

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between the Lines™

PURRFECTLY INCLUSIVE
Michigan's Cat Cafes:
Where Pride Meets Paws

'WE CAN'T GO BACK'
Rep. Jason Morgan Urges
Voters to Take Action

AFFIRMATION AT TEMPLE BETH EMETH
Why Local Queer Jews Are
Flocking to Ann Arbor

DRAWING STRENGTH FROM NATURE

Graphic novelist Meggie Ramm
on inspiring LGBTQ+ youth

By Ashley D'Souza

SPRING CLEAN UP!

Whole-House Savings!



Create a positive mindset and a healthier living space when you get your home Hagopian Clean. Refresh your home now from top to bottom and save!

AIR DUCT CLEANING

\$100 OFF

State-of-the-art Cyclone System Air Duct Cleaning

Must present coupon. Some restrictions apply. Not to be combined with any other coupons/offers. Expires 5/31/24

CARPET CLEANING

\$135

2 Rooms + Hall In-Home Carpet Cleaning

Must present coupon. Up to 250 sq. ft. each room. Some restrictions apply. Not to be combined with any other coupons/offers. Expires 5/31/24

DROP-OFF RUG CLEANING

2 FOR 1

Bring your rugs to any of our drop-off locations and we'll clean every other one **FREE!**

Must present coupon at time of rug drop-off. Some restrictions apply. Not to be combined with any other coupons/offers. Expires 5/31/24

PICK-UP & DELIVERY SERVICE

\$25 OFF

Rug and/or Outdoor Cushion Cleaning Pick-up & Delivery Service

Must present coupon at time of pick up. Some restrictions apply. Not to be combined with any other coupons/offers. Expires 5/31/24



OUTDOOR CUSHION CLEANING

Bring your outdoor cushions, pillows, umbrellas and rugs in today so you'll be ready to enjoy your outdoor spaces.

The Most Trusted Name in Cleaning Since 1939

HAGOPIAN CLEANING SERVICES

1-800-HAGOPIAN (424-6742)

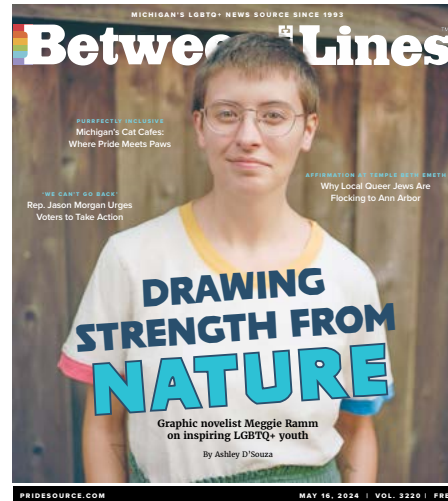
HagopianClean.com

SCHEDULE ONLINE!



- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 Why a Jewish Temple in Ann Arbor Is Welcoming Queer Jews with Open Arms
- 8 How Graphic Artist Meggie Ramm Draws Strength from Nature
- 10 Op-Ed: A Vote for Biden Is a Vote for the LGBTQ+ Community
- 11 The Scroll: 'Idol' Star, Local Drag Legends Join 2024 Motor City Pride Lineup
- 12 Open Letter to Robert Gruss, Anti-Gay Catholic Bishop and My Neighbor
- 16 Purrfectly Queer-Affirming Feline-Forward Coffee Shops in Michigan Offer Alternative Safe Spaces
- 18 Queer Folk®: Coming Soon to a Coffee Shop — or Ceasefire Action — Near You
- 20 A Window to Infinite Worlds: 'I Saw the Glow' Actor Justice Smith on Finding Refuge in Pop-Culture Fandom

Page 8



VOL. 3220 • MAY 16, 2024

ISSUE 1252

PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP

www.pridesource.com
Phone 734-263-1476

PUBLISHERS

Benjamin Jenkins
benjamin@pridesource.com

Publishers Emeritus: Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

EDITORIAL

Editorial Director

Chris Azzopardi
chris@pridesource.com

Managing Editor

Sarah Bricker Hunt
sarah@pridesource.com

CREATIVE

Cartoonists

Paul Berg

Graphic Designer

Sarah Wolf

Contributing Photographers

Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen

ADVERTISING & SALES

sales@pridesource.com

Carolyn Cardenas

734-263-1476

carolyn@pridesource.com

Tim Powers

734-263-1475

tim@pridesource.com

Ann/Andy Cox, 248-613-2513

anncox@pridesource.com

National Advertising Representative

Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

MEMBER OF

Michigan Press Association

National LGBT Media Association

National Gay & Lesbian Chamber

Q Syndicate



"Pride Source"



Follow us @pridesource



@pridesourcemedia



Pride Source



Email your op-eds to
editor@pridesource.com



Sign up online to receive our E-Digest

Our rate cards are available online. All material appearing in Between The Lines is protected by federal copyright law and may not be reproduced in whole or part without the permission of the publishers. Between The Lines is supported by many fine advertisers, but we cannot accept responsibility for claims made by our advertisers, nor can we accept responsibility for materials provided by advertisers or their agents.

Copyright 2024

Delivered ~~Straight~~ to Your Mailbox

Support LGBTQ+ journalism and get BTL delivered to your door for just \$95/year or \$10/month.

WWW.PRIDESOURCE.COM/SUBSCRIBE

5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It somehow feels like 2024 is still just getting started, but here we are, racing toward the halfway point. The good news is that there are still many adventures to come, including the upcoming Pride season.

It's the ideal time for joining up with your local queer community for adventures like a paddling trip on the Rogue River with a queer outdoor enthusiasts group, working up your courage to join a comedy open-mic in Ypsilanti, seeing the latest Out Loud Chorus show or joining like-minded activists working to fight for a ceasefire in Gaza. It's also time to start making a plan to visit as many Michigan Pride fests as possible — good luck, there are more than ever.



Past Michigan Pride events. Photos: BTL Archives

Start Planning Your Summer of Pride

The countdown is in full swing, with the first Pride fests in Michigan just a few weeks away. Don't miss big events like Ferndale Pride (June 1), Motor City Pride (June 8-9) and Grand Rapids Pride (June 22) and small Pride fests all over Michigan (including the U.P.). Our 2024 Pride Calendar has all the details.

Visit bit.ly/4bf253y. Follow BTL and PrideSource.com for Michigan Pride-related content you won't find anywhere else!



Inclusive Open Mic Comedy Nights in Depot Town

Each Wednesday night at 734 Brewing Company in Ypsilanti's Depot Town neighborhood, Depot Town Comedy and host Lisa Green offer a safe, queer-affirming space for stand-up comedians and other performers working on comedic entertainment. Past shows have included special appearances by local drag queen Zooney Gaychanel, who recently launched her stand-up comedy career, and a long list of brave, hilarious local comedians eager to hone their craft. Check out the line-up of pre-selected comics on Facebook and Instagram @depottowncomedy and add your name at the door.

Wednesdays, 734 Brewing Company (15 E. Cross St., Ypsilanti), 7:30 p.m. Visit annarbor.org/events for more info.



Artwork by Out Loud Chorus. Photo: Facebook/@outloudchorus

Watch Out Loud Chorus Perform 'Queers! Queers! Queers!'

Ann Arbor's Out Loud Chorus, a mixed-gender LGBTQ+ and ally ensemble that has been dazzling audiences since 1995, will offer what is perhaps its queerest show ever on May 17 and 18 at the intimate Arthur Miller Theatre in Ann Arbor. A livestream is available on May 17.

Appropriately titled "Queers! Queers! Queers!," selections include music created by queer performers, composers and lyricists like Lil Nas X, Samuel Barber, Janelle Monáe, Franz Schubert, George Michael and Michigan composer Brandon Ulrich, whom the chorus commissioned for the concert.

May 17-18, various times (livestream on May 17 at 8 p.m.), Arthur Miller Theatre (1226 Murfin Ave., Ann Arbor). Find tickets at olconline.org/events.



4

Take a Pride Paddle Trip on the Lower Rogue River

Join up with Friends of the Rogue and The Queer Outdoors, a local queer social club for outdoor enthusiasts, to paddle down the Rogue River on May 18. The Pride Paddle route runs from Dearborn Hills Golf Course to Ford Field Park. Fees include safety equipment, paddles and your choice of kayak or canoe. The Queer Outdoors offers friendly, queer-affirming group outings in Southeast Michigan throughout the year, including hiking, camping and foraging adventures, all geared toward a range of experience levels. Learn more at meetup.com/the-queer-outdoors.

May 18, 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m., Dearborn Hills Golf Course (1300 S. Telegraph Road, Dearborn). Sign up in advance at motorcitycanoerental.com/fotr-events.php.



Get Involved in a Queer-Led Ceasefire Effort

Michigan Ceasefire Pride, a newly established queer organization, invites the Michigan queer community to join efforts calling for a stop to ongoing, escalating violence in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Palestine. One such effort centers on gathering signatures for the Michigan Ceasefire Pride Petition, available at bit.ly/3yeW3Bs. Learn more about how to get involved at instagram.com/MICeasefirePride.

A poster for the musical 'PRISM HITS THE ROAD'. The background shows a man in a tuxedo singing into a microphone on stage. The text 'PRISM' is at the top with colored dots below it. Below that, 'HITS THE ROAD' is written in large white letters. Underneath, it says 'A MUSICAL ROADTRIP ACROSS THE NATION!'. The date and time 'MAY '24 31 8PM' are prominently displayed. At the bottom, it says 'MACOMB CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS' and 'BUY YOUR TICKETS AT: WWW.PRISM-CHORUS.ORG'. There is also a QR code and a 'SCAN ME' icon.



Ari Marcotte (left) and Ari Smith. Photo: Andrew Cohen

Why a Jewish Temple in Ann Arbor Is Welcoming Queer Jews with Open Arms

Two LGBTQ+ temple leaders dish on what makes this space so special for queer Jews

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Ari Smith was a little worried when her rabbi called to ask her about something he was noticing in her part of the sanctuary during weekly services at Temple Beth Emeth, a Reform Jewish synagogue in Ann Arbor. “I was thinking ‘No! He’s noticed I’m talking or something during his sermon,’” she recalls, laughing about the interaction almost two years ago.

“Actually, he had noticed that a lot of young queer people were kind of grouping up together,” she continues, “and he wondered if there was anything we needed. What would make this better for us? How could [Beth Emeth] be more welcoming?”

