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Biscuits & *Belonging*

Norm's Diner in Detroit:
where brunch comes
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By Chris Azzopardi

FROM ALLY TO ICON
Niecy Nash-Betts on marriage,
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- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 Mike McGuinness on Serving Pontiac as Its First Openly Gay Mayor
- 7 Three LGBTQ+ Metro Detroit Professionals Charged in Child Sex Abuse Sting
- 8 The Ypsilanti Entrepreneur Who Created a Gig Platform That Prioritizes Community Connections (Sponsored)
- 10 Brunch, Biscuits and Belonging: Norm's Diner Is More Than a Restaurant — It's a Home for Comfort Food and Chosen Family
- 12 Creep of the Week: Trump's FDA Mandates Display of Big Naturals to Protect Children
- 13 The Scroll: Trial Begins Nearly Three Years After Detroit Neurosurgeon Found Dead
- 15 Lessons From Michigan's LGBTQ+ Trailblazers for a New Year
- 16 Niecy Nash-Betts Beyond the Closet: The Actress on Being an Out100 Icon and 'All's Fair'

Page 10



Elise Gallant and Danielle Norman, owners of Norm's Diner. Photo: Andrew Potter

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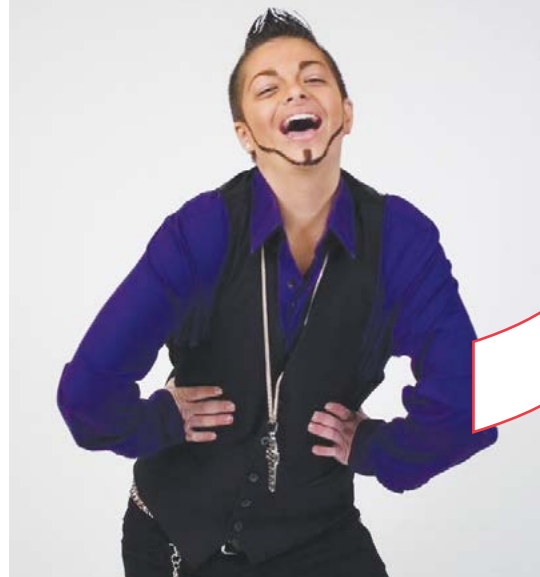
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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

January in Southeast Michigan is that special time of year when your body wants a nap and your spirit wants a party — and now your calendar can suggest “Why not both?” This week’s five things lean hard into that energy: drag kings with perfect eyebrows, communal “Drag Race” watching (as nature intended), “Shrek” trivia with a dash of drag performance and one gentle, body-positive reset you can do from your couch. No pressure to become a new you. Just a few chances to feel a little more connected, entertained and cared for right now.



Dante Gabbana. Photo: Instagram

Witness Swagger and Chaos at All the Kings Men

Never been to a drag king show? This is an excellent place to start: loud, joyful, maybe a bit sweaty and deeply unserious in all the best ways. All the Kings Men brings together a stacked lineup of Detroit-area drag kings for two pop-up mini shows in one night, with Dante Gabbana holding the room together as emcee (and yes, their eyebrows alone deserve applause). Expect masc-y swagger, silliness and a crowd that knows how to cheer each other on. Bonus points for dancing between the two pop-up shows while DJ Illusion keeps the vibes up.

Jan. 10, 9 p.m., Halo Bar and Lounge (8070 Greenfield Road, Detroit). bit.ly/kingsmendetroit.



Rozalynn Triplett.
Photo: MiGen

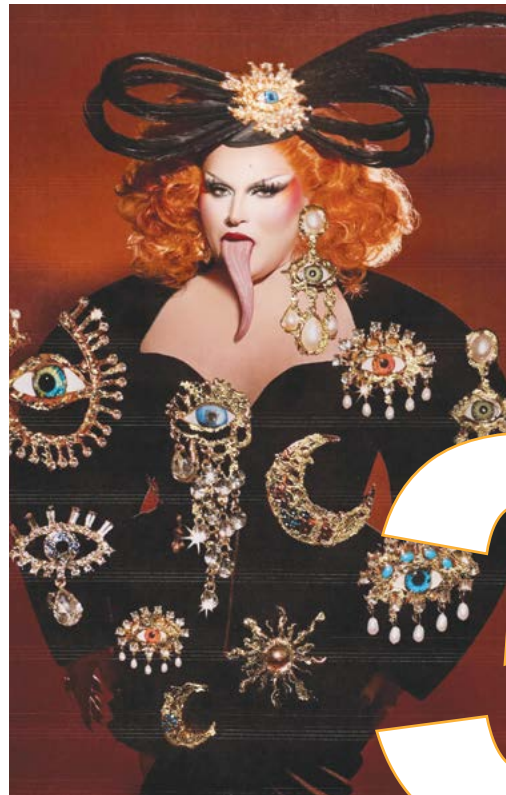
Attend MiGen’s Second Sunday Virtual Artist Talk

MiGen, Michigan’s LGBTQ+ elders network, kicks off the year with its Second Sunday Artist Talk series, featuring Rozalynn Stellina Triplett.

The multidisciplinary artist explores human connection, storytelling and our relationship with the natural world through immersive, sensory experiences that invite you in rather than hold you at arm’s length.

Join virtually to learn about Triplett’s creative process, followed by a Q&A where you can dig deeper into the work. It’s an hour well spent with art that asks big questions gently.

Jan. 11, 1–2 p.m., virtual.
bit.ly/4aGqbqB.



Jane Don't. Photo: Instagram/@heyjanedont

Turn ‘Drag Race’ Into a Group Project

Watching “RuPaul’s Drag Race” alone on your couch is great. Watching it in a room full of queer people, with commentary, screaming and a visiting queen from the season you’re watching? That’s the kind of experience that makes January in Southeast Michigan worth it.

Jane Don’t, drag sister to Bosco and Irene the Alien, joins Necto Pride for a viewing party, Q&A and performances alongside Perry Dox, Chanel Hunter and special guest Jezebel. Get there early, settle in and prepare to have very strong opinions together.

January 16, 7:30 p.m., Necto (516 E. Liberty St., Ann Arbor).
bit.ly/janedont.



Shrek and Donkey. Photo: DreamWorks

Battle for Swamp Supremacy at 'Shrek' Trivia & Drag Night

This event answers the question no one asked, but now we all need to have answered: How much do you really know about "Shrek"? And an additional related query: Do the folks at Ferndale Pride ever sleep or do they just stay up all night plotting fun, surprising and slightly absurd queer events?

Ferndale Pride's "Shrek" Quizzo trivia night combines swampy pop culture questions with drag performances by Sir Guy, Michigan's beloved camp daddy drag king. There are prizes, food options (including vegan and gluten-free) and the satisfying knowledge that your ticket supports keeping Ferndale Pride free and accessible. Come with a team or join one there; either way, Donkey would want you to have fun.

Jan. 16, 8-10 p.m., B. Nektar Meadery (1511 Jarvis, Ferndale). ferndalepride.com/shrek.

4



Build a Body Truce Vision Board

Not a "new year, new you" vision board. A kinder one. This week, try a 30-minute body-positive reset at home. Gather images or words that celebrate what your body already does for you, not how it looks or what you think it should become. Focus on comfort, strength, rest, pleasure and care.

Looking for an easy place to start? Try a Canva vision board template (canva.com/create/vision-boards) and if you'd like some structure or inspiration, Autostraddle queered up the vision board business here: bit.ly/visionboardqueer.

5

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- CBS NEWS



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Mike McGuinness on Serving Pontiac as Its First Openly Gay Mayor

McGuinness reflects on leadership, visibility and what representation means in a city working to redefine itself

BY NICK FULTON

On Oct. 29, just days before Pontiac's mayoral election, City Council candidate Dawn Hannah grabbed a microphone at a local nightclub and urged the crowd to vote against Mike McGuinness. Her reason? To prevent the election of a "gay white man."

Pontiac voters delivered their verdict on Nov. 5. McGuinness defeated Kermit Williams by roughly 10 points in the highest voter turnout the city had seen in 25 years or more, making Pontiac one of just a handful of cities nationwide led by an openly LGBTQ+ mayor.

"I saw Mike go through all of that and win. And he so deserves it. Mike is opening a lane and paving the way for other LGBTQ+ people. And it creates hope and possibilities. He does that for me," said Shelton Martin, a Pontiac voter.

"The campaign was a marathon. And just as I have done in my elected and professional roles now and in the past, I gave it my all, stayed positive, put in the work and it paid off," McGuinness told BTL.

McGuinness' path to the mayor's office includes a long list of professional milestones and public service experiences that continue to shape the new mayor's passion for leadership.

His history of making history stretches back two decades. "Back at Oakland University, I was the first openly gay elected student body president. Twenty years ago. So it's a trend I've kept going," McGuinness said.

After graduation, McGuinness worked in federal politics under then-Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence (MI-14). He now calls Lawrence a mentor whose guidance and stewardship helped shape his career.

