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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

We can officially say it now, right? Happy Pride, friends! Whether you want to get loud in a dunk tank or curl up with a queer classic on a Monday night, these next two weeks are all about saying yes. Yes to joy. Yes to connection. Yes to riding a mechanical bull named Miss Behavin' Hooves.

Or Buck Wilde. Or Sashay Saddles. Or Meryl Steed.

So partake then, of whatever your ragey, grittily hopeful, glittery, exhausted heart needs.

Don't forget the sunscreen.



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We know, we know, you already get 900 emails a day and navigating yet another news feed may feel a little Herculean. But this one will actually make you feel better about the world. Pride Source now has a Substack, and we'll be publishing exclusive content, community news and behind-the-scenes extras. It's free, it's fabulous, and if you want to keep independent LGBTQ+ journalism thriving in Michigan, it's one impactful click away. Go on, be a trendsetter as part of our early launch family.

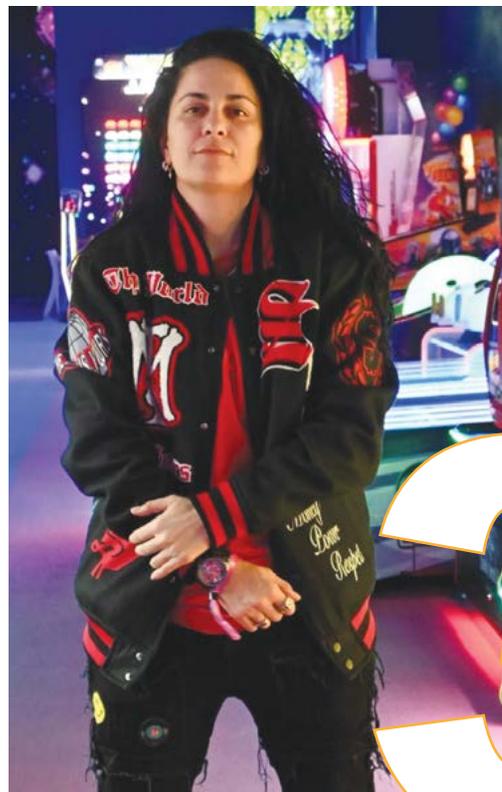
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Cozy Up For a Queer Film

It's called MonGays, and if that doesn't make you want to grab your nearest snugglebuddy and an oversized hoodie, what will? Hosted by the Hamtramck Queer Alliance at Passenger Recovery Community Center, past showings have included "Jeffrey," "Trick," "Carol" and, of course, the King of Problematic Faves, "The Birdcage." Doors open at 7, the film rolls at 8, and the popcorn is always free. Show that you had good home training (or, absent home training, community guidance) and bring enough nutritional yeast to share.

Mondays, 7 p.m. Passenger Recovery Community Center (2697 Caniff St., Hamtramck), bit.ly/mongaymovie.



DJ IC3. Photo: Instagram/@dj.ic3

Queer the Carnival

This is not your grandma's church festival — unless your grandma is a leather-daddy lesbian who deejays on the weekends. Detroit Queer Women is putting together an evening of dunk tanks, giant inflatable games, mechanical bulls and spiked snow cones. This sprawling outdoor bash is hosted by an all-queer cast of royalty including DJ IC3 who is flying in from Miami to bring the beats.

And yes, "ride the mechanical bull" sounds like a euphemism, but we promise it's literal just this once.

June 7, 7 p.m. - 2 a.m., Sandbox Lounge (641 Beaubien St., Detroit), bit.ly/queercarnival2025.



Support Soberfolk

There's no denying there is a whole lot of party this time of year, including plenty of the party-as-a-verb business — i.e., getting drunk and high like "Most Inebriated in a Mesh Tank" is an award category with a trophy all its own. If you're sober or love someone who is, take a second to lean into that journey this June: Pack a messenger bag full of seltzers, host a non-bar hangout or throw a Pride cookie exchange where the only thing getting baked is the snickerdoodles.

Still enjoying your ride on the party train? Plan ahead to prevent a derailment: Carry Narcan, grab harm reduction supplies and test every batch, every time.

Information on recovery support at goaffirmations.org; harm reduction resources at harmreductionmi.org.



Laugh For a Cause

Join the 2025 Pride Comedy Gala Fundraiser on Sunday, June 8 in support of the Ruth Ellis Center's vital work with LGBTQ+ youth. The event aims to raise \$3,000 for the organization's unique approach to providing support, opportunities and education for local LGBTQ+ youth facing issues like homelessness and domestic violence.

The lineup features talented comedians Meta Mendel-Reyes, an activist, storyteller and college professor, as well as Olivia Heator, Mike Boone, Kim Turner, Lauren Noelle and Hailey Zureich. Special guest Miss Trans Michigan Baddie Brooks will provide musical entertainment, while DJ T Lou Ease will set the musical mood all night.

June 8, doors open at 7 p.m., 215 West (215 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale). Get tickets at bit.ly/PrideComedyFundraiser.

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Pride 2025: Why Our Stories Still Matter



BY CHRIS
AZZOPARDI

Twice that day, the tears came unbidden. I sat quietly off to the side, reading prompts as activists and organizers within Michigan's LGBTQ+ community — gathered to show their support for Between The Lines during a difficult era for independent queer press — shared raw stories of struggle and resilience. When their words unexpectedly gave way to sobs, the weight of the moment shifted. I felt it settle differently in my chest.

It was day two of the shoot for our video *When Mainstream Media Misses Us: Why LGBTQ+ Voices Need Pride Source* (watch the full video here: bit.ly/BTLVideo). Affirmations, where we were shooting, was pulsing with stories of queer love, survival and the role BTL has played over its 33-year history. In a period marked by efforts from those in power to mute and erase who we are, this project — and the LGBTQ+ media that inspired it — burns brighter than ever. This publication has been an enduring lifeline, a beacon for those whose stories are too often pushed to the margins.

The message from all of our subjects that day was clear, from the ACLU's Jay Kaplan to Trans Sistas of Color Project founder Jeynce Poindexter: We can't afford to lose independent queer media, too, when we're already at risk of losing so much.

The first two voices cracked open before the camera. One spoke of how Pride this year carries a new ache — a mingling of hope and fear that hits beneath the surface. The other remembered the haunting echoes of the AIDS crisis in the '80s, the ghosts of that time lingering still, casting long shadows over today's battles. Hearing those stories stirred something deep within me. It reminded me of my own journey — finding belonging in these pages long before TikTok (and before I joined the staff), before the flood of social media, when *Between The Lines* was one of the only places local queer people could see themselves reflected. Longtime LGBTQ+ activist Judy Lewis shared

how, in the mid-'90s, someone she knew had nearly taken their own life due to isolation. She said connecting to other community members through this very publication made them feel less alone and literally saved their life. What Lewis shared with me reminded me that these pages have always been more than news; they've been a community, a home.

As someone who oversees editorial for the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ voices, I feel a deep responsibility to elevate those most marginalized — not just in the stories we tell, but in who we invite to help tell them. That's why, in our last issue, we asked Baddie Brooks, Miss Trans Michigan 2025, to write an op-ed — giving her more than just the spotlight, but the space to speak in her own words about her experience as a young Black trans woman. And it's why in our latest issue, we also invited Michelle Fox-Phillips, a longtime trans activist, to take the mic. I encourage you to read their powerful essays, and to pick up a copy of *Pride Source Magazine*, where Poindexter takes center stage on the cover. Inside, she shared how she has weathered “a lot of internal discrimination in the community,” yet continues to lead with resilience.

That same intention guided our choice for this year's Pride cover. We turned to trans and nonbinary muralist Eddie Chaffer of Son Visual Co., whose work lives at the intersection of identity, community and resistance. Their cover reminds me of the protest art we've seen throughout queer history — bold, urgent, impossible to ignore. A powerful tribute to queer defiance, the image centers a trans woman of color, surrounded by symbols that echo past movements and sound alarms about the present. It's a reminder that since Black and brown trans people led the Stonewall riots over 50 years ago, Pride has always been political — and who we choose to center still matters.

I came out at 18 on the wings of other people's stories, their words carrying me across the threshold I couldn't cross alone. Later, in college, they helped me understand myself more fully — what it meant to live, love and exist in the world as a gay person. I think about that often



Martin Contreras and Keith Orr (bottom) and Baddie Brooks at the Pride Source Media office. Photos: Chris Azzopardi

now, especially when I consider the impact these stories can have on someone else — like the trans kid struggling to reconcile their identity with their faith. Maybe they will read about 16-year-old Zach Nawyn-Hellinga, who was baptized by a Presbyterian church in Okemos with his post-transition chosen name (find the whole story online at PrideSource.com and in our June 19 issue). On that day, Zach stood in front of his congregation and claimed his name, his truth — and the entire church stood and responded, in unison: “We see you.”

For us to be seen, we need a safe

place to tell the world who we really are — the pain inflicted by policy, the joy of hard-won triumphs, and everything in between. With no corporate filter and no outside agenda, BTL has been that place for 33 years. Every chance we get, we must keep sharing the essence of our humanity — especially to those who would rather we stay silent, or disappear altogether. You never know who might be listening with their heart wide open on either end of the political spectrum.

Back at Affirmations, I witnessed a moment that captured exactly why this matters — the kind of connection

that forms when someone is met with empathy and care. After one participant broke down in tears during their testimonial, I walked up and hugged her. But then, so did our camera operator — an ally, a stranger to her before that day. That moment of connection — of being seen and held just for showing up as yourself, especially when the world is shouting that you shouldn't — that's what we mean when we say: We see you.

Walking alongside you this Pride,

Chris Azzopardi

Editorial Director

The Inspiration Behind Our Cover

How artist Eddie Chaffer blends activism, identity and legacy in a bold call to action

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

For this special Pride cover, Between The Lines is incredibly proud to feature an exclusive illustration by Son Visual Co., the studio of Eddie Chaffer, a Grand Rapids-based muralist whose vibrant, community-rooted work lives at the intersection of storytelling, identity and resistance. Their striking pieces — particularly visible on Michigan's west side — use community-centered imagery to inspire dialogue and advocate for change. One recent example is a mural created for the Bear Lake Community Mural Wall, located on the backside of Motel Bear Lake.

For this "Still Acting Up!" issue — our biggest of the year — we knew we needed a cover that did more than celebrate Pride Month. Eddie responded with a striking image that channels the urgency of early Pride movements, drawing from the bold visual language of Keith Haring, Gran Fury and ACT UP! At a time when queer and trans communities are under renewed attack, the cover challenges viewers to confront our present reality while reflecting on the legacy of protest and the power of resistance.

The symbolism runs deep: the snake, an allusion to the "Don't Tread On Me" flag now associated with white supremacist groups, speaks to the threat of fascism; the raised hand — both a symbol to stop and a reference to Michigan's lower peninsula — places Detroit at the heart of this resistance. Colors

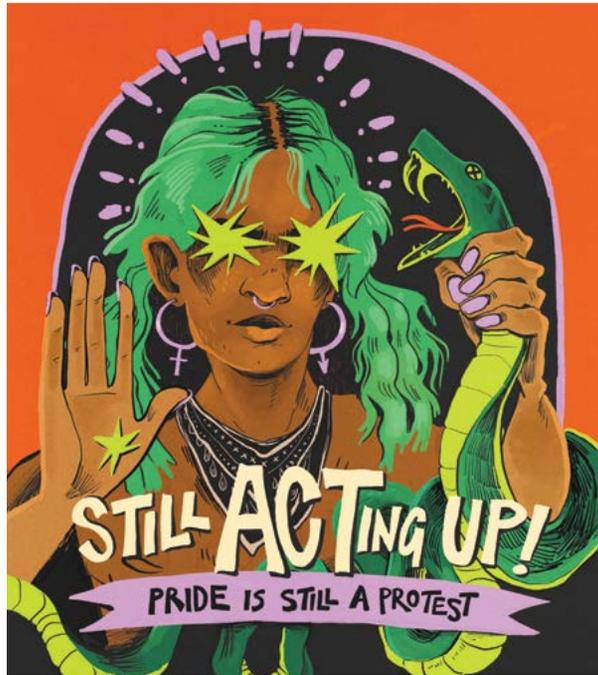
borrowed from Haring's AIDS-era work evoke queer resilience, while the central figure — a Black or brown trans woman — honors those, such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, who have long led the fight for LGBTQ+ liberation.

Below, Eddie shares more about the politics of Pride, the symbolism layered into the cover, and how art can help us organize, remember and move forward — together.

Your work sits at the intersection of visual storytelling, identity and resistance. How do you consciously bridge art and activism in your creative practice?

The reason I became a muralist is because I was too broke to pay art museum admission fees. At the peak of my quarter life existential crisis — exacerbated by living in the capitalist hellscape of New York Shitty — I came to believe that public art was the only truly ethical, humanist way to make art in the modern world. My feelings on this topic have mellowed a bit over the years, but I still consider mural-making my priority because of its radical accessibility. With

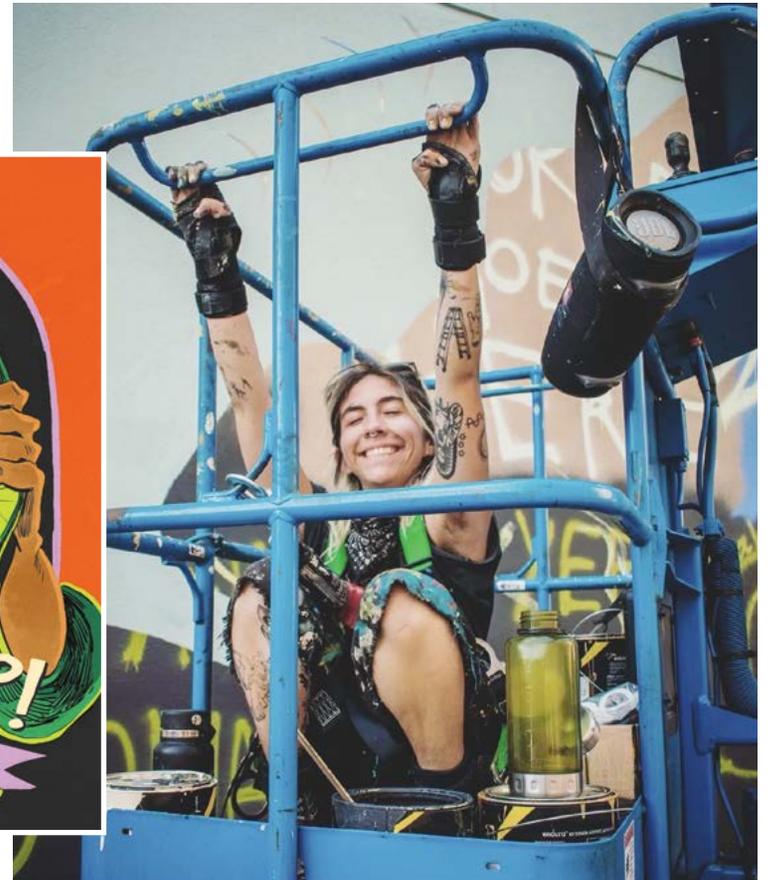
mural work, there are no admission fees, dress codes or billionaire collectors. It's a big painting on a big wall, and you stumble across it,



BTL's cover "Still Acting Up!" was inspired by Black and brown activists who have long led the fight for LGBTQ+ liberation.

and maybe you like it, and maybe you don't, but either way you get to experience it.

The high visibility of public art has made me extremely aware of the impact of my work. It's a massive responsibility to create something so large and so ingrained in a neighborhood's daily existence. I've learned to use such a platform intentionally for the highest good. To me, an avid Earth-worshipper,



Muralist and Son Visual Co. owner Eddie Chaffer, the artist who designed BTL's "Still Acting Up!" cover. Courtesy photo

that usually takes the form of environmental activism.

What was your inspiration behind this Pride cover design? What message or emotion were you hoping to evoke?

I've been thinking a lot about early Prides. Prides that took place way

before corporate sponsorships and "Drag Race." Prides where people got beat up and arrested. This illustration is inspired by the colors and immediacy of Keith Haring's AIDS work, the propagandistic designs of Gran Fury and the protests of ACT UP!

See **Still Acting Up!**, page 9

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How Between The Lines Carries Forward Michigan's Rich Queer Press History

From radical liberation journals to mainstream coverage, Michigan's LGBTQ+ publications have served as lifelines for decades

BY HANK KENNEDY

Long before *Between The Lines* became Michigan's leading LGBTQ+ publication, Metro Detroit had a rich tradition of queer journalism spanning more than five decades. From revolutionary post-Stonewall newspapers to community magazines that weathered the AIDS crisis, Michigan's LGBTQ+ press has evolved from radical underground publications to mainstream advocacy journalism.

These publications have served as lifelines for readers who thought they were alone in the world, provided critical coverage during health crises and informed the public about ongoing battles for civil rights. Through periods of growth, decline and reinvention, Michigan's queer press has remained a vital voice for the community.

From revolution to mainstream

Detroit's chapter of the Gay Liberation Front took up the fight for queer liberation in the aftermath of Stonewall. Nationally, GLF's journal was *Come Out!*, while the local GLF published a journal under the varying titles the *Detroit Liberator*, the *Detroit Gay Liberator* and finally the *Gay Liberator*. Although not as famous as *Come Out!*, the *Gay Liberator* produced more issues and outlasted the more well-known paper, lasting until 1976.

The readership for this paper didn't spring out of thin air, though. "It's important for people to know that there were national publications that reached a Detroit audience before there were Detroit-specific publications," said history and LGBTQ+ studies professor Tim Retzliff of the Center for Gender in Global Context at Michigan State University. Pre-Stonewall Detroiters relied on the *Mattachine Society's Mattachine Review*, *ONE's ONE* magazine, the *Daughters of Bilitis's The Ladder* and *The Advocate*. In 1954, *ONE* had 52 subscribers in Michigan. Most of these publications were associated with the Homophile movement, which focused on early pioneers in the fight for queer liberation.

Being first wasn't easy for the *Gay Liberator*.



Our community needs your support! Champion independent queer journalism with a BTL print subscription at pridesource.com/subscribe and join our Substack community, where you'll find exclusive content and commentary at pridesource.substack.com.

BTL Editorial Director Chris Azzopardi with LGBTQ+ historian and longtime BTL contributor Tim Retzliff at Affirmations. Retzliff holds a copy of the original BTL from 1993, while Azzopardi displays a current issue. Photo: Logan Braun

One early printer refused to handle it. Despite this kind of pushback, other publications persisted in its wake. Connie McConnohie began the short-lived Grosse Pointe-based *Gayzette* in 1973, which changed the title to *Gay Scene* before its demise. David Krumroy established the *Metro Gay News*, publishing 17 issues from 1976-1978.

These later publications were more focused on capturing the gay social scene, especially the bars, and less influenced by the *Gay Liberator's* radical politics. That's not to say they were shorn of politics — *Metro Gay News* covered Anita Bryant's anti-gay "Save Our Children" crusade as well as local efforts to combat it.

Surviving the lean years

From the late '70s through the early '90s, there were no dedicated queer newspapers in Metro Detroit, although *Metra* and *Cruise* could be found in area bars. Not usually thought of as "news," Retzliff credited them for assuming a more serious role during the AIDS crisis. "I would say *Metra* and *Cruise* did step up...in terms of covering HIV and AIDS when that became a major issue," Retzliff said. *Cruise* editor Phillip O'Jibway ran obituaries for people who died of AIDS that "were really important and moving."

In 1990 Steve Culver began publishing the Ann Arbor-based *10 Percent*, which evolved into *Michigan Tribune* and then *Out Post*, which ceased publication in 2024. It was during a pause in publication as the *Tribune*

transitioned to *Out Post* that *Between The Lines* was launched in 1993 out of MaxZine Weinstein's Ann Arbor bedroom.

"That founding story really captures something essential about queer media. We step up when the community needs us most," said current publisher Benjamin Jenkins. "When there was a gap in coverage, MaxZine didn't wait for someone else to fill it. That spirit of 'If not us, then who?' has been a guiding principle."

Eager readership emerges through adversity

In a rerun of the experiences of the See *Detroit Queer Press*, page 11

◀ Still Acting Up!

Continued from page 7

Pride in 2025 feels a lot more like Pride in 1985 than it should, and I wanted to communicate the urgency of that reality.

This cover is arriving in a politically charged moment, especially for queer and trans communities. How does the work reflect what's on your heart and mind right now?

From my perspective, many younger generations of queer people — my own included — have gotten comfortable and complacent thanks to the illusion of acceptance. Since marriage equality, we have been living in a fantasy where everything is fine just because you can buy a rainbow bath towel at Target. If queerness is acceptable for consumers, then we're good, right?

Now, we're getting a wake-up call. Social media is controlled by billionaire oligarchs. Corporations are distancing themselves from queerness to protect their stock prices. Essential medical care for trans people is being gutted. Queerness is no longer popular, and superficial support is disappearing rapidly as a result.

