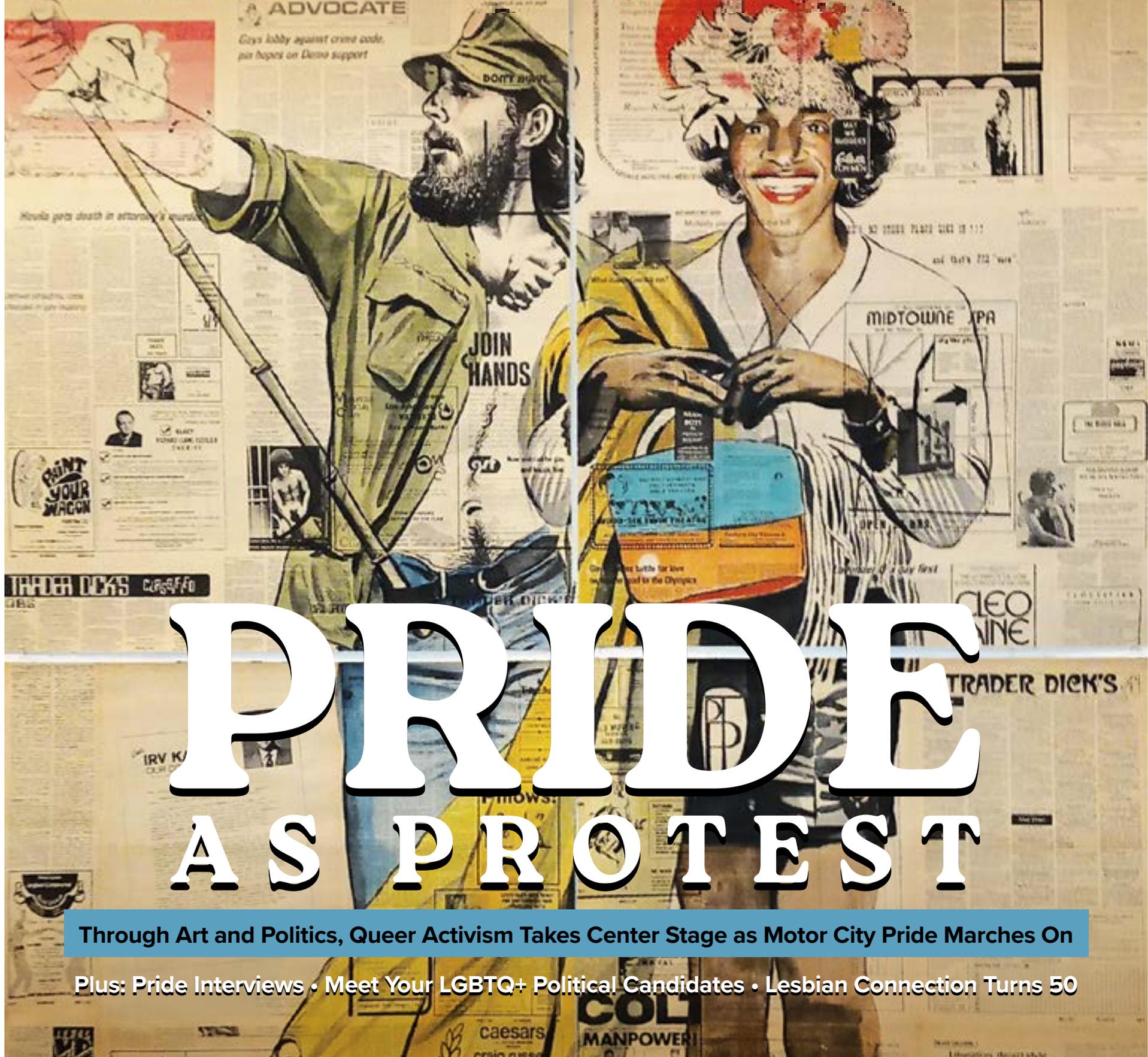


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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It's too late to brace yourself because Pride season is in full swing, but why would you want to? Let go and let loose at events all over the state focused on putting you right at the center of it all. You'll find Pride fests everywhere, including Michigan's largest event, Motor City Pride, as well as smaller Pride events like a queer comedy gala fundraiser, a Detroit Symphony Orchestra performance featuring Titus Burgess, a Pride Shabbat dinner and the annual Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce Colours Pride Awards Gala.



Comedian Diana Graham. Photo: Instagram

Attend a Queer Comedy Gala

Celebrate Pride with a good laugh while supporting a great cause at the fifth annual Pride Comedy Gala at Valentine Distilling Co. in Ferndale on June 9. The lineup includes queer comics like Diana Graham, Joe Aasim, Sam Meier, Lauren Noelle and host Hailey Zureich as well as a silent auction, drinks specials and fun surprises throughout the night. Proceeds benefit Ruth Ellis Center and its mission to assist local LGBTQ+ youth and young adults of color with trauma-informed services to address issues like food and housing insecurity and health care.

June 9, 7-10 p.m., Valentine Distilling Co. (161 Vester Ave., Ferndale). Find tickets at bit.ly/4bGauRO.



Do Yoga in the Park

Join Zion Well in Ypsilanti's Riverside Park on June 9 to celebrate Pride in the Park, downward dog style. Accessible for people of all skill levels, the outdoor yoga class will feature live music provided by DJ Love Permeator, a mental health fair and an afterparty with a food truck, drink vendors and more. Proceeds benefit the work of Stand with Trans, an organization focused on providing support, resources and advocacy for transgender and non-binary youth and their families.

June 9, 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m., Riverside Park (2 E. Cross St., Ypsilanti). Reserve your space in the yoga class at bit.ly/4561JtO.



Eric Jaffe as Jaffe St. Queer. Photo: Facebook

Join a Pride Shabbat in Ferndale

Join the most fabulous Shabbat dinner of the year at the annual Pride Shabbat hosted by NEXTGen Detroit Pride, The Well, CSZ Village, Hillel of Metro Detroit and Repair the World. The event features inclusive Shabbat rituals, music, cocktails, live entertainment and an authentic celebration of queer and Jewish identities. Jaffe St. Queer, an award-winning Philadelphia-based drag queen known for Jewish-centered humor and over-the-top glamor, will bring her "chutzpah-filled shtick" to the event, according to press materials. Tickets include a vegetarian strolling dinner and a drink.

June 7, 6-9 p.m., 215 W (215 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Reserve tickets at jewishdetroitcalendar.org/event/pride-shabbat-2.

Update: The Queer Folk Juneteenth event hosted by Amrit Kohli has been moved to a new location and time: 5:30 p.m. June 19 at Schiffer Park in Ferndale. Visit instagram.com/queer.folk for more information.



Kevin Heard (center) with Melissa Childers and Robyn Childers from Welcome Home Yoga & Wellness, 2023 Small Business of the Year. Photo: Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce

Support the LGBT Chamber of Commerce in Style

Each year, the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce holds a gala awards dinner to recognize community members who have supported the local LGBTQ+ community as employers, mentors and professional partners. The third annual Colours Pride Awards Gala, themed "Purple Reign," will feature a keynote address and awards presentation by former state Sen. Buzz Thomas, who will be presented with the Allan D. Gilmour Award for Outstanding Leadership in Inclusion. Other award categories include Small LGBTQ+ Business of the Year, Corporation of the Year and LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group of the Year. Chamber President Kevin Heard tells BTL that he is excited for the event. "We are adding a pitch competition where we will give away \$10,000 and a silent auction featuring great gifts like autographed items, amazing artwork and more," he says.

June 14, 6-10 p.m., MotorCity Casino Hotel Grand Ballroom (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit). Reserve tickets at detroitlgbtchamber.com/coloursawards.



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Catch the Latest Pride Fests

Chances are, there's a Pride fest near you in the coming days. These events are up next.

Friday, June 7

- Kalamazoo. Through June 8. Arcadia Creek Festival Place
- Ypsilanti. Depot Town, 5-10 p.m.

Sat., June 8

- Detroit (Motor City Pride). Through June 10. Hart Plaza, 1-9 p.m. Saturday and 12:30-7 p.m. Sunday. Parade: June 9, 12 p.m. at Fort and Griswold, ending at Hart Plaza. Visit our booth!*
- Dowagiac (Cass County PrideFest). Dowagiac Library Pavilion, 4-8 p.m.
- Grand Haven. Downtown Grand Haven, 12-9 p.m.
- Holly. American Legion Post #149, 12-5 p.m.
- Marquette. Mattson Lower Harbor Park, 1-10:30 p.m.

*Bonus: Don't miss the *Pride in the Hall Motor City Pride afterparty, St. Andrew's Hall, 9 p.m.* Tickets at bit.ly/3R5wpWg.

Sat., June 15

- Grosse Pointe Pride. Grosse Pointe Village, 12-2 p.m.
- Howell Pride Parade. Downtown Howell, 12-3:30 p.m.
- Livonia. Civic Park, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Niles. Riverfront Park, 4-8 p.m.



See the 2024 Pride in Michigan calendar on page 34 and at PrideSource.com.

Contributors

Dear reader,

I hope you enjoy our biggest issue of the year, no matter who you are. I also hope this issue has found its way to those who need it most like our publication found its way to me at 18 years old, just recently out. Through the empowerment of queer art to the trusted hands of LGBTQ+ lawmakers looking out for us, there are so many affirmations in these pages from an editorial team whose dedication and tireless efforts have culminated in a truly exceptional issue.

To our writers, artists, design team and our managing editor, Sarah Bricker Hunt, thank you for your insightful and impactful contributions. Writers, your words have the power to inspire, educate and celebrate our community in the most meaningful ways. To our designers, your eye for detail and flair for creativity have made this issue visually stunning. Your work brings our stories to life. To our sales, marketing and distribution team, your strategic planning and hard work ensure that our message reaches far and wide, spreading the joy and pride we all feel to an even larger audience. And to our publisher, Benjamin Jenkins, for keeping *Between The Lines* afloat 31 years into its award-winning run. While at our booth at Ferndale Pride last weekend, I was reminded of our publication's enduring significance in the lives of LGBTQ+ Michiganders when longtime readers came up to me and, with sincere appreciation, told me so.

This issue is a testament to what a small but mighty team can achieve when we work together with passion and purpose. I am so proud of what we have accomplished and immensely grateful to each of you for your contributions.

Let's continue to shine brightly together, even when we're told not to.



With gratitude,

Chris Azzopardi

Editorial Director



On the Cover: 'Stonewall Riots 1969'

Rinaldo Hopf, born in 1955 in Freiburg, West Germany, is one of more than 180 artists featured in Mighty Real / Queer Detroit's "I'll Be Your Mirror: Reflections of the Contemporary Queer," a biennial exhibition devoted to LGBTQ+ art. The exhibition runs through June 30, in various Detroit galleries. Hopf studied painting, cultural anthropology and religious studies in Freiburg and Bremen, West Germany and in San Francisco. For several years, he worked as an art therapist in forensic institutions in San Francisco and Berlin. Currently, Rinaldo is based in Berlin and Tuscany as a painter, photographer, editor and curator. He has been editor of the yearbook "My Gay Eye" since 2005 and has been working regularly with the Tom of Finland Foundation in Los Angeles since 2017. For more information on Rinaldo, visit www.rinaldohopf.com.

Lena Wilson

Lena Wilson is a writer who lives in Brooklyn with her partner and two senior dogs. Her favorite areas of coverage include cultural criticism, human interest and any project where she gets to talk to neat people whose stories are seldom heard. She has subscribed to *Lesbian Connection* since 2018.



Liam Clymer

Liam Clymer is a Michigan State University broadcast journalism student and freelance reporter with *Pride Source* and *Between The Lines*. He has previously written for *The State News* as their events reporter. He sees journalistic work as an opportunity to translate his love of learning into digestible material to spur thinking in others.



Kelli Dunham

Kelli Dunham is everyone's favorite ex-nun nonbinary nurse comic storyteller and has appeared on Showtime, the Discovery Channel, Jubilee Media and with Jonathan Van Ness on his Netflix show "Getting Curious." Kelli's award-winning but dubiously named "Second Helping: Two Dead Lovers, Dead Funny" was called "a love letter to the power of community" by the Bechdel Theater and was featured in last year's Edinburgh Fringe and is touring nationally.



Dani Lamorte

Dani Lamorte is a Pittsburgh-based artist. His first book of essays, tentatively titled "Nothing to See," is under contract with the University Press of Kentucky. More at www.danilamorte.com



Ashley D'Souza

Ashley D'Souza is a freelance journalist and musician. They write to help others connect with nature, their communities and themselves. Their work is featured in *GrubStreet's Our Planet, Our Stories* climate anthology, the *Writers Without Margins* literary journal, and more. They spend their free time birdwatching, talking to plants and admiring the sky. You can find them in the woods and at confessionsofabirdfreak.com.



How Queer Art Offers Freedom Where Freedom Isn't Always Found

The co-founders of Mighty Real / Queer Detroit on creative expression as activism



BY PATRICK BURTON & JEFF BRITTING

With Motor City Pride in Detroit — and Pride in cities throughout the country — queer festivals commemorate the fight for political equality accelerated by a demonstration, which began early in the morning of June 28, 1969, outside the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar. Today, this demonstration is honored by annual June events worldwide. The social advances made since 1969 are celebrated. And the contributions of political activism are paid tribute. But is there an activism deeper than the Stonewall uprising and its fight against a night of police harassment and injustice?

There is the creation of a just culture. And this rests on art.

Art is a mirror. It shows. It reflects. It embodies self-recognition and affirms presence.

At the start of the 20th century, the queer presence — the “love that dared not speak its name” — was socially shunned, medically pathologized and legally criminalized. To be queer was to be an outsider in a manner deeper than politics. One ducked and steered oneself alone or gathered in small rural or urban enclaves, stitched together like an Underground Railroad.

The exception was the world of art. For queers, art offered a realm where you could confront and express yourself freely when all other opportunities were unavailable.

With art, you could embody or contemplate localities, relationships and social engagement — or protest the lack thereof. You could storm the barricades with banners and ideas — or engage with the intimate, the decorative, the erotic. You could envision communities, or a sphere of solitary reflection — or combinations of both. Art in all forms rendered our view of the universe concrete, including the scope of our possible action, long before the growth of social acceptance and political freedom. Art affirmed a world within reach.

“I’ll Be Your Mirror: Reflections of the Contemporary Queer” assembles more than 800 such works by 170-

plus artists in 11 galleries, revealing a range of identities and stories, from the playful to the political and the erotic to the domestic.

A selection of these works are displayed here and on the next page:

- Peter McGough’s painted brick is inspired by a verbal assault against the artist on the streets of New York City. In reference to Stonewall and the stoning of sinners, “Faggot Bricks” turns the name-calling of “faggot” inside out. Does the brick (or epithet) flung at you cause harm? Or is the brick a piece of the broken world you can pick up and rebuild?
- Felicitia Felli Maynard’s “Ole Dandy, the Tribute” is a series of photographs that incorporate the historical perspective of a non-binary artist. Using vintage camerawork, Maynard references real figures to reimagine the life of a gender-expansive cabaret performer during the Harlem Renaissance.
- Tylonn Sawyer’s work, “Forever Young: Pulse Night Club 49,” memorializes the individuals who lost their lives in 2016 due to

an act of domestic terrorism. This massacre, rooted in anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice, occurred in Orlando, Florida, during Pride Month.

The 49 portraits are a unified piece, underscoring the scale of tragedy and the reality of grief.

- Eileen Mueller’s “Wayfinding,” portrays trees adorned with trail marks or wayfinders. These markings use a code known to other queer women and reveal hidden paths to private glades, which offer a chance to engage in communal visibility and acceptance.
- Mark A. Vieira’s 1979 “Portrait of Sylvester” captures the late singer in an image used by Fantasy Records without credit. Like many artists of old Hollywood, Vieira shapes a beautiful icon without recognition. Those who know Sylvester’s music can honor both the discothèque and

Mighty Real / Queer Detroit can be experienced at various locations throughout Detroit. See page 10 and 52 for more details.

Vieira’s recovery of authorship.

The art exhibited in “I’ll Be Your Mirror: Reflections of the Contemporary Queer” is a discovery: a dialogue of many voices, a discussion of what it means

to be queer and non-queer — and, more so, what it means to be human.

The growing social acceptance of queers, now celebrated each June, was not achieved through legislation alone. The recognition of rights and their social protection is essential. And the details of politics are vital. But the experience of pride, afforded by standing before a mirror to confront one’s very self, is preliminary, whether that self is embodied in a painting, a poem, a film or music. The activism of art begins with recognizing and affirming the profoundly important. It starts with looking into the mirror, which is art — and returning to that mirror every day of one’s life.

patrick burton is the creative director and curator of Mighty Real / Queer Detroit. Jeff Britting is co-creative director.



"Forever Young: Pulse Club 49," Tylonn Sawyer's tribute in colored pencil to the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting.

Through Art, They Live On

How Detroit artist Tylonn Sawyer is remembering Pulse nightclub victims during Pride Month exhibition

BY ASHLEY D'SOUZA

With the joy and defiance of Pride also comes grief and sadness as we honor those we've lost.

For his piece, "Forever Young: Pulse Club 49," Detroit artist Tylonn Sawyer reflected deeply on the tragic shooting in Orlando in 2016, but in his uniquely evocative way —

with a set of colored pencils. His drawing, which he completed at the beginning of this year, contains 49 individual portraits, a tribute to the individuals killed during the Pulse nightclub shooting. To portray them authentically, he referenced photos of each victim through different news sources and read about their lives. It was a labor of love.

"These are people who were supposed

to be in a safe space," he tells BTL. "The shooting left a mark on my heart and it's still there. I've wanted to do something to commemorate that moment ever since it happened."

Despite the weight of the tragedy, Sawyer deliberately chose to create a joyful dedication, its bright colors resembling those in the Pride flag. The piece will be displayed

at Galerie Camille in Detroit as part of Mighty Real / Queer Detroit's "I'll Be Your Mirror: Reflections of the Contemporary Queer" exhibition through June 30.

"During turmoil, queer folk step out and take care of their own. Tylonn Sawyer's work is a continuation of this attitude," said Patrick Burton, the exhibition's curator. "It's a beautiful piece that will shine in the

exhibition.”

Much of Sawyer’s work is queer-centered and integrates issues of race and politics. In a solo exhibition titled “America Has a Problem,” Tylonn explored social issues from his perspective as a queer Black American. The show ran from last December through January at N’Namdi Contemporary Miami. His displayed works included an oil painting titled “Descent II,” which criticizes the Supreme Court’s decisions to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, end affirmative action and allow businesses to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people. Also featured were oil paintings of Ahmaud Arbery, Jordan Neely and Trevon Martin that have a sci-fi feel and an ink and acrylic piece in the shape of an orange that is 33-inches in diameter and reads “Ron DeSantis Sucks Oranges.” The latter work was inspired by the Florida orange juice boycott from 1977 to 1980 — an iconic LGBTQ+ protest against the anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant.

“I grew up in a blue-collar town, and as a young Black kid going to grad school, I was trying to see the relevance of this art to my own lived experience,” Sawyer says, reflecting on what has shaped him artistically. “My work now is heavily research-based and everything is handmade to the core, just like the blue-collar, get-it-done approach I grew up with.”

Surrounded by creativity at a young age, Sawyer grew up in the Greenfield

neighborhood of Detroit. Both of his parents drew and encouraged him to create fantasy and sci-fi cartoons and comic books as a kid. He studied drawing and painting at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) as an undergrad and graduated with an MFA in painting from the New York Academy of Art in 2003. Sawyer also completed an independent study in painting at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

While Sawyer ensures that his work meets the intellectual demands of the art world, he prioritizes making it accessible to the average person; his goal is to move them, not “a bunch of art snobs.” He’s constantly thinking of both the scholar and the person down the street, he said, and researches issues that he sees in the world and in Detroit and other local

communities.

Sawyer is also passionate about education, and he loves teaching art as much as he loves actually creating it. He has taught art at EMU as well as at Marygrove College and the College for Creative Studies, and he is now a professor at Oakland Community College in Royal Oak. He cited one of his first college drawing professors, Richard Washington, as his inspiration for pursuing teaching.

“He was one of the few Black teachers I ever had in my life, much less a college professor who was an artist. It was like seeing an alien to me,” he says. “I fell in love with that man as a teacher and mentor: how charismatic he was, how effectively he taught, and how he was able to live a pretty nice life as an artist.”

