 3
Kalamazoo, June 2-3
Grand Haven, June 10
Grand Rapids, June 17
Benton Harbor, June 24
Holland, June 24

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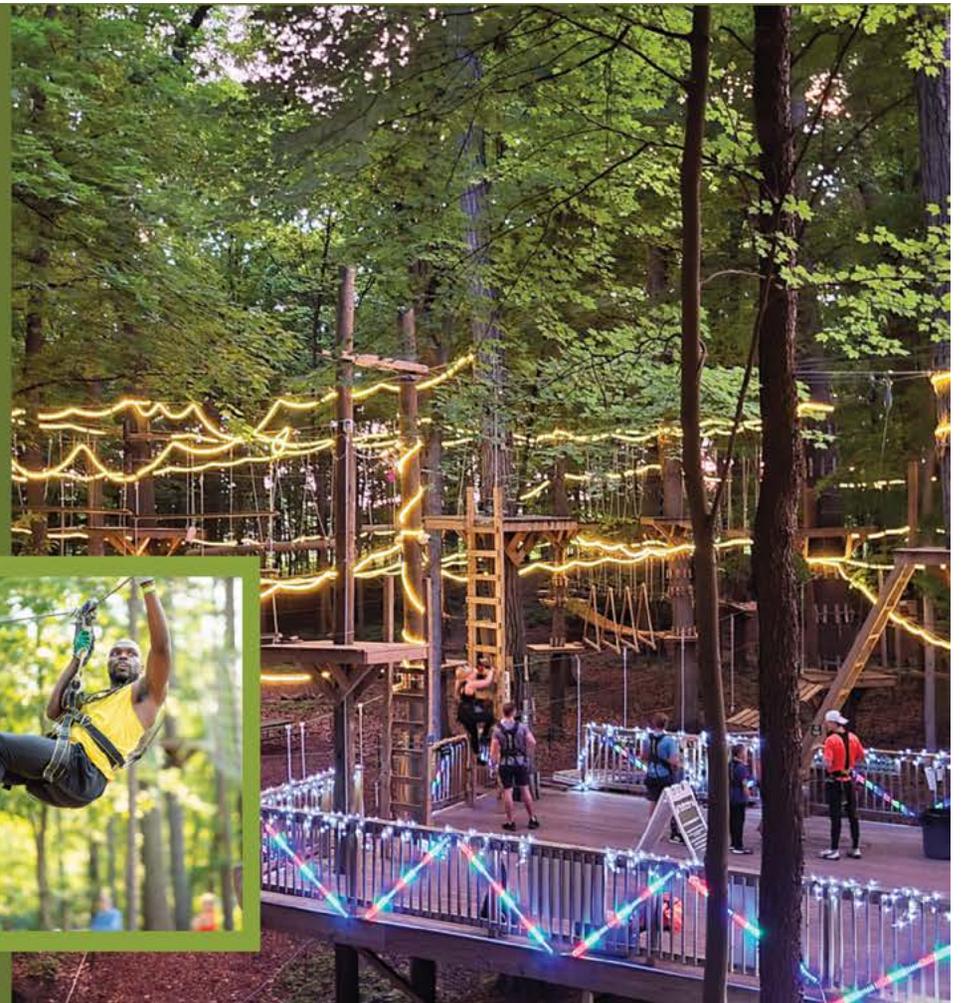
Allegan, Aug. 4-5



View the 2023 Pride Source Michigan Pride Festival map at bit.ly/42o0YK2 and the 2023 Michigan Pride Festival Calendar at pridesource.com/article/2023pridecalendar.



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Add Some ‘Eh’ to Your Queer Travel This Summer in Canada

9 Reasons to Get Your Passport Punched in the Land of Beavers

BY AARON FOLEY

Growing up in Michigan, especially if you lived in the southeastern part of the state, the northeastern tip around Sault Ste. Marie or right near the middle around Port Huron, you knew you were always a bridge away to another country — even if it didn’t quite feel like another country. Yes, you need a passport to travel to Canada, and yes, you need to go through the annoying customs process, but sometimes traveling right across to Ontario feels like you never left Michigan. So, what’s the point, right?

I’m here to tell you there’s a world beyond

Windsor and the other Sault Ste. Marie. Travel isn’t getting any cheaper, lodging seems more and more ridiculous and time off from work seems fruitless since everyone needs a vacation after their vacation. You could make your precious free time easier on yourself by hopping on a cheap flight to the many diverse and accessible Canadian cities that, with an open mind and a willingness to explore, are far more interesting (and, sometimes, even more queer) than their American counterparts.

