

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

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Together, Apart

The U.S. Government Has
Kept Tim and Hugo Apart
for More Than 10 Years

By Dawn Wolfe



2023'S CRITICAL QUEER ISSUES

Michigan Leaders on Conversion
Therapy, Marriage and More

INSIDE THE TERRORISM ALERT

What It Means for Queer
People in the State

A HISTORICAL FIRST

The Bisexual Dad Looking
Out for Your Rights



Advice to Be Well

From Dr. Mark Bornstein and Dr. Paul Benson



I am a transgender male. I want to get a bilateral mastectomy and go to a physician out of state that my friend went to and was very happy with. I went to my primary care doctor asking for a referral who told me that they would not refer me out of state and would be happy to refer me to a capable compassionate surgeon locally who has experience with transitional top surgeries. They said it is due to my HMO insurance and receiving care “out of network”. Can they do that? – DD

Dear DD,

The concept of a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) is to receive care within an organized system of care. This has good and bad points. The good point is that care within a group of providers is usually more efficient and less costly, often avoiding duplication of services and easier access. The bad point is if you want to go out of your physician's or hospital's network, it's not always possible.

Hospitals and providers accepting HMO's get paid a small monthly capitation for each patient to provide care whether you receive any services or not each month. Most medical services to other providers are paid out of that capitated amount. Capitated providers and hospitals would not want to pay another hospital or provider out of their monthly capitation allowance for services they can provide and are included in the monthly capitation. It's not your HMO paying most of

these costs, but your provider and their hospital. Giving out of “their” network referrals with every ask could put individual networks in a negative financial position quickly. This happens more than one would think.

Most providers will issue an out of network referral if there is a valid good reason and certainly for any emergency. HMO insurances are not that public with their financial arrangements with providers. People call their HMO and are told “You can go where you want” as long as you get a referral. The HMO insurance companies don't have much financial risk, so they can say that to keep their subscribers happy. My opinion is that they should change that as it misleads people.

The short answer is you are best off to accept an in-network referral from your doctor. If your consultation does not go well, or you have negative feelings about the specialist, you should go back and discuss this with your primary care physician. For people with little to no known health problems the referral issue is probably not a big deal. If you have health issues, especially you see several medical specialists, opting out of an HMO may be a good idea to allow you to see whoever you want. It's more of a problem for patients having different specialists from different hospital systems, and their insurance changes to an HMO. Usually, we are able to work this out in a satisfactory manner for all.

I hope this helps clarify your situation.

Hi Doc. I am a person living with HIV (PLWHIV) and I am going on a week-long vacation next week. I only have 4 pills left of my HIV treatment, so I will go about 7 days without medications. Should I space them out and take every other day so that I am covered for the entire vacation?

This is a very important question and it is essential that every PLWHIV knows this answer. We DO NOT space out our HIV medications. This is actually quite dangerous and something that can lead to problems in the future. With HIV medications, we typically tell people “All or None”. This means take your medications every day or do not take them at all. Of course, if you miss a day every couple of weeks, it likely is okay although it is of the utmost importance to strive to take medications every day.

The reason for this is that spacing out medications can lead to resistance. When someone has HIV treatment resistance, that means that the HIV virus has mutated so that certain medications will not work on the virus. This limits our options on treating HIV and will increase your chance of having HIV in your body.

To better understand this concept, let's get into the weeds of the science behind resistance. I promise, it will just be for a moment! The HIV medication must be at a high level in your body to decrease the virus. If there is a large amount

of medication in your body, it will be able to suppress the virus. Conversely, if there is zero medication in your body, the virus will thrive as there is no medication trying to counteract the virus and there will be no need for the virus to mutate. The issue comes if there is some virus in the body AND some medication in the body. This is when the virus will be able to mutate and form a more resistant type of HIV. This is why spacing out medications can be so dangerous.

This is an essential concept to understand. Do not space out your HIV medications. Make sure to think ahead and request a refill from your pharmacy before a vacation. If you are truly in a pinch, you can always contact our office at Be Well Medical Center for some samples of medications. We do have a limited supply of most of the single pill regimen HIV treatments. I hope this helps!

Since 1980 Dr. Paul Benson's Be Well Medical Center has been an inclusive medical center celebrating diversity. Do you have a health related question for Dr. Paul Benson and Dr. Mark Bornstein? Submit your questions to bewelladvice@pridesource.com. This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Be Well Medical Center. Between The Lines's journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Be Well. Learn more about Be Well from their ad below.



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Tim Hunter holds up a photo of him and his husband, Hugo Gallardo Petatan. Photo: Andrew Cohen

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5 **Queer** Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Look out, 2023. We're here, we're queer (or queer adjacent) and we're ready for whatever you've got in store for us. Even if you're not the resolution-setting type, a new year can mean a new outlook. It's the perfect chance to do a little self-reflection and maybe some redirection. Turn your energies to a new physical pursuit like an old-school aerobics class (from home!), get out of the house and attend a Dolly Parton trivia night or, if you struggle with addiction, find some LGBTQ-centered sobriety support. Take all the "me time" you need this year.



Erika Nix. Photo: Facebook

Roll Off the Couch and Into An Old-School Aerobics Class

You could join the throngs of hopeful 2023 resolution-makers flooding into gyms and yoga studios across the country or you could roll off the couch like a rock star and start moving that beautiful carcass without the need to scrape the windshield or even find real pants. The choice is yours, but if the latter sounds like a better match for your actual lifestyle, don't miss the Good Morning Workout! with Erica Nix, beaming to a laptop or smart TV near you every Saturday at 10 a.m.

Nix is on a mission to make working out fun again. "This class is more raw, more colorful and more ridiculous than any class you will ever experience," reads a promo for the class. Attendees are invited to wear vintage aerobics wear, with one caveat: "No pressure, because [Nix] prefers to be the best dressed." The class is specifically designed to be queer, trans and nonbinary inclusive.

Saturdays, 10 a.m., workoutwithericanix.com.



Photo: RCA Records

Think You Know Dolly? Prove It!

In times of uncertainty, what would Dolly do? Apart from being fabulously, unflappably positive about our collective future, she'd surely win the Dolly Parton trivia contest and drag show at B. Nektar Meadery in Ferndale on Jan. 13. Dolly might not make a personal appearance at this fun event — by the way, there will be prizes — but you can do her name proud by showing off your encyclopedic knowledge of the country queen, from "Steel Magnolias" to collabs with her honorary niece, Miley Cyrus. Proceeds will benefit Ferndale Pride, which is hosting a series of events ahead of the big festival in June. Event Director Julia Music says, "We welcome the community to join us at our events and see all of the unique places Ferndale has to offer."

Friday, Jan. 13, 8 p.m. B. Nektar Meadery, 1511 Jarvis, Ferndale. Big hair, cowboy boots and sequins optional but highly recommended. ferndalepride.com.



Leo Collection Hotel: Photo: Leo Collection Hotel website

Warm Up with a Last-Minute Lesbian Staycation

Are you a local lesbian in need of some post-holiday stress relief? Carpe Diem Weekend, sponsored by the Litts Committee Detroit, is your chance to relax, reset and refocus in a safe, positive space. The event takes place Jan. 14-16 at the Leo Collection Hotel in Lincoln Park and includes premium cash bars at events including a lingerie party, a "Baddie Brunch" and a late-night pool party, all limited to attendees only. Room reservations are required to take part in the weekend's festivities.

Jan. 14-16 at Leo Collection Detroit, 1805 John A Papalas Dr., Lincoln Park. Learn more and reserve tickets at t.ly/MUMT.



Plan Your 2023 Broadway in Detroit Schedule

Did you know you can catch a Broadway show right here in Detroit? Save your pennies and enjoy the same glam experience you'd get in NYC. It's not too early to reserve seats for the 2023 line-up, which includes "Beetlejuice," "Jagged Little Pill," "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "The Book of Mormon."

Broadway in Detroit has also announced its 2023-24 Subscription Series, including shows like "SIX," "Wicked," "Company" and "Mrs. Doubtfire" — if you're a theater lover, this can be an economical way to get your fix!

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Find Addiction Recovery Support

Recovery from addiction is never easy, and it can be especially difficult to stay focused on sobriety on the heels of the holiday season. It may be an ideal time to check out one of the area's local recovery group meetings created specifically for LGBTQ+ folks focused on sobriety. Here are a few to consider:

- Lives Lived Right (An LGBT Meeting of Narcotics Anonymous), Sundays at 5 p.m., 27700 Gratiot Ave., Roseville. liveritestructuredcorp.com.
- Affirmations offers several options, including virtual and in-person meetings focused on alcoholism, crystal meth recovery, narcotics addiction, harm reduction and more, 290 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale. goaffirmations.org/support-and-discussion-groups.
- St. Luke Episcopal holds a weekly Diversity Wednesday Alcoholics Anonymous meeting alongside a separate Al-Anon meeting for families and loved ones at 8 p.m., 540 W. Lewiston Ave., Ferndale. t.ly/d-Q1

Check out the website gayandsober.org to find a full list of virtual and in-person recovery support meetings in Michigan and beyond (including alcohol, meth and narcotics addiction support). There is a community of support out there — you don't have to face 2023 alone.

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



Tackling 2023’s Most Critical Queer Issues

The Potato Industry Has Its Own State Commission. Isn’t It Time for LGBTQ+ Michiganders to Have One Too?

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

The 2022 midterm elections are history, and LGBTQ+ Democrats in Michigan are rightfully celebrating some significant wins. The state boasts a newly redistricted, majority-blue leadership for the first time in 40 years, as well as a higher number of openly queer legislators than ever before. BTL reached out to local community leaders to ask what’s on their wish list from our elected officials in the coming term.

First, a few high fives

“I’m incredibly excited,” said Mark LaChey, first vice president of the Michigan Democratic Party. “Barack Obama getting elected president was incredible. I think it made me cry. But within the four corners of Michigan, this is absolutely the most exciting and gratifying election result that I as a Democrat and I as an LGBTQ person can celebrate.”

Jey’nce Poindexter said she “wasn’t shocked or surprised” by the election results. Poindexter is director of communications for the Trans Sistas of Color Project, case manager for the Ruth Ellis Center and manager of the Kelly Stough Project. “I wasn’t quite sold on the red wave,” she said. “After the election, I was super happy that I woke up in a Michigan with the same leadership. It’s not lost on me, the importance of getting Governor Whitmer re-elected, of making sure to keep Jocelyn Benson, making

sure to do what I could to make sure to get people to vote for Dana Nessel and just encourage and enlighten them on her platform.”

