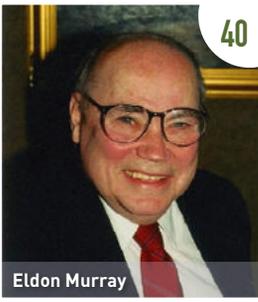


our lives



Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine



Eldon Murray



Dr. Elizabeth Petty



George Schneider

HEALTH & FAMILY

Advocates advancing LGBTQ health equity across our state



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*US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey - Phase 3.2 (July 21, 2021 - October 11, 2021), "Measuring Household Experiences During the Coronavirus Pandemic," August 2021

Being named one of the best places to work for LGBTQ+ Equality by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation for six years running reflects our ongoing commitment to an inclusive culture.



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We're committed to raising awareness of the following organizations that champion the LGBTQ+ community:

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- **One-n-ten**
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- **Center on Halsted**
(www.centeronhalsted.org)
- **Trans Women of Color Collective**
(www.twocc.us)
- **Federation of LGBTQ Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander Organizations**
(www.nqapia.org)

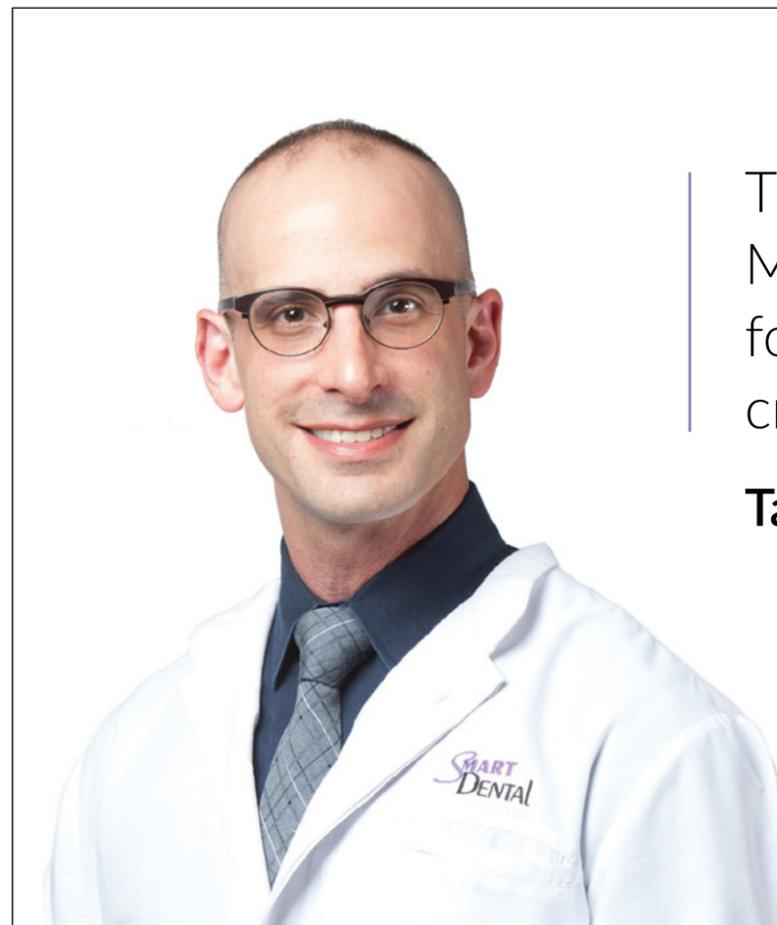
Learn more about how you can get involved by visiting their websites.

For resources on allyship or to learn more about the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index, please visit www.hrc.org.

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- Zach Wahls, activist and son of a same-sex couple

TABLE OF CONTENTS HEALTH & FAMILIES NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2021

DEPARTMENTS

- 5 ADVERTISER DIRECTORY
- 6 PUBLISHER'S LETTER & CONTRIBUTORS
- 7 OUR READERS

FEATURES

- 26 MODERN FAMILY
New LGBTQ parents.
- 36 CHAMPION OF CHANGE
The first National LGBTQ+ Fellowship Program, led by Dr. Elizabeth Petty.

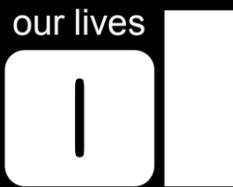
CONNECT

- 9 A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRIDE
Milwaukee Pride, the organization behind PrideFest.
- 15 NEWS BRIEFS
- 16 OUR ORGANIZERS
Janesville Pride.
- 20 OUR ADVOCATES
George Schneider and Milwaukee's This Is It.

IMPROVE

- 40 OUR ELDERS
SAGE-Milwaukee & Eldon Murray.
- 42 OUR PARENTING
The personal, social, and cultural struggles of queer parenting.
- 44 OUR RIGHTS
An update on a case regarding citizenship and immigration rights for children of same-sex parents.
- 46 OUR INTERSECTIONS
DEAR QUEER WHITE PEOPLE: The absence of native folk at Pride events.
- 48 OUR INTERSECTIONS
Working through Intra-Community Conflict.
- 50 OUR TASTE
A Fond Tribute to Manna Café & Bakery.

Cover photo by Melanie Jones



Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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ARTS

p. 10 Forward Theater

ART / ARTISTS / ART SUPPLIES

p. 35 Monroe Street Framing

ATTORNEYS

p. 27 Balisle Family Law
p. 33 DeWitt LLP

AUTOMOBILES

p. 31 MINI of Madison

BANKING / FINANCIAL ADVISING

p. 34 Shannon M. Anderson
Ameriprise Financial
p. 19 Dane County Credit Union
p. 43 Mike Fumelle, Associated Bank
p. 11 Summit Credit Union
p. 51 UW Credit Union

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

p. 46 GSAFE
p. 14 New Harvest Foundation
p. 7 OPEN
p. 12 Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce

COUNSELING / SUPPORT

p. 13 Alexander Einsman, MS MFT
Atlas Counseling

FASHION

p. 44 Ulla Eyewear

FOOD & BEVERAGE

p. 15 Capitol Centre Market
p. 17 Delta Beer Lab
p. 31 The Sow's Ear
p. 19 Willy Street Co-op

FUNERAL SERVICE

p. 41 Ryan Funeral Home & Cremation Services

HEALTH/ WELLNESS

p. 41 Agrace
p. 17 Barefoot Hands
p. 32 Dental Health Associates
p. 44 Forward Fertility, LLC
p. 15 New Health Chiropractic
p. 3 Smart Dental
p. 29 Wisconsin Fertility Institute
p. 39 Wisconsin Well Woman

HIGHER EDUCATION

p. 21 Madison College

INSURANCE

p. 2 American Family Insurance
p. 5 Colleen Frentzel Agency
American Family Insurance
p. 5 David Ryan-Sukup
American Family Insurance
p. 16 Jim Hartman, State Farm
p. 45 Quartz Health Solutions

INTERIOR DESIGN / HOME

p. 35 Bethke Heating & Air Conditioning Inc.
p. 49 Chad's Design Build
p. 21 Kool View
p. 27 MaraLee Olson Design Studio
p. 37 Quigley Decks & Cable Rails
p. 13 Time 2 Remodel

JEWELERS

p. 16 Goodman's Jewelers
p. 39 Jewelers Workshop

MEDIA

p. 47 Towns & Associates, Inc

PAPER SUPPLIES & CARDS

p. 39 Anthology

PETS

p. 25 Angel's Wish
p. 31 Bad Dog Frida
p. 4 Dane County Humane Society
p. 6 EarthWise Pet Supply

PHOTOGRAPHY

p. 49 Dutcher Photography
p. 47 Melanie Renee Photography

REALTY

p. 30 Vivienne Anderson
p. 23 Lauer Realty Group

SPIRITUAL

p. 13 First United Methodist Church
p. 37 Holy Wisdom Monastery

UTILITIES

p. 8 Madison Gas & Electric

WEDDINGS

p. 28 Brandi's Bridal Galleria



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A FAMILY THAT CHOOSES YOU

LAST MONTH I got a phone call that my newly out underage cousin had gone missing. He was found by a bicyclist the next morning in a ditch, suffering from a broken leg and multiple brain hemorrhages. A nearby doorbell camera recorded him being hit by a car and left there overnight. Later that same night someone went into his yard and ripped the



pride flag down off his fence, replacing it with Trump propaganda. With few leads, local authorities are investigating the incidents as possibly related. This was discovered on the anniversary of Matthew Shepard's murder.

A GoFundMe was created on his behalf, and I shared it on my personal Facebook page. To say that both his parents and I have been overwhelmed by the love and

support shown by this community doesn't go far enough. Every time I saw a donation was made by someone I knew here, it reinforced how important our families of choice are, and our need to be there for each other. Rather than wax on about the content in this issue—which merits celebrating for sure—I really want to take a moment to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude for showing up when my birth family needed my chosen family. That brings tears to my eyes even now, putting it into words.

Thank you. ■

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PHILLIP A. LEVY, 78, of Maple Bluff, passed away on Thursday, February 11, 2021 after a difficult struggle with metastatic cancer. He was the first son born to Irving and Dorothy Levy (Barvin) on April 16, 1942 in La Crosse, WI. Phillip graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1964.

Phillip was President of the Phillips Home Specialty Stores located in Madison from 1965 to 1985. He spent 35 years leading the professional design team associated with the Phillip A. Levy Interior Design studio and furniture showroom. In addition to his design studies at the UW-Madison, he continued his education at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. He was a professional member of the International Interior Design Association and served as the Wisconsin Chapter President for three years. He and his team finished the interior of Olin House (Chancellor's residence) in 2008.

Phillip Levy's community involvement included serving on the boards of the Madison Rotary, United Way, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison Opera, Madison Youth Symphony, Civic Center Endowment, the Madison Chamber Orchestra and the Madison Jewish Federation. He was a dog lover and a Director of the Dane County Humane Society. Phillip was a benefactor of the Mayo Clinic and a member of the Bascom Hill Society, Madison Club, Maple Bluff Country Club and Temple Beth El. ■

CONTRIBUTORS



EMILY MCCLUHAN (she/her) is a Madison-based writer, runner, volunteer, and dog-mom. Her contributions to regional publications in Michigan, Montana, and Wisconsin over the last 20 years provide an outlet for her insatiable curiosity and passion for telling the stories that open our eyes and connect to our everyday lives.

LAURA DIERBECK (she/her) is fueled by her passion for people and places. She became the staff photographer at MKE Lifestyle magazine in 2019. There she captures all things lifestyle in the Milwaukee and suburban area. Laura also specializes in outdoor and travel imagery when she's not working as a freelance photo assistant, photo retoucher, and digital technician. She has extensive knowledge of studio lighting, photo software, digital marketing, and what it takes to put together a commercial photo shoot.

DR. MEL FREITAG (she/her) is the Diversity Officer in the School of Nursing at University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Freitag serves as a leader and consultant in curriculum development, programming, strategic planning and engaging in recruitment, retention, and advising initiatives to create equitable and inclusive organizational practices and policies. She advocates for bold and creative diversity, equity, and inclusion models to improve faculty/staff/student recruitment, hiring, orientation, communications, and professional development. She strives to provide evidence-based tools and strategies for organizations, groups, and individuals that are grounded in social justice, health equity, intersectionality, and antiracism. Because of her networks that are both within local, state, and national communities of practice, she continues to develop successful and impactful programs, events, and curricula that are aligned with her commitment to create a dynamic, inclusive, and diverse environment where all can thrive. She spends the rest of her time with her talkative and cat-loving daughter Bennett (Benny), her geriatric but adventurous dog Fred, traveling to exotic places like the Mississippi River with her partner, and procrastinating work by writing, biking, and researching random things online.



EDGERTON, WI

Wendi Kent & Liv von Blomberg

We are Liv and Wendi, AKA Big Punch Farm. We are queer farmers farming on small land in a small town. We are passionate about growing and feeding our neighbors fresh, organic, and affordable veggies and addressing food insecurity where we can. We sell most of what we produce to the general public at average prices which allows us to offer opportunities for our queer and at-risk neighbors to eat healthy on a sliding scale basis. Our dream and goal is to build our farm to a scale that can accommodate a rural event space. We will prioritize hosting gatherings for the queer community and people of color. One of us grew up eating anything fresh from the garden and the other experienced food insecurity, so we each have a different drive for wanting to farm and give back to those in need.

Wendi faces disabilities that make it impossible to hold a typical job, and Liv faces chronic pain issues. We find that our love for one another and farming accommodates us so we can value our health while retaining some financial independence. Bettering the lives of those who matter most to us is what we believe will make us happy and successful. With backgrounds in cooking, activism, art, social services, farming, and customer service, we hope to create spaces and opportunities that will help our marginalized and at-risk communities thrive.

We were lucky enough to find our love just before the pandemic and have spent all of our time devoted to learning, practicing, and saving for our dream and are incredibly grateful to all who have supported us thus far. ■



IMPACT REPORT

IN 2020, WE ACCOMPLISHED

2,600+
COMMUNITY
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our news via email &
social media



11 EVENTS
6 mix & mingles, 3 educational
webinars, 2 virtual fundraisers,
& drag queen bingo!

\$6,600
SUPPORT
provided to community
organizations focused on
social & racial justice



10
ADVOCACY
initiatives & partnerships
in support of our diverse
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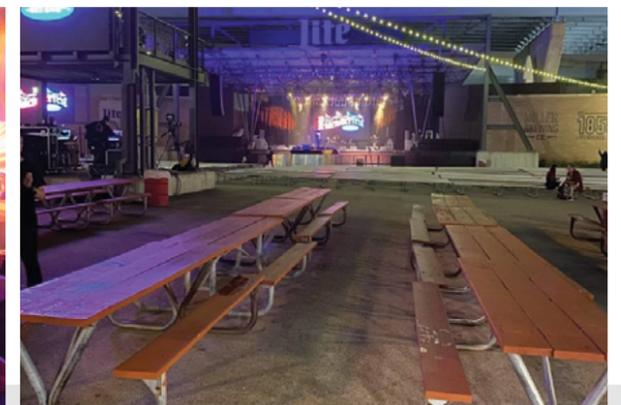


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OUR NEWS

Leading News & Local Stories



A Different Kind of Pride

Amid community concerns about the organization's management, **Milwaukee Pride**, the organization behind PrideFest, throws a scaled-back October event after cancelling last year's festivities outright.

PRIDE | PANDEMIC | NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

FOR TWO UNSEASONABLY MILD EVENINGS in October, the dance pavilion at Henry Maier Festival Park was once again packed with sweaty, happy people celebrating Pride. Bass lines thumped, rainbow flags waved, dancers strutted their stuff, and a community once again came together for much-needed connection.

The event, dubbed Pridetoberfest, marked the long-delayed return of Wisconsin's marquee Pride festival. Normally held in June during LGBTQ Pride month, organizers this year opted to move the festivities back in order to give ample time for more people to get vac-

inated against COVID-19. PrideFest, which normally draws tens of thousands of attendees to Milwaukee's lakefront each summer, was cancelled outright in 2020.

This year's event didn't happen without challenges. Fallout from the pandemic meant supply chain problems, complicated negotiations with performers and their management, and added safety planning and precautions. Wes Shaver, President of Milwaukee Pride (the nonprofit behind PrideFest), says he initially resisted the idea of requiring proof of vaccination for attendees but ultimately decided to implement a mandate.



“I recognize that there are major disparities in terms of who could access the vaccine,” he explains. “But that was for a summertime event. By October, we figured more people had been able to get it if they wanted it. And it was just safer for the community.”

The event was scaled back from its usual four-day run to just Friday and Saturday. Gone were the rows of tents housing local merchants and community organizations, the WomnzSpot Stage, and a chunk of the usual crowd. Instead, the scaled-back celebration focused on DJs, drag performers, and a handful of headliner artists like Big Freedia and GGOOLLD.

While the dance pavilion was mostly filled each night, crowds during the day and at the mainstage were often hit-and-miss. Local artists, like a stellar line-up of drag performers, drew plenty of support, but others fell flat. This was likely reflective of publicity that mostly came late and focused largely on the Milwaukee area, with the line-up of artists released just two weeks prior to the event.

“We were at the mercy of many other organizations and people that held the reins on advancing the announcement dates, approval of marketing materials, etc.,” Shaver says. “Each act had a different protocol for COVID-19; it was our job to navigate the nuances and find executable paths and strategies that met the artists’ and management needs while still being able to operate the festival.”



Tempestt Ballenger, aka DJ Femme Noir, DJing in the dance pavillion.

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marketing materials, etc.,” Shaver says. “Each act had a different protocol for COVID-19; it was our job to navigate the nuances and find executable paths and strategies that met the artists’ and management needs while still being able to operate the festival.”

