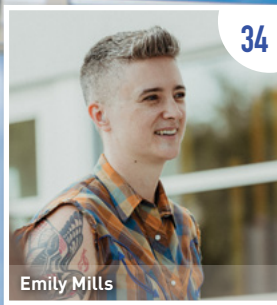


our lives



Emily Mills



Abigail Swetz



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# ENTERTAINMENT

**INSIDE:** Our Annual Wisconsin LGBTQ+ Arts Directory

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

September / October 2024

# NEXT CHAPTER

**Paul Baker Prindle**

The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art's Gabriele Haberland Director lays out his vision for the future of the museum.

## PROJECT 2025

Unpacking the impact it would have on Wisconsin's LGBTQ community.

## QUEER THEATER

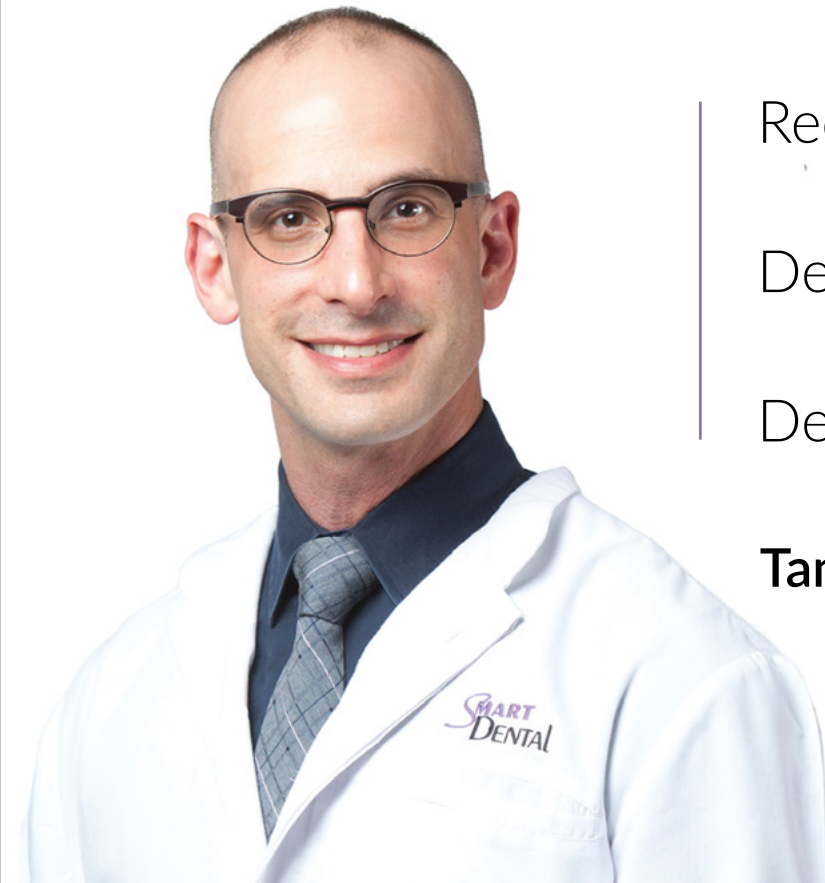
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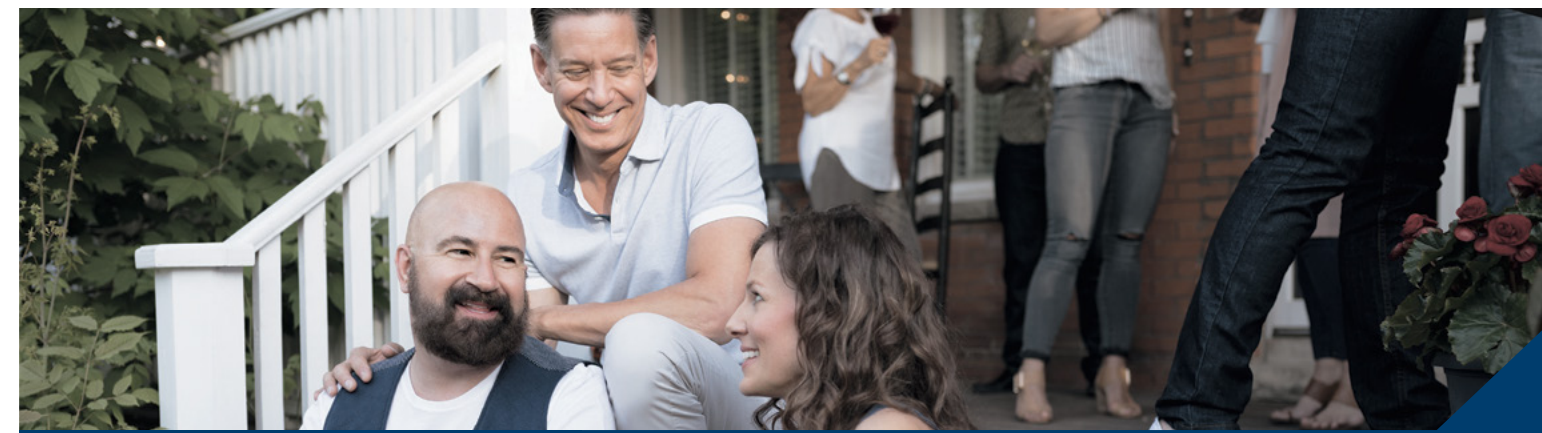
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“Art only stimulated by praise or profit is not art. If it is not born from pain or anguish or pride or shame or desire or overwhelming joy, it is only something of decorative value.”

- James Bidgood

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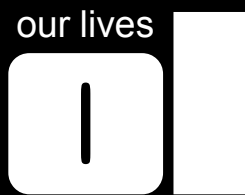
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## PUBLISHER'S LETTER

PATRICK FARABAUGH



## VISUALIZING WHAT'S POSSIBLE



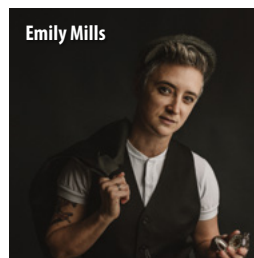
AS THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION draws close, there's no shortage of references being made about the importance of representation. How overdue we are for our first female president. Of course this is true, but it got me thinking about representation in a broader context and the role that *Our Lives* plays in helping to see how multifaceted our queer

life in Wisconsin is. For how cliché the term "role model" can be, its importance can't be understated. It can be hard to visualize what's possible until there's something or someone to point to. While I've often heard "role model" used in a professional context, or for professional opportunity, it's far more expansive than that. We need them for all facets of our life, from professional to personal. When I'm curating the stories and articles that appear in each issue, this is something I'm mindful of. I try to find what often feels like an impossible balance of representation across professional and lifestyle topics, coming from as dynamic a range



Paul Baker Prindle

of identities and locations as I can assemble. Wisconsin being Wisconsin can make this challenging at times, but the challenging make-up of our state only emphasizes the importance of this work. I hope this effort is reflected in how you experience this magazine. If you feel it isn't, please let me know. And please consider offering your voice and vision to the conversation. People are often surprised at how easy it is to be included when they reach out to us.



Emily Mills

Our annual arts issue is one that has consistently helped to broaden my perspective. Getting to spend time reading about local queer artists of every discipline, and what sparks their artistic endeavors, is always compelling and provocative to me. And it's always a joy to both discover who is out there in my community as well

as check in on and be in community with old friends. In this issue we reintroduce you to **Paul Baker Prindle**, in his new role as the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art's Gabriele Haberland Director. I first met Paul maybe 15 years ago when he began contributing to *Our Lives* as a photographer. And it's been a joy to watch him grow into his work over the years. I'm excited to see where he leads one of the Madison arts scene's crown jewels. Former *Our Lives* editor **Emily Mills** also shares about things along their path that have influenced and impacted their journey. I've known Emily for almost as long as I've been doing this magazine, and will forever be grateful for their willingness to work with me on it as editor from 2013 to 2019. I've long admired how multifaceted they are, and how they live their progressive values.

Before I close, I want to circle back to the upcoming election. While I don't want to tell anyone how to vote, I do implore you to read about **Project 2025**—the conservative mandate for a second Trump presidency. There's not an American in this country who wouldn't be impacted negatively by it—especially those in the margins. Project 2025 makes eradicating LGBTQ Americans from public life its top priority, and that's not hyperbole. Want to do more to fight back? Then jump to page 54 and meet **Abigail Swetz**, *Fair Wisconsin's* new Executive Director. I'm sure she and *Fair Wisconsin* would welcome any help you can offer. ■

## OBITUARIES



**KRISTI LYNN MASON** Aug. 25, 1958 – Aug. 25, 2024

It is with the heaviest of hearts that we are writing to inform you that Kristi Mason, our beloved LGBTQ+ Elder Advocate, passed away unexpectedly in her home this past weekend. We were lucky to have Kristi not only as an employee since 2021, but as a graduate school work-study student from 2010 to 2011. During her time with us at OutReach, Kristi embodied the word "advocate" with every

ounce of her being. Our community was lucky to have her kind heart and fierce spirit consistently working to create a better future not only for our LGBTQ+ elders, but for the generations to come. Kristi's warmth radiated through everything she did. Her smile was always there to greet you, whether in our Community Center or out at events, and she was always quick to answer the phones to help those in need. Her true passion was working with LGBTQ+ elders to ensure that they have the ability to live authentically happy and healthy lives.

She worked tirelessly to ensure that no member of the LGBTQ+ family would ever feel alone again, and the Intergenerational Dinners she co-organized were just one of the many ways she worked to connect folks from every corner of our community. Kristi was an incredible educator, mentor, and friend to everyone. Being a part of her journey over the last 10+ years is something we will always cherish. There is so much we will miss about Kristi—from the hilarious stories she shared with us of her vibrant life, to the morning Diet Coke talks and floor time in her office, to her general loving and soothing presence. Her passing is a loss that will be felt not only by our organization, but by the entire LGBTQ+ community in Dane County. We will share information about her memorial service when we know more, but for now we grieve with all of you.

With love,  
OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center



**BERNELL HOOKER** Aug. 30, 2024

Bernell Hooker, a 1978 graduate of Milwaukee Custer High School, died August 30 from ovarian cancer.

If Milwaukee native Bernell Hooker had more time, she would have been the one to bring Wisconsin its first WNBA team. Hooker started the Milwaukee Aces professional women's team, played and coached locally, and ran multiple basketball camps for girls in the area.

As a player, coach, administrator and women's basketball advocate, Hooker provided a legacy for others to follow. Hooker played basketball competitively at Milwaukee's Custer High School. She coached collegiately for 25 years including at Milwaukee Area Technical College and Mount Mary University. She was the senior women's sports administrator at Mount Mary University until she retired in 2006.

Hooker's nonprofit Images of Us, which she started in 2002, provided educational and athletic experiences for women and girls.

On July 17, 2021 she married Rita Adair in a beautiful ceremony surrounded by friends and family in Fitchburg.

A GoFundMe page has been set up for Hooker for expenses of her final affairs and memorial costs [atgofundme.com/f/honoring-bernell](http://atgofundme.com/f/honoring-bernell).

—Cathy Kozlowicz for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

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## Project 2025

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PROJECT

### Project 2025 Revealed

This conservative mandate for a second Trump presidency threatens the lives and livelihood of Americans of nearly every demographic—and should be taken seriously.

POLITICS & LAW | LGBTQ RIGHTS | DEI | IMMIGRATION | CENSORSHIP

**IF YOU'VE BEEN FOLLOWING** the election—and who hasn't?—you've heard about it. Maybe you've been told it's just propaganda, a scare tactic, a boogeyman. You might even have been told it's fake news, designed to throw votes to the Democratic Party in the final months before Election Day.

But Project 2025 is very, very real. It's out there on the internet for the world to see.

If you watched the Democratic National Convention, you saw the Big Blue Book, carried onstage by comedians and politicians as a prop for jokes.

"Have you ever seen a document that could kill a small animal and democracy at the same time?" asked comedian Kenan Thompson. "Here it is, the terms and conditions of a new Trump presidency."

"Usually Republicans want to ban books, but now they're trying to shove this down our throats," said Pennsylvania State Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta.

But there's nothing funny about Project 2025. Nothing at all.

While Trump continues to deny his involvement with Project 2025—"I have absolutely



nothing to do with it,” he told reporters on August 22—the documentation has Trump rhetoric written all over it.

**WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PROJECT 2025?**

Simply put, Project 2025 is a \$22 million blueprint for a second Trump administration. The proposal includes a Mandate for Leadership 2025: The Conservative Promise, a 922-page policy manual with four major goals: Restore the family as the centerpiece of American life, dismantle the administrative state, defend the nation’s sovereignty and borders, and secure God-given individual rights so citizens can live freely.

The Heritage Foundation created one in 2015 for Trump’s first term, and later bragged that President Trump enacted 64% of its policies.

Project 2025 isn’t new. It actually debuted in April 2023. And this isn’t even the first Mandate for Leadership. Unbelievably, the Heritage Foundation has been writing policy recommendations for decades. Their first Mandate, published in January 1981, served as a roadmap for the Reagan administration. Throughout his two terms, Reagan implemented over 60% of the Mandate.

This isn’t even Trump’s first Mandate for Leadership. The Heritage Foundation created one in 2015 for the first term, and later bragged that President Trump enacted 64% of its policies. Several of these were controversial actions: Leaving the Paris Climate Accords, increasing military spending, increasing offshore drilling, and selling and developing federal lands. In July 2020, the Foundation issued a new Mandate to White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows.

The Heritage Foundation is also working on a detailed transition playbook for the first 180 days of a new Trump presidency. This document will outline comprehensive transition plans for every federal department and agency. Due to the negative reactions to Project 2025, the playbook is being safely guarded and will not be released publicly. To thwart a Freedom of Information Act request, the Foundation plans to deliver the playbook directly to the incoming Trump administration.

**WHAT IS THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION?**

The Heritage Foundation is a collective of more than 100 special interest groups guiding an extremely conservative presidential agenda.

Its membership includes Moms for Liberty, the National Rifle Association, Stephen Miller’s America First Legal, and the Alliance Defending Freedom, who sought to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The Southern Poverty Law Center has declared many members of the Heritage Foundation to be hate or extremist groups.

Founded in 1973, the Foundation has served up their wish lists to Republican presidents from Reagan to Bush to Trump. They’ve also briefed Republican candidates in the past 12 presidential elections, including Haley and DeSantis in 2024.

The Foundation is led by President Kevin Roberts, an architect of Project 2025 and the author of *Dawn’s Early Light: Taking Back Washington to Save America*, scheduled for release in September, with a foreword by Republican vice-presidential nominee J. D. Vance. (The book was originally subtitled “Burning Down Washington to Save America” and was retitled and rescheduled due to the Project 2025 backlash.)

Since the Supreme Court’s ruling on presidential immunity, the Heritage Foundation has become bolder and bolder.

“A president no longer has to second-guess or triple-guess every decision they’re making in their official capacity,” said Roberts, a long-time critic of Trump officials and lawyers who advised against more extreme policies. “The nation is in the process of the Second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be.”

British journalists recently captured Russell Vought in a hidden camera video, where he admits to secretly drafting hundreds of executive orders, memos, and regulations to create “shadow agencies.” He claimed that Trump blessed his organization and is incredibly supportive of their work.

“This is chilling,” responded politician Marianne Williamson. “Their idea of a second American Revolution is to undo the first one.”

Roberts has already declared the 2024 election illegitimate—before voting began—stating that any victory but a Trump victory will be evidence of fraud. At the same time, the Foundation has accused Democrats of lying about the Project 2025 agenda.

Throughout the election, the Foundation has been extremely cautious about implying any direct connection to Trump.

“Project 2025 does not speak for any candidate or campaign,” the Foundation posted on X on July 5. “It is ultimately up to the president, who we believe will be President Trump, to decide which recommendations to implement.”

However, British journalists recently captured Russell Vought in a hidden camera video, where he admits to secretly drafting hundreds of executive orders, memos, and regulations to create “shadow agencies.” He claimed that Trump blessed his organization and is incredibly supportive of their work.

“Eighty percent of my time is spent working on the plans for what’s necessary to take control of these bureaucracies, and we are working to destroy their agencies’ notion of independence,” Vought said.

