

our lives



Joseph Torres



Tyrone Creech



Dino Maniaci's Dinotto

MADISON PRIDE

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

INSIDE: Your Guide to OutReach's Magic Pride Festival

July / August 2024



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For years I tried to put myself in a box, and it frustrated me, so I had to let go and let the universe take its course.

- Billy Porter

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Cover photo by Melanie Jones.



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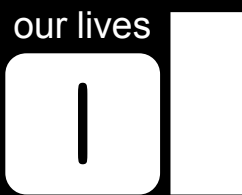
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PUBLISHER'S LETTER PATRICK FARABAUGH



PRIDE REMAINS A PROTEST



WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE of another presidential election year. It always feels like the world is on fire, but especially during election years. As a child, I used to look forward to election years—whether the candidate I supported won or not, there was still excitement and patriotism. Now, for me, there's dread. This time four years ago, we were in the throes of the Covid pandemic. The murder of George Floyd lit a fuse that exploded into a months-long racial justice uprising. The struggle was very, very real.

This election is causing me to reflect on four years ago. It reminds me of something Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, "A great man once said that the true symbol of the United States is not the bald eagle. It is the pendulum. And when the pendulum swings too far in one direction it will go back." At this moment it feels like the progress we gained is slipping.

I carried these thoughts as I worked on this issue. It's our **17th anniversary issue**, and our **8th annual Pride in Color**. When I started this magazine, it was in the aftermath of Wisconsin's constitutional amendment vote that banned same-sex marriage. It was my way of restoring hope and healing through action. This issue marks the 10th anniversary of Wisconsin recognizing same sex marriage (and my 10th wedding anniversary). And our Pride in Color feature remains resolute to centering the lives and leadership of Wisconsin's LGBTQ communities of color. And it also is a kind of protest of its own, saying that we won't go back to the way things were before that progress was made.

Please take pride while reading about **Dr. Fernie Rodriguez**. As a first-generation Latine immigrant, her hire as UW-Madison's Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs makes her the highest-ranking openly transgender official at the institution. Reflect while reading about **Janice Toy**, whose journey led to founding SHEBA—a leading organization serving Black transwomen in the Milwaukee area. And acknowledge while reading about Wisconsin's first gay Black Olympian, **George Coleman Poage** (1880–1962), that yes, we've always been here.

So, returning to that quote by Justice Ginsburg, she concludes her thoughts the same way I will, "We are not experiencing the best of times," but added, "I am optimistic in the long run." ■

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

READING THIS MAGAZINE has brought me so much hope, joy and confidence as a 27 yr old queer woman. Recent stories that resonated with my wife and I have been the ones of queer folk taking up farming. We recently built our own chicken coop (palace) in the backyard of our north east (near Cherokee marsh) home.

In college I was presented with all these statistics of who I could end up as, but very little about who I could dream to become. So in many ways I hunkered down and focused on my future and very little on my queerness.

In 2020 my then fiance and I bought our first house. I was only 23. Last year in 2023, we got married IN A CHURCH (Lakeview Lutheran on the Northside - and we were their first queer wedding). In many ways I still have yet to get to know the queer community in person, but nevertheless I've felt so deeply inspired to read your stories and feel confident to embrace my own queerness in spaces or narratives that I couldn't imagine before.

Thank you! All of you! I can't wait to keep reading! —Laura Colosky

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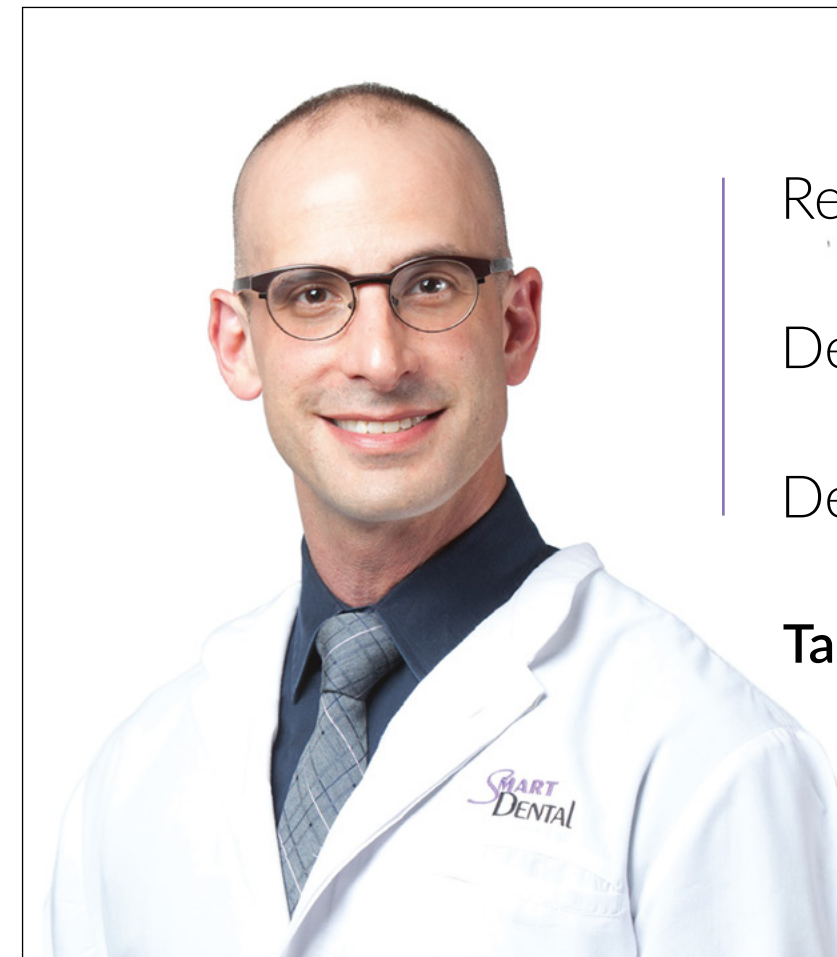
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OBITUARIES



Clarence and Bob's 63-year relationship was featured in January's Love issue earlier this year.

CLARENCE PORTER CAMERON May 19, 1941—June 3, 2024

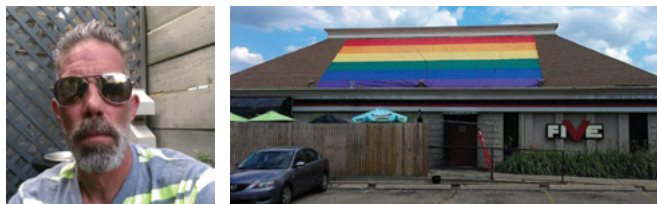
“The Owlman” age 83 passed away on Monday, June 3. Clarence was born in Beloit, WI, on May 19, 1941. Clarence attended Beloit public schools and graduated from Beloit Memorial HS in June 1959. He was one of the “fine of 59.” After two years at the UW- Madison, Clarence began an apprenticeship as an undertaker at Fitch-Lawrence Funeral Home in Madison. In 1965 he opened a hobby ceramic shop on Park St. He sold ceramic supplies, taught classes, and started making ceramic owls for art fairs. As a result of his ceramic owls he was dubbed “The Owlman.” Clarence was renowned for his founding of the organization known as “The Wisconsin Alliance of Artists and Craftspeople” and his co-founding of the “Madison Art Fair OFF the Square.”

Clarence met his lifelong partner Robert Lockhart in 1961. He and Bob lived a life celebrating their love, Art, Architecture, and good friends for 63 years. They were legally married in 2013 in Vermont at an exhibition of The Society Of Animal Artists.

They enjoyed classical music, travel, art fairs, and many, many friends. They also attended Barak Obama’s Inauguration in January of 2009.

Bob passed away on February 26, 2024, at the age of 94. Cameron passed away 14 weeks to the day after losing his partner.

A Celebration Of Life is planned for Saturday, August 3 at First Unitarian Society at 900 University Bay Dr, Madison. ■



ARTHUR DAVIS June 2024 (Shared with permission from FIVE nightclub)

Imagine sitting in your second story apartment hand sewing this giant Pride Flag and having to hang it out the window in order to sew it.

This symbol of PRIDE in Madison has been seen in Pride Parades, on floats, on the Club, in the Club and has been a part of numerous movement marches and events here in Madison. So many of us have proudly carried this flag.

This hand sewn flag was created by Arthur Davis and for decades has been a centerpiece for PRIDE. We appropriately named this symbol “ARTHUR” years ago. Although now you can buy huge flags, this special flag was made from yards and yards of material and sewn for our community. The flag was an amazing gift to the community he loved and was proud to be a part of. Though faded over the years it is kept in safe keeping and will be ready when called on.

Sadly, we have learned Arthur Davis passed away this morning after a battle with cancer.

We thank you Art for this amazing symbol and namesake that reminds us of one man’s effort to represent our community for all to see. ■

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Brian, age 45, California

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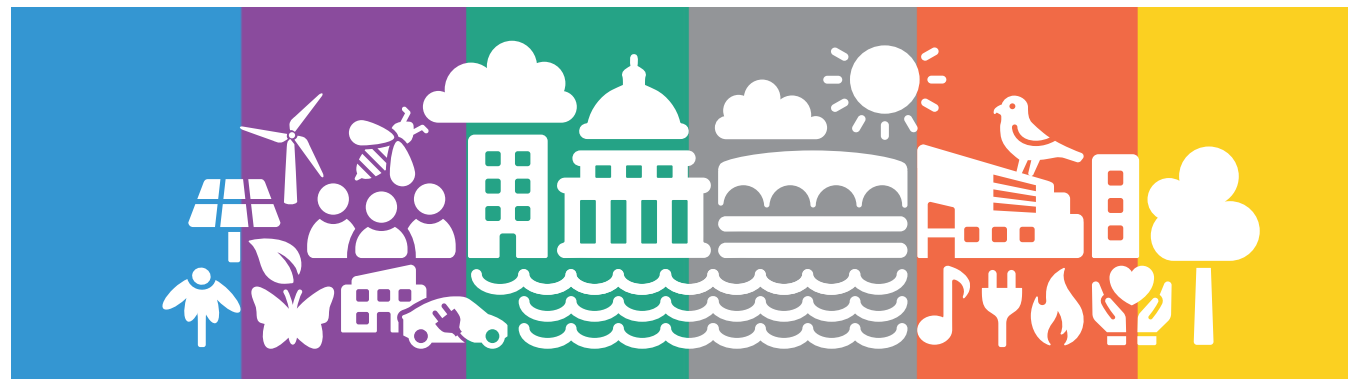
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Get Your Affairs in Order

Given the current climate on the national and state level **10 years after Wisconsin granted same-sex couples the right to marry**, many are bracing for a potential overturn and reversion back to a statewide or national ban.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE SUPREME COURT LEGAL PROTECTIONS

IT'S A STRANGE PLACE we're in right now with regard to LGBTQ rights, and specifically the right to marry. Federal law currently ensures that right, and the vast majority of Americans support these marriages. But recent rulings have the LGBTQ community worried about the future of this right: The 2022 *Dobbs* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court undid *Roe v Wade*, then Justice Thomas signaled that he wanted to go after the right to same-sex marriage (*Obergefell v Hodges*).

In Wisconsin, even before the landmark 2015 decision that legalized same-sex marriage nationally, that right was granted statewide on June 6, 2014 when U.S.

District Judge Barbara Crabb struck down Wisconsin's same-sex marriage ban, ruling it unconstitutional. Many couples, wanting to seize their opportunity before someone changed their mind, made hurried plans and flooded local municipalities to get married. Their instinct proved true, as "The rush to wed prompted Attorney General J. B. Van Hollen late Friday to file an emergency motion aimed at stopping the marriages, arguing that the order should be put on hold pending appeal," according to an article from 2014 by the *Wisconsin State Journal*. The state reinstated same-sex marriage in October, and then the *Obergefell* decision came down the following



year. Despite Wisconsin having legal same-sex marriage before 2015, many worry that if the nationwide ruling is overturned, that Wisconsin would risk reverting back to the constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage that the 2014 ruling overturned, making it illegal to marry a partner of the same sex in the state. They have reason to worry, given that the *Dobbs* decision reverted Wisconsin back to a 1849 law that prohibited legal abortions in the state.

But before diving into the challenges to come, we would be remiss to not acknowledge what the 2014 ruling in Wisconsin did for couples who were finally, FINALLY able to marry their partners, regardless of gender. In the week between the initial ruling and the temporary stop, 215 same-sex couples were married in Dane County alone, and 600 couples statewide applied for licenses. While the 1990s were marred by many states adding language to their constitution defining marriage as between one man and one woman, the 2000s saw the shell start to crack, and more and more states legalized the marriages, creating a confusing patchwork of laws and places where same-sex couples could be married. This meant those marriages may or may not have been recognized in their home state, if it differed from where they married, and it wasn't recognized federally.

Wisconsin is home to over 17,000 same-sex couples, and about 56% are married. Dane County by itself had 3,138 same-sex couples in the 2020 census, making it #1 in Wisconsin, and #4 nationally.

To understand why marriage is such an important right, legally speaking, we need to understand what is gained when a couple is married. Tax benefits are the obvious first gains of marriage, but also rights of inheritance, social security benefits, and the ability to be on a spouse's health insurance plan. In family law, a spouse can adopt the children of the other, and when a spouse falls ill, the other can visit them even when there are family restrictions, and make medical decisions when the other is incapacitated or otherwise unable to make them. Even in 2014, when same-sex couples in Wisconsin were allowed to marry before it was legal nationally, many of these rights gave a sense of peace to couples, many of whom had spent decades together with no legal protections prior to the 2014 ruling. Of the eight plaintiffs in the case in Wisconsin, half had been together

for longer than a decade, with one couple, Carol Schumacher and Virginia Wolf, having been together for 38 years, with their first date being in 1975.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey for 2022, Wisconsin is home to over 17,000 same-sex couples, and about 56% are married. Dane County by itself had 3,138 same-sex couples in the 2020 census, making it #1 in Wisconsin, and #4 nationally. These numbers bring to the fore just how many people are vulnerable to the potential attacks and revoking of rights that might be coming down the line, especially if there is a second Trump term. When Justice Thomas singled out same-sex marriage as something he felt was decided incorrectly, and wanted to correct in his *Dobbs* decision, (an irony considering that the same precedent, that of the right to privacy, also ensures the legality of his own marriage to a white woman as a black man), many LGBTQ people started to fear the worst. Some moved up their wedding dates, many sought the council of lawyers to ensure the protection of their home and family in the event that their marriage should be voided, and the community as a whole felt a sense of unease.

It was because of this fear that Tammy Baldwin, Wisconsin U.S. Senator and out lesbian woman, proposed the Respect for Marriage Act, a bill that became law in late 2022, less than a year after the *Dobbs* decision came down. This act, while not protecting the right to get married in all states should *Obergefell* be rescinded, does protect the marriages that are already in place, and compels states that don't allow same-sex marriages within their borders to legally recognize these marriages if they are made elsewhere. According to an *NPR* article that came out when the Respect for Marriage Act was passed, "If the Court were to overturn *Obergefell*, the legality of same-sex marriages would revert to state law—and the majority of states would prohibit it. The Respect for Marriage Act wouldn't change that, but it requires all states to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and federally recognizes these marriages." The article continued, "It also repeals the Defense of Marriage Act, which prohibited the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages and allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere."

While the Respect for Marriage Act certainly assuaged some fears, it still isn't full protection under the law, and states are still allowed to prohibit same-sex marriages within their

If the Court were to overturn *Obergefell*, the legality of same-sex marriages would revert to state law—and the majority of states would prohibit it. The Respect for Marriage Act wouldn't change that, but it requires all states to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and federally recognizes these marriages

borders. This would bring back the pre-2015 complicated mess of state laws, and would force people to travel, sometimes great distances and to great expense, to get married. In Wisconsin, many fear that the 2014 law would be bypassed, and our state would revert back to a total ban. The sense of security and safety that marriage provided 10 years ago to those 600+ couples who managed to marry in the week af-

ter the ruling, is at risk, especially as we move into another national election cycle, where there is a real chance that we could have a second Trump term. Project 2025, while not actively singling out same-sex marriage, would actively seek to undermine other Supreme Court cases that guarantee rights to LGBTQ people, like in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, in which "the court found that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in banning sex discrimination in the workplace, also bans discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity," according to *The Advocate*.