It only took a little encouragement from Rabbi Josh Winston before Smith, a lesbian, along with Beth Emeth members like non-binary trans religious education leader Ari

Marcotte, who uses they/them pronouns, were off and running with plans to engage the temple’s queer congregants. Smith soon founded Mishpacha, a thriving LGBTQ+ affinity group that offers an active calendar of events for local queer Jewish and Jewish-curious community members. The group celebrated its one-year anniversary in February.

Smith says some Mishpacha participants attend Beth Emeth as congregants and follow the

religious tenets of Judaism, while others exclusively seek the familiarity and community spirit inherent in cultural Jewish rituals like monthly Shabbat dinners. “For some folks, it’s really hard to be like, ‘I’m not a religious person,’ but they still have a connection to Judaism in a more secular way. Having a Jewish space where they don’t have to pick between one or the other, but they get to have a Friday night dinner with candles and things like that feels really

welcoming to them.”

Once word got out about Mishpacha, “people just started showing up,” Marcotte says. “It’s a space where you can be queer and Jewish without having to prioritize one over the other in terms of how you interact with people.” The group’s popular Shabbat dinners are held on the third Friday of each month at 6 p.m. at Temple Beth Emeth.

In March, the temple held a Shabbat service commemorating

the annual International Trans Day of Visibility, an event Smith says was created to “highlight the beauty in being trans, the joy that comes from it, and how there is and always has been enough room in Judaism for us all.” The prayers spoken during the service focused on trans and queer experiences and attendees read poetry and sang songs written by members of the community. Aside from Temple Beth Emeth clergy, every speaker was a member of the trans community.

Marcotte tells BTL that creating Mishpacha wouldn't have been possible without support from Rabbi Whinston and the temple, but that community interest and support has been key, as well.

“There's a clear desire for this,” they say. “This isn't something where we're building the space and nobody's coming — people are turning out who haven't been to a synagogue in years.” On the other end of the spectrum are young adults who are brand new to the Jewish faith — especially those representing Gen Z, a demographic that seems increasingly drawn to Judaism in recent years. Marcotte and Smith both note that young adult membership tends to skew queer at Beth Emeth.

“I have my theories, though I'm not a hundred percent certain, about what phenomenon is drawing all of these young, queer people to Judaism,” Marcotte says. “But I love it. I love meeting other queer Jews, and when Ari approached me, I had so many ideas for ways I want to build community here.”

Not long ago, Smith herself was a newcomer at Temple Beth Emeth — and to Judaism altogether. She says the religion had always interested her, especially as a college student, but she kept running into barriers, like a non-supportive partner and doubts about whether she would be fully accepted into the community. After her marriage ended in divorce and her dad was

diagnosed with a serious illness, she says, “I knew I really needed community and that it was the right time for me. I jumped in with both feet and I got really lucky.”

One lucky aspect of Smith's

“There's a clear desire for this. This isn't something where we're building the space and nobody's coming — people are turning out who haven't been to a synagogue in years.”

— Ari Marcotte, Temple Beth Emeth religious education leader

decision to convert to Judaism that didn't appear particularly lucky at first was that the timing coincided with Covid lockdown. But Smith made it work, meeting with Rabbi Whinston once a month over Zoom and directing much of her own studies, which focused mostly on women and queer people in Judaism. As a smaller faith community, Smith says, Beth Emeth conversion students often approach their Judaic studies in a self-directed way.

Smith was drawn to the Reform denomination of Judaism as opposed to Conservative or Orthodox in part because of the way queer people have been welcomed into the fold. “Reform was one of the first to welcome queer people into the Jewish community,” she explains. “It was one of the first to allow gay marriages before it was legal — other branches are really expanding their acceptance now, conservative in particular — but Reform felt the most welcoming while still being religiously sound for me.”

Marcotte says Beth Emeth and the liberal Reform movement have had a long commitment to social justice, anti-racism efforts and giving voice to those who don't typically have a voice.

“There's a strong commitment to uplifting the queer community and doing things like ordaining queer rabbis — it's not exclusive to Reform Judaism but they've been the pioneers. That's part of why our rabbi came to us and said,

explains, “and so doing that from an explicitly queer perspective is a logical next step.” Alongside Smith, Marcotte leads Mishpacha's hybrid in-person and online Torah study groups each Tuesday at 7 p.m.

Around 33% of American Jews identify as Reform, while around 15% practice Conservative Judaism and 8% follow Orthodox Judaism, according to a 2017 Pew Research study. Meanwhile, 29% of American Jews follow a non-denominational Jewish practice.

Because the concept of community is so central to Judaism, Marcotte isn't surprised to see young, queer people exploring conversion, “people who need spiritual nourishment from a religious community but who say ‘Christianity left me with a real bad taste in my mouth and

says. “There's a tradition that the rabbi turns you away three times before you begin classes, and it could take years before you actually finally undergo the final process. There's a lot of studying and writing involved, too, but it's a very rewarding and fulfilling process.”

For the curious, Marcotte suggests reaching out to Jewish people in your friend circle and people you know in the local community to ask questions and to explore resources like a temple's website. The Temple Beth Emeth (templebethemeth.org) site offers a “become a member” page and other resources geared toward people new to the faith. And, of course, there are Mishpacha events where there's a mix of people in various stages of conversion — or who have opted



Ari Smith (left) and Ari Marcotte in front of Temple Beth Emeth. The temple shares space with St. Clare of Assisi Episcopal Church. Photo: Andrew Cohen

“I've noticed a lot of dyed hair and pronouns in this corner of the sanctuary. How can we make you feel as included as possible?”

Marcotte saw a path toward more inclusion through a weekly queer Torah study group. “Judaism already encourages a kind of grappling and struggling with text and history,” Marcotte

I'm seeking to challenge some of the things we take for granted in the secular world because of that cultural Christian narrative.” Still, Marcotte cautions, it's not an easy process, especially compared with the typical conversion practices of many Christian sects. “You don't just walk up and say you want to be baptized,” Marcotte

not to convert yet. “We've had people come who are interested in converting to Judaism, stay for a couple of months and then say they don't think they are ready — and that's fine,” Marcotte says. “There's no sense that once you dip your toe in the water, you have to go all the way in. Curiosity is never a bad thing.”

How Graphic Artist Meggie Ramm Draws Strength from Nature

‘Batcat’ creator on their comics journey and being inspired by Michigan trees



Meggie Ramm. Courtesy photo

BY ASHLEY D’SOUZA

Batcat is pink and round, and maybe you guessed it: part bat and cat. They love a good fish taco, their video games and being alone. And they hate when people question the validity of their multifaceted identity. For Michigan-based comic artist and author Meggie Ramm, the inspiration for the character isn’t actually a bat or a cat.

“Oh my gosh, I am Batcat,” they told BTL. “It’s an allegory for being nonbinary — having

people say there are two options and you can only be one, and deciding that there’s a third option I’m going to stick with and everybody else can just deal with it.”

Batcat is the main character in a two-book-and-counting comic series by Ramm, whose second book in the series, “Batcat: Sink or Swim,” was released in April through Abrams Books. Their comics have also been published in *The New Yorker*. This wasn’t the career they imagined as a kid, though.

While Ramm enjoyed reading comics from

a young age — they savored the funnies in the newspaper every week and had a penchant for “*The Far Side*” — they didn’t originally plan to create comics themselves. While growing up in East Lansing and Grand Ledge, they dreamt of becoming a marine biologist, and in 2009 they entered college to study science.

“I hardcore flunked my science classes, but I took one comic class by chance as a freshman that I did well in and loved,” they said. After their art professor at the University of Michigan suggested they pursue comics,

Ramm switched to art, getting their BFA and eventually earning a graduate degree in comics from the California College of the Arts.

One of Ramm’s first comics jobs was at *The Michigan Daily*, the University of Michigan’s student-run newspaper. At the time, they were still learning how to draw, and their comics consisted mostly of stick figures.

“It was my first attempt at making comics that were funny to people other than just me,” they said. “I was just starting out, so it was really helpful that somebody was there to give

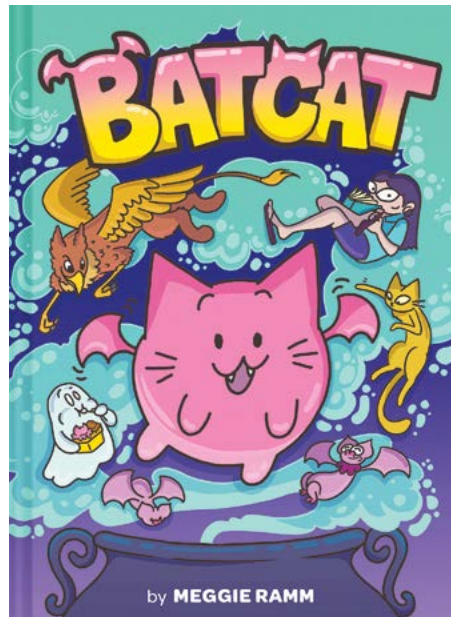
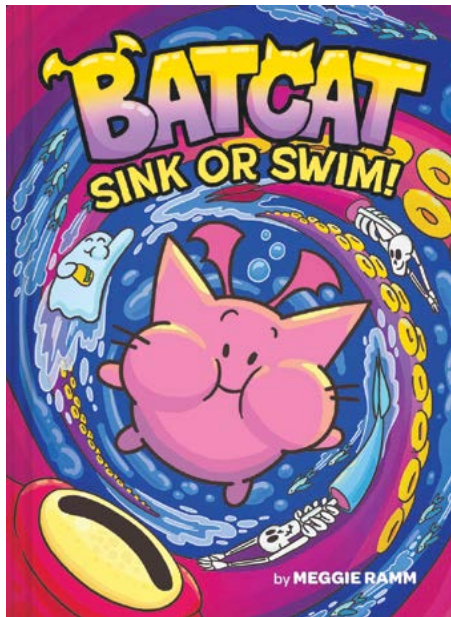
me a chance. I would just submit ideas and they would say yes or no.”

Staying afloat in the comics industry has been a challenge, though, and throughout their 15-year career, Ramm has often considered quitting due to low pay and pitches being turned down. They cited their partner Sam’s support and an ingrained “bullheadedness” from their family’s affinity for marathon training as what kept them from quitting. Their mom even surprised them by getting a Batcat tattoo.

