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APRIL 11, 2019

VOL. 2715 | FREE



A Welcoming Retirement

*LGBTQ Couple on Finding
a Safe Place to Call Home*

BTL Photo: Andrew Potter

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BTL Photo: Andrew Potter

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Couple Finds Retirement Made LGBTQ-Friendly

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Having only lived in their new home for a matter of weeks, Ed Ploegar and Rick Hahn decided to make their way to their community's biweekly movie night for some entertainment and maybe to meet some of their new neighbors. To their pleasant surprise, the film shown was GLAAD Media Award-nominated.

"The movie that they showed last week was the recent release 'Boy Erased,'" Hahn said. "We were quite surprised that in a senior community of this size they would actually choose a gay-themed movie and really, [the movie is about] such a controversial subject [conversion therapy]."

Hahn and Ploegar were surprised a second time after the film was over.

"A number of residents came over and spoke with us and gave us hugs and many of them had tears in their eyes going, 'Oh my gosh, we're so sorry that these things happened and we hope that you didn't experience anything like this when you were young!'" Hahn said. "The people that talked to us after the movie were extremely warm and caring about us as a whole. ... That had a good effect on us."

Since moving into the Henry Ford Village senior living community, the couple said that their experience has been nothing but positive, and any concerns they might have had about LGBTQ discrimination have been dispelled. Though the couple wasn't directly looking for a retirement opportunity when they learned of HFV, they said it had been in the back of their minds for years as a potential spot to live when they retired.

"What really piqued our curiosity was when we received one of the fliers a couple of years ago and as we looked at the bottom, we saw it was equal opportunity housing, pet-friendly, wheelchair accessible and ... gay-friendly? 'When did this happen?'" Hahn said. "So that's when we started thinking more seriously about Henry Ford Village. Ed and I are seniors, we're getting up in years and we're both a couple of widowers. We had longtime significant others prior to us getting together and so we wanted to find a place that we would be in a safe environment when the time comes that we're going to be by ourselves. So that was the beginning."

Hahn is 65 and Ploegar is 80. They said that finding a place where they could put down new roots among peers was valuable to them.

"As we age and without any family, we actually do create our own family and what makes Ed and I feel good about being here is that we've known that the family we will create here as a couple will continue when that time comes that either one of us will pass away," Hahn said. "Indeed, in the nine or 10 weeks that we've been here, we do truly feel a sense



Ed Ploegar and Rick Hahn in their new home at Henry Ford Village. BTL Photos: Andrew Cohen

of community and now what are going to end up being lifelong friendships."

Aging LGBTQ

Though Hahn and Ploegar's experience should be the standard, it's an unfortunate reality that many LGBTQ elders don't have the luxury of being an out couple without facing discrimination for their orientation. The National Center on Elder Abuse found that of the roughly 9 million of LGBTQ-identifying adults in the U.S., roughly 16 percent of them are elders who face added challenges when searching for post-retirement housing and care.

"LGBT elders face the typical challenges of aging, including the possibility of elder abuse or domestic violence, in combination with the threat of discrimination and abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity," the study said. "In a 2006 study by MetLife Mature Market Institute, 27 percent of LGBT Baby Boomers reported that they had great concern about discrimination as they age."

And in a survey of over 400 LGB elders aged 60 and older, 65 percent reported experiencing victimization due "to sexual orientation (e.g. verbal abuse, threat of violence, physical assault, sexual assault, threat of orientation disclosure, discrimination) and 29 percent had

been physically attacked. Men were physically attacked nearly three times more often. Those who had been physically attacked reported poorer current mental health."

Part of the reason LGBTQ adults face discrimination of this sort is because of ignorant caregivers. Adam Sterling is the resident life and business development director at HFV. He said that cases of health care provider-related LGBTQ abuse is something he's actively fighting via the organization's existing policies, adding that he's always looking for ways to improve HFV's knowledge base.

"The board adopted a statement of understanding professing its openness and desire to be a warm and welcoming place without discrimination for the LGBT community and that was truly a reflection of the residents and the wills of the residents, as well as the board that is responsible for governance," Sterling said. "Henry Ford is a not-for-profit community so it is the board that ultimately has that responsibility. More profoundly, it's the culture more than anything."

Autonomy in Senior Living

Sterling added that HFV residents are also able to run for spots on the organization's board, which he said allows them to have more

autonomy in HFV's decision-making than at other senior living communities.

"I think that talking about resident-led programming is number one, but one further example of that is that we have three residents that sit on the board of directors which help with the governance which I think really speaks to the level of respect we have for the residents and their independence and empowerment in the community," he said.

Peter Falzon is an HFV board member who is openly gay and whose parents live in the community currently. He agrees with Sterling's assessment of the HFV diversity-oriented culture. When asked if he noticed the organization's commitment to inclusion when he first became aware of HFV, he gave a resounding "yes."

"I actually think Henry Ford Village was already, if you look at the other senior communities in the Metro Detroit Area, way on the forefront of being the most inclusive," he said. "If you walk through there, there is a mix of white people, brown people and black people and you can see they have [inclusive] programs and outreach."

Sterling has worked with HFV for over 20 years. He said that a good signifier of the organization's cultural openness to LGBTQ community members specifically is that even

when he began his role in the late '90s he recalls residents both openly and fondly speaking of LGBTQ family.

"I had the first experience of being with the residents of the community in a forum setting and hearing them talk about a son or daughter and hearing them talk about diversity and having children and grandchildren and relatives who were gay and lesbian," Sterling said. "And then we've had residents who have subsequently moved in over the years as well and I think they've always felt at home and comfortable."

Sterling acknowledged that merely positive mentions of LGBTQ people decades ago doesn't signify that HFV was always fully optimized for inclusion, but that it has laid a good foundation for improved policies. He added that the staff goes through an extensive LGBTQ sensitivity training session to familiarize themselves with the needs of the community members.

"The residents here, even if they aren't LGBT, they have family that are and friends that are and they're very aware. It's not like this was 20 years ago or longer, it's not something they're unfamiliar with or afraid of, they're very aware. And the staff is very aware," Sterling said. "We've had training in the past with Judy Lewis [of SAGE Metro Detroit] and they've really enjoyed that and it's been a great experience and looking for some future training opportunities. SAGE offers a national certification program and we're looking into that right now."

Always Learning

Perhaps the aspect of HFV life that Sterling is most proud of is the freedom the community provides its residents to impact existing programming via the creation of brand-new groups and organizations that suit the specific needs of residents. He noted a travel-specific group that has cropped up in recent years that has resulted in trips around the world for residents. And Falzon said that his

mother has been involved with a group that formed recently that is dedicated specifically to creating a dialogue about racism, conscious or unconscious, that can exist in any community.

"It really raises the awareness and I think that's part of the community-building inside of that complex," Falzon said. "I'm really impressed at how thoughtful many of the residents are and how eager they are to engage in social dialogue around issues that are important in today's world. They care."

Sterling said that there isn't a group dedicated to tackling LGBTQ issues currently, but he said he'd be open to residents starting one should they feel the need, and exploring more LGBTQ-specific programmatic options in the future.

"We're waiting for Ed and Rick to kick it off," he said with a laugh. "We do have other LGBT residents but we don't think that at this point anyone has wanted to initiate LGBT-specific programming. But we would be readily, happily able to help them do so. We follow the leadership of the folks that live here and I think to bring substance and make it really valuable to others it would be best if it was initiated by the residents that live here. I think their experience with the movie means that there is a genuine openness and respect for that."

Though Hahn and Ploegar may end up starting a group in their time at HFV, for right now, "we really are just getting our feet went at this point," Hahn said.

"Whenever you change places, you are going to be somewhat apprehensive of how things are going to go and actually if you're going to be accepted," Hahn said. "So far, we have truly felt that we have been accepted and welcomed and Henry Ford Village does have their commitment to diversity right in their mission statement and they say what they mean."

To learn more about Henry Ford Village visit henryfordvillage.com or call 877-660-1807.



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GILEAD

Michigan Supreme Court to Consider Issuing Opinion on Constitutionality of Gutted Fair Wage Proposal in Lame Duck

The Michigan Supreme Court announced this month that it will consider issuing an opinion about the constitutionality of a lame duck period proposal for higher minimum wage that was struck down during that transition period. Dr. Alicia Renee Farris is the state director of Restaurant Opportunities Center of Michigan and chair of the Michigan One Fair Wage steering committee. One Fair Wage's goal is to raising the state minimum wage to a livable one and Farris recently spoke out about this consideration.

"We are pleased the Michigan Supreme Court has agreed to consider issuing an opinion about this very important issue that is central to our democracy and the rule of law," Farris said. "We are hopeful the Michigan Supreme Court will stand with Michigan workers and the more than 400,000 Michigan voters who signed the One Fair Wage petition and approved raising the minimum wage to \$12 for all Michigan workers."

To learn more about One Fair Wage and its goals concerning restaurant workers, visit onefairwage.com.



Benefit for Community Health Awareness Group

The Community Health Awareness Group, the largest minority AIDS service organization in Michigan, has been providing prevention and care services for some of Detroit's most vulnerable citizens for many years. To support the agency's mission and efforts, join them for a wine tasting event from 4-6 p.m. on May 4 at the Rattlesnake Club, 300 River Place Drive, Detroit. The cost is \$55 per person. For more information, visit facebook.com/DetroitCHAG/.



SAGE Table Looks to Link Up Different Age Groups

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

A SAGE Table is a program of SAGE Metro Detroit, an agency dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ older adults, and is an intergenerational dinner event designed to start conversations with those of varying generations. The latest SAGE Table took place at the Ferndale Affirmations LGBTQ community center on April 4, and I was invited as a reporter to attend and experience the evening firsthand. Upon arrival, I was greeted at the door by Judy Lewis, SAGE Metro Detroit's training and education manager.

She told me that the first SAGE Table was held just last year, "But it was so successful that this year we're going to have four."

"Our next two are going to be in Macomb and Washtenaw Counties to make sure we're covering every geographic area we service," she said.

Allowed to sit where we chose, all attendees were encouraged to pick tables with people we did not already know. The invitation to the event said groups would be randomly divided at tables by the age groups of 21 to 35, 36 to 49, 50 to 65 and over 65.

Eventually, there were seven of us at our table and roughly 40 across the room — though our group was not as diverse as we would have hoped. There was Tim, 64, retired after 40 years on the line at Chrysler; Karen, 65, who works for the city of Detroit; Beth, 66, a retired social worker; Sam, 60, a cancer

survivor; Keisha, 40, in charge of Sage Metro Detroit's Friendly Caller Program; myself, 47; and a final individual, estimated to be in his 40s, who did not wish to be a part of this story and who eventually left the table.

Though we were all happy enough to share a meal, pizza and salad, I sensed that the group was slightly disappointed in the lack of diversity among those in attendance.

"That I'd like to see develop more," Beth said. "Those intergenerational interactions. We certainly have a lot to learn from each other and we both need each other."

As with almost any brand-new meetings, opening up is a slow process, but by the end we began to share basic information about our lives.

Tim was married twice to women and has, for the past decade, been married to a man. He was outed while in the process of divorcing from his second wife and he was so distraught that he became suicidal for a time. But today, he said he's happier than he's even been.

"It's been the best 10 years of my life," he said. "He is a great guy and his family is wonderful."

Karen, despite being a year older than Tim, is not yet ready for retirement. Beth, on the other hand, is fully enjoying her retirement. She takes poetry classes and practices yoga at a studio called Silver Sneakers.

After generally chatting for a while, Beth prompts us to pay some attention to the list of suggested topics sitting on the table. The list asked such questions as, 'What's your super

power?,' 'What was the defining event of your generation?,' 'How do you feel about the word "queer?" and more. Though we all participated, it was clear that our mutual experiences and opinions really aren't that varied.

But, the conversation was congenial and everyone in attendance seemed to be a fan of SAGE's programming. Sam said he participates in the agency's friendly caller program, too, and speaks two to three times a month with a 30-year-old from the program who, he said, lets him know what's going on the world. Karen said that she's hosting a potluck for the group later in the month.

"SAGE is a good organization," she said. "They focus on my peers with a real positive attitude. They do fun things, educational things, house parties, conversations and everything's free. You can't beat that."

Eventually, after cake was served, the crowd several dozen strong began to thin out. By the time I had my slice and said my goodbyes I'm able to say I've had a pleasant evening and I'm delighted to see that it's still light outside. I left genuinely pleased to have shared in good conversation with some nice people. It was good to be reassured that our LGBTQ elders are still surviving and, at least from what I saw, thriving. Though it was my first SAGE Table, I hope it won't be my last.

To find out more about SAGE as a national organization visit sageusa.org. Local events can be followed by visiting sagemetrodetroit.org.

Holy Week

Palm Sunday, 4/14/19 at 11:30 a.m.
Guest Speaker Aaron Bianco, from San Diego

Maundy Thursday, 4/18/19 at 7:00 p.m.
Join CUMC, Worship Service in the Chapel

Good Friday, 4/19/19 at 7:00 p.m.
"The 3 Nails" Service in the Sanctuary

Holy Saturday, 4/20/19 from Noon - 1:30 p.m.
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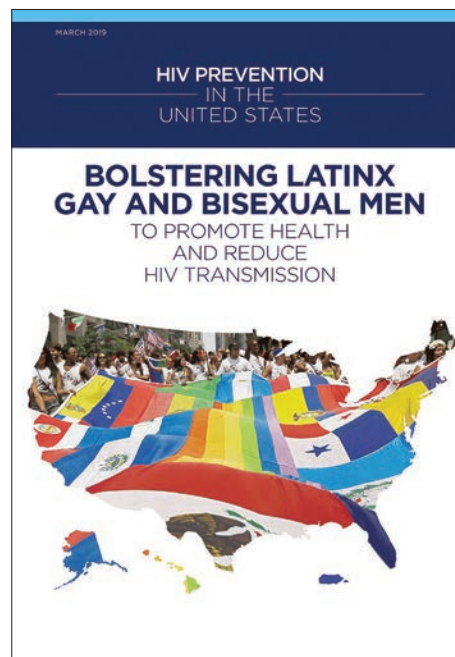
1 in 5 New HIV Diagnoses Are Among Latinx Gay and Bisexual Men

BY BTL STAFF

The O’Neill Institute is releasing a new policy brief titled, “Bolstering Latinx Gay and Bisexual Men to Promote Health and Reduce HIV Transmission.” This follows the release of President Trump’s budget request for fiscal year 2020 calling for a \$291 million increase in funding for his plan to end the HIV epidemic over the next decade. The policy brief, developed in partnership with Bienestar Human Services – an LA-based community-based social services organization focused on health issues faced by the Latino and LGBTQ populations – explores health and social factors that contribute to HIV risks among Latinx gay and bisexual men.