**WHY DO PEOPLE THINK TRUMP IS INVOLVED WITH PROJECT 2025?**

Project 2025 is the work of 38 primary authors, 28 of which held high-ranking roles in the Trump Administration. These players include:

- **Russell Vought**, key architect of Project 2025, and former White House Budget Chief
- **Paul Dans**, recently resigned Project 2025 director, and former Trump Chief of Staff under the U.S. Office of Personnel Management
- **John McEntee**, senior advisor of Project 2025, and former director of the White House Presidential Personnel Office, who told the Daily Wire he would be integrating his work into the Trump campaign when the transition team was announced
- **Spencer Chretien**, Project 2025 associate director, and former Special Assistant to the President
- **Roger Severino**, former director of the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Health & Human Services
- **Ben Carson**, former Secretary of Housing & Urban Development
- **Ken Cuccinelli**, former Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security
- **Christopher Miller**, former Secretary of Defense
- **Peter Navarro**, former Director of the White House National Trade Council

In July, CNN reported that a minimum of 140 people involved with the Trump administration contributed to Project 2025.

“This is a great group,” said Trump at a Heritage Foundation event in 2022, “and they’re going to lay the groundwork and detail plans for exactly what our movement will do and what your movement will do when the American people give us a colossal mandate to save America.”

**WHAT ARE REPUBLICANS SAYING ABOUT PROJECT 2025?**

Trump has changed his tune on the campaign trail. “I have nothing to do with it,” said Trump on *Fox & Friends* on August 22. “I have no idea what the hell it is, and I don’t even want to see it. I don’t want to read it, because I want to say I have no idea what it is.”

Project 2025 is the work of 38 primary authors, 28 of which held high-ranking roles in the Trump Administration.

“The radical left Democrats are having a field day, trying to hook me into whatever policies are being said. It is pure disinformation on their part,” he said.

Agenda 47 is Donald Trump’s policy platform, available online at the campaign website. You’ll recognize many of the elements above, and you’ll see some new ones (Trump’s Plan to Protect Children from Left Wing Gender Insanity, among them). Trump supporters feel he is restoring common-sense, working-class values, and that his government will reflect their concerns.

“Project 2025 has nothing to do with the campaign, did not speak for the campaign, and should not be associated with the campaign or the president in any way,” said Trump’s campaign team.

Donald B. Ayer, who served as deputy attorney general under President George H.W. Bush, is deeply concerned. “[These] ideas are designed to let Donald Trump function as a dictator, by completely eviscerating many of the restraints built into our system. He really wants to destroy any notion of rule of law in the country. If Trump were to be elected and implement some of these ideas...no one in this country would be safe.”

If Trump hasn’t seen or read Project 2025, one of the most remarkable coincidences in U.S. history is under way. CBS News extracted 700 specific policies from Project 2025, and compared them to Trump’s campaign promises, rally speeches, interviews, and first term policies. Across the board, they identified 271 proposals—over 41%—that were a direct match.

**WHAT ARE DEMOCRATS SAYING ABOUT PROJECT 2025?**

“Project 2025 should scare every living American. It will destroy America,” said President Biden.

“America declared independence from a tyrannical king 248 years ago tomorrow,” said James Singer, a spokesperson for the Biden campaign, on July 3. “Now, Trump and his

allies want to make him one at our expenses. They are dreaming of a violent revolution to destroy the very idea of America.”

“Project 2025 is a plan to return America to a dark past,” said Vice President Kamala Harris. “Can you believe they put that thing in writing?” The Harris campaign launched a website to highlight the dangers of Project 2025.

“This unacceptable agenda rips away America’s freedoms, gives handouts to corporations and billionaires, and does nothing to address American people or the issues they care about most,” said Kevin Muñoz, senior spokesperson for the Harris campaign.

During the Democratic National Convention, speakers cited exact page numbers of concern. They also condemned Governor Ron DeSantis for making Florida a “testing ground” for Project 2025’s most dangerous policies.

“This is a poisonous agenda, where every single state will be in a state of crisis,” said Senator Cory Booker, D-NJ.

“Project 2025 is about turning the clock back,” said Rep. Barbara Lee, D-CA. “But it’s not new. It’s just now being exposed. People need to know it’s real and they want to do this.”

“I know a couch commando when I see one,” said Rep Jason Crow, D-CO. “Donald Trump’s Project 2025 would abandon our troops, allies, veterans, and our principles.”

“Project 2025 is an agenda that nobody asked for, serving only the richest and most extreme amongst us,” said Democratic Vice Presidential nominee Governor Tim Walz. “And speaking from experience as a high school football coach, let me tell you: When someone draws up a playbook, you know they’re going to use it.”

After being briefed by the ACLU, Congressman Jared Huffman (D-CA) was so alarmed that he launched the Stop Project 2025 Task Force. “Project 2025 is a dystopian plot,” said Huffman. “Trump would seize supreme powers to dismantle democratic institutions, abolish checks and balances, chip away at church-state separation, and impose a far-right agenda that infringes on basic liberties and violates public will.”

“The plans being developed by members of Trump’s cult to turn the DOJ and FBI into instruments of his revenge should send shivers down the spine of anyone who cares about the rule of law,” said Michael Bromwich, former Justice Department Inspector General (1994–99.) “Project 2025 is rhetorical ‘window-dressing’ for four years of personal vengeance.”

Still, Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transpor-



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tation, feels Project 2025 has been “disastrous” for the Trump campaign. “I think it’s incredible that the biggest scandal of the year is a policy scandal,” said Buttigieg on the August 21 episode of *Late Night with Stephen Colbert*. “The one that actually has Repub-

Brynn Tannehill agreed, writing in *Dame Magazine* that Project 2025 “makes eradicating LGBTQ people from public life its top priority.”

licans the most afraid, the one that has them doing damage control...is the simple fact that they wrote down their own policies. That is the thing from which they may never recover. And somehow, we’re still underreacting to it ourselves.”

**WHY ARE WE JUST HEARING ABOUT THIS NOW?**

Until Taraji Henson called for action at the June 30 BET Awards, most American households had never heard of Project 2025. In May, the polling group Navigator found that less than 25% of surveyed adults knew what it was. Ninety days later, the same poll showed 59% of adults recognized the name.

Henson launched a social media groundswell. Within days, there were hundreds of TikTok explainer videos raising awareness of Project 2025. Today, a TikTok search reveals nearly 75,000 #Project2025 videos—some of which have hundreds of thousands of views—and many of these videos have also been shared on YouTube, Instagram, and other channels.

The results speak for themselves. Navigator’s August poll showed that 43% of respondents had a negative opinion of Project 2025, while only 11% felt it was favorable and 46% chose “no opinion.”

**SO, WHAT IS PROJECT 2025, REALLY?**

It’s been called the “Declaration of Discrimination.” Imagine an instruction manual for transforming America into a real-world Republic of Gilead from Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. You’d be close to the vision of Project 2025.

“Project 2025 combines the authoritarian goals of the MAGA movement with the deregulatory dreams of America’s plutocrats,” said Pema Levy of *Mother Jones*. *The Washington Post* called it a plan to “infuse Christian nationalism into every facet of government.” Snopes cites concerns about the plan being a precursor for authoritarianism.

Most of the proposals are inhumane and unethical; some are outright unconstitutional and would trigger long legal battles. The ACLU has already declared war against Project 2025, saying they will use all the tools at their disposal to defend democracy.

The key to a good life, according to Roberts, “is found primarily in family—marriage, children, Thanksgiving dinners and the like,” and, above all, in “religious devotion and spirituality.”

That “good life” is rooted in the most discriminatory legislature ever proposed in America. If you are not a white, straight, cisgender, conservative male, you will experience pain points under Project 2025.

“The destination is an ugly and embittered America that is largely unrecognizable to most of us. We must not go there,” said Michael Hicks, director of the Center for Business & Economic Research.

**LGBTQ RIGHTS**

In a year when states introduced over 527 anti-LGBTQ bills, could it get worse for LGBTQ people?

Yes. Project 2025 is “designed to transport LGBTQ Americans back six decades to an

unrecognizable landscape of isolation and invisibility,” wrote Charles Francis in the *Washington Blade*.

Brynn Tannehill agreed, writing in *Dame Magazine* that Project 2025 “makes eradicating LGBTQ people from public life its top priority.”

“Trump’s Project 2025 is a 900+ page playbook to shape the government into an extreme, conservative hellscape,” said Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI). “It includes step-by-step plans to completely gut the LGBTQ rights and protections that we have fought so hard for over the course of decades. It’s not hyperbole when I say, ‘If you are part of our community, Trump’s Project 2025 will without a doubt negatively impact your life in very real ways.’”

“As harmful as the first Trump presidency was for LGBTQ Americans, the Trump-Vance Project 2025 agenda makes it seem quaint,” said Cathryn Oakley, senior director of legal policy at the Human Rights Campaign. “It would give Trump unprecedented powers to dismantle our rights and undo many of the protections the LGBTQ community have spent decades fighting to gain. No part of our lives would be off limits—not the doctor’s office, our classrooms, our workplaces, or our families. And it would be even worse for those who sit at the intersection of multiple marginalized communities. That’s why no matter how much Donald Trump and J.D. Vance try to distance themselves from this toxic, anti-American agenda, HRC Equality Votes PAC will keep talking to voters from now until Election Day about Project 2025 and reminding them what’s at stake.”

LGBTQ Americans are prioritized in “Promise #1” of Project 2025. Sexual orientation is highlighted as a threat on page four, ahead of global warfare, U.S. border immigration, the economy, and God-given individual rights.

The Human Rights Campaign has launched a website to educate LGBTQ voters of this year’s stakes.

LGBTQ Americans are prioritized in “Promise #1” of Project 2025. Sexual orientation is highlighted as a threat on page four, ahead of global warfare, U.S. border immigration, the economy, and God-given individual rights.

“The Family Agenda” section proposes that the Department of Health & Human Services

declare that men and women are biological realities and that “married men and women are the ideal, natural, family structure, because all children have a right to be raised by the men and women who conceived them.”

Furthermore, the Agenda calls for government to “maintain a biblically based, social science reinforced definition of marriage and family.”

Project 2025 takes aim at the transgender community. It would weaponize federal law to require states to discriminate against trans “ideology, penalize schools that protect the rights of trans students, eliminate federal funding for schools and universities that teach gender studies, and withdraw Medicaid benefits for hospitals providing gender-affirming medical care.”

“No serious country should be telling its children that they were born the wrong gender,” said Trump. “Transgenderism is a concept never heard of in all of human history...the radical left invented it just a few years ago.”

Any mention of transgender identity would be removed from government policies and practices. Gender-affirming care would be redefined as “child abuse” with penalties for supportive parents and providers. Trump also supports the Project’s call for a trans military ban to be restored.

In effect, transgender people would legally cease to exist in America.

Project 2025 doesn’t specifically call for the elimination of LGB civil rights. There are hints of future reductions of workplace protections (i.e., removing sexual identity as a protected class from Title IX), but no outright call for immediate changes.

There’s no outright call to eliminate marriage equality, although the redefinition of “ideal, natural family structures” implies future action.

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

“The next conservative President must make the institutions of American civil society hard targets for woke culture warriors,” states Project 2025.

Seeking to destroy “woke propaganda” and the “inappropriate political indoctrination of America,” the proposal vows to eliminate the words “sexual orientation,” “gender identity,” “gender equality,” and “racial equity” from government language. It calls for the widespread cancellation of DEI programs in schools, universities, employers, and government. All policies, programs, and funding will be removed. All staff and grantees engaged in “ideological agitation on behalf of the DEI agenda” will be terminated.

These measures would also censor critical discussions in classrooms, cutting federal funding for schools that teach racial, gender, LGBTQ, or any other topics from the perspective of the oppressed. History would literally be rewritten by the conquerors.

**REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

Project 2025 does not call for an outright abortion ban.

However, the proposal does call for more restricted access of mifepristone, banning use after seven weeks of pregnancy and requiring in-person dispensation. Project 2025 also calls for the Food and Drug Administration to overturn approval for the drug.

It would weaponize federal law to require states to discriminate against trans “ideology, penalize schools that protect the rights of trans students, eliminate federal funding for schools and universities that teach gender studies, and withdraw Medicaid benefits for hospitals providing gender-affirming medical care.”

Project 2025 calls for the Department of Health and Human Services to be reinvented as a federal “Department of Life.” It would create a Pro-Life Task Force to promote the life and health of women and their unborn children and eliminate the Reproductive Healthcare Access Task Force established by the Biden Administration.

Project 2025 would intensify surveillance of abortion across the nation. States that didn’t track and report abortion volume would lose federal funding. Abortion providers would be prohibited from receiving Medicaid dollars, and medical colleges would be forbidden from teaching abortion procedures.

**IMMIGRATION**

Nowhere is Project 2025 more cruel than in its solutions for the border crisis.

Project 2025 calls for the largest deportation program in American history, which author Russell Vought feels will “save the country” and “restore Christian nationalism.” This specific plan is fully supported by the Trump campaign. Vought feels Trump will bypass the rule of law to maintain order, including using the military to suppress the inevitable mass protests and dissent.

But that’s just the beginning. Recommendations also include:

- Finishing the Wall from coast to coast
- Employing National Guard and active-duty military to

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**NETWORK WITH US**

**MISSION**  
OPEN welcomes diverse LGBTQ+ and allied professionals to share perspectives and experiences in connecting, developing, and building a vibrant community.

**VISION**  
OPEN believes in demonstrating personal and professional leadership as stewards of an inclusive community where all are equal and valued.

- Career Resources
- Exclusive Events
- Discussion Boards
- Job Board
- Featured Members
- Networking

OPEN provides education and information resources regarding issues of gender and sexual diversity and other issues of professional concern to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBTQ) individuals who live in the Madison and Dane County, Wisconsin area.

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- police the Mexican border
- Granting local law enforcement jurisdiction over border security issues
- Allowing arrests at formerly protected places (churches, schools, playgrounds)
- Eliminate all family-based immigration—which they call “birth tourism”—and deport all Dreamers
- Escalate family separation: Transfer care of minors to the Department of Homeland Security
- Suspend due process that allows immigrants a day in court before deportation
- Create new limitations on which immigrants can qualify for employment
- Eliminate T and U visas available for crime victims, including human trafficking
- Allow immediate expulsion of migrants if immigration courts are backlogged
- End the Flores Settlement Agreement, which limits how long migrant children can stay in detention and requires them to be detained in the least restrictive conditions available
- Introduce a “Show Me Your Papers” mandate, which would require authorities to remove, arrest, and detain long-term immigrants without a warrant if they cannot present proof of citizenship

Project 2025 also grants near-limitless power to the Security of Homeland Security. If they determine there is a real or anticipated mass migration of immigrants, they can create rules and regulations without any outside governance or oversight.

**FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS**

Project 2025 views the tech industry, especially social media companies, as predators preying on children like drug dealers. They are planning a “thermonuclear attack” against what they’ve termed industrial-scale child abuse that has caused mental illness, political indoctrination, and the breakdown of the American family.

“No serious country should be telling its children that they were born the wrong gender,” said Trump. “Transgenderism is a concept never heard of in all of human history... the radical left invented it just a few years ago.”

They propose an outright ban on TikTok, which Trump does not support, and deep investigations into the other social media companies.

In addition, the Project seeks to ban all pornography, and prosecute everyone (including

“The Family Agenda’ section proposes that the Department of Health & Human Services declare that men and women are biological realities and that “married men and women are the ideal, natural, family structure, because all children have a right to be raised by the men and women who conceived them.”

teachers and librarians) who create access to any material considered by conservatives to be pornography. Tech and telecom companies who broadcast porn would be shut down.

Other sections of Project 2025 call for expanded warrantless surveillance of American citizens, using federal laws to target journalists and professors, and severely limiting voting access through complex qualification processes.

**EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE**

Project 2025 proposes that the entire federal government be placed under presidential control to streamline decision-making and implement policies faster. This action would invalidate the Constitution and essentially usher the United States into totalitarian rule.

The next step would be the largest political reappointment in U.S. history. Thousands of government employees would be fired and replaced with Trump loyalists. This would revive Trump’s Schedule F policy, which reclassified federal workers as political appointees. It would also override the 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act, which sought to reduce government corruption by demanding merit-based presidential appointments.

The project has already created a database of personnel who could serve in the next administration. All candidates are vetted on their political stances, whether they agree or disagree with statements like “life has a right to legal protection from conception” and “the president should be able to advance his agenda without hindrance from unelected federal officials.”