There are a lot of young people who have only ever known queerness in its popular, mass-market form. Rainbow socks and cuddle puddles. As acceptance dwindles, we need to look to our surviving elders and learn how to organize. How do we find each other without social media? How do we care for each other when the medical system abandons us? How do we shed this often self-imposed identity of "tender queerness" and embrace the inherent radicalness of our identities?

Pride is both a celebration and a protest. How do you balance those two energies in your visual work, especially when designing for a public-facing platform like this cover?

I try to walk the line between accessibility and complexity in my work. Bright colors! Big shapes! That's how I reel ya in. But if you're willing to take a moment with the work, there's a lot of subtler messaging layered in there as well. In this illustration, for example, it's a pretty basic "good vs. evil" theme. It communicates Pride, struggle and resistance. If that's all someone takes away from it, great.

But with some more context, it's a better piece. The snake is a reference to evil, obviously, but more acutely to the "Don't Tread On Me" flag, which has been adopted by white supremacist groups. The raised right hand is a symbol for "stop," but also a reference to Michigan's lower peninsula, where the star marks Detroit. The colors are taken from Keith Haring's work during

the AIDS crisis. Finally, the identity of the figure is important as well — Black and brown trans women have historically led the way for queer civil rights, and continue to do so today. All this symbolism taken together reveals a more direct message: that Michiganders must stop fascism from infiltrating our state, and that we must look to the Black and brown leaders of our past in order to learn how to move forward.

Son Visual Co. centers historically excluded voices in bold and intentional ways. How do you ensure your art remains rooted in community, especially when working on larger platforms or collaborations?

A lot of my community organizing work stems from having imposter syndrome [laughs]. I'm a huge lover of the natural world, but don't know much about the science behind it. So, I began to make work that gave me an excuse to talk to scientists. That kind of work functions as a platform for ecologists to communicate their research to a wider audience. Before ya know it, you've started a whole nonprofit dedicated to environmental education through public art. Whoops!

Most of my projects nowadays involve a lot of people from varying backgrounds — environmentalists, musicians, artists, social workers, homesteaders, firefighters, poets, etc. — speaking on a central ecological theme. With the elevation of many voices, we hope to find deeper understanding.

As it turns out, conservation is the best topic for bridging political divides, too. My team is made up of a bunch of trans people, but we regularly engage with old-school deer hunter types who think that they're conservative. But then, when they meet us in person at a birding event, they have to reconsider their views. "I thought I didn't like trans people, but that guy knew a LOT about native plants..." We find something that we agree on — that the Earth is good — and the rest is kind of secondary. My community is always expanding because of this approach.

What else should we know about you?

I'm the founder and director of an ecology-themed mural festival called Pleasant Peninsula. This July we'll be installing 21 new murals in downtown Grand Rapids, each featuring a different native Michigan species! Our fest illustrates how the natural world relies on diversity for the health of its ecosystems, and how we as Michiganders can be better neighbors to humans and non-humans alike. Come to Grand Rapids on July 26 to party with us, or learn more about what we do at pleasantpeninsula.org!



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Drag, Dance and Defiant Joy: Ferndale Pride 2025 in Full Color

Pride season kick-off event brought an inspiring message of belonging

**BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT
PHOTOS BY ANDREW POTTER**

Ferndale Pride marked its 15th year on May 31 with a celebration that transformed the entire city into a vibrant showcase of LGBTQ+ community and culture. Many consider Ferndale the queerest city in all of Michigan, and the city's enthusiastic

partnership with Pride organizers was evident throughout the day as the community came alive with festivities.

The day kicked off with fresh energy at the 2025 Newcomer Drag Show on the Planavon Stage at noon, right after the opening ceremony. The showcase put emerging performers center stage, giving baby queens and kings the spotlight they deserved.

"All of the stages were very busy all day long," said Julia Music, Ferndale Pride executive director. "The crowd energy was very contagious and you could tell that the performers were feeding off of it. We are so lucky to have so much talent in Michigan."

This year's event featured two full stages of

See **Ferndale Pride**, page 28

◀ Detroit Queer Press

Continued from page 8

Gay Liberator, the first printer refused to handle the inaugural issue. Still, Between The Lines couldn't be stopped. Early stories told readers about protests of Republican politicians and hypocritical bar owners who operated both a gay bar and a straight bar that featured a homophobic rapper. After a year, Shannon Rhodes became the paper's new owner.

The paper was purchased in 1995 by Susan Horowitz and Jan Stevenson. Stevenson, who was the first executive director of Affirmations before stepping down in 1996 to work on Between The Lines full time, recalled that Horowitz met Rhodes to talk about working on the paper. "I said 'So how did it go?'" Stevenson said. "Oh really great. I bought the paper. I went, 'You did! I thought you were buying breakfast.'"

Running the publication was a labor of love rather than a financial windfall. "No one ever got rich running a gay paper," Stevenson said. Still, they were determined to make Between The Lines visible throughout Michigan. "We did everything we could to be visible," Stevenson said. To that end, their cargo van purchased for distribution was christened the "Big Gay Van." Wrapped with decals proclaiming "Between The Lines: Michigan's Gay Paper," the van traveled the state spreading the good news.

Stevenson and Horowitz ran the paper until 2021, when Jenkins, who had been a longtime staffer, assumed ownership, continuing a Michigan queer media tradition that now spans more than five decades.

From early on, Between The Lines attracted a dedicated readership. Circulation rose to 15,000 but special issues for Pride had an even greater reach. If there was a delay due to printing problems, readers would let the office know. Calls came in asking "Where's my paper? Where's my paper?" Although that could be frustrating, it showed the importance of Between The Lines to its readers.

Not everyone was so supportive. Stevenson kept a folder of hate mail and recalled receiving a bomb threat written on stationery from the Michigan House of Representatives. One detective investigating the case kept returning to the paper's offices. Finally, he turned to Stevenson and said, "Everybody here is just like a regular person. I've never met a gay person that I wasn't arresting." Such was the state of affairs in 1990s Michigan.

Becoming a political force

Politics has long been in the paper's DNA. Stevenson said she is particularly proud of their role combating the anti-same sex marriage

ballot initiative titled Proposition 2 in 2004. That year, she said they "took over additional office space in the building we were in... and the whole campaign moved into that office. We had wires going over the walls to power their computers."

In 2008, they helped with a pledge drive of LGBTQ+ voters who would pledge to vote for civil rights for queer people. This was at a time when Democrats were still shy about embracing queer people. The pledge drive let them know that there were votes to be gained by standing up for civil rights. Sensing a good idea is a good idea no matter its origins, Between The Lines has produced a voter guide modeled on similar guides published by the conservative organization Michigan Right to Life since 2008. "We like to think that we made a difference," Stevenson said. "I know that the politicians noticed."

“LGBTQ+ media today faces new challenges... but the need for authentic community journalism hasn't gone anywhere.”

— Benjamin Jenkins, BTL publisher

"Our political coverage has evolved tremendously, but the core mission remains the same — we're always working to make sure our community's voices are heard," Jenkins said, noting that these days, his staff is tracking everything from local school board races to state and federal anti-LGBTQ+ legislative efforts.

"Over time, the challenges have shifted from basic recognition to protecting the rights we've won while pushing for full equality for the entire community," he noted. "Right now, trans women are in the political crosshairs, and our coverage reflects a commitment to centering their voices. Readers tell us our annual voter guides are more crucial than ever because representation really does matter."

From the earliest days, queer publications in Michigan have performed invaluable services as lifelines to readers who thought they were alone in the world, raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and informing the public about battles for civil rights. Today, Between The Lines upholds a proud tradition of Michigan queer media that has served as a lifeline for more than five decades.

"Taking over from Jan and Susan was both humbling and exciting," Jenkins said. "They built something incredible, and I get to be part of carrying that forward. LGBTQ+ media today faces new challenges from social media, funding pressures and a rapidly changing landscape, but the need for authentic community journalism hasn't gone anywhere. People still need to see themselves reflected in the media, and they need trusted sources covering the issues that matter most to their lives. That's what keeps us motivated every day."

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PEWABIC

RFK Jr. and Joni Ernst: Brave Soldiers in the Republican War on Human Life



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

You learn something new every day (though with the Republican crackdown on education and villainizing of scientists, who knows how much longer that will be legal). Today

I learned that Bitcoins make noise. Or, more specifically, that the mining of Bitcoins makes noise. I'm not talking about a bunch of guys underground with pick axes. I'm talking about "the powerful computers that create and protect the cryptocurrency [that] need fans on the go constantly to cool them down." According to The Week, these facilities are located "across rural, mostly Republican towns" and the constant noise is not only annoying residents, it may also be making them sick.

Sounds bad! Apocalyptic, even. Should I be second-guessing my decision to use my life savings to buy Donald Trump meme coins?

Anyway, recently Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), who has a long history of fighting against LGBTQ+ rights, held a town hall where attendees also learned something new and were made sick.

Ernst was talking about her support of the Republican-backed budget bill that, if passed as-is by the Senate, would make drastic cuts to Medicaid in order to give bigger tax breaks to the richest Americans.



might mean for themselves and their loved ones.

When someone at Ernst's town hall yelled "People are going to die" regarding Medicaid cuts Ernst replied, "Well, we all are going to die, so, for heaven's sake, folks."

For some reason, people took issue with this callous and flippant response. But don't worry. Ernst apologized. "I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely apologize for a statement that I made yesterday at my town hall," she said the day after in an Instagram video.

She continued, "I made an incorrect assumption that everyone in the auditorium understood that yes, we are all going to perish from this Earth. I'm really, really glad I did not have to bring up the subject of the tooth fairy as well."

Get it? Because only idiots believe in the tooth fairy and she thinks her constituents, especially the ones with their fucking lives at the mercy of Republicans who could not give less of a shit about them, are idiots.

Because she is a Good Christian Woman™ she added, "For those that would like to see eternal and everlasting life, I encourage you to embrace my lord and savior, Jesus Christ."

Remember, folks, everyone has the right to life. Unless you're on Medicaid. Then you'd better stop sucking at the government teat and start praying that you never get in a car accident, that your cancer doesn't come back, and that God will give you lots and lots of money so that you, too, can look down on the most vulnerable people in the

country and hope they just die already.

Meanwhile in the Trump Death Cult, HIV/AIDS research is being gutted in the U.S. Apparently Republicans want to make sure it isn't just people in other countries who suffer due to HIV/AIDS funding cuts.

According to The Daily Beast, "Research programs at Duke University and the Scripps Research Institute that are working to deliver an HIV vaccine were told by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that their \$258 million funding would be stopped. The vaccine manufacturer Moderna said that its clinical trials, funded by the NIH, have also been paused."

"This is a terrible time to cut it off. We're beginning to get close," Dennis Burton, an immunology professor at Scripps Research, told CBS News. "This is a setback of probably a decade for HIV vaccine research."

That's a lot of time and a lot of money down the toilet.

"The cancellation of the funds comes weeks ahead of the Food and Drug Administration's June 19 deadline for deciding on approval of lenacapavir, a twice-yearly injectable drug to prevent HIV," CBS reports. "The drug's availability could lead to a significant drop in HIV cases worldwide, since a study found it was 100% effective in preventing transmission."

In other words, right as scientists are on the cusp of an HIV vaccine, their funding gets yanked.

Could this be related to the fact that Health and Human Services and Dead Brain Worm Host Robert Kennedy, Jr. is an anti-vaxxer and AIDS denialist?

Yes. Of course it's related.

It's almost like the meanest and dumbest people are in charge of this country right now, and your death would mean absolutely nothing to them.

Haha. I don't really mean it. The "almost" part.

“Remember, folks, everyone has the right to life. Unless you're on Medicaid.”

About 80 million people in the U.S. are on Medicaid, including those with low income, children and people with disabilities. Their lives literally depend on Medicaid in a myriad of ways. Medicaid pays for hospital visits, insulin, home health services and more. People are, quite understandably, very scared about what cuts to Medicaid

Record Turnout at LGBTQ+ Capitol Day Shows Community's Political Power

More than 265 LGBTQ+ advocates and allies turned out for Equality Michigan's largest Capitol Day ever on May 14, representing 36 Senate districts and 77 House districts across Michigan.

The record turnout translated into meaningful access, with community members securing 63 meetings with state representatives throughout the day. Participants focused on discussing healthcare access, legal protections and the right to live authentically without fear.

"The momentum feels like the state of the LGBTQ+ movement in Michigan is as strong as it has ever been," said Emme

Zanotti, senior director of movement building and political affairs at Equality Michigan. "The swell of LGBTQ+ and allied engagement is deeply encouraging, but it's also not a coincidence."

State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, an out bisexual state representative who served as a featured speaker, praised the focus on vulnerable community members. "I was inspired to see so many people in Lansing to meet with their lawmakers, particularly when it came to trans rights, which we know have been under attack in the Michigan House."

The day also included two listening sessions with the Michigan LGBTQ+ Commission. Zanotti emphasized the event's significance as both an achievement and a beginning: "While this year's Capitol Day is a culmination of years of hard work, I think the community also senses that we are just getting started."



A group of 2025 LGBTQ+ Capitol Day participants in Lansing. Photo: Equality Michigan

BTL Contributors Recognized in Michigan Press Association Contest

Two Between The Lines contributors received honors at the 2024 Michigan Press Association Better Newspaper Contest, which recognizes excellence in journalism, photojournalism, column writing, graphic design and advertising across the state.

Julisa Abad earned second place in the Best Opinion category for "The Dark Side of Advocacy, According to This Leading Michigan Trans Advocate," while Ellen Shanna Knoppow took third place in the Government/Education News category for "The Impact of 2023 Legislation on Transgender Youth: A Scorecard for Michigan."

The annual contest allows media professionals across Michigan to showcase their best work while serving readers and communities. Michigan Press Association past-President Wes Smith noted that while journalists aren't motivated by recognition, the contest provides a rare opportunity to reflect on meaningful work accomplished throughout the year.

Both winning pieces highlight Between The Lines' commitment to covering issues affecting Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, from advocacy challenges to legislative impacts on transgender youth. Join us in congratulating Abad and Knoppow for their exceptional work amplifying essential stories about queer and trans experiences in Michigan.



Supreme Court Case Could Strip Federal Protections for Michigan's Trans Community

A pending U.S. Supreme Court decision in *U.S. v. Skrmetti* threatens to reshape transgender rights nationwide, including in Michigan. The case challenges Tennessee's sweeping ban on gender-affirming care for trans youth, but legal experts say the ruling could determine whether all transgender Americans receive enhanced federal protection from discrimination.

The central question involves what level of constitutional scrutiny applies to laws targeting transgender people. A ruling against the plaintiffs could signal that anti-trans legislation can withstand federal challenges, potentially emboldening other states to pass similar restrictions.

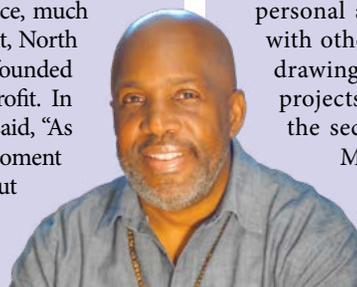
For Michigan, the stakes are significant despite current protections under the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. Legal experts warn that state-level protections aren't permanent and could be revised if political majorities shift. The Supreme Court heard arguments in December, with a decision expected in June affecting everything from healthcare access to employment protections for transgender Michiganders. — Reporting by Anni Arbour

Ringwald's 'Annie' Offers a Timely Message of Hope

The Ringwald Theatre is reimagining the beloved musical "Annie" with a twist that's sure to surprise audiences — an entirely adult cast taking on the classic roles. The production runs June 6-30 at the theater's home inside Affirmations in Ferndale. The unconventional casting choice transforms the show's theme of choosing optimism during difficult times into something deeper and more intentional. As the resident theater company within Michigan's largest LGBTQ+ community center, The Ringwald delivers another thought-provoking production for queer audiences.

Kwabena to Serve as MCP Grand Marshal

LGBT Detroit Executive Director A. Nzere Kwabena will serve as Motor City Pride's grand marshal in the June 8 parade. Kwabena has dedicated more than three decades to the fight for LGBTQ+ equity and justice, much of it leading LGBT Detroit, North America's largest Black founded and led LGBTQ+ non-profit. In a news release, Kwabena said, "As fortunate as I feel, this moment isn't about me — it's about all of us."



A. Nzere Kwabena. Courtesy photo

Create in Community at Ypsilanti District Library

Need a quieter alternative to the bustling Pride festival scene? The Ypsilanti District Library's Downtown Queer Crafting Group offers a relaxed space for LGBTQ+ folks 18+ to work on personal art projects while connecting with others. Bring fiber arts, painting, drawing, writing or digital art projects to this welcoming group on the second Monday of each month. More info at bit.ly/3ZLkaCs.

HOW TO BE THE QUEER YOU NEEDED

77 Tiny, Mighty Acts of Pride



Your Pride to-do list just got way more interesting

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Pride is a muscle boy covered float that used to be sponsored by a vodka brand (we see you, fair-weather friends). A dozen dancing drag queens. A glittery dancefloor meltdown.

But Pride is also protest. And joy. And grief. And healing. And very good outfits.

It's also a chance to do something, or even anything, that makes the world a little better, queerer and more yours. Not everything on this list is suitable for everyone, but hopefully, some of it will appeal to you. Pick a few. Start there. Share it with your ex. Share it with your future ex.

From pocket-sized gestures to community-changing moves, here are 77 things you can do to make 2025 your queerest year yet.

1. Support a queer person involved in a cause that bores you.

2. Wear obnoxiously queer socks to work. You define "queer socks," of course, but something in the argyle family is a good start.
3. Offer to be someone's plus one for a difficult event, like an extremely boring theme wedding, family reunion or a gender reveal you can't sabotage.
4. If you can safely (and appropriately) do so, make up with an ex. They don't have to be your best friend, but the community is really small, isn't it?
5. Write the next gay anthem.
6. Or go to karaoke and sing the last great gay anthem. Bonus points for power ballads.
7. If you're partnered, ask yourself: Are we just a couple, or are we actively part of a community?
8. Invite your single friends on vacation.
9. Join an LGBTQ+ sports club. Or maybe

start one. The queers have been holding out on pickleball, and we'd probably dominate.

10. Smile at the local drag queen who really gets on your nerves. Performing outdoors in full makeup is not for the faint of heart, and she is probably extremely dehydrated.
11. If a local church calls itself "open and affirming," give them an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment. Start with a request to produce a drag show in their sanctuary; negotiate down to free space for a community potluck.
12. Help someone come out to their family. Consensually, of course.
13. If you feel like laughing, laugh.
14. If you feel like crying, cry.
15. Actively address your own racism, ableism, biphobia and transphobia. There's nothing more queer than genuine intersectionality.
16. Start an LGBTQ+ employee resource group at your workplace. Or whatever ERGs are called these days. If your office already has a bowling league and a fantasy football draft, they can handle pronouns.
17. Commit to buying all your birthday gifts for the next year from an online LGBTQ+ book shop or from LGBTQ+

Etsy creators or whatever portal is currently not problematic. Or, um, less problematic.

18. If you have occasion to interact with the grief and death world (e.g., hospice, funeral homes) in your professional life, remind them of the important contributions to grief literature that came out of the early years of the AIDS crisis. Refer them to books by Mark Doty and Paul Monette.
19. Actively cultivate hopefulness.

20. If you want to actively cultivate hopefulness but don't know where to start, read Sarah Schulman's book "Let The Record Show: A History of ACT UP." The losses in the early years of the AIDS epidemic were unfathomable. Remember, our direct action led to substantial and life-saving policy changes.

21. Let that really sink in. There are people alive today that are only alive because our queer and trans forefathers

and foremothers and forepersons demonstrated and met with their elected officials and participated in endless tedious meetings with other queer and trans people who were probably annoying.

22. If you need it and have access, consider going back to therapy.
23. Sure you don't need it? Double check with someone who loves you — maybe your second-worst ex?
24. Consider going to therapy to save any relationship that matters to you. With a partner, a best friend, a sibling, a softball team...

25. Forgive Baby Queer You for all the bad relationship choices you made in your 20s. You're doing better now! If you're not doing better now, see No. 22.

26. Support a new Pride event in a city smaller than yours.
27. Start a new Pride event in a city smaller than yours.
28. Start a new Pride event in your hometown. Baby Queer You would really be impressed, right?
29. Bring extra servings to the potluck. Someone always forgets.
30. Label all the ingredients at the dish you bring to the potluck.
31. Bring extra 3-by-5 cards for other people to label all the ingredients for the dish they bring to the potluck. Someone always forgets.
32. Host a Pride craft night. Bedazzle like you mean it.
33. Download the 5 Calls app and make the five calls. Or at least one.
34. If your circumstances permit, consider trade school. The world could benefit from more queer plumbers, and queers could benefit from more union jobs.
35. Bring extra sunscreen or water to an outdoor Pride event.
36. Go with a friend to their long-overdue pelvic exam.
37. Go to your own long-overdue pelvic exam. Ask a friend to come with you.
38. Learn about Pride subculture flags you don't identify with.
39. Volunteer with MiGen or another group serving LGBTQ+ elders.
40. Ask an older LGBTQ+ person about their coming out story.