"[Congresswoman Lawrence]



Mike McGuinness on the campaign trail last fall. Courtesy photo

mentored me, hired me and really took me under her wing and taught me a ton about public service [and the importance of] including everyone's voices... She has been a mentor and role model for a number of us openly LGBTQ+ local leaders," McGuinness said. He added that Lawrence has also served as a mentor to congressional candidate Jeremy Moss.

McGuinness first made history in 2016, when he was elected to the Pontiac School District Board

of Trustees, becoming the city's first out LGBTQ+ elected official. He later served as board president in 2020 and 2021.

In 2021, McGuinness was elected Pontiac City Council president, a role he credits with preparing him for the city's top executive office.

"So I'm not an outsider who's unfamiliar with the different moving parts of the city operations, but I'm also not the current guy. So there was this interesting dynamic of me being

both the continuation and stability candidate, but also being the change candidate and how I would bring fresh, energetic leadership to the new role," McGuinness said.

Pontiac is on a positive upward trajectory, and McGuinness spent much of his campaign time strategizing about how to keep the city moving forward while picking up the pace.

He praised current Mayor James Greimel for helping deliver record funding for the city from state, federal, county and foundation

sources.

But McGuinness also identified a key area for improvement.

"My compliment, and my constructive criticism, is that the pace of implementing those projects has not been as brisk as it should be or could have been on a number of fronts." He added that communication has also been lacking from the mayor's office to residents.

See **Mike McGuinness**, page 14

Three LGBTQ+ Metro Detroit Professionals Charged in Child Sex Abuse Sting

Community reels as doctor, attorney and psychotherapist arrested in FBI case alleging child sex exploitation network

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Editor's Note: This story contains explicit details about child sexual abuse material and exploitation.

Three prominent Metro Detroit professionals — a doctor, an attorney and a psychotherapist — are facing federal charges after an FBI investigation uncovered what authorities describe as a network of men sharing child sexual abuse material and discussing plans to abuse children.

The arrests have sent shockwaves through communities where the men held positions of trust and leadership, including Detroit's Palmer Woods neighborhood and local healthcare and mental health organizations.

The investigation

In March 2025, Brett Tooman of Toledo was arrested after allegedly traveling to meet an undercover FBI agent who was posing as a parent. Tooman reportedly believed he would be meeting a 7-year-old girl and a 6-month-old baby.

That arrest led federal investigators to three additional suspects with ties to Metro Detroit: Jeremy Brian Tacon, 51, of Huntington Woods; Joshua Ronnebaum, 45, of Detroit; and Lincoln Erickson of Farmington Hills.

According to federal complaints, Tooman had been communicating with an undercover FBI agent between March 6-29, 2025. During those conversations, authorities allege he discussed explicit sexual acts involving minors and shared videos depicting child sexual abuse. Court documents indicate the messages were extremely graphic, with authorities declining to share their full contents publicly.

When Tooman failed to appear for an initial meeting with the agent, he reportedly apologized

and expressed eagerness to try again. The two arranged another meeting, and when Tooman arrived at the planned location, he was immediately arrested. Cocaine was allegedly found in his vehicle.

Following his arrest, Tooman reportedly told police he had been viewing child sexual abuse material for several years and shared it with others. When asked about what led to his arrest, he allegedly told authorities, "bad decisions."

Federal investigators subsequently learned he had allegedly been sharing such material with Tacon and Ronnebaum, leading to an investigation of both men and eventually Erickson. Court documents show Tooman and the three Detroit area men allegedly spoke casually and graphically about their interest in sexually abusing very young children.

The suspects

Jeremy Brian Tacon was a licensed psychotherapist who worked at the Arbor Wellness Center in Huntington Woods. Born in New Zealand, Tacon's LinkedIn profile describes his background as a flight attendant before pursuing a master's degree in clinical psychology and moving to Michigan in 2016.

According to the federal complaint, investigators reviewed conversations between Tacon and Tooman that showed Tacon expressing sexual interest in children and requesting child sexual abuse material. In one exchange cited in court documents, Tooman allegedly messaged "Whatcha wanna see pedo?" After Tacon reportedly told him what he wanted to see, he received at least a dozen videos containing child sexual abuse material.

In one exchange cited in court documents, Tooman allegedly wrote that he wished they could



Joshua Ronnebaum's Palmer Woods home.

"find a kiddo and have our way together," to which Tacon allegedly replied using profane language expressing agreement.

In November, the FBI searched Tacon's home and seized his phone. When investigators dialed the number from the messages, that phone rang, according to federal documents.

In a statement, Arbor Wellness Center said its "first priority was, as always, ensuring client safety and continuity of care. There is no indication that these charges are related to the agency or its clients. Mr. Tacon was an independent contractor on a limited contract and is no longer a part of the agency."

Joshua Ronnebaum is a prominent environmental and immigration attorney who lives in Detroit's Palmer Woods neighborhood and served on the Palmer Woods Association Board of Directors. Just over a year ago, BTL interviewed Ronnebaum for a feature about the neighborhood's annual Holiday Home Tour, where he spoke about community values



Lincoln Erickson and Jeremy Brian Tacon.



and historic preservation.

According to the federal complaint, Ronnebaum allegedly exchanged messages with Tooman from June 2022 to July 2023 about abusing children. Tooman reportedly told authorities they met to use drugs, have sex and watch child sexual abuse material. Ronnebaum reportedly told Tooman he lived in a Detroit mansion with three other men.

A search warrant was executed on Ronnebaum's home in November. According to the

complaint, investigators seized 38 media storage devices, including an iPhone that was allegedly on the nightstand next to Ronnebaum's bed. The phone's screen was reportedly displaying a prompt asking if the user wanted to confirm deletion of the Telegram app.

Another phone found in his closet allegedly contained over 150 illegal images, including material depicting infants and toddlers. Text

See **Detroit Arrests**, page 22

The Ypsilanti Entrepreneur Who Created a Gig Platform That Prioritizes Community Connections

BY ANDREA POTEET

As Washtenaw County's premier tech incubator, SPARK connects entrepreneurs with essential tools, networks and capital for success. This is part three of our four-part LGBTQ+ Tech Innovator Series, showcasing entrepreneurs driving Michigan's tech ecosystem forward. See the video companion to this article at pridesource.com.

Sierra Lambert has worked at over 30 different places — restaurants, nonprofits, volunteer organizations and skill-based gigs.

Each experience taught her something new, but also revealed a persistent problem: talented people struggling to find meaningful work and small businesses desperately needing skills they couldn't afford full-time.

The solution came to her while running Bridge Community Cafe in Ypsilanti. As a small business owner, she found herself wishing she knew skilled individuals who could help with marketing, photography or menu design, while also realizing she'd gladly take on gig work herself to supplement her income.

That insight sparked Gig-L — pronounced "Giggle" — a community-first gig platform designed specifically for small businesses and local organizations. The queer entrepreneur, who studied political science and international affairs at Eastern Michigan University, launched Gig-L a few months ago. More information is available at gig-l.net.

Tell me about Gig-L.

Gig-L is built for small businesses and local organizations, focusing on community and people first.



Don't miss our video on pridesource.com featuring Sierra Lambert, where she shares more about creating Gig-L and how it's improving the local gig work environment.

Unlike most gig apps that are purely transactional — you come, do the thing, get money and leave — we're building lasting relationships. When we work for companies we know, we get to know who owns them and become part of supporting and shaping them.

Why were you driven to create Gig-L? What problem are you trying to solve?

The inspiration came from experiencing both sides. When I opened my coffee shop, I wished I knew people with the skills I'd developed over time. I needed help with social media, photography, menu design. We're solving the disconnect between people who

want meaningful work and small businesses that need help but can't afford full-time employees.

What resources have been helpful to you along the way?

SPARK has been a game changer. They are really awesome. I work with somebody through SPARK who helps walk me through things and gives me insights from working with other founders. They have programs like the Digital Summer Clinic — I have two interns from Eastern Michigan University who want to do marketing but haven't had jobs where they could actually do marketing. SPARK has been amazing with their programs,

the people who work there and financial support too.

Why is LGBTQ+ representation important in the tech field?

People shut themselves out of rooms really often, and if you don't see yourself in a room, it's easy to shut yourself out. The more people making an impact and the more diverse their voices and experiences are, the more innovative solutions we get. When somebody builds something for you, somebody has to be in that room to build it who knows what you're going through and what you need. Tech is only limiting because we're letting it be that way.

What's on the horizon for Gig-L?

We brought our first users last summer. The next phase is really getting into it with our early users — following their journey, getting their feedback, understanding what they wish we had and what doesn't translate the way we thought. I want this built with people, because that's how you build for people. We're always inviting feedback, support and partnership ideas because everything depends on who's involved. The more people who want to support or have ideas, the better we're able to serve the community.

