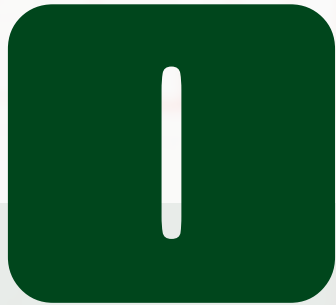


our lives



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POP Bar



Arielle Juliette

HEALTH & FAMILY

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

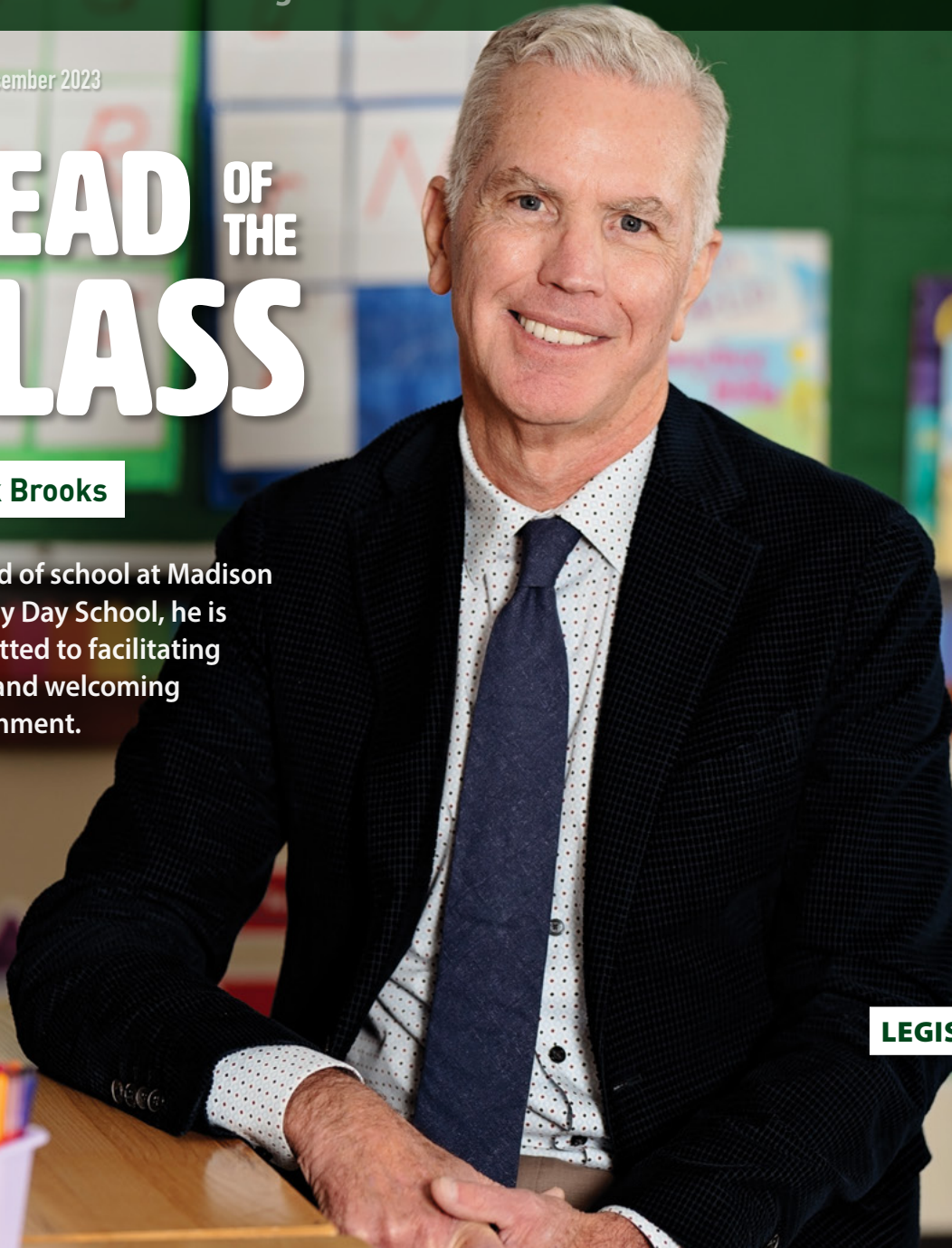
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November / December 2023

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Breaking down Wisconsin lawmakers' anti-transgender bills and their broader implications.

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- Rachel Levine

Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary

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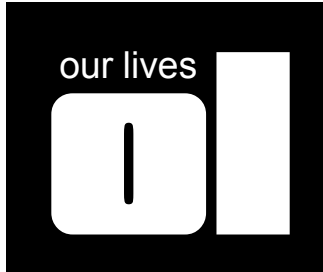
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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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PUBLISHER'S LETTER PATRICK FARABAUGH



The public hearing for Assembly Bill 465.

PUSHING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

GENERALLY I TRY to use this space to show-case what you'll find throughout this issue of the magazine, but the past few weeks have been daunting. I've sat through numerous public hearings for proposed anti-transgender legislation by Republican lawmakers and have found myself both furious and disenchanted at the same time. The audacity of these exclusively white, cisgender lawmakers to target and use some of the most vulnerable among us as political pawns—over and over—was hard to stomach. It has felt like every week, going on for weeks, we've had to scramble with our friends at Fair Wisconsin to get a new action alert out about a new bill slated for a hearing. There have been bills targeting trans student athletes at every level. There have been proposed medical bans on all gender-affirming care for minors. Another bill targets and misgenders incarcerated trans people. Yet another exposes medical professionals who treat trans minors to legal liability. And the most recent is the equivalent of a "don't say gay" bill that would not only require schools to out their LGBTQ students to their potentially hostile families, but also require schools to notify parents if a "controversial subject" will be taught or discussed in the child's classroom. As Rep. Ryan Clancy (D - Milwaukee) said in his testimony against AB Senate Bill 480, "Trans kids are not considering suicide because of who they are, but who we are."

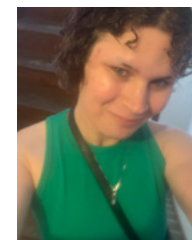
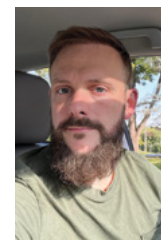


While the reasons for my feelings of anger are potentially obvious, my disenchantment may not be. I've lost count of how many times I've sat through hearings like this not just in Wisconsin, but in many of the states I've lived in over decades of queer advocacy. While I'm grateful for the willingness of our vulnerable community members to testify, I have a hard time not seeing it as a kind of trauma porn for the lawmakers listening. I genuinely don't believe that any of these GOP legislators care. I think their opinions on how they intend to vote are decided before they enter the room, and this is all an exercise in futility. It's not by coincidence that often these hearings are scheduled at simultaneous times to limit their attendance. Perhaps the only redeeming qualities of the testimony are to preserve our opposition for the political record, and to be with each other as an act of community and resilience.

While it's difficult for me to ignore the dog whistles being used today, their echoes are similar from previous waves of anti-LGBTQ targeting that have been used against us since the birth of our battle for equal rights. It's impossible not to see the same boogeyman cases being used to drum up fear against a marginalized group, conveniently going into a fundraising cycle for a major election year.

So where do we find hope? For me it's in those echoes and knowing the success of our trajectory. The path forward isn't without its obstacles and setbacks. I find my resilience in all of you, and my confidence in knowing the inevitability of us reaching our goals. ■

CONTRIBUTORS



After graduating from Yale, **ERICA LÓPEZ** did research on immigration and education. Before matriculating into University of Wisconsin Law School as an Advanced Opportunity Fellow, she worked at Cleary Gottlieb Steen and Hamilton in New York City and at the founding site for the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnerships at Boston Medical Center. She was a public benefits and housing eviction attorney at Legal Action of Wisconsin Inc. for over a decade. She was the inaugural Clinical Instructor of the Eviction Defense Clinic (EDC), as part of the Economic Justice Institute at the University of Wisconsin Law School. She is the founder and Executive Director of the Peoples Law Center | Centro de Derecho de la Gente, a non profit law firm focusing on representing marginalized and undocumented people in housing civil matters.

IAN DEGRAFF is a creative brand storyteller with a talent for corporate video production. His current projects include a documentary focused on the intersection of ufology and the lives of Wisconsin residents, producing a food trends and marketing podcast, and editing the photographs of butterflies and orchids taken during a recent holiday trip to Costa Rica. He lives in Madison with his husband and macaw.

TESSA JADE PRICE is a transgender woman who moved to Madison in 2011 to study politics. After graduating, she worked in tech support and web design. Tessa came out publicly as trans in 2020 and, in 2021, started working with Trans Advocacy Madison to advocate for the needs of transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive people. She is passionate about helping others and using media and politics to help platform queer and trans perspectives.

OBITUARY JERRY S. BREILING



It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of **Jerry S. Breiling**, 63, on October 20, 2023. He touched the lives of many and will be profoundly missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him. Jerry is survived by his long-time love and business partner, Serge Pellicelli, who held a special place in his heart.

Jerry was not only a beloved family member but also a respected figure in the LGBT Milwaukee community. He was known for his caring and nurturing nature, always looking out for his people. His kindness and compassion left a lasting impact on the many lives he touched.

The staff of KRUZ bar, Jerry's many friends, and loyal KRUZ customers all hold cherished memories of him. He will be remembered for his warm and welcoming presence and the love and care he bestowed upon those around him.

Jerry and Serge wished to extend their heartfelt gratitude to Nancy Breiling, the compassionate team at Aurora Hospital Home Care, the medical professionals at the Medical College of Froedtert Hospital, and the caring staff at Froedtert who supported him over the years.

In memory of Jerry, celebrate his life and continue his legacy of love.



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OUR NEWS

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At the public hearing for Assembly Bill 465, which seeks to prohibit minor trans kids from accessing gender-affirming medical care.



Anti-Trans Legislative Onslaught

Wisconsin lawmakers have recently passed **several bills targeting transgender individuals.**

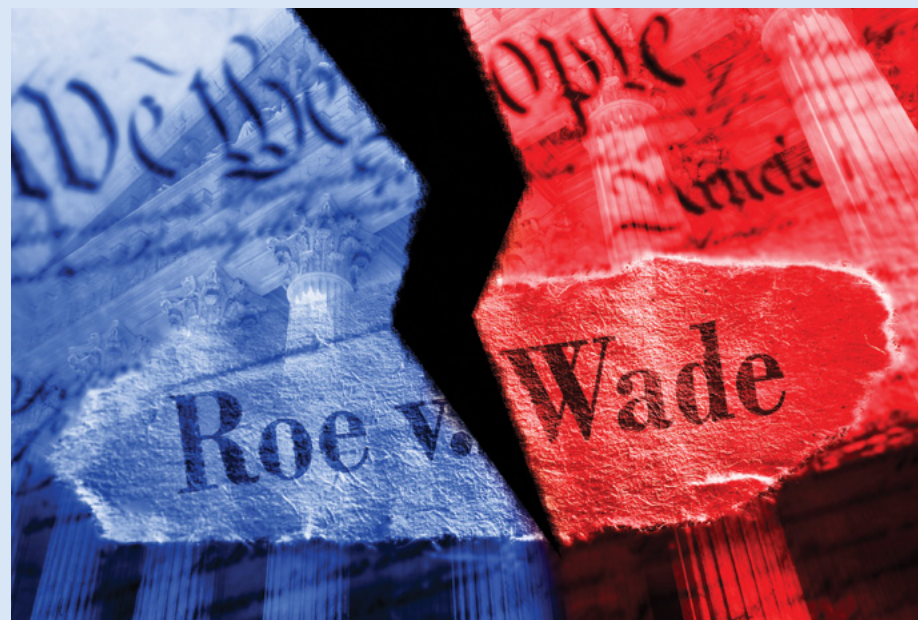
Governor Evers has exercised his veto power, but there are broader implications—and future concerns—as these scenes repeat throughout the country.

POLITICS & LAW NEWS HEALTH CARE TRANSGENDER

SINCE 2021, anti-trans legislation has spread across this country like a wildfire. While a few state legislatures passed, or tried to pass, bills limiting bathroom usage in the years prior to 2021, anti-trans legislation was very uncommon, and usually unpopular. Unfortunately, 2021, 2022, and now 2023 have all been record-breaking years for bills specifically targeting trans people. Trans youth, in particular, have been the main target of these hateful bills, but as these gain traction, some states, like Oklahoma, are starting to reveal legislation that would limit access to gender affirming health care for trans adults. The party waving the dual banners of

personal freedom and parental choice above all else seeks to limit both the personal freedom of trans individuals of all ages, and the parents of kids who identify as trans or non-binary who want to give their children access to often lifesaving gender-affirming medical care.

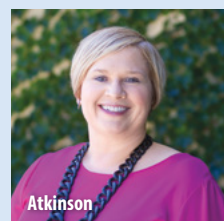
According to the site translegislation.com (a site that tracks both trends and individual bills) 2021 saw the beginning of the disturbing trend of bills introduced, saying that “the U.S. appeared to be reaching an inflection point, as 144 bills were introduced in 37 states.” Eighteen of those passed, including a law in Arkansas



HEALTH & WELLNESS | ABORTION RIGHTS | LGBTQ HEALTH CARE

Wisconsin's State of Abortion Access

We check in with **Tanya Atkinson, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin's President & CEO**, about the path that restoring access to abortion is taking in a post-*Dobbs* Wisconsin.



WHEN THE DOBBS DECISION came down from the Supreme Court in June of 2022, rolling back the constitutional right to abortion granted by both *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and returning the power to regulate abortions to the states, Wisconsin's health care landscape relating to pregnancies and abortions was chaotic. A trigger law passed back in 1849, before women could vote, went into effect, and Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, as well as other organizations that provide the same care, stopped performing all abortions. Tanya Atkinson, the PPWI President & CEO, said that the penalties for physicians, which include up to six years in prison on felony charges and \$10,000 in fines, was significant, and it was "too much to risk without clarity." Atkinson further explained that there are two paths forward: Legal and legislative. The former has proven a dead end, as conservatives hold a majority in both houses, so the legal option has been the way forward for abortion access in Wisconsin.

IMMEDIATE POST-DOBBS CARE

Following the *Dobbs* ruling, Planned Parenthood pivoted to providing people seeking abortions with navigators to help them access the care in Illinois, where the procedures remained legal, with some staff even driving across the state line. These navigators also were well versed in access across the country:

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin as an organization seeks to expand access to all health care, especially reproductive health care, for those who identify as LGBTQIA, and does not turn anyone away for lack of funds or insurance.

The landscape changed drastically as conservatively controlled states rushed to pass restrictions and bans that had previously been ruled unconstitutional. Atkinson also emphasized that despite stopping abortions within Wisconsin, the health centers stayed open the whole time, so when the organization resumed abortion services in September of 2023, the same teams were mostly

→ Continued on Page 12

that passed despite a veto from their Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson, who wrote in an opinion article addressing the veto, "H.B. 1570 puts the state as the definitive oracle of medical care, overriding parents, patients and health-care experts. While in some instances the state must act to protect life, the state should not presume to jump into the middle of every medical, human and ethical issue. This would be—and is—a vast government overreach."

In a move that mirrors similarly unnecessary and discriminatory bills in many other states, this move appears to be entirely to rile up the conservative base, who have now identified trans and gender nonconforming people as their current boogeyman, as the 2024 election year draws nearer.

And 2022 saw the beginning of the hysteria around girls' sports, as well as the "Don't Say Gay or Trans" bills. We also saw states carving out "exemptions for discrimination on religious grounds and declared emergency changes to state law to deny non-binary birth certificates," which, to a group of people already targeted and limited in their access to care, was terrifying. Translegislation.com continues that 2023 was the year that we saw a continuation of trends from the past few years: blocking trans kids and teachers from being visible in schools, and denying state recognition through birth certificates. Attacks on gender affirming health care, mainly for minors, but also increasingly for adults, skyrocketed, too, with 2023's current tally of 178 nationwide bills, which is more than the previous five years combined. This year we also saw the rise in anti-drag legislation, as conservatives labeled them "groomers" and sought to prohibit them from performing in public spaces.

A September 19 article in *The Guardian* that chronicled the "subtle and sinister" targeting of drag queens and trans people laid out the reasoning for these extreme bills rising up as a way for the GOP to switch tactics away from marriage equality—which has largely been abandoned as a rallying cry for the right since the full legalization of same-sex couples' freedom to marry in 2015—onto trans people. The switch in targets highlights how the GOP is trying to rally people around the prosecution of a small and often misunderstood group of people who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in health care, sports, public spaces, and job placement. Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO



One of multiple overflow rooms filled with people who came to voice opposition to Assembly Bill 465.

and President of GLADD, told *The Guardian*, "This makes drag an obvious target for those who inaccurately conflate being transgender to being a drag performer. These baseless drag bans attempt to erase, shame, or otherwise make it harder for LGBTQ people, and especially transgender people, to be themselves and to celebrate their communities and art forms."

