

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

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FOR

Everyone

By Ellen Shanna Knoppow

How This Proudly Plus-Size Woman Is Leaving a Queer Mark on a Male-Dominated Industry

A STORIED SUBJECT


Inside the Revealing
Jeffrey Montgomery Film

SPEAKING OUT

Op-Ed: Michigan Laws
Must Protect Trans Women

ONE FAIR WAGE?

Looking at Both Sides
of the Coin



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Photo: Amanda Fincutte

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY JACKIE JONES

April showers may block some much-needed vitamin D, but thanks to a springtime influx of social events, your internal sunshine is sure to shine through. So, live it up, whether you decide on a star-studded drag show at Hamburger Mary's or an exhibit at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Attend a Pride Cancer Support Group

Rosie Ingebritson, program director for Cancer Support Community of Greater Ann Arbor, said she created Pride Cancer Support Group to serve "folks underrepresented within the LGBTQ+ community" who've been affected by cancer. Since then, it has become a "compassionate" space that is "professionally facilitated." The group welcomes patients, survivors and loved ones impacted by cancer who identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, nonbinary, queer, transgender, two-spirit, and all other sexual and gender minorities. Their next virtual monthly meeting is set for 6 p.m. April 21.

Visit the Cancer Support Community of Greater Ann Arbor website to sign up.



Photo: Chris Montgomery



Widow Von'Du. Photo courtesy of Jadein Black

Be Entertained By a 'RuPaul's Drag Race' Superstar

Grab the crew and head over to Ypsilanti's Hamburger Mary's for a show to remember. This star-studded spectacle features Widow Von'Du from Season 12 of "RuPaul's Drag Race," and will be hosted by Hamburger Mary's Show Director Jadein Black, also known as the co-founder and show director of Southeast Michigan drag troupe Boylesque. "Our intention is to keep awareness and positivity in the community," Black told BTL. At the end of the show, they will be accepting donations for the Michigan chapter of Stand with Trans.

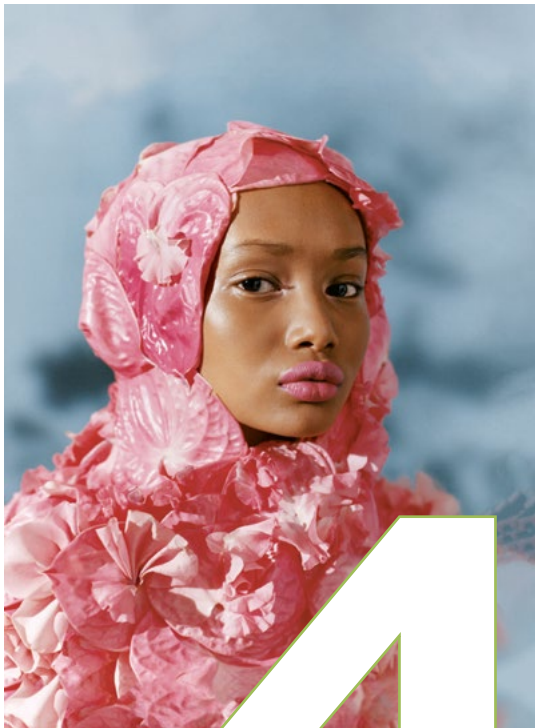
Showtimes are 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. on April 24. Tickets are available at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com); there will be no meet and greet.



Party at an Inclusive Lesbian Event

Hey ladies, check this out: Pronto! Restaurant and Showbar in Royal Oak is holding their monthly Lesbian Friday. Local talents DJ Nouveau and DJ Kenny will be spinning throughout the night. Pronto! opened in 1991 and considers itself "a local food pioneer and a cornerstone of the community."

The event requires no admission charge and runs from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. on April 17. Visit Pronto's website for more information.



Tyler Mitchell, Untitled (Hijab Couture), New York, 2019. Photo: DIA

Explore a Black Exhibition at the DIA

Spring is the perfect time to indulge in vibrant color portraits, conceptual images and fashion editorial photographs by 15 emerging Black photographers. If you could use an artsy refresher, check out "The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion" at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), which simply breathes inspiration. The exhibit includes over 100 photographs captured on various mediums and platforms. In addition, "the exhibition explores conversations around Black representation and Black lives as subject matter," according to a DIA press release.

"The New Black Vanguard" runs through April 17. Visit the DIA's website for more information.

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Get Totally Freaked Out By a Horrifying Baby

Call a cuddle buddy over, turn out the lights, and let the horror of HBO's new limited series "The Baby" wash over you. Because, judging by the trailer, you're going to want company when you watch this one. According to HBO, the series is a "Get Out"-esque, darkly funny horror-comedy that takes a "very unique approach to commentary on motherhood and what it means to be a mother in 2022," including a prominent LGBTQ+ storyline. Because even shows about terrifying babies deserve fair and equal representation.

"The Baby" debuts April 24 on HBO Max.



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Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.



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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
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Scan to see Dimitri's story.



Jeff Montgomery. Photo: Michel Francois Soucisse

The Life and Times of Triangle Foundation Co-Founder Jeffrey Montgomery Examined in New Documentary

LGBTQ+ Activist Leaves Behind a Storied, Complicated Legacy

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

“America, You Kill Me,” a new documentary about Michigan LGBTQ+ activist Jeffrey Montgomery, is making its long-awaited world premiere as part of this year’s Freep Film Festival in Detroit.

The film was first scheduled to debut at the festival in 2020, before COVID-19 caused the festival’s cancellation. In the interim two years, director Daniel Land tweaked his project as producer John Montgomery, Jeff’s brother, anxiously awaited to share his brother’s story

with the world.

John said that through the film, he’s hoping audiences can see “what one individual can do when they really put their mind, heart and soul into it. We’re trying to get people to become activists.”

“Activist” is, of course, the word that best describes Montgomery and his decades of work. He co-founded The Triangle Foundation, known today as Equality Michigan, in 1993. This was eight years after his lover was killed outside a gay bar. That case was never solved and sources at the time told Montgomery that

the police department would do very little about it because, to them, it was just another gay killing.

So Montgomery, who had previously participated in anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations and who worked to save Orchestra Hall from demolition, turned his focus to gay rights and became the face of the movement in Michigan. He went from working the first two years for free to running an organization with an operating budget of over \$1 million annually.

The work was tiresome. He chainsmoked

three packs of cigarettes and drank up to 20 cups of coffee in a day on average. He traveled across the state and country, became an expert on the so-called “gay panic” defense and represented the LGBTQ+ community to the media in the cases of Matthew Shepard and “The Jenny Jones Show” murder.

At the peak of his power, in 2000, Montgomery delivered the inaugural Matthew Shepard Memorial Lecture at Brown University. It was called “America, You Kill Me.” Sadly, there is no surviving video footage of the lecture, so the film, instead, uses a voiceover reading of the speech.

Somewhere along the way Montgomery got tired. He was in poor health and chronic pain, suffering from polyarteritis nodosa, a painful necrotizing inflammation of blood vessels, in his legs. The pain led him to ultimately make a choice: turn to opioids or pick up the bottle, which he had given up almost 20 years earlier. He chose the bottle.

That choice would ultimately lead to his departure from Triangle. During the sadder parts of the film, we see his worsening illness, his eviction from the apartment he lived in for 30 years and his eventual death. A barrage of news clips and photos of Montgomery are among the film's footage, along with two exclusive primary interviews with historian

opportunity to attempt to shame Michigan's LGBTQ+ community for shunning him during his struggles. But Montgomery, himself, does not speak on it.

"As with anything, there were conflicting perspectives, and we tried to navigate that as fairly as possible," said Land. "I would clarify that Montgomery never directly expressed that sentiment himself, and a lot — though not all — of that material in the film reflects things we were informed of after his passing."

Still, the sort of "putting out to pasture" that Montgomery experienced, his drinking aside, is not unusual in the LGBTQ+ community, Land said. "What we were told over and over again, both on and off record, and by many people,

'America, You Kill Me'

7:30 p.m. April 28, The Redford Theatre

7:30 p.m. April 30, Birmingham 8

freepilmfestival.com

Tim Retzliff and journalist Craig Fahle. Video footage ranges from Montgomery clean-shaven and dapper, wearing his signature single earring, to sporting long hair and an enormous beard.

For the most part, Montgomery is frank and honest throughout the film, though there are certain issues he either couldn't or did not care to recall. Through it all, we see that he lived life on his own terms.

His story has "drama, tragedy, injustice, danger — shot through with humor and humanity; it's all there," director Daniel Land told BTL. "His story is so full, and it was a fight I knew almost nothing about beforehand."

Introduced through a mutual friend, Land said he quickly found himself fascinated by Montgomery's story. "What immediately struck me was his clarity and his wit, which meant he could carry his own messages and carry the film along with them," Land said. "The more I learned, the more I wanted to learn, and the more important it felt to tell."