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Elise Gallant and Danielle Norman at their restaurant, Norm's Diner, in the West Village. Photo: Andrew Potter

Brunch, Biscuits and Belonging

Norm's Diner is more than a restaurant — it's a home for comfort food and chosen family

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

When Elise Gallant and Danielle Norman opened their restaurant in October 2024 in Detroit's West Village, they were ready to take their romantic relationship to the next level — restaurant co-ownership. Norm's Diner quickly became more than just the realization of Gallant's dream to serve food from her own kitchen; in just over a year, the duo has earned national recognition. "We probably won't get a James Beard. We're not going

to get a Michelin star. We're literally cooking eggs," Gallant says from a back booth.

Still, they never expected a shoutout from *Bon Appétit*, which featured Norm's Diner in an August 2025 roundup of new spots celebrated for "waking up the breakfast menu." The only Michigan restaurant on the list, writer Kate Kassin praised it for embodying "the American diners of yore," spaces "defined by a warm sameness — the sure feeling of no matter where you ended up, you'd find familiar decor

and omelet specials." Kassin went on to note that, despite its short time in business, "Norm's already feels like a neighborhood institution worn in by years of happy regulars."

"It's so cool to be recognized not only for the food, but also the space and the feeling and our staff, just the big picture of it all," says Gallant, who's been reading *Bon Appétit* since she was a kid. "To be in it was like, wow."

"For Elise," adds Norman, "this is the best thing, aside from a freaking TV show, in my opinion."

Much like its welcoming atmosphere, the food at Norm's Diner carries an immediate sense of familiarity, rooted in the comforts of true Midwestern cooking and shaped by Gallant's experience as a Michigander "through and through." "We never ate at restaurants; my mom cooked every single night, and if she didn't cook, I cooked for me and my sister. So, to me, comfort food should just be simple, tasty and well-seasoned, whether that's with a packet of something or with kosher salt."

On the menu, those roots show up as classics with a twist: an egg and cheese sandwich (the twist: spicy pimento), biscuits and gravy (with pickled chilis, because why not) and a tuna melt (with capers and Irish aged cheddar). "A lot of it, too, is making something from nothing, which is such a valuable skill. I learned that growing up. We were an ingredient house with not a ton of ingredients. So it was like, I'm putting together what I have," Gallant recalls.

When French toast landed on

the menu recently, another early memory resurfaced: “I used to go home from school in middle school and make French toast almost every single day. We always had eggs and bread and milk — *always* — but maybe not a ton of other stuff.”

A business built before a home

There’s something distinctly queer about the way Gallant and Norman’s romantic relationship — which began in June 2022, more than two years before they opened Norm’s — intertwines with their business partnership. They opened a restaurant together months before they ever shared a home, eventually moving in this past March.

“We’re like, hmm, can’t move in together, but we can open a business together,” Norman says. “Hardest thing you can possibly do,” Gallant adds.

Before opening Norm’s Diner, Norman worked in construction management at an energy storage company in Novi. When her boss dreamed of offering free lunch to employees, Norman suggested bringing in Gallant’s years of kitchen experience. Together, they fed 500 people a day across five locations for 18 months — until the lunch program fizzled and both were laid off.

As they weighed their next steps, opening a place of their own felt like a natural move, especially given Gallant’s background in fine dining, including time at the acclaimed Mabel Gray in Hazel Park. “Why wouldn’t we do this somewhere else for ourselves?” Norman says. “When she and I first met, the first thing she said was, ‘I’m going to open a small diner,’” she recalls. “She was like, yes, I’m going to do that. And I always knew I would own a business; I just didn’t know what kind.”

The menu took shape during early conversations about elevating homestyle Midwestern staples — casseroles, Sloppy Joes — into something restaurant-worthy. “People make that stuff at home, but they don’t really get to go out and have a really good version of it.”

Logistically and emotionally, they had already begun building a foundation to keep their relationship healthy both in and outside the restaurant. It helps, too, that Gallant is never on the computer and always in the kitchen — naturally, she was there, plating food, when I

walked into the restaurant — while Norman, who has years of front-of-house and bartending experience, handles scheduling and anything else involving a computer.

“When it comes to running a restaurant, there’s a level of trust you have to have in your business partner to do all the things that they need to do,” Norman says. “And that just crosses over into trusting Elise enough in our relationship to know that in our business, we can have the same kind of rapport and just count on each other.”

It isn’t always easy, but Norman and Gallant are refreshingly transparent about how they handle the tough moments. Take a recent photo shoot for Hour Detroit. The image of the couple doesn’t reveal that the air conditioning was out on a sticky, hot summer day. “Elise and I were yelling,” Norman recalls, remembering the journalist asking them to “try to act like they love each other,” while she wiped beads of sweat from her face.

“Which felt very gay in the moment,” Gallant says, laughing. (BTL is happy to report there was no sweaty behind-the-scenes business drama during our photo shoot at Norm’s.)

“Ninety-nine percent of the time, it’s super fun,” she adds. “We get to enjoy each other’s successes and also help each other when we have a problem.”

Where regulars become family

Now that the couple share a home as well as a business, there’s little separation between life and work — and honestly, they wouldn’t have it any other way. Norm’s is an extension of their life together, a space where creativity and care spill from the couch into the kitchen. Some of their most memorable specials come from the quietest moments — like Norman lounging on the sofa, half-watching “Shark Tank.”

“There’s this funny TikTok Elise sent me yesterday, because it’s literally us at home coming up with specials for here, and it’s this husband talking to his wife and he’s like, ‘What if we made buffalo chicken mozzarella sticks?’ And then she goes, ‘What if I made buffalo chicken mozzarella sticks?’” And that’s the perfect example of how we do specials. I’ll be like, ‘Elise, what if we did a chicken

bacon swiss?’ And she’ll be like, ‘What if I did that?’”

Starting at home makes perfect sense. Norm’s carries the quiet magic of a lesbian-owned space where people linger, laugh and feel seen. The homey decor, the familiar chatter, the intimacy of a staff who knows their patrons by name — it all adds up to a place that feels like chosen family.

“In the least toxic way possible, I am love-bombing every person who walks in this door with my tomato sauce, with my green goddess

are known. Parties are shared. One regular, who reads the newspaper there often, even invited a worker to his daughter’s wedding. “They’ve met my mom,” Gallant adds.

On the day of our interview, that sense of connection plays out in real time. The owners gesture toward a regular sitting at the counter as an example of exactly what they’ve built. Though he prefers to remain anonymous since he’s not out to his family, in a follow-up text, he later put words to what that sense of belonging feels like.

person, you never feel like you’re on display... you’re just another regular!”

He doesn’t hesitate to name the impact the owners have had. Noting Norman and Gallant as “pivotal people in the community,” he adds that, “It’s the kind of diner where you leave feeling more connected than when you walked in.”

For him, the magic lies in the details that never waver. “It’s the consistency,” he says. “Being greeted right away, having staff remember you, pulling you into conversation



One of Norm’s Diner’s most popular menu items: the egg and cheese sandwich. Photo: Andrew Potter

“

“It feels really great to be someone that someone else can look up to [who goes] ‘being lesbian or being gay won’t stop me from doing anything I want to do.’ I love that.”

— Danielle Norman, Norm’s Diner co-owner

dressing, with the sausage that we make, with the potatoes that literally take a day,” Gallant says.

The generosity extends beyond the menu. Regulars are more than customers; they’re part of the rhythm of life at Norm’s. Families

“Norm’s just feels real. It’s small, intimate and comfortable in a way that can’t be forced. Dani and Elise created a space where you can slide into a counter seat, talk to the servers, talk to the kitchen [staff] and just hang out. As a gay

whether you’re sitting alone or with friends. Norm’s is one of those rare places where you never feel like a stranger. That feeling of being

See **Norm’s Diner**, page 19

Trump's FDA Mandates Display of Big Naturals to Protect Children



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I see London, I see France. I can see your underpants. Actually, I can't. But you can see mine. Go ahead. 99.9% of my underwear and bras are from TomboyX.

I found TomboyX while being treated for breast cancer. I had a lumpectomy which made my left breast incredibly sore. It's still sore, in fact, a decade later. I also had a chemotherapy port in my chest which made wearing bras with thin straps uncomfortable. And then there was the radiation that made me feel like my chest was sunburned.

