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# Between THE Lines <sup>TM</sup>

## Art Without Apology

Davone Tines brings uncompromising humanity — and the fullness of Black life — to Detroit Opera

By Chris Azzopardi

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New Ferndale gallery centers queer creatives

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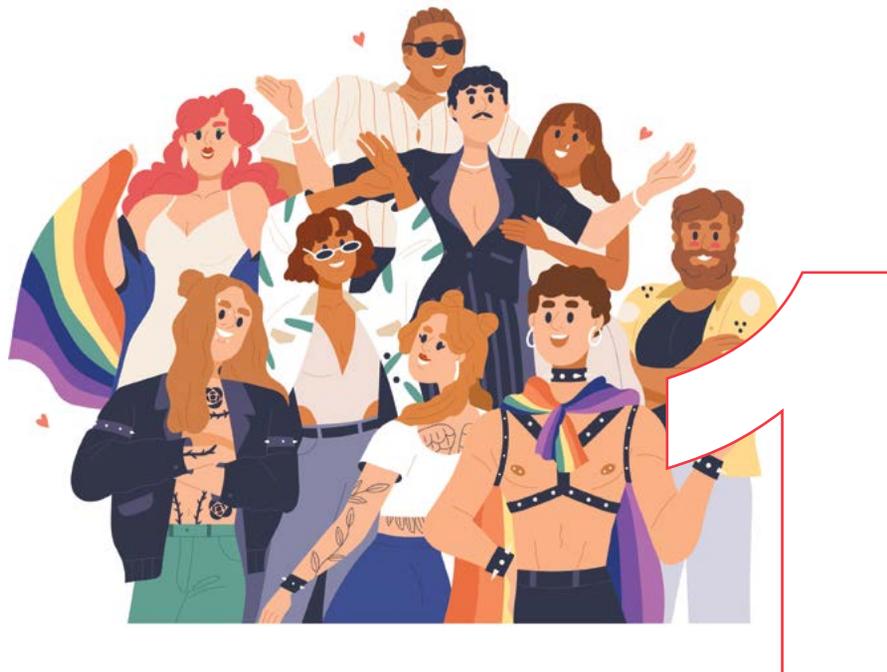
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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

The year may be winding down, but Southeast Michigan's queer calendar isn't. If you're in need of big WLW energy, a variety show with endless surprises or a charitable excuse to jog (OK, maybe walk quickly) in very little clothing, we've found multiple possibilities for lifting your spirits. Let's join in for a little queer coziness, a little queer rowdiness and some encouragement to step away from your SAD lamp for at least an evening.



## Celebrate with TheyGay's Festive Array

TheyGay's motto is "bringing queer Detroit together through sports, clubs and social events," and their Whatsapp community delivers with chats focused on books, baking, "gayming" and more.

Up next? TheyGay's first Friendsgiving Potluck in Ferndale over Thanksgiving weekend. If your vibe leans more Delightfully Dubious Choices in Wardrobe and Gift Giving, check out their White Elephant/Ugly Sweater party the next week. Or don't choose! As a queer/trans person under fascism, perhaps you need both.

*Friendsgiving Potluck. Nov. 27, 4 p.m., Jim's Community Corner (22757 Woodward Ave., Ferndale). White Elephant/Ugly Sweater Party, Dec. 9, time and location via Whatsapp group (join through link on Instagram bio). [instagram.com/theygaydetroit](https://www.instagram.com/theygaydetroit).*



Bentley James. Photo: Instagram/@bentley\_james

## Revel in Hamtramck's All-Queer Variety Mayhem

Hamtramck Is Gay! is an LGBTQIA+ all-queer-cast variety show hosted each month at the Ghost Light Bar inside the Planet Ant complex by transgender antifolk hero Dahmer's Breakfast. December's lineup features drag by Michigan's own Porcelain Princess, Bentley James, some Detroit doom punk with Vampfire Cowgirl, and — of course — the very best in clown street performance with Notso The Clown.

If Michigan is wishing for the next queer Renaissance (and aren't we all), Hamtramck Is Gay is leading the charge.

*Dec. 1, 7 p.m., Ghost Light Bar (2314 Caniff St., Hamtramck). [bit.ly/hamisgay](https://bit.ly/hamisgay).*



Runners at a past Detroit Santa Speedo Run. Photo: Facebook / @detsantarun

## Dash (or Freeze) for a Good Cause

Strip down or dress up and joyfully make your way through the Michigan cold in your skivvies. First up is the 8th Annual Detroit Santa Speedo Run on Sunday, Dec. 7, where Detroit's bravest runners will race through downtown in nothing but Speedos and holiday cheer to benefit The Greening of Detroit and the Ruth Ellis Center. *Dec. 7, 1 p.m., Checker Bar (124 Cadillac Square, Detroit). [greeningofdetroit.com](https://www.greeningofdetroit.com).*

If one scantily-clad run isn't enough, don't miss The Naughty or Nice Dash benefiting Lansing Pride. Come in your best festive gear (or the bare minimum) and jog, trot or power-walk your way from Brenke Fish Ladder to Turner Dodge House and back. Warm up afterward with a bar crawl boasting drink specials for racers. *Dec. 13, 2 p.m., Brenke Fish Ladder (216 E. Grand River Ave., Lansing). [lansingpride.org](https://www.lansingpride.org).*



Detroit Fleat. Photo: detroitfleat.com

## Cheer with Sapphics

The Midwest Sapphic Society is serving WLW sports-rom-com energy for this night designed exclusively for lesbians, queer women and sapphic-aligned nonbinary folks. DJ Nouveau kicks off the evening, facilitating pre-game music bingo with a happy-hour vibe, then folks settle into viewing mode as the Lions prepare to take down the Dallas Cowboys.

Expect joyful flirtation swirled into pigskin fandom, cozy winter outfits and the comfort of a space with zero cis male energy. Whether you're there for the football or the queer people yelling at the football, it's guaranteed serotonin.

Dec. 4, 6-11 p.m., Detroit Fleat (1820 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). [bit.ly/sotsl](https://bit.ly/sotsl).

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## Observe World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day falls on Dec. 1, honoring those we've lost to AIDS-related illnesses and supporting people living with HIV. Southeast Michigan offers several opportunities to gather and recommit to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

### Monday, Dec. 1

#### Oakland County's World AIDS Day

**Observance:** Speakers, Sing Out Detroit performance, candlelight vigil and AIDS Memorial Quilt display. 6-8 p.m., Ferndale First United Methodist Church (22331 Woodward Ave., Ferndale).

**Unity in Numbers:** The World AIDS Day Community Committee presents community resources, speakers, performances, food and panels from AIDS Memorial quilt on display. 10 a.m.-4 p.m., The Corner Ballpark (1680 Michigan Ave., Detroit).

### Saturday, Dec. 7

**Rituals Of Love Brunch:** Honoring women of color and local entertainers affected by HIV/AIDS. 2 p.m., Matrix Human Services (13560 E. McNichols Road, Detroit).

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# How This Michigan LGBTQ+ Chorus Became a *Metro Detroit Tradition*

Nearly 10 years in, PRISM is a household name and a lifeline for the local queer community

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

PRISM's holiday concert has become a Metro Detroit tradition — and for many in the LGBTQ+ community, it feels as essential as chosen family. This year proved it. In October, when the organization opened sales for “Holiday Movie Magic” at Motor City Casino’s Sound Board, tickets for the Dec. 18 show vanished faster than any performance in the organization’s history. A waiting list continues to grow, with hopeful attendees eager to claim their spot at what has become one of Southeast Michigan’s most beloved seasonal gatherings.

“This is by far the earliest we’ve ever sold out a show,” says Darin DeWeese, PRISM’s artistic director. “To see that hunger and appetite for ticket sales is really exciting. It means that we’re putting on quality performances and something that community members are seeking.”

As PRISM prepares for its 10th anniversary in 2026, the sold-out show reflects dramatic growth since 2016, when around 20 singers started a gay men’s chorus in Metro Detroit.

“I have felt the shift to PRISM really becoming a household name around Detroit and Metro Detroit,” DeWeese says. “We’re really finally established as one of the premier queer organizations within our local metro, which I think is awesome.” PRISM’s performance venue has evolved too — from the Macomb County Performing Arts Center to Sound Board at Motor City Casino, a larger downtown Detroit space befitting the chorus’ growth.

Even as PRISM gains prestige, the organization maintains its welcoming approach. New members are paired with a “chorus buddy,” an extension of the group’s “no one left behind” philosophy. The approach has proven successful. When DeWeese joined in 2021, the chorus included 45 members, all male. Today, PRISM includes 145 singers ranging in age from 19 to their 80s and promotes gender inclusivity.

Gerald Ashby Jr., the organization’s vice chair, has witnessed much of that transformation. A California transplant, he joined PRISM in 2018 as part of a personal quest to find community.

“I needed to find my people and I needed to make sure I didn’t just get off work,



PRISM's Men of Step dazzle the crowd in fabulous Santa attire. Courtesy photo

go home and watch TV,” Ashby recalls. Though initially hesitant when a friend from community theater invited him to audition, he eventually joined during the 2018 holiday show season. Over time, his organizational skills led to roles on the music committee, then secretary in early 2020, and eventually vice chair — a position he’s held since 2021.

Like every PRISM member BTL spoke with, Ashby’s response about why this organization is so special to the community includes a sentiment about family and belonging: “PRISM, for so many people, is their second, chosen family,” he says.

That sense of family became particularly crucial when PRISM outgrew its longtime rehearsal space at Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church in Clawson and moved the group to The Hawk in Farmington Hills. The converted high school now serving as a community center offers everything PRISM

needed: a modern soundstage, breakout rooms for intensive rehearsals, mirrored dance spaces where performers can perfect choreographed routines, and a location more accessible to the chorus’s farflung members.

