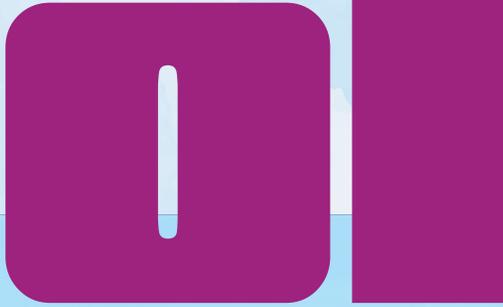


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HOME & GARDEN

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

STOUGHTON: From neglected property to eclectic eden

March/April
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The WI GOP are introducing multiple bills targeting trans minors.
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JAMES BIDGOOD

The Madison-raised photographer who elevated campy gay photography.
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REMEMBERING

DICK WAGNER

1943 - 2021

An early advocate, architect, and historian for Wisconsin's LGBTQ communities, he pioneered the way for, and mentored, all who followed—including **Senator Tammy Baldwin** and **Congressman Mark Pocan**.

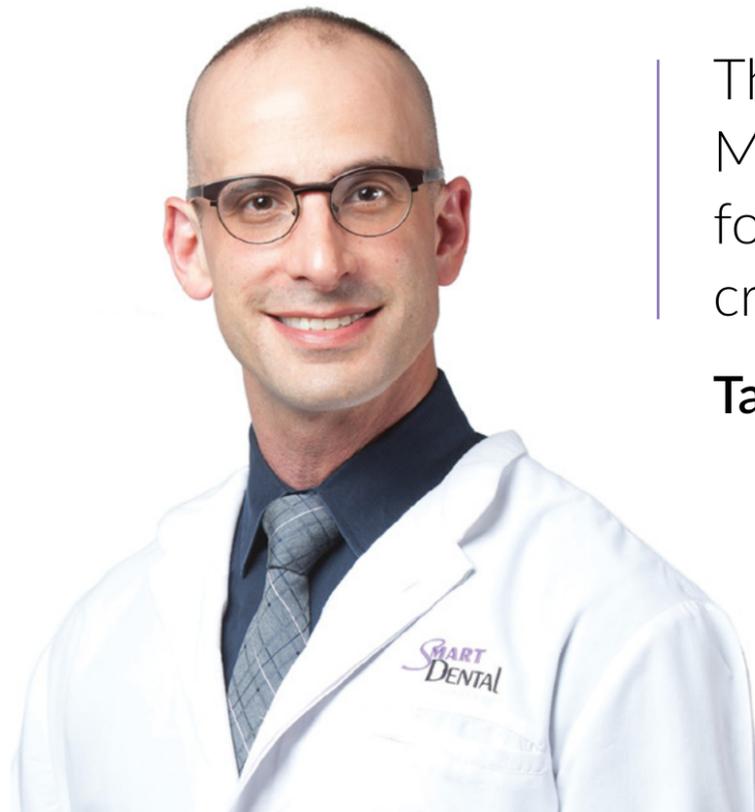
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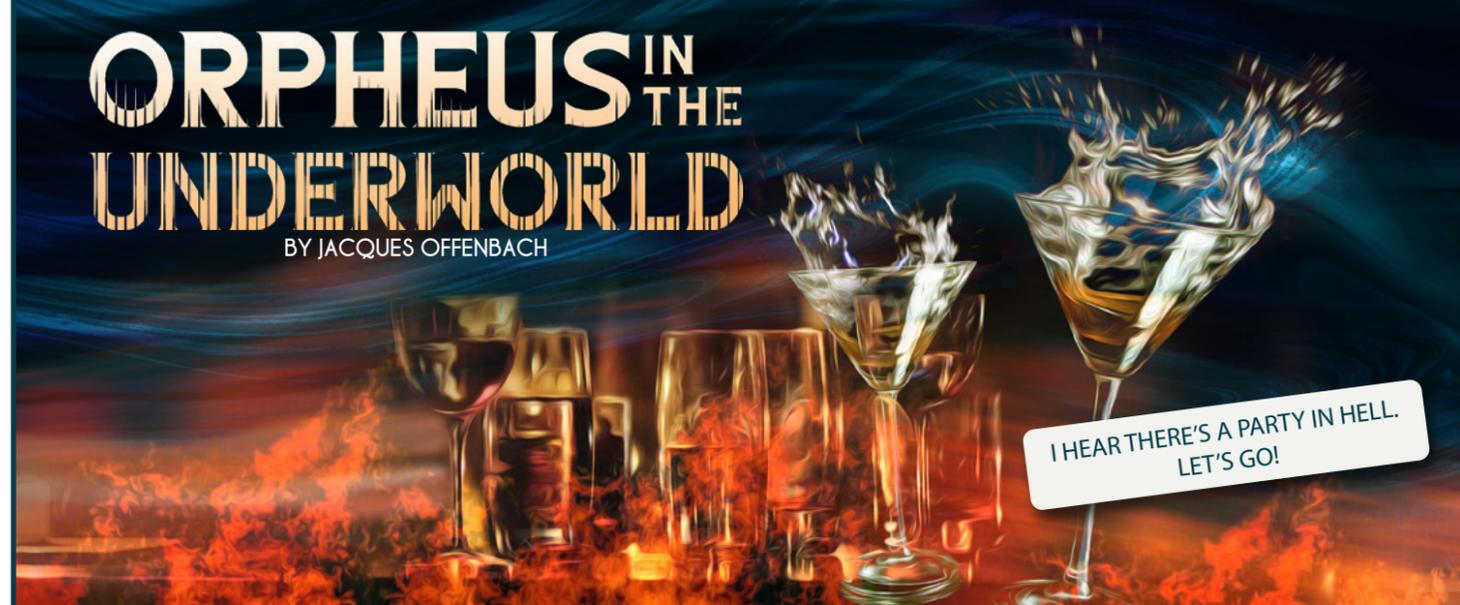


CAP TIMES

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ORPHEUS IN THE UNDERWORLD

BY JACQUES OFFENBACH



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“Most everybody thinks gay history happens on the east or west coast, but there’s a lot of it in the Midwest that’s not known. And that’s part of my crusade right now, to make it known.”

- Dick Wagner, 1943-2021

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Cover painted by Rae Senarighi



Madison’s LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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PUBLISHER'S LETTER PATRICK FARABAUGH



Wagner & Farabaugh at a New Harvest Foundation gala.



Hangin' Off Bed by James Bidgood.

Home can be how we feel in our bodies, especially for trans and gender non-conforming folk. With the mental health journey our community takes to achieve that, as **Emily Mills** reports, the attacks coming from the GOP-controlled legislature feel all the more violent.

EVERY YEAR I STRUGGLE with this issue, perhaps more than any other throughout the year. Traditionally, lifestyle magazines are known for showcasing the most over-the-top stylized homes and gardens filled with expensive appliances and gadgets. That has never felt appropriate to me for the mission of *Our Lives*. While I do want the magazine to celebrate the wonderfully creative aesthetics that queer people can envision and bring to life, I don't want to cloud the values of the magazine in a way that can feel overtly materialistic. So every year I look for a way to queer the idea of what a home and garden issue can be.

I think this issue gets that right. Home for queer people can mean different things: From real estate, to a non-geographic place of belonging. Or it can be what queer people do to provide the essence of home in places that don't traditionally evoke it. **Stacy Harbaugh's** feature on **Solace Friends** shines a much-deserved spotlight on their work to create and provide a home at the end of the road, where the homeless can die a dignified death. It should be no surprise that this org has queer leadership at every level.

Or, home can come from our chosen community, as it has for me. Our posthumous tribute to **Dick Wagner** is a way for myself—and I imagine many whose lives he's impacted—to honor and say goodbye to someone that dedicated their life to advancing equality for our full rainbow community. Dick's legacy lives on through both his political achievements and the history that he was so passionate about curating. As former Wisconsin State Assemblyman **David Clarenbach** has said, "There are, regrettably, no more Dick Wagners." I do hope our piece captures even a little of what made Dick so one-of-a-kind.

Beyond that, I'm grateful to **Karin Wolf**, for her help lifting up the work of the late photographer **James Bidgood**. Bidgood, who's often referred to as the father of the gay pulp aesthetic, was born in Stoughton and raised in Madison before leaving to make a genre-defining name for himself in New York City. His work from the 60s, long before being queer was socially acceptable in any capacity, is said to have inspired artists from Pierre et Gilles, to David LaChapelle, to Lil Nas X's "Montero" video. Karin is hoping to bring an exhibition of Bidgood's work to Madison, hopefully later this year around Pride season. Be sure to keep an eye out for that. ■

CONTRIBUTORS



LINDA LENZKE (she, her, hers) is the LGBTQ+ AODA (Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse) Advocate for the OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. Linda is in recovery for over 35 years from alcohol, substances,

and behaviors that no longer serve her. She shares her lived experience with the community members that she supports and facilitates LGBTQ+ 12-Step A.A. and Al-Anon meetings. Linda recently completed Wisconsin Certified Peer-Specialist Training. She has contributed to *Our Lives* in the past and writes for her own blog, mixedmetaphorsohmy.com where she shares stories about her lived experience as a person in recovery, a lesbian, and community activist.



KARIN WOLF is an arts administrator, freelance arts writer, and consultant. She likes to get deep and try to understand complex art, people, and ideas. Writing about them is her favorite

way to do so. She has a M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and undergraduate degrees in History, History of Cultures, and Afro-American History. She is a long-time supporter of the arts and arts education, and is involved with many organizations in establishing exhibitions, film programs, temporary art, and permanent public sculpture projects, and placemaking.



RAE SENARIGHI aka Transpainter is your average non-binary cancer survivor inspiring self-compassion, activism, and gender resilience via unapologetic portraiture and typography. Currently residing

in Madison, Rae champions storytelling through art, working to create accurate and celebratory representation of the transgender and non-binary community in the fine art world and beyond. He is on a mission to spread self-acceptance and love, as is evident in his portraiture, typography, and speaking engagements. Rae believes that trust and self-love are vital to the journey of understanding and accepting his own identity, hoping to remind others to not only love themselves, but to celebrate and lift up their respective communities. Rae's work has been featured internationally through media and news outlets, including Netflix and GLAAD, DNA India, and more. He has toured with his art to 10 states and 17 different locations and counting.



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OBITUARIES



DONNA BIDDLE died on February 24. She was my friend of almost 50 years. If my memory serves me, I first met Donna and her partner Phyllis Andersen at Lysistrata. Lysistrata played a large role in Donna's life, especially after the feminist restaurant cooperative suffered a crisis due to IRS taxes. Before the fire that destroyed the building that housed Lysistrata, Donna volunteered her time and culinary talents by hosting TGIF Dinners (Thank Goddess It's Friday) to help keep the doors open.

For years, Donna and Phyllis hosted gatherings for community members and friends at their home on Ski Lane. Years later, Donna designed the home she resided in at the end of her life with Phyllis, who supported Donna as her caregiver, companion, and much more.

Donna and I were members of a peer support group that met for 15 years and included some of our closest women friends in recovery. We met at least once a month and would retreat in Northern Wisconsin at our friend Elthea's lakefront cottage on Perch Lake in Eagle River. Donna's culinary skills would come into play again when she made her famous lasagna.

One outgrowth of our peer support group is we founded "The Orphans," lesbian women, allies, and their families in recovery. We'd gather, often at Donna's home, to share a Thanksgiving potluck or Easter dinner. As always, Donna was the welcoming and gracious host, opening her home. In addition to celebrating holidays, we'd go camping as a group at Peninsula State Park in Fish Creek in Door County.

I was honored to interview Donna for the UW Archives Oral History. Both Donna and Phyllis were early members of the LGBTQ+ community at UW-Madison, during a time that many people remained closeted.

I was also fortunate to travel with Donna to Indiana and visit the people and homes of her childhood. She shared a lot about those years and how they influenced her life; many experiences from which she needed to heal. Sharing that trip with her gave me firsthand insights into the person who was a close friend and a member of a recovery circle which made a profound difference in my life.

Lastly, people who knew and loved Donna, witnessed that she was accident prone, falling on ice, in her home, and once catching a line drive to her forehead while playing softball on A Room of One's Own Bookstore's women's rec league. I was her driver to the ER that day, where she told stories while we waited for her to be seen. Donna was a natural storyteller, so we knew she was okay.

Recently, Donna suffered a number of health crises, so she's now pain free. I'm grateful that Donna was an integral part of my life, and she will be missed, but not forgotten. —Linda Lenzke



SASHE MISHUR was a fierce femme who was never afraid to fight for a just cause or to defend the butches that she loved. Her organizing started in the 1940s with a petition on a roll of cash register tape, protesting the raising of Saturday matinee prices at the Coral Theater in Oak Lawn, IL.

In 1956, she married, enjoying a year of living in The Hague with her husband, returned to Palos Heights, IL and raised two rock and roll sons, Zachary and Jason. She coordinated volunteers for the Community Center Foundation's youth hotline,

did some family counseling, and discovered adventure education. She eventually became involved as a trainer in both high- and low-ropes courses. She was President of The Friends of Indian Boundary Prairies and received an award in 1989 from the Nature Conservancy for her work saving Gensberg, Paintbrush, Sundrop, and Dropseed Prairie. She helped preserve a total of 250 acres where she cut brush, saved seeds, and worked with others to raise money to purchase the land and preserve it.

When her sons were in their twenties, she began her life as a lesbian, eventually moving to Madison. She met Toby Sigle while she was organizing arts and crafts fairs for Apple Island, and together they began organizing women's drumming circles at their home, sharing skills in drum making and other arts.

Sashe worked at Room of One's Own Feminist Bookstore for 17 years. Sashe was a high femme, never short of bling. She had a strong sense of style, and an amazing wardrobe. When Sashe parted ways with Toby, she continued her Drum Fem group at East Madison Community Center (EMCC). Attending a workshop at the Grass Roots Leadership College, Kate Moran noticed Sashe's pink sequined beret and retro glasses. Kate made a strong point and Sashe stood up to back her and that started what they both consider to be the greatest relationship of their lives, never again to be apart for more than a night.

Kate and Sashe fought to save Drumlin Farm and for many more great causes. After leaving A Room of One's Own, Sashe eventually worked as an outreach coordinator for EMCC organizing open break-dancing sessions where she would encourage B-Boys and B-Girls to both teach something and learn something at every session. She encouraged youth leadership, creating many jams she called Honor the Warrior, where sometimes more than a hundred folks would show up to watch youth battle for cash prizes.

As an ally, she began organizing the first Disability Pride Festival, she loved working the welcome tent and greeting everyone. She later developed Myasthenia Gravis and struggled with losing her vision and mobility. She battled chronic pain for many years. She did great work with visual artist Brent Gerlach and The Neighborhood Organizing Institute, and she protested wherever she saw injustice until Covid in March of 2020. Suddenly, having an auto-immune disease and taking immune-suppressive drugs was terrifying. The isolation of Covid caused her to lose her beloved break dancers, which was very hard on her.

Eventually the isolation, steroids, chronic pain, osteoporosis, and the death of her youngest son was too much for her body to handle. She died in hospice holding Kate's hand. She was preceded in death by her ex-husband, Gerald Mishur, her son Jason, and her dear dog Pixie. She's survived by her community, including Toby Sigle, Zachary Mishur, her beloved partner Kate Moran, and their dog, Skippy. In lieu of flowers, please support the East Madison Community Center. A celebration of Sashe's life was held Sunday, March 20. ■

OUR READERS



MADISON, WI

Neal Ellis

Hi! You look familiar. Have we met before? If not, my name is Neal. My pronouns are he/him. You may have seen me either at your local gay watering hole, jogging around the city, or on a volleyball court in a park near you. I am so pleased to be featured here because I, like you, have something to say. So often and so easily, the wants and needs of those that need the most are drowned out. Being black and gay, what I needed most was a queer community to guide and uplift me so that I could finally fully realize my self-worth. I couldn't find that in Williamstown, MA nor in New York City, but it found me in Madison. In the athletic community at large, I have found a group of people that hear me and encourage me to not mince words—to make myself heard, no matter the circumstance. As the athletic community has done for me, I too endeavor to amplify minority and LGBTQIA voices and to showcase and celebrate the presence and prominence of these bodies within the Madison community and beyond. I encourage you to speak your truth—now and always. Special shoutout to my volleyball family. Shine on, loves! ■



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The Next Legislative Onslaught

Anti-LGBTQ bills pending in the **Wisconsin Legislature** mirror the increase in similar legislation making its way through statehouses across the U.S.