HRC state political director Amritha Venkataraman called the 2022 election “a really strong rebuke against hateful policies. We worked really hard on ‘Hate Won’t Win,’ and I feel really validated by the voters of Michigan in saying that they don’t want a hateful state. They want a loving and accepting state.”

Amending the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act

A loving and accepting state begins with amending Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA).

Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, now in her third term and recently elected Speaker Pro Tem, put it simply. “Obviously, Elliott-Larsen,” she said, in reference to prioritizing the final

push toward amending Michigan's civil rights law to include sexual orientation and gender identity or expression as protected classes. "That, I think, is a priority for the whole legislature or at least the Democrats."

Further, she called an amendment that left out the transgender community or one with a religious exemption "a non-starter for me. And I think that that is the case with our whole caucus," she continued. "As far as I'm concerned, what we need to do is codify what the Department of Civil Rights has been doing and what was the opinion issued in Rouch World," she said, referring to the case decided by the Michigan Supreme Court in 2022, which affirmed that the ELCRA includes protections based on sexual orientation.

Regarding ELCRA, Erin Knott, executive director of Equality Michigan, said she was "cautiously optimistic."

"We know that in past legislatures that there was bipartisan support to amend our state's civil rights law," Knott said, "but unfortunately, leaders never allowed committee hearings or the chance for a floor vote. And so, we are cautiously optimistic that we're going to get these non-discrimination protections within the first 100 days of the new legislature."

"One of the reasons why amending ELCRA is so critically important is because it will have a ripple effect on all sorts of other laws and policies when you say that LGBTQ individuals cannot be discriminated against in all areas and walks of life," she added.

Conversion therapy

Knott added a conversion therapy ban to the list of executive actions Equality Michigan and the Hate Won't Win Coalition would like to see codified.

"The world didn't end when the governor took action to ban conversion therapy as it relates to taxpayer dollars [being] used to fund the barbaric practice," Knott said. "So, we really believe that the legislature can follow her lead and act swiftly after they amend Elliott-Larsen to put a ban in place."

Transgender rights

Knott gave a preview of the Hate Won't Win Coalition's upcoming campaign to protect transgender individuals as it relates to Medicaid insurance. There exists an insurance bulletin to that effect, but Knott would like to see that broadened and codified. "Transgender individuals and their doctors are making the decisions that are right for them and not insurance companies," Knott said. As

a longer-term goal, she also mentioned the possibility of establishing Michigan as a sanctuary state for transgender families.

Hate crimes

Many also said they'd like to see more work done to strengthen hate crime legislation. In 2020, the Michigan Court of Appeals ruled in *People v. Rogers* that Michigan's Ethnic Intimidation Act does include gender identity as a protected class. However, that's the extent of LGBTQ+ inclusion. But there has been talk of legislation that would codify that decision to explicitly include the categories of sexual orientation and gender identity in Michigan's Ethnic Intimidation Act.

Reproductive Freedom for All

While Pohutsky was pleased with the passage of Proposal 3, Reproductive Freedom for All, she said there's still work to be done when it comes to protecting reproductive freedom.

"I know with the passage of Prop 3, some people think that we did it, we're good, we can just put a bow on that," Pohutsky said. "But there are a lot of existing statutes that we need to repeal. Prop 3 guarantees the right to reproductive health and that includes abortion care, contraception, gender-affirming care. But there are a lot of statutes that we have that limit the access to those forms of healthcare for folks. And we want to make sure that everyone has equitable access to reproductive health care."

State Sen. Jeremy Moss, recently elected President Pro Tem, was specific about the 1931 abortion ban still on the books in Michigan.

"Proposal 3 really should compel us to repeal that outdated and cruel 1931 abortion felony and continue the mandate from the people of the state of Michigan to respect bodily autonomy and protect reproductive freedom," Moss said.

Marriage protection

Moss also has his eye on repealing Michigan's 2004 marriage amendment.

"Clarence Thomas signaled that Obergefell is on his chopping block after the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*," Moss said. "And so even with the passage of the Respect for Marriage Act, because

Michigan Cannibal Killer Sentenced to Life in Prison in Grisly Kevin Bacon Grindr Hookup Murder

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Convicted cannibal killer Mark Latunski has been sentenced to life in prison with no possibility for parole for the murder of Kevin Bacon. The two met on Grindr and arranged a rendezvous on Christmas Eve 2019. But Latunski, 53, had deadly intentions. After Bacon, 25, arrived at Latunski's Bloomfield Township home, Latunski stabbed him in the back, slit his throat, hung him from the rafters and actually ate parts of him, including his testicles. Latunski pleaded guilty to the crime in September and was convicted in October of first degree murder and other charges.

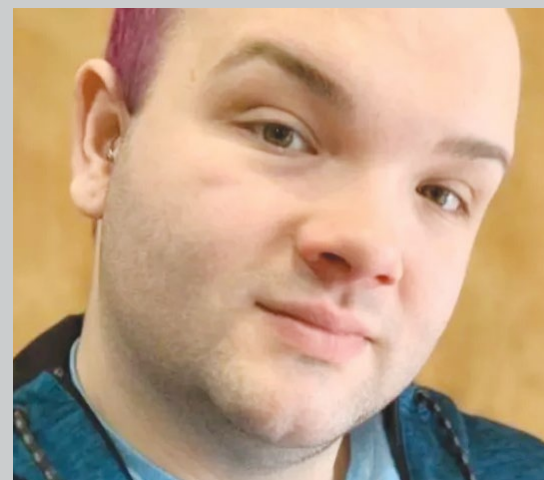
At the sentencing, a statement from Bacon's mother was read to the court.

"In your sick, twisted mind, you probably don't think you did anything wrong," Hannah Bacon's letter read. "This Christmas, I hope you suffer like we have."

Hannah Bacon's letter went on to say that Christmas will be forever ruined by her son's tragic death, according to Advocate.

"We used to go watch movies, make Christmas cookies, go shopping and go to the deer farm and cook Christmas dinner together as a family," it said. "This has all been taken away from us, our family is broken all because of you and nothing, not even you behind bars, will ever make our lives better."

Kevin Bacon was a hairstylist who was "turning his life around" and had just made plans to return to school, his mother said. Bacon's family reported him missing when he did not show up for Christmas breakfast. His roommate reported that Kevin Bacon had met up with a man he met on a dating app the night before. It



Kevin Bacon. Photo: Facebook

would not be until Dec. 28, however, that police would trace the lead to Latunski's house. There they found Kevin Bacon hanging by his ankles from rafters in Latunski's basement.

Latunski originally pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. After subsequent psychiatric treatment, however, he changed his plea to guilty. Latunski did not speak at his sentencing, and strict sentencing guidelines left no room for a lesser sentence.

BTL previously reported that Kevin Bacon's grandmother, trans rights pioneer Grace Bacon, spoke out after his tragic slaying.

"I've seen death up close at times," she said in a Facebook post. "But nothing bothered me quite like this. It's a young person that was robbed of what? Sixty, maybe 80 years of life, even? This young man had a lot of potential. We were robbed of his company."

In the same BTL article, Equality Michigan Executive Director Erin Knott gave tips for hooking up safely.

"Make sure you have a safety plan that includes meeting in a well-lit public space, and do not leave your drinks or belongings unattended," she said. "Additionally, consider using a location and alert app like Life360 so that you can share your location with a friend or family member."



Madeline Cowdell. Photo: Jason A. Michael

Loving Life, and Herself

How Journalist Madeline Cowdell Turned Her Life Around After Transitioning

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Madeline Cowdell knew that she was in the wrong body from the age of 5. Knew she was meant to be a girl. Knew she *was* a girl, inside.

Even if others couldn't see it.

Raised in Canada with dual citizenship, Cowdell, the assistant news director for Lansing-based TV station WSYM Fox 47, was attending a French immersion

Catholic school for kindergarten as a boy when the revelation hit her. It happened when the nuns lined up the students for a washroom break before mass.

"I remember standing in line and

thinking I was in the wrong line," she said, a wistful look in her eyes. "All of my friends, the girls, were standing across the hall from me and going to a different bathroom. I remember just feeling some

confusion about that."

The confusion would continue as she grew older, confined to a body she did not feel at home in. She tried to be a dutiful son to a Catholic father and a Mormon mother. She bonded with the former over sports. "We'd watch hockey, of course, because we're Canadian. But there was also football and soccer."

She also followed in the footsteps of both parents and got into the sport curling. "It's a very unique sport," said Cowdell. "I love it because it makes you think. ... People think, 'Oh, you just throw rocks down the ice,' but there's a whole strategy involved. It's like chess."

But no matter what she did, she did not feel that she fit in. As a teenager, her mother sent her to a Mormon therapist who only confused things for her further. "I was told that, 'People don't understand what it's like to be trans, so just come out as gay and see if that works for you.'"

And it did. For a while, at least.

"I had boyfriends," she said. "I would go to the clubs and hang out with the guys ... but still it didn't feel quite right."

Cowdell said the experience felt "way better than anything I was experiencing at church. But, still, the puzzle pieces were not quite fitting yet." She moved to the U.S. and worked in a few states, including California and New York. She eventually married a woman. But no matter what she did, happiness was elusive.

She was in the closet, literally, when her wife found her on the brink of suicide. "The irony of the closet was certainly not lost on me," she said. "We had a long talk about how depressed and just dead inside I was."

Cowdell's wife encouraged her to find a therapist, and it was only then that she started to take transitioning seriously. And then something special happened when she took the first official steps to transform herself at last.

"I just knew," she said. "I knew within 10 days of starting hormone therapy that the clarity was there. [It was] like, 'Yes, this is who I'm meant to be. This is who I am.'"

But feeling comfortable in your own skin and feeling comfortable out and among others are two different things. Not to mention the discomfort she felt in her family's home. "My father ... had a very hard time," she said. "We're in the process of mending our

relationship, and it's going well."

The process continues slowly but surely, she said.

"As I'm more confident in myself, and being more comfortable around my family, I'm finding myself rebuilding those connections and finding the essence of home," Cowdell said. "I'm still not sure what's the right amount of information to give out before it gets too awkward. My father, I think, is still trying to get used to having a daughter in the house rather than just one of the boys. But we're finding our way."

Introducing Michigan Maddie

These days, Cowdell is finding her way in many respects. She said she feels more comfortable with herself than ever before. "I think my story starts when I came to Michigan," she said. "I keep calling myself Michigan Maddie because I just feel like I've been given this opportunity for rebirth, the opportunity of regrowth and to be able to live my life."

Though getting there has been a long and winding road, she's learned a lot along the way.

