

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE Lines TM

TRUTH in Tempo

Trans virtuoso Sara Davis Buechner
shares her story through music

By Kelli Dunham



FIVE TO WATCH
Key Michigan races
draw LGBTQ+ backing

STATEWIDE MISSION
Canvassers rally
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Dr. Paul Benson's



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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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Sara Davis Buechner. Courtesy photo

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

There's a very specific kind of spring energy happening right now. Don't you want to dance, organize, dress up, speak out and maybe also sit quietly with your people and remember you're not alone? This week's lineup leans into all of it. You can reclaim a prom like you're the main character from "Footloose" and take your voice to the Capitol. Let's get into it.



Affirmations Prom 2023. Courtesy photo

Reclaim Prom Night

If your original prom experience ranged from "well, um, that happened" to "actively not built for me," this is your do-over. And probably your glow-up as well.

Affirmations' annual Prom ReDeux transforms the entire center into a full fantasy: dancing, drag performances, photo booths and the kind of joyful chaos that happens when everyone shows up exactly as themselves.

Come solo, bring a date or arrive with your chosen family and a dramatic outfit that deserves its own lighting design. There's even a low-sensory space if you need a breather. It's prom, but this time you're in charge of the playlist and the narrative. In addition to the prom itself, there's also a pre-prom dinner option and a post-prom party, so make sure you check the website carefully to design your perfect evening.

May 9, 8 p.m., Affirmations (290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Tickets at bit.ly/goaffprom.



LGBTQ+ Capitol Day 2025. Courtesy photo

Lobby Like You Mean It at Michigan LGBTQ+ Capitol Day

There are moments when "someone should really say something" quietly turns into, "Oh, it's me, hey, I'm the someone, it's me." Capitol Day is that moment — with backup. You'll meet with lawmakers alongside other advocates from your district (no solo wandering required), get a clear briefing on what to say and spend the day ensuring LGBTQ+ voices are heard where decisions are actually made. Whether you're a seasoned organizer or a first-timer who is bravely doing the thing anyway, this is a powerful way to turn concern into action. Collective voices land louder.

May 13, 8 a.m.–2 p.m., Michigan State Capitol (Lansing). Registration required for directions, orientation and all the details: bit.ly/micd26.



Kesha. Photo: Instagram/@kesha

Belt It Out at Kesha's Freedom Tour

Kesha's Freedom Tour promises big feelings, big anthems and the kind of crowd energy where strangers become your temporary choir. The sexually fluid singer's message is all about survival, but also the realization that you are, in fact, magnificently yourself. "I've lived through the fire. This tour is about what comes after," Kesha posted in the tour announcement. "Freedom isn't just leaving something behind — it's discovering that what you have lived through has made you magnificently who you are." If you've ever needed a reason to scream-sing your way into a new era, this might be it.

June 5, 7 p.m., Pine Knob Music Theatre (33 Bob Seger Drive, Clarkston). Reserve tickets at bit.ly/keshamichigan.



Sabin performing on the Michigan Drag Bus.
Photo: michigandragbus.com

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Ride Along With Fabulous Chaos

Imagine a party bus. Now add professional drag performers, lip-sync battles, games and a level of charisma that could power a small city. The Michigan Drag Bus turns Detroit into a moving runway — equal parts show, celebration and “how did this become the best two hours of my month?” You’ll laugh, you’ll cheer, you’ll absolutely take too many photos and you’ll likely leave with at least three new friends and one new catchphrase. Buckle up: the journey is the event.

Ongoing dates including May 2 at 3 p.m. and 5 p.m., Detroit Shipping Company (474 Peterboro St., Detroit). Reserve your space at bit.ly/detroitdragbus.



Gladie. Photo: Instagram/
@gladie_band

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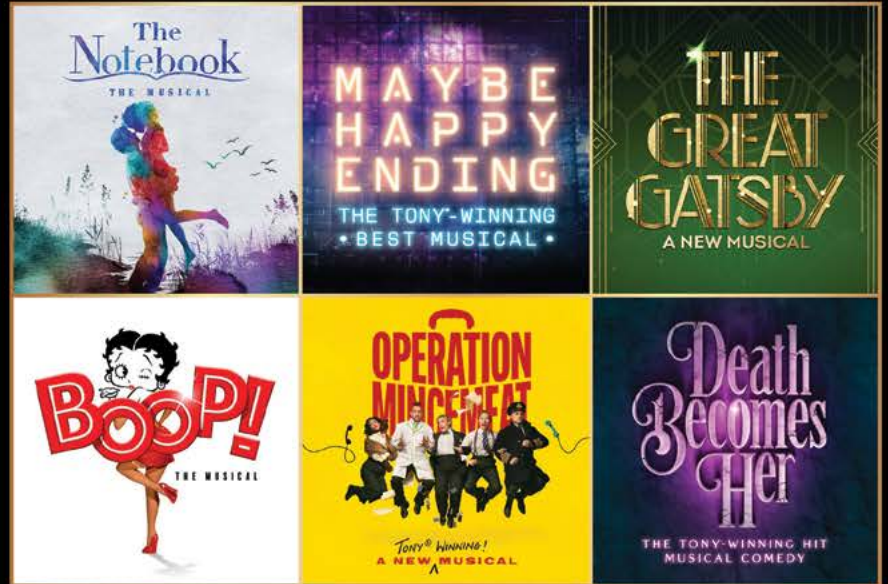
See Gladie at Lager House

A fixture in the DIY queer punk scene, Philadelphia’s Gladie, set to play Detroit’s Lager House with Noun (the solo project of Screaming Females lead guitar player Marissa Paternoster) on May 1, has been writing songs that hold the contradiction of feeling completely wrecked and stubbornly hopeful at the same time. Their new album “No Need to Be Lonely” was produced by punk artist Jeff Rosenstock. Think dreamy, measured melodies that open up into something rawer and louder before you’ve had time to brace for it, with an undercurrent of unapologetic queer energy.

May 1, 8 p.m., Lager House (1254 Michigan Ave., Detroit). Buy tickets at bit.ly/GladieTix.

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Door by Door, Equality Michigan Is Building Support for Trans Rights Across the State

New deep canvassing initiative is meeting Michigan voters where they live

BY NICK FULTON

A new statewide canvassing initiative is aiming to combat the war on trans bodies with “empathy, connection and real conversation.”

In November 2025, Equality Michigan launched the new Trans Organizing and Narrative Shift project, or TONS for short. In coordination with the Equality Federation, the LGBTQ+ advocacy organization is leading a revolutionary strategy to educate voters on the experiences of trans people in their community, right at their doors.

TONS starts similarly to other traditional canvassing efforts — door-to-door conversations intended to increase awareness of an issue at the discretion of a political campaign, nonprofit or other organization with community goals. This canvassing initiative, however, was born out of the increasingly volatile political environment targeting trans people, according to the program’s organizers.

“We have had this really bizarre dystopian last decade or so of escalating anti-trans attacks globally, but especially in the United States,” said Emme Zanotti, senior director of movement building & political affairs at Equality Michigan, in an interview with BTL. “We see especially in these last eight years how this sort of anti-trans propaganda campaign has translated into a policy campaign.”

In the 2025 legislative session, the ACLU tracked 616 anti-LGBTQ+ bills across the country, 21 of which resided in Michigan. In 2026 so far, the ACLU is tracking 519 anti-LGBTQ bills, 22 of which reside in Michigan.

“It’s an all-out assault,” Zanotti said. “Being a member of a community that’s being targeted by fascism in that way is unsettling



Equality Michigan canvassers. Courtesy photo

when you’re sitting at a restaurant just trying to exist in public.”

