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February 16, 2017

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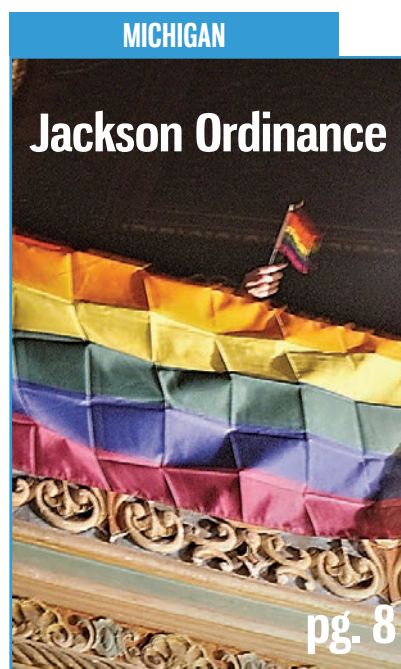


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DOJ Nixes Request to Halt Order Against Trans Student Protections

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, THE WASHINGTON BLADE

UPDATE: The Fifth Circuit has granted the request from the Justice Department to cancel oral arguments in the case initially scheduled for Feb. 17.

On the day after Jeff Sessions was sworn in as U.S. attorney general, the U.S. Justice Department has withdrawn its request to halt partially an order against Obama administration guidance protecting transgender students from school discrimination and assuring them to the restroom consistent with their gender identity.

The request for a partial stay was filed on Nov. 23 before the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in response to an order from U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor, a George W. Bush-appointed judge who instituted a nationwide order prohibiting the federal government from enforcing the guidance. The judge ruled the Obama administration overextended its authority by applying the provision against sex discrimination in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 to transgender students.

The brief from the Obama administration sought a partial stay so the ruling would only apply to the 12 states, led by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who filed the lawsuit against the guidance as litigation proceeded before the Fifth Circuit. The plaintiff states are Alabama, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Utah and Georgia as well as the Arizona Department of Education and Maine Gov. Paul LePage and Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant on behalf of their states.

(The first name listed on that Nov. 23 brief was Benjamin Mizer, former principal deputy assistant attorney general for the civil division and of the hundreds of openly gay officials in the Obama administration.)

But the new three-page Trump administration brief, jointly filed Friday by Paxton and Justice Department officials withdraws the request for a partial stay pending appeal. Further, the brief calls for cancellation of oral argument scheduled Feb. 17 on that request, asserting "parties are currently considering how best to proceed in this appeal."

Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, placed the blame of the brief seeking to undermine the transgender student protections squarely with Sessions.

"After being on the job for less than 48 hours, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has signaled his intent to undermine the equal

“Transgender students are entitled to the full protection of the United States Constitution and our federal nondiscrimination laws.”

– Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign

dignity of transgender students,” Griffin said. “Transgender students are entitled to the full protection of the United States Constitution and our federal nondiscrimination laws. It is heartbreaking and wrong that the agency tasked with enforcing civil rights laws would instead work to subvert them for political interests. President Trump must immediately reverse course and direct the DOJ to uphold guidance protecting transgender students.”

A Trump administration brief seeks to withdraw a request to stay an order against transgender student guidance.

Nowhere is Sessions’s name on the brief. The top names listed are Paxton on behalf of Texas and Acting Assistant Attorney General Chad Readler.

The Trump administration brief is consistent with a campaign promise from President Trump, who said in an interview with The Washington Post he’d rescind the Obama-era guidance prohibiting discrimination against transgender students, but “protect everybody.” The legal brief could be the Trump administration’s first step in complying with that campaign promise.

Even though the O’Connor order bars the U.S. government from asserting Title IX applies to transgender students, transgender advocates have insisted students are still able to sue on their own under that law if they feel they’ve experienced discrimination as a result of their gender identity.

The Justice Department makes this move one week after the White House issued a statement asserting Trump is “respectful and supportive of LGBTQ rights” and would keep in place a different Obama-era executive order barring anti-LGBT workplace discrimination against federal contractors.

Chris Johnson is Chief Political & White House Reporter for the Washington Blade. Johnson attends the daily White House press briefings and is a member of the White House Correspondents’ Association. This article is made possible by The National Gay Media Association.

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Equality Michigan's New Strategy is Bold Risk in This Political Season

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

In a politically unfriendly environment for LGBTQ citizens, Equality Michigan says the one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective in helping achieve full equality. The organization's current strategy is to find a way to work with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, to push for an amendment to the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act, adding sexual orientation and gender identity to its list of protected classes.

When asked if she genuinely thinks full equality can be achieved, Stephanie White, EQMI executive director said, "There is a huge population, both LGBTQ people and our straight allies, that want us to win equality because of what it says about our state overall and what it says about us as people who live here. What kind of Michigan are we? Are we the kind of citizens who are angry, regressive, hateful and shut off from the modern world? Or do we want Michigan to be a place that's part of the future? Cities and states that are growing, that are future-facing, that attract and retain top talent – both gay and straight – are places that respect and protect the rights of LGBTQ people. Equality Michigan is the key vehicle through which we will do that. Our community will only get there if we decide we are serious about wanting to get there and decide to work together."

For an organization historically steeped in progressive alliances, this is a challenge as everyone tries to move forward. Working with Republicans in the state has been nearly impossible over the years. Animus toward LGBTQ citizens by them has often garnered negative national attention, and some supporters of EQMI are doubtful this "across the aisle" strategy can work. Nevertheless, the organization has moved ahead building a new board, rearranging program priorities and says it is laser-focused on building a new way forward. White frequently talks about the organization's "friends who are Republican." She notes that many members of the GOP, particularly younger members, are supportive of LGBTQ equality, and it's time to build those relationships.

After a historic LGBTQ rights hearing that ended without a vote on Michigan's anti-discrimination proposals in 2014, the organization – now fully staffed with high-profile influencers on their board of directors – is focused on establishing a coalition with activists from the LGBTQ community, with allies, with faith leaders, with business people, with people from academia and people from public policy. This includes Republicans.

Attempts to amend ELCRA have been



Stephanie White, EQMI executive director said, "There is a huge population, both LGBTQ people and our straight allies, that want us to win equality." BTL file photo: Andrew Potter.

“If you can't analyze what the actual political situation is, what the reality is, you're never going to win. As long as you're denying the reality, you're never going to create the steps to get what we want.”

– EQMI Executive Director Stephanie White

introduced regularly in the state legislature since 1981. In the 2014 cycle, Republicans wanted to drop gender identity from the legislation, while LGBTQ community leaders and Democrats wanted the bill to include the language. It was sponsored by East Lansing State Rep. Sam Singh. The non-inclusive legislation was sponsored by Republican Rep. Frank Foster who lost his seat in a primary challenge in August 2014. This loss is often cited as having scared off Republicans. The GOP-controlled House did not bring either bill up for a vote in committee and both proposals

died at the end of that year.

The loss hit the entire community hard. During the campaign, a public debate took place about whether a non-inclusive bill should be pursued instead. It was a position that Jim Murray, AT&T Michigan President and co-chair of the coalition pursuing the legislation pushed for. Murray lost that 2014 battle as the coalition stood firm in its commitment to only advance a fully inclusive bill. Fast forward to 2017 and Murray is the newly appointed board president of EQMI, and the organization says it will only work to advance a fully inclusive bill in the future.

Ingrained Problems

In April 2015, for the fifth time in less than a decade, EQMI was without an executive director. Since the 2007 retirement of executive director Jeffrey Montgomery – who led the organization's predecessor agency, Triangle Foundation – a significant turnover in employees, executive directors and some key board members took place.

As far back as 1999, tensions prompted a small faction upset with the Triangle Foundation, to form Michigan Equality, a non-partisan Lansing-based group.

After Michigan's gay marriage ban was passed by voters in 2004, having two statewide political organizations was no longer tolerable. The Arcus Foundation stepped in and essentially forced both agencies to merge in 2010 to form EQMI – made possible by a \$500,000 grant in 2009 that funded capacity, and was given in part, to try and facilitate tangible progress.

By the time White joined EQMI in October 2015 she said, "We were pretty isolated. Many of our allies, donors and political leaders stopped working with the organization because they found it not useful or dissatisfying."

Despite some of the ingrained problems White acknowledges that "not everything sucked" prior to joining the organization.

"During some of the low periods when Equality Michigan has been less strong, less present, less active, other people stepped up. The vacuum, the emptiness was filled by other organizations," she said boosting local community centers, including Kalamazoo Gay and Lesbian Resource Center, Affirmations Community Center and the ACLU of Michigan.

At 47 years-old, with several years doing this type of work under her belt, White said

See next page

she has a “good view of the ups and downs and the cycle that communities and organizations go through.”

No organization is immune to controversy, which White and her current staff are trying to grow through together.

“People will always find fault, will always criticize. The most productive, most successful advocacy organizations always have fault to be found. We will always earn it because we are a human institution made up by humans, but we will put our heads down and work methodically, strategically, professionally, step by step and we will win our rights.”

Not only has White been faced with rebuilding a strong LGBTQ political group that is critically needed, but she is tasked with helping the organization overcome years of inconsistency, poor decision making and now resistance to change.

“We’re smart enough to understand we don’t have the pieces in place yet to amend ELECRA. Can we pass it right now? No. There’s no political will today to get it done by the people who hold the power to get it done. It’s not going to change for a couple of years. That’s just a reality. That’s not us slowing anything down. If you can’t analyze what the actual political situation is, what the reality is, you’re never going to win. As long as you’re denying the reality, you’re never going to create the steps to get what we want,” she said.

The plan is to build a case that makes it harder to say no to. “We need to be smart about what we need to win,” said White.

A recent financial analysis of EQMI’s 990s (see “Funding Steady at Equality Michigan,” pg. 12), shows promise as the organization appears to be financially on target. They recently hired Leila Vallarino, finance and development assistant, to help maintain the organization’s financial health moving forward.

Community Tensions

Some members of the LGBTQ community questioned why the organization decided to honor Greg McNeilly with the Change Maker Award at their annual fundraising event in December 2016. McNeilly has been a long-time trusted political advisor to the DeVos family, known for their anti-gay financial support and has himself advocated on behalf of anti-gay positions that he has not acknowledged or apologized for.

In an effort to be clear about EQMI’s strategy, White represented, in a BTL op-ed, “If ever there was a way to bridge the gap between the LGBTQ community and the conservatives in Michigan, Greg is that bridge and we celebrate his courage to engage in this work with us.”

Murray came under fire in 2014 – as co-chair of the Michigan Competitive Workforce Coalition at the time – for his willingness to pass an amendment to ELECRA that would have excluded protections for gender identity and or expression.

Murray went on record in September 2014 with what many considered to be offensive comments about moving forward with the LGB and not the T. He used the example of a hungry person ordering a pizza, noting they would be satisfied with “half a pizza.”

During a discussion with BTL about his past and how he plans to move forward Murray said, “I don’t need to be redeemed. I don’t need my reputation to be rebuilt. I think part of the issue that happened a few years ago was the radical part of the community who didn’t really understand what was happening at the capitol and didn’t want to sit down and understand what was happening at the capitol. I’ve spent the last few years finally saying ‘Okay, why don’t you guys get to know me better?’ and I think that you’ll find that I am out for a fully inclusive bill, I am going to get a fully inclusive bill someday and we’ll have that. That’s what I want.”

Murray further explained his reaction at the time.

“I was being attacked very personally and I couldn’t understand why. We were not trying to exclude anybody, but we also couldn’t get an audience with even the Democratic leadership who were friends of mine. We had some options, but they wouldn’t even sit down and say ‘How could we get there without using phrases that lost us votes?’ or ‘What kind of words can we use?’ for a fully inclusive bill. We also had a limited amount of time to do it, like a month, and if the community at that time wouldn’t support anything other than using their exact language, it was doomed to fail.”

Standing Firm

White, in her short tenure, seems to be standing firm in the storm, determined to make sense of the organization’s new approach to reshaping the political landscape and its perceived deal with the devil.

“It will be a political battle based on providing political and policy expertise in relation with the decision makers who can change the laws. That’s what we’re doing,” she said, adding that EQMI, classified as a nonprofit 501(c)(3), relaunched the Equality Michigan Action Network, a 501(c)(4), which allows them to engage in lobbying efforts and more hard-hitting advocacy work.