So, in celebrating this win, while keeping an eye on the potential coming storm, we in Wisconsin, often referred to as "the first gay rights state," should keep the hope, celebrate the win, but also get legal affairs in order and protect ourselves from what might come to be. ■

NEWS BRIEFS

WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES

PRIDEFEST SETS RECORDS FOR NUMBER OF ATTENDEES, VENDORS, SPONSORS & PERFORMERS

DESPITE POOR WEATHER conditions hampering attendance on Saturday, June 8, Milwaukee Pridefest was bigger than ever this year, with overall more attendees, more vendors, and more performers than ever before. In a press release sent out after the event, Milwaukee Pride, Inc, the parent organization of Pridefest, organizers said that this year's event brought in 43,964 attendees, 200 vendors, 32 festival sponsors, and 500+ performers, all in a three-day timespan. Pridefest, which takes place on the Summerfest grounds on the lakefront in Milwaukee, welcomed a diverse lineup of performers, with priority placed on representation and local talent. "You cannot rinse and repeat in this business—coming off the heels of successful 2022 and 2023 festivals, our team was very intentional about how we'd build an all-star lineup of diverse, world class entertainment while doubling down on local representation and inclusion," said Wes Shaver, Milwaukee Pride President and CEO. "The hope is: You'll offer an attractive event to those here in Milwaukee, but also to those beyond city limits. And this year's results prove our strategy was effective."

Pridefest in particular wanted to expand its weekday attendance by selecting headliners for Thursday night that brought in an increase of almost 50% over the previous years, and Friday's lineup brought in just over 20% more people than 2023. According to the release, "Saturday's inclement weather proved to slow attendance numbers down during

the peak hours of the festival's family day festivities resulting in lower results, however as the rain stopped and skies cleared, festival gates saw some of the largest crowds start to enter the festival park heading into the 5 o'clock hour." The release continues that by Midnight, numbers reached and then exceeded

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PROVEN RESULTS IN THIRD-PARTY FERTILITY



ed those from 2023, and speculated that had the weather been more agreeable, they might have hit their target attendance of 50,000. The release did not say how far short from that goal they were. Presale tickets were also up sharply, with 2.5x the number of pre-sale purchases of 2023.

Despite not hitting their 50,000 Saturday goal, Luke Olsen, VP of festival production for the event said "I couldn't be more pleased with the outcomes of the 2024 festival, and that's truly because of the people that own their respective duties and bring their talent, ideas, and passion to the table." He continued, "This work requires the ability to be nimble and flexible despite having plans and procedures in place. Throughout the weekend, we saw great teamwork that ultimately allowed us to be able to work in the moment and find solutions and positive results fast."

FAIR WISCONSIN NAMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FAIR WISCONSIN announced in early July that the organization has chosen a new Executive Director, Abby Swetz, after a nationwide search. Swetz was awarded the GSAFE Educator of the Year award in 2017, and the Rockwell Cooperating Teacher Award from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Fair Wisconsin, a political advocacy group, "envisions a fair, safe, and inclusive society in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people are treated with dignity and respect," according to their website. They continue "Fair Wisconsin Inc. works to build a fair, safe, and inclusive Wisconsin

for all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people by advancing, achieving, and protecting LGBTQ civil rights through lobbying, legislative advocacy, grassroots organizing, coalition building and electoral involvement. These efforts are designed to educate the general voting public, sensitize the media, promote a politically active and effective organizational membership, and better inform policy makers on issues of concern to the organization's members."



In a press release sent out to members and donors on July 2, Fair Wisconsin stated that the org is "the state's only LGBTQ+ civil rights and political advocacy organization and has been on the forefront of the fight for LGBTQ+ equality in Wisconsin for the past 30 years. Swetz will bring extensive experience in policy, public education, and advocacy to the role." Swetz's history confirms this experience, as she has attended the La Follette School of Public Affairs, where "she earned the Penniman Prize for her policy analysis," according to the press release. After La Follette, she worked in domestic abuse policy and went on to work with the Secretary's office of the Department of Health and Human Services during "the height of the pandemic."

Abby Swetz states in the press release that, "I am honored to be entrusted with the future of an organization with such a storied and impactful past of working to ensure the safety and civil rights of LGBTQ+ Wiscon-

sinites. As the leader of Fair Wisconsin, I look to build on that rich history by rooting our present work in hope and equity as we look to a future of liberation and full inclusion for our LGBTQ+ siblings in this state." She continues, "To my LGBTQ+ family and our allied friends here in Wisconsin, let me say this: buckle up—we've got work to do, and I'm ready to lead it together."

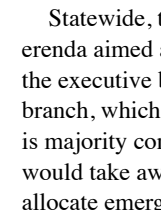
OUT CANDIDATES RUNNING IN PRIMARIES

WITH NOVEMBER'S ELECTION showdowns looming large over the country, it's important to focus on the local issues that affect our everyday lives, and to remember to show up in the August primary, even if it doesn't seem as important. While there aren't many contested elections in August in either Madison or Milwaukee, there are a few to pay attention to, most notably in Madison.

With the recent retirement of former Dane County Executive Joe Parisi, four local community members are looking to take his place, and the August primary will decide which of them moves on to the November general election. Joe Parisi, who held the office from 2011 until 2024, was pushed to the forefront by the pandemic, becoming the face of the measures that Dane County enacted in the hopes to stop the spread of the pandemic. As the politics of the pandemic response grew more contentious, Parisi oversaw the enactment of some of the most rigid policies in the state, which, while derided by some, likely made the outbreak in Madison much less deadly than it could have been. He joins a national wave of local officials who are retiring post pandemic, and while he has not said whether this is the reason for his departure, many of his counterparts across the country left office because of toxic politics and threats from community members who disagreed with the administration on mask mandates and limits on large gatherings.

Melissa Agard, Wes Sparkman, Regina Vidaver, and Dana Pellebon are all on the ballot to replace Parisi and take over from the temporary executive assigned when he fully stepped back in May. This is a non-partisan contest, but with Dane County being liberal, this is a contest between four progressives. Parisi endorsed Agard, a current state senator, as his replacement, but Dana Pellebon has also been very active in the local LGBTQ community, even having a table at the recent Big Gay Market at Alliant Energy Center. Her resume is rich with community involvement, ranging from being on the leadership team for Dane County Sexual Assault Response Team, as well as a board member for both Freedom, Inc. and Urban Triage. Wes Sparkman

is currently the Director of The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion in Dane County, and has been the Chairman of the Board for SSM Health Wisconsin Region and Chair on the Board of Visitors for the UW-Madison School of Sociology. He also has a history in law enforcement, citing a decade of service to the "City of Madison Police and Fire Commission, including two terms as President," according to his election website. Regina Vidaver is a scientist and common council member, with experience specializing in public health. "Regina oversaw the public health response when 13,000 Afghan refugees arrived at Fort McCoy, and managed all procurement for the Alternate Care Facility at State Fair Park during the COVID-19 emergency," according to her election website. She also helped advocate for the C.A.R.E.S (Community Alternative Response Emergency Services) team, which "has led to a dramatic decrease in the need for police responses to calls for people experiencing serious behavioral health needs."



Statewide, there are another pair of referenda aimed at pulling power away from the executive branch and into the legislative branch, which, because of gerrymandering, is majority conservative. These referendums would take away the power of the governor to allocate emergency federal funding, like that allocated during the pandemic, and in 2018 when Dane County saw catastrophic flooding. If they pass, the governor would have to call a special session to ask for approval, slowing down the response time.



Chuck Erickson, a dedicated out public servant with over two decades of experience on the Dane County Board, is running in a competitive primary for District 77 in the Wisconsin State Assembly. Chuck's roots run deep in Madison, having long been a resident of both the Vilas and Monona Bay neighborhoods, where he has actively engaged with his community. Since 2002, Chuck has served the people of Madison as a Dane County Board supervisor, tirelessly advocating for inclusive decision-making processes. Throughout his tenure, Chuck has been at the forefront of progressive initiatives, including the recognition of domestic partnerships and gay marriage. His advocacy extends to championing affordable housing and securing substantial investments for the Bayview Foundation. ■

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SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS SOCIAL

Memory Lanes

Honeymooners, Madison's queer bowling league, offers friendly competition and friendships, too. Honeymooners' **Ryan Feathers** shares his lifelong bowling memories and all the details on how to get involved with the league to make your own friends and memories, too.

I REMEMBER WATCHING the colored balls curve down the lane, smashing through the pins at my mother's bowling league. My memories are clouded by the haze of extreme youth, as foggily as the alley itself, being the days before indoor smoking bans. Yet I still can recall that alley I would go on to spend many other moments of youth in: Enjoying the rhythmic hum of the ball return machines, the clunks and whirrs of the balls hitting and gliding down the boards, the crashing of the pins, and the exclamations of joy from a perfect throw.

I remember Saturday mornings throughout many school years, being part of a youth bowling league. It was always a great time to hang out with friends and play on the Alley Dogs team—an homage to that classic Disney channel original movie from that time, *Alley Cats Strike*. It was the first time I got some more serious coaching on bowling form and deliveries and the more technical aspects of

the sport—and my average score steadily improved with practice. None of that mattered much compared to the simple enjoyment of hanging out with good friends.

I remember dashing through the rain on the way to Point Bowl with my group of college friends. We'd often go several times a week because it was a great spot with cheap specials on beer and bowling and located just a few blocks south of campus. It was the first spot I could claim to be a regular at, in time becoming friends with the owner and being on a first-name basis with several of the other employees. I'd buy my first bowling ball from the pro shop there and continue to get some coaching and tips I use to this day. Even after graduating, we all stayed in the area for a few years and enjoyed gathering weekly for league play.

I remember timidly walking through the door of Bowl-A-Vard for the first time, looking to join the Honeymooners—Madison area's

queer bowling league. I had recently moved to the area—and was even more recently single—and was in desperate need of local connections. I found some friends that first season of bowling, friends that I still hang out with to this day, many who are still bowling, too. Through them I learned of other events, clubs, and opportunities in the Madison area. Each week I'd look forward to meeting the other team we'd be bowling against, and growing my network of friends and acquaintances.

Those friends and connections are what I value the most from bowling. Ultimately, what keeps me engaged and coming back year-after-year, decade-after-decade are the connections I make with my fellow league mates.

I remember a few years later when some new members joined the league. One had particularly caught my eye, and I was glad to get their number after a pleasant conversation. Fast forward a few years, and I now not only bowl on a team, help run the league, and travel to bowl with them, I'm thrilled to call them my partner. Each week at bowling is now full of a bunch of friends and, hopefully, soon-to-be friends when new members join.

As I look back, I'm thankful to my mom for bringing me along to her bowling league all



Ryan Feathers

those years ago. While I have a lot of passions and interests that make up my life, bowling has fairly consistently been there, and I have a good deal of friends and connections I owe to my time with bowling.

Those friends and connections are what I value the most from bowling. I do enjoy the sport of it, too: The seeming simplicity of knocking down 10 pins with a ball, and the intense difficulty of consistently doing so. I enjoy seeing the progress after weeks or months of playing and practicing. Ultimately, what keeps me engaged and coming back year-after-year, decade-after-decade are the connections I make with my fellow league mates. Whether it is my old college mates, my local friends, or my partner, my life is interwoven with connections I've made on the lanes. I'm hopeful that I'll get to add many more to that list in the years to come.

WHAT IS HONEYMOONERS?

Honeymooners is the Madison area's queer bowling league. It has been around since the 90s at various Madison lanes, and meets on Monday nights at Bowl-A-Vard lanes (next to East Towne Mall). All are welcome in Honeymooners, regardless of bowling skill, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

WHEN DO YOU BOWL?

We bowl on Monday nights from around 7:30 to 9:15 p.m. We play three games in a row each night, called a series. Our fall session typically runs from early September through early December, while our winter session typically runs from mid-January through early April. Bowlers can join either or both sessions, with most of our members playing both halves.

I'M BAD AT BOWLING. CAN I STILL JOIN?

Absolutely! While we do keep score, everyone is more focused on fun and camaraderie than winning. Furthermore we are a handicap league (we adjust for skill). This means the bowler who averages 80 will be on an even

competitive footing as the bowler who averages 200. Winning is whoever beats their average by more.

DO I NEED A TEAM TO REGISTER?

No, you can absolutely sign up as an individual, and we'll help with finding you a team. Each team will have three people bowl each night, but our teams range from three to six members. Those teams with more players get to choose which three are bowling each night. This is handy for folks who are busy and are worried they can't commit to playing every week. And just because you aren't bowling on a certain night doesn't mean you can't come watch and cheer your team on!

HOW DO I REGISTER?

You can email honeymoonersbowling@gmail.com with your interest. In addition, you can come to our league meeting on Monday, August 26 at 7:00 p.m. at Bowl-A-Vard lanes. At this meeting, we'll confirm league dates, rules, and information, as well as start to get teams signed up ahead of our first week of bowling on Monday, September 9.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFO?

Email: honeymoonersbowling@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/HoneymoonersBowlingLeague
Instagram: [@honeymoonersbowling](https://instagram.com/honeymoonersbowling)

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OPINION | TRANS ATHLETES | YOUTH

Let Trans Kids Play

Kalick Kiioro, a transgender high school softball player, makes the case for inclusion, equity, and sound science when it comes to participation in sports.

I HAVE PLAYED SOFTBALL for more than 10 years; nine years presenting as a girl, and now one year presenting as myself: a trans man. This last year, after coming out, I thought I was done. I thought that, as a trans man, I could no longer play softball—the sport I love—so I shut it out of my life for a year. It didn’t even occur to me that I could still play. It’s a “girl’s sport,” and I’m not a girl. I couldn’t even bring myself to watch softball. I would just want to play it myself so badly that I would be out of my seat pacing. I tried doing other sports, and even though I enjoyed them, nothing made me as happy as softball.

Eventually, I confronted myself and asked, “Why can’t I play?” There is no reason to give up the sport I love just because I now live authentically as myself. I decided to return to softball, and when I did, I got to re-experience the joy that it gave me. I feel so energized and excited when I play, and I was lucky to be met with inclusion from others when I started playing again, just as I am now.

But this is not the case for everyone.

Trans athletes in sports have recently become the subject of political debate in the United States and Wisconsin. Gov. Tony Evers recently vetoed a bill that would have banned transgender athletes from high school sports. Current regulations allow transgender athletes to participate but with a lot of rules and regulations that make it incredibly difficult.

The rules for high school transgender athletes are created by the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA), which creates rules for all high school sports in Wisconsin. For trans men, the rule states that “a [female to male] student who has started hormone therapy (example: testosterone) is only eligible for male teams.” For trans women the regulations are harsher, “A [male to female] student must have one calendar year of medically documented testosterone suppression therapy to be eligible to participate on a female team, consistent with WIAA policy.”

These current policies are very black-and-white and fail to take into consideration the nuances involved, especially when it comes to access to and effects of hormone replacement therapy (HRT). With these current policies, a trans man cannot compete on a women’s team if he desires. This may sound good, but some trans men may feel more comfortable remaining on a team with people they’re already familiar with. These policies could and do easily lead to bullying and trans athletes feeling uncomfortable on teams with less supportive peers.

In my experience, men’s teams aren’t always the safest place for trans men—testosterone or not. Trans athletes in high school sports in Wisconsin should not be regulated the way they are now. Trans athletes should be allowed to play on the team they choose. If advantages or disadvantages become a problem as seen by the coach, an unbiased council can help decide how they can participate.

CURRENT REGULATIONS ARE FAILING TRANS KIDS

The current regulations are not working, and this is because of their inconsistency and lack of equity. An example of these inconsistencies is presented by Eric Vilian, a professor and scientist specializing in the differences in sex development. He expresses concerns that individual-based rulings deciding whether a trans athlete can play will “create a quite inequitable patchwork of inclusion and exclusion throughout the country, with some states or some cities more likely to include and others not. And the same trans athlete may be eligible in one school and, if they move, may not be in another school.” This shows how even if we transitioned away from the all-out bans that have been proposed and away from WIAA’s current requirements, individually deciding rulings create inequity as well.

