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VOL. 2826 • JUNE 25, 2020

ISSUE 1150/51

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Trump Admin Sued for Refusing to Back Down on Anti-Trans Health Care Rule by Chris Johnson

Ferndale Mayor Melanie Piana on Pride Month, Coronavirus and Being an Ally by Ellen Shanna Knoppow

HISTORIC: Supreme Court Rules Firing Workers for Being LGBTQ is Illegal by Chris Johnson

Asylum Connect Helps LGBTQ Refugees Find Support Across U.S., Co-Hosts Virtual Pride by Eve Kucharski

Also, make sure to check back for continuing COVID-19 coverage.

To find more Between The Lines content, visit our site online at Pridesource.com and check out our **PrideSource YouTube channel**. There, viewers can find one-on-one interviews like our talk with Jason Mraz.



Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center to Host Pride Telethon June 27

BY BTL STAFF

FERNDALE – In celebration of Pride Month, the Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center will host a six-hour livestreaming event called the Pride Telethon 2020 on Saturday, June 27, starting at noon. It will feature interviews with community members, activists and supporters, along with entertainment segments by local artists.

“It is truly an honor to bring together such an important group of people in celebration of Pride,” said Dave Garcia, executive director of Affirmations. “This will be a wonderful opportunity for the community-at-large to learn more about the programs and services offered here at Affirmations and have some fun during these truly trying times.”

What began as a single helpline program for LGBTQ resources and referrals some 31 years ago, has transformed into the region’s largest community center that offers a wide array of support, social and human services located in the heart of downtown Ferndale.

“This telethon will help our organization raise awareness and needed funds to continue and expand the important work we have been doing for decades,” said Cheryl Czach, board chair of Affirmations. “Given the current climate, and our pivot to address critical emerging needs of our LGBTQ+ citizens, we will use this event to connect those that can help us meet the needs of those we serve every day.”

The telethon will livestream on Affirmations’ three social media channels — YouTube, Facebook and Vimeo.

NextGen: Celebrating Pride, Engaging Young Voters

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Commitment to Diversity

NextGen America, the coalition of young people whose goal it is to mobilize other youth to register and vote for progressive candidates, places a high value on the diversity of its volunteers and staff. That’s of great importance to Eden Zimak, a 26-year-old Wayne County NextGen organizer who identifies as a queer woman.

“I don’t think I could work in an organization that didn’t prioritize that,” said Zimak, who uses they/them pronouns. “As someone who is still not protected in some ways under the Elliott-Larsen Act, I would have a really difficult time being engaged with any organization, any job that didn’t ... just accept, but really celebrate, LGBTQ people.”

Indeed, NextGen is celebrating the LGBTQ community this June. The lineup of virtual opportunities begins Monday, June 15 and extends through Saturday, June 20.

What to Expect

A family-friendly favorite, Drag Queen Story Time is scheduled for Monday, “which we think will be a really fun way to kick off the event,” Zimak said.

Local Michigan queens will be featured. That’s followed by a community



Eden Zimak, a 26-year-old Wayne County NextGen organizer

chat based in west Michigan on Tuesday, June 16, designed to provide locally-available resources for the LGBTQ community in that region of the state.

“Wednesday [June 17] is a Latinx panel discussing the term Latinx and the history of that, and that’s put on by two of our organizers who identify as Latinx,” Zimak said.

Attendees may join NextGen for a

happy hour and open mic night called Inside Out Loud on Thursday, June 18, that will include some featured poets who identify within the LGBTQ community.

According to Zimak. “We’ll have a bartender there who will show us how to make a fancy cocktail; we’ll hang out,

See **NextGen**, continued on p. 14

Macomb County Sheriff says Fake Grindr Account Used to Smear Deputy’s Image

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Last Thursday was a normal evening for Southeast Michigan resident Ian Peters when he received a notification on his phone. At first, it seemed regular enough. But a closer look revealed that Adam Edward, the person reaching out, was a Macomb County deputy whose account showed a racist bio with a Confederate flag background.

“He messaged me on Grindr and I automatically [saw] the Confederate flag as his picture, so I clicked it and his bio said, ‘I wish there was an app for only white guys,’ and I was like wtf,” Peters wrote over Facebook Messenger. “So I clicked the message and it was literally a picture of a Macomb County cop in his uniform, and then another picture of him nude in the mirror, and I was like, ‘Oh my God, what the hell!’”

It wasn’t long before Peters took screenshots of the account and called on the Facebook

community to “do its thing.”

“I honestly felt the urge to post it to my Facebook, because, for one, why would a cop literally be frolicking around on a gay dating app like that, being straight-up racist and giving out that image and energy? I just thought it was plain disgusting,” Peters wrote. “And it makes me really upset to know that the people who are supposed to ‘serve & protect’ the community I live in are like that. Especially with everything going on in the world, and a cop from my area is gonna be out frolicking like that? Absolutely disgusting.”

Peters said that after he posted the account images, several people told him “they’ve received multiple messages from the same guy and multiple pictures” including selfies.

Between The Lines contacted the Macomb County Sheriff Anthony M. Wickersham for comment. He also condemned the images, and he added that investigation so far has shown the account to be a fake. In fact, Wickersham

said that this isn’t the first time this deputy has been targeted.

“I believe it was about three-to-four months ago, we had an email that was sent to me anonymously [from] a concerned citizen of a deputy’s actions. The deputy denied it, our computer crimes task force went in and looked and we were able to identify the individual that created the account and was trying to smear the name of the deputy,” Wickersham said. “At that point, the deputy didn’t want to pursue anything and the issue was dropped.”

Wickersham said that last week he received another anonymous email with the images of the account that Peters had posted on Facebook.

“The deputy was immediately notified and, again, denied any involvement in this,” he said. “And this was turned over to our computer crimes task force to identify the individual that posted it.”

Wickersham said that the task force was able to track the IP address of the original poster

and “clear” the deputy of wrongdoing. When asked what the motivation would be to use images of the deputy in a malicious manner, Wickersham said he did not want to comment on an ongoing investigation or release the real name of the deputy.

“Well, at this point, we know what the circumstances were on the first one, and right now it’s just hard to speculate. And nor do I want to say anything as the investigation is going on, but it’s definitely not him that’s posting this kind of stuff online,” he said. “... The pictures up [are] him, and it’s our guy. And we’re working on identifying [the person who posted them], and if we find them we will prosecute the individual responsible.”

Peters said that this experience has reinforced his caution “about being on apps like that in general for privacy and safety reasons.”

Editor’s note: Some quotations have been edited for length and clarity.

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Michigan Plaintiff Instrumental in Pro-LGBTQ Supreme Court Ruling

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

In today's historic 6-3 Supreme Court decision, LGBTQ people across the U.S. came one step closer to full equality when justices ruled that workplace sex discrimination protections extend to sexual orientation and gender identity. The majority's 33-page opinion consolidates the answer to three cases in one, *Bostock v. Clayton County*, that asserted that the definition of "sex" in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 could extend to LGBTQ people.

What is perhaps most surprising about the opinion is that it was penned by conservative justice and Trump-appointed Neil Gorsuch. A staunch "textualist," Gorsuch holds the view that when interpreting the law, justices should interpret legislation exactly as the statute says without considering the original author's intention.

"Judges are not free to overlook plain statutory commands on the strength of nothing more than suppositions about intentions or guesswork about expectations. In Title VII, Congress adopted broad language making it illegal for an employer to rely on an employee's sex when deciding to fire that employee," he wrote in his opinion. "We do not hesitate to recognize today a necessary consequence of that legislative choice: An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law."

Earlier in the opinion, he summarized his point with a workplace example.

"Consider, for example, an employer with two employees, both of whom are attracted to men. The two individuals are, to the employer's mind, materially identical in all respects, except that one is a man and the other a woman," Gorsuch wrote. "If the employer fires the male employee for no reason other than the fact he is attracted to men, the employer discriminates against him for traits or actions it tolerates in his female colleague."

He was joined in his majority opinion by conservative Chief Justice John Roberts alongside the Court's four liberal justices.

Michigan's Impact

One of the other two cases that were vital in securing this opinion includes Michigan's *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*. Here, plaintiff Aimee Stephens was fired after six years of steady employment when she came out as transgender to her former boss, Thomas Rost.

After her termination, Stephens filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and sued Rost. Though she initially lost her case, Stephens'

team appealed, and a federal judge at the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the funeral home engaged in sex discrimination against Stephens when they fired her. Today, the Supreme Court's ruling served to reinforce that decision.

"There are no words to describe what I'm feeling at this present moment, and I just—I cannot thank the people enough that worked so hard on this case to get us where we got to," said Donna Stephens, Aimee's wife. "I know the last seven years of Aimee's life, she rose as a leader who fought against discrimination against transgender people. And I'm so grateful for this victory to honor the legacy of Aimee and to ensure people are treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity."

Aimee Stephens died last month at 59 due to complications related to kidney disease. Jay Kaplan is the ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project staff attorney, and he worked directly with Stephens on this case. He said that as "monumental" as the outcome is, "it's tempered with the bittersweet knowledge that Aimee's not here."

"And her one wish was that she would live long enough to read this opinion, so I'm very sad, very sad that she's not here," Kaplan said. "It's a wonderful opinion. The majority pretty much agreed with what we'd argued in our brief, and it's a very strong opinion and it can help and save the lives and make a better life for so many LGBT people. I'm thinking a lot about Aimee today."

