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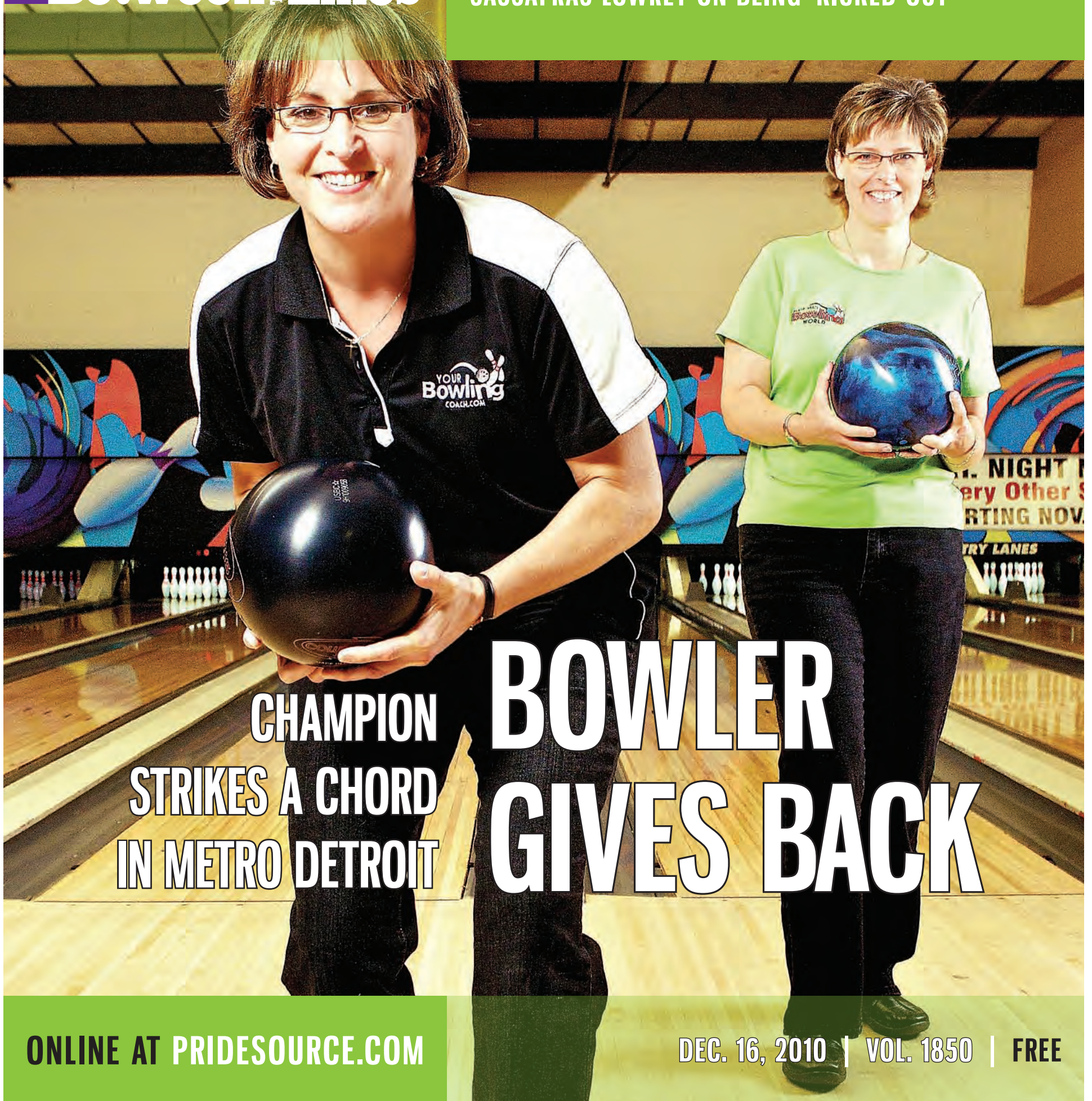
BTL

Between THE Lines™

ANN ARBOR SHOW WISHES YOU A 'HAPPY HOLIDAY'

STATE CONSIDERS BENEFITS FOR UNMARRIED PARTNERS

SASSAFRAS LOWREY ON BEING 'KICKED OUT'



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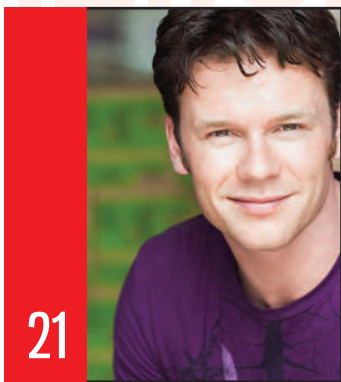


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Champion bowler Aleta Sill poses with her partner Michelle Mullen at Aleta Sill's Bowling World 7

Photo by Andrew Potter



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"I should have gone to ..."

ENCORE MICHIGAN

If it's about Michigan theaters, it's here.

Jessica Best is a senior at the University of Michigan and an intern at U of M's Spectrum Center. Here, Jessica chats with us about why she works to support the LGBT community.

1 What do you do at the Spectrum Center?

My responsibilities include putting together the newsletter, keeping track of and updating the events calendar, and updating the social media.



In order for that to change you can't just have the gay community asking for (it). You have to have everyone asking for the change.

I chose to use the term "coming out" in reference to being an ally. A few people I talked to didn't understand how that worked: How can I come out if I'm not gay? I definitely wasn't expecting that kind of response.

2 Why are you an ally for the LGBT community?

Because (the LGBT community) doesn't really have a lot of allies, especially in regard to the government and the current climate of society. I definitely think right now the status quo supports heterosexuality. That's something that I feel is not fair. I think it's true that LGBT issues are one of the major social justice issues of our generation.

LGBTQ people are not really treated equally. I think that definitely needs to change. In order for that to change you can't just have the gay community asking for it. You have to have everyone asking for the change.

5 So what do you mean, "coming out" as an ally?

Support for the community is really important, and it was another way for me to try and show that support.

I had some difficulty with that term because when a person talks about coming out, a lot of times there's a struggle with it, and there's a chance that it would be received in a negative way. I feel like those issues didn't really apply to me in such an extreme. I might get somewhat of a negative response to being an ally, but it's not in the same way.

3 What reactions do you get when people learn you're a straight ally?

A lot of the time, the first question people ask me is if I'm gay. And I'll say no, I don't have to be to work (at the Spectrum Center). A lot of people can't understand why I care if I'm not gay.

There are some problems in comparing (support of LGBT rights) to the civil rights movement, but there are some similarities. Then, it wasn't just black people or people of different races asking for (equal rights), it was white people too. That's what made it successful, for everybody to want it.

My parents are kind of over that it at this point. In high school I was in the gay/straight alliance. I've always had a lot of gay friends, so I would talk to my parents about this kind of stuff. Especially my dad. He always asked.

The ally training at the Spectrum Center has given me a good vocabulary to discuss these kinds of issues. They give really concrete ways to talk about gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and how they're all different.

I've always had conversations with my dad about the morality of homosexuality. But especially now that I have this vocabulary that I can use, our conversations have been much more constructive.

There were a few times where conversations were tough, but I think we're past that now. It's nice that he's being receptive to this stuff too.

4 Why do you think it's important for straight people to be allies?

The straight community is in the majority. LGBTQ people are not really treated equally. I think that definitely needs to change.

Between Ourselves is a bi-weekly feature that highlights members of Michigan's LGBT and allied community. To recommend someone for Between Ourselves, e-mail our news editor Tara Cavanaugh at tara@pridesource.com.



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WRAP renamed Jim Toy Community Center



Jim Toy

ANN ARBOR — The Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project changed its name to the Jim Toy Community Center, in honor of renowned activist Jim Toy on Dec. 8.

Toy co-founded the first sexual orientation program office at any university in the world. That original Lesbian-Gay Male Programs Office at the University of Michigan still exists and is now named the Spectrum Center.

Toy is also credited with being the co-author of Ann Arbor's 1972 nondiscrimination policy in regards to sexual orientation and, in 1999, for gender identity and expression. He also helped U of M expand its non-discriminatory bylaws.

"I'm so honored," says Toy, who's been secretary of the WRAP board for many years. "More than that, I'm humbled to have my name on a community center that is so important for the health and vibrancy of queer residents and their friends—and the community."

Six new board members were elected Dec. 8, along with other elected officials. The center said the changes helped "repledge the organization to its mission as an energetic resource for the transgender, bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer and ally local residents."

Warren murder causes dating site safety concerns

CRYSTAL A. PROXMIRE

WARREN— A Thanksgiving Day murder has prompted Equality Michigan to issue safety guidelines for those who use the Internet to make friends or find dates.

Robert Miller, 57, of Warren was found dead in his home on Nov. 26 after he failed to show up for his job at Home Depot. He had been stabbed several times. His car, computer, cell phone, wallet and rings were stolen.

Police later discovered that Miller had been conversing with a 19-year-old man named Andrew Terrell Clark, whom he met on the dating site MegaMatesMen.com. Clark allegedly met Miller at his home late in the evening, where he killed him and stole his belongings, according to the police report.

This is the second attack reported this year in Michigan in which the victim was targeted on MegaMatesMen.com. On March 26 Ferndale Police were called to Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak after a 48-year-old male reported being beaten, robbed and held against his will at his Ferndale home. The victim said he had met the main assailant through the online dating service, and the two of them had gone on a date two weeks prior.

Ferndale Police said the suspect came to the man's home for a second date, said he had to go to his car to get something and then returned with another male suspect, a hammer and a handgun.

The victim said the men beat him with the hammer and took his ATM card. One suspect guarded the man, while the other – disguised in a long wig – went to a nearby gas station and withdrew money. He returned and the men continued to beat the victim and rob him. The victim escaped and made it to the hospital with serious injuries.

The two incidents are not believed to be related, other than the fact that the victims were first contacted through the online dating service.

Equality Michigan guidelines

In response to Miller's attack, Equality Michigan issued safety guidelines for online dating:

- Tell someone where you are going and how long you will be gone.
- Look for well-lit, public, open and secure areas in which to meet.
- Trust your gut instinct: If you get bad vibes from the person, leave.
- Never let the pick-up know you are alone. Let them think that you have a friend who knows where you are.
- At any sign of trouble make as much noise as possible. Carry a whistle or personal alarm.
- If forced to fight, use whatever you

can as a weapon -- your stilettos, bag, sharp ring, belt buckle or anything that will inflict pain.

- Strike vulnerable areas of the body (eyes, throat, nose, fingers, crotch, knee, feet); these hurt the most.
- Be cautious about revealing information that could identify you. For example, if you give someone your listed phone number, he or she can get your real name and street address.
- For your first meeting, pick a place that's public and neutral. If you're traveling to visit the person in his or her town, pick a place you're comfortable with when you arrive.
- Always carry a cell phone. This will allow you to call 911 at any time. If finances are tight, purchase a pre-paid cell phone.
- Know that violence is never your fault, no matter what.

Equality Michigan provides victim services, crime tracking, and advocacy throughout the State. To learn more about how to protect yourself against violence, or to report a hate crime, visit their website at www.equalitymi.org

State considers health benefits for unmarried partners

BY TODD HEYWOOD

The Michigan Civil Service Commission is considering a proposal to extend health insurance benefits to unmarried, live-in partners of all state employees, regardless of sexual orientation or relationship.

Under the proposed policy, negotiated by the Office of the State Employer and unions representing state employees, health insurance coverage would be available to all non-related people over 18 who have shared a residence with a state employee for at least 12 months, covering both same-sex and opposite-sex partnerships. The children and dependents of those newly eligible will also be extended coverage under the same conditions as any other person eligible for coverage.

Action on the proposal was tabled by the commission Wednesday, but could be revisited as soon as January.

State Rep. Rick Jones (R-Grand Ledge) said the plan will cost too much at a time of budget austerity. The lawmaker, who is preparing to serve his first term in the state Senate next year, said the state cannot afford the program because it is facing a \$1.6 billion budget hole. Jones also said he has heard state employees "joking" about using the new program to help friends in need of health care coverage.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm supports the proposal, her office said Wednesday afternoon.

"The agenda item before the Civil Service Commission honors a commitment that our administration negotiated with the state employee represented groups in 2004. We are honoring that commitment," Granholm spokesperson Liz Boyd wrote in an email.

The governor's office says the annual cost for the program could be as much as \$5.7 million, but the CSC was told this morning the cost could be as low \$2.2 million.

Neither figure considers the tax revenue which results from the plan. The IRS has determined that benefits provided under domestic partner-like programs are considered taxable income. As a result, the Human Rights Campaign reports that in 2007, people with partner benefits pay an additional \$1,069 in federal taxes. The Michigan Department of Treasury was unaware of what amount of income tax in the state is generated by current domestic partner programs, such as those offered by state universities and private employers.

Gary Glenn, president of the American Family Association of Michigan, said the proposal, so long as it was not just for same-sex partners, was legal. But he questioned if it was good public policy.

"Even in the best of times, taxpayers should

not be compelled to subsidize homosexual relationships that many people consider immoral," Glenn said in an email to Michigan Messenger. "At a time when Michigan is facing a \$1.6 billion deficit, forcing taxpayers to subsidize new groups of beneficiaries – and especially a group whose choice of sexual behavior is fraught with a dramatically higher incidence of health hazards including serious life-threatening disease – is unthinkable and will only further increase the cost of healthcare for all of us."

Instead, he said the state should actively promote marriage – specifically and solely marriage between one man and one woman.

"Health insurance is a basic right and benefit," said Nusrat H. Ventimiglia, director of victim services for Equality Michigan. "To systematically exclude LGBT families from health coverage is just wrong."

Ventimiglia said in her typical day she regularly hears from gay and lesbian couples who are struggling because one partner is unable to access medical coverage.

