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ELECTION 2022

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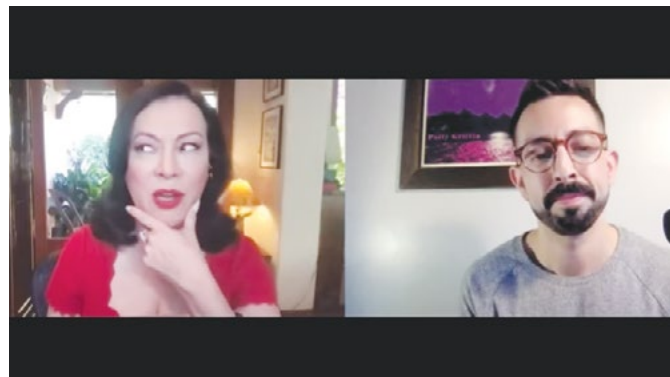


22 COVER STORY

Photo: Sean Howard



Find Pride Source on YouTube to check out all of our latest videos, including new interviews with Philemon Chambers, Jennifer Tilly and JoJo Siwa.



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish For the Holidays

BY JACKIE JONES

December's coming to an end, and we all know that means holidays are flying at us left and right. With all that's happening, it's easy to forget to savor the fun times, whether that's curling up to enjoy a holiday novel or partaking in a holiday-themed cocktail. So, deck the dance halls, make the Yuletide gay and get ready to explore these five queer things that can add some spice to your holidays:

Get Lost in a Queer Holiday Book

Sometimes, with the right book and a little imagination, you can sprinkle warmth onto your winter blues. That's why we recommend dedicating some time to read or reread your favorite LGBTQ+ holiday story during this holiday time. Check out the newly released "Amor Actually," edited by queer bestselling author Adriana Herrera. In this anthology, enjoy three LGBTQ+ love stories: "Make the Yuletide Gay" by Herrera, "All I Want for Nochebuena" by Alexis Daria and "To Us, You Are Perfect" by Daria and Herrera. All the stories are based in New York and follow Latinx couples as they navigate the Christmas season.

Find out more, including where to buy the book, at [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com).

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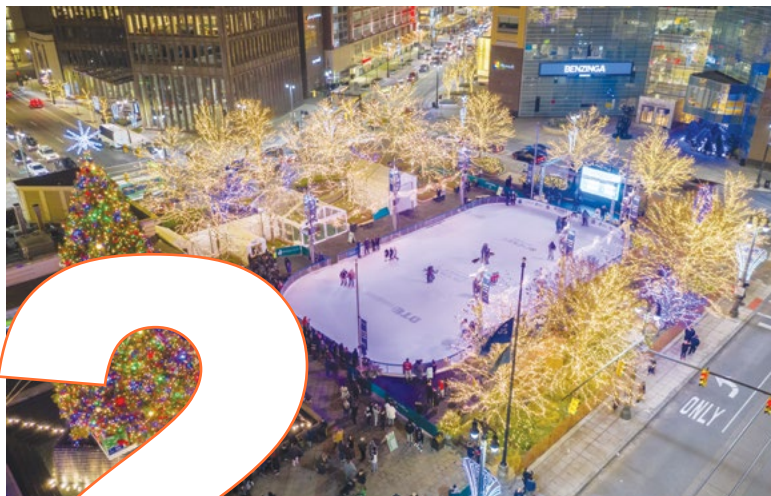
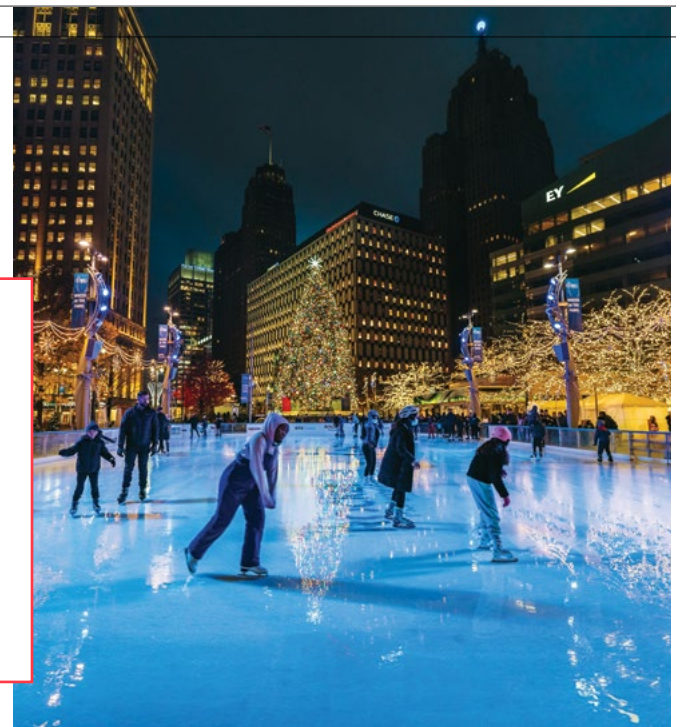


Photo: Downtown Detroit Partnership

Ice Skate at Campus Martius Park

Attention all queers, it's your time to twinkle on the rink, to twirl among the best and to show the straights that you, too, can enjoy a whimsical winter. Where? Downtown Detroit, of course. Campus Martius Park is back with its outdoor skating rink on Woodward Avenue this holiday season. "The Rink at Campus Martius Park offers one of the most beautiful and iconic skating experiences in the country and continues to be a top destination for the entire region during the holiday and winter seasons," said Eric Larson, CEO of the Downtown Detroit Partnership.

No skates? No problem. Skate rentals are available for a \$5 fee. Holiday times vary, so be sure to check the website ahead of time. For more information, go to [Downtowndetroitparks.com](https://www.downtowndetroitparks.com).



Holiday-themed cocktails at The Oakland. Photo: Instagram

Partake in Holiday-Inspired Cocktails in Ferndale

Don your best Mariah-inspired look, call up your merry and queer folk, and stroll into this modern-day speakeasy. For this holiday season, Ferndale's The Oakland is delivering seasonal cocktails with the help of the festive pop-up bar Miracle. Walk into a cozy, dimly-lit atmosphere surrounded by Christmas tchotchkes and warm aromas of butter, brown sugar and cinnamon-infused Pierre Ferrand Cognac. "The whole menu are cocktails with Christmas themes, served with Christmas-themed glassware," said Sandy Levine, owner of The Oakland. "When you walk in, it's like a wonderland feeling."

Due to limited seating, they are not accepting parties over six and reservations are strongly recommended. Bar seating is available as well. Make your reservation on [The Oakland's website](https://www.theoakland.com).



Decompress from the Holidays at Affirmations

Hey ladies, this one's for you: The holidays can induce anxiety, so take some time to decompress once the dust settles. Then, consider joining Ferndale's Affirmations Women's Discussion Group. Topics will vary from lighthearted subjects to in-depth discussions regarding coming out stories, heteronormative social decorum, friends and family, sexuality and more. The group's facilitator, Nicole Lupiloff, said the meetups are a time to "socialize, vent and build community in a safe space."

Meetings are at 6:30 p.m. every first Thursday of the month and 10:30 a.m. every last Saturday of the month. Their next meeting is Jan. 6, 2022. Email info@goaffirmations.org for more information.



Wayne County Lightfest. Photo: Wayne County website

Cruise Through the Glamour of Wayne County Lightfest

This is all about the sparkle, honey. Wayne County's annual light show is back once again for their family-friendly light fest. Starting at Merriman Hollow Park in Westland, cruise through 4.5 miles of nearly 50 colorful light displays and more than 100,000 lights along Hines Drive.

The show runs through New Year's Eve but is closed on Christmas day. Car fees start at \$5 and go up to \$50. For more information on times and prices, go to Waynecounty.com.



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Considering All Sides of Michigan's Gender Marker X

Does the New Policy Promote Progress or Create New Concerns?

BY JACKIE JONES

As of press time, 173 Michigan residents are sporting a new, more accurate state ID card or driver's license after an updated gender marker policy was announced by the Michigan Secretary of State's office in early November.

The policy change comes as a welcome relief for many Michigan residents who identify as gender non-conforming or non-binary, while the change raises concern for two local community leaders.

For Kay Korchnak, a 37-year-old Ann Arbor middle school teacher, who identifies as non-binary, bisexual, queer and trans, changing

their gender marker was a positive experience. In fact, they didn't waste any time in updating their ID at their local SOS office.

"I had made an appointment [for] the 17th [of November], but instead, I went the day of because I got too antsy," they recalled.

Korchnak said the process was straightforward: They walked into the SOS

office on Washington Avenue in Ypsilanti, filled out one form, took an updated picture and paid their \$9 correction fee along with a chauffeur's license fee. Two weeks later, the updated license came in the mail.

They said the significance of it hasn't completely set in, but the change was "affirming" because when they came out as non-binary

three years ago, it was “both scary and worth it.”

“I’ve been a teacher for going on 14 years, so I was putting that on the line [when I came out],” they explained. “A lot of times, I was alone. I didn’t really know any non-binary people, which is one of the reasons why I created a non-binary group here in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti.”

The private Facebook group, Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti Non-Binary Folx, has 225 close-knit members, including people who identify as non-binary, parents of non-binary youth and allies. Since its inception, Korchnak, the admin, says they’ve grown into a supportive community.

David Mieris, 39, is also a part of that Facebook group, and they, too, decided to change their ID to the “X” marker. Mieris, an automotive engineer, identifies as a queer, non-binary transfem. When they first heard about the change, they went onto the SOS website and made an appointment in Warren, where they work.

“I was a little nervous,” they recalled. “I thought: ‘This is kind of Trump territory. How is this going to go?’ But I walked right in and the clerk, when I told them I was there for the gender option [change], they gave me two thumbs up and a smile.”

For Mieris, the whole exchange was a “pleasant surprise” and left them feeling really “excited and happy” to show people their ID.

“[Validation] is not something people my age were raised to know about or look for,” they said. “This comes out of nowhere, and it’s really nice.”

