

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

# Between the Lines™

THE CANNABIS ISSUE  
Meet the Pansexual  
Artist Making Art for  
Pot Smokers

PRIDE PUSHBACK  
What Would Whitmer  
Say About These  
Homophobic Acts?

## Go Ahead, Fangirl Over Samantha Irby Like We Are

The 'And Just Like That...' Writer  
on Hollywood, Boredom and  
Why She Loves Michigan

*By Sarah Bricker Hunt*





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Photo: Lori Morgan Gottschling



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### PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP

[www.pridesource.com](http://www.pridesource.com)  
 Phone 734-263-1476

### PUBLISHERS

Benjamin Jenkins  
[benjamin@pridesource.com](mailto:benjamin@pridesource.com)

**Publishers Emeritus:** Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

### EDITORIAL

#### Editorial Director

Chris Azzopardi  
[chris@pridesource.com](mailto:chris@pridesource.com)

#### Managing Editor

Sarah Bricker Hunt  
[sarah@pridesource.com](mailto:sarah@pridesource.com)

#### Senior Staff Writers

Ellen Shanna Knoppow, Jason A. Michael

#### Writers and Columnists

D'Anne Witkowski, Jon King, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, Tim Retzliff, George Elkind, Eve Kucharski

### CREATIVE

#### Cartoonists

Paul Berg

#### Graphic Designer

Sarah Wolf

#### Contributing Photographers

Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen

### ADVERTISING & SALES

[sales@pridesource.com](mailto:sales@pridesource.com)

Carolyn Cardenas  
 734-263-1476  
[carolyn@pridesource.com](mailto:carolyn@pridesource.com)

Tim Powers  
 734-263-1475  
[tim@pridesource.com](mailto:tim@pridesource.com)

Ann/Andy Cox, 248-613-2513  
[anncox@pridesource.com](mailto:anncox@pridesource.com)

#### National Advertising Representative

Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

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

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Are you overdue for a break from a news cycle that has become hyperfixated on underwater exploration and global crises that require a degree in international relations to fully understand? Take a break from the relentless anxiety-inducing real world with a burlesque show, an award-winning play or reserve your tickets for a strange (but beautiful) stage performance by queer singer Melanie Martinez or the DSO's tribute to Tina Turner. Need to fully break free from regular life? Head to a queer-friendly Michigan "gaycation" spot.

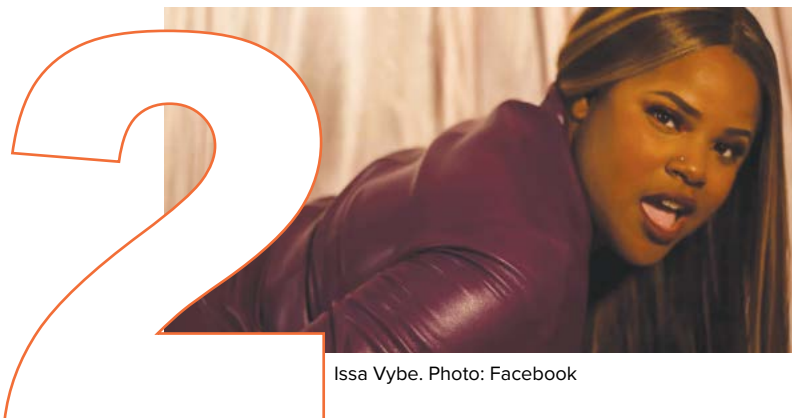


Tina Turner. Photo: Philip Spittle

## Celebrate the Life and Music of Tina Turner

Tickets are available now for a unique celebration of the life and music of beloved belter and unwavering LGBTQ+ ally Tina Turner, who died in May. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) will present *Simply the Best: The Music of Tina Turner* on July 8, featuring vocalists Tamika Lawrence, Shaleah Adkisson, Scout Coulter and pianist John Boswell alongside the DSO. Highlights include several orchestrated renditions of Turner classics, including "Proud Mary," "What's Love Got to Do With It," "Private Dancer" and, "Schitt's Creek" fans will be excited to note, "Simply the Best."

July 8, 8 p.m., Orchestra Hall (3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Tickets at [dso.org](https://www.dso.org) or by phone at 313- 576-5111.



Issa Vybe. Photo: Facebook

## Support Queer Visibility and Bawdy Burlesque

Whether you're a burlesque aficionado or just someone in need of a fun night out, Lilith's Big Ol' Golden Show: Queer Coded — a Celebration of Queer Visibility is sure to fit the bill. Showcasing the talents of Detroit burlesque icon Lilith Von Tal, the performance will offer a smorgasbord of unique delights, from burlesque to drag to aerial acts to live music. The show, press materials read, "celebrates and illuminates many of the pop culture icons and characters in which the queer community has found visibility, claimed as their own or found an embrace." Starring alongside Von Tal are burlesque performers Issa Vybe and Margot Lugosi and local legends Burnie Mac, Denna Iniquity, Eartha Kitten, Flan Dulcé, Johnnie Always, Rickie Sparkle, Star Baby and Vex Thorn.

June 30, 8 p.m., Planet Ant Theatre (2320 Caniff St., Hamtramck) Tickets at [PlanetAnt.com](https://www.planetant.com).



Melanie Martinez. Photo: Facebook

## Buy Tickets for Otherworldly Queer Artist Melanie Martinez

When queer artist Melanie Martinez takes the stage in Sterling Heights July 8, you can expect an otherworldly experience. In recent appearances, the singer has revealed a whole new persona, one she describes as a "new lifeform," complete with pink-hued skin, a second pair of eyes set into her forehead and even a new, higher-pitched speaking voice. Martinez told KIIS FM the transformation is part of an eight-year, planned artistic journey. Martinez's "Portals" tour will immerse audiences in this strange new world. Tickets available now.

July 8, 7 p.m., Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre (14900 Metro Parkway, Sterling Heights). Tickets at [melaniemartinezmusic.com/tour](https://www.melaniemartinezmusic.com/tour).





### Take a Michigan Gaycation

The nice thing about a vacation in Michigan versus, say, DeSantis Land, is that the state has made it abundantly clear (and legally enforceable) that queer people are welcome here. Still, vacationing at a property that is explicitly welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community can offer peace of mind and more opportunities to connect with other queer fun and sun seekers. Lucky for you, Michigan offers several queer-friendly hotspots for a little R&R. Consider classics like The Dunes Resort in Douglas along Lake Michigan, the Campit Outdoor Resort in Saugatuck or stick closer to home at the Copper House “bud and breakfast” in Detroit. You can even explore the naturist community if you’ve ever dreamed of a pants-off/danceoff kind of vacation at LGBTQ-friendly Nuance Naturist Bed & Breakfast in Battle Creek.



### See Queer, Black Play ‘The Magnolia Ballet’

Don’t miss “The Magnolia Ballet,” on stage now at Detroit’s Plowshares Theatre Company, Michigan’s only professional African American theater. The play, which features drama, dance and poetry, explores the relationships between a father and his queer son in rural Georgia. The production, written by Chicago-based playwright Terry Guest, has won several major theater awards, including two Joseph Jefferson Awards for Excellence.

Through July 2, The Carr Center at Park Sheldon (15 East Kirby St., Detroit). Buy tickets at [plowsharestheatre.org/programming/the-magnolia-ballet](http://plowsharestheatre.org/programming/the-magnolia-ballet).

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



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# Michigan Communities Push Back on Pride

## What Would Whitmer Say About These Homophobic Acts?

BY JON KING

While Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has declared, “Michigan is standing up for the LGBTQ+ community,” several Michigan communities are sending the opposite message.

In the 72-hour period after Whitmer signed an executive order establishing Michigan’s LGBTQ+ Commission, with a goal toward “eradicating and preventing discrimination” of the LGBTQ+ community, two elected bodies in Livingston County moved to restrict efforts at promoting Pride events and messages, while a third in Wayne County approved an outright ban on particular flags, including the Pride flag, from being displayed on city properties.

On Monday, June 12, the Livingston County Board of Commissioners voted to implement a restrictive policy prompted by promotion of LGBTQ+ events, while 10 miles to the east, the Hartland Consolidated Schools Board of Education passed a similar policy revision to restrict the content of classroom displays.

While neither proposal explicitly mentions LGBTQ+ content, they were both put forward in reaction to such efforts and have added to a coordinated pushback by communities during Pride Month.

The all-Republican Livingston County Board of Commissioners voted 8-1 to adopt a resolution that prohibits any committee appointed by the Board from promoting events or activities that are “not clearly within the scope of the mission of the appointed entity,” effectively granting the board sole authority to decide what can and cannot be advertised.

Sponsored by Commissioner Wes Nakagiri, the resolution was brought forth in response to advertisements in the summer newsletter for the Human Services Collaborative Body (HSCB)

for a June 4 Pride Rally in Brighton and a June 10 Pride March in Howell, both sponsored by the Livingston Diversity Council and the Pride Alliance of Livingston.

Nakagiri insisted his resolution was not an act of discrimination, but rather a change in policy as he believed the ads did not serve to coordinate health and human services, and were therefore beyond the scope of the HSCB’s mission.

Most of the members of the public present at the meeting saw it differently.

Yvonne Mackle of Hartland called the resolution a “petty abuse of power,” while Connie Conklin, the director of Livingston County’s Community Mental Health and a member of the HSCB, said she was disappointed in the board’s decision, explaining that as a resident of this county, she is “in a position to advocate that this is a great place to work and live, but resolutions like this make it harder to recruit and maintain staff.”