Jay Kaplan, of the ACLU of Michigan Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Project, said the costs concerns are a red herring.

"Less than one percent of the eligible people take advantage of this," said Kaplan referring to programs established after a 2008 Michigan Supreme Court ruling which made same-sex

domestic partner program illegal. As a result, universities and other public employers developed programs called Other Eligible Individual programs. Under those programs, an eligible employee can name a person as their OEI, but those people have to fit a list of criteria. Those criteria vary from public body to public body, but generally include verification that the two people have lived together for 12 months or more, share finances and possibly own property together."

Even if the cost of the proposal is at the highest estimate of \$5.7 million, that amounts to only .0035 percent of the expected budget deficit.

The proposal the commission considered Wednesday stems from a 2006 contract agreement between state unions and the Granholm administration. Those approved contracts included the option to extend partner benefits for state employees. Granholm said under the 2004 amendment to the Constitution passed by voters she could not extend those benefits. Employees sued, resulting in the 2008 Supreme Court ruling barring gender based partner benefits.

"The bottom line is that this is about treating people fairly," Kaplan said. "And about competing with companies in the private sector that are already offering domestic partner benefits."

This story originally appeared on www.michiganmessenger.com

World-class bowler gives back

Aleta Sill made \$1 million as a female bowling champion. Now, she and her partner teach others the sport.

BY ALEXA STANARD

Here are a couple of fun facts about Detroit: It's the Mecca of the bowling world, and home to the all-time best female bowler in the country. Aleta Sill, the first female bowler to earn \$1 million in prize money in the sport, is in seven halls of fame. She's the only bowler, male or female, to win the sport's Triple Crown twice.

"My grandparents were league bowlers and they took me with them one night (when I was five)," Sill said. "They let me throw a ball afterwards. I was hooked from that point."

Sill started touring right after she graduated from high school in 1980. Soon she was knocking out up to two dozen tournaments a year. At the end of 1998, the Professional Bowlers Association alerted her that she was on track to earn \$1 million in prize winnings.

Katrina Hancock, a sports reporter for WDIV, featured Sill on "Sports Final Edition" in 2008 when she was inducted into the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame. She ran the story because "Winning over a million dollars in sports as a woman is huge. It's something you don't see very often," she said. "She's a good role model for ladies. You don't have to be in basketball or volleyball or track. You can make a good living in bowling."

Not long after her big feat, Sill met Michelle Mullen, who won several national titles and is one of five gold-level female bowling coaches in the world. Like Sill, Mullen, a Chicago-area native, was introduced to bowling by her grandparents. By high school she was on a team that won the state title. At the University of Illinois she became a collegiate champion and began to tour after she graduated.

Mullen's heart, though, was in coaching. She learned the craft while on tour and founded a coaching company with a partner, touring the country. She heard good things about Sill's coaching and invited her to coach a bowling clinic with her in Chicago.

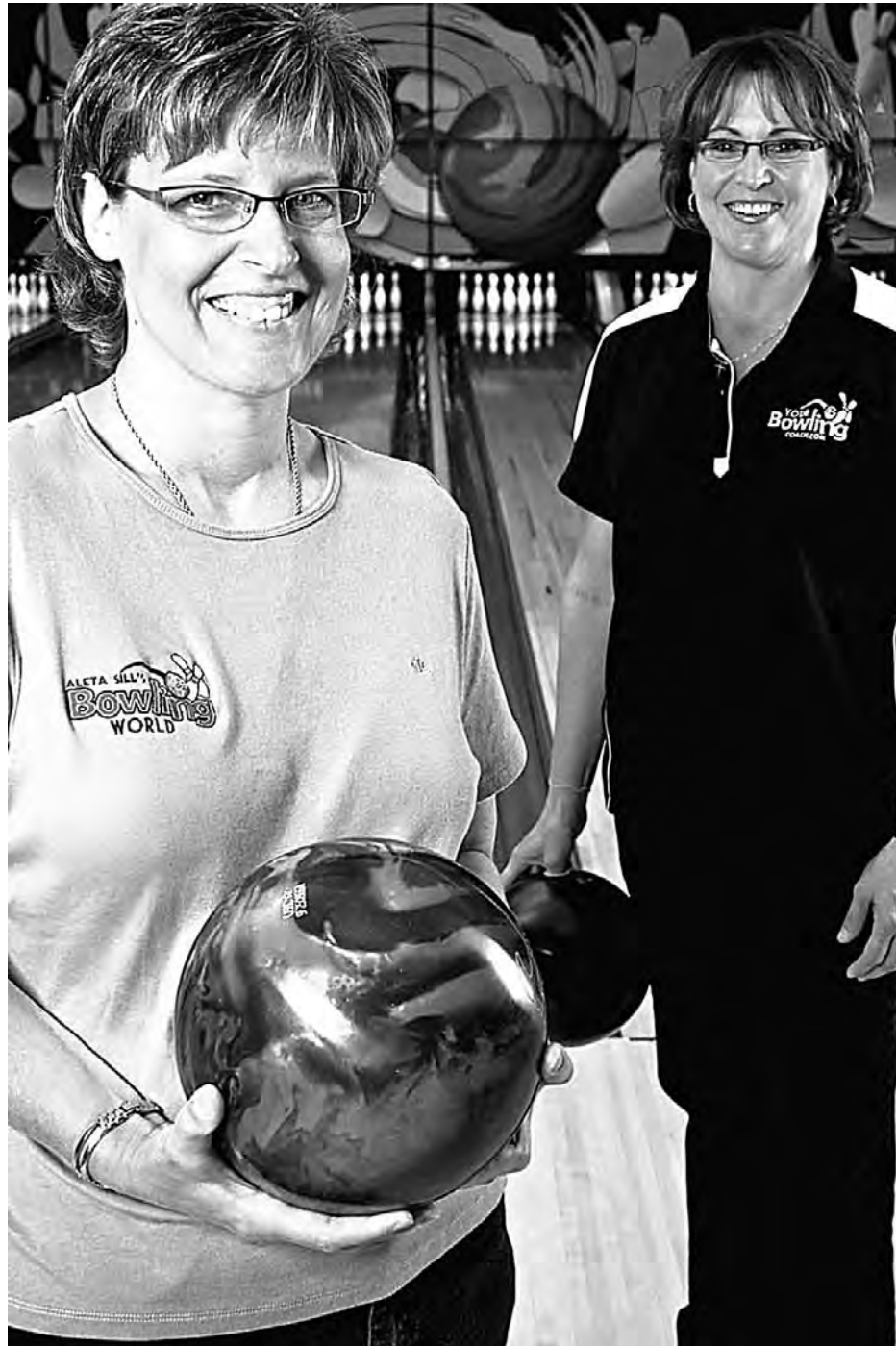
"We had known each other on tour but we barely spoke," Mullen said. "We just both are quiet."

The women found their voices during the weekend spent coaching together. Sill and Mullen became so engrossed in conversation at the airport that Sill missed her flight home. It was the last one of the night. By the next day, the two had another visit planned for the following weekend. A year later, Mullen moved to metro Detroit.

"We're having a great time, getting to know each other," Sill said.

The beginning of the women's relationship coincided with a decline in Sill's career. After hitting the \$1 million mark in 1999, bowling equipment began to change, which made it hard for Sill to stay competitive without making significant changes in her game.

"There just wasn't enough money for me to stay out there and make changes and try to make a living," she said. "You're paid on how



Aleta Sill, left and her partner Michelle Mullen. BTL photo: Andrew Potter

you perform. If I didn't bowl well that week, I didn't get a check. 2001 was a very bad year. At the end I'd just had it. When you play at a certain level... and get your butt beat every week, that was enough for me."

She retired from professional bowling and began to focus on coaching. She and Mullen started Your Bowling Coach with two partners and based the operation out of Country Lanes in Farmington Hills. They coach on-site and travel to clients, using software that records players during their game so they can scrutinize their technique. Sill and Mullen eventually bought

the company. Now, they give about 800 private lessons a year in addition to summer camps and clinics. In 2003, they opened a pro shop at Country Lanes called Aleta Sill's Bowling World.

The women's successes haven't inured them to discrimination or being underappreciated. Despite Sill's iconic status, Hancock was the first TV reporter to run a story on her.

During their professional careers, the women kept their private lives private. Colleagues knew they were a couple, but it wasn't discussed openly.

"Anything that mattered to me I pretty much

"She definitely has had an impact on young women getting into bowling, and she's teaching them now... She's made her money and now she's doing something with her talents to give back."

-Katrina Hancock, sports reporter for WDIV

kept to myself," Mullen said. "Besides, I don't think being a professional woman bowler or a professional coach as a woman was the most 'in' thing 25 years ago."

Even today, being female and gay can pose obstacles.

"We worried when we opened (the store), Will guys want to come to us because we're girls?" Sill said. "And one of our competitors has been making (homophobic) remarks to our customers. Like I can't throw a bowling ball because I'm gay."

"You just have to try to be better," Mullen said. "You try to treat people right."

But it's also the community that's helped make the game fun again for Sill. After a hiatus of several years, Sill returned to bowling when a couple of friends invited her to join a gay league. "It's strictly for fun," she said. "I just go to socialize. I was in adult leagues at 15. I didn't do collegiate bowling. There were times when I was bowling three nights a week and I started at 9 at night. Bowling was fun, but it was a job. It was all about money. Now it's different."

The couple also sponsored the International Gay Bowling Organization's annual Motown Invitational Classic this year. It was their first time getting involved in a public LGBT event; Sill said the experience "was really good."

The couple, who own four cats and four dogs (all rescues), also are enthusiastic supporters of animal welfare organizations. They host a yearly fund-raiser, Bowl for Animal Rescue, which benefits the Dearborn Animal Shelter and the Michigan Animal Adoption Network, and they also collect animal supplies for the Animal Care Network.

Hancock, who has broadcast live from Bowl for Animal Rescue for the past three years, said Sill and Mullen deserve to be appreciated for their accomplishments and commitment to metro Detroit.

"Sill is a pioneer in the sport," Hancock said. "She definitely has had an impact on young women getting into bowling, and she's teaching them now, along with Michelle. That's the main thing - she's now giving back to our community. She's made her money and now she's doing something with her talents to give back."



BTL EDITORIAL

Lansing should make sure new police chief is LGBT friendly

BY TODD HEYWOOD

The City of Lansing is looking for a new chief of police. Former Chief Mark Alley left the post in February to join Emergent BioSolutions. Alley, who led the department for a decade, leaves a powerful legacy of cooperation, outreach and community development with Lansing's LGBT community.

Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero, who makes the final selection after the Lansing Police Board makes recommendations, should make sure whoever fills Alley's shoes continues that cooperation and relationship with the LGBT community.

But being community-driven should not be the only skill of the new chief.

It is essential that the new administrator have the skills to communicate with the media. That is key, as Lansing Police, like other police agencies, sometimes gets it wrong. When police agencies get it wrong, it is essential to admit the error and step up with solutions.

Chief Alley did that in Lansing. After the controversial release of a man's HIV status in a police report, Alley connected with then-Triangle Foundation and did training for police on LGBT issues to make sure the controversial sex sting and the release of the HIV-positive status were not repeated.

Acting Chief Teresa Szymanski has continued that openness to the LGBT community, working with Captain Ray Hall in appointing a liaison for the community. That too was a natural outgrowth of the sex-sting incident last summer, which was welcomed warmly by the Lansing community.

The new chief must also have a finger on the pulse of the community and understand when it is time to raise the concerns. Whether those concerns are about problems in the LGBT community or about safety issues impacting the community, the new chief must be able to swiftly, and deftly, handle those threats.

Under Alley's leadership, the Lansing Police Department responded to numerous hate crimes, and had no issue calling a hate crime a hate crime. When Lansing's Old Town, where the city's gay bars are located, was vandalized with anti-gay graffiti two years ago, Alley and his department were among the first to call the incident what it was -- a hate crime and an attack

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on the entire community.

Bernero has a big job in selecting a new chief. The city is diverse and shifts politically as the legislature develops a new personality each year. The new chief needs to be someone who understands the community, with all its foibles. With the constant protests and marches in the city, any new chief executive of the police agency must be able to take the reins without any delay or need to get up to speed.

We know Bernero is a staunch ally of the LGBT community. His choice to replace Alley, who was also an ally, must reflect that continued commitment. Lansing has become a shining example of how the police and the gay community can work together. Bernero cannot allow that proud tradition to slide backwards, or to be lost.

VIEWPOINT



Trans-Portation Security

BY GWENDOLYN ANN SMITH

'Tis the season: The time of ornaments on pine trees - not to mention bell ringers, packed shopping malls, and the same 15 songs you've heard every December since you were a child. In all of this is the potential for holiday travel -- and in no time in recent history has travel been wrought with so much controversy.

This year, the Transportation Security Agency has added what they've characterized in their own press releases as "an unpredictable mix of security layers," including an increase in "Advanced Imaging Technology" and a new, more intrusive pat-down procedure for those traveling by plane.

A large number of stories have circulated in the media about these systems and the "rock and a hard place" option between an X-ray machine that can expose the whole of your body and a pat-down that includes groping one's most private parts. Many are outraged about a system they view as counter to the liberties they hold dear.

For many transgender people, the new procedures can mean being "outed" while traveling.

The TSA is using both millimeter wave and backscatter X-ray systems. Both systems produce an image that displays the whole body of a subject, including visible buttocks, genitals, and breasts. They also would reveal any binders, gaffes, or prosthetics present on a subject. A suspicious item could be further "zoomed in on" by a TSA agent using these machines.

The new pat-down procedures include handling around the breasts and genitals of passengers, and there has been a report of a mastectomy patient having to remove and expose a silicone breast prosthesis. It would be safe to assume that any materials used to conceal or enhance genitals and chests could be viewed as suspicious and require additional study by the TSA.