Another challenge came in the form of supply chain disruptions that have been impacting

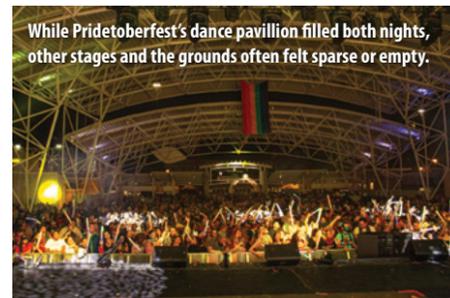
almost every industry across the country and globe. While they were able to find needed products by the event, Shaver says it meant taking matters into their own hands and last-minute hustle.

“We had issues with sourcing beverage supplies like cranberry juice and tonic water, so Luke [Olson, Milwaukee Pride’s Vice President] and I spent two whole days sourcing and purchasing these items so our bars could operate. Our partner and beverage vendor had zero supply due to supply chain issues, so we solved the problem.”

On a positive note, Shaver says, new volunteer recruitment went extremely well. Performers and attendees at the dance pavilion in particular posted glowing reviews and praise on social media after the event.

“This year had lots of challenges in planning and logistics, but it all came together for an amazing 2-day production!” wrote Bryan Hearn, stage manager for the dance pavilion.

Tempestt Ballenger, aka Madison’s DJ Femme Noir, was thrilled with her experience at the event. “PridetoberFest was unlike any other Pride event for me due to having the chance to actually be part of it!” she said. “Having our first major Pride event since the



While Pridetoberfest’s dance pavillion filled both nights, other stages and the grounds often felt sparse or empty.



pandemic was truly needed. Overall I felt like I was returning home after a long trip away.”

Too, despite the smaller size of the event, it represented a chance for the organizers to get back into the swing of things, with an eye on putting on the full PrideFest in summer 2022.

“In regards to the future of PrideFest, it’s never been more promising,” says Shaver. “As a team of people, we continue to get better and produce impressive results every year.”

COMMUNITY CONCERNS CAST A SHADOW

Pandemic aside, and despite its popularity with the general public, PrideFest has faced serious internal challenges over the years and through different leadership. In 2003 the whole thing nearly fell apart when a major bankruptcy scare resulted in community intervention, a major restructuring to address financial and operational mismanagement, and the removal and prosecution of a board member. It was

saved by the community again in 2011 in time for its 25th anniversary.

Problems persisted, however, including inflated revenue numbers and a lack of transparency with board members about budgets and spending. In 2012, George Schneider and other board members worked with an outside group to improve the organization’s structure, eventually transitioning from a 501c4 to a 501c3 non-profit to better reflect the group’s needs.



The festival has grown exponentially in recent years, both in duration and scope. With that has come its own challenges, as well as new concerns about how things are being run behind-the-scenes.

Schneider, owner of the historic LGBTQ bar This Is It!, expressed excitement that the festival was rolling again, but also concerns

Problems persisted, however, including inflated revenue numbers and a lack of transparency with board members about budgets and spending.

over what he sees as a lack of needed transparency or collaboration by the organization behind it.

“We always donate and support PrideFest, no matter what,” Schneider said. “But most non-profits at least publish an annual report. And when I talked about organizing a smaller Pride celebration in Cathedral Square Park earlier this year, Wes [Shaver] contacted me and was really upset about it. In the end, I was too busy to do it so I offered to work with PrideFest to take it on. That never happened.”

Members of various LGBTQ organizations have also questioned why the beer vendors

DANCE PAVILLION PHOTO BY STILLS OF THE NIGHT FOR MILWAUKEE PRIDE.

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by JORDAN HARRISON



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Milwaukee Pride, Inc.'s current Board of Directors



- 1 **Wes Shaver, President**
- 2 **Luke Olson, Vice President**
- 3 **Michael Heller, Secretary**
- 4 **Terrence Rafeet**
- 5 **Jorna Taylor**
- 6 **Vince Tripi**
- 7 **Stephanie Knuteson**
- 8 **Kate Sherry**
- 9 **Mark Gerber**
- 10 **Denise Hausse**

Unable to find it published anywhere, this list of current board members and officers were submitted by Wes Shaver to *Our Lives* upon request.

at Pridetoberfest were not operated by local community groups. That had been an important source of fundraising revenue for a number of smaller organizations, who took home tips from the sales. All alcohol booths are now operated by a private contractor.

There are other complaints, too—that the Milwaukee Pride website has been “coming soon” for over a year, that vendors who applied to be part of the fest didn’t receive timely responses (if any—some reaching out to *Our Lives* for help), and that other, smaller organizations and businesses were able to pull together Pride events earlier in the year while Milwaukee Pride remained mostly silent.

Shaver, who also acts as Milwaukee Pride’s main spokesperson, bristles at the notion that the organization isn’t doing a good job. He touts the creation of the digital health and wellness directory as a proactive response to the limitations of the pandemic. The directory collects listings from LGBTQ-friendly service providers who he says would otherwise be present at the festival itself.



Milwaukee's own winner of RuPaul's Drag Race s12, Jaida Essence hall.

“When I talked about organizing a smaller Pride celebration in Cathedral Square Park earlier this year, Wes [Shaver] contacted me and was really upset about it. In the end, I was too busy to do it so I offered to work with PrideFest to take it on. That never happened,” Schneider says.

PrideFest also lent its name to the “Light Up Hoan” Pride event, organized by Radio Milwaukee, and supported the grassroots-organized March with Pride for Black Lives Matter, both held in June.

Milwaukee Pride also indicated that \$1 from every online ticket sale for Pridetoberfest would be donated to the Milwaukee LGBT Center to help defray the cost of that organization’s recent relocation.

Shaver says that Milwaukee Pride has reinvested more than \$100,000 in the LGBTQ community since 2017, including a yearly grant given to the organizers behind the Milwaukee Pride Parade, which is run independently from PrideFest.

He emphasizes that this year’s event, while scaled back in many ways, used 90% local, Wisconsin-based businesses as vendors and performers. In response to some of the questions raised by community members about the financial management of the festival, Shaver says a professional accounting firm oversees all of the organization’s operations and professional bankers from BMO Harris now help with the event’s cashroom.

“Milwaukee Pride is in terrific shape and our team has never been more aligned and unified,” Shaver says.

The board of directors met in late October to begin planning for the 2022 event. ■

OCTOBER 8 & 9 Milwaukee Pride's PridetoberFest

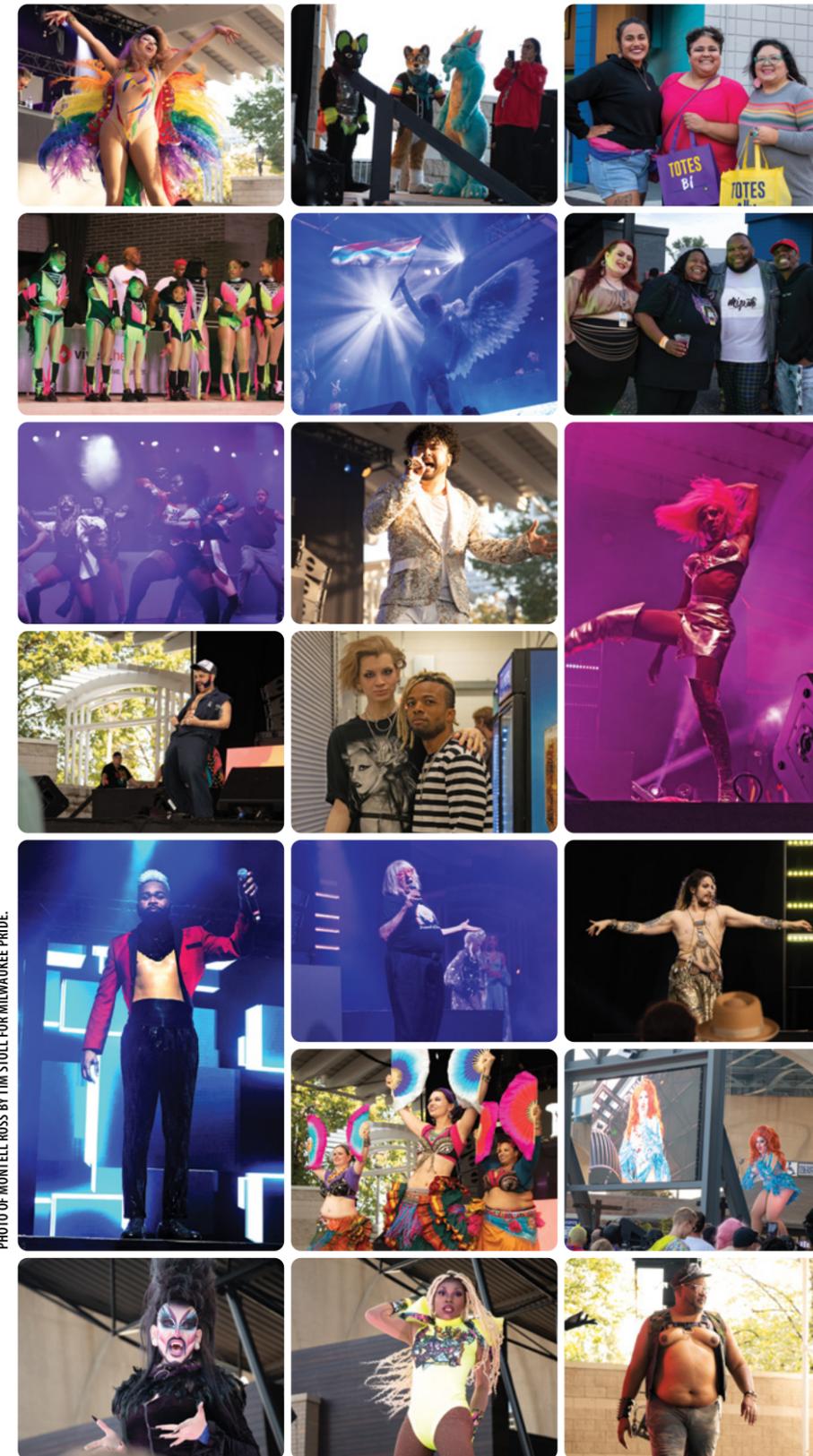


PHOTO OF MONTELL ROSS BY TIM STOLL FOR MILWAUKEE PRIDE.

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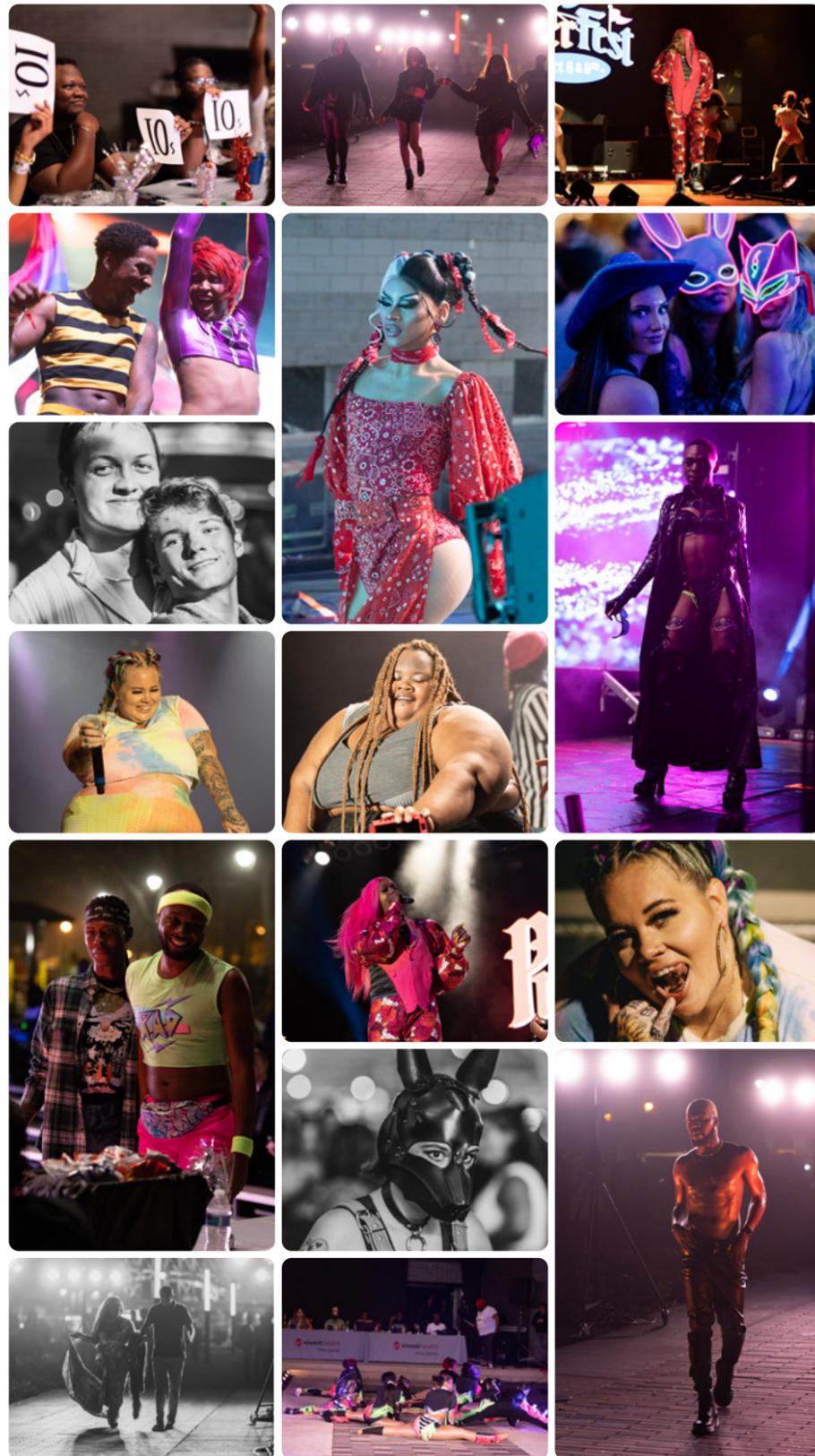


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OCTOBER 8 & 9 Milwaukee Pride's PridetoberFest



NEWS BRIEFS

WRITTEN BY STACY HARBAUGH

REPUBLICAN LEGISLATORS INTRODUCE LEGISLATION REQUIRING SCHOOLS TO NOTIFY PARENTS IN ADVANCE OF "PROVIDING ANY PROGRAM RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY, OR GENDER EXPRESSION"

IN SEPTEMBER, Republican legislators in the Wisconsin State Assembly introduced legislation that would require public and private schools to notify parents in advance of "providing any program related to sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression" to students (AB 562). The legislation is broadly written and would allow parents to opt their children out of any instruction or activity related to gender identity and sexual orientation programs in schools.

Republican legislators introduced the bill on September 15 and scheduled a hearing the next day. Opponents quickly prepared testimony to explain why the bill would harm LGBTQ+ students, rather than protect parents' rights as legislators stated it would.

At times during the testimonies of both legislators and those who registered, speakers compared instruction on sexuality and gender identity to religious beliefs. **Dana Pellebon**, Co-Executive Director of the Dane County Rape Crisis Center, shared her personal experiences in exploring gender and sexuality. She compared parents who would opt their children out of LGBTQ+ related topics to parents who would pull their kids out of civil rights education on Martin Luther King Jr.'s history if they didn't believe in racial equality.

Another opponent of the bill was GSAFE Co-Director **Brian Juchems**. Juchems pointed out that Wisconsin was the first state to prohibit discrimination against students based on sexual orientation, and that a strong majority of Wisconsin's school districts prohibit bullying and discrimination based on gender identity.

"Proactive education and training to help students understand the diversity of their classmates more fully helps school districts meet those legal obligations while working to create a safer, more supportive learning environment for all students," he said in his testimony.

Throughout the hearing, Republican legislators made arguments for parental rights in the realm of explicit discussions of sex in schools. Members of the committee discussed hypothetical examples of school programs. Representative **Gary Hebl** (D - Sun Prairie) asked if parents would need to be notified if U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin would be discussed in a classroom or invited to be a speaker.

Representative **Chuck Wichgers** (R - Muskego) noted that parents would need to be notified if Sen. Baldwin would talk about "her sex in the bedroom" when discussing her personal life.

Representative **Sondy Pope** (D - Mt. Horeb) asked if parents would have to be notified if teachers included a mention of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors who was assassinated in 1978. Rep. Pope noted that the U.S. Postal Service has a commemorative stamp featuring Milk. Representative **Donna Rozar** (R - Marshfield) commented, "Is that a real person? Are you just throwing that out?" Opponents to the bill audibly gasped in response.

