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SUMMER OF PRIDE

ANOTHER YEAR WAITING

How the Pandemic Has
Delayed Treatment for
Trans People

THE INTERVIEW

Ypsi Native Leo Sheng
Talks Putting the 'T' in
the 'L Word' Reboot

THE FINANCE GUIDE

What Every Queer Person
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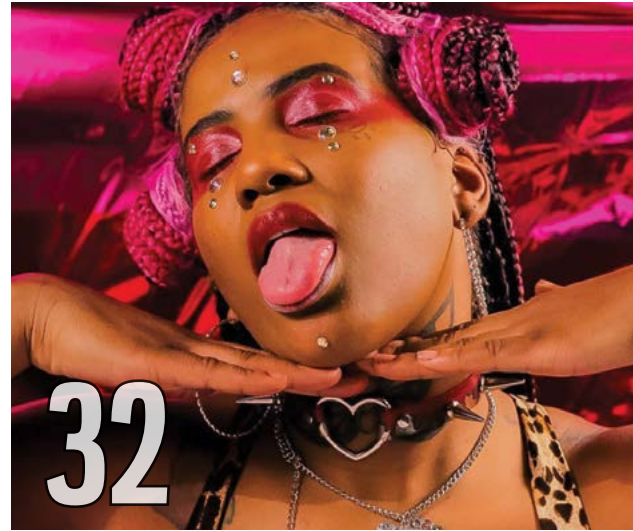
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Photo: Magnolia Pictures

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By Jackie Jones

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Just because summer is coming to a close doesn't mean there aren't plenty of ways to round off this last bunch of warm nights. Make the most of what's left of August with these events that'll push just about anyone out of their social shell.

Respectfully Ogle Bears for Charity

There are few things gayer than a bear in a speedo — and perhaps fewer things that are as Detroit-specific as getting your car washed by one. This month, at the 15th Annual Motor City Bears in Speedos Car Wash, get your car's shine back and enjoy the view all for a good cause. The event "promotes body positivity in the LGBTQ community," says Scott Wood of the Motor City Bears. One-hundred percent of all donations go to Affirmations and the Ruth Ellis Center. "The pandemic stopped us from holding the car wash last year," Wood adds, "but this year we are back and really looking forward to doing it again. We hope to see you."

The event will be held 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Aug. 28 at Level One Bank, 22635 Woodward Ave.



Photo courtesy of Motor City Bears

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Revisit a Friday Night Classic at Menjo's

Looking for a new weekend haunt? Maybe it's time to revisit a classic. Menjo's Entertainment Complex has been entertaining Detroiters and gay icons (like Madonna) for nearly 50 years. And Friday nights there might be the gayest of all, says Tim Zazo, Menjo's general manager. "We do a really fun and poppin' Friday night Pride party each and every Friday. It's always all-inclusive. We also do a lesbian Pride party next door to Menjo's, at the Olympus Theater," Zazo says. "It's a fun mix of people."

Menjo's Entertainment Complex is located at 940 W. McNichols Road in Detroit. Visit the bar's Facebook page or menjoscomplexdetroit.com for more information.



Photo: Andrew Potter

Help Plan Ferndale Pride

Though it's rescheduled for Oct. 2, Ferndale Pride organizers have kept the festival's spirit alive all summer with fundraising events like the annual Hot Daddies contest and psychic self-care parties. Now, anyone looking to help the festival prepare for its fall festivities can do so at the upcoming volunteer meeting at 7 p.m. Aug. 25 at the Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center in Ferndale. "The meetings will help get you acquainted with the Ferndale Pride Core team and get you in the know for Ferndale Pride 2021," says co-founder and executive director Julia Music. "Attendance at one meeting is recommended but not required for volunteering."

Affirmations is located at 290 W. Nine Mile Road. Learn more about the event on the Ferndale Pride Facebook page or at goaffirmations.org.



Share Your Talents at an Open Mic

Slipstream Theatre Initiative is an LGBTQ-inclusive Ferndale ensemble theater company that takes classical and original local works and brings them to the mainstream. At its upcoming Open Mic night at Coco Fairfield's in Berkley, Slipstream is celebrating "creativity in all its forms," according to Hanna Roth, Slipstream's director of social media. Roth encourages anyone interested to stop by and support this "fantastic fundraiser event and support Slipstream in their goal of getting our local actors, designers and technicians back to the work they love."

Coco Fairfield's is located at 2959 Twelve Mile Road in Berkley. Visit Slipstream Theatre Initiative at 460 Hilton Road in Ferndale or its Facebook page for more information.



Make Time for Queer Conversations

We know seeing friends right after lockdown restrictions were lifted was exciting, but it's OK if you're sick of hearing your friends' same old quarantine stories. Broaden your horizons and learn about some LGBTQ+ people's COVID-prompted hobbies at the Queer Conversations discussion group at Affirmations. Who knows? Maybe you'll meet someone who also rewatched all seven seasons of "The Golden Girls" during the pandemic.

11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 21. Visit [Pridesource.com](https://www.pridesource.com)'s event page to learn more about Queer Conversations.

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Meet SAGE's New Executive Director Angela Gabridge

BY JACKIE JONES

After a national search, SAGE Metro Detroit welcomes its new executive director, Angela Gabridge.

Gabridge, an LGBTQ+ ally, has an extensive career in human services and social justice, making her an ideal candidate to succeed former executive director Angie Perone. Before joining SAGE, she held positions at Accounting Aid Society, ACLU of Michigan, Affirmations and The Helm. Between The Lines spoke exclusively to Gabridge about her exciting new role and how, as an ally, she can support the LGBTQ+ community.

How did you get introduced to SAGE Metro Detroit?

I actually have known about SAGE since its inception stage. I was on staff at Affirmations with Judy Lewis and Jay Kaplan — some of the organization's founding members — who were involved in putting together funding support to get SAGE declared as an affiliate. It started as Gay Elders of Metro Detroit. They were able to get certified as an affiliate chapter of the national organization, which brings all sorts of benefits for the community that we serve and helps with brand recognition and organizational sustainability.

I remember sitting in those conversations. When I was at the ACLU, working with Jay Kaplan, a board member at SAGE, he would always keep me abreast of things happening with the organization. He would always let me know whenever they had a success and when a grant would come in. When they were able to hire their first executive director, I remember having that conversation with him.

So, it has always been on my radar. People who have always been involved in a high level in that organization have been a part of my network for a long time. Because I've worked previously in senior services and the social justice and LGBTQ+ communities, it was a great opportunity to marry those two things together.



Angela Gabridge was recently named the new executive director at SAGE. Photo courtesy SAGE

What do you hope to bring to SAGE Metro Detroit?

I hope to bring the particular skills that I've acquired throughout my career, which focus on non-profit administration and leadership, along with philanthropy. So, SAGE has an outstanding program team in place. I hope to bring SAGE's infrastructure expertise and philanthropy piece up to the next level. I say all the time, "I'm here to learn as much as I'm there to lead." And, I'm really a tool to be used by the organization and the community to better this work.

As an ally who does not identify as LGBTQ+, do you have any hesitations?

I think for me, as a person who identifies as an ally, it's important for me to be really respectful and aware of the spaces in which it's appropriate for me to play a role. It's also important for me to be aware of the spaces where I should take a backseat and assure the leading people have the resources they need to be successful.

What programs or initiatives are you looking forward to the most?

The first order of business is getting my arms around everything as far as the financing and infrastructure are concerned. I have a lot of one-on-one meetings scheduled with the staff and contractors, so I can learn about what they do and what their hopes are for the organization, and how they like to work. The second part of it is stepping

in and helping lift up the programs they have already. There are a couple of projects that the organization is working on right now. They got off to a little bit of a slow start because of the pandemic awfulness.

They have this nursing training program that they're rolling out. It's the first program of its kind that's specifically tailored to work with nursing care staff in long-term care facilities. They are coming in and providing comprehensive training, from the language you use with people, the forms you use and how those are structured in a culturally responsive care environment.

This program is all for nursing care staff in long-term care facilities serving the LGBTQ+ community. There's a ton of outreach to be done in facilities to get them enrolled in that program. It's a grant-funded program, so it's completely free of charge. It's a great opportunity, and it's a great opportunity to get some CEU credits for the nursing staff.

"Because I've worked previously in senior services and the social justice and LGBTQ+ communities, it was a great opportunity to marry those two things together."

The other thing I'm really excited about is the transgender aging project. This project is a partnership between SAGE and Corktown Health. They're developing a volunteer network of health advocates that can accompany transgender older adults either virtually or in-person to doctor's appointments so they can advocate for them. They're also implementing and designing a transgender workshop series called "Love Your Aging and Trans Body." This initiative is to encourage self-care and self-love. So, there are all these issues that we have to aging, but of course, it is much more complex and nuanced in the transgender community.

How did you feel when you were offered the position?

I'm so incredibly humbled that they believe in my skill set enough to step in and work with this incredible team they have built. Really, for Angie and all of the staff and board members, SAGE has been a labor of love. They have gotten this organization to this really exciting tipping point, where they have a really good pool of resources and grant-funding and connections and community partnerships from which to work. They're really ready to take all of that to the next level. So, the fact they were willing to trust me to step in, along with the other team members, is really humbling.



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During the Pandemic, Trans People Have Faced Yet More Barriers to Treatment

Another Year Waiting

BY TAYLOR BLACKLEY

As a professional drummer, Rikki Bates knows something about keeping time. And time, over the past year, has moved at an agonizing tempo.

“You’ve got to go straight up the trail and, you know, cut down trees with nail files. It just takes a long time,” she says. “Well, the clock’s ticking.”

Bates was 4 years old when she knew she wanted to play drums. Around that same time, she also realized she was different. Something felt wrong. “I felt paralyzed ... I lost interest in absolutely everything and just felt like I wanted to die,” says Bates, who lives in Cape Code, Massachusetts.

At last, in March 2020, she had access to a surgery she had known she wanted since she first heard of it in the 1970s. At 66 years old, she was finally ready to set a date for a gender-affirming operation that would drastically improve the quality of her life.

Then, the coronavirus hit, and the whole world paused.

“To think that I was all ready to have this facial surgery and then [to] have the rug pulled out from under me was devastating,” says Bates. “It’s terrible.”

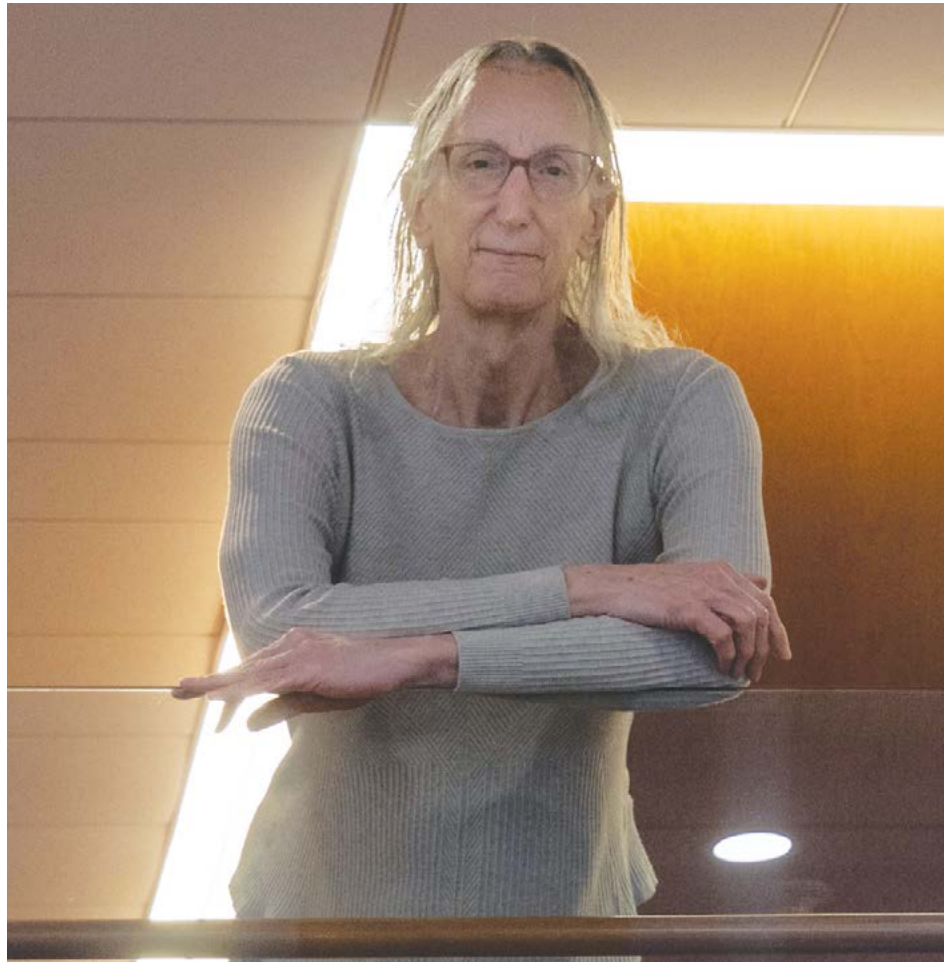
She had no choice but to keep doing what she had been doing for as long as she can remember — wait. During a stressful and traumatic pandemic year for everyone, she wasn’t the only trans person to do so. Many transgender individuals seeking gender-affirmation surgery faced the additional stress of postponed lifesaving treatments.