LAW & POLITICS ANTI-LGBTQ LEGISLATION COPYCAT BILLS

BILLS TARGETING THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY for discrimination continue to be introduced at record numbers across the country, with 280 proposals alone focused on taking rights away from transgender people. The others are aimed more broadly at stifling discussion of or support for LGBTQ people—particularly youth.

In Wisconsin, there are five bills currently pending before the Legislature that aim to undermine protections for LGBTQ people. They are almost exact copies of legislation popping up in multiple states: The so-called “parent bill of rights” that seeks to take away students’ rights to privacy and gender-affirming environments; the “don’t say gay” bill

that would either ban outright or give parents the ability to opt their children out of any discussion of LGBTQ people, issues, or history; a ban on gender-affirming medical care for youth; and laws aimed at banning transgender and non-binary kids from participating on sports teams that affirm their gender identities.

Freedom for All Americans has a comprehensive legislative tracking tool where the onslaught can be viewed in full. It also highlights the similarities between bills, indicating the coordinated effort, backed by some of the usual sources, to roll back or undo entirely the rights of LGBTQ Americans.

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“During the 2021–22 Legislative session we have seen the largest wave of anti-LGBTQ and anti-transgender/non-binary legislation in recent memory,” says Megin McDonell, Executive Director of Fair Wisconsin. “These bills show a fundamental lack of understanding about the broader LGBTQ+ community and pose significant threats to the mental, social, and physical wellbeing of our community members. Further, these bills are part of a coordinated national effort by opposition groups like Alliance Defending Freedom and Family Policy Alliance to introduce dangerous bills like these in states across the country, with a goal to use our humanity as a wedge issue for political gain in the coming midterm elections.”

A REPUGNANT ROLL-CALL

Keeping up with the status of these bills—and opportunities to testify against them—can be a daunting task. That’s almost entirely by design. The “Don’t Say Gay” bill (AB 562 & SB 598) received its first hearing with little more than 24 hours notice and was scheduled in the middle of a school day, making it difficult for those most impacted by the proposed law to testify. That bill was passed in Executive Session in February but as of print time had not yet been scheduled for a full floor vote, though it’s likely to get one before the session ends in late March.

“This bill would muzzle educators and prevent the teaching of LGBTQ+ issues, health care, and history,” noted Brian Juchems, Co-Executive Director of GSAFE, which advocates on behalf of LGBTQ students in Wisconsin. “It would require school districts to inform parents every single time anything related to LGBTQ+ topics is mentioned in the classroom or at school events.”

Parents would then be able to opt their children out of any/all lessons they chose.

A similar bill in Florida has the support of Governor Ron DeSantis and garnered fierce criticism from many, including President Joe Biden, who expressed his support for the LGBTQ community, “especially the kids who will be impacted by this hateful bill.” He vowed to “continue to fight for the protections and safety you deserve.” Currently, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas have laws on the books that expressly prohibit mention of queer identities or needs in sex education class-

es. Last year, Tennessee and Montana passed laws that allow parents to opt their children out of discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Florida bill goes a step further, allowing parents to directly sue school districts and seek damages if they believe an educator has broken the law.

SB 915, a ban on medical care for transgender youth, was introduced in the state senate in early February and was referred to the Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families. The bill would prevent and prohibit essential, often life-saving care for transgender and non-binary youth. Transgender and non-binary youth below the age of 18 would not be able to receive transition-related care of any kind, including talk-therapy, puberty blockers, hormones, or surgeries.

Language from this bill appears to have been copied nearly word-for-word from an earlier bill passed in Arkansas in 2021 and subsequently slapped down by a federal judge, thanks to a lawsuit brought by the ACLU.

The so-called “Parental Rights” bill (AB 963 & SB 962) was introduced late in the session and has so far had a

public hearing in the Assembly. It will likely be scheduled for the Senate, as it was authored by Senator Alberta Darling, who is also the chair of the Education Committee. The legislation includes clauses that would give parents the right to determine all medical care for a child unless otherwise specified in law. It would also allow parents to choose the name and pronouns a child uses at school, negating policies like Madison’s that instruct teachers to use the name and pronouns as determined by the student (that policy is currently facing litigation by the right-wing Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, which has a long history of filing anti-LGBTQ, anti-diversity lawsuits).

PARENTAL RIGHTS BILLS ARE CROPPING UP IN MULTIPLE STATES:

The final pair of bills (AB 195 & SB 323, and AB 196 & SB 322) target transgender students in public and private K–12 schools and the UW System, seeking to force youth to play on teams that don’t align with their gender identity or, more likely, to bar their participation at all. After facing overwhelming opposition in public hearings, both bills received

Take Action

To stay up-to-date on these bills and/or get connected with ways you can take action to support LGBTQ kids and adults in Wisconsin, get in touch with one of the following organizations:

- **Fair Wisconsin**
fairwisconsin.org
- **GSAFE** gsafewi.org
- **Diverse & Resilient**
diverseandresilient.org

a full floor vote in the Assembly, passing on a party-line vote of 59–38. However, the bills went nowhere in the Senate and are likely dead for the time being.

PROGRESSIVE BILLS AND LGBTQ YOUTH LEFT IN LIMBO

A slate of pro-LGBTQ bills introduced by a group of Democrats in June of 2021 has been left to languish, with Republicans refusing to schedule hearings or votes. The Equality Agenda includes a ban on discrimination on the basis of a person’s gender identity, gender expression, or gender nonconformity. Another bill would create a task force to study “the legal and societal barriers to equality for transgender, intersex, non-binary, and gender nonconforming individuals in Wisconsin.” The package also includes resolutions designating March 31 as the Transgender Day of Visibility and November 20 as a Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Democrats have introduced similar legislation for several years in a row, but while Republicans control the Legislature, none have moved forward.

For now, the only stop-gap for passage of the bad bills is Governor Tony Evers, who is almost certain to veto any anti-LGBTQ legislation that passes. Evers will face one of the four current Republican and two independen-

dent challengers in the gubernatorial race on November 8 of this year.

Meanwhile, LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin and across the country are left facing a seemingly relentless onslaught of bigotry and oppression by adults in leadership positions. A recent poll by the Trevor Project revealed that “more than two-thirds of LGBTQ youth said recent debates over state laws that target transgender people have negatively impacted their mental health.”

“While we have seen an unprecedented level of attacks on the community, we also want to remind people of the good work that our governor has done. Governor Evers has been a strong, visible ally, and has done everything he can to defend our community and advance critical policies to provide protections for the LGBTQ+ community,” says McDonell. In June of 2021 Evers introduced three executive orders that prevent the use of state funds for conversion therapy, require the use of gender neutral language in state agencies’ public-facing documents, and declared June as Pride Month.

“We are encouraging the community to call their state senators and representatives to hold the legislators who introduced this legislation accountable,” McDonell adds.

You can find your legislators and their contact information here: legis.wisconsin.gov. ■

Melanie Renee PHOTOGRAPHY



April 21 - May 8, 2022

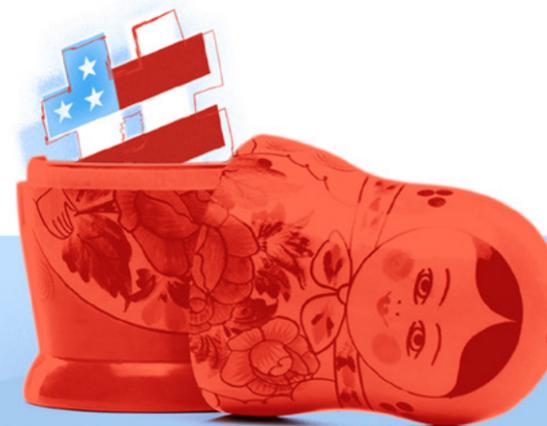
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MADISON SUBURBS HATE CRIME

Community Rallies After Hate Crime

After three men in their 20s targeted an LGBTQ home in McFarland and verbally assaulted their daughter, the Fifareks were moved by the community outcry and support.

ON THE EVENING of December 23, three young men rang the McFarland doorbell of **Christine** and **Brittany Fifarek**. When their five-year-old daughter answered, the men shouted anti-gay slurs and vulgarities at the child and left.

When the hate crime incident happened, the Fifarek family was initially confused, shocked, and surprised. Christine posted a video of the perpetrators to a neighborhood group text chat and got immediate responses of support and comfort as neighbors went into a voluntary neighborhood watch mode. Christine said one neighbor searched local bars for the perpetrators, and another neighbor "ding dong ditched" a pint of ice cream and a bouquet of flowers.

Identified as Arena residents **Cory Mellum**, 24, and **Bradley Behling**, 24, and **Malik Yrios**, 23, of Madison, police found the men with the help of community members who viewed the video online (including a viral Tik Tok), and charged them with disorderly conduct and hate crimes.

Christine and Brittany are new residents of McFarland. They purchased their home after moving to Wisconsin from Washington, D.C. to live closer to Brittany's extended family.

"We were initially concerned about living in Wisconsin, especially with it being a purple state, and we had some safety concerns with today's climate," said Christine. "We knew

Madison had good opportunities for education, work, and hobbies. We had our hearts broken a few times when house hunting on the east side. Then, we extended our search to McFarland and found the perfect house. The street we live on is like one giant front yard where the kids play all the time. We've closed the street for a couple of block parties. In the end, we got exactly what we wanted in a neighborhood."

Among the Fifareks' neighbors is photographer **Ruthie Hauge**. She agreed that the neighborhood is like one big, extended family, and she knew she and the Fifarek family would be friends right away.

"The kids were excited to have a new friend on the block when they moved in," said Hauge. "They are always out playing. They call themselves the bike gang because they ride their bikes everywhere and take over the street playing games. People watch out for each others' kids and say hi to each other. Christine and Brittany are raising their daughter with respect—the kind of respect you would give an adult peer. Their daughter is so smart, independent, and kind. She will be an incredible grown-up some day."

The outpouring of support by McFarland residents made a big difference in how the Fifarek family is dealing with what happened.

NEWS BRIEFS

WRITTEN BY STACY HARBAUGH

PELLEBON RUNNING FOR SEAT ON DANE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

DANA PELLEBON WILL RUN unopposed for an open seat on the Dane County Board of Supervisors in the spring elections. Pellebon serves as a co-executive director of Rape Crisis Center in Dane County and has experience serving on the board of OutReach LGBTQ Community Center.

Her campaign will focus on issues of economic justice, partnerships among local, state, and federal governments, and conservation and sustainability. She brings experience with working with people who have been homeless through her work at Porchlight.

Pellebon told Madison365 that when she saw an open seat in her district, "I started to think about what needs to happen in our community and how it is that I could help everyone. For me, that choice was to go straight to the government and say, 'Alright. Here is where I can make some very big impacts and help people on a larger scale.'"

She enters a race in which all Dane County Board districts were redrawn after the 2020 U.S. Census. Board Chair **Anaiese Eicher** described the updated district maps as a "natural turnover point" to the Wisconsin State Journal. For concerns ranging from personal to professional and pandemic reasons, nearly a third of county supervisors will not seek reelection. ■



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Christine described how a neighbor brought a care package with coloring books, chocolates, and stuffed animals. Another neighbor went door-to-door handing out hand-held pride flags.

"I started seeing more and more pride flags around town, and that's when I was able to really start processing what happened and how supportive the community has been," said Christine. "People keep telling us and leaving comments online that (the hate crime) isn't what happens in McFarland. Seeing their support really solidified our feelings about this community. It's nice to put out a pride or progress sign, but our neighbors really put their beliefs into action and showed their support when it was needed. Now we know that we and our daughter are truly welcome here." ■



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through the motions, but here people pause and help others.” Opening a shop during the COVID crisis is a risk and would give any business owner pause, but Kristin had a gut feeling that the space would work.

“It was a blank canvas. It had sawdust on the floors and wasn’t built out yet. The landlords were incredible with designing the space for our needs. From the layout to the flooring, the lighting, even installing gallery hanging systems, they really went above and beyond to design the space to meet our needs.”

Kristin’s background in art stretches back to ceramics and drawing classes she took in school, which inspired a degree in art therapy and studio art at Edgewood College. Now she creates nature scenes in glass mosaics and experiences firsthand the peaceful effect of creating art.

“I find making art really calming. It’s a way to center myself,” she explains. “It’s definitely something that when times have been stressful or chaotic, it brings me peace. Glass is challenging to work with. It’s actually dangerous to work with. But it’s like putting together a puzzle to make the different pieces make sense to the viewer. Some glass looks different in a window, and the colors look different in the light. It’s a challenge to include more details with smaller and smaller pieces.”

Kristin and Nicollette have a long history of collecting art, including pieces from their travels to Door County. The process of creating, collecting, and enjoying art is something that they enjoy doing together, and it guides the decisions they make on which artists to feature in the gallery.

While for some artists, the pandemic was a barrier to creating art, for others the COVID crisis opened the floodgates of creativity. Artwork is still selling as some workers’ culture shifts into a home-office hybrid in which people don’t want to stare at white walls.

“My wife and I are different in a lot of ways,” Kristin says with a laugh. “We are different people, but we agree on the artists we work with. We can easily agree on artists that have a wide appeal.”

Prior to opening the gallery, they reached out to artists they admired or who were friends-of-friends, including those who featured their work on Instagram and Etsy. Through a lot of Zoom conversations about the vision for the gallery, they pulled together a diverse mix of styles and stories. Now Kristin spends a lot of time responding to artists who approach Farwell Gallery. While the gallery is small and full, she is always looking for new artists to feature in the future.

The COVID crisis presents other challenges to how they use the space, but it isn’t stopping foot traffic in the shop. Kristin recognizes

when gay and lesbian couples stop in and express how happy they are to see the art gallery in McFarland. The holiday season was a busy one. Kristin says it’s an interesting time for artists and for the business of selling art. While for some artists, the pandemic was a barrier to creating art, for others the COVID crisis opened the floodgates of creativity. Artwork is still selling as some workers’ culture shifts into a home-office hybrid in which people don’t want to stare at white walls. The Farwell Gallery is one functional piece of that larger picture of how people are expressing their creativity through artwork.

Kristin is looking to the future and what kinds of classes, events, or creative uses of the space would be welcoming to the community. A watercolor class sold out in two days. She’s looking forward to hosting coffee hours where people can visit the shop with no pressure to buy. She knows new parents could use a quiet place outside of the house to go and enjoy the artwork, a warm cup of coffee, and some conversation.

Though the future of art shows and events is uncertain, the Farwell Gallery will continue to be both a physical space in the McFarland community and a website to sell diverse mediums of art. One area where Kristin believes there could be more diversity among the artists she features is in finding LGBTQ+ artists to work with.

“We don’t have a lot of queer artists right now,” she said. “We would love to work more with queer artists and make space for them to work with us. I love it when queer couples come to visit our space, but we also don’t have a very queer feel to this space. Having more queer artists would definitely be nice.”

—Stacy Harbaugh



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A Home for Art

Kristin and Nicollette Ellis create a space for art in McFarland with the Farwell Gallery.

McFARLAND RESIDENTS Kristin Ellis and her partner, Nicollette, quietly opened the Farwell Gallery on the day after Thanksgiving. Located in a sunny storefront on the first floor of an apartment building on Farwell Street, just west of McFarland High School, the once-empty space inspired Kristin to put her idea of opening an art gallery into reality.

“The concept of opening a gallery was something that had been in my head for years,” said Kristin, “but we hadn’t fully come up with what that vision would be. We found the space and fell in love with it. We had a short amount of time to put it together, but we named the gallery something that was easy to remember and that was visible and recognizable throughout McFarland.”

Kristin and her wife moved to McFarland around five years ago after outgrowing their home on the east side of Madison. They were visiting a friend who lived in McFarland and noticed an open house for a home that was for sale. They took a tour and fell in love with the house.