Here’s why I’m suggesting Canada as a destination for more than poutine and Labatt.

1. It’s significantly less expensive to fly within Canada than from outside it.

Ever look at airline fares in Europe and see it’s like 40 bucks to hop from city to city? OK, so it’s not always that cheap to hop between Canadian cities, but you can shave off a few dollars by making your way to a Canadian airport and traveling from there, rather than flying out of Detroit Metro. For Detroiters, it’s a quick trip through the tunnel to Windsor’s tiny airport, where you can leave your car in a parking lot

while you’re gone. Canada’s budget airline, Porter Airlines, is the maple leaf equivalent of Spirit, and as long as you pack light, you can find your way to most of the country by booking the same way online as you would any other American airline.

2. Many Canadian cities are just European dupes.

You can certainly argue that Canada doesn’t have a Louvre, a Big Ben or Spain’s Running of the Bulls. But if we’re being real, most queers

just walk around, eat, party and get some good Instagram shots when they're not waiting in line for these places. For example, Old Montreal — Vieux Montreal when you're there — is undeniably French, with 17th-century architecture still standing on cobblestone streets and many of the locals only speaking French.

3. Canadian boys love tourists.

The little airplane stickers on Grindr and Scruff that show up when you travel to a new place are like blood in the water for Canadians looking for new friends. Locals in some of the midsize Canadian cities point to two main reasons why. One, queer communities are thriving, but small in some of these cities, which means that everyone knows each other, and everyone has dated or hooked up with each other already; they need a new challenge. Secondly, very much like Detroit, no one loves their Canadian hometown more than a homebody, and they're eager to talk about all the insider tips with new visitors. You'll never be offensive if you ask, "What's a good bar to check out?" before "Into?" — it's very welcomed.

4. Nature abounds.

The things we love about Michigan, like coastal areas, trails and scenic drives, are just as much in abundance up above. Take for instance Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, which is known worldwide as having some of the best scenic drives in the world, rivaling the fall colors tour we Michiganders take to Traverse City every year. Banff in Alberta, which may ring a bell because of its film festival, is a must-visit for hikers. Thunder Bay in Ontario, which has its own airport, is a must-visit for climbers and sailors.

5. Immigration has brought a wide variety of culture.

Canada didn't fully open its borders beyond mostly white countries until 1967, something many in the nation are still reckoning with because of how recent it was. (And like in the U.S., we'd be remiss not to mention that they're also reckoning with their treatment of Indigenous residents.) Still, thousands of folks from across the world have settled and integrated into almost all of Canada's major urban centers, bringing with them cuisine, music, dance, art and other cultural expression. The American gyro is a "donair" in the Atlantic Provinces with a distinctly Canadian spin; West Indian and Caribbean music is felt almost everywhere and was way ahead of the Afrobeats wave sweeping the U.S.; and indie bookstores are especially supportive of showcasing local authors and poets offering tales of the immigration experience.

6. The exchange rate currently works to Americans' benefits.

Speaking of dollars and cents, everything — for the moment — is cheaper in Canada, with one U.S. dollar being worth 75 Canadian cents. That means you can splurge on the lobster dinner without guilt and pick up a few designer labels while shaving some percentages off.

7. Alanis Morissette is on the radio everywhere.

She's a mainstay of adult contemporary (I refuse to call it oldies) radio in the country, which means you can have your main character moment of queer millennial angst in the back of an Uber, in the middle of a mall or over a bowl of poutine at the corner pub.

8. Some of the best seafood on the planet is readily available.

Particularly in the Atlantic Canadian provinces, where salmon, halibut and crustaceans are in surplus. Just like in the States, a rise of avant garde chefs have opened forward-thinking restaurants — and don't for a minute think that just because you're in Canada, those restaurants will be automatically friendly to walk-ins or they won't be crowded. You will need a reservation for some of the hotter places, or you'll have to be prepared to be placed on a waiting list. If frou-frou isn't your thing, every city has its old standbys with traditional seafood favorites. Everywhere has oysters — and don't forget, oysters are an aphrodisiac.

