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Healing, prevention after
high-profile arrests

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Adam Hollier campaigns
on trans equity

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By Sarah Bricker Hunt

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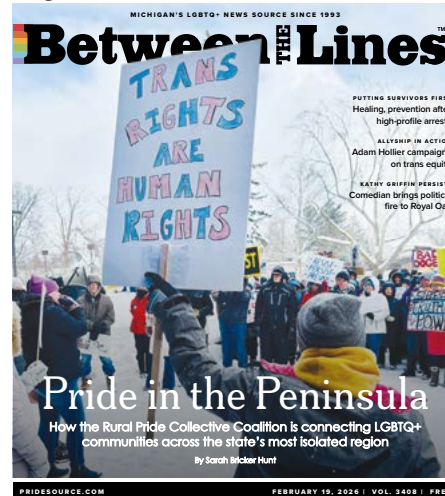
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Community members participate in a trans rights protest in the Upper Peninsula in 2025. Courtesy photo

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

February in Southeast Michigan is doing what February does best: confusing our skin, testing our patience and daring us to leave the house. Luckily, there are reasons to bundle up, lace up, zip up and perhaps strap on something fabulous.

This week's lineup includes leather, learning, dancing, singing and at least one invitation to build community from the comfort of your home, possibly in sweatpants. As always, there's something for the bold, the bashful and the "I'll decide at the last minute" among us.



A model poses in the 2025 Rainbow Resilience show. Courtesy photo

Embrace Intergenerational Glamour

Aging isn't always easy, but it is in many ways a privilege; not everyone gets to grow older, and far too many in our community never had the chance. MiGen's Rainbow Resilience: An Ageless Fashion Affair celebrates the beauty of LGBTQ+ elderhood and reminds us that visibility (and being ridiculously fabulous) is timeless.

The afternoon begins with live entertainment, food and drinks, and plenty of time to mingle before the main event: LGBTQ+ older adults taking the runway not just as models, but as storytellers, sharing an ongoing narrative of authenticity, pride and joy in community.

Get your tickets now — this intergenerational celebration is sure to sell out.

March 1, 2 p.m., Detroit Yacht Club (1 Riverbank Drive, Detroit). bit.ly/Agelessfashion1.



Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams in "Heated Rivalry." Photo: HBO Max

Dance It Out, 'Heated Rivalry' Style

Can't get enough of the Canadian hockey romance where the heat between the sheets outscores the rivalry on the ice? This "Heated Rivalry"-themed dance party celebrates Shane and Ilya's secret love story with all the energy of HBO Max's record-breaking hit. DJs Samuel K.O. and Gaby Hemolock are spinning queer anthems, pop bangers and disco favorites, with drag personality Aphrodite and go-gos André Mason and Presley St. Clair keeping the vibes sky-high. There's a \$100 best-look contest (hockey jerseys encouraged) and happy hour runs 9–10 p.m. Hydrate. Stretch. Text your friends.

Feb. 28, 9 p.m.–2 a.m., Orchid Theatre (141 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). parasolpride.com.



Mr. Dominus.
Photo: Instagram / @mrdominus_dc

Explore Black BDSM at Cold As Hell 6

After five years away from in-person heat, Cold As Hell 6 returns — and it is not here to whisper. Hosted by Master Sango, Sir Apocalypse Onyx and Mr. Dominus, this three-day weekend centers Black BDSM culture with structure, mentorship and intentional education. Expect hands-on demos, a Kinky Mixer, a fetish-focused fashion show and dance party, and a grounding aftercare brunch. Whether you're kink-curious or seasoned, the focus here is consent, communication and community. Bonus: share a story about educating someone around kink with respect and you could win a full weekend pass. Education and sensation? Detroit said yes.

Feb. 20–22, LGBT Detroit (20021 Greenfield Road, Detroit). coldashell.org.

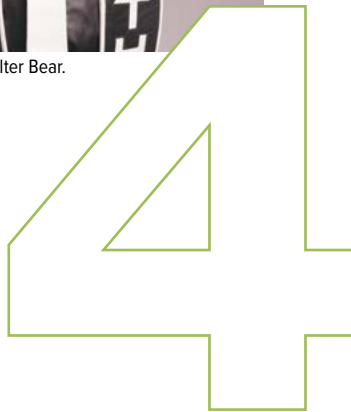


2024 Soho Leather winner Walter Bear.
Photo: Ray Capozzoli-Anguish

Cheer On Community at Soho Leather Weekend

Leather folks, allies and the leather-adjacent, this one's for you. The third annual Soho Leather Weekend takes over 215 West in Ferndale for a fundraiser benefiting Ferndale Pride, a Saturday night competition open to all genders (only six contestant spots — no pressure), and a Sunday social to keep the conversations going. It's part contest, part community reunion, part "how did I end up staying until closing?" Tickets are refreshingly affordable, and yes, there's a hotel partnership if you plan to make a weekend of it. Come for the leather, stay for the cheering section energy guaranteed to liven up a winter's night.

Feb. 27–March 1,
9–11:30 p.m., 215 West
(215 W. Nine Mile Road,
Ferndale). [ferndalepride.com/
soholeather2026](http://ferndalepride.com/soholeather2026).

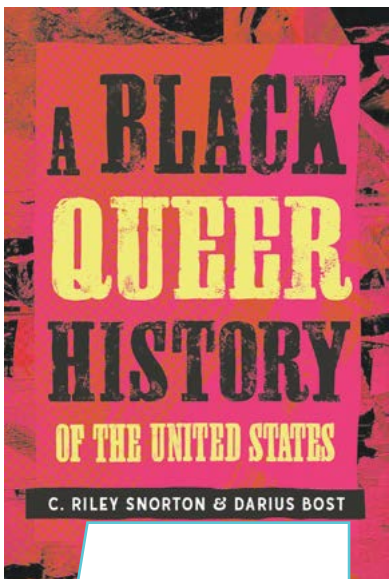


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BY **RICHARD JOHNSON**
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Read Black Queer History Into the Room

One way to celebrate Black History Month without reducing it to a quote graphic or a corporate logo swap is to invest in learning context. The recently released "A Black Queer History of the United States" by C. Riley Snorton and Darius Bost is the first book-length Black history to center queer voices, tracing Black queer, trans and gender-nonconforming lives from slavery to today. It makes clear that gender and sexual expression have always been part of the Black freedom struggle. Buy it. Read it. Talk about it. Let it complicate a conversation about intersectionality in all the best ways.

Available now at local bookstores and online.

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Building (Rainbow) Bridges Across Michigan's Upper Peninsula

How the Rural Pride Collective Coalition is connecting LGBTQ+ communities across the state's most isolated region

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Midway through our Zoom interview, Carrie Fiocchi's screen freezes. She's calling from a local library in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and the internet there has been spotty all day.

"Welcome to rural life," she says when she reconnects a minute later, switching to her phone's hotspot.

The irony isn't lost on anyone on our group call. We're discussing the unique challenges facing LGBTQ+ people in rural Michigan, and here's Exhibit A. But Fiocchi, Equality Michigan's rural outreach coordinator, doesn't dwell on the frustration. She's too busy building something that didn't exist a year ago.

Equality Michigan's Rural Pride Collective Coalition brings together community organizations, service providers and advocates across the Upper Peninsula, creating a web of support in a region where distances are measured in hours, not miles. The network includes U.P. Rainbow Pride, Pride de Noc in Escanaba, Keweenaw Queers, Suunta Wellness in Marquette, the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan, the Women's Center in Marquette and Bay College's diversity, equity and inclusion office.

The coalition grew out of necessity. Margaret Avery, director of community advocacy at Equality Michigan, said the advocacy organization recognized the unique challenges in rural Michigan communities, especially in the U.P., including "unique cultural barriers." Just traveling around in this region can be nearly impossible when winter conditions settle in; add in a pervasive conservative culture (Trump won 14 of the 15 U.P. counties), and it's easy to see why "queer connection" can be elusive here.

The solution was simple in concept, ambitious in execution: Get as many local organizations



Members of the Intergeneration Queer Conversation Book Club planning committee meet in the Upper Peninsula (left to right: Kaitlyn Bamm, Jake Clifton, Marna Franson, Carrie Fiocchi). Courtesy photo

involved as possible to create a patchwork of connectivity that was missing.

The coalition meets biweekly, holding 10 meetings over the past year with consistent participation from 15 partner organizations, gatherings that have become laboratories for learning. Each session starts with educational content for allies who may be less familiar with LGBTQ+ issues, then moves into collaborative problem-

solving.

For Rev. Marna Franson, diocesan missionary for Marquette County of Northern Michigan in the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan, that collaboration has transformed her organization's approach. The Episcopal Church has wrestled publicly with LGBTQ+ inclusion for years, and Franson doesn't sugarcoat where her diocese falls short.

"Although the Episcopal Church

says that we are queer-friendly and wants to be queer-inclusive, we do not necessarily act in a way that supports that intent," she acknowledges. "We are constantly needing to grow in this area."

The coalition gives them a place to do that growing. The diocese has started sponsoring book groups, conversations that reveal gaps in their own understanding. They created an LGBTQ+ working group. They distribute stickers reading

"God is Gender Fluid."

"We did not know that reality until we were taught it — and continue to be taught it — by the LGBTQ+ community," Franson reflects.