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Money Where It Matters

As Dane County's first and only funder dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ projects, the **New Harvest Foundation** has been advancing LGBTQ advocacy for 38 years.

NEW HARVEST FOUNDATION is getting close to a charitable giving milestone. Since its founding 38 years ago, the foundation will soon have distributed \$500,000 to LGBTQ+ focused nonprofits in Dane County. As the only funder in Dane County that is dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ projects, grants normally range from \$300 to \$3000 to support arts and culture, community development, health care, public education, social change, and social services.

Board chair Logan Dixon explained that the COVID crisis cranked up both the community needs and its generosity.

"New Harvest Foundation has been able to share grants up to \$10,000 to support the most at-risk groups," said Dixon. "We've funded nonprofits that serve people who are homeless, transgender and gender non-conforming people, seniors, people of color, and youth. Our primary goal continues to be a focus on at-risk populations, but as the pandemic continues, this year we're honing in on homeless, youth, and transgender issues. We see the need that's out there, and we're working with local organizations that are doing important work for the LGBTQ+ community."

In addition to giving more funding to nonprofits that serve Dane County's most

vulnerable people, the foundation is evolving to provide funding to programs around the state.

"In 2021, we expanded further because we needed the agility to provide emergency grants to groups responding to the COVID crisis," said Dixon. "We still had our main funding guidelines, but we also made exceptions to help groups to pay for their administrative costs. We sent support to more groups outside of our traditionally funded communities to be as inclusive as possible. We're still there to serve the communities that need us the most, but we are also trying to be sure we are flexible and meeting the needs of people."

In addition to giving more funding to nonprofits that serve Dane County's most vulnerable people, the foundation is evolving to provide funding to programs around the state.

We're still looking at this broader scope this year, and we're still focused on the issues we traditionally work on."

One example of a broader reach of New Harvest grants was their support for the LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin to convert their programming to all-virtual platforms.

While the foundation might not normally fund costs for administrative services like Zoom subscriptions, the need for virtual programming was essential work for the Racine-based community center to provide support services for queer and trans youth and networks for queer and trans people of color.

"We also gave a grant to FORGE for their advocacy work for trans people affected by COVID," said Dixon. "The staff there typically focus on helping survivors of violence, but COVID cost transgender people their jobs, housing, stability, access to medication. They had unique challenges to their mental and physical health and well being. FORGE was putting in the work on the ground to help people impacted by the pandemic."

In Madison, OutReach LGBTQ+ Center's LGBT parent support group helps parents network and navigate the complexities of adoption, surrogacy, foster care, and acceptance when they face homophobia or transphobia.

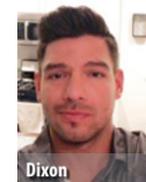
"In spite of the pandemic, families are still going through adoptions, and having kids of their own," said Dixon. "Outreach has always been good about applying for funding. This grant to the parent support group was really important now to make sure families had the support they needed at a time when people may feel really isolated."

From the early days of the pandemic, the arts have taken a particularly bad hit. Everyone from actors to sound and lighting engineers and set builders have had limited means to earn a living or share their art and passion. New Harvest Foundation found a way to invest in future shows through Wisconsin's Queer Theater company Stage Q.

"Stage Q has been the recipient of grants in the past. This year we funded Stage Q to do a week-long CapitalQ Theatre Festival at The Bartell Theatre. The funds aren't just for that show, but also for long-term production investments. The staging for this series will be reused in the future. We want to make sure to fund the arts—we always have supported the arts—but we focused on how we could help this sector that has been heavily hit by COVID."

CapitalQ Theatre Festival is an update on the "Queer Shorts" tradition of producing one-act plays during Pride month. The festival will run June 24–26.

Logan got involved with New Harvest Foundation at the invitation of his close



friend, Melissa Hunt. They had served on boards together in the past, and it didn't take much convincing for the Melissa to get Logan to sign up. After the end of board chair Holly Anderson's term, the board elected Logan to be the next chair.

One example of a broader reach of New Harvest grants was their support for the LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin to convert their programming to all-virtual platforms.

"It's voluntary-but-satisfying work," he said. "We would welcome more people to join the board. It's not a ton of time commitment, but the work we do is so satisfying in how we can impact the communities we work and live in. Now that we are funding organizations outside of Dane County, we'd especially welcome board members who live outside of Dane County as well."

By collectively raising money and redistributing it to LGBTQ+ organizations, New Harvest Foundation's mission can make a big impact in supporting the rights, services, culture, and community development of the queer and trans community. Dixon describes donors as the lifeblood of the organization.

"A huge portion of revenue comes from

monthly or recurring donations," he said. "We have a fundraising drive once a year to ask folks who may have additional money they can give. Planned giving is also an option for donors to give back. We always appreciate the continued involvement with the donors we have."

Volunteers who want to learn more about serving on the board can email. Details on becoming a donor are available at newharvestfoundation.org, where donors can sign up for updates on the foundation's mailing list or Facebook page. ■



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LGBT SPORTS | SOFTBALL | PERSONAL GROWTH

Taking a Swing

Badgerland Softball Women's+ Commissioner **Jess Wreczycki** recounts finding the league before she was out and how it contributed to her growth as a person and in community.



AS BADGERLAND SOFTBALL League celebrates its contribution toward 20 years of providing LGBTQIA softball in the greater Madison area, I took a moment to pause and reflect on what a momentous achievement this is, as well as how my involvement in Badgerland, and in its predecessors, has helped to shape the individual I am today. Many Our Lives readers may be familiar with Madison Gay Hockey Association (MGHA)'s annual essay contest "What Gay Hockey Means to Me." Inspired by that theme of autobiographical openness, I decided to share my story of Badgerland with others. This is not a history of the league, but rather my own personal experience.

February 2006, I was a bright-eyed freshly turned 21-year-old who would soon be wrapping up my third year at UW-Madison. College was supposed to be all about finding yourself, becoming an adult, figuring out what to do with your life. As I looked toward my future, I was still lost. My inner self was still tormented with self-doubt and self-hate. I still had yet to figure out where I belonged in the world. And I still felt very alone. I didn't want others to know about my inner turmoils so I carried

on with my head held high. My best friend at the time wanted me to meet his new boyfriend for the first time, so off we went. As we approached his boyfriend, my ears perked up as another patron kissed his cheek and said, "See you next week at softball registration." I was immediately excited. After a few pleasantries, I was eager to get back to the softball discussion. "I overheard you play softball? Where do you play?"

This recreational softball league was not like any other I had ever heard about. It was open-gendered, so teams weren't based on

strict binary "co-ed" rules where teams must have an even number of men and women, where the assumption is that men are better athletes than women. I found a place where gender was less rigid and not always binary, sexuality wasn't criticized, and a place where it was safe to be who you are, no matter who you are. I signed up the first chance I had. There I got to know my first girlfriend, experienced life in Madison outside of downtown and the bar scene, and of course got re-acquainted with my love of sports. I would likely not have joined MGHA or LGBT volleyball if I hadn't



found Badgerland Softball first.

At 21, I was not out of the closet yet. Not to others. Not even to myself. Discovering this league was more than finding a place to ball. It allowed me to find a community. It allowed me to discover myself. This league has helped turn a rather shy, timid, in-the-closet kid into an independent-thinking, forward-minded, out-and-proud woman. In the 16 years I have been with the league, I have grown from player, to coach and mentor, to commissioner and national delegate. Badgerland has afforded me opportunities that I never would have otherwise been able to achieve and given me lifelong friendships that are more than priceless.

After my inaugural year on the "Black Beauty" team, one night a week was no longer enough. I was recruited to join the L-Team for the Tuesday night women's league. Of course, I couldn't say no. With a few years under my belt, it was time to start giving back to the league in the form of coaching and managing. As Badgerland kept growing, so, too, did the number of days a week that I played softball. I added Sundays to the list of Badgerland Leagues I played in, an open-gendered competitive league. This is where I was introduced to traveling in more competitive tournaments.

With the help of Badgerland's generous, shared fundraising events, I was able to travel across the country with my fellow Badgerlanders to several tournaments. I have been to Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Austin, Kansas City, St. Louis, New Orleans, Long Beach, Virginia Beach, and this year, Washington, D.C. My teams have brought five trophies home to Madison from these tournaments, but win or lose, these experiences can never be forgotten nor would they have been able to happen without Badgerland Softball League.



This league has helped turn a rather shy, timid, in-the-closet kid into an independent-thinking, forward-minded, out-and-proud woman.

My most recent endeavor with Badgerland has been that of Women's+ Commissioner. The opportunity to help carry this league into the future has been both a privilege and humbling experience. Our league has had its fair share of struggles throughout the years. Some decisions have been made that some, including myself, may not have necessarily agreed with as well. However, despite the flaws, I will always stand by Badgerland Softball League and be grateful for its existence when I needed it most. And I have promised to dedicate my time to ensure that this league endures so that someone in need in the future may also stumble across its wonderful community of humans. ■

Badgerland Softball League Info

OPEN RECREATIONAL: Sunday afternoons, McGaw Park (Fitchburg), 8-week season
This league is for anyone who just wants to have fun. It's open to all genders, and knowledge of softball is not required. Here everyone registers as "free agents," and we try our best to balance each teams' skill levels to make for safe, fairly matched, and fun games. Historically, we have been able to accommodate reasonable play-with requests.

OPEN COMPETITIVE: Sunday late mornings, McGaw Park (Fitchburg), 5-week season
This league is for anyone that has quite a bit of experience and is ready to take their game to the next level. This league comprises two divisions (C and D), but all play against each other in a single schedule. This league is open to all genders. Registration for this league is as a team, but free agents are always welcome to register to be considered for a roster. This league is the primary source of qualification for the NAGAAA World Series. (Need not attend the World Series to play in the league.)

WOMEN'S+ SEMI-COMPETITIVE: Tuesday evenings, location TBD, 10-week season
This league is for women, trans, and non-binary folk. This league's aim is to create a safe space around the sport of softball. Some softball experience is encouraged but not necessary. Historically, this has been a more competitive league but all skill levels are encouraged to register. This league is the primary source of qualification for the ASANA World Series. (Need not attend the World Series to play in the league.)

Registration is now open at badgerlandsoftball.com or [contact info@badgerlandsoftball.com](mailto:info@badgerlandsoftball.com).

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FASHION GENDER EXPRESSION PERSONAL GROWTH

Designing Gender Freedom

After struggling to find clothes that represented them, **Nikki Nelson** launched **Queer Suave** to create a space that focused on fashion and clothing.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

I grew up poor and lived on the southside on Badger Road in Madison with my mom and brother. We moved around a lot, but wherever we lived it also felt like home. My mom did a good job of teaching me that you don't need a lot to be happy and how important it is to be resourceful and learn how to do many things for yourself.

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE GROWING UP?

When I was growing up, I was extremely shy, which made it hard for me to tell people I needed help. Paired with undiagnosed dyslexia, I had a tough time in school and didn't want to go, ever. I believe one big reason I was shy was because of what was going on at home. I love my mom and my dad very much, but they both suffered from drug addiction. It was extremely hard on me and my older brother when my mom went to prison for three years, and my brother and I were split apart. I did grow out of my shyness once my mom came home, and school got a little easier, but the addiction and my dad's death of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease when I was 14 made childhood feel like a roller-coaster. I did learn so much from my mom and dad before they passed. They taught me how to be strong, kind, and caring. One of the biggest lessons I learned from them was to treat people how you want to be treated. I really do live my life by that.

HOW DID COMING OUT IMPACT YOUR SELF CONFIDENCE AND SELF EXPRESSION?

After I came out to my mom when I was 14, I was over the moon. I was so excited to finally not have to hide. I always felt like the odd one out in my family, and at times in life, but being able to express myself through fashion has allowed me to thrive. I always struggled to feel comfortable in my own body, and until recently I couldn't understand why, but when I came out for the second time as non-binary and looked into hormone replacement therapy, things started to look up. I wanted to change all this negativity to something positive. I knew by digging deep within myself, I could get over the fears I had about coming out again, going back to fashion school, and teaching myself how to sew from scratch. I've made big jumps this year, and I'm very grateful for everything.

HOW HAVE YOU STRUGGLED WITH CLOTHING?

My biggest struggle has been finding clothing that fits. I really didn't like shopping for clothing in a typical store. It really made me feel uncomfortable being told I was in the "men's" section and therefore was in the "wrong" section. The looks, the stares, the glares—it really sucked, since all I wanted was to find some way to express myself finally after coming out.

I had to go to a tailor to get some clothing re-sized for a job and it made me feel really uncomfortable from the jump. The person running

it right away told me I had men's clothing and I must have grabbed them by mistake. When I said "no" he just looked at me like I had two heads then proceeded to act uncomfortable and upset the whole time while also not respecting my requests. Long story short, I wanted to change this and knew I had to help to prevent someone else from having to feel this way.

WHAT IS QUEER SUAVE BOUTIQUE, AND WHAT GOALS DO YOU HAVE FOR IT?

Right when I came out, I felt like there were few safe queer or artsy queer spaces. There were some welcoming spaces, but none focused on fashion and clothing. I started Queer Suave boutique to give the Madison queer community space for fashion. My goal in the coming years is to open a physical storefront where you can have your clothing tailored, custom clothing made, suits constructed, and have a space to learn about

You can come with me on the journey of making that yard of fabric and buttons into something amazing, whether it's a jacket that protects your confidence like armor, pants that make you feel like you can take on the world, or a caped blouse that makes you feel like your own superhero

the journey of creating clothing where you can trust the process of and enjoy it. I'd also love to create a space where you can both come and watch my work and design your own garments. You can come with me on the journey of making that yard of fabric and buttons into something amazing, whether it's a jacket that protects your confidence like armor, pants that make you feel like you can take on the world, or a caped blouse that makes you feel like your own superhero.

HOW CAN PEOPLE ACCESS QUEER SUAVE?

For now, everything is done through my website, but you are still very much involved in the process. I'll make a digital image of your garment then we get to the fun part of picking out fabric, thread, buttons, snaps, or straps. Anything you want! I'll create a sample of your garment for you to test the fit. Then I will cut out your garment pieces to sew, construct it for you, and make you an unforgettable and totally unique piece of clothing that you had a part in creating.

I also have small collections that are ready-to-wear or can be customized and fit to measure for you as well. These collections drop weekly and are limited to five or 10 items that are never re-created, so they're truly unique.

My clothing design is a mix of formal with streetwear. I wanted it to look sharp and clean but also comfortable as well. Check it out at queer-suavebynikki.com.



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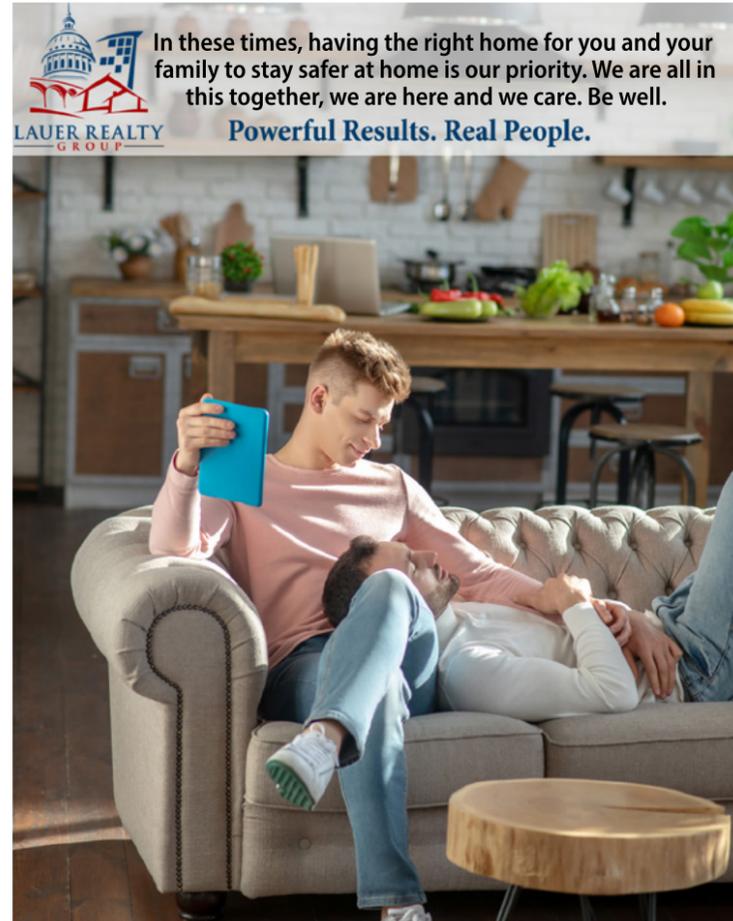
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A Truly Civil Servant

While a movement is always bigger than a single person, few have moved as much as **Dick Wagner**. An early advocate, architect, and historian for Wisconsin's LGBTQ communities, as one of the first out electeds in the nation, he pioneered the way for, and mentored, Senator Tammy Baldwin and Congressman Mark Pocan. As former Wisconsin State Assemblyman David Clarenbach has said, "There are, regrettably, no more Dick Wagners."