According to the CDC, one in five new HIV diagnoses in 2017 in the U.S. were among Latinx gay and bisexual men. While HIV rates are stable, or falling in other groups, they rose by 12 percent among these men from 2012-2016. Eighty-four percent of the increase among Latinx gay and bisexual men was in Puerto Rico, Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas. By looking at different factors and health outcomes, the authors highlight four policy actions to heighten attention:

- Strengthen governmental responses to HIV that focus on the unique prevention and care needs of Latinx gay and bisexual men.
- Address the social determinants of Latinx gay and bisexual men’s health.
- Support immigrants and migrants,



including when providing HIV services.
- Cultivate and support emerging Latinx leaders.

“There is much that we are getting right in our national response to HIV, as exemplified by declining HIV diagnoses and increased HIV viral suppression, yet these outcomes are not being equally shared. By understanding the challenges facing Latinx communities and more strongly embracing Latinx gay and bisexual men, we can turn this around and reduce these disparities,” says Jeffrey S. Crowley, program director of Infectious Disease Initiatives at the O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown Law and lead author of the brief.

“Every day, we witness the trauma and burden of our clients for being Latinx gay and bisexual men. We face racism and marginalization from some parts of the LGBTQ community, and too often our families do not fully understand us. Nonetheless, we also witness amazing queer Latinx leaders of all ages fighting for themselves and their communities. This brief shows how we can better support our communities,” commented Oscar De La O, President and CEO of Bienestar Human Services.

Community partners and agencies from around the country have collaborated on a call to action articulating demands from Latinx gay and bisexual men for better support.

In releasing the report, the authors note that Latinx transgender women and men also are at high risk of HIV infection and often have large unaddressed HIV and health care needs. The focus on gay and bisexual men in this brief is not intended to detract from the need to support Latinx and other trans people.

In commenting on the brief, Sean E. Bland, senior HIV associate and co-author of the brief said, “While we welcome the Trump Administration’s new commitment to ending the HIV epidemic, it cannot be achieved until we stop attacking immigrants and Latinx people, and we must expand protections that enable Latinx gay and bisexual men to safely come forward for HIV prevention and care services.”

The policy brief can be read online at <http://oneill.law.georgetown.edu/media/Latinx-Gay-and-Bi-Men.pdf>.

Whitmer Declares April Sexual Assault Awareness Month

BY BTL STAFF

Raising public awareness about sexual assault and educating communities about how to prevent it are the center of the national campaign for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has proclaimed April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month in Michigan, joining advocates and communities across our state in playing an active role to prevent sexual assault.

“It’s crucial that we stand with the thousands of Michiganders who are impacted by sexual assault each year and take steps to prevent sexual assault across the state,” Whitmer said. “We need

to work to ensure survivors across the state have the support they need if they choose to reach out for services. I’m committed to working with Director Gordon, my partners in the legislature, and everyone else who wants to spread awareness and prevent sexual assault in their communities.”

National statistics show that one in three women and one in six men experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. Sexual assault is broadly defined as any form of unwanted sexual contact obtained without consent. Michigan State Police statistics indicate that 12,096 sexual assault related offenses were reported to law enforcement in 2017.

“Sexual assault is a pervasive issue that affects

every community in our state,” said Robert Gordon, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services director. “Sexual Assault Awareness Month is a unique opportunity to raise awareness around this critical issue and to empower Michiganders to take an active role in changing our culture and preventing assault from happening in the first place.”

Last year the state’s first sexual assault hotline was launched, creating 24/7 access to free, anonymous and confidential counseling services for all survivors. A new resource website, Michigan.gov/voices4, was also established to provide easier access to sexual assault services and resources.

“Everyone has a responsibility to speak up so victims’ voices are heard,” said Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel. “I’m incredibly proud of the work our attorneys do to successfully investigate and prosecute sexual assault, whether it is on a highly visible case like Larry Nassar, or the cases happening in communities across our state. This month serves as a reminder of the important work Michigan is doing to put an end to these terrible acts and the resources available to Michiganders to help prevent them.”

To view the proclamation, visit Michigan.gov/Whitmer.

You are Invited to our "Over 50" Living with HIV Medical Lecture

Tuesday, April 30, 2019

Complimentary dinner, 6 pm • Program, 6:30 pm

**Ascension St. John Macomb Oakland
Hospital Educational Center
27351 Dequindre, Madison Heights, MI 48071**

As we age living with HIV, our metabolism changes more rapidly than uninfected individuals and so does our well-being. In other words, we get older quicker. These changes include all body systems, such as heart, lungs, brain, liver, bones, kidneys, vision, hearing, gastrointestinal, and more. The number one cause of mortality in older persons living with HIV is not HIV, but non-HIV-associated malignancies, such as colon cancer, prostate cancer, liver and pancreatic cancer to name a few. Thankfully, with all newer HIV medications, the virus itself is not really the problem any longer.

There are many things you can do to enable yourself to live longer and more healthy with HIV. At the **Be Well Medical Center**, we focus our HIV primary care for our treasured older HIV population, many of whom have been with us since the 1980s. We do the seemingly little things, like early and aggressive treatment for borderline high sugar, cholesterol, or blood pressure. It makes a difference.

Our primary care for the "over 50 crowd" separates good from great. As your healthcare team of coaches, we are constantly reviewing medications to avoid over medicating. Sometimes, less is more. We address and encourage good nutrition, exercise, and tobacco cessation. We provide evidence-based care to protect your liver, bones, kidneys, and other vital body systems. We limit or substitute medicines to reduce risk of falling, especially at night, to help prevent bone fractures. We respect aging livers and kidneys. We have Keyuna Nance, MSW, on site, to aggressively screen for and treat depression that sometimes accompanies getting older.

We will be announcing plans for "Group Medical Appointments" for those over the age of 50. These visits will provide an opportunity



Dr. Paul Benson's
**Be Well
Medical Center**

to hear from different specialists about combating the issues getting older with HIV. At these visits you can have discussion with your peers and can get your HIV tests completed as well.

This meeting is complimentary and open only to our Be Well patients until April 23, 2019. After that, we will open registration to others as space is limited.

RSVP! It is essential that our patients RSVP by April 23, 2019.
Call **248-544-9300** or email research@doctorbewell.com to RSVP.

Sincerely,
Paul Benson, D.O.

DoctorBeWell.com

Dr. Benson is an Associate Professor at Michigan State University providing training to our next generation of physicians.
He leads our team of professional and talented providers at the Be Well Medical Center, 1964 Eleven Mile Rd, Berkley, MI 40872.



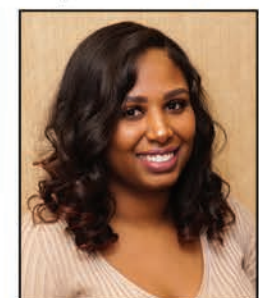
Caleb Youngblood, PA-C, AAHIV-S



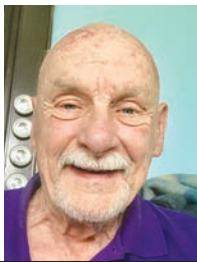
Mark Rosen, PA-C



Leon Bullough, NP-F



Keyuna Nance, MSW



Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

A Hug in Time

An open house I attended a blossoming spring or two ago was winding down at the home of BTL co-publishers Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz. Two boys of some of the invited party guests were fussing over who'd get to release balloons at the festive closing of the couple's full bloom garden showcase.

Tucker, younger by a year, was losing out to his brother, taller-by-an-inch Sammy, age 7.

Tucker ran to his mom in tears. She hugged him, stroked his tousled hair. Gently rubbed his back. He held her a little closer, cried a hint more audibly, but was soon distracted from his hurt.

I envied Tucker his hugs. That simple act of parental comfort prompted memories for me. Some pleasant. Some so deeply sad.

I tried to recall a time when my father hugged me, but no embrace came to mind. And my mother wasn't much on hugs either, though I know she often pampered me.

She read me the "OZ" books at bedtime, bought me comics when I was sick, and sent me to Baptist camp two happy summers in a row. (Where I developed a compensating hug crush on my cabin counselor Jerry Proxy.)

My father never spanked me, and I recall only once my mother did: I threw a stone at a friend and accidentally nicked his face. He rounded up a gang of neighborhood kids and they sing-songed names about me outside our courtyard window.

My mother underscored their taunts with her silver-handled hairbrush. Not too hard. But emphatic nonetheless.

Truth is: many families aren't affectionate. Intimacy is a no-no. Reticence by one parent is copied by the other. If you're an only child, as I was, you survive with one less emotional perk, and you miss so much.

I've been told that not showing feelings is English (my mother's side) or Scottish (my father's). My friend Chris O'Brien, who hails from London, said so. She said it over lunch (fish and chips, I'm sure.)

"Charles, you're so bloody English." She didn't elaborate. But, now that I'm older and can think about things other than sex (try me) I find she spotted a fellow traveler early on.

So, I suppose it's understandable, given the Anglo-Saxon family tree I tumbled out of, that I didn't care tuppence for hugging.

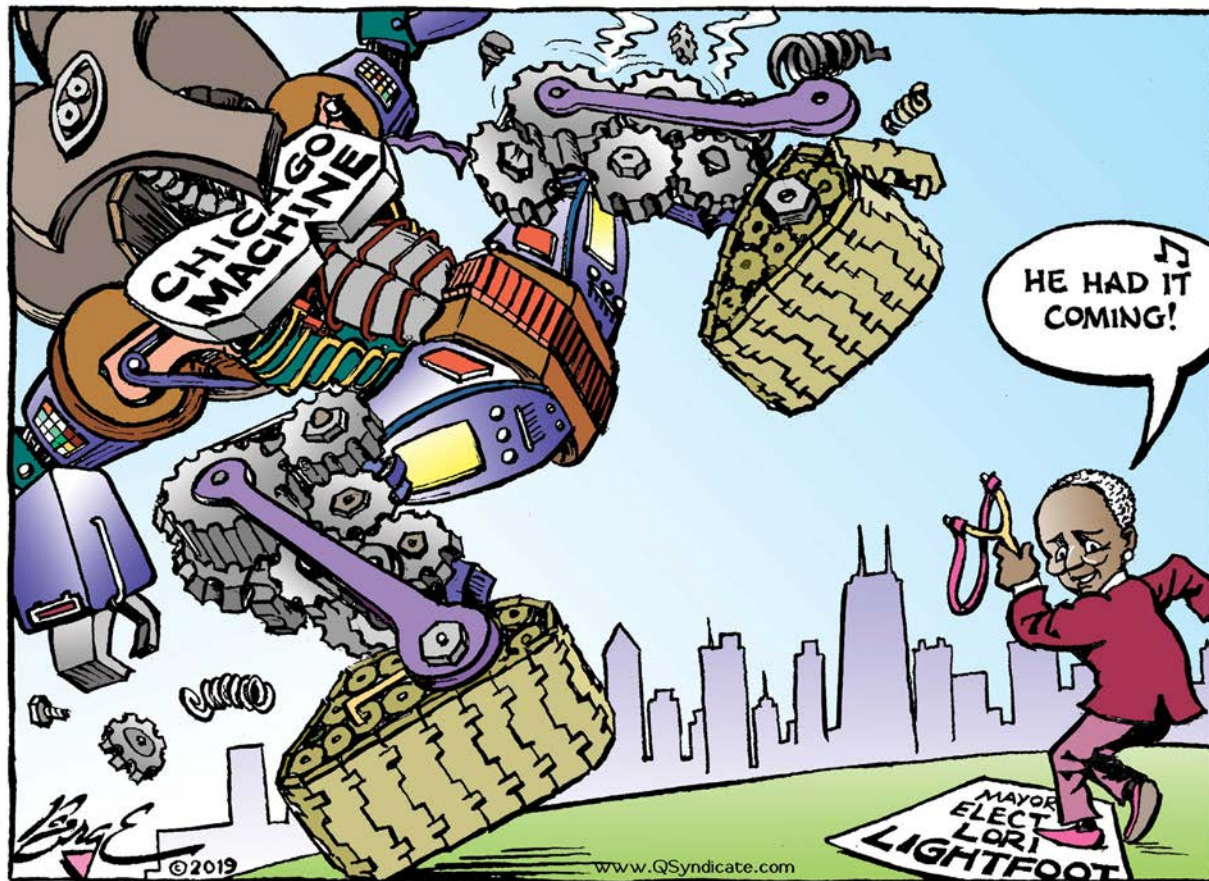
Nowadays I hug unabashedly (try me.) It's no big deal. Jocks hug each other openly. Straight men do, too. Affection - including cheek-kissing and gridiron butt-patting - is acceptable. Occasionally televised to sports-minded cheers.

I began hugging at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in 1982. Everyone at AA hugs (and swills coffee.) It's another way of saying, "We're here for each other. Each hug helps us stay sober, one day at a time."

I also hugged, while also surviving sober, at MCC-Detroit, where one-on-one open communion is highlighted with a warm embrace.

"Greet each other with a Sign of Peace," Sober now 38 years. At both places my sense of self worth was gradually restored.

See **Parting Glances**, continued on p. 13



Another Day in LGBTQ History: Even in Victory Our Work Continues

BY MICHELLE E. BROWN

Lori Lightfoot was elected Mayor of Chicago! Let that sink in - an African-American Lesbian was elected Mayor of the nation's third largest city. If that wasn't historic enough, on the same day Madison, Wisconsin, and Kansas City, Missouri, also elected queer women as mayors - Satya Rhodes-Conway and Jolie Justus.

Now let this sink in.

On the same day as these historic wins, the House Judiciary Committee held hearings on the reintroduced Equality Act that would protect LGBTQ people nationwide from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

No this isn't an episode of "The Twilight Zone" or a parallel universe in some graphic novel. It's right here in the United States of America where three queer women can get elected mayors of their respective cities but in 30 out of 50 states, they have no protections at work, school, housing and from receiving many services including medical care.