The film shows the many awards and honors given to Montgomery, conveying the immense weight of his contributions to Michigan's LGBTQ+ community. That, of course, was never in doubt. But it also shows his darker moments, when Montgomery, let loose from the agency he co-founded, floundered. On that topic, the film features various recollections.

"Jeff ended his career on an unfortunate note, and a lot of people turned their back on Jeff," said Montgomery's friend Ricci Levy.

Those close to Montgomery take the



was that this is something that happens too often to elder activists."

Montgomery died in 2016. But it is indisputable that no matter what happened at the end of his working days, the memory of his enduring activism will live on.

So what, exactly, is Montgomery's legacy? "That's not for me to define here, and I want the film to speak for itself," Land said. "Hopefully our retelling communicates some of it through his work and those he impacted. There is so much that young activists could learn, from both the highs and the lows of his career."

"I will say," he added, "that his legacy is woefully unsung, and that's something I want to change."

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Michigan Native Andi Mudryk First Trans Person Appointed to the Bench in California

The Southfield-Lathrup High School Grad Brings Nearly Two Decades of Disability Rights Work to Role

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced March 25 that he was appointing Andi Mudryk to the bench. The appointment makes Mudryk, 58, the first trans person to be appointed to the bench in California. Mudryk also becomes the second trans person to serve as judge in California after Victoria Kolakowski became the first openly trans judge in the state when she was elected to the Alameda County Superior Court in 2010.

Kolakowski tweeted her congratulations to Mudryk the day the appointment was announced.

“Andi Mudryk is a great appointment and will be a wonderful judge,” read the tweet. “I’m glad to finally have a trans colleague on the bench in California.”

Mudryk, for her part, spoke to the Los Angeles Times about her appointment.

“I’m humbled, honored and I’m thrilled,” Mudryk said. “I’m grateful to Gov. Newsom for creating a vision of California for all.”

Mudryk will serve as a judge in Sacramento County Superior Court. Mudryk’s appointment was one of eight Newsom made. He also nominated Fourth District Court of Appeal Justice Patricia Guerrero to be the first Latina associate justice on the California Supreme Court.

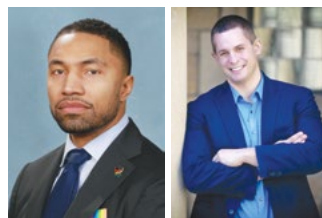
Prior to her appointment, Mudryk worked for 11 years with Disability Rights California, serving as managing attorney, director of litigation and deputy director. In addition, Mudryk worked as director of litigation and policy advocacy for Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County and spent a short time as executive director of Disability Rights Advocates. She also joined the California Department of Rehabilitation (CDR) in 2018 as the department’s chief legal counsel. Two years ago, she was promoted to the position of CDR deputy director.

“A seasoned civil rights advocate, Mudryk brings almost 20 years of experience in disability rights and rehabilitation to the court,” Tony Hoang, executive director of Equality California, said in a statement. “As governors and state

See **Andi Mudryk**, next page



Michigan Laws Must Protect Trans Women



By **Adam Hollier and Eli Savit**

No one can deny that the state of Michigan is making strides in ensuring equality

for all communities.

The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) was passed in 1976 to protect Michiganders against discrimination on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status. ELCRA, however, does not explicitly list sexual orientation or gender identity as categories protected from discrimination.

But in 2018, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) adopted an interpretive statement that stated the term “sex,” as used in the ELCRA, protected individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. This major milestone was achieved due to significant efforts made by groups such as Equality Michigan, as well as a courageous stance by then MCRC chair Alma Wheeler Smith and her fellow MCRC commissioners. The Court of Claims affirmed MCRC’s interpretation in 2020 as it relates to gender identity. And this March, the Michigan Supreme Court heard arguments in a case that would clarify, expressly, that ELCRA

also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Yes, Michigan is moving in the right direction. But more must be done to protect the LGBTQ+ community — especially trans

women of color — from physical violence.

Transgender women of color are often threatened, harassed, or even killed for simply being themselves. In the City of Highland Park, several transgender women of color were murdered within a few miles of the Ruth Ellis Center, a safe haven for people identifying as LGBTQ+. Last month, Naomi Skinner, a 25-year-old transgender woman of color, was killed at an apartment complex in Highland Park. Shot in the neck, her body was dragged into the hallway and left there. In 2018, another transgender woman of color, Kelly Stough, was found shot to death. A Detroit pastor was arrested for her murder.

Both victims were young, in the prime of their lives. Their deaths are an unspeakable tragedy.

Any physical violence is unacceptable. But especially heinous are crimes that target people because of who they are. Such crimes — whether on the basis of race, sex, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity — cause lasting fear and trauma among victims. Compounding matters, those crimes can make entire communities

See **Michigan Laws**, next page

→ Andi Mudryk

Continued from previous page

legislatures across the country attack the trans community, we applaud Gov. Newsom's continued commitment to increasing trans representation across appointments and on the bench."

Mudryk, who was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, also known as brittle bone disease, credits her experience as a trans woman, a person with a disability, the parent of a Black man and the descendant of Holocaust survivors as motivating her to work toward advancing civil rights.

Prior to her work in California, Mudryk,

who received her law degree from George Washington University Law School, lived in Michigan. She graduated from Southfield-Lathrup High School before attending college and law school, and then went into private practice in Ann Arbor. While still in Michigan, Mudryk was involved in an LGBTQ+ Jewish group called Simcha. She also helped put together the Michigan contingency for the 1993 March on Washington for gay rights.

Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan's LGBTQ Project, knew Mudryk casually from when she lived here and said he's "so thrilled" for her.

The first openly transgender judge [appointed in] California," Kaplan told BTL. "This is something to celebrate!"

“

It is long past time for Michigan's hate-crimes law to be amended to expressly prohibit crimes targeting a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

→ Michigan Laws

Continued from previous page

feel unsafe and insecure.

For these reasons, Michigan maintains a "hate crimes" law, which imposes additional criminal penalties if a person assaults, intimidates, or harasses a victim "because of that person's race, color, religion, gender, or national origin." But lamentably, Michigan law does not expressly prohibit crimes targeting people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. That omission is particularly troubling given the prevalence of crimes targeting the LGBTQ+ community. According to the FBI, hate crimes targeting LGBTQ+ victims are the third largest category of hate crimes nationwide, trailing only race and religion. Gender-identity-based crimes, in particular, are on the uptick.

It is long past time for Michigan's hate-crimes law to be amended to expressly prohibit crimes targeting a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. In March, State Sen. Adam Hollier introduced legislation that would do just that — allowing law-enforcement and prosecutors across the state to treat those crimes with the seriousness they deserve.

To be sure, Michigan's hate-crimes law, like the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, could well be interpreted by courts to encompass crimes that target LGBTQ+ victims. Last year, the

Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office issued legal guidance directing prosecutors to charge LGBTQ+-targeted crimes as hate crimes, under the theory that such crimes inescapably target victims because of their gender. In August, the Michigan Court of Appeals embraced that theory, though litigation is still pending before the Michigan Supreme Court.

Case law interpretations, however, are no substitute for expressly amending state law to extend protections to LGBTQ+ communities. Far too frequently, crimes against the LGBTQ+ population go unreported, largely due to fear that they will not be taken seriously. But when states recognize LGBTQ+-targeted violence as hate crimes, reporting rates increase. And amending Michigan's hate-crimes law would send an unmistakable message that crimes targeting LGBTQ+ populations will not be tolerated.

In enacting its hate-crimes law, Michigan has recognized that nobody should be targeted for violence because of who they are. Those legal protections must be extended to our LGBTQ+ communities. Those protections should be enumerated in the law itself, so that there can be no doubt that hate crimes will be charged and prosecuted statewide.

Sen. Adam Hollier and Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit are allies and leaders in the state of Michigan.

CREEP OF THE WEEK

Republicans Love Putin, Hate Gays. Rinse and Repeat.



By D'Anne Witkowski

I have tinnitus, which, according to the technician who did my hearing test, is pronounced TIN-uh-TIS rather than the more commonly heard ti-NI-tis. But no matter how you pronounce it I can assure you: it sucks.

It occurs to me that this high-pitched, grating, and never-ceasing noise in my head is basically the perfect soundtrack as I read through story after story about the wave of Republicans' anti-LGBTQ+ bullshit sweeping the nation.

Everything old is new again, as the saying goes. And these days, just like high-waisted jeans, being anti-LGBTQ+ is very fashionable among the right.

Or, at least, it is among a group of people who believe that because they are the loudest, they are the majority. But they aren't. And it's important to remember that.

Unfortunately, it's also important to remember that a disproportionate number of these creeps are in positions of power. Lawmakers can (and do) make anti-LGBTQ+ policy, and judges use their power to adjudicate in ways that hurt LGBTQ+ people and their families.

The system has, unfortunately, been rigged against us for, well, ever. Despite this, LGBTQ+ people have made great gains in my lifetime. Being able to legally marry my wife AND be on her health insurance, for example, was life changing for both of us (but especially for me since I had cancer and was about to lose my insurance).