9. Poppers aren't sold in Canada.

In 2013, Canada outlawed the sale of nitrite products for health concerns usually associated with inhaling them, which can include drops in blood pressure, seizures and arrhythmia in extreme cases. And yes, officials are wise to the ol' "VCR cleaner" trick, so don't go into any store thinking they'll have it under a code name; it simply is not for sale. That said, there is somewhat of a black market for poppers among locals, but some have complained that the formulas are diluted, and the selections are limited. Now, I'm not saying that you'll be the most popular boy on the apps if they see you're an American with a few hard-to-come-by brands of nail polish remover in your toiletries bag, but...

Aaron Foley is a Detroit native living in Brooklyn, but still can't stop writing about Detroit. He is an editor, author of fiction and nonfiction and freelance writer.

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Spectacular Sydney WorldPride

LGBTQ+ Event Attracts Visitors From Around the World

BY DANA PICCOLI

Imagine a place where rainbow flags fly from every corner. Everything from the local dentist to the world-renowned art museum rolls out the rainbow carpet. A place where even the sharks donned their finest gay apparel. (More on that later.)

This was the reality of Sydney WorldPride, which offered 17 days of celebrating the LGBTQ+ community in Australia and beyond from mid February into early March.

Sydney WorldPride coincided with Sydney's famed Mardi Gras. Similar to New York's Stonewall rebellion of 1969, Mardi Gras began as a protest in 1978. In fact, the night of the first Mardi Gras commemorated Stonewall. Much has changed in Australia since those brave "78ers," as they are known, marched, protested and changed the course of Australian history.

Drag queen bingo 40,000 feet in the air? A menu specially made for Sydney WorldPride? Live performances, curated queer films and a preflight party? Qantas' Pride Flight from Los Angeles to Sydney offered this and more. This reporter arrived at LAX only to be ushered into Qantas' lounge and greeted by smiling drag queens, never-ending sparkling wine and a rainbow carpet. Past the step and repeat, fellow travelers gathered to mingle and enjoy snacks and performances by Australian artists G-Flip, comedian Joel Creasey and singer/actor Hugh Sheridan.

Guests eventually changed into their official Qantas Pride Flight pajamas and took to the skies for the 15-hour flight. (You'd be surprised how quickly the time passes when you are having a blast.) Australian makeup brand MECCA MAX provided swag bags and in-flight makeup lessons. (Those wipes and eye cream came in handy during the long trip.) Members of Qantas Illuminate, the LGBTQ+ employee and ally group, were on board, making sure all were well-fed and taken care of on the way to Sydney.



WorldPride attendees look forward to WorldPride 2025, which will be held in Washington, D.C. Courtesy photo

Flyers who booked a seat on the Pride Flight also scored tickets to the sold-out "Live and Proud: Sydney WorldPride Opening Concert."

Flying the rainbow skies was a real treat.

Kick-off with Kylie

Before every event, from large-scale production to smaller, more intimate events, respect was given to the custodians of the land the event was taking place on. Hosts, performers and Sydney WorldPride staff all paid tribute to the Gadigal, Cammeraygal, Bidjigal, Darug, Dharawal people. While the language may have changed slightly depending on the event and where it took place, the sentiment was always there: "We pay our Respects to their Elders past and present. Always was Always will be Aboriginal Land."

The opening night "Live and Proud" concert showcased talent from Australia and beyond, welcoming performers like Electric Fields, Jessica Mauboy and Australia's highest-selling female artist of all time, Kylie Minogue. Hosted by international drag superstar and Brisbane-born Courtney Act and Casey Donovan, the concert attracted thousands of revelers decked out in their finest rainbow outfits and glitter for days. The production values were top-notch and included a special drone show and fireworks. A bombastic tribute to "Priscilla Queen of the Desert" brought out dancers and drag queens to celebrate the beloved Australian film, which will be celebrating 30 years since release in 2024.

Certainly, Minogue was the big draw of the night. The star first played during Sydney's Mardi Gras back

in 1994 and has long been an ally and icon in the queer community. Minogue and her troupe of dancers performed her big hits including "Can't Get You Out of My Head" and "All the Lovers," during which she was joined by sister Dannii, who is also a beloved figure in the country.

Queer content creator Matthew Schueller, and one half of the duo Michael and Matt, was in attendance for the "Live and Proud" concert and WorldPride festivities and wasn't sure what to expect but was quickly moved by the welcoming atmosphere of Sydney. "From the beginning of the event, I was blown away by the sense of togetherness I experienced there," Schueller said. "It felt like walking into an open-armed embrace. The atmosphere was electric, people were really genuinely happy to be there and support each other, and you could feel it."

