

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

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The **Ally** Issue

Meet Kris and Dave.
They love you just the way you are.

By Chris Azzopardi

STEP UP YOUR ALLYSHIP
Michigan LGBTQ+ leaders
urge active support

GILCHRIST FOR EQUALITY
Lt. governor to allies:
'Don't run away'

SUPREME COURT LOSS
How Michigan trans
youth could be impacted

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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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Kris Cravens-Hutton and Dave Hutton at their home in Detroit. Photo: Andrew Potter

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

We're here! We're queer! We're weary!

It's nearly the official end of Pride Month, so it's somewhat inevitable that some of the glitter has worn off, right? Unless you're using dollar-store glitter, which is basically industrial metal shard remnants and not something I particularly recommend.

But whether you're wishing there were a few Zzzs in the middle of LGBTQ+ or you're just now getting your second queer wind, there are events from wild burlesque shows to mild bar nights to fit your energy level and remaining wardrobe.



Lilith Von Tal. Photo: Instagram/@lilithvontal, @moonrisephotographystudios

Bounce into Burlesque

Local burlesque-celeb Lilith Von Tal is bringing the high-glam, high-glitter "Queer Coded: A Celebration of Queer Visibility" back for its third year. Part of Lilith's Big Ol' Golden show series, "Queer Coded" features the work of top-tier local burlesque and variety show artists at the celebrated Planet Ant Theatre. Bring your singles (or 20s? I'm sure no one would complain) for tipping or upgrade to VIP tickets for stage-side seating and a commemorative keepsake.

June 27, 8 p.m., Planet Ant-Ant Hall Stage (2320 Caniff St., Hamtramck), bit.ly/queercodedburlesque.



Fern Fest. Photo: Ilana Bar-A

Frolic in the Ferns

If your Pride style is less techno-club and more forest rave, Fern Fest is calling your name, so get your tickets now!

This six-day, five-night music festival is specifically curated to drive connection and foster community for women, nonbinary people, trans folks and those who live on the spectrum of the feminine spirit. At Fern Fest, you'll find everything from communal meals to stargazing and quiet queer cuddles under the canopy. It's the perfect getaway for anyone who wants to experience a community that's loud, soft, sweaty or sparkly — or all of the above.

Community scholarships are still available if cost is a barrier, and while this is rustic camping, their website offers comprehensive prep guides. Who said glitter and bug spray can't co-exist?

July 22-27, exact location provided upon registration, michiganfernfest.com.



Dance with Dykes

Need an excuse to break out your most sappho-centric wardrobe? Well, dig out that "Cat Ladies Come in All Genders" T-shirt and join the fun at July's Dyke Night at Ann Arbor's North Star Lounge. Connect and make eye contact over sweaty cocktails and even sweatier dance floors — Dyke Night is a trans and nonbinary inclusive space! Miss it this month? No worries. Dyke Night happens every second Thursday.

July 10, 7 p.m., North Star Lounge (301 North 5th Ave., Ann Arbor), nstarlounge.com/events/julydykenight.



Inside Affirmations. Photo: Andrew Potter

Connect with Community

Have you checked out Affirmations' monthly calendar lately? You could think of Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center — the largest LGBTQ+ community center in Michigan — as a queer community-making buffet: There's a little something for everyone and plenty to try out. Looking to chat with other parents of queer kids? Want a space for creative expression? Curious about trans and nonbinary support groups, social clubs or workshops for young folks? Need help with food insecurity? Seeking STI support, recovery groups of all types or harm reduction supplies?

Whether you're 16, 26, 46, 86, 106 or (well, you get the idea...), Affirmations is where new friendships, chosen families and brilliant ideas are born. It's also where you can catch Ringwald Theatre shows, the MiGen community center for older LGBTQ+ community members and weekly services from Metropolitan Community Church - Detroit.

Ongoing, Affirmations (290 W Nine Mile Road, Ferndale), goaffirmations.org/events.



Help Trans Folks Directly

Between relentless political attacks and exhausting paperwork, accessing gender-affirming care continues to be way harder than it should be. But you can help by donating directly to a trans health fund like the Trans Empowerment Project Fund — or find a local individual mutual aid effort to support. Even \$10 helps someone get HRT, a binder or life-saving surgery prep.

Want to do even more? Ask your employer if their insurance covers gender-affirming care. And advocate if it doesn't. If you're a person who needs this kind of support to get care, please ask for it.

It can be scary, but people do want to help — and your life is worth fighting for!



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How to Be a Better Ally (Even If You're Already a Good One)

Michigan LGBTQ+ leaders call for intentional support

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Being an LGBTQ+ ally means more than just posting rainbow flags on social media or attending Pride events — though those gestures matter too. True allyship requires what Julisa Abad, a Black trans victims rights advocate and community liaison director at the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, calls “being an ally all year round, not only when it's beneficial.”

Abad's call for intentional, sustained support offers a roadmap for moving from performative allyship to meaningful advocacy that creates real change in Michigan's LGBTQ+ community. Whether you're just beginning your journey as an ally or looking to deepen your support, these strategies will help you center accountability and opportunity-creation in your allyship practice.

It's worth noting that allyship exists within the LGBTQ+ community too. Cisgender gay and lesbian people can be allies to trans and nonbinary community members, white queer people can support LGBTQ+ people of color and those with economic privilege can advocate for working-class LGBTQ+ folks. These principles apply regardless of your own identity.

Prioritize representation and create opportunities

“What I feel that we need from allies is to show representation, but also, give my community opportunities,” Abad said. “I feel like representation is really important when it comes to any facet of life, for any demographic of people that you're trying to serve — but we need real world opportunities, too, in employment and beyond.”

Real allyship goes beyond visibility to actively creating pathways for LGBTQ+ people to succeed. This



means examining your workplace, organization or community group and asking: Are queer and trans people represented in leadership? Are they being considered for opportunities? Are barriers being removed?

As Jeynce Poindexter told us earlier this year, effective allyship requires collective action. “Every successful movement required organizing and mobilizing,” she emphasized. “It took a host of people pulling together with one achievement to either bring better quality of life, to bring equity and equitable resources to people, or to just show up for people in a real way.”

Support LGBTQ-owned businesses and organizations by putting your money where your values are. Look for local LGBTQ+ business directories, attend

community events and consider making donations to organizations doing important work for queer and trans people. The Pride Source Directory, published each year in our annual Pride Source magazine and online, can help you find LGBTQ-owned and affirming businesses to support throughout Michigan.

Center those facing the most marginalization

Abad emphasizes the importance of understanding intersectionality and supporting those who face multiple forms of discrimination. “We must understand the marginalization that LGBTQ+ people go through, and specifically, trans people of color

are the most marginalized, so be intentional about giving them a voice and opportunities to succeed,” she said.

She points to systemic barriers that prevent trans people of color from accessing basic resources. “There are so many trans people who don't have access to basic education, to basic trade skills, to a number of things, many who are intelligent and remarkable and able to be fast learners and capable of doing astronomical things, but who are never given the opportunity because of the world that we live in when it comes to biases, when it comes to stigma and even issues like colorism.”

LGBTQ+ people don't exist in a vacuum — they also have racial, ethnic, religious, class and other identities that shape their experiences. Effective allyship means

understanding how these intersecting identities create unique challenges and opportunities. Educate yourself about how racism, sexism, ableism and other forms of oppression impact LGBTQ+ people differently, and center the voices of those who face multiple forms of marginalization.

Hold politicians accountable year round

Abad offers pointed criticism of elected officials who court LGBTQ+ voters during campaign season but disappear from the community afterward. “We have had several public elected officials and people

See *Allyship*, page 19

True Allyship Means Embracing the Discomfort of Growth



BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Dear readers,

Allyship isn't a badge you earn once and wear forever. It's a practice — a commitment that asks you to sit with discomfort, to listen when you'd rather speak and to show up even when the work gets hard.

In this special Ally Issue, we're exploring what true allyship looks like in 2025 — not the performative kind that shows up for a rainbow-filled June and disappears by July, but the kind that weathers legislative attacks, family tensions and the daily grind of making real change happen.

We had the privilege of sitting down with Detroiters Kris Cravens-Hutton and Dave Hutton, the Instagram stars whose viral Pride arbor has become a beacon for LGBTQ+ folks across Michigan and beyond. Made from nearly 2,000 pieces of craft foam and countless hours of love, their creation draws people from all over the country. But what struck us most wasn't the spectacle — it was their no-nonsense approach to advocacy. This Army veteran couple doesn't just build beautiful displays; they build bridges, demonstrating that allyship is both an art and a discipline.

In this issue, you'll also find an interview with Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, who shared with us how his allyship began in childhood and is rooted in his relationship with a beloved uncle who showed him that love transcends all boundaries. Now running for Michigan's top office, Gilchrist has a clear message for leaders and allies alike: Don't back down, and keep showing up. His words carry extra weight as our community faces unprecedented attacks on our fundamental rights.

In addition to our guide to being a better ally on the opposite page, in this issue you'll also find Bridgette Redman's inspiring feature on the Together Art Project, where a mother's post-election rage transformed into a collaborative piece of hope involving artists across the country. When Lora Garcelon channeled her fear for her LGBTQ+ children into art, she created something that now helps others feel less alone — proving that allies find powerful ways to turn despair into community action. In this issue, Redman also explores how Nina's Notions Paper Crafting in St. Johns has become an unexpected safe haven where owner Jenina Halitsky's visible allyship transforms a small craft store into a lifeline for LGBTQ+ youth in rural Michigan.

Meanwhile, Elle Warren's deeply personal

essay reflects on the profound difference that simple visibility can make in a young person's life. Her story about seeing Pride symbols in her former high school classroom years after graduation reminds us that the work of creating inclusive spaces has real, lasting impact on the lives of LGBTQ+ youth — and that the stakes have never been higher.

“Our shared history of advocacy teaches us that progress requires people willing to risk comfort for justice... Each victory came because allies joined LGBTQ+ people in demanding better.”

If there's an overarching directive that needs to be made clear to LGBTQ+ allies in 2025, it's this: Embrace discomfort. Too many well-meaning people get trapped in the comfort of good intentions without ever translating those feelings into meaningful action. They share the right posts, use the right pronouns and genuinely care — but when push comes to shove, they stay silent at the crucial moments.

When LGBTQ+ people — especially trans folks — tell you what we need, believe us the first time. When lawmakers target our children with discriminatory bills, don't just shake your head sadly. Act. When your family member makes a transphobic joke at dinner, speak up. When your workplace falls short on inclusion, use your voice. The gap between caring and doing is where true allyship lives.

Our shared history of advocacy teaches us that progress requires people willing to risk comfort for justice. The Stonewall riots weren't polite. The AIDS activism of the '80s and '90s wasn't convenient. The fight for marriage equality and for queer civil rights in Michigan wasn't easy. Each victory came because allies joined LGBTQ+ people in demanding better.

Today's threats to trans rights and attacks on LGBTQ+ youth are serious. They require serious responses. Not just during Pride season, not just when it's trending on social media, but every single day.

Listen to us. Learn from us. Stand with us. The stories in this issue will show you how.

In solidarity,

Sarah Bricker Hunt

Managing Editor

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Saddle Up For Anti-Fascist Librarians In Ann Arbor District Library's 2025 Big Gay Read

Community read features Sarah Gailey's timely 'Upright Women Wanted'

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The Ann Arbor District Library's fifth annual Big Gay Read brings together readers across Southeast Michigan for a month of community engagement around Sarah Gailey's "Upright Women Wanted," a queer speculative fiction novella featuring anti-fascist librarians on horseback fighting censorship in a dystopian Wild West.

The annual Big Gay Read functions as a community book club amplified across an entire month of programming, offering a series of in-person events at library branches. Though reading the book adds a little more depth to The Big Gay Read's events, they can be enjoyed even if you haven't read a page in the book. This year's lineup includes drag performances, academic lectures, crafting workshops ranging from cross-stitching to miniature library making and a country-themed social complete with cowboy hat decorating. Participants start by reading the same book — this year's selection features propaganda-smuggling librarians, found family and, yes, horses — then dive into immersive group experiences culminating with an in-person community conversation with Gailey.

AADL staffer Jacob Gorski says the library chose "Upright Women Wanted" because "it was important for us when choosing the Big Gay Read for this year to choose a book that meets the moment of where we are in America." The book, he explains, "has a sense of whimsy and imagination and community that also lends itself really well to what we're doing here at the Ann Arbor District Library."

"This is a book about women and nonbinary folks taking action directly against the fascist dissemination of false information," Gorski notes. But beyond its political themes, "this is a book about how people find each other, sometimes in very distressing situations, but how

they can come together to make a difference."

The novella follows Esther, who escapes a forced marriage and the execution of her best friend (who she was also in love with) only to find herself among a crew of librarians smuggling banned materials across a post-apocalyptic landscape. In Gailey's world, books are censored and queerness is forbidden, making the librarians' work both dangerous and essential.

"These are some outlaw librarians," Gorski says, "and while I think the book might imagine a dystopian future of outlaw librarians, I think that future is very much here for many librarians in many different communities."

Gailey, who uses they/them pronouns, bases much of their speculative work on real-world issues. "I'm not that creative. I'm really just looking outside," they insist, though Gailey's fans frequently praise the creative turns Gailey's fiction often takes. "Upright Women Wanted," Gailey says, draws from "existing decline and decay of fascist controlled civilizations and the way that fascism in no way serves the needs of the people," but also from Gailey's real-life interactions with librarians.

"What they do is so much more than cataloging and shelving and checking out books," Gailey explains. "They are responsible for education about information and the nature of reading and getting access to resources. They teach people — they don't just give people resources. They teach people how to find resources."

This approach resonates saliently in the current political climate. "It's not a far leap to imagine them being the core of the resistance."

The author will visit Ann Arbor for the first time as part of the Big Gay Read programming. "I'm so excited," Gailey says. "I've never been to Ann Arbor before, but I know that it's beautiful, and I know that there is an incredibly excited and enthusiastic community of readers there who I'm

really looking forward to connecting with."

Gailey describes libraries as more than allies to queer communities. "There are allies and then there are accomplices," they explain, referencing advice from a queer mentor. "Libraries are accomplices to everything we're trying to build in society and in community."

The month-long celebration includes seven events designed to bring the community together around themes from the book. "We want to create spaces for people to come together and do something fun at the library, but hopefully also interact with one another," Gorski explains.