LOCAL ISSUES

Unfortunately, Wisconsin gained national attention in the fall of 2023 as members of the state legislature, using the bills drafted in

other states as templates, passed legislation that would limit trans students' access to girls' and women's sports—as well as a bill to outlaw gender-affirming medical care for all minors—and would threaten the licensure of medical professionals who provide that care. Using tactics such as announcing public hearings on short notice (in what appeared to be an attempt to limit the ability of those who oppose the bills to attend) and scheduling those hearings to be at the same time as each other (diluting the effect of those who were able to attend), the conservative co-authors and their

supporters hoped to get these bills passed as quickly as possible. All three bills easily passed in the disproportionately conservative Assembly, and Assembly Bill 465, known as the "health care ban" bill passed the also conservative Senate on October 17.

Assembly Bill 377 stipulates that sports in K–12 schools, including public, private, and independent charter schools, should be divided by sex determined at birth, and that all sports designations have to fall into one of three categories, based on the sex of the participating pupils, males, females, or both male and female. It specifically prohibits those who were assigned male at birth from "participating on an athletic team or in an athletic sport designated for females." It also allows both individual students and educational institutions to "bring action against" the school, governmental agency, athletic association, etc. if they feel that they have been deprived of the ability to participate in and win because of what they would consider to be a violation of this law. Senate Bill 377 is by and large the same, but for colleges and universities in the state.

The main argument for the bills, according to the Republican lawmakers who publicly support the bans, is that "transgender girls are stronger and faster and could injure and

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already in place, having switched to family planning and vasectomy services. Within 24 hours of announcing they would be resuming services on September 14, all of the appointments were filled, proving that the need remained despite the ban.

RESUMING ABORTION SERVICES

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin announced that they would resume abortion services in Madison and Milwaukee following a ruling by Dane County Judge Dian Schlipper, who allowed a lawsuit seeking to invalidate the 1849 law to proceed and ruled that “She did not believe the law in question bans consensual abortions,” according to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. The ruling came as a response to a motion to dismiss the lawsuit from Sheboygan District Attorney Joel Urmanski, who argued that the question of legalizing abortion in Wisconsin should fall to the legislature. According to the *Journal Sentinel*, “Schlipper in her order rejecting Urmanski’s argument said doctors deserve an answer to which abortion-related state law they should follow now that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, putting back into effect laws in Wisconsin that were dormant under the 50-year decision.” The lawsuit, filed by Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul and Governor Tony Evers shortly after the *Dobbs* decision came down from the federal Supreme Court, would invalidate the 1849 law in favor of laws passed more recently that restricted, but did not outright ban, abortion in the state.

With 22 health centers around the state, only three provided abortions: Madison, Milwaukee, and Sheboygan. In Sheboygan, staff physician coverage restrictions make it so the center can provide abortion through medication only. “Even though abortion was legal, it wasn’t accessible,” Atkinson said. She continued that she and the organization are committed not only to protecting the right to abortion for everyone but also fighting the restrictions—both on the clinics and on those who are seeking abortions—to expand access to as many people in need as possible.

LGBTQ CULTURAL COMPETENCE

In a political climate where so many in the queer community are fighting for their right to body autonomy, like trans, intersex, non-binary, and everyone with a uterus, abortion access is a critical need. Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin as an organization seeks to expand access to all health care, especially reproductive health care, for those who identify as LGBTQIA, and does not turn anyone away for lack of funds or insurance. “If we think about social inequities that the queer community faces, like poverty, discrimination in housing, and medical care, they are all cumulatively related to health outcomes,” Tanya Atkinson said when asked about how abortion access specifically relates to the queer community in Wisconsin. She continued, saying that her team is trained to be inclusive as human beings, and to provide care across the spectrum,” with particular emphasis on pronouns and body parts, and the ways in which those can differ from person to person.

She continued, saying that her team is trained to be inclusive as human beings, and to provide care across the spectrum,” with particular emphasis on pronouns and body parts, and the ways in which those can differ from person to person.

The resumption of abortions and the lawsuit brought by Kaul and Evers making its way through the legal system, presumably on its way to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, where progressives have a majority after the election of Justice Janet Protasiewicz, is an important step toward the protection of body autonomy in a state where the legislature held hearings for three weeks in a row regarding access to gender-affirming care and sports for trans kids and young adults. While access has temporarily been granted, the future of abortion services remains in limbo, with different sides arguing that different laws should take precedent. The conservatives want to keep the antiquated law and argue that it outlaws all abortions in the state. Progressives say that the 20-week restriction law that was passed by Republican Governor Scott Walker in 2015 should take precedence. Both heavily restrict access for people who need reproductive care in Wisconsin, and even the 20-week ban would create unacceptable barriers for many.

While conservative politicians use arcane bills that restrict or outright ban access to both abortion and gender-affirming care to fire up their extreme rightwing bases, it’s important for the queer community to come together to vigorously oppose all restrictions to body autonomy. All of these bills seek to perpetuate the dangerous idea that there are segments of the population who are beneath others, and that those people should remain quiet and out of sight. By reopening access in Wisconsin to abortion services, as well as continuing to provide access to other medical services, like gender-affirming treatment, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin has rebuked these attempts and driven forward the fight for autonomy and agency for all. ■

take scholarships from the athletes they’d be competing with unless restrictions are passed,” according to the *Associated Press*. They quoted Rep. Janel Brandtjen as saying, “We want to make sure women’s sports have a chance in hell to be able to compete after all the training, all the workouts, all the sacrifice.” Rep. Barbara Dittrich, the chief sponsor of the bill in the Assembly, admitted that she only knows of six K–12 transgender athletes in Wisconsin.



Dittrich

With only six people in the state that would suffer restrictions because of these bills, it does beg the question of why lawmakers are spending the time and resources to push these bills forward. In a move that mirrors similarly unnecessary and discriminatory bills in many other states, this move appears to be entirely to rile up the conservative base, who have now identified trans and gender nonconforming people as their current boogeyman, as the 2024 election year draws nearer.

Progressive opponents to the sports bans call these bills a harmful singling out of a very small population of students, and can lead to bullying and the student’s inability to participate in any sports. In a group of people already isolated and at risk for poor mental health, this singling out is dangerous.

THE GUISE OF PROTECTION

While the above bills garnered lots of criticism and debate, the large majority of the coverage on the current trio of bills making their way to Governor Evers’s desk has been focused on Assembly Bill 465, which seeks to prohibit minor trans kids from accessing gender-affirming medical care. Introduced by Rep. Allen, a Republican representing district 97, the bill “prohibits health care providers from engaging in, causing the engagement in, or making referrals for, certain medical intervention practices upon an individual under 18 years of age if done for the purpose of changing the minor’s body to correspond to a sex that is discordant with the minor’s biological sex.” It continues with a requirement that any medical professional who has violated this bill be subject to the revocation of their medical license or certificate.



Allen



Brandtjen



Fair Wisconsin delivering stacks of written testimony against the proposed legislation.

“Trans kids are not considering suicide because of who they are, but who we are,” added Rep. Clancy in his testimony that included personal experience of his son. In that same hearing, a 12-year-old trans boy, with the support of his parents, shared his experience of being shut down emotionally, and considering suicide, until he came out to his parents and accessed gender-affirming care.

In the packed public hearing on this bill, Allen claimed, despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, that the science on allowing minors to access gender-affirming medical care, like puberty blockers, is not yet settled, and that those who give these treatments are “experimenting on children.” He continued by clarifying that this bill would not affect adults from accessing similar medical care, and would not stop minors from socially transitioning. Other supporters accused medical professionals of pressuring kids and parents into irreversible medical intervention, using the threat of suicide to get parents to acquiesce to procedures they would not otherwise allow.

The opposition to Assembly Bill 465 refutes all of those claims, citing the Trevor Project’s statistics on mental health, suicide, and suicidal ideation of LGBTQ youth, and trans youth in particular, to show that “transgender and nonbinary youth were 2 to 2.5 times as likely to experience depressive symptoms, seriously consider suicide, and attempt suicide compared to their cisgender LGBTQ peers.” On their website outlining the findings of various studies, the Trevor Project continues, “Gender-affirming medical care, such as hormone therapy, is associated with positive mental health outcomes including showing promise for reducing suicide risk. A 2021 peer-reviewed study by

The Trevor Project’s researchers, published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, found that gender-affirming hormone therapy is significantly related to lower rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among transgender and nonbinary youth.”

PBS.org sites that in Wisconsin, only two groups have registered their support: A Catholic conference and the conservative Wisconsin Family Action, while two dozen groups have registered against the ban, “including Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin and other health care providers, the Medical College of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association.” Brian Michael, COO of Mental Health America of Wisconsin, stated during the well-attended public hearing that most trans people know that they are trans when they are a teenager, and that this bill and those that are similar would dissuade trans kids from coming out. He continued that 8/10 of adults who live as a gender that is different from the one assigned at birth have a greater quality of life, and that the bills are “legislating based on fear.” He also noted that while these bills are unlikely to become bills, suicide and mental health hotlines see a big jump in calls when they are even introduced.

“Trans kids are not considering suicide because of who they are, but who we are,” added Rep. Clancy, a Democrat, in his testimony that included personal experience of his son. In that same hearing, a 12-year-old trans boy, with the support of his parents, shared his experience of being shut down emotionally, and considering suicide, until he came out to his parents and accessed gender-affirming care. “You shouldn’t make laws without hearing from the people who are directly impacted,” he concluded.

DISPARATE IMPACTS

Kaleb Her of Freedom, Inc., a local advocacy group for people of color in Madison, spoke out against the bills in a comment to *Our Lives*, “Black and HMOob people have a huge health disparity rate. We struggle with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, mental health, and war trauma. Instead of addressing these health disparities, the state is trying to put a medical ban on gender-affirming care. These health disparities are results of the state not investing in the well-being of Black and HMOob people. Bills like AB 465, AB 377, AB 378, and the rest of the 500+ anti-trans bills in the nation are part of an effort to further marginalize our people and institutionalize hatred towards trans people.” They



Her



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continued, "I've been providing advocacy to Black and Southeast Asian LGBTQI+ folks in Dane County for years now, and when working with specifically trans folks, there were many barriers and hardships. Some of the biggest trends I saw were folks not being able to find stable housing, financial stability, and even getting their basic needs met. It is contradictory that our elected officials who are responsible for addressing health and education needs, are putting a ban on trans athletes and medical care when we have such high health disparity rates and are continuously heavily surveilled, policed, and pushed out not only in public spaces but even our own homes."

For his part, Governor Evers has come out publicly and strongly against these bills, saying that "not one of them will become law in this state." Evers has been a staunch supporter of LGBTQ rights in Wisconsin since his election, and is the first Governor of the state to fly a pride flag over the state capitol during June, and in 2023 flew the progress pride flag. In a speech during the 2023 flag raising ceremony,

he beseeched lawmakers across the country to stop passing harmful bills, stating that their actions matter. "Evers has pledged to 'veto any bill that makes Wisconsin a less welcoming, less inclusive, and less safe place' for LGBTQ+ people," according to Advocate.com.

As noted earlier, these bills specifically target kids, youth, and young adults in college, but the GOP has no intention, despite their denial, of stopping there. Leaked emails from other representatives in other states where similar, almost identical bills are being introduced—and many are becoming laws—show a roadmap to use these wins as stepping stones to discriminate against trans people as a whole. As of this writing, Republican lawmakers have introduced new anti-trans legislation for the third week in a row, this time targeting trans incarcerated individuals. Keep an eye on what is going through the legislature, and watch out for that gradual encroachment that they will certainly try over the coming years to silence and outlaw trans and non-binary people from existing. We can't let that happen. ■



LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

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

GENERAL NEWS

Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.

ACLU WISCONSIN is now providing "Know Your Rights" training in Milwaukee. This community training program aims to combat persistent racial disparities in Milwaukee's criminal legal system by empowering Black youth, and other historically marginalized communities, to exercise their rights and reduce risk to themselves when interacting with law enforcement. Organizations can register to host a training at aclu-wi.org.

COURAGE MKE held a sold out annual gala on November 3 at the Mitchell Park Domes to raise funds for LGBTQ+ youth.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT has re-launched their Milwaukee-based Anti-Violence Program with

the support of Advocate Andrew McKee. Having a Milwaukee-based advocate enables D&R to better support LGBTQ survivors in southeastern Wisconsin and statewide. If you want to talk to an LGBTQ anti-violence advocate at D&R who can help, please call or text the non-emergency LGBTQ Anti-Violence Resource Line at (414) 856-LGBT (5428) for family, friends, and survivors of intimate partner, sexual, or hate violence. This is not a 24-hour hotline. A call will be returned to you within 24 hours on weekdays and varying hours on weekends.

LGBT CENTER OF SE WISCONSIN will be conducting their first community needs assessment. With the assistance of Payne & Frazier Consultants, they will be gathering information from up to 1,000 people in SE Wisconsin and beyond. Check your email and social media, and be ready to share your thoughts, experiences, needs, and wish lists for the Center.



OutReach receives a donation of \$300,000 from UW Health.

LOUD 'N UNCHAINED THEATER CO. is hosting a series of virtual Krip writing workshops on Wednesdays this November hosted by T Banks.

MADISON GAY HOCKEY ASSOCIATION spoke out in October against the NHL's recent decision to ban players from wearing Pride jerseys or using Pride tape on their sticks.

MADISON MINOTAURS remained undefeated throughout their fall season.

MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER is launching a peer-to-peer support group for Intersex individuals. This will be a space to hear and be heard providing a shared pool of knowledge, identity, common interest, vision, and mission.

OUTREACH LGBTQ+ CENTER celebrates 50 years of operation this November.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF WI is announcing that medications used to prevent HIV infection, PrEP and PEP, are now available at health centers across the state. Patients can be seen in-person or over telemedicine for PrEP and PEP services. Both medications will be stocked in all PPWI health centers, so patients can pick up the medication from the health center or have a prescription sent to their pharmacy. Patients who wish to learn more about accessing care at Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, or who would like to schedule an appointment, can do so at ppwi.org.

TRANS LAW HELP WISCONSIN is seeking volunteers who want to support Trans* rights in Wisconsin. There are one-time and ongoing opportunities in operations, volunteer management, administration, finance, and other areas for those who have time and skills to share.

METHODOLOGY | Our Lives reaches out to area LGBTQ+ organizations to seek information for inclusion in this section. We also gather information from newsletters and social media put out by the various organizations. If your LGBTQ+ organization would like to be included in these updates, please reach out to us directly at contact@ourlivesmadison.com.

AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

Special thanks for those who do good.

OUTREACH LGBTQ+ CENTER received a generous donation of \$300,000 from UW Health to help their work supporting the community.

WI LGBT CHAMBER announced the winners of its 2023 Business Awards for contributions to building the LGBTQ and allied business community:

- **Corporate Partner of the Year:** Kohler
- **LGBTQ Business of the Year:** The Foster Lane
- **Allied Business of the Year:** Ollie's
- **Nonprofit Organization of the Year:** Rainbow Alliance Advocacy
- **Business Resource Group of the Year:** Molson Coors' L.A.G.E.R. (LGBTQ+ & Allies Group Employee Resources)
- **John Ross Pruess Business Leader of the Year:** Doug Wetzel of Ashton North LLC
- **Advocate of the Year:** Vince Tripi

WISCONSIN LEATHER PRIDE is proud to announce the winners of the Wisconsin Leather Pride 2024 contest, held October 21 at FIVE Nightclub. Four titles were run, with one contestant each. Two contestants made the minimum number of points to earn their titles. We congratulate Pup Delta, Wisconsin Pet 2024 and Anubis, Wisconsin Bear 2024.

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.

ENCORE STUDIO is sad to announce the loss of one of their Artistic Associates, **Liam McCarty-Dick**. Liam attended Monona Grove high



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school before attending Lawrence University to study music. His work as an actor/artistic associate and direct support professional with the Encore Studio for the Performing Arts gave him tremendous satisfaction, fulfillment, and joy.

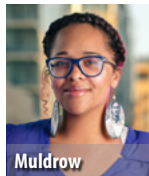
GSAFE has named **Tyrone Creech, Jr.** as their new Associate Director of Diversity Equity and Inclusion. Tyrone has worked with GSAFE as an adult mentor for more than four years, being a staple at the Leadership Training Institute camp that is held every year.