The canvassing initiative was also a product of a model that Equality Michigan used in previous cycles. In 2024, Republicans spent an estimated \$215 million on broadcast ads targeting trans communities. That same year, Equality Michigan took part in the national storytelling campaign, Here We Are. The campaign included two trans Michiganders, Syd and Chrissy, and was built around a desire to “create connections between and among communities who otherwise may never meet.”

According to Zanotti, telling Syd’s and Chrissy’s stories inspired a more personal program.

“What if we could do this at a more micro level? What if we could do this voter by voter, constituent by constituent, neighbor by neighbor... getting above all of the noise, like Facebook and Fox News, and just meeting folks where they’re at,” Zanotti said.

The TONS project has been running for several months now,

and the results speak for themselves.

“When rubber hit the road, everyone I talked to thought that everyone should have the ability to be themselves, have legal protections from discrimination, and be able to participate in society as equal members,” said Emma, who asked that we publish only her first name. Emma is a canvasser for TONS and a member of the Huron Valley chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America.

In November and December of last year, Emma and 21 other canvassers knocked on 354 doors across Michigan. Conversations lasted up to an hour and a half, and canvassers reported significant improvements in what the community members believed trans people deserved.

“I think this offers a lot of hope in terms of being able to break down this information and share an actual human experience with people and grow acceptance and understanding,” Zanotti said.

The main prerogative of these conversations was to bridge

the gap in education, as voters become increasingly consumed by conservative political propaganda.

“Many folks didn’t have an understanding of what it means to be trans and, in particular, weren’t aware of the day-to-day struggles of being trans in the U.S.,” Emma said. “In general, they were more likely to have heard conservative talking points like sports fairness and youth transition than about the discrimination we face in housing, employment and healthcare.”

Those conservative talking points are sure to become increasingly common as Michigan prepares for an incredibly important midterm election. This cycle will decide the fate of all 13 U.S. representatives, a U.S. senator, the governor, the secretary of state, the attorney general, two state supreme court seats and every single member of the Michigan House of Representatives and the Michigan Senate. This is a year that will define the political atmosphere for anti-trans legislation.

“The hope then is that they

eventually transform that empathy into action — engaging in the electoral process, taking direct action and participating in mutual aid on behalf of the transgender community,” Emma said. “The act of showing up for a canvass can lead to more and bigger steps, and we need as many people as possible to join us in walking together toward a better future.”

Equality Michigan plans to host more TONS canvassing days, and for Michiganders interested in participating but worried about potential risks, the project prepares canvassers with the tools and the company to do this work in a way that never compromises safety.

“For anyone who’s door-knocked before, I wouldn’t expect it to be like your typical canvass,” Zanotti said. “All of our folks who are going to engage in deep canvassing from a volunteer level go through a full two-hour training first, and we make sure they’re comfortable with every aspect of what we’re doing.”

Canvassers also never do this work alone; they travel in groups around neighborhoods and in pairs to knock on doors. TONS plans to run canvassing efforts across the state, with successful programs already run in Detroit, Lansing and Ann Arbor. The project will continue to focus on a community-level impact, which starts with conversation but ends in real progress, according to Zanotti.

“That’s just how communities are supposed to exist. Neighbors are problem-solving together and having conversations with one another. So it’s really sort of tapping into the most foundational aspects of being a human.”

Visit mobilize.us/equalitymi to learn how to get involved with TONS and other Equality Michigan initiatives.

LGBTQ+ Victory Fund Backs Five Michigan Candidates in 2026 Races

Endorsees span congressional, state and local contests, with historic firsts potentially on the line

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

With Michigan's Aug. 4 primary drawing closer, five candidates across the state have earned endorsements from the LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, the national organization that has worked since 1991 to elect out LGBTQ+ leaders at every level of government.

Michigan's 2026 slate is a mix of fresh faces and seasoned incumbents, and it includes two congressional races where historic milestones could be made. In addition to these Victory Fund endorsed candidates, several other LGBTQ+ community members are running for office across the state. Every state representative and Michigan Senate seat is up for grabs in 2026, as are the governorship, lieutenant governorship, attorney general, secretary of state, a U.S. Senate seat, all 13 U.S. House seats, two state supreme court seats and various local offices.

The LGBTQ+ Victory Fund may endorse additional Michigan candidates as the primary election on Aug. 4 and the general election on Nov. 3 draw closer.

Jeremy Moss, U.S. House of Representatives, MI-11

State Sen. Jeremy Moss of Southfield — Michigan's first openly gay state senator, currently serving as Senate President Pro Tem — is running to succeed U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens, who is leaving her Oakland County seat to run for U.S. Senate. Moss has championed gun safety legislation, reproductive rights and expanded ballot access during his time in Lansing. He's been endorsed by



(Clockwise from top left) Jason Morgan, Jeremy Moss, Joanna Whaley, Eric Chung and Jennifer Cornell. Campaign and official State of Michigan photos (Jeremy Moss photo by Andrew Potter)

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and was the first candidate to announce for the seat after Stevens declared her Senate candidacy. The Victory Fund notes that a Moss win would make him the first out LGBTQ+ member of Congress from Michigan. votejeremymoss.com

Eric Chung, U.S. House of Representatives, MI-10

A first-time candidate and Sterling Heights native, Eric Chung is running to flip the Macomb-Oakland County seat currently held by Republican Rep. John James, who is vacating it to run for governor. Chung, who is gay, is the son of Vietnamese immigrants and grew up watching his father work in the region's automotive plants. He went on to become a

lawyer at the U.S. Department of Commerce, where he worked on the CHIPS and Science Act — including a \$325 million investment in Michigan — before the Trump administration gutted the program. This is one of 56 open U.S. House races this year in which an incumbent is not seeking re-election. The Victory Fund has also named Chung a potential first out LGBTQ+ member of Congress from Michigan. ericchungformichigan.com

Joanna Whaley, Michigan House of Representatives, District 2

A newcomer to electoral politics, Joanna Whaley is seeking the open District 2 seat, which covers the Downriver communities of Allen Park,

Lincoln Park, Melvindale and parts of Southgate. A transgender bisexual woman, Whaley is a former evangelical pastor and seminary-trained theologian who survived 15 years of conversion therapy in a high-control religious setting. She's a clinical spiritual care provider in a local hospital and has spent recent years doing LGBTQ+ rights work inside religious spaces across Michigan and beyond. The Victory Fund says a Whaley win would make her the first trans woman elected to the Michigan state legislature. joannawhaley.com

Jason Morgan, Michigan House of Representatives, District 23

State Rep. Jason Morgan is currently serving his second term

representing the Ann Arbor-based 23rd District. A gay man who grew up in Pinconning as the son of a commercial fisherman, Morgan was a first-generation college student who worked his way through Northern Michigan University and the University of Michigan. Before joining the legislature, he was a government teacher and the first openly LGBTQ+ chair of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners. In Lansing, he has been a consistent voice for LGBTQ+ equality, affordable housing and public education. He also serves in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and lives in Ann Arbor with his husband, Jon, who serves on Ann Arbor City Council. votejasonmorgan.com

Jennifer Cornell, Ann Arbor City Council, Ward 5

Also running for re-election is Jenn Cornell, a bisexual woman who has represented Ward 5 on Ann Arbor City Council since 2022. A nonprofit arts leader and former small business owner, Cornell co-founded one of the first all-female-owned CrossFit and Olympic weightlifting facilities in the country. She points to key safety improvements in the Miller Avenue resurfacing project — including new sidewalks and protected bike lanes — as among her proudest accomplishments from her first term. Her re-election priorities include housing access, transportation, environmental sustainability and keeping Ann Arbor welcoming to all residents. a2jenn.org

Both the congressional and state legislative primaries are set for Aug. 4, with the general election on Nov. 3, 2026. Find more information about the Victory Fund's 2026 endorsees at victoryfund.org. Find your sample ballot at vote411.org.