All Big Gay Read events are free and open to the public. Readers can pick up their copy of "Upright Women Wanted" at any of the five Ann Arbor District Library branches or access it as an e-book or audiobook.

2025 Big Gay Read Events

Cowgirl Boot Cross Stitch

Monday, July 7, 6:30 p.m., Pittsfield Branch (2359 Oak Valley Dr.)

Guided cross-stitch craft event for all skill levels. Kits provided with take-home materials.

Wild West: Decolonized and Uncensored with Nadine Hubbs

Wednesday, July 9, 6:30 p.m., Downtown Library (343 S. 5th Ave.)

University of Michigan historian, musicologist and professor Nadine Hubbs will explore how Gailey's wild West connects to real-life stories of queer cowfolx and the Mexican and Indigenous origins of the cowboy and the American Southwest. Hubbs is the author of "The Queer Composition of America's Sound" and "Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music."



Sarah Gailey. Photo: Kate Dollarhyde, 2023

Pink Pony Social

Friday, July 11, 6 p.m., Downtown Library Lower Level

Crafting and fellowship event featuring cowboy hat decorating, yarn-wrapped rainbow making and custom chili seasoning packets. Music from queer and ally country artists like Chappell Roan, Orville Peck and Dolly Parton. Space for meeting other community members with puzzles and photo opportunities.

Yeehaw Drag Review

Sunday, July 13, 2 p.m., Downtown Library

Country-themed drag performance featuring performers from across the state and Toledo.

Mini Library Making

Sunday, July 20, 2 p.m., Traverwood Branch (3333 Traverwood Dr.)

Create tiny libraries in Altoids-sized

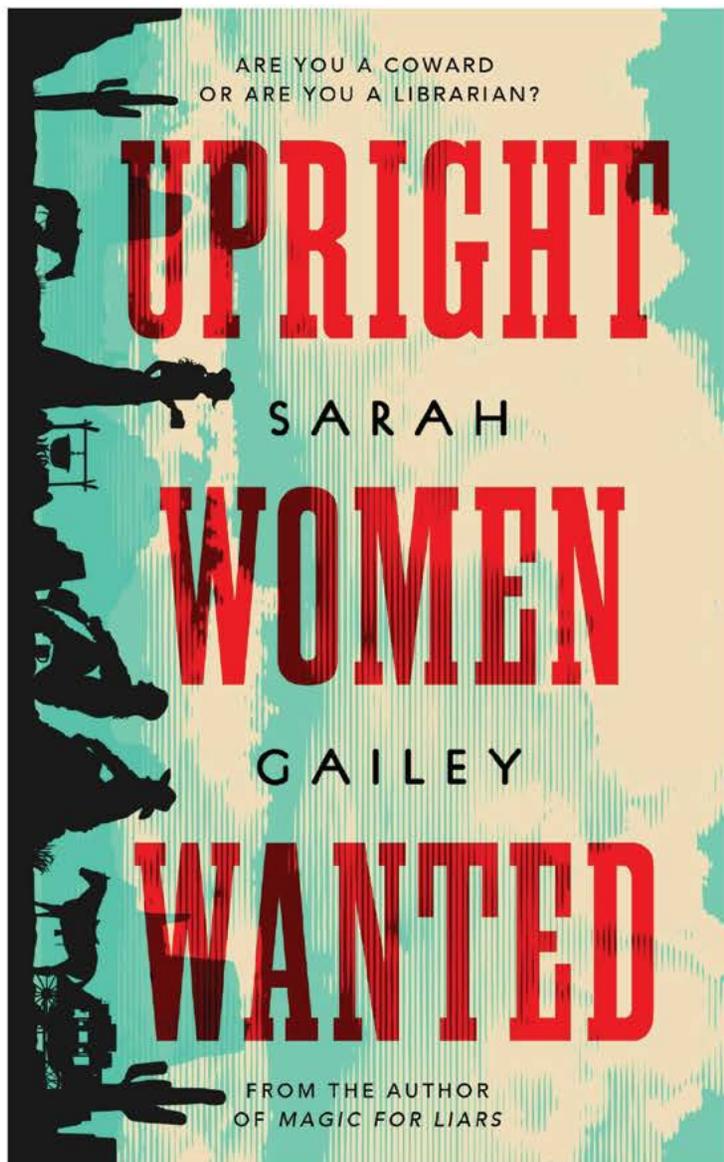
cases with handmade books featuring covers from lesbian pulp fiction and other queer literature.

Author Event with Sarah Gailey

Wednesday, July 23, 6 p.m., Downtown Library

Talk, Q&A and book signing with "Upright Women Wanted" author Sarah Gailey. Gailey will discuss the real-world pieces of inspiration behind the book, including authoritarian interference with media production and consumption, the history and goals of media censorship, the legacy of the Hayes Code and the work readers can do in their local communities to protect the right to read, watch and study freely. Books will be available for purchase.

This content is made possible through our partnership with Ann Arbor District Library. Learn more about the Big Gay Read at aadl.org/thebiggayread.



THE BIG GAY READ

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‘Don’t Run Away’: Garlin Gilchrist’s Message to LGBTQ+ Allies as He Runs for Governor

Lt. governor emphasizes unwavering support for the queer community as he campaigns across Michigan

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Marching through the streets of Detroit in the 2025 Motor City Pride Parade on June 8, Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist marked his 10th consecutive year at the festival — not just showing up for a photo opportunity, but celebrating, listening and continuing a journey of allyship that began decades ago with a beloved uncle and a pair of custom MC Hammer pants.

Now running for governor, Gilchrist brings to his campaign an extensive track record of LGBTQ+ advocacy rooted in personal experience and unwavering conviction that puts our collective soul first.

“I don’t think it should be difficult for people to stand for humanity,” Gilchrist told BTL during a recent interview. “That’s why I have been and will always be proud to stand tall alongside the community as an ally.”

The lieutenant governor spoke candidly about his commitment to LGBTQ+ rights and the challenges facing the community under what he described as “a scary and dangerous time for so many people in the LGBTQ+ community.” His approach, he emphasized, is multifaceted — both defensive and proactive.

“My administration will be vigilant in making sure that we have our eyes open so that we can see these kinds of attacks when they come and we’ll be able to respond to them forcefully,” Gilchrist said, referring to potential federal policies under the Trump administration that could target LGBTQ+ rights.

One of Gilchrist’s proudest moments as a state leader came during the passage of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act expansion, which added LGBTQ+ protections to Michigan’s civil rights law after a 50-year fight. As president of the state senate in his role as lieutenant governor, he briefly handed the gavel to Sen. Jeremy Moss, an openly gay state senator, to preside over the historic vote.

“We had made [LGBTQ+ discrimination] illegal by expanding the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, and that’s a fight that’s been going on for 50 years. We’re proud to get that across the finish line,” Gilchrist said. “It was tremendously moving to be in the chamber to do that.”

Legislative victories are just one element of Gilchrist’s vision for supporting LGBTQ+ Michiganders. He emphasized the need



Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist takes part in the 2025 Motor City Pride Parade. Photo: Andrew Potter

to address specific challenges facing the community, including higher rates of homelessness, housing insecurity, substance abuse and mental health challenges. He praised the work of local LGBTQ+ chambers of commerce in places like Detroit and Grand Rapids, linking economic empowerment to community well-being.

“We have LGBTQ+ people who experience higher levels and rates of homelessness and houselessness. We have LGBTQ+ people who experience higher rates of challenges when it comes to drug addiction or mental health,” Gilchrist explained. “By investing in resources that can be made more available and partnering with organizations like those chambers of commerce and other advocacy organizations around the state, we can make sure people have what they need to be successful in Michigan.”

When asked about politicians who struggle to be vocal allies due to political considerations in their districts, Gilchrist offered clear guidance and a strong personal example of unwavering leadership. After all, he represents every Michigan county, spanning diverse communities with varying political leanings.

“I represent the state of Michigan, all 83 counties across both peninsulas. We are a big, broad state with a diverse set of people, communities, ideas and identities,” he said.

“There’s not a version of public service that should be OK with discriminating against people. I don’t care whether you live in a district that’s considered a swing district or not.”

His message to those officials was uncompromising: “What’s important is, do the people who you serve feel like they can be their best self in their jurisdiction? Do they feel like they have access to opportunity? Do they feel like they have access to education, and that they have access to the economy?”

For allies looking to make a difference, Gilchrist’s advice was both straightforward and empathic.

“Don’t run away. Don’t turn your back,” he urged. “Allies have to be allies on a consistent basis — it means being willing to show up, willing to listen, willing to use the space that you occupy to make sure that someone else has space. That’s what allies do.”

He emphasized that effective allyship requires action beyond good intentions. “For me as a public servant and a problem solver, my job is to make sure that I am listening to members of the community and understanding what’s important, what people are excited about as well as what people are worried about and then do my best to either solve those problems, work with them to find solutions or build solutions.”

Allies, Gilchrist said, need to ask, “How can

you help? Don’t shy away from that.”

Gilchrist’s commitment to LGBTQ+ advocacy extends back decades and is deeply personal. That foundation was built early through his relationship with his Uncle Glen, his father’s youngest brother, a fashion designer in Los Angeles. In a 2022 interview with BTL, Gilchrist recalled how Glen would receive “a hero’s welcome” whenever he came home to Detroit, and how young Garlin cherished their bond.

“I remember begging him to design me a pair of MC Hammer pants. He did that and gave them to me. And it was magical, as a child,” Gilchrist said in that earlier interview. Uncle Glen, who died of complications from HIV in the late ’90s, became more than family to Gilchrist — he became an early teacher about the importance of love without conditions.

“Being exposed to members of your family who may be LGBTQ+ is a way to gain an understanding of that at an early age,” Gilchrist said at the time. “I was very blessed to have that experience in different parts of my family, whether it’s distant relatives or immediate family members.”

That personal connection evolved into public action as Gilchrist built his career in activism and later politics. In 2019, responding to a homophobic social media post by an NAACP official, Gilchrist delivered an address on Black gay civil rights activist Bayard Rustin at the organization’s Flint fundraiser, using the moment to educate others about Rustin’s crucial role in the civil rights movement.

More recently, at LGBT Detroit’s 30th anniversary gala in October 2024, Gilchrist delivered what would become one of his most quoted statements about allyship. “You can’t be an ally to people you don’t respect,” he told the audience, emphasizing that true allyship requires genuine relationship-building, not just ceremonial appearances.

As Michigan approaches the 2026 gubernatorial election, Gilchrist is highlighting a lifetime of consistent advocacy, from a child who loved his gay uncle unconditionally to a public servant who has used every opportunity to advance equality.

“The LGBTQ+ community have made really important contributions to our communities, to our culture, to our economy, to our education,” Gilchrist said. “Michigan is better when everybody has a place today and a place tomorrow — it’s how we move forward as a state.”

Supreme Court Upholds Trans Healthcare Ban as Michigan Leaders Vow Protection, Decry ‘Attack on Children’

Rep. Pohutsky and Equality Michigan’s Emme Zanotti respond to decision while reassuring state residents

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The U.S. Supreme Court dealt a devastating blow to transgender rights June 18, upholding Tennessee’s ban on gender-affirming medical care for minors in a decision that could embolden similar restrictions nationwide and leave thousands of trans youth without access to evidence-based healthcare.

All six conservative justices joined at least part of the majority opinion in *U.S. v. Skrmetti*, rejecting arguments that the law constitutes sex-based discrimination under the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause. The Court’s three liberal justices dissented.

“This is a devastating loss for families with transgender youth in Tennessee and in the other 24 states that have similar healthcare bans,” said Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the Nancy Katz and Margo Dichtelmiller LGBTQ+ Project at the ACLU of Michigan. “Over 100,000 transgender people under age 17 now live in states that ban medically necessary and in many cases life-saving medical care.”

Responding to the ruling, Michigan State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky told BTL, “The most important thing I want folks in Michigan to know is we do not have a state law that prohibits gender-affirming care for anyone, including minors. So there is no reason that this court ruling should impact the availability of gender-affirming care for anyone in the state.”

Pohutsky noted the broader emotional toll of the ruling, which

serves as a reminder of intense anti-trans targeted at the highest levels of federal government. “The ruling is painful,” she acknowledged. “The ruling is traumatic, whether it impacts our state or not. It does signal one more attack against the trans community, particularly trans children. And it’s an isolating and fearful feeling to watch your government literally bully and harm children.”

Roz Keith, executive director of the young adult trans advocacy organization Stand with Trans, told BTL the ruling is “devastating.”

“The government should not be making decisions about anyone’s medical care and certainly not about whether a trans person is ‘entitled’ to gender-affirming care such as hormones that allow one to live authentically and feel comfortable in their own skin,” she noted. “If my son could not get what he needed, our conversation would be very different. This care is life-saving.”

Background: U.S. v. Skrmetti

The case before the Court represented one of the most significant challenges to LGBTQ+ healthcare protections in recent years, with implications extending far



beyond Tennessee’s borders.

U.S. v. Skrmetti centered on Tennessee’s law banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors. The legislation prohibits treatments like puberty blockers and hormone therapy when used to support gender transition, while allowing the same medications for other conditions in cisgender children. Under the law, someone assigned female at birth cannot be prescribed testosterone, but someone assigned male at birth can receive those drugs.

The case was filed by three families of transgender children and a provider of gender-affirming care, who argued alongside the Biden administration that Tennessee’s restrictions constituted clear sex discrimination. LGBTQ+ legal advocates contended the law violated the equal protection clause by singling out trans youth while ignoring established medical consensus.

In his majority opinion, Chief

Justice John Roberts emphasized that the ruling rested primarily on the justices’ finding that the law did not violate the equal protection clause, rather than ideological opposition to trans rights.

“This case carries with it the weight of fierce scientific and policy debates about the safety, efficacy and propriety of medical treatments in an evolving field. The voices in these debates raise

sincere concerns; the implications for all are profound,” Roberts wrote. “We leave questions regarding its policy to the people, their elected representatives, and the democratic process.”

Justice Sonia Sotomayor authored a scathing dissent, joined by Justices Ketanji Brown Jackson and Elena Kagan, arguing that because the law discriminates on the basis of sex, it should face higher legal scrutiny than the majority applied.

“Male (but not female) adolescents can receive medicines that help them look like boys, and female (but not male) adolescents can receive medicines that help them look like girls,” Sotomayor wrote. “By retreating from meaningful judicial review exactly where it matters most, the Court abandons transgender children and their families to political whims. In sadness, I dissent.”