In response, Nakagiri said that the Livingston Diversity Council and Pride Alliance of Livingston are “private entities,” and that “if they

want to promote their events, they are welcome to. But they are not welcome to do so under the banner of Livingston County.”

“I didn’t think it would be appropriate for the county to promote Pride events,” he continued, “just like I wouldn’t be supportive of the county promoting NRA events, or the county promoting or supporting the Proud Boys’ events.”

That comparison to a neo-fascist group that promotes political violence and is classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center only served to stoke further anger from residents, including Anna Wysocki of Howell, who noted that the LGBTQ+ community is “a historically and currently oppressed group, and the Proud Boys is an outwardly oppressive group.”

Livingston County Diversity Council Executive Director Nicole Mathews-Creech said they were “disheartened” by the resolution, which the council sees as an effort to discriminate against a specific group that is a part of the community.

“The mission of the HSCB as stated on the HSCB page of the Livingston County website



is 'ensuring a system of support for members of our community,' she said. "The events in question are hosted to provide support for members of our community and are thus in line with the mission of the HSCB."

Queer Families Livingston, a 501c3 whose mission is to support members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Livingston County, issued a statement after the vote saying they were "deeply concerned" about policies that appear to be discriminatory and attempt to erase the progress in Livingston County.

"We want the queer community to know that you are seen, you are heard, and you are loved," read the statement. "Be heartened that the recent Pride celebrations across the county have proved that Livingston County is a welcoming place for LGBTQIA+ people, and the actions of a very small but loud group will not change the reality we know through these great events."

Meanwhile, in Hartland, the school board on the very same night passed a similar policy with the aim to restrict free expression for and by the LGBTQ+ community.

Put forward by Trustee Glenn Gogoleski, the policy update states that any media including signs, posters, stickers and flags (other than the American and Michigan flags) "depicting any social and/or political causes unrelated to the daily curriculum shall not be allowed in schools and classrooms unless the media/items are for the classroom discussion as part of the curriculum for that day and subject."

Many parents in the district are convinced the proposal is a direct attack on "safe space" stickers and other similar materials that are present in some Hartland classrooms letting students in marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, know that they are welcome and safe in these designated environments.

As such there was lengthy comment at the board meeting on the issue, although in the end it narrowly passed 4-3.

The swing vote came from Treasurer Meghan Glabach, who said her decision was based on a proposed student-designed safe space sticker that represents all students, including those who are a part of the most vulnerable groups.

"I recommended moving forward with the student-designed sticker," she said. "Every student should feel safe and welcomed. We need to hold ourselves, our students and our families accountable to this as well."

However, that rationale didn't sit well with Nate Dorough, a parent in the Hartland district.

"To me, it smacks of an 'All Lives Matter' sort of scenario, where we're not going to say that it's OK to be gay, we're not going to use rainbows, but we're going to say that everybody deserves respect," he said. "Which, to be clear, everybody does deserve respect, but also sometimes for marginalized communities, you have to say, 'Black Lives Matter', you have to say, 'Gay people are welcome here', you have to say, 'Trans rights are important.' You have to be able to say these things individually to

acknowledge the overarching thing that, yes, all people deserve respect."

Julie Ohashi with the advocacy group Stand Against Extremism LivCo said the decision could also very well result in the involvement of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and potentially even litigation.

She pointed to a letter the ACLU recently sent to the Fenton Public School District to support the School Board's decision there to continue to permit school staff to wear Equality Badges in support of LGBTQ+ students.

In that letter, Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU's LGBTQ+ Project, noted that "the prohibition against sex discrimination under Title IX and the Equal Protection clause of the U.S. Constitution protects students from discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status or gender non-conformity."

Kaplan said amendments to the state's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act signed into law in March by Gov. Whitmer provide "explicit protections against discrimination in education on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression."

Kaplan told BTL that having a policy prohibiting all other flags except the school flag, state flag and American flag is probably legal, although the issue isn't that cut and dry.

"The issue of symbols and displays that can only be related to daily curriculum is something that we would have to look at more closely to see what is actually considered 'daily curriculum,'" he said.

The pushback on Pride, however, was not confined to mid-Michigan as the Hamtramck City Council on Tuesday, June 13 unanimously voted to ban certain flags, including that for LGBTQ+ Pride, from being displayed on city property.

The resolution states that because "the City does not want to open the door for radical or racist groups to ask for their flags to be flown," no flags can be flown on city property by "religious, ethnic, racial, political, or sexual orientation group(s)."

During the meeting, members of the public spoke out against the resolution, with one person saying, "For Hamtramck to attempt to equate the LGBTQ Pride flag with hate symbols, when it is a symbol of progress and love, is now a local attack on our community."


Council members, however, framed their argument as a religious freedom issue.

"We only want to respect the religious rights of our citizens," said City Councilman Nayeem Choudhury. "Why do you have to have a flag flown on this city property to be represented? You are already represented. We already know who you are and we don't have any hate or any discriminations against that."


"You are welcome here," he added. "But we have to respect the people around here; schools, mosques, churches."

As a result of the vote, only the U.S. flag, the flag of the State of Michigan, the City of Hamtramck Flag, the POW/MIA flag and the "nations' flags that represent the international character of our City shall be flown."

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# Go Ahead, Fangirl

## Samantha Irby on Hollywood, Boredom and Why She Loves Michigan

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

As I tore through a used library copy of Samantha Irby's 2017 bestselling collection of essays, "We Are Never Meeting in Real Life," in one sitting, I felt a kinship with the readers who came before me. The ones who collectively adorned the well-worn paperback with chocolate smears, left behind a series of coffee mug rings on the back cover and dog-eared the corners of dozens of pages, no doubt to quickly find the passages they, too, felt compelled to read aloud to their unwitting life partners or passive pets. Before I'd finished, I'd ordered the others, Irby's "Meaty" and "Wow, No Thank You," and pre-ordered her latest collection, "Quietly Hostile," which came out in May.

Somehow, I'd missed Irby's rise to the top of the humor memoir genre, perhaps distracted by things like the Trump era, a pandemic and warily considering what these new Nazis are all about. I asked her forgiveness while expressing my thinly disguised new fangirl energy during a recent Zoom call, where Irby joined me from the home she shares with her wife in Kalamazoo.

"Listen," Irby begins, "I have incredibly low self-esteem and a massive ego somehow. So, be a fangirl if you like, and I won't tell. I'm always kind of surprised when someone says, 'Oh, I like this thing that you wrote,' but then I'm, like, flooded with gratitude because sometimes it feels like you're writing into the void."

"Plus," she adds, "I'm not gonna read reviews ever. I'm never gonna read anything anyone says about me online if I can help it. So it is really nice to hear from a real person with a voice and a verifiable identity. You like the book; you just made my day."

Even as a newbie to Irby's work, it seems reductive to reference it in one of the ways other outlets have: self-deprecating, vulnerable, scatological (rude — also, maybe true) or, especially cringeworthy, a "writer and comedy juggernaut." Can a person even be a

juggernaut? I do know that if pressed — if some dude caught me in an alley and demanded at knifepoint that I describe Samantha Irby in three words or less — one of those words would not be juggernaut. They'd be closer to "Honest. Hilarious. Persistent." And I would maybe add "painfully" ahead of each of these.

Because what Irby does on the printed page looks easy, but her breezy vibe belies a labor of love (and a fight against intense chronic procrastination, Irby tells me). Where other authors might hold back or couch their non-fiction confessionals in vague, guarded observations, Irby goes for it.

If she's going to explain the real, literally messy details about living with chronic conditions like ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease (and she is), she's going there. It might involve cleaning up after herself in socially vulnerable situations or a focus on what it's like to get a colonoscopy at the hands of a good looking doctor. It could involve adult diapers.

She's also going to share the visceral pain of growing up with an alcoholic sometimes-dad and becoming a caretaker at age 11 for a chronically ill mother and share all-too-familiar dating stories about the series of men who disappointed her before she found her person.

Writing is therapy for Irby, a cathartic exercise in trauma-informed recovery. "I work so much shit out in the writing," she says. "And then I'm like, 'Hmm, didn't think about how I'm also working this out for an audience' — but by then, it's too late and I'm like, 'Well, we may as well just go through this together.'"

The approach has garnered the author a fiercely loyal fanbase on one hand and the kind of internet gold we take for granted in 2023 on the other — for example, a critical review on Good Reads written by Mary (a middle-aged white woman whose profile pic is encircled by a red feather boa): "What we have here, ladies and

See **Samantha Irby**, page 26



Samantha Irby. Photo: Lori Morgan Gottschling



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### Important Facts About DOVATO

This is only a brief summary of important information about DOVATO and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and treatment.

#### What is the most important information I should know about DOVATO?

If you have both human immunodeficiency virus-1 (HIV-1) infection and Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection, DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- **Resistant HBV.** Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV infection before you start treatment with DOVATO. If you have HIV-1 and hepatitis B, the HBV can change (mutate) during your treatment with DOVATO and become harder to treat (resistant). It is not known if DOVATO is safe and effective in people who have HIV-1 and HBV infection.
- **Worsening of HBV infection.** If you have HBV infection and take DOVATO, your HBV may get worse (flare-up) if you stop taking DOVATO. A "flare-up" is when your HBV infection suddenly returns in a worse way than before.
  - Do not run out of DOVATO. Refill your prescription or talk to your healthcare provider before your DOVATO is all gone.

- **Do not stop DOVATO without first talking to your healthcare provider.**
- If you stop taking DOVATO, your healthcare provider will need to check your health often and do blood tests regularly for several months to check your liver function and monitor your HBV infection. It may be necessary to give you a medicine to treat hepatitis B. Tell your healthcare provider about any new or unusual symptoms you may have after you stop taking DOVATO.