So what does this mean for a transgender person?

For many, especially when one might be new at presenting in their preferred gender identity in public, being in a large, crowded, public space can make one nervous. We may

worry about being "outed," or getting in trouble solely for how we're presenting. This nervousness may work against us, causing a TSA agent to be more concerned about us. When this happens, it becomes all that more likely that one will indeed be "outed." In a worst-case scenario, this could mean public humiliation and degradation. Heck, even in the best case this will be a less-than-pleasant situation.

An important note: The TSA does not have any policies in place for the treatment of transgender individuals. This means that you can

The TSA does not have any policies in place for the treatment of transgender individuals. This means that you can face TSA agents who don't have a complete grasp on why a person might be binding their breasts or wearing a "packer" to fill out their pants. They may not understand why someone would wear breasts forms or tuck male genitals back. What's more, you stand a chance of coming across a TSA agent who is less-than-friendly towards transgender presentation.

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presentation.

I cannot help but feel that many transgender people will find their personal safety compromised in the name of safe air travel. Their personal privacy will indeed be at risk, and I dare say I expect to hear of TSA agents harassing transgender travelers this season and in the future. I don't want to think that -- but yet, I do.

The National Center for Transgender Equality has produced a guide for the transgender traveler, suggesting that one check their binders and other items, or be prepared to educate the TSA officers when they ask. They also note the procedures for complaining about how one might be treated. Go to <http://www.transequality.org/>

Meanwhile, the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the Transgender Law Center are collecting stories from transgender people who have faced issues while in airport security lines. The form for that is at <http://www.nclrights.org/>

In between the fruitcake and other holiday traditions you may enjoy, I hope that safe, friendly skies will be yours -- and that you will not face public humiliation at the hands of the TSA.

Gwen Smith might have to take the train next time. You can find her on the web at www.gwensmith.com

S/he said

Religion and art, health and youth

COMPILED BY HOWARD ISRAEL



Frank Rich

"The incident is chilling because it suggests that even in a time of huge progress in gay civil rights, homophobia remains among the last permissible bigotries in America. 'Think anti-gay bullying is just for kids? Ask the Smithsonian,' wrote The Los Angeles Times' art critic, Christopher Knight. One might add: Think anti-gay bullying is just for small-town America? Look at the nation's capital."

-Frank Rich, in his column titled "Gay Bashing at the Smithsonian," about the decision by officials at the National Portrait Gallery/Smithsonian Institution in Washington who yielded to anti-gay pressure groups and politicians and removed an AIDS-themed video from the exhibition titled "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," a survey of gay identity in art over the last century, www.nytimes.com, Dec. 12.

"The message in the DVD conflicts with core Christian values of love, compassion, tolerance, and respect. Jesus' essential teaching is 'love one another.' This DVD threatens the well-being of gay and lesbian people, particularly vulnerable young people. It hurts them and all who are connected to them. The manner in which the DVD targets this group of God's children contributes to dehumanizing and depersonalizing them. It subtly endorses bullying and blatantly endorses bigotry... reflects misguided priorities, and strays from the essential teachings of Christ."

-In a letter to Roman Catholic Archbishop Nienstedt of Minnesota, from a group of Catholics who rejected the actions taken by the Archdiocese which distributed 400,000 anti-same-sex marriage DVDs by collecting the DVDs and returning them to the Church, <http://returnthedvd.org/>, Dec. 10..

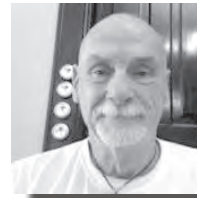
"I wish I could say that their results are surprising but unfortunately they are not. Anti-homosexual bias can occur anywhere, such as in the police officer who lets go a teen-aged boy and girl for making out in a park, but charges two teen-aged boys with public indecency. Authority figures ill-at-ease with homosexuality may feel that the non-exclusively heterosexual youth's transgression may be more indicative of the youth being 'out of control' since they consider that his/her sexuality is also a transgression. In this case, they may feel that more sanctions are needed to attempt to steer the youth 'back' to more 'normal' behaviors."

-Dr. Karine Igartua, co-founder/co-medical director, McGill University Sexual Identity Centre, about a study titled "Criminal-Justice and School Sanctions Against Nonheterosexual Youth," that found that LGB teenagers are far more likely to be harshly punished by schools and courts than their straight peers, even though they are less likely to engage in serious misdeeds, www.reuters.com, Dec. 06.



"Peppermint Patty isn't a lesbian, but she was still an extraordinary, even revolutionary character when she was introduced to the strip in 1966: a proud and unapologetic tomboy who wears pants and sandals rather than a dress, and who is apparently the best athlete in town, male or female. This was at a time when such female characters were extremely rare in popular culture, except as objects of ridicule. But the most remarkable thing about Patty is that she was completely unremarkable in the strip. Patty's implosion of gender stereotypes is accepted by all the other kids without question, as if it's simply one other perfectly acceptable way to be."

-Brent Hartinger, in his Q&A column titled "Ask the Flying Monkey," this posting titled "Is Peppermint Patty a Lesbian?," about Charles M Schulz's "Peanuts" cartoon series, www.afterelton.com, Dec. 06. Schulz stated Peppermint Patty isn't a lesbian.



Parting Glances Then & Now

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

We're not in Bethlehem, Toto!

There are paths that by chance occasionally mix up in time, space, thought and crazy activation. Some factual. Some fantasy.

If stars are auspicious—and on this particular Night of Nights astronomers say alpha centauri stars were auspicious—these paths magically switch, however fleetingly, for whatever poetic reason of contrast, alliteration, reality versus illusion.

And so it happened, once upon a near-but-distant whimsical time—in a universe that was hoodwinked by twinklings many light years away—that two paths—five companions on one; three, on the other—switched direction, and stood up destination.

For our first group of travelers—names familiar to young and old alike—Dorothy and Toto, Tinman, Scarecrow, Cowardly Lion—they were sharing the Yellow Brick Road to Oz, when the unexpected crisscrossing occurred.

Quite suddenly they were sideswiped by a brilliant light that seemed to nudge them through winter's gloom. Giddy—very, very young—exuberantly naive at heart—they forgot all about Oz, which is not an easy thing to do. Ask any adult.

(Our second regal sojourners—Gaspar, Balthasar, Melchior—bearing gifts for someone of high estate—were baffled to find themselves in a poppy-infested countryside, traveling only to God knows to where. The sign pointed to MGM.)

"I hear music. Could it be choirs singing?" asked Tinman, eager to follow wherever the sounds led. "How marvelously wonderful," thought Dorothy, knowing full well that tin men have tin ears; that perhaps this was an auspicious sign.

Along the way Dorothy and her rerouted companions found themselves waved at by shepherds keeping their flocks by night. "It seems we're celebrities," giggled Scarecrow, as Toto and Cowardly Lion busied themselves—bravely to be sure—chasing off wolves howling too close for comfort.

Yea, verily, readers, the night was clear. The light indeed got brighter. "No doubt!" ventured Scarecrow, with newfound mental acumen, "This star is of 31.50 magnitude. A biggie."

And as the buddy-buddy friends traveled the rolling hills they were overwhelmed by a sense of caring warmth, wonderment, well being, even though it seemed so dead and dread at a sad year's end.

Inspired by the dreamlike mood they found themselves in, Dorothy, who had palatial lyric gifts—she hoped someday to perform in movies—began to sing. And, out of the blue, she sang lyrics she had never heard before, but somehow knew by heart, with Tinman, Cowardly Lion, Scarecrow crooning in.

How quickly the miles reeled by. And before they could finish the last chorus of "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louie" they found themselves among a small crowd gathered in front of a tiny, makeshift manger.

There were shepherds, seven dwarfs, a newly awakened princess and her adoring prince, and, in the center of it all, a mom, a carpenter dad, a small baby wrapped in hand-me-down clothes. And . . .

. . . most probably because there was an awe-inspired, opening-night crowd applauding, the little guy began to cry. Not too loudly. But authoritatively audible nonetheless. And—in a moment of exquisite improv—Scarecrow pulled straw from his thump-thump-thumping heart and blushing gave it to cradle the baby's head.

Dorothy, with perfect on-stage presence, sang another lullaby that again popped unasked into her head. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" she sang. The crying baby hushed, smiled, and gave the tinniest of, so I'm told, technicolored laughs. (His own over-the-rainbow-time would come another day.)

Alas! Alas! In the twinkling of an eye, Dorothy, Tinman, Scarecrow, Cowardly Lion, Toto, were suddenly whisked away. 1939! "Well, I wonder what Auntie Em would say?" sighed Dorothy, shaking her head from side to side.

"And why in heaven's name would a shepherd be wearing Ruby Red slippers and clicking his heels? Is he funny that way?" camped the Cowardly Lion, with a wink.

Charles@pridesource.com

ACLU and Ruth Ellis Center announce youth leadership program

Editor of anthology on LGBT youth homelessness helps kick off initiative

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

DETROIT— The ACLU of Michigan and the Ruth Ellis Center announced a new joint initiative last week. Out and Upfront: Youth Leadership and Advocacy is a collaborative training and education project designed to educate and encourage homeless, runaway and at-risk LGBT youth to become advocates for social change. Specifically, the program is designed to teach them how to combat bullying and discrimination. Details of the program were rolled out at a special event Friday night at the ACLU's headquarters in Midtown.

"This program is aimed at listening to those with firsthand experience of discrimination and empowering them to envision and build better policies," said Jay Kaplan, head of the ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project.

One specific area Kaplan said the program will focus on is reducing bullying in local schools.

"Detroit is one of the largest school districts in the country," he said. "Detroit, the city, has an anti-discrimination ordinance, but they don't have an anti-bullying policy for the district. Part of the grant is also to work with Highland Park, which does have an anti-bullying policy [in their school district] but does not have an anti-discrimination ordinance in their city."

Kaplan said still, an anti-bullying policy is just the first step in fighting this problem.

"A lot of schools have policies, but we've found that a policy, itself, is not enough," he said.

During the 12-month program, which is funded through a grant from the Arcus Foundation, youth advocates will develop recommendations for policies that represent the needs of the LGBT community and include guidelines for raising awareness and remediation programs in schools.

"We have had tremendous support from local and state government leaders who are volunteering to help us train youth to go in front of legislators and school boards," Hughes said. "Twelve young people are going to take part in the program, which will include such training topics as Knowing Your Rights, What's Your Voice, What Is Advocacy, etc. It's a pretty intensive curriculum that we're still in the process of putting together."

Hughes said while anti-bullying has become the cause du jour in recent months, the Out and Upfront program was already in the works before the recent rash of tragic gay suicides.

"It's something that we had been working on for the past eight months," she said. "So much of it seems very timely, but as a center we knew that this was something that needed to be done for our community way before that."

One of the leaders who has pledged her support for the program is Detroit Councilwoman



Jay Kaplan, head of the ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project, and Ruth Ellis Center Executive Director Laura Hughes announce the kickoff of Out and Upfront, a collaborative youth leadership program. BTL photo: Jason A. Michael

Saunteel Jenkins, who will take part in trainings. She has also, according to Hughes, pledged to get an LGBT-inclusive ordinance on safe schools passed next year.

Speaking with the voice of experience

As a tie-in to the launch of this initiative, Sassafras Lowrey, editor of "Kicked Out," a collection of first-person stories from current and formerly homeless LGBT youth, spoke and read selections from her anthology, which was released by Ypsilanti-based Homofactus Press earlier this year.

Lowrey, who grew up in rural Oregon, was sent packing by her parents for being gay when she was only 14. Even prior to that, she faced the challenges of being raised by a physically abusive mother and a stepfather who raped her.

"Forty percent of homeless youth identify as

LGBT," she said. "At the same time we know that number is higher because of the people who don't get counted or who won't identify to anyone as LGBT. My interest in fighting this epidemic of LGBT homelessness is purely selfish. When I was 14, I became part of the 40 percent who identify as queer."

When she was kicked out, Lowrey, now 26, went to her local library in search of support and solutions to her crisis, sure she would find something on the topic.

"I saw libraries as very much the source of knowledge," she explained. "I went looking for these type of stories and I didn't find anything there. At that point, I made this commitment that if I survived I was going to make a book so that no one would feel as alone as I did in that moment."

Lowrey left Oregon for New York City four years ago, and it was then, after contributing to a number of other anthologies, that she revisited the idea of creating one of her own.

"I was thinking about what my first book would be," she recalled. "I thought that by this point, surely, a book like this had been written. It was surprising and disturbing to me that it hadn't happened, and that's really when I began working on 'Kicked Out' in earnest."

As she did, Lowrey saw that the need for such a collection was as great as ever. It would raise awareness of the issue of LGBT homeless youth, ensure that the next 14-year-old kicked out by her abusive parents wouldn't feel so alone, and teach those trying to fight the epidemic how to better do so.

"Youth are often undermined by the very systems that try to advocate for them," Lowrey said.

"Sometimes, community organizers of non-profits or agencies who are charged with or designed with the intention of acting in the best interest of youth, are doing work based on their perspectives as youth organizers, as adults in the community, without taking into account what youth want, need or are experiencing."

The 34 personal accounts in "Kicked Out" makes those concerns clear.

"These sort of real-life stories paint a better picture for people," she said. "Stories, in my opinion, are what bring this epidemic to life, making it impossible to ignore."

For more information on Sassafras Lowrey and "Kicked Out," visit www.kickedoutanthology.com.



Q & A with Sassafra Lowrey

Sassafra Lowrey is an international author, educator and artist. She edited the "Kicked Out" anthology, which tells the stories of homeless LGBT youth. She spoke at the kickoff of the ACLU of Michigan and Ruth Ellis Center youth leadership initiative on Dec. 10.

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

What was the hardest part about telling your story?

