

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE CITY Lines™

MICHIGAN QUEER ICON HONORED
Kathy Kozachenko, First Out
Elected Official in U.S., Immortalized
with Ann Arbor Statue

THE ULTIMATE COMEBACK STORY
The 20-Year-Old Who Went
From Homeless Teen to City
Commission Candidate

STANDING TOGETHER
Grosse Pointe Gathers Around
Queer Community After
Pride Flag Burned

THE GLOBAL DESTINATIONS

≡ 'That Inspire Bargain Block' ≡

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Keith Byum and Evan Thomas, the stars of "Bargain Block." Photo: HGTV



PrideSource.com Has a New Look

You may have noticed that BTL's home on the web, PrideSource.com, has had some work done. Let's call it a digital eyebrow lift — you'll find the same commitment to queer-led content with a fresh new face. Let us know what you think on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram!

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Now that the “Barbie” hoopla has passed, you can seek out queer energy in new places. Just kidding — it’s time to sort out your Barbiecore Halloween costume. But you can multitask, right? Don’t miss all the fun happening at Ypsilanti Freighthouse this month, including an exciting drag performance organizers are billing as a full-on “extravaganza,” musical performances by the renowned Renée Fleming and queer multilingual performer Gina Chavez, or an opportunity to meet a new queer romance author in Royal Oak. Need to get out of town? Plan a trek up north for what might be the last Pride fest of the year.



Lightning Drag Extravaganza performers. Photo: University Musical Society

Watch an Electrifying Drag Performance

An upcoming drag performance at Ypsilanti Freighthouse will bring together some of the best local drag artists as part of a monthlong residency hosted by UM’s University Musical Society and the City of Ypsilanti. The residency, which runs through Oct. 7, features a pay-what-you-wish series of nine performances, family events and participatory workshops focused on wide-ranging topics. “Lighting: A One-of-a-Kind Drag Show Extravaganza,” set for Sept. 29, is an 18-plus event celebrating queer performance. You can also check out West African Dance and square dancing workshops, musical performances and several fun kid-friendly events.

Drag performance Sept. 29, 7-9:30 p.m., Ypsilanti Freighthouse (100 Market Place, Ypsilanti). Reserve tickets (free) at ums.org/performance/lightning-drag-show-extravaganza. Learn more about the residency at ums.org/season.



Head North for Pride

Michigan has so much Pride, the season never seems to end. That’s good news for anyone who welcomes the opportunity to support the community at a time when LGBTQ+ rights are under attack nationwide. It’s also a lovely time to visit Traverse City, the location for Up North Pride, set for Sept. 27 to Oct. 1. Festivities include what organizers describe as the largest participant-driven LGBTQ+ Pride March in Michigan, a Pride Ride biking event, a poolside party, a comedy night, drag performances, and a keynote address from “RuPaul’s Drag Race” favorite Nina West. The event is celebrating its 10th year.

Sept. 27-Oct. 1, Traverse City. Details at upnorthpride.com.



Renée Fleming. Photo: Andrew Eccles-Decca

See Renée Fleming Perform

Don’t miss your chance to see an iconic diva raise the rafters when voice-of-a-generation Renée Fleming performs at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor on Sept. 28. Fleming has long been an icon to her queer audience and boasts an extensive list of artistic accomplishments spanning a four-decade career. She is a National Medal of Arts recipient, a five-time Grammy award winner and was a recipient of the 2023 Kennedy Center Honors. The Hill Auditorium performance will draw on Fleming’s 2023 album “Voice of Nature: the Anthropocene,” accompanied by an original video produced by the National Geographic Society.

Sept. 28, 7:30 p.m., Hill Auditorium (825 North University Ave., Ann Arbor). Find tickets at tickets.ums.edu/5809/5818.



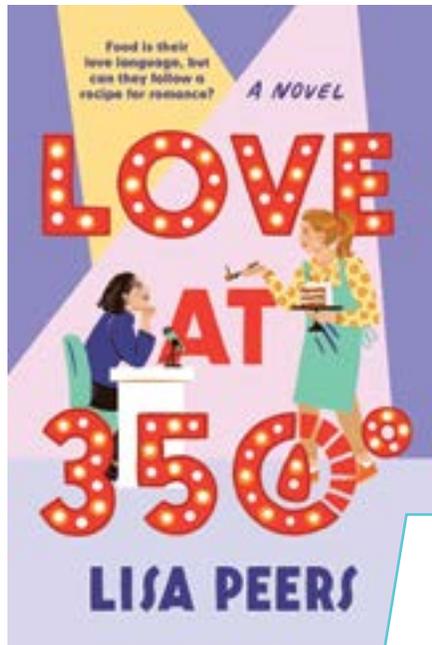
Gina Chavez. Photo: Instagram

See Gina Chavez at The Ark

Head to The Ark Oct. 4 to catch a stripped-down performance by multilingual pop queen and out lesbian Gina Chavez. The 10-time Austin Music Award winner is known for her unique songwriting, which often combines English and Spanish influenced by Chavez's Mexican-American roots featuring stories about her life as a married, queer, Catholic woman. Chavez will perform selections from her Spanish-language album "Up.Rooted," which focuses on her experience alongside wife Jodi Granado volunteering in San Salvador, where the pair spent several months educating young women impacted by gang warfare. Chavez was nominated for a Latin Grammy for her latest album, "La Que Manda."

Oct. 4, 8 p.m., The Ark (316 South Main St., Ann Arbor). Tickets at theark.org/event/gina-chavez.

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Attend a Queer Book Launch

Queer Metro Detroit author Lisa Peers will join Royal Oak's Sidetrack Bookshop owner Jenny Carney to debut her new work of fiction, "Love at 350 Degrees." The book focuses on two women who meet as judge and contestant on the set of a televised baking competition. As the show progresses, it becomes clear that contestant Tori and "Bake-o-Rama" judge Kendra are both hoping to win the ultimate prize: true love. At the event, Peers and

Carney will discuss the book and Peers' journey to becoming a novelist.

Oct. 10, 6:30 p.m., Sidetrack Bookshop (325 South Washington Ave., Royal Oak). Reserve tickets at bit.ly/463oRJ0.

5

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Spencer Calhoun. Courtesy photo

Spencer Calhoun: From Homeless Teen to City Commission Candidate

How this 20-year-old union organizer is rewriting the script for the next generation

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

As a candidate and community activist with years of experience knocking doors, Spencer Calhoun knows there's often no telling who will answer. Not long ago, Calhoun came face to face with a constituent whose most grave concern for the city of Mount Clemens was the prospect of drag queen story time at the public library. And she asked

Calhoun for his opinion on it.

"I told her that I completely support the right of people in our community to freely express themselves," said Calhoun, who is openly gay. He called the library's programming fantastic but told her people don't have to bring their children if they don't want to. "I said, 'Of course you have a right to feel that way. I completely disagree with you. People need to

feel welcome and valued in our community.'"

Calhoun couldn't believe the woman signed his nominating petition for city commissioner. She said it meant a lot to her that he explained his position and remained level-headed. "And so that meant a lot to me, too," Calhoun said.

While Calhoun isn't native to Mount Clemens, he is perhaps more passionate about his adopted

hometown than most — for good reason. Calhoun was homeless as a teen, and the city welcomed him with open arms.

"I'm a board member on the nonprofit that served me as a homeless youth, Comprehensive Youth Services," Calhoun said. He has also mentored students. For three years, Calhoun went door to door registering people to vote and learning what issues they wanted

brought before city officials — well before deciding to throw his hat in the ring.

While openly queer politicians are not as rare as they used to be, being out publicly holds particular resonance for Calhoun: He was homeless because he was kicked out for being gay.

"The ultimate rejection for me

See **Spencer Calhoun**, page 13

After a Pride Flag Burns, Grosse Pointe Stands Together

Christ Church Grosse Pointe displays unwavering commitment to queer community

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When tragedy strikes, sometimes the simplest and most effective response is for members of the community to band together and support one another. Such was the case recently after an unknown perpetrator burned Christ Church Grosse Pointe's flag and left its remains at the base of the flagpole. The ensuing outcry has been loud and clear.

Of the church's three flags — U.S., Episcopal and Progress Pride — only the Pride flag was vandalized. The Rev. Andrew Van Culin, aka Father Drew, said he didn't know exactly when it happened.

"What we do know is a parishioner was walking here at the church," Van Culin said, "and noticed that the [Pride] flag wasn't there. And on further investigation, she found that the flag had been burned." She contacted the pastor, who called the response of the Grosse Pointe Farms Police "helpful and sympathetic."

The church does not use security cameras.

Van Culin dispatched a heartfelt letter to the congregation with news of the crime, in which he called the incident "candidly, among the saddest and most troubling of my 24-plus years in ordained ministry."

Meanwhile, Welcoming Everyone Grosse Pointe (We GP) sprang into action. Formed after the 2016 election, We GP is a grassroots 501(c)(3) committed to resisting attacks on civil rights and human rights and to promoting policies that align with their guiding principles. We GP engages in community building and activism, which is what came next in the form of a community-wide emergency Pride flag delivery.

We GP received well over 200 requests for Pride flags which were delivered to Grosse Pointe and Harper Woods. Sean Greenroyd, who is bisexual, is one of the volunteers.

"I took my whole family out

yesterday to deliver the list that we had," Greenroyd told BTL. He has three young kids. "And it was nice talking to people about it, trying to stay positive instead of focusing on the obvious negative."

Greenroyd was raised Christian. "I can't imagine that that was a Christian that took that flag down and burned it," he said. "It's a terrible thing that happened, and it's going to continue to happen, but they're on the wrong side of history. So it's just a matter of staying the course, keeping positive."

Valarie St. John isn't backing down, either. As Grosse Pointe Public School's first openly LGBTQ+ trustee and a parent, she's thinking of the kids. St. John pointed out Christ Church stands next to the high school. "I know that the intention is to terrorize the LGBTQ community," St. John said. "I'm not going to let it affect me."

St. John said she is intentional about speaking out. "Younger people who aren't as secure in their identities are going to feel more afraid and feel like their community doesn't support them or that there are dangerous people in the community who want to hurt them," she said.

St. John has reason for concern. She once filed a police report with the Grosse Pointe Farms Police after receiving homophobic threats on social media. She says there exists a small minority who are angry that the status quo is changing from the 1950s. "It's not particularly important to me who did it," she said, in reference to the flag burning. "It just needs to stop."

Though shocked by what happened, 18-year-old Alexander Kuplicki didn't sound entirely surprised. "It's sort of one of those things that you never want to believe because I know a lot of that is present in our community, but it's not always forward and outward," said Kuplicki, who is gay and lived in Grosse Pointe until recently leaving for college.



