

our lives



Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine



# HOME & GARDEN

How LGBTQ people define & create their sense of home



The Artful Home & Life of

## JOSEPH PABST

From childhood to retirement, he shares how significant influences have shaped him.





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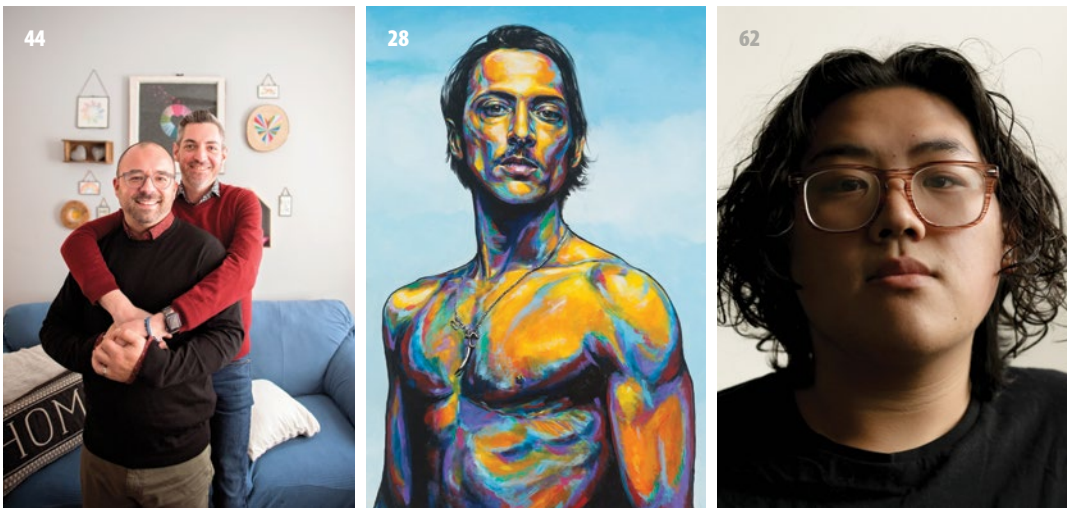
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A vibrant poster for Pridefest Milwaukee 2020. The background shows a large, diverse crowd of people at an outdoor event. In the upper right, there's a purple circular logo that says "PRESENTED BY: MILWAUKEE Pride". The word "Pridefest" is written in a large, stylized, rainbow-colored font. Below it, "MILWAUKEE 2020" is written in white. Further down, the dates "June 4, June 5, June 6 &amp; June 7" are listed. A large, white, cursive text overlay reads "Wisconsin's Largest 'Family' Reunion". At the bottom right, a red banner says "DON'T MISS THE STATE'S PREMIER LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY EVENT". In the bottom left corner, a red banner says "LOOK FOR US AT THE PRIDE PARADE IN WALKER'S POINT ON SUNDAY JUNE 7TH". The website "www.Pridefest.com" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the bottom right. The overall scene is festive with rainbow clouds and a cable car in the background.





“This world would be a whole lot better if we just made an effort to be less horrible to one another.”

- Ellen Page

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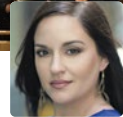
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A HOME FOR OUR HEARTS

**HOME IS SUCH A LOADED WORD.** It can evoke entirely different thoughts and feelings from person to person, almost always incredibly personal. It can be where you were raised. It can be what's on the other side of the door that the key in your pocket unlocks. Or it can be as simple as a scent, a mood, or a smile. It can be a person, a place, both or neither.

Every year for the past 10 years when I've started working on this, our home issue, I revisit thoughts on what home means to our community. In a traditional magazine it's often about offering dreams and ideas on ways you can elevate and personalize the space

you come home to each night. But, specifically for *Our Lives*—a magazine about queer narratives and transformative storytelling—I've always felt opposed to resting on that convention. Do I think stories about interiors are important? Absolutely. They have their place. I think there's beauty in someone sharing such a personal space, and the personal decisions that brought that space to



life for them. But, I also think that through our queer lens that home often is something more. It can be about understanding the unique trials and struggles that queer people encounter when it comes to something as universal as housing. It can be about the communities we build that attach us to a location. It is shelter, in all the forms it takes.

With that guiding vision, this issue takes shape each year, and hopefully brings some light to a few of the ways we build our homes.

In our cover story, I'm deeply grateful to **Joe Pabst**, for opening not just his home to us, but also some of the vulnerable, shaping moments of his life. My conversations with him over the past few months have been filled with illuminating insights into the intentionality, purpose, and care he's designed into every inch of the space he calls home. Our feature on the **Courage House** in Milwaukee shows us the potential our compassion can embody, and the resilience we can nurture in those who feel broken or with few places to turn. And even though the Courage House may be Wisconsin's first home for LGBTQ youth, it's far from where our community's compassion began. I'm also happy, even in small part, to reflect on the legacy of **Rodney Scheel** through our efforts to lift up the **Rodney Scheel house**—an affordable housing community for people living with HIV.

Beyond those examples, there are still many, many other ways that our understanding of home fills this issue. Working to bring these stories together in one collective space always reminds me of how grateful I continue to be for the privilege of helping to tell these stories. ■



Courage House founders Nick & Brad Schlaikowski.



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**JENNIFER MORALES** is a freelance writer, poet, fiction writer, and performance artist. A longtime Milwaukee resident, she is now based in rural Wisconsin. Her first book, *Meet Me Halfway* (UW Press 2015), a short story collection about life in hyper-segregated Milwaukee, was Wisconsin Center for the Book's 2016 "Book of the Year," among other honors. Recent publications include two queer fictions: "Cousins," a short story in *Milwaukee Noir* (Akashic 2019), and "The Boy Without a Bike," a story in *Cutting Edge*, edited by Joyce Carol Oates (Akashic 2019). Jennifer is president of the board of the Driftless Writing Center and of Viroqua Area PRIDE, both based in Viroqua, Wis.

**SANDRA ZAPATA** (she/her/they/them) is the Counseling and Advocacy Coordinator at the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. Sandra graduated with her Master of Arts in Psychology with an emphasis in Criminal Justice from the University of the Rockies. Sandra serves clients directly by providing emotional support, safety planning, and access to emergency resources that include food, clothing, and transportation. As well as advocacy services to individuals navigating the legal system as it relates to sexual assault and domestic violence. Sandra has delivered trainings on safety and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace, health organizations, and schools since 2005.

**DR. GINA SENARIGHI**, PhD, CPC is a certified relationship coach, retreat leader, speaker, and author specializing in human connection, intimacy, authenticity, shame-resilience, and alternative relationships. For more than 12 years she has supported hundreds of clients creating fulfilling integrity-based relationships according to their own rules. She's been leading teams and couples to clarity and connection and supported clients creating integrity-based relationships according to their own rules for more than 20 years. In that time she's developed a solid framework based in neuroscience, nonviolent communication, and positive psychology research that has transformed diverse relationships across the country.

QTPOC PRIDE

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

**OUR LIVES** is once again working to compile a celebratory list of queer people of color from across Wisconsin for our PRIDE issue, and we need your help!

For the past three years we've been proud of the growth of our QTPOC Pride List. We're proud to again have the help of a **group of QTPOC leaders** to compile and organize our 2020 QTPOC Pride feature this year. This group will help to further expand the reach of the list and they will again organize the **QTPOC Pride space** at **OutReach's MAGIC Pride Festival** on August 16.

If you are an LGBTQ person of color living in Wisconsin, we encourage you to participate in this feature! To do so, please complete the submission form at [ourlivesmadison.com/qpocpride](http://ourlivesmadison.com/qpocpride). We will be leaving the form open indefinitely, but for this year's list, please submit by June 1. Thank you! ■

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MILWAUKEE GAY PRIDE PRIDEFEST COMMUNITY ORGANIZING LGBTQ HISTORY

# The Messenger

After a decade as the media spokesperson for Milwaukee Pride, the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, Milwaukee Guerrilla Gay Bar, and other groups, **Michail Takach** has gone west to California. In this *Our Lives* interview, he reflects on 10 years of service to a rapidly changing community.

SO TELL ME, WHERE ARE YOU FROM AND WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILY LIKE?

I grew up on the south shore of Milwaukee, where my father’s family has lived for six generations. My mother’s family is pretty diverse: I grew up with LGBT family members, and their friends and their partners, as part of my extended family. And really, I couldn’t have asked for a healthier upbringing or worldview. My mother was decades ahead of her time.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CHILDHOOD?

I was reading by age three, and my parents never censored anything, so I was exposed to a lot of concepts much younger than most. I was far more independent. I grew up surrounded mostly by older adults. I formed my own sense of identity much younger than most people my age—and without a lot of the anxieties or moralities of youth.

At 15 and 16, I was already pretty fearless. I owe a lot to my guardian angels. But Generation X didn’t really have the youth outreach or support programs that exist today. There was no internet, no email, no mobile phones, and no apps. There were very real risks in revealing yourself to another person.

SO HOW DID YOU MEET PEOPLE YOUR AGE?

Fortunately, we DID have the teen club scene. After the drinking age changed in 1987, an entire industry of non-alcoholic clubs opened. Almost any night of the week, you could go somewhere that was inviting, safe, and comfortable. Most importantly, these youth-only venues were connective—people from every corner of the state came together to share epic, over-the-top experiences that wouldn’t happen in their high schools or hometowns. They helped LGBTQ youth realize that they weren’t alone, they weren’t damaged, and they weren’t outcasts. They were popular, they were famous, and they were part of a high society.



Michail Takach

There have been so many turning points, over the past 34 years, where PrideFest could have just ended forever. 2003, 2008, 2011... all very rough years that could have been our last. A small group of people prevented that from happening, over and over and over, and accepted the weight of keeping this legacy and tradition going.

THIS SOUNDS LIKE A “MTV REAL LIFE: I WAS A CLUB KID” MOMENT.

I really could write a book about it. We all had our 15 minutes of fame. And it wasn’t all fun and games. I lost a lot of friends before their adult lives even began.

But that’s just how it worked. You “joined the community” when you got into a gay bar—usually underage—and found other people your age in those bars. And back then, there were over two dozen gay bars in Milwaukee to break into!

WHO INSPIRED YOUR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT?

Well, being raised by hippies always helps, right? But there are two people that I have to thank for being the change I wanted to see in the world.

Back in the early 90s, my friend Andy Bagnall was heavily involved with local causes, at a time when it just seemed so unthinkable for me. I really didn’t see myself as somebody who could step up to the plate like that. But I remember being very impressed and inspired that someone did.

Another one who really challenged my sideline stance was Kurt Dyer. Kurt, who I believe was the founder of Project Q, was also a friend and a kickball cohort. He always questioned the notion that there was a “right way” to get involved in making the world a better place.

I think we always think activism is someone else’s job. It comes down to recognizing the privileges you’ve been given, and reinvesting that energy back into the world. There’s a moment where your individual heroism just emerges. Milwaukee’s challenge is getting those individual heroes to stay.

OF ALL THE ORGANIZATIONS IN MILWAUKEE, WHAT DREW YOU TO PRIDEFEST?

PrideFest just went so far, so fast in the 1990s. I remember when it (somehow) fit inside Juneau Park. In those days, being gay was still a political statement, and people still worried about being seen in gay spaces in public. That all seems so surreal now. I first attended in 1996, the year that the festival moved to Henry W. Maier Festival Park.

Watching the trajectory over the next decade was amazing. I still marvel at his work, and I don’t know how he did it, but our entertainment director David Charpentier really put PrideFest Milwaukee on the national map. Pride festivals didn’t get A-list talent in those days, but David was pulling in major names. He brought in Jeffree Star, Pam Ann, Bruce Vilanch and Amanda Lepore before anyone in Milwaukee knew who they were. And then, he brought in Cyndi Lauper, which was just incredible.

There was this next-generation energy that was crackling just under the festival’s surface, waiting to be unleashed. It seemed like it had this tremendous opportunity to be more than it was: not just a three-day weekend festival, but a year-round organization that would elevate voices, amplify causes, drive visible change, and create the next gen-

eration of leaders. We were really at this moment in time when Milwaukee was changing and becoming something quite unique and different from other Rust Belt Cities.

HOW DID YOU DIVE IN?

I sent an email and said “So, hey, I’d like to help out.” The PrideFest I joined was a very different organization than the Milwaukee Pride of today. Those were really some dark times. We were still recovering from a downward spiral that left the organization near bankrupt and heavily dependent on community donations. Everyone was working very, very hard to overcome those memories. I have to hand it to Scott Gunkel, who was president during some of the festival’s most devastating years. Somehow, he held the legacy together when it was most endangered.

And 2011 was a really rough year. The festival booked headliners who were not exactly LGBTQ fan favorites. And then, the weather didn’t cooperate at all, with freezing rain in mid-June. We went into 2012 knowing we might not survive.

We didn’t really have any brand strategy at the time. So, my work was really just building the narrative around who PrideFest was, why PrideFest existed, and how PrideFest was trying to learn, grow, and evolve. And, of course, build an audience that cared about what we had to say and cared about our continued existence. Over 10 years, I went from

social media manager to marketing director to vice president of communications.

HOW BIG WAS THE SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE BACK THEN?

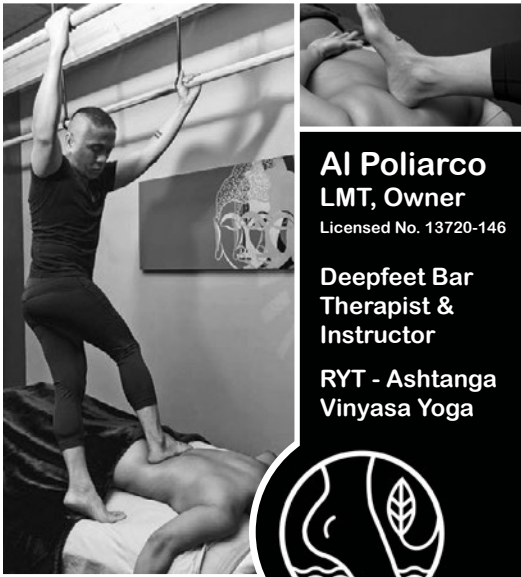
When I started managing the Pride Facebook page, we’d just hit 1,000 followers. When I left in June, we were approaching 47,000. For a while, we were the second largest Milwaukee festival page on Facebook, and the state’s largest LGBTQ page.

HOW DID YOU MAKE SURE YOU REACHED THE RIGHT GROUPS WITH THE RIGHT MESSAGES?

My number one goal was always making sure that PrideFest was everyone’s PrideFest. Everyone should feel safe, comfortable, included, and belonging to that experience.

I would hear and see things like “PrideFest is just for older lesbians” or “PrideFest is just for young kids” or “this is a white person’s PrideFest.” So, I established a relationship with DocUWM to shoot our commercials, which were always focused on the vast diversity of people you would see at PrideFest. We introduced a Pride Patrol which took photos all day, every day, at the event and encouraged people to tag themselves and their friends on social media. Suddenly, the conversation changed from “I don’t feel seen by PrideFest” to “Why am I not down there being seen?”

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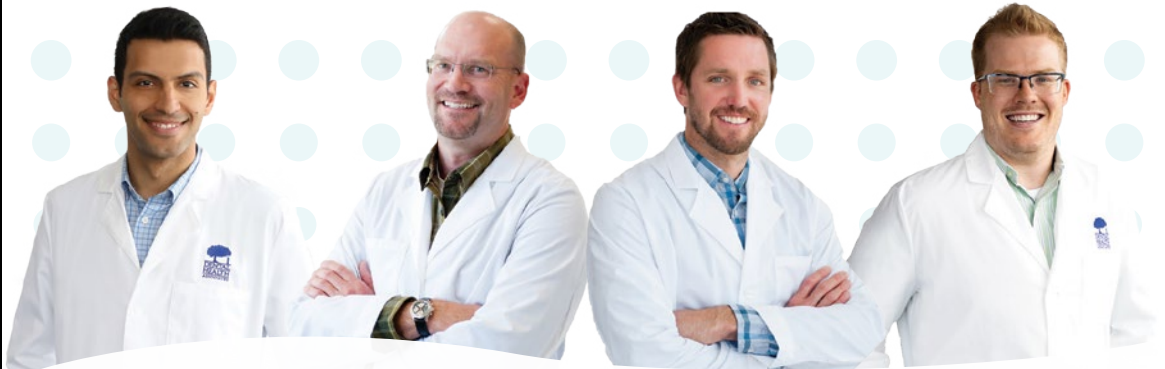


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## OUR CONVERSATIONS

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### HOW DID PRIDEFEST GROW FROM HOMETOWN EVENT TO REGIONAL EVENT?

In 2011, there was really a push to market PrideFest outside Wisconsin. There were all sorts of outreach events, at Twin Cities Pride, Market Days, IML, Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. We had this noble goal of attracting people from outside markets, but we never anticipated that those outside markets would develop their own hyperlocal pride events. Did you ever think you’d see a Mineral Point Pride? Sheboygan Pride? Upper Peninsula Pride? Look at how huge Kenosha Pride has become.

If anything, social media was more effective in driving our growth than outreach booths. As soon as we close for the year, we’re already receiving requests for next year’s dates from people across the country.

### HOW HAS THE FESTIVAL ADDRESSED THE “YOU SHOULDN’T HAVE TO PAY FOR PRIDE” COMPLAINT?

Pride festivals, especially of our magnitude, can’t realistically operate for free. Sorry. It costs nearly a million dollars to operate PrideFest in its current state. Corporate and personal donations are shrinking. Sponsorships are down. So, we have to carefully and strategically offer free admission to people who need it most.

We chose to remove obstacles for LGBTQ youth. We introduced \$1 Friday admission and gifted over 1,000 free tickets each year to Wisconsin GSAs. That might seem small, but imagine being the teenager who doesn’t know any other gay people in their hometown at all, and then they’re invited to PrideFest. We always have to remember how that moment felt, to find your tribe and know you weren’t alone anymore.

### HAS PRIDEFEST EXPANDED ITS DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY DURING YOUR TENURE?

When I joined PrideFest, the board was composed of seven 40-something white men, one Hispanic man, and one white woman. All cisgender. I was grateful that membership rapidly diversified over the next few years, but few of those diverse individuals stayed. As I leave the board, it’s back to being predominantly white, cisgender and male, which is disappointing.

I hope that trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming people, and more people of color, rise to the challenge, join the board, shatter the status quo, and build a better future for us all.