41. Re-read a queer classic. Rewrite the tragic ending.

42. Embrace harm reduction: Carry Narcan and test kits.

43. Start a worm composting colony in honor of lesbian icon Mary Applehof, aka the worm woman from Kalamazoo.
44. Self-publish a book about something (or anything) in memory of Mary Applehof, who wrote "Worms Eat My Garbage." Don't laugh, it sold a bazillion copies.
45. Start a queer storytelling night. Begin with a one-off and see what happens.
46. Take out your headphones and listen.
47. Ask a friend with a mobility-related disability how your local Pride event could be more accessible to them. Do what you can to make this happen.
48. Ask a friend with sensory needs how your local Pride event could be more accessible to them. Do what you can to make this happen.

49. Ask for help. Mutual aid means mutual.

50. Suggest LGBTQ+ books to your library.
51. Write a queer poem.
52. Write a queer song.
53. Make a queer zine.
54. Organize a queer zine fair.
55. Or a queer fiber arts fair.
56. Or a queer comedy festival. If it's more than one night, it's a festival.
57. Teach yourself to cook. Don't let them starve us out.
58. Organize a speed-friending event.
59. Be gentle with a queer person much younger or much older than you.

60. Repost queer art with <500 likes. They need you more than Beyoncé needs you.

See **Pride Ideas**, page 28



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Reflections on 2025 Pride Through the Lens of AIDS Activism



BY ASTER ASEM

As English words can have several definitions and connotations, I find interpreting phrases, even in ways the originators didn't intend, can be a nice springboard for a ponder. As we move into Pride Month, I've had in my head a refrain from the AIDS crisis and surrounding surge of LGBTQ+ activism: "We buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon, and we danced all night."

Burial. Even before modern humans, members of the genus *Homo* have buried our dead. On a practical level, it makes sense — decaying flesh smells. But what interests me more are the rituals that accompany burial. Why show reverence for a body that cannot perceive the respect?

It seems to me that we who must move on resist letting go — not just of the deceased, but of the parts of ourselves that were shaped by their presence. It's why we have visitations before a funeral, as if their face alone can restore their company, and why we impart formally their remains to earth or sea, as if their former tenant might come back home. It's why, even years later, one might visit their grave, carved with a name that can outlast its letters — and why we keep those names alive: Sylvia Rivera. Frank Kameny. Stormé DeLarverie. And all others who pushed back on hatred, step by incremental step.

Protest. Having researched a century's worth of revolutionary movements, political scientist Erica Chenoweth of Harvard University says nonviolent collective action, including strikes and boycotts — by even 3.5% of a society — can lead to significant and lasting change. Surveys by the PRRI, Pew Research Center and others

See **Pride Essays**, page 30

We Have Always Existed — and We Will Not Be Erased

Michigan trans advocate Michelle Fox-Phillips reflects on the community's past struggles and present challenges



BY MICHELLE FOX-PHILLIPS

The struggle for our existence began in August 1966 at Gene Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco. Fed up with constant police harassment, transgender women and gay men fought back when one person threw coffee in an officer's face. Fifty years later, in 2016, the city commemorated this pivotal moment with a plaque. In 1969, three years after the riot at Compton's Cafeteria, two trans women — Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson — stood at the forefront of the Stonewall riots, almost 30 years before I came out in a very different era in 1998.

And since then, I've witnessed tremendous progress.

I remember Michigan's first rally for trans and non-binary people on the Capitol steps, organized by Rachel Crandall-Crocker in honor of Transgender Day of Visibility. Years later, the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act was finally amended to include sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Last year brought another victory: We no longer need to be fingerprinted or have our names published when legally changing them, making the process safer for our community.

Yet here in 2025, we now stand at a new crossroads. We have a president who openly advocates for erasing us under the guise of fighting "gender ideology" — not just from history, but from our daily lives. Some states are following suit, passing laws that prevent gender-affirming care for trans youth and prohibit trans girls from playing sports that align with their identity. Here in Michigan this April, the state House passed a resolution — with support from eight



Marsha P. Johnson hands out flyers for support of gay students at N.Y.U. in 1970. Photo: New York Public Library/Diana Davies

“Our collective power is tangible. When we work together and stay on message, we can have a direct impact on decision-making that impacts our community.”

NOT BE ERASED. This is my mantra — let it be yours.

On May 30 this year, Gender-Identity Network Alliance (GNA), Inclusive Justice, Equality Michigan Action Network and Stand with Trans held a rally on the Michigan Capitol steps to express our joy in living authentically. Several hundred people gathered to celebrate and connect with others from across the state. The rally ended with a glitter blessing from deacons and pastors. As Grace Bacon said that day, we must come

Democratic members — to ban trans students from playing sports that match their gender identity (never mind that not a single Michigan transgender minor is registered to play sports with their high school). Now, the Michigan GOP has introduced bills banning gender-affirming care for youth.

Now is the time for all of us who identify as trans and non-binary to come out and fight alongside our allies. Be proud of who you are. I WILL

together, make friends and build connections. If you see something, say something — but always prioritize your safety.

Our collective power is tangible. When we work together and stay on message, we can have a direct impact on decision-making that impacts our community. This year, a well-known hospital suspended gender-affirming care for youth following the president's executive order. After pressure from trans-supportive organizations and Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, they reversed their decision.

I encourage all queer people and allies to attend Pride events, meet people and forge connections, while acknowledging that the fight can be exhausting in every way. If you're struggling, and especially if you're experiencing thoughts of suicide, please call the Trevor Project at 1-866-488-7386.

A TIP FROM A
**FORMER
SMOKER**

**HIV alone
didn't cause the
clogged artery
in my neck.
Smoking with
HIV did.**

Brian, age 45, California

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Anarchy, Addiction and ‘God’s Dick’

Trans punk icon Laura Jane Grace on ego death, gender dysphoria and the cost of living honestly



Laura Jane Grace. Photo: Pinelopi Gerasimou

BY JOSEF GREENBERG

Early in my interview with legendary trans rocker Laura Jane Grace, I can't help but fawn over her 2016 memoir "Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout," which details Grace's struggles with addiction and her very public transition.

"Tranny" is really junkie-prose adjacent," I tell her, explaining I cut my literary teeth on the late punk poet Jim Carroll and other drug-fueled autobiographies. Unexpectedly, my heart drops to my gut, hoping she catches the reference. "Oh yeah, right on," she says, laughing. I'm instantly relieved.

Knowing her rocky relationship with journalists, I tell her I don't want to fuck it up. I reference this excerpt of her memoir: "I hate interviews. They feel like homework and I'm just trying to guess the right answers so the journalist will write an article that will help us sell records."

Again, Grace laughs, and my heart settles somewhere comfortable for the next 30 minutes. I quickly confess, telling her I started my own transition as a solo trek and personally relate to her gender journey, including her revelation that the path to sobriety is often complicated and non-linear.

Grace lives on the bleeding edge of honesty. She's raw and has made a career out of living — and screaming — out loud in that space. She first gained prominence as the founder and frontwoman of Against Me! and came out as transgender in 2012 at the height of the band's success. Her transition, documented in the acclaimed 2014 album "Transgender Dysphoria Blues," marked a watershed moment for transgender visibility in mainstream rock music. Since then, Grace has become one of the most prominent transgender musicians in the industry, balancing her artistic career with outspoken advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights.

So leave it her to record an unapologetically unorthodox, X-rated anthemic song that could make even the most hardened punk rocker blush. "Your God (God's Dick)" is the first single

from "Adventure Club," a project she worked on with her four-piece band Laura Jane Grace In The Trauma Tropes, which includes her wife Paris Campbell. The release, due July 18, is Grace's fourth full-length album with the band.

Like many tracks on the new album, "Your God (God's Dick)" was written during her time in Greece as part of the prestigious Onassis Air Program, an artistic research and residency initiative. Speaking during our evening chat after sound-check for a concert in Portland, Oregon, she described the program as "the most magical experience ever," which became the creative backdrop for "Adventure Club."

"Every day we would wake up and drive up and down the coast, and find a new spot on the beach to go snorkeling. Literally like swimming with sea turtles and eels. It was just majestically beautiful, and then we would record all evening," Grace told me.

The fellowship provided Grace with structure and accountability, challenging her to explain her creative process and inspiration. "I had to be like 'OK, so this week I wrote this song called 'God's Dick,'" said Grace, who arrived for the fellowship with four songs in pocket and left with 12.

Michigan fans will have two opportunities to experience the new material live, as Laura Jane Grace In The Trauma Tropes plans upcoming shows on June 20 at St. Andrews Hall in Detroit and July 15 at the Pyramid Scheme in Grand Rapids. Both performances will support the band Murder by Death.

During our conversation, Grace spoke about life as a transgender punk anarchist, the relationship between addiction and dysphoria, and what advice World Wrestling Entertainment superstar wrestler CM Punk offered up when she was rebuilding her life.

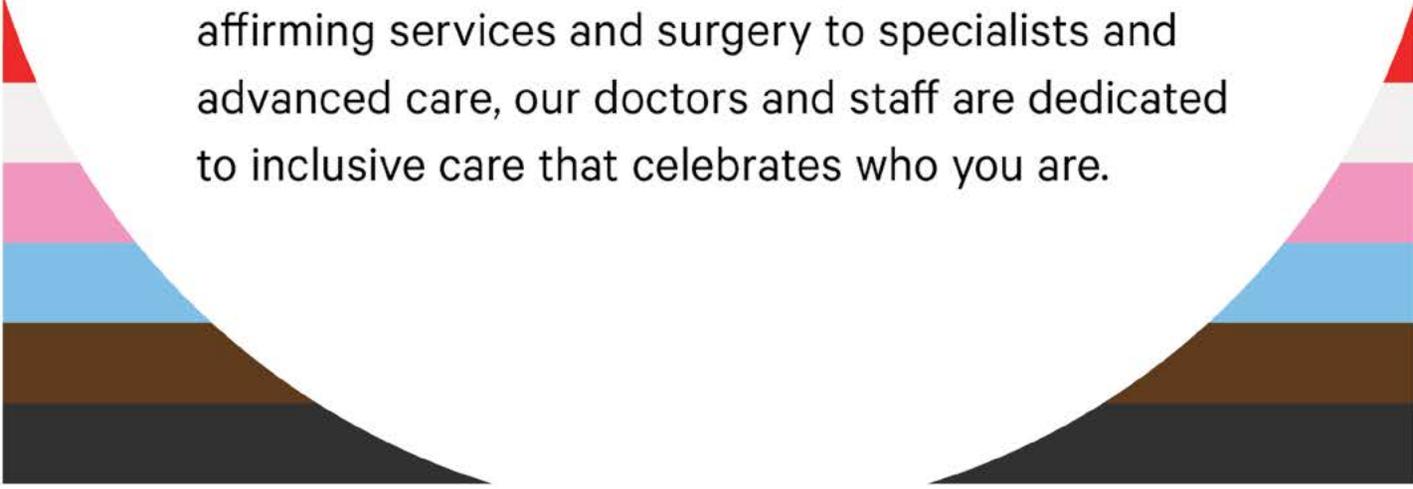
When I was listening to "Adventure Club," it read like a love letter to addiction and using.

See [Laura Jane Grace](#), page 50



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2025 Pride Calendar

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Buckle up, babes of all genders — Michigan Pride is back for 2025 and it's queerer, louder and sparklier than ever. Whether you're into big-city parades, small-town park picnics or drag shows by a lake, we've got your whole Pride season mapped out.

From the tippy top of the U.P. to the mitt's pinky finger, there's a celebration near you (and yes, a few bonus bashes outside the Mitten, because we're generous like that). Get your glitter, your sunscreen and your snack stash — we're going on a gay road trip. You know we need this.

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

Single day events are in chronological order, alphabetized by date. Multiple day events are placed in the calendar in the order of the earliest event.



Motor City Pride Parade 2023. Photo: Andrew Potter

JUNE

FRIDAY, JUNE 6

Ironwood Pride (through June 7)

Movie: Historic Ironwood Theatre, 7 p.m. ("Kinky Boots")

Pride in the Park: Downtown Ironwood, 1-5 p.m.

Pride After Dark: Golden Dragon (215 S. Suffolk St., Ironwood), 6-9 p.m.

ironwoodareapride.com

Don't sleep on the Upper Peninsula this Pride season. Unless it's napping in a hammock between events! The UP's smaller Pride celebrations are packed with big heart, small-town charm and a truly inspiring ratio of glitter to population.

Take Ironwood, perched way up at the UP's western edge, where they're throwing their 5th annual Pride fest like the pros they are. Over two days, they're serving up community-friendly joy with a screening of "Kinky Boots," a Pride-in-the-park extravaganza and a karaoke dance party where someone is legally required to sing Cher.

Kalamazoo Pride

Arcadia Creek Festival Place (145 E. Water St., Kalamazoo), 6-11 p.m., and Saturday, June 7, 2-11 p.m.

outfrontkzoo.org/pride2025

Kalamazoo Pride 2025 is bringing the sparkle back to Arcadia Creek Festival Place. Friday night entertainment features theater and dance performances, culminating in the Mx/Ms/Mr Kalamazoo Drag Pageant. Saturday, you can

peruse vendors and check out local community resources tables, dance your afternoon away with DJ Tribewalker. Headliner Baddie Brooks brings the night to a close.

All proceeds from Kalamazoo Pride support Out Front Kalamazoo's amazing programs for youth, adults and families — including a fiber arts hangout delightfully called Knit Happens. If that name doesn't melt your heart just a little, don't worry — spend the whole weekend at the festival and let the glitter do its work.

Ypsi Pride (Ypsilanti)

Depot Town, 5-10 p.m.

facebook.com/YpsiPride

Ypsi Pride's theme this year is "Celebrating Our Stories," with Headliner Baddie Brooks, aka The Queen of Brass, will deliver a high-energy show Friday night.

Don't miss local vendors, plenty of food and drink and fun events like "Pied for Pride," where you can throw a pie in the face of Ypsi Pride board members! In the meantime, follow their social media for details on upcoming Yappy Hours — your chance to grab a coffee and chat with Ypsi Pride board members at some of the city's queer-friendly spots.

SATURDAY, JUNE 7

Abigail's Pride (Ortonville)

Brandon Township Community Park (1414 N. Hadley Road, Ortonville), 4-8 p.m.

abigailspide.godaddysites.com

This is the fourth year that Abigail's Pride will bring rainbow-kissed care to the Ortonville area. And even though festival founder

Abigail Rowe has been accepted into the prestigious Disney College Program (go Abigail!) and Abigail will continue to help organize remotely — Abigail's Pride shows no signs of slowing down! Come out to Pride In The Park for music, food, fun and, most of all, community!

Keweenaw Pridefest

Calumet Colosseum (110 Red Jacket Road, Calumet)

keweenawpridefest.org

Hosted for the third fabulous year by Keweenaw Queers, Pridefest 2025 is serving up small-town charm with big queer heart. Come out for lawn games, live music and community resources.

Lowell Pride

Lowell Riverwalk, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. lowellpride.org

Lowell Pride's theme, Defy and Amplify, is salve for our battered queer hearts and delight and hope for our collective queer futures. Entertainment, community tables and, of course, Gary, the Emotional Support Pug!

Motor City Pride (Detroit)

Festival: Saturday, June 7, Hart Plaza, 1-9 p.m., and Sunday June 8, 12:30-7 p.m.

Parade: Sunday, June 8, 12 p.m.. Kick-off at Fort & Griswold, ends at Hart Plaza.

motorcitypride.org

Motor City Pride isn't just Michigan's biggest Pride festival — it's been making Hart Plaza sparkle since 1972. That's over 50 years of fabulous. This year's June 7-8 celebration promises an enriched festival experience across four stages of live music, featuring "RuPaul's Drag Race" stars Jackie Cox and Jan Sport, Brooklyn queer punk band PONY, nonbinary alt-rock artist Candi Carpenter and veteran Detroit DJ Stacey Hotwaxx Hale.

The festival boasts an expanded history area connecting attendees with LGBTQ+ movement pioneers, plus more exhibitors than ever before. Health-conscious attendees will appreciate the return of the Health Village, providing connections to LGBTQ+-affirming healthcare providers.

The annual Pride Parade remains a central highlight, with LGBT Detroit Executive Director A. Nzere Kwabena serving as grand marshal. More than 100 organizations will march Sunday at noon from Fort and Griswold streets to Hart Plaza, where diverse food vendors and community organizations await. As visitors gather along Detroit's riverfront for this unofficial start to summer, they'll stand together against nationwide anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric while celebrating community support and advocacy for full rights and inclusion.

Mount Pleasant

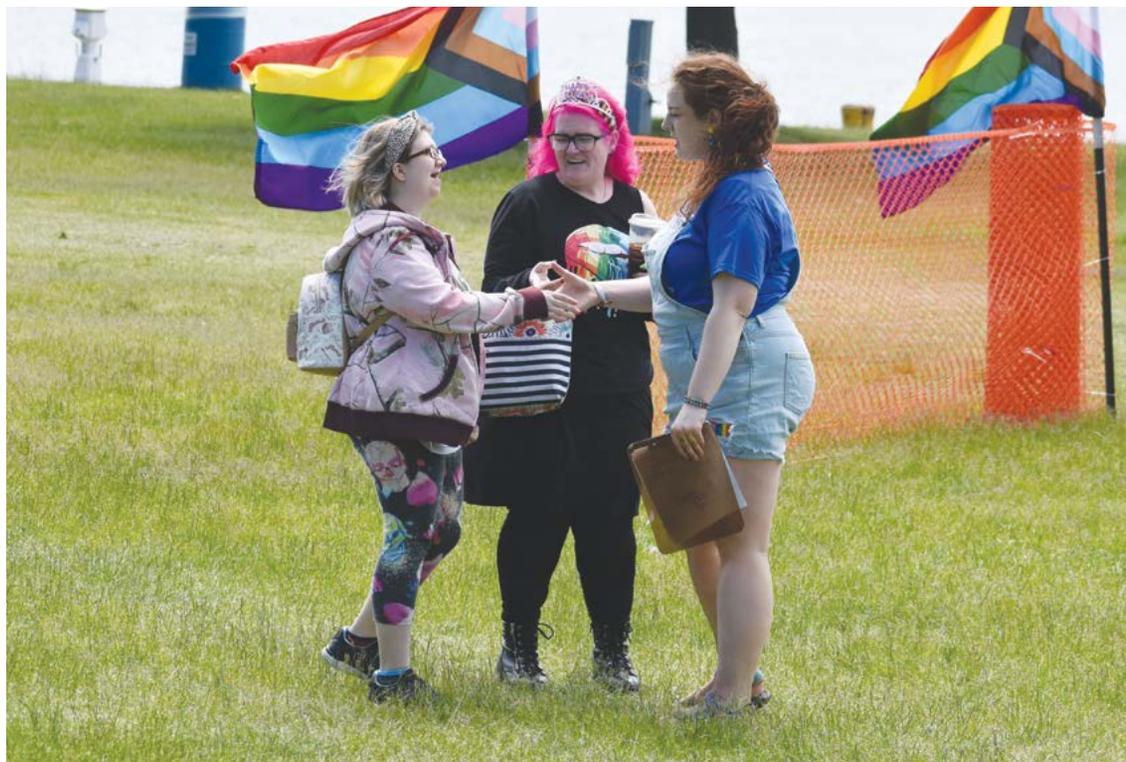
Broadway Park (2451 Nish Na Be Anong Road), 2-5 p.m.

greatlakesbaypride.org/events/call/mount-pleasant-pride-festival

Muskegon Pride

Hackley Park (350 W Webster Ave., Muskegon)

Parade kick-off: 10:30 a.m.



Marquette Pride, 2024. Photo: Melinda Hupy

Muskpride.org

The Muskegon Pride Festival organizers can't wait to greet us on rainbow-studded streets, so plan your calendars around the festival at Hackley Park, with tables, vendors and entertainment, including headliner Thea Austin. If you can't wait until June to get your Pride on, check out their ongoing programming including Coffee With Friends, Golden Years Lunches and a weekly all-ages transgender, genderqueer and gender nonconforming social group.

Community Pride Michigan (Saugatuck-Douglas)

Parade kick-off: Saugatuck High School (401 Elizabeth St, Saugatuck), 10:30 a.m.

Pride in the Park: Beery Field (8 Center St., Douglas), 12- 8 pm

communitypridemi.org

Community Pride Michigan does not just tip their collective toes into Pride — they do a full cannonball:

June 1: Kickoff Tea Dance (The Dunes Resort, 333 Blue Star Highway, Douglas), 4 p.m.