But Zoe Steinfield, Ferndale’s Affirmations behavioral health program manager and an openly transgender woman, is concerned about potential repercussions. Steinfield, who spearheads the Name and Gender Marker Change Clinics at Affirmations, is in constant communication with her local trans community. Through these clinics, she helps the community understand the processes in Michigan and answers their questions.

“The general idea I’ve seen is that having an ‘X’ could mark someone as part of a marginalized group to a greater degree and expose them to experiences of persecution from police and in public interactions,” she explained.

Steinfeld further explained that many people within her community don’t think this change

“Having an ‘X’ could mark someone as part of a marginalized group to a greater degree...”

is necessary.

“What these folks, who are often non-binary themselves, are arguing is that they don’t want to give the government or strangers more information about themselves [or] their identity,” she said. “The proposed solution for not being misgendered is to simply not have anyone’s gender information on ID.”

In the end, it’s a progression change that could cause more gender and LGBTQ+ discrimination. Recently, Julia Music, event chair for Ferndale Pride and community leader, has been receiving feedback from some concerned community members.

“I think it’s an important option, but I’ve been hearing from some people in the community, especially people of color, that they don’t want a police officer to see [the gender marker ‘X’] if they get pulled over,” they said. “It’s just a fear for safety in that type of situation.”

To counter gender concerns regarding state IDs, cities like New York offer genderless city IDs. In a February ACLU op-ed, Spencer Garcia, a non-binary paralegal with ACLU, had a lot to say regarding their decision to change their New York City city ID to no marker at all. They said the city ID gave them a feeling of “safety and comfort.”

“When applying for my city ID, there were four options: M, F, X, and not designated,” wrote Garcia. “I was given the autonomy to choose the gender marker that was best for me, and I did not have to provide a reason or any medical documentation for my choice... I felt relief that when showing my city ID, it wouldn’t ‘confirm’ anyone’s assumptions or prompt any questions about my gender.”

“It’s one of those weird situations,” said Music. “It’s not something I want to push back on the government because the more we acknowledge that things are non-binary, the better. But at the same time, I understand why people don’t necessarily want that.”

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Image: Lynn Davis, *Ken Moody, New York City (Dancer #31)*, 1985–90, gelatin silver print on paper. University of Michigan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Agah, Class of 1989 (BBA), 2012/2.99 © Lynn Davis/Courtesy Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York.

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John Gutoskey and Peter Sparling. Photo: Robin Vincent Photography

Ann Arbor Artists and Partners Claim Queer Space with Their Art

Shared 'Liminal Landscapes' Exhibit on Display at CultureVerse Gallery in Ann Arbor

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Art brought John Gutoskey and Peter Sparling together 31 years ago.

Sparling was teaching dance at the University of Michigan. Gutoskey ran the costume shop in the university's theater department. "Anybody who wanted to borrow costumes had to go through me," Gutoskey tells BTL.

"I was a faculty member who needed costumes," Sparling remembers. "John was

the man at the other end of the phone."

It wasn't long before Gutoskey became the man in the passenger seat of Sparling's car. "I told John I had a car; if he needed me to get him somewhere I'd be happy to help out," Sparling remembers. This led to a couple of trips to the mall together, a couple of movies, including "Reversal of Fortune" with Glenn Close and Jeremy Irons.

"Then we began to see each other on a pretty steady basis," Sparling says.

Sparling had a tenure track position at the school. Gutoskey decided to leave U-M to explore different employment opportunities.

"I was actually going to leave town," Gutoskey says. "I was done at the university, and I was ready to get out of here, but Peter had other ideas. I basically said, 'Well, if I stay, can we live together? Because otherwise I'm not going to stay,' and we've been living together ever since."

For the last 15 years, Gutoskey has been making art full time. Sparling's professional

life has been centered on dance as a student, performer and teacher. It was only recently that Sparling started painting.

The couple share an exhibit of their works for the first time at the CultureVerse Gallery & Scanning Lab in Ann Arbor. The exhibit, which is called "Liminal Landscapes," runs through January 2022.

"It's the first time we've shared something

See **Gutoskey and Sparling**, page 18

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Photos courtesy of Jeremy Moss

Jeremy Moss Wants You to Run For Elected Office

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

“Be authentic.”

That’s the most important piece of advice state Sen. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) said he would give an LGBTQ+ person considering a run for office today. The 10-year veteran of Michigan city and state politics knows a thing or two about being yourself: When he first ran for Southfield city council in 2011, Moss wasn’t out publicly. He called running as an openly gay candidate back then a “risk” and a “liability.”

“We’ve come a long way,” Moss told BTL. “And I think anybody who is LGBTQ recognizes that. We are a community that definitely does not take for granted the struggle up until now.”

These days, not only is Moss open about his sexuality, he uses his platform as Michigan’s first openly gay state senator to bring attention to critical LGBTQ+ issues. That includes speaking on the state Senate floor in recognition of World AIDS Day and in celebration of Pride Month and sharing his thoughts on Coming Out Day, just to name a few.

As Moss demonstrates every day, serving in office openly is not only possible, it is critical. Representation matters.

“Representation is important on many fronts,” Moss said. “It signals to the [LGBTQ+]

community here in the state of Michigan that they have a voice in the process.” That means someone who understands their conditions, understands their lived experiences and understands the unique challenges they face.

Representation also matters in the lawmaking process. “We can actually have some serious gains,” Moss said. “We can convince the other side of [our] issues and gain momentum for the issues that impact us.”

And sharing one’s lived experience means sharing commonalities like the need for good schools and clean water. “As a gay person in the neighborhood, I care about roads,” Moss said. “I care about housing. I care about the same economic conditions that my neighbors care about — and I’m gay. And I think then people start to realize it’s not the only driving factor of why I want to serve.”

Moss noted how important it is to bring an LGBTQ+ perspective to issues that his colleagues might not otherwise have recognized as important to the community.

“When I’m in a workgroup with folks on housing and then I can bring up housing discrimination in the LGBTQ community, it really opens eyes and opens hearts,” Moss said.

Just as “normalizing” LGBTQ+ representation in elected office is beneficial to the political

process, it also means that as more members of the LGBTQ+ community see success is possible, the more candidates run — and win. It’s known as a “virtuous cycle.”

Currently, by the Victory Fund’s count, Michigan has 38 openly LGBTQ+ office holders. Twenty-nine of those positions are at the local level.

Moss’ entry into politics at the city level “certainly prepared me for Lansing,” he said. Some call this

legislative director and current Southfield city councilmember, who is also openly gay.

Beyond being out of the closet, “be prepared and be comfortable to share your lived experience,” said Moss. In doing so, campaigning can also be a way to advocate for the LGBTQ+ community meaningfully.

“I think that the more we talk about issues that everybody can embrace and everybody can get behind, it’s a foot in the door,” Moss said. “We’re not that different...and we’re not looking for special treatment because of who we are. But we’re also not going to accept anything less than equal protection under the law.”

Moss had other tips, especially for first-time candidates who consider a candidacy cost-prohibitive.

“Knocking doors costs really nothing,” said Moss, who is known for tirelessly going door to door. “It costs shoe leather. It costs sweat equity. But other than that, it costs time. Knocking doors doesn’t require this big robust bank account.” Another advantage to door knocking is that it enables a candidate to meet their neighbors and listen to their concerns, one on one.



“building the bench.” It’s the way down-ballot races like county commission, city council and school board can serve as a pipeline to greater representation — and power — at higher levels of office.

“Where decisions about us are being made, we deserve to have a seat at the table,” Moss said. “Whether it’s on a city council or whether it’s on a school board, those decisions impact LGBTQ residents and students throughout the state.”

That’s not to say Moss’ time on city council was just a stepping stone. It gave him a greater perspective on the disconnect between the state and the needs of municipalities, something Moss is just as passionate about addressing today.

With one term on city council, two in the state House and currently in his first term in the state Senate, Moss knows what it takes for an LGBTQ+ person to launch a winning campaign. Running openly is key, but that’s just the beginning.

Political mentors are “absolutely” important, Moss said. “I can call up Brenda Lawrence at any given moment and just kind of share with her what’s going on in Lansing,” Moss said, referring to the current congresswoman and former mayor of Southfield. “I can elicit her feedback. I can confide in her some of the issues that I’m dealing with. It makes me a better legislator.

“It has propelled me to reach back out,” Moss added. “It also has propelled me to reach back to others who are looking for mentorship.” One of those individuals is Jason Hoskins, Moss’

Yet mailers need to be printed and mailed, and those are costs any campaign will incur. Moss recommends asking 100 people for \$100 each, which can mean asks that are sometimes uncomfortable. “It’s a combination of investing money and investing energy,” Moss said. “And I think both of those are key components to winning a race.”

Moss reflected on his 10 years in office. He said he’s not remarkable or special because he’s the first out person to serve in the Michigan Senate. “I just happened to be first,” he said.

“I think a lot of bigotry is fueled by ignorance and the way that you dispel that ignorance is to inform,” Moss said. “So, being the first person at that mic to advocate for Pride Month or, maybe even more consequentially, advocate for Elliott-Larsen reform, that finally has gotten Republican support for the very first time in both chambers, is important.”

It’s been a long journey for Moss — and for the LGBTQ+ community. “We’ve seen so much progress. But out people help build progress, [and] progress helps build more out people who run. It’s a good cycle.

“I attached myself to this Harvey Milk quote,” he continued. “And I really think it’s applicable that ‘coming out is the most political thing you can do.’ Coming out to your family, coming out where you work, where you shop, where you eat is the best way to break down myths and dispel stereotypes and lies. For everybody’s sake, when you run as an openly gay candidate, I think it makes a huge difference.”



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Lonely? We're Here to Help

As Covid Numbers Surge, Remember These Tips



BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Most of us experience loneliness and/or social isolation now and then. It's part of the human condition. But there are some strategies experts suggest can soften the blow. Below are five tips for LGBTQ+ people to keep in mind, especially during the time of year when it's common for people to gather.