For starters, Project 2025 proposes that all Department of State employees in leadership roles should be fired no later than January 20, 2025. State Department leadership will be appointed in “acting” roles that will not require outside review or Senate confirmation.

**GOVERNMENT REFORM**

No aspect of the U.S. government would be safe from Project 2025, which seeks to

“shrink” government while eliminating many federal functions. Many of these changes are painfully short-sighted, others are simply based in cruelty and avarice.

- The FBI, which it calls a “bloated, arrogant, lawless organization,” would be drastically reinvented. The agency would no longer be authorized to investigate misinformation, including election interference. Critics fear the Department of Justice will be weaponized against Trump’s enemies.
- The Department of Education would be disbanded in favor of creating a Parental Bill of Rights and expanded school choice. Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on gender or sexual identity, would be eliminated. Schools would be allowed to opt out of federal education programs. Head Start, which has helped 40M underprivileged children since 1965, would be eliminated. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which also supports children from low-income households, would be canceled.
- The Department of Homeland Security would be recreated as an immigration police force.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA,) which oversees the National Weather Service and five other offices, will be significantly downsized as “one of the main drivers of the climate change industry... harmful to future U.S. prosperity.”
- The Department of Agriculture, which has published dietary guidelines for decades, would be reformed due to their “infiltration by the climate change and sustainability agenda.”
- The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau would be eliminated, despite resolving over 400,000 complaints since 2011 and recovering \$183M for victims.
- The Federal Reserve would be canceled, and Project 2025 recommends that the country return to a gold-based economy.
- The White House Press Corps would become a loyalty-based organization.
- The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private non-profit corporation, would be defunded, impacting the survival of PBS and National Public Radio. In addition, NPR would see its noncommercial status revoked.
- The Federal Trade Commission, which is responsible for enforcing antitrust laws, would be abolished, as well as the National Labor Relations Board, which protects employee rights.
- Many provisions of the Endangered Species Act would be eliminated without scientific review. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey teams would be decimated. This would cripple all future conservation efforts and reverse decades of ecological progress.
- The Department of the Interior would open most federal lands to development. Biden’s America the Beautiful Campaign—which seeks to conserve 30% of natural lands by 2030—would be canceled. The public would



be removed from all federal land decisions without judicial review. Carbon reduction goals would be replaced by efforts to increase energy production. While this would create a gold rush for private oil, gas, and mineral companies, it would seriously impact environmental and public health.

**GOVERNMENT BENEFITS**

Project 2025 does not call for the end of Social Security. However, the Heritage Foundation has long criticized the program and lobbied for a complete overhaul.

Their recommendations for other government benefits are a harbinger of things to come:

- Medicaid payments would be capped for states without alignment to their actual spending needs, creating a situation where coverage could be denied for particular services. Medicare Advantage would become the default for most Americans.
- Medicaid and Medicare would be forbidden from negotiating drug prices. The Inflation Reduction Act, which caused a sharp reduction in pricing on 10 critical prescriptions, would be repealed.
- Disability would be redefined for veterans, making it harder to get disability benefits. Existing claimants would see their benefits reduced, while new applicants would be outright denied. The PACT Act, which offers benefits for veterans who experienced Agent Orange, oil well fires, or burn pits in wartime, would be canceled. (Yet, service people who refused COVID vaccination would be restored to duty.)
- The Housing First strategy, which prevents veteran homelessness through housing, mental health, and AODA services, would be canceled. Over 100,000 veterans receive support through this program each year.
- The Housing Supply Fund, which removes barriers for first-time homeowners through low-income housing tax credits, would be eliminated.
- OSHA and overtime pay thresholds would be rewritten. Rather than paying overtime pay, employers could offer paid time off or flexible schedules. Most of the 4M American workers who gained overtime eligibility under Biden would lose it under Project 2025. However, Sundays would be declared federal holidays as “Sabbath Rest” Days, and all hours worked would be eligible for overtime pay.
- Federal subsidies for electric vehicles would be eliminated, as well as emissions limitations on gas powered vehicles.
- Childless adults on federal assistance would be transitioned back into the workforce through increasing working hour requirements.
- All federal programs for student loan forgiveness would be revoked, and anyone who had received forgiveness under the Biden Administration would see their loans reactivated.
- The EEOC, specifically the consent decrees, would be rewritten to favor “able-bodied workers” and make it

easier to discriminate against the disabled in hiring, performance evaluation, and firing decisions.

**FEDERAL TAXES**

Project 2025 is an unashamed corporate tax giveaway. Since 2017, the corporate tax rate has dropped from 35% to 20%. The Project recommends dropping it even further to 17%, which would cost the nation over \$300B, and recovering that loss by removing deductions and increasing taxes for the middle class.

Capital gains tax would also be reduced from 20% to 15%, and the Child Tax Credit would be discontinued.

While gifting Corporate America an enormous tax benefit, and bleeding middle class America dry, Project 2025 also plans to cut \$2B from the IRS to reduce “unnecessary and intrusive oversight.” Congress would require a supermajority to veto these moves or pass any tax increases in the future.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

Please note that this isn’t the entire blueprint. This is just the opening chapter.

While we’re all laughing at the Republicans for being “weird,” let’s not overlook the fact that all the components are in place to make Project 2025 a reality.

America is currently governed by a Chris-

“Seeking to destroy “woke propaganda” and the “inappropriate political indoctrination of America,” the proposal vows to eliminate the words “sexual orientation,” “gender identity,” “gender equality,” and “racial equity” from government language.

tian nationalist Speaker of the House and a politically compromised Supreme Court. If Democrats lose the House and/or the Presidency, Republicans will have the supermajority required to advance the concepts of Project 2025. We are already seeing efforts to eliminate the separation of church and state. We are already seeing efforts to deconstruct freedoms for “others” in American society. We’ve already seen children in cages, and we’re still hearing rumblings of concentration camps.

In 2016, we heard, “Stop being hysterical. What’s the worst he can do?” And we’re still hearing that eight years later, even with the “worst” spelled out in plain language.

*When someone shows you who they are, believe them.*

VOTE on November 5. ■



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NEWS BRIEFS

UNPACKING AUGUST'S PRIMARY ELECTION RESULTS

**THE AUGUST PRIMARY** has come and gone in Wisconsin, and it's clear that voters are engaged and showing up. The state beat a 60-year record for a fall primary in an election year with 26% of registered voters statewide casting a ballot. Madison had the best voter turnout in such an election in the 40 years that the clerk's office has kept records on those statistics with a 45% turnout. Some wards saw numbers as high as 70% throughout the city. High voter turnout usually bodes well for progressive causes, and we saw that this summer with the rejection of the two amendments that "sought to limit the governor's power to spend money," according to PBS Wisconsin. They continue, "The election was also the first under newly drawn legislative maps, creating dozens of competitive races in addition to other hot contests for local office."

In Madison, there was a primary for who would replace **Joe Parisi**, who retired in April of this year, for County Executive. **Melissa Agard**,



Pellebon



Erickson

a current State Senator who was endorsed by Parisi on his way out, received the majority of the votes with 57%. **Dana Pellebon**, a current County Board Supervisor who has been very visible at local queer events this spring and summer, was second with 17.2% of the votes. They beat out Dane County Equity and Inclusion Director **Wes Sparkman**, and Madison City Council Ald. **Regina Vidaver**

to advance to a runoff election this coming November. Both women have a track record of support for the LGBTQ community. Also in Madison, **Chuck Erickson** did not win his bid to represent District 77, a new district that, for the first time ever, comprises the entire UW-Madison campus. **Renuka Mayadev** will continue to the November election for that district.

In Republican news, **Eric Hovde** will face incumbent **Tammy Baldwin** for a spot in the United States Senate. Hovde has been criticized for his numerous attacks on LGBTQ rights, coming out strongly against gender-affirming care for minors and parroting the talking points used by many Republicans against trans kids playing sports on teams that align with their gender identity. Baldwin, on the other hand, in addition to being the first out gay person in the U.S. Senate, spearheaded the "Respect for Marriage Act" in late 2022, a law aimed at protecting marriage rights for LGBTQ Americans. She did so in response to Justice Thomas's opinion published for the *Dobbs* decision, famously reversing *Roe v. Wade*, which called for the Court to "right the wrong" of the *Obergefell* decision from 2015.

WISCONSIN DEDICATES AND REVEALS ITS FIRST LGBTQ HISTORIC MARKER FOR THE PRE-STONEWALL BLACK NITE UPRISING

**ON MONDAY, AUGUST 5**, Wisconsin dedicated and revealed its first LGBTQ historic marker on the 63rd anniversary of the Black Nite uprising. This marker, located in Milwaukee at the corner of N. Plankinton and E. St. Paul Avenues, commemorates a fight between four servicemen and a black trans woman (the servicemen lost) that predated the Stonewall uprising, also one where black trans women led

WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES



the charge, by eight years. According to *Urban Milwaukee*, "The event takes its name from the Black Nite bar, which was a well-known gay bar and the site of the attack. The marker currently sits on a median between the freeway and E. St. Paul Avenue, which is just west of where the now-gone Black Nite bar stood at 400 N. Plankinton Avenue. The tavern was one of several properties cleared to build Interstate 794 through Downtown."

The marker reads:

*On August 5, 1961, four servicemen went on a homophobic dare to the Black Nite (400 N. Plankinton Ave.) a well-known LGBTQ tavern. After losing a fight with Josie Carter (1941-2014) a black woman of trans experience, the men vowed to return and "clean up" the bar.*

*"We do not run from a fight," Josie replied. "We do not run from anything."*

*Josie's courage was a call to action. When the servicemen returned later that night, they*

faced over 70 customers who heroically defended their safe space from invasion.

Milwaukee County Executive **David Crowley** and Mayor **Cavalier Johnson** both presented official proclamations recognizing the Black Nite Uprising. **Peter Burgelis**, the first out-LGBTQ member of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, spoke to the importance of the marker, noting that "the LGBTQ community hasn't always enjoyed vocal support from state and local government," according to *Urban Milwaukee*.

This marker is not only the first one in Wisconsin to commemorate an event within the LGBTQ community, it is also the first to recognize a Black transgender woman, according to **Tony Snell Rodriguez**, who continues by saying, "The historic marker is a powerful symbol of visibility and representation, particularly for our Black transgender siblings, who have faced extraordinary challenges and yet continue to demonstrate incredible resilience and strength."

This marker's existence is largely due to the work of the **Wisconsin LGBTQ History project**, whose members **Michail Takach**, a frequent contributor to *Our Lives*, and **Ricardo Wynn**, "did the legwork to corroborate the story of the uprising using contemporaneous public records, newspaper clippings, and interviews with other first-person witnesses," according to *Urban Milwaukee*. The site was submitted for nomination by Takach back in 2022.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION PARTNERS WITH THE GREATER MILWAUKEE FOUNDATION

**CREAM CITY FOUNDATION**, a foundation created at the height of the AIDS crisis to help with advocacy and funding, evolved with the times to advocate for marriage equality and LGBTQ+ rights in general, and now works to support the LGBTQ+ community of Southeastern Wisconsin through fiscal sponsorship and donor-advised fund programs. The foundation is partnering with the Greater Milwaukee



Nash

Foundation as a way to address an "increased call for equal funding for disparate outcomes across racial lines," according to Charlie Nash, Board Chair and President of Cream City. Nash continued that, "Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the world. Within that, how do we make the foundation more sustainable, returning to our roots as an all-volunteer organization?"

The answer seemed to come from a similar partnership in Chicago with the Chicago Community Trust, a larger community organization similar to the Greater Milwaukee Foundation,



which has a dedicated LGBTQ+ focused part of the foundation known as the LGBTQ Community Fund. "The LGBTQ Community Fund, an affinity fund of The Chicago Community Trust," according to the Chicago Community Trust website, "unites donors to support Chicago's LGBTQ community. Since its founding in 2010, the Fund has provided close to \$3 million in grant support to over 50 organizations." In 2018-19, the Cream City Foundation sent board members down to Chicago to learn about this partnership, and felt that it was "worth repeating," said Nash. He continued, "We feel like this is a great opportunity that greatly increased the assets of the foundation, joined a number of donors, to move their funds under Cream City Foundation. What they allow us to do is under the coordination of funds under the board of directors, allow for higher and better impacts for the future. We really wanted a model where we are committed to moving forward, volunteer board, and working, building relationships, allow Greater Milwaukee Foundation

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to focus on the operations side, allow us to run at a lower rate, and have more of those funds to the community.”

Jeremy Podolski, Director of Public Relations and Editorial Strategy for the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, outlined in an email to *Our Lives* some examples of the specific ways that the foundation supports its partner organizations. These examples include grantmaking support, “such as assistance preparing grant guidelines, grant processes, grant proposal reviews, evaluations and communications to grantees,” and financial services including “financial oversight and reports, investment management, 990 preparation, administrative services.” The benefits of this structure include “lower operating expenses, tax benefits, networking and collaboration.” Greg Wesley, president and CEO of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation said of the partnership, “The Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Cream City Foundation choosing to partner is a win for both organizations and for our community. Cream City Foundation has provided decades of hope and support for LGBTQ+ communities locally, and the need for their knowledge, commitment, and voice continues to grow. An inclusive Milwaukee is far more likely to thrive, which is why the Foundation is focused on its goal of building a Milwaukee for all. That vision cannot be achieved by working alone.”

**OPEN TO HOST CAREER FAIR IN OCTOBER AS PART OF THEIR ANNUAL DINNER**

**OPEN**, which stands for Out Professional Engagement Network and is an organization based in Madison that works to create a network for LGBTQ+ professionals to help elevate workers and help hold employers accountable to being inclusive and welcoming, is holding a career fair in October as part of their annual dinner event. While there are many area job fairs, this one is special in that it is meant to specifically bridge the “readiness gap” by providing career services, workforce development, and an inclusive opportunity for workers to meet with both employers and volunteers who will help them with professional wardrobe, resume building, and answer questions and give advice for anyone in the LGBTQ+ community who need it.

Heidi Duss, board president, said that part of the OPEN’s mission is to break down what “professional” means—a word rooted in patriarchy and white supremacy and has been frequently weaponized against people of color and people within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly trans people. In attempting to do so, this fair will not only include what you would normally

expect to see at a job fair, namely white collar companies and corporations, but also trade organizations and unions who would typically not be at these types of events. Little Light




Duss

Solutions, an OPEN member whose focus is business development and inclusion, will have recruiters there from the Greater Madison Area Society for Human Resource Management in booths before job seekers even enter the main area with companies to help guide them and provide support. “Networking and talking to companies is a skill,” Duss explains, “and the point of bringing in these recruiters is to provide encouragement and support.”

From the side of the companies participating in the fair, OPEN has created a stringent vetting process to make sure that everyone participating is transparent, inclusive, and cultivates a workplace environment that is welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community. They begin this vetting process by submitting a form that asks them to outline benefits, policies of

inclusiveness, and other points of information that job seekers should know. OPEN wants to further know what inspired them to want to participate in this particular job fair, how they address discrimination and harassment in their workplace, what resources they have to help their employees that might help the LGBTQ+ community in particular, and how OPEN can help them continue to be even more inclusive. Heidi Duss says that she recognizes that the forms ask a lot of questions that most don’t, but OPEN is committed to a community that has particular needs, and they want to ensure that anyone they welcome to the fair can provide a safe space for all of their employees.

When asked what else the organization wants job seekers to know about the fair, and OPEN in general, Duss replied that anyone can reach out to OPEN for any questions. Duss said to let them know if you are looking for anything in particular, if you want to see something specific, what employers you are hoping to see there, what resources might be needed that aren’t covered already, and let them know what help you might need. ■



## LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

**GENERAL NEWS**

*Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.*

**BAY AREA COUNCIL ON GENDER DIVERSITY** acted as a co-sponsor for the Oneida Pow Wow Two Spirit Special Dance this summer. Joe Tores, Oneida Two-Spirit community member, received a sponsorship check from Martha Marvel that transferred funds provided by anonymous donors to support the dance. The Pow Wow is in the 50th year and this is the first recorded Two-Spirit special dance.

**CREAM CITY FOUNDATION** in a move to enhance future growth, sustainability and impact in the LGBTQ+ community it serves, has joined the Greater Milwaukee Foundation as a supporting organization. In this specialized community foundation structure, Cream City Foundation will maintain an independent board and decision-making power while benefiting from the investment expertise, administrative support,

and regional reach of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. The Greater Milwaukee Foundation is Wisconsin’s largest community foundation and was among the first established in the world.