“We were bursting at the seams in Clawson,” DeWeese explains. “But we were held there for so long because they are such an important part of PRISM’s story and were really the place that gave us a home when PRISM was in its infancy.”

For many members, PRISM serves as a crucial touchstone — a place where community comes first and music provides the vehicle for connection. Kade McKay, an opera singer and Oakland University professor who joined PRISM in 2023, moved back to Michigan from New York City in 2020 after 12 years and wanted a space where singing could be fun rather than work.

“Having chosen family was really important to me,” McKay says. “Everyone was so welcoming. I’m definitely a little bit more of an introvert. It took me a while to open up and warm up to people, but everybody made that process so easy for me, and I’m still eternally grateful for that.”

That sense of family extends beyond Tuesday night rehearsals. When one member recently faced a housing challenge, eight chorus members drove to Flint to help them move, with one returning five times in a single week.

“These people will drive you to the airport at 6 a.m.,” McKay says. “We just show up for each other. Having that kind of resource, emotionally, for those of us who don’t have family is a literal lifeline. This is lifesaving work that PRISM is doing.”

That commitment reflects PRISM’s evolution from community chorus to nationally recognized organization. In



(Top) PRISM chorus and band perform "Holiday Hits Then & Now" show. Courtesy photo. (Right) Former Spirit of PRISM Award winner Jeffrey Cash presents the award to the next elected, Kade McKay. Photo: Arcs Studio Productions

July, PRISM seized an opportunity to perform alongside hundreds of esteemed choral ensembles at the 2024 GALA Choruses Festival, the quadrennial gathering of LGBTQ+ choruses from across North America and beyond.

The performance earned the organization an invitation to the Midwest Showcase during GALA's upcoming February Leadership Symposium in Columbus, a gathering of artistic and executive directors from member choruses.

Next spring brings another first — a partnership with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Disney Pride in Concert, which features select gay men's choruses nationwide. The DSO reached out to PRISM to bring this Disney-themed concert to Orchestra Hall.

For classically trained musicians like McKay, who regularly performs with the DSO, the partnership represents validation of PRISM's musical excellence. "To see PRISM come to that kind of space, that kind of level of musicianship and excellence, is a really beautiful thing," they say.

What sets PRISM shows apart, DeWeese explains, is an intentional focus on surprise and delight — unexpected moments woven throughout each performance.

"I think when people come to their first PRISM show, they think that they're walking into a choir concert," he says. "And when somebody says, 'Hey, do you want to go to this choir concert?' you have a very different vision in your head of what you're walking into."

Audiences instead discover a fully produced, professionally lit and choreographed performance. DeWeese and his programming team plan "surprise and delight elements" throughout — moments designed to make people smile and laugh.



"The music is very nostalgic," McKay notes of this year's "Holiday Movie Magic" setlist. "Once Upon a December" and "Walking in the Air" and "Somewhere in My Memory" — they hit those nostalgic feels and just take you back to your childhood instantly."

"I have performed on a lot of stages," McKay says. "I have never had an audience like a PRISM audience. It is an energy that is absolutely electric. As a performer on stage, when you get that kind of feedback from the audience, we have so much more fun up there. It really is such a celebration every single time we get up on stage."

As the organization approaches its 10th anniversary, DeWeese reflects on what makes PRISM resonate so deeply: "At the core of why people choose to join PRISM, it's community first," he says. "Music just happens to be the vehicle that we use to build that community in a very fun way."

While "Holiday Movie Magic" is sold out, PRISM will share performance clips on social media. Learn about January 2026 vocal placements at [prism-chorus.org](http://prism-chorus.org).

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# Beyond Politics: Davóne Tines Reclaims Black Humanity on the Opera Stage

In Detroit Opera's 'Highways and Valleys,' the singer shifts the focus from expectation to authenticity — and insists that Black stories need not serve the white gaze

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

In an era marked by backsliding on human and civil rights, any artistic work that centers marginalized voices can feel inherently political simply by existing. Detroit Opera's "Highways and Valleys — Two American Love Stories" is one such work, uniting two composers often excluded from the operatic mainstream: William Grant Still, celebrated as the "dean of African American music," and Jewish émigré Kurt Weill.

From their marginalized positions in American society, both artists drew inspiration from the heart of American folk traditions and carried that sound into opera. Composed in the 1940s, Still's "Highway 1, USA" celebrates Black culture through blues, jazz, spirituals and classical music, while Weill's "Down in the Valley" reflects immigrant experiences using American folk songs. Detroit Opera will bring these works to life Dec. 7, 11 and 13, giving audiences a rare opportunity to experience how marginalized voices have shaped the vibrancy of American music.

Celebrated bass-baritone Davóne Tines, an Interlochen Arts Camp alum heralded as an artist "changing what it means to be a classical singer" by *The New Yorker*, portrays Bob in "Highway 1," a love story met with marital tension, and the wealthy businessman Thomas in "Down in the Valley," an Appalachian-murder-love story. Tines acknowledges that this is a "very interesting time in terms of how quote-unquote 'Black art' is presented and received" given the "unique context historically, socially and socio-politically." Yet, he's quick to emphasize that the production itself is "not overtly political."

"I actually just want to honor the reality of my Black existence, and not position that in the context of, or trying to be in any way in service of, whiteness, the white gaze and the white context," he tells BTL. "This story in this time is in parallel with how I've been approaching my own personal creative work in that I've moved from the place of trying to make things that explain Black trauma and try to implore largely white audiences to actually embody entropy, which I think felt necessary at a certain time."

Tines's work has deepened the stage-to-audience connection on numerous occasions, both as performer and creator. Locally, he played the title role in Anthony Davis's "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X" while serving as



Davóne Tines. Courtesy photo

artist-in-residence at Detroit Opera during the 2021–2022 season.

But Tines was exploring honesty in humanity long before that role. In 2018, his co-creation "The Black Clown," based on Langston Hughes's poem of the same name, premiered at the American Repertory Theater featuring an all-

Black ensemble. The production expressed his thoughts about the history of Western America, illustrating a Black man's resilience against America's legacy of oppression. *The New York Times* wrote in its review of the show that "Davóne Tines embodies the evolving, divided soul of Black America."

"Highways and Valleys" is an extension of that ethos, continuing Tines's commitment to exploring the human experience through the lens of Black life. "The stakes of what happened aren't dealing with racial unrest or political unrest," he says about "Highway 1." "This is a story about a family and the

complications that arise just within a family dynamic. And yes, in terms of class and resources, but less so about race. One thing that interests me about that is, and not to say that race isn't important, but to present the complexity, depth and even quotidian of a Black community, in the space of opera. To simply say, this exists on its own terms."

"We don't have to engage in some sort of larger statement other than saying, "These are humans engaging human life," he adds, "and just simply doing that presents a depth of work that I'm very much personally drawn to at this time."

*"If you say my work is political or activist, you actually flatten the more depthful potential of what it's trying to do in the world. You're making those problems non-human. You're making those problems non-personal."*

To understand Tines's own approach to acting and singing, it helps to see him as a teacher as much as a performer — one who asks his students to dig deeply into themselves. The Juilliard School and Harvard University graduate pushes them to consider who they are, how they feel and why they're singing in the first place, believing that self-awareness brings truth to what happens onstage.

"All of a sudden, their technique lines up, because they're actually trying to communicate or say something," he says. "They feel like they're talking to the real

people in the audience — our bodies want to communicate, and the funny thing is, if you're intentional about that, all the technical shit and artistic acting shit will just let you do that, because we do it every day."

For Tines, this kind of intentionality changes not just the performer's experience, but the audience's as well. It invites a genuine exchange — one rooted in empathy rather than expectation. This, he explains, is how audiences connect, human to human, without the filters or agendas that can distance them from a character's truth.

"It's been wonderful to see audiences also affected by that," he says. "It's like, oh, they feel like a real person is in front of them saying something. And if you combine that with the amazing things people can do with their voice or their bodies, it just makes that honest human expression even more amplified and even more captivating, and as a conduit for a real exchange."

Tines has wrestled with what he calls an "ongoing battle" over how his work is perceived — whether as political or activist. Earlier this year, he told the publication *Bozar*, "If my work is interpreted politically, it's because some people find my identity political." When asked if he resists the "political" label because it could be a barrier between the work and the people it needs to reach most, he shrugs that off.

"If you say my work is political or activist, you actually flatten the more depthful potential of what it's trying to do in the world. You're making those problems non-human. You're making those problems non-personal."

"A lot of the work that I do, I'm interested in being connected to simply being myself, all the time, in every context," he says. "It's authenticity. I try to be myself, whoever I am, and all the parts of that are hopefully a demonstrative invitation for other people to do the same. So it's not even necessarily about inserting my Black queer identity, but simply that all intersectionalities should be welcomed."



Davóné Tines in the title role of Anthony Davis's "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X" in May 2022. Photo: Micah Shumake

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# Get More From Your Healthcare Dollars in 2026

Be Well Medical Center founder Dr. Paul Benson shares how to maximize every appointment

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

With open enrollment season here and many people discovering their 2026 premiums and deductibles have climbed yet again, healthcare affordability is top of mind. But cutting back on medical care isn't the answer. Instead, it's about being strategic with the care you do seek and making sure every appointment delivers real value for your time and money.

Dr. Paul Benson, founder of Be Well Medical Center, has spent 45 years providing care to Michigan's LGBTQ+ community and has seen how thoughtful preparation can transform routine visits into comprehensive health partnerships. His advice? Think of your healthcare like any other major purchase — you want to get exactly what you need and make sure it actually works for you.