VIVENT HEALTH has appointed **Brandon Hill**, PhD, who was featured on our November 2022 cover, their new President and CEO. He previously served as the interim President and CEO while the board conducted a comprehensive search.



Hill

WISCONSIN ABORTION FUND has expanded operations and hired former co-director of GSAFE (and current Madison school board member) **Ali Muldrow** as their first executive director. In a statement to the Isthmus, WMF Board President Cynthia Lin described her as a perfect choice for the position. The organization is also looking to hire an operations manager for book-keeping and grant management.



Muldrow

WISCONSIN LEATHER PRIDE owner/producers Sir Nate and pup Cyon announced that Producers **Girl Becky** and **Daddy Sparkie** will be taking over full ownership of the Wisconsin Leather Pride Weekend. Being members of the local community, they provided extensive support to make this weekend happen over the last two years. Girl Becky and Daddy Sparkie affirmed their commitment to ensuring the contest remains a radically inclusive event.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in.

STAGEQ November 3-18 "The Secretaries" A Satiric Comedy is a sustained, amusing look at the fine line between aggression and assertive-

ness. It will be shown at the Bartell Community Theatre (\$15-45).

LOUD 'N UNCHAINED THEATER CO. November 17 LNU will host the EP release of Basal Jones titled "Quest" at Robinia Courtyard with guest performances by Chakari Daezhare, GoddessN-acole, and MC Sunshine Raynebow, and music by DJ Femme Noir (\$10).

MADISON MINOTAURS November 18 They will hold their annual drag show, Jocks in Frocks, at FIVE Nightclub to benefit GSAFE. (\$5)

LGBT CENTER OF SE WISCONSIN November 20 The Center will host a hybrid event for Trans Day of Remembrance to commemorate lives lost due to violence, bigotry, and systemic oppression while also focusing on resilience and empowerment within the trans community.

GSAFE November 28-December 4 The 2023 Quilt and Fiber Art Auction "In Rainbowland" will be held online. As the days get shorter and temperatures start to dip, GSAFE wants to help you get cozy while supporting our LGBTQ+ youth.

FORGE November 30 Trans Survivor Toolkit Listening Session Report Back Webinar: FORGE has been conducting Listening Sessions with trans/nonbinary survivors, community members, service providers, and allied professionals to inform a comprehensive, culturally responsive Toolkit. In this report, FORGE will share the process of coordinating more than 25 Listening Sessions and some of the key findings and emerging themes. Participants can ask questions and respond to the information.

THE HOUSE URBAN ARTS INITIATIVE December 2 a 20th Anniversary Showcase will be held at MYArts Starlight Theater.

PERFECT HARMONY CHORUS December 1 & 3 Perfect Harmony presents their winter season concert, "Winter's Harmony." In these tumultuous times in the wider world and within the LGBTQ+ community, Perfect Harmony hopes this repertoire can be a salve amid the snow and the cold (\$30).

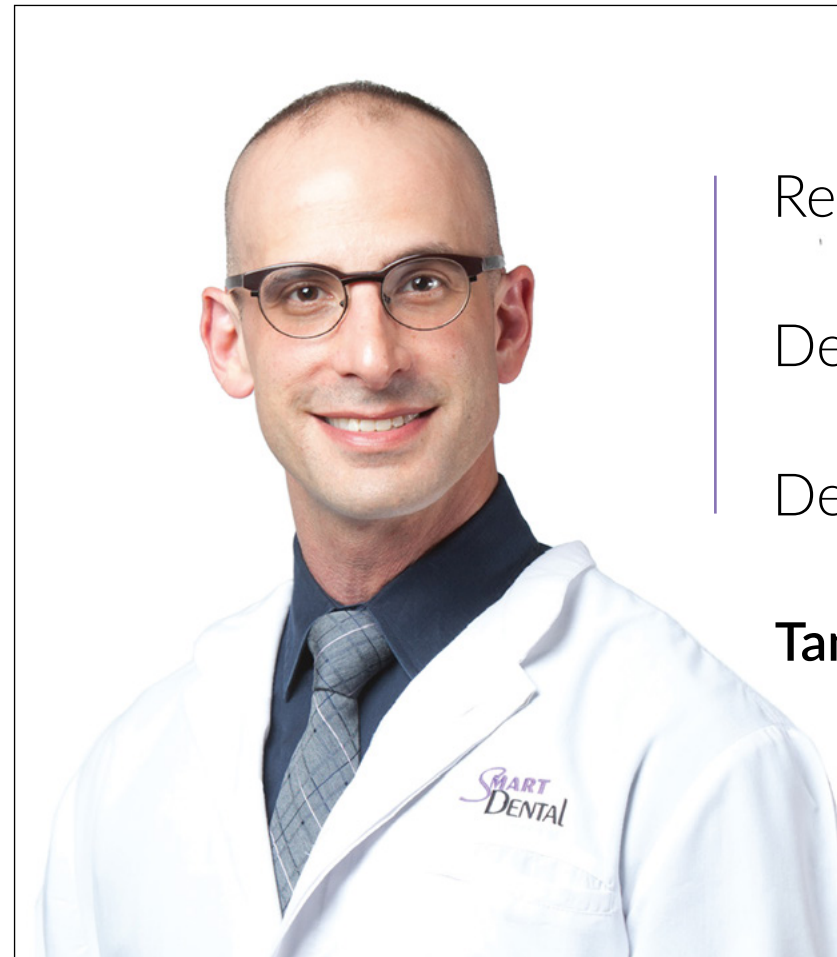
OUR VOICE MILWAUKEE December 9 & 10 Save the date for this winter season concert. ■

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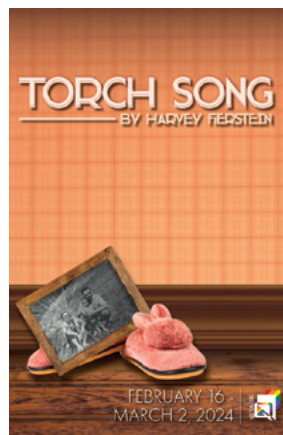
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ARTS THEATER THIRD SPACE

Queer Community Theater

StageQ's James Van Abel gives us a season preview and behind-the-scenes peek as well as an appeal to community members to get involved.

SINCE 2001, we at StageQ have worked tirelessly in our mission to celebrate and advance queer representation through theater written by and about LGBTQ+ persons. So much more than just a source of entertainment, theater provides community, a space to feel seen and heard, a platform to tell one's story, and a temporary escape from the troubles of everyday life. As a queer-specific theater, StageQ also works to create a safe atmosphere where people are encouraged to show up as their full, authentic selves.

SELECTING A SEASON

Selecting shows for a full season is an art in itself. Starting in the fall of every year, our StageQ Artistic Committee reads and reviews dozens of scripts to identify a lineup of shows that capture a range of queer identities and experiences. From there, the committee submits a proposal to the StageQ Board of Directors that describes the content, character breakdown, and potential benefits or risks of each show. After a vote of approval, the information is shared out at the annual Bartell Theatre season announcement celebration.

Selecting shows for a season is a fun, full-group effort and has been one of the best ways to get the local queer and theater communities involved with behind-the-scenes work at StageQ. We are currently in the process of

discussing next year's shows. If any person is interested in joining in, please email info@stageq.com or president@stageq.com.

OUR 23RD SEASON

THE SECRETARIES, November 3–18, 2023

Pretty Patty Johnson is thrilled to join the secretarial pool at the Cooney Lumber Mill under the iron-fisted leadership of sultry office manager Susan Curtis. But she soon begins to feel that all is not right—the enforced diet of Slim-Fast shakes, the strange clicking language between the girls, and the monthly disappearance of a lumberjack. By the time Patty discovers murder is part of these office killers' skill set, it's too late to turn back! In the guise of satiric exploitation-horror, *The Secretaries* takes an unflinching look at the warping cultural expectations of femininity.

TORCH SONG, February 16–March 2, 2024

In *Torch Song*—the two-act revival of Harvey Fierstein's award-winning *Torch Song Trilogy*—the life of Arnold Beckoff, a torch song-singer, Jewish drag queen living in New York City, is dramatized over the span of the late 1970s and 1980s. Told with a likable, human voice, *Torch Song* follows Arnold's odyssey to find happiness in New York. All he wants is a husband, a child, and a pair of bunny slippers that fit, but a visit from his overbear-

ing mother reminds him that he needs one thing more: Respect.

TWELFTH NIGHT, April 19–May 4, 2024

A classic tale that has been exploring gender lines and bisexuality for centuries, StageQ brings a non-binary perspective to Shakespeare's classic comedy of mistaken identity. After surviving a shipwreck and the loss of their brother, Viola must make a new life for themselves in Illyria, caught between a love-lorn duke and lovesick lady.

CAPITALQ THEATER FESTIVAL, June 21–23, 2024

For one weekend in June, StageQ takes over both Bartell Theatre stages to present brand new play readings, 10-minute shorts, and one-act plays by up-and-coming queer playwrights from around the country. Complete with free workshops and masterclasses on various aspects of theater, we will celebrate Pride Month the best way we know how: highlighting new, queer voices telling their stories.

NO SMALL ROLES

In addition to joining the Artistic Committee, there are actually several ways in which community members can get involved with our theater, whether on stage or off. And we need people to be involved now more than ever! In addition to managing our current season, we are working hard behind the scenes to incorporate more accessibility efforts into our shows (a steady sliding scale ticket model, sensory friendly shows, etc.).

Our mission states that we aim to celebrate and advance queer representation. It is important to us that we are true to our mission and make actual efforts to truly be representative and accessible to all in our community.

And while we've made some strong first steps in the work, we need our community's help to continue in our efforts.

From direct show work to behind-the-scenes operations, the various roles involved in StageQ include:

PRODUCERS Producers work alongside the Board of Directors and Artistic Committee recruit and coordinate production teams, including designers, directors, and the other roles listed below. Working behind-the-scenes, producers ensure that the show is fully staffed and ready to run.

DIRECTORS (& ASSISTANT DIRECTORS) Directors take their vision of a production and use it to guide the actors, designers, and technicians to bring a show from script to stage. Directors attend all rehearsals, and as such are one of the more involved roles in a show.

DESIGNERS (LIGHTS, SOUND, SET, COSTUMES) Designers work with the director to create a blueprint and gather materials for the show.

STAGE MANAGERS Stage Managers act as the right hand to the Director and are the heart to keeping the show organized. They attend all rehearsals, taking blocking or cuing notes and ensuring the rehearsal schedule is set. During the production, Stage Managers sit backstage or with technicians to call the show (provide cues and maintain the flow of the show).

TECH CREW (LIGHTS, SOUND) Tech Crew operate the light and sound equipment during the show. They join the production around tech week (the week leading up to opening night) and help the show come together.

SET BUILDERS Builders come together to construct sturdy sets. Whether it's coming in for a day of woodwork or painting, build days offer a creative outlet that is essential for a show with very little time commitment.

ACTORS Actors work with the Director, and occasionally Playwright, to take the characters from the page to the stage. Actors attend rehearsals and are cast through auditions.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS Board Members focus on behind-the-scenes operations. This includes fundraising, budget maintenance, community outreach, program development, rehearsal/storage space organization, and more. Board Members step in to fill in production team roles, as needed.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS Committee Members

provide voice and direction in the various subcommittees StageQ offers. Meetings usually occur 1–2 times per month, depending on need. StageQ subcommittees are:

- **Fundraising:** Find show/season sponsors, write grants, manage donor databases, and plan any fundraising-specific events.
- **Artistic:** Read prospective plays, create season proposals, and help recruit for production positions.
- **Festival:** In charge of aspects of CapitalQ Theater Festival including play submissions, play reading, call for directors, event planning, etc.

HOUSE MANAGERS, BOX OFFICE, USHERS, & BARTENDERS These roles operate the front-of-house during shows. Whether it's scanning and selling tickets, serving drinks, or welcoming audience members into the theater, there are plenty of one-night opportunities to support StageQ shows.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS We cannot have a show without a wonderful audience filling up seats!

DONORS & SPONSORS Ticket sales make up less than half of our revenue. We rely heavily on individual donors and company sponsors to keep our organization afloat. We offer varying benefits for sponsoring companies, depending

on sponsor level. Please reach out for more information!

THEATER COULD BE FOR YOU

We at StageQ very much believe that theater can be for everyone. Whether you've spent decades involved in productions or are just now considering for the first time a way to get involved, StageQ can be for you. If any of the above roles spoke to you, please reach out to either info@stageq.com or president@stageq.com. And, please come check out our amazing shows this season. For information go to stageq.org.

Because theater takes a lot of hard work and effort, we want to recognize and thank our current Board of Directors:

- James Van Abel** (he/him), Board President
james@stageq.com
- Shawn Padley** (he/they), Board Vice President
shawn@stageq.com
- Lu Meinders** (they/them), Board Secretary
lu@stageq.com
- Kalea Bicoy** (she/her), Board Treasurer
kalea@stageq.com
- Peter Turino** (he/him), Member At Large
pturino@stageq.com
- Brittany Loughman** (she/her), She's not technically a Board Member, but the absolute backbone of our Artistic Committee! ■

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Twins Cherry Pi Sugarbaker, and Apple Brown Betty Sugarbaker, along with fellow Camp Wannakiki Camp Counselor, Milwaukee's own Dear Ruthie.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT | DRAG | COMPETITION REALITY SHOW

CAMP It Up!

Camp Wannakiki on OUTTV is a popular drag competition reality show produced by Hamburger Mary's International and starring Milwaukee performer **Dear Ruthie**.

HAMBURGER MARY'S CHICAGO was opened as a franchise by Ashley and Brandon Wright, twin brothers, in 2006. The following year they partnered with the owner of the West Hollywood location to purchase the national franchise brand. The chain grew from four locations, to more than 20, opening international locations in Germany and Mexico. The brothers opened the Milwaukee outpost in 2011.

Following the Covid pandemic, some locations closed, but there are currently 13 Hamburger Mary's restaurants in operation, with one more set to open this year. As successful drag-based entrepreneurs, the twins and their alter egos Cherry Pi Sugarbaker (Brandon) and Apple Brown Betty Sugarbaker (Ashley), along with co-conspirator, Milwaukee performer Dear Ruthie wanted to change how drag culture is represented, and Camp Wannakiki was born!

Brandon told us, "RuPaul's Drag Race, was a huge international sensation, and was all about the glamorous side of drag, and there was Dragula, which celebrated the darker side of drag." Ashley said, "But there wasn't a program that celebrated the campy and funny side of the art form. That's the drag we have always enjoyed the most. So, we decided it was about time to give those artists a platform to showcase their talents."

Following appearances at their Chicago-based location hosting "Gong Show Karaoke" the twins somewhat retired the characters of Cherry and Betty, as business pressures of running an international franchise took over. When things settled and they had time to think, the idea of a drag reality show like Camp Wannakiki came roaring back. One of the first people they contacted was Dear Ruthie, who they knew would be the perfect foil to their Camp Director roles, as Camp Counselor Ruthie. "I loved the concept that paid respect to America's campy Kings and Queens. I eagerly accepted. There was a lot of brainstorming going on. It was the first season after all, and we had to plan out the concepts, activities, judging methodology, camp uniforms...everything. We all brought a lot of suggestions to the table," said Ruthie.

Now in its fifth cycle, the show has grown a loyal fan base, first on YouTube, and now on OutTV by subscription. The competition is open to ALL performers who have a campy bend in their drag. Camp Wannakiki can be summarized with this quote from Camp Counselor Ruthie, "We take 10 of the country's craziest, funniest, wackiest drag performers and dump them in a campground, where they must complete camp activities in full drag. It's like "RuPaul's Drag Race" meets "Survivor"...but without the budget."

Ruthie and the Sugarbaker twins knew they had struck a nerve, since the drag scene at the time it premiered seemed to compartmentalize people. The Camp Wannakiki show was the first to include bearded queens, non-binary queens, drag kings, and trans performers.

"Sending Campers on a Hike, which is what we call our elimination, is definitely the hardest part of the show," said Cherry.

"We know how much they want to do well and win. They have

poured their hearts and souls into their presentations. Then, to be told it wasn't as good as the others? It's devastating. For them and for us. Sadly, that is the nature of the beast. As much as we want to celebrate positivity, it is still a competition. We try to rip the bandage off as painlessly as possible," said Betty.

Even with the pain of leaving, the competitors are put through the rigors of "camp" assignments on every episode. "Season Four had the campers milking cows, boogie boarding on the lake, and performing stand-up comedy in front of a live audience. Season Five brought campers into a recording studio to record the song "Here for Camp," and selling cookies on a busy downtown street. I also really loved the zip-line activity on Season Three and the intense ropes course from Season Two," said Camp Counselor Ruthie.