Gender-affirmation surgeries can be a pivotal stage in a person’s transition. Doctors today have surgical techniques at their disposal that make it safe and feasible to alter parts of the body to better align with a person’s true gender identity.

Commonly sought procedures include bottom surgery (below the belt), top surgery (waist up) and facial surgery, where parts of the skull that serve as gender cues are altered. Not all people who are transgender choose surgery, but some feel that one or a combination of these surgical interventions is necessary for them to live their most authentic lives.

In Bates’ case, she had already received three gender-affirming operations before the pandemic: two bottom, one top. For her, the surgeries made life worth living.

“Before I had any surgery, I just didn’t care



Rikki Bates experienced surgical delays she says were “devastating.” Photo: Taylor Blackley

about anything anymore. I just didn’t care about anything at all and just didn’t want to be alive,” Bates says.

After the surgery, everything changed. “I felt like this mountain of lead weights just went away,” she says, “and never came back.”

At every step of the way, she had to fight her insurance over the medical necessity of gender-affirmation surgeries for her, a process that dragged on “at a snail’s pace” through months and years. But she never considered giving up because “it’s the only path toward me being able to love myself, which isn’t easy if you’re transgender.”

Last March, at the beginning of the pandemic, operating rooms across the nation shuttered their hermetically-sealed doors to any surgeries that were elective or nonessential. That included gender-affirmation surgeries, along with anything else that didn’t require immediate and urgent medical attention.

Some operating rooms started performing nonessential surgeries during that summer, only to close once again when COVID-19 cases peaked this past winter. Over a tumultuous year, trans people waiting for their surgery date were on an emotional roller coaster.

During this period, Amy Hunter, the executive director at OutFront Kalamazoo, an educational and advocacy group that provides support for LGBTQ+ youth who are experiencing homelessness, witnessed an uptick in demand for OutFront’s therapy groups. This pattern is emblematic of how rough the past year has been for the trans community.

“The whole idea that gender-affirming care is elective needs to be disabused,” says Hunter, a woman who is transgender. “In most cases, it’s actually life-saving.”

Hunter, 61, lives in Kalamazoo, and she said the area is “luckier than a lot of places across the state,” and certainly across the country, because

there are a few doctors there that specialize in gender-affirming care.

“It’s really a hit or miss, whether you can find competent care or even a doctor that will see you,” she says. This struggle to attain compassionate health care from a competent provider can take a toll on trans patients as they seek care.

“The process is slow,” Hunter says. “We have to teach our doctors. We have to teach our social workers. We have to teach the intake people about who we are, and what our needs are and why. We try to teach those systems how to deal with us as who we really are, not as how they would perceive us [or] how they would like to perceive us.”

Even areas where gender-affirming care is more easily found are not without their problems, and many people in trans or gender-nonconforming communities feel left behind, especially given the particular set of challenges posed by the last year.

Candace Nguyen, 28, works at Fenway Health in Boston as a clinical coordinator for STI and HIV prevention clinics. Fenway Health recently marked its 50th year of providing healthcare to the LGBTQ+ community of Boston and beyond. Around 15 percent of the patients they care for are transgender or gender-nonconforming. For Fenway, ensuring a gender-affirming healthcare experience where patients feel safe and understood is a priority. After all, Nguyen understands firsthand the anxiety of waiting to express herself. She, like many of the other providers at the clinic, is a woman of trans experience.

“The fact that you have to wait to do that, I think that’s more painful,” she says. Nguyen started her transition at 25. She had only been on hormone therapy, which in her case suppresses male hormones (testosterone) and supplies her body with the female equivalent (estrogen), for a year when COVID-19 hit.

“I had this irrational fear that when COVID-19 happened the world was gonna end before I actually got to fully live my life,” says Nguyen. “I don’t want to feel like I wasted my whole life not living.”

Quarantining at home with family, she felt disconnected from her community and her identity.

“Every day I would just be waking up, looking at myself in the mirror, and it [was] like, ‘I’m not happy with myself. I’m not happy with the

See **Trans Healthcare**, page 30



Michigan AG Dana Nessel (right) and wife Alanna Maguire on election night, 2019. Photo: Facebook

Michigan Fifth in Nation for Number of LGBTQ+ Elected Officials

'Equitable Representation' Across U.S. Still Falling Short

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

A new report released by Washington, D.C.-based LGBTQ Victory Institute found that Michigan ranks fifth in the nation for the highest number of openly LGBTQ+ elected officials. The state, the report shows, has a total of 28 state and local elected leaders who identify as LGBTQ+. In addition to Attorney General Dana Nessel, the highest ranking, the state has two LGBTQ+ mayors, three state legislators, 28 local officials and three judges.

Michigan is behind California (157), Pennsylvania (54), Illinois (43) and New York (38) on the report. Mississippi, meanwhile, is the only state to have no LGBTQ+ elected officials.

"Over the past year, we've seen an incredible jump in the number of LGBTQ+ people elected to public office — and they are becoming more representative of our entire community as well," said former Houston

mayor Annise Parker, president and CEO of the Victory Institute. "These public servants are leading the way in passing conversion therapy bans in city councils, fighting anti-trans bills in state legislatures and in passing the Equality Act in the U.S. House."

The report also found that there are 986 LGBTQ+ elected officials in the U.S. If that number appears impressive, consider this: According to the report, only 0.19 percent of elected officials in the nation identify as LGBTQ+ whereas LGBTQ+ people make up 5.6 percent of the country's population. This means there would need to be a substantial amount of more LGBTQ+ people elected to achieve equitable representation.

"We still must elect 28,116 more LGBTQ+ people to public office before equitable representation is achieved," Parker said. "And we must ensure those leaders are as diverse as our community."



"We came here to live, and there's a sense of life here in the community and in the people."

—Jan and Gene M., community residents

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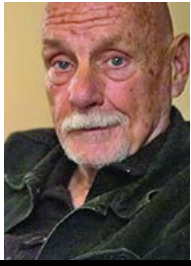
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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Fines Paid: Then and Now

“Your fine’s been paid! Alexander. Ease up! Go back and get on the bus to the city limits.”
“This time, stay out of trouble!”

I was 23 when I heard that bit of last-minute redemption, as it were. It was the Monday following Mother’s Day weekend, and I was in the lockdown side of the Detroit House of Correction in Plymouth Township.

I had just asked the Officer in Charge (OIC) if I could make a telephone call. I thought I had no choice but to call my parents to let them know — shamefully to be sure — that my offense, soliciting an undercover vice cop, was \$30 or 30 days.

When I was told no calls were permitted for 24 hours, I broke down. The OIC must have been touched by my performance, as he let me know I was soon to be free to go home.

Inwardly, my relief was joyous beyond belief. I was secretly stunned by the news. Later, I learned a gay work companion paid my hefty fine. Thirty dollars was a lot of money back in 1959.

Looking back, it’s obvious to me now and to hundreds of other gay men — actually thousands — this incident was entrapment. Nothing more. Nothing less.

At the time the arrest happened to me, I was leaving a downtown bar and was asked by a very handsome undercover vice cop where I was going and would I like a ride to get there?

When I said “Sure,” I was arrested on the spot. Taken to the nearby 1st Police Headquarters, fingerprinted, placed in a six by eight-foot cell, with a flat board to sleep on. I was there from early hours Sunday to mid-Monday morning.

When the vice cop came to get me on Monday morning to take me to Records Court, he said somewhat offhandedly, confidently: “If you plead guilty, the judge will let you go. It’s your first offense. You have no previous record.”

Unfortunately, I believed him. Judge Elvin Davenport gave his required sentencing.

Today, I often think about those words I heard that saved me: “Your fine’s been paid.”

I repeat the mantra when daily mishaps occur in my life or are — thankfully — avoided.

When I was a teenager and also in my early 20s, there were no strong LGBTQ+ organizations, no centers like Affirmations, no churches like MCC-D, no publications like BTL.

What we did have was constant hate mongering of gays and lesbians, including the places where they gathered and met to socialize and to just be alive and joyous as people so deserving to be respected and protected legally and socially.

These days, it’s increasingly obvious that as members of the LGBTQ+ community, our fines are not only being paid, but paid off in the hard-fought long run, politically, socially, and in the media.

This is despite modern-day undercover vice cops like Trump, Pence and Franklin Graham.

Dr. Tim Retzlaff, who earned his Ph.D. from Yale University with his dissertation on Detroit’s gay history, researched more than 1,200 Detroit Recorder’s Court records of gay men and bisexuals arrested by vice squad officers. His data provided, and still provides, documentation of possible abusive entrapment practices. Detroit’s present Mayor Duggan has been aggressive in curtailing the often unethical strategies used by vice squad agents.

In 1970, my own arrest record was examined and reversed by Judge Robert Evans. I was found not guilty, and my fingerprints and related misdemeanor data were fully expunged in Recorder’s Court.



Viewpoint

40 Years Ago: Meeting at Larry Kramer’s House as a Pandemic Began

BY ANDY HUMM

Something was killing us gay men in 1981 and no one knew what was causing it. That summer there was one alarming article about it in The New York Times on July 3 (“RARE CANCER SEEN IN 41 HOMOSEXUALS”) based on a CDC report and two articles by out gay Dr. Larry Mass in the gay New York Native, including “CANCER IN THE GAY COMMUNITY.” While there were many gay groups in those days none of us stepped up to coordinate a community-wide response whether through a sense that health authorities would address it (ha!) as they did with Legionnaire’s Disease in 1976 or fear that a community that had just officially ditched the mental illness label in 1973 would now be linked with a deadly physical malady.

It took Larry Kramer, an Oscar-nominated screenwriter (for “Women in Love”), to bring us together. These cases hit his friends in the Fire Island fast lane hard. I only knew him as the author of the secret-spilling novel “Faggots” that had been condemned in gay movement circles.

Larry had also written an op-ed piece in the Times after the assassination of Harvey Milk in 1978 praising gay political muscle in San Francisco and condemning his hometown: “We are not ready for our rights in New York. We have not earned them. We have not fought for them.” (“Fuck him,” I thought at the time as a spokesperson for the 50-group Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights that campaigned for our gay rights

bill. We had the votes for it in Manhattan — a much larger place than San Francisco — in 1971 when the Gay Activists Alliance first conceived it. But Queens was then Archie Bunker territory. And Staten Island? Fuhgeddaboutit. Who is this guy who has never been to one of our meetings?)

But when Larry wanted to get things moving, he called everyone he knew — friend and foe — and many who he did not. So as one of the “gay leaders” he looked down on, I got invited to a packed gathering at his Washington Square apartment on August 11, 1981, to hear from the doctor quoted in the Times, Alvin Friedman-Kien. Larry wanted us to raise money for research since none was forthcoming from government.

If all you know about this was Larry’s dramatization of it in the HBO version of “The Normal Heart” you don’t know what happened. (It is not in his searing stage version.) On HBO, a doctor is explaining what she is seeing with gay patients and flippant gay men are shouting, “C’mon, honey. I have an orgy to get to.”

As Larry later wrote more about the devastation of AIDS, he was indeed vilified by some for being “anti-sex” for saying things like, “Just stop fucking!” But at that gathering 40 years ago we listened intently, respectfully, and full of dread as the soft-spoken Dr. Friedman-Kien described the devastation he was seeing in his practice and hearing from other physicians treating gay men. You could have heard a pin drop.

We did not know what was causing clusters of deadly pneumocystis carinii pneumonia and the disfiguring purple lesions of Kaposi’s Sarcoma, an otherwise slow-moving cancer mainly of older Mediterranean men. We knew the gay patients were immunosuppressed but



Activist and writer Andy Humm

not why. Recreational drug use? Multiple STIs from multiple partners? There was even speculation about a viral agent — a prospect too frightening to contemplate with its attendant threat of quarantine. But the conclusive identification of HIV as cause would not come until three years later. We needed research.

If memory serves, Larry passed the hat at that gathering. I recall going back to Dignity, the gay Catholic group I still belonged to, and reproducing Dr. Mass's article for our 300 members. At the next board meeting we voted for a \$1,000 donation to this research effort — a very large sum in those days in a community with very little tradition of philanthropy. Most gay people were afraid to write checks to gay causes lest it expose them in a deeply homophobic culture.

Larry himself reportedly went to Fire Island and stood on the dock with a tin can to collect money for the effort and netted a total of \$60. He did organize his friends into forming the Gay Men's Health Crisis — but that would not be incorporated until 1982 to provide services and education that the government was not. He wanted GMHC to be much more aggressive in its advocacy to the point that he got removed from the board — a turn of events well-portrayed in his play, "The Normal Heart."