These days, Michigan’s nature is one of Ramm’s primary motivations for continuing to create. After living in California for six

“It’s difficult to navigate because you have to decide if you’re going to call out everybody who does it wrong,” they said. “It can be exhausting.”

Ramm currently works remotely as a comic designer, and their job is based in California. Their current coworkers get their pronouns right, but at their previous job at a bookstore in Chelsea, that wasn’t the case. They have, however, found an accepting queer community as an artist within the comic-book world. That part of their journey aligns with Batcat’s struggle with identity erasure, as Batcat’s dual identities as a bat and a cat are challenged by other characters throughout



years, they moved back and now reside in Chelsea with Sam. They recounted missing Michigan’s natural beauty while living in California — specifically, its trees.

“California has nice trees, but they’re not the right kind,” they said. “And I draw a lot of trees. Michigan is such a beautiful place, and there’s so much here that I want to draw.”

Nature’s influence on Ramm’s work is evident: Batcat lives inside a gnarled oak tree in the middle of a forest, and they encounter various other animals in their adventures, real and mythical. Many of the animals are warm, patient and welcoming, mirroring something else Ramm missed while living in California: the Midwestern charm of where they grew up.

“All the Michigan libraries and bookstores have been so kind,” they said. Ramm gave a shout-out to Sidetrack Bookshop in Royal Oak, which threw a book launch party for them the day “Sink or Swim” was published. “There’s a very Michigan kind of person, and it’s been nice being back here while my books come out because everybody has been so sweet about it.”

However, moving back to Michigan brought a different challenge: being accepted as nonbinary. When Ramm lived in California, many of their friends were also nonbinary, and people generally got their pronouns right. In Michigan, that hasn’t always happened.

the first book. A group of cats claims Batcat will never be one of them, a group of bats questions if Batcat is really part bat because they can’t echolocate, and a skeleton tells Batcat they “don’t look like a bat” but “don’t look like a cat, either.”

By the end of book one, though, Batcat learns to accept themselves, with the help of some wise words from a pair of griffins: “You do not have to be one thing or the other. You can just be you.” Ramm’s message about gender has resonated with readers, and since the book’s release, Batcat has helped children navigate various identity struggles.

“I’ve had parents reach out to me saying their kids have gotten all kinds of different messages from Batcat beyond being nonbinary,” they said. “It’s helped them move back and forth between their different identities and even having divorced parents.”

In “Sink or Swim,” Batcat learns to face their fears and find courage through friendship, all conveyed through Ramm’s deeply affirming storytelling. At the end of the day, though, Ramm cares more about giving readers hope and an escape than instilling a grandiose message.

“Being a kid is hard right now,” they said, acknowledging they’re already working on a third Batcat book. “If I can take a kid out of their worries for just a little bit, that’s enough for me.”



A GREAT PLACE TO START YOUR SOMEDAY

Top Reasons Why Students Thrive at OCC >>



Programs designed for both direct entry into hot careers and university transfer



Save more than \$22,000* when pursuing a 4-year degree



Flexible scheduling and convenient online or in-person classes



Financial aid and more than \$500,000 awarded scholarships each year



Committed to diversity, equity and inclusion



Personalized instruction from faculty with real-world experience

*Based on transferring 60 credits to a public university

Scan Me



Start your someday today.
Schedule a campus tour or attend an admissions event.



OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

oaklandcc.edu/admissions



Beauty Beyond Labels



@IVEYSALON
IVEYSALON.COM
100 S FOURTH AVE,
ANN ARBOR 48105

Op-Ed: A Vote for Biden Is a Vote for the LGBTQ+ Community

State Rep. Jason Morgan on why Trump isn't getting his vote



BY JASON MORGAN

As a proud LGBTQ+ Michigander, I know there's only one choice this November to protect our community's rights and freedoms — and that's a vote for President Biden and Vice President Harris.

I am all too familiar with the hate that still exists among MAGA extremists. You only have to look at their constant attempts to rip away our freedom to simply exist — in classrooms, at nightclubs and even at work.

When extremist MAGA Republicans demonize and spread hate about our community, it has very real consequences: Nearly half of all LGBTQ+ kids in Michigan have considered suicide.

I don't have to tell the LGBTQ+ community our rights are under constant attack by extreme MAGA Republicans. We know.

We watched as a majority of Republicans voted against LGBTQ+ protections in our civil rights bill in Michigan. We witnessed state legislators across the country introduce a record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills last year. And we still feel the civil rights "whiplash" of four years ago, when former president Donald Trump



the LGBTQ+ community access the care they need without discrimination.

It's a stark contrast to President Biden and Vice President Harris — two champions for the LGBTQ+ community. They believe everyone should be treated with respect and dignity and deserve to live without fear no matter who they are or who they love and have made it a priority starting on day one to protect our freedom to show up as our authentic selves.

From championing The Respect for Marriage Act, a law that protects same-sex couples to issuing an executive order focused on ensuring transgender Americans can serve their country like everyone else, President Biden and Vice President Harris are fighting back against MAGA Republican hate and moving us forward.

These aren't just symbolic actions. President Biden is making a real difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ children.

He's strengthening mental health resources for LGBTQ+ youth, addressing book bans within the Department of Education, and tackling other issues LGBTQ+ children face, including homelessness and foster care.

President Biden and Vice President Harris have also

strengthened the Affordable Care Act for the LGBTQ+ community and fought to ensure everyone can receive the best possible health care, including gender-affirming care.

It's simple: A vote for Biden is a vote for progress and safety of the LGBTQ+ community and a vote for Donald Trump is a vote against it.

Trump is pushing hateful culture wars. He wants to drag us back into the past and enact hateful laws that would rip away our freedoms and reverse the progress we've made under President Biden.

We are at a crossroads in this country, and we can't afford to return to a White House that hates our existence.

This November, I'm proudly OUT for Biden — someone who has fought for our protections and civil liberties time and time again. We owe it to our LGBTQ+ community across our state and country to mobilize, organize and show up at the ballot box to re-elect President Biden, the only candidate fighting for our existence, our rights and our freedoms.

State Rep. Jason Morgan is serving his first term representing the 23rd House District. Over the last 15 years, Rep. Morgan has worked in various leadership positions in Michigan and Washington, D.C., including serving for six years as a Washtenaw County commissioner and was elected as the county's first-ever LGBTQ-identified person to serve as chair of the Board of Commissioners. His passions include addressing economic and social inequality, LGBTQ+ rights, transportation and infrastructure, access to quality public education and protecting the health of our environment.

“It's simple: A vote for Biden is a vote for progress and safety of the LGBTQ+ community and a vote for Donald Trump is a vote against it.”

threatened and reversed hard-earned LGBTQ+ rights and protections.

As president, Trump gutted President Obama and Vice President Biden's anti-discrimination protections, appointed judges who oppose same-sex marriage, and played a key role in the military's transgender ban. If reelected, he'll punish doctors who treat transgender youth and repeal the Affordable Care Act, which helps

'Idol' Star, Local Drag Legends Join 2024 Motor City Pride Lineup

Let the countdown begin. Now that Motor City Pride, set for June 8-9 at Hart Plaza, has announced its annual music line-up, the 2024 Pride in Michigan Season is officially underway.

Headliner Loren Allred, an ally, will hit the Pride Stage on Saturday, June 8 at 6 p.m. Allred is best known for the soaring, soulful "Never Enough," featured in "The Greatest Showman" — a live performance of the track earned Allred a Golden Buzzer on "Britain's Got Talent" in 2022. Allred told LadyGunn in 2021 that her biggest fans are part of the LGBTQ+ community: "I feel like I really connect with them on a level that I can't connect with other people, and I just try to give back as much as I can," she said.

Genderfluid headliner Kyle Dion will take the Pride Stage on Sunday. Dion is sure to bring unique, powerful energy to the stage. His song "I Could Be

Your Girlfriend" embodies his true spirit, he told Very Good Light in 2021. "It's speaking on gender fluidity," he told the outlet. "What the standard of genders are meant to portray in society, what we should wear, how we should act and that the way or what we wear defines our sexuality in a sense, and that's not true."

Other Pride Stage performers include Michigan's own PRISM Chorus. Hometown drag queen Sabin will perform multiple times throughout the weekend and emcee the Pride Stage.

You can also catch entertainers like Sing Out, Flamy Grant and Thaylane and performers on the Riverfront Dance Stage like drag artist Kass, local DJ Raedylex, DJ Stacey "Hotwaxx" Hale and Rimarkable. Find the full lineup at motorcitypride.org.



Kyle Dion. Photo: kyledion.co



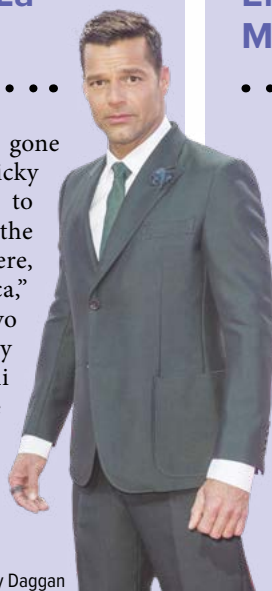
New Michigan Pride Fests Set for 2024

LGBTQ+ rights are under attack all over the country, including efforts by conservative leaders throughout Michigan — could it be that the increase in the number of Pride Fests in small pockets of the state is a direct result of these actions? Pride Festivals and marches can be a form of protest, a message to the far right that attacks on our community will not stand and that an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda will not ultimately be a winning strategy in this country.

Check out new Pride festivals in Dowagiac on June 8 (outcenter.org/pridefest), Wyandotte on June 22 (downriverpride.com), South Haven on June 29 (southhaven.org/events/south-haven-pride) and an all new Youth Pride in Kalamazoo on June 23 (outfrontkzoo.org/youthpride2024).

25 Years of 'Livin' La Vida Loca'

Somehow, 25 years have gone by since perennially sexy Ricky Martin, who would go on to come out as gay in 2010 to the delight of queer fans everywhere, released "Livin' La Vida Loca," a true bop for the ages. Vevo is celebrating the anniversary with a behind-the-scenes mini doc about the making of the song's music video. Find it at bit.ly/3UW3O8d.



Ricky Martin. Photo: Kobby Daggan

Emo Nite Returns to Magic Bag

Connect with your inner emo teenager at the Magic Bag in Ferndale on May 24, when Emo Nite returns with a mix of '90s angst rock, 2000s indie emo and modern music featuring an emotional connection. "It's not just about the music," says a press release. "It's about the culture, the love of the scene and finding a place where everyone belongs."