In graduate school, Sawyer took classes in pedagogical studies, where he was awe-struck

by the intention and science that goes into teaching. He discovered an interest in teaching through an internship with high school kids and worked as an art director for camps in the mountains in New York. Throughout it all, he has maintained a focus on the relationship between student and teacher.

“I really pay attention to that relationship and my responsibility as an instructor and mentor,” he said, adding that although it’s “weird” to have students older than him calling him their mentor, he wouldn’t change it.

Next for Sawyer are large-scale equestrian portraits — he has three such paintings in progress right now, including an oil painting of Octavia Butler that hails back to the early sci-fi and fantasy influences of his parents. He wanted to explore the idea of putting a (speculatively) queer, female icon on a horse since, historically, equestrian portraits were only for the super-rich and elite. He also painted a Dyson sphere reminiscent of a halo on top of her head because he enjoys adding layers of distortion to traditionally romantic styles of art. Sawyer likes to be “enveloped” by large-scale paintings, and this portrait sits at seven-feet tall.

“My work is very labor intensive, so once a piece is done, I’m super happy — like, thank god,” he said. “But at the same time, I’m anxious to work on something else.”



Tylonn Sawyer. Courtesy photo



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Is Detroit Ready for a New Queer Business District?

A new Detroit LGBT Chamber of Commerce survey invites community input

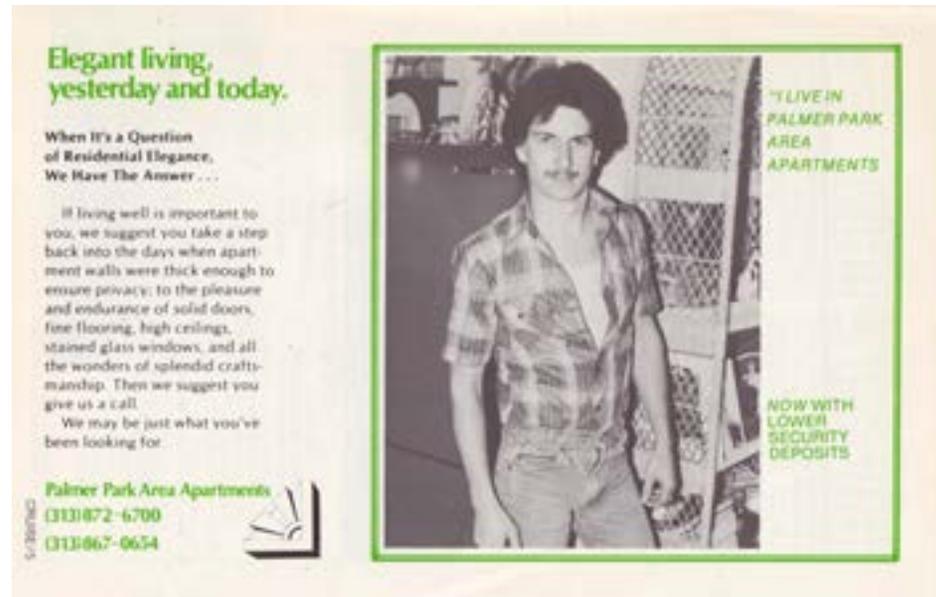
A new survey from the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce poses a question Board of Directors President Kevin Heard says local LGBTQ+ community members haven't ever been asked by government entities, politicians, urban planners or developers: Is Detroit ready for an LGBTQ+ business district?

Visitors and newcomers to Detroit seek out Detroit's LGBTQ-friendly neighborhoods frequently, Heard says, but they don't know where to go. "Visitors come and they're like, 'Where's your gay area?' They're at the hotels downtown or staying with families in the actual neighborhoods of Detroit, so going out to a suburban area like Ferndale is not desirable," he notes. "They're visiting, maybe without a car — they're looking for an area that's walkable, near their hotel, one that feels safe and where they can see people like themselves."

Heard and the Chamber want to get a feel for how LGBTQ+ city residents feel about creating a new LGBTQ+ business corridor, one created with intentionality and an equity-minded approach. "Some cities have these neighborhoods, but they've become gentrified — are they still conducive for people of marginalized identities within the LGBTQ+ community to truly be themselves in those spaces?" he ponders. "We're talking about creating a Utopian space, where there are people of all identities being able to live, breathe and work in an area that is made for everyone."

To get there, Heard says it is vital that every voice is invited to the table. "It's time for us to have this conversation. Detroit is well-positioned for this compared to other places because the standard of living here is so much more affordable than other major metropolitan areas, yet we don't necessarily have a destination for LGBTQ+ people to go to," he says.

Another key factor Heard sees as a benefit for Detroit as an ideal location for a new LGBTQ+ business district is related to the racial makeup of residents here. Over 80% of Detroit residents are Black, according to 2020 Census data — only two cities in the country (South Fulton, Georgia and Jackson, Mississippi) boast a higher percentage of



Black residents and both are much smaller than Detroit. An LGBTQ+ business district in Detroit would organically reflect the kind of intersectionality other regions envy and attract tourists from outside the city.

Heard's hope is that establishing a new LGBTQ+ district in Detroit would lead to a space inherently more authentic than some neighborhoods he's visited. "You could put a rainbow crosswalk anywhere, but if it's not in a place created with intentionality, if it's not a place with LGBTQ+ ownership and investment, is it sustainable? I think Detroit can actually do that very well."

Detroit's historic 'Gayborhood'

For a time in the post-World War II era, downtown Detroit boasted a long list of gay bars, but by the mid 1950s, the gay city population was swept up in the mass migration northward, including to the Palmer Park neighborhood. But by the '90s the mostly-white segment of this population moved to places like Ferndale and Royal Oak, which remain primarily white. While the area around Six Mile and Woodward is still a minor hub for the Black queer community, there isn't a true LGBTQ+ business corridor in the city limits today.

The late Greg Piazza, the author of "A History of Detroit's Palmer Park" and a resident of the neighborhood in the '80s and '90s told WDET in 2016 that he remembered a truly gay-centered experience. "There was one building we called 'The Barracks,'" he told the outlet. "48 apartment units, 46 of them were gay men." Piazza recalled eight bars, two gay-friendly bookstores and two

gay-friendly restaurants. In time, though, the neighborhood changed. "I just turned around one day and it was like everybody was gone," Piazza told WDET. "All my friends were gone." Many, he said, had moved north to Ferndale.

Historian and MSU professor Tim Retzlaff, who has extensively studied the migration of LGBTQ+ folks across Michigan, told WDET in 2016 that Palmer Park was still a gay neighborhood — "It's just now an African-American gay presence and not a white gay presence," he noted at the time. Eight years later, LGBT Detroit still holds parts of its annual Black LGBTQ+ Pride celebration, Hotter Than July, in the neighborhood, as it has for the past 30 years, but few would argue that Palmer Park is still a truly queer-centered enclave.

In some ways, the Chamber's vision for a new LGBTQ+ district would pick up where the Palmer Park of the '70s and '80s left off, but there's an important distinction in a renewed effort championed by the DRLGBTCC — building a queer presence that reflects Detroit's Black culture and a more expansive reflection of modern LGBTQ+ identities, including trans voices that have historically been left out of the conversation.

Jeynce Poindexter, who serves as co-executive director of Trans Sista of Color Project, case manager with Ruth Ellis Center and a board member of the Michigan Chamber for Reproductive Justice, is happy to hear the Chamber is seeking to create more intentional spaces for the community to thrive. "Some may think it's pushing for too much, but I think it's spot on with the progression of our neighborhoods — it mirrors evolutions," she says. "So many times, efforts don't get supported because of naysayers." Poindexter has faith in the Chamber and in Heard's

leadership. "He's a visionary for what can be," she notes. "That's never to be stifled."

How can queer investment help grow Detroit?

Central to the Chamber's survey is gauging whether today's LGBTQ+ community in Detroit finds value in pursuing an LGBTQ+ neighborhood anchored by queer- and ally-owned businesses. Heard feels there is support for the concept, but can't predict what the survey will reveal. "We need to find out why, if the survey tells us that people don't actually think we need an LGBTQ+ neighborhood, why they don't think we do," he adds. "Are there additional barriers that the Chamber and other nonprofit organizations and governmental entities need to uncover and supply support to fill in some gaps?"

One argument in favor of LGBTQ+ business districts comes in the form of political power.

In fact, a recently proposed redistricting map created by the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC), a bipartisan citizen's group established through a ballot initiative in 2018 to create fair Congressional maps, focused on a "community of interest" comprised of LGBTQ+ voters in Metro Detroit. One potential new House district proposed by LGBTQ+ advocates would have combined Ferndale with the Palmer Park neighborhood. While the map piqued the interest of many community members, it did not ultimately gain enough support to move on to the next stage.

Pamela Alexander, co-founder and first DRLGBTCC board president, says she feels a renewed sense of momentum for a new LGBTQ+ district in Detroit, a city she says is well positioned to support and grow such an area. Detroit, she notes, is a powerful city that attracts international visitors and a place that values and encourages intersectionality — factors that would surely help the queer community establish a successful business corridor.

Alexander says it's time to develop an LGBTQ+ business district anchored by businesses credentialed by the Chamber. "I was a resident for 25 years," she says. "I lived, breathed and shopped in Detroit, but after I came out, there was something missing. I knew where the restaurants were where folks kind of gathered who identified as LGBTQ, some of the clubs and other places that over time tended to somewhat diminish. Today, our community is still spending millions of dollars here."

Beyond the clear monetary value in keeping queer dollars in Detroit, Alexander acknowledges that on a personal level, it just feels good when she knows she's in the "right place." "It's that feeling of "This is what it is supposed to be," she says. "To walk into a business that I know is owned and operated by a lesbian or just anyone within the LGBTQ community gives me not only a certain amount of pride, but I know that this is the way it's supposed to be."

Businesses working toward certifying their organizations within a credentialing body like the DRLGBTCC are connected and partnered with organizations throughout the country — a network Alexander says is worth many millions of dollars.

"It gives me great pleasure to know that the Detroit LGBT Regional Chamber of Commerce is without a doubt a strong presence, one that has built a strong voice for the community and contributes to growing the infrastructure in Detroit," she adds.

Queer Black artist Tiff Massey is one resident working to develop inclusive opportunities for Detroiters through her endeavors with commercial real estate. Massey seeks out buildings, often in and around the

Avenue of Fashion neighborhood where she grew up, that have been forgotten — before they can be snapped up by developers she said lack real intention when it comes to growing Detroit in an authentic way. "There's not a lot of investment into what we're actually adding to the landscape," she told BTL earlier this year. "There was so much money and investment poured into the history of the city of Detroit, and to see the juxtaposition of that — that none of these [new] structures are really gonna hold up like some of the historic structures. I want to see what can be added of value, outside of just recycling a building, essentially."

Massey's vision includes a new community art center she plans to offer as a "white box" space where community members from all walks of life can gather and create art.

How the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce supports local LGBTQ+ workers and employers

The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce is a key driver for this kind of support. Not only does the organization support LGBTQ- and ally-run businesses, but they are available to help individuals for their entire professional lives, Heard says. "From the time you start your first job to after your retirement, we can help you connect with

other people," he adds. "Or if you're looking to start a business or to help invest, we're here to assist you there. On top of all that, we're here to advocate for policy to make it easier for you to start your business and to find the capital you need."

Heard says the Chamber has grown to become a trusted connector of its 11-year history, linking both business owners and employees to services in the legal, insurance, financial, real estate fields and others. "We connect people to others who respect and understand and who are often a part of the community," he says. "We are the organization for everything when it comes to LGBTQ+ development and professional services in the



Jeynce Poindexter. Courtesy photo

city of Detroit, and we're the only place in the state centering LGBTQ+ people. We're here to support you as a young professional and when you're headed for retirement."

Ready to participate?

Access the survey, which was designed to be completed in about 10 minutes, at detroitlgbtchamber.com/survey. Or, if you're heading to Motor City Pride, visit the Rocket Companies booth to fill out the survey in person (and snag some amazing incentives!). Your responses will help the Chamber determine whether there is interest in developing a new LGBTQ+ business corridor in Detroit and how the organization can best support the effort.

Heard encourages community members to reach out to him and the rest of the LGBT Regional Chamber of Commerce board of directors. "We're bold enough to ask questions of our community," he notes. "And I want you to be bold enough to ask all the questions of us and our board. We're here at the service of our community."

Ultimately, Heard wants to do right by the city he loves. As he told BTL in 2022, "If Detroit wins, we all win."

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IS DETROIT READY FOR A LGBTQ+ DISTRICT?

LET US KNOW

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Bye, Felicia: Texas Democrats Choose Love Over Hate in Houston



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

It's Pride Month! Cue the rainbow flags, the Pride parades, the guy in the neon green Speedo wearing a leather dog mask, the lesbians with the toddler wearing a "I ♥ My Moms" t-shirt, the teens wearing trans Pride flags as capes, the drag queen looking fabulous despite the heat, the protesters...

Ugh. The protesters.

There's no escaping the fact that Pride Month (or Pride at any time, really) makes right-wingers very aggressive. They begin to froth at the mouth, desperate to spread the disease living in their saliva by biting anyone and everyone.

Ah, wait, that's rabies. Well, a valid comparison regardless.

But let's focus on a few positive things first.

President Joe Biden officially proclaimed June 2024 to be Pride Month, something that is not going to happen with a Republican in the White House. But what's an official proclamation, anyway, besides a very public and worldwide display of support for LGBTQ+ people by the United States' most powerful person?



THE OVERTURNERS — RAISING RED FLAGS

high.”

You heard the man! Wave away!

Meanwhile, in Texas, a state known for its hostility toward LGBTQ+ people, a Democrat who voted with Republicans to ban gender-affirming care lost her reelection bid to a Black queer woman.

“Lauren Ashley Simmons beat Rep. Shawn Thierry in the Tuesday runoff by a margin of 65 percent to 35 percent to win the Democratic nomination in Texas House District 146, located in Houston,” The Advocate reports. “The district is heavily Democratic, so Simmons is favored to win the general election in November over Republican Lance York.”

Sixty-five percent to 35 percent is no joke. Voters turned out hard to oust

Thierry, who joined the Republicans in a number of anti-LGBTQ+ votes

“Thierry also broke ranks from her party to support a GOP bill aimed at removing sexually explicit books from school libraries, a designation critics feared would be used to target LGBTQ+ literature,” The Texas Tribune reports. “She also voted for a bill requiring transgender college athletes to play on teams that align with their sex assigned at birth.”

Not a great look!

“Clearly voters are tired of the bigoted politics of Shawn Thierry, who has betrayed her constituents so she could carry water for the worst politicians in Austin,” said former Houston Mayor Annise Parker, President & CEO of LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, in a statement. The LGBTQ+ Victory Fund backed Simmons. “I couldn’t be more proud of Lauren, the campaign she ran and the fierceness she’ll bring to the Texas House, where she’ll proudly fight to make Houston a more welcoming place for everyone,” Parker said.

And it will be quite a fight. Texas is a majority Republican state and Gov. Greg Abbott is happy to sign any and every bill intended to harm LGBTQ+ Texans and make them more invisible. That’s why Texas needs leaders like Simmons.

“I’m not a politician. It’s not something I ever really envisioned myself doing,” Simmons told Houston Public Media. “But once I wrapped my head around what was at stake and what was really important, I decided to go for it. I’m glad that the results turned out the way they did, because they let me know that I wasn’t alone in my thinking and I wasn’t alone in my dissatisfaction, and we were ready for change.”

And we need more people to do exactly what Simmons did: Run for office. Especially for school board. Because school boards around the country can make the difference between whether LGBTQ+ students are loved and supported or whether LGBTQ+ students’ lives are living hells.

The saying “Be the change” has become kind of cliché, but it is still true. Things don’t get better when good people stand aside. Things only get better when good people stand up.

The saying ‘Be the change’ has become kind of cliché, but it is still true. Things don’t get better when good people stand aside. Things only get better when good people stand up.

Seriously, though. It’s a BFD. The President making LGBTQ+ people visible is very meaningful at a time with Republicans are feverishly trying to erase us. Living in the shadows is no life at all. I mean, there’s a reason people avoid walking down dark alleys at night. Bad things can happen there and no one would ever know.

“I call upon the people of the United States to recognize the achievements of the LGBTQI+ community,” Biden said in his proclamation speech, “to celebrate the great diversity of the American people, and to wave their flags of Pride

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Get Set for Motorball XXX

Originally known as the GEAR Party (Generating Education, Awareness and Respect), the 2024 Motorball, set for June 8, marks 30 years since the Geared for Life organization held its first dance event in honor of the local LGBTQ+ and ally community in 1994 at the Majestic Theatre. This year's event will feature headliner DJ Jason Kendig of Honey Soundsystem with DJ Tylr_ in Olympus Theater and Darryl G, Ladylike and Garrison XR in The Eagle — all within Menjo's Complex in Detroit.

Over the years, Motorball has been spearheaded by various local organizations involved with

HIV/AIDS advocacy, including the Michigan AIDS Coalition, Matrix Health and World AIDS Day Detroit. Geared for Life founders formally re-established the organization in 2019 as a non-profit organization focused on a mission "to enhance the lives of LGBTQ+ citizens in the State of Michigan through education, awareness and special event activities."

Since then, the party has been going strong. Typically held the same weekend as Motor City Pride, the high-energy event is essentially an all-night afterparty supporting an enduring, vital good cause.

Motorball will take place from 10 p.m. June 8 through 6 a.m. June 9 at Menjo's (928 W. McNichols Road, Detroit). Secure tickets at gearedforlife.us.



Remembering Linda Burnett

Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, will hold a celebration of life for Linda "Lindy" Seaver Burnett on July 13 featuring slides showcasing the longtime advocate's performance art. Burnett, who died on May 16, had a decades-long career as a scientist specializing in geology and was an outspoken Michigan advocate for LGBTQ+ causes.

In addition to campaigning against the state's same-sex marriage ban in 2004, Burnett worked in support of non-discrimination proposals in cities like Kalamazoo, Flint and Traverse City and administered several summits for the Michigan Fairness Forum. Burnett will be remembered, her obituary reads, for her sense of humor and sweet stubbornness for capturing the light "just right." She is survived by her spouse of 40 years, Faye Schuett, and many family members.

Don't Miss Machine Dazzle's Ouroboros

Queer artist Machine Dazzle's Ouroboros is a fever dream meets maximalist art installation focused on the permanence of the objects all around in relation to our

collective impermanence. Whether it's a dildo suspended inside a giant coiled vessel hanging from the ceiling of the University of Michigan Museum of Art or repurposed plastic pieces plucked from a public dump, each carefully crafted element of this three-act installation brims with intention, potential and ambiguity — as do we all. An Act Three performance will be held on June 14; this final installment of the exhibition includes a night on the runway,

with performers who will strut in Machine's sculptured wearables. Machine Dazzle told BTL in March, "What I'm trying to do is transform [anger] into queer joy... I'm turning it into something else because there's nothing I can really do about it. I can vote. But I'm only one person."

On display at UMMA through Aug. 25, Irving Stenn, Jr. Family Gallery (525 S. State St., Ann Arbor). Learn more at bit.ly/3wWMNld.

Grab Your Troye Sivan and Charli XCX Tickets

Queer icon Troye Sivan and outspoken ally Charli XCX are making plans to drip sweat (and sex) all over the continent in 2024 at 21 U.S. and Canadian stops on their "Sweat" tour, set to kick off in Detroit on Sept. 14 at Little Caesars Arena. The performers worked together previously on Charli's "1999" and "2099" tracks several years ago. As one Instagram user noted, "People don't understand that this will go down in gay history." Tickets are available now.

Out Post Ceases Publication

After 34 years, Out Post bids farewell to Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, marking the end of an era. Founder Steve Culver started the publication in 1990 as a 12-page newsletter and nurtured it into a glossy magazine that readers relied on for local queer news and events coverage. Culver told BTL recently that he plans to donate Out Post's archives, photos and newsletters to local historical libraries. Visit pridesource.com to read more.

