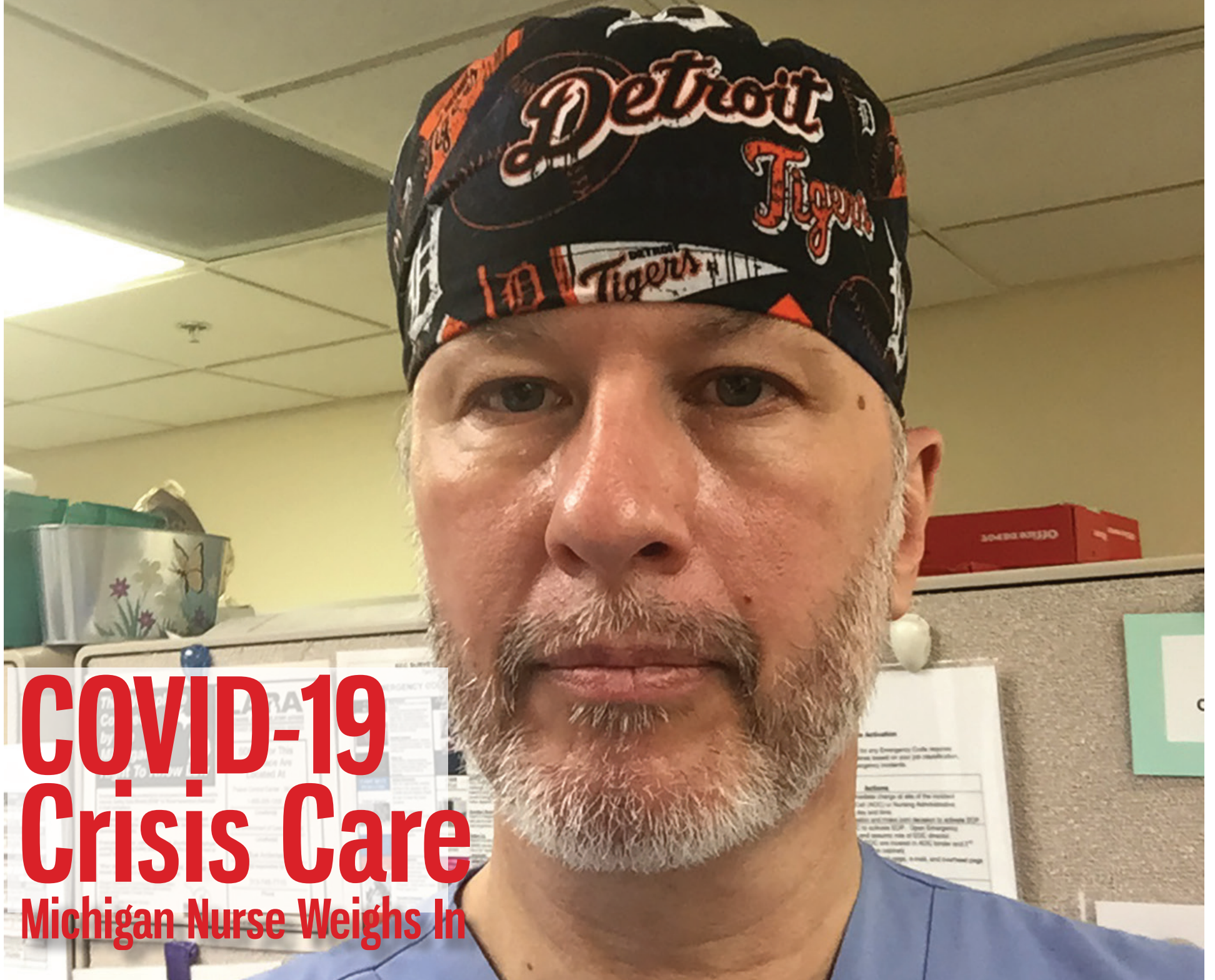


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PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP

20222 Farmington Rd., Livonia, Michigan 48152
Phone 734.293.7200

PUBLISHERS

Susan Horowitz & Jan Stevenson

EDITORIAL

Editor in Chief

Susan Horowitz, 734.293.7200 x 102
susanhorowitz@pridesource.com

Entertainment Editor

Chris Azzopardi, 734.293.7200 x 106
chrisazzopardi@pridesource.com

News & Feature Editor

Eve Kucharski, 734.293.7200 x 105
eve@pridesource.com

News & Feature Writers

Michelle Brown, Ellen Knoppow, Jason A. Michael,
Drew Howard, Jonathan Thurston

CREATIVE

Webmaster & MIS Director

Kevin Bryant, kevinbryant@pridesource.com

Columnists

Charles Alexander, Michelle E. Brown,
Mikey Rox, D'Anne Witkowski,
Gwendolyn Ann Smith, Dana Rudolph

Cartoonists

Paul Berg

Contributing Photographers

Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen, Roxanne Frith, Tih Penfil

ADVERTISING & SALES

Director of Sales

Jan Stevenson, 734.293.7200 x 101
jan@pridesource.com

Sales Representatives

Ann Cox, 734.293.7200 x 103
anncox@pridesource.com

National Advertising Representative

Rivendell Media, 212.242.6863

MEMBER OF

Michigan Press Association
National LGBT Media Association
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Photo by Andrew Cohen.

Motor City Pride Holds June 6 Virtual Pride Celebration

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

While summer Pride festivals are a great opportunity for celebration, they're also annual reminders of LGBTQ history and the important strides that activists have made in the fight for full equality. In that spirit, Motor City Pride is hosting a Virtual June Pride event on Friday, June 6, from 3 to 5 p.m. in order to "spotlight the LGBTQ community as plans for a physical festival continue to evolve" in light of new coronavirus health concerns.

"It's a two-hour event that we're planning, and during the event, we've asked eight of the performers who we were going to have at the festival to do a little four-minute segment," said Motor City Pride Chairperson Dave Wait. "We have four different hosts who are going to be filling in between those segments on air and talking about the things that we do at the festival. We've asked, and are in the process of asking, some elected officials and celebrities to submit little welcomes and greetings and that type of thing."

Wait said that those interested in tracking updates for both this event and upcoming plans for a 2020 Motor City Pride sometime later in the year are encouraged to consistently check back on motorcitypride.org, which is being consistently developed to highlight upcoming plans.

"All of our vendors are invited to submit information so people can be connected with them in a virtual marketplace," he said. "We're going to have a kind of a live Instagram social media feed so that people can make comments, we're working to have some submissions to be a section on the website, and then we're also [displaying] our history that shows our movement, primarily in Michigan, over the past 50 years."

Ideally, he said, the virtual event will be as close of a replication to a physical day spent at the festival as possible. And because attendees won't be able to join together this year, Wait said that the organization is encouraging social media involvement to show individual Pride support at home.

"Probably at the start of Memorial Day weekend, we'll be asking people just to submit to us via social media what they're doing during Pride month. Maybe they're decorating their house or putting up colors at their home," Wait said. "And we want to have individuals sending in their artwork. ... Art can be very healing during these challenging times we have."

Wait added that anyone, even those who aren't artists, are encouraged to share their artwork because Pride is a celebration designed to bring people together.

"This is a celebration until we can meet again so that we can all connect to celebrate and continue working toward full equality for everybody in the state of Michigan," he said.

Keep up with updates online at motorcitypride.org.

'Stay Home, Stay Well' Initiative Aims to Address Mental Health Challenges During Pandemic

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPOW

Stress from the stay-at-home order, growing fears of the unknown about one's livelihood or life itself — those are just some of the reasons the coronavirus pandemic is taking a toll on the emotional well-being of countless Michiganders. For that reason, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services is promoting several easy-to-access resources that are designed to assist those in distress, which are all part of the state's "Stay Home, Stay Well" initiative. And while these resources aren't LGBTQ-specific, they are suitable for anyone dealing with mental health concerns as a result of, or exacerbated by, the pandemic and have staff trained to point individuals to other, more appropriate options if needed. Information about one such resource, the Transgender Michigan helpline, can be found here.

Peer-Run Warmline

Warmlines, in contrast to psychiatric hotlines, are designed to provide early intervention with peer specialists and avoid severe emotional distress that can lead to tragic outcomes. Individuals are connected with certified peer support specialists who have lived experiences of behavioral health issues, trauma or personal crises, and are trained to support and empower the callers. Dr. Debra Pinals, psychiatrist and MDHHS medical director for behavioral health, explained that the warmline is meant for people with mental health issues that pre-date the pandemic, such as depression, anxiety or a substance use disorder.

"The peers do what's called active listening for the most part in terms of their calls, where they would just talk to the person about what's going on for them and how that's a challenge," Pinals said. "In [a] scenario where they're saying they haven't seen their therapist they might direct them to resources to help them access more support and care."

Because of their lived experience, the peer professionals are trained to help others on their journeys of recovery from mental health and substance use conditions, Pinals explained. They are able to identify what type of response is needed in any given situation, be that support, help with wellness and coping skills or finding additional resources.

And if a real crisis emerges where the person expresses suicidal thinking or other serious mental health concerns, they would then be referred to other call centers that handle crisis calls.

