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Why gay Sen. Moss stormed an anti-marriage equality event

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By Sarah Bricker Hunt

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- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 Gender and Name Changes Do More Than Affirm — They Save Lives
- 7 ‘Oh, No Questions?’: Sen. Jeremy Moss Slams Anti-LGBTQ Attack Like a Boss
- 8 Trans Lucent: Respect Yourself: Why Using Terms Like ‘Tranny’ Is Not Empowering
- 8 Reimagining a Classic at UM with a Queer Cast and Trans Lion
- 10 Detroit Pistons’ All-Star Commitment to LGBTQ+ Community Shines at Pride Night (Sponsored)
- 12 Creep of the Week: Iowa Republicans Tell Trans People in the State to Disappear or GTFO
- 13 The Scroll: Dems Stand Firm as U.S. Senate Blocks Anti-Trans Sports Ban
- 14 Inside Ferndale’s LGBTQ+ Senior Haven
- 16 How Internet Trolls Helped This Detroit Couple Amplify Their Message for LGBTQ+ Rights
- 18 A House with No Closets: Why MAGA Fans Are Afraid of My Parenting Style
- 20 Spring Theater in Michigan Celebrates Queer Stories and Bold Premieres
- 22 Where Are They Now?: André Wilson, Trans Healthcare Trailblazer

Page 14



Photo: Andrew Potter

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Feet sore from marching? Thumbs aching from texting your elected representatives? Throat raw from screaming into the void? Maybe it's time to make space in your calendar for a cabaret night chock full of drag kings, an LGBTQ+ elder-focused evening of great food and interesting conversation, or an array of dazzling entertainment options at Ann Arbor's most recent addition to the gay bar scene.

Queers don't live by protest alone; here are five ways you can celebrate the community we're fighting for.



The King Teddy. Photo: Facebook/@MCDK-The-King-Teddy

Support Ferndale Pride at a Cabaret Night

If you hear the admonition "get ready to stay up past 10 p.m." as practically a dare, it's time to pull those disco nap pajamas out of their glitter-covered mothballs and prepare to spend the evening at a cabaret night in support of Ferndale Pride. Michael Christian and The King Teddy will bring the spirit, the joy and undoubtedly some meticulously crafted spirit gum-affixed facial hair to Gigi's Gay Bar on March 7.

Julia Music, event director for Ferndale Pride, tells BTL, "We are thrilled to have the support of Motor City Drag Kings. MDK is known for bringing a diverse group of performers who honor the craft at a high level. I am excited to work with them."

March 7, 10 p.m., Gigi's Gay Bar (6920 W. Warren Ave., Detroit). Learn more at ferndalepride.com.



Attend a Detroit Elders Event

Aging is inevitable (and so much better than the alternative), but aging alone doesn't have to be. The Detroit Elders Project, held on the third Thursday of every month, is a safe and welcoming space for older LGBTQ+ folks to gather, share a meal and build connection.

"Detroit Elders Project is an important group, now more than ever, because it provides a safe and regular space for folks to build community together," explains Kat Hutton, program director for MiGen. "This group not only provides a space to break bread and build friendships but also to discuss challenging topics and learn about community resources."

The get-togethers are hosted at the Hannan Center in Detroit and supported by MiGen. Whether you're looking for camaraderie, support or an introduction to your next fling (oh, just me?), the Detroit Elders Project offers the glorious possibility of all this.

Third Thursday of each month, 5 p.m., Hannan Center (4750 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Learn more at bit.ly/lgbtelderMI.



Road Trip to Kalamazoo to Support Queer Composers

If you haven't been to Kalamazoo since a fifth-grade tour of the Kellogg's factory to watch Frosted Flakes be made, it's time for a much queerer field trip. Pack your friends into whichever car doesn't have the bumper hanging on by a vintage (but, unfortunately, still relevant) "hate is not a family value" sticker and head to the Queer Crescendo concert.

Part of Kalamazoo's Queer Theater offerings and produced by Sydney West, Queer Crescendo is a night of music and revelry in the form of a classical concert featuring original music by seven local LGBTQ+ composers. The cast includes not only the Kalamazoo Queer Chorus (say that five times fast) but also a host of other performers making their parents proud and pleased (say that five times fast) about the money they spent on instrument and voice lessons.

Producer Sydney West is passionate about creating more opportunities for audiences to experience work by LGBTQ+ composers. "Expect to hear beautiful classical music and connect to the community," said West. "It will be an unforgettable experience...that I am sure will be impactful for everyone that attends."

March 7-8, March 8 ASL interpreted, 7:30 p.m., Stetson Chapel (1200 Academy St., Kalamazoo). Learn more at bit.ly/queercrescendo.



Photo: Facebook/@uplifta2

Enjoy Uplift's Weekly Themed Nights

When it opened last year, Uplift burst onto Ann Arbor's queer nightlife scene with the heartwarming promise of "something for everyone." While I'm waiting patiently for my 5 a.m. nonbinary queer humor writer/nurse/comedian co-working breakfast, they've scheduled out so much to enjoy that you won't even miss that obvious vacancy in their programming. Trivia takes place on Tuesdays. Karaoke carries on Wednesdays. And their Friday "Drag Race" viewing event party and live drag shows start at 8 p.m. and end in the wee hours, so don't throw your disco nap pajamas into the wash just yet.

If meeting up to chat is more your style than getting up to dance, Uplift hasn't forgotten you! Check out their thrice weekly themed conversational get-togethers in the earlier evening hours.

Weekly events vary, Uplift (210 S. First St., Ann Arbor). See the full calendar at upliftannarbor.com.



Support Artists Who Are Staying In

Our community's in-person events are amazing, beautiful and fabulous, but many folks can't participate IRL due to accessibility limitations. Research barriers at the events you attend and bring your cash and your ass extra hard for inclusive venues!

You can also consider supporting creators doing fantastic work from home. A few I love include JD Davids (writing about chronic illness, disability justice and strategies for survival), Taipei (a drag queen raising awareness about long covid), Nyss (a Brooklyn-based ground-breaking young writer with long Covid) and Themme Fatale (self-described Long Covid Bimbo Laureate).

Because community isn't just who can show up in person — it's who we uplift, listen to and make space for every day.



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Gender and Name Changes Do More Than Affirm — They Save Lives

Why I changed my gender marker and what you need to know about ID laws in Michigan

BY MEGAN B. WELLS

In retrospect, what surprised me most is how quick it was.

When Illinois approved the addition of an X gender marker on state IDs in 2019, I wasn't even entirely sure I wanted one. It seemed altogether too strong a statement for the gender knot I'd still just begun to untangle, but there was time before I'd need to decide — the Secretary of State cautioned that the option would take years to properly implement.

That's OK, said my burgeoning gender crisis. I can wait.

I checked on the status of the availability of selecting the X option a couple of times a year at first, but less and less as it failed to yield results. By December of last year, when my driver's license was due for renewal, all I had on my mind was how irritating it would be to trudge all the way downtown with a sheaf of personal documents in my bag.

But the day before my license expired, some fire of a dusty late-30s synapse prompted me to check on the gender marker's progress again. Lo and behold, they'd finally started issuing X's in March. Abruptly, the possibility of having one for myself was real, and it was directly in front of me.

I'd only just come out to my family over the summer. Donald Trump, with his explicitly anti-trans policy goals, was due to take office in six weeks.

Was now the time?

I was able to make the decision at the 11th hour because in Illinois, as it is in Michigan, it's fairly simple (at the moment) to change your gender marker, if that's all you plan on doing. You simply need to fill out and sign a form, which you submit at a Secretary of State's office — no appointment needed. You can walk out that same day with an updated temporary license, and the new one on its way in the mail.

But I'm nonbinary, and I don't have plans to change my name anytime soon. For Michigan trans



people who need additional services, the process can get much more complicated. That's why Julisa Abad, director of transgender outreach and advocacy at Fair Michigan, began hosting gender and name change clinics to guide her community through the process. The clinics began serving qualified trans people in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw counties four years ago, and by Abad's count, she's assisted with 616 name changes — to say nothing of the gender marker

and birth certificate changes she's facilitated as well. One challenge is keeping up with a constantly evolving legal landscape around gender marker and name changes.

Recent legislation signed into law by Gov. Whitmer marks significant progress for Michigan residents seeking to update their identity documents, though with important limitations for those specifically looking to change gender markers on state IDs. The new laws (introduced as House Bills 5300 and

5303) have streamlined the legal name change process by eliminating several barriers that previously affected transgender Michiganders, including removing requirements for fingerprint criminal background checks, newspaper publication of name change hearings and presumptions of fraud.

Additionally, the legislation replaces the outdated requirement for "sex reassignment surgery" to amend sex designations on birth certificates with a simpler self-

attestation process. While these changes represent meaningful improvements for individuals who often pursue name changes alongside gender marker updates, it's important to note that companion bills (HBs 5301-5302) that would have specifically enshrined the right to amend gender markers on drivers' licenses and state IDs did not advance to the governor's desk

See **Gender Markers**, page 23

‘Oh, No Questions?’: Sen. Jeremy Moss Slams Anti-LGBTQ Attack Like a Boss

‘Buffoonish’: Front-row confrontation with Republican lawmaker sends resolution to legislative graveyard

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In a dramatic turn of events at the Michigan Capitol Feb. 25, what was intended to be a show of conservative force against marriage equality quickly unraveled when out State Sen. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) stormed into a press conference and confronted Rep. Josh Schriver (R-Oxford) with righteous indignation.

Moss, a fierce champion for LGBTQ+ rights who sponsored legislation adding protections to Michigan’s civil rights law, didn’t just observe — he seized the moment to deliver a passionate rebuke that left Schriver visibly shaken.

“Oh, no questions? I’ll take questions,” Moss said, before taking Schriver’s place at the podium after the rep left abruptly without answering questions from journalists.

Schriver’s non-binding resolution backed by seven conservative Michigan Republican legislators urged the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the historic Obergefell v. Hodges ruling that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015. The resolution specifically targets Michigan’s dormant 2004 constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, which could potentially be revived if the Supreme Court were to reverse its previous decision.

What made the press conference particularly explosive was Sen. Moss’s fearless decision to position himself defiantly in the front row, locking eyes with Schriver throughout his homophobic rant:

“Today I hereby call on the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn Obergefell v. Hodges, where gays, queers, transsexuals, polygamists and other perverts

advance attacks on our children. Marriage belongs to one man and one woman... This is a biological necessity to preserve and grow our human race... We must restore the order of the family. If we cannot conserve the bedrock of our civilization, the family, then we can’t call ourselves conservatives anymore,” Schriver said, before stepping away from the podium without answering questions.