Sara Davis Buechner Spent a Lifetime Mastering Classical Music — and Refusing to Disappear

The celebrated trans pianist brings her story to Kalamazoo

BY KELLI DUNHAM

For many people — especially queer and trans folks — classical music can feel like a closed world: formal, intimidating, full of rules. Not meant for us.

As the highest-level classical pianist to ever transition mid-career, internationally celebrated musician Sara Davis Buechner understands what it means to feel excluded. But she also knows how to dismantle those walls with a unique combination of hard work, talent and simple stubborn refusal to go away.

In her multimedia performance “Of Pigs and Pianos,” set for May 9 at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo as part of the Irving S. Gilmore International Piano Festival, Buechner blends virtuosic piano with personal storytelling, tracing a life shaped by discipline, isolation and, ultimately, self-recognition. The show moves from her childhood to Juilliard to concert halls around the world, and through the long, often confusing process of understanding herself as a trans woman in classical music, when there were few visible examples.

Now she’s bringing that story to audiences who may never have felt invited into a concert hall. We spoke about identity, survival and what it means to stand onstage, fully visible.

You’ve described knowing who you were from a very young age. What was it like carrying that before you had language for it?

I knew who I was from age 3 or 4. But since there were no references to this anywhere, I was very confused. When I went off to college at age 16, 17, at Juilliard, I met people who were open and out. But they didn’t seem quite my people either.



Sara Davis Buechner. Courtesy photo

I buried myself in my work. People remember me in my late teens and early 20s as the goddamn hardest worker in Juilliard. I showed up every day at eight in the morning. I didn’t leave till 10:30 at night. I practiced 10, 11, 12 hours a day until I got bleeding ulcers at age 18, and I nearly died.

How much can you stuff yourself in the closet and still breathe? And even then, I didn’t know what kind of closet I was burying myself into.

When did things start to shift?

It wasn’t until the dawn of the internet age in the 1990s. I got my first computer

and discovered an AOL chat room. *You’ve got trans.* That was an eye-opener, a door-opener, a personal opener to me. Somewhere in my early and mid-30s, I started to say, well, if I’m this person who looks fabulous in taffeta, why not? Who am I hurting by being myself? That’s a very important line for anybody to repeat as a mantra.

Living openly as a trans woman came with consequences, both in the classical music world and personally. What did that look like?

I was amazed by how many so-called

friends and acquaintances I lost. They liked the person with the mask on. I remember sitting at a meeting in my suit and tie, looking around at the moroseness. And I thought, I’m about to take my suit of armor off, and these people are going to go through their whole lives with it on. It’s so sad and it makes no goddamn sense, this kind of rejection of the incredible, beautiful variety of human beings.

Some of the show is very vulnerable, especially your experiences with therapists. What made you decide to include those

specific interactions?

That's probably my favorite part of the show! I sit in the therapist's chair and subject the therapists to what I was subjected to — people who really didn't understand, but were paid to understand. Those therapists were so clueless. They did not know what the fuck they were talking about.

You spend time with young trans people across the country. What are you hearing from them?

They can't get their meds. They're being vilified. Their parents don't understand. They have so many hardships. They get the severe message that you are not lovable as you are. So change or die. It's a horrifying message.

When people ask me for assistance, I always give them my email, but what they need is the support and understanding of a good medical community and a good local LGBTQ+ community. We need a sense of connectivity and community. A lot of LGBT folks live lives in isolated terror.

The show combines storytelling and music. What can audiences expect?

It's basically all biographical. I talk about my childhood, coming to grips with being trans and along the way it's illustrated with music that tells the same story in an artistic way. So it's a very fun and engaging way

“Who am I hurting by being myself? That's a very important line for anybody to repeat as a mantra.”

for people. They're going to learn a lot, but they're also going to be entertained and a little dazzled.

For me, classical music has always been fun and enlivening. I think it's really sad that people with money ruin everything — they ruin classical music, they make it this solemn sort of thing. So the show is a great intro to classical music for people who don't really know what it is. And for people who already support classical music, they can learn a lot about what it means to be trans, who trans people are.

What do you hope people take away from “Of Pigs and Pianos”?

How important it is that we all have something to contribute to the world. Try to imagine the world with twice as many actors, dancers, musicians, storytellers, sidewalk artists. Wouldn't it be great?



Sara Davis Buechner. Courtesy photo

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Joy Clark (left) and Kate Peterson (center) perform at The Ark in March, 2026. Photo: LifeInMichigan.com - Chuck Marshall

Michigan Queer Artists Are Weaponizing Joy Against the Trump Era

From storefront stages to chorus risers, LGBTQ+ performers are turning delight into defiance

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Nobody said resistance would be fun — but Michigan’s queer artists are making a strong case for it. As federal rollbacks on LGBTQ+ rights, attacks on DEI programs and relentless culture war rhetoric wear on audiences, performing artists across the state are reaching for a sometimes-elusive tool of resistance: joy.

Chad Swan-Badgero, artistic director for Lansing’s Peppermint Creek Theatre Company, has spent 30 years exploring political and

human questions through theater. After directing “Fatherland,” a play about a Jan. 6 insurrectionist, he sees the stage as more essential than ever.

“At its best, theater has always been a space where people can gather to make meaning together, and in moments of political and social tension, that function becomes even more vital,” Swan-Badgero said. “For queer communities in particular, the stage has long served as both a mirror and a sanctuary: a place to see ourselves reflected truthfully, and a place to imagine

futures that feel more just, expansive and joyful.”

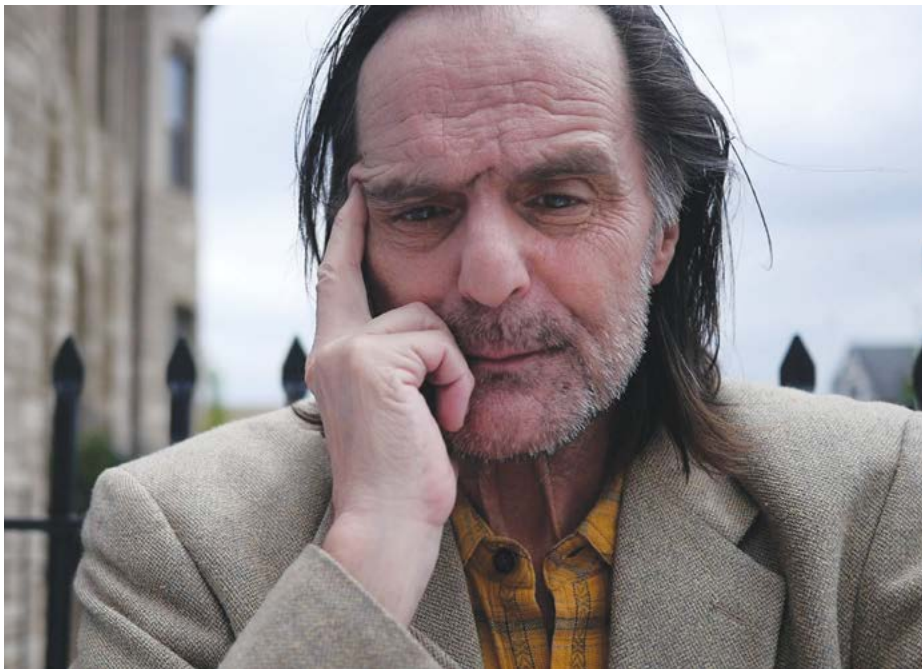
That sentiment is echoing across the state. Singer-songwriters Joy Clark and Kate Peterson performed “Joy as an Act of Resistance” in late March at Ann Arbor’s The Ark and Lansing’s Ten Pound Fiddle. Sistrum, a queer women’s chorus in Lansing, performed at the Capitol during the March 28 No Kings Rally and is building its anniversary concert around joy and community protest.