"Loneliness and social isolation aren't clinical diagnoses, but they do have clinical significance," says Zoe Steinfield, a social worker and certified addiction counselor who is the behavioral health program manager at Affirmations LGBTQ community center. "Social isolation is more of a statement of fact about one's lack of social connectedness, whereas loneliness is the subjective experience of distress about this." That is, not everyone who enjoys solitude is socially isolated. By the same token, some

people experience loneliness when surrounded by others if those bonds don't feel meaningful or supportive.

It's well-established that a constellation of factors put LGBTQ+ people at increased risk for loneliness and social isolation: LGBTQ+ people are more likely to have been rejected by family, experience mental health challenges and have physical health issues such as HIV/AIDS.

Because of general societal stigma against LGBTQ+ people, it can be a challenge to form friendships or romantic relationships. "Add to that the difficulty with trust and secure attachments that many LGBTQ+ people feel as a consequence of formative experiences of rejection or trauma growing up," says Steinfield, "and many people find it even more challenging to build the supportive relationships they may truly desire." Covid makes it even harder, because places like LGBTQ+ community centers, trans

and nonbinary potlucks, and queer-friendly bars and restaurants might feel unsafe or are closed altogether.

But it's not all bad news. Here are some proactive tips for queer folks to consider:

Figure out what kind of connection you actually need. "There's a lot of social pressure to be around families of origin during the holidays, or out partying on New Year's, but there's no law that says you have to do that," says Steinfield. Check in with your feelings. If you'd honestly be happier staying in and reading a book, watching a season of "The Golden Girls," hanging out with a pet or just connecting with a limited number of people, give yourself permission.

Decide which family will cause you less loneliness. "Chosen family is family," Steinfield

Are you struggling with social isolation and loneliness? Turn to these resources for help.

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people. Call 1-866-488-7386, 24/7. Text "START" to 678-678, 24/7.

Trans Lifeline Hotline

Trans Lifeline's Hotline is a peer support phone service run by trans people for our trans and questioning peers. Call us if you need someone trans to talk to, even if you're not in crisis or if you're not sure you're trans. 877-565-8860. The Hotline is open 24/7, but operating at reduced capacity. Operators are guaranteed to be on call from 5 p.m.-1 a.m.

Reach Us Detroit

The Detroit COVID-19 Virtual Therapy Collaborative, coordinated by the Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network, aims to remove stigma and barriers to treatment for African-American males, single parents, transitional-age youth, the hopeless adolescent, the isolated member of the LGBTQAI+ community, and the otherwise overlooked. Call or text for help 24/7: 313-488-HOPE.

points out. "Some of our families of origin are reliable sources of emotional support, closeness and warmth." Some are not. If your family of origin doesn't affirm your LGBTQ+ identity and relationships in your life and your friends/chosen family are more supportive, it's entirely valid to spend the holidays surrounded by those who do affirm you instead.

If you're visiting with a cissexist or heterosexual family of origin, protect yourself. Plan ahead. You may want to be upfront about who you will bring, what name or pronouns are acceptable and what topics are off-limits. "Boundaries are the distance at which I can

See *Lonely*, page 18



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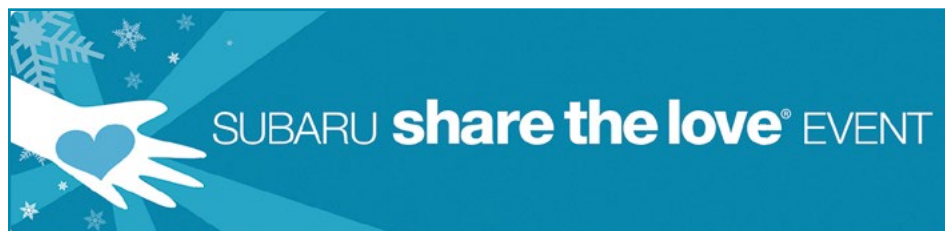
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I Don't Want to Stop Saying 'AIDS'

BY TIM MURPHY



Like many folks, I'm on a daily text thread with three of my closest Judys (as the young queers, perhaps in a sweet nod to the original gay icon Judy Garland, are calling their friends these days). It's Mark, Kevin, John, and me. We're all

gay men in our 50s, and we've all been living with HIV from anywhere between the early to mid-'90s to the early to mid-aughts. Mark and Kevin were diagnosed in 1994, I in 2001, and John in 2005. That makes us all members of the "shoulda known better" generation — too young to claim we didn't see AIDS coming and too old to have shielded ourselves with PrEP.

Anyway, we all think the word "AIDS" is the best punchline ever, and we use it constantly in our texts. We'll say: "Leave me alone, I have AIDS!" or "I'm feeling AIDSy today!" Or about our longtime favorite (and now recently defunct) New York City diner, The Dish, an uber-gay hangout: "You could get AIDS just from walking in there!"

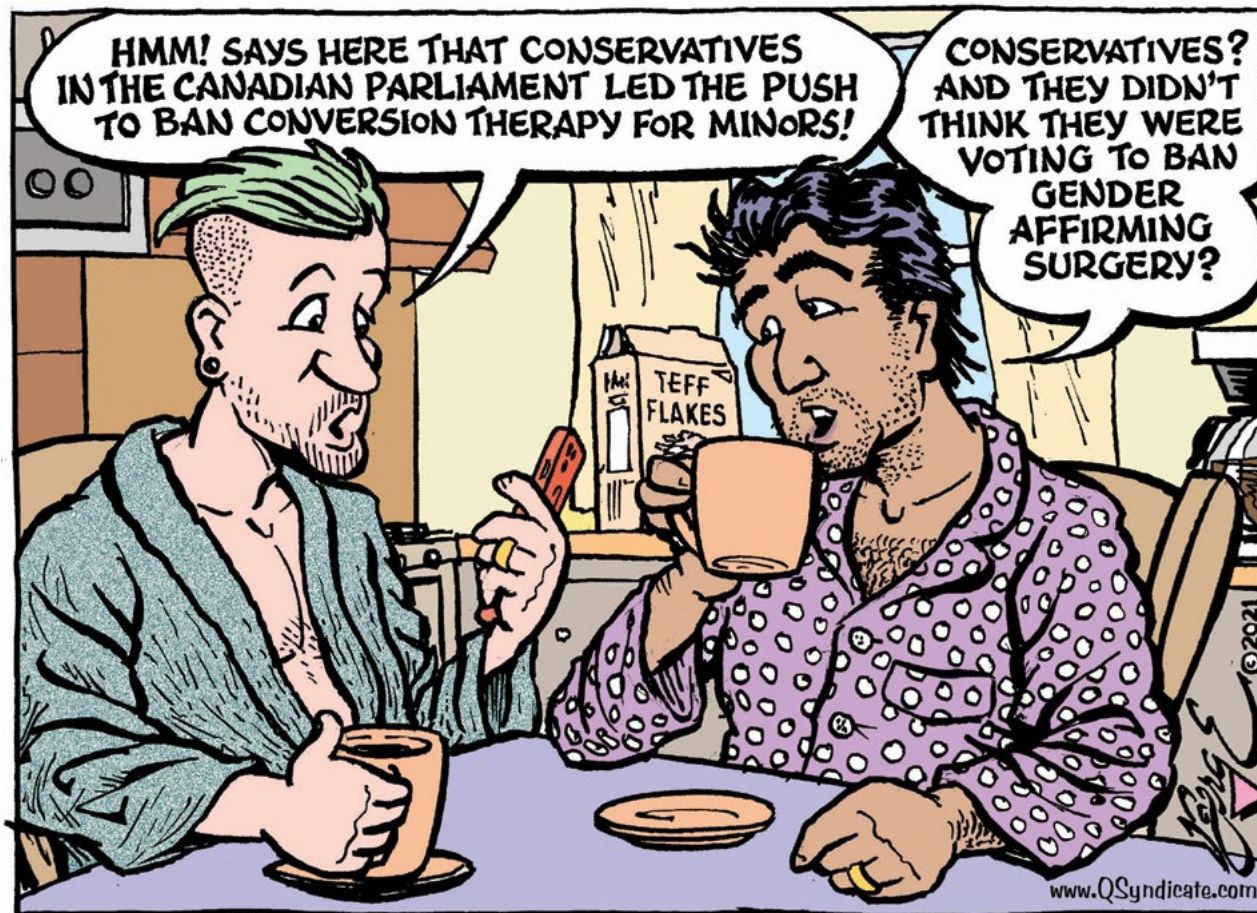
Now let me be clear: With the exception of Kevin, whose T cells once dropped slightly below 200 (the longtime medical definition of AIDS) even though he never had symptoms, none of us has ever actually had AIDS. As far as getting HIV goes, we were "lucky" to get HIV either a few years before or after the advent of highly effective, lifesaving cocktail therapy.

Yet when we joke about "AIDS," we're tapping into some collective shared history as middle-aged New York City gay men. Kevin and John moved here in the '80s, Mark and I at the start of the '90s. John was one of the fresh-faced babies of ACT UP. The rest of us have all been involved in HIV/AIDS work or activism in one way or another — me as a journalist, the others as intermittent fundraisers, community organizers, and activists. We all know people who died of AIDS.

As someone who was already writing about advances in HIV treatment in 2001 when I was diagnosed, I truly never worried I would die from HIV. But it was different for my friends. Says Kevin: "I 100 percent thought I was going to die and I wasn't happy about it." Says Mark: "I was positive I was going to die before I reached 30. It was pretty heavy hourly terror, to be honest." And even John, diagnosed in the mid-2000s, says: "I told my therapist a week after I seroconverted that I was now living life on a timeline."

Moreover, as sexually active gay men, we certainly lived, pre-diagnosis, with the fear of getting HIV, and post-diagnosis, with our share of angst about disclosing our status to sexual partners — not to mention outright rejection because of our status. About a decade ago, right before PrEP, I had a hook-up who was virtually panting with lust, no mention of condoms, suddenly turned stone cold when I told him I was HIV-positive. As we arrived at our highly anti-climactic climax, after a long and mood-killing talk about "the issue" of AIDS, he stood three feet away from me holding up a strip of paper towels as though he were a toreador warding off, rather than luring, a bull toward him. It was unsexy, to say the least.