For more information about side effects, see "What are possible side effects of DOVATO?"

#### What is DOVATO?

DOVATO is a prescription medicine that is used without other HIV-1 medicines to treat human immunodeficiency virus-1 (HIV-1) infection in adults: who have not received HIV-1 medicines in the past, or to replace their current HIV-1 medicines when their healthcare provider determines that they meet certain requirements. HIV-1 is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It is not known if DOVATO is safe and effective in children.

Please see additional Important Facts About DOVATO on the following page.

**Ask your doctor about staying undetectable with fewer medicines in 1 pill.**



## Important Facts About DOVATO (cont'd)

### Who should not take DOVATO?

#### Do not take DOVATO if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine that contains dolutegravir or lamivudine.
- take dofetilide. Taking DOVATO and dofetilide can cause side effects that may be serious or life-threatening.

### What should I tell my healthcare provider before using DOVATO?

#### Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have kidney problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. One of the medicines in DOVATO (dolutegravir) may harm your unborn baby.
  - Your healthcare provider may prescribe a different medicine than DOVATO if you are planning to become pregnant or if pregnancy is confirmed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
  - If you can become pregnant, your healthcare provider may perform a pregnancy test before you start treatment with DOVATO.
  - If you can become pregnant, you and your healthcare provider should talk about the use of effective birth control (contraception) during treatment with DOVATO.
  - Tell your healthcare provider right away if you are planning to become pregnant, you become pregnant, or think you may be pregnant during treatment with DOVATO.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take DOVATO.**
  - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
  - DOVATO passes to your baby in your breast milk.
  - Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

**Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take**, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Some medicines interact with DOVATO. Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.

- You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a list of medicines that interact with DOVATO.
- **Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider.** Your healthcare provider can tell you if it is safe to take DOVATO with other medicines.

### What are possible side effects of DOVATO?

#### DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- See “What is the most important information I should know about DOVATO?”

### What are possible side effects of DOVATO? (cont'd)

- **Allergic reactions.** Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with DOVATO. Stop taking DOVATO and get medical help right away if you develop a rash with any of the following signs or symptoms: fever; generally ill feeling; tiredness; muscle or joint aches; blisters or sores in mouth; blisters or peeling of the skin; redness or swelling of the eyes; swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue; problems breathing.
- **Liver problems.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during treatment with DOVATO. Liver problems, including liver failure, have also happened in people without a history of liver disease or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following signs or symptoms of liver problems: your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice); dark or “tea-colored” urine; light-colored stools (bowel movements); nausea or vomiting; loss of appetite; and/or pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area.
- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Too much lactic acid is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms that could be signs of lactic acidosis: feel very weak or tired; unusual (not normal) muscle pain; trouble breathing; stomach pain with nausea and vomiting; feel cold, especially in your arms and legs; feel dizzy or lightheaded; and/or a fast or irregular heartbeat.
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# Identity Is More Than Just a Document, But Having the Right Documents Can Be a Matter of Life or Death

## Goal, Say Local Activists, Is Better Legislation Improving Name Change Laws

BY JON KING

Imagine the stress and anxiety of finally deciding to live your life as your true authentic self, working up the courage to tell your family and friends who you really are.

Now imagine you had to take out an advertisement in your local newspaper, using your dead name, to announce to the world your decision.

For trans and non-binary Michiganders, it's not something they have to imagine. It's one of the many procedural hurdles they are required to leap over if they want to legally change their name and obtain proper identification documents.

"That was really one of the biggest reasons that I delayed for so long before I started the process of legally changing my name, because that was just so barbaric and honestly scary for me to see that that was part of the process," said Mikah Rector-Brooks, who recently wrote a column for the Detroit Free Press about their experience. "I wasn't sure if I wanted to change my name and gender markers, even though deep down I knew that I needed to."

Rector-Brooks, 20, is a trans rights advocate from Ann Arbor and tells BTL that the legal requirement to publish an ad announcing your decision to change your name is not only degrading, it can place people like themselves in physical jeopardy.

"That's the case for so many trans people," they said. "It's just so outwardly unsafe for us to publish that information, especially when the only choice we have is to either legally change our name and gender markers to become our true selves, but that also includes outing ourselves in a paper, or we just stay closeted living with a dead name that doesn't resonate with us anymore."

"It's a really tricky decision

to make because this step is so dehumanizing, truthfully, to force a trans person to publish their dead name and their new name in a local newspaper. It's so outdated and there's such little reason behind it at this point," said Rector-Brooks.

But according to Emme Zanotti, Equality Michigan's director of advocacy and civic engagement, that isn't even necessarily the most intrusive part of the process.

"As it relates to name changes, certainly there are a number of obstacles right now, the biggest ones being that for those over 21, you have to file fingerprints with the local police department," she said, adding that one copy gets sent to the Michigan State Police

and another sent to the FBI to do criminal background checks.

Zanotti points out that as it relates to the trans community, it is an inherently discriminatory requirement.

"That is not a process that, if someone was getting married, they would have to take to legally change their name," she said. "There's also things from a compliance perspective. The Michigan State Police are supposed to destroy those fingerprints if the criminal background check comes back clean. There's just a lot of steps along the way that are outside the autonomy

See **Trans ID Change**, page 22



## Sad Guy With Microphone Travels From Pride Event to Pride Event Crying for Help



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Hope everyone had a good Pride Month, despite the haters. Looking forward to Pride merch going on clearance at big box stores. Because if 50% off doesn't say, "We support you, LGBTQ+ community," what does?

My wife and I missed most of the Pride events in Michigan because of scheduling issues, but we did attend the Berkley Pride Block Party and honestly, it was really great. I saw gender being proudly expressed in all different forms by people of all ages. I saw lots of dogs, including a St. Bernardoodle (part poodle, part St. Bernard) who was wearing a little rainbow shirt with her hair in a fun little top knot (most importantly, I got to pet her).

I also saw lots of families. So many families. Babies and toddlers decked out in rainbow apparel being pushed in strollers and elementary age kids holding hands with

gathered around those booths, especially Berkley's because they had a very popular tie-dye station. My wife, who heads the GSA at her school, got to meet other GSA teacher leaders and students. She even ran into two of her students and their parents — it was really cool to see how much these kids looked up to her and how much she clearly cares about



Berkley Pride. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

parents wearing t-shirts reading things like, "Ally," "Love Wins," "Love is love" and "It's not a phase" (complete with a phases of the moon graphic).

There were two gay-straight alliance (GSA) groups there with their own booths: Troy and Berkley. It was really cool to see the teens

them. My wife is pretty awesome.

We also spoke to the folks at the Detroit City FC table, which we gravitated toward because our son really digs soccer. We learned that they are raising a ton of money for the Ruth Ellis Center.

I also got a very informative lesson about

NARCAN at the Corktown Health table and even got some NARCAN to take with me. NARCAN, if you aren't familiar, is a nasal spray you can administer to someone having an opioid overdose and has saved many lives. If you or someone you know is using opioids, you should really have some on hand. The opioid crisis in this country has gotten so bad that I suggest you learn how to use NARCAN and carry it with you in public because you could very well save someone's life.

There were, of course, protestors. Or, more accurately, there was one protestor. A guy with a Madonna-style headset and an amplifier preaching that God condemns immoral sexual practices and other greatest hits of the religious-right. I honestly don't remember much of what he said because I, like almost everyone else there, tuned him out. Some Pride attendees confronted him or tried to engage with him, which is always a mistake. Folks like this crave attention and the best thing to do is to make them wallow in their lonely outsider status by ignoring them completely.