June 2: Putt-Putt Tournament (Saugatuck Mini Golf, 3460 Blue Start Highway, Saugatuck), 5:30 p.m.

June 3: Bowling Party (Alley's

Pizza Lakeview Lanes, 229 Center St., Douglas), 6 p.m.

June 4: Speaker Series and garden party featuring author/historian Bonnie Morris (Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, 130 Center St., Douglas), 4 p.m.

Presentation — Archiving Lesbian History: From Sports to Music (Saugatuck-Douglas Public Library, 174 Center St., Douglas), 5:30 p.m.

June 7: Pride in the Park

Festival entertainment on June 7 includes the Lakeshore Community Chorus and the award-winning Chicago tribute band 16 Candles. Will this be the year you fulfill your lifelong goal of enthusiastically singing along to "Saturday In the Park" on a Saturday in the park?

SATURDAY, JUNE 14

Cass County Pridefest

Library Pavilion (206 Main St., Dowagiac), 4-8 p.m.

outcenter.org/pridefest

Cass County Pridefest is one sparkling stop on the Pridefest On Tour trifecta, dreamed up by the fine folks at OutCenter of Southwest Michigan. Details for all three tour dates are still in the works, but go ahead and mark your calendar — and maybe pre-glitter your shoes while you're at it. Also, this one's happening at a library pavilion, which means it's

automatically iconic. Because if I can't read, I don't want to be part of your revolution.

East Lansing Pride

Albert El Fresco (Albert Ave. between Grove Street and M.A.C. Ave.), 4-9 p.m.

[instagram.com/p/DImOKEBR0eI](https://www.instagram.com/p/DImOKEBR0eI)

This year, East Lansing Pride is bringing back their legendary open floor drag show — so get ready to cheer, twirl and maybe even join in (we won't stop you, although the queens might). The evening will also feature live music, local vendors and inclusive art activities.

Grand Haven Pride

Downtown Grand Haven

ghPrideorg/events

Grand Haven Pride details are on the way, but in the meantime, if you find yourself bopping around town, don't miss their year-round lineup of events — including a monthly Community Connections meetup. One month it's hiking, the next it's coffee, so whether you're an indoor queer or an outdoor queer, there's something to love.

Upper Peninsula Rainbow Pride (Marquette)

Mattson Lower Harbor Park (200 N Lakeshore Blvd.), 12-10:30 p.m.

uprainbowPrideorg/events

UP Pride is turning 10 this year — double digits, baby! And they're celebrating in style with a brand-new poster featuring a pansy, the flower that once was used as a slur but has since been gloriously reclaimed as a symbol of queer resilience. This year's poster art came from a community contest (yes, they're that wholesome and fabulous), and the winning design is both beautiful and meaningful — just like UP Pride itself. If you've been looking for an excuse to plan a road trip to the Upper Peninsula, this is it. Ten years of Pride power, queer joy and, yes, drag performers ready to strut their stuff in the land of lakes and pasties.

Warren City Pride

Warren Civic Center, (1 City Square, Warren) **Festival**, 12-8 p.m.

Parade: location TBA, 11:15 a.m.

warrencitypride.com

Free, family-friendly pride event in downtown Warren; entertainment on not one but two stages, tasty food, tons o' vendors, water bottle refill stations and low noise/stimulus areas.

SATURDAY, JUNE 21

Fenton Pride

Rackham Park (150 S. Leroy Street), 2-7 p.m.

fentonpride.org

The heart of the fest lives in Rackham Park with the Fenton Pride Collective, vendors and community orgs, but the fun doesn't stop there. Local downtown businesses are also getting in on the action, offering sweet discounts and special Pride-themed food and drinks. Lesbian lemonade? Bear biscuits? Lavendar love lattes? Bi-burgers? Rainbow ravioli?

Additionally, organizers note that Fenton Pride has another notable tradition: it's typically hot. Like, summer-sizzle, glitter-melting hot. So dress cute and comfy — think breathable fabrics and maybe a fan you can wave dramatically.

Grand Rapids Pride (through June 22)

Calder Plaza (320 Ottawa Ave.)

See **Pride Calendar**, page 36

How Bree Taylor Transformed Personal Struggle into Transgender Advocacy



Bree Taylor. Courtesy photo

Through nationwide action, the Transgender Unity Coalition founder has advanced rights for trans people across Michigan and beyond

BY ANNI ARBOUR

From the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C., Bree Taylor's voice carried across a crowd of over 1,000 people. The scientist-turned-activist spoke with the precision and assurance that had become her trademark, rallying supporters for transgender rights on a cold March day earlier this year.

For Taylor, the journey to this podium began long before she founded the Trans Unity Coalition. It started with a little girl trying to find her place in the world.

"I've been picked on to an extent as a person of color, but not as an everyday thing as I'm pretty white-passing," Taylor notes matter-of-factly about her mixed-race background. "I'm just myself, independent. I don't require a connection to a culture."

This fierce independence was forged through early hardship. When Taylor was just 3 years old, her mother died — her earliest and most traumatic memory. Her maternal grandmother stepped in to raise her while her father remained absent, leaving questions about her heritage unanswered.

As a child, Taylor was placed in California's Gifted and Talented Education program, but rather than thriving, she grew restless. The classroom couldn't contain her energy or address her emotional needs. By her preteen years, Taylor began running away from home. Her grandmother, battling Parkinson's disease, struggled to maintain stability.

Taylor's rebellion intensified in high school, leading to poor grades and eventually removal from her grandmother's care. The foster system became her new reality — a structured environment that helped her academics but came with its own emotional toll.

"It was not a healthy household," Taylor recalled of her foster home. "An emotionally abusive household for a foster child."

Yet through these difficult years, Taylor wasn't wrestling with questions about gender identity. Like many transgender individuals who come out later in life, the language and framework to understand her experience simply wasn't available to her.

"I wasn't out. I didn't even know what gender was. But there were signs," Taylor said. "I recall signs as early as 7. If I knew what gender identity was or gender expression, or if there were transgender role models that I could have identified, [who said], 'This is what transgender is and what it means,' I would have [come out] sooner."



Lansing Trans rights rally, Jan. 30, 2025. Photo: Brian Wells

After a false start at the University of California, Davis, Taylor took time to regroup, working as an emergency medical technician—a job that taught her crisis management skills that would later serve her well as an activist. When her grandmother passed away, Taylor was 23 and inherited enough money to pay off her debts and spend a year in the Philippines.

It was during this time of exploration abroad, immersed in an unfamiliar culture, that Taylor began the deep introspection that would lead to her coming out.

“There’s a realization that the person is not so much changing as they’re discovering themselves,” she observed. “It’s the people around you that have the perception of change. At 25, I stumbled upon the concepts of gender. The idea that you can be you, despite what society is assigning to you.”

This realization blossomed into a profound understanding: “That concept

“*There’s a realization that the person is not so much changing as they’re discovering themselves. It’s the people around you that have the perception of change. At 25, I stumbled upon the concepts of gender. The idea that you can be you, despite what society is assigning to you.*”

snowballed into asking: Is that true of sex? Is that true of gender? Which it is, so then [I realized], ‘Yes, I am transgender.’”

With newfound clarity about her identity, Taylor returned to academics with purpose. She graduated from UC-Davis in June 2023 with a Bachelor of Science in biochemistry and molecular biology, immediately landing a lab technician position with a San Francisco medical genetics company.

See **Bree Taylor**, page 58



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What Pride 2025 Means to Me

Voices from Our Community

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Pride in 2025 hits different. Yes, it's still about the glitter, the drag, the dancing in the streets. But it's also about showing up — in the face of rising hate, political attacks and attempts to erase who we are.

Across Michigan, from grassroots organizers to longtime advocates, community leaders are grappling with what this moment means — for them, for their organizations, and for everyone who's ever felt the weight of being different in a world that often punishes difference. Their reflections are raw, honest and deeply rooted in both love and resistance.

As one community leader puts it, our humanity has always been “up for scrutiny,” always “delivered at a fraction.” Another reminds us that Pride started as rebellion — born from the defiance at Stonewall in 1969, when Marsha P. Johnson and others refused to back down — and rebellion is exactly what showing up looks like when the government tries to legislate you out of existence.

Their voices tell a story of a community that refuses to be invisible, that understands joy itself as an act of defiance. Pride, they remind us, isn't just a party. It's a protest. It's a family reunion. It's hope wrapped in determination. And this year, more than ever, it's about coming together to remind the world: We're still here. We always will be.

Jay Kaplan

Staff Attorney, ACLU Michigan

I think being prideful is being willing to stand up for our rights and for all members of our community. This year, yes, we should celebrate who we are and our ability to be our authentic selves and all the progress we've made, but we have to be reminded of the sobering thought that there are some very strong attacks against that progress. So, I'd like us to be prideful in that we are committed to this civil rights struggle that continues going on, and we recognize that every part of our community is part of us.

Julia Music

Executive Director, Ferndale Pride

For me, Pride in 2025 means sticking together. We have worked so hard to build our community in Michigan. There are proud, out communities all over the state. We have over 55 Pride festivals in the state of Michigan. That means we need to be stronger together.

Mark Erwin

Executive Director, Ruth Ellis Center

This year, Pride is more important than ever. I think that we are all feeling the weight of what is happening in our country, and it can be a heavy burden to bear. But knowing that we have community, that we have support and that we have each other to navigate these challenges, is what ultimately see us through to a better future.

Roz Keith

Founder and Executive Director, Stand with Trans

Pride 2025 means that we get to celebrate

another year of the LGBT community. It means that we can find new ways to be visible and make our voices heard.

Nazarina Mwakasege

Director of Development and Advancement, Ruth Ellis Center

Pride is a rebellion. Pride is us staking our claim in this environment and in this world. I really want for people, when they're outside, to be proud, but also be loud and be brave because the only way we're getting through all of this is together. So family, let's bring it in.

Tabitha Mason

Managing Partner, Cornman Farms

It's things like Pride that let people understand they have a community and it's OK to be who they are regardless of race, gender, age, life experiences, incarceration status. There are all of these things that make us special. And so I hope that Pride 2025 is the biggest party yet. And I also think we're prepared to ride if we need to.

Tim Retzloff

Professor of LGBTQ+ Studies, Michigan State University

Pride in 2025 is a year that I really want to embrace the smaller localized Prides. I think this is a crucial year to come together as a community to show support for each other, for our allies to rally around us and also show support and to really counter the idea that maybe we don't belong in America or in the world. The attacks on trans people in particular, and the idea that you can kind of declare a



Martin Contreras

Co-owner, Aut Bar

When we started the National Coming Out Day celebration here in Ann Arbor, which eventually became Ann Arbor Pride, it was 1999 and there was probably a small gathering of about 75 people partying in the streets. So it has changed a lot over the years.

It's important this year not only to have the celebration and the visibility of queer people celebrating our community because people have to know that we're here, but also I hope this year that they focus on a political message in terms of how important it is to show up and challenge your politicians and your city councils and your school boards to be all inclusive and not to fall victim to the current administration and what's going on politically. So the party's important because it's fun, but the political message is if not more important.

whole population as non-existent through an executive order, are appalling. And we need to push back.

In some ways this is a scary time, but we've been through scary times before. I remember being very scared the first time I attended a Pride as a 22-year-old in 1986. And just being afraid of who might see me, what kind of physical threats we might have, what the ramifications might be. And I don't want to say that those threats weren't real and don't remain real now despite ebbs and flows of tolerance

Keith Orr

Co-owner, Aut Bar

I remember many, many years ago, during one of the Marches on Washington, Barney Frank [the first openly gay member of Congress] was discouraging people from doing this March on Washington. He felt it was a waste of resources, like there isn't a single senator that's going to change his vote. And my view on it is, maybe not, but you know what happens? After people come back to their hometowns after that, suddenly community centers have more volunteers, political groups have more volunteers, more organizing takes place.

So it's really important that we have these moments in places that affirm who we are because they empower who we are, and we can't give in now. Now more than ever, it's important that we are empowered and out working to make change.

and moments of fitting in. But the crucial point is coming together and realizing we're not alone and that we're there for each other.

A. Nzere Kwabena

Executive Director, LGBT Detroit

Pride means the world to me. We're celebrating our 30th anniversary this year at Hotter than July. We've come a long way, and it is the most impactful project that the collective has done since 1995. This year it is

Baddie Brooks

Professional Musician and Miss Trans Michigan 2025

In our current political climate in the year 2025, Pride means joy. It means bravery, an act of resistance. Despite everything the queer and trans community is facing, it is so meaningful to me for us to continue to show up for ourselves and continue to share our joy and pride. I know that for myself, professionally, as someone who is headlining three festivals in Michigan, I'm very excited for this Pride season. However, I want to continue to use my own voice to advocate for the queer and transgender community.



more important than any other year that I can recall that we have to be visible and active and alert and present. We have to be prepared. We have to fight. We won before; we'll win again.

Pride helps us not only celebrate, not only rejuvenate, not only continue this tradition of the family reunion, but the important thing about Pride is the ability to engage community. And that's very tough because community is diverse.

There was a recent surprise, nationally. We thought we were going to lead in a different direction. We now know that the nation wants something else, and it's up to us to tell our stories, to be out front, to be visible so that the public knows that we want more than what other media outlets perceive us to want.

Antonio David Garcia

Executive Director, Garrett's Space and Former Affirmations Executive Director

As I've been thinking about Pride 2025, especially under the Donald 2.0 umbrella, I am reminded once again that Prides started out as rebellions, as protests, reminding the world that we are here, queer and we're not going anywhere. No matter

the attacks, whether that's from the police or whether that's from the federal government, we're not going away. We need to remember that Pride is not about generating dollars for the local downtown community business district. That's part of it, but that's not the most important part. The most important part is remembering why we started Prides in the first place.

I hope that in 2025 when we're here in Ann Arbor or in Detroit or Kalamazoo for these Pride festivals, that we remember our

Jeynce Poindexter

Founder and Executive Director, Trans Sistars of Color Project

Pride 2025, more than ever, means visibility. It means being outspoken. It means networking. It means also being empathetic. Some people, particularly community members, are scared. And rightfully so with this administration. So Pride has definitely taken on a new meaning.

I know for Ruth Ellis Center and the Trans Sistars of Color Project, and definitely for me personally, there is an intentional, active, real-time era happening. This world has never fully affirmed, appreciated and recognized our humanity. Our humanity, liberties and rights are always up for scrutiny. They're always delivered at a fraction and they're hitched to some level of insult or injury simultaneously.

With each new day is a new day to tap into new mercies and new grace. Your life has value beyond the rhetoric that you may hear on the TV on a day-to-day basis, specifically targeting and perpetuating hatred to you.

Remember that if you didn't have a purpose, you wouldn't have a life. There's a reason that you are here and you have to own that. But if you complain about today and you complain about tomorrow, try missing a day and tell me what that feels like.

ancestors before us — everything they fought for, why we have what we have today — and that we reflect on that and protect each other from what's to come.

Emme Zanotti

Senior Director of Movement Building & Political Affairs, Equality Michigan

The first Pride festival I ever went to was about a year and a half after coming out as a trans woman. It was Motor City Pride in the summer of 2016, and I was all excited to go to my first Pride festival. I went on the Sunday, the second day of the festival, and woke up that morning to the news of the Pulse nightclub shooting. So that was my first Pride festival.

As we head into Pride 2025, I think it's easy to say that it's at least as impactful as that first Pride festival was for me in 2016, because I know there are going to be a lot of baby Emmes, the future generation of trans leaders in our state who are really looking for that space, that solidarity,

that community, that sense of collectivity right now. And I just kind of want to stand at the entry gates at all the Pride festivals around the state this year and just see the looks on these young people's faces as they come to their first Pride festival.

Amid such political turmoil, I think there's going to be a lot of smiles, a lot of elation, a lot of relief, a lot of emotion. I don't think my expectations have ever been higher for Pride Month than June 2025.

Joe Kort

Founder and Psychotherapist, The Center for Relationship and Sexual Health

Pride 2025 means visibility, not just for people seeing us at the Pride event, but for us to be together and to get away from the keyboard. It's great if you're a keyboard person and you're social media and that's your activism, but it's not enough. So if you have the physical ability to get out, it's important for us to be together and empower each other. I don't think we're going to make it if we're not a united community and find a way to say, "Hey, we're all different, but we're all in this together and we have to fight together."



Jadein Black

Entertainment Director, Ann Arbor Pride

Pride 2025 means that everyone has a seat at the table and is welcome. I'm seeing so much hatred and homophobia, especially in our own community, with our trans brothers and sisters and others. We need to come together and just know that if we all love each

other, love wins. The hatred is very infectious.

In this day and age, I think we should start having conversations at our tables, and it's OK if you disagree with somebody; you put on your teacher cap and you come back in with a different point of view, a different story to try to get them to understand who you are and what you are, so our community can thrive and have allies that will partner with us so we can win.

Photos: Chris Azzopardi and Andrew Potter



Hit the Road for Small-Town Pride Vibes

Finding joy, community and protest spirit beyond the big Pride fests

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Need an escape from the daily barrage of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric flowing from Washington these days? With the Trump administration targeting our community from every angle, sometimes the most effective resistance is simply enjoying life on your own terms. Is there a better way than hitting the road with your chosen family to discover some of Michigan's smaller Pride celebrations?

Michigan's Pride scene stretches far beyond Metro Detroit and Southeast Michigan. Throughout the mitten, you'll find dozens of Pride fests that capture the grassroots, rebel spirit of Pride in authentic celebrations in cities and towns you've likely never visited. These DIY gatherings showcase the resilience, creativity and pure joy that have always been hallmarks of queer resistance.

So, pack your overnight bag, queue up your road trip playlist and let's escape for a series of weekend adventures that combine Pride celebrations with Michigan's natural beauty, quirky small towns and the freedom of the open road. Here are three perfect Pride road trips waiting for you this summer.

The small-town resistance

Lowell Pride Festival
Saturday, June 7

Drive from Metro Detroit: 2.5 hours – take I-96 West to M-21

Who says Pride only belongs in big cities? Lowell Pride, returning for its 5th annual celebration this year beginning at 10:30 a.m., exemplifies the growing resistance movement in small-town Michigan. This charming community nestled at the confluence of the Flat and Grand Rivers might seem an unlikely place for a Pride festival, but that's exactly what makes it so powerful — visibility where it's needed most in a time when LGBTQ+ rights and identities are being challenged.

The event organizers describe their mission clearly on the Lowell Pride website: "In a time when our

rights, our identities, and our very existence are being challenged, Pride isn't just a celebration — it's an act of RESISTANCE," the page reads. That radical spirit is exactly what Pride celebrations were originally about before corporate sponsorships took center stage. The festival combines community resources, local entertainment and the intimate, grassroots feel that bigger Pride events sometimes lack.

Beyond the festival

Turn your Pride journey into a perfect weekend getaway in this picturesque river town. Downtown Lowell features Victorian-style street lamps and beautiful turn-of-the-century architecture along Main Street, where you'll find antique shops, art galleries, restaurants and breweries. Nature lovers can explore nearby Fallasburg Park, home to one of Michigan's few historic covered bridges. The North Country Trail Association, which frequently invites the LGBTQ+ community to outdoor events, is headquartered in Lowell, offering maps for hiking adventures along America's longest scenic trail.

LGBTQ-friendly stops

Lowell is developing its own queer-friendly scene, with queer-owned Bettie's Pages leading the way. This mission-driven independent bookstore offers new and used books along with gift items. It serves as more than just a retail space — it's a community hub for inclusion and activism.

The UP adventure

UP Rainbow Pride (Marquette)
Saturday, June 14

Drive from Metro Detroit: 7 hours – take I-75 North across the Mackinac Bridge into the Upper Peninsula, then M-28 West to Marquette

Want to feel a million miles away from Lansing politics and D.C. drama? Nothing says escape like crossing the Mighty Mac into Michigan's other world — the Upper



Lowell Pride 2024. Photo: Facebook/@lowellpridemi

Peninsula. Marquette combines everything wonderful about the UP: spectacular Lake Superior shoreline, historic downtown, outdoor adventure and a surprisingly vibrant arts scene.

UP Rainbow Pride transforms Mattson Lower Harbor Park into an all-day celebration running from noon until 10:30 p.m., where the DIY ethos shines through local performances, community-run booths and genuine Yooper hospitality. Unlike corporate Pride events, there's a raw authenticity here that feels like a throwback to earlier days of LGBTQ+ organizing.

Beyond the festival

Make this a long weekend! Explore Presque Isle Park's rugged shoreline, iconic black rock topography and old-growth forest. Wander downtown Marquette's historic buildings housing indie bookstores, brewpubs and coffee shops. Outdoor enthusiasts can bike world-class trails or paddle along sandstone cliffs, while history buffs will love the Maritime Museum and former ore dock. In

summer, Lake Superior's chilly waters are refreshing after a day of hiking.