Maya Rudolph Is Your Mother

Maya Rudolph's May 11 "SNL" monologue is sure to go down in the annals of queer entertainment history. "I'm your mother," she intoned in Madonna-esque "Vogue"-speak as she casually dropped several ballroom culture references (fittingly, she claimed to represent the House of Rockefeller) while serving lines like "Who's your favorite funtie? It's me, come on, hunty! I will also turn this car around if you don't stop hitting your sister."



Maya Rudolph, mothering. Photo: NBC

Open Letter to Robert Gruss, Anti-Gay Catholic Bishop and My Neighbor

Please embody the values of gentleness and loving kindness your faith encourages

BY JAMES FINN

Dear Robert,

I hope you don't mind me calling you by your first name even though we don't know one another. I'm writing you human to human, heart to heart, as your neighbor. I'd like to use your first name as a demonstration that I view you as an equal and as quite probably a kind and loving person — values I know your church and faith strongly encourage.

But I also write from a position of pain as a gay man who has often been stigmatized and scorned by men who hold office in the Roman Catholic Church.

Can we talk about it?

I'm writing because you and I are effectively neighbors in both the traditional Christian and the ordinary received sense. You live only about 90 minutes from me, but as you might have guessed, I'm writing about something that happened closer to home, only about 40 minutes away.

I'm 62 years old, Robert, and I was baptized a Catholic in small-town Ohio, where most of my extended family still practice the faith. (We avoid discussing the Michigan/Ohio football rivalry, which I'm sure you can appreciate!)

A cousin of mine who worked as a social worker for decades at a Catholic high school in rural Ohio recently quit her job and started attending Episcopal services. That broke her heart, actually, and she is one of the reasons I'm writing you.

The main reason I'm writing is because of controversy that recently embroiled the bucolic town of Beal City after Father Tom Held apologized to St. Joe parishioners for allowing Dominic Thrasher, a gay man, to read to preschool students from his popular book series about puppies. Dom is a local resident who started writing for small children during the pandemic. People love his gentle books, which are packed



with wisdom about being kind and loving to family, friends and strangers.

Dom is gay, but he doesn't write about that; you'd never guess from his children's books.

Dom and his neighbors were thrilled by his unexpected publishing success. Getting a book into traditional print is like lightning striking! It's a joyous occasion worth celebrating. (Of course, as a novelist who has yet to be traditionally published, I would say that, but I'm sure you understand.)

So, as Dom's neighbors celebrated with him, a friend who teaches at the Father Tom's parish school invited Dom to read to her class.

I'm sure you know the rest.

Some parishioners complained that an openly gay man had been allowed to read to children, and Father Tom responded by sending a letter to every parishioner and

parent, apologizing for letting Dom read, assuring them he'd take steps to see that no openly gay person would ever address students again.

Can I be vulnerable, Robert? When I first read about that, I shed tears of pain and grief.

I admit I was angry too — but infinite, heavy sadness was my predominant emotion. I'm so tired, so bone weary, of being treated as a leper by respected religious leaders. (Who are supposed to care for metaphorical lepers, no?)

I'm so much more than a gay man, Robert, and so is Dom. I don't know him personally, but his neighbors say he's the salt of the earth — generous, kind and trustworthy.

I'd like to think I'm all three of those things too. I'm sure you realize that at my age as a gay man, I survived the worst of the AIDS crisis. Sometimes I feel guilty I'm still alive, because I'm exactly the wrong age to have understood the

risk. Somehow, the virus didn't find me, and I spent 10 years caring for friends and friends of friends as they struggled — often against great physical and emotional pain — to stay alive.

Most of them died despite my spoon-feeding, apartment cleaning, backrubs and love. They died despite my joining street activism to encourage safer-sex messaging, medical research and affordable access to lifesaving treatment.

But that's another story for another day.

After that decade ended and effective treatment created something of a Lazarus effect in my closest circles, my beloved gay partner died, and I lost our home because we had been legally barred from marrying.

I left the country for a while, eventually fell in love again and raised a foster child with my new partner. Our son faced

multiple physical and mental health challenges stemming from abandonment and severe abuse when he was an infant and toddler. (Trust me, you don't want to know the details, though I'm sure you've heard similar stories.)

He wasn't always easy to love, and all the experts warned us he would likely never recover, never be capable of leading a happy or fulfilling life.

But as we persevered with patience, gentleness and kindness, our son proved all the experts wrong. He began to thrive. Against all expectations, he made friends. Eventually, he discovered the joys of romantic love with a young woman he respected and treated like gold. Today, he's a happy, healthy, gentle adult with children of his own.

I don't say any of this, Robert, to pat myself on the back.

At every point in my life, I've done only what seemed necessary and morally virtuous. Often, I've

made mistakes, like we all do. But I've done a lot to love my neighbor as myself and (even though I abandoned Christianity at the age of 16) to emulate the teachings and practices of Jesus.

That's why I cried when Father Tom apologized for Dom's reading and announced a policy that effectively removes him (and me!) from the pool of potential good neighbors in Beal City.

Father Tom's apology reduced Dom (and me!) to one quite small characteristic — sexual orientation.

Robert, you supported Father Tom's decision to ban people like me from parish classrooms, as if we are too toxic and dangerous to be in the presence of children. I understand I might be reducing your support to one unfair dimension, but I ask you to carefully examine how your support for homophobic stigmatization is itself one-dimensional and unjust.

If we got together for a beer and a chat, who would you see? The man who spent a decade caring for the grievously ill, expecting nothing in return? The man who spent years caring for a grievously wounded child despite suspecting I would not be able to truly help him?

Or would you only see a gay man who must be unwelcome in your diocese because of that single characteristic?

Robert, that's why my cousin quit her job at a Catholic school and left her parish in tears to join an Episcopal congregation where she does not feel at home. She could no longer tolerate her bishop's directives to reduce her gay and transgender students to one characteristic and to treat them with effective cruelty instead of gentle kindness.

She tried as hard as she could, and then she gave up, because her values of loving kindness and nurturing had become impossible for her to live out. She tells me she HAD to leave despite the pain, because she HAS to live out her core Christian values. Isn't that

interesting? Is that something you should think about, Robert?

Now I have something especially challenging to bring up, and I ask you to think about it carefully, withholding judgement and considering deeply.

Did you know seven Michigan high school boys recently stalked and beat a gay undergrad couple in the main MSU library? The boys didn't like how the couple looked, apparently angered by their clothing, which they objected to for appearing gay.

The boys punched the couple while yelling anti-gay slurs, and they broke one of the young men's fingers in the process.

One set of parents rushed up to East Lansing from Ann Arbor to drive the couple to the hospital. As you can imagine, everyone involved felt terrified and traumatized.

Here's the challenging part, Robert: I believe you bear some indirect responsibility for that attack.

Oh, I know you probably deplore it and would urge your flock never to indulge in open hatred or violence. But did you know that teenage physical attacks on LGBTQ+ people have quadrupled in recent years from an already significant baseline?

Why?

Adults are talking, and children are listening. Modeling. Emulating.

And Robert?

You and Father Tom are some of the people they're listening to.

What do you think children learn when you teach them by example that gay people are unfit to read books about puppies to other children? What do you think children learn when you promise parents that students will never again have to be in the presence of gay people?

Kids are smart. They often see past bullshit and drill right down to the heart of things — for better or worse.

I know the Catholic Catechism calls for avoiding unjust discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, and I know it calls for treating us with respect. But

the same passage calls us depraved and disordered, ugly words very hard to reconcile with respect.

So, children look to you and other Catholic leaders to help them cope with the evident dissonance. When you show them gay people should be kept away from children, you resolve that dissonance in quite an ugly way.

In my opinion, you resolve it in favor of behavior a certain Jesus of Nazareth urged his followers to reject. (Remember him praising the traditionally reviled Samaritan?)

I don't hold you directly responsible for the violence at Michigan State, but I urge you to accept indirect responsibility and to begin fostering dialogue to counter such sentiment and behavior. As an influential cultural and religious leader, you have a responsibility to work to enhance social cohesion, grow love and encourage kindness.

I believe you made a big mistake endorsing Father Tom's stigmatizing behavior, but since we all make mistakes, I don't think that makes you some kind of monster. I think it makes you someone who needs to learn and grow.

As your neighbor, I ask to you to thoughtfully consider my position. I don't want to live in fear of violence, and I don't deserve to — not because of anything special about me, but because I'm a human being for whom dignity and respect ought to be a birthright.

Dignitas Infinita, ring a bell?

If we ever do get together for that beer, maybe we can practice our Latin together and talk about love — about the human capacity for love and the need to encourage the practice of love.

What do you think, Robert? Am I making any sense?