Christ Church Grosse Pointe. Courtesy photo

Kuplicki said the attack felt personal, but it has only served to galvanize the community. "It's just kind of further invigorating us," Kuplicki said. "We're a strong community, and we've dealt with worse. And if people think this is going to stop us or dissuade us from continuing our work, they're sorely mistaken."

Kuplicki rated the queer friendliness of his community, acknowledging that "if you're a conforming cisgender gay couple, I would say it's a pretty welcoming community." However, he said it's harder in the school system for trans and nonbinary students.

Shannon Byrne, who is openly queer, is 47 and president of We GP. Byrne was born in Grosse Pointe.

"Initially, I was pretty shocked," Byrne said. "The flag at Christ Church has been flying for several years. They're one of the sponsors [of] our Pride March here in Grosse

Pointe." We GP has organized the event for the past seven years. Like the others, Byrne is undeterred. "We're not going to let this unsettling event change who we are."

Proud of the growth of We GP, Byrne feels, "Over the last seven years, watching that support grow has been incredibly heartening for me as a leader of We GP and for me as a queer woman here in Grosse Pointe."

Leslie Scott feels what happened is a reflection of the larger problems the country is facing, mirrored through smaller communities. "Obviously, I was very disheartened, upset, outraged as a queer woman of color, a Black woman married to another woman with two young children," Scott said. "It's extremely important to me that my family is safe and feels safe and that my community and our allies feel safe." She added that she does feel safe and has visible, queer neighbors.

With experience as a public defender, Scott's vantage point is unique. "I have the sense that broken people do broken things," Scott said. "I would like to see whoever did this caught and held to account. But I also, at the same time, believe in second chances and restorative justice."

The church swapped their Facebook cover photo for one proudly displaying their flags as they originally stood.

When asked about an upcoming sermon, Van Culin said, "I hope it's a more effective one than ordinary." By then, there were new developments.

"Good morning, friends," Van Culin began. He said he had sad news to share.

"This morning, or last night, presumably, the replacement flag that we put out was torn down. And so we've replaced that flag again this morning. And we will continue to do [so]."

Queer Saugatuck Councilmember Subject of Rare Criminal Investigation

Garnet Lewis' clerical error left her with a criminal record and thousands in legal fees

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When Saugatuck City Councilmember Garnet Lewis, a three-time candidate for the Michigan Legislature and former mayor, was collecting signatures for city council hopeful Mark Miller last summer, she failed to sign a nominating petition as its circulator before it was turned in to the city clerk. As stated in the fine print, it is a misdemeanor to not report oneself as a circulator.

"Mark [Miller] took the petitions to the clerk to turn in," Lewis told BTL. "He signed them. No one questioned it until they were FOIA'd and studied." She was referring to a few enthusiastic residents who retrieved copies of the petitions through the Freedom of Information Act.

Lewis wasn't aware that something was amiss until while on vacation, when she received text messages that state troopers wanted to talk. The campaign violation had been reported to the Michigan State Police by former mayors Russ Gardner, Bill Hess and Peg Sanford in October, according to the Commercial Record. Miller dropped out of the race. ("I think in order to just get this past us," Lewis said.) Lewis said she was surprised that the state police were involved.

"Normally, anything related to elections tends to go through the Secretary of State and/or the Bureau of Elections," Lewis said, "and to have the state police involved with this — it just was not the normal process."

It wasn't until a Friday at the end of February that Lewis heard from the trooper again. This time, he told her the attorney general had filed misdemeanor charges against her and Miller. "And that was the first I had any inkling that anything was going to go beyond just a standard reporting," Lewis said. "So I was a bit shocked. And as you can imagine, my heart fell into my stomach."

This is just the latest example of extremists on the west side of the state stirring up trouble for no other reason than to push people out of office and enforce their own agenda. Let Ottawa County serve as a cautionary tale. Or ask Ruth Crowe, a lesbian artist whose work wasn't to the liking of the Allendale Public School board and rejected from display in her alma mater. Defunding the Patmos Library over books some folks don't like is yet another



petty, short-sighted act by individuals who wish to strong arm a community. (With that said, Election Day is Nov. 7.)

Lewis was advised to hire a criminal defense attorney and not turn herself in lest she wind up in jail over the weekend. The attorney informed her the case would cost a minimum of \$5,000. Lewis decided she would be foolish not to proceed. "But never in my wildest dreams had I ever imagined having to do something like that," Lewis said. She was arraigned on April 6 and freed on \$1,000 bond.

Appointed to the Michigan Travel Commission in February, Lewis

understood her legal matters could become a distraction. She submitted her letter of resignation to the governor.

Lewis' settlement hearing was held Aug. 11 via Zoom in Allegan County District Court. She pleaded guilty to the charge of collecting signatures on a petition without reporting herself as circulator and has agreed to pay a \$500 fine plus \$350 in court costs.

Lewis released a statement to the media. It reads in part, "Even with years of experience circulating nominating petitions, mistakes can happen. I clearly made one. This process has been an expensive lesson I will

not repeat."

Former State Rep. Barb Byrum has been the Ingham County clerk since 2013. She said she hasn't heard of a case like this before.

"Prior to this, I am not familiar with a circulator being charged as a result of their failure to sign the circulating portion of a petition," Byrum said, adding, "It has been my experience that law enforcement in general, whether that's the municipal, county or state police, are typically reluctant to get involved in alleged election complaints such as this."

Since the matter came to light, Lewis has

chosen not to step down from city council and is currently seeking a third term.

After the settlement hearing, what should have been the end of 10 harrowing months for Lewis was not yet over. Cyberbullying, a crime in Michigan, would come next.

A recording of the settlement hearing was posted in the private Facebook group Saugatuck and Douglas Awareness by retired attorney Gary Medler with the words, "Time for Ms. Lewis to resign." Screenshots were provided to BTL by Saugatuck resident Glenna Dejong before the posts were removed from that group and a second group where it had been posted. Medler put forth a scheme allegedly concocted by Lewis and Miller. Other residents pushed back. Medler was joined in another neighborhood forum by former clerk Erin Wilkinson.

"I will copy and post the entire State Police Detective Investigation Report, the criminal charges brought against Garn and Dr. Miller and the Court Dockets for both prosecutions," Medler said. Dejong does not believe Medler made good on his threat. What Dejong did find was that by posting the recording, Medler was likely in violation of court rules, YouTube copyright law and the neighborhood forum's own guidelines — or some combination of the three.

Lewis reported the harassment to the state police. Not long after, the posts came down.

"There were people that served on city council forever and just were rooted in their ways and didn't like change," Dejong said, explaining why she thinks Lewis was targeted. "From my perspective, a lot of things, we just didn't modernize. We didn't get moving. Garn wanted to move things."

She said Lewis wanted to keep Saugatuck both a tourist town and a desirable place to live by making improvements like finishing bike trails. Lewis, Dejong said, encourages new people to join the council. "I think it's kind of the old guard [who are] upset about it," she added.

Still, Lewis acknowledges that it doesn't always work in her favor that she's a strong woman and an LGBTQ+ activist — not even in Saugatuck.

"I've not been shy about being openly LGBTQ and have been a strong advocate for Pride and recognition and support of our LGBTQ+ community," Lewis said.

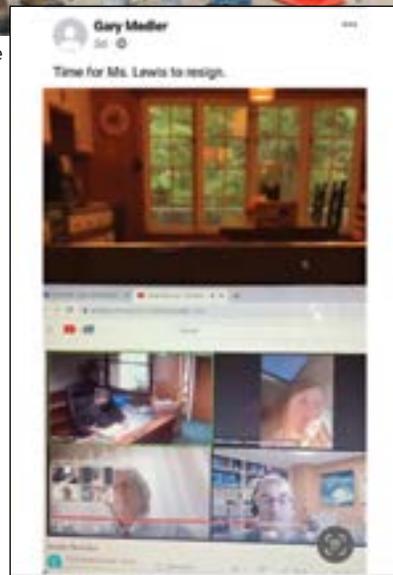
"I've never been shy about that."

Lavora Barnes, chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, expressed her support.

"I'm glad to see the legal process play out fairly so that the council can continue to do important work for the people of Saugatuck," Barnes said. "Garnet Lewis is



Garnet Lewis (center) at Pride Fest crosswalk in Saugatuck, June 2022. Courtesy photo



a fierce advocate for her community, and I know she will serve Saugatuck proudly"

During Lewis' political career, she has taken on the likes of marriage equality opponent Gary Glenn, nemesis to so many in the queer community. She said being attacked is like that all over again.

"I think karma will have its due course," Lewis said. "The bullies will continue to get their way unless good, strong people stand up and stay involved. This type of stuff is very childish. It's very immature." Lewis expressed gratitude for her support network and the support of the majority of the constituents of the city of Saugatuck. "They are not happy about this," she said.

"More often than not," Lewis added, "if you're strong, folks will follow your lead. I think there are a lot of good people who should step up into these leadership roles. And if anything, this should make them more determined to do so."

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GOP to County: Let Us Hurt Trans People or We're Shutting This Whole Thing Down



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Will they or won't they? That's the question on everyone's mind in the U.S. as we watch "The Bachelor..." Oh, wait. My bad. As we watch to see whether or not extremist Republicans will shut down the federal government.

And before your eyes glaze over, know this: I, too, am sick of this shit. It's old. It's boring. Republicans pull this every single time, making demands as the clock ticks down. But it's worth noting that the



Republicans pulling the strings right now are the party's ultra-extremists (I know, I know. It's hard to tell the difference). So their demands for the 2024 budget are, likewise, more extreme than ever, including "measures that put the nation's LGBTQ community at risk by threatening to weaken certain anti-discrimination protections and restrict gender-affirming health care for transgender adults and minors," according to The Hill.

See, when it comes to funding the government, that's Congress's job. But Republicans hate government. They don't believe it works — unless the

government is being weaponized against transgender kids, say — so why fund it?

And wouldn't you know it, disgraced former president Donald Trump is urging Republicans to shut it all down unless they get what they want. It's all very dumb. Except that a shutdown does have real consequences. Say you want to, I don't know, fly somewhere and not have your plane crash into another plane.

In an interview with CNN, the world's most lovable Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said a shutdown would include "shutting down air traffic control training at the exact moment when the country recognizes the need for more, not less, ATC staffing." In addition, "The air traffic controllers who would be working in the towers, they wouldn't get paid. They're under enough stress as it is doing that job without having to come into work with the added stress of not receiving a paycheck."

People doing a very stressful job in

stressful conditions who aren't even getting paid. What could go wrong?