## 1. Start with a practice where you can be yourself.

Here's something many people don't consider when calculating healthcare value: If you're not comfortable being fully honest with your provider, you're essentially throwing money away.

Think about it. You schedule time off work, pay your copay, sit in the waiting room and then hold back crucial information because you're worried about judgment. Maybe you downplay your alcohol consumption. Perhaps you avoid mentioning that new partner or skip the conversation about your mental health. Or maybe you just never quite feel seen or understood as a queer person in a heteronormative medical space.

"A person needs to feel comfortable that they can share information with their provider so they can get the proper care," Benson explains. That comfort isn't just about feeling warm and fuzzy — it's about prevention, accurate diagnosis and treatment that actually addresses your life as you live it.

For LGBTQ+ patients especially, finding affirming care isn't a luxury. It's a necessity. Studies consistently show that LGBTQ+ people face unique health disparities, often stemming from experiences of discrimination in healthcare settings. When you finally find a practice where you can exhale and be yourself, you're not just more comfortable — you're statistically more likely to seek preventive care, disclose



important health information and follow through with treatment.

At Be Well, that comfort is intentional. The waiting room reflects the diverse community they serve — gay, straight, trans, people of all ethnicities and backgrounds. "As a straight person, if you come into this office and you feel uncomfortable, then you probably should be going to some other clinic, because that's not who we are," Benson says. "We're very diverse."

This welcoming approach extends beyond adult primary care. Be Well's newest provider, Dr. Robert Andrews, offers pediatric care for both LGBTQ+ youth and children of LGBTQ+ parents. For families, having a pediatrician who "gets it" means one less thing to explain, one less moment of anxiety about whether your family will be respected.

## 2. Do your homework during open enrollment.

Don't just compare premiums when shopping for insurance. Verify that your current providers accept the plan you're considering. Then dig into the formulary — that's the list of medications your insurance will cover and at what cost.

"Different insurances have different formularies," Benson explains, "and if people are on certain medications, they need to make sure that the insurance company they're choosing has them approved at a tier that's least expensive."

Benson's practice has seen this play out with GLP-1 drugs, the weight-loss medications that have transformed care for many patients. Benson says his team spends a great deal of time trying to convince insurance companies to cover these drugs. Many insurance policies exclude them entirely, or require a BMI above 35. The practice prescribes these medications and advocates for patients who need them, though insurance hurdles remain significant.

The good news? Be Well accepts a wide range of insurance plans, including Medicaid

and Ryan White coverage. The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program provides medical care and support services for people living with HIV who lack sufficient health insurance —

a crucial safety net that Be Well has embraced since the earliest days of the AIDS crisis. This commitment to accessibility means more people can get consistent care rather than bouncing between providers based on what they can afford at any given moment.

*“For LGBTQ+ patients, finding affirming care isn't a luxury. It's a necessity.”*

## 3. Treat your appointment like a team meeting.

When you're finally in the exam room, come prepared. Bring a list of all your medications, including over-the-counter drugs and supplements. Write down your questions ahead of time, prioritized by what matters most. Be ready to discuss



Learn more about Be Well Medical Center at [doctorbewell.com](http://doctorbewell.com).

lifestyle factors honestly including factors like your diet, exercise habits, sexual health, substance use, stress levels and sleep patterns.

Your doctor can't read your mind, and they're working within tight time constraints. The more efficiently you can communicate your concerns, the more ground you can cover together.

#### 4. Push for real conversations about sexual health.

Here's an uncomfortable truth: Many healthcare providers skip sexual health histories, especially with older women and anyone they assume isn't sexually active.

"Most internists and gynecologists just skip over the sexual history because they're maybe 50, 60 years old, or married, and they don't ask the pertinent questions," Benson observes. That's a problem, because sexual health isn't separate from your overall health; it's integral to it.

At Be Well, providers ask the questions that lead to better prevention and care. All patients should know about PrEP — pre-exposure prophylaxis medication that's highly effective at preventing HIV transmission. The practice also discusses doxycycline, an antibiotic taken after sex that can prevent bacterial sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis.

This kind of comprehensive sexual health conversation is precisely what makes affirming care worth seeking out. When providers assume heterosexuality or make judgments about your relationship structure, they miss opportunities for prevention that could literally save your life.

Benson has been a principal investigator in over 200 HIV clinical trials since 1980, contributing to the development of nearly every HIV treatment drug available today. He's even preparing to launch an HIV cure therapy trial next year. That depth of

experience informs Be Well's strong focus on prevention. "The cure and eradication of HIV is not going to be treatment alone. It has to include prevention," he says.

#### 5. Find a practice that grows with you.

Maybe you need primary care now, but what about when your life changes? If you're considering gender-affirming care, starting a family or managing a new diagnosis, having providers who can meet multiple needs saves time, money and emotional energy.

Be Well's seven providers offer services ranging from primary care to gender-affirming care for transgender patients of all ages. The practice has grown significantly from Benson's solo practice in 1980, expanding to meet demand while maintaining the welcoming, shame-free environment that defines the space. With locations in Ferndale, Detroit and Flint, they've built something rare — a medical home where you can bring your whole self.

"I started my practice in 1980, not necessarily planning to have an LGBTQ+ practice," he reflects. "I wanted to be that classic TV family doctor type person, but it kind of morphed into that, especially during the advent of HIV in the 1980s."

Back then, many patients living with AIDS struggled to find any provider willing to see them, let alone one who was compassionate. Benson's doors stayed open. Word spread. The practice grew into what it is today — a place where, as Benson puts it, "Whether you're gay, straight, transgender, it doesn't really make a difference. We treat everybody equally."

That's healthcare that's worth every dollar.

*This content was made possible through our partnership with Be Well Medical Center. Visit [doctorbewell.com](http://doctorbewell.com) to learn more and don't miss Dr. Benson's and Dr. Mark Borstein's Advice to Be Well column on [pridesource.com](http://pridesource.com).*

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## Democrats to the Rescue? I'll Believe it When I See It



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

So Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Georgia) is resigning from Congress. And yes, I am taking credit for it.

Not sure if you saw my last column, but I wrote about Greene and Trump's ugly public falling out. I also wrote about her antisemitism and her homophobia and the general what-the-fuckery of her concept of reality.

And then, BAM. Greene announced her resignation effective Jan. 5, 2026.

You're welcome.

In case you're wondering why she chose to wait until Jan. 5 rather than storm out now, it's because Greene, age 51, wants her Congressional pension. According to Newsweek, "Members of the Federal Employees Retirement System qualify for a full, deferred pension upon turning 62 if they've completed at least five years of service."

How nice for her.

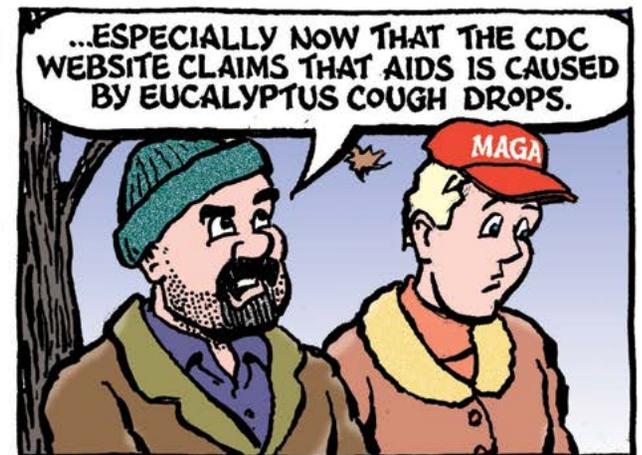
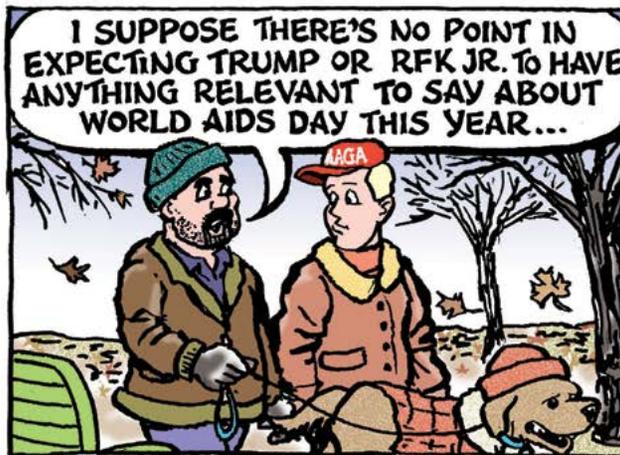
But hey, she earned it. Nevermind that the entire Republican Party treats public employees like teachers and firefighters who get pensions like greedy thieves.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like Greene is going to fade into the obscurity she deserves. People are even talking about a presidential run. The idea is pure lunacy, but then again, we've elected Trump twice. So I wouldn't count her, or America's ability to continue to make very bad choices, out.

*Republicans absolutely deserve to lose their majorities. They've been running the country using nothing but cruelty and spite, and while that certainly appeals to the MAGA base, the rest of the country thinks it sucks.*

Greene's departure means the Republican majority in the U.S. house will shrink, which I'm definitely not sad about. A special election will be called by Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and Greene's seat will likely be won by another Republican as her Congressional district is very red.

But who the hell knows? Politics is in a very weird place



right now. The majority of the country thinks that Trump and the Republicans are doing a very bad job at pretty much everything (and that is, indeed, correct). This is good for Democrats (see the Nov. 4, 2025 election where Democrats swept a bunch of elections).

But this is the same Democratic Party that had the lowest approval rating in decades just a few months ago. So let's not get ahead of ourselves.