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"He made so many people feel like they weren't alone, and that they could do whatever they wanted to do."

"I never once saw him get angry. Frustrated yes, angry no. He was always the perfect gentleman."

"His laugh, oh his laugh. I will always remember it. If you knew him, you know what I mean."

WHEN WISCONSIN LOST Roland Richard "Dick" Wagner on December 12, 2021, we lost more than an esteemed civil servant, dedicated historian, and consummate host. We lost the long-time linchpin connecting the remarkable advance of LGBTQ civil rights, the vibrant careers of LGBTQ politicians, and the proud heritage of LGBTQ people statewide. We lost a champion for the preservation of historic homes, lavish gardens, vibrant neighborhoods, and elegant parks, and the constant steward of a higher quality of city life. And we lost the last of the great political operators, who was driven by strategy, guided by compassion and curiosity, and deeply committed to progress for all.

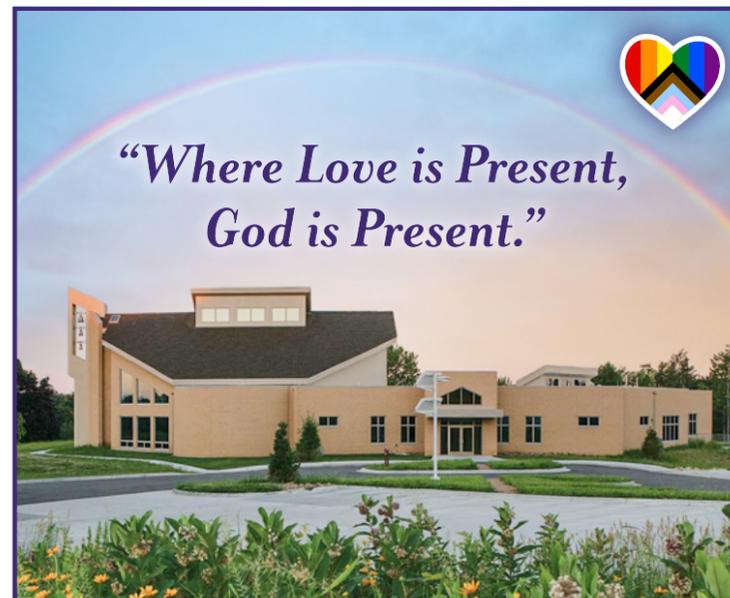
"There are, regrettably, no more Dick Wagners," said former Wisconsin State Assemblyman David Clarenbach. "I don't know that there's anyone else on his level, or even approaching his level, with the wide range of influence Dick had across so many causes and communities."

ORIGINS

Dick Wagner was born in Dayton, Ohio on September 12, 1943. He completed graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with Master of Arts (1967) and Ph.D. (1971) in American history. His passion for social justice began early: He organized a Civil Rights rally in 1965 after the "Bloody Sunday" violence in Selma, Alabama, and marched with Reverend James Groppi in Milwaukee for fair housing. Later, he organized rallies with the Moratorium Against the War in Vietnam.

He soon launched a 33-year civil service career and a humbling portfolio of work.

Over the next three decades, Dick served Wisconsin in innumerable ways, including advisory or board positions with Historic Madison, Inc., the Gay Center, the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, Dane County Regional Planning Commission, Airport Commission, Downtown Madison, Inc., Madison AIDS Network, Olbrich Botanical Society, and Fair Wisconsin. He chaired the Madison Landmarks Commission, Plan



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Years before George Segal's "Gay Liberation" was permanently installed in New York's Sheridan Square, Wagner was instrumental in making the statues' first home Madison's Orton Park.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT CIRCA 1989: Richard Wagner, then Dane County Board Chair; Madison Alder Jim McFarland, District 8; Dane County Supervisor Earl Bricker, District 9; Madison Alder Ricardo Gonzalez, District 4; Dane County Supervisor Kathleen Nichols, District 2; Dane County Supervisor Tammy Baldwin, District 8.

Commission, Urban Design Commission, Wisconsin Arts Boards, and Wisconsin Humanities Council. He was a founding member and first co-chair of the New Harvest Foundation for LGBTQ charitable causes. In 1980, he was the first openly gay official elected to the Dane County Board of Supervisors. He served 14 years as a County Supervisor, including four years as Chairperson.

"He couldn't say no to public service," said Madison Alderman Mike Verveer.

Dick was instrumental in changing the Madison landscape: He drove the formation of Period Garden Park in Mansion Hill, Kerr-McGee Triangle Park, the Rodney Scheel House, and Monona Terrace. He organized the local installation of George Segal's "Gay Liberation" sculpture in Orton Park, before it was permanently housed at New York City's Stonewall National Monument.

"By the 1990s, Wisconsin had more publicly elected LGBTQ officials than any other state, including New York, California, or Massachusetts," said Clarenbach. "I can credit that to a lot of things, but if there's one thing, it was Dick Wagner's organizing skills."

"Nothing happened in the past 30-40 years that he didn't have his hand in," said Mark Webster, communications strategist. "He was the one who negotiated the size, scope, and sustainability of almost every building constructed in downtown Madison. He was the constant negotiator. He got things done in a way that people felt they didn't lose. He always made progress, but without making enemies of the people he was opposed to."

"From my perspective, Dick was the most influential behind the scenes," said Clarenbach. "He was a leader and an organizer, but he was very quiet about his leadership. It was striking that he sometimes stood so far in the background. He was the kindest and most gentle politician I've ever known. It's a rare combination: Civility and principle does not usually coexist in one political figure. But that's how he conducted his

personal and public lives."

Humility became Wagner's hallmark. "He never lost his cool, never returned an insult, and never lost his commitment to the cause," said former Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz. "He could handle the heat." Current Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway agreed, "He was a kind and generous man who treated everyone with respect and dignity."

"The tone of political discourse has degenerated so severely, not only in Washington D.C. but at the State Capitol, that I don't even recognize the environment anymore," said Clarenbach. "And I spent most of my adult life in that environment. Worse yet, it's crept down into the public level as well."

"Dick worried that activists would stoop to the same tactics as the fascists they were fighting," said Webster. "He believed the way to win in the future was to be bigger than they are, to be more 'American' than they are. The American ethos should be about civil liberties and constitutional rights, and when those are being attacked, we lose our moral high ground. He

hoped activists would be cloaked in the republic they loved. America is an imperfect union, but the foundations are strong, and every generation has improved upon them. Attacking the foundations of America meant reducing rights for all Americans."

As a testament to his reputation, Wagner was presented the first-ever Jeffrey Clay Erlanger Civility in Public Discourse Award in 2007.

TRAILBLAZING FOR GAY RIGHTS

"I first met Dick Wagner more than 50 years ago, while we were working on the McCarthy primary campaign in 1968," said Clarenbach. "I was 15 years old. He was attending the university. We got to know each other much better through the anti-war movement. He was involved in organizing a series of mass demonstrations against the war, on designated days each month, to really focus public attention against the Vietnam War. Dick was also a heavy mover and shaker behind the 1970 gubernatorial campaign. He initiated a lot of the grassroots techniques that were used throughout the 1970s. It was a very dynamic and trailblazing campaign."

"I graduated from high school in 1971 and moved downtown to Dick's neighborhood. In spring 1972, I was either precocious or arrogant, and so I decided to run for the County Board of Supervisors. Dick spearheaded my campaign efforts. It was a surprise victory—no one really expected this 18-year-old high school student to get elected to office—especially in the first year in which 18-year-olds were allowed to vote! (Until spring 1972, you were required to be 21.) I was the first 18-year-old elected to the Board."

"Dick's skills—organizing, negotiating, focusing, rallying—made me successful. That kickstarted my political career—to which I give Dick full credit," said Clarenbach.

At the time, Dick was only out to his closest friends. Stonewall had just happened in 1969, and gay rights organizations were only beginning to take shape across America. The Madison Alliance for Homosexual Equality, formed in November 1969, was the first in Wisconsin. By 1970, the group had evolved into the more militant Gay Liberation Front. However, it was not yet a time for gay visibility or voice in political affairs.



The 5th anniversary of Wisconsin's pioneering gay rights law was celebrated with public LGBT officials in 1987. FROM LEFT: State Representative David Clarenbach, Dane County Board Supervisor Dick Wagner, Madison Alderperson Hank Lufler, State Representative Tim Carpenter, Dane County Board Supervisor Tammy Baldwin, and Dane County Board Supervisor Kathleen Nichols.

"My introduction to Dick was not based on sexual orientation, but we understood that we were gay," said Clarenbach. "And, as soon as he could, he used his access and position to start moving the needle for gay people."

"It was important to both of us that my campaign include a very clear and very public declaration of advocacy for gay rights," said Clarenbach. "I use the term 'gay rights' as there was no LGBTQ acronym at the time. The campaign was one of the first concerted efforts, in Wisconsin politics, to advance the cause in a public forum. In today's world, it is difficult to dial back the clock 50 years and understand the significance of this. But it was extremely significant."

Wagner lobbied for a gay rights ordinance throughout 1974. In 1975, Madison became the first city in Wisconsin to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. (Milwaukee followed with its own ordinance in 1980.) Wagner worked with Madison's first Gay Center in 1978 and 1979 to better understand the needs and wants of the local community. Inspired by the life and work of Harvey Milk, Wagner ran for the Dane County Board in 1980.

In 1982, Clarenbach partnered with Wagner on a bill that would extend those discrimination protections statewide.

"I don't think I can overstate the role he played," says Clarenbach. "If there was no Dick Wagner, I doubt Wisconsin would have become the Gay Rights State."

"The nation's first gay rights law was enacted with a carefully planned, three-tiered strategy: 1) bipartisan support, the bill passed thanks to Republican votes and was signed into law by a Republican governor, eliminating all risk of partisan dissent; 2) religious advocacy, by defining human discrimination as the terms of the debate, not endorsement or approval of homosexuals, we created a base of humanitarian support that isolated the extreme right-wing reactionaries; 3) change led by the community itself; it took eight full years to get the bill to a place of political support and legislative support before it was brought to a vote. By that time, gay community leaders were recognized and respected within Wisconsin."

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LEFT: Wagner with David Clarenbach at Clarenbach's first fundraiser for his election to the Dane County Board in 1972. RIGHT: With Scott Thornton and Scott McDonell at the opening of Monona Terrace in 1997.

an invaluable service. There was so much blowback after the Gay Rights Law was enacted, and serious risks that it would be repealed by the 'Moral Majority' that was moving into government. Although they targeted the law, it wasn't repealed—it wasn't even brought up for a vote. And we can credit Dick for his hard work in small towns throughout Wisconsin, helping people understand what the law meant—and what it didn't mean."

"This was groundbreaking for a straight governor, in a state like Wisconsin in 1983, to ask a gay man and a lesbian to travel around the state surveying the LGBTQ political and cultural climate. It was so groundbreaking it may have cost him reelection. His opponent said the

governor's office was "full of fruits, flakes, and nuts." But Dick thought this was tremendously heroic, to take this risk as a one-term governor, for the advancement of Wisconsin.

"Dick was always wondering when the pitchforks would come for gay and lesbian people," said Webster. "He was very worried about the last presidential administration and the potential misinterpretation of the Constitution. At the same time, he had faith that the moral arc would forever bend toward freedom."

In 2006, the Wisconsin Marriage Amendment passed via referendum with 59% of votes. With marriage off the horizon for the foreseeable future, Dick began to plan "ideas from exile."

"It was a tough time for equality organizations, because we had so little opportunity for wins," said Megin McDonell of Fair Wisconsin. "If you'd asked anyone in 2009, will we have marriage in the next decade, we'd have thought you were crazy."

"Dick realized the battle was going to be uphill, and we'd need more leaders to get us to the top of that hill. So, in 2012, we launched the Wisconsin LGBT Leadership Conference. Although the pandemic has impacted event planning, the mission and purpose of the Leadership Conference remains the same, a full decade later."

Of course, when marriage equality did arrive in Wisconsin in June 2014, Dick was at the county clerk's office, issuing the first same-sex marriage licenses in the state as a deputized clerk.

"We anticipated the court ruling, and we wanted to be ready," said Scott McDonell, Dane County Clerk, "so when the ruling arrived at 4 p.m., we had an assembly line set up. This was really very important to me, and it was important for Dick to be part of this history. We coordinated our timing with the Milwaukee County clerks, which wasn't easy because the phone lines were overwhelmed! By 5:30 p.m., there was a line out the door. We opened more windows, trained more people, and

increased access to anyone who wanted to marry."

"Our office issued the first license in the state of Wisconsin," said Scott McDonell. "And by Monday, the rest of the state was doing it. And we just kept on doing it until the stay."

"Dick knew that marriage equality was not the end of the fight," said Megin McDonell. "He really lit the fires of the Equality Act in political circles. He kept the conversations going. He kept focus on what mattered. He never took his foot off the gas pedal."

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

As one of the first dozen openly gay officials in the nation, Dick Wagner was a founding member of the National Association and Conference of Gay and Lesbian Public Officials in 1985. Later the International Network of Lesbian and Gay Officials, and now the Victory Institute, the organization brought together elected LGBTQ officials to create a network of support. Wagner co-hosted the group's fifth conference in Madison with Senator Tammy Baldwin.

"I don't think I can overstate the role he played," says Clarenbach. "If there was no Dick Wagner, I doubt Wisconsin would have become the Gay Rights State."

"If you were on a school board in Missouri, and openly gay, and targeted by abuse, it was crucial to have an established support group to lean on," said Clarenbach. "So many people were so terribly isolated and had so few resources."

"He was a mentor to many around the country, but certainly in our backyard," said U.S. Representative Mark Pocan. "I don't know if there would be a Representative Mark Pocan or a Senator Tammy Baldwin or an Alderman Mike Verveer, if it wasn't for Dick Wagner."

"By the 1990s, Wisconsin had more publicly elected LGBTQ officials than any other state, including New York, California, or Massachusetts," said Clarenbach. "I can credit that to a lot of things, but if there's one thing, it was Dick Wagner's organizing skills."

Scott McDonell agreed, "In Wisconsin, being gay and running for office isn't a big deal anymore, and that's because of Dick Wagner. Gay people in the 1980s or 1990s saw Dick confidently and effectively holding a leadership position, and it made it easier for them to pursue their own potential. So many folks leaned on him and looked up to him. He had such a profound effect on people, like a favorite teacher."

"We met in 1996 when I decided to run for County Board," said Scott McDonell. "I was just starting to organize my campaign and figuring out what I wanted to stand for. People pointed me to Dick because he'd been on the County Board for years. His reputation preceded him as the County Board chair. Everyone had such tremendous respect for him, as that position holds so much power in Madison."

"And then, I won that seat by six votes!"

"Over time, Dick became a member of our family. My wife worked with him at Fair Wisconsin," Scott McDonell said. "We chose Dick as our oldest son's godfather. I wanted someone who would help guide his religious education and spiritual upbringing. Dick was fairly religious, having spent a lot of time at St. Paul's on campus when he was younger, and Holy Wisdom as the local church became more conservative and exclusionary."

"My son is 16 and identifies as transgender," said Scott. "He and Dick spent a lot of time together. He is a student of history and culture, and so he enjoyed Dick's library of books so very much. It was always his favorite place to hang out. Less than a week before Dick died, he

and Sawyer went to Holy Wisdom to meet a visiting transgender pastor. These are memories he'll never forget."