This is why trans athletes should automatically be allowed to play on the team where they feel most comfortable. This would help eliminate some of that inequality. Another problem with the all-out ban is illustrated by Laura Meckler, a journalist specializing in education and with experience writing about health and social problems. She says that “schools that want to limit trans athletes’ participation in sports would have to consider the sport, the level of competition, and the grade or education level involved... Some teams require advanced skills and others allow anyone to participate, such as intramural or junior varsity squads, and said rules must ‘reflect these differences in competition.’”

This helps illustrate all the factors that go into different levels of sports and different kinds of sports that need to be thought about before banning trans athletes from all of them. If an athlete wants to play for fun, they should be allowed to. That really should be what grade school sports are about, more than competitiveness. An outright ban would bar trans grade school athletes from exploring sports and all of the benefits they bring: fun, confidence building, community/friendships, and mental and physical wellbeing. This is one of the reasons why an outright ban is not right.



WHO REALLY HAS THE ADVANTAGE?

Another thing to consider about an outright ban is that, when it comes to so-called “advantages” for trans athletes, we ignore the other ways that even cisgender athletes have inherent advantages and disadvantages. Again according to Vilian, “There are all sorts of advantages coming into play for athletic abilities—genetic advantages, metabolic differences, physical characteristics, height, for example—and all the socioeconomic access to better nutrition, better coaching, better training equipment. [Are] all of these differences that provide some advantages dwarfed by the fact of being a trans athlete? We simply don’t know.”

Vilian addresses other factors that give all athletes different performance levels. There is no real cut-and-dried answer to the advantages any competitor has. All competitors have different conditions helping or hurting them, and simply being trans doesn’t guarantee success or overall advantage. An outright ban simply bars any participation from trans athletes and is not fair, considering all other factors that give cis athletes advantages.

Trans people should be allowed to participate fairly until it is proven otherwise to be unfair. There is no true reason to exclude trans athletes other than ignorance and transphobia.

Not only are the regulations not working for trans athletes, but the increased scrutiny on all athletes caused by these misguided bans and regulations also causes harm. Cisgender female athletes with high testosterone levels are being discriminated against. An example of this is Caster Semenya, a cis woman who was banned from competing in track because of high testosterone levels. These regulations harm everyone.

Good data on athletic performance differences between trans and cis people is still hard to come by, but one recent study by the International Olympic Committee has begun to shed some light on this. The study concluded that “transgender female participants showed greater hand-grip strength than cisgender female participants but lower lung function and relative VO2 max, the amount of oxygen used when exercising. Transgender female athletes also scored below cisgender women and men on a jumping test that measured lower-body power.”

This study shows that, yes, trans women may have an advantage over cis female athletes in certain areas, but cis athletes of both genders have multiple advantages over trans athletes in other categories. Every trans athlete is different, and it is unfair for their participation to be outright banned because of these differences.

Another point to consider is brought up again by Vilian, who thinks that “some [people] are making the argument that the difference between boys and girls should translate directly into ...[the] difference between trans and cisgender girl athletes. But there is no good evidence for this, in part because many cases are going to be different, some having undergone blocking of puberty at different ages.” This backs up what the IOC study found because trans athletes scored in between cis athletes of both genders in multiple tests. This helps illustrate the differences between trans people and cis people. It also brings up that every trans person is different, and that is why trans people should be given the benefit of the doubt and allowed to play.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS LACK UNDERSTANDING

In contrast, Michael J. Joyner, a Mayo Clinic doctor who focuses on the biology of male and female athletes, argues that “science supports the bans in elite sports, where events can be decided by the smallest of margins. We know testosterone is performance-enhancing, and we know testosterone has residual effects. Additionally, [the] declines in performance by trans women after taking drugs to suppress their testosterone

levels do not fully reduce the typical differences in athletic performance between men and women.”

While Joyner may be right that some advantages are seen in trans women, he fails to address the disadvantages that scientists have also found trans athletes to have. The issue is not so simple as Joyner says, and there simply is not enough research to support either opinion. That is another reason why trans athletes should be allowed to play. More trans athletes participating means more studies and data can be collected for research on their performance.

The public has already formed a lot of opinions on trans athletes; this is important because public opinion plays a huge part in whether or not trans athletes can compete, according to a poll by the Pew Research Center. They polled Americans regarding their stance on trans athletes, and “polling [showed that] a majority of Americans oppose allowing transgender women to compete in sports.” Another poll by Maryland University found that “Fifty-five percent of Americans opposed allowing trans women and girls to compete with cisgender women and girls in high school sports.” This shows that the majority of Americans already have pre-formed negative opinions about trans athletes. This is why an unbiased council would need to be chosen to help decide how trans athletes can continue to participate in sports after a coach brings up concerns. It would be unfair for a council with already biased opinions against or for trans athletes to determine how they can play.

Long-distance swimmer Dianne Nyad brings up another possible solution to this problem. She says that “a fairer [solution would be to] give competitions a new ‘open’ classification: Cisgender, transgender, intersex—all are welcome. Okay, there probably won’t be many entries just yet. But there weren’t many women competing in sports when they were first allowed, either. Switzer ran solo not that long ago, and now nearly half of the 30,000 Boston marathoners are women.” This solution is a good idea and promotes the idea of equality and having fun, but trans people should not have to be separated from sports just because of transphobia. Trans people should be allowed to participate fairly until it is proven otherwise to be unfair. There is no true reason to exclude trans athletes other than ignorance and transphobia.

LET TRANS KIDS PLAY

To put this all together, research does not back a total ban on trans athletes, yet neither does it back unregulated participation for them. However, current regulations are inconsistent and unequal. Instead, high school trans athletes should be allowed to play on the team they choose. If their performance is questioned by their coach, then an unbiased council will help determine how they can still participate. The council could help determine if the coach has real concerns or is just being transphobic, and could help foster a plan for each individual athlete if there are real concerns. Overall, high school trans athletes are still just teenagers and should be allowed to explore and have fun. ■

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ORGANIZERS BOOKS JUSTICE PRISON ABOLITION

Liberation through Literature

A Q&A with **Sandy Olson** and **Nicholas Leete** of **LGBT Books to Prisoners**.

The organization is trans-affirming, racial-justice focused, and operates from a prison abolitionist perspective.

BOOKSHELVES FULL of every genre line the walls of the Social Justice Center on Williamson Street. Some volunteers sit at a table writing letters, and others look through the stacks, curating packages for queer and trans incarcerated people across the country.

Over the past 10 years, LGBT Books to Prisoners has sent books to more than 9,000 people with the mission to get books into the hands of LGBTQIA+ identifying incarcerated people so they can learn and grow on their own terms.

WOULD YOU TALK MORE ABOUT THE MISSION? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SEND LGBTQ BOOKS?

Sandy Olson: We are prison abolitionists. We are doing a form of harm reduction. We can't get rid of prisons today, though we wish we could. But what we can do is send books to queer and trans people who are locked up, and that is part of liberatory practices.

It's also important to know that queer and trans people are targeted by police and by prisons and jails and other carceral systems... They are disproportionately targeted by the state. There are more queer and trans people in prison proportionately compared to the rest of society.

Nicholas Leete: They're disproportionately targeted once they're in prison, by the state again... The idea of prison abolition is counter to this theory that the way to repair harm or the

way to make safety is imprisonment.

Queers are more likely to be targeted. Queers of color are more likely to be targeted. Immigrant queers are more likely to be targeted. Low-income people who are queer are more likely to be targeted for various reasons. And then, once in prison, because society is fractal and prison culture is everywhere, measures of confinement are used to create "safety." So you have a lot more people whose freedoms are further restricted. They're put into solitary confinement, which is a form of torture, for their "own safety." So people need more books to read... It's not solving the problem of state torture... it's a measure of harm reduction.

SO: Anytime someone gets mail from outside that is humanizing. The guards and other staff and the people around them are like, "well, somebody on the outside cares about this person. They must be important." It raises the stature of that person in their eyes.

People get to choose what they're asking for and what they're getting, within the limits of what we have. Making autonomous choices is something that is liberatory. And usually they get a note, not everyone gets a note, but a lot of people are getting a note from us that is personal. That says "Hey, we're thinking of you, you're part of the community," etc.

WHAT IS AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS?

NL: Someone will hear from someone else who got books from us, or they see us on resource lists, and they send us a letter. Usually, it's a small note. You'll get people wondering what our deal is, how much it costs.

It's important that people have agency and autonomy. So, we're not just sending out books willy-nilly, they're part of the process. One of us reads the letter and makes sure they're asking for books. Then they check our database of prison restrictions and make note of the restrictions, for example whether the books has to be hardcover or softcover or contain no nudity or only educational nudity.

SO: There are a lot of restrictions that they'll claim there is some reason behind, but the reason is pretty shoddy. My experience of working on these restrictions is that it's a tool of oppression rather than for safety or the order of their facility. It's about oppression and control, and dehumanizing people even more.

HOW DO YOU WORK AROUND THE VARIOUS RESTRICTIONS AND BOOK BANS?

NL: When I'm filling a request, there are two things determining what to send: What the person requested as well as all the restrictions.

SO: You have to thread the needle.

NL: There's this book called *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, which is hugely popular, and people find it very helpful.

SO: There's no replacement for this—it's a textbook that is more than 600 pages long. What are you going to do if this is the information they need, and we can't get it to them? Nothing, but that's just one example. There are also places that have bans on stickers. Some places don't accept any used books at all. We've had problems lately where they're complaining about too much tape on packages and sending it back to us.

ARE THERE ANY NEEDS YOU ARE LOOKING TO FILL?

NL: We need to catch up on the backlog of requests. If we had more volunteers, more books, and more funds to buy books, then we could send more books out. Longer term, a goal is to get more involved with the other local prison abolitionist organizations dealing with all the restrictions around what type of books we can send.

SO: As for immediate needs, I actually think we're doing well. We just need more book genres to draw from. There's room for people to get involved, and we are doing really well.

What I didn't understand when I started was the scale of the problem—I think it is something that is important to know. You can gently learn about the problems and do something that is materially and emotionally helpful. ■



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Trans Masc Meetup

Allister June, the founder of the **Trans Masc Meetup**, shares details about the monthly gathering. The Madison meetup takes place 1:00–3:00 p.m. on second Sundays at Garver Feed Mill in the Garver Lounge.

Written by Clara Lefton.

HOW DID THIS GROUP GET STARTED?

I was on Bluesky, which is a Twitter alternative, and the trans-feminine community is very strong there. That is a great thing in general, but as a transmasculine person, I ended up just feeling really isolated. Especially because I'm new to the Madison area myself and only just starting to develop my own social connections.

When I first learned about trans people, I learned about transfeminine people, and it was a lot later before I met anyone that was transmasculine. Personally, I've run into a lot more transfeminine people, both in person and online. Trans information is not super accessible, and it's a lot of word-of-mouth. Ultimately, I just decided to be the cliché of, "Be the change you want to see in the world." I knew that this was something I could do, so I just decided to do it!

WHAT CAN AN ATTENDEE EXPECT?

I intentionally don't want the meetup to be like a therapy support



group, because I don't think that we necessarily have the education or resources to do that. But I do very much want it to be a social group where you can make friendships, which I have done. I met two great guys, and we play Dungeons & Dragons, and that's awesome.

Also, one of the other members is a big fan of spreadsheets. So, he did a big spreadsheet of all the top surgeons in the tri-state area, which was a great resource that I would have never had, if not for hosting this.

Honestly, it's just a great way to meet people that have a shared transmasculine experience. You know, which is not going to be all-encompassing, but it's still one aspect. It's important to share common experiences or stuff that you're dealing with that you have in common.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET IN TOUCH WITH THE ORGANIZERS?

Although the meetup is hosted in Madison, it is not limited to Madison residents. To learn more about the meetup, check out their Transgender Madison Discord server via discord.com/invite/KZEB3kk7tS or email TransMascMadison@gmail.com.

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Orgullosa

UW-Madison's Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, **Dr. Fernie Rodriguez** (they/them), on what it's like being the highest-ranking openly transgender official at the institution, growing up as a first-generation Latine immigrant, and overcoming economic adversity.

HIGHER EDUCATION TRANS QTBIPOC

I MET WITH DR. FERNIE at their bespoke loft decorated in Talavera pottery in downtown Madison. The windows and balcony give stunning views of the city and the Wisconsin State Capitol. The space has become a semi-sanctuary for Fernie, who has a very public-facing and demanding role. To relax since their January 2024 roller coaster move from Minneapolis, they love to enjoy Mother Nature by observing the clouds (especially when storms roll in) and tending to their potted plants.

Despite having never met prior, Fernie was truly an open book throughout our 90-minute conversation.

PANDEMIC PANDEMONIUM

Over the last 15 years, Fernie worked for four Minnesota-based higher education institutions, culminating in their 2019 hire as Director of the University of Minnesota's Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence. Although they enjoyed that position, they experienced a lot of turmoil having had the COVID-19 pandemic begin during their second semester after hire, followed by the murder of George Floyd right there in Minneapolis.

Additionally, the pandemic served as a time of soul searching and discovery for Fernie, as it allowed them to process their gender identity. Despite having put on makeup and dressing in feminine clothes occasionally as an undergraduate, it was only in 2020 with someone whom they were dating who asked, "Would you ever dress up for me?" that suddenly made them realize there was more to it for them.

"What does your college degree mean to you?"
The subject responded, "My college education is my apology to my family for being gay."

"Every time I would look in the mirror over the course of my life I saw a girl—every time!" Fernie exclaimed. "I would look and I would be like, 'I'm a girl.' They're just fleeting moments, but there are many," explained Fernie. "I've been accessing her in different ways. In situations or moments, like on Halloween when I would have that 'Oh my god!' feeling and then always having to put her away. The turning point was in 2020 when I got connected to a good therapist and started asking some really important questions."

The struggle was so deeply entrenched in Fernie's psyche that they even incorporated gender and sexuality into their academic pursuits. In 2018 they received their Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. Their dissertation was entitled *Borderland Masculinities in Higher Education* and focused on unpacking masculinity with six first-gen, gay Latino men.

Make Room for Love



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William Villalongo: Myths and Migrations

MAY 3–AUGUST 11, 2024



William Villalongo, *Rhombus*, 2010.
Acrylic, paper, and velvet flocking on wood panel,
75 x 58 inches. © William Villalongo.

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Dr. Fernie recalled one poignant moment during the research process where they sat across from one of the guys and asked, “What does your college degree mean to you?” The subject responded, “My college education is my apology to my family for being gay.” The two, seated at Starbucks, both ended up in tears. They recalled almost falling out of their seats and wondering, “Fernie how long have you been apologizing? And how long are you going to continue to apologize?”

Despite this, Fernie remembers still being unable to tap into their femininity and instead focusing on the next big thing e.g. the position at the Multicultural Center.

“As soon as I broke my masculinity, I realized all of this indebtedness to cultural expectations, gender norms, guilt of being first gen—all of this indebtedness that was wrapped up into my being a man suddenly was gone. The pandemic forced me to stop, and finally, as I realized my transness, I started also understanding, ‘Oh gosh, this is why I have been self-harming. This is why I have been abusing alcohol. I have been literally doing everything possible to keep this [a secret!],’” Fernie said.

FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Fernie grew up in El Paso, Texas with parents who married and divorced each other twice. Their father immigrated from Juarez, a city in Mexico separated from El Paso by practically just the Rio Grande and Border Patrol. However, after the second divorce, their father told Fernie’s mom, “Keep your house and keep your kids.” Thus, the two have not spoken in over a decade, and Fernie is unsure if he’s even aware of their transition.

“What tipped it over for me was his toxic masculinity continuing to destroy and harm the family,” they explained. They gave the example of their brother coming out as a gay man and being kicked out of the home. This turned out to be a defining moment for Fernie, who would

eventually come out as bisexual, gay, and then transfeminine.

Fearful of being kicked out if anyone knew about their questions surrounding gender and sexuality, Fernie sought out attending a university away from home. This was a dream they were only able to pursue because of the divorce, which loosened the cultural norms and expectations they had grown up with.

“In my culture, you don’t leave the house unless you’re going to get married, and you don’t get married unless it’s to the opposite sex. The expectation was you’re going to go to the local university or community college, and stay home. You’re going to do the thing. Or you’re not going to go to college and you’re going to get a job, and you’re going to do the thing. Either way you have to do the thing,” said Fernie.

Because of the communities that I have supported, I see communities experience the worst aspects of an institutional structure, the worst aspects of poverty as it plays out on college campuses, the worst aspects of racism and racial microaggressions, the worst aspects of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy.”