"The best education or transformation is not found in a book, but in action and collaboration and working together," she adds.

See **Rural Pride**, page 16

Adam Hollier Returns to Senate Race With Trans Women of Color as His North Star

Former state senator makes equity and justice central to campaign for Michigan's 3rd District

BY NICK FULTON

In a bid to return to the State Senate, one candidate said he's making equity and justice for trans women of color his "North Star." Adam Hollier, a former Michigan lawmaker and officer in the U.S. Army, has made allyship one of his campaign cornerstones as he runs to represent Michigan's 3rd Senate District.

Shortly after his first campaign victory in 2018, Hollier told BTL that a formative conversation he had with his wife, Dr. Krystle Hollier, an accomplished clinical psychologist and healthcare leader, shaped his forthcoming service. "In a world where every interest group has someone or something that advocates for them, she said Black trans women didn't. I decided then and there that I would," Hollier said. Hollier also mentioned the murder of Kelly Stough, a Black trans woman who was shot in Detroit in 2018, as a specific instance that opened his eyes to how deeply trans people needed a loud voice in state politics.

This exchange led Hollier to years of public service grounded in care and allyship for queer people in Michigan.

"Trans women of color need a champion; they need somebody who is going to prioritize them," Hollier told BTL. "I recognized that there was a group of people who, if we made a system that worked for them, it would also work for everybody else."

Hollier previously served as a state senator for District 2 from 2018 until 2023. Since leaving office, he has pursued other electoral opportunities, including congressional campaigns in 2022 and 2024 for Michigan's 13th District, currently represented by Shri Thanedar. Most recently, Hollier ended a congressional campaign in September to join the race for Michigan's next Secretary of State. On Feb. 3, he dropped out of that statewide race — shortly

after Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II entered the already crowded field — and announced his candidacy for the 3rd Senate District, which covers Hamtramck, Highland Park and the east side of Detroit.

Hollier's candidacy is one uniquely grounded in his allyship to queer people — allyship that he has taken to positions of power before. In 2022, State Sen. Hollier led calls for the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in state hate crime laws.

"In enacting its hate-crimes law, Michigan has recognized that nobody should be targeted for violence because of who they are. Those legal protections must be extended to our LGBTQ+ communities," Hollier wrote in an op-ed with Eli Savit, prosecuting attorney for Washtenaw County, for BTL in 2022.

While it took until 2025 for Michigan legislators to include sexual orientation and gender identity in the state's hate crime statute, Hollier's early advocacy paints a clear picture of his commitment to queer people.

In 2022, Hollier fought for the funding that opened the Ruth Ellis Clairmount Center, a supportive housing, healthcare and community center serving at-risk LGBTQ+ youth, a project he says was born from his commitment to find the humanity in every person, even fellow legislators across the aisle.

"I got \$1 million for the Ruth Ellis Center to do permanent supportive housing because I got a conservative Republican from Midland, who was the chair of the Appropriations Committee, to come spend the day with me in Detroit," he said. Hollier, who sits on the Ruth Ellis Center board of directors, described the day as a gathering of queer people of all walks of life, centered on the needs of his constituents.

This bipartisan success story

See [Adam Hollier](#), page 17



Adam Hollier. Courtesy photo

After Detroit Child Sex Abuse Arrests, Advocates Urge Focus on Survivors and Prevention

The aftermath of three high-profile arrests has left Detroit's LGBTQ+ community processing shock, grief and anger

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Editor's note: This story contains discussion of child sexual abuse. If you or someone you know needs support, confidential help is available 24/7 through the included resources.

The federal criminal complaints are sealed. The accused men remain in custody as they await trials that won't begin for several months. And for many in Southeast Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, the December arrests of three well-known Metro Detroit professionals on child sex exploitation charges have left a wound that won't heal quickly.

The arrests of Joshua Ronnebaum, 45, Lincoln Erickson and Jeremy Brian Tacon, 51, sent shockwaves through Detroit's LGBTQ+ community in December. Federal investigators allege the men shared child sexual abuse material and discussed plans to abuse children. Some communications referenced abuse they claimed to have committed.

While no contact offenses are currently charged, the real children depicted in the materials these men allegedly possessed are survivors whose exploitation continues each time that content is viewed or shared. So too are survivors of sexual violence more broadly, who face repeated exposure to triggering content as cases like these dominate news cycles.

All of this is happening against a backdrop of near-constant media coverage centered on the perpetrators of child sexual abuse. As the Epstein files continue dominating national headlines and similar cases unfold across the country, advocates say this focus away from survivors is taking a toll. It's time, they say, to shift the conversation toward healing, accountability and prevention.

"In the context of something like the Epstein files, but also [in cases like the Detroit arrests], there is this real focus on who these people are and trying to understand, which I think is a very human instinct," says Isha Raj-Silverman, policy communications coordinator at RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network). "But it's not necessarily a focus on who's being hurt and the work that we can do to support them, to support other people who are going through

similar experiences."

Reporting on the case has painted a picture of how these men operated in plain sight: Ronnebaum was a prominent immigration attorney and Palmer Woods neighborhood leader who lived with his neurosurgeon husband in a meticulously restored Tudor mansion featured in *Hour Detroit* magazine. Erickson was a respected rehabilitation doctor at Detroit Medical Center's Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan. Tacon was a licensed psychotherapist working at Arbor Wellness Center in



Resources:

RAINN National Sexual Assault

Hotline: If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual assault, you can dial 1-800-656-HOPE or text HOPE to 64673. Resources are also available online at rainn.org.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

CyberTipline: Report suspected child sexual exploitation at CyberTipline.org or call 1-800-843-5678.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 for free, confidential support 24/7.

Huntington Woods.

The Palmer Woods home — a nearly 5,400-square-foot mansion next door to Detroit's largest residence, the Bishop Mansion — became a gathering place for philanthropic events that attracted some of Michigan's power players. The opulence and community involvement created a facade that left most people completely unaware of the alleged crimes happening behind closed doors.

For Roland Leggett, a political consultant who had known the men socially, the news

was devastating.

"I happen to know them very well," Leggett says. "I've spent a lot of time with Josh and [his husband] and Jeremy and his husband as well, and they were always such kind and gracious people. And so to hear that such a horrific thing happened was heartbreaking."

Leggett says he had no idea about the alleged criminal activity. As an adoptive father, he's also a mandated reporter who would have contacted law enforcement immediately if he'd seen anything concerning.

The ripple effects extend far beyond personal relationships. Because of the accused men's professional positions and community involvement, the case has affected numerous institutions and individuals who interacted with them.

"Because of their generosity, so many LGBTQ+ institutions and politicians really leaned on them to get resources for their programs and their campaigns," Leggett says. "So it's a real hit to the movement."

Community members have expressed shock and disgust online. One Reddit user who attended medical school with one of the accused wrote, "Before yesterday I would have told you he was a great guy. Came off as super kind and sincere. You never really know

someone, do you? Maybe if I would have known him better then I would have picked up on something. Or maybe not. Maybe some people hide really, really well."

Another commenter who worked at a Detroit hospital cafeteria and frequently served one of the accused wrote, "He was always very nice and seemed pretty normal. It's very frightening!"

Confronting misconceptions and harmful stereotypes

The case has prompted difficult conversations within the LGBTQ+ community about media coverage. Some worry that high-profile cases involving gay men reinforce a pernicious and false stereotype linking homosexuality with pedophilia — a myth that is easily debunked through crime statistics but continues to fuel discrimination.

According to a literature review published in the journal *Pediatrics*, the notion that gay men are more likely to sexually abuse children is not supported by evidence. The review found that in cases where an adult male abuses a male child, "the molester is usually not gay-identified" and that "the distinction between a gender preference when choosing an adult partner and the gender of victims of

pedophiles is absolute.”

Research consistently shows that child sexual abuse is overwhelmingly perpetrated by heterosexual men who are known to and trusted by their victims — often family members or authority figures. According to RAINN’s statistics, 93% of children who are sexually abused know their abuser, with about 34% of perpetrators being family members.

“We know that the vast majority of instances of sexual violence, in any instances of sexual violence, happen from acquaintances or even people who the survivor knows well, whether that be child sexual abuse material or contact sexual violence,” Raj-Silverman says. “And so I do think it’s important when we talk about these issues to understand that this sort of blown-out idea — it’s not the anomaly that these ‘charming men’ are the ones perpetrating. That is more the rule than the exception.”

For Raj-Silverman, these patterns reflect a common misconception about sexual violence — the belief that perpetrators are isolated individuals who don’t integrate into communities.

“I do think that it’s very easy for folks to think about sexual violence as this thing that happens when someone drags you into an alley who you don’t know, and so you think, ‘I don’t walk in dark alleys, so this isn’t something that’s going to happen to me,’” she says. “Or when we think about child sexual abuse material, we think of someone isolated in their mother’s basement who maybe doesn’t have the kinds of communities that we think of ourselves as being in. But that’s not an accurate representation of what’s happening.”

The reality, she says, is far more uncomfortable — and not specific to any sexual orientation.

As news about the Epstein files and similar cases continues to cycle through media outlets, survivors of sexual violence face repeated exposure to triggering content. Raj-Silverman says this creates a particular challenge for trauma-informed reporting.

“I also think we can often be guilty, or I know I have definitely seen this both in reporting and in the advocacy space, of infantilizing survivors and treating them like they can’t handle things,” she says. “So we tell them, ‘Oh, you should avoid this or you don’t need to consume this content.’ But that’s really up to them.”