I've been very open about my experience from the beginning, so that wasn't so much a struggle for me. But I think for many of the contributors to "Kicked Out" some of the difficulty came from being open about this part of their past that's still incredibly stigmatized – even within the LGBT community. They had concerns about the way that they would be seen by people in their community.

You've lived through your own horrors, but was there one story in Kicked Out that was difficult for even you to read or hear?

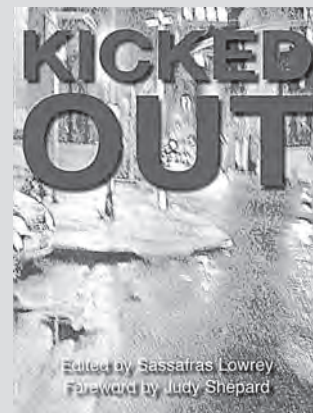
Everything that was shared by the contributors is, on some level, very difficult – very difficult for them and, thus, very difficult to read. But they're also, in this funny way, very empowering. A lot of people come up to me, having not read it, and say, 'This is going to be a very hard book to read. How depressing.' Then nine times out of 10 they come back to me and say, 'This was very inspiring.'"

What's the key to survival for LGBT youth who suddenly find themselves homeless?

There's not one answer because everyone's situation is different and the resources available to them are different. The big thing that I say, that was certainly key to my survival and is the best advice I can give, is to create family with other people who have similar experiences and other LGBT people in general.

What is it that these youth need from us as a community?

They really need support and that support can take a lot of different forms. On an institutional level they need our advocacy for securing funding for direct services that are working for homeless youth. We also as a community need to think about advocating our resources in terms of money that we donate, things that we donate as well as our time. Then, also, one of the really important things that people can do, regardless of how much money or time they have, is to start talking about these issues. We need to break down the stigma this carries and that means having conversations with your friends at the bar or wherever you may be about how these issues are impacting our community.



Lowrey's writing has been included in a variety of anthologies, including "Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation," "Trans Bodies, Trans Seives," and "LGBTQ: America Today."

What's the answer to this epidemic?

I think that's the million dollar question and I don't think there is one thing that will end it. If we knew that, that would be incredible.

"One of the really important things that people can do, regardless of how much money or time they have, is to start talking about these issues. We need to break down the stigma this carries and that means having conversations with your friends at the bar or wherever you may be about how these issues are impacting our community."

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BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

If there's one thing that makes America uncomfortable, it's art. Because art is gay in a very literal, serious, and horrible way. And it must be stopped. Especially if Jesus is involved.

Which is why, on Nov. 30, the day before World AIDS Day, a short video segment by David Wojnarowicz, a gay artist who died of AIDS in 1992, was yanked from an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. The exhibit, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," is touted as "the first major museum exhibition to focus on sexual difference in the making of modern American portraiture," which means, of course, H-O-M-O.

Wojnarowicz's piece, titled *Fire In My Belly*, contains a brief segment of a Hummel figurine-looking Jesus on the cross with live ants skittering all over it. Clearly, as far as Catholic League President Bill Donohue saw it, Wojnarowicz meant to offend Christians, especially Catholics, even though Donohue is to Catholics what Fred Phelps is to Baptists. Donohue is ardently anti-gay and believes that homosexuality and pedophilia are irrevocably linked. This is a guy who, while on CNN in March, called the Catholic sex abuse scandal "a homosexual crisis" and said, "They can't keep their hands off the boys. Don't you get it?"

In his Nov. 30 press release, Donohue misrepresented Wojnarowicz's video as showing "large ants eating away at Jesus on a crucifix." There is no eating happening. The figure is some kind of glazed ceramic. Not exactly the kind of thing you see ants carrying away from a picnic.

There is one thing that Donohue and I agree on, however. "It is a sad commentary on the judgment exercised by Smithsonian officials that it took a pressure group like the Catholic League to send them a wake-up call," he said. That Wojnarowicz's work was pulled from display is, indeed, "a sad commentary on the judgment exercised by Smithsonian officials."

"The decision wasn't caving in," the museum's director, Martin E. Sullivan, told *The Washington Post*. "We don't want to shy away from anything that is controversial, but we want to focus on the museum's and this show's strengths."

But as Frank Rich pointed out in *The New York Times*, Dude, you totally caved. And caved for a guy whose opinion isn't worth the kilowatt hours it took to post his press release to his bullshit organization's website.

"I regret that some reports about the exhibit have created an impression that the video is intentionally sacrilegious," Sullivan said. "In fact, the artist's intention was to depict the suffering of an AIDS victim. It was not the museum's intention to offend."

This explanation did little to quell the anti-gay fire in Donohue's belly. That a figurine of Jesus was used to "depict the suffering of an AIDS victim" probably just made it worse. So after they pulled the video Donohue is still calling for a cut in federal funds for the museum. Never mind that the "Hide/Seek" exhibit is privately funded.

And Donohue has friends in high places— friends who will soon hold the Smithsonian's purse strings. "If they've got money to squander like this, of a crucifix being eaten by ants, of Ellen DeGeneres grabbing her breasts, men in chains... then I think we should look at their budget," Georgia Rep. Jack Kingston told FOX News. And yes, there is a photo of Ellen grabbing at her hoots. Who knows? Maybe she's got ants in her bra.

Soon to be House Majority Leader Eric Cantor told FOX that it was an "outrageous use of taxpayer money and an obvious attempt to offend Christians during the Christmas season."

Cantor is right. "Hide/Seek" is obviously just part of the War on Christmas. Thank Jesus the Republicans are going to be back in charge and we can start focusing on some real issues for a change.

Belmont University under fire for firing gay soccer coach

BY TERESA M. WALKER

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)— Belmont University has come under fire for forcing out its women's soccer coach, who her players say was let go for telling them she is expecting a child with her same-sex partner.

Students, including some of Lisa Howe's former players, held a three-hour protest Wednesday afternoon pushing for a change allowing for freedom of sexual orientation. Mike Curb, a music industry executive and major donor to the private Christian school, wants Belmont to rehire Howe and "act like Christians."

In a statement from her attorney, Howe told *The Associated Press* Wednesday she misses her team and thanks Curb for his "powerful statement." She had not talked with Belmont officials directly and said her head is spinning.

"I miss my team. Coaching is my passion and my life's work," Howe said. "I do know that policies and attitudes would have to change for me to come back to Belmont and feel safe and welcome and for me to feel like my family would be safe and welcome."

Neither Howe nor Belmont have said why the coach left Dec. 2. Belmont issued a statement Friday calling her departure a "mutual decision." Asked Wednesday if she was pushed out for telling her players about her personal life, Howe declined to comment through her attorney.

That hasn't stopped Howe's players from talking, or gay and lesbian students from protesting. About 50 students showed up Dec. 5 to protest, a sit-in was held Dec. 6 outside the office of the university president and Curb made his statement Dec. 7. Curb is a major donor whose name is on several buildings, including Belmont's basketball arena.

Sophomore Brandi Phillips said for Howe "to be gone over something so wrong

"Belmont has to decide whether they want to be a national recognized university...or they want to be a church."

-Mike Curb, a music industry executive and major donor to Belmont

it's really heartbreaking."

Her teammate, Laura Harris, also a sophomore, said the controversy has brought the soccer team closer together.

"There's nothing more we can do. We've got it all out there. All we can do now is hope for change," Harris said.

Belmont is seen as a progressive university that had been affiliated with Southern Baptists until 2007, wanting to bring greater Christian diversity to its board of trustees. The university has thrived on its connections with Nashville's music industry and even hosted one of the 2008 presidential debates.

Curb made what students called a "game-changer" of a statement Tuesday.

"Belmont has to decide whether they want to be a national recognized university — particularly with their school of music business — or they want to be a church," Curb said.

A trustee emeritus, Curb issued a new statement Wednesday saying he spoke out because another board member spoke out on Belmont's behalf and that he had heard nothing from university officials for six days.

"President (Bob) Fisher has asked me as a member of the Board, now that I've made my statement completely, to hold off making any further statements to give him an opportunity to resolve these issues so that this type of injustice can never happen again. I promise you if the matter is not resolved, I will continue speaking out about this the rest of my life," Curb said in his statement.

Fisher held a short news conference late Wednesday where he took no questions and said gay and lesbian students and faculty are welcome. He also said Belmont does not consider sexual orientation in its hiring or dismissals.

Howe had been coaching at Belmont the past six seasons, going 52-48-16 and winning the Atlantic Sun Conference regular-season title last year. Her players want her judged on her record and performance with her program.

Senior Erica Carter, days from graduation, wants state laws to provide protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation. She said coaches should be judged on their success and that Howe's resume, which includes two championship rings in three years and an NCAA tournament bid, speaks for itself.

"Do they treat their players well?" Carter said of coaches. "Do they demand the best from them? Are they excellent at their jobs should be the only thing they're judged on."

Even though Howe hadn't shared details of her private life with her team before, players said they knew because it's impossible for details not to slip out. They said they never felt uncomfortable around Howe.

"She was, throughout her years, very professional," Harris said. "Completely kept her personal life to herself. Never showed anything to us."

Miss. school: Bikini photo negates lesbian's suit

BY SHELIA BYRD

JACKSON, Miss. (AP)— A Mississippi school district hopes photographs of a teenage lesbian in a bikini will help lead to the dismissal of a lawsuit claiming her rights were violated when a picture of her in a tuxedo was left out of the yearbook's senior section.

In the latest documents filed in U.S. District Court, the Copiah County School District attempts to shoot down Ceara Sturgis' argument that her right to gender identity was violated.

Sturgis has said she likes to wear masculine clothes and that's why she donned a tuxedo instead of a drape to appear in the 2010 Wesson Attendance Center yearbook.

The district, which is asking the court to dismiss Sturgis' lawsuit, contends that the teenager had maintained the drape was offensive and a form of sex discrimination. Yet,

Sturgis chose to wear a bikini to the senior party, which is a school function, according to the documents. Pictures from the pool party also appear in the yearbook.

"Indeed, it is hard to conceive of an item of clothing more sexualizing and feminine than a bikini," the district said in the documents.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which filed the lawsuit on Sturgis' behalf, said Sturgis also had on a pair of long shorts in the swimsuit photo.

"They're just trying to bully her into dropping the suit," Bear Atwood, legal director for the ACLU of Mississippi, said Wednesday.

"The point is did the school engage in gender stereotyping when they made her wear a specific outfit designed only for girls" in the senior portrait, Atwood said, referring to the drape girls were required to wear.

Sturgis, who graduated from Wesson

Attendance Center in May, is now a student at a community college, Atwood said.

The ACLU filed the lawsuit against the school district in August, months after another Mississippi lesbian teenager, Constance McMillen, sued the Itawamba County School District over its policy against same-sex prom dates.

The ACLU claimed the central Mississippi school district discriminated against Sturgis on the basis of sex and gender stereotypes. Her photo and name were kept out of the senior section of the yearbook. However, Sturgis' photo in the tuxedo did appear on a personal page in the yearbook that was purchased by her mother.

The suit challenged the district's policy allowing male students, but not female students, to wear a tux for senior portraits. The suit alleges a violation of Title IX, the federal law prohibiting discrimination based on gender.

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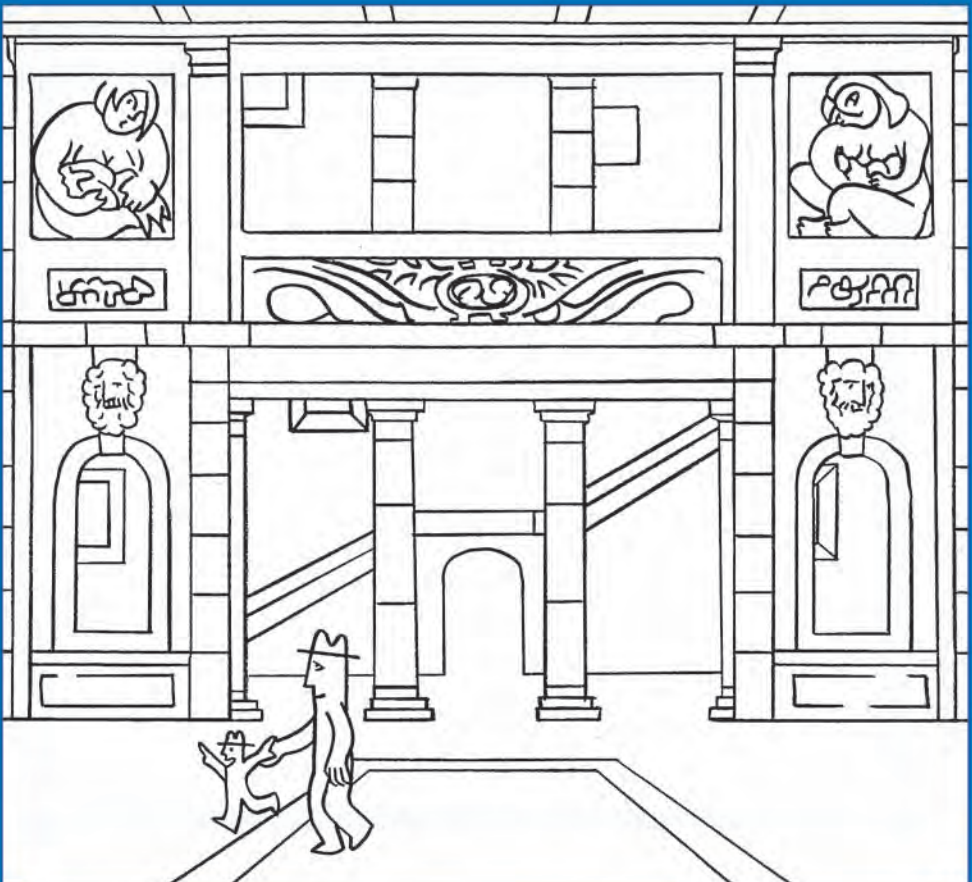
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Gender performance troupe Drag King Rebellion will perform during "Happy HoliGAYS" in Ann Arbor.