Fearful of being outed while attending the University of Texas at El Paso and living at home, they forged a path to University of Texas at Austin. However, the institution posed new challenges for Fernie.

“Going to UT-Austin was like, ‘No boo, you’re just a Mexican.’ That first gen-ness became people commenting on my Mexican accent. At that time, I recognized how poor I actually was within the context of [UT-Austin]. First generation meant people labeled you ‘at risk.’ First generation meant I wasn’t prepared for the academic rigor of the

institution. First generation meant there were going to be lots of people who didn’t look like me; I was going to be one of few,” explained Fernie.

To emphasize the poverty they were facing, Fernie recalled desperately searching everywhere for change to buy \$0.62 cheeseburgers with friends when the university’s dining halls were closed over break.

“I experienced poverty in ways I didn’t appreciate until being in this career for 15+ years and watching students navigate it and helping them get resources. All of that shapes how I view the institution, the questions I ask at the table, the realities that I am bringing with me as I’m doing strategic planning. For me, the reality that I sit in is different than most,” Fernie said. “What I now know is the realities that I experience[d] within any institution, especially here at UW, are the hardest realities at the institution. Because of the communities that I have supported, I see communities experience the worst aspects of an institutional structure, the worst aspects of poverty as it plays out on college campuses, the worst aspects of racism and racial microaggressions, the worst aspects of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy.”

Fernie remained closeted to their family until 28 years old, when they had hit what felt like rock bottom: They were let go from a professional role in relation to their use of alcohol. At this point, they had already earned a Master of Arts in Higher Education/Student Personnel Administration from New York University, but were still going home and dressing in their “straight clothes.” Ashamed and ready to make a change, they decided to finally come out on a trip home to visit the family over Christmas.

“My family was loving and understanding, [a] very different experience than my brother had, but alcohol continued all the way through my Ph.D. I abused alcohol and it didn’t stop until around 2020.”

Today Fernie maintains close relationships with their mother, their older sister and brother and their niece, who all live in the Austin area.

IMAGINING MADISON

When Fernie began considering a role at UW it was the beginning of their gender transition and the end of a marriage. Torn between multiple worlds, they were unsure whether to be up front in their application and interviews about their gender identity. The process made Fernie reflect on gender on a deeper level, because in previous employment opportunities they had been able to rely on their perceived cis and maleness as hiring advantages. Once again, they debated putting on a suit, tie, and getting a buzzcut.

Despite all their professional success, the daily struggles of being transgender still weighed on them. “I was waiting for the comment that somebody shouts out of the car,” they said. Ultimately, they decided, “I had nothing to lose,” and they wore them makeup, earrings, and used they/them pronouns—this was the first time they had ever presented femininely in a professional context.

At their first Zoom interview with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Lori Reesor, they were asked, “What do you need from your supervisor and working environment?” Dr. Fernie decided being direct was the best option and said, “I’m at the beginning stages of my transition, and I need this journey and my transness to be a non-issue. I need you to trust that I know how to navigate spaces.”

Finally on January 22, 2024, they packed up their two-door Honda and made the drive down from Minneapolis to Madison. Reesor suggested they take some time to adjust and not begin immediately, but Fernie was thrilled at the opportunity for a fresh start and began their role at UW the following day.

“I got rid of all of my boy shit before I left. Imagine if I had done the buzz cut—how horrible. First thing I did was set up all my makeup, and I realized that first afternoon, ‘Oh my god, that’s all I have ever wanted.’ So, the move has been liberating.”



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Q&A

Note: When Dr. Fernie refers to themselves as he/him in italics, that is a reference to themselves prior to realizing their transness.

What are the biggest challenges you've faced since starting at UW?

Honestly, it's figuring out the role. All of it is supporting human beings. So, the capacity to hold every emotion every day within 60- or 90-minute intervals. One meeting can be devastating, another meeting can be infuriating, another meeting can be happy and joyous, another meeting can be tense—all of those emotions!

Then to know when I started that the conflict in Israel and Palestine was going to be a part of this experience, but not truly appreciating how much. I have been astonished with just how much of an impact it has had on me, my role, my colleagues, but also the students—who are why I do this work. Watching them in struggle and conflict has been remarkable.

It is a historic moment. If I can make it through—and by making it through, I mean not leave the field, not get burned out... If I can make it through this huge moment in higher education, I'm very confident in my continued path forward because it has been a lot.

What does a typical day look like for you?

It's only been [a few months] but it feels like I've been here for a minute. I was saying in the first few weeks, "Oh it'll calm down after the semester," and a few of the other Associate Vice Chancellors—one in particular was like, "Fernie, it never calms down." He was like, "It's just the nature of the job." And that has come to be very, very true!

I'm an early riser. I wake up at 5 a.m. every day, even when I'm not working. I start my day looking at email and seeing what I have to [respond to] immediately; things that I have to follow up on or the things

that are going to make my day stressful because I know that someone is expecting me to do something. The reason I do this is because if I don't get into my email by 8:30 or 9:00 a.m., then I'm not getting to it until the end of the day.

Every day is a roller coaster. In the summer, every day except Friday we have orientation. So, I know that every day I'm going to be in front of about 200 or 300 undergraduate students who are coming into the institution. I'm going to get to talk to them about belonging. A few years ago, it used to be, "I know that I might be the first gay, Latino man that they have met." Now [there's the] responsibility of holding the position and also my transness in a way that I have never had my whole career.

So, that's a part of my day-to-day now, but it's exciting, and it keeps me engaged, and it's always great to see the new faces and students. We have cabinet meetings, I have director one-on-ones, I have student follow-up meetings, I have meetings with HR about the upcoming review process, I have meetings with my executive coach to plan the strategic vision of the department. Here's the thing: That's just in the summer! During the academic year it's night events and receptions and being visible. It's a lifestyle, and I fucking love it.

As someone who has a poverty background, as someone who is first generation, as someone who often was the only fill in the blank, my day-to-day is guided by all of those experiences.

Here's what's really important for me to name as I am telling you about my day-to-day life. My day-to-day life, prior to me taking on this job was just as intense, just as demanding, just as early and just as late with back-to-back multiple things. Except I didn't realize that was a foundation that I was laying: Surviving, working multiple jobs, constantly stressed about everything because I was teaching and then I was writing my dissertation and I was doing academic advising, and then, at one point I was the property person, so shoveling the snow.

I remember I had a conversation with University of Minnesota President Eric Kaler. He was gracious to host me in his office for coffee after he retired. He pulled up his calendar, and I remember thinking, "That looks like my calendar." What I'm articulating here is that as I think about the journey of getting here and the story of how I got here, it feels really important to acknowledge and think about my day-to-day. Because I didn't just get here and was like, "Oh, I can take on this role."

As someone who has a poverty background, as someone who is first generation, as someone who often was the only fill in the blank, my day-to-day is guided by all of those experiences. Now part of what my day-to-day includes is recognizing I am not the person I was when I was holding all of the other positions that I had before this, because that was *him*.

I think about how much makeup I'm going to wear, I think about how I'm going to dress my body a lot, I think about my voice, and I think about how open or not open the space is going to be. I think about how I am constantly butting up to masculinity. I have to do this high-profile role now at a high-profile institution, sticking out everywhere I go!

I have to do a lot of softening in the environments I'm in. Sometimes I want to say, "Your masculinity is okay! Your masculinity will not break!" But thank goodness I just recognize that is a part of what I have to do. So, I do it knowing that "You're the Associate Vice Chancellor and it's important for folks to be able to be in community with me regardless of how much makeup or lashes I have on."

The phrase, "constantly butting up against masculinity" is interesting. What else does that bring to mind?

It happens in so many different ways. First is my own internalized masculinity stuff that I'm going to spend my life untraining. So, defaulting to my man training of not asking for help, not being vulnerable, being stoic, my voice, navigating going out into the world—it's a lot.

It's also understanding the way masculinity plays out in a room and that it's weird because I'm implicated in some ways with my masculinity but then also not. I'm in this part of my transition where I'm still very binary, fluid, I guess—let's just say I still see "he" a lot. Although I got my updated driver's license, and I was like, "Oh my god time [has passed]!"

When I speak in front of people, much of the glares or stares are coming back to me from the perceived male students. Here's what I think is happening: Cis men are very uncomfortable with someone relinquishing their masculinity. That's the condition of masculinity: a disdain for femininity. I think that's the perpetual condition of masculinity as specifically related to people who are perceived as men.

What terms do you use to describe your gender identity?

I describe myself as transfeminine. I am transitioning, and I'm also on a gender affirming journey. The thing that continues to cause me tension as I think about my gender identity and also, "Why they? Why not she/her?" People have asked me.

Part of my grappling is not wanting to pretend *he* didn't get me here. That's a little bit of understanding that I was surviving and that using these perceptions of my cisness and masculinity to protect myself and therefore being advantaged. I have said, "Gosh, if I had made the connection 20 years ago, I probably would be dead." Because I don't know what I would have done with that, I barely was able to access gayness.

I shared part of my abuse journey: I was very self-harming. Because I do diversity, equity, and inclusion work, because I educate people around sexism, patriarchy, and masculinity—and the advantages of being all of those—I was advantaged.

Maybe if I was different and I didn't have that [DEI] experience and values, I might not recognize that part of me. The privileged parts of my journey still in this iteration of my being—I have to grapple with that. So, I think for me I will get to she/her, but that is a goal, because right now I am still grappling with everything that *he* did. When people do "she" me, it's surprising—and I like it—and that is the goal.

What do you love the most about your role at UW?

I enjoy that I have colleagues who are willing to ask really hard questions because of all of the reasons that I've already talked to you about. Let me just say, credit to them I'm not an easy one to have at the table because one thing that I now have embraced is I worked really hard to get to the table. So, I love that I am able to—and this is also credit to UW-Wisconsin—I love that I am able to be in community with great colleagues who are putting in the hours, putting in the time. I know that they are also working their butts off and that they have given me the space to show up authentically.

The fact that I can do this job, in this moment, at UW-Madison in this iteration of my being is beautiful, and I think that says a lot about the institution. Everybody has been wonderful, not just my immediate cabinet members. I have felt welcomed, I have felt challenged, seen, and valued. With that I am able to give back to my role. I am determined to be the best Associate Vice Chancellor that I can be. I love the job, and I love the institution.

Anything else you want to mention?

I am grateful to be in Madison. I hear about the vibrant queer and trans LGBTQ community here, and I hope that I can make a difference. I'll be here for as long as they keep me! ■

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Activism at its Core

Tyrone Creech Jr., new **Executive Director of GSAFE**, shares his vision for guiding the non-profit toward greater representation and focus on queer and trans BIPOC youth and adults.

QTBIPOC ACTIVISM TRANS YOUTH

THERE'S TRULY NOTHING quite like seeing the impact of change in a human being, especially that which comes from your own influence. Seeing your own actions, no matter how large or small, changing those around you makes activism what it is at its core. A great activist is made up of many traits, such as confidence and determination, but the most important is having a voice. Luckily, I never struggled with having a voice. I've always been loud and proud thanks to my family teaching me that I had no reason to ever be anything less than my authentic black gay self. Not everyone has been as fortunate as I have in that regard, and now more than ever finding those voices is of so much importance.

My name is Tyrone Creech Jr., and I am the Executive Director of GSAFE, an LGBTQ non-profit based in Madison that focuses work on creating safe and nurturing environments for queer and trans young

adults across school districts statewide. We train teachers, educate parents, and—most importantly—teach the next generation how to find their voices in activism through camps, retreats, conferences, and summits. To me, investing in the next generation of voices shaping the universe and upending the status quo is one of my greatest passions, and we at GSAFE strive to see that passion thrive in the state of Wisconsin and beyond.

FAMILY ROLE MODELS

Growing up in one of the oldest black families in Madison, I was surrounded by powerful personalities that overflowed with confidence and individuality, especially from the women who raised me. There's Auntie Meryl Lynn, who taught me the power to say no, which helped me learn how to stand my ground. Auntie Coly, who taught me the power of compassion, which helped me learn the value of helping others. And then of course, my queen mother herself, Lisa, who, among a list of other things, taught me how to be proud of who I am, which helped me learn how to be confident as a black queer man. This core foundation still runs through my veins and is the forefront of the man I've become. Without it, I might not have found my voice so early on.

WORK TO BE DONE

It wasn't hard to get into activism from there. Being black in the upper Midwest means I've always been the minority. Spaces aren't built with myself or my culture in mind, our schools teach history through a lens of white culture. I'm seen as nothing more than a stereotype that the media has portrayed us as to people who don't know me. On top of that, I'm also gay. We're perceived to be walking illnesses, plagues that populate "woke" ideologies that aren't natural. With all of this, there was no way I was going to sit down and accept that this was just how things were. There was work to be done, and I answered that call.

In 2015, I volunteered for a camp called the Leadership Training Institute (LTI) run by GSAFE. One of my closest childhood friends Ali Muldrow, who happened to be one of GSAFE's co-executive directors, invited me to be an adult mentor for this multiple-day-long camp where high school-aged young adults would gather and form bonds with like-minded individuals while strengthening their knowledge as activists through workshops based on social justice. At the time, I was just a bartender and hadn't given a career as an activist much thought yet, but the opportunity was one I couldn't pass up. By the end of the few days spent at camp, it was like a bonfire was ignited deep within my heart. This was my future. Not only did I get to watch some of the most inspiring, creative, and fantastic queer teenagers develop their voices, but I also met the other adult mentors, who did the inspiring and showed me how important it was to influence this generation of queer folk. I continued to volunteer every summer, getting more and more involved and falling more and more for this type of activism.

MAKING MY PASSION A CAREER

In 2020, a position opened at GSAFE. I remember seeing the opportunity and immediately jumping on it. An opportunity to make my passion into a career was a no-brainer. The process was a long one—and had a few delays due to GSAFE still recovering from the blow that Covid had dealt to it—but I eventually was officially signed on as GSAFE's newest Youth Leadership Organizer in 2021. As I walked into the office on the first day, I felt like I was finally taking a step in the direction I was meant to be facing. I immediately took to work, taking the reins of planning the very camp that got me hooked on this work in the first place, LTI. After that, I formed the Youth Activist Council (YAC) which consisted of a handful of some of the most promising young adults that I got the pleasure of mentoring during the school year.

HONORING AN INSPIRATIONAL ACTIVIST

Before I go any further, I want to take a moment to honor another fierce and unstoppable force of activism that has been in my life for decades, Ali Muldrow. To those who do not have the pleasure of knowing her, Ali has been one of the most inspirational activists that I have ever had the honor of standing by. Her dedication and passion for activism is something I've been in awe over for as long as I can remember. Her voice is proud, confident, and full of love and compassion for the work she does. She pushed me to apply for the position at GSAFE, pushed me even harder while I was there, and has always believed in me with every fiber of her being. Without her, I might have still made it here, but the path would have been much more turbulent. And thanks to her, I was able to push my way further in GSAFE than I ever thought possible.

SPREADING MY WINGS

In 2023, I was promoted to be the Associate Director of DEI, working closely with not only Ali, but another cornerstone of GSAFE, Brian Juchems. Between the two of them, attending conferences and summits, and pouring more into the work we do, I began to truly spread my wings. On March 12, 2024 I was voted in as GSAFE's new executive director. Stepping into this role has been a great opportunity. The amazing team I work with and I are committed to modeling shared leadership, transparency, investing in staff wellness, and organizational sustainability. Setting ourselves up for growth, I want to express how thankful I am that everyone has supported our mission. We wouldn't be here without you.

CENTERING & UPLIFTING BIPOC QUEER & TRANS PEOPLE

GSAFE is a phenomenal organization that strives to create safe, accepting spaces for LGBTQ BIPOC and trans youth while providing resources for our educators and parents to be able to support our future leaders. As the new executive director, I am thrilled to continue to stay true to these goals while also paving the way for new ones to help make more of a point to center and uplift our BIPOC queer and trans youth of color. As an organization, we're invested in providing that representation for youth while making sure that our queer and trans adult educators of color are being protected and supported as well. I make a point of this because in Wisconsin, around 94% of our educators are white, 2% are Hispanic, and 1.8% are black. For these students, many don't join their local GSAs or reach out to seek resources from non-profits like ours because there isn't enough representation from their peers, nor adult role models to whom they can relate. Non-profit culture is not built for BIPOC and trans-identifying people to succeed. It is time we dismantle the white supremacy infrastructure that non-profit culture has been built upon, and that is what GSAFE is doing with this new leadership structure we have implemented. We've spent years as an organization building a foundation for queer youth, and now it's time to extend that foundation to those who need it most.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS & NATIONAL EXPOSURE

Beyond this, GSAFE is going to strive to create new connections while strengthening existing ones with both our partners and non-profits. While most of our support and reach has stayed within the state of Wisconsin, our goal moving forward is to gain more exposure on a national level so that we can continue to pursue our mission to the degree our youth deserve. We want to continue to provide more in-depth resources and support when it comes to our family engagement, youth programming, educator training, and community outreach.