### WHAT HAS MILWAUKEE PRIDE, INC. DONE TO MAKE A LARGER CULTURAL IMPACT?

Milwaukee Pride, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization that produces the PrideFest event. So, the idea was that we would produce multiple annual events, not just PrideFest.

One example was BeOUT Day, a National Coming Out Day collaboration with the NOH8 campaign, which ran from 2016 to 2018. There were also talks of a winter gala and a family-friendly picnic in the park.

In November 2018, we became the non-profit steward of Milwaukee’s rainbow crosswalks, which are a permanent, year-round tribute to LGBTQ visibility. We also launched the Stonewall Stage Talks, which are “coffee shop talks” on critical LGBTQ topics.

We were really at this moment in time when Milwaukee was changing and becoming something quite unique and different from other Rust Belt Cities.

In 2018, Milwaukee Pride also extended its partnership with the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, which is a treasure trove of history and heritage going back 100 years. We began scheduling education and outreach events to ensure that every LGBTQ person in Milwaukee feels connected to that heritage. LGBTQ history is not an inherited tradition, like ethnic or racial history. For most people, LGBTQ history begins the minute they themselves come out. They have no idea what, if anything, came before them.

### WHAT IS YOUR ROLE WITH THE WISCONSIN LGBTQ HISTORY PROJECT, AND HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THAT?

I started writing history segments for *QueerLifeNews* and *QUEST* magazine back in 2008. Eventually, I connected with Don Schwamb, whom I’d known since our days at Milwaukee Guerrilla Gay Bar, and we began collaborating on a number of ever-growing projects. I also worked with Jamie Taylor, founder of the History of Gay Milwaukee Facebook group. In 2016, Arcadia Publishing commissioned me to write the first LGBTQ social history of Milwaukee.

Telling these stories—and being a voice for the silenced—is incredibly inspiring and motivating for me. I’ve become convinced there are stories that nobody would know unless I told them. One of the most com-

elling was the Black Nite Brawl of August 1961. In the ashes of a long-forgotten audio interview, I discovered not only evidence of Wisconsin’s first real LGBTQ uprising, but the pivotal role someone I knew played in that moment. Talk about “Smallwaukee!”

### WHAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE MOST ABOUT PRIDEFEST?

I wish Milwaukee would understand how lucky they are to have PrideFest.

PrideFest is an extraordinarily FRAGILE event. I don’t think people can possibly understand how fragile it really is. Throwing a party for 45,000 is no small task. Breaking attendance records for eight consecutive years is no small task. And yet, there are so few people behind the curtain. Finding people willing to donate their time is harder every single year.

There have been so many turning points, over the past 34 years, where PrideFest could have just ended forever. 2003, 2008, 2011... all very rough years that could have been our last. A small group of people prevented that from happening, over and over and over, and accepted the weight of keeping this legacy and tradition going. We should be applauding their resilience. I know I am.

I don’t know how Sue Black, the “mother of PrideFest” did it. She and the organizers

experienced tremendous harassment, including death threats. It didn’t stop them.

So, after a lifetime in Wisconsin, what inspired your exit?

I’ve always felt the City of Angels was my spiritual homeland. While I was navigating a divorce, I received a once-in-a-lifetime job opportunity with an amazing company. It really felt like the universe was correcting itself. Since moving to downtown Los Angeles, I’ve joined the board of DTLA Proud, which is currently planning its fifth annual festival and the launch of our very own LGBTQ community center.

I thought I could maintain my commitment to Milwaukee Pride, but certain factors made this role impossible to manage. So, I accepted it was time to move on—and time for someone else to carry the torch forward. I’m very proud of how far we’ve come, especially considering how far away we started. Now, I’m eager to sit back and watch the next generation take Milwaukee Pride to new heights. ■



**PATRICK FARABAUGH** founded *Our Lives* in 2007 and has published it since. He also founded the Madison Gay Hockey Association in 2006. Before moving to Wisconsin, he was a Senior Creative at *Condé Nast Traveler*, and an Art Director for *OUT*.



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## The Price of Access

Local health insurance companies are navigating accessible coverage of gender-affirming care at widely different paces. Here we try to breakdown the state of transition-inclusive care.

**AS OUR LIVES HAS PREVIOUSLY COVERED**, July of 2018 saw the transgender care coverage exclusion for Wisconsin Medicaid members overturned. Then, in September of that year, the exclusion for state employees was also ruled discriminatory. Both rulings cited Title VII and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), both of which prohibit discrimination against various protected classes.

While these changes have opened up a new world for trans people locally seeking gender-affirming care, it unfortunately does not do anything to help those who have already been harmed financially, physically, or emotionally by discriminatory practices. In fact, the Wisconsin Department of Employee

Trust Funds (ETF) specifically stated they would not reprocess already-denied claims or run anything through insurance that should have been covered during the time coverage was illegally unavailable.

It also does not take into account the gatekeeping that continues to happen, from outdated requirements to illegal discrimination against trans folk.

### GATEKEEPING

Part of the gatekeeping measures are heavily institutionalized. Many insurance companies utilize requirements for care created by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). WPATH's most recent edition of the standards of



Barbara's Story







care is version 7. The association has been working on version 8 for a while, but has not yet released it, as they've not finished. This has been the excuse given by a number of insurance companies locally as to why they're dragging their feet in covering some procedures currently considered 'elective' like Facial Feminization Surgery (FFS).

In June, her father loaned her money to put down as a non-refundable deposit for FFS with Dr. Spiegel as this was a procedure she needed. A month later, the ETF announced that they were removing the exclusion as of 2019. In November, Evelyn tried to get a prior authorization through Quartz to help cover the FFS procedure. This was denied as Dr. Spiegel was labeled "out-of-network" by Quartz. By January 2019, Evelyn filed an appeal on the grounds that there was no such thing as an "in-network provider" due to the exclusion at the time she made the down payment.

One of the drawbacks of the WPATH is the ableism (or discrimination against those of us with disabilities) included in their guidelines. For instance, in order to start on hormone therapy, an individual's mental health issues must be "under control." What mental health conditions and what "under control" means are both left vague for health care providers to decide. The guidelines state that mental health conditions don't bar someone from starting on hormone replacement therapy (HRT), but that "these concerns need to be managed prior to, or concurrent with, treatment of gender dysphoria." Given the fact that transgender folx have a higher rate of mental illnesses, this can be a major barrier. This is especially true when one considers how conditions like depression and anxiety can improve on their own with hormones. Requiring therapy to access HRT winds up gatekeeping many from getting life-saving care, especially locally due to the lack of financially accessible, gender-affirming therapists in the Madison-area.

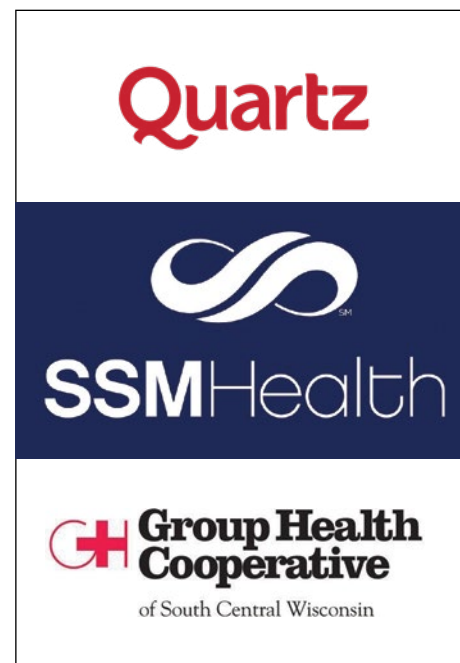
#### CLAIRE'S STORY

Claire didn't have insurance coverage for therapy under her pre-ACA Quartz plan and couldn't afford to switch to a more-inclusive coverage option. As such, the WPATH requirements to be in therapy could not be met.

Eventually, she was able to get in with a doctor who provided her with Informed Consent as well as a referral to a therapist she can self-pay with. Then, as she felt she had things figured out, her insurance coverage got reconfigured at a higher rate. Why? She took the affirming step of changing her gender marker to F. Claire is now struggling and in a financial hole due to taking financial assistance from friends to cover negative balance charges. Since she couldn't afford the higher rate being charged by her Quartz plan, Claire and her wife married sooner than they'd planned so that she could get access to better insurance.

#### BAILEY'S STORY

Speaking of insurance, no insurance company locally has gotten great reviews across the board for transgender competency. Bailey's interactions with her insurance company, GHC,



have not been great. GHC has denied multiple attempts to get FFS covered by "citing that it's considered 'cosmetic' and listing further reasoning as 'transgender/gender identity disorder.'" Bailey has been led to feel that trans folx are nothing more than a diagnosis code to insurance companies. At Fruit Fest 2019, she had an incredibly awkward reaction with someone from GHC: "While trying to dishearten my request for care, she insisted that if they were to provide coverage for what I was requesting that GHC would have to then consider covering requests for people with dysmorphia (which they very well should whenever feasible)." Bailey went on to share that

"the one good thing that member accomplished was finally getting paperwork I had requested, that they are obligated to provide mind you, sent out after their Care Management team proceeded to get aggressive, uncooperative, and ultimately refused to process upon realizing I was trans." Bailey's surgeon was denied a second peer-to-peer review, something that GHC has listed as a 'right' for their members.

This entire process has left Bailey feeling rather alone. One of the biggest frustrations is, as she put it, "There isn't much of a work-around when it comes to acquiring the care we deserve. The standard process is to persuade your insurer to cover your needs through the paths that be, scheduling peer-to-peer reviews with the head of the medical board, preparing to state your case to their board, going through their appeals process, and ultimately pursuing a court case." The emotional numbing she's had to do in order to try to go through these harmful and often pointless processes is almost too much to bear. "I've been transitioning for nearly a decade and this feeling is reminiscent of the abuse and despair I faced at the start of my transition," she shared.

Despite all that this experience has put her through, Bailey's advice to others is to "Keep fighting like hell." She went on, "You have support. You have understanding and sympathetic individuals all standing beside you in this fight. Find those people. We will get through this, but we should never allow ourselves to become complacent within our own individual privileges. We should never give up fighting until everyone, EVERYONE, is truly cared for as they need and deserve."

#### EVELYN'S STORY

Another trans woman, Evelyn, has had a similarly frustrating journey with Quartz. In April of 2018, she was denied FFS under the now-illegal exclusion for state employees. In June, her father loaned her money to put down as a non-refundable deposit for FFS with Dr. Spiegel as this was a procedure she needed. A month later, the ETF announced that they were removing the exclusion as of 2019. In November, Evelyn tried to get a prior authorization through Quartz to help cover the FFS procedure. This was denied as Dr. Spiegel was labeled "out-of-network" by Quartz.

By January 2019, Evelyn filed an appeal on the grounds that there was no such thing as an "in-network provider" due to the exclusion at the time she made the down payment. She went ahead and paid the remaining balance of \$39,627 for surgery with Dr. Spiegel, using her

mom's life insurance money as she had died during the previous fall. In April 2019, she was served with a cease & desist letter from Quartz to stop contacting them in person and over the phone. She continues to appeal the decision made by Quartz with no avail.

Unfortunately, this entire process has put Evelyn at risk. She has developed mental health conditions, even needing to be hospitalized shortly after paying her surgical balance. Her job hangs in the balance, held hostage by the effects of the continued trans-exclusionary notions she's dealt with from insurance companies, employers, and co-workers.

Bailey and Evelyn's experiences come from insurance companies that have covered gender-affirming care in the past. Another local insurance company—Dean/SSM Health—isn't even that trans-friendly.

#### IAN'S STORY

Ian started at Dean Health Plan in mid-2019 as a contract-to-hire employee, excited to have found a place that was welcoming after three years working in Green Bay and pretending to be cis. IT is not an easy world to navigate if you're non-binary and use different pronouns from the people around you.

When Ian was negotiating their offer to become a permanent employee in late 2019, they had asked for a copy of the detailed 2020 insurance information. Only the SBC was available (a Summary of Benefits and Coverage, the brief table-like document most of us are familiar with when looking at insurance). More detailed information wasn't received until early January. At this time, Ian was still on insurance from their prior employer via COBRA coverage. In 2019, those receiving coverage under Dean/SSM through their Employee Health Plan, their gender-affirming care was covered. Without detailed information, Ian made a choice based on the stated policies of SSM, and the prior year's coverage. Unfortunately, as of January 1, 2020, Dean/SSM added a blanket exclusion for all gender-affirming services other than behavioral therapy—meaning that visits, labs, medications, surgeries, and "other materials and services" were no longer covered.

Suddenly, Ian found themselves in a situation where their insurance no longer paid for care they had received, and needed to continue on an ongoing basis. Worse still, the time had passed to make any other choices around insurance, such as signing up with a Marketplace plan or even continuing their COBRA coverage, which would have been an option for them (albeit an expensive one) through late 2020. For any of those, Ian would have needed to know about this exclusion prior to mid-December, the end of the enrollment period from their

"hiring" as a full-time employee. As a result, Ian has had to interact with Dean, SSM, and Navitus (also owned by SSM) on a near-daily basis in the form of phone calls, denial letters, appeals, grievance letters, and meetings with a myriad of staff to try and argue for the care their insurance should pay for anyway. In addition to the blatant misgendering happening in these letters—including one stating incorrectly that HRT is experimental—they've been misgendered repeatedly by staff that are supposed to be helping, whether in the clinics, via phone calls with insurance staff, or even with their own HR personnel.

Thankfully, Ian will be starting with a different organization soon, though it requires them to take a significant pay cut. While they did so happily for their mental and physical well-being, moving on from their supportive team makes this a bittersweet change; they cited the insurance exclusion as the only factor "forcing [them] out the door"—between the removal of their coverage and others at SSM who were suffering in a less public way, they "could no longer in good conscience" work there.

It should be noted that SSM Health cites a position of nondiscrimination of the basis of sex and gender identity in their code of conduct and ethics policy. In fact, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary founded what would eventually become SSM Health on the tenets of providing

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### Madison Area Coffee Connection

March 11 - 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

The River Food Pantry

Free to attend. All welcome. Details on website

### LGBTQ+ and Allies Career Fair

March 18 - 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Goodman Community Center

Free to attend. All welcome. Details on website

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quality healthcare to underserved and marginalized communities. While that has long centered poor communities and communities of color at times when health care was difficult to find and expensive, in modern times SSM has been vehemently criticized by other Catholic health care organizations for their choices to provide gender-affirming care in their medical facilities, and most of their commercial health plans today have coverage for gender-affirming services, with many having a "rider" that provides coverage for gender confirmation surgeries as well. One of the most galling things about this choice is the hypocrisy. SSM states they wish to bring the "healing presence of God" to marginalized communities, but turn around and enforce discrimination against their own employees. They cite the very same religious beliefs that inform their mission of community and social justice, as a shield to then refuse to cover gender-affirming care.

### HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

While things may look grim, there are many reasons to hold out hope for a better future.

Gender Services at UW has been expanding rapidly over the last several years. All providers undergo training around pronouns and wear pronoun pins to share their own across UW Health. That change is just the tip of the iceberg. UW Health now provides a gender services navigator to help people find their way through insurance requirements, etc. At the Voice & Swallow Clinic, speech pathologists help people work on developing a voice that fits with their gender identity. Surgical social workers can help people with questions around surgery (pre- and post-op), transportation, advanced directives, and more. Add to the mix the surgeons, primary care providers, laser hair removal technicians, various behavioral health experts, specialized pediatric clinic, and fertility care, and UW is leaps and bounds beyond any other health system in the area. The Gender Services team is eyeing the creation of a multidisciplinary clinic that would offer a wide variety of gender-affirming providers under one roof, too, making it even easier to access care.

People often equate the UW Health system and Quartz as one entity, believing that UW Health can affect change at Quartz by requiring it. While it's true that UW Health owns Quartz, the notion that UW can "make" Quartz do anything is a false one. UW is a medical system and Quartz is an insurance company. They operate in different ways for different reasons. UW Health "provides input for Quartz medical policies; however, Quartz makes final

decisions on medical policies and determines coverage." Thankfully, UW and Quartz are having more productive conversations about gender-affirming care with additional meetings already scheduled throughout 2020.

UW Health now provides a gender services navigator to help people find their way through insurance requirements, etc. At the Voice & Swallow Clinic, speech pathologists help people work on developing a voice that fits with their gender identity. Surgical social workers can help people with questions around surgery (pre- and post-op), transportation, advanced directives, and more.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion overall is getting a bigger push at Quartz. That's especially true around gender-affirming ideas. Diego Campoverde-Cisneros, manager of the Diversity & Inclusion team, sat down with *Our Lives* and discussed a number of the positive changes. In partnership with UW Health, Diego and his team created an e-learning training on pronouns that is required for all employees of Quartz. This training will be revisited annually for any needed updates and changes. This mission of internal education will extend to the public as well.

### ALEX'S STORY

Alex shared his feelings about how Quartz coverage has affected his gender journey: "At times, it has been a source of stress. Not even considering the costs of seeing a therapist to get a letter for my primary insurance at the time, the uncertainty of coverage and struggling to get a clear answer... was very stressful..." That said, Alex has had some very positive interactions with Quartz: "For top surgery, when I was told Quartz would cover everything, I had to pull over because I was driving home from work and I was so overjoyed I couldn't focus on the road."

### HOW CAN WE DO BETTER?

Given all of the variables involved, how can Madison do better by trans folx?

First and foremost, we can start by pushing for all of our insurance companies to meet local and county-level ordinances prohibiting discrimination against gender identity. The ability of local businesses like Dean Health Plan to flat out exclude transgender care from most of their

coverage options should not be tolerated by the City of Madison or Dane County.

As a city, we need to thoughtfully consider how we may be contributing to harm for trans folx and communities. The LGBTQ+ spaces we have are often populated with people who still don't "believe" in the existence of trans or nonbinary folx in one way or another. The discrimination the transgender community often faces from their alphabet neighbors does nothing to help promote progress or inclusion. We need to think about how to approach people spouting this hateful rhetoric in our spaces and events, especially as it directly relates to the discrimination trans people experience from society at large.

We also need to think about how to best help those who've been discriminated against due to their gender identity. While there are general trans groups, would one based on surviving and thriving after these setbacks be helpful? Is there an advocacy group that could be created to push for more progress?