The 2026 midterms are a BFD. Republicans are rightly scared that they are going to lose their majorities in the U.S. House and Senate. Greene, by the way, thinks they will.

"Now that House members are switching gears into campaign mode and will be fighting for their lives, our legislative majority has been mostly wasted," Greene posted on social media. "Our best shot was the first 6-9 months. And when Republicans likely lose the midterms it will become total and complete political war and gridlock once again."

Political war and gridlock?

Uh, like what the Republican majority has now? This Congress has done jack shit in terms of passing legislation. Now, the Trump Administration has been terribly productive. Project 2025? Trump has already gotten half of it done. Granted, none of those things in it are good and most of them hurt the majority of Americans, but they've definitely got the doing-

evil-shit machine's pedal to the metal.

Republicans absolutely deserve to lose their majorities. They've been running the country using nothing but cruelty and spite, and while that certainly appeals to the MAGA base, the rest of the country thinks it sucks.

Food costs more. Healthcare costs are going up. The Secretary of Education is in the process of destroying the Department of Education, which will likely decimate support for special education and make it impossible for students who have had their civil rights violated to get redress. The Health and Human Services Secretary is working overtime to sew distrust in vaccines and bring back the measles. The Secretary of Defense is hell-bent on making the military his personal mercenary army.

The fact is, people want to eat. They want to be able to afford medicine and housing. They don't want to go to war. And while there are way too many people in this country who would, most people don't want to trade these things for Mexican immigrants being shoved into unmarked vans by masked men at their local Home Depot or transgender people being terrorized and erased from every facet of life.

It's the whole, "I didn't think the Eating People's Faces Party would eat MY face!" thing. It's clear that things like racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia are big, big problems in this country. Bigger than many people had ever considered. And it's going to take a LOT of work to change that.

If, that is, the will exists to do that work. It's going to take a hell of a lot more than "Vote Blue no matter who." A Democratic majority will without a doubt do far less to hurt the country.

But I have yet to see clear evidence that Democrats have that will. And not hurting isn't the same as healing.

# THE SCROLL

## QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

### Ferndale Terror Plot Suspects Plead Not Guilty

Three Dearborn men accused of plotting a Halloween terror attack targeting LGBTQ+ bars in Ferndale pleaded not guilty to federal terrorism charges on Nov. 22.

Majed Mahmoud, 20, Mohamed Ali, 20, and his brother Ayob Nasser, 19, appeared separately before Magistrate Judge Kimberly G. Altman. All three waived formal detention hearings and remained silent on the advice of their attorneys.

The case is part of a broader multi-state investigation involving eight people total. Two Dearborn minors ages 16 and 17 have been charged as juveniles in sealed federal court

filings. Three others were arrested in New Jersey and Washington State.

The defendants face conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS, which carries up to 20 years in prison, and conspiracy to transport firearms and ammunition to commit terrorism, carrying up to 15 years.

Defense attorney Amir Makled maintains his clients' innocence, describing them as gamers who legally own firearms. Federal investigators allege the group used encrypted chats and code words like "pumpkin" to plan attacks, with phone records showing they researched the 2016 Pulse nightclub massacre.

The FBI alleges Ali, Mahmoud and one minor scouted LGBTQ+ venues in Ferndale in September. Federal raids recovered AR-15-style rifles, tactical gear and more than 1,600 rounds of ammunition.



### Holiday Parody Heads to The Ringwald

The Ringwald Theatre's annual holiday parody returns with "Steel Poinsettias," an unauthorized sequel to "Steel Magnolias." Written by Vince Kelley, the show reunites the beloved characters from Truzy's Beauty Spot as they navigate holiday chaos when Shelby's son announces a life-changing decision that throws M'Lynn for a loop.

Packed with humor and holiday hijinks, the production features Joe Bailey as M'Lynn, Chase Bowman as Jackson Jr., Quinn Jacob as Shelby, Richard Payton as Truzy, Brandy Joe Plambeck as Annelle, Jamie Richards as Ouiser and Mark Sobolewski as Clairee. Kelley and Plambeck co-direct.

Performances run Dec. 5-21 at The Ringwald inside Affirmations Community Center in Ferndale. For tickets, visit theRingwald.com.



Miss Woodward 2018. Photo: Andrew Potter

### Woodward Bar & Grill Site Demolished Three Years After Fire

The building that housed the Woodward Bar & Grill was demolished on Oct. 31, more

than three years after a fire destroyed the historic LGBTQ+ venue.

The bar, which opened in 1954, served as Detroit's oldest gay bar and became a vital gathering place for the city's Black LGBTQ+ community. "The Woodward's 68-year legacy as a meeting place for the LGBTQ+ community in Metro

Detroit shaped the lives of tens of thousands of queer folk in southeast Michigan," LGBTQ+ historian Tim Retzloff told BTL following the June 14, 2022 fire that was ruled a total loss.

Property owner Lorraine Karagas has not announced plans for the site, which sits on less than one-tenth of an acre in Detroit's Midtown neighborhood.

### Michigan's Eric Swanson Named to Out100

Michigan native and drag artist Eric Swanson, known as Miss Bouvée, has been named to Out magazine's 2025 Out100 list. Swanson worked in Michigan theater for 16 years before relocating to South Florida. According to his interview with Out, Swanson, the star of Hulu's glam-horror comedy "Big Easy Queens," is developing a new period film about queer love during the Nazi regime and actively fighting to protect drag performances and rainbow crosswalks in Florida.

### Don't Miss 'The Jinx & DeLa Holiday Show'

"RuPaul's Drag Race" stars Jinx Monsoon and BenDeLaCreme sleigh into Detroit Dec. 6 at 7 p.m. at the Masonic Jack White Theatre with "The Jinx & DeLa Holiday Show." The eighth iteration of their internationally acclaimed spectacular promises new songs, dance numbers and enough sequins to blind Santa himself. Entertainment Weekly calls them "the reigning queens of Christmas." Expect over-the-top camp, side-splitting comedy and heartfelt moments celebrating queer community. Tickets at axs.com.

### Elphaba's Viral Cardigan Moment

Elphaba's chunky gray "sex cardigan" from the steamy "As Long as You're Mine" scene in "Wicked: For Good" has gone viral, inspiring memes and thinkpieces about the cozy knitwear choice. Cynthia Erivo told Bustle she wanted the look to show Elphaba's softer side. "I wanted a moment of real softness for her," Erivo said of collaborating with costume designer Paul Tazewell on the now-infamous sweater.



Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba in "Wicked." Photo: Universal

# New Ferndale Gallery Opens Its Doors as a Hub for LGBTQ+ Creativity

Queer artist Jarrad Tacon-Heaslip showcases bold abstract work in his new Ferndale Gallery

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

On a recent afternoon at the Tacon-Heaslip Gallery, the only thing doing the talking — aside from queer artist and founder Jarrad Tacon-Heaslip — is the art. Just days ago, on Nov. 15, the 4,100-square-foot gallery buzzed with the grand opening crowd — so many people that Tacon-Heaslip didn't consider whether guests could fully take in the large abstract works. "I was like, oh, damn, we kind of screwed that up," he said, laughing. "I think we might've invited too many people."

Now, in the quieter aftermath, the intentions behind the new space — at 22100 Woodward Avenue between Eight and Nine Mile Roads in Ferndale — come into clearer focus. Formerly operating out of a small studio on Hilton, Tacon-Heaslip sees this larger gallery as more than just an upgraded workspace. He wants it to function as a visible, supportive hub for the LGBTQ+ community, with plans for Pride Month programming, artist collaborations and community-centered initiatives woven into the gallery's future.

Inside, the art finally has room to breathe. Vibrant colors from Tacon-Heaslip's bold abstract expressionist works, both large-scale and more intimate renderings, brighten the space. After viewing the pieces from afar, I could understand why freely walking around them made sense: They beg for you to experience them from multiple perspectives, the same way he hopes visitors will engage with the broader roster of artists he plans to uplift here.

"When you're further back, you're experiencing the colors as a whole," he says about his work. "When you come up close, you get to see them in isolation, nearly, and you see how they're responding to the other colors."

In talking with Tacon-



Jarrad Tacon-Heaslip, artist and founder of the Tacon-Heaslip Gallery in Ferndale. Photo: Leslie Gauvin

Heaslip — whose work reaches national audiences in places like Provincetown — the precision behind his vibrant pieces becomes clear. Before any color goes down, the works start as meticulously taped and measured line drawings, each tiny segment isolated and painted in multiple layers. A single piece might require six full rounds of taping and painting, plus repairs and adjustments — including moments where he'll scrap an overworked section and paint an entire block black just to reset it.

Color planning shifts between structure and instinct. Sometimes

he digitally mocks up palettes or scribbles color notes along the canvas edge; other times he wakes up with a configuration fully formed and rushes to the studio to paint it. His styles cycle every several months — from black-and-gold minimalism to today's bold broken gradients and darker, sexier overlays with pops of color. Some canvases are siblings that can live together or apart, while others function as single, inseparable installations. Whatever form they take, the works seem to arrive with their own demands, and Tacon-Heaslip simply follows where they lead.

"I am curious to see what his next style is going to be," says artist assistant Jeremy Isaacson, stationed at a working table in the back, mid taping process. "Every eight months he switches things up. So different color combinations, different pattern designs. It's always changing."

Tacon-Heaslip, who lives in Palmer Woods, painted casually for years in his native home of New Zealand before his practice took professional shape in Detroit nearly a decade ago. A summer trip to the U.S. with his husband unexpectedly turned into a longer stay, and with employment limited

by visa restrictions, painting became the one thing he could pursue seriously.