Why wasn't our response quick and intense? Some of it was denial and fear. You can see that now in the early lack of response to the devastating COVID pandemic today. The reports out of Wuhan in the early winter of 2019-20 ought to have put a worldwide public health response into action immediately. But we dithered and wished it away instead. (I have a copy of the New Yorker magazine a month before the city was locked down and there is not one word about COVID.)

In 1981, this was hitting us when we were still "pre-teenage" as a movement. It had only been 12 years since the Stonewall Rebellion and while that had sparked an explosion in gay activism, we were still a relatively powerless, underfunded, and mostly volunteer movement. Most gay

people were not out — they just hoped to be left alone. I wrote for the gay New York City News back then and it was months before the health crisis became a regular subject. We did step up the fight for gay rights because without civil rights how were we to get the system to respond to our health crisis?

The Times and other mainstream media ignored it. There was no national TV news feature on it until Joe Lovett's piece on ABC's "20/20" in 1983 — the same year Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz published "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic" based on the limited knowledge we had then and when GMHC was able to fill Madison Square Garden for a celebrity-studded circus benefit. Dr. Mass did keep writing about it for the Native but had an article ("The Most Important New Public Health Problem in the United States") rejected by the Village Voice.

We did pass the city gay rights bill in 1986 and I went into AIDS education for youth at the Hetrick-Martin Institute. By 1987 though — impatient with the community's response to "the plague" — Kramer gave the speech that led to the formation of ACT UP. Activism — fueled by desperate, dying people — got into high gear. But it would not be until 1995 that effective treatments were developed, by which time millions had died and millions more had been infected.

Politicians and human beings in general are loathe to admit they have a plague in their midst. That's how they get out of control. The question about so many challenges we now face — from the pandemic to climate change — is when we are going to trade some short-term comfort for long-term survival. Those meetings need to be convened everywhere — from dinner tables to town halls to Congress.

Andy Humm, a gay activist since 1974, has been co-host with Ann Northrop of the weekly national GAY USA television show since 1985. This essay originally appeared in Plus magazine.

Creep Of The Week

Infrastructure Week: It's Here, It's Queer, Oh God, Will It Ever End?

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Have you ever driven or walked across a bridge? Have you ever turned on your faucet and received water that you could reasonably expect was safe to drink and/or to bathe in? Have you ever flushed a toilet and watched the water swirl into oblivion rather than, say, backing up onto the floor or into your basement? Have you ever driven on a freeway?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you might have Infrastructure.

Don't worry, it's not terminal. I mean, unless you're driving over a bridge that hasn't been maintained for decades and it collapses, sending your car and its passengers free falling into a ravine. Then it's terminal. But the chances of that happening are really small.

In fact, you never have to think about infrastructure at all, unless it goes wrong. The roads you drive, the pipes that deliver water to your house, the bridges your kid's school bus drives over every day, simply... exist.

When everything is working, infrastructure is just there, and it does its thing, and that's that. Which is how it's supposed to work! Your tax dollars are used to fill potholes and maintain bridges and replace lead pipes to keep you safe and keep everything you depend on functioning. That's your government at work.

Alas, if there's one thing Republicans hate besides transgender kids playing sports, it's a functioning government. Especially a government that tries to protect LGBTQ+ people in any way, shape, or form.

Which is why the Family Research Council sent me an email urging me to contact my U.S. Senators and ask them to vote against the infrastructure package. Why?

Come on, you know why.

"Right now, Democrats in Washington are lining up a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure 'deal' that's bad news," the email, which is signed by "Quena Gonzalez, Senior Director of Government Affairs," reads. "Not only will the bill increase the national budget deficit, which has already ballooned to three times the 2019 level, it contains a poison pill that advances the goal of the Equality Act: the total overhaul of our federal civil rights framework to mandate special privileges based on LGBT identities."

Oh no! Not the Equality Act! Heaven forbid that protections for LGBTQ+ people should be included in an infrastructure package.

Also, conservatives Do. Not. Give. A. Shit. about deficits unless Democrats are in charge. Under Republican rule they don't say a word about paying for wars or tax cuts for the rich no matter how much debt results.

But as soon as Democrats get control of the budget and want to spend money doing things that actually help people, conservatives are all of a sudden worried about the debt burden we're leaving our grandchildren. They don't believe in climate change, though. But hey, at least when future generations are scrambling over the rubble of this nation's former freeway system and drinking water rife with heavy metals, they won't be burdened by debt incurred by trying to actually fix or maintain these things.

Anyway, the "special privileges" carved out for LGBTQ+ people are, unfortunately, not rainbow-colored crosswalks and bridges reserved for queer use. No, the most special privilege of all, apparently, is protection from discrimination. That's the "poison pill." The infrastructure bill mentions gender identity and sexual orientation so it must be stopped!

I don't know about you, but I have a pretty recent memory of a whole building full of sleeping people crumbling to the ground in seconds in Florida. It's the kind of truly terrifying thing that you might think would motivate our elected officials to actually address this nation's dire infrastructure issues.

But who am I kidding. The same folks who want to torpedo any spending on infrastructure are the same ones who have watched millions of people worldwide die from COVID-19 and have come to the conclusion that the whole thing is a hoax and that vaccinations are the real problem.

"This bill advances an aggressive leftist agenda that seeks to mandate an ideology about marriage and human sexuality across the nation," the email continues. "Please take a moment right now to make your voice heard!"

In other words, "Let our nation's infrastructure continue its decline into dust to own the libs because we hate LGBTQ+ people so much."

The Republican Party is truly a death cult. Vote them out.

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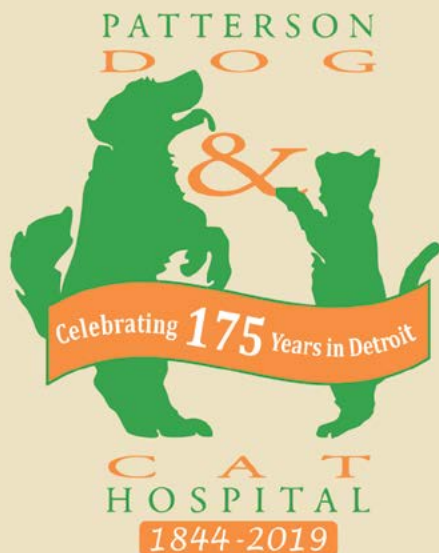


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'He Showed Me What True Love Is'

Remembering George Jonte-Crane



George Jonte-Crane (left) with his husband, Paul Jonte-Crane. Photo courtesy of Paul Jonte-Crane

BY JACKIE JONES

The LGBTQ+ community lost a local legend when George Jonte-Crane passed away after a short battle with esophageal cancer on Aug. 3 at age 72.

"We were called half the Beatles because we were George and Paul," says his husband Paul Jonte-Crane, reflecting on the life of his late husband.

"He romanced me, and I laugh about it," Paul remembers. "He has always been consistent about saying it was love at first sight for him, and we always laugh at the fact that I say it wasn't for me."

George and Paul met through a mutual friend in 1999 when they lived in Houston. George definitely took the lead.

"I had just very recently come out, so I was getting my feet into living my truth," he continues. "And the age difference was almost 13 years. I wasn't interested in dating someone older than me. So, I made him work a little hard for it. I didn't make him work very hard, though, I will admit."

For three months, the two dated casually — not committing to one another. "When we actually started dating, I was very open about

not wanting to settle down," says Paul.

George was persistent during their wooing phase, Paul says, but one particular moment sealed the deal.

"Valentine's Day came within months of dating, and that Valentine's Day started us moving onto the next step," he says. "When I opened up the door, I saw him standing there. He had a single red rose in one hand and a little teddy bear in the other hand. I had already started calling him 'teddy bear,' so that was kind of his nickname from me. Basically, that night I already knew."

A few weeks later, the couple made the commitment official, and, almost 22 years later, they were still together.

"He showed me what true love is, and he never stopped that, and that's what makes it the hardest. I've lost everything important to me," he reflects. "I've lost my best friend, I've lost my husband, I've lost the person that taught me to be."

A few years after meeting, George and Paul moved to Michigan. Paul, a Michigan native, moved back in 2000, and George followed in 2002.

See **PRISM**, page 25

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The LGBTQ+ Generational Wealth Gap Is a Serious Issue. This Is Why.

BY FINBARR TOESLAND

It's no secret that LGBTQ+ people face a range of financial challenges that heterosexual people simply don't need to contend with. Less discussed are the effects of financial discrimination on building LGBTQ+ generational wealth. The stereotypical view of a wealthy gay couple with no children and a sizable disposable income is just that — a stereotype.

In reality, the “American Dream” — buying a home, getting married, having kids, finding a good job and investing in a 401(k) — is out of reach for many LGBTQ+ people, according to a survey by TD Ameritrade. Almost two thirds (35 percent) of LGBTQ+ millennials say they are unlikely to achieve these goals by age 40, compared to fewer than half of straight millennials. The same survey found that while the average annual income for a straight household is \$79,400, the average LGBTQ+ household earns just \$66,200 a year.

LGBTQ+ people are being left out

of generational wealth for many reasons including family rejection, systematic barriers and a lack of financial education. With almost half of LGBTQ+ adults saying they have been excluded by a family member or close friend as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity, according to a study by the Pew Research Center, a lack of familial financial support is a common problem for many in the community.

This combination of unique financial barriers that LGBTQ+ people face is what has led to generational wealth gap. It's a problem that will only affect more queer people if we don't address it now.

Legacy financial exclusion

At every stage of life, it's not uncommon for LGBTQ+ people to encounter financial challenges that their heterosexual counterparts won't face. Being kicked out of their homes as teens due to unaccepting parents, not receiving

financial support from family for college, being removed from an inheritance — the financial cost of being LGBTQ+ can be substantial.

With the average inheritance reaching close to \$177,000 according to a HSBC survey and Cerulli Associates forecasting that up to \$68 trillion will trickle down to younger generations within 25 years, LGBTQ+ heirs could collectively lose trillions through inheritance exclusion.

“Even much smaller amounts could help folks pay off debt, pay off a home, send their own kids to college and help them with their own retirement. Many LGBTQ+ kids aren't getting these benefits,” explains John Auten-Schneider. Auten-Schneider is the co-owner of The Debt Free Guys blog and host of the Queer Money podcast, a leading gay money blog and podcast for the LGBTQ+ community run by him and his husband, David.

Raising a deposit for a house or apartment can be a difficult task for all people, but without financial support from family, many would not be able to fund a deposit. When David's

parents pass away, David's sister will likely be inheriting upwards of \$1,000,000. Yet, David says, he won't receive any of this money, solely because he's gay. “His parents have every right to do with their money what they want, but it's a particular disappointment that they'll do this only because he's gay. This, of course, means we need to plan differently for our retirement than his sister does,” explains John.

Just because David and John are LGBTQ+ financial experts doesn't mean they don't deal with many of the same systematic challenges that impact other members of the community. Younger LGBTQ+ people also face challenges directly related to their sexuality or gender identity.

A disproportionately high number of young people experiencing homelessness identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. According to research from the Williams Institute, between 20 percent and 45 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+.

Lacking

See **Generational Wealth**, page 22



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7 Tough Financial Questions Every Queer Couple Needs to Go Over

BY MIKEY ROX

Money can be a sensitive and stressful topic for couples to discuss, but working together on a financial plan is crucial for creating the life you both dream of. Sweeping your financial faux pas under the rug will only lead to more difficult moments and bigger fights later, so it's better to get it over with early on. No time like the present, of course, so plan a date with your partner to discuss these tough questions that are critical to your joint financial success.

1. How much debt do you owe?

Debt is often associated with shame so it's important to be positive and empathic. Begin by talking about your own dilemmas with debt so your partner doesn't feel judged. Figuring out the cause of your partner's debt can help you two avoid it in the future. Be willing to work together on a repayment plan and remember, the sooner you pay off this debt, the sooner you can work toward your shared goals. There are

apps that can help you with this, according to family finance expert Andrea Woroch.

"Apps like Debt Free allow you to track debt repayments to help you both stay motivated, while Mint and HoneyFi help you manage shared finances and bills in one place," she says. If cutting back isn't enough, take on a side hustle to boost debt payments. For instance, you can pet sit with your partner to make up to \$1,000 a month via sites like Rover.com, which is a fun way to spend time together while making some extra cash."

To avoid taking on new debt, set spending rules to avoid impulse purchases. For instance, you and your partner agree to discuss potential purchases at a predetermined dollar amount, say \$50 or \$100, depending on your budget.

2. What's your credit score?

In a society that puts so much emphasis and value on our credit scores, it's easy to feel inferior to a partner that has a high number. But just because it may be uncomfortable to talk about doesn't mean it should be disregarded altogether. In fact, you may find ways to increase it by laying it all out on the table.

"A healthy credit score is important to



reaching certain goals you may want to work toward with your partner," Woroch explains. "Poor credit health can make it more difficult and expensive to rent an apartment, buy a house or car, or even qualify for a really great travel rewards card – which can add stress to your relationship. Talking about your credit scores

may seem awkward at first but this allows you to discuss ways to improve them together."