As we ponder this, we also need to consider how to do this in a way that offers the most

support to those most marginalized. The notion of intersecting levels of oppression doesn't simply exist to be a buzzword or phrase to toss into diversity and inclusion work. It's something that we all must strive to recognize and combat. For example, what can we do to create more financial access to surgeries that have proven to be life-saving, even when they're not covered by insurance? Can we create funding that might help people locally?

Stacey Abrams once said that "Progress is possible, but it is fragile—and across our country, the battles for our most basic civil rights rage on." The fight for better will continue, both here in Madison and abroad. One can only hope that the right side of history can prevail sooner rather than later. ■



**KIRSTEN SCHULTZ** is a world-renowned queer and disabled writer, activist, and sex educator. They hold an MS in Healthcare Administration from Utica College. You can learn more about them and their work at [kirstenschultz.org](http://kirstenschultz.org) and on Twitter @kirstie\_schultz.



## LGBTQ Organizations Update

News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes  
Calls to Action | Events

Reported by **Stacy Harbaugh**

*Stay up-to-date with area LGBTQ+ and allied organizations and non-profits, be informed, and get involved.*

### NEWS

*Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.*

### DIVERSE & RESILIENT

A new peer navigator program will support people with HIV in Milwaukee County who are currently not in care. For information, contact Justin Roby at (414) 390-0444 or [jroby@diverseandresilient.org](mailto:jroby@diverseandresilient.org).

Diverse & Resilient has anti-violence advocates on staff in Milwaukee and Appleton who work with people statewide to get help. Calls and texts to their non-emergency LGBTQ Anti-Violence Line at (414) 856-LGBT (5428) or emails to [ipv.diverse@gmail.com](mailto:ipv.diverse@gmail.com) are welcome.

Along with Mayor Tom Barrett, Diverse & Resilient staff recognized National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness day throughout the City of Milwaukee on February 7.

### YELLOW BRICK ROAD ORGANIZATION

Beloit residents who want to help Yellow Brick Road

and Attentive Counseling Services create an ordinance with the City of Beloit to ban conversion therapy are encouraged to contact the Beloit City Council at [beloitwi.gov/council](http://beloitwi.gov/council).

### AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

*Special thanks for those who do good.*

### VIVENT HEALTH

At the April 4 Make a Promise Dinner Gala, Vivent Health will recognize the contributions of individuals and companies who have been leaders in the fight against HIV. Stay PrEP'd Up ambassadors, Chris, Ken, Persia, Stacy and Stephanie, will receive leadership awards for being real PrEP users participating in an outreach and marketing campaign. Aurora Health Care will receive a vision award for their expansion of PrEP access and longtime support of Vivent Health. Delta Dental of Wisconsin will be recognized for their philanthropic contributions that helped expand Vivent's



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## UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF CANOPY, NEW VENUE OCCUPYING FORMER PLAN B/PRISM LOCATION



Due to continued concerns by the neighborhood about another nightclub in the location and frustration expressed by ALRC committee members about Carl's shifting business plan and lack of experience, the committee voted to deny an alcohol license on February 19. ■

A proposal by Army veteran and DJ Austin Carl to bring a new entertainment venue to 924 Williamson Street in Madison is before Madison's Alcohol License and Review Committee. The space was previously home to LGBTQ+ friendly bars Plan B and Prism, which closed in November after a year of controversy and management changes.

In January, Canopy's alcohol license was on the ALRC agenda. Committee members heard from Carl about his plan to open a space that would be a coffee shop by day and an entertainment venue at night. At the time, Carl's business plan was in flux due to limited startup capital and critical feedback from the neighborhood association. This left committee members with more questions than answers, and they voted to postpone the decision on whether to approve an alcohol sales license until February.

Late night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel briefly mentioned the January ALRC meeting. On the show, Kimmel played a clip of the meeting where Carl was quoted as saying the venue would be more of a lounge than a nightclub and would not be a place where people would party and get wild. Later committee member Michael Donnelly incredulously pointed out that the center of Canopy's website's home page read, "Get Wild."

Canopy had a soft opening on January 18, but could not serve alcohol without approval by the city. On February 11, Carl attended the Marquette Neighborhood Association Preservation and Development Committee meeting. Without changes in his business plan and with lingering concerns from the neighborhood association about noise, parking, and bartime activity, Carl failed to gain the support of the MNA.

HIV Medical Home Clinic in Milwaukee. The Make a Promise Dinner Gala will feature Chad Michaels, winner RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars.

### STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

*Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.*

### DIVERSE & RESILIENT

Diverse & Resilient welcomes new programs and staff: Yante Turner, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator; Eddie Cannedy, Healthy Youth Coordinator; Justin Roby, Peer Navigator Program Manager; Kedem Benkedem, Corey Clark, and Julius Pitman, Peer Navigators; and Demi Carr, Grants and Program Support Coordinator. D&R also welcomes Brenda Coley to the board.

### MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER

The Center hired Jerry Wilcenski as the Special Events and Volunteer Coordinator who will organize the Stone-wall Exhibit in March. To work on partnerships and resource building with MATC and United Community Center, the Center hired Tiodolo A. Delagarza III as an AODA counselor. Natalie Zaroni, formerly the Director of Programs and Services, is taking on the role of Associate Executive Director.

### OUTREACH LGBT CENTER

OutReach welcomed two new board members—Joseph Muenich of ActionCoach Wisconsin and Tyson Vitale, a fundraising consultant for progressive political campaigns—in December. The board is working on a three-year strategic plan with Genia Stevens of Belwah Strategies. OutReach is hiring a program director and an advocate for

a new, Dane County-funded alcohol and drug addiction position.

### PRIDE IN HEALTHCARE

The UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health's LGBTQ+ student org welcomes new leaders including Alec Perrera, Jordyn Anklam, Ton Doan, Jefferson Imasuen, and Drew Richards.

### DEVELOPMENT & CALLS TO ACTION

*New programs, outreach, or changes in mission.*

### HOTEL RED

Hotel Red offers Cocktail of the Month fundraisers to local nonprofits. A dollar for each Cocktail of the Month sold benefits the nonprofit of the month. To partner with Hotel Red in a fundraiser or event, contact Allie Schaitel, marketing manager, at [promotions@hotelred.com](mailto:promotions@hotelred.com).

### UPCOMING EVENTS

*Plan ahead to join in.*

### COURAGE MKE

On March 21 the Courage MKE 2020 Pageant will be hosted by Dita Von and will feature Milwaukee's talent including recognition of Miss Birdee and Eddie Candelaria, Miss and Mr. Courage MKE 2019. More than a drag pageant, Courage MKE is looking for brand ambassadors who can represent the organization and raise awareness of LGBTQ+

## 14 UNNAMED CHRISTIAN PARENTS SUE MADISON SCHOOLS OVER TRANS POLICY



On behalf of 14 unnamed Christian parents, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty filed a lawsuit against the Madison Metropolitan School District over the District's policy on gender expression in schools.

While the District's policy requires parental consent for official changes to a student's name, the District's policy allows teachers to

call transgender students by their affirmed name and pronoun and prohibits teachers from informing parents of a student's affirmed name and pronouns without explicit permission from the student.

WILL's lawsuit claims that the policy violates the rights of parents' due process and freedom of religion. The conservative law firm describes Wisconsin state religious protections as being stronger than federal law. It also bases the parents' objections to school policy on "transgenderism" and pronouns on the argument that "gender dysphoria can be a serious mental-health condition that requires professional help."

On the District's policy, LGBTQ youth advocate Brian Juchems of GSAFE told Channel 3000, "It's designed to create a safe and affirming environment for our transgender students to help them gain confidence in their identity and be able to share this information with their families. It's more than just a fad, it's more than just a phase. It really is about having the right to be seen for who we are."

The full WILL legal complaint is available online: [will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/doe-v-mmsd-complaint.pdf](http://will-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/doe-v-mmsd-complaint.pdf) ■

youth in need throughout the year. To reserve a table, email [brad@couragemke.org](mailto:brad@couragemke.org).

### DIVERSE & RESILIENT & FAIR WISCONSIN

On March 28 the Wisconsin LGBTQ Summit, a joint production of Diverse & Resilient and Fair Wisconsin, will be held at The Westin Milwaukee Downtown. For more information visit [wilgbtqsummit.org](http://wilgbtqsummit.org).

### FIVE NIGHTCLUB

The Drag Sale & Swap will be held on March 22 from 2:00 to 7:00 p.m. The event is for anyone with costumes, wigs, heels, or other drag wardrobe to sell or swap. Admission is free, but registration is required to reserve table space. Contact Bianca Lynn Breeze via Facebook to register.

### GSAFE

GSAFE's 24th Annual Celebration of Leadership is Saturday, May 2. GSAFE will honor four high school seniors and one Educator of the Year for their LGBTQ+ activism across Wisconsin. Follow GSAFE on Facebook for updates on event registration.

### LGBT CENTER OF SE WISCONSIN

Youth Arts Program sessions are rescheduled to March 3, 17, and 31. Sessions include Printmaking 101 led by David Jones from the Center of Collaborative Research, one-act plays with board member Nathan Stamper, and field trips to museums, theater productions and other arts programs. The Center's art programming is sponsored by a grant from Forest County Potawatomi. For

details contact the Center at (262) 664-4100.

On March 21 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., the Spirituality Symposium will feature a panel of local clergy discussing the church's beliefs and



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### APPLETON BANS CONVERSION THERAPY WITH NEAR-UNANIMOUS VOTE



On January 22, the City of Appleton's Common Council approved a resolution in opposition to licensed medical or mental health professionals using conversion therapy for minors. The resolution was approved on a 14-1 vote. The language will be turned into an ordinance drafted by the Appleton city attorney.

The vote happened shortly before 11:00 p.m. after four hours of discussion and comments from the public. People who spoke in favor of the ban described conversion

therapy (also called reparative therapy) as an abusive and unethical practice of trying to change someone's sexuality through mental health treatment or spiritual intervention. Opponents to the ban argued for parental and religious freedom.

The original ordinance would have applied fines to therapists, but the final version would have the city report complaints to the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services, the regulatory agency that oversees professional counselors.

Appleton follows other Wisconsin cities that have banned conversion therapy including Cudahy, Eau Claire, Madison, Milwaukee, Racine, Sheboygan, and Shorewood. ■

### MADISON TO HOST NEXT TEAM TRANS FRIENDSHIP SERIES IN APRIL



The Madison Gay Hockey Association will host the next Team Trans Friendship Series during the weekend of April 3-5. Team Trans is an international collective of hockey players who are transgender or non-binary and is the first team of its kind to play in any sport in North America. Games will be open to the public. Go to [madisongayhockey.org/team-trans-friendship-series](http://madisongayhockey.org/team-trans-friendship-series) for more information. ■

practices of the LGBTQ+ community. On April 18 the Symposium will feature stories from the LGBTQ+ experience growing up in the church. The Symposium will be held at the Racine Public Library, 75 7th St. in Racine.

Equality Prom will be held on April 25 at Delta Marriott at 7111 Washington Ave. in Racine from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. Admission is free. To register, call (262) 664-4100.

#### OUTREACH LGBT CENTER

OutReach will host panel discussions for UW-Madison human sexuality students on March 31 and April 1. On April 17 the Center's LGBT Senior Advocate Ticia Kelsey will coordinate an LGBTQ+ Resource Fair and Reception at UW-Madison, a companion event and kickoff for the UW School of Nursing's LGBTQ+ Health Summit.

#### TRANS LAW HELP WISCONSIN

On April 18 vol-

unteer attorneys will host a legal aid clinic to provide assistance to people who want to obtain corrected identity documents (birth certificates, driver's licenses, passports, etc.) that reflect their authentic name and gender. Get necessary information about the process for name and gender marker changes as well as hands-on assistance with completing required forms. The event will be held at the GHC, 675 W. Washington Ave, Madison from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Learn more at [translawhelp.com](http://translawhelp.com).

#### VIVENT HEALTH

On March 16, members of the National Touring Company of WICKED will host "Witches' Night Off," a one-night song and dance cabaret at The Bartell Theatre. Proceeds benefit Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and Vivent Health. VIP tickets include preferred seating and a post-show reception with WICKED cast members at Eno Vino

Downtown. For tickets, call The Bartell Theatre box office at (608) 661-9696 or visit [bartelltheatre.org](http://bartelltheatre.org).

#### WI LGBT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

On March 5 the Chamber will host the Northeast Wisconsin Business Equality Summit at NWTC in Green Bay. Register through the events page at [wislgbtchamber.com](http://wislgbtchamber.com).

On April 2 at the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County Volunteer Center, the Milwaukee LGBTQ and Allies Career Fair will help job seekers connect with companies that are committed to pro-fairness values. The event is free to attend and a photo booth for free headshots will be available. To be an exhibitor, contact Kat Klawes at [kat@wislgbtchamber.com](mailto:kat@wislgbtchamber.com).

#### WOKE UP CRYING BAND

The queercore band's next show will be at the Tip Top Tavern in Madison on March 19 at 10:00 p.m.

#### YELLOW BRICK ROAD ORGANIZATION

Dorothy's Fire and Ice ball will be held on March 21 at Boundaries Bar and Grill in Beloit from 5:00 to 10:00 p.m. The all-ages event includes drag performances and proceeds benefit Yellow Brick Road. For tickets visit [yellowbrickrd.org](http://yellowbrickrd.org).

Yellow Brick Road also hosts Gayme Time at 2:00 p.m. every third Saturday of the month at 400 E Grand Ave, Ste 420. The LGBTQ Book Club is held at 2:00 p.m., every fourth Saturday of the month at Bushel & Pecks in downtown Beloit. Rock County PrideFest will be August 22 at Beloit's Telfer Park. ■



### MILWAUKEE'S JAIDA ESSENCE HALL CAST ON RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE

"I'm funny, I'm cute, I got some nice stuff, you know I'm living my best life and I have a personality," Hall said in her promo for new season. Locally Hall is a standout performer who many knew would eventually turn up on the show. Now that she's on, expectations are high and rumor has it she makes it far in the competition. ■

BINGO PHOTOS BY IAN DEGRAFF.

### FEBRUARY 23 Vivent Health's Camp Bingo (Bingo at the Prom)



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QTPOC RAP &amp; HIP-HOP SOCIAL JUSTICE WOMEN IN MUSIC

## Inside K.I.L.O.'s ReiGnBow

**Akiya Alexander**, better known as **K.I.L.O aka SkitL'z** has made a name for herself in the local music scene by using her talent to advocate for social issues like the injustice in black communities, support of the LGBTQ+ community, and providing a positive opportunity for youth through music and business.

**BACK IN 1991**, I was a six-year-old when Naughty by Nature came out with “OPP,” and I was saying it everywhere. At the age of seven, I went to my first Hip-Hop concert starring the famous Kris Kross, and that was the moment I felt like my life changed, looking back on it. If you were to ask anyone in my past growing up what they thought I would be doing in my adulthood, they probably would tell you playing basketball overseas somewhere. I am sure they wouldn't say Hip-Hop artist. Music always played a key role in my life growing up. I used music to help me through a bad situation, pump me up for a basketball game, or just to relax. It was always around my daily life. I used to fall asleep every night with tunes. It was always R&B—that soulful music that I was in tune to, and before I knew it, there wasn't much I was doing that didn't involve music.

Around 2010, I became more involved with music, so I added the recording studio and stage as full-time performance platforms, and tapped into a talent in the making. I mixed my lifelong affinity for music with the work ethic and dedication instilled by a lifetime of competitive athletics. The combination came about organically, thanks in part to my roommate and close friend who performs under the name 1neofmani. 1neofmani is a dedicated artist and member of B.L.O.O.D.L.I.N.E hip hop crew out of Peoria. My music career started with me pushing buttons in the recording studio. Before you knew it, I was recording my own music with 1neofmani. In 2012, I was announced as the First Lady of B.L.O.O.D.L.I.N.E., which stands for “Building Loyalty On Our Destination Limits Improper Novelty Effectively.” I was



As a female artist in this male-dominated industry, I started with strikes against me. I am a womyn, and I am gay. My personal identity hits a cross-section of minority groups, giving a voice to the struggles of the under-represented, the misunderstood, and the historically oppressed.

blessed by 1neofmani and older brother Corey with my stage name K.I.L.O. aka SkitL'z (Keep It Lesbian Only).

### CREATING CHANGE THROUGH RAP

My main goal in my music life is to rap for progress. “Rap for Progress” to me is utilizing the artistry of rap to bring aware-

ness to different social issues in communities, spread lyrical content around the world, address the injustice for black community issues, uplift womyn to use their power, support LGBTQ+ community, support Black Excellence, gentrify our communities, offer a positive example for the youth, and provide opportunity for youth through music and business.

My lyrics pack a message that is as true-to-self as it is relevant. Avoiding Hip-Hop clichés that glorify crime, money, and street life, I want to educate the masses from a platform of individual empowerment and social movement. As a female artist in this male-dominated industry, I started with strikes against me. I am a womyn, and I am gay. My personal identity hits a cross-section of minority groups, giving a voice to the struggles of the under-represented, the misunderstood, and the historically oppressed. To carry the message beyond awareness and into action, my single “Lord Knows” plays like a mission statement—a track dense with cleverly crafted rallies of “justice for all” and cries for strength through unity. It's a call to action, saying, “I'm not the first to say what we've been through / but the question still remains / What are we gon' do?”

In my video for “Lord Knows,” I wanted to focus on the youth and their future. I stand at the head of a crowd of Darbo neighborhood kids—a visual shoutout to the future of the community—while my words construct a vision of progress through unity. “Positive influence / no race, just a movement / we come together as people / united and equal / imagine how lethal a power / justice is feasible,” with my back to the camera, facing the kids like a quarterback in a huddle.

I want my music to last and become the soundtrack of my life, to teach those around me, especially the youth.

Mainstream Hip-Hop isn't exactly saturated with female LGBTQ+ rappers, and I recognize my identity as a definite strength. I credit my life experience and perseverance through adversity with cultivating the boldly authentic perspective I take in my music. My sexuality helps me: I've already been going against the grain my whole life, so why would I allow this to hinder my success?

I want to give credit to 1neofmani, the rest of Blood-Line members, and my family for helping me to find that focus, to find my lane, and attack it.