“Day in and day out, Equality Michigan is in Lansing talking to lawmakers who have the power to affect our lives, making sure they understand the needs and realities of LGBTQ lives,” said White. “Some don’t know that we face discrimination. Some of them don’t know how that discrimination negatively impacts our lives.”

That’s why building a stronger, more diverse board is a priority for White, as is working with a staff that is representative of the community the organization serves.

“If we’re going to be credible and do our job well, we have to have diverse perspectives on this work,” said White. “You can’t say you’re

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Supporters and opponents filled the historic Michigan Theater Feb. 7 to tell city council members in Jackson their views on a non-discrimination law. Inset: Supporters of a non-discrimination ordinance in Jackson draped a rainbow flag over the balcony of the Michigan Theater Feb. 7 during testimony about the proposed law. BTL Photo Todd Heywood

Jackson Passes Non-discrimination Ordinance, 17 Years After First Ordinance was Introduced

BY TODD HEYWOOD

JACKSON – After nearly five hours of public testimony Feb. 7, the Jackson City Council voted 5-2 in favor of adopting a new non-discrimination ordinance, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Council members Derek Dobies, Freddie Dancy, Andrew Frounfelker, Arlene Robinson and Daniel Greer voted yes. Mayor Bill Jors and Craig Pappin voted no. Greer voted no two weeks ago on first reading of the ordinance. He did not explain his change of heart. Frounfelker has been on council for years and has previously opposed the ordinance. He has said he changed his mind.

“What I have realized is that hundreds have also picked up a paintbrush and also helped paint Jackson’s narrative on the canvas of our city,” explained Derek Dobies, the sixth ward city council member and vice mayor who introduced the ordinance.

“Together we can paint a picture to the rest

of Michigan to the LGBT community and our allies that depicts Jackson as a tolerant inclusive community. When it speaks to the LGBT community with the message that we will welcome you, protect you and rebuild our city with you in it.”

The vote makes Jackson the 42nd municipality to adopt comprehensive non-discrimination laws. But it comes after 17 years after an ordinance was first introduced, and 37 years after councilmembers first broached the topic – in 1980.

Under a heavy police presence – with law enforcement from three agencies including the Jackson City Police, Jackson County Sheriff’s Department and the Michigan State Police – council members sat for hours of testimony from 156 individuals. In addition, 676 people packed the historic Michigan Theater in Downtown Jackson for the council meeting.

City officials said prior to the vote that in addition to the 156 public statements - which included 88 in favor, 66 opposed and 2 who did not express an opinion - 205 people opposed to

the ordinance and 274 in favor of it submitted their views in writing at the meeting.

Opponents of the law argued it would unfairly burden Christian business owners by forcing them to violate their sincerely held religious beliefs. They also took issue with the \$500 a day fine for those found to have violated the ordinance.

“We decided long ago that businesses open to the public open to everyone on the same terms,” said Dobies. “And state and federal law we prohibited discrimination based on race color religion age sex and a number of other protected classes. No one including LGBT individuals should be turned away from a business or is this denied service in a restaurant or store simply because who they love.”

The approval came after a full court press from a citizen group called Jackson Together as well as the business community. In addition, progressive religious leaders were also engaged in the process and had a large presence at the event Feb. 7.

Stephanie White, executive director of

Equality Michigan, was present at the meeting Feb 7. Following the vote, she congratulated the city on its move.

EQMI has been pursuing local ordinances like the one passed in Jackson as a deliberate political tactic to force the state legislature to amend the state’s Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Lawmakers have resisted such a move since 1981.

When asked when the tipping point would be with the adoption of ordinances showing lawmakers this was the right thing would be, White said, “You know I think you have to ask the state legislature. I mean how many examples do they need? They’ve got all the examples they need. That this is good for communities, good for people, good for business, good for the state, and doesn’t cause any harm. It’s time for them to act.”

Learn more at www.facebook.com/JacksonTogether

Raucus LGBT Caucus at MDP

Record Attendance, Members Energized

BY BTL STAFF

DETROIT – The LGBT & Allies Caucus gathering at the bi-annual Michigan Democratic Party Convention is usually a fairly uneventful, lightly attended affair. But at the Feb. 11 MDP state convention about 200 people crammed into a standing-room only space, and for the first time in anyone’s memory the proposed leadership slate was challenged in sometimes contentious voting.

Mark LaChey, the chair of the caucus, opened the meeting with a report on the successes and growth of the caucus over the past two years. He said that when he took over as chair four years ago there were only a few dozen people involved. Now over 2,500 people are connected via the email list, the caucus Facebook page or the website, and there are often 20,000-30,000 views when LGBT-related political events or issues hit the news.

“For the first time ever, we also have three openly gay members of the Michigan House of Representatives,” said LaChey, referring to state Reps. Jon Hoadley (D-Kalamazoo), Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) and Tim Sneller (D-Genesee County).

The next order of business was to elect the chair and three vice chairs. LaChey was nominated, as was Robert Vankirk who gave an impassioned speech about the need for more visibility within the party and implored the gathering to not settle to become simply “the Democratic

Party’s checkbook.” Vankirk was one of many younger people at the convention who had supported Democratic Party candidate Bernie Sanders for President in 2016, and who expressed frustration with current party leadership – including leadership of the LGBT Caucus.

LaChey ultimately won reelection for another two-year term, and in his acceptance speech reached out to Vankirk, saying he hoped to work with him to implement some of the ideas for outreach and communication that Vankirk outlined in his bid for the chairmanship.

Jan Stevenson was then reelected by acclimation for another term as first Vice Chair. The other two Vice Chair positions went to Roland Leggett and Susan Grettenberger, both of whom were challenged by new members of the caucus. Leggett won election over Sam Jones Darling and Drew Marsh. Grettenberger won election over those same two candidates, plus Rachel Strickland and Noah Getz.

The most contentious moments came when LaChey tried to speak during the voting process. Twice he was called upon to respect “point of order” and move on to voting. Clearly frustrated, he acquiesced to the groups’ requests and moved along the agenda.

After the meeting, the four newly-elected leaders each sought out those that had run against them and asked for their help in building a stronger LGBT Caucus.

“I was thrilled so many people – and

so many young people – came to the meeting and voiced their concerns,” said Stevenson. “It gives me great hope that we will be able to grow our political influence both within the Party and beyond to local, state and national politics. We’re all upset by the election. Now we have to get to work and we need all hands on deck.”

The 2017 MDP conference attracted almost 5,000 people – by far the largest crowd to ever attend, and people were energized and focused on working to elect Democrats to offices at local and national levels. In addition to the LGBT & Allies Caucus, there are 21 other constituency caucuses of the MDP such as the Black Caucus, the Veterans’ Caucus and the Labor Caucus. Record crowds were at all the caucus meetings and leadership was challenged in many of the other caucuses, often by younger people seeking a larger voice in the party.

LaChey said he will follow up on requests for local town hall meetings, regular conference calls and other strategies to energize LGBT people and our allies to run for office at all levels of government, work on campaigns and donate money to LGBT-friendly candidates.

For more information about the LGBT & Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party find them on Facebook or email mwlachey@comcast.net.



Mark LaChey, standing, was reelected chair of the LGBT & Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party and Jan Stevenson (seated from left) was also reelected as caucus' First Vice Chair. The other two Vice Chair positions went to Roland Leggett and Susan Grettenberger. The election was Feb. 11 at the MDP state convention that attracted a record crowd of almost 5,000 people at COBO Hall in Detroit. BTL Photo Susan Horowitz



Nicholas Pidsosny. Photo courtesy Drew Saunders.

Campus Chat: Local LGBT University Student Reacts to Trump Presidency

BY DREW SAUNDERS

YPSILANTI – The conversations had within the LGBT community following one of the most polarizing elections in U.S. history revolve around uncertainty about how the next four years will play out. And while many community activists and political leaders have come forward to share their thoughts, BTL has been talking with local university students in and around metro Detroit to better understand what young people are feeling and what a Trump presidency means to them. This is second in a series.

Nicholas Pidsosny, an economics major at Eastern Michigan University said, “I’m just terrified about it. I know that there’s going to be fear, not only in the LGBT community, but for people of color and female-bodied people in loss of rights and loss of access to other resources.”

Pidsosny, who identifies as agender, discussed his feelings about Vice President Mike Pence as well.

“Mike Pence as vice president just terrifies me,” Pidsosny said. “I think just because of the fact that Trump is all over the place with it [LGBT Rights] I assume that he [Trump] doesn’t know much about it. And would not know how to pass legislation against LGBT people, which [means] Pence would probably lead it.”

When asked if he feels targeted specifically, Pidsosny said, “It would make sense just because we still have so few rights. We just got marriage equality and we’re still seeing a rise in bills against transgender people,” he said. “I feel like he would work more against that to gain the support of more Republicans, who are against us in general.”

Pidsosny expressed his concern about marriage equality under the new administration.

“I think that he will try to get it overturned, or at least Pence will try to convince him to get it overturned,” he said.

And despite progress made for LGBT people, Pidsosny believes transgender people will become more vulnerable to discrimination.

“We’ve already got bills...that area already limiting our rights and ability to go to the bathroom in public, of our gender identity. I think that will only increase in this administration,” he said.

Regardless of what happens under President Trump, Pidsosny said, “I plan to be somewhat more outspoken. I haven’t come out to my family yet and I plan on doing that so they know, and hopefully are able to help support me, and the cause more. I plan on being far more of an activist because we kind of need it at this point.”



A Drag In Time Parting Glances

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

In the sixty-some years I've been out, I've seen more female impersonators than you can shake a rhinestone tiara at. Some great. Some talented. Some gone bonkers. Some now gone bingo.

I was celebrating my 21st birthday when I saw my first drag show at the Flame Show Bar, located on Detroit's Brush Street in the city's famed Paradise Valley. (I went with my new partner, Ernie – three years older, a foot shorter. An intellectual top to me, a skinny-guy bottom.)

The Flame Show Bar was a black-and-tan venue. A club to which whites felt comfortable – even daring - frequenting. The performance that night of nights at the beginning of my own reasonably long gay run – with many mental costume and professional changes in the wings for me – was the internationally famous Jewel Box Review.

Headliners of the 12-member, Miami-based touring company formed in 1939, were nationally famous female impersonator T. C. Jones, who died, age 54, in 1971, and black drag king impersonator Storme DeLarverie.

(Just a few years later, Storme, was one of the 1969 Stonewall Riots instigators. She had a yelling tussle, a loud, fight-back encounter, a courageous, rallying stand against the New York police officers called to handle the confrontation bar scene. Storme died in 2014 at 94.)

In the early '60s, public cross-dressing was confined to Halloween. Anyone caught in drag at other times might be arrested. Two early impersonators who played Detroit's drag venue – The Diplomat Club, Billy & Maurice – wore elaborate hairdos and pancake makeup. Men's black shirts. Men's black slacks.

In the 1960s, the Diplomat had its own star-struck retinue of drag queens: Bobbie Johns, a former baseball shortstop; Lola Lola, ex-army sergeant, whose routine included humping the stage curtains.

There was Chunga, who danced with a 6-foot snake; Vicki Marlene, who lip-synched songs that allowed her to cry, and Fat Jack, "a quarter ton of fat and fun", who wore a yellow polka-dotted bikini while butt-wobbling to music of the same title.

There was also a stunningly beautiful Gail Sherman, a talented vocalist, a gorgeous tease. She jilted a straight guy I knew at Wayne State University, a sociology major who killed himself over Gail in the club's parking lot. Gail, who later transitioned into a woman, must now be in her ambulatory 80s.

Perhaps the most famous impersonator to play the Diplomat was Ray (later Rae) Bourbon. He got a big start in 1927, appearing in Mae West's police-raided Broadway play, "The Drag." He followed that success with bookings on what was then derisively called the "Pansy Circuit."

