

our lives



24

Finn Enke



20

CTOAN Candles



36

Delta Beer Lab

FOOD & DINING

LIST: LGBTQ-owned & operated restaurants

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

May / June 2024



THE ORGANIC FARMER

Cassie Wyss

Crossroads Community Farm co-owner on building community and finding something meaningful in the work.

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Former Vice President of PFLAG's National Board
Sandy Brown.

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SEASON

2024

2025

sept
20-22

Reunion

John DeMain,
Conductor
Tommy Mesa,
Cello
Greg Zelek,
Organ

music

Valerie Coleman,
*Umoja: Anthem of Unity**
Joseph Jongen,
Symphonie Concertante,
Op. 81
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky,
Variations on a Rocooco Theme,
Op. 33
Manuel de Falla, *Suite No. 2*
from The Three-Cornered Hat

*MSO Premiere

oct
18-20

Visions

Nicholas Hersh,
Guest Conductor
Kelly Hall-Tompkins,
Violin

music

Anna Clyne,
*This Midnight Hour**
Ralph Vaughan Williams,
The Lark Ascending
Maurice Ravel, *Tzigane*
Hector Berlioz,
Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14

*MSO Premiere

nov
15-17

Momentum

Michael Stern,
Guest Conductor
Garrick Ohlsson,
Piano

music

Jonathan Leshnoff,
*Rush for Orchestra**
Edvard Grieg, *Piano Concerto*
in A minor, Op. 16
Dmitri Shostakovich,
Symphony No. 5
in D minor, Op. 47

*MSO Premiere

nov
23

MSO at the Movies

Kyle Knox, Conductor

SAT, 7:30 PM

dec
6-8

A Madison Symphony Christmas

John DeMain,
Conductor
Vanessa Becerra,
Soprano
Craig Irvin,
Baritone

music

Madison Symphony Chorus,
Beverly Taylor, Director
Mount Zion Gospel Choir,
Tamera and Leotha Stanley,
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Beethoven x3

John DeMain, Conductor
Gil Shaham, Violin
Orli Shaham, Piano
Sterling Elliott, Cello

music

Ludwig van Beethoven,
Leonore Overture No. 3,
Op. 72b
Ludwig van Beethoven,
Concerto for Violin, Cello,
and Piano in C Major, Op.
56 (Triple Concerto)
Ludwig van Beethoven,
Symphony No. 2
in D Major, Op. 36

jan
17-19

FRI & SAT 7:30 PM
SUN 2:30 PM

feb
22-23

MSO at the Movies

Kyle Knox, Conductor

SAT, 7:30 PM, SUN, 2:30 PM

mar
14-16

Legacy

John DeMain, Conductor
Amanda Majeski,
Soprano
Kirsten Lippart,
Mezzo-Soprano
Joshua Sanders, Tenor
Matt Boehler, Bass
Madison Symphony
Chorus, Beverly Taylor,
Director

music

Richard Strauss,
Don Juan, Op. 20
Richard Strauss,
Four Last Songs
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,
Requiem in D minor, K. 626

FRI & SAT 7:30 PM
SUN 2:30 PM

apr
11-13

Yearnings

Joseph Young,
Guest Conductor
Time For Three:
Nicolas Kendall, Violin
Charles Yang, Violin
Ranaan Meyer,
Double Bass

music

Samuel Barber, *Second Essay*
for Orchestra, Op. 17
Kevin Puts, *Contact**
Sergei Prokofiev,
Selections from
Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64

FRI & SAT 7:30 PM
SUN 2:30 PM

may
9-11

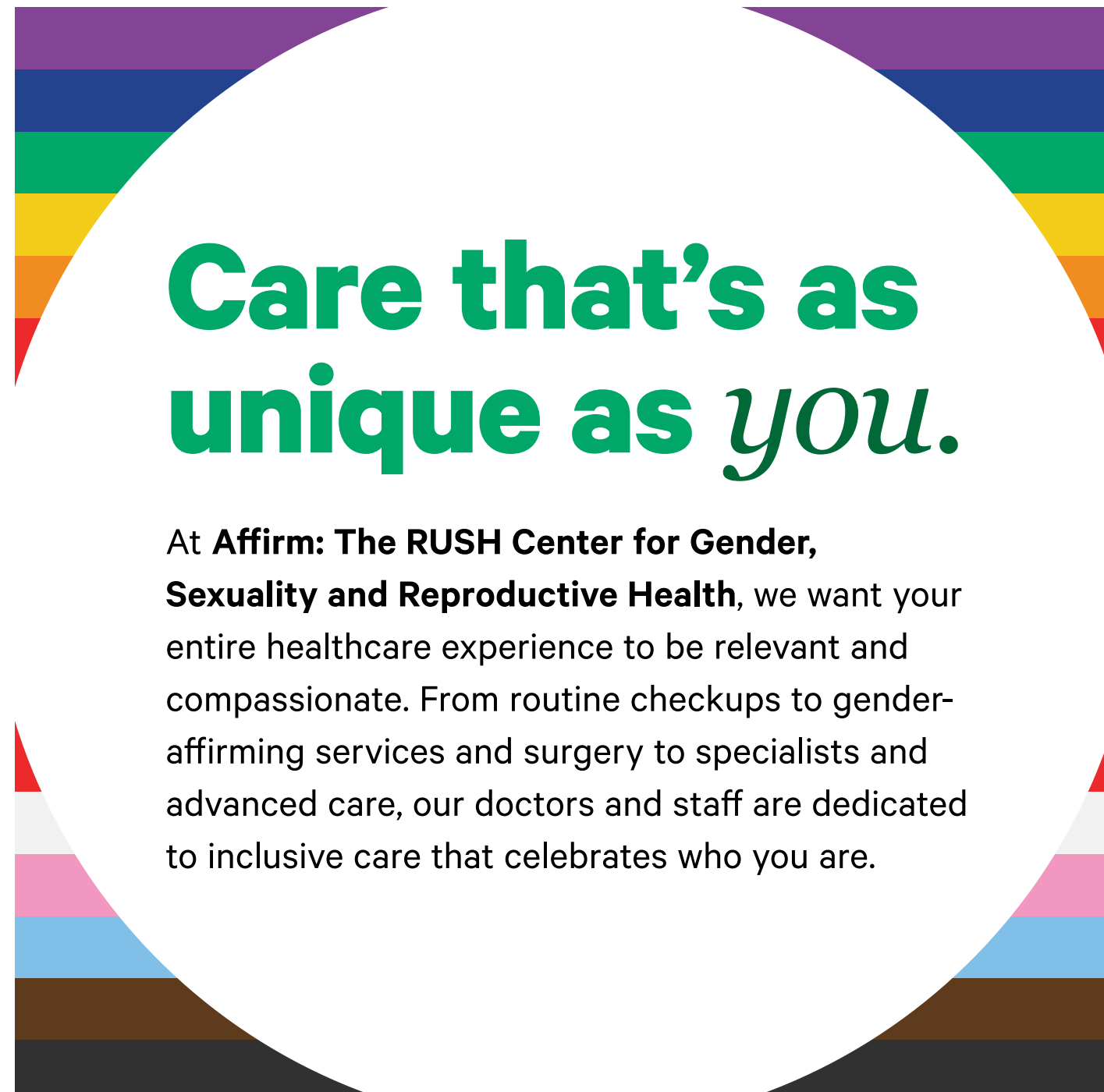
Gershwin!

John DeMain, Conductor
Philippe Bianconi, Piano
Michelle Johnson,
Soprano
Eric Greene, Baritone
Madison Symphony
Chorus, Beverly Taylor,
Director

music

George Gershwin,
Cuban Overture
George Gershwin,
Piano Concerto in F Major
George Gershwin/Robert
Bennett, *Porgy and Bess:*
A Concert of Songs

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SUN 2:30 PM



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Sandy Brown, inside Hope Church, where PFLAG meets in Sturgeon Bay.

“It is absolutely imperative that every human being’s freedom and human rights are respected, all over the world.”

- Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, former Icelandic Prime Minister & first openly gay head of state

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Cover photo by Melanie Jones.



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE PATRICK FARABAUGH

WISCONSIN FIRST

I LIKE TO DESCRIBE one of my mentors, the late Dick Wagner, as the Harvey Milk of Wisconsin. Although he wasn't the first openly LGBTQ elected person in our state, he remains one of our most significant. He mentored Senator Tammy Baldwin, Congressman Mark Pocan, and countless other public servants. He was one of the founders of the New Harvest Foundation, and he had a lifelong passion for historic preservation. He spent his retirement chronicling our state's LGBTQ history in this magazine as well as in two books for the Wisconsin Historical Society. He took great pride in achievements toward advancing equality that were reached here in Wisconsin—often before that progress was seen on either coast.



Wagner & Farabaugh at a New Harvest gala.

For example, the first gay rights legislation in our nation's history was signed into law right here in 1982. It's remarkable to me that after 40+ years, a majority of LGBTQ Wisconsinites are still unaware of this achievement. After Dick passed in late 2021, I worked with Congressman Pocan to secure a federal grant in his name.

The Dick Wagner Memorial Grant was part of an omnibus bill in late 2022 and is funding Our Lives Media's work creating the Wisconsin First Archive to help preserve the impact and legacy of that historic 1982 gay rights bill. To learn more about our work to bring awareness and access to this groundbreaking legislation, please be sure to read the piece by Michail Takach in this issue. It details the work going into it, and what to expect from this archive when it goes live in a couple months. It's been an honor to work with our team creating the archive, and to contribute to something that helps enshrine not only the legacy of that legislation, but also of one of my personal heroes, Dick Wagner. ■

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MELANIE JONES is a photographer and writer living on the northside of Madison with her spouse, two dogs, and three cats. While she enjoys photographing people, her passion project for the past two years has been her photography work with dogs under her Dulcy Dog Photography brand, located on Atwood Avenue.

ELLEN KNOPPOW is a writer who believes in second acts. She is the recipient of the 2022 award for Excellence in Transgender Coverage by NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists.

NICOLE KURTH is from SE Wisconsin and has more than 15 years of experience in higher education, holding a Master's Degree in Student Personnel Administration and a Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Design. Her passion areas include LGBTQ community outreach, programming, and history. She is currently on the board of directors for the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project. Both Nicole and her wife love animals and have an extensive fur family: Four dogs and four cats. They also raise service dogs for children with autism.

ROGER REYNOLDS writes from experience. He lives with lifelong Complex PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Since 2012, he's participated in, designed, and led peer-led mental health support groups and skills groups. As a lived-experience presenter/facilitator, he brings understanding, compassion, and empathy to the workshops he leads as well as his YouTube channel "Down to Earth Plus Fun."

OBITUARY GINGER VICTORIA BAIER



In Memoriam of a Matriarch

Jen McCoy mourns community advocate Ginger Baier.

SHE HELD COURT sitting on a donated chair. New faces peeked out from the door with caution during the Madison Area Transgender Association (MATA) support group. Ginger Baier waved them into the safe space with her red, manicured nails. Her hair color complemented each outfit, as did strands of necklaces and bracelets that she would twist and adjust while she listened.

Ginger was seen, and she made damn sure of it.

From local politics to public speaking, she never strayed from her authenticity and passion about LGBTQ+ rights. She was honest, kind, courageous, and quick-witted, which made some cheeks blush—to her amusement. Her laugh made her head tilt back, as if the joyful sound needed more room to escape.

Fifteen years ago, Ginger was a client at OutReach LGBT Community Center, attending a transgender support group. She was quiet, observing from the back of the room with another newcomer, Corrine. The two became fast friends, with Ginger volunteering at OutReach, as she convinced Corrine to join in on a favorite outlet: Dancing. If you looked for Ginger at 10:00 on a Friday or Saturday night, she was on the dance floor with her drink of choice: Half cranberry juice and half Sprite.

During her time at OutReach, Ginger became a leader of MATA; a member on the Board of Directors; then as the Transgender Advocate staff position. She was a massive force in developing MATA and the Transgender programming at OutReach. In 2021, Ginger left her role, but it didn't go unnoticed. She took home a big box of countless cards and words of gratitude from community members who were moved by Ginger's services.

Unexpectedly, the 73-year old matriarch died on April 14 while biking on a sunny afternoon.

The community is grieving a powerhouse, a mother hen, a confidant, and a trailblazer. According to close friends, Ginger didn't want a funeral, but she also was afraid to be forgotten. The glamorous matriarch who made sure that others weren't cast aside, sometimes questioned if she made a lasting impact. The answer is an echoing "yes!"

To Ginger, with love.

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Support for LGBT Issues Declines

Party polarization and a rise in Christian nationalism have fueled waves of rhetoric and legislation across the country seeking to denigrate LGBTQ individuals and limit or repeal our liberties.

POLITICS & LAW NEWS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

LAST YEAR WAS ROUGH for queer people in America. Every week, there seemed to be another attack from some political leader somewhere in the country targeting the community with hateful legislation, and even though the vast majority of them didn't become laws, the language and lies surrounding those efforts have had damaging ripple effects that we are only starting to understand now.

Put bluntly, support for LGBTQ causes has dropped for the first time since 2015, and the extreme political polarization of the country, and the repeated attacks on queer Americans—specifically drag queens and trans people—is largely to blame, according to a new poll by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).

Most surprising in the report is that young people, aged 18–29, accounted for the largest drop in support, negating the idea that because those coming of age are much more likely to identify openly as queer or to have people in their immediate circle who identify as such, that this generation as a whole is progressive in regards to LGBTQ rights.

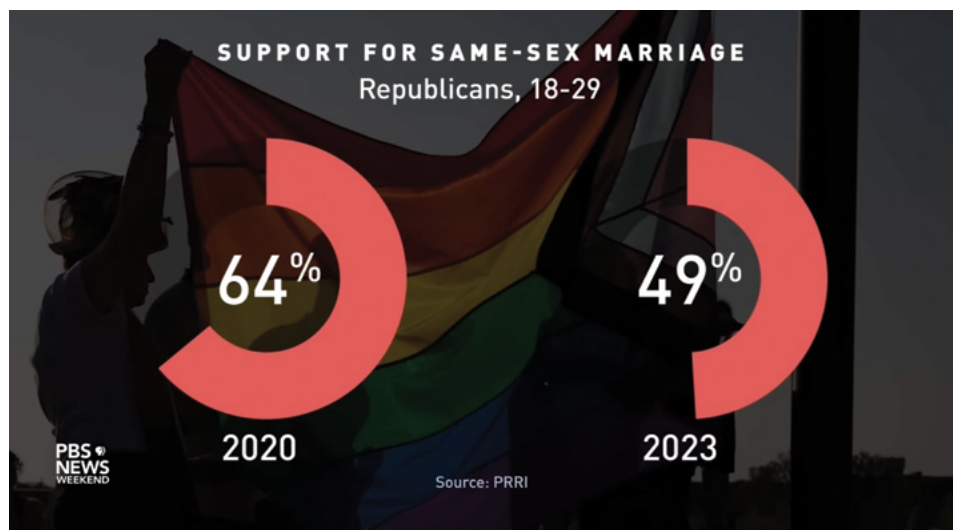
PARTY POLARIZATION NATIONWIDE

In an interview with *PBS Newshour*, Melissa Deckman, the CEO of PRRI expressed her surprise and concern about these drops, saying that research has shown that they are caused by party polarization and the rise of



Christian nationalism. As an example, in 2020, 64% of Americans aged 18–29 who identified as Republican supported same-sex marriage. That number has now dropped to 49%, despite nearly one in five people aged 18–29 in America identifying as LGBTQ. In short, one side gets queerer, and the other gets more hateful.

We’ve seen anecdotal evidence of this in news stories like that of Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old, non-binary teenager who was attacked in the bathroom of their high school, and later committed suicide, presumably because of relentless bullying. This incident is particularly notable since the altercation took place in a school bathroom. According to the *New York Times*, Oklahoma, where Nex lived, has “several laws restricting transgender rights,” they said in an article dated March 15, 2024, including what has become known as a “bathroom bill,” that “prohibits students from using bathrooms that do not align with their sex at birth.” Furthermore, the Oklahoma State Legislature is “considering a bill to prohibit residents from changing their sex designation on birth certificates, and another to require public schools to acknowledge that gender is an ‘immutable biological trait’ and bar people from using names or pronouns that differ from



their birth certificates.”

Oklahoma isn’t alone in their quest for anti-LGBTQ, and particularly anti-trans, legislation. We saw this in Wisconsin this past fall as bills were proposed that sought to limit trans students’ ability to participate in sporting events, limit or ban gender-affirming care for trans people under the age of 18, and forcing incarcerated people to be placed and stripped searched according to their assigned sex at birth, rather than their identity or presentation.

Many questioned why the legislature even bothered with these bills, knowing that Tony Evers would certainly veto them. The fear was that they did so to grandstand to their increasingly radical base for the sake of votes and fundraising, but also that even the introduction of these bills would have a chilling effect on people, particularly young people, coming out as trans. Hearings on these bills, particularly the sports and gender care bills, were packed with many on either side who at times were verbally hostile toward each other as many shared their experiences. In those hearings, it was clear how truly divided this state and country are with regard to LGBTQ rights—and how far we still have to go to make sure that these rights are codified and protected.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

The rise of Christian nationalism has markedly pulled people, including young people—who might otherwise have more tempered views that slowly get more progressive—back to the far right, and toward rejection of LGBTQ rights. When noting this fact, it’s important to know what Christian nationalism is and what it isn’t. It is not, according to the *Washington Post*, interchangeable with evangelical Christians, or for anyone who either “votes

The rise of Christian nationalism has markedly pulled people, including young people—who might otherwise have more tempered views that slowly get more progressive—back to the far right, and toward rejection of LGBTQ rights.

their values” or wants “religion to play a part in public life.” According to University of Oklahoma sociology professor Samuel Perry, “The difference between Christian nationalism and civil religion is Christian nationalism says this country was founded by our people for a people like us and it should stay that way.”

The PRRI report grouped people into a Christian Nationalism Scale, which “sorts respondents into four types depending on their responses to a battery of five questions gauging different tenets of Christian nationalism, we can see how adherence or rejection to Christian nationalism relates to support or opposition to LGBTQ policies.” When looking at people’s views according to this scale, Christian nationalism rejectors are very supportive of LGBTQ rights, including those to marry, not be discriminated against, or be subjected to religiously based refusals. Most of those numbers were in the 90th percentile. Support decreases steadily as you go down



MELANIE JONES is a photographer and writer living on the northside of Madison with her spouse, two dogs, and three cats. While she enjoys photographing people, her passion for the past two years has been her photography work with dogs under her Dulcy Dog Photography brand, located at Atwood Avenue.

the scale, with skeptics still supporting but at a much lower percentage (60–75%). Unsurprisingly, Christian nationalism sympathizers and adherents strongly oppose LGBTQ rights, with white Christian nationalism adherents being the strongest opposition among those asked, and these have been the loudest, and most effective, political group with regard to dismantling these rights.

RIGHTS CAN ROLL BACK

Deckman, when asked what lies ahead and why these numbers matter, replied that they are the “canary in the coal mine,” and that we should not assume that rights, even those

granted by the US Supreme Court, will exist “in perpetuity,” or increase. We saw this with the *Dobbs* decision reversing *Roe v. Wade*, and should expect legal challenges going forward to roll back those rights. We also can’t assume that as older generations age out and younger generations come to the fore in government, that those younger people are more progressive. Lastly, we can’t assume that just because a large majority of Americans as a whole support LGBTQ rights, that that means those rights will be legally protected. She ends with the mantra that “votes matter,” which I know sounds like a tired slogan but only gets more true as we near the 2024 election. ■

NEWS BRIEFS

WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES

TALLYING UP THE VOTES: HOW LGBTQ CANDIDATES DID IN THE SPRING ELECTION

WITH EVERYONE’S attention focused on the immense fight coming in November, the spring primary that took place in April has flown a bit under the radar for most people. Even so, we should always remember that small elections matter. Sometimes they matter more, because they are where county supervisors, school board members, etc. are elected, and these people have real influence over the everyday lives of those who live in their districts. Those elections are also where every vote carries a huge amount of weight, so even those who are disillusioned about voting in large elections can feel like they make a difference.