Instead, Raj-Silverman says the responsibility falls on media outlets and advocacy organizations to ensure survivors have access to support.

“I think our responsibility is making sure that they have the resources to process that when they do make those decisions to engage with content that can be triggering,” she says.

For many survivors, staying informed about these issues matters, even when the content is

difficult to process. The key is ensuring they’re not forced to navigate it alone.

“It’s not just about that person who is in active crisis,” Raj-Silverman says. “It’s also about making sure that survivors have spaces to continue to heal.”

The path forward

When asked what people should be doing right now, Leggett’s advice is straightforward: “Take care of yourself first, then look around and see who needs help.”

He recommends several concrete actions: checking in with friends and neighbors, making donations to organizations like the Ruth Ellis Center or Affirmations that support people dealing with trauma, and volunteering time to help others.

“There’s a lot we can do, but start with taking care of yourself first and put your head up, look around, [see] who needs help, and let’s go from there,” he says.

Raj-Silverman emphasizes that survivors need to hear a clear message: “You’re not alone. There are places that you can go. There are people who will support you, and we believe you.”

Perhaps most importantly, Raj-Silverman wants people to know that prevention is possible and already underway.

“I want people to know that there are people who are fighting for prevention, who are fighting to make sure that this doesn’t keep happening in the way that I think a lot of us feel sort of numb to because we have these cases,” she says.

RAINN is actively working on policy reforms in Michigan, partnering with state Rep. Regina Weiss on legislation to expand statutes of limitations for sexual assault cases and eliminate involuntary pelvic and rectal exams for patients under anesthesia.

The Michigan Senate passed a package of bills in May that would give survivors a 10-year window after a crime was committed to file civil lawsuits, with extensions under certain circumstances. The bills now await action in the Republican-controlled House.

“We’re trying to make the world safer so that we don’t all feel like we have to be on high alert, checking to make sure that our neighbors aren’t committing heinous crimes against members of our community,” Raj-Silverman says. “Because it shouldn’t be on all of us to have to be paranoid and checking in on everyone. You shouldn’t have to assume that your neighbor could be a sexual predator. You should be able to know that we live in a system where when these things happen, there is real accountability and prevention is possible.”

For Leggett, supporting survivors and pushing for systemic change are the only acceptable responses.

“This is not complicated,” he says. “Supporting survivors is the most important thing we can be doing right now.”



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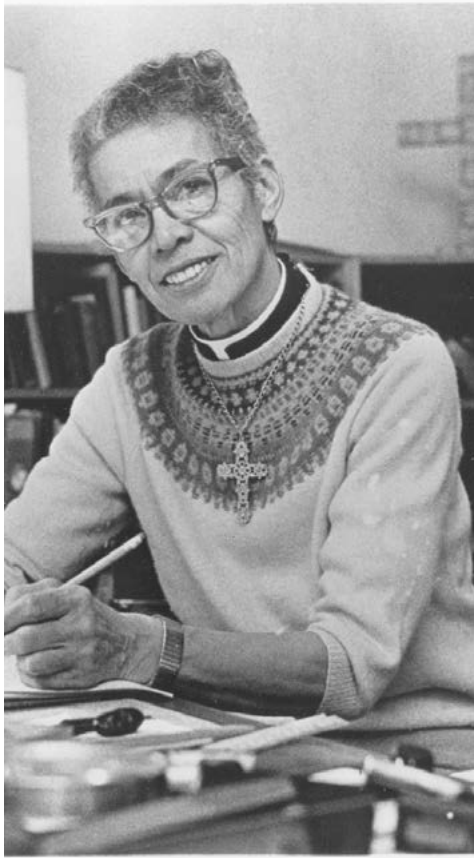
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Pauli Murray, Marsha P. Johnson, Frances Thompson and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy. Courtesy Erin in the Morning

Black Trans Trailblazers You're Not Hearing About in History Class

Honoring Black trans pioneers from across America

BY S. BAUM

It's Black History Month, and despite what the Trump regime wants you to believe, Black trans and gender nonconforming people have always been at the forefront of change in this country — sometimes waging these battles from the most marginalized of spaces, and other times, doing so in the highest halls of power.

Not all of them may have used the word “transgender” to identify themselves, given that labels and notions about gender are specific to time and place. But today, we can look back at all of these trailblazers and recognize reflections of our own experiences of gender diversity.

For Black History Month, we'll be honoring the legacies of just a few of these heroes who have shepherded the struggle for the liberation of Black people, trans people and all Americans.

1. Pauli Murray (1910-1985)

Perhaps the most underappreciated Black gender-nonconforming icon is Pauli Murray. Like many queer people who lived in an earlier era, Pauli did not, as far as public records show, use the word “transgender” to describe herself. Many modern day institutions still reference the civil rights leader using “she/her” pronouns.

While Pauli did indeed use she/her pronouns in public writings, in private, they expressed herself more nebulously. Pauli, who grew up in North Carolina, wrote that they believed themselves to be “a girl who should have been a boy.” They sought out testosterone for hormone replacement therapy, and even begged doctors to perform exploratory surgeries with the belief they would find undescended testes.

They were also known to wear a seahorse brooch on their lapel — and indeed were “obsessed” with seahorses due to their “genderless” nature. It was a symbol, Murray felt, of their own gender ambiguity.

Regardless of what word Pauli would have used today, they were passionate about the crux of gender liberation and racial justice. They were known as the first African-American “woman” ordained as an Episcopal priest and the first Black person to graduate with a JSD from Yale Law. Alongside Betty Friedan, Pauli also co-founded the National Organization for Women.

But Pauli's most significant contribution to American life might be their role in ending segregation. They initially pioneered the legal theory that was used by civil rights lawyers in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed racial segregation in American public schools.

2. Frances Thompson (1840-1876)

Historian Channing Joseph described Frances as “one of the linchpins” who propelled Reconstruction forward after the Civil War.

Frances was born into slavery on a Southern plantation. It was here that she transitioned — the family that claimed to own her recognized her gender identity and gave her feminine clothes to match.

Frances was liberated during an uprising and began her life as a free woman in Memphis, Tennessee, where she witnessed one of the most consequential post-War atrocities against Black Americans — the Memphis Massacre of May 1866.

Countless Black Tennesseans were murdered, robbed or raped by an angry mob of white men, most of whom were

police. Thompson was one such victim.

In the aftermath, Frances was one of five brave Black women who recounted their stories of survival before a congressional committee. Their testimony helped reinvigorate Reconstructionist efforts. Congress adopted the Fourteenth Amendment just a few weeks later, in June of 1866.

“To check the brutal violation of black Memphians’ rights by agents of the state, the federal government would guarantee citizenship, equal protection and due process,” writes historian Jules Gill-Peterson. “At the heart of this historic transformation of the Constitution lay the testimony of five women who told Congress of being raped by white men, asserting that they must be protected from such violence like any white woman would have been [and...] their claim to equal protection included a woman who had become one through transition.”

“Thompson had once been enslaved, and she knew as well as anyone that her testifying under oath to white congressmen was unprecedented,” Gill-Peterson continued. “In much of the country, black women could not legally be raped because the legal system developed during slavery did not consider them persons.”

The entire Memphis police force was fired in the aftermath, largely in thanks to Frances and the women who testified, Gill-Peterson writes. For a while, she returned to life in Memphis as a renowned spiritualist and fortune teller. But after nearly a decade of police harassment, a neighbor outed her, and law enforcement arrested her for “crossdressing.”

Frances was sentenced to forced labor in a men’s chain gang, and died shortly after her release, likely due to health conditions exacerbated by the brutality of her incarceration.

3. Miss Major Griffin-Gracy (1946-2025)

We would be remiss not to mention that we’re celebrating the first Black

History Month since the passing of the magnanimous Miss Major.

Known to many as “Mama,” Major was a dedicated community organizer who refused to abandon the most marginalized among us.

“Major’s fierce commitment and intersectional approach to justice brought her to care directly for people with HIV/AIDS in New York in the early 1980s, and

“Our main goal is to see gay people liberated and free and have equal rights that other people have in America. We’d like to see our gay brothers and sisters out of jail and on the streets again.”

— Marsha P. Johnson, 1970

later to drive San Francisco’s first mobile needle exchange,” her obituary via House of gg reads.

“As director of the TGI Justice Project, she’d return to prisons as a mentor to her ‘gurls’ inside. In 2019, she would be powerfully guided by spirit and her vision in search of a family gathering property. House of gg was born out of her dream to build a center that would empower, heal and be a safe haven for Black trans people and movement leaders in the Southern U.S. — a space for our community.”

In Miss Major’s own words: “We used to

See **Black Trailblazers**, page 22



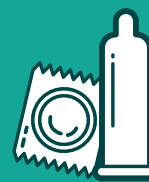
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Indifference to Fascism Is Not a Thing



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I had a post go viral on Bluesky recently. At least, viral for me. When I left Twitter (which you should definitely do) for Bluesky (which you should do if you want), I had it in my mind that I would use Bluesky solely for heavy metal. Talking about albums I love, getting and giving recommendations, keeping track of tours and album releases. No politics.

I managed it for a short while, but it didn't last long. This didn't really surprise me as there is nothing in my life (or yours) that isn't touched by politics. And one cannot simply put one's head in the sand and exchange consciousness for blast beats. Alas.