### HIP-HOP IN MADISON & A LIVING LEGACY

Being in Madison for the past 15 years, I have seen the local Hip-Hop music scene have a negative stigma against us because of unproven theories. I personally have been to several Hip-Hop shows and there were people having great vibes with local performing artists in the community. I was determined

For me “L's” equal lessons that are meant to be learned instead of losses. I have goals to perform more in the local festivals (Wurst Times Fest, Taste of Madison, Brat Fest, Freak Fest, etc.), and continue to bring awareness to local artists that there is a brand that is built for them.

to begin building my legacy, something tangible that I can leave after I am gone. In 2013, 1neofmani and I started a clothing line, L.E.S.S.W.O.R.K.; for local Hip-Hop artists to wear. LessWork stands for Let's Emphasize Self Service With Optimistic Resourceful Knowledge. A brand who is built to solely represent local artists. Support who is supporting you. Since then we have many local artists who have supported and purchased apparel, also we have collaborated with local businesses in the Madison area on community events.

In life we go through so many phases, some good some bad. It is all about how we react afterward to something we are not proud of and use it as a learning tool. For me “L's” equal lessons that are meant to be learned instead of losses. “Your journey in life is what you make it;” “What you put in is what you get out;” are sayings we have heard a thousand times. The future for me looks so bright, I plan to continue to rap for progress through music. I have goals to perform more in the local festivals (Wurst Times Fest, Taste of Madison, Brat Fest, Freak Fest, etc.), and continue to bring awareness to local artists that there is a brand that is built for them. I plan on releas-



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**03p-07p: MEGAN**

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ing my second mixtape, along with some visuals, and I am looking to collaborate with more local artists.

**Instagram:** instagram.com/kiloakaskitlz/  
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QTPOC DANE COUNTY BOARD POLITICS LATINX

Called to Serve

José Rea seeks to be the first openly trans non-binary candidate elected to the Dane County Board.

MY NAME IS JOSÉ REA, my pronouns are they/them/theirs, and I am running as the first openly trans non-binary candidate for Dane County Board. I'm looking to serve District 5. I am also the descendant of immigrant parents, and when elected I will be one of the first Latinx candidates to ever serve on the board. My story in Dane County is one of hardship, hard work, and perseverance.

I was born and raised in Madison, and as a lifelong Dane County resident, my community has always played a role in my life. Having grown up on the South Side and attended Madison Public Schools, I understand on a personal level the serious issues Dane County residents face. I was raised in a low-income household with two hard-working parents. Like many families, the 2008 recession took a heavy financial toll on us.

Money was tight and food pantries got us through moments of food insecurity. I know what it's like to live in the dark. I remember the lights getting cut off and my parents working to make sure they didn't stay off for longer than a day or two. It's hard knowing that there are many others in my district and throughout Dane County living through similar experiences. I was shaped by poverty in many ways. I learned to be thankful for the opportunities and blessings life has to offer, I learned to value those you love, and that education has the power to fundamentally change someone's life.

I know what it's like to live in the dark. I remember the lights getting cut off and my parents working to make sure they didn't stay off for longer than a day or two. It's hard knowing that there are many others in my district and throughout Dane County living through similar experiences. I was shaped by poverty in many ways.

I am a proud graduate of MMSD public schools (Madison West High School Class of 2008). It was during our lesson on American government and presidential elections in 5th grade where my interest in politics and community organizing began. My first experience in community organizing was during the ACT 10 protests. Other student leaders and I did our part to coordinate walk outs with our classmates to the state capitol. Seeing the capitol filled with labor unions, students, and other fellow activists inspired me to stay involved.

I also attended the P.E.O.P.L.E program and UW-Madison's Information Technology Academy. It was through these programs that I learned how to better synchronize my education and political activism. My parents, especially my mom, were big supporters of my community involvement. After the 2016 presidential election my community was angry and concerned about our future. In 2016 I ran for Alder of Madison's South Side, District 14. Although my race was unsuccessful, I have not allowed that to discourage me from community organizing and protests. This led me to be nominated and appointed to the Dane County Equal Opportunities Commission where I now serve as the Vice Chair.

It is because of my experience growing up in a low-income family,



my love for my community, and my strong held belief that if we unify together as a community there's nothing we couldn't accomplish that I chose to run for Dane County Board of Supervisors. I am running with a clear vision for Dane County; the right to housing, immigrant justice with no Dane County & ICE collaboration, divestment of prisons and investment in our community, mobilizing against climate change, supporting inclusion and safety for LGBTQ+ folx, creating a public safety system that's safe and just for all, fighting for safe and inclusive schools/campuses, protecting access to mental health services, and creating a Dane County economy that supports entrepreneurs from all walks of life. I am energized more than ever to tackle the issues faced by students and residents living in District 5 and throughout Dane County.

To learn more, visit the campaign website: [votejoserea.com](http://votejoserea.com)

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OUT MAYORAL CANDIDATE IN APPLETON LOSES PRIMARY

Among the options Appleton voters had for their Mayoral primary was an out, gay candidate, Dana Johnson, who finished fourth in the election.

Johnson is a 38-year-old small business owner who has a background in social work for hospitals and nursing homes, and as an educator in the Social Work Professional Program at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

Most of his campaign had been focused on economic and infrastructure development, attracting and retaining a younger workforce, and growing the tax base in order to expand affordable housing.

On being an out gay candidate, Johnson told WBAY, "I think that what we have seen, particularly in Appleton, is we have a diverse community. And a lot of times diversity and the idea of moving that conversation forward sometimes comes under attack. And I think it's important to say there's a place at the table, and we need to keep that conversation going."

"As a person who has persevered through some tough times in their life because of my identity status, it has made me that person that can bring people to the table that talk about it and talk about difficult things, and then really kind of push the idea that we can be inclusive without sacrificing all of our other belief systems."



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# Mind the Gap

Health care is slowing waking up to the importance of recognizing how someone’s identity impacts their care. The University of Wisconsin’s School of Nursing will host its second annual **LGBTQ+ Health Summit** to address the gaps.

**ON FRIDAY, APRIL 17** the University of Wisconsin’s School of Nursing will host its second annual LGBTQ+ Health Summit at Cooper Hall. *Our Lives* spoke with **Mel Freitag**, the School of Nursing’s Diversity Officer, about what’s new for this year’s conference and why students have been the effort’s strongest and most important leaders.

## WHAT PROMPTED THE SCHOOL OF NURSING TO LAUNCH THE SUMMIT?

It evolved from a course. It used to be an elective, but it started off by mostly preaching to the queer students and strong allies. It’s a great course, but we knew we needed to do more.

Last year’s Summit was very student-led. Though we had a limited communications and marketing plan, we still had around 325 people come. We knew we hit something. It wasn’t just the School

of Nursing. We worked with the UW LGBTQ liaison and were able to get other UW System schools attending. Students drove the objectives and it was important to them to have a very intersectional lens in our approach. We had lots of student moderators and many of the facilitators and speakers were queer people of color.

It was exciting that healthcare workers came to the Summit in scrubs to get knowledge they could apply the next day for their patients. There is a sense of urgency that we’ve hit this gap in our ability to meet people where they are at. A one-day ally training isn’t enough, but they are eager to serve people better.

## WHO IS THE MAIN AUDIENCE FOR THIS YEAR’S SUMMIT?

It’s geared for two groups. It’s for faculty and practicing professionals in health care who need a 101-level introduction to the needs of LGBTQ+ patients. It’s also for students who will be out in the field and who want to dig deeper into issues like consent models, social determinism in health care, resources for protocols, and literature on how clinical skills and standards of care are changing to be more inclusive and sensitive to diverse genders and bodies, reproductive health, and patient communication.

## WHAT IS THE LEADERSHIP FROM STUDENTS LIKE THIS YEAR?

The Summit is really important to them because when students are in classes and they experience curriculum that isn’t inclusive of our diversity in gender, sex, and sexuality, there is a power differential that makes it hard to speak up. They can make more of a difference in groups, and we see this with their Pride in Healthcare organization.

Last year we had a session called Up Teaching. We know that students are the ones who are providing examples of how healthcare can serve people better and they can articulate where they see the knowledge gaps on gender and sexuality issues and protocols.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES IN LGBTQ+ HEALTH TODAY?

Identity validation is huge. People in the medical profession are really afraid to get things wrong. They want a script or a universal approach to serving patients. But defaulting to a colorblind/gender-blind approach actually gets in the way. We have to get them used to asking about patients’ identity and experiences rather than putting the responsibility on patients to educate their providers.

It’s a perfectionistic culture and there’s a lot of pressure to get it right. We start introducing these Humanities concepts that are all about change and grey areas which aren’t comfortable in health science. We want to help people stay curious and be comfortable with changes and the spectrum of identity in something so personal as health care.



## WHAT SPECIAL PERSPECTIVES WILL YOUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER BRING?

Rachel Walker is a nurse who brings a deeply intersectional lens and systems thinking to their talks. They look at where the decisions are being made, power structures, who is at the table and who is not, and who is ensuring that the workplace is somewhere to thrive.

Driving change at a policy level is hard when you’re talking to a patient whose name doesn’t match their medical records and you have to confirm what’s on a wrist ID before surgery. Rachel helps us understand how nurses can make a difference in the moment when relating to that patient, and how to take their experience to drive policy change on a broader level.

We know it’s going to be “all hands on deck.” It’s CNAs, therapists, doctors, receptionists. Students are experiencing homophobia and microaggressions across our state. It’s up to our school to educate the clinical faculty to be advocates and to go into the clinical environment to talk to administrators and staff about what to do. ■

# UW Madison PRIDE in Healthcare’s OUT LIST

## Faculty/Staff – School of Medicine & Public Health

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**Maureen Brady**, WMAA Alumni Relations  
**Kevin Jacobson**, Office of Rural Health  
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**Dr. Clint Peebles**, Assistant Professor, Dermatology  
**Dr. Joseph Connor**, Assistant Professor, Anatomic Pathology  
**Dr. John Shepler**, Assistant Professor, Anesthesiology  
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**Amy Elaine Thomas**, Social Work, Organ Transplant  
**Dr. Ronni Hayon**, Faculty, Family Medicine  
**Dr. David Schneider**, Faculty, Surgery  
**Dr. Chris Ulmschneider**, Research Staff, Otolaryngology  
**Dr. Steven Ethier**, Fellow/Faculty, Anesthesiology  
**Dr. Anne Traynor**, Faculty, Department of Medicine  
**Dr. Amy Fielder**, Faculty, Department of Surgery, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery

## Residents – School of Medicine & Public Health

**Dr. Erick Sheffit**, PGY3 Psychiatry  
**Dr. James Lehman**, PGY2 Psychiatry

**Dr. Nick Zajdel**, PGY1 Dermatology  
**Dr. Natalie Taylor**, Pathology & Laboratory Medicine

## Students – School of Medicine & Public Health

Kevin Beene, 2019 (MD)  
Laura McClung, 2019 (MD)  
Jered Nystrom, 2019 (MD)  
Matt Guerrieri, 2019 (MD)  
Ben Beduhn, 2019 (MD)  
Cassidy Bommer, 2019 (MD)  
Jessa Kuxhause, 2019 (MD)  
Dylan Lukato, 2019 (MD)  
Alexa DeBorth, 2019 (MPH)

Jessa Kuxhause, 2019 (MD)  
Laura Muller, 2019 (DPT)  
Ryan Haggart, 2020 (MD)  
Ari Maxwell Stone, 2020 (MD)  
Adam Awe, 2021 (MD)  
Sara A Cuadra Aruguete, 2021 (MD)  
David Glaubke, 2021 (MD)  
Julia DeSantis, 2021 (MD)

Do Dang, 2021 (MD)  
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Carter Johnson, 2021 (MD)  
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Josh Bodnar, 2022 (MD)  
Brandon Huynh, 2022 (MD)  
Peter Ngo, 2022 (MD)

Amber Sheth, 2023 (MD, MPH)  
Haley Strouf, 2023 (MD)  
Alec Perrera, 2023 (MD)  
Ton Doan, 2023 (MD)  
Erik Sanson, 2023 (MD, MPH)  
Taryn McGinn Valley, 2025 (MD, PhD)  
Hailey Bussan, 2026 (MD, PhD)  
Drew Richards, 2023 (MD)

## Faculty/Staff – School of Pharmacy

**Sarina Lotlikar**, Sr. Digital Marketing Specialist  
Professional Development Office

**Ryan Seagren**, Dept of Pharmacy, Pediatric Clinical Pharmacist

## Students – School of Pharmacy

Kevin Tyler Luu, 2019  
Mai Lien J Dombroe, 2019  
Mark Cinquegrani, 2019

J. Grady Easterling, 2020  
Seth Cross, 2020  
Matt Stevens, 2021

Sara Taylor, 2021  
Grady Easterling, 2020  
Vincent Wartenweiler, 2021

Maeleigh Tidd, 2024

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**Mel Freitag**, Director of Diversity

## Students – School of Nursing

Michelle Watkins, 2019  
Anna Landry, 2019

Beth Alleman, 2019  
Alex Dudek, 2019

Amanda Kent, 2019

# Exploring Vocal Gender Affirmation

The voice, its relationship to gender and treatment options

Saturday, April 18

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PAINTING TRANSGENDER CANCER LOVE

# Expressing Joy

New to Madison, transpainter **Rae Senarighi** celebrates the intersectional identities of the people he paints, including for Netflix's short doc film, "The First Time I Saw Me."

**TO RAE SENARIGHI**, love is all that matters. Talking with Rae the conversation flows along a high vibe where an art practice and life practice are almost indistinguishable. Whatever creative energy Rae puts out into this world he wants to be about love. And the beautiful thing about this generous aspiration is that he seems to be achieving it. His is the art of spreading joy, not just with large-scale, portraits of trans and non-binary people, but in public speaking, in his communication design day job at Edgewood College, and in other aspects of his personal life as well.

Rae moved to Madison in spring of 2019 with his wife, Gina, and their two young children. The couple decided to move here to be closer to family. The two of them bought a house on the far eastside, found a good preschool for their children, and picked up where they left off in Portland, building community and making the world a better place. Rae glowed when speaking about Gina, a relationship coach who supports non-traditional relationships, and co-hosts the podcast Swoon. Gina and Rae have "been through a lot," Rae acknowledged, not only did they deliberately take on several of life's top stressors in the last five years: a cross-country move, two children, and a new job, but in 2015, the couple also faced Rae's cancer diagnosis.

## TURNING POINT

Surviving a life-threatening health crisis was a turning point for Rae Senarighi, both personally and artistically. He committed to spending at least 10 minutes a day working on his own art and he doubled-down on his gratitude practice. He deepened his penchant for public speaking and live painting events.

## BEING SEEN

In 2018 Netflix and GLADD discovered Rae on Instagram (follow them at "transpainter") and invited Rae to create live paintings for the short doc film, "The First Time I Saw Me." The project highlighted



transgender actors who have been featured on Netflix in recent years. As the actors were being interviewed on camera, Rae was given 45 minutes to paint them from behind a curtain. At the end of the interview the curtain was pulled back and the actor's portraits were revealed in an emotional climax underscoring the importance of being able to SEE one's likeness represented in popular culture. See it at [raesenarighi.com/netflix-special](http://raesenarighi.com/netflix-special).

In his current series, Transcend, Rae creates portraits of trans and non-binary people with energetic, expressive brush strokes. He avoids using "natural" skin tones, instead working with bright colors that communicate pride in the intersectional identities of the people he paints. He depicts clothing in gray-scale, a subtle hint to the viewer to focus slightly more on the subject's humanity than their individual fashion sense. And always a sky blue background. In Rae's words, "The vast blue sky is in direct response to the oppression and erasure from public space experienced by transgender people and is an homage to reclaiming space for this community."

Rae writes, "Transgender is not just about one experience, not linear and not simple. Each transgender person is unique with incredibly diverse experiences yet we are united in a common struggle. Portraits in this series are of individuals living their lives out in the open with courage, authenticity, and commitment to integrity over safety."

## POSITIVE & AFFIRMING REPRESENTATION

Rae believes that it is not merely representation that matters, but positive and affirming representation. In his artist statement he explains, "Plenty of research has demonstrated the power of seeing faces and bodies, like our own, as beautiful and revered. Elevating authentic stories helps to empower communities." Like the portrait painters since the ancient world, who memorialize the rich, the powerful, the admired, and the beloved, Rae is happiest when asked to paint someone's trans child or a transfemme of color, as Rae sees these works as providing a conduit for the respect and understanding trans and non-binary people deserve.

In a world that is cluttered with negativity, strife, and fear, Rae's body of work stands out, not only because of the lack of representations of trans and non-binary individuals in art and culture, but because his portraits convey the personal power, energy, and agency that signifies the full humanity of each individual he paints and the vibrancy of the community he loves. ■



**KARIN WOLF** is the Arts Program Administrator for the City of Madison Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development and the Madison Arts Commission.

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QTPOC DISABILITY JUSTICE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

## Accessing the Movement

Accessibility in queer inclusion efforts are too often an afterthought. **Davette BakerMounce** speaks with disability advocates **T. Banks**, **Cecil Leigh Wilson**, and **Jill Nagler** on ways to be more intentionally intersectional.

**IN 2016 I MADE A CHOICE.** I decided to leave my desk job to become a community organizer. I was 38 years old, coming into my queer self, disabled both physically and mentally, and dealing with several chronic illnesses that include diabetes and chronic sinus issues. I was in a lot of pain, but I was determined to make the world a better place for those of us who are often forgotten.

In my journey of activism I often wondered, who is out there organizing that was like me? Where are folks who are members of the same communities that I belong to, working towards making the world a better place like I was?

In the world of organizing I see a lack of recognition of those of us who are living with disabilities and or identities that are not part of the binary. Why aren't folks listening to those of us who do this work and inhabit identities that we work to uplift and create change for?

I reached out to some folx out here doing the work, and I asked them about how their identities intersect and affect the work they do.

### WHAT'S YOUR WHY? WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING WHEN YOU WANT TO QUIT?

**T. Banks:** I go back to the place when I was newly diagnosed and hospitalized for my mental wellness. I felt alone, unheard, and in danger. I went through homelessness, economic and emotional abuse from my payee and care-takers, and I was close to death because doctors did not believe my symptoms. I think of that place I was in. Isolated from my community. I never want to go back to that place, and I seek to change or unroot any systems that continue to create harm against Black, disabled, and trans bodies. When I feel I can no longer go, I summon the spirit of my ancestors, I write, I speak, I resist in any way to change the harm inflicted on me. I know that what I'm currently living in is not freedom, and that fight I honor, and recognize, and it reignites me every time.