There's a saying in my family that for me truly describes how I feel about the struggles and achievements we face as a community: "We may not have it all together, but together we have it all." ■

NEW EXHIBIT!



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Culture Reclaimed

Two-Spirit Oneida advocate and presenter **Joseph Torres** shares his journey from the closet to the podium.

QTBIPOC TWO-SPIRIT INDIGENOUS COMING OUT BIRACIAL

JOSEPH RAY TORRES feels the greatest joy when someone asks him to present on the important-yet-hidden history of two-spirit people. And it's more than just a presentation to him, it's an identity—one that gave him a sense of belonging that was missing for so long.

Joe was born April 16, 1965, the 11th of 13 children to two loving parents. His parents met one summer when his dad was in Oneida, Wisconsin, working landscaping jobs. His dad was part Mexican, part Pueblo. His mom was Oneida and spotted him when she was a teenager and brought him lunch every day. Eventually they married when she was 16.

STOLEN OPPORTUNITY

Joe's parents both thought they should spare their children the experiences they had growing

up. They wanted their kids to assimilate and only speak English. Joe was always frustrated that the chance to learn the language of his parents was stolen from him due to the actions of others. Joe's father spoke fluent Spanish, but due to experiencing racism, he decided he would not teach his children Spanish. His mother was fluent in the Oneida language, but spent years in a mission school that made her deny her native heritage and afraid to teach the language to her children. Joe begged her to teach him, but she only shared a few phrases. Joe was in his 50s before he began to learn the Oneida language at UW-Green Bay.

MISSION SCHOOLS

Joe was always close to his mother, and he felt terrible about her childhood experiences

at the mission school. He came to learn that boarding schools were designed by a white man named R.H. Pratt, who was credited with coining the phrase "kill the Indian and save the man," which became the main mission to assimilate native children to leave their Indigenous ways behind and embrace the white American lifestyle. This was accomplished through force. Pratt went on to found The Carlisle Indian School which influenced other similar government-run schools to open. At one such school, Joe's mother internalized the western narrative that Natives were savages. They were warned to unlearn what Native teachings they were taught and told to not pass on their ways to their children as it would only bring harm. Joe's grandmother eventually pulled her daughter from the mission school

in 6th grade, but the damage was done. Joe said that these experiences had a deep impact on not only his mother, but her family, too. He observed that she was "whitewashed in school."

NOT "NATIVE ENOUGH"

Growing up was not easy for Joe or his siblings. They did not have a lot of money, and there was a lot of racism directed at him and his siblings from other Oneida due to their mixed background. The Torres kids were made to feel like they were not "Native enough." The group of 13 siblings were tight knit because of this. Joe recalls that white kids were always nicer to them than Native kids when he was younger.

LONG HAIR

When Joe was in fifth grade, he started growing his hair out long; it was something he was proud of. In middle school, he really committed to it. When Joe reached high school, his hair was down to his lower back. He wore it down a lot, but sometimes it was in a ponytail. It was in high school that Joe recalled getting harassed by white male students for wearing his hair long. He remembers male classmates yelling "fucking woman" when they passed him in the hallways. Joe was proud of his hair and was not about to put up with nonsense from ignorant people. Joe knew that the other Oneida students that saw him growing out his hair were inspired by him. Many asked their parents if they could grow out their hair, too, and were not allowed to do so.

NOT FITTING IN

Joe was always interested in learning about his Oneida roots. He remembers trying to find books on his people, and he could only find books on the Plains Indians, the Lakota and Cheyenne tribes. Joe found his heroes in Native history—people like the Nez Perce and Chief Joseph. Joe loved learning about the great warrior, Crazy Horse. His story resonated with young Joe because he did not look like the others, and he did not fit in with his own people. He was of shorter stature and was known to be a great horseman. He was never a chief but fought for his people until the end.

Joe said, "Right around middle school, I knew I was different. I knew I was attracted to men, and my feelings were really strong. I had a close friend who was also Oneida that was one year younger, and I always wanted to tell him that I liked him as more than just friends. I fought it, as I was raised Episcopalian, and I was taught it was a sin. Every night I prayed for these feelings to go away."

The parents of Joe's classmates viewed

him as a troublemaker and told their children that they could not hang out with him. They thought Joe was a bad influence because he had a reputation for sticking up for himself and others. Joe had no problem "telling off a teacher" if he felt they were in the wrong. He never fought anyone physically, but he did use his words as a shield. Joe became a frequent visitor in the principal's office. Some of the Oneida friends that Joe had were sent off to boarding schools by their parents such as the Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota or the Intermountain school in Utah. The kids who were sent away were ones who Joe used to get into trouble with and sometimes skipped

with the white kids in his class. This is how things were for him until high school.

In sixth grade, a white teacher read a book about Chief Joseph, and she said it reminded her of him. The teacher took to calling Joe "Chief Joseph" when she addressed him. Joe hated that, as it felt like she was tokenizing and mocking him because he happened to be Native and his name was Joseph.

RESPECT AT LAST

In eighth grade, Joe had a teacher that he often clashed with. The teacher was also the school's basketball coach, and Joe viewed him as a "total jock." One day, the teacher finally

The friend exclaimed "Oh, so you're two-spirit" after learning that Joe was a Native gay man. Joe had never heard that term before and brushed it off as "just another white person telling me what I am."

school with. Joe made friends with some other Oneida kids who were good students and did not skip school, and he eventually stopped skipping school. Joe's teachers and principal noticed the positive change in him and commended him on the improvement. Because many of the Oneida kids were not able to hang out with him, Joe became really good friends

asked Joe, "Why do you give me such a hard time?" Joe told him if he wanted respect, that he had to give respect. Joe was shocked that he and his teacher started to get along after that. Joe remembers a history assignment from that teacher where he had to write an essay on the perfect society. Joe wrote that he wished "there were no white men who arrived to take all of

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Joe at the Oneida's buffalo overlook. Below, from left: Joe as a toddler, and as a teenager.



At the time, lip sync was really big, and he decided to enter a contest. He became hooked and kept entering contests because it was so much fun! Eventually, after honing his craft, he moved out of state and started winning lip sync contests. Joe had felt connected to the queer community, but did not feel that connection at home on his reservation in Oneida.

AN IMPORTANT MOVE

He moved to Minneapolis with the purpose of embracing the queer culture and experiences that he got a taste of when visiting friends there. Joe got a job at the Mall of America as an Assistant Manager at Wilson's, which led to working downtown at Banana Republic.

He loved that he was able to be himself in Minneapolis, and he often went dancing at the clubs. Sometimes, he even danced as a backup dancer for drag queens he knew. The music and club scenes were such a prominent piece of LGBTQ culture. Joe recalled, "People didn't care what nationality you were or if you were gay. They didn't give a shit. It was the freedom I craved and had wanted for so long."

A favorite memory of Joe's time in Minneapolis was, "When the AIDS fundraiser came to Minneapolis (event was precursor to AIDS Walk), there was a dance-a-thon on First Avenue at a bar called Quest. It was Prince's nightclub and where the movie *Purple Rain* was filmed. The dance-a-thon was on the first floor of the club. At the time, I was dating a guy that worked for Prince. I raised \$700 and danced nonstop for over four hours. My colleagues from Banana Republic came out to watch. The donation was matched dollar for dollar."

Joe lived in Minneapolis for 11 years. Eventually, he moved back home to Oneida. It was a reluctant move, but a necessary one due to employment issues in a shaky retail economy in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 attacks.

STEREOTYPING

All of his life, he had been mistaken for being Mexican because of his last name.

Usually, he did not bother to correct it. A common phrase he heard from others, unasked, was that he had a unique look, and he looked "old world." Joe never understood that and remarked, "I've heard it both ways—that I'm not Native-looking, not Mexican-looking. I always felt uncomfortable when people tokenized me when they found out I was Native. Suddenly, all interactions with white people brought up some Native stereotype." Joe was asked, "What do you do? Play bingo? Burn sage?" Joe became annoyed with this line of questioning. Reflecting on this, Joe said, "White people don't know how to act around natives. It was like I was the last unicorn."

A LIFE-CHANGING INTRODUCTION

It was around 1990 when Joe met a roommate's friend that was in Minneapolis visiting from Texas. Upon meeting Joe, the friend exclaimed "Oh, so you're two-spirit" after learning that Joe was a Native gay man. Joe had never heard that term before and brushed it off as "just another white person telling me what I am." For his birthday that year, the friend from Texas gifted him a book that opened his eyes to a hidden queer history he had never heard about before. The book was *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* by Walter Williams. Joe read the book from cover to cover. In it, he learned how Native Americans had much diversity before colonization. He learned that queer native people were known by different names in different tribes and often held places of honor within their tribe. For those who lost their language due to colonization, some modern Indigenous folks had adopted the English term "two-spirit." As Joe read the book, he experienced a mixture of emotions: Sadness about a lost way of life he would never know, and anger that it was taken away from him and his people. Reading that book changed his life. Joe felt empowered.

COMING OUT

Shortly after reading that book, Joe was dumped on his birthday by his boyfriend. Emboldened by the passages in the book, anger came flooding out of him from trying to hide the fact he was gay his entire life. Joe said it was in this moment that he vowed to not back down or apologize for who he was. Previously, he had felt terrible that he had not told anyone in his family that he was gay. It took the birthday breakup and reading an impactful book to change all of that. Joe decided to come out individually through handwritten letters to his family members. He called his older sister Linda to follow up with her. Linda informed

Joe that she and their sister Joanne had been waiting for some time for Joe to come out and tell them. Joanne was supportive to Joe after she read his letter. She told him that she had known he was gay for many years and was waiting for him to say something. Joanne thought it was funny that Joe believed he had hidden it so well. Joanne had also told her kids that their uncle was possibly gay and that it was not a big deal. Joe's sister Judy responded to his letter and told Joe that she would love him no matter what. Joe came to learn how fortunate he was when he came out to his family. They were so supportive. In time, he learned that other Natives that came out to their family were threatened with being disowned or with assault, such as running them over with their car.

TWO-SPIRIT PRESENTATIONS

Around 2015, Joe met an Indigenous woman who became a dear friend: Kat Werchowski. She was giving a talk at UW-Oshkosh on two-spirit people. It was the first time Joe had seen a presentation on two-spirit and it was being presented by two wonderful Indigenous folks, Kat and Mark Denning. Joe hosted additional two-spirit presentations and events through partnerships with the Oneida to assist with getting things going.

Joe was transfixed from the moment he saw the two-spirit presentation at UW-Oshkosh. He was a man on a mission to have Kat come present in Oneida. In 2016, Kat presented at the store Joe was working at, Turtle Island Gifts. Joe told Kat how much he wanted to present on two-spirit and let people know about this important-yet-hidden history. Kat encouraged Joe to pursue his passion, and so a seed was planted. In 2021, Joe presented on two-spirit at the UW-Green Bay Middle School and High School Pride Camp. It was a hit with the students. Joe had re-enrolled in school at UW-Green Bay in hopes of finishing his undergrad degree. During his time in school, Joe worked as a Pride Center Intern in the UW-Green Bay Pride Center and as an Intern in the First Nations Education Office. Joe mentored fellow students in the Pride Center and the First Nations Education Office. During this time, he honed his presentation on two-spirit people and also made a permanent window display educating folks about two-spirit people for the Pride Center.

In 2021, Joe hosted a PBS documentary night for Two Spirits, a film about Fred Martinez, a young Navajo who lost their life because of being gay. Afterward, Joe debuted his new two-spirit presentation and had a Q&A panel with his nephew, Dr. Cory Carline.

The entire camp watched mesmerized as a young two-spirit Oneida filled the room with absolute queer joy.



our land and exterminate our people." Joe did not get his assignment back when the essays were handed back to the students with their grades clearly marked. Instead, the teacher simply said, "Please see me after class, Joe." All the students said "Oooohhhh" in unison because they thought Joe was in trouble. The teacher handed him his essay back with an "A;" he just wanted to tell him he did a good job. Joe marveled at how his teacher had changed over the year. He thought he was cool because he actually listened to Joe and he felt seen by someone he did not expect to see him at all.

FIRST KISS

In high school, Joe became very interested in fashion. He was always worried about his presence and overall appearance. Joe noticed that he paid more attention to his appearance and seemed more concerned about it than his peers were. When Joe was 18, he had his first same-sex kiss with a 19-year-old. He thought

he was his friend and gay, but the kiss was interrupted, and the next time Joe saw this friend, the friend's attitude toward him had changed. He informed Joe that he really liked him but did not want to get AIDS. He kept grabbing to hold Joe's hand, which Joe found very confusing. Joe's first kiss wasn't what he had hoped for. Instead of butterflies, he felt confused and hurt. Joe didn't know what AIDS was at the time, but the experience left him rattled. Joe decided to stay in the closet for a few more years.

FIRST GAY BAR

After graduating from high school, Joe decided to attend UW-Stout, focusing on Hotel and Restaurant Management before changing to Fashion Merchandising. He attended for five years, ultimately not finishing his degree. After college, Joe came home and remembered how much he loved to visit Za's in Green Bay. It was the first gay bar he ever checked out.

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Joe with family at his high school graduation, and college graduation.

His friend Kat surprised him by coming to his presentation. Joe was floored that she drove all the way down from Superior, to his presentation at UW-Green Bay. After the presentation, Kat took her two-spirit medallion from around her neck and placed it around Joe's neck and told him, "Remember when you said it was your dream to do this? Now you're doing it. Wear this whenever you do a presentation—it has everything in it that you need." Joe thought it was probably the most precious gift anyone had ever given him.

"It was hers. It was like passing the torch when she gave me her medallion. Kat designed it, and it has medicine in it: Sage, sweetgrass and cedar. We both started crying," he recalled.

PROUD GRADUATE

Joe fulfilled his goal of graduating and finished his undergrad at UW-Green Bay in 2023, becoming a proud first-generation college student. In June 2023, Joe returned to UW-Green Bay to give his two-spirit presentation at the middle and high school Pride Camps. In the middle school camp, one young Oneida camper shared that they were excited about Joe's presentation. They asked if they could perform a medicine dance known as the Jingle Dress. Joe was overcome with gratitude. He had always wanted to have a dance incorporated into his presentation, but he was not sure what that looked like. After Joe finished his presentation, the student put on their regalia and performed a jingle dress dance for the entire camp. The entire camp watched mesmerized as a young two-spirit Oneida filled the room with absolute queer joy. Joe teared-up and honored him by dancing at the end of his presentation.

WHAT HAS CHANGED, WHAT HAS NOT

Joe said, "One thing that has changed about the queer community is that bars don't seem to be the popular space to meet as much anymore. Not as many people in the community drink. Green Bay has improved with offering other things to do. There are places like the UW-Green Bay Pride Center to visit, too. Sometimes, there is still that feeling of competition among gay men. It's hard to be

platonic friends with someone when you're in a committed relationship, as there is always jealousy from someone.

"Also, there is definitely still a lot of insecurity due to the current political environment," Joe added. "People are getting afraid to be who they are.

Gay bashing was prevalent growing up, and it seems to be coming back. Some people are bragging because of Trump and the anti-LGBTQ bills being passed around the country. The LGBTQ community needs to come together and stand up for our rights. We also need more allies to be vocal about it, too. We all need to work together—it's all or nothing for all of us who are marginalized. And, we all need to respect one another—no one is better than the other."