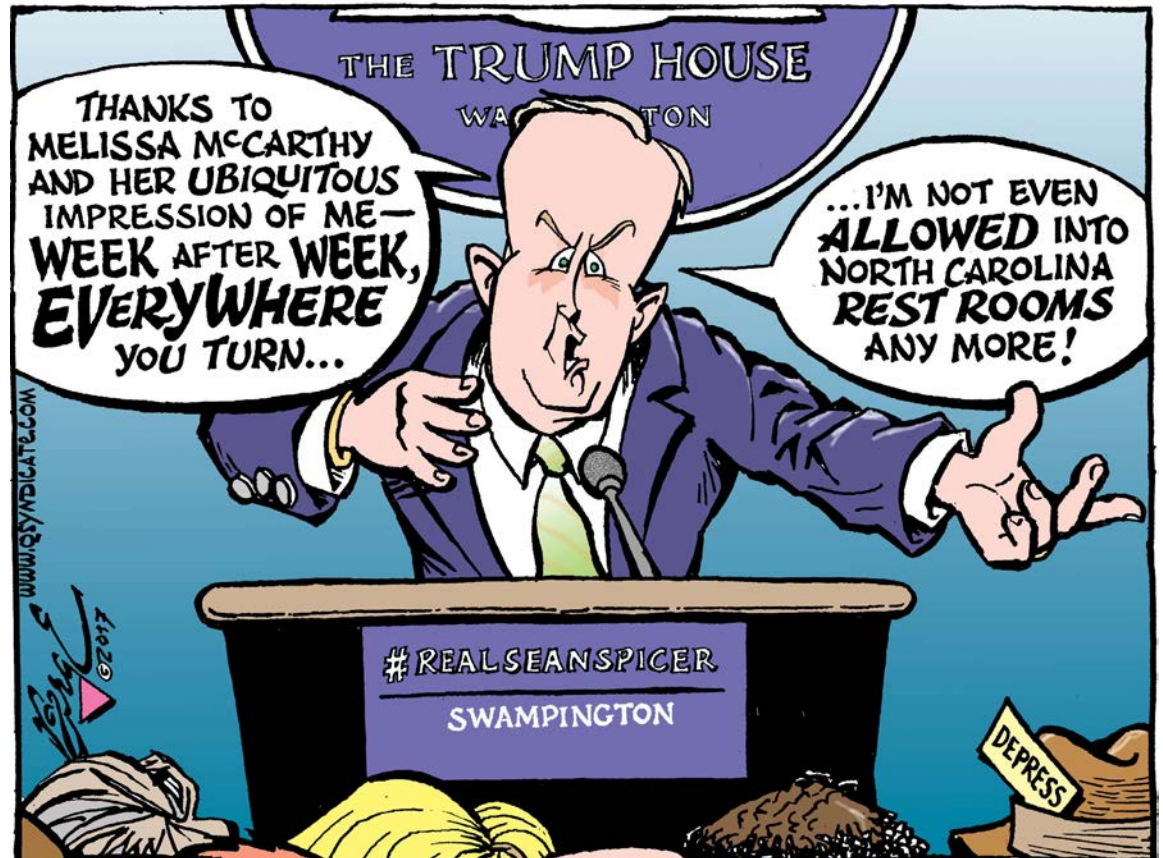
The 1930s through 1940s were the heyday of "pansy" drag queens. Forbidden fruit for viewer sampling. A safe taste of gay life imitating – and often damn well besting – the genuine female article. (Chicago's Baton Club has for years carried on the drag queen glamour tradition to tourist packed weekend houses.)

When Bourbon (now Rae, though he lied about actually having a sex change) played the Diplomat, his glory days were over. He was paid per performance, to avoid IRS complications.

Rae was older, heavier, booze bloated, mascara fluttered, still doing his infamous "Around the World in 80 Ways" LP record routine. Sadly pathetic. Soon to be incarcerated without fans.

He loved dogs and boarded five with a vet, but neglected to pay for the animals upkeep. Patient too long, the vet found separate shelters for the barking menagerie.

A pissed-off Bourbon hired two thugs to rough up the vet. They accidentally killed him. Rae was ultimately arrested. Died without makeup in prison. (Rye Bourbon on the rocks.)



Viewpoint

Trump's Supreme Court Pick Would Leave All of Us Vulnerable



BY MICHAEL KEEGAN

The Courts Are Meant to Protect All Americans, but Neil Gorsuch Thinks Otherwise

One of the primary purposes of the U.S. Constitution is to establish justice. It's right there in the opening words: "We the people, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice..." It's our Supreme Court that has the responsibility of safeguarding our constitutional rights. That means justices on the court have to be committed to upholding constitutional and legal protections for all Americans, not just the rich and powerful.

Judge Neil Gorsuch, Donald Trump's first pick to join the Supreme Court, simply doesn't pass that test.

Trump picked Gorsuch from a list prepared by powerful organizations that have spent millions of dollars promoting a legal and political ideology that would weaken the government's ability to protect workers, consumers, and communities.

Gorsuch made that list because he has a backwards-looking view of the Constitution – one that would make it harder for the government to enforce protections for our air, water, and food.

Those backward-looking theories would also threaten our constitutional right to privacy and reverse progress the country has made in recognizing full equality for women and all Americans, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Here's the fundamental point: Our courts should be places where ordinary people have a fair shot at justice. They should be places where powerful people, institutions, and corporations can be held accountable for harming individuals and communities. That requires judges who are committed to upholding the Constitution and rule of law for everybody.

Unfortunately, Gorsuch has actually argued that

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► Supreme Court Pick

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the courts shouldn't be so involved in constitutional questions, suggesting that people should rely on the political process instead. He accused progressives of being "addicted to the courtroom" for relying on the judicial system to protect and vindicate fundamental rights.

But the Constitution and the courts are meant to protect all Americans, even those who don't have a lot of power and aren't politically popular. When the political process violates the rights of ordinary Americans, it's the courts' job to step in.

Supreme Court justices serve for life, so we'll all be living with our next Supreme Court justice long after Donald Trump leaves office.

Trump campaigned as a champion of the average person. He could have nominated someone for the Supreme Court whose record demonstrates an understanding that the Constitution and Bill of Rights are there to protect all of us. Instead, he nominated someone whose approach to the law will leave all of us vulnerable.

In the large popular protests of recent weeks, millions of Americans have made it clear that they'll stand up to Trump when they believe he's taken actions that undermine our constitutional values. We need fair and

Gorsuch made that list because he has a backwards-looking view of the Constitution – one that would make it harder for the government to enforce protections for our air, water, and food. Those backward-looking theories would also threaten our constitutional right to privacy and reverse progress the country has made in recognizing full equality for women and all Americans, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

independent courts that will do the same.

We especially need a Supreme Court that will stand up for the Constitution, not serve as a rubber stamp for any president's political agenda. Americans who want a court that will protect freedom and justice should get ready to resist this nomination.

Michael Keegan is the president of People For the American Way. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Creep of the Week

Peter LaBarbera

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI



LaBarbera claims that anyone identifying as "genderqueer" should totally expect to be discriminated against and should basically shut up and like it. "For goodness' sake," he writes, "if you identify yourself as genderqueer, you should expect a little pushback, right?"

Hair is a very charged and political thing. It has been since, well, forever.

For example, a colleague of mine once called the mullet "the hair cut of the oppressed," pointing out that it was a style most commonly worn by Native Americans, lesbians, and lower socioeconomic whites. It helped me to understand why mullets are so easily ridiculed and the joke suddenly became much less funny.

Then there's the fact that men traditionally go to barber shops, and women go to salons. Because men have short hair and women have long hair, right? Well, no, but hair and gender identity are closely linked and American men and women are expected to stay within the "normal" range. Men can have as much body hair as they please, their hairy legs and armpits a sign of virility and strength, while back hair is often frowned upon. And pretty much all of the hair on a woman's body is considered gross and should be removed via razor or hot wax at regular intervals so that her body may remain as hairless and smooth as toddler.

But if you think about it logically, our "rules" about hair don't make any sense. They are silly and even harmful, especially since we don't live in a world where each and every person has a gender identity that neatly fits into cultural expectations of "male" or "female."

Which brings me to Kendall Oliver of California who identifies as genderqueer and keeps their hair closely cropped as is their right. It's their hair after all. Oliver sued when they were denied a haircut at a barbershop because the owner told Oliver, "We don't cut any type of women's hair."

Keep in mind, it's not like Oliver was asking for a perm or something. What Oliver wanted was totally within the barber's experience and abilities.

Except the owner doesn't cut women's hair because it says in the Bible that a woman should have long hair. Thankfully California law says discrimination is

wrong, even if you claim God is telling you to do it, and so the barbershop lost the case.

Which led professional homophobe Peter LaBarbera of Americans For Truth about Homosexuality to declare this "yet another example of what I'm calling LGBTyranny – ridiculous even by 'gay' standards."

LaBarbera claims that anyone identifying as "genderqueer" should totally expect to be discriminated against and should basically shut up and like it.

"For goodness' sake," he writes, "if you identify yourself as genderqueer, you should expect a little pushback, right?"

LaBarbera then goes on a rant against "genderqueers" as if it is the craziest and most dangerous thing he's ever heard of then adds, "These LGBTQueer lawsuits make a mockery of real civil rights, and America a laughingstock around the world."

Ah, so Oliver's civil rights aren't "real" because Oliver doesn't look the way LaBarbera would prefer a woman to look.

Referring to a picture of Oliver that LaBarbera posted on his website he writes, "By the way, look at the photo: there's a beautiful woman under all that faux masculinity."

Nope. Nope. Nope. Get out with that sexist bullshit. Oliver's gender is not for LaBarbera or anyone besides Oliver to decide, nor is their beauty up for LaBarbera to define. LaBarbera's opinion doesn't matter in the slightest, thank you very much, because it's none of his fucking business.

By the way, look at LaBarbera's photo. Perhaps under that combover is a man with some compassion for fellow humans, but I've yet to see any. Hey, the combover, in all it's maligned glory, is his right, after all, but if you identify as a anti-gay bigot, you should expect a little pushback, right?

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► Equality Michigan

Continued from p. 7

a social justice organization if you don't act and organize that way."

Program Focus

As the founding member of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, EQMI is committed through their Victims Services Program, to providing support and advocacy services for LGBTQ, SGL (Same Gender Loving), and HIV-affected people experiencing various forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, hate violence, harassment and discrimination.

The Crime Victims Fund, established by the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984, funds the program, which received a 26 percent increase in 2016, according to White.

"All too often, the idea exists that our lives don't matter enough to investigate," she said, pointing to EQMI's deep relationships with police departments across the state with which they are creating strategies to mitigate crimes against LGBTQ people – specifically transgender women of color in the Detroit area.

The organization is better fulfilling their statewide mission by expanding their reach across the state to cities such as Grand Rapids and Traverse City, maintaining regular office hours where the community has direct access

to EQMI staff members including Serena Johnson, director of victims services; Jeynce Poindexter, transgender victims advocate; and Genny Maze, lead victim advocate.

White expressed her excitement about integrating both the advocacy and political arms of the organization to create "systemic change instead of putting a Band-Aid on the problem."

"For example, when there's a victim of a crime or harassment, when we detect a pattern of more than one person being harassed by a particular police department or being unfairly targeted by that police department for who they are, now our department of victims services brings this issue to Nathan Triplett, our director of public policy and political action. They sit down together to make up a plan based on policies and programs and political realities that might be contributing to this and what the political solution could be," she said.

White explains why building relationships are so important to the organization's success.

"It's really hard to vilify and demonize people when you know them as humans, so to the conservative lawmakers who continue to vilify and demonize us, they can only continue to do that as they stay isolated away from the community. As we introduce ourselves and make our presence known, the more they realize we are real people with the same hopes and dreams as anybody else," said White, calling on members of the LGBTQ

“ We can't be a serious organization that secures the legal equality that we all deserve and fight amongst ourselves. I think it's clear, if anybody steps back and looks at what happened in our state and our movement when we spend a lot of time picking apart each other, it's self-defeating. ”

– Stephanie White, EQMI Executive Director

community and its allies to function as third-party validators.

Whether it's standing up for a transgender coworker in the workplace, for example, or supporting a community sign-on letter telling local officials 'I want to live in a state that respects LGBTQ people' – these small gestures make a difference.

In moving forward White said, "We as a community have to decide collectively, do we want to be taken seriously by political leaders? If we do, we have to take ourselves seriously and we have to act seriously," she said. "That means letting go of minor grudges from ages gone by. We can't do both. We can't be a serious organization that secures the legal equality that we all deserve and fight amongst ourselves. I think it's clear, if anybody steps back and looks at what happened in our state and our movement when we spend a lot of time

picking apart each other, it's self-defeating. There are always going to be people who are self-defeating."

Board of Directors

Currently serving on the Equality Michigan board is Jim Murray, chair (see BTL Q&A pg. 13); Michael Rowady, vice chair; Sean Rhaesa, secretary; Mira Krishnan, treasurer; Joy Geng, member; Seth Davis, member; Kerene Moore, member; Buzz Thomas member; David Worthams, member; and Ronald Moore, member.