But the hate still haunts us. It's damaging to be labeled a pervert and a danger to children. That's a falsehood that has always been used to make people afraid of gays, and while it never went away, it's rearing its ugly head with a vengeance, now with an added helping of transphobia.

Republicans claim that LGBTQ+ people and allies are "grooming" kids to be LGBTQ+. To even mention your pronouns or mention that you are in something other than a heterosexual relationship is harmful to kids, they say. They want everyone to believe that there is a scary transgender person behind every public restroom door and a radical lesbian teaching every science class and that our kids are in danger.

And it's true. Our kids are in danger. But not from LGBTQ+ people.

Gun violence, suicide, depression,

car accidents, addiction, homelessness, abuse of all kinds. These are very real things that very real kids are experiencing RIGHT NOW and that we could

do something about. So long as there is one kid who needs but is unable to access mental health treatment, so long as there is one kid who can't sleep because the shelter is too loud and their stomach is rumbling, so long as there are kids who are bouncing around from foster home to foster home, every single person pushing anti-trans athlete bills or trying to erase the mention of LGBTQ+ people or history in school should be FUCKING ASHAMED.

All of those above issues, by the way, are things that only Democrats care to address. Democrats who are painted by a not insignificant portion of the Republican party as literal pedophiles who kill babies and drink their blood. Seriously.

Believe it or not, there was a time in our country when Republicans actually engaged in serious, substantive arguments rather than simply resorting to calling their detractors pedophiles. That party is over, I'm afraid. Today's Republican party is home to Q-Anon conspiracy theorists, racists, right-wing Christians and gun nuts who believe that a transgender swimmer is a bigger problem than, well, anything.

And speaking of anything, if you listen to Republicans tell it, transgender kids are the true threat to the United States and that Vladimir Putin, a man who is war-criming his way through Ukraine, is only trying to protect his country from the radical West.

"Our woke ideology is hitting a gag reflex in other nations," Biblical Worldview Guru Lance Wallnau said. "Certainly in Russia, they don't want our transgender ideology to infect their youth."

What about Russia's ideology of MURDERING PEOPLE BEFORE THE WORLD'S EYES?

Conservatives have been praising Putin for a long time, but Trump seems to have taken it to the next level. And the attack on Ukraine isn't changing their love for Putin.

These people have very messed up priorities. The fact that the Republicans even have a fleeting chance of taking control of the House and the Senate in 2022 is stark evidence that this country is gravely ill.

I often end this column by urging you to vote. And I am, of course, going to do that now (vote, damn it). But I also want to say things can absolutely get worse. And they absolutely will if Republicans get the majority back in D.C.



Photo: Amanda Fincutte

‘Mechanic Shop Femme’ Is on a Mission to

EMPOWER QUEER CAR OWNERS EVERYWHERE

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Chaya Milchtein, aka Mechanic Shop Femme, is just as comfortable talking about lubricating cars as she is talking about lubricating sex toys. The automotive educator, journalist and empowerment speaker uses her platform to teach folks about car ownership and maintenance — all while showcasing plus-size fashion and blogging on subjects as varied as finding an honest mechanic, visiting Mexico with her wife and why masturbating isn’t a dirty word.

If Milchtein’s platform sounds unique, that’s probably because it is. Milchtein, who is queer, said she wanted to meet a specific need: making automotive topics like buying a used car accessible to people who have traditionally felt shut out, specifically queer people and women. Milchtein finds some spaces that focus

specifically on women “pink washed” and not the right fit for Milchtein or the community she wants to serve.

“The way that I built Mechanic Shop Femme,” Milchtein tells BTL, “was designed to serve queer people first, women second, and to still create a space where everyone else was welcome as long as they understood the community that they were entering when they were participating in my classes or my social media, [and that] they were able to remain respectful.”

Milchtein, who is based in Wisconsin, said she wasn’t interested in creating yet another channel designed for people who want to fix their own cars. Instead, her virtual classes for individuals and workshops for groups include topics like “The Why’s and When’s of Car Maintenance,” “How Does Car Insurance Actually Work?” and “Are All Mechanics Scammers?” Her workshops have been booked

by libraries, nonprofits, educational institutions and businesses across the U.S. and Canada. She’s also available for phone appointments to answer auto-related questions, either a quick call or a 30-minute session.

A Google review from a student named Lucy is on par with other feedback she’s been given: “I feel knowledgeable, confident and inspired to buy a used car. I also feel like I was not spoken down to and everything was explained without my having to ask basic questions. Chaya is truly the best at what she does.” Another reviewer, Siobhan, says, “I attended a Zoom presentation through our library. Chaya was amazing: interesting, understandable, friendly, very knowledgeable. She kept cars from being intimidating.”

“I think it’s really important to me that people feel seen and people feel heard,” Milchtein says, “and people feel like they have found a place

where they can ask questions without any kind of negative questions, without any disrespect.”

Mechanic Shop Femme’s unlikely origins begin with Milchtein’s birth into a Chassidic Jewish family, the eldest of 15 children. Abused by her father — a rabbi — Milchtein was removed from the home and placed in foster care at 16. As she aged out of the system, Milchtein was faced with finding a way to support herself.

Yet Milchtein’s background in politics — which includes training by the Victory Fund Institute and an internship with Fair Wisconsin — didn’t translate into the kind of job skills she would need to work at the fast food restaurant down the street. Perhaps because she was overqualified, Milchtein couldn’t get an interview anywhere. “I started a GoFundMe because I didn’t really know what else to do,” she says.

Milchtein said she poured out her heart in what may have been her first essay. People responded positively. But the greatest help came in the form of a woman who noticed the campaign and asked Milchtein what she needed most. When Milchtein replied that she needed a job, the woman offered to connect her with the human resources department at Sears. That meeting went well.

“Toward the end of the interview, the HR manager asked me, ‘So, Chaya, what department do you want to work in?’” Milchtein recalls. “In my very true Capricorn style, I was like, ‘Well, whichever department makes the most money.’” Of the two departments offered, appliances didn’t interest Milchtein. “Let’s try cars,” she said, and soon started work in the Sears automotive department. It wasn’t until shortly thereafter that Milchtein got her driver’s license.

“I fell in love with helping people,” Milchtein says. “I fell in love with being able to explain to people what their car needed. I always took great pride. And when people would spend a lot of money on repairs with me, they wouldn’t leave with a bad taste in their mouth. They wouldn’t leave confused about where that thousand went; they would leave my desk with an understanding of what their vehicle needed, why their vehicle needed it [and] how their money was being put to good use.”

Milchtein compared car knowledge with knowledge of another complex tool people use every day — the cell phone. “It is perfectly natural and normal for everybody to understand how the phone works and all the different functions and how it could be used in all different ways to benefit your life,” Milchtein says. With a phone, people generally receive instruction and learn along the way; they ask questions and can easily find answers.

With cars, it’s a different story. “When it comes to cars, there’s this group of people, or rather this industry, that almost actively prevents in a way — or makes it incredibly uncomfortable and difficult for — people to be able to learn things about the vehicles that they use every single day,” she says. Milchtein is on a mission to end the kind of gatekeeping imposed by what she calls an inner circle or a “boys’ club.”

Milchtein also made a decision about how she presents herself in the work that she does: she’s not going to hide her plus-size body. “I wasn’t going to hide myself in order to do the work that I’m doing,” Milchtein says. “I wasn’t going to provide people with access to incredible education information in a respectful and kind space [if] they couldn’t respect and honor my body, my community, my identity.

“I want myself to be seen,” she continues, “and that ties right into my love of bright clothing



Photo: Amanda Fincutte

and fashion, and showing people that I’m not just a woman in the automotive industry — I am a fat woman in the automotive industry. I am a queer woman in the automotive industry. I am a Jewish woman in the automotive industry. Those are all intrinsically part of my identity.”

From authoring articles and creating videos for Real Simple to being featured in local and national media like AARP, the Chicago Tribune and Aljazeera, Milchtein has been recognized for her novel concept, her unique story and her relatability. She was named one of the Advocate’s 2020 Women of the Year, alongside such luminaries as Rachel Maddow and Lizzo. And the story of her pandemic-era wedding (zero invited guests, viewed virtually by thousands) was featured in The New York Times’ Vows column.

Milchtein offers many of her services on a sliding scale, including her workshops for nonprofits. She also actively offers and gives scholarships to low-income people of color and people with disabilities.

As a brand, Mechanic Shop Femme is growing. Milchtein is working on a new course on electric vehicles and a gig with CarMax where she is creating educational content. She’s writing a book, too.

“I’m also really looking forward to being able to make a direct impact on the automotive industry itself,” Milchtein says, “instead of just the people that own cars. Working with brands and companies to help make the culture of their space more friendly and more welcoming and more inviting to women and queer folks in every position, both as employees and as consumers.

“Because if the space isn’t safe and comfortable for women and queer employees,” she continues, “then likely it isn’t going to be a safe and comfortable and inviting environment for automotive consumers, either.”