“This was just as buffoonish as I expected it to be,” Moss thundered when he took to the podium after Schriver hurried away, his voice cutting through the tension-filled room. The out gay lawmaker’s fury was palpable as he defended his community against what many view as a direct attack on their families and very existence. “I think that this has fallen flat with people in the State of Michigan. I think that people respect their LGBTQ neighbors, their LGBTQ family members. These marriages have been the law of the land for 10 years. They contribute to family security. They contribute to economic security.”

Despite originally having six co-sponsors, Schriver found himself abandoned at the actual event, his allies seemingly unwilling to publicly stand behind their bigotry. His apocalyptic rhetoric echoed in a room of empty chairs as he claimed, “Ten years ago, the United States Supreme Court redefined the sacred institution of marriage. This blunder compromised the mother-father-child family unit.”

News of the resolution prompted immediate public response, with protesters gathering at the Capitol and filling the halls of the Anderson House Office Building on Wednesday. Many carried signs supporting Moss and condemning the attempted rollback of hard-won rights.

Perhaps most telling was the



Instagram/@jeremyallenmoss

reaction from Schriver’s own party. House Speaker Matt Hall (R-Richland Township) hurriedly organized a competing news conference and effectively buried the resolution by assigning it to the House Government Operations Committee — widely known as a legislative graveyard.

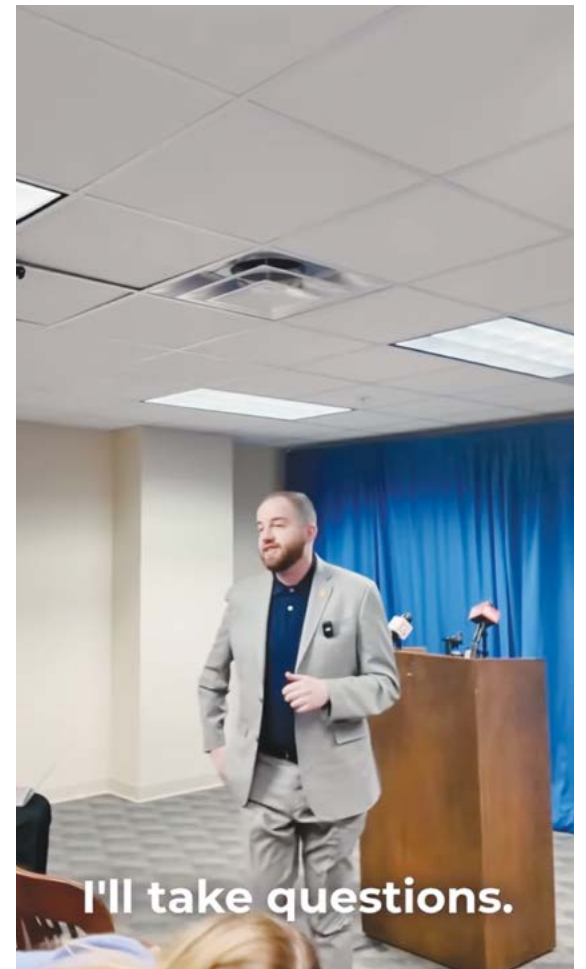
While the immediate threat appears neutralized, largely thanks to Moss’s unflinching confrontation, concerns remain about potential Supreme Court action. Justice Samuel Alito recently renewed criticism of the same-sex marriage decision, and he was joined by Justices John Roberts and Clarence Thomas in dissenting from the original

ruling.

Rep. Jason Morgan (D-Ann Arbor) suggested that Michigan might eventually need to formally repeal its dormant same-sex marriage ban through a voter-approved constitutional amendment.

“I’m not sure if the moment’s here yet or not,” Morgan told Michigan Public Radio Network, “but I think we’re getting to that moment where we’re ready, where we have to, as we inch closer and closer to the potential of the Supreme Court rolling back our right to marriage equality.”

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer responded with a video to Schriver’s press comments on



Facebook, mincing zero words. “Here’s my response to that,” she wrote. “Hell no.”

For now, Moss’s fiery defense has not only shut down this particular attack but has also sent a clear message: Michigan’s LGBTQ+ community has a relentless warrior in their corner who won’t back down when their rights and families are threatened. His willingness to directly confront homophobia in the halls of power demonstrates exactly the kind of bold leadership the community needs as conservative forces continue to target hard-won protections.

Respect Yourself: Why Using Terms Like ‘Tranny’ Is Not Empowering



BY ANNI ARBOUR

Words can make or break a person. How you communicate with another informs their perception of you, and how you allow others to communicate with you also forms perceptions.

I am sensitive to the use of words involving transgender people. Our community is the most openly maligned and insulted identifiable group in existence. And, sadly, we are often complicit.

“Tranny” is used to dehumanize trans people, misgender trans women and point us out in public. While it’s considered bad manners for a man to hit a woman, many are perfectly fine hitting a ‘tranny.’”

“However, if you are a tranny, the word can feel like home. Among the dolls, we use the word to show that we trust someone. If I call myself a tranny around you, you know that I feel safe with you. And if I call one of my friends a tranny, you can know for sure she’s my ride or die. We’re in an exclusive family, and we see and love each other for who we are and, sometimes, that’s trannies.”

The writer of this is Mey Rude, a transgender woman writing for Out.com. On one hand, I get it. I have heard trans friends describe themselves as “trannies,” but it is usually with sardonic self-deprecation. I can understand the sense of empowerment that comes from reclaiming a slur by applying it to oneself, but by doing so, it leaves open the window for others — cis people trying to be funny, or blatant transphobes trying to demean — to use it. It provides those individuals with an excuse. If you can use it, so can they, at least in their minds.

Another transgender journalist, Julia Serano, has written extensively on the use of the word “tranny.” Her long, thoughtful essay on the subject appeared in her book, “Outspoken: A Decade of Transgender Activism and Trans Feminism.”

Serano transitioned back in 2001, and her perception of the word has transitioned as well over time.

“There was virtually zero media coverage of trans people and issues outside of a handful of sensationalistic

movies and the occasional ‘Jerry Springer Show.’ When I was first coming out to people in 2001, most told me that they had never (to their knowledge) seen or met a real-life transsexual before. So, the simple act of being out as trans was often read by the cis majority as a shocking in-your-face sort of move,” she wrote.

“Back then, cis people used the word ‘transsexual’ with just as much disdain as they used the term ‘tranny.’ I think this helps to explain why many of us (at least in my community) didn’t tend to get quite so upset about the use of the term ‘tranny’ — it wasn’t viewed as significantly more soiled in society’s eyes than other well known trans-related labels.”

“Today [2013] we have a few labels (‘transgender,’ ‘gender-non-conforming,’ ‘gender variant,’ ‘trans,’ and even ‘transsexual’) that have garnered a modicum of recognition and respect in our culture. I feel that it is this respectability (as limited as it may be) that has led many trans folks to want to purge less respectful-sounding labels — such as ‘tranny’ and ‘transvestite’ — from the lexicon. Not coincidentally, these latter words also happen to be more closely associated with sex work, pornography, and fetishism) in the public’s mind...”

This is the group I fall into. Like it or not, much of the general (that is, non-transgender) public’s perception of trans people is formed by pornography. Well, it was until politicians seized on us as political pawns. Until that point, though, it was mostly while browsing porn sites that the cis majority encountered us.

Of course, they would rarely admit that, but it is the fetishizing of transgender women as sex unicorns — sex objects with both male and female genitals — that intrigues and attracts (mostly) cis men. This result draws the “creep” contingent, sexual predators and other bad actors. Allowing someone to diminish my existence by trivializing me as a “tranny,” or a “shemale,” plays into their twisted view of me being less than human.

Serano came to a similar viewpoint but explained it far more eloquently.

“I pretty much stopped using the word

See **Trans Lucent**, page 24

Reimagining a Classic at UM with a Queer Cast and Trans Lion

‘Our Oz’ celebrates identity in updated adaptation of the L. Frank Baum classic

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Actors are often asked to leave behind their own identities and lose themselves in a character of someone else’s creation.

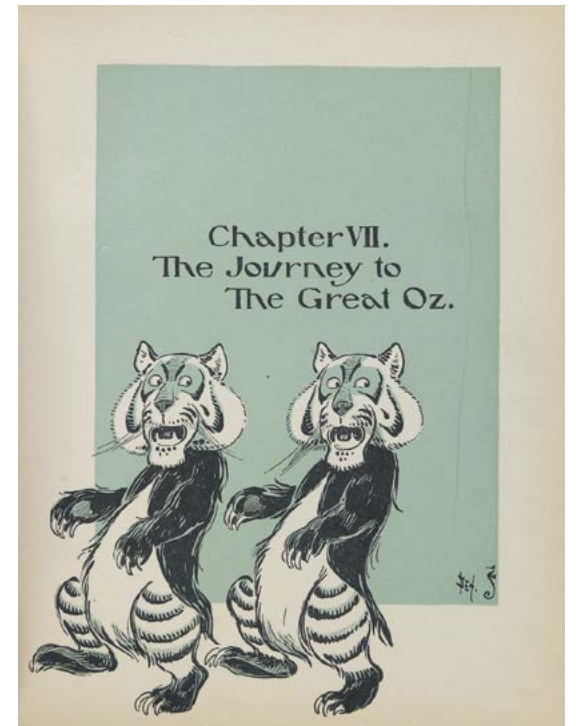
But at the University of Michigan (UM), professors José Casas and Jake Hooker are flipping the script. They are asking their students and actors to bring their own identities and experiences to the forefront as they collaboratively create the roles and storylines for “Our Oz” — a reimagining of “The Wizard of Oz” through a BIPOC and queer lens. The production will be performed at 8 p.m. on April 4 at the Arthur Miller Theatre.

“We’ve been introducing kids to a very chaotic and frenetic process where we’re asking them to ‘bring yourself, bring your identities,’” Casas told BTL. “This is one of those chances where, as actors, we’re literally asking them to be a part of that creative process.”

Since L. Frank Baum’s “The Wizard of Oz” debuted over a century ago, the story has been told and retold in many mediums. The Judy Garland film in 1939 became an instant classic. Fifty years ago, “The Wiz” landed on Broadway and then the 1978 film of the same name, starring Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Richard Pryor and Lena Horne, became a cult classic. In 2003, “Wicked” became a generation’s gateway to musical theater with the first half of a film version coming out just last year.

“Our Oz” embraces the tropes and images from all those renditions while devising something new and experimental with a nod to Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town.”