The Equality Michigan Action Network consists of State Senator Rebekah Warren, chair; Gary Reed, vice chair; Sean Rhaesa, secretary; Mira Krishnan, treasurer; Tim Atkinson, member-at-large; Clif Levin, member; and Chuck Otis, member.

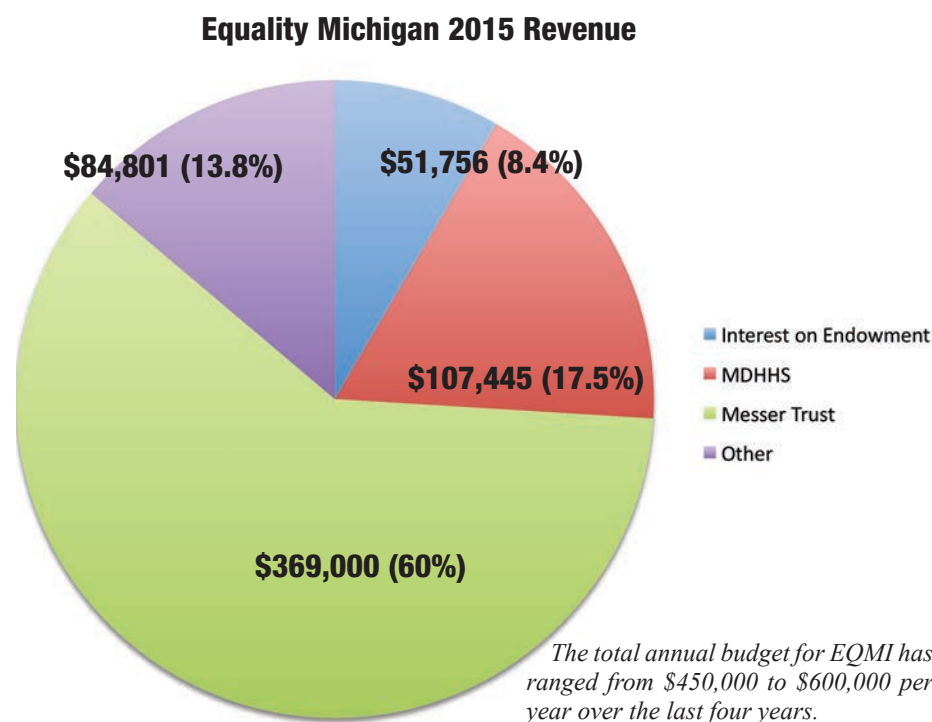
Funding Steady at Equality Michigan

BY JAN STEVENSON

Despite lots of changes in personnel and management, especially at the executive director position, an analysis of the financial reports for Equality Michigan from 2013 through 2015 show that the organization has enjoyed fairly steady funding, and going forward it should continue to garner enough funding to continue operations at least at its current level of activity for two to three years.

The total annual budget for EQMI has ranged from \$450,000 to \$600,000 per year over the last four years. The largest source of funding is now the Henry Messer trust. When Messer died in 2014 he left \$3 million to EQMI in two parts. The first was a \$1 million gift to be disbursed over four years for general operating expenses. The second part of the bequest was \$2 million in an endowment fund housed at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. Interest earned on the endowment is available to the organization for general operating expenses.

In 2015, EQMI received \$369,000 from



the first part of the bequest, plus \$51,756 in interest on the endowment fund. In 2016, management opted to take less from the first part and only drew down about \$225,000. The 2017 budget calls for an even smaller

distribution from the first part of the bequest, in an effort to make the funds last longer than the original four years. Fundraising events, grants and membership dues increased in 2016 and are expected to support operations

to a larger extent going forward. Management plans to eventually replace the monies from the first part of Messer's bequest in the annual operating budget before those funds are fully dispersed.

The second largest piece of EQMI's funding comes from a Michigan Department of Community Health grant that supports the victim services project. In 2015 that grant totaled \$107,445 and increased by 26 percent in 2016.

At press time, BTL learned that EQMI received a new grant from the HOPE Fund of the Community Foundation of southeast Michigan. This fuels expanded community outreach, policy engagement, and greater capacity for victims services.

It is important to note that Motor City Pride has not been a source of significant funds for EQMI. With a budget of about \$225,000, most years the event has either broken even or lost a small amount. EQMI reports the net amount from Motor City Pride on its financial statements. In 2015 that was \$4,300. The January 2017 decision to spin off MCP into a stand-alone organization should have little to no financial effect on EQMI, and management hopes the staff and board will now have the opportunity to focus more on the core political mission of EQMI rather than producing the state's largest Pride event.

New EQMI Board Chair Talks Strategy

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Equality Michigan will continue the political charge for LGBTQ rights in the state of Michigan with Jim Murray as the new chairman of EQMI board.

As the president of AT&T Michigan, with more than 25 years of experience building connections in both business and political communities, Murray is confident he will “help bring focus” to the organization. The Jackson-area native has worked in Lansing for almost two decades, learning the ways of the capitol, aiding lawmakers and influencing policy.

Murray sat down with BTL to talk about evolving as a gay Republican, how he plans to achieve full equality in the state, and what his



Jim Murray

goals are for the organization moving forward.

How do you plan to lead the organization?

I want to focus on four things. My overall reaching goal is to bring some stature back to Equality Michigan. I want EQMI to go out and raise some money and I want to set the table so that when the legislature is ready for Elliott Larsen that EQMI is a force to be reckoned with. I'm very focused on making this organization a really powerful and respected group. I also want to continue our victims services work. If whatever we're doing doesn't fit within these four categories, I don't want us to be involved in it. I'm not interested and won't spend my time worrying about it.

What is EQMI doing right now to “set the table”?

We're not out there persuading right now. We're trying to garner support so that when we can – we have forty-some new members of the House – we pretty much know where they are, the people we can go talk to. We'll get a couple at a time and when we do, we'll keep them in our back pocket. We're only going to spring when we're ready to do it

and we can't be rushed just because there's clamor for something to happen. I think one of the most important things we can do right now besides raise money is work on local non-discrimination ordinances because then that builds support – little dots all over the state. Some of those are in Republican areas. It may not be ground moving, shake you at your soul change, but if we get more and more of those then you go to the legislature when the time is right. This is part of setting the table, right? Then we can say “We're in your community. That law that we're asking you to pass right now already exists for your constituents.” That means a lot.

When do you think an amendment to the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act can be introduced again?

It's not going to be overnight. Anybody that thinks we're doing to do this this year, it just isn't going to happen. It's going to take many years. The earliest possible is probably 2019 and even then it depends on who wins some of the leadership positions over there, but in the meantime we need to take Equality Michigan's brand and make it mean something when the organization opposes or supports something.

Following the controversy in 2014, what lesson will you carry with you moving forward?

I learned not to be as reactionary as the reactionaries. I have to just get out there and continue with the message that we're not going to have a revolution on this. We're going to get change, but we're not going to have a revolution...I only recently came out so I haven't experienced the radical side of these issues. I just hadn't, and I didn't realize how upset people would be and I didn't have the proper vehicle to explain to everybody what was really happening, so I think I just learned not to be reactionary to the reactionaries.

What are your thoughts about the challenges ahead for bipartisan cooperation?

Everybody will start coalescing. You're always going to have those fringes on the left and the right who are never going to be a part of what's going on in the middle. I think part of the hit that I keep hearing is that “Oh my God, he's a Republican.” Well, I'm going to tell you something. You can't do anything in this state without Republicans. That Senate is never going to go back to the Democrats. There's only 10 or 11 right now and the districts are drawn and they're going to redo the districts in two years and the Republicans are going to control that and so you have to be able to work with Republicans. You can't just work with the left-wing liberal Democratic legislators. You have to be able to talk to Republicans about it...so that's what we're going to do.

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Ruth Ellis Center Builds Diverse and Inclusive Board

Youth Social Services Agency Sees Correlation Between Mission, Strategy and Board Composition

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

A strong non-profit organization recognizes that a diverse and inclusive board is essential to its success. It's with that in mind the Ruth Ellis Center in Highland Park added five new board members in January – Gary Astrein, Laura Champagne, Sabin Blake, James Coleman, and Jerrell Harris – to join four others who were appointed towards the end of 2016 - Jim Luckey, Roland Leggett, Asad Muhammad, and Sabrina Gujral.

“We elected board members that we feel like we can count on and engage in work happening both at the Center and in our community. Because we are a small organization, our reach only extends so far, so we rely on the skill sets of each individual board member to help us achieve our long-term goals and these individuals bring a wealth of experience to the table,” said Mark Erwin-McCormick, REC director of development and advancement.

As the REC enters a new phase of strategic planning, the organization will look to this collection of individuals who are passionate about its cause.

“A lot of diversity is important to all of us at the Center. This is a community effort regardless of your age, your background, your race or socio-economic status,” said Erwin-McCormick. “All of those things play an important role and they define us as individuals. It's really exciting to see their own unique passions and why they're here and what skills they bring to the table.”

Sabin Blake, a longtime supporter and former REC board member is so passionate about volunteerism and community involvement that he rejoined the board again this year. Blake turned this passion into an actual role as



Sabin Blake

community outreach manager for General Motors where he collaborated with the company to develop the teamGM Cares program.

Historically, it's common for LGBTQ organizations to have boards comprised primarily of individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

But the REC recognizes that having allies on the board, such as small business owner **Gary Astrein** of Astrein Jewelers in Birmingham, is critical to their longtime sustainability.



Gary Astrein

While on the VOICES Committee for the last three years, he has been a champion for the work being done at the center.

“There is a huge need that caught my heart and caught my mind,” said Astrein. “I've never been on a board before, but I will be surrounded by amazing people who I can learn from.”

One board member in particular who can help guide the way is **Roland Leggett**.

The 35-year-old has been a social justice activist for more than 15 years working for organizations such as the ACLU of Michigan and Equality Michigan. What attracted him to the REC?



Roland Leggett

“The mission of this organization is so unique and so needed that it is a no-brainer for anyone that has had any interaction with this community,” said Leggett, vice chair of the Human Rights Commission in Detroit and principal at Roland Leggett Strategies.

“A lot of folks on the board have a background in the private sector so I offer a unique perspective - with grassroots organizing experience and having worked in the field - about how the community interacts with the center and what the needs are of the young folks that come here. This is a great opportunity to hopefully bridge two communities that don't necessarily always interact,” he said.

Bridging the gap is an important goal for **Jim Luckey** also. At 65 years old, the retired Detroit architect said, “Given that I'm here to support a group that is generations younger than I am, it's a little challenging. So I have to be very open to other perspectives. People

have lived lives that I haven't had to live. I've been very blessed and I think being on the board will help me to grow too, so it isn't just helping other people, they'll help me too.”

The activities Luckey wants to support at the REC are “empowering our young people to be willing to express themselves, to be able to express themselves, to have the power to live the life they really want,” he said.

It's not uncommon for REC board members to engage in fundraisers throughout the year as well as host specific events at the drop-in center, get involved in volunteer projects, and participate in the REC's annual events.

“The Center has established an infrastructure that allows us to continually engage community partners on a deeper level. We host quarterly community trainings that are open to anybody interested in the Center's work,” said Erwin-McCormick.

Which is one of the reasons why **Laura Champagne** said she joined the board.

“They are a model for the country, constantly innovating, offering top-notch quality for the kids,” she said.

As vice president of the ACLU Fund and managing director for Citizens for Better Care, Champagne is familiar with serving on non-profit boards and hopes to use her skills as a “good organizer” to “make sure voices get heard” while an REC board member.

“It's all about listening to people and that's where it's really great when you have a diverse board,” she said. “Everybody has a different perspective. In those discussions, all voices should be heard and then we come to a solution. It drives me crazy when people don't say anything at board meetings. We need to hear your voice.”



Jim Luckey

That's important for **Jerrell Harris**, an Albany, Georgia native, who was looking for somewhere to go where he could be



Jerrell Harris

most useful. The 38-year-old spun the globe and landed in Detroit four years ago. With a background in urban planning, Harris secured a job as director of restructuring and transformation in Mayor Mike Duggan's office.

He gained interest in the organization following a brief conversation with Jerry

Peterson, REC executive director.