In Ferndale, the Ringwald Theatre has been running a season at Affirmations mixing

drama, farce and laughter. And in Lansing, “Joy as Resistance: Take a Stand! Sit In!” brought two days of workshops and events to Lansing Community College and the Capital City Film Festival in April, channeling protest through song, dance, film, comedy, poetry and even crafts like crocheting, beading, macrame and knitting.

For Peterson, perhaps best known for being half of the duo Nervous but Excited,

See **Arts in the Trump Era**, page 22



Jeffrey Montgomery in "America You Kill Me." Courtesy photo

Now More Than Ever: The Importance of LGBTQ+ Activism

What would Jeffrey Montgomery do?



BY SEAN KOSOFSKY

For half a century, the arc of LGBTQ+ progress in America has bent — slowly, imperfectly — toward justice. We fought for visibility, for legal protections, for the right to marry, serve openly and live with dignity. Each generation built on the courage of the last.

And yet today, that progress is in peril. Across the country, lawmakers are rolling back protections, demonizing LGBTQ+ people for political gain and trying to erase us from public life.

Opponents of our equality are working to erase us from the Constitution and, indeed, public life. In moments like this, based on my personal involvement working with one of the most effective leaders for LGBTQ+ rights I find myself asking a simple question: What would Jeffrey do?

Jeffrey Montgomery — the focus of the 2022 documentary "America You Kill Me" and a longtime Michigan activist and founder of the Triangle Foundation — was never content with quiet advocacy or compromise. He was a rabble-rouser, a

strategist and a relentless thorn in the side of powerful bigots. When politicians tried to marginalize LGBTQ+ people, Jeffrey didn't politely ask for scraps. He forced the issue.

Jeffrey Montgomery started with his own determined voice and turned it into a movement. His story is living proof that personal courage can spark national conversations about justice and inclusion.

At a moment when the LGBTQ+ movement again faces hostility and regression, Jeffrey's playbook offers lessons we would be wise to remember.

First, Jeffrey understood the importance of punching above our weight. In the early days of LGBTQ+ organizing, our movement was small, underfunded and politically marginalized. But Jeffrey refused to let opponents see us that way. Through visibility, media savvy and relentless organizing, he made LGBTQ+ advocates appear larger, stronger and more unified than our numbers alone might suggest.

That perception mattered. Political opponents think twice before attacking a

See **Sean Kosofsky**, page 20

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BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Fuck Ron DeSantis. I mean, not literally. But yeah, fuck that guy.

While signing anti-DEI legislation that would let “individuals to sue local governments that implement DEI programs,” Florida Gov. DeSantis said, “I would think with DEI the disfavored groups, number one obviously, would be white males and I think they’ve been discriminated against.”

Give. Me. A. Fucking. Break.

The entire Republican Party, from the president to state legislatures to local governments, is an affirmative action program for white men. White, straight, cisgender men, more specifically.

At a time when this country is rounding up people who aren’t white and putting them in concentration camps, transgender people are fighting against being legislated out of existence, marriage equality is firmly in the sights of a right-wing Supreme Court and the right to an abortion is wildly different from state to state, Republicans seriously see white, straight, cisgender men as victims.

Mind you, no one else is allowed to see themselves as victims. Republicans love to rail against “victim mentality” whenever the policies they support hurt people. To them, it’s weak to be a victim. Unless you’re a white, straight, cisgender male. Then it’s alpha, I guess?

Republicans love to rail against ‘victim mentality’ whenever the policies they support hurt people. To them, it’s weak to be a victim. Unless you’re a white, straight, cisgender male. Then it’s alpha, I guess?

Now, look. I have a son who is a white, straight, cisgender male. So it isn’t like I have no sympathy here. In fact, I would argue that white, straight, cisgender men are, indeed, oppressed, but not because a Black woman sits on the U.S. Supreme Court or because of preferred pronouns.

No, white guys are being oppressed by the very people who are cutting DEI programs and rooting Black men and women out of military leadership positions. The Trump



administration and the Republican Party are telling people like my son that they have a god-given duty to be violent and misogynist and dismissive of anyone who doesn’t look like them. Toxic masculinity is at the helm in this country, and we’re headed straight for a tiny fishing vessel that we’re going to blow up just for fun because we think it’s cool to kill people.

Masculinity doesn’t have to be toxic. Cruelty is not strength. Empathy is not weakness. I’ve been doing my best to teach this to my son despite the fact that he can see the most powerful men in the world are soulless creeps who think kindness and love are beta shit.

As any human with a heart and soul knows, living a life void of love, compassion and care for others is not a happy life. Yet the message in this country being fed to white, heterosexual, cisgender men is that the key to a good life is seizing power from wherever you can get it, especially from people who have less power than you. Fuck love and other sissy shit.

Unsurprisingly, this makes these men very unhappy. And their unhappiness is blamed on immigrants and drag queens and women who wear pants and complain about being called “honey” in the workplace.

And so they must oppress them. It’s literally a cycle of abuse. According to Florida Politics, Republican Rep. Dean

Black sponsored the anti-DEI bill. And his reasoning is some bullshit.

“For more than a decade, we have seen the philosophy popularly known as diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, used to divide our society into competing factions,” Black said. “Not only have millions and millions of taxpayer dollars been wasted in the name of DEI, this philosophy has fostered resentment instead of goodwill, mediocrity instead of merit. And it has divided our society against itself.”

The audacity.

The words diversity, equity and inclusion are not fighting words to most people. The people who think they are? White supremacists. Who conveniently hate women and LGBTQ+ people as well.

DEI is definitely imperfect. And there are definitely DEI programs that are basically window dressing that don’t translate into any real change. But that’s not what guys like DeSantis and Black are upset about.

DEI as a whole is a tool for dismantling structural inequality. The very inequality that DeSantis and Black benefit from. DEI threatens their ill-gotten gains.

Of course they don’t think they’re ill-gotten. They believe that they really are superior and that they only way, say, a Black woman could become a CEO or a brigadier general or a senator is at the expense of a more qualified, whiter, maler candidate. They rail against mediocrity whenever mediocre men aren’t handed accolades and power.

The entire Trump administration is the perfect encapsulation of this. A collection of mediocre, mostly white males engaged in a never-ending dick measuring contest. That’s literally all they know how to do.

It’s pathetic. They are pathetic. And they are dangerous.

With toxic masculinity running the country, no one is safe.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Black Trans Woman Alleges Discrimination at Soho in Viral TikTok

A Black transgender woman is alleging she was discriminated against at Soho in Ferndale after a bartender refused to serve her and had her removed from the bar.

The Detroit woman, identified in the video as Lauren and posting on TikTok as @gmoprincess, says a dispute over her ID escalated April 14 when a bartender and other patrons shouted at her and kicked her out. She told Metro Times she had used the same state ID at

Soho three weeks earlier without issue, and that staff gave shifting reasons for rejecting it, including claiming there was a hologram problem and that a state ID was not acceptable in place of a driver's license.

The bartender allegedly told her it was impossible for her to be discriminatory because she is a lesbian working at a gay bar. In the post, Lauren said she is considering filing a complaint with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

Soho issued an apology, saying the interaction "escalated in a way that should not have happened" and did not meet its standards. The bar did not respond to questions from Metro Times about whether the bartender remains employed there.



Soho during Ferndale Pride. Photo: Facebook/@SohoFerndale

President Buttigieg? 2028 Buzz Builds

Pete Buttigieg came close to saying the quiet part out loud at the National Action Network convention in New York on April 10, telling the Rev. Al Sharpton to "save me a seat" at Sylvia's — the Harlem restaurant where the two met during his 2020 presidential run.