It's not just ATC. According to PBS, "Federal agencies will stop all actions deemed non-essential, and millions of federal employees, including members of the military, won't receive paychecks."

Cool, cool. Totally normal way to run a country.

Speaking of running a country, Republicans have been screaming that government needs to be run like a business for longer than I've been alive. Last time I checked, a successful business can't just stop paying the bills. No wonder they think Donald Trump is a business genius.

Underscoring the fact that the demands of the most extreme Republicans are what is bringing us to the brink of a shutdown, the Human Rights Campaign has jumped into the fray. According to The Hill, Republican demands include preventing "the Department of Defense from displaying LGBTQ pride flags and funding drag shows. It would also rule out certain schoolbooks with LGBTQ themes and gender-affirming medical care for service members and their dependents."

Pretty wild that Republicans are focused on things like "funding drag shows," as if that's what the Department of Defense is doing on the daily. But even if they were, the DoD does have a LOT of money. Like

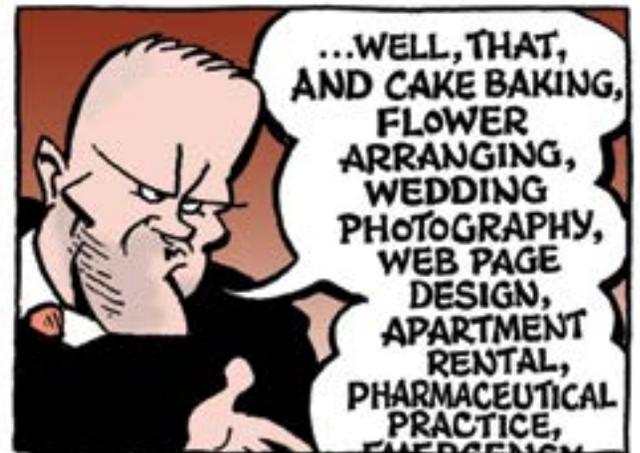
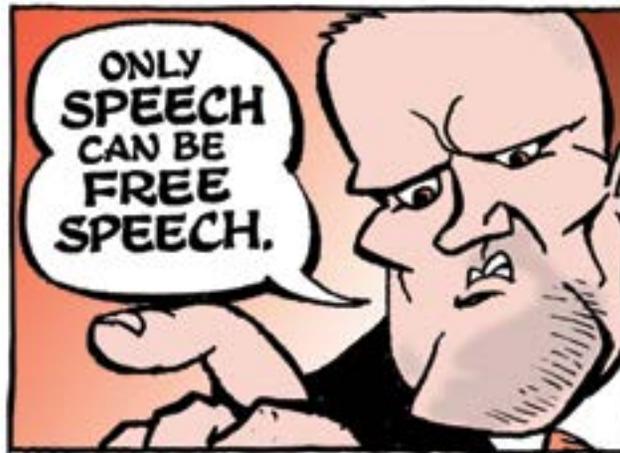
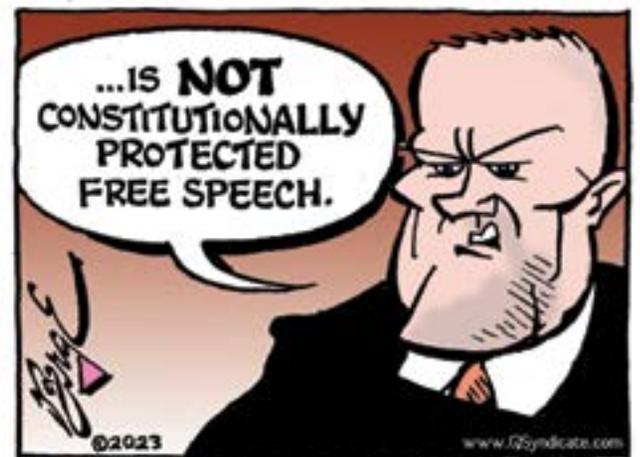
more money than any other government department. Like, TOO much money. So why not splurge on a little entertainment for the troops?

HRC has released a 30-second ad with a voiceover that says, "You sent your representative to Washington to work on behalf of everyday Americans like you. But House Republicans spent the summer trying to divide us and failing to pass essential spending bills. Instead, they're trying to limit the health care you and your family can access, ban books and flags and block enforcement of civil rights laws, all while risking the government grinding to a halt. Tell Congress to reject the politics of hate and get back to work."

Granted, if your representative is, say, Marjorie Taylor Greene or Matt Gaetz, they will just tell you to go pound sand. These aren't people interested in doing their jobs.

Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson accused House Republicans in a press release of hijacking "the appropriations process to attack LGBTQ+ communities" and said a shutdown would be "the height of irresponsibility."

I mean, we HOPE that a shutdown is as far as their irresponsibility goes. Sadly, something tells me that Republicans will just see that as a challenge.



THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Queer-Themed Mural Ordered Removed From Michigan School

.....

The Grant School Board voted Sept. 11 to remove a controversial mural that opponents say features queer themes and witchcraft from Grant Middle School north of Grand Rapids.

Evelyn Gonzales, the student artist, included a character from a video game that some parents claim represented Satan and a depiction of a student wearing a sweater in the transgender Pride colors.

The school board ruled that the mural must be painted over by the end of October. This, despite protestations by Gonzales that the mural does not represent anything evil — and that the video game character featured is not the devil. “That’s not what I’m a part

of,” Gonzales said at the original board meeting last year. “That’s not what I’m trying to put out there.”

“When adults pretend things that are like real life, it’s a mental illness,” parent Danielle Beight said at last year’s meeting. “We need counselors, we need medication that’s going to help bipolar disorder, fix their brains.”

“I’ve never seen more bigoted people in my life,” said self-identified conservative parent Tracey Hargreaves during the meeting and, later, to Today.com: “The meeting turned into a hate fest... It wasn’t even about the mural. People were talking about how we need to pray the gay away.”

— Jason A. Michael

Visit pridesource.com for full story.



Evelyn Gonzales' mural inside Grant Middle School. Photo: WOOD TV8 (YouTube)

Letter to the Editor

.....

This letter is in response to the web version of “When Garnet Lewis Was Targeted By Small-Town Extremists, the Saugatuck City Councilmember Fought Back,” also on page 8. Have you own thoughts? Email us: editor@pridesource.com.

To the Editor:

I was troubled by two characterizations in your article about Saugatuck’s former Mayor and current council member Garnet Lewis. While there’s certainly rancor, I believe your article is wrong to say that Lewis was targeted by extremists or to compare what’s happened to her to the anti-LGBTQIA+ MAGA madness that’s occurring in Ottawa County.

I’ve voted for Lewis three times — once for State Senate and twice for Saugatuck City Council. She has done many good things to make Saugatuck a better place to live and visit. While failing to properly sign a candidate petition isn’t an egregious violation of election law — I initially likened it to jaywalking — it does break the law. And if there’s ever a time that election laws matter, it’s now.

No question Lewis, like all lesbians and strong women (myself included), has experienced discrimination. I don’t think that’s the case in this instance. Equating her situation with the very dangerous anti-LGBTQIA+ actions that defund libraries, ban artists, and spew hate — or comparing the three former Saugatuck Mayors to Ottawa Impact extremists — is unfair.

Holly Anderson, Saugatuck

Anderson is currently running for Saugatuck City Council in the November election.

Trans Sistas of Color Project Receives Lyft Travel Grant

.....

On-demand rideshare company Lyft is expanding a partnership with The Human Rights Campaign’s (HRC) Trans Justice Initiative (TJI) to better serve BIPOC trans clients. The partnership, which started in 2021, distributes codes riders

can use to access free trips to doctor’s appointments, job interviews and legal services.

Lyft has also expanded a training program for drivers focused on safety and inclusion for LGBTQ+ riders. The new grant includes \$40K earmarked for organizations focused on advocacy for BIPOC trans



clients. Locally, Detroit’s Trans Sistas of Color Project will receive resources from the grant.

Visit hrc.org/resources/free-lyft-rides-for-public-safety for more information or reach out to the Trans Sistas of Color Project at facebook.com/TSCOPD.

Kylie Minogue Drops ‘Tension’



.....

Kylie Minogue has padam, padamed up the charts with “Tension,” the gay icon’s 16th studio album. The record meshes all the great Kylie music eras we love, from disco to ’80s and her early aughts “Can’t You Out of My Head” sound, and creates something entirely fresh and completely danceable. Minogue, who is celebrating her 35th year as a recording musician, has been over the moon about the enthusiastic response to “Tension.” In a recent post, she gushed to her three million Instagram followers: “LOVERS!!! The response to TENSION has been overwhelming and you have me 🥰 and 🥰 at the same time!!”

UM Grants Prestigious Book Award to ‘Translocas’

.....

The University of Michigan Press has awarded the 2023 University of Michigan Press Book Award to Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes for his book, “Translocas: The Politics of Puerto Rican Drag and Trans Performance,” which focuses on drag and transgender performance and activism in Puerto Rico and its diaspora. Charles Watkinson, associate university librarian and director of the University of Michigan press, wrote in a release that “the book informs our larger understanding of the representation of transgenderism and is a vital work.”

‘Cassandro’ Serves Up Queer Lucha Libre Vibe



.....

The biopic “Cassandro,” about Saúl Armendáriz, a gay amateur wrestler from El Paso who created a luchador character, just hit Prime Video. It stars Gael García Bernal as Armendáriz and is directed by openly queer Oscar winner Roger Ross Williams. It premiered at Sundance earlier this year to rave reviews.

Gael García Bernal. Photo: Prime Video

If We've Learned Anything From Alice Cooper, It's Knowing When to STFU

Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing at all



BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Look. No one says the conversation around queer issues (particularly transgender issues) is uncomplicated. These topics require thoughtfulness and nuance, and even then, people in the know don't always get it right. Luckily, when people with bullhorn platforms get it not quite right, they always take a beat and make it right.

Right?

Well, no. Way, way too often, when public figures miss hitting that nail on the head by several feet, there's a lot of huffing, puffing and doubling down when they get called on their bad hot take. Looking at you, various straight, cisgender icons from decades past who just cannot seem to stop displaying your bottomless ignorance related to what queer and trans people need and what they need to do. *cough cough Ted Nugent, Kid Rock, Alice Cooper, Ricky Gervais...*

Let's break down a recent headline-grabbing anti-trans public gaffe involving the legendary musician Carlos Santana, who has been putting out hits since before many of our readers were born. The 76-year-old Rock & Roll Hall of Famer recently took to the stage in Atlantic City to not only play from his iconic discography but, for some reason, to enlighten the audience with his thoughts on gender. The gist was "Rest assured, Carlos Santana is fine with trans people — as long as they keep it in the closet."