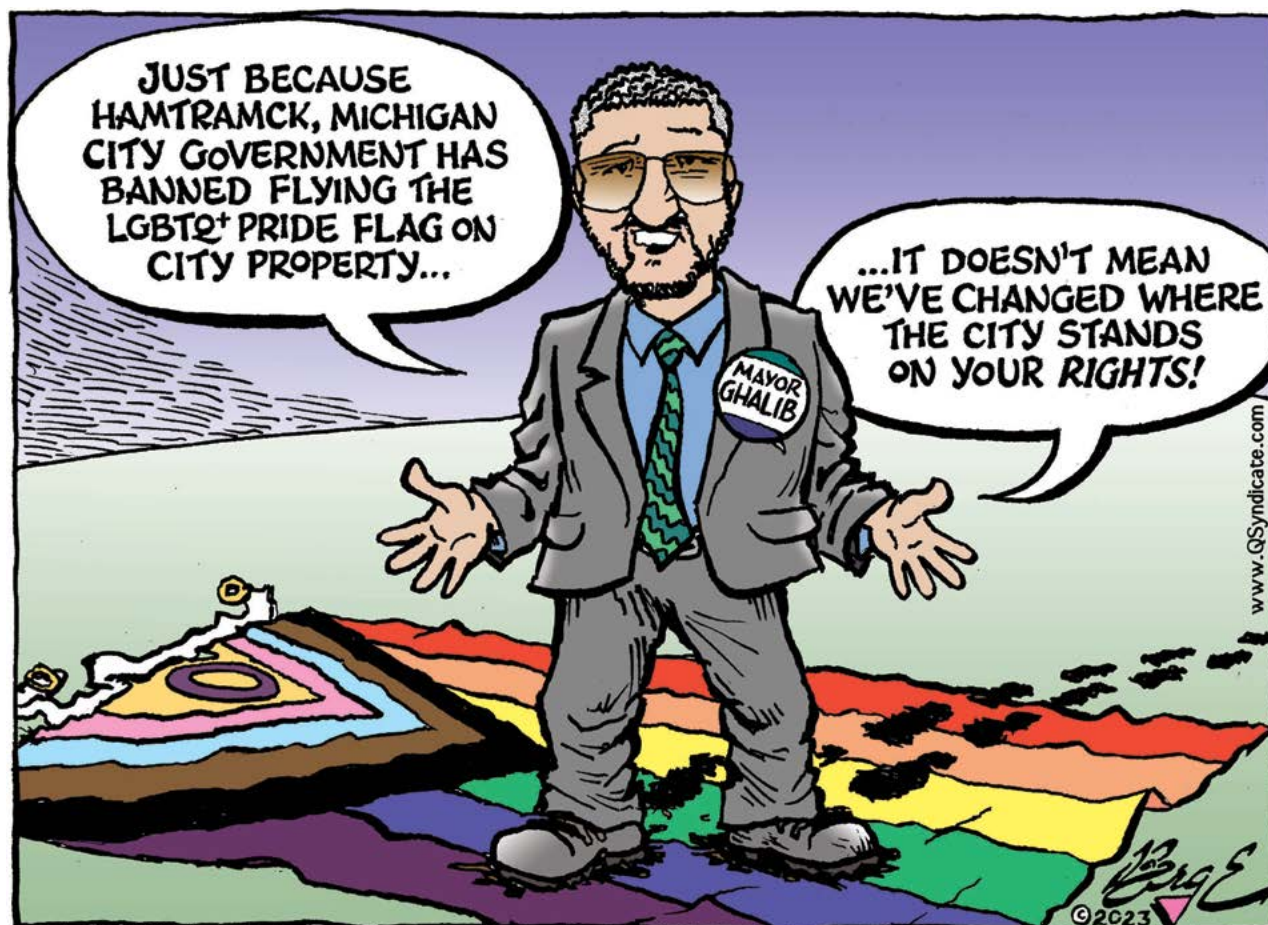
I do remember him saying something along the lines of "I've been doing this all month," traveling from Pride event to Pride event with his little mic and amp production to yell at people who are trying to find a bit of joy in what is often a very hard world to live in. I wouldn't say I felt sad for him, because if he didn't get something out of it, he wouldn't

do it. But I was struck by how profoundly pathetic it is to dedicate your life to hating other people and hiding behind the guise of "God." What a loser, truly.

Unfortunately, some of these losers are violent, and we live in a country where it's easier to get a gun than it is to unsubscribe from an Amazon Prime trial. Yet another reason to stay the hell away from these folks. Don't engage them. Don't crowd around them. Don't make yourself an easy target. It's something my dad, who was a criminologist, taught me from an early age: If you sense trouble of any kind, turn around and head the other way.

Of course, the anti-LGBTQ+ folks aren't just lonely dudes at a local Pride fest. They are at every level of power and dominate the Republican Party. They are making laws about trans bodies intended to eradicate trans people from existence. They want to overturn marriage equality. They want to undo all of the gains LGBTQ+ people have fought so hard for.

At times, it can feel hopeless when there are so many people with so much power working against us. But we can't just turn and head the other way. We need to head toward the ballot box. We need to organize and support candidates who value LGBTQ+ people and LGBTQ+ lives. We need to run for office ourselves. Here's hoping that the rainbow glitter still stuck to us from Pride is a reminder that love really can win.





# Me and the Maui Wowie



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

**M**y first introduction to marijuana came when I was a tender and precocious 8-year-old. No, dear

readers, I wasn't going around puffing on fatties in my pre-pubescent years. I did, however, go see the hilarious hit film "9 to 5" starring my already favorite diva of all genres, the delightful Dolly Parton, along with Jane Fonda and a not-yet-out Lily Tomlin.

In the film, Lily's character comes across a joint her open-minded son had slipped into her purse. The threesome head back to her place and then proceed to enjoy what is identified as some "primo Maui Wowie." My little Southern Baptist heart was conflicted seeing my Dolly do such a thing. But they were having such a good time that I was somewhat intrigued. Just what was this marijuana about? I wouldn't know for many years.

Fast forward a decade. Three days after graduating from high school, I moved to Miami — home to a very large Jamaican community. Weed is part of the Rastafarian religion. It's as common in their community as jerk chicken. Maybe more so. It didn't help that I worked in the music industry, where weed was also prevalent.

I grew accustomed to the smell, though I never cared for it. I was more than a little puritanical at this point. My strict Christian upbringing had led me to believe I was somehow better than those who did drugs. And I very much considered marijuana a drug at that time. So I wasn't uncomfortable around it, yet I'd never touch it. Never. And I somehow thought myself a better person for my abstinence.

Fast forward two more decades. Literally. To the year. It's 2010 and I am 38 years old, my heart recently broken by the man who I thought was going to be the one. I was dating a loser while on the rebound and

feeling rebellious. Sitting around the table at the loser's friend's house playing Spades, a blunt was being passed around the table.

When it came to me, the loser announced, "Oh he's a goody two-shoes. He don't smoke." Something hit me. Then and there. Maybe it was a contact high. Or maybe I was just tired of men trying to tell me what I could and could not do.

"The hell I don't," I said. I took hold of the tightly wrapped brown blunt. It smelled of grapes from the rolling papers. I lifted it to my lips, took a big hit and proceeded to cough my head off while everyone else around the table laughed.

But that's really all it took. One little resentful puff and I was hooked. At this point in time, marijuana was not legal in Michigan. Not even medicinally. Still, it was not difficult to procure the stuff. Rolling it was a challenge, though. Initially, I'd employ the help of friends and share a little with them for their assistance.

I rejoiced when medical marijuana became legal in Michigan. I wasted no time in getting my card. Suddenly, it was so easy to get the Maui Wowie, as well as the Barack O'Bubba or the Alaskan Thunderfuck or whatever other strain I might want to try.

Soon, I developed a habit. I really did smoke for medicinal reasons. Though it wasn't the reason I qualified for the card, I soon discovered that weed was great for treating my bipolar depression and anxiety. When I smoked, my mind

stopped racing for a little while and I could live in the now, something I ordinarily was no good at doing. I could be present, albeit quite relaxed. It made my response time slower when I tried to play along while watching "Jeopardy!" But other than that, I had no complaints.

Today, I'm blessed to live in a marijuana hotspot. River Rouge has six dispensaries within a square mile. It's like a little marijuana village. People come from near and far to partake. And I am still one of those people.

I've been asked to include a funny story related to me and my marijuana usage in this column. What can I tell you? In the early days, I'd get so high I'd begin to panic. I'd start talking to myself, trying to get myself to relax. "Calm down," I'd tell myself. "You're just high. Give it a half hour and you'll be back on planet Earth."

I used to freak out. And, speaking

of freaking out, marijuana was the closest thing I ever got to "party and play." I am still desperately uncomfortable around drugs. I've never partaken in anything other than weed. I doubt I ever will. But it does seem to make certain adult activities more fun. At least, I think I remember that. These days, I'm about as celibate as a nun. But through the haze, I seem to recall it helped in those situations.

I can't recall doing anything particularly humorous while smoking weed. Hell, when you're smoking weed, everything seems hilarious. Until you try the next day to regale your friends with stories and find out what you were laughing at was really not that funny — if you can remember it at all.

I love to smoke while I watch what I call ratchet, trashy reality TV. Shows like "The Real Housewives" or "Love & Hip Hop." Smoking weed has

been good for me in several ways, except for the brain cells I might be destroying. When I smoke, I don't drink as much.

I love to laugh, and weed does make things seem funnier at the time. I love to eat, and weed does somehow make food taste better. In short, I love weed. Truly. But don't get it twisted. I can stop smoking for a day, a week for a month and I'm good. It does not control me. I control it and my usage. I am very much offended by the name "weed head." Even if it might be true.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to Maui. Wow-wie!

*Jason A. Michael is a senior staff writer for Between The Lines and Pride Source Media Group. He has been writing for the paper since 1999. Jason is also an Essence bestselling author. He may be reached at [jason@pridesource.com](mailto:jason@pridesource.com).*



Lily Tomlin in "9 to 5." Photo: YouTube / 20th Century Studios



# MEET THE PANSEXUAL ARTIST MAKING PRETTY PARAPHERNALIA FOR SMOKING POT

## Molly Murphy's Business Is Ablaze

BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE

Weed smoke and queer folk came together at Ferndale Pride this year. The smell of marijuana was in the air, and many local dispensaries handed out goodies and coupons. While I'm not a stoner myself, I am a lover of art, and one cannabis-related tent did draw me in — that of Mol Murphy's Creations.

Apart from jewelry and home decor, the seller offered an array of smoking paraphernalia including ashtrays, rolling trays and lighters wrapped in her logo, an endearing, simply illustrated daisy with a pink center. Amidst the overstimulating crowd, I grabbed a business card and left the tent as quickly as I found it, hoping to learn more about the artist later on. And that I did.

"[Ferndale Pride] was the best show I think all year, I'm sure of it," business owner Molly Murphy tells BTL. "I went last year for the first time and it was sweet. So I thought if I do craft shows, it would be cool to do that one."

Murphy, a 25-year-old from Grosse Pointe who identifies as pansexual, loves gardening, hockey and creating floral resin art for fellow Michiganders. She launched her business in 2019 and now travels across Michigan for craft shows. Murphy launched her line primarily with necklaces and earrings, but got fully into rolling trays, coasters and dishes in 2021. "That's when I really went full-time doing craft shows," Murphy says. "Pre-Covid, it was mostly just, like, online sales through Instagram and my website."