“They provide a great safe space for people who need it. So you think about all the identities one can have. I'm black, I'm a man, I'm cisgender, I'm same-gender loving, I'm this, I'm that. I travel in spaces very easily and I feel safe in a number of spaces, but that is not everyone's experience so the Ruth Ellis Center provides that safe space for people who don't necessarily have that same experience that I have or that I enjoy. My privilege allows me to do that so it's my responsibility to give my time and my talent to make sure everyone has that opportunity,” said Harris.

Asad Muhammad

said he understands what it's like to be a “black, queer teenager growing up in a predominantly black neighborhood. I can relate to the feelings of isolation and inner conflict that some of the young people of the Center walk with everyday.

As a board member, I bring strategic planning skills, a passion for youth development, and over 15 years of experience in both education and non-profit management to the table. More importantly, I bring lived experience, and when I look at a youth member of the Ruth Ellis Center, I see myself.”

While **Sabrina Gujral**, a Ford Motor Company employee with 17 years of finance experience, had already been serving on



Laura Champagne



Asad Muhammad

the board for the last two years, becoming chair in January made her feel “excited, scared and terrified,” she said. “I wasn’t sure if I was cut out for it or if I was chair material, but the thing - and I’ve told everyone this - that changed my mind was the election. Everyone after the election was wondering what they can do and I had this opportunity right in front of me and I wasn’t going to let it go. It’s going to be really important to make sure that we steer the Ruth Ellis Center in the right direction and despite what might be happening in the government, make sure that we don’t fail our youth.”



Sabrina Gujral

Gujral, a woman of Indian descent, said she feels connected to the youth.

“Growing up, I knew what it meant to be different for a reason you couldn’t help. I have also grown up in a very different culture than most people that I run into and it’s helped me to have an open mind about everything.”

Elliott Broom, former board chair and vice president of museum operations at the Detroit Institute of Arts, said Gujral “is exactly who we need in this role at this time. I am delighted Sabrina is in the new chairperson of the REC board. She is whip-smart, an excellent listener, incredibly approachable, dedicated and a respected board member.”

As the center transitions from one executive committee to another, Broom will continue to assist Gujral while she settles into her new role.

“When I stepped down from the position as board chair, I wanted to stay involved and help in any way I could. So, we’re taking a hybrid approach. I am currently vice chair for one year - of a two-year term - and then Roland will take over for the second year of the term as vice chair,” he said, adding that he planned to remain as active on the board after his time as chair. “We are still fundraising for our all-important Health and Wellness Center, a critical new part of the Ruth Ellis Center and our mission to help LGBTQ youth and young adults who are in need.”



James Coleman

The mission for James Coleman prior to joining the board was simply to spread awareness about the REC.

“Because for some crazy reason in the community people still think that this is a homeless shelter for LGBTQ youth and that is absolutely not the case,” said Coleman, president of PNC Bank’s diversity employee resource group. For many years, he has helped the REC host events at Motor City Pride and secured funding for various programs at the center.

“This is an amazing organization. That was the biggest reason for joining. There is a branding gap, for lack of a better word. We need to let people know there is so much more to the Ruth Ellis Center - an education piece, a health and wellness piece, and the story about Ruth herself. When people ask where the name comes from it empowered me to know more myself,” he said. “And from a corporate standpoint, when you believe in something it makes sense to want to give money, and I can pull in more resources this way. It’s personal. It’s passion. It all kind of aligns.”

The Ruth Ellis Center, a youth social services agency located at 77 Victor Street in Highland Park, provides short- and long-term residential safe space and support services for runaway, homeless, and at-risk LGBTQ youth in Highland Park and Detroit. For more information, visit www.ruthelliscenter.org or call 313-252-1950.

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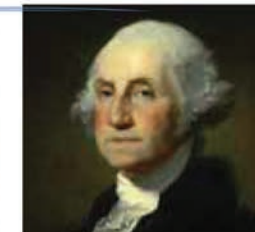
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Criticized for Anti-LGBT, Racist Views, Sessions Confirmed as AG

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, THE WASHINGTON BLADE

The U.S. Senate narrowly confirmed Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) as U.S. attorney general after a rancorous debate that included the silencing of Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and criticism of a long anti-LGBT career.

Lawmakers approved Sessions at the nation's top lawyer by a 52-47 vote along party lines. The Republican caucus, including Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), was unified in support of Sessions. The Democratic caucus, including lesbian Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), was largely opposed, although Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) broke ranks to vote with Republicans.

The confirmation of Sessions as attorney general was anathema to LGBT rights supporters — especially after the office was most recently held by Eric Holder and Loretta Lynch — because of Sessions' long anti-LGBT record in Congress.

Janson Wu, executive director of the GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders, said in a statement the Sessions confirmation marks a "sad day for justice in our country."

"It is our hope that, now confirmed, Attorney General Sessions will recognize the magnitude of his obligation to all Americans, and will seek to carry out the duties of his office accordingly," Wu said. "But our Constitution's guarantees of liberty and equality apply regardless of who holds that office. As advocates for LGBTQ Americans and Americans living with HIV, we stand ready to hold Attorney General Sessions accountable, and to defend those constitutional guarantees at every turn."

As a U.S. senator, Sessions during the Bush administration voted in favor of a U.S. constitutional amendment that would have banned same-sex marriage throughout the entire the country and during the Obama administration against "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," hate crimes protection legislation and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Upon the U.S. Supreme Court decision in favor of nationwide marriage equality, Sessions called the decision "unconstitutional."

During his confirmation hearing, Sessions sought to downplay the anti-LGBT positions he's taken over the course of his career and said he understands "the demands for justice and fairness made by our LGBT community." Sessions said he'd follow the law with respect to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in favor of same-sex marriage and the Matthew Shepard & James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. But Sessions also said a priority of his would be "religious freedom," which is code in conservative circles for enabling discrimination against LGBT people.

It was charges a racism that dogged Sessions the most during the confirmation process — an

accusation the senator has faced before. In 1986, Sessions was nominated for a seat on the federal judiciary, but the Senate denied him the seat based on charges of racism. Among other things, a career Justice Department attorney at the time testified Sessions had said white civil rights lawyers are a traitor to their race.

Sarah McBride, national press secretary for the Human Rights Campaign, wrote in an op-ed for Teen Vogue various minority factions are united against Sessions because the senator has been a hostile to each of them.

"We talk a lot about how the resistance to Donald Trump is intersectional; because LGBTQ people are Muslims, women, people of color, Latinx, and immigrants, an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us," McBride said. "Well as we see it, Jeff Sessions's opposition to equality is intersectional, too. His actions tell us that he'll discriminate against almost anyone, and Donald Trump has decided to put our basic civil rights in his hands."

Prior to confirmation vote, Warren sought to read a 1986 letter from Coretta Scott King, the widow of the late Martin Luther King, Jr., who said Sessions as a U.S. attorney sought to "chill the free exercise of the ballot by citizens" and attempted to "frighten and intimidate elderly black voters." Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell took the unusual step of silencing Warren on the basis she violated Senate Rule 19, which prohibits senators from imputing on the floor other senators have engaged in conduct unworthy of a senator.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said Wednesday in response to the letter he has respects for King's accomplishments on civil rights, but would "respectfully disagree" with her on Sessions "then and now."

"His record on civil voting rights I think is outstanding and like the late Arlen Specter, I can only hope that if she was still with us today that after getting to know him and seen his record and commitment to voting and civil rights that she would share the same view that Sen. Specter did, where he said although I voted against him, getting to know the man that he is now, I regret that vote," Spicer said. "I would hope that if she were still with us today that she would share that sentiment."

Chris Johnson is Chief Political & White House Reporter for the Washington Blade www.washblade.com.



Jeff Sessions



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Price Confirmation to HHS Dismays LGBT Advocates

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, WASHINGTON BLADE

The U.S. Senate approved late Feb. 9 another Trump Cabinet pick with an anti-LGBT history with the narrow confirmation of Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.) as secretary of Health and Human Services.

The 52 Senate Republicans were united in voting “yes” and all 47 members of the Democratic caucus present, including lesbian Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), voted against him. (Sen. Claire McCaskill was absent from the vote because her husband was having heart surgery.)

A chief critic of Obamacare during his six terms in Congress, Price as a physician was the face of the House Republican effort to undo the health care law. His confirmation is seen as the first step in fulfilling Trump’s campaign promise to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, which currently provides health insurance for more than 20 million people.

Advocacy groups concerned with LGBT health have raised the alarm about repealing the Obama-era law. The Affordable Care Act contains a provision barring discrimination on the basis of sex, which the Obama administration interpreted to bar discrimination in health care on the basis of sex stereotyping and transgender status. The law also expanded Medicaid, which is the primary source of care for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, condemned the Price confirmation as a danger not only to transgender health, but the American public as a whole.

“By confirming Rep. Price today, the Senate voted to put health care for millions of Americans at risk,” Keisling said. “Despite today’s vote, people all over the nation, including transgender Americans and their families, do not want and cannot afford to have their health care taken away from them.”

Citing a 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey in which 23 percent of respondents said they had not sought health care in the past year because they were afraid of being mistreated due to their gender identity, Keisling said trans people “already have a difficult time accessing health care, and given his history, Rep. Price will likely increase that hardship.”

In terms of LGBT issues, Price has an abysmal record. In 2006, he voted for a U.S. constitutional amendment that would have banned same-sex marriage throughout the country. Price also voted against hate crimes protections legislation, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” repeal and a version of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

In 2013, Price participated in a conference call hosted by Tea Party Unity, as Right Wing Watch reported at the time, and said a caller was “absolutely right” about the potential of negative health and fiscal impact of legislation promoting LGBT rights. The caller was Rabbi Noson Leiter, who attributed Hurricane Sandy to the arrival of marriage equality in New York.

Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement Price has shown an “alarming disregard for LGBTQ people” and LGBT health issues, saying his confirmation is consistent with anti-LGBT threats from the Trump administration.

“The fact of the matter is that too many LGBTQ people are still denied care, denied visitation rights, and are treated unfairly by their providers,” Griffin said. “The Trump administration has floated executive order language that would allow the government to bankroll

discrimination in all of those areas – and Tom Price’s alarming record shows that he’s the perfect rubber stamp for the president’s shameful proposals.”

Griffin’s statement refers to a draft executive order circulating among federal advocacy groups that would enable anti-LGBT discrimination in the name of “religious freedom.” White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said Trump has no plans to sign the executive

order – at least for the time being – and media outlets reported Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner convinced the president not to sign it and keep former President Obama’s order in place against anti-LGBT workplace discrimination.

As time has proceeded in the Republican Congress without approval of legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act,

Republicans have increasingly shifted to the phrase “repair” when discussing efforts to change Obamacare as opposed to Trump’s campaign promise of “repeal and replace.”

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) denied during an interview that aired Sunday on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that change in wording was significant and insisted Republican plans remain the same.

“I don’t know what happened, but maybe somewhere in the press this kind of got crosswise,” Ryan said. “If you’re going to repair the American health care system, and fix its problems, you have to repeal Obamacare and replace it with something better. Patient-centered health care. And that is how you repair this health care system.”

Chris Johnson is Chief Political & White House Reporter for the Washington Blade www.washblade.com. His work is made available through The National Gay Media Association.



Tom Price. Photo: Washington Blade Michael Key

Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement Price has shown an “alarming disregard for LGBTQ people” and LGBT health issues, saying his confirmation is consistent with anti-LGBT threats from the Trump administration.

In Emotional Speech, Streep Renews Harsh Criticism of Trump

BY JOCELYN NOVECK

NEW YORK (AP) – In an emotional speech by turns tearful, defiant and humorous, Meryl Streep doubled down on her harsh criticism of President Donald Trump, and spoke of having become a target since she first took him on in her Golden Globes speech in January.

Addressing a cheering audience at a fundraising gala for the Human Rights Campaign, a national LGBT

group, Streep referred to Trump’s tweet after her Globes speech, in which he called the celebrated actress “overrated.”

“Yes, I am the most overrated, over-decorated and currently, I am the most over-berated actress – of my generation,” she said to laughs.

She noted that she wished she could simply stay home “and load the dishwasher” rather than take a podium to speak out – but that “the weight of all these honors” she’s received in her career compelled her to speak out.

“It’s terrifying to put the target on your forehead,” she said. “And it sets you up for all sorts of attacks and armies of brownshirts and bots and worse, and the only way you can do it is if you feel you have to. You have to! You don’t have an option. You have to.”

Streep did not elaborate on the type of attacks she may have been subjected to since her Globes speech, or from whom. The Associated Press reached out to her publicist for details. The term “brownshirts” was first used to describe an early Nazi militia.