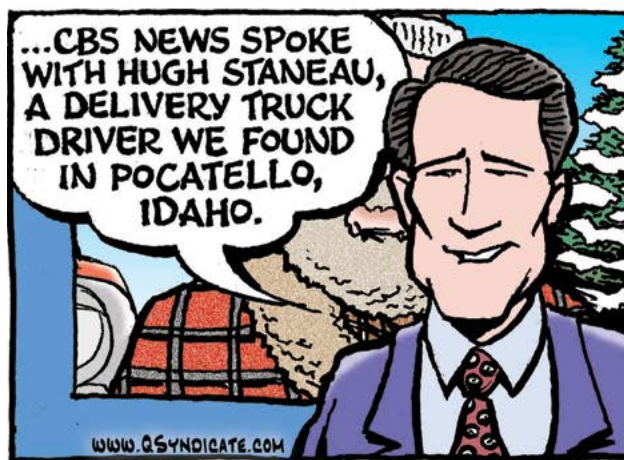
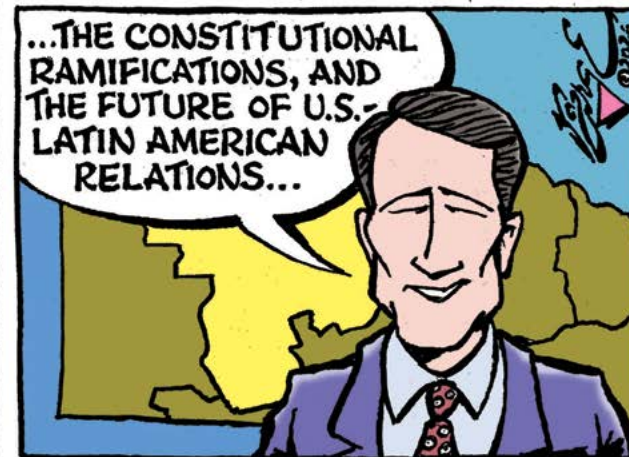
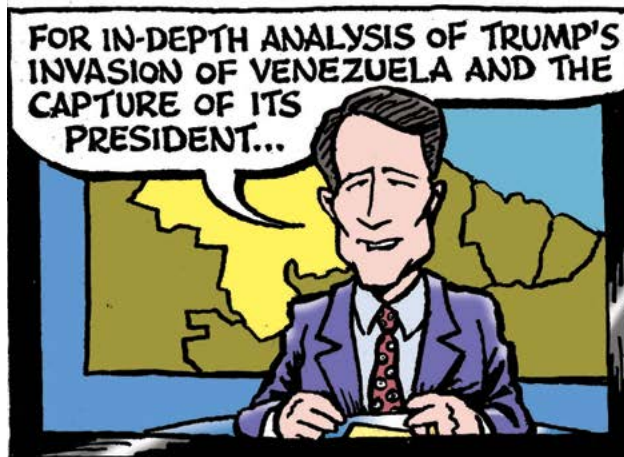
I needed something comfortable. Something soft. Something that felt good after feeling bad for so long. TomboyX filled that need perfectly.

I can't remember exactly how I discovered TomboyX, but I can tell you that I placed my first order for two bras and two pairs of underwear on Nov. 28, 2016. Coincidentally, my most recent order was placed on Nov. 28, 2025. There have been many orders in between.

I have tried just about everything that TomboyX makes and over the years I've found what I like and don't like. I prefer their Essentials Soft Bra over the racerback or bralette. I love their boxer briefs in 4-, 6- and 9-inch lengths. Their boy shorts and briefs are too short for me.

If you don't stand up proudly and loudly for transgender people, you are actively participating in their oppression and erasure. You're also participating in your own. Anything they can take away from trans people they can, and eventually will, take away from you.

Their swim wear played a huge role in my recovery when I started going to aqua aerobics several times a week. That stopped during the height of Covid and then the gym with the pool closed. It was important to me to find swim wear that covered my upper back where I'd had melanoma removed. I had my first suit for years until it literally wore out from so



much use. But on the rare occasion that I do go swimming I still wear their 9-inch swim shorts and swim tank.

When I found TomboyX, their target audience seemed to be mostly queer women with a variety of body types. Over the years that audience has expanded to any gender and even more body types. They even have an entire gender-affirming line that includes packing and tucking underwear as well as compression tops.

Which is how they got the attention of the Trump administration.

In a video posted to Instagram, TomboyX CEO and cofounder Fran Dunaway said she was "bewildered" and "outraged" to receive a warning letter from the FDA claiming that compression tops, also known as chest binders, are "a medical device and should be regulated."

"We've got excellent legal counsel, and we're going to be calm and measured in our responses," Dunaway said. "We've been underestimated before and it doesn't end well for those doing the underestimating. So hang in there. We're in this for the long haul and we're going to meet it with clear eyes and a strong spine. We deserve to exist and our ability to keep building and thriving is part of

how we protect our community."

According to The Advocate, about a dozen companies that sell similar items received the same letter.

Yes, the administration that claims to hate regulations because they "hurt" businesses by not letting them spew toxic waste into our neighborhoods (hello Love Canal),

sell products that hurt people (goodbye metal-tipped lawn darts) or curb their ability to make reckless fiscal decisions (see the 2008 financial crisis), wants to regulate a particularly niche article of clothing. Why? Because it is used by trans, genderqueer and gender-nonconforming people.

The FDA claims that the companies they've sent warning letters to are "illegally" marketing "breast binders for children." TomboyX is not marketing anything to children. According to The Advocate, nor are the other companies targeted.

This is not the FDA trying to protect people of any age from harm; this is the FDA perpetuating harm on an already marginalized group of people. It's targeted harassment.

The Trump administration and the Republican Party (there is no daylight between the two, so it feels wrong to mention one without the other) have gone out of their way to tell trans people: You can't use the bathroom. You can't use the locker room. You can't use preferred pronouns. You can't use your preferred name. You can't change your gender marker on your identification documents. You can't be incarcerated in a gender appropriate facility. You can't play sports. You can't get medical care. And now you can't buy and wear an article of clothing that helps you feel comfortable in your body. Essentially: You can't exist.

And if you can't exist, you can't live. The end game is obvious.

If you don't stand up proudly and loudly for transgender people, you are actively participating in their oppression and erasure. You're also participating in your own. Anything they can take away from trans people they can, and eventually will, take away from you.

Oppression is a tool to gain, keep and consolidate power. If you oppose them, they won't just come for your underwear. They will come for you.

Trial Begins Nearly Three Years After Detroit Neurosurgeon Found Dead

Nearly three years after Detroit neurosurgeon Dr. Devon Hoover was found shot to death in his Boston-Edison home, the trial is set to begin for the man accused of killing him. Desmond Burks is charged with murder, larceny, using a computer to commit a crime and felony firearms in connection with the April 2023 death.

Hoover, 53, was discovered in the attic of his home after he failed to show up for a scheduled visit with his dying mother in Indiana. As we reported in July 2023, Hoover was part of the LGBTQ+ community and a

beloved neurosurgeon known for his kindness and meticulous restoration of his historic \$1.2 million mansion.

The discovery launched an investigation lasting more than a year. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said Burks was the original person of interest but was initially questioned and released while authorities gathered additional evidence.

Worthy said Dr. Hoover had approximately 4,000 communications with a number attributed to Burks. "The text messages established that Desmond Burks and Dr. Hoover were in an intimate relationship with one another and that, on occasion, Desmond Burks would charge Dr. Hoover for these sexual services."

Burks also faces charges in another murder allegedly committed a year after Hoover's death, a case involving a road rage incident in Detroit.



Devon Hoover. Courtesy photo

LGBT Detroit Health Launch Continues Despite Grand Opening Delay

Despite a weather-related postponement of a grand opening that had been scheduled for Jan. 17, LGBT Detroit Health is moving forward with its mission to provide dynamic educational initiatives and direct services for physical, mental and emotional well-being — think personalized fitness regimens, expert-led mental health sessions, comprehensive chronic care management and nutritional classes.

Brutal winter storms caused devastating roof damage just weeks before the planned grand opening, forcing a postponement while repairs are completed. In the meantime, LGBT Detroit Health programming continues at the organization's main campus. If you want to help speed up the timeline and support this community milestone, they're accepting donations to cover repair costs. Visit lgbtdetroit.org for information.

Ex-Editor Claims NYT Bosses Directed Anti-Trans Coverage

Former New York Times editor Billie Jean Sweeney alleges the paper's anti-trans coverage stems from a deliberate editorial direction set by top management.

In a Jan. 1 Trans News Network interview, Sweeney, who is trans and worked at the NYT for 11 years before retiring in 2024, claimed publisher A.G. Sulzberger drove the shift beginning in 2022. "I think he saw this as a political project, that he could take a stance that the hard right would like, that the Trump campaign might like," she said.

A March 2024 GLAAD and Media Matters report found 66% of NYT articles on anti-

trans legislation failed to quote any trans or gender nonconforming people. Sweeney said the paper "put a stamp of legitimacy on medical falsehoods" and "legitimized anti-trans hate."

Perhaps your subscription dollars are better spent elsewhere — like, say, independent LGBTQ+ media? To subscribe: pridesource.com/subscribe.

Find Your Voice With Sing Out Detroit

Looking for a way to build community, make new friends and sing your heart out? Sing Out Detroit is auditioning tenors, basses, altos and sopranos for the 2026 season. The vibrant LGBTQ+ chorus performs year-round and is a Pride fest staple, welcoming singers of all ability levels — just bring your love of music and see where your voice takes you. Auditions are Jan. 12 and 13 at 6:30 p.m.; visit bit.ly/SingOutDetroit to register and get all the details.