**Cecil Leigh Wilson:** I know that my life and my community members' lives depend in many ways on justice work. For that reason, I rarely want to quit—I often feel like I should be doing more. When I do feel like giving up in a broad sense, it's because I feel overwhelmed, powerless, exhausted, scared, etc. It's the communities I work with that make it possible for me to survive. Our determination to make life possible gives me hope to keep going, and working together makes it possible to rest when we need it.

**Jill Nagler:** I want the world to be better, kinder, gentler, and more just. I want to be a part of my community. I want all my friends and chosen family to be welcome and supported in the community, too.

Being in community is not easy, and it is not passive. Just because you occupy space with others doesn't mean you are in community with them. I am in community with folks when we have a mutual interest in each others' well-being, authentically and with reciprocity. The pain of loneliness can kill people, but when we are in community we can help hold space for the pain and work towards healing.

### HOW HAS DOING THIS WORK CHANGED YOU?

**T:** Confidence. I know my rights, I feel connected, and I feel challenged and compelled to learn more of my history, to strategize, and to continuously reimagine and implement what is safety and accessibility for me.

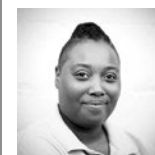
**C:** The more I participate in organizing and the more people I work with, the more I can unlearn individualism as an image of what successful organizing looks like and can learn how interconnected all of our lives are. One person by themselves can accomplish very little long-lasting without burning themselves out—I've seen how this interconnectedness can replicate patterns of oppression even in groups that value social justice, and I've also seen some amazing, life-saving changes made by people working together. It's been very humbling and comforting to learn to see myself as one small part of a vast, complex collective of people working for justice.

**J:** Organizing has helped build my confidence and capacity. I've met more chosen family and dear friends. I get to be a leader and educator, as well as an observer and student. I am consistently challenged, for better and for worse. Organizing has also helped me be more aware of my sphere of influence and has helped keep me humble and accountable. It's also a lot of unlearning and discomfort.

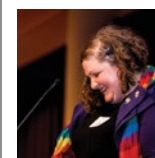
### WHAT ORGANIZATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED IN?

**T:** Disability Pride Madison, Loud 'N Unchained Theater Co, and a teaching artist at Arts + Literature Lab.

**C:** Disability Pride Madison, UW-Madison Gender and Sexuality



**T. S. BANKS** is a disability justice and mental wellness advocate, poet, and playwright from Madison. T. is a First Wave Scholar and graduate of UW-Madison. He received his BA in English with an emphasis in creative writing. Currently, he is serving on the board for Disability Pride Madison. T. recently launched his own Black-, Queer-, and Trans-led arts company called Loud 'N Unchained Theater Co. Which is also home to LNU Publishing House, LNU Black Theater Festival and a hub of Black Creatives. Banks has published two chapbooks, "Call Me Ill" and "Left."



**JILL NAGLER** is queer, trans, non-binary, multiply disabled, and working class. Jill has spent hir time in Madison gaining education on the greater issues of systemic violence towards all marginalized persons. Jill works at the UW in the department of Computer Sciences in grants administration. Ze is currently serving as President of the Board at OutReach. Jill is also a member of Disability Pride Madison, a disability justice organization, and Groundwork, an anti-racism coalition. And in hir spare time they are a screamer/shredder in the local queer, feminist, punk band, The Hasbians.



**Cecil Leigh Wilson** is a doctoral candidate at UW-Madison in Slavic languages and literatures with a focus in cultural disability studies. Ze is a queercrip scholar, teacher, and fiber artist invested in accessibility and disability justice in education and beyond. You can find out more at [cecilleighwilson.com](http://cecilleighwilson.com).

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Campus Center, Teaching Assistants' Association

**J:** Disability Pride Madison, OutReach LGBT Community Center, and Groundwork.

**HOW ARE ORGANIZERS WHO ARE DISABLED FORGOTTEN IN MOVEMENTS?**

**T:** We are simply not consulted on many issues, accessibility is the new buzz word, but that goes further than elevators, it means access to the facility, bus line, level ground from the parking, or sidewalk to building, awareness of allergens, providing food, asking if there are needs for specific types of communication. Are disabled folx a part of the planning and there when gathering/organizing?

**C:** As with many dynamics of oppression, if organizers are not deliberate to make their work accessible to as many people as possible, even if they have good intentions, disabled people can be shut out of participating. If disabled people are shut out, organizers miss out on the skills, perspectives, and connections disabled people could have brought to the work and are much more likely to replicate patterns of ableism without realizing how inaccessible their work is.

White fragility is a barrier. It can be incredibly difficult to talk to white disabled folks or white LGBTQ+ folks about racism. Some white folks seem to think that because they are members of a marginalized group that they don't benefit from white privilege. It is difficult to see your own privilege when you've experienced trauma related to any or all of your identities.

**J:** Disabled folks are forgotten in every aspect of life, including activism, because access is not a priority, it is often an afterthought instead of intentional. Disabled folks aren't consulted on how to make events more accessible, so the accommodations that are provided are usually provided by abled folks.

**HOW HAS YOUR DISABILITY/LGBTQ+ IDENTITY/OTHER IDENTITIES IMPACTED YOUR ORGANIZING?**

**T:** I'm Black, queer, trans, fat, non-binary, disabled and chronically ill, at no time can I extract one of these identities and show up into any space, I can try very hard to cover up my anxiety, depression, or schizophrenia, but it becomes extremely taxing and doesn't allow me to be who I am. I decided to organize because at a young age I knew my race impacted how the world treated me, especially in school and in hospitals and clinics. I was somehow not believed and treated as a token. I was hyper-aware of knowing how I should act, speak, think,

write. I felt the need to resist at every level, and that same spirit hasn't left me today. I am hyper-aware of who is in the room, who has spoken or has been listening. I ask: Are they the ones who should be leading? My identities cause me to do the work intentionally.

I am also aware of how dismantling systems of oppression are especially taxing on mental wellness. There was a time I was so ill and depressed but still continued to organize in the same capacity when I felt well. I think with the intersecting identities I hold, I am unfairly tasked with overworking my body in order to say and hold the same space as abeled, white, and cis bodies. I was tired before the meetings and exhausted afterwards. Today when I organize, I have a list of providers in my back pocket I would call if someone needed a safe space to work through the trauma of state violence and interpersonal violence while organizing for change. I take a daily account of my body and check in multiple times with myself about how I will engage with my mind and body at the moment. This awareness, therapy every week, and making time for spiritual practice is how I organize today.

**J:** Being disabled definitely impacts my ability to always be present for meetings and events. Thankfully, technology gives us the ability to connect without having to be physically present. It is difficult to be a disabled person organizing in able organizations when I often have to advocate for accessibility. My whiteness definitely gives me access to leadership and assumed authority. However, being trans non-binary but clocked as a cis woman and treated as such socially means that sometimes people have taken credit for the work I've done, and challenging cis men can result in bullying and threats of violence. However, these incidents are generally few and far between.

**WHAT ARE SOME DIFFICULTIES YOU'VE SEEN IN CREATING MORE INTERSECTIONAL MOVEMENTS IN ORGANIZING?**

**T:** In organizing spaces that have multiple racial identities, there can still be a problem or racism or anti-blackness even if the mission of the organization is to dismantle those harms. I've seen disabled people used as a token to validate that a specific organization is an accessible one that centers the voices of disabled folx. I've seen leadership not communicating the same way, or as openly or clearly with black folx and/or disabled folx.

**J:** White fragility is a barrier. It can be incredibly difficult to talk to white disabled folks or white LGBTQ+ folks about racism. Some white folks seem to think that because they are members of a marginalized group that they don't benefit from white privilege. I do understand that this rationalization comes from a place of trauma. It is difficult to see your own privilege when you've experienced trauma related to any or all of your identities.

**WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS CAN BE MORE INCLUSIVE OF DISABILITY JUSTICE? RACIAL JUSTICE? LGBTQ+ JUSTICE?**

**T:** Elevate the members of the organization with specific identities and make sure there is room and space for their expertise and to not only be heard but included in the decision making and accountability process of the organization. Just because the organization had one training on LGBT issues, or disability justice, does not mean the conversation and problems or homophobia, racism, transphobia, anti-blackness is addressed and acknowledged. It takes multiple conversations, planning, and checking about how the most impacted by these harms are heard.

**C:** It's important to recognize that effective organization around social identity must necessarily take intersections of oppression into

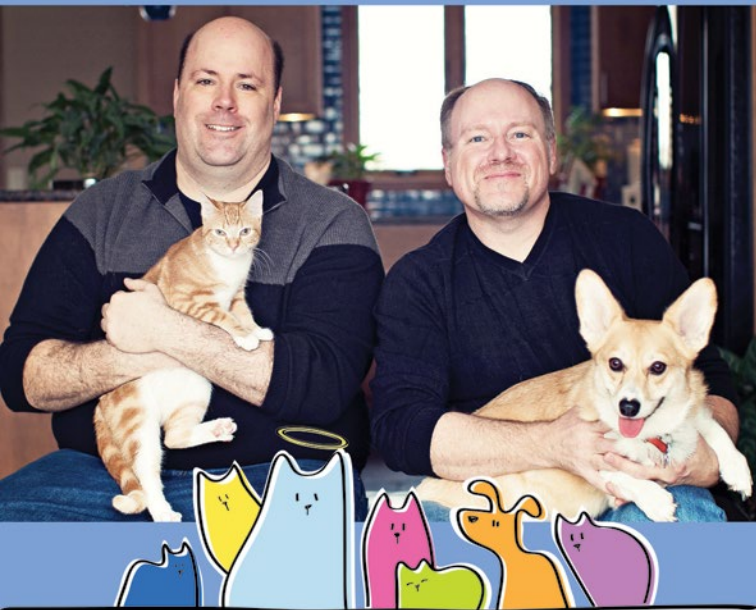
account. That is, if one is serious about standing up for LGBTQ+ people, that means standing up for LGBTQ+ people of color, disabled LGBTQ+, people, working class LGBTQ+ people, etc. Our liberation is intertwined. Find out who is already doing justice work on the issues you want to work on and join forces with them. Do the internal work to make sure your organization is a place where marginalized and multiply marginalized people can participate and be included seriously in decision making. Always strive to better understand how your work impacts others, and be prepared to decenter privileged ways of working and knowing.

**J:** If you are an abled organization, employ (pay) disabled folks who work in disability justice advocacy to consult on how to make your organization more accessible, add accessibility notes to the event description, especially if accessibility isn't guaranteed, and pay disabled disability advocates to educate your managers and organizational leaders on accessibility. If you are a majority white organization, employ (pay) racial justice organizers to consult on how to make your organization more racially just including educating managers and organizational leaders on how to cultivate a racially just work environment. If you are a majority heterosexual organization, contact OutReach and set up trainings for organizational support on LGBTQ+ issues. All organizations benefit from community and connectedness. In order to achieve social progress we must aim to uplift communities who are represented the least and impacted the most. ■



**DAVETTE BAKER** is an experienced community organizer with a demonstrated history of working in the civic and social organization industry. Her strengths are in community and social services. She also has a strong history working with Medicaid, Medicare, persons with disabilities and mental health.

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Joe, with his partner John Schellinger (left), photographed at Joe's Milwaukee condo for Lois Bielefeld's New Domesticity series.

# Interior Lives

Blessed and beholden by his family's surname, **Joseph Pabst** reflects on witnessing more suffering "than a person should," and the fortress he's built as his own artful sanctuary.

INTERIOR DESIGN | ARTS | ACTIVISM | HIV/AIDS | GAY | COMING OF AGE

**IF A HOME IS A REFLECTION** of your personality, then Joe Pabst is a little bit too much—in all the right ways.

Let's get this out of the way from the jump: Joe may be the great-great grandson of Capt. Frederick Pabst, founder of Pabst Brewing Co., but his business is art.

His last name certainly carries special weight in Wisconsin, but the Milwaukee-based Pabst has spent much of his life distinguishing himself for his own interests and work. He's a designer, an arts patron, and a philanthropist. Those focuses have roots in his own upbringing and experiences as a gay man. They also cast a spotlight on his unique personality and give tantalizing insights into values cultivated over a lifetime of change and challenge.

Joe himself understands that well. Over the course of a long and revealing conversation this winter, he delved into everything from artistic inspirations to human cruelty. There's also the wide variety of work he's done over the years to support the LGBTQ community and HIV/AIDS survivors, both of which he counts himself a member.

Perhaps closest to his heart and home, however, have been his efforts to provide support for victims of bullying, and of domestic abuse and their animal companions. Joe's own sister, he says, delayed getting help to escape domestic violence at least in part because she feared for the safety of her pets. It was a delay, due to lack of services, that cost his sister her life.

"I was getting off the school bus, I was being called faggot, I was being kicked in the balls so hard I was doubled over," he remembers. "I was brutalized."

AIDS took his first serious partner, too. There have been other losses, large and small, too sacred to do anything like number them.

"I think it's entirely possible that my health and my sorrow have been the catalyst for my philanthropy," Joe reflects.

Currently retired, Joe stays involved in the community, if at a slightly less hectic pace than in the past. After decades of giving to a wide range of causes and organizations, he's since focused his efforts more exclusively to anti-bullying efforts, support for domestic violence survivors, and animal welfare.

He does all of this while privately continuing his lifelong passion for interior design and decorating. It's an interest Joe attributes to a desire, born in childhood, to build a comfortable and personalized space to keep the often chaotic-feeling world at bay.

"Every place I have lived has been a restorative space, a fortress," he notes.





#### YOUNG MAN IN AMERICA

Joe grew up in Arizona, the son of loving parents who were nevertheless not entirely prepared to help him navigate life as a sensitive, art-obsessed boy in a world with very narrow expectations of gender and sexuality. By the age of nine, Joe says, the bullying kicked into high gear.

“I was getting off the school bus, I was being called faggot, I was being kicked in the balls so hard I was doubled over,” he remembers. “I was brutalized.”

After the one-mile walk home, Joe says, he was still so distraught that his father took notice. The elder Pabst decided to pick his son up every day from the bus stop, “my father had a ridiculous little Honda motorcycle,” which stopped the abuse in its tracks.

It was around that age Joe began to really look at what he describes as “beautiful things,” too, “things that can’t hurt me.” Paintings, furniture, bronzes, jewelry, all began to catch his eye.

His father’s intervention had a profound impact on Joe, but it wasn’t enough to completely save him from the homophobic confines of his small town. Joe eventually asked—and then begged—for his parents to send him to a boarding school.

“I had a very loving family,” Joe explains. “[My hometown] was not the place to be young...I had to get out. And frankly, it was only economic privilege and some sort of awareness on the part of my parents to foster that and to make it happen: to set me free at a very young age. I think they would have loved to have kept me home. I felt like I had to go for my very safety.”

#### COMING OF AGE WITH A PANDEMIC

He went east, eventually ending up at a school in New Jersey, where it put him close to relatives who provided crucial support to him as a



**FROM LEFT:**  
Joe with his late mother, Audrey Pabst. With his late father, Gustave Pabst III. And with his late sister, Kathryn Pabst.

“Well, people are rising up and they are doing things,” he counters. “It just looks different and it’s very exciting. Do I want to be a contributor in a minor way to it? Yes, I do, but it’s their...I’m not going to say it’s their turn. It’s their time, and it’s beautiful.”

young person exploring the world—and himself—for the first time.

“By going away...I saw a world that was better exposed, more intellectually curious, more diverse, really more of everything,” he says. “And I also had the proximity to a very loving and sympathetic aunt in Boston, and a very loving and sympathetic grandmother in New York, who were, I think, ahead-of-their-time, tolerant people, who fostered the person they saw and loved. It saved me.”

Having New York City an easy train ride away didn’t hurt, either. It was the early ‘80s, and despite being underage, Joe found himself at clubs like Danceteria, Xenon, and Area, where he was able to dive headlong into the city’s thriving gay community.

“I was astonished by it,” Joe says of the time and the place. “To me it was the living embodiment of something as beautiful as a sculpture, or a piece of jewelry... I thought it was staggering and intoxicating. I was wide-eyed. I wasn’t frightened.”

It was also the early days of the AIDS epidemic. Joe says his youth mostly shielded him from reality, but eventually it became impossible not to notice all the people getting sick and dying around him. He was lucky for a time, getting tested frequently, before the seemingly inevitable diagnosis came some 25 years ago. Ironically, it happened when he’d moved to Chicago and gotten into his first serious, committed relationship. His partner was diagnosed around the same time.

“The truth is, of course I wanted to have fun, but I think at the end of the day what I really wanted was love,” says Joe. “I wanted to be held...and I would do anything to get it. And when I found that person, when I truly felt everything—the kind of love where the best part is emotional security and everyday life is a facet of it, just the daily activities of life are part of the love—to then be walloped with what was still in many cases a death sentence, certainly proved to be a death sentence to my partner.”



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Still, he says, there was comfort in sharing the experience with a partner. To have that mutual understanding, and to provide support for one another, was a kind of blessing. Joe says his partner was already the nurturing type and leapt into the role of caregiver without pause.

“He was physically bigger and stronger, and intellectually more powerful,” Joe says. “He was an attorney, so he had this sort of presence, strength in every capacity; in kindness, in physicality, in intellectual capacity. I’ve always been slight, and I’ve had health issues my entire life with very serious measles, and very serious bronchial issues, and Crohn’s disease, and I was sure just looking at him in those days that, in spite of [T-cell] numbers, that I would be....” He trails off. “It never occurred to me that he would go first.”

It was another tragedy that would galvanize Joe into action. After moving to Milwaukee, he helped organize the local gay bars into a friendly competition to raise money for the Wisconsin AIDS Walk and AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (now called Vivent Health), called Raising the Bar. He said it was important to him to show that the bars didn’t just become scapegoats for risky behaviors that lead to health problems in the LGBTQ community, but that they be recognized as the important community hubs they were and still can be.

“Not unlike barbershops in communities of color, [gay bars] are places where people can come together, they can share a story, they can work towards something, and I recognized that,” Joe says. “And a great credit to ARCW, to Dan Mueller and Doug Nelson, was that they recognized it, too. This is where you bring people together; you become a catalyst. I have a friend who refers to it as ‘intersectional funding.’ You bring people together to achieve a greater goal, and to end up with a result that is greater both in terms of engagement and money raised.”



FROM LEFT: Joe with his late partner, Robert Johnson. With his mother, Audrey in Russia.

STEPPING IN, STEPPING UP, STEPPING BACK

The lessons Joe learned throughout his years organizing and funding various LGBTQ community causes were ultimately applied to his overall approach to philanthropy. He’s particularly passionate about Safe Haven, a project he helped to create that’s aimed at helping people escaping intimate partner violence find shelter for their pets, too.