"Something that's really gotten me through this journey, and that I have discovered as Michigan Maddie, is self-care. Self-care is just tremendously important. I've been working on it with my therapist as a recovering workaholic."

The key, she said, "is taking moments for yourself. It provides so much clarity."

The journey of transitioning is different from what people imagine. "I do a lot of meditation. I listen to music. I go out and drive, take a lot of road trips. I feel like I'm my best self in the car when I'm away from distractions and just being with myself in nature."

Recently, Cowdell drove to Traverse City to take in the fall foliage. She stopped to grab a bite and, before she knew it, found herself in some random bar, where she quickly made new friends and soaked up the music.

"I'm dancing with all these people and I'm like, 'Who is this? Maddie doesn't do these things,'" she said. "We had so much fun that they invited me back the next night. And, so, I went back a second time, and I was like, 'This is who I am.'"

Cowdell said she's as surprised as anyone to discover what a free spirit she is. She's learned to "just go with it, have fun and don't take yourself too seriously. I've never, ever been like that in my life but it's always who I wanted to be."

Now settled into the Great Lakes State, Cowdell loves her challenging job as assistant news director at WYSM.

"I've always wanted to be a journalist," she said, pointing out that her initial ambition was to become a meteorologist. "I was a weather nerd."

Her first job after graduating from Loyalist College in Belleville, Ontario, was as an associate producer at a small station in the area. From there, she went on to become a supervising producer for a morning show in Ottawa, until she began to feel burned out. "I was falling out of love with the business. My lifelong dream was to work on television. So, I wanted to find a new way to spark that excitement again."

A friend encouraged her to relocate to Michigan. She said, "You're gonna love it," and I'm like, "Detroit?" Despite the fact that all she really knew about Michigan was the route from the Ambassador Bridge down to Ohio via I-75, Cowdell began looking for work in the state. She originally applied for a producer position with WXYZ in Detroit. Instead, they offered her the more prestigious job of assistant news director for their sister station in Lansing.

"Having someone like Madeline Cowdell in a leadership position as an assistant news director at a TV station like WSYM is such a total win," said Dina L. Walters, a former news producer and reporter who worked for various outlets in Michigan. "Her unique perspective spawns coverage that moves beyond typical LGBTQ+ reporting."

Walters said that perspective allows Cowdell to use her insight and experience to authentically produce stories about her community. "It also allows her an empathy to look at the situations of others and help them to also share their stories effectively," Walters added.



As a communications and marketing consultant and trans woman, Walters said she also appreciates that there's an editor who doesn't need to be taught queer culture when considering pitches for news stories. "She knows more about how transpersons truly are than all the sensitivity training and seminars one could ever possibly attend. Her success is an outstanding example from which others can learn."

Outside of the station, Michigan Maddie keeps busy building her new life. In addition to curling, she is a proud member of a Mini Cooper car club and loves long drives around the state listening to music. She's now a woman who throws caution to the wind and dances with strangers.

"I put a lot of effort into building up who I am," she said. "Finally, I'm seeing the benefits. I've built this wonderful life for myself as myself. ... I feel like I've finally made it, you know? I've got a job and a house, and I'm just doing normal things that I never thought were possible due to years of depression and anxiety."

Yes, Michigan Maddie has come a long way. Today, she's boldly optimistic about the future. Cowdell said she hopes her example can serve to inspire other trans women, particularly trans youth.

"The biggest message I can tell them is don't give up," she said. "You'll find your sense of community. You know who you are."



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Tim Hunter holds up a photo of him and his husband, Hugo Gallardo Petatan. U.S. immigration laws continue to keep them apart.
Photo: Andrew Cohen

This Michigan Man Just Wants to Live With His Husband

BY DAWN WOLFE

Their relationship has survived two-and-a-half presidencies (so far), roughly 12 years and a separation of nearly 2,000 miles. Now, all Tim Hunter and Hugo Gallardo Petatan want is to start their married life together.

But they can't do that yet. And even if they do everything exactly right, and everything goes exactly right, Hugo won't be able to leave Mexico to rejoin Tim here in Michigan for at least another two years.

At its heart, Tim and Hugo's story isn't just about anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination; it's also an indictment of an immigration system that treats everyone caught in its grasp as second-class human beings.

Of course, being LGBTQ+ makes a couple even more second-class than most.

When BTL met Tim and Hugo in 2012, Tim was busily fighting his then-partner's deportation. That fight was unsuccessful, and Hugo was deported back to Mexico in 2013 after spending 19 months locked up in an ICE facility. Hugo's arrest and subsequent deportation happened just five weeks after he had moved to Michigan from North Carolina to be with Tim after they first met in June 2011.

At the time, Tim told BTL how hard it was to keep his emotions hidden when visiting Hugo in detention. But even then, Tim was showing signs of the dogged determination and love for Hugo that has helped keep their relationship alive despite the hurdles in front of them. As Tim said when we met in November, when Hugo was deported,

"I told myself wholeheartedly that I will not ever let my government tell me who to love."

Building a relationship one visit, phone call and FaceTime meetup at a time

Tim Hunter's quiet, even voice and gentle manner belies a force of nature. Ask him for some of the factual details about their relationship, and Tim happily sends an email detailing everything from the day he met Hugo to the dates of every one of the eight trips he has made to Mexico so far, including their October wedding in the third floor government offices in Mercado Corona, Guadalajara. Ask him about wedding photos, and you'll receive an album's worth.

When Hugo — who doesn't speak English — was afraid and indecisive about being interviewed for this story, Tim offered to do the interview himself to make his husband more comfortable.

Not many people would be able to maintain this kind of solid, enduring commitment to another person when their only contact is by phone, FaceTime and a yearly visit. There was even a time when Tim himself questioned whether he would be able to do it.

A conversation with another binational couple changed all that.

When Tim admitted he might be ready to back off of their relationship if Hugo, who has issues with alcohol use, were to "fall really hard," one

member of the couple told Tim, “That is not the way you do it.” Instead, Tim was told, “Once you marry somebody, it’s forever. And if one of you goes down, the other has to go down there to pick him up. You have to agree that if one of you falls, you have to be there for him no matter what.”

Tim admits that the relationship hasn’t always been easy. But when the two have found themselves with very little left, “we always took that very little and built upon it and brought it back,” he said. Plane trip by plane trip, phone call by phone call, Hugo and Tim have kept building. A year ago, they took the leap and decided to get married.

Marriage equality is *not* actual equality, particularly in immigration

It would be wonderful if the advent of marriage equality had made life easy for binational same-sex couples. After all, such couples are supposedly just like everyone else in the eyes of federal law. LGBTQ+ U.S. citizens should be able to marry non-citizens without having to accomplish the legal equivalent of running an all-uphill marathon.

Unfortunately, U.S. immigration laws were designed specifically to create that marathon — particularly for people the government has deemed “undesirable.” The ban on what were then called homosexual migrants wasn’t repealed until 1990. In 2018 and 2019, Immigration Equality filed suit against the State Department for its failure to grant citizenship to the children of U.S. citizen, same-sex couples born abroad. The State Department didn’t change the policy until 2021.

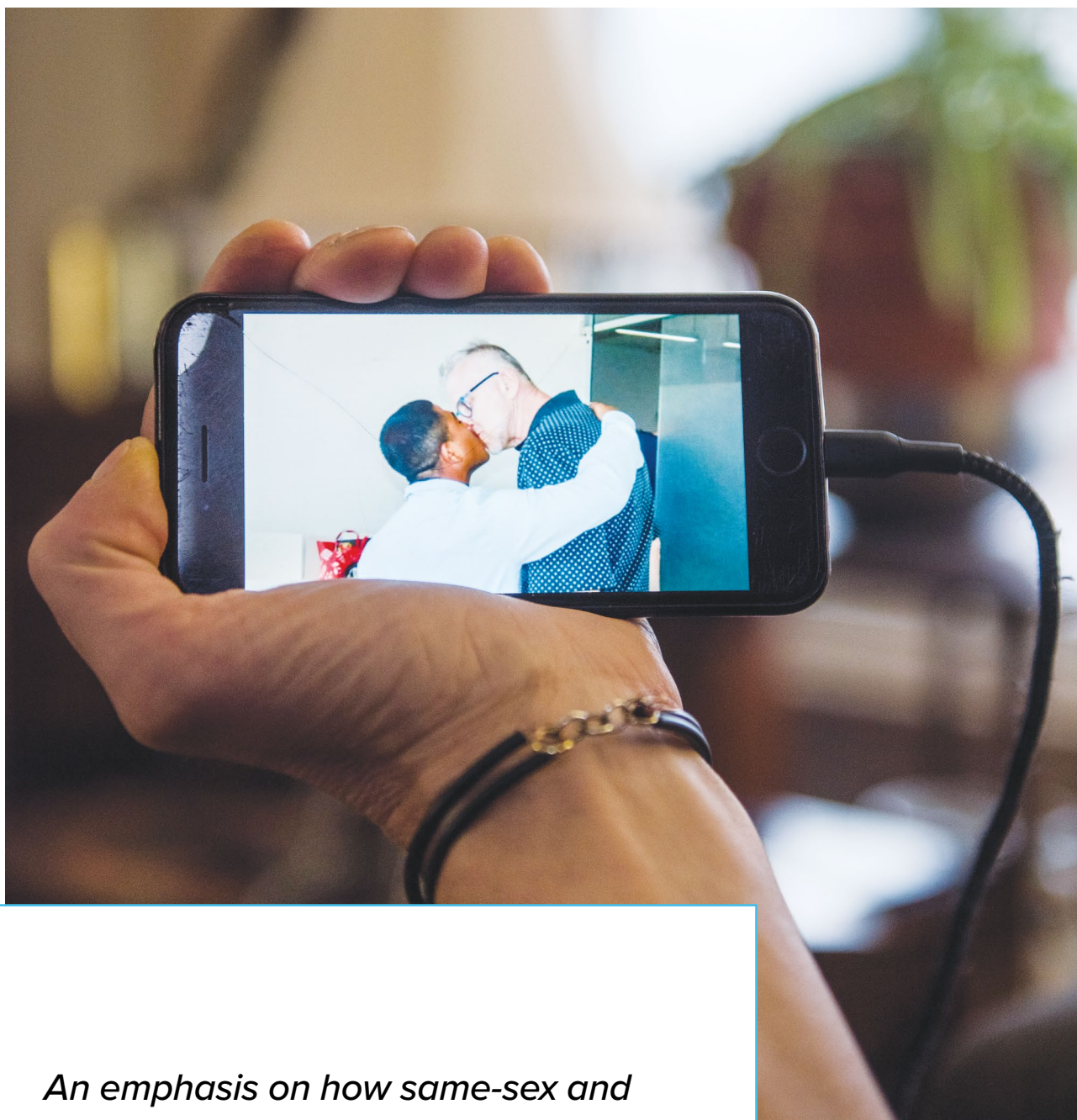
If Hugo had never been deported, the spouses would still be looking down an invasive, expensive bureaucratic process that could last anywhere from a year-and-a-half to three years and cost nearly \$1,000 in fees to the federal government alone. Because Hugo was deported, they’ll have to wait until May, when Hugo’s 10-year ban on re-entering the U.S. will end, to even get started. There’s also a good chance they’ll have to pay an extra nearly \$1,000 for yet another invasive process, and yet another delay.