Join Westland Library's Queer Book Club

Westland Public Library invites readers to its monthly queer book club for discussions celebrating LGBTQ+ literature. This month's selection is TJ Klune's "The House in the Cerulean Sea," a heartwarming fantasy tale about a caseworker who discovers a magical orphanage on a remote island and finds unexpected love and chosen family. Jan. 22, 6:30 p.m., 6123 Central City Parkway, Westland. Learn more at westlandlibrary.org.

Success of 'Heated Rivalry': More Than Sex

Gay hockey romance "Heated Rivalry" has been dominating queer and straight social media alike with its steamy scenes between rival players (Hudson Williams' Shane Hollander and Connor Storrie's Ilya Rozanov). But star François Arnaud (team captain Scott Hunter) told E! News at the Critics' Choice Awards there's more to the HBO Max hit: "The sex is how they hook you, and then they kind of really break your heart by the end of it."



François Arnaud and Robbie G.K. Photo: HBO

McGuinness' success has drawn national attention from organizations focused on LGBTQ+ representation in elected office.

"Mike McGuinness' election marks a historic milestone for Pontiac and for LGBTQ+ representation. As the city's first out LGBTQ+ elected official, he has already delivered real results by stabilizing finances, driving economic development and

UAW Local 653 in Pontiac — and the Michigan Building Trades, representing nearly 100,000 construction workers statewide.

Martin said his enthusiasm for McGuinness' campaign came from the mayor's authenticity. "I've just never seen somebody so passionate and just so sincere about everything. That's why I was really team Mike from the start," said Martin.

McGuinness' candidacy was also endorsed by a wide slate of local leaders, including state Sen. Rosemary Bayer, Oakland County commissioner Gwen Markham

and matter here," he said.

He also emphasized the intersectionality within Pontiac's LGBTQ+ community.

"We have an incredibly diverse population of African-American, Hispanic, Indigenous, Asian and Arabic Pontiac residents. There are queer community members in Pontiac from all of those diverse backgrounds. That's part of the myth to be dispelled, that being LGBTQ+ comes in one shape, size, color or creed. That's just not reality, and that has never been the reality in Pontiac. We have an extremely diverse LGBTQ+ population here, and it's part of our city's strength."

McGuinness recognizes the weight of his historic position.

"I recognize that for some, for a substantial portion of my overall population of our city, I am demonstrating and modeling how an openly gay public servant is representing and serving and leading them and their family, as well as LGBTQ+ residents and businesses," he said.

He drew parallels between his journey and that of his mentor, Lawrence.

"She was the first woman to be mayor of Southfield. She was the first African-American to be mayor of Southfield. She had a lot of people looking to her, judging how she'd do. There will be people looking at me: What will he do? How will he do? I've got to deliver a superb job to do right by me, my name and the community I hail from."

Despite the decisive victory, the campaign was not without hostility toward McGuinness' identity as an openly gay man.

"It was unfortunate. But it also, in a way, was cathartic because those conversations [in regard to sexuality] had been out there with some voters and were talked about in hushed tones. So it put it out there and shed sunlight on it. And voters had to contend with that question for themselves. And the community collectively had to make that judgment call," McGuinness said.

He acknowledged the likely impact on some voters.

"Ultimately, I think it did make my election more challenging... there were likely voters that may have gone for me this time, if not for that aspect of me. They might have thought I was experienced and qualified and would do a great job, but that's a problem for

them," McGuinness said.

Voters ultimately did make that judgment — and not in favor of McGuinness' opponent. Hannah's bid for City Council was unsuccessful, a result McGuinness said he was grateful for. "It would have been a wild dynamic if I had to serve alongside this person who very vocally was rallying opposition to me because of my sexuality," he said.

Looking ahead

As the campaign season winds down, McGuinness' work is just beginning.

"I have a lot to do, but I am very enthusiastic about the meaningful work that's before me. I've assembled a transition team, I'm conducting interviews for potential leadership hires and I'm proactively charting out innovative policy and program strategies that I hope to implement," McGuinness noted.

He said his first priority as mayor will be strengthening capacity at City Hall by improving Pontiac's operational infrastructure.

Among his key priorities outlined on his campaign website is creating a dedicated youth recreation center — "a safe, positive space where our kids can engage in sports, arts, mentorship and community activities."

He also pledged during the campaign to convene a roundtable of workforce development stakeholders to build a citywide action plan for job training and educational opportunities.

On senior services, he promised to expand programming and remodel gathering areas at the Bowens Senior Center and Ruth Peterson Center.

Another key focus will be how the city supports communities that continue to be targeted by lawmakers at both the state and national levels. The ACLU is tracking 21 active anti-LGBTQ+ bills in Michigan and 616 nationwide, most of which target transgender people.

McGuinness said navigating that reality will remain an ongoing responsibility, including for the thousands of immigrant neighbors in Pontiac.

"How can I keep them safe? How can I help navigate the constantly shifting federal policy winds underneath our feet? And how do I engage and hear and uplift

their voices in this vulnerable and uncertain time?" are among the questions McGuinness is considering while charting his priorities for 2026.

McGuinness' victory carries particular significance for a city whose identity has long been defined by its working-class roots and union halls. This is a blue-collar Midwestern community where factory shifts shaped generations of families — not the kind of place where political observers might expect to see LGBTQ+ leadership take hold.

Yet Michigan itself has been on a progressive trajectory, expanding Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act protections to LGBTQ+ residents and establishing the state's first LGBTQ+ commission. McGuinness' election exists at the intersection of these two realities: a state moving steadily toward inclusion and a city with deep ties to an industry and culture often coded as traditionally masculine and conservative.

That he won decisively, with the backing of the UAW and building trades unions whose members built this city, suggests something shifting in places like Pontiac — not despite its working-class character, but perhaps because of a working-class politics increasingly focused on solidarity across differences.

"His deep community roots and positive vision for revitalizing neighborhoods and the historic downtown make his leadership invaluable for Pontiac's future," Low said.

McGuinness says his administration will focus on accelerating Pontiac's momentum.

"Pontiac is on a positive upward trajectory. And I spent a lot of my time speaking to and strategizing about how we can keep moving forward, but pick up the pace," McGuinness said.

McGuinness' victory was one of 115 winning campaigns endorsed by the LGBTQ+ Victory Fund in 2025, including four others in Michigan: Drew Duncan and Jacqueline Slayby in Kalamazoo and Denzel Anton McCampbell and Gabriella Santiago-Romero in Detroit.

Amid a national rise in anti-LGBTQ+ political rhetoric, McGuinness' election stands as a powerful marker of progress and a sign of what is possible in Pontiac, in Michigan and across the country.



Mayor Mike McGuinness with constituent Tamara Orza-Ramos of Pontiac at his Election Night victory party. Courtesy photo

expanding affordable housing," Evan Low, president and CEO of the LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, said in a statement to BTL.

LGBTQ+ Victory Fund works to elect pro-equality, pro-choice candidates who are openly LGBTQ+ and was among several organizations endorsing McGuinness' campaign, alongside the United Auto Workers — which represents more than 391,000 active members nationally including over 1,200 workers at

and the Rev. Yolanda Whiten.

For McGuinness, representation is crucial on multiple levels.

"Pontiac is sometimes not seen as a hospitable place or a place where many LGBTQ+ community members may be, but for generations, there's been a sizable population and queer-owned businesses here. Hopefully, my continued leadership roles in Pontiac communicates to our region and state that it is safe here, we are welcomed, and we exist

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Lessons From Michigan's LGBTQ+ Trailblazers for a New Year

Lavender Graduation founder Ronni Sanlo, Ann Arbor trailblazer Kathy Kozachenko and four others on resilience, solidarity and hope

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Over the past year, our “Where Are They Now?” series has reconnected readers with some of Michigan’s most influential LGBTQ+ advocates — people who built the

institutions, fought the battles and created the spaces that made it possible for today’s queer community to live more openly and safely. These conversations reveal the practical wisdom of movement-building, including how to turn personal pain into policy change, when to push back and

when to plant seeds and why solidarity matters more than individual heroism.

Here are some of the most powerful moments from six remarkable lives dedicated to LGBTQ+ liberation to take with you into 2026.

Ronni Sanlo: Turning Personal Pain Into Institutional Change

When Ronni Sanlo lost custody of her children in 1979 after coming out as a lesbian in Florida, she channeled that pain into creating one of the most enduring traditions in LGBTQ+ higher education: Lavender Graduation, a ceremony that recognizes the achievements of LGBTQ+ college graduates and acknowledges the unique experience of getting a degree while queer.

“After coming out as a lesbian in 1979, I lost custody of my children due to anti-LGBTQ+ bias in my home state of Florida, which fueled my passion to support LGBTQ+ students in ways I hadn’t experienced myself,” Sanlo explained. She had noticed that LGBTQ+ students at the University of Michigan “often felt invisible and under-celebrated in their achievements compared to their peers.”