"Dick Wagner was a deeply inspiring person in my life as a role model, mentor, and lifelong friend," said Senator Tammy Baldwin in a statement to *Our Lives*. "I may not have ever entered public service if not for the guidance and encouragement he provided me to walk the path he paved. He provided the opportunity for young people like myself and others growing up all over Wisconsin to know that they are not alone and that they stand on the shoulders of people who came before them. Dick lived a life that showed to all of us that history only moves in one direction: Forward. For that, I am forever grateful."

REVEALING OUR HIDDEN HISTORY

As if he wasn't heavily committed enough, Dick Wagner was also a prolific writer. In 2002, he published *DOA, The Story: Four Decades of Wisconsin's Department of Administration*. He contributed to *Our Lives* for 14 years and became the magazine's longest-running contributor.

His next project focused on the history of LGBTQ people in Wisconsin. *We've Been Here All Along* was published in 2019, chronicling early gay and lesbian existence before 1969. In 2020, he published the second of his two-book series, called *Coming Out, Moving Forward: Wisconsin's Recent Gay History*. It highlights the modern LGBTQ civil rights movement. He said he chose his book title to highlight that LGBTQ people have always been in Wisconsin, even before there was a Wisconsin, and that our history did not begin at the Stonewall Uprising.

"Not all of gay history happened in New York or California," he said. "Dick knew that this history needed to be documented," said Scott McDonell, "and I think he feared that someday it might even be erased. His central message is so powerful: you are not alone, and you've never been alone."



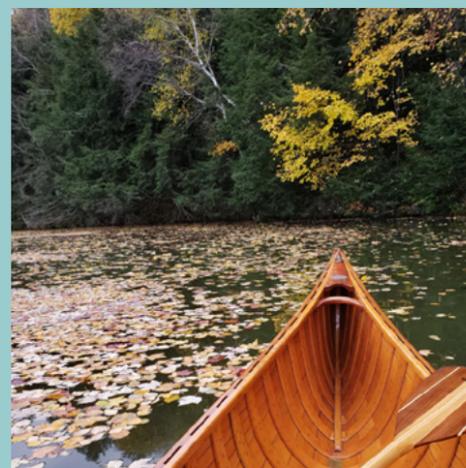
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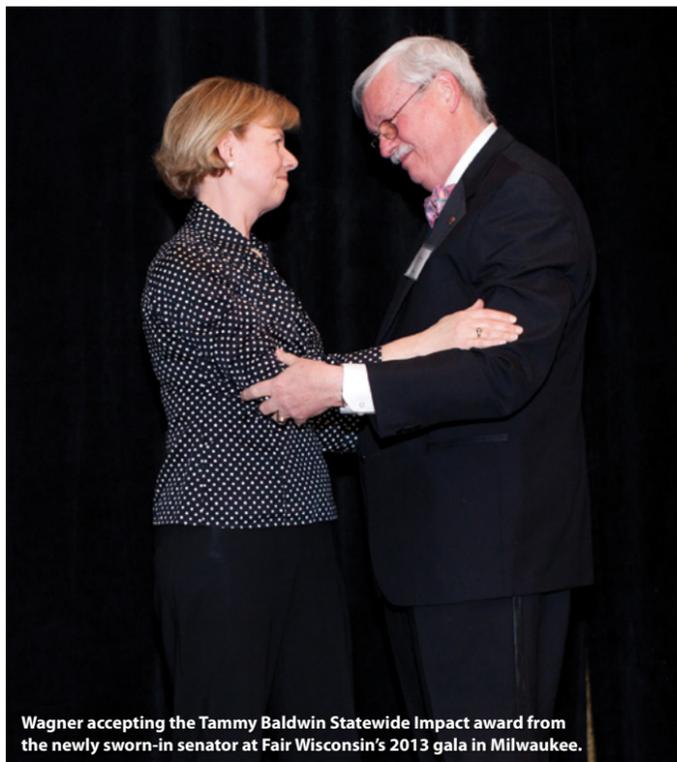
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Wagner accepting the Tammy Baldwin Statewide Impact award from the newly sworn-in senator at Fair Wisconsin's 2013 gala in Milwaukee.

"The quality of research produced in those two volumes did not surprise me," said Clarenbach. "But it was extraordinary. As someone who has been long involved with the LGBTQ community, I gained a much greater appreciation for the depth and breadth of who we were. For most of the public, and even for LGBTQ people of my generation, there just isn't sufficient appreciation for our culture, heritage, or long-time presence in American life. While there were not legislative or political actions before Stonewall, the fact is that we had presence in every community in the state, in every nook, in every cranny, and we contributed to our communities in very real ways."

"He told stories of pioneers who were living their lives, as they wished, when it was unpopular, dangerous, even deadly to do so," said Webster. "He wasn't out as a teenager, or even a college student, but he understood how people struggled to find their truth and express their identities while navigating an unaccepting society."

"Because I was his book coach, he would send me content as it was developing," Webster said. "It struck me how the story was often the same: people making a big difference in their own small ways. They didn't proclaim themselves 'activists' in 1914 or 1932, but they said, 'I'm living with another man, and we are opening this business together.' The courage it took people—just to live their day-to-day—was incredible. Dick read between the lines—and the language of those eras—and put himself in their shoes."

"My only criticism is that Dick wrote himself out of the story to a very large extent," said Clarenbach. "Yes, he was the author, but there was so much more about himself that he could have included. And I told him this myself when it was published, 'You fumbled the ball on the second volume, sir!'"

Don Schwamb, founder of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, partnered with Dick Wagner on more than occasion. He shared his final respects for a fellow community historian: "For large segments of our history, LGBTQ life was hidden beneath layers of ignorance, disguised as 'morality' or religious righteousness," said Schwamb. "The story of our survival has been suppressed, misrepresented, and silenced. It takes talent

to tease out the truth from the ambiguity. It takes a special type of intellectual researcher to uncover the true history of LGBTQ people, and our cultural contributions to our state and country. Dick was able to shine a spotlight into some of the darkest eras of Wisconsin history and still find hope. Together, Dick's books provide a resource, a guiding influence, and an inspiration for future researchers. Just as he credits the History Project for context, he motivates me and others to continue pursuing this work."

"He spent so much time digging through the archives that he developed a lasting and lifelong appreciation for their body of work," said Webster. "As an executor of his estate, and one of the people the book was dedicated to, I'm proud to say that the LGBTQ Archives at UW-Madison will receive a generous gift from Dick."

In 2020, Dick also contributed a chapter to the anthology *Education for Democracy: Renewing the Wisconsin Idea*. He was just starting his research for a new book on Dane County when he died.

"A few days before he left us, Dick was rounding things up in my office," said Scott McDonnell. "It still hasn't sunk in that we'll never see that book."

HOSTING THE PARTIES OF THE CENTURY

Dick Wagner never needed an excuse to host a party—and his parties were the stuff of legend.

"He had a great house—one of the oldest in the city, and on the water—and he loved to bring people into this magical space," said Scott McDonnell. "He took a lot of pride in your experience as a guest. And he had such a reputation as a generous and gracious host! There were an incredible number of organizations he was involved with, and he was always looking for ways to support them. I used to work in restaurants, so I would help him cook at times, just cranking out all this amazing food. You always could count on the turnout to be tremendous."

"You would overhear people saying things like, 'Look, if I'm going to any fundraiser this whole year, I'm going to the one at Dick Wagner's house, because his food is to die for,'" Scott McDonnell said.

"His parties were extraordinary," said Clarenbach. "A substantial part of my political life was made possible by Dick Wagner's gourmet cooking and the receptions and dinner parties that he hosted. He also had unbelievable Christmas parties. He would light real candles on the Christmas trees, and half the party guests would be looking around like 'where are the buckets of water, just in case?'"

"Dick was so committed to his vision. He was from a different century. He was a country gentleman from small-town, old-time Ohio. And the image I have, of those candles blazing away on his Christmas tree, during these large, crowded, festive parties, in this lavishly decorated historic home... that image will never leave my memory," said Clarenbach.

"We planned everything for our wedding, except flowers for the venue," said Megin McDonnell. "I was so exhausted that I was ready to just let it go. When he found out, he said, 'Don't you worry about a thing'—and then he showed up with these magical, beautiful floral arrangements curated from his own gardens."

"He was the Anna Madrigal of Madison, and his house was a salon, full of fabulous and curious things," said Webster. "There will never be an entertainer like him again."

WHO INSPIRED THE INSPIRATION?

By now, you've got to wonder: How did Dick Wagner find the strength, confidence, and resilience to lead such a charmed life? Who were the heroes who inspired this man, who would later inspire and encourage so many to be their best selves?

"Dick was greatly impressed by Oscar Wilde," said Webster, "and that's how it became the starting point for the first book. He followed

Wilde's entire story, from his tour of Wisconsin to his exile to France. He appreciated Wilde for being a clever, intellectual, revolutionary dilettante—but also for his smart and funny approach to life.

"Truly, the people he covered in the books were his heroes. The men who restored Pendarvis. The women who founded the Art Institute. The individual contributions of activists whose lives were the activism. They survived purges, they survived slings and arrows, and yet, they continued to live their lives. They found their own way to express their identities," said Webster.

"Tammy Baldwin was always one of Dick's heroes," Webster said. "She is just such a champion and defender of all things Wisconsin: Cheesemakers, cranberry farmers, brewers, engine builders, ship captains. She demonstrates so much class and gentility. She has never stopped moving LGBTQ issues forward. From her first day on the County Board, he was her mentor, and now she's a U.S. Senator who was on a short list for the vice presidency. The teacher was in awe of his student."

IN THE WAKE OF A GIANT

"Everyone knows the biography, not everyone knows the man," said Webster. "There are so many contributions that will outlive Dick, but some that died with him. And that's the tragedy for those of us left behind."

"I believe national LGBTQ trailblazing will continue, thanks to his efforts. But it won't likely be done by thoughtful, gentle revolutionaries wearing spectacles and bowties," Webster said. "Dick Wagner achieved so many groundbreaking things and he achieved every single one of them with class and nobility."

"Things in Madison won't be the same without him," said Clarenbach. "We've lost the fine art of having public discourse without treating the opponent as an enemy. There will never be another political operator like him."



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"There's really nobody else like him today," said Scott McDonnell. "Nobody even comes close. Nobody is that selfless. Dick was the kind of person who was always running something, but he didn't seek to chair them. He wanted to help others climb the ladder. He always had 20 irons in the fire, and he managed every iron gracefully. He didn't do anything unless he could do it right. But he really struggled to say no."

"Dick taught me to stick with it. Things may not happen right away. Things may fail. You may spend years and years working on something that never happens. You may have to work on multiple things and attack them at multiple levels. You have to let the failures go while you continue to chase the wins," Scott McDonnell said.

"We are losing the 'giants of the movement,' the people who drove such dramatic change and made such meaningful contributions," said Megin McDonnell. "Nobody can replace Dick Wagner, but we need emerging leaders to step up and move the work forward. The LGBTQ movement becomes more intersectional with every generation. We can never forget the people who got us here, but it's time for the new giants to make themselves known." ■

Dick Wagner died in Kerr-McGee Triangle Park while rerouting a neighbor's delivery received at his home. Wagner was one of the park's founders, after leading neighborhood protests against an incongruent apartment complex and acquiring the land in the late 1970s. There is a proposal to rename Kerr-McGee Triangle Park in Dick Wagner's honor.

Look for upcoming opportunities to honor Dick Wagner's legacy via Fair Wisconsin. Dick helped form the organization fighting for LGBTQ equality. Fair Wisconsin is committed to honoring his incredible, groundbreaking role blazing the trail for gay rights in America. We will share updates on how you can contribute when we have them.



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Solace Friends seek to create a hospice space where the homeless can die a dignified death.

HOMELESSNESS | PALLIATIVE CARE | SOCIAL HOSPICE MODEL

IN THE EARLY DAYS of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the U.S., people who contracted HIV faced stark discrimination in health care. Those who had the fewest resources were the most vulnerable to a lack of AIDS-related care, particularly in what was then a terminal illness. In 1990, Joseph's House was founded in Washington, DC to offer people with AIDS a place to get end-of-life care and experience death with dignity.

Meanwhile in Madison, Wisconsin, Ann Catlett was a palliative care physician who witnessed firsthand the limits of how our healthcare system treats and cares for those with terminal illnesses and who are also experiencing homelessness. She remembers an example early in her practice that opened her eyes to what patients faced.

"I had a patient who had a new diagnosis of lung cancer that was very progressed," Catlett explained. "We didn't have a place to discharge him to. Hospitals try to discharge patients with the best plans in place, but us saying 'Go see another doctor about your cancer' wasn't enough. I was newly aware at the start of my career as a physician that there are sick people who don't have shelter or care after their stay ended at a hospital. It was surprising to me at the time."

"We focused on how people in our community who are the most marginalized are also historically oppressed in the ways that don't allow them access to the health care system and the ability to die a dignified death, where they can get the respect and care they deserve."

As Ann continued to ask questions about the gap in care and shelter for homeless patients, she learned about Joseph's House in DC, and she wanted to learn more about how the HIV/AIDS homeless hospice worked. In 2008, she signed up to "volunteer," but it was almost like an immersive internship where she got to experience how the home wove threads of its faith-based mission, hands-on care, and justice work together.

"I learned that they started the house for people—who would otherwise be living on the street—to live their final months of life with care and support," remembered Catlett. "But as treatment for HIV/AIDS

has gotten better, Joseph's House transitioned into accepting people with other kinds of terminal illnesses. They had eight beds and were having to turn people away. I went there to volunteer, but mostly it was to learn and be inspired by their work. I came back to Madison and wondered how we could create a place like this here."

Solace Friends is that place.

WHEN THE CAUSE OF DEATH IS HOMELESSNESS

It was on a marble bench in front of the Wisconsin State Capitol building where Dwayne Warren died on June 16, 2009. At age 38, Warren died of sepsis, a treatable blood infection. The stark and public death of someone who was homeless, who died at the steps of the hub of elected officials' policymaking in Wisconsin, was an enormous wake-up call for those who advocate for equitable housing and systemic change.

Since then, local advocates, including Just Dane Executive Director Linda Ketcham, memorialize those who lived and died on Madison's streets each year in The Longest Night memorial on the Capitol square. The winter solstice gathering includes contemplative remarks, a reading of the names, and a horse-drawn hearse that makes a slow loop around the square. The mourners who follow then meet at First United Methodist Church for a meal and formal service of peace and remembrance.

"It was Dwayne Warren whose death spurred us to put The Longest Night together," said Ketcham about the local observance that's a part of a national effort. "Sepsis is something that could easily be treatable with an antibiotic. This made us really think about what it means to 'die of a natural cause.' I don't think it's a natural cause for a man to



die of a blood infection that an antibiotic can take care of. We should question what we are willing to accept as a natural cause."

The list of names read during The Longest Night ceremony in 2021 was strikingly long. Ketcham said in most years, the list is around a dozen names. In 2021, they read 62 names. While not all of the people who were named died in the 2021 calendar year, the list included the new reports of deaths submitted by area agencies that serve those who are homeless, and each name represents someone who fell into the complex gap of housing, healthcare, and hospice needs in the Dane County community.

"As we go through the comprehensive list of a couple hundred people we've remembered in the past 14 years, sometimes I can figure out the cause of death, which people died of cancer," said Ketcham. "But what I see, and what I think Solace Friends sees, is a lack of data. We don't do a good job of tracking the cause of death for people who are unhoused. Where I can find a cause of death, it's most common that a person was murdered or was the victim of a hit-and-run driver. But unless a death crosses the line of a crime, it doesn't get reported. The City of Madison and Dane County have a road map to prevent violence, but we have to think about how we define violence. There are national statistics on the likelihood of the unhoused being a victim of a crime. We should really include homelessness itself as a form of violence."

HOW WE'RE TALKING ABOUT DEATH AND THE BARRIERS OF HOMELESSNESS

Meagan Minster is a medical social worker who worked for a Madison-area hospice agency. She met Ann Catlett before Solace Friends was formed. Ann conducted a needs assessment and interviewed people



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in the community like Meagan who worked in health care, hospice, or homeless services.