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Local bands sing and get silly for 'Happy HoliGAYS' in Ann Arbor

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

The most wonderful time of the year – if you believe that song – is about to be the gayest, too, as a few local bands unwrap the holiday cheer for the queers on Dec. 18 at the Blind Pig.

For "Happy HoliGAYS Extravaganza," Nervous But Excited, along with Drag King Rebellion, Jess Klein and DJ Jamie Register, will festify the Ann Arbor club with ugly holly-jolly sweaters and silly seasonal songs. 'Tis the reason: "We felt a large lack of options for the queer community during the holidays," says Kate Peterson, half of Ann Arbor folk duo Nervous But Excited. "Unfortunately, for a lot of queer folks, the holidays can represent awkward or uncomfortable family times where they don't necessarily feel comfortable or safe."

"This is a time of year for folks to relax and celebrate and be with the people they love, to be themselves and feel safe and welcome. Not to mention, give us all an opportunity to partake in some ridiculous debauchery that may involve multiple mistletoe."

The event promises "the gayest yuletide ever," and gender performance troupe Drag King Rebellion takes that allegiance seriously, rolling in what they call the three G's: glitter, Gaga and gayness.

Happy HoliGAYS Extravaganza

Doors 8:30 p.m. Dec. 18
 Blind Pig
 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor
 \$10/\$13
www.blindpigmusic.com

See Holiday queer, page 16

Best holiday song? Bands dish.

“We’ll have to go with ‘Last Christmas’ by Wham! We added this song to our repertoire toward the end of last season – it’s put this strange sway in our shoulders.” – *Nervous But Excited*

“I’m a big fan of ‘Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)’; it reminds me of winter car rides when I was a kid. It’s also my mom’s favorite and it reminds me of her.” – *Jess Klein*

“When is Lady Gaga coming out with her holiday album?” – *Drag King Rebellion*

► Holiday queer

Continued from p. 15

“We suspect no Grinch will be able to resist us at our campy, silly, charming best – especially not if we are decked out in our finest holiday sweaters,” they say. “And, if all that fails, troupe member James Queen has promised that he will personally see to it that everyone gets a kiss under the mistletoe, even if he has to kiss them himself.”

Ho-ho-ho, indeed – but from the sound of it, even without the smoochy-smoochy agreement, the merry music should be enough to make everyone jollier than a gay guy sitting on Santa’s lap.

“We can’t give it all away,” says Peterson, “but let’s just say we’ve put a holiday spin on some favorite rap classics – the second annual rendition of something we like to call ‘The 12 Gays of Christmas’ – and some spiced-up favorites.”

Klein, who’s part of local group The Mylo Fix, plans to play some of the band’s material, her own songs and then a few surprises. “Perhaps a Hanukkah song?” she says. “I’m Jewish, so it’s only appropriate!”

The Ypsilanti singer-songwriter, known for her rootsy folk-rock, prefers putting a spin on traditional tunes from artists that are never heard from around the holidays. So we probably shouldn’t count on a stripped version of Mariah’s “All I Want for Christmas is You.”

“I am so sick of the classics,” Klein says. “We hear them every year, over and over.”

You’ll have a better chance at getting those annual staples from Drag King Rebellion – just gayed up. “We are constantly on the lookout for ways to put a queer spin on things,” they say. “Holiday songs? We suspect they’re made for



Nervous But Excited will perform “silly” takes on holiday classics for “Happy HoliGAYS” show in Ann Arbor.

that purpose.”

Nervous But Excited won’t stray too far from them either, but mostly because the classics are the ones that really boost the spirit: “There is something great about performing songs that everyone knows,” Peterson says. “Holiday songs also offer an option to get a little silly – and you know we are always down for that.”

But Happy HoliGAYS isn’t just meant for donning gay apparel and partaking in Sugar Plum Fairy dances (but please don’t let us stop you).

Like a family huddled around a ham on Christmas Day, the event’s first priority is to create a community within a community. “In the wake of the events of the past year for our community – both its triumphs and its losses – our hope is that this show is effective in bringing together our community in celebration,” says Drag King Rebellion, “especially before people head off to what may be less LGBTQ-visible or friendly spaces for the holidays.”

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Natalie Portman stars as a tortured ballerina in Darren Aronofsky's "Black Swan." Photo: Niko Tavernise

'Black Swan': One of the year's best – and craziest – movies

Natalie Portman is Oscar-worthy in brilliant (and lesbian?) ballet noir

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Some of the best artists are crazy: Van Gogh snipped off his ear, and Virginia Woolf's deeply set depression led to her self-imposed drowning. But neither were dancers, so only virtuosos like Nina Sayers – Natalie Portman's young, repressed overachiever in one of the best movies of the year, "Black Swan" – know how cutthroat the ballet world can be. Director Darren Aronofsky's brilliant mindfuck of a movie, his follow-up to 2008's "The Wrestler," wants you to know it's a one-way trip to hell.

And, as Nina, Portman lives it like her own, executing precisely what her character can't: A role completely outside herself. Nina has a handle on the White Swan (why, of course she does: She, as her mother constantly – and eventually hauntingly – remarks, is a "sweet girl"), but its darker double swallows the fragility of her tangled being whole, as she succumbs to horrific pressure while rehearsing for the lead during a New York run of "Swan Lake." But it isn't until newcomer Lily (Mila Kunis), her rivaling alternate, steps in that Nina's jealousy causes her world to completely crash into a maddening meltdown.

Even the one person siding with Nina, her deranged mother (a terrifically terrifying Barbara Hershey), is a Black Swan block: How can Nina be mysterious and sexy like Lily, who's more convincing in the part, if she's still getting tucked in by "mommy" and hoarding plushies?

"Seduce us" is the flirty direction stringent instructor Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) dishes to Nina Sayers, who goes

deep to expose her darker side – into her imagination; into bed with Lily, who goes down on her; and, hoping to perfect her role, into the dressing room of washed-up prima ballerina Beth (Winona Ryder) to swipe some swag. And what the hell... are those really feathers ripping through Nina's skin?

As she tugs at the inferno of her soul, her self-destruction exacerbates – she vomits more, eats less; scratches, picks, washes and hallucinates. She finds ways to ignite the flames inside her: rebel against her mother, live out a lesbian fantasy, touch herself at the request of her artistic director ("homework," he calls it, in one of several humorously frisky scenes).

But her paranoid world implodes, especially in the final crescendoing act, and it's achingly sad to behold her transformation from timid to tigerish. Her cyclone of insanity can't help but suck us in, as Aronofsky wraps Nina in mood-over-plot melodramatics (even the music, Clint Mansell's maniacal twist on Tchaikovsky, wonderfully drives the tension) that rattles nerves and plays out like a horror movie – the psych-outs, the blood, the jumps.

Portman, who should start writing her Oscar thanks, is a hypnotic feast for the eyes and mind, mastering the dexterity of the moves but also her character's complicated psyche – a role that demands the actress be a kid and an adult, mild and wild, winsome and wicked. Her scenes with Hershey, steadily disturbing as the bizarre nature of their relationship heightens, are especially unshakable; this is one sick mother-daughter dynamic. It's good, however, to see Hershey in a role with



Natalie Portman and Barbara Hershey in "Black Swan." Photo: Niko Tavernise

so much meat, and the veteran tears at it with her teeth. Kunis' depth as an actress is particularly powerful as the bewitching, sexed-up understudy, playing Lily with more layers than a part like this might offer. Even Ryder, however briefly she cues craziness onscreen, is impressive.

But Portman owns this movie, as she throws on the hysteria like a snowstorm in a spellbinding, fantastically disturbing film that's at once hard to watch but impossible not to. If the near-flawless "Black Swan" exposes the price of perfection in all its terror, poor Aronofsky.

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OUTINGS

Friday, Dec. 17

Womyn's Film Night, 7 p.m. Film: Fun in Girls' Shorts- Eclectic anthology from Frameline, San Francisco 's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender film festival, rounds up six of its best lesbian-themed shorts from America, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. Affirmations, 290 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

West Michigan Gay Men's Chorus, 8 p.m. "A Hologay Party" Holiday Concert. Tickets: \$15 available online. East Congregational Church, 1005 Giddings Ave., Grand Rapids. 616-328-0202. www.wmgmc.org

Saturday, Dec. 18

West Michigan Gay Men's Chorus, 8 p.m. "A Hologay Party" Holiday Concert. Tickets: \$15 available online. East Congregational Church, 1005 Giddings Ave., Grand Rapids. 616-328-0202. www.wmgmc.org

Sunday, Dec. 19

All Creatures ULC Sunday Pets Welcome Services, 1 p.m. Sunday interfaith spiritual services held at an indoor dog park so all types of pets are welcome at all services. Services are held at 1:00 pm every Sunday. 27911 Five Mile Rd., Livonia. 313-563-0162. cbarber_art@yahoo.com www.allcreaturesulc.com

Tuesday, Dec. 21

First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor (Interweave), 6 p.m. Oasis TBLG Outreach & Inclusive Justice "Standing Up for Love-Coming Out as People of Faith -An Interfaith Holiday Service" Reception following the service. 4001 Ann Arbor-Saline Road, Ann Arbor. 734-665-6158.



EDITOR'S PICK

The Kalamazoo Institute of Arts is offering a look at some of the last century's greatest photography with "In Focus: National Geographic Greatest Portraits." This exhibit, created by National Geographic and the Smithsonian Institution, is certain to inspire, documenting nature and society around the globe.

The exhibit will include photographs as far back as the early 20th century, a wide variety of both well-known and rare photographs and arguably one of the most famous photographs in history, Steve McCurry's green-eyed "Afghan Girl."

The exhibit will remain at the KIA until Jan. 2. Admission to the KIA is free. Visit www.kiarts.org for Museum and Gallery Hours.

Thursday, Jan. 6

Euchre Tournament, 7 p.m. Fundraiser to benefit Out Loud Chorus, Washtenaw county's original GLBT chorus. Tickets: \$10 1950 South Industrial Highway, Ann Arbor. 734-973-6084. outloudchorus@gmail.com www.olonline.org

Friday, Jan. 7

Womyn's Film Night, 7 p.m. Film: The Brave One-Oscar winner Jodie Foster stars in this dramatic thriller as Erica Bain, a New York City radio host who decides to take the law into her own hands after losing her fiancé in a brutal Central Park attack. Affirmations, 290 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

Saturday, Jan. 8

St. Joseph Mercy Oakland offers free Mammograms, 9 a.m. For those who reside in Oakland County, have no health insurance or are underinsured, older or with a palpable mass. 44405 Woodward Avenue, Pontiac. 248-858-6662. PRESSH@trinity-health.org

Thursday, Jan. 13

Meet 'n Greet, 7 p.m. A meeting for LGBT and allied people ages 18-33 for dinner, drinks and conversation. 20 Somethings, 222 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. www.the20somethings.org

Friday, Jan. 14

Womyn's Film Night, 7 p.m. Film: Guardians of the Frontier-College students Alja, Simona and Zana go on a canoe trip down the Kolpa River in this edgy thriller billed as a female version of Deliverance. Affirmations, 290 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

Saturday, Jan. 15

Pancake Breakfast, 10 a.m. Breakfast followed by AA meeting with open speaker. Tickets: \$8. Together We Can, 2441 Pinecrest, Ferndale. twc@twcdetroit.com www.twcdetroit.com

Hepatitis A and B Vaccinations, 11 a.m. In partnership with ACCESS. Free, with HIV testing also available. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

MUSIC & MORE

CONCERTS

State of Michigan Singers "State of Michigan Singers-Christmas Concert" SOMSingS (State of Michigan Singers)-The SOMSingS are a group of active and retired state employees who have been singing together for 25 years. They will give a concert of Christmas music on Tuesday, Dec. 21 at 6 p.m., led by John Brough Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ, 125 S. Pennsylvania Ave, Lansing. 5 p.m. Dec. 21. 517-484-7434. www.PilgrimUCC.com

Grace Centers of Hope "A Jazzy Christmas" Men of Grace hosts A Jazzy Christmas concert and silent auction on Saturday, Dec. 18, with Alexander Zonjic & Friends and featuring Men of Grace. The event, which will be held at the Crofoot Ballroom, located at 1 S. Saginaw Street, Pontiac. Crofoot Ballroom, 1 S. Saginaw St, Pontiac. 5 p.m. Dec. 18. 248-334-2187. www.gracecentersofhope.org

See Music, page 22

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BY JOHN QUINN

Awakening the Morning After befuddled and bemused is not a new experience for me, but is usually associated with intemperate doses of cheap scotch the Night Before. This time I'm trying to piece together my evening at The Box Theatre in Mount Clemens, where I took in opening night of "The Eight: The Reindeer Monologues." I'm just not sure what I saw.

The title is helpful. If Clement C. Moore's traditional octad were given voices, they might have more to say about Santa Claus than the poet did. In fact, there may well be a darker story behind Rudolph the Red-Nosed that Gene Autry couldn't reveal. Perhaps a good holiday satire can burst the giant parade balloon that is the institutional Santa Claus. But none of that gives us a handle on "The Eight."

It can't be satire; it lacks the "class, taste and discretion" – not to mention the focus – of satire.

I suppose it can be described as a dark comedy, if your idea of comedy centers on Evil Santa, a jolly old elf accused of serial bestiality and pedophilia. Perhaps

REVIEW

'The Eight: The Reindeer Monologues'

The Box Theatre, 51 N. Walnut St., Mount Clemens. Friday-Saturday through Dec. 18. \$14. 586-954-2311



"The Eight: The Reindeer Monologues" continues its run through Dec. 18. Photo: The Box Theatre

spiking the holiday punch with conduct unbecoming the season and enough offensive stereotypes for everybody can add a kick to bland traditions. In the end, though, "The Eight: The Reindeer Monologues" comes off as naughty for naughty's sake. One wonders if playwright Jeff Goode still resents not getting that Lionel train set he always wanted.