Sasha Colby to Headline Ann Arbor Pride

Ann Arbor Pride's 2024 lineup just got a glittery upgrade. Get ready to sashay with the fabulous Sasha Colby, crowned queen of "RuPaul's Drag Race" Season 15. The iconic queen, known for her Hawaiian charm and killer moves, is set to dazzle on Aug. 3 in downtown Ann Arbor. With her signature "neck crack" move and fan-favorite antics, Sasha is primed to steal the show and our hearts, proving she's truly a "GODDESS" of drag.



Sasha Colby. Photo: sashacolby.net

Coloring Outside the Lines

How a community of LGBTQ+ artists in Ferndale is fostering connection through creative expression



An artist's work from the Detroit Queer Sketch Series. Photo: James Shanek

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

The first time I drew, I was the only gay boy in the room. Oftentimes, I did it alone, a scared kid afraid of what people would think of me — drawing wasn't a sport, and weren't boys supposed to play rough? Now, I almost can't believe it: I regularly draw in a room spilling over with LGBTQ+ people and allies, a space welcoming and supportive to all people and their level of artistic talent.

I'm talking about my experience when I drop in to the Detroit Queer Sketch Series, which I was grateful to find in 2023 after a loss of community spaces during the pandemic shutdown. At the time, I was emerging from significant transition and still feeling the impact of Covid's upheaval on both the world and my life.

Art's been a trusted friend along the way, even before I grew up. Many years earlier, as a closeted gay boy in the early 1990s trying to make sense of who he was, simply putting marks on a clean page brought me comfort and escapism on that journey and eased me into a greater understanding of myself.

I couldn't stop drawing then. I would sketch Disney characters and cartoons on the living room floor while watching Mr. Dressup at his easel on TV. My passion evolved into still-life charcoal drawings and then portraits, and with encouragement from my wonderful teacher, Sharon Dillenbeck, I began selling prints at an art festival in my hometown of Canton and teaching other kids how to get Ursula's tentacles just right. Those hours spent exploring the potential of a blank sheet of paper were invaluable. In large part, I survived some of my toughest years as a teenager — my parents' divorce, my coming out, thoughts of suicide — because of them. In high school, after a fight between my parents that left me afraid and uncertain, another great art teacher sensed something was off about me and suggested I skip lunch in the school cafeteria. She found me a comfortable spot in her back art room, put a big piece of paper in front of me and, to this day, I couldn't tell you if more charcoal or more tears made it onto the page.

I was too young then to know that other queer boys needed art like I did — were we all grieving what society told us we had to be but were not? A recent article in *The New York Times* called "With Grief By Their Side," featuring artists reflecting on how creative expression can be a balm, crystalized for me the role of art during my young years and even now. "Grief evolves, and how can people return to their essence



A model poses during a Detroit Queer Sketch Series event. Photo: James Shanek

and return to who they are? It's because of art," says filmmaker Lila Avilés in the piece. Photographer Justin Hardiman added, "Art is like a therapy. We go into the studio or go outside and talk to people, and create. The grief is not going to get easier, but it helps to have somebody to help you make it through because there's a lot to unpack."

I think my own grief related to the pandemic and family brought me to the Detroit Queer Sketch Series, and perhaps that's why many of the queer adults come every third Thursday (and now also first Monday) to Ferndale, when a community of queer artists and allies gather around a model with their sketch pads and chosen medium to partake in figure drawing.

The love of art brings us together, but it's hard to argue that at least some shared feelings in our collective queer experience keep us coming back — art really is a powerful form of healing. As an adult, I now know I'm not the only gay person who leaned desperately on creative expression. Case in point — on his website, co-founder James Shanek (his last name appears in most places as Staycation, the name he uses to promote his events) writes about his motivation to create art in a way that probably feels familiar to queer artists, explaining that creating is the result of "growing up in a world that wasn't designed for him — years of trying to fit into a mold that he was never designed to fit [and] letting go of societal expectations."

During the distressing shelter-in-place era, when I turned back to art as relief from an overwhelming sense of world-weariness, so did Shanek, who called painting his "pandemic therapy." "As things loosened up, I was having models come for my paintings," he recalls, which, as more people expressed

in a shared space for drawing models, led him to Chris Gorski. With his own spacious industrial spot that serves as a warehouse and office for his design and apparel brand that specializes in promoting Detroit (aptly, it's called Detroit GT), Gorski opened up his doors to Shanek's idea, giving Detroit Queer Sketch Series a home on Wolcott Street in Ferndale. The first class in 2022 wasn't at all what some people who showed up thought it would be.

"When we first started doing it, we got a lot of voyeurs because there was a nude male and that was the focus," Gorski says. "But now that the novelty has worn off, people come and they see, oh, it's a naked person, and for the first 15 minutes it's tantalizing and exciting and then people are in the zone. People are *actually* drawing."

For Timothy Yang, who lives in Hazel Park, the Detroit Queer Sketch Series has been entirely about the feeling of creating, and, as someone who's "usually reserved in new spaces," he's even surprised to find he feels "welcome and at ease."

"In the past, I've gone to a few drawing classes hosted by other organizations that got the job done but there wasn't much camaraderie going on; sometimes the regulars came off as pretentious or entitled so being new didn't help my anxiety," says Yang, who has a BFA in illustration from College for Creative Studies.

Yang first attended this year, in March, and is reconnecting to artistic expression in a way he hasn't in some time — projects are piling up, including a backlog of personal illustrations he's working on, but the series "has definitely reignited a spark that's been

See **Sketch Series**, page 60

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How LGBTQ+ Individuals Engage with Conspiracy Theories

From Samantha's HIV test to Stonewall's first brick

BY DANI LAMORTE

I'm rewatching "Sex and the City," and there's so much that's hard to believe: Carrie affording her apartment on a columnist's pay; Samantha avoiding an HIV test until the third season; anyone having feelings for Big (other than blinding rage). It's almost like the writers were paid by the NYC Tourism Bureau. Maybe I'm being paranoid, or maybe there's a conspiracy.

Across (my) town, a group of us gathered to watch something else that inspires belief in conspiracy: the Oscars. I was working my way through a "Manhattan Project" cocktail when another partygoer turned to me and asked, "Do you believe we landed on the moon?" I laughed and said I did. Then I saw the look on his face. The question hadn't been rhetorical.

"Hey, do *you* believe we landed on the moon?" I figured reflecting the question back at him might undo some damage. As he explained the reasons for his lunar doubt, I couldn't help but notice that this wasn't the face I expected for a conspiracy theorist. This was a sweet, fun-loving gay guy who'd voted for Barbie in every category of our little at-home Oscars viewing party. Questioning the Apollo 11 mission — a topic I think about infrequently — made me act defensive, even rude. I wondered: Why did talking about the moon make me act like such a Venus head?

Joshua Smith, a faculty member at Central Michigan University, chalks conspiracy theories up to not being doubtful enough. "So you think that there's this huge conspiracy of people who are keeping this big secret," Smith says. "Are people really that good at keeping secrets?" He's got a point. When people point to "big secrets" that have been revealed — like the Tuskegee Study or nuclear bomb testing

in the Marshall Islands — they're pointing to Smith's proof. Secrets don't last long on this earth.

Back in Carrie's part of the world, Eliot Bornstein of New York University suggests that we all take on a "conspiratorial subject position" from time to time. In this position, we prioritize a good story over a rigorous

examination of fact and logic. Bornstein gives the example of going to a musical and not bothering to ask how all the people of Yonkers just happen to greet Dolly Levi with the same song and dance in unison. Part of seeing a musical is expecting that things will be orderly and work together in a way that they really don't in the "real world."

For some people, conspiracy theories are like musicals — entertainment. Kelly Stevenson, a queer Detroit native who "grew up in a conservative family with Trump supporters," says they watch videos about conspiracy theories for fun and to learn about people with conservative viewpoints. Some conspiracies, like the idea that birds aren't real, are a diversion, Stevenson explains. "I don't think that people are harmed with those and that's the biggest thing for me."

When they aren't pure entertainment, conspiracies are "reworkings [of information] in the service of a pragmatic belief system," according to John Bodner at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It's pragmatic because it resolves a source of very real frustration: Life is fairly random at times, and other people can be hard to understand. It can be frightening to find the world changing around you, with no one specifically at the helm of those changes. "Hello Dolly" and fake birds both fix things for us, one way or another, by putting a shadowy (or technicolor) force at the center, working all sorts of irrational magic so that the world makes sense for once.

Back here on a messy earth, I texted my cocktail compatriot some questions about his unconventional views, and asked how people respond when he shares them. He answered my questions, but also said he appreciated being asked. In day-to-day life, people don't often solicit his thoughts on why he does what he does, and what it all means. His response suggests another reason conspiracy theories are meaningful to some.



Have you heard about when Marsha P. Johnson landed on the moon? Illustration by Chris Azzopardi

See **Conspiracy Theories**, page 57



Temple Bar Closing ‘Indefinitely’ After Building Collapses

Community support — and questions on what happened — pour in

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When the historic limestone facade gracing the front of the iconic queer-loved Temple Bar at Cass and Temple in downtown Detroit crumbled and fell on May 24, the timing couldn't have been worse — or better.

Yes, the building is closed, “indefinitely,” according to the city’s Building, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department. It won’t reopen until it’s been repaired in line with current building codes and inspected by the city.

And yes, the facade collapse happened just hours ahead of one of the most profitable annual weekends of the year for the bar, which was set to host 11 DJs for a jam-packed Memorial Day weekend of events related to the nearby Movement Music Festival, including a fundraiser for

the Underground Music Academy and a dance party. “We had to quickly cancel everything,” Temple Bar owner George Boukas tells BTL.

While he’s understandably worried and upset about the closure, Boukas is also grateful for the timing. What if, he ponders, the collapse had happened when patrons were lined up in front of the bar having a smoke, as is often the case on busy nights? He’ll scarcely let the thought enter his mind. “I’m feeling blessed,” he says. “I really am. This could have been so much worse.”

The damage, Boukas says, is limited to the outside of the building, but until the city determines it is safe for patrons to return, Temple Bar will remain closed. He’s working with several contractors and city officials to get repairs moving and permits issued, including a structural engineer, a masonry repair professional and various city entities.

In the meantime, patrons of Temple Bar, which has been in operation since the Great Depression, have been voicing their concern for Temple Bar’s employees,

See **Temple Bar**, page 47

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Celebrating 50 Years of ‘Lesbian Connection’

Why lesbians worldwide still turn to the grassroots Lansing magazine

BY LENA WILSON

In every issue of Lesbian Connection, you’ll find messages of gratitude.

“Read your letter at a meeting and there was cheering afterwards,” a Wisconsin reader wrote in December 1974, for the publication’s second ever issue. “I think you have hit on a real neat idea.”

From a reader in the March/April 2024 issue: “You truly have meant so much to

me all these years. I came out in 1970, and you’ve helped to validate my world over and over.”

Lesbian Connection, affectionately known as “LC” or “Elsie,” is unlike any other magazine published today. It ships worldwide every two months, but subscriptions are free. It has featured advertisements for Subaru and “The L Word,” but you’ll never see a glossy celebrity on its cover. The vast majority

of content, including the cover art, comes from readers.

As a result, you’re just as likely to open a new issue to a provocative political letter as you are to flip to a photo of someone’s thriving tomato plants (January/February 2021) or to a recipe for vegan Sloppy Joes (September/October 2019). Lists of “Contact Dykes” and lesbian-friendly retreats offer subscribers a safe, easy way to make travel plans — and possibly to

connect with other lesbians around the world.

For 50 years, Lesbian Connection has survived where countless bars and bookstores couldn’t, offering lifesaving community and open dialogue to readers in rural areas, unaccepting families and even prison. The forum, which will celebrate its golden anniversary this September in Lansing, started with a borrowed mimeograph machine and a dream: to

broadcast lesbian issues, news and events to as many lesbians as possible.

A brief herstory

The Ambitious Amazons, a group of nine women in the Lansing area, published the first “LC” in October of 1974.

“We see a real need for a national newsletter,” the Amazons wrote in a flier announcing the publication to over 400 lesbian and women’s organizations. “There are many national feminist publications and several gay liberation newspapers. But there are no papers that we know of dealing with current news that is pertinent and accessible to all lesbians.”

That first issue was composed of 17 colorful, mimeographed sheets stapled together by hand. It included an announcement for the Lesbian Mothers National Defense Fund — an effort to help lesbian mothers retain custody of their children despite homophobic prejudice — and a feature about North American sodomy laws. It was, to put it lightly, a difficult time to be a lesbian — an era of persecution that, because of that generation’s efforts, would become unrecognizable to future readers.

If one object could symbolize that early era of persecution — and two decades of LC — it would be a stapler.

From 1974 until 1995, the grassroots forum was sent out folded in half and stapled shut. Some subscribers had an E on their address labels, meaning they’d requested extra staples.

Readers still send in letters about “the staple days” today.

“We even, at one point, sold staple removers that said ‘LC, connecting lesbians since 1974,’” Margy Leshner, one of the founding Amazons, recalled in a phone interview.

Despite these efforts, LC has lost plenty of issues to unsympathetic parties over the years. Guards have destroyed the magazines before they could reach incarcerated subscribers. In the early days, a closeted teenager would sign up for an issue, only to have her parents discover it

and alert authorities.

“We would get this form letter from the post office saying that we sent an issue to a residence where there was a minor and the family complained,” Leshner explained. “It was considered obscene material.”

Passing on a legacy

The Amazons have persevered despite it all. Now, issues are distributed in plain, brown envelopes, and they’ve foregone DIY printing in favor of local services. They have two offices near downtown



The Lesbian Connection archives. Photo: Kathe Mitchell

Lansing, one for their six full-time, onsite staff — and two office cats — and one for in-house production and mailing. They also run a lesbian lending library from the latter location.

The publishing schedule was thrown off for a bit, but the magazine survived the height of the Covid pandemic.

Though they originally asked international readers to help pay for postage, the Amazons soon decided it

See **Lesbian Connection**, page 26

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5 Things You Might Not Know About Cavetown

Trans singer-songwriter will bring tour with Mother Mother to Sterling Heights next month



Cavetown. Photo: Kris Khunachak

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When Robin Skinner, aka Cavetown, brings his latest tour to Sterling Heights on July 12, expect the “bedroom pop” vibes the performer has been creating since a very early age — and plenty of growth, too. The trans singer, who uses they/him pronouns, has been growing up right before our eyes, from early days on YouTube and free tracks on Bandcamp to international touring dates alongside British Columbia indie

rock band Mother Mother.

Somehow, Cavetown has carried his early, inarguably youthful aesthetic through to a more mature, experience-informed brand of songwriting and performing that has helped him amass a fiercely loyal online following. While the melodies have grown into something more intricate and lush than those early YouTube entries, Cavetown is still the same vulnerable, clever songwriter he was at 14. Whether you’re new to Cavetown’s music or part of his “Cave Club,” here are

five facts you may not know about the British musician.

1. Cavetown is young — but a music industry veteran!

At 25 years old, it might be hard to believe that Cavetown has been creating music for audiences for over a decade, but it’s true. The performer started a YouTube channel in 2012 at age 14 and debuted an original song called “Haunted Lullaby” the following year, quickly followed by the album “Everything Is Made of Clouds” on Bandcamp. You can still find Cavetown’s early covers on YouTube, including his acoustic rendition of the Twenty-One Pilots song “Tear in My Heart” featuring an earnest, fresh-faced Cavetown strumming along on ukulele.

2. Cavetown is an outspoken trans advocate

While he is typically more private about his own identity, he did come out publicly as trans in 2020 and has often spoken out about transphobia. Cavetown told BTL in 2022 that he wasn’t surprised to see a wave of anti-trans legislation sweeping across the country in conservative-led state legislatures. “I try not to read too much on stuff like this, because I just end up feeling so powerless as an individual,” he said, “but it’s important to

remember how enormous, loving and active our community is. Just keep sticking by your friends and being unapologetically yourself. Things will be OK in the end, and if they aren’t OK, then it’s not the end.”

Cavetown created his “This is Home Project” in October 2022. The organization provides funding to foundations focused on LGBTQ+ youth in need. Through the Project, Cavetown works to increase access to LGBTQ-related physical and mental healthcare, safe housing and much more, both on a broad and more personal scale. Since its creation, This Is Home Project has benefited the Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project, True Colors United, Trans Lifeline, BTEA Collective, and Stonewall. Find out more at cavetown/pages/tihp.

3. Cavetown loves cats

Cavetown’s gray-and-white kitty Juno is a frequent guest on his social channels and even makes it into a song now and then. The song “Juno,” from the 2022 “Worm Food” album, includes the heartbreaking chorus: “I do it for Juno/Pretend her life is on the line/Manipulate myself into staying alive.”

4. Cavetown is a skilled climber

On Instagram (@lemon.socks) a few months ago, Cavetown shared a fun fact: He loves to climb. Next to a video of the performer scaling

an indoor rock climbing wall, he wrote, “I love to clamber around, and I have been trying to get stronger and better at it over the past few months. I managed to catch my first time completing this route, so I made a silly video of it to share because I’m really proud of myself!”

5. Cavetown is a mental health champion

Fans relate deeply to Cavetown’s vulnerability, which shines through on introspective tracks related to the musician’s life experiences, including challenging moments when he has wrestled with staying mentally healthy. The singer-songwriter told BTL in 2022 that the 2020 song “Sharpener” is a deeply personal track that he’s “really proud of.” This song, which he said was inspired by an earlier song, “I Promise I’m Trying,” holds a special place in his heart, Cavetown said. “They both come from a similar subject matter of struggling with your mental health and looking for a way to ask for help while also finding it hard to leave behind the coping mechanisms you’ve relied on for a while.”

Cavetown, who is open about his struggles with depression and anxiety, frequently spotlights mental health resources on his social media feeds. A post on Instagram from mid-May highlighted Mental Health Awareness Month along with several mental healthcare tips from Cavetown Cave Club fan club members.

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Lesbian Connection being printed in 1983. Photo: Joan E. Biren

◀ Lesbian Connection

Continued from page 23

would be more in line with their principles to eat the cost. Lesbian Connection is, as they say on every cover, truly “free to lesbians worldwide.” They can even pay their staff.

“Maybe 10 percent or less of our money comes from advertising,” Leshar said, “but the rest is all donations.”

Women have given generously to LC, sending checks, cash and even food stamps by mail. A lot of donations now come through the magazine’s website.

Some women leave bequests to LC. In July of last year, the current staff was floored when they received a check for over \$329,000, courtesy of a longtime reader who had passed in October of 2021.

The “Passings” section in each issue features obituaries by and

for LC readers, often submitted by partners of the deceased.

Jeanne Arnold, 92, became a subscriber in 1979. She and her partner, Barbara, ran Mother Courage Bookstore and Mother Courage Press in Racine, Wisconsin. They proudly distributed copies of Lesbian Connection at the bookstore, and when Barbara passed in 2013, Jeanne sent her obituary to the magazine.

“Lesbian Connection printed my announcement of her parting, which was really beautiful,” Arnold said in a phone interview. “Lesbian friends of ours said they cried when they read it. And every time I get my issue now, I

look at that first, to see if I knew anybody.”

“Passings” aren’t just a beacon for older women; they also show young readers that it’s possible to live fully, happy, lesbian lives.

“For younger women, we get some insight into what the conditions were like in the ’50s, ’60s, ’70s — of the difficulties, but also the ways that they made their lives joyful.”

— Laurel McBride

Laurel McBride, a 35-year-old reader in Vancouver, Canada, says that “Passings” is one of her favorite parts of the magazine.

“For younger women, we get some insight into what the conditions were like in the ’50s, ’60s, ’70s — of the difficulties, but also the ways that they made their lives joyful,” she said in a phone interview. “I just think there’s so much to learn there, and so much to recognize. If we don’t do that for each other, no one’s going to do it for us.”

The next chapter

The first generation of LC readers and writers is waning, as are

old-school lesbian-feminist venues like women’s bookstores and festivals. Readership peaked around the year 2000, with a circulation of about 28,000. It now sits around 15,000.

But young lesbians are still finding solace in the forum. Nary an issue goes by without at least one letter from a teen- or college-aged reader grateful for her new discovery.

“Where young women used to pick us up in bookstores, they’re now finding us in their online communities,” Lisy Harmon, one of the current Ambitious Amazons, said in a phone interview. She mentioned that their numbers have gone up recently, with subscribers saying they came from places like Tumblr, Discord and Instagram.