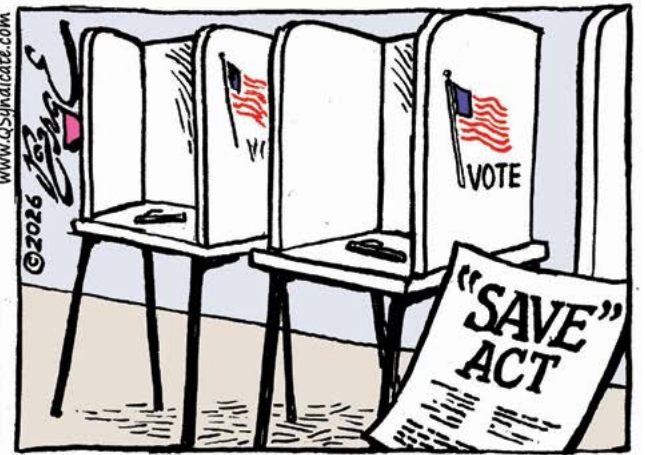
Anyway, on Feb. 13, I posted, "Indifference to fascism is not a thing." I had been thinking of when President George W. Bush said, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" in 2001 and how this is also the Trump administration's attitude about its vile and cruel immigration enforcement efforts. Anyone who opposes living under a fascist tyrant and dares to criticize the violence ICE is unleashing on our communities is labeled a domestic terrorist. And they've made it perfectly clear that they can and will execute you in the street for the crime of resisting.

When you ignore fascism, it just keeps multiplying and encroaching into more areas of public life. You have to reject fascism in every form and facet.

This is, of course, intended to quell opposition. They want people to be too afraid to oppose them in any way. And yet, people continue to take to the streets.

As I write this, my post has gotten 644 likes, 110 reposts, 28 replies, 17 quotes, and three saves (not sure what these three people are saving it for. Probably for marriage).

This is not a ton of engagement in the grand scheme of



things, but it's a lot of engagement for me. After clicking the little heart icon for the first few replies, I did not respond to any more. Soon I stopped reading new replies. After all, I have metal to listen to.

I was not saying, as some responses seemed to think, that indifference to fascism doesn't exist. Of course it does.

But indifference and apathy fuel fascism. When it comes to fascism, you really are for it or against it. There is no neutrality. When you claim indifference to fascism, you aren't refusing to engage, you're giving fascism your permission to operate as it sees fit.

If you are antifascist (and you should be, damn it) then you need to make that shit known. This is not the time to just assume that other people know how you feel. Any privilege you have needs to be leveraged against the fascist forces who would prefer that you just get out of the way.

Although it shouldn't be this way, the people with the most power in the United States are people who are white, male, cisgender, heterosexual and wealthy. If you are one or more of those things, then you need to be speaking out. There are already plenty of people with way more to risk than you who are saying loudly and often, "Abolish ICE." It's literally the least you can do.

I highly recommend reading "On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century" by Timothy Snyder, a history professor at Yale University. A few of those lessons really stand out to me.

One of those lessons is "Take responsibility for the face of the world."

Snyder writes, "The symbols of today enable the reality of tomorrow. Notice the swastikas and the other signs of hate. Do not look away, and do not get used to them. Remove them yourself and set an example for others to do so."

In other words, keep your eyes open. If you see something, say something. When you ignore fascism, it just keeps multiplying and encroaching into more areas of public life. You have to reject fascism in every form and facet.

Another lesson is "Stand out." Again, this is something that people with privilege really need to do. It is not safe for everyone to do so. But, as Snyder writes, "Someone has to."

"It is easy to follow along," Snyder continues. "It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. Remember Rosa Parks. The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow."

There is another lesson that haunts me, especially in the wake of people being shot in broad daylight on the street for the "crime" of opposing ICE. That lesson is, "Be as courageous as you can. If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny."

It sounds scary because it is scary. But I don't think it's hyperbole to say that more people are going to die at the hands of ICE and its enablers. I only hope that we never stop being outraged and that we never lose count.

Fired Calvin Professor's Case Reaches State Supreme Court

The Michigan Supreme Court will decide whether a former Calvin University professor can pursue his claim that he was fired over his association with LGBTQ+ individuals.

Joseph Kuilema, now teaching at Grand Valley State University, was terminated in 2022 after officiating a same-sex wedding for a former student. He had worked at Calvin since 2008 and was named professor of the year in 2019.

"It never really occurred to me that this would be a problem for Calvin, because it was something I was doing in my personal life, and it was a non-

religious wedding," Kuilema told Michigan Advance.

The case presents a novel legal question in Michigan. While the state has recognized associational discrimination claims based on race, none have addressed sex-based discrimination. The Court of Appeals previously ruled against Kuilema, arguing that his sex was irrelevant to Calvin's decision.

But Kuilema's lawyer, Charissa Huang, contends the discrimination was directed at the same-sex couple. If it had been a heterosexual wedding, she argues, the university wouldn't have deemed it "controversial."

Kuilema frames the case as broader than his termination. "This is about something that's happening at a school that's receiving considerable amounts of tax dollars from you, from me, from members of the queer community," he said. Oral arguments have not yet been scheduled.



Meet the 'Blade Angels,' Your New Favorite Olympic Trio

The U.S. women's figure skating team won gold in the team event at the Milan Cortina Olympics on Feb. 8, and at press time, Amber Glenn, Alysa Liu and Isabeau Levito were preparing for individual competition.

After being named to the Olympic team, the trio brainstormed a team name in their group chat, settling on "Blade Angels." Other contenders included "Powerpuff Girls" and "Babes of Glory" (rejected for copyright reasons).

Glenn made history as the first openly queer Olympic women's figure skater. TikTok fans are obsessed with the self-named trio, summing them up perfectly as "alt, gay and from New Jersey." Whatever the individual results, queer fans will remember the Blade Angels as a highlight of this Olympic season.

Michigan Joins Legal Challenge to Federal Attack on Trans Healthcare

Oral arguments are scheduled for March 19 in a lawsuit challenging federal efforts to bar healthcare providers from Medicare and Medicaid if they offer gender-affirming care to minors.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel joined 19 states and Washington, D.C., in suing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services over a December declaration by HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. claiming gender-affirming care is "unsafe and ineffective" — contradicting major medical organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Oregon,

argues Kennedy exceeded his authority. HHS agreed not to issue exclusion notices until after the court rules.

In Michigan, the University of Michigan and Corewell Health both stopped providing gender-affirming care to minors last fall despite such care remaining legal in the state.

Equality Michigan (equalitymi.org) is tracking healthcare disruptions and urging Michiganders experiencing issues to report them.

GOP Rep: Bad Bunny's Halftime Show Was Too Gay

Tennessee Rep. Andy Ogles is demanding a congressional investigation into Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show, claiming it featured "explicit displays of gay sexual acts." The evidence? Two male dancers grinding on each other for approximately two seconds. Calling the performance "pure smut," Ogles accused the NFL and NBC of violating FCC guidelines. Bad Bunny didn't even perform the explicit lyrics Ogles cited. One might wonder what's behind all this attention to detail.

Pride Flag Re-Raised at Stonewall, Defying Trump Order

New York City officials and activists re-raised the rainbow Pride flag at Stonewall National Monument on Feb. 12 after the National Park Service removed it following Trump administration guidance banning "non-agency flags" from national parks. About 1,000 people gathered at the birthplace of the LGBTQ+ rights movement as activists chanted "we will not be erased." The flag had flown continuously at the site since February 2021 under the Biden administration.

Queer Stars Leave Wasserman Over Epstein Ties

Queer pop stars including Chappell Roan, Orville Peck and Chelsea Cutler left the major global talent agency Wasserman Music after founder Casey Wasserman's emails with convicted sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell became public last week. "No artist, agent or employee should ever be expected to defend or overlook actions that conflict so deeply with our own moral values," Roan posted on her social channels.



Chappell Roan. Photo: Lucienne Nghiem

Kathy Griffin on Comedy, Controversy and Throwing Dildos at Nazis

The outspoken comedian discusses chanting against ICE at her shows, the lasting fallout from her Trump photo controversy and LGBTQ+ solidarity

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

On camera from her Malibu home, Kathy Griffin looks harmless, even friendly. But I'm not Gary Busey, Mel Gibson, Larry Ellison or Sean Penn, who are among Griffin's neighbors — the people, she says, she might run into in aisle 9. "I'm here in Malibu terrorizing celebrities as much as I can at the grocery store where they all try to avoid me," she says.

Griffin has spent her entire career as a standup comedian fearlessly digging her nails into Hollywood's most elite, not even sparing the President of the United States. In 2017, she was investigated by the Department of Justice for a viral photo that depicted her holding up a severed model head covered in fake blood that resembled Donald Trump. In the years that followed, she lost her mother Maggie, beat lung cancer and went through her second divorce. The resulting tour and YouTube special, "My Life on the PTSD List," was her first in six years.

Her latest tour, "New Face, New Tour," is irreverently inspired by her third facelift. "I have no secrets," she says, ahead of her March 7 stop at the Royal Oak Music Theatre. Your ticket, she says, will give

you at least two hours of new celeb takedowns and moments reserved for political solidarity and current events, plus a chance to "look at the face right up close in person."