Begin by checking your scores online via sites like Credit Karma or Credit Sesame. Next, review your credit reports together to look for

See **Financial Questions**, page 18



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How the Financial Services Industry Is Becoming More LGBTQ+ Inclusive

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Jason Porter is confident he can bring his “whole self” to work. Porter, who is gay and who has worked in the financial services industry for 15 years, said that wasn’t always the case.

Before he began working at Bank of America, Porter said he was a little reserved about bringing his “whole self” to work. “I will say, from the start of my own employment here at Bank of America, I really never had that reservation,” he said. “I never felt as if I couldn’t come and discuss things about, maybe, my husband or my family.”

Today, Porter serves as regional chair of Bank of America’s LGBT Pride Employee Network, an Employee Resource Group (ERG). ERGs are made up of groups of employees who join together in their workplace based on shared community to achieve shared workplace goals through activities like recruitment, professional development and charitable work.

The financial services industry, like other industries, has modernized. BTL spoke with several professionals to explore how and why the industry’s relationship with LGBTQ+ clients and employees has changed. We looked

at what’s specific to the financial services industry and what reflects the evolution of workplaces across the board.

Bank of America’s LGBT Pride Employee Network reflects an ongoing evolution in the financial services industry when it comes to its relationship with LGBTQ+ clients and employees. Other financial services providers, like Comerica Bank, are shining new light on issues like diversity and outreach.

LaToya Roswell, vice president and community affairs manager at Comerica, described that company’s “business resource group (BRG)” approach, which she said was started around 30 years ago. BRGs, Roswell said, are external-facing groups that do work in the community and interact with customers and prospects.

Roswell, whose work focuses on diversity and outreach, described the evolution of the various BRGs at Comerica. “[An] African American group was the first kind of foray into that,” she said, “and they saw the success of having these teams, or having that team, be kind of the face of Comerica in the African American community. Then that opened it up for LGBT, Middle Eastern, Hispanic, South Asian Indian... Asian Pacific Islander.”

See **Bank Evolution**, page 20

→ Financial Questions

Continued from p. 16

any mistakes or potential fraud. Then, look for ways to boost your scores. For instance, you can add your partner as an authorized user on your credit card or look into a credit-building loan through apps like Self, which helps you build credit while you save money at the same time.

3. How much do you make?

Your parents probably impressed upon you at a young age that it’s impolite to ask someone how much money they make, but that’s not the case with your significant other. It’s certainly not a first or second date query, but if you’ve moved into a stage where you’re planning a future together, it should be a topic of conversation. Why? For one, it can put many other conversations that you’ll have – like where you might move in together – into perspective. It also may help determine the percentage of your joint expenses each of you is expected to contribute. If one partner makes \$90,000 a year while the other is barely cracking \$35,000, it’s not necessarily feasible for each of you to go half on everything like rent and utilities – and that’s something that needs to be discussed before going all in.

4. How much do you have in savings?

This is another “mind your business” kind of question where outsiders are concerned, but partners should be privileged to this information for a couple reasons. One, it will give you a good idea of how capable your partner is (or isn’t) at building and maintaining a nest egg, and two, it will let each of you know how much surplus you have set aside to make progressive, equity-building money moves like buying a house or investing elsewhere.

You shouldn’t expect that your partner will part with his or her savings to help fund your investment plans, however. For starters, it’s money that they’ve earned, and you’re not entitled to it. Ideally, you’ll be a cohesive unit in terms of how to combine savings for the benefit of you both, but it shouldn’t be viewed as a requirement. If that’s a deal-breaker for you, you may need to rethink the relationship altogether.

5. What are your/our financial goals?

An excellent way to gauge if you’re headed in the same direction as a couple is to discuss your financial goals. Talk about what you each want to achieve in the short- and long-term with your individual or joint money. Are you interested in entrepreneurship, and will you need start-up cash? Does your partner plan to further their education? Do you want to see the world and,

as such, put all your savings into a travel fund for the time being? Is a big wedding in your future? These are all relevant goals that will require cash, but each partner not only needs to be aware of them but also allowed to have an opinion on them as far as their own finances and financial goals are concerned.

6. What are your thoughts around having kids?

For same-sex couples, especially male partners who are biologically incapable of carrying a child, the road to becoming parents can be long, hard and expensive. These obstacles are of minor consequence to those whose major life goal it is to become a parent, and they’re committed to doing whatever it takes. That in mind, the obvious first question you need to ask yourself – and then your partner – is, Do I/you/we want to have kids? If you’re both in agreement that you want to become parents, the next focus will become the method and the cost. No matter which way you plan it this will be a huge financial undertaking, both during the process – whether it be adoption, surrogacy, or another approach – and after the child arrives. Sacrifices will need to be made in your existing budget, and you both need to be prepared for that.

7. What will happen if you die?

No one wants to think or talk about death, but it can happen at anytime. Without certain legal documents or financial plans set in place, things can become very stressful, confusing and complicated for loved ones – especially in an unmarried queer relationship. A life insurance plan can cover mortgage payments and bills, funeral arrangements and possibly even pay for your kids’ college educations, all of which can ease some stress your spouse and children will be experiencing. Creating an estate plan also ensures your assets are managed and distributed to your wishes. Plus, it includes who will care for your kids or pets if something happens to either or both you and your partner.

“Setting up an estate plan and buying life insurance is easier than ever to do online these days,” Woroch explains. “For instance, TrustAndWill.com makes it easy and affordable to create an estate plan in minutes. You can create a will in 10 minutes for \$69 or a trust in 15 minutes for \$399, including step-by-step instructions and live chat support. Meanwhile, Ladder Life Insurance promises to have you set up with a plan within five minutes without having to deal with an agent or pay annual policy fees.”

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. He’s currently nomading across the country in his van, seeking queer excitement everywhere he roams. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyroxtravels.




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→ Bank Evolution

Continued from p. 18

Roswell said the growth of Comerica's LGBT BRG, founded in 2010, "showcases the level of involvement."

"It originally started with maybe five or so folks," she said. "And now, I believe we have up to 30 individuals who are part of our team."

"Our teams are really doing great," Roswell said, noting the work the LGBT BRG has done with community partners like The Ruth Ellis Center. She said the group is "surpassing the amount of business relationships that they're bringing back to the bank this year versus what they did in 2020."

"Our respect for diversity permeates everything we do," adds Jennifer Barrett, vice president and banking center manager. In addition to her role at Comerica, Barrett chairs the LGBT&A Michigan Business Resource group.

ERGs and BRGs are just two examples of how the financial services industry has grown to not merely accept but actively respond to the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. At a high level, the financial industry is taking notice of the LGBTQ+ community, with many leading financial institutions extending benefits like parental leave and certain tax benefits to their LGBTQ+ employees.

The most effective companies, according to the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Corporate Equality Index, are identified as some of the most LGBTQ+-friendly places to work, a designation that also gives insight into where companies land on political causes like the Equality Act.

Improving the way financial services professionals interact with their LGBTQ+ clients is another way companies are working on becoming more inclusive. Angelo Rea, senior vice president at Flagstar Bank, explained that employees there are educated about interacting with LGBTQ+ clients.

Rea said Flagstar's training focuses on treating LGBTQ+ clients "no differently than anyone else." "It's listening to them, understanding them and making them comfortable that our

services are available to everyone," he said.

Daylight, an exclusively online banking platform, takes a direct approach to reach the LGBTQ+ community. The company bills itself as a safe space for people's money, offering features like bank cards issued in one's preferred name, financial coaches who "get it," and the ability to virtually interact with a community of like-minded customers.

"Our community has \$1 trillion spending power in the US, and yet 53% of LGBTQ+ people struggle to maintain regular savings," the Daylight website explains. "We're done letting the system ignore us. We're building Daylight around our unique needs: different timelines, different kinds of families, different goals and different futures."

Overall, Rea said the financial services industry has become friendlier to the LGBTQ+ community. With 38 years in the industry, most of that time with Flagstar Bank, he sees the progress as the result of a cultural shift.

"Every lending or financial institution has a D and I (diversity and inclusion) program," Rea said. "So, I think it is growing. I think it's the culture that is happening around us: in the media, at work, commercials, marketing tools, television programs. It's just getting bigger and bigger and stronger."

Marriage equality likely had an impact on that progress. Rea spoke of his own experience in the human resources department at Flagstar when he got married six years ago when submitting forms to add his spouse to his insurance.

"It was the smoothest transaction," Rea recalled. "It was the smoothest processing. No multiple questions. No questions asked. It was, 'OK, this will be adding Michael to this, this, whatever, like insurance, home, health, all that. It was just very smooth and easy.'"

Rea acknowledged he did not enter into the process without some trepidation.

"At first, I was nervous about it," Rea said. "Not that I was embarrassed. I was just nervous. That people, or [the] HR

department, would talk, or people would start looking at me differently. None of that happened. It was between HR and myself, business as usual."

The financial services industry is certainly less traditional than it once was. It wasn't until 1974 that a woman could secure her own credit card without her husband's signature. Yet while progress has been made, there's plenty of room to improve.

In Rea's experience, his concerns also had to do with how he might be perceived by customers. He said he agreed "somewhat" that the financial services industry may be slower to modernize than other ones.

"I think it was the norm throughout other...companies," Rea said. "But for the financial industry, I hate to say this, but you know back then it was white shirts, black suits, stiff — you were a banker."

Although Rea said he loves working in the financial world, in the past, it was a culture of "Don't ask, don't tell."

"I had to be careful both during work, and I also had to be extremely careful who I hung out with, who my friends were, where I went," Rea said about his early career in the financial industry. "It was uncomfortable. But that was the lifestyle."

Rea's experience at Flagstar has been strikingly different. Rea had only positive things about working under CEO Sandro DiNello and the spirit of inclusion he brings to the company. "We want to be a company that you're not afraid to come to work, [where] you're comfortable and you appreciate and understand the people you work with," Rea said. "[DiNello has] been promoting that since Day One."

Going forward, Rea said his generation — the Baby Boomers — and Gen Z have a lot to learn from each other. He mentioned a recent graduate he knows who is seeking employment with a company that has a good diversity and inclusion program, based on what he sees from Flagstar.

"That's what Flagstar has been teaching us," Rea said. "To be candid. To be open. Speak out."

Improving the way financial services professionals interact with their LGBTQ+ clients is another way companies are working on becoming more inclusive.



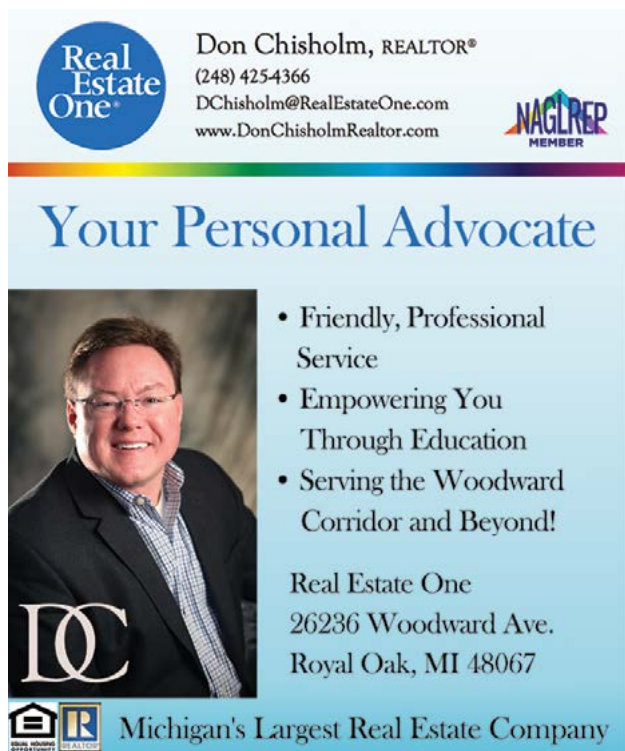
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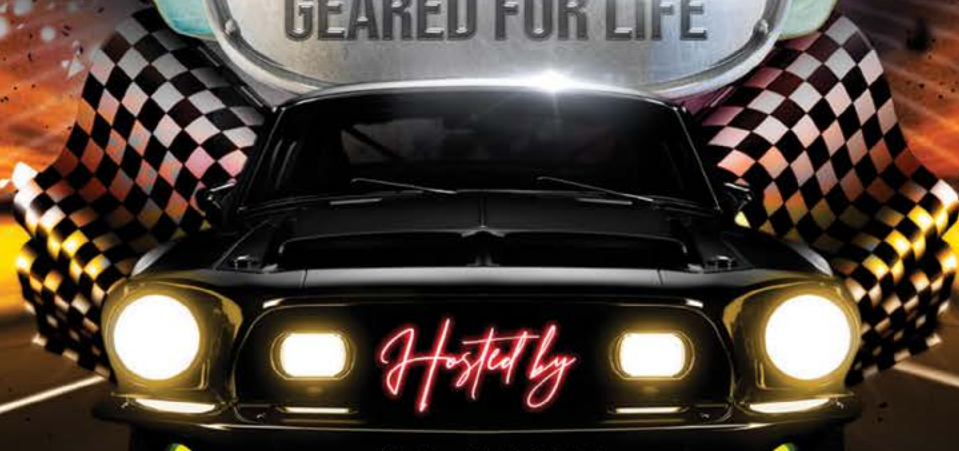
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Continued from p. 14

access to basic housing or financial support from family can set up a young person up for economic disadvantage before they even graduate from high school.