Tennessee defended the ban as necessary to protect children from what it termed “experimental”

medical treatment, despite every major medical and mental health organization in the U.S. finding that gender-affirming care is evidence-based and medically necessary. These groups also oppose political bans on such care.

The decision validates Tennessee’s position and could set a precedent for dozens of other lawsuits involving transgender youth rights. Since 2021, 26 states have passed bans on gender-affirming care for minors, affecting nearly 40% of trans youth in the U.S. Many of these restrictions have been paused by court challenges, but today’s Supreme Court decision could have vast implications for those lawsuits’ futures.

The case arrived at the Supreme Court amid an escalating campaign against LGBTQ+ rights under the Trump administration’s second term. Earlier this month, House Republicans advanced a bill sponsored by Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene that would criminalize gender-affirming care for minors nationwide.

“I completely disagree with the ruling,” Pohutsky said. “I disagree with the methodology that was used to reach it. And I think that it’s abhorrent that the Supreme Court is attempting to make a decision about what care is available for children and particularly to make it harder for parents to make those decisions.”

“It’s worth noting that that question was not actually answered,” she

See *Skrmetti*, page 27

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We Are Currently Living Through the Absolute Worst ‘Groundhog Day’ Reboot



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

On Sunday, June 22, I received an email from the Detroit Free Press at 8:09 a.m. with the subject line, “U.S. Bombs Iraq.” At 8:11 a.m., I received another email with the subject line, “CORRECTION: U.S. bombs Iran.”

I truly cannot stop thinking about this. This blunder from the largest newspaper in Michigan is so emblematic of where we are as a country right now. Inside this typo is a portal into U.S. foreign policy: all the rush and recklessness that surely led up to Trump making this decision. The striking ignorance so many Americans have about both countries. How many, including the president, could point to each one on a map? How many Americans, including the president, see Iran as just another country full of brown people whose lives frankly don't matter that much? Just like the people of Palestine, the people of Afghanistan, the people of Iraq. Certainly their lives are not as rich and vibrant and meaningful as the lives of the Americans who, in their infinite

emails to my sister, she called it “a time machine error.” And she is not wrong. It's like we're in 2003 again listening to a president lie to us in order to justify war.

And just as in 2003, this is all happening against a backdrop of fierce opposition to LGBTQ+ people and our rights.

In 2003, the Marriage Protection Amendment was introduced for the second time (the first being the year before), seeking to amend the country's constitution to forever bar same-sex couples from getting married. President Bush voiced his support. This harmful amendment was introduced and debated endlessly for years, finally being snuffed

out by the Supreme Court's 2015 Obergefell decision, one that could very likely be overturned by the same Court that overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Also, same-sex marriage became legal in Canada in 2003 and Michael Stark and Michael Leshner were the first couple to legally marry there. According to a 2023 CBC article, “After 42 years together — 20 as a married couple — the two still very much enjoy each other's company, whether that's making raspberry pancakes, discussing the news over a cup of tea or travelling abroad.” The couple finds the attacks on LGBTQ+ rights in the U.S. today “quite scary.” As they should.

2003 was also the year of the landmark Supreme Court

ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down the many laws nationwide that criminalized queer sex and the year the Massachusetts Supreme Court struck down its ban on marriage equality. Legal marriages began in the state the next year.

As you can see, 2003 was kind of a big deal for the LGBTQ+ civil rights fight. But if you've been paying attention to what's happening now, it's hard not to see how, historically, 22 years is not long ago at all.

In 2003, we were invading Iraq searching for non-existent “weapons of mass destruction” while the nation debated whether two people of the same sex could actually love each other and even if they could, whether they should be afforded the same legal protections as heterosexual couples.

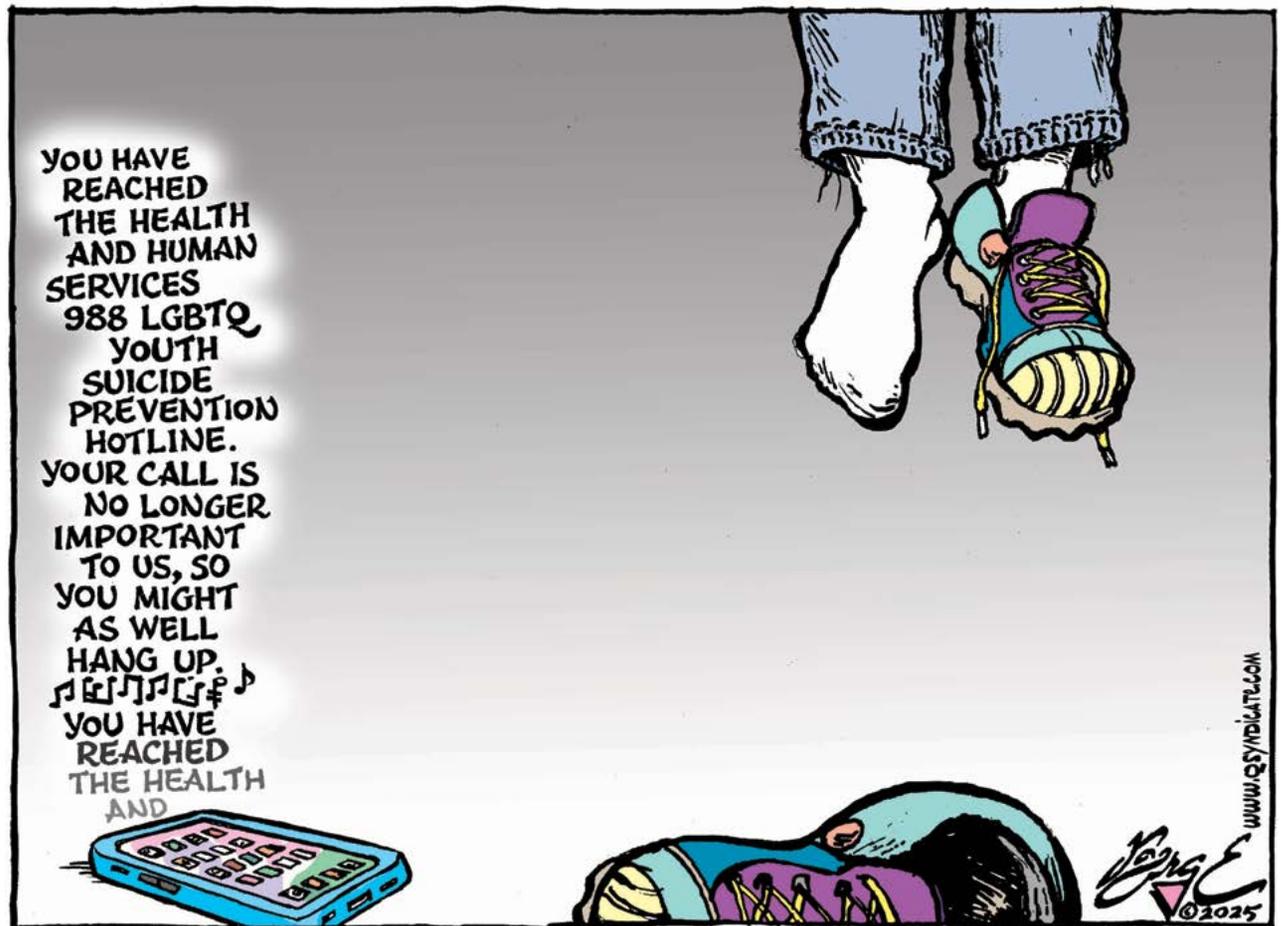
In 2025, we've bombed Iran under the pretense of them building nukes while the nation debates whether transgender people should be allowed to exist at all, actively pursuing policies that make it harder for them to just live their daily lives.

As Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr said in the way-older days, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

It is easy to feel hopeless. I remember how hopeless I felt in 2003. I honestly didn't think I would ever be able to get legally married in my lifetime. I did not think things would get better.

But they did. Not in every way. But I was able to marry my wife, be put on her insurance when I had cancer and give our son two legal moms.

These are the things I remind myself of when I watch the country hurtling into a backwards time vortex. These are the things that I hold onto tightly to keep from being sucked into that hopeless past. It's hard and my fingers hurt. But I'm trying my best.



In 2025, we've bombed Iran under the pretense of them building nukes while the nation debates whether transgender people should be allowed to exist at all.

wisdom, elected Trump to be president. Again.

I make a conscious effort to be anti-racist, recognizing that I, like every white person in this country, was born and raised surrounded by racism and that I am surrounded by it still. It is not enough for me or any white person to simply say, “I'm not racist” — or worse, “I don't see color.” That isn't doing any work or taking any kind of responsibility. Thus, we hear some of the most racist people saying things like, “I haven't got a racist bone in my body.” And perhaps they're right, but only because racism isn't a signal from a rogue femur. It's much more insidious.

When I sent a screenshot of the back-to-back Free Press

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Don't Miss the Multi-Day United We Slay Fest

What might just be Metro Detroit's most ambitious LGBTQ+ celebration is in full swing, and there's still time to join the party. United We Slay continues through Sunday, June 29, bringing together 11 venues across the region for an unprecedented weekend of community, performance and Pride.

Born from the final vision of the late Golden O'Hara-Polo — a beloved transgender drag performer and community advocate who died in April — the four-day celebration of LGBTQ+ artistry, resilience and unity was created to honor the past, empower the present and unify the future of the community. In a time of division, organizers say the event creates space for healing and transformation through performance, visibility and collective joy.

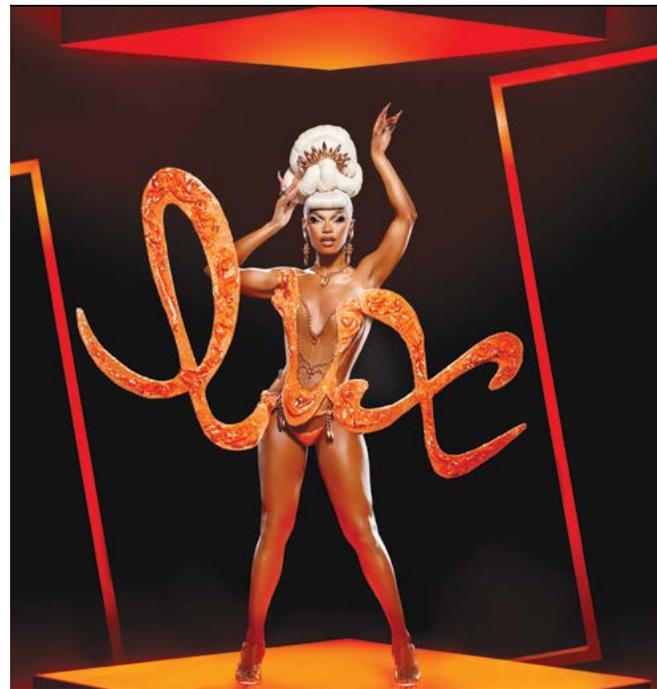
The festival spans venues from Detroit

to Royal Oak with Royal Oak's Pronto! and Five15 serving as anchor locations, powered by collaboration with Metro Detroit's most beloved LGBTQ+ venues.

This weekend's can't-miss events include "RuPaul's Drag Race: All Stars" performer Olivia Lux taking the stage at 7 p.m. Saturday, June 28, followed by "Slay the Night" featuring international DJ Dan Slater at 10 p.m. Sunday brings another "Drag Race" favorite, Cynthia Lee Fontaine, for a 2 p.m. show hosted by legendary Miss Nickki Stevens.

The weekend also features tea events including "Therapy Tea" and "Next in Line: The Royal Tea," along with "The Village" and "Queens of the Block" programming spanning both days.

All proceeds support the ACLU of Michigan's civil liberties work, a cause O'Hara-Polo championed throughout her career. Find more information at facebook.com/five15royaloak.



"RuPaul's Drag Race" star Olivia Lux. Photo: Xavier Guerra, World of Wonder, Paramount+

Dana Nessel Named Queer Changemaker

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel was recently featured on Fast Company's annual Queer Changemakers list, celebrating her groundbreaking LGBTQ+ advocacy. Before taking office in 2019 as Michigan's first openly LGBTQ+ statewide elected official, Nessel challenged the state's same-sex marriage ban in a case that became part of the landmark Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court decision legalizing marriage equality nationwide.

In 2022, Fast Company notes, she successfully argued before the Michigan Supreme Court that the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act protects people against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, helping usher in an amendment that added LGBTQ+ discrimination protections to Michigan's civil rights law. Nessel has also led legal resistance against Trump administration policies, securing injunctions blocking federal funding cuts and joining lawsuits challenging executive orders targeting diversity programs and limiting birthright citizenship. Read more at fastcompany.com.

Trump Admin Cuts LGBTQ+ Youth Crisis Line Funds

The Trump administration is eliminating specialized LGBTQ+ youth counseling from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, terminating the Trevor Project's \$26 million federal contract within weeks.

The Trevor Project has seen call volume spikes during events threatening LGBTQ+ rights, including Trump's November election victory and the June 18 Skrametti Supreme Court ruling. An anonymous Trevor Project source told CNN the funding cut creates a serious budget shortfall that could trigger staff layoffs without replacement funding, potentially leaving many of the 1.3 million annual callers without specialized support.

Trevor Project CEO Jaymes Black told MSNBC that removing the hotline "tells our youth that their

lives do not matter."

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration announced the consolidation June 17, notably using "LGB+" instead of "LGBTQ+" in its announcement — language commonly employed by anti-trans activists.

Crisis support remains available through 988, Trans Lifeline at 877-565-8860 and Rainbow Youth Project at 1-317-643-4888. Michigan's Stand with Trans offers its ally parent program for non-crisis support at 833-435-7798.

Renée Rapp to Play Detroit

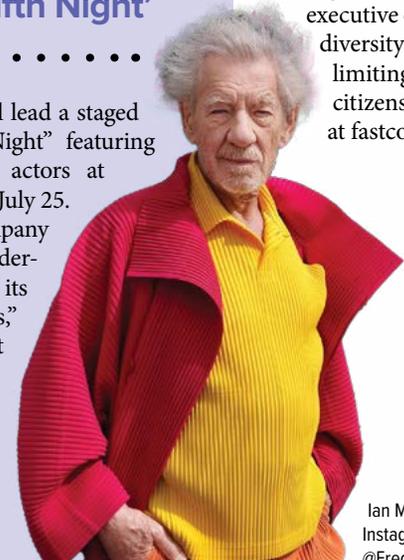
Openly lesbian pop sensation Renée Rapp brings her electrifying "Bite Me" tour to Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre at 8 p.m. Sept. 27, with support from Syd. The tour celebrates her forthcoming sophomore album "Bite Me," dropping Aug. 1. General tickets go on sale Friday, June 27 at 10 a.m. via 313presents.com. Don't miss this arena-sized showcase of Rapp's signature vulnerability and unbothered confidence.