The first Lavender Graduation took place at Michigan in 1995. Nearly 30 years later, the ceremony has spread to campuses across the United States and internationally. Now 77 and splitting her time between Palm Springs, California, and Sequim, Washington, with her wife Kelly, Sanlo remains active as a consultant and keynote speaker.

Santo’s approach to storytelling reflects the philosophy that



(from top left, clockwise): Carole Hoke, Johnny Jenkins, Kathy Kozachenko, Ronni Santo, Leslie Ann Norlin-Thompson, André Wilson. Courtesy photos

sustained her through decades of advocacy. “Storytelling for me is about authenticity. It’s about sharing our stories so that our history lives on and so that others know they’re not alone.”

Leslie Ann Norlin-Thompson: From Suicidal to Life-Saving

Leslie Ann Norlin-Thompson’s path to becoming Affirmations’ longest-serving executive

director started in the darkest possible place — sitting in her car with the engine running, ready to end her life at age 25 because of the shame she felt about her first relationship with a woman. Her roommate came home unexpectedly in the middle of the workday, interrupting the suicide attempt and saving her life. Norlin-Thompson eventually found her way to Affirmations — the very organization she would later lead through a complete

transformation.

“I believed it then and I still believe it to this day... Affirmations saved my life,” she told BTL.

When Norlin-Thompson became executive director in 1999, the organization was in crisis. “Attendance was down, all the staff had walked out in protest over some board action, there was no money in the bank and the building was a mess.” Within eight years, she had raised \$5.3 million to build a new facility. The project

attracted \$250,000 donations each from Ford, GM and Chrysler — “the largest corporate contribution to an LGBTQ+ organization, anywhere, from a Fortune 500 company... let alone three of them.”

The building featured big windows facing Nine Mile Road in the heart of Ferndale. “We made a statement to the greater

See **Where Are They Now**, page 18

NIECY NASH-BETTS BEYOND THE CLOSET

The actress on being an Out100 icon, saying yes to ‘All’s Fair’ without a script and becoming L.A.’s ‘mayor of Queerville’



Niecy Nash-Betts. Courtesy photo

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

If there's one thing Niecy Nash-Betts knows how to do, it's turn a moment into a metaphor. So it feels almost too perfect — borderline sitcom-ironic — that before our conversation even begins, I realize she's literally sitting in a closet. Because if Nash-Betts' recent years have taught us anything, it's that the closet is the last place she's ever lived metaphorically. After decades of being embraced as an ally and only later discovering love with her “hersband,” Jessica Betts, whom she married in 2020, Nash-Betts has become one of Hollywood's most joyful examples of what it looks like to live loudly, proudly and entirely on your own terms.

And yet here we are, surrounded by shelves and a large shoe collection, talking about her latest bold move: playing Emerald Greene — and executive producing — Ryan Murphy's new queer fever dream, Hulu's “All's Fair,” which also stars Glenn Close, Sarah Paulson, Kim Kardashian and Naomi Watts. It's a role she signed onto before she ever even saw a script, a leap of faith that has since rewarded her with anal-stimulator PowerPoints, “Dynasty”-level melodrama and a whole lot of queer adoration.

From being crowned “mayor of Queerville” on the streets of L.A. to laughing about how fast lesbians seem to nest (she now personally knows!), Nash-Betts enters our chat with the same mixture of candor, comedy and sincerity that has made her an icon — Out100-certified, even. And as she talks about love, visibility and why she said yes to a show she knew nothing about, the irony of starting this interview in a closet doesn't go unnoticed: Nash-Betts may be physically in one, but figuratively speaking, she's never been further from it.

You get some fun lines on this show. Was it easy to say yes to this script?

Well, to be honest with you, I didn't have a script when I said yes. None of us did. I signed on because I love Ryan Murphy, and I trust him. He calls, you say yes, and then you figure out what you said yes to later.

Did you feel good about what you said yes to?

Oh yeah.

How did you feel when you learned that your introduction in the very first episode would involve presenting an anal stimulator on a PowerPoint slide?

I wasn't shocked, because it's Ryan. I was like, “Oh, we're doing it.” OK! Here's the thing with Ryan: You don't know what to expect, but you do know to expect the unexpected. You never know how his mind works. You can't figure it out. As soon as you think you got it figured out, he hits you with something that you did not see coming.

With a show like this, how do you keep the comedy grounded while staying true to your character?

Well, I feel like everyday life gives you so much comedy, you know what I mean? And I just think that the goal, in most cases, is to not play it for the comedy. That's how you keep the comedy grounded.

Queer viewers have so many reasons to tune into this show, and I'm sure the gay men around you tell you that all the time.

I lovingly say about “All's Fair,” it's for the thems, the theys and the gays. And it is for people who grew up on “Dynasty” and “Knots Landing,” and who had to run home because they wanted to find out what happened with Luke and Laura on “General Hospital.” It's

like, if you don't know that life, it's not for you.

Are you saying that you're in that club? You grew up on those shows?

Oh yeah! "Dallas," all of them. All of the nighttime soap operas. But the daytime soap operas, like "The Young and the Restless," I had been watching that with my grandmother since I was 5. So if you grew up in that era, then you get this show.

There seems to be a consensus on gay social media that this show is made for queer audiences, with many comments suggesting that people who aren't queer might not fully get it. Are you noticing that queer viewers are responding to the show in ways that other audiences aren't?

Am I? I'm a walking hero! I go outside and I'm the mayor of Queerville. I mean, I'm basically the queer of the year when I step out into these L.A. streets. They are on me! [They're like] "Ah, I gotta tell you," and I'm like, I know, I know.

Another reason for gay people to love this show: Sarah Paulson. What was it like working with a fellow queer person, and what else did you bond over beyond "Carol"?

[Laughs.] Sarah and I had done the series "Mrs. America" together. That was where we first worked together. And we both bond over the love of my spouse. We both love my spouse a lot. Yeah, she's obsessed with my spouse. [Laughs.] And it's so funny because her partner, Holland [Taylor], is obsessed with me. So, it's a lot of love that goes around that circle.

That's a dinner party that a lot of gay people would want to come to, let me tell ya.

Come on, come on!

Thinking about you and Sarah on this show, and

your history of being involved in projects with queer representation, how significant is it now — after coming out in the last few years — for you to pay attention to that when deciding on a role?

You know, I think it's very important. And let me just clear something up, for me, because language is important. I don't feel like, for me, I had anywhere to come out of, because I wasn't living a sexually repressed life. I wasn't hiding a life or keeping my life from the public. The minute that I fell in love with JB, I was like, let's sing it from the *hiiiiills!* Because it was just another iteration of love. So, as soon as I could make it public, I did. I didn't right at the beginning, because I didn't know if it was gonna work. So if it didn't work, like, what was the point? But I found out what I did not know: that lesbians nest very quickly. I didn't know that. And the next thing I know, I turned around three times and was married, and I said, "Oh shit, I guess we better tell the folks we married!" So, I definitely am a person who just, no matter where I am in life, I live it out loud. When it showed up for me, I didn't see it coming, but I welcomed it with open arms, among other things.

And I love showing up in places, on set specifically, because the community needs to see itself — on the TV, big screen, small screen, here, there and everywhere. That's one. But there's also the other layer where you get to lean in and play characters that are in the community, which is also delicious. You know, which was what I was able to do on "The Rookie: Feds." I was an equal opportunity lover on that show and was able to have my spouse as my first lover that was introduced on that show. Now, with regards to "All's Fair," Emerald had a tough go of it the first season. So, as she's looking for love, I don't know where she's gonna land. But [in

the second season] I wouldn't be mad if she took a walk on all sides of the thing!

How much of a say do you have in her sexuality as that character develops?

All of the ladies are executive

Thank you. Oh my goodness, you know, that's a very good question, because in terms of celebrity, and people that you could look to, they don't see a lot of Black on Black love. So, I'm very, very grateful to stand in those stilettos. And with my hersband, what you see is what you get. And it's not a fake life for

No pressure at all. It just means keep living and loving, because that's all I'm doing. And I'm unapologetic about it. I had tears in my eyes when I couldn't go to accept my award because I ended up being given both the show, and that was one of the greatest things



(Left to right) Sarah Paulson, Niecy Nash-Betts, Kim Kardashian, Glenn Close and Naomi Watts in "All's Fair." Photo: Hulu

producers on the show. So, that gives you a voice, and Ryan is a wonderful collaborative partner. And so, we're gonna chit and chat and see what his thoughts are about Emerald for Season 2 and see what we're thinking is gonna happen for her. But, you know, I definitely want her to move beyond sex toys in the drawer.

