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Karola Wollstein (left) and Diane Stead (right) with Hansi and Sylvie, their Wheaton Terriers. The couple was married in June 2017. Photo courtesy of Milhem Images, Inc.

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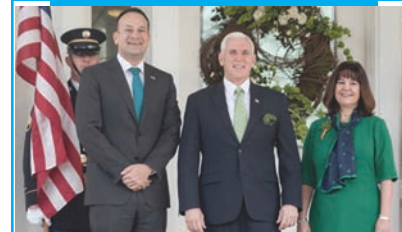


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U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell, Vegas Mass Shooting Survivor and Others to Attend March for Our Lives in Ann Arbor

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

On Saturday, March 24th, the March for our Lives will converge upon Washington, D.C. A student-led movement to end gun violence in our country, the march is an outgrowth of the activism of students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., who have been calling for action since a gunman killed 17 people in their school last month. Since then there have been student walk-outs across the country and now the focus moves to the march.

In addition to the national march in Washington, there will be marches in every state in the country, including several in Metro-Detroit and around Michigan, and even around the world. As of press time, more than 800 walks are being planned.

In Ann Arbor, the walk is being organized by 18-year-old Kennedy Dixon, a student at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti with a major in public and non-profit administration and a minor in public law and government.

"I was inspired that so many people my age and younger have become vocal about the issue, so I knew I had to get involved," Dixon said. "Normally most teenagers don't care much about politics. But following this past mass tragedy that took the lives of so many young people, the youth is here to say enough is enough."

The Ann Arbor march, which will start and end at Pioneer High School, 601 W Stadium Blvd. Organizers are asking that people begin to gather at 10:30 a.m. The walk will begin at 11 a.m. It will feature nearly a dozen speakers and performers. The list includes U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell; Las Vegas mass shooting survivor Liana Trevino; Celeste Kanpurwala from Moms Demand Action; 10th grade English teacher Mary Voorhurst; Washtenaw County Youth Liaison DaQuann Harrison; Howell High School student Ashley Dunn; social worker and Sandy Hook Promise volunteer Jennifer Tang-Cole; pediatrician Dr. Omkar Karthikeyan; State Rep. Yousef Rabhi; and student performers Seth & Kenyatta and Gemini.

Dixon said she is hoping at least a couple of thousand will show up for the march and rally.

"My only hope is that enough people come out to make us visible and heard, which I'm sure won't be an issue," she said.

Dixon also stressed that the March for our Lives movement is not anti-second amendment.

"We are not trying to take all guns away," Dixon said. "It is also supposed to be non-partisan with the thought that anybody, regardless of political affiliation, should be on board with common sense gun laws so we can save lives of innocent people."

When asked what political change she would like to see as a result of the worldwide march effort, Dixon was reluctant to say.

"As the organizer of this event I've been trying to refrain from publicly making my personal opinion known since I'm sure there is a plethora of solutions people [who plan to attend] the march are looking towards," Dixon started. "But among other things, I, personally, would like to see more protocol for the licensure of gun owners, mandatory safety classes, laws on gun storage, as well as a ban on military style weapons. Truthfully, I am very far from anti-second amendment. But I don't see the need for any citizen to own weapons that are made to kill while using excessive speed and force."

On the national March for our Lives website, Parkland student Emma Gonzalez, who has become a face for the movement, shared a message.

"This isn't a political rally," Gonzalez said. "It's literally a march for our lives. Please help us amplify our voices by using yours. Be part of this moment in time. I believe the young people in this country can change the world. And wouldn't that be something?"

For more information on March of our Lives Ann Arbor, visit <https://marchforourlivesan.wixsite.com/mysite> and for information on the national march or additional marches in your area, visit www.marchforourlives.com.



Emma Gonzalez of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School has become one of the faces of the new gun reform movement.

LGBT Advocates Joining March For Our Lives in D.C.

BY LOU CHIBBARO JR.

The Human Rights Campaign and the National LGBTQ Task Force are among a large number of LGBT advocacy organizations and LGBT activists expected to participate in a March 24 demonstration in the nation's capital against gun violence.

The March For Our Lives, which was initiated by student survivors of the Feb. 14 school shooting in Parkland, Fla. that claimed the lives of 17 people, is expected to draw hundreds of thousands to the Washington march and at more than 100 regional marches expected to be held across the country and abroad.

"On March 24, the kids and families of March For Our Lives will take to the streets of Washington, D.C. to demand that their lives and safety become a priority and that we end gun violence and mass shootings in our schools today," a statement on the event's website says.

Organizers say a key component of the event will be a call for Congress and state legislatures to strengthen the nation's gun control laws.

Although the event is being billed as a "march," spokespersons for D.C. police and the National Park Service have said organizers of the March For Our Lives have stated in their permit applications that the event will consist of a large rally on Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., between 3rd and 12th streets, N.W.

"We are not aware of any plans for a march or a demonstration at the White House, but the organizers would be the best source for that information," said D.C. police spokesperson Sean Hickman.

Hickman was responding to an inquiry from

the Washington Blade about unconfirmed rumors that participants of the event planned to march past the White House.

The March For Our Lives website doesn't include a phone number, and the Blade couldn't immediately reach a representative of the event for comment.

Shortly after students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., where the school shooting took place announced plans for the Washington march, the nonprofit group Everytown for Gun Safety founded by former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced it would provide financing and logistical support for the event. A representative of the group didn't immediately respond to a message from the Blade.

Among the Stoneman Douglas High students who have emerged as vocal advocates for strengthened gun control laws is junior Emma Gonzalez, who also serves as president of her school's Gay Straight Alliance Club.

Impassioned pleas by Stoneman Douglas High students for action by Congress and state legislatures for stronger gun control laws prompted a number of Hollywood celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey, George Clooney, and Steven Spielberg, to pledge hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions for the march and efforts by the students for strengthened gun control legislation.

Alex Morash, a spokesperson for the D.C.-based National LGBTQ Task Force, said the Task Force has endorsed the March For Our Lives and the group's staff and volunteers will

See March 24: D.C., page 15

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Dr. Abdul El-Sayed Challenges Tradition as Gubernatorial Candidate

BY TODD HEYWOOD

He's an outsider with no formal elective office experience, but Dr. Abdul El-Sayed is the upstart candidate in the Democratic primary for governor. He is rattling the traditionalism of the party and its selection process, but he says he's doing it not by reaping cash hand over fist from bundlers and political action committees. Instead, his approach is through small donations from his fervent followers.

He acknowledges the comparison to Sen. Bernie Sanders primary challenge to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that rocked national Democrats, but deftly puts it aside.

"That's nice," he said sitting in a Subway in downtown Lansing. "But I think I am me."

However, in a July report from Politico, El-Sayed's campaign team were eager to acknowledge that they were using the Sanders' handbook, hoping to grab the collective attention of the anti-establishment wing of the Democrats.

His team is a mishmash of Sanders players and supporters, youthful interns with eternal optimism and political advisors with a history of working with the come-from-behind candidate winners.

At 33, El-Sayed is a new father and devout Muslim. He's also Michigan born and raised. He played three sports in high school, went to the University of Michigan, took on a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford, obtained his medical degree from Columbia University and even taught public health at that institution's prestigious Mailman School of Public Health. He made his way back to Detroit to head up the revitalization of the city's public health program.

There's no question El-Sayed will face a long fight uphill to secure the nomination. He's been attacked on questions about his residency — questions he dismisses, "We have election attorneys who say I qualify for the ballot."

Still, they linger. Like one raised in a Bridge Magazine piece by Joel Kurth this year: Will a professorship in NYC jeopardize his campaign?

And, to add to these doubts, his name recognition is not high. For that matter, neither is Sen. Gretchen Whitmer's — the presumed front-runner in the Democratic race. Sri Thanedar is the only Democrat to have name recognition, according a poll released last week by Epic MRA of Lansing.

Jack Lessenberry, who teaches journalism at Wayne State University and expounds his political views in commentaries for Michigan



Dr. Abdul El-Sayed is the upstart candidate in the Democratic primary for governor.

Public Radio, noted that El-Sayed has another significant issue to overcome: his own name.

The following is an edited transcript of the conversation on LGBTQ issues with El-Sayed.

What role do you see for the LGBTQ Michiganders in any future administration and other appointments if you win the governor's office?

Partners in governance. I'm really proud that when I started the Detroit Health Department, the first administrative hire that I made was of a deputy director — and one of the most incredible leaders I've ever gotten the privilege to work with. She identifies as a lesbian and is raising her two daughters with her wife, Steph. I recognize the critical need to have representation in the governor's office, and in the cabinet when we're having conversations about how best to support the lives of folks. As a cis straight male, I know that I have deep blind spots when it comes to the ways in which the LGBTQ community has been discriminated against. While I'm well aware of the key issues, I just can't

appreciate the ways through which all of these issues insinuate themselves in peoples' lives.

Do you support the voluntary guidance that was approved last year by the state board of education to assist schools in creating an environment where LGBTQ students can live, learn and thrive?

It's critical that we're empowering young LGBTQ students. I actually think we need to move beyond voluntary guidance. I think the guidance on its face is a good start. I think we need to move beyond voluntary and start having conversations with school boards. What's going to happen is you're going to have resistant school boards and school districts. I think being able to put some teeth to this is really important in terms of defending young people.

Do you support an LGBTQ-inclusive sex education curriculum? That includes frank discussions on

how HIV infection can be avoided. And beyond only talking about abstinence and the use of condoms, because we now know there's a lot of new science.

I'm a doctor and I will support anything that will empower somebody to be their own best protector of their health. Keeping people away from information that can be used to protect them is, to me, just frankly wrong and abominable. I think there's a responsibility to have comprehensive, well-enumerated, anatomically and physiologically correct conversations about sex and sex education — which includes conversations about sexual and gender identity, and includes conversations about being able to protect against sexually transmitted infections. HIV being one of them.

Are you willing to fight at the state level to allow students to use bathroom and sport facilities, and sports teams that concur with their gender identity?

What we know is that people are the best arbiters of who they are. What we've often

It's critical that we're empowering young LGBTQ students. I actually think we need to move beyond voluntary guidance. I think the guidance on its face is a good start. I think we need to move beyond voluntary and start having conversations with school boards.

tried to do, unfortunately through broken social policy, is tell people what they can and can't do as a function of biological rather than individual identities. To me, I think it's really important for us to fight at the state level to protect access to bathrooms, to locker rooms, to sports teams of choice for young people. The consequence here that we don't appreciate is that not only are you otherizing people who usually have a much harder time in school because of the risk of bullying as a function of gender identity, but also the mental health consequences of this are real. They're tangible. We have a responsibility to protect and to empower young people, whoever they are. That includes transgender men and women.

What would you do in your role as governor to help support Gay-Straight Alliances, and GSA's in Michigan schools?

I think the role of governor is unique because you have both the legislative and bureaucratic platform. You also have a cultural platform, and the opportunity to lead on key issues. Being able to drive a conversation about the importance of unity and solidarity and allyship and alliance at the level of the governor, I think, helps to empower those kinds of movements at other levels.

What's your view on term limits which impact our current and future LGBT legislators? Plus, the dramatic drop in women in our state legislature, and, more importantly, how do we fix it?

I oppose legislative term limits. I think term limits for the governor are good because the ability to accumulate executive power is substantially higher. [Legislators] do whatever it takes to solve short-term problems, but not long-term problems like making sure we're financially empowered and largely building out the kind of infrastructure and the kind of investments in human developments and human welfare that

we need as a state. I think the outcomes of legislative term limits speak for themselves. We've seen sort of (the) eliminating out, disproportionately, of minority and of female and of LGBTQ legislators. Unfortunately, it hobbles the progress that so many have made on so many important issues in government.

How will you expand secular adoption options for LGBTQ couples?

I think it's obviously discriminatory policy. Anything that discriminates against Michiganders is something that I will oppose. On this issue I just think there's a responsibility that we have to both amend Elliot-Larsen to make sure that it enumerates the rights of LGBTQ-identifying Michiganders, and then, even beyond, that to enumerate the rights of folks in the constitution.

Beyond those "license to discriminate" laws, what do you think needs to be done to close the chasm between the LGBTQ community and the religious community?

A lot of folks wonder, I'm a devout Muslim. A lot of folks will say, "How can you, as a devout Muslim, be so supportive of the LGBTQ community?" And that's because in my faith we're told that all people are equal. The way that I hope to lead as a function of how I believe as an American, and also personally as a Muslim suggests to me that any system within which we're allowing somebody to be discriminated against is a broken, unfair, unjust system that deserves to be toppled. I think there's an opportunity for us to sit down and say, "How do we heal that chasm by recognizing that baked into these faith positions is the idea that we ought to be dignifying people and empowering them?"

Would you support the decriminalization of HIV? Specifically, would you support Jon Hoadley's legislation that would create two levels of misdemeanors for infected people – when it can be proven – who had the intention of transmitting the virus, and engaged in behavior that's demonstrated to transmit the virus??

Of course, I'm a doctor I treated patients with HIV. One of the big things that we have to recognize about HIV is that no disease can be illegal. The continuing forward of these laws on the books stigmatize people with the disease.

More information about El-Sayed's campaign can be found online at abdulformichigan.com.

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Longtime LGBTQ Activist Joy Geng Retires, Reflects on Decades of Engagement

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The year was 1991, and long-term plans were being set in motion. The Michigan Organization of Human Rights (MOHR) had created the MOHR Foundation as a separate legal entity to fight discrimination against the LGBTQ community. With this expansion, the next step was clear: buying an office space. After some searching, a dentist's office on Seven Mile Road in Northwest Detroit became home base. And, before long, the Foundation had renamed itself the Lesbian and Gay Foundation of Michigan (LGMF).

On the board were Henry Messer, John Monahan and, at Messer's urging, his next-door neighbor Joy Geng, a manager at Ford.

"Henry kind of bugged me until I gave in," Geng said. "I had a more than full-time job at that time and I didn't have a lot of extra time. I had a partner and a family. But he got me."

Geng would become an integral member of the organization; staying with it through both glory and conflict. But, at the time, the hitch was that Geng was not yet out of her other job, so she joined the board under the name of Jay Grange. Then, she got to work.

"Our mission was primarily beginning to look at hate crimes," Geng said. "At some point, and I don't recall how, we got some money and we decided to call ourselves the Triangle Foundation. Then we realized we needed a staff."

The board hired attorney Jay Kaplan as its first employee but the partnership was not meant to last. Kaplan left after only two weeks.

"I left on my own," said Kaplan, "realizing that I was not up to the daunting task of running the organization."

Next, the board hired a brash young activist named Jeffrey Montgomery.

"He turned out to be a great hire and Jay went on to do great things at the ACLU using his legal skills," Geng said.

However, stuck in Geng's craw is the widely-believed misinformation that Montgomery was a founder of the organization. He came close, but he wasn't. Still, Montgomery wasted no time making an impact.