Today, she says in-person craft shows are one of her favorite ways to sell her creations, and she loves when people are interested in hearing about her process. "I pick and press all of the flowers, and then that takes like a month or two,"



Molly Murphy (top right) and her floral creations. Molly pictured with her mother, Suzy Murphy (bottom right). Courtesy photos

she says. "Then I lay them out, and then I pour the resin. Then I pour more resin, and then it cures for like 24 hours. And that's about it. Take it out of the mold, sand it."

Like many of her customers, Murphy, too, is "absolutely" a stoner, she says.

She didn't always know she could fuse both weed and her creativity, but Murphy's artistic journey started early, shaped by lifelong experiences of gardening alongside

her mother and grandmother and tagging along with her father when he was an art student at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit. As she explored childhood endeavors like ceramics and painting flowers and rocks, her passion for creation blossomed.

"Growing up, we always painted and made gifts from rocks we found," Molly's mother Suzy Murphy says. "It was awesome. I still have mine that Molly made



Murphy sells her work are near where her grandmother lives in northern Michigan, so she is able to visit her and her garden and make sales at the same time.

Murphy uses gardening and the picking and pressing of flowers for her art as a daily therapeutic activity. She cites the calming nature of her passion, which cannabis is sometimes a part of, as beneficial to her mental health. "Not when I'm actually doing the resin but when I lay out my flowers and do designs like that, I tend to smoke and it helps," she says.

Besides marijuana, Murphy's favorite flowers are forget-me-nots and butterfly wheat and she loves incorporating specific colored plants into her work. "I love using pinks and whites and blues, but they're the hardest to have in stock," Murphy says. "There are not many plants that are blue, and there's not many plants that stay pink when you press them."

Through her artwork, Murphy's exuberant personality finds expression, with bright and colorful flowers being her signature motifs. "I feel like I'm a pretty cheerful, happy person, so making art that resembles that is cool," Murphy says.

"I love watching Molly's creative spirit soar," Suzy Murphy says. "I really enjoy the time we get to spend together. I'm so proud of her."

Looking ahead, Murphy hopes to continue to expand her business — in fact, in the future, she's got her eye on selling her work at large music festivals.

Visit [molmurphs.com](http://molmurphs.com), where Murphy presents her work with unique names, lists past and upcoming shows and provides tips to customers on how to care for products.

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# It's High Time the Rest of the Country Catch Up to Michigan

BY STEPHEN POST

On March 31, Kentucky became the 38th state to legalize medical cannabis. The same week, the state's legislature overrode the governor's veto to enact what the ACLU has called the "worst anti-trans bill in the country." Kentucky is not an aberration. As the United States celebrates tremendous progress in the movement to decriminalize cannabis, at the same time, more than 400 pieces of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation have been introduced in statehouses around the country.

Michigan stands an outlier on both fronts, as part of the minority of states to legalize both medical and recreational cannabis use and as a proactive LGBTQ-supportive state that has passed multiple laws protecting the community. There are many opportunities for the two movements to support one another throughout the state.

The progression of the LGBTQ+ movement and the cannabis justice movement are intricately intertwined, as activists in both movements have fought together for years. However, if we are to truly build an equitable and inclusive industry, the cannabis community must be vocal in its opposition to these acts of hate. This can't be accomplished without the cannabis community taking an intersectional approach to the issue of cannabis justice.

Consider this. Mainstream cannabis justice

research, rhetoric and culture all too often exclude the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ communities. It bears repeating that queer and trans people have been overrepresented in incarceration and arrest rates. When we take a closer look at the women most impacted by carceral systems of policing and punishment, we see that queer and non-binary women are disproportionately impacted, making sexuality and gender identity factors that must be considered when trying to understand and solve criminal justice problems.

Last Prisoner Project's Just Cannabis podcast, hosted by the organization's director of impact, Mikelina Belaine, creates a space for a discussion of these intersectional experiences. This way we can better understand how systems of policing and punishment distinctively and differently impact individuals who are LGBTQ+.

In order to survive, LGBTQ+ individuals are often pushed toward criminalized behaviors such as selling and using cannabis, which increases their risk of arrest and confinement.

A Prison Policy Initiative analysis of data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reveals, “that in 2019, gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals (with an arrest rate of 3,620 per 100,000) were 2.25 times as likely to be arrested in the past 12 months than straight individuals (with an arrest rate of 1,610 per

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See **Decriminalizing Cannabis**, page 18





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## LOOKING TO REACH THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

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## Decriminalizing Cannabis

Continued from page 16

100,000).”

In trans populations, one in five (21%) trans women have experienced incarceration at some point in their lives. These statistics worsen when you account for race as nearly half (47%) of all Black trans people have been incarcerated.

And to be clear, these statistics likely undersell the disproportionate impact cannabis criminalization has on LGBTQ+ communities, as there is a shameful lack of data on the issue.

Given the stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals that continues to run rampant in today's cannabis community, it is important to acknowledge the power of solidarity when these two communities unite. This was evident in the recent push from public officials, cannabis leaders and members of the LGBTQ+ community when they advocated for the release of basketball superstar Brittney Griner.

There is much work still to be done to make progress in both the cannabis justice movement and LGBTQ+ civil rights movement. My hope is that our collaboration makes that work a little easier.

*Courtesy of the National LGBT Media Association. The National LGBT Media Association represents 13 legacy publications in major markets across the country with a collective readership of more than 400K in print and more than 1 million + online. Learn more here: <https://nationallgbtmediaassociation.com>.*

*Stephen Post is a senior communications associate at Last Prisoner Project, a national, nonpartisan non-profit dedicated to cannabis criminal justice reform. We aim to release every last person incarcerated for cannabis, as well as to repair the harms of cannabis criminalization. We accomplish this through legal intervention, direct constituent support, advocacy campaigns and policy change.*

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# PUFF WITH PRIDE

## The Intersection of Cannabis and the LGBTQ+ Rights Movement

Individuals from all walks of life have come together in support of cannabis use and legalization. From activists and lawmakers to celebrities and public figures to just your average Joe. The most substantial push for cannabis activism, however, came from the LGBTQ+ community in the late '80s and early '90s. During this time, the AIDS epidemic was in full force. The early victims of this syndrome just so happened to be predominantly gay men, leading to the unfortunate stigma that attached HIV/AIDS to the LGBTQ+ community. Due to the widespread homophobia at this time and the ignorant belief that you could only get AIDS from being gay, the LGBTQ+ community struggled to receive support. By the year 2000, more than 700,000 people were diagnosed with AIDS, and over half of these individuals died from it.

To manage their symptoms, sufferers turned to cannabis to help ease nausea, anxiety, pain and cachexia — also known as AIDS wasting syndrome. Cannabis significantly increased the quality of life for people with this incurable disease. This is where we see a bond strengthen between the LGBTQ+ community and the cannabis community. Each of these groups faced similar stigma for being on the outskirts of what is considered the social norm. Activists within the LGBTQ+ community played a huge role in medical cannabis legalization.

### Cannabis activists within the LGBTQ+ community

**Dennis Peron**, also known as the “father of medical cannabis,” was a prominent figure in cannabis and gay rights advocacy throughout the '80s and '90s. In 1996, Peron co-wrote California's Proposition 215, also known as the Compassionate Use Act, which was the first U.S. law legalizing the use of cannabis for medical purposes. Peron's partner, Jonathon West, suffered from AIDS



and Peron saw first hand how beneficial cannabis was to him, especially in his final months. After Jonathon's death, Peron took it upon himself to educate people on the positive effects of cannabis. Without Peron's relentless activism, medical cannabis legalization would not have happened as early as it did.

**Paul Scott**, founder of Los Angeles Black Gay Pride, worked as a nurse in the AIDS ward in the '80s and was so traumatized from seeing how these patients were treated that he left nursing. Scott was later diagnosed with HIV himself, and by the late '90s, he created the first medical cannabis facility in Inglewood to help terminally ill patients through support groups and safe, legal access to cannabis.



**Harvey Milk** is well known for being the first openly gay politician to be elected into office in California in 1977. Milk was also one of the



first politicians to advocate for cannabis legalization. Milk campaigned alongside Peron in support of Proposition W, an initiative to decriminalize the cultivation, transfer and possession of cannabis. This proposition was approved by 63% of San Franciscans but was not implemented. Sadly, in 1978, Milk was assassinated by Dan White, a former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors who had a history of clashing with Milk and others on several issues. White only served five years of his eight-year sentence for voluntary manslaughter. This, understandably, caused an uproar of riots within the gay community.

**Mary Jane Rathbun**, also known as “Brownie Mary,” worked for the Shanti Project, the first organization to offer medical services to AIDS patients. Mary got her nickname due to her covert efforts to provide patients access to cannabis through her medicated brownies. At the height of the epidemic, Rathbun baked nearly 600 brownies

a day, and she was arrested multiple times for her efforts to try and help these patients. Through these efforts, the 2019 Dennis Peron and Brownie Mary Act was born, stating that licensees are authorized to make retail sales to provide free cannabis or cannabis products to medicinal cannabis patients.

Married couple **Karen Paull** and **Wendy Robbins** have carried their passion for cannabis advocacy into the digital world with “The Marijuana Show,” a reality show similar to “Shark Tank” in which cannabis entrepreneurs pitch their business plans in the hopes of receiving funding. The show first aired in 2014 and since then has given \$13 billion to cannabis startups to do research and build innovation within the community.