Stevens



Gorman



Duggan

For proof of this, we need only look at the results of the Rock County Supervisor for District 13, which lies within Beloit city limits. **Genia Stevens**, an out lesbian woman of color, won by literally three votes. The final tally was 346 for Stevens, and 343 for her opponent, Tammy Green Gonfiantini. In another win for an LGBTQ Rock County Supervisor, **Phillip Gorman** won District 14, also in Beloit, by fewer than 80 votes.

Other members of the LGBTQ community who celebrated wins include **Dianne Duggan**, who easily won reelection for Mayor of Evansville; **Richard Kilmer**, who won re-election of rural Juneau County, District 5; and **Todd Larson**, who won Green County Supervisor Dis-



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“We loved working with Curt and Janean. The results are enjoyed aesthetically and functionally every day!” **PAULA & ANN**



trict 25 by a landslide in 2022, and continued that trend with a win almost as large this April. **Joey Prestley**, who ran for and won Green Bay City Council District 6, only won by 15 votes. **DJ Nichols**, who ran for and won Oshkosh City Council At-Large, and **Peter Burgelis**, who ran for and won reelection to Milwaukee Common Council District 11, both won their contested elections. Peter Burgelis was attacked last year at a local mall and was called a homophobic



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Kilmer



Larson



Prestley



Nichols



Burgelis



Meltzer

slur during what appeared to be a road rage incident.

Several other LGBTQ candidates who ran for Dane County Supervisors in various districts were unopposed and won easily, as did **Vered Meltzer** and **Nate Wolff**, who were both elected to Appleton's Common Council, Districts 2 and 12 respectively. Only two LGBTQ candidates listed on Fair Wisconsin PAC's endorsement list lost their elections: **Gloria Eastment**, who lost her campaign for Brown County Supervisor to District 5 to Dan Theno, 367 to 585, and **Jesus M. Rivera**, who lost a bid for Cambridge Area School Board At-Large by fewer than 100 votes.

So what does this mean? While LGBTQ candidates overall did well in the Spring Primary, some only won by small margins, signifying wins that were hard-fought and where every vote mattered. We want to keep queer people in office to continue advocating for the community in a state that was the first in the union to pass legislation banning discrimination based on sexual orientation, but Wisconsin has seen overreaches by the far right at all levels. Attempts have been made to ban trans kids from school athletics and gender-affirming care on a statewide level, locally to force teachers to out kids to parents who might not be safe, along with efforts to ban books and even a Dolly Parton song. Teachers in some districts can't signify their pronouns or have rainbow flags on their desks. Wisconsin has been a leader in the past, but is just as vulnerable as the rest of the

country to a regressive backslide, and the above winners are the front line against that.

EVERS VETOED BAN ON TRANSGENDER STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS

HOLDING TRUE TO HIS WORD. Governor Tony Evers vetoed a bill on April 3 that would have effectively been a ban on transgender students participating in high school athletics. The bill was introduced in the fall, and was passed by the Republican-controlled legislature, despite large community opposition and a promise from Evers that it would never become law even if it made it to his desk. Republicans in the legislature do not have the power to override the veto, which means that this particular bill, at least, is dead.

The bill would have required athletes to compete on teams that coincide with their assigned sex at birth, even if that is not the gender that they identify or present as. This topic has been a hotbed of debate around the country, with many on the right deeming it unfair and unsafe for kids who were assigned male to compete with and use the same locker rooms as those who were assigned female. Republican Rep Barb Dittreich echoed those talking points when she released a statement regarding the veto, calling Evers "misogynistic" and that "his veto today clearly demonstrates his disrespect for women and girls as well as for protecting their hard-fought achievements," according to the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

Opponents to the bill argued that there was

no real issue with this in Wisconsin, and that the ban "was a form of discrimination and harmful to transgender youth," according to the same article. Evers, in his veto message, said that these bills "harm LGBTQ Wisconsinites' and kids' mental health, emboldens anti-LGBTQ harassment, bullying, and violence, and threatens the safety and dignity of LGBTQ Wisconsinites, especially our LGBTQ kids."

As these bills spread across the country, with some becoming laws (especially in red states), we see the truth of what Evers said in his statement come to fruition, as hate crimes have risen sharply in recent years, and support for LGBTQ people and their rights has started to decline for the first time since 2015. A report by the *Washington Post* that counted the number of anti-LGBTQ school hate crimes reported to the FBI (which includes crimes committed on K-12 and college campuses) shows a stark reality and a skyrocketing jump in 2022 that has only continued through 2023 and into 2024. The largest number of attacks happened in red states, where these laws have largely been passed, but the uptick in blue states shows that even when these bills don't become law, the rhetoric and lies behind them spark violence that is dangerous to queer kids.

MADISON MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART NAMES PAUL BAKER PRINDLE AS DIRECTOR

PAUL BAKER PRINDLE, a Wisconsin native and past contributor to *Our Lives*, has been named the new director of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA). His official start date is May 9. He is replacing Christina Brungardt, who stepped down in 2023. While Brungardt brought about a lot of development and change, *The Capital Times* said she "brought in guest curators, helped coordinate the museum's youth education programming, and expanded MMoCA's permanent collection, including the installation of a limestone statue located outside the building by artist Faisal Abdu'Allah," but has also weathered controversy when an exhibition featuring 23 Black women artists was left unsupervised and was subsequently vandalized.

Baker Prindle holds an MFA in printmaking and has images from his "Memento Mori" series, one in which he photographed places where LGBTQ individuals have been murdered, in MMoCA's permanent collection. In addition to being an artist, he has spent many years as the head of the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach; and the Lilley Museum of Art at the University of

Nevada, Reno before that.

A graduate of both UW-Madison and Edgewood College, his placement as head of MMoCA has been something of a homecoming. "My work is in the collection, I worked here, and I have a great many friends here," he told an interviewer with *The Capital Times*. In response to the question of how the role of museums are changing, he stated, "It used to be that museums were places where you were very quiet, and you did not show up with headphones in, in jogging pants, with your buddies. They were highbrow." He continues, "Museums originated as tools of the Empire, plain and simple. We can critique the institution, but also we have to remember that museums don't run themselves. They're made by people who work here, human beings who are fallible and make mistakes. What I want to bring to the museum is a values-driven practice that keeps the focus on a human scale, and works to be resonant with how we want to live with art."

GSAFE STAFF CHANGES AND NEW LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

GSAFE (Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools, Inc.) has changed its leadership structure after the 2023 departure of Ali Muldrow, who was the Co-Executive Director along with Brian Juchems, according to a press release sent out on April 10. In this release, they detail that



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GSAFE's new Leadership Council will comprise five directors, who will each have specific focus areas within GSAFE, and Tyrone Creech, a Madison native who worked for over four years as a mentor with the organization, will be the Executive Director. According to GSAFE's website, Creech graduated from East High School in 2007, studied at UW-Platteville, has a passion for sports, and wants to one day focus "his advocacy in the queer community on LGBTQIA+ young athletes, providing guidance through his experiences and hope to nurture their confidence and activism into their future lives."



Brian Juchems, a transplant to Madison from rural Iowa who "developed and piloted GSAFE's Gender Inclusive Schools Project, a multi-level approach that helps school districts create systemic change toward the health and well-being of transgender and non-binary students" will serve as the Senior Director of Education & Policy. Lane Hanson, who worked with GSAFE 10 years ago as part of a Social Work internship but who has recently shifted gears toward grant writing, will be the Director of Finance & Development. Sue Neeley, a first-generation American with Laotian parents, who has several years of experience working with children and youth, and was most recently an Assistant Director at Goodman Community Center, will be Director of Family Engagement and Advocacy. Katie Rickert, a former teacher at Sherman Middle School on Madison's Northside, a queer woman, and Indian-adoptee who is "driven by the urgent need for LGBTQIA+ youth of color to see themselves represented in leadership and feel supported as they navigate their identities," will be the Director of Youth Leadership & Advocacy.

**NEXT-GENERATION "POP-UP" LESBIAN BAR
HERLOUNGE MKE DEBUTS MAY 18**

IN 2020, the Lesbian Bar Project confirmed there were only 15 surviving bars nationwide – and some of those survivors were further challenged by pandemic economics. Fortunately, the Renaissance has arrived: As of 2024, there are now 32 known lesbian bars nationwide, an increase of over 100% in just four years.



And the Renaissance has arrived in Milwaukee, where a clever new pop-up space aims to get women back on the dance floor.

HerLounge MKE announced its first event "Blooms & Beats," to be held at Denizen on May 18. Francesca Wilson, founder of HerLounge MKE, aims to create something exciting for Wisconsin women.

"After visiting places all over the world, I felt inspired to create my own space—something that was very, very different from what already exists in Wisconsin. And that's how HerLounge MKE was born."

"I check a lot of boxes in the community," said Francesca. "LGBTQ. African American. Veteran. A woman. I want to be able to reach people in each of those categories, and be a beacon for those who feel unheard or unseen. So many women in Milwaukee want camaraderie and connection with other women—but just don't have a place to find each other."

For now, HerLounge MKE is a traveling pop-up. But, if the 2024 events are successful, Francesca plans to scout a permanent location.

"If the support is there, HerLounge will be there," said Francesca. "We will be growing and advancing our concept, in response to what the community wants and needs."

Follow HerLounge MKE on Instagram and Facebook. —**Michail Takach**



LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

GENERAL NEWS

Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.

MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER is seeking funding to keep their doors open after 26 years of serv-

ing the community. A fundraising plan has been developed in conjunction with the Board of Directors and is being led by Ritchie T. Martin Jr. acting as Interim Executive Director. The Center has received a grant from Leonard-Litz LGBT Foundation and is attempting to raise

\$25,000 by May 23 to engage an additional \$25,000 matching grant. At the time of writing they had raised nearly \$6,000. The Center has also announced plans to rent out several offices in its downtown location to raise additional operating funds on an ongoing basis.

COURAGE MKE is in need of items to fill "Courage Kits" for unhoused individuals. They have given away 30,000 kits to date and are in need of travel size deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, and hand sanitizer as well as socks, toothbrushes, chapstick, and pocket snacks such as granola bars or trail mix.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION announces the launch of its 2024 Scholarship Program for the 2024–25 academic school year for students of Southeastern Wisconsin. Last year 20 scholarships of \$2,500 each were awarded to local students—a total of \$50,000. LGBTQ identifying students who are residents of southeastern Wisconsin and are pursuing a post-secondary education are encouraged to apply. Students who are allies of the LGBTQ community are also encouraged to apply as allies play an important role in making spaces more accepting. Applications are open through May 31.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT now has a Discord for youth who want to access their programming. They are also seeking youth in Milwaukee for their Youth Advisory Council. This is an LGBTQ youth collective that focuses on healing, advocacy, leadership, and fun.

FAIR WISCONSIN PAC endorsed President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, U.S. Congressman Pocan (WI-02) and U.S. Congresswoman Gwen Moore (WI-04).

FREEDOM, INC. has extended the deadline for their Queer Education Scholarship to May 17. This scholarship is open to Black or Southeast Asian, queer residents of Dane County who plan to pursue post-secondary education.

LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS announced a change in the way the Wisconsin Department of Corrections is handling printed materials. The change seeks to counter an increase in narcotics being transported by spraying them onto paper and then mailing those materials, which means that books shipped need to be in new condition. As of mid-April LGBT Books to Prisoners Madison had sent 1,400 items in 464 packages for the year but needs additional resources to continue meeting needs in our state.

MILWAUKEE LGBT SOFTBALL is registering players for their 48th season. All skill levels are

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welcome—both competitive and recreational. Players can join a team or be free agents. Games are held at Wilson Park on Saturdays from 9:00 to 3:00.

VIVENT HEALTH has begun to offer Xylazine test strips as overdoses related to the drug are impacting communities all over Wisconsin. According to reporting by Spectrum 1 News there have been at least 6 Xylazine-related fatal overdoses in Milwaukee County so far this year.

AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

Special thanks for those who do good.

BAY AREA COUNCIL ON GENDER DIVERSITY has received a grant from the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation for General Operating Support. Funding will be used to expand outreach and increase the number of trans adults, youth, families, and allies served. Additionally, funds will support further development and presentations by Trans Artists Collaborative.

COURAGE MKE is celebrating the successful move in of their first C2 apartments resident. The apartments are designed to provide housing

in Milwaukee for people ages 18 to 24 who are aging out of the social welfare system or are otherwise without housing.

LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS thanks an anonymous community member who donated several copies of *Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen*. They also recognizes Olbrich Botanical Gardens for donating books that had been part of the Schumacher Library and the Alice Baker Library in Eagle, WI, who donated several boxes of books.

MADISON MINOTAURS trounced the Milwaukee Beer Barons 50–14 in their faceoff at the Wisconsin Rugby Sports Complex in April with “Minotaur of the Match,” Dillon Beal, scoring four tries.

MILWAUKEE PRIDE shared that their President & CEO, Wes Shaver, has been selected as Vivent Health’s “Make a Promise” Leadership Award recipient for 2024.

OUR VOICE MILWAUKEE held their spring Rehearsal Intensive—a day-long music learning retreat—where they welcomed 16 new members to the chorus.

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who’s moving on or moving into org leadership.

FAIR WISCONSIN is proud to announce the promotion of Sean O’Brien to Policy and Advocacy Director. In addition, Fair Wisconsin hired two new staff, Cait Mallery as the Statewide Organizer and Ziggy Odogun as the Development Associate. They are now conducting a national search for a new executive director after the departure of Megin McDonell.

GSAFE announced a new leadership structure and the promotion of several staff to leadership roles. Tyrone Creech will now be Executive Director of the Leadership Council. Longtime GSAFE presence Brian Juchems will serve as Senior Director of Education & Policy. Former intern Lane Hanson will become the Director of Finance & Development. Sue Neeley, formerly the Assistant Director at Goodman Community Center, will come in as the Director of Family Engagement and Advocacy. Katie Rickert, a former teacher at Sherman Middle School, will be the Director of Youth Leadership & Advocacy. A Director of Youth Programming is yet to be announced.

LGBT CENTER OF SE WI is celebrating 15 years of operation. It was opened in 2009 as “a place for LGBTQ people to meet, celebrate, support, and advocate for one another. They created training, support groups, and events that built a community.” The Center would like to recognize Bruce Joffe, Gari Green, Neal Zeltinger, Sister Clarice Sevegney, Charles McDonald, John Powilaites, Lisa Thielke, Brenda Dower, Steve Wanberg, Mike Dubrowski, and others who made this space possible.

MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER now has an interim executive director, Ritchie T. Martin Jr., who formerly served the organization as a board member and External Affairs Co-Chair. Martin holds a Master of Public Health degree and has served as a Milwaukee County Commissioner as well as Director of Health Promotion at Vivent Health.

OUTREACH LGBT CENTER mourns the passing of Ginger Baier. Ginger’s history with OutReach spanned almost two decades. Starting as a client, Ginger became a leader of the Madison Area Transgender Association (MATA), and later served a term on OutReach’s Board of Directors. Subsequently she joined the staff as Transgender Health Advocate, a position which she held for several years. Thousands of people benefitted from her work over the years she was involved with OutReach.

WI LGBT CHAMBER has appointed Areli Herrera as the Supplier Diversity Program Manager. Herrera will head programming that seeks to support and expand the number of LGBT business enterprises in the state. They hold degrees in English and Secondary Education, and prior to serving the Chamber they were a classroom teacher. This position is funded through the Diverse Business Assistance Grant Program awarded by Governor Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Administration.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in.

PERFECT HARMONY CHORUS **May 17 & 19** The depths of human experience will be explored in this spring concert: *Under the Surface*. The event will be held at the open and affirming Christ Presbyterian Church (\$30).

WI LGBT CHAMBER **May 22** Central WI Area OUT After Work will be held at Daisy Lounge in Stevens Point. Whether you’re an entrepre-

neur, professional, or someone simply looking to expand your circle, this is the perfect opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals in a vibrant and inclusive atmosphere.

OUR VOICE MILWAUKEE **May 30** This spring concert, *Finding Our Way: Forward Together*, will be held at the United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay. It will conclude their 13th season and explore stories about travel (\$20).

VIVENT HEALTH **May 31** The Make a Promise Gala for 2024 will be held at the Baird Center. This event began as a dinner party held in 1986 by a group of gay men who wanted to raise money to fight HIV/AIDS (\$100).

LGBT CENTER OF SE WI **June 1** Equality Prom is a Youth Prom for ages 14–18 to dance and frolic at the Meadowbrook Country Club in Racine, from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. This year is Renaissance-themed and free to attend.

WI LGBT CHAMBER **June 17** Celebrate Pride with the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber at their annual Luncheon in Appleton at the Fox Cities Stadium. Inspiring speakers will share their story and vision for a more inclusive world. Networking and meeting with business members will be possible during a brief expo. Tickets are \$50 for members and \$60 for non-members.

WI LGBT CHAMBER **June 18** Pride Business Showcase is a signature event to celebrate Pride and network with businesses and individuals that support the LGBTQ community. The event is free, and attendees are encouraged to bring a friend or colleague to this exciting event!

OPEN **June 20** Summer Social: Madison Women in Tech. This event at Giant Jones Brewing is open to individuals of all genders (21+ with ID) but the space seeks to center women and nonbinary individuals. Free to attend; registration requested.

STAGEQ **June 21–23** The CapitalQ Theater Festival is an annual Pride Month celebration when StageQ takes over both Bartell Theatre stages for one weekend to present brand new play readings, 10-minute shorts, and one-act plays by up-and-coming queer playwrights from around the country along with free workshops and masterclasses. Festival passes are \$15–30.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION **June 25** The 2024 Summer Social will be held at 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at a new location: Radio Milwaukee. The theme is “Honoring our past to create an inclusive future.” The event will have food, beverages, entertainment, a raffle, and a silent auction. Tickets are \$50 with a 50% discount available to first time attendees. ■

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SPORTS HOCKEY COMMUNITY

What Gay Hockey Means to Me

Jon Zimmerman found community as a spectator, and a safe space as a player, in the Madison Gay Hockey Association.

TWO YEARS AGO, I had never even considered watching sports, let alone playing in one. At the time, I was struggling with depression and was losing interest in things I used to enjoy doing. Activities like yoga, biking, playing piano—activities where I could be alone in my head but still exist in the world without really having to be a part of it. Activities for me to momentarily forget the overwhelming heaviness of depression and loneliness I felt every waking moment. I was living in a gradually darkening place, and I felt out of control to stop it. It was during this time that I was introduced to hockey.

A SENSORY EXPERIENCE

I had started seeing someone who was an MGHA player, and he invited me to come watch his game. My first memory of that night was the smell of the ice arena when I first walked through the doors. It smelled like coolant and popcorn, an odd but somewhat pleasing aroma, something unique and somehow fitting. Sitting in the stands, I had no clue what to expect. I felt awkward and nervous about being an “outsider” around the other experienced hockey fans. From the stands, I looked down at the ice, trying to take it all in. It seemed so big, felt so cold, and I felt out of place. But then I spotted my guy, and he looked up and waved to me from the ice. In that moment, all of the anxiety and awkwardness melted away. I felt a sense of validation and could let myself relax and enjoy the game.