That initial conversation sparked more interest in Meagan. She volunteered, served on the programming committee and ultimately as the board secretary of Solace Friends nonprofit before she and her wife moved to Waukesha County to be closer to family.

Meagan sees a broader conversation about death and dying happening in the United States. But while some states are making progress on death with dignity laws, doctor-assisted death options, alternative or green burials, and family leave to care for terminally ill relatives, there are still big gaps in the ways we care for the dying, particularly for those who are the most vulnerable in their experience with social injustices.

“One of the main things we focused on is how people in our community who are the most marginalized are also historically oppressed



“We established Solace Friends as a nonprofit and started fundraising. Now we are looking for a physical space to provide this care.”

in the ways that don’t allow them access to the health care system and the ability to die a dignified death, where they can get the respect and care they deserve,” said Minster.

“A part of a natural death is that people become weaker and need support. Traditionally hospice includes the day-to-day tasks provided by loved ones who can care for someone when they cannot walk, get to the bathroom, feed themselves, or take meds independently. In hospice, that care is provided wherever people call home, usually a private home, an apartment, or an assisted living facility that has the built-in, hands-on care.

“The biggest barrier to death with dignity is when those who are ill don’t have family who can provide the day-to-day help, like people who can prepare them a meal if they cannot get to a meal site, who don’t have resources to meet their needs like a safe place to store medication, or have a place to rest and have meals delivered to them.”

It’s the day-to-day help that the leaders of Solace Friends seek to be able to provide. Nationally there are around 40 nonprofit, community-supported homes that are a part of the Omega Home Network which teaches the hospice model of the Social Model Hospice Home. There

are more homes that exist outside of the Omega Home Network with a similar model as well.

“The social hospice model is based on providing a physical space where people can get hospice care and the social support of caregiving,” explains Minster. “This can be everything from meals, a cozy bed, medication management—though we’d work with local hospice agencies for prescriptions and medical care. It’s all the non-medical things that are crucial to having a comfortable and dignified end-of-life experience. Based on other models around the country, we learned about ideas and the structures that would serve our community best.

We established Solace Friends as a nonprofit and started fundraising. Now we are looking for a physical space to provide this care.”

MAKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CARE AND JUSTICE

Just Dane saw unmet housing needs in the community for families with someone who is recuperating from an illness or surgery. Linda Ketcham was among the leaders who worked with local faith groups to open Healing House in the summer of 2019. Since opening, Healing House guests have included an unaccompanied minor with a high-risk pregnancy, and infants and parents recuperating from surgery or broken bones.

The work leading up to opening the shelter, and the lessons learned since 2019, revealed more systemic gaps in how society treats those experiencing homelessness.

“We learned that, because of the way we have criminalized poverty, many adults who are homeless have also been involved with the justice system,” said Ketcham. “We’ve found that people have had to pay so much in penalties that they have no place to sleep. The racial disparities in the justice system cut across issues of housing and homelessness. We can focus on advocating for shelter or transitional housing, but that’s not justice. It’s a bandaid on larger problems of substandard wages, the unwillingness of elected officials—especially at the state level—to increase the minimum wage, and the lack of affordable housing stock.”

For elderly people who need medical care or respite, there are other policy barriers. Nursing homes can refuse to care for people who have had past convictions related to violent crime or drug abuse, even if the conviction is decades old. “Truth in sentencing” conviction policies kept people behind bars for lengthy sentences. When the COVID crisis hit, some correctional facilities released elderly inmates who had health problems. Those who spent so long in jail they could not qualify for social security or medicare are left without any safety net of money for housing or medical care, further complicating pending end-of-life options.

“Part of what I like about Solace Friends is it’s a model that meets people where they are and welcomes them where they are without judgment or pretense,” said Ketcham. “I think we need that trauma-informed model of care that we don’t always see in hospice or hospital programs. It’s important if someone has been unhoused and is terminally ill that they feel comfortable to go into a hospice that is a safe and welcoming place, that’s accessible for friends to visit, people build relationships and Solace is doing the relationship building. There is a level of trust there as they take the time to get to know people where they are at instead of ‘You have to come to us.’”

RIGHT NOW SOLACE FRIENDS NEEDS A HOUSE TO CALL HOME

Minster and Catlett describe the vision for Solace Friends’ house as a single-family home with three-to-five bedrooms where people can die a safe death. The board is prepared to pull in local resources to renovate a building as needed.

“We’d like to find a building that’s centrally located along a bus line so that visitors or volunteers could get there, with bedrooms on the first floor and space for gurneys and wheelchairs so it’s accessible,” said Catlett. “But we’d also like the house to have a big dining room table, and a big front porch or a garden so guests can enjoy living in a home together with other people. Some have suggested that we start by renting apartments, but a shared living space with an outdoor area where people can sit and enjoy nature and each other is ideal.”

It would also be licensed as an adult family home, a designation that is important for funding and the way group homes are regulated. Adult family homes provide the non-medical services that typically family caregivers provide. Everything from changing linens and clothes, keeping people warm and dry, giving medications, preparing meals, and providing company. Volunteers and future staff would be following the policies and procedures licensed facilities require to ensure guests have the safe and supportive stay that supports the end of life experience they wish to have.

Solace Friends fundraising committee co-chair Joan Karan is confident that the home would be sustainably funded. An attorney is helping the board identify what services would be covered by Medicaid, and some guests will have access to Social Security funds. But fundraising for the start-up efforts and pledges of future support have been very strong.

“We’ve received funds from the Evjue Foundation, UW Health, Madison Community Foundation, Madison Gas and Electric, the Katz-Krantz Family Philanthropies, and Roots and Wings,” said Karan. “We’ve received tremendous support from individual donors and faith communities. We raised \$50,000 last year, and we aren’t even open yet. We know we will get lots of future support as well, but it all depends on finding the house to make Solace Friends a home.” ■

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HOME & GARDEN GARDENING RECLAIMED SPACE STOUGHTON



JAY HATHEWAY AND JIM OTTNEY met in the 1980s and, now married, have been together for 34 years. They purchased a late-Victorian-era house in need of extensive repair on a 66x132-foot original 1855 platted lot in downtown Stoughton. The most urgent of the structural modifications, remodeling, and room additions were completed in the early 1990s, freeing up time and resources to begin working on the lot's landscaping.

IT STARTED OUT SHADY

Like the house, the sloped lot had been left untended for nearly a decade and featured piles of tires, an oil change sand pit, brambles, an invasive grove of sumac trees, noxious weeds, and volunteer sapling trees. In addition, a few salvageable larger trees divided the property into areas of varying degrees of shade. The trees included black locust, American chestnut, tulip poplar, magnolia, birch, apple and spruce. The first few years, after clearing most of the lot back to the dirt, "shovel by shovel" as Jay says, they seeded the area with grass and added foundation shrubs around the house. A row of mulberry whips provided a screen from the alley at the back of the property.

The garden tends to be a foliage-based one, brightened by splashes of color. The combination makes for a relaxing, cool, 'secret garden' that feels like an escape from the urban surroundings

The "vision" for the remainder of the lot grew over time, determined in large measure by the predominantly shady conditions. An ultimate goal, notes Jay, was to "create privacy," given that there are parking areas on two sides. As he describes it, "A small garden bed here, another there, expanded from little rectangles into sweeping curves, carving multiple beds in irregular shapes without any specific final layout in mind." Providing vertical interest are arbor vitae, a ginkgo, a redbud, Korean maples, and numerous pagoda dogwoods—a particular favorite for their form.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

A central pergola and a corner gazebo, a bathtub-sized pond, an artesian well-style fountain, and several arbor trellises anchor the design, defining a series of rooms linked by gravel paths winding through the flower beds. With the addition of a flagstone area, the entire lot from the street park row at the front to the alley in the back is grass-free. Jim says, "Overall, the garden tends to be a foliage-based one, brightened by splashes of color. The combination makes for a relaxing, cool, 'secret garden' that feels like an escape from the urban surroundings."

Jay, who grew up in the oil fields of southern Iran and lived in California, brought a warm weather perspective while Jim, who grew up

in Buffalo, NY, came with gardening experience in colder climes. Jay's mother had flower and vegetable gardens that he helped her maintain. Jim learned about vegetable gardening from his father and began his first personal flower garden as a preteen and continued gardening on and off over the years as opportunities to do so arose.

A WHOLE LOTTA HOSTAS

Selecting what plants would work (and could be afforded!) in a Stoughton garden was a combination of prior familiarity, research—and a bit of trial and error—with an emphasis on shade and woodland plants. Some areas in the garden afforded opportunities to "push the limits" with partial shade and sunny perennials. The garden makes extensive use of some common perennials throughout, including Jim's hosta collection—though with 350+ varieties from giants to miniatures included, there are always distinctive specimen surprises. Accompanying the hosta are patches of ferns, scattered clematis, plus a smattering of astilbes, epimediums, hellebores, and woodland plants.

Jay and Jim also discovered a true monarch butterfly magnet on a trip to the Flower Factory: the *liatris ligulistylis*. Jay says, "It was incredible to see how rapidly the monarchs discovered the plants, and watching them cluster is a real delight." In addition, the entire lot is underplanted with tulips, daffodils, Virginia bluebells, and bleeding hearts that provide swaths and spots of color in the early spring.

These are followed by several varieties of allium, Asiatic and Oriental lilies, phlox, and monarda, with continuing blooms throughout the late spring into fall provided by sun patiens, impatiens, coleus, and varieties of begonias. In fall, a second flush of phlox flowers are accompanied by stands of asters in a range of purples, pinks, and magentas. A large single truckload delivery of annuals arrives in late spring, supplemented by purchases from garden centers, greenhouses,



and nurseries throughout Dane County. Jim and Jay add a touch of the tropics with overwintered elephant ears and banana trees, plus pots of caladiums, canna lilies, and flowering vines.

A PERFECT PLACE TO HANG OUT

An elevated deck and sunroom overlook the garden. In Mediterranean style, the railings of the deck support pots full of bright red begonias and dripping vines that reach down past a latticed potting area under the deck to a raised bed filled with coleus. Jay especially notes that "several dozen hanging baskets and scores of colorful pots are located throughout the garden." The advantage of the potted plants is that they can be moved around as sunny areas shift over the season.

"Gardening is a learning process, and you need to find out exactly what the 'microclimate' of your property can support," says Jim. The couple also offers advice to ambitious new gardeners to "tackle only small areas at a time, and grow your beds by enlarging or adding

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another distinct space each year only as you can fully fill and maintain it. Plants are expensive, so we've also only bought one or two of a new type of plant each year to see if it survives and where it does best before investing in quantities. Truth be told, we've probably lost more than most people ever planted as we've experimented!"

The back wall of the house features a collection of vintage tools acquired over time at local thrift stores and second-hand shops. A fence along one lot line is also covered in vintage signs and hanging durable art. Metal sculptures, mosaics, and glass art Jim and Jay bought from artist friends, scavenged at garage sales, and purchased at retail locations bring additional interest and "around the corner" surprises as visitors walk through the garden. Face jugs line the steps up to the deck, and the gazebo is inhabited by a family of classic busts and caricature pots that all sport foliage and floral hair.

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL

One tree has numerous traditional and novelty birdhouses that regularly have wrens in them. A wide range of songbirds visit the seed and suet holders, and urban wildlife also frequent the garden, including chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, and even the occasional deer. Because the house is located less than 100 feet from the Yahara River that flows through Stoughton, the yard also attracts some waterfowl, with one pair of ducks who annually return to nest and relax in the tiny pond.

"Gardening is a learning process, and you need to find out exactly what the 'microclimate' of your property can support," says Jim.

Once they had filled their own space, Jay and Jim decided to expand into small "leftover" city spaces surrounding the property. A short-lived early venture into growing vegetables on a sunny spot located on the other side of their fence was eventually overtaken by a neighboring walnut tree. Next came an irregular patch along a parking stall and the extension of the park row down to the entrance to the lot. But then they set their sights on a much larger enhancement, a 150-foot riverfront strip they see from their living room bay window. They got permission from the Stoughton Area Senior Center, who owns the land. Jay observes that "the strip had been landscaped a couple decades ago but had gradually deteriorated—and the riverbank itself was eroding away annually—so the space was in need of a real facelift." After an original grant that shored up a further part of the riverbank, the city was able to obtain additional funds to build up the remainder with riprap.



PLANTING PHILANTHROPY

Working with the city, Jim and Jay got some overgrown beds and dying ornamental trees and bushes removed and a new bench installed. With the area cleared, they used the summers of 2020 and 2021 to plant a variety of sun-loving perennials along the top of the riverbank. They chose plants that would grow full and spread down the rocks without interfering with the ability of fishermen to access the popular spot. The entrance area welcomes guests with bright daylilies and other colorful perennials that change throughout the season, supplemented by geraniums that provide brilliant spots of continuous bloom. Perhaps most prominent are nearly two dozen hardy low-growing and small shrub rose bushes that have prolific flowers in a range of colors and fill the air with a sweet perfume. In 2021, the city held a naming contest to designate the area as an official park.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Having expanded about as far as they can and planted as densely as possible, what lies in the future? Jim and Jay laughingly agree "there is now plenty of work in just maintaining, replacing, and annual planting. The real joy is in watching it change over the seasons and sharing it with others."

Since the 1990s, Jim and Jay have hosted numerous garden tours, including the Wisconsin Hosta Society, other hardy plant and hosta organizations from Wisconsin and Illinois, community garden clubs and the Olbrich Gardens benefit tour. In addition, the national Garden Bloggers group tried to visit in 2020 and 2021, but were unable to do so because of Covid, and are rescheduling once again for June 2022. ■



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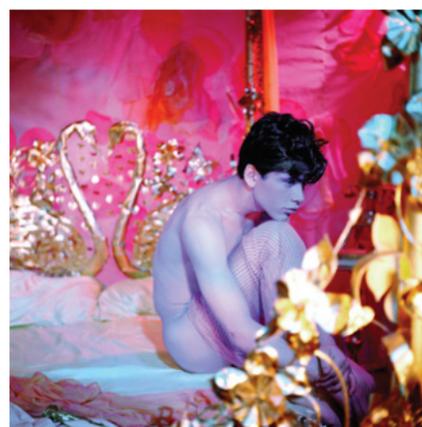


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Bidgood told stories of begging his mother for paper dolls, a toy many considered inappropriate for boys at the time. Thankfully, she honored his request. He also mentioned that his parents had a print of Maxfield Parrish’s “Daybreak” in their bedroom. It was set in a “baroque silver frame” and “mounted on tufted purple satin.” At an age when children often have their creativity and queerness aggressively put down, Bidgood’s childhood experiences, education, and fantasies seemed to be cared for and even fed.

Many queer youth long to live in bigger, better, and more welcoming places. Bidgood left Madison in 1951, soon after he graduated high school, but what really pulled him to New York was his desire to work in musical theater. In the *Gayletter* interview, when Keady asked, “What were your creative outlets in Madison? What did you like to do?” Bidgood replied, “I was the town’s prima donna, I’d like to think, and I was a terrible tart. I was unusual—I don’t think there were many naughty boys like me. But aside from that, I was in school musicals and plays and theater. So I moved to New York.”

The 1950s must have been an exciting decade for Bidgood. He attended Parsons School of Design. He performed drag and designed sets and lighting for Club 82. But like most of us who leave our hometowns seeking to discover where we really belong and what we want to do with our lives, life often turns out differently than we think it will. By the 1960s, Bidgood’s big Broadway dreams pivoted into DIY dreamscapes that he made in his apartment, filling his home with alluring young men posed in luscious tableaux. His incredible imagination and knowledge of art history enabled him to draw upon the art and culture he knew yet create something truly unique. His photos, which pushed right up to the boundaries of the day’s decency laws, were featured in gay men’s physique magazines such as *Muscleboy* and *The Young Physique*.