Despite our increasingly digital culture, LC remains committed to

See **Lesbian Connection**, page 53

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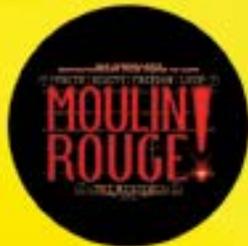
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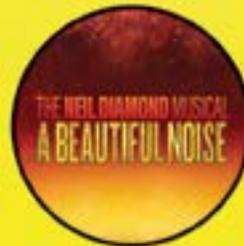
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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Catching Up With Longtime Michigan Trans Advocate Denise Brogan-Kator

Our new “Where Are They Now?” column will get you up-to-date on the lives of LGBTQ+ community advocates who have contributed to Michigan with years of tireless activism before embarking on new chapters, whether in retirement or pursuit of fresh opportunities elsewhere. In this space, we’ll trace the paths of these trailblazers as they navigate life beyond the limelight, offering insights into their current endeavors, passions and the legacies they continue to shape. Join us as we

celebrate their resilience, achievements and the lasting impact they’ve left on Michigan’s LGBTQ+ community.

First up is Denise Brogan-Kator, who served in various LGBTQ+ advocacy capacities for decades, including as the first transgender executive director of a statewide LGBTQ+ organization, Equality Michigan — though this was far from the only “first” she achieved during her career.

On her connection to the LGBTQ+ community in Michigan

Twenty years ago, after a business career in Florida, I became the first openly trans student at the University of Michigan Law School. While there, I worked as a volunteer with the Washtenaw Rainbow Access Project where I worked with Jim Toy and the Triangle Foundation led by Jeff Montgomery — both of these pioneers became friends and mentors during my time as executive director of Equality Michigan — and was a member of the U of M Speakers Bureau, helping to raise awareness of trans people as part of the University community. I also worked for and helped organize the drive to get the university to expand its bylaws to prohibit discrimination in all forms on the basis of gender identity. I was honored when, the year after graduating, the trustees of U of M invited me back to witness the vote as the bylaws were so amended. Ten years later, I returned to Michigan Law for a semester, as the first openly transgender adjunct law professor, to teach a course on LGBTQ+ law.

After graduation, my wife Mary Kator (also a Michigan Law grad) and I started Rainbow Law Center, a law practice we set up to serve the diverse needs of LGBTQ+ people in southeastern Michigan. We served many clients prior to marriage equality, helping them to establish legal arrangements that protected each

other and their children; we set up wills, trusts, deeds and powers of attorney, and too often, helped couples to separate. We also litigated child custody matters and various types of discrimination. One of our most significant cases was representing a client who had been arrested during a police sting operation that targeted gay men. Our success in the case helped to stop such operations.

While practicing law, I served on the board of the Triangle Foundation in several capacities before being elected chair. I worked with the boards of Triangle and Michigan Equality to combine forces as Equality Michigan. Later, I served as executive director of the organization; I was the first transgender executive director of a statewide LGBTQ+ organization not specifically focused on transgender issues. While ED, I had the great privilege of meeting the President of the United States, Barack Obama, at the White House during Pride festivities.

During my time at Equality Michigan, our principal focus was to advocate for the amendment of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to protect LGBTQ+ people from various forms of discrimination in jobs and in public accommodations. Although we made progress, it wasn’t until years later that the person we worked closely with in the state senate, Gretchen Whitmer, signed that amendment into law as governor. We also worked very hard to build community and engage with other organizations

such as Affirmations and LGBT Detroit to listen and learn how to work together on the issues that mattered to everyone.

On what she’s done since leaving Equality Michigan

After leaving Equality Michigan, I worked in the policy department of the national LGBTQ+ family rights organization, Family Equality (formerly Family Equality Council). Over nine years, I moved up through the organization to Chief Policy Officer and, finally, served as the interim Chief Executive Officer as we conducted our national search for our new CEO.

We accomplished many notable things during my time at Family Equality. I started the organization’s legal aid clinics for lower-income families in the deep South. In Mississippi, we joined in a case that overturned the last remaining law in the nation prohibiting LGBTQ+ couples from adopting and fostering. We also worked on several marriage equality campaigns in various states in partnership with the state LGBTQ+ organizations, all of which were successful.

At Family Equality, we worked with outside counsel to write several “Voices of Children” amicus briefs for the Supreme Court and other federal courts around the country in support of marriage equality, emphasizing how legally recognized marriages (or the lack thereof) affect family

stability, especially children’s well-being. In oral arguments in the Windsor case that overturned DOMA, Justice Kennedy held our amicus brief aloft and asked a lawyer advocating against marriage equality if he’d read it and asked what was to be done about all the children of LGBTQ+ couples. It was a proud moment and, I’m convinced, helped to sway Justice Kennedy and win the day for marriage equality.

After marriage equality was achieved, I led our policy team as we worked with several LGBTQ+ state organizations and their legislatures to help them rewrite and update their parentage laws to reflect marriage equality. I also led the coalition that finally overturned New York state’s ban on surrogacy, opening that pathway for LGBTQ+ couples to form their families.

On her proudest achievement as an LGBTQ+ activist

That’s tough to say. My activism career spans several decades, back to the early 1990s when I helped start a trans-specific non-profit dedicated to assisting transgender first responders and military veterans. I am very proud of the teams that I was able to assemble and lead, both at Equality Michigan and at Family Equality, that had such an impact on the lives of LGBTQ+ people and their families.

See **Where Are They Now?**, page 66



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Let It Die Here

Puzzle can be found on page 55

Pride & Precaution

Your guide to celebrating your queerness with care

BY KELLI DUNHAM

I've been performing at Prides as a comedian and storyteller since glitter-covered T-rexes sashayed across Jurassic drag stages.

It's possible this is slight hyperbole.

It's also possible that I'll receive many emails from people who understand dinosaur-related timelines better than I do.

Grave errors in evolution for comic purposes notwithstanding, in my over 200 Pride-related gigs, I have seen some things. This includes things that have sometimes compelled me to don my nurse hat (even though nurses haven't worn hats for decades) and make some gentle suggestions:



Instead of succumbing to the pressure to show up everywhere for everything the entire month, prioritize meaningful connections and experiences — the Love of Missing Out. If the Pride-themed Dungeons and Dragons night is more fun for you than the huge club blow-out, pack up your character sheets and go, kween!

Tip #1: Dress for (heat-related) success. Yes, we all want to look cute, but climate change is real, and it's really a drag. Not in a good way. Could we just as easily parade on the sweltering blacktop during National Coming Out Month in October? Perhaps, but where's the challenge in that? Until October Pride catches on, plan that killer

outfit so it won't literally kill you with heatstroke. Wear light colors and light fabrics. And breathable fabrics.

Lame is not a breathable fabric.

Tip #2: I scream, you scream, we all scream for sunscreen. And by all, I mean everyone. Even if you already have a tan, even if you have more naturally occurring

melanin and even if you "never burn." It's not 1973. The Ozone Layer did its best but is down for the count. If it's hot, you will sweat off even "waterproof" sunblocks, which are mostly only theoretically waterproof, so be prepared to reapply.

I asked S. Hope Dundas, a physician assistant based in Lansing, about Pride-related sun worries, and Dundas had some additional advice: "[If you're using] testosterone gel, wait for at least two hours after applying before applying sunscreen. Also, be aware that sun exposure can increase testosterone levels slightly. Estradiol therapy can make you more sensitive to the sun, so wear good quality sunscreen and, ideally, a hat — or have fun with a Pride-themed parasol. Keep estradiol patches covered and out of direct sunlight."

Dundas also advised people taking doxyPEP or doxycycline to treat chlamydia or syphilis or minocycline for acne to be aware that these meds increase sun sensitivity. "Be extra careful to use good quality sunblock and cover-up," she advises.

On a slightly less clinical note, did you know that cheap glitter is made of metal, which can reflect the sun back onto your skin? The resulting burn can be both painful and strange-looking. Trust me on this. Upgrade your glitter to biodegradable versions or sneak backstage and borrow some from a drag queen — they always have the good stuff.

Tip #3: Replace homo FOMO with homo LOMO. Observing the whirlwind of activities that might not be available at any other time of the year can leave us constantly

wondering, "Is this party/doggie drag show/penis-shaped bagel eating contest where I really want to be?" Instead of succumbing to the pressure to show up everywhere for everything the entire month, prioritize meaningful connections and experiences — the Love of Missing Out. If the Pride-themed Dungeons and Dragons night is more fun for you than the huge club blow-out, pack up your character sheets and go, kween! Did you really come all this way to go back into the 10-sided die closet?

Pro-tip: Titrating your social media scrolling may facilitate more lomo-esque choices.

Tip #4: Party like it's 2024. Because it is 2024. Research harm reduction for your drug of choice

See **Pride & Precaution**, page 42

RUTH ELLIS CLAIRMOUNT

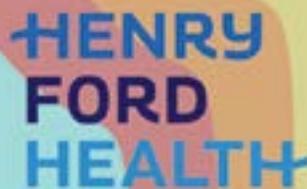


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The History of Motor City Pride

Motor City Pride is one of the largest Pride festivals in the country, drawing an estimated 65,000 visitors to Hart Plaza for a two-day event featuring live performances, hundreds of food and merch vendors, and a parade that frequently honors Michigan

VIPs, including the governor. It's an impressive endeavor, especially considering the volunteer-led efforts that prop up this mainstay event, but it's even more impressive when considering the origins of the event, which stretch back 52 years to the first

Pride march in downtown Detroit.

Here's how Motor City Pride has evolved over the years into a festival that still maintains its legacy as a form of peaceful protest against vocally anti-LGBTQ+ efforts that have taken center stage in recent years:

1972: The Michigan Gay Confederation organizes Detroit's very first gay Pride march, known as "Christopher Street Detroit '72," a tribute to the location of the 1969 Stonewall Riots.



1982: The newly formed Detroit Area Gay and Lesbian Council (DAGLC) organizes Detroit's "Celebration '82" Pride event, which includes a dinner, picnic and a memorial service.



1986: MOHR creates "Forward Together," a statewide Pride and civil rights parade in downtown Detroit.

1989: DAGLC coordinator Frank Colasonti, Jr. and his organization hold a Pride event on the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus called PrideFest.

1992: Michael C. Lary becomes PrideFest's coordinator.

1974: Kathy Kozachenko of Ann Arbor is elected to city council as the first openly lesbian politician elected in U.S. history and speaks at Detroit's Pride march down Woodward Avenue.



1984: The DAGLC holds a Pride fest on July 1 at Wayne State University.

1985: The Michigan Organization for Human Rights (MOHR) hires Craig Covey to organize a Pride parade.

1991: DAGLC moves PrideFest to Oakland Community College in Royal Oak.

1989: MOHR moves their Pride parade to Lansing with the hope of attracting more statewide participation and media coverage. The event memorializes the 20th anniversary of Stonewall and will eventually evolve into Michigan Pride, which ran from 1990-2011 in Lansing.



1993: Lary and others form South East Michigan Pride (SEMP), which begins planning an annual Pride fest.

1996: PrideFest Celebration moves to the northern Oakland Community College campus and is held outdoors for the first time.

2003: The event is renamed Motor City Pride.

2009: Motor City Pride is organized by a dedicated group of volunteers that becomes known as the Motor City Pride Planning Committee.

2002: Ferndale City Manager Tom Barwin helps SEMP move the event to downtown Ferndale. Later that year, PrideFest Celebration becomes a project of the Triangle Foundation, now known as Equality Michigan.

1994: Lary's event is renamed PrideFest Celebration with the tagline "A Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pride Celebration."



See MCP Timeline, page 44

THE CROSWELL

SUMMER SEASON 2024

THE BODYGUARD THE MUSICAL
JUNE 7 - JUNE 16

SCHOOL of ROCK THE MUSICAL
JULY 12 - JULY 21

Disney NEWSIES THE BROADWAY MUSICAL
AUGUST 9 - AUGUST 18

TICKETS
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Ferndale Pride 2024. Photos: Jamie Feldman

Your 2024 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar

Michigan Pride 2024 is rolling, and we have all the details you need to plan out your Pride season right here. You'll find Prides big and small from all over the state, and a few bonus events from outside the Mitten, too.

JUNE

Friday, June 7

OutFront Kalamazoo — through June 8
Arcadia Creek Festival Place.
145 E. Water St.

Kalamazoo Pride draws around 8,000 people each year to an annual two-day Pride festival featuring drag performances, music, exhibitors, food, dancing and more. outfrontkzoo.org/pride2024

Ypsilanti (Ypsi Pride)
Depot Town, 5–10 p.m.
facebook.com/YpsiPride

Saturday, June 8

Dowagiac (Cass County PrideFest)
New Pride Event!

Dowagiac Library Pavilion
206 Main St., 4–8 p.m.
Part of "PrideFest On Tour" — three Pride events in the Berrien, Cass or Van Buren tri-county region. outcenter.org/pridefest

Grand Haven Pride
Downtown Grand Haven, 12–9 p.m. ghpride.org/events

Holly Pride
American Legion Post #149.
408 S. Saginaw St., 12–5 p.m.
facebook.com/ACTHOLLY

Detroit (Motor City Pride) — through June 9

Hart Plaza, June 8: 1–9 p.m., June 9: 12:30–7 p.m.
Parade: June 9, 12 p.m., Kick-off at Fort & Griswold, ends at Hart Plaza

The largest annual Pride fest in Michigan, Motor City Pride draws tens of thousands of people to Hart Plaza for a sprawling event with fun for all ages. Live music across four stages, plentiful food

and drink options, and family- and pet-friendly amenities make for a whole weekend of entertainment.
MotorCityPride.org

Saturday, June 15
Grosse Pointe Pride

Grosse Pointe Village, at St. Clair, 12–2 p.m. wegp.org/Pride-2022-Details

Howell Pride Parade
Downtown., 12–3:30 p.m.

Also: Howell Rainbow Reception, June 3. Brighton Amphitheater, 12–3 p.m.
livingstondiversity.org/pride-alliance-livingston

Livonia Pride
Civic Park, 15218 Farmington Road, 11 a.m.–3 p.m. livonia.gov/1984/Livonia-Pride-Fest

Help us keep our calendar up to date! Email sarah@pridesource.com with details about fests we're missing.

Marquette (Upper Peninsula Rainbow Pride)
Mattson Lower Harbor Park,
200 N Lakeshore Blvd., 1–10:30 p.m. uprainbowPrideorg/events

See **Pride Calendar**, page 39

MOTOR CITY
PRIDE
DETROIT



Presented by



DELTA

FESTIVAL & PARADE

June 8 & 9, 2024

Hart Plaza, Detroit

VISIT [MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG](https://motorcitypride.org) TO LEARN MORE

#MOTORCITYPRIDE

Pride Stage

Sponsored by



Saturday, June 8, 2024

Time	Act
1:15 PM	Bershy
2:00 PM	Chayla Hope
3:00 PM	Motor City Drag Showcase
4:00 PM	VIAL
5:00 PM	Daisha McBride
6:00 PM	Loren Allred
7:00 PM	Motor City Drag Showcase
8:00 PM	Jair Alexander

Sunday, June 9, 2024

Noon	Problematic Black Hottie
1:00 PM	PRISM Men's Chorus
2:00 PM	Candi Carpenter
3:00 PM	RuPaul's JAX
3:00 PM	Dragula's Landon Cider
3:00 PM	Sabin
4:00 PM	Kyle Dion
5:00 PM	glimmers
6:00 PM	Problematic Black Hottie

Festival Stage

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Time	Act
1:30 PM	Sing Out Chorus
2:30 PM	Anthony J. Fink
3:30 PM	Werkout Plan
4:30 PM	Multimagic
5:30 PM	THAY
6:30 PM	Anna Toma
7:30 PM	Marissa & The Starter Packs

Sunday, June 9, 2024

1:30 PM	HippieSoulChild
2:30 PM	James Taylor Jr.
3:30 PM	Inner Circle Avenue
4:30 PM	Flamy Grant
5:30 PM	Paytra

Schedules are subject to change. Check the website

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HAP CareSource



Pyramid Stage

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Time	Act
2:00 PM	Shuan Savage
3:00 PM	666chainz
4:00 PM	Dee Tha Baddie
5:00 PM	Corey TuT
6:00 PM	Xavier Toscano
7:00 PM	Arpita

Sunday, June 9, 2024

1:30 PM	The Science Fair
2:30 PM	CHINA
3:30 PM	Crystal Harding's Drag Review

Riverfront Dance Stage

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Time	Act
1:00 PM	ANTI
2:00 PM	ASHTON SWINTON B2B
LOREN	
4:00 PM	RAEDYLEX
5:30 PM	Stacey Hotwaxx Hale
7:15 PM	KASS

Sunday, June 9, 2024

12:00 PM	TYLR_
1:30 PM	Erik Raphael
2:45 PM	IAMBRANDON
4:00 PM	Heidy P
5:15 PM	LADYMONIX B2B RIMARKABLE



FESTIVAL EVENTS 1 - 9 p.m.

Four Stages of Entertainment Featuring over 50 Acts!

Over 140 Sponsors, Vendors, Non-Profits & Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+ people coming together for Equality!

1-5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games Sponsored by Kruger

8 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes (No Admittance or Re-Entry after 8pm)

9 P.M. Festival Closes

#MOTORCITYPRIDE \$5 for everyone over 12 years of age



FESTIVAL EVENTS 12:30 - 7 p.m.

Four Stages of Entertainment Featuring over 50 Acts!

Over 140 Sponsors, Vendors, Non-Profits & Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+ people coming together for Equality!

11:00 AM 2024 Motor City Pride Parade Sponsored by Jeep

1-5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games Sponsored by Kruger

6 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes (No Admittance or Re-Entry after 6pm)

7 P.M. Festival Closes

#MOTORCITYPRIDE \$5 for everyone over 12 years of age

PARADE

Presented by



Sunday, June 9
Starts at Noon
 Starts at the corner of Fort and Griswold
 Join us in celebrating Pride at this year's parade.

www.motorcitypride.org for any last minute updates.





Pride Stage

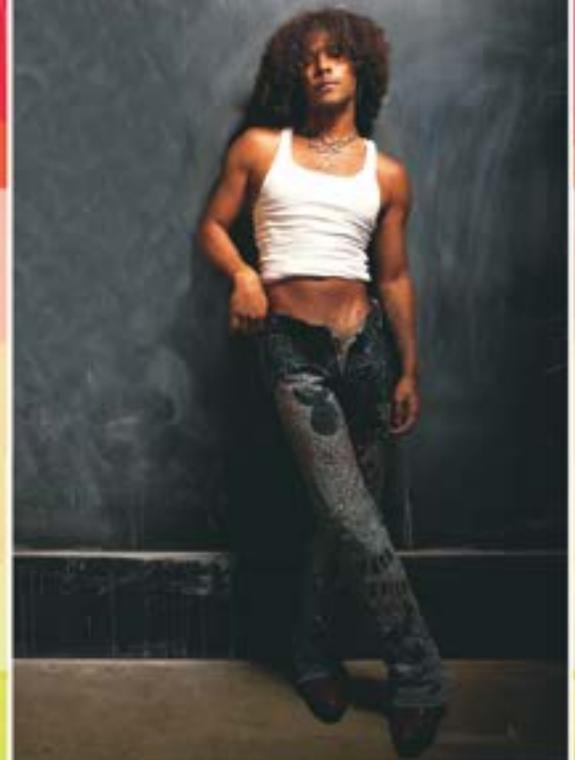
Saturday, June 8, 2024 • 4 p.m.

LOREN ALLRED



Sunday, June 9, 2024 • 4 p.m.

KYLE DION



Family Activities



Saturday
June 8th
1:00-5:00 p.m.

Sunday
June 9th
1:00-5:00 p.m.

Join other families as they participate in face painting, arts and crafts, plus much more!

PARADE MAP SUNDAY AT NOON!



Crystal Harding Hopes to Inspire Younger Generations

Motor City Pride mainstay on becoming a drag queen at age 16

BY LIAM CLYMER

For the “Arabian Princess” Crystal Harding, Motor City Pride marks a new opportunity to bring joy to the Michigan community — a community with which Harding’s performance roots run deep.

Harding told BTL that the start of her 18-year-long performance journey began with a chance meeting of a mentor at a Michigan gay club. “I was 16 years old when I went to my first gay club, and I met a drag queen there,” she said. “We used to hang out every Sunday. She used to do a show at night, but we’d hang out during the day.”