Get Active at Stonewall Sports Field Day

Ready to have some fun while connecting with your community? Stonewall Sports Detroit and MiGen are hosting a Field Day and Health Expo from 1-5 p.m. on Saturday, June 28 at Geary Park in Ferndale. This multigenerational gathering for LGBTQ+ adults features activities tailored for those 55 and up, free health screenings and complimentary food and drinks. Transportation available. Register at bit.ly/stonewalljune.

Queer Icon Champions All-Trans 'Twelfth Night'

Sir Ian McKellen will lead a staged reading of "Twelfth Night" featuring a troupe of all-trans actors at London's The Space on July 25. The trans theater company chose Shakespeare's gender-bending comedy for its "inherent queerness," featuring a plot about disguised identities and complicated romance. Can't quite make it to London? Catch the livestream at space.org.uk.



Ian McKellen. Photo: Instagram/@FredericAranda

FROM DETROIT WITH LOVE

Kris and Dave didn't know the term 'ally' until recently. Now, they're national examples of how to be one.



Kris Cravens-Hutton and Dave Hutton at their Detroit home. Photo: Andrew Potter

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

On a quiet, tree-lined street in Detroit's Indian Village, pops of rainbow colors burst from one front yard like a joyful exhale. Even just passing by, it's impossible to miss the hand-cut foam flowers in every hue of the Progress Pride flag — light pink, light blue, white and

more — that adorn this historic home's porch.

The floral arch at Kris Cravens-Hutton and Dave Hutton's home has grown beyond neighborhood curiosity — it's now a statement of chosen family, fearless allyship and everyday defiance, all crafted from store-bought blooms and a shared community effort.

Above the arch, last year's "Peace. Love. Detroit" display has been replaced with a bold new message: "Onward Detroit!" To the left, a sign reads, "The first Pride was a riot."

"This year, with the election of Trump and the things we see coming out of that administration — trying to peel back gay marriage,

the ban on trans service members — it felt like this was the year to lean more into the resistance side," Kris tells BTL in an exclusive in-person interview at the Cravens-Hutton home. "That quote coming out of Stonewall felt really appropriate."

With over 700,000 followers, the Huttons' Instagram presence (@kris.and.dave) has become

a virtual Pride arch, radiating hope across the world. But this digital community grew from an unexpected source: a confrontation rooted in queerphobia. During a neighborhood home and garden tour, a man approached and insisted they remove their Pride flag, citing his religious beliefs.

"I was like, 'Sir, that's not going

to happen,” Kris told us earlier this year. The next morning, still fuming from the confrontation, she recorded a response and shared it impulsively. Their followers surged to 13,000.

“When we read that it makes people feel safe, that’s the way we should all feel,” Kris says about the arch. “That should be the default of the way we feel.”

Kris recalls how the arch brought a young trans person — whose family lives out of state — to their house. They stood outside the house, taking it in, and Kris did what Kris does — she offered more than a kind word. She offered herself.

“They have my phone number,” she says. “I’m like, ‘Hey, we’re here if you need anything. I know your family is somewhere else, but we’re around if you need us.’”

Neighbors Curtis Truitt and Doug Wahl have watched as the Pride arbor has only gotten “bigger, better and more elaborate.”

“This highly visible statement of support is photographed by passersby frequently,” says Truitt. “And it, along with supportive Instagram posts, are passed along to many others, creating the kind of awareness that is needed and so appreciated in the LGBTQ+ community.”

Since the couple began the tradition of building the Pride arbor in 2021 with the help of more than 20 neighbors, the Huttons have cultivated more than a display — they’ve built a landing pad, a gathering place, a beacon. “We’ve just made this huge community of people,” Kris says. “A lot of it is from finding people standing outside of our house.”

While there, I watched as a couple walked by and couldn’t help but break into beaming smiles. Some of these admirers aren’t just a walk or short drive away — they’re in Florida, overseas even.

I first heard about Kris and Dave’s social media presence from an ally friend in late 2024. Watching Kris scorch an internet troll who told them they should be supporting military veterans instead of LGBTQ+ people tickled some of the dread out of me. The punchline was its own kind of medicine, served with the kind of shady perfection that would at least get a queen onto “RuPaul’s Drag Race,” if not win them the crown: both Kris and Dave *are* Army vets. But Kris didn’t just say it — they brought out their military hats.

Then Kris looked the troll dead in the eye and, with her signature calm Southern drawl, said, “You go on and have yourself the day you deserve.”

Late last year, after Trump was elected, I sent so many videos of Kris serving takedowns crisp enough to be served on a silver tray to everyone I know: to co-workers, to friends, to my mom. As I sat with hard, uncomfortable feelings about what the next four years might feel like, Kris’ no-nonsense deadpanning loosened up the knots in my stomach long after I received that first iconic video. I figured others might need some of that Kris and Dave medicine. Then I decided to send it out to all of our readers, with a story about them that we published in March called “How Internet Trolls Helped This Detroit Couple Amplify Their Message for LGBTQ+ Rights.” But we didn’t expect what came next.

After our story ran, the response was electric — comments poured in from across the U.S. and beyond, from people who had also been waiting for something to pierce the collective heartbreak and offer a lift. We found that spark in Kris and Dave. In the Indian Village couple, people saw something that sometimes can feel like it doesn’t exist anymore: not just a light cutting through the darkness of queer erasure and anti-trans legislation, but a force — sharp, graceful and completely unwilling to tolerate bullshit. One commenter, *Sonialorenzoni*, called them a “national treasure.” *Ginabogolino* wants them to run for president. And *Rachel_kazmier* wished she’d found them before her recent trip to Detroit — even just to have “a glass of wine with a smart woman like you!” They’ve also been called “angel allies” and “legends.”

Thanks to Kris and Dave, *Mattinsmom* in Florida was relieved to discover a clever workaround for showing Pride in a community where Pride flags are banned. “I just realized I can plant specific colored flowers!” they exclaimed.

Another exchange highlighted the emotional power of social media connection. After visiting Detroit for the first time, *Plot.twist.lounge* shared that they had driven by the Huttons’ home with “tears in my eyes.”

“I’m the mom of a trans kid and love their IG posts so much! We’ve spent the last two weekends in Detroit house-hunting, in large

part because of the community highlighted by these amazing humans.”

Bierkat123 chimed in: “Hey there, I’m also the mom of a trans kid whose [sic] doing really well. We are really proud of him. I’m so happy you have found a great community to give support. I love following them on Instagram. They are amazing people.”

Bonflourish responded to *Plot.twist.lounge*, writing, “Welcome to Detroit, glad to have you! Please

deep affection Truitt and Wahl feel for their next-door neighbors — whom they call “lovely friends, first and foremost.”

“They are friendly and fun, thoughtful and generous,” says Truitt. “Through simple acts, like walking their dog or volunteering to fix the nonworking neighborhood gaslights, they came in contact with lots of neighbors — and made lots of friends. They do not hesitate to assist neighbors in need with anything. They are the

happened in the first place. But when people share those stories with us and call us their internet mom or dad or their favorite auntie or uncle, that is really special to us because Dave and I don’t have children.”

Through their connections with the LGBTQ+ community, which Kris endearingly calls the “Pride community,” and their own run-in with that homophobic man requesting they take the Pride flag off their house, the couple have



Dave Hutton and Kris Cravens-Hutton in front of their annual Pride arch at their Detroit home. Photo: Andrew Potter

reach out if you need help with your search. I am a neighbor and ally!”

Another user, *ducky_and_titch*, was simply savoring all the online friendliness: “Just here for this beautiful interaction. Love to you all.”

These days, good problems don’t seem to come around often — but Kris and Dave found themselves facing exactly that. The flood of kindness and connection has surprised even them. “We try to read every comment that people write,” Kris says. “In the evenings, we read ’em to each other before we go to bed. We appreciate every single thing people say, but we’re not really used to that kind of outpouring of kindness. We’re not used to people being so generous of spirit. It’s a lot to read. It’s a lot to take in.”

If strangers are driving by, their emotions spilling onto their steering wheels, just imagine the

type of people anyone would love to have next door. Their alliance to the LGBTQ+ community is secondary and is, in my opinion, their delightful way of offering real support and encouragement to an often marginalized group.”

When I drive up to their house, it’s clear the love they have for their community is an extension of the love they have for each other. Inside, their connection is palpable as they sit on their couch, so close that the space between them seems nonexistent.

“I’m sorry, Chris,” Kris says as we settle into our conversation. “Sometimes it’s hard for me to talk about this, please excuse me. It feels so personal when people share that part of their lives with us or tell us parts of their personal experiences, or if they’ve been abandoned by their families. And it feels like that shouldn’t happen anymore. I feel like we should have grown past that by now. It should have never

deepened their understanding of issues that affect a community of people who are now their nearest, dearest friends. “That ghostly gentleman was a gift to me because all of a sudden it gave me a chance to see things a bit more clearly,” she says. “The audacity to pull up in front of someone’s house and tell them what to do, especially in regards to that flag, I was shocked. Shocked and angry.”

For Kris and Dave, allyship has come so naturally that they only recently learned the word “ally.” Kris, who’s from Arkansas, recalls having gay friends as far back as college in Oklahoma City, when “one of my dear friends introduced me to gay culture.” Still, neither she nor Dave, who grew up in Kentucky, had thought deeply about what it means to be straight and actively supportive of the

Crafting Change in Rural Michigan

In a town of 7,500, Jenina Halitsky's shop Nina's Notions is a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Jenina Halitsky didn't set out to create St. Johns' newest LGBTQ+ safe space when she opened Nina's Notions Paper Crafting. But in a town of 7,500 surrounded by farmland, her craft store has become exactly that — a place where Pride flags in the windows signal something more valuable than the paper crafting supplies inside.

A lifelong crafter, Halitsky saw an opportunity when a local store was going out of business a year and a half ago. Opening her own place, she knew that one of the shop's core values would be inclusivity. Today, the store not only proudly displays the Pride flag, but Halitsky hosts affirming events and retreats and has collaborated with area non-profits that support LGBTQ+ youth.

"I have family members who are in the LGBTQ+ community and I've always been open to it," Halitsky said. "Love is love and I wanted a business that would be open to everybody. I have little flags in my window saying we support everybody. We participate in the Pride events in St. Johns."

The store is more than just a retail outlet selling supplies. Nina's Notions is designed to be a place where people can create, learn and find community. That sense of community is created outside the doors of Nina's Notions too. Halitsky is more than willing to pack up her supplies and go to where people are gathering, as she did on a recent Friday.

She partnered with St. Johns Call-In Coalition, a community organization founded in 2020 with the vision of "calling in the community to celebrate differences, create relationships, empower disenfranchised groups and to foster diversity in an effort to create a more inclusive, safer and healthier community," according to their website.

Twice a month, they provide a "Third Space," a safe place for LGBTQ+ youth and their supportive adults. Co-founder Andrea Ryan, a licensed clinical

social worker, described it as a drop-in space for LGBTQ+ youth that they host at the Clinton County Regional Educational Services Agency.

Halitsky attended a session, hosting a workshop for high school-aged teenagers on quilling, an art form involving rolling thin paper to create intricate designs.

"She brought in all of her stuff and she came into the Third Space," Ryan said. "She did an awesome project with us and the kids had fun doing it. Now we're trying to think about what else we can do, because they really like it. I'm thinking next time we take the kids to her location."

Halitsky said the two organizations hope to host an adult group for parents of LGBTQ+ youth who need a place to make connections and gain support.

This type of visible allyship, Ryan says, makes a difference and can even save lives.

"Kids need to know where and who they can be safe with," Ryan said. "People are talking bad about the LGBTQ+ community, trying to create policy against people living their lives. So quite honestly, it saves lives when people can be bold and say, 'Yes, I am an ally in the community.'"

Ryan points to the significantly higher suicide rates within the LGBTQ+ community. According to The Trevor Project's 2023 National Survey, 41% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, with rates even higher among transgender and nonbinary youth. Research shows that having just one accepting adult can reduce the risk of suicide among LGBTQ+ young people by 40%. Ryan emphasized that simply letting someone know they are seen and valued can be life-saving. They also noted that even in the absence of overt hostility, silence and lack of support can contribute to feelings of isolation and risk.

"Being in a rural place there are a lot of things that just aren't talked about and not talking about



Jenina Halitsky opens her door to all, including the LGBTQ+ community, at Nina's Notions. Photo: Ida VanBeelan

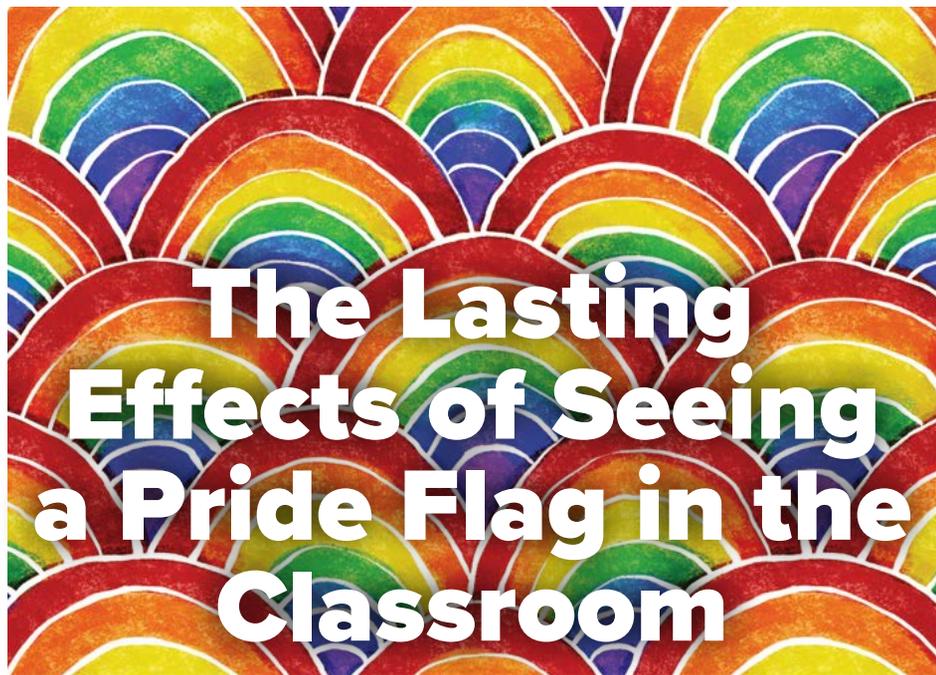
something is not a sign of safety," Ryan said. "When someone like Jenina can be bold and say, 'Yes, you are welcome in my shop. I'm here with you. I'm standing right beside you,' it's life-changing for kids."