"When God made you and me, before we came out of the womb, you know who you are and what you are," Santana proclaimed. "Later on, when you grow out of it, you see things and you start believing that you could be something that sounds good, but you know it ain't right. Because a woman is a woman and a man is a man. That's it. Whatever you wanna do in the closet, that's your business. I'm OK with that."

Hoo, boy. There's no need to unpack all of this, but suffice it to say, c'mon, man. We're well past this point in the public conversation around gender. It is widely understood that it's much more complicated than Santana is acknowledging here. His statement only underscores the fact that gender is a deeply personal topic. It's a complicated subject that requires a very simple response: Other people's gender is none of your business.

But Santana did weigh in, and then he had to apologize. Let's hope he meant it when he (or his people) released the inevitable non-statement statement: "I realize that what I said hurt people, and that was not my intent. I sincerely apologize to the transgender community and everyone I offended."

To be fair, he seems to have taken a minute to think things over, taking a classic Santana approach by penning a poem during his time of introspection: "the energy of / consciousness generates its own kind. /hate begets hate/ love begets love." Really, though, none of this was necessary. He didn't need to go there. It's OK just to embrace being 80 and take a walk with your tiny dog.

Every now and then, though, a celebrity with a platform gets it wrong — and then makes it right.

Take Irish singer-songwriter Róisín Murphy, who made headlines recently after she made some cringeworthy comments about gender-affirming care on X. "Please don't call me a TERF [trans-exclusionary radical feminist], please don't keep using that word against women," she posted. "I beg you! But puberty blockers ARE FUCKED, absolutely desolate, big Pharma laughing all the way to the bank. Little mixed-up kids are vulnerable and need to be protected, that's just true."

In reality, puberty blockers have been used for decades, are endorsed as part of the gold standard of care for gender-affirming treatment by every major U.S.

See **STFU**, page 26

SECOND GLANCES

Jenny Jones, Murder and Tabloid TV



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It was sort of trial by fire — if you'll pardon the pun. I'd been writing for *Between The Lines* mere months before I was sent to Pontiac to cover the retrial of Jonathan Schmitz, aka the redux of the "Jenny Jones Murder Trial." I'd not done a great deal of crime reporting at this point. And I'd certainly never covered a trial. But it was my assignment, and so I took it on with great enthusiasm.

Experience or not, I had certainly heard about the case. It was now August 1999, and the murder had occurred four years earlier in Lake Orion. Scott Amedure, 32, who had served in the Army until he came out as gay, was a bartender there. He had the unfortunate luck of having the hots for a straight 24-year-old, the aforementioned Schmitz.

Lots of gay boys have crushes on straight boys. It's happened to us all. But Amedure took it a step further. He signed up for an episode of Jones' tabloid talk show titled "Revealing Same Sex Secret Crush." Now, mind you, this may not have seemed like such a big deal. But remember, the episode was taped 28 years ago. "Will & Grace" had not yet premiered, and "Ellen" the sitcom had only premiered the year before, in 1994. "Ellen," the popular daytime talk show, was not even a twinkle in her eye at this juncture.

The point I'm trying to make is that it was a different time. We still lived under the ridiculous Don't Ask, Don't Tell military policy. DOMA, the Defense Against Marriage Act, was still in effect, and marriage equality was still far off in the distance. So, perhaps America wasn't quite ready for this ill-advised episode just yet.

America aside, Schmitz certainly wasn't ready for it when he found himself a guest on the show. He was backstage while Amedure, egged on by Jones, began to share his fantasies about Schmitz. When he came out, Schmitz awkwardly hugged Amedure and made it known quickly that he was a heterosexual. He was not expecting his crush to be a man, though producers testified he was informed that it could be either sex during the trial.

None of this was seen on TV. The episode never aired. But we were treated to a private screening in the courtroom. There, we learned that after the taping, Schmitz and Amedure had even gone out for a drink. If things had ended there, I wouldn't be writing this column. But things didn't end there. Instead, what happened up to this point was only the first chapter in this horrific tale.

On the morning of March 9, 1995, Schmitz, who later claimed to have been deeply embarrassed by the taping and the thought that it would soon air on national television, went to an ATM, took out money, drove to buy a gun and ammo, and then drove to Amedure's

trailer, where he shot him twice in the chest. Despite all this and his guilty plea, Schmitz had originally been convicted of only second-degree murder.

This trial was not to get Schmitz off guilt-free. This, we all knew, was not going to happen. In fact, Schmitz's attorney admitted as much from the jump. All he was asking is that Schmitz be found only guilty of manslaughter, which would greatly reduce his sentence. Schmitz's attorney, Jerome Sabbota, wasted no time in attempting to blame the victim. "You're going to find that Scott Amedure lit that fuse and kept it burning," he said in his opening statement. Later, "The evidence is going to show that the killing was caused by provocation, provocation by Scott Amedure."

Despite Sabbota's attempt to convince the jury that Amedure somehow forced Schmitz to shoot him to death, that he left Schmitz no other choice, the jury, thankfully, saw through the homophobia. The trial lasted a mere three days, and Schmitz was again found guilty of second-degree murder. And I wrote a synopsis of all of the above for BTL, published in September 1999.

I was honestly relieved the trial was over and that Schmitz had been found guilty again. He was sent back to the big house, and I went back to Farmington, where *Between The Lines* was then located and went back to work. Schmitz would go on to serve his time — some would say a measly 17 years — and was released from prison on Aug. 22, 2017.

When I reread the stories I wrote about the trial I am, I must confess, a little impressed by my writing, considering my level of experience at that time. But, mostly, I am stricken by the same sense of sadness I had in that courtroom. What a waste of a life. Who knew a crush on a straight boy could cause a gay boy to lose his life.

Jeff Montgomery knew this, I guess. The executive director of the Triangle Foundation (now Equality Michigan), who closely monitored the Schmitz retrial, had traveled to Wyoming the year before to attend the trial of the two men who killed Matthew Shepard. That crime had taken place a year earlier, before I started with BTL.

Montgomery and I spent some time together during the Schmitz trial, a couple of lunches, a few chats in the hallway during recesses. He wasn't always available as the master of publicity was often in front of the cameras of Court TV, which gave the trial a national audience. There, live, Montgomery schooled the nation on the so-called "gay panic defense" that Schmitz's attorney tried unsuccessfully to promote.

This would not prove to be the last time I'd be in a courtroom and hear that defense played out. It didn't work in the Schmitz trial. It worked like a charm in others. But they say you never forget your first time, and perhaps that is why this trial has stayed so clearly in my mind. So has the memory of Scott Amedure, who didn't deserve to die for having a crush. Nobody does.

◀ Spencer Calhoun

Continued from page 6

is my parents rejecting me simply because of who I love,” Calhoun said. “My parents are very strict religiously. And when I told them that I was gay, they told the elders in that congregation. Essentially, I was shunned by everyone.” He was 15 or 16 at the time.

“And then as time went on, things really just got worse,” Calhoun continued. “And my dad and stepmom, just one day, I came home from work for my first job at Kroger, and they told me to pack my bags and get out. They couldn’t take it anymore. That’s how I ended up in Mount Clemens.”

Calhoun said he still has those struggles and sometimes experiences depression. But he loves Mount Clemens because he feels safe there. And he says a lot of LGBTQ+ people and people of color feel safe there too. “And I want to keep it that way,” Calhoun said. “And I want it to improve. We hold Macomb County Pride here. There are a lot of fantastic allies in the community, and I just want to keep that going.”

It would mean a lot to Calhoun to be one of the only openly LGBTQ+ elected officials in Macomb County. “I’m hoping that by doing good work on the city commission and continuing to make Mount Clemens a more welcoming place, I would be one of the first, for sure. Not one of the last,” he said.

In addition to addressing homelessness and the poor condition of public housing, Calhoun is concerned about Mount Clemens’ tax base. Inside the four square miles of the city’s boundaries, there are more than

30 churches and several Macomb County administrative buildings, leaving about half of the city’s land untaxable.

“We have pretty high taxes,” Calhoun acknowledged. “And residents are really starting to get concerned about how high their taxes are and how that relates to the services that they’re receiving.” He said when it comes to infrastructure, their hands are often tied because Mount Clemens lacks the tax base to provide adequate essential services.

As an elected official, Calhoun would look to government partners for sustainable solutions. “I don’t want to see us really taxing people out where people just can’t live here anymore,” he said.

Calhoun would also like to see the city’s downtown corridor continue to improve. But more than anything, he wants to advocate for residents’ needs — and he’s willing to be creative.

“One person told me that here in Mount Clemens, a lot of people are just looking for ‘a guy who knows a guy.’ And so when it comes to solutions, sometimes we have to go out of the box to get them.” Calhoun would help residents connect people to resources or individuals who could assist them, something that he said hasn’t happened in the past. To identify the community’s needs, Calhoun posted a survey on his campaign

website.

At the age of 20, Calhoun would be the youngest member of the current city commission. In 2022, he not only successfully managed the campaign of State Rep. Denise Mentzer, Calhoun also ran for school board but came up short by just 54 votes. He’s also been active



Spencer Calhoun says he supports fighting for better wages. Courtesy photo

with the Democratic party as a campaign volunteer.

Calhoun, who holds certificates in robotics and mechatronics, is currently enrolled at Macomb Community College, yet much of his day is spent as a full-time union organizer for the Michigan AFL-CIO. He agreed it’s an exciting time to be fighting for workers’ rights.

“I am very happy to see that we are standing together on a united front to fight for better wages and

benefits for employees — and not just the auto workers,” Calhoun said. “It’s nice to see that people are working together.” He said they have employees on strike at Blue Cross Blue Shield and informational pickets at Delta down at the airport.

“We’ve really seen the value in unions,” he added. “And through our strength, we’re going to see some results. And I’m just very excited to play a small role in that.”

Calhoun’s hands-on approach on behalf of Michigan workers is mirrored in how he has advocated for young people experiencing homelessness. Frustrated with the control the state has over homeless youth, Calhoun has poured hours into this advocacy work, recently testifying in committee hearings on three bills focused on healthcare for this population.

Calhoun believes it’s important for young people to stay engaged in politics. “We’re the people who are going to have to live the longest with these decisions that are coming up,” he said.

“In terms of something like climate change, I personally am worried that time is kind of running out for us to solve some of these really big issues,” Calhoun said. “And then you throw in other uncertainties and things that are happening on the national and global stage.”

He mentioned gun violence as close as Oxford High School and

Michigan State University. “There’s a real urgency for me.”

While he appreciates and benefits from the wisdom of older people, Calhoun said younger people deserve a seat at the table too, and shouldn’t be an afterthought.