A joint project of the Wisconsin Humane Society and Sojourner Family Peace Center, the Safe Haven program provides up to 60 days of shelter for the animals of domestic violence victims. While what happened to his sister was the catalyst, statistics bear out how important the issue is nationally, too: Some 71 percent of women with animals seeking shelter reported their partner had threatened, hurt, or killed their animal. Abusers often use animals to manipulate and control their victim, taking advantage of the person’s concern/love for the animal.

The problem is perhaps even more prevalent for LGBTQ people, who are often overlooked by intimate partner violence surveys and supports but face disproportionate impacts. Queer folks have also sometimes traditionally gravitated toward pets in lieu of children.

Joe himself is a lifelong animal aficionado, something that started as a child, when “the only living being I could discuss everything with was my dog.”

When I truly felt everything—the kind of love where the best part is emotional security and everyday life is a facet of it—to then be walloped with what was still in many cases a death sentence, certainly proved to be a death sentence to my partner.”

“I have a very strong feeling about domestic pets with whatever they may be; a turtle, a fish, a cat, a dog, anything,” he explains. “At least with children you can usually find shelter of some kind, but you can’t find it for your pet. So to create a program that allows a victim of abuse to leave with the knowledge that their pet—very often the only living being that is true, that cannot be manipulated—is safe and that you will be reunited with at the end of it, it’s the best healing that I could have. I couldn’t help my sister. I couldn’t get her out of it.”

Despite—or perhaps because of—Joe’s losses, he remains hopeful at heart. Projects like Safe Haven are part of his dogged determination to, as he says, use his privilege to support the people and causes he cares about, particularly for those people with less access to the levers of power.

“I didn’t ask for an iconic surname but I have one,” he says, “and if I must endure some of the troubles that come with it, I might as

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well take advantage of some of the perks. And if that helps, great. It doesn't always help. But sometimes it gets you in the door."

Joe is also happy to step back and let the next generation take the reins. He says too many members of his generation complain that younger people aren't "doing things the way we used to," or that they

aren't rising up and taking a stand.

"Well, people are rising up and they are doing things," he counters. "It just looks different and it's very exciting. Do I want to be a contributor in a minor way to it? Yes, I do, but it's their...I'm not going to say it's their turn. It's their time, and it's beautiful."

#### ALL THINGS BEAUTIFUL

In addition to ideas and funding, Joe also leant his homes to good causes. In 2008, he hosted the Challenge Party, an event aimed at raising funds to donate to a variety of Southeast Wisconsin LGBTQ organizations. It was a chance to offer tangible support for causes near and dear to him, and an opportunity to show his hospitality—and his house.

Joe carried out a major remodel of the 5,000 square foot, 1929, Eschweiler-designed house shortly after moving in. The Georgian-style home was redecorated top to bottom to fit his style, which Joe refers to as "cozy abundance."

He redid nearly every room in the house once more, in 2016, before deciding in 2018 that it was time to downsize. Joe now shares a 2,000 square foot double-unit condo with his partner of five years, John Schellinger. The process forced him to distill his possessions and "begin to identify with the memories associated, which ones I wanted to hold on to, which ones would be strong enough if I let



**LEFT:** Opposite Joe's bed, a work by Philip-Lorca diCorcia. This was a collaboration with Dennis Freedman for publication in *W* between 1997 & 2008. Perhaps diCorcia's most famous body of work was the "Hustlers" series. This is very relevant to our LGBTQ+ community and the issues surrounding homeless youth. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1989, each subject was paid his going rate—but not for sex. The images were exhibited at MOMA with name, hometown, age, and amount charged. Mind blowing, disturbing, and haunting work.



**ABOVE:** When Joe came out to his father, Gustave gave Joe this 18th century oil of Frederick the Great. It was without much explanation and they didn't discuss his coming out at length, but Joe feels it was his dad's way of saying that he was not alone. History had extraordinary examples of gay leaders.

the object go." The process has, he notes, helped him achieve a more peaceful relationship with his family—blood and chosen, immediate and extended.

"It's for me," Joe says. "It's not something to impress other people; it is for me."

He credits several members of his immediate and extended family for cultivating his love of interior design and decoration, and for introducing him to some of the artists from whom he draws inspiration.

There was his great grandmother, Ilma Vogel Uihlein, who ignited his interest in "all things beautiful." His father, Gustave, was equally comfortable discussing beautiful shotguns, cars, jewelry, and gemology. His paternal grandmother, Louise, encouraged his interest in her passion: glasswork. And then there was his aunt, Louise, who had "amazing taste" introduced Joe to the artist Bernard Buffet, one of his favorites. Coincidentally, his great uncle John Uihlein—who was also gay—passed along his interest in decorative arts and objects, as well as a desire to create whimsy and folly. "Beauty without strict purpose or desire for absolute functionality," Joe adds.



**ABOVE:** An illustration by Bernard Buffet from the book, *A Certain Monsieur Blot*. Buffet was a significant 20th century artist and was the lover of Pierre Berge. He subsequently dumped Berge in favor of Yves Saint Laurent after the funeral of Christian Dior. Buffet represented France in the Venice Biennale in the mid 20th century. He later married a woman, raised a family of adopted children & remained famous (if much maligned) by the art establishment until his suicide in 1999. Purchased at Christie's in Paris.

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Joe has drawn on the work of designers like François Catroux, who used stainless steel in the home. A recessed baseboard and crown in Joe's new home is a direct result of the influence. He names a few other off-the-beaten-path influences, too: The 1960s home of Dorothy and Richard Rogers (the composer), and Dorothy's book describing the process of designing it, *The House in My Head*; the apartment of tastemaker and Picasso biographer John Richardson.

Both, he says, utilized traditional and modern elements to create unique environments, that "defy description but evoke a style and comfort and, for sure, individuality."

This isn't a case of copy-and-paste, though. Joe is sure to point out that, while he takes notes from others, the ultimate designs are unique to him and his tastes. "Having antiques comfortably coexist in a '60-era building was one of the reasons those people were so inspiring," Joe explains. "Art also directed and dictated many of the decisions. The liberal use of Sapele wood in tongue-and-groove paneling was also a period feature, although in the '60s mahogany was more common. The uniquely veneered doors are pure folly of my own imagination."

Again, it all comes back to the feeling of being inside a kind of fortress against the threats and disarray of the outside world. Instead of hiding from it and turning to minimalism, though, Joe embraces a carefully curated chaos: "Abundance...collision in terms of color, and high and low materials coming together," he says. It's something akin to exposure therapy, where a person is intentionally exposed to a source of anxiety in a controlled environment, where the person knows they're safe. Over time, it helps bring peace.

"It's an action-packed space, and there's really nothing particularly restful about the interior," Joe says. "Except that, if you begin to take notice, you will see sight lines. There is symmetry and there is a grid. Within the chaos there is order."



FROM LEFT: Joe with his paternal grandmother, Louise Uihlein Snell. With Bina, his dog.



#### BETTER THAN A PICTURE

Back in his dorm room at boarding school, Joe pasted and taped Marimekko wrapping paper to his walls in lieu of proper wallpaper. He stapled covers of *New Yorker* magazines to the foamy ceiling. A statement. A fortress.

Now he has a window with a view of the gray-blue waters of Lake Michigan, and the ever-changing city that laps at its shores. The contrast, and the pairing, of his private and carefully designed space with that open, unpredictable, and living world is entirely intentional.

Here, as he reaches the stage of life where there's more time to reflect, it's clear that it's no longer just beautiful objects with which Joe finds himself in love, but life itself, in all of its complexities.

"I have witnessed more than a person should," he says. "When I need to nest and retreat, and look out and imagine serenity, and something living ... I mean, what I've learned is," as he motions toward the lake, "That is living art out there. It's better than a picture. It's alive." ■

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# Full House

As Courage House took in its first residents, all of their dreams and hard work came to fruition—and the real work of their mission began. **Brad** and **Nick Schlaikowski** share their journey and praise their community of volunteers.

YOUTH | COURAGE HOUSE | MILWAUKEE | THE FOSTER SYSTEM | VOLUNTEERS

**AFTER FOUR YEARS OF FUNDRAISING**, 18 months of planning, renovations and licensing, red tape and hundreds of hours put in by some of the world’s best volunteers, The Courage House opened its doors in March 2019. The day we cut the ribbon was a day we will never forget. The day our first resident moved in at the end of May, was an emotional day for everyone. He moved in a week before Milwaukee Pride. That week we all learned so much, including him. To see him live his authentic self without fear, attending his first Pridefest and wearing a different Pride flag every-day, then smiling from ear to ear as he walked with Courage MKE in the Pride parade assured us that what we are doing is the right thing.

We started this organization without a penny to our name and without any experience of the non-profit sector. It was a very, very cold December night that we met with our attorney at a local coffee shop to get the organization started. We filed the necessary paperwork, and we left there with the official documents making Courage Initiative, Ltd, DBA Courage MKE a legit business. We also left with a daunting laundry list of tasks that needed to be completed in order for us to become a non-profit. At the time (and until January 2020), we both worked our full-time jobs, Brad in corporate America and Nick as a multi-store district manager for a nationwide retailer. So, we sat down to figure out how we will raise our children, maintain our “day jobs,” and grow Courage MKE into what it is today.

DOING NON-PROFIT DIFFERENTLY

We reached out to our inner circle of friends to create our first Board of Directors. Time and time again, we were told by others that we weren’t creating a nonprofit correctly. We listened and appreciated the feedback,

*Courage House is Wisconsin’s first home for displaced LGBTQ+ youth. Courage MKE believes that in order for youth to work on themselves, they must be able to be themselves.*

*The Courage House is a licensed group home on Milwaukee’s south side. Our staff and volunteers are committed to creating an environment in which each resident feels like they are a part of the entire Courage MKE Family. At the Courage House, we assist residents with counseling, healthcare, life skills, family reunification, and provide them the same experiences every child deserves in a family setting.*

—The Courage House website



Nick & Brad Schlaikowski on the steps of the Courage House.

but we loved the idea that we and our board had almost zero experience. We believed that this would allow us to make our dream a reality without the baggage of, “This is how it’s always been done....”

Over the next two years, we took advantage of every opportunity that was given to us to raise awareness within our communities of the growing need to support our displaced and homeless LGBTQ+ youth. We visited bars, restaurants, meetings, social groups, and events to teach everyone what was happening in our own backyards. We started our Courage Kit program which distributes gallon-sized bags of daily necessities throughout Milwaukee and beyond to organizations and schools that need them. We also began funding GSAs throughout the entire state of Wisconsin to ensure that these important clubs continue to exist.

It didn’t take long to see that the people in our communities have the biggest hearts. They started showing up to every event and gave what they could. Often times it was \$100, \$50, \$20, \$5, or perhaps less. Regardless of what they gave, they gave from their hearts. We were expecting at least a five-year process to purchase a property, but because of the outpouring of support, we purchased the first Courage House after only 26 months of sharing our mission and fundraising.

SO, WE BOUGHT A HOUSE!

We remember a time when we were sitting at the house talking, and Nick said, “Ummm, now what?” and we

both sat there silent and then burst out laughing. Yep! NOW WHAT!?!? Though we like to think we are pretty handy, we had to admit defeat in acknowledging that neither of us could do the work that needed to be done. The house sort of became storage for a few months of all of the generous donations that had taken up our entire garage. It wasn’t until July 2018, when we received a call that would forever change The Courage House.

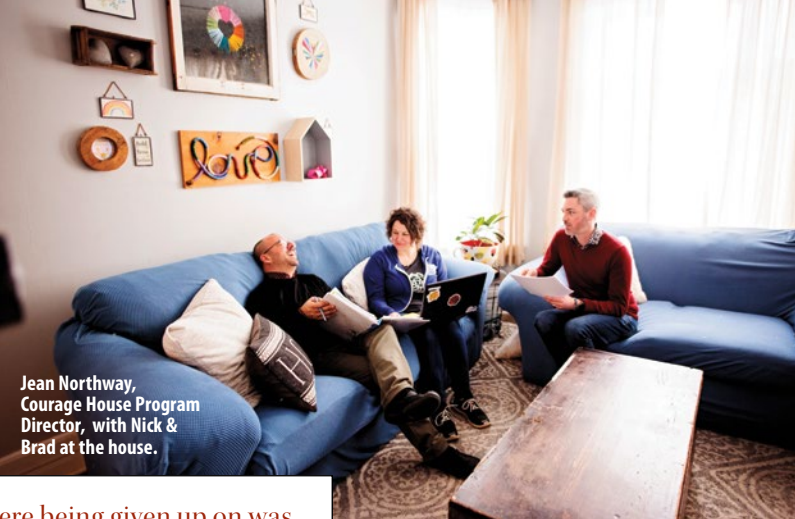
GAME CHANGERS

The team at Kohl’s Corporate reached out and asked if they can help with the interior. They had created three different amazing style boards, from which we chose one and gave them free reign to surprise us! A month later, another group of heroes called. This time, it was our friends at Lowe’s Home Improvement. They wanted to help, too. So, in August 2018, the construction started and lasted through February 2019. We finished the last of the renovations on a Thursday and were not allowed back to the property until the following Tuesday after the Kohl’s team came in to decorate and furnish what we left as a shell. They made it a home. That day was an emotional one. We couldn’t even get through the door without the emotion hitting us hard after seeing what this beautiful team did. The employees hand made almost all of the art, they stocked our cabinets, closets, and more.

CHILDREN IN THE SYSTEM

Many have mentioned to us that we aren’t licensed as a homeless shelter, and they are right. This house is licensed as a group home. When we started the process of licensing, we learned about a population of youth that aren’t being talked about. The children in the system. Foster home after foster home, group home after group home, some of these children were being passed around over and over again. The thought that children were being given up on was something that we couldn’t stand. They deserve something stable. We knew we had to do something, so we started our licensing as a group home with the plan that the next facility would be larger and allow us to take both children within the system and children that knocked on the door that

The thought that children were being given up on was something that we couldn’t stand. We knew we had to do something, so we started our licensing as a group home with the plan that the next facility would be larger and allow us to take both children within the system and children that knocked on the door



Jean Northway, Courage House Program Director, with Nick & Brad at the house.

need a place to stay. This would allow us more time to look at how we can get exceptions to allow youth to stay longer than the two weeks the state says they can stay for.

OUR DREAM WAS NOW A REALITY

With our board, staff, and mayor there, we cut the ribbon on March 1, 2019. We’d like to tell you a resident moved in that day, but we were still crossing that least few “Ts” and dotting the last “Is” on our license and zoning approval.

Our brilliant Courage House Program Director, Jean Northway was hired in January 2018. She hit the ground running, making sure we were ready for our first resident. She hired the staff we needed and began training everyone. By the time our first resident arrived in May 2019, we think it’s fair to say everyone was ready!

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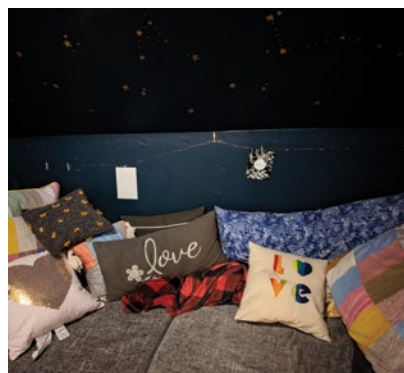
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We've have taken calls from counties all over Wisconsin. About 50% of youth that live or have lived at The Courage House come from Milwaukee. As we expected, the need is everywhere and keeps us pushing to get the next house open.

This past summer, more residents moved in. We learned that we had no clue what to expect every time a child walked through that door. Each child comes with their own history, their own story, and their own emotions. All of us had to take a step back to really think about how we are going to manage a house full of teens. The big emotions, the big feelings, the fear, the excitement hit all of us the same, but different.

#### THE NEED IS EVERYWHERE

One thing that surprised us since we have opened are where the calls come from to place youth at The Courage House. We have taken calls

from counties all over Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and recently Pennsylvania. About 50% of youth that live or have lived at The Courage House come from Milwaukee. As we expected, the need is everywhere and keeps us pushing to get the next house open.

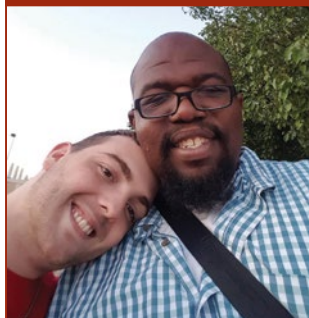
#### THE SUPERHEROES

We get asked about how we feel about what "we've" done. The honest answer is we are humbled. You see, we did nothing but have an idea. This community deserves just as much credit, from donations, to sponsorships, to the countless volunteer hours they have all put in—each and every one of them deserves their own cape. Then, you have our staff, Jean, Jenna, Xan, Paulina, Blake, Halle, Kayden, Yante, Ky, Tywanda, and Aareania. These are the SUPERHEROES of this story. This group of diverse and talented people work with our residents on a daily basis. They experience the ups, the downs, and in-betweens. They are the ones that show our residents what family looks like. They care for them day-in and day-out and know every day is a new day. Without these amazing humans, we simply would not exist, and we are forever grateful that they chose to work for our organization.

#### NEW TRADITIONS

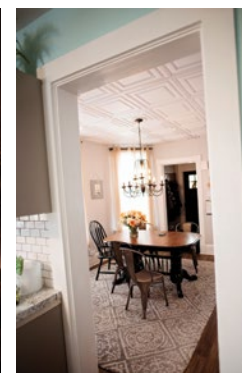
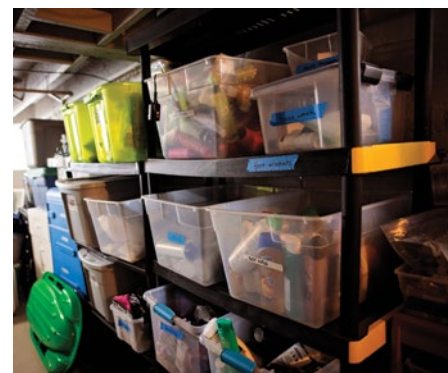
Last Thanksgiving, our family started a new tradition of bringing our children to Courage House and cooking our Thanksgiving meal there, spending the day playing games and getting to know the residents. At Christmas, our residents were showered with love from Courage Family near and far. Regardless of what they may have been through, it fills our hearts to know that as we continue to grow and move forward, our resi-

#### MADISON ACTIVIST SEEKS HELP TO OPEN A SIMILAR HOME FOR LGBTQ YOUTH IN DANE COUNTY



My name is **DaMontae January**. I am currently working in the mental health field and am hoping to further my passion for helping those in need. In order to address the homeless of our beautiful LGBTQ+ youth, I am looking for volunteers for the starting of a group home here in Madison. I have a small dedicated few, but we are looking for a few more.