With drag being in the news—day after day—as something less than wholesome, I must admit that this show is actually very wholesome!

There are Hamburger Mary's franchises located in (Ron DeSantis's) Florida which has put bans on drag performances in place. "We're very proud of our Orlando Hamburger Mary's franchise for standing up to the injustices in Florida. Our new location in Dallas has also been very active to prevent similar laws from being passed in Texas. And now there's talk in Ohio about enacting similar laws. Our Mary's in Toledo is ready to fight!" said Cherry.

But on a more serious note, Betty said, "Hopefully America will wake up from all this nonsense, but it is a stark reminder that elections have consequences. From reproductive rights being reversed to LGBTQ issues, we could have seen all this coming. But half the country isn't paying attention. Now more than ever, it is so important to vote. From local elections on up to national ones." ■

You can watch previous seasons of Camp Wannakiki on YouTube for free and purchase a subscription to seasons Four and Five on OUTTV.

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FAITH HEALTH & WELLNESS DANCING

The Embodied Faith of Arielle Juliette

As the human behind **Dance Life Studio**, **Arielle** is an example of how faith isn't exclusive to religion.

FAITH IS NOT A SYNONYM for religion. In speaking with Arielle Juliette (she/he), I learned that faith is too delightful to ever be exclusive to religion. Arielle is a teacher and the person who developed Dance Life Studio. She expresses faith as a form of joyous, queer, body-celebratory ministry that is completely separate from religion or any particular need to express a belief in a divine creator. Instead for Arielle, his faith is in finding her way—and teaching others to find their way—to radical delight in our full physicality in this world.

In this column, you are invited to stretch both your understandings of what defines faith and your understandings of body and gender. Arielle is bigender and uses she and he pronouns. For this article, I will alternate pronouns when referring to Arielle. Arielle also goes by Julian, but in her role as a faithful person in the teaching of dance and body, we will refer to him mostly by Arielle, while never dismissing Julian as also a real part of her transgender identity.

When Arielle was young, she could see little of any future for herself. He names religion, even at a distance, as a core of the pain he felt, saying, “My parents were both raised very Catholic,” and “my dad was even in seminary. They both broke away from that religion in their 20s.” Though Arielle was raised in a post-Christian household that was, “very New Age,” she sees that “Catholicism still heavily influenced their outlook on life.” Arielle says that “both my parents came from a culture of sexual shame, and that shame was passed down to me without even talking about it.”

Arielle did not find liberation in any organized religion. For Arielle, the path out came over time, from dance. “When I came to dance, I was a junior in high school, and that was kind of the peak of sexual violence in my childhood. Dance was what saved me.” Before he found his calling in dance, “I didn’t really want to live, because I didn’t feel like my body was my own anymore.” She recounts an incident when she told a teacher “about this group of boys who were just putting their hands all over me in any way they felt at any time” and asking the teacher for help, saying, “I need you to stop this. You’re the adult,” and her just being like, “Oh that’s just what it is to be a girl.” This moment, far too common for so many girls, compounded by incident after incident in Arielle’s life, is not an only moment in which Arielle’s body was stolen from him, it is simply a crystallization of the truth that “there were lots



of times where I was failed by individuals and also just society.”

Arielle shares that, “When I started dance, I was self mutilating, and I had cut a streak across my stomach. It was pretty deep. For the first nine months of belly dance class I didn’t tuck my shirt up because I didn’t want anybody to see.” Arielle describes himself as a young woman, “17 and so insecure.” But in dance, she was finding her people and her body. Arielle says, “I distinctly recall this moment of standing in class and being like, ‘I just want to be able to tuck up my shirt.’ That was the moment of me really coming out of the black hole of high school and adolescence.” In this desire, she “moved away from my body as a prison and a source of constant pain, a piece that I was always at war with, and I moved into, ‘OK! There’s some pretty cool things that my body can do and that I actually like.’” Arielle found that she didn’t “care as much about how it looks. I’m caring more about how it’s functioning, and how it’s working, and I have to take care of it.” Arielle’s belly healed. But all was not rosy. Even when he later started her own dance studio, Arielle says, “I was not at a peaceful place.

It was like a ceasefire.” Arielle still labored under the teachings of the world that if she could “get thin enough, you’ll accept yourself and everybody else will accept you. And yeah, I got that societal validation but I hated myself even more.”

Entering into the world of dance, Arielle didn’t at first perceive any call to teaching or the creation of safe spaces for others to grow into themselves as he was beginning to grow. In fact, in those early days, Arielle thought he would follow in his mother’s footsteps and “enrolled in nursing school because she was a nurse.” But her parents “didn’t do the whole, ‘you have to do something practical.’ I think they knew that wasn’t for me.” Her mother asked her, ‘Do you actually want to do this? I don’t think you do,’ and I was like, ‘No, you’re right! I want to dance!’”

As she began to learn, Arielle says, “I was a reluctant teacher. I wanted to travel the world and be a diva and, you know, headline workshops and all of that. But my teacher was like, ‘I don’t want to teach the beginning class anymore, so you’re going to do it.’” Of course, it wasn’t as simple as his teacher telling him to teach a class, and Arielle suddenly knowing everything was right. The move from reluctant teacher of a

class, to greater and greater responsibilities in her teacher’s studio, to opening her own studio in 2010, was a process. But even as she began that work, Arielle was feeling in performance “a masking and looking for gratification externally.” But in teaching, she found that “watching people grow and accept themselves in the same way that I had found was what stuck with me.” He says, “It started out as seeing the dancers grow as dancers and seeing, ‘Okay you couldn’t do this move a year ago, and a year later, look! You can do this and so much more that you would have never thought you’d have been able to do a year ago!’”

As she has developed Dance Life Studio over the years, she feels that the creation of a healing space “is a big part of why people come in here. They can feel the spirituality of the place.” How often do we think of dance as spirituality? How often do we understand dance as prayer to however you define the divine? In her work at Dance Life, Arielle has noted that there is “so much healing to be had here. There are so few sanctuaries in the world where you can just be embodied, and be comfortable in your body, and be comfortable with the people who are being embodied with you, and I think that’s a big part of the power.” Arielle sees now that, “I definitely attract people who have experienced a lot of trauma in their lives in a lot of the same ways that I have.”

As Dance Life Studio developed, Arielle notes that the first students who joined her in her studio “became the staff of Dance Life, and that is when it became a bigger thing. It wasn’t just me anymore, it was me and a community of people who believed in the studio honestly more than I ever did at the beginning.” This group of women, including Arielle’s mom, “became the power of the group. That’s what sustains it now is we’ve got people who have been on staff for years, and I think it’s because of believing in the studio as a greater whole. It’s more than just a dance studio.”

Arielle tells of many who were transformed: “There’s one student in particular I remember. Her very first day, this would have been close to 10 years ago, I remember looking at her and she was so shy! She was painfully reserved. You could tell she really wanted to dance, and she had it in her heart, but society had told her to never take up space in any way, ever. I could see her fighting to break out and remember looking at her and saying, ‘I want you to love this. I want you to feel like you are in community here.’” This student did find her way, and “to this day, she still comes every now and again and she’s active on our social media.” This student was just one of many that Arielle has seen. In teaching, “I started to get a keener awareness. I can feel when somebody walks in and I’m like, ‘Ah you’re one of us. You found your place.’ Because a lot of us who come in here and find a home here couldn’t really find a home elsewhere or struggle to fit in in other places. The people who really resonate with this as the church of Dance Life are the people who come in and are like ‘I’m home.’”

At Dance Life Studio, Arielle Juliette, in the company of women and non-binary people, has created a space of laughter and dance and something queerly holy, existing in its own space, separate from religion but wonderfully powerful. Arielle says that dance and teaching is “part of what, in my version of God, has inspired in me to give. The more I was able to fill up that cup, the more I was able to give that to other people.” In this space, the language on repeat is a language of uplift: “Every body is a dance body. If you are dancing and having fun, and you aren’t running into anyone, you’re doing it right.” ■



VICA-ETTA STEEL is a Vicar at St. John’s Lutheran where she preaches and does outreach. She also serves as a public chaplain at the Madison Farmers’ Market, at coffee shops, and on Tik-Tok. It is her joy to work with people across the spiritual spectrum who have returned to their queer family, Jewish, Pagan, Christian, to name a few, and the many atheist and agnostic people who taught her how to believe deeply in love, in community.

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New Health Chiropractic's New Chapter

Since purchasing **New Health Chiropractic** in 2017, **Dr. Rich Merrion** has grown the business by centering holistic, inclusive, and intentional care for our LGBTQ+ community.

GROWING UP IN INDIANA, Dr. Merrion was a high school athlete, swimmer, and diver. He attended the University of Indianapolis for two years before transferring to Indiana University. Although he started college as a pre-med student, he decided after his first four years to go a different route. He spent 11 years in the environmental industry before returning to school. After exploring several options, he chose to pursue chiropractor school based on his positive firsthand experiences as a student athlete.

After graduating in 2007, Dr. Merrion ran a chiropractic practice in Naperville, IL for over a decade. While his husband pursued a career opportunity in Wisconsin, Dr. Merrion pursued his own next chapter. He purchased his own practice in Fitchburg and opened New Health Chiropractic in November 2017. Over the years, the practice has grown to offer both integrative and regenerative medicine, and has a nurse practitioner and medical doctor on staff. Recently, Dr. Merrion relocated the business to a new and larger facility at 2690 Research Park Drive in Madison, which will facilitate future growth, service offerings, and expanded access to care.

As New Health Chiropractic & Integrated Healthcare celebrates its grand reopening, we spoke with Dr. Rich Merrion about his vision for holistic, inclusive, and intentional care.

WHAT DOES YOUR CARE MODEL OFFER THAT TRADITIONAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS MIGHT NOT?

The traditional health care system is set up to care for the sick. We have a great trauma care system. We have great life-saving systems for people who are severely injured or seriously ill. But they're not wellness care systems. They deal with the symptoms until the symptoms go away. I'm looking for the cause of the symptoms. I want to understand why this is happening. Through chiropractic care, we don't cure your pain by giving you a pain reliever and sending you home. We cure the pain by finding out what caused the pain. If it's pressure on a nerve, we try to alleviate that pressure. If it's a muscular or postural dysfunction, we look to cure that dysfunction. Traditional health care providers are just not prepared to offer anything more than surgery or medicine.

I also practice functional medicine, which is focused on what you're putting into your body. What foods are you eating? What supplements are you taking? Are you having digestive issues? For example, if you have acid reflux or GERD, traditional medicine will give you an acid blocking drug to relieve the symptom. But you're still producing too much or too little acid. So, I'll collaborate with that patient to find out what's causing this and what will correct it. What will cure the source of

the problem?

We believe in an approach that diagnoses, corrects, and maintains. We take our patients through a "pyramid of wellness." We always start at the bottom, which is chiropractic adjustments and exercise, to work on whatever the patient is facing. Sometimes, we move to the next level up, which offers other interventions like laser therapy, supplementation, and dietary changes to deal with a chronic issue. And the top tier is regenerative medicine, which might include a wide range of advanced circulatory, cellular, and healing therapies. As you work your way through these tiers, the care becomes more intensive and complex, and we do everything we can to resolve an issue that might become chronic if left untreated. Our new space will allow us to add massage therapists, acupuncturists, wellness coaches, and other caregivers to create a highly customized care plan.

WHAT'S THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTION YOU HEAR ABOUT INTEGRATIVE CARE?

When they first walk in, most customers just don't know all the things we can do for them. For instance, they don't understand that sciatic pain can be caused by more than just a blown disc in your back. They don't understand that decompression, steroid injections, and/or flexion distraction treatment can treat their issues. They read online that the only cure is surgical intervention, and they're resigned to the worst-case scenario. But physical therapists and chiropractors can do amazing things for them. I always tell people that we're going to do everything we can to eliminate the need for drugs or surgery. These huge interventional approaches come with many, many risks. So, if we can do the less risky, less costly options first, we can build out from there.

HOW DOES LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE CARE ELEVATE THE WELLNESS OF THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY?

I'm so glad you asked that question, because one of the things I prioritize in my practice is meeting people wherever they're at. Being able to share publicly that we are a gay-owned and operated business, and that my husband and I both work within the practice, is very liberating for me. I hope it can be inspiring for others as well. Putting that out there, up front, gives us the space to talk with everyone about their unique health care needs, wants, and struggles. It sets a precedence of honesty and transparency that might not exist in traditional health systems. I have a great relationship with my patients because we start with this foundation of truth. We're not perfect, we've fallen short a few times, and we haven't reached everyone every time. But if I can take the scariness out of health care, from a cultural perspective, it lifts one of the biggest barriers to care—and makes the other barriers seem less challenging. My clinic might offer something for everyone, but we might not be the right fit for everyone. I understand that completely. Our strength comes from offering a space for the LGBTQ community where they feel welcomed, recognized, and cared for.

HOW DO YOU CARE FOR YOURSELF AS A CAREGIVER?

One of the greatest things about my position is that I have access to so many amazing people. And I have a team of people that takes great care of me. I love what I do, but even I need to recharge my own batteries after caring for others all day. If you do nothing for yourself, your battery will burn out quickly. I see a chiropractor for regular adjustments. I see a massage therapist for stress relief. I have someone who does energy work with me. I eat healthy food. I stay physically active, lifting weights, playing volleyball, and visiting the gym. Doing all these things keeps me well. I'm not young anymore, but I still feel 25 years old most of the time.

WHAT'S ONE THING PEOPLE COULD DO TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF THEMSELVES?

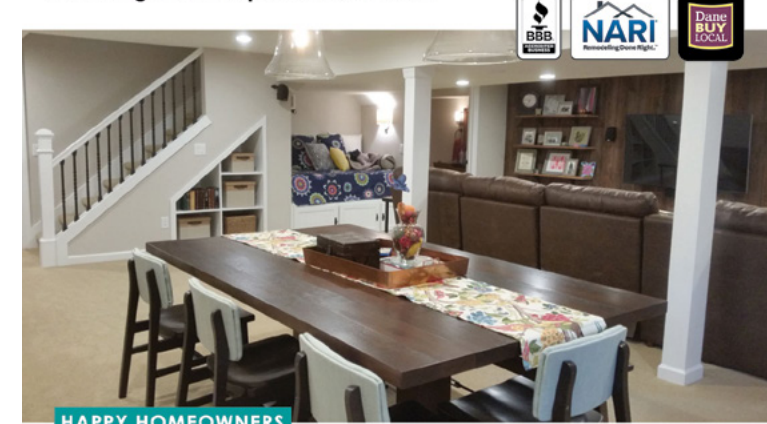
You don't have to spend a lot of money to be healthy. You don't have to spend a lot of time. You just need to listen to your body. Pain is normally the last thing that shows up when something is wrong. Health conditions often start as small annoyances that we ignore until they're serious issues. Take the time for self-care. Understand that stress can cause physical responses. Take care of those responses when you see them. Take five minutes a day to do something small that improves your body's condition: Drink more water, eat better food, take a little walk.

Five minutes. If I could get everybody to start doing that, their worlds would change in no time!

For more information, visit the New Health Chiropractic & Integrative Care website at newhealthmadison.com.

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ORGANIZERS CLUBS ART POP-UP

Gay Art Club

A Q&A with organizer **Elizabeth David MacIntyre** about this pop-up event spawned from a need for a communal space to create.

WHAT IS GAY ART CLUB, AND WHO ARE THE ORGANIZERS?

Gay Art Club is a happening and a call to practice. We are a collective of local LGBTQ+ interdisciplinary artists who gather at locations across the Madison area to take up space and make all kinds of art. My name is Elizabeth David MacIntyre, and I organize club meetings and curate the Instagram page

We meet at coffee shops and breweries around Madison twice weekly to practice our creativity and cultivate community among queer artists. This club has an expansive mindset about what a “club” is, what “art” can mean and what a “creative practice” looks like in real time.

Our Instagram account now connects more than 700 local artists in the Madison area and is still growing!

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR GAY ART CLUB COME FROM?

The idea came from a few places. Our first club meeting happened during the summer of 2022 when we were all emerging from our pandemic sanctuaries. I think we were all missing our chosen families and chosen connections. I certainly was because I was new to Madison and missing the community I found living in Minneapolis.

I was eager to make more friends and collaborate with other queer artists. Body doubling is an essential part of my creative practice. I was also inspired by the folx who organize Femme and Queer Skate Night and the Sappho's Secret dance parties. I borrowed some ideas about how to hold space from them, and I deeply admire the work they do.