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6 ICONIC ROAD TRIP MOVIES That Symbolize Queer Self-Discovery



“To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar” is one of the most celebrated queer road movies. Photo: Universal Pictures

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No Surprise That Queer Audiences Connect Deeply with Life on the Road

BY GEORGE ELKIND

for mapping out one’s world.

For queer audiences, the rich symbology of cars and road films — along with their enduring outsider associations — has made them tantalizing objects to re-interpret through a queer lens. Evoking ideas of mobility, rebellion and self-determination, road movies have always resonated with broader notions of camaraderie, romance and escape.

When queered, these symbols and stories echo in ways that cast old narratives into new frames. Upending scripts and structures ranging from gendered hierarchies and legal strictures to notions of where queer people might be able to carve out a home, the image and role of the car becomes altered, like so many things, the instant queer people take it up.

What follows is an incomplete tour of queer-centric works which center on the allure of cars as extensions of different, less normative kind of selves, each suggesting an alternate pathway

“To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar” (1995)

The hulking, daisy-yellow Cadillac convertible snagged from a reluctant dealer by the leads in “Wong Foo” serves as an extension of their own outsized style and physicality. When Patrick Swayze, Wesley Snipes and John Leguizamo, as award-winning drag queens, find themselves stalled in a rural town on a cross-country tour, the convertible serves as a way for them to assert the grandeur of their drag presentation together, even to anyone who could somehow miss it. Though their temporary home is not immediately hospitable, “Wong Foo” suggests that even the most conservative spaces can be changed by just brief contact with flamboyant queer personae. By the time the queens skip town, they’ve plainly left their mark, expanding the range



In "Y tu mamá también," travel marks personal progress. Photo: Criterion Collection

inevitable fact of life in a way it's not for his traveling companion, Keanu Reeves' well-heeled Scott, with movements across states often happening in periods when Mikey's left unconscious. Whether through sex work in clients' cars or

of habitable queer terrain in the process.

"The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert" (1994)

An even bigger vehicle features in "Priscilla," granting the film's trans lead character (Terence Stamp) and accompanying drag performers a mode of conveyance that makes them a target for hate. Their response? To paint it pink in a gesture of stubborn, expressive defiance. As a glaring, massive signifier of queer identity driven across a range of unwelcoming spaces in the Australian outback, the titular bus also becomes a symbol of the ties that closely — and not always comfortably — bind its sniping, frequently hostile trio of lead performers. Serving as a pressure cooker for their fraught relationships, a means to achieving a shared livelihood and a flexible dwelling place for a group of outsiders, the bus draws out the stakes and tensions of self-styled queer presentation and the struggle to retain a sense of community even in the worst of times.

"The Living End" (1992)

Fully embracing the post-"Easy Rider" rebel iconography of American road films, director Gregg Araki's outlaw romance likewise embraces that film's sense of abrasiveness, experimentation and risk along with gunplay and leather jackets. Spotting a pair of HIV-positive gay men keenly aware of their place on the margins ("Fuck everything," one says early, following it with "We're totally free."), a life on the road — even if it's brief — allows for forms of power and self-assertion that would otherwise prove impossible to find. Channeling a sense of rage brewed from a decade-plus of queer marginalization and governmental neglect, driving proves a cornerstone to its leads' searing romance and itinerant life, a free-wheeling existence shadowed by being one of the only roads available.

"My Own Private Idaho" (1991)

Moments of transit tend to pass by here in narcoleptic ellipses, as befits the tossed-about existence of a drifting pair of leads. For River Phoenix's Mikey, loss of control is an

hitching rides, Mikey lives and works largely as a passenger, denied as a matter of both class and queer identity — the modest sense of self-assertion typically found in nomadic life. And yet director Gus Van Sant still finds poetry in his meanderings, a romance and dreamlike peace amid his scrabbings to get by. In fully embracing an outsider's place, Mikey drifts beyond the most gutting effects of loss.

"Desert Hearts" (1985)

In director Donna Deitch's underseen marvel, a car provides a space outside the trappings of familiar society for Helen Shaver's soon-to-be-divorced lead. In the car, there's room for surprise and exploration and an environment conducive to vulnerability; drives out with Cay (Patricia Charbonneau) offer up a miniature world in which characters are free to open up. For these queer women, there's a sense of shelter found in such excursions, a quasi-private space which insulates travelers from the stigmas they'd find in better-monitored, more public spaces. In one of its finest scenes of tentative advance, the two kiss through a car window in a rainstorm amid a wash of misty light. The sense of newfound freedom proves palpable, even from beneath the cover of a storm.

"Y tu mamá también" (2001)

Queerness is just a hinted presence for most of "Y tu mamá," a Mexican road trip picture focused on prolonged adolescence whose leads constantly undermine its journey's received associations with progress. Seeing its two young men grasping at the affections of Luisa (Maribel Verdú), always the bemused adult in the room, director Alfonso Cuarón follows their ardent, performative machismo to a natural endpoint, which sees it unmasked as desperately repressed and insecure. Questioning narratives of travel as an empowering route to personal progress, the film finds its most dizzyingly revelatory moments in experiences both unplanned and unexpected. It's the car here that pushes its drivers to endpoints of queer self-discovery, taking them to places they might otherwise not have found.

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Off the Beaten Path: Surprisingly Queer Road Trip Destinations

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

There's just something about a road trip. You might be venturing out in the same car you use for your daily commute and boring errands, but on a road trip, your whip transforms into a magical chariot, whisking you off to familiar backroads or uncharted territory.

Who knows what gifts the road will present to you — memorable local characters, many a roadside cow to moo at, greasy diner food, colorful conversation with your travel companions...

The best thing about a road trip is the unpredictability.

So, load up on car snacks (pretty sure those are calorie-free on a road trip, so go wild), launch your carefully curated playlist, avert your eyes from the outrageous bill as you fill up your tank, and hit the highway or byway. Here are a few of our favorite, sometimes unexpectedly LGBTQ-friendly travel destinations to consider right here in the Mitten State.

Experience Saugatuck in a new way

The Dunes Resort holds a special and well-deserved place in LGBTQ+ Michigan history, and it's always a great destination for a little debauchery and highly spirited fun. If

you're interested in a quieter, more romantic experience, consider Hidden Garden Cottages & Suites, a gay-owned getaway located within walking distance to Lake Michigan and all the leisure and food choices in charming downtown Saugatuck.

See [Off the Beaten Path](#), page 18



Hancock Street, Pentwater. Photo: Michigan.org

Down & Dirty with Gay Racer Dustin Sprouse

And Yes, He Answered All of Our Questions About Why He Supports Trump

BY MIKEY ROX

There's no beating around the bush with competitive race car driver Dustin Sprouse: He's out, he's proud, and he's an unrepentant Trump supporter.

Before you crumple up this page — like most LGBTQ+ folks are apt to do whenever they read the T-word — Sprouse implores you to hear him out. And so do I. Which is precisely why I chose to interview the 35-year-old amateur athlete who, in 2021, won Rookie of the Year in dirt-track racing's Top Notch Late Model series.

Politics and sports seem to go hand-in-hand these days anyway. Auto racing is no different. Sprouse — thick like a grizzly on a 6-foot-2-inch frame — is at a crossroads, however. Being gay has limited his sponsorship within the blue-collar racing community while his conservative leanings alienate a large portion of the LGBTQ+ community. As a recent cover story of the speedster in *Sport Illustrated* points out, which I recommend reading before pressing on with this piece — it's a broader introduction to Sprouse (and one of his insurrectionist crewmembers) opposed to this more focused interview — his life is complicated.

As you'll discover in our recent chat, Sprouse is a Trump supporter, yes. But he's



Photo courtesy of Dustin Sprouse

See [Dustin Sprouse](#), page 20



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Au Train Beach near Marquette. Photo: Travel Marquette

→ **Off the Beaten Path**

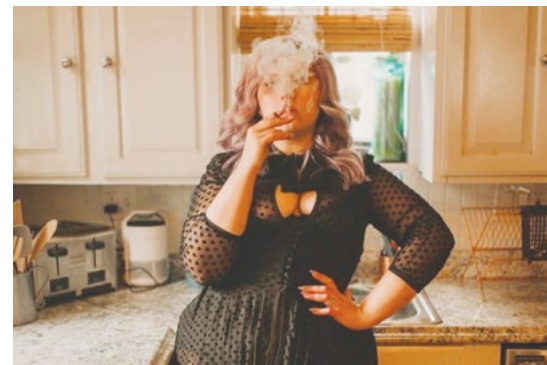
Continued from page 16

Hit the beach and take a stroll in a lake town you've probably overlooked

Despite being an outwardly LGBTQ-friendly lake town, cheerful, welcoming Pentwater seldom makes the list when it comes to queer vacation spots. You'll find a fantastic, not-too-crowded beach and all the quaint charms of other Lake Michigan towns, including memorable restaurants and several boutiques, most adorned with Pride Flag stickers welcoming passersby at the door. Don't miss family-friendly Good Stuffs for top-notch diner fare and a veritable museum of kitschy knick-knacks.