Streep was receiving the group’s National Ally for Equality Award, and was the huge draw of the evening. Introduced by filmmaker Ken Burns, she took the stage to a thunderous ovation. After a humorous defense of her remarks in her Globes speech that football and martial arts weren’t arts, which had drawn some criticism – she clarified that she indeed likes football, too – the actress praised the organization for defending LGBT rights, and spoke about two teachers – one transgender, one gay – who had influenced her childhood in suburban New Jersey.

She then spoke about how early cultures had always put men at the top, but at some point in the 20th century, women, people of color and other minorities began achieving their deserved rights. Progress was fast, and so now, “We shouldn’t be surprised that fundamentalists, of all stripes, everywhere, are exercised and fuming,” she said.

Turning to Trump, she said: “But if we live through this precarious moment – if his catastrophic instinct to retaliate doesn’t lead us to nuclear winter – we will have much to thank this president for. Because he will have woken us up to how fragile freedom really is.”

The country has now learned, she said, “how the authority of the executive, in the hands of a self-dealer, can be wielded against the people, and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The whip of the executive can, through a Twitter feed, lash and intimidate, punish and humiliate, delegitimize the press and all of the imagined enemies with spasmodic regularity and easily provoked predictability.”

At the end, Streep made a passionate call for religious liberty – the right, as she said, “to live our lives with God or without Her.”

“All of us have the human right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” she said.

“If you think people were mad,” she closed, “when they thought the government was coming after their guns, wait until you see when they try to take away our happiness.”

Streep, 67, received a record 20th Oscar nomination in January.



Going the Distance



Photo: Emilia Paré

Vanessa Carlton Wants to Remind You (and President Trump) That She's a 'Proud Bisexual'

Vanessa Carlton can't say she's "good," even though, initially, she does. The singer-songwriter is going through the motions, as you do, replying to the usual "How are you?" conversation starter, and she knows it.

So, she backpedals: "Actually, I'm not great." Despite a healthy daughter and dog, and the fact that she can confirm her husband (John McCauley of the band Deer Tick) was "alive" on a plane at the time of our interview, Carlton is, like any anti-Trumpist, on edge.

"It's really scary," says the 36-year-old, who's established herself beyond pop's limitations after her Grammy-nominated hit "A Thousand Miles" made her a household name in 2002. "If the administration tries to take away the right to adopt and same-sex marriages – if I could lose my mind any more,

I will. I can't even fathom... at this point, we're talking about civil rights of Americans, and LGBTQ is a community and that is *real*."

For Carlton, the threat hits close to home: In 2010, she told the audience at Nashville Pride that she's a "proud bisexual." Now, like the rest of us, she's grappling with the distressing reality that "the most fundamental human rights in this country are at risk," she says.

Carlton's allegiance to the LGBT community first blossomed when she was an aspiring dancer at just 13 years old, after moving to New York City and immersing herself in queer circles.

"I don't look at the community as separate from my life," she says. "I was never able to differentiate it because I was just always in it. My adolescence was in that community, so I never really looked at it as some kind of

specialty community or 'other.'"

Even though she describes herself as "private... but not weirdly private," when Carlton played Nashville Pride – her first pride festival – a couple of young women in the audience compelled the singer to come out publicly. Her reason for taking that leap was simple: She imagined them being shunned by their parents for being gay.

"I just wanted to connect with them," she recalls.

Carlton continues to reach out to fans on social media, posting about her current tour in support of what's arguably her best album to date, "Liberman," but also the Trump administration's constant barrage of bad decisions, including the recently court-ruled immigration ban.

Again, it's personal: "I have family that

live in the Middle East, and when I'm seeing stories of these families being divided and the children being detained for five hours in the airport because it's something our president did – that is when I will highlight and communicate to strangers about how I feel."

Because "every day or every week there's a new threat to something," Carlton hasn't been as out as she thinks people should be right now, she realizes during our conversation.

"I haven't highlighted that fact about myself," she admits, pointing to her lack of outness on her social media. "Every American that believes in rights for all, they should be out – and not just out supporting, but sharing, 'This is who I am.'"

Traces of the singer are woven into the ethereal fabric of 2015's "Liberman," Carlton's fifth studio album titled after an

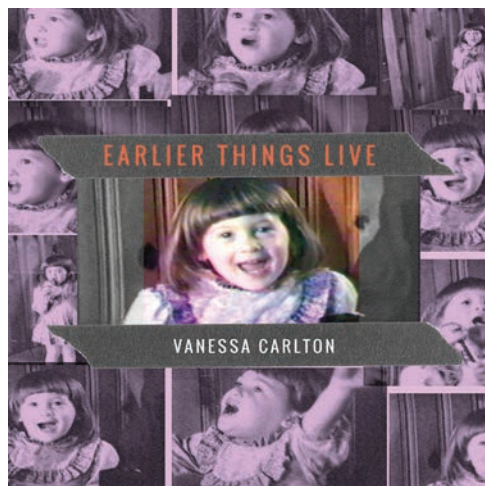
“Every American that believes in rights for all, they should be out – and not just out supporting, but sharing, ‘This is who I am.’”

oil painting her grandfather made. Last year, the album was released as a live set, recorded in Nashville’s 3rd & Lindsley. “Liberman” isn’t just the most cohesive collection in her repertoire, dating back to 2002’s breakout LP “Be Not Nobody,” it’s a major sonic shift from “A Thousand Miles.” Her breakthrough piano ditty left such an indelible mark on her career that Carlton’s publicist asks journalists to limit their questions regarding the song to one.

“I will tell you, I play it first at my shows,” she says, noting that her core fanbase now comes to hear songs from 2011’s “Rabbits on the Run” and “Liberman.” “And then there’s always the people who go, ‘Oh my god! It’s Vanessa Carlton! We’ve gotta go see her!’ They don’t know the other stuff, and I’m like their ‘Get Drunk With It On YouTube Girl’ and they just want to relive that moment, but it’s not that kind of show, really. It’s a moodier show. So, I open with that song, and if they’re wanting to stay for the rest of the set, then great; if not, then they got what they wanted.”

Though “A Thousand Miles” has followed the musician around since the beginning of her professional career, Carlton admits it’s afforded her, both financially and otherwise, the ability to pursue more personally fulfilling ventures. After signing to A&M Records, a now-defunct Universal subsidiary, it became apparent to the singer that, “I wasn’t interested in being a pop star.”

“Being a pop star at a major label – there are a lot of rules, there are a lot of walls, there’s a



The artist’s recent release, “Earlier Things Live,” a six-song collection of early-career staples.

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lot of expectations, there’s a lot of limitations,” she continues. “It’s just not my vibe. I never was good at it. I always alienated people along the way. I never kissed the right ass. It was a disaster. It was bound to change.”

Fifteen years after launching her major-label career, that evolution fully materializes on “Liberman,” which, from the celestial murmur “Take It Easy” through its dreamlike finish, was “made to be that soothing, cool feeling on the brain.” On the road, while supporting “Liberman” as well as her recent release, “Earlier Things Live,” a six-song collection of early-career staples like 2004’s “White Houses,” she hopes to nurture more Pride-type connections – sans politics, though.

“It’s just about human beings and dissection of emotions of humans and connection and fear and beauty,” she says. “If I can highlight that in a time like this – I guess this tour is a good time to play this record.”

Her mood, about human rights and even her purpose these days as a musician, strikes the same general chord as the world at large: uncertainty. Her blood pressure rises just talking about President Trump and how his administration could strip her friends and family of their inalienable rights, so when asked to shift topics – from politics to music – she happily obliges with a “no, please!”

But there’s hope yet, and it’s the music, a glorious escape. “It really calms me down playing it,” she says of “Liberman.”

The truth is, though: It’s as much a refuge for her as it is for us.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBT wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. Reach him via his website at www.chris-azzopardi.com and on Twitter (@chrisazzopardi).



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Guns & Hoses Hockey Game to Benefit Local Woman Battling Cancer

Royal Oak police and firefighters are raising funds and getting ready to face off in a benefit Guns & Hoses hockey game to help a longtime Clawson volunteer battling cancer: Carrie Chambers, 42, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in the fall, underwent a double mastectomy, and later learned the disease had spread. The annual charity game, now in its seventh year, is organized by police Sgt. Patrick Stanton and Firefighter Tony Cattini.

Over the years, Guns & Hoses in Royal Oak has raised money for the families of a fallen state police trooper, a Madison Heights police officer who died from illness, a hockey program for disabled war veterans, autism, and a nonprofit that provides dogs to help child

victims testify in court cases. Tickets are on sale now for the upcoming hockey game at 7:30 p.m. April 22 at the Lindell Ice Arena. Read more in The Daily Tribune online about the many ways the community can provide help and support.

ROMT Welcomes Christopher Titus

Christopher Titus' new show, according to his website, takes the audience on a wild ride through his personal life, and proves why he isn't qualified to be a father, and why childless couples win. In between Titus again takes you down some roads that may be unlikely to win him a CNN heroes award but will always be hilarious. His reasoning as to why owning a Ferrari is better than having children along with more of his beloved dysfunctional personal anecdotes will have you clutching your sides with laughter. This is some of his most surprising material yet, and Titus again shows in his seventh 90-minute special why he is one of the best comics working today. The actor and podcaster puts on his stand-up comedian hat for his "Born With a Defect" show Feb. 11 at the Royal Oak Music Theatre, 318 W. Fourth St. Doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$27-102. Call 248-399-2980 or visit royaloakmusictheatre.com.



Brooke Wilson Vitale, owner of the Love and Buttercream bakery in Royal Oak. Photo courtesy of Oakland County government

Royal Oak Baker Earns Top Spot In Public Online Vote

Owner of the Love and Buttercream bakery in Royal Oak, Brooke Wilson Vitale, is "creative, thoughtful, has an incredible business sense and is precisely the kind of young leader we want to keep in Oakland County," said Oakland County executive L. Brooks Patterson during his State of the County address on Feb. 8, according to a Feb. 9 Patch report by Mera McKenna.

The 29-year-old is the winner of Oakland County Executive's Elite 40 Under 40 Class of 2017. The contest was to highlight young professionals and thought leaders who live or work in Oakland County and "have achieved excellence in their field and contributed to the quality of life in their communities." Judges reviewed around 400 applications before narrowing it down to the top 40.

Vitale earned the number one spot after being selected by a public online vote. She started the bakery in her parent's basement in 2012 and just a few years later is at the helm of a 29-women operation. Love and Buttercream has received a number of accolades throughout the years, including HOUR Detroit's "Best Cookie" in 2014, 2015, and 2016 and Eater's "Top 5 Bakeries in Metro Detroit." Last year alone, the bakery created wedding cakes and desserts for 600 couples.

In a statement, Vitale said "I was really surprised and very flattered...There's something about this area that I can't quite put into words...It's a set of values, a culture, a feeling of support and a feeling of home. It's something magical and unique

that you'd be hard pressed to find anywhere else in the nation. It was the perfect place to let my dreams fly."

Vitale plans to open a second location in Birmingham. Love and Buttercream bakery is located at 3202 Crooks Road in Royal Oak. Call 248-850-7207 or visit www.loveandbuttercream.com.

Royal Oak Market: Spring Art Fair

The Guild of Artists & Artisans returns to the Royal Oak Farmers Market for the Royal Oak Market: Spring Art Fair March 2-3 from 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. each day. The 2017 art fair season will kick off with this indoor show featuring 75 jury selected artists, delicious food from area food trucks, entertainment, and beer and wine. Admission is free for this event located in the heart of downtown Royal Oak at 316 E. 11 Mile Road where there is plenty of parking plus the surrounding community boasts some of the most eclectic shops and restaurants. Please direct questions to info@theguild.org.