LGBTQ-friendly stops

The Marquette area has become surprisingly queer-friendly in recent years. Fuel up at Blossom Bird Bubble Tea, get a fresh look at Baby Bangs Salon and check out local LGBTQ+ meetups at the many microbreweries. Arts venues like the Peter White Public Library often host LGBTQ+ focused events and readings.

Capital city getaway

Lansing Pride Festival
Saturday, June 28

Drive from Metro Detroit: 1.5 hours – a straight shot west on I-96

If you're looking for a quick escape that won't burn through your gas tank, Lansing Pride delivers the perfect day trip or overnight adventure. There's something deliciously ironic about celebrating Pride in the shadow of the state Capitol while conservative

lawmakers continue pushing anti-LGBTQ+ bills inside. This festival, held from 1 until 10 p.m., has all the elements of old-school protest Pride mixed with jubilant celebration.

Being the state capital, Lansing's Pride has a more politically-aware edge than many others, often featuring voter registration booths and advocacy groups. Yet it maintains a joyful, grassroots vibe with local performers, community drag shows and less of the overarching corporate presence you might feel at bigger events.

Beyond the festival

Turn your Pride day into a full weekend by exploring Lansing's surprising charms. Old Town's colorful historic district is filled with independent shops, galleries and restaurants, while the Lansing River Trail offers 13 miles of walking and biking along the Grand River. MSU's campus in nearby East Lansing — it's a different city, don't embarrass

See **Pride Road Trip**, page 42

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◀ Pride Ideas

Continued from page 15

61. Write a love letter to your 14-year-old queer self.

62. Text someone who's struggling: "You don't have to be OK, but you're not alone."

63. Read a queer book in a genre you don't usually touch.

64. Watch "Go Fish" or "Watermelon Woman."

65. Write a queer op-ed for your local paper.

66. Compliment a stranger's very gay outfit. Be awkward together.

67. Write "You are valid" on Post-it notes and leave them everywhere.

68. Host a trans clothing swap.

Include binders, joy and snacks.

69. Help a teen get ready for prom, graduation or court.

70. Learn how to use encrypted messaging apps like Signal.

71. Say "I'm proud of you" more often. Mean it.

72. Offer child care so someone can attend Pride.

73. Attend your local school board meeting and say "queer" into the mic.

74. Vote in that school board election.

75. Introduce a younger queer person to "Closer to Fine." Maybe learn to play it on the guitar.

76. Tell someone younger than you, "I'm so glad you exist."

77. Start a Pride gratitude list. One queer joy per day.



◀ Ferndale Pride

Continued from page 10

entertainment. The Planavon Performance Stage, hosted by emcee Bentley James, showcased headliner Baddie Brooks, Miss Trans Michigan 2025. The multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter delivered a set that resonated deeply with the crowd, creating an atmosphere of mutual support and celebration. Over on the Woodward Dance Stage, attendees lived out their queer fantasy of going directly from brunch to the dance floor.

"Words can't begin to describe how surreal it was to perform as the 2025 headliner for Ferndale Pride," Brooks told BTL. "The audience was very receptive, engaged and encouraging. I truly felt a sense of belonging from my community."

Throughout the fest, Ferndale Pride organizers fostered an atmosphere of defiantly diverse representation. In

addition to Brooks, DJs Stacey Hotwaxx Hale and Rimarkable also took the stage — all women headliners in what Music described as a "triple headliner situation," a first for the event.

"We are proud that our host Blanca Sapphire is the first openly nonbinary host of any stage in Michigan," Music also noted. "And even more proud to be one of two larger Prides in the United States with all drag programming organized by trans men at Motor City Drag Kings."

Beyond the main stages, organizers ensured there was something for everyone. Families enjoyed Readings With Royalty in the children's area, while water bottle fill-up stations helped attendees stay cool throughout the day. Sensory-sensitive and quiet spaces provided opportunities for people to rest and recharge.

Brooks noted the powerful sense of unity visible throughout the event. "I noticed people of various backgrounds coming together to celebrate this momentous occasion. I would do it again in a heartbeat."



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Albion College's Lavender Graduation Ceremony Showed Me Where I Belong



BY SOPHIA VALCHINE

When my friend asked me to attend his lavender graduation ceremony, I was confused having never heard of such an event before. I didn't question it, simply planning to support my friend. It wasn't until receiving a program with rainbows that I realized this was an LGBTQ+ event at Albion College.

I was surprised, noting that while the college flies a Pride flag daily, I had seen homophobic comments on apps like Yik Yak, where Albion students post anonymously. Being at an event honoring LGBTQ+ graduates sparked hope in my heart, especially seeing the college president in attendance. It meant something significant that the institution's leader was there supporting a community that deserves recognition.

The presence of older queer people was another pleasant surprise. From what I typically see online, younger queer communities appear most prevalent, making it easy to forget that older LGBTQ+ individuals have been living through anti-LGBTQ+ legislature and hatred for much longer.

Seeing these people expanded my perspective of queerness, building confidence that I too could find my place as I grow older. I realized I could navigate through hatred and find pockets of safety and support anywhere in the world. The thought resonated: If these individuals made it this far, so could I.

As graduating students shared their stories, I wondered if one day I might stand in the same position, inspiring freshmen sitting in the back row as I once did. This possibility filled me with hope.

The keynote speaker, Albion alumnus Jordan Herron, vice president of the Alumni Board of Directors, spoke about his struggle accepting his identity. When he finally did, he found a supportive community that stood by



him through everything.

This resonated with me as I had struggled to find my community during my first semester. I felt lost until discovering the school's theater company, where I was welcomed and connected with people who shared similar experiences, helping us bond and create memories together.

Hearing Herron discuss finding his community after college deeply moved me. Having a support system has been vital throughout my life, and knowing similar support exists for other queer people gave me hope that as I pursue my dreams, such communities await me too.

Herron's words struck such a chord that I had to hold back tears. His genuine voice reassured all of us that people want to see us

succeed and will help us get there. I realized I had almost forgotten how much love and support surrounds me, having been stuck seeking love from someone who wasn't giving enough. Now free, I could see the love that had been there all along.

At the ceremony's conclusion, each student received a lavender cord for their graduation ensemble. I felt excited about eventually earning my own, wearing it proudly while receiving my diploma. I cheered loudly for my friend and all graduates, imagining the work required to reach that milestone. I resolved to follow these graduates' footsteps and become part of the next generation that would make them proud.

Throughout their journeys, these graduates had support systems and communities

encouraging them at every step, preventing them from giving up. These graduates became supporters for others, continuing the cycle. I hope to provide that same support one day, giving back the love I've received.

Ceremonies like this reassure me that regardless of where I go or who I become, I will always have an important community supporting me.

Sophia Valchine is an English and theater double major at Albion College. She is involved all over campus, writing for The Albion Pleiad, performing plays, and being a part of the Center for Sustainability and the Environment. Sophia is pleased to be a part of such an important news publication.

◀ Pride Essays

Continued from page 16

say the majority of Americans oppose discrimination against LGBTQ+ people by a substantial margin, even if they stay quiet while conservative pundits vomit lies. Still, a toddler's tantrum will exhaust them, while a crowd can sustain a chant even as some members must catch their breath.

Organizing and cooperating is essential in our continued struggle for our rights. But we, as LGBTQ+ people, exist as living protests, straining, breaking or linking together normative constructs. We are living defiance of abstract and arbitrary categorization, conscientious objectors by nature. Some sophists might equivocate "Pride" with their deadly sin, but every virtue of ours, every achievement, is our own. We should be proud, in both senses.

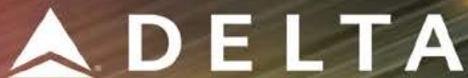
Dance. Even infants as young as six months will move to music. Dance can feel irresistible and is most beautiful, in my opinion, when one acquiesces. The intuitive movement needs no refinement or tradition, only authenticity without reservation. Music correlates with the mathematical structure of the universe, and when we dance, we integrate into that harmony. So, as we move ever forward into Pride Month and beyond, through the

coming night and into the dawn beyond, let's dance, let's sing and let's live legends.

Aster Asem is a recently hatched demichick with an egg tooth "mightier than the sword." They have a degree in philosophy and a passion for pedagogy. A recent trans-plant to southeast Michigan, they are currently melting into the arms of the LGBTQ+ community and Ypsilanti.

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June 7 & 8, 2025

Hart Plaza, Detroit

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#MOTORCITYPRIDE

Pride Stage

Sponsored by



Saturday, June 7, 2025

Time	Act
<i>Hosted by Sabin</i>	
1:15 PM	Elspeth Tremblay & The Treatment
2:00 PM	PONY
3:00 PM	Sabin's Motor City Drag
4:00 PM	Bentley Robles
5:00 PM	Jenna DeVris
6:00 PM	Candi Carpenter
7:00 PM	Sabin's Motor City Drag
8:00 PM	DJ Griffin Maxwell Brook

Sunday, June 8, 2025

<i>Hosted by Jai Rodriguez</i>	
1:00 PM	PRISM Choir
2:00 PM	Cole Redding
3:00 PM	RuPaul's Jackie Cox, RuPaul's Jan Sport, and Sabin
4:00 PM	Madison Rose
5:00 PM	Zee Machine
6:00 PM	Sing Out

Pyramid Stage

Saturday, June 7, 2025

Time	Act
1:00 PM	Low Phase
2:00 PM	Prince Devv
3:00 PM	deadbeatdad
4:00 PM	Matty P.
5:00 PM	Fremont Pike
6:00 PM	Kenny Nelson
7:00 PM	Mia Simone

Sunday, June 8, 2025

1:00 PM	Strut Honey Fashion Show
2:30 PM	Astromann
4:00 PM	Crystal Harding Drag Review

Schedules are subject to change. Check the website

2025 SPONSORS



Riverfront Dance Stage

Saturday, June 7, 2025

Time	Act
12:00 PM	Darryl G B2B Al Ester
1:00 PM	TYLR_
2:30 PM	RAEDY LEX
3:00 PM	KASS
4:30 PM	Stacey Hotwaxx Hale

Sunday, June 8, 2025

12:00 PM	Brooke Steele
1:00 PM	DJ RONS
2:00 PM	amino
3:00 PM	HYPEMELO B2B Margaret
4:15 PM	Luca Miel B2B UR_IN
5:30 PM	Ashton Swinton B2B Loren



SATURDAY
WELCOME
GATES OPEN
AT 1 P.M.

FESTIVAL EVENTS 1 - 9 p.m.

**Three Stages of Entertainment
Featuring over 50 Acts!**

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& Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+
people coming together for Equality!

- 1 - 5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games
Sponsored by Kroger
- 8 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes
(No Admittance or Re-Entry after 8pm)
- 9 P.M. Festival Closes

#MOTORCITYPRIDE \$5 for everyone over 12 years of age
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SUNDAY
WELCOME
GATES OPEN
AT 12:30 P.M.

FESTIVAL EVENTS 12:30 - 7 p.m.

**Three Stages of Entertainment
Featuring over 50 Acts!**

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

- NOON Motor City Pride Parade
Sponsored by Jeep
- 1-5 P.M. Family Area with youth activities and games
Sponsored by Kroger
- 6 P.M. Festival Entrance Closes
(No Admittance or Re-Entry after 6pm)
- 7 P.M. Festival Closes

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PARADE

Sunday, June 8

Starts at Noon

Presented by

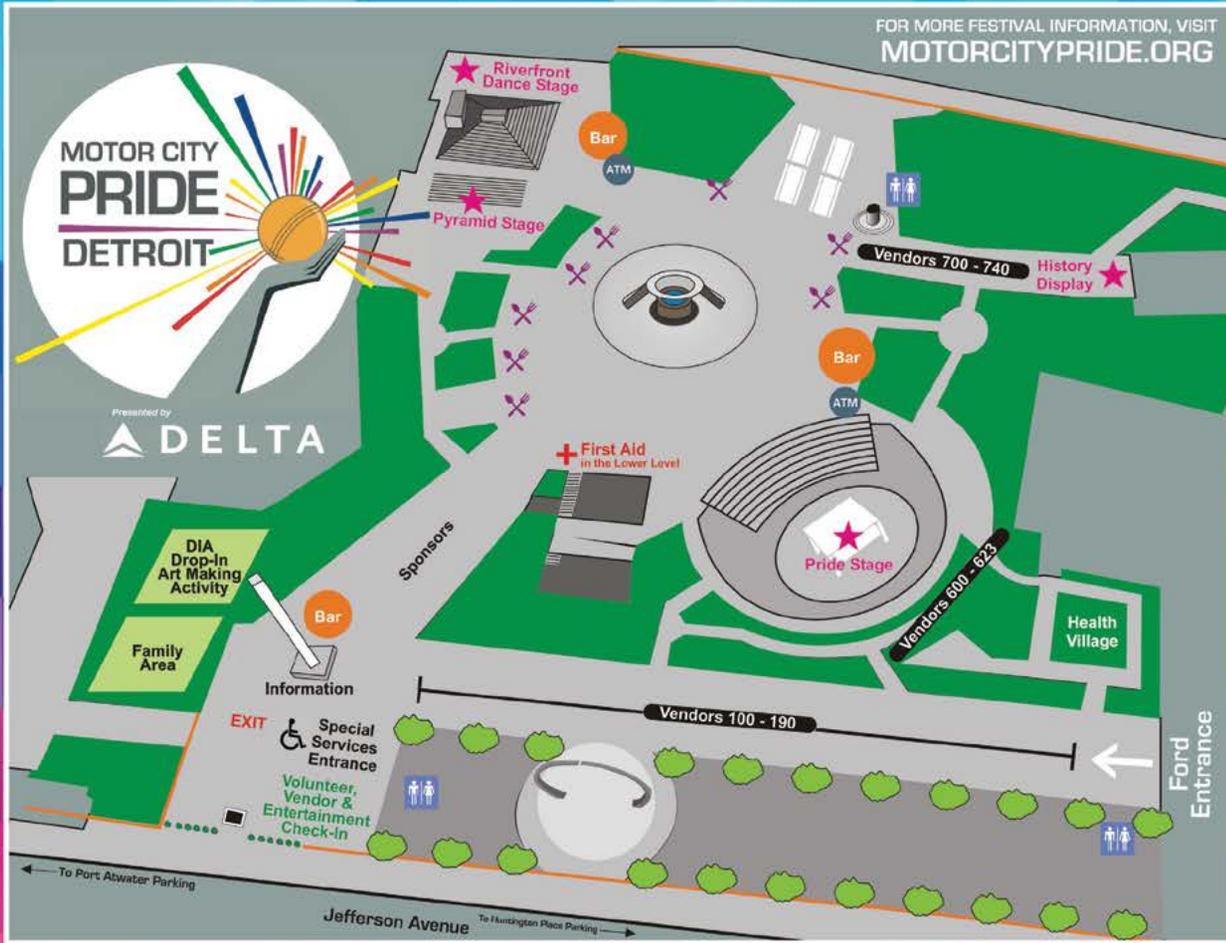


motorcitypride.org



Starts at the corner of Fort and Griswold

www.motorcitypride.org for any last minute updates.



Pride Stage

Saturday, June 7, 2025 • 4 p.m.

Candi Carpenter



Sunday, June 8, 2025

MC: Jai Rodriguez



Family Activities

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Saturday

JUNE 7TH
1:00-5:00 P.M.

Sunday

JUNE 8TH
1:00-5:00 P.M.



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

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◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 21

NW, Grand Rapids)
grPrideorg/pride-festival

Grand Rapids Pride Festival is back for its 37th year — which means it's officially older than most TikTok influencers and just as fabulous. Join the party, as West Michigan comes out (again!) to celebrate radical joy, community and the beautiful messiness of queer interconnectedness. GR Pride packs Calder Plaza with over 150 vendors, food trucks galore, a beer garden with NA options (because hydration is sexy), all-ages activities, a sensory space and performers TBA.

Livonia Pride

Schoolcraft College (18600 Haggerty Road, Livonia), 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

livoniapride.org

Livonia Pride is back and ready to party in a brand-new spot — Schoolcraft College! While the entertainment lineup is still under wraps (ooh, mysterious!), you can still show this big-hearted little Pride some love. Add them as your charitable contribution partner on the Kroger app and let your grocery runs turn into tiny acts of queer joy.

Michiana PrideFest (Niles)

Riverfront Park, Niles, 4-8 p.m.
outcenter.org/pridefest

This is the third installment of the Michiana PrideFest, part of the three-event PrideFest On Tour series. And we bet you'll have three times the fun as anything the straight folks at your job will be doing that same weekend! More details to come about this fabulous event on the banks of St. Joseph River at, well, Riverfront Park.

Three Rivers (Downriver Pride)

Downtown Three Rivers (103 Portage Ave.), 12-11 p.m.

www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61568270740208

Wyandotte (Downriver Pride) (through June 22)

Downtown Wyandotte, 12.-11 p.m.



Motor City Pride, 2018. Photo: Andrew Potter

downriverpride.com

Downriver Pride has already released a tentative list of 2025 Pride vendors, and it looks like they'll have our mouths watering and our fanny packs open, reaching for our collective rainbow wallets! Roasted nuts? Tattoos? Candles? Spa treatments? They're all queering it up. Entertainment listings to come.

SUNDAY, JUNE 22

Berkley Pride Block Party

Downtown Berkley, 1-5 p.m.

www.instagram.com/berkeleypride

Berkley Pride returns for the fourth year, hosting another block party with activities for all ages; a kids' tent (crafts, facepainting, maybe occasional adorable mayhem), a teen lounge and DJ Laura from L Sharp Productions. Plus, you can secure your very own Berkley Pride T-shirt so you can wear your heart (and your city) on your sleeve!

Plymouth Pride

Old Village Neighborhood, 2-6 p.m.

oldvillageplymouth.com/pride

Liberty Street in Plymouth will be closed for the second annual Pride event and converted into a fabulous, fun space for all. Check out the vendors, resource tables and, of course, an amazing

pride stage with a DJ and drag performers all afternoon!

THURSDAY, JUNE 26

Canton Pride OUTside

Heritage Park (1150 S. Canton Center), 6:30-8:30 p.m.

cantonmi.gov/calendar

SATURDAY, JUNE 28

Holland Pride

Centennial Park (250 Central Ave.), 1-6 p.m.

outonthelakeshore.org/holland-pride

Out On The Lakeshore seems tickled pink (tickled rainbow?) to be bringing back Holland Pride to Centennial Park. You can spend the afternoon soaking up fabulous entertainment, tasty bites from food trucks, awesome merch, helpful resources and fun for every age — from toddlers to chosen aunts.

Lansing Pride

Old Town (216 E. Cesar E. Chavez Ave.), 1-10 p.m.

Lansingpride.org

Get ready to turn up on Turner Street — Lansing Pride 2025 is coming in hot! It's a full day of queer joy, local love and rainbow-fueled fun. You won't want to miss the all-day entertainment including the People's Party Princess Singer, Adore Delano,

of "American Idol," "Drag Race," TikTok and all the other fames.

Monroe County Pride

St Mary's Park (111 W. Elm Ave., Monroe), 1-7 pm.

monroecountypride.org

Monroe County Pride is bringing together local drag, resources, food trucks, an art market and every single one of your exes — all together under the banner Love Is Everything.

Owosso Pride

Curwood Castle Park (224 Curwood Castle Drive, Owosso), 1-5 p.m.

facebook.com/OwossoPride

Owosso Pride Festival 2025 is gearing up — and while the entertainment lineup is still under wraps you can certainly still sign up to be a volunteer. Wrangling folding tables in a glitter strewn park will undoubtedly build queer character and it's a great way to meet Mx Right (or Mx Right Now, if that's more your style).

Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival (Saginaw)

Jolt Credit Union Event Park (300 Johnson St, Saginaw), 11 a.m.- 7 p.m.

greatlakesbaypride.org

The Great Lakes Bay Pride Festival is not a newcomer to the Pride

scene, but they are at a brand new location this year with more room, more sparkle and more ways to keep everyone safe and smiling. This free, family-friendly outdoor fest brings together LGBTQ+ folks, allies, chosen family and supportive humans from all over the region. You'll find retail vendors, community resources, live entertainment, health screenings and a full-on kids' activity zone (because little queers and future allies deserve fun too). And don't forget the afterparty at the Dow Center, the largest drag event in the region!

South Haven Pride

Stanley Johnston Park (202 Dyckman Ave.), 12-10 p.m.

www.facebook.com/southhavenmichiganpride

South Haven Pride is now in its sophomore Pride, and they're primed to outdo their first year's spectacularity! Expect vendors, entertainment, live DJ and dancing and — of course — cornhole. Because queers love a lawn game!

Twin Cities PrideFest (St. Joseph)

Shadowland Pavilion (101 Broad St., Silver Beach County Park), 4-8 p.m.

outcenter.org/pridefest

Now in its fabulous fourth year, Twin Cities PrideFest is the seasoned trailblazer of the PrideFest On Tour crew — the granddaddy, grandslappy or maybe just the glamparent of the bunch? Whatever you call it, this joyful beachside bash at Silver Beach County Park is bringing the sunshine, the sparkle and the queer cheer. Come for the vibes, stay for the beautiful water views!