Specifically, I am looking for social workers, community organizers, those addressing the issue of homelessness, and those who are passionate about our future and want to give back to our community in a meaningful way. If this is you we invite you to join in this mission to fight against LGBTQ+ youth homelessness. Contact me at [casadelrainbowhouse@gmail.com](mailto:casadelrainbowhouse@gmail.com).



dents are making new memories that one day will hopefully help them be our future leaders.

#### THE UNEXPECTED PATH

This may not have been the path either of us planned for our lives, but there is no other path we'd rather be on. In January, Brad became the full-time Executive Director at Courage MKE, freeing him up to be able to spend more time at home with our family. We always hoped this might happen but certainly never expected it. Thank you to everyone who has supported us along the way. Each of you inspires us to keep reminding people to follow their dreams no matter what they are. You never know who's life you might change. Afterall, our Courage Family has certainly changed ours! ■

### Stories from the Courage Family

**JENNA, HOUSE SUPERVISOR** Each new day at The Courage House brings me unforgettable moments and many fantastic memories have already been made. However, I think my favorite part of this job is every time I get to know more about the kids we support. Watching them explore and learn who they truly are has brought me so much joy. One stand-out moment which comes to mind was the day one of our kids found a pair of heels in the closet. I watched his eyes light up with excitement as he asked if he could have them. I replied that as long as he could walk, they were his.... And let me tell you, he killed it like a runway model! It is small moments like these which help build a strong sense of self for our kids, many of whom have not had a supportive adult in their lives accepting them for who they are and encouraging them to live fully as their true selves. I am so proud to be a part of it.

**BLAKE, ONE OF OUR RESIDENT CARE WORKERS** One winter evening, we walked to the park with the intention of playing basketball, only to discover the court had not been shoveled. Since we had already trekked 15 minutes there, we decided to make the best of it. We constructed a snowman that was named "Bob the Park Ranger," threw snowballs, rolled down hills, and made snow angels. This ordinary evening is my favorite because of how happy the kids were and how picturesque it was; the park was empty and quiet except for the sound of laughter, with snow falling softly in the glow of the streetlights.

**JEAN, HOUSE PROGRAM DIRECTOR** My favorite moment this week was watching two residents immediately bond with each other. A new resident moved in the day before and was feeling pretty nervous. Watching a resident who had been here for several months immediately try to make the new resident feel at home, and bond over similar backgrounds and stories, really warmed my heart. I walked upstairs to see the two new roommates jamming to music and applying face paint in the trans flag colors: both of them feeling accepted and less alone.



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# In Their Time of Need

Founded by **Rodney Scheel** during the AIDS crisis to address housing instability for people living with HIV/AIDS, the **Rodney Scheel House** is calling for community support to continue their mission after sustaining flood damage.

HIV HOUSING FLOODING RODNEY SCHEEL FUNDRAISING



Rodney Scheel.

**THE RODNEY SCHEEL HOUSE**, a subsidized home option for people living with HIV/AIDS, is more than a place to live. It’s a lifesaver.

No one knows that better than Cass Downing. Diagnosed with HIV in 1995, Downing lived in the house for five years. “It was right after gender reassignment surgery, which I almost died from,” Downing says. “I needed a caregiver and wasn’t able to work. Given the severity of my situation, they said, ‘Yes, you qualify’ right away.”

A “using drug addict” at the time, she needed a way to get back on her feet, financially and physically. “Today I have 19 years clean. That place was given to me in such a time of need and I will always be so grateful.”

Those years at the Rodney Scheel House were just what Downing needed to create the foundation for a healthier, more stable life. Eventually, she moved out so that others could benefit from living there. “I felt I

needed to open that space for someone who needed to use those financial services,” she says. Today, she’s in the process of renovating a condo that she will soon move into.

The Rodney Scheel House opened in 1995 and is located on Madison’s east side. The “house” is actually two buildings, one with six units and another with 17, administered by local housing nonprofit Project HOME. To be eligible to rent an efficiency or one- or two-bedroom apartment at a reduced rate, at least one member of the household must be living with HIV/AIDS and the household’s income must be no more than 50% of Dane County’s median income level. Residents pay up to 30% of their income in rent, with the balance made up by rental assistance programs.

“Many of our residents come to us from homelessness and we have a robust waiting list for our apartments,” says Jennifer Campbell, Rodney Scheel House Foundation board president. Affordable options are important to populations facing multiple risk factors for homelessness. “Everyone deserves a place to rest their heads at night and start their days from in the morning,” says Campbell.

## THE LEGACY OF RODNEY SCHEEL

Rodney Scheel was a well-loved Madison entrepreneur who specialized in creating the kinds of gathering spaces that the emerging LGBTQ+ community needed to connect and thrive. In 1972, at the age of 21, Scheel opened the city’s first gay bar, The Back Door. He went on to found Rod’s, a gay bar in the basement of the Hotel Washington. When that proved successful, he expanded the Hotel Washington complex to include the Café Palms, a popular brunch spot; the Club de Wash which featured live bands; The New Bar, with its lively dance floor; and The Barber’s Closet, a former speakeasy that served craft cocktails. He also opened up some rooms for rent on the upper level of the hotel. To celebrate his employees and patrons, Scheel hosted an annual picnic in Brittingham Park, which in 1978 became the MAGIC Picnic, the city’s main Pride celebration for many years.

Scheel’s caring personality endeared him to many and helped to create a sense of family belonging at his businesses. Downing, a well-known Madison entertainer who performs as Cass Marie Domino, got her start in shows at the Hotel Washington in the early 1990s. She remembers encountering Scheel’s “generosity and kindness” as a young person seeking LGBTQ+ community. “We were a huge family,” she says. “He was so amazing, so kind.”

When Scheel died of AIDS in 1990, it was a blow not just to his relatives but to a sprawling network of friends, customers, fellow activists, and people he helped through the years. One sign of the continued importance of the community he created: A bustling Facebook page devoted to



For Fey, the Rodney Scheel House deserves support because of the dignity and community it provides. “When you get the diagnosis,” he says, “it changes everything about your life. When things get bad financially, knowing that you have a home gives you a little uplift and hope to know that people still care.”

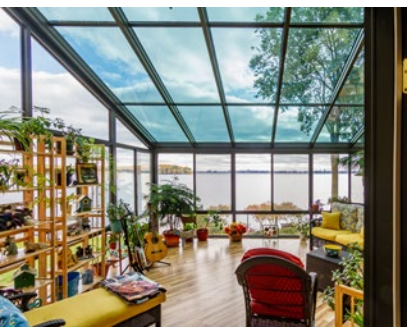
low-income people with HIV. They were unstoppable.”

## SURROUNDED BY COMMUNITY

The residence offers amenities important to those living with HIV/AIDS, according to Shawnti Fey, a Scheel House tenant since 2014. “I was really attracted to the fact that this is a secure building—there’s 24-hour security,” Fey says. “We have an on-site resident resource coordinator who works for Project HOME. He’s really good about getting us resources. We have an on-site food pantry, and every two weeks it’s stocked with fresh vegetables to help us with good nutrition.” The food pantry is a big help because, while the complex is close to bus routes, “there are no nearby grocery stores,” Fey says, “so

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Rodney Scheel.

Rodney Scheel was a well-loved Madison entrepreneur who specialized in creating the kinds of gathering spaces that the emerging LGBTQ+ community needed to connect and thrive. In 1972, at the age of 21, Scheel opened the city's first gay bar, The Back Door. To celebrate his employees and patrons, Scheel hosted an annual picnic in Brittingham Park, which in 1978 became the MAGIC Picnic, the city's main Pride celebration for many years.

really such social pariahs. There is this continuing stigma," but living at the Rodney Scheel House "gives us the opportunity to just be ourselves without microaggressions."

The shared diagnosis also helps smooth over some of the social friction that can result from shoulder-to-shoulder city living. "It's a community that has one thing in common, and I think that makes us more compassionate with each other and more patient," says Fey. "Living in an apartment building can be challenging. We get along."

#### UPROOTED BY FLOOD

Unfortunately, that community was uprooted in June of 2018 when a water main break flooded the first floor of the 17-unit apartment building. Residents were evacuated to hotels, and whatever personal possessions could be salvaged were loaded into storage pods. Tenants of seven of the apartments spent seven weeks in hotel rooms while repairs were made. In addition to the apartments, the flood damaged many resident storage closets, the resident services coordinator office, the food pantry, and the community room.

Rodney Scheel House Foundation board president Jennifer Campbell says the timing of the flood was particularly challenging, coinciding with the influx of visitors for the CrossFit Games. Hotel rooms were in short supply. "We had to move the residents three times, adding to the stress of the flood," Campbell says. "We also had to suspend the food pantry deliveries and the access to food from that resource to the residents of all 23 units."

Since the June 2018 flood, there have been two other, more minor, flooding events. The common areas and one apartment were affected. "We have since discovered that this is due to a sag in the line, which we are in the process of having addressed so that this will not happen again," Campbell says.

Because of the population that the Rodney Scheel House serves, special care must be taken with the renovations. A GoFundMe page for flood recovery notes that "our resident population lives with compromised immune systems. We are doing a wholesale remediation to ensure no chance of mold, bacteria, or other lingering contaminant."

While insurance subsidized the majority of costs associated with the remediation and rehabilitation of the flooded areas, the board is unsure if the damage caused by subsequent flooding events will also be covered. The disruption and added expense caused by the floods continue to affect how services are provided. "Much of our attention has been directed to dealing with these issues instead of proactively looking to increase our residents' access to services and fresh food and other needed items," Campbell says. "With the two additional flooding events, we are still working to finalize restoration in the common areas and the one apartment that has now been affected by flooding three times."

Fey also worries that the impact of the floods will be felt in terms of regular maintenance. "If Rodney Scheel House and Project HOME are

focused on the flood recovery, there are other things that will be postponed or not taken care of at all."

#### COMMUNITY SUPPORT NEEDED

The board hopes the community will rally to support the Rodney Scheel House now as they did when the residence was first built. "The foundation expended a lot of its funding on costs for rehousing during the displacement and so are not able to put additional funding into our food pantry and other improvements we would like to see at the property," says Campbell. "We are working to replenish our accounts so that we are able to assist when emergencies pop up in the future and are looking at creative ways to approach emergency funding which may include creating a dedicated fund." She notes that the GoFundMe page is still live for anyone interested in making a monetary contribution. "We also encourage support of ARCW, one of our partners, which provides incredible services for our community."

Downing encourages people to support the Rodney Scheel House in honor of the legacy of Scheel's generous spirit, speaking of him in the present tense. "He is a blessing to many people—even to people who don't know him—for the community of people who live with HIV/AIDS."

For Fey, the Rodney Scheel House deserves support because of the dignity and community it provides. "When you get the diagnosis," he says, "it changes everything about your life. When things get bad financially, knowing that you have a home gives you a little uplift and hope to know that people still care." ■

To contribute to the Rodney Scheel House GoFundMe campaign, go to [gofundme.com/f/rodney-scheel-house-flood-recovery](https://gofundme.com/f/rodney-scheel-house-flood-recovery).

#### AIDS RESOURCE CENTER OF WISCONSIN BECOMES VIVENT HEALTH

As of January 1, the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin became known as Vivent Health.

The name change follows recent mergers with other HIV/AIDS care centers including Rocky Mountain CARES in Denver and St. Louis Effort for AIDS in Missouri to expand access to specialized prevention, support, health care, medication, and services for people living with or who are at-risk for HIV.

HIV transmission and AIDS care has changed, especially in the wake of major changes in health care insurance law and the opioid epidemic. A record 1.2 million people are living with HIV in the United States, and the virus still disproportionately impacts young gay and bisexual men, people of color, and people who inject drugs. However, prevention programs have been effective and the promise of PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) drugs are helping more people reach the lifesaving goal of having an undetectable viral load.

"As the need for PrEP increases and HIV continues to be a leading example of a health disparity, Vivent Health will be as committed as ever to expanding lifesaving programs to individuals with the greatest need and working toward our ultimate goal of a world without AIDS," said Michael J. Gifford, President and Chief Executive Officer of Vivent Health.

Vivent Health operates in 12 locations in Colorado, Missouri, and Wisconsin, and serves more than 7,000 patients annually.

"Our new name is a celebration of our most sacred beliefs—that no one should be defined by the health challenges they face and everyone deserves the highest quality of care and the chance to live long, healthy lives," said Gifford. "Our new, stronger brand and mission reflect our relentless efforts to help people affected by HIV thrive." ■

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## On the passing of a Happy Prince

Historian **Richard Wagner** fondly remembers his longtime friend and colleague **Ron McCrea**.



**OSCAR WILDE WROTE** a wonderful fable story about a statue called “The Happy Prince” who possessed a generous heart for doing good. In the tale, God sent an angel to seek for one of the most precious things of the world and the angel returned with the Prince’s heart. “You have rightly chosen,” God said. Ron McCrea, yet to have his actual statue, was a happy prince among us and now is gone. But he is worth many stories.

I met Ron in 1974 when we both lived in the Mansion Hill historic district. He was in a gay coop house, and I was living in a Nineteenth Century coach house. I was running for alderman on a gay rights plank, and he attended a candidate coffee. That was the beginning of many interactions.

For a number of years, my house hosted a Labor Day weekend potluck for gay men. And yes, gay men, as well as lesbians, have potlucks! On one occasion we asked those coming to bring an essay on the topic, “What—and who—I did on my summer vacation.” On a lovely late summer day, the experienced journalist Ron McCrea walked off with the essay prize. I have no memory of his essay anymore, but my many memories of Ron are filled with fondness.

From the time he came to Madison in 1970, Ron was involved with the city’s early gay activists around the Madison Alliance for Homosexual Equality, the Gay Liberation Front, and the Gay Center. For a time, he was editor of the *Renaissance* newsletter put out by the Gay Center. In his early journalism, he uncovered the story of Madison’s Gay Purge of 1962.

Some of Ron’s early letters and writings show an extremely thoughtful approach. He wrote, “Why should there be such a big deal over men and women sleeping with their own gender?”

### SPEAKERS’ PANELS

Ron ruminated about his many experiences on speakers’ panels in multiple classrooms. He felt strongly the early activists had to reveal

themselves through these occasions. For him, one never broke down any stereotypes about homosexuality by talking theory.

The speaker panels were done to “give it a human face.” He would write of the importance of “dealing with gay feelings in an honest way, incorporating them into your real life, and not keeping them in some dark nether-world.” Yet, being self-reflective, he had doubts, too. “Justifying myself or homosexuality in general to the straight world is a foolish waste of time.” In the end, writing in the early 1970s, he felt the

real reward of the panels was for the latent homosexuals, the panels were “an opportunity to bring out and heal people who are struggling with their homosexual feelings.”

In a charming letter in 1971, Ron would describe those who came up privately afterward to seek “more information.” He wrote of those “who have exorcised their ghosts and can appreciate the very human comedy of sexual identity.”



At Dick Wagner's house.



Ron McCrea, in back.

“Madison is one of the most pleasant places in the country to be gay,” Ron said. His fictional character, a long-traveled gay itinerant, said of Madison, “This is the softest scene I’ve ever seen.”

### GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL

When Ron was appointed in 1982 by Governor-Elect Earl to be his Press Secretary the *Milwaukee Sentinel* ran a headline “Avowed homosexual named Earl press chief.” As a seemingly controversial appointment, Ron offered to withdraw. Earl’s response was “Bullshit you will. If I can’t deal with a few small-minded people on this, what am I going to do when I have a real problem?”

In 1983 Ron and I worked together on Governor Tony Earl’s creation of the first-in-the-nation Governor’s Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues. I drafted the Governor’s Executive Order, and he put out the press release on the issuance of the order in what he quipped was an all-gay operation.

### LOCAL LGBT HISTORY

Ron and I also shared an interest in the history of the Madison LGBT community and worked on an outline covering 1969–1989. It culminated in a wonderful in-depth cover article for *Isthmus* on May 5, 1989, timed for the first Galvanize march.

Still being the reflective Ron in describing the many out elected officials in Madison and Dane County he put it, “Why should a person’s sexual orientation—the most private of matters—be a public issue or even a matter of public interest?” His answer, “Because invisibility never worked. Hiding one’s true sexual orientation left gays and lesbians isolated, incommunicado, and at the mercy of hostile

In a charming letter in 1971, Ron would describe those who came up privately afterward to seek “more information.”

He wrote of those “who have exorcised their ghosts and can appreciate the very human comedy of sexual identity.”

forces ranging from the police to bigoted employers and landlords.”

Proudly he noted, “Today, Madison lesbians and gays are speaking for themselves rather than being spoken for, and 20 years of organizing have produced far-reaching results.”

As a reporter and editor at the *Capital Times* and for the *Press Connection*, Ron broke ground to make sure positive stories about our community could reach the front page.

More recently, I worked with Ron on the LGBT Archive Collection at the UW-Madison Archives, which includes many of his papers and other material. Among the extremely fascinating material was the line, “Madison’s brand of gay politics, which for all its internal differences and disagreements, never relents in its community work.” The example of the Happy Prince is there to encourage us.

Ron also spoke and published about Frank Lloyd Wright. In 2012 the Wisconsin Historical Society Press published his *Building Taliesin: Frank Lloyd Wright’s Home of Love and Loss*.

Ron is survived by his wife of 26 years Elaine DeSmidt. He chose his epitaph from Walt Whitman: “Loth. O so loth to depart! Garrulous to the very last.” ■



**DICK WAGNER** (rrdickwagner@gmail.com), openly gay former Dane County Board Chair and co-chair of Governor Earl’s Commission on Lesbian and Gay Issues, is the author of *We’ve Been Here All Along: Wisconsin’s Early Gay History*.

## The Daily Cardinal



**April 15, 1991:** Students protest to expel ROTC from campus unless the military changes its policy of discriminating based on sexual orientation.

**October 14, 1979:** The Madison Committee for Gay Rights at the First National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

The Madison LGBTQ+ Archive recently accepted a collection of 150 photos, digitized and analog, of LGBTQ+ student activism from the UW-Madison student newspaper, *The Daily Cardinal*.