In Bidgood’s *New York Times* obituary Neil Genzlinger explains, “He staged photographs, mostly in his Manhattan apartment, that were lavish

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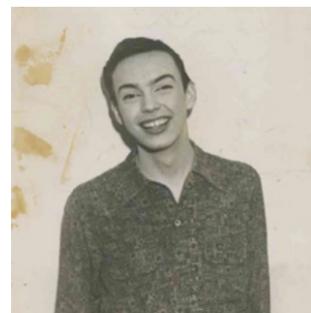
Stoughton-born and Madison-raised photographer **James Bidgood** leaves an artistic legacy that continues to be seen in today’s queer creative legends.

Rest in Peace and Power, James Bidgood
(3/28/1933–1/31/2022)

THE LEGENDARY FILMMAKER and photographer James Bidgood died earlier this year at the age of 88. His fabulous artistic gestures made their mark on the continuum of history. Biographer Bruce Benderson lauded him as “the father of the pulp and glamour aesthetic,” and the website Artsy dubbed him “one of the quintessential creators of homoerotic imagery.”

Bidgood’s artwork inspired subsequent generations, whether they knew it or not. Once you study his images, you start to see them everywhere. The photography of Pierre et Gilles and David LaChapelle for example, even Lil Nas’s “Montero,” can be traced to the color-saturated fairy-tale genre Bidgood belonged to, if not invented.

The fact that Bidgood was born in Stoughton and grew up in Madison



should put a little extra pride in Madison’s LGBTQ Pride. In 2015 *Gayletter* (Issue 2) posted an interview with Bidgood by Cameron Keady, titled “Out of a dream: James Bidgood.” The interviewer says, “I want to hear your story directly from you.” Bidgood replies, “Fine then. I was born in Madison, Wisconsin. But who cares?”

That quip aside, while Bidgood’s forever home and community was made in NYC, he seems to have always maintained a fondness for his hometown and

his formative years. He continued, “Madison was a nice place. What I didn’t know about it at the time was that *Life* magazine had named it one of the best places in the country to raise a child. And it was actually a pretty liberal place. Of course, there was bigotry, but it wasn’t outright, and there weren’t any incidents or ugliness. So I had a good start, so to speak, about being gay.”

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fantasies full of references to mythology, adventurous lighting and props, and attractive men—sometimes in costume, sometimes in nothing. The pictures, some of which ended up on the magazines' covers, were both erotic and amusingly campy."

Bidgood brought the drama, lighting, and costumes of musical theater to gay men's erotic photography. In a 2011 *NYT* article, referenced in his obit, Bidgood explained his motivation to spice up plain beef into beefcake. Gay male photography of the time was "badly lit and uninteresting" according to Bidgood. "Playboy had girls in furs, feathers, and lights. They had faces like beautiful angels." Bidgood told the *Times*, "I didn't understand why boy pictures weren't like that." He pushed the genre beyond merely displaying skin into images of a thousand-plus words that told dramatic homoerotic stories.

James Bidgood is best known for his film, *Pink Narcissus*, released anonymously in 1971. Bidgood created his elaborate art film in his apartment between 1963 and 1969, the years leading up to the Stonewall Riots. In his modest abode, he constructed fabulous costumes and staged elaborate sets for his passion project, just as often described as an artistic masterpiece as it was a cult classic.

John Waters' film, *Pink Flamingos*, was released in 1972 and though their films' names overlapped at the time of their original release, the filmmakers did not. Waters, who repeatedly includes *Pink Narcissus* on his top 10 must-see films, explains to *Our Lives* that he did not even discover Bidgood's film until it was re-released much later. But when he



did see it, he found it beautiful and original. "It is an incredibly beautiful art film that I've seen over and over."

Waters stated that even though there were other filmmakers and photographers dabbling in dreamy gay imagery at the time, Bidgood took the genre in a new direction, "He made it arty." Waters also posits that Bidgood was not part of any group or artistic movement. "He was his own man. He did it obsessively in his own loft and he did it like nobody else. I'm sure some people knew about it, but most did not." Though many fans and critics describe Bidgood's work as campy, Waters disagrees, explaining, "No, I don't think it was Campy. Campy is something that is so bad it is good. To me it was so good it was great."

In a short YouTube interview called, "James Bidgood, Background Player" posted back in 2013 when he was an extra for the film *Love is Strange* (2014), Bidgood appears to be in great spirits, telling bawdy stories and cracking self-deprecating jokes. He mentions being "poor," owning only two shirts, and having few teeth left.

Though it is painful to think of a visionary, queer, culture-maker like Bidgood suffering poverty toward the end of his life, his friend and gallerist, Brian Paul Clamp, notes that Bidgood also had an extended community caring for him. "He supported himself on the sale of his art. It is difficult, even for very well-established and successful artists, to totally pay their bills just from the sale of their work. But, he was taken care of. He had someone who looked after him. His rent was always

PAIN COURTESY CLAMPART.

paid and he had food to eat, but he certainly didn't have a lot of money." Clamp emphasized that Bidgood was well-loved by his community, especially by Kelly McKaig, who stepped in after Bidgood's partner, Alan Blair died in 1985, a death that rocked Bidgood's world and left him "a bit lost" according to Clamp.

Bidgood describes how he met Alan in 1975, and what it felt like to lose him in 1985, in *Out Exclusives*, "The Secret Garden" (January 18, 2012). "I was inconsolable for years. I loved that man so much. People would call years later and find out he was gone, and they would say such wonderful things because he was a special human being. Everyone who ever met him knew that. This was to the bone. We fit together. We were one unit. It's something you don't experience with just anybody. I had the 10 best years of my life with that man."

According to Clamp, it was McKaig who made sure Bidgood was well cared for in the last decades of his life. In fact, McKaig established a GoFundMe to help ensure Bidgood receives a fitting funeral and that his artwork will be preserved in perpetuity.

Bidgood's artwork inspired subsequent generations. The photography of Pierre et Gilles and David LaChapelle for example, even Lil Nas's "Montero," can be traced to the color-saturated fairy-tale genre Bidgood belonged to, if not invented.

Though some describe Bidgood as reclusive in his elder years, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, he did experience a last hurrah. In 2019, artist Lissa Rivera, curated "Reveries" a retrospective of Bidgood's work at the Museum of Sex. She consigned artwork from ClampArt, Clamp's New York gallery that centers around queer erotica and represented Bidgood since 2007. Clamp said that "Reveries" brought Jim, as his friends called him, an outpouring of public love and support. The opening coincided with Bidgood's 86th birthday party.

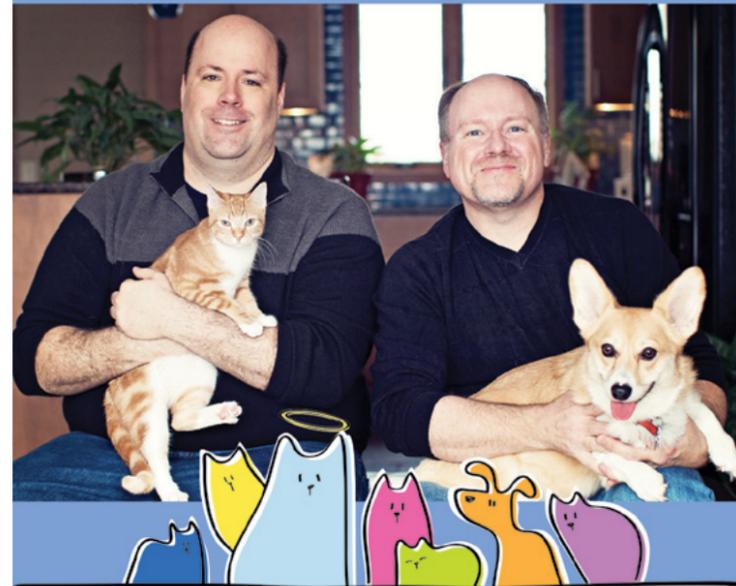
On September 18, 2020, Bidgood posted on Facebook that he thought it would be June or July of 2021 before he would be "rejoining the human race" and that would only be true, he predicted, if the world saw "the populace changing from total assholes to sensible sane citizens." He went on to rebuke those who could not be bothered to don a mask and maintain social distance, insinuating that they were unpatriotic.

He talked about the sacrifices Americans made during "the war effort," an era that clearly impressed him as a child of the Great Depression. Bidgood was eight years old when the U.S. entered the war in 1941, and he was 12 when Japan surrendered, ending the war. "As I said before," he concluded on his FB post, "we would have lost WWTwo if it were up to this self-centered entitled bunch." In the same prophetic post, Bidgood predicted that COVID would be with us "until it wore itself out," and sadly he seems to be being proven correct. In fact, Bidgood died in a Manhattan hospital of complications due to COVID-19, and he never was able to rejoin the post-COVID world we are all still eagerly anticipating.

On his last public Facebook post on Sept 25, 2020, James Bidgood referred to himself as an "old poof," a term Merriam-Webster defines as, "Extremely Disparaging and Offensive. A contemptuous term used to refer to a gay man." Yet somehow, the way Bidgood dispatches those two loaded words, they read as a healthy reclamation of the term and an endearing self-description of an authentically lived, full life.

"I have always said that musical theater is my church...my religion... because the moment I hear the first notes of the overture... I am as close to God as I ever expect to be," Bidgood wrote in his post. Depending on your beliefs, you might console yourself at the news of this influential artist's death by imagining that Bidgood is even closer to God now, and hopefully he is up there creating the greatest queer musical theater production heaven has ever seen. ■

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New Ways to Access PrEP

OUT Health's Dr. Kathy Oriel shares ways to protect yourself against HIV, from a new bi-monthly injectable PrEP shot to new expanded guidelines from the CDC.

IT'S BEEN AN EXHAUSTING and draining couple of years. We're all exhausted by the limitations COVID has placed on our usual lives. So when I saw announcements in December that the CDC was telling doctors to "talk to everyone who is sexually active about PrEP," I rolled my eyes and thought, "Thanks CDC—because we don't have enough going on right now!"

And then I took a deep breath. What's good for HIV prevention is good for everyone and should be applauded. HIV so disproportionately affects those who already suffer from health disparities: People who inject substances without access to clean needles. People who trade sex for money. People who are Black and brown. People who are trans. People who aren't people yet: fetuses.

I remembered that this isn't an either/or construct, it's a both/and. Everyone who is sexually active should have access to medication to prevent HIV. PrEP stands for Preexposure prophylaxis for the prevention of HIV infection. PrEP is amazingly effective at preventing HIV transmission during sex, injection drug use, or pregnancy.

PrEP was initially available as a combination of two medications that stop the HIV virus from replicating or making copies. The first medication available for prevention of HIV contains two antivirals called emtricitabine(F) and tenofovir disoproxil (TDF) (brand name Truvada®). People with an HIV-positive partner, or who are at risk for

HIV in other ways, take the daily medication which is over 99% effective in preventing transmission. In 2019, the FDA approved a second oral prevention medication Combining emtricitabine (F)and tenofovir alafenamide (TAF) (Brand name Descovy®). Both are intended to be taken daily but may be used only when a person is most at risk of being exposed to HIV, called "on demand." The downside of these medications is that they require close monitoring of kidney function and cholesterol levels. Like other medications, it's sometimes hard for people to remember to take them, or they don't want to go to the pharmacy because they worry about the stigma of being on those medications.

Like other medications, it's sometimes hard for people to remember to take them, or they don't want to go to the pharmacy because they worry about the stigma of being on those medications.

In December, the FDA approved an injectable medication cabotegravir (Brand Name Apretude®), an injection to prevent HIV for sexually active adults that only needs to be given every two months. This is terrific news; for people at risk of HIV who don't like the side effects of other medications this is a great option. For people who couldn't take one of the oral medications because of kidney disease, this is a terrific option. Even better are

the more flexible practice standards the CDC revised in December. These guidelines reinforce many important concepts: **1)** Any patient that asks for PrEP should be prescribed it because people may want to be protected but may not want to disclose what behavior places them at risk; **2)** The guidelines emphasize that prescribing PrEP is within the skill set of any primary care provider, that people shouldn't need to go to a specialty HIV clinic to obtain this important care; **3)** The guidelines for cabotegravir are more flexible, allowing for less-frequent blood testing and even home testing, if needed; **4)** Finally, people who should be on PrEP but have kidney disease or didn't tolerate either of the two pills have another option.

As with any new medication, the cost of cabotegravir (Apretude®) is ridiculous: \$3700 per injection for the wholesale cost compared to \$141 for a two-month supply of emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate. There are medication assistance programs, but we don't yet know how easy it is for people to qualify for them.

Please remember that most people who take PrEP for HIV prevention tolerate it very well.

I believe the best part of these new guidelines is they include more people who should be offered PrEP:

SEXUALLY ACTIVE ADULTS AND ADOLESCENTS

- Anal or vaginal sex in the past 6 months and HIV-positive sexual partner (especially if partner has unknown or detectable viral load)
- Or recent sexually transmitted bacterial infection
- Or history of inconsistent or no condom use with sexual partner(s)

PERSONS WHO INJECT DRUGS

- HIV-positive injecting partner
- Or shares drug preparation or injection equipment

As COVID numbers wane a bit, I'm hopeful that we'll all be able to get back to a bit more socializing. You are a human who is worth the effort to keep yourself healthy. Get vaccinated and boosted against COVID, and talk to your healthcare provider about options for keeping you safe from HIV. ■



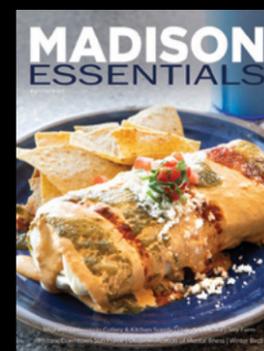
KATHY ORIEL, MD, MS is a family physician and addiction medicine physician who has been an advocate for LGBTQ+ Health throughout her career. In 2019 she founded Out Health Inc., a Wisconsin 501c3 non-profit addressing health disparities among LGBTQ+ people through direct patient care, education, and advocacy.



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RECOVERY | SUBSTANCE ABUSE | MENTAL HEALTH

The Road Forward: A Recovery Journey

As our second pandemic winter ends, **Linda Lenzke** looks at the effect it has on those working through substance abuse and recovery.

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

—Desmond Tutu

AS I WRITE, it's -5 degrees. A winter storm, spanning from Texas to Maine, brought rain that turned to sleet, then ice, and tornadoes in Alabama. In Tennessee, homes lost power, while blowing snow wreaked havoc in the Northeast. Here in the Midwest, we endured Arctic temperatures. Winter came late this year, and we ask how long it will linger like a bad mood. Many of us are suffering from

prolonged cabin or spring fever, and pandemic fatigue; however, soon spring will arrive, bringing with it hope and light.

ISOLATION: IMPACT ON COMMUNITY & HEALTH

It's also the beginning of year three of the pandemic. Between the isolation due to the surge in the Omicron variant—plus winter in Wisconsin—many of us have been struggling with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), and unfortunately, some of us are struggling with more serious mental health issues and increased use of alcohol and substances.

Isolation for marginalized LGBTQ+ communities can compound the challenges we already face in our everyday lives. When we are separated from our allies and affinity groups, we are often vulnerable and at risk.

Our LGBTQ+ community is not alone in the struggle in how to cope with isolation. People often turn to alcohol, substances, or unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to cope. Unfortunately this can lead to deadly consequences. A report by the nonpartisan Wisconsin Policy Forum found “...alcohol-related deaths in Wisconsin rose almost 25% in 2020.”

When we look at statistics specific to our LGBTQ+ community, collected by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) from the most recent report in 2019 before the pandemic, we see the baseline of mental health, substance, and alcohol use in our LGBTQ+ community, understanding however, that there was a dramatic increase during the pandemic. See charts to the left.

Though many of us in our LGBTQ+ community stayed connected virtually, some of us suffered from pandemic fatigue, skin hunger, and the lack of in-person social activities, events, and support.

The OutReach LGBTQ Community Center conducted a survey in 2021 of its community members to measure the impact of COVID-19 and isolation and to gauge their readiness to return to in-person groups and events and asked what kind of activities and support was needed.

The sample size of our survey was small, and respondents didn't answer every question, however we learned that 74.5% answered “yes” to the question, “Did you isolate in response to the pandemic?” Sixty percent believed that their mental health or well-being suffered during the pandemic. Seventy-four percent answered that they would attend social groups like potlucks, film, or game nights. Lastly, 43.6% indicated that they'd attend programs or support groups that addressed mental health.