Visit your Yooper neighbors

It's the road trip your grandparents might have taken for their honeymoon — a trip over the iconic Mackinac Bridge to the land of camo and cheap beer. Don't let the



Copper House. Photo: Andrew Potter

hunting lodge vibe fool you: the U.P. offers plenty of LGBTQ-friendly gems. Admire the queens jazzing up the thriving drag scene in Marquette or add some "extreme" to your road trip by renting a sea kayak from Keweenaw Adventure Company in Copper Harbor, which welcomes LGBTQ+

clientele to one of the "last places without cell phone reception."

Motor over to the Motor City

While the Detroit area may be more of a staycation for many readers, it's worth taking a look at a few LGBTQ-friendly spots you may not have on your radar. Consider the gay-owned, super welcoming Hotel Royal Oak Hotel. Academic-minded travelers can spend hours digging through the archives at the Walter P. Reuther Library, which features historical documents focused on Detroit's rich LGBTQ+ history. Don't miss Copper House, a lesbian-owned "bud and breakfast" celebrating the LGBTQ+ community while fully embracing Michigan's (totally legal) recreational pot scene.

This one's for the ladies

Head up to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore to Labry's Resort for Women, a "wilderness haven" featuring several charming cottages tucked into a pine forest. The resort welcomes single women, couples, kids and pups. Or pull out your camping gear and head to Windover Women's Resort in Owendale in the heart of Michigan's "thumb." The campground features a pool and themed weekends all season long.



Image purchased from MiniMoms Etsy shop, a collaborative of moms in Dnipro, Ukraine

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Photos courtesy of Dustin Sprouse

➔ **Dustin Sprouse**

Continued from page 16

Sprouse is a Trump supporter, yes. But he's also a passionate, caring, dedicated friend and family-oriented race car driver who yearns to be accepted for his wheel-spinning skills without being judged on the basis of his sexual orientation — or political alignment.

Even the open-minded need to be challenged now and again. Consider this a crash course.

Racing is in your blood. Your entire family has a need for speed, including your parents and your brother. Tell me a bit about your upbringing in West Virginia and your journey to becoming a professional dirt-track racer.

My dad started racing in 1989, and that's where my own love of racing began. I never went on vacations because we were always at the races every weekend. My brother started racing in 1997, and I started in 1999. We all got out of it in 2010 due to [a lack of] financial support. I found my way back in it in 2021 in the Top Notch Late Model series where I would end up winning the 2021 Steel Block Late Model Rookie of the Year. That brings us to where we are today.

What were some of the considerations you made when deciding to come out publicly in your early 20s? How was it received?

I was really nervous about coming out in a redneck state, but when I was 23 years old I finally did it and, believe it or not, the rednecks stayed my friend and the friends

I thought would be are no longer my friends. Just have to respect others as they are.

Success in racing comes down to winning races, but it's also about sponsorships — race cars are expensive and you've got to keep yours running if you want to compete. What's the criteria for a sponsor choosing to affiliate with you? We know what's in it for you — financial support to keep doing what you love — but what's in it for dirt-track racing sponsors?

I'm looking for corporate backing from a national company that prides itself in being an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. A corporate partner that will commit to supporting my efforts at being the first openly gay driver competing at the top level of dirt track racing. This shows consumers that they are committed to building inclusivity into their brand and support the efforts of people like me who are unapologetic about who they are. I put a great product on the track to advertise their business. I have a kind heart, I'm a good sport, and I'm a great person to be a public representative for your business.

Sponsorship has largely eluded you because you're gay. How long can you compete without that deep-pocketed corporate financing?

I'll continue racing at a local amateur level if I'm not successful at attracting meaningful corporate backing. However, if I'm fortunate enough to secure a strong sponsor interested in supporting my racing career, I know in my heart I can compete at a professional level in



national dirt track racing.

Sports Illustrated profiled you in a cover story published at the end of last year and in it, one of your crewmembers, Eric Barber, who remorsefully attended the Jan. 6 insurrection, details how the confluence of social media and politics affected his mental health. In the same piece, you proudly proclaim to be a Trump supporter. First, why are you a Trump supporter?

I like Trump for his "America first" policies. I support the coal industry, and I have friends who depend on oil and pipelines for employment. I felt like our economy was strong under Trump.

Why — especially given Barber's very distracting experience with politics — would you publicly attest to being a Trump supporter as a gay semi-professional athlete? How do you see that admission helping your career? Is there a possibility that you're publicly a Trump supporter because you think it will ingratiate you to conservative race fans?

I am who I am, and after living a closeted life I feel best when I'm completely honest about who I am and what I believe.

It's a very interesting intersection. You're an

example yourself of inside politics preventing you from receiving sponsorships yet you're vocally supporting the conservative ideology that instituted it. How do you respond to someone who says you might be getting what you deserve?

I'm not sure what people with a strong partisan perspective think I deserve. However, I believe that I deserve to be treated with inclusion and understanding, with fairness and support from both LGBTQ+ allies as well as friends and family. So my political views don't define me as much as racing does. To be truly inclusive means accepting me as a proud gay athlete despite my support for Trump.

Politics aside, a profile in Sports Illustrated is a huge deal for any athlete, let alone a gay-identifying one. How did that story impact your career? What has changed since it was published?

I've received some local sponsor support but it's been minimal as far as financial support goes. Encouragement from people all over America in the form of private messages and likes/shares in social media has been the most noticeable impact of

the Sports Illustrated article.

If your sexual orientation, ultimately, is the limiting factor in your success as a racer, what will you do about it?

I'll continue as I have been since I started. I'll never give up or quit. My dreams and goals are important to me and I'll never let discrimination obstruct my pursuit of success on the track.

Romantically, where are you? Is there a man behind the man behind the wheel?

I'm single still, but always have room in my life for that special someone.

What's your dream car?

Brand new Dodge 3500 Cummins. Already have the late model, but need better equipment to have my dream dirt track car to compete at the Top Notch level.

What are your aspirations beyond the track? If you succeed, what's the ultimate goal? If you don't, what's the contingency plan?

I will keep being me and racing as much as I can, but if that does fail I will live my life as a loving and caring family man because I put my family first.

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What Would a \$15-Per-Hour Minimum Wage Mean for the LGBTQ+ Community in Michigan?

A Ballot Initiative to Raise Michigan's Minimum Wage Could Lift Many LGBTQ+ People Out of Poverty



BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

While the stereotype that waiters and bartenders are commonly gay persists, evidence that LGBTQ+ individuals are overrepresented in the restaurant industry is lacking. Still, it stands to reason that LGBTQ+ people in Michigan's service industry — and all industries — could benefit more than the general population from raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

First, more LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. live in poverty than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts: specifically, 22% versus 16%. Another indicator is the so-called LGBTQ+ wage gap, identified

by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which reveals LGBTQ+ people earn 90 cents on the dollar compared to non-LGBTQ+ people. Transgender women fare the worst, at 60 cents on the dollar. But while raising hourly wages might sound like a winning strategy, some business owners are sounding the alarm.

Today, activists are collecting signatures to allow voters to decide whether the One Fair Wage ballot initiative becomes law, thus raising the minimum wage in Michigan incrementally to \$15 per hour by 2027. BTL spoke with two LGBTQ+ individuals involved in the matter: one leading the charge, one advising caution.

The Organizer: 'There's so many different things that intersect when it comes to wages.'

If a ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage in Michigan sounds familiar, that may be because petitions to do just that were circulating before the 2018 election. Although the initiative was popular, its supporters' efforts were thwarted by Republican

See **One Fair Wage**, page 24



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Got Nothing to Hyde

→ One Fair Wage

Continued from page 22

lawmakers.

"When we did a ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage to \$12 an hour while ending the sub-minimum wage as well, it was adopted and amended by the state Legislature," explained One Fair Wage Lead Organizer Chantel Watkins. "Before it landed on the governor's desk after the election, [they] gutted it." Subsequently, the Michigan Supreme Court refused to hear a case on the "adopt and amend" maneuver.

One Fair Wage is focused on the service sector, the restaurant industry in particular. Currently, the tipped minimum wage in Michigan is \$3.75 per hour, while the standard minimum wage for adults is \$9.87 per hour. Those numbers represent increases since Jan. 1, 2022. While the federal minimum is \$7.25, efforts are under way to increase it to \$15 across the board via the Raise the Wage Act.

Watkins suggested that when raising wages is on the ballot, voters are eager to turn out at the polls — and statistics bear that out. In response to a survey conducted by One Fair Wage, 41% of voters said they would be "more excited" to vote in 2022 if raising the minimum wage were on the ballot, compared with 5% who would be less likely to vote. It's also to their advantage that any changes made by the Legislature are subject to the governor's approval.