The legislation is entirely sponsored by Republican legislators. Openly gay Republican, Rep. **Todd Novak**, attended the committee's hearing to speak on another bill, but conveniently left before testimonies on AB 562 began.

State Senator **Andre Jacque** introduced a companion bill to AB 562 on the eve of National Coming Out Day. Sen. Jacque is recovering from a COVID-19 infection and was hospitalized and on a ventilator for several weeks before being discharged to a rehabilitation facility. ■

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ORGANIZATIONS PRIDE STARTUP

Janesville Pride

As a new 501c3, **Janesville Pride** is hoping to support the LGBTQ+ community of the greater Rock County area.



WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT IS YOUR RELATION TO JANESVILLE PRIDE?

I'M DENA SPEIR, and I am the Team Lead for our Organization Operations team, as well as one of the directors of Janesville Pride. More importantly than my title in the organization, I am a citizen of queer community in Janesville, and I believe in the need for advocacy for our LGBTQIA+ and allies in our area.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF JANESVILLE PRIDE?

On June 6, Ali Larson, asked a simple question in a Janesville Community Page Facebook

group: "Any pride events in Janesville this month?" A handful of responses came back with "No, we wish there was," and one very important one came: "Sometimes if you want something, you have to do it yourself."

Later that evening Ali created a Facebook Group called Janesville Pride, called in friends to help build the group and invite anyone they knew who was LGBTQIA+ or ally, and asked everyone to invite all they could who would be interested in having Pride come to our town. I joined that evening and just like others would do, I messaged this new person in my life and asked, "How can I help make this happen?"

A few days later we had hundreds of members from our community and some from surrounding areas supporting this new dream. A week later, we were more than 1,000 members strong, and still growing. A core team of people came together almost immediately and started building the event concept, led by Ali.

It became apparent that what we were forming was not just a team to run an event, but a group to serve a larger purpose. With a few late nights brainstorming and some paperwork, we became Janesville Pride, a non-profit organization of Rock County, Wisconsin.

WHAT PLANNING THAT WENT INTO THE 2021 EVENT?

Being a brand-new group, we had no dedicated financial support yet, no established social media. Why did we want this event? When? Where? How do we pay for it? How do we plan it, who can take charge of areas so we are all working cohesively? We literally hit the ground running with setting up evening meetings with the volunteers who all came running in with "How can I help, this is my skill set," and we quickly jumped in. None of us had set up or planned such a large undertaking before, so we learned together. We learned as we went how much we'd need and who to lean on for different needs.

Right away, it became obvious we would want to partner with an established non-profit in our area for this to succeed. Being June, we knew we could not host a Pride event during pride month. We selected a date important to us (Oct 9) which was two days away from National Coming Out Day. The sad statistics show the acceptance rate of kids who come out to their families are not only unsupported afterward, but they lose their homes. With this in mind, a beautiful partnership blossomed with Project 16:49, the non-profit organization serving Rock County's unaccompanied homeless teens.

This was followed by connections with so many of the other non-profit organizations in our county like BASE, Rock County LGBTQ+ Committee, JM4C, and so many more. We reached out to local businesses who are LGBTQ+ allies for support. We reached out to bands and entertainers, vendors, food trucks, and with hundreds of hours put in from our staff team, late evenings, phone calls—literal sweat and tears—our dream became a reality.

WHAT'S THE LONG-TERM VISION?

We started out as a planning committee for a pride event, but we are so excited to show we are here to do so much more than throw a party and be a one-and-done team. As of a few months ago, we applied for 501c3 status in Wisconsin so we can dive even deeper into helping our community. Our mission at Janesville Pride is to provide a foundation of support to the LGBTQIA+ community and their allies of Janesville and the greater Rock County area through advocacy, education, and support services to build and maintain a more affirming, equitable, and empowering community.

We are bringing together counselors, homelessness resources, youth outreach, queer youth abandonment resources, queer-affirming religious organizations, and so much more.

We are here to help inspire our city and empower our community to spark change.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO BECOME PART OF JANESVILLE PRIDE?

Because change needs to happen. Because every human deserves a shot at a happy and healthy life, to be accepted for who they are, even when it is against society's norms and standards. Because everyone loves differently, and there is no shame in that. Because no one should lose their home, their ability to succeed, or their life for who they truly are.

I learned when I moved here that historically Janesville and our community had been known only to be conservative, and sadly even as a historic KKK area. I am proud to stand here to help lead and show that Janesville is a safe, welcoming community—to ALL. ■

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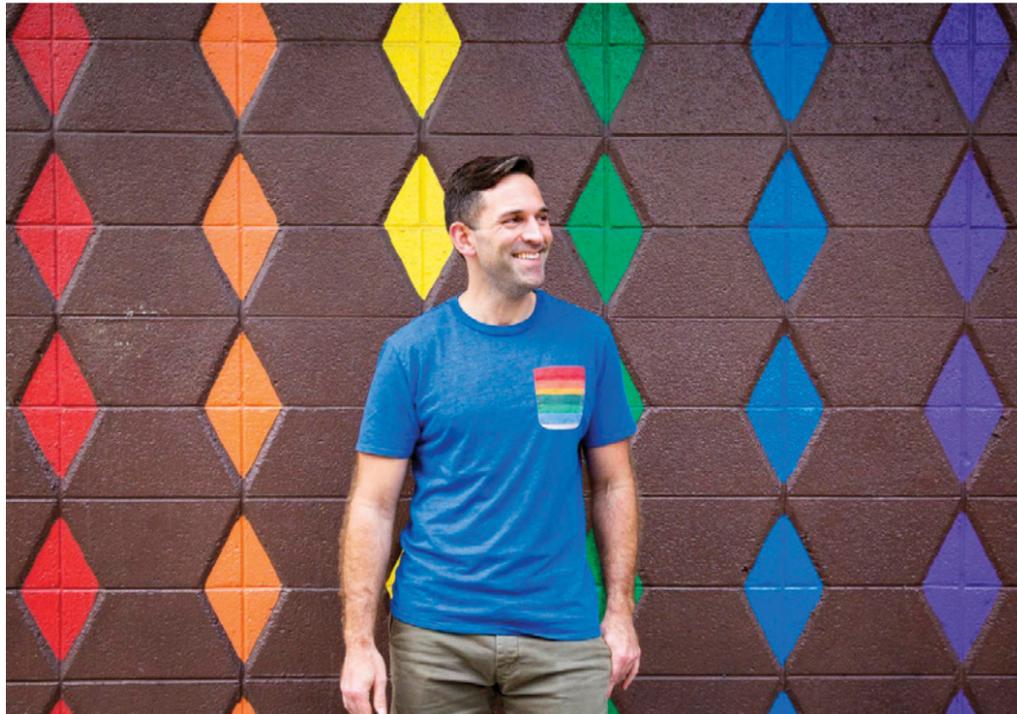


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GAY BARS NIGHTLIFE & ENTERTAINMENT LGBTQ HISTORY

Stewarding a Legacy

When **George Schneider** purchased Milwaukee's **This Is It** in 2016, with it came more than five decades of history as Wisconsin's oldest gay bar. As he honors the bar's past, he's laying a foundation for its bright future and chosen families. **Michail Takach** shares the history of this historic gathering place and the man who continues to carry forward the vision of a welcoming space that began in 1968.

LIKE MANY LITTLE GIRLS, Sarah and Jessica loved to go shopping with their grandmother. They have warm memories of their trips to Mayfair, where they'd eat lunch at the department stores, and Grand Avenue, where they'd visit the lady who played the grand piano. Grandma always dressed like a celebrity: fur coats, leather pants, and always a splash of Opium perfume.

"My grandmother had really good taste," said Jessica. "We spent a lot of time at local restaurants like Watts Tea House, Karl Ratzsch's, and Mader's. We always had a lot of fun!"

At the time, the sisters didn't realize their grandmother, June Brehm, really was a celebrity. She was the owner of This Is It, one of the city's most popular and longest-running gay bars; a well-known businesswoman and community leader; and, to her customers and friends, an unstoppable "force of nature" who always got what she wanted, or else.

"My grandma always said she was the Gay Queen!" said Sarah.

ESTABLISHED IN 1968

"These places, they would take me, I just couldn't even believe them," Catherine "June" Brehm said of her gay friends and the bars they frequented during an interview in October, 2008. "First, you had to find the damn place, which was never easy. Then, if they even let you

in, you have to pay to get in. And for what? Rooms so dark you couldn't see a single face. If you were lucky, there was a tiny little record player playing scratched records. And they were filthy. The toilets never flushed. The drinks were always watered down. And there was never any ice!"

By the late 1960s, Milwaukee already had nearly three dozen gay bars. While there were many places to go, almost all of the bars were owned by straight people capitalizing on a community who wouldn't complain about the quality of the experience. (Only Your Place, opened by Jim Dorn and lover Jerry Stinson at 813 S. 1st Street in May 1965, really catered to their gay clientele.)

"I decided I was going to find these guys somewhere better to go, even if I had to open the place myself," said June. "And that's exactly how it happened. We looked at a bunch of places, and at the end of the day, we got here. I said, This Is It, we're not going anywhere else.' And we opened a new kind of bar."

This Is It opened in August 1968—nearly a year before the Stonewall Riots—at a time when, technically, serving alcohol to known homosexuals was illegal. Old-school laws banned gay men from congregating at any place of business, and business owners

could lose their licenses for allowing them to do so. If anyone actually looked at the law books, they'd see a law that forbade two men (who did not know each other) from sitting on bar stools next to each other, and another one that allowed for their arrest if they turned to face each other while seated.

Ten years earlier, the Pink Glove (631 N. Broadway) was shut down for ignoring the laws. As a woman navigating a business dominated by men, June already had a rough road ahead of her. Now, she was opening a gay bar. Wasn't she worried about public scorn or scrutiny?

"You know, I never really thought about it," said June in 2008. "Everyone was so busy telling me I was crazy for wanting to run my own business. You're a mother with two children, can't you just be happy with what you have? You're a woman, what do you want with a bar? These questions didn't make any sense to me. They called me stubborn, silly, stupid—on and on! I just couldn't let people fill my head with nonsense. I do remember one person, a gay friend, saying June, you're going to get yourself in trouble, and for what? And I said, because I know it needs to be done, and if that gets me in trouble, then so be it."

June, who already had a successful restaurant in Butler, envisioned This Is It as a "friendly bar and grill." Her business partner, Michael Latona, was onboard with the plan. But when tensions arose between the

luncheon crowd and the cocktail crowd, June started losing her gay business. Closeted customers weren't interested in mingling with a straight crowd, especially co-workers who might "out" them to their employer.

June made a historic decision: rather than losing her loyal customers and friends, she would rather lose money and shut down the luncheon operation. Latona, concerned about lost income and even more concerned about earning a "gay bar" reputation, challenged her decision.

"So I pulled out two \$20 bills and asked him, you tell me which \$20 is gay and which \$20 is straight," said June in 2008. "He looked totally confused and just kept getting redder and redder in the face. I don't know if he was going to have a stroke or what! I just laughed and said, 'Until you can tell me what the difference is, I'll serve whoever I want to serve, and you can shut the hell up!'"

Latona exited the business in June 1970, and June became sole owner of This Is It going forward.

Urban renewal, freeway construction, and gay liberation transformed the local community, as Walker's Point became the epicenter of gay life in Milwaukee. The long-running Seaway Inn (744 N. Jefferson), a companion bar to This Is It, was demolished in 1971.

But This Is It continued to thrive, because, as Joe Brehm said in 2008, "My mother took care of her people. Regular customers knew they would be taken care of. When someone was sick, she'd call them up and check in on them. When someone lost their job or broke up with their boyfriend, she'd invite them in for a drink on the house. She was really

"I decided I was going to find these guys somewhere better to go, even if I had to open the place myself," said June. "And that's exactly how it happened. We looked at a bunch of places, and at the end of the day, we got here. I said, This Is it."



June behind the bar serving up drinks, circa 1970.

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in tune with what people were feeling, all the time.”

“She wasn’t just a shoulder to cry on, she would be straight with them. If someone bounced a check, they would avoid coming in, because nobody wanted to be scolded by June in front of everybody. So, after a while, she would call people at home and scold them in private. And what do you know, as soon as that check got repaid, all was forgiven, and they were back in good graces. When it came to ‘her boys,’ she held no grudges.”

“Some of these guys, they’d been disowned by their families, so they had nobody to call when things got rough. They always knew they could call June.”

ENTER JOE BREHM

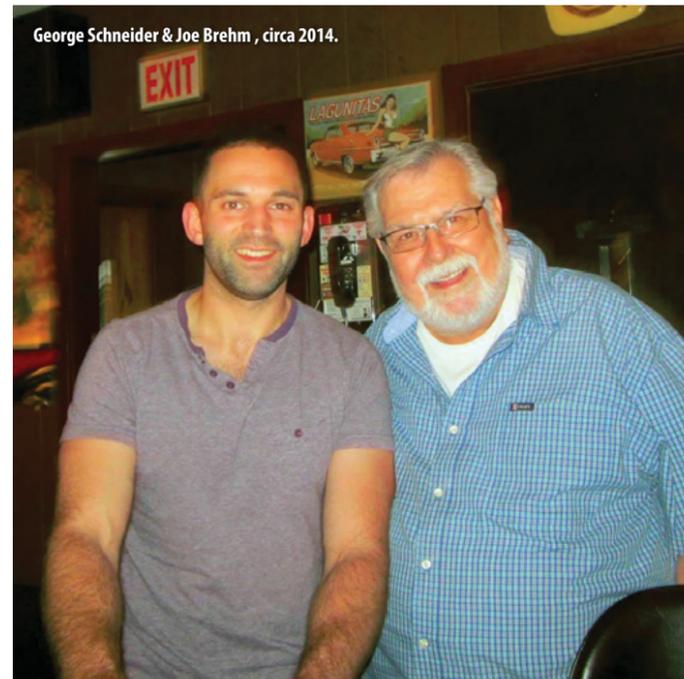
Karen Brehm married June’s son Joe in 1968, shortly after June opened the bar. Her parents also ran a tavern business, but she never expected she nor Joe would become involved in either of their parents’ bars. They were living out of state at the time, with no real plans to return to Wisconsin.

And then, one night in 1981, June called.

She needed help. Her bar manager was leaving—either to retire, move out West, or both, depending on who you ask—and it was too much for her to manage alone. So, Joe returned to Wisconsin, ultimately becoming part-owner after June suffered a stroke later that year. (Joe’s father, Joseph T. Brehm Sr., passed away in 1984). This Is It was now a family business.

“Forty years ago, it was a different time and place,” said Karen, who

“He said, ‘Why don’t you come to lunch with me and let’s talk,’” said George. “He said, ‘I have a proposal for you. How would you like to step into the business as a partner? I’ve had a lot of people express interest in managing, buying, and taking over the bar, but you’re the only I’ve ever had here that I’d entrust it to.’”



George Schneider & Joe Brehm, circa 2014.

became a substitute teacher in the Franklin school system. “Sure, you could talk about running a bar, but you didn’t mention it was a gay bar.”

As Joe took on more and more responsibilities, his daughters were invited behind the scenes. Sarah tagged along on trips to the Third Ward to buy lemons and limes, or on trips to Fein Brothers for bar supplies. Her dad would make them Shirley Temples and set up the jukebox so they could play songs. Later, they learned how to use the soda gun themselves, and were always sure to add generous amounts of grenadine. Sometimes, customers would introduce themselves, including a man who opened his wallet and showed them a picture of his pet tiger.

Later, Sarah and Jessica would spend extra time with her father and grandmother at the bar, doing registers, washing glasses, running errands.

“My best memories are going to Radio Doctors (later Rose Records) with my father to shop for new releases,” said Sarah. “He would bring the old records home, and we would play them on the record player and jump on the bed. It’s probably why, to this day, I’m still obsessed with learning about new musicians and finding new music.”

She remembers being surprised by how many people knew her father and grandmother on a first-name basis. They seemed to know everybody in Milwaukee.

“When people needed help, Joe always did the best he could,” said Karen. “He was always there to hear them out and help them find the help they needed. He helped out so many people over the years, and never asked for anything in return. I remember all the thank-you letters he used to receive, but I don’t know anything more specific. Joe was always very careful to protect his customers’ privacy.”

This Is It was always open on holidays to welcome those whose families didn’t welcome them—complete with complimentary, home-cooked meals.