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Ceramic works by Joseph Pelka. Photo courtesy of The Guild Artists & Artisans



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OUTINGS

Thursday, Feb. 16

Detroit Elders 5 p.m. Attendance is free. SAGE Metro Detroit, 4750 Woodward, Detroit. 313-833-1300 ext. 15. <https://sagemetrodetroit.org>

Home Sweet Home 6:30 p.m. Support LGBTQ homeless youth. Tickets: \$75 Ozone House, 100 N. Ashley St., Ann Arbor. 734-662-2265. amorris@ozonehouse.org www.ozonehouse.org

Saturday, Feb. 18

Spiritually Centered Leadership 10 a.m. Please RSVP via email. Facilitated by Rev. Dr. Kevin Downer. Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit, 2441 Pinecrest Ave., Ferndale. 248-399-7741. revkev@mccla.org www.mccdetroit.org/

The Dirty Show 6 p.m. Tickets: \$30. 21+ (18+ on Feb. 12) The Dirty Show, 1600 Clay St., Detroit. www.dirtydetroit.com

Sunday, Feb. 19

PFLAG Ann Arbor 2 p.m. Ann Arbor meeting for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Free to attend. PFLAG Ann Arbor, 306 N Division St, Ann Arbor. 724-741-0659. info@pflagaa.org pflagaa.org

Tuesday, Feb. 21

Gamenight 1 a.m. Gay Geeks Social Group, 4636 15 MILE RD Apt. xxx, Sterling Heights. www.meetup.com

Happy Birthday Julia Music 5 p.m. Join Julia and her friends for some fantastic vegan cuisine. A portion of sales will go directly back to Ferndale Pride. Ferndale Pride, 215 W. Nine Mile Rd., Ferndale. 248-206-7510. <http://greenspacecafe.com/>

Addiction and Families 7:30 p.m. By Anna Byberg, LMSW, CAADC. Free, open to anyone with a personal or professional interest. Dawn Farm, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 7344858725. info@dawnfarm.org <http://www.dawnfarm.org/programs/education-series>

Thursday, Feb. 23

LGBTQ Book and Movie Club 7 p.m. Meets the 3rd and 4th Thursday of each month. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com www.goaffirmations.org

Saturday, Feb. 25

50/50 Bingo and Games Day 2 p.m. Proceeds benefit Affirmations and Ruth Ellis Center. Motor City Bears, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105.

Healthy Me, Stigma Free 2 p.m. Free for youth of color, ages 13-29 in Detroit at U of M Center, 3663 Woodward Ave. www.facebook.com/events/409926989339554/

Mardi Gras Gala: a Ferndale Pride Fundraiser 7 p.m. Tickets: \$20. Dinner catered by Howe's Bayou, music and dancing. Ferndale Pride, 22856 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. <http://ferndalepride.com/>

Sunday, Feb. 26

Drag Queen Bingo 11 a.m. Tickets: \$20-\$30. Reservations required. 18+ Five15, 515 S. Washington Ave., Royal Oak. 248-515-2551. www.five15.net

Film Screening: 'Little Women'

The Michigan Opera Theatre will present Mark Adamo's "Little Women" on Feb. 23 at 8 p.m. at the historic Detroit Yacht Club. "Little Women" (1933) is a "coming of age" drama tracing the lives of four sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. During the American Civil War, the girl's father is away serving as a minister to the troops. The family, headed by their beloved Marmee, must struggle to make ends meet, with the help of their kind and wealthy neighbor, Mr. Laurence, and his high-spirited grandson Laurie.

RSVP is required online at <http://www.michiganopera.org/special-event/film-screening-little-women> for the free screening starring Katherine Hepburn at 1 Riverbank Drive in Detroit.



Monday, Feb. 27

Factory Monday 9 p.m. Goth-industrial night. Main room: DJ Void6 hosted by MC Yoda. Red Room: DJ Madisi. Tickets: \$1-3. Necto, 516 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. www.necto.com

MUSIC & MORE

Benefits/Social Events

The Ark "The Love Hangover: A Benefit for Breakfast at St. Andrew's" Tickets: \$30. The Ark, 316 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. 7:30 p.m. Feb. 18. 734-761-1800. www.theark.org

Comedy

Motor City Casino "Lisa Lampanelli" Coming off of her "Stuffed" tour, Lisa Lampanelli - a comic's comic - is heading to Detroit Feb. 17 to get up on stage and say what most people are afraid to think in one of her raunchy, gut-busting performances. Her recent play, she said, is about food and body image. Tickets are \$30-45. Sound Board, 2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit. 8 p.m. Feb. 17. 800-745-3000. <http://www.soundboarddetroit.com>

Concerts

Congregational Church of Birmingham, UCC "Sing Out Detroit Choir" . Congregational Church of Birmingham, UCC, 1000 Cranbrook Road, Bloomfield Hills . 7 p.m. Feb. 18. 248-514-8746. [ccbucc.org](http://www.ccbucc.org)

Palace of Auburn Hills "Eric Church" Tickets: \$25-\$90. The Palace of Auburn Hills, 5 Championship Dr., Auburn Hills. 8 p.m. Feb. 25. 248-377-0100. <http://bit.ly/2f6MCEJ>

The Ark "Greg Brown" Opener Chicago Farmer. Tickets: \$35. The Ark, 316 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. 8 p.m. Feb. 17. 734-761-1800. www.theark.org

The Ark "The Vegabonds" Tickets: \$15 . The Ark, 316 S. Main St., Ann Arbor.

8 p.m. Feb. 16. 734-761-1800. www.theark.org

Film & Video

FIA's Palette Cafe "Film Fancy February: Dheepan" Reservations required 24 hours in advance. Tickets: \$30. View menu online. Flint Institute of Arts, 1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint. 5 p.m. Feb. 24. 810-234-1695. www.flintarts.org/films

FIA's Palette Cafe "Film Fancy February: Sunset Song" Reservations required 24 hours in advance. Tickets: \$30. View menu online. Flint Institute of Arts, 1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint. 5 p.m. Feb. 17. 810-234-1695. www.flintarts.org/films

Michigan Opera Theatre "Film Screening: Little Women" RSVP is required. Free event. Detroit Yacht Club, 1 Riverbank Drive, Detroit. 8 p.m. Feb. 23. www.michiganopera.org/special-event/film-screening-little-women/

THEATER

Sing Happy! A Celebration of Kander and Ebb Tickets: \$30 for dinner and show; \$15 for show only. Penny Seats Theatre Company, Conor O'Neills Irish Pub and Restaurant, 318 S Main St., Ann Arbor. Through Feb. 16. www.pennyseats.org/box-office

Professional

Dr. Heidi Jekyll Tickets: \$12. Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Slipstream Theatre, 460 Hilton Road, Ferndale. Feb. 19 - March 12. 3139869156. www.slipstreamti.com

Firepower by Kermit Frazier Tickets: \$17-20. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. Through March 12. 313-868-1347. www.detroitreptheatre.com

Hand to God Tickets: \$10-20. The Ringwald Theatre, 22742 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Feb. 17 - March 13. 2485455545. www.theringwald.com

Hedwig and the Angry Inch . Broadway in Detroit, Fisher Theatre, 3011 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit. Feb. 21 - March 5. 313-872-1000. www.broadwayindetroit.com

The Lion King . Broadway in Detroit, Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway St., Detroit. Through Feb. 26. 313-237-SING. www.broadwayindetroit.com

ART 'N' AROUND

Detroit Institute of Arts "Detroit After Dark: Photographs from the DIA Collection" Detroit Institute of Arts, 2100 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Feb. 5 - April 23. 313-833-7900. www.dia.org

Detroit Institute of Arts "Bitter/Sweet: Coffee, Tea & Chocolate" What is your ritual for drinking coffee, tea or chocolate? Take a picture and share it on Instagram. It's all part of the Detroit Institute of Arts' exhibit - the first of its kind at the museum to engage all five senses. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2100 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Jan. 1 - March 5. 313-833-7900. <http://www.dia.org>

Lawrence Street Gallery "The Body Eclectic '17" Reception, Feb. 17, 6-9 p.m. Works by Nora Venturrelli. Free and open to the public. Lawrence Street Gallery, 22620 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Feb. 1 - Feb. 24. 2485440394. www.lawrencestreetgallery.com

Static Network "Erotic Poetry & Music Festival" Tickets: \$10-15. Proceeds to Paws with a Cause. The Tangent Gallery, 715 E. Milwaukee, Detroit. 8 p.m. Feb. 25. 313-873-2955. www.facebook.com/EroticPoetryandMusicFestival/

6 Reasons the LGBT Community Needs to Stop Being A-Holes to One Another

The Frivolist

BY MIKEY ROX

If you're gay – a gay man, specifically (because that's all the experience I have) – you know how catty we can be to one another. You're trying to have a drama-free evening at your local bar and then – bang! – some queen throws you shade for no good reason. Insults (and sometimes wigs) fly, and before you know it yet another homo has ruined an otherwise low-key evening with her sass. I'm over it, and so are you, and these are the reasons we need to stop the bitchery in its tracks.

1. Your Parents Probably Didn't Raise You to Be a Jackass

I can't speak for everyone, but I'm willing to bet that if you're an asshole your parents weren't exactly committed to bringing you up that way. For argument's sake, I expect they wanted the best for you, for you to get a good education and pursue your passions, and to practice politeness and respect with everyone you meet. But somewhere along the line you said "fuck it all" and turned your repressed sexuality into anger that you dole out on an at-will basis. Not cute. Maybe it got a good chuckle when you were in your late teens and early 20s, but that act gets old after awhile (this advice comes from experience, mind you; I'm a work in progress), and by the time you're my age – 35 – people are fed up with your juvenile antics.

Just be nicer, K? Because you never know when you'll meet the wrong person who will pick you up like a ragdoll and throw you across a bar because your mouth is too big. (This advice also comes from experience.)

2. You'll Attract More Bees With Honey Than Vinegar

Lamenting the fact that you're always single? Maybe it has to do with your prickly personality. If you have a knack for being negative, it's hardly a wonder why nobody wants to be around you. It's easy to be a pessimist in this world, sure, but if you look for the good, you'll find it. Open your eyes.

3. Pricks Are Fun to Fuck, Not Date

I'm a firecracker – everyone I know will tell you that. A stereotypical ginge with Irish lineage who has a quick temper and a penchant for too much alcohol. I'm also really good in bed. But while my black book isn't lacking in return visitors, my dating career – and my marriage – has been plagued with disappointment, hurt



feelings and tears. Lots of tears. I'm currently in the middle of a divorce – which, thankfully, is amicable now – and I'm dating someone new. After eight years of being unhappy with my husband (we're both to blame, not just him) and a couple ill-fated long-term relationships before that, I think I've finally learned how to be at peace with myself and my partner. With age comes wisdom, they say, and I've learned from my mistakes. Granted, cutting back on my alcohol intake also has contributed to this success – but, hey, whatever works.

4. You're Not as Right As You Think You Are All the Time

I'm starting to recognize that this edition of my column isn't making me look very good, but I'm nothing if I'm not honest. Alas, I'm a know-it-all, and that really ticks people off. The difference between me and you, though, is that I'm always right when I think I'm right – I won't argue anything I'm unsure about – and you just *think* you're right. I don't know what burns people up more – people like me who are always right or people like you who will argue to the death about how right they are even though they're wrong. Either way, we both should cut it out so we don't die alone.

5. Hypocrisy Isn't a Good Color on You

As a community, we collectively wag our fingers at gay Republicans because they're basically Benedict Arnold with Botox, but there's plenty we need to reconcile on our side of the fence. Like how we treat different races and sexual identities. I mean, come on – are you, preacher of civil liberties, protester of oppression, really being a racist right now? If I hear, "Everyone except Asians" one more

time from a fag, I'm gonna shove a pair of chopsticks right up his ass. Then there's the side-eye many of you give to bisexual men and women just because you don't "believe" in it. That logic sounds eerily similar to the "Christians" who want you to shut the hell up, just not with a dick in your mouth. Who

are any of us to judge? Just mind ya business.

6. While We Basked in Our Civil Victories, a New War Emerged

If I had to choose a solitary reason why we all need to get along, it's that our protections and civil liberties are in grave danger under Führer Trump. This administration is bad news for many Americans, the LGBT community included. Which is why we need to band together and rise up – we've done it several times before – to let our fellow citizens know that we'll take a lot of things lying down, but we won't accept whatever bullshit they have in store over the next four years. March, call your representatives, hold rallies and continue to exercise your right vote to help change the tide, or at least keep it from coming in full force, poised to drown us out.

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. He splits his time between homes in New York City and the Jersey Shore with his dog Jaxon. Connect with Mikey on Twitter @mikeyrox.