### Quality Roots is an ally

Members of the LGBTQ+ community have had a profound impact on the cannabis industry. For decades, we have seen so many influential figures within the LGBTQ+ and ally community who have shown significant support for cannabis use and legalization. It is vital for businesses to give back to their community, especially to a community that has shown them so much support. To show our support, Quality Roots will be running BOGO deals throughout the months of June and July to help raise money for multiple LGBTQ+ organizations. You'll also find our booth at Pride fests throughout lower Michigan and at the upcoming Hotter Than July event, which supports LGBT Detroit. See you there!

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## ◀ Trans ID Change

Continued from page 11

of a human being.”

Zanotti says the publishing requirement only compounds the problem because that ad is also required to list the date and time of the court hearing that would make the name change official.

“If someone were to want to come oppose your legal name change for any reason, they could come do that,” she said. “That’s a huge barrier. On top of that, you have to appear in court, so you have to go before a judge in most circumstances. The judge will call you by your dead name, then read the name you’re legally changing your name to.”

Zanotti said on a practical level, the costs involved with the process can be a barrier in and of themselves.

“It takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of money,” she said. “Unscientifically, we’re probably looking at about \$500. Some people require legal representation, some don’t.”

In fact, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that the cost of

changing IDs was one of the main barriers respondents in Michigan faced, with 42% of those polled saying they had not changed their legal name and 40% of those who had not updated the gender on their IDs reporting that it was because they could not afford it.

That same survey also reported just 9% of respondents said all of their IDs had the name and gender they preferred, while 81% said none of their IDs had the name and gender they preferred.

Further, 33% of respondents who had shown an ID with a name or gender that did not match their gender presentation reported that they were “verbally harassed, denied benefits or service, asked to leave, or assaulted.”

That very circumstance was relayed in 2019 by Jey’nce Poindexter, a case manager at the Ruth Ellis Center in Detroit, who was then the Transgender Specialist/Victim Advocate for Equality Michigan.

At a press conference announcing a decision by Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson to revert state policy back to previously existing procedures that made it easier for transgender people to obtain ID,

Poindexter gave a real-life example of a transgender woman who experienced discrimination because her gender marker did not match up with her presentation.

“We had a situation where a young lady was downtown. She was outside of a bar. After a bouncer confirmed her biological ID, her card was burned, and they were standing there threatening to beat her and chase her down,” Poindexter said. “So that’s the importance of an ID that aligns with your presentation. It’s a matter of life and death for us.”

Poindexter added that having proper identification reduces the chances for misunderstandings to occur when members of the trans community interact with law enforcement, health care providers and others.

Zanotti said another step forward occurred in 2021 when Attorney General Dana Nessel issued an opinion declaring as unconstitutional a state law requiring “sex-reassignment surgery” to change the sex designation on a birth certificate.

“That opinion laid out that there’s no real beneficial interest to the state in making this that hard for the

trans and non-binary community,” Zanotti said. “It doesn’t advance anything that’s imperative to the state’s wellbeing or operations or anything like that, and so essentially the Attorney General’s not enforcing those requirements on birth certificates at the moment.”

Zanotti said their focus now is to codify the AG’s opinion and the Secretary of State’s decision in case there were ever someone in their positions who were to view those policies unfavorably.

She indicated that it’s part of a broader effort to legislatively resolve the issues with name changes and identity documents.

“There are not bills introduced, but there is discussion,” she said. “There are champions in the legislature who are ready to help with this and get this going.”

However, Zanotti said that at this point they’re not ready to disclose who those champions are.

“I think work has to be done educating legislators and other kinds of core stakeholders as to why this is such an impactful and critical issue,” she said. “And so that’s the work that has to be done over the course of the next couple months.”

Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for

the ACLU’s LGBTQ+ Project, confirmed for BTL that those efforts are underway.

“We have worked on proposed legislation that would streamline this process which hopefully will be introduced soon,” he said.

Rector-Brooks concurs that legislation is the goal, and is hopeful that it may even be introduced this session, but cautions against anyone taking a victory lap just yet.

“We’ve seen that Governor Whitmer has really pushed the message that Michigan has become this safe haven of sorts for the LGBTQ+ community,” they said. “And I applaud that effort, but I do push back on that slightly because the reality is that Michigan is not quite that safe haven, especially for trans people.”

“We’re still being policed, we’re still being discriminated against in many, many ways, including through the law. So we have many more steps we have to take before we can claim ourselves as this place that is so inclusive for the queer and trans community. But I really applaud the efforts that we have taken, and urge legislators to push even further to make this a truly inclusive state.”





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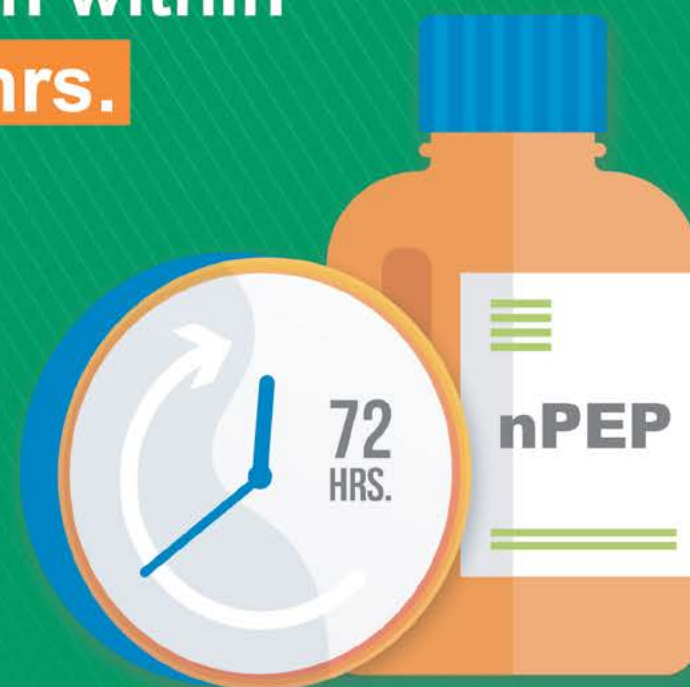
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# Affirmations From ReDeux Attendees

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As one attendee said on Facebook, the Affirmations Prom ReDeux, which took place June 24, was the “best prom I never had.” Prom-goers took full advantage of the opportunity to get a do-over among affirming LGBTQ+ community members and allies, donning fabulous evening wear and dancing the night away. For a moment in time, it was a chance to revisit young adulthood with the fresh perspective of wisdom.

*Photos: Steve Koss*



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## The Godfather of Queer Film

Puzzle on page 29



# Meet Latia Craig and Carl Crockett, MiGen's Newest Community Navigators

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

MiGen, Michigan's LGBTQ+ elders' network, is looking to expand upon the work they previously did as SAGE Metro Detroit. MiGen provides services, advocacy, fun and opportunities to connect for LGBTQ+ folks ages 45 and over. To help with that goal are Latia Craig and Carl Crockett, two recently hired and dedicated individuals who serve as community navigators for the agency. They are both passionate about their work. They are both concerned about the clients they serve. And they both recently sat down to talk to BTL about their jobs and their joys.

**Hello to you both. Let's start with the work that you're doing. What does it mean to be a community navigator?**

**Latia Craig:** I love it. I love to be involved with the community and help those individuals who don't have the right resources. A lot of our members have been let down by other agencies or don't know where to go. So, I take pleasure in being the voice for that person and helping them get the assistance they need.

**Carl Crockett:** To me, being a community navigator is to be a voice for the voiceless. It means to advocate for those seniors in the community who are in need of help.

**What are your backgrounds?**

**LC:** I studied at Wayne State and started out in medical nursing. I did that for about nine years in an ICU unit. Then I switched over to the insurance side of the business. The past four years, I've been doing community navigator work.

**CC:** I did undergrad at Morehouse, then graduate studies at University of Detroit-Mercy, where I got my law degree as well. I didn't pass the bar yet. It's on my bucket list. Going to school down south to an HBCU, it changed my life. I think that's why I'm reaching out to this community, the LGBTQ+ community. These people understand injustice and discrimination. That opened my eyes to helping.

**Latia, what are some of the tasks you perform regularly?**

**LC:** I help individuals by being an advocate for them, finding resources and everyday life skills they aren't able to do on their own. If an individual needs help with housing, I'd help with that. Or an



Carl Crockett, Latia Craig. Courtesy photos

individual who doesn't have any food, I'd sign them up for food or transportation to a doctor's appointment.

**What's the best aspect of the work you do?**

**LC:** Working directly one-on-one with the consumers, clients or just individuals in the community. I love the ability to be out there directly working with them. Not just in the office. Having the pleasure of coming into their home. That's when you get a better feel for what they're lacking.

**CC:** The best part about the work that I do is being an ally for those who are defenseless. Helping them during their time of need. That matters. I have over two decades of experience in the non-profit sector. Through networking and connections and an in-depth knowledge of resources in Wayne County and other areas I can assist.

**Any difficult cases that stand out?**

**LC:** We had one client who broke her wrist.

See **MiGen**, page 30



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## ◀ Samantha Irby

Continued from page 8

gentlemen," Mary writes, "is an enraged black lady who had a lousy childhood, and has grappled with severe depression, isolation, racism and obesity all her life. It's a perfect set-up for humor! Not." It's not a stretch to imagine why Irby isn't devoting much energy to reading what the internet thinks.

Lately, some of the internet thinks Irby is responsible for the things they hate about the new "Sex and the City" reboot, "And Just Like That..." Irby sat in the (virtual) writers' room for the first season of the show, an experience she said was a "joy — no, really. But, also, viewers get so mad and somehow, it's all my fault." (Since our interview, the Writers Guild of America, which includes television writers, has gone on strike — Irby has publicly stated that she fully supports the Guild and stands in solidarity with the cause.)