As the game began, I was absolutely mesmerized by the players gliding around the ice in their colorful jerseys. It looked like so much fun, and I couldn't keep my eyes off the game. Some of the fans sat down next to me and helped me to understand some of the game's rules. I felt welcomed and surprised at their openness and enthusiasm.

Afterward, remembering how much fun the players were having skating around and playing on the ice, I was curious to explore ice skating to see if I could do it. I bought a pair of skates and started going to public skates, crawling along the boards at first, feeling eager but looking ridiculous. All the while, I kept coming to watch MGHA games. Over the next few months, I began to meet and make friends with more



Jon Zimmerman with Lori Prechel and Breanne Cyr at the Madison Gay Hockey Association's annual tournament, the MGHA Classic.



of the players, and they took the time to help me learn how to ice skate, for which I was so grateful. At first, my only intention was to learn about the sport and ice skating so I could share in a hobby with the guy I was seeing. However, gradually, as the weeks went by, I grew more intrigued by the game, and my focus shifted and transformed into my own genuine excitement and love for the sport.

LOSE SOME WIN SOME

Things did not work out how I would have liked with the guy I was seeing, which left me heartbroken. Adding to that pain was him telling me he did not want me to come to his games anymore. I felt upset because, by that time, what I was really enjoying about the MGHA games was being around the enthusiastic players and fans and being caught up in the excitement of watching the games with them. It felt like I was beginning to be accepted into a unique community of people from many backgrounds and interests, all of us bonding together over the sport of hockey.

Sundays were “hockey” days, and it was the highlight of my week. Nevertheless, even though it hurt, I stayed away as he asked. A few weeks went by, staying home, but I continued my skating practice and hockey research. Eventually, he apologized, saying it was not his place to stop me from attending the games. I eagerly began coming again every Sunday, watching more games, and meeting more people, and he and I are still friends to this day.

After watching the 2023 Classics games, I felt like I did not want to be just a spectator anymore. I decided I would try learning to play hockey. I spent hours and hours, day after day, at the UW Shell ice rink and, eventually, the Bakke ice arenas for public skates. I ever so gradually went from crawling along the boards to clumsily skating to actually skating. When summer rolled around, I borrowed some hockey gear and went to my first stick and puck. Wearing the gear for the first time, I felt awkward and silly, but going back, again and again, it became like my suit of armor. Later that summer, I attended the MGHA skill sessions, where I learned all the basics of the game and skating. I kept going to more public skates and open stick-and-pucks, getting as much ice time as possible.

A SAVED SPACE

Eventually, fall came around, and I was now a player in the MGHA, on one of the best teams with one of the best captains. My biggest worry about joining the league was that I would get discouraged or receive harsh feedback about being bad at the game. But I was surprised at how much the opposite my experience was. Everyone was so encouraging and supportive of each other; I could miss passes, fall, skate slowly, and I was always encouraged to keep going with enthusiastic cheers from my teammates. I cannot think of any other place where taking a risk of learning something so challenging and new could be done in such a safe space.

Hockey has saved me and has helped me find new purpose and fulfillment in my life. Aside from the pure thrill and joy of flying down a sheet of ice on steel blades covered in gears with sweat pouring down your face, the sense of friendship, support, and comradery I found as part of the MGHA has helped me through some of the darkest, most difficult times this last year. Hockey has given me an outlet to pour all of my emotion, pain, loneliness, and heartbreak into a fierce, fun, and healthy activity. From all this, one thing I've learned is that it is tough to feel sad

when you're on skates.

Putting on that MGHA jersey for the first time before my first game, the feel of my skate touching the ice, the peculiarly pleasing smell of the arena, it occurred to me—here I am, a full year later, I am on the ice

Hockey has given me an outlet to pour all of my emotion, pain, loneliness, and heartbreak into a fierce, fun, and healthy activity. From all this, one thing I've learned is that it is tough to feel sad when you're on skates.

that I was once mesmerized by from in the stands. I began to think about my first time in the arena, about how nervous and awkward I felt, and wondered if it was someone else's first time. I looked up to the place in the stands where I first sat, reflecting on how different of a person I am now compared to back then. I imagined my past self up there, watching his future self down here. I looked up, and waved. ■

SPENCER MICKA



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

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BUSINESS CRAFTSPEOPLE MILWAUKEE

CTOAN Candles for Every Body

Milwaukee entrepreneur **Jodyann Morgan** and her team want to give the world more diversity of art.

UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO, Morgan never considered a career as an artist. But today, her gender-neutral, plus-size candle business has grown so successful that the 37-year-old Milwaukee resident was able to quit her full-time job and hire a part-time staff of three. It's outgrowing her living space, too.

"I was definitely someone who colored outside the lines," said Morgan, whose company, CTOAN, proudly offers art that celebrates fat bodies. The soy wax candles, plant-based planters, and other products made by CTOAN ("C'TOAN," an acronym for Can't Think Of A Name), frankly feature stretch marks, FUPAs, side rolls, butt dimples and the like, in all their human glory. They are designed with a gender-neutral perspective, says Morgan. That means all of them, the ones with genitals, too.

"Someone may be viewed or appear to be a biological female, but without them telling you, they may identify as trans or nonbinary," Morgan said. "So I just didn't want to gender the candles. I'm surrounded by a lot of queer individuals, so I wanted a business to involve everyone."

AN INSTA HIT

CTOAN's origin story, and how a former security guard found a passion that brings queer and plus-size joy to so many, begins during the early days of Covid. Before that time, Morgan enjoyed hiking and long walks. But when the pandemic hit, "the world was a chaotic place, and I

didn't necessarily want to go outside," she said.

When Morgan grew impatient with indoor gardening—and cooking up organic haircare products wasn't her jam either—she turned her attention to candle-making. And that ignited her creative spirit. Soon, Morgan looked to create something a little different, and ordered a 3D body candle mold online.

The body candle was an instant hit with her Instagram followers. "People really liked the 3D body mold candles," Morgan said. "One person messaged me, and they were like, 'Can you make a candle in my body type?' And they were plus size." With a mold sourced from Poland, Morgan began making her signature candles. Then she had a reality check.

Advised by her wife, Chaya Milchtein, that selling her candles on Instagram was not a legitimate business, Morgan found such demand for her plus-size candles that for a time, it became her before-work side gig. "That's when we started to create our own molds for the candles," Morgan said. Of the 14 body type candles featured on the website, 12 were developed in-house.

DESIGNED WITH FOLLOWERS IN MIND

While Morgan and her team's creations appear life-like, she says the molds are designed with computer software, not live models. Each torso, booty, or the very popular thigh of thunder is hand poured and can be

burned like any candle, although most consumers use them for display. "The names of the candles are all intentionally gender-neutral," Morgan adds. "We pretty much go on Google and type in 'gender-neutral names' because we try very hard to use gender-neutral language when it comes to the candles, because a lot of people do not fit in the binary."

Most of the candles are available in dark brown, light brown, or white with a choice of unscented, sandalwood, lavender, or a seasonal fragrance. Wax melts that mimic the shape of a vulva are newer to the collection. Fans of CTOAN can also enjoy many of the products by subscription, which include stickers and coloring pages.

Morgan takes her inspiration for new products from the feedback of her followers, which number 46.5K on Instagram. Folks often ask if she can make a candle in a particular body type. "People are asking for C-section candles," Morgan said. "But I don't think we're going to do that yet." Some have asked for a body type with wider shoulders and smaller hips.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there are a few social media trolls who call Morgan's artwork lewd. "At the end of the day, I'm not doing anything that you won't see hanging in a museum," she says.

While the bulk of CTOAN's sales are online, Morgan meets admirers of her creations at local shows, too. About a year ago, Morgan found just how diverse her audience was when an older woman approached her at one such market. The woman, who was perhaps over 80 years old, recognized Morgan from a TV news segment and complimented her work. "I was like, 'Oh, thank you.'" Morgan recalled. "Then she was like, 'If only there were things like this when I was growing up.' And it gave me a good feeling."

TRYING TO GIVE MORE

It's also a good feeling to give back to the community, which CTOAN has done to the tune of \$10,000 so far. It's all part of CTOAN's mission. A recent effort in memory of Nex Benedict raised funds to make Wisconsin schools safer. Separately, for every collection, a certain percentage of the cost of each candle goes to a nonprofit or mutual aid fund.

"I believe that representation definitely matters," Morgan said. "And growing up as a young queer teenager who had a hard time because of my sexual orientation, it's good to involve the community in the work I do." That means CTOAN has big plans for Pride month, but Morgan is keeping it under wraps for now. "I can't really give all the details yet," she said, only promising "Pride will be massive."

Morgan still marvels at her unexpected success. "I never set out to be a business owner," she said, adding that she'd like to connect with other Black small business owners. Although she enjoyed her career in security because of her love of sports and entertainment, Morgan realized it was, in her words, a dead end.

"Two years ago, I was making \$15.74 working at a museum with more than 10 years of experience," Morgan said. "And in the last two years, I've been able to donate over \$10,000 to mutual aid funds. Plus, I'm able to pay my employees a living wage. So I'm just really grateful. I'm not a big corporation. I don't have investors. This is just me and my team trying to give the world more diversity of art." ■



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BUSINESS | AUTHORS | AUTOMOTIVE | MILWAUKEE

Mechanic Shop Femme on Tour

Automotive expert and writer **Chaya Milchtein** talks about her childhood, career path, and recently published book: *Mechanic Shop Femme's Guide to Car Ownership*.

I SPOKE WITH MILCHTEIN on the phone in April while she waited to board a flight to Burlington, VT, the fourth stop on her 16-city book tour. However, unlike most book tours that stop at stores selling books or even libraries, this one would exclusively meet at locations not known for literature. Instead, she would be visiting mechanic shops across the country owned by people who identify as women, queer, or people of color.

She insists, "I am not a car enthusiast.... At the core of this is not a love for cars, it's a love for people. It's a love for helping people and supporting my communities through a process that's very difficult and fraught with discrimination and challenges in a way that most people just really don't know how to handle.... It's really designed for regular folks, for women and for queer folks, for people that are just trying to get to work, to school, and not waste all their money in the process."

Although many are familiar with Milchtein due to her massive TikTok following or blog, "Mechanic Shop Femme," she has spent over a decade building her brand.

CAREER BEGINNINGS

Her journey to becoming a published automotive author did not begin with anything like a childhood passion for journaling or cars, but rather grew out of desperation in times of financial hardship.

Growing up, Milchtein lived in a Hasidic Jewish home and, "was

raised without television and movies, books, music, or any kind of secular education. I went into foster care when I was almost 17.... I never learned how to write or to spell or anything like that in the traditional manner that Americans take for granted," she explained.

At 18 she aged out of the foster care system and was trying to figure out how to make it on her own. Desperately, she started a GoFundMe when someone messaged her, "Listen, money can only go so far. What do you really need?" Soon after, the individual helped Milchtein get an interview at a Sears. When asked by an employee which department she wanted to work in, Milchtein says, "Whichever one makes the most money!" After being offered either the appliances or automotive departments, she chose automotive, despite not having a driver's license at the time.

MECHANIC SHOP FEMME

After obtaining her driver's license and spending about two years answering people's questions about cars for work, a career coach suggested she start a blog. Although Milchtein doubted it would ever amount to anything, "Mechanic Shop Femme" will turn eight this June.

"There's nowhere good to turn to get advice, and when you do there's a lot of misinformation and disinformation. Most of the time, it's just contradictions because different cars require different things," explained Milchtein. "You'll look up how often to do an oil change and discover

that there are 16 different suggestions. If you're the person that's super careful, you're going to go with the most often. If you're somebody who's like, 'Oh, I don't want to spend my money,' you're going to go with the least often—and both are probably going to be wrong."

Next, she began teaching classes about cars and was getting quoted in different publications; one of those was the now defunct *Rewire* by PBS, whose editor asked Milchtein if she would consider a writing assignment—launching her career past as a journalist as well.

Over the last four years, Milchtein has produced an online video series featuring women and queer-owned mechanic shops around the country. So, once her book deal was underway and she knew it would be released in April (which is National Car Care Month), she was inspired to collaborate with some of these repair shops instead of bookstores. Book tour attendees must pay a \$5.00 admission ticket fee, all of which will be turned into the Jill Trotta Scholarship to help women and queer folks that are entering the automotive industry have access to tools, clothing, and tuition assistance. The scholarship's namesake is a queer, ASE-Certified Master Mechanic who wrote the forward to Milchtein's book.

"She's my mentor and friend. She's made a lot of difference to a lot of people in the automotive industry. This scholarship is in honor of her to continue the work that she's been doing and the opportunities that she's created for so many of us in the industry," explained Milchtein about Trotta. "It's part of what I do: Community, giving back, and supporting each other is really very important to me."

Mechanic Shop Femme's Guide to Car Ownership has public appeal. It sold out its first print run via preorder the day before it was published.

"Ultimately, the guide is there to help people be better car owners and arm folks with the knowledge that they need to be the very best that they can be.... My goal is to help regular people with their cars. Nothing in my book is for car experts, although I find that most people will learn something from it, including car experts and car enthusiasts."

QUESTION & ANSWER

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR YOUR BOOK?

This book was written for queer folks and for women, and it's a book that will help everybody. My friend Mercury Stardust says, "A focus is not an exclusion." It's going to help anybody who owns a car, but it is written specifically for queer folks and for women. It takes into account our experiences and struggles within the industry to acknowledge what people have been through—and what they're likely going to face—while offering them the tools to be better, more educated car owners and to save money in the long run.

HOW IS THE BOOK STRUCTURED?

The book is a guide to car ownership. It goes through the lifecycle of owning a vehicle, starting with buying the car, and ending with selling it. So, the first two chapters are dedicated to buying a car, then there's a chapter on car insurance and extended warranties. Then there's how to find a mechanic, and then we go into your owner's manual and preventative maintenance, brakes, tires, electric cars, car emergencies, and a lot more stuff. Then I have a chapter on electric vehicles and hybrids, how to let go of your vehicle when it's time to let go, how to make that decision, and then selling your car at the end.

It is all written in first person, like I'm sitting there and talking to you. I include a lot of data to back up what I'm saying because people learn differently—some learn from just straight-up facts, and some learn from data. I included my own stories in the industry and stories that I've experienced with my customers. I also included many, many stories from people who shared their experiences with their vehicles, which are intended to illustrate and drive home the different points I make. So, it's

a pretty easy read. It's not a textbook, and it's written for regular people.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO WRITE A BOOK?

It was an interesting experience; the world of publishing is shrouded in mystery. You get a lot of information from a lot of different people—it all seems to contradict itself. That's probably because different authors have different experiences. Depending on who you work with and how you work with them and what kind of advocates you have on your side, your experience writing and publishing a book is very different.

So, for me, I finished writing the book just under a year ago. Then there was all the editing and many, many, many, months of marketing the book—that was probably the largest chunk of time. I got my book deal two years ago, from Hachette Book Group's Little, Brown Spark. My experience was far different from what I was expecting. For example, my editor really allowed me to take the direction I wanted it to go in and to take the lead to make sure that this is something that came out that matched my vision—which I was surprised about, because I've heard a lot about editors pushing back in different ways to change it.

I guess that's a testament to how hard I've worked and how far I've come in building my brand and my ethos that I was granted that trust. She basically said, "Write the book. Let me know if you have questions, and get it back to me by this date. Then we'll take it from there with the editing process." I hadn't expected that. I thought they would want one chapter at a time or one section or a couple chapters. So, I was surprised.

ARE YOU TAKING ANY TIME OFF AFTER THE BOOK TOUR?

I'm a workaholic and a Capricorn. So, I'm taking some time, but I am going to Europe for my sister's wedding. Then I have a weeklong press trip in Portugal, which should be pretty relaxing, hopefully. Then I have to go to the Indianapolis 500 for a story in a print food magazine. Then hopefully after that, I'll get a little bit of a break in July. ■



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Professor Profile: Finn Enke

UW-Madison professor and artist **Finn Enke** (he/they) talks about his upcoming memoir and graphic essay collection, prioritizing tenure over transition, and being the only openly trans faculty member in 2011.



ENKE FIRST ARRIVED in Wisconsin as a faculty member at UW in 2001 and continues today as a professor in both the History and Gender and Women’s studies departments. When asked whether he’d rather talk more about his queer professional life or queer personal life, Enke admitted the two have blurred over time.

“In some ways it’s a little bit hard to separate them. I would be queer and trans were I not an academic, but academics has also always provided me a kind of a vehicle for exploration,” explained Enke who is also the Director of UW’s LGBTQ+ Studies certificate program. “I was exposed to a lot growing up. One of those things was if you’re interested in something, you can learn about it. So, in that way it’s a little bit hard for me to separate what I do in my job from what I live, to an extent.”

Over their 23 years at UW, Enke has garnered quite an impressive resume with a variety of publications, earning a tenured spot on the faculty, and receiving the 2023 Emily Mead Baldwin Award in the Creative Arts; this UW award will provide him \$20,000 over two years toward both his upcoming comic project and graphic memoir.

An outsider might imagine that being such a superstar in the field of queer history would make coming to terms with his gender identity a cakewalk. Yet having been born almost 60 years ago, Enke still had to fight off feeling trapped in the cultural norms of the times he grew up in.

FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Enke grew up in Michigan in a family of intense readers who were very involved in the Vietnam anti-war movement. His immediate family’s church of choice was particularly progressive, as the pastor’s wife was a radical feminist studying to be a minister, and at least one of their children was a lesbian. Enke’s mother followed suit, and he even describes her as, “sort of a champion of gay people,” and having queer friends. However, Enke still grew up with the impression that although their mother might not have been ignorant about queer identities, they still should not choose that lifestyle.

“It wasn’t like, ‘Here’s a way that people can be, by the way don’t think that you have to get into a heterosexual marriage.’ No, my mom was very like, ‘You’ll meet some nice man,’” recalled Enke who also empathized with his mother’s concern over personal safety

for queer individuals. “She was aware of trans existence—very aware of it—and had no judgment in a moral sense but...it was the way she would always put it as, ‘That’s a really hard way to be.’”

In Finn’s upcoming memoir, he recalls her having this sentiment when he shouted, “Look!” having been a child fascinated by trans women in long, sequined dresses on a family vacation to New York City. Unfortunately, Enke only recalls having awareness of “transsexual women” as a kid, and that would eventually grow into a sort of childhood sci-fi, imaginative fear.

“That really scared me, because I felt like if they can turn into women, then somebody’s going to be able to turn me into a woman. I was afraid they would force me into the same sort of medical, technological regime...So, when I encountered discussions of transsexuality, I felt a certain kind of recognition in people, but a terror that I would be forced in that direction,” shared Enke who identifies as trans male.

QUEER BEGINNINGS

Enke eventually went on to Swarthmore College and would graduate from the Pennsylvania-based school in 1987. It was there that they would first really dive into queer culture, attending events on campus for GLUBQC, a student organization which stood for Gay and Lesbian Union and Bisexual and Questioning Circles. He fondly recalls most of his college friends coming from these student gatherings and attending dances at Bryn Mawr College, a nearby women’s liberal arts college.

However, Enke still refused to acknowledge their queerness and was in a long-term relationship with a cisgender man that lasted even after college. Enke’s mom passed away right as he was on the cusp of coming out as queer in the early 90s. This ended up serving as a tipping point to acknowledge his sexuality.