The support goes beyond just emotional comfort. Ryan described a recent incident in which some teens were targeted in downtown St. Johns. Knowing of a trusted community member, they ran to that person's shop for

safety.

"Bullying is a problem and not having enough spaces in rural communities is a problem," Ryan

See **Nina's Notions**, page 19



It's healing seeing my old high school display Pride flags in classrooms



BY ELLE WARREN

In high school, even though there were a couple teachers who were rumored to be queer, I didn't know anyone who was out. "I saw Ms. B at dinner with a woman last night," someone would incredulously spread around the school; queerness was a spectacle, and for reasons I wouldn't fully confront for years, I was invested for different reasons than my classmates. Almost everyone I knew, including myself, belonged to one Christian denomination or another in our small West Michigan town. Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2015, the year before I graduated, but it didn't shift the status quo of our school's culture.

As such, I spent my high school years the way that many do: seized with terror over the mere possibility of confronting any kind of queerness, my own or otherwise. I'd go through periods where I spent hours a day for months on end analyzing the "evidence." I kissed girls as a child, but I was a cheerleader now. I hadn't kissed a boy yet, but when my middle school fling held my hand, it made my stomach flutter. I didn't have any official boyfriends in high school, just "situationships," but DTR withstanding, being involved in any romantic way with a boy was always a relief — even if I wasn't sure I wanted to kiss him.

Post-graduation, I friended a couple former teachers on Facebook. This past summer, eight years after graduation and around the time I got married (to a woman!), one of them posted a photo of themselves in their classroom. On the speaker of the intercom, I noticed a decal of the school's logo in Pride colors, and the teacher donned a Stonewall Inn T-shirt. I commented,

"Wow, so cool to see a Pride flag there, and you wearing your Stonewall shirt." My former teacher wrote back, "Yeah, most teachers have them up!" Witnessing not just one but several Pride flags displayed in the school made me feel like I was living in an alternate universe. Though it's been less than a decade since I was a student there, it felt so far from my experience. The closest thing we had to pro-diversity messaging was a poster that touted "tolerance."

It's easy to think that something as simple as a decal on an intercom wouldn't have made a difference in dismantling my internalized homophobia, but in reality, that line of thinking is probably a self-preservation tactic; it's painful to consider how simple the act of celebrating all identities is — and was, all along. If I'm honest, I know that the mere visibility of non-heterosexuality would have been a game-changer for me. After all, homophobia was presented to and internalized by me more so via omission than by voiced hatred.

Part of me questioned whether queer people truly even existed. Yes, "Glee" premiered in 2009. There was "Will & Grace" long before that, premiering in 1998, the year I was born. But "Modern Family," with its (albeit stereotypical) gay couple, was the first and only time I saw queer characters onscreen — and my parents and I only tuned in because it came on after "The Middle," a sitcom that depicted a more traditional, "all-American" family: white, heterosexual and middle class.

When I saw that Pride decal and Stonewall Inn T-shirt in my former teacher's Facebook post, I felt a sense of sadness for myself, but more poignantly, I felt hopeful. Hopeful that the queer students who go there now will be

See **Classroom Pride**, page 26



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How One Michigan Ally Mom Turned Post-Election Anger Into a National Project for LGBTQ+ Solidarity

Michigan mother channels fear for her queer children into nationwide collaborative artwork

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

While fear and rage are rarely welcome visitors, they sometimes spark unexpected creativity.

The day after the 2024 presidential election, Lora Garcelon found herself frustrated, afraid and overwhelmed. She responded by launching an art project that people around the country have contributed to and has now been displayed in two Michigan locations.

The Together Art Project, a collection of square collages co-created with global artists, is Lora's answer to those who hate. Four panels now house 25 pieces of art each, with Lora working on a fifth as requests continue pouring in.

It started in a doctor's office.

"I was in the waiting room and on the radio we get Donald Trump's voice and I can't get away from it because it's on the radio," Lora said. "I am so angry and afraid for my children."

When she got home, she went outside and started slinging paint, sticks, rocks and other objects at watercolor paper to work out her rage. Lora didn't stop there.

While visiting her nonbinary youngest child at college, she listened to the anger and fear that many of their friends were experiencing. Many were staying in bed and seeking out suicide prevention resources.

"That's when I got the idea of moving forward, of not just making angry art," Lora said. "I saw the huge need for something that I have the tools to help [with]."

She attended a wedding that same week in which the bride's gay brother walked with his partner down the aisle and the family spoke about inclusion at the reception.

"It made my heart happy to see people of the queer community being treated with love and inclusion and kindness," Lora said. "That's the thought I was building on and if you look at the project, one of the collages in the very center is that couple who was walking down the aisle, holding hands."

She began reaching out to other artists, asking them to help transform the art made in anger into a message of hope, love and inclusion. The process works like this: Lora creates the initial squares by flinging paint and expressing her anger on large sheets of watercolor paper, then cuts them into seven-inch squares and sends them to artists who transform them into pieces of hope.

She received nine squares initially, which was what she expected. Except news kept

spreading. In the months that followed, as of early March, she had sent out 185 squares and received requests for 50 more.

Her husband built the panels out of plywood. She covered the panels with copies of Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" and the Obergefell decision and other Supreme Court rulings that supported LGBTQ+ people.

"The initial squares are gone and they are in the collage," Lora said. "I fling paint, I write stuff and I get out my anger. I take a large sheet of watercolor paper, which is 2-by-3 feet, and I cut it down to 7-inch squares."

In addition to paintings, contributors have covered squares with photography, mixed media collages or written words of support or poetry. The youngest contributor is 8 while the oldest, at 91, is Lora's father, who wrote "Grandpa loves you" on a square.

Keane Garcelon, Lora's son who practices law in Chicago, contributed a collage and has been helping review written materials related to the project. Keane, who is gay, said the project was a culmination of the ongoing support he and his siblings have received from both their parents.

"This collaboration between my parents and other artists made sense to me," Keane said. "My mom is emblematic of what happens when you have someone who listens to their queer children."

Since he made his piece, Keane said he's gone through many different stages of emotion and processing.

"I'm glad that my mom chose to focus this project on the community and coming together," Keane said. His nonbinary sibling created a "don't tread on me" square that reflects a more defiant energy. "That's the energy I feel much more."

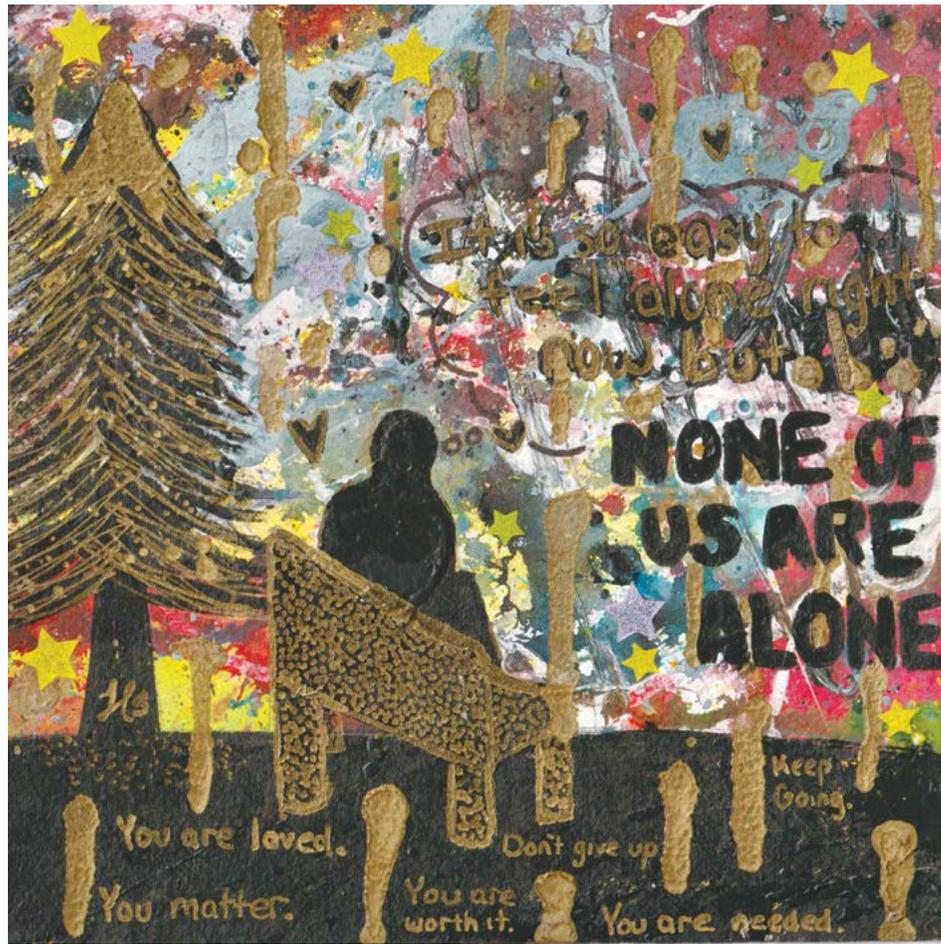
Marie Garcelon, another of Lora's children, said that she grew up doing art with her mom but they'd never collaborated on a piece.

"It felt nice to be able to contribute some of my own art to it," said Marie, an Ann Arbor resident. "My siblings are both LGBTQ and I felt it could show my support."

Marie's piece depicts a large German Shepherd. "I wrote [on it], 'We must bark for those who must wear a muzzle,'" Marie said. "Instead of an angry, aggressive dog, it was a voice standing up for those who can't — like protecting your puppies."

A class from Howell High School contributed squares, as have professional

See [Lora Garcelon](#), page 24



(Top) Artwork from the Together Art Project. (Bottom) Lora Garcelon in front of 100 art panels from the project. Courtesy photos



Jenina Halitsky with her husband Kevin. Courtesy photo

said. “As a non-profit, we don’t even have our own building — we’re just a very grassroots type of organization. When there can be places like Nina’s Notions, that’s an actual building that someone could go into and find safety and security and acceptance; that means the world to people.”

While rural areas are often associated with greater intolerance, Halitsky describes St. Johns’ downtown area as being very community-minded and supportive. She points to a nearby shop that specializes in chocolate for those with dietary restrictions as just one example of the diverse ways businesses in the community strive to be inclusive and create equitable opportunities for people.

“It’s just a great community which is very supportive of each other,” Halitsky said.

In the less than two years that Nina’s Notions has been open, Halitsky’s customers, especially her younger ones, have learned that they can find a place of support and a person who will listen.

“I had a young lady come in — she is 16 and doesn’t have the support of her family,” Halitsky said. “She just needed somebody to talk to and knew that we were open. Just having a listening ear for them to talk to and for them to know that they can come to us at any time and we’re there for them. They’ve been back because of that and will shop at the store.”

Halitsky described another incident where a woman did not approve of her granddaughter identifying under the LGBTQ+ umbrella and when they both ended up in the store, the grandmother refused to acknowledge granddaughter’s presence. After her grandmother left, the young person needed a place where she could talk about her hurt.

As her store has blossomed and found a larger home, Halitsky’s commitment to nurturing an open, welcoming community has only deepened. “Everybody should be treated the same,” Halitsky said. “We’re living in a time where there seems to be a lot of backlash against acceptance and I think it’s important for people to know that they have somewhere that they can go where they’re not going to be judged.”

Visit *Nina’s Notions Paper Crafting* in St. Johns at 104 N. Clinton Ave.

that are in seats that are able to do incredible things for our community who, when it was time to vote or get them elected, they were at every community gathering of people who are marginalized, telling us how life was going to change for us, that there was going to be all of these wonderful changes in Michigan. And then, the elections happened and where did they go?”

While Michigan has made significant policy advances for LGBTQ+ rights, Abad feels that “a lot of these same elected politicians don’t come check on those same constituents that put them in those seats.”

She calls out a troubling pattern in political priorities: “And if you’ve noticed or looked at some of their activity for the last two, four, six years, it has been servicing rural areas and not the demographic of the people that got them there. We need intentionality and elected officials to be allies all year round and not just when you need our vote for specific seats.”

Allies can help hold politicians accountable by staying engaged with LGBTQ+ issues year round, not just during Pride Month or election season. Attend town halls, contact your representatives about ongoing community needs and support candidates who demonstrate consistent commitment to LGBTQ+ rights — beyond campaign season.

Listen more than you speak — and ask before acting

Active listening forms the foundation of effective allyship. When LGBTQ+ people share their experiences, resist the urge to jump in with your own stories or solutions. Instead, focus entirely on understanding their perspective without judgment or interruption.

This means putting away distractions, making eye contact and asking thoughtful follow-up questions that show you’re engaged. Remember that you’re learning about experiences that may be completely different from your own, and that’s exactly the point.

One of the most common mistakes allies make is assuming they know what kind of support would be most helpful. Before launching into advocacy mode, ask LGBTQ+ community members what they actually need from you in that moment. For instance, when BTL Editorial Director Chris Azzopardi recently sat down with Detroit allies and Instagram influencers Kris Cravens-Hutton and her husband Dave Hutton for our cover story, Kris asked Azzopardi, “Is there anything happening legislatively, since the Trump

administration came to power, that’s made you really uncomfortable or anything you think we should be aware of as allies that we can be more vocal about?” Sometimes the community needs someone to speak up. Other times they need allies to step back and let them lead. They might want emotional support, practical help or simply for you to bear witness to their experience. The only way to know is to ask.

De-center yourself in LGBTQ+ spaces and conversations

Allyship isn’t about you — it’s about supporting marginalized communities outside your own. This means recognizing when to step back and let other voices take center stage, especially in conversations about their own experiences and needs.

When you do speak up, make sure you’re amplifying queer and trans voices rather than speaking for them. Use phrases like “I heard [LGBTQ+ person] say...” or “According to [LGBTQ+ organization]...” to redirect attention to community voices. Stop and reflect: Are LGBTQ+ community members asking you to speak on their behalf? When they do, and only if they do, that’s your cue to step up and use your voice.