JUNE 29

DeWitt Pride in the Park

Riverside Park (405 S Bridge St., DeWitt), 12-3 p.m.

midewittpride.org

The second annual DeWitt Pride in the Park promises more of the same family-friendly fun that brought the community together in 2024, including games, activities, snacks and more. Sign up to volunteer or support DeWitt Pride

See **Pride Calendar**, page 38

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◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 36

with a donation at midewittpride.org.

Pride Big Rapids

Downtown Big Rapids, 12-8 p.m.

pridebigrapids.org

Big Rapids Pride wants us to “Turn Up the Pride: Love Louder” and they’re going to give us just the opportunity to practice with a queer joy, community cheer and maybe a little dancing like no one’s watching (but they totally are and they love your moves). Be prepared for 70+ vendors ready to delight, dazzle and maybe tempt you into buying another pronoun pin, family and kids’ activities to keep little hands busy and little hearts full, a quiet area to recharge and live entertainment that’ll have you clapping, cheering and possibly shedding some tears (the good kind).

Bluewater Pridefest (Port Huron)

Downtown Port Huron (McMorran Plaza) 1-7 p.m.

bluewaterallies.com/team-1

Bluewater Pridefest takes over downtown Port Huron for this family-friendly event that

will include a special kids’ zone (rumors of a cute clown abound), entertainment, amazing food and big queer smiles!

Buchanan Pride On The Common

The Common (122 Days Ave., Buchanan), 1-8 p.m.

buchananpride.com

Buchanan Pride on The Common has a little something for everyone and a full day of joy starting with a vibrant vendor market, lively samba performances and dance lessons from Cultural Arts Everywhere. Plus, DJ Chuck Fry will be spinning tunes before and after a high-powered set from the UltraFab Band.

Farmington Pride In The Park

Shiawassee Park (32340 Shiawassee St., Farmington), 2-5 p.m.

It’s Farmington’s very first Pride event and they’ll have vendors and activities for everyone from age 5 to 105!

JULY

JULY 12

South Lyon Pride

McHattie Park (300 Dorothy St.), 12-4 p.m.

facebook.com/SouthLyonPride

The 5th annual South Lyon Pride is once again gracing McHattie Park with a glitter-infused presence.

Information about entertainment coming soon!

JULY 18

Battle Creek Pride (through July 20)

Parade kick-off: Michigan Ave. at Washington St., July 18, 7 p.m.

Festival: Leila Aboretum (928 W. Michigan Ave.), July 19, 12-8 p.m.

Candlelight Vigil: Battle Creek Pride Resource Center (104 Calhoun St, Battle Creek), July 20th, 8 p.m.

battlecreekpride.org

Battle Creek Pride makes a weekend of it! The festivities kick off Friday with an evening parade — promptly at 7 p.m., so save your emotional ex-texts for later and snag a good view of that softball league float you’ve been waiting for all year. Saturday brings the main event: drag, music, dancing and a plethora of vendors. And on Sunday, the celebration slows down with a candlelight vigil, honoring lives lost to violence and the brave folks who made the weekend’s joy possible.

JULY 19

Flint Pride

Saturday, July 19, downtown Flint (multiple venues), 2-8 p.m.



Holland Pride, 2022. Courtesy photo

facebook.com/flintgaypride

Flint Pride is turning 15 — just old enough to be full of feelings and fabulousness! The usual venue, Riverbank Park may be getting a glow-up, but Flint Pride isn’t missing a beat. Instead, Pride takes over multiple downtown venues, with music,

See **Pride Calendar**, page 40

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SATURDAY JULY 26

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NEW!
ONE DAY SCHEDULE!
1PM - 11PM



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◀ Pride Calendar

Continued from page 38

performances, food vendors and vibrant community energy. Think of it as a little Pride adventure — same sparkle, new stomping grounds.

JULY 22-26

Hotter Than July (Detroit)

Detroit (multiple venues and dates)

2025 marks the 30th anniversary of LGBT Detroit's annual summer Pride event, Hotter Than July. Michigan's longest-running Black LGBTQ+ Pride event, the celebration features several key events:

Tuesday, July 22 — Candlelight vigil, Palmer Park

Wednesday, July 23 — Reception — Detroit Historical Museum, mixer

Thursday, July 24 — Film festival

Friday, July 25 — Annual gathering for LGBTQ+ issues; mayoral candidate forum; official opening party, Pandora's Boxx

Saturday, July 26 — Palmer Park picnic

Sunday, July 27 — Worship service at One Church Detroit; Sunday brunch with Billionaires Boys Club

hotterthanjuly.org

JULY 26

Royal Oak Pride

Downtown Royal Oak, 1-11 p.m.

prideroyaloak.com

AUGUST

AUG. 1

Downtown Ann Arbor, Schedule TBA

annarborpride.com

AUG. 16

Jackson Pride

Horace Blackman Park (W. Michigan Ave. and S. Jackson St.), 2-9 p.m.

mijacksonPrideorg/events

Jackson Pride is gearing up for a day of fun, flavor and fierce celebration under the banner "Equality Now! No Turning Back!" With food trucks, live music and dancing and the iconic Walk of Pride.

Macomb County Pride Festival

Main Street between Macomb Place and Market Street, Mount Clemens, 12-6 p.m.

macombcountypride.com

Last year's Macomb County Pride Festival was attended by more than 5,000 happy



PrideFest, 2010. Photo: Andrew Potter

folks; this year, the festival returns with entertainment, resources, a family-friendly Youth Zone and additional youth-focused entertainment. Plus, it's all pet-friendly so pack up your portable water dish, Stonewall the Dog and Ferret Faucet (that's your pet ferret, but with a drag name) and spend your Saturday afternoon basking in the brilliance and warmth of LGBTQ+ community!

AUG. 23

Transgender Pride in the Park

Martin Road Park (1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale), 12-6 p.m.

Transgender Michigan's annual event features a BYO picnic, entertainment, speakers and more. This year, the organization will mark the 54th anniversary of the Compton Cafeteria Riots, when trans women in San Francisco's Tenderloin district fought back against police harassment in August 1966 (before Stonewall), sparking transgender activism in the city and nationwide.

transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 11

Straits Pride (Mackinac Island)

Mackinac Island, Details TBA

straitspride.org



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lansingpride.org

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◀ Pride Road Trip

Continued from page 26

yourself with the locals — houses impressive museums and gardens. Potter Park Zoo and the impressive Michigan History Center offer family-friendly diversions.

LGBTQ-friendly spots

Lansing's LGBTQ+ scene centers around Old Town and East Lansing. Strange Matter Coffee serves up excellent brews with progressive politics. The Avenue Café hosts regular queer nights. Spiral Dance Bar remains a longtime community hub. And between East Lansing's college crowd and Lansing's state workers, you'll find plenty of queer-friendly businesses proudly displaying rainbow flags.

Why small-town Prides matter

In times of political hostility toward LGBTQ+ communities, there's something profoundly powerful about visibility in unexpected places. While corporate Pride festivals serve their purpose, these smaller celebrations speak to the original protest spirit that launched Pride in the first place. They remind us that LGBTQ+ people exist and thrive in every corner of our state — not just in urban gayborhoods.



Lansing Pride 2024. Photo: Facebook/@LansingPride

Without massive budgets or corporate sponsorships, these festivals rely on the same community spirit that fueled early Gay Liberation demonstrations — volunteer power, mutual aid and the simple joy of being together in connection with LGBTQ+ Michiganders outside our bubble, a reminder that our community extends far and wide. In today's climate, these connections matter more than ever.

So gas up the car, pack your Pride gear and hit the road. The journey itself — windows down, favorite music playing, stress of daily life fading with each mile — is as much a part of the experience as the Pride celebrations waiting at your destination.

After all, sometimes the most political act is simply finding joy in being exactly who you are, wherever you go.

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Sapphic Cinema
Puzzle can be found on page 57



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From McCarthy to MAGA: How Today's Right-Wing Crusade Is Repeating History

Drawing parallels between mid-century America and today's political climate

BY SAM SCHWINDT

The so-called “unmentionables” always return, courtesy of a sinister conservative movement.

Three-quarters of a century after the Red Scare and the coinciding Lavender Scare, the Trump administration orchestrates its own troops to suffocate political discourse and, specifically, LGBTQ+ rights in government and beyond. Is history already repeating? Look no further than the current re-vamp of morality power in Washington, from Trump's numerous executive orders aimed squarely at LGBTQ+ community members (today's “unmentionables”) to moves like U.S. Director of Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard firing 100 intel officers for LGBTQ+ chat groups at the NSA and Michigan Republicans urging the Supreme Court to ban gay marriage. LGBTQ+ federal workers are speaking out — but remain fearful of repercussions if they share their names.

The Red Scare was a concerted effort to expunge Communists and political dissenters from government (and society) in the '50s through the '70s. The Lavender Scare coincided, targeting LGB people under the guise of political fear. Officials feared — or claimed to fear — miscreant minds might sabotage U.S. strength. The movement quickly grew into a systemic expulsion of gay and lesbian people from government ranks.

A Michigan congressman used the word “unmentionables” in spring 1950 when a fascination with “sexual perverts” surged in government offices. According to author David K. Johnson's 2004 book “The Lavender Scare,” a fellow congressman followed with, “Oh, you mean the people that Dr. Miller has talked about so much on the [House of Representatives] floor?” These slithery constrictions reify a sentiment of controlling, managing and excommunicating

supposed moral threats. Some, though, dissented. A critical reporter at the time called it “one of the maddest spectacles in the history of representative government.” In “Secret City: The Hidden History of Gay Washington,” James Kirchick writes that while the Red Scare bred fear of thy neighbor, “the homosexual remained a terrifying mystery.” The Senate Appropriations Committee wrote in grotesque concern to Gen. George C. Marshall, “[There is] extensive employment in highly classified positions of admitted homosexuals, who are historically known to be security risks.”

That was the view on homosexuals at the time, it seems: They were a mystery, Others, people whose characters were morally corrupt, illegal and, at the end of the day, threats to national security. Those in charge set about naming and removing homosexuals from the federal workforce — and then, unnamng and expunging career workers dedicated to their jobs.

Johnson references astronomer Frank Kameny, who sought to support the U.S. Space Race but was shed from the Army and questioned about his “most recent sexual encounter.” He had, apparently, lied on a federal application and was accused of falsifying it. “It was no accident the first federal employee fired for homosexuality was a scientist,” Johnson wrote. In fighting to be reinstated, he founded the D.C. chapter of the Mattachine Society, a pre-Stonewall gay rights group with localized, individualized organizing.

The Midwest, including Michigan, weren't spared the Lavender Scare. Michigan U.S. Sen. Homer Ferguson (1943–1955) and U.S. Congresswoman Clare B. Hoffman (1935–1966) led morality investigations in the State Department and beyond, aligned with U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy (1947–1957).



Protest at the White House during the Lavender Scare. Photo: PBS, “The Lavender Scare” documentary



Photo of two men in the 1950s. Photo: PBS, "The Lavender Scare" documentary

In Michigan Public Library archives, Mount Pleasant's Daily Times News reflected on an article by Robert C. Ruark on March 24, 1950, detailing a voyage to Africa. Ruark had described meeting State Department officials, including "a drunk, a homosexual and a flagrant fool," questioning their fitness to represent the U.S. abroad. LGB individuals, he implied, couldn't be trusted in government. These were early signs.

Even local, supposedly "safe" stomping grounds felt the suction of the Lavender Scare. Michigan State University's Tim Retzliff, a professor in the Department of History and the Center for Gender in Global Context, wrote in an email that even Mattachine members in Detroit "were so fearful of being found out and losing their jobs, they used pseudonyms." Their numbers never grew beyond a dozen, and gatherings remained small.

Now, to today.

In March, the AP reported researchers in California were told to omit data on sexual orientation from a scientific paper already accepted for publication. Rather than comply, they withdrew the research from Public Health Reports — focused on smoking among young adults — and plan to publish elsewhere to avoid political interference. Scientists are speaking out, and so are LGBTQ+ federal employees — but often under conditions of anonymity. The Independent interviewed a nonbinary U.S. Postal Service worker who only allowed use of their first name, fearing retaliation.

Trafficking in further dramatics, Trump as a candidate promised to end "transgender insanity," and The New York Times reported a list of banned government words: "bias," "LGBTQ," "nonbinary," to name a few. Mother Jones focused not only on trans

individuals' fears of expulsion but on Trump's broader push to erase LGBTQ+ workplace protections. Notably, all eight federal employees interviewed for that story remained unnamed in an effort to protect themselves and their coworkers from retaliation.

While the fear is palpable and inflamed moral exaggerations are rising, it's essential to recognize that many view these efforts as a circus. Recall the "maddest spectacle" quote. There's a conservative obsession with identifying those in government, exposing them and then removing them from record. It's that named-but-nameless paradox, the radical sleight of Republican politics that creates the showbiz of erasure.

This fuzziness runs through Lavender Scare research — and queer history more broadly.

In a follow-up Zoom and email exchange, Retzliff and I discussed the difficulty of accessing identifying info and the risks of public queer research. Workplace exposure then (and re-emerging again) often meant the loss of livelihood, abandonment and threats of imprisonment or psychiatric commitment. The paradox of being unmentionable yet a looming threat is the touchstone: named to be excommunicated, then erased.

But, as Retzliff noted, "Times also changed and people's wish to remain 'closeted' eased as visibility and the importance of sharing the reality of our lives... became strong values in LGBTQ+ movements and communities."

Self-protection, yes — but naming the issue, staying grounded in queer undercurrents of unity, is key. Remaining nameless can sometimes be our greatest strength.

He's So *Lucky*, He's a *Star*

Inside 'Overcompensating,' the show Benito Skinner made for the closeted kids who worshipped Britney and survived bro culture



Benito Skinner. Courtesy photo

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

There's a Mariah Carey canvas in my hands and Benito Skinner on Zoom, and somehow, this feels exactly right. My teenage self — the one who lip-synced "Fantasy" in a locked bedroom — would totally get it. And Skinner, who knows firsthand the life-saving power of a pop girlie, greets the moment with the enthusiasm it deserves when I hold up the massive artwork in front of the camera.

After all, his new Prime Video show "Overcompensating" — which he created, produced and stars in — opens with a young Benny watching Britney Spears' "Lucky" video with a group of boys who don't get it. For Benny, though, "Lucky" is an emotional lifeline — one that helps him survive the toxic pull of college bro culture. Honestly, the specificity hits almost too close to home for me.

Skinner — best known for his sharp, satirical characters on Instagram and TikTok — makes

his biggest leap yet with "Overcompensating," a tender, chaotic and deeply funny series that explores what happens when you bury your queerness under a mountain of Axe body spray and forced masc energy. The jokes are biting but what lingers most is the emotional honesty. And yes, I did cry.

During our chat, we talked about going back in time to confront your closeted self, masculinity as performance and which of his internet personas would absolutely terrorize a liberal arts campus if given the chance. (Spoiler: Hailee's already there.) And before we said goodbye, Skinner brought it all back to where we started — with the elusive chanteuse herself.

"My love to Mariah Carey," he said. "E=MC²" was huge for me... Randomly, 'Migrate.' People don't talk about 'Migrate' enough."

"From the bar to the club, we migrate," he added, quoting the song like a benediction.

Clearly I identified with little Benny

right off the bat. How did it feel revisiting that part of yourself, those early formative obsessions as an adult with the freedom to fully own them now?

That's exactly it. It was so much fun because I could own them and now laugh at them, and I think that's how the cast felt. It's like we all had enough distance from this time that nothing felt too terrifying, and if it did, it was over quickly. For me, it felt like I finally had so much power over it, whether that be my voice or my mannerisms, and being able to finally laugh at the sadness of it, and maybe obviously cringe.

But yeah, at first, it definitely felt strange being in the dorm room. I remember when I met with Daniel Longino, the director of the pilot. We talked about what the dorm room should look like, and I had this photo of my dorm room. And then in the end, we were just like, "We shouldn't pull from any references.

It should just be the dorm room," and he said that. He was like, "No, we're making that dorm room." And Shane Fox, our production designer, did. And so I stepped into it on the first day of shooting and I was like, "What the fuck have I done?"

But then it was like, boom, my brain could click in and I was like, "Let's make some people laugh and cry. Let's fucking go." I was like, "We're telling this story. This is helping me as an actor to get right back into it." So it was bizarre and I felt so grateful, and by the end, it felt very cathartic for me.

I didn't expect to cry during this show. So for me, too, as a viewer, it felt cathartic.

Yeah. I think what happens in the fifth episode was really hard for me. I definitely got back into some of those feelings of putting your love in someone that can't do anything with it, and it isn't about actually wanting to be with that person. It's just an addiction to masculinity and the safety that we all think it can bring because of all the things we've been taught for so long in the society we're in. Trying to forgive myself for not coming out sooner — that's something I've always made fun of myself for. It's like, who was I kidding? God, I've missed out on my life. I went abroad to London and wasn't out. It's like, what? Could you imagine?

You're not that old, Benito. You can still make up for lost time.

Yeah, I know. And I've made up quickly. How many wigs can one man put on? But I feel like I could forgive myself because I think it's understanding there's so many reasons. It's giving yourself the grace of that experience. We all have our reasons for not feeling safe in scenarios or not feeling like we can be ourselves, and that extends to everyone.

The show arrives at a particularly charged moment, both politically and in the ongoing conversation about hypermasculinity — especially with the current climate in the White House. How does it feel for you to tackle hypermasculinity in this era?

I think I never planned for that. I thought maybe this would happen a little faster, but I feel so fortunate that the show could give anyone a break from the clown parade for even



Benito Skinner with co-stars Wally Baram and Holmes in "Overcompensating." Photo: Prime Video

a minute, and to feel like there are people out there who are like you and rooting for you and protecting you and supporting you, and have experienced things that you're feeling. I feel so fortunate that the show got made and that it's coming out, and now.

And I just want two best friends to watch it in a bed on a laptop. Preferably a bigger laptop. I do think the show's pretty! That would mean the world. But to give people that little bit of a break and a little space, and to be able to laugh and cry with your friends and just feel like there is some fucking human decency that exists on Earth, which I think is really hard to remember currently.

I feel so lucky that this is the show that we got to make and that these are the actors in it, and I hope everyone sees themselves on screen and is able to just feel a nice moment and feel human empathy. And it's a very scary time, so I think being able to make comedy is such a privilege.

Comedy has long been a tool for survival and protest in the queer community. How do you see "Overcompensating" continuing that legacy?

Oh, I think by being as honest as possible through it. I feel lucky that everyone let me do some of these things in the show and that I could say, "I want to be in a harness on a couch with Matt [Rogers] and Bowen [Yang], and that's it." And everyone's like, "Fabulous." But allowing that, I feel so fortunate. It was just like, how true can we get? OK, I licked a condom, let's lick a condom. Let's go to what desire is for queer people. Let's show a girl who gets it wrong and is doing the best she can, but she Googled "gay" one time and this is what came up, so she's doing the best she can.

It happens.

Hey, it happens, and not that I don't love

"Drag Race" or "Brokeback Mountain," but OK, girl, there's more here that we could find. But yeah, I think it's having all of those conversations and not shying away from any of it, and opening a show on Amazon with a kid realizing he's sexually attracted to a man for the first time, not that he understands that in that moment, but opening with that and being allowed to open with that feels like a protest of sorts. Also the scenes that I got to write where it's just all these straight guys in a room, showing how uncomfortable those rooms feel and how it's one performance on top of another. But it also being disgusting and allowing for that, and poking at it and poking at how much of all of this is a performance, and masculinity is such a performance at its core.

If you could drop one of your TikTok characters into the "Overcompensating" universe, who would cause the most chaos?

Oh my God, I kind of did! So Hailee was one of my first characters. I had her as this girl who went abroad, and then I think she was the Gemini in my astrology. So I already dropped her in, and oh my God, she is the nucleus. She's a bat out of hell. I think that's the most fun almost Easter egg for anyone who's been with me since then, which would be crazy, but I feel like, yeah, getting to develop that character and then write her into a script and then now have an actor like Holmes take on that part and just fucking go absolutely bat shit with it, that's the dream. So it happened, but maybe Deliverance Richards if I had to. I think she's doing something on campus. I don't know what, but we'll figure it out. She's teaching a class, she's doing a TEDx talk or something. I don't even know. I don't know what my girl's doing.