Enke reflected, “‘My life is mine. Like her life was hers, but my life is mine, and I don’t owe it to anybody else.’ I needed desperately to just be true to what I was experiencing, and my dad didn’t have any problem with it at all. I don’t think he found it particularly interesting...he doesn’t treat anybody differently depending on their identity or labels.”

Enke would go on to complete a master’s degree at the University of Minnesota in 1992 and then in 1999 a Ph.D. in feminist history, gender history, and the history of sexuality.

TRAJECTORY TOWARD TENURE

By the time Enke arrived at UW in 2001, they were openly identifying as a lesbian in both their professional and personal life.

However, Enke describes their gender identity as something that was almost like an irritating horsefly.

“Trans has always been hovering; it’s always been hovering. It’s just been so present in my life, but really the models of trans that I grew up with when I was young in the 70s, 80s, and 90s even, were not models that I could really recognize myself in,” explained Enke. “The medical models were...so binary, and then there were these sets of procedures that had to follow along this trajectory—that just didn’t feel right.”

An outsider might imagine that being such a superstar in the field of queer history would make coming to terms with his gender identity a cakewalk. Yet having been born almost 60 years ago, Enke still had to fight off feeling trapped in the cultural norms of the times he grew up in.

As a result, they threw themselves into their work focusing relentlessly on pursuing tenure at the university. “There was no way at that time that I was going to say, ‘Oh, let’s also do this other major thing that I can barely even comprehend how that’s going to work out!’ But after I got tenure, all of a sudden it was like, ‘Oh, these doors are starting to blow open.’”

Once the pressure of earning such a

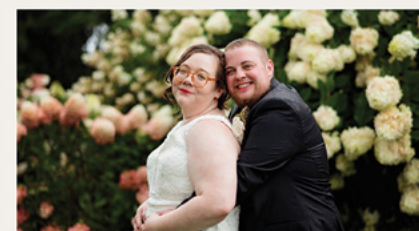
sought-after academic achievement was over in 2007, Enke started noticing how some students were really pushing them to be a more conscious professor and not make assumptions about people’s gender identities. It was actually the university setting which allowed Enke to witness a lot of different ways of existence and create a dialogue of how they were interacting with the world and their own identity.

“I didn’t come out as trans prior to tenure because I wasn’t ready to—not because my job wasn’t secure or people wouldn’t have been supportive—but because I wasn’t ready to do that in all aspects of my life. My job had to be all-consuming at that stage. It would have been hard to transition then. But mainly, I wasn’t ready to contemplate whether and how I might ever step farther into trans,” explained Enke.

COMING OUT—AGAIN

Finally in 2011 Enke publicly came out as trans, and at the time he didn’t know of a single other out trans professor at the whole university. He heard rumors of another one in STEM, but it would be years until he had a trans colleague, “and it really sucked in countless ways to be the only one,” they said. “When I first came out as trans and started using ‘they,’ oh my god, did it take people a long time! Like a decade... it seemed like ‘they’ was just never going to happen.”

Eventually another openly trans professor



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was hired, but the employment was only short-lived. However, gradually a build started, and now there are many openly trans and non-binary professors and staff spread throughout most of the schools at the university.

“I think it’s still very possible to feel isolated and definitely marginalized in numerous ways. But I’m not only not the only one carrying the ball, I’m now so ancient that I’m not even a mentor anymore—I’m almost more like a relic. Everyone else is doing most of the carrying—at least it feels that way in comparison to just a decade ago—and it’s a beautiful, exciting thing,” explained Finn.

Enke’s queer visibility has been an important marker of validation for the student body

according to Peter Zook (he/him/his) a member of the UW undergraduate class of 2010. Zook fondly remembers Enke being a queer elder as empowering.

“I just don’t think we have an enough of that... like there was no vision of what the future looked like, and we were kind of getting a sense of what the future could look like.... We hadn’t seen a whole lot of that, or at least I hadn’t, and it was rad to get to see,” said Zook.

COMIC PROJECT & GRAPHIC MEMOIR

For the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 semesters, Enke will be taking a sabbatical to finish his comic project and graphic memoir. Although they have always dabbled a little

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in visual art, it was not until they started to transition that Enke regularly found themselves creating; “Almost like it was not something I made a conscious decision about,” they explained. At first, they kept it very separate from their academic work as it felt so personal and autobiographical. However, eventually, “I basically came out about the fact that I was working on a graphic memoir,” Enke joked about sharing it with the university.

PEDAGOGIES OF THE IMPOSSIBLE:
FROM THE TRANS ON CAMPUS CORPUS

This graphic essay collection is a series of comics that started seven years ago and describes the trans experience in educational environments. It details how people come to learn about gender diversity and the experiences of people whose gender identities are more marginalized, and it helps to educate allies.

WITH FINN AND WING: ARCHIVE OF AN
AMPHIBIOUS CHILDHOOD IN A NUCLEAR AGE

This graphic memoir is told from a child’s perspective and involves both an archival element as well as childhood art, married together through collage. Family documents and environmental reports are accompanied by handmade art using childhood nostalgic tools like crayons and magic markers. The book will share what it was like growing up as a transgender kid before there was known language for it in popular United States culture. Including a variety of stories like the frightening two years of nuclear power plant construction that took place close to his childhood home.

Interestingly, Enke says his growing passion for creating art has also influenced his teaching, as he has increasingly added graphic memoir to his class syllabuses.

GRADES ARE IN: WHAT THE STUDENTS ARE SAYING

“I really like to take classes with them; they’re probably my favorite professor here at UW...The classroom environment was really engaging and affirming...He is very thoughtful, like he doesn’t necessarily assert that what he knows is the end all be all...[Enke] make[s] sure the students all know that what we’re thinking has value, and I know as a student, I’ve come to really appreciate that.” – Jess Harlan (they/them) took four classes with Enke and completed their undergraduate studies in May 2024.

“It was always just such a warm, chill atmosphere. I definitely recall feeling like for the first time this is a very queer space for learning, and I learned about so many historical figures I just didn’t know; that was eye opening. It really helped cement that, ‘I’m gay and this is what gay history looks like.’ We felt really welcomed

and seen. I really loved the questioning of so much, of all the norms that are how you’re supposed to be. It was really cool to get to be like, ‘Oh wait, it doesn’t have to be like that.’ Finn introduced so many things. That’s where I watched *Paris Is Burning* for the first time in class. So much free thinking that I always hungered for but never got to do. He’s a really warm, kind, sweet, good person—like salt of the earth.” – Zook, who completed a certificate in what was known as LGBT Studies at the time of his graduation.

“The medical models were...so binary, and then there were these sets of procedures that had to follow along this trajectory—that just didn’t feel right.”

“Even though I changed my [graduate thesis subject] multiple times, Finn was always really cool with it, which was great. Finn was always down for whatever I was passionate about, which was just really cool. Because it was hard for me to figure out what I wanted to do; I have a lot of interests.... Even the things that they didn’t know about, they were really interested in learning about, which was very cool.” – Ollie DiPietro (they/them), who graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Gender and Women’s Studies in May 2023. ■

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Queer Climbing Social

Co-chair **Becca Ridge** (she/her) and Co-host **SJ Hemmerich** (they/them) on a monthly meetup at Boulders Climbing Gym's two locations in Madison.

WHAT IS THIS MEETUP ALL ABOUT?

HEMMERICH: Climbing Social is a celebratory space of queer joy and community every first Sunday of the month at one of the Boulders locations from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. We climb and socialize with each other, though you may choose to lean into either climbing or socializing depending on how you are feeling! We generally switch between the two Boulders locations: the downtown location has only bouldering, which is climbing shorter walls with no ropes, while the eastside location also has higher walls where climbers can either clip into the automatic belay devices or ask a belay-certified person to belay them while they climb.

RIDGE: To me, Madison Queer Climbing Social is all about providing a safe space where queer folks in the Madison area can feel empowered to use their bodies in a way that feels good to them. It's no secret that gym culture can be a little intimidating. Ideally Madison QCS is able to lower those barriers to entry and make climbing for everyone.

HOW DID THIS GROUP GET STARTED?

HEMMERICH: Once I learned about QCS nearly 10 years ago, I began coming early every month and was often one of the last to leave. I felt at home with my community, excited for the climbing, and grateful for the shared meals. Because of the COVID pandemic, there is no longer food at these events; but maybe at some point we can bring that back!

RIDGE: QCS was started by Jacqueline Goldstein as a collaboration with Boulders as an affinity group for the under-represented population of LGBTQ climbers. Alongside QCS starting, Boulders plays host to two other affinity groups, Madison Climbers of Color and Madison Women Climbers. Together, these make up a portion of Boulders' Climb 4 Community program meant to make climbing accessible to everyone.

HOW MANY PEOPLE USUALLY COME TO EVENTS?

HEMMERICH: Recently, I would say we have about 25-40 attendees at each event. I am always surprised how many new people we have, both to the event itself but also to climbing! In the past year or so, I have found the most joy in welcoming some of our youngest queer, trans, and nonbinary folks who attend the event with their supportive caregivers. It is powerful to witness the youngest members of our community surrounded by the support of their parents or caregivers as well as the larger queer community. Not only are the young climbers seeing themselves represented as adults living full and complete lives; but also the caregivers are able to imagine a fulfilled, joyful future for their children, one that's not always highlighted in the doom, gloom, fear, and horror of the media and current anti-trans legislative efforts that have been specifically targeting them.

RIDGE: Like SJ said, we've been seeing upwards of 50 people at our monthly event lately, and there's always room for more. I've been excited to see that we've been getting more youth and children interested in attending (usually with parents tagging along, too) and also getting some



folks closer to the Gen X age group. We really want to create a family-friendly space and never want age to be a barrier either.

WHAT SKILL LEVEL DO YOU NEED TO ATTEND?

HEMMERICH: You can come to QCS as you are, with no prior climbing experience and no gear. As long as you wear something comfortable to climb in, Boulders has climbing shoes and harnesses for you to use. What is "comfortable for you" is for you to decide—people wear everything from athletic gear to dresses to jeans! We want you to show up—so, you do you! Many people who attend QCS are belay-certified and can belay you if we are at the eastside location. There are also automatic belay systems that you can clip into, if you prefer. We also have "intro climbing" or "learn to belay" classes that are free at some of the events!

RIDGE: None at all! Just a willingness to learn and meet new folks. I particularly really enjoy teaching folks how to climb for the first time. There's nothing quite like seeing someone finish their first climb. Nobody can take away that feeling of you having accomplished something using your own body and brain. On days where I or others aren't feeling like doing a lot of climbing or even socializing, I'll often say, "It's called Queer Climbing Social. Out of those three words, it's fine if you only have energy for the 'queer' part today."

ANYTHING ELSE?

RIDGE: A bit of my own personal story here: As a trans woman, I've struggled to feel like I "belong" in athletic spaces and also in using my own body for a sport. There was always a lot of shame there. However, Boulders and Madison Queer Climbing Social have played a huge part in inspiring me to love everything that my body is capable of and to use it in ways that feel good to me. Because of the people I met at QCS, I have had the privilege of competing in a handful of competitions put on by Boulders. Did I do very well in any of them? Not necessarily. But for me, what matters is that I was able to get out there and do it. Those are the kinds of stories I hope to help others have, too.

HOW CAN PEOPLE LEARN MORE?

HEMMERICH: Information about QCS is on the Boulder's website with links to join our Facebook group called "Queer Climbing Social" and our google group, queerclimbingsocial@googlegroups.com. Either will allow you to receive announcements or be aware of any changes to our schedule. A change usually means the location needs to be changed, or the event is on the second Sunday instead of the first Sunday because of a conflict or holiday. ■

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ORGANIZERS BIKING NON-COMPETITIVE SPORTS

Madison Queer Bike Ride

Organizer **Zach Johnson** shares about a meetup in Madison's Law Park. The ride specifically welcomes all bodies, including new or infrequent bikers, on the second Wednesday of every month at 6:00 (weather permitting).

HOW DID THE MEETUP GET STARTED?

I wanted to get out biking more and get more of a community that I knew around biking. I've been to some of the other rides around town. Occasionally they skew a little "Bro [culture]" or towards a more traditional sports group. It wasn't really my thing. I just ride my bike because that's what I like to do. This is about creating a space more open to being less competitive, less heteronormative, and just kind of be around people that are similar to me.

WHAT EQUIPMENT DO PARTICIPANTS NEED?

Anything goes. I try to make it a ride that will not require you to have some sort of specialized off-road bike, but then I also don't want it to be a ride where you have to have a nice road bike that'll zip you around really fast. It's intentionally supposed to be somewhere in the middle. It's a lot more casual, and what they call "party pace."

WHAT IS YOUR PITCH FOR THE RIDE?

My biggest thing is I often find myself selling it to people who aren't bike riders and trying to convert them into biking in general. It's a good way to get started biking because someone will plan the route for you. You get to come out and meet other people who like to bike and then hang out. We often have a social stop. In the winter, those are generally indoors

and at some sort of establishment, but in the summer, I try to make the social stops some where outside.

March was our first ride after daylight savings. We celebrated by biking to Governors Island to catch the sunset.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT ROUTE TO TAKE?

I test them out ahead of time. I bike all the time because I don't have a car, so it's just all that I do in town to get around.

I definitely ride a lot of them beforehand just to make sure that I can get all of the turn directions accurate. Otherwise, there's so much conversation and stuff going on during the ride and I'm not always the one [up] front.

IS IT A YEAR-ROUND RIDE, WEATHER PERMITTING?

It's a year-round ride. The only weather that I would generally cancel for is extreme cold or one of my least favorite ones is cold rain. If people are not prepared for that, getting wet and cold can be pretty dangerous.

DO YOU ALWAYS START IN THE SAME SPOT?

We always start in Law Park, near the boat launch and tiny beach. ■

To learn more visit [Instagram.com/madisonqueerbikeride](https://www.instagram.com/madisonqueerbikeride).



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Hard Work

Crossroads Community Farm organic farmer **Cassie Wyss** talks about becoming a farmer and a member of the LGBTQ community later in life.

FOOD & DINING | COMING OUT | FARMING

BEING A FARMER PREPARED ME well for coming out. With my dirt-caked boots and weathered hands, I know how to walk into the unknown and hold hope that something beautiful will grow from the tiniest of seeds. Thick heat, cold rains, and tired muscles have taught me how to do difficult things, and how to keep doing them when all I crave is an easing that isn't yet in reach.

I remember the last day-trip we took as a straight nuclear family. We'd taken the kids on a sunny August canoe float down the Wisconsin River. We were using a farm truck to haul the boat and when I got back inside the cab that afternoon, I was overwhelmed by the smell of tractor diesel and dirt, a smell I associated with home and my partner. It undid me. It was the smell of my life as I knew it. Our separation planned and imminent, my soon to be ex-husband held my hand as we drove back east on Highway 14, my tears falling silently amidst the unknowing chatter of our three daughters in the back seat.

At that moment I could never have imagined the expanded beauty my life now contains. All I knew then was that I had to leave the life I was currently living, and that was terrifying.

BEGINNINGS

I always tell people I fell into farming.

From a very young age, I was deeply in love with the natural world around me. I struggled (and still do) to understand why our culture commodifies, devalues, and degrades the natural systems that sustain both our bodies and spirits.

Tired of grading papers and prepping science lectures, one summer on a lark I took a job on a local organic farm. The days felt impossibly long, but I kept at them because I could feel myself accessing something deep and meaningful in the work. Working outside in the community of humans and birds and bugs to grow food that then sustained me, tapping into that cycle, felt right and true. It made me feel whole.

Eventually I met my now ex-husband and farming partner. Together we built a successful, local organic vegetable farm. Together we created a family sustained and kept healthy by the literal fruits of our labor.

LINES

When I think about my coming out story, one visual always pops up in my mind—a smile line.

A farming community colleague and I had started meeting up to discuss the lack of connection between farms like mine and folks struggling to put food on the table. First we had these conversations in meetings, then over beers. One evening at the Ohio Tavern, she found something I said darkly ironic. She smiled. She has this smile line that pops up on the left side of her face, but never the right. I noticed from deep within that this fact delighted me.

From that tiny little uneven smile line, eventually I could draw a whole line that connected many dots inside of me. There were so many things I



had overlooked and misunderstood. The truth had been there all along. At first, that little line and what it had revealed to me was an unwanted revelation. But eventually my ex-husband and I began to see it as a gift. It morphed into a bright, clear line of explanation. You see, as partners we had brought to life so much beauty. And yet we felt unfulfilled together. There was something intangible, unnameable that was missing from our relationship. We both felt it for years, but we didn't know what it was. We had tried so very hard to grow what wasn't there. But some things even farmers can't grow.

It was May. JJ came to the farm to help out for the afternoon. They were helping me pull muddy, wet row cover off of the bok choy rows to dry in the sun. With smiling eyes and a mischievous grin, they said, "I hear the queer community has a new gem." Fast forward to August that same season. JJ was back, helping weed the pepper beds.

"JJ, what do you mean when you say queer community? I don't really understand what that means, or how I can become a part of it—especially living out here." JJ thought for a minute. They'd been out for most of their adult life and had lived in urban settings most of the time. Queer community wasn't something they had to think about seeking at this stage in their life. "Hmm," they said. "Maybe... sports?"

BEAUTY OF HARD

The growing seasons began to pile one on top of another, layered year by year. After some time I recognize what June tastes like. My eyes and skin learn that the goldenrod, delicata squash, and soft low light make September the yellow month. My life becomes a mixture of patchworked green fields, crisp fresh food, boisterous smelly crew mates, comical farm dogs, and chubby strawberry stained cheeks. My existence is woven between the land I work, the food I grow, the birds that serenade me, the people I sweat alongside of, and the humans I love.

Farm work is hard. And as much as we would like to soften it, nature has different ideas. We work in the elements—transplanting onions with numb hands in April, slogging through fields during July rains, harvesting tomatoes in August heat waves, knowing they would spoil before more comfortable working temperatures return. We bend down. We hoe. We shovel. We lift heavy things. We have to repeat mundane tasks in the heat at efficient paces.

One hail storm can destroy months of labor. And well, the baby plants in the greenhouse don't understand that it's Saturday—they are still thirsty. Farm work and farm life demands much of us. It is achingly beautiful. A true privilege.

Family meetings happen on Sunday evenings. Whichever parent hasn't had the girls that weekend cooks a nice meal for the whole family with whatever vegetables are in season. The other parent brings the girls over for what we call 'transfer'—a term borrowed from the farm, for the

constant movement of trucks, tractors, produce, and people from one set of fields to another. These meals are a safe space we created for the girls, where they know they will have access to both of their parents together once a week to discuss plans, events, requests, and family matters that require parental agreement.

One family meeting, a few years back, I was nervously preparing to bring up a topic of my own. I had learned about Madison's gay hockey league, and I wanted to join. With a slightly trembling voice, I asked my kids and co-parent if they would be willing to sometimes have family meetings on Monday nights during the winter so I could play hockey on Sundays and possibly meet other queer folks.

I held my breath. Thankfully, they said yes.

NOURISHING ACCESS

I used to think my coming out and the concurrent shift of my farm's work toward food access was a coincidence. I see now that it wasn't.

Coming out allowed me to access a part of myself that had never before been available to me. And without realizing it, at that same time I began to grapple with concepts of accessibility through many different lenses. What did I have access to? What didn't I? What access do I have that others don't? What responsibility do I have to increase access to others and what does that look like?

For the past four growing seasons, every Wednesday we load up a white cargo van with enough vegetables to feed 60-80 households. Alex from Healthy Food For All then drives these veggies directly into food apartheid neighborhoods in Madison, where folks who lack access (both the cash kind and the car kind) to fresh, high-quality local, organic produce, can take what they want for free. On those same Wednesdays, we also deliver vegetables for 40-60 households directly to Badger Prairie Needs Network's pantry where shoppers can get our beautiful produce at no cost.