**COURAGE MKE** has been added to “Everywhere is Queer” which is a worldwide map of queer owned businesses.

**ENCORE STUDIO** announces its 2024–25 season. A combination of live theater and filmed works; improvisation and an Encore Classic! Join in to celebrate 25 years with Encore Studio for the Performing Arts!

**FAIR WISCONSIN PAC** has endorsed candidates for the fall 2024 cycle with an expectation of more to come. These candidates have been identified as champions for LGBTQ+ equality in the state Legislature and Senate. To see this list and other resources, visit [fairwisconsin.com/fair-wisconsin-political-action-committee](http://fairwisconsin.com/fair-wisconsin-political-action-committee)

**LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS** continues to serve a large population of LGBTQ+ folks impacted by the carceral system. They have sent over 700 packages so far this year and are always in need of donations in the following categories: LGBTQ+ (non)fiction, dictionaries, urban fiction, and art/hobby books. Volunteers can join Monday or Tuesday evenings 6:00–8:00 p.m. or every other Saturday 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

**LGBT CENTER OF SE WI** has released an update on their Trans Resource Project. Soon you will be able to search the Center’s website ([lgbtsewi.org](http://lgbtsewi.org)) to find a directory of gender-affirming medical providers and mental health professionals in SE Wisconsin. Outreach to providers and been overwhelmingly positive. By the end of the year, the goal is to have 150+ providers in this directory. The Project is funded by the United Way of Racine County’s Equity Innovation Fund.

**OPEN** invites LGBTQIA+ inclusive businesses to participate as sponsors and/or career fair vendors at their upcoming event on October 3. For more information on how to get involved, visit [OPENMadison.org/2024AnnualDinner](http://OPENMadison.org/2024AnnualDinner).

**STAGEQ** has announced its “bloody good” 2024–25 Season. Join their newsletter for audition updates and tickets.

**VIVENT HEALTH** experienced extensive damage to their Madison space due to a burst fire suppression pipe. For now, prevention services remain available and prescriptions will be either mailed to patients or transferred. Operations are anticipated to resume in late September.

**AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS**

*Special thanks for those who do good.*

**CROSSROADS COMMUNITY FARM** has raised nearly \$25,000 to support their food access work through donations from customers and community members. This will fund approximately half of the program for the year and the other half will be partially grant funded with the remainder paid by the farm.

**DIVERSE & RESILIENT** has been an annual sponsor of the *Shepard Express* LGBTQ Progress Awards. This year, D&R sponsored the Pioneer of LGBTQ Progress Award. They are proud to award Lula Reams. Born in rural Tennessee, at age 10, Lula Reams moved with her sharecropper family to Racine. Reams volunteered at the Counseling Center of Milwaukee. That led to “more learning,” as she would phrase it. Through her engagement with support groups

for women who identified as lesbian, it was then she conceived her brainchild, an organization known as “Lesbians of Color” (LOC). With co-founder Sarah Ford, Reams’ innovative idea would mark a historic moment. Founded in the mid-1980s, LOC would be Milwaukee’s first organization for lesbians not only of color, but inclusive of all. Reams would later serve on the Cream City Foundation board of directors.


**FREEDOM, INC.** Queer Wellness Grants are open and accepting applications until September 13. Freedom, Inc.’s annual Queer Wellness Grant program benefits Black and HMoob Queer community members by awarding recipients \$5,000 that can be used for health and wellness. Since 2018, Freedom, Inc. has awarded four community members annually. In 2024, we are increasing the number of annual recipients to six, in order to meet our community’s increased need, impacted by a slew of oppressive bills that are attacking their bodily autonomy, access to education, and right to simply exist. If you are a part of the Black and Hmoob Queer community, don’t hesitate to apply!

**LGBT CENTER OF SE WI** is celebrating 15 years of

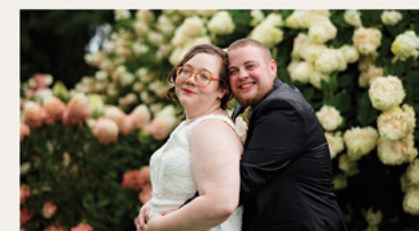
operations. They became a reality in 2009 and continue to offer impactful and accessible programs and services, including support groups, training, youth programs, and advocacy.

**MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER** received \$25,000 from Molson Coors Beverage company in honor of PrideFest, and a \$25,000 matching grant from Leonard-Litz LGBT Foundation, in addition to funds raised through donations by community members. These funds, along with a new financial plan, will allow the organization to continue providing free counseling services, support groups, youth services, recovery and victim services, older adult services, trans and non-binary services, and more.

**PATHFINDERS** is celebrating the 15th anniversary of Q-BLOK, Pathfinders’ housing program for LGBTQ+ and allied young people aged 16–25. Q-BLOK is free and voluntary for participants, providing housing, rental subsidies, and reliable support as youth work on their mental wellness, employment, and overall stability. Q-BLOK was one of the first housing programs in the nation to provide this level of intensive and flexible support. Since 2009, more than 100



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



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# Melanie Renee

PHOTOGRAPHY

[melaniereneephoto.com](http://melaniereneephoto.com)

# YOUR Connection TO LGBTQ WISCONSIN

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## PEOPLE



## EVENTS



## BUSINESSES



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Milwaukee-area youth have received support from Q-BLOK.

**VIVENT HEALTH** won the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment Community Health Award at the 25th anniversary of the LISC Milwaukee (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) MANDI Awards.

### STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

*Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.*

**FAIR WISCONSIN** is excited to announce the hiring of Executive Director, **Abigail Swetz!** Swetz's professional experience reflects her deep commitment to equity and inclusion, the safety of LGBTQ+ Wisconsinites, and the liberation of our queer community. She is an award-winning middle school teacher and Gender and Sexuality Advisor, having been recognized as the 2017 GSAFE Educator of the Year and with the Rockwell Cooperating Teacher Award from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Inspired by the activism of her students, Swetz attended the La Follette School of Public Affairs, where she earned the Penniman Prize for her policy analysis. Upon graduation, she worked in domestic violence policy and advocacy, and in the Secretary's Office at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Swetz



Turner



Wild

**GSAFE** welcomes **Yante Turner** as the new Director of Youth Programming. He brings a wealth of lived experience as an out, queer, Trans man, cultural competency as a Black grassroots organizer and principled care to every space he takes up. He remains a dedicated member of his community, working tirelessly to abolish carceral systems for Black people, Trans folks, youth and their Kin. Yante has a background in uplifting and supporting Trans folks, youth based communities and advocacy work.

**PROUD THEATER** announces their longtime supporter in many roles, **Brian Wild**, will return as Artistic Director of the Madison chapter for their 25th Anniversary season.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

*Plan ahead to join in.*

**FORGE September 9** Trauma-informed approaches to hate violence—FORGE is hosting a series of webinars that focus on anti-trans hate violence and how it can and does impact victim service providers and allied professionals. All live webinars will include ASL and will also be recorded.

**FORGE September 10** Hate Matters: The Impact Hate has on Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocacy—FORGE is hosting a series of webinars that focus on anti-trans hate violence and how it can and does impact victim service providers and allied professionals. All live webinars will include ASL and will also be recorded.

**PROUD THEATER September 11–December 4** Open Enrollment with Fun! Food! Friendship! Young people from Madison and the surrounding area can join Proud Theater for its 2024–25 season starting September 11. Rehearsals are on Wednesdays during the school year beginning at 5:30 p.m. and held at Trinity Lutheran Church, 1904 Winnebago Street, in Madison. To enroll, youth need only contact Proud Theater at madison@proudtheater.org or simply show up to rehearsals. Food and snacks will be served. Open enrollment ends December 4.

**VIVENT HEALTH September 12** The 2nd Annual Dining Out for Life Milwaukee—Eat at some of Milwaukee's most popular bars and restaurants to support people living with HIV through Vivent Health's food pantry program. Last year, Vivent Health provided 11,250 pantry orders to nearly 1,100 clients and their families—a 37% increase from 2022. This year, those needs continue to grow.

**MKE GAY SPORTS NETWORK September 15** 11th Annual Grant Heffelfinger Big Gay 5K Run/Walk—Veterans Park (1010 North Lincoln Memorial Drive, near Kite Stand.) Registration

will open at 9:00 a.m., and yoga will start at 9:15 a.m. (\$45).

**WI LGBT CHAMBER September 18** Culture Elevation Series: Creating a Culture of Belonging. How can we create habits that lead to cultural belonging and a renewed sense of mattering? What “bubbles” can we burst that lead to new perspectives and openness? Let's strengthen the engagement of your workforce, whether through Employee Resource Groups or an organization-wide movement on mattering (\$0–20).

**WI LGBT CHAMBER September 18** Madison Area Coffee Connection—Connect with fellow professionals, explore new opportunities, and start your day with the perfect blend of networking and camaraderie at MINI of Madison.

**ENCORE STUDIO September 20 - September 28** Found Money: The Musical—Showing Fridays 8:00 p.m., Saturdays and Sunday 2:00 p.m., at the Mary Dupont Wahlers Theatre, 1480 Martin St. in Madison. An updated musical about when a person with a disability mistakenly gets a windfall in their benefits check. Everything is looking up until their misguided “friend” tells the wrong people. Will the found money be lost forever? (Tickets \$5–25).

**COURAGE MKE September 23** Portillo's Fundraiser—20% of Milwaukee sales will benefit Courage MKE on 9/23/24! Order online or in app for pickup using code PORTILLOS44 before checkout in the “Apply Offer” field.

**OPEN October 3** LGBTQIA2S+ Career Fair and Annual Dinner: Join OPEN at Monona Terrace for an affirming career fair, 2:00–5:00 p.m. complete with resume review services, mock interviews, headshots, and a gender-affirming clothing closet. The fair is free with registration for job seekers. Following there will be a separately ticketed networking hour (5:30–6:30) and engaging annual dinner program entitled “Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges” (\$100).

**GSAFE October 13** Trick or Trot 5k Walk/Run—The 2024 theme is Zombies vs. Humans. This year's run features pre-event kids' dash as well as candy stations along the route, making the event fun for both kids and grown-up kids (\$45).

**WI LGBT CHAMBER October 23** Business Awards & Showcase—To be held in Milwaukee presented by BMO. ■

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT THEATER MUSICALS REPRESENTATION

## Queer Stories, Reimagined

StageQ's 2024-25 season promises to entertain and even push some boundaries.

**AFTER WRAPPING UP** a jam-packed 2023-24 season, StageQ, Wisconsin's queer theater company, is preparing to bring queer stories to the stage once again.

StageQ's mission is to "celebrate and advance queer representation" by spotlighting LGBTQ+ playwrights, stories, and actors. With a play about gay politicians and a musical about a lesbian ax murderer, the upcoming season is no exception.

The shows are not the only new aspect of StageQ. This summer, StageQ welcomed a new president, **Abby Pawleski**. Pawleski previously performed in multiple StageQ productions, including *Act a Lady* and *Secretaries* and served on the board of directors. Pawleski understands the importance of telling queer stories. "As someone who visibly presents queer, it's a lived experience," she says. "It colors everything I do."

StageQ is always looking for new people to join, whether through volunteering, helping out backstage, or auditioning for a show. Pawleski sees StageQ as more than just a space for people to gather, but as a community space. This upcoming season she wants to increase community participation, making StageQ a center point for the queer community.

This season is made up of two plays, one musical, and a festival. "I'm always looking to see what shows are pushing boundaries, what shows are going to grab an audience's attention," Pawleski says.

The 2024-25 season kicks off with the play **Angry F\*gs**, a dark comedy exploring the question, "What do you do when the system that's supposed to help you doesn't?" The play follows two gay men in politics who turn to violence in order to fight injustice and homophobia after witnessing a hate crime. Pawleski told *Our Lives* it is no coincidence StageQ is choosing to run a political show in November, shortly after the 2024 presidential election. The play will be shown November 1 through November 16.

Following *Angry F\*gs*, StageQ will offer **Dr. Ride's American Beach House** from January 24 through February 8, 2025. The play will take the audience back to 1983, the night before Dr. Sally Ride made history as the third woman

**SEASON ANNOUNCEMENT**  
2024-2025

<b>ANGRY F*GS</b> NOVEMBER 1 - 16	<b>LIZZIE THE MUSICAL</b> APRIL 18 - MAY 3
<b>DR. RIDE'S AMERICAN BEACH HOUSE</b> JANUARY 24 - FEBRUARY 8	<b>CAPITOLQ FESTIVAL</b> JUNE 13 - 15

to fly to space. Many assumed Dr. Ride was a lesbian at the time, but it was not confirmed until after she died. The play takes place in Missouri, as four women on a rooftop explore their own queerness while listening to Dr. Ride travel to space on the radio.

From April 18 through May 3, 2025 **Lizzie the Musical** will electrify the Bartell Theatre stage. Pawleski compares it to *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, as both shows have "very rock, very punk energy." The musical follows the story of Lizzie Borden, an ax murderer from the 1800s. Through song and dance, performers explore what is myth and what is reality. "It's a rock exploration of her life," Pawleski says. "Musicals can make things larger than life, and the truth is somewhere in there."

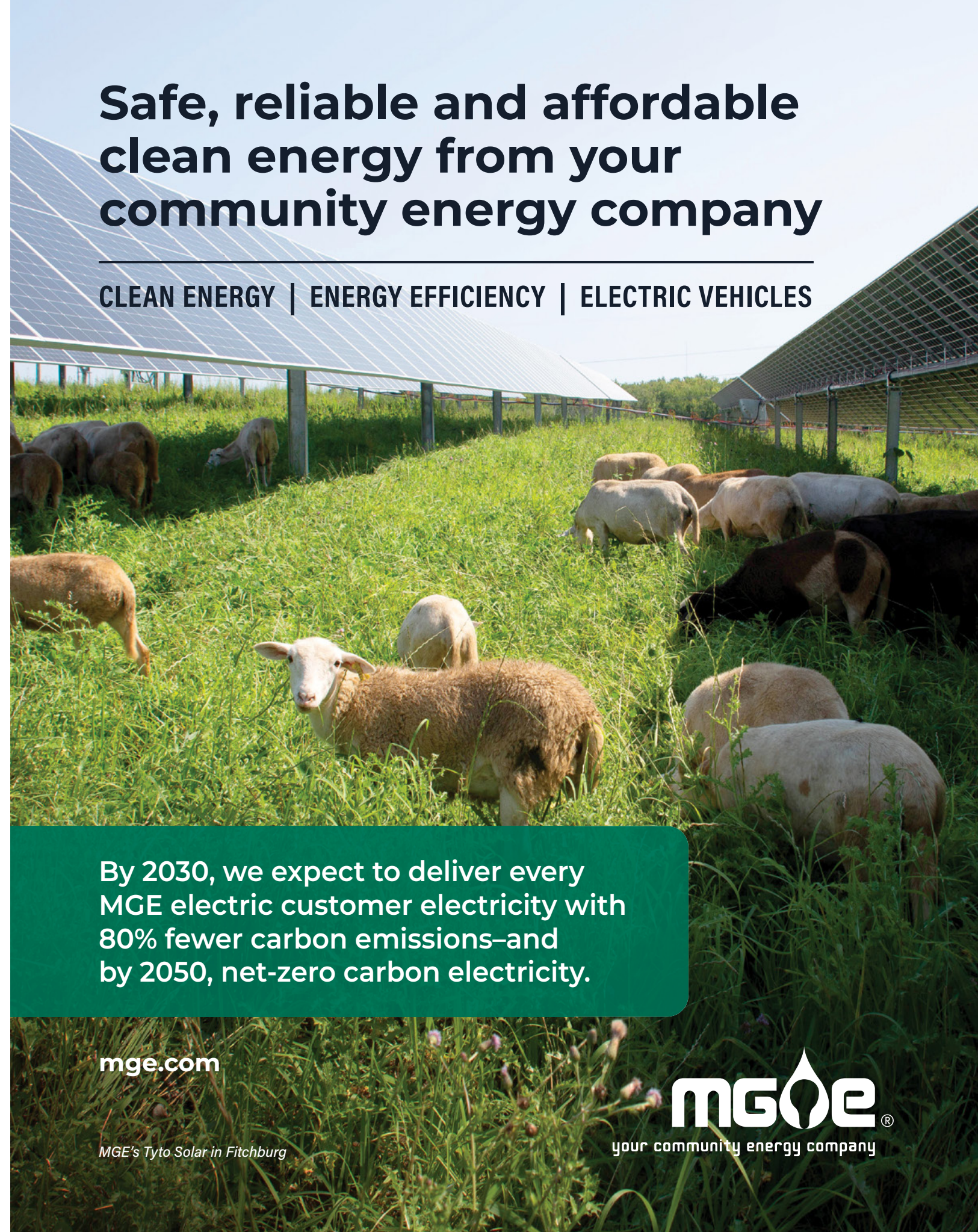
The **CapitolQ festival** will close out the season. "It'll be a bit of a revamp," Pawleski said, but shared that they are still having international queer playwrights submit their shows and then put them on with local queer directors.