The required paperwork for each of these steps looks like even a bureaucrat’s worst nightmare. That

nightmare is made worse by the fact that there’s no guarantee of success.

Despite these challenges, Tim and Hugo are comparatively fortunate. The Mexican government legally recognizes the right of same-sex couples to marry. They are both cis men. And while Hugo is working off and on in construction in Mexico, the spouses can also rely on Tim’s income as a bilingual ESL parapro in a southeastern Michigan school.

Other couples don’t share those relative privileges, as UM-Dearborn Women’s and Gender Studies Program Director Amy Brainer reported last year in the journal *Humanity & Society*. Brainer was inspired to do her research after facing difficulties bringing her own then-



A photo of Hugo and Tim, via Tim’s phone.
Photo: Andrew Cohen

“

An emphasis on how same-sex and different-sex couples are the same is ultimately helpful for no one; it sets the bar for human rights at its lowest common denominator.

spouse to the U.S. after their marriage in 2015.

Brainer’s data came from roughly 3,000 posts over several years from three online forums for binational couples and 30 in-person interviews with individuals and couples. Her research returned results that are as rage-inducing as they are

unsurprising. If the non U.S. citizen’s gender identity is outlawed in their home country, or that person is arrested for an activity that’s perfectly legal here, or if they live in a country where their right to marry isn’t recognized — all of these issues, and others, can and do provide excuses for the U.S. government to tell the couple that they’re welcome to live

anywhere but here.

Or, as Brainer writes, “An emphasis on how same-sex and different-sex couples are the same is ultimately helpful for no one; it sets the bar for human rights at its lowest common denominator.”

While Tim and Hugo get ready for the long slog to find out if they will be able to be reunited in the U.S., Tim

is keeping busy. In addition to his job, he’s staying in touch with the more than 1,000 Facebook friends he’s made with other couples facing similar challenges across the U.S. He’s been to local and national protests of our country’s immigration policies. And when he and Hugo’s long wait is hopefully, finally, at an end, Tim hopes to use their experience to help other couples facing the same challenges.

In the meantime, he shared one of the secrets that has kept his and Hugo’s relationship alive: “You just have to believe in your heart,” he said, “and have the most understanding, the most empathy, and the most patience. And a belief that you have a future.”

Arizona Is Pouring Energy Into Protecting Kids (From Drag Queens, Not Guns or Poverty or Pollution or...)



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Arizona starts the year off right by protecting children from lace front wigs, stoned tights and faces beat for the gods!

The list of threats to children in the United States is very long. Off the top of my head I can name gun violence, car accidents, cancer, drug overdoses, suicide, abuse and neglect, not to mention the long-term health consequences for kids who are exposed to environmental toxins and those who live in poverty.

For a political party that claims to care so much about children, you'd never know it from what Republicans actually focus on when they claim they're trying to protect kids. Because they've already made it very clear that they don't care about gun violence. Or pollution. Or poverty. They choose guns over kids' lives every time they claim environmental protections are Marxist, and think that poor kids made a bad choice to be born poor in the first place.

What Republicans claim your kids actually need protection from, of course, is drag queens.

"If you walked up to someone at the supermarket today and said, 'Hey, what's a problem that's facing you and your family?' I bet they would list 15-20 things before they ever got around to drag shows," Arizona performer Richard Stevens whose drag person is Barbra Seville told AZFamily.com.

And I would bet that many of those asked wouldn't list drag shows at all!

And yet, here we are. In Arizona, the 2023 legislative session opened with incredibly important crackdowns on drag shows. As God intended.

The first bill dictates what hours drag shows are allowed to be held, lumping

them into the category of shows with nudity. The second bill yanks state funding from places who violate the first. According to The Advocate, the bills "are all part of a right-wing trend of attacking drag queen story hours and similar events."

So if your local library wants to have Bob the Drag Queen read "Two Grooms on a Cake" to a group of elementary school kids, too bad, so sad. Empty your pockets and go straight to drag jail.

Arizona's 2022 election, like in far too many other states, included Republican candidates campaigning on anti-LGBTQ+ garbage, like Republican candidate for Arizona Gov. Kari Lake, who wrote on Twitter in June, "They kicked God out of schools and welcomed the Drag Queens. They took down our Flag and replaced it with a rainbow. They seek to disarm Americans and militarize our Enemies. Let's bring back the basics: God, Guns & Glory."

Weird random capitalizations aside, Lake, a Trump endorsee, was called out by none other than Seville, who considered Lake a friend. A friend who hired Seville to do drag at a party in her home. A friend for over 20 years who attended 15 to 20 of Seville's shows during that time, according to The Washington Post. Seville called Lake a "complete hypocrite."

Oh, the shade of it all.

Thankfully, Lake did not win the election

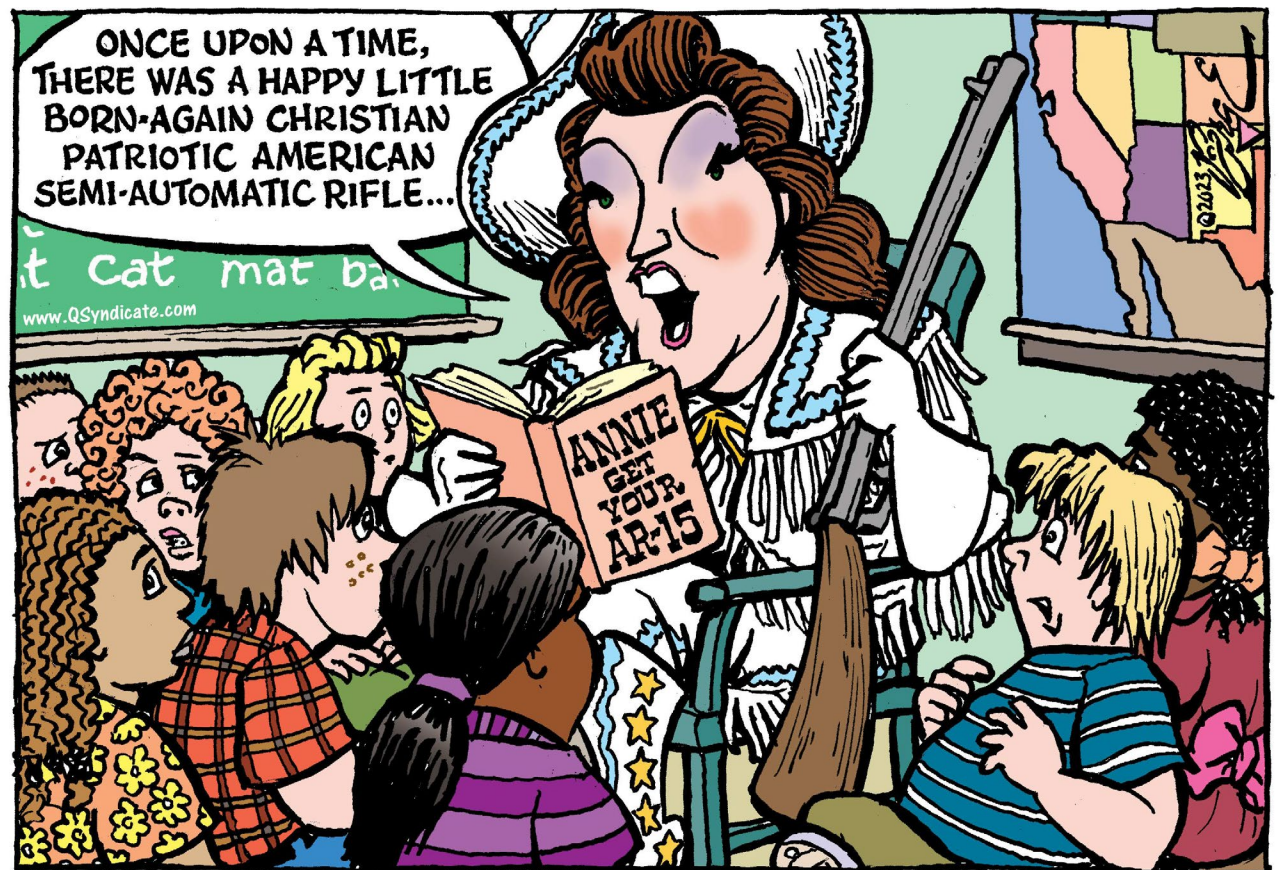
and is not Arizona's next governor. Sadly, Republicans hold majorities in both the state Senate and House.

Sen. John Kavanagh, who sponsored the "do drag and lose funding bill," also introduced a bill that "would not let school employees refer to students by pronouns that differ from a student's 'biological sex' unless they get written parental permission," according to The Advocate. Obviously, that would require the child coming out to parents who might, oh I don't know, be people like Kavanagh. But that's just so parents can help their children, he said. I mean, if a kid can't feel safe at home, why on earth should they feel safe at school?

"As radical politicians sow hate and fear with anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, we have seen the physical threats to our community multiply," Bridget Sharpe, Arizona state director for the Human Rights Campaign, told The Advocate. "From armed men who were stopped on their way to cause harm at a Pride Parade

in Idaho, to threats of violence against local drag shows at libraries, to the continued rise in fatal violence against members of our community, especially Black transgender women. The Human Rights Campaign strongly opposes these anti-LGBTQ+ bills and urges the lawmakers behind them to stop attacking our community and instead focus on real issues impacting Arizonans."

Of course, that would require these lawmakers to actually care about real issues impacting real people. That's just not how Republicans roll. And yet, people keep voting for them. And that's a serious drag.



MAKING DRAG TIME STORY HOUR ACCEPTABLE TO THE MAGA CROWD

“

For a political party that claims to care so much about children, you'd never know it from what Republicans actually focus on when they claim they're trying to protect kids.