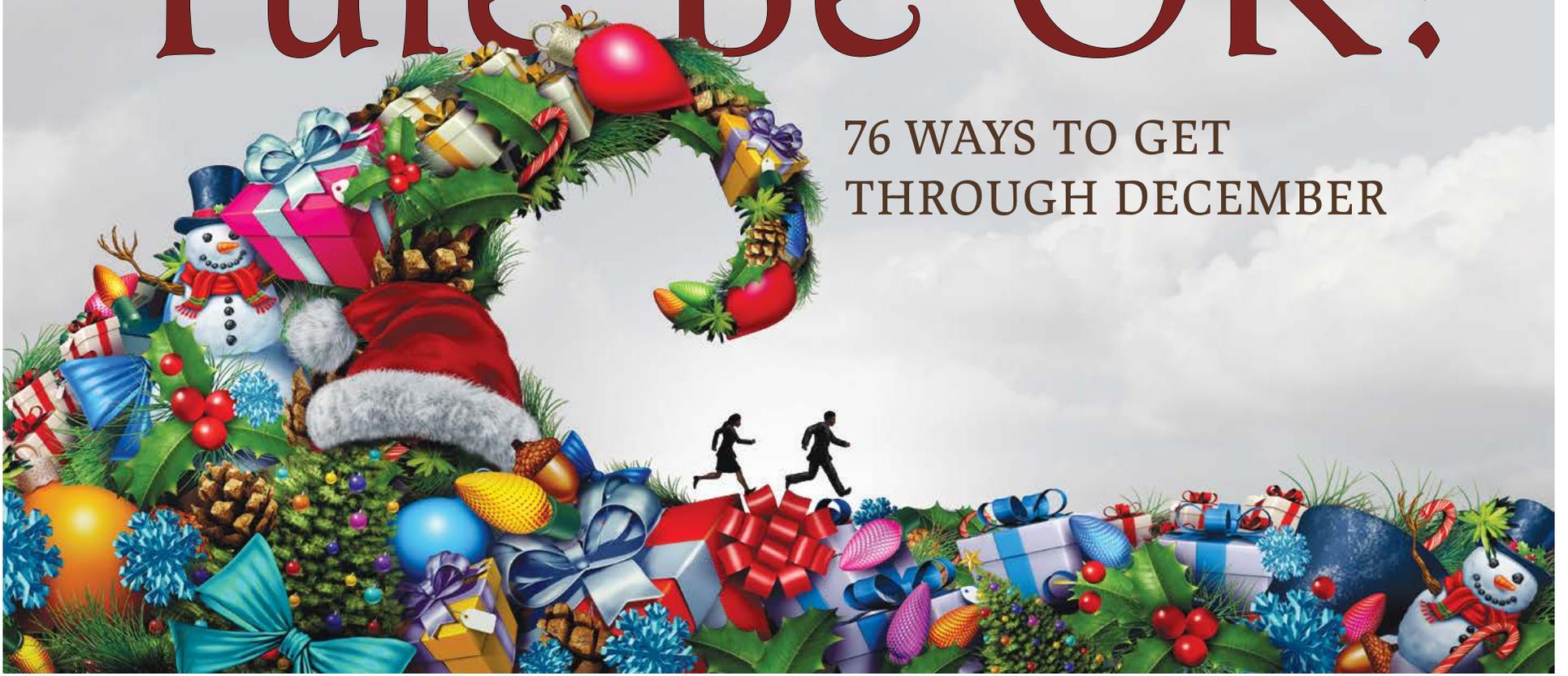
"We had a large basement, and I had plenty of time. I had plenty of space," he recalls. "I finally had time to be able to actually paint something, but then friends would come around and people started seeing what I was producing, and then people would be like, OK, I think I want to buy that."

Aside from Tacon-Heaslip's own works, the gallery is currently hosting a range of artists — about

See **Tacon-Heaslip**, page 22

# Yule Be OK!

76 WAYS TO GET THROUGH DECEMBER



A queer survival guide for navigating family gatherings, building new traditions and finding joy during the winter holidays

BY KELLI DUNHAM

OK, queers, it's the winter holidays — that magical time when straight people wear matching pajamas unironically, and every commercial assumes your biggest wish is a fiancé. Whether you're braving the family table, building your chosen family's charcuterie board or hiding in the bathroom pretending to "take a call," here's your official queer survival guide.

1. Build an emergency exit script: "So good to see you. Gotta hop, long story." Anything can be a long story if you don't want to tell it!
2. Or leave social occasions by simply saying, "Oh, thanks so much. I'm going now."
3. Or sneak out without saying goodbye at all. You can always write a heartfelt thank-you note later. *Psst:* They probably won't even notice.
4. Decide your role this year — host, guest, volunteer, hermit — and then act accordingly.
5. Prep deflections for Aunt Cheryl: "It's a long story." See how handy this whole long story thing is?
6. Practice boundary lines in the mirror until they feel boring.
7. Perfect the neutral conversational parachutes: "How about that?" and "Huh." You can say "how about that" in response to nearly anything shy of a death threat.

**8.** Pre-arrange a check-in buddy who will call with a fake "emergency."

9. Carry a 3-by-5 card with safe conversation topics: sunrise times, curd size in cottage cheese, optimal grilled cheese technique.
10. Don't ask questions you can't

tolerate the answers to.

11. You do NOT need a partner to have a c o m p a n i m e n t for family visits. Bring an Emotional Support Human. Establish hand signals beforehand.
12. Pre-eat with your vegan partner before family meals; no need to explain tofu again.
13. Always have an escape plan: Uber, Greyhound or Grindr in a pinch.
14. Play Dysfunctional Family Bingo via group text.
15. Keep your phone charged; it's a valuable boundary-enforcing device.
16. Declare a social media ceasefire; mute liberally.
17. If you must scroll, browse

queer artists and leave kind comments.

**18.** Start a "Holiday Complaint Choir" with your friends.

Everyone sings their seasonal grievances to the tune of "Jingle Bells."

19. Make a bingo card of microaggressions you won't dignify with a response. Reward yourself with pie when you hit five in a row.
20. End every awkward interaction with, "Wow, we've really shared something here," and walk away before they can

See **Survive the Holidays**, page 19

# When Biology Fails, Chosen Family Shows Up

You are never alone — how queer community becomes the village that raises us

BY ASTER ASEM

*Note: The non-public sources in this story have requested BTL use only their first names as a privacy and safety precaution.*

Societies tend to assume their ways of doing things are universal truths. “Humans are innately selfish,” hence capitalism. “Someone has to be in charge,” hence government. “A child needs a mother and a father,” hence the nuclear family.

But history tells a different story. Many Native American tribes practiced collective resource sharing. Anarchist communes have proven viable. The Igbo people of Nigeria understood that “it takes a village to raise a child.”

We are not, in fact, at “the end of history” — and when our biological families fail us, the village can step up, which is a very good thing, because genetic similarity alone doesn’t obligate us toward anyone. Instead, our parents, in creating a person, assume responsibility over their care. But “a roof over your head” and “three square meals a day” alone do not make for a healthy adult.

“My parents had always been shitty towards me verbally,” says Juno, a local trans individual. “Everybody would always say, after they met my parents, ‘Wow, they’re fucking terrifying.’”

But our parents made us and sustained our existence! Why shouldn’t they have the right to shape who we become? I’m being sarcastic, of course.

“Gender always confused me,” says Elliot. “I didn’t really understand why it was a big deal or why it was so important in the broad scope of things. Due to social conditioning, I came to understand that it was important and I had to adhere to things, [but] I don’t really adhere to any labels. I kind of just go with the flow of my own gender identity and sexual orientation.”

But people who’ve long known us often expect definability, and, as many of us LGBTQ+ folk know, our fears about coming out are sometimes substantiated. Juno says that when she left home at age 19,



she “just picked a direction to drive... [and] realized, ‘I don’t have anywhere to go, do I?’” Thankfully, she figured it out. She stayed on the couch of someone she’d met in a queer student group at Eastern Michigan University.

Meanwhile, when she was in the thick of it, Audré found her own community — other kids oppressed by their parents’ “culty Christian shit.” And Elliot deepened his bonds within a fanfiction community.

When Reena, known as Car Cat (she/her), had to leave her ex-wife, she “didn’t really have anywhere to go, or even a job — ‘nothing like that.’” At a local event, she says, she “met someone, ‘who, just barely knowing me, was willing to take me in and house me for several months.’”

This person also helped Car Cat address her alcoholism and find a job. In return, Car Cat “did chores and whatnot” for them.

“It’s kind of a cycle,” Juno says. “People in my life who are willing to just let me sleep on their couch every once in a while will look at me and say, ‘Yeah, that seems like an OK roommate.’” Elliot has had

online friendships form but then atrophy. It’s the ones who come close and stay who prove themselves to be family, regardless of genes.

But sometimes, biological relatives are those people, like the family of Audré’s wife, Carina. Audré says, “I would have a friend that was going through something very difficult. Maybe their guardian died, or maybe their family was being really abusive. And so, they needed a safe haven. My family always stepped up to support my friends and people that I knew.”

Elliot’s family does the same. “Whenever anybody needs a place to go or a place to stay, my parents always [welcome] them.”

One person who stayed with Elliot’s family shared what the experience meant to them. Elliot recalls, “We had a pretty good conversation, and my best friend kept thanking me and saying... they [felt] a sense of normalcy again, being able to hang out with our family.”

“I have friends now who consider having my parents walk them down

the aisle, or who will come to family dinners because our lives have been intertwined,” Audré says.

Maybe that’s why it hurts so much when biological relatives reject us — we’ve often been with them for our entire lives. They should know us. But when we come into ourselves, they show that the history we share means less to them than their preconceptions.