In reality, of course, writers' rooms include multiple voices, and in the case of a show like "And Just Like That..." there's an overarching vision to be considered — in this case, it's the vision of executive producer Michael Patrick King ("This show is his first born," Irby explains).

Irby also worked on the animated 2019 Netflix series, "Tuca & Bertie," featuring Tiffany Haddish and Ali Wong, and on Hulu's "Shrill," starring "SNL" alum Aidy Bryant. For "Shrill," Irby lived in Los Angeles for two months, a "fucking dream, but also I had to live in Los Angeles for two months. I was feeling unsettled and discombobulated, but it was cool to be there for work. Still — I'm not thin and blonde and I don't fit the stereotype, I don't look like Hollywood, but I had trust in my brain. I knew I could write a script, I knew I could make a Netflix executive laugh. I was pretty confident in that stuff."

Irby's love of TV comes up frequently throughout her memoir writing. Like so many Gen X and older Millennials, she came of age at a time when something was almost always on in the background. Growing up, she remembers watching sitcoms like "Mr. Belvedere," "Gimme a Break!" and "Family Ties."

Even now, she says, she returns to certain "comfort shows" that play in the background of her everyday life. "I don't even have to be watching it," she says. "I just kind of like the drone in the background, and I have to have it on even if I'm not actively watching TV. I like to put on some sports or news or anything with a live person and just kind of have them narrating what I'm doing even though they're not saying what I'm doing. TV is like my pal. Let me cuddle up with my TV."

Now that Irby has peeled back the curtain and has an intimate knowledge of how the TV sausage

is made, her perspective has changed a bit. "It's the little shit," she begins. "Like, where the cameras are behind a person who's talking, but their lips don't match with what they're saying. I know it's because this was the best shot of the person who's listening, but now that's bugging me. It takes me out of it a little bit — not to be too melodramatic, but it's like, there's no mystery now, right?"

Los Angeles, and even Irby's hometown of Chicago, are vastly different from her current, quieter life in Kalamazoo. "It's funny — when the street outside is quiet, it kind of feels like 'I Am Legend,' where there's no one but me and a couple animals and some zombie hunter operations... but it's good. I'm not built for city life anymore."

Laughing, she adds, "Any excuse to stay in the middle of the country where it's flat is fine with me."

Though Irby says she still calls Chicago home, being there at this stage in her life feels stressful. "I thought I'd feel more stressed here

[in Kalamazoo], but it is much more stressful to have to fight for parking spots. And I don't have to worry about pickpockets. I'm not, every time I go outside, playing a game of chicken. It's slower, easier, better."

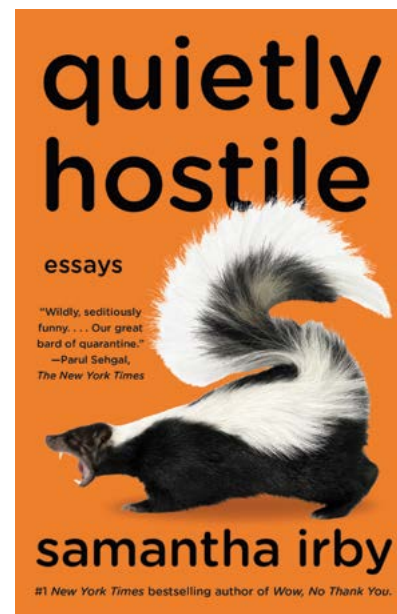
Irby's tumultuous young adult years in Chicago, as outlined in her essays about that time, stand in stark contrast to daily life now. "What do I do here? Well. I take the dog to his expensive daycare, three times a week. I cook meals sometimes because I have guilt for being a writer who's been home while my wife was out being a social worker. I do have a few friends here... I go to the library... the bookstore. Um, these things all sound very boring."

Boring, though, doesn't mean "bad." In fact, she tends to prefer boring over the alleged excitement of fame.

Irby's latest book, "Quietly Hostile," focuses on the often uncomfortable duality of regular life tinged with the experience of being famous, or at least the kind of edge fame typically afforded to writers. Irby isn't as likely to be recognized in a grocery store as a well-known actor, but she still has to attend social gatherings and events that smack of Hollywood from time to time, and she is more frequently accused of wielding power in ways she actually doesn't.

"It's been weird to absorb people's ideas of what my career is like versus the reality," she reflects. "And sometimes, they over-inflate it by accusing me of things in the show that I could never have done because I'm the last person on the call sheet."

"I have been lucky in that people have enjoyed my work, but Hollywood is unpredictable. What's not unpredictable is books. If they keep buying my stupid ass books, I'm happy."





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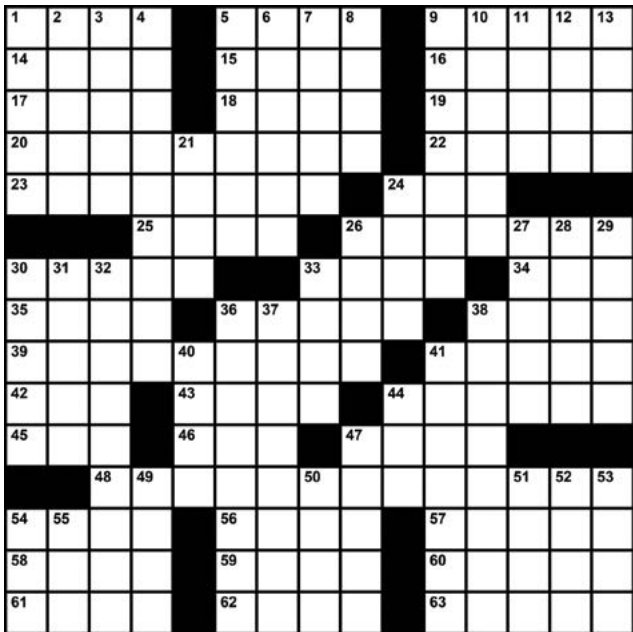
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### The Godfather of Queer Film

#### Across

- 1 Where Dr. N. Kim works
- 5 Tail for Pluto?
- 9 Head of men who don't sleep with women
- 14 Stick it in milk
- 15 What "let" means to Mauresmo

#### Q Puzzle

- 16 River of Rimbaud's land
- 17 "See ya!"
- 18 Ian Schrager's \_\_\_ de Cuba restaurant
- 19 Lesbos and more
- 20 With 26-Across, Book series by Kenneth Anger (1927-2023)
- 22 Billie Holiday's "God \_\_\_ the Child"
- 23 Loads, as software
- 24 West of Hollywood

- 25 Cathedral of Hope area
- 26 See 20-Across
- 30 "The Silence of the \_\_\_"
- 33 Diva's piece
- 34 A porn star may have a big one
- 35 Kind of stimulation
- 36 PC drive insert
- 38 Arsonist, in slang
- 39 1947 homoerotic experimental film of Anger
- 41 Helps reelect Tammy Baldwin, e.g.
- 42 Pro partner
- 43 "What a shame"
- 44 Gay in the library
- 45 "Reduce Speed", on a sign
- 46 Dairy animal
- 47 Toto's Dorothy
- 48 1963 biker film of Anger
- 54 "The African Queen" author
- 56 "And another thing..."
- 57 Where to find your first mate
- 58 "Screwed again!"
- 59 Collars, as a perp
- 60 Concerning one's coming out?
- 61 Hand with attitude
- 62 Timothy Daly's sister
- 63 Fairy tale character

#### Down

- 1 \_\_\_ Minh City, Vietnam
- 2 Hunter in the night sky
- 3 Elite divers
- 4 Furniture piece with cushions
- 5 Moves barely
- 6 Fix a sneaker, maybe
- 7 Lorca's "Later!"
- 8 One with a long tongue
- 9 Arabian Disney character
- 10 Mr. C. portrayer on "Happy Days"
- 11 Ill humor
- 12 Rock group?
- 13 Madonna's "Dick Tracy" character
- 21 Shriill barks
- 24 Hurt, like a Broadway Auntie?
- 26 The Brewer twins, for short
- 27 Island of the Philippines
- 28 Shrek and others
- 29 It may slip over one's head
- 30 Artists' pads
- 31 Plath poetry collection
- 32 Long-tailed monkeys
- 33 Beth Simchat Torah scripture holders
- 36 What people are dying to use?
- 37 Offensive tactic in Esera Tuaolo's sport
- 38 Little Bear constellation's brightest
- 40 Baylor's city
- 41 Prince of comics
- 44 It gets laid in the streets
- 47 Poke in the backside
- 49 "Camelot"'s "\_\_\_ Moi"
- 50 Library ID
- 51 Words in an analogy
- 52 Scott of "Beautiful Thing"
- 53 Balls of brass
- 54 Sandy's sound in "Annie"
- 55 Queer in Quebec