When asked if their alcohol or substance use increased during the pandemic, 62.5% answered “yes.” Asked if they would attend programs or support groups for alcohol or substance use, 50% said yes.

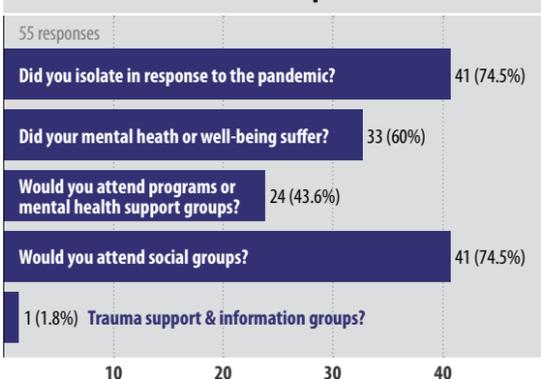
Clearly, the pandemic and the resulting isolation affected the well-being and health of our community. Compounded by the seasonal isolation common in Midwestern winters, we suffered, sometimes turning to unhealthy ways of coping.

HOPE & RECOVERY FOR OUR COMMUNITY

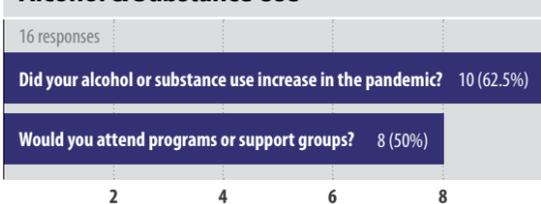
Dry January is when some people abstain from alcohol for the month. There are hopeful signs too, as the pandemic seems to be transitioning to an endemic, when we'll be able to return to restaurants and bars and socialize with our community. There are more non-alcoholic options in addition to the growing number of coffeehouses. Sober bars and “mocktails” are a growing trend. LGBTQ+ people have always relied on queer-friendly bars and gathering places to congregate in safe and affirming environments.

In Madison, new businesses have opened, offering alternatives to alcoholic drinks. One example is the Blind Shot Social Club located on Fair Oaks Ave. near the Garver Feed Mill and across the street from Community Pharmacy where you can run a health-related errand while you're in the neighborhood. From

Mental Health & Social Impact of COVID 19



Alcohol & Substance Use



a profile in *Madison* magazine from September 2021, of Blind Shot co-owners Brent and Michelle Duvall, “There’s so many reasons why people don’t drink, Brent has never drank, and as for myself, I got sober and stopped drinking back in 2014,” Michelle Duvall said. “We’ve seen people who are health-focused, designated drivers, pregnant women, and even sobriety groups who come in and want to still drink something that’s fun and unique—not just run-of-the-mill.”

If you're seeking some serenity in nature, Olbrich Gardens is nearby, and the Garver Feed Mill offers many healthy food choices. Down the street on Atwood Avenue is the new home of A Room of One's Own Bookstore where you can find books on health, recovery, plus LGBTQ+ themed fiction and nonfiction.

From a 2021 article in *Madison* magazine, Erica Krug wrote, “New studies show that alcohol consumption has sharply increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and that heavy drinking, especially among women, has soared. Prevalent in Wisconsin, alcohol use is popular for unwinding at the end of the day and socializing with friends.”

“But it doesn't have to be that way, says Nicole Peaslee, one of the founders of New Fashioned Sobriety, a group based in Madison for sober and “sober-curious” women. “I thought drinking was fun, but it turns out sobriety is a thousand times better,” she says.

Many of Madison's LGBTQ+-owned restaurants and bars have bartenders who will mix you a mocktail or offer alternatives to alcohol. During the pandemic, we missed fundraisers like Camp Bingo and drag shows

and burlesque. In response, Club 5 implemented mask mandates and proof of vaccination to ensure the health of their customers. The Dive Inn, a new bar on Cottage Grove Road in Madison, launched their own Drag Queen Bingo.

For some, bars are “slippery,” not safe places when in early recovery or still drinking. Gratefully, there were recovery and social support groups that met virtually via Zoom during the pandemic and this past winter. Some began hybrid meetings where you had the option to attend in-person or virtually. Many of the groups took a hiatus from in-person and/or hybrid meetings when the Omicron variant surged.

If we take a glass half-full look to the future, soon we'll be able to gather together as a community in-person again, in recovery, to recreate, and to celebrate. Many or-

ganizations like OutReach are hoping to launch in-person events this summer and fall like the Madison Magic Pride Festival and its Annual Award Ceremony.

In the meantime, if you're struggling with mental health and substance-use challenges and behaviors, there's both help and hope. One

of the unintended consequences of the pandemic has been the increased virtual access to mental health and recovery services, for those who are in rural areas or have transportation impediments.

Spring is a time of hope, renewal, and rebirth. Living in Wisconsin, our lives ebb and flow with the changing seasons. Sometimes winter is unrelenting, and it's a struggle to get out the door for our day-to-day lives. We are restored in the spring when the changing weather brings us hope and quells the itchy restlessness of spring fever. ■

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- OutReach LGBTQ Community Center: outreachmadisonlgbt.org
- The Road Forward: theroadforward.org
- A.A. Meetings in Madison (MAICO): aamadisonwi.org
- Safe Communities MDC: safercommunity.net
- Journey Mental Health: journeymhc.org
- Rogers Behavioral Health: rogersbh.org
- Pride Institute: pride-institute.com



LINDA LENZKE (she/her) is the LGBTQ+ AODA (Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse) Advocate for the OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. Linda recently completed Wisconsin Certified Peer-Specialist Training.

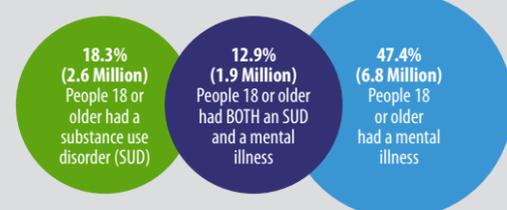
Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders in America among LGB Adults (≥18 y.o.)

AMONG LGB ADULTS WITH A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

- 1 in 2 (51.6% or 1.4M) struggled with illicit drugs
- 3 in 5 (64.6% or 1.7M) struggled with alcohol use
- 1 in 6 (16.2% or 426K) struggled with illicit drugs & alcohol

AMONG LGB ADULTS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

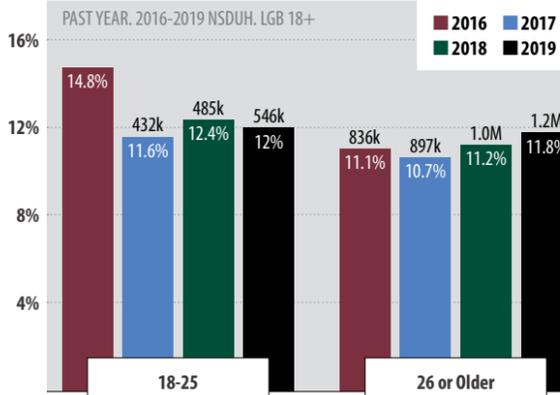
- 2 in 5 (38.2 or 2.6M) had a serious mental illness



In 2019, 7.6M LGB adults had a mental illness and/or substance use disorder—an increase of 20.5% over 2018 composed of increases in both SUD and mental illness.

Alcohol Use Disorder among LGB Adults

PAST YEAR, 2016-2019 NSDUH, LGB 18+



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Exceptional Food & Coffee to Fuel Exceptional People

J. Moe ventures out to Cambridge to check out **Millie's Coffee and Eatery**, an overnight "Must Visit" on Main Street.

WALKING INTO MILLIE'S is like walking into your (very stylish) friend's house, the big front windows make their space bright and airy, the chairs are comfy, the atmosphere is beyond friendly, and the smell of food and great coffee greet you (as will Jen and Courtney, the owners) before you even get two steps through the front door! As someone with a long history in the hospitality business, my impression was that Jen and Courtney were absolutely meant to be in this business.

Jen O'Branovich and Courtney Sargent met a number of years ago and currently live in Madison, but they want to move out to the Cambridge area soon. They've worked together at different restaurants/bars/event centers over the years (oh—and they got married along the way). They both agreed early on that their shared love of the hospitality industry would culminate in owning an event center or restaurant of their own someday. Before they opened Millie's (which is the name of Courtney's grandma) they were working at the Cambridge Winery, which allowed them the

Thanks to Courtney's talent in the kitchen, the menu varies from day to day. Interestingly enough, when I asked what was one of their hottest menu items, they said it was their avocado crumpet.

opportunity to establish some roots within that community. They are 100% "people people," and both possess the industry acumen/moxie it takes to run a successful eatery.

On the night of our interview, they were running a taco special (beef or vegetarian). It was a Thursday, so that meant it was the night they stayed open later (until 7) and people were stopping in to get food or have a drink and relax after work. Nearly everyone that came in was greeted by name, and most stopped by our table to check in with Jen and Courtney (Millie's really feels like an upscale version of your neighborhood diner or pub, everyone knows everyone else). You would never know that they'd only been open for three weeks!

I was very impressed with their philosophy around hiring queer young folk from their community and paying them a living wage. Additionally, they feature art for sale by local artists. They also feel very strongly about sourcing as much of their menu from local and organic suppliers as possible—I ordered a bottle of local elderberry/cherry kombucha that was delightful! They get their beans from JBC in Madison, and the list of local food purveyors, such as Big Punch Farms of Edgerton, and Old Stone Farms in Cambridge, is too long to list, but just believe me when I say it was impressive. Courtney proudly tells me, "Our motto is Exceptional Food and Coffee to Fuel Exceptional People," and that is so spot on!

Thanks to Courtney's talent in the kitchen, the menu varies from day to day. Interestingly enough, when I asked what was one of their hottest menu items, they said it was their avocado crumpet. Ok, I'll bite... It's a crumpet (Google it if you're not in the know) topped with avocado mash, house-made pickled onions, roasted tomatoes, and their superseed mix. You can take this next level by adding bacon and/or an egg. Basically, nearly everything on their menu is made in-house and is fresh, fresh, fresh! From the party potatoes to the salads and sandwiches, their menu has something for nearly everyone (unless you like dull and lifeless food, then maybe not so

much). Also notable, they offer both wine and beer if you're in that kind of a mood.

Millie's is housed inside of Galleria 214, which hosts a handful of other local (mostly women-owned) businesses. Inside of this beautifully restored historical building, there is an indoor courtyard that Millie's uses if larger groups stop by (the courtyard is really amazing). They offer eat-in or carry-out food and drink options and also have plenty of indoor space for private parties (and in the warm months, they also offer patio seating outdoors).

I'll leave you with this thought. Jen and Courtney are awesome. They are very committed to their community. They were super-bold to open a place like this during a pandemic. Go there. Put their delicious drinks and food offerings in your mouth! Cambridge is ridiculously close to Madison, and there are so many things to do and experience after your meal at Millie's. Make it a day trip, bring the family, and support our queer neighbors doing really great things for their community. ■



J MOE is the proud owner of Simply Served Personal Chef Service and also works at Edgewood College in science outreach. They're nonbinary, and happily living as one of the village people (of McFarland). They love eating good food, discussing good food, making good food, and of course, writing about good food. Their pets are great, and they are dating a lovely human who also uses they/them pronouns because they like keeping our people on their toes. They gave up serious in lieu of fun a few years ago and have never looked back.



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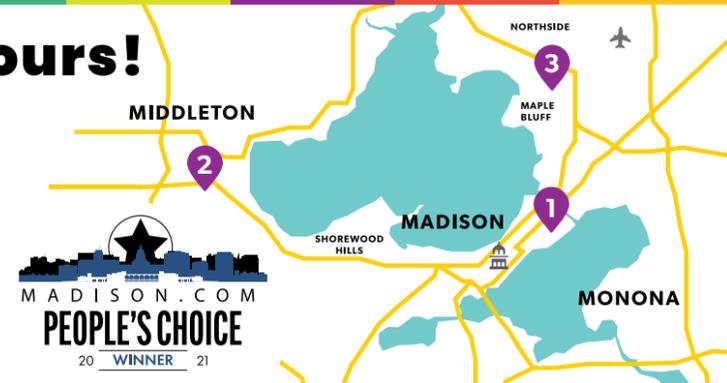
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anyone, not even my friends, because of the fear I had with my biological family. When I was 12, I developed depression and suicidal thoughts. I didn't know who to turn to. So most of my actions showed at school. I was basically crying out for help, but no one saw it until one day I told my principal what was going on at home.

Being Black, disabled, and queer, I didn't get the same opportunities as my straight peers. As I grew up, going to programming every week at Freedom Inc., I was finding myself and who I was. I felt that I was different. No one understood me. Being gay was not a "normal thing" in my home, and I knew I might've liked girls. I didn't tell anyone though. I didn't formally come out at school, but everyone knew I was gay. And it was okay with everyone except my biological family.

I wished for a better life, and better parents, and a loving family that could protect me.

The summer of 2016 changed my life. I got adopted by two loving parents and three siblings that gave me a family I always dreamt of. I came to them at a very hard time in my life. Still struggling with depression, suicidal thoughts and anxiety, they got me the help I needed.

I was more comfortable dressing in masculine clothes, but was scared to do so because I didn't think people would accept me. First there were men's boxers. Then men's shirts and shoes. The summer of 2016 when my parents took me in, they let me get clothes that I was comfortable in. I felt so fresh that no one could tell me anything. Then, I cut my hair. Taper. High on the top, short on the sides. Fresh lining. I have dreamt for this my entire life.

When I was 13, I was in the Black Beauties program at Freedom, Inc. I was a very shy kid and didn't talk much there. But it was always good to be there and build with other Black girls. After being in the group for two years, I was offered a role as a youth leader. I would be leading with a group of other Black and Southeast Asian youth. We called ourselves the Freedom Youth Squad.

Throughout the years, we saw the school resource officers (SROs) in schools attacking and harrasing Black girls and youth of color. From there, we started our Police Free Schools campaign. We would go to countless school board meetings for four years, do speeches, and protest to get the SROs out of our Madison high schools. Speech after speech, they did not support or listen to us. There would be people attacking us and finding our personal information and putting it on social media. We asked the school board to do four things: One, take cops out of schools and hold teachers accountable for calling police on students. Two, invest in Black youth and youth of color creativity, wellness, and leadership. Three, replace harsh punishments with restorative justice. We believe in repairing and restoring where the harm has been done. Figure out the root cause of everyone who has been harmed and take accountability. Lastly, give youth, parents, and trusted adults the real decision making. We also came up with some things that teachers could do to help with our campaign. We came up with a Black Sanctuary Pledge. This was a pledge where teachers signed on not to harm Black students and will come to meetings/training to learn how to not harm them.

Currently, I am a Youth Justice coordinator who leads two Black girl groups between the ages of 11-18. Black Girls Matter is a space where black girls come together and do activities and learn about body safety. We also come together and learn about topics that are not taught to us in schools for example: teen dating violence, LGBTQIA+, advocacy, and talk about current situations that are important to know about.

My vision is for Black girls to live free and always know that they are loved and that they can get the resources that they need. ■



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Still She Rises

Treated as a "bad Black girl" in school, **Shyra-Sekani Adams** found her voice and purpose by leading Freedom, Inc.'s Freedom Youth Squad.

"It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."

—Assata Shakur

A FREEDOM FIGHTER, Assata wrote this message for her people before escaping a men's prison and going to Cuba. This is a quote I always say with my young people to let them know that we are strong and loved by each other.

My name is Shyra-Sekani Adams, and I'm 22 years old. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I grew up on the west and southside of Madison. My first 18 years of life were hard as a Black girl. In school, the teachers never believed in me and always saw me as a "bad Black girl." I struggled with many learning disabilities, so I had an individualized education plan (IEP) my whole 12 years in school. My IEP was not accounted for correctly. It was more like a punishment. They would call home every day to tell how bad I was. For little things like turning around, talking to my friends, and needing to walk around because I have ADHD/ADD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

Home was never a healthy place. Physical, mental, and emotional abuse. The older I got, the worse they became. For years I couldn't tell

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