Since the warmline was rolled out April 13, well over 2,000 Michiganders have received assistance. It operates seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. at 888-PEER-753 (888-733-7753).

Crisis Text Line

To accommodate those who prefer to communicate via text for privacy or for any reason, Michigan residents are now able to have a confidential conversation with a crisis counselor by texting the keyword RESTORE to 741741. The text line is provided by Crisis Text Line, an organization established in 2013 that provides this type of support worldwide.

Trained counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to texts from Michigan residents who are facing a mental health crisis — everything from anxiety and financial issues to suicide and domestic violence. While the text line is starting during the pandemic, MDHHS intends to continue offering the service in the future.

"We on the back end are able to understand the types of texts that are coming through from people in Michigan in terms of level of distress and information that they're seeking," Pinals said. "The crisis text responder... will both be able to link them to national databases including databases in Michigan to show them where there's resources as well as help provide us at the state information about the nature of the texts that are coming through, in a global sense." None of the personal information is identifiable, she emphasized; it only serves to identify broad trends to better understand the needs of residents of the state.

Headspace

Headspace is a global leader in mindfulness and meditation; many know of it as the first meditation app and available by paid subscription. Now, Michigan has partnered with Headspace to give residents free access to a curated selection of evidence-based guided meditations along with at-home workouts that guide people through mindful exercises. Sleep and kids' content is available, too.

"The app emphasizes these mindfulness exercises and helps people walk through guided meditation-like thinking, shorter or longer, Pinals said. "There's exercises you can do in the morning and exercises you can do at night... to help you sleep. There is data that looks at mindfulness as a way of helping people relax, helping people deal with some anxiety symptoms, and this Headspace kind of operationalizes exercises to help people utilize mindfulness."

Problem Gambling Help

Due to social distancing protocols, casinos are temporarily shuttered. And with decreased access to gambling, stress and anxiety can increase the urge to gamble for someone who struggles with a gambling addiction. Because the lottery, online gaming and sports betting remain concerns, those who head up the Michigan Problem Gambling Helpline want community members to know there is always help for anyone trying to manage urges to gamble.

Trained and experienced counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by phone or virtually to provide immediate help to address issues related to gambling disorder, including screening services and referrals to treatment or support groups. Call 800-270-7117 for crisis intervention and referral to treatment.

National Resources

If you are thinking of taking your life, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255, or text TALK to 741741. For more information visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org. For those who are deaf or hard of hearing, a video relay service is available. Call 1-800-273-8255 (TTY 1-800-799-4889)

The National Disaster Distress Helpline is intended for those experiencing emotional distress due to COVID-19-related issues. Individuals may call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-985-5950 or text the keyword TALKWITHUS to 66746.

For those seeking mental health assistance in their own communities, dial 211 or visit the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan directory at cmham.org/membership/cmhsp-directory/. All of the above Stay Home, Stay Well resources can be found at michigan.gov.

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Hotter Than July Advances Growing LGBTQ Black Consciousness

HOTTER THAN JULY 25TH ANNIVERSARY
RETROSPECTIVE HOTTER THAN JULY

BY RHIANNON CHESTER-BEY

To be black and lesbian. To be black and gay. To be black and bi-attractual. To be black and trans. These double-minority identities present a multi-dimensional challenge for all of us in the crosshairs of intersectionality for generations.

By the late 1980s, black LGBTQ institutions, clubs and groups started to mobilize around the intersections of health and identity as organizing centers for the community. These community gatherings were not only social gatherings where friends could see each other and check on their well-being, but they became spaces where ideas were generated and plans were made.

Curtis Lipscomb, executive director of LGBT Detroit, recalls how the HIV epidemic devastated the LGBTQ community, calling for the community to organize.

“Black Pride started as an early ‘90s phenomenon, centered around LGBT black consciousness,” Lipscomb said. “Historically, there was always LGBT black consciousness, but it developed and manifested in various ways based on contemporary conditions.”

Lipscomb recounted the development of “LGBT black consciousness” through the lens of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the losses and the trauma experienced that impacted all of us.

“Mothers, fathers, boyfriends, girlfriends, neighbors — you have people who you didn’t even know that they were gay and had died,” Lipscomb said. “Additionally, you didn’t know they were in the closet. There was not only the issue of being out, but also the issue of being infected with HIV.”

Lipscomb recalls it as an “identity crisis and a health crisis at the same time that fueled this reality of proclaiming life. We wanted to live!”

Black LGBTQ Pride celebrations were a part of the catalog of community-based responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the black LGBTQ community. As consciousness rose, so did the response to conditions.

“We were arguing to be free. I believe that being free was to stand up physically in spaces and proclaim freedom,” Lipscomb said. “That’s why you have people starting to write, starting to take pictures, starting to document, because by the late ‘80s, there was an increased amount of black death. It wasn’t until the late ‘80s that there became this awakening, and it manifested into a number of organizations and social clubs being developed, conversations with elected officials occurring, and new health activists

emerging.”

Through pain and suffering, lack of medical solutions and other systemic issues, organizers in Detroit took on the challenge of creating an event that not only holds space for pain but celebrates life.

Hotter Than July, starting at the plateau of a major health crisis that put gay life on display in the media, confronted stereotypes about who the black LGBTQ community was with a right to an authentic life. Community leader, activist and original Hotter Than July planning committee member, Dr. Kofi Adoma, said Hotter Than July made space for the vastness of identity and expression.

“We were a part of something major, something to showcase our organizations, and something to showcase our black LGBTQ+ communities,” Adoma said.

According to the activist, Hotter Than July gives the world a chance to see the black LGBTQ community as multi-dimensional.

“Often times the stereotype is that if you’re LGBTQ+, you’re single, you don’t have family, you don’t bring your kids [to events], you only go out to the clubs, have fun, party, and that’s all there is to you as a gay person,” Adoma said. “So having a space that was kid-friendly was really important.”

Hotter Than July Faces its Own Challenges

While Pride itself has confronted the external stereotypes and issues through celebration and organizing around the realities of LGBTQ life and culture in Detroit, it also came with its own set of challenges.

LGBTQ identities are more visible and, in some cases, accepted today. Hotter Than July fostered the idea that black, gay people can openly celebrate in Detroit, instead of traveling to other cities. The climate was different in the ‘90s than it is today.



Photo by Chris INPAQ Sutton.

“The challenge then was, were people willing to be outed in their neighborhoods as opposed to feeling more comfortable while being themselves in and outside of city limits?” Lipscomb said. “Prior to 1996, the thought was, ‘If I wanted to be myself, I have to go to some remote area to do simple things like barbeque and play volleyball.’”

The concern presented by the community is real and valid as, “There was internalized homophobia and you had those who were victims of hate crimes,” Lipscomb said.

Hotter Than July supporter and photographer, Miz Korona, reflected on her experience of being an attendee “afraid to be outed” and capturing photographs at the Saturday picnic at Palmer Park.

“It was interesting to see it from that viewpoint,” Korona said. “I was very aware of where I pointed my camera lens when I’d see somebody’s facial expression or that look in their eyes that they didn’t want to be captured; maybe because they needed some anonymity.”

Hotter Than July organizers had dissenting opinions on where Pride should be held. Although Palmer Park won, “We had to convince people you can be yourself in Palmer Park because we were always ourselves at Palmer Park,” Lipscomb said.

“There’s a lot of blood, sweat and tears to get people together,” Adoma said.

Traditionally, a volunteer committee plans and executes the vision for each Hotter Than July event.

Robert Tate, who has been involved with Hotter Than July since its inception, explained the importance of “being creative and having fresh ideas,” as he chaired the Sunday Brunch committee. Tate, a Billionaire Boys Club founding member, has 25 years of involvement that affords him the insight that, “volunteering is an investment.”

“You might not have the money, but you can volunteer for a lot of things, and that helps out a great deal,” Tate said.

David Nelson, former chair of the Saturday picnic committee shared his thoughts on the importance of having people at the table.

“No matter how much work you put in each year, some people will still be unhappy. You have to come to the table,” Nelson said.

A present-day barrier is “stigma and poverty,” Lipscomb said.

Many of the black LGBTQ organizations and venues that were the backbone of Hotter Than July have since dissipated. Their absence leaves a void that presents a challenge to the gathering of interested parties, and ultimately, the attendance of the varied events.

“Regine’s and Innuendo were close to Palmer Park,” Korona said. “People could get there easily and weren’t going to catch the bus or drive across the city.”

“There are always lessons in organizing, because each time you gather it’s going to be different, but what do you do with that information? How do people get that information? Email, text, through the grapevine? That’s always the challenge,” Lipscomb said.



Rhiannon Chester-Bey is a cultural visual artist, writer and healing arts practitioner born, raised, and educated in and by Detroit. She is a long time activist, advocate and contributor in the Detroit LGBT community.