"He became the face of the organization," Geng said. "We began receiving donations because of the work he was doing. So we had a little bit of money. When we did, our objective was to try to provide Jeff with some staff."

Two of the most significant members the board approved were Sean Kosofsky, who joined in 1996 and was soon appointed director

of policy, and Kevin McAlpine, who started in 1998 as director of development.

"It was Sean and Kevin that was really the foundation of the organizational staff," said Geng. "Sean brought the activism and

Coming Out

As Geng became more and more involved with Triangle, she found herself becoming more comfortable with herself.



Joy Geng. BTL photo: Jason A. Michael

Kevin was a fund raiser. He really brought structure into the organization, both in terms of management and the staff, and the business and the finances."

"The process of coming out was one of the most wonderful things that happened to me," Geng said. "When I did come out at Ford I had to tell my management and my employees. I had their full support. And the only comment that was made by one of the top VPs was, 'Did

I know Ellen Degeneres?'"

By then, Triangle was in the middle of its biggest growth spurt to date.

"I think after losing Prop 2 in 2004 there was a lot of interest in funding some of the organizations in the state and Triangle benefitted from that," said Geng. "That really helped us to expand. The budget was significantly higher than it had ever been and we were able to hire more staff."

At one point, Triangle had 13 full-time employees. But Geng wasn't just around for the glory days, she was still there when the agency fell into decline.

Montgomery left amid scandal in 2007 and was replaced by Kate Runyon. Funding decreased, and Kosofsky and McAlpine both departed the agency in 2008. Geng was discouraged and actually left the board in disgust.

"I disagreed with the board on how Jeff's departure was handled," Geng said. "And I disagreed with the selection of his replacement, so I stepped off the board. Then, about six months later, Alicia Skillman was the executive director and she called me and asked me to come back."

Community Infighting

Among all the tumult, members of the organization began to butt heads.

"One thing I was shocked at when I began my work with Triangle was how competitive our community was with each other," said Geng. "So many different personalities, certainly with an interest in building power in organizations, an 'I'm better than you' kind of thing. And I think all of that created what I called "Mission Creep," which is when everybody wanted to do everything. For example, I remember when Affirmations was seeking a 501(c)(4) so they could jump into politics."

Also in the business of LGBTQ politics was Michigan Equality — an agency founded by Beth Bashert in 1999 that Geng said "directly competed with Triangle."

"I'm sure to the legislative people we looked unorganized because we were carrying two different messages, and it hurt us," Geng said. "I thought, 'Good Lord, we're all on the same team and we ought to be doing it together.' So, I was shocked at how much energy the community wasted working against each other."

And even though she asked Geng to come on, Skillman left the same year Triangle merged with Michigan Equality, taking on the new name Equality Michigan. Geng called the process of merging "very painful." But

“ You have to agree on what your slice of the pie is, and focus on your slice of the pie and not anybody else’s slice of the pie. Keep it simple. Even the most complicated issues can be broken down into small pieces to sizes that are solvable. ”

– Joy Geng

funding was still down and staff turnover high.

After Skillman, the board hired Denise Brogan-Kator to lead the agency. Brogan-Kator became the agency’s first transgender executive director, but her tenure would end a mere 10 months later.

“When Denise left that was a blow,” said Geng. “Those circumstances are confidential, but it wasn’t expected. I remember the day after the press release was issued the executive director of Affirmations was at our back door wanting to come in and help us get back on track. That’s not what he wanted though. He wanted the business.”

Donations continued to drop and the agency was in a downward spiral.

“There were times when I wasn’t sure we were gonna be able to keep the doors open,” Geng said. “I think it was Dave Wait and I who were primarily the two people who supported us financially at that time. But we were determined to not let the organization fold.”

In 2013, Emily Dievendorf became the fifth executive director to lead the agency. Then, in 2014, Messer died. Dievendorf departed in 2015 and Stephanie White came onboard in her place.

The Long Path to Stability

Today, nearly three years after White’s arrival, Geng decided the organization was on enough equal footing that she could feel comfortable stepping down from the board after 27 years of service. She credits White and the current board for making her comfortable with leaving.

“Stephanie has the communication skills that are necessary,” Geng said. “She has the ability to work with others in the community, and I simply felt comfortable with Stephanie and the board. They have been able to really focus on two main objectives: One is to repeal Elliot Larsen — which may not happen ever — and the other is to continue to focus on hate crimes.”

As she leaves, Geng said she is unsure what her legacy will be.

“I think other people can determine that,” she said. “I think the one thing that I brought that wasn’t there initially and really hasn’t been until recently is some stability in terms of financial reporting and financial analysis. One of the important things that I think most non-profits don’t understand is that what

they’re really doing is running a business. It’s a business, and they have a product and they have customers. You can’t do something unless you can pay for it, and you can’t pay for it unless you plan and you fundraise.”

But, even though Geng can’t say for certain what she will be remembered for, historian Tim Retzloff said that Geng’s contributions to Michigan’s LGBT community have been great.

“In nearly three decades of activism, Joy Geng has witnessed tremendous change in our community, and has been an agent of that change, both with her involvement with the Triangle Foundation/Equality Michigan, and her pioneering activism at Ford,” said Retzloff. “While her name might not be as well-known as those of Henry Messer and Jeffrey Montgomery, Joy Geng deserves to be recognized as a leader in the movement for social change.”

A Message for Posterity

Geng said her note to the next generation of leaders is that communication and partnership with community members is key.

“You have to agree on what your slice of the pie is, and focus on your slice of the pie and not anybody else’s slice of the pie. Keep it simple. Even the most complicated issues can be broken down into small pieces to sizes that are solvable,” she said.

In a 2005 interview with Between The Lines, Geng said she hoped to see the day when the LGBTQ community organizations were no longer needed and discrimination against LGBTQ people was a thing of the past. Now, as she retires from the Equality Michigan board she’s not quite so philosophical.

“I was dreaming,” said Geng. “Still, that’s a great answer and I would love to see all the organizations go out of business because we have no discrimination. We’ve worked so hard over the years. It seems we take two steps forward and then one step back. But I don’t think they’ll ever go away. We’re always going to need our organizations to support our needs and our rights.”

Tim Retzloff contributed to this article. He is an adjunct assistant professor of history and LGBT studies at Michigan State University.

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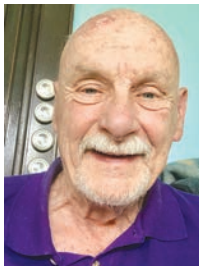
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Tidbits from Tan-Tam Tammy

Parting Glances

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

In 1987 some 165,000 people pledged \$1,000 to Muskegon-born Jim Bakker's Heritage USA, a Bible-themed vacation and so-called recreation village.

For their ready cash, each attendee was promised a four-day stay and a down-home gospel good time. They got nothing, and being good Christians, they sued. According to Christianity Today, a settlement was eventually reached in 2003, 16 years later. It entitled each claimant to a court-ordered token refund of \$6.54.

(Attorneys got \$2.5 million of the \$3.7 million settlement – which in this world of commission by omission is how things often go for the gullible; no matter how bless'd they may lay claim to being.

And it cost \$200,000 of the settlement to track the claimants.)

Bakker, 78, who's presently back as a fundamentalist TV preacher – respected, one presumes by the 81 percent of evangelicals who voted for Donald John Trump as president – was married in the '80s to Tammy Faye, much beloved, "Queen of Mascara" by the nascent rainbow drag-bingo community.

Those who don't know the almost forgotten details of what happened may nonetheless profit morally from learning that in 1989 Jim Bakker got 45 years in the slammer for cheating the faithful – and using some

In between guest appearances on "The Hollywood Squares," Tammy's church work, her duties as Roe's bubbly soul mate and her role as starry-orb'd makeup queen to all God's kith and kin, she somehow found time to reflect upon her once-waffled Bakker domestic life and write, "I Will Survive ... And You Will, Too!"

of their hard-earned cash to air-condition his family doghouse.

He was released after five years of state-mandated, un-airconditioned meditation and is presently now back and hitting the hallelujah trail – a great deal grayer, a damn sight poorer (so far), but still eager to sell real estate in that Glorious Theme Park-in-the-Sky. All tax-free.

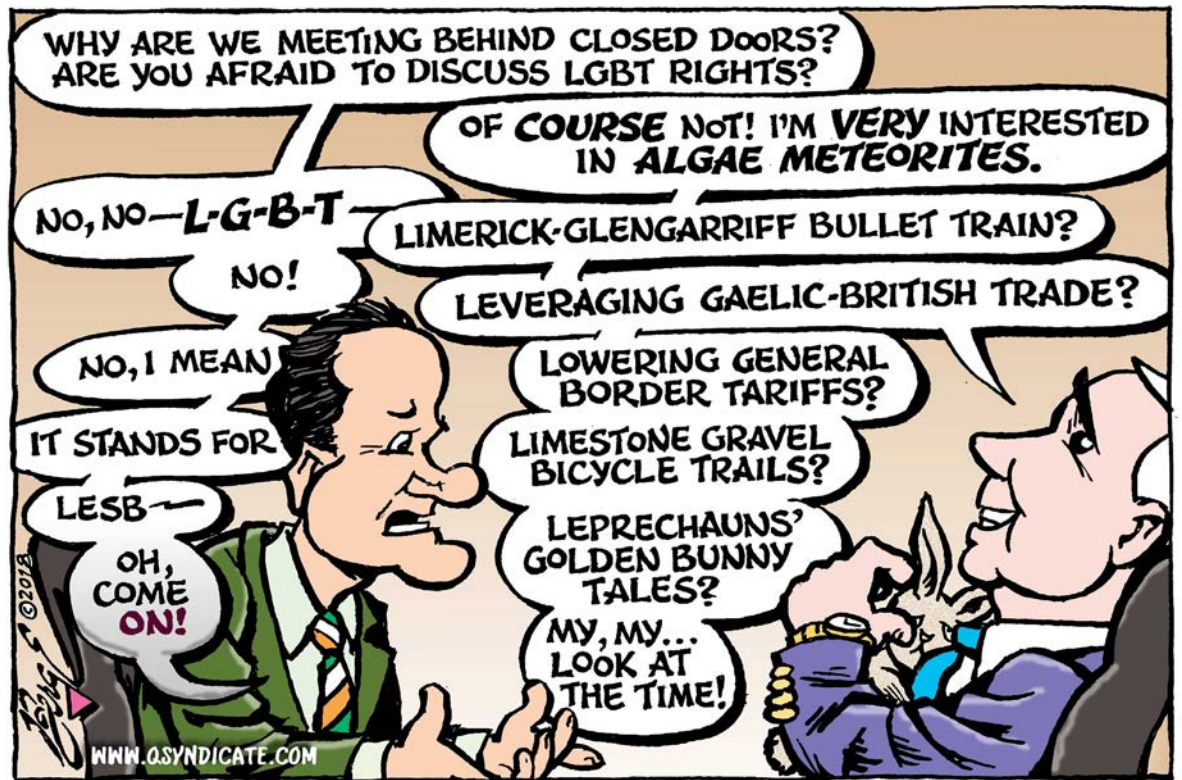
Ex-wife Tammy Faye – who single-handedly made mascara-embossed tears a mainstay for TV Mary Magdalenes – died in 2007. The Holy Spirit – apparently with nothing better to do socially – moved her to dump Jimmy and to marry someone with more inspirational wherewithal (read not rumored to be bisexual).

Tammy Faye became Mrs. Roe Messner and lived reasonably happily as a mint julep in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her born-again hubby, born-again puppies Muffin and Tuppins, born-again tabby-cattums Tinkerbell and unlimited access to squeaky toys, rawhide chews and Tender Vittles.

In between guest appearances on "The Hollywood Squares," Tammy's church work, her duties as Roe's bubbly soul mate and her role as starry-orb'd makeup queen to all God's kith and kin, she somehow found time to reflect upon her once-waffled Bakker domestic life and write, "I Will Survive ... And You Will, Too!"

I would be intellectually – and, maybe, just spiritually remiss if I

See next page



SO, HOW DID THAT MEETING BETWEEN MIKE PENCE AND IRELAND'S OPENLY GAY PRIME MINISTER LEO VARADKAR GO?

Viewpoint



BY DR. CHRISTINE CANTRELL

Emotional Support Animals: Real or Fake?

Once I encountered a goat on an airplane. I had one short flight left to reach my destination from Nigeria to Ghana, and the old workhorse plane was overstuffed with luggage, squawking chickens and smelly, bleating goats. It barely lifted its nose for takeoff. This was my first exposure to the bribe culture: enough Cedis, and your goat will fly!

Animals have shared our homes and worked with us for over 10,000 years. Once tamed, interspecies relationships flourished as dogs helped humans hunt and herd, and cats protected grain stores from vermin and goats gave milk, meat and hides.

Now, we keep animals in our homes as pets for

companionship. They sleep in our beds and gorge on treats we feed them. Working dogs have modern jobs as search and rescue, Seeing Eye or bomb sniffing dogs. And they might share the same cabin of a plane as you, or they might patrol with an officer at an outdoor concert.

There is a newer category of "Emotional Support Animal" in which a pet owner needs a certificate from a therapist, a pet vest and ID to permit that pet to go wherever you go. These dogs, cats, parrots, rats and hamsters do amazingly effective work, like sense a seizure in time to alert their person into a safe position, or they assist someone with physical limitations (e.g., a

See next page

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► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 10

quadruplegic person) or reassure someone who is emotionally scarred from PTSD and give confidence to a person with Autism.

However, as this cadre surges, fake support animals, aka pets, are threatening the rights of people who rely on real working animals and the rights of people who want to avoid animals due to legitimate allergies and fears. Ours may not be a bribe economy, but it is too easy to access necessary documents on the internet for fake support animals.

I have written three or four certifying letters for emotional support animals to be able to live in their owner’s apartment, dorm or workplace, or for travel required by their owner’s job. So far, all those animals I have certified have been small and either contained as a companion rat in a cage or are a leashed dog under 10 pounds, and they are up to date on shots.

A man complains to me that when he goes to his Birmingham Starbucks for his daily cuppa Joe, pets are there, and often not on a leash. He tells the manager that animals don’t belong in a restaurant, who

► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 12

failed to offer BTL readers tasty tidbits from Tammy’s homespun, tug-at-your-hearts, 285-page cornucopia of self-help advice, glamour tips and low-cal cooking formulas. After all, she was very gay friendly.

For starters, this book promo: “Tammy Faye is known for many things, including her steadfast faith, the scandal that rocked a nation, and those oh-so-famous eyelashes. But above all, she is a survivor. No matter how often life has tried to push her down, Tammy Faye has always landed on her high heels.”

Tammy Tidbit #1: “Don’t give up! Moses was a basket case.”/ “When your dreams turn to dust, vacuum!”/ “God answers kneemail.” [Kneepads are a fashion optional.]