In short, Vixen has accused Santa Claus of raping her in the workshop. She threatens to boycott the flight Dec. 24, and other deer line up for and against the strike. Through their eight speeches we piece together the story of a dysfunctional North Pole rife with abuse and neglect. While the

structure of eight solo performances works well on the tight stage at The Box, it is unfortunate that the cast is unable to enliven a fundamentally static genre. Monologue is monotonous.

Vixen the victim has one of the most memorable lines of the night when she describes Santa Sex as "vulgar, humiliating and ultimately futile." That, for me, pretty much sums up the show.

To read the complete review, log on to ... www.EncoreMichigan.com or PrideSource.com

A few minutes with Nicolas Dromard of 'Mary Poppins'

BY DONALD V. CALAMIA

On Dec. 16, one of the world's most famous nannies swoops into Detroit when Mary Poppins lands at the Detroit Opera House for a special holiday visit. In the iconic role of Bert is Nicolas Dromard, who returns to the role he initially understudied – and later played – on Broadway. If the handsome actor looks familiar, his early career found him at the nearby Stratford Festival and, later, in a national tour of a smash-hit musical that played to sold-out crowds in Detroit. Dromard spoke recently to *Between The Lines* about his career – and where he plans to do much of his Christmas shopping this year!

PREVIEW

'Mary Poppins'

Broadway in Detroit at the Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway St., Detroit. Tuesday-Sunday Dec. 16-Jan. 2; no performance Dec. 24. \$25 and up. 313-872-1000 www.broadwayindetroit.com.



Nicolas Dromard stars as Bert in "Mary Poppins" at the Detroit Opera House through Jan. 2, 2011. Photo: Courtesy of Broadway in Detroit

"Wicked," and there are some dangerous aspects to this show, but I never feel in danger. There are over 30 people in the wings always watching the show making sure that everybody is safe.

As an athlete, I have to take good care of my body as to not hurt myself doing this physically demanding role and to make sure I can bring 150 percent every show.

What's the most fun part of the role for you as an actor? The most challenging?

As an actor, playing different roles is so much fun. Being able to create different roles and see them being born on stage or on film is incredible.

It's also the most challenging when you are required to play an emotionally demanding role that drains you every night or makes you create scenarios that you haven't experienced in life.

Have you noticed any differences in how Broadway audiences respond to the show versus the "regular folks" across America? Does one part of the country find certain things funnier than others do?

It's hard to say, because audiences respond differently every night. Sometimes you'll get very responsive audiences that are very attentive, and the next night you'll get a very quiet audience.

Everybody loves the show and has a great time, but what we hear is different.

You were also in the first national tour of "Wicked." Were you in the production that came to Detroit a few years back? And if not, will this be your first visit to the Motor City?

Yes, I was part of the production that was in Detroit in 2006. I had a great time in Detroit, spent a lot of money in that gorgeous mall in Troy (laughs). I'm looking forward to doing all my Christmas shopping there!

You've had quite an interesting career so far. Do you know what your next gig will be after "Mary Poppins"? And if not, what would you like it to be?

I would love to play Tommy in "Jersey Boys," that's one goal of mine. And of course, originating a new role on Broadway wouldn't be so bad either.

To read the complete review, log on to ... www.EncoreMichigan.com or PrideSource.com

Mary Poppins is one of the most beloved fictional characters in America. Were you a fan of hers – or the movie – growing up?

I remember watching the film when I was growing up. I saw it once or twice as a kid, but saw the movies in French. My parents are from Paris, moved to Canada 35 years ago and so I didn't speak English until I was 7 years old. I loved the movie.

You left the San Francisco production of "Wicked" to play Bert in the national tour – but this is not your first encounter with the character or the musical, is it?

No, I was part of the original Broadway cast as a member of the ensemble and an understudy for Bert. I played the role on Broadway around 20 times before I came back to play the role on Broadway this summer.

How difficult – or dangerous – are the dance numbers in "Mary Poppins"?

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EDITOR'S PICK

"Dreamgirls" is once again hitting the Fox Theatre in Detroit, except this year Affirmations will be partnering with Olympia Entertainment to sell tickets for the Dec. 21 evening performance. First debuting in 1981, "Dreamgirls" became an immediate classic, the story of three backup singers, their rise to fame and the trials they faced

along the way. You won't want to miss this opportunity to see Deena Jones, Lorrell Robinson and Effie White's performances as the three "Dreamettes" this month.

A portion of the tickets sold for the Dec. 21 show will benefit Affirmations. Contact the Olympia Entertainment Group Sales Department at 313-471-3099 for tickets.

► Music

Continued from p. 20

Detroit Together Mens Chorus "Spirits of Christmas Past" Featuring all-time favorite holiday music. Tickets available from Chorus members, online, by phone, or at Five15 in Royal Oak. 6:30 p.m. Dec. 18. Lamphere High School Auditorium, 610 W. Thirteen Mile Rd., Madison Heights. 248-544-3872. www.dtmc.org

Sky Production "Wednesday Night Concert & Jam ft. Sky Covington" Harbor House, 440 Clinton Street, Detroit. 10 p.m. Dec. 15, 22, 29. 313-424-3458. skycovington.com

Ypsilanti Community Choir and the Washtenaw Community Concert Band "A Holiday Concert Tradition" Ariel Toews-Ricotta directs the choir in a variety of seasonal pieces, including "Gesu Bambino" by Pietro A. Don and Gustav Holst's setting of "In the Bleak Midwinter." Free. 7:30 p.m. Dec. 16. Pease Auditorium, EMU Pease Auditorium College Place & Cross St., Ypsilanti. 734-487-5386.

FILM & VIDEO

Michigan Theater "Sesame Street Presents: Follow That Bird" Part of the Family-Friendly Film Series. Tickets: \$9 adults, free for kids under 13. 1:30 p.m. Jan. 9. Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. www.michtheater.org

SHOWS

The Whiting "Moscow Festival Ballet: Swan Lake" Moscow Festival Ballet: Swan Lake. Tickets: \$17-\$39 8 p.m. Jan. 15. 1241 E. Kearsley, Flint. 810-237-7333. TheWhiting.com

Sing Out Detroit "Holiday Music Sing-A-Long" Music, food, sing-a-long, raffle. Tickets: \$5 to benefit Sing Out Detroit. 8 p.m. Dec. 18. AJ's Cafe, 240 W 9 Mile, Ferndale. 248-943-2411.

The Whitney "Kimberly Fairchild Live" Sexy, Sassy Detroit Diva entertains a diverse crowd with eclectic song selections in one of Detroit's most beloved historical landmarks. 7 p.m. Dec. 17, Jan. 7, 14, 21, & 28. The Ghost Bar, 4421 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 313-832-5700. kimberlyfairchild.com

THEATER

CIVIC/COMMUNITY THEATER

Annie \$18-\$22. Through Dec. 19. Kalamazoo Civic Theatre at Civic Auditorium, 329 South Park Street, Kalamazoo. 269-343-1313. www.kazoocivic.com

Irving Berlin's White Christmas-The Musical \$18-\$20. Through Dec. 19. Stagecrafters, Baldwin Theatre, 415 S. Lafayette, Royal Oak. 248-541-6430. www.stagecrafters.org

It's a Wonderful Life \$10. Dec. 17-19. Warren Civic Theatre, Warren Community Center, 5460 Arden Ave., Warren. 586-268-8400. www.warrencivic.org

The Merry Frickin' Xmas Show \$10. Dec. 15-19. Fancy Pants Theater at Studio 246, 246 N. Kalamazoo Mall, Kalamazoo. www.fancypantstheater.webs.com

The Norman Conquests \$10-\$16. Through Dec. 18. PTD Productions at Riverside Arts Center, 76 N. Huron Street, Ypsilanti. 734-483-7345. www.ptdproductions.com

PROFESSIONAL THEATER

9 to 5: The Musical \$32.50+. Dec. 15-19. Wharton Center, 1 Wharton Center Dr., East Lansing. 517-432-2000. www.whartoncenter.com

A Christmas Carol \$25-\$40. Through Dec. 23. Meadow Brook Theatre, 2200 N. Squirrel Road, Rochester. 248-377-3300. www.mbttheatre.com

A Sock Hop Christmas Dec. 17 is family night and includes a special visit with Santa (and children eat for free). \$39.95 adult & \$30 ages 12 and under, plus tax and tip; price includes a four-course meal with your choice of four entrees. Reservations required. Through Dec. 23. Williamsburg Showcase Dinner Theater, 4230 M-72 East, Williamsburg. 231-938-2181. www.conventiondinnertheater.com

A Strange Disappearance of Bees In Elena Hartwell's story, time is like a bee flitting from flower, here, over there, then back here again. What unfolds is a refreshing tale about holding loyalty tightly to the bosom and making as much sweetness as you can no matter the odds, the disappointments or shifts of fortune. \$17, \$20 at the door; \$70 New Year's Eve. Through Dec. 26. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson Street, Detroit. 313-868-1347. www.detroitreptheatre.com

Best Damn Holiday Show \$10-\$15. Through Dec. 23. Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. www.gocomedy.net

Best of Friends \$25-\$40. Through Dec. 18. The Purple Rose Theatre Company, 137 Park Street, Chelsea. 734-433-7673. www.purplerosetheatre.org

Breaking The Leg \$25. Dec. 18-19. City Theatre, 2301 Woodward Ave, Detroit. 1-800-745-3000. www.olympiaentertainment.com

Chat Line \$10-\$15. Redline Cinema Productions. Dec. 18. The Charles H. Wright Museum, 315 E. Warren Ave., Detroit. 313-433-8384.

Christmas with Mark Twain \$18-\$24. Dec. 16-19. Stormfield Theatre, 201 Morgan Ln., Lansing. 517-372-0945. www.stormfieldtheatre.org

Comedy Mondays \$5 for an all-night pass. Every Monday through Dec. 20. Dog Story Theater, 7 Jefferson Ave., Grand Rapids. 616-894-1252. www.dogstorytheater.com

Dance Xanax Dance \$20. Through Dec. 18. Planet Ant Theatre, 2357 Caniff Street, Hamtramck. 313-365-4948. www.planetant.com

Detroit Be Dammed: A Beaver's Tale \$25. Through Dec. 18. Planet Ant Theatre at Park Bar, 2040 Park Ave., Detroit. 313-365-4948. www.parkbardetroit.com

Dreamgirls \$20-\$72. Dec. 21-26. Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 1-800-745-3000. www.olympiaentertainment.com

F\$\$\$ the Holidays: A Seasonal Retail Story \$10. Through Dec. 20. Sweet Love Productions at The Ringwald Theatre, 22742 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. 248-545-5545. www.whowantscaketheatre.com

Fridays and Saturdays at Go Comedy! \$5-\$15; "Dark Matter" is free. Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. www.gocomedy.net

Greater Tuna \$18-\$24. Through Dec. 19. Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam Road, Williamston. 517-655-7469. www.williamstontheatre.org

Guys On Ice \$28-\$30; \$75 New Year's Eve. Through Jan. 15. Tipping Point Theatre, 361 E. Cady Street, Northville. 248-347-0003. www.tippingpointtheatre.com

If Only In My Dreams \$15-\$25. Dec. 9-18. The Blackbird Theatre, 325 Braun Ct., Ann Arbor. 734-332-3848. www.blackbirdtheatre.org

Mary Poppins \$25 and up. Dec. 16-Jan. 2. Broadway In Detroit at Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway Street, Detroit. 313-872-1000. www.broadwayindetroit.com

Oh, Holy Spite A Late Night show. \$5. Dec. 17-18. Crawlspace Theatre Productions, Farmers Alley Theatre, 221 Farmers Alley, Kalamazoo. 269-599-7390.

Onstage & Unplugged \$70; tickets for the night performance on Dec. 31 are \$85. Dec. 21-31. The Purple Rose Theatre Company, 137 Park Street, Chelsea. 734-433-7673. www.purplerosetheatre.org

Opera at The Acorn \$25. 8 p.m. Dec. 18. The Acorn Theater, 107 Generations Dr., Three Oaks. 269-756-3879.

Plaid Tidings \$27.50-\$32.50. Through Dec. 31. The Gem Theatre, 333 Madison Street, Detroit. 313-963-9800. www.gemtheatre.com

Sister's Christmas Catechism \$27.50-\$32.50. Through Dec. 31. The Century Theatre, 333 Madison Street, Detroit. 313-963-9800. www.gemtheatre.com

Sonia Flew A co-production with Performance Network Theatre. \$32-\$41. Through Jan. 2. Jewish Ensemble Theatre, Aaron DeRoy Theatre, 6600 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield. 248-788-2900. www.jetttheatre.org

Sundays at Go Comedy! \$5-\$7. Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. www.gocomedy.net

The Drowsy Chaperone \$30-\$46. Through Jan. 2. Performance Network Theatre, 120 E. Huron Street, Ann Arbor. 734-663-0681. www.performancenetwork.org

The Eight: The Reindeer Monologues \$14. Through Dec. 18. The Box Theatre, 51 N. Walnut Street, Mount Clemens. 586-954-2311.