For Michigan's queer community, the moment carries extra weight: the former U.S. transportation secretary has been one of us since 2021, when he and husband Chasten put down roots in Traverse City. The Sylvia's exchange wasn't an isolated moment, either. It came on the heels of a February swing through New Hampshire — his third visit to an early-voting state since leaving the Biden administration — where he campaigned alongside Democratic Senate candidates and rallied supporters from his 2020 run.

Whether or not he makes it official, he's clearly keeping the engine warm. An early New Hampshire poll puts him at 19% among Democratic primary voters, ahead of Gavin Newsom and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Michigan Joins Federal Win Against RFK Jr.'s Gender-Affirming Care Ban

A federal judge in Oregon has overturned an HHS directive from HHS secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. that threatened to strip Medicare and Medicaid funding from any healthcare

provider offering gender-affirming care to minors. U.S. District Judge Mustafa Kasubhai called the Dec. 18, 2025, declaration unlawful, finding that Kennedy had acted without authority in effectively attempting to ban an entire category of medical care. Numerous providers, including major medical systems in Michigan, have already suspended gender-affirming services rather than risk losing federal funding.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel,

who joined the 21-state coalition that brought the suit in December, welcomed the ruling. "Politicians should never drive medical decision-making," Nessel said. "I am relieved that the Court has affirmed that the federal government cannot unlawfully interfere with doctors providing essential healthcare, including treatments like puberty blockers and hormone therapy. My office remains committed to protecting access to necessary care for young transgender individuals."

'Dragged to Death' Book Out Now

Out now, Frank Anthony Polito's latest mystery in his "Domestic Partners in Crime" series, "Dragged to Death," follows home-renovation duo PJ and JP as they swap power tools for sleuthing when a charity drag show turns deadly. After a beloved performer is found smothered by her own wig backstage, the Domestic Partners must clear a friend's name before the killer takes their final bow. Available now online and in local bookstores.

InfoWars Soon to Become Gay Parody Site

Alex Jones spent decades peddling conspiracy theories, calling Sandy Hook a hoax and warning listeners that chemicals in the water were turning frogs gay — and his court-ordered reward is watching The Onion, in the coming weeks, turn his prized website into a rainbow-flagged LGBTQ+ parody fronted by a comedian doing a Joe Rogan impression. A share of merch sales will go directly to the Sandy Hook families. The frogs could not be reached for comment.

Rapinoe: Sports Media Missing Queer Nuance

Soccer icon Megan Rapinoe is calling on sports media to do better by the WNBA, where more than a quarter of players are openly LGBTQ+. "I do think we are watching legacy or establishment media come in and sort of do business as usual," she said. "It just feels like it needs more understanding and nuance." Predictably, the social media comments sent the right into a tailspin, because suggesting queer women deserve thoughtful coverage is now controversial.

Megan Rapinoe. Photo: Team USA



I Was a Gay Kid Dreaming of Anywhere Else. Then I Went There.

For Keith Langston, growing up queer in the conservative Midwest meant no comfort zone. Turns out, that was a gift.



BY KEITH LANGSTON

I think being gay made me a natural traveler. That might sound strange, but hear me out. Growing up, I never fit in. Actually, it was way beyond just not fitting in. I was universally hated by everyone. My school was super conservative, filled with those religious types who were avidly “pro-life” and aggressively homophobic, racist and sexist. If the manosphere was manifested into a physical space, it would be my high school.

My family was better than my school, but that’s like saying being bitten by a piranha is better than being bitten by a shark. While one is certainly not as bad as the other, neither is ideal. To be fair to my family, a lot was going on with them, from a teen pregnancy to a bitter custody battle over my grandma, and a grandpa who was developing a terminal illness. Plus, this is the Midwest, and my family didn’t know anything about gay people except for the homophobic things they saw throughout their lives in the media. To them, the idea of being gay was basically AIDS and perversion. And with the numerous crises happening in their lives, taking the time to reevaluate their homophobic beliefs wasn’t exactly a priority.

This is sounding pretty depressing, right? Trust me, I agree. That’s why I spent my childhood dreaming of being somewhere else, mostly through media. Without friends or a meaningful life, I turned to movies and TV to find what I didn’t have at home — friendship, adventure, mentorship, excitement, literally anything that gave life some sort of meaning and worth.

That’s where I found my love of travel. Movies like “Wild,” “To Wong Fu,” “Eat, Pray, Love,” “The



Keith sitting in the Canadian Badlands. Courtesy Keith Langston

Best Exotic Marigold Hotel” and “The Way” all captivated me. I used to binge-watch the Travel Channel the way people binge “Bridgerton.” I clung to the hope that travel gave me. The hope that not everyone was bad. That not everywhere was dull and lifeless. The hope that happiness did exist somewhere.

My first trip away came the summer after sophomore year of high school. I traveled around Florida on an educational excursion sponsored by Sea World. The next summer I went to film camp in L.A. Then I moved to L.A.

for college, and after graduation I spent three months living in the woods in the Northwest Territories of Canada.

I still remember going through customs. The guy was like, “Don’t most Americans go to Europe after graduation?” I looked him dead in the eye. “That’s exactly why I’m not going there,” I replied. From there, the urge to travel was uncontrollable. It felt like the world had opened up and my life had finally started. I loved meeting new people, seeing new places, eating new foods and immersing myself

in every place I went.

I got two working holiday visas and spent a year working at Lush in Australia and a year working at Vodafone in New Zealand. Best of all, in New Zealand you get one month of paid vacation per year. So as my time there came to a close, I was able to leave and backpack around Southeast Asia ... while still getting paid! Then I spent a summer teaching English in Shanghai before becoming a travel writer, which allowed me to explore everywhere from Ireland to Aruba, Costa Rica, Mexico,

England and even back to Canada numerous times.

But here’s what I’ve learned throughout the years: I’m not like most people. The most common questions I get asked about my life are things like, “How’d you do it?” “Weren’t you scared?” Or, “I could never just pack up and move to a foreign country.”

I always forget that most people didn’t grow up dreaming of being somewhere else. Most people

See **Anywhere Else**, page 19

Ditch the Car: Your Next Queer Getaway Is a Train (or Bus) Ride Away

From Chicago's legendary gayborhoods to the Provincetown of the Midwest, some of the best trips you'll take this year start at the station

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

There's a particular kind of road-trip exhaustion that has nothing to do with the miles. It's the highway hypnosis, the merge anxiety, the GPS rerouting you through a construction zone outside Kalamazoo at 6 p.m. on a Friday. Flying, of course, is its own special category of indignity. So consider this a gentle case for opting out of both.

Michigan sits at the center of a genuinely remarkable web of train and coach connections that can put queer travelers in some of the most welcoming, historically significant and flat-out fun destinations in the Midwest and beyond, without once touching a steering wheel or separating your 3-ounce liquids at a security checkpoint.

Chicago: the city that invented the gayborhood

Amtrak's Wolverine, the daily route connecting Pontiac and Detroit to Chicago via Ann Arbor, Kalamazoo and points in between, is the workhorse of Michigan rail travel. It's comfortable, reasonably priced, and it delivers you directly to Chicago Union Station, which puts you — with a short CTA train ride — in the middle of one of the most LGBTQ-affirming cities in the country.

Chicago was ranked the No. 1 safest city in the U.S. for LGBTQ+ travelers in 2025 by Misterb&b, an LGBTQ+ travel platform, besting both San Francisco and Seattle. And it's no surprise, given Chicago's commitment to the community. The city has some of the strongest local anti-discrimination protections in the country, and its queer community is deeply, visibly woven into the city's identity.

Take the Red Line north from the Loop and you'll land in Northalsted, officially the oldest LGBTQ-



Chicago's Boystown neighborhood. Photo: coupleofmen.com

designated neighborhood in the country. Along Halsted Street, the Legacy Walk serves as an outdoor LGBTQ+ history museum with 20 pillars commemorating 40 figures from queer history. The bars are iconic: Sidetrack, Roscoe's, Berlin.