HOTTER THAN JULY 25TH ANNIVERSARY
RETROSPECTIVE HOTTER THAN JULY



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COVID-19 Crisis Care: Michigan Nurse Weighs In

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

In a seemingly positive trend overall, Michigan headed into Memorial Day 2020 with the fewest reported novel coronavirus deaths since March. And while Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has been called “cautiously optimistic” about those results, she’s noted that “we’re not out of the woods yet” and has extended the state’s stay-at-home order until June 12 and its “state of emergency” until June 19. In total, there have been just over 5,000 deaths in the state and cases across Michigan number just over 54,000. It’s clear that Southeast Michigan has been hardest-hit by COVID-19, with Wayne County reporting the most cases at 19,771 and 2,329 deaths, and surrounding counties like Oakland and Macomb coming in at second and third places with 8,215 and 6,499 cases respectively.

So while the statewide news is promising, it’s important to remember that thousands of people remain sick in Michigan and that the respiratory virus can still be passed on. That’s the advice of 30-year nursing veteran John Floros. He said that the best way to curb infection is still to adhere to social distancing guidelines because “everyone you come into contact with is a potential vector.”

“What you want to do is wear a mask, cover your nose and your mouth — because those are both areas where you can absorb the virus — you want to maintain your distance from the person, six feet or more, and you don’t want to go anywhere where you have to have a lot of people around you like in the grocery store,” he said.

Treating the Compromised

Floros works as an administrative nursing supervisor at the Karmanos Cancer Institute. While he normally specializes in cancer care, he said his patients usually have compromised immune systems, meaning that they have a predisposition “to catching things a little more easily than a normal person with an active immune system.”

“When you’re talking about the patients that come to Karmanos, they have a lot going on,” he said. “They have a lot against them.”

In recent months, many of Floros’ patients have turned the focus of their fight from cancer to COVID-19. And because of the lack of a vaccine and the virus’ unpredictability — COVID-19 is a respiratory illness but it has been shown to be capable of attacking everything from the brain to the placenta in pregnant women — he stressed that doctors don’t fully “know how to treat it.”

Floros is unsure of the exact date he encountered COVID-19 for the first time, but he said Karmanos began taking preventative steps — like restricting areas of the hospital



John Floros is a 30-year nursing veteran. He urges the public to be cautious and follow the CDC guidelines, practicing social distancing, washing your hands frequently and wearing masks in public.

for personnel and mandating extra personal protective equipment — as early as late February or March to help mitigate the influx of infected people. Despite that, it was still a “fiasco” due to a previously several-day wait time for test results.

“[When] these patients started rolling in the door we were almost overwhelmed by them, because here it was so busy for all patients [who had to wait when] we were trying to rule out COVID,” he said. “Now, the tests they have now come back within maybe an hour or so — I’m not quite sure what the latest test is that they have — but at the time it was taking days when these patients were on COVID precautions.”

The lack of immediacy around test results also resulted in a higher rate of precautionary usage of extra PPE when supplies were already low.

“When we started off, we had some personal protective equipment handy, PPE, but as it went on we realized that we were going to run out shortly,” Floros said.

Today, despite some public donations, there still isn’t enough equipment.

“We use one mask over, I think, seven shifts,” Floros said. “I know, it’s ridiculous, it really is, because you have to make sure that the supplies are going to last you, and yet, using a mask for

more than just one shift is considered not even safe because the integrity of the mask will break down after a time.”

Personal Toll of Providing Care

While he has remained at his job despite his daily risk of exposure — even volunteering his time at the Novi Civic Center that was converted to help provide drive-through testing — Floros said the bleak reality of limited safety equipment and daily interaction with COVID-19 has made many nurses seek employment elsewhere.

“There are many, many people who have families, and I know many nurses that have quit their jobs and moved on,” he said. “I don’t know where they’ve gone, but they’re not nursing anymore, at least for right now, because of the fact that they don’t want to get it and they don’t want to bring it home to anybody around.”

When asked if he feels that the public is doing its part to curb the disease’s spread, Floros said that he too often sees people talking with each other with no masks on. He said that while it might be difficult to believe, a short visit to even a very close friend or family member can leave everyone involved vulnerable — even after immediate stay-at-home orders are lifted.

“And there will be definitely a resurgence, I can almost guarantee that. And it’s a sad thing, too, because these people just don’t want to listen to what the doctors have to say. The doctors are trying to tell them the truth, and yet, in Lansing the other day there was a protest against Gov. Whitmer,” he said. “They’re saying how she’s being unfair with the lockdown and they have their guns in their hands, and they’re mad and they have no masks on. They were so close to each other and I thought, ‘My goodness, that’s just asking for a problem ... and the kids

“There’s two people when I was a younger guy that both came down with the AIDS virus and ended up dying from it ... It kind of brings you back to years ago when I was with my friends battling that virus at the time.”

[present] didn’t have masks on either. It was so sad.”

On a personal level, this is something Floros has “never experienced before.” But as both a nurse and an openly gay health care practitioner, he has had experience dealing with the AIDS epidemic in the ‘90s, “which really brought people together.” He said that while treating immunocompromised patients currently is not the same, there are similarities.

“There’s two people when I was a younger guy that both came down with the AIDS virus and ended up dying from it. I was very close to them, and they were dear friends,” he said. “... It’s stayed with me for the majority of my life so far, and when I see people that are in situations, especially at Karmanos where they’re dying of cancer or they’re compromised in some way because of diabetes or low white blood cell count, you know that probably they’re going to have a very hard time fighting this virus. ... It kind of brings you back to years ago when I was with my friends battling that virus at the time.”

So Floros’ long-term advice is clear: be cautious.

“At this time, listen to what the doctors say, what the CDC says, you have to protect yourself, [because the person who transmits COVID-19] could be your daughter, that person could be your husband.”

Visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for regularly updated information about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

A Stroke in Time

It was a year ago this Memorial Day 2019 that I had a stroke and spent two weeks in Detroit Receiving Hospital and a month in physical rehab in the Senior Care Center in Henry Ford Village, where I am now living in its Berkshire Gardens units.

My recovery has been steady, thanks to the excellent rehabilitation care, exercising pacing and challenging encouragement to get better I have been given. COVID-19 was not yet then a horror on the horizon of worldwide pandemic.

In March of this year, my medical check-up registered pluses for pulse, breathing, blood quality and 180 pounds, waist 34 inches. Again, COVID-19, the fear thereof was not a factor.

Perhaps there's a touch of long-range irony here, but today's need for wearing masks and practicing social distancing reminds me of when, just out of Cass Tech High School I trained as an OR Tech at Harper Hospital, where I happened also to be born in 1936.

In the mid-1950s many metropolitan city hospitals had acute shortages of surgical nurses. This was very, very much the situation during World War II. In both instances it was found that laypersons could be trained to pass surgical instruments reasonably as well as surgical nurses

As an OR Tech at Harper, I learned sterile procedure: how to scrub my hands, how to keep sterile procedures while putting on surgical gloves and gowning to pass instruments.

During my year-long tenure at Harper I passed instruments and sutures on several caesarian sections, countless tonsillectomies, a few D&Cs — dilatation and curettages — and, the one surgery I hated, sub-mucous resections — cracking by scapel of nostril bone.

There were 13 operating rooms at Harper, numbered 1 through 14, no number 13, I also witnessed a craniotomy, where four holes drilled into the skull, and was in attendance when I patient died on the operating table.

Another OR Tech and I tagged his thumb and big toe, and put his body into a freezer unit. To break our first such encounter with death, we tried to make jokes about its seriousness.

And, what may well be an item for the Guinness Book of World Records, I actually got to scrub with the doctor who brought me into this crazy, wonderful, at times horrible and baffling world, Dr. Leonard Heath. The moment of recognition understandably amazed us both.

Perhaps all of this backgrounding is appropriate as it coincide with this BTL's interview with my friend of 30 years John Floros, the head R.N. at Karmanos Hospital, and the current nurse at Novi State Hospital.

Fortunate for myself, John Floros was my principal care giver for this past year of my stroke recovery.

John was there at my bedside at Detroit Receiving Hospital on my first day of admission, watching over me, monitoring and reporting on my day-to-day progress.

He has since run countless errands for me and encouraged my recovery with good-natured, metaphysical understandings and comments. John! My heartfelt gratitude!

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Viewpoint



Living in the Shadow of COVID-19: Sowing Seeds for My New Normal

BY MICHELLE E. BROWN

It wasn't until the governor's declaration that we had to stay home that I stayed home. I had been following the progression of the pandemic, but I had decided with social distancing, hand-washing and other recommended practices I would be OK.

I also knew that, since my partner lived with her mother who has some medical conditions putting her at risk, the quarantine directive meant I would at home alone.

I'm good being alone normally but I then had options. I didn't have to be

alone 24/7.

I like being busy! I have books to read, books to write, research to do, people to interview and projects. I could easily stay busy, but I need to move, be out and about. No gym. No movies. No restaurants. Don't get me wrong, I love being home, but the additional hours spent in the house quarantined seemed like a recipe for decline.

That first week I developed a close personal relationship with my couch, Netflix, Cool Ranch Doritos and guacamole (go figure). I was still getting up when the alarm went off

each morning, but I walked around in my pajamas wondering what I was going to do.

I have used this time to reset, to think about not just how I could work smarter but how I would redefine the things that really mattered to me and make them the engine driving my activities moving forward.