More or less, I started telling the internet gays where I would be practicing every Sunday, and they found me. The response has been both humbling and thrilling. I am excited to see how far the idea can go, and I feel really grateful that it has come this far.



WHAT IS THE MEETING FORMAT?

Like Femme and Queer Skate Night, people come to meetings and engage with their practice wherever it is that day. That can look different for everyone. If an artist needs to sit with their practice, somebody to body double with, or just some good people watching, they come, make their little art nests, and mostly keep to themselves.

Our first meeting happened during the summer of 2022 when we were all emerging from our pandemic sanctuaries. I think we were all missing our chosen families and chosen connections.

Other folx come to collaborate, network, socialize, and get feedback on their work. That means the structure is always balancing itself, but the format is mostly constant: Sundays 12–3 p.m. at a coffee shop and Thursdays 6–9 p.m. at a brewery, every week.

HOW CAN PEOPLE JOIN IN?

Gay Art Club is on Instagram at @gay.artclub. If folx are interested in volunteering some time and energy toward cultivating or sustaining this space, slide into the DMs on Instagram! I would love to share this responsibility and joy with a few other administrators and as many ambassador artists as we can find.

WHAT ARE YOUR ONGOING PLANS FOR THE ORGANIZATION?

It would be exciting to put together a Gay Art Club Gallery Night and Open Mic. I see an evening where Madison's LGBTQ+ artists can celebrate their work with each other. There is art everywhere and a stage for our actors, writers, poets, performing artists, and musicians.

If anyone knows of a space that could hold that much queer joy, please let me know! ■

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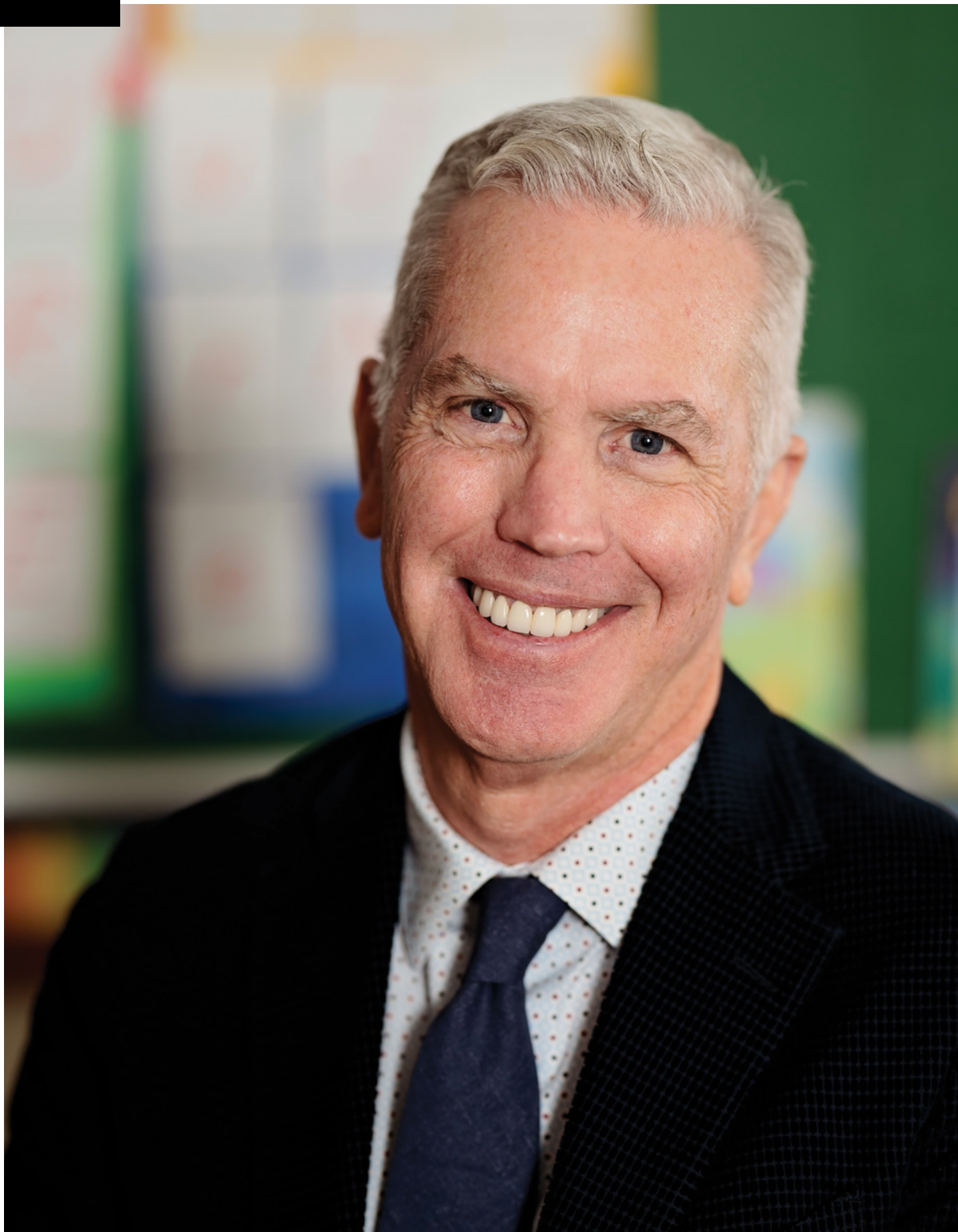
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A Lot to Learn

Mark Brooks, head of school at **Madison Country Day School**, once felt unsafe at school. Now he is committed to facilitating a safe and welcoming environment for students and educators.

EDUCATORS | LEADERSHIP | SCHOOLS

In 2020, at the height of the COVID pandemic, Mark Brooks became the head of school at Madison Country Day School. Before moving to Wisconsin, Mark served for a combined 15 years as the head of two different independent schools in Los Angeles. He was president of the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) Board of Trustees and a trustee of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). He's also a trustee of the Ahmanson Foundation and a member of the boards of The Principals' Center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Slingerland Literacy Institute. Prior to his career in education, Mark had a distinguished legal and leadership career in the technology and automotive industries.

RECENTLY, MADISON COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL capped off homecoming week with a dance at the Overture Center. Students, whether straight, gay, transgender, cis, or nonbinary, all celebrated together to the beats of a popular local DJ. I'm so proud MCDS high schoolers accept each other as they are.

When I was a student, I felt unsafe in school. Always.

FACING DISCRIMINATION AND DISCOURAGEMENT

I never found school very engaging. In elementary school, I was an outsider. I knew I was different. As I got a bit older, I still had a hard time claiming my place in school. In high school, I was elected student body president. But the principal of my school said I could not take on the role: gay students were not allowed to hold the office. That harsh message could have left me defeated, but it ended up inspiring me instead. The experience motivated me to work harder and outperform those around me, making it more difficult for those in positions of power to discriminate against me because I was gay.

Many years later, when I finally got the chance to become a head of school, I made it one of my goals to make sure that every child feels included, feels known, and feels they belong at my school. I think about how much more I would have learned if I actually felt safe at school. I think of the ways I would have been involved as a student if I had felt I belonged. I want to work to make that change.

When I graduated from high school, the most popular college major in the United States was education. I wanted to be an education major, too. But my mother, the original tiger mom, said absolutely not. She told me that I'd never make any money in education, and somebody in our family had to make some money. It was straightforward. I could go to law school or medical school. Those were the two options.

As a head of school, I've prioritized increasing teacher pay. I don't want others to be discouraged from a career in education because of money. Our son is a young teacher. I want him and everyone else who is called to the profession to be compensated for their talent, hard work,

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and commitment to their craft.

But at the time, I did what my mother told me to do: I became an attorney. I worked as a partner at a law firm and as the lead counsel for a major automobile company. All the while, I really wanted to be a teacher. So, when I found out that the auto company I worked for was planning to fund and start an alternative school, I jumped at the chance to help.

CATCHING A BREAK

I did legal work to help establish the new school, but mostly I loved to be on campus with the students. They came there because traditional schools had not worked out for them. This school was their last stop—they'd never had a fair break. The school we built helped those kids blossom. Over time, I could see how different they were. I could see how going to school at a place where they belonged allowed them to open up to learning.

By contrast, working in corporate America did not allow me to live fully. I spent so much of my life closeted. At the time, an openly gay person was not going to be promoted to the positions I held. It was exhausting to never talk about my life.

Eventually, I left the auto company and took a job as the general counsel for a dotcom startup. We were a software company, and, in those days, school technology was just taking off. We got permission from the company to equip a school with technology. We set up a full computer lab and every other imaginable tech device. But the faculty at the school weren't prepared to teach computer skills and put the tools we'd supplied to use. So, I volunteered to teach the technology class. And I just loved it.

The most amazing thing happened next: we sold the dotcom, and literally the same day—it was actually my birthday—a life-changing opportunity came to me, like a gift. I was at a concert with the head of school at my own son's school, the school where I'd been teaching technology. Since trading had closed for the day, I told her we had sold the dotcom company. I wanted to celebrate! She said, "Great. Then you can come run my school because I'm leaving. I'm done." She was retiring. The school had hired another person for her job, but at the last minute the new hire fell through. She told me the school really needed me. It

might shut down if it didn't have a leader.

I said, "What do I know about running a school?" It turned out I knew quite a lot—and I had a lot to learn.

TOO IMPORTANT TO FAIL

That night, my partner and I talked and talked about whether I could help the school. This school was the most diverse independent school west of the Mississippi. He urged me that the school was too important an institution to allow it to fail. In the end, I agreed. I told the school, "You know what? I'll do this for a year for you for a dollar." Literally, that was the deal.

In due course, I took part in an educational leadership program for mid-career training at Teachers College at Columbia University, and off I went. I ended up working at the school for 11 years. The job was demanding, but I loved it.

I did face challenges along the way. Earlier, when my partner and I had enrolled our son at the school, we were the first gay couple ever admitted there. We did not receive the warmest reception. They had no history of gay parents at the school, and some faculty and parents were uncomfortable. Indeed, when I became the head of school, some families left.

But when I became a head of school, I decided I was not going to hide who I was. I realized that the kids—especially the ones who were gay or questioning their sexuality or gender identity—needed a role model. I wanted to show all the students that a gay person can be successful, can lead a school. At the same time, I wanted to show that being gay is just one component of who you are.

Later, I served as head of school at another school in West Hollywood. I ran a \$100,000,000 capital campaign there. We knocked down the school and rebuilt it in four years. In 2020, the new school was completed, and I felt my work there was done. I planned to take a sabbatical. Soon, though, I realized my sabbatical, like so many other things, would be canceled by COVID.

LEADING AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

I got a call about a school that needed a new head of school in Madison, Wisconsin—Madison Country Day School. Years earlier, when I was a lawyer, I had tried a case in Beaver Dam. I spent my weekends staying on the square in Madison. I fondly remembered enjoying the lake at the Union Terrace.

But when I became a head of school, I decided I was not going to hide who I was. I realized that the kids—especially the ones who were gay or questioning their sexuality or gender identity—needed a role model.

I learned that MCDS had an International Baccalaureate (IB) high school program and was working toward becoming a full continuum IB school. The IB program is recognized around the world as the gold standard in education, one that develops caring, inquisitive, self-motivated learners. That piqued my interest. One of the schools where I had worked had a history of enrolling the children of families employed by different countries' embassies, and many of those students came to our school from IB programs. These students would arrive ready to go—they were curious learners, and they were globally minded. I wanted to take on the challenge of getting MCDS authorized as an IB school for all grade levels.

My immediate focus upon coming to MCDS was guiding the school

through COVID. Since then, we've increased teacher salaries and benefits. I am grateful that the MCDS community has embraced increasing teacher pay, which has resulted in retaining and hiring the most talented educators. Thanks to those gifted educators, Madison Country Day School is now officially Wisconsin's only independent pre-Kindergarten through grade twelve IB World School.

I've also worked on inclusion and belonging initiatives at MCDS, incorporating faculty and staff training with Welcoming Schools and GSAFE. Welcoming Schools, run by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, helps educate school employees about how to create LGBTQ+ inclusive schools, how to support transgender and nonbinary students, how to prevent bullying, and how to welcome all families. We also focused on how to make our workplace more inclusive and welcoming for LGBTQ+ colleagues. GSAFE, a local organization dedicated to creating just schools for LGBTQ+ youth, taught us about meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ students. I want to open our adults' eyes to what it feels like to walk these halls as an LGBTQ+ student.

We've been able to implement trainings like these because MCDS is an independent school. I'm an advocate for independent schools. Independent schools, by their nature, are able to do autonomously what's best for the students in their care. The leaders at independent schools are able to make decisions based on what's happening right there, on the ground, every day.

A CHALLENGING PATH TO HAPPINESS

At school, I try to be authentically who I am. I want every member of the school community to be able to do the same. I'm mindful that there are people who may feel uneasy that I am running their child's school. That's the cold, hard reality. At the same time, all students are safe here and able to be open with who they are. The students are supportive of their classmates and comfortable with this. For the straight students, I'm glad that they see me, a gay person, in a leadership role at school.

Madison is a welcoming space for me, as was Los Angeles, where I worked previously. But not all educators in our country are as fortunate as I am to work in places where they are welcomed as they are. I've served on the boards of the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). Both of those organizations wrestled with member schools discriminating against gay faculty, staff, and students.

Given the current political climate, it's challenging for young LGBTQ+ people to consider a career in education. In the last year, more rights have been taken away from LGBTQ+ people than in a very long time. It feels like your rights are slowly being eroded around you. And it's really scary—especially for students.

But I'm in education for the long game. Life changes, and I'm hopeful about the future. So, I would encourage young LGBTQ+ people to pursue work in teaching or school administration. We also need people who've already begun their careers, for example, people with business experience or social work experience. Being an educator has been the most fulfilling work of my life. I'm so lucky to be able to help the kids and help the faculty and staff, the people who are making the magic happen in the classroom.

Most importantly, I would encourage LGBTQ+ people to go into education because our kids need those role models desperately. When I was a student, I had no gay role models at school, and I often felt excluded. No young person should have to experience what I experienced.

I want all students to feel safe and welcomed at school. Students flourish when they feel they belong. That's why I do the work I do. I want to wrestle with problems. I want to create solutions for students. Doing so gives me meaning and purpose. It's exhausting, but it makes me happy. ■

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Where Health & Justice Partner

The **Center for Patient Partnership** has launched a **dedicated LGBTQ+ health justice program** to support and advocate for LGBTQ+ patients navigating insurance challenges.

HEALTH & WELLNESS | HEALTH INSURANCE | GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, Meg Gaines, a criminal justice attorney and lesbian, suffered from ovarian cancer. She found her skills as an attorney useful for navigating the insurance challenges of her diagnosis, and wanted to offer those skills to others with similar needs. The Center for Patient Partnership [CPP] was founded as a clinic within the UW-Madison Law School to educate graduate students through service learning. For example, they helped cancer patients with much-needed health advocacy. The group was rooted in the legal principle that everybody deserves due process and representation. Soon, the Center's publicity soared. In 2005, Gaines was featured in the New York Times and other publications, focusing on her groundbreaking new project. The Center seemed poised to help break through the notoriously complex legal-health system in the United States.

In part, the center's activities revolved around insurance appeals, a process necessary for appropriate health care in a system that limits health services for millions of people. CPP connects the classroom to the community, and online, providing a unique opportunity for service learning in health advocacy at UW. They directly help people in need of advocacy within the notoriously complicated U.S. health care system, and then share those stories to advocate for change. Sarah says the program hopes to educate future leaders in insurance and the medical field to make better decisions regarding their health contracts.

With rainbows pinned to the gray cloth walls, a large table at the center of the room, the Center within the UW Extension building is a vibrant and welcoming space. Sarah Davis, the current director of CPP, and a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself, is hopeful for the future. She hopes to use the Center's advocacy experience to advocate for systemic change. Like a good portion of the Center's activities, a dedicated LGBTQ Health Justice Coordinator position will be funded by so-called "soft money," or funding not obtained directly through the department nor the university. Toward this goal, Sarah says they had a great start for fundraising the new program at Delta Beer Lab, a queer-owned brewery, over the summer. Still, they are short of their funding goals and could use some help to achieve them. Sarah feels the inspiration of queer health advocacy of the past—particularly the organizing of the community to help one another and advocate for better health options during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, with groups like ACT UP. She hopes her work and the work of the Center continues in that legacy. Patients come for help in difficult times of their lives, and the ability for the advocates to hear them out and support them socially is invaluable for building trust when dealing with serious health difficulties.