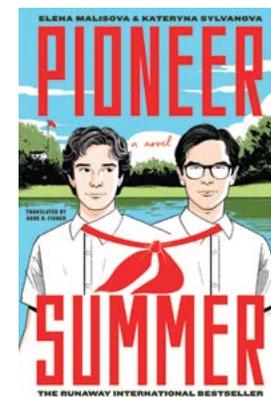
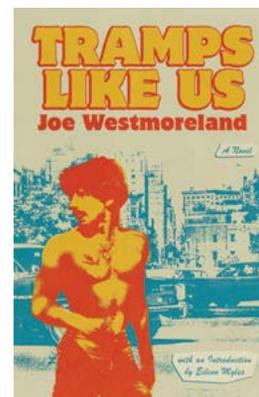
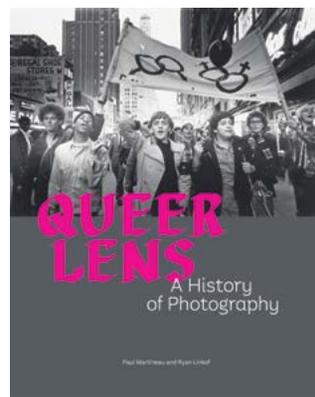
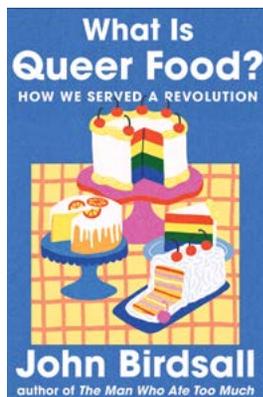
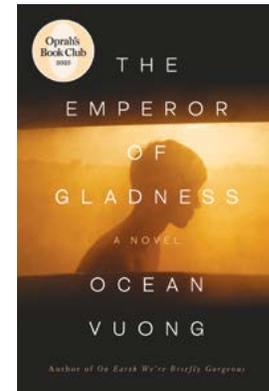
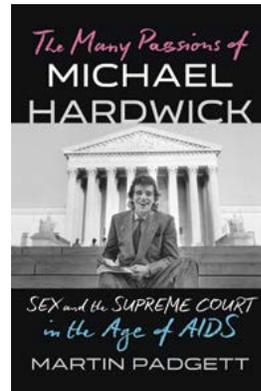
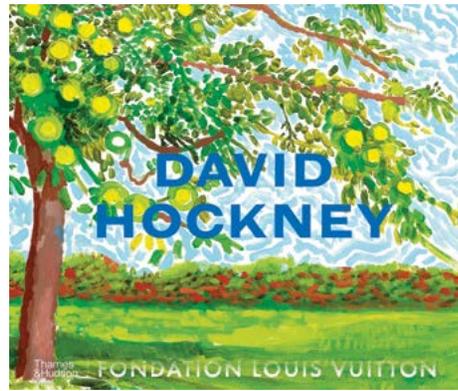
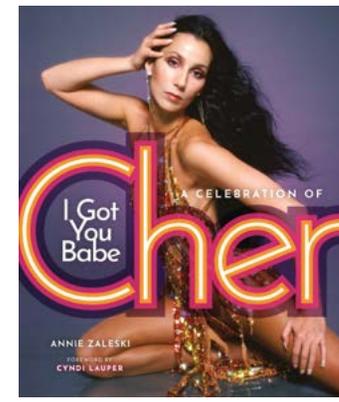
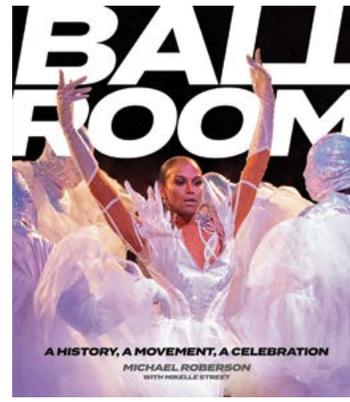
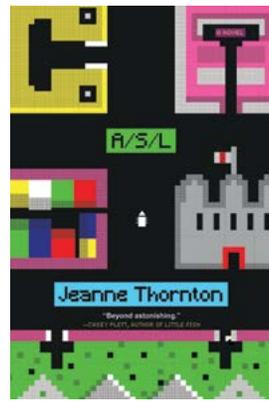
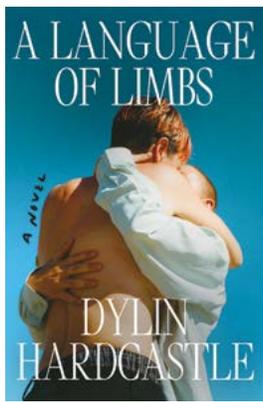
See **Benito Skinner**, page 54



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Voices of Pride

Essential LGBTQ+ Reads for June

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

As Pride Month unfolds, BTL celebrates the voices, stories and icons that illuminate the rich tapestry of queer experiences. This curated selection honors the resilience and complexity of LGBTQ+ lives through literature. From Ocean Vuong's poignant exploration of connection in "The Emperor of Gladness" to the vibrant legacy captured in "David Hockney" by Norman Rosenthal, these works offer

diverse narratives across the spectrum of queer life. Each book, whether delving into historical movements, speculative fiction or a fan-service book that celebrates Cher, has the power to not only entertain but also empower and inspire.

'The Emperor of Gladness,' Ocean Vuong

With "The Emperor of Gladness," Ocean Vuong returns

not just as a poet, but as a seer of queer emotion. In his latest work, we meet Hai, a 19-year-old depressed Vietnamese American on the brink of ending his life. Before he does, he hears a voice belonging to an older woman with dementia, named Grazina. The two bond instantly, marking the beginning of what queer readers will recognize as the foundation of a chosen family — one formed by shared ache and unexpected grace. Halfway in, the book had already wrecked me in the best

way — equal parts laughter and heartbreak. A brilliant flash of dry wit from Grazina — a thoughtful spitfire — lands when she tells Hai, an aspiring writer: "You wanna be a writer *and* you want to jump off a bridge? That's pretty much the same thing, no?" What's remarkable here isn't just Vuong's mastery of language — it's the way he uses it to build a kind of sanctuary. Reading this feels less like consuming literature and more like being held.

'David Hockney,' Norman Rosenthal

The most comprehensive book on David Hockney — a trailblazer of the white gay male experience in 1970s Los Angeles — arrives just in time for Pride Month. For nearly seven decades, the legendary British artist has invited us into his vibrant world, depicting desire, identity and freedom through his

See **Pride Books**, page 52

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8/6 - BIG TIME RUSH

MICHIGAN LOTTERY AMPHITHEATRE

8/26 INDIGO GIRLS & MELISSA ETHERIDGE

SAINT ANDREW'S HALL

6/23 - BETTY WHO
7/20 - JOJO SIWA
8/26 - BOULET BROTHERS' DRAGULA
10/21 - SASHA COLBY

MICHIGAN THEATER

6/13 RANDY RAINBOW

LIVE NATION
MICHIGAN

◀ Laura Jane Grace

Continued from page 18

I think that's accurate. What's been interesting to me is that those songs that I've had kind of kicking around for a while — like the song "New Year's Day" (*The hardest part of getting sober/Is pouring yourself out of the bottle*) and the song "Active Trauma" (*Gonna wake up tomorrow morning/And burn this house to the fucking ground/Only when it's ashes will the fire go out*) — those were two of the songs I went over to Greece with. So, it was really about finding the time and place for the right magic. With whatever is happening in the world now, it's crazy how much they've lined up and how relevant they are.

Where are you at with your sobriety journey right now? I know personally that it can be a long, winding road.

Understatement of the century, right? I haven't had a drink since August 31 of 2018.

When I was younger, I drank to disassociate from my body in an effort to kill the "me" I couldn't really access — my transness. Do you have any sort of relationship to dysphoria that came into clarity when you got sober?

I think I already realized all that from a really young age, the way that substance has affected my dysphoria. Alcohol would numb it and make me forget about it in ways, which was appealing. But some other things would enhance it in good ways, if that makes sense. Cocaine would just completely annihilate it, but smoking weed would kind of calm it in a way that made it not as panicky or frantic.

So, from a young age that was what drew me to drugs, almost. I was experimenting with the way that substances would make my dysphoria feel, and that kind of spirals. I think touring is what kind of made it all a problem in a lot of ways. When you tour months end, you can just be drunk that whole time and it's not abnormal in the scene. It was kind of a necessary thing to stop.

In your book "Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist

Sellout," there's this part discussing your transition where you muse, "Will I ever pass? I don't really care anymore." That struggle between internal change and outward change — how did you work through that?

I had some eye-opening realizations within the last couple years. Specifically, I had FFS [facial feminization surgery] in 2018, which is part of what would help me kick drinking. I stopped drinking three months before I went in for surgery, but after FFS I realized I can't see myself right. I would see my face after FFS and not really notice a change at all, but then I would see pictures from months prior and realize, "Oh wait. I do look really feminine there." I see the change now but in the immediate of looking in the mirror, that's dysphoria. I can't see myself and it's like body dysmorphia; whatever someone else sees of me, the way I look, that is not what I see. And that was really driven home by having FFS, then realizing I can't even see my face is obviously changed. Like, it's not apparent to me.

I know hormone use was a thing that you struggled with. For transitioning or living authentically, do you think hormones need to be part of that equation?

It's something that I've thought about an abnormal amount and something that I still think about. There are so many angles to it. On the one hand, I recognize the good that hormones have done for me, not just physical changes but mental changes and emotional changes from them. Then there's the part of me that is a realist where I look at what's happening in the world now and I'm just as fearful as every other trans person. What happens if they take away those hormones from everybody? I don't want to be in a position mentally where my whole identity hinges on that, so I have to make sure that I'm solid.

As you transition, there's a shift in identity — or shift to identity. Have you found anything that stayed constant in you or anything that surprised you?



Laura Jane Grace In The Trauma Tropes. Photo: Vanessa Söllner

Yeah, I guess music has been that, right? I don't think that I'm a musician or that I like doing what I do because I was a closeted trans kid who had no other outlet and that just worked. I'd like to think that even if I weren't trans, this is still exactly what I'd be doing just because I really love it. So that's been affirming to really feel that, for sure.

After leaving Against Me!, how did your trans identity change?

Growing as an artist and then coming into my identity were working in tandem with each other. I realized I can't grow as a songwriter or as an artist if I'm not actually being honest with myself or being honest with everyone around me. Because there's a block there. There's something I'm not addressing, or there's something I'm not talking about, so it was less about physically appearing some different way on stage and more about just mentally accessing parts of myself that I compartmentalized or denied.

Anarchy has been a really big part of your life in philosophy and in action. How does that intersect with gender for you?

Part of what drew me to anarchy politics back in the day was the idea

of it being a safe space. Seeing punk-rock posters that would say "all people are welcome" regardless of gender-based sexuality and feeling like this is a place where maybe I could be myself. There were times where I felt like that scene was kind of just a recreation of high school or whatever other microcosm and I've been disappointed by it, but I feel like, at best, punk is supposed to be about those things. About creating space for everybody and welcoming everybody.

How are you processing the current times and a shift in the world as we knew it?

It's wild because trans people are such a focus — the scapegoat of why things are bad. So, on the one hand, it's almost empowering, where you're like, "Damn, trans people scare people shitless." We can literally unravel society just by being visible.

Part of transition for me was undergoing a real ego death. If you're trans female, you don't even realize the amount of privilege you have in the world until you abandon that. I think most average males don't realize that. This is kind of a joke, but I think it would be beneficial if every single cisgender male in the world was just pumped full of estrogen for a year of their life. To experience that kind of ego death, I feel like they would come out a better person on the other end.

I have a wild card question. I saw that you are friends with pro-wrestler CM Punk. What's the backstory?

It's fucking weird. Somehow Against Me! ended up having a lot of pro-wrestler fans. I have no clue how it happened, but from really early on there used to be these two wrestlers, Josh Prohibition and M-Dogg 20, who would come out to our shows when we were playing basements. We would be terrified because they were obviously these two huge big wrestling dudes, so we're like, "What the fuck are they doing here?" But then they were the nicest people ever.

CM Punk ended up being a fan and he would come to shows and we had a couple mutual friends and so we hung out with him. I've never watched wrestling. I just knew, "Oh this guy is a famous wrestler," but he could not be a nicer person. When I was working on getting sober and I was really unhealthy at the time, I reached out to him at one point and asked if he could recommend a personal trainer. I'm trying to get in shape, trying to get sober and stuff like that, and he just really bluntly was like, "No, fuck that. You don't need that if you're serious. You'll just do it." Ouch, that's fucking harsh. But he was 100% right and it was completely the motivation I needed, so I'm forever indebted to CM Punk.



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◀ Pride Books

Continued from page 48

unmistakably bold art. Coming out in the 1960s London when homosexuality was still illegal, Hockney's early "gay" graffiti-like paintings — crafted as a student at London's Royal College of Art — boldly captured men in showers, pools and intimate moments rarely seen in mainstream art.

Published by Thames & Hudson, alongside the Fondation Louis Vuitton's major 2025 David Hockney exhibition, this lavish, large-format volume offers a vivid survey of his life and work, from Bradford to California, and later Yorkshire and Normandy. Featuring contributions from top art historians and critics like Sir Norman Rosenthal and Sir Simon Schama, the book delves deep into Hockney's signature styles and themes — still lifes, portraits, landscapes and his fearless embrace of new tech, like the iPad. "His perspective reveals an entire world, his own, but one that immediately becomes ours too, shared among us all," writes Fondation Louis Vuitton owner Bernard Arnault. Compiled with Hockney's full involvement, this is arguably the definitive celebration of a gay icon whose creativity and queerness transformed the art world forever. Fittingly for our times, the book's back cover reminds us: "Do remember, they can't cancel the spring."

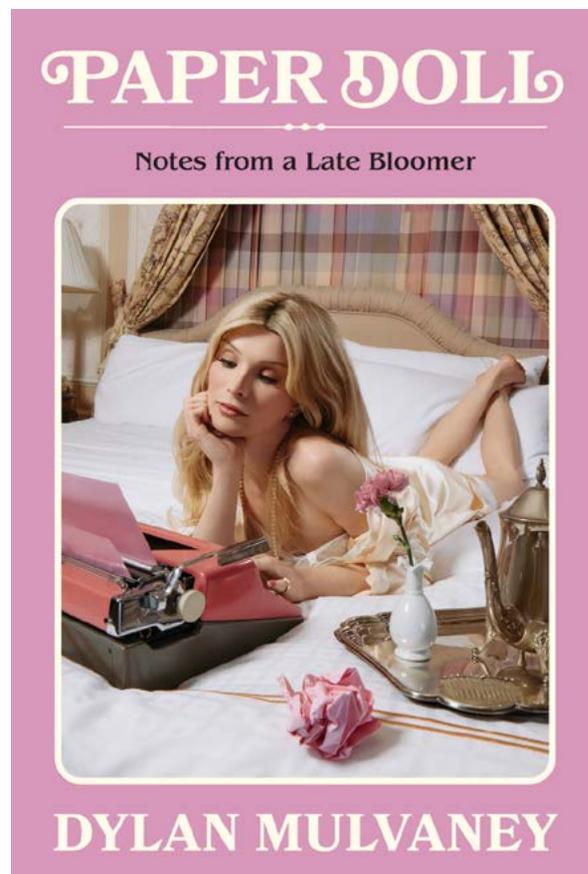
'What Is Queer Food? How We Served a Revolution,' John Birdsall

When you think of queer liberation, does delicious food come to mind? It might now, thanks to John Birdsall, whose James Beard Award-winning writing has helped redefine food journalism. In "What Is Queer Food?," Birdsall brings both scholarly depth and sensual appreciation to the table. The book opens with diaristic reflections on his pilgrimage to Lil Deb's Oasis — a queer tiki bar in upstate New York — in search of "shelter from history" and to "roll the taste of queer deliverance across my tongue." As Birdsall traces the long history of queer people creating magic around the table, what unfolds is a rich exploration of how cooking, serving and eating together have sustained LGBTQ+ communities through both feast and famine, in sync with our political gains and setbacks. The book profiles often-overlooked queer culinary pioneers — many of them women and people of color — while Birdsall's personal reflections on the search for belonging through the shared experience of

dining provide the perfect emotional seasoning.

'Paper Doll,' Dylan Mulvaney

Known to millions through her "Days of Girlhood" series, actress and social media



star Dylan Mulvaney's memoir trades viral soundbites for something even more personal — and, in this challenging political era for trans people, important. The book, endorsed by Glennon Doyle and Jonathan Van Ness, moves between stage lights and quiet, aching moments: her early days in musical theater, the messiness of navigating girlhood under a microscope, the joy (and sometimes pain) of being visible as a trans public figure under relentless right-wing scrutiny.

Honest in a way that resists turning survival into spectacle, "Paper Doll" isn't a guidebook or a grand statement about being transgender — it's more like a diary left open on the kitchen table. My copy arrived with a limited-edition bath bomb from Lush, created in partnership with Mulvaney to celebrate the release. Also inside: Lush's How to Be a Trans Ally Guide — a quietly radical inclusion in an era of DEI rollbacks and rising anti-trans discrimination.

'Ballroom: A History, A Movement, A Celebration,' Michael Roberson with Mikelle Street

Far more than a history lesson, this

See **Pride Books**, page 56



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◀ **Benito Skinner**
Continued from page 47

When you think about your younger closeted self watching this show, what's the scene or moment you hope he would hold onto?

I love the scene between Benny and Carmen in the fifth episode at the end: allowing yourself to really show yourself fully to someone. I also really love the scene between Benny and his mom, Kathryn, played by the living icon Connie Britton. I wrote that with Scott King and that was such an emotional scene because both of them trying to allow the other to say what needs to be said, but they're just both not quite ready to fully say it out loud. That is what I would love people to take [away], that you can take your time on any aspect of this journey in your life and allow people to surprise you at times. God, I feel like it's really hard to pick one because I think I made so much of it for... I made it for gay people, and I hope that they feel that and see it.

What was it about the scene with Connie as your mom that resonated with your younger self?

That scene was pretty easy to act in because I'm still reminding myself of that now. That is something that I feel all of us who aren't just

straight, white dudes feel, which is never being enough and that we have to do so much. And if we're not perfect, people won't love us or accept us, or we won't be allowed in spaces or given respect or we'll be in danger.

What queer creators or stories have shaped your sense of humor and your voice as a performer?

It's funny, I feel like I never sought any queer stories when I was a kid. I kept turning away. If anything started to feel like me, I would maybe look for a second then turn away. I remember Rupert Everett in "My Best Friend's Wedding" was one of the first times I was like, "I kind of act like that." And my family was all like, "He feels like Benny," and I'm like, "Shut the fuck up." But I remember when he's singing "Say a Little Prayer" at a brunch, I was like, "That's me." And that moment where he ends up with Julia Roberts feels so explosive to me, that a huge Hollywood movie, this mega star like Julia Roberts, she just ends up with her gay best friend. That's why that movie's perfect.

But I feel so lucky to be a comedian during this time because when I was coming up, even in New York, I felt so supported by



Benito Skinner with actor Rish Shah in "Overcompensating." Photo: Prime Video

Matt Rogers and Bowen Yang too, and that's why I loved having them in the show. They brought me on "Las Culturistas" when I had only been making videos for a bit, and they were so supportive and it felt like this kind of celebration of all of these queer voices that were entering the space. During that time, I was doing a lot of standup, so I got to see some of these people that now I'm seeing shine, and it's really so exciting.

Obviously, John Early and Kate Berlant. I think the "Paris" sketch will stand as one

of the great sketches of our time. And Cole Escola has always been a hero of mine. Seeing them get flowers and just own New York City, and I need them to win a Tony. I just think that "Oh, Mary!" is the most brilliant piece of work from the most genius, brilliant, kind, unbelievable person. So I feel fortunate that, honestly, all my heroes, I get to be around them and experience their work right now. As sad as it was that I didn't feel like I really had that as a kid, I feel lucky to be in a scene with my heroes in the show.

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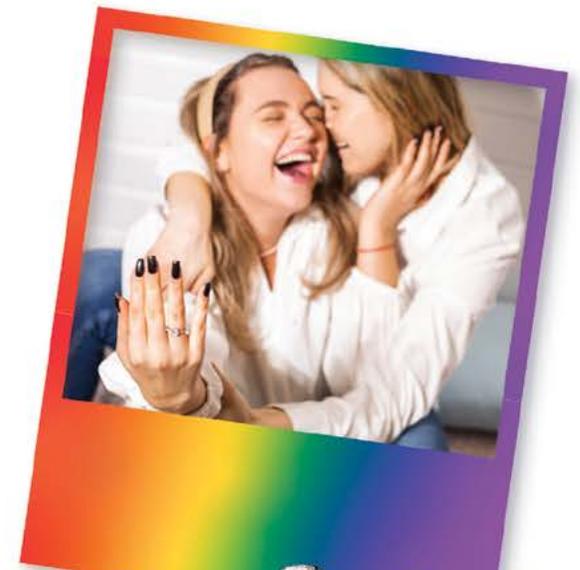
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◀ Pride Books

Continued from page 52

gorgeously illustrated volume pulses with the same electric energy you'd feel walking into a ball at 2 a.m. Through meticulous research, Roberson — a theologian and pioneering voice in the House and Ball community — traces ballroom's evolution beginning in the 1880s, from underground necessity to global phenomenon, all without losing sight of its revolutionary core: creating family where none existed and beauty where society denied it. An afterword by "Pose" star Dominique Jackson further deepens the narrative.