Chris Kipp, a former board member of Macomb County Pride, became a friend and mentor to Calhoun after Calhoun was homeless and taken in by Kipp’s neighbor. The neighbor didn’t know how to help a queer teen, so he reached out to Kipp.

Impressed that Calhoun was able to graduate high school despite being homeless, Kipp noted Calhoun’s intelligence and called him energetic and a people pleaser.

“I think Spencer is — I know it sounds cliché — but of the people, for the people,” Kipp said. “He’s been there. He knows. And he wants to help communities.”

That’s how Calhoun frames it, too. He’s running to be a voice for the people.

“I came here when I was 17 as a homeless youth, and I stayed in a long-term transitional living program for eight months,” Calhoun said. “And people in this community went out of their way to take care of me. They bought me clothes when I needed clothes. They helped me to find jobs, provided mentoring. And so I’ve seen just in our community that there are a lot of people who need someone to speak up for them.”

A fundraiser will be held Oct. 6 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Dovetail (29200 Hoover Road, Warren) with special guest Rep. Donovan McKinney. Learn more about Calhoun and his campaign at votespencercalhoun.com.

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Ann Arbor Set to Immortalize Queer Michigan Trailblazer Kathy Kozachenko

Kozachenko became the first elected out official in the nation in 1974

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Kathy Kozachenko blazed a trail for others to follow, including Harvey Milk, and became the first out gay person ever to be elected to public office when she won a seat on the Ann Arbor City Council in 1974 — a full three years before Milk would become a city supervisor in San Francisco and only five years post-Stonewall.

Now, the city of Ann Arbor is recognizing Kozachenko by erecting a statue in her honor.

“Kathy Kozachenko’s election to the Ann Arbor City Council in 1974 as an out lesbian candidate is long overdue for recognition,” said Tim Retzloff, an adjunct assistant professor at Michigan State University who specializes in queer history. “Ann Arbor, East Lansing and Detroit were on the vanguard of 1970s LGBTQ+ activism in so many ways.”

Kozachenko was elected when she was just 21 and a student at University of Michigan and ran as a third-party candidate for the Human Rights Party. Like all good politicians, Kozachenko was a gifted speaker. In her acceptance speech, she laid her cards on the political table, remarking, “Ten years ago, or even three years ago, lesbianism would have meant automatic defeat. This year, we talked about rent control. We talked about the city’s budget. We talked about police priorities, and we had a record of action to run on. Many people’s attitudes about gayness are still far from healthy, but my campaign forced some people at least to reexamine their prejudices and stereotypes.”

A year earlier, Kozachenko’s predecessor, Nancy Wechsler, a fellow Human Rights Party member, had come out after being elected and on the council for some time. This makes Wechsler the first openly lesbian public office holder in the country. But it was Kozachenko who was actually the first elected out lesbian.



Kathy Kozachenko. Photo: Ann Arbor District Library (donated by The Ann Arbor News)

Kozachenko served only one term and gave up politics in 1976.

“People have asked why I’m not still in politics,” she told BTL’s D’Anne Witkowski in 2021. “I was really never in politics. I was a part of a social justice movement, and running for office and elections was one part of how we wanted to share our ideas and make change. I’m still very much a social justice activist even though I’m not someone who is into party politics, per se.”

That’s not to say that Kozachenko dismisses her contribution to the queer rights movement.

“I think we’ve made enormous progress in opening the country’s consciousness to the fact that there are many ways of living, there are many ways of loving, there are many ways of expressing who we are,” she told Witkowski. “It’s not ‘Leave It to

Beaver’ or ‘The Partridge Family.’ Cookie-cutter families are not who everyone is in this country.”

A true progressive, Kozachenko campaigned on an agenda that included such items as a fine of no more than \$5 for possession of small amounts of marijuana. Another cause she was passionate about was placing a ceiling on the amount of profit a landlord could make from rental income.

Kozachenko opted not to run for a second term and pretty much disappeared from public life.

“As hard as we tried to make our organization representative of and inclusive of individuals beyond students — to be a voice for working people, people that were on welfare but trying to move beyond welfare, people of color — we weren’t really able to go beyond being a student

organization,” Kozachenko said of the Human Rights Party for an NBC News story in 2020. “So, the viability of the organization as a vehicle for change, I could see that it wasn’t going to be long term, and I wanted to see where else I could be effective.”

Nearly 50 years after she was elected, Kozachenko said she preferred to look forward.

“We have so, so far to go in so many things,” she told Witkowski, noting that the lack of affordable housing, income disparity and institutional racism are huge problems in the U.S.

“We’ve got to somehow communicate with each other so we see our commonality,” she added. “And that doesn’t mean giving people a pass when they say something offensive or inappropriate. It means having discussions with people in an



(Above) Former Ann Arbor City Councilmembers Mary Richman (left) and Kathy Kozachenko in 1974. Photo: Ann Arbor District Library/Jack Stubbs (donated by The Ann Arbor News)

attempt to communicate and be able to open people’s hearts and minds.”

Retzloff agreed.

“At the same time we celebrate this effort, we should remember that acts of commemoration can say as much about the present as the past,” Retzloff said. “While local officials move forward in honoring the first openly LGBTQ+ person elected to public office in the U.S., let us also ask what this says about our movement’s achievements, values and priorities in 2024.”

Jacob Gorski is an Ann Arbor District Library librarian. He interviewed Kozachenko for his podcast, *Gayest Generation*, last year.

“In my short interactions with Kathy, I was overwhelmed by her humbleness and humanity,” Gorski said. “It is wonderful news to hear that she will be commemorated in this way.”

In the 2020 NBC News interview, Kozachenko reflected on her role in history and standing in the shadow of Milk, even though she predates him.

“Not a lot of people know about me,” Kozachenko said. “Harvey Milk was a very strong and vibrant gay activist. I was and am a social justice advocate, of which LGBTQ rights come in.”

Kozachenko’s statue is scheduled to be unveiled during the city’s bicentennial celebration in 2024.



Wayne State University Student Center. Photo: wayne.edu

Wayne State Center Will Bring LGBTQ+ Services Closer to Students

Queer students weigh in on what the project means to them

BY DREW SAUNDERS

A new center at Wayne State University will focus on sexuality and gender studies. The school's Board of Governors has approved the creation of the dedicated space, which will be housed within the school's student center.

"It's a huge deal. This is really a monumental new development for our community on campus," said Simone Chess, an associate professor of English and the director of gender, sexuality and women's studies at the university.

"Wayne State, for a research university of its size, was really behind our peer and neighboring institutions in terms of dedicated university resources for LGBTQ and feminist students because of our legacy as a commuter school; there were fewer student service resources than people might have expected," she added. "We've always made it work. We've always had a thriving LGBTQ community on our campus, but this center is a really big step in centralizing the resources that we do have and growing those resources."

By making it work, Chess means a scattershot of services, including an out-of-the-way location way up in the Maccabees Building, an Art Deco building at the corner of Woodward Avenue and Putnam, adjacent to the Detroit Institute of Art and the Detroit Public Library's main branch.

The fact that there will now be a permanent, expanded space in the much more heavily trafficked student center is a welcome step for Hal Sutherland, a queer junior majoring in art history. He just wishes it happened sooner.

"It is really, really exciting to finally have a safe space on campus to exist as a queer person," Sutherland said. "Not that existing as a queer person on campus is inherently unsafe, but I definitely do feel better having a space to be with other queer people, and I don't have to worry about people giving me weird looks or making comments about the way that I look or the way that I present myself."

"I'm excited the freshmen have an opportunity to cultivate a safe space with other like-minded queer people that I didn't have when I was a freshman," he added. "I didn't realize there were queer spaces on campus until the beginning of my sophomore year."

The new center will be open next year on the sixth floor of the student center, adjacent to other student organizations such as the Office of Multi-Cultural Student Engagement, the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies and the new Office for Sexual Violence and Education. A completion date for the new center has not been set.

When the center does officially open, trans student Jamie Pittinos, a junior, plans on using the space to plan events for the student organizations that they are the president of — CAMP and the Queer Creators Guild.

"This is the first time since I've been a student that a very large sum of money has been given specifically to queer people. The same goes to a large space," Pittinos said. "Before, we just had to create our own spaces and raise our own money. So, this is really exciting. It also gives us a lot of visibility that we've never had before, as well as safety, because visibility without safety is dangerous for us."

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What Can One Gay Politician Offer the Ruth Ellis Center?

During a recent visit to the LGBTQ+ youth organization, Rep. Mike McFall found out for himself

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When State Rep. Mike McFall came to tour the Ruth Ellis Center (REC) campus recently, he wasn't yet aware that his new in-district office is located within blocks of the main REC building on Victor Street.

In his first term as state rep and part of the seven-member LGBTQ legislative caucus, McFall began his political career on city council in Hazel Park, at the center of Michigan House District 8. His passion for mental health, as evidenced by a recent town hall with Henry Ford Health on the subject, was one reason for McFall's visit to REC. Last year, McFall told BTL the best way to deal with the state's poor mental health system, at the root of many issues, was from a seat in Lansing.

"I'm really happy you're in my district," McFall told REC Executive Director Mark Erwin during the tour, which BTL tagged along for. "I wanted to know the resources you provide so that way, if someone comes in, we can point them in the right direction because that's the primary use of that office." McFall's office is working with Wayne County Community College to offer GED services, job fair opportunities and other resources.

Representing a narrow north-south district that runs from 14 Mile Road in Madison Heights to Canfield in Detroit, McFall felt he and his staff at the resource center would be better able to direct the public to REC's services after he toured the facilities.

Erwin explained that REC space was initially small (around 500 square feet) but grew as the organization responded to the needs of the community they serve. In partnership with Henry Ford Health, REC added healthcare to its services in 2016 after learning that most clients

were not connected to any primary care.

"When we explored those conversations," Erwin said, "we started learning more about the experiences they were having in healthcare settings. Trans young people being misgendered, being asked inappropriate questions." As a gay man, McFall said he could relate to the importance of LGBTQ-friendly healthcare providers. Primary care, STI testing and treatment, HIV care and gender-affirming care for youth are some of the healthcare services available.

McFall commented later how impressed he was not just with the healthcare services REC provides but their integrated behavioral health services, in particular. "It's something that hits very close to home," McFall told BTL after the tour.

Krystina Edwards, community engagement manager, led the tour, which began at the health and wellness center and the drop-in center. Laundry facilities, a computer center, the center's clothes donation closet, the dance floor and a community food pantry are some of the amenities that draw people to the space. Brightly colored murals add a feeling of warmth.