Driving Mother Knickers

Recalling My Special Friendship with Charles Alexander



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Every night the call would come. “Any gossip?” he would ask. Sadly, there wasn’t usually much worth mentioning since we’d spoken just the day before and neither of our lives were terribly exciting. But we checked in with each other, and Charles Alexander was the only person I was guaranteed to hear from on a daily basis. Tonight, I won’t hear from him. And today, I’ll get through the day without anyone telling me they love me, or that they’re “holding the good thought” for me, as Charles always did.

I’d be lying if I pretended that Charles didn’t have a special knack for calling at inopportune times. I’d be lying again if I said I wasn’t sometimes slightly annoyed. But I knew, had known for years, that if nature took its course, I would one day miss these calls. Now, that day has come. And I miss the calls already.

Looking back, my friendship with Charles was a bit unlikely. It began in 1999 when I was hired as the new staff writer for *Between The Lines*. Charles was 63, and I was 27 at the time. A popular columnist for the paper, Charles traditionally came in once a week to work from the office and, more importantly, catch lunch with the bosses, his dear friends Jan and Susan.

Soon enough, Charles, who did not drive, had wrangled me into picking him up and dropping him off at his apartment in the Park Shelton in Midtown. It was a little off my route, but worth the detour. We hadn’t traveled very many miles together that first day before I began to realize that Charles and I shared a similar sense of humor, an affinity for a certain combination of catty and completely irreverent remarks to be delivered deadpan.

Charles was just some four years younger than my grandmother. Still, the friendship seemed to work. Eventually, even after I left my full-time position with the paper, Charles and I would continue to get together for dinner once a week. Favorite spots included Pete’s Place in Ferndale and Baker’s Square in Birmingham, both long closed. Charles loved to go to Borders — and later Barnes & Noble — and trips to Ann Arbor for a meal at \aut\ BAR and a pass through Common Language Bookstore were always enjoyable.

But the most fun I’d ever have with Charles would be on our road trips to Chicago. Charles had been going to Chicago frequently since



Charles Alexander with writer/friend Jason A. Michael. Courtesy photo

the 1960s. All told, over the years, we made 11 wonderful trips to the Windy City. A 12th was planned, but then he had a stroke in 2019 and travel was no longer possible.

I’d agonize over the playlist for these trips. In the early years, I made a series of CDs and then, eventually, I got an iPod before moving onto a flash drive. Charles and I shared a varied taste in music. He liked classical, opera, pop, disco, chill out and oldies. He had a couple favorite songs I’d always be sure to include.

One was “Trade Winds” by Roberta Flack and the other, somewhat comically to me, was Donna Summer’s “Love to Love You Baby.” Both songs brought back pleasant memories for Charles of trips to Chicago in the ’70s. He often regaled me with stories and, when we were there, we’d often take long walks where he’d

point out gay landmarks that no longer were.

We’d also listen to old time radio serials. Programs featuring Rita Hayworth for his dear friend Gordon “Rita” Barnard, who was, as Kenny from Chosen Books used to call him, a legend in his own living room. We discovered a fantastically campy 1950s San Francisco-based radio show called “Candy Matson,” about a feisty female private detective.

In Chicago, we stayed in separate hotels. Our rendezvous spot would be the giant Borders on North Michigan Avenue next to Water Tower Park. After it closed, we’d just meet in the park, which was a prime spot for people watching, something Charles loved to do.

We’d go bargain shopping at the old Virgin megastore and make trips to Boystown. Charles’ favorite spot there was the still-open Lucky

Horseshoe, which was home, he liked to say, to the world’s homeliest boy go-go dancers. That didn’t stop him from tipping them now and then, though.

We were both always sad on the way home. Yet we managed to have our share of fun in Michigan, too. During one trip up Woodward Avenue, I don’t recall where we were headed but we were listening to some miscellaneous old-time radio show when we were introduced to a character called Matilda Knickerbocker. We burst out laughing, in sync, at the mention of the silly name.

And from that moment on, it was Charles’ new moniker. He’d shorten it in time to Mother Knickers, and that’s how I’d address his birthday cards and other correspondence. He called me Jasona. We played around with other drag names over the years. He created the fictional character Sister Scatterpin for a few farcical columns he wrote. And anyone whom he determined to be a little dingy would be deemed to be a Dora Dizz.

Charles remained healthy and vital into his 80s. He was active and well known in his Midtown neighborhood, often seen at Cass Café and Shangri La (and Twingo’s before that). He was a regular in the area and never failed to run into someone he knew at most places we went. He only ate out — he never cooked — and would often appear in paint-stained jeans having just finished a new piece of art.

After the stroke, though, problems with vision and mobility slowed him down. He moved into a very nice senior community, which was not a particularly good fit for someone so young at heart. As Covid kicked in and visitation was restricted, Charles fell victim to feelings of loneliness and isolation. He was never quite the same again.

He had no living relatives but, like many gay men, had built a family of caring friends who acted as surrogates. I was honored to be one of those friends. Our unlikely friendship ended up being one of the most meaningful relationships of my life. He wasn’t very active in his final years, but we still spoke every day.

Now, there is no one holding the good thought for me, not quite in the way Charles did. But though he is gone, I will think of him every time I pass by the many pieces of his artwork I have hanging in my home, every time I visit Chicago (which will be terribly difficult to do at first) and every day, I’m sure.

I’m still holding the good thought for him. And somewhere, high above the clouds perhaps, I hope he is still doing the same for me.

WHAT DOES THE DHS **Terrorism Alert** MEAN FOR MICHIGAN'S **LGBTQ+** **Community?**

A Business Owner, Detroit Police Corporal and Whitmer's Administration Weigh In on Alarming Bulletin

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In many ways, 2022 has been an alarming time to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Across the globe, the community has been in the crosshairs of "lone offenders and small groups motivated by a range of ideological beliefs and/or personal grievances," according to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This includes the horrific attack at Club Q in Colorado Springs just ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday and less violent, but still highly concerning, events right here in Michigan, like an anti-LGBTQ+ rally held in Dearborn in September.

DHS issued a National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin Nov. 30 focused on not only the LGBTQ+ community but other groups currently targeted by extremists. "Our homeland continues to face a heightened threat environment — as we have seen, tragically, in recent acts of targeted violence — and is driven by violent extremists seeking to further a political or social goal or act on a grievance," said Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas in the bulletin.

"In the coming months, DHS expects the threat environment to remain heightened and threat actors could exploit several upcoming events to justify or commit acts of violence. These targets could include public gatherings, faith-based institutions, the LGBTQI+

community, schools, racial and religious minorities, government facilities and personnel, U.S. critical infrastructure, the media, and perceived ideological opponents," the bulletin continues.

DHS pointed to several recent attacks, plots and threats of violence originating from both domestic and foreign terrorist organizations who are driven by "reactions to current events and adherence to violent extremist ideologies." Some of these extremists, DHS warned, have conducted attacks inspired by previous attacks.

Heightened awareness, proactive safety measures

In light of recent attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, Detroit Police Corporal Dani Woods, the department's LGBTQ Liaison, recommends a proactive approach by clubs, bars and other business owners, including "active shooter" training. Woods said she wants spaces to be as prepared as possible in case of a shooting event.

"Also, I always advise that when someone is out on their own attending a function or meeting up with someone, please let a friend or someone know where you are and/or who you're meeting with," she said. "It is devastating the amount of notifications I receive regarding

incidents, and no one knew where their friend or loved one had gone, or with who."

Woods said it's also a good idea to take self-defense classes or situational awareness training. Obtaining a gun through the proper channels is another option Woods mentioned. "I know a lot of people are not a fan or believe in [gun ownership], but that is also a way to responsibly and legally protect themselves or others," she said.

Woods says patrons of local venues can use their voices to let the owners of those spaces know that their safety needs to be a priority if venues want to keep their business. "Inquire about what safety plans are in place and what type of security they have," she recommended. Businesses can also consider using one of the police department's safety programs, like Project Green Light and Secondary Employment. Another option is requesting "Special Attention" from the police department during peak hours and dismissal times.

"The thing is, it's both scary and sad that we have to do all of this because of the hate someone else has in their hearts for people who have nothing to do with them, who are living their lives and attempting to enjoy life just the same as others," she said. "These measures we have to consider because of our safety and this current climate in human behavior. But it's also worth it because our lives depend on it."

Though BTL inquired about the DHS alert

and the Whitmer administration's response, officials there did not respond with specific details at the time of this article's publication.

Communications Director Bobby Leddy did respond with the following: "LGBTQ+ Michiganders are an essential part of Michigan and make our state a better place. From day one, Gov. Whitmer has fought for policies that pursue equity for Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, including action to prohibit conversion therapy and strengthen protections in state employment as well as calling on the legislature to expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. Gov. Whitmer will continue to fight to ensure LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe and valued."

BTL has sent a followup request for information related to how the state is responding to the DHS alert.

Gary Baglio, owner of Five15 and Pronto! in Royal Oak, said he's had to implement significant changes in the wake of recent violence and the DHS alert.

"In Five15's 15-year history, these things have always existed," he said. "But now, with such a divided population, poisonous social media and public officials and leaders that disseminate conspiracy theories and misinformation, it seems that hate has spread in the public forum

See **DHS**, page 26



The owners of Let Fri and Welcome Home Yoga and Wellness with their checks from the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber. Photo: Facebook (Welcome Home Yoga)

Wish Granted

Two Detroit Queer-Owned Businesses Receive \$5,000 Grants From LGBT Chamber

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Two local LGBTQ-owned businesses will benefit from grants issued by the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce. For the first time in its six-year history, the Chamber has awarded grants through its Chamber Fund. Two Detroit businesses, Welcome Home Yoga and Wellness Center and Let Fri LLC, a plant-based meat producer, received \$5,000 each from the Chamber at a ceremony at Welcome Home Yoga and Wellness.

Kevin Heard, the Chamber's executive director, said the grants are important because many new businesses and start-ups need immediate assistance to help scale or fill in gaps in funding.

"These grants are for them to be able to make an investment to help pay for items or services that will fill those gaps and not jeopardize making payroll or stopping the progression," he said. "Marketing services can be expensive and time-consuming but, ultimately, very valuable for any business to get its name and services out there."

Heard, who founded the Chamber in 2016, went on to say that he is "filled with joy" to be able to give out these grants.

"After running this Chamber for so long, we can now give back to the community monetarily," he said. "We are the organization best positioned to know how to infuse dollars

See **Chamber Grants**, page 20

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Luke Londo. Courtesy photo

Bi Dad Makes History

Luke Londo, a Former Schuette Staffer, Is the First Openly LGBTQ+ Commissioner of Michigan Civil Rights Commission

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Luke Londo said learning of his appointment to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC) was the “second coolest” thing that happened to him that week. Becoming a dad was the first. And to be honest, he said, having applied for the Commission many months earlier, Londo forgot about it.