Pawleski encourages those who have not seen a show to take a risk this season. She compares attending a StageQ show to going to a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* for the first time: You won't know what to expect, but by the end you are changed.

StageQ is ready to bring in new people who have otherwise never experienced a queer story. StageQ shows provide a sense of escapism, according to Pawleski. She explains that most queer people experience hardship in addition to joy, and so to see queer stories reimagined on stage allows viewers to see themselves in a new light. People see different versions and parts of themselves on stage, she says. "There's always a bit of magic that happens." ■

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TRANS COMMUNITY GREEN BAY TRANS YOUTH ART INSTALLATION

## Filling a Need to Be Seen

**Martha Marvel** is the founder and president of the (Green) Bay Area Council on Gender Diversity, or BACGD.

Here, she outlines the origins and welcomed growth and expansion of support and community-building initiatives for the trans, non-binary, and intersex residents of Northeastern Wisconsin.

**NEVER IN MY WILDEST** imagination did we envision anything like we have now. We started in 2017 with just four mostly closeted trans-feminine persons. We gathered in what was then a musty storage room attached to the back of the Napalese Lounge in Green Bay. We had no lofty goals other than to spend one night a month in safety where we could put on our feminine finery, swap a few war stories, beauty secrets, laugh, and share a drink or two. There weren't (and still aren't) any registration fees, hard and fast rules, formal program, etc.

### MONTHLY SOCIAL & PUBLIC GATHERINGS

The group grew through word of mouth, connections made via the internet, and a Meetup group ([meetup.com/green-bay-transgender-meet-up](https://www.meetup.com/green-bay-transgender-meet-up/)). After a year, on average about 10 of us gathered each month. The back room of the Napalese Lounge was renovated into the community room. Members wanted to get out in public more, so Super Saturdays were planned. As a group we often turned heads, going to local coffee shops and restaurants. A local women's clothing resale shop opened her store on Saturday nights for wine and cheese parties. T-girls could shop without worrying about "being read or who they might run into."

### "WE WILL BE SEEN" MURAL

The group continued to grow. In the fall of 2020, I was invited by a group called United Arts, to come up with a creative way to use art to help marginalized artists and people. I had the idea to paint a public art mural on the side of the Napalese Lounge. It would affirm and celebrate the contributions of LGBTQ+ people in NE Wisconsin. The idea caught on like wildfire. The trans and queer communities, the broader business, nonprofit, and civic communities all got on board. It seemed like Green Bay had been waiting for the right opportunity to come together to affirm the queer community. The installation of the "We Will Be Seen" mural and a weekend long celebration became that vehicle. Funds were also secured to install a new front door for the Napalese Lounge. The original door was sealed shut years ago due to anti-queer vandals using it to harass the gay community.

In August 2021, 600 people attended a block party with the mayor, the lieutenant governor, and other officials present. As the mural was unveiled with its message, "We Will Be Seen," many in attendance were in tears. Comments like, "I never thought I would see a day like this in Green Bay," were heard. With big smiles and beaming pride, hundreds walked through the new front door. Confetti cannons showered the crowd. It was quite a sight. It also opened a new era of feeling welcome for the trans and queer communities in NE Wisconsin.

Just before the unveiling, parents of trans youth noted, "You are doing wonderful things for trans adults, but what about trans youth and their families?" The day of the mural unveiling celebration, the nearby Green Bay Unitarian Universalist Fellowship welcomed 12 families with trans youth and counselors for information sharing and mutual support. Comments by parents included, "It's great to know that we are not the only



At each gathering there are first-timers—those who have been living in their closets for years. Almost all come "scared to death" to venture out. However, once they meet and are welcomed by members of the CD/TG First Thursday members, the common response is, "Why didn't I do this sooner?"

ones," and "It's good to know we are doing a better job than we thought. Youth commented, "It was great; nice to know there are others like me and it's okay that I don't have it all figured out yet!"

### MONTHLY GATHERINGS DRAW ATTENDEES FROM ACROSS THE STATE

Attendance at our monthly CD/TG First Thursday Gatherings grew. People traveled to attend from the Upper Peninsula, Wausau, Madison, Waukesha, the Fox Valley, etc. Many believe that they cannot go out in their communities for fear of having to deal with disparaging comments or worse being "outed." At each gathering there are first-timers—those who have been living in their closets for years. Almost all come "scared to death" to venture out. However, once they meet and are welcomed by members of the CD/TG First Thursday members, the common response is, "Why didn't I do this sooner?"

### SUPPORTING TRANS YOUTH

In the fall of 2021, an exploratory committee met to consider, "How to connect with and support trans youth." After listening to youth, parents,

and professionals the need for a safe private place where youth in grades 7–12 could gather to meet, greet, and socialize with one another was addressed. The local Dave & Buster's stepped forward and offered their private party room for monthly gatherings. Local public school teachers and counselors volunteered to help. The first gathering was held in February, 2022 with about 15 trans youth. The group draws from beyond the immediate Green Bay area and has reached about 150 trans youth.

The original organizing committee evolved into a standing committee known as The Bay Area Trans Youth Alliance (BATYA). In the fall of 2022, due to a conflict in scheduling, the group was asked if it could find a different location for its December T-Youth gathering. A member of the Green Bay Police Department heard about the need and asked, "Would it be okay if I made some inquiries? I've got a few connections." The result was a special holiday party for T-Youth sponsored by the Green Bay Packers and the Titletown District. BATYA has also expanded to offer an annual T-Youth families, friends, and allies picnic at Bay Beach Amusement park. In service to queer youth, each May the BATYA hosts an area-wide LGBTQ+ high school prom at a popular entertainment venue, The Tarlton.

### TRANS ARTISTS COLLABORATIVE

During the winter months of 2022, the group was asked, "Is there any way you could gather a group of trans artists and create an "out of the box" creative art piece that has a significant trans message?" If so, the piece would be considered for inclusion in a special gathering of artists called Unhinged, which was to be held at the Weidner Performing Arts Center at UWGB. We gathered a trans art teacher, a digital artist, a multi-medium painter and woodworker, and a geologist/engineer for what is now known as the Trans Artists Collaborative (TAC).

After a lot of stops and starts, the TAC proposed the creation of a multimedia and digital immersive art space that would tell the stories, challenges, and joys of trans persons. The first iteration of The Transperience was presented as part of Unhinged at the UWGB Weidner Center in October, 2022 to great acclaim. It touched people deeply. Comments like, "I had no idea what it meant to be trans," "My heart is really full now with a greater awareness of what my relative or co-worker has had to experience," were heard.

The Transperience was so impactful that the Mulva Library at St. Norbert College hosted the installation for a week in the fall of 2023. This led to an invitation from the Brown County Neville Museum in downtown Green Bay to offer educational programs and The Transperience installation for six weeks this past summer. From November 11 to 17 The Transperience will be at the student Union at University of Wisconsin—Green Bay. It will be open to the public during regular school hours.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

With more growth, the time came to add another element to the mix. A Board of Directors was recruited for an umbrella organization named The Bay Area Council on Gender Diversity (BACGD). The Board adopted a mission statement that says, "To provide support and education for transgender persons, their families, and allies." In February of 2022 BACGD was recognized by the IRS as a 501c(3) non-profit corporation. The Youth (BATYA) and Artists (TAC) groups became subsidiaries of BACGD.

### A SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

To regularly communicate with almost 400 trans people and allies and promote BACGD, a Social Media committee was established. Talented members of the trans community volunteered their time and created a website ([BACGenderDiversity.org](https://BACGenderDiversity.org)) Facebook page ([facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/)



groups/5559265447440011), an Instagram account for BATYA (Bay\_Area\_Trans\_Youth\_Alliance), and a free one-page monthly e-newsletter that anyone can sign up for by going to the BACGD website.

### TWO-SPIRIT INCLUSION & SUPPORT

In June of 2023, BACGD marched in the Milwaukee Pride Parade. Almost 50 people marched. During planning for the June 2024 Pride parade, we befriended Two-Spirit people from the Oneida and Ojibwe tribes and invited them to join BACGD for the parade. About 25 Two-Spirit persons, their friends, and families marched. One Two-Spirit person reported, "I had tears of joy in my eyes—I felt so affirmed and free—everyone along the parade route cheered us on and proudly shouted out the names of their tribes." We are committed to doing what we can in the future to help First Americans to reclaim the sometimes lost Two-Spirit realities in their indigenous cultures. BACGD also raised funds to co-sponsor a Two-Spirit Special (dance & competition) at the Oneida Pow Wow that was held on June 29 outside of Green Bay. It is also helping to subsidize travel costs for members of the Oneida and Ojibwe nations to attend the August Western Montana National Two-Spirit Gathering.

### A TRANSMASCULINE & NON-BINARY PERSONS GROUP

This year also saw the first attempts by BACGD to organize a group specifically for transmasculine-non-binary persons. While TM-NB people have always been warmly welcomed to BACGD events, a group expressed an interest in the establishment of their own group. A first gathering attracted 12 people. More outreach and offerings are planned for this fall.

Where is BACGD going from here? Based on reliable data, it is estimated that just in Brown County there are 6,000 trans, non-binary, or inter-sex people. BACGD has been able to connect with about 500 of them. There are still too many who live in fear and in the closet. While there has been a lot of progress when it comes to the welcome that trans people have begun to feel in NE Wisconsin, there are so many more who have never met a trans person or have a lack of knowledge and understanding of the transgender non-binary experience. We still have a lot of work to do. ■

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# Homecoming

**Paul Baker Prindle**, prodigal son of Madison's fine arts scene, returns to take the helm of the **Madison Museum of Contemporary Art**.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT | ART MUSEUM | QUEER ART | PHOTOGRAPHY

**FOURTEEN YEARS AGO**, when *Our Lives* and Paul Baker Prindle were young, and I was youngish, I wrote a piece for this magazine about Paul and his photography series Mementi Mori. I still remember the night I was breezing through UW-Madison's MFA exhibition in a building off Park Street, where Park Cedar Apartments are now, until I was drawn into Paul's room full of his large landscape photographs. The places in the images had one thing in common: They depicted ordinary locations where LGBTQ people had been murdered. I stopped in my tracks, chills ran up my spine, and I gave the work the mindful attention it deserved. I will never forget the feelings evoked by those powerful images and my admiration for the thoughtful, provocative, intelligence of their maker.

This past May, we learned that Paul Baker Prindle was named the new Gabriele Haberland Director of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA). This was big news for Madison's arts' crowd. MMoCA has navigated some rough waters over the last several years and seems to have lost its way a little bit. Many of us are anxious to see this gem of Wisconsin's contemporary arts scene resuming its role at the helm. I was honored to be asked by *Our Lives* to (re) introduce Paul Baker Prindle to our community but acknowledge I am a bit biased: I have been a fangirl of his since that long-ago night I met him at his MFA show.

Those of us who know and love Paul have watched him build an impressive resume that spans two decades in the art world. While completing his MFA, Paul spent periods of time in 2008 and 2009 working in New York at Gagosian Gallery and as a studio assistant to the now-deceased pioneering gay photographer, James Bidgood.

I am not the only one. Paul has a whole fan club in the area, and it is comprised of the who's who of Wisconsin artists and culturati. Paul worked at the MMoCA museum gift shop starting when he was 19. Leslie Genzler, the woman who ran that store, became like a mother to him. Before she hired him, he was living in a 1988 Grand Marquis in a mall parking lot. He told me that from the moment he sashayed into the shop, Leslie knew she was going to hire him immediately. He calls her his "transcendental mama," explaining she was like a Mrs. Madrigal character to him at a time in his life when, it seems to me, he needed the unconditional love of family.

He finished his undergraduate degree at Edgewood College in 2004 and was fortunate to study with the prominent art historian Melanie Herzog. When Paul was still an undergraduate, Dr. Herzog and he even co-authored a paper about queer pedagogy in art history and co-presented on the topic at several conferences.

Some of Madison's most prominent artists and faculty, Tom Jones,

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John Hitchcock, Jill Casid, and Michael Connors, were on Paul's graduate school committee. David Wells, Paul's successor at Edgewood College's gallery, has stayed in close touch with him also. Previous MMoCA staff uniformly speak adoringly of him, and by the way, MMoCA owns three images from Paul's Mementi Mori series. It says something about Paul's character that the whole time he was working jobs and building a life out west, he maintained and nurtured his relationships back here.

Those of us who know and love Paul have watched him build an impressive resume that spans two decades in the art world. While completing his MFA, Paul spent periods of time in 2008 and 2009 working in New York at Gagolian Gallery and as a studio assistant to the now-deceased pioneering gay photographer, James Bidgood. [Bidgood was memorialized in the March/April 2022 issue of *Our Lives*.] Then in 2009, Paul got a call from artist and curator, Tracy Dietzel, asking him to throw his hat in the ring to serve as the Director at Edgewood College Gallery at a critical time when Edgewood was building The Stream and moving their exhibition program from a hallway into a proper gallery space. He was at Edgewood until he left to take a gallery director job at University of Nevada, Reno in 2013. While there, he once again helped a growing program and institution. In Reno he was responsible for establishing The John and Geraldine Lilley Museum of Art. He then spent many years as the head of the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach, and there he once again helped establish a new facility.

And then there is Ben. You know the saying, behind every successful man... Well, the wind beneath Paul's wings is his beloved husband, Ben. In 2013, they registered as Domestic Partners in Madison before gay marriage was legal. Fortunately, Ben worked remotely before

If Paul's life were a Hallmark movie of the hero's journey, his hiring would be the moment of climax in which the main character returns home, transformed by his long adventure, lessons learned, and victories won. Then the hero would use their newfound knowledge to save the village, or in Paul's case, the museum.

working remotely was a thing, so he was free to move to Reno when Paul took the position there. In 2014, when gay marriage became legal, Paul and Ben got married at Washoe County Administrative Complex, "a very sexy location," Paul quipped.

Paul's career has been marked by innovation as he has helped three institutions open their new gallery facilities. He has also worked in higher education settings, where fostering dialog was part of the institutional mission. He has a deep understanding of the power of art and the lived experiences of artists. And importantly, as an openly gay, Jewish man, he brings a personal understanding of oppression and the importance of including diverse voices in cultural institutions. From my informal survey, I would say that those in the community who know him continue to have great faith in his ability to not only bring back MMoCA's reputation, but to take it to new heights. They say that even while they understand the gargantuan job he has signed up for.

Why so dramatic? Well, it is hard for an arts hag like me to believe there is anyone who is unaware of what MMoCA has gone through in the past four years, and I hate to bring it all up again, but in order to appreciate the context of what Paul has ahead of him, you need to know the backstory. This is the way I remember some major events from the

last several years at MMoCA, in case you missed it:

In spring of 2020, MMoCA's long-time director, Stephen Fleischman, retired after about 30 years. When Fleischman left MMoCA, it appeared to be shipshape. But then COVID-19 happened, and like all museums everywhere, MMoCA was hit hard. First, the museum shut its doors due to the pandemic, and while it was still in mid-pivot due to COVID, protests erupted in the wake of George Floyd's murder. On Saturday, May 30, 2020 after the peaceful protests ended, mayhem broke out on State Street. Like many others, I watched the live reporting as the museum's gift shop window was shattered and the store was looted.

The museum boarded up their building as soon as possible, and those boards remained over MMoCA's storefront for many, many months. The museum reopened in August of 2020, but the store never re-opened as the museum's then fairly new director, Christina Brungardt, decided the area the store had previously occupied would better serve the community as an interactive exhibition space, arguing that museum gift shops are the domain of wealthy white women, and she wanted to transform that space in a way that would increase public access to the museum. A worthy goal, but it did not go over very well with the community—both because many people knew and loved Leslie Genzler, MMoCA's gift shop manager and because visiting the museum store is often part of the ritual of visiting a museum, at least for middle-class white women.