AIDS COMES TO WISCONSIN

Shortly after the Brehms returned to Milwaukee, an unwelcome visitor made itself known in the state. In 1982, the first AIDS case in Wisconsin was reported.

“The community was just devastated,” said Karen. “Family friends, people Joe and June had known for years, people they really deeply cared about, were getting sick and dying so fast there wasn’t even the chance to say goodbye. Joe kept things pretty close to his chest, but I know he was hurting. The whole family of friends was hurting.”

“By the early 1990s, my father was going to a lot of funerals,” said Jessica. “Before I even understood that the bar was a gay bar, my father explained that some people weren’t accepted by their families for who they were. He wanted This Is It to be a fun place where everyone could go for a nice time.”

“When I was younger, my father always conveyed the importance of accepting others, based on the experiences of his customers,” said Sarah. “He never used any customers’ names, but he shared many examples of why this was so important.”

By the 1990s, This Is It had become less of a hot spot and more of a cocktail lounge frozen in time. With minimal remodeling since 1968, the quieter, calmer space (and its aesthetics) appealed to refined, older gentlemen seeking the same, outside of the wilder Jazz in the Park or Bastille Days nights that brought in tourist crowds. Even in the 1990s, most customers still used the back door as the main entrance, as they still weren’t comfortable being seen in a gay bar.

“My father worked very hard to keep the bar open,” said Jessica. “There were a few times money was tight, and he almost didn’t make it. I’m proud of how hard my dad worked to keep it going.”

WISCONSIN LGBT HISTORY PROJECT.

CHANGING TIMES

This Is It celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2008. The bar enjoyed a rebirth of cocktail culture, powered by Mad Men, and a massive surge in millennial popularity. No longer known as “The Wrinkle Room,” This Is It appealed to a new generation who loved its dark woods, stained glass pendants, red carpeted walls, and black leather banquette booths. A new generation of bartenders began to curate a jukebox powered by personalized mix CDs. However, the collection still served up everything from Sinatra to Streisand to Sarah McLachlan to Scissor Sisters.

“So I pulled out two \$20 bills and asked him, you tell me which \$20 is gay and which \$20 is straight,” said June in 2008. “He looked totally confused and just kept getting redder and redder in the face. I said, ‘Until you can tell me what the difference is, I’ll serve whoever I want to serve, and you can shut the hell up!’”

After four decades, June was still coming into the bar every morning to oversee the business functions and bar cleaning. She admitted she was slowing down, but she liked being part of the daily business, even if she was in and out of the bar long before it opened for the day.

June passed away on January 3, 2010 at the age of 92. Although she always threatened to write a book about her customers and their crazy lives, no known book was ever started.

Joe took full ownership of the bar but knew even he couldn’t manage it alone. In fall 2010, he reached out to regular customer George Schneider to fill a shift.

“I still remember the day Joe said, ‘Want to make some extra money tending bar?’” said George. “It was November 5, 2010, and I had just left my job opening The Iron Horse. He needed help for Monday happy hours, and I said sure.”

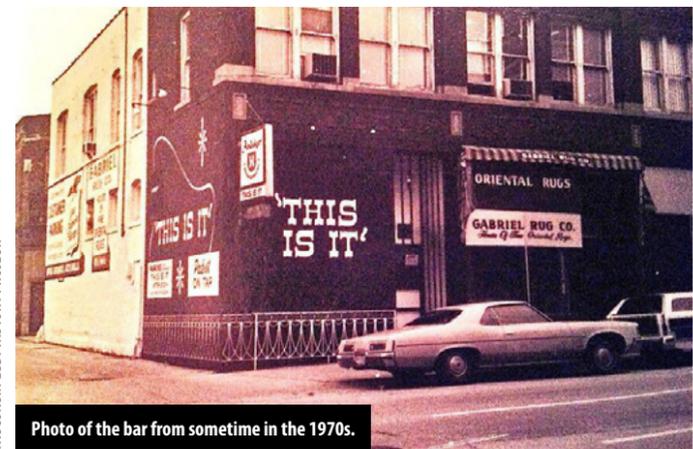
Mondays quickly turned into two-to-three days a week. Before George knew it, Joe was talking to him about a management position.

“He knew what I was capable of,” said George, “and he asked me to consider this while I found my way. At the time, I really wanted to get back into hotel and hospitality management.”

When George notified Joe that he’d accepted a management job in Dallas, Texas, Joe intercepted those plans with a special request.

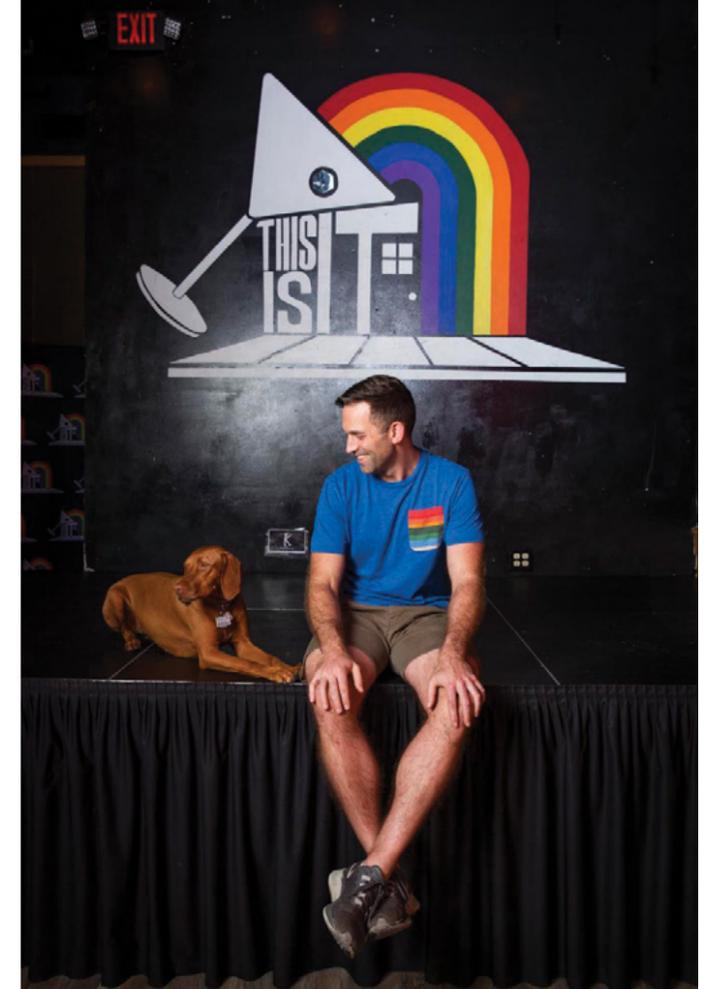
“He said, ‘Why don’t you come to lunch with me and let’s talk,’” said George. “When we sat down, he said, ‘I have a proposal for you. How would you like to step into the business as a partner? I’ve had a lot of people express interest in managing, buying, and taking over the bar, but you’re the only I’ve ever had here that I’d entrust it to.’”

“My initial thought was, ‘This is a family business,’ and I didn’t want to take this away from his children. Joe said, ‘No, they have careers of



WISCONSIN LGBT HISTORY PROJECT.

Photo of the bar from sometime in the 1970s.



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Trixie Mattel at This Is It in May.

their own, and they are not interested in becoming bar owners.' He'd really thought through this for a long time. He reviewed the serious offers he'd received, and he wasn't comfortable with any of them. He'd seen so many bars come and go over the years, and he knew what made a bar survive. He wanted someone who would run This Is It with respect for its history and commitment to its priority. He wanted someone who would give it 100%, not treat the bar as an afterthought."

"My father was not interested in having my sister or me work at the bar," said Jessica. "He wanted someone that loved going to the bar to take over and continue the bar as long as they could. He wanted someone who would love it and have fun at work."

"Most of all, he wanted someone who would carry June's vision forward another 50 years," said George. "I couldn't believe the opportunity I was presented with. Joe needed someone of my experience and a next generation to step up and take ownership of the business, and we got along so well!"

THE NEXT 50 YEARS

As people learned about the new partnership, some long-time customers expressed concerns.

"People thought we were going to change everything," said George. "Some changes did need to be made, but we made those changes slowly and evenly so it wouldn't be too much at once. Larger changes were done thoughtfully and carefully, so we could preserve the overall look and feel of the bar in the process."

The black leather booths, a longtime favorite, limited capacity as the bar was getting busier, so they were replaced with high tables. The bar switched out the curated jukebox for an internet jukebox powered by mobile apps. The colorful carpeting, which required ongoing daily main-

"As much as Trixie loves our bar and community, she is a very astute businesswoman. She would never have signed up to save a failing business. This wasn't a bar rescue," he said.

tenance, was finally retired this summer. Next, George wants to remodel the bar's bathrooms, which were built in another time—for another time.

On April 3, 2016, Joe Brehm passed away after a long battle with ALS. After six years, George suddenly found himself the keeper of a family legacy. He wants to be clear, though, that this was no inheritance.

"I did not inherit the bar from Joe," said George. "I bought it outright in a business arrangement that I am still making payments on. There has been some confusion about this."

This Is It celebrated its 50th anniversary in August, 2018 with an exciting announcement. Neighboring restaurant space had become available, and This Is It would be expanding with a cabaret space that would greatly increase their capabilities and capacities. The expansion opened in January, 2019 with 18+ dance events, performance space, and a permanent exhibit from the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project.

The pandemic presented universal challenges for all businesses, but LGBTQ businesses nationwide were hit hard. This Is It reopened as soon as it was safe to do so, carefully enforced COVID-19 protocols, managed fundraisers to cover operating costs, and offered a colorful schedule of virtual drag events, including a virtual Pride Weekend in 2020 when PrideFest Milwaukee was cancelled. Eventually, in-person performances and dancing returned.

In February 2021, This Is It announced that Brian Firkus (aka Trixie Mattel) had made an ownership investment in the bar.

ARIEL KASSULKE FOR THIS IS IT.

"Some seemed to think Trixie came in with a bag of money and saved us from COVID. That's not what happened," said George. "Truth be told, the community saved us from COVID. They supported us with all their heart. They showed up full force even with all the restrictions. This Is It left the pandemic in a healthy financial situation.

"As much as Trixie loves our bar and community, she is a very astute businesswoman. She would never have signed up to save a failing business. This wasn't a bar rescue," he said. "Trixie's homecoming has been a good thing for the This Is It family. When she's in town, she is accessible and conversational with bar customers. She's not in a roped-off VIP section or too good to speak to her fans. I think it's inspiring for all of us, to know that someone at that level of stardom has not forsaken her roots or her fans. She's really opened up some new opportunities for us!"

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

George is thankful for the long-running regular customers who have become part of the family. "There are so many. Scott 'Marcia' Munoz. Mark 'Rose' Maurer. Dale 'Dahlia' Servais. 'Professor Mark' Srite. Barb Larkin. Marvin Zingler. Dean Diplaris. Scottie. Tracey, who was once a famous bartender herself, at the Mint Bar. The list goes on and on.

"I know something personal about each of these people. We've spent significant time together inside and outside the bar. But it all started in the family room of This Is It. That's where it all begins. You're not just an order taker, [and the customers] are not just a source of income. Our connection goes way beyond that."

Maintaining the family feel of the bar is really important to George.

"Every time I interview a new staff member, I talk about this," said George. "We are responsible for upholding a tradition. June wanted a place where people would be accepted as they are. She was very outgoing and took good care of people. Joe continued that: he could remember names, and favorite drinks, and something personal about everyone who walked into the bar. Even if you were there once every six months or once every six years, he remembered you. He instilled that in the staff who joined later, including myself. It's not about making the drinks, it's about treating people with kindness and respect, and always inviting them back. I do my best to keep that tradition going."

"I'm so happy for Joseph," said Karen Brehm. "He put so much of himself into that bar. He was so happy to find someone to manage the bar as well as he could do himself. George is doing fantastic. I am just so proud of his work. He's done a marvelous job. Joseph couldn't have found anyone better."

"My dad always made it clear to me that he wanted someone within the LGBTQ community to take over the bar," said Sarah. "I love hearing from people about the positive impact that my grandma, dad, George, and This Is It had and continues to have for the LGBTQ community. Surviving the pandemic is demonstrative of strong community love and support, combined with the business's ability to adapt and overcome unprecedented circumstances."

"I love all of the great ideas that George has come up with to modernize the bar," said Jessica. "I'm grateful the bar continues to flourish."

With due respect to the past, George is also embracing the future. "We are wrapping our arms around the next generation," said George. "That is really our drive, our mission, and our purpose."

"It's easy to say we're witnessing the death of the gay bar, but I have to tell you they're needed more now than ever," said George. "At the end of our 18+ nights, I see young people making connections they would not have made otherwise. I see them thriving in a safe space and finding their people. My last thought at the end of those nights is that we did good. We're not force-feeding a bar environment, we're fostering a sense of belonging."

George also sees a more inclusive and diverse future for This Is It,

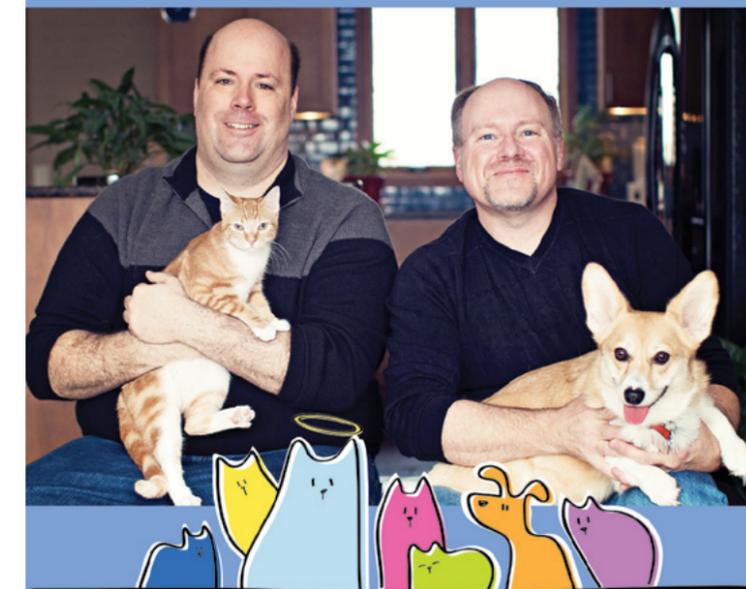


one that challenges the white-washed reputation that challenges most of Milwaukee's gay bars.

"I can't change who I am, but I can change how we welcome our community, the opportunities we create, and who we invite and celebrate as our family," said George. "We've had our problems in the past, but so has the entire gay bar scene. The future is breaking down the barriers and moving forward together in a way that embraces all people. This isn't virtue signaling, it's evolution. Bars need to reflect our entire community because that community is our family."

"Emerging generations want more face-to-face contact, versus the 'picture-perfect' world of social media existence," said George. "The pandemic really taught everyone how much they value human contact. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to create a world that we're all in together, where we can call each other family and mean it." ■

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Modern Family

Today's LGBTQ couples face fewer barriers and far more options to adding a child to their family than previous generations. But challenges persist, as we learn from the six Wisconsin families featured here.

SURROGACY | SPERM DONORS | FOSTER | HEALTH CARE | LAW

UNLIKE PREVIOUS GENERATIONS of LGBTQ couples—many of whom were formed after failed straight relationships produced a child or two—today's queer couples often start their parenting journeys together. With advancements in social acceptance and medical and scientific breakthroughs, there are more options becoming available.

For many couples, the starting point to adding a child to their family can be a mix of creativity, some science, a heap of financial planning, and a lot of honest communication with each other. What if they aren't approved to foster, or can't afford to go the surrogacy route, or their transition process complicates carrying a baby? How does a relationship endure through the toll of these impacts? We talked to six Wisconsin families that got creative, faced barriers, leaned into their love for each other, and ultimately found the joy of bringing a child into their lives.



DOUG & CHELSEA ROWE
Madison

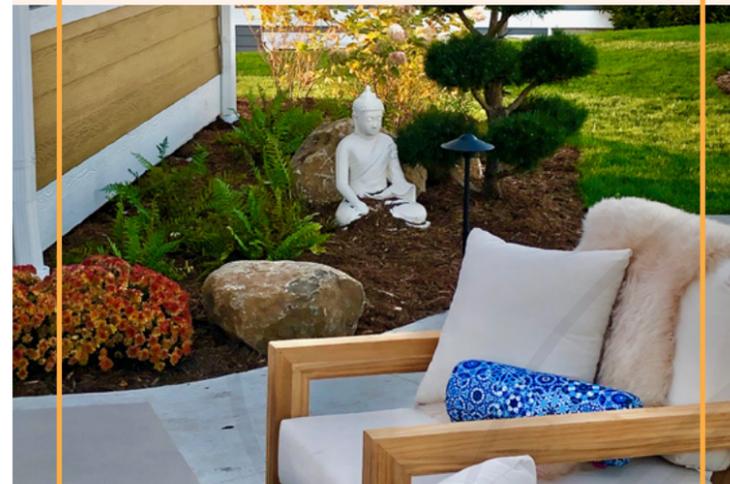
DOUG & CHELSEA ROWE PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAMANTHA WALDRON.