The Marvelous Wonderettes \$29 for weekdays and Sunday matinees, \$33 for Friday and Saturday evenings. Through Dec. 26. Farmers Alley Theatre, 221 Farmers Alley, Kalamazoo. 269-343-2727. www.farmersalleytheatre.com

The Nutcracker's Nuts \$16. Through Dec. 18. Broadway Onstage Live Theatre, 21517 Kelly Road, Eastpointe. 586-771-6333. www.broadwayonstage.com

The SantaLand Diaries & Season's Greetings \$10-\$20. Dec. 18-22. Who Wants Cake Theatre, The Ringwald Theatre, 22742 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. 248-545-5545. www.whowantscaketheatre.com

Thursdays at Go Comedy! \$5-\$10 per show. Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. www.gocomedy.net

Wednesdays at Go Comedy! \$5-\$7. Go Comedy! Improv Theater, 261 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-327-0575. www.gocomedy.net

THEATER FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

King Midas and the Golden Arches \$15 adult, \$8 student. Through Dec. 19. Korda Artistic Productions at The Kordazone Theatre, 2520 Seminole Street, Windsor. 519-562-3394. www.kordazone.com

Puppet Scrooge \$10, \$8 for students and seniors, \$5 kids 14 & under. Through Dec. 19. Matrix Theatre Company, 2730 Bagley, Detroit. 313-967-0599. www.matrixtheatre.org

Stories for the Season of Light \$10 adult, \$7 ages 15 and under. 1 p.m. Dec. 18. Children's Theatre Network at Performance Network Theatre, 120 E. Huron Street, Ann Arbor. 734-663-0681. www.performancenetwork.org

The Homecoming \$12-\$18. Through Dec. 18. Flint Youth Theatre, 1220 E. Kearsley Street, Flint. 810-237-1530. www.flintyouththeatre.org

The Sleeping Beauty \$10 adult, \$5 children. Saturdays through Dec. 18, plus Sunday, Dec. 26. PuppetART, 25 E. Grand River Ave., Detroit. 313-961-7777. www.puppetart.org

AUDITIONS, CLASSES & MISC:

REDBUD PRODUCTIONS – is offering acting classes for adults and high school students beginning Jan. 15, 2011, 734-663-7167;

TRENTON VILLAGE THEATRE – is holding a blood drive, Dec. 29, 734-740-1097.

ART 'N' AROUND

Detroit Institute of Arts "In Your Dreams" 500 years of imaginary prints from Europe and America. Tickets: \$8 adults, \$6 seniors, \$4 youth. Sep. 8-Jan. 2. 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-833-7900. www.dia.org

Detroit Institute of Arts "An Intuitive Eye: Andre Kertesz Photographs, 1914-1969" This exhibition celebrates the photographic achievements of Andre Kertesz (1894-1985), whose groundbreaking work achieved a delicate balance between technical perfection and lyrical beauty. Nov. 24-April 10. 5200 Woodward Ave, Detroit. 313-833-7900. www.dia.org

Grand Rapids Art Museum "Diana, A Celebration" An exhibit with personal objects of Princess Diana, including dresses, home movies and more. Tickets: \$20 adults, \$18 seniors and students, \$15 youth. Nov. 9-Feb. 16. 101 Monroe Center, Grand Rapids. www.artmuseumgr.org

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts "In Focus: National Geographic Greatest Portraits" A traveling exhibition created by National Geographic and the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. Free. Oct. 30-Jan. 2. 314 S. Park, Kalamazoo. 269-349-7775. www.kiarts.org

Kresge Art Museum "The Power of Design" An exhibition of Chinese textiles, costumes and accessories. Free. Oct. 9-Dec. 17. Michigan State University, East Lansing. 517-884-0659. www.artmuseum.msu.edu

Kresge Art Museum "Designing Women of Postwar Britain" Their art and the modern interior. Free. Oct. 16-Dec. 17. Michigan State University, East Lansing. 517-884-0659. www.artmuseum.msu.edu

Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum "Artists Portray Artists" An exhibition of 35 portraits and self-portraits. Oct. 1-Jan. 29. 7400 Bay Road, Saginaw. 989-964-7096. www.marshallfredericks.org

Midweek Meditation Group "Midweek Meditation Group" A group of all ages, backgrounds and traditions. Meet every Wednesday for two sessions: guided meditation and a silent, seated meditation. All are welcome. \$3 donation suggested to cover expenses. Nov. 3-April 27. The Dharma Room, 195 West 9 Mile, Suite 106, Ferndale. 248-547-2987. www.meetup.com

MSU Museum "Dear Mr. Mandela, Dear Mrs. Parks" Children's Letters, Global Lessons. Showing in the Main Gallery. Dec. 20-Jan. 3. Michigan State University, East Lansing. museum.msu.edu

Sherry Washington Gallery "Free Radicals", paintings by Senghor Reid." Nov. 20-Jan. 22. 1274 Library St, Detroit. 313-961-4500. www.sherrywashingtongallery.com

The Henry Ford "George Washington Carver" An exhibit celebrating the work and life of the extraordinary American. Tickets: \$15 adults, \$14 seniors, \$11 youth. Nov. 1-Feb. 27. 20900 Oakwood, Dearborn. 313-982-6001. www.thehenryford.org

Toledo Museum of Art "Voices That Taught Me How to Sing" Two- and three-dimensional works by Ohio artist Aminah Robinson. Nov. 19-Feb. 27. 2445 Monroe Street, Toledo. 419-255-8000. www.toledomuseum.org

University of Michigan Museum of Art "Mai-Thu Perret: An Ideal for Living" The first large scale North American survey exhibition of the contemporary Swiss artist (born 1976 in Geneva). Synthesizing a range of media and genres-including painting and sculpture, but also literature, design, craft, film, and performance. Dec. 18-March 13. 525 South State Street, Ann Arbor. 734-763-UMMA. www.umma.umich.edu

University of Michigan Museum of Art "Simon Dybbroe Moller" Sculptures and other works by the Danish-born artist. Nov. 6-Jan. 30. 525 S. State, Ann Arbor. 734-763-UMMA. www.umma.umich.edu

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A festive selection of TV favorites and specials

Dec. 16
Gift of the Magi (Hallmark; 8 p.m.)

Yes, Virginia (CBS; 8 p.m.) CGI animation steals the spotlight in this re-telling of the famous story that appeared in the Sept. 21, 1897, edition of New York's now out-of-print newspaper The Sun. Neil Patrick Harris and Jennifer Love Hewitt provide voice talent.

Dec. 17
Food Network Challenge: Holiday Cake-Off (Food Network; 7 p.m.) Six of the nation's top pastry chefs compete for the title of best holiday cake maker. But only one will take home a stocking full of cheer and a pocket full of cash.

Christmas in Paradise (Lifetime; 8 p.m.)

Christmas in Washington (TNT; 8 p.m.) Mariah Carey, Miranda Cosgrove, Annie Lennox, Maxwell and Matthew Morrison help host Ellen DeGeneres ring in the holidays in the nation's capital.

Little Women (1949) (TCM; 11:30 p.m.)

Dec. 18
Rudolph & Frosty's Christmas in July (ABC Family; 12 p.m.)

Rudolph's Shiny New Year (ABC Family; 2 p.m.)

A Miser Brothers' Christmas (ABC Family; 4 p.m.)

Battle of the Bulbs (Hallmark; 8 p.m.) If you've seen "Deck the Halls," starring Matthew Broderick and Danny DeVito, then you're familiar with the premise of this movie, which has dueling neighbors (Daniel Stern and Matt Frewer) vying for the gaudiest house on the block.

Dec. 19
It Happened on 5th Avenue (TCM; 10 p.m.)

Dec. 20
Winnie the Pooh & Christmas Too (ABC Family; 6:30 p.m.) Pooh and Piglet retrieve a letter to Santa, but while trying to add some forgotten Christmas wishes, their plans go amiss. Honored by TV Guide as the "most lushly animated" holiday program of all time, this prime-time special was nominated for a 1992 Emmy Award in the Outstanding Children's Program category.

Phineas and Ferb Christmas Vacation! (ABC Family; 7 p.m.)

Santa Buddies (ABC Family; 8 p.m.)

Dec. 24
Pinocchio's Christmas (ABC Family; 12 p.m.)



Annie Lennox performs during Dec. 17's "Christmas in Washington" on TNT.

'Twas the Night Before Christmas (ABC Family; 7:30 p.m.)

The Bishop's Wife (TCM; 8 p.m.) Not to be mistaken with the 1996 remake, renamed "The Preacher's Wife" and starring Whitney Houston, this classic stars MGM's most famous closet bisexual, Cary Grant.

Dec. 25
A Christmas Story Marathon (TBS; all day) You'll shoot your eye out. Or someone else's if you have to watch this all day long.

Walt Disney World Christmas Day Parade (ABC; 10 a.m.) Guests will include a slew of stars (like Selena Gomez) from Disney Channel series, cast members of ABC's most popular shows, and, of course, hosts Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa. Uh huh, it's one big happy (self-promoting) family.



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Family drama at Xmas

Q. Last Christmas was a nightmare like you wouldn't believe. It could have been a movie script from a crazy movie called "Christmas in the House of Horrors." I don't want to ever be a part of something like that again, but I don't know how to keep my family from making Christmas something to dread – they have made a history of it, though never as bad as last year.

Last Christmas Eve my mother insisted that we all go to Midnight Mass. As usual, my father got so drunk that he couldn't go. My mother and he got into a big fight about his drinking – he's been drinking a lot for at least 30 years. I guess mother thought that this year would bring a miracle and he'd be sober.

After my father stormed out of the house, my brother told my mother that he was no longer Catholic and wouldn't be going to church. He apparently decided that Christmas Eve was a good time to tell her that he was an atheist and would celebrate Christmas as a cultural holiday but not a religious one. This set my mother into a meltdown. Before I knew it, she was grabbing at her heart and having a difficult time getting air. My sister called the paramedics. Apparently she wasn't having a heart attack, just a panic attack. Still, we missed Midnight Mass. Missing church on Christmas Eve is, for my mother, a sure trip to Hell for us all.

Christmas Day, Dad started drinking at breakfast, causing Mom to be at Dad's throat from early on. Dad, unbeknownst to us, had invited over some of his drinking buddies – from his Christmas Eve trip to the bar – for dinner. When they showed up, they were all drunk like Dad. As you can imagine, my mother was livid and said nothing, but her face was beet red and she talked through her clenched teeth, like she does when she's ready to kill.

One of the drunken friends started to get fresh with me. I pushed him away and told him to cut it out. My dad laughed and said that he was "barking up the wrong tree" because I was nothing but a dyke. At that, my mother screamed at him to shut up and stop letting skeletons out of our closet. Of course, he didn't shut up but he went on to say that my sister was "available." I came unglued, told my dad off, and kicked him out of our house.

My brother left the house, my sister flew upstairs to her room, and I was left eating Christmas dinner with my mother and the rest of my father's drunken friends.

I could have left and gone back to my apartment, but I didn't want to leave my sister in a house filled with men like this, and a father who was willing to give her over to them. (My sister was 16 at the time and still in high school.) This year Mom is expecting us all for Christmas, like nothing ever happened – that's our family's M.O.

I had an idea this year to get my brother and sister together for Christmas along with a few of our friends, and not go to my parents. Both my siblings were excited about the idea and wanted to do that. My mother got upset when I told her what we were going to do. She thinks we're "ungrateful kids." We're all feeling guilty about it, but we just don't want another dreadful Christmas to live through.

I told them that I would write to you and see what you think. We'll be waiting for your answer.

Where's the Christmas Cheer?

A. I applaud you for coming up with another plan for Christmas, other than the horrible, dysfunctional situation that you have had to deal with for all these years. I hope you and your sibs can fight off the guilt your mother is sending your way.

The life that your parents created together is about their choices; you were victims of those choices. But you are adults now and don't have to be a part of it anymore. It is a sign of health in you and your siblings that you have made the decision to stay away from the craziness of Christmas at your parents' home and have chosen to create your own Christmas together with friends.

You've suffered enough. Enjoy!

Jody's on Facebook! Though not all families are as dysfunctional as the writer's family, most of us have difficult family members to deal with during the holidays. For strategies on how to deal, go to DearJodyValley/Facebook.

Jody Valley spent 12 years as a clinical social worker. She worked with the LGBT community both as a counselor and a workshop leader in the areas of coming out, self-esteem and relationship issues. The "Dear Jody" column appears weekly. Reach Jody at DearJodyValley@hotmail.com. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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Keep perspective, Sagittarius!

BY JACK FERTIG

Mercury backing into Pluto, Mars and the North Node, all in Capricorn, may unleash a torrent of backlogged work, ancient regrets, old failures and feeling old. Face up to the hard work that remains before you. Learn from past mistakes, shrug off useless distractions and focus on priorities.

ARIES (March 20 – April 19): Your engine to success is heading toward a train wreck. Some occasional backtracking is necessary for course correction. Take a good look at those who've gotten where you want to go, and learn from their examples.

TAURUS (April 20 – May 20): It feels like everything you know is wrong. Maybe! Joining arguments even when you're unsure can help you discard obsolete notions and get more insight. (Phrases like "Just hypothetically..." or "Playing devil's advocate..." offer wiggle room.)

GEMINI (May 21- June 20): You need a good challenge to explore new depths, whether in the bedroom, in meditation or in a library is up to you. Exploring kink is fine, but be very careful. Save erotic asphyxiation for another time.

CANCER (June 21- July 22): Every relationship has problems, and you seem to be hitting a perfect storm. This will pass. Dig deep for answers before you even think about running. Single or coupled, think hard about the necessary work that goes into a good partnership.

LEO (July 23 – August 22): Slow and easy does it. When you hit the wall, don't bang your head against it. Life is more like a labyrinth than a racetrack. You can't always go forward, but take frequent strategic turns, sometimes seeming to go backward. Breathe. Think. Adapt.

VIRGO (August 23 – September 22): You can make fun look like hard work, but if you find hard work to be fun, be as productive and creative as you like. Remember: Geeks and nerds are ruling the world while partiers fall by the wayside.

LIBRA (September 23 – October 22): Uncover some family secrets if you can stand the shock. Don't mind upsetting some folks on the way.