PARTNERSHIP PROCESSES AND CHANGING PATIENT NEEDS

The Center for Patient Partnerships has a standard process for build-



ing those partnerships. Once a person in need contacts CPP, somebody there will reach out by phone within three days to learn about the patient's needs and listen to their experiences and difficulties obtaining necessary health care. From there, the patients are informed about the program and its goals to educate the next generation of professionals through these freely available health advocacy options. Most of the patients appreciate having this resource available for free in their time of need.

The Center uses those experiences with patients to drive feedback and improve future advocacy partnerships. Those direct advocacy experiences are then put to work to help advocate for systemic solutions to health care problems. Like all service learning, there is a balance between the needs of participating graduate students to learn from their experience, as well as the needs of the patients from the community to benefit from CPP's advocacy. The partnership between the university and the community forms the heart of CPP's work.

The needs of patients have changed dramatically over the years. While some patients are provided additional support resources, others are left without those resources. Recent struggles include the Medicaid rollover this year that will cause countless people to lose health care in the aftermath of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Rural areas also face challenges since medical facilities tend to be located in cities or other heavily populated areas. This geographic disparity leaves much of rural areas without access to life-saving health options, and important advocacy help. The advocates and their supervisors can't do it all, and they

cannot help everyone. Waitlists and different advocacy approaches are used to ameliorate this overwhelming need. The Center does give options to help folks advocate for themselves within the sometimes Kafkaesque health care contracts. Through these processes, graduate students become familiar with members of the community at large and gain crucial insight into the disparity in legal-medical work and the deep value of advocacy. CPP has experience working with insurance and health providers and understands how to communicate medical necessity to them. Sometimes these arguments can be dehumanizing, or they do not work; but other times they do, and their processes are always improving. Empathy and listening are at the core of what CPP practices and teaches.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SERVICE LEARNING

One student, Patrick Miller, spent 2022–2023 with CPP providing a diverse array of health advocacy, community support, and insurance appeals. Patrick helped various folks with gender-affirming care and is part of the LGBTQ+ community. Sometimes, the clients felt trepidation in trusting a stranger with their health care, especially if they had had bad experiences with healthcare in the past. Much of the insurance appeals for trans folks comes down to properly communicating the medical necessity of gender-affirming care. Patrick says the central theme is to elevate people, listen, and practice grace and patience. There are systemic needs, but also social needs when these clients can be in such a vulnerable place. He connected with ethics committees and providers to help get people the wide variety of care they might need. Sometimes, these clients are referred by UW Gender Services, and other times they are referred by social work groups.

Folks are passionate, and Patrick is hopeful about CPP getting more involved with the grassroots community of generally LGBTQ+ friendly Madison. He also notes the uncertainty in the current political and social

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atmosphere, the intense backlash to queer and trans people and efforts to politicize an individual's health decisions. He worries politicians are trying to make decisions that should be in the hands of a child, their parent(s), and their doctors. Some of this backlash, he reckons, is plain bigotry. This is about an individual's health care and not politics.

guy john halcón participated in CPP the summer before and during his second year of law school. He recalls helping a client navigate their insurance denial for gender-affirming care. He describes the work as "hands-on" and "active." guy came out as trans prior to attending law school, and needed to arrange his gender-affirming care around his classes and work schedule. As he sought top surgery, he notes that the Center was extremely accommodating and flexible. He had his own hardships navigating health care with an insurance denial later on, and worked with CPP with another law student to gain support in the process. guy was relieved to be able to vent and trust the folks involved enough to be vulnerable and open in sharing his struggles with insurance. His goal is to be an advocate for his own community and help give a trans person's input into the programming.

guy received experience with grant writing and helped explore programming early on in the process of imagining this new program. He says that the experience stuck with him, and he keeps in touch with the CPP. guy imagines a modern Wisconsin Idea that prioritizes equity, justice, and community, and sees CPP as a prime example of what the Wisconsin Idea could be.

OBSTACLES IN GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

The new Dedicated LGBTQ+ Health Justice Program, seeks to be responsive to the community and engage in the sort of medical-legal partnership that the Center is known for. This program comes as a response to the demonstrated need in the LGBTQ+ community of Wis-



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Sarah Davis (she/her), Curran Cauldwood (she/they), Sachin Gupte (he/him), guy halcon (he/him).

consin for skilled and dedicated advocacy in law and health. Notably, the goals involve queer and trans patients sharing their lived experiences with advocates to help them develop empathy and perspective in their work. Initially, the program looks to focus on the needs of transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive people receiving gender-affirming care in Wisconsin, with expanded goals to help the LGBTQ+ community in general. Gender-affirming care has especially notorious obstacles in advocacy, as experienced by myself and countless others in the community.

For context, I will dive into my own difficulties obtaining insurance coverage for my gender-affirming health care. A year or two ago, I was in desperate need of laser hair removal. This type of hair removal is common among trans women and trans femmes, and is a generally expensive treatment that takes multiple sessions to see results. My doctor, who has been treating me for gender dysphoria, told my insurance that this treatment was medically necessary. My insurance at the time disagreed. They told me that hair removal was never covered because it was always deemed cosmetic, and therefore not medically necessary. I then went on a demoralizing journey through countless phone calls receiving conflicting information, and no answers. They would get back to me, they would say.

Eventually, disheartened and suffering from dysphoria due to my lack of treatment, I paid for laser hair removal out of pocket with a credit card. My insurance that was supposed to take care of my medically necessary health care, instead, led me on a wild goose chase that did nothing but deprive me of that very same health care. I gave up battling with them over the phones because it seemed to be getting me nowhere, and I had a life to live, and health to take care of. Notably, I did not have an advocate to help with insurance hurdles. They wanted me to give up, Sarah tells me. They run me through the wringer with countless calls and conflicting information because they would rather not pay for my gender-affirming care if they can wiggle out of it.

A DEDICATED LGBTQ+ PROGRAM

CPP has existing partnerships with UW Health Gender Services Clinic (GSC), UW-Madison's Department of Family Medicine and Community Health (DFMCH)'s LGBTQ+ National Fellowship program, and the DFMCH Office of Community Health. Given their previous experience building university-community partnerships, GSC reached out to urge CPP to address trans health rights cases. GSC also acts as a major referrer of LGBTQ+ patients to CPP.

The Center is looking for a leader in this new program, known by the

working title of LGBTQ+ Health Justice Coordinator, and the position was posted for applications in early October. This individual will be responsible for gathering community input and research-based evidence to drive the policies of the program. They will also recruit, train, and supervise students who act as advocates to partner with patients to improve their experience with health care within the LGBTQ+ community. Since this program will encompass social work, public health, gender studies, and legal and justice work, this sort of qualification and experience is required for the position. In response, CPP started a pilot program for advocacy with gender-expansive patients and insurance denials, such that about 40% of their caseload now consists of those cases. The need from our community for this sort of partnership is very clear.

Their advocacy work with LGBTQ+ patients includes both direct and systemic advocacy. Direct advocacy encompasses helping the patient with care, access, insurance options, or legal issues. While system advocacy involves advocating for improvement for LGBTQ+ patients in general, gathering policy research, and communicating with state regulators.

The Center for Patient Partnership has a history of expertise in building advocacy relationships with patients in difficult situations, and their new dedicated LGBTQ+ health justice program seeks to address a serious need in this uncertain sociopolitical climate. Having the support of an advocate can mean all the difference for folks in tough health situations trying to get a fair shake from their insurance company and health provider. CPP hopes to develop new insight into the LGBTQ+ community, in particular, as they tackle patients' difficulties around gender-affirming care. They are building on a solid foundation of knowledge and community outreach to educate the next generation of legal, health, and social work professionals. Now, they hope to provide the LGBTQ+ community of Wisconsin the dedicated health justice coordination that we desperately need. ■

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LITERATURE HISTORY CHICAGO

Owen Keehnen's *Man's Country: More Than a Bathhouse*

Tour the golden age of gay liberation with **Michail Takach**, revisiting a long-hallowed landmark on the release of this historic volume.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2017, was a night to remember.

After 44 years, Man's Country (5017 N. Clark St. in Chicago) hosted the first of two closing parties. And the old dame went out in style with Loose Ends, a 12-hour, all-inclusive "disco rave" featuring a three-story funhouse, rotating DJs, and drag performances from Divine (Lucy Stooie), Bette Midler (Toyota Corona), and Grace Jones (Coco Iman).

And, of course, a free clothes check.

MY FIRST & LAST TIME

That night was my first time inside Man's Country. Although I'd been aware of its existence for decades, I never really had any reason to visit. And by 2017, it was nobody's favorite. Truth be told, Generation X grew up not during the heights of gay liberation, but during the panic and paranoia of the AIDS crisis. As a result, we've been robbed of the social value, spiritual meaning, and cultural legacy of the bathhouse.

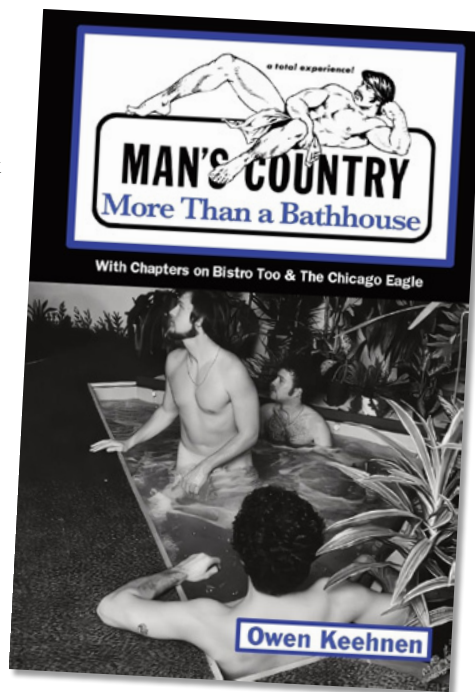
And what a legacy it was. Steam baths have been gay havens for over a century. Milwaukee's Turkish Steam, located in a former Plankinton Mansion at 4th and Michigan, closed in 1902 due to "morals violations." The city's seven neighborhood natatoriums were also legendary cruising grounds on men-only days. Throughout the 1970s, Milwaukee had four fully functional gay bathhouses. They were, unfortunately, targeted by the Milwaukee Vice Squad with brutal and oppressive raids.

By the 1980s, bathhouses around the country were demonized as "super-spreader" sites, shuttered by public health officials, and entirely extinguished nationwide.

As a result, it's difficult for us to imagine a time when bathhouses were a place where an entire hierarchy of needs was met several nights a week. We've never known a communal one-stop shop that served up drinks, meals, TV viewing, movie nights, contests, drag shows, concerts, dance parties, and various forms of exercise—or the liberty of socializing with strangers in ill-fitting bath towels. But on that November night, it suddenly all made perfect sense for me, for the first time.

The freedom. The unity. The brotherhood. **THIS** moment is what it was all about.

Fortunately, that moment has been preserved in *Man's Country: More Than a Bathhouse* by Chicago author Owen Keehnen. Keehnen, the co-founder of Chicago's Legacy Project, has authored a dozen books about Chicago LGBTQ history. *Man's Country* is an expertly researched, multi-faceted, and respectful tour of the bathhouse as a cultural cornerstone. Packed with meaningful memoirs and torrid testimonials, *Man's Country* is an inspiring and liberating read.



"THEY GO SOMEWHERE ELSE TO HOOK UP"

After opening the Gold Coast (501 N. Clark St. in Chicago) in 1960, believed to be the first leather bar in America, Chuck Renslow noted a business opportunity.

"They come to the bar, and they drink, but then they go someplace else to hook up," he realized. Renslow decided he wanted to own places where people could hook up. First, he owned peep show arcades like Machine Shop and Tool Box, and then gay male hotels like Barracks and Crystal Hotel in River North. After investing in Club Baths Chicago, he realized that even the hook-up places could be something bigger, something better, something more.

New York's Continental Baths inspired Renslow to create something spectacular for Chicago. On September 19, 1973, he opened the first floor of Man's Country and gave away 700+ free memberships. Over the next 44 years, thousands became lifetime members at the low, one-time fee of only \$10. Those memberships protected gay men against the raids, stings, and harassment of everyday life.

The rest is history. Man's Country hosted Sally Rand, Wayland Flowers and Madame, Holly Woodlawn, Cherry Vanilla, Charles Busch, Julie Brown, Judy Tenuta, Rusty Warren, Bruce Vilanch, and many, many more. Stage manager Wanda Lust hosted shows of all sorts—drag shows, game shows, variety shows, fashion shows, sock hops, homecoming balls, holiday pageants, movie nights, porn film festivals—and talent competed to be seen on this famous stage. Man's Country hosted the Black and Blue Ball, the traditional closing party of the International Mr. Leather Contest, for several years.

UNFETTERED COMMUNITY SPACE

Man's Country had an enormous presence in Chicago's earliest Gay Pride parades. The bathhouse was also a home base for community fundraising, advocacy, political action, sporting events, and even health screenings. In 1975, Renslow partnered with Chicago Gay Health Project to open a culturally competent onsite STD testing clinic. Within three years, the clinic had screened thousands of visitors, and expanded access to care by launching a mobile testing unit.

"A common misconception is that people come here just for sex," said Renslow, "And that's not true...they're really here to be with people of their own kind."

Over time, Man's Country grew into a three-story, 20,000 square foot complex, with experiences including the largest steam room in the Midwest, a subterranean dungeon with a triple-sized hot tub and rain curtains, private leather code rooms, a row of glory holes, a Sling Room,

and the legendary "Orgy Room" (which was, oddly enough, carpeted). On weekend mornings, the spa offered continental breakfast on its rooftop sundeck, accessible by spiral staircase. The lower level offered a 24-hour souvenir shop and snack bar (later, a juice bar) for visitors. In 1996, an adult film was shot within those walls, and later, the first two Grabby Awards ceremonies were hosted there.

"Man's Country is like a mythical fantasy land somewhere around the corner from Nirvana," wrote *Drummer* magazine.

Provocative, sex-positive advertising did the trick. Members came from all over the Midwest. Some stayed for hours—others checked in for days on end. At the height of its popularity, there were lines down Clark Street waiting hours to get in.

But why? Former members explain in their own words:

"It was a political statement to celebrate your sexuality in the 1970s. At Man's Country, I felt so much positive sexual energy. I felt connected to a real community."

"I had to be straight all day, but at Man's Country I could be myself. There was such power being around people and not having to hide who I was."

"Man's Country was a self-contained place, where we were sequestered from the rest of the world that didn't get us. It was not just hot and sexy—there was a sense of camaraderie and safety to just hang out in this all-male, gay world."

"Man's Country was wrong in all the right ways. There was something primal there. It was like a thrilling throwback to a more exciting time. This is what being a sexual outlaw felt like. I liked feeling that I was doing something subversive."

"It was down and dirty, raunchy, a little terrifying, but always very sexy."

THE AIDS CRISIS AND BISTRO TOO

The AIDS crisis deeply wounded Man's Country, and business never truly recovered to earlier levels. Renslow decided to reinvent his business. He partnered with club king Eddie Dugan to resurrect the Bistro, once known as the "Studio 54 of the Midwest." Bistro Too opened in October, 1987 as a gay bar packed with glitterati. The high-energy dance club, decorated in a combination of Art Deco and high-tech, was the kind of place where anything could happen. Many remember hearing house music for the first time at Bistro Too. Oversized video monitors showed surreal video clips, robotic lighting pulsated in time with the music, cash cannons and glitter explosions were constantly firing off, and host Memory Lane (dressed as a nurse) sold shots on the dancefloor out of an IV bag.

Performances included Divine, Boy George, the Village People, Thelma Houston, and Hazell Dean. Porn stars visited on a regular basis, including Jeff Stryker, and a "porn star suite" was built upstairs while a shower was installed on the club's stage. Bistro Too hosted the Chicago Meatpackers, an in-house dance team founded by Tyler Adair of Milwaukee. And there was never a dull moment: Events ranged from Drag Queen Wrestling to Techno Night, from Vampire Circus to Strip Search.

THE CHICAGO EAGLE AND SALE

The Bistro Too was reinvented as the Chicago Eagle in 1993. Customers now entered through the cab of a semi-truck parked in the alleyway. The leather bar featured relics from the Gold Coast, including the neon sign for The Pit, an actual trap door in the floor that opened at 11 p.m. nightly. Despite being incredibly popular, the Eagle closed in 2006. Chuck felt it lacked the mystique, ambience, and magic of the old Gold Coast. Customers didn't entirely agree.

"It felt like we were losing a part of our world and it was not coming back," said an Eagle fan. "It was saying goodbye to the place where

we could explore and be free. The Eagle was a place to be uninhibited and learn the unspoken leather code of ethics. To see it close was heartbreaking."