Nestled between the busy schedules of a performer and a student each week were interactions that provided space for conversation and friendship — until the Sunday when everything changed.

“One Sunday, me, her and another drag queen were in the car, and she was getting worried — ‘Oh my god, another queen canceled on me. What am I going to do?’” Harding recalled. “Then after an hour of them trying to find her, they both looked up at me.”

Harding said at that point she didn’t have a complete understanding of drag performance and was apprehensive to fill in. However, after a bit of convincing and discussion, she decided to give it a go.

Before getting up on stage, Harding said her friends helped get her ready for performance, which was a new and challenging experience in and of itself. “It took me three hours to shave one leg — it was crazy,” she explained. “And baby, I’ve got two legs, so think about that.”

When it came time for her debut, announcers realized that they hadn’t asked for a name, but Harding quickly arrived at the stage name she would carry with her from then on. In that moment, she considered what values and people she held closest, she said.



Crystal Harding. Photos: Tih Penfil

“My brother’s girlfriend at the time was named Crystal — she was like my sister,” Harding said. “Also, with the name Crystal, I think of brightness, a breath of fresh air and something cute.”

Harding said after she saw the audience at that first show, she fell in love with performing. She continues to do so while spreading a message of brightness and care — a message made all the more vital in an era when drag performance has become a common topic of harmful political rhetoric.

While Michigan is currently a blue state, Harding said safety while performing still often comes down to the individual. She said you must realize your own power to affect your life. “They’ll call your manager to get you a gig, and when you get the information, you can either kindly decline or you can say yes,” she said. “You have

the upperhand on your safety, your life and your goals.”

But even then, there are instances where confrontational hate must be met with kindness, Harding said.

“I like to kill them with kindness,” Harding said. “[Protesters] are out there in the heat saying stupid things, while you’re in here doing your job with the best crowd ever. Don’t go out and fight them. You can make it fun, or you can make it your worst nightmare — I personally make it fun.”

Harding said her mom inspires her to perform while keeping fun and kindness at the center of her art. “My mom’s the best,” she declared. “I wish more people were like her in general. I promise you I’m not saying that because she is my mom, but her heart is sweet, nice and giving.”

Much like those friends and

family who’d supported her journey, Harding said she hopes to inspire younger generations with her performances across Michigan. “I get inspired, especially at Pride, when I see the new generation come up and tell me how much they love seeing me year after year,” she said. “At one point, I had this one queen meet me at Pride when she was 15 who then became a drag queen at 18 and we worked together.”

Harding said performance isn’t limited to just inspiring younger generations, it’s a “way out” for all involved. “It’s a way out for the artist — it’s literally a five minute performance of spilling your heart out on stage,” she said. “For people watching, it’s just a way out of stress. You sit and watch a good bubbly song and forget about your



troubles for a moment — that’s therapy without therapy.”

Harding said the only thing she doesn’t like about performing at Motor City Pride is how quickly it’s over. “The tears, the energy, the food, the other entertainers — Motor City Pride is just so amazing,” Harding said. “It takes so long to get to the date because it’s a whole year, but to me, it feels like it lasts only five minutes when I’m there. I’m so mad about it, because it’s so much fun.”

Crystal Harding will close out Motor City Pride on the Pyramid Stage at 3:30 p.m. on June 9. Find the full Motor City Pride entertainment lineup at motorcitypride.org/entertainment.

◀ **Pride Calendar**
Continued from page 34

Niles (Michiana PrideFest)
Riverfront Park, Niles
Riverfront, 4–8 p.m.

Part of “PrideFest On Tour” — three Pride events in the Berrien, Cass or Van Buren tri-county region. outcenter.org/pridefest

Saturday, June 22

Benton Harbor (Twin Cities PrideFest)
Dwight P. Mitchell Park, 100 E. Main St., Benton Harbor, 4–8 p.m.

Part of “PrideFest On Tour” — three Pride events in the Berrien, Cass or Van Buren tri-county region. outcenter.org/pridefest

Grand Rapids Pride
Calder Plaza, 320 Ottawa Ave. NW, 12–10 p.m.

Grand Rapids Pride will celebrate its 36th annual festival in 2024. One of the largest one-day events held in the city each year, the festival is a true community event brimming with family-friendly activities, live music on multiple stages, dozens of food and drink options, drag performances and more. grpride.org/pride-festival/

Bay City (Great Lakes Bay Pride)
Wenonah Park, 801 N Water St., 11 a.m.–6 p.m.
greatlakesbaypride.org

Lansing Pride
Old Town, 1–10 p.m.

A few years ago, Lansing Pride had shrunk to a small gathering each year in the state’s capitol after picking up from where Michigan Pride, held from 1990–2011, left off. But in recent years, Lansing Pride has roared back. Now a full-day event that draws thousands of attendees to the vibrant Old Town neighborhood, the fest features a long day of live music, drag shows (including a meet-and-greet following Loosey LaDuca’s feature performance), food trucks, a beer tent, a children’s area with drag story time and nearly 200 vendors. LansingPride.org

See **Pride Calendar**, page 62

Celebrate Pride 2024 in Style and Support These Queer-Owned Retailers



BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Skip the mass-marketed offerings at your local big box store or faceless online outlet in favor of curated, queer-owned retailers offering authentic LGBTQ+ Pride goods. Here are a few of our recent favorite finds for Pride 2024 — share yours on our Facebook @pridesource and Instagram @pridesourcemedia.

Shop the Phluid Project's Gender-Neutral 2024 Pride Collection

Gender-neutral clothing company The Phluid Project's founder and owner (and Grosse Pointe native!) Rob Smith told BTL earlier this year that creating the brand and leaving the corporate world to promote

gender inclusivity everywhere has made his younger self proud. Phluid's mission "dissolves the artificial boundaries of gender, skin color, and status, we and they."

The 2024 Phluid Pride collection embraces this philosophy with a long list of trendy, affordable pieces. We love the No Hetero Handbag, the "Thembo" crop tee and the Metallic "Gender Is a Social Construct" hoodie, but everything in this collection is worth considering. Head to thephfluidproject.com to shop the whole collection.

Buy from this Grand Rapids Esty seller to help 'Keep Michigan Gay'

Etsy seller Em from Grand Rapids runs the Esty shop "Keep Michigan Gay," where they

sell designs inspired by queer culture and families, Midwest nature, mental health and self-care, and "the little joys in life." You'll find a delightful mix of size-inclusive apparel (don't miss the "Love, Laugh, Lesbian" tee), gear like a 20 oz. "Here & Queer" tumbler and unique finds like a "Protect IVF" rainbow tee. Shop on Etsy at etsy.com/shop/KeepMichiganGay.

Find Pride gear in person or online at Detroit's Well Done Goods

Well Done Goods is a Detroit queer-owned custom print shop combined with a highly curated mix of everything, including unique overtly queer items. Amuse houseguests with a rose-scented bar of Gay Bar Soap ("Don't drop it. Or maybe do?" reads the product

description), upgrade your office desk with the "Don't Be a Drag, Just Be a Queen" Office Desk Nameplate ("Is slaying in your DNA? Do you walk into a room purse first?") or grab the on-trend Pride Flag Snapback Cap. Shop online at welldonegoods.com or visit the store's Eastern Market brick-and-mortar location in Detroit.

Sorry, not sorry to tell you about Not Sorry Goods

The queer-owned gift shop Not Sorry Goods is a must-do when window shopping your way down Woodward in Ferndale — it's hard to resist the kitschy colorful knickknacks beckoning you from the sidewalk. You won't make it more than a few feet in before practically tripping over eye-catching Pride finds like stickers ("I Survived Heterosexual



Indoctrination” is a good conversation starter), sew-on patches (the Stonewall “Pride Is Protest” patch is classy and perfect for Pride) and Michigan-imbued Pride goods like a Great Lakes Pride flag. Shop online at notsorrygoods.com or in person at 22963 Woodward Ave. in Ferndale.

Get your Unicorn Feed & Supply in Ypsilanti

Don't sleep on Ypsilanti-based Unicorn Feed & Supply, which lives on in a digital storefront format after closing up shop in Depot Town. Not only will you find all the supplies your pet unicorn could ever need, but LGBTQ+ Pride practically emanates from every corner of the colorful shop. We're particularly fond of a Teal Non-Binary Statement Earring (also available in trans and female styles), a “Queer

AF” rainbow ornament and a “Magical Homosexual” enamel pin. Shop online at unicornfeedsupply.com.

Support a local business owned by a Black, queer and autistic entrepreneur

The Butters Hygienics Co., based in Ypsilanti, offers all kinds of luxe body, hair and sexual intimacy products so you can enter the Pride festivities feeling pretty and hydrated from head to toe. Owned by former BTL writer Jerome S. Nichols, Butters Hygienics offers fun products like a vanilla icing flavored Booty n Body Shimmer Oil, Champagne Problems Bubble Bath and DILF Long N Soft Beard Oil with jojoba and castor oil. Shop online at getthebutters.com.

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◀ Pride & Precaution

Continued from page 30

and test for fentanyl — every dose, every time. If you're drinking alcohol, especially in the heat, occasionally consume calories in the form of food (sure, even funnel cakes) and keep consuming water or sports drinks, preferably in a two-to-one ratio and NOT just as a mixer. Take designated driver turns; don't always make your pregnant lesbian friend be the one.

If you're in recovery, especially early recovery, my friend Lisa from Traverse City explains, "Sober pride can be amazing, but don't just concentrate on breaking old habits; work on making new traditions with new friends who are not the people, places, and things [associated with your substance use]."

You can find fentanyl testing strips, Narcan and other harm reduction supplies in a free vending machine at Affirmations community center in Ferndale and other metro Detroit locations. Find a location near you here: shorturl.at/jkpAN.

Tip #5: Prep for the vexing ex. I haven't dated anyone who lives in my city for nearly a decade; two of my main lovers are, in fact, deceased and will never again attend any Pride, and for a quarter of my adult life, I was a Roman Catholic nun. Yet — and this defies the laws of probability and common sense

— last year at the New York Dyke March, I ran into not one but two exes. Before we even started marching.

Since I ran into my exes, I can almost guarantee you'll run into yours, even folks who made bad decisions. Or perhaps especially those who were a very bad decision. Dedra Smith, a therapist from Grand Rapids, suggests we take this opportunity to boost our boundaries. "If there's anyone with whom you had a difficult parting, it can be important to clarify if there are events, geographical areas or time frames that might make sense to negotiate [with them] about," she recommends. "Even if one or both parties ultimately can't commit to a schedule or cede an entire event, having the conversation can alert you to the possibility that you might both be present. If you're attending events with your friends, you can let them know your level of comfort around running into a problematic ex and decide on a plan of action should it happen."

And yes. Of course, we'll be attending events with our friends, who are also our exes. That's why Smith added the word "problematic."

I'd prefer not to be a glitter killjoy, but sometimes, we all need reminders. Pride is not just about the celebration; it's about survival — of our fabulousness, our mental health and our resilience in living to annoy those who hate us another day.

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MICHIGAN
DHHS

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◀ MCP Timeline

Continued from page 33



2020: Motor City Pride is moved to a virtual event due to the Covid pandemic.



2024: Motor City Pride is set for June 8-9 and is expected to draw an estimated 65,000 attendees to the festivities at Hart Plaza, with performances by “RuPaul’s Drag Race” star Jax and R&B singer Kyle Dion.

2011: Motor City Pride moves to Detroit’s Hart Plaza and becomes a two-day festival and brings back the parade and march.

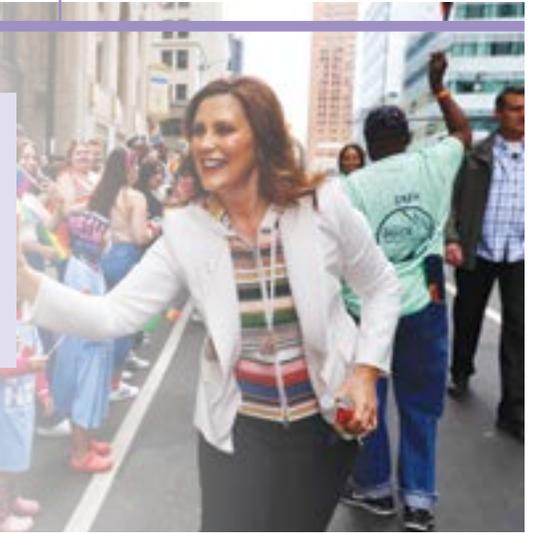
2022: Motor City Pride returns to June for the annual festival and parade.



2017: Motor City Pride becomes its own organization and receives 510(c)3 status. Dave Wait is named executive director.

2021: Two events are held, a virtual event in June recognizing Pride Month and an in-person festival and parade in September.

2022: Motor City Pride celebrates the 50th anniversary of Pride marches and events held in Southeastern Michigan.



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– Terrell, Vivent Health patient

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Top row, left to right: Alyshia Dyer, Domonique Clemons, Emily Dievendorf, Jason Hoskins, Jason Morgan. Bottom row: Katie Scott, Kerene Moore, Travis Radina, Laurie Pohutsky, Leslie Blackburn. Courtesy photos

Meet 10 LGBTQ+ Candidates Running for Office in Michigan

Openly queer trailblazers ready to serve and represent

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The old adage “representation matters” may not be more important anywhere than it is in government. People elected to state, local and federal positions hold a great deal of power when it comes to championing causes like anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination and ensuring equal and fair access to resources we all share. That’s why people like Roland Leggett, chair of the LGBT and Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party, work tirelessly to populate what he calls a “pipeline” of qualified candidates to elected roles big and small.

“It’s not just about making sure people vote — it’s about making sure people take action,” he tells BTL. The Caucus works alongside organizations like the Unity Fund, a Michigan-based PAC focusing on assisting LGBTQ+ candidates for legislative, executive and judicial offices in Michigan and the similarly focused LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, which spotlights LGBTQ+ candidates across the country.

These are 10 of the dozens of openly LGBTQ+ candidates running for offices at every level of government across Michigan, including statewide offices and roles serving select localities. Kick off your local candidate research at Vote411.org.

Alyshia Dyer, Washtenaw County Sheriff

Alyshia Dyer served as a road patrol deputy and marine deputy for the Washtenaw County Sheriff’s Office for nearly a decade before embarking on a career as a therapist and social worker. Endorsed by LPAC, an organization dedicated to electing LGBTQ+ women and nonbinary candidates to public office, Dyer would become the first Democratic woman elected to a sheriff role in the history of Michigan. “As sheriff, I will rewrite jail policies that impact our LGBTQ+ community in collaboration with our LGBTQ+

community, including policies that have placed incarcerated trans people at increased risk of not receiving gender-affirming care and of being placed in solitary confinement,” Dyer tells BTL. “I will bring the Washtenaw County Jail into compliance with best practices laid out by the National Center for Transgender Equality. This will include adhering to federal standards requiring the use of a person’s lived name and pronouns, which is not currently mandated by the administration’s policy. As a pansexual candidate running for a seat that has always been held by men, I deeply believe it’s time for change and we deserve a sheriff’s office that will be accountable, transparent and forward-thinking.”

Travis Radina, Ann Arbor City Council (Ward 3)

Travis Radina has served as an Ann Arbor City Council Member since 2020, when he was elected on

a platform of improving the lives of his neighbors and the community he loves. Prior to serving on city council, Travis served as Ann Arbor’s LGBTQ Liaison to the Mayor and as President of the acclaimed Jim Toy Community Center, the non-profit that oversees Ann Arbor Pride and provides support to local LGBTQ+ community members in myriad ways.

Katie Scott, Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners (District 9)

Katie Scott was the first out lesbian elected to the Washtenaw County Commission in 2018. Since then, this ICU nurse, mother, labor activist and community leader has been working to advance LGBTQ+ rights, workplace democracy, public health issues and tackling issues like housing and food insecurity. Scott’s campaign platform focuses on a belief that

county government should act as a safety net when it comes to providing health and human services — topics close to the heart of this veteran medical professional and community advocate.

Kerene Moore, Judge (District 15 — Ann Arbor)

A social justice attorney with over 15 years of legal and public service experience, Kerene Moore is the current director of conviction integrity at the Washtenaw County Prosecutor’s Office and has served as a juvenile referee and judicial attorney in the county’s circuit court. Prior to these roles, Moore provided free representation to over 1,000 under-resourced clients and founded Outreach, a pro bono LGBTQ+ advocacy project with University of Michigan Law School students. Moore has also served on committees and boards of organizations like the Jim Toy Community Center,

Equality Michigan, Women Lawyers Association of Michigan and the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission.

Domonique Clemons, Genesee County Clerk

Elected as the first out LGBTQ+ county clerk in the history of the state in 2022, Domonique Clemons is running for reelection to a role that has him overseeing the maintenance, upkeep and issuance of Genesee County's vital, legal and property records. The position also plays a pivotal role in protecting our democracy — Clemons serves as the Chief Election Official for the county. A Flint native, Clemons has also served as Genesee County Commissioner and Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners, where he championed projects like the creation of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission and the equitable distribution of American Rescue Plan Act funds. He also worked to fund several programs and projects, including the largest blight elimination plan in Genesee County history and the Redevelopment of Buick City, all while passing a balanced budget.

Leslie Blackburn, Lodi Township Board of Trustees

If elected, Leslie Blackburn would be one of the first out LGBTQ+ people to serve on the board of trustees for Lodi Township in Washtenaw County southwest of Ann Arbor. Blackburn has a corporate background in engineering and management, where they earned skills they will bring to the table as a township trustee. A spiritual awakening after the birth of their daughter led Blackburn away from corporate life to become a teacher, artist, healer and guide focused on personal empowerment and spiritual growth. Blackburn's platform focuses on issues like environmentalism, systemic oppression and a commitment to dismantling racism through community care. Blackburn advocates for what they call the Four Foundations: repairing relationships with our bodies,

community, ancestors and nature.

Emily Dievendorf, Michigan House of Representatives (District 77)

When Emily Dievendorf was elected to office in 2022, they became the first out nonbinary person elected to the state legislature. Dievendorf is also openly bisexual. Prior to serving as a state rep, Dievendorf spent years working in public service and advocacy, including as executive director for Equality Michigan. While in office, Dievendorf has championed several impactful pro-LGBTQ+ pieces of legislation, including the amendment to Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act that codified LGBTQ+ discrimination protections, laws that knocked down the state's long-standing sodomy law and "gay panic" defense, and measures that have eased the legal name change process and have added legal protections for LGBTQ+ families.

Laurie Pohutsky, Michigan House of Representatives (District 17)

In 2018, Laurie Pohutsky became the first openly queer female legislator ever elected to the Michigan state house and the first to serve as Speaker Pro Tempore. Pohutsky has been a steadfast advocate for LGBTQ+ Michiganders, becoming an outspoken voice on the importance of amending Elliott-Larsen and sponsoring and co-sponsoring a long list of pro-LGBTQ+ pieces of legislation, including LGBTQ+ family protections, ridding the state of outdated sodomy and "gay panic" defense laws, and many others.

Jason Hoskins, Michigan House of Representatives (District 18)

Jason Hoskins, Michigan's first Black, openly LGBTQ+ state legislator, took office in 2022, where he immediately tackled

pro-LGBTQ+ causes including the Elliott-Larsen amendment and a host of other bills aimed at improving the lives of the Michigan LGBTQ+ community. Before serving in the Michigan House, Hoskins, who holds a law degree, worked for years in public service supporting state legislators and as a member of the Southfield City Council. Before winning his race in 2022, Hoskins told BTL, "When you're talking about banning critical race theory, and you're potentially thinking about bringing up 'Don't say gay' bills, I think it is very important to have people of color speaking out and queer people of color speaking out. And so that is a responsibility that I know I'll have if I'm elected, but it's certainly a responsibility I'm willing to take on because it's needed."

Jason Morgan, Michigan House of Representatives (District 23)

In addition to making history as one of Michigan's only openly gay elected officials, Jason Morgan is likely the first person elected to the legislature with a muscular dystrophy diagnosis. Morgan told BTL in 2022 ahead of his election win, "I felt like I needed to talk about my disability in a way that was not a story that would make people feel bad for me by any means — because I am so, so fortunate to be where I am in my life — but to use it and to share it as a story of hope, of overcoming pretty big obstacles to achieve your dreams because that's how it has been for me." Prior to his election in 2022, Morgan served as a union educator and as the first openly LGBTQ+ Washtenaw County Commissioner. Despite his young age (Morgan is 35), the candidate boasts a long list of accomplishments, including working alongside Congress Members John Dingell, Debbie Dingell, Elissa Slotkin and Haley Stevens as well as Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.