Jonas Annear, a UM communications student who recently added performing arts management to his studies to pursue a dual degree, plays the Lion. The story was one that had played a ubiquitous role in his early life. He watched the Golden Age movie throughout his childhood, fell in love with “Wicked” and played the Scarecrow in a high school production. Even so, it didn’t top his



Images from L. Frank Baum’s “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,” released in 1900. Photos: Public Domain

list of favorite stories.

“I have a pretty neutral feeling toward it,” Annear said. “It’s very classic and it’s very

See **Oz**, page 21

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Detroit Pistons' All-Star Commitment to LGBTQ+ Community Shines at Pride Night

New Pride party package offers fans an enhanced experience

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The Detroit Pistons are gearing up for the 2025 Pistons Pride Night at Little Caesars Arena on March 28 in a home game against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Imagine rainbow colors dancing across the jumbotron, fans in Pride jerseys cheering alongside the world's best athletes, and the energetic buzz of celebration rising above the usual game-day roar. As the Pistons Dancers prepare for a special halftime performance, a sea of fans cheers them on from a dedicated Pride section, creating a vibrant pocket of community within the larger arena experience.

This is Pistons Pride Night, where sport and identity

celebration merge into something greater than the sum of its parts.

Kevin Heard, founder of the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, noted that this year marks the 11th Pride Night event the Chamber has hosted, a partnership that began at The Palace of Auburn Hills and has grown significantly since the team's move downtown.

"The great thing about the Pistons' allyship is that they have put their money where their mouth is," Heard said. "They are really engaging inside of the community and meeting people where they are because they really want to not only bring people to the game but also to impact the community overall."

Over the years, the event has transformed from a simple game night into a full-fledged celebration that combines sports with purposeful community engagement.



A special package for a special night

This year's Pride Night features an enhanced experience and a special Pride Party seating area, a dedicated section where attendees can enjoy all-you-can-eat hot dogs, nachos, popcorn and non-alcoholic beverages (with alcohol available for purchase). Pride package purchases also include a special Pistons Pride jersey. The Pride

Night package, available at pistons.com/pride, also includes a special Pride-themed halftime performance, the opportunity to shoot a free throw on the Pistons court after the game and a donation to a local charity.

The dedicated seating area creates a unique opportunity for community connection, and as Heard notes, the ticket package offers a great deal of value, especially compared with pricing related to other professional sporting events.

More than just a game

Pride Night extends beyond basketball with pre-game and post-game activities designed to build community connections.

"There is normally a networking event that happens at Heritage Hall prior to the tip-off," Heard noted. "So people can come early and network there."

The celebration continues after the final buzzer with free entry to 215 West in Ferndale for an unofficial afterparty. "We're really excited that our partners have opened up the doors to continue the celebration all night long after the end of the game," Heard said.

Fans can also look forward to a special halftime performance by the Pistons Dancers. Community members have the opportunity to participate alongside the dance team, creating a unique moment of visibility and celebration during the game.

Beyond symbolism: authentic engagement

In a climate where some organizations and corporate entities have scaled back LGBTQ+ initiatives, the Pistons remain

steadfast in their support.

"The Detroit Pistons are proud to support the LGBTQ+ community through our annual Pride Night, reinforcing our commitment to an inclusive environment for all," said Melanie Harris, Detroit Pistons president of business operations. "We believe in using the power of basketball to unite and create a space where everyone is embraced for who they are."

Heard believes basketball serves as a universal connector that transcends differences. "Regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity, everyone should know what basketball is or have seen it, have played it, have walked by a basketball hoop," he said. "And I think that's something that we all can kind of be a part of."

While Pride Night is a uniquely visible example of the Pistons' commitment to inclusivity, the organization engages with the local LGBTQ+ community throughout the year.

"The Pistons have always been very consistent," Heard said. "They actively seek out different organizations and different cultures and celebrate them all. Every year for the past six years, we've hosted an LGBTQ+ community round table around August right before the actual schedule drops for the following upcoming year. And they really want to say, 'How can we make this better? How can we be integrated in other activities that you all are doing?'"

This collaboration extends to other community events as well. "Last year at the Chamber's Colours Pride Gala, we had Hooper, their mascot, come and hype up the crowd," said Heard. "And the year before that, we had the Pistons Dancers come and they took pictures with everyone."

The organization demonstrates a broader commitment to economic empowerment within the LGBTQ+ community, as well. For example, Sterling Littlejohn, the Pistons' manager of community and social

responsibility, sits on the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce. "I'm really happy to see that they're not only all in on hosting a Pride Night, they actually want to see the LGBT community grow and expand as far as business acumen and access to capital is concerned," Heard said.

Another example of the Pistons' commitment to the LGBTQ+ community is its ongoing collaboration with The Phluid Project, a gender-free clothing brand founded by Michigan native Rob Smith.

Smith, who grew up in Grosse Pointe before launching a successful career in fashion, partnered with the Pistons to create an all-gender apparel line called "Basketball for All" that includes sweatshirts, T-shirts and hats.

"It's about changing people's hearts and minds in a place where there is rampant transphobia and homophobia," Smith told BTL about the collaboration in 2024. "If there is some way to have sports open up to show inclusion and acceptance for all — not just queer folks — I think it's a game changer that sets the stage for many organizations to follow."

Smith praised the Pistons organization for their authentic commitment to inclusion. "The team has been amazing. They have really been leaning into wanting to do what's right and showing what real inclusion looks like for queer folks," he said. "Whatever is going on with their season, the thing is that winning comes in many forms, as far as I'm concerned. And they are winning in this space of inclusion and celebration."

As the Pistons prepare to host their 2025 Pride Night, the event stands as a testament to the organization's enduring commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion — a slam dunk for the LGBTQ+ community in Southeast Michigan.

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Iowa Republicans Tell Trans People in the State to Disappear or GTFO

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI



"Today, I signed into law a bill that safeguards the rights of women and girls," Gov. Kim Reynolds (R-Iowa) said in a video posted to X.

Sounds good to me! What's in the bill? Reproductive freedom with abortion and birth control that is accessible to everyone who needs it? Strengthened domestic violence protections? Gun safety measures to keep kids from being murdered in school? Better access to mental health treatment? Better oversight of children in the foster care system in order to ensure that children are not placed in abusive environments?

Sadly, the answer is none of the above. Gov. Reynolds did not, in fact, do anything to protect the rights of women and girls. What she did was intentionally and maliciously hurt transgender people in the state.

With the stroke of her pen, Gov. Reynolds ended "18 years of protection against discrimination based on gender identity in Iowa's civil rights law," the Des Moines Register reports. "The signing makes Iowa the first state

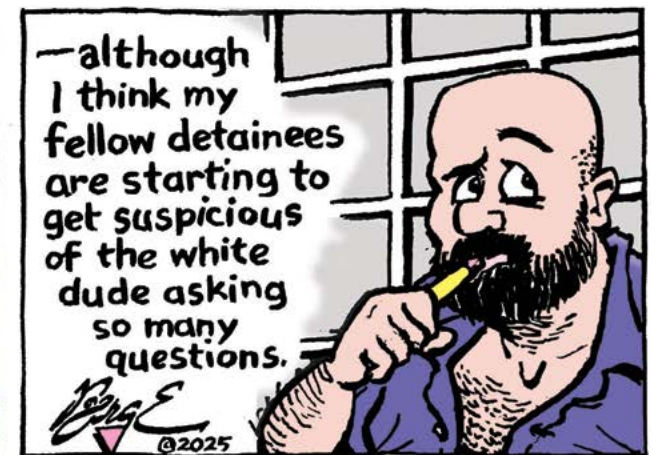
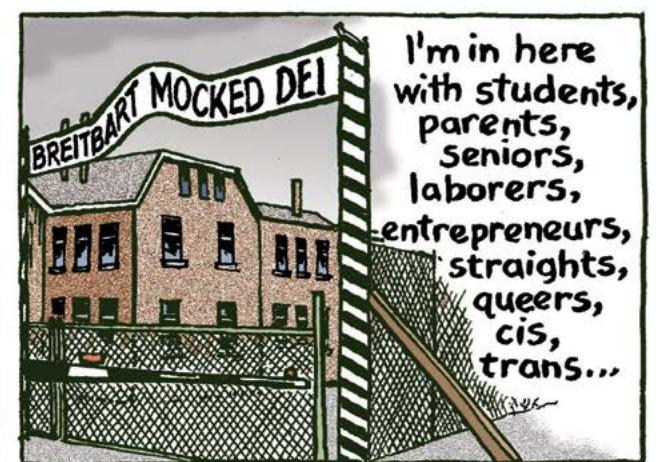
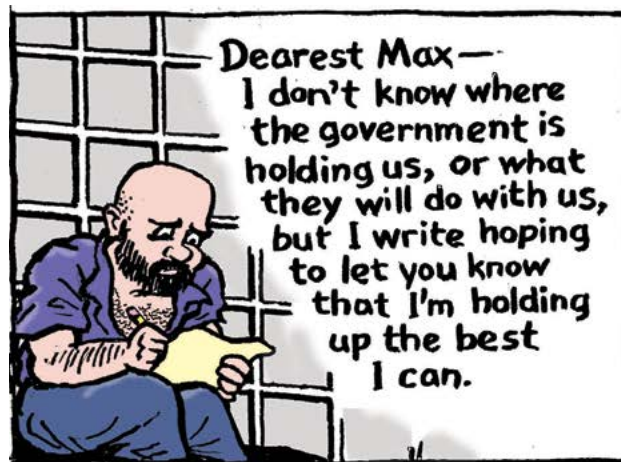
Republicans know that discriminating against transgender people is wrong. But what's a poor major political party supposed to do? Well, just erase transgender people from the state's civil rights protections, I guess.

in the country to take away civil rights from a group it has previously protected in law."

"Before I signed this bill, the civil rights code blurred the biological line between the sexes," Reynolds said. "It also forced Iowa taxpayers to pay for gender reassignment surgeries, and that's unacceptable to me, and it's unacceptable to most Iowans."

But targeting a specific group of people to kick out of the Civil Rights Club is apparently acceptable.

I probably don't need to tell you this, but this move is a disgusting and dangerous escalation of the Republican



war on transgender people.

"Gov. Reynolds has chosen to put Iowa on the wrong side of history," Max Mowitz, executive director of One Iowa, told Iowa Public Radio. "By signing this bill into law, she has made it legal to discriminate against transgender Iowans in nearly every aspect of life — where they live, where they work and where they go to school. This law sends a devastating message: that transgender Iowans are not worthy of the same rights, dignity and protections as their neighbors."