PRIDE PARADE PRESENCE

Looking to the future, Joe is excited about collaborating with other organizations like the Bay Area Council on Gender Diversity and the Bay Area Trans Youth Alliance. Martha Marvel invited Joe and fellow two-spirit folks to march in the Milwaukee Pride Parade on June 9 of this year. All together about 20 two-spirit people marched—among them were Oneida and HoChunk. Joe was surprised how many voices called out to them as they marched along the route and announced their tribal affiliation like the Anishinaabe and HoChunk. Joe and his fellow two-spirit marchers called back in their best war cries. By the end of the route, Joe had practically lost his voice.

TWO-SPIRIT 101

Joe wants everyone to know that the term two-spirit originated in 1990 as an umbrella term for natives to use to describe a gender non-conforming third gender. This term is useful for Indigenous folks to use to identify themselves. Due to colonization, some tribes lost their language, and thus the term for the two-spirit in their tribe. The Oneida are currently working to find their term. Joe also wants people to learn about Native history and the Native queer history of the folks whose land we all reside upon, which was originally called Turtle Island. He said, "If you are not Native, please do not use the term 'two-spirit.' Non-Native LGBTQ folks have plenty of other terms to claim."

Joe offered these parting words of advice: "Be your authentic self. If you live in a community or a family and you can't be out, find your support. It's not always easy to do. You are special. You do matter, and there is definitely a place for you in society." ■

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HANNAH'S STORY

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CELEBRATING WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

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

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

- Shyra-Sekani Adams
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- Angie Alcorta
- Akiya Alexander
- Chris Allen
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- Roshá Brister
- Diego Campoverde-Cisneros
- Sylvester Carmichael

We welcome any & all LGBTQ people of color in Wisconsin to be included in our annual **Pride in Color** community feature. To participate, submit your photo here: ourliveswisconsin.com/lgbtq-pride-in-color

POC Pride at Madison Pride: Once again we'll be helping host the QTBIPOC tent at OutReach's Annual Magic Pride Festival, Sunday, **August 18th** from 1pm to 6pm at Warner Park. Come network with us!



The Visionary

Afra Smith amplifies lived experience and empowers financial freedom through The Melanin Project.

AS THE FOUNDER & CEO of The Melanin Project, I am deeply committed to uplifting women of the Black and African diaspora, along with other historically marginalized communities, through my mission to eradicate wealth disparities. In my role as a leading wealth empowerment advocate and financial coach, I draw from my personal struggles and path to prosperity to inspire and guide others toward financial freedom.

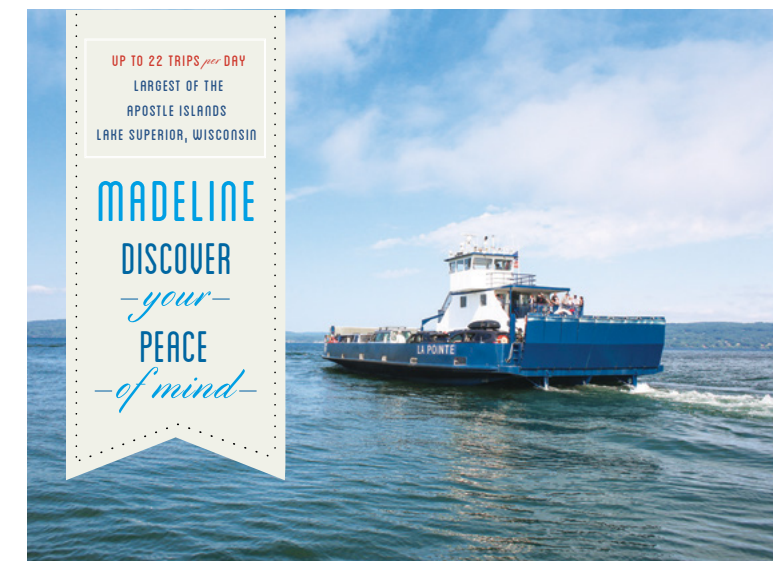
As a motivational speaker and the face of The Melanin Project brand, I openly share my journey of overcoming a daunting \$30,000 in debt from a car loan, payday loans, credit cards, credit report blemishes, and a credit score in the mid-500s. This includes the experience of being unbanked and dealing with a substantial amount of student loan debt.

Through speaking engagements, personal finance workshops, budget planners, online courses, and as the visionary behind the first-ever Wealth Literacy Conference held in Madison in April 2023 and 2024, I offer practical tools and heartfelt encouragement to help individuals achieve their financial goals. These offerings also provide me the opportunity to share my lived experience of how oppression and discrimination eroded my mental health and sense of self-worth, leading to the very model that helped me discover financial freedom and my vision to create a supportive pathway forward for everyone I reach.

In addition to my work with The Melanin Project, I am proud to serve as a manager for the integrated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office at UW Health and the UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health. In this capacity, I help support our vision to be a leader in actively dismantling racism in ourselves, our system, and our community. Although there is much more we need to accomplish with this vision, I am blessed to work alongside an amazing team of colleagues who recognize that all patients, families, faculty, and staff deserve to feel safe and respected. ■



Afra speaking at the 2023 OPEN Dinner, and on the cover of Brava earlier this year.



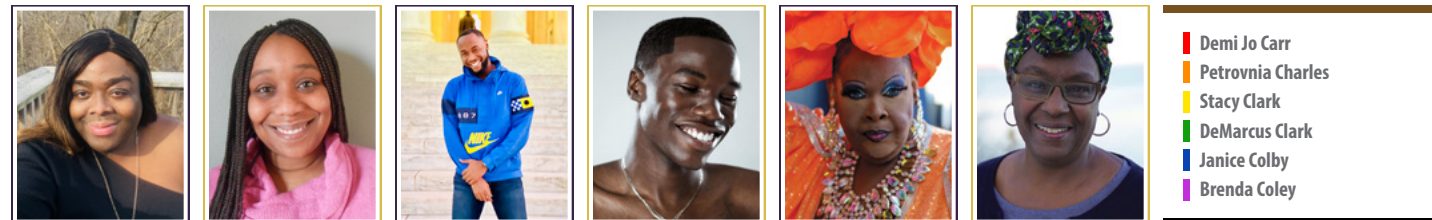
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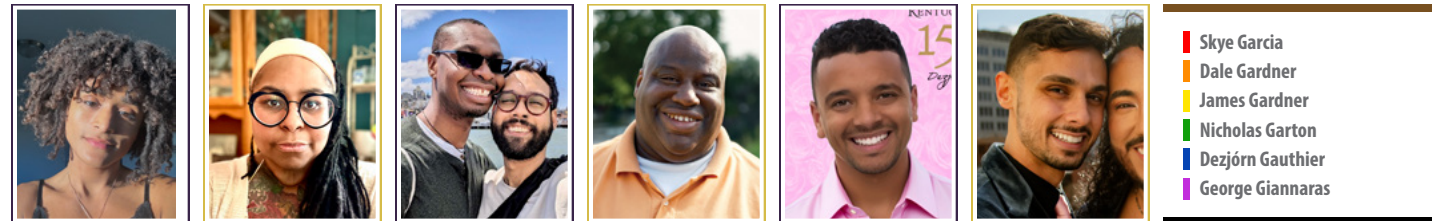
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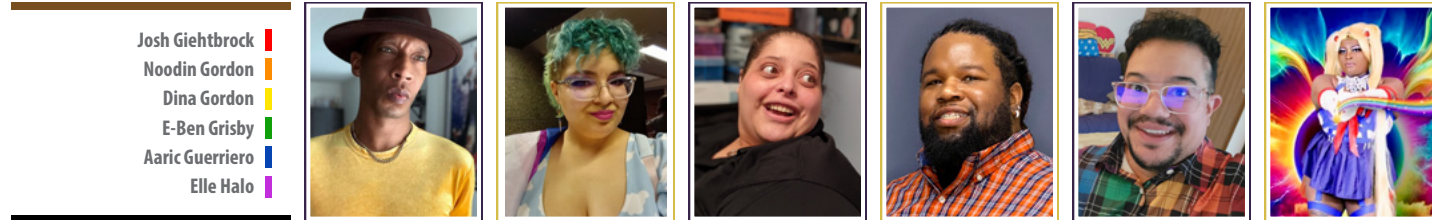
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The Public Servant

Jesus Rivera works to bring needed representation as the only minority and openly LGBTQ+ member on the School District of Cambridge Board of Education.

GROWING UP, I always knew that public service was important to me. From elementary school on, I was always as involved as possible. I started a little broadcast in fifth grade, reporting on our class news. In middle school, it was the student council. I served as class president and school board representative all four years in high school, and I attended Badger Boys State. I always valued an open communication style, except when it came to one thing—being gay.

Finding one's self through adolescence is not easy for anyone. Stressors come from all around you—friend groups, academics, sports, clubs, family, and so on. And trying to hide a part of you—a big part of you—is an exhausting task. Knowing early on that I wanted to serve somehow, I thought the only way I could do so successfully was in the closet. That all changed when I realized that those who meant the most to me did not change their view of who I was based on my sexuality when I came out. That and a lot of processing of the years of hiding who I was.

Fast forward to moving to a primarily white small town as an out minority with my husband, it may have been easy to revert to the practice of hiding who I was—at least the parts I could hide. I took a different route. I decided to run for local office as my authentic self. I had to consciously decide to be fearless in presenting myself as who I truly am to a community that may reject me for whatever reason. No more hiding my sexuality. It was time to be proud.

In the end, being authentic won. Taking the high road won. I won. And now, I get to serve my community as a representative of minority groups and the LGBTQ community.

As a recently elected school board member in my community, I am excited to bring LGBTQ representation to a community where it has been less common in leadership roles. In a time when it is too easy to judge one another hastily, we need positive, forward-thinking people in leadership positions to be role models for the next generation.

Inclusivity is top of mind during every conversation for me on the board—this is a priority of mine. From discussions on free and reduced lunch to ensuring every student has the equal opportunity for unique learning experiences to reviews and approval of curriculum, it is more important than ever that we consider historically underrepresented groups to provide a more equitable learning environment for all.

In my day-to-day work, I oversee internal communication at the Wisconsin School of Business at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Although diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives have been under attack by some in our state legislature, it is important work to bring employees together to better understand each other's culture—our values, attitudes, and beliefs—to be better co-workers to serve the UW community. ■

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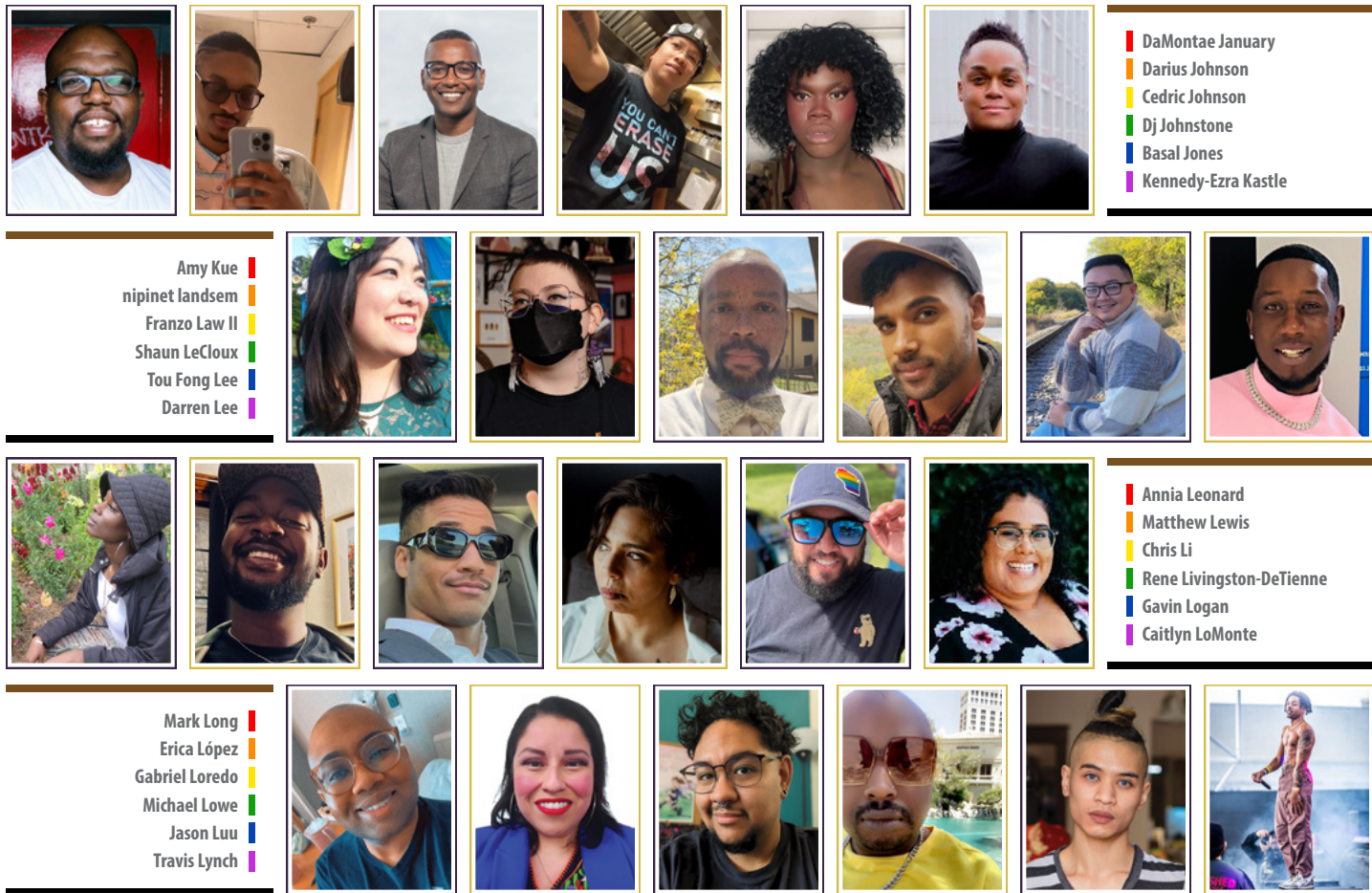
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The Advocate

DeShanda Williams-Clark is a trailblazing advocate for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, sexual exploitation, and crisis in the Milwaukee community.

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT. You shouldn't have to earn a safe place to live. But so many queer young people are kicked out of their homes because of who they are. It happened to me, and it happens to many of the youth I work with at Pathfinders Milwaukee.

In 2011, I was the first undergraduate intern at Pathfinders' Drop-In Center, a space for youth experiencing homelessness to access basic needs like food, showers, clothing, laundry, and support. My mentor, Joseph Stanley, said, "You have all the tools you need—there are a lot of similarities between you and the young people you'll serve here." And that was true—many of the young people I interacted with were Black like me. Many, queer like me, too. I had many of the same experiences. I knew young people just need to be listened to.

Core to Pathfinders' culture is youth telling us what services they need in their community. It's because of young people that we offer housing for ages 17–25 who've aged out of our emergency shelter program. It's because they shared their experiences that we offer anti-sexual violence resources. Youth asked for flexible mental health support in the Drop-In Center—now, they have it.

Many queer youth experiencing homelessness never felt their voice mattered. They never had the freedom most young people do to make mistakes. Pathfinders provides a community of support where young people are accepted, validated, and empowered. Over my 10 years at Pathfinders, and now in my role as Sr. Vice President, I'm proud to have helped bring young people's ideas to fruition, impacting the lives of hundreds of youth each year.

As a young person discovering my identity, I would sneak out and go to Project Q, the drop-in program at the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. That was a space where I could be fully myself. A place where I felt safe. Our youth see Pathfinders as a safe space, as that family-of-choice. When youth come here, one of the important things we do is make them feel welcomed. When they walk in, they hear, "Hey! So, great to see you—how are you doing today? Please let me know how I can assist you today!" Youth experiencing homelessness often feel invisible, we work to make them feel seen.