See **AIDS**, next page



Bounties for Outing the U.S. Conference of Bishops?

BY MARK SEGAL



John F. Doerfler, Catholic Bishop of Marquette, Michigan, just stepped up the American Catholic Church's war against the LGBTQ+ community, and it's about time we engage and fire

back. Before I suggest a plan, here's what Doerfler did via a document he signed titled "An Instruction on Some Aspects of the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same — Sex Attraction and Gender Dysphoria." Bil Browning of LGBTQ Nation summarized the document well: "A Catholic diocese in Michigan has instructed priests to deny baptism and communion to transgender and non-binary people unless they 'repent.'"

Here's what else the document stated: "The Diocese of Marquette said in its

guidance that trans people deserve "love and friendship" and compared them to people "suffering from anorexia nervosa."

"In this disorder there is an incongruence between how the persons perceive themselves and their bodily reality,"

The document also states: "Unlike a man and woman who are cohabitating or in an invalid marriage, the status of same-sex couples can never be regularized."

So what the document says very clearly is: LGBTQ+ people are mentally and morally ill, and they need to change.

These policies don't just affect those who follow the Catholic Church; they are meant to be publicized and thereby give ammunition to haters from every religion.

Marianne Duddy-Burke, the executive director of DignityUSA, which advocates for LGBTQ+ rights in the Catholic Church, said the guidance is part of a larger trend of dioceses' "making statements that look like they're trying to be helpful to gay, queer and transgender people but that are really doing harm to the spiritual, emotional and physical health of our community and to families."

Duddy-Burke is correct, as are numerous Catholic advocates, to rip this guidance apart, but as of now it stands. Now we need to look at where it came from and why. First, the blame and our efforts to fight back must go to the U.S. Conference of Bishops, which encourages this kind of hateful action and allows this campaign to continue. Why do they encourage it? Because they would rather turn the attention away from their own sins: the systematic rape of Children. Institutions such as the Catholic Church in the United States, run by the U.S. Conference of Bishops, are morally bankrupt and criminal. Rather than just allowing their hate against our community and their crimes against children, it is time to fight back.

First, I implore LGBTQ+ media to editorialize in the harshest form against this hypocrisy of morals; this also goes to LGBTQ+ activist organizations and bloggers. We need to point out the church's sins. Then for each diocese that

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→ AIDS

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Joking about the word 'AIDS'

For all these reasons, we feel we've earned the right to joke about the word "AIDS." And let's face it, there's something just funny about the word. Like "abortion," "Holocaust," or "slavery," it's so politically and historically charged that it almost begs to be made a punchline. I firmly believe that the group that "owns" an issue (gays, Jews, Blacks, women) has a right to joke about it. It's a way of letting off steam and turning pain into laughter.

Yet, as I wrote recently on my Substack, I don't think outside groups have a right to make jokes about painful stuff that is not part of their community and history. I'm speaking morally, not legally. I don't believe in censorship, and I generally believe that anyone has a right to say or write anything they want, but folks should at least be ready for the consequences. That's why I was among those who thought it was disgusting, rather than funny, when the comic Dave Chappelle, who historically I've considered quite brilliant, joked that the young rapper DaBaby in his recent onstage rant in Florida "punched the LBGTQ [sic] community right in the AIDS." That's how Chappelle put it in his recent Netflix special, "The Closer," which has gotten so much flack for Chappelle's long tirades against LBGTQ+ people — particularly transgender people, whose very authenticity he questions and mocks while, strangely, insisting he has nothing against them.

But that's another story. We're sticking to "AIDS" here! And let me be clear: I have ambivalence even when AIDS jokes are used

in contexts not as pointedly hostile to queer folks as Chappelle was if they're coming from outside our affected communities. Take the comic Sarah Silverman, who I generally love and consider a queer ally. It's been years since she made AIDS jokes, such as "I have AIDS — billions of them." Or "When God gives you AIDS — and God does give you AIDS, by the way — make lemonAIDS!" Even today, just writing them out, they still make me laugh. They're just so juvenile and wrong. And I know with certainty that Silverman is, and has long been, a friend and ally to queer folks and people with AIDS.

But hearing AIDS jokes from anyone who hasn't carried at least a little of the burden of AIDS, as either a person living with it or part of a community that's been heavily hit by it, still kind of rubs me the wrong way. Who exactly was she to make those jokes? (I should note that Silverman has since said she regrets or would no longer make the kind of jokes about Black folks, rape, AIDS, etc. that she did back in the mid-aughts.)

All of which makes me think more broadly about the word "AIDS" itself. Mainly, about its slow disappearance from our lives. Now, let me be clear — I know there are a small number of people in the U.S. and other wealthy nations who are technically living with AIDS, and (thankfully ever smaller) numbers of people who are not diagnosed with HIV until they have advanced to AIDS (which usually manifests in the E.R. in the form of PCP pneumonia). And according to UNAIDS, about 10 million people with HIV globally are still awaiting treatment, meaning that, certainly and unjustly (and hopefully not for much longer), people with AIDS still exist worldwide.

But generally speaking, we don't see or hear "AIDS" much anymore. Like aerobics, brick-size cell phones, or Bill and Hillary Clinton, it's becoming a relic of the '80s or '90s — a marker of a past era. Which leaves

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Creep Of The Week

Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch Says Vaccines Are Bad Just Like Making Cake For Gays Is Bad

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

A lot of people are dead in this country. In two years, more than 800,000 people have died as a result of COVID-19, and yet we still have folks declaring it their God given right to get Covid and spread it to as many people as they want to.

If we were to have a moment of silence for each of these 800,000 people, one minute of silence for each person would last for over 555 days. That's a year and a half of silence.

But there's no chance of such silence as it will inevitably be broken by someone screaming about being asked to wear a mask at their kid's middle school band concert, or on an airplane, or while visiting a sick person in the hospital. It's truly staggering how politicized what is a very straightforward public health issue has become. Here in Michigan, hospitals are overwhelmed, a very shitty Christmas present to the "Healthcare Heroes" we were all hailing a year or two ago. Now they're being assaulted at work over Covid restrictions by patients and their families.

We have Republican elected officials who have compared mask wearing to the Holocaust. Trump's acolytes booing him when he says he got a Covid booster (because OF COURSE HE DID. He doesn't want to die. But he's been pushing vaccine and Covid disinfo because he DGAF if you do). And whatever the hell this is.

Thankfully the Supreme Court will step in and save us from ourselves, right? Ha. No. Not with the conservative majority currently in place.

First the good news: New York has a vaccine mandate for health care workers.

And the bad news: A group of health care workers sued because the mandate doesn't have a religious exemption.

More good news: The Supreme Court told them to get poked.

And more bad news: Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch dissented, meaning they would rather have the court side with the folks suing New York. This isn't a surprise, as these are three especially conservative justices. But Gorsuch cited the Supreme Court ruling in

the Masterpiece Cakeshop case in his dissent.

Gorsuch's argument was basically that if it's OK for cake bakers to turn away LBGTQ+ people due to their deeply held religious beliefs that LBGTQ+ people are garbage, then health care workers should have the right to refuse the vaccine due to their deeply held beliefs that their patients are garbage? That science is garbage? That government is garbage? That vaccines are witchcraft? All of the above?

Gorsuch writes that "the government must demonstrate that its law is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling state interest." He says they've failed to do so. Apparently, preventing people from dying is not "a compelling state interest." Says a guy who claims to be pro-life.

Why does this matter? Because it's an indication that Gorsuch is predisposed to ruling in favor of so-called "religious freedom," whether it makes sense or not. As we all know, this religious freedom claim is used over and over again by people who don't think they need to treat LBGTQ+ people as fully human. And while it's not a surprise that Gorsuch would be into that kind of thing, it's a bummer to have confirmation of such fears.

And when I say "so-called religious beliefs," I'm not saying that religious beliefs that are sincerely held don't exist. I'm saying that religious beliefs seem to get awfully strong when they support what people already want to do, such as telling gay customers to get lost or refusing a life-saving vaccine that benefits society at large.

On Twitter, political commentator Lindy Li called bullshit on Gorsuch's claim that making people get vaccines came out of a "fear and anger at those who harbor unpopular religious beliefs."

"Those transparently insincere beliefs aren't religious," Li writes. "They're the ravings of an ignorant deluded base fed lies by the people who put Gorsuch in power."

But even the rantings of braindead MAGAites are gospel when those rantings promote the conservative agenda Gorsuch wants to push. And it's garbage.

→ Viewpoint

Continued from previous page

puts this kind of garbage out, maybe it's time to out a member of the U.S. Council of Bishops and their staff. That outing includes those Bishops who are in heterosexual relationships as well as LBGTQ+ relationships. There could also be a bounty for outing them, similar to the Texas abortion bounty, which those Bishops supported.

One last point: this hate is isolated to the U.S. Catholic Church and its bishops

since Pope Francis and other Church leaders around the world have attempted to find common ground with the LBGTQ+ community. The U.S. Conference of Bishops are fighting this change, and endangering our community because of it.

Mark Segal is an American journalist. He is the founder and publisher of Philadelphia Gay News and has won numerous journalism awards for his column "Mark My Words," including best column by The National Newspaper Association, Suburban Newspaper Association and The Society of Professional Journalists.



You've Got Mail

LAHR and Sometimes Art House Team Up For Goodwill 'Love Notes Project'

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Emily Dievendorf had a problem.

The advocacy director for the Lansing Association for Human Rights (LAHR) noticed the loneliness and isolation often felt among members of the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups was exacerbated by the constraints of Covid. Contributing to the devastation brought on by the pandemic were existing factors such as family rejection, mental health concerns and physical illness like HIV/AIDS. Of special concern to Dievendorf were BIPOC and transgender individuals, who can be particularly susceptible to social isolation.

"We know that our communities are especially

vulnerable, in that we may very much need each other and our found and chosen families," said Dievendorf, who is queer nonbinary and uses she/they pronouns (they/them for the purposes of this article).

Dievendorf's task was to find a way to combat isolation without increasing the risk of exposure to the virus. They and their colleagues came up with an old school answer.