“Three days after the birth of my

son, on the way back from our very first pediatric appointment, I got a call from Gov. Whitmer’s office informing me that I was being appointed to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission,” said Londo, who is openly bisexual. He called it “the honor of a lifetime.”

In 1964, Michigan became the first state to enshrine civil rights protections in its constitution. The Michigan Department of Civil

Rights carries out the work of the Commission. While the MCRC is not a lawmaking body, it has power and influence.

“The commission is so important, the department is so important, to really ensure that all Michiganders feel like they have a place they can come if they feel like their civil rights and human rights have been violated,” said Portia Roberson, chair of the MCRC. “There are a lot of education

pieces that we have done and want to continue to do to really make people aware of the many issues that arise and that we can help them navigate.”

Londo cited one issue of particular significance to him: the Commission’s 2018 ruling that the definition of “sex” in the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. Once they began taking complaints on that basis, one was litigated up to the Michigan Supreme Court, which recently concurred with that ruling. Londo said being part of a body that protects the rights of LGBTQ+ Michiganders was extremely appealing to him.

The Commission is nonpartisan. And while Londo identifies politically as an Independent, until recently, he was a registered Republican with a resume that includes working in constituent relations for former Congressman Dan Benishek as well as a stint with former Attorney General Bill Schuette in 2017 and 2018.

“Oh, my goodness, it was wonderful,” Londo said of the experience working in Schuette’s office. “The Michigan Department of Attorney General does so much amazing work.” He cited in particular his tasks educating seniors on consumer fraud and educating students on how to report bullying and threats as “extremely rewarding and fulfilling work,” adding, “Bill Schuette is the kindest, sweetest man I’ve ever met. And it was just an absolute pleasure and honor to work for him.” Londo made clear his boss knew he was queer.

Londo’s tenure with the office of the attorney general coincided with a period of time that Schuette did battle with the MCRC over the body’s interpretive statement of “sex,” the very issue that Londo is so passionate about today. It cannot be overstated how roundly disliked by LGBTQ+ Michiganders — particularly those in leadership — Schuette was at the time.

Londo called Schuette’s disagreement with the MCRC “legal and academic,” and that as someone with a degree in political science and also studying for a master’s in public administration, he could see both sides. But he was quick to add, “I certainly was not part of those conversations. I didn’t actively provide input. However, you know, I always felt that the Michigan Civil Rights Commission had the better argument and I was happy to see that the Michigan Supreme Court agreed with me.”

Currently a Hazel Park City

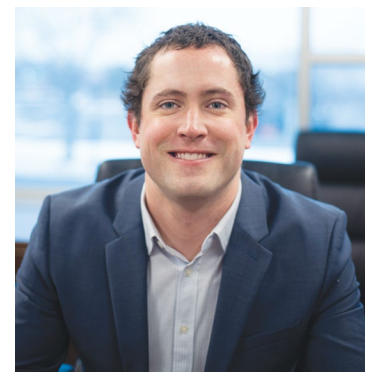
Councilmember, Londo has led the charge for his hometown to be more inclusive of its LGBTQ+ residents. He introduced an inclusive human rights ordinance and a conversion therapy ban, both of which are now on the books.

As a bisexual man married to a woman and also a father, Londo acknowledges his privilege. He can pass easily, but chooses to be openly queer. He spoke of a time after being elected Executive Committeeman on the First Congressional District Republican party that he received pushback and realized there were people eager to use his sexual orientation against him.

“I realized that the best thing that I could do in that moment was to wear it like armor,” said Londo, of his sexual orientation. “So, after that, it was extremely important to me to be not just out, but forcefully out about my representation [to] force people in these spaces to not just tolerate but accept me and people like me.”

Growing up queer in Marquette as the son of a deacon wasn’t easy, said Londo, who is 34.

“At that particular moment, high school was a difficult experience for me,” he said. “And in addition to growing up, you know, extraordinarily Catholic, [I] always just sort of felt a bit like a pariah. Coming out and being able to find



Luke Londo. Courtesy photo

my people and find my tribe was extremely important. And now it’s important to me to just look out for people like me.”

After participating in his first MCRC meeting, Londo has already made an impression. Roberson spoke of diversity on the Commission. “I think it’s so hugely important and I’m so privileged to serve on the commission with him,” Roberson said of Londo.

After their first meeting, “he spoke to young people who are out there who may be feeling very isolated, who

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Antonio Dave Garcia, Amritha Venkataraman and Laurie Pohutsky. Courtesy photos

◀ Legislature Wishlist

Continued from page 7

we have this language as passed by voters in 2004 in the Michigan Constitution banning marriage equality, if Obergefell should fall, we would not be one of those states that could issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. I'm confident that most Michiganders would support it, but the only way to change the Constitution is a vote of the public."

Inclusive language improvements

Venkataraman said she would be advocating for "language changes throughout all of Michigan law to make it more inclusive and open to LGBTQ folks and same-gender families." For example, using neutral terms like "parent" instead of "mother" and "father."

Establishing a commission

Among Michigan's 361 state of Michigan boards and commissions.

— from the Black Leadership Advisory Council and the Michigan Women's Commission to the more obscure, like the Board of Auctioneers and the Michigan Potato Industry Commission — the LGBTQ+ community is not represented among them. Roland Leggett, chair of the LGBT & Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party; Antonio Dave Garcia, executive director of Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center and LaChey would like to see that change to better enable the community to develop policy making priorities on a statewide basis. For example, an advisory board could tackle big-picture issues like ending the epidemic of violence and murder of transgender women of color.

"I don't think it's smart for everyone across the whole state to do individual separate asks," Garcia advised. "I think that has to be organized and prioritized." To that end, a meeting of LGBTQ+ leaders from across the state had been convened.

Budget

One way the government can support the LGBTQ+ community

is through funding initiatives.

"Of course, we can have more [LGBTQ] representation," Poindexter said. "And also, just to be quite honest, more financial backing, allocation to the agencies and the programs that we know have been doing the work for years."

Garcia concurred, adding, "We're gonna talk to the new leadership of the Senate Health Committee and the House Health Committee and try to get an appropriation out of the Michigan state budget, likely for health and human services."

Leggett said he'd like to see a greater investment in community health.

"The folks in our community are really hit hard by the pandemic and by the volatile political system the last several years," Leggett said. "And so there's a lot of work that needs to be done in order to ensure that the folks in our community get access to the resources that they need and get the support that they need."

"I have a particular keen interest in seeing larger investments that focus specifically on the needs of the transgender community, for example," he continued. "In Detroit, transgender women of color are murdered at a higher rate than anywhere else in the

country. And so a focus on how we can address that would be a really great step."

He'd also like to look at how law enforcement interacts with the transgender community — and the LGBTQ+ community in general — and see what can be done legislatively to improve it.

Banning the panic defense

"I have a bill to ban the gay or trans panic defense," Pohutsky said, referring to the homophobic and transphobic legal strategy aimed at partially or completely excusing crimes like murder and assault based on the defendant's claim that they were thought by their victim to be LGBTQ+. It has been used in conjunction with other legal strategies.

Criminalization of HIV

LaChey would also like to overhaul the law that criminalizes nondisclosure of HIV status to a partner before engaging in

penetration, something that a 2019 law sponsored by former State Rep. Jon Hoadley aimed to do. Notably, it appears that the new guidelines are not being applied consistently. While they're strengthening that law, lawmakers can also repeal the ban on sodomy, which is still on the books despite a 2003 SCOTUS decision that legalized consensual homosexual sex.

Democratic priorities

Several interviewees pointed out that queer Michiganders deal with many of the same concerns as other Michiganders do.

"A lot of our issues aren't just specific to us," LaChey said. "So when [Whitmer] is acting to fix the damn roads, when I as a gay person drive on those roads, my life is better."

Moss named several areas where the Democrats are eager for movement, after 40 years of Republican rule.

"I think that we start off with where voters expect us to start, including restoring labor rights and making sure the wealthy and powerful don't unilaterally set the terms and conditions for working people in the state of Michigan. It

includes protections for historically vulnerable communities, not just the LGBTQ community, but minority populations all around that have been neglected in state law for our elderly, who need a better support system.”

The same can be said for common sense gun reform, which is on the minds of many in the LGBTQ+ community presently due to the recent massacre at Club Q in Colorado Springs. Moss is an original member of the House Gun Violence Prevention Caucus.

Increased support for the interests of other marginalized groups is something Pohutsky would like to see. She mentioned specifically the Michigan CROWN Act, introduced by former State Rep. Sarah Anthony, that addresses hair discrimination, which disproportionately impacts women of color.

The big three

Turning to the executive branch, all lauded the first-term performance of Gov. Whitmer, Secretary of State Benson and Attorney General Nessel. Venkataraman summed it up.

“I think they’re doing great,” Venkataraman said. “They have done everything that they can do with their executive power to help advance LGBTQ rights and make sure that Michigan is an open and welcoming place. But we haven’t had control of the legislative branch, which is key. And so we have so many more opportunities, and [they] have been really excited to help figure out how we continue moving forward.”

But there’s always room for improvement. LaChey, who said “I’m excited for the next four years and applaud [Whitmer’s] reelection,” would like to see more LGBTQ+ representation in terms of appointments to the judiciary.

He also noted the lack of queer representation in Whitmer’s cabinet.

Leggett called their performance “wonderful,” but “just a start.” He mentioned specifically going further to eliminate barriers to voting that members of the transgender community sometimes experience. He talked about a benefit to an LGBTQ+ Commission in this situation, so that “we’re doing it in a comprehensive manner, not in our own silos,” he explained.

Like others, Moss detailed how

Whitmer, Benson and Nessel have gone to bat for the LGBTQ+ community “time and time again.”

“Governor Whitmer has gone as far as she can in her executive authority to ban discrimination in state employment based on sexual orientation and gender identity,” Moss began. “She had an executive order that would prevent any Department of Health dollars going toward entities that would support conversion therapy. She has made sure that her cabinet and appointments have reflected the diversity of the state of Michigan. Jocelyn Benson right away wanted to make sure that someone’s driver’s license matched their gender identity and that gender designation was not a barrier to somebody living as their authentic self. And of course, Dana Nessel personally herself, as attorney general, argued the Rouch World case before the Michigan Supreme Court, which indeed verified that LGBTQ Michiganders ought to be protected in the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.”