Educate yourself continuously

Don’t expect LGBTQ+ people to serve as your personal educators. Take responsibility for learning about queer and trans history, constantly changing current issues and terminology through books, documentaries, reputable websites and other resources.

Stay curious about evolving language and concepts within the community. What was considered appropriate terminology five years ago might not be today, and that’s OK — language evolves as understanding deepens. LGBTQ+ resources like Pride Source and the Stand with Trans Lifeline Library can help you stay informed about current issues and community perspectives.

Speak up when you witness discrimination

Use your privilege to interrupt homophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination when you see them happening. This is especially important when no LGBTQ+ people are present to defend themselves.

You don’t need to be confrontational — sometimes a simple “That’s not OK” or “I don’t agree with that” can be enough to shift the conversation. The goal is to make it clear that discriminatory behavior won’t go

unchallenged.

Michigan state Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, an out bisexual woman who chairs the House Health Policy Committee, emphasizes that allies must go beyond passive support. “We need allies to be accomplices,” she noted. “It isn’t just enough to share in our celebrations, we need our allies to defend us, particularly our trans family, against near-constant attacks.”

Some of the most important ally work happens in spaces where few or no LGBTQ+ people are present. Challenge homophobic and transphobic comments from family members, coworkers, neighbors and friends.

These conversations can be uncomfortable, but they’re often more effective when they come from someone who shares group membership with the person expressing discriminatory views.

Miss Trans Michigan 2025 Baddie Brooks, a Black trans advocate and musical performer, stresses the importance of taking concrete action when witnessing discrimination. “Speak up when you witness injustice,” she told BTL recently. “By correcting misgendering, attacking harmful rhetoric and stepping in when a trans person is being harassed, you can make a difference.”

Practice using inclusive language

Make inclusive language your default, not just something you remember when LGBTQ+ people are around. Use gender-neutral terms when appropriate, avoid assumptions about people’s relationships or identities and respect chosen names and pronouns.

If you make a mistake, apologize briefly and move on — don’t make a big production out of it that centers your discomfort rather than the person you’ve impacted.

Brooks emphasizes the importance of genuine commitment. “Visibility without protection is a trap,” she said. “Allyship needs to be direct and visible, not performative.”

Stay committed for the long haul

Real allyship isn’t a one-time commitment — it’s an ongoing practice that requires sustained effort and growth. There will be times when you make mistakes, feel overwhelmed or question whether you’re making a difference. But according to advocates like Poindexter, the path forward doesn’t require perfection — it requires intentional action.

“We don’t need special provisions,” Poindexter said. “What we need is to organize and mobilize in a way that’s effective with transparent love and support that is intentional. That is what will help us make it through.”

Frankie Grande Is Ready to Be the Gayest Pop Star on Earth

With 'Hotel Rock Bottom,' Frankie Grande channels sobriety, sex and sister Ariana's support into bold queer anthems — and a powerful message of visibility

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

When Frankie Grande bounces into our Zoom meeting, he radiates enough energy to power a small city. The self-proclaimed “gayest person on earth” is about to release his debut album and he's turned all the way up — dimmers be damned. It's a moment that's been “brewing and churning and bubbling” for years, and now that it's here, Grande is doing what he does best: going all in, unapologetically queer and completely unfiltered.

At 42, the performer and activist — who previously captured our attention on “Big Brother” in 2014, as the flamboyant Frankini on Nickelodeon, and through his advocacy work with GLAAD — has finally found his sound. Drawing from the icons who shaped his childhood dance parties — Madonna, Whitney Houston and Donna Summer — and his musical-theater background, Grande has crafted a collection of pure, resilience-building dance music with “Hotel Rock Bottom,” due June 27.

The album's first two singles, “Rhythm of Love” and “Boys,” turn up the heat with unapologetic queerness — sweaty bodies, sexual energy — offering a bold invitation to celebrate the pleasures of queer joy. The accompanying videos, which he describes with unflinching honesty, function as both artistic expression and personal catharsis, revisiting scenes from his wilder, pre-sobriety days through the freer, more grounded perspective of who he is now.

During this current Pride season, as conservatives continue their legislative assault on LGBTQ+ rights, Grande sees his album as more than entertainment — it's activism on the dance floor. During our conversation, Grande opens up about sister Ariana's emotional reaction to his music, his surprising journey from EP to major-label signing, and why he believes supporting the trans community should be every gay man's priority this Pride season.

Congratulations on your debut album! How long has this been in the making?

It is really surreal to be talking about it, and I guess this has been brewing and churning and

bubbling under the surface for many, many years. I think once the button was pressed, everything poured out of me. This album wrote itself almost, and so quickly, and it was because I had all these stories under the surface that I have been telling through moments on social media or working toward a novel one day and writing in my journal and talking at sober meetings in order to share my experience, strength and hope. And then all of a sudden there was this new medium available to me, which was music, which I just never ever gave the opportunity that it deserved, I guess. So as soon as I started writing, the whole album fell out of my mouth fully developed — JK! — but it was really exciting and I'm really happy it's happening.

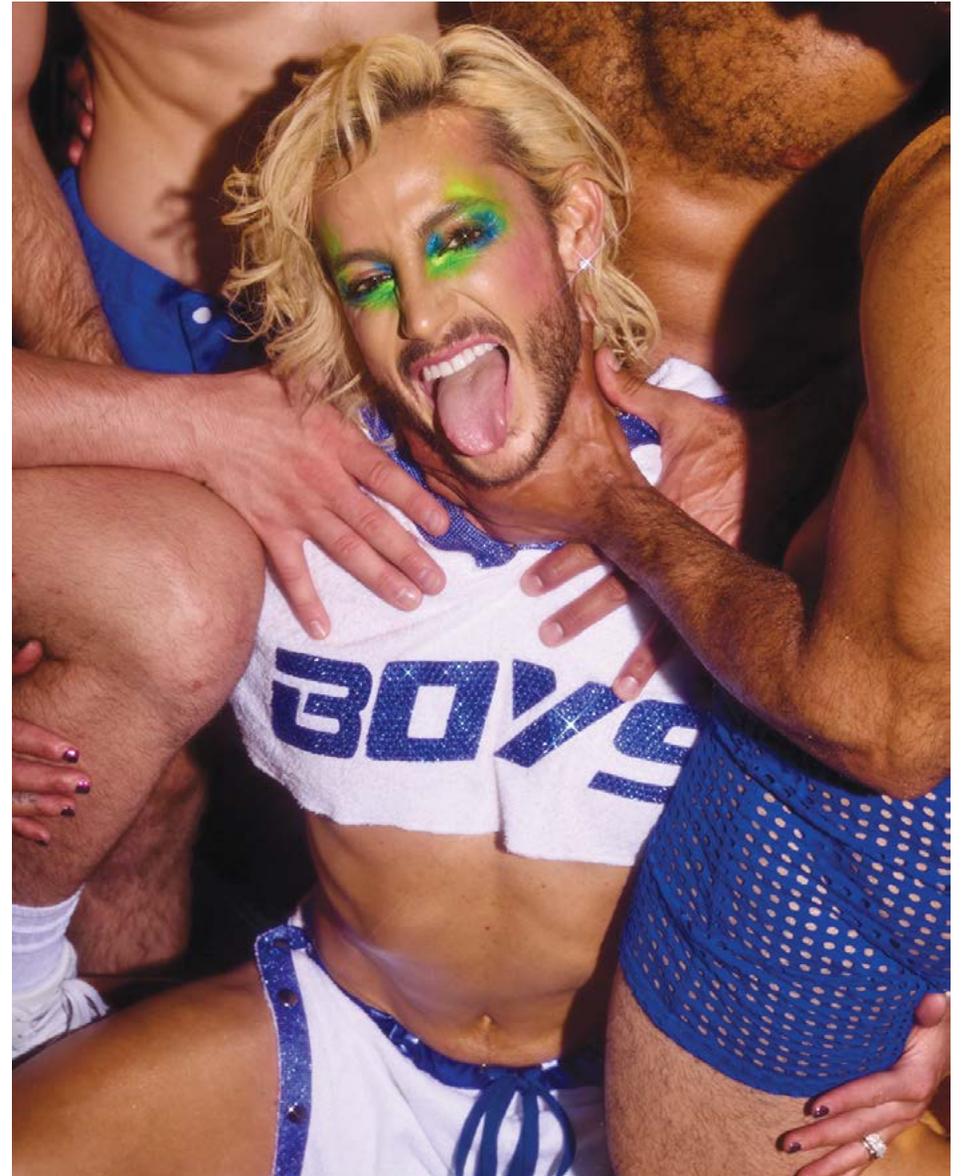
What's the earliest memory of you wanting to create music?

My mother really just had me dancing around the living room when I was a little boy. She was a single mom. [My parents] got divorced when I was 2 years old. And so it was really just me and my mom. And she loved Madonna, she loved Whitney, she loved Donna Summer. She loved Barbra Streisand. And so as I was growing up, it was a dance party 24/7 in mommy's bedroom, and I remember spinning the “Speed of Sound” and Donna Summer's “MacArthur's Park” and “No More Tears.” And then of course, once I got my hands on Madonna's “Immaculate Collection,” it was over, honey. So I think in that moment I was like, “Maybe this is something that I can do one day.”

Were these pop inspirations on your mind as you were working on this album?

Absolutely. I pull from '70s, '80s and '90s throughout the album sonically, but then vocally, there's a lot of Madonna influence on there, but there's also a tremendous amount of David Bowie. He was my North Star growing up. When I saw him in “Labyrinth” as the Goblin King, I was like, “What the fuck is that? And how do I become that immediately? That's me.”

“As the world falls down, falling...” — I



Frankie Grande. Courtesy photo

just wanted to be David Bowie so badly. And George Michael, another huge, huge influence in my life growing up. My mom loves George Michael, so he was on my screen constantly. And so vocally, I wanted to also capture that unique male tone that raised me that you don't necessarily hear so much these days on the radio. The biggest hurdle for me was figuring out what my sound is going to be on a record coming from musical-theater training, coming from these heavy '80s male rock influences. How do I do that on a dance-pop record in 2025? And we got there, and I'm very proud of it. But it was a journey. It was an exciting one.

I know someone close to you — your

younger sister, Ariana — has made the transition from musical theater to pop and back again. Do you ever talk with her about how she navigates those shifts between genres?

Oh yeah. Ariana was my advisor throughout the entire process. It is so cool. Finally, we are speaking the exact same language. I mean, obviously there was musical theater and Broadway, and we've followed in each other's footsteps throughout both of our careers on and off. But she's the shepherd. I am learning directly from her, and it's been just an incredible experience.

And finding my sound, I actually did on

my own because I didn't let her in on the process until I had something to share. And even then, I was terrified. I was so scared to play it for my sister just because, what if it sucked? Do you know what I'm saying? Come on. That would've been really horrible. I want to throw up just thinking about it. What if it was terrible? It wasn't terrible. She started crying as soon as she heard the first song and immediately was like, "You need to keep going. This is remarkable and unbelievable and holy shit, and what a unique sound and perspective you have, and this needs to be out in the world."

From that point moving forward, I sent her everything in real time, but I had almost an entire EP recorded by the time that she even heard it. And so what was that process like? It was basically just playing in the studio and figuring out what sounds good, with some coaching from producers and vocal coaches. Some of the best parts of me that I found was really dropping into a character inside the studio based on the song that I'm singing and using that character as a device to tell the story. I jump around my entire life in this album process. It's not all being recorded from Frankie today. There's some drunken, debauched Frankie from 20 years ago. And so dropping into that character in the studio really helped solidify the sound.

How far back to former Frankie are you taking us on this album?

Great question. The first song was called "I Don't Remember It." It was produced by Gregory Dillon, and it's on an EP but not on the album. This was the EP that I ended up bringing to Republic, expecting them to be like, "Oh, there's this queer indie label that we know. Go over there. We have a friend, we will set up a meeting." But instead, they signed me on the spot, which was crazy. But we've recorded a whole new album since that EP, so hopefully songs from that will come out into the world.

But the first song is "I Don't Remember It," and that was my answer to "Heartstopper" season two, which actually had very few queer artists represented in their music. Season three, they completely fixed that, by the way. Season three was Troye Sivan's entire album. So good job.

Obviously I wasn't the only one having an issue when these two boys took to the dance floor for prom and they danced to Carly Rae Jepsen. Love Carly Rae Jepsen. [But the music] should be a huge homosexual. It should be like a big, cocksucking, faggot homosexual they should be dancing to. And I was happy to provide a service.

So I went into the studio and recorded a song for that moment. It's like an '80s gay prom song and there is a song on the album that I feel is perfect for that moment. I ended up recording a gay wedding song in my mind. It's called "Bound to You," and it has a play on... maybe it's bound to marriage, maybe it's bound to you in leather daddy form. But regardless, it's a song about my marriage.

The video for "Rhythm of Love" is unabashedly queer. Was it your idea to shoot this in a queer club and make out with a guy in the bathroom?

Of course. And if you think that is queer, wait till you see "Boys." It is just fucking in the steam room. The premise of "Boys" is, I'm going to the gym, but then I see a hot man played by Laith Ashley, and I decide to skip the gym and go straight to the steam room. So anyway, I've never been in better shape. I've never been more naked. I am so excited for you to see "Boys." But yes, let's go back to the beginning. The beginning of time, "Rhythm of Love," my debut single where I really wanted to be unapologetically queer. I'm on the board of GLAAD, and I think that the unique position that I find myself in is, I am already the gayest person in media.

See Frankie Grande, page 22

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The Lang Center
 Puzzle can be found on page 25

Frankie Grande Continued from page 21

I'm not having a conversation with myself about, "Ooh, how gay do I want to be as a recording artist?" I am already the gayest person on Earth. So now I get to be the gayest person in music.

That is so important right now for our LGBTQ+ community to have unabashedly, homosexual, free, sexually liberated human beings for them to look up to. And this is my time, this is my moment. This is why I did it. This is why I was like, "I want the beginning of 'Rhythm of Love' to be me going down on a man in a bathroom stall at The Box [in New York City]." Also, because that was me for many, many, many years. He actually represents drugs in the music video. So the way that I was using drugs in that bathroom stall, that exact bathroom stall actually, but I wanted it to be more universal.