These days when the news cycle is primarily filled with stories of the pandemic, I have used my weekly blog radio podcast, through its guests, to

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► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 14

highlight ways communities are planting the seeds for our new reality. The conversations with the guests from across the state and country have been hopeful, inspiring and incredible.

We have talked about politics, diet, connecting with others, poetry and yoga — lots of yoga!

Being in quarantine means not being with the community, but it has also opened new doors to community. As LGBTQ centers across the country had to close their physical doors, virtual doors opened.

Like the book club and discussion group with lesbians across the country hosted by ZAMI NOBLA: National Organization of Black Lesbians on Aging based in Atlanta, Georgia, and an evening of virtual comedy with Karen Williams attended by an audience of over 200 from across the country.

Monday through Friday evenings, the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice in New Jersey brings LGBTQ authors, artists and other notables including former U.S. Sen. Al Franken virtually to computer screens for LGBTQ audiences in many states. Even SAGE Metro Detroit virtually celebrated National Poetry Month. We may be alone, but we aren't alone.

Let's not forget Zoom, which has allowed me to participate in board meetings in Atlanta, attend an open mic in Princeton, New Jersey, and share poetry with audiences across the U.S. and work with an artist in India.

I've met new people in these virtual settings who shared their talents and ideas with me. Working collaboratively, we have been able to identify needs in our communities, bring together resources to assist those providing essential services and get those funds to them quickly. There is a lot of good going on out there in the real world. Crisis builds character.

Like so many others my biological family is spread out across the country — my brother in Los Angeles, my son in New York. Thanks to FaceTime, I virtually

Being in quarantine means not being with the community, but it has also opened new doors to community. As LGBTQ centers across the country had to close their physical doors, virtual doors opened.

toured my brother and his girlfriend's new home. I have been watching my son parenting and my granddaughter grow.

I FaceTime my partner and we have waved at one another from our cars maintaining the proper social distance. It's not the same, but we're all keeping it safe so we can live, laugh and love another day.

But best of all, in a world of social media and texting, I have rediscovered the joy of hearing the human voice by picking up the phone and calling friends. The joy in hearing their laughter, the slight change of tone in their voice, hearing about life in more than 160 characters, a GIF or a meme, and responding with more than a thumbs-up, heart or emoji.

"Reach out and touch someone" has never been more important.

We will get through this. Social distancing, personal protective equipment and virtual events/activities will probably remain a part of our reality but, hopefully, in the future we will stop to smell the roses and reach out to care for one another in a way where we can all prosper and thrive.

I am keeping busy, but, in this time of social isolation, I am finding the time and space to sow the seeds of my new normal, because we aren't there yet!

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/.

and caring for others in good times as well as the unseasonable times we are now experiencing. This too shall pass. Pride will last. One can only hope.

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. 14

May I also extend many, many appreciative thanks to those who wished me well on line and on my Facebook page. Your remarks were pluses of healing for me. The simple truth of the matter is we all need each other. Especially during this time of unintended isolation and fear.

We share our LGBTQ pride by loving

Creep Of The Week

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

On May 17, when Azar appeared on CNN with Jake Tapper above a chyron that read, "CDC expects U.S. to surpass 100,000 virus deaths by June 1" to tell the American people they basically have only themselves to blame, it was a special kind of infuriating.

Alex Azar

At the time of this writing, 89,564 people have died from COVID-19 in the U.S. An uninterrupted moment of silence for each person would last 62 days. And yet there is no state of national mourning, which is the loudest thing I have ever heard.

By the time you read this, the number of dead will have grown. And this is only the number of KNOWN cases. And Trump and his Republicans want you to believe that "only" 100,000 deaths would be something to celebrate.

How did we get here? Well, first of all, we elected an incompetent egomaniac to lead the country. A bad move. And then that incompetent egomaniac surrounded himself with people who don't dare say no to him or give him news that conflicts with his conspiracy theory-driven view of the world, lest they be fired.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar is a perfect example. While thousands of people die, Azar, the head of an agency that has rolled back Obama-era protections for LGBTQ people, makes the rounds on TV news to assure everyone that, "Hey, it could be worse."

According to Slate, Azar is to blame "for the woeful federal response that has resulted in a horrifying under-identification of cases, the actions of public health officials that may have actually exacerbated the crisis and the many lies and misleading statements he has told to the public as the disaster has unfolded."

That was on March 13. And things have only gotten worse.

So on May 17, when Azar appeared on CNN with Jake Tapper above a chyron that read, "CDC expects U.S. to surpass 100,000 virus deaths by June 1" to tell the American people they basically have only themselves to blame, it was a special kind of infuriating.

"Every death is a tragedy," Azar says, "but..."

Now, if I were, say, an aide for Azar, I would probably run up and tackle him to the ground saying, "Hold up. I'm gonna stop you right there..." in the hopes that I could prevent whatever is going to follow.

But, of course, Azar doesn't work with anyone who cares about him that much.

"But," he continues, "the results could've been vastly, vastly worse."

Well, no shit. My twin sister has a habit of saying, "Worst-case scenario," as in, "Well, worst-case scenario, we get there a few minutes late." And I always point out to her that is actually NOT the case and offer up something like, "No, worst-case scenario, on our way there we rear-end a truck hauling pigs to slaughter and are killed when hundreds of pigs fall onto our car, crushing us and then for years our family says, 'It's ironic that they were killed by pigs since they're both vegetarian.'"

Anyway, I'm old enough to remember when

a projected 100,000 deaths was considered a reckless overestimation by the Trump administration.

"Unfortunately," Azar continues, "the American population is a very diverse, and it is a population with significant unhealthy comorbidities that do make many individuals in our communities — in particular African American — minority communities, particularly at risk here because of significant underlying disease, health disparities and disease comorbidities and that is an unfortunate legacy in our health care system that we certainly do need to address."

Huh. OK. So he's saying that more Americans are dying, particularly African Americans, because of the 100 percent intentional and by-design inequities in our health care system that, golly, we should probably take a look at some day, but in the meantime, those folks wouldn't be dying if they took better care of themselves.

The look on Jake Tapper's face at this point is priceless, by the way.

"I want to give you the opportunity to clear it up," Tapper says, "because it sounded like you were saying the reason that there were so many dead Americans is because we're unhealthier than the rest of the world. I know that's not what you meant..."

Azar jumps in to say that, yes, he meant what he said.

"There are, like, tons of fat people, pun-intended," he says — I'm paraphrasing.

Tapper replies, "That doesn't mean it's the fault of the American people that the government failed to take adequate steps in February..."

"Jake please, please don't distort," Azar interrupts. "One doesn't blame anyone for their health conditions, that would be absurd."

Except the Republican party as led by the Trump administration has done exactly that in countless arguments against the Affordable Care Act. A running theme has been, "If we give the poors health insurance then they're not going to have any incentive to take care of themselves because they can just go to the doctor whenever they want."

And, by the way, Trump is still actively working to destroy the ACA as millions of Americans are losing jobs and health insurance in the middle of a pandemic. The Republican Party is a death cult. Vote them out. Or die. Literally.

Donating Blood in the Time of Coronavirus: Activists Say Gay Men Still Face Discrimination

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

The Need is Great

Only about 38 percent of the U.S. population is eligible to donate blood. That's because of various restrictions like age and physical health of the potential donor plus factors intended to protect the blood supply from blood-borne pathogens such as HIV. Men who have had sex with men within the past three months are among those who are ineligible — a deferral period recently reduced from a wait of one year. This change was announced in early April and it comes at a time of greatly increased need for donated blood due to the coronavirus pandemic, as so many blood drives had to be canceled. Many in the LGBTQ community find deferral policies related to blood donation arbitrary and homophobic in general. Dave Garcia, executive director of the Affirmations LGBTQ community center in Ferndale is among them, and he was quick to call the policy “asinine.”

“It doesn't make any sense,” Garcia said. “It is arbitrary. It's an archaic, asinine policy that is steeped in bigotry and prejudice and ignorance. And frankly, any time you have a ... health policy with that kind of prejudice and ignorance associated with it, [it] leads to death. People are dying because of this stupid policy,” he said, implying that lives might be saved by ending the acute blood shortage if the deferral policy were abolished.