Kofi House, established in 2019, was another stop on the tour. Located in Detroit on Hazelwood Street, the historic home was gifted by a longtime supporter of REC. Like REC's other offerings, Kofi House was the response to a direct need.

"One of the things that we really embrace is creating opportunities for feedback from the community that we serve," Erwin said. "We learned that historically, lesbian and queer-identified young women didn't necessarily feel as



Mark Erwin (left) and Rep. Mike McFall. Photo: Krystina Edwards

See [REC Tour](#), page 24



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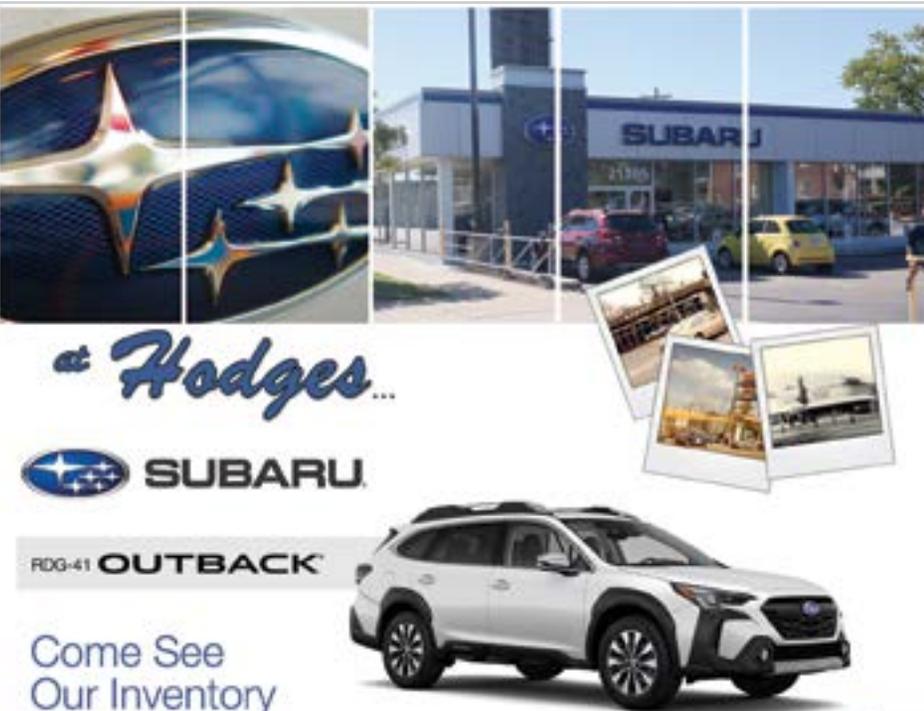


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(Left to right) Keith Bynum, Evan Thomas and real estate agent Shea Hicks-Whitfield on the set of a “Bargain Block” renovation. Photo: HGTV

The Global Destinations That Inspire ‘Bargain Block’

How the French countryside to the beaches of L.A. influence Detroit starter-home renovators

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The boys from the HGTV hit series “Bargain Block” — Evan Thomas and Keith Bynum — are back and smack dab in the middle of Season 3. Busy as they are, they took time to catch up with BTL and share the five destinations that most inspire their Detroit home designs.

If you’ve watched the show, you know that Evan and Keith, both 36, have been together 10 years and moved to Detroit from Colorado — sight unseen — in 2017 to begin transforming decrepit Detroit houses

into stylish starter homes sold at affordable prices.

Their show, an instant hit, has opened multiple doors for them. Most recently, they had a chance to work on a real-life Barbie Dreamhouse on HGTV’s “Barbie Dreamhouse Challenge.” “It was a wild experience,” said Bynum. “They fly you across the country, and you go you to this house, and you paint everything pink.”

Here in Michigan, the couple just bought a second home in northern Michigan, so “that makes us true Michiganders,

according to the internet,” said Keith with a laugh. The couple has little free time for long weekends up north, though. Their business is booming and busier than ever. So busy that the couple no longer goes out — in fact, it’s been over a year since Keith has been to Soho in Ferndale.

When the couple is out of town, whether for business or pleasure, the two are getting recognized a lot these days, but they’re still humble Midwesterners at heart.

“I don’t think we’re that famous,” said Evan. “I think we’re very much

like a D-list kind of thing. The work itself affects our relationship more than anything. It can be stressful and difficult.”

“Evan always tells me to stop waving when people wave at me,” Keith remarked. “But I’m from the south. My adoring fans must be waved at. In my mind, I’m much more famous than I actually am.”

Now that they’re good Michiganders with a home up north, are they settled in Detroit for good? Or might they someday take the show on the road and give another city a try?

“‘Bargain Block’ is Detroit,” said Keith. “You’re not going to be able to find this type of renovation show in any other city. Detroit is special, and we love it here.”

On to their top destination inspirations!

Andrews, Texas

It’s cliché but true: You can take the boy out of Texas, but you can’t take the Texas out of Keith. His tiny hometown, population 13,000, felt confining growing up. Instead of living in the middle of

the desert, he dreamt of looking out the window and seeing trees and water. That's not to diminish Andrews' appeal. The beauty of West Texas influences a big part of how Keith paints, and his painting, he said, influences his style as a whole. "It's still a really beautiful place to go," he said. "Some of my favorite color palettes come from a West Texas sunset. And who doesn't love a bit of turquoise?"

Porte Saint-Antoine, Versailles, France

Though Keith has never actually been to France (Evan has), this part of France inspires them both, and thoughts of it work their way frequently into the couple's designs.

"We did a house in Season 2 that was like a Paris apartment," said Evan. "There's a lot of French influence again this season." That's in part, Keith said, because there's a lot of French influence in Detroit — it was French military leader Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac who established Detroit in 1701, after all.

"French provincial is my favorite style of home," said Keith. "We just did our house, and we have French doors everywhere." When he does get to Versailles, Keith knows directly where he will go. "I want to see everything Marie Antoinette related," he said with glee. "Her summer house is kind of what I dream my life would be after retirement."

Colorado/Northern Michigan

Evan and Keith will always take inspiration from their time living in Colorado, where the two met. The essence of the rugged, natural beauty of the state can often be found in Keith's murals and paintings.

"Nature and beauty have been huge inspirations," Evan said. "Having that for all the houses we've done, they're all, inevitably, a bit of that play into nature." Living now some 1,000 miles away from the Centennial State, the couple enjoys exploring northern Michigan now, and while not quite the same, they're finding Mount Boyne a reasonable substitute for Colorado's Mount Elbert.

"Michigan now has turned into as much of a destination for nature," said Keith. "It's great to

live in a state with such beauty."

Scandinavia

Neither Evan nor Keith have ever been to Denmark, Norway, Sweden or any other part of the Scandinavian region. "But I think the design sense is one of the most noticeable and strongest design senses out there," said Evan enthusiastically.



Keith Bynum and Evan Thomas on "Bargain Block." Photo: HGTV

Season 3 promises to offer a few examples of the Scandinavian influence. Known as the epitome of simplicity, the Scandinavian style places an emphasis on function and beauty. Evan enjoys the minimal yet cozy feel the style offers and, as with other destinations on their list, it's the natural beauty of the region that calls to him. "It makes houses very beautiful, and it's actually easy to pull off," he said.

Los Angeles (and the rest of Southern California)

Evan and Keith enjoyed spending some time on the West Coast over the last year. But they took inspiration from more than just the beach and ocean. It's the variety of architecture that moves them, particularly the Spanish revival style.

"It's such an iconic design," said Keith. "It fits the climate perfectly." Keith went on to say that whenever you're in a Spanish revival-style house, you're transported "to a warmer climate. We've really played with this. The very beautiful, bright spaces with all the sunlight. I love it."

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What It's Like to Be Queer on a Non-Queer Cruise

Just how out and proud could this gay couple be on their Oceania cruise around the Arctic?

BY MARK SEGAL

Courtesy of the National LGBT Media Association

My husband Jason and I have been on numerous cruises on many LGBTQ+ cruise lines, and some that weren't. For our current trip we booked a cruise on Oceania, a line known for its food (they claim the best food at sea), exceptional attention to detail and out-of-the-ordinary shore excursions.

We chose Oceania once before, and it was above most of the other cruises we've done. Another advantage of Oceania is that they do exotic itineraries. Our July cruise started in Reykjavik, Iceland and then proceeded to Greenland, the Shetland Islands, Denmark and Sweden before ending in Oslo, Norway after a whopping 15 days. We traveled with another gay couple, our friends Klay and Val, who are out and proud like us.

But how out and proud could we, as LGBTQ+ people, be on this traditional cruise?

On the first night of the cruise, the ship promoted an "LGBTQIA+ Get Together" in their daily schedule printout. The four of us attended along with three other couples, though we weren't the only LGBTQ+ people on board. Throughout the trip, we met many other LGBTQ+ people, mostly couples, who also had other cruise experiences. I asked many of them why they picked this cruise over an LGBTQ+ cruise, as well as how comfortable they felt being out on this cruise.

The overwhelming answer was that people on a cruise, like the general population, gravitate toward like-minded people. Most of those I spoke with were comfortable being open about their sexuality. Jason and I felt comfortable enough to show our emotions at times and hold hands or put an arm around each other, just

like non-LGBTQ+ couples. Could we have done that a decade ago? Probably not.

Like any cruise, we found ourselves finding our own friends who turned out to be a fascinating lot. One of those was a couple who work at a small college and are developing new ways to be inclusive to LGBTQ+ students. Another was a retired couple from Seattle, another from Dallas.

For all of us, the two factors that led us to this cruise were the itinerary and the reputation of Oceania. Let's start with the cruise stops.

Reykjavik, Iceland

The departing port of the cruise, Reykjavik, deserves a few days to tour since it has some of the greatest landscapes and wonders on earth, and if you're lucky as we were, you will be met by an active volcano. We had arranged three days of touring with an LGBTQ+ tour company called Pink Iceland. Not only is there a sizable LGBTQ+ population in Iceland, but it seems everywhere you go there are rainbows. The country even has had a lesbian prime minister. It's one of the most LGBTQ-friendly places on earth.

Our first day we traveled to the south shore and marveled at the raw natural landscape, which looks like something from the moon but is actually dried lava with moss growing atop. The volcanoes and glaciers are abundant, and with all the volcanoes, you'll see steam coming up from the ground in certain places. This has translated to natural geothermal power that powers the country, as well as natural glacier water (which tastes better than any bottled water) in every home.

Later that day we went to the black beach at Reynisfjara with its basalt rock formation from eruptions thousands of years ago. We also



Rainbow Street, Reykjavik. Photo: Jason Villemez

visited and walked behind several waterfalls, and the sunshine meant that rainbows were aplenty. It was wet, magical and romantic.