Iowa Republicans, however, are claiming that this is no big deal and that transgender people will be fine. Federal law will protect them instead.

[RECORD SCRATCH SOUND EFFECT]

The federal government? The one led by Donald Trump, who declared in his inaugural address that there are only two genders and said during his campaign, "I will take historic action

to defeat the toxic poison of gender ideology and reaffirm that God created two genders, male and female." That federal government?

I call bullshit.

So do Iowa Democrats. "The majority party is removing the rights of fellow Iowans to housing, credit and jobs," House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst said. "Do not tell me the federal government will save us because they're already attacking the communities we're attacking today as well."

The purpose of the bill Gov. Reynolds just gleefully

signed is to support a coordinated attack against transgender people in the state.

As the Des Moines Register reports, "[Iowa] Republicans said the move will help other recent legislation they passed survive court challenges, including a ban on transgender youth from receiving gender-affirming medical care, restricting transgender students from using school bathrooms that align with their gender identity and banning transgender women and girls from competing in female sports."

I see. Republicans know that discriminating against transgender people is wrong. But what's a poor major political party supposed to do? Well, just erase transgender people from the state's civil rights protections, I guess.

What makes this even more disgusting is that Iowa Rep. Aime Wichtendahl is openly transgender. So the people who supported and passed this bill did so even though they actually know and work with a transgender person. And yet Iowa Republicans are operating as if transgender people are some kind of terrifying specter haunting public restrooms and school sports teams. But they're not. They're real people.

"The purpose of this bill, and the purpose of every anti-trans bill, is to further erase us from public life and to stigmatize our existence," Rep. Wichtendahl told Iowa Public Radio. "The sum total of every anti-trans bill and anti-LGBTQ bill is to make our existence illegal, to force us back into the closet. If we want jobs or a place to live, we have to go back, is what they are telling us."

Iowa is, unfortunately, a harbinger of things to come. Republicans are working overtime to ruin transgender people's lives. Unless you're a straight cisgender white man you'd best believe that you, too, are a target.

Dems Stand Firm as U.S. Senate Blocks Anti-Trans Sports Ban

.....

In a strictly partisan vote, Senate Democrats successfully blocked the passage of federal legislation aimed at restricting transgender women's participation in women's sports in a March 3 vote. The bill, called the "Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act" by Republicans and the "GOP Child Predator Empowerment Act" by Democrats, failed to secure enough votes to move forward.

Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin was among four lawmakers who did not cast votes on the controversial measure, alongside Vermont Democrat Peter Welch and Republicans Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming. BTL did not receive a response to a request to Sen. Slotkin's office to confirm why she did not vote ahead of print

deadlines, though Slotkin also did not record a vote on another Senate measure up for vote on March 3.

The legislation had previously passed the Republican-controlled House in January before stalling in the Senate. While debate was limited, Wisconsin Democrat Tammy Baldwin opposed the bill on the grounds that sports regulations should remain under state jurisdiction rather than federal control.

Alabama Republican Tommy Tuberville spoke at length supporting the bill, though his arguments included several inaccurate claims about transgender athletes, including false assertions about Olympic boxers.

The defeated bill represents part of a broader national trend of policies targeting transgender participation in sports. Earlier this year, President Trump attempted to implement similar restrictions through executive action.

LGBTQ+ advocacy groups praised the Senate's rejection of the measure, with the ACLU calling it "part of a sweeping effort to push transgender people out of public life altogether."



Detroit Activist Jerron Totten to Lead Michigan Dem Party's LGBT&A Caucus

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Jerron Totten, currently on leave from his position as social justice engineer at LGBT Detroit, has been elected as the next chair of the LGBT&A Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party. Scott Ellis of Great Lakes Bay Pride will serve as first vice chair.

"It has been one of the great joys of my life to serve as Caucus Chair these last several years. It is with even greater joy that I announce my endorsement of Jerron," said Roland Leggett, the outgoing chair, on Facebook.

Totten, 33, brings extensive political organizing experience, having worked on Obama and Clinton campaigns before moving to Detroit in 2018 at the invitation of LGBT Detroit Executive Director A. Nzere Kwabena. In Detroit, he has overseen many community outreach programs, working with Michigan Voices and Black Votes Matter and as part of the local Harris/Walz campaign.

The next general membership meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. March 12, via Zoom. Visit facebook.com/TheLGBTACaucusoftheMDP to learn more.

ACLU of Michigan Intervenes in Federal Trans Rights Case

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The ACLU of Michigan is intervening in a lawsuit after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission abandoned its claims against a Culver's restaurant in Clarkston, Michigan for allegedly firing a transgender man and two

colleagues who reported workplace harassment. The EEOC cited Trump's executive order against "gender ideology" despite previous Supreme Court rulings protecting transgender employees.

The ACLU has formally filed a motion to represent Regina Zaviski and Savannah Nurme-Robinson, who would otherwise be left without legal recourse. Their colleague Asher Lucas, represented by separate counsel, was granted permission to intervene last month.

"When the government agency abandons an

entire group it is supposed to protect, we have no choice but to step in," said ACLU attorney Syeda Davidson in a statement. Davidson called the administration's actions "deeply harmful." "What your gender is has nothing to do with your ability to make French fries," Zaviski added.

The case is one of seven transgender discrimination suits the EEOC is dropping nationwide.

Share Your Voice

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Celebrate Queer Voices at 63rd Ann Arbor Film Festival

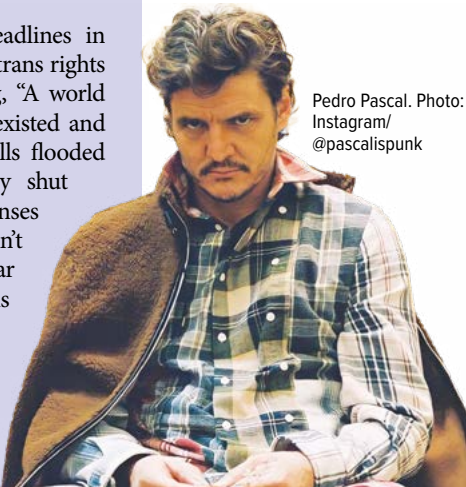
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The 63rd Ann Arbor Film Festival showcases groundbreaking LGBTQ+ cinema March 27-28, featuring international works that explore identity and the queer experience. Highlights include the world premiere of "Roohrangi," a poetic exploration of queer spaces, and "Mr. Bound & Gagged," documenting influential gay pornography publishers. Don't miss "A Body to Live In," followed by a discussion with renowned queer theorist Gayle Rubin. After screenings, join the community at Uplift, Ann Arbor's vibrant new LGBTQ+ bar. Full schedule at aafilmfest.org.

Pedro Pascal Shuts Down Anti-Trans Trolls

.....

Actor Pedro Pascal made headlines in late February after posting a pro-trans rights message on Instagram, declaring, "A world without trans people has never existed and never will." When anti-trans trolls flooded his comments, Pascal brilliantly shut them down with witty responses like "nooooooooooooo" and "I don't give a shit." The "Last of Us" star has consistently supported his transgender sister Lux, who came out in 2021.



Pedro Pascal. Photo: Instagram/
@pascalispunk

Inside Ferndale's LGBTQ+ Senior Haven

New housing complex offers safety, community and the freedom to age authentically

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

For almost a decade, the Metropolitan Community Church - Detroit (MCC-D) and various community partners have dreamed of creating an affordable housing complex where LGBTQ+ seniors could live without hiding who they are. That dream has finally become a reality with the opening of the Raymond E. Shepherd House in Ferndale.

The four-story apartment building at the corner of Nine Mile and Paxton Street welcomed its first residents in December, and already the 53-unit complex is nearing capacity.

"I'm overjoyed," said Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow, pastor of MCC-D and one of the driving forces behind the project. "When you work on a project for as long as we have and see it come to fruition, it's just amazing, especially recognizing this project is literally going to change people's lives and save lives for those who are in desperate need of affirming housing."

A long journey to opening day

The road to creating the Shepherd House was a lengthy one. Though it's been called an "eight-year project," Rev. Stringfellow notes that its roots go back even further.

"It's really been 10 years because Full Circle Communities first contacted us two years before the official project launch," Stringfellow explained to BTL. "I sat in on that initial meeting, and when I heard about their work developing senior housing, I immediately asked to be put on their list."

Full Circle Communities, the developer behind the Shepherd House, has developed several LGBTQ+ focused housing projects in the region, including the Dr. Maya Angelou Village in Detroit and the Clairmount Center at Ruth Ellis. Recognizing that MCC-D couldn't provide all necessary services alone, Stringfellow brought in partners like Affirmations, Corktown Health and MiGen to collaborate on the project.

The bright, modern building honors Raymond E. Shepherd, a lifelong Ferndale resident who had a profound impact on the local LGBTQ+ community. Shepherd, who died in 2018, was an out gay man who served as a deacon at MCC-D and volunteered regularly at Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center.

"Ray lived alone most of his life and longed for [a] community where he felt safe and



Charles "Chuck" Sadowski and Molly. Photo: Andrew Potter

welcomed," Stringfellow said in a news release about the project. "He found those places at our church and Affirmations." The naming of the building recognizes Shepherd's own expressed desire to see affordable housing options for LGBTQ+ seniors, where residents could live openly and authentically in their later years.

'I needed a fresh start'

Charles "Chuck" Sadowski was one of the first eight residents to sign a lease at the Shepherd House.

"I started my process back in September," said Sadowski, who moved into his new one-bedroom apartment in December. The move represented a significant change for Sadowski, who had lived in his parents' house for 43 and a half years.

"I wanted a change from where I was living, and I sold the house and was able to pay off a lot of debts," he explained. "The area for me, being by myself, I felt I was unsafe, and this is safer for me. Plus, financially I was struggling, so it was time for a move."

For Sadowski, the Shepherd House offers practical advantages beyond safety. "I like that all my utilities and Wi-Fi are included," he said. "So, I sacrificed a little bit, but I've sacrificed a lot over the years. So, this is just another stepping stone."

He particularly appreciates the location, which provides easy access to Henry Ford Hospital, where he receives healthcare services. "Things are more easily accessible here," he noted, though he admitted he still drives to his favorite grocery store in his old neighborhood for "good quality meats."

Sadowski, who has been in recovery from drug abuse for over 17 years, found out about the housing through his membership at MCC-Detroit. "I prayed before they even broke ground. I started praying, saying, 'Get me in there, God. I need a fresh start,'" Sadowski said. "And at my age, I did."