Many other queer and ally candidates are running for offices in Michigan. Find Equality Michigan's list of endorsements at bit.ly/4e5fEo4 and keep up with BTL for election news through Nov. 5.

◀ Temple Bar

Continued from page 21

including Larry Love, who has been managing Temple Bar for 15 years. Love told BTL he's feeling overwhelmed by the outpouring of support. "Our customers have been nothing shy of amazing," he says. "The outpour of love and concern has been overwhelming and that makes you feel really good."

Still, Love says he's worried for his staff, who had been anticipating the revenue and tips that come along with a busy weekend. He's hopeful fellow bar owners will step up to offer some temporary work for his talented team members and that they'll be able to wait out the interruption and return to work when the bar reopens. "We're all in this community together," he says. "And Temple Bar has been here forever."

Boukas says he bought the bar in 1988 with the intention of creating a space where everyone was welcomed in. "We're all human," he says. "We have very little differences — that's why I wanted to create a safe space for all 37 years ago." The world was a very different place in the late '80s, Boukas notes, especially for queer men, who were navigating the AIDS crisis, which was in full swing. "We were a place where everyone could come, no matter who they were," he says.

That sentiment has remained at the heart of Temple Bar's mission and is key to why patrons, like long-time customer Joe Basila, keep coming back. "I just adore that bar and wish them the best," he says. "It's a neighborhood bar that makes me wish I lived in their neighborhood." The Oak Park resident says he makes the trip to Temple because of the excellent dance DJs and great patio space, but also because the bar is "extremely welcome to all who enter."

"If they needed help clearing fallen concrete to expedite their reopening, I'd be there at a moment's notice," Basila adds. "People need places to just dance and have fun, and Temple never disappoints when it comes to those two things."

Boukas posted to Facebook after the facade collapse, thanking the community for the support and to give an update on one of Temple Bar's favorite "employees," his 22-year-old jet black bar cat, Darla. "The entire staff and Darla

are safe," he wrote, adding, "What knocks us down only makes us stronger. I'll try my best to keep everyone updated. Thanks again."

Patrons chimed in with words of support and offers of help — and several comments expressing relief that Darla was unscathed. "So glad to hear that everyone is safe, cats and humans alike," wrote Facebook user Avis Saunders. "If you need anything let us know, wishing you all the best!"

"Stay strong George ❤️❤️❤️," wrote Simone Mcfarlen. "We will be there when you reopen — hugs to Darla."

Boukas isn't sure why the facade collapsed, but a nearby, long-term sinkhole, which has recently expanded and the condition of an abandoned building directly next door raise some questions about whether these issues factored into what happened. Police have closed the lane closest to Temple Bar near the corner of Cass and Temple Street, which includes the sinkhole location. Love said the sinkhole, currently marked by an orange traffic barrel, started opening about a month and a half ago and that reverberations could be felt through the Temple Bar building whenever large vehicles would drive over the hole.

The basement of the abandoned building next door has been flooded and appears to sit at an angle. Satellite imagery on Google Maps shows a collapsed roof that is exposed to the elements atop the building, located at 2900 Cass Ave. The building has been abandoned for at least 20 years and is owned by an entity called Temple Commons, LLC, which bought up several dilapidated Cass Corridor properties around 2008.

Most of these properties remain unrenovated. The building was once a drug store and food market and housed more than a dozen apartments, but it has sat empty and open to trespass for decades. Little is known about the investors behind the purchase except that Illitch Holdings appears to own these properties through sub-corporations.

BTL has sent a request for information about the status of the abandoned property and whether the city's investigation into Temple Bar's facade collapse includes reviewing the condition of this building to the Detroit Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department.

Her True Colors, Still Shining Through

Cyndi Lauper on a lifetime of championing LGBTQ+ causes, her farewell tour and new documentary

Cyndi Lauper. Courtesy photo



BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

At 70, Cyndi Lauper's special place in pop music history can be seen everywhere you look. Look around at abortion rights rallies and you'll see "Girls Just Want to Have Fun(damental) Rights" signs held high. Look up at a gay Pride float and there she'll be with her lesbian sister, Ellen. And look at a recent NPR Tiny Desk concert featuring 26-year-old rising pop artist Chappell Roan, with cigarettes tucked into her towering red wig and lipstick smeared all over her teeth, and tell me you don't see the "she's so unusual" vibes that made Lauper famous, theatrical mannerisms and all.

Of course, her timeless songs, which she'll bring to the Fox Theatre on Oct. 24 as part of her Girls Just Wanna Have Fun Farewell Tour, made her a household name too. It

says a lot about an artist who recorded songs decades ago that have either taken on new life or speak to our lives currently, which Lauper's do. Co-written by Lauper, "Sally's Pigeons," from her 1993 album "Hat Full of Stars," didn't shy away from putting a face on the issue of abortion rights, as it tells the story of two childhood friends — "little girls in ponytails," Lauper sings, wistfully — and one who dies from a back-alley abortion. That song resurfaced in 2022 after the Supreme Court ruled to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, prompting Lauper to record an updated version.

These days, I can't help but think of today's LGBTQ+ youth who, facing the hostility of queerphobic rhetoric and harmful legislation, need what is perhaps Lauper's most heartening and universally loved anthem, "True Colors," as much as I did when I came out 25 years ago. When Lauper

whispers, "If this world makes you crazy and you've taken all you can bear, you call me up because you know I'll be there," her voice sounds like a warm hug from a dear friend who hurts for a whole community of people who are still disenfranchised.

It sounds that way because Lauper has been one of the dearest friends anyone could ask for — a true LGBTQ+ community ally. "Let the Canary Sing," a new documentary that goes behind the scenes of Lauper's enduring career, looks at her rising stardom in the '80s and reflects on some of her most seminal songs, including how "True Colors" was inspired by her close friend Gregory, who died of AIDS-related illness. About that whispered message: "I wanted to speak to a human being in the most tender spot," she says in the film.

"Let the Canary Sing," which fittingly premiered during Pride Month on June 4 on

Paramount+, illustrates Lauper's close bond with the LGBTQ+ community — just look at that footage of her testifying on Capitol Hill before a Senate subcommittee about youth homelessness in 2015. "I want to implore you not to pray to God to change your kid. I'm a mom. Pray to God to change your heart so you can love and help your kid," she said at the time. In 2008, she co-founded True Colors United, a nonprofit addressing that very problem in the United States. As an artist and through her advocacy, Lauper has always been passionate about helping young queer people. Just by extending her allyship into songs, she made me feel affirmed for being gay and helped the closeted, quietly suffering teenager I was grow into the very openly queer journalist adult I became — the adult who could now tell her the part she played in helping me get here. So it's true: Cyndi Lauper's place

in pop music history, off the charts, where she has perhaps made her most profound impact, can be seen everywhere you look.

I'm laughing because at the beginning of the documentary you say that you're late for everything, and you're a few minutes late.

[Laughs.] No, we're *very* late. This guy that I just did this interview with, the poor bastard, took him for a walk in Central Park, and then he was like, Cyn, we've been sitting here talking for a long time, but we didn't even get up to 1983 yet. I talked him into the ground. Poor thing.

I watched the documentary. I cried like a baby. Your musical history is so embedded in my identity as a queer person, and so I just really felt that come through in the film.

Well, [director Alison Ellwood] has a lot of heart, and when I was first approached I felt like, ah, why do I need a documentary? But we were all sitting there watching documentaries. It was like, it was ridiculous. It was the pandemic, right? You remember.

And I kept saying, look, I'm not dead. There's no reason. And then they said, "Yeah, but you're alive, so you can make sure it's true." And so then I saw this docuseries called "Laurel Canyon." It was so beautifully done, and also a wonderful story. And it was obvious that this person that did that documentary was a filmmaker. And I looked her up and I said, "Well, if I'm going to do a documentary, I'd like to do it with this filmmaker because she's a wonderful filmmaker." I thought, she really knows how to tell a story. I was excited to work with her.

It's great to have it on the record, in your own words. It's also very special to have your sister Ellen be a part of this. After seeing the film, I feel like she's a big part of your story.

When I went to Washington to sing "True Colors" for President Biden [in 2022] — and actually, I sat next to Senator Tammy Baldwin, who wrote the Respect for Marriage Act — the first thing I started to see was everything we all worked so hard for rolled back to prehistoric times. Some people were very happy, not most. When I went, I met this Republican senator that voted for the bill, Senator Portman (R-Ohio), who has an LGBTQ+ kid. I looked at him and I said, "It's different when it's in your family, isn't it?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "You're doing right because you really see the truth of it, not the crazy people who are fear-mongers, hate-mongers, God-is-a-white-man-who-

hates-everyone-mongers."

It's a scary thing when you think about it. For me, as a little kid, it was a scary thing, but that's why I guess I was asked to leave two Catholic grade schools, because when they told me my mother was going to hell, I said, "She's not going to hell. You don't even know her. She's not going to hell. She works hard, loves her kids, and really tries hard to take care of them. She's not going to hell."

How big of a role did the LGBTQ+ people in your life — Ellen, but also your gay friends Carl and Gregory — play in shaping you as an LGBTQ+ activist?

Oh no, it wasn't that. Are you kidding? What really made me say, "OK, that's it, we got to do something," is when I was pregnant with my son, and the shape of a beached whale, so you can't do much. And it was the beginning of the internet, which I thought was very "Star Trek," like Captain Kirk, because now, you could type something and somewhere far away, someone else would read what you typed instantaneously. This was "Star Trek" to me because it was so new.

And I just kept reading these letters for the first time about people, because I never had time to read anything. I was always working, working, working, working. And when I read the letters, people were talking about feeling horrible and wanting to commit suicide because they were disenfranchised from everything — from their family, their friends, their school, their job, whatever. And then they heard "True Colors." And I called Ellen and I read them to her and I said, "Ellen, we've got to do something. When the time is right, you and me have got to do something." And then we started. Started with PFLAG. Poor Ellen, because I styled her, too. She don't like being styled.

What did she hate most about how you styled her?

The mousse that gave her a pointy head. I thought it was good. She kind of liked it, but I pinned the shirt in the back a little bit. I thought it was too big, and she wasn't keen on that. But she's great. Always an inspiration. She is 18 months older than me, and my mother used to dress us alike and people would go, "Are they twins?" And my mother would say, "Almost." And I used to go to my mother, "Ma, it's not almost, what do you mean almost? You either are or you're not. We're not." But oh, I was up Ellen's butt no matter what. Whatever she did, I did. Whatever she wore, I wanted to wear. Whatever she did, I wanted to do. She still talks to me, though, so that's good.

See **Cyndi Lauper**, page 50

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Despite the mousse! So, you're somebody who has lived and fought through Stonewall, the AIDS epidemic and the fight for marriage equality, and you've been on the front lines during all of this as an ally. And we are obviously going through a very hostile period currently for queer people in this country.

You know what I got to say to that? Vote. Research your voting. Don't just vote. Don't just think, "Oh, they don't have anything on the ballot." Bullshit. There's always shit on the ballot. There's laws, there's a little this, little amendment, little that, little this, and [it's] hidden. Vote411.com — that's what you got to print. Find out who's running in your district, who's voting in favor of you, who's voting against you, and vote for the person that's your advocate, not somebody trying to squash you.

You were involved in the 2008 election, encouraging people to vote for President Obama. Do you plan on getting involved with this year's election campaigning?

Yeah, I have to. Because what are we supposed to do? I am supporting Tammy Baldwin because I think she's brilliant. She always champions families. What do you think was going to happen with all the families that there are now? And there's all different kinds of families, and you know what? Family is family. And when it's in your family, right in your face every day, what do I always say? Button up your shirt,



Cyndi Lauper. Photo: Ruven Afanador

why? Because I was taught blood's thicker than water. You stand together. You can wear down hate. Hate is not a good thing.

There's an old clip in the film of you talking about how you didn't want to be an icon; you just always wanted to be an artist. It's undeniable that you have become an icon in the eyes of many, though. In fact, I can't

this point in your career?

I don't know, sweetie. I don't know what that is. All I know is I've always strived to contribute to the world to make it better. Make it better for the kids, make it better for the Earth if we can. Although we're so stuck in plastic, I don't know what's going to happen. But you want to stand together. The one thing I learned about the "True Colors" thing was that if you want to have somebody listen to you, you got to listen to them, too. And if you share your personal stories, you might find that you have more in common than you think.

Sometimes there's people that go, "Oh, you are a liberal." "Oh, you are a Republican." But the truth is, we are Americans. That's what we are. And these party things, I don't know. I just know I'm an American, and I believe deep in my heart that Americans, deep in their heart, are fair-minded people. And I think that what the Republican Party used to be was Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln was a Republican. I don't know what's happened to the party. I'm telling you that even though you may be dismayed, don't be hijacked. Don't let zealous religious people force their religion down your throat.

Throughout your career, you have really cultivated this sense of individuality as an artist despite some industry folks trying to hold

you back, and then I think of artists like Beyoncé and Taylor Swift...

Hey, Taylor Swift. That girl, she's pretty cool. So is Beyoncé. She's doing all this different stuff. What's wrong with that?

In the documentary, you talk about how it was so segregated for an artist in the '80s, and that you felt you could only stay in one lane musically. And look at what has happened: Beyoncé just released a country album — to some controversy, but she still did it.

There's always controversy, and maybe it will help people like The War and Treaty.

What kind of progress do you feel has been made since you struggled to get out and stay outside of a box in the '80s? Do you feel like we have made progress since, especially for women in the business?

Well, I didn't get too far because as soon as 1989 came and the people that really were advocates for individuality were all let go and fired, then they brought all these other people in and everybody was a soundalike, then it was very difficult for me. And none of the music that I made, well, actually it was heard, ironically. Don't ask me how, but people do know "Hat Full of Stars," the

“ *I just know I'm an American, and I believe deep in my heart that Americans, deep in their heart, are fair-minded people.*

your heart's falling out of your chest. If these people got no heart, they got cold. Cold as can be. But when it's your kid, are you going to vote against your kid, or are you going to help your kid? You're going to vote against your sister, your brother, your cousin? No. I'm not. I'm not going to do that. Guess

recall a time when you haven't been referred to as an icon of some sort — a style icon, a gay icon, and now you've been named a Lifetime Ally Icon by WeHo Pride. What are your feelings on being an "icon" now, at

album. People do know “Sisters of Avalon,” the album, and people know “Shine.” That one wasn’t even released. But you have to just keep doing what you do, and just keep moving forward. And there’s always a way around a brick wall. And there’s a lot of gatekeepers. You just got to find the right one that’s going to let you through the gate.

What has led to your upcoming tour being your last?

Well, hon’, you know, right now I’m strong, and I can do an arena tour. And I haven’t done it in years, like a real bonafide arena — “go see Cyndi, it’s not 50 minutes, it’s a fucking hour and a half,” and you actually can hear a lot of music. Right now, I’m strong and I can do it. But in five years, I don’t know what the heck. Sure, I’ll probably sing. I’ll probably do something because I love singing, but I don’t know that I would have the physical strength to do an arena tour. The people that can, God bless them.

I certainly am not a piano player. I couldn’t sit and play piano. I’m still playing my vocal lessons on it. But I can’t seem to play the “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” which is my hidden dream that I want to be able to, on Christmas, play the “The Twelve Days of Christmas” on the piano so that everybody can fuck up the song the way they always do, and it’s lots of fun, and everybody laughs, and you get somebody with a very strong accent who can’t sing “six geese a-laying.” I was invited into a family at 17, and the grandmother’s name was Grandma Pepitone, and she was always given “seven swans a-swimming and six geese a-laying and two turtle doves,” because she would always sing “two turkle-a-dubs, seven-a-swans-a-swim...” And always somebody’s going “fiiiiive!” — just singing out. [Laughs.] So it’s fun. And that’s what my big ambition playing piano would be, just to play a darn Christmas song.

How about a new album of all original music?

Here’s the thing: “Working Girl: The Musical” and “Kinky Boots” took a long time, and I didn’t want to bastardize what I was doing to take my hat off and become Cyndi, when my hat has to be on for “Working Girl!” I’m trying to get the “Working Girl” thing out — go out of town in ’25 and on Broadway in ’26. That would be a dream come true.

And then a new studio album?

Well, yeah. Then I could relax for a second and write for me. Figure out how I feel. I haven’t for a long time. And I realized that when I was a kid, I used to write poems all the time. I just wrote poems and drew

pictures. And now, I don’t do that, so I feel like maybe I got to just draw pictures and write poems again, just for me.

If anything, I would want to do a back porch record. Kind of simple. Go somewhere, maybe not Tennessee, because that’s getting a little too hard-headed for me. Some place where you could sit on a porch and just everybody sit around like I used to when I lived in Vermont. After school, at night, I’d run across the cow patches, try and avoid the mud pies, with my guitar. And sometimes somebody else would play your guitar, and you play glasses. You just bang on the glasses and sing harmony, and sing old songs that sound like Grandma sang them on the porch. I’ve always wanted to do that, with a fiddle. I don’t know if that’s what I’m going to do. Maybe I do dance music. I loved doing “Bring Ya to The Brink.”

As our beloved Lifetime Ally Icon, any last words that you’d like to get out there regarding Pride this year?

Well, I’ve always enjoyed Pride because it gave us the opportunity to celebrate everybody together, and straight, not straight, everybody together. Families, friend families, just everybody. And I want to wish everyone a very happy Pride. It’s been years since I’ve been able to celebrate with everybody because of work. But my sister will be with me. The last time she was with me, my mom was with us, too, on the float. It was a fire truck we were on.

And my sister and I and my mother were able to celebrate Pride together, and that meant the world to me. And in ’94, when we had the “Deadly Cyns” record out, that was incredible; they were so afraid that we were going to be shut down in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral because they didn’t want noise. It was Cardinal O’Connor, and I felt that he was definitely a man with braces on his heart. And I thought, please, please, God, let them shut me down in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, so the headline could read “Cardinal O’Connor just didn’t want to have any fun.”

Love that you thought that.

Of course I did. Are you kidding? And so I made them stop there, and I did every version of “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” from the “Hey Now” [version], to the first one, to Arthur Baker’s version, everything. Because I was like, come on, you see this battery on my shoulder? Go ahead, knock it down.

Like your sister says in the film, you’ve got that “Italian moxie.”

Sicilian, my friend. Sicilian.

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Don't Sleep on These 2024 Mighty Real / Queer Detroit Events

Live performances, presentations and tributes supplement biennial city-wide art show

BY MADELEINE AITKEN

In 2022, Patrick Burton embarked on a journey to highlight queer artists, and Mighty Real / Queer Detroit was born: an organization committed to honoring, showing and promoting LGBTQ+ art. In June 2022, Mighty Real / Queer Detroit hosted its inaugural biennial, a month-long exhibition devoted to 77 Years of Detroit LGBTQ+ art (1945-2022) with over 700 works of art created by more than 150 queer artists shown in 17 galleries across the region.

Inspired in part by a Velvet Underground song, MR/QD returns with "I'll Be Your Mirror: Reflections of the Contemporary Queer." It will bring over 800 works from over 170 artists to 11 galleries across Detroit throughout June. "To highlight the exhibition's theme, we added 'Reflections of the Contemporary Queer,'" Burton said.

Installations can be viewed at The CARR Center, Detroit Artists Market, Detroit Contemporary, the Elaine Jacob Gallery, Galerie Camille, Kayrod Gallery, the Scarab Club Gallery, Hatch Art, Irwin House, Cetner Galleries at the College for Creative Studies and the Anton Art Center through June 30.

"The exhibition presents emerging artists, established artists and elders; we have artists who have exhibited in major museums like MoMA, the Whitney, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art," Burton said. "We have art coming to Detroit from all over the country and the world."

Separate from art installations on display in gallery spaces, MR/QD will hold a series of events throughout June. "Most of the artists who are part of the additional programming are also visual artists displaying their work," Burton explained.

Don't miss these selected performance pieces, documentary shorts, presentations and panel discussions.

Queer Documentary Shorts

June 6, 7 to 10 p.m., Detroit Film Theatre, Detroit Institute of Arts

Brooklyn-based filmmaker Adam Baran has curated a selection of his favorite LGBTQ+ documentary shorts from the past four years to create an intergenerational portrait of our lives in our current perilous climate.