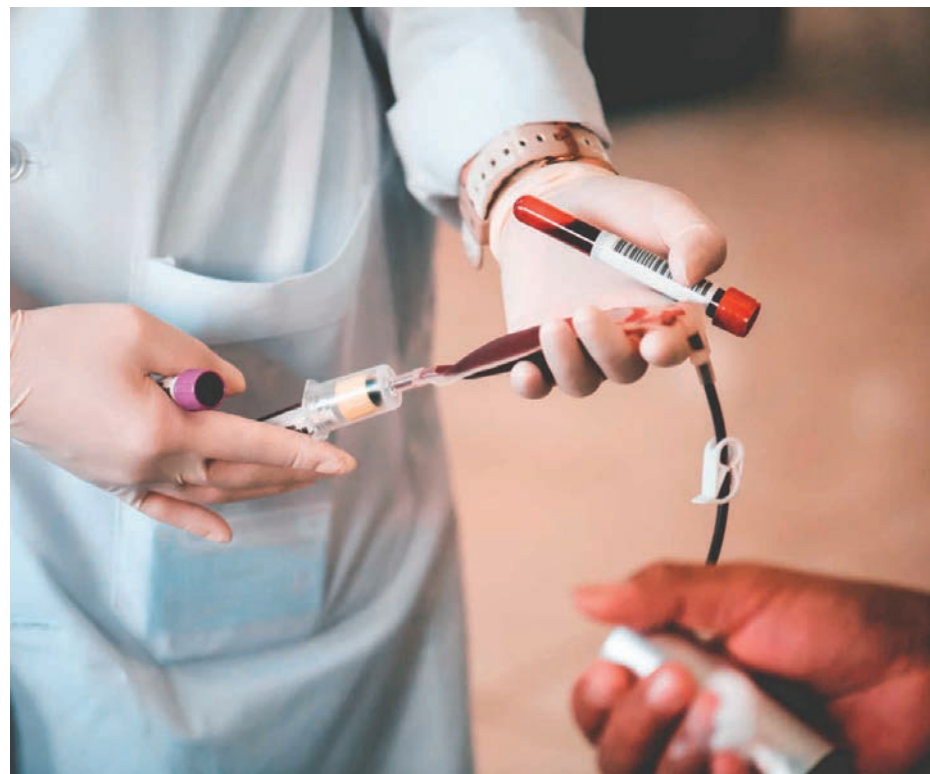
To be clear, it is the Food and Drug Administration that establishes guidelines regarding blood donation, not organizations like the American Red Cross, which is not a government agency. An official from the Red Cross declined to be interviewed for this story, instead they emailed a statement from national headquarters dated April 2. The statement expressed thanks to the FDA for updating the rules regarding men who have sex with men, among other recent changes to their policies.

“These changes will potentially allow more individuals to donate and help ensure blood collection organizations across the country continue to meet patient needs throughout this pandemic and beyond,” the statement reads. “... This is the first and important step toward a greater goal of an equitable blood donation process that treats all potential donors with equality and respect, and [it] ensures a safe, sufficient blood supply is readily available for patients in need. The Red Cross remains committed to building an inclusive environment that embraces diversity for all those who engage with our lifesaving mission...”

Orientation Versus Behavior

While the statement specifies that the Red Cross “does not believe blood donation eligibility should be determined by methods

that are based upon sexual orientation,” Garcia says that is exactly what it does: it bases eligibility primarily on sexual orientation, not on the type of sexual behavior. For example, gay men in monogamous sexual relationships remain unable to donate, as do gay men who



engage in sex that does not put them at risk for HIV.

“Basically, what they're saying is that I can go have sex with a woman today, or a hundred women in a week, and I can go give blood,” Garcia surmised. “If I have sex with one man, deal's over, whether you're on PrEP or not. If I'm a gay man on PrEP, who just got tested three months ago ... you're one of the safest people to give blood, frankly. All that matters is [that] ... you're gay. There's no other way to wrap your mind around that than discrimination and ignorance.”

It should also be noted how rigorously blood banks screen donations for blood-borne diseases such as HIV, hepatitis and syphilis. At the same time, none of these tests are 100 percent accurate, and they can produce faulty results. For example, despite current restrictions and testing of approximately 12 million units of blood donated each year, 10 HIV-infected units have slipped through, according to data provided by the Human Rights Campaign.

Garcia has personal experience with attempting to donate blood and being turned away. It was after the 9/11 tragedy when a lifetime ban against gay men from donating blood was in effect. It was revised to a one-year deferral in 2015. At that time, Garcia said he was aware of the policy.

“I told them then it was a stupid policy and

that I had just had an HIV test — I even brought my test with me,” Garcia said. “And it wasn't enough. I was turned away from giving blood.”

He pointed out that ironically, after 9/11 the need for blood was not nearly what had been anticipated because there weren't many

survivors.

A Plea to the FDA

Garcia's not alone in his frustration. He has the backing of hundreds of doctors and other medical professionals who signed an open letter to the FDA dated April 16 calling on them to overturn the “scientifically outdated ban against MSM blood donors.”

Further, “...we are on the precipice of a critical nationwide shortage of blood products,” it reads. “This severe shortage could be alleviated if antiquated restrictions lacking scientific data were responsibly lifted. According to a 2014 study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, eliminating the MSM ban would result in an estimated 360,600 MSM donors being able to donate an additional 615,300 pints of blood per year.”

With HIV testing that is now nearly 100 percent sensitive to the virus, the window period of infection has been narrowed to approximately 10 days from the time of infection, according to data cited in the letter. However, it should be noted that the window depends on the type of test, as described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Again, like Garcia, the signers of the open letter to the FDA emphasize the difference between sexual orientation and sexual behavior.

“A broad ban against MSM blood donors does not take into account the actual risk behavior in question that could jeopardize blood supply safety — very recent condomless anal or vaginal intercourse with a partner with HIV viremia — engaged by those regardless of sex, gender, and/or sexual orientation,” the letter reads.

Instead of relaxing standards that would compromise the safety of the blood supply, they advocate for scientifically-driven standards that uphold its safety while promoting equity and ending discrimination in blood donation.

Likewise, 20 state attorneys general, including Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, signed a letter dated April 22 that pushed for a risk-based, gender-neutral screening model.

The medical director of Detroit's Corktown Health Center, a clinic focused on serving the LGBTQ community in Southeastern Michigan, weighed in as well.

“It would be OK for questions to be asked about sexual behavior so that there can be a risk stratification strategy,” Dr. Latonya Riddle-Jones said via email. “This would require a new system, and creatively thinking outside of our current box. This new system would not create barriers for those [who] wanted to donate, but it could allow those testing [to keep] the blood supply as safe as possible.”

In contrast to the U.S., Brazil, which has been especially hard-hit by the coronavirus, fully lifted its ban against MSM donating blood earlier in May. Likewise, Chile, Italy, Mexico and Russia are among several other countries that have no deferral period for MSM.

Updated, But Not Yet Implemented

The abovementioned Red Cross announcement stated that it, and presumably all blood banks, would work aggressively to implement the many eligibility changes outlined by the FDA as soon as possible, but that it will take time to implement.

Indeed, the new guidelines are not yet enforced systemwide; in fact, it was reported earlier in May that a state senator in New York who is gay was turned away from donating blood.

“I found, as a gay man, it was entirely insulting to be turned away by the New York Blood Center,” Sen. Brad Holyman said. “The federal government is encouraging citizens to donate blood during this pandemic. The fact that I couldn't do so makes me feel like a second-class citizen. It's completely discriminatory. It's not based on science. It's insulting to LGBTQ people, and it sends a really negative message.”

For his part, Garcia agreed that it sends the wrong message. Still, when asked if he would donate blood if the restrictions were lifted, he answered without missing a beat, “Of course I would.”

Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center Offers Free Food Box Pick-Up and Delivery Service

BY BENJAMIN DECKER

The Affirmations LGBTQ community center has teamed up with Gleaners Food Bank and Wayne State University to offer free food box pickup every Friday for any LGBTQ person in need. From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., recipients can drive up to the back of the community center and volunteers will hand them a box of nonperishable food that should last two weeks. Each box also includes toiletries, like shampoo and conditioner. Condoms and lube are available upon request.

Affirmations Executive Director Dave Garcia explained, “Gleaners and Wayne State gather the supplies and put the boxes together, then send them to Affirmations Community Center so we can distribute them to the community.”

The availability of the food boxes is on a first-come, first-served basis. Last Friday was the first time this service was available and over 20 boxes were handed out to the community, but Affirmations is expecting to give out more this week. Affirmations started this program to help out any members of the LGBTQ community who are suffering from the impacts of the new coronavirus. Whether they cannot afford groceries due to being laid off or have high-risk complications preventing them from shopping

on their own, all are welcome to use the service.

“This is great because the more people who hear about it, as long as we have the funding and we have the partnership with Wayne State and Gleaners, we can continue to provide the service,” Garcia said.

Garcia also mentioned Affirmations has another type of grocery service where it is delivering perishable groceries — like vegetables, fruits and meats — directly to LGBTQ individuals’ front doors. To receive this service, anyone in the LGBTQ community can email Garcia with their grocery list and he will send an Instacart order to their homes.

“Because it is kind of a sensitive issue, getting food and being secure, we ask the community to keep their lists at around \$75 each,” Garcia stated.

Although it is primarily focused around the southeastern part of Michigan, any LGBTQ person from around the state can be helped by this service. Last week was the first run of this program and already 20 households were served.

“It actually started with delivering to our LGBT seniors, but became much bigger than that quickly. If I were to have a call from an LGBT person from the west side of the state, I could still have the grocery delivery service

deliver to their front door,” Garcia said.

As of now, there are no fundraisers to aid this service. The only money it has raised is with the grants given from the government. As long as the grants keep getting renewed, Affirmations plans to help as many LGBTQ people as possible.

Brianna Dee, a disabled transgender woman in Pontiac, is just one of the many people being helped by this service.

“Aff[irmations] delivered Instacart groceries for our household of three, including two other disabled transgender people, one poz, and one diabetic,” she wrote in an email statement. “We also went to last Friday’s pickup and got three boxes of nonperishables to stock the pantry.”

She said that using the service was easy and that staff was supportive.

“Very easy. We sent a wish list of groceries and they were delivered in about a week,” Dee said. “Dave was very helpful and we coordinated the delivery easily. The curbside food box pickup was done with social distance in the alley behind Aff[irmations].”

She added that because her household has several people in high-risk groups for contracting COVID-19 — two members are over 50 years old, one is HIV-positive and another is diabetic — the service has been a

great way to lessen the risk of leaving home for necessary groceries.

“The future is uncertain. The Affirmations delivery service helps us have a better lockdown by decreasing trips to the store and reminding us that our community cares even if we can’t be face-to-face right now,” Dee said. “Any money we save on groceries can be used to pay other bills, including medical care. The doorside service also helps mitigate our chronic pain since even getting groceries is strenuous.”

But beyond being physically nourished, Dee said that the service has provided a tangible positive impact on other aspects of her life.

“It’s not just food. It’s the feeling of community love and support that we cherish. This lockdown is very isolating. We can’t access the family and support systems we built after being rejected when we came out. Affirmations is our community epicenter,” Dee said. “Because of this program, we know with certainty that our meals are literally cooked with love from our friends and neighbors, whether we have met them yet or not. That nourishes our souls, not just our bodies.”

To receive this service, email dgarcia@goaffirmations.org.



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Rep. David Cicilline (D-R.I.) speaks at a press conference for the Equality Act. Washington Blade file photo by Michael Key



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LOVE Wins

Between THE Lines™

Congressional LGBTQ Equality PAC Endorses Biden

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

The Equality PAC, the political action committee led by openly LGBTQ members of Congress, has thrown its support behind Joseph Biden in the 2020 presidential election.

In a statement exclusive to the Washington Blade, Rep. David Cicilline (D-R.I.) said the Equality PAC, which he co-chairs, is backing Biden because he “has been a strong leader on LGBTQ issues over his career and as president will continue to be a champion for our community.”

“Too many LGBTQ Americans can still get fired from their jobs or kicked out of their homes just because of who they are,” said Cicilline. “This is wrong and it’s why electing Joe Biden is critical in our fight for full equality.”

The endorsement was timed to coincide with the anniversary of U.S. House passage of the Equality Act, a comprehensive LGBTQ bill that a chamber of Congress approved for the first time in history last year, and the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia.

“One year ago the House made history and passed the Equality Act, which protects all LGBTQ Americans from discrimination — but the Senate has failed to act,” Cicilline said. “Joe Biden’s candidacy will help elect

Democrats across the country to secure the pro-equality Democratic majorities needed in the House and Senate to see the Equality Act become a reality.”

Biden has indicated passage of the Equality PAC would be his No. 1 legislative priority if elected president.

Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), another co-chair of the Equality PAC, recalled in a statement Biden declaring support for same-sex marriage on “Meet the Press” eight years ago.

“Throughout his career Joe Biden has been a fierce advocate and steady ally for LGBTQ people and those living around around the world, from supporting our right to marry when it wasn’t popular to promoting acceptance of our youth through his work as a private citizen at the Biden Foundation,” Takano said. “His commitment and character is desperately needed right now.”

Takano also drew on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia in declaring support for Biden.

“As we recognize International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia today, I say it’s time to fight back, it’s time to restore the soul of our nation, and it’s time we make the United States a global leader in human rights, and I say, ‘Let’s go, Joe!’” Takano said.

The Equality PAC is the latest LGBTQ


group to endorse Biden. Others who declared their support this month alone are the Human Rights Campaign and the National Center for Transgender Equality Action Fund.

Reggie Greer, LGBTQ+ vote director for the Biden campaign, said the former vice president is “deeply proud and honored to receive the support of Equality PAC.”


“For years, Equality PAC has worked tirelessly to ensure LGBTQ+ people have a critical voice in Congress to fight back against discriminatory policies and advance pro-equality measures,” Greer said. “Their leadership led to the most pro-equality Congress in history as well as the historic passage of the Equality Act in the House of Representatives, which occurred exactly one-year ago today.”

“As we work towards our shared mission of improving the lives of all LGBTQ+ people, we stand committed and ready to work with Equality PAC to ensure we usher in a wave of pro-equality champions into government this November and elect Joe Biden our next president,” Greer continued.


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



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Photo: Netflix

Janelle Monáe Doesn't Know Time Either

Queer Icon Talks 'Too On the Nose' Pandemic, LGBTQ Representation and Pride Plans

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

I really hadn't planned on telling queer powerhouse singer-actress-activist Janelle Monáe that I made food for my boyfriend the night before I got on Zoom with her.

That afternoon, Monáe was feeling it all. This global pandemic, the quarantining. She told me she can't even create right now because she doesn't have the mental bandwidth. When we linked up, her mind was understandably heavy and momentarily adrift. While talking about Amazon's second season of its thriller "Homecoming," Monáe accidentally called her character – a war vet who we first meet on a boat, alone and drifting, unsure of how she got there – an "ex-veterinarian." "I said veterinarian," she started, realizing her slip-up. "It's that quarantine mind!"

Then I diverted her attention to her neo-soul album "Dirty Computer," a life-affirming celebration of queerness released in 2018.

I began by telling her about my night before we Zoomed, when my spiraling mind happened to find a rare moment of pure, unencumbered

joy within that album as I prepared for our virtual chat. Songs from "Dirty Computer" had my boyfriend and I bopping in the kitchen. Emerging from her face was a smile so wide I could almost see my reflection in it. It was like I'd cracked a code. A pandemic-era topic universal enough that it got even Janelle Monáe curious that she, during a promo tour for a TV show, couldn't help but ask me a question everybody is asking everybody because all we do is cook now: "What were y'all eatin'?"

Monáe's in isolation too of course, trying to navigate not merely *how* to be an artist but *if* that's even possible for her right now. From lockdown, she at least looks put together. Greeting me like the bots she sings about, she says, "Hi, I'm Janelle and I don't know who I am today." She appears to be reclining on a couch, a white top hat perched on her head; her virtual backdrop is appropriately one for "Homecoming." In August, Monáe leads the cast of the slavery-themed horror film "Antebellum," which was initially scheduled to be released in April.

And though it was just in February, it seems

like another life when Monáe opened the Oscars and celebrated diversity and being, as she proclaimed on national TV during her performance, a "black queer artist." Previously, in 2018, she came out as pansexual, after years of telling the press she was dating androids.

So no wonder she was looking forward to headlining NYC Pride Island on June 27. In a statement, she called it a "dream." But summer gatherings, including NYC Pride Island, have been canceled.

Monáe is still doing what she can; recently, she took part in a special performance for Verizon's Pay It Forward Live, when she and Verizon made donations to small businesses owned by those in the LGBTQ community and other minorities affected by COVID-19.

"Stay up, Chris," she gently consoles as we wrap, offering the same kind of bright-eyed hopefulness contained in "Americans," one of the songs that, for a few dazzling minutes, took me out of life as we now currently know it. She continues: "And send my love to your boyfriend." Even in a pandemic, even when she's not creating, Monáe has so much to give.

How are you coping with everything that's happening right now?

I don't know. I probably won't know until, like, next month. Time is not real to me. I feel like I'm in a warped, alternate universe, especially watching everybody walking around with masks and avoiding each other, and dealing with an administration who hides information and is putting capitalism above the health and well-being of our people. I have no grasp of reality right now.

It's like living in the twilight zone.

Yeah. I write too much science-fiction to be dealing with this shit right now. It's too on the nose. (Laughs.)

How does "Homecoming" fit into the kind of stories you want to be telling?

We're on a journey with her as she discovers her identity, and I think when you go back into her past there are some decisions that she makes that I just would not make as a human. But when I was creating her backstory and

understanding her motivation I realized that this person could have been dealing with a lot of childhood trauma, and it gave reason to why she is the way she is.

I think that this show has a lot to say about capitalism over citizenship and community, and the well-being of our citizens. I think it has a lot to say about how we treat ex-vets and mental health. And it's a character study on minorities and those who are marginalized and how they go on their rise to being powerful and also having their freedom through living in their truth, so that was super important to me.

And the show's queer representation – how is the fact that your character just happens to be in a relationship with a woman meaningful to you?

Like you said: representation. It always matters. You think about the number of shows that are greenlit and films that are greenlit, and we're still in that minority. It's still not equal in terms of storytelling. There are so many cis, het-normative stories, and that's not a reflection of the real world. I don't want to give away too much, but there is a strong presence of (queerness) in "Homecoming." I hope the folks feel seen.

How would this kind of representation have changed your life as a young woman growing up in Kansas City?

I would probably feel less alone. I'd be more intrigued. When you grow up in small towns and you have large families, and when being Baptist and going to church is the center of your family and your household – in addition to going through that and trying to love yourself and finding out who you are and what you want to be and deciding how you want to live your life – I think that having that representation would have made things easier for a lot of us.

When was the first time you identified with someone from the LGBTQ community and what did that mean to you?