"One thing that we all like to get is mail," Dievendorf said. "And so, we started to talk about that."

Sometimes Art House (SAH) is a Lansing- and Detroit-based art collective founded by women artists of color to encourage collaboration and self-care in the artistic process. After reaching out to SAH, which nurtures artists who are BIPOC,

femme, trans and nonbinary, the Love Notes Project was born.

Each "note" is a card featuring either an artwork of original design or a quote with a LAHR logo created specifically for the project. With options to send a card, receive a card or both, individuals add their own message to the card they choose in the online form and may include their contact information if they wish. There is also an option for the sender to receive a picture of their personalized note before it is sent. Participation is free, but individuals are encouraged to make a donation to cover postage. There is no limit on the number of cards one may give or receive.

"This is one way where we can allow other LGBTQIA people to send messages of love

without necessarily making themselves unsafe if they don't feel safe enough to share who they are," Dievendorf explained. "They can, if they want to, put their names and contact information in their correspondence, but they don't have to. It can be an anonymous love note."

One of the featured postcard designs is by digital artist Baz Pugmire. It depicts Stonewall activist and icon Marsha P. Johnson on a gold background with the words, "No Pride for Some of Us Without Liberation for All of Us." Pugmire, who is nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns, created the image on an iPad using a digital app. It's a piece that began as an assignment for an internship that they later reworked. Originally, it included other Stonewall figures.

"In our community, these are our heroes,"

Pugnire said. "These are people that you should be looking up to and honoring."

"If I was to say, 'This is the piece that I'd want people to know me by,' it would be the Stonewall piece because I think it really speaks to the true roots of the queer resistance movement," they added.

Other cards include quotes like, "You Are Seen, You Belong, You Are Loved As You Are"; "We Are Family"; "I'm Still Fucking Here"; and words from Audre Lorde, "There Is No Such Thing As A Single Issue Struggle Because We Do Not Live Single Issue Lives."

While it seems obvious that getting a positive note in the mail would be a boon to its recipient, Dievendorf pointed out the project is meant to benefit the sender as well. "It's just about strengthening and supporting social networks," they said, emphasizing the importance of building caring families.

"This is being done for the good of it being done," Dievendorf said. "It's just goodwill."

Also benefiting from the project will be LAHR and SAH, as packs of the cards will be available at The Resistance,



a bookstore soon to open in Lansing. Proceeds will be split evenly between the two organizations with no profit to the bookstore, which Dievendorf described as being "focused solely on our communities that are affected by discrimination and oppression."

LAHR and SAH are just getting word out about the project and they've had a handful of orders, said Dievendorf.

"It is also important that we start getting people signed up to send cards because holidays are so tough for social isolation," Dievendorf said, "especially those who are feeling a sense of rejection from families. And I also feel that as a queer nonbinary person."

The Love Notes Project exists to nurture the invisible bonds that connect our families: found, chosen or otherwise.

"Regardless of where we are, there is family," Dievendorf said. "Because one thing that I always like to say, whenever anyone of us is feeling alone and left out of their traditional family structure, is that your family is so much bigger than you can ever realize."

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→ Gutoskey and Sparling

Continued from page 8

since I was designing costumes for Peter,” Gutoskey says.

While this is a shared exhibit, the couple’s work isn’t collaborative. Each artist has a unique style and approach. Gutoskey’s work focuses on current events and is often political, while Sparling’s art is a way for him to marry the movement of dance with the indelible nature of painting. “I think what we’re discovering at CultureVerse is that with John’s art on one side of the gallery and mine at the other is that they complement each other and they both have a significant and strong presence, both apart and together,” Sparling says.

He continues, “We decided upon the title of our show through a series of mono prints that John created called ‘liminal landscapes.’ The works that John is showing and then the works that I am showing share a territory that is also spiritual and psychological.”

In the exhibit notes, “liminality” is defined “as a disoriented, in-between state, and a state that facilitates the disruption of both spatial

and temporal dimensions.” Of interest to both artists is the idea of queer spaces — how there are few spaces that are actually queer, aside from disappearing places like LGBTQ+ bars, and how this lack of queer space necessitates the “queering” of other spaces.

An example Sparling offers is a dance studio “where bodies can come together and go into a liminal space here [and] they are permitted to move freely” in ways that would be considered bizarre or inappropriate in other settings, similarly to how LGBTQ+ people can freely be and act like themselves in a queer space, but don’t necessarily have that freedom outside of that space.

“[A] bar is a sacred space... akin to a church or a temple,” Gutoskey says. “It’s a sacred space to us as a queer community.”

Gutoskey’s series “PULSE Nightclub: 49 Elegies” serves as a good example of the “liminal space” the couple’s work shares when juxtaposed with Sparling’s images of dancing bodies in motion.

“I needed to process what I was feeling because I was so overwhelmed by it,” Gutoskey says. “I was devastated, and I was grieving.” Despite that grief, “It’s not a depressing piece to me.”

you,” she says. If there’s a positive byproduct to the pandemic, Covid has actually opened up a world of possibilities. “Isolating makes geography meaningless in some ways, so now more than ever, you can find a virtual discussion group or support group with people anywhere in the world who share an interest or identity,” Steinfield says. Keep in mind it’s safer for you and others to attend small in-person group events together if you’re all fully vaccinated.

Don’t give up on making connections. “Short-term loneliness is normal — and even healthy — as it can give you perspective and a deeper relationship with yourself and the natural world and usually resolves itself with an increasing drive to seek out connection,” says Steinfield. But she warns that longer-term loneliness can act as a feedback loop. This happens when loneliness causes depression and anxiety, which can cause distorted thinking that motivates people to isolate even further. When this happens, try the counter-intuitive

He says he wanted the piece to not just grieve, but also celebrate the people lost and provide a sense of transcendence and hope. Sparling’s work also includes elements of grief, celebration and transcendence. “As a dancer for 50 odd years, I’ve always been intrigued and maybe even frustrated that it’s such an ephemeral art,” he says.

“It became kind of a natural progression for me to photograph my own body in motion and also video tape my body in motion,” he says. This led to a breakthrough when it came to the challenge of capturing this movement in his paintings.

“I can paint while the figure is moving,” he realized. “I don’t have to stop the video.”

Sparling’s paint brush follows the dancer’s movement, transforming movement to canvas.

“I have crossed the bridge,” he says. “I have united the two seemingly disparate realms.”

Sparling and Gutoskey obviously share physical space in their home, but when it comes to creating, each artist has his own studio in the backyard. Gutoskey’s is in the converted garage and Sparling’s is in a shed the couple built specifically for his work. You can find Gutoskey in his studio “making work in response to what is happening in the world,” he says. “I have to have something that I am mentally and emotionally really involved with.” Whether it’s politics, culture, current events, or “anything that just sort of grabs me.”

He adds, “I just am responding to the world, and I do really consciously want to be an artist who is commenting on the time I live in.”

Sparling, on the other hand, is focused on creating something beautiful. “I’m obsessed with beauty,” he says. “I want to go [to my studio] and make beauty.”

“I seek an immersive state that involves a lot of improvisation,” he continues. “I improvise as I dance for the camera, I improvise when I edit, I improvise with a paint brush... The decisions and choices that I’m making in the moment inform me as to the next step.”

Sparling points out that Gutoskey’s work is more than just commentary. “He has an extraordinary eye for color, for visuals,” Sparling says. “I can’t think of any other word but splendor.”

“I’m not opposed to beauty. I love color. Color is where I live,” Gutoskey responds. “What I mean when I say I’m responding to the word, that’s where my passion is.”

“I tend almost never to make one-offs,” he says, preferring to focus on making a series which “helps me go deeper into what I’m trying to say by staying with it and not just doing one piece and moving on.”

Both men say that they are worried about the future.

“We have to be careful not to become too safe or too comfortable and kind of stick our head in the sand,” Sparling says. “John’s better at that than I am.”

“I’m actually very scared about what’s happening, probably more so than I’ve ever been,” Gutoskey says, pointing to a conservative stacked Supreme Court that is poised to overturn Roe v. Wade and could do the same to marriage equality. “For me to create art is a way of keeping going despite the fear factor,” Sparling says.

But they also know how fortunate they are.

“We’re just both thrilled to have been invited to show our work on Main Street in our own hometown and also to be a gay couple and a gay artist couple, a couple of gay artists, who are able to survive in this world and to have our work seen,” Sparling says.

Over the course of the interview, three cardinals, a pair of blue jays and a woodpecker all land on a branch outside Gutoskey and Sparling’s window.

Gutoskey points out that cardinals represent devotion, loving relationships, courtship and monogamy. “That’s a good omen.”

“They were all in love, and they were all gay,” Sparling says of the birds. “And they were also artists.”

→ Lonely

Continued from page 12

love you and me simultaneously,” says Steinfield, quoting writer and movement organizer Prentis Hemphill. “Visiting your family is an expression of love that needs to also include self-love.” Consider planning virtual check-ins with someone who shares your values and respects your identity. That could mean a friend, partner, likeminded family member or therapist. Support can be just a call, text or video chat away.

If you’re feeling lonely from Covid-related isolation, know that you’re not truly alone. Steinfield says that while it’s especially hard meeting people right now, many are in the same boat. “Reach out to the people you’d like to be closer with, let them know, and turn towards people when they reach out to

me so much when it didn’t work out with any particular person,” she says. Because Steinfield didn’t get discouraged, “it didn’t take long to meet someone I really clicked with,” she says. They’re still together two years later.

Meeting people and dating is harder now, but not impossible. “Zoom dates, outdoor dates, and vaccinated dates are all a great idea,” Steinfield suggests, adding that more recently she’s had to deal more with social loneliness than romantic loneliness, due to her move to Detroit. Between the need to build community here and the need to maintain her relationships back home, the options she described have been “incredibly helpful,” she says.