In fact, during Brungardt's tenure in Madison, she made many controversial decisions. It was not just closing the gift shop, but Fresco, the restaurant that used to occupy the top floor, also closed. Then Brungardt decided to change the format of the museum's Triennial, which had been relatively unchanged since it began in 1978. Under Brungardt, a decision was made to contract with a single individual

curator outside of the museum. She contracted with Milwaukee gallery owner and curator, Fatima Laster.

Two months into the "Ain't I a Woman" triennial exhibition, Lilada Gee, a beloved local artist, had her artwork destroyed by a group of unguided museum visitors. For some reason, neither the director nor the executive board could muster a genuine apology. They claimed to issue one, but the museum's "apology" read like a bad non-apology apology joke including blame-shifting, excuse-making, and sidestepping. Nearly 100% of MMoCA staff fled. There was great turnover with the board of directors. And then on October 24, 2023, MMoCA announced that Brungardt resigned. But who could fix the damage to the institution that had occurred over the last four years?

A search began, and when it ended, Paul Baker Prindle was announced as the new director. When I heard the news, it felt like I took my first breath in years.

If Paul's life were a Hallmark movie of the hero's journey, his hiring would be the moment of climax in which the main character returns home, transformed by his long adventure, lessons learned, and victories won. Then the hero would use their newfound knowledge to save the village, or in Paul's case, the museum. Before the story resolves, Paul will need to "make things right." But Paul would not want any part of that movie that perpetuates a "capitalist hetero-masculine model of the hero coming in" and saving everyone. He wants the whole community to participate in this endeavor.

How does he plan to lead? He emphasizes the importance of hospitality: "Visitor services, development, welcoming people into the contemporary art enterprise." Paul's vision is for the art to reflect what is happening in the community. "With historical work we have the benefit of all the conversations and articles that have been built up over time." Contemporary art is also in dialog with history, but mostly

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it is about this moment right now. “It is reckless to have a person come into a community and foist their vision on them. My skills are in helping pull out of folks a shared sense of where we want to go and helping people apply their unique skills in getting us there.” Paul explained.

Paul and I talked for hours before I wrote this story, and we touched upon many interesting topics. Paul told me about his own artistic practice and how it has evolved and paused as he focused on other aspects of his professional and personal life. He still creates some work, but it is more for himself at this point. He even adds to the Memento Mori series sometimes. He has also become obsessed with gardening, and he has shifted much of his creative energy into his love of plants and landscaping. Leaving behind the California yard he has poured so much into struck me as one of the losses he will experience as he transitions fully back to the Midwest.

When I asked him about his vision for MMoCA, he told me he wants to inspire openness to ideas and varying opinions. He said, “I want us to embrace our differences and build a stronger connection because of them.” He told me the main part of the Talmud is the agreement, but alternative opinions are recorded in the margins. Paul is committed to the idea of being able to hear others even when he disagrees with them. Sometimes he watches Fox News, seemingly for practice. “It is very queer to watch Fox News,” he asserted. “It is queer to hear what other people are thinking.” He concluded that chapter of our discussion by summarizing thus, “Contemporary art is the opportunity to engage robustly with the notion that there are many possible solutions.”

Then we talked about Art Fair on the Square. In spite of some wild storms that caused damage, he thinks most artists were happy and that MMoCA’s major annual event was a big success again this year. Paul tells me he has always wanted to curate an exhibition about Madison’s LGBTQ cultural legacy with objects from places like Rod’s, which was in The Hotel Washington.

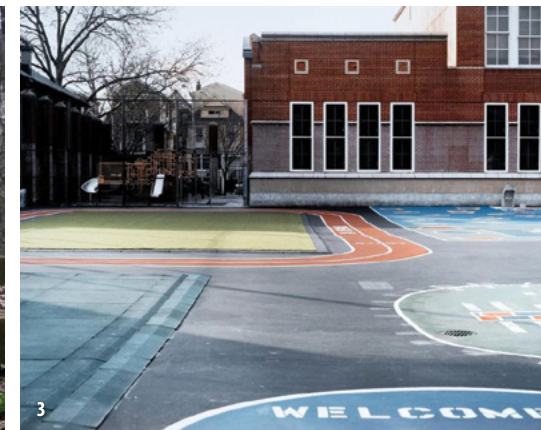
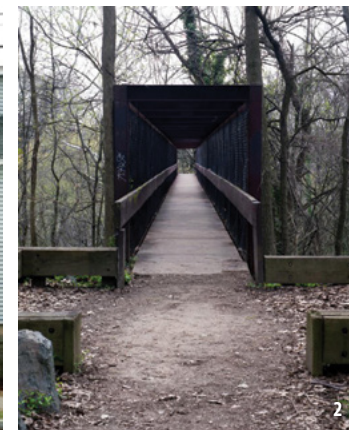
In his favor, he has deep roots here and he knows Madison audiences, our politics, and our history with racism and privilege. And not to do that whole capitalist-hetero-masculine-model-of-the-hero thing, but if anyone can untangle the tangled net MMoCA got caught up in, Paul can.

Ask anyone who has known Paul what they think of him leading MMoCA, and they will likely say something positive. It is uncanny really. I have experimented with this question many times. I’ve asked dozens of people who know him. Lon Michels, for example, didn’t miss a beat before responding, “I went to graduate school with Paul. He is a free-thinking visionary with remarkable ideas. I like him very much, and I am excited for him.” He went on to say, “Paul will advance that institution and probably many more, too.” They all say some version of that same idea, that we are fortunate that Paul chose to come back home.

If they don’t know him, however, they are more likely to say, “We’ll see.” That is true. We will see. In his favor, he has deep roots here and



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The pieces in MMoCA’s permant collection from Paul’s Memento Mori series: **1** Arthur Downey. Maplewood, New Jersey. “Yesterday, Staten, admitted he beat Downey, 27, with an iron just hours after they met then covered Downey’s head with a plastic bag. The cause of death was bludgeoning and asphyxiation.”, 2011. **2** Henry Northington. Richmond, Virginia. “Northington’s severed head had been placed squarely in the center of the walkway, leading many to speculate that the murderer(s) had intended to make an anti-gay statement.”, 2010. **3** Julio Rivera. Queens, New York. “Daniel Doyle, 21 years old, said that after he instigated the attack in the early morning of July 2, 1990, his friends on trial, Erik Brown, 21, and Esat Bici, 19, lured the victim, Julio Rivera, into an isolated corner of a Jackson Heights schoolyard known as a gay cruising area and beat Mr. Rivera with the hammer and a beer bottle before Mr. Doyle stabbed him.”, 2011

he knows Madison audiences, our politics, and our history with racism and privilege. And not to do that whole capitalist-hetero-masculine-model-of-the-hero thing, but if anyone can untangle the tangled net MMoCA got caught up in, Paul can. If anyone can restore trust with the arts community, especially Black women artists, after MMoCA’s last couple of years, Paul can. He has a reputation as an innovator and fixer and fosterer of inclusive environments. He will bring his whole self to the job, and he is a fabulous host. I am hopeful that his appointment marks a promising new era for one of Wisconsin’s top

cultural institutions.

And now, *Our Lives* readers, please join me in welcoming Paul Baker Prindle into this big role in our community and in wishing that he flourishes in his new position, that he and his husband enjoy living here, that his gardens grow well, and that he brings a new era of true inclusion and peace to our cultural ecosystem. ■

*Opinions expressed in this article are solely the author’s and do not express the views or opinions of her employer.*



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# A Story Worth Sharing

**Emily Mills**, known locally as DJ Millbot, shares their winding path growing up a scrappy tomboy to what they describe as their current state of gender euphoria.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT GENDER BISEXUAL GRIEF FAMILY

**LIFE IS NOT A TIDY STORY.** There is no clear throughline, no narratively tight plot, and we can be heroes and villains and bystanders at any given time. But the desire to give coherence to our lives, to pull meaning and understanding from the tangle of events and people that define us, is a deeply human one. I love a memoir, an autobiography, as much as the next person.

It's not a bad thing, this habit, so long as we're careful not to get so far into our own navels that we can't get out. As I sit down to write this piece for *Our Lives*, then, I'm keenly aware that I'm about to attempt this very thing—to turn (some) of my own life story into a tidy narrative. Because I want, like any of us, to be understood. And because I'm incredibly privileged to have this platform.

I am, in so many ways, absolutely living a dream that I didn't have the ability to even articulate when I was younger. I lacked the language, the models of possibility, that so many queer and trans kids lack.

I worked as the Editor of *Our Lives* from 2012 to 2019, and during that time I had the pleasure of helping dozens of people put some of their own stories onto the page. Sometimes I just provided structure and input for someone who wrote the piece themselves, and other times I did interviews that I turned into profiles. I got to meet a wide and truly wonderful array of people that I might never have met otherwise. It popped my little queer bubble to reveal the far more diverse and far-reaching LGBTQ+ community that exists in Wisconsin and beyond. I learned so much, including more and more about how I wanted to show up in the world.

It's been five years since I stepped down from my position at *Our Lives* to pursue different career opportunities. I offer this piece as a show of gratitude for everyone who has shared their stories with me and with *Our Lives* over the years. I am who I am today because of the people and the communities who've loved me and welcomed me in. Because while my individual life is just a collection of sometimes messy anecdotes, we all plug into a bigger story that gives shape to our history, present, and future. We are all (ideally) held by and beloved parts of a larger community.

**CAME OUT FIGHTING**

When I step back and look at my life now, there's a lot that would truly blow the mind of my child self: to be out and proud as a trans/

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genderqueer, bisexual, polyamorous person, to be making music with people I love, to participate in a sport I love, to do a job that feels meaningful, to have a wonderful chosen family, to care for two adorable dogs and multiple partners and to have a comfortable home of my own.

Not to say there aren't plenty of hard times and challenges (I wish!), but I am, in so many ways, absolutely living a dream that I didn't have the ability to even articulate when I was younger. I lacked the language, the models of possibility, that so many queer and trans kids lack. It's only been in the past decade and a half that I feel like I finally started to see and learn from people whose stories really resonated with me and what I was looking for. And it was through all of my communities—music, roller derby, burlesque and drag, *Our Lives*, and so on—that I found them.

**My temper mostly manifested in those schoolyard rumbles, always with boys, usually over gendered slights against myself or others who wouldn't or couldn't fight back. Funnily enough, I would later kiss a couple of those boys. If I could beat (or match) you in a fight, and you still wanted to kiss me, then I was interested.**

I was born in Winona, Minnesota to a mother who taught elementary school and a father who spent his life as a Presbyterian minister. I was and am the youngest of three children, and I've been told that I both do and do not at all embody the "youngest child" stereotypes. I was and am a ham (see: attention hog) and a bit of a smart ass (see: surly and loud whenever I feel like I'm not being heard or taken seriously). I was

drawn toward leadership roles, suffered a serious case of helium hand, and could be prone to rigidity when what was called for was softness and adaptability.

I adored my older siblings and was simultaneously tormented by them, my frustrations over which I took out on schoolyard bullies through too many tussles and fistfights to count. Justice—at least what I perceived to be just—was (and is) my driving motivation.

My parents never entirely knew what to do about their unusual, artsy, tempestuous children. All three of us were prone to fits of rage that were hard to explain or control. My temper mostly manifested in those schoolyard rumbles, always with boys, usually over gendered slights against myself or others who wouldn't or couldn't fight back. Funnily enough, I would later kiss a couple of those boys. The two extremes feel like a pretty apt summary of me as a kid—if I could beat (or match) you in a fight, and you still wanted to kiss me, then I was interested. I'm not saying this was healthy!

My mom was forever torn between her clear and deep love for her kids and her expectations of who she thought we ought to be. Wanting girl children she could dress up in frilly clothes and painted nails, she gave birth instead to two take-no-shit tomboys (both of whom grew up to be queer!). I climbed trees and played in the dirt and much preferred GI Joes to Barbies. I lusted after the outfits of the leading men in movies.

I don't remember ever thinking much about my gender, although lots of people—adults and kids alike—didn't hesitate to force me to confront it: "Are you a boy or a girl?" When that question was hurled at me with such clear anger or annoyance, over and over again, I answered "GIRL" with my whole chest. I only knew I wasn't a boy, and that I didn't like the implication that I was some kind of "other" that people thought was wrong. The world around me didn't show me any other options or ways of being outside that binary, so I clung to "girl" and "woman" for years, despite the feeling that it wasn't quite the right fit.

#### CORE MEMORIES

Four years old: A beautiful, sunny summer day. I was playing in the front yard of our little house next to dad's church. I was wearing only shorts, reveling in the feeling of the sun on my bare chest. An older woman walked by and turned to stare at me. Then she raised a finger and her voice and called out, "Young girls don't run around with their shirts off!" Shame burned my cheeks and I ran inside to find a t-shirt. I was mad at the woman and at myself for doing something that made her yell at me. I won't take off my shirt in front of anyone again until my 20s.

Second grade: Our teacher announced that we'd be taking an "imaginary trip to England" for class, complete with a visit by "the Queen," who was actually the English mom of one of our classmates. My own mother took this announcement to mean that we should dress up for the day and insisted I wear a dress to school. I had not done so since maybe once or twice in kindergarten, and I was not happy. Worse, when I got to school, it was clear that no one else's parents had interpreted the event in the same way. At recess, I huddled in a corner, shivering and miserable during a snowy Minnesota winter day, cursing the whole idea that girls have to wear dresses for anything, ever, if they didn't want to. Instead, I lusted after the suits and uniforms of the male characters in my favorite shows and movies: Indiana Jones, Glory, and The Rocketeer.

As far back as I can remember, I fought my mom about wearing dresses. They made me feel a full-body ick that I didn't yet have the language to explain. The compromise was always that I could wear what I wanted on most regular days but was required to put on a dress

and tights for church and other special occasions. This was not a compromise I enjoyed, but already I was learning to take the small wins where I could.

Third grade: My older sister brings home a VHS copy of "Dirty Dancing" and we watch it obsessively until the rental is up. I'm not sure yet why I'm equally entranced by both Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Gray, by the way the dancing bodies move so closely together, and I sure as hell miss the entire illegal abortion plot. There's a lot to learn about myself and the world.

Somehow, in the fifth grade, I convinced my parents to let me join my friend's family's Civil War reenacting group—portraying a young boy. I had been increasingly obsessed with that era of history since seeing the movie *Glory* and then attending a reenactment near our new home in northern Illinois. Reenactments were the perfect combination of history, acting, and playing dress-up for my adolescent interests. It never occurred to me to portray a girl. The idea of wearing a hoop skirt or a bonnet made my skin crawl. Without a second thought, I saved my allowances to buy my blue Union suit and dragged my parents to living history days all across the region.

I got my period at age 12. I sobbed in my mom's lap while she tried to reassure me that it was a beautiful thing. I didn't feel beautiful. I felt bereft at a body betraying me in a way I couldn't yet articulate. Mom decided that I should start wearing bras, too, despite my utter lack of breasts. I insisted on sports bras instead of the thinner, lacy training bras she held up at the store. My friends at school noticed and laughed while pulling on the bra straps, unaware of how absolutely mortified I was by the whole thing.

Thank goodness for '90s fashion. As I moved into my teenage years, I wore baggy clothes to hide the body I didn't yet understand and sure as hell didn't yet feel any sense of comfort in. I was drawn to punk and



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Mills family photo.



Some things never change.



Civil War reenacting.



Emily's softball career as a catcher.

rave—the music and the culture—but I was too terrified to cut my hair short like I wanted. I had already become the target of regular verbal harassment and abuse by my peers and even adults for not fitting their idea of what a “girl” should look and act like. Instead, I grew my hair out into an absolutely unruly mop that I had no idea what to do with, and hated it. I hid my crushes on girls and boys, terrified of being perceived as having a sexuality. I went out of my way never to be physically affectionate with anyone, especially girls. Surely they would recoil. Surely they could tell.

### AN APOCALYPSE

Like most teenagers, I was fully absorbed in the project of self-discovery, trying a little bit of a lot, following my heart and my head into everything from learning to play the drums to playing Dungeons & Dragons to writing underground newsletters (that would get me suspended from school at one point!). I was making friends, losing friends, lusting after friends, being confused about whether I was just really fascinated by that girl or maybe wanted to kiss her.