That's a really good question. There were, of course, a lot of artists who have come before me that have walked in their truth, like (openly queer singer-songwriter and activist) Meshell Ndegeocello. Even if they didn't say, "Hey, I'm gay," there was just a certain freeness that I got when I looked at David Bowie, a freeness I got that blurred the lines of gender. And I've always felt a part of everything, and as I find out more about myself and who I am, I look at myself and all of us as experiences. I just don't believe in those binaries. But I love identifying as a woman, and I'm not mad when I'm not called a woman. I feel so a part of everything, and I *am* a part of everything.

Earlier this year, you tweeted #IAmNonBinary. Does that mean you're using they and them pronouns now?

I use free-ass-motherfucker pronouns. That's

the pronoun that I use. Absolutely.

Over the years you've gradually taken on more of an activist role, both as a vocal advocate but also in the way you've chosen projects. Your art is clearly a conduit for your messaging of unity and empowerment. How do you see yourself evolving as an activist and artist?

I never considered myself an activist. I think there are really people out on the front lines who are doing that groundwork in our communities. I have a mic; I have a studio; I'm doing film. I'm doing all those things. And I've never considered myself that.

People have kind of placed that label on me, but I don't feel pressure. I think I feel more pressure just as a citizen to lend my support and my voice. I think even if I never wrote another song in my life, if I saw something happening to someone who couldn't protect themselves or take care of themselves and they were in a marginalized group, then I'm gonna say something about it. That's just been me since I've been little. I've never allowed people to bully my little sister or people who were helpless and couldn't defend themselves. I'm just not gonna stand for that. I guess I look at myself as anti-bully, and I will whoop your ass in different ways if you try to oppress or harm other people that I love and I care about. And I care about my community.

How do you feel about where we're at now with LGBTQ representation? And what do you hope is next in that regard?

I think it's getting better. I think we have a long way to go. I think it's a more nuanced conversation because we're dealing with sexuality and we're dealing with gender. A lot of it is a journey, it's not just a destination. And there's new terminology that's coming, and we have to be open and nonjudgmental within our community.

I've definitely received a lot of judgment, and I can't say that I haven't judged myself, but at this point I think that life is a mystery. We are uncovering truths about us, just like this show does, and the more information we have, we should never feel ashamed to lean into that gray area. Don't become a prisoner or a slave of your past. Move forward accordingly once you discover who you are and what it is that you want to be.

But I want to say that I think that we still have a lot more work to do in terms of allies. Folks who are more privileged, who are the majority *and* the minority, I think that they can share the mic.

Are you currently creating? And while I have "Dirty Computer" on my mind – will you make music with the queer community in mind for your next work?

I don't know what kind of music I'm gonna make. I'm not in a musical space. I'm not inspired. I'm just not inspired right now. I

See **Janelle**, continued on p. 20



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► **Janelle**
Continued from p. 19

mean, I want to be; I want to be using this time and come out with five albums. But my heart is just so broken right now with everything that's going on. So I've been DJing; that's been inspiring. Deconstructing songs, my favorite songs. And I've been listening to Childish Gambino, and I love Megan Thee Stallion's Savage remix with Beyoncé. Been listening to that. But I've just been trying to figure out how to put my boots on the ground and how to thrive in a pandemic.

It's affected me. I'm not a black, single mom with five kids or a single parent trying to make ends meet because she got laid off. I'm not in that position. We're in this, but we're not all in the same boat. And for me, I feel a sense of urgency to figure out how we can come together as citizens. Once I get that down pat and understand what this all means and I can get some foundation then maybe I can go to a creative space, but right now my mental real estate is dealing with this pandemic.

You were supposed to perform at NYC Pride Island this summer. What message would you like to send out to all the dirty computers of the world who will be celebrating Pride in a very different way this year?

I love you. I was looking forward to being there, but all of our health is important. I would hate to be irresponsible and hold a concert and bring people together and then people pass away as a result of us trying to have a concert right now. But I have a feeling that in the future I will come back. The organizers of Pride New York are trying to put together something special that I may be a part of, so just keep your ears glued. (On May 15, it was announced that Monáe would be among the



performers taking part in NYC's virtual pride celebration on June 28.)

And to answer your last question: I did say I wasn't really inspired to make music, but because I am a dirty computer at heart, whatever I do is always going to be through the lens of being a part of the LGBTQIA+ communities. That is who I am, so I can't help but to have that perspective. So I'm sure whenever I start making music (laughs) I will still be a free-ass-motherfucker making music.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the 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 The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard.
chrisazzopardi.com

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Puzzle p. 25

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Detroit Gallery Hosts Virtual Exhibit to Benefit Ruth Ellis Center

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

In a blend of the virtual and tangible, the Detroit-based gallery Library Street Collective has created a new digital exhibition platform called SITE: Art and Architecture in the Digital Space. Set in Detroit's historic State Savings Bank, the show features an array of animated works that seem to interact with their real-life environment. Its featured artists include Daniel Arsham, Kadar Brock, Greg Fadell, Simphiwe Ndzube, Jose Parla, Rachel Rossin, Phillip K. Smith III

and Kennedy Yanko. And there's a charitable element to the exhibit, too: a total of 10 percent of sales will go to aid the Ruth Ellis Center — a Detroit nonprofit that provides help and housing for LGBTQ at-risk youth.

"Ruth Ellis Center has extraordinary partners in the Detroit community, and Anthony Curis, co-founder of the Library Street Collective is no exception," said Mark Erwin-McCormick, director of development and advancement for REC. "Through SITE: Art and Architecture in the Digital Space, guests will experience important artwork framed within some of

Detroit's most historic architecture, while also supporting the legacy of one of Detroit's most significant pioneers, Ruth Ellis. We are honored to share in this partnership."

Exhibit organizers say that the exhibit shows "a unique digital connection between the visual arts and the built environment, incorporating aspects of storytelling, architectural history and an artist's unique perspective through the presentation of SITE."

To help Library Street Collective realize its vision for SITE, the gallery called upon architectural photographer James Haefner. Haefner is the co-creator of the books "Michigan Modern: Design that Shaped America" and "Michigan Modern: An Architectural Legacy." Similarly, those works display images in places in "often private realms not open to the public to explore the innovative and often breathtaking design solutions presented on these pages."

And beyond simply offering an artistic glimpse into places rarely visited, Library Street Collective asserts that the online presentation "carries with it an important environmental benefit" that helps to reduce the gallery's carbon footprint.

"SITE is entirely digital, and so the art displayed is skillfully and seamlessly rendered into its environment," said exhibit organizers.

Curis himself chose to give REC a portion



of the show's proceeds when he saw how the organization was navigating the "stay home, stay safe" order that resulted from the novel coronavirus.

"As LGBTQ young people continue to face barriers to housing, health and wellness, even more so during the coronavirus global pandemic, support from our community has never been more critical," Erwin-McCormick said. "All funds raised through the exhibition will support the center's critical programs, including the Ruth Ellis Health & Wellness Center, Ruth's House - Residential Foster Care, and Ruth's Pantry, providing food and safety resources to LGBTQ young people twice weekly. SITE: Art and Architecture in the Digital Space not only brings visibility to some of Detroit's historic buildings, but it also brings visibility to some of our city's most vulnerable."

Learn more about the exhibit online at lscgallery.com.





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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Jamie Lee Curtis is coming to your wedding

You probably don't know the name Sara Cunningham yet. But you will soon enough. See, about 10 years ago, the conservative Christian mom got a bit of a shock when her son came out as gay. She sought support on Facebook from other parents of queer kids, as her questions and worries slowly became pro-queer activism. Then she hit Pride parades to give out "free mom hugs," and, after that, same-sex weddings to stand in for absent, anti-LGBT parents. Her memoir, "How We Sleep At Night," was an immediate hit, and now Jamie Lee Curtis has optioned the rights and will play Cunningham in an original TV movie of the same name for the A+E Networks brand. Sally Robinson will write the script. It's a passion project for Curtis, and though the production stoppage in Hollywood has put everything in limbo, we've tagged this future night-in-with-basic-cable as must-see television already. There will be crying.



Jamie Lee Curtis. Photo: KathClick

Kim Cattrall owns everything in 'Filthy Rich'

Tate Taylor, the gay director behind "The Help" and "Ma," has a new show coming soon from Fox called "Filthy Rich," and from the sound of it, it's something we need to see right this minute. A cross between "Empire"'s take on "King Lear" with a huge helping of Jim Bakker and a dash of the moneyed tackiness of HBO's comedy "Righteous Gemstones," it's the story of an Evangelical televangelism media empire in chaos. The recently deceased patriarch (Gerald McRaney, "Major Dad") leaves behind children nobody knew about, children he included in his will, and widow Kim Cattrall must step in and take control of all that money, even if it means playing dirty. "Filthy Rich" is based on a New Zealand series of the same name, and the retro soapiness includes religious mania, plane crashes, vengeful cocktail waitresses, weed farmers, sexy secrets and, we're just going to assume, some extreme costuming for Cattrall. It's coming soon from Fox. Just not soon enough.