Yours in hope,

James Finn

Former Catholic and current loving human being

YOU & ME

Two-Stone Rings



SCAN TO SHOP

Two-Stone Rings



SCAN TO LEARN ABOUT

Custom Design



LEWIS JEWELERS
SINCE 1921 "YOUR DIAMOND STORE"

300 S. Maple Rd., Ann Arbor
734.994.5111
LewisJewelers.com



The Center for Relationship Health
Founder and Director Dr. Joe Kort

JOIN CRSH'S
QUEER MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP
Individual, Group and Couples Therapy



Group run by:
Gregg Johnson, LMSW
Steven Taylor, LMSW



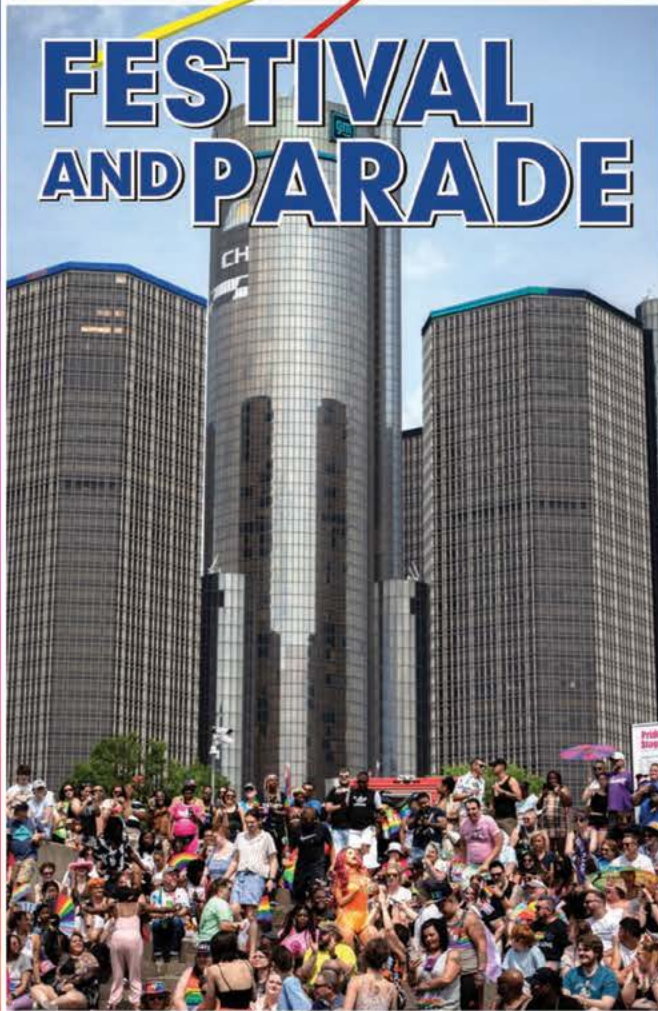
www.crsh.com | 248-399-7447
25600 Woodward Ave., Suite 215, Royal Oak
First Wednesday & Third Friday of Every Month

Scan for more info or go to crsh.com

MOTOR CITY PRIDE DETROIT

HART PLAZA
JUNE 8 & 9, 2024

FESTIVAL AND PARADE



www.motorcitypride.org #motorcitypride



Family Activities

Sponsored by 



Join other families as they participate in face painting, arts and crafts, pl

2024 SPONSORS



DELTA



Pride



SUNTORY
GLOBAL SPIRITS



Be a part of our team,
sign up to be a volunteer.

motorcitypride.org



Saturday

JUNE 8TH

12:00-5:00 P.M.

Sunday

JUNE 9TH

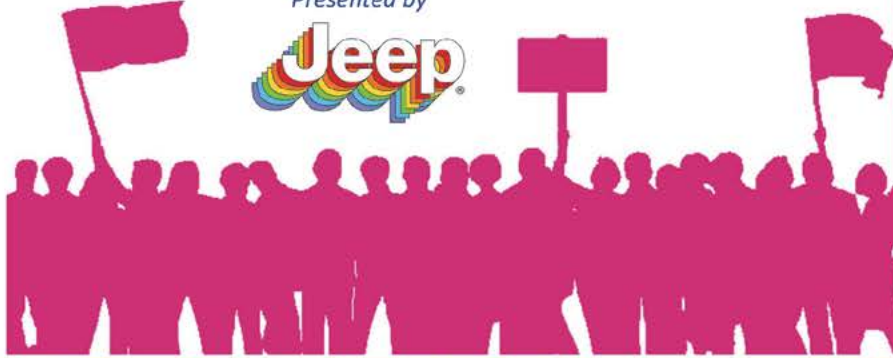
12:00-5:00 P.M.

Participate in
and much more!



PARADE

Presented by



Sunday, June 9

**Starts
at Noon**

Starts at the corner
of Fort and Griswold



Detroit

DAIMLER TRUCK



GE Aerospace

L A Z B O Y



United Way
for Southeastern Michigan



EXPECT
something
MORE



BasBlue



GENERAL DYNAMICS
Land Systems



Mercedes-Benz
Financial Services



METRA!



StockX



PURRFECTLY QUEER—AFFIRMING FELINE—FORWARD COFFEE SHOPS IN MICHIGAN OFFER ALTERNATIVE SAFE SPACES

Drag queen bingo AND cats in one place is our new mood board



A welcoming feline friend at The Catfé Lounge in Ferndale. Courtesy photo

BY KATE ANTONIADES

While the world's first cat cafes opened in Taiwan and Japan in the late '90s and mid-'00s, the U.S. didn't get its own permanent cat cafe (as opposed to pop-ups) until 2014. Just one year later, The Catfé Lounge, Michigan's first cat cafe, opened its doors in Ferndale.

You'll find cat cafes and lounges all over the state, including Tiny Lions in Ann Arbor, Kitty Catfé in Macomb County and the three cafes highlighted here.

Cat cafes let visitors mingle with adoptable felines while enjoying coffee and treats. Many also host events such as yoga classes, crafting activities and board game meetups. Several cat cafes in central and southern Michigan provide something extra by welcoming the local LGBTQ+ community and

being intentionally inclusive to all.

The combination of unconditional cat love (eh, from most cats) and the unconditional welcome from cafe staff and volunteers make cat cafes perfect for hanging out in an affirming space while potentially gaining a new four-legged family member.

Here's a few in Michigan that you'll go "meow" over.

The Catfé Lounge (Ferndale)

While the typical cat cafe is a business that partners with a local rescue group or shelter, The Catfé Lounge is run by the Ferndale Cat Shelter. The suburban Detroit spot features floor-to-ceiling windows, a cheery floral mural and free

coffee and tea. A volunteer-created pollinator garden welcomes visitors just outside the entrance, while bird feeders serve as feline entertainment.

Usually, about 30 cats are in residence here, with more than 100 others living in temporary foster homes. In 2023, the Ferndale Cat Shelter found homes for more than 700 homeless felines.

The cafe is committed to fostering an inclusive environment, and customers recognize it as a safe space, says Deanne Iovan, founder and executive director. "I think they feel comfortable coming in here and know that they're going to be welcomed — warmly welcomed — and accepted."

The volunteers are a diverse group, too, she says. "A lot of [them], and a lot of our adopters and fosters, are part of the LGBTQIA community."

Kevin Kearney, shelter manager

(and former pastry chef), says many volunteers and guests are neurodiverse, too, and they also feel welcomed.

A more visual sign of the cafe's inclusive nature is its participation in Pride, and its Pride merch. In 2023, for example, the Catfé created a T-shirt depicting a cat with a rainbow bandana, with the message "Join Our Pride." Proceeds from the shirts, which were a big hit with Catfé visitors, benefited the community pet food pantry.

Constellation Cat Cafe (East Lansing)

Not long after opening, Constellation Cat Cafe faced a major challenge that Kelsey Maccombs, founder and executive director,

couldn't have predicted. The cafe welcomed its first customers in September 2019, and just months later, the COVID-19 lockdown struck.

With some adjustments, the cafe made it through, and so far, it has placed more than 2,000 homeless cats, according to Paula Crow, social media manager. The Constellation crew cares for 20 to 25 kitties at a time and performs five to 10 adoptions a week.

The cafe's temporary feline residents come from two local groups: Happy Feet Pet Rescue and Saved by Zade. Happy Feet has partnered with Constellation Cat Cafe for almost three years, and in 2023 adopted out more than 100 cats through the cafe, says Constellation

See **Cat Cafes**, page 24



Delivering Amazing Quality since 1892.

800-862-8667 | www.nortonsflowers.com
We Deliver the **WOW!**



LOCATIONS IN YPSILANTI & ANN ARBOR



CLYDE'S

A play by
Lynn Nottage

**APR 24 TO
JUNE 2**

Tickets at
313.974.7918 or
DetroitPublicTheatre.org

“Fast-paced and uproariously funny, CLYDE'S is a spicy feast for the senses.”

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES



**“WHEN I FIRST WENT TO THE CLINIC,
I HAD NO IDEA I WAS WALKING INTO
A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE.”**

– Bridgette, Vivent Health patient

At **UNIFIED/Vivent Health**, our goal is to help you achieve your health goals. That's why each person who comes through our doors gets a customized team of care and service providers—because your needs are unique, and your care should be too.



Here for you now and into the future.

Offices in Detroit and Ypsilanti • Office Hours: M-F 9-5



Scan the QR code for more information.