The move has been beneficial for his mental health too. "Mentally I need it," he shared, revealing that in April of the previous year, he had been in a "dark space."

"I've been in recovery for over 17 years, but I'm more stable with my recovery from drug abuse than I am mentally," he explained.

"So, I needed something to help me mentally feel better about myself. Having the smaller place that's manageable, being around other people, and feeling safe — it all helps. I'm not isolated anymore."

Linda Brincat was another early resident. "I first heard about Shepherd House a few years ago. The thought of an affordable senior living community for the LGBTQ+ community really appealed to me, even though I had my doubts whether or not it would come to pass," Brincat told BTL.

When she learned applications were being accepted, she submitted hers the first day and followed up regularly. "I had made up my mind, this was going to be home," she said.

The property's amenities helped convince her. "Everything is new, clean, modern and beautifully designed. The bonuses were that there is a 'bike room' on the first floor where I can store my bike — I ride a lot. The other bonus is the amazing community room with a kitchen."

Residents are already forming connections. Sadowski said he socializes with neighbors on his floor and recently adopted a cat named Molly, which has

created a bond with another resident.

“There’s one guy that lives on the other end of the hall. I just got me a new cat, and he likes cats, so he’s been spoiling her for me,” Sadowski said. “Reverend Roland, he calls me the mayor of Raymond Shepherd House because when new residents move in, I try to talk to them. I tell them I’m part of MCC-Detroit and if you need anything for your apartment, write a wish list and give it to me.” Sadowski has helped new residents obtain household items and sometimes offers a helping hand for those moving in.

The property hosted a Super Bowl party in February, bringing residents together in the community room. “Reverend Roland and MCC-Detroit hosted it and it was really fun,” Sadowski recalled. “A lot of residents were there, and it gave us all a chance to just relax together, share some food and get to know each other better. That’s when I started feeling like this place wasn’t just somewhere I live — it’s becoming home.”

Building an affirming community

Connie Mathes, the property’s leasing agent, has been busy helping to fill the remaining units and build a supportive community at the Shepherd House.

“They’re super cute. And the building’s amazing,” Mathes said of the apartments. “What I love about it especially is that you’re literally in the CVS parking lot, so how much better can that be?”

While the building was designed with LGBTQ+ seniors in mind, fair housing laws prevent it from being exclusively for that community. However, the environment is intentionally inclusive, and all residents must abide by guidelines prohibiting harassment or discrimination.

The project has been clear about ownership expectations that residents conduct themselves in an affirming environment, Mathes said, noting that prospective tenants have been receptive to this approach. “Everyone that’s been involved in the community has been very like-minded and welcoming and open.”

The location in Ferndale, known for being LGBTQ-friendly and walkable, has been particularly appealing to new residents. “We’ve got super active seniors,” Mathes said. “Even in the winter, they’ve been able to stay active and they can walk up to Como’s. It’s like a block and a half.” She noted that many residents come from less walkable communities in Southfield and Pontiac, making the pedestrian-friendly location an exciting change for them.

The Shepherd House addresses a critical need for affirming housing for LGBTQ+ seniors, some of whom might otherwise

feel forced to hide their identity to secure housing.

“I’ve been passionate about providing affordable housing for older adults since I heard the story of a transgender individual who had to go back into the closet in order to get housing,” Stringfellow said at the groundbreaking ceremony last August. “That individual ended up taking their own life.”

The building’s location in Ferndale, a city with a long history of LGBTQ+ inclusion and advocacy, makes it an ideal spot for the



Linda Brincat. Photo: Andrew Potter

new community. The city has been home to Ferndale Pride since 2011 and hosts numerous LGBTQ-owned businesses and community spaces, including Affirmations LGBTQ+ community center.

Sadowski, who participated in last year’s Motor City Pride parade with MCC-Detroit, is excited about the walkable nature of his new neighborhood. “I’m going to try to get myself walking more when the weather is better,” he said. “Go for a little bit of walk, see how far I can go one way and then come back the other, and hopefully I can make it over to Woodward.”

He’s already familiar with several local spots he wants to visit. “There’s a couple places I’d like to go to. Hambo Coney Island. And I like that Tropical Smoothie place,” he said, adding that he’s downloaded the Ferndale parking app for when he does drive.

The building’s proximity to essential services is particularly valuable for seniors. Aside from the CVS Pharmacy directly adjacent to the property, residents can easily access restaurants, shops and healthcare services. Sadowski appreciates being able to travel easily to his appointments at Henry Ford Hospital.

“Ferndale is upbeat,” Sadowski observed. “For me, it’s better than downtown Detroit.”

Inside the Shepherd House, residents can enjoy several inviting spaces, including the Charles Alexander Gallery community art space, in honor of the late BTL columnist and artist. The gallery will showcase Alexander’s

See **Shepherd House**, page 24

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How Internet Trolls Helped This Detroit Couple Amplify Their Message for LGBTQ+ Rights

Meet the Army vets using their online platform to fight for inclusivity and fairness for all

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In Detroit's historic Indian Village neighborhood, Kris Cravens-Hutton and her husband Dave Hutton are known for their ambitious restoration of a century-old Craftsman-style home and their vibrant Pride decorations. But their Instagram account, 1910.craftsman.on.burns, has become something much more significant: a platform often focused on LGBTQ+ advocacy that reaches nearly a half million followers. The account is peppered with Kris's acerbic wit and her love of maximalist decor, spot-on commentary about issues of the day, and occasional glimpses into the couple's daily life in Detroit, including fun with fan-favorite Remington, their agreeable yellow Labrador retriever.

The couple, who met in the U.S. Army, purchased their sprawling home on Burns Street in 2019 as a major work in progress. What began as documentation of an extensive renovation project has evolved into a space where the couple (especially the more vocal Kris) fearlessly stands up for the LGBTQ+ community against online harassment and political attacks.

"We live in a little historic village over here in Detroit," Kris told BTL. "And from all over, there's people in my neighborhood who are original Detroiters, but so many of us have come here from different places... some of us are married, some of us are single, some people are in long-term commitments, some are gay, some are straight. We are everything. And that's part of why I started speaking out more."

Another, perhaps larger part of the couples' increased advocacy, was the influx of internet trolls who flocked to the comments section of their Instagram account to rail against hopeful, uplifting messages in support of progressive causes — especially on posts where Kris, a staunch ally, has dared to defend LGBTQ+ community members.

Finding their voice

Kris says she became more cemented in her decision to focus on calling out harassment after a confrontation in front of the couple's home during a neighborhood home and garden tour. A man approached the house and told them they should take down their Pride flag, citing religious reasons.

"I was like, 'Sir, that's not going to happen,'" Kris recalled. The next morning, still angry about the encounter, she recorded a response

and posted it without much thought. Then, the internet did its thing.

"All of a sudden, we had 13,000 followers," she said. "I was like, 'David, what is happening?'"

The uncomfortable incident marked the beginning of Kris's more vocal stance on LGBTQ+ issues. Instead of simply ignoring trolls, she began using their comments as teaching moments while protecting her followers from seeing the original hateful messages.

"I screenshot, block and delete them," she explained. "I'm not interested in any troll account using our account to 'feed their ugly,' as my mama would say, and our follower friends don't need to see them. I'll cherry pick the troll comments that light my fire and use it — the rest go into the garbage where they belong."

While the trolls might be poofed out of existence when it comes to the channel, their "inspiration," if you will, is what built the couple's Instagram following. Kris explains that she will sometimes post a troll comment in a reel and then black out their names or Instagram handle and then process her feelings or make a point in response. "Building our Instagram account off that process has been a lovely side effect that I have embraced," she said. "It has brought more of the folks I want to sit down and have a cup of coffee with to our account and comments section."

One particularly significant response came after a comment about LGBTQ+ individuals in the military. Kris fired back, emphasizing that "the Pride community [has] always been in our military and [has] always been serving forever in the military."

In a post responding to a troll who told her she should be using her time to support veterans, Kris posted a reel where she spoke to the camera. "I had to respond to this one because it's just too juicy not to," she begins, in her trademark Southern drawl. "She accuses me of being a middle-aged liberal. Girl, I'm delighted to have lived this long in this life, and I'm happy to be called a liberal. That's a badge of honor to me, sister. And you say I should be doing something more worthwhile in my time, like supporting the veterans."

"I just want to show you something," she continues, before Dave holds her Army cap up to the camera.

"This is the hat I wore for four years on active duty in the United States Army through three deployments. Let me show you something else. This is one of the many hats my husband Dave wore in his 20-plus years on active duty. Girl, we support the veterans. We are veterans. We



Dave Hutton and Kris Cravens-Hutton in front of the Pride arbor Kris prepares each year for the front of their historic Detroit home. Courtesy photo

also support our LGBTQIA-plus community. And if you can't see intrinsically how those two overlap and come together, there ain't nothing I'm going to say that's going to help you get that."

"But I will say one more thing to you," she adds. "And it's the thing I sway to all trolls: You go on and you have the day you deserve now."

Did you hear that mic drop? Because we did.

In another post, she writes: "Most trolls I just block and delete but yesterday's was personal and today's was just a bridge too far. That kind of underhanded, low grade, revisionist history sleight of hand just pisses me off. He's been blocked and deleted and I'm moving on to my normal content of Dave and me putzing around the house..."

While Kris's fiery missives are cathartic and

generate viral moments, the account is also a place where the community finds plenty of hope and joy.

Pride house plans

As Pride Month 2025 approaches, the couple is planning their most ambitious decoration project yet — trolls, be damned. Previous years have featured a Pride flag and a colorful flowing arbor created from craft paper and silk flowers that drew visitors from across the region, but this year, Kris promises the creation will be even more spectacular.

"I wish I could show you what my dining room table is," Kris said, describing the approximately 1,700 foam sheets waiting to be

cut into petals for flowers. Lucky for her, the expansive project has become a community endeavor. “I’ve contacted some of my friends and neighbors and I said, ‘I’m gonna need help.’ And they’re like, ‘Yeah, you tell us when. We’ll help cut these flowers out and we’ll help with the arbor.”

The design will incorporate the colors of the progressive Pride flag, including traditional rainbow colors, plus black, white, brown and the trans flag colors of light pink, light blue and white.

The Pride decorations have become more than just visual statements. They’ve created opportunities for connection in their neighborhood and beyond.

“One of the things that Dave and I love about doing the Pride arbor is we meet so many people,” Kris said. “People will stop by and talk to us about the house.” These connections have led to meaningful relationships, including with a young professional from Arkansas (Kris’s home state) who was new to the area.