Sydney Opera House, a beacon for Pride

You'd be hard-pressed to think of a landmark that exemplifies Sydney more than the famed Opera House. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the Opera House's signature shells were lit up with rainbows at various points during the WorldPride celebration. Seeing such an iconic image, beaming with Pride, is something that will stay with me personally as a queer woman, forever.

Hosted at the Opera House, the "Blak and Deadly: First Nations Gala" was a two-hour concert featuring LGBTQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait artists, plus appearances by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Sydney Philharmonia Choirs. Hosted by comedian Steven Oliver, the concert showcased encore performances by Electric Fields, Jessica Mauboy and Casey Donovan. Australian opera star Deborah Cheetham Fraillon AO was joined onstage by her wife and conductor Nicolette Fraillon. The newlyweds shared a sweeping kiss onstage before performing for the first time together on such a national stage.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra accompanied acclaimed composer and didgeridoo artist William Barton on a remarkable orchestral piece that set the tone for the evening: one of love, community and artistry.

Opera, pop music, dance and comedy, all performed by talented Indigenous artists on the country's most distinguished stage. It was truly a night to remember.

UltraViolet puts queer women center stage

While many events at large Pride celebrations tend to cater to mixed crowds or a primarily gay male audience, UltraViolet created a space for queer women and their friends to dance the night away as well. Taking place at Sydney's stunning Town Hall, a 130-year landmark made of Sydney sandstone and featuring the



(Above) Crew and entertainers have a parade aboard the Qantas Pride Flight. Attendees party at Sydney Mardi Gras (right). Photos: Dana Piccoli



largest pipe organ this reporter has ever seen, Ultraviolet took over the entire space with three different party vibes: an outside terrace for dancing and mingling, a lower level with DJs and dance music beats and the main floor with live performances.

Produced by Sveta Gilerman and Jess Hill, the event featured performances by Jesswar, Bec Sandridge and Okenyo, plus aerialists and bawdy burlesque. There was even an impromptu rendition of “(I’ve Had) The Time of My Life” performed much to the crowd’s delight by Sydney WorldPride CEO Kate Wickett and “Kath and Kim” star and activist Magda Szubanski.

The main event was by electroclash artist Peaches, known for her unapologetic lyrics and subversive performances. Peaches did not disappoint as she crowd-surfed, stripped down into a bathing suit, danced and sang her hits to a rapturous audience.

Progress Shark

Located in front of The Australian Museum, at the busy intersection of College and Park Streets, is Progress Shark. The museum’s large shark statue got into the spirit and became the unofficial mascot for Sydney WorldPride. Wearing a custom Progress Flag (designed by Daniel Quasar) swimsuit, the Great White shimmered in the sun as thousands of WorldPride attendees stopped to take a picture. Artist George Buchanan created the Progress Shark suit, fringe and all. Progress Shark is one of 45 “Rainbow Moments” that appeared across Sydney to commemorate 45 years of Mardis Gras. Is Progress Shark here to stay? Only time will tell. (The statue was originally expected to come down in April.) Long live Progress Shark!

Mardis Gras turns 45

Mardis Gras is Sydney’s largest annual

LGBTQ+ celebration, happening in late February, and much like the large Pride festivals we have in the U.S. While there are certainly the things you expect in a Pride parade (Dykes on Bikes, floats and organizations), Sydney’s Mardis Gras has choreographed dances and massive art pieces like the First Nation’s Rainbow Serpent, which twirled its way through the streets of Sydney’s Gayborhood.

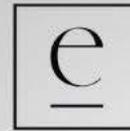
Prime Minister Anthony Albanese attended as PM, marking the first time that someone in the country’s top leadership position has participated. Opposition leader Chris Minns joined him.

The five-hour parade featured over 12,000 marchers, including a bus with many of the 78ers, who are respected and revered for their tireless efforts to change the Australian system for LGBTQ+ people. Same-sex marriage in Australia was finally legalized in 2017 after 22 previous bills failed.