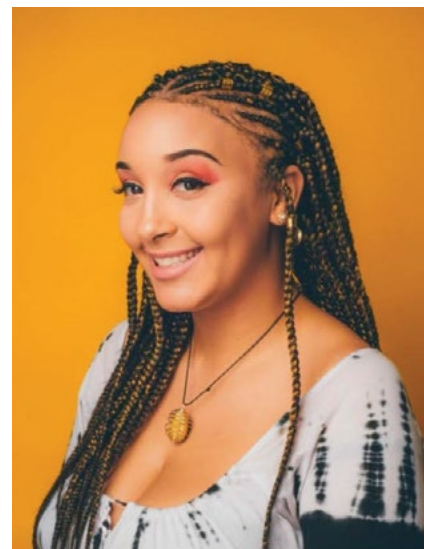
Watkins sounded confident that this time, One Fair Wage will be a winner, despite the pushback from business owners in the past who feared raising wages would be unsustainable.

"With the way that inflation is going, these people who have fought against this before know that industries will crumble — especially the restaurant industry — if they do not make changes," Watkins said.

Acknowledging restaurant owners' fears, Watkins offered a remedy in the form of High Road Kitchens and High Road Restaurants. Emerging from the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, this movement supports restaurant owners in advocating for sustainable business models that champion living wages, basic benefits and fair promotion policies. Within the local LGBTQ+ community, the Detroit lesbian-owned bakery Good Cakes and Bakes is one business that implements such practices.

"One restaurant owner has raised everything at his place 50 cents and no one has noticed; some people have now a service fee," Watkins said. "But that's why we're trying to implement policy. Because if you make \$15 an hour the standard across the board, then everybody is going to have to make those changes so that those restaurants will not crumble."

As the system exists today, Watkins believes LGBTQ+



One Fair Wage Lead Organizer Chantel Watkins.
Photo: Chantel Watkins

people and other marginalized groups are more negatively impacted than the general population — and therefore stand to gain the most from the increase in pay.

"I've heard from a lot of different LGBTQ+ people who have withstood the abuse," Watkins said, "who have worked at host stands and have been called the f-word or a 'tranny' or just

horrible names, and have just gone their way with a smile in order to stay in that place because they're making a higher wage than if they quit." She also mentioned nonbinary people who work in the back of the house and are purposely misgendered. Watkins was referring to waged restaurant positions that might start a few dollars above standard minimum wage.

That kind of abuse exists in the tipped minimum wage realm as well, where 90% of women in the U.S. restaurant industry report being subject to unwanted sexual advances at work. Watkins referenced "maskual harassment," a twist on sexual harassment in which a server — usually female-presenting — is asked by the customer to remove their face mask. Sexual harassment in the restaurant industry is more common in states with a lower tipped minimum and appears more common at downscale restaurants where women servers outnumber men compared to high-end establishments. Female servers in states that have replaced the tipped minimum wage with a standard minimum wage report sexual harassment less often.

Given the choice, Watkins would eliminate tipping as it presently exists in the service industry. Tipping emerged from the days of slavery, she said. After the Civil War, former slaves weren't paid a wage, they received tips for being a "good boy" or a "good girl." In the service industry, it shouldn't be necessary to "earn" a tip in order to live, believes Watkins.

"If you're a maitre d' or a concierge, you make a livable wage, and then they put a tip on top of that if they appreciated your service," Watkins said. "But people should not be dependent on

See **One Fair Wage**, page 26

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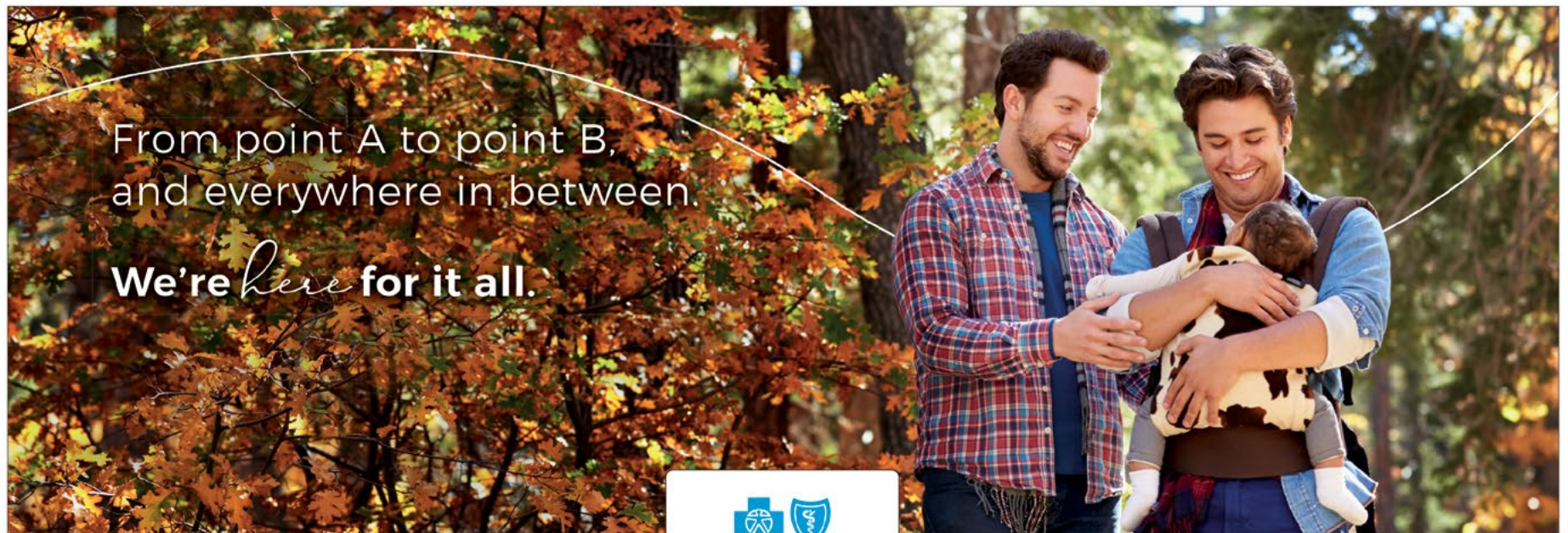
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→ One Fair Wage

Continued from page 24

withstanding abuse and harassment in order to make a living.” Having worked in restaurants and spas herself, Watkins speaks from personal experience.

“I’m a Black, bisexual woman,” Watkins said. “There’s so many different things that intersect when it comes to wages, no matter what group you belong to: whether your ethnicity, your race, your sexual orientation, your gender identity, your religious affiliation, or what party you belong to, every single person has, in life, at some point, come in contact with a waged worker or has been one.”

“It’s something that all of us should care about,” she continued, “especially when you belong to more of the marginalized groups [because] you are facing more abuses than anyone else. It is very, very important that I not only stick up for other people, but I’m sticking up for myself.”

The Bar Owner: ‘That’s not how economics work.’

Brett Nicholson has done the math. And the openly gay owner of Pontiac’s storied Liberty Bar can’t find the extra \$66,000 that would be needed annually if he’s required to pay his bartenders and servers \$15 per hour. That’s not to say his business isn’t successful — quite the opposite.

“I don’t have the final numbers from everyone,” Nicholson said, “but I would believe that probably Liberty Bar is the most successful restaurant in downtown Pontiac — and this is 91 years in business. 2021 was our best year because we worked

very, very hard. All our entire team, our entire staff.” Because of that, he said, he was able to raise the kitchen staff’s wages to \$16 per hour. But Nicholson doesn’t think \$15 per hour is feasible for his servers and bartenders who currently make \$3.75 plus tips.

“I completely believe in, and understand, the average worker and getting their dollar amount up to 15 so that it is a living wage, so they can support their family,” Nicholson said. “That’s not what we’re talking about with tipped minimum wage.”

The workers who take home tips on top of the minimum wage do well above average at Liberty Bar, compared with others in the restaurant industry: from the low \$20s per hour, including tips, all the way up to \$42 per hour for Nicholson’s top bartender. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the median hourly wage for a restaurant server is \$11.42, while the median for a bartender is \$12. Popularity of restaurant, generosity of customer, location and other variables determine what often represents a significant chunk of a tipped worker’s income.



Brett Nicholson, owner of Liberty Bar in Pontiac.
Photo: Brett Nicholson

Nicholson doesn’t believe there’s anything problematic with the necessity to earn tips in order to make a living wage: that’s the nature of the “service” industry. “People will continue to sexualize each other, people [will] continue to treat service employees inappropriately because they’re in service to someone,” he said. But while Nicholson said inappropriate behavior by customers happens at places like Hooters, none of his employees have reported foul play where he works.

“In any industry, someone has choices on who they work for and whether or not they’re being treated properly,” Nicholson said. “Especially in salons [and the] restaurant industry, there’s a tremendous amount of these organizations. You move from one place to the next because it’s not the right fit for you. It’s a wide industry. You have so many different types of settings.”