What’s helped this stay-at-home writer during Covid is a regular “date” with a family member who lives nearby. Beginning last spring, most Tuesday mornings we meet to take a walk and catch up. Not only do we enjoy each other’s company, all of us (including her dog) benefit from the Covid-safe workout.

approach by reaching out and strengthening connections — even as you feel like crawling under the sheets. If this sounds like you, it may also be a good idea to seek out a mental health professional.

Steinfeld let us in on a “secret.” Even therapists are not immune from experiencing loneliness and isolation.

“In the past, I suffered from romantic loneliness for years, in part due to stigma against trans women, and the way I had internalized that,” Steinfield says. “Something that helped me a lot was realizing that I actually thought I was pretty cool, and that rather than wait for just the right person to notice I was lovable, I was going to go out and find them.”

Steinfeld did that by reaching out on social media and using dating apps where she set up as many low-pressure dates as possible, then let go of any expectation of a second date. “When I reminded myself that there were lots of people out there to meet, it didn’t disappoint

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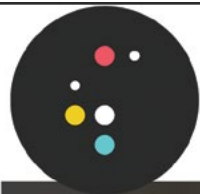


72
HRS.

nPEP



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What Is The Michigan HIV/STD Hotline?

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Funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).

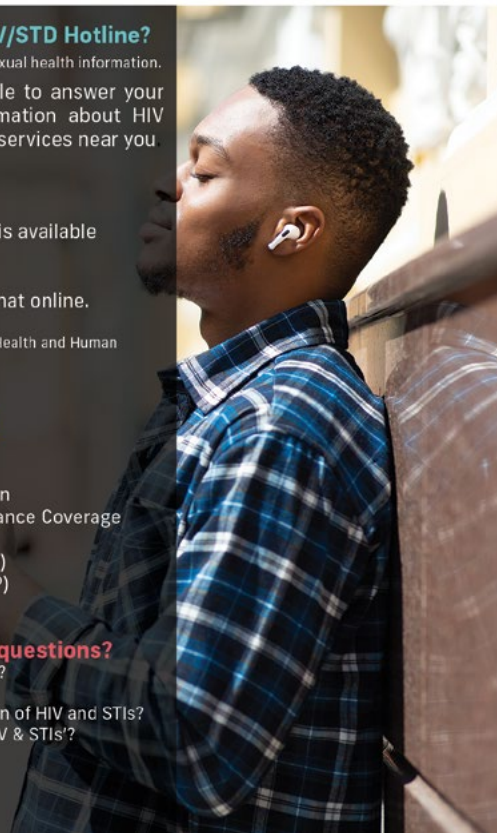
Things People Call About

Recent sexual encounters
Finding a testing site
Routes of HIV & STI transmission
Screening Costs & Health Insurance Coverage
HIV Treatment
Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)
Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

Do you have any of these questions?

When & where should I get tested?
Have I been exposed to HIV?
How can I prevent the transmission of HIV and STIs?
What are treatment options for HIV & STIs?
What is PrEP?
What is PEP?

CALL TODAY



→ AIDS

Continued from page 15

us with the question of what to do with the word. Will we soon be getting to the point where we replace “9/11” with “AIDS” for the joke: “Knock, knock. Who’s there? AIDS. AIDS who? You said you’d never forget!”

A real-life version of this came up last year when NMAC, which has long sponsored the United States Conference on AIDS (USCA), had decided with input from the HIV community to rename the conference the United States Conference on HIV (USCH) based on the idea that not all people with HIV had AIDS, but all people with AIDS certainly had HIV. Wrote longtime NMAC head Paul Kawata of the change: “Over time, [the term] AIDS was seen as stigmatizing by many people living with HIV. NMAC believes [that,] like people of color, people living with HIV have the right to self-determination [in terms of what they are called]”

Yet enough longtime survivors swiftly complained, saying that the change amounted to an “erasure” of those who had died of (and still lived with) AIDS, that NMAC quickly decided to again change the name, to the all-inclusive United States Conference on HIV/AIDS (USCHA).

Wrote Kawata of the second change: “I would never intentionally do anything to erase People Living with HIV or AIDS. When NMAC announced the name change of USCA, we thought we were standing in solidarity with PLHIV. ... How can we reach the community if we were using a word that they considered discriminatory? Unfortunately, to some PWAs, our action looked like the opposite of its intention.”

I think the second change was the right one. I’m moved that some longtime survivors felt that retiring the term AIDS was also mothballing not only their personal histories but that of a community that had fought for its collective life and dignity in the 15 years prior to the advent of effective treatment and often beyond. That’s especially so for the Black community, where rates of AIDS (including AIDS deaths) remained disproportionately high well into the 2000s, due to late HIV diagnoses and treatment delay or resistance rooted in all the offshoots of mother racism — medical mistrust, dramatically lower access to services and care, community stigma, and more.

Just when you think that the world has evolved — that the stigma of having AIDS has evaporated along with the incidence of AIDS and the word itself — you get some ugly reminder that the bogeyman “AIDS” is still alive and well in the minds of the unenlightened and the AIDS-phobic. Take DaBaby’s onstage rant in Florida on July 25. “If you didn’t show up today with HIV, AIDS, or any of them deadly sexually transmitted diseases that’ll make you die in two, three weeks,” said DaBaby amid other lovely homophobic and misogynist sentiments, “put your cellphone light up.”

Even from someone who is not yet 30 years old and did not grow up in the late ’80s-early-

mid-’90s golden age of AIDS education, it was shocking to hear a falsehood like the idea that HIV can kill someone in two or three weeks. (Untreated HIV generally takes years, up to a decade or more, to kill someone.) It seemed like the kind of idiocy some homophobic televangelist might have spouted back in 1985. Thankfully, a raft of organizations, including the Black AIDS Institute, rushed in to give DaBaby an “HIV 101” circa 2021.

Why we shouldn’t stop saying ‘AIDS’

But my main reason for wanting to keep it around is a perverse nostalgia. Call me weird, but I love the shameful, dark corners of gay history that we’re supposed to look back on with a now-versus-then sense of “the bad old days” — or maybe even bury completely.

I feel the same way about “AIDS.” It really happened. I don’t want to forget it, and neither do Kevin, John, and Mark. It’s the gay world we came of age in, and it shaped us in ways both good and bad. It’s a complicated, horrible, heartbreaking history. But it’s our history, and I feel a fierce, affectionate nostalgia for it, especially as PrEP, blessedly, makes the risk of even getting the virus that can lead to AIDS a thing of the past for generations younger than us.

If it weren’t for AIDS, we wouldn’t have some of the favorite icons and moments of my early adulthood: the kitschy and shallow yet also moving AIDS ribbon. The DIY collective mourning of the AIDS quilt. The televised heroism of people including Elizabeth Taylor, Mary Fisher, Bob Hattoy (RIP) and Magic Johnson.

The work of these people — most of them gone — is baked into my very identity not only as a person living with HIV, but as a gay man, a queer citizen, a New Yorker, and an American.

For all these reasons, I want to keep the word “AIDS” alive. Say it loud and say it proud: AIDS, AIDS, AIDS! Sing it, even, as they did in Team America — “Everyone has AIDS!”

Every time I say it, I’ll laugh. But I’ll also think about every single person it’s taken from us — people I could have been among had I been diagnosed a decade earlier than I was.

And you certainly won’t get me to stop watching the (no joke!) “AYDS” diet pill commercial from 1982—released, tragically and hilariously, the same year the CDC first used the term “AIDS.”

The 40-year history of the epidemic proves that the gods may be cruel. But the debut of both “AYDS” and “AIDS” in the same year certainly proves they also have a sick sense of humor.

I’m glad AIDS is (almost) over. But I’m happy to say we’ll always have “AIDS.”

Tim Murphy, based in Brooklyn, has been writing about HIV/AIDS for 25 years, for publications and organizations including The Body and POZ.

SASSY:

Study on Aging and Sexual Satisfaction among Gay Men

Researchers at Michigan State University are conducting a study about sexual satisfaction among gay men 50+.

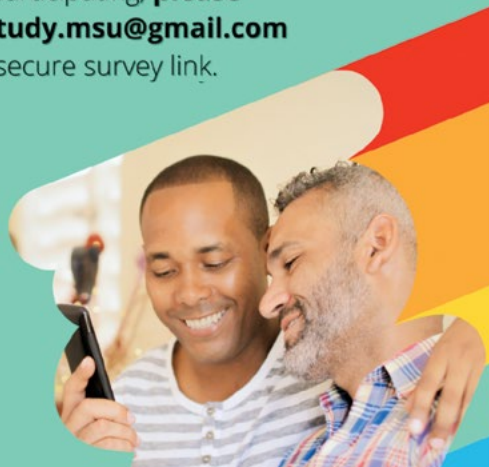
To participate, you will complete a one-time brief (15 - 20 min) confidential online survey about sexual satisfaction, aging, health, and your experiences.

If you are interested in participating, please email Lucas at sassystudy.msu@gmail.com to receive your unique secure survey link.

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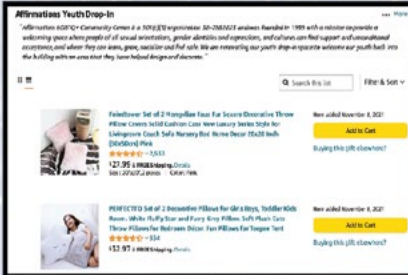
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It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year for *Philemon Chambers*

Breakout Star of Netflix's 'Single All the Way' Has a Reason to Be Merry

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Philemon Chambers can't believe he's in a queer Christmas movie. It's the kind Chambers, recently named "Next Big Thing" by the Hollywood Reporter, could only dream of watching when he was a little queer boy growing up in Compton, California. Then, Black queer characters in mainstream film and TV didn't exist, and when they finally did, those characters were in the closet or shamed for being out of the closet.

Much has changed since for Chambers, and for the better. Now, the 27-year-old actor, who could previously be seen in small TV roles on "Criminal Minds" and "All Rise," is the change he always hoped to see in "Single All the Way," Netflix's addition to the LGBTQ+ holiday rom-com boom of the last couple of years. Here, queerness is incidental to the sweet, marshmallow center of this love story.