During our third day we toured the capital city, which is easily walkable and features a giant rainbow street, and then attended a get-together organized by Eva and Birna, the owners of Pink Iceland, with some local LGBTQ+ community members, including a member of parliament and a playwright who was the first to come out in his village in western Iceland. The audience was among the most engaged I've ever spoken to, and they asked insightful questions and were delightful to engage with. Iceland is a country built on stories (called the Sagas), so the people are keen to learn the stories of others.

After our three days in Reykjavik, we went onto our ship, the Oceania Riviera.

The completely renovated ship had recently come out of dry dock. Its

cabin was the most beautiful we've ever seen at sea and had ample closet space and a bathroom with a rainfall shower. Our home away from home would be comfy.

Isafjordur, Iceland

Iceland is still developing its infrastructure for tourism. Our ship had provided 10 shore excursions, but all were completely sold before we even boarded the ship, including the one we wanted most: whale watching. The fact that shore excursions sell out months before the trip was not fully communicated to us. When we attempted to book six weeks before the trip, many ports had no available excursions. Nevertheless, in this small fishing village, left to our own devices we discovered one of the treasures of Iceland, the Tjörúhúsið restaurant.

The buffet meal included a fish soup, five types of fish entrees (including fish throat, which I didn't

know existed), various vegetable combinations, and coffee, biscuits and chocolate.

After the meal, we took a stroll through the village and discovered that among the fishing boats, fjords (long, narrow bodies of water that reach far inland) and homes, the town square had a giant rainbow painted down the center. That's two for two cities in Iceland with rainbow streets.

Nuuk, Greenland

The capital of Greenland, Nuuk, held its Pride celebration the week before we arrived. Discovering small cities with Pride events astonishes me even to this day. We had tried to find a Nuuk Pride T-shirt but since the city is so small (17,000 people) the organizers told me they didn't have the funds to create merch.

See **The Arctic**, page 22

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THE TRAVEL GUIDE

◀ The Arctic

Continued from page 20

For our excursion for the day, we chose the Fjord Boat Tour, which was majestic. Our boat driver dodged icebergs like a taxi weaving in and out of traffic. When we stopped for a few minutes, the calmness and solitude, being surrounded by ice and mountains, was otherworldly.

Sadly, our driver said that 10 years ago, none of the ice in the water was there, and that it has been a result of climate change and melting ice. I shudder to think what the area will be like in another 10 years. There might be so much ice that boats can't get anywhere.

Qaqortoq, Greenland

In Qaqortoq, a 1,500-person city south of Nuuk, the excursion we chose was the "Kaffemik," basically enjoying coffee and traditional Greenland cakes in a private house. We walked up the hills and passed by colorful homes to get to the residence of our host, an 80-year-old widow with Swedish ancestry who was charming and explained Greenlandic culture. One of her children was there to help translate, while her other children live in Denmark, which Greenland is a territory of. During the pandemic, Greenland received ample funds from Denmark to make up for the loss of income in industry.

After we wrapped up our sightseeing, that evening, while walking around the ship, we came across a portrait of a woman who is the godmother of the ship, Cat Cora, the famous Iron Chef. She and her wife and children were also among the guests on board with us. We went to see her give a talk the following evening. During her presentation she introduced her family, and afterwards we got a chance to chat. When I asked her about how it felt introducing her wife, she said, "That's what we need as a community; we need to be more visible."

Torshavn (Faroe Islands), Denmark

This charming capital of the Faroe Islands is a wonder of old architecture and homes with grass roofs. The town's Library had several LGBTQ+ books on display in the window due to the previous week's Pride celebration. This trip, after learning about Pride in Nuuk, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, proved what I've always believed: that Pride is one of the best exports America has ever given to the world. I thought of my friend Ellen Broidy who helped write the resolution that created Pride, and all of us who marched in that first Pride in 1970 in New York.

Gothenburg, Sweden

Sweden's second largest city has a

population of 579,000 and is a model of a beautiful European city with second empire buildings and a very large central shopping area. We stumbled upon some fun shops, including one dedicated to Pippi Longstocking, as well as the largest cinnamon rolls and cookies we've ever seen. We took some time to sit in a city park and enjoy the surroundings.

On the final night of the cruise, we enjoyed a performance by Tiano, the tenor and piano duo of Shimi Goodman and Chris Hamilton. They dedicated one of the love songs to Val and Klay, who were celebrating their 25th anniversary. The duo will soon embark on a North American tour, and we're looking forward to seeing them again. They're also a couple, and they mentioned that they were glad to meet other LGBTQ+ people on the ship.

Oslo, Norway

The cruise ended in Oslo, Norway, and many passengers planned a couple day layover before heading home. But others, like Jason and I, decided to head to the airport the morning of disembarkation, and we purchased tickets from the ship that would transfer us and our luggage to the airport. The luggage was put in a truck, and we were ushered into buses. The process was confusing, and there was no ship representative at the airport to direct us where our luggage was. Ultimately, the truck with the luggage arrived about 15 minutes after we did, and everyone was reunited with their bags.

Compared to the other Oceania cruise we did, this one failed to meet expectations. While it had what seemed like the best cabin at sea and a wonderful itinerary, the staff, while helpful, seemed to be learning on the job. The other major disappointment was the food. Oceania no longer has the best food at sea. Oceania seems to have lost the sparkle that made it one of the best cruise companies around.

Looking back on our trip, it's the people we met and the destinations we saw along the way that we'll remember most. A private party with some of the LGBTQ+ guests we met; Tiano on that final night; the maitre'd in the dining room who seemed to know the name of every passenger on the ship.

And despite the ship's faults, seeing Iceland, Greenland and so many other places was an experience of a lifetime. We can't wait to go back to Reykjavik someday and see more of Iceland and meet more of the people, and we're forever grateful to have seen Greenland, a place of unparalleled beauty. It's a reminder that the planet has existed long before humans, and that we are but a small part of the wide wonder of nature.

Mark Segal is publisher of the Philadelphia Gay News. This story is courtesy of the National LGBTQ Media Association.



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A photograph of a white convertible car parked on a sandy beach. Two men and a small white dog are in the car. The background shows the ocean and a sunset sky with warm orange and pink tones.

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◀ REC Tour

Continued from page 16

affirmed in some of our spaces because, like everywhere else, young men can dominate that space pretty quickly.”

Kofi House centers on outreach to lesbians, queer women and girls and offers a room suitable for yoga, a library and kitchen, and upstairs spaces for therapy and childcare. And although the alarm was tripped upon entry, it only reflects the organization’s dedication to security. Likewise, one notable feature of the Clairmount Center, REC’s latest major

McFall and Erwin discussed the first-ever \$10 million grant in the governor’s budget for LGBTQ+ health disparities, to be distributed by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. “We just passed the budget, and in the budget, there’s actually funding in there specifically for LGBTQ resources,” McFall said. “So I’m hoping to be able to guide [REC] as best as possible on how to get that funding from the state.”

Erwin had ideas in terms of infrastructure. “Security upgrades are a huge need for all the LGBT-identified organizations, but certainly ours as well, because of just the

number of young people who are coming into the space,” Erwin said. McFall noted the recent murder of Ashia Davis, a Black transgender woman in Highland Park, as well as the anti-trans rhetoric in politics today, as two reasons that keeping the facilities and the community safe are paramount.

Impressed overall, McFall was interested to hear what he could bring to the table.

“I often get asked, ‘What am I bringing?’” McFall said. “And I’m like, I’m not telling you what you need for your community. You tell me what you need for your community. I think oftentimes in predominantly lower-income communities, they’re used to people coming in and just telling them what they’re going to get. And so I’ve been really trying to change that mindset with the people that I’ve talked to. So that’s

not why I’m here. I’m not here to tell you what you need. I’m here to listen to what you need.”

Erwin, too, is a leader who says he prioritizes the needs of the people he serves.

“I’ve been at the Ruth Ellis Center for 12 years, and I think that I always came into my work here with the notion that I am not the expert,” Erwin said. “People that we serve are the experts. And it’s my job to identify and secure the resources that they need to pursue whatever it is that they want to pursue.”

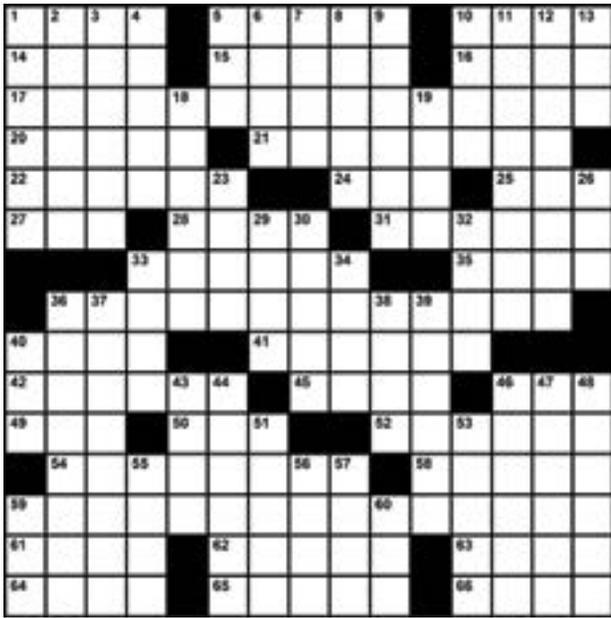
project, is that its residents had input into the security features of the building.

Clairmount is a queer-affirming affordable housing facility that opened last year. It features 43 apartments, a healthcare center, the Ruth Ellis Institute, a technology center and an art therapy room. Outside, a fenced-in area will provide space for a garden and seating. REC currently houses 70 young people in the Clairmount Center and other housing. Case management is part of the program.

“One of the things I noticed is that none of it was very cold and stark,” McFall noted after the tour. “It felt very welcoming, which is great. [And] not just welcoming, but something that feels like home.”

For more information on the Ruth Ellis Center, visit ruthelliscenter.org.

“I often get asked, ‘What am I bringing?’ And I’m like, I’m not telling you what you need for your community. You tell me what you need for your community.”