But while Nicholson believes workers have options, he doesn’t think he has the option of simply raising prices to make up the

estimated \$66,000 per year shortfall. If required by law to pay his entire staff at least \$15 per hour, he would be forced to up his prices significantly — and he doesn’t believe Liberty Bar is suited to be a High Roads success story. He also thinks his high earners might seek opportunities elsewhere.

“They have this idea that everyone’s just gonna start making a ton more money and spend a lot more money, and then it’ll all even out,” Nicholson said. “But that’s not how economics work. It’s never actually happened that way.” And Nicholson doesn’t have confidence the government would step in with subsidies if the experiment failed, as a proponent of the initiative suggested to him.

Yet Nicholson isn’t just concerned about dollars and cents. As the caretaker of a landmark in metro Detroit’s LGBTQ+ community, he’s troubled by what the loss of Liberty Bar would represent. Nicholson distinguished two types of gay bars. In one category are bars in which the “average” LGBTQ+ person would feel comfortable, but that also welcome the wider community. Then there are bars like the Liberty.

“There are many nights where we have many men who have come in dressed as their true self for the first time, and they’re nervous,” Nicholson said. “They’re scared to come and they park in the back...they’re at the end of the bar, and you can see them shaking like a leaf. And it is our job to go over, [to] welcome them, to be affirming, to make sure that they know that they’re in the right place and that they’re going to be safe.”

The initiative is based on speculation, says Nicholson, and he doesn’t want to speculate on the safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community. “There is a group of people who need us,” Nicholson said, and it’s been their choice not to make the Liberty an open format establishment. Nicholson credits the success of his business with his employees’ hard work.

“I’m saying if we can do it, and if we can get our bartenders in a beleaguered auto town in a downtown to make — in the lowest sense — more than \$23 an hour, any other bar can do it too,” Nicholson said. “They have to put in the work. They have to put in the equity.” Nicholson mentioned repainting and adding a patio.

“Restaurants, salons and services go out of business all the time because they cannot attract staff when they are not offering the earning potential,” he added. “Leave those of us alone that are.”

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Sense and Sensitivity



Photo: Amir Hoissain

Cavetown Talks New Projects and War on Trans People

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

As YouTube, social media, and self-released music platform Bandcamp grew in popularity, musicians could create music and garner followings from their own bedrooms: hence “bedroom pop” was born, and so was the career of UK-born, 23-year-old singer/songwriter/producer Robin Skinner (he/they), aka Cavetown.

Currently embarked on a dense, largely sold out US tour through late spring with international dates to follow, the openly transgender Cavetown — who also falls somewhere on the aromantic and asexual spectrum — recently followed up his 2021 EP, “Man’s Best Friend,” with the single “Fall In Love With A Girl.” The song is a collaboration with Filipino-British next gen guitar hero beabadoobee, about “someone who’s

struggling with their sexuality and how that affects their happiness,” Skinner explained in a press release. “This person is scared to take the leap to make themselves happy and tries to make things work in a hetero relationship. When they finally take the step to be in a same-sex relationship, they realize how happy it makes them and that it’s OK to trust yourself.”

Cavetown’s journey began at age 14, when

Skinner uploaded his first original song, “Haunted Lullaby,” to YouTube, which, seemingly on brand for bedroom pop, boasts a ukulele (he’s swiveled more to guitars lately, plus gorgeous, richly melodic hooks and well-produced harmonies on even his most lilting tracks). A 2015 self-titled, self-released full length album scored acclaim and a quickly growing audience — which, today, includes eight million monthly Spotify listeners, over two million YouTube subscribers, and more than a billion global streams. At the same time, Skinner also kept busy dropping covers of songs by Twenty One Pilots, Elvis Presley, Ed Sheeran and Justin Bieber between subsequent singles, EP and LP releases (most can be found on Cavetown’s Bandcamp), including his 2020 major label debut on Sire Records, “Sleepyhead.”

Taking a break from tour rehearsals, Skinner fielded email questions about his new single, his musical evolution, touring, insect wars, other awesome non-binary/trans bedroom pop artists and the GOP’s war against trans people.

To get it out of the way, where did the stage name Cavetown come from?

I wish I had an interesting answer, but I came up with it when I was like 12 or 13, just because it sounded cool! I’m very grateful that it still sounds cool to me and didn’t end up being something cringey.

Was there an opportunity to do something new on “Fall In Love With A Girl” that you haven’t before?

Working with beabadoobee was something new, which I was super stoked to get to do! Her voice works so well in the song, and I had a great time recording with her and mixing her vocals, as well as [musician] Jacob Bugden’s synths and drums. I pretty much just work in Logic and haven’t really explored any cool plugins or hardware, so it was sick to watch Jacob do his thing with the synths he brought. There’s so much unique stuff you can do with external hardware, but finding where to start seems so overwhelming.

You don’t shy away from being vulnerable and intimate in your lyrics. For example, in 2020, you told Billboard, “I write songs about things that I find hard to talk about in person with people.” Which song from your most recent EP, “Man’s Best Friend,” is the most personal for you?

“Sharpener” is definitely the most personal and one that I’m really proud of. Sonically, I started by taking inspiration from one of my really old songs, “I Promise I’m Trying” [from the EP Nervous Friends: Pt. 1], which has maintained a special place in my heart since I wrote it in 2015. They both come from a similar subject matter of struggling with your mental health and looking for a way to ask for help while also finding it hard to leave behind the coping mechanisms you’ve relied on

Cavetown

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See **Cavetown**, page 32

What the Michigan Democratic Party Candidate Endorsements Mean for the LGBTQ+ Community

BY JON KING

The Michigan Democratic Party (MDP) held its Spring Endorsement Convention Saturday at Huntington Place in Detroit and left no doubt that Attorney General Dana Nessel tops the list of candidates who most impact the state's LGBTQ+ community.

Nessel, who is the first openly gay person elected to statewide office in Michigan, is seeking her second term as the state's top law enforcement officer. But even before she became Michigan's AG, Nessel had an outsize role in championing causes close to the gay and trans communities.

While still in private practice as an attorney in 2012, she helped challenge Michigan's ban on same-sex marriage, which was one of the four cases consolidated into the historic 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision that established marriage equality. As if to underscore her commitment to that cause, she famously proposed to her then-girlfriend, Alanna, outside the Supreme Court following arguments in the case. They are now married and raising twin sons.

But Nessel has been far more than just a symbol of equality. She has used her time in office to actively pursue justice on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community. Just last month she argued before the Michigan Supreme Court that the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) prohibits discrimination because of an individual's sexual orientation. That case involved a hair removal business that denied service to a transgender woman; the State Court of Claims ruled that ELCRA did not include such protections.

Speaking to that very issue at Saturday's Endorsement Convention, Nessel said she foresaw optimism on that front in the future. "And soon, at long last, I predict that LGBTQ people in our state will finally have equal rights in Michigan."

However, the other top candidate on the Democratic ticket has similarly demonstrated a commitment to inclusiveness and justice for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson announced in 2019 that her office was revising the policy for changing the sex indicator on a driver's license or identification card to make it easier for transgender people to obtain identification. According to a Secretary of State publication, studies show that nearly 81 percent of the transgender population in Michigan lacks proper identification.

While none of the other candidates seeking endorsement spoke to specific LGBTQ+ issues, State Sen. Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit) spoke to the issue while she projected hope for a



(Left to right) Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson. Photo: Twitter / @dananessel

Democratic majority in Lansing come 2023.

"We want to say once and for all that love is love and LGBTQ folks deserve to be protected under our civil rights laws, but across the country and here in Michigan, Republicans have introduced bills to limit LGBTQ rights," she said. "The difference could not be more clear and the stakes truly could not be higher."

While Sen. Chang's message was meant to help fire up the approximately 1,000 party faithful present both in person and online, there can be little doubt that electing Democrats would provide the most benefit for gay and trans Michiganders.

Kristina Karamo, a Trump-endorsed Republican candidate for Secretary of State, has referred to LGBTQ+ "behavior" as "unnatural" and "extra filthy," while Jon Rocha, a Trump-endorsed Republican candidate for the Michigan House of Representatives, says he will introduce legislation modeled after Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" bill that would ban "discussion, or dissemination of materials, that involves sexual orientation, gender identity, or any sexually explicit content, in kindergarten through fourth grade."

Should the GOP retain its legislative majorities in Lansing, it is likely such a bill will make its way to the governor. If a Republican is there to greet it, there is little doubt it will become law.



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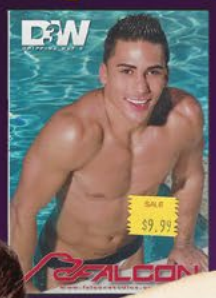
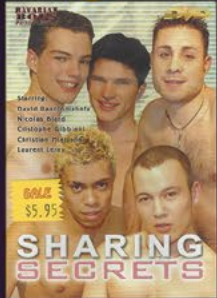


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everything myself from home and plan on keeping it that way forever. And my friend Allie Cuva, a.k.a. allie, makes some stunning music, and an artist I played a show with a long time ago called NoSo has some of the most mesmerizing guitar skills I've seen in person. Highly recommend.