“Now, with a legislature that can back up these executive actions, I think that the potential is limitless for the LGBTQ community in Michigan,” he added.

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Wanda Psyches Us Up
Puzzle on page 25

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Chamber Grants

Continued from page 15

into the LGBTQ business community and prop up businesses to ensure sustainable growth for years to come."

Looking ahead, Heard promised that the Chamber would continue to give out grants, and hopefully bigger ones. "Though this year was a small amount, we hope to only grow that year after year, if the businesses, corporate partners, and the community continue to support us."

The best way to support the Chamber is to attend its events and programming, including their annual gala, said Heard. And new business owners need more support now than ever after recent years filled with a pandemic, supply chain delays and a locked-down China.

"When a business is able to open, they become a job creator," Heard said. "In my opinion, that's the biggest asset to a community. This is somewhere for members of the community to start their journey of building wealth and contributing to society. As LGBTQ+ or minority-owned business owners, we hire and reflect the communities we serve."

Robyn Childers, owner and co-founder of Welcome Home Yoga and Wellness, said it was an "absolute honor" to receive the impact grant from the Chamber. "It is humbling to be recognized as a community leader and hardworking small business owner," she said. "This grant will help Welcome Home Yoga and Wellness continue to grow roots in support of our mission to make yoga and wellness an inclusive experience, accessible to all, especially, historically underserved community members (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, etc.)."

"We are proud to be the first 100 percent LGBTQ+ owned and operated yoga studio and wellness center in Detroit," Childers went on. "And we look forward to welcoming a growing, vibrant LGBTQ+ presence. Representation matters."

Childers said she and wife and co-founder Melissa selected the studio's Avenue of Fashion corridor in Detroit out of a deep love and devotion for the city.

"Like the Chamber, we very much want to

support the revitalization of businesses through collaborating and building strong relationships. Welcome Home Yoga and Wellness became a member of the Chamber because our missions of uplifting community through deep connections are very much aligned."

Childers also said that fledgling LGBTQ+ businesses need to support one another.

"Queer businesses play a vital role within their communities," she said. "They provide products and services, create jobs and support the local economy. More importantly, queer businesses help break down barriers, challenge negative stereotypes and help educate people about misconceptions about the LGBTQ+ community."

But, she said, it's often difficult work.

"Queer business owners also have unique challenges they face unlike their straight counter parts. Some of the challenges we face include disclosing our sexuality and gender to investors, employees, and customers, and being the victim of harassments, discrimination, verbal and/or physical violence."

These and other challenges unique to the queer community, said Childers, "highlight the importance and necessity for queer business owners to join together and support one another."

And that's just what the Chamber is about.

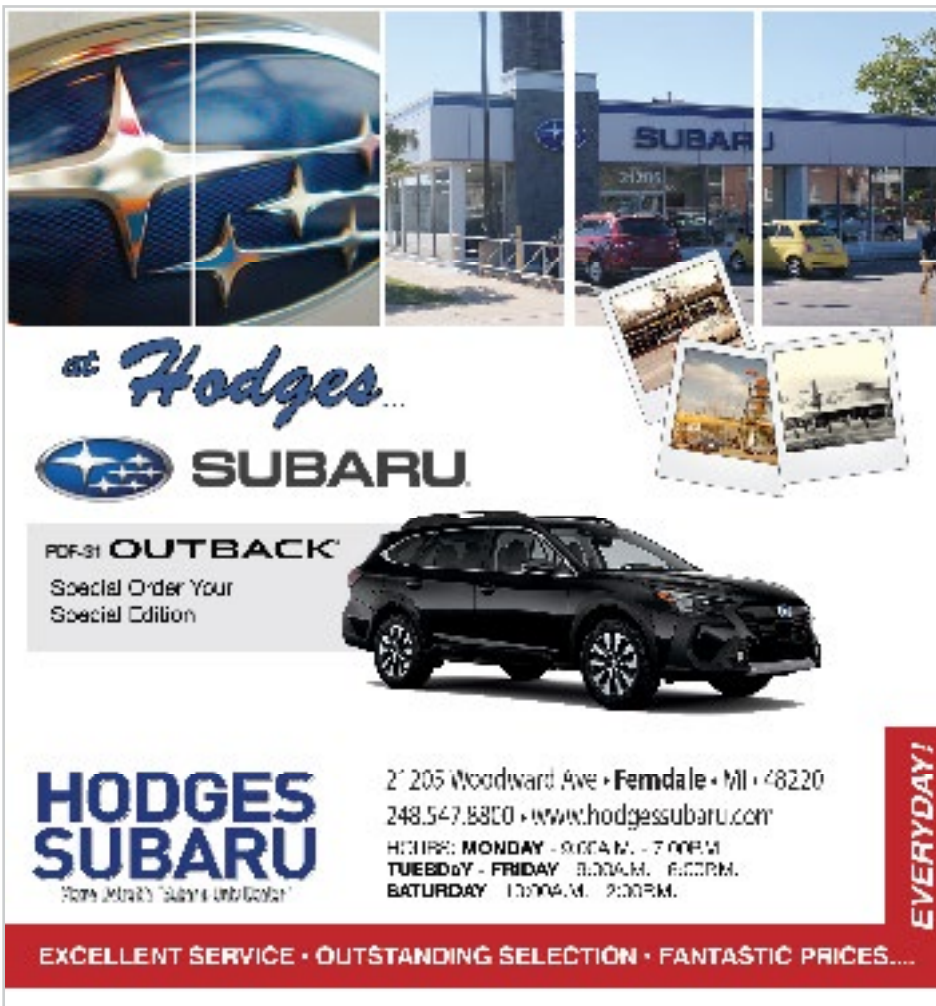
"It's coming together, but much more work needs to be done," Heard said. "We will be collecting data on our members to understand their gaps and needs, more partnerships will be forged, more business owners need to come out and join, and more LGBTQ+ professionals and allies need to join and get involved."

Heard said the Chamber's success depends in large part on simply getting their name out there.

"There are so many people that still don't know we exist, and that is just the truth," he said. "Nothing to sugarcoat."

To fix that, the Chamber will be investing in marketing this upcoming year and attempting to be more visible. The Chamber also hopes to hire staff soon.

"It would be a big accomplishment for us," Heard said. "So, if you know anyone who wants to underwrite a program coordinator position, holla at me!"



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Y'all Means All **Six Religious Music Stars Who Are Vocal LGBTQ+ Allies**

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The LGBTQ+ community has been a constant punching bag this year from conservative-leaning religious politicians and their followers, especially, but this take is only part of the story. Plenty of Christians and members of other faith communities ascribe to affirming, welcoming beliefs where LGBTQ+ folks are not only tolerated, but fully accepted into the fold. These six music superstars have been open about their beliefs, which include religion and LGBTQ+ acceptance under the same big umbrella. As Christian country star Miranda Lambert sings, “Y’all means all.”

Amy Grant

Amy Grant and her country music star husband Vince Gill just made a show of their queer support by hosting Grant’s niece’s wedding at their Hidden Trace Farm in Franklin, Tennessee. Grant did not name her niece but identified her as a lesbian, adding that it was the first “bride and bride wedding” on their property. Grant recently told The Washington Post that her niece coming out was “a gift to our whole family, just to widen the experience of our whole family.”

“Honestly, from a faith perspective, I do always say, ‘Jesus, you just narrowed it down to things: love God and love each other.’ I mean, hey, that’s pretty simple.”

Imagine Dragons frontman Dan Reynolds

Dan Reynolds came to be a queer ally over time. Raised Mormon, he struggled with reconciling his faith with childhood friends he found out were gay. Eventually, Reynolds followed his heart and decided to support LGBTQ+ rights. Today, Reynolds, who regularly performs at the LoveLoud Festival in Salt Lake

City, is bringing up his young daughter to love everyone.

“My little girl, she’s raised to believe what she believes in her heart, and so as a little kid who’s raised that way, this is such an easy concept for her,” Reynolds told BTL’s Chris Azzopardi in 2018. “She’s 5 years old and I can say, ‘What does it mean to be gay?’ and ‘How does that feel?’ and to her I didn’t even have to teach her that concept. It’s like, of course people should love who they want, and you should never bully, and she understands all those concepts.”

Garth Brooks

The country music superstar has long been an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. This is likely due in no small part to the fact that his late sister, Betsy Smittle, was a lesbian. In 1993, his single “We Shall Be Free,” which included the line “When we’re free to love anyone we choose,” was actually boycotted by some country radio stations. More recently, Brooks, who is headed out on tour in the spring, spoke about the impact of the song to Billboard. “That line was about everything from interracial marriage and marriages crossing religions to same-sex marriages,” he said. “If you truly love somebody, that’s what I’m hoping, as a child of God, that we’re doing. That whole line was just about, ‘C’mon, man, see past the walls and love each other.”

Dolly Parton

Obviously, we have to include Dolly Parton, the original queer icon, on the list. Dolly has always embraced her LGBTQ+ fans. In a 2014 BTL interview, Chris Azzopardi asked Dolly why it was important for her to stand up for queer rights. “Why wouldn’t I stand up for everybody, for all people? In the country



Amy Grant. Courtesy photo



Jamie Ashby. Courtesy photo

MISS TRANS MICHIGAN 2023 JAMIE ASHBY TO COMPETE NATIONALLY

Ashby Says Her Family Struggled With Her Gender Identity When She Was a Kid

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The journey to becoming Miss Trans Michigan USA 2023 has been a long and winding road for Jamie Ashby. The 38-year-old HR professional from Holt, a small town just south of Lansing, has faced more than her fair share of challenges along the way. But like the Nina Simone classic says: It's a new day and a new life for Ashby, and she's feeling good.

Ashby, who grew up in Lansing and later lived in Grand Rapids, was no more than 4 years old when she was diagnosed with what was then called gender identity disorder. While pregnant, Ashby's mother believed she was carrying a girl. And though she ended up with a baby boy, it was no surprise to the young mother when her child began expressing that she felt like a girl inside.

Ashby's mother was supportive. She began sending Ashby to preschool dressed as a girl. But authorities there did not understand how to deal with such a situation at that time.

"They got child protective services involved," Ashby told BTL. "I was put into foster care and eventually adopted at 6 years of age."

Things in her new home were not exactly hunky dory, though. "I complained that the dolls I played

with had breasts and I didn't. And I was confused as to when that was going to happen to me."

But Ashby's new family had no more experience with gender identity issues than her former preschool did. They forced her to wear boy clothes and Ashby did not feel she was seen by her family for who she really was. "I don't think they really understood that I was transgender, because I didn't either," said Ashby of her formative years. "I just thought I was a feminine boy who happened to be attracted to other boys. ... I've always had a very feminine spirit."