IT WASN'T LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT when Doug and Chelsea Rowe met in a corn maze in 2009. It took over a year of running into each other through mutual friends—and Doug constantly forgetting Chelsea's name—before they clicked in 2011. When they did, it was for good.

"I never thought that I would seek to have children, but I pretty much always dated women, and most of the women I dated were interested in children," says Doug, who is gender queer and uses they/them pronouns. "I figured, if that's what is going to add fulfillment and happiness to the life of the person that I'm with, then we're going to have a family."

And that's where Chelsea fit. She says having kids was a prerequisite for her, so the couple talked through options and started planning. They knew they wanted to go the sperm donor route, that to find a donor that

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they knew, and they wanted to avoid sperm banks and clinics. They casually talked to a couple of male friends in Madison about being donors, but nothing panned out. Then, having dinner with a friend from New York City who was visiting his family in Madison, the topic came up. Before Chelsea and Doug could even ask, their friend offered to be a donor.

“We feel so lucky that we had a friend willing to be a sperm donor and a person excited to carry a baby,” says Doug. “So many queer couples don’t have access to one, let alone two uteruses, or their dysphoria won’t allow them to carry comfortably.”

The first step was to meet with the Family Law Center and draw up a sperm donor agreement, to confirm termination of parental rights for their friend, but also to protect their family when they travel or in case they move to a different state. It was also to protect their friend.

“I’ve heard horror stories of the state going after sperm donors for support when a mother files for assistance,” says Doug. “Our friend is doing this great service, but he doesn’t intend to be a parent or to be providing financial support.”

Since they were doing at-home insemination, the three planned out a schedule of alternating trips to New York City and Madison. Then the pandemic hit, and their friend was laid off. He ended up moving in with the Rowses for the summer and returned to New York in August.

A couple of weeks later, when Doug’s top surgery was postponed, they and Chelsea planned a getaway to Colorado.

“I kind of knew before we left for Colorado that Chelsea was pregnant,” says Doug, and they were right. Chelsea found out she was pregnant a couple of weeks later.

Now, as baby Charlie chatters away in the background, they both are thankful that their close-knit family includes their sperm donor’s parents, an extra set of grandparents to spoil them.

“Right now we’re using gender neutral pronouns until they’re old

enough to express a gender identity,” says Chelsea. She and Doug clarify that they’re not raising their baby as non-binary; that’s just another assignment. They’re parenting in a way that avoids putting expectations on their child that will limit their expression and joy. And even Doug, who never intended to be a parent, relishes in that joy.



BRI & MEGAN DEYO

Madison

BRI DEYO REALIZED THEY were gay as a teenager and thought that marriage and kids weren’t in their future. Even when they met Megan in 2015 and marriage was legal, Bri says it wasn’t something they wanted to do. Megan was on the other side of the coin.

“When I was younger and I learned that my body was capable, potentially, of producing a baby, I knew I wanted to do that,” says Megan. “And then when I realized I was more attracted to women, I wasn’t sure how it would work, but it still seemed possible. I also knew I wanted a partner to do it with.”

Bri says the topic of marriage came up when the couple started considering having a baby.

“We didn’t need to get married, but the legal protection seemed so much safer,” Bri says.

“It still seems like it’s something that can be taken away,” Megan adds.

They got married in 2018 and decided to explore intrauterine insemination (IUI). Bri, a research scientist, knew they needed a plan since so much of the process would be out of their control.

“We knew all of the other options...adoption agencies, fostering to adopt. But I wanted to give my body a shot first,” Bri says.

The two talked with a couple of male friends about being sperm donors and realized that it would add unnecessary weight to their friendship, so they entered the world of sperm banks. What swayed them was knowing that an anonymous sperm donor (which they chose over a known sperm donor) can’t come for parental rights after the baby is born.

“The idea of a sperm donor is so nuts,” says Bri. “When you think about it, we learned more about these men than most people know about their partners before they have sex the first time...their medical history, what they looked like as a child, mental health history. And those things are never really determining factors for getting pregnant.”

The couple says they were lucky to get money from Megan’s parents for the sperm (which they paid \$700/milliliter for plus shipping and storage costs), and Megan’s insurance covered the hormone treatments and IUI procedures, up to \$2000.

In 2019, Bri went through six rounds of IUI, the hormones taking a toll on their body and none of the rounds resulting in pregnancy.

“When I realized I was gay, I knew that I was never going to have a kid that was genetically or biologically both mine and my partner’s. So when I didn’t get pregnant, I had to be okay knowing that I’m never going to see my physical features in her, but maybe as she grows older, I’ll be able to impose mannerisms,” says Bri, as they joke that baby Ronan already farts a lot.

So they moved to the next step in their plan and began looking again for sperm donors, this time for Megan. Megan had a genetic liver disorder as a child that required a liver transplant, so they limited their sperm bank options to those that tested for this disorder in their donors, which helped narrow the field of contenders. In early 2020, Megan was ready to start treatments at Generations Fertility Care in Middleton.

Then the pandemic hit, and everything came to a halt. Finally, in August of 2020, Megan was able to start treatments, and after three rounds of insemination, they found out she was pregnant in December.

As they talk about possibly having another baby, Bri jokes that only children are weird and they both laugh because Megan is an only child. But they explain that even the option to decide is a luxury.

“Having another baby is very deliberate for queer couples because there are no surprise pregnancies,” says Bri. “We also have to be creative, and have a contingency plan in case it doesn’t work out.”

Megan adds that having a support network, not just of family and friends, but queer support, has been crucial for them through this process—people to talk to about sperm banks, IUI, the ups and downs, and what the baby will call them.

“Titles are something that heteronormative couples don’t even think about,” says Megan. “We tried out a few, and ‘Dad’ felt right to Bri. So now Ronan will grow up knowing that those are just titles and any gender can take that title if they want.”

Seeing these norms challenged and the next generation becoming

more accepting of gender fluidity makes them excited for their daughter’s future, knowing that Ronan can be her own beautiful, weird self. And her mom and dad know that all of it was worth it.



ERIC & GAVIN LOGAN

Sun Prairie

WHEN ERIC AND GAVIN LOGAN MET in 2015, the spark was immediate.

After a short engagement, they married in 2016 and quickly discovered they both placed creating a family high on their lists of priorities. Little did they know the hurdles and struggles they’d have to overcome to become the foster dads they are today, raising two toddlers in Sun Prairie.

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“It’s a lot of emotions to work through, but once we got through that, we decided that we’d try adoption,” says Gavin. “I’m adopted from Paraguay and I thought, ‘How hard could it be?’”

After talking to a couple of adoption agencies and doing some research, the couple had to face the realization that they didn’t have the thousands of dollars needed to go through the process. Soon after, one of Eric’s co-workers became pregnant with twins and chatted with Eric about possibly adopting the babies. Two months before her due date, she decided to adopt through another couple.

“That was tough because that was our third opportunity at starting a family,” says Gavin. “We got cribs and toys. We’d nested pretty hard.”

Megan adds that having a support network, not just of family and friends, but queer support, has been crucial for them through this process—people to talk to about sperm banks, IUI, the ups and downs, and what the baby will call them.

Gavin went into a deep depression, and although he says his partner was his rock, Eric says he just felt numb.

As the pair emerged out of their darkness about six months later, Gavin started exploring fostering through Dane County. The first step was to complete an application and get in the system, but early in the process, Eric says the licensing team called out an issue on his record from more than 10 years prior.

“They told me I had to go through a rehabilitative process, including anger management and an alcohol and other drug assessment,” says Eric.

“But he was deemed not angry enough for anger management, and there were no alcohol or drug issues with the charge, so what do you do with that?” chimes in Gavin. “But for the sake of fostering a kid, we had to do whatever it took.”

So Eric jumped the hurdles and went through the required assessments, gathered over 50 recommendation letters, and a year later, the Logans were approved to foster by a state review board. When the licensor came for the first home visit, she found a few baby-proofing items but otherwise made it seem like it would be smooth sailing.

The second visit two weeks later had a different vibe. Gavin says she gave them two options: they could be approved, but would never be given a foster. Or they could withdraw from the program. She cited an expunged shoplifting charge on Gavin’s record (he stole a candy Ring Pop from Shopko as a teenager) and continued to press on Eric’s record.

“I remember thinking that it can’t be this hard for everyone. We did everything the county asked us to do. Why does this woman get to be the judge and jury on whether we get to be parents? I had no problem throwing her out of our house,” Gavin says.

The fire was lit, though. A couple of days later Gavin reached out to Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin in Milwaukee and connected with a licensor named Shannon Grant. He explained the situation and asked if their past would prevent them from becoming foster parents. She said absolutely not.

“At that point, we’d gone through years of grief... looking at an empty nursery and watching friends and co-workers have babies,” Gavin says.

While Gavin dove in head first on the paperwork, Eric says he dragged his heels a bit. “I just couldn’t hit another dead end.”

But less than a year later, the couple had breezed through the licensing, home visits, and the minimum childcare hour requirements, and were approved to foster.

“It felt for so long like we were not safe... like because a social worker had deemed us bad people we were blacklisted and would never be parents,” says Gavin.

In April 2021, the Logans got to take in siblings, one- and three-year old boys. They jumped at the chance, and after a few weeks of feeling shocked and overwhelmed, everyone started to settle into each other.

“There have been times when I’ve been in tears because I didn’t know you could be so proud. I didn’t know that you could actually physically feel so much love,” says Gavin.

At the youngest’s second birthday party this summer, Gavin and Eric had a chance to absorb where they are today. All of the paperwork slipped away, along with the judgement and frustration. None of it mattered as the little birthday boy smeared cake all over his face. They both agree that where they’ve landed is not where they expected, but is everything they wanted.



JAKE & NICK SIUDZINSKI

Sun Prairie

THE FIRST TIME JAKE SIUDZINSKI said he was gay out loud was to his best friend, Bonnie Jean. They were in their early 20s and fresh out of college. She was immediately supportive, helping Jake paint a picture of what his life could be like as a gay husband (which wasn’t legal at the time), professional, and even a dad.

When Jake introduced her to his new boyfriend, Nick, almost 10 years later, she saw a perfect match. And about six months after Jake and Nick were married in 2017, Bonnie Jean told the couple she wanted to talk to them about something.

“I had no idea what she was going to say,” Jake says. “She said that she had talked to her husband Eric, and they wanted to be our surrogate.”

The excitement and disbelief of that conversation almost years ago still shines on their faces as they tell the story. The couple had already

talked about adoption or finding their own surrogate, but Bonnie Jean’s offer brought the idea of a family to life.

The word “grateful” surrounds this story, and the Siudzinskis are happy to dwell in that feeling. Grateful that their surrogate is a best friend, grateful that the surrogate matching cost of \$20,000 to \$30,000 wasn’t needed. And grateful that they could both wrap up their master’s degrees

“I remember thinking that it can’t be this hard for everyone. We did everything the county asked us to do. Why does this woman get to be the judge and jury on whether we get to be parents?”

and start saving money on their schedule. They did meet with the Surrogacy Center in Madison for advice on the process, as well as the Law Center, which specializes in surrogacy and adoption.

“We ended up before a judge at a hearing because according to Wisconsin Law, if the surrogate is married, she and the husband have to waive parenting rights, so now Nick and I can legally be Parent 1 and Parent 2 on the birth certificate,” Jake says. Those legal fees plus the fertility treatments set the couple back about \$60,000.

Jake says they tried the two fertility clinics in Madison, but one wasn’t a good fit and the other doesn’t work with surrogates. After some searching, they landed on Froedtert Health in Milwaukee where they found acceptance and transparency across the medical staff.

Twenty-two eggs were inseminated—11 from Jake and 11 from Nick—and multiple viable embryos were created. Two days after Christmas in 2020, more gratitude followed when they found out the first embryo transfer was successful. The couple purposefully did not find out



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which of them is the biological dad prior to the birth, but for multiple reasons will find out in the future.

“Our therapist helped us understand how important it is for the baby’s developmental health to know who her biological dad is,” says Jake. “And our goal is to have a second with the other person’s embryo so they’re both biologically related as siblings, and we both have a biological child.”

Ahead of baby’s arrival in September, they are thankful for paternity leave: six weeks for Jake and three weeks for Nick, generous compared to most companies, but inadequate without access to short-term disability that most new moms are offered.

“According to Wisconsin Law, if the surrogate is married, she and the husband have to waive parenting rights, so Nick and I can legally be Parent 1 and Parent 2 on the birth certificate,” Jake says. Those legal fees plus the fertility treatments set the couple back about \$60,000.

“We’ll be good for the first few weeks, but day care doesn’t take new babies until they are 12 weeks old. We both work from home which helps, but we’re not sure how we’re going to do it. We’ll figure it out,” Nick says with a nervous laugh.

For now, they’re trying to soak it all in and realize that it’s taken a village to get them here: Bonnie Jean, embryologists, doctors, nurses, med students.

“That’s when it got pretty emotional... realizing this is all for our baby,” says Nick. “And that Bonnie Jean has not only given us this one baby, but she’s given us generations to come.”



SEBASTIAN WOOD & NOAH KNABENBAUER

Menomonie

SEBASTIAN WOOD WAS NOT an easy kid and, admittedly, a bit of a rebel for his adoptive parents to manage. His undiagnosed bipolar didn’t help. When he came out to them as a transgender man his senior year of high school, it was just another part of him they couldn’t handle. They kicked him out.

Living in his car and trying to attend college, Sebastian felt alone. So when he met Noah Knabenbauer online in 2012 a few months later, something clicked. After a couple of dates in cities halfway between Noah’s home in Milwaukee and Sebastian’s car in Menomonie, Noah eventually came to Menomonie and never left.

Nearly 10 years later, Sebastian marvels at the journey they’ve been

on—from moving into their first apartment where the landlord’s ex-wife showed up drunk to handoff the keys and living paycheck-to-paycheck—to the birth of their baby girl that Sebastian carried as a trans man during a pandemic.

“Noah and I always knew we wanted kids. I didn’t have as many reservations about actually having kids as maybe some other trans men do, as far as biologically having them,” says Sebastian. “I knew I wanted a family of my own.”

In 2017, two weeks before Sebastian planned to start testosterone, he found out he was pregnant. Then, at 11 weeks, he lost the baby.

“That pregnancy was unplanned, but I immediately loved that baby,” Sebastian says. “Noah was more objective about it. We both knew we weren’t ready to be parents, but we would’ve made it work. I think he was relieved when I lost it, but it was traumatic for me.”

Sebastian spiraled into a depression, dealing with the wedge that now existed between him and Noah.

As they rebuilt their relationship, matured and created a more stable life for themselves, the idea of a baby started to blossom again. When Sebastian found out he was pregnant in 2019, the couple was ready.

“It was a big step for me to announce that I was trans and pregnant,” says Sebastian. “I was stealth to a lot of people, but being pregnant, I couldn’t hide it. So I announced it several months in, and I got overwhelming support. It was wild to find I had so many supportive people in my life.”

He was also shocked and comforted to find an obstetrician in Eau Claire, Dr. David Hirsch, who was not only his biggest champion through the pregnancy, but also wanted to learn more about working with other trans men who wanted to carry their own babies. And with very little research available on the effect of testosterone on a fetus, Sebastian trusted Hirsch’s recommendation to stop testosterone treatments.

“[He] said that if I have a male baby, it would likely be fine, but if I have a female baby, it may make them intersex. I wouldn’t have a problem raising an intersex baby, but I don’t want to put that hardship

“It was a big step for me to announce that I was trans and pregnant,” says Sebastian. “I was stealth to a lot of people, but being pregnant, I couldn’t hide it. So I announced it several months in, and I got overwhelming support.”

on them just because I want to take testosterone,” Sebastian says.

So he pushed through his pregnancy, dealt with hyperemesis gravidarum (“I was puking about 20 times a day”) and gestational diabetes, but says the birth process was everything he hoped for. Giving birth on Mother’s Day in 2020, his biggest worry was being lumped in with the other moms and being called she/her. Thankfully, he says, not one person called him “mom” and everyone used his pronouns correctly.