Tidbit #2: “Tan fat looks better than white fat. Oops! Didn’t mean to put that one in.”

agrees, but doesn’t take any action. Since many people are not clear on the law, they dare not confront a pet owner, even if the pet is out of control. The man privately tells me that he is going to call the State Health Department if the manager doesn’t do something.

The New York Times recently featured an airline that refused to board a peacock even though the passenger had bought a seat just for that peacock. Imagine being seated next to a peacock the next time you fly across country!

American Airlines is developing more stringent requirements for Emotional Support Animals, requiring not just a therapist’s letter of the person having a mental health disorder, but a letter from the animal’s veterinarian, vouching for the pet’s health and the owner’s ability to control that animal. Watch for these changes, coming soon.

Christine Cantrell, Ph.D., is a Fully Licensed Psychologist in private practice in Royal Oak. She and her wife have five working cats who stay at home, or at least the neighborhood, working as Pest Controllers, a la Felix, the Senior Pest Controller of Huddersfield (UK) Railroad Station: gaybe.am/46.

[But you did, Tan-Tam, you did!]

Tidbit #3: “Most of the gays I meet say they were born that way. They’re not flip about it. They are dead serious. They discuss with me their fears, their hopes, their dreams. We talk about God, about heaven and hell. They allow me to ask questions ... to disagree with them, because they know I’m not out to hurt them but am talking to them in love. God leads in peace!”

Oh, yes. I just bought an autographed copy of Tammy’s book. It cost me \$6.54. (Eyelashes included.)

Charles Alexander is prolific both as a BTL columnist (700-plus columns) and as a well-known LGBT community artist (1000 Face Book images). He is a Spirit of Detroit Award recipient and an Affirmations LGBT CENTER Jan Stevenson awardee. Connect with him at Charles@pridesource.com.

Creep of the Week

Peter Thiel

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

There’s a serial bomber at large in Austin, Texas. Two people have been killed and at least three injured in four separate bombing incidents. The target of these bombs appear to be black and brown people. Once upon a time this would have been front page news across the country. But the Trump presidency has been such a horror show that the second coming of Ted Kaczynski is being treated like an aside outside of Texas.

And that’s why I hate investor and PayPal founder Peter Thiel.

Okay, wait a minute. Let me back up. I don’t hate Thiel. But I do not like him. At all. I think he’s a pretty horrible person.

And, to be clear, I’m not blaming the bombings on him. (Although if it does turn out to be Thiel then you read it here first!)

But the fact that Thiel not only backed Trump in the 2016 election, but is still backing him now over a year into this disaster of a presidency shows that Thiel lacks a certain something. That something being integrity, or morality or compassion for people who aren’t billionaires and are actually suffering under Trump’s hateful and petty administration.

I know it’s not cool to make generalities, but rich people are the worst. I know, I know. There are nice rich people out there (probably). But if the Trump era (and may it be the shortest era known to mankind) has highlighted anything, it’s that the more money you have the more shit you can get away with. Trump and his family are the perfect example of how money can’t buy class or character. But it can buy a presidency apparently.

But back to Thiel. Thiel, a gay man, backs a president who has done everything he can to roll back advances in LGBTQ rights, because Thiel can afford to. Literally.

It reminds me of a certain powerful lesbian named Mary Cheney during a time when her dad was the vice president in an administration that was openly hostile to LGBTQ people. So lucky for her that she was insulated from all of that through power and wealth.

During a recent interview with Maria Bartiromo of Fox News Thiel said, “Our greatest political problem is the problem of political correctness.”

Said the white rich guy who sued Gawker media out of existence for daring to publish that he is gay. I’m not saying that outing people is great, but it appears that Thiel’s

Thiel, a gay man, backs a president who has done everything he can to roll back advances in LGBTQ rights, because Thiel can afford to. Literally. During a recent interview with Maria Bartiromo of Fox News Thiel said, “Our greatest political problem is the problem of political correctness.” Said the white rich guy who sued Gawker media out of existence for daring to publish that he is gay. I’m not saying that outing people is great, but it appears that Thiel’s sexual orientation was not a secret.

sexual orientation was not a secret. And that his fire and fury lawsuit was literally inspired by speech he did not like kinda makes his whole “political correctness” stance look like bs

Lambasting “political correctness” is the go-to for sexists and racists and homophobes alike when complaining that “you can’t even tell a gal she has nice tits anymore,” or “it’s reverse racism that only black people are allowed to use the N-word” or “can you believe my kid got detention for calling someone a fag?”

What Thiel really means is that there is too much liberal politics in Silicon Valley. Such liberal political dominance, says Thiel, has made it a very “totalitarian place” that isn’t open to opposing ideas.

Ideas like, “The giant baby-man from the ‘you’re fired’ show on TV who rage-Tweets at the FBI all day instead of reading national security briefings and who has made the White House into a veritable ‘Keeping Up With the Trumpashians’ is a great president. All hail our great leader.”

And considering how Trump has been everything that those who voted against him feared he would be, and worse, I’d say anywhere that’s rejecting him is at least doing that one thing right.

In other news, Thiel says that Bitcoin is going to be the next big thing. Be sure to stock up so you have enough money to compensate for the civil rights you stand to lose under Trump.

Pence Criticized for Excluding Media from Breakfast with Gay Irish PM

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

Vice President Mike Pence is taking heat for excluding the media from his breakfast meeting with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who is gay.

The breakfast at the Naval Observatory is a tradition for St. Patrick's Day, which is a time when the Irish leader makes his annual visit to Washington to meet with U.S. leaders. This year, Varadkar was representing Ireland during his first year as prime minister.

But this year was different than previous years: The breakfast was now between an openly gay leader of Ireland and a vice president with a draconian anti-gay record. What's also different is that in the past reporters were able to attend the breakfast, but this time the exchange was closed to the media.

Prior to the breakfast, Varadkar was quoted in the Ireland publication *TheJournal.ie* as saying he'd like to raise LGBT issues with the vice president during the breakfast.

"I am going to be meeting him over breakfast on Friday morning, so if I have the opportunity I will certainly be mentioning the wider issue of equal rights and freedoms for LGBT citizens," Varadkar said.

The nation's largest LGBT group, the Human Rights Campaign, pounced on the closed-press nature of the breakfast as evidence Pence didn't want to be seen with a gay person or be held accountable for his anti-LGBT record.

Pence has an extensive anti-LGBT history. As a U.S. House member, Pence backed a U.S. constitutional amendment that would have banned same-sex marriage; he also opposed hate crimes protections legislation, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" repeal and a version of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

Most prominently, Pence in 2015 as Indiana



Vice President Mike Pence (center) and Second Lady Karen Pence (right) met with the gay Irish PM Leo Varadkar for St. Patrick's Day breakfast. (Photo courtesy Twitter)

governor signed a "religious freedom" bill allowing businesses and individuals to refuse services and discriminate against LGBT people. After pressure from LGBT advocates and the business community, Pence was forced to sign a "fix" to the law significantly limiting its scope.

Pence has been dogged by comments from his 2000 campaign for the U.S. House stipulating he would support HIV/AIDS funding on the condition that resources are directed to institutions that "provide assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behavior." That has been interpreted as support for "ex-gay" conversion therapy, although Pence through a spokesperson has denied he ever supported the practice.

The perception Pence backed conversion

therapy came to the fore during the Winter Olympics when gay skater Adam Rippon said he wouldn't meet with Pence because he "funded gay conversion therapy." A Pence spokesperson asserted the claim was false. Tension grew when USA Today reported Pence sought a meeting with Rippon, but the skater declined it. Pence tweeted out the article was fake and pledged support for Rippon, but the public didn't buy it based on the vice president's anti-LGBT history.

Although the breakfast itself within the Naval Observatory was closed to media, reporters were granted access outside for Pence's invite of Varadkar to the event. According to the U.K.-based *Independent*, Pence ignored questions shouted at him by reporters and Varadkar didn't respond to a

question about whether he'd bring up same-sex marriage with Pence.

Alyssa Farrah, a Pence spokesperson, affirmed the breakfast itself was closed to the press and said the two leaders already appeared together at events in the White House that were open to the media.

"The vice president and the prime minister met and spoke together at multiple events yesterday," Farrah said. "Today's informal breakfast is set up like every breakfast the vice president has had with a foreign leader following their meetings at the White House."

According to the Irish media, the decision to close the event to press was made by the Pence camp. Farrah denied the breakfast was made closed press at behest of the vice president, but didn't respond to a follow-up email on who made the decision.

Sources within the vice president's office said there's no precedent for open or closed press for this breakfast, even though last year's breakfast was open press, because it's only the second time the vice president has participated. (In 2015 and 2016, the breakfasts between then-Vice President Joseph Biden and then-Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny were open press.)

The vice president's office made public transcripts of remarks from Pence and Varadkar during the breakfast. Not once during those remarks, according to the transcripts, did either of the leaders articulate views on LGBT rights, despite Varadkar's pledge to bring it up.

Also made public via the vice president's Twitter account were photos of Pence and Varadkar together during the breakfast, which were captioned with words from Pence praising the U.S.-Ireland relationship.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National LGBT Media Association.

Pride Fund Endorses Tammy Baldwin for Re-election

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

The only LGBT group focused solely on gun reform has endorsed Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), who's running for re-election in Wisconsin for the U.S. Senate in what could be a competitive race.

Jason Lindsay, executive director of the Pride Fund to End Gun Violence, said in a statement Monday his organization based its endorsement of Baldwin on her LGBT record as the only out lesbian in Congress and her support for gun control.

"Tammy Baldwin has repeatedly proven her commitment to passing sensible gun legislation which is supported by her F-rating from the NRA," Lindsay said. "Baldwin's

support for comprehensive background checks and preventing those convicted of hate crimes from owning firearms are two gun safety measures that will undoubtedly save lives. Sen. Baldwin's leadership on civil rights issues and her outspoken position on commonsense gun reform proves that she is the kind of leader we need in Congress."

Baldwin obtains the endorsement from the Pride Fund as she runs for re-election in a state that narrowly went to President Trump in the 2016 election. Outside conservative groups, including the Koch brothers-funded Americans for Prosperity, have spent millions of dollars seeking to unseat her in the congressional mid-term election.

In a statement, Baldwin said she welcomes

support from the Pride Fund as they both pursue efforts to enact gun control in the aftermath of repeated mass shootings in the United States, most recently the shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla., that left 17 people dead.

"I'm proud to have the support of the Pride Fund to End Gun Violence as we work together to stop the rising tide of mass shootings, hate crimes and discrimination in America," Baldwin said. "Washington must listen to the voices of those whose lives have been touched by these horrific tragedies and are calling for action to stop gun violence in America."



The Pride Fund to End Gun Violence has endorsed U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.). (Washington Blade photo by Michael Key)

Bisexual Rio Councilwoman, Human Rights Activist Killed

BY FELIPE ALFACE

RIO DE JANEIRO – Rio de Janeiro Councilwoman Marielle Franco was killed on March 14 at around 9:30 p.m. local time after attending and speaking at a black women’s empowerment event in the city.

Franco was known for fighting for minorities.

She was a bisexual Brazilian of African descent who grew up in one of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. Franco was also one of Rio de Janeiro’s most outspoken critics of police actions in these areas of the city.

She was a member of Rio de Janeiro’s black, LGBT, feminist and favela communities. Franco leaves behind an 18-year-old daughter and a partner who is the first woman with whom she fell in love.

The Brazilian military currently controls Rio de Janeiro’s police in an attempt to curtail the city’s rampant violence. Franco was, among other things, a member of the commission that monitored the military’s intervention in the city.

She denounced the assassination of young people from the community of Acari on her Twitter account just four days before her murder. Franco fiercely blamed the police’s 41st battalion for abusing their power, calling it “the death battalion.”

As the police continue their investigation into Franco’s murder, it is becoming clear that it was nothing short of an execution. One of the newest developments comes from security cameras in the streets of Lapa, the neighborhood where Franco moderated a political debate about young black women’s role in society.

The cameras showed a silver car was parked outside of the event’s location when Franco arrived.

As she entered the venue to participate in the debate around 7 p.m., an unidentified man got out of the silver car and talked on his phone. Franco and her assistant got in the back seat of her car that her driver was driving. The silver car followed Franco’s car after it left the venue shortly after 9 p.m.

The police are investigating the possibility that another car was involved in the killing and possibility of a car chase happening before the shots were fired at Franco’s, but those instances will need further assessment by the police as they look for other security cameras to show the car’s trajectory on the night of the crime.

Another startling discovery that came from the investigation concerns the ammunition cartridges found at the crime scene. They are a part of a 9 mm bullet lot bought by the federal police in 2016.

This is not the first time that bullets from



Rio de Janeiro Councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver were murdered in their car on March 14, 2018. The killing has sparked widespread outrage across Brazil. (Photo courtesy of Facebook)

Bought by the federal police to be distributed to other police departments around the country, the 9 mm bullets could have been sold on the black market and many other possibilities that only the tracking of them will be able to answer.

The most important piece of the investigation right now is the testimony of the only survivor of the crime, Franco’s assistant, whose identity is being kept under wraps for safety reasons.

As the investigation progresses, international associations like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recognized Franco’s fight for the human rights of minorities in Brazil and demanded a serious, prompt and independent investigation about the crime to seek justice for her family.

A true warrior for equality and dignity of Brazil’s underrepresented groups, Franco would more frequently than not used a phrase on her social media accounts to denounce hate crimes against LGBT Brazilians and young people in the country. As Brazilians try to understand the crime that took the prominent advocate’s life, they are left with the three words that she used: “Stop killing us.”

Members of the São Paulo police department in 2015 who were behind the biggest massacre in the city’s history used the same 9 mm ammunition that were used to kill Franco and her driver. Officers who were seeking revenge for a colleague’s murder executed 17 people. In a country like Brazil, the discovery of this ammunition raises bigger questions in these and other investigations.

the federal police have been found at a crime scene.

Members of the São Paulo police department in 2015 who were behind the biggest massacre in the city’s history used the same 9 mm ammunition that were used to kill Franco and her driver. Officers who were seeking revenge for a colleague’s murder executed 17 people.

In a country like Brazil, the discovery of this ammunition raises bigger questions in these and other investigations.

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Study Examines U.S. Views on Polarizing Topics

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Some of the most polarizing topics today are discrimination, sexual orientation, gender identity, race and immigration status. In fact, the topics carry such strong emotions that even the Department of Housing and Urban Development is considering the removal of language about anti-discrimination efforts from its mission statement.

“... in an effort to align HUD’s mission with the Secretary’s priorities and that of the Administration,” a March 5 HUD memo read.

However, as divisive as discussion about these topics can be, it can be difficult to get an accurate overview of public perception on these subjects. To combat this, Dr. Daniel Cox, Rachel Lienesch and Dr. Robert P. Jones collaborated with the Public Religion Research Institute to create a study about U.S. perceptions of just these topics. The PRRI is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that dedicates itself to researching the intersection of religion, culture and public policy. What follows is a summary of their June, 2017 findings.