The food we give away is of the highest quality. We want to make sure recipients feel respected, dignified, and cared for—because everyone deserves access to beautiful, nourishing food.

SEEKING COMMUNITY

Recently I attended an annual fundraiser for the gay hockey league at Club Five. I walked in and everywhere I looked there were friendly faces I knew. The energy in the place was light, fun, connected, and I felt a solid sense of belonging. In my mind I could hear my favorite captain cheering, "Let's play hockey with friends!"

Years back in the peppers with JJ, I remember being so scared and vulnerable when I asked them about queer community—what it meant and how I could find it. Through hockey, I now know that answer in lived experience.

Coming out allowed me to access a part of myself that had never before been available to me. And without realizing it, at that same time I began to grapple with concepts of accessibility through many different lenses. What did I have access to? What didn't I? What access do I have that others don't?

It's one thing to seek out queer community that already exists. It's another to try and cultivate it in one's own space. As I have begun to feel more comfortable in my own queer boots, I feel both a personal desire and a responsibility to grow community right here in my fields.

These days, if you drive up to our farm during the growing season, the long tidy rows of different organic vegetables (as opposed to the monocultures growing around us), our unusual blue barns, and a queer flag fluttering off the front porch will greet you. Out in the fields you'll find a workforce that averages 55 percent openly identifying as queer. And if you ask those queer workers what attracted them to our farm, they'll tell you it was the evidence of inclusivity, both in the creation of a queer rural space and our food access work that drew them. And like all farmers, they'll tell you there's always more work to be done—improving accommodation for neuro-diverse workers and creating a more inclusive environment for BIPOC crew members are areas our farm needs to improve.

WHAT GREW

On the day of the canoes, diesel, and tears—I was terrified that my

family would be broken, that I would lose the farming life and the career I held so dear. All I knew then was that I'd discovered a beautiful truth, a seed that must be allowed to germinate no matter how frightening.

Now, I have access to the truest version of myself. Now, my family, redefined, is stronger. Now, I belong to and am uplifted by queer community—one discovered, one created. Now, concepts of inclusivity and access weave their way throughout our entire farm business, with tangible on-the-ground results both in our fields and our community.

My life and career did not end. They changed and flourished into something far more gorgeous.

I had just attended my teenage daughter's parent teacher conference—looking every bit the farmer I am. I was in dirty work pants, a sweat-stained cap and t-shirt, with a radio on my hip and visible dirt in my nails. My muddy boots had left a visible trail down the tiled hallway. My daughter was furious. Middle school is a time to fit in with the pack, and from her perspective, I had carelessly alerted the predators of her difference.

"Why are you so weird?!" she yelled. She wanted a fight. "You don't wear make-up. You're divorced. You're gay! You're learning to play hockey, as like, an old person. You're still friends with Dad and call him family. You're an organic vegetable farmer and have this like 'queer farm,' AND you and Dad still work together! You can't even divorce like regular people. Can't you do anything normal?!"

I responded, "Oh, my love. I am so proud of everything you just said."

To learn more about Crossroads Community Farm, or to support their food access work, please visit crossroadscommunityfarm.com/food-access-work or donate to their annual community fundraising campaign at givebutter.com/TvuYnB



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The faces behind Delta:
Tim "Pio" Piotrowski &
Michelle "Speedy" Riehn.

Delta Means Change

Delta Beer Lab has done their best to take the high road, as economic pressures challenge business to find a new way, by making changes that still serve their mission and values.

FOOD & DINING SPACES DRINKING EMPLOYMENT

DELTA BEER LAB had a solid business plan when they opened in February of 2019. They worked on creating a model rooted in their values of sustainability, fair pay, environmentalism, community, and helping support local nonprofit organizations that aligned with their mission and values. Their mission statement is: To expand the community through quality local craft beer, without barriers to gender, race, or sexual orientation.

The original business plan included buying locally made equipment, obtaining a large community space for events in an area of Madison/Fitchburg that is negatively impacted by racism and economic disparities, contributing to environmental initiatives to offset the impact of their business (1% for the planet), and paying their employees a living wage (with revenue share) so that tips could be donated to local nonprofits each

month. The plan worked, and worked well, until the pandemic struck 13 months later, and the economic aftermath of the pandemic required Delta Beer Lab to re-organize and strategize as inflation rose, impacting every area of their business model.

CHANGING IT UP

In March 2024, Delta Beer Lab sent out a press release outlining the significant changes that the organization was making to try to mitigate the rising costs they are incurring due to inflation, high interest rates, and financial issues related to pandemic losses and the changes in how and when people gather in public spaces in a post-shutdown pandemic economy.

One of the major changes to their model includes re-organizing their employee pay and their nonprofit revenue share model to lower the costs of their products and encourage consumer growth. This means that they shifted from accepting tips for their nonprofit of the month to allocating those tips to employees instead. This move was made in the hope that they could lower their employees' hourly wages without negatively impacting their employees' ability to make a living wage. This move also opened the potential for tipped employees to make more than what they were making with their higher-than-industry-standard hourly wage. Delta Beer Lab has also committed to pay their employees their prior hourly wage should the tips received not cover the difference between what they were making previously and the new salary structure.

These organizational moves have allowed Delta Beer Lab to lower the prices of their products and keep their employees fairly compensated while preserving their mission and values with the hope of increasing customer growth.

Delta Beer Lab's new plan for supporting local nonprofits moves from a monthly model that was sustained through tips from customers to a model in which each week a different local nonprofit is featured through a program named Change It Up Tuesdays. Each Tuesday, a different nonprofit receives the proceeds from sales for the day and can accept donations at an event they host at Delta Beer Lab 4:00–8:00 p.m. Delta Beer Lab will assist with planning the event and advertising on their website and through social media, while the nonprofit of the week is tasked with hosting and inviting supporters to join them in the taproom. This shift might result in a smaller amount of funds going to each nonprofit but also allows Delta Beer Lab to continue to provide funds to local nonprofits that align with their values.

These organizational moves have allowed Delta Beer Lab to lower the prices of their products and keep their employees fairly compensated while preserving their mission and values with the hope of increasing customer growth. They hope to re-evaluate in the future and find a better way forward. The changes have been made public to raise local awareness of the struggles that small businesses are facing in a post-shutdown pandemic economy, as pandemic financial relief has dried up while inflation and interest rates continue to rise.

PRICING STRUGGLES TEST VALUES

As a business that opened 13 months before the pandemic shutdown, and eased into reopening post-shutdown by prioritizing the safety of their staff and guests, Delta Beer Lab has struggled to find a balance between the increasing costs of operation, costs of living, and knowing when and how to pass those costs on to the consumer through increasing prices. They chose not to raise their prices in the first three years of operation in the hope that they would recover by now as the return to "normalcy" continued in a post-shutdown pandemic economy, despite rising costs resulting from pandemic-related inflation and shortages, including increases to the costs of ingredients, freight, and packaging.

Delta Beer Lab decided to raise their prices in Year 4 and rolled out a reasonable increase in costs that seemed to be generally acceptable to customers and the community. However, the ever-increasing costs forced them to raise prices again, which ultimately resulted in a stagnation in sales. This required them to re-examine the increases that were put into place and re-strategize on how to balance the increasing costs, while

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They are inspired by, and dedicated to, the Seventh Generation Principle of the Native North American Indigenous tribe the Haudenosaunee, that the decisions Delta Beer Lab makes today result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future.

finding ways to encourage growth and also preserving their commitments to their staff, nonprofit partners, and their mission and values.

The financial challenges that Delta is facing have forced the business to actively engage in testing their values while trying to maintain some semblance of a sustainable business model. The changes that were implemented are contextualized within their values of doing good for their staff and community, while being mindful not to engage in practices that are contradictory to their mission and values in order to survive.

The owners of Delta Beer Lab will readily tell you that they did not get into the business to make excessive amounts of money but rather to make enough revenue to support themselves, their staff, their community, local nonprofits that align with their values, and environmental organizations that help offset the impact the brewery has on the ecosystem to sustain into the future.

They are inspired by, and dedicated to, the Seventh Generation Principle of the Native North American Indigenous tribe the Haudenosaunee, that the decisions Delta Beer Lab makes today result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future. This principle is centered in

Delta Beer Lab's values, as care for their staff and community, as well as care for water quality resources and climate change issues have a direct impact on long-term sustainability regardless of overall economic recovery; simply put, beer and community cannot be made without people, water, and crops.

Every decision that Delta Beer Lab has made, however difficult or precarious, has been filtered through their mission. Despite their best intentions, they have recognized where they have made mistakes and will continue to embrace community feedback when they have faltered. It is never more difficult to know what the right thing to do is than when decisions are made that don't perfectly align with their organizational values but are good decisions for their bottom line. This balance is not something that most businesses are transparent about, but Delta Beer Lab has made community accountability an important part of their values. Delta Beer Lab openly welcomes feedback and partnerships as they appeal to the community to help the business continue to sustain and encourage growth so that they have more resources to support the community.

CAN PASSION PAY OFF?

While this feature is focused on Delta Beer Lab and the economic impact that recovery from the pandemic has had on their business plan and their business model, the challenges that they are facing are not exclusive to their business or to breweries. Unfortunately for many small businesses, there has not been a return to pre-pandemic economic normalcy and growth. Many small businesses are struggling to keep up with the continued rise in operational costs, with several filing for bankruptcy as a result. Delta Beer Lab is just one of many businesses that are trying to find



ways to keep the doors open, the lights on, their staff compensated, and their rent paid. And while most of us are struggling to keep up with the high-interest rates, out-of-control housing costs, and the seemingly unending impacts of inflation, the message from local small businesses and nonprofits is timely and clear: If you are able, please find ways to put your money toward businesses and organizations that align with your values so that they may survive—and hopefully thrive—for years to come.

Despite the everyday challenges and stresses of operating Delta Beer Lab, the owners are hopeful that the changes they have made will encourage growth and sustainability. There is no dispute that Delta Beer Lab is passionate about what they do and why they do it; Delta Beer Lab is committed to centering community and living their values even when this conflicts with their bottom line. They are committed to the struggle to do better and to be better than they think they can, and dream of a day when everyone at Delta Beer Lab can shift their focus from the financial stresses they are currently experiencing to focus on their passion for crafting quality beers while supporting the causes that feed the soul of their business and community.

WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN SUPPORT DELTA BEER LAB

1. Buy their beer and/or other beverages (including gluten-free and N/A options) and/or Delta Beer Lab merchandise, and encourage others to do as well! They have carryout options available for those not into the taproom scene as well.
2. Bring friends/family/colleagues out to Delta Beer Lab—The space is located right off of the Beltline, off of Rimrock Road, minutes from Fitchburg and Monona, less than 10 minutes from Downtown Madison, and about 15 minutes from most other areas in Madison. They have plenty of parking and a large accessible taproom (whimsically

decorated with science/chemistry references) and brewery spaces. The bathrooms are gender neutral with two ADA-accessible bathrooms. They offer a variety of beverages including non-alcoholic options and gluten-free options. The taproom is large with tables of varying heights and sizes, and in the warmer weather months, they offer outdoor seating. They have board games, activities available throughout the week (e.g., trivia and craft nights), as well as food for purchase to make yourself, and they also allow folks to bring their own food.

3. Sign your nonprofit up to be featured on Change It Up Tuesday.
4. If you are planning an event, consider holding the event at Delta Beer Lab—they have reasonable rates for large events and often do not require a rental fee for nonprofits and smaller events.
5. Consider the impact you can have on keeping local small businesses open and help sustain these spaces for the future. ■

Author's note: Delta Beer Lab will always have a warm place in my heart as they were a brand new brewery who embraced the first Magic Festival Pride event hosted by OutReach in 2019 following OutReach's decision to remove police participation in the 2018 Madison Pride Parade and the move to a brand new police-free event. It was a risk for any business, let alone a new business, and I'm grateful for their support then and in the years since.



JILIP NAGLER finished up their term on the board of OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center, is a member of OutReach's Madison Area Transgender Association Leadership Team, a musician, and a community activist and organizer dedicated to collective liberation. Everything ze knows about justice ze learned from Angela Davis, bell hooks, and queer/trans People of Color.

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Our yearly roundup of queer third spaces and other food & beverage related businesses in the Madison area—and around the state.

FOR LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS, queer owned-and-operated third spaces provide an opportunity to be ourselves in a way we don't always get to be in other areas of our lives, with restaurants, cafes and coffee shops doing most of the heavy lifting. For years we've been curating a list of LGBTQ-owned spaces that would love your support. As hard as we try, a truly comprehensive list is impossible without your help. If you know of any businesses that aren't on this year's list, please let us know about them! Email us at contact@ourliveswisconsin.com.

MADISON-AREA LGBTQ-OWNED FOOD & BEVERAGE RESTAURANTS & THIRD SPACES

- The Baked Lab
- Cargo Coffee
- D'Vino/Dinotto
- Daisy Cafe & Cupcakery
- Delta Beer Lab
- Fair Trade Coffee House
- FIVE Nightclub
- Fromagination
- Giant Jones
- Greenbush Bar
- Herbiery Brewing
- Java Cat
- Mariner's Inn & Betty Lou Cruises
- Michael's Frozen Custard
- The Old Fashioned
- The Shamrock Bar & Grille
- Square Wine Co.
- Willalby's Cafe
- WOOF'S

OTHER BUSINESSES

- D-Bar Bakery
- Simply Served Personal Chef
- Stubborn Mule Catering

RESTAURANTS & THIRD SPACES AROUND THE STATE

- Allen Creek CoffeeHouse
- Bee Charmer
- Cash & Olive's Pub
- Chandler House Bakery
- Crossroads Community Farm
- Dotty's Bar & Bistro
- Get Real Cafe
- Great Northern Distilling
- Hamburger Mary's
- Horseradish Kitchen + Market
- Luna Circle Farm
- Millie's Coffee and Eatery
- Moxie Food + Drink
- POP
- Pyramid Event Venue
- Todo Postres
- Wolf River Roots
- Young Earth Farm

ESTABLISHMENTS

THE BAKED LAB 100 S. Baldwin St., Suite 202, Madison The Baked Lab is the brain- (and sweat-) child of Shawn Bolduc. Cooking feels like a mysterious art to a lot of folks, but Shawn is on a mission to correct that problem. The other part of Baked Lab is the "Lab" portion where those interested can sign up for classes that seek to offer lessons and also good times. Recently the Lab has been perfecting baking up a variety of croissants.

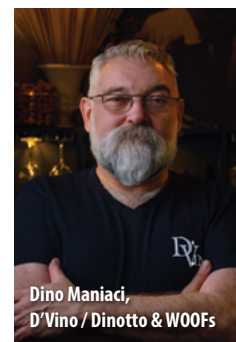
CARGO COFFEE 750 East Washington Ave., Madison & 1309 South Park St., Madison Lynn Lee co-owns Cargo Coffee with his twin brother, Lindsey. Their globally sourced coffee beans are locally roasted, and the shop's decor reflects a vintage charm with oversized maps and aviation/culinary themed antiques. The East Washington location continues to host a wide array of musical acts.

D'VINO / DINOTTO 116 King St./106 South Webster St., Madison Traditional Italian fare is on the menu at D'Vino with a standard dinner menu evenings, brunch on Saturdays and Sundays, a Sunday supper, and now open for lunch on Friday (reservations on OpenTable). An additional location, Dinotto, is slated to open soon around the block at 106 S. Webster St. They will feature imported Italian deli meats and cheeses, and housemade sandwiches, salads, sauces, and desserts. There will also be Take-N-Bake items: lasagne, stuffed shells, and eggplant/chicken parmesan to make dining at home with D'Vino convenient and delicious.

DAISY CAFE & CUPCAKERY 2827 Atwood Ave., Madison Kathy Brooks



Tami Lax, The Old Fashioned



Dino Maniaci, D'Vino / Dinotto & WOOFs



Lynn Lee, Cargo Coffee



Andrea Hillsey, Square Wine Co.



Brian Cummins, Great Northern Distilling



Matt Trotter & staff, Horseradish Kitchen.

co-owns the cafe in Madison's Atwood neighborhood. The menu includes gluten-free, vegetarian, and vegan options. It's a great place to meet for lunch or brunch where you can get one of their specialty egg stratas with varieties currently including Crimini with Havarti & Pesto, chorizo pepper jack, Denver, and Apple Cinnamon.

DELTA BEER LAB 167 East Badger Rd., Madison Owners Pio and Speedy and the rest of the Delta team are celebrating five years of crafting beer and crafting change in the Madison community. Since opening in 2019, over \$237,000 has been directly donated to Delta's local nonprofit partners all while making damn good beer. Always keen on a wide selection of beer styles and collaborations, Delta will soon be adding cocktails and wine to their drink line-up. From Drag Queen Bingo, food carts, and live music to steel-tipped darts and an art gallery, Delta has something for everybody.

FAIR TRADE COFFEE HOUSE 418 State St., Madison The coffee shop was purchased by co-owners Casey Thompson and Thomas Beckwith-Thompson in 2017. It is both a hub for students studying and an early evening gathering place that's an alternative to bars. They prioritize serving fair trade certified coffee drinks and also have cold brew, baked goods, a selection of sandwiches for breakfast or lunch, smoothies, and desserts.

FIVE NIGHTCLUB 5 Applegate Ct., Madison Since 1998 FIVE Nightclub, owned by Dave Eick, has served patrons drinks and entertainment in the club just off Fish Hatchery Road. A community-supported revival in 2015 rejuvenated the club and it remains a central hub of LGBTQ celebrations. They host groups and hold various events including karaoke, drag shows, pageants, Latin Night, line dancing, fundraisers, and variety shows.

FROMAGINATION 12 South Carroll St., Madison Fromagination is Madison's downtown cheesemonger, owned by Ken Monteleone. The specialty cheese shop features dozens of artisanal Wisconsin cheeses and more from around the world and donates to various causes. Customers can use the website to access ordering, class registrations, cheese boards, gifts, and catering options. Lunch can be ordered through EatStreet.

GIANT JONES 931 East Main St., Madison Jessica and Erika Jones started their brewing company in 2018 to bring big beers to Wisconsin's brewing scene. Their craft beers are certified organic and pack a punch at 7% or more ABV. Their taproom is open Wednesday–Saturday evenings. Wednesdays they will now be collaborating with ORIGIN Breads to serve pizza in the tasting room. View their website for a sizable list of additional places to enjoy their brews on tap or to go.

GREENBUSH BAR 914 Regent St., Madison The basement bar in the Italian Workmen's Club in Madison's Greenbush neighborhood is steeped in Sicilian family history. Owner Anna Alberici has shared her family's recipes in the cozy basement restaurant since 1993 where you can find pizza, pasta, and cocktails. The dining room is open Thursday–Saturday evening with reservations, and curbside pickup is also available Wednesday–Saturday evenings.

JAVA CAT COFFEE HOUSE 4221 Lien Rd., Madison Relocated due to redevelopment at their previous location, the coffee shop owned by Renee Raspiller offers coffee that is fair trade, organic, and roasted in Madison by Just Coffee. Along with sandwiches and baked goods, they are once again serving their housemade gelato.

HERBIERY BREWING 2015 Winnebago St., Madison One of two trans-owned breweries in Madison, Herbiery is a modern brewery using timeless herbs instead of hops. Nia Ryan started the business in 2019 and along with Maddy McKeown opened the taproom in Schenk's Corners in the past year.