Car Cat, having found refuge and respite with her “adoptive mother,” has become a leader in the local trans community, organizing a word-of-mouth event, working with moderators on a local Discord server, protecting people in public gatherings and helping strangers with more individual needs.

“When people are afraid to exist,” she says, “when they’re so disenfranchised, a lot of people who are far into their transitional journey still carry internalized transphobia, and it’s sometimes difficult to eliminate that ultimately. But [we try] aggressive positivity, aggressively trying to include people, bring them to things, help them out when they’re feeling down. The thing to do

[when you’re depressed] is not to just sit there and lay down and rot and die. It is to keep moving.”

I’ve struggled with major depressive disorder for over 20 years, and I’m here in part because of people like Car Cat, who say, “Hey, come to the fucking bar. We’re all going to have fun together.”

I realized less than 18 months ago that I was trans. Since integrating into the LGBTQ+ community, I’ve never been happier or thrived more.

“There’s absolutely nothing more affirming,” says Car Cat, “for a trans person than being around other trans people and seeing that it’s OK for us to fucking exist. It’s OK for us to act however we are. It’s OK for us to be neurodivergent and different. There are other people like us, and we are never alone.”

As many of us grieve the loss of family feasts and cozy Christmases and fight the cold, dark urging us to curl into ourselves, I beg you: Just move.

It takes effort to escape the mire, but a hand to help pull you up can come from people you’d think wouldn’t care. There are people like you, and you are never alone.

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# LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX WITH ANTONI POROWSKI

The 'Queer Eye' food expert on destigmatizing sexual health and finding intimacy in the kitchen

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

For Antoni Porowski, conversations about self-care aren't complete without talking about sex. The "Queer Eye" food-and-wellness expert — who's helped audiences around the world nourish their bodies and minds through vulnerability and a really good vinaigrette — is now helping to destigmatize sexual

health through Gilead's Healthysexual campaign.

Porowski joins a growing roster of LGBTQ+ public figures who've lent their voices to the campaign, including actors Lukas Gage, Julian Walker and Daniel Franzese.

In our conversation, Porowski opens up about how taking PrEP has deepened his sense of empowerment, why normalizing sexual health discussions is essential for community wellness, and how intimacy — whether it's cooking dinner with his partner, a Michigan native, or simply talking honestly about sex — can be one of the most nourishing acts of all.

**You have always been open about growth and self-discovery through "Queer Eye." It's inspiring to see you extending that openness to sexual health.**

Well, thank you for saying that. And I do think that you can't really have one without the other. I think wellness, self-care, taking care of ourselves — whatever we want to call it — is a tree and it has a lot of branches, and along with mental health and watching what we eat and sense of community, sexual health falls into that category. They're all integrated and they all affect each other. So I think it's one that not enough people talk about.

**When I first started thinking about taking PrEP, my**

**friends described it as a kind of anxiety drug. And it has actually functioned in that way for me because it has made me feel more empowered sexually. For you, how has taking PrEP empowered you in your own sexual life and given you a newfound sense of confidence?**

I really like what you just said about it being sort of tied to anxiety, not in literal terms, but a lessening of. Because of this partnership, what's interesting is I've had a lot of conversations with friends of mine and it's interesting to see the groups that really talk about it versus the ones that don't.

I think this pertains mostly to my gay friends but applies to everybody who has open conversations with not only their friends but their physicians and their families, but they have a lot more information and are a lot less shy or reticent to talk about it. There's something about normalizing it through that practice and through talking about it that sort of alleviates [the anxiety]. But in terms of your experience of lessening the anxiety, where does that come from? Knowledge is power or...?

**Yeah, knowledge is power and trusting science. I grew up during a time when being a gay man meant sex was tied to fear and risk, and that stigma really shaped how I viewed intimacy. Taking PrEP has helped me feel more confident and less anxious about sex.**

That's great. I mean, I can definitely

Antoni Porowski. Photo: National Geographic

See Antoni, page 20

## Survive the Holidays

Continued from page 15

- ask what it was. Shrug. Maybe a lot.
- Replace your family's Elf on the Shelf with Dyke on a Bike.
  - Rebrand the season: "I'm curating peace," not "I'm surviving chaos."
  - Redo your nativity set so everyone is gender-glorious and Joseph is a trained midwife.
  - Replace mistletoe with a glitter ball — safer for pets and more consent-forward.
  - Create new holiday traditions with your friends. Anything you do more than once can be a tradition.
  - Create a "25 Days of Self-Preservation" advent calendar for yourself.
  - Learn to cook your favorite comfort food. You'll always have someone to make it for you, and you'll always have someone to make it for.
  - Host "Silent Night, My Ass" karaoke with gay anthems only. If you're not up for buying your own home system (often available on free local giveaway sites, clearly an impulse buy), visit Uplift's Wednesday night event.

**29.** Host "Rewrite the Carols":  
God Rest Ye  
Nonbinary Them.

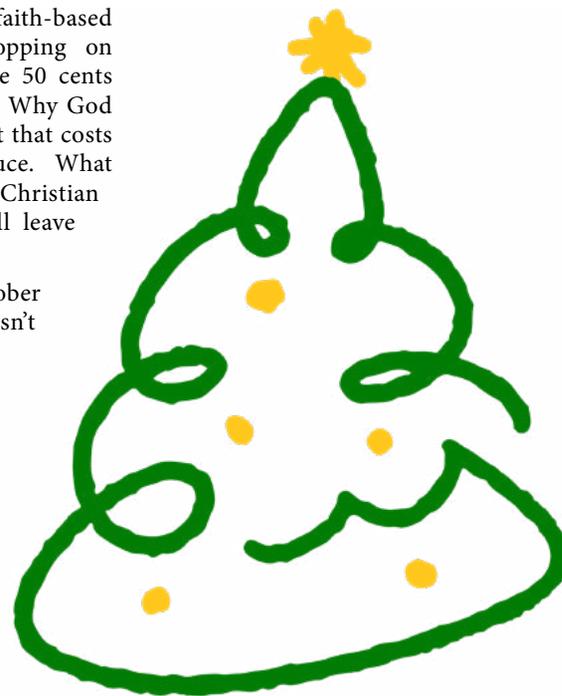
- Start a queer book exchange. Bonus if the books are banned.
- Make your own queer cookie swap. All items MUST have a pun name.
- Create a snowperson army that defends trans rights.
- Make a holiday shrine to queer icons: Audre Lorde, Divine, Chita Rivera, Jay "Superbutch" Toole.

**34.** Bake middle-finger cookies; share selectively (do NOT send them with a child to school by accident).

- Repaint a chipped angel into a glittery butch fairy with a power-drill halo.
- Craft a wreath from campaign mailers; call it Broken Promises.
- Wrap presents in last year's protest signs. You know you've got extras.
- Build a paper-chain countdown to Pride. Or to spring.
- Replace the office Secret Santa with "Secret Mutual Aid." Everyone draws a need from a hat instead of a name.
- Google "gift of any amount" and

your favorite anti-gay faith-based organization. It's like shopping on their dime; you can donate 50 cents for a boxed DVD set about Why God Chose America To Be Great that costs them hundreds to produce. What you do with your absurd Christian nationalist tchotchkes, we'll leave that to your imagination.

- Start or join a queer sober meetup. Community doesn't require eggnog.
- Offer to drive a friend to their meeting, vigil or service; voila, you've tricked yourself into going.
- Join a mutual-aid spreadsheet; send grocery money to a stranger.
- Donate in friends' names to a queer mutual-aid fund — or in your homophobic uncle's name for maximum satisfaction.
- Send a care package to a queer college kid stuck on campus.
- Attend a queer chorus concert and sing loudly from row Z.
- Make everything a sing-along. Queer joy is community service.
- Check Affirmations' calendar for support groups and volunteer shifts.
- Host a Zoom dinner for queer friends in other states. Dress code is pajamas and eyeliner — and board games are a must.



**50.**

Create a Queer Solstice playlist that starts mellow and ends in a voguing anthem.

- Light candles for every queer elder who got through a cold, dark December night so you could too.
- Celebrate however the hell you want.

See **Survive the Holidays**, page 26

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**Nancy Pelosi, Mom and Rep**  
Puzzle can be found on page 25

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## ◀ Antoni

Continued from page 18

relate on that front, but it's also even more than that. I think for me, from my experience, it's really about information. And coming from a family of physicians, there are a lot of things that, as a family, we struggled with. Just communication, overall. But in terms of sexual health, wellness, trusting science, all those kinds of conversations were really ingrained in me since I was very young and whatever questions I had, I was always encouraging my friends to reach out to my dad, who's a physician, who is really good with bedside manner. When you have that information, when you start to learn about the statistics, it gets a little less scary.

And the second part of it is, I think it's important, if you are sexually active, to speak to a physician about your options because PrEP obviously helps prevent HIV to a really high point, but there are obviously so many other STIs and STDs that need to be considered as well. So I certainly don't want people thinking that this is a one [and done]. Hopefully this opens the doors to more conversations. And I think the more you talk about it, it just breeds more curiosity and more opportunity for knowledge. And again, it's speaking to a physician, but also just reaching out to your friends. You never know who needs to hear about it.

**Whether it's PrEP, open relationships or even just honest conversations about sex, what's one thing in queer intimacy that you think still carries too much stigma?**

Good question. Not to answer your question with what you brought up, but I do think that it's just sex in general. I think there are a lot of assumptions that are made in general about our community, about how we're having a lot of sex, versus how we're actually not. The stigma kind of lies in the assumption — and I'll speak for myself — that I have historically made about what it's like to be in a gay relationship: about how much and what kind of sex people are having, when the more people you speak to you realize that it exists on a really massive spectrum, and it's a lot more complex

than we actually realize. And what works for somebody may not work for you. Open relationships, zero judgment might work for somebody, but might not work for the person next to them.