What's the first kind of laugh you're hoping to hear from a crowd when you get out there?

I have a video that I open my shows with and I stole the idea from Cher because I went to see her one time and she has a video that's a retrospective of her work. And I thought, oh, that's a good way to get the audience pumped. I can tell based on their reaction to the video what kind of audience they are. Some audiences like more political stuff, some audiences like more family stuff, some audiences like more pop culture. And I can tell just from that opening video.

When you get out there every night, you are obviously carrying a heavy load along with all of us. What does comedy feel like to perform for you right now?

With everything that's going on in the world, I actually don't start my show with comedy. I start my show just talking to the audience. I was in Canada the day Catherine O'Hara passed away and she was Canadian and I thought, "Well, I can't just go start the show." So I acknowledged it. I acknowledge what's going on with ICE and we talk about that for a minute. And then I go, "OK, everybody, can I move on to the funny stuff?"

People are even protesting ICE at your shows.

I have people chant "Fuck ICE" five times in a row, and I feel like it helps us get out some aggression. I always make a point of reminding

everyone that Renee Good was also a gay woman. I would argue that that murder was a hate crime as well as a murder because you could tell her wife was gay, she presented as gay. And I think that guy couldn't handle two gay women just kind of following him and just being legal observers. So every show I'm like, "Let's not forget Renee Good was a mom, all these great things. She was also a gay woman."

Is this why you've put pressure on people like Anderson Cooper and Andy Cohen to speak out about it?

It worked! I guilted them and I shamed them! And they both can't stand me, but I couldn't help it. I said, "I'll put our beef aside and Anderson, you have to go to Minnesota. We need famous faces there." And by the way, then his thunder was stolen by Don Lemon, who I've been corresponding with. And then I said to Andy, "Andy, I know you do a silly show, 'Watch What Happens Live,' but take a minute." And then he did.

You're demonstrating the power of speaking up.

I do my little YouTube show that I don't even know if anybody watches. I just do it every Tuesday and hope somebody watches.

With that show, "Talk Your Head Off," what do you love about having an outlet like that? What does that kind of direct, unfiltered platform give you that traditional media never did?

Well, it gives me a platform to just pop off to the camera. And usually I don't have guests. My co-host is one of my wigs and I can do stuff that isn't

really appropriate for my standup act, but I tell stories. And recently I've been talking mostly about ICE because it's so ever-present even here in California.

Being a comedian, you have to be on top of the news. And that's our number one news story. And also the folks that are watching my YouTube show are probably not Trumpers. And so we talk about Trumpism and what to look for. And, of course, I make fun of him as much as possible. And sometimes the stuff is so dark. I'm not funny for a few minutes and then I'll try to bring back a laugh later. But I'm in a phase where I really have to play it by ear because the news is changing so rapidly and it's so dramatic. Nothing like I've ever seen in my 65 years. So I think as a comic, it's OK for me to take certain moments and be serious about these topics.

How do you decide when it's OK to make a joke out of a serious moment, and when you should keep it serious?

Well, for example, the way people protest against ICE can be funny. Recently, there was a white nationalist Nazi named Jake Lang, and he came to Minnesota to be pro-ICE. And so the townspeople threw dildos at his car.

The joke almost writes itself.

It really does. And I can just show a clip of it and it's hilarious.

It would be great if you had a dildo moment on stage.

I could. BYO.

You once joked to me that you try to keep your shows to two hours and if they run longer, you're a "bad girl."

Last weekend I was naughty. Time for my spanking. I was naughty. I'm trying to get down to an hour and a half, but I'm working on all this new stuff and people are so gracious. I'm not shitting you. Guess what? I go out, they fucking stand. I'm like, what?

Well, you've earned your place.

I think the audiences coming to the live shows, the people that come to Royal Oak, they know my story. They know about the Trump head picture and how much Trump goes for me. And I think they're very well aware of that. And that's fine with me. I'm not trying to get any Trumpers to come to my shows. I'm just happy to have my own fan base.

It sounds like you question your icon place in pop culture.

Oh, of course. I'm not an icon. My mother would kill me if she was still alive. She'd

go, "What the hell are you talking about? A goddamn icon? What is that? A statue? You're not an icon. You're Irish Catholic from Chicago. You're not even from Forest Park, Illinois. You're not even from Chicago. Don't be high and mighty."

This sounds like some Midwesterner modesty.

Oh yeah. My family is all about the Midwestern common sense. I'm wearing this top that's Gucci and my mother would just ream me for it: "What the hell is Gucci? It's goddamn high and mighty, for Christ's sake." And then she would drink from a box of wine.



I hope you do have moments where you recognize what you've accomplished.

I got a big award and I was named Advocate of the Year and I was on the cover of The Advocate magazine. I still am, actually. And the award was from Out magazine and Sia gave me the award and then I put her on the spot and I made her sing "Unstoppable" a capella and it caused a gay panic.

Speaking of "Unstoppable," you've survived Trump. You went through so much. We talked about it the last time that we spoke.

The Trump picture still defines me. And so I deal with it everywhere I go. My social media is as bad as AOC's. I've had people tell me, "Your social media responses from Trumpers? I've only seen AOC have worse ones than you," which I thought was really funny. And I met her and I told her that. She

was like, "Yeah, mine are pretty bad." And so I just block, block, block. And I'm on Threads a lot, which is kind of a D-list platform. I'm popular on Threads, which is very on brand. I don't have a million Instagram followers. I don't have a million TikTok followers. But I'm big on Threads and that's where I belong.

I just saw how much you loved Bad Bunny's Super Bowl performance on Threads.

Oh, I want to be Mrs. Bunny. I could make that work. I don't know what Kendall Jenner was thinking breaking up with him, but he is sexy and he could be the next Mr. Griffin. And Lady Gaga will officiate.

Are comedians getting braver or more cautious in this moment?

It depends on who it is. I would like to see Jimmy Fallon get political and he's not. That's the place where it's kind of very safe. And I would've liked Colbert to push back on CBS/Paramount more the way Jimmy Kimmel did. But, obviously, Jimmy is the winner in this one because he sat down with [top Disney executives] Bob Iger and Dana Walden and just looked them right in the face and said, "No, I'm not going to stop making fun of Trump. And you'll have to take me off the air." And then Trump got him off the air for something like three nights and the backlash was so enormous that even Bob Iger said, "OK, we'll let you do whatever you want about Trump."

And I've gone on there and made fun of Trump many times and now his audience kind of expects it. So I think Jimmy Kimmel is really leading the way. And right now, the way we got him back on the air is the most successful of our moves as lefties. People

wrote in and wrote old-fashioned letters and emailed ABC and Disney. I wish more celebrities would have that level of balls.

Where did you get your balls from?

My dad. My dad always said, "I don't care if you never work again, just say whatever you want." Which was horrible advice. And my mother would say, "Stop saying that, John. Jesus Christ, you're just drunk." He took it to heart, because my dad was like that. He would say the most inappropriate shit and it would make me laugh so hard.

Ever since I was a little girl, he would just say things that were wrong. I remember one time one of our friends did a remodel of their rec room, which is like a basement, and my dad was a real handyman, so the friend wanted dad to like it. So he walks in, dad's holding my hand. I was like 6, and my dad looks around the remodel rec room and he goes, "What a shit box." And I just thought that was the funniest thing. And the family just burst out laughing. They weren't offended. And so I was dumb enough to think, "Oh, people will know when I'm kidding." They don't! Especially the president.

You have really been the same person your whole life.

I'm the same person I was on "My Life on the D-List," except there's no cameras. But I swear to God, my life is just the same as that.

As someone who has survived Trump, what advice do you have for people to get through this era, especially for queer and trans people who are exhausted and scared?

Well, first of all, you should be exhausted and scared. So stay alert and stay vigilant and stay together. That's one thing the gay community has always done better than any other group. You guys are so good at mobilizing and organizing. So just like you see the people in Minneapolis with their whistles on every corner, that's how I think the gay community will handle it when Trump goes for you. So once again, you guys are natural community organizers. Organize it on Grindr. I'm not sure how you can make it work, but you will.

Before we wrap, I want to give you the floor. What's on your mind right now around "Heated Rivalry"?

First of all, I'm a hockey fan and what cracks me up is how little hockey there was in that. The idea that they would be flirting during the slapshot was hilarious to me. And the mom not knowing he was gay and the mom going out and crying was funny to me because I'm like, "Girl, please." You knew since he was 3. Those two guys are so hot and I think it's great because in my generation, "Will & Grace" was the big, revelatory gay show. And now we got gay guys just blowing each other in every shower from here to Russia.

◀ Rural Pride

Continued from page 6

“By rubbing elbows with and working beside — sometimes in conjunction with — other folks in the community that are supporting Pride efforts, we are learning and growing and stretching.”

Emily Stanton, president of Keweenaw Queers, says the coalition has been essential for newer organizations finding their footing. “It’s a great way to connect with other U.P.

like Green Bay or Traverse City to access healthcare, mental healthcare and other resources.

So organizations get creative. Domestic violence groups refer clients to each other based on who’s closer, even when funding depends on the number of people they serve directly. Healthcare systems develop transportation assistance programs that don’t exist in lower Michigan because they’re not needed there.

“Depending on where the people are calling from, they will swap so that it is the shorter

decided to become a full organization but struggled as an all-volunteer effort.