MARINER'S INN & BETTY LOU CRUISES 5339 Lighthouse Bay Dr., Madison In 2000, Robert von Rutenberg joined his brothers Jack and Bill to carry on the family businesses of waterfront dining and boat tours on Lake Mendota. Now in their 58th year of operation, Mariner's Inn serves dinner five nights a week but is also open earlier for cocktails and has a lighter bar menu with sandwiches and appetizers. June–October look for Lobster Boils the last Thursday of the month. Betty Lou Cruises launches from Mariner's Inn six days a week from Friday May 24 through Sunday October 20.

MICHAEL'S FROZEN CUSTARD 3826 Atwood Ave., Madison Michael Dix has been making frozen custard for more than 30 years. His restaurant has a vintage soda shop vibe and offers vanilla and chocolate custard along with a flavor of the day in cones, sundaes, and shakes as well as burgers, dogs, and fries. Also available: Blue Crown Coffee (hot and iced) made from single origin USDA Certified organic beans along with bagels and a daily assortment of pastries.

THE OLD FASHIONED 23 N Pinckney St., Madison Tami Lax focuses on cooking Wisconsin food and seasonal fare on Madison's Capitol Square. The Old Fashioned, opened in 2005 and managed by Lax's partner Jennifer DeBolt, has a 'Sconnie-casual menu that features famous cheese curds. They are open for lunch and dinner and closed Sundays. Neighboring restaurant Harvest, opened in 2000, ceased operations after ongoing challenges reopening post pandemic.

THE SHAMROCK BAR & GRILLE 117 West Main St., Madison The Shamrock is technically Madison's oldest gay bar. The original bar began in

EDITOR'S NOTE Is there another business you want to see included? Please let us know at contact@ourliveswisconsin.com.



Tommy Hanna, Allen Creek CoffeeHouse



Nate Prince, Willalby's Cafe



Anna Alberici, Greenbush Bar



Nia Ryan & Maddy McKeown, Herbiery Brewing



Mary Celley, Bee Charmer

1985, and since 2013 owner Bob Mahr has worked to keep his drink specials affordable and the food menu accessible. Open seven days a week with happy hour (3–7), Movie Mondays, Friday fish fry with RuPaul's Drag Race, and Packers games all on tap.

SQUARE WINE CO. 1 East Main St., Madison Andrea Hillsey's enthusiasm for wine is equal to her depth of knowledge about the vintages she carries from small family growers around the world. She's committed to teaching consumers about wine appreciation and pairing. You can join them for Friday night tastings (RSVP required) or sign up for the wine club for a monthly bottle with an accompanying food pairing recipe.

WILLALBY'S CAFE 1351 Williamson St., Madison Owner Nate Prince took over Willalby's in 2010 after working there for a decade. The diner is a long-time institution on Willy Street and is known for its vegan-friendly breakfasts and giant buttermilk pancakes that are among the best in town.

WOOF'S 114 King St., Madison Dino Maniaci's King Street bar has served patrons since 2008 with an industrial sports vibe unlike anything in the city. It offers a variety of activities and events as well as dart/pool leagues and leather nights.

OTHER BUSINESSES

D-BAR BAKERY Madison D-Bar Bakery is a home bakery settled conveniently in Madison. Dustin Barman brings your ideas and creative thoughts to life in a way that builds community and enhances your gathering. Offerings range from light summer tarts to traditional tiered wedding cakes or beautiful, themed cakes for any occasion.

SIMPLY SERVED PERSONAL CHEF McFarland J Moe prepares meals, offers cooking lessons one-on-one or groups, serves food for special events, and sources seasonal ingredients for omnivores or those with

gluten-free or vegan palates. As a personal chef, J does everything from shopping for ingredients to preparing food in your home, cleaning the kitchen, and storing meals in your fridge or freezer.

STUBBORN MULE CATERING Madison Co-owned by Ryan Meuller, Stubborn Mule Catering focuses on creating unique events. Menus are always different, and they bring fresh ideas to catering large events or personal chef services. When possible, they source ingredients from farmers' markets and base menus off of local, seasonal ingredients. They have now added weekly meal prep to the offerings with meals cooked and delivered Sundays. They can accommodate vegetarian, gluten-sensitive, dairy-sensitive, and KETO diets (processing facility has gluten and dairy present).

AROUND THE STATE

As *Our Lives* looks to have a more statewide reach, we are including several businesses we are aware of outside of Madison. Want to see your business on our list? Please let us know by contacting info@ourliveswisconsin.com.

ALLEN CREEK COFFEEHOUSE Evansville This cafe was opened last year by Tommy Hanna (owner of the recently closed Mediterranean Hookah Lounge). Seated next to Allen Creek in downtown Evansville, they have espresso and specialty coffees featuring beans from Rusty Dog Coffee in Madison, Chocolate Shoppe Ice Cream, sandwiches, and fresh baked goods.

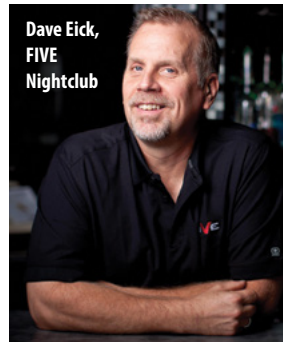
BEE CHARMER Brooklyn Ask Mary Celley anything about bees and she will bring her many years of experience and education in horticulture to explain why different honey has different flavor or how you can successfully keep bees at home. The honey bee enthusiast has been known for selling raw organic honey, candles, beeswax, heirloom tomatoes, pumpkins, squash, and ambrosia sweet corn at the Dane County Farmers' Market.

CASH & OLIVES PUB / MILLIE'S COFFEE & EATERY Cambridge Courtney Sargent and Jen O'Branovich have moved into what was formerly The Sports Page Bar & Grill with their dogs Cash & Olive. The pizza has stayed from the previous business but there are now dining items on the menu that are not otherwise available in Cambridge along with supper club nights. Located inside the pub, Millie's Coffee and Eatery has drive thru coffee and breakfast seven days a week and sit down brunch on the weekends.

CHANDLER HOUSE BAKERY Watertown Chandler House has weekly favorites and rotating flavors so there's something for everyone! Cheesecakes, cupcakes, cookies, bars, muffins, quiche, macarons,



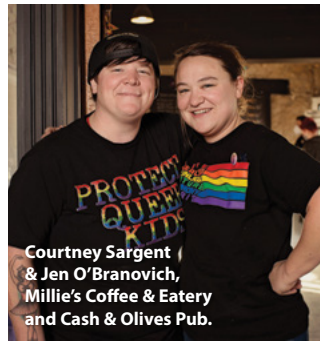
Jessica & Erika Jones, Giant Jones Brewing



Dave Eick, FIVE Nightclub



Shawn Bolduc, The Baked Lab



Courtney Sargent & Jen O'Branovich, Millie's Coffee & Eatery and Cash & Olives Pub.



Ken Monteleone, Fromagination

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CROSSROADS COMMUNITY FARM Cross Plains Crossroads Community Farm is a certified organic operation co-owned by Cassie Wyss. They purposefully grow high-quality, organic vegetables to give away to those who are struggling with food insecurity locally in partnership with existing organizations in Madison who have established relationships distributing food to the communities who need it most. This work is funded by sales to customers as well as community donations.

DOTTIE'S BAR & BISTRO Cross Plains Craig Kimball and his partner Kongmeng Vang talked for years about opening up their own place, and a vacancy in Cross Plains gave them that opportunity. Named after Craig's mother, Dottie's mixes Louisiana comfort food and decor with Wisconsin sports memorabilia. Make it a destination for Friday fish fry or stop by on your way to American Players Theatre.

GET REAL CAFE Sturgeon Bay Get Real Cafe is situated in a 100-year-old building in Sturgeon Bay. Open for breakfast and lunch, the menu emphasizes food options for almost every palate and most dietary preferences. Made-from-scratch meals, bakery, refreshing smoothies and juices with bottomless organic coffee can satisfy every craving.

GREAT NORTHERN DISTILLING Stevens Point Proprietor Brian Cummins is now celebrating 10 years of operation at a new location. They have a tasting room and dog-friendly patio where you can enjoy their grain-free Vodka from local potatoes, gin, bourbon, rye, coffee liquor, barrel-aged rum, and a small annual run of brandy made by distilling wine from neighboring Sunset Point Winery.

HAMBURGER MARY'S Milwaukee Hamburger Mary's is a burger joint with a one-of-a-kind menu and entertainment. Known for an open-minded atmosphere and eclectic drag shows, Mary's has

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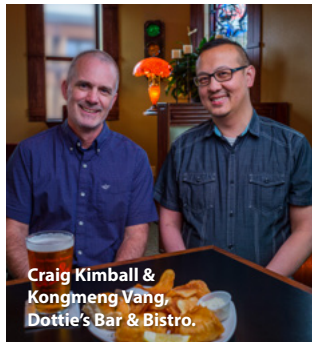
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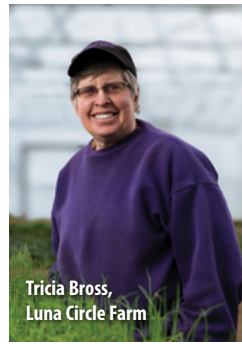
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Craig Kimball & Kongmeng Vang, Dottie's Bar & Bistro.



Tricia Bross, Luna Circle Farm



Renee Raspiller, Java Cat Coffee House



Jesus Bisoso & Pedro Garcia-Rios, Todo Postres



Jillian Macson and Eli Wedel, Pyramid Event Venue

become a staple of the LGBT community since the first restaurant in San Francisco opened in 1972, and it now has locations across the country. The stars of the Mary's menu are the gourmet half-pound burgers with your choice of beef, chicken breast, Beyond Burger, or faux chicken.

HORSERADISH KITCHEN + MARKET Princeton What started in 2015 as the cutest little yellow awning-clad food truck serving specialty sandwiches has evolved into a brick-and-mortar restaurant with a full kitchen. Matt Trotter describes the food as "lighter, fresher, healthier" fare. June through August "The Sunday Sessions" bring live music to the deck where you can view the Fox River and adjacent nature preserve.

LUNA CIRCLE FARM Rio It's easy to spot the stand with the purple awning at the Dane County Farmers' Market. Owner Tricia Bross brings a lifelong experience of farming along with more than a quarter century of experience specializing in organic vegetables. This USDA-certified Organic farm grows an array too wide to list.

MOXIE FOOD + DRINK Whitefish Bay MOXIE Food + Drink, the Milwaukee North Shore's premier upscale-casual restaurant, is owned by wife/wife team Anne Marie and Tamela. MOXIE features inspired American comfort food—steaks, seafood, and pasta—in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

POP Milwaukee Located in the building that formerly held Switch, POP is a bright, spacious, and colorful bar with a full-service restaurant menu including weekend brunch for the family. Head in for a Packers game, RuPaul's Drag Race viewing party, or check out one of their pop icon album release parties.

PYRAMID EVENT VENUE Lake Mills Childhood besties Jillian and Eli started this business to bring a little piece of city living to Lake Mills. Pyramid provides live entertainment nearly every evening including monthly drag shows and drag bingo, karaoke, Nerd Trivia, and a full range of live music in every genre. The location has housed a pizza business for many years, and they continue to offer award-winning pizza baked in a well-seasoned, 40-year-old oven, plus pasta and salads. The Pickle Pizza has now replaced the Spicy Cheese Curd pizza as their most popular dish.

TODO POSTRES Milwaukee Pedro Garcia-Rios & Jesus Bisoso run a Latin bakery offering traditional items as well as custom sweet temptations for all occasions. Check out their social media to see their mouthwatering flan, tres leches, and beautiful occasion cakes

made for an eclectic clientele. They also host a talk show broadcast live with guests every Thursday at 7:00 p.m.

WOLF RIVER ROOTS White Lake Amid the tranquil beauty of Langlade County stands Wolf River Roots, a beloved gathering place for locals and visitors alike. Set in a historic church, it offers a cozy retreat with delicious breakfasts and lunches. Experience the warmth and hospitality of this charming coffeehouse before exploring the abundant recreation opportunities the area has to offer.

YOUNG EARTH FARM Randolph Shirley Young's Young Earth Farm has a wide array of seasonal, certified organic produce available at the Dane County Farmers' Market (just look for the blue and white converted ambulance!) as well as through home delivery or pick-up at Delta Beer Lab. Their produce is extensive including fruits, vegetables, herbs, even bedding plants.

NOTABLE CHANGES

THE BAKER'S TABLE Sun Prairie Gavin Logan is the baker behind the pies, cakes, cookies, and other treats that were previously available for purchase at the Sun Prairie Farmers' Market and other venues. Gavin and family have stepped back from distribution at this time to spend more time together.

CAFÉ SOCIAL 102 N. Bedford St., Madison Partners Omar Lopez and Doug Swenson co-founded the coffee shop located on the ground floor of the Lark building on Bedford Street (just on the edge of UW-Madison's campus) specializing in single-origin Arabica coffee beans sourced from a family farm in Armenia, Quindio, Colombia. Unfortunately Omar passed away last year, and the business has now closed.

CARACAS AREPAS & EMPANADAS Madison Luis Dompablo and his partner David Piovanetti have sold their business to good friends, the brothers Carlos and Luis Aguilar, after 14 years of operation. The El Salvadorian brothers have kept the Venezuelan theme for now but hope to open an additional cart in the future for their home cuisine like pupusas as well as family dishes from their Nicaraguan grandmother.

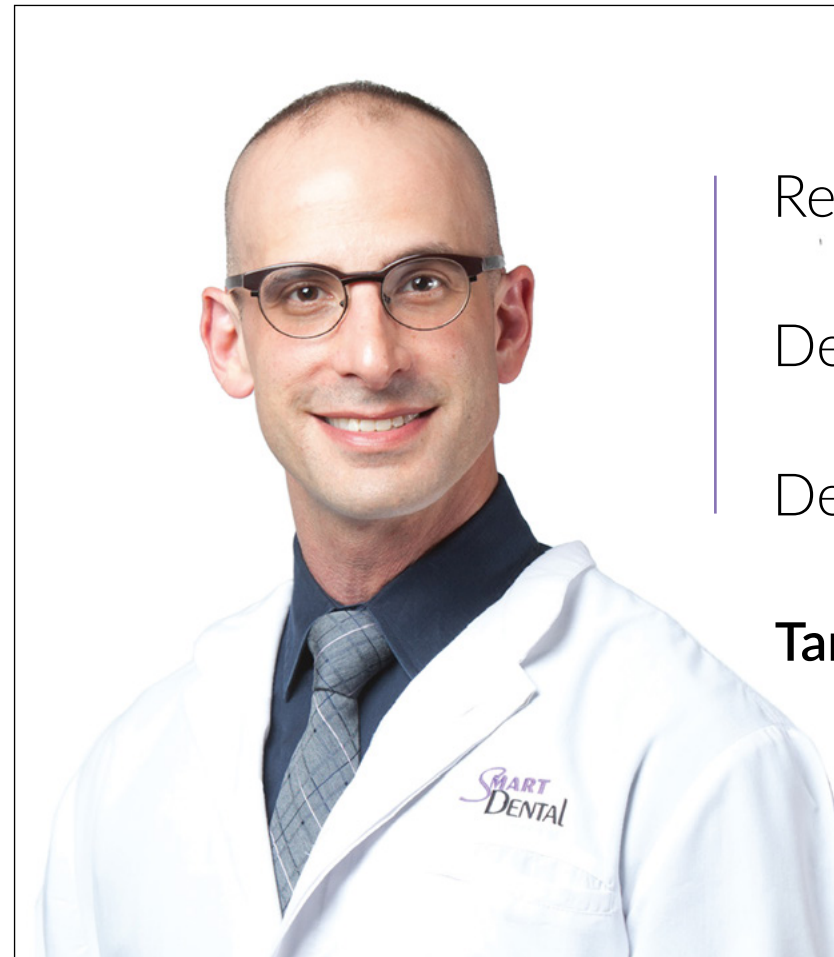
MEDITERRANEAN HOOKAH LOUNGE 77 Sirloin Strip, Madison After 30 years of operation the Hookah Lounge held a farewell party and closed their doors in April. We will miss the Lebanese cuisine, cocktails, karaoke, belly dancers, and afternoons smoking Hookah with friends. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE Is there another business you want to see included? Please let us know at contact@ourliveswisconsin.com.

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In their Milwaukee bungalow in April of this year.

COMING OUT HISTORY

Growing Together

After 25 years together, Pam Mehnert and Lisa Malmarowski reflect on the decades of LGBTQ setbacks and progress they've experienced in Wisconsin.

THE ADAGE “Never date someone you work with” is a common refrain, yet Lisa Malmarowski and Pam Mehnert have defied it. These two individuals, known for their thoughtfulness, have been in a relationship since 1998 when they met at the Outpost Natural Foods Co-op. Pam was the General Manager and offered Lisa a job—and the rest is history.

LEGAL MARRIAGE

They initially entered into a domestic partnership when it became legal in Wisconsin, but later decided to get married in a state where they could relocate if required. They married in Seattle on September 18, 2013, and celebrated in Milwaukee that November with friends and family.

Lisa, who never envisioned getting married, did not want to be constrained that way. “I never imagined my future and wanted to live in the moment.” Before meeting Pam, she had dated men and women. She grew up in a typical Midwestern, middle-class household. Her family was Catholic but not very strict, so she did not have to contend with the religious baggage that many gay individuals must navigate. She discovered kindred spirits in school through music and theater and had close friends. “I didn’t realize my high school friend Mark was gay until we were both in college, and he came out to me.” Later, she discovered that most of the men she dated or hung out with in school were gay.

Pam, on the other hand, grew up in a highly religious family that joined a worldwide church (which some consider a cult) when she was 12 years old. At 14, she enjoyed spending time with boys as friends but was also attracted to girls. “I was sporty and quite a tomboy, so I could wear jeans and t-shirts most of the time in high school. I had crushes galore and wrote what probably looked like love letters to many a girlfriend. The Christian guilt and my naivety kept that from going further. Growing up in a Christian family, like many others, I pushed those feelings deep, deep down until I was 26.”

FINDING ACCEPTANCE

Both women received support from different networks when they discovered their sexuality. Pam was working at the co-op in the 1980s when she began to meet other lesbians and found the courage to be herself. She no longer hid her sexuality from anyone except those who could harm her then-partner’s employment. They lived in Milwaukee’s liberal Riverwest neighborhood and attended every women’s concert and workshop they could. A whole new world was opening before her, and she dove into it as fully as possible, attending organizing meetings for women’s groups, gay rights marches, and the like.

The former couple moved to Washington Heights in 1987 and showed Pam what a great “gayborhood” looked like. Her first gay bar experience was at Fannie’s in Milwaukee. It was amazing and scary for her at the same time. Dancing and holding hands with a girlfriend/partner for the first time in public was something she never could have imagined. A favorite gay bar memory was playing a game of pool with her partner and having two very, very butch women put their money on the table (meaning, of course, they wanted to play them in the next game). Before the match started, her partner whispered, “We’d better let them win.”



Together at a work event at Outpost Foods. In Key West. Earlier in their time together. Getting married in Seattle.

Lisa moved to Madison at 17, where she went to a gay bar for the first time called Going My Way. The club had three floors, with the lower level being the women’s bar. Meeting someone who asked her to dance took little time. “I guess I knew then but never really identified as anything. I saw myself as bisexual, but the big emotions and romantic love always seemed to be entwined with other women.”