What really drew me to this collaboration is the fact that it was an opportunity to advocate for leaning into modern medicine and for reaching out to your physician and speaking to somebody who knows. I have a lot

“There's something really beautiful and there's an intimacy there that I, working in food for so long, can't believe I've never really experienced, but it's sort of like, wow, this is really hot and really amazing. When you get to do that together, it makes it less of a single man performance and makes it more of a dance, if you will.”

— Antoni Porowski on cooking with boyfriend Zacharias Niedzwiecki

of faults, but I'm good at asking for directions. I'm very quick to be like, “Hey, this is something I don't know about.” There are so many physicians in my family. I'm definitely not one. Terrified of needles, always have been, do not like getting my blood drawn. I'm definitely the black sheep in my family on that front. But that's why I have people who are really, really good at that and more knowledgeable and are able to sort of break it down in a more palatable way. And when I have the information, I feel more equipped and more confident.

And to your point earlier, it lessens the anxiety when you know you have those options and the more that you talk about it, it desensitizes any kind of taboo or preciousness we have around it.

**Over time, I've realized that straight people are often having the same kinds of sex that gay people have. If our communities talked more openly about that — like, yes, some straight people have anal sex too — we might start to break down a lot of stigma.**

Imagine if we just communicated more, you know? That's what it boils down to. And I think there are a lot of misconceptions. I know a lot of couples who are in monogamous gay and straight relationships who take PrEP; they trust their partner. It's not a matter of that. It's just a matter of having that extra safety and that security and that confidence.

**I want to connect your love of food to all of this by saying you have made food look downright seductive for over 10 years on “Queer Eye.” What's your ultimate sexy food fantasy?**

Ooh, a sexy food fantasy. I would say, honestly, at this stage of life that I'm in right now it's very different than it was a couple of years ago. For the first time, I'm in a relationship where I can't even believe I'm saying it, we actually cook together. This has never happened, except in one relationship a long, long time ago — but in this one, it's something that we sort of collaborate on together, and cooking for me at home has become

less performative and has become more of a collaborative conversation where we will literally sit down and discuss what the meal is going to look like — what's our fantasy? What do we want to play out? And then doing it together.

There's something really beautiful and there's an intimacy there that I, working in food for so long, can't believe I've never really experienced, but it's sort of like, wow, this is really hot and really amazing. When you get to do that together, it makes it less of a single man performance and makes it more of a dance, if you will.

And you want specifics? You want the full menu?

**Give me the full menu.**

Well, last night — so one of my favorite things is ground beef. I'm just obsessed with ground meat. I didn't have a lot of it growing up, and it's so easy to prepare and during the week when I'm really busy, especially when I'm in town, I want something that's nutritious and filling, but I want to keep it really nice and simple. And so I made this dressing that I have been obsessed with since I saw it on TikTok through Baked by Melissa. She brought up this dressing that I've been having

at Japanese restaurants forever, which is a shocking amount of fresh turmeric, ginger, carrots. Dump 'em in a blender with some white meat.

So a lot of rice, wine vinegar, a sesame oil, a little bit of water, a lot of lime juice and lemon juice, and an offensive amount of cracked pepper and good honey. And you just blend it and it's this beautiful, tangy, vibrant puree that we just dip and dive in, put over tuna salad, serve with literally anything or toss it with any type of greens. And so I did grass-fed ground beef; I cooked some sushi rice that I folded in. I cooked the sushi rice and bone broth just to get it really sticky with all of that collagen. And then I seasoned it with a little bit of oyster sauce, a little bit of fish sauce and, again, a little bit of honey at the end so that it didn't burn.

And we sat yesterday and it was surprisingly romantic, yet a dinner that came together in about 20 minutes, and we just stood at the counter eating butter lettuce cups with this meat rice mixture, and I had herbs on the side of Thai basil and some nice spearmint and cilantro, if you're into that, and some chopped scallion and then just drizzle some sriracha, and it was just food falling off the sides of our mouth. I think that's pretty sexy, but that's what works in my household.

**I'm sure that people tell you this, but the way that you talk about food is erotic. It's the language that you use and it's the way that you talk about it, but you love it.**

I love it. I can be having a meal and talking about what the next one is going to be like, and I've been like that through my entire life, and that's a product of my upbringing. For all of our differences in my family, we were always deeply obsessed with food, whether it's going to a restaurant and having something and figuring out how to make it better, faster. Was the fish right? Was it cut too thin or thick? And then my mother would go and recreate it, and that's just been kind of part of our narrative growing up, and it's something that I continue to do today and I love to do it with friends because there's nothing more exciting than leaning into my type-a control freak and having friends over for a communal dinner and being like, no, this is going to be the perfect bite. I love watching it.

**How has your new connection to Michigan — where your boyfriend Zacharias Niedzwiecki is from — influenced your**

**sense of home, balance or even creativity?**

Well, it certainly helps that he was basically raised learning how to hunt for animals and getting cherries at peak season and all of the wonderful stone fruit and tapping his family's maple trees and processing it. He understands food. And so that's a level of connection, like the respect for food. And especially in those parts of Michigan, I mean, you have people who have farm stands in front of their house where people just leave money and pick up farm eggs or whatever fresh fruit they have.

It's very community-driven. At this stage in my life, since I turned 40 — and it wasn't really planned — I find myself, with the state of the world and with everything that's going on and all the things to be afraid of, leaning into things that bring me comfort, and that's always been community. And sometimes it's with my biological family, sometimes it's with my logical family, my chosen family, now it's with my partner and his, who I had a chance to spend time with, which was amazing. And so food has always been that connective fiber for me. It's always been the easiest way for me to connect

See **Antoni**, page 24



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Guests at the Nov. 15 opening reception take in the art at the Tacon-Heaslip Gallery in Ferndale. Photo: Leslie Gauvin

#### ◀ Tacon-Heaslip

Continued from page 14

half of them members of the LGBTQ+ community. James Charles Morris brings his striking digital collage portraits, with three pieces hanging along the main wall.

Ceramic artist Kaiser Suidan's cubes and jacks are arranged in a 24-piece configuration that looks as if it's just been tossed midair. Matthew Shlian, a Cranbrook alum now working out of his Ann Arbor studio, contributes several of his meticulous folded-paper pieces — intricate geometric works that have earned him over 100,000 Instagram followers.

Architecturally trained artist Patrick Ethen's installations use light, mirrors and layered materials to create shifting visual effects that change as viewers move through the space. And Birmingham-based artist and interior designer Barry Harrison rounds out the collection with his whimsical birds and expressive canine sculptures. Harrison is also part of the design team that helped shape the gallery itself.

But Tacon-Heaslip envisions the space as more than a showroom — it's a gathering point for LGBTQ+ artists whose identities have historically shaped, and sometimes constrained, their visibility. Every year, he

donates a piece to the Ruth Ellis Center, a gesture he describes as both personal and necessary in sustaining local queer youth programs. And next June Pride Month, he plans to spotlight artists from the Detroit Queer Sketch Series, a community-driven meetup that has become an incubator for emerging queer talent in the region.

*“I'd love to find as many LGBTQ+ artists as we can get our hands on. That sounds weird, but yeah, the LGBTQ+ community is super important and because we're in Ferndale, we've got a large LGBTQ+ community.”*

“I'd love to find as many LGBTQ+ artists as we can get our hands on,” he says, immediately acknowledging the unintended innuendo. “That sounds weird, but yeah, the LGBTQ+ community is super important and because we're in Ferndale, we've got a large LGBTQ+ community.”

For now, the gallery hums quietly with possibility — a space where art and community meet, and where Tacon-Heaslip's vision for queer creativity can continue to grow.

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#### ◀ Antoni

Continued from page 21

with other people. I think especially now, I'm looking for ways to connect with people, whether it's an opportunity like this with Gilead, or whether it's having my buddies over for a nice communal dinner after a yoga class in the afternoon, or even just going out with friends. I think it's something that's been really important to me that's helped me fall asleep a little better at night.

**It looked like you were enjoying a really good sandwich in Traverse City based on your Instagram post.**

So that was from Vander Farm. I don't think she makes the sandwiches, but it's Zac's sister and she has a sourdough bakery, and you can literally go to her kiosk and pick up sourdough scones with maple glaze from their own maple trees. It's crazy.

**The final season of "Queer Eye" takes place in D.C. For you, knowing that the city has been the epicenter of so many political and cultural tensions right now, how did it feel to bring joy and connection to people in D.C.?**

The epicenter of it, if you will. I mean, we certainly didn't plan that the person who was in office was going to be in office our first season and was going to be in office for our 10th. That was definitely unexpected, for a lot of people. In terms of planning to film in D.C., I'm going to make an assumption that there was an intention there. It would be a really strange coincidence if there weren't. I've been there visiting during various different political administrations, and it is surprising to see how the energy of that district shifts based on who's there. It definitely brings a little bit of tension. But with that tension, I think there's opportunity.

And not to bring us full circle, but again, it's like an opportunity to have conversations and to understand where people are at. Because while I am really afraid and I'm terrified of so much that's happening to so many people, at the same time, I still maintain a sense of hope and optimism for the future. I think to quote David Attenborough, maybe not his intention for this specifically, but maybe it was, "We always have to have hope no matter what."