Hard to believe that in these days, despite significant steps forward, LGBTQ people lack basic legal protections in all 50 states across the country. The patchwork nature of current laws means that protections in one state could disappear with a move or job transfer leaving LGBTQ people subject to uncertainty and potential discrimination impacting our safety and that of our families, as well as our day-to-day lives. The Equality Act was jointly introduced in both the House

of Representatives and Senate on March 13, 2019, with the support of both Democratic and Republican members of Congress. But as they say it's not our first rodeo before these bodies, fighting for these protections.

The original Equality Act was developed by U.S. Reps. Bella Abzug and Ed Koch in 1974. It was reintroduced in the 114th Congress in 2015 and again in the 115th Congress in 2017. But still, LGBTQ Americans remain unprotected from discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, credit and the jury system.

If approved by Congress, the measure would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that banned discrimination based on race, religion, sex and national origin.

So maybe it will be different this time.

After seeing many of the significant steps forward LGBTQ communities under the Obama Administration come under attack since the 2016 elections, the House is once again under control of the Democratic party.

And unlike, past efforts when the Equality Act received weak bipartisan support, the 2019 bill was introduced with 287 original co-sponsors - the most congressional support that any piece of pro-LGBTQ legislation has received upon

See **Viewpoint**, continued on next page

► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 12

introduction.

It also has 161 corporate sponsors with operations across all 50 states, including Apple, Amazon, Google, IBM, Facebook and Twitter.

National civil rights organizations including the NAACP, international human rights organizations, as well as major professional associations, also joined in support of the 2019 Equality Act.

And the testimonies.

Jami Contreras telling how doctors refused to treat her infant daughter because she and her wife were lesbians. Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D) from Washington's 7th congressional district, which includes most of Seattle, sharing her personal account of being a mother to a "gender non-conforming child. And my friend, and founder of Black Transmen Inc., Carter Brown telling how he was fired because of his gender identity.

Unfortunately, these hearings were not shown during prime time and didn't receive as broad a coverage as the elections. These testimonies were powerful.

They were each different but as Dennis Wiley, pastor of the Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ said in his testimony "No two discriminations are the same ... but it's still discrimination."

Tuesday, April 2, 2019, was a historic moment in time.

We saw three queer women elected to the highest office in their municipalities, one the first African-American woman mayor of the nation's third largest city.

We saw hearings open on the Equality Act to provide protection for our communities, our families in all 50 states with greater support than ever before.

We've come a long way, but we also saw

the hope of Tuesday tempered with the reality that homophobia, transphobia and social inequality still exist not only in society at large but in our community as well.

At the hearings, Julia Beck, a lesbian Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist testified in opposition to protecting gender identity under the Equality Act. A Duke Law School professor testified she was concerned with transgender women forcing cisgender women out of sports.

Texas Representative Louie Gohmert implied that transgender people were not honest about their gender identity. Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz said while he was against the discrimination of the LGBTQ community, he worried that "bad actors" would take advantage of programs set up for women.

Can we just call these arguments what they are: BULLSHIT!

We've come a long way but with every victory comes more work.

We must hold our three new mayors accountable to do the real work, using the wisdom and strength gained from our past struggles against hatred, discrimination and inequality to do better not just for LGBTQ Americans but for everybody.

And as members of the LGBTQ community, we must continue to tell our stories. Silence is not an option – stand up, speak out.

IT'S TIME TO PASS THE EQUALITY ACT NOW!

Michelle E. Brown is a public speaker, activist and author. Her blog radio podcast "Collections By Michelle Brown" airs every Thursday at 7 p.m. Current and archived episodes can be heard on Blog Talk Radio, iTunes, Stitcher or SoundCloud. Follow her on Facebook at facebook.com/CollectionsByMichelleBrown/.

Tomorrow the brothers will have forgotten this spontaneous adventure. But I wish I could teach them to savor and remember their parental hugs.

At my age what I wouldn't give for just one let's pretend parental hug, with make-believe whispers softly in my ear, "There, there, my little man. You're safe, so very, very safe with us. Go out and play. Be who you're meant to be!"

Here today. Proud today. Hug a friend with a non-English remembering hello.

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

► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 12

It was life-saving. And, sadly, hugs helped me through the heart-rending AIDS crisis of the '80s. I lost 10 MCC-Detroit friends to AIDS – all young, bright and in their 30s.

Each had supported my sobriety. We shared laughter, tears and dreams. Not too long ago ...

Sammy and Tucker, each releases his helium balloons and watches the bouquet drift off into tiny, tiny sky-colored dots, gone who knows where. They cheered.

(The balloons rose slowly toward the sunlit clouds. There was hardly a breeze, and the freewheeling colors, like migrating flocks, followed a steady, carefree path. A moment of blue. A fleeting touch of red. A hint of sunshine yellow. Om shanti!)

Creep Of The Week

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Bryan Fischer

While scrolling through my Twitter feed I stumbled upon a photo of Jonathan Van Ness walking hand in hand through Capitol Hill with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Van Ness, one of the stars of "Queer Eye," was wearing a pink sweater and skirt, Ocasio-Cortez, a Democrat representing New York, was wearing a magenta pantsuit. Someone had Tweeted, "THIS is the future Democrats want." My first thought: Oh, hell yes. That future cannot come soon enough.

Van Ness, who was joined by three of his "Queer Eye" co-stars, also visited Nancy Pelosi's office. But they weren't there just for photo ops. The Queer Eye guys were in D.C. advocating for the passage of The Equality Act, which would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

Because even though Van Ness can twirl his beautiful brown locks through the halls of Congress, the fact remains that in too many states he could legally be fired for being gay. Marriage equality may be the law of the land (for now. You'd best believe that all of the right-wing judges Trump is getting rammed through are working hard to undo that), but legal discrimination is, too.

So it's about time we right this wrong so that LGBTQ people can live their life with dignity and the protection they deserve.

Oh, but what's that I hear? Somebody's upset about the idea of LGBTQ people being protected from discrimination? Yes, yes. You, sir, in the back. What's your name?

"Why my name is Bryan Fischer and as I wrote on the internet: 'It's not the Equality Act, it's the Homosexual Supremacy Act.'"

Ugh. I should have known.

On April 7, Fischer, who is part of the American Family Association, wrote on the BarbWire site, "Don't let the left and the Talking Snake Media (sic) lie to you. They lie to us all by the words they hope will drive and dominate the narrative. One of those words is 'equality.'"

As Fischer points out, the left is just so darn tricky with their words since "equality" sounds like a good thing and makes people who are against it seem like bad people! It's just not fair!

"If we oppose it they tag us as people who are against fairness and equal rights for all and as people who are nothing more than blackguards and bigots," Fischer writes.

Exactly A guy who believes that LGBTQ people are not human and are thus incapable of feeling love or contributing anything positive in the world just can't get a break these days!

"But the reality is that not all behaviors are equal in moral value and should not be treated the same," he continues. "The behavior of a man engaged in the act of sodomy with a homosexual partner is not morally equivalent to the behavior of a man who is engaged in

Accusing supporters of the Equality Act of being "Homosexual Supremacists" is ugly and an especially ignorant thing to say at a time when white supremacy, an actual problem that does real, measurable harm to more than just feelings, is on the rise and supported by the White House.

loving and conjugal union with the wife of his youth. It is moral blindness and even stupidity to pretend otherwise."

Well, color me morally blind and stupid then.

What confuses me most about what Fischer is saying here is the use of the word "youth." What is he saying? That only young people can get it? Can't the olds get down? Right-wingers are so confusing.

"There is no equality in this bill for anyone who believes that homosexuality is non-normative sexual behavior and something that should not be promoted, subsidized and celebrated, especially in our schools," Fischer writes.

Subsidized? Is there an LGBTQ tax break I'm missing here? Oh, wait. I think he means that he's opposed to taxpayer money being used to enforce laws that protect LGBTQ people. Damn, he almost had me supporting the Trump tax cut (just kidding. I would never).

Also, boo-hoo, dude. You can think LGBTQ people are gross or immoral or whatever you want. But you don't get to demand that your feelings trump another person's humanity.

"I call this bill 'The Homosexual Supremacy Act,' since it elevates homosexuality and gender confusion above anything and everything else in the moral universe," Fischer writes. "Everyone will be required to bow the knee before the Baal of Sodom or face punishment."

Oh, please. Accusing supporters of the Equality Act of being "Homosexual Supremacists" is ugly and an especially ignorant thing to say at a time when white supremacy, an actual problem that does real, measurable harm to more than just feelings, is on the rise and supported by the White House.

"The reality is that in any circumstance covered by this bill, somebody is going to be discriminated against, either a Christian vendor or a member of the LGBT community," Fischer writes.

Right now in many places in the United States, a lesbian can be fired for marrying her wife. Fischer is crying about the thought police when LGBTQ people have had every aspect of their lives policed. So as far as I'm concerned, Fischer can point at two women and their children and say, "Your family isn't real," but he doesn't have a right to have his hatred enforced by policy.

Guss Pappas

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Let's Talk About Drinking and Health

BY MARK MCMILLAN

I am often asked from clients and friends if I believe there is a healthy amount of alcohol that may be consumed on a regular basis. Of course,



no one likes my response: actually no, there is not. However, I also like to reframe the question: How do you define healthy? More specifically, is there a use for alcohol?

According to a recent study published in The Lancet, a peer-reviewed medical journal, "alcohol is a leading risk factor for death and disease, associated with 2.8 million deaths each year and the seventh-leading risk factor for premature death and disability globally in 2016."

Additionally, this study also stated that "there is no amount of alcohol that is healthy." For comparison, globally, heart disease is first; diabetes is fifth, killing 1.6 million people in 2015, up from 1 million in 2000 according to the World Health Organization.

Let's assume, generally, a healthy diet is one that maintains or improves one's overall health. Let's also assume, generally, a healthy diet begins with moderation; or making what I call more informed choices. However, are we making a more informed choice when so many of us in the LGBTQ community struggle with oppression every day?

Maintaining a healthy diet becomes more difficult when we struggle with safety and threats of violence every day for being our authentic selves. Where in the past for the lesbian, gay and trans communities, the social outlet was the bar or club scene, today most of us in the LGBTQ community have apps that allow for the combined sex, drug and party scene in the palm of our hands. Unfortunately, today it is also estimated that up to 25 percent of the LGBTQ community has moderate to severe

alcohol dependence, compared to up to 10 percent of the general population according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This leads back to moderation and healthy choices or what I term "use and misuse."

OK, so not many of us have discussed our drinking in terms of "use and misuse" before, but it's the best way to discuss drinking without judgment or stigma. First, let's start with the standard one drink an hour rule for moderation in alcohol consumption. Another suggestion comes from "Dietary Guidelines for Americans," a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which suggests women have no more than one drink daily and men have no more than two daily.

Whoa, right? For some, this may be a little extreme. For comparison, think of moderation in our sugar intake, carbohydrate intake and most any other food choice we make.

If we maintain that alcohol use is a drink an hour, then more than that would be alcohol misuse. If you realize you are

Up to 25 percent of the LGBTQ community has moderate to severe alcohol dependence

currently misusing alcohol, then you can modify your behavior or, more simply, try to achieve a healthier balance with your drinking. This works for other healthy choices too: if you are misusing pills, food or sex, for example, then you can more honestly take a look at how to modify your behavior to maintain a healthier moderate lifestyle.

If you or a loved one has moved beyond alcohol misuse, then a more difficult discussion is necessary about out-of-control behavior or OCB and drinking. For example, how often do you have five or more drinks on one occasion, how often in the last few months have you failed to do what was expected of you

Viewpoint

If you or a loved one has moved beyond alcohol misuse, then a more difficult discussion is necessary about out-of-control behavior or OCB and drinking.

because of drinking and has a friend or loved one suggested you cut down on your drinking? If you can answer "yes" to some of these questions, then you are most likely navigating unhealthy choices or OCB with drinking.

Nobody likes to talk about embarrassing behavior, which is why it's recommended to speak to a health care professional; attend a 12-step recovery group; or speak with a trusted friend or loved one. Below are some rules that can be implemented to assess our relationships to drinking:

- One drink an hour is always the best rule to start from. Ask yourself, "Do I need another drink right now?"
- Is your drinking consistent with others around you? Are you often encouraging others to catch up to you or have one more shot?
- Do you get angry, embarrassed or secretive when questioned about your drinking habits?
- Is your drinking consistent and in synch with your other dietary habits?
- Is your drinking compatible with your overall health and exercise routine? (Do you have a health and exercise routine?)

For those who would like more information about this topic, find me and colleagues at Ferndale Pride on Sunday, June 1, 2019, when the Center for Relationship and Sexual Health will be sponsoring the Sober Space for the first time. Please stop by to say hello, play a game or just relax with a free bottled water! I believe with practice, we can have healthier behaviors when it comes to drinking and our health.

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Flint Couple Tackles Kidney Disease, Highlights Story for April, National Donate Life Month

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

It was 2004 and Deb Gustafson and her wife, Sue Weston, were planning on having a great time. The Flint couple was about to go on long-planned vacation when Gustafson started to feel unwell. Her family had a history of urinary tract and bladder infections and she suspected that her discomfort might be related. Eventually, when her symptoms didn't pass, she asked to go home and was rushed to the hospital. The couple learned that kidney disease often begins to take its toll long before symptoms arise and for Deb Gustafson that was the case. While in the Intensive Care Unit, she was diagnosed with stage 3 of the disease's possible 5; her kidneys were slowly beginning to fail.

Though Gustafson began a treatment plan, her symptoms gradually progressed and by 2014, Deb had entered stage 4 of the disease. As the situation grew direr with time, Gustafson's doctors put her on a strict hydration schedule, but to no avail.

"Some people don't experience any symptoms until they're in stage 5. Unfortunately, I experienced symptoms from stage 3 up to stage 5. I made kidney stones, and so there would be times when I would be in pain and have to have a kidney stone crushed for it to pass," Gustafson said. "I did have pain because my kidneys were shrinking, they were full of stones and in 2016 they finally decided to take them out because they were bad and infecting my whole body."

It was then that she joined the more than 114,000 people in the U.S. on the national transplant waiting list, according to Donate Life America. DLA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to increasing the number of donated organs, eyes and tissues to aid in life-saving procedures across the country and reports that there are roughly 8,000 deaths a year because organs aren't donated in time. Perhaps the most striking statistic reported is that 82 percent of the patients who are waiting are, like Gustafson, in need of a kidney. In 2003 the organization dedicated the month of April, directly after National Kidney Month, to be known as National Donate Life Month.