LGBTQ+ students also shoulder a larger student debt burden than their straight peers to the tune of an extra \$16,000. “This has been attributed, in part, to LGBTQ+ college students assuming more debt simply to leave hostile home lives. In some cases, parents may forgo helping their queer children in favor of helping their straight children,” explains John.

Knowledge is power

At the start of 2020, Michigan-based Lexa VanDamme was at her financial rock bottom. Stuck at work after a 70-plus hour work week with no money in her bank account, bills due the next day and a broken down car, she decided to make a change. “I realized that I needed to face my financial situation,” says VanDamme. “I dove deep into the online world of personal finance to learn about budgeting, debt payoff methods, saving and investing.”

After her crash course in finance, VanDamme refinanced her credit card debt into a lower-rate personal loan, created a workable budget and

started a side hustle to make extra income. There were a few bumps on her journey: “I actually cycled back into credit card debt three different times. I would pay it off, then eventually max it out a few months later,” says VanDamme. Still, she managed to pay off her debt by following the financial rules she had set for herself.

While trying to learn about personal finance on her own, VanDamme realized there was a need for accessible and relatable content that appealed to a wide range of people. She decided to create The Avocado Toast Budget (The ATB). Starting out as a blog just over a year ago, The ATB now counts more than 400,000 followers on Tiktok.

“For the longest time, the loudest voices in the personal finance community were cis, straight white males and, as a queer woman, I wanted to share information and tips that were often overlooked by those creators,” says VanDamme.

For many LGBTQ+ people like VanDamme, after spending so long hiding who she really was, she wanted to live as true to herself and be as free as possible. “This led to me ignoring my spending habits and being stuck in the paycheck-to-paycheck cycle. Airing my financial dirty laundry brought up similar feelings of anxiety and concern I felt when first coming out. How would people react? What would they think?” says VanDamme.

There is already a heavy stigma around

talking about personal finances, especially when you may be struggling financially. “Since queer people often spend our lives fighting for the world to accept us and our queerness, we may be less apt to talk about our financial insecurities and struggles,” says VanDamme.

Genuine representation goes beyond just diversifying the financial content creators who receive media platforms, with the advice given by these experts also needing to be fully inclusive. “Advice tended to ignore how systems of oppression affect people of color, women, the LGBTQ+ community and more. We know statistically that it’s easier for some to build wealth than others,” she adds.

VanDamme has an ongoing series on Instagram focused on the intersectional nature of many financial issues. The series helps shed some light on the economic realities that often contributes to minority community challenges. From financial inequality that disproportionately impacts disabled people to wealth inequity and racism and the cycle of poverty, VanDamme works to educate her audience on pressing topics that matter to them.

“It’s especially important to talk about the financial challenges that trans people in our community face. This includes increased reports of lower wages, limited and more expensive housing options, and twice the rate of unemployment. This heavily impacts their ability to build wealth,” she explains.

Intersectional challenges

While being LGBTQ+ can underpin unique money issues, queer people of color and queer women often experience additional difficulties around financial matters.

In addition to the financial barriers faced by LGBTQ+ people, queer people of color also face a racial wealth gap. Employment discrimination, systematic inequalities and disparities in financial education all contribute to this unequal financial playing field.

According to research from the Federal Reserve, the average white family’s wealth is eight times higher than the wealth of an average Black family. The gender pay gap also contributes to excluding women from building generational wealth, according to the latest statistics compiled by Pew Research, which show that women earned 84 percent of what men earned in 2020.

Carmen Perez, creator of Make Real Cents, a personal finance blog dedicated to helping people achieve financial independence, believes it’s important to have experts who are more representative of the people they’re speaking to. “I heard a quote a while ago: ‘You can’t be what you can’t see.’ I think that’s really important because eventually, if you don’t have a model

See **Generational Wealth**, page 25

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A photograph of Ben Platt in a dynamic, mid-air pose, wearing a black tank top and light blue denim jeans with rips at the knees. He has his arms raised and a focused expression. The background is a solid, deep red color.

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→ PRISM

Continued from p. 13

George, who held a degree in organ, piano and choral conducting from the University of Texas, was heavily involved in churches and their choirs in both Texas and Michigan. Before his passing, he was active in First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor, Temple Emanu-El and First United Methodist Church of Troy, where he played piano and directed choir.

Both Paul and George had a love for music, and it was this love that persuaded them to join PRISM Men's Chorus.

"We heard about PRISM on the day of their concert," Paul says. "We wanted to participate in something important, and an all-male chorus was important to us. So, George contacted the chorus and we started going to rehearsal [in the second season]. We sang in the second concert, and we've been singing there ever since. We've come to love all those guys."

According to Brad Foucher, PRISM's vice-chairman, the feelings are mutual.

"George and Paul were the epitome of the couple you want to see," says Foucher. "They

were great together."

Foucher is more than a PRISM member; he is a longtime friend of the couple. He even created a GoFundMe page to help Paul with any expenses after George's passing.

"They were genuine towards each other," he says. "They were supportive of each other, too. I wrote in the GoFundMe, 'George loved music as much as he loved Paul.'"

A true Michigan power couple, George and Paul also inspired those within the LGBTQ+ community without a positive gay influence in their lives.

"The Jonte-Cranes showed us we can be together for a long time, be madly in love with each other and be happy," reflects Ian Jazefowicz, PRISM member and friend. "There are some of us who are younger, who may not have had the best upbringing with regards to the LGBTQ community, so seeing this really perfect couple was very comforting to me."

While George's loss is felt throughout our community, Paul says he will go on, comforted by memories of his time with George: "Like any relationship, you have your ups and downs, but our ups were so much more."

→ Generational Wealth

Continued from p. 22

to follow, either you have to be the first, or it's never going to happen," she says.

As a woman of color and a lesbian, Perez knows firsthand how important it is to address the absence of representation in financial education. "It's definitely one of the things we have to step back and look at in the LGBT community," says Perez. "There's a compounding effect because not only am I part of the LGBT community as a lesbian, but I'm also a minority, and I'm also a woman, and there's a lot of hurdles up against a lot of folks in this space," she adds.

With more than 60,000 people following her Make Real Cents account, Perez is playing a part in democratizing access to finance. There, she does everything from break down the cost of credit to explain 401(k) company matches with easy-to-read graphics and Insta stories. Her methods are a world away from the complexity of some traditional financial advisors and tools.

"Millennials are starting to change the money game because we're delivering advice in a way that isn't super technical. It can be so overwhelming to watch CNBC with all these screens and tickers that don't mean anything to you personally," says Perez.

Increased representation in the finance space means a light can be shone on vital issues, resulting in deeper conversations that make money less taboo. "We're finding instances where historically people who have been locked out of the finance industry, by design, are speaking up. Unlike some traditional financial advisors that

give out all this jargon and talk in all these terms that many may not understand," says Perez.

Future generations

Despite the long-standing barriers facing LGBTQ+ people in gaining access to financial education and financial services, LGBTQ+ personal finance content creators now offer a way for many to improve their financial literacy in more convenient ways than ever before. While investing early and regularly is one of the most effective ways to secure a financially comfortable retirement, it's never too late to build wealth and support for the next generation of LGBTQ+ people.

"[You can] create legacy wealth within the LGBTQ+ community by setting up your estate plan to donate to LGBTQ+ causes that will help homeless youth and [by] giving to local, younger LGBTQ+ folks you know personally," adds John.

Negotiating the LGBTQ+ generational wealth gap is no small feat. But continuing the discussion around both financial literacy and taking steps to combat systematic financial issues can go a long way to address the financial challenges impacting the LGBTQ+ community.

"The stronger we are as LGBTQ+ individuals and allies, including our financial strength, the stronger we are as a community," concludes John.

Finbarr Toesland is an award-winning journalist committed to illuminating vital LGBTQ+ stories and underreported issues. His journalism has been published by NBC News, BBC, Reuters, VICE, HuffPost, and The Telegraph.

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Udo Kier portrays a gay Ohio hairstylist named Mr. Pat in his first lead role during his 50-year career. Photo: Magnolia Pictures

An Aging Queen Gets His Swan Song

Hollywood Icon Udo Kier, With Co-Star Michael Urie, on Queer Generations Coming Together

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

German character actor Udo Kier is on camera holding old prints of press photos from his previous films over his face like a Halloween mask. He jokes that if a journalist dare ask a terrible question that he considers daft, the photos, not Kier himself, will answer back. Luckily those prints never made their way back onto camera during our conversation, which also included his “Swan Song” co-star Michael Urie.

“Swan Song,” the new film from openly gay “Edge of Seventeen” director Todd Stephens (“Another Gay Movie,” “Another Gay Movie

2: Gays Gone Wild”), wouldn’t be the film it is without Kier’s brilliant performance at the heart of it. He’s a leading man for the first time, rightly earning him some of the biggest buzz of his 50-year career. But there’s no question the film’s bittersweet coda, a scene that serves as an elegiac tribute that Kier shares with Urie (“Ugly Betty”), is something special in its own right. Poignantly, it honors older generations of unapologetically queer elders who enriched the lives of younger LGBTQ+ populations, demonstrating that, without them, queer life now wouldn’t be the same.

Though Kier, also openly gay, has appeared in more than 220 films over the span of five

decades (among them: almost all of Lars von Trier’s films, as well as Dario Argento’s “Suspiria” and Gus Van Sant’s “My Own Private Idaho”), he’s never played a character as proudly gay as Pat Pitsenberger, a legendary Ohio hairstylist known as the “Liberace of Sandusky.” Women loved Mr. Pat, as he’s called, for making them look, and consequently feel, beautiful.

Now in his advanced years and living in a nursing home, retired from doing hair, he’s more than earned the right to be a bitter old queen. Mr. Pat survived the AIDS epidemic, lost friends, was at the forefront of gay liberation. In this new gay world, he’s an outsider all over again, his glory days behind him. But when one of his former

clients dies and he’s asked to do her hair, he has an opportunity to reclaim the history that made him who he is.

Kier, speaking from Los Angeles, and Urie, at home in New York, recently chatted about shooting their powerful scene, what attracted them to the film and the legacies they hope to leave behind.

What made you agree to do this project?

Udo Kier: For me, I got the script and I liked it. I said, “I want to meet Todd, because I want to see if I can work with him.” If I wouldn’t have liked him, I wouldn’t have made the film. But I liked him.

He came to Palm Springs, and we talked about it. His script was very strong. And I wanted to shoot as chronologically as we could. I wanted to start in the retirement home, which we did. I stayed there a single day on my own with no camera, because I wanted to feel the bed, I wanted to see where everything was. And then we went into town.

For me, the importance (of) this film is the different generation — my generation — and going back (to Ohio), and people don't recognize me anymore. You see, I'm from Germany, and in Germany ... if two men lived together, and the neighbors were hearing some erotic noises, they could call the police and the people were arrested and put in jail. Now they're holding hands at Applebee's.

So I think it's so, so wonderful (that) in (a) relatively short time, two men or two women can get married and adopt children. It's amazing. It's amazing that, after 50 years in the business working with genius directors like Lars von Trier and Gus Van Sant, the critics now write that it is my best film.

Michael Urie: It was Udo from the beginning. When I was offered the job, he was already on board. That was very exciting to me, 'cause I've been a longtime fan of both the filmmaker, Todd, and Udo. But it's this quiet observation that we as queer people have when we're younger. Most queer people do not grow up in households with other queer people, and so we look elsewhere to find ourselves to see what we could be.

Michael, your character Dustin acknowledges that Pat, even though they had never met, made it easier for him to be openly gay. Who are the queer people you never personally knew who paved the way for you to be openly gay?

Urie: I'm from Texas, and I grew up in a suburb of Dallas called Plano, Texas. I was in drama in high school, and I was reading great queer literature and (there was) theater: "Angels in America" and Terrence McNally plays. I was exposed to this stuff, and I was aware of it and titillated by it. But there was a guy in my high school who was tall, strapping, extremely well dressed, very attractive, and pretty obviously gay. When I picture him in my head, he's 30, even though he was, of course, 17 at the time. I looked to him and his strength and his power and his beauty. He was, in many ways, my Mr. Pat. I still think back on him. I still think about how awesome he was.

As gay men, do either of you see parts of yourself reflected in Pat?

Kier: I think, first of all, Michael, you did amazing, good work. (Our) scene on the couch works so well because I don't move one inch. If I would have had a conversation, that would have been not good. But just having the cigarettes with the ashes, and listening, listening, listening made it stronger than if I would have answered you.