“I work from home a lot and I’ll peek out the second floor window and I’ll see people out front of the house taking photos,” she said. “It makes my heart happy.”

As political tensions rise during the second Trump administration, which has seen intense focus on anti-LGBTQ+ efforts, Kris feels an increasing responsibility to speak out. In one Instagram post, she declares: “The time for subtlety is over. I will not be silent or subtle or complacent.”

She credits her neighbors and community with helping her find her voice. Not long ago in the comments section on a post about her Pride display, two gay neighbors defended her from hateful comments without her knowledge. “They woke up every morning and watched the comments come in on our Pride arbor and then engaged the people who were being shitty,” she said.

Mostly, responses to Kris’s pro-LGBTQ+ posts are positive, such as “Thank you for this post — it means a lot to me” and “Absolutely adore you guys. Thanks for being allies.” “Honestly, those comments keep us going,” Kris said.

The couple sees their platform as particularly important because of who they are: a straight, middle-aged couple who “look like people’s parents or grandparents.” Their appearance gives them a unique position to reach people who might not listen to other advocates.

“Dave and I naturally look like right-wing nut jobs,” Kris joked. “We have an opening in a way to have these kinds of conversations with people.”

For Kris, supporting the LGBTQ+ community “just feels normal.” She explained, “It’s just taking care of people who’ve taken care of us. We try to be careful about overstepping, too.” While she’s a “little uncomfortable” about

being the focus of this article or when she hears praise from fans of the account, the couple plans to keep using the platform in ways that feel helpful toward battling down bigotry and ignorance — and for providing comedic relief



(Top) A portion of a previous year's Pride arbor.
(Bottom) Screenshot from the 1910.craftsman. on.burns Instagram channel. Courtesy photos

at a time when it feels vital to take a breather now and then.

As they continue renovating their historic home and planning for this year's Pride display, Kris and Dave have created something unexpected but deeply valuable: a community platform where advocacy meets authenticity, and where restoration extends beyond a historic house — all the way to strengthening the foundations of a more inclusive society.

“I think one of the things that is going to be really important in the years ahead is finding and building a community where you feel safe,” Kris said, “and where you can flourish and grow and you can work together to fight back against some of the garbage that’s coming out. That’s really the goal here, and we’re just so grateful to have a small part in that.”

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A House with No Closets

Why MAGA fans are afraid of my parenting style



BY BONNIE JEAN
FELDKAMP

The haters are out in full force, already feeling emboldened by this new administration. I will never understand the fear that surrounds the need to enforce gender stereotypes.

One recent morning, someone responded to a weeks-old post where I mentioned that my young son loves to cook with me. “It looks like you’re raising a little bitch,” they wrote. I don’t know this man and I don’t know how he came across my post but he only makes me want to double down on modeling acceptance and belonging.

I don’t know about you, but I want my children to know who they really are because I want the opportunity to love them as their most authentic selves. This is why I made the decision to not dilute or pollute their exploration of identity according to any gender norms.

I talk to children in the spirit of having options. From early on, my kiddos knew that they were free to love whomever they loved. I use gender-neutral terms like “partner” and “spouse” so as not to imply I had hopes tied to any specific preference.

Someone once asked me about my daughter’s best friend who happened to be a boy. They wondered aloud if they were more than friends. I responded that I wasn’t sure; the jury is still out on whether or not she even liked boys that way, and I said so — she was just a kid who had a friend. The response I got

was a sharp, fearful “You’re going to make her gay.”

Well, no. It doesn’t work that way.

What it did do was make our home a safe space to explore and question. We’ve never had a serious, sit-down “coming out” conversation of “Mom, this is who I’m attracted to.” It was just “Mom, this is my person and I love them.” My response has always been “OK. I’m happy for you that you found love.”

That’s it.

It starts with laying that groundwork with very simple things like not categorizing toys, clothes and activities — like cooking — according to gender. My son has long hair that he likes for me to braid. These things were and are gender neutral in our home.

We also do not tease about crushes or imply attraction to anyone. That’s not ours to observe or comment on. When my son was told by his peers that his hair made him “look like a girl” I asked him, “Who gets to decide what a girl looks like?” Spoiler alert, the girl gets to decide. Each person gets to decide how they want to present themselves to the world, regardless of gender.

When my kids are ready to talk to me about attraction and crushes, I’m ready to listen, support and guide them through their new experiences without judgment or projected



fear. This is not only how you raise gay children, this is also how you raise secure amazing allies for the LGBTQ+ people in your community.

Judgment and ridicule starts at home and are taught at home. If we are truly going to have a safe, loving home it must be one that is welcoming, no matter who you are and who you love.

The evolving political climate has proven that the outside world will offer up plenty of opposition to differing identities. Social media will bring out the angry, bitter people who

don’t know unconditional love. Home should be a space where you absolutely know you are loved. It should be your refuge when the world is cold.

The best tool I have to counter outside hate is to work on dismantling the proverbial closets in my own home. I will challenge assumptions and give my children the freedom to learn who they are and the security to be the allies our communities deserve. They are the future and I plan to fill the future with love.

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Spring Theater in Michigan Celebrates Queer Stories and Bold Premieres

‘Cock’ and ‘Prom,’ coming soon to a theater near you

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

In a world that feels increasingly uncertain, one thing remains in high demand: joy.

This spring, Michigan’s theater scene is offering just that — especially for the LGBTQ+ community. With a range of inspiring performances, heartwarming stories and plenty of belly laughs, local theater artists are creating spaces where audiences can find both solace and celebration.

‘Cock,’ Ringwald Theatre

When a slot in their season unexpectedly opened, Ringwald Theatre’s founding artistic director Joe Bailey determined the time was right for “Cock.”

“Cock,” by Mike Bartlett, tells the story of John, who — despite having a long-term boyfriend — falls in love with a woman. The three try to figure things out with a bit of

interference from the boyfriend’s father.

“The universe was saying, ‘Here you are. Now is the time for ‘Cock,’” Bailey told BTL. “It has a reputation amongst gay theater folks. It really deals a lot with identity and sexuality.”

Written in 2009, this British play challenges the notion that sexuality is fixed and unchanging.

“There’s a certain section of the gay community that doesn’t really believe in bisexuality,” Bailey said. “It’s interesting nowadays that so many people are able to discard the binary when it comes to gender but still hang on to it when it comes to sexuality.”

While “Cock” is a comedy, it promises an exploration of intimacy without nudity and conflict without violence, telling the story of a man who is uncomfortable with rigid definitions and labels.

“Cock,” March 7–31, 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Mondays, 3 p.m. Sundays. Ringwald Theatre

at Affirmations, 280 W. 9 Mile, Ferndale, theringwald.com.

‘Prom,’ Hilberry Gateway at Wayne State University

Political events have made Wayne State’s next musical more relevant than they were expecting when they first programmed it. They’re staging “The Prom” from March 28 to April 6.

For Eric Van Tiel, “The Prom” marks his musical directing debut at the Hilberry. Van Tiel joined the Wayne State theater faculty last year, moving to Detroit from New York with his husband.

“My biggest goal with the production is to deliver big laughs and then a story that has a real, true beating heart,” Van Tiel said. “While it is a big comedy and it has a lot of broad characters, because of the climate that we’re in,



John (Stebert Davenport, center) faces a pivotal decision between W (Grace Jolliffe, left) and M (Miles Bond, right) in Mike Bartlett’s “Cock” at The Ringwald Theatre. Photo: Brandy Joe Plambeck

See **Spring Theater**, page 26



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‘done,’ but this specific version really jumped at me because it was taking really understandable tropes and characters that people are able to easily recognize, but giving it fresh writing and meaning.”

Casas said “The Wiz” was a major influence for him, in large part because of its political undertones and the way it addressed its current environment. He wanted “Our Oz” to do the same. In “Our Oz,” Dorothy is a queer woman of color, the Tin Man is a Tin Woman who doesn’t speak, the Scarecrow is Chicano and the Lion is trans.

“We see their identities and we celebrate those identities,” Casas said. “We want them to be proud of who they are. As they bring in those things from their identities, we hope that informs those characters and how they react to the Oz around them.”

Casa said that as a straight, cis male, it is important to him that people who belong to queer communities are telling the story so that it is true and authentic.

“We celebrate these bodies because Oz should be for everyone,” Casas said.

Annear said that from the very beginning of the process — back when they were doing workshops last semester — Casas was clear that what he was providing was a template or an outline.

“It was just waiting for us to fill it up with our own voices,” Annear said. “The character of the Lion has gone through a bunch of different drafts. The role was originally a trad goth kind of character, but when José cast me, he said that’s not what we want. We want a version that looks similar to how you present and how you interact with gender.”

Annear said that “Our Oz” took shape around the identities that the actors brought to the roles.

The play opens with Toto as an “Our Town”-style narrator. Dorothy, played by Isabel Contreras, is experiencing a hardcore migraine. She is a queer woman of color living in the Midwest who doesn’t feel at home and finds her surroundings to be dreary.

“By the time she gets back, she recognizes it is not home to her, that she has to find her tribe and find the home that really accepts her,” Casas said. “She comes back with the recognition that her home is out there, it’s just not where it was when she began. She had to go to Oz to learn this isn’t where she belongs and she shouldn’t force herself into this space.”

Casa said he was adamant about the Lion being trans.

“We’re living in a world where coming out as trans is enough to get you killed, especially if you are a trans person of color,” Casas said. “Someone is brave to say, ‘This is who I am, and either accept me or don’t.’ That, to me, is courage. So when we talk about the Lion, it’s bringing in the idea of accepting and being

brave, even though you shouldn’t have to be.”

Annear, who described his identity as constantly evolving and not defined by traditional gender roles, said that he, Hooker and Casas explored how to make the Lion’s story a non-traditional coming out piece that explores multiple layers of gender.

“The hope is that we bring to this character something really fresh and authentic so that it doesn’t feel like every other coming out story,” Annear said. “We don’t want it at all to feel basic. I’ve been really happy to bring my experiences and my own personal relationship with gender to the role to find a way to tell a story that’s quite authentic.”

Today’s political situation, including attacks on trans people from the federal government, has made this work take on increased importance. Casas said they’re encouraging students to be collaborative creators who can tackle the world’s problems on the stage.

“We’re really trying to build a safe space and a vulnerable space so that the kids feel like they can express themselves,” Casas said.

He said Contreras, who is a queer woman of color from Indiana, told him that she still struggles with her identity and that this production has gone beyond simply playing a role.