Perceptions of Discrimination

Race

Overall, the majority of Americans believe that discrimination is happening to minority groups. The study found that, “Roughly six in ten Americans believe immigrants (63%), transgender people (62%), gay and lesbian people (58%), and blacks (57%) face a lot of discrimination in the country today.”

In the case of white Americans, they are torn in half about the discrimination that African-Americans face, however the variation in opinion is hugely influenced by age.

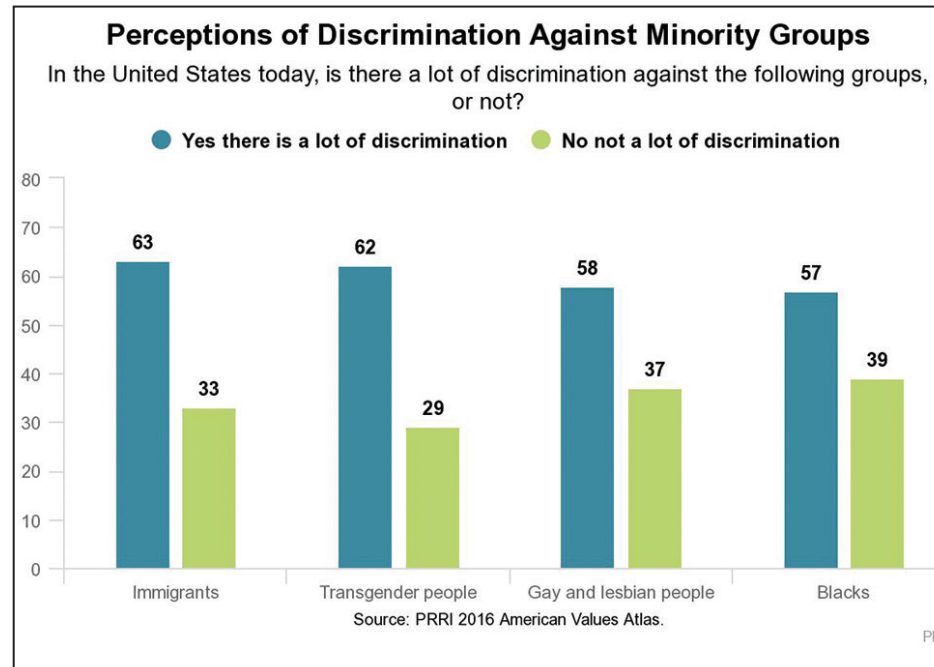
“More than six in ten (63%) white young adults (age 18-29) agree blacks face a considerable amount of discrimination, while fewer than half (43%) of white seniors (age 65 or older) agree,” the study found.

In racial minority groups, 85 percent of black Americans, 66 percent of Hispanics, 64 percent of mixed-race Americans and 55 percent of Asian-Pacific Islanders say that black Americans face discrimination.

Politics

Politically, republicans overwhelmingly reject the idea that black Americans face discrimination.

“Fewer than one-third (32%) of Republicans believe blacks face a lot of discrimination in society, compared to roughly two-thirds (65%) who say they do not,” the study said.



“In contrast, nearly six in ten (58%) political independents and more than three-quarters (77%) of Democrats agree blacks experience a great deal of discrimination.”

Also, 41 percent of Republicans say that immigrants experience discrimination in society, while 78 percent of democrats believe so. Independents came in at 64 percent.

Sexual Orientation

The PRRI study found that African-Americans are the most likely of any other racial or ethnic group to “perceive discrimination against gay, lesbian or transgender people.”

The study reported that almost 75 percent of black Americans said that gays, lesbians and transgender people face much discrimination.

Among Hispanic people, roughly two-thirds said that gay, lesbian and transgender people encounter discrimination. Just over half of white Americans at 54 percent feel that gays and lesbians face discrimination, and 59 percent feel that transgender people do.

Most notably, fewer than half of Asian-Pacific Islanders, at 49 percent, believed that gays and lesbians face bias, while 55 percent felt that transgender people do.

Religious individuals were by far the least likely to to say that gays and lesbians face discrimination.

“Fewer than half of white evangelical Protestants (43%) and Mormons (49%) — and a slim majority of white Catholics (52%) and white mainline Protestants (54%) — say gay and lesbian people experience a great deal of discrimination,” the study read. “However, there are important generational differences. Nearly six in ten (59%) young white evangelical Protestants, but only about

four in ten (43%) white evangelical Protestant seniors, say gay and lesbian people face substantial discrimination.”

Immigrants

In terms of racial and ethnic divisions, nearly six in 10 whites and API-Americans say immigrants are discriminated against, 66 percent of mixed-race Americans believe so, 74 percent of black Americans and 80 percent of Hispanics believe this.

Perceptions of Same-Sex Marriage

Compared to 2015, the perception of same-sex marriage has become more positive, rising 5 percent in three years. However, racially there are significant divides that are still present.

“Roughly six in ten white (59%), Hispanic (60%), and mixed-race Americans (59%) and close to seven in ten (69%) Asian-Pacific Islander (API) Americans favor same-sex marriage,” said the study. “Black Americans are more divided with fewer than half (48%) expressing support for allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry, while 41% are opposed. However, this represents a five-point increase in support for same-sex marriage, compared to 43% in 2015.”

Politics

Over seven in 10 Democrats support same-sex marriage compared to six in 10 independents. Republicans only support same-sex marriage at a rate of 38 percent, and more than half of them, at 52 percent, directly

oppose it.

“Views among Republicans are fracturing along generational lines,” the study stated. “A majority (54%) of young Republicans (ages 18-29) favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry, while fewer than three in ten (27%) Republican seniors agree.”

Religion

The study found that “most religious groups in the U.S. now support same-sex” marriages. The majority of white mainline Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians favor it — roughly at a level of six people out of 10. This is also the group that has experienced the most dramatic shift in its views — a 27 point increase since 2003.

The three major religious groups that oppose same-sex marriage are Jehovah’s witnesses at a 53 percent opposition rate, Mormons at 55 percent and white evangelical protestants at 61 percent opposing.

Perceptions of Religion-Based Service Refusals

Just over half of Americans, roughly six in 10, view the refusal of business to gay or lesbian people as wrong, but three in 10 favor this policy. No religious majority favors refusing business to gay and lesbian people either.

Divided ethnically, the study found that, “Majorities of all racial and ethnic groups oppose religiously based service refusals. Opposition to religiously based service refusals has increased among white Americans between 2015 and 2016.”

Immigration Reform

Today nearly two-thirds of Americans say that that immigration system should allow, “Majorities of all racial and ethnic groups oppose religiously based service refusals. Opposition to religiously based service refusals has increased among white Americans between 2015 and 2016.”

The study also found that a majority of both Democrats (75 percent) and Republicans (55 percent) believe that there should be a path to citizenship for immigrants who illegally entered the U.S.

However, “Permanent legal residency is supported by relatively few Democrats (15%) and Republicans (13%), while deportation is a significantly more popular policy among Republicans (28%) than among Democrats (8%).”

► **March 24: D.C.**

Continued from p. 4

be participating in the event.

“The proliferation of gun violence in America is an LGBTQ issue – we saw that so painfully with the loss of 49 queer lives at Pulse Nightclub,” Morash said. “And we are repeatedly horrified by these frequent mass shootings, but we also know that the conversation about America’s gun problem doesn’t end there,” he said.

“It’s time to reevaluate the role of guns in America, and we at the National LGBTQ Task Force are cheering on the efforts of the Parkland survivors, and we are with them in support of their efforts to ban assault weapons and close background check loopholes,” he said.

Chris Sgro, communications director for the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest LGBT advocacy organization, said HRC’s annual Equality Convention in Washington had been scheduled months earlier for the weekend of the March For Our Lives.

He said as soon as HRC learned about the march it made plans for the more than 100 people expected to attend the Equality Convention to take part in the march. Among other things, he said a group of survivors of the Pulse shooting will be leading an HRC contingent that will march from the HRC headquarters at 17th Street and Rhode Island Avenue, N.W. to the site of the March For Our Lives rally on Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

“We are incredibly appreciative for the leadership that Parkland students are showing over the long needed battle for gun control,” Sgro said. “And as soon as we learned about this march we knew it was incumbent upon us to find a way to harness our 100 plus folks here and their energy into this critical day of activism,” he said in referring to the HRC Equality Convention.

Joanna Cifredo, a spokesperson for the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, which advocates for LGBT youth in the nation’s schools, said GLSEN is pleased that young people are taking the lead in demanding that their elected officials make school safety and gun law reform a top priority.

“We are hopeful that the March For Our Lives will serve as a wakeup call to our nation’s leaders that too many lives have been lost to senseless gun violence, too many children live in fear of going to school, and too many parents have mourned the loss of their young,” Cifredo said.

“For nearly three decades now, GLSEN has supported student-led efforts to effect positive change in their school communities,” said. “Make no doubt that on March 24 GLSEN members will be out in droves to make their voices heard.”

Among the local D.C. LGBT groups that plan to participate in the March For Our Lives are the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance and the D.C. chapter of Gays Against Guns.

John Becker, GLAA’s vice president for political affairs and a member of the D.C. Gays Against Guns, said the two groups support the objectives of the March 24 demonstration.

“GLAA stands with the majority of Americans who support common-sense reforms to our nation’s gun laws that would help prevent firearms from getting into the wrong hands and get weapons of war out of our schools and off our streets,” Becker said.

“We support D.C.’s gun control law – one of the strongest in the country – and we strongly oppose any attempts by Congress to interfere in the District’s self-governance in this or any other matter,” he said.

“I’m beyond inspired to see this next generation of students finding their voice, walking out of school, and taking to the street in peaceful protests like the March For Our Lives,” Becker said. “I’m thrilled to see them standing up and speaking out, and I’m committed to standing with them.”



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Amy and Anna Crandall love their dogs Dalton and Tucker. The Couple got married with the dogs in tow on Oct. 28, 2017. Wedding photographs were captured by Elissa Patterson of Elissa Patterson Photography in Howell.

Couples Say ‘I Do’ With Their Fur Babies

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Anybody who knows and loves Amy and Anna Crandall of Kalamazoo knows how attached they are to their dogs, Dalton and Tucker.

It was no surprise to family and friends when the couple involved their dogs in their wedding ceremony on Oct. 28, 2017 at the Lawton Community Center in Lawton.

“It was a requirement,” said Amy, a real estate agent who has had Dalton, a 9-year-old Pitbull Terrier/Labrador Retriever mix, his whole life.

“He has gone everywhere with me. Even before I met Anna everyone knew to expect me and Dalton if I was coming.”

Since the couple got together everyone expects Anna’s dog Tucker now, too. Amy said the 5-year-old Labradoodle is “shy” and it took a little while for he and Dalton to get used to each other.

“Tucker is afraid of everything from plastic bags to pizza boxes for no apparent reason. Dalton is tolerant and it took a little bit of time

to win him over, but once they were used to each other they became inseparable,” said Amy. “I can’t take Dalton anywhere alone. Tucker will lose his mind.”

Some of the activities the Crandall’s enjoy as a family include going on dog walks, trips to the dog park and the dog beach (Kruse Park in Muskegon) where they met Elissa Patterson of Elissa Patterson Photography in Howell.


“Our dogs got to share a hot summer day on Lake Michigan together. And at the time it was their early dating, we kept in touch over the years, and sure enough I got a call one day asking to photograph their wedding,” said Patterson.

“Capturing their wedding was absolutely easy. These ladies are surrounded with an amazing cloud of love. They have so much support and goodness in their lives. When you see so much joy and happiness those moments are easy to capture. Even during their quiet moments and the times someone wouldn’t think of as a photograph I found beautiful and

See Couples Say I Do, page 18



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LOVE IS IN THE AIR



Karola Wollstein (left) and Diane Stead (right) with Hansi and Sylvie, their Wheaton Terriers. The couple was married in June 2017. Photo courtesy of Milhem Images, Inc.

► Couples Say I Do

Continued from p. 16

picturesque. Without sounding cliché they are exactly the type of couple we should all want to be like. And I was the lucky one they asked to keep their moments in print.”

A Moment

“I met Anna - she’s a civil engineer - when I was working at Lowe’s,” said Amy. “Anna is shy. She was looking for a shower curtain. She figured out where they were then she ran away.”

Later, they messaged each other on a dating website and went out on their first date. The

Pet Pointers

It sounds like a great idea to have your pet in the wedding. “Shooting couples with their pets can add a wonderful dimension to the tone and composition of a wedding ceremony or engagement,” said Janice Milhem of Milhem Images, Inc. in Ann Arbor. “Generally, our pets are calming and keep us grounded. They can be a welcomed distraction from ‘wedding jitters’ of the event at large – and create an on-camera story that conveys the love they share for each other.”

However, it’s not for everyone, she said. Think twice before it could backfire. Here are a five tips to avoid surprises:

1. Temperament – Is your pet calm, easy to manage in a small or large party of people? If not, go no further. Or consider a pet portrait sans ceremony.

2. Energy Level – If your pet has too much energy and is out of control it will lead to problems. Low energy pets may not move at your pace and if your wedding is a precise and scheduled series of moves it may also be disruptive.

3. Size Matters – Small pets are much easier to work with or carry down an aisle. Large pets may not, especially if their temperaments and energy levels are not in sync with the workings of the event.

4. Clothing and Attire – Will your pet wear them or not? Some pets can be trained in advance but don’t think that a pet who’s never worn a sweater will now submit to the torture of a top hat for the day’s event.

5. Backup Plan – Always have a backup plan. Have a guest on-hand to keep the pets occupied or taken away once the party begins.

relationship developed and Amy, being the romantic she said she is, created a scavenger hunt for Anna.

“It started at 3 p.m. at a winery. I placed clues all around Kalamazoo at our favorite places,” said Amy. “Our friends and family were involved. There were people at each stop. It ended at 8 p.m. at Bronson Park where we got engaged by our favorite statue then went to a local brewery to celebrate.”

Anna said, “The scavenger hunt was so much fun. It was better than I could have dreamed of. I was ecstatic when I got the last clue. I couldn’t wait to see Amy. I ran to the park to find her.”

The Big Day

Not many wedding venues allow pets to enter unless they’re service animals, but the Lawton Community Center changed their rules to allow Dalton and Tucker to participate.

“It was important for them to be a part of our wedding because they’re our guys. They’re our family. It wasn’t an option that they wouldn’t be there,” said Anna.

Dalton and Tucker attended the rehearsal dinner, hung out with the wedding party the night before, walked down the aisle and were provided with front row seating during the ceremony.

“Dalton was super well-behaved. Tucker followed his lead,” said Amy.

Anna added, “I was a bit worried that Tucker was going to have a hard time with all the people around because he can get pretty anxious. Both boys just hung out with the bridesmaids being their awesome selves.”

When asked if they have any advice



Tim Wilson (left) and Steve Perry (right) with Merlin and Rufus, who recently passed away. The couple was married in the Fall of 2016 and were happy to include them in this special day together. Photo courtesy of Milhem Images, Inc.

for other pet lovers who want to include their fur babies in their wedding ceremony, Amy said, “If you have animals that are well-behaved and listen, then totally do it. Tucker, who we were worried about doing it with – he totally rose to the occasion. He was super good. You have to make sure you designate someone to dog-sit so you don’t have to worry about them while you’re there. We had someone pick them up from our house prior to the ceremony. They brought them out to the venue and they brought them home. It was awesome to have them with us all day.”



“I love to capture emotion in my images,” said Jay Dreifus of Jay Dreifus Wedding Photography. Dreifus photographed Grosse Pointe Woods couple Peter Caborn and Donald Morrissett with their Yorkie’s Cleaves and Calvin, and their Cockapoo Reno (aka “The Tail Waggers”) during their wedding recessional on July 22, 2017 at the Waterview Loft in Detroit. He said, “When couples include their pets in their photos it clearly adds an extra touch of love, smiles, and laughter to the session.”



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Pets and the LGBTQ Owners Who Love Them

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Paula Weber and Doug

In what city do you and Doug live?

Doug and I live and work in NE Ann Arbor, Village of Dixboro, in a 140-year-old farmhouse. Doug is the self-appointed manager and he takes his position quite seriously. Nary a deer, squirrel nor mouse goes unnoticed by Doug.

How old is Doug?

His birthdate is noted as 12-31-2009 on his adoption papers, so he just celebrated his 8th birthday.

When and how did Doug come into your life?

In March, 2010, I stopped by my neighbors, The Huron Valley Humane Society ... need I say more. A PetSmart Rescue Waggin' truck had arrived from Georgia and the staff was removing puppies from crates and handing them out the door, assigning each one a name as it was handed over: Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato, Daisy, Petunia, Rose, Itsy & then Bitsy. Doug started life as Bitsy. He was renamed Baby, and then last year he officially, and legally, became Doug. It was overdue. He outgrew Baby long ago.

What do you love about Doug?

He can be very enthusiastic, and very low-key. When asked if he wants to "go for a walk" he's as happy as a little dog can be.



Doug's always up for a walk. If I'm on the couch taking a nap, he snuggles right by my side the entire time getting his nap on, too. I guess I love that he lives in the moment, is content, and low-maintenance. What's not to love? We're pretty much a perfect match.

What is your favorite thing to do with Doug?

While taking him for a walk around the yard makes him happy, taking him for a walk that first requires a car ride thrills him! He loves riding in the car, then walking where he can check lots of pee-mail and leave p-mail. His anticipation, as he sits on the car console looking out the window barely able to sit still, is a sight that makes me happy. As much as I love Michigan winters, it will be nice when the weather breaks and we can take longer walks.

Does Doug have any special talents?

Yes! He is a Jack Russell-Italian Greyhound mix, and is quite agile. He can take a full flight of stairs barely touching the middle step, land at the bottom, then fly another six feet across the room. He'd certainly excel on an agility course, given the opportunity. As his Mom, I may sound biased, but I assure you that others who've seen him in action are equally impressed.

How does having a pet make life better?

As a single lady with a "Work/Live" lifestyle, a lot of my activity takes place at home where I'm completing my 22

“If I'm on the couch taking a nap, he snuggles right by my side the entire time getting his nap on, too. I guess I love that he lives in the moment, is content, and low-maintenance. What's not to love? We're pretty much a perfect match.”

year restoration project, curating vintage decor for homes and business interiors, and providing Marriage Officiant services for couples who desire a private elopement. Seeing my little dog's joyful, everyday moments make me smile a lot. When he gets a rawhide treat he runs around the house with it like it's the best gift ever. If I pick up his stuffed dog toy he's all about putting it back where he wants it to be. When I come home he's so happy he spins and spins in little circles. He amuses me on a daily basis and is an integral part of my household, whether he realizes it or not. Just last week I put laundry into the dryer and said, "I'm going upstairs to get another load of laundry." Yes, I actually just admitted that I told my dog what I was doing with the laundry.

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Matirio and Jermaine Moore with Uma, MoMo and Kuvo

In what city do you live?

Detroit in Indian Village

How old are your cats?

Uma (the lady of the house) is 10. Her birthday is April 13. MoMo is 9. His birthday is April 6. Kuvo is 7. His birthday is May 28.

Describe each of your cats personalities.

Uma (grey and white) is a mild mannered, girly girl with a little fire to help deal with a house full of boys. She loves to be brushed. She is also very affectionate, has a tiny meow and will balance on her hind legs for rubs and affection. She loves sitting by the heat in the winter and the sunniest window in the summer. She favors any women that come over and on a daily favors Matirio.

MoMo (orange) has all the personality. He is playful, loves when company comes over. He likes to be right in the middle of everything. He comes anytime his name is called. He is also very affectionate and likes to snuggle. He meows/growls loudly randomly and loves the smell of mint.

Kuvo (orange and white) is the busy baby of the bunch. He harasses both Uma and MoMo. He is extremely curious, gets into everything and is currently figuring out how to open the hook latches on the doors, smart. He meow/sings around the house almost speaking. He likes to roll on his sides while being rubbed.

Where did you get your cats?

They are all rescues from the Humane Society on I-75 in Detroit. We brought MoMo home in 2008 and Uma and Kuvo in 2011. When we were looking for MoMo to have company I spotted and wanted Kuvo, Matirio spotted Uma and they let us adopt Kuvo then let us also adopt Uma with no charge so they have a bond we each other.

What do you love about your cats?

They are great company, very loving and comforting. They provide a sense of love that one would receive from a child.

Do your cats snuggle with you?

We snuggle and watch TV in the

den. They may either lay on the ottoman, the couch or chair. They are not allowed in the bed. We learned that lesson one good time.

Do your cats ever misbehave? In what way?

Uma is the good one. She generally listens and stays out of trouble. MoMo is the reformed troublemaker turned obedient child but sometimes falls back. Kuvo on the other hand is trouble (which I have also been called). His nickname is 'Bad.' They are not allowed on the kitchen countertops or any tables, which we keep mostly covered to prevent them from jumping up, yet when he thinks no one is around he will hop up, but water bottles are always handy. He is led by his curiosity so that gets him into trouble. We always have to tell him 'No' or 'Back' two or three times before he listens.

Do you have any advice for future cat owners or someone thinking about owning a cat?

Cats can, to an extent, be trained – not as well as a dog – but they understand tone and inflection in the voice so being consistent is what we found helps. All of our cats are short hair, but constant brushing helps to cut down on fur.



Matirio and Jermaine Moore with Uma, MoMo and Kuvo



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Five Ways to Cope with the Death of a Pet

BY BTL STAFF

The loss of a pet can bring as much grief as the loss of some human friends and family members. This makes sense when you consider the role our animal companions play in our everyday lives. You cared for your pet's every need and, because they could not speak, you learned to communicate in other ways. Such caring builds intimacy similar to that found between a parent and their infant; love without conflict, jealousy or any of the other complications found in most relationships. So, when a pet dies, the depth of your grief reflects your loss of a special relationship.

"When we lose a pet, we lose a relationship unlike any other," said Ken Dolan-Del Vecchio, a family therapist and author of "The Pet Loss Companion: Healing Advice From Family Therapists Who Lead Pet Loss Groups."

"Many of us love our pets the way we love our children. But in the immediate aftermath of this unique loss, too often family members and friends say things like, 'Just get another one.' Instead of devaluing your grief over the loss of this important relationship, as others may advise, embrace your sorrow," Dolan-Del Vecchio said. "Your grief is important, for it will lead you to healing and teach you important things about what matters most in life."

Dolan-Del Vecchio offers these tips for those grieving the loss of a pet:

1 Share your grief with empathetic friends. Spend time with people who understand your closeness with your pet. Even some friends may be insensitive, so be careful to avoid "get over it" types of people.



"Unfortunately, many people see animals as if they were non-living objects," Dolan-Del Vecchio said.

2 Attend a pet loss support group. Pet loss groups provide a concentrated dose of social support. Meeting with others who also grieve and share similar emotions can boost one's healing greatly.

3 Keep moving. Exercise is a healer. It boosts feelings of well-being and calm, improves sleep and brightens your mood.

4 Be creative. Whether you lean toward writing, scrapbooking, ceramics, photography or making collages, creative projects may contribute to healing.

5 Spend time in nature. Nothing quiets the mind and soul like a stroll through a park, nature preserve, or by the seashore.

"The natural world brings special benefits when your heart has been torn by grief," Dolan-Del Vecchio said. "The sights, sounds and smells of nature connect us to eternal, circular stories of life and death in ways that go beyond our usual thoughts and feelings, and this experience brings solace to many people."

"It's important to care for yourself when you're grieving your pet," he said. "This requires some planning and acts of will, as grief can diminish energy and motivation. You can lessen your distress through self-care. Above all else, be gentle with yourself."

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May 12: Strutting Mutts Help Local Animal Shelter

BY BTL STAFF

Six-legged teams of walkers, runners and their dog companions will fill Dearborn's Ford Field on May 12 for the 13th annual Friends for Animals of Metro Detroit (FAMD) Mutt Strut. The 5K run and 2.2 mile walk is Metro Detroit's only springtime pet-friendly run and walk.

"It's one of the highlights of our year, seeing all the dogs and people enjoying the fun and fresh air," said Elaine Greene, FAMD's executive director. "We especially like seeing shelter alumni return with their new owners."

The Mutt Strut welcomes families and individuals of all skill levels for the run and walk along Dearborn's Gateway Trail. It begins at 8 a.m. for runners and 10 a.m. for walkers. Dogs are not required for participation.

In addition to the race and walk, Ford Field in Dearborn will host food trucks, family-friendly entertainment, demonstrations and a shopping area for pet owners. A lure course for active dogs will challenge racing skills, and an agility course is also free for dogs wishing to show off their tricks. Food



trucks and events will run before, during and after the official walk and run, until 1 p.m.

Participants can register individually or as a team. The 2017 Mutt Strut raised

more than \$82,000. Greene said, "Mutt Strut is one of our biggest fundraisers of the year. Especially with our new shelter opening up in the Fall, we're proud of how far we've come and what we've accomplished. But there's always more to do, and this day really helps us show off our great shelter animals."

The course winds through the side streets and parks of Dearborn with full support from the community according to Greene.

"It's great to see the neighbors come out and support our walkers and runners," she said. "Especially when they bring their dogs too."

Runner registration in advance is \$45 and \$50 the morning of the event. All runners receive a timing bib, an official Mutt Strut Walk & Run t-shirt and a commemorative medal. Walkers who register in advance and raise more than \$45 in pledges also receive a Mutt Strut t-shirt and a dog bandana. If participants choose not to raise funds for the event, they are still welcome to join the walk and the fair at Ford Field in Dearborn.

More information on the event can be found at famdmuttstrut.org.

Bloomfield Hills Woman Offered \$500K for Pet Speaker on 'Shark Tank'

BY BTL STAFF

On the Jan. 14 episode of ABC's "Shark Tank," Michelle Winowich of Bloomfield Hills came away with almost half a million dollars.

Winowich, the founder of G.O.A.T. Pet Products, pitched her pet speaker to the shark panel and tech giant Robert Herjavec took the bait, according to a Metro Times report. Herjavec saw promise in Winowich's pet communication piece and offered her \$499,000 for a 33 percent stake in the company. Winowich accepted Herjavec's offer and moved forward with production using her newly-received funding.

"We at G.O.A.T. Pet Products were thrilled to showcase our creative line of pet products on Shark Tank," Winowich told the Detroit Free Press.

The G.O.A.T. website explains that the speakers, for dogs, cats and birds, are app-controlled and allow



pet owners to give pets a "voice" by customizing pet responses using the app's speech technology. In addition, the speaker streams music using Bluetooth technology to help calm pet anxiety. The app offers functions, including a calendar capable of tracking pet schedules such as vet appointments.

On the show, other products featured included gluten-free G.O.A.T. Milk Dog Treats (made from goat milk). The speakers are listed on the G.O.A.T. pet products website goatspeaker.com for \$19.99, and the app is available on the App Store and Google Play free of charge.



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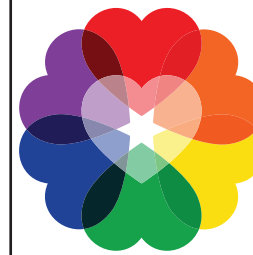
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From Christian Rock to Pop's 'Silver Horizon'

Trey Pearson Finds Community Through Queer-Affirming Music

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Trey Pearson is living the out gay life he never thought he could.

After 20 years as the frontman of the Christian rock band Everyday Sunday, Pearson – a father of two who was married for seven of those years to his wife, Lauren – came out in

May 2016. Publicly revealing his sexuality led organizers of Joshua Fest, an annual Christian music festival in Northern California, to nix him from the lineup after staff members kicked up a fuss about his scheduled appearance.

Inspired to share his story, Pearson switched gears, cutting a seven-song, pop-oriented EP called “Love Is Love.” It was released in

November 2017, and led by its first single “Silver Horizon,” the album taps into the range of emotions the 37-year-old Columbus native harbored at one of the most pivotal – and painful – points in his life.

What song would you most recommend to

someone trying to reconcile their religion with their sexuality?

I could go on for hours about these songs. But every once in a while a song comes out of nowhere, in the moment. I wrote “Hey Jesus” in less than a half hour, and then I spent another hour or two lying on the floor bawling my eyes out. The song encompasses

all the emotions that I always felt growing up and even into my adult life, until I could accept myself.

I feel the most free I've ever felt. The most joyful, the most peace. I never knew I could feel this way. I did not believe it was possible, and to finally feel this way is the most amazing feeling in the world. But it hasn't been without loss: having your teenage years robbed from you – it's OK to allow yourself to grieve that.

How do you feel about being an example for other queer people who are also struggling with self-acceptance?

It's exciting. It feels like it's something I'm passionate about, and I also feel a responsibility, too, because I know if it wasn't for people like Ellen (DeGeneres) coming out and being vulnerable in her truth, I might not have been able to own mine. Ever since my story came out, there's almost not a day that goes by where people don't reach out to me on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. I think there's a great honor in having these people share their stories back to me, but also, we need to tell our stories because there's so much power in them. I've experienced that.

After you came out, you were driving for Uber to make ends meet, right?

Yeah, I had to cancel a tour and figure out how to make money over a two-month period, so I was like, I'm gonna drive for Uber and make money. So, I picked up this guy – and this was right after I came out to my family – and he was like, "So, what do you do besides this?" and I was like, "Well, I usually tour around the world in this Christian rock band and I just came out of the closet to my family." He ended up being the editor of a magazine, which is where I originally came out publicly. But rumors were spreading. When you've been in the Christian music industry your whole career, and you've played in thousands of churches, it's amazing how quickly gossip can spread in churches around the world.

Are you still being asked to perform in churches?

Actually, there have been a lot of affirming churches that have asked me to come. I started this private group on Facebook called Trey's Safe Space and there are hundreds of thousands of people who are sharing this space. People who are either queer or allies, and they just tell their story. But I'm not playing in churches; I'm playing in music clubs. A lot of progressive and affirming churches are asking me to share my story,

so I am speaking at a lot of these churches on Trey's Safe Space tour. I'll do a pride festival on a Saturday night, and then Sunday morning I'm speaking to these churches. It's been really cool.

Did anyone in the Christian music community reach out to you when you came out?

Yeah, actually lots of people did. A lot of people in the industry expressed love toward me. But none of them did it publicly because they're all scared of their careers being on the line, and that's a shame. If every Christian artist that reached out to me would have done it in a public way, I think it would force the industry to rethink their view on the subject, and hopefully one day that'll happen. Unfortunately, we're not there yet. I'm doing everything I can to change the conversation, though.

What did it feel like writing and recording your first song, "Silver Horizon," as an out gay man?

Liberating. The fact that I suppressed so much of myself for my entire life, and to finally have that out in the open – there are so many emotions that come with finally extending myself in that way. Joy and freedom, and a lot of grieving. I missed out on certain things. I knew I would lose people in my life, but this weight that I had been carrying my whole life finally

was lifted from me. There's a part of myself I couldn't be even as an artist because I wasn't able to face it in my own life. This valve burst open with creativity and another level of my songwriting. It was another level of intimacy and vulnerability. I wanted the EP to be long enough to really explore some of these emotions I have experienced since coming out. I literally just played those songs on my floor bawling my eyes out as I wrote them. But I started to turn the corner. It just feels almost like a diary. And with every song I either wanted to make you dance or cry. (Laughs)

Sounds like you've been doing a lot of dancing and crying in the last year.

Thank God it's turned into a lot more dancing than crying these days.

Chris Azzopardi is the editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBT wire service. Reach him via his website at www.chris-azzopardi.com and on Twitter (@chrisazzopardi).

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From Film to the Stage: Melissa McKamie Refreshes Baroness Elsa Schraeder in 'The Sound of Music'

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Although the audience never sees it, a scene change in a musical performance is the product of a well-engineered and well-oiled machine. Many crew members must seamlessly perform dozens of specific actions to set scenery and props in place. Then, as actors take their marks, the flurry of motion stops, the curtain is pulled up, the lights go on and the scene begins. To actress Melissa McKamie, this is her reality every night as she plays Elsa Schraeder in the touring version of Rodgers & Hammerstein's "The Sound of Music" – and it's her favorite part.

"I love the first moment that I enter on stage, the way they transition with the lighting and the music. It's wonderful," McKamie said. "You know, before I even say a word the light comes up and you see my costume which is designed by Jane Greenwood, a Tony Award-winning costume designer, and you see this picture of Elsa. I feel the audience's energy and their reaction to that, and that's very exciting."

The Oklahoma City University grad has been a part of almost two dozen national and regional theater tours in which she played iconic roles like Cinderella and Mary Poppins. McKamie was also a student of Florence Birdwell who in her 60-year career has taught other notable names like Kristin Chenoweth, Kelli O'Hara and Lara Teeter.

Between The Lines spoke with McKamie one-on-one before "The Sound of Music" makes its debut at the Fox Theatre stage, March 30 and 31, getting a feel for the actress's fresh take on her character, her thoughts on coming out as bisexual in the world of theater and how "The Sound of Music" may be more relevant than ever.

When people hear the title "The Sound of Music" it's not unlikely that they think of the 1960s film starring Julie Andrews as Maria von Trapp and Eleanor Parker in your current role as Baroness Elsa Schraeder. Was it challenging to play a character that audiences feel they know already?

Yes, definitely. Playing Elsa has been such a challenge because so many people have seen the movie and they have their own ideas and projections about her coming in. I really worked with the director and he wanted her to be more nuanced, more interesting, more of a real human instead of the caricature that people remember from the movie. So, it's been challenging to try and change peoples' minds in that way about her. The movie was so popular that it kind of overshadowed the Broadway production, but, luckily, the live TV rendition with Carrie Underwood a few years back, it introduced a whole new crowd of people to the show. And I think that's what we're hoping to do with this production, too, is making it fresh and relevant for today's audience. I know that it's been so wonderful to see different people in the audience during our bows, and see small children with their grandparents, it's awesome. It's just really cool to be able to bring this story to them. It's something that their grandparents grew up with, and they can share with their kids. It's a story about the human experience in general.

Though many might not think of it that way, "The Sound of Music" is a pretty politically-charged musical. Do you find it to be relevant to the political landscape now?



Definitely in terms of terms of the division of where they are in 1938 Austria. It is interesting how it parallels where we are today in terms of extremism and as Elsa, she does not pick a side, and I know there are many people in our country who are the same, who are comfortable not taking a side. And it's definitely because she comes from a place of privilege. She's not on the front lines, she has the advantage to ignore it if she wants to, and she does.

Much of Elsa's storyline is that she is seeking to be remarried. Has being married to your wife in real life aided in your portrayal of Elsa?

It is in the fact that, Elsa, she has been married before and her husband passed away. So, she knows what it's like to feel that love, and it's definitely helpful being married myself and bringing that into the role.

Have you found that being part of the LGBTQ community is something that aided or hindered your work significantly?

I didn't know that I was a part of the LGBTQ community until I fell in love with my wife, so it was kind of a shock to me. So, I think going through that, coming to terms with myself, was bigger than being out in the theater community, and I'm lucky to be in the theater community because it is so diverse and so acceptable in the business.

Did it challenge you in the way you portrayed heterosexual roles when you finally were coming to terms with who you are?

I don't think it has challenged me playing in heterosexual roles at all, which is just the same. I was used to playing the ingenue and the love interest, but then when I found out I was in love with her – my wife – and there was a point where I did not audition because of the rejection that I felt from my family and from the community. Not the theater community, but just the world in general, the country in general.

Because, when you go to an audition – the way I was taught – was to be completely present and vulnerable in yourself, and you have to really have a sense of who you are and the confidence when you enter a room to be vulnerable. And, at that time you know, coming in with the rejection already there, I did not audition for quite a while.

What gave you the strength to get back into auditioning again?

You know, honestly, we were engaged after same-sex marriage was legalized in New York pretty quickly. It was legalized in June of 2011 and then we were married in September, and after we were married I felt this huge sense of relief – for whatever reason – just having that



From left to right: Jake Mills as Max, Mike McLean as Captain von Trapp and Melissa McKamie as Elsa Schraeder. Photo by Matthew Murphy.

word attached was so important in terms of our families. Our families both came around when we got married. And, having done that, it kind of gave me permission to go back and try the theater world again.

I think, before then, people just thought I was going through a phase (laughs) even though, before then, my wife and I, we were together

for five years before we got married. But, for whatever reason, for the people around me the label attached to it of being married, it took that for them to fully accept us.

How did you get involved in theater?

I grew up in Texas and Oklahoma kind of

equally, and I started taking piano lessons around the age of six and loved music from that time on. I started voice lessons around 12 and caught the theater bug around then. I decided to study it in college at Oklahoma City University. That's where I met Florence Birdwell who is an incredible teacher still today and she taught me everything I know.

What do you think is something that the audience might not expect from the stage version of the play?

The cool thing about theater is that it's live and it's all happening right in front of your face (laughs), so that is the advantage that we have over film. We do respond to the audience's energy even if it is in a way of, "I'm going to prove you wrong!" Or "I'm going to play into the reaction."

"The Sound of Music" will be at the Fox Theatre from Friday, March 30 through Saturday, March 31. Tickets start at \$26. More information about ticketing and showtimes can be found online at ticketmaster.com or at gaybe.am/06. The theater is located at 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit, and can be reached at 313-471-3200.

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• **Trinity Lutheran Church**
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www.trintyyaa.org

• **Burton**
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• **Detroit**
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Palm Sunday 9:30 a.m.
Good Friday 7 p.m.
Easter Sunday Breakfast 9 to 10:15 a.m.
Easter Sunday Worship — Joint with Bethel UCC 10:30 a.m.

2.) Beacon Unitarian Universalist Congregation
4230 Livernois Road, Troy
beaconcongregation.org/248-524-9339
Easter Worship 10:30 a.m.

3.) Central Woodward Christian Church
3955 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy
centralwoodward.org/248-644-0512
Easter Worship 10:30 a.m.

4.) Grosse Pointe Congregational Church
240 Chalfonte Ave., Grosse Pointe Farms
gpcong.org/313-884-3075
Easter Worship 10 a.m.

5.) Lord of Light Lutheran Church
801 S. Forest Ave., Ann Arbor
lordoflight.org/734-668-7622
Worship at 5 p.m.
Dinner at 6 p.m.

6.) Metropolitan Community Church Detroit
205 N. Main St., Clawson
mccdetroit.org/248-399-7741
Easter Worship at 11:30 a.m.

7.) Salem United Church of Christ
33424 Oakland St., Farmington

salemucc.us/248-474-6880
Easter Worship at 10 a.m.

8.) Unity of Royal Oak
2500 Crooks Road, Royal Oak
unityroyaloak.org/248-288-3550
Easter Worship at 10 a.m. and Noon

9.) King of Kings Lutheran Church
2685 Packard Road, Ann Arbor
kingofkingslutheran.org/734-971-1417
Good Friday Worship 7 p.m.
Rise and Shine Sunday Worship 8:15 a.m.
Easter Breakfast 9:30 a.m.
Easter Worship 10:45 a.m.
Centering Prayer 12:30 p.m.

10.) Trinity Lutheran Church
1400 Stadium Blvd., Ann Arbor
trintyaa.org/734-662-4419
Good Friday Worship 7 p.m.
Greysheet 9 a.m.
Creative Worship 9 a.m.
Easter Vigil Meal 6 p.m.
Easter Vigil Worship 7 p.m.

11.) Our Risen Lord Lutheran Church
4040 Lapeer Road, Burton
ourrisenlordelca.com/810-742-3780
Sunday Worship 8:30 a.m. to Noon
Easter Breakfast 9:30 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

12.) Spirit of Hope Church
1519 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Detroit
sohdetroit.org/313-964-3113

13.) University Lutheran Church
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lansing
ulcel.org/517-332-2559
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Easter Breakfast 9:30 a.m.
Worship 10:45 a.m.

14.) Zion Lutheran Church
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zionlutheranmi.org/248-398-5510
Easter Worship 10:30 a.m.

15.) Bethlehem Lutheran Church
250 Commerce Ave. SW
bethlehemchurchgr.org/616-456-1741
Good Friday Worship 7 p.m.
Easter Worship 10:30 a.m.

16.) Lutheran Church of the Savior
3616 E. G Ave., Kalamazoo
lcoskzoo.com/269-342-0069
Easter Worship 10 a.m.

17.) Ascension Lutheran Church
4252 Breton Road SE, Kentwood
twochurches.org/616-455-8108
Saturday Easter Vigil 8 p.m.
Easter Worship 10 a.m.

18.) Timothy Lutheran Church
8820 Wayne Road
timothylutheranchurch.com/734-427-2290
Saturday Easter Egg Hunt 10 a.m.
Easter Breakfast 8:30
Easter Worship 10 a.m.

19.) Our Savior's Lutheran Church
1132 W. Southern Ave., Muskegon
oslcmuskegon.org/231-722-6565

Easter Worship 10 a.m.

20.) St. Martin Lutheran Church
805 Chestnut St., Port Huron
stmartinlutheran.net/810-982-9261
Easter Worship 10 a.m.

21.) Abiding Presence Lutheran Church
1550 Walton Road, Rochester Hills
abidingpresence.org/us/248-651-6550
Easter Worship 9:30 a.m.

22.) Holy Faith Church
6299 Saline-Ann Arbor Road, Saline
holy-faith-church.org/734-429-2991
Easter Worship 8:15 a.m.
Worship with Choir and Bass 10 a.m.

23.) St. Philip Lutheran Church
1790 Fort St., Trenton
stphilipelca.com/734-676-7141
Easter Worship 10:30 a.m.

24.) St. Lucas Lutheran Church
745 Walbridge Ave., Toledo, Ohio
stlucastoledo.org/419-243-8189
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Easter Worship 8:30 a.m.
Easter Breakfast 8:45
Easter Breakfast
Easter Worship 10:30 a.m.

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OUTINGS

Thursday, March 22

Stand with Trans 2018 Support Groups 7 p.m. All youth are welcome to attend this FREE group. This group meets the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month. FREE and OPEN to the community. Orchard United Methodist Church 30450 Farmington Rd, Farmington Hills. Oakland United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road, Farmington. 248-626-3620 www.oaklandumc.org <http://www.standwithtrans.org>

Pop-Up Event: Dance! Introduction to Partner Movement 7 p.m. Learn the rumba or 4 count hustle at Affirmations with our friend Jeffrey T. Rakowski from Evoke Ballroom. All couples and ages are welcome in this free workshop series. This is a perfect opportunity to brush up on an event every week that begins at 7:00pm on Thursday. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 <https://www.facebook.com/events/390728118060084/>

Pop-Up Event: Love, Simon at Royal Oak Emagine 7 p.m. Join Affirmations at Emagine Theatres for an exclusive screening of the film Love, Simon. Tickets are \$20 and include a refillable 44 oz Popcorn & 21 oz Soda. A portion of the proceeds will go straight back to the center. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105

Jen Kober Comedy Show 7 p.m. Jen Kober's powerful performances weave together a southern-style tale of love lost at the buffet, road trip adventures at The Waffle House and midnight mishaps at Wal-Mart. Originally from Lake Charles, Louisiana, Kober has taken Oakland Center, 312 Meadow Brook Road, Room 118, Rochester. 248-370-3230 gsc@oakland.edu gsc@oakland.edu <https://oakland.edu>

<https://oakland.edu/oc/> <https://oakland.edu/gsc/events/2018/032218-jen-kober-comedy-show>

56 Ann Arbor Film Festival Out Night: Films in Competition 5 9:30 p.m. The 17th celebration of queer cinema at the Ann Arbor Film Festival spotlights recent experimental films with LGBTQ themes. Check our website for full details of featured films. Presented in partnership with AAFF Community Partner: Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 info@aafilmfest.org <http://aafilmfest.org>

Friday, March 23

Trans Day of visibility: Grand Rapids Grand Rapids Pride Center and Grand Rapids Trans Foundation are excited to present our 2018 Grand Rapids Trans Week of Visibility! Following the monumental success in 2017, we're asking you to join us, regardless of Grand Rapids Pride Center, 343 Atlas Ave. SE, Grand Rapids. <http://www.grpride.org/tdiv>

TDOV Kick-Off at The Apartment Lounge 5 p.m. Join us at the Apartment Lounge for our second annual kick-off to a week of celebrations leading up to Transgender Day of Visibility! Friday fundraiser event benefiting Grand Rapids Pride Center and Grand Rapids Trans Foundation. Come out and show Apartment Lounge, 33 Sheldon Ave., NE, Grand Rapids. <https://www.facebook.com/events/559330064438627/>

Slam for Solidarity II 6 p.m. Join the Gay-Straight Alliance for their Poetry Slam in room 1050 of the Human Health Building. Poetry Slam allows students to perform their own poetry pieces, or those of another author, in a private setting. Oakland University Human Health Building, 433 Meadow Brook Road, Rochester.

248-370-2100 gsc@oakland.edu <https://oakland.edu/gsc/events/2018/032318-slam-for-solidarity-2>

Pride Night at Art Bayou 6 p.m. Kalamazoo Pride invites you to join them at Art Bayou, Friday, March 23rd for their first Pre-Pride event of the year. This is a pottery painting family-friendly event. Your studio fee will go towards OutFront Art Bayou, 3306 Stadium Drive, Kalamazoo. <https://www.facebook.com/events/274061196457257/>

Saturday, March 24

March For Our Lives - Ann Arbor 11 a.m. On March 24th, students, parents, teachers, and anyone who wants to lend their voice and support will be peacefully protesting nationwide. We're doing this for the lives lost in Parkland. Las Vegas. Orlando. San Bernardino. Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Blvd., Ann Arbor. a2schools.org/pioneer

2nd Annual Children & Family Reading Hour At Books & Mortar 3 p.m. Bring your children down to hear the stories celebrating trans and gender non-conforming youth. Books & Mortar, 955 Cherry St. SE, Grand Rapids. <https://www.booksandmortar.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/events/596001147409426/>

March Lezread: The Fifth Season (The Broken Earth series) 4 p.m. For March, we're reading N.K. Jemison's The Fifth Season. This is the first novel in The Broken Earth series, winner of the Hugo Award for two years running. Hailed as "intricate and extraordinary" by the Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 734-995-9867 <https://www.facebook.com/events/2043526049258473/>

Sunday, March 25
Ferndale Pride Fundraiser at J's

Penalty Box 1 p.m. J's Penalty Box March Madness Fundraiser for Ferndale Pride J's Penalty Box, 22726 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. (248) 398-4070 julia@ferndalepride.com <http://www.jspenaltybox.com/> <http://www.ferndalepride.com>

Peer Support Group for Substance Abuse 3 p.m. This group is for anyone struggling with substance abuse in their life whether that be: someone who is — or thinks they are — in active addiction, the family member or loved one in active. An event every week that begins at 3:00pm on Sunday, repeating until June 10. Salus Center, 624 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing. 517-580-4593 saluscenter.org <http://facebook.com/events/653869491403858/>

Transgender/Gender Nonconforming Self Defense Workshop 4 p.m. Transcend, a program of OutFront Kalamazoo, invites you to join us for a Self Defense Workshop with Darius Hartwell. This event is free and open to the transgender, gender nonconforming, & non-binary community. Learn the OutFront Kalamazoo, 340 S. Rose St., Kalamazoo. <https://www.facebook.com/events/328873080953837/>

Pink 7:30 p.m. Grammy Award-winning singer P!nk will perform at Detroit's Little Caesar's Arena. Little Caesar's Arena, 2645 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 3133495777 <https://detroit.gaycities.com/events/994282-pink-detroit-mi>

Second Annual Blue Bridge Lights In The Colors Of The Trans Pride 7:30 p.m. Join us on the blue bridge to kick off a week of visibility for the transgender community, leading up to the global Transgender Day of Visibility on March 31. We'll be lighting up the bridge The Blue Bridge, Grand Rapids.

Editor's Pick

Advanced Canine Body Language Seminar

This advanced-level seminar, hosted by K9 Turbo Training and Canine To Five, will help you better read, understand and respond to canine body language and will help you reduce conflict and miscommunication between you and your dog(s). The \$59 seminar is from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. on March 25 at Canine To Five, 1221 E 9 Mile Road in Ferndale. The seminar is worth two continuing education credits for professional dog trainers. Sign up at gaybe.am/bY. Use promo code CTF20 to get 20 percent off.



Monday, March 26

Healthy Living for your Brain & Body 6 p.m. For centuries, we've known that the health of the brain and the body are connected. But now, science is able to provide insights into how to make lifestyle choices that may help you keep your OutFront Kalamazoo, 340 S. Rose St., Kalamazoo. <http://facebook.com/events/2045500915729573/>

2018 TC Charity Joke Jam Qualifier No. 3 8 p.m. The 2018 Traverse City Joke Jam is a Stand-Up Comedy Competition and Local Non-Profit fund-raising effort that will be held over a six-week period in Traverse City, MI. This competition will be held at the The Workshop Brewing Company, 221 Garland St., Warehouse District, Traverse City. 231-421-8977 traversecityworkshop.com <http://facebook.com/events/176424976336585/>

Wednesday, March 28

Affirmations Youth Workforce Development Program 4:30 p.m. Improve communication skills, write an effective resume, nail that interview, understand budgets and financial responsibilities. Ages 13-24. An event every week that begins at 4:30pm on Wednesday and Friday, repeating until July 11. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 <http://www.goaffirmations.org>

100 Women Strong 7 p.m. Join us in celebrating Women's Month as well as Music in the Schools month — 100 Women Strong in support of music education. This is the third-annual fundraiser. Entertainment provided by our Michigan Philharmonic CLASSical Michigan Philharmonic, Plymouth Arts & Recreation Center, 650 Church St., Plymouth. <https://michitx.com/events/100-women-100-dollars>

Thursday, March 29

Talk With The Girls: Security, Safety, Prevention and Response 6 p.m. Understand the misconceptions that impact the prevention of and response to hate crimes targeting transgender women-federal allies. Ask questions about strategies and resources for community safety & security. This event is brought to you with Ruth Ellis Center, 77 Victor St., Highland Park. 313-252-1950 <http://www.ruthelliscenter.org/>

Friday, March 30

2018 Grand Rapids Pride Festival Kick Off 5 p.m. The 2018 Grand Rapids Pride Festival will be taking place Sat., June 16 at Calder Plaza. We're celebrating 30 years and are feeling 30 and Fabulous! Come down to the Apartment Lounge for drinks, 50/50 Apartment Lounge, 33 Sheldon Ave., NE, Grand Rapids. www.apartmentloungegr.com <https://www.facebook.com/events/157057741749598/>

Saturday, March 31

TD0V: Trans Art Showcase and Stories of Truth, Power & Positivity 2 p.m. Amidst the fear and hatred in the world, the transgender community is thriving and that is something worth celebrating. Join us for a night of art for and by members of the trans community, celebration, University Club of Grand Rapids, 111 Lyon St. NW, Ste 1025, Grand Rapids. 616-456-8623 <https://www.universityclubgr.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/events/362546250892402/>

OU Pride Prom 7 p.m. Join the Gay-Straight Alliance for Pride Prom in the Gold Rooms at the Oakland Center. This event is positioned to be a fun and meaningful event for all, whether one wants to relive the prom Oakland Center, 312 Meadow Brook Road, Room 118, Rochester. 248-370-3230 gsc@oakland.edu <https://www.oakland.edu/oc/> <https://oakland.edu/gsc/events/2018/033118-pride-prom>

Mississippi Mud Erotic Art Show 9 p.m. Mississippi Mud Erotic Art Show (Detroit), is a black erotic art show dedicated to promoting a conscious and positive way of thinking toward black sexuality and love. Featuring live band, DJ, food, sex toy vendors, The Artist Village Detroit, 17340 Lahser Road, Detroit. <https://www.facebook.com/theartistvillagedetroit/> <https://detroit.gaycities.com/events/1014511-mississippi-mud-erotic-art-show-detroit>

MUSIC & MORE

Pop-Up Event: Dance! Introduction to Partner Movement March 22, 7 p.m. Learn the rumba or 4 count hustle at Affirmations with our friend Jeffrey T. Rakowski from Evoke Ballroom. All couples and ages are welcome in this free workshop series. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105 <https://www.facebook.com/events/390728118060084/>

Bubble Schmeisis at The Schvitz March 22, 7:30 p.m. Welcome to the steam baths! The word bubbemeises is a Yiddish term meaning "a grandmother's story" or "an old wives' tale." Writer and street performer Nick Cassenbaum, along with his klezmer musicians, invite you into One event on March 23 at 7:00pm One event on March 23 at 9:00pm One event on March 24 at 2:00pm One event on March 24 at 8:00pm One event on March 25 at 2:00pm One event on March 25 at 6:00pm The Schvitz, 8295 Oakland Street, Detroit. (313) 724-8489 <https://schvitzdetroit.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/events/bubble-schmeisis/>

56 Ann Arbor Film Festival Out Night: Films in Competition 5 March 22, 9:30 p.m. The 17th celebration of queer cinema at the Ann Arbor Film Festival spotlights recent experimental films with LGBTQ themes. Check our website for full details

of featured films. Presented in partnership with AAFF Community Partner: Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 info@aaaffilmfest.org <http://aaaffilmfest.org>

Nederlands Dans Theater March 23, 8 p.m. "The world's most magnificent dancers... a retina-shredding spectacle of passion and power". Known for pushing boundaries with its bold repertory and distinct virtuosity, Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT) One event on March 25 at 8:00pm Power Center, 121 Fletcher Street, Ann Arbor. (734) 647-3327 http://smt.d.umich.edu/about/facilities/central_campus/power/index.htm <https://ums.org/performance/nederlands-dans-theater/>

Pink March 25, 7:30 p.m. Grammy Award-winning singer Pink will perform at Detroit's Little Caesar's Arena. Little Caesar's Arena, 2645 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 3133495777 <https://detroit.gaycities.com/events/994282-pink-detroit-mi>

The Devils Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith March 30, 8 p.m. Theatre NOVA presents the Michigan premiere of this hit Off-Broadway musical celebration of the legendary Bessie Smith, whose life was as large and outrageous as her talent. An event every week that begins at 8:00pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, repeating until April 21. An event every week that begins at 2:00pm on Sunday, repeating until April 22. Theatre NOVA, 410 W. Huron, Ann Arbor. 7346358450 <http://www.theatrenova.org>

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Chick Corea March 31, 8 p.m. Surprise! This perennial favorite is back, but this time with jazz pianist Chick Corea at the helm. Corea's staggering career, spanning more than Ann Arbor Hill Auditorium, 825 N. University Ave., Ann Arbor. 555-555-5555 <https://ums.org/performance/jazz-at-lincoln-center-orchestra-with-chick-corea/>

Storm Large & Le Bonheur April 6, 8:30 p.m. Tickets start at \$20. Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, 3711 Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 3135765162 <http://www.dso.org/ShowEventsView.aspx?id=4708&prod=4707>

ART 'N' AROUND

Penny Stamps Series presents Yvonne Rainer: A Truncated History of the Universe for Dummies; a Rant Dance March 22, 5:10 pm Yvonne Rainer, one of the founders of the Judson Dance Theater (1962), made a transition to filmmaking following a fifteen-year career as a choreographer/dancer (1960-1975). Her experimental feature-length films include *Lives of Performers* (1972), *Privilege* Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor. 734-668-8397 https://stamps.umich.edu/stamps/detail/yvonne_rainer

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Joe Kort Teams Up with Modern Sex Therapy Institutes to Offer LGBTQ-Affirmative Therapy Certification Program

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Royal Oak psychotherapist Joe Kort has teamed up with the Modern Sex Therapy Institutes to begin offering an LGBTQ-affirmative therapy certification program. Designed for those in the mental health and medical fields, the 50-hour online certification program comes with 20 hours of case consultation with Kort, Rachel Needle and Ricky Siegel who are MSTI's co-founders and co-directors, and others. Licensed clinicians can receive continuing education credits for these classes; and attendees can go to a single class or complete the entire course.

"Sexuality education of any kind, no less sex therapy training, is woefully lacking among the vast majority of therapists and mental health and medical professionals," Needle said. "When working with different populations, specialized training ensures that therapists have the comfort and competence to be effective and truly comprehensive in their work with couples and individuals."

The LGBTQ-affirmative certification training is a new addition to the certification programs offered by MSTI.

"MSTI is dedicated to training professionals to be LGBT competent and affirmative," said Needle. "Many therapists express concern about their lack of education and understanding of working with individuals who identify as LGBT, as well as concern about being up-to-date with the latest terminology to avoid offending their clients with outdated terms. And most LGBT clients report leaving their therapist due to experiencing a lack of sexual knowledge and training when they want to have sexual health conversations."

"LGBT youth are in constant transition and coming out at younger ages," Needle continued. "Sexual fluidity is something being explored in both youth and adulthood. Most clinicians are not competent in working with these issues."

Needle said that while the course is currently only being offered to mental health and medical professionals now, she hopes to open up the class to others in the future.

"We will be adapting it to be applicable to all individuals and hope to have organizations incorporate our education to train staff to be knowledgeable, tolerant and aware," she said.

For his part, Kort, who has written books on the subject including "Gay Affirmative Therapy for the Straight Clinician: The Essential Guide" and the soon-to-be-released "LGBTQ Clients in Therapy: Clinical Issues and Treatment Strategies," said he has known and worked with Needle and Siegel for years.

"I know Rachel and Ricky through a sex



therapy organization we have belonged to for many years," said Kort. "It's the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, which is the main association for sex therapists. They invited me to create an LGBT online training program because I do so many trainings on that topic."

Kort said he is pleased with how the certification program has shaped up.

"I am helping to pick faculty as well as topics I feel are important for helping professionals to understand," he said. "I will also be providing 20 hours of group supervision for those who register for the entire online certification. I have guided the development of this program to be current and cutting edge of what is happening now in the LGBT community — especially the changes that are coming from the younger generation."

The entire certification program is designed to be diverse and all-inclusive.

"We have chosen faculty from all generations and all races," Kort said. "I am also teaching a course as well on the trauma of growing up as children repressing our LGBT identities, mixed orientation marriages and relationships and doing an overview of LGBT affirmative therapy."

Those who take the course should be prepared to have their minds opened, Kort said.

"I want people to challenge their beliefs of what they think gender and sex is and should be. Most people have their own ideas of what they think for themselves and don't recognize that everyone has a boutique identity these days and are picking and choosing from all the different ways to identify and express themselves and coming up with their very own," he said. "No longer can we assume we know what labels mean. We need to ask what it means to them."

For more information on the LGBT Affirmative Therapy Certification Program, visit modernsextherapyinstitutes.com/certification-programs.



Statewide Events to Celebrate International Transgender Day of Visibility

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Although The International Transgender Day of Visibility had small beginnings when it was started by Michigan activist Rachel Crandall-Crocker, in its almost 10-year life it has become a worldwide phenomenon. Now, Crandall-Crocker is

"A statewide event is really what I'm aiming for. I want to have a calendar of events all over Michigan," Crandall-Crocker said. "Grand Rapids does a great visibility week, and they're partly responsible for inspiring me to do a whole month. On visibility day, they're having someone drive down to my area, pick me up and drive me all the way to Grand Rapids, and I'm the main speaker for their event."

1 Youth Event: Trans Day of Visibility
March 31, 5 to 9 p.m.

Affirmations 290 W. Nine Mile, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. goaffirmations.org.

Youth ages 13 to 20, come to participate in karaoke, treats and have treats. Friends are welcome, too.

For questions, contact Roz Keith at roz@standwithtrans.org.

2 Transgender Day of Visibility – Flagship Event

March 26, 6 to 9 p.m.
Five15 Royal Oak 600 S. Washington Ave., Royal Oak.

Transgender Michigan invites you to celebrate International Transgender Day of Visibility. There will be an open mic, poetry, storytelling, music and more.

Refreshments available from Five15.

3 Trans Week of Visibility Kick-Off & Fundraiser

From March 23 through 31.

March 23 from 5 to 8 p.m.
Apartment Lounge 33 Sheldon Blvd. NE, Grand Rapids

Join the Grand Rapids Pride Center the Apartment Lounge's Friday fundraiser event benefiting both itself and the Grand Rapids Trans Foundation. Come out and show your personal Pride, commitment to end discrimination, and solidarity with the Trans Community. 50/50 Raffle and more. 21+ Only.

A full list of the week-long events can be found online at grpride.org/tdov

4 Trans Day of Visibility Art/Open Mic.

March 30, 6 p.m.
Trimpe Hall/Multicultural Center, Kalamazoo.

In celebration of the Transgender Day of Visibility, the Western Michigan University Office of LGBT Student Services will host an event featuring local art and an open mic.

5 As One: An Opera About The Transgender Experience

Friday, April 6 at 8 p.m. and Saturday, April 7 at 8 p.m.

If you miss the celebrations during the week, not to worry. APEX Contemporary Performance nad Kerrytown Concert House will present Kathleen Kelly's "As One," to reflect a transgender person's path to self-acceptance. Post-performance on April 6, members of the production will lead a "talk-back" session with the audience about the opera.

'Dog Act' at Lansing's Wharton Center

BY BTL STAFF

"Dog Act" is a capstone thesis production by Liz Duffy Adams which features the 2018 Masters of Fine Arts acting candidates. The production, which will be presented on March 16 and 17, follows the traveling performer Zetta Stone, her companion Dog and her diverse theatre troupe in this post-apocalyptic vaudeville as they journey through the wilderness of the former Northeast U.S., heading toward a gig in China.

The performance evokes questions from the audience like, "Will they find it? Will their voices be heard? And Will they survive the journey?" Highlighting a year-long ensemble based endeavor of research and collaboration, the show, directed by Christina Traister, features graduate designs, along with fight direction, choreography and vocal coaching by cast members.

The 110-minute show has no intermission at Michigan State University's Wharton Center for the Performing Arts Arena Theatre, 750 E. Shaw Lane, East Lansing.

Show dates and times are March 16-17 at



8 p.m., March 18 at 2 p.m., March 20-22 at 7:30 p.m., March 23-24 at 8 p.m., and March 24-25 at 2 p.m. There is a director pre-show discussion on March 18 at 1:15 p.m. and a post-show discussion on March 22. General admission is \$15. Seniors and faculty are \$13 and students are \$10.

For more information, call 517-355-6690, email devri124@msu.edu or visit whartoncenter.com/events/detail/dot-dog-act.

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Black and Pink Picks New Executive Director

Agency Connects Incarcerated LGBT People with Allies on the Outside

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Its mission is noble. Black and Pink bills itself as an “open family of LGBT prisoners and ‘free world’ allies who support each other.” The group works toward the “abolition of the prison industrial complex [and] is rooted in the experience of currently and formerly incarcerated people.” In fact, every member of Black and Pink’s national leadership circle has been incarcerated at some point. This includes newly-named national director Dominique Morgan.

Born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska, where he still resides, Morgan came out as gay to his family when he was 14 years old. Just two years later, Morgan moved out of his parents’ home.

“I got into a pretty abusive relationship with a person who was six years older than I was,” Morgan said. “I was able to escape and get away, but I had nothing. I began to commit survival crimes like writing bad checks and stealing cars to sleep in them.”

Morgan was eventually arrested. He took a plea and was sentenced to 16 to 18 years in prison.

“I was incarcerated from the ages of 19 to 27,” said Morgan. “About six months into my sentence my father passed away. I began to write music. I was put into solitary confinement about a year into my sentence because the queer population grew to be too large,” he said. “So, they had me in there about 18 months.”

Still, Morgan made the best of it.

“I wrote about 300 songs,” he said. “Then, about two years later, I received my associate’s degree in culinary arts.”

Released in 2009, Morgan moved back in with his mother and youngest sister. But soon, his mother fell ill and eventually died. Morgan then adopted his sister.

“I fell upon advocacy through Heartland Pride,” said Morgan. “I didn’t know much about it. It was just an open volunteer call. I had been very isolated. Even though I had been home a year I was just working and taking care

of my sister. Soon, I started working on an album – my first love is music – and I started going to school. Everyone I talked to who was being paid to do activism had a public health degree so I got one, too.

“The pace picked up from there,” Morgan continued. “My music got larger and as it did the platform for my activism got larger. I created Queer People of Color of Nebraska. I met the founder and former national director of Black and Pink. We kind of stayed on each other’s radar. Then I was asked to join the Federal HIV and AIDS Task Force and then the board of directors of Black and Pink as the president.”

After the agency’s founder left, Morgan briefly served as interim national director before officially being appointed to the post of national director earlier this year.

“Black and Pink is the light that shines, that kind of removes the darkness of incarceration for queer people,” said Morgan. “We are able to support people whose bodies and whose lived experiences aren’t seen with the same

value as their counterparts. I think this support is the foundation of what Black and Pink does and will do moving forward.”

As for programs, Black and Pink’s largest regular effort is their massive newsletter.

“It goes out to nearly 16,000 people,” Morgan said. “In previous years it’s been monthly, but for 2018 we’re doing eight issues. Everything in our newsletter except my letter as the national director is from the folks inside. They are writing letters. They are submitting art. It’s a great way for folks to feel that what they do has value.”

Black and Pink also has a pen pal program and has working groups inside the system tackling issues such as solitary confinement. There are 10 national working groups across the country and two actually inside of prisons.

“The other piece that Black and Pink has done that I think has been pivotal is the largest survey of queer incarcerated folks,” said Morgan. “It’s called Coming Out of Concrete Closets and we had 1,200 responders. Every day I receive emails from students who want

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“The other piece that Black and Pink has done that I think has been pivotal is the largest survey of queer incarcerated folks. It’s called *Coming Out of Concrete Closets* and we had 1,200 responders. Every day I receive emails from students who want to use our data for the work they are trying to do around prison reform. The survey was 133 questions so that’s huge.”



Dominique Morgan

to use our data for the work they are trying to do around prison reform. The survey was 133 questions so that’s huge.”

When asked for examples of some of the things Black and Pink learned from the survey, Morgan didn’t have to think long about it.

“I think one of the most important things we have learned is that regardless of a person’s potential for release people still have a desire for success and to be better. Folks still wanted education, folks still wanted to earn a living,”

he said. “Folks still wanted to give back to the community and support their families.”

Morgan said the results humanize the prison experience.

“It’s hard to look at somebody who is hungry to be better and hungry to give back and say ‘this person cannot be redeemed. This person should not have the opportunity to be a better person.’ I think that helps people look at our work differently.”

Find Your Tools of Engagement

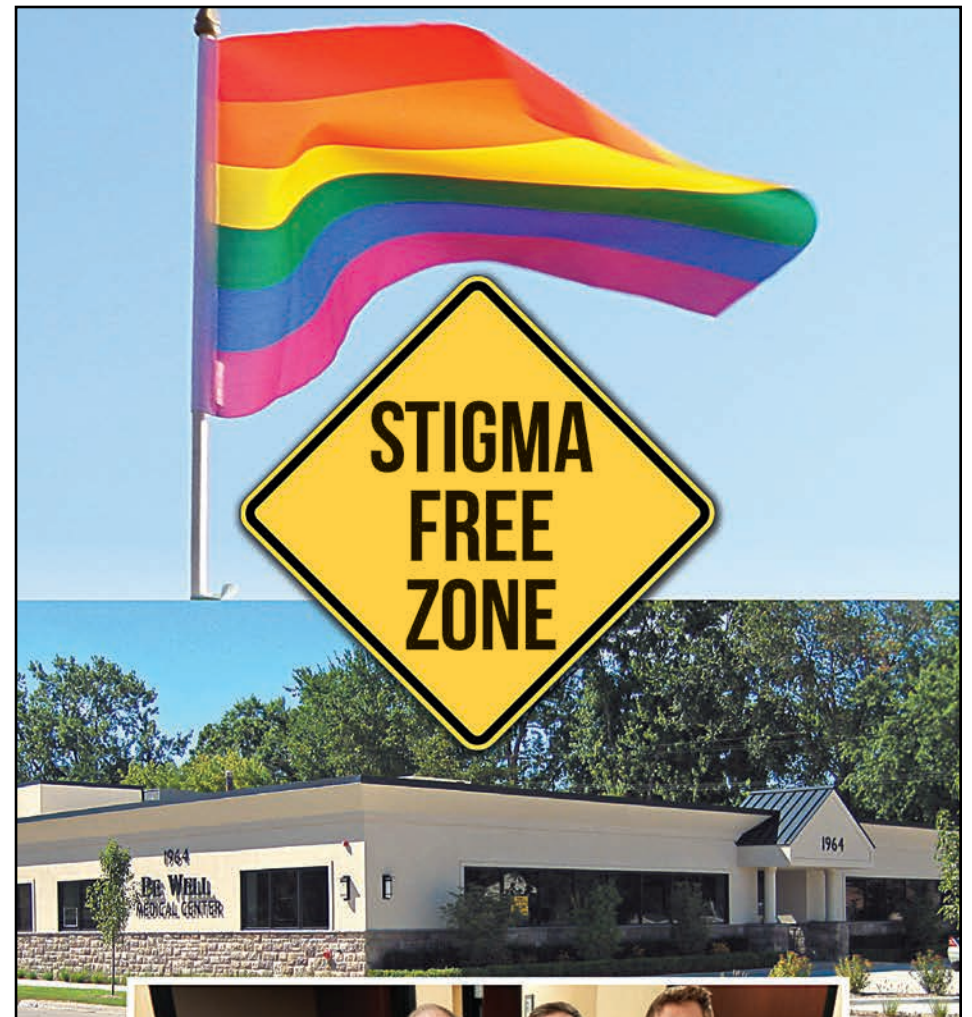
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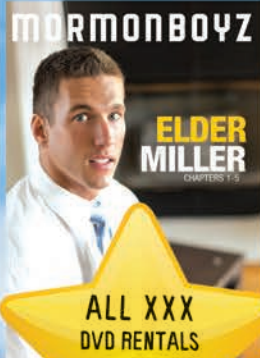
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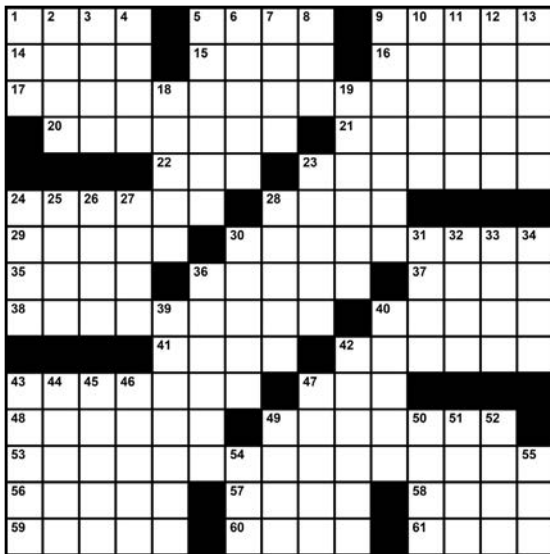
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Luci the Sexting Robot

Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 Femme character in "Mango Kiss," or lip
5 Slap on the bottom
9 Opera selections
14 Loads
15 "The English Patient" nurse
- 16 "With parsley," for Traci Des Jardins
17 Start of a quote about Luci, the sexting robot
20 "Rodeo" composer Aaron
21 Private's position
22 Caesar's salutation
23 Circumspect

- 24 Mame or Em
28 Director Gus Van
29 G or B but not L or T
30 Engages in breeder activity
35 Explorer of Nickelodeon
36 More of the quote
37 Lahr of "The Wizard of Oz"
38 Who we are, in a Queen song
40 Part of a _Tommy_ lyric
41 Treated as a sexual object
42 Hanna-Barbera's Quick Draw ___
- 43 Perched like an eagle
47 Wilder's " ___ Town"
48 Rachel Maddow, to MSNBC
49 ___ name (Box to Vidal, e.g.)
53 End of the quote
56 Ill-suited
57 Place for Proust
58 Go lickety-split
59 Tops of arenas
60 Word to a dominatrix
61 The whole shebang

Down

- 1 "Dog will have his day," for example
2 Homophobic president impersonator Baldwin
3 Gay nightlife district London
4 Margaret Cho's "Can't ___ Dancing"
5 Gather into a bundle
6 Batman's alter ego Bruce
7 What Santa gave, in verse
8 Greek T
9 Emulate ACT UP
10 One who gathers leaves of grass
11 Song from Sondheim's "Passion"
12 Absinthe flavoring
13 Positioned, as artillery
18 Scotsman's skirt design
19 Send toward Uranus
23 "West Side Story" factions
24 Bi
25 "I'm in trouble now!"
26 Mother of "Brothers & Sisters"
27 Coal porter's vehicle?
- 28 "The ___ of Music"
30 Whispered to one's partner
31 Self-description from one's knees?
32 Shoot off to the side
33 Name on an old column
34 One way to cook fruit
36 Stands for the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus
39 Defensive successes in Billy Bean's sport
40 Prepare for surgery
42 New York's ___ of Sex (Luci's home)
43 Foaming at the mouth
44 Bridge bid, briefly
45 William of ___ (English philosopher)
46 Triangle, e.g.
47 Actor Milo of "Oz"
49 Three oceans touch it
50 Vidal's Breckinridge
51 Coup target
52 Style of many South Beach buildings
54 State tree of Barney Frank's home
55 "Oh yeah? ___ who?"

Find solution to this puzzle at www.pridesource.com

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