The coalition changed that. “I could do some of the legwork to help them reach a further audience, and now they have grown significantly, and now the other private organizations that have existed are reaching out to them,” Fiocchi says.

The question of why LGBTQ+ people stay in rural areas comes up often, usually from people who don’t understand the pull of place. Fiocchi herself grew up in lower Michigan but has lived in the U.P. since the late ’90s. She pushes back on the premise that queer people should “just move” if they live in a less affirming (or openly hostile) area.

“A lot of folks live up in this area because they love the land that is here or they have family here and they want to be near their family, and it’s a big distance to move,” she says. “So you see a lot of the same reasons that people choose to live anywhere else.”

Stanton is even more direct. “Queer people are everywhere, including in small, rural communities,” she says. “We have always been there. Life can be hard and inconvenient, but small-town queer people persist.”

Fiocchi has heard from LGBTQ+ youth who used to wonder whether queer adults even existed in the Upper Peninsula. That question itself reveals how invisible people have had to be.

“If folks can get away with not being noticed, that has largely been a way to be,” Fiocchi says. “And that has led to things like youth wondering if there are adults that identify as queer in the Upper Peninsula or, ‘Do they not exist? Do they die? What happens?’”

It’s impactful when younger queer community members see representation among older generations in the region, but getting older LGBTQ+ people to be visible can prove challenging. “It’s difficult to get the older population to come out and be seen with what they’ve experienced,” Fiocchi notes. “And that’s true everywhere, but it is especially true in a rural community.”

“When you are a queer person in a rural area, it can be very isolating,” she adds. “The coalition definitely helps with making connections across the state.”

Franson sees the complexity of rural communities up close. “Being in a rural area means that nothing is standard,” she explains. “Each community has its own idiosyncrasies, loyalties, history, insider dynamics and political predispositions.”

That variation means building a support network that looks different in each town — and it takes buy-in from local stakeholders to create something truly meaningful for the community. “Until the power brokers in each community come on board with supporting the health and wellbeing of the LGBTQ+ community in a town, that LGBTQ+ community will continue to be marginalized and continue to be at risk,” Franson notes.

But something is shifting.

The coalition helped launch the first large-scale Pride gathering in Escanaba,

and the momentum from that day helped create Pride de Noc, a new nonprofit Pride organization now building its own programs in Delta County. The coalition also launched two support groups that draw 30-40 participants monthly: Anything But Cis, a peer-led group for trans and gender-diverse individuals, and Together for Them, an intergenerational group for allies, friends and family to learn, grow and support their loved ones.

Avery, who grew up in a rural area before moving to a city, notes that there’s a sense of community in smaller places that doesn’t happen as organically in larger cities. “You can’t replicate it with my neighbors here [outside Detroit], but I knew my neighbors growing up,” she says.

“There’s just a sense of community that can be extremely rich and extremely valuable and really enrich your life in a lot of ways if you’re able to put yourself out there in places like the U.P.,” Avery continues. “When you’re able to find your people, then you can create a community that’s unlike any other.”

Community building, Avery says, requires intentionality and simply showing up. “There’s Superior Kombucha in Marquette, for example, a place that holds an LGBTQ-specific evening once a month,” Fiocchi says. “Show up at the things, get to know the people and have the conversations. The community exists, and it’s rich and it’s based in connection. But you have to go to the places and do the things.”

She acknowledges a certain kind of irony. “It’s the weirdest thing to move to a rural area where a lot of people like to be more introverted, but the best thing to do in a rural area when you want to is to be more extroverted.”

Queer and trans people in the U.P. have told Fiocchi what they’re looking for, and it’s remarkably straightforward. “They would like to be seen as just another person as they exist in their world and their jobs and in their day-to-day life and to create friendships and relationships in the same way that somebody who looks like your most neighborly neighbor friend might create a relationship.”

That vision drives the coalition’s work. Not just surviving in rural Michigan, but building the kind of rich, connected community life that makes a place feel like home. According to an annual report released by Equality Michigan, the coalition reached an estimated 300-plus people in 2025, primarily in Delta, Houghton and Marquette Counties — clocking an estimated 15,000 miles in the process. Resources and connection are available, even across great distances.

Sometimes it just takes a little patience when the internet cuts out.

For more information about the Rural Pride Collective Coalition or to connect with resources in the Upper Peninsula, contact Carrie Fiocchi at cfiocchi@equalitymi.org or visit equalitymi.org/advocates/up-coalition.



Tie-dye event at a Keweenaw Queers event. Courtesy photo

Pride organizers,” she notes. “Many of our organizations are new, so it’s great to share information with each other.”

Still, the practical challenges are real. Resources that city dwellers take for granted require three to five hours of travel to access. “The difference is, in this area, in order to get to that resource, it’s going to take three to five hours,” Fiocchi notes that Upper Peninsula residents often have to travel to places

distance even though the organizations get their money based on how many people come to them,” Fiocchi explains. “That is a unique piece of the rural community.”

Creative approaches extend to visibility work. Marquette, the region’s largest city, has changed significantly in recent years, and the coalition helped set the stage for smaller groups to step forward. U.P. Rainbow Pride, which originally only focused on the city’s annual Pride event,

is one of rarity in our polarized political climate. Hollier's strategy of reaching across the aisle is one that he plans to bring to the legislature once again.

"You make it real for people, and you talk to them in a way that understands both their humanity and ours," Hollier said in reference to accomplishing bipartisan support of LGBTQ+ issues.

During his first stint in the legislature, Hollier joined current Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson in support of the state's addition of gender neutral markers on Michigan IDs and driver's licenses. During a press conference in 2021, he said that the change reflected, "our shared belief that all Michiganders deserve the dignity and respect of being known by their true identity."

This shared belief is one that extends to every part of his life, not just his elected journey. Hollier told BTL that he is proud to share this passion he has for allyship with his own family in the very community he hopes to soon represent.

"It's been really cool bringing my children to Pride celebrations and events at the Ruth Ellis Center, where they get to grow up seeing people live out loud normally," said Hollier.

Hollier, Ruth Ellis Executive Director Mark Erwin said, has been an "unwavering champion for the mission of the Center and for the LGBTQ+ young people we serve, especially transgender women of color, who too often face the greatest barriers to safety and opportunity." Erwin points to Hollier's work advancing inclusive hate crime legislation that affirms protections based on gender identity and sexual orientation and helping to secure critical funding for Clairmount Center as indicators of Hollier's ability to transform advocacy into meaningful action. "We are deeply honored to have him serve on our Board of Directors and proud to call him not only a steadfast ally, but a true friend," Erwin added.

Hollier's advocacy has gained the attention of openly queer elected leaders who have broken barriers themselves.

"You don't have to explain to Adam very long how these inequities in society have affected the LGBTQ+ community. And that's a special kind of ally because it's not just passion and awareness that they bring, but it's a commitment," Oakland County

Executive David Coulter told BTL.

Coulter was the state's first openly LGBTQ+ person to lead a county and a public servant whose service has included leading the city of Ferndale as mayor from 2011 until 2019. Coulter previously endorsed Hollier in his bid for Secretary of State, but at the date of publication he has not yet made an endorsement for Michigan's 3rd Senate District.

After switching races, Hollier has focused his campaign on economic issues, pledging to help Michiganders weather what he calls "Trump's Economy."

"Trans women of color need a champion; they need somebody who is going to prioritize them. I recognized that there was a group of people who, if we made a system that worked for them, it would also work for everybody else."

— Adam Hollier

"I have been committed to serving my community my entire life, and I believe I can do that best in the Michigan Senate," Hollier wrote in a follow-up email. "I have unfinished business in Lansing; we need to get every Michigander a valid State ID, solve our housing affordability crisis and ensure that we make our government more responsive to hard-working people who are struggling through Trump's Economy."

Under the second Trump administration, Michigan jobs have been shuttered. According to calculations by Climate Power in a report released in October, Trump has cost the state 7,600 jobs and an 11% spike in utility costs. Included in these numbers are the 1,100 workers laid off from General Motors factories in the Detroit area. Trans women of color, Hollier's "North Star," are among the most vulnerable groups to this unemployment and economic instability.

"Every civil rights movement has required allies. We can't do this work just on our own. There's not enough of us," Coulter said.

Now Hollier returns to the legislature with the same compass guiding him. Whether voters will follow that North Star remains to be seen.

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Jadzia Axelrod Has Created the Trans Superhero We Always Needed

Inside the creation of DC's first trans superhero graphic novel

BY ANNI ARBOUR

I don't often cry while reading a comic book. But these words on the dedication page of "Galaxy: The Prettiest Star" brought me to tears: "For the girl who needed this book ages ago, and couldn't find it."

It was as if Jadzia Axelrod, the transgender author of this 2022 graphic novel featuring a transgender superhero, was speaking to my teenage self. A feeling confirmed when I saw the first chapter was titled "Aladdin Sane."

That reference to a 1973 David Bowie album brought back memories of the Bowie concert I saw that year, the queerest event of my teenage life. I was a Bowie acolyte, a fan not just of his music, but also his otherworldly gender ambiguity and brazen flamboyance. My gender-dysphoric self could only dream of possessing such confidence. The title of Axelrod's graphic novel drew upon the song "The Prettiest Star" from that same album, and his songs from that era provided the chapter headings throughout the book.