Head further north and the neighborhood shifts into Andersonville, a more laid-back stretch of Clark Street with a strong Swedish heritage, excellent restaurants and a queer community that's been quietly expanding for years. Women & Children First, a legendary feminist bookstore with more than 20,000 titles by and about women, anchors the neighborhood's progressive identity

and hosts regular author events and readings. Nearby, Nobody's Darling, a Black queer woman-owned cocktail bar that earned a James Beard Award finalist nod, makes a strong case for lingering over a drink and then another.

For the leather community, the Leather Archives & Museum in Rogers Park is one of the few institutions of its kind in the world, with rotating exhibitions on leather and fetish history across sexual orientations. The Gerber/Hart Library, also in Rogers Park, holds the largest circulating collection of LGBTQ+ books and historical materials in the Midwest. Union Station to Andersonville is no

more than 30 minutes on the CTA. Metra's suburban rail lines open up Oak Park, Evanston and beyond. Chicago by train is, genuinely, a city you can move around in without a car (and if you're really feeling the allure of rail travel, consider one of Amtrak's multiday, cross-country trips to cities like San Francisco, Miami, Boston or Austin, best served by the railway's sleeper class cars).

Lakeside leisure

If the Chicago trip is the queer city weekend, Saugatuck and Douglas offer something fundamentally

different: the queer beach town, with serious Provincetown-of-the-Midwest energy, and a trip that starts on Amtrak's Pere Marquette. The daily route runs from Chicago to Grand Rapids with a stop in Holland, about 12 miles from Saugatuck by rideshare. It's a small workaround for a destination that earns it.

Saugatuck and Douglas have been welcoming LGBTQ+ visitors since the early 1950s, a fact that gives the twin towns a sense of lived-in comfort that newer "gay-friendly" designations can't replicate. The

See **Midwest Travel**, page 18

Lady Irina's Lisbon Drag Dinner Offers Queer Travelers a Place to Call Home

At a centuries-old apartment in Lisbon's Bairro Alto, a drag queen's intimate dinner parties have become a safe haven for LGBTQ+ travelers from around the world

BY STEPHAN PETAR

I sat nervously on a red-cushioned stool in drag queen Lady Irina's boudoir awaiting my transformation. I had never been in drag before and worried what my five dinner companions — who were complete strangers — would think, even though they were waiting for their turn.

Vintage-looking jewelry and makeup brushes were sprawled across the vanity table in front of me. The walls of Lady Irina's drag sanctuary were covered with accessories and boas while colorful wigs perched on headforms.

Appearing from behind in a blonde wig swept to her left and wearing a sweetheart-neckline dress, Lady Irina placed a pink bob and fascinator on my head. After pinning them in place, she exclaimed I was ready for dinner.

Looking at my reflection, my nerves disappeared. I felt ready to embrace the unknown for the next four hours. It was time for my worries to step aside. It was time to introduce Ms. Steph Aside.

This is the start of Lady Irina's mystical drag dinner. "The program is hello, let's dress up, let's have food, let's chat, and so on," she explains about her 4.98-rated Airbnb Experience.

Arriving at her 18th-century apartment in Lisbon's Bairro Alto neighborhood, guests are treated to a drag makeover and four-course home-cooked tasting menu. Cocktail-making lessons, crystal ball consultations and tarot card readings take place between each course in her dining room, under a blue and purple glow with candles flickering to set the mood.

On the surface, it's a whimsical dinner party with strangers. But beyond the delicious food, it's a party where identity, emotional growth and confidence are built, and where unexpected bonds are formed.

While some of Irina's guests come for a gastronomical experience, many search for community. "Some people want to find friends or they just want to feel safe," she shares. "I've had different guests with different stories. From countries where being gay is a punishment."

It's a reality that resonates broadly. According to booking.com, 41% of LGBTQ+ travelers have created an alter ego to safely navigate different environments while traveling — a reminder that even in a world of expanding queer visibility, finding genuinely safe spaces on the road remains an ongoing negotiation.

A space to explore, be vulnerable and be one's true self, Lady Irina's home quickly registers as exactly that for queer travelers.

"When it's in an apartment, you can lay down on the sofa and it's safe," she says. When building her dinner party, she wanted something intimate and cozy — a place familiar to people no matter their background, and a place where she also felt safe.

Prior to her dinner parties, Lady Irina hosted food experiences and a popular virtual sangria-making class with her then-husband. When her relationship devolved into unhealthy and unsafe territory, along with drag fatigue, she paused her hospitality venture. She spent the time prioritizing finding safety for herself at home and with her family and friends.

Inviting guests into her haven creates trust, something Canadian traveler Chris and his husband Richard, who asked that we not use their last names, felt immediately. "Hosting us in her home made us not only feel like locals but friends."

The invitation to her boudoir, where she shares her drag process and personally transforms each guest, sets the tone for how open and expressive the evening can be.

"The wigs and accessories give this extra armor so you can pretend that you're someone else," Lady



Lady Irina in her boudoir. Courtesy photo

Irina explains. It also removes the sense of social hierarchy people may perceive about each other, evening out the playing field.

“It gave us the permission to embrace being open with each other,” Chris adds. “You let your guard down.”

That sense of vulnerability carries into the evening’s mystical moments. Whether Lady Irina interprets a tarot card pulled from her deck or swirls her manicured hands across the crystal ball and asks probing questions, her tools encourage individuals to find answers within themselves.

“People can share something with other travelers or remind themselves about their own dreams,” she explains. “When you verbalize things it’s easier to feel them.”

And they do. Feelings, emotions and personal stories, both hilarious and heartwarming, are shared around the dinner table without fear. “It was surreal how honest they were about what pained them and their hopes,” Richard says about his fellow diners.

“Tarot cards give you quick answers and quick solutions, but everything depends on you,” she says.

“We laughed, we cried, we ate, we drank, and we learned about ourselves and others,” a Virginia traveler said in a review.

While conversations can get heavy, Lady Irina knows when to bring comfort or laughs, and when to infuse that well-known fun, campy drag shade.

“It’s an impressive feat for her to weave moments of education, enlightenment and entertainment while making everyone feel engaged and keeping up the laughs and conversation,” says Chris. “It’s a masterclass in hosting.”

Ending the night with a pastel de nata, guests remove their drag armor and gather their things. “We entered as strangers and left friends,” a North Carolina attendee shared in their review. “It was a unique, beautiful experience.”

As Irina bids “tchau” to her guests,



(Top) Mystic Dinner with Lady Irina. (Bottom) Cocktail making with Lady Irina. Courtesy Lady Irina Ganache

waiting for their rideshares to arrive and later messaging the group to ensure they’ve reached their accommodations safely, she hopes each person will be kinder to each other and themselves.

“I don’t expect to fix someone. My job is to entertain, but I hope they will pay more attention to each other and try to be more vulnerable,” she says. “When you show yourself in moments of vulnerability to the rest of the world, that’s how you find your strengths.”

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Dunes Resort, nestled between the two towns, is one of the largest LGBTQ+ resorts in the country, with drag shows, themed parties, a pool scene and a nightclub that brings in top DJs on weekends. If that's not your speed, Campit Outdoor Resort sits just 10 minutes out on 33 wooded acres, with tent camping, cabin rentals, a heated pool and a calendar of events that draws an enthusiastic crowd of queer campers and their friends. Together, the area has more than 140 LGBTQ-friendly businesses, from queer-owned wine tours and galleries to coffee shops flying rainbow flags like they mean it.