Lisa quickly found friends and a community in Madison. She even joined a women’s group for a while. One thing that stood out was going to the MAGIC picnic in Madison. Getting out of dark bars and being out in the open sunshine with hundreds of folks like her made an impression and felt powerful. She remembers holding hands with other women and running across a field like a queer Coca-Cola commercial! Lisa’s favorite memories of her younger self were Sundays at Park Avenue and dancing with other women at Fannie’s. She views these times through the mist of the past and the feeling of being young and invincible.

Both women have found acceptance of their sexuality and their

Her first gay bar experience was at Fannie’s in Milwaukee. It was amazing and scary for her at the same time. Dancing and holding hands with a girlfriend/partner for the first time in public was something she never could have imagined.

community, and they believe that LGBTQ life has progressed. Lisa observes that today in this country, gay folks can live openly and bravely, unlike before when it was still a secret. The early 1980s were a period of genuine growth for the gay and lesbian community after events such as Stonewall and other riots/protests opened people’s eyes to their struggles. However, even with those strides, people still lived double lives. While the general public segregated the lesbian community into butch and femme, the dyke culture was still going strong. Change was happening, but it was slow.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS emerged during a particular period of Pam and Lisa’s lives. Lisa’s roommate started talking about this “cancer” that only affected gay men and was feeling worried. “Little did we know how it would explode into the lives of many. I don’t think there’s a way to explain how this felt or impacted our community. It changed things in so many ways. We all had to become advocates and allies for ourselves and our families. It pushed all of us out of our closets.”

On this serious subject Pam notes, “It is hard to explain to someone younger how the AIDS crisis changed society politically and culturally. Suddenly, people had to fear not only coming out but also public opinions about the community they identified with.”

She also remembers when bars and clubs became a mixed company with straight folks wanting to hang out. “While what we said we wanted all along was to be included in a society like everyone else, it was weird to lose our own space. Women-only events began to disappear locally and in popular culture, and the great “coming out” that began with Ellen was happening not just on television but in music.”

From Pam’s perspective, lesbians began to disappear during the ‘90s

and early 2000s. Movies and sitcoms had gay male characters, so there was no place for lesbians other than daytime talk shows. Ellen followed Rosie on TV; they gained acceptance because they appeared “nice.” Lilith Fair was incredible, but you didn’t see many self-proclaimed lesbian performers. Of course, she says, “If you want to see change (then vs. now), look at women’s college basketball and the WNBA!”

Pam’s history includes attending the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival with her first partner every August. They went every year from about 1987 to 1995. “The Fest,” as it was known, was where you could let your freak flag fly proudly. Pam has vivid memories of the year that Tracy Chapman performed. Unknown at the time, her music was on the radio a year later. “That didn’t happen with many other women performers. Those were great times and great memories.”

Pam also expresses her pride toward the efforts of the gay, lesbian, and trans community before the 1980s, which led to Wisconsin becoming the first state to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in 1982. She further mentions that she and her friends sponsored Tammy Baldwin, an openly lesbian candidate, in the late 1980s and helped her get elected. There was a particular pride in being part of the marches and coming out of the closet once they accepted their true identity.

THE FUTURE NEEDS HISTORY

Lisa is proud that she and Pam are in a position to mentor younger people. “We have young trans friends and family who are just starting their journey into personhood, and it’s extraordinary to be their role models.” Both women are concerned about the complacency that can occur with minorities and their rights. They can see the gains but think LGBTQ people need to realize that these strides can be fragile and taken away.

“Although accepted by most, we are not universally embraced. Public perception can take generations to change, but we must continue fighting for the rights of non-conforming people,” Lisa said.

The couple is now retired from their positions at the Co-op and have advice for the next generation: Lisa strongly advises voting for your rights and the rights of others, being kind, being brave, and finding your people. Pam wants younger people to remember LGBTQ history and every social movement that made that history. She says being yourself is not a crime; we might always have to fight to keep it that way. Don’t take anything for granted. ■

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WHO'S WHO
in Wisconsin LGBTQ History

HISTORY DOOR COUNTY PFLAG VETERAN ADVOCATES

Are You a Friend of Sandy Brown?

Army veteran **Sandy Brown** is a former Vice President of PFLAG's National Board and a recipient of the PFLAG Starr Award as well as the Door County's Ann Kok Social Justice Award.

ASKING SOMEONE “Are you a friend of Dorothy’s?” used to be a way to determine if someone may be a member of the LGBTQ community. If you were in Door County, you may have heard “Are you a friend of Sandy Brown?” Sandy is a local fixture there—deeply connected to the LGBTQ community where she has been a familiar presence since 1976.

Sandy Brown was born in 1946 in Rolla, Missouri—a city halfway between St. Louis and Springfield. She was the eldest of four children and had three younger brothers. In the first two years of Sandy’s life, she moved 24 times. When reflecting on her youth, Sandy vividly remembers going to the local movie theater her senior year in high school where she saw the film *The Children’s Hour* starring Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, and James Garner. In the movie’s dialog, Sandy remembered hearing the word “lesbian” for the first time. The movie wasn’t a positive portrayal of lesbianism but still Sandy knew that she strongly identified with the characters. Throughout high school, Sandy had what she called “strong female friends” and dated boys because she didn’t think anything else was possible at the time.

WOMEN’S ARMY CORPS

In 1967, Sandy was in college studying technical theater. One of her favorite memories from this time was being in a children’s theater workshop production of *The Wizard of Oz* where she had the role of Glinda the Good. Sandy sought the advice of a college counselor about being gay. She told the male counselor that she thought she may be a homosexual. The counselor replied, “Oh, I don’t think you want to be that.” Sandy thought that maybe her counselor was trying to protect her because at that time homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) used in the field of psychology. The DSM would not change its stance on homosexuality until 1973.

In Sandy’s junior year of college, a member of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) presented to students about a month-long summer program that involved going to Fort McClellan in Anniston, Alabama. Sandy was drawn to the thought of service as her family had a strong history of military service. During World War II, Sandy’s aunt had served in the United States Marine Corp, so Sandy decided to “go play soldier.” During her time at Fort McClellan, Sandy learned about an opportunity to join the service as a WAC after college graduation. With her undergraduate degree, Sandy would be sworn into service as a 2nd Lieutenant. Sandy became an executive officer in the WAC where she trained battalion operations for other female officers and enlisted members entering the U.S. Army.

Sandy learned pretty quickly that army life was not for her. Sandy reflected on this time that she “didn’t really like anything—except I didn’t have to decide what to wear.” Sandy completed officer training but was told if she wanted to go somewhere other than Fort McClellan, she had to extend her service. She had already made up her mind that she was not staying and began writing a list on legal paper to share with her supervising officer on why she didn’t want to be in the army. When she eventually shared the list with her supervisor, the list had grown to over five feet long in length! Sandy became “the talk of the base” due to the legendary length of her list.

Sandy left the army after two years of service as a 1st Lieutenant. Fifty years after her time in the service, Sandy reunited with fellow members of the WAC after they found one another on Facebook. During a reunion in Las Vegas, Sandy learned that six out her 10 friends in the WAC had come out as lesbians after the service. Sandy recalled that she was on her third relationship before she used the term “lesbian” only because her girlfriend at the time asked, “Well, who are you?” After that, Sandy embraced the queer life: She saw Chris Williamson at the Women’s Folk Festival and attended the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival.

TEACHER WITH A ROOMMATE

Sandy never pictured herself as a teacher. But the WAC had taught her how to be a teacher during her time as a trainer in the army. Sandy decided to use her GI Bill benefits to become a special education teacher. In the summer of 1976, Sandy went home to Missouri to visit her parents. She took her partner with her. Often Sandy and her girlfriend dressed similarly and referred to one another as “roommates” in front of others. Her mom gifted the two of them with two shirts she had made for them. Sandy felt that no one suspected they were gay and just assumed they were two straight women living together.

When reflecting on her youth, Sandy vividly remembers going to the local movie theater her senior year in high school where she saw the film *The Children’s Hour* starring Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, and James Garner. In the movie’s dialog, Sandy remembered hearing the word “lesbian” for the first time.

While visiting that summer, they went camping with her family in the Ozarks. Sandy’s mom asked her to go on a walk with her without her roommate. It was during that walk that her mom asked Sandy, “Why did you ask your roommate to come along?” Sandy answered, “Because we are partners.” Her mom asked, “What does that mean, and what do you do?” Overall, Sandy felt coming out to her mom to be positive, as her mom was always accepting. Unfortunately, shortly after that trip to the Ozarks, Sandy’s mom passed. She would wonder for years if her mother had told anyone else in their family. She wouldn’t get the answer to that question for another 16 years.

In 1976, Sandy moved to Wisconsin to work at a school in Door County where she taught students with different learning abilities. In



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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

August 7, 1996

Ms. Sandy Brown
Representative
Parents, Friends of Lesbians
and Gays: PFLAG
833 Michigan
Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin 54235

Dear Sandy:

Thank you for contacting me regarding marriage of couples of the same gender.

In 1992, I stated my opposition to same-gender marriage, and recently, when the issue was raised in Congress, I said that if a bill consistent with my previously stated position reached my desk, I would sign it.

I strongly believe, however, that raising this issue is divisive and unnecessary. It is yet another attempt to divert the American people from the urgent need to confront our challenges together. The rich fabric of American society is woven from the threads of our shared experience, and it is of the utmost importance that our nation work to expand this common ground.

Throughout my public life, I have strongly opposed discrimination against any group of people, including gay and lesbian Americans, and I have supported legislation to outlaw discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace. I have also sought to heighten public awareness of the discrimination and promote inclusion in order to send a message of equality and acceptance.

My Administration has taken more steps than any other on behalf of gay and lesbian Americans. For the first time in history, we have openly gay and lesbian individuals serving in senior Administration positions, and their impact has been significant -- and positive. In addition, I have issued an executive order prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the granting of security clearances. I believe that we must make the most out of our great diversity and continue to help people rise as far as their talents and determination can take them.

I know this is a difficult issue for many Americans, and I appreciate your taking the time to share your thoughts.

Sincerely,



ship with a woman. Sandy reflected on this letter, calling it “basically, devastating.” For years, Sandy had wondered if her mother had ever told anyone in the family about her lesbianism. It seemed that her mom took that information with her when she passed—not telling a soul as far as Sandy could tell.

Sandy and her partner traveled to Madison to visit friends. While there, they attended a Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meeting because they were figuring out how they could come out to their families. They also contacted other organizations such as Positive Voice in Green Bay, and Northern Womyn. Initially, all of these groups were used as personal resources for Sandy and her partner. Eventually PFLAG would become the group that caught Sandy’s attention as she felt it was a “whole group of people—not only accepting of me, but supporting and fighting for my rights.”

It was in 1995 that Sandy would become a representative for PFLAG in Door County. She would ultimately become the PFLAG Regional Director from 1998 through 2000. Sandy felt compelled to do more, so she joined the PFLAG National Board (2000–06) and eventually became its Vice President. Reflecting on her time in PFLAG, Sandy stated, “I haven’t done anything significant in my life—but like a splinter in your shoe—I stayed persistent to say we’re here.” Early in the Door County Chapter of PFLAG’s existence, Sandy encountered resistance. She recalls trying to put meeting announcements in the local paper, but the newspaper would consistently forget to publish them. Finally, after this happened several times, Sandy became fed up and asked to talk to a supervisor. There never was a meeting with the supervisor, but their meeting announcements started getting published in the newspaper.

President Bill Clinton was associated with Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) in 1994 and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996. After reading a 1996 interview in *The Advocate* with President Clinton in PFLAG’s magazine, Sandy picked up pen and paper and decided to write to Bill Clinton to share her thoughts on the matter. She urged President Clinton to strike down DOMA. To Sandy’s shock, a letter on official White House stationery with a response from Bill Clinton himself arrived in the mail in which the president stated that he didn’t agree with same sex marriage. Sandy still has that letter today (pictured above).

ELLEN COMING OUT PARTY

The Door County PFLAG chapter had a post office box that Sandy checked frequently. One day, she opened a letter from a young gay man that felt isolated living in Door County and had contemplated suicide. Sandy barely finished reading that letter before she was on the phone calling him, hoping she wasn’t too late. Luckily, that young man answered the phone. As a result of this letter, Sandy decided that PFLAG would start gathering more in-person for social support.

In 1997, Ellen DeGeneres came out on the cover of *Time* magazine, and it was widely talked about. PFLAG National suggested that chapters hold an “Ellen coming out party,” and that’s just what they did. Sixteen

people attended the party, including the young man who wrote the letter. That young man is alive today and a member of the Door County PFLAG Chapter. Ellen’s Coming Out Party in 1997 would mark when Door County became an official chapter of PFLAG. Sandy held the titles of Founder, President, and Treasurer in the Door County PFLAG Chapter.

After the Ellen party, the group started gathering regularly once a month. They would have watch parties for “In the Life,” an LGBTQ news program that used to air on PBS. Over the years there would be more viewing parties that were open to the public, followed by discussion. Some of the notable viewing and discussions included: *For the Bible Tells Me So* (2009), *Gen Silent* (2015), *National Geographic’s Gender Revolution* (2017), and *Becoming More Visible* (2019).

THEE SANDY BROWN

In 2004, when Wisconsin had a constitutional amendment on the status of marriage, Sandy and other friends would gather on Market Square and provide information about the amendment as it pertained to the LGBTQ community. When the square closed at Noon, the group went geocaching. They even made shirts that were printed with the phrase “Friend of Sandy Brown.” Sandy had her very own shirt that said: “I am thee Sandy Brown.”

When thinking about some of her favorite memories or accomplishments, she is particularly proud of being on the PFLAG Board pushing for transgender rights. PFLAG was the first organization to stand alone on the issue of opposing any legislative measures that ignored transgender individuals. When on the PFLAG National Board, there was an issue over the matter with the Executive Director at the time disagreeing over wording a major policy change. As a National Vice President, Sandy felt it was her responsibility to make sure the correct wording was in the policy. Two board members ended up leaving their

posts because of this incident. Sandy saw that the Executive Director was not renewed in his term.

In 2018, Sandy was called up onto the stage at the annual Open Door Pride in Sturgeon Bay. She was presented with the Open Door Pride Visionary Award for her service to the Door County community. Sandy was also an original organizer of Open Door Pride. She was completely surprised and shed tears of gratitude when she was told that starting in 2019 the award would be named after her. Officially, it’s now called the Open Door Pride Sandy Brown Award. In addition to the Visionary Award, Sandy has also been the recipient of other important awards for her service to the LGBTQ community including: PFLAG Starr Award and Door County’s Ann Kok Social Justice Award (both in 2013).

A little-known fact about Sandy is that she has had lovers since the 1970s but never held hands or kissed in public until 2011! Sandy is super-proud to have been a part of the Door County AIDS Task Force and has supported the AIDS Walk Wisconsin for 30 years! When thinking about the future, Sandy said, “Young people need to vote because people are creating laws against us. We become lackadaisical when we think everything is running smoothly. Just look at trans healthcare...it has caused us to wake up and stay alert. Question everything. Pay attention. Be present in the moment and pay attention to life around you. PFLAG would love for you to get involved in your area. Check out PFLAG.org—there are more than 11 chapters in Wisconsin alone.”



NICOLE KURTH has more than 15 years of experience in higher education, holding a Master’s Degree in Student Personnel Administration and a Bachelor’s Degree in Graphic Design. She is currently on the board of directors for the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project. Both Nicole and her wife love animals and have an extensive fur family: Four dogs and four cats. They also raise service dogs for children with autism.

When thinking about some of her favorite memories or accomplishments, she is particularly proud of being on the PFLAG Board pushing for transgender rights. PFLAG was the first organization to stand alone on the issue of opposing any legislative measures that ignored transgender individuals.

1981, she was approached by a foster parent who asked if she was interested in adopting a child with autism who was a student in her class. Sandy was in the closet at the time and ended up adopting her then 8-year-old son, Shane, as a single-parent adopter. In 1981, Sandy moved to Antigo, and continued her work as a special education teacher. In 1984, Sandy and her son moved to Madison, but she began seeing someone in Door County. She would drive back and forth from Madison to Door County and eventually moved back to Door County in 1992 following Shane’s passing in 1991.

FINDING PFLAG

In 1992, Sandy and her partner traveled to San Francisco for a conference. They attended a Harvey Milk reception at the library and went to the San Francisco Pride Parade. They took a bunch of pictures of their trip and decided to assemble a photo album to send to Sandy’s family. They sent the albums with Ghirardelli chocolate with instructions on a note to Sandy’s family that read: “When you gather—open and share together.” Sandy figured that this process would be the easiest if everyone was together to get the news at the same time.

Shortly thereafter, her oldest brother called Sandy and asked if she was trying to tell them something. Sandy responded, “Yeah, we’re partners, and we’re lesbians.” Nobody else said anything to Sandy for a long time. Eventually her youngest brother, who was very conservative, mailed her a long letter that condemned her for being in a relation-



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WISCONSIN FIRST

AMERICA'S FIRST GAY RIGHTS STATE

ADVOCATES HISTORY POLITICS

Celebrating the Legacy of the Gay Rights State

Our Lives Media's **Wisconsin First** project honors our historic role in equality.

ON FEBRUARY 25 of this year, Wisconsin celebrated 42 years as the first Gay Rights State in the nation.

On February 25, 1982, Governor Lee Dreyfus passed Assembly Bill 70 into law, banning discrimination against gays and lesbians in housing, employment, credit, or public accommodation. This groundbreaking bill was a long, uphill battle two decades in the making. The "Gay Rights Law" offered a new layer of protections beyond civic ordinances some cities (including Madison and Milwaukee) had offered earlier.

Today, there are still states that do not offer these protections—and worse yet, there are many states, including Wisconsin, where these rights remain endangered four decades later. It's also important to understand the 1982 law did not offer any protections for transgender people, nor does the State of Wisconsin offer any protections to trans citizens today.

Fortunately, there are efforts under way to document, preserve, celebrate, and elevate Wisconsin's national legacy as an equality leader—to inspire and advance true equality for all.

ANNOUNCING THE WISCONSIN FIRST PROJECT

Since 1982, multiple states passed copycat bills to provide similar protections. Nine of these states specifically reached out to Wisconsin legislators for political guidance.

"Our documented history of this effort and its national impact is currently a patchwork of sources," said Greg Wright, project manager for Wisconsin First. "Some records are held at the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Historical Society, but the complete history lacks a cohesive, centralized point of access. Furthermore, many primary sources from that



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

era are not available in digital formats, and many of the people with access and awareness of those materials are approaching the end of their public lives."

The Wisconsin First Project, which launched February 25, will address gaps in information, access, and centralization to improve opportunities for related research and understanding. Our Lives Media, the Madison-based non-profit working to establish *Our Lives* as a robust statewide LGBTQ media, has assembled a project team to research, collect, and digitize relevant source materials from the Wisconsin bill and copycat legislation in other states. The project will culminate in an interactive online archive freely available to researchers, students, educators, legislators, and historians.

"This work will strengthen collective and institutional memory," said Wright. "The archive will capture the complete history of the 1982 law—and the later equal rights advancements the law paved the way for—while fostering pride for our state and nation's endeavor to achieve true equality for all people."

"With any legislation of this importance and magnitude, one will often find information about it scattered in different places such as archival repositories, state and government archives, online sources, and more," said Katie Nash, archivist and head of UW Archives at UW-Madison. "We live in a very digitally connected world and the expectation for resources and information to be online increases daily. There is great potential for this online resource

to provide researchers with a central place to learn more about Assembly Bill 70, follow any research interests to expand knowledge, and increase understanding of this legislation."