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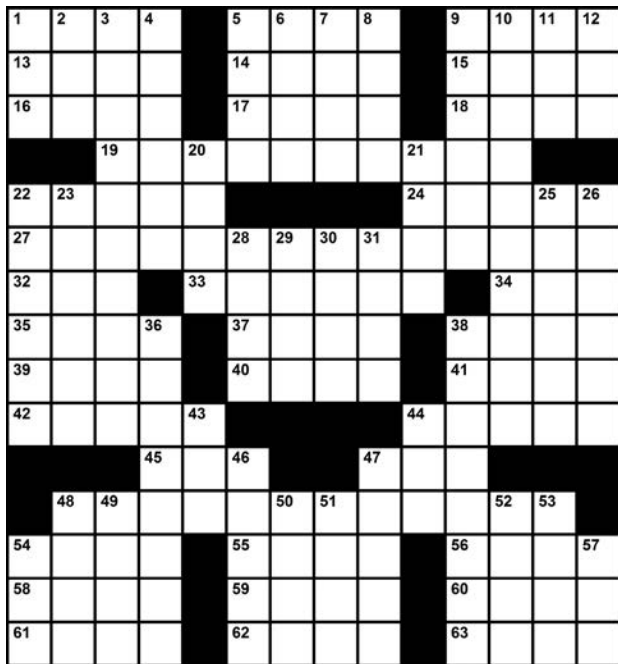


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Q Puzzle



- 33 "What Will Mary Say" singer Johnny
 34 Moist ending
 35 Apple of a sort
 37 More of the dig
 38 Fruity drinks
 39 Like a rain forest
 40 Part of GPS (abbr.)
 41 Straight, in a bar
 42 Word on a Broadway ticket
 44 Can't help but
 45 Spring month for Debussy
 47 Tin Man's request
 48 More of the dig
 54 Chalky white
 55 Soft rock
 56 Billy of "Cleopatra" (1999)
 58 Rubber-stamp
 59 Opera queen's fave, perhaps
 60 Suffix with leather
 61 Tools for Whitman and Byron
 62 Low, for one
 63 Where a cobbler puts the tongue

- 9 "Valley of the Dolls" author
 10 "To thine own self be true" and such
 11 Roadside stop
 12 Abe Lincoln's boy
 20 Bit from Michael Musto
 21 Pink and more
 22 Zelda Gilroy portrayer James
 23 Law at Beit Simchat Torah
 25 Bully's warning
 26 Looks after
 28 Worn-out stallions
 29 Choose not to come
 30 Partners of wherefores
 31 Addington Symonds field (abbr.)
 36 "Chim Chim Cher-ee" stacks
 38 Does Frasier Crane's job
 43 Skin decoration
 44 "___ Girl Friday" (Cary Grant movie)
 46 It dangles on a private
 47 Angelina Jolie's "Changeling" award
 48 Bubbles behind the boat
 49 Wife of Buck's Wang
 50 One way to have one's meat
 51 ___East of Eden_ director Kazan
 52 Scout's recitation
 53 "Render therefore ___ Caesar ..."
 54 Old man
 57 Wide size

Loathing the Clothing

Across

- 1 Caribbean pirate portrayer Johnny
 5 Refuse in a foundry
 9 Forgo swallowing
 13 Earthy color
 14 AZT dose
 15 Bone in a limp wrist
 16 "The Lion King" shouts at Scar

- 17 Meat that goes in your boxers
 18 Take the edge off
 19 Start of a playful dig about Kellyanne Conway's inauguration outfit
 22 Like Edna Turnblad
 24 Bodies of soldiers
 27 More of the dig
 32 Wing for Julia Morgan

Down

- 1 Young lady coming out
 2 Prefix for system
 3 Sticky stuff in Kate McKinnon's "Ghostbusters"
 4 Type of bra
 5 Where women might sweat together
 6 Composer Boulanger
 7 Mounts, to Maria von Trapp
 8 Look tickled pink

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Affirmations Welcomes New Volunteer

FERNDALE - Affirmations has been incredibly fortunate to receive the support of volunteers since their founding in 1989. Volunteers work throughout the community center performing a variety of tasks. In a brief Q&A, Affirmations' volunteer Jeffrey Oliver talks about his deep commitment to volunteering.

How long have you volunteered at Affirmations?

I have volunteered at Affirmations for 17 years. I started back in 2001.



What made you want to get involved with Affirmations' volunteering program?

I came to Affirmations as a center user in 2001. I was newly out and wanted to connect with other gay men, so I attended the men's group. I got started volunteering because two lesbian friends of mine cornered me in the library and asked

me to volunteer. Of course, I agreed.

Why is volunteering important to you?

Volunteering is important to me because Affirmations was there for me when I needed support. It's also important to me because I never want LGBTQ+ individuals to go through the same experience that I had when I came out alone.

Are you involved with any specific groups at Affirmations, aside from volunteering?

Currently, I facilitate Men's Discussion, Coming Out Over Coffee, as well as the LGBTQ Book and Film Club. I also volunteer twice a week at the Welcome & Resource Desk. For me, Affirmations is like a journey that just keeps getting better and better.

What are you passionate about outside of your volunteer work?

Outside of volunteering, I am an extremely passionate animal lover. I raise tropical parrots and aquarium fish. I also really enjoy swimming, yoga, and gardening.

To volunteer and learn more visit www.goaffirmations.org



Michigan Transgender Teen Published in National Geographic Magazine

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

FARMINGTON HILLS - When Hunter Keith was finally able to skateboard in the neighborhood skate park with his shirt off for the first time, he said it was "freeing." Keith of Farmington Hills was 10 days postoperative female-to-male chest reconstruction surgery - also known as "top surgery" - in the summer of 2016 when he said, "It hit me. I could do that now. I was always watching videos of guys skating with no shirts on. Now I

can do it."

This special moment was photographed by Lynn Johnson from National Geographic and appeared in the January 2017 issue of the magazine, titled "Gender Revolution." It was published as a part of the article "How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender," by Robin Marantz Henig, which navigates the shifting landscape that is gender identity.

"It really was dumb luck," said Hunter's mom, Roz Keith, about how this powerful photo came to be. She is

also the president and board of directors of Stand with Trans. While hosting a potluck picnic for transgender youth and their families, the Keith's were approached by a photo journalist from National Geographic who was there to interview another local family.

Hunter, 17, said he tries to be as visible as he can be, and realizes "not everyone will accept you for who you are. It's something you have to live with and accept yourself. It's about being okay with who you are."

Since coming out as transgender to his parents in 2013, Hunter didn't have to look far for support. He has been embraced within his community by his family, his friends, at his school, and his employer.

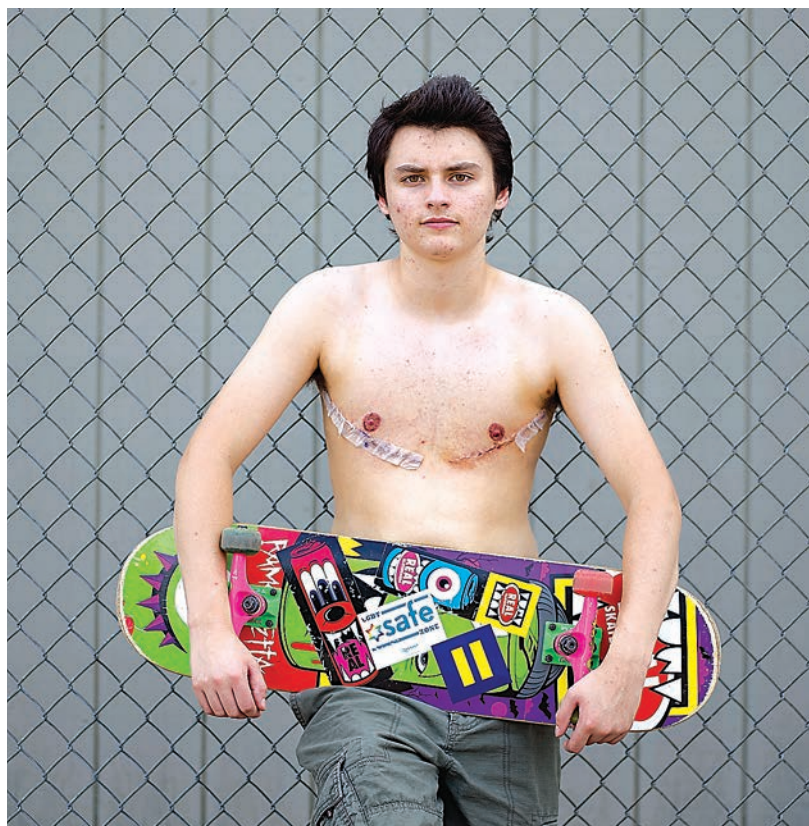
This type of acceptance has allowed the Keith's to engage other families in similar situations that need access to resources and people they can talk to.

"So they know they aren't alone. It's really cool talking with and having conversations with other trans people who need advice," said Hunter, who is also a longtime participant in Keshet's LGBTQ and Ally Teen Shabbaton. Keshet is a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life.

When it comes to being visible or maintaining privacy, Roz encourages parents to take their transgender child's lead.

"Respect what your child wants, and while it's not an automatic step-by-step process, the most important thing is to love your child unconditionally. This has shaped our family. I wouldn't change a thing."

For more information about Stand with Trans, visit <http://standwithtrans.org>.



Hunter Keith of Farmington Hills in January 2017 issue of National Geographic Magazine. Photo courtesy of Lynn Johnson

Benefit for Affirmations and Ruth Ellis Center

The Motor City Bears present 50/50 Bingo and Games Day on Feb. 25 from 2-6 p.m. at Affirmations at 290 W. Nine Mile Road in Ferndale. Not a bingo player? No problem. Bring a game of your choice to play and ask around. Rooms will be available for other gaming groups. Additional prizes will be raffled off including T-shirts and MCB memberships. Check out the Affirmations Facebook page for Bingo details. Fifty percent of the funds collected per game will be the winning prize. The other half will be split between Affirmations and Ruth Ellis Center. For more information, visit [Motor City Bears at www.meetup.com/Motor-City-Bears](http://www.meetup.com/Motor-City-Bears)





Feb. 25 Holistic Health Fair to Look at the Needs of Youth of Color Ages 13-29

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

DETROIT – The Horizons Project will present a holistic health conference for youth of color ages 13-29 on Feb. 25. The fair, “Healthy Me, Stigma Free,” aims to pair youth up with the health services they may need at the University of Michigan Center, 3663 Woodward in Detroit.

“The idea for the health fair came from numerous conversations between myself and my coworker, David Perrett Jr.,” said Ari Hampton, lab coordinator for the Horizons Project, a highly-acclaimed program of the Wayne State University School of Medicine. “The conversations centered on the continuous lack in support services and the need to increase community participation at health fairs where we were attendees. This dialog encouraged us to start asking the community what they wanted and/or needed to see at health fairs, which are geared towards them. We took their feedback and pitched the idea to our organization, where it was received with enthusiasm. We wanted to make sure that the wide range of community agencies that are going to participate in the health fair acknowledged that our community is more than just our sexual needs.”

To that end, the fair will offer health screenings – including Hepatitis C, HIV, Syphilis, blood pressure, glucose, vision and dental – as well as housing assistance, insurance enrollment, support groups and a clothing giveaway.

“We had attended different health fairs in the past, some that were successful and some that were a fail,” said Perrett Jr., an outreach representative with the Horizons Project. “We realized there was a not only a need but a big gap between service providers and the community. Often times we’re at a panel

discussion talking about STI’s but it’s never the holistic concerns of the community.”

That’s why, Hampton said, this fair will be different.

“The goal of this health fair is to not only provide a wide range of health screenings but also to provide a safe space that allows youth to obtain essential resources,” he said. “We also want youth to leave the event knowing that they have the right and ability to confidently navigate healthcare and support service systems in a stigma-free environment.

“In an effort to eliminate barriers and make this an educationally fun and interactive experience for the community, we will be providing all services for free,” Hampton continued. “There will be free food, music, group activities, crafting and a clothing closet for youth. We are also raffling off prizes for youth that receive any health screenings during this event.”

If this first health fair is a success, Hampton and Perrett Jr. are hoping to make it an annual event.

“We’re hoping to introduce a new somewhat progressive approach to how we service the community and we hope to build and foster better relationships between our community members and the service providers,” Perrett Jr. said. “Most importantly, we hope to make this an annual one-stop shop for health services. We realize it’s hard for people to find transportation to get to all these doctor’s appointments so we’re going to make this a central hub where people can come get screenings and their first introduction to health care. Then we will have done our job.”

For more information, contact the WSU Prevention and Outreach Department at 313-577-6098, by email at dperrett@med.wayne.edu or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/WSUPjoinUs.

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