Over the next 10 years, Man's Country became increasingly run down to the point where some areas were actually falling apart. Maintenance was an ongoing battle that Chuck, now in his eighties, couldn't keep fighting. In October 2016, he finally surrendered—and agreed to sell Man's Country.

"Land is premium in Andersonville, and Man's Country occupies a lot of land," said Chuck. "They'll probably tear it down and build condos."

"Real estate taxes killed Man's Country," said Ron Ehemann, "the age of these gigantic bathhouses is probably over."

Chuck died June 29, 2017, at age 87. Following the two Loose Ends parties in November 2017 and New Year's Day 2018, auctioneers dismantled and sold the property. Items included lockers (sold in blocks of six), room keys, key racks, lights, artwork, membership cards, sheets (sold in \$5 grab bags), room doors, slings, metal bars, the St. Andrew's cross, and glory holes. Some items were donated to the Leather Archives & Museums. Following one last scavenger hunt, long-time members even salvaged bricks from the demolished ruins.

The space was that sacred to them.

"Sure, it could be sketchy, but Man's Country was a comfort. No matter what was going on in the outside world, this other place was here for rent six hours at a time. It had changed, and yet it really didn't. Behind these walls, guys could have the fun they needed to have, do what they needed to do, and then go about their business. That freedom meant something."

"If you left Man's Country, and you didn't have a good time—it was your own damn fault."

Man's Country: More Than a Bathhouse is now available from independent booksellers everywhere. ■

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IMMIGRATION RIGHTS HOUSING

At the Intersection of Health, Housing & Immigration

Erica López, Executive Director of Centro de Derecho de la Gente (Peoples Law Center), shares how her own journey led her to advocating for the rights of undocumented immigrants.

I AM LATINX, a mother, the daughter of immigrants, a lawyer, an advocate, and I am queer. I am the literal face of the American dream. I will tell my own story to find my calling at the intersection of immigration, health, family, and housing.

Immigration is a big part of the story of our country; it's also a big part of my story. My story begins with my parents. In Hidalgo, Mexico, they each lived on rural farms replete with outhouses and outdoor kitchens. They had no access to education, and thus had limited options for work. My parents came to this country without permission to fulfill their American dream. I could say they were undocumented or illegal, but I use "people first" language, as we are all people first, before any identity we hold or is thrust upon us. Language is important, and no one is just illegal or just undocumented.

I grew up in Chula Vista, CA where the cultural border is far more permeable than the expanse of the barbed wall. At night, when I walked on the hill behind my house, I could see Tijuana's glittering lights illuminating the desert hills. It felt like I inhabited two countries, never feeling fully Mexican or fully American.

My parents' sacrifices included my dad standing all day, inhaling metal dust while working in a metal finishing factory so that I could go to Yale College, attend law school, and teach at UW Law School. One year ago, I opened a nonprofit law firm that represents people without permission to be in the U.S. in their housing cases. In the last year, the Peoples Law Center (Centro de Derecho de la Gente) represented 300 individuals and families to either keep their housing or stabilize it.

HEALTH & HOUSING ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED.

Most people don't understand just how vital the connection between health and housing is, but it has been thoroughly established that housing is the number one social determinant of health. It's the most stabilizing force in a person's life. The pandemic



taught us all how important it is for everyone to access health care so that the public at large may remain healthy. Health care and housing are basic human rights.

I didn't always understand the connection between health and housing. Before becoming a lawyer, I was an immigration and education research assistant. After graduating from Yale, I helped conduct a qualita-

LGBTQ+ people that do not have permission to reside in the U.S. are at the highest risk of poor health outcomes. Legal representation for this community in housing is vital to preserving the health and wellness of the community while saving vital resources.

tive study on schools that were successful in meeting the needs of young immigrant children. I was only 21 when I traveled the country, up the snowy, slippery, winding, narrow and treacherous roads in rural Colorado, where Latinx immigrants commuted to a five-star ski resort. I will never forget the stench of the meatpacking plant in Iowa

where a principal was so accessible that he met with Latinx parents at the plant at lunchtime. As I collected data, interviewing the mostly Latinx immigrants, I felt as though I was collecting pieces of myself.

During my research, people in interviews repeatedly said that they needed lawyers. Instead of staying in research, I decided to become a lawyer. When I was at Boston Medical Center, I learned about the connection between housing and health. I learned how to practice law in a preventive way, by addressing social determinants of health. This was the start of my journey to representing people in their housing cases. It was at Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., a legal aid organization, where my generous colleagues taught me how to successfully litigate housing cases.

IMMIGRANTS MAKE OUR COUNTRY GREAT, BUT WITHOUT A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP, THEY FACE CONSTANT EXPLOITATION.

Many LGBTQ+ people migrate to the United States because their home countries are unsafe due to war, persecution, and lack of economic opportunity. LGBTQ immi-

grants experience violence and discrimination at home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This explains why transgender individuals disproportionately represent LGBTQ asylum-seekers in the U.S.

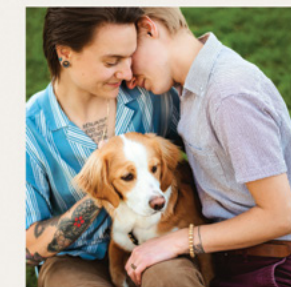
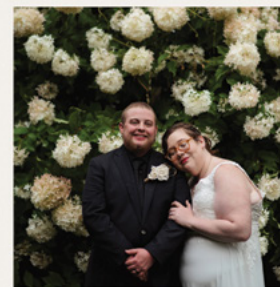
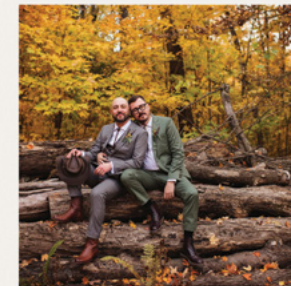
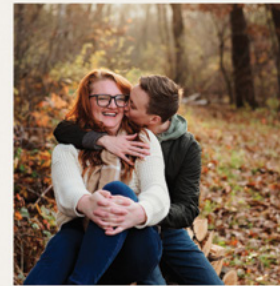
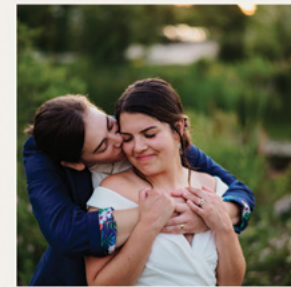
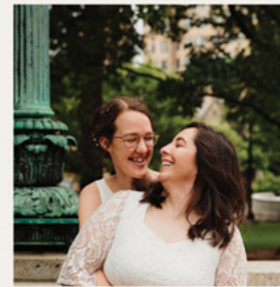
Immigrants that do not have legal status are predominantly from Latin America. Immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador make up 70 percent of the undocumented population nationally. In the U.S., an estimated 22 percent of the LGBTQ immigrant population is undocumented and approximately 4.7% of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) population are LGBTQ.

Without any kind of path to permanent legal immigration status, immigrants are more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination in housing and health care. Paradoxically, people without permission to be in the U.S. pay taxes, have credit, purchase cars, and even homes. Whenever I tune into La Movida, our Spanish Language radio station, I hear auto dealerships and banks touting that ITINs are accepted for loans. An ITIN is something used instead of a social security number on a tax return for immigrants. The IRS essentially acknowledges that immigrants are a vital part of our economy.

Even the DACA program creates harm for those that have it, as it is impermanent and precarious. "DACA-mented" people were often brought to the United States as children and previously did not have lawful status. The DACA program, however, may end. In September of this year, a Federal Judge in Texas rejected DACA status, citing that President Barack Obama exceeded his authority when he created DACA, by executive action in 2012. The case is likely on its way to the conservative Supreme Court. DACA is not the answer; there needs to be a more permanent and direct path to citizenship.

Recently, I had a client that worked at a grocery store. Her employer owned the house she lived in, exerting a lot of power and control over her. She practically only spent time sleeping there. She was not allowed visitors, she was forced to work 12 hours a day even on weekends, without a break. Her landlord transported her to and from her job and she didn't have a real life outside of work and "home." She lost her job and her home when she asked to have Christmas Day off.

There's a high cost to a community when someone like my client loses their housing. This kind of housing instability puts pressure on other social service safety nets like shelters, health care, foster care, and jails.



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When someone can preserve their housing, these costs are avoided. For communities and states that have implemented the right to counsel (representation for tenants in housing) every report has stated they will save far more than is spent on legal representation. While we would have to find the funding at the front end, representation makes sense for our community. In New York City for example, the program to provide tenant representation cost \$200 million, but saved the city \$320 million in housing-related costs, such as the homeless shelter system, preservation of rent-regulated affordable housing, and unsheltered homelessness. Pennsylvania also found that it would save \$3 to \$6 for every dollar invested in tenant representation.

Dane County and the City of Madison used the pandemic funding to create an innovative program that's similar to right to counsel when it took the reins of the federal rental assistance funding to pair it with legal representation. The result was the Eviction, Diversion and Defense Partnership, which is composed of Tenant Resource Center, Legal Action of Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Law School, The Peoples Law Center, and Community Justice Inc.

THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY FACES CONSTANT FEAR.

For many immigrants that can't legally obtain a driver's license, a speeding ticket can mean deportation and family separation if there's an arrest. For immigrants the possibility of detention is very real. For LGBTQ people living with HIV, this can be deadly, as detention means denial of vital gender-affirming health care.

I can't begin to adequately describe this gripping fear. Immigrants without permission to be in the U.S. experience an incredibly magnified stress at the individual, interpersonal, community, and socio-political levels, which result in adverse health effects such as PTSD and depression. They also live in segregated neighborhoods—not only because of financial reasons but also to avoid punitive contact with law enforcement that could result in deportation and family separation.

In Dane County, it was well known that law enforcement used to have a close partnership with ICE (Immigration, Customs and Enforcement). The current Sheriff denies this continues to be a practice. The program is called S-Comm, which is a collaboration between local law enforcement and

ICE. Law enforcement can check fingerprints of people in jails against Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immigration databases. If there is a "hit" ICE is notified even if the person has not been convicted of a criminal act, and then the person can be transferred into ICE custody, where they can face detention and deportation.

In the U.S., an estimated 22 percent of the LGBTQ immigrant population is undocumented and approximately 4.7% of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program) population are LGBTQ.

This creates a domino effect, where people fear exercising their rights. When I'm at a community presentation, immigrants ask me if going to court is safe. (Going to court does not pose a significant risk of deportation.) According to Eviction Lab, many Latinx immigrants do not go through formal judicial processes and end up being evicted informally. This means that my clients often just move out even if they are being forced out illegally. Even when I counsel them about their rights, they simply can't cope with the stress and risk. They think their legal status erodes any rights they may have.

HEALTH OUTCOMES ARE PROTECTED WHEN HOUSING FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE IS PROTECTED.

LGBTQ+ people that do not have permission to reside in the U.S. are at the highest risk of poor health outcomes. Legal representation for this community in housing is vital to preserving the health and wellness of the community while saving vital resources. Retaining the housing of the most vulnerable in our community should be considered emergency preventive health care.

Unfortunately, in the next few years my work is at risk of not being funded in the same way, as the federal rental assistance dollars used to fund our work will be spent. Our community needs to rally and urge elected officials to invest in providing free legal representation to our community. It protects and benefits us all. The Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation, Inc. (WisTAF) recently completed a report on the economic impact of legal aid in Wisconsin and found that for every \$1 spent on legal aid, the community receives a positive impact of \$8.40.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Most immigrant families I represent live in multigenerational family homes with mixed immigration statuses. I've represented LGBTQ+ immigrants in their housing cases. To paint a better picture, I'm going to share the story of a fictional client that is representative of some of the people I work with.

Ana is 23, and a proud trans woman who transitioned after moving into the apartment she was being evicted from. She lives with her aunt, uncle, cousins, and grandparents. Her uncle lost his job after his disability worsened, so the family could not pay rent. Ana's uncle is undocumented and has no access to federal disability. He has no access to a doctor unless he can pay out of pocket, so he tries to manage his chronic pain alone. There is simply no access to resources like welfare even though her uncle has children that have U.S. citizenship.

Retaining the housing of the most vulnerable in our community should be considered emergency preventive health care.

When Ana initially applied for the apartment, she was forced to use her legal name and the identity documents she had at the time. Unlike many of my other clients, Ana had just received her naturalization documents, and they did not match the name used in the eviction. If Ana had been unrepresented, she would have to attend zoom court that is live streamed. The court commissioner would have used her legal name to see if she was present, which could have been really uncomfortable and unsafe.

Thankfully, Ana applied for federal rental assistance after the court case was filed, and the case was referred to me. I was able to walk alongside Ana through the process of defending the eviction and her dignity. I asked her what she wanted to do about her name and pronouns in court, giving her the choice. I ended up writing a letter to the court to state her preferred pronouns and name. The court was very responsive and changed the name on the filing. Eventually, we filed papers with the court asking them to erase the eviction, which was granted. ■



ERICA LÓPEZ is the founder and Executive Director of The Peoples Law Center, Centro de Derecho de la Gente, a non profit law firm representing marginalized and undocumented people in housing civil matters.



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LGBTQ COMMUNITY CENTERS SERVICE PROVIDERS HARM REDUCTION

Reaching Farther

OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center has nearly doubled in size over the past year, adding new programs and expanding existing ones. The center's program director, **A.J. Hardie**, details the impact.

ONCE A WEEK. Annmarie Preece, a long-time volunteer at OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center, stops by the River Food Pantry on her way to her front desk volunteer shift. Annmarie loads up the trunk of her car with all manner of foods like pasta, rice, and canned goods and personal care supplies like soap, laundry detergent, and socks to help fill OutReach's Community Pantry.

OutReach's partnership with the River Food Pantry started in November 2021 with a pantry that fit into two cabinets by the front door to our main office and has since expanded to an entire kitchen with multiple shelving units, a refrigerator, and a standing freezer. Each week, the River sends over enough non-perishable foods and personal care items to keep our Community Pantry well stocked for anyone who drops in to use it. The River also supports our annual events by donating snacks and goods for our Trans Care Package Program, Trans Joy Event, and the Magic Pride Festival.

As the cost of food and household goods has risen, use of the Community Pantry has also increased, and we've been fortunate to have had numerous churches, local businesses, and community groups also donate food and personal care essentials to the Pantry.

One of the things that sets OutReach's Community Pantry apart from others is how deliberately low-barrier we've kept it. Many of the folks who work here have relied on food assistance programs before, and we understand that having to show things like a driver's license or state ID can create an additional barrier for some folks, especially trans folks whose documents may not show the correct name or gender. Our Community Pantry is, and will remain, no-questions asked, come as often as you need, and always open during our regular business hours (12:00–7:00pm, Monday–Friday). Reducing the barriers that keep people in the LGBTQ+ community from accessing food, housing, and other supportive services has always been a part of OutReach's mission, and the Community Pantry is part of that.

The expansion of OutReach's Community



One of the things that sets OutReach's Community Pantry apart from others is how deliberately low-barrier we've kept it. We understand that having to show things like a state ID can create an additional barrier for some, especially trans folks whose documents may not show the correct name or gender.

Pantry has coincided both with our growth as an organization and with growth in the needs of our community. Dane County's LGBTQ+ community has to contend with some of the fastest rising housing costs in the country on top of rising food costs, and these things impact people in the LGBTQ+ community differently based on the intersections of other identities like race, age, ability, education, and others. With new programs focused on harm reduction and housing, we're helping folks in our community meet their basic needs and build connections to a broader community of resources and support.

A SIGNIFICANT AWARD

In 2022, OutReach was awarded a portion of the opioid settlement dollars that came to Dane County via a federal lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies who manufactured opioids. Through this funding, OutReach has been able to expand our support services for

OutReach Programs & Contact Information

Elder Services: For LGBTQ+ adults over age 50 looking for social and educational events, help finding safe and affirming housing, and peer connections. Contact Kristi M. at KristiM@lgbtoutreach.org.

Transgender Services: For transgender and nonbinary people looking for connections to community, help navigating health care and legal processes, and low or no-cost gender affirming clothing items. Contact Gabriel Loreda, GabeL@lgbtoutreach.org.

Young Adult Housing Program: For young adults (age 17.5–24) who need help finding and/or paying for housing, building life skills, and connecting with community supports. Contact DaMontae January at DaMontaeJ@lgbtoutreach.org.

Harm Reduction and Recovery Services: Information and training about safer drug use including how to administer Narcan/Naloxone, distribution of safer drug use and safer sex kits, peer support and LGBTQ+ affirming recovery meetings. For education, kits, and recovery meeting information contact Tarah Stangler at TarahS@lgbtoutreach.org.