As he and Noah navigate parenting a toddler, he says the lessons he learned have made him stronger: be open with your partner; be willing to hunt for a trans-accepting doctor, and be willing to travel to that doctor; find your support network, and hang on to them tight. The most unexpected lesson for Sebastian was finding that his anxiety about presenting as female during his pregnancy was non-existent.

“Suddenly I had this baby to care about, and I didn’t care how I looked or how I was perceived,” he says. “I know it’s hard for a lot of trans guys to even consider being pregnant, but in my experience, it was like the trans stuff didn’t matter when I got pregnant. The risks and stress are worth it. You can always return to your transition.”

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MATT & DAVID CLARK-SALLY

Verona

MATT CLARK-SALLY ADMITS he's never met a stranger thanks to his Southern upbringing and gift for gab. But when he and husband David started down the surrogacy path, he didn't expect to have to use his voice to advocate for his own LGTBQ family and for the future of others.

When their insurance company, GHC of South Central Wisconsin, declined coverage for their future baby's needs at birth because the gestational carrier was out-of-network, the couple sprung to action, contacting a local Madison news station, posting a blog on FamilyEquality.org, and getting the word out to their social networks. About two months before their baby girl arrived, GHC consented to cover the medical costs, a victory according to the Clark-Sallys, but what they considered

the start of the battle for other families.

"I think GHC recognized the errors of their ways, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to change for everyone," says Matt. "They really need to if they're going to be LGBTQ-inclusive like they say they are. I'm sure they're not the only insurance provider facing this."

Matt admits that the costs GHC is now covering is a drop in the bucket compared to the mountain of expenses they discovered when they started exploring surrogacy almost three years ago.

When Matt and David met through a mutual friend in 2018, Matt was recently divorced with two young girls, and only a few months earlier had come out as gay. He and David knew that diving into a new gay relationship had to be done delicately.

"My girls didn't bat an eye when I introduced them to David. Thankfully, a lot of their learning in school here is inclusive," says Matt.

When they married in 2019, David became an insta-dad and fell in love with Matt's girls.

"It's not necessarily how I thought I would become a dad," says David. "But for me, it was a beautiful introduction into the wonderful world of parenting—so much so, that ultimately we determined we wanted to grow our family, so that we could walk this parenting journey together from the beginning."

They ultimately agreed that surrogacy would have the least impact on their girls. They felt with adoption, there would be home visits and interviews the whole family would be involved in. With surrogacy, the couple was able to wait to introduce it to the girls until they had a successful embryo transfer with their carrier.

Matt, a self-described over-analyzer with a project management background, started climbing the mountain of research, met with other gay dads who had gone the surrogacy route, and consulted with the Law Center in Madison to understand parental rights and legal representation

for their carrier, their egg donor, and themselves.

"We're not rolling in dough over here," says Matt, who works as an account associate at Mercury Healthcare in Madison. "David is self-employed and works with nonprofits. We had to do a lot of financial planning and find ways to cut costs."

As expenses mounted for IVF treatments and the various lawyers, the Clark-Sallys discovered a grant opportunity through the Chicago Coalition for Family Building. Proof of infertility is required according to their website, but exceptions are made for same-sex couples. Matt also knew he could project manage the process of finding a gestational carrier, saving them \$20,000 to \$30,000 in agency fees.

Besides having to dig in their heels on coverage for the baby, the couple says the biggest learning was all of the decisions that come with the process.

"With surrogacy, there are decisions around using fresh or frozen eggs—and understanding the differences—the percent chance of success with each, how many kids you want to have out of this process, and considering what to do with the additional embryos that are created," says Matt. "Because nothing is happening naturally, it can be very overwhelming...Don't be scared to ask questions."

Throughout the pregnancy, the Clark-Sally girls also asked a lot of questions. The couple explained to them that their "belly buddy" is carrying their new sister, and to create this baby it took great doctors, mixed with a bit of science, and a whole lot of love. ■



EMILY MCCLUHAN is a Madison-based writer, runner, volunteer, and dog-mom. Her contributions to regional publications in Michigan, Montana, and Wisconsin over the last 20 years provide an outlet for her insatiable curiosity and passion for telling the stories that open our eyes and connect to our everyday lives.

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Champion of Change

The University of Wisconsin's School of Medicine and Public Health has received funding for the first **National LGBTQ+ Fellowship Program**, led by **Dr. Elizabeth Petty**. Dr. Petty shares how her difficult coming out experience continues to shape and inform her priorities for training knowledgeable, affirming, and skilled healthcare providers for LGBTQ communities.

HEALTH CARE | COMING OUT | AIDS | COLLEGE | INTERSECTIONALITY

THIS YEAR the American Medical Association Foundation granted the University of Wisconsin's School of Medicine and Public Health funding for the first National LGBTQ+ Fellowship Program in the nation. More than 50 schools applied for the inaugural program.

The university has received fellowship applications from all over America, including Puerto Rico. The goal of the fellowship is to expand the field and study of medicine to include new research, medical practice and training recommendations, and offer a critical eye on how our healthcare system shortchanges members of the LGBTQ+ community. The AMA Foundation program will support a total of three fellows, one fellow per year starting in July of 2022.

Leading the charge is Dr. Elizabeth Petty who serves as the school's senior associate dean for academic affairs.

"The American Medical Association Foundation has had an active LGBTQ+ advisory board for a number of years," said Dr. Petty. "The board recognized the need to improve and optimize health for the LGBTQ+ community. They came up with a plan to support additional training for physicians so we can develop physician champions and change agents who are going to make a difference in the LGBTQ community and drive change in a positive way."

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN IS IDEALLY SITUATED TO HOST A FELLOWSHIP

Petty explains what's going well at the University of Wisconsin and why the university is uniquely positioned to be a home for this fellowship. From faculty who are nationally recognized as experts in LGBTQ health issues to supporting champions for change in efforts to improve how doctors are trained to practice medicine.

One of those experts is Dr. James Lehman in the Department of Psychiatry. From his time as a neurobiology student at UW to his current work as an assistant professor and a practicing psychiatrist at UW Health, Lehman works to fill the gap in how doctors are trained to care for the unique healthcare needs of the LGBTQ+ community. Lehman built a team of experts to help him write a textbook, *The Equal Curriculum: The Student and Educator Guide to LGBTQ Health*, because there wasn't a go-to textbook on the topic for schools and educators.

"It was the first textbook on education for LGBTQ health providers," said Petty. "We had a team of individuals who had expertise clinically. We had the first transgender services clinic for adolescents, thanks to great work by colleagues in pediatrics. We have colleagues in family medicine who are leaders in terms of working with patient populations



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Dr. Petty with Shiva Bidar-Sielaff
Vice President, Chief Diversity
Officer at UW Health.

“We wanted to focus on primary care and public health because it’s primary care providers who are helping individuals navigate the healthcare system, who can serve as patient advocates in comprehensive care—from physical issues to psychological care—we want physicians trained to identify these issues. It’s the whole landscape of life, from adolescence to geriatrics.”

PETTY’S PERSONAL EXPERIENCES ARE KEY TO HER EMPATHY

Elizabeth chose to pursue medicine after witnessing healers work while she grew up in a small northern Wisconsin town. Her father was drafted into the Army as a physician during the Vietnam War, and his practice included traveling around the country to help combat wounded.

“I also went around with him on house calls and saw lots of different patients,” Elizabeth remembers. “There was always a part of me that wanted to be a physician. Then when I was in seventh grade, I met a wonderful physician who was a geneticist. I was interested in individuals who were different. Who had unique and challenging problems. This geneticist invited me to spend the day with her at her clinic, and I was completely blown away. You couldn’t do that today, but it was a phenomenal experience, and I knew I wanted to grow up to be just like her.”

Petty attended a women-only, liberal arts college as an undergrad. She applied to the University of Wisconsin as her only choice of medical school, and pursued studies in genetics and pediatrics. She jogged over to Yale for a fellowship in molecular and clinical genetics, and then to the University of Michigan for NIH-funded research and teaching. Leadership called and she stepped into Dean positions at U of M.

Elizabeth came out to friends as a lesbian in college and was out throughout medical school. She faced her own challenges with coming out to her family as well as experiencing discrimination in school.

“When it was time to come out to my family, I told them who I was, and the next thing I knew, I was sitting in class in a large lecture hall,

that are LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse populations. We also have the first surgical fellow to provide gender-affirming services. We have a lot of experts. We have a lot of opportunities to be a national leader to train the next generation of physicians.”

The goal of the fellowship is to allow a medical student who has completed their residency to dedicate a year to research and scholarly projects, community outreach and engagement, listening, learning, and challenge how doctors are trained to deliver health care to LGBTQ+ patients.

“We focused on recruiting someone with experience in primary care and public health. We want someone with training in family medicine, pediatrics, or internal medicine. But we also want someone who is passionate about the LGBTQ community,” she said, “who wants to be a change agent, who is interested in the social determinants of health, who is thinking about the community as well as the individual patient.”

LGBTQ+ SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The social determinants of health are the conditions of our lives—from family to school, work and our social spaces—that impact our health risks and outcomes. For the queer and trans community, we often have a list of health challenges in common.

“We still see significant health inequity in the LGBTQ and gender-diverse community. There are multiple studies—from across the nation and here in Wisconsin—that have shown there are more chronic health issues and a lack of access to health care that’s affirming and supportive. We also know we are often misunderstood, often misgendered, often experience negative care or care that is humiliating or belittling, often traumatic and makes it even more difficult to want to access regular, routine health care.”

The list goes on. Petty describes external stresses individuals face, from discrimination to lack of family support, gender- or sexuality-based violence, discriminatory laws and policies that vary from state to state, and a trend of being underinsured or unhoused. Internal stresses include depression, anxiety, tobacco and drug use, obesity, suicidal ideation and the lack of gender affirming care for transgender individuals, which all add up to layers of challenges to our wellbeing and our ability to live authentic, healthy lives.

Interlaced with these trends, Petty adds an intersectional perspective and recognizes how these disparities deepen for those from marginalized populations who experience additional stress from racism, ableism, and other factors. While the university and UW Health provide excellent care and training, not all healthcare providers have gone through the same training or are equipped to serve patients equally. Discrimination still happens and there is room for change.

The goal of the fellowship is to allow a medical student who has completed their residency to dedicate a year to research and scholarly projects, community outreach and engagement, listening, learning, and challenge how doctors are trained to deliver health care to LGBTQ+ patients.

and the dean of students was walking down the aisle with my parents to pull me out of class. My parents wanted to pull me out of medical school because they thought ‘I needed help.’ We walked to a McDonald’s across the street from the school where my parents said they wanted me to come home, that they already had a psychologist lined up, and they wanted to take care of me. But the dean of students said ‘we’ll support whatever you want’ and I said ‘I want to go back to class. I’m missing class.’

“The dean was very supportive of me and who I was, but I didn’t hear from my parents for years. I no longer had their financial support for medical school. It was devastating. But I think that inspired me to become a leader in medicine and wanting to make a difference. To be a champion of change.”

As her medical education began, so did the AIDS crisis. The treatment of patients and the death of fellow residents shone a stark light on discrimination in the healthcare system.

“I remember being a student and some of the terrible things that were said and done,” she said. “I remember some of our first patients, some of the things that were being said about the gay community, about people I knew from the community. I remember some of the challenges we faced,

the kinds of derogatory and demeaning things that were said and done. After seeing how AIDS patients were treated, I have always wanted to try to support people for who they are, and be a champion for who they are.”

As her medical school training concluded, her parents did attend her graduation, though her family relationships still had highs and lows.

“I’ve tried to be a better person, to forgive and move forward. But it’s not a perfect relationship, and it’s hard to forget what happened.”

EMPATHY IS PART OF BEING A HEALER

With her own coming out experiences and after witnessing both the violence and the victories of queer American life, Petty has learned that you cannot divorce personal adversity from your work as a healer.

“We all have life experiences,” she said. “We need to think about how to embrace and lean into those stories, to build empathy and build connections with people and understand. Everyone has had some kinds of adverse situations. How do we take those experiences and learn from them rather than put them in a box on a shelf? How do we keep those experiences with us, but channel them in a way that’s positive, that helps us with the nurturing and support we give?”

As applications come in, Petty’s team are asking prospective fellows about their interests, their personal stories, and what they are most passionate about pursuing in their careers. There are so many areas the fellowship could focus on for research, analysis and public engagement. Petty hopes the fellow will be able to let their experience and their interests lead the way. She compares this to allowing people space in their coming out process, including students and staff at the university who are not yet comfortable with coming out or adding their names to the PRIDE in Healthcare OUT LIST.

“It’s important to meet people where they are at. Help people be who they need to be, and give them the resources and structure they need to become their authentic selves,” she said. “There are so many domains we want to cover. Each fellow will have their own interests and expertise. We want to honor that. There’s plenty to do. But it’s in the places where you feel the most passionate where you’ll make the biggest difference.”

BUILDING A NATIONAL MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE, TRAINING, EDUCATION, AND SERVICE MODELS

The future vision for the program is that it will be sustainable and it will grow. The AMA Foundation is already working on funding more fellowships at other universities, which Dr. Petty sees as an opportunity to scale up and build a national network of colleagues who are working together to make progress in this field.

“With other fellowships in this area, we can build some partnerships with other universities on educational strategies, share best practices, and really change the landscape on how we train physicians to deliver care to individuals who are members of the LGBTQ and gender-diverse communities.”

Like any new initiative or creative endeavor, Petty recognizes that it’s important to manage expectations of what the first fellow can accomplish in a year. She uses the metaphor of spokes on a wheel, in which the fellow at the hub can connect with many different aspects of the school of medicine and public health.

“One fellow is not enough,” said Petty. “However, I see this as the start of a national movement to build these programs, to inspire and encourage others. This fellowship will touch our medical students, our physician assistant students, our campus, other medical professionals, and the community in meaningful ways. It’s only one person, but they will make an impact. Even getting this fellowship has brought attention to the need for LGBTQ equality in health care. People are excited about it and excited to apply to our school at the University of Wisconsin.” ■

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SENIOR CITIZENS ADVOCACY MILWAUKEE

SAGE-Milwaukee and the intersection of aging and disability

Christie Carter, Aging & Disability Coordinator for the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, shares the evolution and current mission of **SAGE-Milwaukee**, which provides advocacy and services for LGBT elders.

IN 2019, I began my career with the Milwaukee LGBT Community center as the Older Adult Coordinator. It was there that I had my first direct connection with SAGE. Not only did I connect monthly with other affiliates throughout the country, but I also got involved in the Milwaukee County Division on Aging boards and programs. Through these, I was able to advocate for and express the concerns of older adult constituents as a community member under the age of 50.

Advocating has always been a large part of who I am. Growing up in Illinois, I was the first person in my school district with a physical disability to be mainstreamed in grades K-12. In high school, I wrote newspaper articles about different disability advocacy topics, one of them being why the football stadium stands should be wheelchair accessible allowing equal access to both the sporting event and the fan experience. Years later, after receiving my teaching degree, I found myself working with and advocating for English Language Learner older adults at Milwaukee Area Technical College. My master's in curriculum development gave me the opportunity to be a part of the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center.

I am extremely honored to do this work and be part of the community. When advocating and sharing some of this information with others who work with older adults, people were somewhat surprised to see how many parallels there were between the challenges older adults face and those faced by people with disabilities. I have spent the last few years advocating for equity and better access to transportation and healthcare services along with others. Making sure that Long-term Care Facilities learn about the disparities that exist for LGBT seniors in these settings is also very important

In January 2020, the plan to create the bridge between older adults and those with disabilities began. According to the Movement Advancement Project, 40% of those individuals that identify as LGBT also identify as having a disability. There was definite interest within the community. I connected with IndependenceFirst, an Independent Living Center (ILC), in the Milwaukee area and the LGBTQ+ Disability Support Group came to be. This intergenerational peer-led group focuses on sharing, advocating, learning, and socializing with one another. This is a unique and empowering group where people can get together with people from all over Wisconsin and beyond to discuss issues and be supported by people who understand.

Starting in January of 2021, the Center began receiving funding through the Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services Disability Division through an Advocacy Grant. This allows us to not only provide the LGBTQ+ Disability Support Group but also provide educational sessions on various topics surrounding disability and the intersections that exist there (as well as consulting to other organizations as needed).

This group is in addition to educational sessions that focus on different disability-related topics and the already well-established Older Adult Program that serves older adults in Milwaukee County and the surrounding areas with weekly Fifty and Better Support Group, Family Coffee, Drop-in Meetings, County Congregate meal pick-ups, Advisory Board Meetings, advocacy opportunities and educational programs surrounding topics related to the specific interests and concerns of older adults as well as holiday events. During the pandemic the program was transferred to a virtual/pick-up format where participants could join either by phone or computer. In this trying and unprecedented time, doing this helped fight the social isolation that many older adults face.