Congratulations on being named an Out100 Icon of the Year in 2025. You've been such an important figure for representation in our community, and you've spoken about how publicly loving Jessica and living authentically matters not just to you, but to the many people who see you both together. With your visibility continuing to grow, especially among queer youth of color, what kind of impact do you hope to have?

social media or anything. And it's so funny because a lot of my glam [team] have said that people they know will say, "What are they like when you go over there? Are they like the way they seem on Instagram?" To which my glam always says, "Oh my god, they're sickening. She can't even be in there getting her makeup done without JB coming in there being like, 'Y'all alright?' And Niecy'll be like, 'You didn't kiss me yet!'" And so, I'm just happy that young, queer, Black people can see that you define how you want your relationship to be, and what you want it to look like, and that you can still go out in the world, and be successful, chart your own path and create the life that you want.

Being honored as an Out100 Icon, does that bring any pressure or change how you think about your responsibility as a representative figure in the community?

that I've ever received. And I'm so grateful to be seen in that way. It's delicious because it's a part of my life that I never saw coming. It's one thing to be an ally, and it's a totally different thing to be a card-carrying member.

Since you've been both, can you talk about that shift from ally to member?

Well, I've always been an ally. I've always had many friends in the community who I advocated for and helped raise money for different organizations and projects. But when you stand in it, it's a little bit different, because the stories that you hear, the pain that people show up with, those experiences... they give them to you in a different way when you're "one of us." It's different, you know? [Laughs.] But I love that for me.

See Niecy Nash-Betts, page 20

◀ Where Are They Now

Continued from page 15

community and to ourselves — we don't need to hide anymore," she said.

Now living in Asheville, North Carolina, with her wife Cindy, Norlin-Thompson remains engaged through volunteer work, including helping her community recover from Hurricane Helene.

André Wilson: The True Power of Solidarity

When André Wilson approached the Graduate Employees Organization at the University of Michigan in 2004 about eliminating trans exclusions from the health insurance plan, no national organizations were prioritizing this issue. Wilson became the lead negotiator, deliberately putting a transgender person at the forefront of all bargaining — not just the trans health care proposal. In 2005, the University of Michigan became one of the first institutions in America to cover gender-affirming care.

One of Wilson's favorite memories captures what that victory meant. During a March 2005 walkout, Wilson made picket signs supporting various equity issues, including one that read "I am a trans grad student." Cisgender union members took every handmade sign he created, including signs reading "We are all trans in GEO."

"I saw the woman with my 'We are all trans in GEO' sign and asked to take her photo. She just beamed into the camera. She said, 'I never told you, but I wasn't on board about the trans health care proposal at first; this year really changed me.' I still choke up when I look at that picture."

A lesson Wilson took from that Bush-era fight remains relevant: "I learned the true power of solidarity. When we stop thinking that 'the pie is small' or if one minority group gets something there won't be enough for others, then we can succeed for everyone."

Now living in the Pacific Northwest, Wilson tends a garden and gives away produce with one request: that recipients "pay it forward and stand up for transgender rights in whatever way they can, small or large."

Carole Hoke: The Long Arc Requires Patience

For Carole Hoke, who started

with a column for the Detroit Area Gay/Lesbian Council called "Over and Out" in the 1980s and went on to become United Church of Christ clergy in Peoria, Illinois, one question from a well-meaning parishioner crystallized everything about the pace of change.

"I had an 'ally' parishioner once ask me, 'Why do people [LGBTQ+] want everything right now?'" Hoke recalled. "I tried my best to help her understand that what feels like 'right now' to her may be a lifetime or more for a person like me."

Approaching their 80th birthday and celebrating 27 years with their spouse Lauren, Hoke has learned that unsuccessful advocacy attempts teach important lessons: "You are always planting seeds. Just because you think you have not had an influence on someone or a group, you may have impacted them more than you realize... Tell your story, let your story stand and maybe, just maybe, someone hearing your words will then share your story with others."

When working on a Peoria city ordinance to include LGBTQ+ protections, gaining support from council members was difficult. But after several advocates spoke openly at a city council meeting, the ordinance passed. "What I learned from that is that one should never, ever give up."

Hoke's advocacy continues on — just in new ways. "Even though my last physical march may have been the March on Washington in 2017, I still march with my words, beliefs and actions."

Johnny Jenkins: Building Black Queer Community

When Johnny Jenkins came out in 1992, he knew nothing about HIV and AIDS. "My coming out was an exhilarating yet terrifying experience of sexual and personal freedom, overshadowed by a dark reality," he recalled. "Despite the constant threat of death, I never considered going back into the closet."

What saved him was finding community. "I found my tribe — Black same-gender-loving men. At the time, Men of Color's (MOC) Motivational Tuesdays was crucial to receiving lifesaving information and a network of same-gender-loving men."

Jenkins went on to help build Black queer spaces in Detroit through his work with Affirmations and LGBT Detroit's Hotter Than July festival. One of his proudest achievements was the Homophobia in Detroit town



Kathy Kozachenko. Courtesy photo

hall at the Wright Museum, which raised the profile of Black LGBTQ+ issues among Detroit's Black religious leaders.

Now pursuing a Ph.D. in gender studies at Arizona State University, Jenkins draws on his Detroit roots when thinking about setbacks. "In all Black social movements, there has been a consistent moment of retrenchment after rights were achieved," he said. "It's reasonable to expect the same with the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights and equality. We have to avoid complacency."

Kathy Kozachenko: The First, But Not the Last

In 1974, when Kathy Kozachenko became the first openly lesbian

candidate elected to any city council in the United States, she didn't set out to make history. She set out to represent the values of the Human Rights Party in Ann Arbor — structural change, redistribution of wealth and the elimination of gender roles.

"My campaign manager suggested I run as an open lesbian. I thought this was a great idea and the rest of the organization agreed," Kozachenko explained. The response surprised her. On the University of Michigan campus, where activism was thriving, she encountered minimal homophobia while campaigning door-to-door. One student told her, "I'm a Christian, but I believe God works in mysterious ways and I'm voting for you."

Kozachenko served two years

before moving on — electoral politics was never meant to be her lifelong calling. "Holding office was one way, but not the only way, to work for social change and economic justice," she told BTL.

Now living in Pittsburgh, where she's been for over 40 years, Kozachenko has watched the current backlash with concern but not surprise. Her advice for young queer people draws on her lifetime of activism. "Hold on to hope," she advised. "Remember that there are millions of us — queer folk as well as allies — working to defend our rights and our ability to live fully and openly. Be mindful of your physical safety and take care of your mental health. And most importantly, don't let the current situation paralyze and defeat you. Hold onto your joy."

◀ Norm's Diner

Continued from page 11

genuinely welcomed, every single time, is what keeps me coming back. Even if I am ordering the same thing every time!”

That consistency is something Gallant is deeply intentional about. Hospitality, to her, is personal — and memorable. “I want to feed you food and I want you to have the nicest server you’ve ever had,” she says, “and I want you to come back and I’ll remember what you said to me the last time you were here.”

Norman’s sister often reminds her how meaningful that visibility is, especially for the next generation. She tells her how glad she is that her kids have them to look up to — two women making their dreams come true, living authentically and cultivating a space where others can do the same. Surrounded by women business owners in Detroit, many of them



Guests enjoy breakfast at Norm's Diner. Photo: Andrew Potter

LGBTQ+, Gallant reflects on what that representation means. “It feels really great to be someone that someone else can look up to [who goes] ‘being lesbian or being gay won’t stop me from doing anything I want to do.’ I love that.”

For Norman, the heart

of Norm’s has always been about safety and belonging — something she believes is felt the moment someone walks inside.

“The gay community in Detroit is big and broad, and I think that being an LGBTQ-friendly space makes it even more special because we’re

not only welcoming people and we’re hospitable, we are fully embracing everyone that walks in the door,” Norman adds. “Every person who walks in here should feel so safe and so comfortable. And I think that just us being the people who own it, it does that.”

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Deep in the Heart of Texas
Puzzle can be found on page 21

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◀ Niecy Nash-Betts

Continued from page 17

I bet there were people who were wanting to claim you long before you knew that you were part of this community.

Let me tell you something, I had no idea. But I got so many DMs where people were saying, "I didn't know I had a chance!" Simmer down! [Laughs.]

Because you were with Jessica when you got those DMs, right?

Right, it was too late! They were like, I didn't know I had a chance, and I'm like, well, I still don't know that you would have had a chance. Because, for me, I lovingly call myself "Jessexual," because that's the only woman that does it for me.

Regarding this project you mentioned — I'm curious if it might be a film, especially since 2026 seems like the year you're set to make a big splash as a film star, because that's what you want.

Because that's what I want, baby! But no, it's not a film, but it is something I'm so excited about. And in February, you'll know about it. But I am very much in the trenches of scripts, trying to figure out what the next thing is I'm going to do and how to fit it into my schedule. And also maybe taking a

twirl in the podcast world.

Lastly, how has your relationship with Jessica shaped your activism and the way you show up publicly?