See p. 24 for answers

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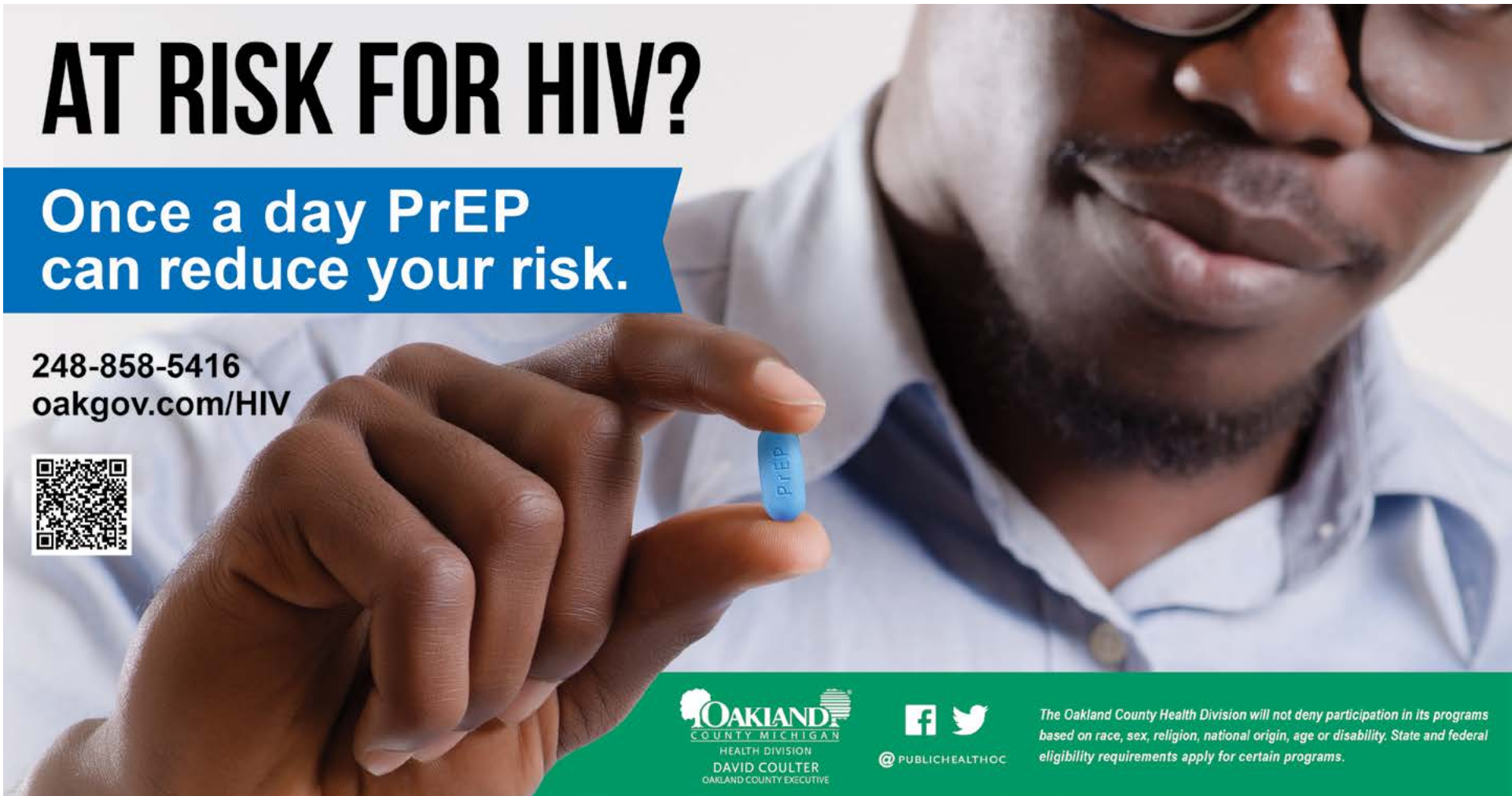

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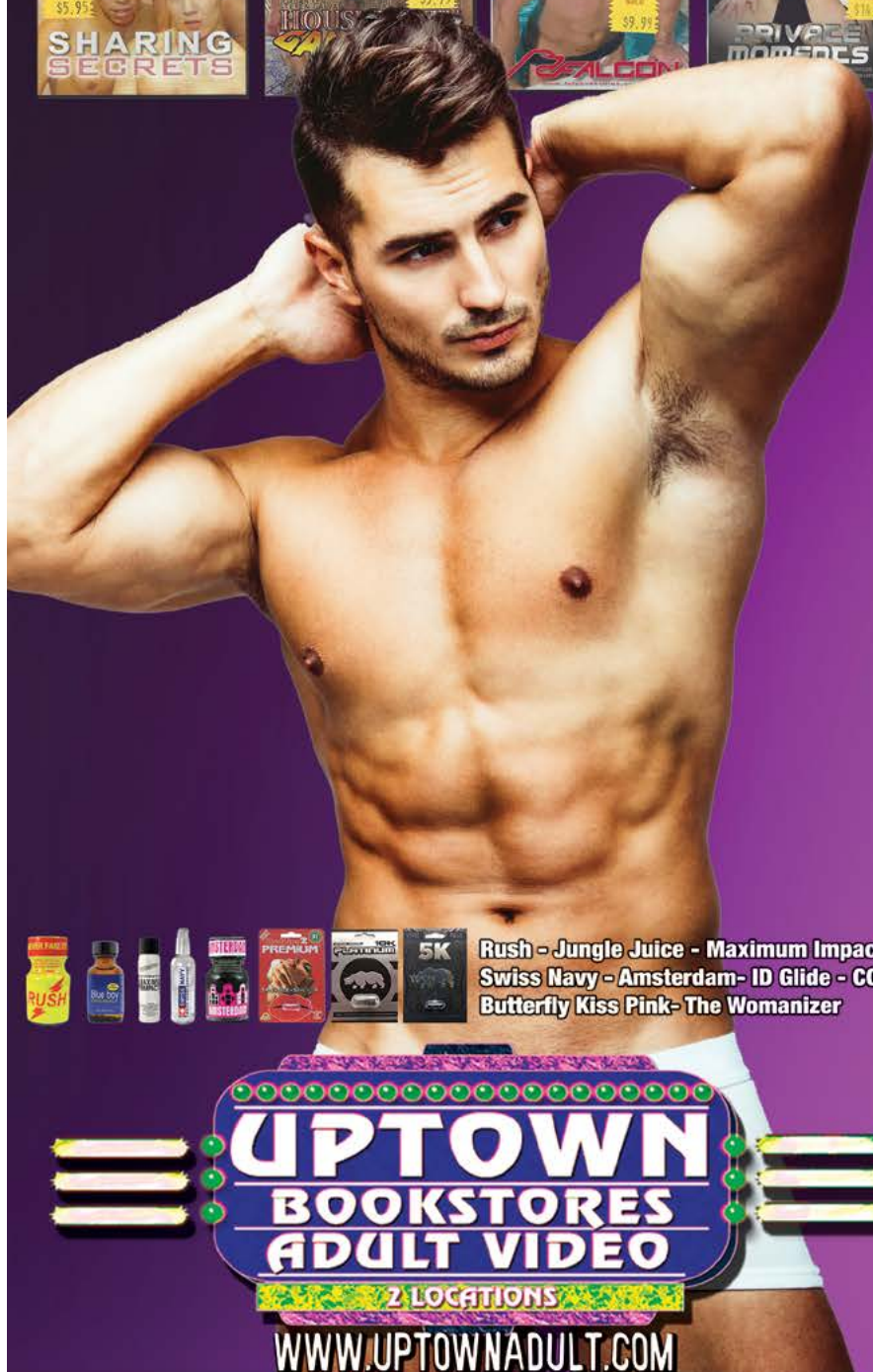
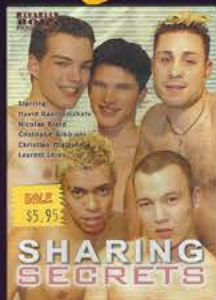


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## ◀ MiGen

Continued from page 25

So she wasn't able to do her gardening. She was thinking that companies were too expensive. We were able to find a company that came out and did the work for her for a reasonable price. Their neighbor, because of them being LGBTQ+, was harassing them. I was able to help them get a PPO, which made them feel more safe.

CC: I think the most difficult thing, the most challenging, is reaching out to clients and getting them to speak up, getting them to not be afraid and to know that help is on the way. And understanding that there's resources here. MiGen is a hidden gem. I think SAGE had a good reputation, but MiGen is taking it to the next level.

**So why MiGen? Why did you want to work for this agency, specifically?**

LC: The reason is because I see they are really speaking for the consumers. The LGBTQ+ community has been looked upon for years in a different light. They haven't got the respect that they needed, or they may have been bullied or discriminated against. So to be a voice for them is a pleasure.

CC: I'm working at MiGen because I see it as an opportunity to serve an underserved demographic. There's a history with our elders and the path that they blazed and the pain that they had and still endure to this day. When I saw the opportunity to aid those in need, I jumped on it right away. You wouldn't have your outspoken advocates and young people today who are free to love if it wasn't for those who were part of the foundation. They deserve their due on every level.

**And outside of work? Who is Latia? Who is Carl?**

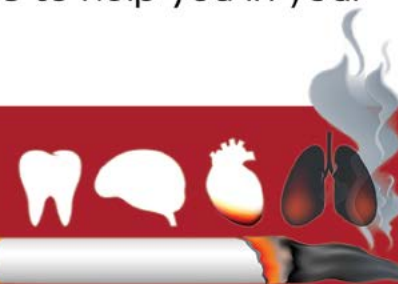
LC: Latia is a wife, mother of six kids. She is really passionate about her family. That's the main reason I do what I do. I love family time. I love to travel. I'm a learner. I love to learn new things on a daily basis. I love to read. And I have my bucket list of things I want to do on this Earth before my time is up.

CC: Carl is a liver of life. I am a recovering workaholic. I think it's in my blood, from my parents to my relatives to my extended family members ... We've always been fighters. As for hobbies, I'd say self-care, self-love, meditation, yoga, cross training, healthy eating and gourmet cooking.

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