I'm queer. I'm Black. I'm a woman. These are all marginalized populations trying to get some grounding and equity. I'm fortunate to live in the fullness of these identities, to get to partner with and share power with young people. I'm fortunate to do the work I do ensuring all youth, regardless of how they identify, have the housing, support, and acceptance they deserve. ■

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- Must identify as Black & LGBTQI+

Application link:
bit.ly/BlackQWellness

Application Deadline:
September 13, 2024 11:59PM

**Panhia Xiong
Southeast Asian
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**Scholarship
Eligibility:**

- Resident of Dane County
- Must identify as Southeast Asian & LGBTQI+

Application link:
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Contact for more info:
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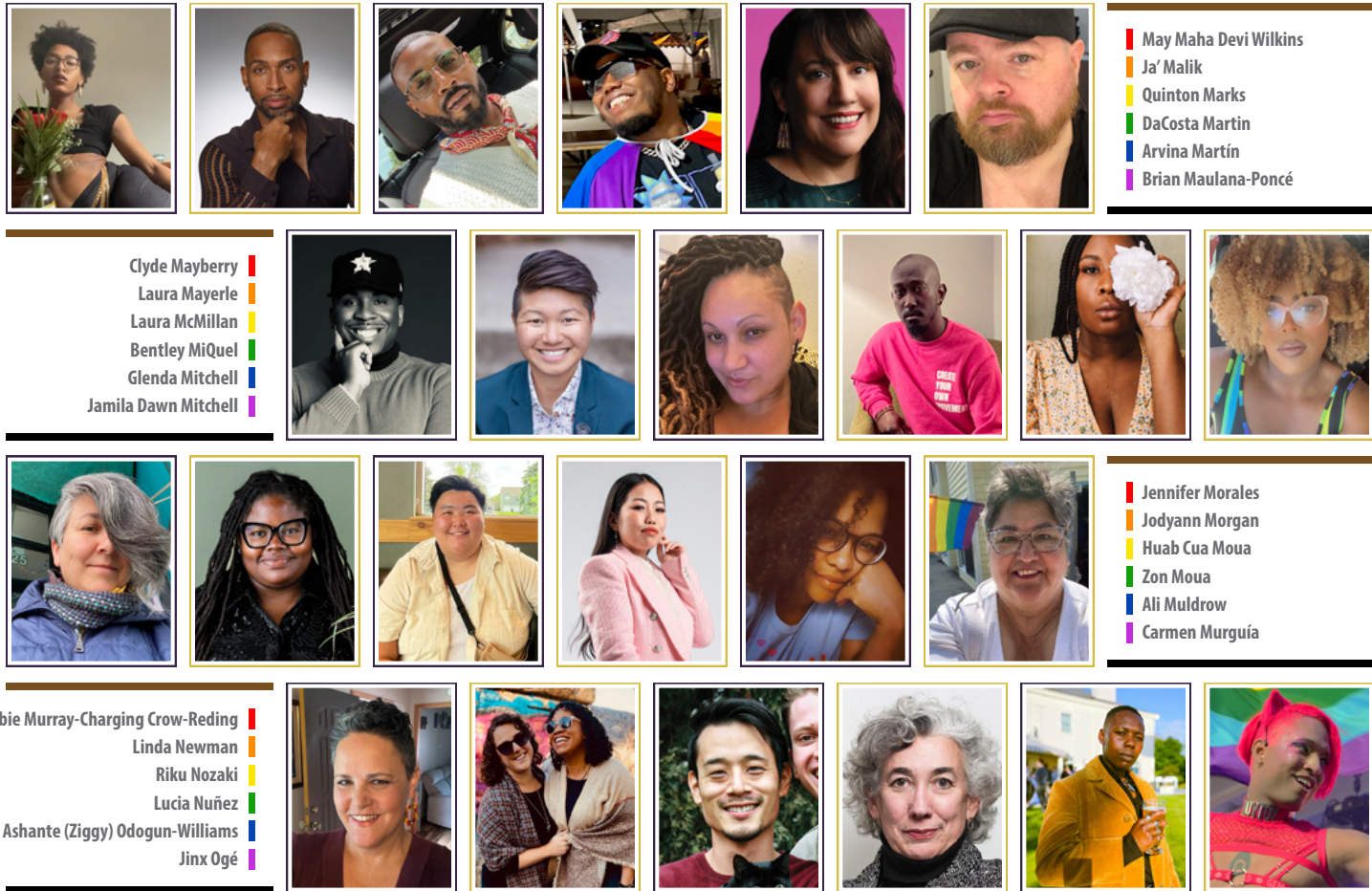


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The Defender

Erica López is the Executive Director and Staff Attorney at the Peoples Law Center | Centro de Derecho de la Gente (PLC).

AFTER GRADUATING FROM YALE, I worked on a qualitative study of schools that successfully met the needs of immigrant children at the Yale Center for Child Development and Social Policy. I also worked at an international, white-shoe, corporate law firm near Wall Street. Later, I worked at Boston Medical Center, addressing social determinants of health as a paralegal. Finally, I went to the University of Wisconsin Law School with a full-tuition scholarship/fellowship.

After law school, I worked at Legal Action of Wisconsin (LAW), representing individuals in their disability and public benefits cases. I also coordinated the pro bono program. In 2021, I left Legal Action to be the founding Director of the Eviction Defense Clinic (EDC) at the Economic Justice Institute at the University of Wisconsin Law School. It was a joy to finally be able to represent undocumented individuals (LAW is barred from representing certain individuals without permission to be in the United States) and teach about racial tropes like the welfare queen and Trump's characterization of immigrants as criminals. I could have stayed in the ivory tower of the academy, but I realized people without permission to reside in the United States need bilingual and bicultural lawyers.

In 2022, I founded the Peoples Law Center | Centro de Derecho de la Gente (PLC). Last year, the firm represented people in over 300 cases with two bilingual and bicultural attorneys. The Peoples Law Center partners with Tenant Resource Center, The Eviction Defense Clinic, Legal Action of Wisconsin, and Community Justice, Inc. as a coalition of organizations called the Eviction Diversion and Defense Partnership, to provide free legal help for people facing eviction in court with federal pandemic funding. Tenants that don't have authorization to be in the U.S. are particularly vulnerable. Predatory landlords operate with impunity, exploiting this population financially and often provide substandard housing.

The Peoples Law Center | Centro de Derecho de la Gente (PLC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit and a civil legal aid law firm. We believe housing is a human right. The PLC serves marginalized individuals and people without permission to be in the U.S. facing housing instability or eviction. PLC provides high-quality legal representation in housing and eviction matters, in a culturally responsive, inclusive, and antiracist manner. Our mission is to increase access to the legal system by providing marginalized, low-income people with the necessary support to meaningfully participate in the legal system, addressing the inherent power imbalance. We provide access to the legal process by helping clients understand their rights collaboratively, allowing them to make informed decisions. ■

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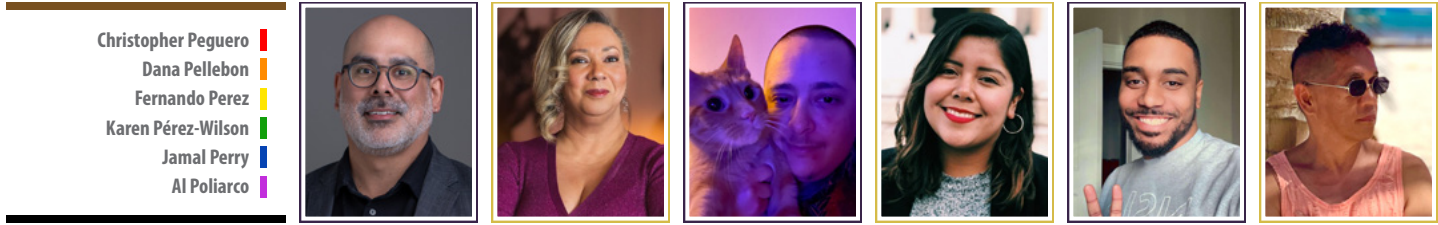
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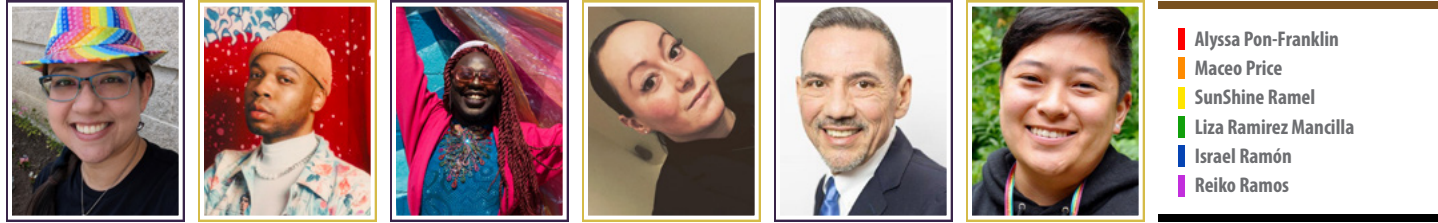
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TRANSGENDER QTBIPOC MILWAUKEE BALLROOM ADVOCACY

Living Her Truth

Milwaukee native **Janice Toy** grew up in the 70s and 80s knowing she was different, and to this day she has lived her truth despite the challenges. Now, she wants to pass along what she has learned to others.



IN 1974, a diva-in-waiting was born to a single mother in Milwaukee on the near Northside. Being the only child of a parent who had come from a very religious family background, they were sheltered and protected in their upper flat in a duplex owned by her mother's parents. This hardworking mother and child led a quiet life. But, like many kids from the LGBTQ-plus spectrum, Janice knew she was different early on. Instead of playing ball or climbing trees with the neighborhood kids, she wanted to jump rope, make mud pies, or play house where they could reign as the mama like the "girls" did. Janice had always looked up to her mother, whose resolve and commitment to living life to the fullest would become a pattern for the shape her later years would take.

Raised with a robust church-going foundation, attending services was mandatory and celebratory. Janice looked forward to seeing what the ladies dressing for service had on and secretly wished she could wear the fancy hats and dresses, too. The glitz of some of the male congregants was accepted as long as it was a part of the ritual of praise. Later, after the arrival of a sibling when she was nine years old, Janice had to share her mother's love with her brother and develop her fortitude. She looked forward to Halloween each year, where she could "dress up" with the full acceptance of the community.

GROWING UP, COMING OUT

As time passed, she kept feeling different, but while attending classes at North Division High School, something clicked with her. During the annual "turnabout" day at the school, accepted gender roles could be changed, and those like Janice found confidence in the compliments received from friends and classmates when dressed in their mother's finery. It just felt right. Unbeknownst to Janice, her inner Diva had emerged. After high school graduation, she enrolled in elementary education at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. Having relatives living there made this transition a safe move, allowing her the first freedom to explore her identity further.

She came into her own in 1992 while at Lane. She had moved out of state, she said, "So I could learn who I was." It was like being freed from a cage of expectations that her family and friends in Milwaukee had created. She started to meet others like herself and learned there was a big world with people who shared her feelings.

Her first gay bar experience was at the

Apartment Club in Memphis, about an hour's drive from Lane College. It was a Black gay bar that opened a whole new meaning of life to her. She saw women like herself; people living their truth. She was abundantly happy and having a good time. In due time, friends and acquaintances in her new milieu encouraged her to enter her first drag pageant, Miss Gay Memphis At Large, and she won. Her reputation as a DIVA was cemented, and there was no turning back. Or was there?

BACK TO MILWAUKEE

Just when she thought she was on the path to her dreams, an unexpected accident brought her back to Milwaukee to care for her mother, who had broken her leg and needed her help. When her mother discovered her trunk filled with wigs, jewelry, and women's attire, she knew she had to have "the talk" with her mom. At first, she thought she'd have to continue hiding. Still, after chatting with her wise and loving grandmother, Janice decided to go there with her mother. She came out to her, and through their mutual tears of recognition, Janice received her mother's unwavering support and the comforting knowledge that "you'll always be my child."

This Diva could not rest, not while there was her hometown to conquer. Once again, she got into her gig and performed in shows at Milwaukee's gay Black bars, such as Renee's, Tina's, Katie and Zip's, and many more. Janice was living out her fantasy of glamour and glitz. She went on to win numerous drag titles such as Miss Black Wisconsin 1998, Miss Gay Minneapolis 1998, Miss Black Wisconsin Universe 2000, Miss Continental Plus Wisconsin 2006, Miss Fluid Bar 2006, Miss Jodee's International (Racine) 2007, Miss Triangle 2007, (the very first) Miss Pridefest 2008, Miss "IT" Milwaukee 2009, and Miss Mystique Great Lakes 2010.

With success came setbacks as well; being a Black trans woman on the larger end of the weight spectrum made her feel vulnerable on many fronts. She maintained office jobs and temp work. At a suburban manufacturing job she held, the sister of a man she was dating "outed" her, and suddenly came the complaints of her being in the locker room with "real women" that previously went unnoticed all that time. Janice acutely felt the rampant discrimination and was terminated. Still, she was committed to making it precisely as she was in her world.

GOOD TIMES

"My favorite times were the house parties and Black gay clubs in the tight-knit community," she said. Along the way, she befriended

and mentored others longing to pursue their authentic lives. She became a beacon and house-mother to others and helped create showcases for them at clubs and organizations around Milwaukee. She currently holds positions as a founding member of SHEBA (Sisters Helping Each Other Battle Adversity) and as the House Mother of the House of History, dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of the Black LGBTQ experience in Milwaukee and Wisconsin.

Janice feels that a few decades ago, the LGBTQ community was more together and depended on each other for support. "Many of the rights people enjoy today we didn't have then. Working in your truth was not a thing then, and having equal access to medical treatment was not an option. Trans healthcare was spotty, and you had to pay out of pocket for hormone replacement. Black market feminization surgeries were a big thing, too," she said.

Being told that you could live openly, marry who you loved, and enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples were still in the future.

Through it all, though, Janice says that the only way forward is to "follow your dreams, never give up, and seek out your truth no matter what." These are wise words indeed from someone who has made it to the other side and wants to help others achieve what she has—peace, contentment, and wisdom. ■

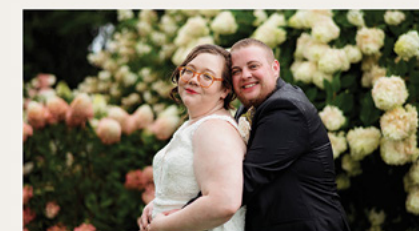


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HISTORY QTBIPOC ATHLETE RACISM LEGACY

The Thrill of Celebrity, the Agony of Being Seen

Reclaiming the story of Wisconsin's first gay Black Olympian: **George Coleman Poage**.

IT'S AN UNDERSTATEMENT to say George Coleman Poage (1880–1962) achieved tremendous historic victories throughout his life.

He was the first African-American graduate of La Crosse High School—a school not segregated by race—and graduated second in his class. He was the first African-American member of the University of Wisconsin track team and the Milwaukee Athletic Club. He was the first African-American athlete to win a Big Ten track championship. He was the first African-American member of the UW-Madison Philomathia Society, a fraternal order composed of “seekers of truth and knowledge.”

In 1904, he was the first African American to receive an Olympic medal. He was later elected to the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame.

So, why isn't his name recognized? Not in Madison, where he reached the heights of his athletic fame? Not in Chicago, where he spent over half his life? And until recently, not even in La Crosse, where his story began?

Poage's life choices, influenced by family expectations, racial inequities, and repressed sexuality, left him on a racetrack with no end. For most of his life, he was running as fast and as far as he could from his greatest fear: Himself. Again and again, he shunned the spotlight out of a fear of being truly seen—and eventually, he found a life so anonymous and invisible that even his grave went unmarked for more than 50 years.

Sadly, that's how the greatest of LGBTQ heroes are erased by time.

FROM LA CROSSE TO THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE EXPOSITION

George Poage was born in Hannibal, Missouri on November 6, 1880. His father, James, was born into slavery. His mother Anna had “freedom papers.” The family left this Mississippi River steamboat town for opportunity in La Crosse. James took a job as coachman to Jason Easton, a lumber baron, and the family took up residence in the coach house.

However, James died in 1888, leaving Anna with children to feed.

Rather than being discouraged by this challenge, she leaned into it, and set some remarkable goals for her son, George. She instilled in him gentleman's standards: Always controlling impulses, managing emotions, and withdrawing from conflict. Black men were widely seen by whites as volatile, unreasonable, and out-of-control, and Anna vowed her son would prove that stereotype wrong.

One day, George's athletic skills were noticed when he sprinted across a city park, and he was welcomed to join the track team. His spectacular race times drew regional attention from UW coaches and talent scouts, who steered him toward college at UW-Madison.

Sports were racially segregated in 1899, but Poage's advocates couldn't have cared less. They recognized a winner and sought to build a winning team. UW-Madison was an economic challenge for the Poages, but a deathbed dowry from Jason Easton put college within reach.