LGBTQ+ art on display

Sydney is a true art city. Murals appear across the city, while art museums (with free

See **Sydney Pride**, page 32



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Progress Shark made a big splash in Sydney. Photo: Dana Piccoli

4 Sydney Pride

Continued from page 31

admission) feature the work of Australian artists and beyond. At the Art Gallery of New South Wales, rainbow placards appeared next to art created by LGBTQ+ artists for the “Queer Encounters” and “Queering the Collection” exhibitions. Contemporary LGBTQ+ artists like Dennis Golding, whose work “Casting Shadows” greeted visitors upon entrance, were featured alongside queer and trans artists who have long passed. Too often, artists were forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity, only to have history forget these important parts of them. Works like “The Bay” by 20th-century lesbian artist Thea Proctor and “By Tranquil Waters” by Sydney Long finally get the context they deserve.

Next door at the North Building, LGBTQ+ artists are featured in the Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Art collections and “Dreamhome: stories of art and shelter.”

At Powerhouse Ultimo, the “Absolutely Queer” exhibition was initially curated for Sydney WorldPride but has plans to continue through the end of the year. “Absolutely Queer” is a collection of costuming, multimedia works and more, all centering on the LGBTQ+

experience. Artists and creators Nicol & Ford, Renè Rivas and Sexy Galaxy are all featured in this colorful exhibition that looks back on our history, with an eye also cast toward the future.

Powerhouse curator Anni Turnbull was part of the team putting together “Absolutely Queer” and shared her enthusiasm for having WorldPride taking place in Sydney. “It’s kind of an enormous celebration,” Turnbull said. “It’s so important to recognize our queer history, to recognize how far we’ve come in the last 38 to 40 years in terms of people’s rights. And I think the way it’s been done is so joyous.”

Oxford Street, the heart of Sydney’s queer district, was covered in murals by artist Amy Blue, commissioned by the City of Sydney. The murals, which also served as a clever way to cover up construction and scaffolding, featured important people and places in Sydney’s LGBTQ+ history.

See **Sydney Pride**, page 34



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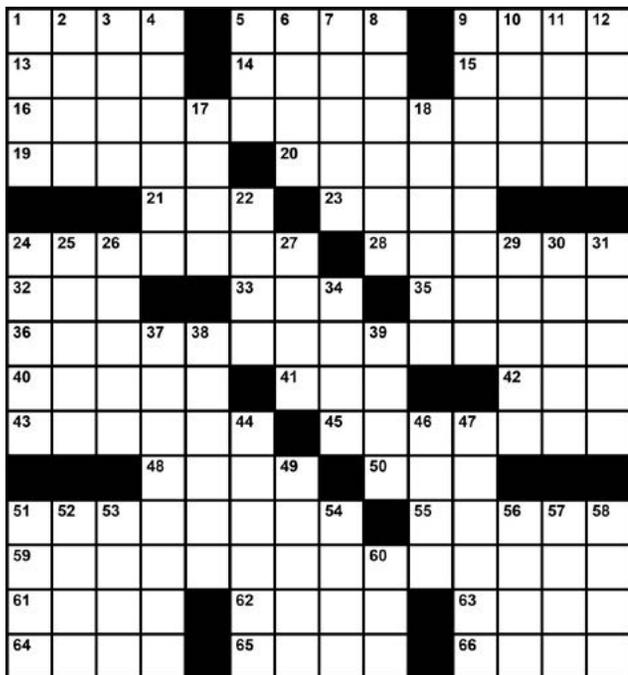
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- 32 Very hairy swinger
 33 Whine for milk?
 35 Tape over a video
 36 More of the quote
 40 Hello at Hula's Bar in Honolulu
 41 Bonheur's island
 42 Spy novelist Deighton
 43 Solitary sorts
 45 Composer Claude
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 51 Not beggars, they say
 55 J. ___ Hoover
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 57 Bard's river
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 60 Unbar, to Byron

Down

- 1 Bound gaily
 2 Bombard of columns
 3 Japanese WWII general
 4 Emulate Emma Stebbins
 5 Michelangelo's output
 6 Ginsberg's kind of poet
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 8 Life force
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 10 Where college women sleep together
 11 Ending with switch

Q Puzzle

- 16 Start of a quote from Malcolm Kenyatta of the Pennsylvania General Assembly
 19 Filmmaker Pier ___ Pasolini
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 21 They go at the bottoms of letters
 23 Rimbaud's zip
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 28 Drag queen's shoe feature

Raised in the Neighborhood

Across

- 1 King's groups of games
 5 Nuts and bolts
 9 Fingered
 13 Fast food pioneer
 14 Take another tour
 15 "You've Got Mail" female

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◀ Sydney Pride

Continued from page 32

Crossing the bridge

The Sydney Harbor Bridge is another iconic landmark in the city and one of the major arteries through the heart of Sydney. On the final day of Sydney WorldPride, 50,000 marches rose early with the magpies and ibis to participate in the historic event. With participants from around the world, the march kicked off and traversed across the bridge.