By sponsoring a \$250,000 Community Funding Request in 2022, Representative Mark Pocan made the Wisconsin First Project possible. These funds, now known as the Dick Wagner Memorial Grant, were awarded to Our Lives Media to steward the project. "I serve on the Appropriations Committee, so I can have first-hand conversations with the right people," said Rep. Pocan. "I needed people to understand why I was supporting this critical project. Since Republicans took control of the House, they've been targeting LGBTQ funding. We are living through a time when rights are being retracted, so it was more important than ever to protect this history."

The Dick Wagner Memorial Grant, approved by the House Appropriations Committee in 2023, promises "to research, compile, and archive all relevant documents that pertain to, and tell the story of, the nation's first gay rights law which was passed in Wisconsin in 1982 (AB 70). A publicly accessible website hosting all relevant materials, and a book containing all such materials, will be published. This project will increase the public's access to, and understanding of, American history, assist future researchers, and support efforts that reinforce the universal truth that "all men are created equal."

"Dick was a mentor to many of us, especially those of us coming up in politics, while coming out in politics," said Rep. Pocan. "While he served on the Dane County Board, he was a mentor to both Tammy Baldwin and me. And he was quite a historian, writing articles and books about the LGBT movement. The Gay Rights Law was so tightly aligned with his lifetime of work. It made sense to honor him with this memorial grant and archive. He did so much to preserve the history of the movement, and he would want us to learn from our mistakes—and not make them ever again."

FUTURE FORWARD

After receiving grant approval, the Our Lives Media board of directors defined measurable goals, actionable timelines, and key roles for the Wisconsin First Project, including project manager, communications manager, and project archivist. After a national talent search, Our Lives Media hired H.W. MacDonald as the archivist in late February.

"While it took a while for Wisconsin First to figure out all of the grant logistics, the project has found its momentum and is moving forward with energy and efficiency," said Wright. "Our project archivist brings expertise from

working on other projects of national significance. Their arrival and onboarding has been a real forward shift in overall progress."

The project is currently working full speed ahead towards its deadlines and deliverables.

"We are scouring online databases, public records, and various archives for any and all

The Dick Wagner Memorial Grant, approved by the House Appropriations Committee in 2023, promises "to research, compile, and archive all relevant documents that pertain to, and tell the story of, the nation's first gay rights law which was passed in Wisconsin in 1982.

existing materials," said Wright. "The pleasant surprise is that we are finding a lot related to AB70. The challenge is that those materials are scattered across multiple states and counties. Many documents, which have the potential to be helpful to us, are lying in unsorted boxes."

"We will finish locating most of the materials related to AB 70 in the next few weeks," said Wright. Simultaneously, we are working with a web developer to frame out the future site. When the Wisconsin materials are secured and digitized, we will shift to copycat legislation in other states—although some of that is already revealing itself. We will close out with

some oral histories to inform what we find and hope to have most of this loaded into a website by the end of June."

In the Information Age, can an archive ever truly be done? Wright admits it's a tough call.

"We have been talking about this archive more and more as a living memory library," said Wright. "In that sense, it may never be 'done,' but it will be built so that Our Lives Media can keep loading in new discoveries as they're found. Our targeted finish line for the grant, then, is to have the spine and website built and as much of the essential information loaded in so that the memory library is of immediate value to visitors and ready for growth."

"I'm a late-to-the-party gay myself," said Greg Wright. "As such, it has been important for me personally to invest in learning the Wisconsin history that has made my experience possible. I am also proud of the many ways Wisconsin has initiated national movements, from kindergarten to conservation to the 40-hour work week. I am excited to see this equally important first memorialized."

YESTERDAY'S PROGRESS MATTERS

Some have asked: What can today's activists, advocates, and politicians learn from the Wisconsin First Archive?

As it turns out, quite a bit. "The world can learn a lot," said Rep. Pocan.



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“There’s tremendous pride in being first in nation. Here in the heartland, in what some call the heart of America, we made this happen. It didn’t happen in California or New York. It happened here in Wisconsin. I remember the debates, the lobbying, the work David Clarenbach was doing. I was watching history happen live.”

“There’s tremendous pride in being first in nation. Here in the heartland, in what some call the heart of America, we made this happen. It didn’t happen in California or New York. It happened here in Wisconsin. I remember the debates, the lobbying, the work David Clarenbach was doing. I was watching history happen live. For the future’s sake, we need to understand where we came from, what we had to fight for, and what some people are still fighting for in other states. This was significant. This was historic. And people made it happen.”

“When we know our history, we can better organize our community,” said Pocan. “To protect our rights, we must understand how to build and grow consensus. When attacks come, like today’s attacks on the trans community, we can recreate the successes from that 1982 process to replicate the victories we earned.”

Michael Doyle, associate vice provost and director of libraries at UW-Milwaukee, agreed.

“We can be proud of Wisconsin’s leadership in protecting gay men and lesbians from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, but we also can’t take it for granted that the trailblazing protections afforded by AB70 can’t be rolled back or assume that LGBTQ people are entirely free to live their lives as they wish. History provides the context for understanding how the future might play out, and libraries and archives provide access

to the sources that make such understanding possible. It’s critical that all LGBTQ stories be collected, preserved, and shared.”

“As supporters of the Pro-Choice movement will attest, no law can be taken for granted,” said Steve Schaffer, archivist for the Milwaukee County Historical Society. “Laws enacted to protect personal freedom, equal rights, and eliminate all forms of discrimination can be struck down or diminished by determined reactionary movements.”

“In the current political environment, AB70 has never been more relevant and in need of protection and support. The Wisconsin First Archive will be an essential resource for the goals of protecting the achievements and legacy of AB70 and creating a new wealth of LGBTQ history to ensure that Wisconsin remains ‘Forward’ in the struggle. Scholars, activists, students, indeed, anyone will have the ability to explore the many facets of LGBTQ life in Wisconsin, but most importantly, individuals and organizations will have an organized repository (for now virtual) in which to entrust business records, memoirs, and oral histories.”

“Assembly Bill 70 demonstrated that progress towards equality was possible at the state level, even during a period when LGBTQ rights were still widely contested and stigmatized,” said Katie Nash. “There is a lot of hope to be found in Assembly Bill 70 in knowing that with legislation we can continue to work towards equality and justice. This online resource provides a place where people can continue to learn about the impact and importance of this legislation, and hopefully inspire people to continue advocating for equality.”

THE ONLY WAY IS FORWARD

With the Wisconsin First Archive launching in months, the natural question is: What’s next? “I think now that Wisconsin has protected

this history, there are other aspects of history that warrant protection of their own,” said Rep. Pocan. “There’s still a lot of history happening in our state. All of that is important to collect, archive, grow, and teach for posterity.”

“For the short term, I look forward to learning about resources that exist outside of established organizations and witness how personal stories contribute to the knowledge and resources about Assembly Bill 70,” said Katie Nash. “For the long term, it would be great to see the archive continue to be maintained and preserved for all to access, but that will take a lot of resources, infrastructure, and money.”



often been the institutional climate of traditional historical societies. I look forward to the opportunity to support and contribute archival material to the Wisconsin First Archive.”

“Our archivist will be visiting Madison soon,” said Wright. “We will conclude their assignment with a strong sense of the themes that revealed themselves, as well as the existing materials that fit within those themes.”

“We will commemorate that final milestone—by sharing what we’ve uncovered with the people who lived it.” ■

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MENTAL HEALTH MINORITY STRESS FAMILY HARM

Identifying and Treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Roger Reynolds unpacks his journey through post-traumatic stress disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder, helping to map some of the catalysts and options available for treatment.

Content warning: Family struggles/alienation, foster care, bullying, work struggles, religion, law enforcement, military, politics, supreme court, conversion therapy, riots, militant groups, physical assault, hate crimes, suicide, death sentence, and murder.

MANY LGBTQ PEOPLE may have Complex PTSD symptoms and don't even know it.

Amazingly, at 53, the lifelong, nearly daily suicidal thoughts have mostly stopped. Thinking about ending my life started at age 10 or 11. At 20, away from my family, I started getting some therapy; beginning to accept being gay. Over the next 25 years, I continued to see therapists on and off; always being treated for depression. Therapy helped a lot, but life has always been an overwhelming struggle. Thoughts of "ending things" were just a regular part of life.

Finally, at age 45, I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as a civilian. Yes, civilians can have PTSD. The primary traumas happened in my family of origin. There was medium-level neglect and abuse, mostly emotional and psychological, with minimal contact physical abuse and no contact sexual abuse.

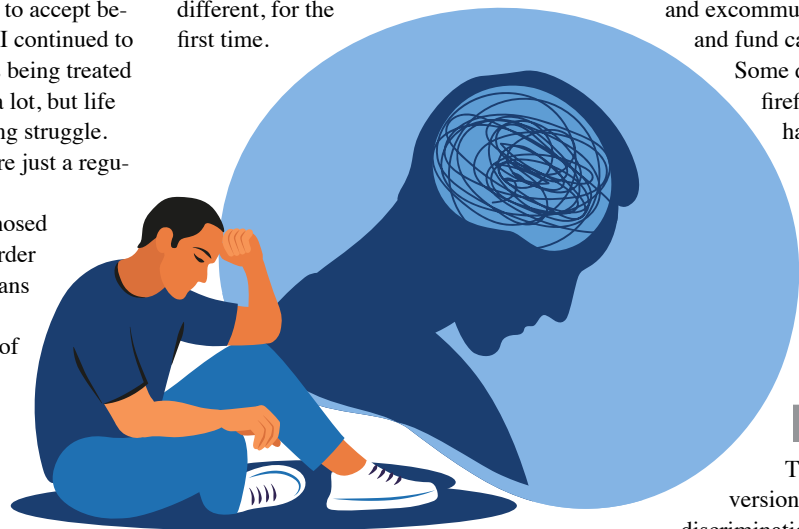
There are many ways to physically or sexually abuse someone, without touching them; these are rarely talked about. The lack of contact physical and sexual abuse is part of why it took so long to accurately diagnose me with PTSD.

Much to my surprise, PTSD has many more symptoms than just nightmares and flashbacks; they were the only two I had heard of, and I experienced neither. My symptoms include: trouble sleeping, avoidance of reminders, difficulty feeling joy, emotional flashbacks, strong negative beliefs about myself, and startling easily. There are 20 primary symptoms on the current medical questionnaire for PTSD.

There is another form of PTSD called Complex PTSD. Complex PTSD is caused by long-term traumas, lasting weeks, months, years, or

even decades. A major contributing factor is that the abused person feels that they cannot escape the situation. As a child, I could not escape my family of origin. Complex PTSD is my primary mental health diagnosis and main treatment focus.

With this accurate diagnosis, I started highly focused therapy. At 50, after four years of appropriate therapy, I stopped all contact with my "nuclear" family. As therapy continued, the suicidal thoughts started reducing in frequency. By 53, they mostly stopped, and this has continued to present, thankfully. My life is so very different, for the first time.



POSSIBLE TRAUMAS

Mixed into the family neglect and abuse were years of struggling with being gay. There was some school bullying. I came out in 1989 and told my family and friends soon after. Regarding queer acceptance, there has been a lot of progress socially in the U.S. since 1989. But, doing research for this article reminded me that a lot of people still suffer many and varied traumatic events because they are queer. Recently, we are going backward.

Almost everything I reference are struggles within the last 10 years. Yes, social acceptance has gotten better since the 1900s—through the 1980s—but social acceptance, equality, and safety are still serious concerns.

Being queer in the U.S. has many possible traumas. Here are some:

FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND FOSTER CARE

There can be struggles, rejection, and alienation with family or friends. Queer people in foster care can face unaccepting foster parents, foster siblings, group home staff, and residents.

SCHOOL, RELIGION, AND WORK

There can be school bullying, workplace harassment, and discrimination, even lower wages. Religions can discriminate, persecute, and excommunicate. Some religions promote and fund campaigns for anti-queer laws.

Some queer law enforcement officers, firefighters, or enlisted military are harassed by co-workers

GOVERNMENT

Some government officials and elected representatives make stigmatizing statements and work to create anti-queer laws. US Supreme Court decisions affect queer rights.

STRANGERS AND BUSINESSES

There is social harassment, conversion therapy, rent and housing loan discrimination, and higher interest rates. Law enforcement officers can be hostile toward queers. Conservative militant groups actively state threats and conspire to riot against the queer community. There are hate crimes: verbal harassment, sexual harassment, physical harassment, and murder.

There are still about 10 countries where being gay can be legally punished by death.

In the U.S., in 2024, queer people live with knowing friends, family, strangers, co-workers, religious people, law enforcement officers, firefighters, politicians, hate groups, and more could be hostile, rejecting—even homicidal.

Just one or any combination of these traumas can cause fear and internal struggles causing more internal turmoil and trauma.

These ongoing and inescapable traumatic

events, even just the possibilities, could cause Complex PTSD.

TRAUMATIC EVENTS FROM MY BROTHER & MOTHER

Around 1990, my brother told me that if I ever brought a lover home (he had seen what to do in a movie), he would take him out behind a farm building and kill him. After that, I barely spoke to my brother for two years.

During that same visit, my brother's friend, the best man in my brother's first wedding, said when he was in the military, he used to seduce gay men up to a hotel room. Then with military buddies, they would strip the gay man, wrap him in duct tape, fill the man's car with ice, and then place the duct-tape-bound man in his car on the ice. My brother and his friend laughed. I was horrified.

After 25 years of acting accepting, my mother removed me from her legal will 10 days before she died. I think this was connected to her own implicit bias against me and the internal, religious, and social struggles she had because I am gay.

SOME OF MY QUEER TRAUMATIC EVENTS

In 1992, in Madison, I saw four men throw a concrete planter onto the hood of a car in a gay bar parking lot. I didn't even think to call law enforcement. That's just what happens to us.

In 1994, in Milwaukee, a friend and I met at a chili joint. As we left the restaurant, a man followed us, and threw a glass beer bottle on the ground behind us, so the broken glass bounced up and hit our legs, while yelling, "Fucking fags!"

In 1995, in Madison, I walked out of a grocery store past a car parked by the door. As I walked in front of the car, they revved their engine and yelled, "Fucking faggot!" I was alone, in sweats, and just bought milk—an ordinary life activity. We never know when harassment will happen or how far it will go.

In 2010, in Lone Rock, I volunteered and created two small low-maintenance, ornamental, food gardens at the Lone Rock Library, with all of the food free to the community. The gardens were cited with a fire code violation and removed. I was teaching this kind of gardening. If these gardens were a fire hazard, I needed to know. The Lone Rock Fire Department would not respond to my certified letters requesting an explanation. Instead, they had their lawyer respond to me with side-stepping deflections. Confirmation eventually got back to me that this was done because I am gay.

LOCAL MURDER

On June 18, 1995, in Livingston, Norman Bennett was murdered, dismembered, and discarded. I know one of Norman's relatives who

told me of the murder. Family and society assumed Norman was gay. Criminal charges were minimal. Some of the details of the murder are in a public article, found with this search "case-text state v tanner Case 96-2787-CR."

MENTAL HEALTH/ILLNESS SYMPTOMS

The queer community is in a neglectful and abusive relationship with society. We cannot escape society. We probably know which friends and family members accept us or not. We never know what stranger may become abusive, where, or at what time. Heightened awareness is required when out in public.

The queer community has higher rates of depression, anxiety, alcoholism, drug use, and suicidal ideation, attempts, and completions.

POSSIBLE CPTSD: UNAWARE, UNDIAGNOSED, AND/OR MISDIAGNOSED

There is justified cause for a lot of queer people to be living with low-level up to diagnosable Complex PTSD.

CPTSD is caused by ongoing trauma that one feels one cannot escape. From the traumas listed above, it is obvious that traumas to queer people can come from any and every aspect of life and continue happening throughout life.

Queer people don't realize the traumas that are happening because this is simply part of life and we have numbed ourselves to dangers and just live with it. We have no other choice.

TREATMENT IS HELPING

For me, after 40 years of major depression, suicidal thoughts, and CPTSD, I am living a more comfortable life, thanks to a lot of self-help work and professional therapy. I still have struggles; thankfully life is getting easier.

I have less worry, rumination, depression, emotional dissociation, and suicidal thoughts are minimal. Thankfully, I have more self-confidence, joy, energy, and self-expression. After an emotional upset, I recover much sooner, often in hours, instead of days to weeks.

RESOURCES

There are several videos about these subjects on my YouTube channel "Down to Earth Plus Fun."

I facilitate a small group, free workshop "PTSD/CPTSD and the LGBTQ+ Community" by video-conference. It is open to anyone, any group. There are openings to join this free, 90-minute workshop on June 12 at 7:00 p.m. or June 15 at 10:00 a.m. Please contact me at NobotoRoger@gmail.com to register or to schedule your group or organization for a workshop.

A search for "Veterans Affairs PTSD LGBT" finds this article, "Trauma, Discrimination and PTSD Among LGBTQ+ People"

on the Veterans Affairs website. This article states that up to 48% of Queer people meet the criteria for PTSD, compared to 4.75% of the general population.

A web search for "PCL-5" will find the current PTSD questionnaire.

The primary symptoms of CPTSD are: Intimacy problems, guilt/shame, anger or feeling numb, relationship problems, emotion regulation problems, and feeling worthless. A screener for CPTSD is the "International Trauma Questionnaire" (ITQ), found at "The International Trauma Consortium" website. Choose "ITQ" from the top menu.

If you have struggles that are PTSD or CPTSD symptoms or both, there are credible books, web articles, web videos, and professional therapists that can help. Life can get better.

A list of the research I used for this article can be found at NobotoRoger.blogspot.com.



ROGER REYNOLDS writes from experience. He lives with lifelong Complex PTSD, depression, and anxiety. He has participated in, designed, and led peer-led mental health support groups and skills groups. Contact him at NobotoRoger@gmail.com to join or schedule one of the workshops he leads.

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YOUTH COMING OUT

Love Strikes

GSAFE youth **Bri Hudson** on coming to terms with being a lesbian and adjusting to a new school.

WHEN I WAS 13 years old, I had never seen women as very attractive. Then, I saw this girl at my mom’s bowling party, and I felt a feeling that I never felt for anyone. I looked at her, and I couldn’t stop looking, like there was a spell or something on me. When she came to my sister’s sleepover, she spent the night, so I was flirting with her a little bit, and she was just as shocked as I was. So, we kissed until my

mom walked in and was very disappointed, but she didn’t show it as much since the girl was there.

When my mom dropped her off, she started talking about what happened. I told her it was nothing, it was an “accident.” But then, the girl and I were in a relationship until my mom found out a few months ago. My mom started going through my phone constantly, and I had to hide our relationship from her.

We were together for seven months, then we broke up because she liked someone else at her school; I found out from her mom. I was crying that whole night, and I couldn’t sleep. My mom and I talked, and she understood, and she has been supportive ever since.

GSA IN SCHOOL
We moved to Milwaukee from Alabama in 2018. When I started middle school, I was nervous because I didn’t know anyone there. I made some friends, but it wasn’t always great.

I joined my school’s GSA when I started high school. Freshman year, we were virtual, and I noticed that they were asking people, so I decided to join. I was nervous because I didn’t know anybody there but I enjoyed myself. We all met in person, and more people started joining.

We talk in the club about our feelings and famous people that are part of LGBTQ+ community. We also talk about different shows/movies with people in the community. Sometimes we play different games or do an activity. We have field trips to places like UWM, the college where I’ve been accepted and want to attend. We also went to see “The Color Purple,” and I enjoyed myself. Other times visitors come in to talk about their coming out story and their resources. Our school therapist came to speak to us about being comfortable expressing your emotions and feelings.

Last year, I was the student advisor with my best friend. ■



Photographed by Glenda Mitchell.



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