In the middle of all that, my mom got sick. First, she had to have a benign cyst removed from her pituitary gland, a surgery that seemed to go well and we all breathed a sigh of relief. A year later the cyst came back, and so the doctors removed it again, and that time they left behind a stent in the hopes that it would prevent another recurrence. What we didn't know until many years later was that the stent was from a contaminated batch that gave my mom a fungal infection in her brain. She spent two years in and out of surgeries, the ICU, and rehab facilities battling the seemingly never ending infections and brain damage that resulted.

At 15 years old, with my two older siblings out of the house and just me and dad at home, I found myself acting as one of two primary caregivers for my mom. I learned how to help her dress, use the bathroom, eat food, and kept an eye out for times she got confused and tried to get behind the wheel of our minivan, convinced she had errands to run. I picked her up and checked her over after falls. I gave the stink eye to people who stared at the helmet she had to wear to protect her head after doctors removed a section of skull bone to alleviate swelling.

I also learned how to compartmentalize the hell out of my feelings. It was far too overwhelming to really think about how I felt about what was happening to my mom and my utterly changed life. I played shows with my punk band and pined over unrequited crushes and went to Medieval Times for friends' birthdays—and then I went home and entered an entirely different world.

On a beautiful, sunny September morning, while I sat and daydreamed in Algebra class, I was summoned to the principal's office. Dad was waiting for me there, and though he didn't say anything, I knew in my gut why. He took me home, where the assistant pastor at his church was waiting along with my brother and sister—suddenly back from their lives out-of-town. Mom had gone brain dead early that morning. A massive brain hemorrhage. She was being kept on life support long enough for us to say our goodbyes.

### LEARNING TO LOVE THE MARATHON, NOT THE SPRINT

For a long time, I measured my life in Before and After my mom died. I understand why. I was just shy of 16 years old at the time—she was only 50. I am sure now that experiencing that kind of cataclysmic event played a large role in how I lived my life after. I had always been curious, outgoing, and energetic. It was like all of that became turbo-charged in the aftermath. Suddenly knowing how short life could be, that I or anyone I loved could die at any moment, made me determined not to waste any time.

For a long time, I measured my life in Before and After my mom died. I understand why. I was just shy of 16 years old at the time—she was only 50. I am sure now that experiencing that kind of cataclysmic event played a large role in how I lived my life after.

Playing in multiple bands. Helping organize and write for a grassroots media website called Dane101 (RIP). Co-producing the Fire Ball Masquerade for 10 years (also RIP). Editing *Our Lives*. Joining roller derby (going on 13 years now!). Being a blogger. Being an opinion columnist. Somehow becoming a blogger again (but in newsletter form). Taking up photography. Acting on stage. Acting in a web series. DJing a radio show. Becoming a club DJ. Joining a prescribed fire team. I'm not about to list my entire resume here, but you get the picture.

One of the most common questions people have asked me throughout most of my adult life is, “When do you have time to sleep?” The secret is that sleep is very important to me and, thankfully, I tend to sleep pretty well. But as I've gotten older, I do understand why people wonder. It's only recently that I've finally begun to do the work to see where I'm overdoing it, being too hard on myself to be “productive” and “useful,” and letting myself be choosier about how I spend my time and

energy. I'm learning that it's OK to just rest and spend time with people I love. That I should let myself be proud of what I've done and who I've become. The passage of time and new milestones to draw from help. Therapy has been good, too! It's definitely an ongoing process.

Throughout all of it, figuring out my gender and sexuality has also been a journey. In some ways, losing my mom and then moving away from my dad (who retreated into his grief and then rebuilt a life with a new family—a good thing for him, but with the consequence of growing distance between us) gave me unexpected space to explore who I wanted to be. I don't believe “things happen for a reason.” I just believe in taking what comes and deciding what you want to learn from it, and what you want to do next.

### JUST HAPPY TO BE HERE

I've come out as bisexual many times over the years: First, very tentatively, when I was 18 and living in southern Oklahoma on a dare to make out with a girlfriend at a party made it definitively clear to me that I was not straight. Most recently, just this year, when I was invited to be featured as part of a Lesbian History Month project and had to explain how that wasn't quite accurate.

I turned 42 last November. I came out as genderqueer/trans just months before that. A decade after getting rid of the last, dusty dress I kept in my closet “just in case,” two decades after first fully coming out as queer, I feel the most comfortable with myself that I've ever been in my life. I like to describe myself as having a masculine side that's a butch dyke, a feminine side that's a swishy leather twink, and a secret third thing that swims around both.

I know there's more to come. I continue to learn about myself and about the endlessly possible ways to live a life, every day.

There are times I feel resentful that it took me “so long” to get to this

place. There are other times I'm just filled with gratitude for making it here at all. A lot of amazing queer and trans people never got to grow older, several of whom were friends of mine. I miss them every day.

So as I continue to age and my hair grows ever more silver, I'm determined to lean into my queer “elder” stage as it comes. Gay Jesus knows we need and deserve more role models for queer and trans aging, in all its glory and challenges and diversity. I'm ridiculously grateful to those who came before me, and those who are coming up after, for everything they are and will continue to contribute to pushing the needle and making things better for us all. It's one hell of an amazing community to be part of, flaws and all.

### A STORY WORTH SHARING

I thought for a long time about what I wanted to say in this piece, which thread to pull on in the messy tapestry of my life so far for the sake of, I hope, being at all interesting to you the reader. I also considered what felt like something I really wanted to share right now. Like anyone else, there are so many themes and experiences, changes and realizations, that it would be impossible to cram it all into a few thousand words and have it be remotely readable. Given that this is *Our Lives*, though, and given that I'm in my early 40s and only just came out as trans/genderqueer, talking about my winding path to something like gender euphoria felt appropriate.

I look back at the scrappy tomboy who held fiercely to their wants and needs and ways of expression, who fought (sometimes literally) to be understood, who sometimes overcorrected and was a mean little shit to others without cause, and I feel love for them. They had no idea what they were doing! But they survived long enough, with enough sense of self in tact, to meet and be open to the people who would help me become more fully myself. And to turn that into a story worth sharing. ■



**QUEER PEOPLE** have long contributed enormously to the fabric of our community through work that adds texture, vibrancy, and contemplation to our lives. To honor those creative efforts locally, below is our sixth annual survey of LGBTQ artists in the greater Madison area.

As always, this is by no means a completely comprehensive list. We reached out to our various networks for names and resources and did our best to contact each artist for updates. Entries are made through a form where participants are free to choose a category, self identify, and provide a description in their own words.

Thank you to everyone who participated and shared our form with their networks. We hope to continue building on this in future years, so feel free to reach out with recommendations at [contact@ourliveswisconsin.com](mailto:contact@ourliveswisconsin.com).

#### PERFORMING ARTISTS: BURLESQUE / DRAG

- Amethyst Von Trollenburg** | [instagram.com/amethystvt](https://www.instagram.com/amethystvt) | A drag and burlesque entertainer known as the Seven Foot Siren. She is a former Miss Madison Pride and is known for her sultry demeanor and vocal talent.
- Anita Spanx** | [instagram.com/spanx\\_me](https://www.instagram.com/spanx_me) | A creative queen who wants to make you laugh. She loves to bring you characters, concepts, and buffoonery!
- Anya K. Thunderkat** | [instagram.com/theonlyanyaknees](https://www.instagram.com/theonlyanyaknees) | Madison-based artist performing for more than six years, show director at FIVE Nightclub and This Is It!, and former Miss Hamburger Mary's MKE.
- Baylee I.J Davenport** | Aaleh has a passion for helping and supporting. As a leader, Aaleh shares her experiences of struggles with being part of the LGBTQ+ Community. Her strong dedication to sharing her story has uplifted youth and has helped them become resilient and proud.
- Bianca Lynn Breeze** | [linktr.ee/blbreeze](https://linktr.ee/blbreeze) | Bianca has loved entertaining and educating others through drag since 2012. She owns her own event management company, BLB Productions, hosting Bingo, Brunch, Evening Shows, and Private Events.
- Bryanna Banx\$** | [facebook.com/bryannabanxs](https://www.facebook.com/bryannabanxs) | Former Miss Club Wisconsin Bryanna Banx\$ has been in the industry for nearly two decades and is still blessed to be able to continue emceeing, performing, and organizing events all over the state.
- Cadence Vuitton** | [instagram.com/cadence\\_vuitton](https://www.instagram.com/cadence_vuitton) | Cadence is a Madison based up-and-coming Drag Queen.
- Cass Marie Domino** | [@theecassmarie](https://www.instagram.com/theecassmarie) | Fabulous at 50 and performing for more than 30 years, Cass is a former Miss Gay Madison Elite and the first trans woman to win the National Entertainer Of The Year Femme pageant. She is an advocate for the trans community as well as for people like her who live with HIV.
- Cynthia Mooseknuckle** | [cynthiamooseknuckle.com](https://www.cynthiamooseknuckle.com) | Known as the Queen of the Pups and the Mother of Moose, Cynthia Mooseknuckle is a Wisconsin-based drag entertainer and bingo host with stylings that vary from Broadway to country, diva ballads, and concept costuming.
- DaddyDon't GiveaDamn / MamaNo Shits** | [facebook.com/mamano.shits](https://www.facebook.com/mamano.shits) | Former Madison Pride King Daddy Don't Give A Damn is a fierce trans non-binary drag king that comes from burlesque and theater.
- Dee Dee Purr** | [linktr.ee/deedeePurr](https://linktr.ee/deedeePurr) | Dee Dee Purr has been gracing the stages with her comedic and theatrical style for over seven years. She has a monthly show at FIVE Nightclub, the third Sunday of each month that was awarded "Best Drag Event of 2023" at the Wisconsin Drag Awards.
- Gio** | [instagram.com/gio\\_guzman\\_180685](https://www.instagram.com/gio_guzman_180685) | Gio has been a drag entertainer since 2008. They infuse their performances with hope and their Mexican culture. They have represented as Mr. FIVE Nightclub, Mr. Gay Latino Madison, Mr. Club Wisconsin, and Miss Wisconsin Capital Pride.
- Jacques Infiniti-Hall** | [facebook.com/jacqmckinz](https://www.facebook.com/jacqmckinz) | Jacques Infiniti-Hall is from Milwaukee. He's a former Mr. Five Nightclub and co-hosts male revue

- THROB in Chicago. He represents the House of Mizrahi MKE Chapter.
- Josie Lynn** | [facebook.com/josielynn94](https://www.facebook.com/josielynn94) | An artist, ally, activist, and friend, 30 years ago, Josie Lynn came out on stage for the first time at a small club in Wausau for a turnabout show and started this fantastic journey. Josie wears many hats and, on occasion, a couple of wigs.
- Jupiter Voyer** | [@Jupiter\\_voyer](https://www.instagram.com/Jupiter_voyer) | Your trans Latina, indigenous deity is ready to serve you glamor, beauty, creativity and entertainment.
- Karma Zavich** | [facebook.com/karma.mirage.1](https://www.facebook.com/karma.mirage.1) | A former Miss Gay Madison and the co-director of the Madcity Drag Review at FIVE Nightclub.
- Kayos Mirage** | [instagram.com/worldofkayos](https://www.instagram.com/worldofkayos) | Now a drag performer for seven years, Kayos has grown to be one Madison's hottest show host with her quick wit and appreciation to each and every person in the audience. She directs multiple shows and drag bingos across Wisconsin and was voted as Best Drag Queen 2023 at the Wisconsin Drag Awards this last January. You can see her every Sunday at Five Night Club co-hosting the Mad City Drag Revue Show, Madison's longest running show.
- Lola Monroe** | [facebook.com/lola.monet.9275](https://www.facebook.com/lola.monet.9275) | A comedy queen from the final frontier of Alaska. From ballads to cartwheels, she brings a smile to all who watch her perform. She strives to support all manner of drag.
- Loretta Love Lee** | [instagram.com/sheezlovelee](https://www.instagram.com/sheezlovelee) | Crowned Miss Gay Madison 2023 and later Miss Gay Wisconsin US of A. Drew is also a Tattoo and Body Artist at Blue Lotus Tattoo and The Piercing Lounge.
- Lucinda Reer** | Milwaukee's campy glamorous Queen. Still pretty new to the scene but stealing the hearts of many with her winning smile.
- Lucy Von Cucci** | [linktr.ee/lucyvoncucci](https://linktr.ee/lucyvoncucci) | She's been performing for 10+ years and held many regional and state titles. Lucy's first love has always been the stage, and she adds her theater background to all she does.
- Madam Lacy** | [instagram.com/madamlacy](https://www.instagram.com/madamlacy) | A burlesque, drag, and vocal artist. Her performance style is a campy mix of Disney Princess and storytelling that's sure to have you laughing and blushing.
- Malaiya Marvel** | [@malaiyamaryl](https://www.instagram.com/malaiyamaryl) | Wisconsin's Queen of Cosplay since 2014! They cohost Wisconsin's only cosplay drag show: MANIA! At This Is It! in Milwaukee, and also host at D.I.X. Milwaukee. Malaiya has been featured in Entertainment weekly, was a Milwaukee Bucks halftime performer, and appeared on Judge Jerry.
- Mercedes Benzova** | [instagram.com/themercedesbenzova](https://www.instagram.com/themercedesbenzova) | A bodacious diva that's a whole lotta fun with an extra side of sass. She is Miss Gay Madison Plus and Miss Gay City of Festivals Wisconsin USofA 2023.
- Michael Lynn** | [instagram.com/thatchichaellynn](https://www.instagram.com/thatchichaellynn) | Pageant competitor, entertainer, MC, producer, and promoter. Former Mr. Gay Minnesota America and Mr. Gay Wisconsin USofA.
- Mimi Sanchez** | [instagram.com/mimi\\_sanchez](https://www.instagram.com/mimi_sanchez) | The life of the party, giving you face, grace, and no lace.
- Monica Ciccone** | [facebook.com/valentin.elizalde.397](https://www.facebook.com/valentin.elizalde.397) | Monica is a former Ms. Diva Latina, has been an entertainer since 1998, and hosts Noches Latinas at FIVE Nightclub.
- Mystie Von Cucci** | [facebook.com/mystie.voncucci.92](https://www.facebook.com/mystie.voncucci.92) | Mystie's drag can be described as fun and comedic. You can catch her at FIVE Nightclub.
- Nemo** | [linktr.ee/nemodrag](https://linktr.ee/nemodrag) | Nemo is Wisconsin's premier teen drag queen and is the newly crowned Mx FIVE Nightclub, at the age of 18 Nemo has broken barriers by introducing a new generation to the art of drag. Nemo co-hosts a monthly family friendly show "Voices of the Next Generation" at FIVE Nightclub. Nemo's story is featured on the series Generation Drag, Produced by Tyra Banks on HBO Max.
- Ponyboy** | [facebook.com/ponyboy.trevor.9](https://www.facebook.com/ponyboy.trevor.9) | A mix between funny and sexy, he gets the people hyped up. He wants to inspire people to be who they are and not care what others think. Mr.TRANS Midwest 2024.
- RyRy Minaj** | [facebook.com/ryan.moffat.39](https://www.facebook.com/ryan.moffat.39) | A male entertainer based out of Madison and performing since 2015. In this time he has captured the titles of Mr. Gay Madison and Mr. Gay Wisconsin USofA.

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**ADAM RAIFORD WILSON (ARWIL)**

**Multimedia** | arwil.squarespace.com

**ARWIL** is a 26-year-old multimedia artist based in Madison, originally from Benton, Arkansas. His work centers on the use (and misuse) of art materials to highlight the low-quality garbage that defines modern consumer culture. ARWIL advocates for consumption habits that support skilled craftspeople and rejects the mass-production of digestible corporate home decor.

From a distance, much of ARWIL's work could be mistaken for stains, spills, or actual garbage. In 2023, a TikTok in which he showed a series of pressure-washed paintings on cotton paper went viral for all the wrong reasons. Over five-thousand comments, primarily negative, hated the concept that time could be spent attempting to replicate the texture and color of trash. This reaction encouraged him to unpack why viewers seemed insulted by the concept and to push those processes further.

"People buy actual garbage every day, products that are designed to go straight to the landfill, but when I attempt to recreate the patina of their wasteful purchases, it seems to trigger something within them. I've never gotten such an intense online response, positive or negative, which tells me I've found something I've got to dig deeper into," he said. "I'm not immune to the sins of consumer culture, but I know there's a better way, and I desperately want people to think about that."