I agree with Eldon Murray that we have come a long way, but we still have a way to go. ■

CHRISTIE CARTER is the Aging & Disability Coordinator at the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. She has a Masters of Education with a focus on instructional design and is part of the LGBT and disability communities. She uses her personal experiences in both of these groups to educate policymakers and advocate for the older adults and people with disabilities she works with every day.

SAGE SENIOR CITIZENS ADVOCACY

Proud Pioneer

Eldon Murray founded **SAGE-Milwaukee** among many other gay and lesbian organizations and is considered one of just a handful of people who drove the gay rights movement of the 1960s and 70s. **Caroline Werner** offers a reflection on Murray's impact.



MILWAUKEEAN ELDON MURRAY (1930-2007) is a nationally recognized figure in the gay rights movement. He founded SAGE-Milwaukee, the first organization in Wisconsin dedicated to the needs of older gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, in 1994, but his local activism began in 1969 after the Stonewall Riots brought national attention to gay and lesbian rights.

In 1970, Murray attended meetings of the Gay Liberation Organization, a new student organization at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. After changing its name to Gay Peoples Union (GPU) in early 1971, it grew into a resource for the entire Milwaukee gay community working toward social change through education and legal reform. Among the founding members, Murray edited the *GPU News* from 1970 until 1980. He helped establish the GPU VD Clinic in the 1970s. When AIDS hit Milwaukee in the early 1980s, he wrote the first grants for what became the Milwaukee AIDS Project, known later as the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin.

SAGE (originally Senior Action in a Gay Environment) is a national organization with local chapters providing advocacy and services for LGBT elders.

In 1999, writer Jamakaya, in *INStep* wrote:

“Longtime gay activist Eldon Murray is among five Milwaukeeans...inducted into the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging’s Senior Citizen Hall of Fame. Since starting the Milwaukee chapter of SAGE, he has been a tireless advocate for gay and lesbian seniors.”

When accepting, Murray said, “This award gives recognition by the county and the Department on Aging to a whole segment of the population that has heretofore been overlooked because in recognizing me, they are also recognizing all gay and lesbian seniors.”

Through SAGE, Murray worked to overcome ageism in our community and in society at large. “In the gay community we can lead the way,” he said. “We can work to educate younger people so they do not have society’s negative ageism. You know, a community is judged by the way it treats its elderly people.”

Asked if things have improved for gay and lesbian seniors, Murray told *IN Step* in 1999, “We still have a long way to go. The older a (gay) person is, the more likely they are to be in the closet, and we know we are not reaching a lot of people who might need our assistance. Even though we’ve (SAGE-Milwaukee) been in existence for six or seven years,” he said, “there are still a lot of older people out there who don’t know about us.”

For more on Eldon Murray’s life and legacy, go to mkelgbthist.org. ■

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WISCONSIN LGBT HISTORY PROJECT.



PARENTHOOD TERMINOLOGY NON-BIOLOGICAL PARENT CULTURAL NORMS

Queering Parenthood

As the non-biological mother to her daughter, **Dr. Mel Freitag** unpacks the personal, social, and cultural struggles of parenting—from what name she’s called to moments of imposter syndrome.



QUEER MOTHERHOODS complicate how parenthood is defined, from the time before conception through birth and childhood. I am the nonbiological (nonbio) mother to my seven-year-old daughter, and I have struggled with finding a name for myself over the years. My daughter has always called me “Mama,” but I know that not every nonbio parent identifies with the term “mom,” namely because it is assumed to be a female, and further, only

of course, “non-biological” mother or parent. Some are queering and reclaiming the word “Dad.” Still, our lexicon doesn’t have a word for us, and perhaps more importantly, all of these terms are supplemental to the “real” mother—and that singular idea of motherhood stays intact. None of these terms attempt to relabel the biological mother category—only renaming the “non” category. I am defined by what I am not.

In order to queer motherhood, we need to revise all categories of parenthood. For example, when the non-biological mother takes on breastfeeding—or more of the household duties like childcare—or fills out the forms for school or the thousand other duties that are assigned to the traditional biological mother, it begins to dismantle the expectations of traditional motherhood. For this reason, I will continue to use the most conventional term, “non-biological” mother, until the biological mother category can also be disrupted and renamed.

Even during birth class, the assumption that the biological “mother” will innately know more about breastfeeding, as well as be the one taking notes and asking more questions, is situated within a heteronormative parental structure. In the birthing class, I took notes. When people ask “the mom” questions about scheduling or nutrition or schools, it is assuming there is a singular, all-knowing mother who does it all. Queer motherhoods, however, begin to transform parenting practices—even redefining what it means to be the mother of the child I co-created. I was there for insemination and conception. I was there for the birth—an embodied experience for the biological parent and also a life-changing, embodied experience for the nonbio parent.

For queer families, the decision to parent a child has to be legally and medically intentional—that is, we have to act on and negotiate a variety of legal and medical terrains before we can inseminate. In my case, I still had to go through second-parent adoption in order to ensure full parentage across state borders while navigating the ever-changing landscape of same-sex family law. Often, when we are discussing family planning and the number of children we are going to have, my straight friends will jokingly say, “Well, you never know!” I reply back, “Actually we do.” Whenever we are trying for a baby, we have to march over to the infertility clinic, and do the insemination. This conscious decision making already resists the heteronormative narrative of a “surprise” or “oops” baby, or that one night of unprotected love making could create another human being.

I have never fit into the mother-father binary—a feeling that began in the fertility clinic where there were images of heterosexual couples and realized their interventions were built on the assumption that the patients were all dealing with infertility and were straight. In fact, in order to define “infertility,” some assessments ask how long you have “tried”—and if you tried longer than a year, then you can be deemed infertile. This question is basically asking if you had unprotected sex with someone who has sperm. This does not apply for many queer couples who do not have access to the sperm (or genetic material as some of my friends call it). The conception experience for both the bio and nonbio parent is already deeply situated within these heteronormative frameworks, questions, and systems. Even picking out the sperm donor qualities—one that matches the nonbio parent or a combination—is still within the framework of being biologically related. For me, my daughter somehow got some recessive genes and has blue eyes and curly hair, so she looks like my biological child. In fact, random

strangers will come up to us and compliment her on her hair—and then say, “She must get that from you.” I don’t correct them. They are assuming I am the biological parent—and the older she gets, the more people do not know if I gave birth to her or not. It is the classic nature/nurture question—but when I hear “she got that from you” with something like hair or other qualities that we define as genetically linked, I am still triggered and feel like an imposter in my own family structure.

I was the first person to “catch” my daughter after birth, and when she opened her eyes, she saw mine first. They were wide open. Our eyes locked, and I knew we would be forever connected. I did skin to skin contact with her, stayed up with her all hours of the night for feeding, took the lead on childcare coordination, was just as much there for her potty training, toothbrushing, time outs, play dates, birthday parties, slumber parties, and conversations every day about how her day was, her new friends, her experiences. I was just as much there. Still there was a feeling of living between two worlds. The transition to motherhood for non-biological parents is complicated by the fact that it generally lacks both legal and biological substantiation and has few role models. Sometimes, when people assume she is my bio daughter, I feel like I’m passing. Since pregnancy is defined as solely a female experience, and even as a rite of passage for women, it would make sense that nonbiological queer mothers would align more with the father role.

This explains why I felt like I was “almost but not quite the real parent” when my daughter was born. I identify as a fierce femme, and I thought I would eventually also give birth. However, life happened—and time and changes—and at this point, I do not know if I ever will. This makes my role as my daughter’s nonbio parent even more pronounced, more profound of an experience, more palpable. I am learning to accept it more, that the universe had these plans for me, that even though queer families get to consciously choose their family, that the unexpected still happens, and we must accept and embrace our newfound identities, our new terrains for being a family, and what it means to have a life that was even less heteronormative than you expected. Sometimes, I have something I call “heterosexual nostalgia,” that is, grieving the parts of a hetero life you thought you’d have growing up—having a bio kid is usually part of that equation. It does not mean that I am hetero, but rather, there are certain privileges and assumptions people make when you live the full hetero life that you don’t get as a non-bio, queer parent with a kid who looks like

you. It is a paradox, then, to have maternal, femme qualities and have to build a collective family unit without being the “only” mother.

We tell our daughter she’s lucky—she has parents who love her and we chose her from the stars in the sky. I know it’s a cliché to say that to a child, but it always gives me chills, and I may be starting to believe it. To

Sometimes, I have something I call “heterosexual nostalgia,” that is, grieving the parts of a hetero life you thought you’d have growing up—having a bio kid is usually part of that equation.

queer motherhood, one of our most sacred institutions, is complicated and doesn’t come without yearning for biological connectedness and sharing genetic traits. So I think it begins to dismantle bio motherhood—otherwise all other types of motherhoods will remain at the margins of the “real” mom. When moms tell me they are the “only ones” doing everything or when moms post questions on social media—“Hey moms, can you answer this question?” I try to transform (queer) the conversation by providing my experience as a femme, queer, nonbio mother and as a parent of a kid who has parents who do all the things and tasks (because why are tasks gendered?).

I am creating a new way of being and a new politic of parenthood, of families. I can only think that one of the reasons my daughter shares my traits is some twist of the universe teaching me that collective, queer motherhood could be a new way of being, of loving. That we are all on this journey together as a queer family together, even though it doesn’t look like what any of us expected.

“I cannot walk on icy or rocky terrain without stumbling; she can dangle from trees by her toes. I agonize over every alternative; she leaps spontaneously toward each decision. I turn in circles without a map; she backseat drives with glee and flawless spatial precision. On the other hand, like me, my daughter likes cooking, cuddling, puzzles, and irony. Coincidence? Parallel genetic construction? Environment? Nurture? Chance? Magic? Does it matter?” —Beizer in *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood* (SUNY Press, 2013). ■

DR. MEL FREITAG (she/her) is the Diversity Officer in the School of Nursing at University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Freitag serves as a leader and consultant in curriculum development, programming, strategic planning, and engaging in recruitment, retention, and advising initiatives to create equitable and inclusive organizational practices and policies. She spends the rest of her time with her talkative and cat-loving daughter Bennett (Benny), and her geriatric but adventurous dog Fred.



None of these terms attempt to relabel the biological mother category—only renaming the “non” category. I am defined by what I am not.

one “mom.” I remember googling it early on before my daughter’s birth and brainstorming with my friends and acquaintances to see if anyone else had the same role. I’ve seen words created for it like mather (blending of mother/father), the “other” mother and more intellectual terms like “de novo families” and,

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Citizen in Limbo...No More

Attorneys **Michele Perreault** and **Raluca Vais-Ottosen** share an update on a case regarding citizenship and immigration rights for children of same-sex parents.

THREE YEARS AGO, we brought you the story of a family with twin babies born through surrogacy, where one sibling was considered a U.S. citizen at birth, while the other was not. After years of legal battles, the family's struggles have finally come to an end as the Biden Administration has formally announced an update in policy so that such an absurd result no longer occurs.

Andrew Mason Dvash-Banks, a U.S. citizen, and his husband, Elad Dvash-Banks, an Israeli citizen, were legally married in Canada. In 2015, they used their own sperm and eggs from an anonymous donor. The pregnancy was carried to term by a surrogate, and Ethan and Aiden, twins born minutes apart, said hello to the world in 2016. Ethan and Aiden were born in Canada.

The family hit a snag when they applied for a Certificate of Birth Abroad for both babies, with the U.S. Department of State, through the U.S. consulates in Toronto. The consular officer ordered DNA testing to ascertain which baby was the biological child of Andrew, the U.S. citizen. After finding that Aiden was Andrew's biological son, the U.S. Consulate in Toronto recognized Aiden as a U.S. citizen, but not Ethan. Federal litigation ensued.

Two years ago, we brought you the updated story after the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California found that, by law, Ethan was also a U.S. citizen just like his brother. The family's joy was short-lived, as the Trump administration appealed that decision in an attempt to strip Ethan of his citizenship.

Last year, in October 2020, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit agreed with the district judge: Ethan was a U.S. citizen at birth. The Trump administration requested a



Andrew Dvash-Banks and his husband, Elad Dvash-Banks, with their twins Aiden and Ethan.

Under the prior (incorrect) interpretation of the law, the Department of State required that children born abroad have a genetic or gestational relationship to a U.S. citizen parent in order to derive citizenship at birth.

rehearing, but its request was denied. Despite the outcome of the litigation, the court's decision in Ethan's favor did not guarantee that the U.S. Department of State would stop denying U.S. citizenship to children born abroad through surrogacy to a family similar to Ethan's. In the meantime, another family had a similar experience through the U.S. Consulate in London and was fighting its own legal battle.

Alisson Blixt, a U.S. citizen, gave birth to a little boy named Massi. Alisson's wife, Stefania Zaccari, who is an Italian citizen, gave birth to Lucas. Alisson and Stefania were married at the time both boys were born, and they were the only parents listed on both birth certificates. In London, the U.S. consulate reached a conclusion for Alisson and Stefania's children similar to that reached by the U.S. Consulate in Toronto: it recognized Massi as a U.S. citizen, but not Lucas. Alisson and Stefania also pursued federal litigation and by June 2021 they had not even

received a district court decision.

The court decision in Ethan's case would not have automatically resolved the issue for Lucas, nor many other children who were still fighting for recognition of their birthright. The only way to fully rectify the problem across the board is for the Department of State to correct the policy that led to this miscarriage of justice in the first place, namely the Foreign Affairs Manual. The Biden administration has recently announced that it would do just that.

The law is clear, it always has been: a person born outside of the U.S. of a parent who is a U.S. citizen and one who is not, automatically derives U.S. citizenship at birth if the U.S. citizen parent physically lived in the U.S. for at least five years prior to the child's birth, at least two of which being after the parent's fourteenth birthday. The law defines the term "parent" as a relationship that exists when the child is born in wedlock, among other requirements. The law does not require a biological relationship to the U.S. citizen parent.

Both Andrew and Alisson, the U.S. citizen parents in these two cases, met all physical presence requirements. And since the babies were all born after 2013 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared DOMA unconstitutional, the federal government began recognizing same-sex marriages for immigration purposes as long as the marriage was legal at the time and place where it was officiated. So, under the law, Lucas and Ethan should have been recognized as U.S. citizens at birth, just like their respective siblings, Massi and Aiden.

The Department of State based its denial of citizenship for Lucas and Ethan not on the law passed and adopted by Congress, but on its own agency policy as written in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM). As we explained in our prior articles, the FAM is not subject to Congressional debate, Senate or House of Representatives votes, or even public comment. It is not law. It is nothing more than a user manual designed by the U.S. Department of State. All federal agencies have one.

Even though the agency's user manual is not subject to congressional oversight nor has the power of a law, U.S. consulate officers are nevertheless bound by its provisions. So even though two federal courts decided that the Foreign Affairs Manual was wrong and it was misinterpreting the law, U.S. Consulate officers were still bound to follow the FAM until and unless the administration changed it to align with the court's decisions and, more importantly, with the law.

On May 18, 2021, the U.S. Department of State announced that it was updating its "interpretation and application of Section

Alisson Blixt, a U.S. citizen, gave birth to a little boy named Massi. Alisson's wife, Stefania Zaccari, who is an Italian citizen, gave birth to Lucas. Alisson and Stefania were married at the time both boys were born, and they were the only parents listed on both birth certificates.

301 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which establishes the requirements for acquisition of U.S. citizenship at birth." Although it does not mention Ethan, Lucas, or their families' fight for equality, the press release does indicate that the revision aims to recognize the advances in assisted reproductive technology (ART).

Under the prior (incorrect) interpretation of the law, the Department of State required that children born abroad have a genetic or gestational relationship to a U.S. citizen parent in order to derive citizenship at birth. The updated policy (correctly) interpreting and implementing the law, now states that children born abroad to parents, at least one of whom is a U.S. citizen and who are married to each other at the time of the birth, will be U.S. citizens from birth if they have a genetic or gestational tie to at least one of their parents, and meet the INA's other requirements.