I'm more like an actor who likes to underplay (the character). That's why, also, I never rehearsed with Todd, because Todd is a

director who likes to rehearse. I learned from Lars von Trier, (whose) favorite line is, "Don't act." I always think about, especially if you're in a movie like "Swan Song," when you have a strong story, a strong situation, which is funny at times, and sad at times, there's no need to do acting numbers. A lot of actors, they'll start with their back to the camera, by the chimney, and then they'll turn around and they'll talk to the floor, and finally they'll come up to the camera. No, no, no, no.

Yesterday I saw 20 minutes (of "Swan Song"), and today I will see the whole film at Outfest, and it's a strong film. I hope a lot of people will see it. I showed it before to a few friends. Not many. I don't have many friends. But I showed it to a few friends, and they all said, "Oh, I cried and cried. And I laughed." So that is good. If you're able to tell a story where people laugh and cry, that's good.

It's amazing how many really young people liked the movie. You know, I was afraid that (they'd say), "There's an old man." But it's not true. There were young, young people. And one girl, yesterday, said to Todd, "This is one of my favorite films ever." And I said, "Wow. Maybe she only goes once a year to the cinema."

I got choked up throughout the movie thinking a lot about my older self and what I might be like when I'm Pat's age, how I might look back on my life. Do you feel like you share something in common with Pat when it comes to being gay and aging?

Kier: That's why I accepted the role. Todd told me a lot about Pat and when I got there (to Sandusky) I talked to Pat's friends and (they) told me how he was smoking and things like that. It's definitely the generation, and we're very lucky that in Sandusky, the main street became our set. So in that green suit, I went to have a glass of chardonnay, and they all know me. There was the secondhand store and across the street was the theater, so it became all real. It was not a film where you have trailers. No, no, no, no. It was a real film. It was all from my heart. It wasn't calculated. I never in the whole film calculated a situation. When I come out and say, "I'm back!," that was a copy of Liberace. Because when Liberace was performing in Las Vegas, he ran through the stage with all (his) rings and said, "You paid for them."

Because this movie says a lot about the legacies we leave behind, how do both of you hope others will remember you?

Kier: Well, in my case, because Mike is so much younger, doing it for 50 years, being Andy Warhol's Dracula, Andy Warhol's Frankenstein, people will, I guess, remember me (for those roles). But, for me, it's really amazing that Variety and all the critics write that ("Swan Song" is) my best film. I feel a little bit strange about that. Making so many films with great directors, like "My Own Private Idaho" with Gus, and now they write it's my best film. I know why. You know why? Because I have the leading part, and you follow the character. If you

See *Swan Song*, page 28



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Michael Urie and Udo Kier star in "Swan Song." Photo: Magnolia Pictures

→ Swan Song

Continued from p. 27

have a guest part in a film, people say, "He's very good. He's a good villain, yeah, yeah, yeah." But they cannot follow you through the story, from folding napkins to wearing wonderful shoes when he's dead (laughs).

Urie: I guess I want my legacy to be: "He was part of cool things. And he was always himself." I've been in a lot of queer movies and queer theater and —

Kier: Strange movies.

Urie: (Laughs.) I've been in a lot of strange movies. And there was a point when I was first on TV and, and I was playing a very flamboyant gay character and I was told, "Don't do this again. Don't do any more of these. Don't get

pigeonholed." And I thought, "There's so many different kinds of gay people." And I do play gay parts all the time, and they are different. We have so many different ways of being LGBTQ, and there are so many stories to tell.

I'm so proud to be part of this one, which I saw with a group at the Rooftop Film Festival in Brooklyn (with) a group of predominantly heterosexual people who loved it. That is a really exciting thing, too, to be a part of a movie that you would maybe call a gay movie because the protagonist is gay and the central conflict has to do with his homosexuality, but this is a straight person's gay movie. Straight people love it. I think that's a testament to Udo and a performance at the center that can compel and delight and break your heart. It's a piece of life, watching it. And working on it felt like walking into the movie.

As Udo said, we took over that town — or they took over that town, and I showed up. I

showed up at a certain point in the shoot and I felt like I was walking into a movie — not onto a film set, but into a movie. There he was in his green suit, and we didn't talk much before we started shooting. He wanted our first interaction to be our first interaction. I'm used to going on stage and making people laugh, and here I am in this movie, reacting to a person. This is a guy walking into my space, and it was actually very easy because he was bringing so much over to me.

Michael, what do you think this film says about aging, in particular regarding the queer demographic?

Urie: That's very interesting because now the way queer people navigate the world — marriage, parenting — there is a more traditional society-based way of getting older. An older person gets taken care of (by) family and loved ones. But I think all of us as queer people, we're not going

"As Udo said, we took over that town — or they took over that town, and I showed up. I showed up at a certain point in the shoot and I felt like I was walking into a movie — not onto a film set, but into a movie."

to have a life that society deems as normal. That is one of the things that we fear: that we will grow old alone or have no one to take care of us. Certainly it's a fear that I have and I think about.

But what's so beautiful about Mr. Pat and the way in which I relate to Mr. Pat is that, even though now it's 2021 and queer people are accepted — I can walk down the street holding hands with my partner and I don't feel any shame anymore or any danger, and I actually feel proud to do that; we're legal, we're allowed to marry, we're allowed to have kids, we have full protections under the law, for the most part, I can blend in, I can assimilate — I don't want to.

I think that is something that the older generation, when marriage equality became a thing and when people started getting married, thought, "Why would we need that? We've been fine without that. We don't wanna be like straight people; we don't wanna get married." It's two different things. It's the right to be married, versus the need to be married. Also, I'm proud of who I am, and I'm proud to be different, and I don't need to assimilate. I can be someone else. I think that I want to always have a little bit of Mr. Pat. I don't wanna walk down the street and have people think, "That's a straight person."

Kier: (Laughs.) You have to get a green suit! Get a green suit and just smoke like (him).

Yesterday I looked up, because I hear (it) now so many times, the word "queer." I wanted to look in the dictionary (to see) what it means. And queer means, actually, strange. If you go on the dictionary, it says queer means strange. Um, (I) definitely did a strange performance. (Laughs.)

So you might call your performance queer?

Kier: Not me. It's just a performance. It's not my Swan Song, I have made already four films after that. And so it's not my swan song. That was the danger of it: I thought, "Oh my god, Swan Song. I'm 77 years old soon, so is that maybe my last movie?" No, no, no. I had to go to Lars von Trier and quickly make a movie. And that'll be my swan song.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

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Candace Nguyen works at Fenway Health in Boston as a clinical coordinator for STI and HIV prevention clinics. Photo: Taylor Blackley

→ Trans Healthcare

Continued from p. 8

body that I am,” Nguyen says.

The process of transitioning looks different for everyone. Regardless of whether people have surgery, they are not defined by the form their body takes.

“Whether or not folks medically transition, our spirit and our character stays the same,” she says.

Now that she’s seeing results from her hormone therapy, she feels like she’s living for herself: “I’m finally like what I’ve always wanted to be, and I definitely feel much happier and more confident.”

Nguyen’s colleagues in the behavioral health department are mental-health experts, many of whom are themselves intimately familiar with the experience of navigating the world as a person who is gender-nonconforming. For many providers, the pain of the past year hit close to home.

“There’s been a really drastic impact by the start of the pandemic on lots of folks who are trans and nonconforming,” says Annie Crossman, an outpatient psychotherapist.

Crossman has noted an extreme increase in their patients’ anxiety and depression over the past year, with more people seeking help for their mental health and experiencing symptoms of mental illness.

Crossman, 28, provides mental health counseling at Fenway Health. They have been working from home over the past year in an apartment they share with their

partner in Brookline, Massachusetts. Many of the people Crossman works with are from populations marginalized based on their racial, socioeconomic, ability and HIV/AIDS status, among other factors.

Crossman largely attributes the abundance of patients seeking treatment to social isolation and the postponement of gender-affirming treatments.

“A lot of folks have been staring at the calendar for quite some time and no longer have access... it gave a lot of people hope to have those surgeries scheduled,” says Crossman. She worried about the trans people who have already been waiting years to receive treatment, and hoped the additional pandemic-related delays would not dissuade people from continuing their medical transition.

For Bates, this hardship was nothing new. She had been waiting for her place in the operating room for close to five decades. “There’s just constantly one delay after another, after another, after another. It starts to feel like I’m just beating my head against the wall and this is never going to happen,” she says.

She spent nearly a decade in court to secure

her rights to transition-related medical care. Represented by lawyers from the New England-based GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders, she appealed against her insurance, MassHealth, and its decision not to cover her transition-related care. This happened three times.

At every turn, there seemed to be another obstruction.

“Just trying to figure out all of it, getting all of these details to work, it was totally maddening,”

says Bates. Finally, in 2014, she had the coverage she needed after former Gov. Deval Patrick directed MassHealth to provide coverage for hormone therapy and gender-affirmation surgery.

Before COVID-19 shut everything down, Bates had an appointment with

Dr. Branko Bojovic at Massachusetts General Hospital to schedule the first in a series of several facial-feminization surgeries. Her desired result after plastic surgery is a softer, more traditionally feminine appearance. This process is a huge undertaking, and in her case will include breaking, recontouring and reconstructing several parts of her skull.

“This is not about me expressing my gender how I want to,” says Bates. “This is about me

being stuck in this thing that I was born into that was never, ever, ever fun and something that I would never, ever, ever, ever wish on anybody else.”

This procedure, while still considered plastic surgery, is not cosmetic. It has the potential to profoundly impact her life. Ideally, patients and their providers work together to select the best treatment options.

“They’re not something that is emergent, but I do think of them as procedures that are urgent for many people and lifesaving for many people,” says Dr. Robert Goldstein, the medical director of the transgender health program at Massachusetts General Hospital.

According to Goldstein, many patients experience a delay in finding the care they desire before coming to his clinic. These delays can range from a year or two up to 20 or 30 years. They can result from relatively minor administrative errors, like paperwork going back and forth between insurance and providers. In other cases, they are the effect of the patient experiencing discrimination as they sought treatment.

Once a patient has initiated the process, depending on the surgery that person wants, the first opening could be six months, a year or even two years away.

“These are surgeries that are highly desired, and unfortunately, there’s only so much space in the operating room on any given day,” says Goldstein.

On March 25, Bates underwent a frontal sinus setback, the first in a series of about five facial-feminization surgeries she plans to have done at Massachusetts General Hospital. Her recovery is going better and quicker than she could have hoped. “I only felt really bad for a couple of days [after] this past surgery,” Bates says. “I’ve had years of torture, and that’s way worse.”

On April 16, Bates returned to have the stitches removed, and was already feeling more healing than discomfort. The changes are subtle, but for Bates, the transformation is profound.

“I really feel whole,” she says. “I feel my forehead. I can feel what he did. And it’s just so much softer and rounder and it just feels really good. I feel like I’m coming home.”

A thin pink scar that traces the edge of her hairline, the faint memory of the surgeon’s blade, is already fading. Even though there are a multitude of incisions still planned, more bones to be shaved and more flesh to be surgically altered in order to achieve her desired result, Bates has reason to hope that the most painful part of the process — waiting to live authentically, waiting to feel comfortable in her own body, waiting to receive healthcare that is gender-affirming — is nearly over.

“I still got a whole bunch more surgeries to go, but the goal is about to get reached,” says Bates. “There’s been all these other delays along the way, and I’m still working, chipping away at some of this mountain that’s still left. But, you know, I can see that there’s sunlight up there.”