Admittedly, Ashby said she was a hard child to raise. "I was a very difficult child," she said, listing losing her bio mom and her new family's lack of understanding of what she was going through as reasons. "I just had this sense of abandonment. ... My family didn't understand who I was or how to help me."

Ashby parted ways with her adoptive family when she was just 14. She was forced to fend for herself and experienced bouts of homelessness. Eventually, she found her footing. "I met another queen and we became best friends," she said. "Through her, I met other girls and I became a part of a pack of girls. We were all living

See **Miss Michigan**, page 26

www.PrideSource.com



Luke Londo being sworn in by Portia Roberson, chair of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. Photo: MCRC

◀ Luke Londo

Continued from page 16

may be feeling very isolated, who may be feeling that they're not protected, maybe at home, maybe at school, just in life in general," Roberson said. "And [he] talked about how he was happy to serve on the Commission because he could be a symbol of the representation that now we are acknowledging and really bringing to the forefront in Michigan."

Not only that, it's because of Londo and others that beginning next year, one of their meetings will take place in the Upper Peninsula.

The admiration is mutual. Londo appreciates the "titans" he now serves with on the Commission.

"All the people on the Commission have such remarkable resumes and just this really deep abiding commitment to making lives better as part of their day jobs," Londo said. "And I'm just so deeply honored to be part of such a significant body with so many great leaders."



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Patti LaBelle. Photo courtesy of Sound Board

Y'all Means All

Continued from page 21

field, we're brought up in spiritual homes, we're taught to 'judge not lest you be judged,' and it's always been a mystery to me how people jump all over things just to criticize, condemn and judge other people when that is so un-Christian – and they claim to be good Christians! We're supposed to love one another. We're supposed to accept and love one another. Whether we do or not, that's a different story. But that's what we're supposed to do."

Jars of Clay frontman Dan Haseltine

In a series of 2014 tweets, contemporary Christian group Jars of Clay frontman Dan Haseltine came out in support of queer people, and in particular same-sex marriage — long before it was even legal nationwide. As reported by GLAAD, the tweets quickly proved controversial. But Haseltine stood by his statements. "I just don't see a negative effect to allowing gay marriage," read one tweet. "No societal breakdown, no war on traditional marriage. ?? Anyone?" And, in another he wrote, "I'm trying to make sense of the conservative argument. But it doesn't

hold up to basic scrutiny. Feels akin to women's suffrage."

Patti LaBelle

Much like Dolly, LaBelle has been showing love to her queer fans since the '70s, when she was a member of funk/soul group LaBelle. The soul legend has been sitting down regularly to chat with BTL since 2001. In 2021, LaBelle, who calls herself "the original drag queen," spoke to Page Six about her adoring queer fanbase. "I always accepted everybody," she said. "And I think they saw [in] me someone that they could spill their hearts to. And they just follow me."

In a 2016 interview with the Washington Post, LaBelle spoke openly about loving the gay community and God. "I'm still the Patti LaBelle who accepts gay people," she said, "while a lot of churches won't accept gay people."

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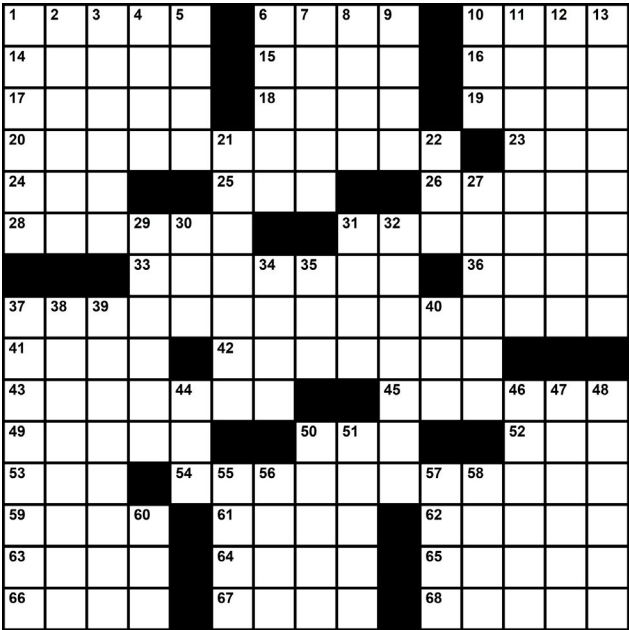
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Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 Perkins' "Psycho" role
- 6 Arty gay-friendly district
- 10 Begin to wake up
- 14 Start of a Sappho title, perhaps
- 15 Not now
- 16 Name repeated in a Stein quote
- 17 Mapplethorpe's "Dark ___ Rose"
- 18 "The African Queen" author
- 19 Apple that isn't a fruit

- 20 Start of a quote from Wanda Sykes
- 23 Blood classification syst.
- 24 Org. in many spy movies
- 25 Crossed through
- 26 Like the space around Uranus
- 28 Ancient provincial governor
- 31 Loeb's partner
- 33 Marsupial with a forked penis
- 36 Prefix with tubbies
- 37 More of the quote
- 41 Former senior

- 42 Top, to a bottom
- 43 "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" author John
- 45 Nero's tutor
- 49 Give the slip to
- 50 Gielgud's john
- 52 Chess queen, ironically
- 53 Caesar's lang.
- 54 End of the quote
- 59 What you can take from me
- 61 Staying power, in "Variety"
- 62 Kahlo's cohort
- 63 Blazing star
- 64 Colorado, to Cocteau
- 65 "The Brady Bunch" episode
- 66 Emulated da Vinci
- 67 Comes together
- 68 "Love Affair" costar Dunne

Down

- 1 ABC's
- 2 Lack of zip
- 3 Musical featuring "Cheek to Cheek"
- 4 Carmela of "The Sopranos"
- 5 Mark with a branding iron
- 6 Tennessee, but not Williams
- 7 "Not another religious homophobe!"
- 8 Pay attention to
- 9 Ready to go in
- 10 Bombay title
- 11 Fannie Flagg had some fried green ones
- 12 Allie on "Weeds"
- 13 Emulated Elton John

- 21 Like a flasher, for a moment
- 22 "___hoo! Fellas!"
- 27 Rise, after a fall
- 29 Emulated Kerouac's "On the Road"
- 30 "The Simpsons" storekeeper
- 31 Try to seduce
- 32 "Self-Reliance" writer Ralph Waldo
- 34 Really moved
- 35 Pose for pix
- 37 Sex toy boutique
- 38 It can help you get it up
- 39 Remedy
- 40 Some escorts want it up front
- 44 Take home after taxes
- 46 Series with Jamal Lyon
- 47 Boy toy
- 48 A single person
- 50 No longer jail bait
- 51 Gives the boot
- 55 He did Jackie's clothes
- 56 Belle's companion
- 57 Part of a name in espionage
- 58 Nat. counterpart in MLB
- 60 Fondle clumsily

See p. 19 for answers

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◀ Miss Michigan

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in a house together.”

She started presenting as a female in 2006 and then, two years later, she started performing as a showgirl at her friends’ insistence. “I had so much stage fright,” she recalled. “But I got out there. And it opened up a can of worms.”

Ashby would continue performing for a few years. She also got involved with pageants, winning eight during her showgirl career, including Miss Michigan Pride in 2010.

By the following year, Ashby had decided to retire from the

stage and concentrate, instead, on her transition. “The amount of money that I was spending on my wardrobe was astronomical,” she said. “I thought, ‘How can I be putting this money into my drag instead of doing what I wanted to do?’ I wanted to medically transition, and that is expensive.”

Over time, Ashby managed to raise the funds and put enough money together to do as she wished. Then, in 2019, she got involved with the pageant world again. “I had always been a lover of pageants. I love the camaraderie you get from competing in them and the experience of meeting other people.”

Ashby said she started watching cisgender pageants from about the

age of 7. “I would study those girls because I wanted to emulate their aesthetic. It was the ultimate in feminine beauty.”

Earlier this year, Ashby was chosen to be Miss Trans Michigan USA. She will compete for the national title next September in Milwaukee. Until then, Ashby will keep on living what she calls a somewhat quiet life. “I’m in a good mental space to put my all into this,” she said.

In her spare time, Ashby enjoys going out for brunch, hosting game nights and trying new foods. “I’m also a fragrance junkie,” she said. “I’m always looking for a new fragrance that is strong and nobody else is wearing.”

Ashby also enjoys travel. “I will

tell you that if I feel like just getting out; I will be on the next plane,” she said. “Nothing really holds me down when I have my mind made up.” At work, Ashby continues to climb the corporate ladder. Currently, she is an HR executive with a major insurance company.

“I’ve always had an interest in HR and just wanted to be under that umbrella,” she said, remembering the days she struggled to get gainful employment without ID that matched her presentation. “As a trans woman in corporate America ... I have an opportunity to make a difference.”

Ashby has been with the same company for seven years. “If I’m able to share my experiences as an openly trans woman that will hopefully

change any mindsets the leaders may have and tenderize their hearts as to what it means to be trans.”

Already preparing for next year’s national pageant, Ashby said she supports the Miss Trans USA platform because it allows trans women and those who identify as non-binary to come together. “It allows you to advocate throughout your year and to just be a role model to the trans and non-binary communities.”

“I think the beautiful thing about the pageant is that it’s not about being a particular size or having a particular body shape,” she continued. “It’s about being your authentic self. The values the pageant has coincides with everything I believe in.”



Pronto! in Royal Oak. Photo courtesy Pronto!

◀ DHS

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and acts of violence are no longer performed in the shadows. It makes me sad that our shows, which continue to bring so much joy and laughter, must [increase security in response] to such needless bigotry and hate.”

Baglio said his staff has always been trained to be prepared for emergency situations and that security has always been a priority inside the venue. Since the DHS warning and the Club Q attack, security issues have become more involved (and more expensive). “We have been required by national entertainers we contract with to provide security checks for weapons and guns upon entry to our venue, adding additional cost in an already inflationary time,” he said.

As a small business owner, Baglio said additional costs related to security make it more difficult for the venue to provide quality entertainment at a reasonable cost, though he is confident Five15 and Pronto! will “weather the inflation storm.” His bigger fear is how patrons will absorb the impact of increased security measures.

“What I fear is more permanent, as folks come here to escape the pains of their lives, whether it be cancer treatments, the death of a loved one, a recent breakup or just to have fun and laugh,” he said. “They are greeted upon entry by a weapons check and pat down. It is a blunt reminder of the hard realities we’ve been forced to succumb to and sadly tolerate.”



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