And it was definitely very emotional. I mean, the season was sort of compressed and stressful

to get it all done. You're dealing with the area of Virginia, Maryland, and D.C. and with different laws and where to film. And so that made it a little more challenging for our producers. There would be just random moments where I think it would sort of catch up with everybody where it was like, "Oh, this is the last one. This is going to be my last field trip. This is the last time I get to cook with someone." And that would just kind of hit us all over the place. So, emotions were

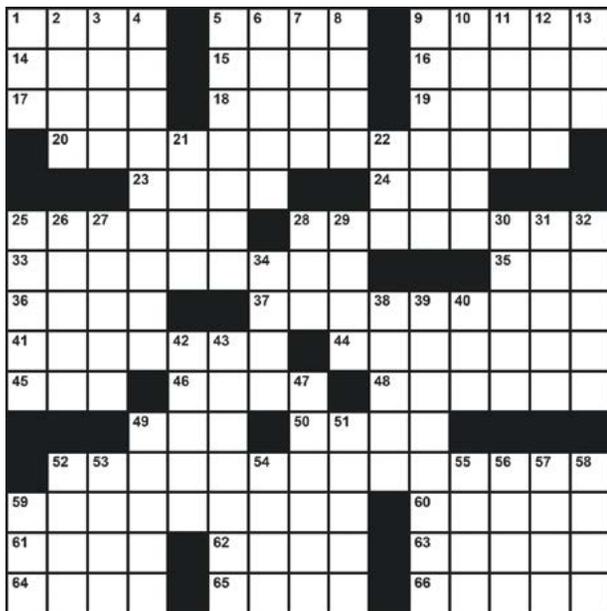


Antoni Porowski with boyfriend Zacharias Niedzwiecki in Mexico in November. Photo: Facebook / @antoniporowski

zigzagging from joy and excitement to meeting new people and having them have epiphanies about their own lives or realizations or moments of acceptance or really embracing who they are to all of the other stuff in between. So it was just this amalgamation of every emotion possible.

And by the time it all ended — I can't disclose too much about the episodes — but the last scene was set up in a way where it was really celebratory and we were celebrating the hero or heroes in question. And there was this moment of joy and accomplishment, but also a profound sadness to think, oh, we're not going to be doing this, for now. Though never say never to anything. Who knows what's going to happen in a little bit. But there's going to be no shortage — and I say it all the time, but it really is true — of emotions. I mean, we have Jeremiah [Brent] on board, so there's plenty more tears added just because of that alone. But everybody cried at some point or another.

This show has changed our lives and allowed us to have so many opportunities beyond our wildest dreams. I never speak for the group, but I think I can say that confidently. And it's something that we're really proud of and that we're really excited to share with everybody whenever it comes out. Strong assumption: 2026. But that's all I got.



## Nancy Pelosi, Mom and Rep

### Across

- 1 Broadway opening for a lot?
- 5 Paris, to Debussy
- 9 Mary, in Mexico
- 14 "Nowhere Man" opening
- 15 Partner of a wink
- 16 Opposite of ecstasy
- 17 Sinead O'Connor's country

- 18 Worker under Tammy Baldwin
- 19 Metal waste
- 20 Start of what Pelosi said to her daughter about running for congress or remaining at home
- 23 Type of seaman
- 24 Shoe store spec
- 25 Blues singer Smith
- 28 Unzipped partner?
- 33 Oakland team
- 35 Race unit
- 36 Bangkok tongue
- 37 More of what Pelosi said

- 41 End of what Pelosi said
- 44 Type of strength
- 45 Chemical suffix
- 46 Top drawer
- 48 Mistreats
- 49 \_\_\_ UP
- 50 Schoolyard retort
- 52 What her daughter said in reply
- 59 Billiards game
- 60 12-inch stick
- 61 Result of a sexually active Woody
- 62 Like sharp cheese
- 63 Beauty parlor item
- 64 Links athletic supporters
- 65 Balls
- 66 Open positions

### Down

- 1 Sea shell seller
- 2 Roz portrayer on "Frasier"
- 3 "Yeah, right!"
- 4 \_\_\_ between the cup and the lip
- 5 \_Romeo and Juliet\_ clan
- 6 Like someone blown away
- 7 Roman wraparound
- 8 James Dean's "East of \_\_\_"
- 9 AMC drama with Jon Hamm
- 10 "I'm with you!"
- 11 Cheer for the Washington Mystics, e.g.
- 12 Preceder of many words?
- 13 Oral affirmations
- 21 "Jeffrey" won one
- 22 Supporter of Spencer-Devlin
- 25 Get into hot water with a

- friend, perhaps
- 26 Hawke of "Hamlet"
- 27 Triangle, e.g.
- 28 Gay history mo.
- 29 Exam for jrs.
- 30 Words before "forgiven"
- 31 Put aside
- 32 They make points by touching the body
- 34 Has the stage
- 38 It helps a baker get it up
- 39 Some motorboats
- 40 Tigers of the NCAA
- 42 Luxury cruiser
- 43 Free gift, in some promotions
- 47 Small leather bar?
- 49 Member of a Dumas three-some
- 51 Card combos
- 52 Muddy ground
- 53 What you do to a hottie
- 54 Spaghetti sauce choice
- 55 Try to seduce
- 56 "Would \_\_\_ to you?"
- 57 Oats for a stallion, e.g.
- 58 Blows it
- 59 Enjoy orally

See p. 19 for answers

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## Survive the Holidays

Continued from page 19

- Joy is your birthright, not a reward.
- Schedule a No Humans Day: pets, snacks, naps.
  - Use harm-reduction principles for anything you might struggle with this season. Like booze, food or maybe contact with exes.
  - Make proactive playlists that don't weaponize nostalgia or remind you of your ex.
  - Write a love letter to your future self that starts, "You made it. You didn't even throw the gravy boat."
  - Write a breakup letter to capitalism on red and green stationery.
  - Send holiday cards to your ex's cat. Not necessarily your ex — just the cat.
  - If the early sunsets wreck your mood, replace bulbs with full-spectrum lights.
  - Watch "The Muppet Christmas Carol" and cry like the emotional-support Muppet you are.
  - Remember: Nothing says "holiday spirit" like surviving capitalism and heteronormativity with flair.
  - Build a gingerbread house with ramps and gender-neutral

**70.** Revisit an old haunt from your youth, but bring your queer self this time.

- Make your New Year's resolution "More naps, fewer explanations."
- Write out everything you're leaving behind this year and burn it safely (glitter optional).
- Host a Queer Vision Board Night — add power tools, affirmations and snack trays.
- Tip anyone working New Year's Eve like you're their fairy godqueer.
- Adopt the motto: "Less resolution, more revelation."
- And when in doubt, raise a glass (or mocktail) to yourself: the reason the season got a little gayer, funnier and brighter.





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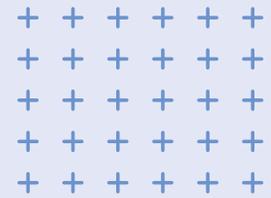
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**A Personal Note**

*Take it from me—when I first started using GLP-1 medications, we didn't know as much about their long-term effects as we do now. They were very effective for weight loss, but I also lost muscle mass. That experience is why I emphasize protein intake, strength preservation, and healthy habits for every patient using these medications today.*

GLP-1 medications can be very helpful for weight management. Many people find that these treatments reduce “food noise” or the constant urge to eat. While this can support weight loss, it also can make it easy to eat too little and feel tired.

To stay healthy & strong while using GLP-1s, please keep the following in mind:

**Prioritize protein.**

Aim for about half your body weight (in pounds) in grams of protein each day. For example, a 200-pound person should consume about 100 grams of protein daily. Good sources include eggs, meat, chicken, cottage cheese, and beans. Beans also add valuable fiber.

**Increase fiber.**

A high-fiber diet supports digestion, fullness, and overall nutrition while on GLP-1 therapy.

**Stay hydrated.**

Drink plenty of water throughout the day to support wellness and digestion.



**Plan your meals.**

Experts recommend planning meals in advance. Start slowly—perhaps by planning just one meal a day—and try new foods and recipes. Good nutrition is a journey, and small steps make a big difference.

**Make wise choices when eating out or at home.**

Choose protein and fiber-rich foods first to support your long-term success.

**Build habits for when the medication plateaus.**

GLP-1 medications may become less effective over time. Establishing strong habits now helps you maintain progress later. Remember: people who regain

weight often gain back fat, not the muscle they lost.

GLP-1s are generally safe, although complications can occur, and some may be serious. Our office protocol is to evaluate you monthly at the start of therapy to determine proper dose escalation or reduction. Once a maintenance dose is established, visits occur every three months.

We also recommend visiting [www.NutritionforWeightLoss.com](http://www.NutritionforWeightLoss.com) as a valuable resource on GLP-1 medications and nutrition.

**Special Offer: Body Composition Tracking**

To help you protect your muscle mass and monitor your progress, we are offering a specially priced package using our GE Prodigy Body Scanner. This test measures your body composition throughout your body and also provides your bone density.

We are offering **three scans over six months for \$175**, paid in full at the first visit.

The regular price is \$79 per scan.

These tests take about 15 minutes and are **not covered by insurance**.

If you would like to schedule an appointment or start the body composition package, please contact our office.

**A Thoughtful Holiday Gift**

This package also makes a meaningful holiday gift for someone focused on improving their health in the coming year.

Warm regards,

**Dr. Benson**

Body Composition only available at Berkley Location.

Dr. Paul Benson's



## Four Locations



**Be Well Medical Center**

1964 11 Mile Rd,  
Berkley, MI 48072  
248-544-9300



**Osborn Family Medical Clinic**

13560 East McNichols Rd,  
Detroit, MI 48205  
248 544-9300



**Community Health Awareness Group**

1300 West Fort St.,  
Detroit, MI 48226  
313-963-3434 x118



**Live Well Clinic**

5103 West Pierson St.  
Flint, MI 48504  
810-21-0605



**Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein**