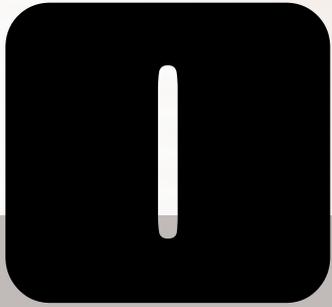


our lives



Pyramid Event Venue



Melee



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MADISON PRIDE

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

INSIDE: Your Guide to OutReach's Magic Pride Festival

July/August 2022

SIXTH ANNUAL

PRIDE IN COLOR

Christopher Peguero

The indigenous & Latinx Wisconsin native helps to kick off our sixth annual statewide list celebrating LGBTQ leaders of color.

15 YEARS OF OUR LIVES

Our Lives editors past & present celebrate our milestone anniversary.

p.54

40 YEARS LATER

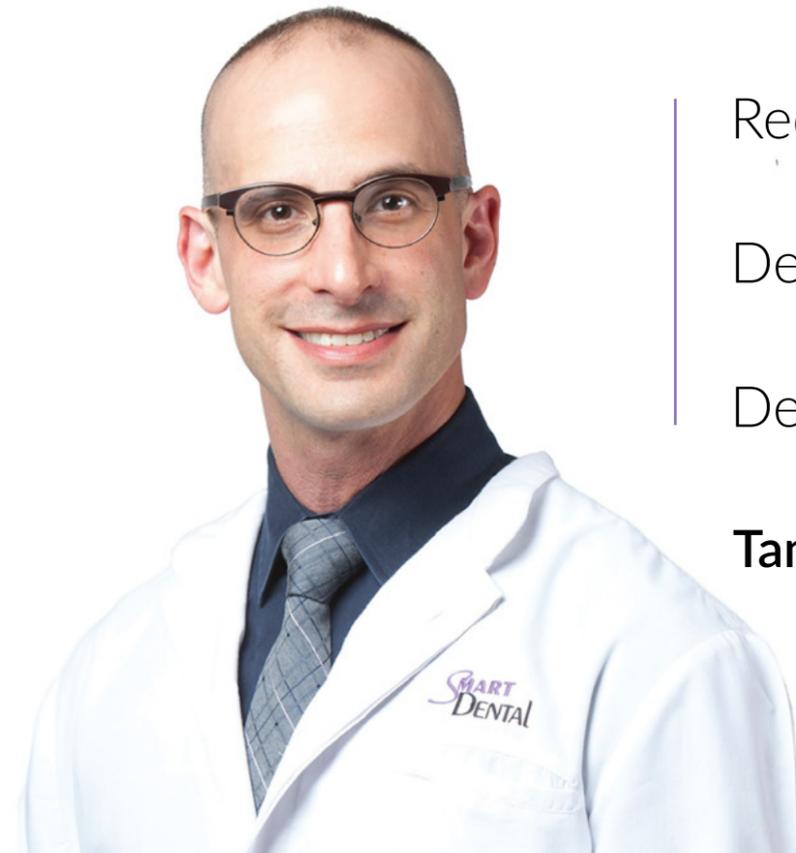
We celebrate & reflect on Wisconsin's 1982 first-in-the-nation gay rights bill.

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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

Patrick Farabaugh
Publisher / Editor-in-Chief
Virginia Harbaugh
Copy Editor

Stacy Harbaugh
Contributing News Editor

Doug Rowe
Features Curator
Online Jobs & Events Curator

Contributing Writers

Colleen Frentzel
Melanie Jones
Stacy Harbaugh
Dexter Lane
Jason Luu
Michele L. Perreault
David Ryan-Sukup
Vica-Etta Steel
Michail Takach

Contributing Artists

Ian DeGraff
Melanie Jones
Lidia Sharapova
Samantha Waldron

Social Media Curators

Jill Nagler
Doug Rowe

Webmasters
design.garden

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PUBLISHER'S LETTER PATRICK FARABAUGH



15 YEARS OF STORIES TOLD

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER the weeks leading up to publishing the first issue of *Our Lives* magazine. I was a ball of nerves for many reasons, but one of them was coming to terms with the commitment necessary to see this through if it was to truly become representative of the community we serve. That doesn't happen in one issue, or even 10 or 20. It's a years-long commitment to entrepreneurship, to being in the crosshairs of political activism, and vulnerable to the financial insecurity not just with a grassroots startup, but also from working in a marginalized space. I was frequently gut-checking myself on the years of my life it would take to fully realize the potential that I believed was there, and proving it on paper issue after issue.



The issue you're holding in your hands now is our fifteenth anniversary issue, and we've come a long way, baby. I'm deeply proud of the work that so many over the years have put into curating a collective voice for our community. I'm grateful to each person who



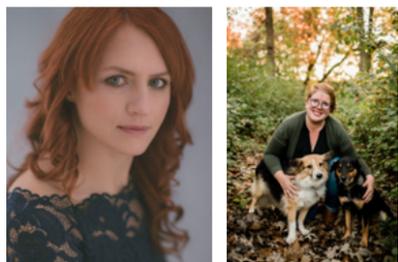
has trusted the magazine to help tell their story. It's the narrative storytelling that has been at our core since that first issue that led me to naming the magazine "our lives." This issue is a celebration of that, and I couldn't be more proud that it coincides with our annual Pride in Color feature. From **Christopher Peguero** leveraging his career for equitable progress, to **Clyde Mayberry** making an intentional space for Black youth in Dane County, leadership at every level is on display across this community feature.

Recently I was honored to have *Our Lives* receive recognition at many levels of government. We received citations at the Capitol from both **Governor Evers** and the **Wisconsin Legislative LGBTQ Caucus**. **Mayor Rhodes-Conway** issued a Mayoral Proclamation as well naming July 1st *Our Lives* magazine day. Truly, back when I was trying to wrestle down my nerves before that first issue came out, these are honors I couldn't have imagined.

We also are celebrating another anniversary, too, in this issue. Wisconsin's first-in-the-nation gay rights law turns 40 this year. What better time to check in on its lasting impact, and how the landscape has changed and evolved since it was signed into law... or in some cases devolved. **Michele L. Perreault** is quick to point out that in SCOTUS' decision to overturn *Roe*, marriage equality is still very much at risk. And that is not to mention the escalating attacks on trans youth that we're see both in our schools and in our statehouses. If for some reason you've found yourself resting, we're more than ready to welcome you back into the fight. ■

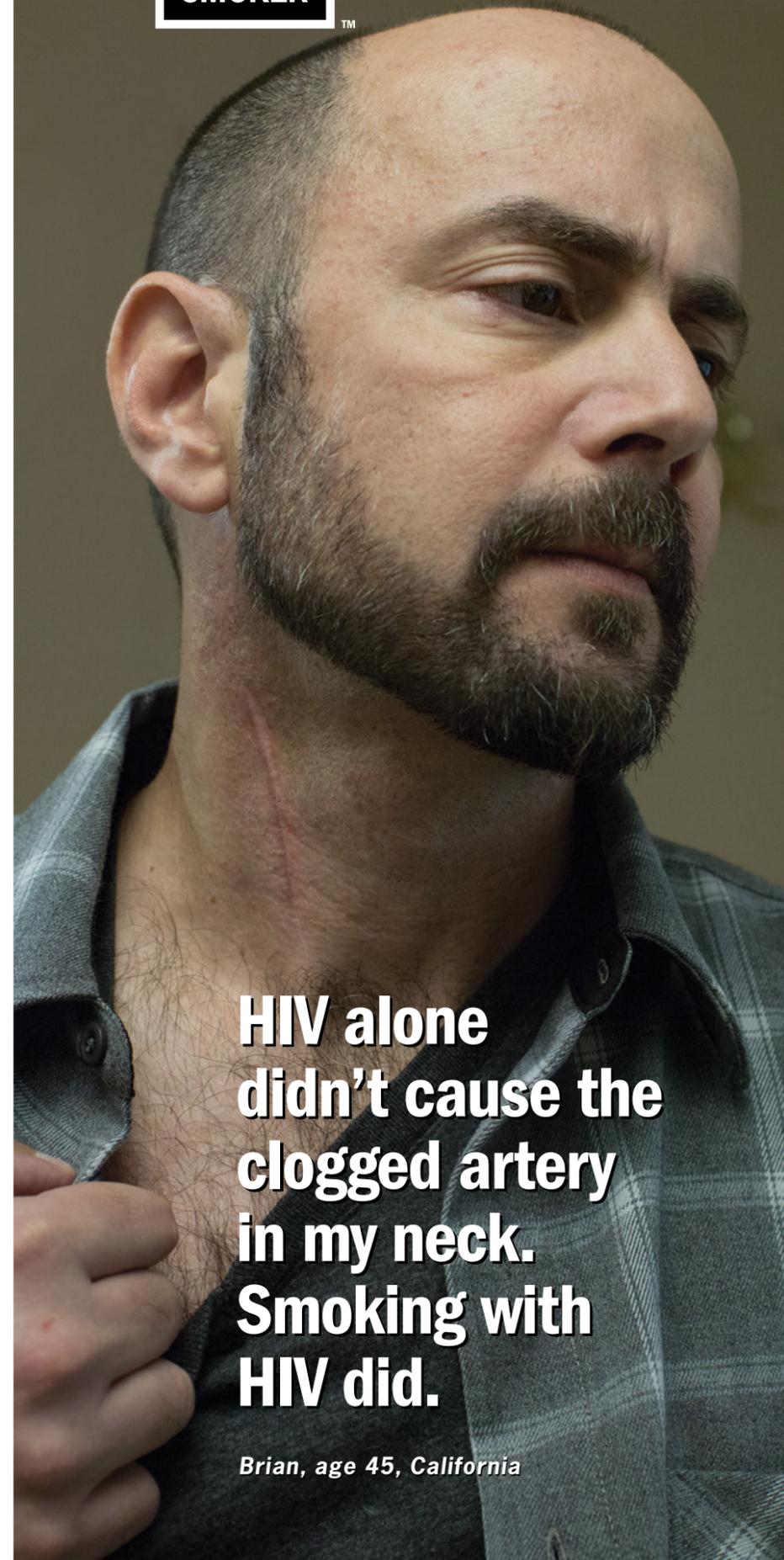
CONTRIBUTORS

LIDIA SHARAPOVA is a photographer and videographer based in Milwaukee, WI. She grew up in Siberia and moved to the United States in 2013. Lidia uses documentary photography to explore issues of social identity, gender, minorities, and small communities. She is interested in gracefulness and vulnerability, in intimacy and mystery. Lidia believes in the power of photography to change and empower people.



MELANIE JONES is a photographer and writer living on the Northside of Madison with her spouse, two dogs, and three cats and working out of her Atwood Ave studio. While she enjoys photographing people, her passion project for the past 2 years has been her photography work with dogs under her Dulcy Dog Photography brand. A Virginia native, she moved to Madison 6 years ago from the mountains of Montana and has grown to love the beer, cheese, and culture of Wisconsin more than she thought she would initially. However, her favorite place in the world is still Yellowstone National Park.

A TIP FROM A FORMER SMOKER



HIV alone didn't cause the clogged artery in my neck. Smoking with HIV did.

Brian, age 45, California

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OUR READERS

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MADISON, WI

Tyrone Creech

Besides "Tyrone," most folks know me as "TC" or "TJ." I go by he/him pronouns and have been GSAFE's Youth Leadership Organizer for just over a year. Coming from one of the oldest and proudest black families in Madison, I've channeled a lot of that pride into my activism in the LGBTQIA+ community, specifically with teenagers and young adults. I firmly believe that educating our next generation of queer youth is so important to our future and our growth in humanity. I spend a lot of my time with GSAFE running youth leadership summits, building connections with schools across the state, and above all else, creating safe spaces for all who need it. Aside from the work I do in the community, I enjoy going to the gym and socializing at our local queer bars. I look forward to playing hockey with the Madison Gay Hockey Association later this year. ■

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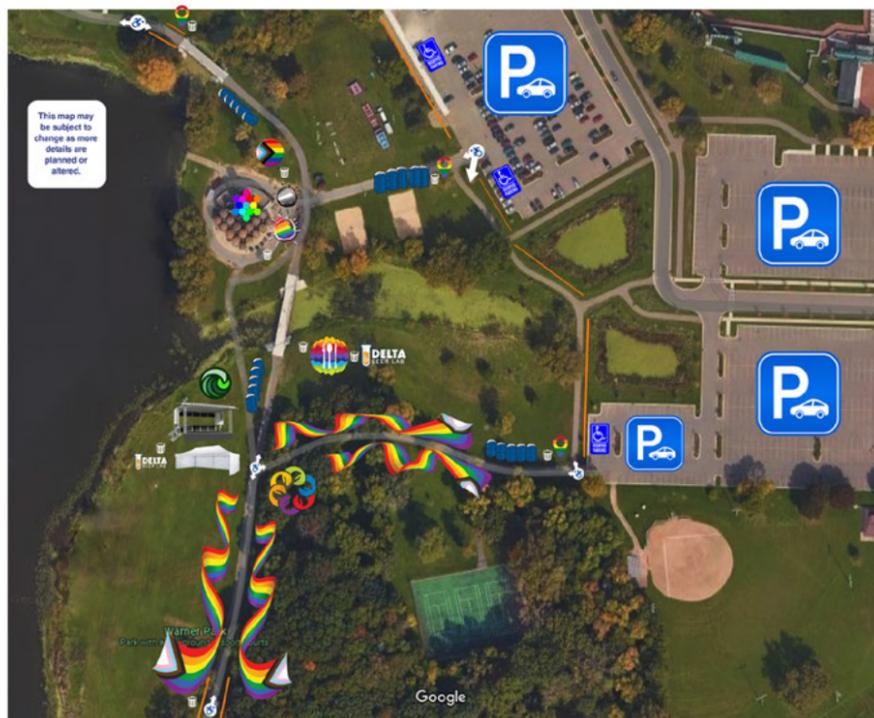


2022 PRIDE will be held Sunday, August 21st, 2022!

OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center will be hosting our 4th Annual Magic Pride Festival LIVE in person - from 1pm to 6pm at Warner Park in Madison!

For more information call 608.255.8582 Monday-Friday or send email to steves@lgbtoutreach.org. The 2022 Magic Pride Festival will include a stage show with local LGBTQ+ identified performers, large vendor area, games and activities for youth and families, food and beverages, and more! Please join us! For updates, please visit us at www.outreachmagicfestival.org!

OutReach Magic PRIDE Festival Map



- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Greet/Check-In/Exits* | Food Vendors |
| OutReach/INFO Table | Vendor Way (Along Paths) |
| OutReach Soda/Water | Stage |
| Beer Tents | Viewing Tents |
| Porta Potties | QTPOC Tent |
| Park Shelter/Bathrooms | Youth Area |
| Parking | Green Room (Entertainment Only) |
| Disabled Parking | Garbage/Recycle Bins* |
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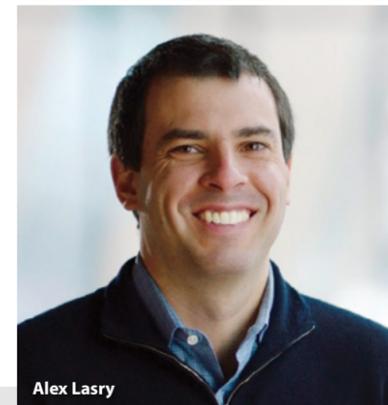
Adam Murphy



Mandela Barnes



Sarah Godlewski



Alex Lasry



Tom Nelson

Know Your Candidates

The **Human Rights Campaign of Wisconsin** held a virtual candidates forum with the leading **Wisconsin Democratic candidates** in the U.S. Senate primary. Here are the highlights.

SENATE PRIMARY ROE V. WADE INTERSECTIONALITY EQUALITY ACT

THE STATEWIDE PARTISAN PRIMARY is on August 9. To help voters make an informed decision, the Human Rights Campaign of Wisconsin hosted a Democratic candidates' forum that included Adam Murphy, Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes, State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski, Alex Lasry, and County Executive Tom Nelson. Each are all hoping for a chance to run against incumbent Republican senator Ron Johnson. Candidates were given the opportunity to choose their first question, and were then pressed on other LGBTQ+ issues in a virtual format with the hope of

helping voters determine who will best represent them in this upcoming critical midterm election. We've included highlights below from each of their responses.

ADAM MURPHY

Adam Murphy, a self-described "50-year-old, cis white man" began his time laying out how he prepared for this candidacy, namely by returning to school to study economics, political science, psychology, ethics, morals, etc. He also talked about how he has been running his

Editor's Note: The forum and this summary predate the June 24 repeal of Roe v. Wade.

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campaign thus far, namely by focusing on grassroots campaigns and training volunteers to go door-to-door. He emphasized that he wants to engage all of his constituents, regardless of political affiliation, so he can represent all. When he did that, he said, he was able to increase democratic voting and reduced apathy. He wants to rebuild trust in the political system from those who have checked out.

Murphy wants to change the conversation completely. "It's not a culture war, it's a privilege war," he lamented. "It is a war of terror and we need to address that."

When asked directly about abortion, he began by expressing his disappointment in the Democratic party as a whole for allowing the GOP to so completely control the conversation. He said they won, and progressives and Democrats let them. "We didn't take the opportunity," he states. "We were the nice guys and that has put everybody at risk." He then continued to express fear for the right to privacy, which if overturned would turn back protections for not only women, but the LGBTQ community as a whole, and even interracial couples. The filibuster is "key to all of the changes we want to make," Murphy continued. Not only the aforementioned right to privacy, but also voting rights.

Murphy wants to be the senator who gets out of his own "silo" and talks to people all around the country to try to move us forward, one voter and vote at a time. He wants to create content to share for all of us who want to engage without having to "fight the fight" and reveal personal information. He wants to, as a senator from Wisconsin, make life better not just for his immediate community, but for the country as a whole. That's his tactic for dealing with conversion therapy, too. Because it is still legal in many states, Murphy wants to change the conversation completely. "It's not a culture war, it's a privilege war," he lamented. "It is a war of terror and we need to address that."

MANDELA BARNES

Next was Wisconsin's current Lieutenant Governor, Mandela Barnes, who introduced himself by retracing his blue collar, downtown Milwaukee upbringing. His dad's assembly line job and his mother's public teaching job were "their tickets to the middle class." He

continues that his main goal is to "rebuild the middle class and give everyone a fair shot at the American Dream." His political career began by organizing against Scott Walker's administration, eventually leading to a successful campaign for the state legislature and later as Lieutenant Governor. He hopes to keep the momentum going with a spot in the U.S. Senate using his skills as an organizer to get voters to turn out to expand the Democratic majority in the Senate so they can roll back the filibuster. He continued that he "will never let some archaic Senate procedure stand in the way of our basic human rights."

He expressed the same concerns as the other candidates that if Roe is overturned, the degradation of the right to privacy can lead to erosion of LGBTQ+ rights, and that the only way to protect those rights is to roll back the filibuster and codify those rights into law, namely with the Equality Act. The Equality Act aims to protect the rights of everyone, regardless of sex, gender, orientation, or race. Barnes affirmed that he would cosponsor the act, citing Wisconsin's history of being on the forefront of protecting LGBTQ rights, both as the first state to ban employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and with electing the first openly gay senator, Tammy Baldwin. Even with that history however, Barnes laments that all of our rights are still compromised by fear mongering on the side of the right.

He expressed the same concerns as the other candidates that if Roe is overturned, the degradation of the right to privacy can lead to erosion of LGBTQ+ rights, and that the only way to protect those rights is to roll back the filibuster and codify those rights into law, namely with the Equality Act.

Barnes cited that he is frequently the "only black elected official in the room," and that often when issues that impact the black community come up, white politicians leave it to the black politicians to fix. He will use this experience to advocate for the LGBTQ community, and continue to be a strong ally, not forcing members of that community to be the sole advocates for it. He continued by stating that he will fight for communities within the LGBTQ community that are more frequently the target of violence and brutality by the government, namely black trans women.

When asked about the anti-trans and

anti-LGBTQ legislation that's been exploding around the country, Barnes went back to the need to roll back the filibuster, and pass the Equality Act. Those two things, he lamented, have allowed "bigoted individuals [to] roll back the clock when it comes to equality." He continued that we need to hold elected officials accountable and take actionable steps to undo the harm that's been done, especially to kids. "LGBTQIA+ kids belong," he declared, noting that he wants to speak plainly and definitively, and while he is proud of the work he has done in Wisconsin, he now wants to take those protections nationwide in the Senate by banning conversion therapy.

SARAH GODLEWSKI

The third candidate in this forum was Sarah Godlewski, a 5th generation Wisconsinite from Eau Claire. Like Mandala Barnes, she referenced her blue collar roots in her introduction, and said she is "the proud product of a union family." Also like Barnes, she currently holds a statewide office (as state treasurer). She said she overcame odds to overturn a gag order on climate change and investing in renewable energy. During the pandemic, she helped provide hotspots and digital tools to kids learning remotely, funded community wide infrastructure projects, and set up a program to help homeowners prevent foreclosure. She is also the first in this forum to directly mention Ron Johnson, the current Senator and her likely Republican opponent, should she get the nomination.

Even though both of her previous opponents mentioned disappointment with the Democratic response to restrictions to abortion, Godlewski went further, decrying that there have been 50 years and several Democratic administrations who haven't felt the urgency to codify abortion rights into law, saying that they "chose not to prioritize it and made it more of an afterthought." She continued that if the 50 years of precedent set by Roe is overturned, they can "criminalize LGBTQ people." She cited Texas and Florida as examples of states already ramping that up. She said we must make sure LGBTQ people have full access to health care, such as abortion and gender affirming care. Again here she directly named Ron Johnson, as well as Mitch McConnell as people who want to take our country backwards. "It's about our freedom, not theirs," she adds.

When asked about the Equality Act, Godlewski expressed frustration that while the act was first introduced in 1974, it "died in committee." Even with a resurgence in 2015, and the passing of the act this year in the House, the Senate has allowed it to fall away again,

effectively killing it again in procedure. Like the two candidates before her, she cited the filibuster as the major hurdle to passing not only the Equality Act, but also laws codifying Roe and marriage equality. "We've got to codify everything because if the Republicans can overturn 50 years of precedent with Roe," she continued, "...they can once again, criminalize LGBTQ people."

She also acknowledged that she needs to do her own work and research and needs to balance listening to communities of color and the LGBTQ communities while not "rely on marginalized groups to be experts."

When asked about intersectionality in her support for LGBTQ+ rights, Godlewski, a white cis woman, noted the importance of recognizing what she doesn't know, doing her research, and listening to the voices of those most impacted. She cited her work with HRC to help address credit discrimination in Wisconsin, and acknowledged that these communities are not "one-size-fits-all" in terms of needs and access. As treasurer, one of her main projects was starting to address the barriers to home ownership with Take Root Wisconsin. She also acknowledged that she

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needs to do her own work and research and needs to balance listening to communities of color and the LGBTQ communities while not "rely on marginalized groups to be experts."

Godlewski concluded by acknowledging how terrible 2022 has been for the trans community, and how the rights of LGBTQ people are being stripped by state legislatures, courtrooms, and even the federal government. She stated that for her, this is an emergency, and that she wants to codify freedom, dignity, and privacy on a federal level.

ALEX LASRY

Next in the forum was Alex Lasry, who, unlike his predecessors, did not cite any blue collar roots as his background and call to action, but instead his efforts as a "great corporate citizen." Lasry was the Senior Vice President of the Milwaukee Bucks, and cites how the team created good paying union jobs, was on the forefront in Milwaukee of social justice and voting rights, were one of the first teams in the NBA to have a Pride night, and has one of the first arenas to offer gender-neutral bathrooms. This track record, he stated, shows how he will advocate for the LGBTQ+ community in Washington and that he will "give Tammy a real partner in DC." Like Godlewski, Lasry goes after Ron Johnson, stating that he is "not up to the task of being our U.S. Senator."

We all know Harvey Milk, and while he didn't want to downplay Milk's importance, he wanted to acknowledge the culture's disregard for other narratives in the past.

Unlike the three previous candidates, Lasry did not start his time with abortion rights, and instead focused on conversion therapy. He began by saying that this is one of the most important things to attack on a federal level, and the federal government needs to make sure that states aren't infringing on people's rights. He continued by saying that it is important to him that LGBTQ youth know that they are welcome and loved, and he wants them to learn their history and have role models to look up to. Above all, he said he wants to be welcoming, and for Wisconsin specifically but the United States as a whole to be a welcoming place. He said when states pass discriminatory laws, it only makes them look less welcoming, and makes it harder to create

jobs, bring investment and stop the "brain drain." A federal law codifying a conversion therapy ban would go a long way towards making this county a welcoming place again, he said.

When asked whether he would co-sponsor the Equality Act, he, like his predecessors, cited the filibuster as the barrier, but stated that not only would he co-sign, he would do whatever it takes to get it passed. He lamented that people just co-sign bills to say that they tried to be able to put their name on something. Lasry thinks that lack of action is unacceptable. Like Godlewski, he criticized the lack of federal protections for Roe and marriage equality, and shared her concern that if Roe falls, many of the things we've all taken for granted over the past 10 or 20 years will fall too. He believes in protection through legislation, rather than counting on the courts to make decisions for the country.

Lasry, when asked about the intersectionality of race and LGBTQ+ issues, he first noted the importance of centering black, trans women and other people of color in the fore of LGBTQ activism history. We all know Harvey Milk, and while he didn't want to downplay Milk's importance, he wanted to acknowledge the culture's disregard for other narratives in the past. His fix is to bring more people to the proverbial table and ask direct questions about whether a policy negatively impacts or marginalizes someone. He acknowledged that he might not know because he isn't part of these marginalized groups. Lasry also talked about bringing more of these groups in as staff in the government, working on writing the laws, and making sure representatives are hearing from everyone. "It's also about making sure that our Senate staff, our White House staff all are having fair representation," he said.

TOM NELSON

Rounding out this group of candidates was Tom Nelson, who currently serves as the Outagamie County Executive, where he runs 23 departments and oversees 1300 employees. He has previously served in the state legislature for three terms and served one term as majority leader for the Democrats.

For Nelson, co-sponsoring the Equality Act is especially poignant because of his work 16 years ago in the state assembly, where he felt pressure from both sides of the aisle to vote for the marriage ban amendment. Because he was elected in a conservative district and was a freshman up for reelection, he felt particular

pressure from the Democrats to vote for it to keep his seat. He voted against it and has never regretted it. He was even reelected easily. He is living proof that people can stand up for what they believe in and still be electable, even in red districts. Or, at least, that used to be the case. He feels hope in the fact that this act is coming back with renewed fervor, and stated, "It would be an honor and a privilege to be in the United States Senate to be in a position to cosponsor that legislation."

For Nelson, co-sponsoring the Equality Act is especially poignant because of his work 16 years ago in the state assembly, where he felt pressure from both sides of the aisle to vote for the marriage ban amendment. He voted against it and has never regretted it.

When asked about how his advocacy for LGBTQ rights will be intersectional, Nelson stated that it's all in the approach, and that, "It's important to know how all of these pieces connect to each other." He then went on to share a figure he saw in a courthouse recently, that stated that 44% of LGBTQ people suffer from mental health issues. He sees this as a failure to see these issues in depth, and allocate proper resources and policy changes to address them. "It would be malpractice," he continued, "if we went forward, not understanding just how comprehensive an issue this is and how our approaches in the past that were not intersectional have failed." He said his admission of systemic failure and a clear vision on how to move forward comes from his 17 years in public service.

To the question of protecting transgender and other rights in response to the rash of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, Nelson echoed his predecessors with a call to codify legislation that would protect these groups federally. He lamented that these bills are so ugly that they are not only damaging the LGBTQ+ community, but everyone. He asked the question of how the United States can remain a leader and beacon of hope to so many while demonizing children.

He then went into some practical realities, that 52 Democratic senators are needed to get rid of the filibuster, and therefore stem this tide of hatred. He posited that because he has been elected many times in conservative areas, that he would be the ideal candidate to take on Ron Johnson. He said he can then take on these challenges on a federal level. "We're all Americans, we all respect each other. Everyone should be guaranteeing these basic rights," he said.

NEWS BRIEFS WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES, TESSA PRICE & VICA STEEL

BOMB THREATS END HARASSMENT INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENT'S MISGENDERING

LAST MONTH, the right-wing legal organization Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) sent a letter and mounted a media campaign to pressure the Kiel Area School District to end a Title IX investigation into three eighth grade boys who repeatedly misgendered a classmate who goes by they/them pronouns. WILL was hired to intervene and take the case public by the parents of the boys under investigation. In the now public letter, WILL contended that "using incorrect pronouns doesn't constitute sexual harassment under Title IX or the school district's policy. It also says the boys



Kiel Area School District

were within their First Amendment right to free speech and the district didn't follow the proper procedure of a Title IX investigation when it failed to provide detailed notice of the allegations before starting an investigation," according to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

The resulting media campaign included appearances by the lawyers, one parent, and one of the students on Laura Ingraham's Fox News Show, Newsmax, and an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. This media bullying resulted in extremists making six bomb threats against the district, Kiel City Hall, the public library, the private homes of district employees, roads, and utility companies in the area. In reaction to these extreme threats of violence, the district took school virtual for the remainder of the year, a disruption to kids who have had so many school disruptions in the past two years, and they canceled the annual Memorial Day parade. They also ended their Title IX investigation, stating that they handled it with the boys privately.

WILL publicly condemned the threats, but celebrated when the inves-

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tigation was closed. Deputy Counsel Luke Berg released a statement saying, “While the District’s statement attempts to reframe the investigation, it was always primarily about ‘mispronouncing.’ The district may not be willing to admit it publicly, but it has recognized that it has no legal basis to demand that our clients refrain from ‘mispronouncing’ other students.” He released this in a statement despite a clear ruling in 2020 from the Supreme Court prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

BROWN COUNTY DA TO DISMISS HATE CRIMES AGAINST EX-PRISON GUARD ACCUSED OF THROWING LGBTQ VICTIM INTO FIRE

ON JULY 3RD, 2021 in Brown County, a now former correctional officer violently attacked a woman who is openly gay while sitting with her around a fire pit at her home. During the unprovoked attack, the victim and witnesses say that Shane Nolan called her a pejorative term, threw her into the fire pit, and beat and strangled her when she managed to crawl out and try to fight back.



The victim, Dessiray Koss, was loud enough that her sister and neighbors heard her and tried to get Nolan off of her. According to the *Green Bay Press Gazette*, “Nolan pushed off Koss’ sister and lunged for Koss’ throat, according to her sister’s account. Nolan squeezed Koss’ neck, appearing to use all his force, she said. She watched his complexion change to purple while he strangled her sister.”

The attack only stopped when a neighbor was successful in pulling him off and first responders arrived. Koss is still recovering and suffered first, second, and third degree burns. Using Koss’s statement, photos of her injuries, and statements from her sister and other witnesses, Brown County prosecutors charged Nolan, who claims he was blacked-out and has no memory of the attack, with substantial battery, a felony, and disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor. They added a hate crime modifier to both offenses that would have added seven more years of prison time and substantially higher fines if convicted.

All of this is truly shocking, as not only was the attack unprovoked and at Koss’s place of residence, but the injuries sustained by her were substantial enough that she is still recovering, having endured burn treatments and surgeries, a year later. Not shocking enough, apparently, to make the felony charges and

hate crime enhancements stick however. This week Brown County District Attorney David Lasee has offered a plea deal to Nolan, without Koss’s consent, that reduced all the charges to misdemeanors and would require no jail time. While the judge in this case, Court Judge Kendall Kelley, has the ultimate discretion to determine charges and sentencing if he is convicted, Diverse + Resilient Appleton, anti-violence advocates speaking on the behalf of Koss have cried foul with this offer. Because Nolan is a former correctional officer, Kathy Flores, the program director, states, according to the *Green Bay Press Gazette*, “It’s hard not to be cynical about why a Brown County prosecutor is going lighter on the defendant.

“In this case, it feels like the call is coming from inside the house.” Regardless of the outcome of this case, the decision from David Lasee sends a clear message to the LGBTQ+ community in Brown County that they are not safe, and the law will not protect them.

FOX NEWS CELEBRATES ALLIANCE WITH TERFS IN HATE CAMPAIGN AGAINST TRANS KIDS

ON JUNE 1 AT 9:55 P.M., The Ingraham Angle, a staple of Fox News punditry, featured an unlikely ally—a tattooed and short-haired woman along with a man with the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL). “Are you shocked by the alliance that has formed with more liberal feminists and some conservatives on this issue?” asked Laura Ingraham, the host, who was curious, too. The guest, Milwaukee Public School Counselor Marissa Darlingh dodged the question, the issue was “non-partisan.”

Darlingh is a school counselor at Allen-Field Elementary and is under investigation by the Department of Public Instruction for immoral conduct for participating in a hate rally on the

Wisconsin Capitol Square on April 23. At the rally, Darlingh proudly announced both her occupation and her name publicly, clearly tying her comments to her work duties. Darlingh is currently on administrative leave at the MPS school following the investigation into her comments. She is, however, still employed by the school. “I oppose gender ideology ever entering the walls of my school building,” she declared. Her work that should be supporting the lives of trans and non-binary students does the opposite. They are not welcome. She will not respect them with their correct pronouns. For them, this public school counselor is more of a conversion therapist, denying vulnerable kids support when they need it most.

“F**k transgenderism. F**k it!” she says in a clip from the rally. The five-minute-interview on Fox made the message clear—Darlingh’s hate screed was just spirited free speech. Never mind the official capacity she was engaging in. Never mind her clear intent to hurt and discriminate against queer and trans kids. She was just careless with her use of expletives. WILL is set on this narrative. It is a free speech case, of course. She was there on her “own time” despite flouting her official position that is supposed to be helping kids and not hurting them actively.

Laura asked a very leading question about the “new movement” to “encourage sexual exploration in very young children today.” Her question referenced an old trope of homophobia and transphobia to compare LGBTQ+ people to perversion or pedophilia. Marissa claims to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual folks, unlike Laura, but that won’t stop her from allying with the right against the LGBTQ+ community. Darlingh went into various TERF transphobic talking points about “disfiguring



body parts” and how the trans rights movement is supported by “big pharma.” “Protect Trans Kids,” Darlingh said with venom as she describes the t-shirt of a counterprotester.

This all comes as various statehouses target trans kids’ lives before the 2022 election. A genital inspection bill just passed in Ohio for “suspected” trans girls, requiring them to get three medical tests if accused. Florida has a Don’t Say Gay bill that disallows mention of gay and trans people in schools. The Texas Governor is fighting to allow Texas Child Protective Services to investigate supportive parents of trans kids for abuse, despite various courts disagreeing about his authority to do so. These powerful people put a target on trans kids—some of the most vulnerable people in America. They are relying on outdated systems to support them through relentless attacks from governments and social stigma.

LA CROSSE COMMON COUNCIL BANS CONVERSION THERAPY

ON THURSDAY, JUNE 9, the La Crosse Common Council passed a conversion therapy ban ordinance in a vote of 6–4, making La Crosse the 14th city in Wisconsin to ban the outdated practice. This new ordinance bans any type of conversion therapy to be practiced on anyone under the age of 18 within the city limits. The ban was initially introduced by students at UW-La Crosse, who worked with a Common Council member Mac Kiel to draft it and introduce it to the council.

Conversion therapy is defined by the city of La Crosse as “any practices or treatments that seek to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, including psychological counseling. It also includes efforts to change a person’s behavior or gender expression, or reduce attraction or feelings towards someone of the same sex” according to the *La Crosse Tribune*, who further clarified that it does not “include counseling that provides support, acceptance and understanding of a member of the LGBTQ+ community... That means an individual is still allowed to seek guidance or counseling from a religious leader, for instance, about their sexuality or gender identity, so long as there isn’t an attempt to change how that person is identifying.”

A number of local organizations and community members sent in letters in support of the ban, many citing how discredited among the medical community it is and how harmful it can be to those who go through it.

Unsurprisingly, the ban has been opposed by senior members of some of the local religious organizations, who say that the ban infringes on their religious freedoms and parental rights, and that those who seek this sort of treat-

ment do so willingly and have the ability to “change.”

MADISON TO HOLD FIRST-EVER PRIDE INTERFAITH SERVICE

A DIVERSE GROUP of affirming religious communities spanning the faith spectrum are joining together for Madison’s first-ever Pride Interfaith Service this August. The planners of this event feel the need to speak queer affirmation loudly. Rabbi Bonnie Margulis, Executive Director of Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice, explains that “for far too long, faith communities have been a source of pain and discrimination for the LGBTQIA+ community,” adding her joy that she and her organization can help with this work.

The event will be held Thursday, August 18 at First Baptist Church of Madison and will center LGBTQIA+ faith leaders, musicians, and allies. Rev. Tim Schaefer, pastor of First Baptist, says, “As an openly queer pastor, I have experienced the Church as both a source of my trauma and a source of my liberation. This service is our way of acknowledging the complicated relationship our faith communities have with the LGBTQIA+ community.” The gathering in faith will speak to the need for true repentance of past and continuing harm caused by religious institutions, but will also center queer joy and love. Charles McLimans,



a gay faith leader and CEO of the Benedictine Women of Madison and Holy Wisdom Monastery, which has a long history of inclusivity and welcoming the LGBTQIA+ community and other faith traditions, says, “Hospitality, Justice, Right Relationship are core values that we strive to practice and live out in our daily lives, which is why we are proud to serve as one of the organizers of the Interfaith Pride Service.”

This event is open to the public. The event is Thursday, August 18 beginning at 5:00 p.m. for a time of food and fellowship, featuring the Holy Cow Food Truck and

local LGBTQIA+ organizations. The Pride Interfaith Service starts at 6:30 p.m. and will be livestreamed at live.firstbaptistmadison.org

GOP GOVERNOR CANDIDATE MICHELS OPPOSES SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

TIM MICHELS, a Trump-endorsed GOP candidate for governor, confirmed in an interview with the Associated Press on June 14 that he maintains his opposition to gay marriage,

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stating plainly that he believes that marriage should be between a man and a woman only. While his views on this topic are not new, he made them clear in 2004 when he supported a constitutional amendment that would ban same sex and LGBTQ marriages, he does currently stand alone among his GOP opponents on publicly announcing this view. Many of them,



Michels

despite going on record in the past against, have now said that they no longer oppose it, and recognize it as the law of the land. This includes former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, who is on record in the past disparaging marriage equality legislation, stating that it could result in people marrying pets or inanimate objects. She and another candidate, Kevin Nicholson, now recognize that a majority of Wisconsin voters support marriage equality, and consider the matter closed.

While it is the case that same sex marriages are currently legal in all 50 states, many fear after the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, a case won on the basis of privacy, *Obergefell v. Hodges* might be next. When asked if he would rescind marriage equality in Wisconsin if elected, Michels dodged the question, answering “as a businessman, what I do is I look at what’s in the legislation, and it’s all about the details. So I am very hesitant to do hypotheticals on a broadly stated question like that.”

Wisconsin Democrats are using this opportunity to discredit Michels, saying that because marriage equality has majority support, he is “too radical for this state.” As we’ve all learned over the past five years, however, “too radical” does not always translate into unelectable, and a Trump endorsement does solidify Michels’ status as a top contender for the nomination.

CHRYSALIS HAIR & BODY OWNER WINS SBA AWARD

JULIA MCCONAHAY of Chrysalis Hair and Body (soon to be known as Chrysalis Closet) on the northside of Madison received a special SBA Wisconsin District Director’s award, an award that is not given annually but at the discretion of the director in recognition for resilience during challenging times and creating community. In 2020 and 2021, Julia created outdoor events where people could walk over, hear music, shop from local makers, and feel safe in an outdoor setting while still feeling connected to their community. They helped people get out of the house, local makers who lost income from canceled events and fairs, and helped solidify

Chrysalis as a focal point for the neighborhood. Chrysalis Hair and Body was born from Julia’s desire to do hair but also from her extreme allergic reactions to the chemicals and products that dominate the industry. She wasn’t sure if she was going to be able to even do hair after having to leave a salon for her health. Now Chrysalis is a haven for anyone who suffers



McConahay

from allergies or is sensitive, as she provides “chemically conscious hair services and natural self-care.” For five years, Chrysalis was in a different location and was just hair, as Julia learned hard lessons on the ebb and flow of business, and how to feel equipped to take on employees and a growing business. She has now been at her current location on the Northside of Madison for four years, and has grown the business beyond hair and body and into a vintage wonderland, providing a safe space for all bodies and people.

Going forward, Julia hopes to continue to foster community and build her space, offering boutique experiences such as after dark “twilight shopping sessions” where a small group of friends can have the place to themselves to try on clothes and perhaps moving her hair services into another, more quiet and private space. She mostly feels like she is ready to emerge from her cocoon and meet the challenges of the changing world more confidently than ever, and the SBA award solidified for her that she is on the right track.

TWO NEW SISTER PROJECTS CENTER YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS’ QUEER SPIRITUALITY AND FAITH

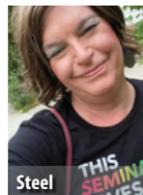
RECOGNIZING THE reality that queer people are too often still excluded or marginalized in faith spaces, two sister projects, LOVE and FAITH, are starting up for queer spirituality and faith. Both projects center youth and young adults who have been marginalized by faith and society, queer, BIPOC, disabled, neurodivergent, and all who are not listed here and all who exist across the intersections and feel the exclusions of marginalization.

The two projects are based in Madison and South Central Wisconsin, but are not limited to only those spaces. Vica-Etta Steel, a queer woman and one of the organizers, says, “If there is an interest in other parts of our state, we can grow!”

Regarding LOVE, two of the founding organizers, Katie Rickert, the LGBTQIA+ lead for Madison Metropolitan Public Schools, and Vica-Etta Steel felt there was a need for a

broadly welcoming space for youth and young adults across the spiritual spectrum. Another organizer, Gabriel Loreda says, “What drew me in is that it’s a group that celebrates queerness and will help youth explore spirituality in a way that I didn’t get to,” adding, “it’s my duty to be a good queer mentor.”

The sister project, FAITH, centers queer and allied youth and young adults in a more intentionally faith-based space. The core of this group is affirming Lutheran but is open to all who hold affirmation of LGBTQIA+ people in their heart and actions. The founders of this project are Marie Leafblad, Associate to the Bishop of the South-Central Wisconsin Synod of the ELCA, an affirming branch



Steel

of the Lutheran church, and Vica-Etta Steel. You can find out more about both projects at sites.google.com/view/faith-and-love/home. Or you can contact any of the organizers at faithandlovemadison@gmail.com.

MILWAUKEE PRIDE PARADE TRIUMPHS AFTER TWO-YEAR TWILIGHT

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 5, the Milwaukee Pride Parade returned to the streets of Walker’s Point with a record-breaking number of parade entries, and a record-setting number of marchers. This year’s parade featured Mayor Cavalier Johnson, County Executive David Crowley, and, for the first time, a Wisconsin Governor—Tony Evers. The procession broke its earlier record of 130 entries, with 132 registered groups, and Kohl’s delivered the largest group ever, with more than 200 employees marching.

Since 2004, the Milwaukee Pride Parade has been an independent and separate organization from PrideFest. For the first time in PrideFest history, the festival was closed entirely on Sunday this year. How did that impact the parade operation?

“We think it boosted the crowd and perhaps participation in the parade,” said Larsen. “For several years, we’ve been getting a bigger and bigger turnout. People know this is a quality parade. They are staying in the neighborhood after the parade, spending more time in the bars, and enjoying the block party.”

The Parade Board is composed entirely of unpaid volunteers who spend nine months planning this Sunday afternoon experience for. What keeps them coming back for more?

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DRAG NIGHTLIFE QTBIPOC ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Role-Modellesque

Expressing themselves through the art of drag, **Jason Luu's** persona **Melee** has been elevating Asian drag representation in Milwaukee and beyond.

I WAS 22 WHEN IT STARTED. I was new to the scene and was so excited because it was going to be the first time I'd get to experience being at a gay bar. Nowadays, I believe that is considered pretty late as many places hold events where people that are 18 years or older can enjoy a good drag show.

I grew up in a conservative Asian immigrant family, so as a child I lived a pretty sheltered life. I am the only gay child in my close family circle, so I felt like the black sheep. This was a recurring theme as I was the only one that didn't aspire to medicine, law, or things considered money-making occupations according to my family's standards. My goals, even at a young age, have always been more artistic and unpredictable. Having such a private upbringing, I've become an introvert as it's what I was taught as a child.

When I told my parents I wanted to be an artist, I was met with words of concern for financial reasons, and these worsened when I came out as gay. With the news of my sexuality, I was met with tears of concern for the structure of my life, as my parents didn't have much of an understanding of what it was to be gay from an American perspective. The closest representation for my parents with

queer culture were homeless crossdressers who did sex work just to survive and how they were rejected by society in Vietnam. So naturally when I saw drag and the way it drew people in the community, I was fearful because of what I had been taught; however it also inspired me, as I saw it as an opportunity to express what was being suppressed. Even with the fear of how my family would perceive me, I used it as a form of inspiration—to be able to succeed within this artform.

When I saw drag and the way it drew people in the community, I was fearful because of what I had been taught; however it also inspired me, as I saw it as an opportunity to express what was being suppressed.

To me drag was the embodiment of so many forms of art, and the main medium consisted of making yourself into a star!

There was a feeling that anyone who acquired the skills needed could get on to stage and suddenly matter to a community of strangers. One of the inspiring factors for my drag was the most popular television series for me in my teens: America's Next Top Model. I took Tyra Bank's teachings to heart and engineered all of my schooling to

gear me toward creating imagery that I simply defined as "modelesque." I took all the art classes including photography, graphic design, and dance. I studied at UW-Milwaukee's Peck School of Arts and found my way into a theater make-up class where I turned every assignment into a drag project. I entered a Wednesday night drag competition at La Cage and a Tumblr Drag Race that both had weekly challenges modeled after RuPaul's Drag Race. All these small things collected into my drag process. They all framed my understanding of how and what people want to see from a Drag artist, entertainer, and stage presence. There is a balance of success, deserving the success, and how you treat others.

When I started getting booked without having to be in competition, it was mostly charities or benefit shows. A giant part of Drag culture in Milwaukee was to raise funding for local

causes such as Pathfinders, Diverse & Resilient, and Courage MKE. My first big show was UW-Milwaukee's Annual Drag Show, and all tips went to Pathfinders. I got to perform with local legends like Lady Gia and find my drag sisters Malaiya Marvel and Gluttoni Sinn. After being a secluded no one for 22 years, I had found my way to being surrounded by my queer icons and a gay chosen family.

A drag artist can have a vast compilation of talents. They can be beautiful, hilarious, con-

ceptual, a great dancer, or the absolute opposite of all that with a great personality. They will gain a following as long as people are intrigued by them or their journey. For myself, I really wanted to show my ability to emulate beauty and the artist I am behind all that I present. Simply put, I like creating beautiful things. I like styling hair, making cool shiny outfits, taking photos, dancing, and doing it with other artists. Then in the process, I like changing the definition of beauty. I look to pop idols such as Blackpink, reference animations and cartoons, and draw from beauty standards in Asian culture. By showing off my interests, I have given others more opportunity to do the same.

Now after about eight or nine years of doing drag, I have many titles to my drag name. I am the first Asian-American to be the main host on the dance pavilion of Milwaukee Pridefest, first Asian-American drag artist to participate at a Bucks Pride Night show, and the first Cosmo Queen from Milwaukee that hasn't been on RuPaul's Drag Race. I host and perform at multiple local venues including This Is It, Hamburger Mary's Milwaukee, D.I.X., Garage on Brady, Hi Hat, and Crafty Cow. With the responsibility of hosting, I'm now able to book other performers with the same level of passion. Malaiya Marvel and I host a monthly show at This Is It called Mania. It is meant to showcase a mix of cosplay and drag. It is highly conceptual because it challenges the entertainers to pick a character reference they want to portray from anime, cartoons, comics, or movies and match looks and performance to it so that the audience will understand.

I believe all the responsibility given to me can all be credited to my work ethic, aesthetic, and professionalism. I see success as putting on a good show, presenting a beautiful image, and connecting to others. You have to capture people's attention. Drag Entertainers LOVE ATTENTION! And attention can be acquired

in so many ways.

Some of my drag ideals for myself are classic in that I am born male, and I present as a woman for stage and imagery. However, when I first encountered drag I do remember thinking, "Anyone can become a Star!" I think a lot of people enter the path to drag with that mentality. It's important to have that dreamy aspiration when starting, but there is a lot more to it that should be picked up along the way now. I believe that a drag artist should consider what they could mean to a community. I wouldn't be anyone if my community didn't

allow me into the spaces to represent them.

There is a built-up trust in doing the job right. Sometimes, it's as big as being the first representation to achieve or be given opportunity, and sometimes it's as small as just showing up on time or performing a good number. As much as doing drag gives me a chance to show off the artistry I learned, the base of the industry is to entertain and represent your community. The best way to represent for me moving forward is to work to ensure safe spaces that are inclusive for anyone that wants to work to better the community. ■





MILWAUKEE NIGHTCLUB LEGACY

La Cage Sold to Long-time Local Customer

The Walker's Point, Milwaukee landmark enters a new era of ownership as **Dave Wolz** takes the reins.

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, rumors rumbled that La Cage (801 S. 2nd Street, Milwaukee) was for sale, had been sold, or would otherwise be changing owners. Yet, the landmark nightclub—a cornerstone of the local LGBTQ community dating back to March, 1984—remained proudly and defiantly open for business.

On June 15, 2022, those rumors became reality.

“My last day at La Cage was June 15,” said former owner George Prentice, “and we closed on the business the next day. We close on the real estate at the end of June. It’s a done deal. It’s over.”

La Cage wouldn’t be here today without the long-time commitment of owners George Prentice and Corey Grubb. The couple managed the business on a day-to-day basis for more than 21 years before retiring in November, 2005. Twelve years later, the couple unexpectedly returned to Milwaukee to rescue the financially struggling club. Its owners had defaulted, and the future of the business was grim.

“I did not want to come back to La Cage,” said George. “I made no bones about it then, and I make no bones about it now. But I knew I had to. God knows what would have happened if I didn’t. It might have been sold at auction. I had to protect my interests, and I wanted to protect the legacy. We went to work putting the business back together. We had a lot of work ahead of us, and we left a lot on the table to do it. It was for sale from day one in 2017.”

“We had legitimate offers over the years, but the pandemic really squashed any real movement,” said George. “Nobody would pull the trigger until the restrictions were lifted. Rightly so: we are a dance club and our dance floor was closed. Everyone had to remain seated. Nobody in their right mind would have taken over with those restrictions.”

“You have to understand: I didn’t just buy a bar, I bought the first gay bar I ever went to in my life. I still remember the first night I came here. I still think about where I was when I heard a certain song, or where I met a certain person, or where I was part of a particular moment.”

Eventually, the deal came down to two competing bidders.

“It was a difficult decision,” said George, “but we’d like to see La Cage continue to serve what’s left of the gay community. This weighed heavily on us as we considered the offers.”

“Ultimately, we chose Dave Wolz. We’ve known him a long time, we know where his heart is, and we know he can make La Cage better for the future,” said George. “It’s time for new ownership, new life, new ideas. This is good for us, good for him, and good for Milwaukee. Dave will be very hands-on and very committed to this business.”

George was only 20 years old—“not even old enough to drink!”—when he opened his first business, the River Queen (402 N. Water Street) in 1971. Later, he was involved in the Circus Disco (219 S. 2nd Street), and other ventures, before opening La Cage in 1984.

LaCage at 801 S 2nd St. in Milwaukee. Below: New La Cage owner Dave Wolz took command June 16, 2022



How does George feel—to finally step away—after over 50 years of running LGBTQ businesses in Milwaukee?

“I am 100% relieved,” said George. “This time around, it’s nothing but relief. We are entering a new business and a new chapter of our lives in Florida, and we are done with this chapter and this business in Milwaukee.”

“When I look back, La Cage was all about the people,” said George. “We met so many good people here, and had so many good employees. Some of them now live near us in Florida. The good memories come back to us in bits and pieces, but it’s the overall collection of memories we created that matter.”

“It was a fight in the beginning, but an important fight for the community,” said George. “Gay bars weren’t supposed to be so out in the open. But here we were, like us or not. We worked very, very hard to make it what it was, and it was fun building it, and watching it grow. We can’t think of another nightclub—anywhere in the country—that’s still open after 38 years.”

“We also know it’s time to get off the stage,” said George. “We know it’s time to go. Nobody wants 70-year-olds running a nightclub.”

“When we leave Milwaukee in early September, we don’t really have to come back ever again. Of course, we will, though: There’s a certain 40th anniversary party coming up in 2024. I can’t promise I’ll still be around for the 50th, but I’m not going to miss the 40th! That’s going to be a party to remember,” George said.

MEET THE NEW OWNER

“It’s not something I ever imagined doing,” said Dave Wolz, new owner and operator of La Cage Nightclub. “It’s not something I really even thought about. And yet, here we are.”

Last winter, he was visiting George and Corey in Florida, who shared their readiness to move on. They wanted to move into new directions with their lives, but the burden of La Cage was holding them back.

“George said something sassy—which, if you know George, is not

surprising—but it’s what he said that really stuck with me,” said Dave. “He said, ‘You know, if La Cage turns into something else, so be it, life will go on.’”

“I couldn’t imagine the legacy and history of that space just fading away,” said Dave. “and suddenly, it seemed like it was moments from happening.”

“While driving across Florida after our visit, I kept thinking to myself, ‘Who do I know that could take the reins for them?’” said Dave. “I talked to a few people, and there was a legitimate interest from one group. As negotiations moved along, George and Corey started asking me about my own interests. I thought I was just bringing people together to talk ownership. I never thought of myself as a possible owner. Fortunately, George and Corey did.”

The potential deal fell through. And then, last summer, Dave’s father passed away suddenly. He found himself with an inheritance he hadn’t expected, as well as the rare opportunity to do something unexpected for the community.

“Another person was interested in the bar, but it was not someone from within the community,” said Dave. “I’ve seen what happens to legacy gay bars that are taken over by straight owners. I knew in that moment I had to find a way to make it happen. And, in the end, we did.”

What’s it feel like to be the caretaker of a community institution?

“More than anything, I am humbled,” said Dave. “You have to understand: I didn’t just buy a bar, I bought the first gay bar I ever went to in my life. I still remember the first night I came here. I still think about where I was when I heard a certain song, or where I met a certain person, or where I was part of a particular moment. La Cage was the backdrop for so many important moments of my generation. There’s so much déjà vu when you’re in this space.”

“And I’ve heard, from so many people, how thankful they are that La Cage will live on,” said Dave. “I’ve heard so many ‘thank you,’ so many

‘alleluias,’ and so much support. Older people are relieved to know that La Cage will continue, and that young adults will have a place to make their own memories. There really aren’t that many gay bars left.”

Dave has no small plans for the future of La Cage. His first order of business is amplifying the second floor, “Montage Night Club” space, rechristened the Jackie Roberts Show Lounge in fall 2021.

“La Cage was at its peak in the late 90s,” said Dave, “when it offered multiple spaces, experiences, and memories. It’s a big space, and so much of that space is currently unused or underutilized. How can we make the second floor a destination? I foresee everything from a rotating schedule of live entertainment to LGBTQ non-profit events, from rising local talent to ticketed shows with national headliners. We want to bring back some of that M&M Club feel, with fish fries, brunches and bar food, so you can eat, drink, and be comfortably entertained under one roof. We want to bring back the days when people would come for the shows, stay for the dancing, and enjoy the neighborhood. The second floor is at the heart of all these plans, and we need to get that heart beating.”

“La Cage is one of only a handful of dance clubs left in Milwaukee,” said Dave, “and we plan to pack that dance floor again. It’s the center of La Cage for a reason.”

He promises the cage above the dancefloor since 2005, will remain.

“Make no mistake, I know this place has seen its ups and downs,” said Dave. “I have seen it for myself. I have been a customer for more than 25 years, and I’ve seen good nights, and I’ve seen bad nights. I know it has not always lived up to the legend. This is a LGBTQ community space—and we want everyone to feel that they belong here. We will be working very hard to ensure that La Cage is a space that is open to all. Our future depends on it.”

“Trust me, when I say that I am committed to making La Cage the best place it can be,” Dave said. “It’s more important to me than anything else.” ■

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[The Rivals, Photo by Liz Lauren]



DISRUPTION DRAG MILWAUKEE NIGHTLIFE

The movement will not be Instagrammed

Chuckie Betz, the last surviving member of Wisconsin's Gay Liberation Front, tells all.

CHUCKIE BETZ KNEW he was different way back in grade school.

“There were incidents when I was four or five,” said Chuckie. “I remember my parents sat me down and told me that I wasn’t supposed to be wearing kimonos. So, I took my mother’s red high heels and wore them to my kindergarten class. She was the substitute teacher that day. She wasn’t having it.”

Chuckie grew up in Cudahy, where he was one of three children born into an old South Shore family. His father was a truck driver, his mother was a teacher. His grandparents were “entrenched” in Cudahy, as he puts it, and attended services at St. Frederick’s Church. One of his grandfathers even ran for mayor.

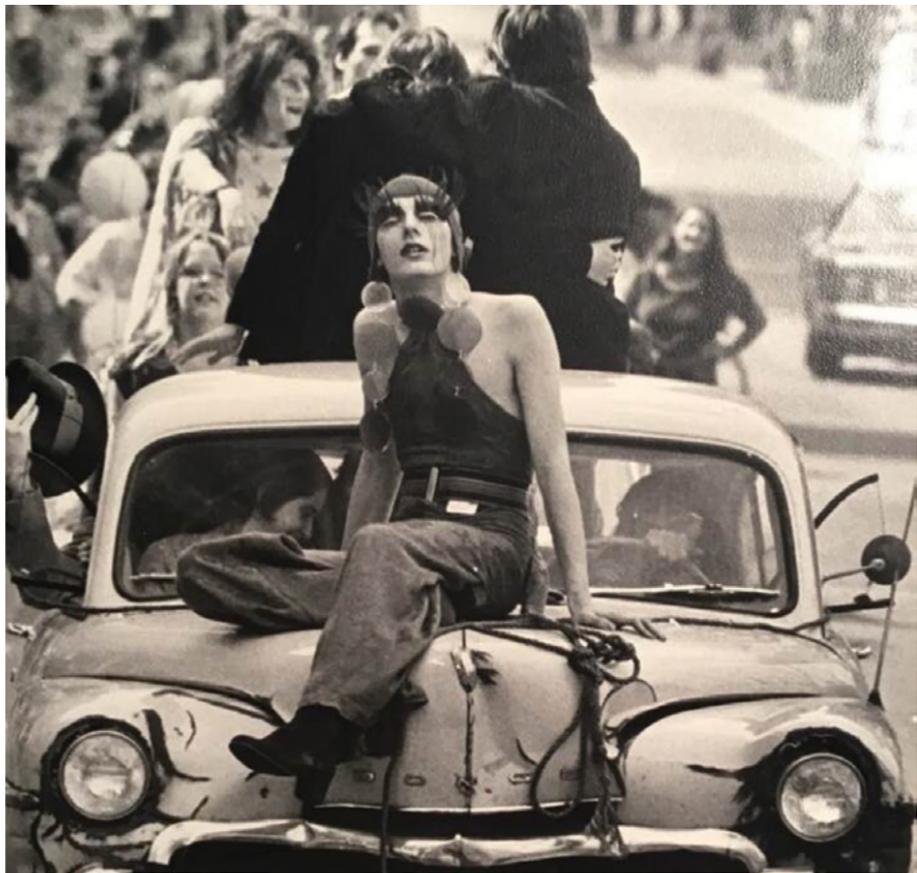
“I was a pretty queer child,” said Chuckie, “and it was pretty evident to everyone around me. The neighborhood kids on my block called me Sharlene, but not as an insult. I was just Sharlene and that’s the way it was. The boys used to carry my books—all the way through grade school.”

“I grew up with three gay people,” said Chuckie, “and we all used to hang around. When I was 12 or 13, we would hang outside the Fox Bar (455 N. Plankinton Ave.) because my oldest friend told me it was a gay place. Guys would come outside and talk to us. I couldn’t even go inside, I just wanted to be where the people were. Sometimes we’d linger at the Antlers Hotel (624 N. 2nd St.) These places were already pretty seedy, but they were all we knew.”

Chuckie attended St. Francis Prep High School—a seminary school—for his freshman year when he was asked to leave. “I was not what they were looking for,” he laughed. “Not in terms of lifestyle, nor clothes, nor ambitions! And I was already going out with the guys. So everything was wrong.”

Like many queer youth of his generation, Chuckie hung out at the Loop Café (603 N. 5th St.)

“We couldn’t get into bars, so we became regulars at the café,” he said. “You could fag out there. We met a lot of gay people from the area, of every age, and sorted out where to go and what was happening. There was one wait-



Chuckie Betz and friends represented Gay Liberation Front at the Vietnam Vets Against the War Parade. This photo—seen in local papers—was the first photo of a gay pride event ever seen in Milwaukee media.

“We were very much into demonstrating with other groups to recognize gay rights,” said Chuckie. “And we had this old car, but no hood ornament. I decided I was going to be the hood ornament. And that’s how I wound up on the front page of the newspaper.”

ress, and she was pretty tough, so you did not cause trouble. There was also a regular, older gay crowd who DID NOT like us. They liked things to be cut and dry, butch and femme, queens and kings. They did not appreciate our hippie mindset. It’s funny, the hippies didn’t like us because we were gay, and the gays didn’t like us because we were hippies.”

“Marc’s Big Boy on 5th and Wisconsin was another big hangout,” said Chuckie. “They would let you come however you were

dressed. That restaurant might as well have been my real high school. All of the gay kids from all over gathered there. We’d parade up and down Wisconsin Avenue.”

He transferred to Cudahy High School for his sophomore year, but didn’t receive a warm welcome.

“I was called a faggot on the first day I walked into that school,” said Chuckie, “and I’d never met any of those people before. They harassed my gay friend and me daily. It just

wouldn’t quit. After a while, all of the bullying, all of the harassment, all of the assaults... it got to be too much. The teachers would do nothing about it. Nothing at all. It was obvious I was not going to survive three years there. I had to get out.”

Chuckie transitioned to Cathedral High School in downtown Milwaukee, where his uncle was a priest. He became close friends with his art teacher and the principal.

“There was a lot of talk about me, but nobody said anything to me until graduation practice,” said Chuckie. “As they called my name, and I walked up, these guys yelled out ‘WOMAN!’ But they knew they couldn’t touch me, and they never did. After graduation, I was invited back to give presentations on gay life. I have to say, Cathedral was very liberal, way ahead of its time.”

After graduating in 1969, Chuckie pursued his love of art at the Layton Art Institute. By that time, the Fox Bar was long ago razed for freeway construction. He was aware of the nearby Seaway Inn (744 N. Jefferson), but knew nothing about This Is It (418 E. Wells St.) until many years later. He also discovered the Castaways (196 S. 2nd St.) and the Rooster (173 S. 2nd St.), two of the most popular bars in an emerging gay village south of downtown.

“Getting into the Castaways was a fake ID situation,” said Chuckie, “you had to go early, very early, and you had to show them some kind of ID. So we’d show Jimmy Zingale charge cards, insurance cards, anything but a real ID. And he would let us in! I was so excited to get in, along with my friends, that I can’t tell you what happened once we finally got inside. I will tell you though, we attracted the customers. We were the draw.”

“I went to the Rooster religiously once I turned 19,” he said. “The drinking age was 21, remember. But they had no problem with me being only 19. Me and my friends would get devastated at that place. ‘Big Al’ Barry owned the place. They had remodeled it pretty extensively and always kept it nice and clean. The bartender Dudley had a boyfriend named Rubber Duckie and a friend named JP. Sometimes, Dudley would close down the backroom and serve JP’s dog Lola little bowls of wine. The scene was that small, that comfortable.”

“Eleven days before my 21st birthday, the River Queen (402 N. Water St.) opened, and it was just great,” he said. “It was a huge, upscale place. The whole concept was completely different from anything we knew before. Only a few years earlier, we would have been hanging out at the old, dark, dingy Fox Bar a block away. Now we had fancy gay places. And it was mixed from day one—men and women together. No attitudes allowed! Things were

changing, and we were nixing the old ways of doing things.

“We were all so broke, though, even the dime beer nights were a stretch sometimes,” said Chuckie. “People would sneak in beer and booze and hide it in the toilet tank to keep it cold! They didn’t get caught for years!”

Chuckie remembers a heavy police presence inside and outside of the River Queen, including the vice squad cop who once drove him home to Cudahy. “His gut was so big it was sitting on the dashboard!”

Chuckie also remembers the existence of the Regency East (1758 N. Water St.) and Stud Club (546 N. 5th St.) but not much about the experiences of going there. Other Milwaukee east side favorites included the Neptune Club (1100 E. Kane Pl.), where he once ran for the Miss Neptune pageant, and Ten Hundred East (1000 E. North Ave.), which was a favorite of his in the early 1970s before leaving Milwaukee, and in 1980 upon moving back.

“On Halloween, we were all at the Neptune when a man in a bunny suit exploded in flames,” said Chuckie. “His costume was supposedly flame-retardant, but it obviously was not. He must have caught a cigarette ash or spark somehow. Everyone started throwing their drinks on him, which only made things worse. So, I dragged him into the bathroom and tore off the suit to discover he was very



“Gay Liberation Front was really radical,” he remembered. “They would disrupt services at local churches, sending a gay man wearing a crown of thorns into the mass. They picketed movies like The Boys in The Band, which made all gay men seem miserable and boring!”

badly burnt. So we drove him to the hospital, with me wearing only a floor-length velvet coat and underwear. The nurse brought me his false eyelashes in an envelope to hold onto. I’ll never forget that night!”

Meg Holzhauser was 15 when she started working at the Granfalloon (1627 E. Irving Pl.). The coffee shop was operated by publish-

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Left: Chuckie and the Radical Queens weren't trying to be beauty queens. "We were trying to scare the fuck out of straight people." Right: Chuckie channels Cleopatra for a 1970s Halloween.

er John Kois and DJ Bob Reitman, but they were too busy with their other endeavors, so Meg was left alone to run the place.

"It was this weird, dark, little place that served hamburgers on one side and donuts and coffee on the other side," remembered Meg. "The tables were made out of these gigantic longshoreman wire spools. And it was always empty. We had NO business!"

She remembers seeing Chuckie walking down Farwell Avenue, in a huge black cape, with a bull whip wrapped around his neck.

"I knew I had to meet this guy," she said, "and one day he came into the Falloon with his entourage. We fell in love with each other right away. We were kindred spirits."

"Chuckie and I got really drunk when I was 16," said Meg, "and announced we were getting married. We announced this at the bars. We announced this to our families. Chuck Sr. was very down on homosexuality, so he was pleasantly surprised by this news. My father, not so much. He said, 'My daughter is not marrying a queer man.' He knew me too well."

"We had to be safe in those days," said Chuckie. "Everyone was fighting everyone. We'd get attacked by straight guys trying to pull people into their cars. We'd give their license plates to the police, but the police wouldn't do anything. They overlooked it all. I remember seeing my friend, Gary, showing up with black eyes and a swollen mouth. He was such a big guy, and he got beat up all the time. It was a reminder to us all, if he can get beat up, we all can. Later, I learned to carry a knife in my boot."

The Granfalloon was under near-constant pressure from the East Side Neighborhood Association, affectionately known as the "East Side Mothers." The president of the association lived on Irving Place and wasn't thrilled to have a counterculture hotspot on his block. They doubled down on the Granfalloon hard, especially when it became known as a gay destination. Meanwhile, the coffeehouse stocked up on baseball bats to defend its gay patrons from harassment.

Sadly, the Granfalloon lasted just under a year, but that year made Chuckie famous. He appeared almost weekly on Bob Reitman's radio show to talk about gay issues. He did an interview with Channel 12 that inspired a weeklong series on gay rights.

"If there was a way to get into the media, Chuckie would find it," said Meg. "The cameras just loved him!"

THE BIRTH OF GAY LIBERATION FRONT

Chuckie remembers the scene getting more and more organized, with people wanting to make a more meaningful and lasting impact. There was a lot of talk, but very little action, about creating a "Freedom League" for homosexuals. In March 1970, eight people at UW-Milwaukee got together and formed the Gay Liberation Organization with faculty advisor Barbara Gibson. By the second meeting, it was clear that the members were not in agreement.

"One side wanted tea dances so they could meet other gay men," said Chuckie, "and the other side wanted to march in the streets to drive change. Eventually, the GLO broke in half: The social side became the Gay People's Union and the radical side became the Gay Liberation Front.

"Gay Liberation Front was really radical," he remembered. "They would disrupt services at local churches, sending a gay man wearing a crown of thorns into the mass. They picketed movies like The Boys in The Band, which made all gay men seem miserable and boring!"

When beatings increased in Juneau Park, we patrolled the park with bats and clubs. Eventually, a gang member got thrown through a window at the Hotel Knickerbocker. We occupied the First Baptist Church for several days. We took over the UWM Union during the Kent State protests. But GLF was really small, and the movement itself was still very small, so we needed to align ourselves with other causes to be seen and heard.

"My lawyer Sandra Edhlund appeared in a man's suit, and I appeared in glamorous furs. Seraphim took one look at me and decided there was a problem with me based on my appearance. I got sent to a psychiatrist."

"We would say really outrageous and shocking things," said Chuckie, "like we might say we wanted all straight men to be castrated. We wanted to be noticed. We wanted to let people know we were out there. And we wanted them to be scared of us, because gay people had been scared for so long. It was time to turn things around."

"Our nature was to question authority, speak up, not back down, and go right to the streets and march," said Meg. "You had a constant churn of protest activity throughout that entire

era. All those little factions, all those interest groups, all that fighting for what was right. Thank God for UWM. Everyone got their posters ready no matter what the issue was."

One of the GLF's greatest milestones was attending the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in 1970, where they met with Gay Liberation Front and STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) representatives from New York City. But the trip almost didn't happen.

"We heard it was happening," said Chuckie, "and we decided we needed to be there to represent Milwaukee. The county was tearing down my neighborhood—this whole strip of beautiful, historic homes—for the Park East Freeway. They even tore down my house—the Layton Art Institute—which ended this tradition of artists living on the lower East Side."

"We had friends that lived on Ogden Avenue, so we went house-by-house and lifted stained glass windows that we sold to finance the trip. And then we hitchhiked our way there and back!"

Today, Chuckie doesn't remember who he met at this historic conference—"it was all so much, so fast"—but the guests included Huey P. Newton, Sylvia Rivera, and Marsha P. Johnson. He remembers seriously considering a move to New York City.

Chuckie's activism was blooming—and

he had met a large group of people (including Flash Gorski) who encouraged his self-expression. When the Vietnam Vets Against the War parade was announced, they knew they had to be there.

"We were very much into demonstrating with other groups to recognize gay rights,"



At age 15, Meg Holzauer ran the Granfalloon Coffeehouse, a popular gathering spot for East Side gays.

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The friendship of Meg Holzhauser & Chuckie Betz spans over 50 years.

“What’s funny is that we also dressed up the driver of that car in drag,” said Chuckie, “and we took him from corner to corner downtown, until finally the police arrested him for violating the ‘three article rule. So that became the next thing we fought against.”

“Milwaukee was really a tough place to be,” said Chuckie, “because you had Breier running the police and Seraphim running the courts. And they’d come after you. If you became known as a troublemaker, they would come for you. They could beat the hell out of you and you couldn’t do a damn thing about it.”

“I was picked up for a different charge and wound up in front of Judge Seraphim,” he said. “My lawyer Sandra Edhlund appeared in a man’s suit,

and I appeared in glamorous furs. Seraphim took one look at me and decided there was a problem with me based on my appearance. I got sent to a psychiatrist.”

In fall 1971, Chuckie and two other GLF members (Angelo Peaches and Connie Worm) created the Radical Queens. The Queens had a very extensive manifesto, which included the threat “we’re angry queens that are out to get you. And when we do, we’re going to set your hair aflame and scratch your eyes out, fuckers!” However, Chuckie insists they weren’t a very formal or even organized group, and there was never a formal membership or charter. Chuckie is also very clear that he was never trying to be female, or even very effeminate, in his drag appearance.

“This was street drag, as they called it in New York,” said Chuckie. “It was genderfuck drag. Drag as terrorism. Drag as confrontation. We weren’t trying to be pretty. We weren’t trying to be women. We were trying to scare the fuck out of straight people. It was one part woman, one part man, some jewelry, some fur, and some glitter. Huge hats. High heels. Fur purses. Maybe a little acid here and there. We’d crash events dressed up like this, just to shake things up and leave people guessing. Was it worth it? Of course. It was worth every minute to be seen.”

Chuckie remembers disrupting everything from Wisconsin Avenue fur shops, to a Job’s Daughter revival at the Marc Plaza, to the

makeup counter at Woolworths, to a high school musical in Cudahy.

“One day, we’re in the Gimbel’s Wig Department, coming down the escalator one by one, posing like fashion models in our impossible outfits, on this very long escalator ride, when I see my future brother-in-law and his co-workers staring up at me,” said Chuckie. “What a way to introduce him to my social life! But he wasn’t shocked at all. He just said, ‘Oh, hey Chuckie!’”

He remembers showing up at parties with Christmas lights woven through his hair, doing LSD at the Circus Parade, hanging out with Father Joe Feldhausen at the “gay church,” partying with Jerry Rubin of the Chicago 7, and traveling to Washington, D.C. with Father Groppi. He also remembers bringing a gay liberation presence to the Be-Ins in Lake Park, the Water Tower Riots, and the Fountain Riots. “I was always big on breaking windows,” he said, “and I broke them again at the San Francisco riots in May 1979.

“We included everybody and anybody who wanted to be part of our movement,” he said, “but there were people who just did NOT like us. The older queens were just so pissed. I got pushed into a pond by a drag queen once. She didn’t think we were funny AT ALL. And yet, later, we became best friends.

“There was so much name-calling, so much verbal bitch-slapping,” he said. “The older queens didn’t have easy lives, and they felt we were disrespecting what they’d done. But they were into passing drag, which didn’t interest us at all! We wanted to be an art form, not a pageant winner. So, we introduced them to drugs—and suddenly we were accepted!”

KEEPING THE MOVEMENT ALIVE

When the Gay Liberation Front dissolved, the New Gay Underground was born at 904 E. Pleasant. Chuckie remembers unfurling a huge banner from the windows across the entire roof. Today, it’s a condominium building, but back then it was a rooming house filled with gay artists and activists.

“It was all gay people,” remembered Chuckie, “and if we had any problems with straight people, they police would come over and tell them to leave! There were so many parties. So much dancing. So much drinking. It was really a moment in time. Eventually, the police went to my parents’ house in Cudahy and tried to convince them to get me out of the Pleasant Street house.”

“They were stone broke, and never had a dime, but they were such a bright group,” said

Meg. “You just don’t even know how cultured and worldly they were for 1970s Milwaukee—in tune with arts, music, fashion, social justice. Everything.”

“All those humans were so genuine,” said Chuckie. “It was a melting pot of great minds. What you saw was what they were. They were creative, clever, intentional activists. Everything had to be genuine. There was no posing, no faking it.”

“And Chuckie didn’t save his drag for Saturday night,” said Meg. “He didn’t turn it off. He couldn’t turn it off. It was always on!”

“New Gay Underground was started to encompass everyone,” said Chuckie, “and to bring some life back into the movement. But it got so splintered. It wasn’t neat and clean. The original members grew up, graduated from college, and removed themselves from the scene. Times changed SO fast. And then New Gay Underground was over, too.”

GO WEST

In the mid-70s, Chuckie moved to Los Angeles and became part of a social group known as Les Petits Bon Bon, who ruled the Sunset Strip as “living art” and socialized with heavy hitters like Rodney Bingenheimer, Cherry Vanilla, and even David Bowie.

“I went to the Hollywood premiere of Last Tango in Paris,” said Chuckie, “and later had dinner with David Bowie and his boyfriend at Rainbow Grill. We knew everyone. We experienced a lot.”

Later, Chuckie moved to San Francisco, where he worked at the original Hamburger Mary’s, the Stud, and as the first cocktail waitress at the first Folsom Street Fair. He remembers building the first DJ booth at The Stud, and drawing the 1979 bar poster.

“Everywhere you went in San Francisco was gay,” said Chuckie, “you didn’t have to go to a certain area. We lived by Polk Street and spent many nights at the Palms and Buzzbys. I even hung out at the Trench!”

Meg lived upstairs, and she always did his eyelashes before he’d go out. The pair was living check to check, and times could be a little tough. Meg remembers stopping at Macy’s Union Square every morning to put on her make-up before work. Chuckie remembers a shoe store off Market Street that offered high heels in men’s shoes with a discrete fitting room. “I said, no thanks, I’ll just try them on here!”

One night while preparing for a hot date, Meg noticed that her favorite bra and dress were missing—because Chuckie had put them on and went out on the town.

“I never had a date with that man again,” she said. “We fought about this for weeks!”

“She ‘accidentally’ cut a bald spot in my head,” said Chuckie, “and she said I moved. I did not move! She did it on purpose. I wound up with this weird asymmetrical haircut. I went down to Sassoon and asked them to fix it. And then I wound up with a modeling gig!”

Meg remembers Chuckie nursing her broken heart after a major breakup. She laid on his living floor on Hyde Street for a month, listening to the same song over and over. And Chuckie remembers when his neighbor suddenly became very, very sick and died of a mysterious disease nobody had ever heard of: AIDS.

“It was just starting to percolate,” said Chuckie. “Nobody was talking about AIDS. Nobody had any idea such a thing could happen. It was like the last moment of innocence.”

“Our life in San Francisco was an explosion of sequins, tube tops, and gold lame,” said Meg. “It was such a time to be alive.” After losing an audition for a Divine show, Meg decided it was time to move back to Milwaukee. “Our landlords wanted us out, so I accepted a job offer, and moved to St. Louis,” said Chuckie, “but I could not stand it. I wound up back in Milwaukee in 1980.”

Meg was happy to see him. “In reflection, I have to say: it’s a wonderful experience to be in love and to be so close to a person without it ever being sexual. And it lasts so much longer.”

LOOKING BACK WITH LOVE

Today, Chuckie is retired and living in South Milwaukee. He is the only known survivor of Milwaukee’s Gay Liberation Front and the Radical Queens. “This is it, honey, this is all that’s left,” he jokes. The other two Radical Queens are long gone. There aren’t any GLF members remaining to tell their story.

Fortunately, Chuckie carries this colorful history forward for all of them.

“Back then, people were always ready to battle for what they believed in,” said Chuckie. “I worry that people are so focused on their online lives, they’ve forgotten about what’s going on in the real world. I worry that we’ve become divided when we should be coming together. I worry that we’ve become way too comfortable when we should be sleeping with one eye open.”

At the same time, Chuckie looks back lovingly on a lifetime devoted to liberation.

“Each decade of my life has been like a completely different lifetime,” said Chuckie. “I’ve had more life in a decade than some people have in their entire lives. I could not be more grateful or fortunate for the life that I’ve had.”

Learn more about Gay Liberation Front, and the history of gay rights in Wisconsin, at the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project website, mkelgbthist.org. ■

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said Chuckie. “And we had this old car, but no hood ornament. I decided I was going to be the hood ornament. And that’s how I wound up on the front page of the newspaper.”

On September 6, 1971, Chuckie appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal* in his full gender-fluid glory. It was the first time that a gay pride event—and possibly a gay person—had ever been seen in the local newspaper. More than 50 years later, the photo was chosen to represent the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project’s new podcast, *Be Seen*.

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TRANS EXPERIENCE CONVERSION THERAPY AFFIRMING CHRISTIANITY

The Queerly Faithful Journey of Gabriel Loredo

In this first installment in a series, **Vica-Etta Steel** begins a column that will shine a spotlight on queer people of faith, with each column focused on someone from a different faith tradition. This first column focuses on trans, queer Christian **Gabriel Loredo**.

QUEER. RELIGION. So often these two words feel like antonyms. Many of us have felt the pain from words of faith twisted into weapons. So many of us feel that pain still. But today, we start a journey to see synonyms in the concepts of “queer” and “religion.”

We start this journey with a close-up of one man in faith. Gabriel Loredo, a young, Chicano, queer, transgender man who has joined and taken a level of leadership at Sherman Methodist Church in Madison and is helping start up L.O.V.E., a project for Madison’s queer and allied youth across the spiritual spectrum. (You can find more information about this project in the News Briefs section of this issue.) I start with Gabe and this look into a man who stepped away from the Christian faith that abandoned its queer family, but with time and love, he found a home in a Christian church. My hope is that in columns moving forward, I can share stories of queer people in other religions as well: Queer in Islam, queer in Buddhism, queer in Wicca, queer in Hinduism and queer in so many other spaces that we reclaim or maybe, were never pushed out of.

As we look at Gabe in this issue, never forget that each of our stories are our own, but our stories also resonate. Gabe has felt both the pain brought by houses of faith and the love that uplifts from those who intentionally welcome. Gabe says that he is the last person to tell anyone to follow the same path he has, though you’d be welcomed if you did. Gabe sees too much beauty in each of our stories and he tells of how much he learns both from the faith leadership of his pastor, the Reverend David Hart, as well as from a friend who is Norse Heathen and from his work in advocacy for all across the spiritual spectrum.

Gabe grew up, as too many of us do, in a home and church that did not welcome or affirm. He says he knew early that he was not the girl his family expected him to be. He tells his feelings about puberty, “I was hoping my mom was actually lying to me about what would happen. And then it happened. I was like, ‘Dang it!’”

Gabe tried to make things better, becoming hyper-feminine. His mom was conservative and had an image of a stereotypical family with one boy and one girl. He says, “She had the boy. She thought she had the girl.” Gabe tried to please his mom, “I just was really



hyper-feminine and just tried, maybe if I was dressed feminine enough [my dysphoria] would just go away. Eventually though, as my body just kept forming and I was like, ‘Oooh! I’m really uncomfortable!’”

Gabe recalls a joyful moment of defiance as he unexpectedly found a chance to claim at least some of his masculinity, in a shopping trip to a Madison mall, “I remember a shopping trip with my brother, for school

clothes. My mom didn’t have time, being a single mom, to take me so [my brother] was like, ‘Whatever you want to get, just pick it out. I don’t know what you wear.’ And I was like, ‘Oh my gosh I have free rein to pick out my clothes!’ So I just picked out whatever I wanted! And it was all sweaters, jeans, t-shirts, and shoes from the guy’s section, and I felt great!” Gabe’s mom was not happy with his choices, but went along with it, giving a resigned, “Fine,” with an offensive addition of, “At least you won’t get pregnant wearing this.” Gabe says he “gave her the biggest eye roll” and he thought, “Oh, mom. If only you knew.”

Gabe didn’t know many queer people growing up, but one queer person he met in band introduced him to BriarPatch, and through that organization he joined Top Ten, going to other youth groups to teach peer to peer, and he joined Teens Like Us. In these spaces, Gabe learned more about queerness and gained a stronger sense of self.

FAITH LOST

Gabe struggled against the queerphobia—and specifically the transphobia—that surrounded him through his life. He recounts the faith journey of his family, one that was always unaffirming, with differing levels of outright hostility. “I grew up Catholic and then [Mom] left Catholicism and joined the Assemblies of God...after that it went more evangelical and then after that was non-denominational Christian. I don’t really know how that works to be honest.” Gabe felt more and more uncomfortable in faith spaces. He tells of his youth pastor showing movies of *The Rapture* with traumatic scenes of sinners being beheaded. The message was clear, he says, “If you stray from God, then you won’t go to Heaven, and these awful things will happen to

you.” He still has nightmares about those movies. Gabe pointed me to the Tik-Tokker @kevinjamesthornnton who speaks of his own work deconstructing harmful Christian spaces.

As a youth, and still today, he didn’t understand how churches could be so cold and the people could abhor him just for existing. One common way transphobic Christians justify their hate is to say that God doesn’t make mistakes. Gabe has a strong faith that he is not a mistake, that he was wonderfully and fearfully made (Psalm 139:14). He says, “I didn’t understand why all these people were just so abhorrent toward me, and I didn’t understand why, if I’m this way and supposedly God doesn’t make mistakes, then why are they saying that it’s terrible.”

Gabe stopped going to church when he was a senior in high school. He recalls the drama that grew from one time when he tried to tell his mom that he thought he was “queer in some way.” His attempt at connection led to a conversation with their pastor who slipped his mom a brochure and tried to get Gabe to go to therapy, which Gabe now understands wasn’t therapy at all but a “therapy camp,” a form of conversion therapy that was not what the brochure advertised. That’s when Gabe said, “Okay, I think I’m done. This is not for me.” He remembers that word got out about him being queer. “Church parents would just hold their kids just a little closer when I would walk past with my mom,” he said. “Or my mom would come home from church and she’d be like, ‘Well, this person asked about you today and they’re praying for you,’ and I said that I don’t need their prayers.”

Gabe came out fully in his early 20s. He says, “I finally said I can’t keep trying to do this hyper-femininity. I can’t keep trying to pray the trans away for my mom to love me. I just can’t keep doing this. So I came out, and I promptly started hormones, and here we are.

But he stayed away from the church for years.

FAITH RECLAIMED

When Gabe went to church again, it wasn’t something he meant to do. He speaks of a moment in time, an affirming pastor, The Reverend David Hart, opened the door in a gentle way. After being invited to come to Reverend Hart’s church, Gabe declined, saying, “I’m not into it. I don’t want to go to church.” Gabe says that the Reverend Hart never pushed and just engaged in conversation about how each of their days were going. After his earlier toxic experiences, Gabe wondered at this man who was a Christian leader and yet “so chill.” Gabe did find out that The Reverend Hart was affirming of LGBTQIA+ people, which also surprised him.

Gabe’s first time in a church again came because his spouse at the time wanted to go. Gabe decided that they would be most welcome at Sherman Methodist with Reverend Hart. What he did not expect was to be moved emotionally. He was so surprised when people from the church greeted him, fully welcoming without concern that he was queer. In other church spaces, the people stayed well away once they found out he was queer. But at this church, he was greeted fully, and when he heard the sermon, he said it was so beautiful that he cried a joyful cry. However, he also wondered, “How is this person making me cry! I’m on testosterone!” One of the first things Gabe noticed when he started on T was that his ability to cry just tanked. But here he was just bawling in the pew and thinking, “I need to be here.”

If you knew more of the Reverend Hart, you might also cry for joy. When asked about when he became an affirming pastor, Hart said, “I have always been an ally and affirming in my ministry and have carried that wherever I go. I refuse to be in a place where I can’t do that. I was marrying queer folk—family and friends—and blessing their unions back when it was illegal to do so. We would cross the state lines, speak up, speak out. Yes, I have always been an ally as a

called clergy and as a human. As a Black man, I identify with others who have struggled to exist and to be fully themselves in this world, because some are afraid or hateful.”

Reverend Hart continued with more of his own theology, stating, “I have spent my called life as a womanist preacher. I see God as a trans God—a God bigger than pronouns and hate. So I am intentional about the pronouns I use for a God that big. God is not simply “he.” God is all things. My sermons and teaching are liberators and affirming. Anyone who sees the sermons hears the love and fullness of God.” And in the work he leads with his church, Hart says, “We are making our bathrooms accessible to all people. We show up for the oppressed and marginalized, not just when it’s convenient. And we do right.” And in that spirit of always working for the oppressed, he asked me, and really all of us, how we, the people and readers of *Our Lives*, are working toward ending the oppression of Black people.

“How is this person making me cry! I’m on testosterone!” One of the first things Gabe noticed when he started on T was that his ability to cry just tanked. But here he was just bawling in the pew and thinking, “I need to be here.”

Gabe also holds a strong warmth for the faith leadership of his friend who is Norse Heathen. Gabe says that she offers a wisdom that he doesn’t always reach on his own, especially when he feels self-doubt about belonging. He says, “I’ll never forget when she said that I do belong. That I have ties to this earth. That the Earth tells me who I am so I can teach the next generation. She always encourages me to feel my feelings when I want to bury them.”

With that leadership, it is not hard to see how Gabe found a home in faith. Gabe speaks of the need for people in faith to do better in the world, and he is clear that he does not ever want to come across as telling anyone else how to be. He speaks clearly of the need for Christians to be open to hearing how much hurt Christianity has done to the queer community, and adds, “Not just the queer community, but also to the Indigenous community, the Black community, the Asian community, the disabled community—by not having accessible buildings and by being ableist in word and intention, and all communities that are not white and hetero.” He adds, “I think being able to listen to that, with an open heart and an open mind to take that, and do better in your church is I think what will make it better.”

And Gabe takes to heart every part of his own journey and all that he is learning as he works his way into the service leadership at the heart of his faith, both at Sherman Methodist and with the project for queer and allied youth across the spiritual spectrum. Gabe works to live into his own call for spaces that are not pushy and that work against the idea that there is only one truth, but welcome all truths that are centered in love and mutual understanding. ■

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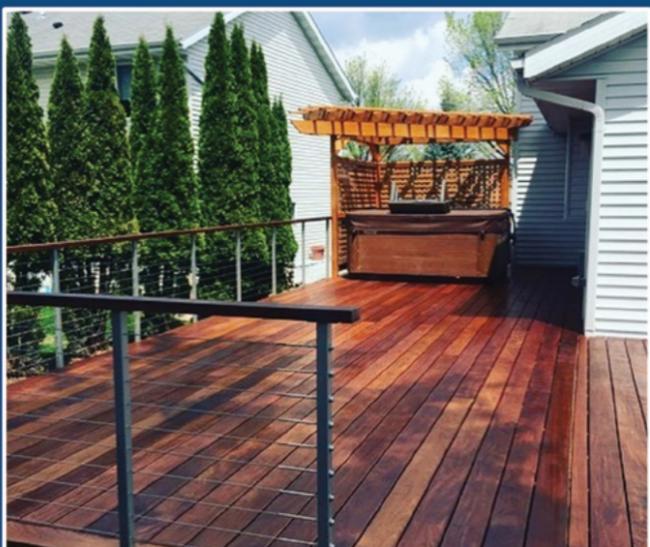


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SPORTS DRUG ADDICTION & RECOVERY TRANSGENDER

What Gay Hockey Means to Me

Dexter Lane finds a way into hockey and human connection through the **Madison Gay Hockey Association**.

MY EARLIEST MEMORY of hockey is from elementary school. I came home from school and told my father that I quit soccer so I could play hockey instead. He told me absolutely not and signed me up for girl scouts. I grew up playing soccer from then on. I played many other sports through the years, but soccer was always my constant. I played sports year-round until my junior year of high school. Shortly after I graduated high school in 2009, I got sick, and after months of tests, procedures, and surgeries, I was finally able to come back home. I was given a prescription for Percocet, and I flew through them. This really opened the door for my addiction, and for the next several years I used a variety of drugs daily.

It's fair to say that I have very little recollection of a large portion of 2015. I was living in Madison, and I woke up on the top of a parking ramp in West Virginia with almost no memory of how I got there. I came home and overdosed for the final time, less than a week later. After being taken to the hospital and receiving Narcan, I spent the next three days in the hospital. I have almost no memory of my time at the hospital, but I do remember the doctors told me that if I would have gone home and gone to sleep, I would not have woken up. Within weeks I found a treatment center in the area that felt right for me, and I dove in. I made my recovery my full-time job.

I had many obstacles to overcome, but something that always seemed to pull me down was boredom. I had received emails from Patrick Farabaugh asking if I was interested in playing hockey, and with a lot of hesitation and fear, I made the jump. I laced up skates for the first time just days before the evaluations. I walked into that building not knowing a single person. I specifically remember Leah Rudin watching me try to tie my skates. I looked up, and she gave me a smile and said, "Can I show you a trick?" I use that same trick to this day. I started hobbling to the ice, and Christina Libs said, "You'll need one of these" as she tossed me one of her old jerseys with an "A" on it. She said, "Look at that, you are already an assistant captain." As my skate glided onto the ice for the first time, I grasped tightly to the boards. I looked up, and I must have had a face of pure panic because Molly Costello looked at me and said "Hey, you got this." That first day on skates was one of the first solid memories I have after I found sobriety.

My first year of hockey wasn't pretty, on or off the ice. On the ice I was not the best skater, I had a tough time with the rules, and I was extremely quiet. Off the ice, I was dealing with a lot of anger. The first year of sobriety is hard for anyone, and another one of my biggest struggles was anger. I had spent the last five years numb, and was finally starting to feel everything I had been suppressing. Looking back on the first year or two of hockey, admittedly, it was not the best reflection of who I wanted to be.

The entire first year of hockey, most people didn't know I identified as a transman. I was not a very social human, and outside of Rainbow Kate, I really didn't connect with anyone in the MGHA right away. It wasn't until the beginning of the second year that I came out as a transman in

all aspects of my life. The MGHA was the newest community I was a part of, but it instantly made me feel the most welcome when it came to how I was going to identify. It was the first space I was a part of where someone asked me and respected my pronouns.

When I reflect on where I started my journey versus where I am, I can't thank hockey and the MGHA enough. Hockey gave me a place to go when just that was all I needed. MGHA was the first place I was able to feel completely like myself. It was the first place I could comfortably walk in a space and say, "My name is Dex, my pronouns are he/him/his, and I'm in recovery." Those were two huge parts of my identity that I was hiding in different areas of my life. I was never made to feel uncomfortable for being in recovery, nor did I ever feel left out. I was still always invited out after games. Connection was difficult for me for many years, and if I'm being honest, it wasn't until the last several years that I really started to open up and was able to make connections at MGHA. I feel that last year has been the best reflection of the true me. I feel more involved, have more patience, and have made so many meaningful connections.

There is a saying that "the opposite of addiction is not sobriety; it is

There is a saying that "the opposite of addiction is not sobriety; it is human connection." I came here angry, alone, and closed off. The MGHA family have helped me find that human connection was possible for me.



human connection." I came here angry, alone, and closed off. Hockey and the MGHA family have helped me find that human connection was possible for me and gave me something to feel passionate about. ■

ED. NOTE: We are happy to publish the Madison Gay Hockey Association's selected essay each year for their league-run essay campaign. Any other LGBTQ sports organization that wishes to publish essays or testimonials from their league members should contact *Our Lives* at contact@ourliveswisconsin.com.

There is
peace
even in the
storm.



 **rutabaga**
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thanks, vincent.



NIGHTLIFE GAY BARS HOMECOMING REUNIONS

Where Everybody Knows Your Name

Sixteen years after saying goodbye, **M&M Club** returns for an emotional reunion.

*Through the door, there came familiar laughter
I saw your face and heard you call my name
Oh, my friend, we're older but no wiser
For in our hearts, the dreams are still the same*

ON SUNDAY, MAY 13, 2006, the M&M Club (124 N. Water Street) ended a 30-year run as Gay Milwaukee's most beloved bar & grill. At the stroke of midnight, a tearful crowd sang "For the Good Times," and the lights went out forever. Owner Bob Schmidt retired to California, the staff moved on to new ventures, and the story of M&M Club was over.

Until it wasn't. After an extraordinary 10-year reunion in May 2016, M&M veteran Ron "Rona" Thaite began planning a 15-year celebration for May, 2021. "Rona wanted Bob to feel the love and appreciation so many have for the M&M Club," said Karen Valentine. "After 29 years at the bar, he was a very devoted employee and very good friend to Bob. The bar was only open one year without him!"

Unfortunately, COVID-19 discouraged large indoor gatherings, so the 15-year reunion became a 16-year celebration instead. The eventual reunion, held on Sunday, May 8, 2022, attracted hundreds of M&M customers—so many, in fact, that the old tavern was literally bursting at the seams.

"The biggest challenge is turning back the clock," said Karen. "We are reverting a modern-day bar to what the M&M Club was in 2006. The second is getting the word out! It's sometimes difficult to remember real names, as so many were known by nicknames, and not everyone is on social media. Third, making sure we can accommodate everyone's budget, expectations, and any special needs. It's all a labor of love."

With a drag show hosted by Karen and Maple Veneer, featuring Shawna Love, Dita Von, and Shannon Dupree, and a video reel showcasing happy M&M memories across four decades, visitors were overwhelmed with a flood of emotion. As old friends reconnected, some for the first time since 2006, there wasn't a dry eye to be found in the house.

"The M&M Club was home!" said Karen Valentine. "I was 18, a college freshman, and an admitted old soul. I felt as if I were in a real 'gentlemen's' club. Show tunes, martinis, sophistication, ties and jackets. And yet, there was a glory hole in the men's room! It was gay Cheers, before there was ever a straight Cheers. Many have tried to copy M&M, but there will never, ever be another."

"I'll always remember my first visit to the M&M Club," said Steve. "I met my now-husband, his co-workers, and his friends for a Thursday night outing. This was the first close group of gay friends I ever had. The bar had a tremendous influence on my adult life. Today, like on that first night, coming to M&M felt like coming home."

"My first time at M&M Club was in the early 80s," said David. "I remember parking my car across the street from the bar and just sitting there watching people come and go. I was too shy, too scared, and still

too closeted to go in. Eventually, I went in and ordered a soda, when a very large man asked me, 'are you lost, little boy?' I freaked out and headed out the door, and I heard behind me 'you will be back, and we will make you a man!' I later learned that man was 'Doris Delago!'"

"I was beyond blessed to have been welcomed into that family," said David. "I wound up working at M&M Club for over 16 years."

Debi first went to M&M Club with Ron Geiman to visit a bartender friend. Cindy went after work with her co-workers from T. A. Chapman's. After meeting at the M&M, they forged life-long friendships and sparked a romance that has spanned over four decades. "Some people we still see every week," said Debi, "others only once or twice a year. But it doesn't matter. It's like time stood still. We just pick up right where we left off."

"I was thrilled to see the old gang back together, laughing, reminiscing, enjoying each others' company.... Just like we did so many years ago," said Mark. "We really lost a sense of family when we lost M&M. The people who went to the M&M Club were tight. This was a group that really cared about each other. Hell, we even went on vacations together—that the bar organized!"

"Milwaukee always had a large gay nightlife scene," said David, "and we've seen many close over the years. But when M&M closed, we lost our anchor. We lost our foundation. We lost our favorite meeting place."

"This was home for so many LGBT people in Milwaukee," said Steve, "and it very much felt that way again at the reunion. When Milwaukee lost M&M Club, we felt a little hole in our hearts. That hole still hasn't healed."

"We lost that special place where everybody knows your name," said Debi, "but love keeps on bringing us back together. It's as simple as that!"

"People traveled from all over the country for the M&M Reunion this year," said David. "It's all for the chance to see—and share some laughs

and tears—with those we don't see often. And that is priceless. Gone way too soon, and sorely missed, were Buffy, Bill Lalacata, Wheezy, Ruth Ann, and so many more. We also lost chefs 'Hazel' and 'Grunie.' Many people were not able to make it, and sadly, we have lost so many more since the bar closed. I hope they were all smiling down on us and feeling the love."

"It was all worth it just to see the smiles on Bob and Rona," said Karen. "Looking around, I was awash in nostalgia. Having these faces, these smiles, these people gathered one more time, just one more time, was simply magical."

"Whether you came for a beer, a fish fry, brunch, Boo-Boo's weiner dog races, Possum Queen, 2-for-1 Thursdays with Rona, Larry, and Randy, once in your lifetime or three times a week, please keep M&M Club in your memories," said David.

Are organizers aiming for a 20th reunion in 2026? "Absolutely—and hopefully sooner!" said Debi.

"As long as Bob and Rona are up for it, I'm happy to help any way I can, as are so many others," said Karen. "It takes a village to keep the village once known as M&M Club alive. My gratitude goes to the hard work, time, talent, finances, creativity, and drive of both Bob and Rona. I was honored to take a bow with these men at curtain call."

*Those were the days, my friend
We thought they'd never end
We'd sing and dance forever and a day
We'd live the life we choose
We'd fight and never lose
Those were the days, oh yes, those were the days.*

For more information about the history of M&M Club, visit the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project website, mkelgbthist.org. ■



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CELEBRATING WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Our Lives magazine's annual Pride in Color feature allows us to see the faces of queer and trans people of color across Wisconsin, many of whom are doing the essential labor of keeping our communities afloat. The faces displayed in these pages remind us that our community is still here, always has been here, and is a source of both power and hope. Each face is a person who is living their life as a queer or trans person of color in a time when such identities are increasingly under attack, when our lives feel precarious in multiple ways. Yet, we are still here.

If you are reading this, you matter. This community matters. We are grateful for each and every name and face on these pages. Take heart, friends, and have a look at the beautiful QTBIPOC faces who are surviving, like you're surviving, and thriving all over our state. —Sami Schalk



The Change-Maker

From his time with the City of Seattle to his new role at Promega, Christopher Peguero has always advocated for equitable change.

CHRISTOPHER PEGUERO is a Wisconsin Native—of the Menominee Nation, to be specific, on his mother's side. She recently retired as the Principal for the Oneida Tribal School in Oneida. Christopher's father is Mexican-American from Laredo, Texas and worked with immigrant farm labor communities there.

Christopher grew up in Green Bay and completed his undergraduate degree at UW-Stevens Point in 1999. He then moved to the Pacific Northwest to start his career where he worked in the environmental non-profit sector (often at the intersection of environmental justice and equity). He met his first partner Kelvin who helped him come out to his family and friends. Tragically, Kelvin passed away a few months prior to Christopher turning 30 after a long fight with HIV/AIDS in 2004.

Along with Christopher's early experiences of homophobia and racism, this tragedy inspired Christopher to connect more deeply with the LGBTQIA2S+ community as well as social and racial justice movements in Seattle. Christopher became an outspoken leader of uplifting an intersectional liberation perspective from both the mainstream LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC communities at the time when marriage equality was at the forefront. That work continues for Christopher to this day.

In 2008 Christopher established SEqual, The City of Seattle LGBTQ Employees for Racial Equity. The employee resource group centered the employment experiences of QTBIPOC employees at the City of Seattle. SEqual was a professional leadership network that worked to identify opportunities to enhance anti-discrimination and anti-racist efforts in labor practices in partnership with human resources. SEqual successfully advocated for

establishing transgender health benefits, produced a City of Seattle "It Gets Better" video to address LGBTQIA2S+ youth bullying and suicide, and held regular trainings for city employees.

On Barack Obama's first election night in November 2008, Christopher met his future husband Anthony. In May of 2013, their daughter Adela was born. The following May, they welcomed their son Alexander.

In 2015 Christopher prepared a proposal for, and established, Seattle City Light's Environmental Equity Program. The program centers opportunities for community-led and co-designed engagement efforts to inform the electric utility's environmental programs and policies. The program's foundation builds green job pathways for environmental justice communities while increasing education and access to the outdoors.

Through Christopher's leadership, Seattle City Light's Environmental Equity Program sponsored over \$2 million in sponsorship funds to regional BIPOC led environmental organizations to leverage community capacity for sustainable wealth development and power, helping to mitigate gentrification and displacement.

Again, Christopher's personal experience in the environmental non-profit sector influenced him to establish an annual environmental equity trip to the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center in North Cascades National Park, bringing members of several BIPOC organizations and community youth interested in learning about careers in the outdoors.

At the City of Seattle, Christopher was a CORE (City Organizers for Racial Equity) Team member and racial equity lead. The programs developed community advocates to understand and analyze City of Seattle policies and build strategies to mitigate unequal impacts on BIPOC and marginalized communities.

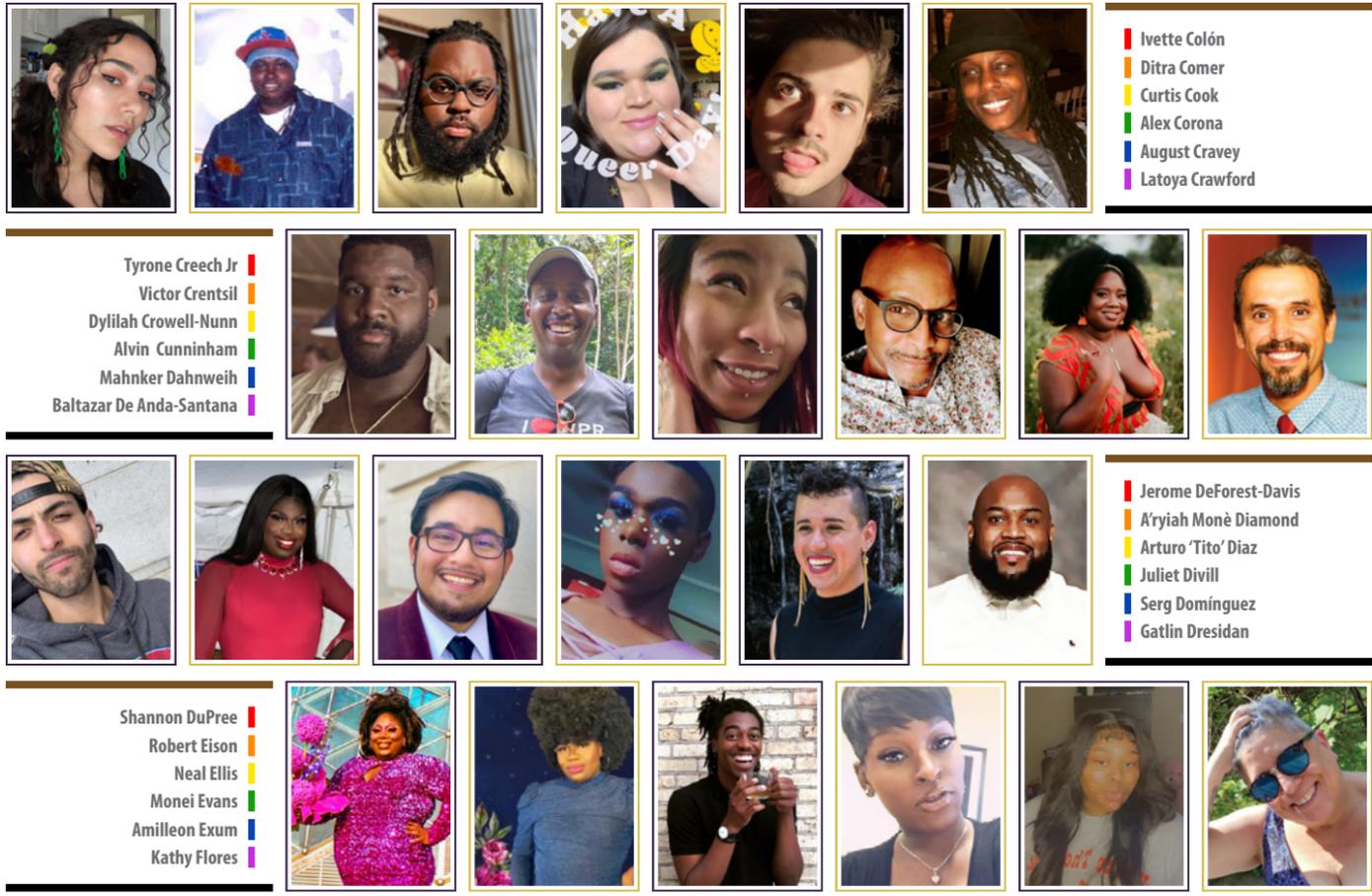
In 2018, seeing ongoing racial and economic disparity, gentrification, displacement, and a rising homelessness crisis in Seattle, Christopher decided to run a political campaign for Seattle Council in Seattle's most diverse city council districts. Although he did not win the election, the experience provided an opportunity to build trusting relationships with immigrant and refugee, BIPOC, environmental justice, low-income, and homeless communities. After the election, Christopher continued to advise City Council members and executives to better understand unintended impacts of policy while centering community-based solutions to mitigate those impacts.

In 2021 Christopher and his family moved to Fitchburg to be closer to family in the midst of the pandemic and the illness of his younger brother. Christopher is now the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Communities of Belonging Program Manager at Promega. Prior to his current role, Christopher was the Assistant Superintendent for the City of Madison Parks Division where he was the executive sponsor of Park's Racial Equity and Social Justice Change Team.

Christopher says, "In all the leadership roles I have held, I have promoted the transformative power of collaborative, community-driven solutions versus extractive relationships with BIPOC communities. I believe that communities closest to the struggle of systemic racism and oppression are experts in knowing the solutions to overcome those struggles. When everyone in our community is able to thrive—we are all collectively stronger, healthier, and better for it."

Christopher is happy to be home once again, bringing his work experience of LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC community liberation and justice. He hopes his perspective can bring new insight to the work happening in Wisconsin—especially at the intersection of racial, queer, and environmental justice. ■





The Frontrunner
 Fifteen-year-old transgender track star **Ayden Yee** will be profiled in Here-TV's docu-series, *Road to the Runway*, premiering August 1.

I WAS BORN AND RAISED in Franklin, Wisconsin (2020 population 36,013). I think from a really young age, I always gravitated toward more feminine things. I loved playing with dolls when I was younger. I loved dressing up. Not that this stuff defines your gender, but I was always more pulled toward that. As I got older, I didn't really feel comfortable as a boy.

I wasn't too nervous to approach the topic with my family. I came out to my grandma first. From there, we told the rest of my family, and they were very supportive. My grandma and my grandpa were the first ones to come here from China when they were young. My grandma came via Hong Kong, and my grandfather came from the Canton area.

From a very young age, I loved dressing my dolls. I could pretend to be who I wanted to be while playing with them. I really wished I was able to wear the same clothes, but being a boy at the time, I felt like if I would wear them, it didn't feel right. I loved playing games online that were all about dressing up, doing makeup, and stuff. It was always an outlet.

I got bullied a little bit in middle school for being too feminine. I transitioned the summer after eighth grade. Coming out didn't really affect my friendships a lot, but being in a very conservative city there were definitely a good half of people who were very unsupportive. It's a mostly white-populated area, and I've been through some racist bullying. People would make fake accounts on social media and message me stuff like telling me to kill myself or just calling me racist slurs or transphobic slurs mixed together.

The first thing I ever saw about being trans was a Gigi Gorgeous documentary on YouTube. I really loved her story and how she became her true self. Now I am doing *Road to the Runway*. It will be documenting our experience through the Slay Model Search 2022. Watching the Search you don't really get to talk to us. I feel like this documentary is a great way to really get to know the people in the Search with additional interviews and film.

I'm hoping to get more into the modeling industry, but before modeling I always wanted to do track and field in college. Thankfully, I'm able to compete on the women's track team this year. The WIAA has certain expectations that you need to meet like a year of hormone therapy. My coaches are very supportive and always want me to do my best, but I do have teammates who will say things about me behind my back. They'll be like, "Why is Ayden competing? She shouldn't even be competing."

At first it hurt, but I feel like over time I just learned to ignore it, to a point. It's become something I brush off now. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. At first, it was something I would feel really bad about, but now I'm not going to let people determine what I do. I'm not doing it for them. ■

EDITOR NOTE: At the time this was written Ayden was competing at a regional competition in Iowa and ultimately placed first in her event after placing second at state.

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The Pastor
Cameron Overton (he/him) is the executive pastor at Zao MKE Church and a Black transman called to build the church into an intersectional and queer liberated space committed to the liberation of all people.

CAMERON BRINGS HIS commitment to justice, passion for music, and training as a community activist and social worker to his role in leading Zao MKE Church, a majority queer and trans Milwaukee church. At Zao, the community is proud of being “Jesus rooted, justice centered, and radically inclusive,” which drives every part of building the church.

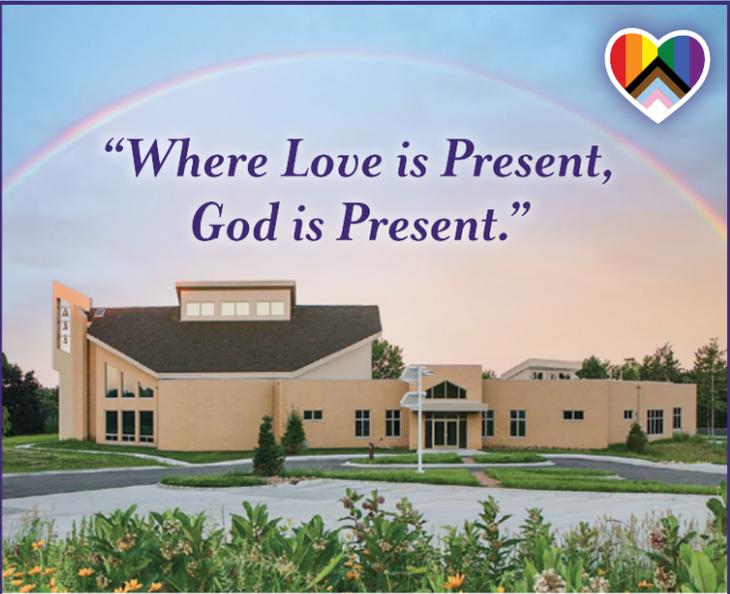
Rooting the community in the life, person, and teaching of Jesus—a radical, Brown-skinned revolutionary—leads the community to centering justice in the life of faith. That justice work, which requires dismantling systems of oppression so that all may be liberated and free, points towards the radically inclusive world we are trying to build. At Zao, radical inclusion means that all are included, but those who have been most marginalized are centered first and foremost. Together, this call towards Jesus and justice—and radical solidarity pushes the community to take action, from marching in the streets with Black Lives Matter to creating a trans clothing boutique for those in need of gender euphoria, to organizing The Depot, the largest supply drop and distribution center in the state to support street protests and community actions.

Zao also means “to be fully alive,” so Cameron never forgets that the work of justice must be matched with moments of joy and fun. Whether it’s soaking in the sun at Zao events like Beach Please, or solving a murder mystery escape room at Fourth Friday Fun Fest, or having a beer and having deep conversation at Holy Spirits, Cameron loves to be fully alive with his church community.

Cameron also uses his voice to bring change in the world. He teaches at a Milwaukee college, training up the next generation of activist social workers. He advocates at local and national levels for policy changes that will combat harmful anti-LGBTQIA legislation. He co-hosts a podcast called Christian Queeries, which unpacks toxic ideas about God and offers a new, exciting, queer- and trans-informed take on Christian spirituality. And his music, which often gender-bends language for God or puts a new spin on tradition,



invites the community to experience the divine with their own voice, their bodies, and one another. Cameron is the proud father of a baby girl, who will have her first birthday this summer. He is dedicated to fighting for a better world for her to grow up in... and to one day take over. ■



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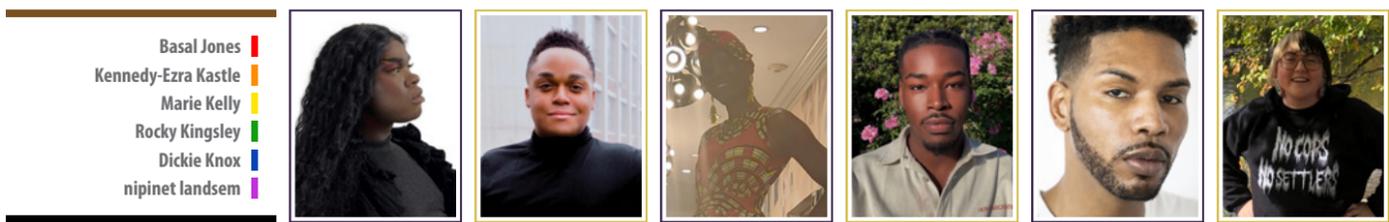
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- Michael Lowe



The Ancestral Flame
 Maria Paula Lujum is the Youth Programs Manager for Centro Hispano of Dane County.

I AM THE RESULT of a very deep, personal journey; thousands of Latine QTPOC (queer and trans people of color) ancestral sparks that connected to who they were, built community, and with their voices/actions increased visibility and changed the course of history for me to be who I am—FREE.

I am an example of a latine story, a personal struggle that was overcome. My shelter became my mind, and my freedom became my thoughts that could not be expressed freely. I was a bee orchid, wearing a custom to survive in a world where being who I was, what I was feeling, how I was seeing the world, being seen and heard as a lesbian was not accepted by society.

Like a bee orchid, the art of camouflage and finding my way around the world became the mechanism to protect/take care of myself for years. Hide-and-seek was not only a game but a strategy—a bridge to find freedom.

Freedom started once I connected to the community and found a safe space alongside others that were living openly and proud of their journeys/stories. Experiencing so much joy, happiness, and openness gave me the courage-strength to follow my heart and be who I am.

The invitation to be part of Centro Hispano of Dane County came in August 2019 in an envelope full of hope, healing, wellbeing, and community. Centro's love language to holistically value youth-families-communities from the inside-out connected deeply to my own journey and inspired me to be part of a group of 15 talented peers that collectively co-create fun, healing, creative spaces. The youth squad plays a pivotal role in walking alongside each other/youth/families to co-imagine a sustainable community where we learn, share, and express our individuality.

Centro promotes nurturing spaces where 230+ students can have a sense of belonging in their academic community, feel their work has value, know they can succeed and that their abilities and competencies grow with their effort to support their families, communities, and other students from an equitable, holistic lens.

Many of the students who are part of Centro's youth programs are low-income, first-generation college students, and English language learners who are on their own when it comes to their college journey. Many are part of families that work multiple jobs and are often compelled to get an after-school job themselves. As such, these students find themselves with limited support from their parents or school to navigate the increasingly complex high school to college transition.

We've developed additional wrap-around opportunities through family and community initiatives to support parents as students navigate their transition journeys from middle school to high school to college as well as engage community peers that would like to invest their time through volunteering.

I would love to celebrate/see more young people experience the joy/pride of being who they are—feeling seen, heard, and valued and continue to trailblaze spaces for more QTPOC folk and DREAM BIG. ■



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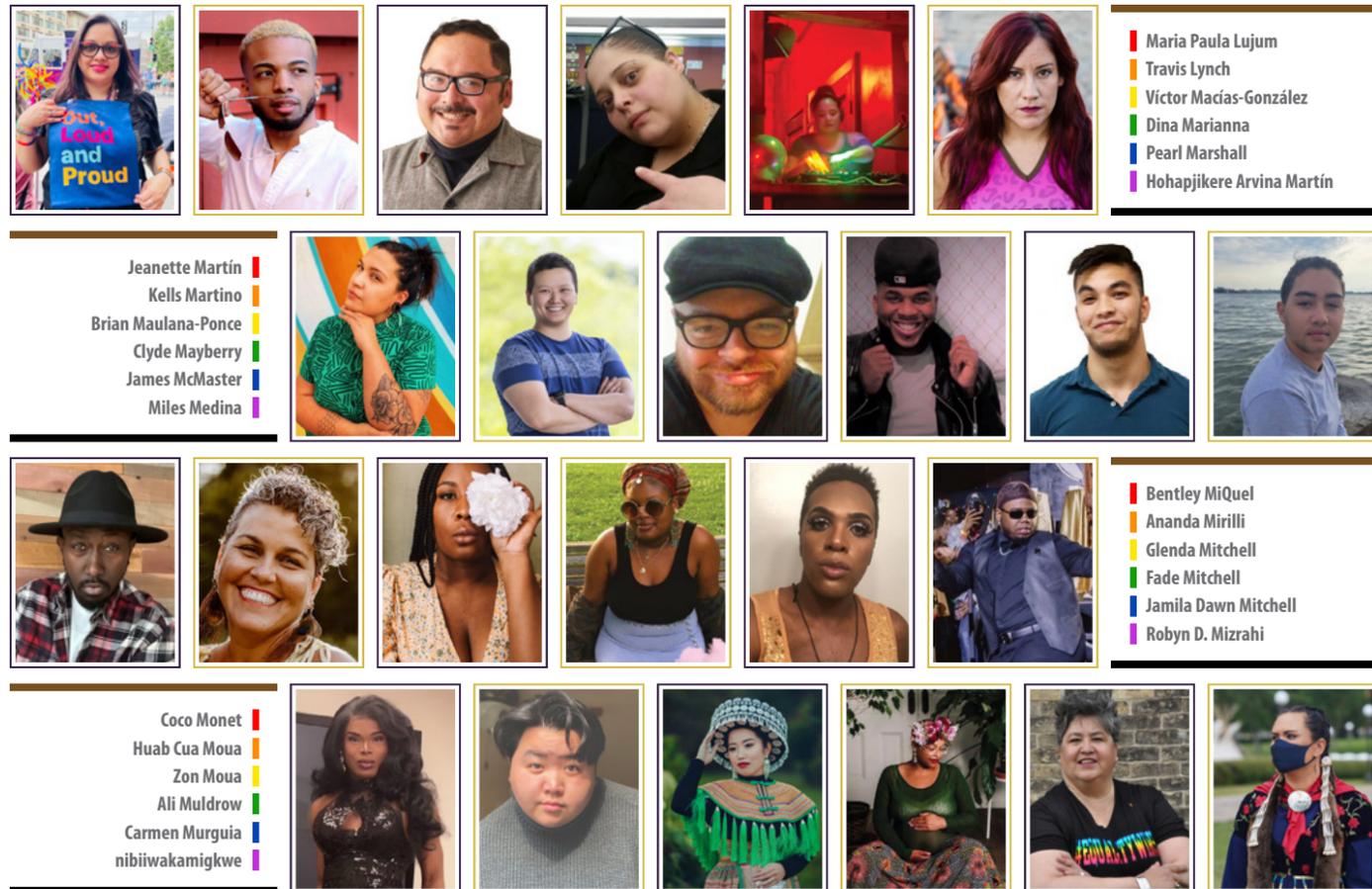
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The Educator
Stacy Clark is a Community Health and Equity champion whose mission is to provide services and education to others that he may not have had as a young, black, gay male.

FROM BEING APPOINTED by Governor Tony Evers to sit on Wisconsin's first inaugural Health and Equity Council, to being elected Vice Chair of the Black caucus for the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, to being a TED Talk Speaker, Stacy shakes the ground with his message, heart, and influence.

With seven years experience in community engagement and HIV prevention, he has carved a vital lane by cross-pollinating his work into politics and policies that help marginalized communities of color through empowerment and increased awareness of HIV. The pandemic has exacerbated health disparities, social disconnect, and scarcity of resources—things that can not be remedied through an approach that relies on medical interventions alone.

In terms of examining health equity, there are social determinants of health for people living with HIV and communities heavily impacted by the disease. Stacy supports the implementation of proactive strategies for responding to mental health, housing instability, and discrimination so that individuals are better supported in living healthy and thriving lives.

In addition to impacting access to services, Covid made educational outreach to the most vulnerable communities more difficult. When people are focused on paying for their next meal, their long-term physical health is more difficult to prioritize. Day-to-day survival comes to the forefront, and things like adhering to medication schedules, follow up appointments, or learning about PrEP and other HIV prevention tools are all in the background. As the pandemic and time progress, organizations have to be innovative in their approaches to engage communities and support individuals.

Stacy encourages everyone to shed grace on one another. Especially during this time of loss, inflation, community violence, racism, and homophobia. He says, "Be the one light, out of billions, to have the audacity to shine differently."



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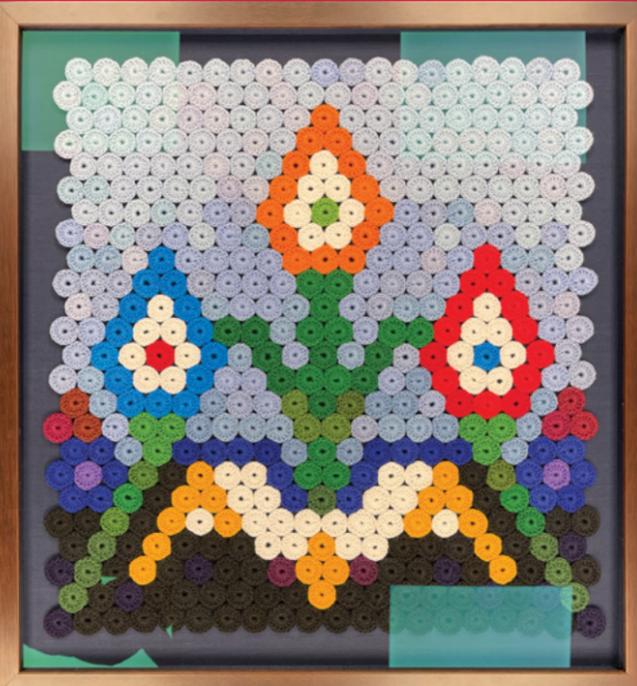


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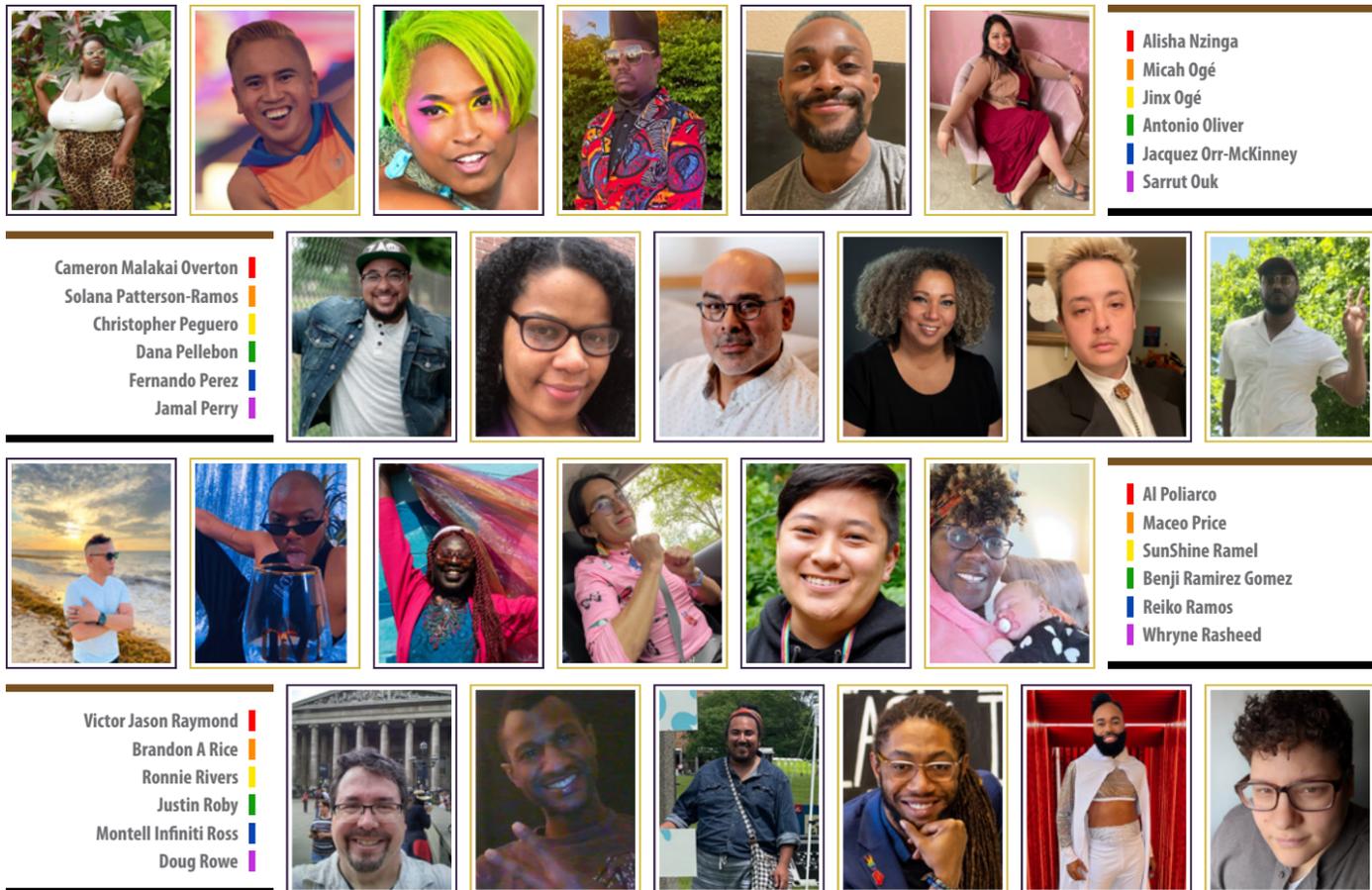


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The Good Foot
Al Poliarco is the force behind Barefoot Hands Bodywork.

I AM FROM THE PHILIPPINES and was a community organizer prior to immigrating to the United States. I followed my ex-husband to Madison when he came for grad school. It was here that I brought my three biological children from the Philippines in 2001. Being new in town and having a young family, I saw the need to get involved in the Filipino-American community to help my children assimilate and to keep them connected with our culture.

I took a leadership role with the Philippine-American Association of Madison and Neighboring Areas (PAMANA). I served as president 2002–05 promoting cultural awareness events and spearheading discussions and actions. In 2004, Senator Tammy Baldwin gave me the rare opportunity to represent the Wisconsin Asian-American community in Washington, DC during the Democratic Party Caucus Convention.

My family was one of the many faces who represented Fair Wisconsin in its fight against a statewide referendum banning same sex marriage. Door-to-door, we worked hard to educate many. I spoke at the State House Committee hearing opposing the ban. Sadly that referendum was a massive loss to the LGBTQ+ community and to liberty as a state.

Protecting LGBTQ+ rights is always at stake, as the extreme-right's on-going disarray is looking for an excuse or wedge issues to rally their base and stay relevant. Their repeal of *Roe vs Wade*, is a testament that all the gains from years of fighting for equity and equality for the LGBTQ+ is always in danger.

Of the numerous possible career-change options I explored in order to move on from my previous dedications to social work, my hunt led me to massage school in 2015. Becoming an Ashiatsu Deepfeet Bar practitioner and instructor gave me more than a new start. I now know that the "air of freedom" is loving what you do. When I'm on the massage table, it means I'm doing Ashiatsu. I am humbled to be the first to introduce Ashiatsu Deepfeet Bar Therapy in Madison.

I was to sublease a space in spring of 2020, but lockdown stopped that plan in its tracks. Two years later, a friend told me that a spa business was leaving a move-in ready space but the agent suggested taking a look at another unit 3 doors down. Despite its dirty and neglected condition, the moment my son Kaimo and I walked in, we knew we had found our home. I wasn't aware until later that this was previously the location of OutReach.

It is heartwarming to know that Barefoot Hands' current location was the home of Outreach and adds even deeper meaning to a space providing support in healing for so many members of our community. I think of our body as the vessel where we unconsciously store all the stresses and burdens we carry each day. LGBTQ+ people face tremendous challenges personally and socially. Our body needs our attention. When we ignore our body, we pay the price for neglecting it. Receiving massage, along with other approaches to allow our body to reset itself, should be an essential part of our self-care. When every member of our community is healthy, together we can do more and we can give more. ■

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The Dynamo

Clyde Mayberry is the CEO & Founder of the first African American Performing Arts Center in Dane County.

CLYDE'S WORK STARTED in 2003 with a drive to promote black arts in his community. He performed and directed dance pieces for the Overture, BET-Black Entertainment Television, and even our first black president Barack Obama. In 2018 Clyde used his experience to open Dane County's first black-owned performance arts center: The House Urban Arts Initiative, Inc. The House hosts an array of programs for youth and adults such as dance, drama, and theater arts.

Clyde says that teaching dance has literally saved his life. Being self taught was a lesson for him in how to teach. Teaching dance full time to youth allows him to draw on his own experiences dealing with the structure of dance mentally, physically, and emotionally. He views his own personal struggle as a privilege he can share with youth who can learn from an instructor who looks like them and reflects their experiences.

His work does not stop at teaching. He is also Co-Owner of Events By Mayberry, an event consulting firm that hosts weddings, birthdays, workshops, seminars, and other private events. Born from a desire to help a friend with her twin children's first birthday, EDM has grown into a scalable business that can host smaller gatherings or assist with logistics at large venues.

While all of the events are fun and interesting in their own way, Clyde is especially fond of planning weddings. The emotional and spiritual connection that a couple exemplifies, and being able to coordinate a day of joy in celebration of that, is a special treat.

Clyde embodies what it means to be a walking masterpiece. Although Clyde wears many hats his favorite slogan is, "I'm not yet tired." He promises to continue promoting authenticity, love, and arts in his community any way he can. When asked how he maintains his tireless commitment, he reminds us that being good to yourself allows you to do good for others. Take time for yourself first, and that means making time for daily rest and sometimes vacationing. Remember: passion over profit, and the riches will come! ■

- Mike Ruiz
- Denime Infinity Sanchez
- Sami Schalk
- Monty Scott
- Genia Stevens
- Keith Streicher

- Steph Stringer
- Ruben Tabares
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To celebrate *Our Lives'* 15th anniversary, *Our Lives* editors past and present speak about its early challenges, lasting relevance, and place in Wisconsin's history of queer media.

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WHEN PATRICK FARABAUGH was growing up in suburban Indiana, he had no desire to be a business owner. He pictured himself as a domestic dad—married, with kids, and working whatever occupation it took to get there. He thought this would bring him the contentment he sought from life. Not that it mattered, really. Growing up in the place and time that he did, where it still wasn't safe to be gay, things happened that took choice away from him.

"Being queer caused me to step outside the heteronormative roadmap to what a life is supposed to look like. Being queer disrupted that roadmap, and knocked me off that straight/cis assembly line," Patrick said.

"I had no interest in journalism or media, but I was fighting not to drown. I was desperate for a place where I could find a community to help me know life could be better than it was," he said. The only place I was exposed to that was in magazines, and they all had addresses in New York City. So as a teenager, I ran away and started there."

"I knew nothing about the industry and even less about the city," said Patrick. "I just knew in order to survive, I would need to go there. I figured I would find people who would help me learn."

When Patrick finally arrived in Madison in 2005, he had a limited skill set—limited to magazine publishing.

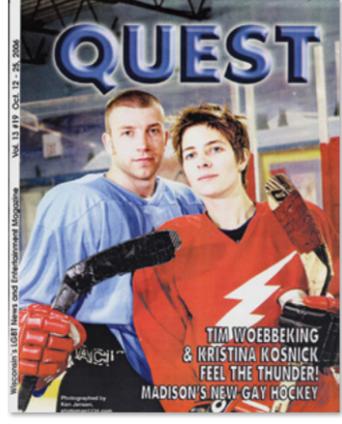
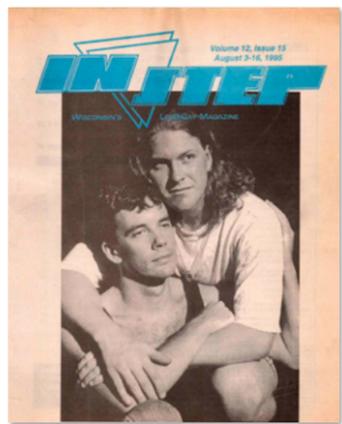
"I was always chasing, chasing, chasing, in survival mode," said Patrick. "And it dictated how I saw the world. Most of my career choices were made in desperation. I never had a plan B, nothing to fall back on."



They wanted to see more stories about trans people while also unaware that the first feature in our first issue was on an indigenous transwoman, Felicia Melton-Smyth. What they also didn't know is that the first managing editor of the magazine was a transwoman as well.

Eventually, I realized I would have to create my own publication here just to find employment."

People of marginalized communities often experience not only heightened stress and anxiety, but also higher levels of substance abuse as they self-medicate the pain they're experiencing. Unfortunately, this clouds their cognitive abilities to fully process their situation, consider viable solutions, or break that cycle. Patrick was no exception.



pectedly created a nation of gay mail-order publishers that continue to operate today. Sometimes by circumstance, sometimes by design, these grassroots publications were extremely unstable, poorly designed, barely funded, and, as a result, extremely short-lived.

In Wisconsin, the first mail-order magazine was *GPU News*, which debuted in October 1971 and ran for 10 full years. *GPU News* was non-profit, self-funded, volunteer-operated, and very confidentially subscription-based. By the late 1970s, it was already the longest-running gay publication in America, with more than 5,000 subscribers and more than 100 contributors. Unfortunately, *GPU News* only survived to see its 10th anniversary. Eldon Murray, the magazine's founder, lamented, "We've exhausted not only ourselves, but whatever skeleton crew of volunteers we have, and it simply cannot continue. The movement has grown, and so must we."

But Gay People's Union and *GPU News* never grew. For a variety of reasons, the landmark organization slowly faded away throughout the

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Virginia Harrison accepting an Organization of the Year award with *Our Lives* at OutReach's 2011 Awards banquet.



Emily Mills accepting GSAFE's Special Recognition Award for *Our Lives* from Everett Mitchell at their 2019 Celebration of Leadership.

delivering arts, culture, politics, and entertainment news alongside major news headlines.

Between the three publications, most—but not all—of Wisconsin's LGBTQ population was well-served with dedicated coverage. Queer people of color had no publication to call their own, nor did the growing trans community. They were not regularly featured by any of the three remaining publications, nor were they really their target audiences, either.

MANIFESTING THE CHANGE

Where do you start when you want to publish an LGBTQ magazine? "So many of the grassroots LGBTQ publications on the market across the country had a surface-deep vision," said Patrick. "There was often no deep mission, purpose, or sometimes even a business plan.

"I remember attending a Chicago convention of publishers in 2008," said Patrick. "I'd just finished the first year of the magazine. Some of the larger publishers looked and talked down to me, as if I needed everything explained or translated to me. *Our Lives* was the 'small fish' and they wanted us to know it. Fortunately, I met Tracy Baim (publisher of the *Windy City Times* then and the *Chicago Reader* now) at this event. We connected and remain friends to this day."

Patrick quickly learned that Madison wouldn't have the benefit of "easy money" enjoyed by advertisers in larger markets.

"You don't have to try as hard, when you can base your ad rates on the larger captive audience of a bigger city," said Patrick.

There was another risk: advertisers who couldn't pay their own bills.

"Even the most successful publications are still beholden to advertising revenue," said Patrick, "and when it just doesn't come in, it can kill a magazine. It's an enormous risk.

"I realized our content had to be the selling point," he said. "*Our Lives* had to be hyper-relevant, hyper-compelling, and a culturally competent standard bearer. It had to be positioned to lead and educate at all levels, just to continue existing in a market of Madison's size. If *Our Lives* had published content as low-bar as some of the larger publications I've seen, I don't think it wouldn't have lasted a year."

"So, my commitment became to put in as much energy as needed to make the quality as good, if not better, than what the big markets produce," said Patrick. "If you have a traditional journalism background, you might choose to lean on AP Newswire stories, as some LGBTQ media has done. But I didn't really care about those stories. In 15 years, I don't think I've ever run a national wire story. My focus has been 100% local all the time.

"*Our Lives* has always been hyperlocal," laughed Patrick. "I wanted to create a space where anyone who needed the space had access to it. I don't know that people always took us up on that offer, in the beginning, but over time they have.

"It's a careful balance deciding what stories matter most. It's really an informed judgment call. Something might earn a full-page feature story, while something else may only warrant a small news brief. It just depends on how grassroots the story might be," he said. "I like to say there's real estate for anything in the magazine, as long as there is engagement for that content or a strong educational opportunity.

"There's always this appetite among the media for casting a wider net," said Patrick, "and getting deep into political issues to activate and engage people. I find there is much more activation and engagement when we take the opposite approach and go deep into the margins. The people in the margins need to know they're part of the DNA of the magazine. That's why it was called *Our Lives*: I wanted everyone to feel part of this conversation we were starting."

Although he still carried the bulk of the work, Patrick soon had a team to lean on.

1980s, eclipsed by the gay rights victories of 1982–83 and the AIDS epidemic that quickly followed.

New publications, inspired by *GPU News*, came to Wisconsin in the late 1970s and 1980s. *GLIB* and *Milwaukee Calendar* were short-lived "bar rags," created as a take-home guide for gay nightlife. *OUT!* was probably the first newspaper-style and format publication for Wisconsin's gay and lesbian community and it was published by Out! Inc., a non-profit organization based in Madison. *Gay Milwaukee*, later known as *Escape*, ventured into the legal, political, and cultural content that *GPU News* made famous—but abruptly disappeared in 1983. Even shorter-lived publications like *Ragg* and *G Milwaukee* barely provide a snapshot of their eras.

InStep, launching in early 1984, offered comprehensive, high-caliber journalism from a local, regional, and national perspective. Bar guides and nightlife coverage were just chapters in a magazine of community content, with special attention paid to the emerging AIDS crisis and its implications. *Wisconsin Light*, debuting in 1987, stepped up the game even further, with a true biweekly newspaper committed to the community. For over a decade, Wisconsin enjoyed two high-quality, award-winning publications that relentlessly drove the narrative. But all good things must come to an end: after a change in ownership, *Wisconsin Light* left the landscape in 2001, with *InStep* to follow shortly afterward.

However, when *Our Lives* debuted in summer 2007, the LGBTQ media landscape remained surprisingly strong. Although *InStep* had finally folded in 2003 after 29 years of publishing, the state still had three queer publishers: the long-running *QUEST* (1994–2019) was still going strong as a regional magazine covering northeastern Wisconsin, *Out Bound Wisconsin* (2002–11) specialized in nightlife events, bar news and the leather community, and newcomer *Queer Life News* (2004–08) was

"I don't know who reached out to who, but that interview? It was extraordinary!" said former editor Virginia Harrison. "Instead of interviewing me, Patrick shared his personal history and the mission and vision of the magazine. It's not at all what I was expecting, and yet, it was so much more. That was approximately 13 years ago, and I've worn several different hats with the magazine since that time.

"I had a journalism degree, and I had been working in a corporate job. The job was fulfilling, but the business was sold, and I didn't want to relocate with it," Virginia said. "So I became a freelance editor.

"I was very attracted to the editorial approach: It was *OUR Lives*, specifically curated to be reader-contributed and community-based. The magazine really spoke to me in this organic, authentic, heartfelt way."

—Virginia Harrison

Editing *Our Lives* was a very attractive proposition: It was queer, it was a long-term project, and it was meaningful. I was very attracted to the editorial approach: it was *OUR Lives*, specifically curated to be reader-contributed and community-based. The magazine really spoke to me in this organic, authentic, heartfelt way."

"I quit my day job in 2007, right in the middle of the recession, to become a full-time freelancer," said former editor Emily Mills. "And I became aware of *Our Lives* because I wanted to write for them. I pitched an idea about local queer music, which became a series of vignettes and profiles. This was my first involvement with the magazine. For one reason or another, I didn't write much for them after that."

"A few years later, *Our Lives* was hiring for an editor, when Virginia left, and about 10 different people sent me the job listing saying I'd be

great at it. So I applied, and I was extremely surprised—and grateful—to get the job. I started as a part-time employee and moved to full-time after a few years. I was the editor of *Our Lives* for the next seven years."

DON'T STOP BELIEVING

What was the first threat to the new magazine's survival? Would you believe the publisher himself?

"I arrived in Wisconsin from NYC in 2005. By 2006, people had started hearing my name through my work creating the Madison Gay Hockey Association," said Patrick. "Nobody knew who I was, and often I was seen as a threat to the status quo. Some saw me as a real problem.

"Who knew what I might do next? I might change the narrative, or change the social hierarchy, or divert donations, or lead change that others didn't want or need. Some were having trouble envisioning a community larger than the world they knew. On one hand, I didn't want to damage relationships, organizations, or traditions," he said. "On the other hand, I was an outsider that had no 'in.'"

Patrick made many people very uncomfortable. A few regulars in queer nightlife were repeating every whisper of gossip about him to their organization's leadership. A member of that org began to warn other community organizations not to work with him. Someone actually created an anonymous blog equivalent to a "burn book" to hate on him.

"The personal attacks made no sense but still hurt very much," said Patrick. "I was sacrificing significantly so I could try to contribute something to this community, and instead, I was in tears reading a hate blog."

Madison hadn't had queer media for so long, that many already forgotten they'd ever had it. The community had to relearn what queer media meant for them.

"When people heard I was doing a gay magazine, they pictured a very different kind of magazine," said Patrick. Some organizations hesitated to partner with *Our Lives* until they could see what I was printing.



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It took some a long time to understand that *Our Lives* was a legitimate publication. There was a massive amount of inertia needed to push the rock up the hill, just to get tentative approval.”

Another critic contacted *Our Lives* to share how excited they were to move to Madison and see a queer magazine. But after an issue or two, they felt like they didn’t see themselves reflected, so they determined the magazine should not be called *Our Lives*, it should be called “*Patrick’s Friends’ Lives*—But only if they are attractive enough for the magazine.”

“My headshot on the Editor’s Letter page was all most had to build perceptions of me on,” Patrick said. “If felt like many just assumed that since I presented as a cisgender white male, that I hand-picked everyone who looked like me to feature. The majority of the time the people in each issue were chosen by community facilitators and weren’t even people I knew. That taught me a lot about perception.”

In reflection, Patrick isn’t sure what caused such initial mistrust, but he’s grateful to have overcome it.

“I don’t think it was necessarily not trusting me,” said Patrick. “In the early years of the magazine, people could be very critical, if not combative, if they looked at the magazine and didn’t see what they wanted to see. They wanted to see more stories about trans people while also unaware that the first feature in our first issue was on an indigenous transwoman, Felicia Melton-Smyth. What they also didn’t know is that the first managing editor of the magazine was a transwoman as well. She only lasted a few issues, resigned, and then disappeared from the community. In 2007, there just wasn’t the level of cultural competency around trans issues, and like many, she was suffering a massive amount of minority stress. We’d approached a number of trans people, as well as many queer people of color in those early years, only to be told absolutely not. They weren’t willing to be featured on the cover of a local queer magazine. It wasn’t a fully safe world for any of them to be that publicly out or searchable on Google yet.

“If you didn’t get a chance to peek behind the curtain, it looked like I was gatekeeping what stories I chose to tell,” said Patrick. “But the truth is that race and gender are incredibly nuanced minefields. It took time to earn the trust of the most marginalized in our community.”

It was also difficult, in the early years of *Our Lives*, to find main-

stream queer organizations talking about racial or gender justice. It wasn’t until around 2011 that GSAFE led as one of the first to make the intentional shift toward centering anti-racism in their work.

“Patrick had an absolute commitment to inclusion,” said Virginia, “but inclusion requires participation. Admittedly, the magazine started very white, but not because we weren’t trying to share the stage. Over time, we’ve seen participation grow, and we’ve been able to feature people of color in an authentic, positive way. I am so proud of the *Pride in Color* issue every year. I am so proud of the allies we’ve built in the Black community, despite the leadership constantly changing. It has been a massive shift to where we always wanted to be.”

Patrick wasn’t just facing challenges from outside the business. He was facing serious challenges in his personal life.

“When I first came to Wisconsin, I was fighting serious housing insecurity,” he said. “I literally had no money at all. Maybe now I’m finally middle class, but I’ve always considered myself lower working class, and I certainly came from a poverty class. When I came to Wisconsin, I could not get a job to save my life. As a result, I lost the lease where I lived, found myself technically homeless again, and lived off charity and friends for a while. Starting *Our Lives* only happened because a confluence of issues compelled me to do it: first of all, pure desperation for employment, second, a path to a healthy, sustainable community, and also, underneath it all, a confident belief in what I had to offer.

“I had almost impenetrable confidence,” said Patrick. “Some found this threatening.”

“He was new to Madison, he was a cis white male, and he could only open so many doors for himself,” said Virginia. “A lot of people did not

trust him. There are still elements of the queer community that don’t trust cis white men, but Patrick has been so approachable, kind, and genuine in lifting up everybody. Over the years, more and more people have come to understand that aspect of him.”

Patrick secured housing through a property management job, worked a retail job to pay for groceries, and spent every minute of his free time establishing and producing the magazine.

“I abandoned my social life for the first four or five years of the magazine,” said Patrick. “I also abandoned having a salary until halfway through the fourth year. It was entirely volunteer up to that point. The magazine now needed me full time, and I was in no position to volunteer for free, because I was only a paycheck away from homelessness myself.

CONQUERING THE CRITICS

“When the first issue came out, I was running around State Street delivering it,” said Patrick. “And I noticed something odd. Someone was going around and turning every copy upside down to conceal the cover. This was like a game, but it wasn’t meant as a game. As soon as I’d flipped them back, they’d be flipped again! This went on for a full year.”

To stop it, Patrick collaborated with PrideFest to create a back cover that was even gayer than the front cover. But things just kept escalating. Instead of flipping the covers, vandals began throwing them all out.

So he launched the free subscription model, which allowed *Our Lives* to bypass the street entirely.

“I worked with ClearChannel (now iHeart) and Madison’s CW on advertising trades,” said Patrick. “They got ads in the magazine, we got spots on Z104 and TV commercials. We began to bypass the street as more and more people began having the magazine mailed to them.

“People were often surprised—and they’re still surprised today—that we never focus on news,” said Patrick. “Our six annual issues don’t lend themselves to news very well. If daily newspapers can’t compete with the internet, how could we? I’ve always been drawn to the value of connecting people through conversation. We can go deeper around that than the news. We can tell the stories behind the story. We can leave the news to the news media.”

“I don’t think the mission has ever changed,” said Virginia, “but the magazine has widened its networks and affiliations. It was such a small group of people when it began. For awhile, he had quite a staff growing, and an office, and all sorts of new momentum. But then the economy retracted, *Our Lives* had to retract with it to survive.”

“The magazine has definitely changed,” said Emily, “and the online presence has expanded so much. That’s no surprise, as most people get their news today from digital sources. Personally, I love the commitment to keep a print product—with a free subscription—running continuously, despite the challenging logistics and the increasing costs. People appreciate having a physical, tangible, keepable thing to hold onto. By keeping it free, you reach more people: whether they’re picking it up on a Madison newsstand or coming home to find it in their Green Bay mailbox.

“Patrick’s mission and purpose has ultimately remained the same,” said Emily. “But the shape of his work has adapted with the times.

“He’s always felt it was important for the community to tell its own stories,” Emily said. “If you’re new to town, or have lived here forever, you should be able to both see people like you in the magazine, as well as people you’d never meet in your everyday lives. Wisconsin has an incredible diversity of queer and trans people, who live, work, and love among us, and rightly deserve a space that shares their stories. It’s not good enough anymore just to say, ‘we exist here in Wisconsin,’ we need people to be seen and heard.”

“The greatest stories are those narratives that reveal an authentic experience,” said Virginia. “Many times, people can’t see themselves or

their journeys—but Patrick does. Over the years, the *Our Lives* stories that moved me the most were the ones about youth. They are the future of our community, and the leaders we’re going to need. All of these political attacks on youth weren’t happening when I was young. At the same time, youth are very supported in their queer identities in Madison. We’re in a bit of a bubble where youth can accept the gray, navigate the fluidity, and relate to a spectrum that does not force anyone to choose. These weren’t options my generation had in the 1980s. It took us a while to figure out who we were. I’m inspired to see healthy self-expression and self-love come through in our stories.”

Emily points out that while all media is valuable, LGBTQ media has been limited by its focus on the nightlife and culture of gay, white, privileged men. Perhaps that’s why, in 2014, the demise of published Multimedia Platforms Worldwide doomed long-running publications like *Frontiers* in Los Angeles, *NEXT* in New York City, and *AGENDA* in south Florida. These magazines ran for decades, reached 7.5 million readers in 40 cities, and engaged another 4 million website visitors every year. Yet in the end, they’re remembered simply as “bar rags.”

“We really tried to become a true magazine, with a true commitment to the local landscape,” said Emily. “After all, there are many ways of being and existing. We needed to hear alternative voices. We needed to widen the narrow point of view of the bar rags. We needed to establish a vibe unlike any other media.

“I’m proud that *Our Lives* has become an important source of role modeling,” said Emily. “People can see a path for themselves that wasn’t always there.”

Today, *Our Lives* is the last of the statewide LGBTQ publications. The only other community publication is *Milwaukee Pride Life*, which circulates occasionally in the Milwaukee bar scene.

“It’s never been more important for us to get it right,” said Emily. “It’s essential and important because we are all that’s left to reflect Wisconsin. Mainstream media has done a better job in reflecting the community, but with their outside-in perspective, even they don’t get it entirely right.

“That’s why LGBTQ media matters: We have to be able to tell our own stories.

REFLECTING ON 15 YEARS OF RELEVANCE

“I could name a dozen things that were wonderful and important,” said Emily. “I think the thing that comes to mind first is the BIPOC list. It was really hard to get it up and running, but the idea was so important to Patrick. Nothing like this existed in Madison. People were really segregated and divided. So, *Our Lives* wanted to really jump-start this with an event. We really wanted to bring people together through opportunities for role modeling and networking. We heard a lot of feedback about how hard it was for queer trans people of color to find their people in Madison. We wanted to foster a coming together of folks who might not otherwise

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have ever met. We worked very hard to build that trust. The profile series has had its ups and downs, but ultimately it is so important.

“I’m also proud of our series on the ownership changes at Plan B,” said Emily. “For half a year, we covered an unfortunate series of events at the bar, which started with the original owners leaving and ended with an original owner returning and buying it out. What you didn’t see was all the legwork: the interviews, the fact-checking, the feather-ruffling, the making of enemies. What you did see, and what I’m really grateful for, is the community conversation that triggered. I took on this responsibility for leading change, pulling the pieces together, and calling things out. Eventually, an original owner returned with new, well-trusted co-owners alongside him. It became an entirely new space.

“We’ve been humbled by the positive feedback from the trans community,” said Emily, “as trans people really haven’t been centered in LGBTQ media. We are unapologetically pro-trans and pro-trans rights, even though it’s caused a blowback against the magazine. We got a rock through our door. We’ve lost advertisers. We’ve lost subscribers. We’ve had our magazine boxes vandalized with anti-trans messages. There are some radical anti-trans people out there. But we’ve also had people reach out and thank us. ‘I don’t have a lot of exposure to the trans community,’ they’ll say, ‘so I really appreciate your coverage. I’ve learned so much.’”

“I’m keen to see *Our Lives* expand its geographic and online presence,” said Emily. “I know there have been talks about expanding to Milwaukee. I couldn’t agree more. I foresee a true statewide operation, with journalists signing in from not only Milwaukee, but Green Bay, La Crosse, Appleton, even places like Door County, Eagle River, or Bayfield.”

“We work to create a space for the people who needed it the most,” said Patrick. “And that’s the thing about movements: they continuously move. There’s no finish line that you cross. You must keep up with the movement. Sometimes people reach a point of comfort, and then they tap out. The movement keeps on moving without them—and then those people risk becoming the problem that the movement was invented to solve. They are stuck, frozen in time, while the rest of the world continues moving forward.”

“There’s a segment of older lesbians who come from a tradition of separatism (i.e., gays here, lesbians there),” said Virginia. “And they simply do not see inclusion as valuable. I’m glad to see this changing, but there’s a dwindling segment out there that can be very loud, with a message that can be very destructive.”

“I can assure you that we are not wavering on our mission,” said Patrick. “We are uncomfortable with the status quo, we are committed to changing it, and we are moving forward.”

“Whether it’s people of color, trans folks, people living with HIV, or someone struggling with substance abuse, all stories have value,” said Emily. “We hope people will look at *Our Lives* and see a supportive and accessible platform. We hope people will say this space is ours.”

Some of the faces and stories *Our Lives* has helped tell over the past 15 years

1. Nikki Baumblatt & Cris Derrick, Jan. 2009 2. New Shamrock Bar Owner Bob Mahr, Jan. 2014 3. Skylar Lee, Jan. 2015 4. Marriage Equality Pioneer Donna Burkett, July 2014 5. Trans advocate, Ret. Col. Sheri A. Swokowski, March 2015 6. U.W. Gender & Women’s Studies Professor Dr. Sami Schalk, July 2018 7. David Clarenbach, who helped pass the nation’s first gay rights law while serving in the state assembly 40 years ago, March 2010 8. Senator Tammy Baldwin, while serving as the nation’s first out congressperson, Sept. 2008 9. Gay Rights Pioneer and community historian, former Dane County Board Chair Dick Wagner, March 2022 10. Madison Minotaurs co-founder, Tim Lom, Sept. 2012 11. Rape Crisis Center co-Executive Director Dana Pellebon, Nov. 2020 12. Isthmus Editor/President Judy Davidoff, March 2017 13. Attorney Linda S. Balisle, Nov. 2011 14. Brandon Rounds aka Bianca Lynn Breeze, Sept. 2018 15. Alianza Latina, March 2012 16. Fromagination’s Ken Monteleone, May 2012 17. Intellectual Ratchet’s Ja’Mel Ware, May 2016 18. Michael Dix of Michael’s Frozen Custard, May 2014 19. Local activist and fundraiser Jenny Pressman, March 2019 20. Transpainter Rae Senarighi, Sept. 2021 21. Donald Haar of Willma’s Fund, Nov. 2015 22. Local chef Dave Heide and his child, Ollie Joy, March 2021 23. Drag Legend Candi Stratton, March 2022 24. FruitFest founders Corey Gresen, Rico Sabatini, and Liz Tymus, July 2010 25. Advocate Cedric Johnson, July 2021 26. Activist Kaci Sullivan, Nov. 2017.

A BRIGHT AND PROMISING FUTURE

Going into 2020, Patrick had more coals in the fire than ever before: a website upgrade, staffing expansions, and a whole new way of doing business. At the magazine’s peak, Patrick employed five employees and managed a business office.

“And then the pandemic hit,” said Virginia. “The arts were gone, restaurants were closed, nightlife was shut down, significant advertising revenue—gone. Funding set aside for the future had to be invested in survival. It was all so exhausting and challenging, but in the end, *Our Lives* remained our labor of love.”

Emerging from the pressures of the pandemic, *Our Lives* has begun its transition to a non-profit organization. This is a historic change for the publication—one meant to secure its long-term future.

“Shifting to a non-profit model makes a statewide expansion not only intentional, but viable,” said Patrick. “Funding that works for Madison doesn’t work statewide. We need to become a more reader-supported/sponsor-supported operation. Today, we have to be able to return on advertiser investment, even if our subscribers throughout the state aren’t anywhere near the businesses that advertise with us. Transitioning to a non-profit liberates us from that.”

“I’m keen to see *Our Lives* expand its geographic and online presence,” said Emily. “I know there have been talks about expanding to Milwaukee. I couldn’t agree more. I foresee a true statewide operation, with journalists signing in from not only Milwaukee, but Green Bay, La Crosse, Appleton, even places like Door County, Eagle River, or Bayfield.

“I must shout out my deepest appreciation to Patrick,” said Emily. “*Our Lives* would not exist without him. His dedication knows no limits, sometimes at the cost of his own health and wellbeing. *Our Lives* has been so important to him, so important to me, and so important to the community. Nobody is a perfect human. Everyone makes mistakes, but Patrick learns, grows, includes more voices, and builds more leadership with every lesson.”

“I’m grateful for every single person who has trusted the magazine to share their story,” Patrick said. “It’s been a huge community effort to keep this thing going, so every contribution mattered more than you know. We’ve thousands of contributors over the past 15 years.

“Being the last statewide queer media in Wisconsin comes with an accountability for journalistic integrity and content quality,” said Patrick. “And *Our Lives* will continue to share the stories of everyday people. People who will share the path they’ve built forward for themselves. People who are here, in your city, in your neighborhood, on your canvas.

“We will continue the mission that’s been there all along,” said Patrick. “We will find ways to go deeper into those margins and find ways for those voices to be safely heard. We will build capacity to do more of this—and better.”

“As much as Patrick doesn’t want *Our Lives* to be ‘his,’ it does remain fully his,” said Virginia. “Building out a succession plan will be essential for the long-term lifespan of the magazine, but Patrick just hasn’t been able to do that yet. He’s too busy doing everything the magazine demands.”

“Ultimately, I want to give *Our Lives* to the community,” Patrick said. “It’s my legacy at this point, but I don’t want it to live and die with me.” ■





POLITICS & LAW LGBTQ RIGHTS HISTORY

The First Gay Rights State

Forty years ago, Republican Governor Lee Dreyfus signed **Assembly Bill 70** into law, making Wisconsin the first state in the nation providing anti-discrimination protections for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

AS WISCONSIN CELEBRATES PRIDE month this summer, imagine a Wisconsin where LGBTQ people only knew shame. Imagine a lifetime of negative, hostile, dehumanizing messages that told you that you were broken, sick, deviant, criminal, immoral, sinful and (worst of all) all alone in the world. Imagine an infrastructure of schools, churches, police, media and government systems committed to protecting and preserving conformity—while punishing anyone who dared live outside the rules.

Today, we are free to live proud, out, bold, unapologetic lives. But that’s not how things worked in the other Wisconsin.

If you were suspected of being “queer,” even without cause or evidence, you could expect no mercy:

- You could legally be denied service by any business, at any time, as business owners could lose their licenses for allowing homosexuals to congregate.
- You could be denied alcohol, as the state law prohibited homosexuals from being served, and taverns went to great extremes to prevent homosexual mingling. Two men, who did not know each other, could not sit on adjacent barstools, nor turn to face each other, nor purchase drinks for each other, without the bartender alerting the police.
- You could take the extreme risks of visiting a gay bar, which included being seen (and blackmailed), harassed by hecklers, arrested in raids, or rolled by hustlers.
- You could be the victim of a “poison pen” letter, where someone with knowledge of your secret life threatened to out you, unless you paid them substantial sums of money; some blackmailers didn’t give you the chance: they simply outed you to friends, family, employers, police—effectively ending your life as you knew it.
- You could be fired from your job, with unemployment and references denied, even if you had a perfect performance record for decades.
- You could be evicted from your apartment, with security deposit and references withheld.
- You could be denied apartment rental, and many landlords made it very clear upfront that queers were not welcome.
- Once you found housing, usually in a less-desirable but no less expensive neighborhood, you might be subjected to police “sweeps” designed to harass and intimidate known homosexuals.
- Your private home or hotel room could be invaded at any time, with or without warrant, if you were suspected of having homosexual relations, and you and your sexual partners arrested.
- You could be denied a bank account, credit card, or loan from any financial institution, no matter how impressive your financial portfolio.
- You could be dishonorably discharged from the military, lose all military benefits, and forever live with the burden of your discharge status.
- You could be subjected to “three article” inspections on city streets, and suspected cross-dressers would suffer illegal search, seizure, and

sexual assault.

- You could be harassed, arrested, and/or beaten by police in public places, for no crime other than “seeming” queer or being in a known queer space. Upon arrest, your name would appear in local newspapers, as well as your age, address, and employer, inviting more of the harms already listed above.
- You could be forced, as a condition of arrest, to undergo psychiatric examination and/or hospitalization, designed to “cure” you of your disease. For a brief time in Wisconsin, anyone—with or without evidence—could declare you a sexual psychopath, which compelled local authorities to arrest, detain, and institutionalize you until you were considered “healed” by a psychiatric professional.
- If you couldn’t be “healed,” or refused to be “healed,” you might face more permanent punishment for your condition—including forced sterilization, which destroyed the lives of 645 inmates between 1913 and 1978.
- Your name would be listed on an FBI watch list, as well as the names of your family and close friends, and the US Postal Service would monitor your mail for “irregularities.” Your mail could be intercepted, opened, and/or refused delivery.
- Although family rejection was sadly the norm and not the exception, you could be legally forbidden from seeing your own children or parents, based on the social shame and harm you’d caused them by being “queer.”
- You could even be denied a passport or driver’s license.

We’re not talking about 100 years ago. We’re not talking about an alternate reality or a dystopian nightmare—this was life in Wisconsin before 1982. And it was all 100% legal.

Many, many lives were destroyed beyond repair—leading to endemic substance abuse, self-harm, and suicide. It is nothing less than a miracle that any LGBTQ elders survived a life this hard, and that they rose above this ugliness to live their truth.

Thanks to the relentless efforts of right-minded activists, we don’t live in that Wisconsin anymore.

WISCONSIN: FORWARD, NEVER STRAIGHT

Forty years ago, Wisconsin became the first Gay Rights State in the nation, offering anti-discrimination protections for gays and lesbians in housing, employment, credit, and public accommodation.

Lloyd Barbee, one of the most significant leaders of the Wisconsin civil rights movement, saw the human costs of this criminalized community. He sought to legalize homosexuality (1967) and create protections against workplace discrimination (1971). Although his bills failed to pass, he inspired a new class of legislators, including David Clarenbach, to carry the torch forward.

Working with student activist Leon Rouse, Clarenbach was able to build a groundswell across lawmakers, business owners and even religious leaders that led to bipartisan support. Their strategic approach did not seek



On February 25, 1982, Republican Governor Lee Dreyfus signs AB70 into law with Leon Rouse and David Clarenbach at his side. The law added “sexual orientation” to the list of non-discrimination categories in Wisconsin.

We’re not talking about 100 years ago. We’re not talking about an alternate reality or a dystopian nightmare—this was life in Wisconsin before 1982. And it was all 100% legal.

approval or endorsement of homosexuality, but instead asked the question “is it morally right to deny these protections to all human beings?” After passing the House and the Senate, the bill went to newly elected Republican Governor Lee Dreyfus for signature on February 25, 1982.

Confusingly, the new law didn’t decriminalize homosexuality or overturn the state sodomy laws in place since the days of the Michigan Territory. It only prohibited discrimination against a group of people who didn’t legally exist. A second motion, known as the Consenting Adults Law, was necessary to seal the deal. It wasn’t until May 5, 1983 that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people were legal citizens of Wisconsin. For the full story, see the September 2021 issue of *Our Lives* magazine.

This timing could not have been more critical. As AIDS paranoia began to overcome the country, and the first cases were reported in Wisconsin in 1982 (non-resident) and 1983 (resident), a new sense of “Moral Majority” began to creep into politics. Critics of the Consenting Adults Law now felt justified in their bias: by legitimizing gay and lesbian lives, Wisconsin was risking the moral fabric of society, and now AIDS was here to prove how wrong they were. Fortunately, it was too late to

undo the vote—but it’s safe to say that if the Consenting Adults Law was delayed or tabled even six months, it may never have passed at the height of AIDS panic, or at any point in Wisconsin history since then.

There are eerie parallels between the activation of the Gay Rights Bills in 1982–83 and the arrival of marriage equality in 2015. Both events were preceded with ferocious activism and followed by tremendous complacency. Once the immediate goals were won, it seems that both movements lost steam. Gay People’s Union, a national powerhouse of gay liberation, was gone by 1983—taking many of its

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national “gay firsts” (including a community center, crisis hotline, free health clinic, youth leader program, national magazine, radio show, parents support group, and more). After the arrival of marriage equality, many felt the battle was “won”—not recognizing the vast numbers of LGBTQ people who never sought marriage, but more critical equality provisions instead.

While achieving tremendous legal protections for sexual identity, which would be tested in Wisconsin courts for the next four decades, neither the Gay Rights Law nor the Consenting Adults Law made any provision whatsoever for gender identity. Why?

“You have to understand the community as it was in 1980,” said David Clarenbach, in a recent phone interview from Thailand. “It’s easy to look back now, and ask ourselves, why didn’t we include gender? At the time, we thought we were including everyone. We thought it was obvious: The goal was rights for ALL, not just extending rights to ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ Wisconsinites.”

“There was not the vibrant transgender movement that we have today. There was not this intentional targeting of trans people we see today. Conservatives attacked ‘the gays,’ and ‘the gays’ took care of their collective own,” Clarenbach said. “I think the lesson learned is that [Rouse] was a highly respected insider who was willing to do the work to get this bill passed. Getting these same protections, specific to gender identity, is going to take that inside leadership. It can’t come from outside the community.”

This is a solid call to action. Wisconsin still has no laws protecting transgender or non-binary people from discrimination in employment, housing, credit, or public accommodation.



Barbee

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But—make no mistake—even the rights earned 40 years ago for gays and lesbians are not secure today.

THE YEAR OF DON'T SAY GAY

Last year (2021) there were a record number of anti-LGBTQ bills, with over 147 laws proposed in 34 states. In 12 states, anti-LGBTQ bills were passed without any proven existence of the behavior they banned.

On Monday, March 28, 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis passed into law the nation’s first “Don’t Say Gay” Law, which forbids mention of sexual or gender identity in K–3 classrooms. Earlier versions of the bill were more overt; one version actually required schools to “out” students who disclose to their teachers. DeSantis openly boasts that the law will prevent “indoctrination,” a thinly veiled reference to the “grooming” rhetoric circulating among homophobic conservatives. Ironically, no K–3 curriculum ever included these mentions in the first place, making the law a “solution without a problem.”

Unfortunately, this rhetoric has expanded to nearly two dozen states, which have either proposed or drafted “Don’t Say Gay” legislation of their own. Ranging from banning books, to erasing LGBTQ history, to forbidding the mention of any LGBTQ people, organization or event, these laws are obvious attempts to destabilize, disempower, and isolate the next generation of LGBTQ leaders in America.

Even worse are the new wave of anti-trans bills. In Texas alone, 13 bills were introduced this year that targeted transgender youth, including would prosecute parents who seek gender-affirming care for their own children (even out-of-state), or take children to drag shows.

Despite a proud progressive heritage, Wisconsin is no stranger to this sinister thinking. Wisconsin Senate Bill 915, which sought to outlaw a sweeping array of gender transition services, override parental consent, and penalize medical providers, fortunately failed to pass in March 2022. Assembly Bill 562, which would require school boards to notify parents of any classroom instruction on gender or sexual identity in advance to protect their children against “indoctrination,” also failed. Yet, these are only two of several bills, either proposed or drafted, that seek to silence or erase LGBTQ existence, and there will be many, many more.

SEIZE THE DAY

Looking back at a lifetime of activism, gay rights pioneer Eldon Murray (1930–2007) always said, “Those rights you have must be constantly guarded, or they will be taken away from you. Count on it.”

With midterm elections approaching, every Wisconsin voter must recognize the historic moment in time that’s already here. We can either vote to protect the rights we have—and strive for more equitable and just rights for all citizens—or we can allow others to choose our rights for us.

It’s no longer hysterical to say that fascism is on the rise in America, and there are political forces at work—nationally and locally—that seek to remove LGBTQ people from public life.

We’re closer than you think to living in that other Wisconsin again. Choose well at the polls. ■



MICHAEL TAKACH is a historian, author, reporter, and communications professional. He earned his master’s in communications and history at U.W.-Madison. As a fifth-generation Milwaukeean, he supported various non-profit organizations over the past two decades, including Historic Milwaukee, the Milwaukee County Historical Society, the Walker’s Point Association, and Milwaukee Pride. Michail is currently the curator of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, a not-for-profit organization devoted to connecting local LGBTQ people with their hidden history and heritage.

ABORTION RIGHTS MARRIAGE EQUALITY SUPREME COURT

Apathy is our Enemy

After the fall of *Roe v. Wade*, attorney **Michele L. Perreault** warns that there’s a real possibility that *Obergefell v. Hodges* will, too. It’s time to vote like our lives depended upon it.

THE UNITED STATES SUPREME

Court issued a devastating blow to women’s rights to self-determination over their own bodies as it overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the recent decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. In a 6–3 decision, the Court held that *Roe* was wrongly decided, and that because that decision was rendered “only” 49 years ago, the rights declared in *Roe* were not “deeply rooted” in American history, and therefore could be overturned. Given that decision, now it is up to each state to determine whether women and medical providers will have the right to make their own decisions, in some cases, even where the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother.

Given the nature of that decision, LGBTQ+ citizens are understandably alarmed about whether we are next in line to lose legal protections. While I would love to assure people that will not happen, unfortunately I have to report that we are at risk.

The majority decision (written by Justice Alito) in *Dobbs* purports to render it as a narrow decision addressing solely abortion. In fact, in response to the dissent raising concerns that the Court would overturn prior decisions, including *Obergefell* (the decision legalizing marriage equality), Alito specifically wrote that the dissent is trying to “stoke unfounded fear that our decision will imperil those other rights.” Justice Kavanaugh similarly wrote in his concurring opinion that the decision does not implicate other rights and protections, including *Obergefell*, and confines the opinion to abortion. However, Justice Thomas—despite being a beneficiary of a Supreme Court decision overturning criminal statutes prohibiting interracial marriage—flat out calls for overturning all of those decisions (but not surprisingly, stops his historical analysis a few years shy of the *Loving v. Virginia* decision). No one joined Thomas in his dissent.

If we conclude that Thomas is an outlier even on this conservative Supreme Court, and if we



believe the conservative justices when they reiterate that they are singling out abortion only, then we should have confidence that marriage equality and other Court-established protections for LGBTQ+ citizens will remain the law of the land. It is likely that new lawsuits will test this resolve in the next several years, but we can’t just sit back and wait to see what happens.

So what can we do? It is time to take action. The *Dobbs* decision does not in itself make abortion illegal. Instead, each state has the authority to pass laws regarding abortion. If *Obergefell* is overturned in the future, despite the assurances of Alito, Kavanaugh, and others, marriage equality will similarly

be a state-by-state determination. The only way to truly secure protection is to make sure that our elected officials actively support equality for their LGBTQ+ citizens. Platitudes during Pride month or generic statements of equality are insufficient. We must demand legislative action. But we must also vote in numbers that can’t be overcome. That means sacrificing time and money to get out the vote and actively supporting legislators who are truly allies. It means talking to your friends, family, and coworkers about how devastating it is for our families to potentially lose basic protections and legal dignity, and making sure they vote accordingly. It means mobilizing young people and others who have never voted before. We have the numbers to make this right, but numbers are meaningless unless they are turned into actual votes. ■



MICHELE PERREULT is a shareholder and Chair of the Family Law department of DeWitt LLP. Her practice includes representing families and individuals in family matters ranging from adoption, to prenuptial agreements, divorce, and estate planning. She’s also a former Board member of Fair Wisconsin.



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LIFE INSURANCE | GENDER IDENTITY | HIV STATUS

Applying for Life Insurance when you're Transgender and/or Living with HIV

David Ryan-Sukup and Colleen Frentzel share information on life insurance to help you find coverage that meets your needs.



WHILE LIFE INSURANCE companies have different approaches to how gender impacts your rate, you will not be automatically declined if you are transgender.

Likewise, life insurance companies also differ on how they treat HIV status. If you are a person living with HIV, you might not be automatically disqualified from getting coverage.

Knowing how life insurance is underwritten, and that companies are not all the same, may help you find one that is willing and able to provide you with life insurance coverage to meet your needs.

GENDER IDENTITY ON A LIFE INSURANCE APPLICATION

Most life insurance applications will ask you to identify your gender using binary male/female choices without more inclusive gender identity options. As a part of the underwriting process, the life insurance company may want to review some medical records in order to rate a policy based on your health. During this process it is possible they will learn the gender you were assigned at birth. Some life insurance companies will then automatically rate you based on your assigned gender at birth. Other companies will proceed to rate you based on the gender listed on the application. When shopping around for life insurance, you can ask how the company approaches gender and gender identity to help you find a company that's right for you.

HOW GENDER IMPACTS LIFE INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Gender or sex is one of many factors life insurance companies use to determine the premium you pay for your policy, and it is legal for life insurance companies to charge different premiums based on gender. This is because there is a statistical correlation between being male or female and life expectancy.

LIFE INSURANCE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

Due to medical advancements improving life expectancies for people living with HIV, some life insurance companies have updated their underwriting guidelines to allow some clients who are living with HIV to qualify for coverage. Almost all life insurance applications ask if you have HIV. You should know that you will likely be asked to provide details about your HIV status by the agent or representative taking your application.

FACTORS INVOLVED IN LIFE INSURANCE UNDERWRITING

Life insurance underwriting looks at many factors to determine if the applicant can be approved for a policy and then determines the underwriting rate class which is used to calculate the premium.

Factors involved in underwriting a life insurance policy may include, but are not limited to:

- Age
- Gender/sex
- Physical measurements and lab results
- Tobacco or nicotine use
- Medical history
- Mental health history
- Prescription history
- Surgical history
- Family health history
- Chronic health conditions

Underwriting guidelines vary from insurance company to insurance company. But it's important to remember that all life insurance applicants need to meet all of the company's

underwriting guidelines in addition to any single criteria. Not everyone will qualify.

The underwriting of a specific condition, like HIV, may depend on many additional factors to determine if a policy can be approved and at what premium. For example:

- When was the original diagnosis
- Medications and treatment history
- Additional physical or mental health factors

GUARANTEED ISSUE LIFE INSURANCE OPTIONS

Some life insurance companies may have what is known as a "guaranteed issue" life insurance policy available for clients who cannot be approved through standard life insurance underwriting (or those who would prefer not to answer health questions or be medically underwritten). If you have concerns about any of the factors listed above, or other circumstances, you can ask your insurance agent or broker if their company has a guaranteed issue policy. Even with these options, there may be some requirements or limitations, such as:

- Age
- Death benefit amount available
- Waiting period for coverage
- Type of policy allowed (term life vs whole life)

A guaranteed issue life insurance policy costs more for the same amount of coverage because there is less underwriting involved in the application process and the policy is designed for applicants who are in poor health and present a higher risk to the insurance company.

OTHER TIPS WHEN SHOPPING OR APPLYING FOR LIFE INSURANCE

There are many life insurance policies available on the market and choosing the right policy for you may seem confusing. Here are some additional factors to consider:

TERM LIFE vs WHOLE LIFE

Term life insurance is a type of policy that is designed to provide you lower-cost coverage for a specific period of time (the "term"). Most term life policies do not build a cash value. Because you are only covered for the duration of the term and there is no cash value, term life insurance is lower in cost compared to other types of life insurance like whole life.

Whole life is another common type of life insurance and is designed to provide coverage for your "whole life" and build a cash value over time. The cash value in the policy may be

withdrawn if the policy is surrendered early, borrowed-against or used to purchase paid-up insurance. Be aware that loans taken from your life insurance policy may accrue interest. Any outstanding loan balance (loan plus interest) could be deducted from the death benefit at the time of claim or from the cash value at the time of surrender. If the loan balance grows too large for the cash value to support it, the policy could terminate. Because whole life has a lifetime benefit (subject to policy terms and conditions such as the timely payment of premiums), the premium is higher compared to term insurance.

EVALUATING YOUR LIFE INSURANCE NEEDS

There are several factors to consider when evaluating the death benefit amount needed for life insurance. These factors may include:

- Debt you'd like paid-off
- Income you'd like replaced for a surviving spouse or partner
- Childcare expenses
- College or other tuition and education expenses
- Final (funeral) expenses

In addition to talking to an agent, many life insurance companies have an online life insurance calculator or tool to help you determine a total benefit amount that is appropriate for you and your family.

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD TO PAY

When shopping for life insurance, or working with an agent or broker, it's often helpful to know how much of a premium will fit your budget. This may help you determine the type of policy, benefit amount, and any additional features you might want. Make sure to know if the policy has a fixed premium or if and when the premium changes.

CHOOSING A BENEFICIARY

A beneficiary is the person(s) or organization(s) that you identify to receive the death benefit of your life insurance policy when you pass away. You may list more than one beneficiary, and you may be able to list a contingent beneficiary(ies) if your primary beneficiary(ies) is not living when your policy benefit is paid. The life insurance application will likely need some information for the person(s) or organization(s) you name as beneficiary, including: full name, date of birth, address, contact information, and maybe even a Social Security or Tax Identification Number.

REVIEW YOUR LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM EVERY FEW YEARS

As your life changes, so does your need for life insurance. That is why it is important to review your life insurance program with your

agent/broker, financial advisor or life insurance company representative every few years. Common elements of a life insurance review include:

- Have your life insurance premiums or benefits changed since the policy was issued?
- Are there any deadlines for coverage or options approaching in your policy?
- Does the death benefit still meet your needs? Or does the policy now exceed your needs?
- What recent life events may have impacted your coverage needs, including: marriage or divorce, birth or adoption, or job changes?
- Are the beneficiaries listed correct? Or do you need to update them? ■



DAVID RYAN-SUKUP is an American Family Insurance agency owner in Madison. As an American Family agent, David specializes in helping clients with their Home, Auto, Business, Farm, and Life insurance needs. David and his husband Justin live in Fitchburg.



COLLEEN FRENTZEL is an American Family Insurance agency owner since 2014 and has 25 years in the business. She is licensed for multiple states including AZ, GA, IA, IL, OH, NV, UT, and WI. She and her wife Kimberly reside in Janesville.

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SMALL TOWN TOURISM LIVE MUSIC DRAG

Pyramid: A full-circle story

Childhood friends **Jillian Macson** and **Eli Wedel** co-own **Pyramid Event Venue**—a boutique performance and event venue in Lake Mills—where locals and out-of-towners alike are treated to delicious pizza and fabulous entertainment.



Photo by Ian DeGraff.

ON MARCH 16 at the 2022 Wisconsin Governor’s Conference on Tourism, nominees for the Governor’s Tourism Awards included Jillian Macson. She got to meet the Governor because her work with Eli Wedel as a co-owner of the Pyramid Event Venue in Lake Mills was being recognized for contributions to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in Wisconsin tourism. In short, Pyramid is a destination for live music, community events, and good food in a radically inclusive atmosphere.

How Jillian and Eli opened Pyramid is a story that began in childhood. “We’ve known each other all our lives, since birth really,” explains Jillian. “We dated in high school for several years and were really just best friends. When we got to college we realized who we were and came out to each other.”

Their close friendship was a bond that continued through college and even moving to Los Angeles together to work for big-name clothing companies. The 2008 recession made them rethink their careers and move back home to Wisconsin. Their friendship remained close even though they lived apart so Jillian could pursue other opportunities in Door County

and Chicago, and Eli could advance a career in photography. Being apart didn’t last too long.

“When I decided to move back to Lake Mills, Eli had a space open in his home,” remembered Jillian. “We became roommates again and it was like everything came full circle. I didn’t like my job in Madison, and Eli was ready to try something new. That’s when we started talking about creating something that brought some of the big cities we lived in back to our community.”

In early 2020, Eli and Jillian learned about a restaurant that would soon be on the market. They contacted the owner and bought the business. They set out to re-envision the space, working with a contractor to renovate the building to support live music, community gatherings, and private events. They announced the start of their venture on February 25, 2020. Then Covid hit.

“Since we were brand-new and focused on renovations, we didn’t feel the impact of stay-at-home orders right away,” said Eli. “We were outside of Dane County, so the limits on businesses in Madison didn’t apply to us. We could start with a 25% capacity and provide a safer space right from the start. We were seeing people from Madison and Milwaukee come to see live performances, but we’re still in a small town that’s very family-oriented where not many folks were going out to bars to hear live music.”

Over time, Pyramid found its groove to provide live entertainment nearly every evening. It now features monthly drag shows, bimonthly drag bingo, karaoke, and a full range of live music in every genre. They even hosted an Elvis impersonator. Eli says their success is because of their inclusive approach and desire to offer something for everyone. Pyramid’s building has been a pizza place for many years, and they continue to offer award-winning pizza baked in a well-seasoned, 40-year-old oven, plus pasta and salads. They say the spicy cheese curd pizza is their most popular dish.

With their life-long friendship, Eli and Jillian know each other well. Jillian says they compliment each other and can bring a 50-50 partnership to managing the event space.

“Because we dated for three plus years in high school, came out to each other, lived with each other, and now have started a business together, the biggest thing is communication,” said Eli. “If you don’t communicate well, nothing is going to work well. We know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. We can be a kind of yin and yang in our business relationship. It’s not like some husband-and-wife partnerships in business that don’t end well.”

Supporting each other helps them celebrate successes, such as the recognition by the state

tourism department, but also handle the small acts of critics in their smaller community. Jillian and Eli have dealt with some negative comments online and got a critical call by someone who was offended after Pyramid hung a pride flag. But overall their experience in being a visibly LGBTQ+ owned business in Lake Mills has been a positive and welcoming one.

“Growing up here, we knew there were some business owners who were gay,” said Eli. “By the time we moved back to Lake Mills, I was hoping there would be more LGBT representation and acknowledgement here. When there wasn’t any, that was something we both wanted with this business. We wanted to be more at the forefront about it. Because of doing that, the response from the community has been great. Our Pride events are our most popular events and people come from miles—even hours—away for drag bingo. It’s fun providing that experience for people in small towns.” ■



STACY HARBAUGH is a freelance writer and marketing specialist with over a decade and a half of experience in nonprofit communications and advocacy. In her free time she hones her DJ skills by playing polka and vintage soul and pop records, and celebrates the cozier side of our community.

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The first speech I wrote was named, “The Problem with the Pledge,” and it really explained why our nation should not force kids to say this pledge when they don’t know the true meaning behind it.

mixed kid cliché, but I never knew where to go, what to do, or where I fit as a kid. I was just stuck. Transported wherever others thought best, no real say in my future, whether it was to a hair salon, to a neighborhood, a camp, etc. For the record I love or loved all of these places, but as I’m growing up, I’m beginning to figure out what is more to my liking.

“LISTEN, LEARN, LOOK, LEAD, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY HAVE FUN!”

In elementary school, my parents started each day with the whole family saying some affirmations to remind ourselves what we stand for and what we practice in our family. We would say “Listen, Learn, Look, Lead, and most importantly Have Fun!” These reminded us to listen to others, learn at school, look people in the eye, and be leaders, and of course have fun! But that second to last part I never really understood until I started seeing things that upset me as I grew up. An adult litters as I’m walking by, police brutality continues, I’m told to stand up during the singing of the star spangled banner by one of my volleyball coaches.

FINDING MY VOICE

In middle school, I discovered spoken word and poetry. I began writing a soapbox speech, originally just for an assignment in class, but I eventually went on to present my speech at the Mikva Soapbox Challenge. This event brought me a huge amount of confidence as a middle schooler! Learning to give speeches, and sharing what I want to change, was so powerful to me and really gave me a voice. The first speech I wrote was named, “The Problem with the Pledge,” and it really explained why our nation should not force kids to say this pledge when they don’t know the true meaning behind it, and it’s not valued by most families. My second speech was about the masks we wear throughout our day-to-day lives, and how we hide our true selves from the people around us. This second speech was given over Zoom, and I thought it really related to the times. For both of these speeches, I made it to the final 10, which was the last round and was able to present my speeches to about 200 people. I was proud of myself and the many others who decided to share their thoughts and feelings with the people at the event.

FINDING A COMPASS

This year, my first year of high school, I truly realized that because of all my experiences in life, who I am and what I stand for—as well as my skin color—will all affect who I surround myself with. Some of those people will be major parts of my life, and they’ll support and love me forever, and some of them will leave or choose different paths than me. I think the people I surround myself with, my morals, and what I’m passionate about has affected my life and my activism.

Overall, my leadership drives who I am and who I want to become. My parents and many other role models have shown me how, and now I hope to help lead our world into a better and brighter future, with the help of many other amazing leaders and activists in society. ■

QTBIPOC COMING OF AGE

Navigating without a Map

GSAFE youth **Avi Mack** shares what it’s like to navigate life as a biracial youth.

RACE. It’s a word we bring up constantly in society. But race is, was, and always will be a barrier, and is, was, and always will be a strengthener. For me, it’s a confusing maze that I’ve been trying to navigate my whole life without a map. My parents and grandparents, both of different skin tones, try their best, but they will never experience the feeling of being stuck in a never ending game of tug of war between two parts of oneself. On the flipside, I find so much strength in the perspective I have as a biracial person, and I love being a combined part of two races and cultures.

YOU HAVE TO LIVE IT TO UNDERSTAND IT

My parents raised my siblings and me to be strong, loving, independent people in society. However, over the course of growing up, there were things that were hard to show them, or help them to understand, without them actually being in my skin. Here comes the



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