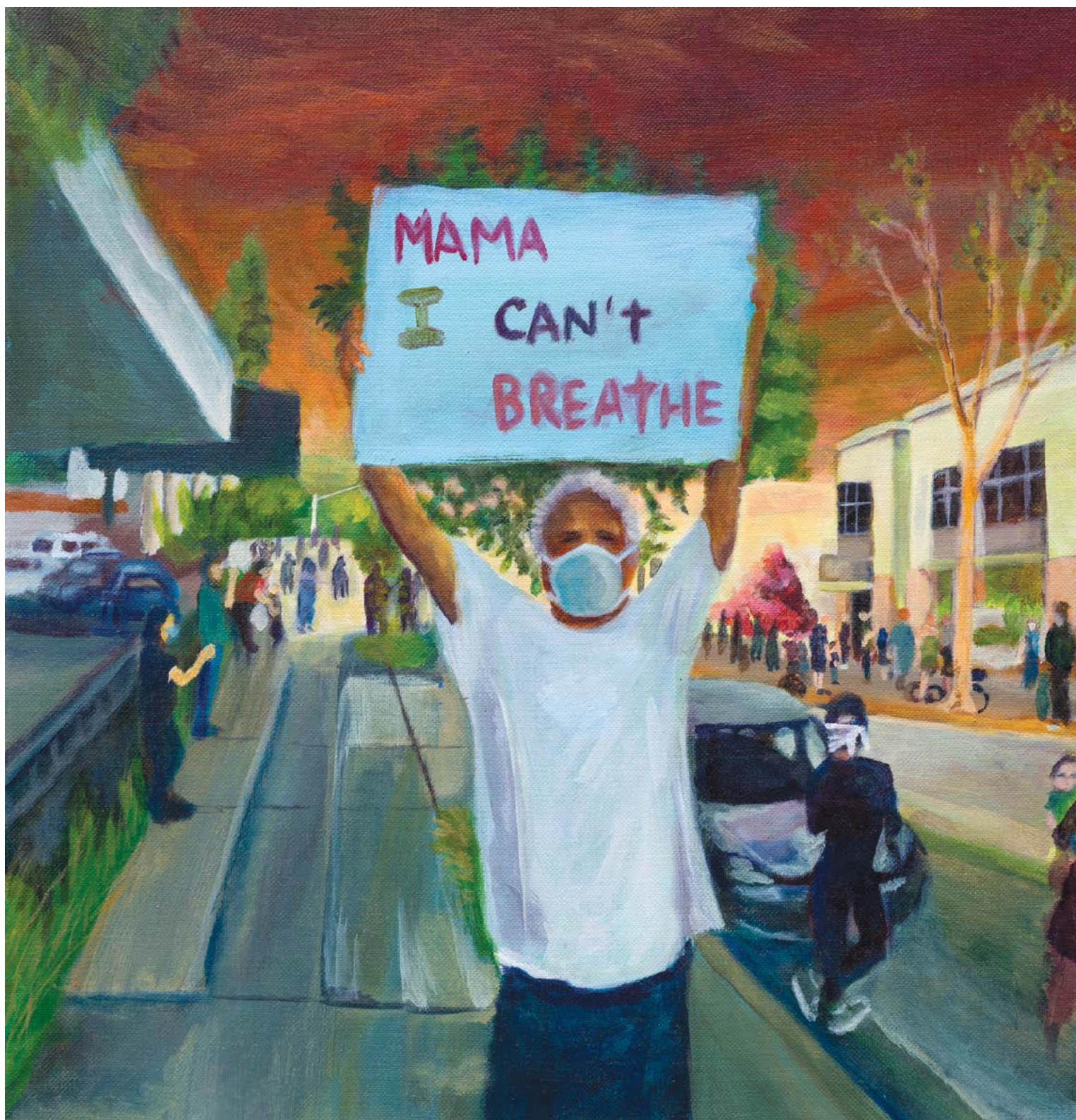
OFFERING

- SOCIAL SERVICES
- FOOD PANTRY
- TESTING SERVICES
- SEXUAL HEALTH HOTLINE

If you have questions, please contact us at **UNIFIED@ViventHealth.org** or **877-266-1821**

COMING SOON MEDICAL • PHARMACY • BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

Queer Folk®: Coming Soon to a Coffee Shop — or Ceasefire Action — Near You



Somewhere near the intersection of artistry and activism sits local musician Amrit Kohli's Queer Folk®, Inc., an incubator for progressive queer artists and activists.

Since founding the group in 1997 with the aim of fostering connection among like-minded artists of all types, Queer Folk® has blossomed into a diverse movement focused on more than simple entertainment — the coalition serves as a platform for societal reflection and change. “We use our platform to raise awareness about issues that affect our community, from queer rights to racial justice to police brutality,” Amrit says. “It’s about using art as a tool for advocacy and empowerment.”

Through performances, art installations and poetry, the coalition addresses pressing issues such as queer rights, racial justice and systemic oppression in a way that Amrit hopes sparks vital conversations and empowers marginalized communities. Recent initiatives, like a Gaza ceasefire advocacy event at Drifter Coffee in Ferndale, exemplify the coalition’s commitment to broader social issues.

“Queer Folk® is more than just a record label; it’s a movement,” Amrit explains. “It’s about creating a space where queer artists from all walks of life can come together, collaborate, and celebrate their unique voices.”

Born in Nairobi, Kenya, Amrit’s personal journey, shaped by his family’s immigrant experiences and early encounters with discrimination, ignited an enthusiasm for both music and social justice and is foundational to why he was inspired to create Queer Folk®. “Music has always

See **Amrit Kohli**, page 22

Artwork by Alma Ponce de León for Amrit Kohli’s upcoming album “Mama! I Can’t Breathe.” Photo: Amrit Kohli

GO GIRL! Saugatuck! 2024

MAY 31 - JUNE 2

Lucky #7
Everybody gets lucky!

Live Music & Comedy
DJ's Dancing Pool Party
Hundreds of Women
Burlesque Drag Kings
Gospel of YOU Brunch

THE DUNES
SAUGATUCK, MI

RESORT ACCOMMODATIONS

WWW.GOGIRLSAUGATUCK.COM

WWW.DUNESRESORT.COM





SUBARU

at Hodges...

RFH-22 FORESTER



Come See Our Inventory

21205 Woodward Ave • Ferndale • MI • 48220
248.547.8800 • www.hodgessubaru.com

HOURS: **MONDAY** - 9:00A.M. - 7:00P.M.
TUESDAY - FRIDAY - 9:00A.M. - 6:00P.M.
SATURDAY - 10:00A.M. - 2:00P.M.

HODGES SUBARU
Metro Detroit's "Subaru-Only Dealer"

EVERYDAY!

EXCELLENT SERVICE • OUTSTANDING SELECTION • FANTASTIC PRICES....

RUTH ELLIS CLAIRMOUNT Health & Wellness Center

LGBTQ+

- GENDER AFFIRMING CARE
- STI TESTING & TREATMENT
- HEALTH NAVIGATION
- CONTRACEPTION
- HIV TREATMENT
- PRIMARY CARE
- PREP

313-484-5888
61 Clairmont Ave.
Detroit, MI 48202

OPEN TO ALL AGES

Ruth Ellis Center

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

HENRY FORD HEALTH



Shop LGBTQ+

PRIDESOURCE.COM

L	I	E	S	A	S	C	A	P	S	F	P	D
A	L	A	N	B	E	R	L	E	V	O	T	E
P	E	S	O	E	M	A	I	L	E	R	A	S
I	F	Y	O	U	L	I	V	E	L	O	N	G
S	T	A	T	S	E	N	E	R	G	I	Z	E
				S	I	S	I	T	R	A	V	I
B	A	N	N	O	M	A	D	L	E	N	S	
E	N	O	U	G	H	A	N	Y	T	H	I	N
A	T	I	P	O	T	T	A	W	A			
V	E	R	S	A	S	N	I	G	G	E	R	S
				T	R	E	E	G	A	R	N	E
S	P	O	R	T	S	M	A	N	R	A	D	I
I	S	P	O	S	S	I	B	L	E	D	I	N
P	A	R	K	A	L	B	E	E	E	V	E	L
S	T	Y	E	Y	E	A	R	N	R	E	D	S

Barry Many Performances
Puzzle can be found on page 25



A Window to Infinite Worlds

'I Saw the TV Glow' actor Justice Smith on finding refuge in pop-culture fandom and his advice for struggling queer youth

Justice Smith in "I Saw the TV Glow." Photo: A24

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

For struggling queer kids, pop culture can be a life-saving escape when faced with an unimaginable reality. This is true for two suburban teenagers who find themselves consumed by a supernatural TV series in "I Saw the TV Glow," especially Owen, whose bedtime prevents him from catching episodes of his new obsession: the mysterious late-night show "The Pink Opaque." But like any youth desperate enough to live in the fantasy of what could be, he finds a way to get what he desperately needs. Owen's access to a world outside of his own is through cool, slightly older high schooler Maddy (Brigitte Lundy-Paine).

Over the course of the film, Maddy and Owen, played by Ian Foreman as a kid and Justice Smith as a teenager, develop a close bond as they share an infatuation for what "The Pink Opaque" represents to them as they grow up and become adults. An homage

to the '90s with a sci-fi flair that resembles the work of David Lynch, "I Saw the TV Glow" premiered at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year to acclaim, with AV Club praising the movie for being a "remarkable portrait of pop-culture obsession — how it can unite us, change us, and ripple down through our entire lives in ways both uplifting and unsettling." A recent commentary on Polygon celebrated the film's queerness, placing "I Saw the TV Glow" among other 2024 films that are "reshaping the possibilities of what a trans film looks like, and how transness can be expressed in cinema."

The writer and director of "I Saw the TV Glow," Jane Schoenbrun, who is trans, was acknowledged in the article for breaking new ground in the horror genre. "The directness of Schoenbrun's usage of thematic and personal metaphors through the guise of horror is a classic storytelling device, but the way these ideas are communicated is startling, singular, and new territory for a mainstream horror

picture," the article notes. For Smith, whose wide-ranging résumé includes "Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom" and Max's queer teen series "Genera+ion," he was immediately drawn to Schoenbrun's vision. All he had to do was read the script.

How did the script initially speak to you as a queer person?

I had no idea what it meant. I really was like, "I don't get this at all and I have to do it," because it was just a vibe, and I had seen "We're All Going to the World's Fair," and Jane has a way of making films that get under your skin, and it was on the page. I was like, "I feel this movie so deeply, even though I don't understand it logically." That drew me to this. I'm really interested in doing unique, different stories that are shepherded by really eccentric minds. I feel like those are the creative voices we should hear from more often.

What appealed to you about Owen?

It was a character epic to me. It tracked this guy over 20, 30 years, and I was like, "That just seems so fun. There's just so much meat here that I feel like it will be really fun to play." But obviously, on first read, I didn't know what it meant at all. I just was like, "Dope." And then when I had a meeting with Jane before I signed onto the film, Jane then kind of broke it down for me and I was like, "Oh my god, that makes so much sense. This is genius."

What was that conversation with Jane like and what clicked about their explanation of the film?

I could just tell that they had a really clear idea of what they wanted to make. To me, the story felt so ephemeral, and I couldn't conceptualize it, really. And I knew it would take somebody with a meticulous eye to bring every detail to life in order to read this overall

picture. And talking to Jane, and seeing how smart they were, and also obviously, seeing their previous movie, I was like, “I feel like I can trust this person.

Once you realized how this film is partly about understanding who you are through pop culture and the need to escape into that world, did anything personal click with you and your own experiences?

When you are a marginalized person growing up specifically in a community that doesn't really see you, I feel like a lot of times we're drawn to representations in media, and that doesn't necessarily mean a character that has our same identities, but just a character who feels like us in some way. I think it offers a lot of solace and a lot of escape from the toxic environments that we live in. So I definitely identified with that.

Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to be an actor, and obviously it's because I enjoyed the pretend world more than the real world, and I was constantly looking for ways to escape. So I get Owen's obsession, and I get why he would go down this dark path of being so invested in this representation of himself. I think it's also safer to kind of tell your story through someone else's. You talk about the pop culture thing you're obsessed with, and you're like, “Oh my god, on this week's episode, she had a fight with her parents, and she's just so misunderstood by them,” and it's like a safe shell. It's a safe way to let people into your inner world.

“

Did you do some filtering in this movie?

For me, in this movie, what Owen was going through wasn't as black and white. For me, it was about letting go. That was a big lesson from this film. Because in previous projects, I put a lot of pressure on myself to be good and really try to listen to music and bridge this gap between me and the character. And with this, I was like, “What if I just trusted myself?” Especially because there was so much I had to track, I was like, “What if I just trust these words and I just trust that when Jane says action, it'll be there for me?” And surprisingly, it was. And so, it was a really profound lesson in showing up authentically, trusting that I had all the tools that I needed to give a meaningful performance and tell this story. It's about authenticity. And here I

Your relationship with yourself is the longest relationship you're ever going to have, so your self-love is the most important love you're going to receive.

am, actually finding mine.