In the film, Chambers plays the adorably likable Nick, who accompanies his roommate and longtime friend, Peter (Michael Urie of "Ugly Betty"), on a trip home for the holidays to see Peter's family in New Hampshire. It's an especially kind gesture given Peter has recently learned that his boyfriend is married to a woman. Though Peter's mom (Kathy Najimy) desperately wants to connect her newly single son with James (Luke Macfarlane), the rest of the family does everything in their power to help Peter and Nick see they're more than just friends.

Recently, Chambers chatted about the humbling responses he's received about "Single All the Way" from LGBTQ+ people around the world, how he and Urie developed their chemistry over Zoom, and the message he hopes the movie delivers to young Black queer kids.

This seems like a really big moment for you. Does it feel that way?

It still is a euphoric type of moment. I'm not overwhelmed because it's a good feeling to finally have this film out 'cause we've been

talking about it for such a long time. To have it out and to see the response that people are having toward it and the love that it's garnering — wow, I'm gobsmacked.

What's it like to be a part of the queer Christmas streaming movie boom that started last year?

It's nice that these types of stories are being told and that they're being told authentically by queer [and] gay actors. It's monumental in that respect because usually they hire a heterosexual actor to portray a gay character. So it's not an accurate depiction of them, of us. It's not.

I feel like the films that were released, we needed them at that time. But we really need "Single All the Way." "Single All the Way" is the first film of its kind to not hold onto the homophobia and not hold onto any negativity. It is pure joy, pure love, pure happiness. And I'm glad that we're moving in this direction. I can't wait to see what happens and what comes from it.

Are you and Michael sharing in the splendor of what being a part of this movie feels like right now?

Me and Michael actually had like a 15-, 20-minute conference last night just about how much love we are getting. Everybody is loving Peter and Nick. Everyone is loving the story. And I could not imagine doing this and going through this with anybody else other than Michael Urie. He is such a gem. But yes, we talk literally every day. He'll respond to me when he wants to respond to me, 'cause I know I'm a little bit annoying.

I watched this with my mom, and it was a powerful thing to be able to watch something with her that's authentic to my experience as a gay man.

Even my mom, she was like, "Oh, I'm gonna watch this film so many times." And I was just like, "OK, you're gonna watch it 'cause I'm in it. We get it." And she's just like, "No. It's just a really good story." She was just like, "I love that it's not about the characters being gay.



Photo: Sean Howard

It's about the character finding love, about the family wanting the character to be in a relationship no matter who it is."

It's nice to have something like this where you don't, again, see that homophobia, you don't see the negativity behind it. But you see a family rallying behind their son. I feel like that is so monumental to have. I got a Twitter DM yesterday from a gentleman; he lives in a different country. And he was saying where he is, it is a crime to be gay. He watched the film and he had said for the first time he felt like he had been seen. And that gave him hope.

That must mean a tremendous amount to you.

I cried. It means a lot to me that it's affecting people in the way that it affected me. It's a beautiful thing to be able to stand in the forefront for people and be that conduit. Like I said in another interview, Nick made me accept myself even more.

In what ways did playing the character make you feel more comfortable with your sexuality?

It's different when your life is private. It is such a difference when you're not in [the] public eye, when people really don't know who you are. It's easier to live your life how you wanna live your life. You can go out. You can be with your boyfriend or your girlfriend, whatever. But there is a difference when now you are in [the] spotlight and people are trying to figure out who you are, what you do, who you're dating. I'm like, "Why do you wanna know who I'm dating?" I'm single. I do feel like I'm like Beyoncé — you know, the relationship is private until [points to his finger and motions putting a ring on it]. Just saying.

I just feel like that's a personal thing. But with accepting myself, I accepted myself. I did. If people would ask, I would tell them. But it was more the liberation that I got from playing Nick, because Nick is how I am with

my family. My mom is just like, "OK, is this the boyfriend?" I'm like, "Mom, no. It is not. This is a friend."

When I got home and I really sat down and got to think about everything, I was like, this is the representation that I needed when I was a kid. And now I'm gonna have to talk to people about this and I'm able to now, versus before it was a touchier subject. I'm like, why not stand in the forefront? Why not be that vessel? Why not be that conduit to embrace fully who I am? I feel like as we get older, the idea of trying to put on for people should go away. I'm just at that point in my life where I genuinely love who I am. I owe a lot of it to Nick, in [the] sense of how he is and how the Harrison family was with him. It just showed that these types of things can be normal.

Did Michael give you tips on navigating being out in the public eye?

Michael gave me more tips on how to navigate the industry in a sense of just being an actor. He has been truly a blessing. So has Jennifer Robertson (as Lisa, Peter's sister). So has Kathy Najimy (as Carole, Peter's mom). So has Barry Bostwick (as Harold, Peter's dad). Even Jennifer Coolidge (who plays Peter's Aunt Sandy) has given me advice. Rookie amongst veterans.

What advice did Jennifer Coolidge give you? And was there any bend and snap action on set?

You said bend and snap? You talkin' about [does a little snap]. Jennifer Coolidge, her advice was, "Have fun." Jennifer Coolidge's approach to everything — she does not know what she's gonna do until she does it.

The chemistry between you and Michael seemed so easy.

See **Philemon Chambers**, page 24



Philemon Chambers and Michael Urie in "Single All the Way." Photo: Netflix





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LOCATIONS IN YPSILANTI & ANN ARBOR

7 Holiday Films and Shows for You and Your Chosen Family

Make the Yuletide Gay and Snuggle Up With This LGBTQ+ Content



RuPaul stars in "The Bitch Who Stole Christmas." Photo: VH1

BY JACKIE JONES

This time of year can be isolating for many, especially if you're not close to your blood family. That's why many in the LGBTQ+ community find comfort in their chosen family.

So, this holiday season, curl up on the couch and veg out with your chosen family and check out an LGBTQ-centered holiday film or show. There's plenty to choose from, including Netflix's first-ever gay holiday film "Single All the Way" and Amazon Prime's "With Love," a

mini-series with an LGBTQ+ cast.

'Zoey's Extraordinary Christmas' (Roku Channel TV)

The canceled NBC show "Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist" returns, sort of, with a holiday special in the small-screen Roku Channel TV movie "Zoey's Extraordinary Christmas." In this special, Zoey, who hears people's innermost desires

through popular songs, attempts to create a magical Christmas for her family on their first holiday without her father Mitch.

"Glee" alum and gender non-conforming icon Alex Newell, who stars as Mo, Zoey's friend and landlord, opens the holiday special with a rendition of the classic "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

'A Jenkins Family Christmas' (BET+)

All the drama comes out in this one as one family gets together for Christmas to fulfill a late father's last wish, but as the night goes on, major secrets get exposed and arguments ensue. The queer-inclusive family saga features a gay couple played by Broadway actor and photographer Anthony Chatmon II and openly gay model Derek Chadwick. There's even a marriage proposal. It's a story that tackles Black family queer stereotypes and the power of unyielding love from beyond the grave. "A Jenkins Family Christmas" is streaming on BET+ and Paramount+.

'Single All the Way' (Netflix)

"Single All the Way," Netflix's first queer holiday film, is about a gay plant daddy named Peter, played by "Ugly Betty" star Michael Urie. When Peter visits his family in New Hampshire,

with his best friend Nick (newcomer Philemon Chambers) in tow, his mom (Kathy Najimy) is keen on setting him up on a date with James (Luke MacFarlane). But it's hard to ignore the sparks that are flying between Peter and Nick, even if mom doesn't see them at first.



Kristen Stewart and Mackenzie Davis star in "Happiest Season." Photo: Hulu

'Happiest Season' (Hulu)

Though "Happiest Season" came out last holiday season, it's still worth a mention, obviously. In the film, openly lesbian Abby (Kristen Stewart) and closeted lesbian Harper go to Harper's family home so Abby can meet them for the first time. But, of course, they're introduced under pretenses. When Harper introduces Abby, she pulls the "is just my roommate" card, leaving Abby in an awkward and messy predicament.

See **Holiday Films**, page 26

→ Philemon Chambers

Continued from page 23

The thing about being in a pandemic is everything is over Zoom. Me and Michael, we did our chemistry read over Zoom. And we had to give chemistry over Zoom, which is kind of a tough thing to do because it's hard to sometimes articulate. But honestly, when me and Michael started, everything clicked. It was an automatic thing. It was not forced. We were able to play off of each other over Zoom. I remember getting off of Zoom and going into my sister's room and being like, "I don't know what just happened, but I love it."

What does it mean to you to be a queer person of color playing this character?

I echo this a lot: I am what I needed when I was younger. It's one of those things where I still have my pinch me moments. To be at the forefront where there is a story out there for

young Black men who are maybe questioning themselves or already know who they are, that is positive, that [says] you can come out, you can say these things, you can be yourself, and there is a family out there that will love you, genuinely and unconditionally for who you are — it still is one of those things where I am still taken aback, still humbled. I'm just very, very grateful to have this moment. I text my team every day — I even message Netflix [laughs] — And I'm like, "Thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to be a vessel and to be a conduit." It means the world to me.

What about a sequel? There's been talk, and you can tell me. This is a safe place.

The non-answer answer to that is, Chris, if you must know, Netflix is amazing. And you know, there's no telling what you'll see from Nick and Peter.

As much as I am interested in knowing what

happens with Nick and Peter in a potential sequel, I am also interested in knowing what it means for them when it comes to Aunt Sandy's annual pageant in New Hampshire.

You know what? I feel like, if anything, what should happen is Nick and Peter should be in the pageant. We could do a whole little thing. We could act along with Aunt Sandy. I'm just saying.