So we decided to use obsession over a relationship, obsession over that guy that you just met at the bar who you don't give a shit about, but you're out with your friends. But the whole time you're still thinking, "Where is that guy? What is he doing? Is he with somebody else? Should I go back to the bathroom?" And it's like, "Bitch, just enjoy your fucking friends. Just have a good night." But my obsession with men, with drinking, with using was so strong that I lost the ability to do that, even though I knew that there was a community around me that was so beautiful and loving. And so that's the story of "Rhythm of Love." I'm up on the stage with my best friends who I was in "Mamma Mia!" with; there's actual people in that video who were with me during that time.

And you're in the bathroom at the club you used to frequent?

Yeah, that's where I drank and did all my drinking and using and fucking when I was in the clubs.

You've changed a lot since, so how did it feel to return to a place as a different person?

So in that space, since I have gotten sober, I've gotten married at The Box. I shot galas for GLAAD and had parties there in sobriety. So coming back for this music video was really beautiful and full circle. Also dropping into that character of who I used to be, but then getting the director to say cut and then being me again, oh, how powerful. How liberating to not be controlled by drugs and alcohol, but still get to have that kind of fun. And that also spills into the "Boys" music video. I am just fully getting triple penetrated in

a steam room. And then the director says cut. And I'm back to being a married man with a puppy. It's cool. It's liberating. It's cathartic. Life imitates art. And then I get to tell the story to the world of a time in my life that I'm no longer in.

Pride is heavy this year, given the current federal administration's attacks on LGBTQ+ people. How're you feeling as you prepare to perform at several Pride events?

Going back to that point of me being the gayest person on Earth, us just existing right now is a form of protest. But luckily, I also am an activist. So I would say the reason that this Pride is more important than ever is for our trans siblings. The whole thing, everything for me, even this launch, is just to make sure that the trans community also feels loved and represented and wrapped in our rainbow. All of the colors of the rainbow are especially referred to the trans community now, during this time. I think there's still a big group of gay — I'm a gay man, so I'll speak for gay men — who feel like, "That's their problem, and it's not my problem." And that's not true. If anything happens to the trans community, it is our problem. It is gay men's problem. We need to fight for them.

So that's going to be my message throughout this Pride. And the reason why I'm so excited to release this album is because in my life when the community has been under attack, I've always run to the dance floor. And that is not going to change. I feel like the dance floor is our safe place. It is where we come together as a community. It's where we fucking recharge, which we need to do so that we can go back into battle, which we need to do.

Given your platform and the importance of visibility, why do you think the character Frankini on Nickelodeon's "Henry Danger," and then the movie released earlier this year, has been a significant step forward for representation on the network?

I mean, it was the best thing ever. Frankini is 8 years old now, maybe 9 at this point. And so that amount of representation on TV back then is just crazy for live-action children programming. To my knowledge, it is the first. For a long time, it was the only. I don't know of any other live-action queer characters on kids programming, but I hope there are more. I really do. And it was such an honor to get to play him and also get little boys coming up to me in theme parks being like, "I get to wear nail polish because Frankini wears nail polish." I'm

like, "I'll throw myself off this ride. I'm so emotional." But yeah, it was just a huge gift and a gift that keeps on giving. I was so lucky I got to play him in the movie, and he got to make gay jokes. It was fun.

Another seminal moment for you and representation was you just being yourself on "Big Brother." How do you reflect on that chapter now?

I was a badass, man. It was so fucking cool to be, again, the gayest person on Earth and the one that everyone feared and the one that everyone was scared is going to win the show, is going to win every competition. "You can't beat him. He's unbeatable" I was beaten, but it was just because Derek was a fucking undercover cop. But you know what I'm saying? It was really cool to be the gayest person and also the most feared on a very difficult reality TV competition.

I was actually sprinting in Barry's boot camp, and have you ever been to Barry's? You're right in front of the mirror and you're just staring into your fucking soul and you're like sprinting at 12 mph, and you're like, "I can go faster." And I literally looked at myself in the mirror and I said, "You are one of the greatest competitors that has ever competed on 'Big Brother.'" I gagged myself. And then I was like, "Faster." So do whatever you need to do to motivate yourself. But yeah, no, I'm fucking incredible.

What's one moment in your activism over the years that you're especially proud of?

I'm very proud of this new chapter with GLAAD, where I partnered with Peppermint to pen a letter to the reality TV industry. I'm demanding that they have more fair and inclusive casting for the LGBTQ+ community because we're still in a place of tokenism on shows like "Big Brother" and even "Survivor" and "The Amazing Race." "Traitors" is doing much better recently, but we want even more.

Having one letter in the rainbow on one season is not OK. You can't be like, "Oh, we hit our LGBTQ+ quota with this one cast member." You can't do that. So do better. And I'm proud that I've shone a light on this, because I don't think people think about it, to be honest. They're like, "No, there's that gay guy. The gay guy's on it." Let's put four gay men on a fucking single season. And a trans woman and a lesbian. You know what? Maybe it's OK to show two men making out in the "Big Brother" house. Maybe that's what we need. Maybe we need the next marriage out of "Big Brother" to be a homosexual one. I'm ready.

LGBTQ+ community.

In the military, she says, Dave knew more openly gay soldiers than she did.

“I knew people after active duty who then came out to me,” she notes.

Although they’ve long supported LGBTQ+ people and causes, they only learned the term “ally” because their Instagram followers started calling them that. “We’ve learned so much from our Instagram community,” Kris says. “We’re constantly learning because this is a relatively new world for us.”

She adds, “It’s become such a bigger part of our life now because of the Pride arbor and maybe because we’re also in Michigan. It created a life of its own.”

One night, after they threw their first big party in their house, they got into bed and something suddenly hit Dave, to which he told Kris: They have a lot of gay friends.

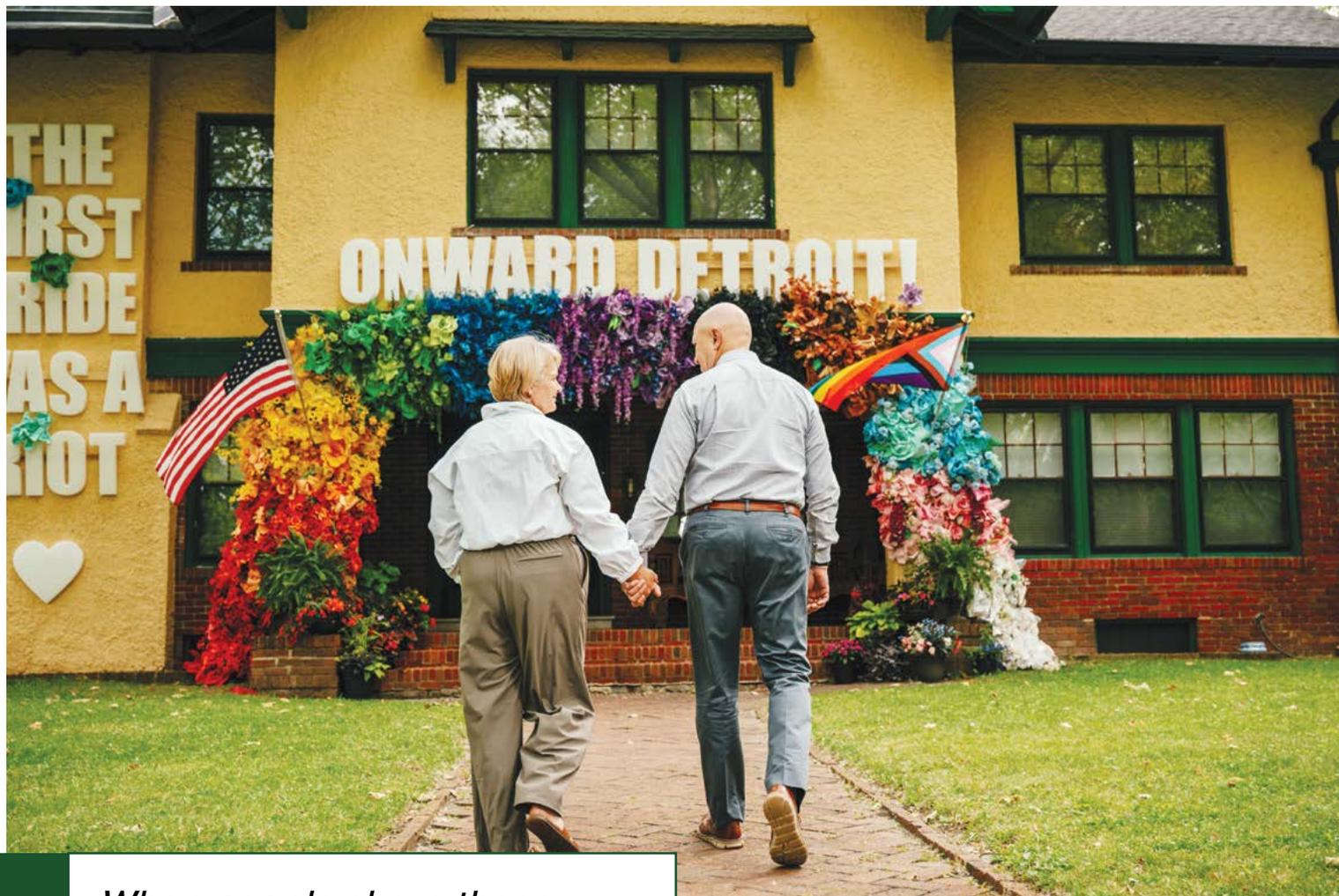
“I knew we had friends who are gay,” he says now, laughing. “Just didn’t realize that most of them were.”

Just days before we met, they had co-hosted more than 100 people at their first Pride party, which Kris says “felt fucking epic.” The gayest remnants of the celebration were still scattered throughout the first floor: Progress Pride flag stickers, beaded rainbow keychains ending in tiny hearts and buttons (Kris said the one with the Grindr logo was gone in a flash — shocker, right?). Additionally, Pride-themed cookies carried messages like “The first Pride was a riot” and “Equality hurts no one,” piped in colorful frosting. It felt like the kind of gathering that would’ve had half of Instagram lining up for an invite.

As the “token straight house” helping prep the party, they’re now feeling the love from the queer community.

“Just people taking us in because acceptance is part of their family,” Dave says. “It’s the best thing.”

Although Kris and Dave were initially hesitant to step into the role of allies — largely out of respect and a desire not to



Kris Cravens-Hutton and Dave Hutton. Photo: Andrew Potter

“

When people share those stories with us and call us their internet mom or dad or their favorite auntie or uncle, that is really special to us because Dave and I don’t have children.

— Kris Cravens-Hutton

overstep — they’ve since fully embraced the responsibility, becoming vibrant examples of how to show up with intention and heart.

They even wanted the Pride arbor to be green-lit by someone else before they felt comfortable putting it up. “I wanted to decorate for Pride and Dave was like, ‘OK, let’s do it,’” Kris says. “We already knew that we were going to do the front porch, and then when we called our friend and said, ‘Are we allowed to do this as allies?’”

“I think [Kris and Dave] quite naturally support people they know and like,” Wahl says. “It took no convincing on our part. As they

have offered loving gestures of support, they have received love from the community in return.”

Now, as outspoken allies who strike a balance between the soothing presence of Mr. Rogers and the bawdiness of Bette Midler, Kris brings her trademark sharp wit (her recent reference to Donald Trump as “old yam tits” before attending a “No Kings” protest in Detroit has grown wildly popular among their followers), while Dave leans into his goofy charm, proudly sharing his dad jokes, like: “What do you call a line to get into a gay bar? LGBT-Queue.” She’s quick to note that she and Dave don’t “present as people

who would look normally like a bunch of liberals,” adding, “The way my voice sounds, the way we look, Dave’s big-ass truck, I think we probably look like we might not be allies. We might present as people who are close-minded. And I think when people find out we aren’t, what I hope is that it empowers them to be more vocal in their support as well and lets them know that there are a lot more allies out there. Hopefully it will empower them to be more vocal on their own.”

One thing, she says, that made her consider her allyship was seeing a close straight friend always wear a “Trans Kids Matter” pin on her lapel.

“That made me say, what’s going on? What’s happening with that? What do I need to know that I don’t know?” Kris says. “So I have a very supportive community. I’m the one who’s the dumbass. I’m the one who’s had to learn more and more. And that’s why I say visibility is so important now because that visibility, her wearing that pin, is what made me start asking questions. What’s happening to trans kids in these

families?”

What advice would they give to others on their own allyship journey?

“Supporting justice and equality is never wrong,” Kris says. “I think leaning into love is never wrong. I think I was so scared of cancel culture and overstepping my bounds and maybe somehow accidentally culturally appropriating something that it kept me more quiet than it should have. I wish I had been more vocal for so much longer. I didn’t become as flamboyantly supportive until recently, and I wish I had done it years ago. I wish I had made people feel this comfortable years ago. So just lean in. Get the flag, buy the pin. Put on the sticker.”

“[When] you don’t know, ask the question,” Dave adds.

“There’s no shortage of ways to get smarter, to be a better ally and a better friend,” Kris goes on, as Dave nods in agreement. “And it’s actually the easiest thing you can do. Loving other people and believing in equal rights and protections for all of us are the easiest things we can do. And it’s always going to be the right thing.”

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◀ Lora Garcelon

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artists from Oregon, Florida, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Texas, New Mexico, Wisconsin and California.

Marie said she was especially moved by the squares contributed from Howell High School, where she graduated more than a decade ago. The school's evolving culture represents broader changes in community acceptance.

"It was such a taboo thing for anyone to come out as gay," Marie said of her alma mater. "To see that outpouring of love and the fact that students were comfortable contributing made me really happy."

Liz Walker, a Portland, Oregon artist, contributed several pieces. Like Lora, Walker found catharsis using her art to express support and hope.

"After the election, we were all pretty gutted," Walker said. "[Lora] came up with a write-up that was the Together Art Project and sent it to me."

Walker sent emails to her like-minded artist colleagues. They responded and the representation in the project from the West grew.

"[The project] resonates with me because I have a beating heart," Walker said. "How could I not? This is an injustice; we have to get the word out."

Walker knows what it is like to be an ally. Her mother was a Texas school teacher who came out in 1977 when Walker was 19, launching her family into activism.

"She had to be pretty closeted," Walker said. "Now she's retired, 92, and married to her partner, Mary. We all realize these things can be taken away in a heartbeat."