Casas said Contreras told him she wants to



Director José Casas. Courtesy photo

grow as an actress, but that “because Dorothy is a queer woman of color and I have to make sense of her world, I hope this is one of those spaces that offers me a place of healing.”

And that, Casas said, is why the university does work like “Our Oz.” It’s a journey that is more than just reimagining a classic — it is laying claim to representation, resistance and self-expression. By centering BIPOC and queer identities, the team at UM is attempting to create a world that is wide enough for all.

“Our Oz” is a declaration that everyone belongs on the yellow brick road.

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Amber Ruffin Ready
Puzzle can be found on page 25

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

André Wilson, Trans Healthcare Trailblazer

BY DREW SAUNDERS

In 2005, André Wilson helped make the University of Michigan one of the first institutions in America to cover gender-affirming care as lead negotiator for the Graduate Employees Organization

(GEO). Today, André is thriving in semi-retirement in Washington State, experiencing the positive well-being that came from living authentically.

Between The Lines recently caught up with André in an interview, which has been edited for length and clarity. Read the full exchange on pridesource.com.

In 2004, you approached U-M administrators to add trans healthcare coverage for graduate employees. How did you succeed in convincing them this should be standard medical care?

At an all-member union meeting to determine our bargaining platform for the upcoming contract, I suggested we include nondiscrimination under “gender identity or expression” and that we make it meaningful by eliminating the discriminatory “trans exclusion” in our health coverage. My first task was convincing other union members that this was both an important area of discrimination and that if we put it on the table, it was winnable. To succeed, members had to come to understand an issue most knew nothing about.

I think one of the keys was that, as a steward in architecture for a number of years, I was known and trusted. I had spoken at meetings, walked the picket lines for previous contract fights, and members from our college had just won one of the biggest grievances GEO had ever fought. GEO stewards had supported me when I told them I was transitioning. And they could see the difference transition had made in my life.

I felt one key way to convince the administration that this was a “normal” thing to do would be to have a transgender person

be the face of GEO bargaining. The lead negotiator would have to speak on every proposal, not just “the trans issue,” and have a lot of interaction with the administration team. It was a clear way to demonstrate how effective a transitioned trans person could be and also convey the union’s resolve to eliminate the trans exclusions.

What is your favorite Michigan memory?

Four decades of living in Michigan is a lot of memories to choose from! But what I will always cherish about Ann Arbor is organizing and solidarity. Here are two connected memories separated by a quarter of a century.

October 1979, on the eve of the first-ever March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. My girlfriend, Judy, and another friend Sarah and I had been so disappointed by the cancellation of a planned charter bus that we arranged our own bus. In under a week, with no internet or cellphones, we had organized to fill every seat. Just hours before leaving for D.C., we took one of my bedsheets, laid it on our makeshift dining table and painted “Ann Arbor Says: Closets Are For Clothes,” the name of the local gay radio show on WCBN, in huge letters. We arrived in D.C. the next day and held that banner high, joining many others from Michigan and at least 100,000 from all over the country, marching out and proud in D.C.

Fast forward to March 2005, GEO members walked out to push the administration for movement at the bargaining table. Kneeling on the sidewalk in front of Mason Hall, I made picket signs. As fast as I could draw them, GEO members grabbed them and hit the picket line. Lots of different messages: Equal Pay for Librarians, Protect Domestic Partner Benefits... every issue on the table. A few counter-pickers showed up, and were yelling stuff against “sex changes.”

This made me mad and I made signs like “equal rights for trans workers.” So I made a sign — obviously for myself, I thought — that said “I am a transgender grad student” on one side and “equal benefits for all” on the other. Cisgender union members took every sign including that one, so I made another and they took that too. I made a sign that said “We are all transgender in GEO” and “An injury to one is an injury to all.” A member of our organizing committee took that one. Later that day, when we all gathered for a rally, I looked out across all the picket signs. I could see a few that I’d made, but nearly all the ones about “trans” had been drawn by other members, made and held high by people I knew to be cisgender.

The support was overwhelming. Later, I ran into the woman who was marching with my “We are all transgender in GEO” sign, and asked to take her picture. She just beamed into the camera. Then she said,

“I never told you but I wasn’t on board about the trans health care proposal at first; this year really changed me.” I still choke up when I look at that picture.

Where are you now?

I moved to the Pacific Northwest because it is the place my spouse loves more than anywhere in the world. But I also knew I was coming to a state that had strong protections in place for TBLGQIA+ people. I consider myself partly retired, but I also know that none of our policy work anywhere can be taken for granted, so I am still active with advocacy efforts here and nationally.

For the last 35 years, I have also been a passionate gardener, growing vegetables and berries for my family and to give away. My plots here are a tiny fraction of what I grew in Ann Arbor. Last year I finally planted black raspberries and am hoping they do well. People told me I couldn’t grow big tomatoes in the PNW. But just like “you’ll never eliminate the trans exclusions” that was a rule meant to be proven wrong. So, each year, I raise many tomato plants — just 35 last year, down from 105 the year before.

I enjoy giving my tomato [seedlings], big tomatoes and other produce away. The only “return” I ask for the produce is that the recipients pay it forward and stand up for transgender rights in whatever way they can, small or large. I think of this as my little “Trans Plants” initiative.



Top to Bottom: André Wilson (Courtesy photo). Wilson at 2017 National Women’s March on Washington (Courtesy photo). Delivering keynote address at the 2008 Minnesota Trans Health Conference (Photo: K. Jamieson). Speaking at 2010 Minnesota Trans Health Conference (Photo: K. Jamieson). A GEO union steward at the 2005 GEO WalkOut at University of Michigan (Photo: André Wilson).

due to constitutional conflicts with another legislative package.

For Michigan residents navigating the gender marker change process, these legal name change improvements offer partial but significant relief, even as advocacy continues for comprehensive ID document updates.

“When I explain the process, I let everybody know that I take care of everything,” says Abad.

It’s a bolder statement than it might sound at first. The logistics of a Michigan name change, if it doesn’t relate to marriage or divorce, are intense. The process varies by county, but usually involves:

- Submitting a name change petition to the circuit court in your county. This costs \$175, but you can apply to waive the cost (which takes more time, and requires notarization).
- Scheduling a court hearing.
- Attending your hearing and explaining why you want a name change.
- Gaining approval from the judge.

It’s a lot for anyone to tackle. But for Abad’s clientele, there are often extra hurdles.

“Because I help all populations, particularly trans women that live in poverty, some of those individuals don’t have a stable address,” Abad says, “or don’t have anything but a government assistance phone that sometimes doesn’t have minutes.”

Without an address to receive mail or a phone that can receive calls, Abad’s clients are at risk of missing important communication from their attorneys. Clinic attendees also represent a wide range of backgrounds and demographics, including immigrants and people of color, and that means some of her clients may face literacy barriers, lack reliable transportation or not live in affirming environments.

“Particularly in my community, people that are Black and brown and people of color, we are thrown out or don’t have family support from really, really young ages,” she says, which can make it all the harder to navigate a hostile system.

Even one hiccup can hold back a process that’s already painfully long.

“After they fill out the paperwork with me,” Abad says, “it usually takes anywhere from six to eight months for the process to be completed.”

Fair Michigan’s clinics were created to connect under-resourced trans people with no-cost guidance through this maze, including the help of sensitivity-trained,

volunteer attorneys. And while the process may be arduous, the results, Abad says, are transformative.

“I know how hard it was,” Abad says, “to even navigate the trajectory of what that looked like for me, to have documentation that matched [my gender presentation]. I never realized how much easier, [more] affirming and safer my life would be having that documentation.”

She saw it in her own experience, and she sees it in the experience of clinic attendees as well. “I’ve had people cry, I’ve always had people be excited,” Abad says. “I’ve had people reach out and tell me how inspiring it is and

“With my new ID in hand, I feel more visible than ever, which brings with it a joint sense of pride and fear.”

want to give back to their community... To be able to see that with all of the people I’ve helped has been remarkable, inspiring and fulfilling.”


As for me, I made the choice to finally get my X gender marker last December. With my new ID in hand, I feel more visible than ever, which brings with it a joint sense of pride and fear. It’s hard to know yet all the ramifications of my decision in our new political context, especially once I find myself flying down to visit family in Republican-led states. But I’m lucky enough to have a strong support network — and one less place to hide. For me, it was time to stand up and be counted.

Abad and Fair Michigan are continuing their work amid the political uncertainty. “I don’t want people to be discouraged because we don’t know what’s happening right now,” she says. “Keep in mind that at one point in time, we never even thought that [a gender marker change] was possible. So though we are all holding our breath in disbelief, I also know that as trans people, we are strong, we are resilient and we will get through it.”

To learn more about Fair Michigan’s gender marker and name change clinics, visit their website, or contact Julisa Abad at lgbtteamabad@gmail.com or 877-4FAIRMI.




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Trans Lucent

Continued from page 8

'tranny.' My reasoning had nothing to do with contemporary debates regarding the word. Rather, I stopped because I was in the process of noticing and critiquing disparities that existed within trans communities, especially with regard to how we were accepted within feminist and queer circles. Some of these disparities were driven by trans-misogyny, masculine-centrism, subversivism and forms of cissexism that specifically target transsexuals," Serano wrote.

There are other terms I see bandied about that are porn-based but used uncomfortably often in our community.

"Sissy" is one. I know many trans women who happily apply this term to themselves, but it makes me cringe.

Again, it is a sexually diminishing creation of cis men seeking to make someone subservient to their sexual

fantasies. I am all for sexual freedom, and if this is a part of your roleplay fantasy, so be it. But it has become a defining term that inherently dehumanizes the person it is applied to. You can dress up and pretend to be anyone (or anything) you wish in order to add excitement to your sex life. But when you accept that role as your life, you become a slave to another person's needs.

And "sissy" also implies an acceptance of self-disrespect. You can be a trans woman without abasing yourself. You are no less desirable, or sexy, by being strong and determined. Femininity is not subservience.

To me, derogatory terms such as "tranny" or "shemale" or "sissy" should be anathema to us all. I appreciate irony, but we are too marginalized to get away with it. There are too few of us to simply riff on insults by using them ourselves and then expecting others not to use them against us. We do not have that luxury.

If you want respect, respect yourself.

Shepherd House

Continued from page 15

artwork and serve as a rotating space for queer artists to display their work.

"Before he passed, we told him about this, and he really wanted to make sure that it was a rotating space and would not just be solely him, but recognizing there are a lot of queer artists out there that are looking for space to display their art and their work," Stringfellow said.