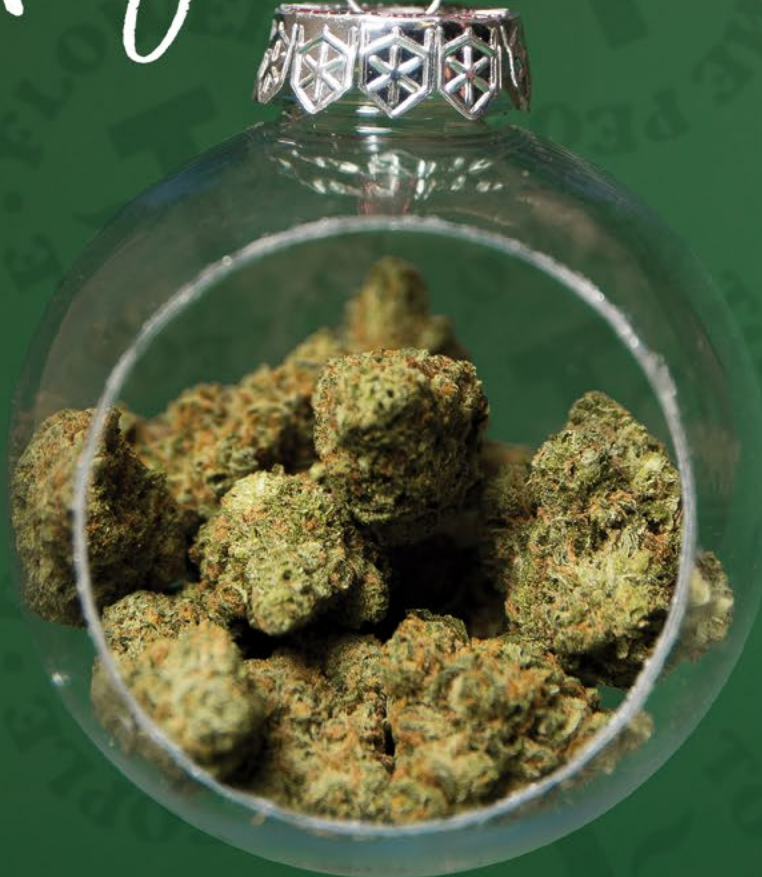
She's a tough director. Do you think you have what it takes to be in her pageant?

You know, I can scream. And I can remember my lines.



Philemon Chambers, Jennifer Coolidge and Michael Urie in "Single All the Way." Photo: Netflix

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Michigan Man Launches 'BE KIND' Yard Sign Campaign in Lathrup Village

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Greg Ruvolo of Lathrup Village has an interesting self-appointed title.

"I'm currently a marketing and communications director for a small bank," he told BTL. "I'm a communications and marketing expert. But, by purpose, I'm a Kindness Maker."

Ruvolo's work as a "kindness maker" started just two months ago on National Coming Out Day.

"I was noticing a lot of negativity around me, in my city, just going out and about. People were just negative and disrespectful. So I had a brilliant idea at 2 or 3 a.m. I was thinking, 'Why can't people just be kind? How can I spread the word about being kind?' I had a vision to have two words — BE KIND — on a sign, big and bold, like me. I designed it the next morning and sent it out to print."

Ruvolo posted a photo of himself holding the sign on social media and about two dozen of his friends quickly requested one. He spent about \$100 of his own money to print the first batch of 36 signs. He delivers the signs all across

Metro Detroit and asks for only a donation to go back into the project and be used to create more signs. So far, Ruvolo said he's distributed over 200 signs to nearly 40 cities with the help of his husband, sisters and parents. Today, he's delivering a new batch of 27 signs and the requests just keep coming.

He has dubbed the effort the BE KIND Project and has already received 501c3 status as a federally tax-exempt organization.

"The donations have been so generous that it's kept the project going," said Ruvolo. "I ask for two things: a donation and a picture of the person holding the sign. I list that on my website. It's really catapulted the project and moved it forward. People want to donate, and



Photos courtesy of Greg Ruvolo

I want to be transparent. People are giving to the project and not me personally."

So far, the project — and the signs — are spreading like wildfire.

"It's a simple phrase," he said. "I didn't want anything else on the sign. I get emails every day

from people asking for signs. It's just incredible how it's organically growing."

"Be kind: It's a small phrase that means a lot," Ruvolo continued. "It means be kind in what you do, how other people see you, be kind in your actions and how you interact with people on a daily basis... People sit behind a computer and they'll fire off an email or something. People tend to be more relaxed when they're hiding behind a computer."

Ruvolo is looking to expand beyond just lawn signs. He's looking into stickers and T-shirts, as well.

"I want to find other things that could relay that message wherever you are," he said. "My future aspiration for the BE KIND Project is to be a catalyst for spreading kindness. Right now it's a message in the form of a yard sign. In the future, I would like to include community sponsored initiatives on behalf of the project like beautification projects, supporting families in need [and] performing random acts of kindness."

For more information or to request a sign, visit bekindusa.org or email bekindprojectusa@gmail.com.



Lifetime's "Under the Christmas Tree" features the channel's first lesbian romance. Photo: Lifetime

→ Holiday Films

Continued from page 24

'The Bitch Who Stole Christmas' (VH1)

RuPaul has done it again. The Emmy-winning TV icon and "Drag Race" legend, in all her merry and gay cheer, stars in her own holiday special on VH1. In "The Bitch Who Stole Christmas," a workaholic, big-city journalist is sent to a Christmas-obsessed small town to dig up a story. While on the hunt, she finds herself in a cutthroat world of housewives, "Winter Ball" competitiveness and sinister plots that could destroy the holiday forever. Honey, it's not for the weak. The live version aired on VH1, but it can still be streamed on Hulu, Fubo TV, DirectTV Stream and more.

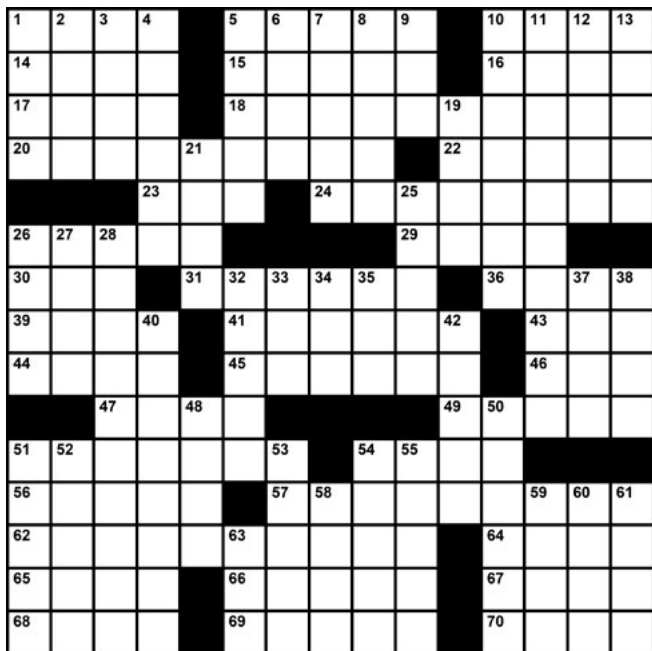
'With Love' (Amazon Prime Video)

The Amazon Prime Video mini-series has two

things we love to see: a Latinx cast and LGBTQ+ representation. Told over five episodes, the story involves Jorge Jr. ("Ugly Betty" star Mark Indelicato) and Henry (Vincent Rodriguez III), two men in a blossoming relationship, while Sol (Isis King) and Miles (Todd Grinnell), another queer couple, are learning to integrate Miles' child into their life together.

'Under the Christmas Tree' (Lifetime)

This holiday season, Lifetime brings us their first-ever lesbian romance, "Under the Christmas Tree." Alma Beltran and Charlie Freemont cross paths one fateful day when Charlie finds the perfect Christmas tree for the Maine Governor's Holiday Celebration conveniently placed in Alma's backyard. Of course, upon their first introduction, they dislike one another. But, as time progresses, romantic sparks fly, bringing the two women close. The enchantment of it all sounds like a fairytale, and we're here for it.



- 31 Low quality, in slang
 36 Sondheim's Sweeney
 39 Electronic synthesizer
 41 More of the proposal
 43 Peebles of "Fame"
 44 It may come before 69
 45 Marcos of the Philippines
 46 Blow it
 47 Jockey's gear
 49 Hot and bothered
 51 More of the proposal
 54 Slave girl in an Elton John work
 56 Fairy tale hag
 57 End of the proposal
 62 Make-out spot of yore
 64 Part of Liberace's style
 65 Iowa State University site
 66 Portable home
 67 Like sexy undies
 68 Popeye and Bluto
 69 Former NFL player Tuaolo
 70 "Diana" singer

- "What Women Want"
 9 WWII area
 10 Nonbeliever in the Divine Miss M?
 11 Tough testicles?
 12 Took to the police station
 13 Ready for bed
 19 Type of bargain
 21 "Hairspray" composer Shaiman
 25 "Pretty Boy" of crime
 26 Tucker of "Modern Family," et al.
 27 Loads
 28 Is a little too proud of
 32 Japanese poem
 33 One that spreads the limbs
 34 Blow away
 35 Bert, to Ernie
 37 Type of straits
 38 Come quickly
 40 Ambiguity, especially ethical
 42 Riyadh resident
 48 Good buddy
 50 "A Walk on the Moon" writer Gray
 51 Big splash
 52 Luncheonette lure
 53 Grout may separate them
 54 Mary Tyler Moore's costar Ed
 55 "___ little silhouette of a man ..."
 58 Strip in the locker room
 59 Scheme
 60 Be deficient in
 61 "Lord of the Rings" singer
 63 Canadian map abbr.

See p. 17 for answers

Decent Proposal

Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 Shuttlecock
 5 Keep moist in the kitchen
 10 Shows on TV
 14 Personal lubricant ingredient
 15 Otherwise
 16 Cop flirting in a tearoom
 17 "The ___ in Winter"

- 18 RCA symbol
 20 "Indecent Proposal" star with a decent proposal
 22 Big dictator in Nureyev's land
 23 Posed for Herb Ritts
 24 Start of a proposal from 20-Across
 26 One who plays with roundballs
 29 Avoid premature ejaculation
 30 "I Could Have Danced ___ Night"

Down

- 1 Like Yul in "The King and I"
 2 Confession of mendacity
 3 Woolf wrote about one of her own
 4 Poet Levertov
 5 Homophobe, for one
 6 Do style
 7 Bitchy warning
 8 She hoped Gibson was gay in

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