When you think of the polar opposite of this experience in which you had trouble trusting yourself, what project might that have been?

That's messy. [Laughs.] I'll answer it vaguely in the sense that, as a kid, I've already said acting was an escape for me. It really was a catharsis for me. And as it started to become a business and a job, slowly that started to infect my mind, and my approach to my work, and it became less magical and less fun. I remember there being a really pivotal moment that wasn't that long ago actually, where I was like, “I need to return to my original inner child's reason for doing this, because I'm not happy. I feel like I'm really obsessed with quality rather than my own actualization in this process,” which when I got into this, that's all it was about. It wasn't about being a good actor; it was about, “How does this help me heal?” And so, I've been on a journey of returning to that, of just finding how I'm healing through each character I play or each story I tell.

It seems like you're really plugged

See **Justice Smith**, page 26

When you were younger, what was that “safe shell” for you?

There were a lot of movies and television shows. I mean, I was also a really big gamer. I play a lot of video games for hours and hours on end, but that was when I was really young. As I got older, it was acting, like it was plays and characters. And not to be too hippy-dippy about it, but that kind of was my escape. I was just always prepping monologues or trying to do scene analysis on something, and waiting until I got into class in order to perform, because that's kind of where all my pain went. That's where all my mess went, into my performance and into my characters. I still find that to this day. I find that whatever project I'm doing, or whatever character I'm doing, traditionally will mirror my real life, something that's going on in my real life that I can find catharsis in playing that character, because like, “Oh yeah, I know exactly how to filter my own issues into this thing.”

WHAT SPRINGS FORTH

**A World Premiere
by Carey Crim**
directed by Kate Thomsen



 **June 21 - August 31, 2024**
PurpleRoseTheatre.org

The Risk is Not Knowing

Know Your Status! Get Tested!

STI/HIV Clinic - Rapid HIV Testing
FREE Testing and Treatment
Confidential - Appointment Only

- Syphilis
- Gonorrhea/Chlamydia
- Trichomoniasis
- Non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU)
- Scabies
- Pubic lice
- Hepatitis C (Testing Only)



586-465-9217
miscoenbgov.org/departments/health-department

 **Health and Community Services Health Department**

 **Purses 10 & older**

Southwest Health Center
27680 Van Dyke, Suite B
Warren, MI 48093

Central Health Center
43625 Elizabeth Road
Mount Clemens, MI 48043

SPONSORED EDITORIAL

Amrit Kohli
Continued from page 18

been my solace,” he says. “From teaching myself guitar to writing songs that reflect my immigrant experience and activism, it’s been a journey of self-discovery and empowerment.”

Inspired by the works of artists like Ani DiFranco and driven by a desire to challenge societal norms, Amrit says he founded Queer Folk® as a means to amplify marginalized voices and advocate for social change. “I wanted to create a platform where queer artists could express themselves freely, without fear of judgment or discrimination,” he explains.

Despite obstacles he says he has faced along the way, including ongoing discrimination and the censorship of an early album called “9/11” that featured a cover image of the World Trade Center under attack, Amrit remains unwavering in his mission to amplify queer voices and promote inclusivity. Through performances

and social media campaigns, he continues to challenge norms and advocate for a more equitable society.

Looking ahead, Amrit envisions Queer Folk® as a global movement, uniting queer artists worldwide in solidarity and celebration. While Queer Folk® helps promote members of the collective on its website and through social media, Amrit says the group’s mission goes well beyond a typical record label or promoter. It serves to create a sense of community in a time Amrit says our community has been fractured by apps like Grindr and Tinder, which he says separate people into boxes and do little to promote a true sense of community. “We welcome artists of all mediums – musicians, painters, poets — as long as they self-identify as queer and resonate with our values,” Amrit emphasized. “It’s about fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among queer creators.”

Queer Folk® artists like musician Ryan Cassata promote similar vibes through music, while writers like Marques Coley channel peaceful queer energy into written

works of poetry.

In a world often fraught with division, Queer Folk®’s message of love and acceptance serves as a beacon of hope for a more inclusive future. “We live in a society that still marginalizes queer voices, but we’re not afraid to speak out,” he says. “Queer Folk® is a testament to the resilience and creativity of the queer community.”

Amrit envisions Queer Folk® evolving into a global movement, a sort of “traveling bazaar” uniting queer artists from around the world in solidarity and celebration. “Our journey has just begun,” he says. “But with each song we sing, each painting we create, we’re forging a path toward a more inclusive and equitable world.”

Amrit recently announced the forthcoming release of his next (and fourth) full-length album titled “Mama! I Can’t Breathe,” a tribute to George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. The album drops on Juneteenth this year on Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music and just about all the music streaming sites. “Playing our songs, listening to our music and buying

our merchandise is the best way to support our vision and mission,” Amrit says. You can purchase music and other meaningful merchandise on the Queer Folk® website, queerfolk.com.

The album release show will happen at Affirmations’ Ringwald Theatre at 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale on June 19 at 7:30 p.m. This event is organized and hosted by Queer Folk®, Inc. There will be a suggested donation at the door, but the event is free and open to all. As the venue, Affirmations is not involved nor liable for the program or views presented at this event. Also, calling all artists and activists! If you are an artist, musician, poet, activist, public speaker or, in any capacity, an orator, and you are interested in speaking or performing at this Juneteenth event, please get back to Amrit at 415-361-6691 or at amrit@queerfolk.com.

This content is made possible through our partnership with Queer Folk®. Partnerships like these enable Pride Source to produce free, quality storytelling for the LGBTQ+ community.

queer folk®

MAMA I CAN'T BREATHE

queer folk® NO MORE U.S. FUNDED GENOCIDE. END THE APARTHEID STATE. 2024 © queer folk®, inc.

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE



- Transfer your prescriptions today
- Specializing in providing world class HIV pharmaceutical care
- Free HIV Testing
- Pickup free at home HIV testing kits
- Free Syphilis testing
- Blister Packaging Available
- Free Delivery!



Toll-Free Available 24 Hours/Day: **1-800-381-7518**

www.crownpharmacy.com



24401 Plymouth Rd, Redford, MI 48239

313-532-DRUG (3784)

CrownPharmacy1@aol.com

Hours: M-F 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM | Closed Weekends and Holidays

AFFIRMATIONS
LGBTQ+ Community Center

PROM BUT MAKE IT QUEER

Tickets on
sale now!



Prom
ReDeux

Saturday, May 18

8 pm - 12 am

\$30 | 21+

Affirmations, 290 W. 9 Mile, Ferndale

🎵 📱 📷 @goaffirmations

GRAND RAPIDS
PRIDE FESTIVAL 2024

SATURDAY 06/22 ————— 12PM - 10PM

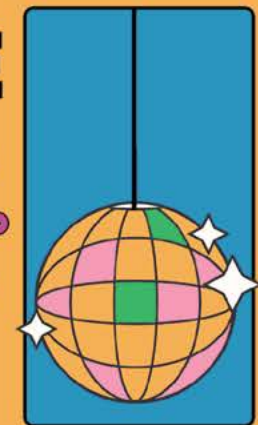
CALDER PLAZA ON OTTAWA AVE

queer is
NATURAL

FREE



GRAND RAPIDS
PRIDE
FESTIVAL



THE FINEST IN ADULT ENTERTAINMENT AT THE BEST PRICES!

RUSH - Jungle Juice - Maximum Impact -
 Swiss Navy - Amsterdam - ID Glide - COLT -
 Butterfly Kiss Pink - The Womanizer

UPTOWN
BOOKSTORES
ADULT VIDEO
 2 LOCATIONS
 WWW.UPTOWNADULT.COM

16541 Woodward Ave.
 at McNichols next to "Deja Vu"
 Highland Park
 313.869.9477

16401 W. 8 Mile
 Between Greenfield & Southfield
 Detroit
 313.836.0647

Hours:
 Mon-Sat 10am - 9pm
 Sun 12 - 6pm

◀ Cat Cafes

Continued from page 16

Cat Cafe's director, Patience Cole.

While you're getting your cat fix, you can also get your coffee fix at the in-house coffee shop serving cat-themed drinks and more. "We have Meowshakes that come in little cute cat cups," says Crow. "We also have a Purrly Temple mocktail, which is really fun for the kids."

A welcoming environment is another key feature of Constellation Cat Cafe. In addition to a prominent message on its website declaring it a safe space for all, it supports the local queer community by taking part in Lansing Pride, selling cafe merch from local queer artists and hosting events for LGBTQ+ business

Mystie Beckwith, Karma Kat Cafe's founder and director, says she founded it as "a safe space for all humans and all cats," and she emphasizes the "therapeutic" effect of spending time with kitties for those in need of comfort.

As a queer woman, staff member Ashley Bergman says she's experienced the cafe's welcoming nature firsthand. "It's been a very open and welcoming place for me and my friends personally, and I like working here because of that," they say.

Even more than the Safe Space sticker on the front door, the cafe's frequent drag bingo events reveal its inclusiveness to potential visitors. Besides offering a couple hours of fun, the events also boost the cafe's operating budget. "[The performers have] raised thousands of dollars for us," Beckwith says.

The drag performers have also shown their



Karma Kat Cafe. Courtesy photo

“Anyone, regardless of race, religion, age, gender identity and sexual orientation, are welcome, so long as you have a kind heart and a love of felines.”

— Patience Cole, Constellation Cat Cafe director

networking and friend speed dating.

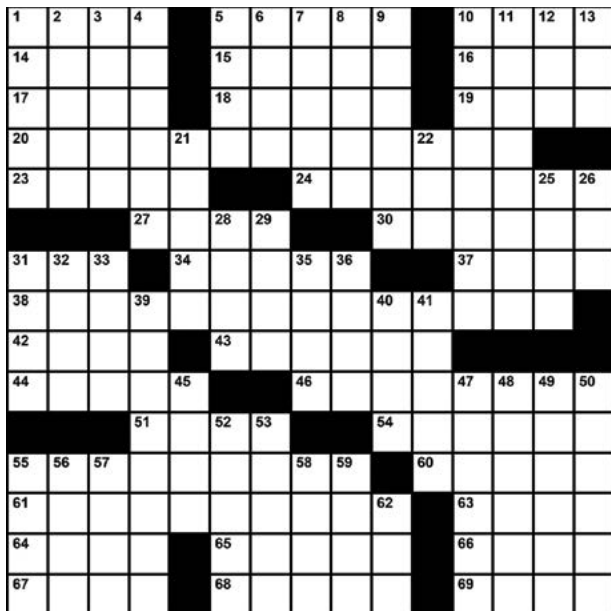
Cole echoes the website's inclusive message. "Anyone, regardless of race, religion, age, gender identity and sexual orientation, are welcome, so long as you have a kind heart and a love of felines."