A group from Dhaka, Bangladesh marched with a banner representing their region. "We are here to march for those who cannot march in our country," one of the Dhaka members shared. This was a common refrain, recognizing our LGBTQ+ community in countries where being gay or transgender is illegal or oppressed.

The Rainbow Serpent made its final appearance, leading the march, followed by the 78ers and World Pride 2025 hosts, the delegation from Washington, D.C.

I caught up with artist Renè Rivas at the end of the walk to get his thoughts about the WorldPride experience. Rivas is a renowned artist and designer of Mardi Gras fashions. Originally from El Salvador, Rivas came to Australia as a refugee as part of the Family Reunion Program in the 1980s.

"For me, this is a dream come true to be able to be open to the world," said Rivas. "In

Australia, we welcome all kind of communities and we really embrace the diverse culture that we have."

Rivas also had a message he wanted to share with the global community: "Don't be afraid of who you are. That happened to me many years ago. Now my costumes are at the Powerhouse Museum and I travel around the world being able to express myself."

Passing the torch

All good things must come to an end, and at the Sydney WorldPride closing ceremony, people gathered one last time to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community and applaud all those who worked hard to put on such a large, diverse and meaningful event. Before Muna, Kim Petras and Ava Max took the stage, CEO Kate Wickett, Festival Creative Director Ben Graetz and Graham Simms (also known as the iconic Nana Miss Koori) welcomed members of the Washington D.C. Capital Pride team. D.C. WorldPride will take place May 23-June 8 2025, and marks 50 years of Pride in D.C.

It will be hard to top Sydney WorldPride, but it's clear that the next event is in extremely capable and enthusiastic hands. In the meanwhile, Sydney and New South Wales have once again established themselves as a major destination for safe, welcoming and exciting LGBTQ+ travel.

This story originally appeared in News is Out.

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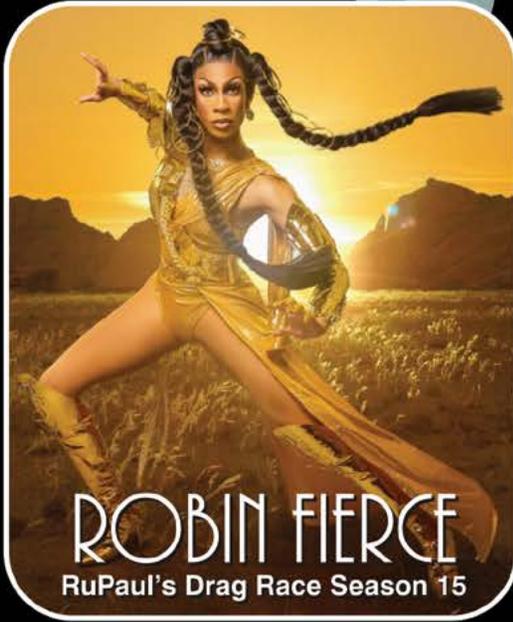
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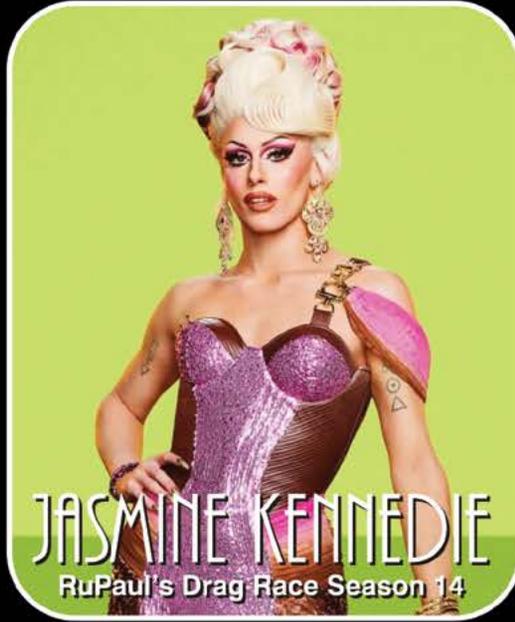
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