It will take some digging, but interview your oldest relatives – preferably the outcasts – if you want the dirt.

SCORPIO (October 23 – November 21): You can sound a lot harsher than you intend. When in doubt, write before you speak. Even when you want to blast the stupidity out of some obstructive bubblehead, organize your thoughts on paper first.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 – December 20): Keep perspective! Problems with money and errors in accounts are surfacing. Yes, they indicate deeper problems and will require more work. Focus on the clean up phase for now. You can solve this one step at a time.

CAPRICORN (December 21 – January 19): Neglected duties and responsibilities will bite you on the ass if you don't turn around and face up to them. Worrying takes more energy than dealing with them – and the stress makes you look older.

AQUARIUS (January 20 – February 18): Even your worst nightmares could prove a blessing in disguise. Dig deep into your fears and worries; see what's behind them. To conquer those fears, do charity work for those who have suffered what you dread the most.

PISCES (February 19 – March 19): The future is looking especially dark, but a rude shock will help you see flaws in that vision. It could be either worse or better than you imagine. It will be very different. Find a safe space to scream, just to let it out.

Jack Fertig, a professional astrologer since 1977, is available for personal and business consultations in person in San Francisco, or online everywhere. He can be reached at 415-864-8302, through his website at www.starjack.com, and by e-mail at QScopes@qsyndicate.com.



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Joyce

Solution to puzzle from page 26

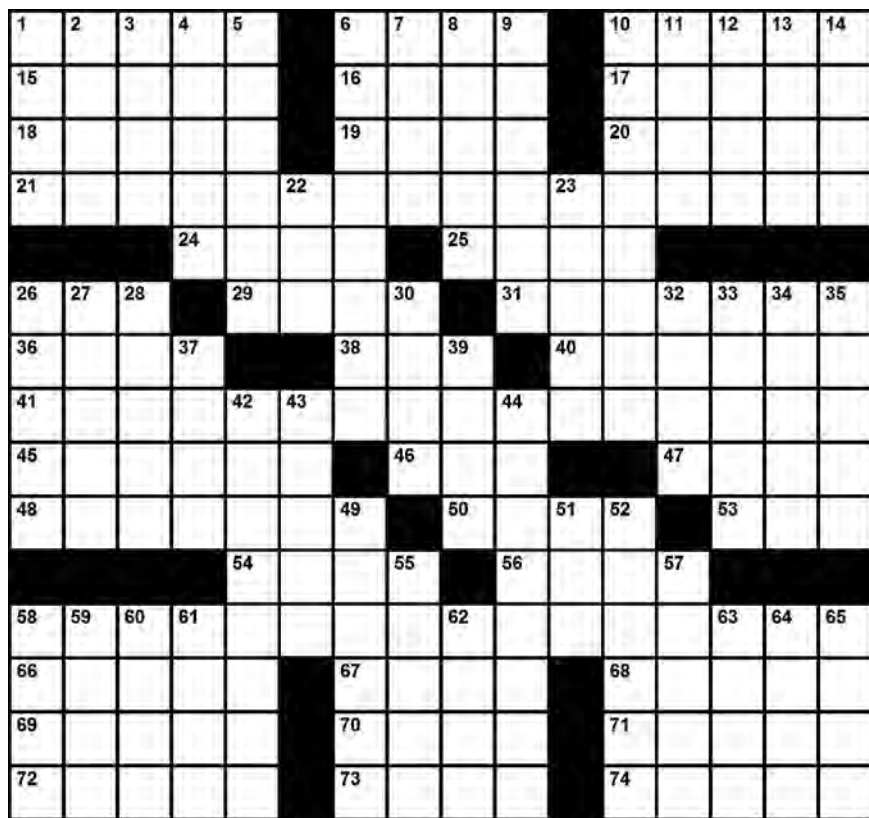
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Solution on 25

Q U I Z Comeback for Coming Out

Across

- 1 Supporters in the bedroom
- 6 Bump off
- 10 Like someone blown away
- 15 Scroll at Beth Chayim Chadashim
- 16 Giggling Muppet
- 17 Capone rival
- 18 Capital of Ghana
- 19 Groups of games, to Mauresmo
- 20 Jodie Foster's " ___ Room"
- 21 Common insult
- 24 Carol, for example
- 25 Boy who shoots off arrows
- 26 Sault ___ Marie
- 29 Granny
- 31 Diana, to the Greeks
- 36 Running into overtime
- 38 Dottermans of "Antonia's Line"
- 40 Rivera portrayer, in "Frida"
- 41 Start of a family response to the insult
- 45 Upright shaft

- 46 It'll float your boat
- 47 Teen outbreak
- 48 Grabs greedily
- 50 Stole at the Oscars, e.g.
- 53 Boating pronoun
- 54 Stadium level
- 56 You might get dates from it
- 58 End of the response
- 66 Last letter from Socrates
- 67 Pita sandwich
- 68 Gertrude's partner
- 69 Type of pole
- 70 Bus. school course
- 71 Cole Porter's " ___ I Kissed My Baby Goodbye"
- 72 Broadway whisper
- 73 ___ ex machina
- 74 Hot to trot

- 6 Edith Head, e.g.
- 7 He did Jackie's clothes
- 8 Cho's " ___ One That I Want"
- 9 "Our" to Pasolini
- 10 Fake
- 11 He took on a pair of bears
- 12 Composer Thomas
- 13 Play a mean sax
- 14 Env. fattener
- 22 Latina writer Castillo
- 23 Singer with an accent?
- 26 You don't want to get pink ones
- 27 Bring to the auto repair
- 28 ___ Gay
- 30 "Uh-oh!" to Shelley
- 32 Lanchester of ___Bride of Frankenstein_
- 33 David's "Baywatch" role
- 34 Nuts
- 35 Pop singer Leo
- 37 Chug-a-lug
- 39 One way to cook fruit
- 42 Some heteros change it at the altar
- 43 Ancient Celt

- 44 Moby Dick stickers
- 49 Classified, informally
- 51 "That was good, honey!"
- 52 Tickle pink
- 55 Auto pioneer Henry
- 57 Sasha Obama's big sister
- 58 " ___ light?"
- 59 Tori who sang "I am not from your tribe"
- 60 Legendary Himalayan
- 61 Dated
- 62 Drop ___ (moon)
- 63 Rhames of "Holiday Heart"
- 64 Homo leader?
- 65 Not e'en once

Down

- 1 Deer, or without a dear
- 2 Nuts
- 3 Curve and others
- 4 Fruit desserts
- 5 Stone of "If These Walls Could Talk 2"

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Kahlua, Cream and Fiasco

BY ED SIKOV

My cold lasted another week, so forget about literary reticence. Let the gross descriptions fly: Snot spewed out of my nose like raw scrambled eggs, only darker, more translucent, and graced by tiny bloblets of blood. My lungs hacked up a hocker so gray it could have come out of an old coal miner. When I wasn't wiping smears of sputum off my hands, sheets and nearby skin mags, I contemplated my recent poor behavior. Dan was right: I'd become "an old-fashioned asshole." Dan was nothing but affectionate with me, even after I spat goose-shit-green mucous onto his pillow while he slept. He deserved better from me. So did my friends.

When I stopped being viral, I invited Craig and Kyle to dinner. Surprisingly, Craig didn't hang up on me when I called. "I'm sorry..." I began. He cut me off: "Listen, dollface - I'll forgive you anything as long as you keep your tongue off my boyfriend." "Right-O!" I sang out, anxiety turning me strangely into Terry-Thomas in some British war comedy. "How about dinner here on Saturday? It's Chicken Cacciatore and an after-dinner drink that doesn't suck." All was well.

Dinner was a disaster. Dan was late, so I had to wield the vacuum cleaner and a can of Pledge and set the table while trying to make what turned out to be an absurdly complicated "hunter's style" chicken with only half the ingredients the recipe called for. (I hadn't bothered with a shopping list. "Calling Dr. Freud! STAT!") The result was a greasy, taste-free horror - no wild mushrooms, no fresh sage or thyme, clumpy years-old garlic salt instead of garlic... "Hunter's style?" What were they hunting - something out of "Oliver Twist"?

Having tasted the cacciatore, I downed some Tormore Single Malt and became morose.



But when Dan waltzed in mere minutes before Craig and Kyle were supposed to show up, my irrepressible life force returned. I became hostile. Craig and Kyle thus entered during the second act of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf," with me playing both George and Martha. I behaved terribly; Dan was rightly embarrassed. I might have summoned enough dignity not to spend the whole evening staring at the gap between Kyle's bottom shirt button and his belt, a space out of which a perfect tuft of soft hair emerged. Craig noticed, much to his glee and my continuing disgrace.

But dessert was fabulous! The White Russian is one of my favorite cream-based cocktails because of its subtlety, simplicity and relative lack of sweetness. It's got a little Kahlua for a café au lait effect, vodka for some kick and thick, chilled heavy cream for the mouth-to-belly bliss that only cold dairy fat can provide. Still, two rounds of White Russians wasn't enough to make up for hurling lettuce fragments and bacon chunks in Craig's face after discovering that puppy Kyle had been gobbled up by Jabba the Hut.

Am I still bitter? You bet your elephantine ass I am.

The White Russian

- 1 part Absolut
- 1/2 part coffee liqueur
- 1 part chilled heavy cream

Put some ice in a shaker and add all the ingredients; put the cap on and swirl it around a bit rather than shake it. (After all, you're not trying to make liquor butter.) Pour through strainer into a good-looking glass and serve.

Ed Sikov is the author of "Dark Victory: The Life of Bette Davis" and other books about films and filmmakers.

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Rebuilding home

Nate Berkus of "The Nate Berkus Show" surprises Wendy Walsh, the mother of 13-year old Seth Walsh who hung himself this past September after years of bullying for being gay, and her younger son Shawn with a newly decorated space in Seth's honor at the NYC's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center for LGBT teens. This emotional moment, taped on Dec. 13, will air along with a daytime exclusive interview with Wendy who sits down with Nate in-studio for a very personal episode - "Rebuilding Home After Tragedy" - of the nationally syndicated, "The Nate Berkus Show," airing Dec. 29 (check local listings; or visit www.thenateshow.com.)

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Gus Van Sant to 'Boss' around Kelsey Grammer

Gus Van Sant's career can be divided into high-profile successes like "Milk" and "Good Will Hunting" on one side and arthouse hits like "Elephant" and "Paranoid Park" on the other. And his new project will tip the scale to the seriously mainstream side: a TV series starring Kelsey Grammer for Starz and Lionsgate Television. Van Sant will direct the pilot for "Boss," penned by "Apocalypto" co-writer Farhad Safinia and already picked up for eight episodes. It will feature Grammer as a Chicago mayor (great casting, too – who's got a more authoritarian politician's voice?) with a secret degenerative mental illness. The "King Lear"-like story of power and politics will be Grammer's first time on a cable series, not counting those promo spots for the fizzling Tea Party cable channel RightNetwork he did earlier this year while simultaneously starring on Broadway in "La Cage Aux Folles." We can just pretend that never happened.

'Tarnation' director's long-awaited new (untitled) movie

Indie film audiences who still remember being blown away by Jonathan Caouette's 2003 debut "Tarnation" – that audacious, zero-budget, intimately moving portrait of his struggle growing up with a mentally ill mother – have been

waiting patiently for the day when he'd get behind the camera again. He has, of course, by taking on cool-director duties for the "All Tomorrow's Parties" concert film and debuting a new short at the New York Film Festival (a weird little piece that juxtaposed footage of his grandfather and Chloe Sevigny). But his next feature, one he describes as a collection of interconnected short films, is underway and still in production. The movie will return to the subject of his mother but will also feature fictional elements, possibly placing both her and Caouette in imaginary circumstances. Eager fans of this talented man, keep the faith. These things take time.

Daniel Day-Lewis drinks Lincoln's milkshake

Maybe you heard somewhere – OK, yes, you heard it here – that Liam Neeson was the man stepping into Abraham Lincoln's tall hat and odd, mustache-less beard for Steven Spielberg's agonizingly slow-moving "Lincoln." But things change. People move on. They have creative differences. Their schedules get too busy. They want to star in "Taken 2" instead. Whatever. And that's when you have to go find a new actor. Taking Neeson's place in the film, already written by gay Pulitzer/Tony Award-winning playwright Tony Kushner, will be equally tall actor Daniel Day-Lewis. And now finally American moviegoers will learn who Abe Lincoln was. If you think that was a joke, just go to any mall and ask a random stranger to explain the man's job and what he did in history. It'll make you sad for the rest of the day. They say this movie is coming Christmas of 2012. We'll see.

The Reichen movie wants you. Meaning Chace Crawford.

As a veteran Air Force pilot, author, Lance Bass dater, winner of "The Amazing Race" and current most-recognized face of Logo's hit trainwreck "The A List: New York," Reichen Lehmkuhl finally realized that his calling in life is not to star in off-off-Broadway productions of "My Big Gay Wedding" (nor is it recording pop songs, as "A List" viewers can attest). It's fighting against Don't Ask, Don't Tell. And what better way to light another flame that holds the culture's feet to the fire than with a movie version of his 2006 memoir "Here's What We'll Say: Growing Up, Coming out and The U.S. Air Force." There's already a screenplay and a producer, now the project needs a director and star. Lehmkuhl has expressed a desire to see Taylor Lautner or Chace Crawford take on the role, and either of those young men would give it the A-list face it needs. But whatever happens, make sure that if a theme song needs singing, give that job to anybody but Reichen. Please.



Reichen Lehmkuhl. Photo: Logo

Romeo San Vicente is concerned about how that treacherous Austin keeps meddling in Reichen and Rodiney's relationship. He can be reached care of this publication or at DeepInsideHollywood@qsyndicate.com.

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