"The films have been selected specifically to



Linda Simpson's work will be featured among over 800 artists as part of the Mighty Real / Queer Detroit exhibition.

complement the theme of the visual art in the exhibition," Burton said.

The program includes seven films, ranging from 10 to 20 minutes in length, covering different topics, communities and settings. For example, there's "Queenie," about a 73-year-old Black lesbian applying to Stonewall Residences, New York's first affordable housing for LGBTQ+ elders. "Merman," about a 58-year-old Black queer man's life as an emergency nurse, leather titleholder and civil rights advocate, provides another portrait of queer life. There's also "Out of the Corner of Our Eye," which covers seven iconic, formerly queer spaces in Los Angeles that are no longer what they once were, a reflection on what queer space looks like today.

The goal of the shorts, Baran said in a statement, is to "witness firsthand how issues like isolation, climate catastrophe, racism, transphobia and gentrification are impacting our lives today," while also illustrating "moments of beauty, joy and hard-fought freedom."

The Drag Explosion

June 14, 7 to 8:15 p.m., Walter B. Ford Auditorium, College for Creative Studies

Linda Simpson, a New York City drag queen, spent the 1980s and 1990s with a camera in her hand, shooting the scene in photographs that would eventually come to document the rise and fall of a golden era of drag. Set against the background of the AIDS crisis and gay activism, when drag was still an underground art form, Simpson's photos have been featured in art exhibits, documentaries, magazine articles and books.

"Simpson has been part of New York drag for decades," Burton said. "Her photos take me back to the underground scene that shook the East Village."

Simpson has turned those images into two books, "PAGES" and "The Drag Explosion," and an accompanying slideshow "The Drag Explosion," with photos and narration, that she

has presented internationally. As part of "I'll Be Your Mirror," she'll bring her photographic tribute to Detroit.

A Tribute to Big Mama Thornton

June 22, 7 to 10 p.m., The CARR Center

Big Mama Thornton, the legendary blues and R&B singer and songwriter, will be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame this year. Poet, performer and visual artist Pamela Sneed has created a musical in honor of Mama Thornton, a largely unsung hero, which she will perform at The CARR Center as part of "I'll Be Your Mirror." In what Burton called a "stunning one-woman tribute," Sneed, accompanied by a band, will cover Thornton's greatest hits. When she premiered her show at the Armory in March 2023, it broke a record

See MRQD Events, page 54

◀ **Lesbian Connection**

Continued from page 26

its print model, though they send readers digital issues, rather than physical ones, upon request.

Likely as a result, LC is notable for its wide-ranging, level-headed coverage of everything from childhood sexual abuse to coming out late in life.

“They will print it all, and women get to be in conversation with one another,” said McBride, the young subscriber from Vancouver. “And I think because it’s in a

written form, you don’t get the dopamine hit of writing your take on social media.”

“We’ve been referred to as the original lesbian message board,” said Harmon. “You just have to wait two months for your response.”

Readers can enjoy a quicker repartée — as well as performances, auctions, dinner and a dance — at the publication’s 50th anniversary celebration in Lansing this September. To find out more, you can contact their offices by calling 517-371-5257 or emailing LC@LConline.org.



Workers mail Lesbian Connection to readers in 2011. Photo: Kathe Mitchell

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MRQD Events

Continued from page 52

for the earliest performance ever sold out.

Beyond her performance piece, Sneed is also a writer and a visual artist whose work has been exhibited at the The Ford Foundation. She brings this multidisciplinary artistry to "I'll Be Your Mirror," with some of her watercolor paintings showing in the exhibition at The CARR Center.



(Left) Pamela Sneed. (Right) Stephanie Crawford. Courtesy photos



Queer Night Life: Disco, House, and the Rave Scene 1970s to Present

June 23, 7 to 9 p.m., Walter B. Ford Auditorium, College for Creative Studies

"I'll Be Your Mirror" will include two panel discussions, one with the Leslie-Lohman Museum about art as activism and another on disco, house and the rave scene in Detroit.

"We'd really like the conversation to focus on what it takes to create safe spaces for the queer community, what some of the challenges are, and what the benefits are," said Adriel Thornton, who will moderate the discussion. "Those [disco, house and rave] scenes were initially adopted by the queer community before the broader community," Thornton added.

Thornton has been promoting events in metro Detroit for 32 years, primarily focusing on electronic music, including events like FAMILY, Motor City Pride and Dally in the Alley.

Memories of a Supernatural AIDS Crisis

June 29, 7 to 8 p.m., Hilberry Gateway

An assistant professor in the Theatre and Dance department at Wayne State University, Marc Arthur has created a queer performance piece set in Detroit, 100 years in the future.

"The traumatic loss of a generation of artists in the early years of the AIDS pandemic has been a powerful directive for me as a queer artist," Arthur said. "This performance is an effort to connect with that past and to meditate on a speculative future in which the systemic conditions of AIDS are reimagined, transformed and brought into a space of joy."

Arthur has been making performances of this sort for the past 15 years; this one will be a combination of dance, drama and song. "Audiences can expect a thrilling sci-fi journey through Detroit, the last surviving city on Earth 100 years in the future with two queer

beings who discover supernatural abilities as they embody memories from HIV/AIDS history," he said.

Written and directed by Arthur, "Memories of a Supernatural AIDS Crisis" will be performed by Notorious Pink Flowers, Yolanda Jack and Joe Smentowski.

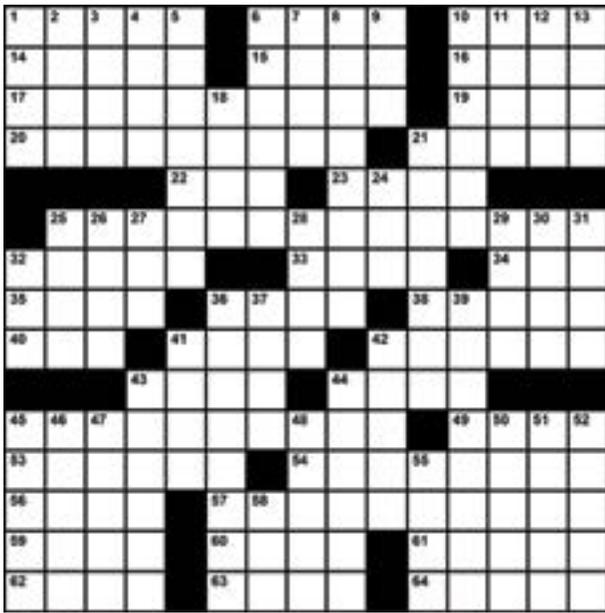
An Evening with Stephanie Crawford, Jazz Chanteuse

Sunday, June 30, 7 to 9 p.m., The CARR Center

A Detroit native, Stephanie Crawford is a visual artist and a celebrated jazz singer.

"She grew up in Detroit's Black Bottom. In the '80s, she moved to New York City, singing in clubs like the Blue Note and queer venues like the Pyramid. Later, she moved to Paris and was awarded the Django d'Or award for Best International Jazz Vocalist in 1993," burton said.

"An elder in our world community," burton said, Crawford will perform an evening of jazz music to close out the "I'll Be Your Mirror" month of programming.



- 36 Sharp pain
 38 Earthy pigment
 40 Toto outburst
 41 Bigwigs, to Britten
 42 Sources of 411 of old
 43 Barney's event
 44 Editor Roshan
 45 More of the quote
 49 Maria's "Do-____"
 53 Trojan, but not a condom
 54 Female hormone
 56 Cry of pride
 57 End of the quote
 59 "If ____ I Would Leave You"
 60 Michelangelo's painting and sculpture
 61 Place to perch
 62 They wave their sticks in Cincinnati
 63 Mike Brady portrayer Robert
 64 Ford lemon that was not fruitful
- 12 Overly brainy sort
 13 Harvey's "Hairspray" role
 18 Georgia spread on the screen
 21 Suit type
 24 Bears org.
 25 Diva's piece
 26 Drivers get off on it
 27 Officer in the navy (abbr.)
 28 Scores for Burke
 29 End of a Beatles song title
 30 Not even once, to Dickinson
 31 Long-jawed swimmers
 32 Like the "fruit loop" section of a city
 36 Bright light in the Little Bear
 37 His brother laid him in his grave
 39 Looked like
 41 Atlas acronym
 42 Social stratum
 43 Applies, as body paint
 44 Came together
 45 Spud, to Gomer
 46 Word before "hol!"
 47 Pulled the plug on
 48 Classic Chevy
 50 "Great Caesar's ghost!"
 51 Come together
 52 Company that can help you double click your mouse
 55 Rub the wrong way
 58 Rough stuff underground

Down

- 1 Lammy winner Rednour
 2 Type of seaman
 3 Drop down like a chicken-hawk
 4 Linc portrayer in "The Mod Squad"
 5 Side by side for female nudists?
 6 Backseat driver, e.g.
 7 Deep pink
 8 Excelling
 9 Coins w. Abe images
 10 Gemini's guys
 11 Wilson of "Zoolander"

See p. 29 for answers

Let It Die Here

Across

- 1 Island of Mead's research
 6 "Peter Pan" critter, for short
 10 Type of defense for the Indiana Fever
 14 Mushroom source?
 15 Big-time defeat
 16 Got a little behind
 17 Start of a quote from

- 21-Across
 19 Laura of "Recount"
 20 Turned tail
 21 Singer/songwriter Perry of the film "Let It Die Here"
 22 Paul Newman role in "Exodus"
 23 Ready to go in
 25 More of the quote
 32 Cary of "An Affair to Remember"
 33 Dad's bros
 34 Some like it hot
 35 Gets ready to shoot off



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BEN PLATT'S QUEER FOLK REVERIE

Ben Platt. Photo: Vince Aung

The Broadway star talks bringing queerness to a very non-queer genre and what Pride means to him

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

The facial hair comes up because it has to. After all, the unofficial rulebook for any Americana artist stipulates somewhere that wherever an acoustic guitar shall go, a full beard must too. And so Ben Platt is all about his furry face, but not just because he's in full-on folk-roots mode for his third solo album, "Honeymind."

Considering this particular genre isn't necessarily a welcoming platform for openly queer musicians (or even close to one), there is a quiet rebelliousness to Platt merely existing in that space — just ask Beyoncé, who shook up the country community by simply

being a Black artist releasing her rural-toned "Cowboy Carter," a nod to her Southern roots. As for Platt, his subtle defiance is front and center on the album's cover, as he queers a classic vintage car-makeout scene while straddling the lap of his fiancé, Noah Galvin, but it is also embedded in its songs of longing, love and more love, too.

During a recent afternoon from his place in New York, I spoke with Platt about the reasons he's especially proud to be an openly queer artist on "Honeymind," how buying his first home with Galvin inspired one very special song on the album and how he really feels about being a hairy Jew.

When I saw you in Detroit

in 2019, I noticed just how loving and loyal your fans are. They really love you. I wondered about that long history, which I'd say definitely dates back to your role on Broadway in "Dear Evan Hansen." How do you explain the bond you've established with your fans?

It's hard. It's sort of ineffable because the introduction was "Dear Evan Hansen," and that was something where I was really emotionally burying myself as much as I possibly could, and I think I was able to really forge a meaningful connection without ever necessarily expressing my own perspective.

When I started to do that, it was in the same vein of really not trying to create any kind of wall or filter or version of myself, but rather just continuing to share even more openly, as much as I could, my own experiences and my point of view.

I always try to give as much of myself as I have available to me whenever I'm performing or doing anything for an audience or for fans. I think that mine really recognize that and respect that, and I hope to keep doing good by them. I think it's that level of transparency and earnestness. There are a lot of great, wonderful artists giving things with a lot more edge, and apathy, and other things that are not natural to me. I can only give what I can give. I'm lucky there's people who really

seem to connect to that.

On the flip side, who do you feel this level of love for?

Anyone that is really vocally impressive, I fall in love with, but Beyoncé remains my number one in the sense that she is sort of guarded, and I think that's been a whole part of her thing — how perfect and pristine she is. Within that, you can see so much unbelievable hard work, talent, vision and experience that she's trying to share and communicate. I just think she's the greatest live performer ever. If we're judging by who leaves it all on

See **Ben Platt**, page 58

◀ Conspiracy Theories

Continued from page 20

All of us, I think, want to think critically, and to interrogate how this big old world comes together. Curiosity is pleasure, and conspiracy theories are a ready fuel for that pleasure. These theories are cheaper than college, more welcoming than a lecture hall and encourage the everyday gay to be a contributor.

Fashioning and re-fashioning history takes place in the mainstream, too. Each Pride season, someone claims that “Marsha P. Johnson threw the first brick at Stonewall!” Others — historians, eyewitnesses, Internet curmudgeons — counter that she wasn’t there when the riots started. Someone else threw the brick. Or maybe there was no brick. Rummaging through vague remembrances and partial records, we end up reviving something very real about that night: noise and disagreement. Something happened back in 1969 and, over time, it became

important to many. It’s a symbol but, like all symbols, what it stands for is negotiable.

Without a doubt, conspiracy theories can be a vector of cruelty. From Holocaust denialism to the idea of “paid actors” at Sandy Hook to “transvestigations,” simplifications of a troubled world make meaning by refusing to let other lives be meaningful or complicated. When conspiracy meets hate, genocidal

“

All of us, I think, want to think critically, and to interrogate how this big old world comes together. Curiosity is pleasure, and conspiracy theories are a ready fuel for that pleasure.

thought often follows. YouTube debunking channels try to convert the conspiracy-minded and help the rest of us be properly doubtful. They use facts and evidence to prove we landed on the moon. I’m sure we did. It’s easy to be certain about the moon — but not so easy to feel certain about life on this earth.

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◀ Ben Platt

Continued from page 56

the floor and gives you everything they have in their body, Beyoncé's number one.

With “Cowboy Carter,” Beyoncé also happens to be finding her place in Americana right now. Did you two orchestrate this?

Yeah, we decided on our conference call that we should both stick to the same stylistic world. [Laughs.]



Ben Platt. Photo: Vince Aung

What inspired your shift to folk music?

It was the kind of thing where that's just really very organically what started to come out. I went to Nashville for the first round of writing for this record, all the way back in April 2022. I've been working on this record for a long time, and I knew I wanted to go to Nashville because there's so many writers there that I love, both ones that I have worked with before, like Alex Hope, who's a writer on almost half of the songs on the album. Then a lot that I admired that I wanted to work with, like Natalie Hemby, Hillary Lindsey, Jim Robbins and Laura Veltz. I went with the intention of just working with these people who I knew were very storytelling-forward and emotionally narrative-driven

and honest and melodic, and all the things that I wanted, but didn't necessarily have a particular style in my mind of what we needed to accomplish.

When I started to write about where I was at and the experiences I was having, that's just the sound that emerged. As it started to come out, I got really excited because it felt very natural to my style of storytelling and singing. It just felt like an organic landing pad for where I've sort of been wanting to return to. Then also just the idea of the super expressly queer perspective living in that sonic world is not something

the boy in “The Joke” grows up to become the boy in “All American Queen.” Because there are so many origin songs, I just wanted it to be like “Sweet Child O’ Mine,” and all these songs about just happy upbringings, American images, values and traditionally American terms, and the idea of writing about a queer upbringing in America where it's purely about the joy of it and the fun of it, and there's no talk about tolerance, difference, otherness, oppression or trauma, any of that. It's just this super dirt road, fun, gay narrative, which was really fun and exciting to me. That's

and that he felt so much for this friend that she just didn't feel was the same for him.

It just seemed like so many friendships and experiences that I had growing up in elementary school, middle school and high school. The next day during a session, I said, “I really want to write about this ineffable straight boy who is kind and doesn't do anything wrong, and there's no one at fault. It's just a chemical misfire, essentially.” I love the song that we wrote, and for me, probably my first few Andrews were things I couldn't even really name, like friends who I had that I had feelings for or love for but I didn't know what it was.

One of my best friends in high school, who did improv and musicals with me, I just really connected with on every level. Of course, I developed feelings. It was tough, and I had nice friends around me to help me understand that it was no one's fault, and that he's just a good friend. He's still one of my best friends, so it worked out.

Apart from the cover image, how else was your fiancé, Noah Galvin, part of this album's creation?

I always run things by him. He's very creatively smart, and he has an excellent aesthetic. He's a great guide and he's a great barometer. I really trust his instincts. In terms of working together on the album, he did do me a solid and star for free in a video with me [“Cherry on Top,” released after this interview] that has some of that same reclamatory vintage imagery and energy through this really nice queer lens. It was really fun to do it with him.

What was the whole shoot like for that car-makeout cover photo?

It was really fun. Interscope has done a great job of just really responding to my ideas and bringing a lot of creativity and authenticity to what I'm trying to do. What was exciting to me in getting on set and seeing that kind of a car, the diner that we shot in and the open road is all these really bromantic, beautiful American images that we've seen so many times, and just getting to use them for gay stuff for once.

It was really fun to just inhabit that world. I imagined it as a slight utopia of what it would be like if we were in this time period with this sort of imagery, to just have it also

be a queer image.

You have me thinking about “Treehouse,” a love song that sounds like it has a special place in your life. And you get to sing it with Brandy Clark, both of you out, queer performers, taking on what is traditional-sounding folk. I'm wondering what all of that coming together felt like for you.

It was wonderful. I wrote it with Brandy and Jimmy Robbins, and it was one of the first things we wrote back in April of 2022. It existed for a while as just a song that I would sing alone, and it was inspired by Noah, and I recently found our sort of home-home, like our first real joint home, and we've been calling it our “treehouse,” because there's a lot of trees outside the window, and it just felt like somewhere we could hole up together.

The song is really emblematic to me of the safe space that you create with your partner and the idea that no matter how careful you are and how safe it is, it's always going to be a little precarious. You just have to be very protective over it. I think I sat with the song for a little while, and loved it and listened to it, and then it sort of had one of those light bulb moments of like, “Duh, of course I should ask Brandy if she would consider being on it with me,” because it came so organically from both of us.

She's such an icon in that Americana space, and has so much authenticity in her voice. She just jumped at it and couldn't have been easier and more excited to be part of it. I feel like my intention was not to have necessarily features on the record, but this just seemed like too perfect an opportunity to get to work with her.

Talking about folk and looking at you now, I'm glad that we're doing this on camera because I get to see your beard, which if you're going to inhabit this space as a folk singer, I feel like you have to treat the beard right.

Very much so.

Will the beard now become a prominent part of this new era as you go on Broadway and tour?

I necessarily have heard or seen a lot. Most of the artists that I love in that zone write beautiful songs that are very universal, but aren't necessarily like the Troye Sivans and Lil Nas Xs, and the people who are giving us really specifically queer content, which I love. The idea of doing something like that, but in this much more subdued kind of introspective, emotionally earnest style, was really exciting to me.

I know that you'll get this reference because you've covered Brandi Carlile's “The Joke,” but the boy you're singing about in “All American Queen” sounds like he should be friends with the boy in “The Joke.”

Absolutely. I feel like hopefully

another one I wrote with Alex.

Then, of course, for any queer person, your song “Andrew,” the first single, is entirely relatable. Who among us hasn't had an unrequited crush on a straight boy? How did that song come about, and how did you navigate your first Andrew?

The song came about because I was talking to a friend of mine who was one of the writers on the album, a different writer than Alex, who I wrote “Andrew” with, but she was telling me about her child and how he has a best friend who he loves so much, and how she was getting the sense that there was a little bit of an unrequited infatuation happening

I'm going to keep it. Anytime I'm allowed to have the beard, I love the beard. Ever since I finished "Evan Hansen" in 2017, anytime I'm not playing a role where it's expressly needed that I be shaved, I always want to have my beard. I just feel much safer with my beard. I'm experimenting with some mulletry as well, which I've been liking. I think it just makes me feel like myself, and like I'm not so stripped clean, and I'm a little more organic and easy. I get to put nice oils in it that smell good. Then it's nice when I sing, because then I can breathe them in while I sing. I'm happy to have my beard.

What's your go-to beard oil?

Oh, I don't even know what is in there, but it's like a... [goes into another room to grab it]. It's literally called Best Damn Beard Balm. It's a little wax-y. It's really nice.

How do you feel about your body hair in general? Have you always embraced it?