Oval Beach has been called one of the top beaches in the country by both Condé Nast and National Geographic. The Saugatuck-Douglas History Center in Douglas has an exhibition called "A Century of Progress: 100 Years of LGBTQ+ History" that puts the area's queer legacy in real context. In fall, the whole region transforms into apple orchards, vineyard tours and the kind of leaf-peeping that makes you remember Michigan is genuinely beautiful. Pride in the Park happens each June; the Saugatuck LGBT Music Fest draws a crowd to Campit in summer. There's something happening here for nearly every season, which makes it the kind of destination you keep returning to with different people.

Toronto: four hours and a passport add up to a quick foreign getaway

VIA Rail runs four daily trains from Windsor to Toronto's Union Station, covering the roughly 200-mile route in about four hours and 20 minutes. Tickets start around \$50 CAD and can be booked directly at viarail.ca. Cross the Detroit River by tunnel or bridge into Windsor, and the train takes care of the rest — no 401 traffic, no parking nightmares, just a comfortable ride into one of the most queer-affirming cities in North America.

Church-Wellesley Village has been a community anchor for decades, built on a history of activism that includes the 1981 bathhouse raids that galvanized Toronto's queer community much the way Stonewall did in New York. Glad Day Bookstore, the world's oldest surviving queer bookshop, hosts Toronto's longest-running drag brunch alongside a retail floor stacked with queer literature. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, attached to a cabaret bar called Tallulah's, has been producing queer theatrical work since 1979 and is the largest and longest-running 2SLGBTQ+ theater company in the world. Woody's and Sailor, Crews & Tangos and the leather-forward Black Eagle round out a nightlife scene that runs deep. Pride

Toronto spans the entire month of June, with a Trans March, a Dyke March and a parade down Yonge Street that draws hundreds of thousands.

Toronto (and points beyond, like Montreal) carries extra resonance for queer Americans right now. There's a reason organizations that help LGBTQ+ people relocate to Canada have reported record demand in 2025. Visiting feels, for a lot of queer Americans in this moment, like something beyond tourism.

Don't miss the bus: Midwest gems worth the ride

FlixBus has quietly built a strong coach network out of Detroit and Ann Arbor, with comfortable seats, free Wi-Fi, power outlets and fares that make a spontaneous weekend trip genuinely easy. For travelers who want a no-passport, no-train-transfer option with serious queer bona fides, Columbus and Pittsburgh are both worth a closer look.

Ohio's centrally located capital city surprises people. The Short North Arts District, running along High Street north of downtown Columbus, is one of the most walkable, LGBTQ-friendly neighborhoods in the Midwest, dense with galleries, independent restaurants and bars that have been serving the queer community for years. Union Cafe — restaurant, bar and drag venue — is a Short North anchor on High Street boasting a spacious outdoor patio and a Sunday showtunes tradition that draws a devoted crowd. Axis Nightclub is the city's biggest gay club, known for drag performances that locals consider some of the best in Ohio.

Beyond the bars, Columbus's Clintonville neighborhood draws a strong lesbian and queer women's community, and the city's arts scene, particularly its theater and gallery culture, punches well above its weight. Columbus hosts the second-largest Pride celebration in the Midwest with nearly 700,000 attendees each year, coming in second only to Chicago, every June. It's an affordable, 3.5-hour FlixBus ride from Detroit, and it's the kind of city you'll want to return to.

Pittsburgh is another FlixBus destination worth flagging, particularly for queer travelers with a taste for history and arts. The city's LGBTQ+ neighborhood around Liberty Avenue has a scrappy, authentic character, and Pittsburgh's broader queer cultural scene — including a strong theater community and a notable drag presence — makes for a genuinely engaging long weekend. The FlixBus from Detroit runs just over four hours.

None of these trips require a boarding pass, a rental car or a particularly early morning. They just require knowing where to look, and maybe grabbing a window seat.



(Top to bottom) Columbus Pride (Courtesy Buckeye Flame), Amtrak views (Courtesy Amtrak), FlixBus on the road (Courtesy FlixBus).

◀ **Anywhere Else**
Continued from page 14

actually liked high school, and they spend their adult years reminiscing about the “good ol’ days.” Most people live small lives in small places. They get comfortable there because it’s all they know, and they’ve never faced any major oppressions that’s forced them to question it. They like things that are familiar because familiarity makes them feel safe. They create a comfort zone for themselves and then never leave it.

Take my mom for example. She views the “outside world” as this scary place where bad things happen. She’s never left America (and rarely ever leaves the Midwest), but she’s somehow certain that things are much scarier and much more dangerous elsewhere.

But my experience growing up was ... definitely not that. I never felt comfortable, or normal, or safe, or wanted. I was an outcast. How could I leave my comfort zone when there was never a zone I felt comfortable in?

Growing up an outcast has strangely turned me into a true global citizen. I hate to say it’s a “benefit,” because the mental health toll of growing up ostracized by everyone around you isn’t something I’d recommend. But, part of me is also kind of glad? It doesn’t bother me when people look different from me, or speak a different language, or have a different culture. I don’t view them as “other” or “different” because I think my upbringing taught me that “other” is arbitrary. According to everyone I grew up around, I’m the “other,” so like, whatever? The idea



(Left) Keith chasing a chicken through Longjing, China. (Right) The Arenal volcano in Costa Rica. Courtesy Keith Langston

means nothing to me.

But for so many people, it means so much. It’s the difference between normal and weird, familiar and strange, right and wrong, desirable and unwanted. To me, new and different isn’t something to be afraid of. It’s an exciting adventure. And I think that’s helped me immensely on my travels. Without that fear, there’s nothing to hold me back. I can fully embrace new destinations because I don’t view the world through a lens of Us and Them.

I guess I owe some thanks to all the homophobes out there? Because without you constantly pushing me away, maybe I never would have left. Maybe I never would have hiked through tea fields on misty mountainsides, or sat next to a lake staring up at the aurora borealis, or slept in a lavish 13th-century castle. Maybe I’d still be like so many of you,

trapped in my box of familiarity and afraid to leave it. You saved me from a drab life of mundanity and monotony. You saved me from becoming you, and for that I owe you my thanks.

I think most people in the LGBTQ+ community can relate and probably felt very similarly growing up. I think lots of us have hometowns that treated us like outcasts, which naturally makes us want to venture out, explore and find where we belong. If you’re queer, you should travel. It’s important to know that there’s a big world out there filled with lots of people who are all different. As a marginalized group, we grow up learning that we’re bad because we’re different. But the reality is that everyone is different, and the word means absolutely nothing. Don’t believe me? Book a ticket and find out for yourself.

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I'm Not a Lesbian
Puzzle can be found on page 21

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◀ **Sean Kosofsky**
Continued from page 11

movement that looks organized, energized, and capable of mobilizing public pressure. Jeffrey knew that power is partly about reality — but also about what your opponent believes your power to be.

Second, Jeffrey never compromised on the value of our lives. Movements make compromises all the time. Politics often requires it. But Jeffrey understood that some things are not negotiable. The basic humanity of LGBTQ+ people is one of them. You can't put our basic rights on the ballot. You don't tell people to wait their turn. There are no turns. It's now. It's always now.

“If Jeffrey Montgomery were here today, he would not be discouraged by the backlash we are seeing. He would recognize it for what it is: the predictable response of those who feel their power slipping away.”

Too often, our opponents frame equality as something to be bargained over — as if the dignity and safety of queer people were a policy preference rather than a fundamental right. Jeffrey rejected that premise entirely.

You can negotiate strategy. You can negotiate timelines. But you cannot negotiate the worth of human lives.

And finally, Jeffrey understood the power of coalition. Today, one of the most

effective tactics used against marginalized communities is division. If LGBTQ+ people can be fractured — by identity, ideology, generation or strategy — our collective strength weakens.