A fitness center is also being installed, which Sadowski is looking forward to using. "Now that they're getting the fitness equipment in here, I'm going to try to get on the exercise bike and get some strength going," he said.

Additionally, there's a memorial garden named after Jo Ploeger, a former lead deacon at MCC-D.

first started going there, I found people who accept me completely. This place feels like an extension of that acceptance — we look out for each other here."

Brincat shares Sadowski's enthusiasm for the community's future. "I'm looking forward to meeting more residents as they start moving in," she said. "I'd also like to say the staff here has been wonderful and very helpful. Being a part of the LGBT community for so many years, living in Ferndale and in a senior community for the LGBT community has been the perfect fit."



Raymond E. Shepherd House. Photo: Andrew Potter

Looking ahead

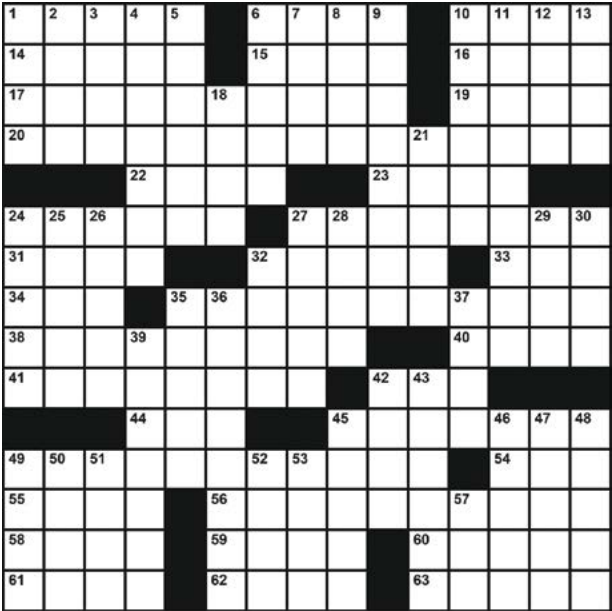
As more residents move in, the Shepherd House is poised to become a vibrant community. Mathes envisions an interactive environment where residents, many of whom are retired, can find camaraderie and stay active.

For Sadowski, the move represents a chance to create a new family after losing his own.

"I outlived everybody in my family, and I get to create a new family," he said. "MCC Detroit has done that for me because when I

Rev. Stringfellow and MCC-D plan to establish a ministry extension at the complex called Shepherd Metropolitan Community Church, offering worship services and spiritual support specifically designed for residents.

"You don't have to age ashamed or have to go to a facility where you have to go back into the closet," Stringfellow said. "It's wonderful — incredible, really — and I'm so very honored to be a part of it all."



Amber Ruffin Ready

Across

- 1 Stock phrase
- 6 One born in a Cukor title
- 10 Haul ass
- 14 Manhandle
- 15 Composer Thomas
- 16 River near Michelangelo's David

- 17 Faking an orgasm, e.g.
- 19 Special delivery?
- 20 Start of why Amber Ruffin says "It's kind of my duty to have fun"
- 22 "How you ____" (Joey's "Friends" line)
- 23 Take advantage of International Male
- 24 Gomer's drawl, e.g.
- 27 Baltic denizen
- 31 Jethrene Bodine portrayer Max
- 32 Take in, perhaps

- 33 Childcare writer LeShan
- 34 Merchandise ID
- 35 More of the quote
- 38 Clan members
- 40 Sailing the Pacific
- 41 Rod accessory for a hit man
- 42 Johnny Mathis disks
- 44 Org. in many spy movies
- 45 Rudolf of ballet
- 49 End of the quote
- 54 Docs' org.
- 55 "I'm not in the ____!"
- 56 Cole Porter classic
- 58 Gaze at gays, e.g.
- 59 Fruit flavor for gin
- 60 Mix up
- 61 "Out" in Glenn Burke's sport
- 62 "Death in Venice" author Thomas
- 63 Ass-kissers' responses

Down

- 1 Sally Ride's org.
- 2 End note
- 3 Fast feline
- 4 Adverb in marriage vows
- 5 Use for support
- 6 Negligee material
- 7 Minimal haircut
- 8 Hathaway of "Brokeback Mountain"
- 9 Verb for voters
- 10 Where chaps wearing chaps might pick up chaps
- 11 Bet middleers?
- 12 Adult film store aisle
- 13 Sondheim's Sweeney

- 18 "Take a crack ____"
- 21 G or B but not L or T
- 24 Borders on
- 25 Italian resort isle
- 26 DeMille of "Sunset Boulevard"
- 27 Male-on-male kissing target of Bugs
- 28 Coldcock
- 29 Presbyterian activist Michael
- 30 Frida Kahlo's zip
- 32 Where to look, in "Misty"
- 35 It may come out after some rubbing
- 36 Means of avoiding reality
- 37 "____ On Down the Road"
- 39 Cartoonist Alison
- 42 Magazine magnate Henry
- 43 Buy in advance
- 45 David, who played the bishop in "The Bishop's Wife"
- 46 Online exaggeration?
- 47 "Dirty Dancing" director Ardolino
- 48 They hold pansies, perhaps
- 49 Well-endowed college guy?
- 50 Madonna's field in "The Next Best Thing"
- 51 Sound of getting your chimes rung?
- 52 Heterogeneous mixture
- 53 Bird on the Canadian dollar
- 57 Fruit-drink ending

See p. 21 for answers

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I want to make sure people remember that the center of the story is a character based on a real person.”

Van Tielen said he has been very conscious that the production has gone from entertainment to a form of protest, growing more purpose-driven as the students in his cast struggle with current events.

“In my casting process, I was making sure that the show is packed with students who represent the LGBTQ+ experience,” Van Tielen said. “We’ve got trans kids, gay kids, bisexual kids, kids who identify as queer both in the show and on the creative team. All of a sudden it feels like we have a duty to present this message of acceptance.”

Local queer couples are included in the musical’s finale. Throughout the show’s run, the theater department will conduct a prom attire donation drive, and on March 29, there will be a queer prom featuring a local drag performer.

“We want to give people a chance to come laugh and to feel good,” Van Tielen said. “There’s an open invitation for everyone in the queer community to show up — maybe specifically to show up for the kids who are going through a bit of a harder or more confusing time. Older people in the LGBTQ+ community are no strangers to fighting. They’ve lived through a lot of what it feels like to face the fight. Maybe these

younger kids don’t understand that.”

“The Prom,” March 28–April 6, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sundays and 7 p.m. Thursdays. Hilberry Gateway, 4715 Cass Ave., Detroit. <https://theatreanddance.wayne.edu/season/2024-2025/the-prom>.

Celebrating 10 years at Detroit Public Theatre

Ten years ago, Courtney Burkett, Sarah Clare Corporandy and Sarah Winkler launched what has quickly become a Detroit theatrical institution. This spring, they’ll wrap up their anniversary season with a work by their executive artistic producer, Dominique Morisseau, and a world premiere of a show about school gun violence.

“It’s been a really exciting 10 years,” Burkett told BTL. “The beginning was a test of [whether] this would even work. Now we’ve entered a new phase where we’re grown ups and it’s exciting to see how the community has grown and the response we’ve gotten both from the artistic community and the audience.”

Morisseau’s *“Confederates,”* a play that spans time to explore racism and gender biases in U.S. institutions, runs through March 16. It follows two Black American women, living 160 years apart, each fighting their own battles — sometimes of a literal nature.

Morisseau has been involved with DPT from the start, originally serving as a founding advisory board member. According to Burkett, Morisseau has played a key role in helping

develop the audience and shaping the messages within the show.

“Her rules of engagement are on the wall in the theater as you walk into the space as an invitation on how to interact with the work,” Burkett said. “Everywhere you look you see Dominique and hopefully feel her energy, her spirit and her leadership.”

Ultimately, *“Confederates”* is a play the founders feel promotes the meaningful conversations they want their audiences to have.

“Even when the world is obviously changing all the time — and it’s changed even since we decided to produce it — the conversation is very powerful,” Corporandy said. “It has a lot to say about women, Black women in particular.”

Closing out DPT’s anniversary season is *“Soft Target,”* a new work by Emily Kaczmarek that runs from April 30 to June 7. In it, 9-year-old Amanda and her stuffed toys, including penguin Jonah and emotional support bunny Ugly, have been thrown into chaos because of a school shooting.

“It’s a tender spot for society and our culture, a painful thing to talk about,” Corporandy said. “Whole communities get shook and rocked when there are school shootings. Theater can uniquely create an environment where you can have a conversation and it not be about you or me, but about these characters. This play invites us to sit with this subject matter in a framework of healing and imagination and comfort, centering on how these instances in our country and world are affecting the day-to-day lives of the victims.”

“Confederates”: Through March 16.
“Soft Target”: April 30–June 7. Detroit Public Theatre, 3960 3rd Ave., Detroit. <https://www.detroitpublictheatre.org>.

And more!

- Broadway in Detroit brings the Tony Award-winning *“Kimberly Akimbo”* to the Fisher Theatre from March 11–23. The musical features a girl with a rare genetic condition that causes her to age rapidly. From April 1–6, *“The Book of Mormon”* moves in. The hilarious, irreverent musical follows two Mormon missionaries to Uganda.
- Williamston Theatre wraps up its run of *“A Case for the Existence of God”* on March 16. The Michigan premiere follows two single fathers with toddler daughters. One is white and divorced, the other is Black and gay.
- The Tipping Point Theatre explores the lives of Iranian immigrants in the Michigan premiere of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *“English,”* which runs from March 12 to April 6.
- Flint Repertory Theatre hosts the world premiere of *“A Driving Beat,”* from March 14–30. A 14-year-old boy and his adoptive mother make a road trip across the country in which they tackle their different identities and the meaning of family.

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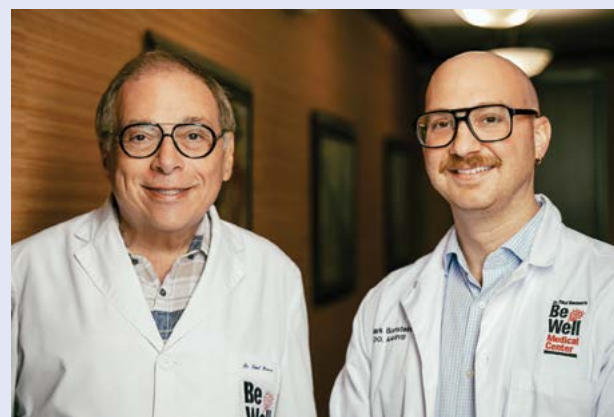
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