You performed at Lollapalooza in 2021. How was that experience?

It was cool! Definitely quite nerve-racking, as it felt very foreign to be around so many people after the pandemic, but we managed to stay as isolated as possible. The most memorable moment for me was watching a cicada and a bee falling from a tree while fighting. The cicada was screaming and I witnessed it die on the ground. [sad emoticon]

What separates touring the U.S.A. from touring your native U.K. and other countries?

The crowd is pretty consistent all over the world, which is really nice! Ninety-nine percent of the time everyone is super sweet and respectful, which is really comforting because it feels like I'm just going out into a room full of my buddies no matter where in the world I am. The biggest difference is definitely the travel time. The U.S.A. is huge. I'm very privileged to be able to travel in a bus and sleep through most of the long drives.

Any cities you love the most, or can't wait to visit on this current tour?

I'm really excited to spend more time in San Diego, Seattle and Toronto.

Have you been to Detroit before, and if so, any anecdotes you can share?

I have! I was in Detroit during that polar vortex a few years ago visiting [fellow singer/songwriter/ YouTuber] Chloe Moriondo. I've never been so cold in my life; it straight up felt like my lungs were gonna freeze. I remember getting into Chloe's car, and there was a bottle of soap in the cupholder that was frozen solid.

Republicans and GOP leaders are attacking trans people through hateful state bills right now and plan to make this a culture war point for the 2022 election. Are you aware of it, and any thoughts or words of inspiration to share with people who live in those states?

I hate to say that it's not a surprising thing to see happening. I try not to read too much on stuff like this because I just end up feeling so powerless as an individual, but it's important to remember how enormous, loving and active our community is. Just keep sticking by your friends and being unapologetically yourself. Things will always be OK in the end, and if they aren't OK, then it's not the end.

→ Cavetown

Continued from page 30

for a while.

How would you describe your musical evolution since 2015?

It's hard for me to identify how my songwriting has changed, but my production has definitely improved a lot, and I just hope that it continues to do so.

Have you recorded some songs over the years that you're saving for a future release, or, like Prince and Paddy McAloon of Prefab Sprout, will keep in a vault forever?

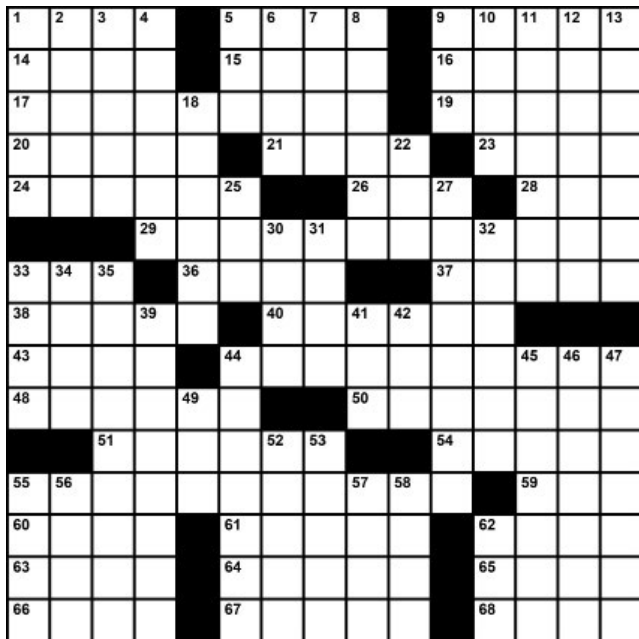
No full songs that I can think of, but I have a ton of half-finished project files that I forgot about or got bored of. They're great to keep for inspiration when I'm feeling stuck. Quite a few of my songs, like "Guilty" and "Boys Will Be Bugs," came from unfinished projects that I originally got stuck with or thought I would be scrapping.

And what other projects are in the works that you can say something about?

I don't know if I can share much, but I'm working on dipping my toes into some film scoring.

There seems to be a proliferation of fantastic non-binary and trans-identified bedroom pop artists lately, including Kali, Khai Dreams and Addison Grace, your opening act on your current tour. What is it about that genre that's so perfect for you, and did I miss any artists you'd add to that list?

I feel like I just fit so comfortably into bedroom pop as someone who's always felt so protective over my production. I've always produced



- 33 Elton John's lang.
 36 Rimbaud's zip
 37 Tickle pink
 38 "___ and tigers and bears ..."
 40 Wicks, making a basket, e.g.
 43 You could get caught in it
 44 Joe who is directing 29-Across
 48 Penile boast
 50 "___ to Watch Over Me"
 51 "I Will Survive" singer Gaynor
 54 Beethoven's "F_r ___"
 55 She plays the title role in 29-Across
 59 Old Ford model
 60 Electronic synthesizer
 61 Bea sitcom role
 62 Prop for Juliet
 63 R.E.M.'s "It's the End of the World ___ Know It"
 64 Skins
 65 "Bus Stop" playwright
 66 Drag queen ___ Pool
 67 Shooting sport
 68 Got mellower

- 9 "Suze Q" band, for short
 10 Kind of stimulation
 11 Noted Andy Warhol subject
 12 City hue of Oz
 13 Takes the whole bed say
 18 Shakespeare wrote a comedy of these
 22 JFK's successor
 25 Ursula Le Guin's field, with "fi"
 27 Was appropriate for
 30 Put out a feeler
 31 Years ago
 32 Essential part of cornholing?
 33 It serves Tel Aviv
 34 Cleopatra was queen of this
 35 Eating out, with "on"
 39 Victoria's Secret item
 41 Word after photo or special ___ Know It"
 42 P on fraternity row
 44 Works for Bubba Gump
 45 Getting dirty
 46 Working in the theater
 47 Got under one's skin
 49 Ballerina's perch
 52 Fishing writer Walton
 53 Blue, to interior decorators
 55 Web info source
 56 Amount of AZT, e.g.
 57 Chick's suffix
 58 Knock off
 62 Caesar's way

Got Nothing to Hyde

Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 Male delivery?
 5 She played gay in "Silkwood"
 9 Has the big O
 14 Plot unit
 15 "Brothers & Sisters" matriarch
 16 Difficult position aftermath
 17 Writer Robert Louis, writer of the

- source novella for 29-Across
 19 Pinker, to meat-eaters
 20 Caruso or Domingo
 21 Work your fingers to the bone
 23 Coin of Versace's homeland
 24 Elevator alternative
 26 Come out on the beach
 28 Perry Mason's field
 29 Upcoming movie about Hyde

Down

- 1 Doesn't come quickly
 2 Four duos
 3 Gladiator area
 4 Empty
 5 Anderson Cooper's network
 6 Party thrower
 7 Ending with switch
 8 Monaco VIP

See p. 24 for answers

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BUT
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16 Michigan Orgs Receive \$2 Million HIV Prevention Grant From CDC

Federal Grant Focused on High-Impact Prevention Programs for Various At-Risk Groups

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The CDC has awarded 16 Michigan organizations a \$2 million grant focused on HIV prevention among high-risk groups. Among the recipients are Community Health Awareness Group (CHAG), AIDS Partnership Michigan and HIV/AIDS Resource Center (HARC). The \$300,000 CHAG received — the most sizable single grant amount — will go toward implementing a high-impact project for young men of color who have sex with men. LGBT Detroit will help CHAG with the work.

"For over 35 years, CHAG has worked tirelessly to address Detroit's HIV challenge using the most effective proven interventions in response to the needs of those most at-risk," CHAG CEO Cindy Bolden Calhoun said in a press release. "This new funding opportunity uniquely positions our organization in collaboration with LGBT Detroit to address those core social determinants."

Those determinants include health and access to quality healthcare, education, poverty, stigma and racism, and Calhoun said these factors continue to plague young Black men who have sex with men.

The generous award will continue to advance the parallel missions of both CHAG and LGBT Detroit to help improve the quality of life of Detroit's African American community by addressing current health issues and developing effective ways of promoting and implementing positive health strategies.

Barbara Locke, CHAG's director of finance

and prevention programs, told BTL that the new grant opportunity "is very unique in that allows us to not only target or prioritize HIV prevention and intervention services, but it allows us to address those core social determinants that place individuals at higher risk for HIV."

Locke said the approach of the program is called a "status neutral approach," impacting both those who are HIV positive and those who test negative.

"Whether you're negative or positive you get the same type of support to get into care if you're HIV positive or help you stay negative should that be the case. ... Back in the day, if you were negative, we'd talk about condoms and that's about it."

But now, if you test negative, "we want you to stay negative," said Locke. "We want you to get on PrEP and stay on it and be adherent to it. And we'll provide you the support to help you do it."

Locke said she is excited about working again with LGBT Detroit. "They're a great organization," she said. "We've partnered with them before, and it allows us to expand the work. They will function as a safe space where the community can gather."

Other organizations receiving funds from the \$2 million CDC grant include Detroit Medical Center/Wayne State University and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) in Dearborn. Find the full list at Michigan.gov.

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