Jeffrey instinctively resisted that trap. He worked with civil rights groups, labor leaders, faith communities, civic leaders and allies across movements. He understood that the fight for LGBTQ+ equality was never isolated from the broader fight for justice.

When opponents try to divide us, the answer is not to retreat into smaller camps. The answer is to build broader ones.

If Jeffrey Montgomery were here today, he would not be discouraged by the backlash we are seeing. He would recognize it for what it is: the predictable response of those who feel their power slipping away.

And he would remind us that progress has never been linear. It has always required courage, persistence and a willingness to challenge power directly.

So, when the moment feels uncertain, when the political winds shift against us and when our opponents try to make us feel small, the question remains a useful one: What would Jeffrey do?

If history is any guide, the answer would be simple. He would make some noise. And making noise, today, means refusing to let fear, fatigue or false unity quiet us when our lives are on the line.

Sean Kosofsky served as director of policy at the Triangle Foundation, now Equality Michigan. This article appears through the National LGBT Media Association, representing 13 legacy publications in major markets across the country with a collective readership of more than 400,000 in print and more than 1 million-plus online. Learn more here: nationallgbtmediaassociation.com.

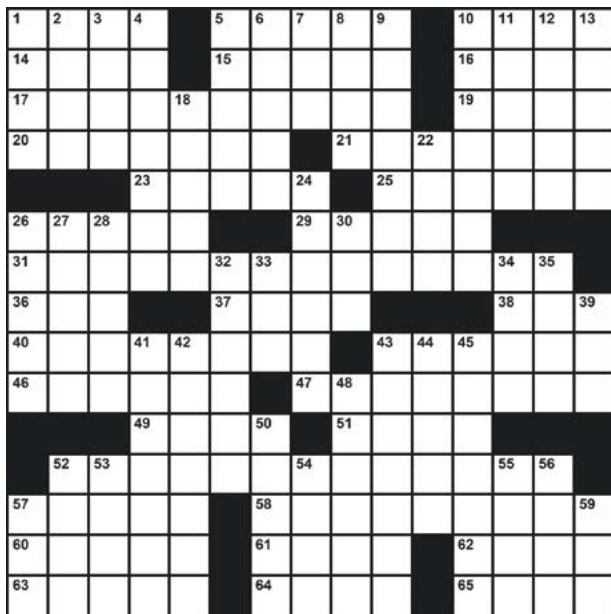
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43 Removing a fruit center, e.g.
 46 Explorer Vasco
 47 Musical co-starring David Hyde Pierce
 49 Sitarist Shankar
 51 Creator of Sal Mineo's "Exodus" character
 52 End of the quote
 57 Angelina of iGirl, Interrupted
 58 Words before "it" in a gay activist cheer
 60 What you might lend Marc Antony
 61 Bullfight shouts
 62 Barber-shop sound
 63 TV series with Guillermo Diaz
 64 Brit's wheel
 65 Dances like Hines

Down

1 Highway behemoth
 2 Neeson of "Kinsey"
 3 Peter player on "ER"
 4 Stripped bare
 5 Cosmetics maker Lauder
 6 Land, in Lyon
 7 All-purpose vehicle, for short
 8 Industrious one
 9 Walked onstage
 10 Old word for God
 11 Popeye's gal
 12 Former shortstop Derek
 13 In plain sight
 18 Ed Norton's milieu
 22 Come together
 24 Two-footers?
 26 Accumulated, with "up"

27 Walled city near Madrid
 28 Excavate anew
 30 Work under Edith Head, perhaps
 32 Book page size
 33 Season opener
 34 Disney's "___ and the Detectives"
 35 Carson's late-night successor
 39 Guy under J. Edgar, for short?
 41 Serious kind of arrest
 42 Figurative language
 43 Paint the town red
 44 Leaves out
 45 Most foolhardy
 48 Patty Sheehan's club on the green
 50 Bar for both gay people and straight
 52 Top-flight
 53 N.Y. Met, e.g.
 54 Slippery
 55 Krabappel of "The Simpsons"
 56 Stick it in your ear!
 57 Traffic tie-up
 59 Photo ___ (media events)

See p. 19 for answers

I'm Not a Lesbian

Across

1 Aspen vehicle
 5 Piano exercise
 10 Siwa, source of this puzzle's quote
 14 Land of Sinead O'Connor
 15 Attack
 16 Ft. above sea level

17 Anytown, USA thoroughfare
 19 Sexologist Shere
 20 More of the quote started in the title
 21 Manicurist's bottle
 23 Weenie
 25 Go back (to)
 26 Cole Porter title city
 29 "___ bad moon rising ..."
 31 More of the quote
 36 Head cover, in slang
 37 Rowing team
 38 "Peel ___ grape"
 40 Brought out

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◀ Arts in the Trump Era

Continued from page 10

the work is as much about sustainability as it is about protest.

“When we don’t have the energy to get out there and make a big statement, what we can do is continue to take care of each other. One of the ways that we do that is through music and art and celebrating together with like-minded people,” Peterson said.

Joe Bailey, artistic director of the Ringwald Theatre, put it plainly: “There’s so much value in sitting in a room full of people that you don’t know and sharing that common experience of just having fun.”

In February, Ringwald presented Matthew López’s “Somewhere,” a play about the Latino experience in the U.S. in 1959, selling out most of their shows. They followed that with an adaptation of John Irving’s novel about an abortion provider when abortion was still illegal. But comedy was also an intentional part of their response, with shows like “Silver Foxes” and “Steel Poinsettias.”

“It was an antidote. It was a way to just enjoy yourself and laugh for a couple hours. The balance is needed,” Bailey added. “For every ‘Cider House Rules,’ you have to do something that people can just turn their brains off and enjoy themselves.”

When Ringwald chose to stage “Annie” with all adult actors, it too was a deliberate response

to the moment.

“It was a choice to actively choose optimism in your day-to-day life. Joy and laughter are absolutely important, relevant and necessary.”

Connar Klock, artistic director of Queer Theatre Kalamazoo, is navigating a trickier funding environment. Worsening economic conditions and the ongoing culture wars have many funders shying away from overtly political or queer groups, and Klock has watched regional and community theaters across the country quietly roll back queer programming to protect their donor bases — pulling back years of hard-won progress to retain audiences drifting further to the right. Queer Theatre Kalamazoo is going the other direction.

“I have decided that Queer Theatre is going to lean in a little bit further than we were before into being political, into being anti-fascist and to making sure that our stories are told and that queer artists are being paid,” Klock said.

Klock also curated a season of works by women playwrights, including Leanna Keyes’ abortion-themed “Doctor Voynich and Her Children” and Sarah Ault’s “The Lysistrata Project.”

Meghan Eldred-Woolsey, artistic director of greater Lansing’s Sistrum Chorus, said they don’t have the luxury of ignoring politics. Like other community and church choirs, they contend with funding, marketing and repertoire decisions — but as a queer chorus, those pressures carry additional weight.

“Those are things that we are actively concerned with because we are out there on the



Ringwald Theatre “Annie” actors in rehearsal. Courtesy photo

front line being at the marches and being a part of the movement,” Eldred-Woolsey said. “That is something gay and lesbian choruses have to do. We are called to be a part of that. Queer organizations are at the root of trying to make a space for everyone.”

Klock is quick to note that the demand for queer storytelling right now exists because those stories aren’t just for queer audiences.

“There is so much that cis-het folks could learn from the way that queer people have had to adapt to live in this life with our relationship

structures, our family structures, our ability to have difficult conversations and not make assumptions about people,” Klock said. “Queer themes now are more useful to everyone at large than ever before.”

Collective imagination, Swan-Badgero said, is a form of power, a weapon against despair and nihilism. “Theater doesn’t just reflect the world — it helps shape it. And in this moment, lifting up queer voices onstage is one way we actively participate in building the kind of world we want to live in.”

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