The Department of State's change in

policy to formally recognize the scientific advancement in the medical field is long overdue. That is especially so in this case, where the law already allowed (and in fact required) that recognition the entire time despite having been written in 1952, long before ART existed. Hopefully, this policy update will prevent U.S. consulates from discriminating against U.S. citizen children born abroad to LGBTQ married couples, with respect to the children's automatic acquisition of U.S. citizenship. ■



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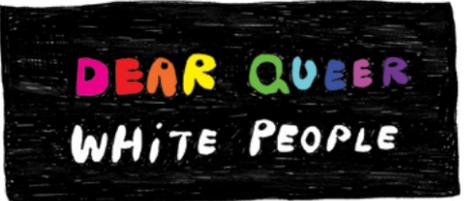
Pride, without Progress

Nibiwakamigkwe explains the absence of native folk at Pride events.

IT'S HOT OUT, and I'm passing by a large, rainbow-festooned crowd. Music is playing, people are dancing in place, and it's all cut off as the emcee jumps on stage. In solemn but gleeful tones, they proclaim, "these are the lands of the OH-JIB-OH-WAYYY," randomly adding an extra syllable to "Ojibwe" and dragging out the last syllable. I cringe a bit, then glance out over the crowd to look for another Nishgay also trying to shake off the awkward interaction. No one catches my eye. From my sightline, I am alone here, with people who can't even pronounce my people's name.

I don't go to pride events a lot. Really never. It isn't internalized homophobia or a distaste for crowds. I promise I have good outfits. It's because I can't stand colonization.

"We have always been here" has recently grown as a tagline amongst queer communi-



ties. It establishes our identities, culture, and selves as more than the contemporary fads bigots claim them to be. As a two-spirited Indigenous person, this sentence holds double power, but that power is often diminished by the same people repeating these words.

I am often asked where are Natives during queer events. The answers are nuanced and difficult, but ultimately, impacts, despite intentions matter, and American queer culture often erases and harms Two-Spirit, Queer, Trans Indigenous People (2SQTIP).

From the popularized rainbow headdresses at 2019 NYC Pride, appropriate New Age spiritualities, to what feels like every other episode of Drag Race, we constantly feel the effects of exploitation and fetishization of our cultures and bodies. Further, we are expected to support or at least ignore these same exploitations for the sake of unity and supposed reform.

We are products of our ancestors' resilience, and their strength and determination remains in us. Many of us choose not to march, appear alongside, or associate with institutions working towards their degradation. The residential school system (1883-1996) was determined by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be an act of cultural genocide. In the United States, the government is finally investigating the analogous boarding school system, some of which are still in operation today. Mass graves of children are finally returning to their communities. So far, over 6,000 children have been found in the United States and Canada at these schools. Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Christians (non-denominational), Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Hicksite Friends, Lutherans, Methodists, Orthodox Friends, Presbyterians, Quakers, Reformed Dutch, and Unitarians all participated and profited in this system. Very few have offered apologies, fewer have offered reparations. This list doesn't include Catholic, non denominational Christian, Jewish, and



How are we supposed to feel safe at pride around institutions who have genocided us and taken no action in reconciliation? Why are organizations not held to the same standards when they are anti-Native instead of anti-queer?

Mormon adoption programs so adept at stealing Native children from their communities that the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978) was created to slow the theft and trafficking of children by these colonial religious organizations.

How are we supposed to feel safe at pride around institutions who have genocided us and taken no action in reconciliation? Why are organizations not held to the same standards when they are anti-Native instead of anti-queer? We cannot constantly be exposing ourselves to new trauma for the sake of demographic presence and perceived diversity.

Two-spiritedness has been largely decontextualized from cultural and linguistic traditions. Native Nations exist as sovereign entities. We all have our own languages, cultures, teachings, many of which express our identities better than the current concept of Pride ever could. The opposite of pride is shame, and as we decolonize ourselves, we unlearn that shame forced upon us. Two spirit comes from the Anishinaabe term "niizh manidoowag" and was largely adopted as a pan-Indigenous term in 1990. "Manidoowag" refers to spirits outside of ourselves: two-spiritedness is a community understanding. For many, including myself, it means to take on additional roles not expected of you because you have the added support, love, and capability.

Our cultures care for us, as they have for our ancestors, and will for our descendants. Harm against our cultures is harm against us. We have always been here: if you can't see us, it's because we don't want to be seen around you. ■

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BURNOUT PANDEMIC BRIDGE-BUILDING LGBTQ IDENTITIES

Working through Intra-Community Conflict

OutReach LGBTQ Community Center board president **Jill Nagler** shares strategies for movement building across our rainbow coalition.

THE PANDEMIC HAS BEEN extremely stressful nearly universally, especially for marginalized communities. The stresses of the pandemic, joblessness, alienation, and isolation compound upon the stresses of everyday life, which can range from not having adequate access to education to not having any access to housing. And while mutual aid efforts continue to help support those with access to technologies and networks that keep us connected, these means of connection are not universally accessible. So how do we connect with and support those in our community who are not connected, who are isolated, and who are most vulnerable to harm—whether that is community harm or harm within the systems?

Activists for intersectional social justice have emphasized the importance of community as a path to collective liberation, with a focus on offering concrete solutions for dealing with intra-community conflict and harm. Despite having many community building tools available, as well as the lived experience of folks who've been working on community-centered activism, our communities remain fractured and siloed, and the community-centered momentum that was built at the beginning of the pandemic seems to have largely burned out with the "return to normal." This is not uncommon in movement work as circumstances change and momentum is lost due to a variety of circumstances, let alone the persistence of a global pandemic.

We cannot fight each other the way that we fight the systems, and we can't rely on the systems to provide us with the support that our communities need.

The last 20 months have been a prolonged trauma, and burnout has been affecting the various helpers and givers who have been throwing themselves into their work as a coping mechanism. Those in positions of service to others have been the target of the wrath of the general public, as well as the opportunists and manipulators among us—including people in positions of political power who continue to



put people's lives at risk due to misinformation while attacking the rights of all marginalized people. While the givers and helpers are in various states of disarray and burnout, an undercurrent of hope persists. Efforts are being made to build and rebuild our communities.

A PANDEMIC OPPORTUNITY

In this moment, we have the ability to build better communities and be more intentional with how we nurture, grow, and care for our communities. But this requires reflection and accountability. It requires us facing our own shortcomings, where harm is occurring that we are responsible for, because we can't hold others accountable if we aren't taking responsibility for our own actions; we have to commit to holding ourselves and others accountable regardless how difficult or complicated. And if people are not willing to be held accountable for the harm that they have caused, then we need to find ways to protect people from further harm, together.

COMMUNITY CARE IS TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Community care and transformative justice are not new concepts, but they have gained

popularity in social justice activism due to an increased focus on efforts to abolish prisons and policing and discussions of alternatives to carceral punishment. At the core of community care and transformative justice is accountability, but what that means is not a fixed set of standards that can be uniformly applied. Accountability requires acknowledgement of the harm that has occurred and concrete steps that can be taken to remediate, repair, and/or transform the harm that has occurred. Accountability doesn't begin and end with the person who was/is harmful either. Accountability requires our community to come together and work with those most impacted to not only address the harm that occurred, but to also work together to address the root cause of the harm, as well as working to find ways to be proactive in bringing solutions to the root cause of the harm; this is community care.

Accountability is not limited to cancel culture, but in some cases exclusion is the only just solution when a person is not only unwilling to acknowledge the harm that they have caused and also unwilling to stop being harmful. And while cancel culture can be an acceptable measure when a person is actively

doing harm and refuses to acknowledge the harm that they are doing, it can also be used in abusive ways that alienate folks who try to hold abusers accountable for harm. If the goal is moving from systems of punishment to systems of community care and accountability, there needs to be room for solutions for a person to transform the harm they've caused, if they're willing to put in the work.

Of course this is referring to ways of transforming harm within communities, within organizing, when the harm is committed by peers and not in cases of significant power differences or state-sanctioned violence. We cannot fight each other the way that we fight the systems, and we can't rely on the systems to provide us with the support that our communities need. Our present situation is a glaring example of how much we rely upon one another in order to survive. It is indicative of the consequences of our fractured and siloed communities, and begs us to listen to those among us who not only preach community care, but also practice community care as best they can within the constraints of rugged individualism and the notions of a hierarchy of humanity.

This way of being in beloved community together requires a commitment to recognizing our shared humanity, as well as a commitment to working through conflict and harm together. It requires taking the time to listen and reflect on how we are in community with one another interpersonally, as well as how the greater social systems impact belonging, conflict, and harm. Individual efforts are necessary, but one person alone does not make a community and cannot be the sole catalyst for collective liberation. We need to work together to build, create, and maintain communities of care.

Some work that we need to do in order to make progress on communities of care includes asking ourselves these questions:

HOW DO WE BUILD COMMUNITY?

- What are the best tools that we have to remove barriers to inclusivity, belonging, and care?
- How do we do better when mistakes have been made and harm has occurred?
- How do we protect our community from harm?
- How do we repair harm within our communities?
- How do we learn to respond to conflict and harm without contributing to further conflict and harm?
- How do we repair, transform, and heal when harm is compounded (e.g., collateral damage)?
- How do we hold folks in our communities accountable for harm?
- How do we protect our community from people who are unwilling to be held accountable for harmful behavior?
- How do we build intra-community trust?
- How do we rebuild community?

And how do we address these issues in the midst of a global pandemic that has relied on community participation in safety efforts, in which enough people have decided not to participate in keeping others safe, which has done more harm in our communities by spreading the virus, thereby creating variants. In a post-factual world that normalizes spreading medical misinformation that has furthered suspicion, distrust, and alienation, how do we respond to the fear and conspiracy that keep us divided in a just and equitable manner?

What do we do with the anger, frustration, and sadness that many feel as a result of this prolonged separation from our communities?

When and how will we get to regain our humanity?

No one has all the answers, especially not in this moment, but I can only hope that there are enough of us dedicated to working together to find community-centered solutions that promote our shared humanity. ■



JILL NAGLER is serving their second term as President of the Board of Directors at OutReach where ze has brought a focus to issues of racial justice and representation in the LGBTQ+ community, including co-founding and facilitating Reading Antiracism: An OutReach Book Club.

Dutcher

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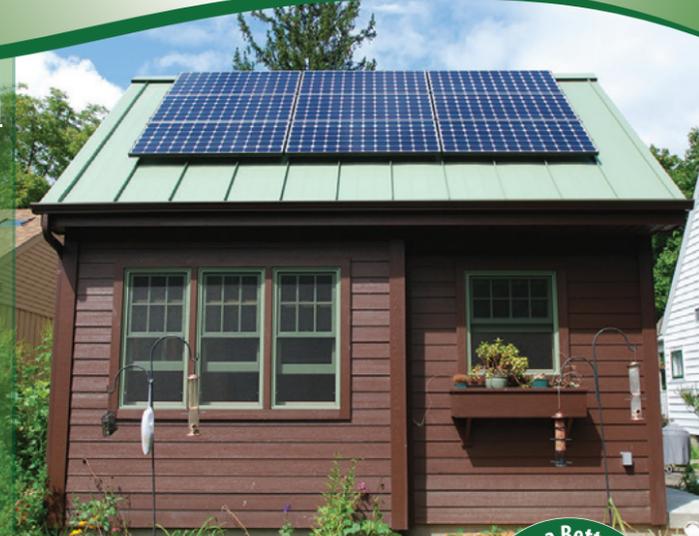


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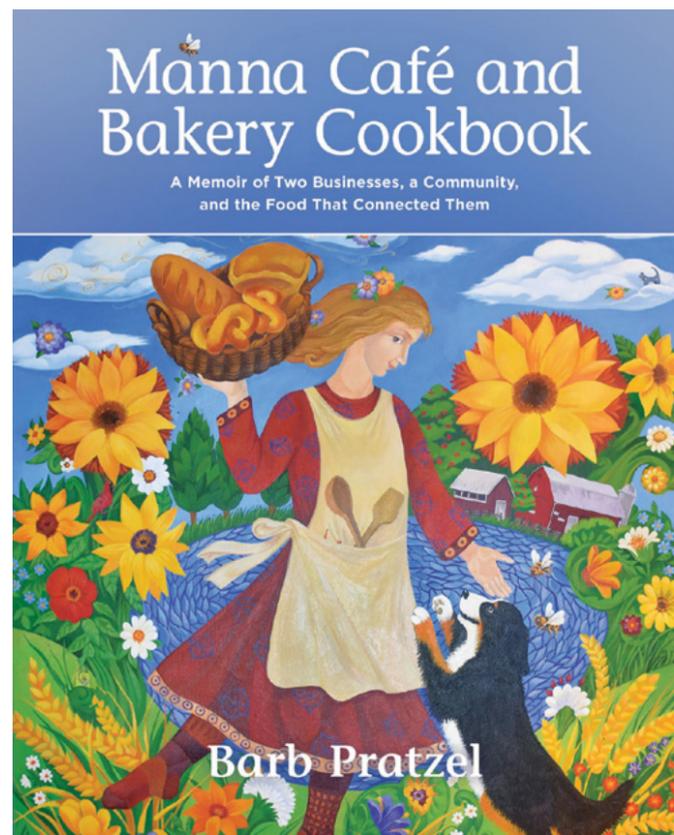
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FOOD & DINING PANDEMIC THIRD SPACES

A Fond Tribute to a Beloved Café

Manna Café & Bakery was an early pandemic casualty, but its memories and dishes live on thanks to a new cookbook from the owners of a cherished third space.

IT IS HARD TO REVIEW *Manna Cafe and Bakery Cookbook* without being wistful, because this isn't really a cookbook. Well, obviously it is a cookbook. But it is more than that. It is a memoir, it is a eulogy. It is a celebration of life. It is a funeral in physical, hardcover form, and it was written by none other than Manna co-owner Barb Pratzel. Because Manna Cafe was more than just a coffee shop. It was more than a bakery. Manna was a "third space"—one of those places a person can go and just be. The sort of place a person can think of as a public living room. Manna was that for a lot of LGBT folks in Madison—it was a magical safe place to just be. For members of a community who are all-too-often not safe or comfortable at their residence—that is an important place.

And it is just gone. I don't mean to be dramatic—there are absolutely other coffee shops in Madison. But Manna occupied a place for a lot of members of the LGBT community that was special. It was a place for a first (or fifty-first) date, to meet with colleagues, for board members to gather, for friends to collude. And it is gone. Its absence leaves a hole in the community. For many folks, Manna had become more than a place, it was almost a character in their lives. This cookbook feels very much like the final act of that beloved person.

The book is divided into two distinct sections, the first is the history of the cafe, and the B&B that preceded it. Barb tells the reader not just about the ins and outs of the businesses and how they came to be, and end, but

enchantingly about the people who inhabited them and made them the iconic businesses Madisonians came to love. There are caring stories about employees and regulars and family members and employees and regulars who became family members. This is the heart of the book, and I encourage readers to savor it. It is well-written and delightful.

The second section is the recipes, the soul of any cookbook. It seems that there are two different types of cookbooks in the world: books for food voyeurs, and books for those who like to cook and eat. The first is dominated by large glossy photos of food and scant information on recipe creation. The latter is dominated by copious instructions and descriptions of techniques used to create the food shown in the scant photos—many of which are not of completed meals but used to illustrate technique. This cookbook is very much the latter, though it is intended and written to be accessible even for those who say they can't boil water. Many of the recipes include ample instructions on such mysterious culinary practices as waking yeast or folding one ingredient into another. As Barb writes, "Sometimes it takes a recipe to make a recipe"—and she provides all that one will need.

While not all of Manna's recipes have been provided, there are over 150 of them, all scaled to fill the needs of a family of four. Chances are very good that your favorite is in there, along with its origin story.

No review of the book would be complete without mentioning the illustrations by Emily Ranney that punctuate the book with delightful drawings of the wooden spoons used as customer numbers, and the myriad of cat figurines that inhabited the space.

Recipes are able to transmit memories through families and communities. People who eat the same foods share a cultural bond. Many families have a favorite dish, and the recipes for those dishes (sometimes carefully guarded) are passed from one family member to another. Not only is this cookbook a fantastic way to keep the culture of Manna alive in our own homes, but I predict it will be one of those cookbooks that has well dog-eared pages, and notes in the margins about who likes what and how to customize each recipe for particular tastes.

Coincidentally, the book is available from another of Madison's stand-out gems and magical safe places, A Room of One's Own bookstore at its new Atwood location. ■

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*US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey - Phase 3.2 (July 21, 2021 - October 11, 2021), "Measuring Household Experiences During the Coronavirus Pandemic," August 2021

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- **Center on Halsted**
(www.centeronhalsted.org)
- **Trans Women of Color Collective**
(www.twocc.us)
- **Federation of LGBTQ Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander Organizations**
(www.nqapia.org)

Learn more about how you can get involved by visiting their websites.

For resources on allyship or to learn more about the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index, please visit www.hrc.org.