Ty the Knot

Across

- 1 Violates an old military rule
- 5 Jean of "Designing Women"
- 10 Queens stadium name
- 14 Sub sinker
- 15 Lindsay of "Liz & Dick"
- 16 Slinky shape
- 17 Start of a quote from Ty Herndon, who just married Alex
- 20 Greek triangle

- 21 Some canines
- 22 Oscar Wilde tragedy
- 24 NYPD rank
- 25 "Sex and the City" channel
- 27 Scores in D. Kopay's sport
- 28 Where to look, in "Misty"
- 31 Playground piece for a couple
- 33 Shrek's girlfriend
- 35 Woody valley
- 36 End of the quote
- 40 Vast area in Asia
- 41 Cause anguish to
- 42 Be a pain in the ass to

- 45 Opening day, briefly
- 46 Broadway scenery chewer
- 49 Request for Vanna
- 50 Caesar's way
- 52 Canonized gay guy?
- 54 Florist, often
- 58 "Ol' Man" of Broadway
- 59 Number one hit of Ty Herndon, 1996
- 61 Stick in the fridge?
- 62 Popular hero of Lorca's land
- 63 Series ender
- 64 Oral attention getter
- 65 Actor Robert and family
- 66 Amount of AZT, e.g.

Down

- 1 In the thick of
- 2 "Nothing Compares 2 U" singer O'Connor
- 3 Funeral bell sounds
- 4 Take care of
- 5 Patty Hearst's former org.
- 6 Marilyn Monroe facial feature
- 7 Cruising greeting
- 8 Did Rex Reed's job
- 9 Some legal tender
- 10 BenGay target
- 11 "Bali Hai" setting
- 12 Testicle that hasn't descended?
- 13 Above-ground trains
- 18 Cost, in slang
- 19 Human Rights Campaign fundraiser, e.g.
- 23 To be in Rimbaud's arms
- 26 Pussycat's partner
- 29 Tuna-and-cheese sandwich

- 30 Flynn role opposite Davis
- 32 Cut
- 33 What tail
- 34 Broadway opening for a lot?
- 36 Acrylic add-ons for some drag queens
- 37 What a Peeping Tom does
- 38 Stats from "A League of Their Own"
- 39 Milk neighborhood
- 40 4.0, for example
- 44 Quasimodo at work
- 43 Wolfson of Freedom to Marry
- 46 "Can't get out of it"
- 47 Writer Reinaldo
- 48 South Carolina beach name
- 51 Able to bend over
- 53 Went without saying?
- 55 Pussy ____ of punk rock
- 56 Suffix with prefer
- 57 Police incursion at Stonewall
- 59 Be a branch manager?
- 60 OR workers

See p. 15 for answers

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STFU

Continued from page 12

medical oversight body and have been studied extensively. A 2020 peer-reviewed study found a distinct correlation between puberty blocker access during adolescence and a decrease in suicidal ideation.

Murphy was taken to task for the comments, and then, in a refreshing move, she cleaned up her mess. She shut up, listened up and sincerely apologized. "I cannot apologize enough for being the reason for this eruption of damaging and potentially dangerous social-media fire and brimstone," Murphy posted on X. "To witness the ramifications of my actions and the divisions it has caused is heartbreaking.

She also spoke directly to her LGBTQ+ fanbase, noting that she had spent her whole life "celebrating diversity and different views, but I never patronize or cynically aim my music directly at the pockets of any demographic."

It's a good example of messing up and at least earnestly trying to make things right.

You know what's even better, though? When people with platforms apply self-restraint in the first place. It can feel frustrating when a celebrity refuses to weigh in on sensitive topics. "Just tell us what you think already!" we might implore. It can feel like they are trying to play both sides. And don't get me wrong — there are topics when silence isn't an option, especially when it comes to LGBTQ+ rights. There actually is a wrong and right side on issues where we're actually talking about human rights. LGBTQ+ rights are human

rights. Full stop.

But it's not actually a bad thing when we don't hear, say, Dolly Parton, chiming in about trans athletes. I certainly know where I'd like her to land on that issue, but I also am OK with her tendency to always focus on humanity versus wandering outside her lane. Her message is "All people deserve love" and she backs that up with supportive action alongside the queer community, again and again. I don't actually need to know her opinion about what percentage of testosterone should be the maximum for trans women in sports or what the appropriate medical treatment is for a specific trans child.

Ultimately, this is a situation where prevention is key, and it's a lesson from which we can all benefit. Before we even open our mouths (or when we're hovering over the keyboard), we can ask ourselves: Does this need to be said? Right now? By me?

It can be fun (or cathartic) to rant, especially into the social media void, but when it comes to complicated, sensitive issues on topics that are extremely personal, we're just not adding to the conversation when we fire off a non-expert tangent, and neither are celebrities with highly influential platforms. In fact, we could be hurting the cause, and we already have politicians for that. They're doing a fine job destroying the lives of trans people and the people who love them without any input from wildly out-of-touch metal singers like Paul Stanley and Dee Snider.

In a world where you can be anything, be the person who knows when to STFU and listen. Be a Dolly; never a Nugent.

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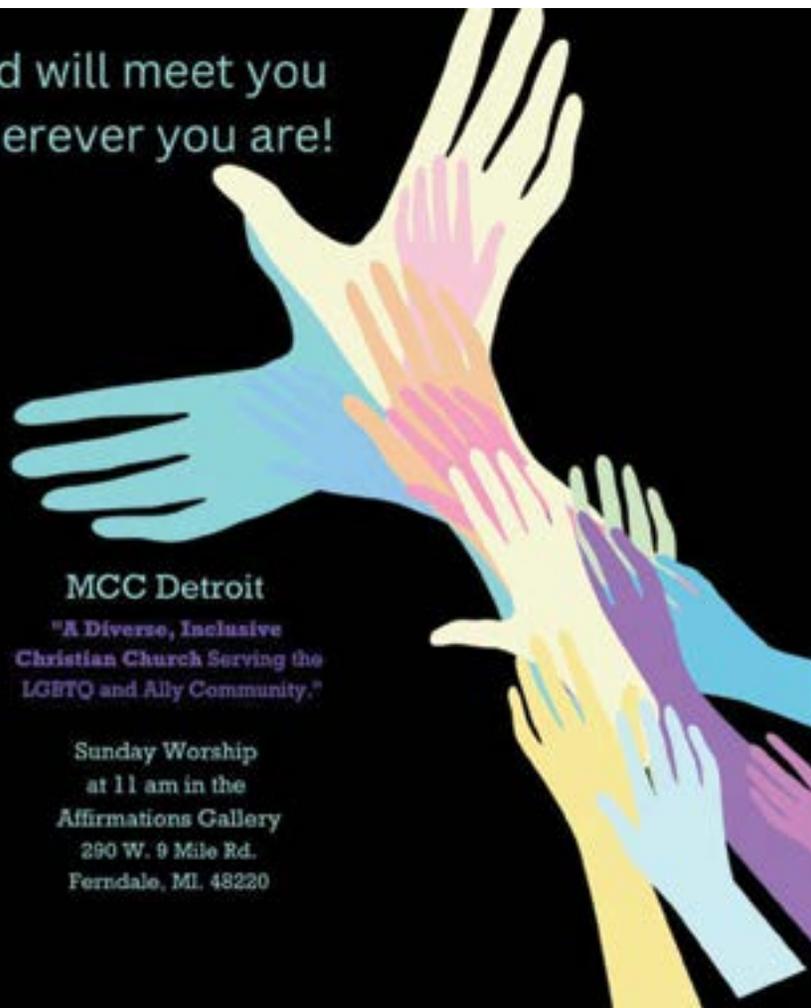
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Tell Me More: What Is the ‘Weight Loss Wonder Drug’ Semaglutide All About?

PRESENTED BY ELIZABETH MED SPA

For decades, doctors and scientists have been steadfast in their insistence that there is no “magic pill” for weight loss, so it’s hard not to be skeptical about all the buzz surrounding high-profile drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy. These drugs, among others, include the active ingredient Semaglutide, and it turns out, there just might be some magic — or very compelling science — at work here.

This weekly medication is FDA-approved, has minimal side effects and can boost the results of healthy lifestyle changes to promote weight loss.

How does Semaglutide work for weight loss?

Originally developed to tackle diabetes, the drug belongs to the GLP-1 receptor agonist family, and it knows how to play the appetite game like a pro. Essentially, the drug mimics the action of a natural hormone in the body that regulates appetite.

Semaglutide interacts with the brain’s hunger control center — patients feel full faster and have fewer cravings. It also slows down your stomach’s emptying speed, increasing the length of time between urges to eat. If your digestive system is a highway, Semaglutide is that slow vehicle that jumps in front of you in the left lane. Semaglutide also helps your body regulate blood sugar, which reduces sugar cravings and excessive hunger.

None of these mechanisms are actually magical, but these drugs help people clear hurdles that consistently get in the way of our best intentions and trick us into thinking we “have no willpower” or that we are somehow not trying hard enough. The conversation around weight loss in the medical and scientific communities has dramatically shifted because of the research related to these medications — biology is absolutely at play, and it’s every bit as important as mindset. Semaglutide addresses the biological differences impacting many people living

with obesity.

Does it really work?

In a word, yes. It really works. There is good reason for all the buzz. For patients with appropriate indications, semaglutide injections can be a “game changer” for weight loss among overweight individuals. Studies show that patients typically lose 10-20% of body weight or more with semaglutide injections combined with eating a balanced diet and regular physical activity.

A 2022 peer-reviewed study revealed that on average, overweight and obese study participants lost around 15 pounds in 3 months and 30 pounds within 6 months. Since these are average figures, some people lost more and some, less. Because these drugs have become so popular, there is a wealth of information online, including online forums where people chat about their successes, too. Not surprisingly, those who combine Semaglutide with healthy lifestyle adjustments like exercise tend to see the best results.

Semaglutide is definitely working

for local Elizabeth Med Spa patient Chase Yarnell, who says, “I feel and look great! Since starting Semaglutide I have lost over 50lbs.”

Is it safe?

Semaglutide has been rigorously tested since 2008 and has been used for diabetes management since 2012. Researchers have determined that the drug is very safe when used under the direction of a qualified medical professional.

Still, Semaglutide is not without a few unpleasant side effects, many of which may subside over time. Patients can experience digestive issues like nausea, vomiting and diarrhea — sometimes to a severe extent. These side effects may subside and then return when dosage is increased.

Learn More About Semaglutide

In a world where the scales tip too often in favor of obesity, Semaglutide is a shining ray of hope. With its super appetite-controlling powers, it’s here to help you reclaim your waistline, one satisfied stomach at a time. Just remember, while this

weight loss wonder drug works its magic, it’s essential to maintain a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet and some good ol’ exercise.

The LGBTQ+ community, like other demographics, often faces medical stigma when seeking treatment for conditions like obesity. Elizabeth Med Spa offers a safe, affirming environment for the queer community with specialists ready to work with you to find a comfortable, achievable weight loss program, including Semaglutide treatment. Reach out today online (elizabethmedspa.com) or by phone at (248) 268-1655 to set up a free consultation to find out if Semaglutide is right for you.

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