The photos were requested by the Madison LGBTQ+ Archive Committee, subsequently digitized, and transferred (along with copyrights) to the archive in May 2019. They depict student activism by and for LGBTQ+ students 1971–1992. While the photos have been previously published, they were not widely known or accessible to students and scholars. They will now be available for any visitor to the archive as part of the Madison LGBTQ+ collections.

To view more of these photos, or any of the Madison LGBTQ+ materials, please contact the UW-Madison Archive at 608-262-5629, [uwmadarchiv@library.wis.edu](mailto:uwmadarchiv@library.wis.edu), or [library.wisc.edu/archives](http://library.wisc.edu/archives). ■



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RETURNING HOME CHANGE RELATIONSHIPS

## Choosing Madison

**Dr. Gina Senarighi** is a certified relationship coach and author specializing in human connection, intimacy, authenticity, shame-resilience, and alternative relationships. In her first column for *Our Lives*, she explores returning to Wisconsin, and the fear and discovery that comes with such a significant life change.

**ONE YEAR AGO TODAY** we were sitting at our dining room table unsure what the future held. I was 40 and four months pregnant with a miracle baby when my partner's 10-year employer decided to abruptly terminate any employees working remotely.

That meant my partner. And half our household income and all our healthcare benefits. We were in a panic.

"I can't move back to Wisconsin," I told him through tears.

Today I'm watching our six-month-old napping and our son is playing in the snow outside my home office window here in Madison. My parents drive down from Door County every other week to watch the kids, and we host regular queer parent playgroups at our house.

Portland was the perfect place to be a young queer couple. LGBTQ folks are everywhere, and we had fun dabbling in trendy dancing and dining events. There was no question we'd find affirming health care providers and same-sex marriage was always an option. We marched and organized, reduced, reused, and recycled collectively in a diverse and very proud queer community.

In all honesty, I was scared to move back.

Nearly a decade of big-city progressive politics, one-night stands, queer two-step nights,

and IKEA hand-holding meant I finally could embrace parts of myself that were silenced and scared growing up in Wisconsin.

We'd built a vibrant life in liberal left coast bubbles, and I simply couldn't picture a fulfilling life here.

And though my parents assured me things had changed, when I left Wisconsin, queer student groups still didn't share pictures or names of members for safety reasons. Pride events were filled with hateful protesters and even recently, when I brought my butch girlfriends home to visit, they feared public events in my small town.

### HAD IT REALLY CHANGED?

One thing was certain, I'd changed. I met my partner in 2009, and the part of me who was never going to get married settled down. Soon with kids and a mortgage, the struggle to find parking began to outweigh our interest in the trendiest spots in the city. And when my partner's fine art career began to take off, we needed grandparent support more often than we'd imagined.

In the 20 years since I'd moved there, the west coast had also changed. The cost of living, traffic, and apathetic progressivism was wearing on us.

And that progressive queer community we loved? While it was great at organizing for large-scale change, when our basement flooded or our sitters backed out, we were stranded and helpless over and over again.

We needed a place where a family like ours could afford a home and childcare, find an organic farm CSA, work in creative industries, and still see an occasional show on date night. We wanted a community filled with ride-shares and playdates and potlucks.

When I left Wisconsin, queer student groups still didn't share pictures or names of members for safety reasons. Pride events were filled with hateful protesters and even recently, when I brought my butch girlfriends home to visit, they feared public events in my small town.

My folks advocated hard for us to move back to Door County, but we knew we needed to have play dates with families like ours. And while we love Chicago, we were hesitant to return to the grueling city commutes we were leaving behind.

So hey, Madison. We chose you. But we had no idea if you would choose us.

At almost eight months pregnant, I hopped

a one-way flight with our three-year-old to an AirBnB on Willy Street. We knew no one here but our real estate agent, my doula, and a handful of distant classmate Facebook connections.

It was a terrifying leap. The first week we were here, I got caught on State Street in a huge thunderstorm. And my toddler and I ducked into Qdoba to cry together. And a few days later, when I fell down the stairs in our ramshackle rental place and broke my ankle, I was sure we'd made the worst decision of our lives.

But then the magic started. I posted about my fall on Facebook, and those distant high school classmates showed up to move boxes. And people we'd met only once at Madison's queer parent's group brought us dinner. And the local daycare co-op we'd just joined offered childcare. Friends of friends we'd never met brought beer.

Of course the energy Rae and I put into making immediate friends was a part of the picture. We'd researched family events and meet-up groups, coworking communities and professional networking well before we arrived so we could hit the ground running.

I'm not denying the race and class privilege that helps Rae and me in every life transition. I know our experience would be different if we came at different places in our careers or didn't have the background and access we do. And at the same time, we're incredibly grateful for all

the support that's come our way as we adjust to life in the Midwest as mid-career professionals and parents.

You'll have really met us with an incredible welcome. Thank you for being there when we needed you Madison. I never thought I'd say it, but our return to Wisconsin has been the best decision we could have made for our family.

I'll be sharing a little more about our adventures as newbies in town here, and we're excited to get to know you better. ■

To learn more about **Dr. Gina Senarighi's** background, values, and work, visit [heygina.com](http://heygina.com).

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**QTPOC   DOMESTIC VIOLENCE   MILWAUKEE**

## Supporting Domestic Violence Victims

Milwaukee LGBT Community Center's **Sandra Zapata** breaks down the impact domestic violence has on the queer community in Milwaukee and shares culturally responsible ways for supporting LGBTQ victims.

**LGBTQ+ PEOPLE** are experiencing more acceptance in the media and are more able to explore loving public relationships, but we are not immune to the problems of control and violence that can plague any partnership. According to the Center for Disease Control, LGBTQ+ people experience a greater incidence of sexual assault and abuse.

- Lesbians experience rape, physical violence, or stalking at a rate of 44% and bisexual women at 61% as compared to heterosexual women at 35%, gay men at 26%, and bisexual men at a rate of 37% as compared to heterosexual men at a rate of 29%.
- The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey revealed that transgender people are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives at a rate of 47% (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- LGBTQ+ individuals are less likely to seek or receive help after experiencing violence or sexual assault.
- Of gay men who have experienced near lethal violence, only 26% contacted the police, and only 5% of LGBTQ people who have experienced intimate partner violence pursued protection orders.
- There are barriers to seeking and receiving assistance for LGBTQ people. These include potential homophobia or lack of training among service providers to provide appropriate care which can result in the survivor not seeking assistance or

when they do, receiving poor care.

- Since many shelters are only for females, transgender people are not allowed due their gender status (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2013).

This harrowing data shows that we experience domestic violence at greater rates, and this is a nationwide problem that organizations like the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center are trying to address and fix. But in addition to our work, there needs to be societal shifts and education about healthy relationships, power dynamics, and the normalization of therapy.

**LGBTQ+ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & MILWAUKEE**

Although Milwaukee-specific data about LGBTQ+ domestic violence has not been officially collected, the Center sees many clients who are facing these issues. We help connect to mental health professionals, but we can also make referrals to legal aid, to affirming shelters, and to support groups. We have clothing, food, blankets, and toiletries for people who have to leave their housing and have computers available for people to use who want to work on resumes and look for jobs or new housing.

The Milwaukee LGBT Community Cen-

We often share stories on cultural expectations that sometimes collide with living in a more liberal society. It is not uncommon for folks to feel like they need to code-switch between their identities, as it pertains to sexual orientation and/or gender, and cultural-specific norms in an effort to seek safety.

ter is the only LGBTQ+ serving organization that has multiple licensed therapists on-site who are able to see clients at no charge. Organizations that have specific LGBTQ+ affirming therapists require clients to use their insurance and/or pay out of pocket. The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center offers free mental health counseling in both English and Spanish as well as AODA therapy and youth-specific counseling. In addition, all four of our clinicians identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, which really makes a difference because they can easier relate to the experiences of the clients. Our services are filling a major gap in providing mental health care for LGBTQ+ folk in the greater Milwaukee area.

We also have mental health counseling in Spanish. This service allows for LGBTQ+

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## PEOPLE



## EVENTS



## BUSINESSES

Latinx individuals to have access to a service that has not been offered ever before. Engaging in therapy in one's native language is much more effective and powerful for the individual and reduces barriers to services for individuals that hold these intersectional marginalized identities.

### SANDRA'S EXPERIENCE

It is important to acknowledge that historically, advocacy done for and by queer spaces has left out racial, ethnic, religious, and other monitized groups as they intersect with the queer community. Thus trying



Thus trying to build a safe environment that celebrates inclusivity can be challenging, as those communities would be right to be hesitant to enter queer spaces and conversations they have systemically been left out of.

to build a safe environment that celebrates inclusivity can be challenging, as those communities would be right to be hesitant to enter queer spaces and conversations they have systemically been left out of. However, we believe the way to build connections is to acknowledge this historical fact, acknowledge that these challenges exist, and move forward in seeking collaborations and partnerships outside the scope of those we have been able to serve so far.

An integral part of creating a more comprehensive and affirming space has been attending different events that celebrate the diversity in our city, especially those events created by communities of color. Last year we fostered community partnerships with businesses and organizers which allowed us to reach individuals and families we may

have missed otherwise. This engagement in the community has been crucial in my therapy practice here at the Community Center. By engaging with the communities I serve and live in on personal and professional levels, I can better understand the dynamics of people's relationships and how domestic violence comes into play. People from different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds will have different approaches to therapy and might be hesitant to reveal problems such as domestic violence, so my therapy style must be adaptive and reflective of their individual needs.

Though creating safe and inclusive spaces at times can feel gargantuan, we believe it is paramount. The center has made a conscientious effort to include different intersectionalities within the scope of work we do by providing culturally specific programming. We introduced a Latinx & LGBTQIA+ support group last year for folks to be able to share in their experiences living

in that intersection. We often share stories on cultural expectations that sometimes collide with living in a more liberal society. It is not uncommon for folks to feel like they need to code-switch between their identities, as it pertains to sexual orientation and/or gender, and cultural-specific norms in an effort to seek safety.

While the data shows that there are certain trends when it comes to cases of domestic violence in the LGBTQ+ community, every single relationship has its own unique dynamics, and people may have different goals when it comes to facing problems. Some might want to repair or strengthen existing relationships while some people want to escape toxic situations and start fresh. When seeing a client, I work with them to establish what it is that they want out of therapy and how we can reach that goal together. I work



**SANDRA ZAPATA** (she/her/they/them) is the Counseling and Advocacy Coordinator at the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. Sandra graduated with her Masters in Psychology with an emphasis in Criminal Justice from the University of the Rockies.

ILLUSTRATION BY RACHAL DUGGAN.

with both individuals and couples depending on the relationship they have and how agreeable to therapy they are. This process doesn't work if the participants aren't willing to engage or do the work of change and growth. While I help facilitate that, I can't do the work on my own. In cases of domestic violence, depending on the needs of my client, I can advocate for them through legal processes and in dealing with law enforcement if that is something they want to pursue, but I'm also honest about the realities of outcomes in these cases involving members of the LGBTQ+ community. Our problems are often minimized and not treated with the same respect or dignity that our heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. This is even truer in rural communities outside of Milwaukee and Madison. So I try to help my clients set realistic and achievable goals that are personally and culturally sensitive to their needs and wants.

I'm very grateful for my communities and clients and look forward to growing with these people and learning and growing with my practice and being the best advocate for queer communities of color that I can be. ■



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SOCIAL JUSTICE

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## Crafting Change

Celebrating their first anniversary, **Delta Beer Lab** is pioneering what community around social justice advocacy can look like for a local brewery.

**OWNER PIO** (aka Tim Piotrowski) and his team at Delta Beer Lab celebrated their first year in business in February. Even in a crowded beer market in Madison, Delta is carving out a unique niche as it fulfills its mission of “crafting beer, crafting change.”

If you look closely, you’ll find hints of rainbows that reflect the sense of pride of the members of the LGBT community who are among Delta’s owners and workers. They are in the flag that hangs in the brewery and in a pixelated mural on the wall.

In the taproom, inspired by actual laboratories, you’ll see lab counters, tall stools, and hexagons that echo the carbon building blocks in what they brew. The bathroom’s design eschews gender segregation in favor of radically inclusive single stalls, braille signs, and wheelchair accessibility.

After he had successfully built up The Freehouse brewpub in Minneapolis, Pio took a five-month break to “hike the AT” and travel 2200 miles across 14 states. On the trail, he gained more clarity about what Delta Beer Lab would be. His hiking gear hangs in the corner of Delta as a reminder of the power of overcoming obstacles and moving forward toward a goal.

“There’s a lot that happens here that couldn’t be done in other places,” Pio explains. “The no-tipping model of paying our employees a living wage and having revenue sharing is one example. Giving back to the community is a part of everything we do.”

SURPRISES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The biggest lesson learned in the first year of business might be summed up as “go big or go home.”

“Everything we’ve had to do to overcome challenges involved growing quickly,” explained Pio. “If we wanted to see Delta beer on tap at local restaurants, we had to hire someone to specialize in sales to overcome the tendency of restaurants that prefer to work with distributors.

“The more we grow, the more we’ve invested in equipment like building a bigger cooler to keep up with demand. We invested a lot in this space to make it big enough to hold the community events we’d envisioned. We’ve had all the capital pains of a brand new business, but still we keep growing.”

Though Pio did his market research before embarking on building his own brewery, some quirks of the Madison market still surprised him.

“Our location is just south of the beltline and though it’s just 3.9 miles from the state Capitol, it feels far for some folks. It’s also not uncommon for breweries to invite people to bring food in or order delivery. It’s great to see everything from folks ordering Chinese food to groups bringing crockpots, but we’ve had some quiet times after happy hour is over as folks head to restaurants around town.”

They added DIY pizza ovens and Pep’s Drafthaus pizza and were a site for the filming of a Pep’s commercial last year.

COMMUNITY MODEL

Delta Beer Lab’s commitment to giving back to the community is articulated to every guest who learns that staff don’t accept tips, but rather

welcome donations to the Nonprofit Partner of the month.

In its first year, Delta has sponsored LGBTQ sports leagues from softball to hockey and supported roller derby and rugby. Its space is used for yoga and Trinity United Methodist Bible study, Packer and Badger games, and the Women’s World Cup soccer win.

They aren’t afraid of political controversy either. They welcomed Governor Tony Evers on his campaign trail, showed nonpartisan debates, and aired HRC’s LGBTQ Town Hall. Nonprofit partners included Planned Parenthood and Fair Wisconsin’s 501(c)(4) advocacy efforts, and while they got a couple of objections, events in support of partners have been overwhelmingly positive.

“We strive to do good and do well at the same time,” says Pio. “Building community is everything to us.” —**Stacy Harbaugh**

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QTPOC UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MADISON WHITE SUPREMACY

## Transforming Trauma

UW—Madison's inability to decenter whiteness lead to house fellow Chuefeng Yang's removal from the Multicultural Learning Community. We're providing a space here for them to speak out on how the university continues to fail students of color.

**AS A STUDENT OF COLOR** on this campus, I—like so many of my peers—need a place to be unapologetically cultured. From the language I speak, to the food I eat, to my daily habits, the Multicultural Learning Community (MLC) gives me that. I genuinely love and appreciate the MLC, so I try to give back. Whether that is through being a peer mentor, a supporter, or the former House Fellow, I do what I can to make sure the MLC continues to be a place for students of color.

The conflict that unfolded this past semester has appeared in many forms of the media. To clear the air, I do not feel that I discriminated against white students. I simply chose to prioritize the needs and experiences of students of color first. Something only very few places strive to do on campus. As the former house fellow for the MLC, I made it clear that on the MLC, white comfortability was not my priority. That in this space, the community would be discussing many social justice topics, and with social justice work comes the dismantling of white supremacy.

In my work as an advocate, educator, activist, and artist, I strive to decenter whiteness. Prioritizing whiteness and white feelings on this campus, comes at the heartbreaking cost of the safety and well-being of marginalized people—especially people of color. To counteract, I actively put the experiences and truths of marginalized people before that of our white counterparts. This is not to invalidate the experience of white people, but simply hold off on it so for once, a marginalized experience can be heard, remedied, and maybe even shared.

The reason why the conflict grew so much with University Housing though, is that University Housing felt as though I was being discriminatory towards white students. This perception resulted in my removal from the MLC—in order to allow University Housing officials to investigate. My removal inflicted emotional trauma

University officials will wreak havoc amongst marginalized people, turn around and apologize, hold a listening session, and pretend to care. Then in one to two years, it will be as if nothing happened.



on students of the MLC and myself. Angry at a frivolous act of protecting whiteness and white fragility, amongst many other emotions, students of the MLC and other students of color came together and organized a protest and presented demands for the MLC to the Director of Housing.

When I was reinstated, I was told I was put on probation for breaking discrimination policies. To be completely transparent, I had disclosed to my supervisor and the MLC residents that when I was reinstated, I did not want to come back. I was being exploited for all of the work I did, constantly at odds with anti-black and close-minded professional staff, and traumatized.

But I did come back, just for the semester. I came back because I know the patterns of this

university. University officials will wreak havoc amongst marginalized people, turn around and apologize, hold a listening session, and pretend to care. Then in one to two years, it will be as if nothing happened. But the students of color live with the trauma. Day in and day out. They carry those memories; the unpacked emotional baggage that comes with being so deeply wronged and disrespected. I knew that I wanted to come back and help MLC folx start the healing process. Like Tabitha Mpamira-Kaguri said in her TED Talk, “Trauma not transformed is trauma transferred.”

At the end of the semester, I left the MLC because the university had succeeded in exploiting and pushing out yet another person of color. As much as I love the MLC, working with marginalized communities, and advocating and educating on social justice issues, I had to walk away. To preserve myself. The amount of work and love I put into the MLC is one of my proudest commitments. But three years of fighting, giving, and advocating takes a toll on your soul. I couldn't allow myself to keep being exploited for my emotional labor and skills. I couldn't work for a department that keeps proving they prioritize white comfortability over the safety and well-being of their students of color.

The University of Wisconsin—Madison is harmful to all marginalized people. Not just students of color. I need to make that clear. This experience is only one of many harmful ones. It's time for this university to do better. To stop the apologies and start taking action towards reparations. To stop talking about “intent” and start discussing impact. Until then, this university cannot claim diversity. It cannot claim to care for all of its students. Until then, this university, like so many institutions and systems, is a pawn of white supremacy. A means of keeping marginalized people from prosperity and safety. ■

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