I honestly always loved it. I'm a Jew, so it's very much common in my community, especially Ashkenazi

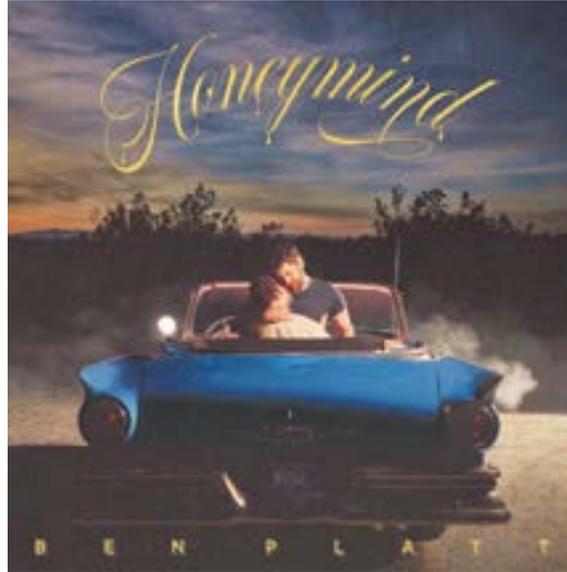
Jews, to be quite hairy. I didn't really have a choice from puberty onward. It's just been everywhere. I've always really loved my beard and my chest hair. It just makes me feel like a guy. I love to play with femininity and masculinity, and I love getting my nails done and wearing things that feel somewhere in the middle.

I think sometimes I do love to lean into my masculinity, and I think the hair lets me do that. The only hair I ever felt self-conscious about was... I have a lot of back hair, because again, I'm a Jew, and that's my genetics, but Noah really likes it. As soon as I started being with Noah, it made me really love it and embrace it too.

How often do you think about being a queer role model, and what do you think it means to your fans that you are one?

I so don't have answers or expertise that other queer people don't have. I think I always find myself

underestimating the power of just being forthright about my own relationship and my experiences. I think there are times when I get



worried about, as an actor, because I'm doing both things, I experienced pigeonholing, or I experienced casting directors, directors or writers having difficulty viewing me as not a queer character, now that I've been so forthright about being a queer person, and I sometimes

think, should I be more quiet about it? Should I have not been so forthright?

Anytime I see someone online, or in person, or at a show with their partner, or a queer couple, or just a queer young person who feels seen, or is either really happy because of the music, or crying because of the music, or whatever it might be, it sort of immediately dust-busts that out of my head, in the sense that it's like, what a more important and special opportunity that I get to do to, just purely by sharing what I'm already excited and happy to share. I can make people feel seen and feel like they are safe to share those things, so I take it very seriously, but I also try to be as clear as possible that I know as little as anybody else.

With "Honey Mind" out around Pride, and with so much anti-queer rhetoric and legislation this year,

what does it feel like to be releasing something so authentic to yourself as a queer person in this precarious moment?

It feels wonderful. I think everybody has a different role in any fight or any conversation, and I feel like what I have to offer is this music and my art, and just trying to be as transparent as I can. To be able to do that right now, I feel really lucky. I just think any opportunity we have to lean into the joy, complexity and all the things that make us not just equal but superior, I think that is very important.

Specifically, as a last note, we all need to be looking out for our trans community members and making sure we're lifting them up and sharing stories and art of theirs that is, again, rooted in joy and complexity — how compelling and interesting and beautiful it is, not just the debate about identity or the trauma or the oppression. I think it's important to just focus on the humanity and to make sure that they're as protected and as lifted up as us as gay men are, even though we aren't always too.

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◀ Sketch Series

Continued from page 19

out,” he says.

“Seeing how different everyone’s results are is so inspiring,” Yang adds. “I can’t say I’m finishing everything immediately, but I’m definitely moving forward in ways I haven’t felt since last summer.”

In Michigan, finding a nude model to draw in a professional setting isn’t challenging — this option is obviously not unheard of at most major art studios — but what makes the Detroit Queer Sketch Series special is how our community is capturing, through artistic expression, our actual community, whether that’s a twink or a trans man. “Being queer has definitely made it easier as well since it’s just another thing bringing most of us together on top of wanting to draw,” Yang says. “I see familiar faces at every session and I’ve noticed myself opening up a little more. I let people see the mistakes I make when drawing and by showing my creative process, I’m also letting my guard down. I feel safe and not judged.”

Gorski didn’t realize until well after this series launched that there’s a national trend of similar drawing events. He recently went to a sketch drop-in in New York at Club Cumming, actor Alan Cumming’s bar, where he said people were packed into a space smaller than the Detroit GT warehouse. “There were younger people, there were queer people,

there were straight people, there were older people, there were professors, there were young, budding students,” he recalls. “What I realized is that this is happening everywhere and we’re doing a good job and that we just need to expand it and keep going and make it even better,” he says. He took some notes. Club Cumming played club music, a reminder as to why they don’t — at the Detroit Queer Sketch Series the music vibes are mellow. “The one thing that I did catch at

the end, they gave away prizes. They let the model choose which drawing they liked, and I really liked that aspect. So we kind of adapted that into our sketch session.”

“The cool thing about having the model choose is that the model doesn’t always choose what is the best piece of art,” Shanek adds. “They’re choosing what they like the most. We had a guy who just didn’t want to put his artwork out there because he was just messing around. He was like, ‘I’m

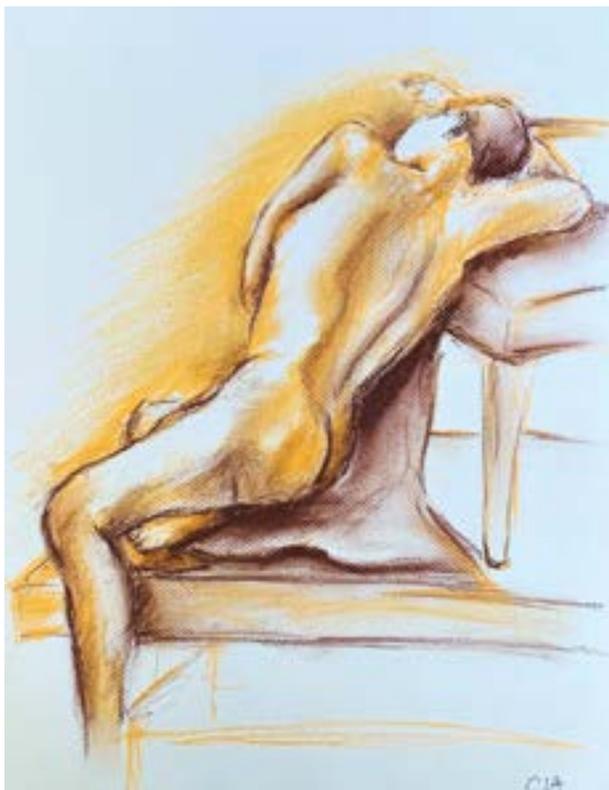
not serious about this. I don’t want to do it.’ So we encouraged him to do it. He did put his piece out, and then it ended up being one of the pieces picked. So there’s no such thing as bad art. There’s just art that speaks to different people.”

Two years in, the sketch series has grown in popularity so much that on Thursdays the crowd is so big artists end up sitting in the mezzanine upstairs or on the stairs themselves. “We were regularly basically bursting

at the seams and we wanted it to be a comfortable experience for people to draw,” Shanek says. Given the turnout, Gorski and Shanek decided to add a second sketch day on the first Monday of every month. While Thursday’s models remain men, the Monday addition is open to models who are women and drag queens.

“We always wanted to make sure that it was all body shapes, all sizes,” says Gorski. “So we’ve actually heard from people like, ‘I really appreciate you having white, black, Latin, Asian, and you have bears and twinks.’”

To commemorate their two-year event anniversary in July, that month both Gorski and Shanek will be modeling. Shanek, who has modeled before, says that models often tell him afterward how “liberating” it feels to be naked on the centerstage platform, celebrating their body as a group of artists capture what they see. I speak from experience when I say that the Detroit Queer Sketch Series is more than just a creative outlet. In a world that marginalizes and misunderstands us, this space, even for the artist, offers a sanctuary where we can express ourselves freely and authentically. I’m no longer the only gay boy in the room. When I go, I’m part of a thriving community of LGBTQ+ artists. That has been transformative and a testament to the power of art to heal, connect and empower.



Models at the Detroit Sketch Series. Photos: James Shanek. Artwork: Chris Azzopardi

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◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 39

Owosso Pride

Curwood Castle Park, 224
Curwood Castle Dr., 1–5 p.m.
facebook.com/OwossoPride

Rochester (Pride in the Park)

Rochester Municipal Park —
Kiwanis Pavilion, 400 6th St.,
12–4:30 p.m. instagram.com/rochprideinthepark

Saint Ignace Pride

American Legion Park, 200
N. State St., 11 a.m.–3 p.m.
straitspride.org/events

Wyandotte (Downriver Pride)

New Pride Event!

Downtown Wyandotte, 12 p.m.–
11 p.m. downriverpride.com

Sunday, June 23

Berkley Pride

Downtown Berkley, 1–5 p.m.
downtownberkley.com/berkley-pride

OutFront Kalamazoo Youth Pride

New Pride Event!

Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan,
601 W. Maple St., 12–5 p.m.

Kalamazoo's first-ever Pride event specifically geared towards LGBTQ+ youth will feature games, music, food and fun for all ages. outfrontkzoo.org/youthpride2024

Saturday, June 29

Flint Pride

Riverbank Park, 1 Riverfront
Ctr W., 2–8 p.m. facebook.com/flintgaypride

Holland Pride

Centennial Park, 250 Central
Ave., 12–5 p.m.

Holland Pride's host organization, Out on the Lakeshore, has faced down an unfriendly local government to get this year's festival off the ground. The conservative Ottawa County Commissioners withdrew funding, drawing national headlines, but Out on the Lakeshore rallied the community to fund an LGBTQ-affirming, family-friendly

event complete with food, entertainment and a renewed spirit to continue the fight against anti-diversity. facebook.com/HollandPride

Jackson Pride

Horace Blackman Park.
W. Michigan Ave. and S.
Jackson St., 12–6 p.m.
mijacksonprideorg/events

See Pride Calendar, page 64



Scenes from local Pride festivals over the year. Photos: BTL archives

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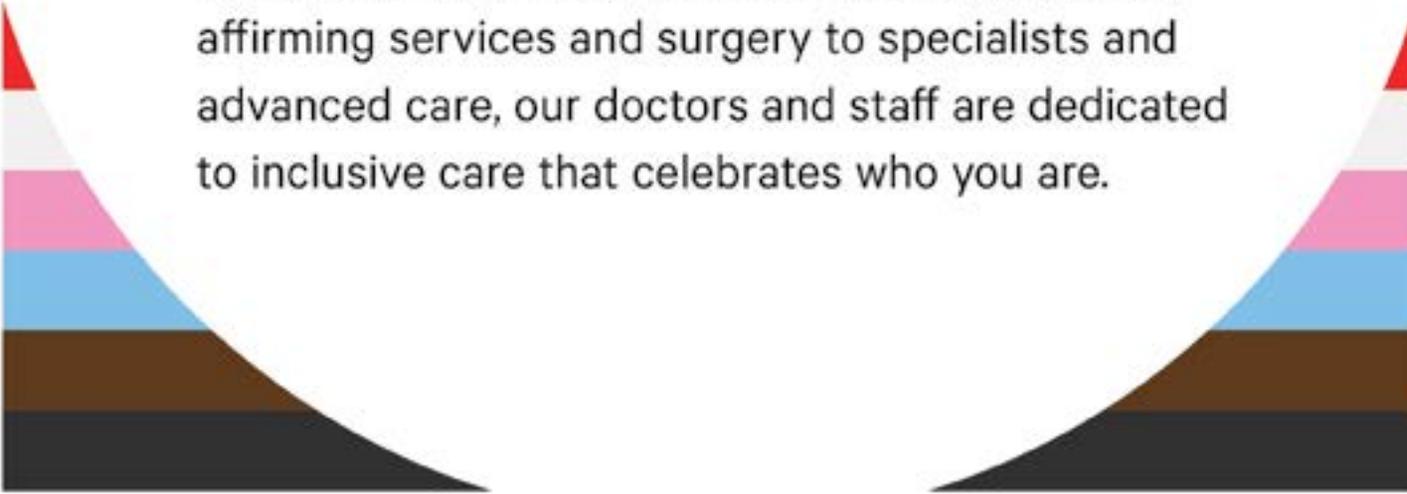
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◀ **Pride Calendar**
Continued from page 62

Monroe County Pride

111 W. Elm Ave., Monroe,
12–6 p.m. facebook.com/PRISMMonroeCounty

South Haven (Pride in the Park)

New Pride Event!

Stanley Johnston Park. 202 Dyckman Ave., 12–10 p.m.

South Haven will hold its first-ever Pride event in 2024 with a day packed with activities like TikTok Lip Sync Battles, a Wagon Float Pride Parade, a poetry slam, a talent show, stand-up comedy, drag performances and a prom dance, along with food and vendors.

southhaven.org/events/south-haven-pride

Three Rivers Pride
Downtown Three Rivers.

103 Portage Ave., 12–11 p.m.
facebook.com/threeriverspride

Warren Pride
Warren City Hall (1 City Square), 11:30 a.m.-6 p.m.
warrencitypride.com

Sunday, June 30

Big Rapids Pride
Downtown Big Rapids, 12–8 p.m. pridebigrapids.org

Buchanan Pride on the Common
Downtown Buchanan, 4-9 p.m.

Port Huron (Blue River Pride)
701 McMoran Blvd., 10 a.m.–3 p.m. bluewaterallies.com/event-details/blue-water-pride-1

JULY

Sunday, July 14

South Lyon Pride
McHattie Park. 300 Dorothy St., 12–4 p.m. facebook.com/SouthLyonPride

Thursday, July 20

Battle Creek (Pride Weekend)

Various events, July 18–21

Parade kick-off: Michigan Ave. at Washington St., July 19, 7 p.m., ends at Commerce Point

Festival: Leila Aboretum (928 W. Michigan Ave.), 12–8 p.m. battlecreekPrideorg/pride-weekend

Sunday, July 28

Hotter Than July
Various events, July 26-28

Hotter Than July Gospel & Soul Concert
MotorCity Casino, July 28, 8 p.m.

The signature summertime Pride event hosted by LGBT Detroit, North America's largest Black-founded and led LGBTQ+ non-profit, Hotter Than July is the world's longest-running, uninterrupted Black Pride celebration. The three-day event features a candlelight vigil honoring the lives of

queer community members, a worship service, health screenings and a feature musical event. In celebration of the organization's 30th anniversary, LGBT Detroit will offer the Hotter Than July Gospel & Soul Concert featuring Grammy-nominated artist B. Slade. lgbtdetroit.org/hotterthanjuly

AUGUST

Saturday, Aug. 3

Ann Arbor Pride
Liberty and Main Streets, 12 p.m. facebook.com/AnnArborPride

Saturday, Aug. 24

Transgender Pride in the Park
Martin Road Park. 1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale, 12–6 p.m.

Transgender Michigan will hold its 25th annual Transgender Pride in the Park in 2024. The bring-your-own picnic features speakers and a vendor area with organizations and businesses serving the trans community and

a corresponding virtual vendor mall. transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride

Saturday, Aug. 17

Macomb County Pride (Mount Clemons)
Downtown Mount Clemons, 12-6 p.m.

macombcountypride.com/pride2024

SEPTEMBER

Thursday, Sept. 19

Mackinac Island Pride Through Sept 22
Mackinac Island, details TBA, events run 2 p.m. Sept. 19 through 3 p.m. Sept. 22. straitspide.org

Saturday, Sept. 28

Up North Pride (Traverse City)

Various events Sept. 26-29

Visibility Rally & March: F and M Park (716 E. State St.), 4-6 p.m. upnorthpride.com

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◀ Where Are They Now?

Continued from page 28

But ultimately, I think my proudest accomplishment has simply been being visible, which has included becoming the first trans person to attend Michigan Law and the first trans person to become a law professor there. I was also the first trans person to lead a statewide LGBTQ+ organization and a visible trans person who spoke regularly at events and panels across Michigan and across the nation about being trans. These activities helped to raise the visibility of trans people, helped to turn acquaintances into allies, and even to inspire younger people to be their authentic selves. It's great to hear from people that, at least in some small way, I have made a difference in their world.

On how the fight for trans rights now is different than it was when she was leading Equality Michigan

When I started advocating for transgender rights, long before I led EQMI, transgender people were often pariahs, even within the broader LGB community. I recall, clearly, when we were cut from proposed non-discrimination statutes because people thought that doing so would allow it to pass and then they'd "come back for us." I recall, clearly, when a U.S. Senator from my home state took an involuntary step backward when he learned that I was transgender, as if I were a threat or contagious. Back then, we were just trying to get acknowledgment of our basic humanity and worth.

As ED of EQMI, I used to say that if it was safe for you to be out, please be out. We needed the visibility.

It is common knowledge that to know someone who is gay or lesbian is to lessen your opposition to our equality. The same is true for trans people.

Thankfully, we have achieved much for trans people in that regard. We are no longer omitted from proposed legislation; our inclusion in the acronym LGBTQ+ is no longer a battle or, worse, an empty promise.

However, trans people make up a tiny percentage of the population; many people either have never met a trans person or are unaware of ever having done so. That makes distorting the facts and vilifying our community that much easier. Consequently, powerful forces on the political right are now using the struggle for equality for trans and gender nonconforming people as a wedge to divide the nation for political gain. Worse yet, they have begun to attack our youth — passing laws in various states that deny life-saving care to transgender youth. The fight for trans equality was originally about the right to exist and, unfortunately, now it is about the right of trans youth to exist. I'm not sure that's progress. But we are no longer alone in this fight and that *is* progress and I'm proud of the small role I played in that.

On her life now

I retired in May 2021 at 66 years old. Mary and I have recently moved from Florida to Asheville, North Carolina, where I plan to work hard only on my tennis game. One of the great joys in my retiring is the ability to spend more time with Mary and with my kids and grandkids. Now 8 and 10, they are growing up so fast. This summer we are planning a family trip to Yellowstone and I couldn't be more excited.



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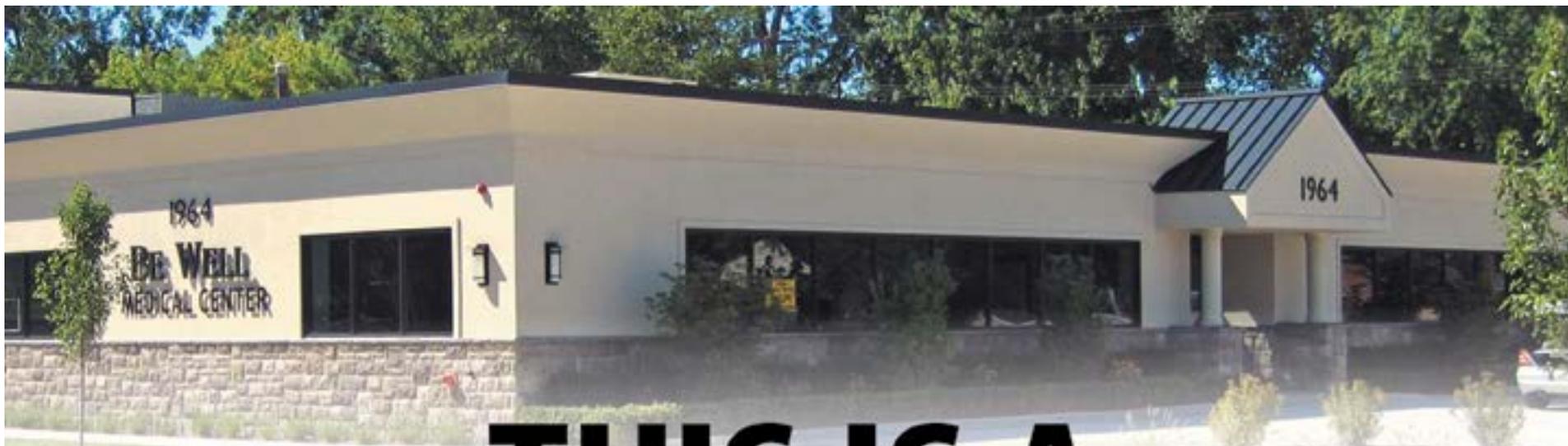


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