Karma Kat Cafe (Mt. Pleasant)

Like The Catfé Lounge, Karma Kat Cafe is run by an animal rescue organization and doesn't do double duty as a coffee shop. Refreshments include cold drinks, self-serve coffee and snacks. As the nonprofit Karma Kat Rescue, staff and volunteers provide adoptions and low-cost spay/neuter services for both owned and feral cats.

support in other ways. "I think every one of the performers has adopted from us, pretty much, at this point," says Beckwith. In fact, her friend Wayne Johnson, who as Cherry Poppins will host the Pride edition of drag bingo on June 8, was the cafe's first adopter in 2018. (The lucky cat's name is Egg Salad.)

For some future queer-centered events, the cafe may collaborate with the new Mt. Pleasant Pride Center, Beckwith says. "They did a really cool speed-dating friendship thing [and] I've been talking to them about doing something here too."



equipment
 38 More of the quote
 42 Take it from me
 43 Canada's capital
 44 First lesbian magazine "Vice"
 46 Suppressed laughs
 51 It can bear fruit
 54 Dark red gem
 55 1992 ____ of the Year, Arthur Ashe
 60 ____ City Music Hall, where Manilow set a record for most performances
 61 End of the quote
 63 Bedrock pet
 64 What Shakespeare might be in, with "the"
 65 "Three Tall Women" writer
 66 Big name in stunt riding
 67 It makes watching porn harder
 68 Long
 69 Beatty flick

9 One of the small balls
 10 Sinister manipulator
 11 No longer resented
 12 Arena for GLSEN
 13 Chef Traci ____ Jardins
 21 Treating as a sexual object
 22 Bruin Bobby
 25 Judy Garland's "____! Went the Strings of My Heart"
 26 Snaky shape
 28 Gay nightlife district of London
 29 "____ my wit's end!"
 31 Theodore Cleaver, to Wally
 32 Kick off a poker hand
 33 Like a Peter Lorre film
 35 You can have them in your pants
 36 Cannon in films
 39 Part of the cycle of a hand job
 40 Tiny stick
 41 Helmeted cartoon character
 45 They're performing, in "Fame"
 47 Teaching assistant, at times
 48 Curly-leaved vegetable
 49 Pulled on a stallion's strap
 50 Gay bar perches
 52 Op-ed offering
 53 "Dirty Dancing" director Ardolino
 55 Drinks slowly
 56 Exam for jrs.
 57 "Aida," to Gomer?
 58 "Dancing Queen" band
 59 NY Met, for one
 62 Shakespeare's dusk

Down

1 Blue stone
 2 "____ My Heart in San Francisco"
 3 Emma Stone's beard movie
 4 Some stick them where they doesn't belong
 5 His brother laid him in his grave
 6 Top Four matchup
 7 Have overwhelming desire for
 8 Coming from Uranus, e.g.

See p. 19 for answers

Barry Many Performances

Across

1 Cause of Pinocchio's 8-incher
 5 Protector of k.d. lang and Janis Ian
 10 Bay Area bulls (abbr.)
 14 "Six Feet Under" creator Ball
 15 Occasional cross-dresser comic Milton
 16 Help reelect Tammy Baldwin,

e.g.
 17 Jack in Mexico?
 18 Response to an online personal
 19 The Gay '90s, and more
 20 Start of a quote by Barry Manilow
 23 Chat room request
 24 Build a fire under
 27 Emphatic affirmative, to Frida
 30 Country singer Randy
 31 Exclusion of gays from the military, e.g.
 34 One who won't settle down
 37 Part of Mapplethorpe's



Don Chisholm, REALTOR®
 (248) 425-4366
 DChisholm@RealEstateOne.com
 www.DonChisholmRealtor.com



Your Personal Advocate



- Friendly, Professional Service
- Empowering You Through Education
- Serving the Woodward Corridor and Beyond!

Real Estate One
 26236 Woodward Ave.
 Royal Oak, MI 48067



Michigan's Largest Real Estate Company

LOOKING TO REACH THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?
PRIDESOURCE.COM/ADVERTISE

Supporting the Community Since Before it was Cool.

100% Local Agents. 100% Client Focused.
 Trillium Real Estate Helps People Make Good Decisions.

Sandi & Linda
www.trilliumrealtors.com

323 Braun Ct. Ann Arbor, MI 48104
 734-302-3011



Serving the Real Estate Needs of Michigan's LGBT Community for 30 Years!

Lynn Stange & Eli Moran

Full Service Realtors

Buyer's & Seller's Agents

70 W. Long Lake Rd., Troy, MI 48098



"There really is a difference!"

Eli Moran (586) 291-1432 eli.dobek.reo@gmail.com
Lynn Stange (248) 561-6967 LLStange.aol.com

Justice Smith

Continued from page 21

into roles that have something to say about worldview and identity, and I wonder if what is happening in the world — a lot could be said about the attacks on queer people now — impacts the roles you decide to play?

I waver on this. For a moment, when I was really trying to find my purpose, and being an actor in the public eye, I was like, "Oh, maybe it's a representation thing. Maybe it's about fighting for communities that I love and I'm a part of." But I realized that that was another twisted way in which I put pressure on myself. It still led to my obsession with quality because I was like, "Oh, well, if I don't pick the right thing, or if I don't play the right thing, I will let people down." And it still was a way that I was motivating myself externally, versus finding my own internal drive to keep acting. And so selfishly, I concluded on my own, it's really about me in my own healing, and I think indirectly that provides a lot of healing for my communities. And a lot of feedback I get from fans, people who watch my work, is something like, "It meant so much to me when you played Chester [on 'Genera+ion']," or that "you were public about your relationship." When really, it sounds crass, I don't do it for them. I do it for me. It's a beautiful byproduct

of me just trying to be as authentic as possible, and following my own gut and following my own heart. And it's not something that I'm like, "No, you guys can't identify with me." If anything, I'm like, "That's beautiful."

In the film, Maddy and Owen are trying to find their place in the world, and there are so many young people in our community, especially right now, who are also trying to do the same. What advice would you give to LGBTQ+ youth struggling with acceptance?

Although there's a twisted aspect to this film, I do think that there is a lot of comfort in finding yourself in media, especially if your environment isn't safe, and creating a really meaningful inner world, one that is safe, one that is comforting. But I think that if you live in an environment where you feel loved and protected, I know that being true to yourself is still scary, even in those environments. But your relationship with yourself is the longest relationship you're ever going to have, so your self-love is the most important love you're going to receive. So I think that when you get to a place where you can be like, "If I love myself, that is the most important," you'll be able to tell your truth and accept whatever people's reaction is to that.

Are you a cisgender man in a relationship with another man?

Join our research study to earn up to \$410 and free HIV/STI tests! Scan below for more information.



Email us at verve-cohort@umich.edu

Shop LGBTQ+

PRIDESOURCE.COM

New ED Treatment will Get Your Swing Back



Sexual confidence is an essential quality of life. No one should be deprived of the pleasure!

Whether it's medical, physical, or a combination of the two, challenges with sexual health can be frustrating and confusing to tackle.

At times, it may seem the only treatment options are experimenting with medications or devices that often don't deliver satisfying results. Be Well Medical Center, specializing in sexual health since 1980, is here to help you defeat ED for good with Alma Duo. This medical procedure is speedy, simple, and painless.

Alma Duo is a non-surgical and non-invasive treatment that can strengthen and improve men's sexual function. It is also a patented technology that is FDA-approved, extremely safe, and has a minimal risk of side effects. The innovative energy-based system is an attractive option for men that is administered in our office.

Most Experienced & Knowledgeable
Established in 1980 as the first Primary Care Medical Clinic in the Detroit area specializing in LGBTQ+ care.

Board Certified in Family Practice & Designated Patient-Centered Medical Home by Blue Cross Blue Shield as a Center of Excellence.

Dr. Paul Benson's
Be Well
Medical Center

1964 Eleven Mile Rd
Berkley, MI 40872
(248) 544-9300
doctorbewell.com

A REVOLUTIONARY TREATMENT FOR
MEN

NO PAIN
NO NEEDLES
NO DOWNTIME

Living Life before
Alma Duo.

Living Life with
Alma Duo.

Kindness & Patient Care: At the Top of Our Priorities since 1980

Dr. Benson is an Associate Professor at Michigan State University providing training to our next generation of physicians. **He leads our team of professional and talented Providers:**

Paul Benson, DO



Mark Bornstein, DO



Caleb Youngblood, PA-C, AAHIV-S



Mark Rosen, PA-C



Leon Bullough, NP-F



Marna Taylor, FNP-C



New Locations Meet Community Needs

Be Well Medical Center is proud to partner with Wellness Services of Flint and CHAG:

Living Well Medical Clinic of Flint 810-257-3131 • 311 E. Court Street, Flint, MI 48502 • www.wellnessaid.org

Community Health Awareness Group (CHAG) | Living Well Clinic of Detroit • 313-963-3434
1300 W. Fort Street, Detroit, MI 48226 • www.chagdetroit.org

When entrepreneurs succeed, our communities do too

As America's #1 business lender, we're invested in local economies with over \$40 billion in business loans. Our commitment includes providing funding to under-resourced business owners and supporting entrepreneurs with the tools and resources to help them make every move matter.



My teammates work closely with entrepreneurs here in Detroit. We are here to help them start and grow their business, so they can continue to create jobs and keep our community strong.

Matt

Matt Elliott
President, Bank of America Detroit

See how we support businesses at bankofamerica.com/detroit

BANK OF AMERICA 

What would you like the power to do?®

Scan for details



When you use the QRC feature certain information is collected from your mobile device for business purposes.

Bank of America, N.A. Member FDIC. Equal Opportunity Lender. © 2024 Bank of America Corporation. All rights reserved.