"One of my art-class buddies gave me a mix tape of 'Ziggy Stardust' and I was just blown away," Axelrod told BTL. "I had never heard music that was so unapologetically queer before."

Born in the Appalachian Mountains outside Knoxville, Tennessee, Axelrod's family moved to the small town of Hillsborough, North Carolina, when she was 12 years old.

"When I was in high school, I wrote and drew a six-page comic and submitted it to the Congressional Art Competition, and it won!" she said. "First comic to do that, as far as I know. I've been writing and drawing comics ever since."

Despite her academic achievements, Axelrod secretly bore the pain of gender dysphoria.

"I knew I was queer and was pretty certain I was trans, neither of which were the best identities to have in rural North Carolina."

Her outlet was hanging out with

her best friend — a girl who was also queer. Together, they would secretly attend Pride parades and queer film festivals in nearby big cities.

"My writing previous to coming out was full of transgender subtext," Axelrod noted. "Characters were always hiding something they were scared of people knowing about that was nonetheless intrinsic to who they were."

Axelrod made her gender transition in 2015 at the age of 36, and rechristened herself "Jadzia," both for its Eastern European roots in recognition of her ancestral familial roots on her father's side, and as a nod to Jadzia Dax, a character from "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine."

A few years later, Michele R. Wells, vice president and executive editor for DC Comics' newly formed Young Readers line, was seeking a writer who was familiar with their lineup of characters and had "an unusual point of view." She reached out to Axelrod's literary agent who assured them his client was the person they were looking for.

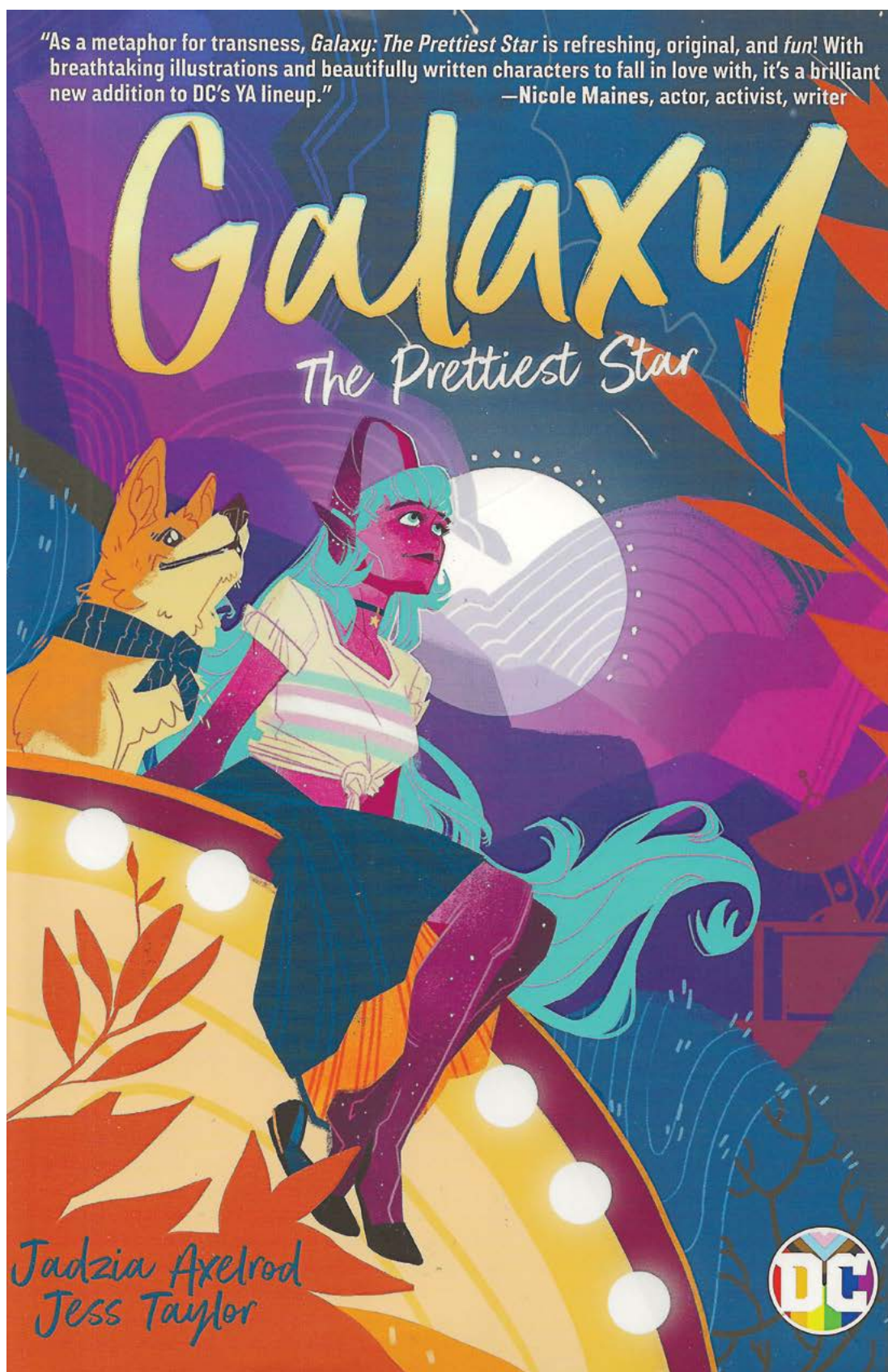
Axelrod sent them pitches involving Superman, Lex Luthor and other stalwarts of the DC Universe. But it was her last proposal, just a two-line summary, that caught the editor's attention.

"There is an alien princess on Earth who is hiding out disguised as a human boy and falls in love with the new girl in town and decides to be herself," recalled Axelrod in a YouTube video.

DC bought it and she was assigned to write a graphic novel which became "Galaxy: The Prettiest Star." And the fact that Axelrod and her character were transgender wasn't an obstacle.

The character at the heart of this story is known as Galaxy, an alien princess forced into hiding on Earth disguised as a human boy. This layered identity mirrors the complexity many trans people experience navigating different aspects of themselves.

"I think my outspoken pro-queer, pro-trans attitude was a feature, not a bug," Axelrod observed.



Still, even before starting work on the book, Axelrod wanted assurances from DC concerning certain aspects of it.

“With Galaxy, I said, ‘I’m not going to change any of the queer stuff. That’s my line,’” she told interviewer Avery Kaplan. “They didn’t ask me to so I didn’t even have to push back. I don’t think I’ve ever done a project like this where I felt so many people had my back.”

Overseeing the project was editor Sara Miller, who worked with Axelrod on developing the structure of the story.

To make sure that the main character Galaxy acted and sounded like a teenager, Axelrod dipped into her own past. She pulled out journals she had kept when she was in middle and high school and found them to be surprisingly insightful.

“I was pondering being trans, and I just repressed it,” was how Axelrod interpreted her long-forgotten diaries.

In order to save Galaxy from



Jadzia Axelrod. Courtesy photo

invading aliens, she and a group of trusted protectors are sent to Earth and disguised as humans. To give her an added level of disguise, she is transformed into a human boy by way of alien technology. Galaxy is understandably anguished by this forced transformation and her rebellion against it forms the basis of

the book.

Axelrod infused the tale with unmistakable overtones of Superman’s upbringing as an interplanetary alien raised on Earth and overlaid it with the real-life pain of gender dysphoria. And all of this underlies the love story between Galaxy’s human persona and Kat, her lesbian girlfriend.

Axelrod’s text was brilliant, functioning simultaneously as a powerful story about gender transition and an allegory for that experience.

The script finished, editor Miller reached out to Vash Taylor, a non-binary British artist now living in Canada.

“Working on Galaxy was emotional,” Taylor replied in an email. “I cried the first time I read the script. There’s something indescribable about

knowing you’re working on a project that really sees you and knowing in turn, that other people will feel that way too.”

Taylor’s gorgeously stylized, digitally

See **Jadzia**, page 20



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Contemporary Cool
Puzzle can be found on page 21

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Love sequence between Galaxy and her lesbian human girlfriend, Kat. Photo: DC Comics

◀ Jadzia

Continued from page 19

created art is unlike traditional comic book artwork. Taylor and Axelrod collaborated via Zoom over a period of several years. Taylor's contributions were so integral to Galaxy's creation that Axelrod willingly credits them as the character's co-creator.

"Working with Jadzia was one of the best experiences I have had in comics," Taylor's email concluded. "Jadzia was so consistently kind, insightful and enthusiastic. She made the comic a joy."

So enthusiastic was DC with the finished book, that upon its release in May 2022, an abridged version of "Galaxy: The Prettiest Star," was one of only three comics in their entire line to be given away on that year's Free Comic Book Day.

Since then, Galaxy has appeared throughout the DC Universe, including in "Hawkgirl," team-ups with other trans heroes like Nicole Maines' Dreamer, and an upcoming May 2026 graphic novel titled "Galaxy: As the World Falls Down."

In an industry historically dominated by cisgender, heterosexual white characters, Axelrod has created authentic trans representation that resonates with readers

who've rarely seen themselves reflected in superhero stories. Galaxy fights cosmic villains, saves the world, and falls in love, just like any other superhero. The difference is that she also navigates the very real experience of gender transition.