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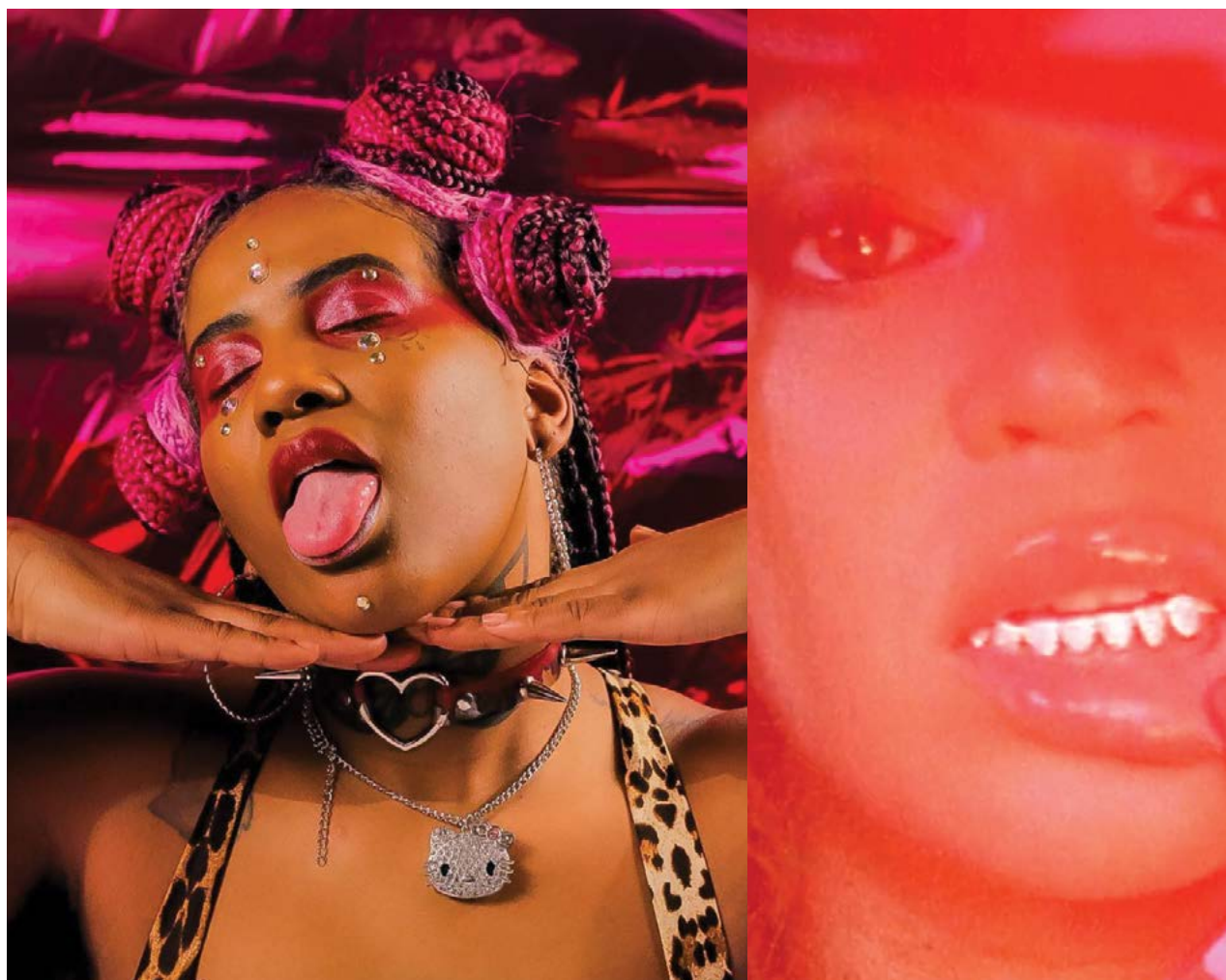


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Music by Detroit rapper Milfie (left) is featured in the latest ad from Beyoncé's high-end athleisure brand, Ivy Park Rodeo. Milfie photo: Instagram

Bisexual Detroit Rapper Milfie Is Shook After Hearing Her Voice In a New Beyoncé Ad

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Most people will never hear their own voice when watching an ad for Beyoncé's own clothing line. But most people are not Milfie, a self-described "bad bitch" whose music is featured in the newly released trailer for the latest drop from Bey's high-end athleisure brand, Ivy Park Rodeo.

On Aug. 6, Milfie, who is bisexual, took to Twitter to make the announcement. And, honestly, if we were her, we'd be this excited too.

"MY VOCALS ARE ON THE NEW @WeAreIvyPark COMMERCIAL!!!!!! WHAT THE FUCK," she writes, followed by four crying face emojis. "I'm so out done!!!!!!!!!! WHAT!!!!!"

The ad is literally fire, as Milfie's voice is heard over a clip of Bey strutting in a butt-baring one-piece. Flames surround her, and then the camera moves in close to her face as she sensually pulls her bottom lip down.

Responses on Twitter were

congratulatory, with many people saying they were happy but not surprised, an indication that Milfie, while not yet a household name, has fierce fan support, especially in Detroit.

"Bitch you MADE IT," reads one response. "I know that's the fuck right congratulations!" reads another.

Milfie has been rapping "publicly" since 2015, according to RollingOut.com, and says that Bey is a big influence: "My biggest forms of influence are Trina and Beyoncé. I feel like I'm a mix between the two, and they're packed into my tiny body." Speaking of her body, she's got "Bad Bitchery" tattooed across her chest. And this is definitely a "bad bitch" moment.

"To be a bad bitch, you can't question if you are a bad bitch; you just know," she told Metro Times in 2019. "It doesn't matter where you are, you have to be a bad bitch."

Milfie's lyrics reflect this attitude. In the song "Candy" from 2020's "Milfie's House of Horrors" she raps about her sexual prowess and tripping on LSD. "You

are not a factor, bitch, I'm badder, pussy fatter, with a ladder you can not reach my plateau," she raps. Then later, "I put that candy on my tongue, baby girl, it's LSD, moving pictures, quoting scriptures, and bringing men to their knees."

Since 2015, the Detroit rapper has collaborated with a number of artists and producers including Supercoolwicked, Oba Rowland, Evol, The Monalyse, PRISM and Whyandotte.

Two years ago she told Grungecake, "I am Milfie. I am a mother. I am a very real, very bad bitch from the westside of Detroit, Michigan. I am the Ghettech princess of Detroit, and I am going to soon take over the world. Quote me."

Obviously, Milfie's newfound association with Beyoncé and the icon's exclusive Adidas X Ivy Park line, which makes "inclusive styles for every body," definitely brings Milfie closer to world domination.

You can find Milfie on Instagram and Twitter @milfiebitch and on Soundcloud.

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Ypsilanti Native Puts the T in ‘The L Word: Generation Q’

Leo Sheng Auditioned for the Series From His Michigan Home

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Representation matters. And since media representation has a long reach, it matters a whole lot. Leo Sheng knows this all too well, which is why his role playing Micah Lee on “The L Word: Generation Q” is such a big deal. It isn't every day that shows include an Asian trans man as an important part of the storyline.

Emphasizing visibility, Sheng often wears a pink and blue striped button that says “I'm Still Fucking Here.”

“It's a quote from Miss Major, trans pioneer,” Sheng tells *Between The Lines* over Zoom.

In a 2018 interview, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, who has been advocating for trans rights for over four decades, told *Them.us*, “It's not that we believe we're this or that. We know that's who we are. When the dust settles, I want my trans girls and guys to stand up and say, ‘I'm still fucking here!’”

Sheng says that he is conscious about when he wears the button. “I wanted to wear it when there would be a lot of press,” he says. “As I'm starting my career and forging my own path, it feels very important to me to be intentional about my presence in public.” Sheng hopes that wearing the pin will start conversations that, hopefully, lead to learning.

Sheng, who grew up in Ypsilanti but now lives in Los Angeles, is the adopted son of two moms, both social workers, who still live in Michigan. “I wish they were closer physically,” he says.

“You can imagine dinner table conversations in middle school, which were very deep, very intense,” Sheng says of having social worker moms. Often, they would discuss something someone said to him at school, a weird experience he had or “my parents explaining the importance of providing support as a peer and what it was to show up as a friend.”

Sheng's gender identity started to become clear to him around the age of 8. One of his first physical gestures toward his gender identity was a haircut. “I chopped my hair in first grade. It was a big chop,” he says. He adds, laughing, “It

wasn't quite a bowl cut but it was pretty round.”

While he has always had support from his moms, affirming his gender identity wasn't without challenges.

“People will likely assume that, having two moms, they were automatically on board but... there was still an element of challenge and uncertainty for them,” he says. “For any parent there's going to be a moment when you have to recalibrate.”

In addition to his moms, Sheng says his support system also includes close friends from high school and college and his “incredible housemates.”

“I'm also slowly building more community here in L.A. I've only been here a couple of years and then the pandemic hit,” he says, adding that “it's there and it's growing.”

Sheng's introduction to transgender people was, in fact, the original series of “The L Word” in the form of Max Sweeney, a trans man played by Daniela Sea, a non-binary actor.

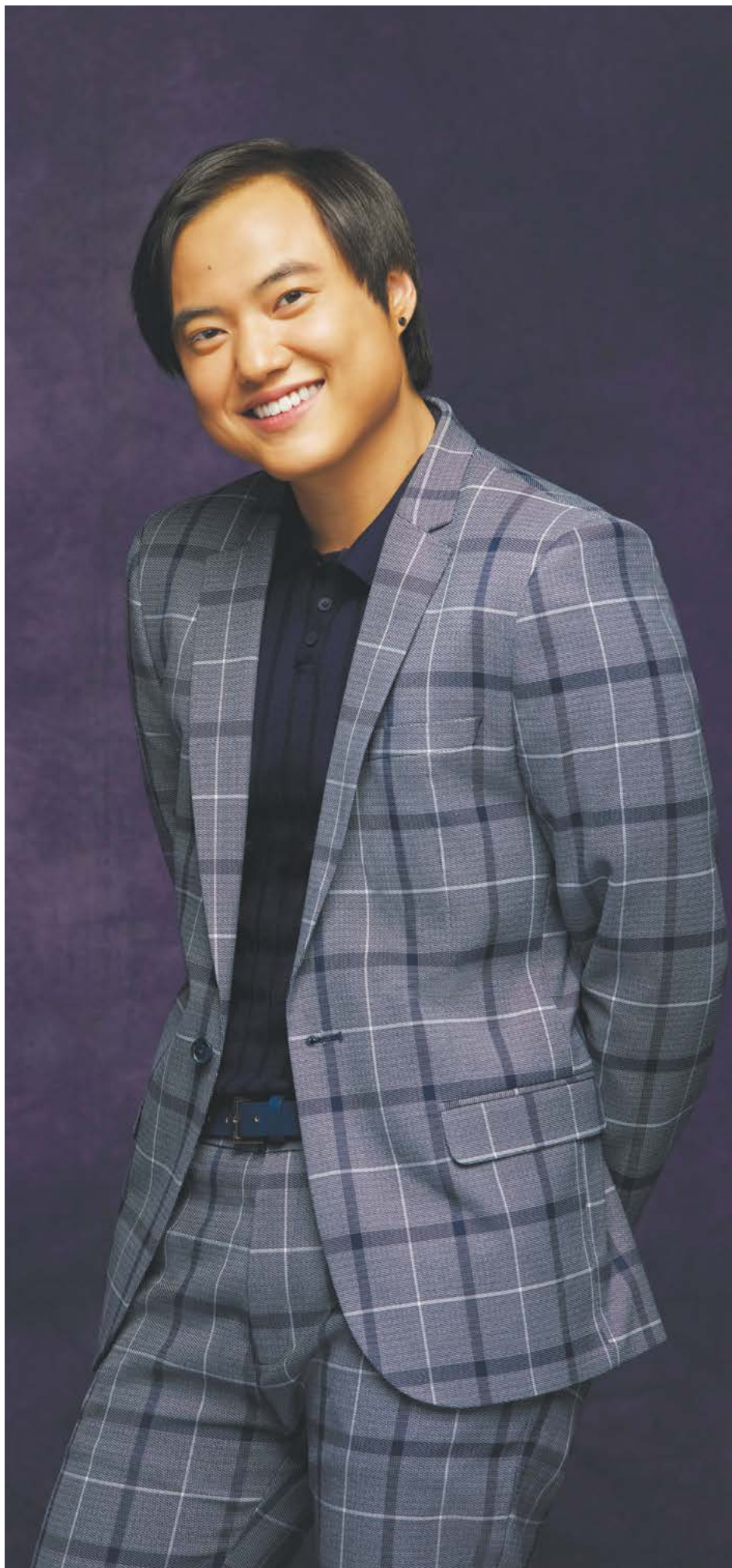
“For a lot of trans guys, myself included, it was the first time I encountered a trans man in my life, ever. I didn't know that trans guys existed.”

He describes being cast to play Micah Lee in “The L Word: Generation Q” as a “full circle moment.”

It was all the result of “just kind of good timing,” he says. Sheng was in grad school, following in his moms' footsteps studying social work, when he did an independent film called “Adam” that was part of Sundance in 2019. It was at Sundance that he met his manager, who soon after sent him the character breakdown for Micah. “They were explicitly looking for an Asian trans guy and in my very limited knowledge I knew that wasn't a common character to be sought out,” he says.

“I auditioned from Michigan,” Sheng recalls. “And flew out to LA for a screen test and a chem read with Ari [Mandi] who plays Dani.”

If you've seen the show, then you know that the chemistry between Sheng and Mandi is evident in the relationship between their characters, Micah and Dani.



Ypsi native Leo Sheng stars in “The L Word: Generation Q.” Photos: Showtime



Micah is, according to Sheng, “Not super emotionally connected to romantic relationships.”

“He doesn’t do dating, he does hookups,” Sheng says. “If he had a slogan, it would be, ‘Sex is easy; breakfast is hard.’”

But it isn’t all about sex.

“What I love about Micah [is] we get to see a journey of identity,” Sheng says. “I love that we get to go on this ride of queerness with him. To be a young trans person who is also Asian, I know that I’m young enough to really figure out life, and the thing with Micah is that he’s young and he’s figuring out his life.”

Sheng looks forward to what’s ahead for Micah. “There’s so much

I don’t know about him and so much I’m learning,” he says. “I want to see more of him in his element and in his body and in his spirit.”