Along with dozens of other local politicians and groups, Michigan's Gov. Gretchen Whitmer released a statement expressing her support for the Supreme Court ruling, mentioning Stephens by name.

"Today, in a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court confirmed what we already know – that nobody deserves to lose their job because of who they are or how they identify," Whitmer said. "This is good news for the countless LGBTQ+ Michiganders who have been fighting for equality for decades, and would not have been possible if not for one of the plaintiffs, Aimee Stephens, a brave Michigander who fought for transgender rights until the day she died. There is still more work to do. We must continue fighting to expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to protect members of the LGBTQ+ community and make Michigan a state where more people want to move to for opportunity. In honor of Aimee, take today to celebrate this victory, and tomorrow, let's



continue fighting to ensure equality for all Michiganders."

Explicit Terms

Deputy Director for Transgender Justice with the ACLU's LGBT & HIV Project Chase Strangio called the decision an "incredible moment and victory," especially considering its timing.

"And this is really is a rebuke to the Trump administration that has attempted to undermine protections for LGBTQ people through federal agency action since January of 2016," Strangio said. "... All the way up to Friday ... when Health and Human Services issued a sweeping 340-page rule attacking trans people, particularly trying to undermine our health care protections. All of that was premised on interpretations of sex under federal law that the Supreme Court just rejected."

James Esseks is the Director of the ACLU's LGBT & HIV Project. He joined Strangio in his praise of the decision, but he cautioned those celebrating to remember that there is still much more work to be done. Specifically, he mentioned "gaps" in federal protections that don't extend to uniform LGBTQ rights in public accommodations — businesses available to the public — and in the recipient of federal funding. He said that The Equality Act, which would extend the nation's Civil Rights Act to explicitly include the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," is the ideal way to fully ensure protections for LGBTQ people across the U.S.

"The Equality Act would fill both of those gaps protecting all women as well as LGBTQ people, and that's something that we think is an essential next step. It should happen right away in order to fully protect LGBTQ people in the civil rights context," Esseks said. "That is a bill pending in Congress. It passed the House of Representatives about a year ago and has been stalled in the Senate by the leadership in the Senate and we call for them to release it and get it to a vote."

Kaplan agreed.

"What's so important, though, is that we not just rest on our laurels and the media doesn't just decide that everything's taken care of," he said. "Our next step is we need to have those explicit civil rights protections."

Supreme Court Ruling may Force Trump Retreat on Anti-LGBTQ Policies

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling this week in terms of the immediate protections it granted LGBTQ people in the workplace, but the decision may soon provide more victories by forcing President Trump to retreat on much of his administration's anti-LGBTQ policies.

After all, many of the Trump administration rule changes in enforcement of civil rights law to exclude LGBTQ people rested on the idea the definition of "sex" didn't include them. That has been undisputedly rejected in the ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which determined firing workers like Gerald Bostock for being gay or workers like Aimee Stephens for being transgender violates the ban on sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

On issues ranging from housing and health care to transgender kids' access to school restrooms, the Trump administration may be forced to roll back many of its anti-LGBTQ policy changes. If the Trump administration fails to reverse these policy moves, the U.S. government could be subject to costly lawsuits.

Shannon Minter, national legal director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, said the decision is "bound to have far-reaching implications in the full range of other sex discrimination cases involving LGBTQ people."

"Those include pending challenges to the transgender military ban, a Fair Housing Act case on behalf of a lesbian couple excluded from a retirement community in Missouri that has been stayed in the 8th Circuit pending the resolution of the Title VII cases, a number of Affordable Care Act cases challenging denials of care to LGBTQ individuals, and every policy that the Trump administration has promulgated that is based on the false view that sex discrimination laws do not protect LGBTQ people," Minter said.

Ironically, that would be because of a decision written by U.S. Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch, a Trump appointee and textualist conservative judge whose confirmation LGBTQ rights advocates vigorously opposed.

Omar Gonzales-Pagan, senior attorney for the LGBTQ legal group Lambda Legal, said in an interview with the *Blade* "so many administrative pronouncements" would be subject to reversal as a result of the *Bostock* decision.

"All of these are situations in which the administration relied on a cramped reading of sex discrimination and should be directly impacted by the decision, aside from the countless other cases laid out in the great roadmap by Justice Alito," Gonzales-Pagan said.

Top of the list for reversal is former U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions' memo in 2017

declaring the U.S. Justice Department won't apply Title VII to cases of anti-transgender discrimination in the workforce. That memo on its face is in conflict with the law now that the Supreme Court has explicitly determined anti-transgender discrimination is prohibited under Title VII.

Also on the list are policies explicitly interpreting laws against sex discrimination other than Title VII to exclude transgender people, such as the Affordable Care Act, the Fair Housing Act and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

The most high-profile of these actions is the rule the Department of Health & Human Services made final just last week undoing Obama-era regulations determining Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act applies to cases of anti-transgender discrimination of sex stereotyping.

Although a federal court had already enjoined the U.S. government from enforcing the Obama-era rule, the Trump administration by reversing the regulations in the back end effectively enabled health care providers to refuse services to transgender people, including transition-related care and gender reassignment surgery.

Now that the Supreme Court has determined anti-trans discrimination is a form of sex discrimination, the framework of the HHS policy is contrary to the law.

Minter said the reasoning behind the HHS rule change can't hold up in the wake of the Supreme Court's determination in the Bostock case.

"The ruling is also an extremely forceful rebuke to the lengthy analysis published by HHS Friday, in conjunction with issuing its new rule attempting to strip protections from LGBTQ people under the Affordable Care Act, which argued that sex discrimination does not protect either LGB or transgender people," Minter said. "The Court's opinion eviscerates that analysis."

Anti-trans policies from the Department of Education, which were made by interpreting Title IX to exclude transgender people, are also poised for reversal in the aftermath of the Bostock decision.

One is the policy of refusing to take up cases from transgender kids in school that are refusing them access to the restroom consistent with their gender identity, which is based on a narrow interpretation of Title IX. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has said — publicly and reportedly in private meetings — the policy would continue until Congress or the Supreme Court says otherwise.

Eliza Byard, executive director of the LGBTQ student group GLSEN, said DeVos told her the policy was dependent on the courts during a March 2017 meeting, so now the time has to come to make a change.

"Secretary DeVos must immediately reverse her attacks on transgender students' rights, which began with her very first official actions in 2017," Byard said. "Now, she can no longer hide behind the claim of waiting for the courts. Trans girls are girls. Trans boys are boys. And



President Donald Trump may be forced to retreat on anti-LGBTQ policies after the Supreme Court ruling. (Screen capture via ABC7 WJLA Facebook livestream)

the law protects them from discrimination 'on the basis of sex.' Like all children, they deserve to learn and grow free from fear and in community with their peers."

Also legally suspect now is the recent determination from the Department of Education based on Title IX against the participation of transgender girls in school sports, which was made as a result of a complaint from Connecticut girls who lost to transgender athletes in a track event.

The Department of Education came down on the side of the girls who said the victory of the transgender athletes unfairly pitted males against females in a system designed to separate athletes by gender, but that reasoning is at odds with the Bostock decision.

Trickier are other anti-LGBTQ rules from the Trump administration that weren't based on narrow interpretations of the definition of sex, but the inherent powers of the U.S. government.

Among them is the Department of Housing & Urban Development's proposal to carve out an Obama-era rule prohibiting homeless shelters from turning away transgender people based on the ban on sex discrimination in the Fair Housing Act.

The reversal under HUD Secretary Ben Carson, which isn't yet final, allows homeless shelters to refuse to let transgender people stay consistent with their gender identity based on various factors, including, privacy, safety, practical concerns and religious beliefs.

Also in this category is the rule change from various departments undoing an Obama-era regulation issued in December 2016 days before Trump took office barring federal grantees from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Because the Obama-era policy was based on the inherent power of the U.S. government, the Trump administration invoked the same authority to reverse it, not any interpretation of "sex" under the law.

Gonzales-Pagan, nonetheless, said the Bostock decision could provide fuel for legal challenges to the HUD proposal and rollback of non-discrimination requirement for federal grantees.

"Their cramped reading of sex is the same cramped reading that they try to use here and they tried to use in Section 1557," Gonzales-Pagan said. "Obviously, the court, not just by its words but by its actions in treating with the respect that she deserves Aimee Stephens and referring to her with her chosen pronouns and talking about transgender status and sex are inextricably linked to the lack of thinking they put into these proposed rules."

Trump's transgender military ban is another anti-trans policy, although legal framework for contesting the ban based on the Bostock is more complex.

Because no law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in the military, one might say the Bostock decision wouldn't have any impact on Trump's transgender military ban. However, according to U.S. legal jurisprudence, laws related to sex discrimination must be subjected to heightened scrutiny, or a greater assumption they're unconstitutional, by the courts under the guarantee of due process and equal protection under the Fifth Amendment.

If anti-transgender discrimination is a form of sex discrimination as it pertains to Title VII, that could very well be the case for the Fifth Amendment, which forms the basis of legal challenges currently underway against the transgender military ban. The Bostock decision clearly identifying anti-trans discrimination as sex discrimination, therefore, gives attorneys challenging the policy a boost to their argument.

Gonzales-Pagan, whose organization Lambda Legal is behind litigation against the ban percolating in the 9th Circuit, said that logic should apply to the transgender ban.

"The same analysis and thinking applies," Gonzales-Pagan said. "Granted they are different provisions, but if the analysis is that you cannot discriminate based on transgender status without discriminating based on sex, then yes. And so, really an implication of this decision is that in some ways, heightened scrutiny now theoretically applies across the country both as to sexual orientation and transgender status."