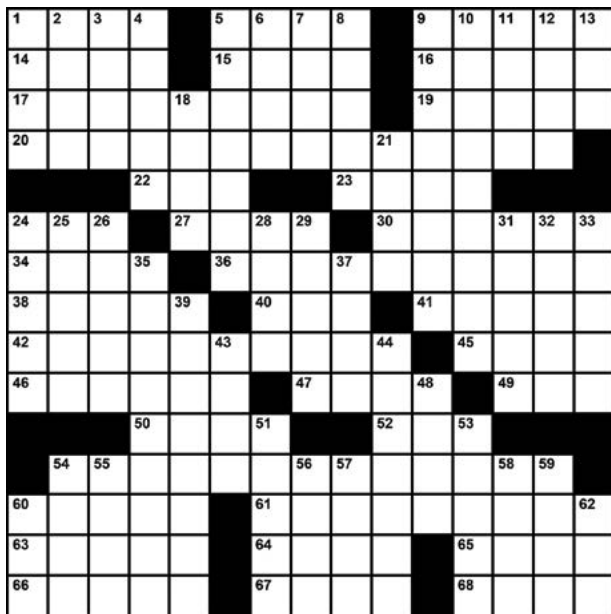
"I get messages from readers telling me what Galaxy means to them," Axelrod said.

"I think my outspoken pro-queer, pro-trans attitude was a feature, not a bug."

— Jadzia Axelrod, on securing a deal with DC Comics

"That never gets old."

It's heartening to know that Jadzia Axelrod has created a superhero that the trans community can believe in. Current and future generations of trans youth won't have to wish, as I do, that she had been around when they were young.



42 Jazz pianist who composed "Valentine"
 45 Rising row
 46 One way people may be led
 47 Jerusalem server
 49 Post-triage destinations, for short
 50 Part of YSL
 52 Golf ball position
 54 Drummer/bandleader for Boom Tic Boom
 60 Rehoboth Beach setting
 61 Low-cut blouse meant to seduce?
 63 Dollar bill holder for male strippers
 64 "____, Brute?"
 65 Potent opening
 66 Sees to
 67 Silence for Bernstein
 68 David's brother on "Six Feet Under"

18 Like the piper in Hamelin
 21 Obi-Wan's portrayer
 24 Nicholson title role
 25 Islamic leaders
 26 Contemporary of Bonheur
 28 On ____ with
 29 "Look but don't touch" type
 31 Lizard of "Kaos"
 32 Hot to trot
 33 Powers portrayer
 35 Where to keep a leaky boat
 37 Salt on a chemist's table
 39 Wood shop debris
 43 Potato features
 44 Large food fish
 48 Gilded bloom of idiom
 51 Not pickled
 53 "Candle In the Wind" composer John
 54 Head or heart ailment
 55 Redbone or Russell
 56 Re or so
 57 Bits of wit
 58 Humorist Bombeck
 59 Talk violently
 60 Mel in the Baseball HOF
 62 Brown's Sneaky ____

Down

1 Challenge for a speech coach
 2 Court doings
 3 Big-time defeat
 4 "Corydon" author Gide
 5 Fruit handlers
 6 TV series about the Norse god of mischief
 7 Draft eligible
 8 Benton of "Hee Haw"
 9 Kept in the know
 10 Travel the world
 11 CompiÈgne's river
 12 At no time, poetically
 13 They have three ft.

Contemporary Cool

Across

1 Byron poem
 5 Goopy drop
 9 "The ____ and the Ecstasy"
 14 Barbra, Judy, or Bette
 15 Gossip follower Barrett
 16 Practiced, as a trade
 17 Card game with a hottie?
 19 Masquerades

20 "Touch of Trash" singer/pianist
 22 Wide size
 23 Former netman Nastase
 24 Line of dresses
 27 "Nuts!"
 30 Regard
 34 Melville classic of 1847
 36 Crooner with a lush, cinematic sound
 38 Erotic artist Tom, et al.
 40 Part of a whiz kid's report card?
 41 Con game

See p. 19 for answers

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Black Trailblazers

Continued from page 11

accept this crap of: ‘We’re not worthy,’ and ‘We shouldn’t exist,’ like this government is trying to push down our throats,” she told VICE in 2018. “We’ve got to revolt, and we’ve got to reclaim who the fuck we are [...] If this world is going to get its act together, they have to support and put in the front to lead this revolution the people who are the most oppressed, which is my Black transgender community.”

4. Marsha P. Johnson (1945-1992)

Marsha “Pay It No Mind” Johnson is perhaps the most recognizable figure in Black trans American history. In the early years post-Stonewall, many mainstream gay and lesbian organizations sought to distance themselves from their trans counterparts. Today that inclination is making a nasty comeback as mentions of trans people and trans life are removed from Stonewall Monument materials.

Marsha was a prolific organizer and drag queen whose radiant joy and humor was a fixture of Manhattan’s queer nightlife scene. She mobilized her community in the aftermath of the Stonewall Uprising. Alongside Sylvia Rivera and others, she founded Street

Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a group that waged direct actions against anti-trans violence and police brutality.

Most importantly, however, STAR established deep networks of mutual aid and care for the trans street kids and sex workers either abandoned by the state or actively targeted by it.

In her own words: “We want to see all gay people have a chance, equal rights, as straight people have in America,” Marsha said in an interview from 1970. “Our main goal is to see gay people liberated and free and have equal rights that other people have in America. We’d like to see our gay brothers and sisters out of jail and on the streets again.”

The circumstances around Marsha’s death remain unclear — we only know she was pulled from the Hudson River in 1992, off of the historic Christopher Street Piers.

But Marsha’s legacy lives on, and her name has become synonymous with the spark that ignited the LGBTQ+ liberation movement as it is known today. A floral archway adorns the Marsha P. Johnson State Park in Brooklyn, and every Pride, homages to Marsha are plentiful — indeed, her rallying cry of “For All of Us” is the theme of this year’s Pride Parade in New York City.

This article is shared with permission from independent journalist Erin Reed.



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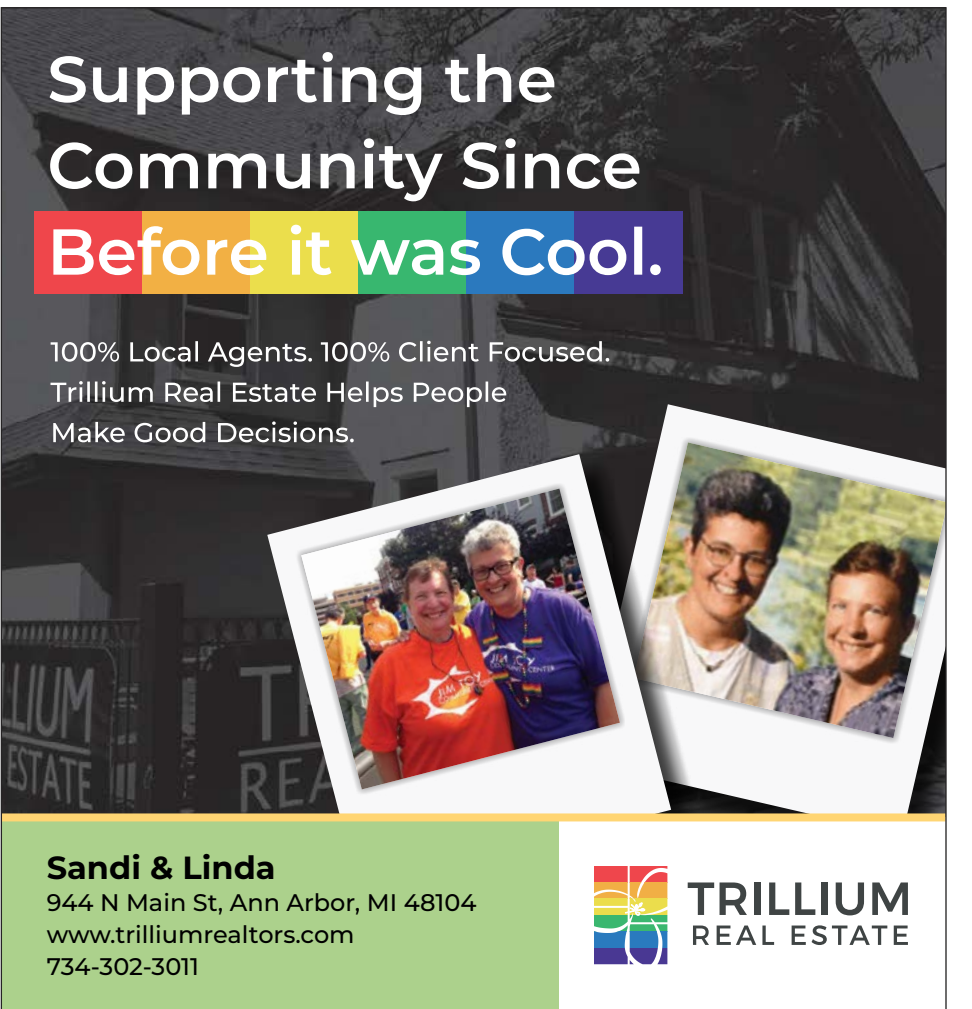
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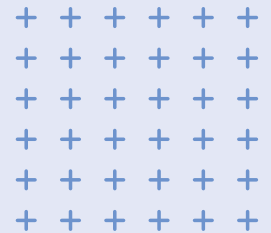
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