Before leaving La Crosse, Poage was involved in a peculiar situation that has raised the eyebrows of several historians. On August 18, 1899, he was involved in a public fight with another Black man. Three days later, a warrant was issued, Poage was arrested, and he pleaded not guilty. The charges were dismissed, and the details of the case were never reported. What's unusual, culturally, and historically, is that Poage's warrant was requested by another Black citizen. While Poage's story was that his temper had gotten the best of him, he was never known to be temperamental, violent, or dangerous—in fact, he had never been known to express anger of any kind.

Whatever happened on August 18, 1899, was deeply personal, highly emotional, and—most importantly—outside the limits of the local community's capabilities. Someone wanted Poage out of La Crosse, for reasons we will never know.

It was the first hint of a life unseen and unknown by public eyes. And Poage certainly knew about the “Race Problem,” and his high school commencement speech focused entirely upon it. He was leaving the big city of La Crosse (population 29,000) for the small town of Madison (19,000). He knew he'd need to be on his best behavior.

High standards were set for Poage before he even got there. The university's athletic leaders, coaches, newspaper, alumni, and marketers saw him as magical. He spent the next five years sprinting to outrun ever-increasing academic and athletic expectations, increasingly unsure if meeting them was even humanly possible.

He was bombarded with reminders that he was a Black man in spaces meant for white people. The news media was cruel under the guise of complimentary, calling Poage “colored lad,” “colored quarter miler,” “crack colored sprinter,” “colored wonder,” “dusky star,” and shockingly, “the Negro player.” He was no longer an individual person—he was now just the “colored Badger.”

While his grades slipped year over year, Poage graduated in June 1903 with a full year of college sports eligibility remaining. The university wasn't going to let him go easily.

“It will seriously cripple Wisconsin on the track were George Poage to leave,” wrote the *Janesville Daily Gazette* on June 25, 1903. University management convinced him to stay on campus, taking just enough credits to meet athletic requirements. When the coach was away, Poage was asked to manage the team in his absence. He also took a job at the football training quarters. The scheme was widely recognized for what it was: A clever way to pay athletes to perform after graduation.

During this final year, the Milwaukee Athletic Club approached Poage with a membership offer and an invitation to run for the club. The Third Olympiad was coming to St. Louis, to coincide with the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and the Club was assembling the midwest's greatest champions to compete. While his membership was delayed

until his studies ended, Poage ran for MAC at Milwaukee competitions throughout 1903. He was repeatedly reminded that he was an exception. His athletic reputation—and nothing more—made him the state's most famous African American.

And that wasn't going to last forever.

VICTORY & DEFEAT

The 1904 Olympiad and Louisiana Purchase Exposition had to be a surreal experience. It was America's largest celebration since the Chicago Columbian Exposition, bringing a victorious nation and President Theodore Roosevelt together after the Spanish-American War.

But the events were laced with a toxic spice of “white man's burden,” including Southern School of History exhibits depicting the “historic benefits” of plantation life, the “natural condition” of the American Negro, and the Civil War as an attack on Southern traditions and customs. During Anthropology Days, organizers forced “uncivilized tribes” (i.e., Patagonians, Filipinos, Inuits, Sioux, and Ainu people) into bizarre competitions to prove their genetic inferiority. Racism was embedded into a national celebration—and people were rightfully offended.

“In no place but America would one have dared to place such events on a program, but in America, everything is permissible,” said Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the International Olympics Committee. Many leaders called for a boycott of the Olympiad and Exposition.

Poage did not listen. Many white newspapers applauded his decision to attend the Games, while equally applauding the segregation of grandstands, bleachers, exhibits, housing, food service, and restrooms.

He was effectively running for free. Any honors won in the Games were seized by the sponsors, not retained by the athletes. There were no monetary rewards. There were no future endorsement deals at the finish line—except maybe sponsorship for the next competition.

On August 31, 1904, he took third place in the 400-meter hurdles, and a bronze medal the next day in the 200-meter hurdles.

After the Games, he chose to stay in St. Louis, where he accepted the role of principal at the brand-new William McKinley High School in South St. Louis. He had never taught before, nor attended a segregated school system, but the School Board sought to leverage his celebrity for gain. Within a year, he was reassigned to teach at Charles Sumner, the city's premier African-American high school.

His teaching career came to a strange and sudden end in spring 1914. Vicious rumors circulated that Poage and two other unmarried male teachers were secretly meeting in ragtime cafes. School administrators insisted there was no cause for alarm; after all, the teachers were among the best educators in Missouri.

The *St. Louis Star and Times* reported that the allegations were a “frame up,” but school board members believed the school was harboring a dark secret. No accounting of the teachers' talents, accolades, or achievements would sway their rage.

Within weeks, a committee of parents, school board members, and civic leaders filed formal complaints against Poage and his colleagues, questioning their moral character and social intentions. Twenty students came forth to prove that the teachers' “immorality” was common knowledge at Sumner High School. Abruptly, Poage sent a letter of resignation and vanished.

Wrote the *St. Louis Argus*, “Mr. Poage was one of three teachers brought before the board involving their moral character...it is said the committee made a very strong case. Some of the most damaging testimony was introduced, and a startling condition of affairs was disclosed.”

There was never any accounting of what this “damaging” and “startling” evidence was. Meanwhile, his colleagues—who came from prominent local families—fought the charges, sued for damages, and won both a settlement and their jobs back.

What would Poage fear so much that he would abandon his 10-year teaching position without a fight? Was he devastated that his beloved students turned on him? Was he lonely in St. Louis after his family moved on to Denver? Was he truly that concerned, as he later told historians, that his health was in danger? Was he just tired of living in constant fear of being found out for something?

The decision changed the course of his life.

DISAPPEAR HERE

For a while, Poage had a limitless future ahead of him. Now, he had nothing to show for his 37 years, and less to look forward to. So, he tried to lose himself in a new city where nobody knew his name.

Draft records indicate he was living in Chicago between 1914 and 1918. Within the Bronzeville neighborhood, he was near South State Street, Stateway Field, and the rowdy cabaret district. The “Black Belt”—a tenderloin district with nightlife destinations Cabin Inn, Pleasure Inn, Club De Lisa and more—attracted crossover crowds from as far away as North Chicago.

He was close friends with Hugh Buchanan, one of Chicago's greatest musical talents—and another unmarried man who lived with his mother. Both were members of the Chicago Athletic Club, a popular gathering (and cruising) space for gay men. He also associated with Lillian Davenport, a comedian, musician, producer, and La Crosse graduate.

There was virtually no risk of scandal following him to Chicago. But he never again pursued any role in education, even though he was certainly qualified to do so.

By May 1924, Poage was working as a cook at the Horn & Hardart Automat (116 N. Dearborn). When he learned the Chicago Post Office was hiring temporary clerks, he applied and was hired immediately. By December, he was a full-time employee; five years later, he'd nearly doubled his salary. In 1930, he was transferred to Sears headquarters. He made enough money to buy a new Art Deco apartment.

Poage died of pneumonia on April 11, 1962, and was buried in an unmarked grave in Lincoln Cemetery in Blue Island, Illinois. Very little is known about the last three decades of his life.

WHO WAS GEORGE POAGE—REALLY?

By 1984, when Dr. Bruce Mouser and Edwin Hill presented at the North American Society of Sports History's annual conference, Poage was an unknown, despite being admitted to the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame in 1958.

He could have been an athlete, a coach, a trainer, a historian, an educator, an entertainer, even an author. Instead, he was forgotten. After being pursued by the greatest universities and athletic clubs of the era, and after reaching the great heights of the 1904 Olympiad, how can one really accept a lifetime sentence in a Sears stockroom?

In August 2016, Reverend Lawrence Jenkins casually leaned over to Dr. Mouser and said, “Of course, you know my great-uncle was gay.”

“Our George Coleman Poage had to hide his intellect and his academic accomplishments as much as he had to hide his sexual orientation. The racist society in which he lived had no room for either. The miracle of his survival under those conditions is what stands out to me,” said Reverend Jenkins.

George Poage's legacy is finally being seen. In 2016, the City of La Crosse rededicated a local park in Poage's honor. Recently, he was honored in the PBS Wisconsin documentary, “Wisconsin Pride.”

And, a headstone was finally placed on George Poage's grave, with his graduation photo and words taken from Homer's Iliad: “Of matchless swiftness, but of silent pace.”

A very fitting summary of a fame that burned twice as fast and expired much too soon. ■



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FOOD & DINING DELI TAKEOUT CULTURE

Dinotto was Meant to Be

Dino Maniaci opens an Italian deli that shares a kitchen with his restaurant, D'Vino, filling a vacancy in downtown Madison.

THERE ARE SOME THINGS in life that the universe just nudges us toward. Almost as if they are things we are supposed to do. As a realtor, I have seen people wait, or lose offer wars on houses, only to end up getting the one they seemingly were supposed to have. It doesn't have to be something we are looking for, it can even be something that feels risky, but when the universe pushes, things just seem to happen. Such seems to be the case for local restaurateur Dino Maniaci who not only owns WOOFs! bar on King Street, but also D'Vino, the Italian restaurant next door. And now he is busy opening a deli called Dinotto, which is the part of the puzzle that just seems to be kismet.

Call it fate, call it luck, call it karma, I believe that Dino is a man who is meant to open this deli. While he demurs about his age, and already having two businesses to run, everything else about it seems to line up too perfectly. And honestly, the two other businesses seem to align and symbiotically enrich Dinotto.

Dino says Dinotto is a place that has been missing from downtown since Fraboni's closed their downtown location prior to Covid. He describes it as a classic Italian deli where folks can pick up sandwiches and typical deli items, but also some take-and-bake, as well as some warm food for lunch or dinner to go. Dino is careful to clarify that the menu at Dinotto is different from the menu at D'Vino, but there is also significant overlap. Which is part of the magic.

When Dino showed me the new space, we entered through D'Vino, and as we walked back into the kitchen, he took about three steps in and planted his foot on the floor "This is where the old kitchen ended" he told me. Full disclosure: I have never worked in a commercial kitchen even though I am friends with a number of chefs and write about restaurants with some regularity. The kitchen Dino was describing was absurdly, perhaps obscenely, small. The hand-wash stations, the dish machine, the plating station and a stand up cooler comprised well over half of the floor space. Even by commercial kitchen standards this was a tight fit, and Dino had been making excellent food out of the space for three or more years (D'Vino's initial launch was in February of 2020).

So when the tiny space behind D'Vino became available, the opportunity to expand D'Vino's kitchen was obvious. AND, because of the shape of the block, there was also an opportunity for a second storefront. But it isn't JUST the opportunity to expand the size of D'Vino's kitchen, allowing an entirely new business to flourish, and opening up the possibility for catering. There is a deeper reason these pieces all fit together.

When I spoke with Dino, I was struck by his connection to his heritage, and his family. As we walked through the space, he pointed out the artwork on the walls, including a photo from maybe a hundred years ago blown up and turned into giant custom wallpaper. Dino described the shop in the photo as a local deli. "This was my grandfather's place," he said. "This might be my dad," pointing to the grainy image of a toddler in the photo. "No one remembers the name of the shop, but it had my grandfather's name on the door. Last week, I put my name on this door."

Go see Dino at his new place, recently opened at 106 S. Webster Street in Madison. Tell him the universe sent you. ■



Dino Maniaci showing off the interior of Dinotto at 106 S. Webster Street. dinottomadison.com

Photo by McKenna Patterson

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TRANS YOUTH QTBIPOC COMING OUT

Accepting myself and the other Jefferies I've been

Jeffery Payne reflects on his identities as a black, queer, trans man and encourages himself and others to stand tall, despite feeling like an outsider in any community.

WHO I AM AS A QUEER PERSON is a huge part of who I am and will continue to be. I don't imagine myself any less queer in the future. Growing up, I had to separate and change how I acted depending on who I was with. It was exhausting but I had learned from a young age no one will like the real Jeffery, so I must split myself apart to be accepted. I had to change how I spoke when I would ask for things, and I always found myself mirroring others.

I've always felt different, maybe it was how I was raised, or how I applied myself in school, but there was always a level of disconnect with things like my gender or just me in general. I officially started going by Jeffery in fifth grade. It started out as a nickname when I was in fourth grade, and it just grew from that. I was so happy that people stopped calling me by that awful name my father gave me, and I started to realize I hated how gendered things were in school. I went to a couple uniforms schools, and when I was forced to wear a dress or skirt, I would always switch to pants or shorts to feel more comfortable with myself.

I loved it. My deadname was being forgotten, and I didn't even realize I was socially transitioning until in sixth grade when I expressed to one of my teachers that I felt uncomfortable with girlhood and manhood. I knew I wasn't a girl, but I couldn't shake what society had viewed me as, and the teacher recommended I look into the queer community. She even started using he/him for me, and it made me feel like the pieces of the puzzle that I was always searching for were finally connecting.

My first look around was the world of the internet, where I had a lot of good and bad experiences and learned a great deal about myself.

I'm a trans person—more on the nonbinary spectrum. I consider myself a man, but a man thing? I recently made a discovery that I might be asexual, and the label "queer" has felt better-suited for me.

GETTING INTO THE COMMUNITY

Getting into the community, I was first so worried about labels, because that's who the loudest people are at first, and once I started to enter queer spaces, I realized I had to start fighting with myself again.

Being black and queer is one of the most lonely feelings in this world. I was well used to racism, because I had gone to a Christian white school. But I had assumed a community who had faced similar problems would be free of such views. I was very wrong to discover there's only certain things a black queer person can do or look like. Trying to find resources or even just someone else who looks like you is hard. Online spaces were the only ones a young child like me could access.

Things weren't always so bad. I joined a Discord full of different people who helped shape parts of me. The me of today is different from



the me from yesterday, and the me of today will also be different from the me of tomorrow.

The community had not welcomed me warmly at first. My changes were still being accepted at home; when I came out officially to my mother as bi, she said she knew I was gay already. However being queer and trans seem to also be different things. Once Covid started, my identity was able to grow, and soon I had changed my name in the MPS school system, and my first year in high school really added to my experience.

Meeting another black queer person is an awakening. It's like, "I'm not the only one."

I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE

Finally, I wasn't the only gay kid in the room, but being a trans kid was a whole 'nother story. I was an even rarer Pokémon, and everyone just seemed to ask me weird questions at every turn. It felt like no one would ever understand that I was a man. The transphobia didn't seem to end during those times. As I stayed at Marshall, it became less and less, because people just grew up and didn't really care that I was the trans kid anymore. There were people who made me feel so small and others who made me stand proud as I do now. The friendships I made then, and the ones I continue to have now, have made being queer in such a close-minded city all the more easier.

I have so much joy for both my communities, but also a feeling of sadness that I will never truly fit in. But that's who I am! I'm Jeffery, and you are you! I was never supposed to fit in a box. We are supposed to grow and enjoy life as we have it. Our identities shape us, but do not have to chain us. I stopped letting transphobia, homophobia, and racism affect me because I realize life is far too short for me to allow myself to be miserable simply because others believe I should. I may change, but who I am as Jeffery—and the many different Jefferies I have grown from or I will grown into—won't be any less queer or black than I am now.

I am simply me

I feel like I probably won't be able to truly date anyone; the sad price of not fitting in is the fact that finding love will always come with a price. I feel like I'll always be asked to hide a part of who I am, but I am not going to lower my stunning personality for someone or some people to appreciate me.

My advice: Don't let yourself be unhappy because the world is. We are human beings. We only have so much time to enjoy and find out who we are. Stand proud that you are capable and worthy of that happiness, just as I am learning I am also deserving of it. There's no shame in being queer. You are who you are because you are so many beautiful things at once. Being queer or being queer and black is a beautiful thing. ■



U Belong.

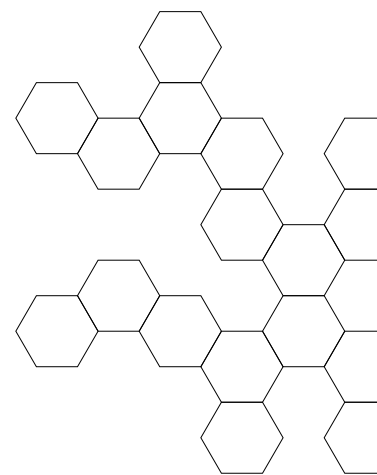
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