Well, you know, love makes you courageous. It makes you bold, and you definitely don't want anyone you love or have romantic love for to experience anything on your watch that's unfair, that's unkind, that's hurtful,

"I'm just happy that young, queer, Black people can see that you define how you want your relationship to be, and what you want it to look like, and that you can still go out in the world, and be successful, chart your own path and create the life that you want."

that's mean. So when things are happening, she can definitely take care of herself. She's very much like, I got this, I've been doing this a long time. I'm like, OK, well, I just got here, and I'm letting you know. So I just think that love is such a powerful force in so many mediums that it changes you, it grows you, it's the thing that will stretch you and ultimately make you a better person — if you let it.

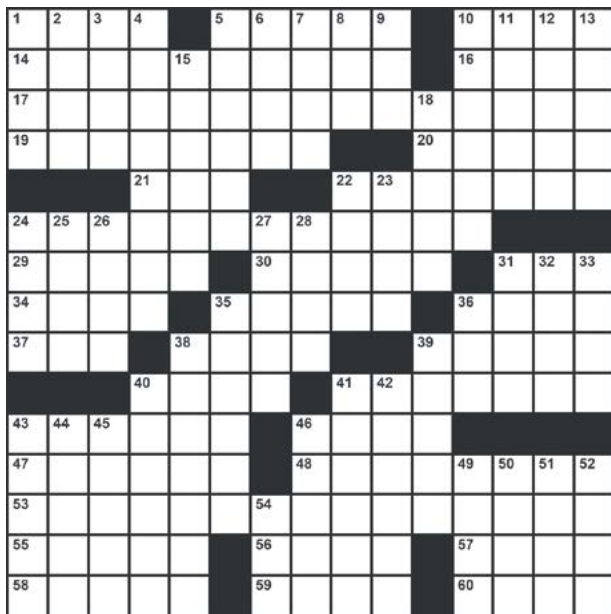
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Deep in the Heart of Texas

Across

- 1 Shakespeare, for one
- 5 Fruit with wrinkles
- 10 Nuts and bolts
- 14 Vehicle for cruising
- 16 Maupin's "___ of You"
- 17 Start of why you can't get rid of gay history, per 53-Across
- 19 Livers in Greece

- 20 Top targets
- 21 Sussex suffix
- 22 Needing to be set straight
- 24 More of the quote
- 29 Get straight
- 30 Ballet ___
- 31 Cyndi Lauper's word before "Bop"
- 34 Hangs loose
- 35 Time spent with Frida
- 36 Dr. on TV
- 37 What hangs from a Cuban
- 38 Karen on "Will & Grace," for one


- 39 Like Dorothy Parker's humor
- 40 "Margaret Mead ___ Me Gay"
- 41 End of the quote
- 43 Far from fearless
- 46 Maker of some fruity flavors
- 47 Head
- 48 Epitome of slowness
- 53 House Representative from Texas
- 55 "The Hot Chick"'s Eric Christian
- 56 "It's ___ real!"
- 57 Himalayan legend
- 58 Taking advantage of
- 59 "Pastor, I Am Gay" author Howard
- 60 Boot attachment at a gay rodeo

Down

- 1 Threesome answer to "Which one?"
- 2 BenGay target
- 3 Circle of life for _The Lion King_?
- 4 "Little ___" (Kristy McNichol flick)
- 5 Uranus, for one
- 6 Rub the wrong way
- 7 United, to Colette
- 8 Mauresmo's court divider
- 9 Trick ending
- 10 Take for granted
- 11 The Beatles' "Can't ___ Love"
- 12 Jockey's prods
- 13 Dr. for the children's hour?
- 15 Liam of "Kinsey"
- 18 Loaded for bear


- 22 Ingrid's "Casablanca" role
- 23 Untouchable head
- 24 Baja abode
- 25 "Uh-oh!" to Lord Byron
- 26 Close at hand, to the Bard
- 27 One that mates with a queen bee
- 28 Current Amsterdam currency
- 31 Visit Barneys, e.g. for example
- 32 San Francisco's Nob, for example
- 33 "She" to Bonheur
- 35 In the closet
- 36 Solidly behind
- 38 Banshee's activity
- 39 Cul-___
- 40 AMC drama with Sal Romano
- 41 Is nuts over
- 42 Aviators' guides
- 43 Firm-fleshed fruit
- 44 Stable youngsters
- 45 Big name in vermouth
- 46 Whoopi at the 2002 Academy Awards
- 49 "The ___ the limit!"
- 50 Penetrate slowly
- 51 Caesar's last question
- 52 Recipe instruction
- 54 Come out on the beach


See p. 19 for answers





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◀ Detroit Arrests

Continued from page 7

messages reportedly found on Ronnebaum's phone included references to him working as an English teacher in Japan and allegedly abusing a 10-year-old and a 12-year-old boy. He allegedly shared details of that abuse with several people online.

Lincoln Erickson is a rehabilitation doctor who worked at Detroit Medical Center's Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan. He has since been fired. "The individual in question has been terminated from the joint WSU-DMC Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation program," Detroit Medical Center said in a statement.

According to federal documents, conversations on Ronnebaum's phone allegedly showed Erickson and Ronnebaum discussing wanting to travel to Thailand and sexually abuse children together. Court documents quote one message from Erickson as reading, "Love being a pedo."

The FBI alleges that Erickson shared in messages a fantasy about having a relationship with a man where they would raise a child together that they would abuse and groom "from baby to adulthood." Messages also allegedly included Erickson stating he knows a father who allows him to sexually abuse his 3-year-old son.

Erickson was arrested at a Detroit hospital where he was a medical resident. He allegedly admitted receiving what he believed was AI-generated child pornography from a man in Chicago. Investigators allege a Telegram chat on his phone showed him requesting more videos and writing, "Bro, I love other pedophiles. So hot."

Erickson is currently on probation for a 2024 domestic violence case. During his Dec. 16 federal court hearing, prosecutors described Erickson as having a history of domestic violence and threatening behavior, according to widely reported information. Court documents also allege he attempted to impregnate an adult woman whom the defense described as his best friend.

During Erickson's hearing, prosecutors presented evidence of his alleged interactions with the father of three minors, including phone sex and in-person meetings, as well as disturbing messages regarding the children. The defense labeled the discussions as "roleplay and fantasy," while the judge found the allegations alarming.

Ronnebaum and Erickson appeared in federal court on Dec. 16. Both were ordered to remain in custody without bond. Court records do not indicate whether Tacon has

had an initial appearance.

A conviction for possession of child sexual abuse material carries a mandatory minimum of five years in federal prison.

Zayne Jackson
 Ugh . The more I read, the more my stomach turned. Im glad they were caught. Hate that there are people like this around. So evil.

1d Like Reply 11 🙄🙄🙄

Annalsia Rivera
 The fuck do you mean the neighbors weren't surprised by it? So they just knew this was going on?

22h Like Reply Edited 11 👍

Conor Nicholl replied · 1 Reply

Angela Marie · Follow
 The messages are wild. That is so disgusting. Why do people like this exist? I will never understand

23h Like Reply 6 🙄🙄

Chello Vultaggio
 Absolutely fucking disgusting! They all need to held to highest punishments

1d Like Reply 9 🙄🙄

Daijajuan DeLabar
 The way everyone was on Lincoln's d*ck... haha 🤔 wait until they realize he only likes 'em below age 7. So sad. Anyone asking for this to be deleted is just complicit in a crime atp. 🙄

Community reactions to the case on Facebook.

Community impact

Ronnebaum's arrest has sent shockwaves through Detroit's Palmer Woods neighborhood, where he had been an active community leader and served on the Palmer Woods Association Board of Directors.

In a November 2024 interview with BTL about the neighborhood's annual Holiday Home Tour, Ronnebaum described the Palmer Woods neighborhood as embodying a "culture of openness."

"People want to make the community better, make Detroit better — both in terms of architectural contributions and in terms of cultural contributions," he said. "We are a community that understands the value of giving back," he added.

BTL has reached out to the Palmer Woods Association for comment.

Multiple sources have contacted BTL to indicate they recognize Erickson from dating apps like Grindr. These reports have not been verified.

Prominent Metro Detroiters are speaking out about the case on social media. On Facebook, Wayne Underwear founder Perry Wayne has been particularly outspoken. Alongside screenshots of the ClickOn Detroit story, he posted, "Cried all morning... Knowing that these are pillars of the community makes me sick to my stomach. I'm begging people to please do better."

In a follow up reel, Perry wrote, "Thank you to everyone who supported and stood with me. Speaking up about protecting children and raising awareness matters. I appreciate those who understand that vigilance and accountability are acts of care, not harm." In a second slide, he added, "Silence tends to protect harm more than protect the innocent."

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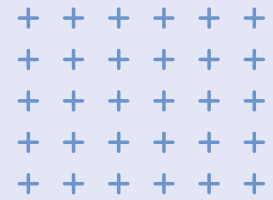
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