And as successful as DLA has been at registering potential donors, "[DLA registered] 147 million organ, eye and tissue donors in the United States – more than 58 percent of the adult population," there's still dire need.

Gustafson and Weston agreed to share their story with BTL in an effort to put attention on the issue and to shine a light on the treatment and prevention of kidney disease because as Gustafson puts it, "Your whole life changes."



Sue Weston and her wife, Deb Gustafson. BTL Photo: Eve Kucharski

Searching for Donors and Living With Treatment

Shortly after the couple found out that Gustafson's kidney would have to be removed, Weston got tested to see if she was a compatible donor. Initial tests came back with good news, Weston was a match, but she learned soon after that she too had kidney damage.

"I found out that she had gallstones and pancreatitis which I didn't know I had because I had no symptoms because otherwise we matched and were excited about me being a donor and when we found out I couldn't be I was crushed," Weston said. "I said I gave her my heart and now I want to give her my kidney. We thought things were great, but it didn't turn out that way."

While on the waiting list, Gustafson had to undergo hemodialysis, a daily process that filters the toxins out of one's blood in lieu of regular kidney function. It's a time-consuming endeavor that the couple elected to do at home.

"In order to do home dialysis you have to go through a 21-day training period at the dialysis center, we were at DaVita, and after the 21 days, hopefully, you've learned everything and you've

passed," Gustafson said.

Weston was able to become qualified to treat her wife but there were unforeseen challenges surrounding Gustafson's treatment, too.

"In order to do it from home it takes anywhere from four to five hours because you have to set the machine up, then I hook up, then I run for 2 1/2 to three hours and then we have to tear the machine down. In the meantime, we're taking blood pressures and temperatures and all sorts of things. So it's a really time-consuming thing and it's also really very inconvenient, you have a 75-pound machine that's your lifeline and that's what keeps you alive," Gustafson said. "And in order to do that you have to have physical access to your body in order to be able to hook up and that's the whole other challenge."

Initially, her care team created an arteriovenous fistula or a connection between an artery and a vein designed to help Gustafson's body better absorb the machine's filtered blood flow. But Gustafson's physical access point proved to be a difficult one.

"I'm a very small person and so my veins are very small and I had one fistula and that died," she said. "The next level is they go up where they put a medical material tube into your arm

and attach it to a vein an artery and that's what your blood flows through to be cleaned by the machine. I had three or four different ones that had to be put in and have clogged."

Despite those difficulties, the couple was able to soldier on and provide consistent treatment for Gustafson while they looked for a match.

Finding a Match

Gustafson said that perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions she feels people have about organ donation is concerning the speed at which it occurs.

"When the person offers to be a donor for a person, they have to go through an intensive physical and it can take months for the physical part to be done, in fact, the blood test they have to do to make sure all of their body systems are working correctly and to make sure there's no diabetes and plaque and they do a lot of heart checks and diabetic checks, making sure kidneys are in check," she said. "It doesn't happen overnight like you often see in TV shows and read in books. It can take up to a year before you find out if that person's a

See **Kidney Disease**, continued on p. 18

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Southeast Michigan Community Mourns Loss of Dani Som, 20

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Though he had relocated to Portland, Oregon, last summer, when word traveled back to Detroit that 20-year-old Dani Som, aka Dani Sommerville, had taken his own life in February, his friends here were devastated. By all accounts, Som was bold, audacious and outgoing. He was confident in his identity as a trans man who was disabled, and he advocated for all the communities of which he was a part.

Som had moved to Portland to make a new life for himself but less than a year later, he ended it. As is often the case with suicide, friends and family were left with lingering questions. A memorial service took place at the Affirmations LGBTQ community center last month, where Som had been very active before relocating.

Lilianna Reyes, now working at Ruth Ellis Center, was the youth program coordinator when Som first came to the center.

“Dani was a spitfire,” Reyes said. “He really believed in equality. He believed in trying to understand people. He was a fun person. He liked to make people laugh, and he was creative.”

Reyes, who is transgender herself, was there as a support when Som first began transitioning, too.

“He didn’t know which name he wanted to choose,” Reyes recalled. “He didn’t know if he wanted to be Henri or Dani. He said, ‘I want to be a trans man. I feel like I am a trans man. But I don’t know what that means.’ So we talked a lot about him ... we talked about transitioning and finding your power in transitioning. There were lots of discussions that he and I had about power and privilege and what people can do to make this life better.”

After Reyes left her position, Ian Unger took

over the youth group at Affirmations and began regular interactions with Som. Unger said he was quickly taken by Som’s charm and positive outlook.

“He identified as a trans man, as do I,” Unger said. “We talked a lot about the politics of LGBT gender identities and queer theory.”

Unger said that Som went through several rounds of the curriculum-based youth program offered at Affirmations and was active in the youth drop-in center as well. Unger said he noted that Som always had an eye out for ways in which to improve existing systems.

“He gave lots of feedback, different things he noticed or that he thought we could improve on,” Unger said. “He always gave active feedback.”

And as he continued to grow in his identities, Som became even more active. In addition to Affirmations, Som attended FtM Detroit meetings. He wrote and performed music accompanying himself on the guitar, he was published on the website *The Mighty* and he was the head intern for a while at the charity *Mi Community*, a social engagement organization for Autistic individuals founded in honor of his late friend. Som was a member of the *Trans Student Educational Resources*, the only national organization led entirely by transgender youth. He was also a member of the *Gender Spectrum National Youth Council*.

“He was such a joy to have a part of the group,” said Jenna Hackman, a member of the council. “I distinctly remember his interview for the council because he was the only person we accepted on the spot right away. We could see such a spark in him from the beginning. His commitment to helping others and fighting for justice in the world will be truly missed.”

In addition to writing for *The Mighty*, Som was interviewed by Klie Kliebert for a series called “More Than Trans.”



“He volunteered for an interview with me because he knew that his story needed to be told,” Kliebert said in an online post about Som. “He was funny. He was sassy. He was direct. He knew what he wanted. He went for it. He cared deeply for his peers. He wanted other kids to feel seen and represented. He wanted us to do better. He asked me to grow, and so I grew. He may not know it, but Dani will stay with me.”

In the “More Than Trans” piece, Dani said, “I just want people to know that your disability, mental illness or neurodivergence is just as beautiful an identity as your trans one. Embrace

“Dani was a spitfire. He really believed in equality. He believed in trying to understand people. He was a fun person. He liked to make people laugh, and he was creative.”

- Lilianna Reyes

all of your medical quirks.”

Though friends say he enjoyed living in Portland, they also report that there he continued to suffer from depression and anxiety. He took medications such as *Abilify* but, mostly, struggled in silence. Som’s friend *Mirror Rose* said that in the week before his death he started isolating himself. His depression appeared to worsen and he began experiencing suicidal ideation.

“He was exhibiting the symptoms of anxiety and possible panic attack moments before he left,” *Rose* went on. “He had been pacing for roughly 30 minutes before he left.”

Som told *Rose* he was going to *McDonald’s* to meet a friend when he left his room at the *Nooch House*, a queer punk house where Som lived in Portland. However, his body was discovered in an abandoned house not far away.

Back in Michigan, Unger said he was “not necessarily surprised, but definitely disheartened and really sad” to learn that Som had died by suicide.

“He was an activist all the way through,” Unger said. “He was very proud of his identities and even when people in his life weren’t supportive of his trans and non-binary identities, he still persevered and was himself.”

► Kidney Disease

Continued from p. 16

match or not.”

That’s why when someone from the couple’s church offered to donate and later found plaque around his own kidney, it wasn’t an overnight revelation. The couple, after investing weeks into following his case had to go back to square one. They were fortunate, however, that in 2016 they were given hope once more when another woman from the congregation approached the couple about donating her kidney. And when she was found to be a perfect donor, *Gustafson* said she almost couldn’t believe that it was happening.

“I, of course, was ecstatic and of course it began and I gave her the information of who to contact and it went from there,” *Gustafson* said. “Every little step, every little test she took, we were on pins and needles until we got the

results and then we found out in June of 2018 that we definitely were a match.”

Barely two months later in August, the transplant was successfully completed.

BOLD New Hope

Now, although she’ll have to be on medication for the rest of her life, *Gustafson* said she’s living a life that’s similar to the one she led before her 3 1/2-year stint with dialysis and search for a donor.

“Before the transplant, I went from being very active and volunteering and working to not working, not volunteering, not going out at night, not being able to socialize so it was a drastic change,” she said. “I no longer spend half my life at the hospital or emergency rooms and no longer fight diseases that I’ve had to fight during that time. Now, I’m volunteering, I’m outgoing, I talk to people, I look better. When you have kidney disease, certain people say, like with jaundice you look yellow, when you

have kidney disease you look gray.”

Now, *Gustafson’s* volunteer work focuses primarily on helping others fight kidney disease and general prevention. That began when *Gustafson* saw an ad for a *Personal Action Toward Health* class, originally developed by *Stanford*, being run by the *National Kidney Foundation of Michigan* on living with chronic disease. She signed up and when the monthly class was finished, she wanted to do more with *NKFM*. She became a volunteer with the *NKFM Leave a Legacy* program, presented to groups on the need for kidney donations and encouraged people to sign up with *Michigan’s* donor organ registry. She also became a resource volunteer for the *NKFM*, answering people’s questions about kidney disease.

And despite the fact that *Weston*, too, was recently diagnosed with *prediabetes*, a leading cause of kidney disease and failure, the couple has remained strong. When asked what their advice is to those just starting their fight, the

answer is simple: “Don’t give up.”

“And don’t stop talking to each other,” *Gustafson* said. “You’ve got to be open. You’ve got to tell each other the truth. ... The most important thing is that you have support and loving support and if your partner is that, then you guys can handle anything.”

“That’s what we do,” *Weston* said. “And if you need to see somebody to talk to, a counselor or someone, do it separately and then go together because some things you don’t think are important, they are and you just don’t realize it at the time.”

Gustafson agreed.

“We’ve done all that and it’s so important to have the ability to communicate with each other honestly and openly.”

To find out more about the signs of kidney disease, its stages and where to find treatment go online to nkfm.org. To learn more about donation visit donatelifenet.net.

Michigan State Rep. Jon Hoadley to Run for Congress

BY BTL STAFF

This week openly gay State Rep. Jon Hoadley of Kalamazoo announced that he will run for Congress via press release. His message stated that he is running because he believes “that we should put people at the center of our decision-making process.”

“The choices we make over the next few years will determine what our future looks like, tomorrow and a hundred years from now. For too long, big forces have been dictating their agendas to our elected officials in Washington,” the release read. “That’s how we ended up with water that was undrinkable in Parchment, or families working themselves to the bone and still unable to afford child care. It can be easy to despair and throw our hands up. Although the challenges in front of us can seem daunting, we have seen the power of what happens when people come together to make change. We need to remember what we’ve known all along — we have the power. Now is the time to use it.”

Hoadley’s release then went on to address his history in the legislature and outline some of his primary goals



if elected.

“I gained valuable experience in the legislature and championed a consistent set of ideas on behalf of the people who elected me: We should invest in education for today and tomorrow, build an economy that works for everyone and fight for social justice and a clean

environment,” the release said. “We’ve made progress, but there’s more work yet to do.”

To find out more information about Hoadley’s campaign visit housedems.com/hoadley.

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With His Passion for Social Justice, Noble is Thrilled to Head ACLU of Michigan

BY BTL STAFF

Following a nationwide search, the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan is excited to welcome new Executive Director Dave Noble, who has been fighting for peoples' rights for nearly two decades. Noble has experience building and leading national social justice nonprofits and political organizations and affecting change from inside and outside government. Most recently, Noble has been consulting with national progressive groups on strategic planning, coalition building, communications, electoral engagement and leadership development.

"Dave is not only a dynamic and passionate leader, but an extraordinary human being who has immense experience building grassroots movements, recruiting and mentoring diverse and talented teams, fundraising, and budget, board and staff management," said Dan Varner, ACLU of Michigan Board President. "His many years strategically shaping issue campaigns, as well as his devotion to civil rights, is exactly the guidance needed to ensure the continued success of the ACLU of Michigan, as it grows its grassroots and campaign prowess."

Noble has deep roots in nonprofit, grassroots and legal advocacy. He led two national grassroots political organizations before joining the National LGBTQ Force in 2005. There, he oversaw a team of legislative lawyers crafting and advocating for better state laws for LGBTQ people, he led outreach to faith communities and raised the voices of welcoming and affirming religious leaders and he advised several statewide ballot initiatives. He also co-created and co-led a coalition of over 350 local, state and national organizations demanding the inclusion of protections for transgender people in federal non-discrimination legislation. He then joined the Obama campaign and led the national effort to turn out LGBTQ voters. That work led him to Michigan where he served as Deputy General Election Director, and where he has deep ties working with political, legislative and nonprofit leaders reaching back almost 20 years.

"It's an honor to be chosen to lead the talented, passionate and successful team at the ACLU of Michigan," Noble said. "The ACLU of Michigan makes sure the promises America makes in its Constitution are guaranteed for everyone. Across the country, the Michigan team is known for its work fighting the Muslim ban, expanding voting rights, helping the people of Flint, tackling criminal justice reform and standing up for LGBTQ people, among so many other important fights. I'm ready to hit the ground running and help the team, along with our coalition partners, as we continue fighting in the courts and Lansing, and engaging Michiganders across the state in a grassroots movement to protect all of our civil liberties."

In addition to his nonprofit leadership work, Noble served in the White House as deputy assistant to President Obama and deputy director of the Presidential Personnel Office, recruiting, selecting and interviewing leaders for presidential appointments across the administration. Noble also was Deputy Chief of Staff and White House Liaison for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration from 2009 to 2012, supporting the Chief of Staff in all aspects of managing the agency. And as a member of the First Lady's "Let's Move!" team, Noble built a coalition of 400 mayors and other city leaders who joined her in committing to make their communities healthier for kids.

Noble begins as Executive Director of the ACLU of Michigan on April 8.



Dave Noble

Inclusive Justice to Host Gay Catholic Church Activist

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

When Aaron Bianco, a gay layman, was brought in to manage St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in San Diego in 2016, he joined the church with great hopes. He had been invited by Bishop Robert W. McElroy to start an LGBTQ ministry at the church and become one of about 300 churches across the country that, in direct opposition of church policy, welcomed and embraced the LGBTQ community.

The church was not doing well at the time and Bianco hoped he could help. St. John the Evangelist "was dying" Bianco told Between The Lines.

"It averaged 30 people at a Sunday mass [when I came] and when I left we averaged 200."

Now, Bianco is coming to Christ Church in Bloomfield Hills on April 13 to talk about his success story. This event is sponsored by Inclusive Justice, a statewide, faith-based coalition dedicated to promoting LGBTQ-inclusive religious practices.

Rocky Road to Change

Despite its successful attendance rates, not everyone was thrilled with the growth and the direction the church was taking. Older, conservative members began to push back. This intensified last summer after renewed allegations of clergy's sexual abuse were brought against the church and extremist websites such as Church Militant and Lifesite News began blaming the scandal on homosexual priests.

"It didn't even make sense," Bianco said. "They just equate homosexuality with pedophilia without looking at any studies."

Soon, the backlash against Bianco began to intensify. There was an arson attempt at the church, and once, someone even tried to throw a punch at Bianco. He also experienced a deluge of anonymous phone calls and letters with anti-gay messages.

"My bishop and I had plenty of

conversations that I was going to stay," Bianco said. "I was not going to allow their hate to win out. But when they decided to put pictures of my family and a link to my home address on their website, and then someone broke into the church, it finally came to where I knew I had to leave."

Bianco said that this decision to leave San Diego was not one he took lightly, in particular because he had been a member of the Catholic Church

received emails, letters, telephone calls from literally all across the globe encouraging me to continue to work for total inclusion for LGBTQs in the Catholic Church. So, it makes me smile that these organizations wanted me done and now people who would have never known who Aaron Bianco was are writing to me from all over the world."

And even with him gone, the battle still continues at St. John the Evangelist

"The part that makes me smile is [that] they wanted to silence my voice," he said. "That was their goal. And since I've left my job at the church I have received emails, letters, telephone calls from literally all across the globe encouraging me to continue to work for total inclusion for LGBTQs in the Catholic Church."

- Aaron Bianco



for more than 20 years. However, when it came to the safety of both himself and those supporting his involvement, he said there was no other option.

"I have had individuals at different times at the church who maybe found out that I was married or gay and complained about it," he said. "But I had never seen the intensity that happened once these national organizations started to print about me. I like to say though: This is a small group of people, but they have money and they're loud and they became violent."

Adapting

Today, Bianco has made a career out of his experience, and he travels across the country speaking about what happened to him at parishes and conferences.

"The part that makes me smile is [that] they wanted to silence my voice," he said. "That was their goal. And since I've left my job at the church I have

in San Diego.

"They still have LGBT outreach," Bianco said. "I'm sad that these angry individuals are able to create such hate that they cause people like me and others at the church to leave. But I've said all along that they'll never get me to leave the Catholic Church. That's my home. And they'll never get me to be silent about welcoming LGBT people into the church, their rightful place."

Aaron Bianco will speak Saturday about his experiences as well as giving a workshop on how Catholic parishes can build inclusive communities and reach out to all people in the margins who don't feel welcome in the Catholic Church. The conference will take place at Christ Church Cranbrook and is sponsored by Inclusive Justice. Christ Church Cranbrook is located at 470 Church Road in Bloomfield Hills. The conference takes place Saturday, April 13, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. This event is free. For more information, visit inclusivejustice.org.



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News Analysis: The Implausible Success of Buttigieg's Campaign

BY LISA KEEN

Openly gay Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg has leapt into a surprisingly strong position in the latest poll of Iowa Democratic caucus-goers: Third place. Right behind former Vice President Joe Biden, in first with 25 percent, and U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, in second with 24 percent. South Bend Mayor Buttigieg — pronounced “buddha judge” — came in third with 11 percent, followed by U.S. Sens. Kamala Harris, 10 percent, and Elizabeth Warren, nine percent.

The news, though based on a relatively small sampling, marks an astonishing milestone for an openly gay candidate for the presidential nomination of one of the two major parties. Only one other openly gay person has ever tried to run for a major party presidential nomination: Fred Karger. Karger ran for the Republican nomination in 2012 and beat eventual nominee Mitt Romney in one New Hampshire college straw poll, but he never made it onto a nationally televised debate stage and appeared on the primary ballot in only six states.

Buttigieg's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination has fared much better, so far. He's been the subject of many mainstream media profiles and opinion pieces. On Monday alone, the New York Times said Buttigieg has “generated more buzz” than New York City's well-known Mayor Bill de Blasio,” who is also running for the Democratic presidential nomination, and the Washington Post said he's drawn “enthusiastic crowds of hundreds” in South Carolina.

He's appeared on numerous nationally broadcast political programs, including a one-hour CNN Town Hall on March 10. His performance at that event prompted former President Obama's chief campaign strategist, David Axelrod, to post on Twitter, “I have rarely seen a candidate make better use of televised Town Hall than [Buttigieg] is on [CNN]... . (sic) Crisp, thoughtful and relatable. He'll be a little less of a long shot tomorrow.”

Fighting for the National Stage

There's another nationally televised stage serious candidates want to be on: the Democratic presidential primary debates. The first one is in June; and the party wants to limit the number of candidates on stage to 20, possibly spread over two different nights. To be included on the stage for the debates, a candidate must, in the next three months, achieve the support of at least one percent of respondents in at least three national polls approved by the Democratic National Committee. Buttigieg's gotten two: Fox News's

poll of 403 Democratic primary and caucus voters March 17 through 20 (margin of error plus or minus 5 percentage points) and CNN's poll of 456 Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents March 14 through 17 (margin of error plus or minus 5.7 percentage points). In both, he got one percent. In the Fox poll, he did as well as Sen. Amy Klobuchar. In the CNN poll, he did as well as Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand. (At the top of both heaps was former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders.)

Though it is not a national poll, a poll by Emerson College of 249 Iowa Democratic caucus-goers between March 21 and 24 found Buttigieg in third place, with 11 percent their support. (The margin of error was plus or minus 6.2 percentage points.)



Presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg. Photo: Michael Key, Washington Blade.

Emerson Poll Director Spencer Kimball called Buttigieg's third-place finish “the biggest surprise” of the poll, noting that “last week we saw him inching up in our national poll, and now he's in double digits in Iowa.”

Buttigieg was a zero when Emerson polled caucus-goers in January.

More than 200 people have notified the Federal Election Commission of their intention to seek the Democratic nomination. Pollsters cannot survey the public about all 200 candidates, so they have to choose which candidates' names to include in their surveys and which to leave off.

This year, the Democratic National Committee said it would use an additional gauge to determine who reaches the debate stage: those candidates who report getting contributions from 65,000 people from at least 20 different states and with a minimum of 200 donors per state.

Buttigieg said on Twitter March 16 that his campaign has received contributions from more than 76,000 individuals. And campaign spokeswoman Lis Smith told CNN the campaign has raised at least \$1.6 million since the CNN Town Hall.

But the Democratic Party plans for the

debates also noted that, if more than 20 candidates meet just one criterion, the DNC will pare down the number to those candidates who meet both criteria. And if there are still too many candidates, the debate slots will go to the qualifiers with the highest polling averages. So, even if Buttigieg gets one percent in a third poll and has 76,000 donors, he could potentially be barred from the stage. But his unusually successful campaign to get the media's attention thus far could well put him among the highest polling candidates come June.

Meanwhile, March 31 is the next deadline for presidential candidates to report to the Federal Elections Commission how much money they have raised for their campaigns. Many media organizations will use those dollar figures to assess how much traction each candidate is getting.

The Implausibility and the Difference

To some extent, Buttigieg's success in getting media attention — and thereby the attention of the public — is due to his being gay. He is, apparently, the only openly gay candidate among more than 600 people who have filed notice of wanting to run, either as a Republican, a Democrat, other party or independent candidate.

Today, almost everything gay gets attention from the mainstream media and, for a candidate who was virtually unknown three months ago, such attention generates even more attention.

But Buttigieg's success so far seems to be fueled by his very serious, very intelligent and very down-home likable personality. When the MSNBC “Morning Joe” talk show hosts asked him to “tell us about your faith,” he noted that he's Episcopalian, that his church takes seriously its role in the urban community of South Bend and that he thinks candidates should “have the option to talk about our faith.”

“Don't get me wrong: I believe strongly in the separation of church and state. I think any [candidate] needs to demonstrate how they will represent people of any faith, people of no faith. But I also think the time has come to reclaim faith as a theme,” he said. “The idea that the only way a religious person could enter politics is through the prism of the religious right — I just don't think that makes sense.”

Buttigieg said he thinks it is time for “more of a religious left to emerge in our country.”

At the CNN Town Hall March 10, nationally televised from Austin, the first question out of the chute from the audience was why he thinks he is qualified to run the country when he's not held elective office at even the state

or congressional district level. Buttigieg has been asked that many times and his answer is consistent: being a mayor of a city of any size is the “best kind of preparation you can have” and noted “I have more years of government experience under my belt than the president,” “more years of executive government experience under my belt than the vice president” and “more military experience than anybody to walk into that office on day one than since George H.W. Bush.”

Buttigieg was the first Democratic candidate to appear on Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace. There, he said, “I'm not like the others,” noting that he's 37, his generation, being from the Midwest and having served in the military. When prompted to say another Democratic candidate was “wrong” about an issue, he said, instead, “I'd do it differently.”

In each venue, Buttigieg has moved easily through a wide range of topics, from job security and training, income supplements, Venezuela's political unrest and transitioning veterans into civilian life to the power of businesses to grow the economy, the war in Afghanistan and whether Congress should regulate Facebook and impeach President Trump. (On the latter, he said he would prefer voters remove Trump from office.)

He neither avoids nor insists on acknowledging his being gay, and makes a point to introduce his spouse, Chasten, to most audiences, though most moderators find a way to broach the subject.

And then there is his biography, detailed in “The Shortest Way Home”: He is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, a Rhodes scholar to the University of Oxford, a business analyst for a global management consulting firm and a popular mayor of South Bend, Indiana's fourth largest city.

“Why are you in such a hurry?” asked Fox's Chris Wallace near the end of his March 17 interview, which — oddly — did not once bring up Buttigieg's being gay.

“Why not wait a few years, get more experience, build a bigger record, get better known and run for president at, say, the ripe old age of 41?” Wallace asked.

Buttigieg said he has taken into consideration both “the moment” in American history, “what is called for” in this moment and “what I bring to the table.”

“I see it as a very unusual moment. Look, it's unusual for it to be even plausible that a 37-year-old Midwestern mayor is giving national interviews for a possible candidacy for president,” said Buttigieg, who has announced an exploratory committee, but not yet a formal campaign for president. “But there's something that's happening right now that calls for something completely different than what we've been seeing — generationally different, regionally different, somebody with a different story and a different background.”



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BRAVER THAN BEFORE

Photo: Epic Records



Sara Bareilles Talks Political Convictions, Her 'Ride or Die' Lesbians & Meeting a 'Drag Race' Queen

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Sara Bareilles wanted to see herself be brave. Of course she summoned you to do the same atop a bop that wouldn't take no for an answer, but she's been a work in progress herself. She followed her own be-bold guidance for her fifth solo album, "Amidst the Chaos," making timely feminist assertions ("Armor") and using coded language to write songs that could be about love but were actually written, mournfully, longingly, with a specific loved one in mind: Barack Obama. "Amidst the Chaos" is Bareilles' first studio album in six years, the last being 2013's "The Blessed Unrest." (She also wrote the music and lyrics for Broadway's

"Waitress the Musical," which opened in 2015.)

Recently, Bareilles spoke candidly about fearlessly (and finally) speaking her mind, backlash from Trump supporters who are refusing to listen to her new music and criticism that allies shouldn't sing about the LGBTQ community. But first, drag queens...

You recently had a run-in with Nina West, a contestant on this season's "RuPaul's Drag Race," outside the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, home to "Waitress the Musical."

I sure did.

You're like, "I know. I was there" You didn't forget.

Of course not! You don't forget that! It was amazing. I was still in the show at the time and it was the day they announced she was joining the cast, and I walked outside – I was going to physical therapy for my shoulder – and she is so fierce and she was wearing that pink, yellow, super bright dress and she's underneath the marquee. I'm like, "Give that to me please!" So we just had this beautiful, sweet little run-in, and then she sent a whole box of goodies and I shared it with the cast and I got my Nina West t-shirt.

You have a Nina West shirt now?

I sure do! There's an amazing array of t-shirts. Like whoever does that merch is on point.

Now all the queens are gonna be sending you drag queen t-shirts. You're gonna have a whole closet full of them.

I'll take it, are you kidding me? That's all I'm gonna wear this year. (Laughs)

Does this mean you're a "RuPaul's Drag Race" fan?

I am, although I'm not gonna pretend like I watch it every time. I feel like I stay up to date on it because my friends watch it. You sort of keep an eye on it. Like, I love that it exists, and it makes so many people so happy and I love it.

SAVE THE DATE

Sara Bareilles

8 p.m. Oct. 5

Fox Theatre

2211 Woodward Ave, Detroit

olympiaentertainment.com

(Tickets on sale at 10 a.m. April 12)

Also: "Waitress the Musical," featuring music by Sara Bareilles, comes May 7-19 to the Fisher Theatre (3011 W. Grand Blvd). For tickets, visit broadwayindetroit.com.

Now, after Nina, there's basically a gay movement to get you on the show to be a judge.

Oh my god, I would love to.

If you were a judge on the show, what kind of judge would you be? Are you qualified to judge drag?

No – let me just tell you what I know about myself: I am a terrible judge and I learned this when I was on "The Sing-Off" because I was a judge for one season on this a cappella competition show and who does not want to ever give criticism? Sara Bareilles. It is not why I am on this earth! Other people are good at it; I am not. I am all about, I wanna love you up! I wanna make you feel great! I wanna pick out all the things I'm excited about who you are! I'm not a good person for, like, constructive criticism. I'm so uncomfortable. I'll just be a really sweet judge.

Shifting to the new album, and given its subject matter, was the LGBTQ community on your mind while creating it?

Always. That community is just braided into the fabric of my messaging and my intention, always. And beyond. Really, for me, the pivot point was the election and wanting to turn back toward music and talk about the way I was feeling about the world with music again, with my own personal music.

The thing that's been so hard to witness is this total absence of compassion and inclusivity, and it's really jarring to watch this soul-crushing nature of so much agitation and anger and blame. I'm having a hard time with it. It's really, really hard to metabolize as a person, and so I definitely turn toward music to parse those ideas out and put them somewhere and try to make sense of it. But on a macro level and a micro level, this last handful of years has felt very chaotic.

Though they're disguised as love songs, some of these songs were written about Obama, like "No Such Thing" and "If I Can't Have You." In turn, they've turned off some Trump supporters. One comment on a Variety article read, "I am deleting her from my playlist. She loves a president that literally destroyed the healthcare for my family and millions of others because

he's 'cool.' Another idiot who has no concept of the real world." You must've known some of these songs would polarize your fan base. Why sing them anyway?

Because they're true for me. I think that one of the things that has happened to me in the last handful of years is that I have stopped feeling fearful of displeasing people with my truth. I think as a young artist I felt very aware of never saying anything that was controversial or wasn't sort of milquetoast-y in the sense of steering clear of anything political.

On some level, I'm not a policy wonk. I can't break down to you the ins and outs of every point of what's happening politically, but I am learning and I am curious and I have questions. And I'm not fearful of losing a fan who doesn't care for my belief system. It's OK. You don't have to listen. I still wrote the song for you, but it's OK. I don't need to be angry about that at all. It doesn't even ignite any of those feelings toward me.

I feel sad that we're watching the healthcare system get dismantled. Whoever that person is, I want your family to be taken care of. I really do. And I just happen to believe that another system is the better way. But it's OK. If it's too triggering to listen to my music because I don't have the same politics, then that's OK.

Then there are songs of yours like "Brave," where you ignited a positive sense of self-empowerment within the LGBTQ community. Did that song take on a different shape and life after it was unleashed?

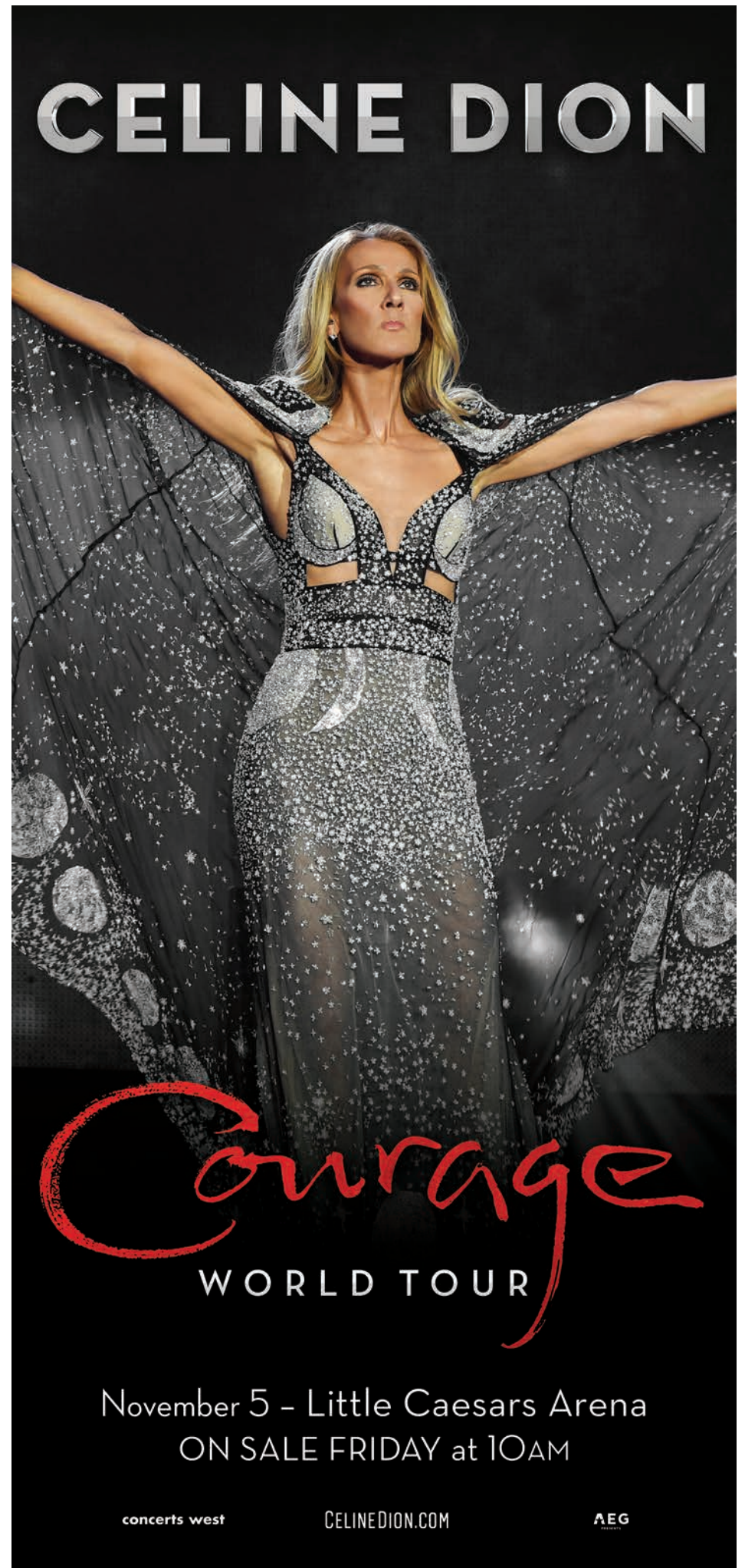
It did. My goodness! That was one of the greatest sort of movies I ever got to watch: Where is "Brave" gonna go? I did not anticipate that that song would be so mutable and malleable and turn into so many different things for so many different people. As a songwriter that is the deepest hope and wish for the thing you make: that it's going to land in the hearts and the hands of the people who need it for whatever they need it.

So I love singing that song still. I love the connection it makes with the fans. I really believe in the message. I still turn to that message personally all the time, with an attachment to the outcome: Can I just be my bravest self? Can I be my most authentic? Can I be my most truthful? That's the goal.

I read a column in The Guardian around the time "Brave" came out about Macklemore's "Same Love" and "Brave" that addressed straight allies expressing their solidarity, and the article asked allies to "now make room for us to sing our own stories." Is this a sentiment from the community you've been made aware of, and as an ally, how do you feel about it?

I think we're in this really delicate time, understandably, of people wanting to claim their own story. My feeling, as an artist and as a writer: Your job is to sort of crawl into that radical empathy space and hopefully,

See Sara, continued on p. 26



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► **Sara**

Continued from p. 25

with the best of intentions, just amplify a message. It's not that I would ever hope to take the place of an artist from the LGBTQ community, but do I certainly want to be on the team to amplify the message that inclusivity, diversity, acceptance, truth, advocacy are worthy to be talked about? Yes. To me it feels like it's diminishing the strength in numbers if the only people that can support the movement are people who are inside the movement. Then you're making your movement smaller.

And no movement in the history of movements has effectively moved forward with just a single group of people.

Yeah. I can relate it to the new feminist movement. One of the most important voices that need to speak up for women's rights are men. That's how we are going to amplify messages. So I completely understand the impulse of wanting to tell your own story. I think that's completely valid, and in terms of who I make music with or who I bring on tour, those are the things I can pay attention to. But I think to shut me out because I am straight is maybe a slightly mixed message to me.

I really appreciate your honest and eloquent answer.

It's hard because it's delicate. I think it's good that you ask those questions. But for anyone to sort of have the idea that it's black or white, it's so personal for everybody, and I think that's the part of our life and our culture right now that is creating so much tension. I always refer to it as the death of nuance. It's like there's no room for gray area. It's like you are or you aren't. It's all these really stark contrasts, and I think really where humanity exists is in that gray matter in between, just in the middle.

In 2018, you sent gay Twitter ablaze when you tweeted "It was never about a he," referencing your hit "Love Song" and its inspiration. Gay Twitter thought you were coming out. Though you did eventually set the record straight, so to speak, how quickly were you made aware that many in the LGBTQ community thought you were coming out?

Are you kidding me? My lesbians have been my ride or die since the beginning, so I knew they were just waiting for me (laughs)... . But I also thought when I made that tweet that it's just a story I've told so many times, that



I wrote it about the record label and that it wasn't a particular person, that I didn't think anything of it. Then it was just delicious to watch the kind of aftermath of that. (Laughs)

And then your DMs filled up with messages from your loyal lesbians?

Yeah! Well, there's been like a little campaign to get a female Dr. Pomatter in "Waitress" for a long time (in "Waitress," the doctor falls in love with the musical's female protagonist, Jenna), so it's something that I find delight in, and we're certainly open-minded about where the story goes and who gets to tell this story, so all the things are possible, I think.

Outside of "Waitress," you usually write from an autobiographical place. Which song on "Amidst the Chaos" do you feel closest to?

So my favorite song on the record is "Saint Honesty," but the song that I actually feel the closest to is "Someone Who Loves Me" because it deals with anxiety and depression and how you allow someone to see your pain and that's been a very difficult journey for me in my life. So I think that's the song that probably feels closest to my skin. That's the one that kind of lives the closest to my heart. But also, I fucking love "Armor." I love getting to sing that song, so yeah, it's hard to choose. They're like your babies.

All artists say that, so I'm glad you were able to narrow it down.

(Laughs) That's my answer today.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in GQ, Vanity Fair and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.

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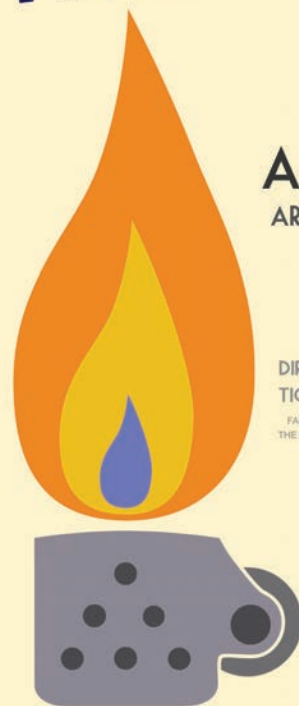
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'Southern Comfort' at Stagecrafters Takes on 'Love and Understanding'

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Robert Eads was 51 when he was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1996. Despite him immediately seeking medical help, more than a dozen medical providers rejected his case, feeling that taking on a transgender man would damage the reputation of their practice. By the time Eads did find treatment in 1997, the disease had become quite advanced. Eads' story originally came to the public eye in a 2001 GLAAD Media Award-nominated and Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize-winning documentary called "Southern Comfort."

The story follows Eads during a year of his life and sheds light on the fact that due to prejudice that still exists today, Eads' circumstances are not unique. In fact, the National LGBT Cancer Network reports that ovarian cancer will affect one in 72 people born with ovaries. Though the five-year survival rate is at 90 percent when caught early, 75 percent of diagnoses are made in the later stages of ovarian cancer.

The story made its way into the public eye again in 2017 when Dan Collins and Julianne Wick Davis composed a musical stage adaptation of the story dedicated to bringing it to a new audience. Now, from April 26 through May 12, Royal Oak's Stagecrafters at the Baldwin Theatre will bring it to Metro Detroit. Directing the upcoming performance is Jay Kaplan, a 20-year community theater veteran and ACLU of Michigan LGBT Project lawyer who said that the story was one about which he feels "passionately." Ahead of the show, Kaplan filled BTL in about the differences in the musical adaptation, taking care to do justice to Eads' story and the musical's overall "uplifting" message of "love and understanding triumphing."

Since its musical adaptation how has "Southern Comfort" changed from the original documentary?

So, in the documentary Robert pretty much had the support of his family. He had his son and his grandchild, and they spent time with him. In the musical what they've done is they've demonstrated that Robert doesn't have that kind of support from his parents, he's pretty much been rejected by his family and the people that are closest to him have also been rejected by their family. So, they've created their own family together, their chosen family. What was maintained for the documentary is that Robert is in a relationship with Lola, a transgender woman, and how she comes to move in with him to take care of him until the end of his life and



"Southern Comfort" will play at Stagecrafters in Royal Oak from April 26 through May 12. The story follows Robert Eads, a transgender man who is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and is directed by Jay Kaplan of the ACLU of Michigan pictured above center.

that's certainly reflected in the musical as well.

Chosen family is for many people in the LGBTQ community their main source of support.

Right. And this show focuses on how just about every character has been rejected by their family. They've encountered difficulties in terms of people accepting them for who they are in terms of being transgender, for being gender non-conforming or, in the case of Melanie, who is a cisgender woman, for being married to a transgender man. And they've come together to kind of create their own support unit for each other as a result of the rejection and the discrimination that they've encountered not only from their families but by society itself.

You suggested that "Southern Comfort" be chosen as a musical during this season. What drew you to this particular musical?

I always like to follow what's new in the theater and what's happening in New York [and] I became aware of this production and I was very interested in it. I was able to get a copy of the script and I contacted the composer of the show because there wasn't any commercial recording of the music and he was kind enough to send me the demo recording of the musical score and I fell in love with it. It's this beautiful country, bluegrass musical score, very heartfelt songs. So, I submitted that to the 2nd Stage committee and, thankfully, they decided to choose the show. And I believe we

are the first community theater production of this show anywhere in the country. It was just done in New York City in 2016, there's currently a production going on in Chicago but it's a relatively new show and certainly the first time it's ever been done in Michigan.

How did you go about casting? Were you mindful of choosing a transgender cast to portray the characters in the musical?

It was a challenge. The production being done in Chicago features all transgender actors and it was my hope that we could also have the performers reflect the stories that were being told so we did a lot of outreach to different trans organizations and community members and what we found at this point in time is that the known talent pool is, in terms of people who are out and trans, relatively small in this area. And then, it's not enough to say that, "Hey, I've got a play that deals with trans people, come and join it," I think it takes some time for members of the trans community to become aware of groups like Stagecrafters, to feel comfortable and it's also their availability. Community theater is volunteer, you rehearse at night because people have day jobs and not everybody is available to do a show, to rehearse at night, not everybody has transportation to Royal Oak to rehearse. So, right now, we have one person in our cast who self-identifies as transgender. Certainly I would have liked to have tried to have gotten more people from

the community and I think we definitely tried and can continue to do better. I know that the actors who are playing all these different parts, they're very much committed to being truthful and sensitive and understanding of the characters that they're playing and to be sensitive to the experience to the person that is transgender and wanting to do it the right way and to be accurate and also to be true to these parts.

Do you think this show will raise awareness about the issues faced by the transgender community as well as the relative dearth of theater content that prominently features transgender stories?

I hope so. There's not too many shows that really focus on transgender people and their experience. This show's not written by authors who are members of the transgender community and I think at this point we felt that we need to have more shows about transgender people, written by and performed [them, too]. Hopefully, this [show] will create an impetus that we need to see that work. I'm very happy that for the first time I'm aware that I've been involved in community theater for more than 20 years, that we have a show that's focusing on these characters that's focusing on their lives and what I'm hoping is that not only will that create greater understanding with the audiences who come see the show,

See **Stagecrafters**, continued on p.35

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Passion Pit Celebrates Decade Anniversary Tour, to Visit Royal Oak May 16

BY BTL STAFF

Having released their debut record “Manners” in 2009, Passion Pit will now commemorate its decade as a touring act with a spring tour across North America that will hit Royal Oak on May 16. Famous for hits like “Lifted Up (1985),” the group has earned top 10 spots on the Billboard 200 and been featured on shows like Netflix’s “The Launch.”

Michael Angelakos is the band’s lead singer. When reflecting on the success of the album and the decision to bring it back a decade later in a 2015 Medium interview, he said it was an album about a time of “limbo” in his life that has become similarly relevant again.

“I was in the middle of these different record deals, and so there was the business side that was coming up, and I was no longer a student anymore,” he said. “So that was confusing. I didn’t know what I was doing with my life. I was recording a record but I didn’t know where it would lead. I was single and was no longer



with my now ex-girlfriend. Everything was totally in the air. I think that’s why that record makes a lot of sense to me now: I’m always in limbo. All the records seem very pretty to me, but I also find them to be really, really sad. They bring up memories now that I didn’t have before. But I was just trying. I was just trying to do something. They were valiant efforts to do something beautiful.”

Tickets start at \$29.50. This all-ages show starts at 7 p.m. To learn more about the band go online to passionpit.com or visit royaloakmusictheatre.com.

Five15 Hosts Broadway Singalong Brunch

BY BTL STAFF

Fans of Broadway can enjoy a little taste of it in Royal Oak with a singalong-style brunch on Sunday, April 28. The show’s comedians will bring to life iconic showtunes.

“Join in with Eric and Gerianne, aka the Dynamic Duo, as they sing your favorite Broadway tunes to benefit Ferndale Pride,” write event organizers. “You’ll enjoy a brunch buffet as you sing along with this incredibly talented pair. Cocktails will be available.”

This event is \$30 per person, and requires payment in advance. Doors open and brunch is served at 1:00 p.m., and the show starts at 1:30 p.m. This event requires tickets to be purchased in advance.

To reserve a spot and find out more about Five15, visit five15.net.



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Between THE Lines



See puzzle on pg.35

Happenings



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Over 30 percent of University of Michigan students struggle with food insecurity in some way. The Maize & Blue Cupboard, located in the basement of the Betsy Barbour Residence Hall on campus in Ann Arbor, ensures anyone with a valid U-M ID, whether on a tight budget or physically restrained from getting to a grocery store, receive equitable access to healthy, nutritious and nourishing food and the ability to prepare it for themselves or others. Hours are Tuesday-Friday, 3-7 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. For more information, visit <https://mbc.studentlife.umich.edu>.

OUTINGS

Friday, April 12

Gender and Sexuality Center Semester Send-Off! 12 p.m. Make crafts, socialize and celebrate the end of the semester at our last event of winter 2019! OC Gold Room B. GSC@Oakland University.edu.

LGBT Social Meet Up 6:30 p.m. A group for all lgbt people who want to meet have light-hearted discussions and social activities. Hazel Park Community Center, 620 West Woodward Heights, Hazel Park. 248-632-8274. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com

Saturday, April 13

LGBT Community Chat 11 a.m. Saturday LGBT Chat is an on going social discussion group meets every week to discuss issues LGBT people face. Coming out, dating and much more. Come join us every Saturday at 11 am. Java Hut Ferndale Michigan, 165 w 9 mile, Ferndale. 248-632-8274. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com.

Monday, April 15

LGBT Game Night 7 p.m. LGBT Game Night is an opportunity for all LGBT people and allies to come play a board game, drink coffee and socialize with other LGBT individuals. Java Hut, 165 W Nine Mile, Ferndale. 248-632-8274. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com.

Wednesday, April 17

Affirmations Senior Koffee Clatch! 1 p.m. A discussion and networking group for people 45 and older. Various discussion topics, social outings and potlucks are held throughout the year. With age comes wisdom but, for LGBTQ seniors, loneliness can often come along, too. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. goaffirmations.org.

Stand with Trans Support Groups – Livonia – Wayne County 6:30 p.m. Free. Parent Support Group Facilitators Karen Sessler, kssessle@yahoo.com or 734-673-3590 and Scott Sessler, pastorscott@emmanuel-livonia.org or 734-673-2485 Trans. Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 34567 7 Mile Road, Livonia. standwithtrans.org.

Toastmasters International SpeakOUT! LGBTQ Meeting 7 p.m. Professional & personal communication skills development. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 734-995-9867. lawrencemoeb@gmail.com. speakout.toastmastersclubs.org.

Thursday, May 2

Pride Night at Thunderbowl! 7 p.m. Meet & Greet First Thursday of every month, unlimited bowling, shoe rental, private room, private bar area, drink specials,

billiard room, 250 foot video wall. Come as you are!! Thunderbowl Arena, 4200 Allen Road, Allen Park. 313-928-4688. thunderbowl.org.

MUSIC & MORE

Intervention to Durable Recovery: The Power of Family April 16, 7:30 p.m. Best-selling authors, educators and clinicians Debra Jay and Jeff Jay will provide practical, helpful, hopeful information about how to do an intervention and how to build a recovery team. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725. dawnfarm.org.

People Like Me: Mutual Aid and Recovery from Substance Use Disorders April 23, 7:30 p.m. Dawn Farm

staff member Todd Diana will provide an overview of mutual aid addiction recovery programs, research supporting the efficacy of mutual aid participation, and include a panel discussion. St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium, 5305 Elliott Drive, Ypsilanti. 734-485-8725. dawnfarm.org.

Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship April 30, 7:30 p.m. Father Gregory Boyle; founder of Homeboy Industries and best-selling author, will share how compassion, kindness and kinship are the tools to fight despair and decrease marginalization. Towsley auditorium, 4800 East Huron River Drive, Ann Arbor. dawnfarm.org.

Flint Symphony Orchestra Presents 'Mahler's Resurrection' May 11, 7:30 p.m. FSO bringing you yet another Classical Concert featuring Enrique Diemecke, conductor with the Flint Symphony Orchestra. Pre-Concert talk at 6:30 p.m. These fun and informative

Editor's Pick

Support Group for Trans and Non-Binary Clients

Corktown Health Center is offering a six-session weekly support group for trans and non-binary clients to come together and process their experiences relating to gender identity. The group meets every Wednesday now through May 8 at Corktown Health Center located at 1726 Howard St. in Detroit. For more information or to RSVP, please contact Mitch (they/them) at 313-832-3300 ex. 32.



talks take the mystery out of classical music. Flint Institute of Music, 1025 E. Kearsley St., Flint. 810-238-1350. thefim.org. thefso.org.

THEATER

Young Frankenstein April 12, 7:30 p.m. This monster musical comedy is an adaptation of Mel Brooks' legendary cult classic film. Following the grandson of the infamous Victor Frankenstein, Frederick Frankenstein inherits his family's estate in Transylvania. Watch as hilarity abounds! The Marlene Boll Theatre, 1401 Broadway, Detroit. tasiopeg@udmercy.edu. udmercy.edu.

Detroit Public Theatre Presents "Girlfriend" April 12, 8 p.m. Romance unfolds in a new musical wound around the tender love songs of Matthew Sweet's landmark album, *Girlfriend*. Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-576-5162. dso.org.

Williamston Theatre Presents "The Gin Game" April 12, 8 p.m. Winner of the 1978 Pulitzer Prize for Drama! Weller Martin is playing solitaire on the porch of a seedy nursing home. Enter Fonsia Dorsey, a prim, self-righteous woman. Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam Road, Williamston. 517-655-SHOW. info@williamstontheatre.org. williamstontheatre.org.

Theatre and Dance at Wayne Presents "Venus" April 12, 8 p.m. Traveling from her home in southern Africa for what she

hoped would be a better life, Saartjie Baartman became an unfortunate star on the 19th Century London freak show circuit. Studio Theatre at the Hilberry, 4743 Cass Ave., Detroit. theatredanceatwayne.com.

Mamma Mia! Presented by Theatre and Dance at Wayne April 12, 8 p.m. Over 54 million people all around the world have fallen in love with the characters, the story and the music that make *Mamma Mia!* the ultimate feel-good show. A mother. A daughter. Three possible dads. Bonstelle Theatre, 3424 Woodward Ave., Detroit. 313-577-2960. theatredanceatwayne.com.

Detroit Repertory Theatre Presents "Aubrey" April 12, 8:30 p.m. Aubrey Gagnier, a heroin addict, haunted by her role in her lover's overdose death, seeks out the grave digger and coffin maker. They become each other's best hope to live. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. 313-868-1347. DetRepTh@aol.com. detroitreptheatre.com.

Ann Arbor Civic Theatre Presents "Fahrenheit 451" April 25, 7:30 p.m. In a dystopian none-too-distant future, "firemen" don't extinguish fires, they start them. And they know that 451 degrees Fahrenheit is the temperature at which paper ignites – because that is how you destroy books. Arthur Miller Theatre, 1226 Murfin Ave., Ann Arbor. 734-764-2538. smtd.umich.edu. a2ct.org.

Angels in America – Parts I and II April

26, In this two-part epic, Prior Walter, a young man living in NYC in 1985, is diagnosed with AIDS. His boyfriend, Louis, struggling to cope with the disease and his own fears, abandons him. More information about this Hilberry Theatre, 4743 Cass Ave., Detroit. theatredanceatwayne.com.

Angels in America: Part Two – Perestroika April 26, 8 p.m. Following the events of Part I: Millennium Approaches, *Perestroika* continues the complex and fantastical examination of homosexuality, race and AIDS in 1980s America. Fighting illness and losing hope, Prior Walter is hesitant to become the prophet as demanded. Hilberry Theatre, 4743 Cass Ave., Detroit. 313-577-2972. wsushows.com/

Stagecrafters Baldwin Theatre Second Stage Presents "Southern Comfort" April 26, 8 p.m. *Southern Comfort* is based on the true story of Robert Eads, a transgender man with ovarian cancer, who lives in rural Georgia with his chosen family of transgender friends. Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak. 248-541-8027. stagecrafters.org.

Angels in America: Part One – Millennium Approaches May 5, 3 p.m. In Part I of this two part epic, Prior Walter, a young man living in NYC in 1985, is diagnosed with AIDS. His boyfriend, Louis, struggling to cope with the disease and his own fears. Hilberry Theatre, 4743 Cass Ave., Detroit. 313-577-2972. wsushows.com.

The House The Ringwald Theatre

FERNDALE – Currently running at The Ringwald, *The House* by Michigan native, Brian Parks, is a hilarious take on good manners going bad.

Martyn and Shanny have lived in their beloved house for their entire marriage. Now facing empty-nest syndrome they decide to sell directly to Fischer and Lindsay, a younger couple just starting their life together in wedded bliss. On the day Martyn and Shanny are handing over the keys to Fischer and Lindsay, things start genially but quickly devolve when the young couple starts talking about their plans for *The House*.

The production is directed by Kelly Komlen, stage managed by Brandy Joe Plambeck and features Sue Chekaway as Shanny, Erin



Hildebrandt as Lindsay, Jerry M. Nehr, Jr. as Martyn, and Andy Reid as Fischer. The design team features Nick Yocum (set), Brandy Joe Plambeck (lights and sound).

Tickets can be purchased at www.TheRingwald.com or at the theatre, located at 22742 Woodward Avenue in downtown Ferndale. The Ringwald box office opens 45 minutes before performances and tickets can be purchased with cash or credit card. For more information, please call 248-545-5545

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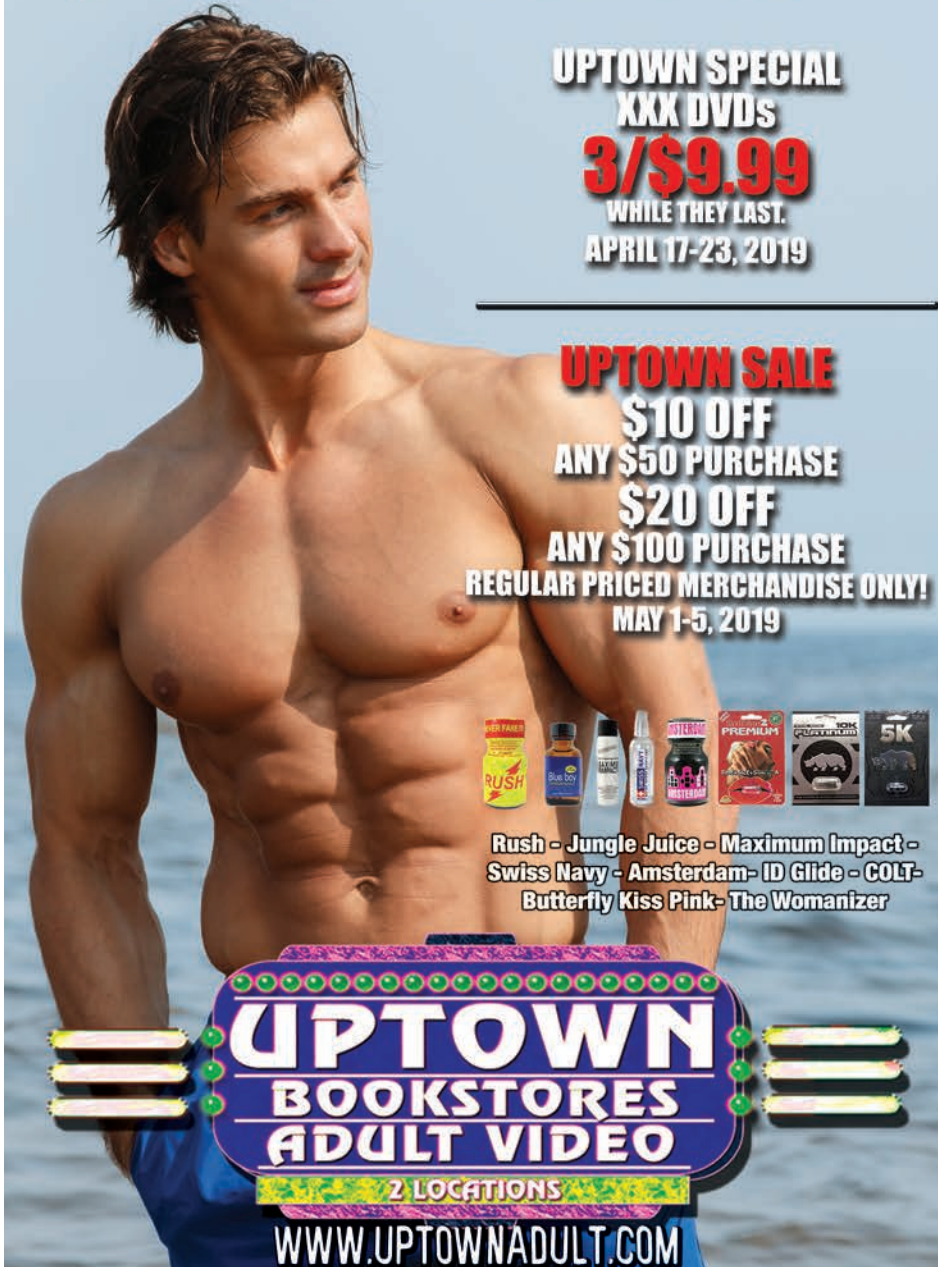
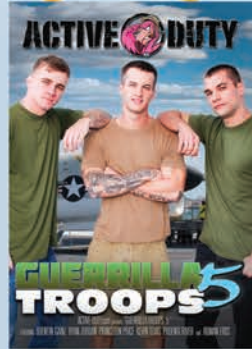
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► Stagecrafters

Continued from p. 35

but we'll see more theater that reflects diverse lives that includes the lives of gender non-conforming people.

This show deals with serious, topical issues facing the transgender community and certainly features some poignant moments. What are some that stand out to you that you hope the audience can benefit from seeing?

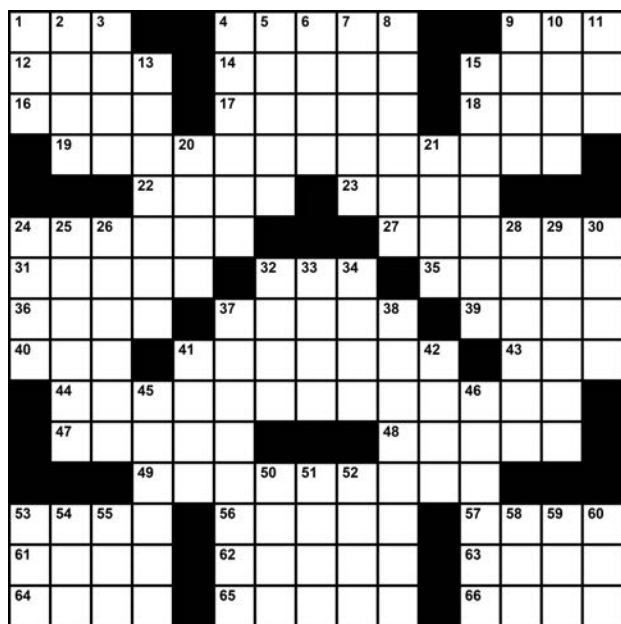
You know, with a lot of musicals, sometimes the script is kind of filler in-between song cues, but that's not the case in this show. There's some very, very strong scenes. And among the songs there's a song called "Bird" that the character Lola sings as a trans woman. Not only is the melody beautiful, but the lyrics where she talks about looking at herself in the mirror and she doesn't see who she really is and that by closing her eyes and imagining who she feels inside she feels free like a bird. I've talked to a number of people who we were recruiting to audition for the show who aren't transgender and they said to me, "Jay, that song so reflects my own experience and how I felt. I know who I am and yet when I hear the sound of my voice" — for Lola this deep male-sounding voice. Or, "I look at myself in the mirror and I have masculine features in my face," or maybe,

"The way my body is it's so incongruent with who I really know I am." And to be able to see past that reflection in the mirror and to be able to see who you truly are is this incredibly freeing experience. So that's very special.

What's been the most rewarding thing about putting on this show?

The actors' commitment to this show and the message means so much to them and just the dedication that everyone has shown has been very gratifying and heartwarming. And I think given what's happening today with the Trump transgender military ban and with the administration trying to change the definition of sex to essentially erase transgender people from existence in terms of protections under the laws, and given the continued violence against trans women, most notably trans women of color, this piece is so relevant. And obviously I feel passion for this because of the work that I do and really hope that people will come and see this show because I think it's an opportunity to increase their understanding and I hopefully their empathy to what this is all about. You know, if we really just let people be who they are and be true to themselves there's no harm to anyone else, but certainly society can make that difficult.

Southern Comfort opens at Stagecrafters on April 26 and runs through May 12. Stagecrafters is located at 415 South Lafayette in Royal Oak.



- 36 Besides that
37 Hotties
39 Activist Clare Boothe ___
40 '70s org. of kidnappers
41 Like Trump's ego
43 k. d. lang's "Big Boned ___"
44 More of the quote
47 Hub-to-rim lines
48 Author Crowley and others
49 End of the quote
53 Moby Dick chaser
56 Ballet rail
57 Added stipulations
61 Time that drags
62 Rampagers go on it
63 Big top barker
64 Cheese for Ms. van de Kamp?
65 Goes public
66 "Hair"'s "___ to Be Hard"

Down

- 1 Brief amount of secs?
2 Israeli statesman
3 DeGeneres voice role
4 Like one's nuts, perhaps
5 Rub the right way
6 Party to
7 Jessica of "Fried Green Tomatoes"
8 Log Cabin lists
9 Job for Burr's Mason
10 Zenith
11 B'way locale
13 Forget to use the KY?
15 Lyricist Bill of "Side Show" fame
20 Still getting around
21 Mouthful for a stallion
24 Blows away
25 Where to find Norma Bates
26 One of a nice pair of melons
28 Chewy candy
29 Wilde with a statuette?
30 "A Boy Named Sue" writer Silverstein
32 Whipping boy
33 Vet, of a sort, for short
34 Son of Eric the Red
37 Gay nocturnal flyer?
38 Enjoys the bedroom, perhaps
41 Gladly, old-style
42 Airline to Ben Gurion
45 Safe to swallow
46 Line of Todd Oldham clothing?
50 Part of APR
51 Pitcher Hershiser
52 Russian river
53 Vestment for Mychal Judge
54 Heston's "Ben ___"
55 Disney prince
58 Three R's supporter
59 Article of Marlene Dietrich
60 Like a cunning linguist

Auto Eroticism

Across

- 1 Start of a quote by Amanita on "Sens8"
4 Kate McKinnon bits on "SNL"
9 More of the quote
12 "___ your pardon!"
14 Like sex with a historian?
15 Like the Indy 500?
16 "Zami: A New Spelling of My ___"

- 17 Former hotelier Helmsley
18 Nabor's branch, on TV
19 More of the quote
22 Went lickety-split
23 Consenting votes
24 International agreement
27 Pool parties?
31 Fagged out
32 Come together
35 Sound of three men in a tub

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The Frivolist: 5 Problems With Living in the Future

BY MIKEY ROX

We all like to daydream about what the future may hold, but when those prospects consume your thoughts more than the present, there's a real risk of living your own mental and emotional nightmare. Make a conscious effort to enjoy the here and now by recognizing these problems with overthinking life's uncertainties.

1. You can't enjoy the present

How will you ever find success and happiness in the future if you can't enjoy right now? It's a classic catch-22. Because focusing on tomorrow today won't end as long as you live since as long as you live there will always be today and tomorrow. *Plan* for the future, sure, but don't let the what-ifs take away from your enjoyment of the present. You get one shot at today, and you'll never get it again.

2. It can destroy your relationships

I've been cheated on in the past by guys who've told me how much they love me, who were affectionate, who genuinely enjoyed spending time with me – but that didn't stop them from lying and stepping out. The effect of that behavior makes it harder to



build new, healthier relationships, because I often worry if the next guy will do the same in the future – and if I'm constantly sleuthing for problems, problems will arise. I've personally found that the only way for me to keep myself in check in this regard is with therapy: talking with someone regularly about my doubts, fears, and ultimately the reinforcement of my own self-worth (I'm better off being single than letting a cheater control my emotions), and I recommend seeking professional help if you're also feeling lonely in this world.

3. The anxiety it can cause you will make you miserable

If you're worrying about the future, you're probably not concentrating on all the wonderful possibilities it holds. Instead, human nature is honing in on everything that can go wrong, leading to stress and anxiety. There have been times in my own life where my pessimism about what hasn't even happened yet has physically debilitated me to the point that I can't get out of bed. I do find solace in a daily routine and checklist, however, that firmly keeps me moving at today's pace instead of tomorrow's.

4. Worrying about it can affect what good may come

There are amazing things ahead for you, but your endless apprehension about the future can and will affect what's to come. Every decision we make sets the foundation for what's next, and you're doing yourself a disservice (perhaps lifelong) by allowing negativity to cloud your judgment. This isn't to say that you should rest on your laurels and let the world dictate what happens to you, but also don't count yourself out before the countdown is done.

5. It's out of your control

You are only one tiny influence on your future. The rest – all the people and events that live right outside your door – have much greater impact, and there's no way you can control it. So don't try to. Live your best in-the-moment life and let nature take its course with your hands on the wheel. You never know where you'll end up – and *that's* the best part.

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. He spends his time writing from the beach with his dog Jaxon. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyrox.



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Edie Franklin's 40-Year Career Recognized as 'Living Legend' at Motown Honors April 14

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Edie Franklin, a mainstay in Detroit's drag scene for years, is set to be officially recognized for her contributions with the Living Legend award at the fourth annual Motown honors at Gigi's Gay Bar on April 14.

"I feel like I earned that one," Franklin, aka Eddie Rhodes, said. "It took a lot."

Franklin first started performing at Gigi's in 1972, when she was just 18 years old. Michael Swayze, the bar's original owner, did Franklin's makeup on her first night. The number was "Respect" by Aretha Franklin, and a star was born.

"At first, I was real nervous, because it was my first time getting up on the stage," Franklin recalled. "But I had seen other entertainers before I got up there. Michael kept telling me, 'You can do it. You can do it. It's nothing to it. You know the song. Just go up and there and have fun.' And that's what I did – and everybody else had fun, too. The audience gave a great reaction."

Swayze came up with Franklin's stage name, paying homage to Franklin's favorite, the Queen of Soul. Franklin became known for performing



Edie Franklin

a lot of Aretha and also Donna Summer. In 1978, Franklin became the fifth official Miss Gigi's and though she made her rounds all across Detroit and the Metro area, Gigi's was her home bar. In 2004, she was crowned Miss Gigi's Classic.

Now, more than four decades after she first started, Franklin is being given the Living

Legend award.

"Edie was chosen as this year's Living Legend because it was simply her year," said El Ross, who co-created the awards with Brian Rodeo. "She brings a sense of class and elegance to the honor, and we are so pleased to be recognizing her this year."

The Motown Honors

Ross and Rodeo originally created the group Men of Detroit, which focused on the city's showboys. But soon after, the duo decided to expand and pay tribute to Detroit's nightlife in a broader way and thus The Motown Honors were born.

"We sit and look at every person we consider," Ross said. "We look at their body of work, the years they have been in the business, etc. Then we narrow it down. It's a hard choice because we would love to honor everyone, but that just wouldn't be right."

Other honorees this year include Diva Cliché, Lifetime Achievement; LaToya Ross, Icon; Sabin, Trailblazer; Ka'Juan D. Hill, Humanitarian; and Jamar Boykins, Most Respected."

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Ross said she was "deeply honored to be recognized by many of my peers for my work in the gay community for over 30 years. I hope that I can continue for many years to be a positive influence in people's lives."

For his part, Hill, who has made a name for himself in recent years hosting the "Let's Talk About It" podcast and acting as a hype man for parties around town, said he was touched to be called a humanitarian.

"I do the work that I do for people because I love it," Hill said. "I care about my community on so many levels from mental health to sexual health to toxic relationships. I'm open about my stories in hopes of inspiring and motivating others. I never thought of myself as a humanitarian. I saw a need in the community, and I thought I could help."

The Motown Honors takes place Sunday, April 14, at Gigi's Gay Bar, located at 16920 W. Warren Ave. in Detroit. Doors open at 6 p.m., dinner is served at 6:45 and showtime is at 7:45 p.m. Tickets are \$10.

Birthday Bash Honors Jim Toy, Commemorates Ann Arbor LGBTQ Community Center

Known as the first publicly "out" man in Michigan, after coming out in 1970, Jim Toy developed the first ever campus center dedicated to supporting those in the LGBTQ community. And because of his almost 50-year career of service to the LGBTQ movement through speaking, teaching, writing, administrating, organizing and protesting, Ann Arbor's LGBTQ Center dedicated its name to his legacy. On Thursday, April 4, the Center honored him again at its annual Jim Toy Birthday Bash held at Bona Sera Restaurant.

"The Jim Toy Birthday Bash is a fantastic event to honor our namesake, the legendary Jim Toy, while also bringing our community together for an enjoyable evening celebrating an incredible man and his lifetime of advocacy and accomplishments on behalf of the LGBTQ community," event organizers wrote.

Not only did the event serve to celebrate Toy, all proceeds go directly toward the Center to further its mission of creating an "inclusive community where people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity are visible and live together in equality, respect and happiness."

Visit jimtoycenter.org to find out more about the Center.



The annual Jim Toy birthday bash was celebrated with the honoree himself and U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell, center top, and Ypsilanti Mayor Beth Bashert. See more photos online @ pridesource.com BTL Photos: Andrew Cohen



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