Looking back at the original run of “The L Word,” the series faced criticism for its lack of diversity in its cast, particularly the lack of trans and gender non-binary characters. “Generation Q” is consciously more inclusive.

Sheng says there is value in bringing unrepresented voices into the process.

“There is a lot of power in having trans folks be in the writers’ room and have a hand in

creating those characters,” he says. “That’s a big piece of what’s different [from the original series].”

Sheng notes that hiring trans writers and actors results in more authentic representation. “There’s a level of understanding that I think

trans people can bring to stories about us which is otherwise posturing or guessing,” Sheng says. “When it comes from someone who has actually lived it, there is a level of authenticity there.”

Overall, the feedback Sheng has received about his role has been positive. “The majority of the messages are from other trans folks or family and friends of those trans folks who are extremely grateful that these stories exist and [that they] get to see these stories on screen.”

That said, there are a lot of negative portrayals of transgender people in the media, as well, and it takes courage and strength for transgender people to transcend the negativity. Sheng says he is “in awe of” the resilience of transgender people, while also acknowledging “the exhaustion of fighting.”

“One thing we have to be proud of, and [that] I am amazed about,” he says, “is the resilience and the ability to keep existing in this world.”

“There’s a level of understanding that I think trans people can bring to stories about us... When it comes from someone who has actually lived it, there is a level of authenticity there.”

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On the New 'L Word,' Everybody's Invited to the Party

"L Word" stars and executive producers Leisha Hailey, Jennifer Beals and Kate Moennig. Photo: Showtime

Series Vets Hailey, Moennig and Beals Talk Spotlighting a New LGBTQ+ Generation

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

What did the first run of "The L Word" get wrong? It's a question that was posed to veteran stars Jennifer Beals, Leisha Hailey and Kate Moennig on Zoom one recent afternoon.

"Haircuts!" Hailey, 50, exclaims. "First season

outfits, sunglasses," adds Moennig, 43.

Of course Hailey can't deny it: "There were some *bad* sunglasses," she emphasizes.

But the actresses who helped revolutionize queer characters on TV with "The L Word" when the show first aired on Showtime from 2004 to 2009 are also fully aware that the shades, the cuts and the outfits aren't the only

thing that hasn't aged particularly well. The series, for as groundbreaking as it was then, has been criticized for missing the mark on trans representation. It's hard to ignore that fact retroactively in the years following the show, as trans issues are finally at the forefront of our cultural and political landscape.

"We were where we were when we were

there," Hailey says, noting this is a common response of hers when asked about the passé parts of the show's initial run, something she seems to be asked about often. "It's so easy to be the Monday morning quarterback at this point. The show is dated stylistically, but thematically I think it still holds up."

Moennig isn't reticent about holding the show



accountable for “storylines that are considered problematic now.” “There’s no denying that,” she says. “But at that time, no one was there to hurt anyone’s feelings or disparage anyone. That’s what we knew then.”

As the tide keeps turning for LGBTQ+ progress in this country, so does content that reflects those shifts. Between the original series and the 10 years that passed before the reboot premiered on Showtime in 2019, Hailey, Moennig and Beals saw an opportunity: to feature a young, diverse cast of LGBTQ+ characters who could reflect contemporary queer life, along with delving into modern love dynamics like polyamory.

Though the three actresses aren’t writing the episodes, they’re still doing their due diligence. “We need to make sure that our show is relevant,” says Hailey, who adds that during the decade the show was off the air “the world was changing before our eyes.”

She says they felt not only a “responsibility to bring these characters back to show how they’re living in today’s world, but also: ‘Let’s bring on some new characters to represent people in the community.’”

Seeing as though they’ve “completely changed language,” Beals, 57, was thrilled to spotlight a new LGBTQ+ generation. “They’ve added words to the dictionary — non-binary used to be just a mathematical term,” she says. “We look at language in a different way (because) of this generation who refused to be anything other than self-identified. So to be able to bring the show back on and explore those stories is really important and exciting to me.”

At the onset of “Generation Q,” Beals, who plays Bette, expressed what subject matter she wanted to see represented in the series. One of those issues was race, especially colorism, in the LGBTQ+ community. Aging, which was also on her mind, was a topic she brought to the writers’ room. Her suggestion led to an exploration of Bette’s menopausal experiences in Season 1 of “Generation Q.”

“For me, the show in itself is doing a lot

of that work when it comes to personally my character,” Hailey says. “I want to go into personal stories and I feel like through that kind of representation, just being a gay woman and showing what we go through, is doing that work. It’s not always about getting on the soapbox — it’s about the subtleties of what we do.”

Moennig’s on the same page. She feels the show, by its very queer nature, is innately political, and always on her mind while filming is: “How do I make this as honest as possible?”

“It’s the little things that actually seem to provide a lot of impact,” she adds.

Moennig recognizes that, from the beginning, the show was always meant to be a “celebration, not a woe-is-me fest.”

It still is, she says.

Beals wholeheartedly agrees: “It’s primarily centered in joy and the smaller moments, and I think in that way it’s been really forward-moving.”

In Season 1, Alice (Hailey) navigates a throuple, Shane (Moennig) opens a queer bar, and Bette (Beals) is co-parenting Angie (Jordan Hull) with ex Tina (Laurel Holloman). Season 2 finds Bette more deeply exploring her mother-daughter relationship with Angie, while Alice writes a book that brings buried personal issues to the surface, things she hasn’t quite figured out yet — “a lot of stuff you would think she might’ve at her age,” Hailey says, laughing. And what’s going on with Shane? Moennig says to expect “a very, very slow burn where you’re going to have to watch a good majority of the season to get any kind of answer.”

As for bringing Alice, Bette and Shane together with the cast of the upcoming “Queer as Folk” reboot — well, it’s not an impossible idea. “That would be amazing!” Beals says. “Boy, would that be cool,” Hailey adds. “That’d be fun.”

And Beals, enthused by these two queer universes colliding, knows just the person to unite these iconic casts: “I know Alice is going to host a party and everybody’s going to be there.”



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Murray Bartlett and co-star Lukas Gage in HBO's "White Lotus." Photo: HBO

Another Rotten Week in Paradise With 'The White Lotus'

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

We watched "The White Lotus." You watched "The White Lotus." All queers watched "The White Lotus." (Note: we realize this is false, but we're trying to make it a thing.) And now "The White Lotus," queer writer-director Mike White's deliriously entertaining/agonizingly uncomfortable comedy-drama-kinda-sorta-death-mystery that's full of queer-adjacent and wickedness-adjacent college kids and surprising gay reveals and Jennifer Coolidge and the kind of on-screen sex that makes homophobes upset, is getting another season at HBO. Obviously, the cast isn't coming back to the same hotel for another week of terrible experiences. Rather, it will be a new cast of unhappy vacationers at a different hotel in the White Lotus family of all-inclusive luxury resorts. But with the success of this season, you can absolutely count on White's trademark scalpel-precise evisceration of human badness, and almost certainly count on an upping of stakes in the horny weirdness department. Is it next summer yet?

More Hollywood Dish

Will Tiffany Haddish visit The Haunted Mansion?

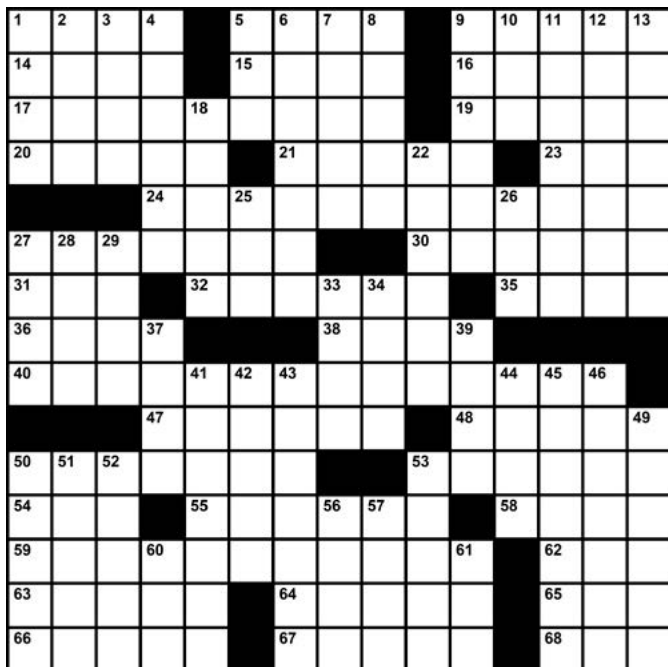
One of our favorite queer filmmakers/TV series creators, Justin Simien, has a new high-profile gig: rebooting Disney's "Haunted Mansion" franchise. The 2003 Eddie Murphy-starring installment failed to inspire a demand for more, so Disney's taking another shot at turning the ghost-filled manor into a "Pirates of the Caribbean"-level saga. This time around, "The Haunted Mansion" is courting comic gold Tiffany Haddish for a lead role, as well as Academy Award nominee LaKeith Stanfield

("Judas and the Black Messiah"). Obviously, the impulse to make every ride at Disneyland parks into feature films isn't always a slam dunk (we remember "The Country Bears" only because the gay bears we know felt duty-bound to buy tickets), but if the man behind "Dear White People" and the breakout star of "Girls Trip" can't infuse this one with some supernatural comedy magic, then maybe it's going to stay deader than the ride's hologram ghosts. And if we may, one haunted request: let the "Nightmare Before Christmas" characters come along for the ride? It works in the parks.

Keiynan Lonsdale is getting a 'Fake Boyfriend'

Now this is the kind of thing we like to hear: a young rising queer star and an experienced New Queer Cinema filmmaker teaming up for something we're absolutely going to watch. "My Fake Boyfriend" is an LGBTQ+ romcom starring Keiynan Lonsdale ("Love, Simon"), "Modern Family" alum Sarah Hyland and Dylan Sprouse ("After We Collided"), to be directed by Rose Troche of the legendary '90s lesbian rom-com "Go Fish," produced under a partnership between Lionsgate and BuzzFeed. Lonsdale, who came out around the time of "Simon," will play a young man who uses social media to create a fake boyfriend to keep a problem ex out of his life. One problem: he meets a new real boyfriend and has to figure out how to uncreate the fake one. It all starts shooting in Canada soon with a current theatrical date of summer 2022. We're going to vote with our ticket money on this one for sure because we envision a future of queer rom-com domination. The straights have had almost all of them, so now they have to watch ours.

Romeo San Vicente loves all contact sports involving five men working together for a common goal.



- 32 Town in da Vinci's land
 35 Michelangelo's David, and more
 36 Like some memories
 38 Guitar of Shakespeare's day
 40 Gus Kenworthy, at the Olympics
 47 Most like the Family Stone?
 48 "Jailhouse Rock" star
 50 Light trucks
 53 Thumbs-up
 54 Bowie collaborator
 55 "Rita Will," for one
 58 Jason went cruising in this
 59 Belle Brockhoff, at the Olympics
 62 The whole shebang
 63 Portable erection
 64 In harmony
 65 Right, to the ass
 66 Brian of figure skating
 67 Drops down
 68 Cause of Venus envy?
- 10 Prepare to shoot straight
 11 Get inside of again
 12 Gay men's chorus event
 13 Sign at a bank
 18 Antigay crusader Bryant
 22 NASA outfits
 25 Bunkmates on base
 26 You might say it when you get it
 27 Lover's spat, e.g.
 28 "Firebird" composer Stravinsky
 29 Zip
 33 Racism and homophobia
 34 Bird feeder food
 37 Place for Susie Bright's drawers
 39 Barely makes, with "out"
 41 Enjoy the bedroom
 42 It's not a mistake at the Red Cross
 43 Affirmative to a male cross-dresser
 44 Ingrid's "Casablanca" role
 45 Dame Edna
 46 One of Cindy Brady's curls
 49 Wraps for female impersonators
 50 Trattoria topping
 51 Boyd's "Gay Priest: an ___ Journey"
 52 Fowl places
 53 "___ we a pair?"
 56 Roughly
 57 Porn star Ryan
 60 Not well endowed
 61 Second pitches for Bernstein

Down

- 1 "East of Eden" director Kazan
 2 Maplethorpe photos, e.g.
 3 "Da Doo Ron Ron" beginning
 4 Systematize, as rules
 5 Grecian vessel
 6 They are but openings
 7 Lend it to Marc Antony
 8 "SNL" producer Michaels
 9 Hooch holders

At the Olympics

Across

- 1 "Spartacus" or "Ben-Hur"
 5 Russian river
 9 Oscar Wilde forte
 14 Bride and bride's vehicle
 15 City near Tahoe
 16 Use for a bed
 17 Eric Radford, at the Olympics
 19 Change the constitution
 20 Husband of a Duke
 21 Zippy flavors
 23 USMC barracks boss
 24 Adam Rippon, at the Olympics
 27 Poorly endowed Dickens character?
 30 Movie house guides
 31 "Where did ___ wrong?"

See p. 32 for answers

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