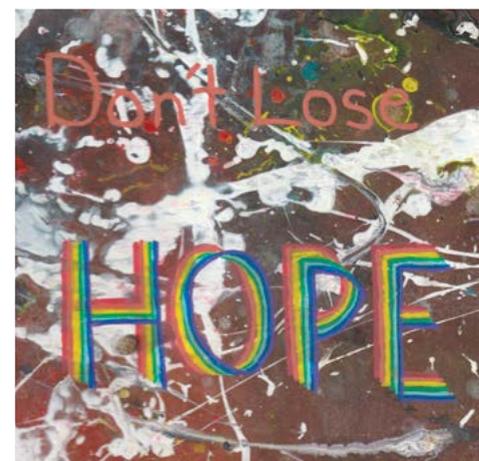
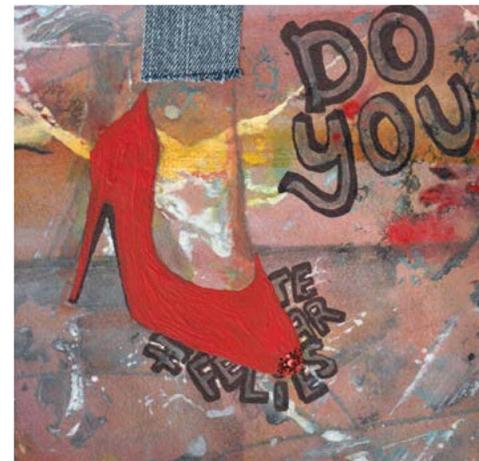
One of the people Lora invited to participate was Brett Rogers, the director of marketing at Cleary University in Howell.

"She was telling me about the concept and I fell in love with it," Rogers said. "She shared the squares with us, which we shared with some of our students, staff and faculty. It's just amazing the quality of the art that has come in and how they all interweave with each other to make this impressive, beautiful piece that really does take a moment of anger and translates it into something productive."

The project debuted at Cleary University where it was on display for several weeks earlier this year.

"It truly is a therapeutic piece," Rogers said. "It takes time to look at it and that causes you to pause and reflect on what is happening currently in our political environment and how there can still be a sense of community and healing with those who are like-minded and trying to create a better world."

In March, two panels of the exhibition moved to Michigan State University and were being displayed on the first floor of the Student Services Building, hosted by

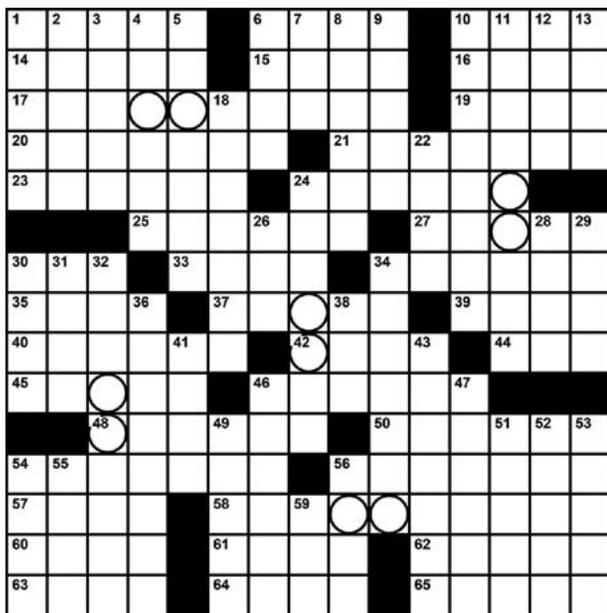


the Gender and Sexuality Center. After it left MSU on April 17, it headed to Detroit for a few days as part of a fundraiser for the Ruth Ellis Center and then to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Brighton.

"This gives me a focus to channel my angst, my anxiety," Lora said. "My oldest child is gay and my youngest child is trans. I've got a lot of fears for the future, especially my youngest who is going to be a teacher — there are concerns for a transgender person as a teacher right now in the state of Michigan."

She hopes the Together Art Project will help people know they are not alone and give them a sense of community.

"If there is anything that can help people feel less despair, to know that there are people out there who are fighting for them and who actually care — that's my goal," she said.



The Lang Center

Across

- 1 Cabaret band
- 6 "Perry Mason" star Raymond
- 10 Trojans' org.
- 14 "Are you calling me ___?"
- 15 Ending with switch
- 16 "Hi, sailor!"
- 17 Purchasing power of thr

- LGBT community
- 19 Piercing part
- 20 Causing to come out
- 21 Entices into the sack, per-
haps
- 23 Samantha's witchy cousin
- 24 Ashton, to his supporters?
- 25 Spoke, for example
- 27 Conductor Boulanger
- 30 Part of Queen's equipment
- 33 Omar's "Mod Squad" char-
acter
- 34 "Savage Love," for example
- 35 Dwelling, to the von Trapps

- 37 The Creator, functionally
- 39 Neighbor of Mont.
- 40 Em, e.g.
- 42 ___ ex machina
- 44 Aunt in a Disney film
- 45 Went with dykes on a Har-
ley-Davidson
- 46 Exasperating
- 48 Dana of "Desperate House-
wives"
- 50 Vague chat room boast?
- 54 Salon employees
- 56 Spray can
- 57 Blast furnace fuel
- 58 Training for advocacy events
- 60 Baltic Sea feeder
- 61 K-12
- 62 Throws a hissy fit
- 63 Love yourself, with "off"
- 64 James of "East of Eden"
- 65 You ride them during gay ski
weekends

Down

- 1 Ambiguously Gay Duo attire
- 2 Shelley in "Popeye"
- 3 Parent's major responsibility
- 4 Tammy, who became a family
friend
- 5 First, for one
- 6 Homeland of the Singing Nun
(abbr.)
- 7 Net destination
- 8 Meat treats
- 9 "Air Music" composer Ned
- 10 Neither sharps nor flats, to
Bernstein
- 11 Flamboyant gay guy

- 12 Tops
- 13 Seaman's pair
- 18 Like a short stop
- 22 Paul of "Little Miss Sunshine"
- 24 Give exhaustive oral sex to
- 26 Pinch opening?
- 28 Bowie married her
- 29 "Diana" singer
- 30 Moby Dick chaser
- 31 Spot for gay honeymoons
- 32 Lesbians who wear mo-
hawks
- 34 Looked for a hottie
- 36 NFL team that took part in
Pittsburgh Pride
- 38 "___, a mouse!"
- 41 Laying out
- 43 They make noise in bed
- 46 Pump pad
- 47 All over this terrestrial ball
- 49 Dangerous partner
- 51 Native of Oooooooklahoma
- 52 Picked up on
- 53 Sharon of "Queer as Folk"
- 54 James VI, e.g.
- 55 Tina Turner's "What's Love
Got ___ with It"
- 56 Similar (to)
- 59 Chinese tea

See p. 22 for answers

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◀ Classroom Pride

Continued from page 17

better off than I was. Maybe, I thought, they will at least be able to view queerness as real and possible. And maybe that sense of possibility will grow into a full embrace of who they truly are.

Yet, six months later, as we stare down the barrel of Trump's second term, fit with a Republican-majority Senate, that hope is threatened and the need for symbols of support becomes more stark. It's been half of a year since his inauguration, and already, he's signed a whole slew of anti-LGBTQ+ executive orders. These include, but are not limited to, the federal government recognizing only two genders and the slashing of DEI programs. In February, the Trump administration gave schools and universities two weeks to end DEI programs or risk losing federal funding. Many states have been taking this as an opportunity to introduce anti-LGBTQ+ legislation themselves.

Project 2025, a right-wing document containing terrifying and detailed plans for Trump's second term, described by BBC as a "right-wing wish list," details even more plans to pick away at the freedoms queer people have spent the last many decades fighting for. Though Trump's administration has denied any affiliation with Project 2025, many have noted that his actions thus far seem to correlate closely.

In conservative spaces, it seems to be thought

that shielding youth from any mention or representation of queer people is a means of protection (see: the uproar over kid-friendly drag events or the continued struggle for age-appropriate queer representation in children's movies). Yet there's no evidence to support that exposure to or mention of queer people can "turn" children gay or gender-nonconforming — what it does show is that kids have a far less chance of hating themselves or feeling hopeless. Or even committing suicide.

According to 2023 research from The Trevor Project, queer youth who receive support from a parent or caregiver, doctor, or teacher have 40%, 45%, and 43% lower odds, respectively, of attempting suicide within the past year. Moreover, in that same research, it was found that about two in three LGBTQ+ youth said that hearing about potential laws banning the discussion of queer people at school significantly impacted their mental health.

I hope that schools and their wider communities keep in mind the first principle of Timothy Snyder's "On Tyranny," a book that looks back on tyrannical regimes in order to help us avoid them in the future: do not obey in advance. Do not anticipate what all this administration will attempt to take away and comply now. Protect the existence, rights and well-being of queer students at all costs. It doesn't only make a meaningful — potentially life or death — difference in their lives right now, but I can also speak from experience when I say it's sure to impact them well beyond their adolescence.



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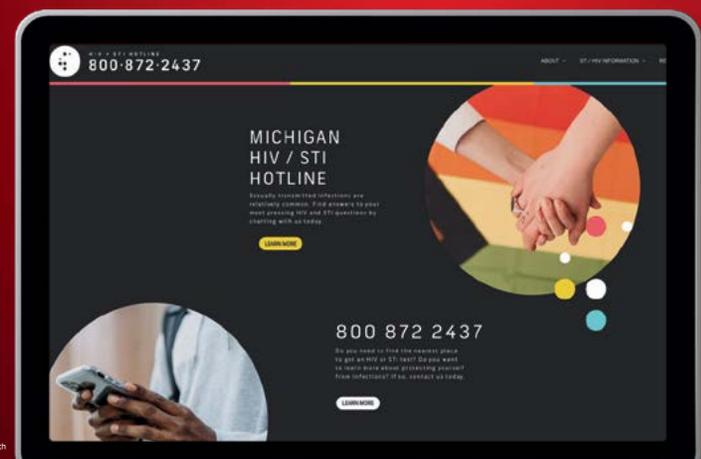
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◀ Skrmetti

Continued from page 11

added. “The ruling was not determined on the basis of the right for parents to make healthcare decisions for their children. But that doesn’t help anyone who is no longer able to access gender-affirming care in the United States because their states already have laws banning it.”

Looking ahead

The June 18 ruling represents a devastating setback for transgender youth and their families in states where transgender healthcare bans are in effect or had been pending while the Supreme Court was decided. Thousands of families live in states with legal restrictions that advocates argue ignore medical consensus and endanger vulnerable young people. The decision will likely embolden other states to enact or defend similar bans, while legal challenges to existing restrictions may face an uphill battle given the Supreme Court’s precedent.

However, Kaplan emphasized that the decision has important limitations. “It’s important to understand what the decision did not do,” he said. “It does not mandate a ban on gender-affirming care and it does not change the law in states like Michigan where such care remains legal or the bans that ACLU has overturned in state courts.”

Kaplan also noted several key aspects the Court left unresolved. “The Supreme Court majority did not decide whether transgender people are a suspect class for heightened constitutional scrutiny and left the door open about whether other forms of discrimination against transgender people could be challenged under this tougher standard,” he said.

“The Court majority did not overturn the Bostock decision, which recognizes that employment discrimination against transgender people is sex discrimination, which means that trans employees continue to be protected under federal civil rights laws,” Kaplan added.

Michigan advocates quickly moved to reassure families that the Skrmetti ruling doesn’t immediately impact access to care in the state. Emme Zanotti, senior director of movement building & political affairs at Equality Michigan Action Network, wrote in a moving statement that the organization “condemns this decision in the strongest possible terms.”

“Today’s decision, as you’ve all heard, is an unfortunate one,” Zanotti’s statement begins. “Most unfortunate about this decision, though, is that at the true heart of it, you had the plaintiffs, Samantha and Brian Williams, pleading to keep their 16-year-old daughter’s medical care available. Pleading the way any parent would; trying to move heaven and earth the way any parent would; making sure they can legally do what’s best for their child, which was maintaining access to the health care that they and their doctors determined was necessary for her to thrive.”

She emphasized that Michigan will not

follow Tennessee’s path: “Some politicians in Michigan, who are not doctors, who do not have transgender kids and who don’t even have the decency or regard for keeping the children of our state fed while they are at school, who have already tried to emulate the style of ban we saw in this case, want to turn our state into Tennessee, who ranks in the bottom 10 of all U.S. states as it relates to healthcare. Let me be clear for them. Michigan does not go backward.”

“The Supreme Court has failed to protect families’ freedoms and opened the floodgates for politicians trying to ban transgender health care, abortion and more,” Zanotti continued. “We know that politicians’ assault on our freedom doesn’t end here.”

Pohutsky sought to reassure Michigan’s transgender community: “I know it’s a really frightening time, but I do want people to know that they have people willing to fight for them who are holding power, who are holding office, and that’s not going to change,” she said. “I want people to know that there are folks in your government who are not cowed by a very, very vocal minority of people who are doing the dangerous work to harm trans people. There are people who want to defend the trans community, protect them and make sure that they don’t just have rights, but they can flourish the way that everyone else can and they aren’t being persecuted by their government.”

Kaplan emphasized the broader movement’s commitment to continuing the fight. “To quote Chase Strangio, ACLU national attorney who argued the Skrmetti case before the Supreme Court: ‘We are determined as ever to fight for the dignity and equality of every transgender person and we will continue to do so with defiant strength, a restless resolve, and a lasting commitment to our families, our communities and the freedom we all deserve,’” he said.

Zanotti, a trans woman, directly addressed Michigan families in her statement. “To the transgender young people and the parents and families of transgender young people in Michigan: While the U.S. Supreme Court has failed today to protect the fundamental freedoms of your peers in hostile states, this decision should have no legal bearing on yours or your kid’s ability to access this evidence-based, essential medical care. You should experience no interruptions in your care.”

“Transgender health care is safe, essential and legal here in Michigan,” Zanotti wrote. “We will fight like hell to keep it that way. And it’s Pride Month. So, it’s important for you to learn and remember that our ancestors fought against unjust laws and unjust systems to obtain the rights we have today. In their brave shadows, your true spirit lies.”

“In your heart, there exists an angel that’s capable of a degree of love, compassion and empathy that this country has not reciprocated today,” she continued. “In your heart also exists a warrior, who I know will grow up strong, despite any setbacks, and carry our community’s torch to liberty and justice when it’s time. And no matter what any person, politician or otherwise tells you, please don’t ever forget that.”

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