But if the Trump administration is preparing to reverse its anti-LGBTQ policy in the

aftermath of the Bostock ruling, it doesn't appear to be in a hurry. Each of the departments contacted by the Blade on whether they plan to change anything after the ruling said at most they were reviewing the decision.

White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, asked by the Washington Blade Wednesday if President Trump wants the decision implemented narrowly or extensively, said that would up to the Justice Department.

"In terms of how it's implemented, DOJ will lead the multi-agency effort to help provide certainty to the regulated parties," McEnany said.

McEnany said she wasn't aware of Trump planning to have any conversations with DOJ about the implementation of the decision.

Asked by the Blade whether Trump thinks the ruling is a civil rights win, McEnany said didn't him that question, but quoted a portion of the dissent from U.S. Associate Justice Brett Kavanaugh saying he disagreed with the majority, but the win was important to gay and lesbian people.

"I thought that was a very good quote from Justice Kavanaugh," McEnany said, declining to mention anything about transgender people in response.

The Justice Department didn't Blade's request for comment on the way the Trump administration intends to implement the ruling.

One factor that could be holding them up is the upcoming decision from the Supreme Court in the cases of *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, *Agnes and St. James School v. Darryl Biel*, which will determine whether religious schools are entitled to a wider religious exemption from non-discrimination laws, including Title VII, in terms of hiring practices.

If the Supreme Court rules in favor of the religious schools, it would undercut the decision it just issued on Title VII, and likely factor into new regulations coming from the Trump administration on the Bostock ruling.

Another caveat could come from the Supreme Court during its next term as a result of its forthcoming decision in *Fulton v. Philadelphia*. In that litigation, Catholic adoption agencies are seeking a First Amendment right to refuse child placement into LGBTQ homes. A ruling in favor of Catholic Social Services could undercut the Supreme Court's ruling in the Title VII cases.

Minter said the decision in the Catholic school cases "applies only in employment," but the upcoming decision from the Supreme Court in the *Fulton* case is another story and "could potentially have a much broader impact."

"Depending on how the court rules, *Fulton* could create new religious exemptions that apply in virtually any context, federally funded social service agencies of all kinds, not just adoption agencies, and potentially even in for-profit workplaces," Minter said.

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

The Significance of the Black Gay Pride Experience

HOTTER THAN JULY 25TH ANNIVERSARY
RETROSPECTIVE *Hotter Than July*

BY RAMÓN HARRIS

A few goals of the Black gay Pride movement are visibility, empowerment and equality — similar to mainstream Pride events. So why are there separate, race-related Pride experiences in the LGBTQ community? Here, members of the Black LGBTQ movement explore the question of why Black gay Pride exists.

Since mainstream Prides, historically, have not honored the voices of Black LGBTQ people, approximately 25 Black gay Pride events were instituted to represent these unheard voices. Inclusion is not merely an act of attendance or communal partying, it is shared interests, goals and support 365 days of the year.

Senior Editor for Thebody.com, Kenyon Farrow, thinks separate Black LGBTQ Pride exists “because of a history of Black people not being included in the organizing and decision-making around what events got sponsored for Pride.”

The Center for Black Equity has programmed DC Black Pride for nearly 30 years.

“Not only do we want to have the coveted seat at the table, but it is true — we still want to ‘do our thing,’” said Earl Fowlkes, the Center’s president and chief executive officer.

Excluding Black LGBTQ people from the planning process of mainstream Pride lends to the pathology of exclusion and segregation, pushing LGBTQ people of color into a need for separate, more inclusive programming.

“Well, first of all, we didn’t do it, it was done to us,” Fowlkes said. “Why are there two sets of Masons, fraternities, nurses associations, journalism associations, social worker associations? The white [organizations] wouldn’t let us into theirs. The formation of Black Pride continues a tradition that we’ve had since we’ve been in this country. White folks don’t want us around, but we still want to do our thing.”

Black LGBTQ people want spaces that value their uniqueness instead of simply being tolerated. The need is to feel as though they have a place to belong. Gary Portnoy penned it best in his 1983 song, “Where Everybody Knows Your Name,” that “Sometimes you want to go/ Where everybody knows your name/ And they’re always glad you came/ You want to be where you can see/ Our troubles are all the same/ You want to be where everybody knows your name.”

Entrepreneur and DC Black Pride Director of Volunteering & Vending Denise Chambers-Woods has had a unique experience. Chambers-Woods’ grandmother is a lesbian, and her grandmother took her to every DC Black Pride



since its inception.

“It was eye-opening,” Chambers-Woods said. “It made me understand that regardless of what I am, or whatever I decided to be, or come out as when I grew up, I would totally be accepted by one person, my grandma. It just let me see that there are other sides to social norms that we thought were straight [culture].”

Historically, Black LGBTQ people have relentlessly experienced bias, discrimination and prejudice. The challenge for Black LGBTQ people is trying to find places in which they can be comfortable — or, better yet, in which they can feel at home. Black gay Pride experiences provide that sense of community.

Alyce Emory, Beyond Bold & Brave/Black Lesbian Conferences Project co-founder and executive director explains that the world’s current protest and civil unrest due to police brutality against Black people illuminates why there is a need for separate Black LGBTQ Pride celebrations.

“Racial inequity is why. That’s one [reason]. But also, I believe in order for us, as social justice workers, to do the strongest and the most responsible work, we must first understand ourselves,” Emory said. “We have to be home first, because home is comforting, home gives us strength and is what we need to move forward.”

Emory warns that we must focus on our history as Black LGBTQ people, adding that understanding our history is realizing the larger work that reflects the communities where we

live and where we are.

“We are LGBTQ people, but we are also Black folk. The need for Black LGBTQ celebrations are paramount,” Emory said. “It is absolutely paramount and required because of the consistent disparities in resources and philosophies around LGBTQ life and history.”

For the last 25 years, LGBT Detroit Executive Director Curtis Lipscomb, has led the charge on Detroit’s Black LGBTQ pride celebration, Hotter than July.

Lipscomb recounted the ‘80s and ‘90s when he lost many of his friends to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

“HIV/AIDS destroyed so many of us, and we had no resources,” Lipscomb said.

The world then, as it is now, has demonstrated the stark resource disparities for Black LGBTQ people during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

“There was no money given to us, there was no one to take care of us,” Chambers-Woods said. “When our families found a lot of our brothers and sisters were HIV-positive, they were thrown to the masses. We had to make sure our family was OK.”

In the ‘80s and ‘90s, Black gay Pride events were the vehicle to provide resources the Black LGBTQ community desperately needed.

“It was more than just a party with a

sponsorship, it was to raise money to take care of our own that was hit by the HIV epidemic,” Chambers-Woods said.

Emory explained that New York Black Pride was founded because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

“There was a crisis within the Black [LGBTQ] community surrounding HIV/AIDS,” Emory said. “And, information was not being disseminated to us, no resources [were] being allotted to us, and we were dying — primarily Black gay men.”

History suggests that movements for a group of people disparately underrepresented, underserved, and undermined, require safe spaces. Generations of Black LGBTQ people before had to fight for recognition, fight to be heard, fight to be seen and fight for resources.

When looking for the reason to why Black gay Pride exists, the answer seems overtly simple: It’s so that we don’t forget to remember.

Ramón Harris is an advocate in the LGBTQ community, podcast journalist and entrepreneur.



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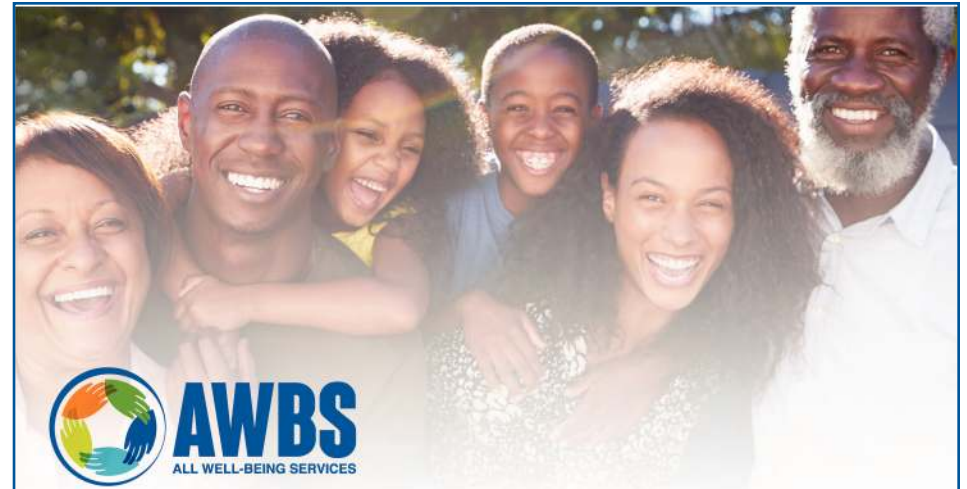
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ShaZOOM! Oz Pride 2020

Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

In spite of the halo'd Wizard of OZ, Pride 2020 came to the Yellow Brick Road — for the first time ever — this June. Thanks to the determination, hard work — and loyal fan base — of that redoubtable foursome: Cowardly Lion, Scarecrow, Tin Woodman and “Over the Rainbow” vocalist: smiling, singing, swinging, Dorothy from Liberal, Kansas.

As might be expected their Virtual OZoom, two-hour-long presentation does full, if somewhat controversial, tribute to America's LGBTQ comic book community and its neglected history, struggles, heroes and villains.

“We are Proud, with a capital P, of who we are,” Tin Woodsman said. “And while our comics have been around for decades delighting both young and old alike for 10 cents a read, we have our rainbow moments as well!”

OZoom 2020! begins with America's outspoken, full-fledged crime fighter and vocal Amazon, Wonder Woman, speaking candidly about why it is so frequently necessary to put men in their place — especially when they make snide, demeaning comments about how women should keep silent in business, at home and at church.

Wonder Woman, who's been around since 1941, shows her soft-side moments when candidly talking about her relationship with her secret admirer Etta Candy, “Who has perhaps too much weight to be my heroine understudy.”

She talks openly about her once-closeted side as Princess Diana of Themyscira.

“It took a while to come out, but it's been a source of strength and power for me,” she said.

OZoom next features coverage of America's oldest comic book couple: Batman & Robin. The renowned “Dynamic Duo” have been together — would you believe — 79 years. Seventy-nine years! That has to be a record.

Featured, too, is their palatial Gotham City penthouse and pictured selections from their extensive, high-quality collection of capes and leather gloves.

OZoom Pride 2020 concludes with two well-deserved tributes. First, to Bert and Ernie of the Muppets and “Sesame Street” fame.

As a memory jog: it has been long-rumored that Bert and Ernie were a “loving couple,” but in 2018, their “Sesame Street” writer Mark Saltzman said that they were “best friends” — if you can believe that.

Recently, however, “Sesame Street” carried a statement of inclusivity.

“On our streets we accept all, we love all and we respect all,” it said. “Happy Pride Month.”

It looks like Bert and Ernie are officially out.

The final tribute is to Burr Tillstrom (1917-1985), the creator, writer and puppeteer, of the much-beloved TV show, “Kukla, Fran and Ollie.” The series was popular in the 1940s and 50s. It also starred the lovely and personable Fran Allison.

The Kuklapolitans, as they were called, was one of the first programs appealing to both children and grown-ups. Both Kukla and Ollie were “high camp” puppets on stage.

Little known at the time, Burr Tillstrom, originally from Chicago, was gay. A well-kept secret to TV audiences — that

See next page



BY MARK SEGAL

Viewpoint

Civil Unrest Now and Then

As someone who participated in the Stonewall riots back in June 1969, many people have been asking me the similarities between that event and the events, civil unrest and demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd. They want to know if the two events—and the people pushing for change—share a connecting factor.

In May of 1969, when I was 18-years-old, I moved to New York to escape a closeted life of lies. I quickly realized that we LGBT people were invisible in the media, business, entertainment, and most areas of life. We were thought of as immoral by all religions, illegal by the police and mentally ill by the medical profession. And as I noticed almost instantly, we were treated as inhuman, dominated, and controlled by police. I would find out the extent to which we were dominated very shortly.

When the police burst into Stonewall that night in June, I witnessed police violence against our community for the first time. Not just intimidation, not just verbal abuse, but true physical assault. The lights blinked inside the bar and soon after the doors burst open. Police took people, who had been peacefully enjoying their drinks, and slammed them up against the walls. They did this simply because they knew they could and nobody would stop them. It was their right to attack us because they believed we deserved it. Nobody thought we as LGBT people had any worth in society. No authority would be on our side.

We were let out of the bar one by one. But rather than run home, many of us chose to stay. I stood across the street from

the bar. Eventually there were more of us outside the bar than the Police who were trapped inside. Almost spontaneously we began to throw anything we had at the doors. The police had lost control because we refused to allow them to attack us any more.

Like the black community, we witnessed the hate, disregard, and a police force attempting to dominate and control us. Like today, the Stonewall Riots were made up of young people my age, street kids, trans people, people of color, and women. Society and even parts of our own community had already abandoned us. We didn't have good jobs that we were afraid of losing. We had only our lives and our dignity to protect. We were the ones that had nothing to lose.

Sometime in the middle of all the ruckus, I stood there and thought: this is 1969. Black people were fighting for their rights, so was the Latino community and women's community. What about us? In the middle of that revelation, a man named Marty Robinson handed a piece of chalk and told me to write on the walls and streets “Tomorrow night Stonewall.”

And we did meet that second night, and a third, and from the ashes of Stonewall, Gay Liberation Front was created. From our anger we found a group that made sure nobody would forget what happened at Stonewall and nobody would forget how we'd been treated by the police. A movement was created, the first LGBT movement that was willing to fight back and not just plead for our rights. We were out, loud, and in your face.

In the following nights we were the ones who dominated the streets. We were the ones who defied the police to stop us.

See Viewpoint, continued on page 12

Together We Can Make Historic Change

BY GARY PETERS



I was honored to recently join Affirmations, OutFront Kalamazoo, Equality Michigan and several other hardworking organizations and activists across

the state for a virtual celebration of the historic ruling made by the Supreme Court to protect LGBTQ rights in the workplace.

And while our fellow Michigander Aimee Stephens was not able to live to see this landmark decision, her legacy will mean so much for the LGBTQ community.

I'm proud to be part of the progress toward equal rights in our country. As a former lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve, I was active in the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," because no patriot should be turned away from serving their country because of who they are. And I have been an advocate of marriage equality, including signing the amicus brief to support the overturning of the DOMA. But there is still so much more work to be done and that includes passing the Equality Act.

As I continue to work in the Senate, I can promise that I will keep fighting for consistent and explicit non-discrimination protections for every American. No employer should ever be able to discriminate an individual based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. No American should ever be denied housing, employment, health care or public accommodations based on who they are or who they love. It is a promise I

take seriously as an elected official, and one I wish all elected officials and candidates shared.

My colleagues in the House fought hard to pass the Equality Act, but Mitch McConnell refuses to put it up for a vote in the Senate. All the while, President Trump continues to implement an agenda that has unraveled years of progress for the LGBTQ community from rollbacks of health care coverage to banning transgender Americans serving in the military.

With Republican leaders in the White House and Senate not even allowing a vote on the Equality Act, we cannot truly achieve equality or make gains for marginalized communities.

That's why in 2020, our goal is clear: Win back the White House, hold the majority in the House and flip the Senate blue. And that starts right here in Michigan with this Senate seat. To capture the Senate majority and take back the White House, we must win Michigan.

It couldn't be more clear how much is at stake and how critical it is that we elect people who are going to fight for the equal rights of all Americans.

We have a lot of work ahead, but I know that together we can rise above the challenges to make historic change.

Gary Peters is a U.S. Senator from Michigan. He has been ranked as one of the most effective and bipartisan Democratic Senators. Peters said his number one priority is making sure Michigan families can thrive via fighting for quality, affordable health care and lower prescription drug prices, defending our Great Lakes, protecting public schools or standing up for small businesses.

swaying to the music of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

"Stay safe. Stay blessed. Stay determined! Vote wisely in 2020! But not for the slightly dizzy Wizard of OZ and his zany cohorts," Dorothy adds.

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

he was a long-time puppeteer since 1936, should have been a clue.

He has since been inducted into the Television Academy Hall of Fame. And, in 2013, he was also inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.

OZoom PRIDE 2020 concludes with Scarecrow, Tinwood Man, Cowardly Lion and Dorothy holding hands while each wears rainbow-colored face masks while

Creep Of The Week

Roger Severino

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Even if you know in your heart of rainbow hearts that the president of the United States and the cretins who work for him hate you, you might not realize that this administration is always busy working to further harm LGBTQ people.

They're cruel. But are they "deny transgender people health care in the middle of a major pandemic during Pride month on the anniversary of the Pulse night club massacre" cruel?

You know the answer.

The Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights, which is headed by Roger Severino, a man the Human Rights Campaign has described as a "radical anti-LGBTQ-rights activist," issued a rule that narrows what counts as "sex discrimination" in Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act. It only counts if you get discriminated against because you're a lady or a man. Not if you're "other." In the Trump Administration you're either strictly a MAN or WOMAN or you're some kind of freak who doesn't count. Doesn't exist.

So LGBTQ folks are fighting back using one of the only words Trump seems to understand: lawsuit.

As NPR reports, "A coalition of LGBTQ clinics and organizations are suing to block a Trump administration rule that aims to strip 'sex discrimination' protections for transgender people from laws that govern health care."

If you remember back to 2016, BEFORE we elected a racist dumpster fire as a president, the Obama Administration was clear that "sex" included gender identity. But under Trump, gender identity is out. Discrimination is in.

TransLatin@ Coalition President and CEO Bamby Salcedo told NPR that this rule change "will hurt marginalized communities who already experience barriers to care."

"Even those of us who are lucky to get through the reception and get to see a doctor," Salcedo continued, "we often encounter that the doctor tells us, 'I don't treat people like you.'"

We have a major health care problem in this country. Too many people go without it. And too many people can't access it even if they want to. The Affordable Care Act, though not perfect, attempted to address some of those problems. And Republicans have done nothing but try to destroy the ACA, and they truly don't care what it means for people who stand to lose care if they succeed in dismantling it. There is NO Republican plan for a replacement. The replacement is, "Health care is for everyone. If you can afford it."

It's an immoral stance, but their goal

to set the ACA on fire didn't miss a beat once the pandemic started. Now, with over 120,000 dead from COVID-19, instead of being focused on preventing death and stopping the spread of this virus, the Trump Administration is throwing transgender people to the wolves. Well, they're actually throwing the country to the wolves, they're just trying to hurt transgender people more beforehand.

Trump said that the reason we have so many COVID-19 cases is because we test too much. He said he wants to "slow down" testing. More than 120,000 are dead, but it's not because of Trump's incompetence and complete disregard for anybody but himself, it's because we're too aggressive with testing.

Stupidity and cruelty rule the day in Trump's administration.

And it's entirely by design. Severino — who has a history of opposing marriage equality, supporting abusive "conversion" therapy, not considering transgender people fully human and who has a history at the anti-LGBTQ Heritage Foundation — didn't get to be the head of HHS' Office for Civil Rights by accident.

According to CBS News, there are 10 plaintiffs in the case against who argue that the rule change was made "with next-to-no legal, medical or reasoned policy foundation, and contrary to the opinions of professional medical and public health organizations."

Omar Gonzalez-Pagan, Senior Attorney and Health Care Strategist for Lambda Legal, said in a press release that the change "creates chaos and confusion where there was once clarity," which could literally describe everything the Trump Administration has ever done and will ever do.

Severino, however, believes that the religious rights of health care workers are being violated if they have to take care of transgender people. And, let's be honest, it's likely the only kind of medical care Severino associates with transgender people is what he no doubt calls a "sex change operation," as if trans folks don't get sinus infections and kidney stones.

"For years, the Trump administration has utilized HHS as a weapon to target and hurt vulnerable communities who already experience alarming rates of discrimination when seeking care, even now, during a global pandemic," Gonzalez-Pagan continued. "We will fight back."

I'm glad that we have folks like Gonzalez-Pagan working hard to protect LGBTQ rights, but remember that if the people who write the laws in the first place think LGBTQ people are human beings, we wouldn't be at this sad awful juncture. Voting matters. Do it.

Council Members Call for Resignation of Ypsilanti Mayor at Public Protest

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

On June 16, during a public Zoom meeting, the Ypsilanti City Council was discussing whether to reappoint Ka’Ron Gaines to the Human Relations Commission. When the discussion reached Ypsilanti Mayor Beth Bashert, she said, “Since I will be crucified if I vote against any black person on a commission, I’m going to vote yes.”

Other council members immediately criticized the comment, with some asking for an apology and council member Annie Somerville voicing concerns via social media. Bashert was the only leader to vote in favor of



Gaines remaining on the Commission. Then, on Saturday, June 20, council member Somerville and Mayor Pro Tem Nicole Brown called for Bashert to resign at a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest in downtown Ypsilanti. Somerville stated that they would not participate in another meeting until Bashert tenders her resignation.

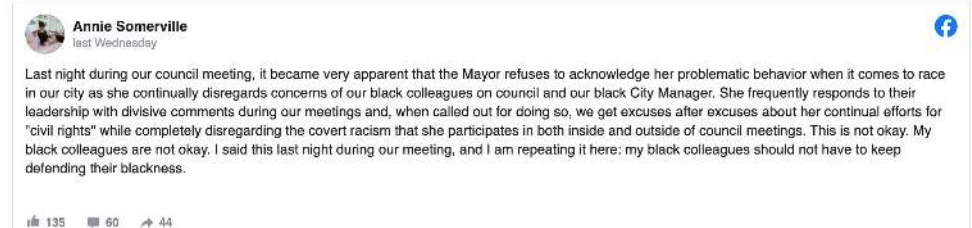
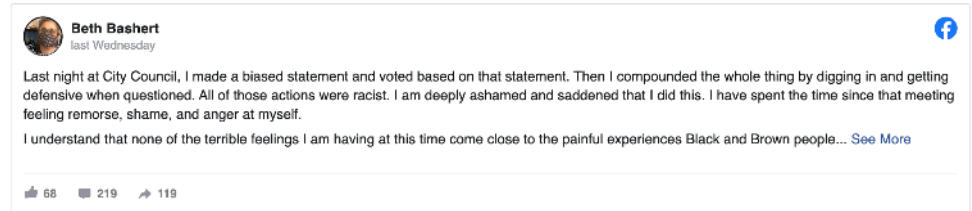
“So, if we’re talking about allyship and how we move forward, then the request from me, from my fellow council member Annie Somerville and many people in the community already is that she resign,” Brown said. “The only way for her to learn and grow is not currently sitting in the seat that you should be representing us

all from. You cannot represent us all and call yourself a racist on TV and in your responses in the news. So, I have no problem teaching a person things outside of that seat.”

Last week Bashert posted a lengthy message

via Facebook admitting her actions were racist and committing to “do better.”

BTL reporters have reached out to Bashert and council members for direct comment. This is a developing story.



► Viewpoint

Continued from p. 10

We had found in ourselves real radical organization, self-identity, and community.

Part of our movement was to work with others seeking social justice, so we marched with women, Latinos and African Americans. We worked with the Young Lords and Black Panthers. The women of GLF were part of the women’s movement, and many were leaders there.

For people who were literally illegal in New York at that time, we took back our streets. We advertised our meetings and dared the police to break them up. For the first time a drag queen could walk down Christopher Street and not be arrested, and they were welcomed as part of this new movement of inclusion and diversity, where in the past our own community had shunned them.

We protested and created incidents, some of us were beaten, others arrested, but we never gave up. When anyone got arrested, we demonstrated the next day outside the police station.

The similarities are obvious between Stonewall and the protests today. Violence once seen as normal in all its ugliness became unacceptable. A dominating police force would no longer be tolerated. The idea that this cannot keep happening led to civil unrest and created a movement for change.

We are at a pivotal time in history, a time of powerful change. We need to embrace the moment and help it spread. We need to be proudly on the front lines. We can’t be afraid of being arrested. Many of us in 1969 wore our arrests as a badge of honor. After all, our country was born from a revolution. Those who fought to create this country are known as Patriots. And the people fighting for change today, the people taking to the streets and demanding that these injustices happen no more, they are patriots too.

Mark Segal is the founder and publisher of Philadelphia Gay News. Learn more at <https://epgn.com>

Detroit Pistons Pride Equality Panel Discusses LGBTQ Inclusion in Sports

BY BENJAMIN DECKER

While Pride month is halfway over, the Detroit Pistons are not slowing down with their message of LGBTQ inclusion. This week, the Detroit Pistons held their third virtual Pride celebration, an Athletes for Equality Panel hosted by Hudson Taylor, founder of Athlete Ally.

“Everyone has come to tonight’s panel because Pride is both personal and important to them,” Taylor said. “We each have a connection to this conversation in some way.”

Taylor was accompanied by Chris Mosier, the first transgender athlete to represent the U.S. in an international competition, Detroit Pistons radio analyst Rick Mahorn, the first openly gay athlete in the NBA Jason Collins, Athlete Ally member Kenneth Faried and openly lesbian athlete Sharnee Zoll-Norman.

The panel discussed the roots of homophobia and transphobia in sports, as well as covering topics on why Pride is important to each athlete, how coaches can help include the LGBTQ community, the next steps in advocacy and more.

In regards to the importance of Pride to him, Faried replied, “My mom is gay, and, for my whole life, I had to deal with that. I’m going to protect her and stand up for her and for her rights. She deserves to be treated like a normal human being, like everyone else.”

Taylor was especially interested in discussing the restraints put on male

athletes to come out of the closet and see what work is needed so that other athletes, like Collins, can feel comfortable sharing their sexual orientation.

“Well, there’s a lot. I got to tip my cap to women. They’ve been leading the way in this for decades, starting with Billie Jean King,” Collins responded. “With regards to male athletes, we are still waiting on that next male athlete to step forward. We’re waiting for the day where it becomes like when Elena Della Donne came out before the Rio Olympics and everyone was like, ‘OK, cool. Go win a gold medal.’ So, I hope that male athletes who are closeted will look at my example.”

Tyler then pivoted the conversation toward Zoll-Norman and Mahorn, as they have experience being both players and coaches. Tyler was interested in hearing from their perspectives when he asked what role do coaches have in making sports a place where LGBTQ athletes can be themselves.

“I am coaching 17-22-year-old women ... they’ll follow my lead. I am the adult in this situation and if I allow for it to be a safe space and let them know [that] no matter what, we’re here,” Zoll-Norman replied. “We’re a family and with that family, you protect [them.] You have to allow people to feel comfortable in who they are. You know how it feels to be that young.”

Mahorn replied, “It is about that safe space — who you are comfortable talking to or the comfortability of being able to share. My job is not to hate. My job is to be

the person who loves everybody. They just want to play basketball, go out and enjoy themselves. I am not judging. I’d wanna be respected just like I respect them.”

Tyler shifted the conversation towards the conservative legislation restricting the rights of trans athletes, from laws legally preventing them from using locker rooms to unequal access to health care.

“Almost half of the states in the United States had a government bill that was put forward from conservative legislatures attempting to restrict or completely ban transgender student-athletes — specifically transgender girls- from playing sports with girls at the high school and college level,” Mosier said. “Idaho’s law actually restricts any transgender girl or anyone assumed to be transgender from participating in sports.”

To conclude the panel, Tyler brought up the importance of advocacy for equality, both racial and LGBTQ. He questioned the panelists about what the next step was, how to keep the momentum going forward and what calls to action society has.

“I know it sounds a bit cliché, but we have to educate ourselves- on the plights of other people. So while that be people of color or LGBTQ+, understanding the fights that we have gone through, that it is not something we are just complaining about,” Zoll-Norman said. “It is something that people live and experience every single day.”

For more on Pistons Equality Pride week, visit www.pistons.com.

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Puzzle on page 21

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NextGen

Continued from p. 4

kind of decompress a little bit, listen to some awesome poetry.”

Friday, June 19 will be a Juneteenth virtual symposium. An educational experience led by Black artists and activists. Participants will learn what Juneteenth is, its history and what's ahead.

NextGen's Pride Week ends on Saturday, June 20, with a performance by Flint native and gender-nonconforming musical artist Tunde Olaniran. Follow the NextGen Michigan Facebook page for more information when that becomes available.

While NextGen's Pride Week is meant to celebrate the queer community, it also serves to introduce young people to the organization and to activism by way of activities that appeal to its demographic.

“We are 100 percent celebrating Pride,” Zimak emphasized. “We think that's really important to have that space especially with things like Pride festivals being canceled this year. But we do always have a political education component [to] discuss with people how they can get involved, register voters. This year there's a big push to obviously get people absentee ballots, and so we're doing some education around that as well. So that will be included, but our focus is to highlight Pride as the month to celebrate the LGBTQ community.”

Making Adjustments

As Zimak mentioned, many Pride festivals were canceled this year due to the novel coronavirus. Gatherings of large groups of people just haven't been possible, and that's affected the way countless organizations function. NextGen is no different.

“It's been a huge adjustment,” Zimak acknowledged. “When we were out in the field, what we were focusing on was meeting people, especially young people, where they are. So that would look like music festivals, open mics, parties, partner with local artists and DJs ... events like that. Protests, rallies — and that obviously is all in person, in the field.

“We've tried to shift some of those things onto a digital platform. So we've done open mic nights, happy hours, things like that. We think that's really important right now to make sure that there is still space to engage with communities,” Zimak continued. “And then we'll also have political education as a component of that as well, but our focus definitely is to create the space and make sure people are feeling supported during this really challenging time.”

While times may be difficult due to the pandemic, Zimak said overall, they find plenty to enjoy about their job educating and engaging young voters ages 18 to 35 through get-out-the-vote efforts and by holding elected officials accountable.

“I like that I get to work for people in my age group, and that I get to be knowledgeable about the electoral process system and speak with people who think that the system is not built for them,” Zimak explained. “A lot of young people do feel that way, and I feel that that's often by design. We're sort of meant to be kept out of this very complex system, and so it's cool to engage with folks and say, ‘Hey, if we want to see a future that includes us, if we want to see a future at all, we need to have a hand in shaping a system that actually works for all of us, not just those with the most wealth and resources in this country.’”

Find out more online at nextgenamerica.org.



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Haaz Sleiman to the Rescue

Photo: Apple TV+

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Actor Haaz Sleiman is on a mission to take part in stories that broaden the pool of queer perspectives on the screen. And if you already know his work, you know he's on a roll.

For "The Son," an episode of Apple TV+'s acclaimed anthology centered on the immigrant experience, "Little America," Sleiman portrayed a gay Syrian refugee trying to gain asylum in the United States after his father brutally condemns him for kissing a man. Sleiman must be doing something right: The episode has been banned in 10 Arab countries and in Russia.

Then, in writer-director Mike Mosallam's indie rom-com "Breaking Fast," which is currently seeking wider distribution while also making its virtual Pride rounds this summer, Sleiman plays a gay Muslim Arab navigating life, love and loss in West Hollywood during Ramadan.

But the queer storytelling mission that's so important to Sleiman, who has also starred in "Nurse Jackie," "24," "Veronica Mars," "The Good Wife" and "Jack Ryan," will reach towering heights when he plays the husband of gay superhero Phastos in Marvel's "The Eternals," due in theaters in early 2021.

Here, Sleiman talks about telling stories that are long overdue, how Madonna's sex-positivity influenced him as a gay man, and why he makes

a convincing straight guy onscreen.

After "The Son" aired, what kind of feedback did you get from LGBTQ immigrants whose experiences were similar to Rafiq?

I am so grateful for amazing, positive feedback on Instagram, just comments thanking me and saying they felt seen. The importance of what we do, and storytelling and television itself, is that you can feel like if your story is being told, you matter somehow. It was really just very gratifying.

By the way, the lovely gentleman I got to portray, Shadi Ismail, was floored by how it came out and felt it was exactly what he went through. He was in tears. So, for me, I'm just very happy with the way it came out and how LGBTQ people have been receiving it. This is a story that should've been told a long time ago; it's long overdue. We're finally getting it, and I really think it's about time.

Regarding representation, who did you look up to as a gay boy who grew up in Lebanon?

Great question. I grew up in Lebanon in the '80s – there were a lot less options. And also, I was in Lebanon, so it's even more limited there. So just one word: Madonna. She was really it. Now, in all my interviews, Madonna comes up. (Laughs.) But she was that for me. She really represented hope for me. She was really the first person who actually told me

that I was OK, that nothing is wrong with me; she gave me hope that, yeah, I can actually have a bright future for myself, and I can get what I want, and that there's nothing wrong with that. As a gay kid, I really loved strong women, and so in that sense it made sense I looked up to her. I was inspired by her and really, honestly, if I didn't have Madonna in my life as a child I don't know if I would've been able to survive.

In "The Son," Rafiq's friend, Zain, is a Kelly Clarkson fanboy and finds comfort in her song "Breakaway." What's a song that kept you going during your time as a gay man living in Lebanon?

I was a very interesting child, I guess you could say. An old soul. So I always heard people being like, "What's wrong with Haaz? He needs to be like normal children. He needs to play with children." I never understood that. I felt bad about that. The reason I'm saying all of that is because it also applies to what I'm about to tell you.

I think I was kind of sophisticated in the sense that I really was a feminist when I was a kid. And I don't know why but I really had a strong empathy for women. I really cared about them. Whenever I would see that women are not treated fairly or equally, it really upset me. So, for me, the songs that really moved me and affected me are when Madonna would sing lyrics about doing

things that women are not supposed to do, and her breaking the rules and her being so rebellious in the sense that, yeah, I'm gonna have sex with this guy and I'm gonna be so happy about it and I'm not gonna feel any shame the next day. Whenever Madonna was equal to men, whether it's in her lyrics, in her music, that's what really empowered me because I saw, through her, that I can be like that as a gay man. That's really what inspired me and empowered me the most.

I would say a lot of her sexual songs do that for me. I'm a very sexual person and I'm a big flirt and it's just something natural for me; it's second nature. So I flirt with women, I flirt with men; it doesn't matter. And, for me, anytime she was free and uninhibited in expressing her sexuality in her songs that was very empowering, because in Lebanon and in most Arab countries sex is a shameful subject to talk about.

You've been open about being, as you've said, a "total bottom." But at the same time, you've acknowledged that being so sexually transparent could hinder you career-wise. Why do you think that would affect your professional life? And has it?

Look, I'd be lying to you if I said I'm not worried about how it's affected that and my career. I'm not delusional. I'm aware that there is an effect; I am aware that we are evolving; I

am aware that we are making a lot of progress. But there's a lot more to be done.

I think my biggest fear was that it would affect my career. That's why I didn't come out before I came out, and I really just thought it was going to affect my career. Then, afterwards, I got to the place where I didn't care anymore. I didn't care about my career. Respecting myself became a priority.

Before you officially came out in a video posted to Facebook in 2017, you were asked about your sexuality by The Advocate. How do you reflect on denying being gay in that interview? Do you feel public figures have a responsibility to be out if they're LGBTQ?

For public figures, no one has a responsibility to save the world. I think everyone has the responsibility to be honest. Look, you could say a lot of people play the game and are really clever. Trump is one of them. They're really good at faking it. But I really think public figures, absolutely: their main responsibility is to be truthful, because if they're not then they're not enlightening the world. I think public figures' job is to enlighten the world. More than ever now, today, we need that. And that I believe in my heart of hearts is my job, my responsibility.

Of course when The Advocate asked me about my sexuality it was awful. I really struggled afterwards because I lied. I said I was straight. I betrayed myself. I betrayed my fans. I betrayed the people who admire my work. I also felt I was a hypocrite. That really ate from the inside. That, combined with the evolution of it all and all the different shows, like "RuPaul's Drag Race," and the massive killing of trans women of color, all of that just made me finally come out.

I don't know. After many years of lying and not coming out and just basically disrespecting myself and betraying myself, it's clear to me today that, whether you're a public figure or not, the most important thing is to really live your truth. Be authentic. And that applies to anyone. It doesn't matter who you are or what sexual orientation you are. That comes first. And then after that everything else falls into place. My favorite artists in the world are all authentic and respect who they are. The ones I look up to, they're all an example of that.

You're a lead in Mike Mosallam's feature film debut "Breaking Fast." How does that movie fall in line with your goal of centering queer stories that typically aren't told?

I think the majority of the world is not aware that there are openly gay practicing Muslims. I've had so many conversations about this with a lot of gay and queer people. My friend is an openly gay practicing Muslim. They exist. And there's a lot of them. So this film simply is making those people visible, no different

from how finally the world is making trans people visible because they were not visible for the longest time. Now, finally, they're seen.

The internet was thrilled to hear that you'd be sharing a kiss with your husband, Phastos, in "Eternals," the first Marvel film to feature a gay married couple; they will also be raising a child. What did it feel like to witness the excitement around such a historical moment in pop culture for the LGBTQ community?

Marvel is purposely and intentionally trying to put out a positive image of a queer family for the whole world to see, from kids to old people. That's huge. Visibility at a level that is unprecedented. We got to humanize a queer family who have a son, and we got to really show how loving queer families are.

I actually even believe that queer families are healthier than straight families, and I really think their journey shows that in a beautiful way. So I'm very proud that I was a part of it. I'm very grateful that I got to humanize a queer family on a global level and I can't wait for the world to see it. And I think what "The Son" did was also revolutionary. For women, for LGBTQ people, and for other marginalized people and ethnic minorities, there's a movement happening; there's an elevated level of consciousness, globally speaking.

And you asked me, "Do you think coming out is gonna harm my career?" I'm excited to see what's gonna happen with that. Meaning, I'm excited to start seeing openly gay actors play straight. I would be excited to play James Bond, for instance. And by the way, I've had some training in Lebanon. When I was a teenager I really had to sell it to make people think I was straight. I had to have a girlfriend, I had to befriend straight boys to look like a badass. I really pulled it off. The reason I'm so convincing playing straight roles is because I did that in Lebanon with my family.

And you'd play a straight James Bond, not a gay one?

I would play a straight James Bond because I think it would be a big statement that an openly gay actor is playing a straight iconic figure. That's more challenging for the world. I think, for me, I'm interested in playing the roles that would challenge the world's thoughts and perspectives about each other. That's the most important thing for me: to really change the conversation.

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. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.

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How the COVID-19 Outbreak and Quarantine Is Affecting Local Queer Choruses

BY BENJAMIN DECKER

The novel coronavirus has swept the nation clean of any summer 2020 plans, and with 2020 Pride events being canceled, too, many local queer entertainment groups in Southeast Michigan are now out of work and are struggling to find ways to still perform virtually. With ordinary schedules out of synch and performances suspended, several local chorus groups are also doing everything they can do to keep a close-knit community.

Out Loud Chorus

Between The Lines caught up with Darin DeWeese, artistic director of Out Loud Chorus, to see how the Washtenaw County-based LGBTQ group has made adjustments for its summer season. As director, DeWeese feels he also has the responsibility of keeping the community as tightknit as possible. As of now, members of Out Loud are still getting together virtually, but instead of rehearsals together, they have been reuniting for various trivia nights, karaoke and online vocal lessons to stay in touch. DeWeese explained that since the events Out Loud had planned are getting canceled, there is no reason to practice every day.

The cancellation of summer 2020's Pride events, as well as the group's two-night May



Sing Out Detroit

concert series at the University of Michigan, comes on the 25th anniversary of the group's formation. Normally, Out Loud has upwards of five events throughout the summer, but for now, the focus is on its winter series and a virtual variety show for the 2020 online Ypsilanti Pride. Auditions for new members will begin in September.

Sing Out Detroit

Linda Brincat, one of the original four founders of local LGBT chorus Sing Out Detroit, is continuing to meet with her fellow members of Sing Out through online meetings. Originally, the group had planned to rehearse weekly through virtual meetings, but it soon switched to individual practices. Now instead of a normal schedule, members use the time to keep in touch with one another through

cocktail hours. Brincat highlighted how it was so important for the chorus group to keep in touch with one another, as many members join Sing Out solely to be connected with others part of the queer community.

The group is cautiously optimistic that its June concert can be rescheduled for later this summer, but it is planning to make more virtual concerts in the months ahead. Since the group's establishment by Brincat and three friends in July of 2008, Sing Out has secured a spot on the Motor City Pride stage every year, and summer 2020 would have been their 11th performance. To support Sing Out through this time, those interested can visit its website, make donations or become a corporate sponsor.

Prism Men's Chorus

Mark Ortwine is the chairman of Prism Men's Chorus. Ortwine said that the nonprofit group has canceled all of its events for the rest of the year, including sold-out August and December concert series. This summer, Prism planned to have performances at Motor City and Ferndale Prides, but those were canceled as well. In four years of being an established chorus group, Prism has performed with vocal powerhouses

See **Choruses**, continued on p. 22



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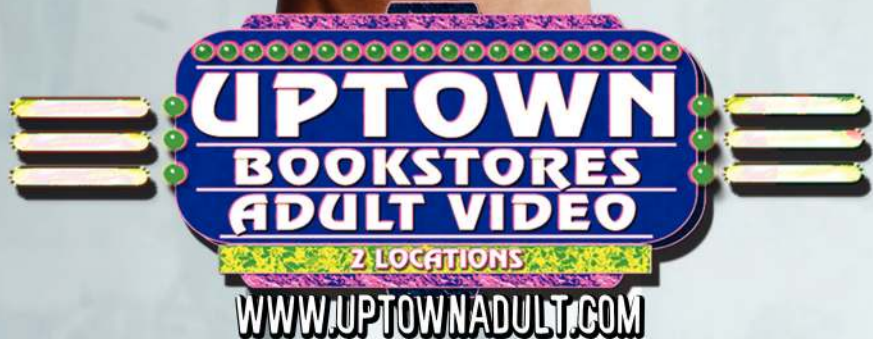
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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Justice Smith just queered up 'Jurassic World'

Rising star Justice Smith ("Pokemon: Detective Pikachu") just came out alongside his boyfriend, actor Nicholas Ashe ("Queen Sugar"), over social media, just in time for Pride Month. They're adorable together – an Instagram picture of them brushing their teeth side by side is the sweetest thing, truly – and since Smith's statement on the matter included the perfectly composed and forthright, "... if your revolution does not include Black Queer voices, it is anti-black," it's just all the more satisfying. Smith also has some career news, some cinematic content coming down the road. First, a psychological thriller called "The Voyeurs." Then a high school dramedy about kids exploring their sexuality titled "Generation." And a little indie feature co-starring Chris Pratt called "Jurassic World: Dominion." Now, there was a time when an up-and-comer would be forbidden from even thinking about joining a blockbuster mega-franchise and then risking it all by coming out of the closet. But that was five minutes ago; the kids are doing whatever they damn well please now. Isn't it great?



Justice Smith. Photo: KathClick

'Queen of The Capital' will serve, slay and stream

Daniel Hays has two jobs. By day he's with the U.S. Department of Labor, working for the government, and leaving his 36-inch-high wig at home. At night, Hays' drag character, a Southern Christian named Muffy Blake Stephyns, takes over, and she works on a different sort of Washington, D.C. campaign: the competition for the title of "Empress IV" of the Imperial Court. Don't know what that even means? Well, then, you'll want to see the new documentary, "Queen of The Capital," from director Josh Davidsburg. The film is both a drag documentary and one that explores the old-school, community building

work of gay bars via classic drag performance and fundraising, all of it aligned with a camp fantasy of royalty. It premiered earlier this year at Slamdance 2020, and will be arriving in arthouse theaters this summer as well as taking a queenly bow on June 20 via streaming. If you're going to brave a cinema then here's a reason to go.

'Riverdale' star Lili Reinhart just came out

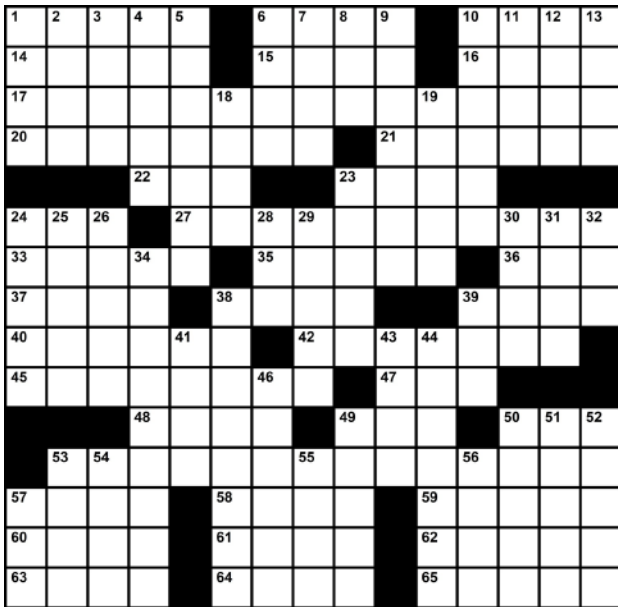
Betty Cooper is bi. Well, OK, it's actually Lili Reinhart, who plays Betty on "Riverdale" – and who, lest we forget, also lit up the screen in the superfemme crime hit "Hustlers" – that just went public about being bisexual. We love it when this sort of thing happens, because the B in LGBT is too often overlooked, and we're always thrilled when charming young celebrities casually drop that information into the world. We especially like it when they do it in the publicity run up to a new movie, chipping away at the old Hollywood system where actors would, once upon a time, conveniently pair up with an opposite sex love interest around the time their film was due to take its bow. The movie Reinhart's got coming up is called "Chemical Hearts," from director Richard Tanne ("Southside With You"), and it's about a disabled teen journalist who finds love working on the school newspaper. Based on the novel "Our Chemical Hearts" by Krystal Sutherland, the film co-stars Austin Abrams ("Euphoria") as the boy who earns his place in her emotional chem lab. If the movie theaters are in full swing again by late August, you'll get to see this one there. Otherwise, check for streaming options.

Romeo San Vicente is ready to stay far away from you all summer.

Charlize Theron never says die in 'The Old Guard'

Charlize Theron became an action star when you weren't noticing. From "Mad Max: Fury Road"

to "Atomic Blonde" (and its upcoming sequel) to the "Fast and Furious" franchise, she's pretty much out-Neesoning Liam Neeson, and we're really into it. For her next one, she jumps and kicks her way into Gina Prince-Bythewood's ("Beyond the Lights") newest, "The Old Guard." Theron plays an immortal mercenary who leads a team of similarly gifted never-dying warriors to protect humanity, all the while confronted by villains who'd corrupt their ancient ways. The film is based on the graphic novel by Greg Rucka and features Chiwetel Ejiofor, Matthias Schoenaerts and KiKi Layne ("If Beale Street Could Talk"). But here's the bonus: a same-sex romance – one that's been hot for centuries – between two members of the team, played by international actors Luca Marinelli and Marwan Kenzari. We'll take it, the delicious queer icing on Theron's Furiosa cake, when it drops on Netflix July 10.



Rocketman

Across

- 1 O'Neal of "The Bad News Bears"
 6 Bend over
 10 Direction from Stephen Pyles
 14 In concert
 15 Bedrock pet
 16 Cosmetics businessman Laszlo
 17 Start of the response to "Be yourself" in "Rocketman"
 20 Wilde, for example

Q Puzzle

- 21 Treat, as seawater
 22 Edvard Grieg's land (abbr.)
 23 Canine from Kansas
 24 Gore Vidal, ___ Edgar Box
 27 More of the response
 33 With 39-Across, "Corydon" author
 35 Kirsten of "Spider-Man"
 36 "A drop of golden sun"
 37 Iditarod terminus
 38 Director Gus Van ___
 39 See 33-Across
 40 More of the response

- 42 More of the response
 45 Plea made on one's knees
 47 Acapulco article
 48 Blows it
 49 Mustangs of the NCAA
 50 Meas. for Dr. Kildare
 53 End of the response
 57 Big sticks
 58 Have top billing
 59 Robert of HIV research
 60 With respect to
 61 Continent of Cho's parents
 62 Moon in "Return of the Jedi"
 63 Bombed, on Broadway
 64 Mary-land athlete?
 65 Odometer button

Down

- 1 Dances like Hines
 2 Where to find Moby Dick
 3 Tugboat sound
 4 Remove, as a nametag
 5 Hollywood district
 6 Gets the bottom line
 7 Civil uprising
 8 Anderson Cooper's network
 9 Wieners
 10 Best buy for WNBA tickets
 11 Michael Buble's "___ Little Tenderness"
 12 Part of ILGA (abbr.)
 13 What an athletic supporter might do?

- 18 Land of Sinead O'Connor
 19 Itty-bitty, to Baudelaire
 23 First extra inning
 24 Network of "Wedding Wars"
 25 "If I'd only ___!"
 26 "Thou shalt not ___ adultery"
 28 Childcare writer LeShan
 29 Like the Seven Dwarfs
 30 Diva's performance
 31 My fair one, on Broadway
 32 Color for Easter eggs
 34 Went back to homophobia
 38 Eyes, in a gay bar
 39 Family docs
 41 On the spot
 43 Salt's saint
 44 Like a chicken to a chicken hawk
 46 Fly over the equator
 49 Jock's Johnson support
 50 Causes of sneezes
 51 Amanda Seyfried flick of 2009
 52 Stallion's sound
 53 Collette of "The Hours"
 54 Fairy-tale monster
 55 Grizzly's hideaway
 56 Social activist Addams
 57 Top

Clues P. 14

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Jay Kaplan, Staff Attorney, LGBT Project
2966 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI
www.aclumich.org
313-578-6800

Fair Michigan

PO Box 6136
Plymouth, MI 48170
877-432-4764, 313-556-2300
fairmichigan.org
[Facebook.com/fairmichigan2016](https://www.facebook.com/fairmichigan2016)

Know Your Rights Project

Outlaws U-M student group
outlawslegal@gmail.com
734-995-9867

Older Adults

SAGE Metro Detroit

290 W. Nine Mile Rd. Ferndale, MI
313-578-6812
sagemetrodetroit.org
Facebook: SAGE Metro Detroit

Political

The LGBT and Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party

[Facebook.com/TheLGBT-CaucusoftheMDP](https://www.facebook.com/CaucusoftheMDP)
Stonewall for Revolution
www.facebook.com/stonewall4reolution

Transgender

FtM Detroit

<https://www.facebook.com/FtMDetroit/>
ftmdetroit@gmail.com

FtM A2 Ypsi

ftmannarborypsilanti@gmail.com
<https://www.facebook.com/ftma2ypsi/>

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You can add or update any listing by going to www.PrideSource.com and clicking on Yellow Pages. Once you submit your listing, our staff will contact you to confirm your information.

You can add your event to the Pride Source Calendar online and in print by going to www.PrideSource.com and clicking on Calendar, then "Add Event." Send any press releases and announcements to editor@pridesource.com



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► Choruses

Continued from p. 18

like Demi Lovato and Patti LuPone, while also maintaining various outreach programs that have given the chorus the official title of a nonprofit corporation. At each rehearsal, members would bring in cans of food and donate them to local food pantries, but since practices have gone virtual, they are looking for other ways to still help the shelters.

However, since it is a nonprofit, Prism is dependent upon steady concerts to pay expenses. Due to the shortage of funds, the group has canceled all of their subscriptions and cut out all unnecessary expenses — everything from storage units to online advertisements. Despite the odds being stacked against the group, Ortwine has been trying to find the silver lining in COVID-19-induced quarantine. He said it's a good time to fix operational aspects of the group that have been on hold for a while. To make a donation or contact the group, supporters can visit prism-chorus.org.

Detroit Together Men's Chorus

Artistic Director of Detroit Together Men's Chorus Brian Londrow said that the group is planning for virtual rehearsals and ways for the group to stay connected with each other. Like most other groups, their concert planned for the end of May was canceled, as well as a performance at the Freep Film Festival, which sponsored the new documentary, "America You Kill Me," about the life of Detroit LGBTQ activist Jeffrey Montgomery. The group's next steps are being deliberated via a board meeting this week, but Londrow said it is realistic that Detroit Together will be planning virtual concerts and other creative ways to connect with its audience. Londrow explained that for Detroit Men's Chorus the most important goal is to be a symbol for Pride and to be there for their fellow members of the LGBTQ community — whether they are physically present at a Pride festival or not.

LanSINGout Chorus

Peter Morse and Ben Boerkoel are both heads of the LanSINGout Chorus. The group is currently not doing virtual rehearsals as many members do not have the correct software to do so. This means that, for the time being, LanSINGout has chosen not to plan any online concerts. However, members are still meeting virtually to get caught up with one another. The entire spring schedule has been indefinitely postponed, including a fundraiser for the Chorus and another group to attend the chorus-oriented GALA Festival in Minneapolis, which is held once every four years. The festival has been postponed until next summer. Their spring concert that was supposed to be held the weekend of May 8 has been scheduled for next spring. Morse and Boerkoel's main priority is letting the chorus' audience know that there are still plans in motion for a strong winter season.

Transgender Michigan

23211 Woodward Ave.
Ferndale, MI
info@transgendermichigan.org
www.transgendermichigan.org
800-842-2954

Trans Sistas of Color Project

19641 W. 7 Mile Rd. in Detroit
313-537-7000 Ext 107
info@tscopdetroit.org
www.facebook.com/TSCOPD/

Youth

Ruth Ellis Center

77 Victor Street, Highland Park, MI 48203
info@ruthelliscenter.org
Facebook: Ruth Ellis Center
313-252-1950

Ozone House


102 N. Hamilton Street
Ypsilanti, MI
734-662-2265
734-662-2222

Stand With Trans

Farmington, MI
www.standwithtrans.org
248-739-9254


Find these resources online

Adoption Services
AIDS/HIV Hotlines
AIDS/HIV Organizations
Alzheimer's Association
Animal Shelter
Anti-Violence
Archives/Collections
Campus; Student and Alumni Groups
Cancer Support Groups
Choruses
Community Centers
Employee Resource Groups
Families and Parents
Foster Care
Foundations and Funders
Hotlines & Switchboards
Labor Union
Legal Organizations
Museums
Music Groups
National Organizations
Political Organizations
Professional Organizations
Religious & Spiritual
Senior Living
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Transgender Groups/Services
Women's Health
Youth Services



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WWW.MIUNIFIED.ORG




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PrEP must be taken every day to be most effective

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- ✓ PrEP Assessment
- ✓ Insurance & Payment Guidance.
- ✓ PrEP Education



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Your risk of getting HIV from sex can be even lower if you combine PrEP with condoms and other prevention methods.



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- Other STI testing and treatment





ACCESS

www.accesscommunity.org

Sterling Heights Center
4301 East 14 Mile Rd., Sterling Heights, MI 48310
586-788-6235

Part of the MetroCare Coordination Network

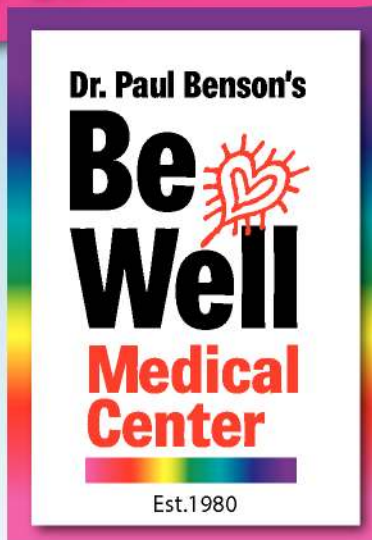
On the Edge of Primary Care PODCASTS with Dr. Paul Benson



Dr. Benson is launching a new podcast series for 2020!

Use your cell phone to capture the QR code above, or visit our website, Spotify, Apple, or Google for access.

Since 1980, our medical team has been committed to providing compassionate, sensitive care for all lifestyles. The topics and specialists featured on the podcast will help you keep pace with the most up-to-date info to improve your health!



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

Sleep is one of the most important, but least understood aspects of our lives and wellness.

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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