"Today, as the very fabric of our democracy is being tested, the legacy and importance of the Ballroom community matters even more," Roberson writes. That quote appears beside a photo of a memorial for O'Shae Sibley, a young Black man whose final moments included vogueing to a Beyoncé song at a Brooklyn gas station — where he was fatally stabbed in 2023 by a 17-year-old. The book doesn't shy away from the ongoing struggles — economic marginalization, HIV/AIDS, violence against trans women of color — that remain inextricably linked to ballroom's story. What elevates this work beyond documentation is Roberson's insistence that ballroom isn't just about fierce performances, but about the sacred space between oppression and liberation where queer and trans people of color have always found a way to not just survive, but thrive spectacularly.

'I Got You Babe: A Celebration of Cher,' Annie Zaleski

You won't find chapters titled "The Many Wigs of Cher" or "Barbie Who? The Cher Doll" in Cher's own memoir, but Annie Zaleski has us covered. Commissioned to write Cher's Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction essay, Zaleski brings the same reverence — and fabulous detail — to this fan-fueled tribute to our forever goddess.

Of course, the gays get their due. There's an entire chapter on "Burlesque" (justice!) and another on Cher as a drag icon, spotlighting that moment in 2018 when "RuPaul's Drag Race" honored her — though, as Zaleski notes, Cher was folding drag into her performances long before it was trending. "The Gay Icon" chapter almost says it all, but in case it doesn't, Zaleski includes a quote from Cher as told to me when I interviewed her in 2018: "I don't know how that happens. I mean, how does it happen? I have no idea! It's just like, we made a pact and we're a group and that's it."

'Tramps Like Us,' Joe Westmoreland

In this time capsule of queer life in 1980s New York, Joe Westmoreland delivers a blunt,

unvarnished narrative that's as authentic as it is devastating. "Tramps Like Us" captures a moment when finding your people often meant risking everything else — a worn snapshot of the downtown underground, where freedom and danger danced in equal measure.

Originally published in 2001 by a small press, the book vanished almost as quickly as it appeared. In 2023, Westmoreland mailed a beat-up copy to editor Jackson Howard, setting in motion its long-overdue return. After years of cult status, "Tramps" is finally back in print. Part memoir, part fever dream, this slice of autofiction follows a young gay man named Joe as he searches for meaning across 1970s and '80s America — from San Francisco to New Orleans to pre-AIDS New York. Along the way: sex, drugs, disco, drag queens and deep bonds forged amid a tumultuous era for queer life.

'Pioneer Summer,' Kateryna Sylvanova and Elena Malisova (Translator: Anne O. Fisher)

Maybe you've heard of "Pioneer Summer" thanks to TikTok, where it went viral — or because it was so popular it was banned by Putin's regime, catalyzing one of Russia's largest-ever crackdowns on LGBTQ+ representation. Originally published in 2021 and now available in English for the first time, this groundbreaking Ukrainian novel reimagines Soviet rural life through a defiantly queer lens.

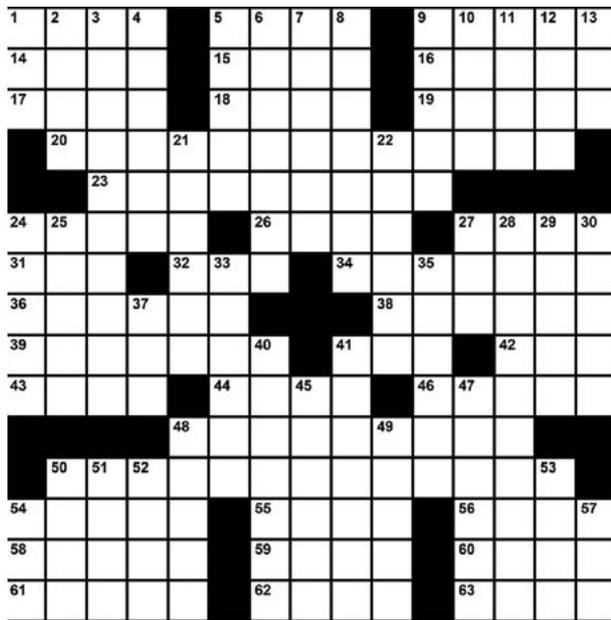
Set in a remote agricultural collective in 1980s Soviet Ukraine, the story follows 16-year-old Yurka, sent to a youth summer program. There, he meets Volodya, who is slightly older and entirely unlike anyone Yurka has known. What begins as a cautious friendship deepens into an unspoken but undeniable attraction, leading to quiet acts of rebellion in a world where queer desire is policed.

"Pioneer Summer" captures the ache of youth, identity and forbidden longing within an oppressive system. A rare historical novel that still feels tragically current.

'A/S/L,' Jeanne Thornton

Remember dial-up internet? The sacred ritual of waiting for parents to go to bed before logging onto AOL chat rooms where you could be anyone — or more importantly, yourself? Thornton's nostalgic yet razor-sharp novel captures that liminal moment in the late '90s when the internet offered queer and questioning youth unprecedented freedom to experiment with identity. Following three teenagers in different parts of the country whose lives intersect on the internet as they create a videogame together, "A/S/L" (that's "age/sex/location" for any Gen Z readers) captures both the liberation and

See **Pride Books**, page 60



Sapphic Cinema

Across

- 1 "Ed Wood" star Johnny
- 5 Baby bloomers
- 9 Tomato impact sound
- 14 On ___ with
- 15 Straddling
- 16 Mother-and-son piece
- 17 Robert De ___

- 18 Hayworth of Hollywood
- 19 Lennox or Leibowitz
- 20 She played the title role in "Carol"
- 23 Honor in Ruth Hunt's religion
- 24 Runner Nicholson
- 26 Abound
- 27 Gossip from Ted Casablanca, e.g.
- 31 Airport in Israel
- 32 "Chasing ___"
- 34 "To be or not to be," e.g.
- 36 With 38-Across. she played Queen Anne in "The Favourite"

- 38 See 36-Across
- 39 Mayor, in Kahlo's country
- 41 Carmen's that
- 42 "Yecch!"
- 43 HIV exam, e.g.
- 44 "All's Well That ___ Well"
- 46 Goes to the bottom
- 48 Watch or hourglass
- 50 She played Cherie Currie in "The Runaways"
- 54 Like rays caught at South Beach
- 55 ___ Fein
- 56 To be "lesbienne"
- 58 Blows away
- 59 Gin flavor
- 60 Like a Muscle Mary who does sit-ups
- 61 Leonardo DiCaprio title role
- 62 Phallic swimmers
- 63 "Equal justice under law," to homophobes

Down

- 1 Butler of _Frasier_
- 2 "Ben Hur," for one
- 3 Carlos Reyes of "9-1-1: Lone Star" and others
- 4 A hydrogen atom has one
- 5 Caustic quips
- 6 Batman's kind of belt
- 7 Excessive fondness
- 8 Reached across.
- 9 Jane of the cloth
- 10 "Six Feet Under" box material
- 11 Fasting time
- 12 "Take a crack ___"
- 13 ___ kwon do

- 21 Require a bottom?
- 22 Cho and mo'
- 24 Puff up
- 25 Bea Arthur's TV maid Esther
- 27 Martin of the Daughters of Bilitis
- 28 Any minute now
- 29 Sound of oral enjoyment
- 30 Tom of "Philadelphia"
- 33 Arrived
- 35 Unlace a teddy, perhaps
- 37 Winery container
- 40 As a body
- 41 Lorca's tongue
- 45 Make dirty
- 47 Most like a polar bear's locale
- 48 Bodybuilding-themed porn mag of old
- 49 Laura of "ER"
- 50 "What did I ___ deserve this?"
- 51 Kramer, to Yale
- 52 Lucci in "All My Children"
- 53 Worker on Broadway
- 54 Old abbr. of Nureyev's land
- 57 Alt-rock genre

See p. 43 for answers

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◀ Bree Taylor

Continued from page 23

When Taylor relocated to Ann Arbor in 2024 for a position with a digital pathology firm, she quickly connected with the local transgender community. But she noticed something missing: cohesion, support and organized advocacy. Unlike in California, where “being trans is not a big deal,” as Taylor puts it, Michigan presented varying levels of acceptance and unique challenges.

The coffee shop meetings Taylor organized to discuss health care access and concerns about the political climate gradually evolved into something more structured. By October 2024, these informal gatherings had transformed into the officially registered Transgender Unity Coalition, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit with an ambitious mission to “empower the transgender community across the nation.”

“Bree is incredibly driven and passionate,” says Mallory Fournier, an early TUC recruit, “and I’m happy to have crossed paths with [her] as she connected me with a community of transgender allies, siblings and friends.”

With the organization established, Taylor turned her scientist’s precision to political action. The TUC’s first major objective was pushing Michigan legislators to pass House Bills 5300-5303, which would make name and gender marker changes easier on state-issued documents.

Taylor produced informational YouTube videos, organized phone campaigns and, in early December, led a rally at the state Capitol in Lansing. The momentum built by these grassroots efforts paid off. Just before the Republican majority was set to take control of the state House, the bills passed and were signed into law by Gov. Whitmer in January 2025.

This early victory energized Taylor and the TUC. Using digital platforms like Discord, Taylor connected with transgender advocacy groups in other states. The result was coordinated rallies held in nine state capitals on Jan. 30, bringing hundreds of supporters into the streets.

For Taylor, the path from troubled foster child to biochemist to national activist isn’t as winding as it might appear. The same determination that helped her overcome childhood trauma and educational setbacks now fuels her advocacy. The analytical mind that succeeded in the laboratory now

dissects political strategies and building movements.

Standing before the crowd in Washington, D.C., in March, Taylor embodied the transformation she describes in others — not a change, but a discovery of what was always there. The voice that had once struggled to be heard in foster homes and classrooms now resonates across state



Bree Taylor speaking at a rally in Lansing in December 2024. Courtesy photo

capitals, not just for herself, but for an entire community finding its unified voice.

Today, as TUC continues to expand its reach across the nation, Taylor remains focused on what’s ahead. The victories in Michigan represent just the beginning of a broader movement that she hopes will create lasting change for transgender Americans facing hostile legislation and social barriers in many states.

“What we’re building isn’t just an organization – it’s a network of support that many of us never had growing up,” Taylor says, reflecting on TUC’s rapid growth. “Every person who finds their voice through this work strengthens our collective power.”

For the girl who once felt out of place in every environment, Taylor has finally found where she belongs — at the forefront of a movement, using her scientific mind and passionate voice to transform personal discovery into community empowerment. The journey from isolation to connection, from silence to speaking out, continues to define both her story and the movement she’s building — one rally, one victory and one voice at a time.



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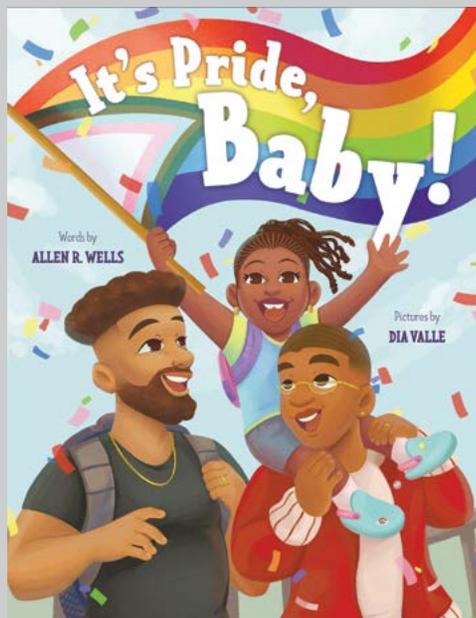


YA and Children's Books Perfect for Pride Season

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

From picture books celebrating queer families and Indigenous traditions to young adult novels exploring identity and friendship, these new books reflect the breadth of LGBTQ+ experiences across different ages, cultures and communities. Whether you're shopping for a young reader or looking to expand your own library, these titles center queer joy, authentic representation and the power of finding your place in the world.

'It's Pride, Baby!' by Allen R. Wells (Ages 3-5)



This joyful picture book from debut author Allen R. Wells and illustrator Dia Valle follows a family with two gay dads preparing for Black Gay Pride Day in Washington, D.C. From getting dressed in colorful outfits to celebrating with neighbors and enjoying fireworks on the National Mall, the story captures the community spirit and visibility that makes Pride celebrations so meaningful for LGBTQ+ families, offering young readers a vibrant representation of queer joy and Black LGBTQ+ pride.

'Raven's Ribbons' by Tasha Spillett (Ages 4-8)

This picture book from Cree author

Tasha Spillett and illustrator Daniel Ramirez, a descendant of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe of Michigan, celebrates gender expression and Indigenous tradition through young Raven, who loves round dances and dreams of wearing the beautiful ribbon skirts he sees swirling around him. When Raven asks his grandmother if boys can wear ribbon skirts, her loving response challenges gender norms within their community, creating a heartwarming story about acceptance, identity and finding your place in cultural traditions that will resonate with queer readers and families seeking inclusive Indigenous stories.

'You-ology: a Puberty Guide for Every Body'; by Melisa Holmes et al (Ages 12-18)

This comprehensive puberty guide written by three pediatric doctors and published by the American Academy of Pediatrics stands out for its inclusive approach to adolescent development, particularly in Chapter 12, which addresses the experiences of trans and nonbinary young people who may feel distress during puberty. The book provides practical information about puberty blockers, binding and tucking, making it a valuable resource for LGBTQ+ teens and their families seeking medically accurate guidance about transition options during the teenage years.

'Benny Ramirez and the Nearly Departed,' by José Pablo Iriarte (YA)

This middle-grade novel from nonbinary author José Pablo Iriarte follows young Cuban American Benny Ramirez, who discovers he can see the ghost of his egocentric abuelo after moving into his late grandfather's Miami mansion. Filled with humor and authentic family dynamics, the story explores themes of self-discovery and finding your own path as Benny navigates a performing arts school while his famous musician grandfather tries to earn his way into the afterlife by helping his grandson succeed.

◀ Pride Books

Continued from page 56

limitations of digital connection.

This work of historical fiction (yes, the '90s are now historical — I'm crying too) illuminates the origins of our current digital queer spaces, reminding us that long before Instagram activism or TikTok coming out videos, LGBTQ+ people were finding each other through glowing screens and creating community one painfully slow and noisy connection at a time.

'Outrage,' Ellen Jones

British writer and activist Ellen Jones, honored as Stonewall's Young Campaigner of the Year by Sir Ian McKellen, refuses easy answers or pearl-clutching condemnation in exposing the discrimination queer people continue to face in all facets of life — from marriage to mental health, education to aging, and beyond. Through moving personal accounts, Jones builds a compelling case for accountability models that center transformation rather than exile. For anyone who's ever found themselves frozen at the keyboard, terrified of saying the wrong thing or staying silent in the face of genuine harm, this book offers not answers but something more valuable: a framework for thinking about the difference between punitive performance and genuine community care.

'A Language of Limbs,' Dylan Hardcastle

Set against the backdrop of 1970s Australia during the Gay Liberation Movement, "A Language of Limbs" is a gorgeous, aching "what if" love story. Told through a poetic, sliding-doors narrative, the novel follows two women whose lives nearly intersect over decades: in hospital rooms, at protests and in quiet, near-intimate moments that pulse with what could've been. Hardcastle explores queer longing, community and the quiet power of choice with such emotional clarity, it's no surprise the book has already been optioned by Sony's Curio Pictures, with the author set to showrun. A celebration of queer resilience and romantic possibility, it's the rare sapphic novel that's both tender and revolutionary.

'Queer Lens: A History of Photography,' edited by Paul Martineau and Ryan Linkof

"Queer Lens" is the first wide-ranging exhibition and catalog to center the contributions of queer artists within the history of photography. This sweeping volume unfolds over a century of queer visual culture, revealing photography's transformative role in constructing and recording LGBTQ+ identities. Published by the J. Paul Getty Museum to accompany a major exhibition at the Getty Center from June 17 to Sept. 28, the book features nearly 300 images — including

intimate portraits, street protests, snapshots of queer kinship and experimental self-imaging — alongside essays from leading curators, critics and artists. The collection traverses history, media and geography to investigate how queerness has both shaped and been shaped by the camera, examining themes such as visibility, performance, subversion and self-fashioning.

With contributions from Martineau, Linkof and other prominent voices, this richly illustrated, large-format hardcover offers a vital and timely survey of photography as both an artistic and political tool for queer communities worldwide.

'The Many Passions of Michael Hardwick: Sex and the Supreme Court in the Age of AIDS,' Martin Padgett

Martin Padgett's meticulous research and novelistic pacing turn what could have been a dry legal history into a page-turning portrait of both a man and a moment. The *Bowers v. Hardwick* case — which upheld Georgia's sodomy laws in 1986 — has long been discussed in constitutional terms, but Padgett gives us the human being behind the case name. Through interviews with Hardwick's friends, lovers and family, we meet a complicated, charismatic man who became an accidental activist when police literally invaded his bedroom.

Padgett situates the case within the raging inferno of the AIDS crisis, showing how legal discrimination and medical disaster created a perfect storm of oppression. The heartbreaking irony that emerges is how a case about the right to privacy became a public spectacle that forced Hardwick to become the face of a revolution he never asked to lead. For younger readers who've only known a post-Lawrence v. Texas world where sodomy laws are unconstitutional, this book is an essential reminder of how recently our basic rights hung in the balance — and how easily they could again.

'Disappoint Me,' Nicola Dinan

In "Disappoint Me," Nicola Dinan delivers a piercing, tender portrait of love in your 30s — the decade where life feels like it's supposed to be settled, even when nothing is. Fresh off a messy breakup, Max, a sharp-witted trans woman, is hesitant to embrace the stable relationship offered by Vincent, a charming lawyer with a penchant for baking and baggage of his own. As Max grapples with questions of self-worth and belonging — especially within the context of Vincent's conservative Chinese family — Vincent finds himself haunted by a long-ago romance in Thailand that mirrors his present more than he's ready to admit.

Dinan's storytelling is both stylish and searing, echoing the emotional intimacy of Sally Rooney and the fearless insight of Torrey Peters. "Disappoint Me" is a story about who we were, who we are and who we're allowed to become in the eyes of others — and ourselves.

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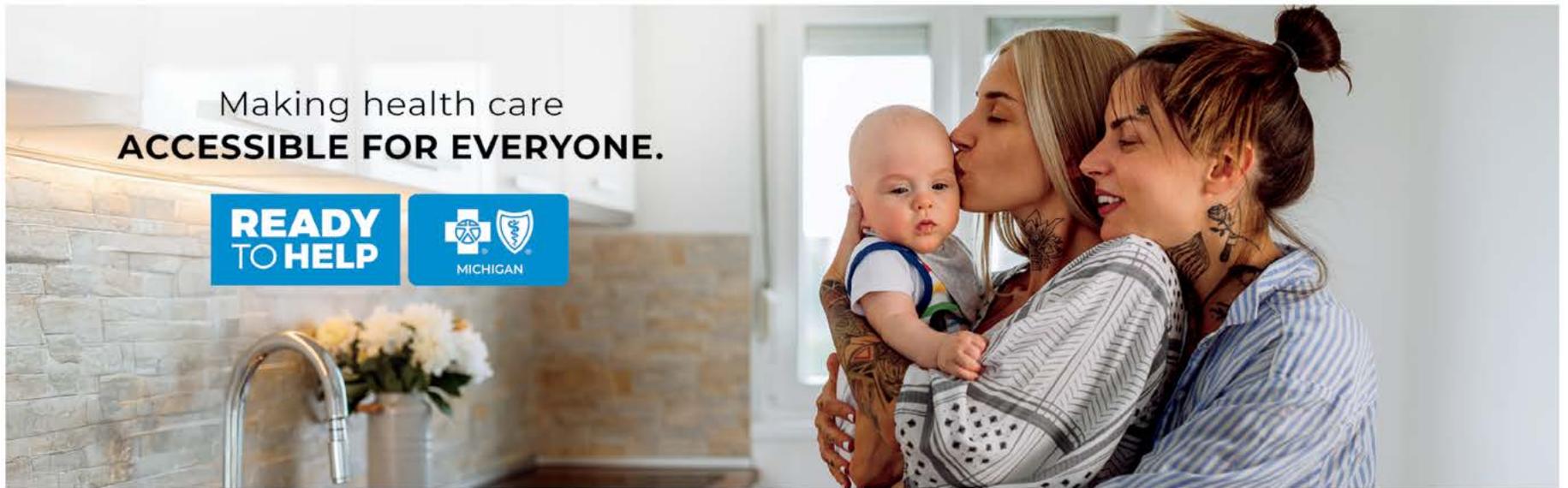
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