More 'American Horror Story,' plural

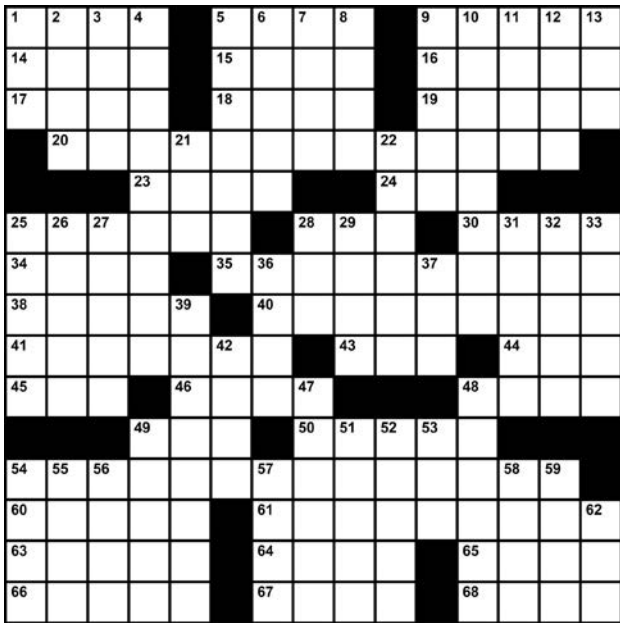
The things you learn from Instagram. TV supermogul Ryan Murphy recently got on a Zoom call with cast members from his series "American Horror Story," and when posting about it on IG, he dropped the news that another "AHS" project was underway, an anthology series called "American Horror Stories." Each episode of the "Twilight Zone"-styled project will be a standalone tale of spooky stuff – and will also probably involve major helpings of Ryan Murphy's favorite things:

campy/creepy horror imagery, pop stars, a handful of young actors who look like Matt Bomer, although to be fair we're just guessing here – with a familiar cast of AHS regulars. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down production of just about everything in the entertainment business, so the project is currently on indefinite hold with very little information available. But the folks on that Zoom call, people like Sarah Paulson, Emma Roberts, Kathy Bates, Denis O'Hare, Finn Wittrock and Angela Bassett, can probably expect an offer from their agents soon enough.

Jim Parsons produces a lesbian sitcom

HBO Max has put "Beth & Sam" into development, a half-hour single-camera comedy from Emily Wilson ("The Conners"), "My Boys" creator Betsy Thomas, and Jim Parsons (who's currently slashing and burning his way through Netflix's wild-eyed Ryan Murphy series "Hollywood" as the gay villain to end them all). "Beth & Sam" is a romantic comedy about two female friends – one queer, one heterosexual – who are not a couple, but who're doing what sounds like a "When Harry Met Sally" dance around the inevitable. There's no cast and there's no timetable, but we will watch literally any series about lesbianism conquering all, especially while we're waiting for another season of the new "L Word." Advice to this show: keep them apart until at least the beginning of Season 2, and while we know that Hollywood loves a femme lesbian at all times, please give us at least one handsome butch woman to root for, even if that person is a sidekick-style character. We, the future fans, are a demanding bunch.

Romeo San Vicente is wearing his mask.



- 41 More of the quote
 43 Characters in the navy
 44 Winter product prefix, in ads
 45 Lawyers' thing
 46 ___ Paolo Pasolini
 48 Normandy city
 49 Eagle's org.
 50 Stand next to Cassatt
 54 End of the quote
 60 Suspect's defense in an Ellen Hart novel
 61 "But of course!"
 63 Solemn sound
 64 Sch. for your first mate
 65 Went head to head
 66 Makes more bearable
 67 Cho's "I'm the One ___ I Want"
 68 Dumbo's "wings"
- 21 Rudy Galindo's milieu
 22 Homophobes, e.g.
 25 Kid-lit elephant
 26 "You'll Never Walk ___"
 27 Sees to
 28 Kind of fingerprint
 29 Queer spelling of an Alaskan dome
 31 Loads of
 32 Public spectacle
 33 "Rubber Capital of the World"
 36 Lesbos, e.g.
 37 Meas. of speed
 39 Schooner features
 42 "Kinsey" title role portrayer Neeson
 47 Discuss to death
 48 Cut
 49 Source book for "Dreamcoat"
 51 Allstate rival
 52 Dottie did this behind the plate in "A League of Their Own"
 53 Cont. of Ibiza and Mykonos
 54 Overdo it at South Beach
 55 Bone in a limp wrist
 56 Butch lesbian accessories
 57 Carpenter's connector
 58 "East of Eden" director Kazan
 59 NY Met, for one
 62 Meas. of a braggart?

Down

- 1 Hermit's home
 2 Arthur of the AIDS Quilt
 3 Rupert Everett's "___ Life"
 4 Government sponsored pirate
 5 Nuts
 6 Affleck's "Chasing Amy" crush
 7 Future queen of "Star Wars"
 8 Dr. Jones's nickname
 9 Targets of tops
 10 Have an O
 11 Porter's "Well, Did You ___"
 12 Campbell of "The Company"
 13 Threesome for Marcella Hazan

Clues P. 18

Music Royalty

Across

- 1 It requires several G-strings
 5 Start of a "South Pacific" song
 9 One who often screws actors
 14 Friendly opening
 15 Genie portrayer Barbara
 16 Cut
 17 Ethnic cuisine type
 18 Police incursion at Stonewall

Q Puzzle

- 19 Prevent, with "off"
 20 Start of a quote by Little Richard (1932-2020)
 23 Perfect serves from Billie Jean
 24 Language suffix
 25 Pancake mixture
 28 Understand, to Kerouac
 30 Poet Gidlow
 34 Toward shelter
 35 More of the quote
 38 Lisa of "The Lathe of Heaven"
 40 Sailor's tool?

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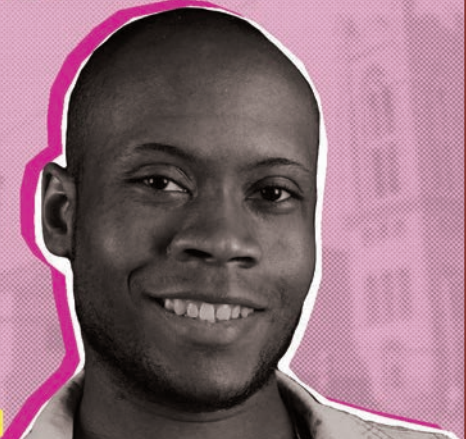


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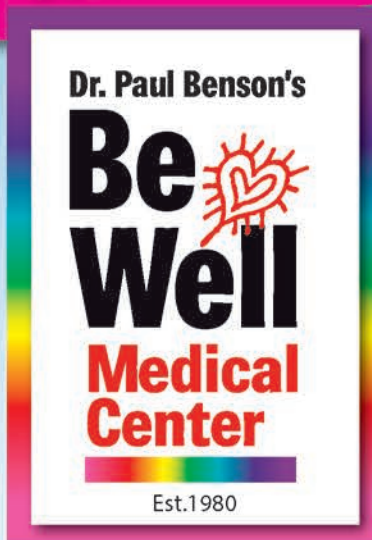
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1 Why We Sleep? (Dr. Benson) Release: **1/2/2020**

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2 Living with HIV in the 21st Century (Dr. Benson & Caleb Youngblood) Release: **1/16/2020**

HIV is a chronic manageable disorder, perhaps easier to live with than Heart Disease or Diabetes. Learn the latest about the HIV virus, new therapies, and the lessons learned from our history of dealing with HIV and its social stigma.

3 On the Edge: Transcending the Standard of Care

(Dr. Paul Benson, Dorea Shoemaker & Gretchen Haughton) Release: **1/30/2020**

Take matters into your own hands and become an active participant in your health. We'll discuss Cannabidiol (CBD) and its properties to improve and manage health with an expert, Dorea Shoemaker. CBD may be a new and safer alternative for pain instead of Tylenol or ibuprofen. We'll also discover benefits of whole food supplements to keep us healthy.

4 The Transgender Population – Understanding and Embracing this Population (Leon Bullough) Release: **2/13/2020**

A report from the World Professional Association on Transgender Health's (WPATH) Annual Conference. Hormone Replacement therapy is only a part of the transitioning process. Community and mental health support is essential for success. Individualized care plans based on evidence based

medicine and created to match each individual's desires and pace is essential to make the transition process a safe and healthy journey.

5 Sexual Health and HIV Prevention

(Dr. Paul Benson & Mark Rosen) Release: **2/27/2020**

We'll discuss sexually transmitted infections and their prevention. Many healthcare providers sweep this topic under the rug, but outcomes improve when we talk about how to stay healthy and infection free. Sexual health is not simply the absence of disease. It's living comfortably without fear or stigma; and embracing your sexuality while living day to day in your comfort zone.

6 Living Well Over the Age of 50

(Dr. Benson and Colin Colter) Release: **3/12/2020**

We'll discuss simple steps you, with the assistance of your doctor, can implement to live longer and healthier. Proper health maintenance makes a big difference at any age, but becomes even more important as the decades pass. We'll talk about prevention and aggressive strategies to manage co-morbidities sometimes encountered as we age. We can't turn back the clock, but you *can* improve your heart, liver, brain function, kidneys, and virtually every organ system.



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