Willma's Fund: Emergency, short-term financial assistance for LGBTQ+ adults in Dane County. For more information, call OutReach or email A.J. at AJH@lgbtoutreach.org.

people who use alcohol and other drugs by creating a harm reduction team focused on peer support, community outreach, and education.

Harm reduction is an inherently queer approach to substance use that arose from programs like needle exchanges created to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Our harm reduction program aims to provide support for people who use alcohol and other drugs without judgment and with the understanding that there are many ways to build healthier relationships with alcohol and other

drugs. Tarah Stangler, the lead staff person of the harm reduction team, views the goals of OutReach's harm reduction programming as "closing gaps and overcoming barriers to care for queer people who use drugs so that they have access to holistic and affirming care."

Tarah, Linda Lenzke, and Kaeden Watford make up OutReach's harm reduction team and work within the Queer Care Collective (formerly the Pride in Prevention Coalition) to ensure that community members and local organizations have access to harm reduction





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education and supplies. Our team assembles and distributes safer sex kits (including condoms, lube, or other items), safer drug use kits, wound care and first aid kits, safer smoking kits, and overdose response kits. Team members also lead Narcan (Naloxone) trainings for organizations who would like to have staff on hand that can safely respond to overdoses, and they facilitate harm reduction and recovery meetings weekly.

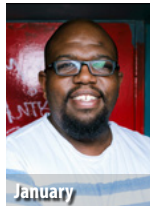
Since 2020, the amount of assistance given out through Willma's Fund has grown by 500%. In 2022 alone, OutReach staff provided financial assistance to 110 people and gave out approximately \$50,000 in grants

Also in 2022, OutReach became a partner in the City of Madison's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). Led by the Dane County Youth Action Board (YAB), the YHDP is a youth-driven project aimed at reducing the number of young adults (aged 17.5-24) experiencing homelessness in Madison and Dane County. OutReach's goal in partnering with the YAB and other local

organizations is to ensure that young adults experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness, a large portion of whom are part of the LGBTQ+ community, have access to the care and resources they need.

ADDING NEW FACES

Through the YHDP, we have added two new staff positions filled by DaMontae January and Skye Gia Garcia. DaMontae and Skye



Gia focus on helping young adults navigate the housing system while building life skills and connecting with the supportive services that exist at OutReach and in our greater community.

While implementing a project of this scale has not been without challenges, OutReach's staff began enrolling young adults into the housing program in September. Since, they have been busy with everything from

helping people find apartments and connect with housing programs to shopping for clothing and groceries with program participants.

OutReach's harm reduction and young adult housing programs complement our existing work with Willma's Fund, which has been a lifeline for many in Dane County's LGBTQ+ community experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness since 2011. Willma's Fund, like our other services, dramatically expanded both during and following the Covid-19 public health emergency.

INCREASED DEMAND FOR SERVICES

Since 2020, the amount of assistance given out through Willma's Fund has grown by 500%. In 2022 alone, OutReach staff provided financial assistance to 110 people and gave out approximately \$50,000 in grants to individuals to pay for things like rent, security deposits, short-term hotel stays, and utilities. Demand for Willma's Fund has only increased in 2023, to the extent that in several months OutReach exceeded our monthly budget for assistance within a matter of days. Willma's Fund has now provided over \$300,000 in assistance to more than 500 people.

Some of our long-running programs are also more active than ever. The LGBTQ 50+ Alliance, a joint program of OutReach and the Madison Senior Center, continues to host

events for LGBTQ+ elders and build connections with national organizations like SAGE and AARP.

OutReach's Elder Advocate, Kristi, is working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to create supportive services for LGBTQ+ elders with memory loss and their caregivers, a program that will be starting in 2024. Recently, the LGBTQ 50+ Alliance has co-hosted intergenerational dinners and celebrations with the Madison Area Transgender Association (MATA), further building connections among folks in the LGBTQ+ community.

OutReach's Transgender Advocate, Gabriel Loreda, has also been working to expand OutReach's financial and material support programs for transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive folks. Gabriel put together OutReach's Trans Closet, stocked with donated chest binders and other gender affirming clothing, and has been administering grants covering the cost of legal name changes and document updates for trans folks. We're also incredibly excited to be partnering with OPEN Foundation on additional services for transgender folks that will be available in 2024.

OutReach's recent expansion of services would not be possible without the incredibly motivated and hardworking people who have joined our staff within the last year and half, alongside those who have served the organization for years or decades. Our program staff is working with more community members and finding new ways to engage with and support folks than ever before. We also have a wonderful complement of volunteers leading groups, working at our front desk, helping out around the community center, and many, many other things.

Sustainable growth is always a challenge, but we have been able to accomplish great things this year, and we're all looking forward to what 2024 will bring. ■



A.J. HARDIE is Program Director at OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. A.J. was born and raised in Charlotte, NC but has called Madison home for more than 10 years. They hold a PhD from UW-Madison and are passionate about nature and conservation in addition to their LGBTQ+ advocacy work.



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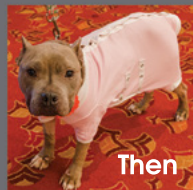
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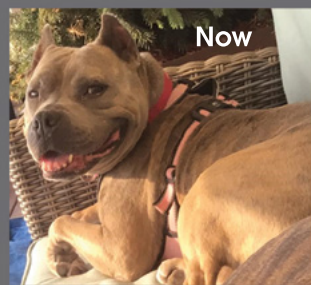
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FOOD & DINING MILWAUKEE GAY BAR

A Next-gen Experience in Walker's Point

Newly opened **POP** is Milwaukee's first new gay bar since 2010.

ACROSS AMERICA, gay bars have been closing at an astonishing rate. Over the past 20 years, Milwaukee has lost its longest-running icons: Ball Game (38 years), C'est La Vie (34 years.), M&M Club (30 years), and Club 219 (24 years). The national prognosis is chilling. Between 2012 and 2021, over half of the gay bars in the country closed. Lesbian bars have been decimated: Walker's Pint is one of only 25 remaining in the nation.



Considering this mass exodus, it's exciting to see a new gay bar open anywhere. But it is especially exciting to see a landmark address "reclaimed" by the community—with an exciting and energetic vision.

On September 8, POP celebrated its grand opening at 124 W. National Avenue, formerly home to Switch. Make no mistake: This is not your 20th century gay bar. POP has replaced the traditional Milwaukee tavern ambience with a bright, colorful explosion of sights and sounds.

And no, they won't be resurrecting those foam parties.

He envisioned opening a new kind of bar: One that served art, entertainment, and community in a neighborhood space. But he wanted to be clear: It needed to be a gay bar, first and foremost.

"You're not the first person to ask," said Marcus Wise, who owns and operates POP with partner Daniel Patterson. "That was then, this is now. Due to expansions and renovations, the Switch patio no longer exists."

"Historically, a lot of gay bars were crowded, dark, secretive, anonymous places to protect people's safety," said Wise. "But we're making a loud and proud statement. We're bright, we're spacious, we're colorful. Our doors and windows are always open. We have no reason to hide."

Originally from Buffalo, NY, Wise has extensive experience in the entertainment and service industries. His first jobs were working in restaurants, following in the footsteps of his father (a chef) and his mother (a bar/restaurant worker). He's owned multiple art galleries in New York and Wisconsin, as well as the Buzz Social family entertainment center in Green Bay.

After eight years in Wisconsin, Wise felt the decline of gay bar culture firsthand. Over time, he envisioned opening a new kind of bar: One that served art, entertainment, and community in a neighborhood space. But he wanted to be clear: It needed to be a gay bar, first and foremost.

"I understand why there's not as much demand for gay bars today," said Wise. "We have more opportunities to be out now. But, on the other hand, there is still a need for safe spaces. Just because most of our population might be out and proud, doesn't mean that everybody is ready to be out and proud. We're also seeing so much hatred and discrimination

right now. We cannot honestly say we don't need gay bars. I hope that we are moving closer to a world where anyone can feel safe anywhere, but we are not there now."

"Over time, our space will evolve as it evolves. But I want to create a safe space that makes room for everyone."

POP is not just a bar, but a full-service restaurant with a clever, seven-day menu, including weekend brunches and "fast casual" hand foods the rest of the week.

"We hired a great kitchen manager who is really killing it," said Wise. "This helps us serve the community. When you can eat tasty food right here; you don't need to leave to find a quality meal."

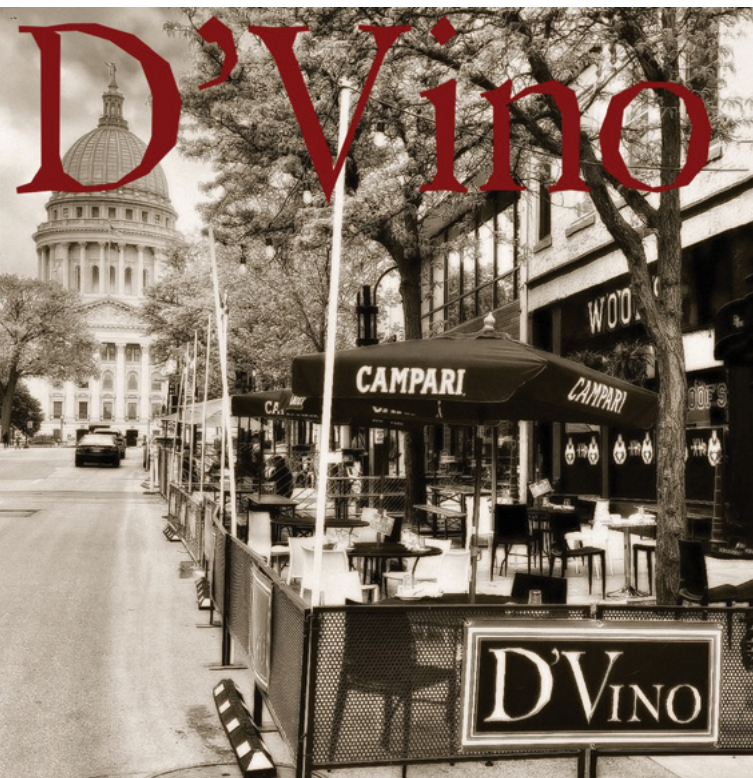
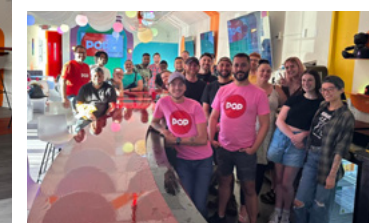
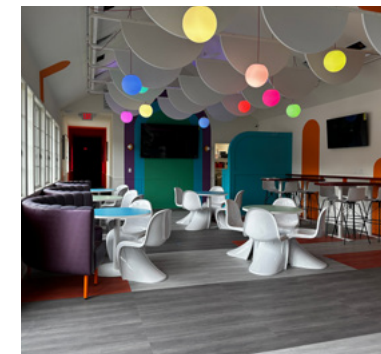
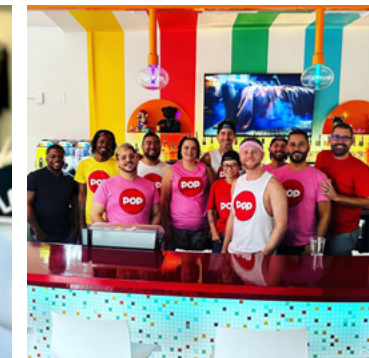
"As I like to say, drink with one hand—and eat with the other."

Wise also hopes to flex his arts and entertainment background to create an ever-changing vibe.

"We're creating a space for people who love to go out and have fun," said Wise. "I built this bar because something was missing in Milwaukee. We are creating a space where you can watch videos at the bar, or grab a snack, or watch a Packer game, or RuPaul's Drag Race, or meet friends for weekday happy hours, or bring the family for brunch. We'll have drag shows, but we're not a drag bar. We'll have DJs, but we're not a dance club. And we look forward to partnering with our neighbors in Walker's Point on bar crawls and neighborhood events. We've got so many exciting things coming up in fall and winter. We'll be trying new concepts, listening to our customers, and seeing what our community really wants and needs."

"We're creating a space for people who like what they like—and aren't afraid to say so."

POP is open 4:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. Monday through Friday and 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. on Saturday and Sundays. Kitchen menus and reservations are now available online. For ongoing news and event updates, follow them on Facebook and Instagram. ■



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YOUTH NONBINARY COMING OUT

Reclaiming Queer Joy

For **Cameron Craig**, navigating their way out meant finding the right spaces and language to feel safe. And now they're advocating for others on similar journeys.

GROWING UP IN A POLARIZING political landscape, with transgender rights under attack at every waking moment, people feel as though they have a right to how it's impacted you. The world would rather hear stories of queer pain: the time classmates had bribed friends to out me, the time a teacher outright refused to use my pronouns because I was out sick too frequently, the people telling me I'm "going to hell" for wearing a "You Are Loved" shirt.

Cisgender heterosexuals try to justify their obligation to hear the trauma of marginalized communities by claiming it'll help them feel inspired to advocate for us. They don't have that right. Instead, I'll take it upon myself to share experiences of queer joy, something that may be less interesting to those not in our community, but something we are so desperately deserving of hearing.

I've known I was in the queer community for as long as I've had memories, but I didn't have the vocabulary to tell anyone. Luckily, I didn't need them for a while; however, in middle school, when everyone started exploring relationships and their own romantic interests, the words were becoming more and more necessary to me. I needed a way to identify how differently I'd been feeling. These words were introduced to me through our GSA, a place where everybody was welcome, where everyone belonged. They gave me the words I had only heard in hushed whispers and told me that being gay wasn't something you had to be quiet about. Really, they sparked my interest in LGBTQ+ activism and advocacy.

Months later, I finally told the world I wasn't straight, starting with bisexual and eventually correcting to "lesbian" a few months after that, in the first classroom I'd been in with an LGBTQ+ teacher: French. French class was a utopia for me, an incredible place where gender neutral language was ingrained in the curriculum, identity was celebrated, and where you could be honest without fear of consequence. These days, I still wish I could go back to the freedom and representation of people like me that my Mme. Deyo had let us feel, and with the majority of my current college-level French classmates coming from the same middle school, I feel they must, too.

During the pandemic, I had by far one of my favorite coming out experiences, because nobody even took it as coming out. All I had to do was add my pronouns to my zoom name, and allow the world to play identity-catch up. I was able to hear the first adults in my life call me by the right pronouns, without making it a movie-moment. I let the world catch up without an announcement. It was gratifying to hear people refer to me properly without ever giving them a chance to question it.

Since starting high school, I've gone back to my middle school, directing plays and musicals alongside my former teachers and mentors. Larger than any political win, I find the joy I feel in that space to be exhilarating. Introducing myself with "they/them" pronouns, I always see a few young actors with an excited, joyous face, finally seeing someone



who'd been through what they're going through and emerging on the other end, understanding and proud of their identity. They're even more joyous when my girlfriend comes to help out, seeing two nonbinary students, similarly identifying to many of them, who've found confidence despite the alarming effects of the school system. To know that just by existing proudly, I've instilled them with a glimmer of hope they'll get through everything bringing them down, I find myself beaming. The smile only grows when they get to share their own true selves onstage and offstage.

There's an incredible amount of positives in our community, something that simply cannot be expressed in even an endless amount of words. While many come from connections with others, there's a lot of euphoria within the individual aspects of queer joy, too. I find nothing more pleasing than when an outfit gives off the perfect expression of "femme, but not feminine," and I think that eyeliner is the most affirming makeup product to exist. The individual doses of happiness aren't to be ignored, and for many of us, they're the most common ways of experiencing queer joy.

The world asks us to share our pain. Often, it takes sharing traumatic experiences for our voices to be heard. For our country, this is sometimes necessary for the greater political and social success of the LGBTQ+ community, but it is critical that we receive chances and spaces for true queer joy. So today, I implore you to choose queer joy, and I promise I'll do the same. We, and our entire community, are so much more than the trauma and pain we're forced to share with the world. ■



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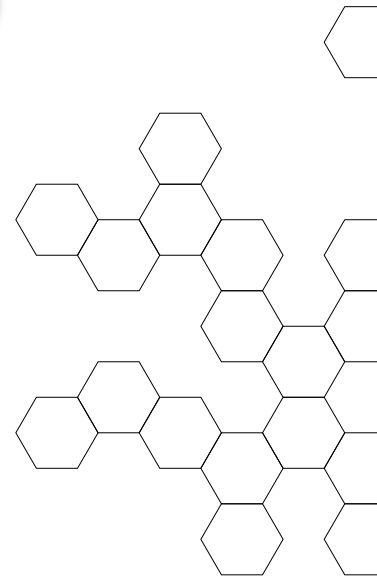
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