ARWIL combines traditional art materials such as oil, acrylic, and graphite with nontraditional application techniques.

Across both his 2D and 3D work, ARWIL's pieces reject the ideals of modern consumer habits in favor of compositions and textures that are impossible to recreate or mass produce. Instead of selling prints, which he feels sacrifices essential textures and shadows, he makes his sketches and small works available at accessible price-points.

After moving from Arkansas four years ago, ARWIL has settled in Madison with his husband, Logan, and their two cats. Since then, his work has been featured in coffee shops and retail spaces around the city. This spring, ARWIL completed a 3-month artist residency in Beaumont-des-Pertuis, France. Working in such a remote and ancient village provided a unique opportunity to focus exclusively on his art and to draw inspiration from the textures around him. Works from this residency were exhibited at The Bounty in Madison, where he will be undertaking his next residency in 2025. ■

**Sasha Christine** | [facebook.com/sasha.christine.1](https://facebook.com/sasha.christine.1) | Her drag can be described as a tiny little dancer, who's polished and pristine, but doesn't mind getting a little dirty. You can catch her at FIVE Nightclub.

**Susan Sox** | [facebook.com/auntsusansox](https://facebook.com/auntsusansox) | Madison's Premier Auntie of Drag. Her charming, comedic stylings make you feel right at home. Why don't you ever visit your Auntie Sue anymore!?

**Victoria Lynn** | [facebook.com/ThickVick89](https://facebook.com/ThickVick89) | Former Miss Gay Madison, Miss LaCage Plus, and Miss Gay Wi USofA. Also known as Bicky the Bucking Queen, she is a quick witted, kind, and statuesque drag queen.

PERFORMING ARTISTS: COMEDY

**Dina Nina** | [dinanina.com](https://dinanina.com) | Trans comedian, speaker, actor, and Madison alder. Her sass and charm has been featured in comedy festivals and world-class comedy venues. She is the founder of Lady Laughs Comedy & Artemis Bow Productions. She was named one of the "58 Trans Women Actors You Should Know & Also Love" by AutoStraddle.

**Forest Reed** | Forest is an artist, comedian, and event host.

**Linda Lenzke** | [mixedmetaphorshmy.com](https://mixedmetaphorshmy.com) | Linda is an amateur stand-up comedian, spoken word storyteller, blogger, and events emcee. She riffs on the culture wars, politics, surviving the pandemic, and draws from her lived experience as an aging lesbian and woman in recovery.

**Vanessa Tortolano** | [facebook.com/vanessa.tortolano](https://facebook.com/vanessa.tortolano) | Vanessa jumps from improv comedy to a bit of burlesque and can be found on various Madison stages in support of women- and LGBTQ-centric events.

PERFORMING ARTISTS: DANCE/THEATER

**Alyssa Pon-Franklin** | [facebook.com/alyssapon](https://facebook.com/alyssapon) | Alyssa has been active in the Madison community for seven years as a stage manager. She has worked with many local companies, including Madison Opera, Stage Q, and Oregon Straw Hat Players.

**Ankita Bharadwaj** | Produces the show *Subtle Desi Traits* (writing and sound production including audio editing, mixing, fading, etc.).

**Brian Wild** | [artandsoulinnovations.org](https://artandsoulinnovations.org) | Brian Wild has been a key figure in Proud Theater since 2001, leading the organization as Artistic Director and Executive Director of its fiscal sponsor, Art and Soul Innovations, Inc. An accomplished playwright, director, and LGBTQ+ youth advocate, Brian's dedicated his career to creating inclusive spaces.

**Chris Walker** | [education.wisc.edu/staff/walker-chris](https://education.wisc.edu/staff/walker-chris) | A professor of dance and founding artistic director of the First Wave program in the Office of Multicultural Arts Initiatives at UW-Madison. He is also a senior choreographer with the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica and program director for the New Waves Dance & Performance Institute in Trinidad & Tobago.

**Dana Pellebon** | Dana has acted, directed, written, and produced for a variety of theatrical troupes since 2001. She is a co-founder/producer of the Loud 'N Unchained (LNU) Black Theater Festival and the Caburlesque troupe, Foxy Veronica's Peach Pies.

**J. Michael Bruno Productions, Inc.** | [madstheatre.com](https://madstheatre.com) | Host of SHOW BIZ BUZZ WITH BRUNO sponsored by Madstheatre.com A podcast that introduces audiences to theater, music, dance and comedy. Local artists, companies and personalities share their projects and backgrounds with host Michael Bruno every other Saturday afternoon, LIVE. The audio of the podcasts are then available on Apple, Sirius, Spotify, and Google podcasts and YouTube.

**Jay Gile** | [facebook.com/jeremiah.a.gile](https://facebook.com/jeremiah.a.gile) | Jay has worked multiple shows as a director for StageQ. Their goal is to always create meaningful, fun, uplifting, emotional, and thoughtful theater while also working on developing their voice in social justice works.

**Jim Chiolino** | [madisontheatreguild.org](https://madisontheatreguild.org) | A producer, director, and actor as well as a former president of the Madison Theatre Guild (Madison's oldest community theater organization).

**Kanopy Dance Company** | [kanopydance.org](https://kanopydance.org) | Kanopy Dance Company, a quintessential modern dance company, is a resident company of the Overture Center for the Arts. While the Kanopy Dance Company "informs" its works through its roots in the Martha Graham tradition, the company has developed its own brand, shaping an exciting new dimension and visual language to advance American Modern dance.

**KelsyAnne Schoenhaar** | [encorestudio.org](https://encorestudio.org) | KelsyAnne has a mixed career of music (from rock to symphonic to jazz), theater (in the Chicago area as a musician; in addition to writing "to" actors, as she wrote, directed, and produced original children's theater), and human services.

**Laura McMillan** | [ctmtheater.org](https://ctmtheater.org) | A proud Black/Lebanese queer womxn who is not only a 20-year theater vet, but a US Navy vet as well. Laura works as Children's Theater of Madison's Education Manager. Onstage credits include: "The Revolutionists" as Marianne (Bartell) and "Little Shop of Horrors" as Ronnette (Edgewood College).

**Neil Mills** | [neilmillsdesign.com](https://neilmillsdesign.com) | A scenic designer and an assistant professor in the Department of Theater and Drama at UW-Madison, he's also a proud trans man and member of United Scenic Artists—USA 829.

**Oh, My Stars! Productions LLC** | [ohmystarsproductions.com](https://ohmystarsproductions.com) | Oh, My Stars! Productions is a LGBTQ+ focused performance troupe dedicated to the preservation of camp and drag performance styles in scripted theatrical productions in Madison and surrounding areas.

**Orion Risk** | [orionleerisk.com](https://orionleerisk.com) | A director and theater artist whose work includes creating TransTheatreFest—Madison, crafting the virtual play GenderTalks from real conversations about gender between trans, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming people, and producing and directing as founding artistic director of Scene D Theatre Project (Iowa).

**Paul Lorentz** | A character actor and singer based in the Madison area whose most recent credits include appearances with Music Theatre of Madison, Madison College, StageQ, and staged readings of new works at Shake Rag Alley (Mineral Point). Madison's "understudy-at-large."

**Proud Theater** | [proudtheater.org](https://proudtheater.org) | Now in its 25th season, Proud Theater has been a powerful community of queer youth who create brave spaces for support and self expression. Proud teaches theater, activism, and the power of authentic storytelling to youth aged 13–19.

**Richard Ganoung** | The Madison-based actor is best known for his roles in the movies *Parting Glances* (1986), *True Identity* (1991) and *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss* (1998), but has appeared on stage with groups like TNW Ensemble Theater, the Madison Rep, and Forward Theater.

**Robert (Bobby) Goderich** | Goderich's love for singing brought him to the stage with Madison Opera. He's worked with local theater companies including Children's Theater of Madison, Verona Area Community Theater, Middleton Players Theatre, StageQ, and Four Seasons Theatre.

**Roseann Sheridan** | [ctmtheater.org](https://ctmtheater.org) | Roseann is Artistic Director Emeritus at Children's Theater of Madison. She served the organization as director for 15 years and was previously Producer and Associate Artistic Director at American Players Theatre for 17 years. She has directed for regional and university theaters, including UW-Madison, Texas Shakespeare Festival, Next Act Theatre (Milwaukee), Penobscot Theatre (Maine), UW-Whitewater, Edgewood College, and UW-Oshkosh.

**The House Urban Arts Initiative** | [thehouseinc.org](https://thehouseinc.org) | Clyde Mayberry, CEO/Founder of The House Urban Arts Initiative, leads as Executive Director of the performing Arts department. With more than 21 years of teaching in movement dance, he champions a visionary approach, merging hip hop, house, and body positivity all in his dynamic rehearsals. Guiding the creative process, his expertise ensures an artist-driven exhibit shaping tomorrow's purpose, and not just in today's rehearsal.

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## ARTERY INK

**Design & Illustration** | arteryink.com

**WE'RE GLORIA AND MARA**, the artists, founders, and owners of Artery Ink. Our mission is to create hand-drawn anatomical designs for healthcare professionals while building community and inspiring you to love your insides! From custom group apparel for healthcare teams to raising awareness for organ donation, mental health, childhood cancer awareness and more, we have something for everyone!

Artery Ink began as a spark of an idea back in 2014 and has blossomed into a global brand. It started in a tiny 10x10' spare room and now operates out of a 4,800 square-foot studio, showroom, and warehouse in Milwaukee!

Artery Ink's journey was fueled by personal transformation. Facing our own health challenges and loss, we embarked on a journey of discovery that led us to appreciate our bodies and the importance of wellness. This newfound understanding became our passion, igniting our purpose to fuse art with health, wellness, and anatomy.

With Mara's background in graphic design and Gloria's expertise in illustration, Artery Ink was born. Starting with greeting cards, prints, and t-shirts, we expanded our offerings to include stickers, coloring books, custom apparel, and more. As our business grew, so did our connections, particularly with healthcare professionals. Designing apparel for this community became a cherished part of our work.

In 2020, amid the pandemic, we found a way to give back. Moved by seeing what our healthcare workers were going through, we created two special designs (The Heart of Healthcare and the "We're In This Together" Lungs) and raised over \$12,000 for a local "feed the frontline" campaign. We were so grateful to be able to help during this scary time.

This experience sparked a commitment to giving back, leading us to establish the Community Collection. Through this initiative, we support causes close to our hearts, contributing more than \$65,000 to date. Visit our website and click the "shop for a cause" tab to see what organization we're donating to next! We launch new products every month.

We are always creating the next designs, so if you don't see something that represents what you do or the journey you've been through, reach out to us at [info@arteryink.com](mailto:info@arteryink.com). ■

**The Space Cats** | [facebook.com/SpaceCatsMKE](https://facebook.com/SpaceCatsMKE) | The Space Cats are a loud colorful dance team created and produced by Jinx & Micah Ogé with the mission to spread positivity. Since 2015, the group has appeared in music videos, club performances, local shows, and Pridefest Milwaukee.

**Tim Sauers** | [facebook.com/tim.sauers](https://facebook.com/tim.sauers) | As Overture Center's Chief Artistic Experiences Officer, Tim is responsible for providing program and marketing vision, strategy, leadership, and management, and for developing and directing Overture Center portfolio of artistic experiences.

**TNW Ensemble Theater** | [tnwensembletheater.org](https://tnwensembletheater.org) | Danielle Dresden and Donna Peckett are co-Founders/co-Producing Artistic Directors of TNW Ensemble Theater. Established in 1985, TNW creates, produces, performs, and presents original works of art and cultural practice. The company collaborates with artists and scholars working in theater, social justice, visual arts, tap dance, and music to promote the understanding of diverse cultures while enriching the lives of all individuals.

**Trevin Gay** | [ctmtheater.org](https://ctmtheater.org) | An actor, director, teaching artist, arts administrator and is thrilled to serve as Associate Artistic Director and Actors Academy Director for CTM. He holds an MFA in Actor Created Physical Theatre from the London International School of Performing Arts.

**Zak Stowe** | [zakstowedesign.com](https://zakstowedesign.com) | An award-winning lighting designer, director, and producer for theater and opera having worked for various theater companies all over Madison. He's currently the Lighting Supervisor for the Overture Center, President of the Bartell Community Theatre Foundation, and Webmaster for StageQ, as well as being a founding member of the National Queer Theatre Alliance, and a pyrotechnician and photographer for the touring airshow act "Tora!Tora!Tora!"

### PERFORMING ARTISTS: DJs

**DJ Avalon** | [linktr.ee/theonlyDjAvalon](https://linktr.ee/theonlyDjAvalon) | A DJ since 2011, Avalon made her mark in Philly celebrating women in punk, riot grrl, and rock n' roll. Since then she has charmed audiences across clubs and bars with her emphasis on pushing women and LGBTQ artists toward the spotlight.

**DJ Ellafine** | [linktr.ee/ellafine](https://linktr.ee/ellafine) | A DJ specializing in darkwave, synthpop, post-punk and related alternative genres, dj ellafine spins everything from disco to classical. Twitch stream Tuesdays 10 pm CST.

**dj exgirl** | After several lackluster nights in spaces that felt unsafe, they took interest in creating spaces for queer folks to let loose, and dance! They currently work with other local organizers to host Sappho's Secret, a dyke dance party. They are passionate about featuring queer artists, women, and a slew of throwbacks.

**DJ Femme Noir** | [facebook.com/DJFemmeNoir](https://facebook.com/DJFemmeNoir) | Femme Noir spins an eclectic blend of highly danceable tunes. Catch a show at FIVE Night Club, Hot Summer Gays, Majestic Madison, This is It! in Milwaukee, or many other venues around Southern Wisconsin.

**DJ Millbot** | [facebook.com/djmillbot](https://facebook.com/djmillbot) | DJ Millbot (aka Emily Mills) runs the monthly, free, early HOT FLASH event at the Cardinal Bar, which also features a rotating line-up of co-DJs who help bring the throwback jam dance party vibes to a vibrant and diverse crowd. You can also find Millbot at various (mostly queer) dance parties around town, spinning their beloved house, disco, and techno.

**DJ Sarah Akawa** | [facebook.com/djsarahakawa](https://facebook.com/djsarahakawa) | Voted silver for Madison's best DJ 2022, DJ Sarah Akawa has been curating nightlife and community events for the queer community of Madison since 2014. Find her at Hot Summer Gays, Subtext, or Dyke Dive!

### PERFORMING ARTISTS: MUSICIANS

**Akiya Alexander** | [facebook.com/kiloakaskitiz](https://facebook.com/kiloakaskitiz) | The hip-hop artist and emcee's accolades include Female Artist of the Year (Madison Hip-Hop Awards

2016), Madison's #1 Lesbian Rapper (Queer Pressure Awards 2017), and Hip-Hop Performer of the Year (MAMAs 2019 and 2020).

**Amanda Jane Hoffman** | [facebook.com/AmandaJaneSingsALot](https://facebook.com/AmandaJaneSingsALot) | Heartful singer and guitarist, singing songs from the radio, stage, and campfire.

**Arthur Durkee Arts** | [arthurdurkee.bandcamp.com](https://arthurdurkee.bandcamp.com) | Award winning visual fine artist, illustrator, designer, letterpress printer, watercolor painter, photographer, book artist, composer, musician, recording studio engineer, vocalist, multi-instrumentalist, poet, lyricist, essayist, multimedia sound and light installation artist, land sculpture, and travel writer.

**Basal Jones** | [@basaljones](https://@basaljones) | Madison rapper with a sound fairly unique to his own but evocative of the historical body of queer music in a way that will appeal to various ages of listeners.

**Benjamin Rose** | [mxbenjaminrose.com](https://mxbenjaminrose.com) | Self-described as a "hopeful skeptic," Rose uses music to tell stories and connect with people. They are a core member of the Madison synth-rock outfit Kat and the Hurricane and also the creator and host of the podcast Queerful, highlighting stories of queer creators and trailblazers.

**Certified Scruffian** | [soundcloud.com/colortunes](https://soundcloud.com/colortunes) | Certified Scruffian of Afro American Productions focuses on drum and bass, and they experiment with different sounds and filters. Finding a voice in music has helped them find confidence throughout their transition.

**Crimes Against Nature** | [facebook.com/crimesxnature](https://facebook.com/crimesxnature) | Playing music together over the past decades, Crimes Against Nature (cXn) brings a healthy mixture of riot grrrl, queercore, alt, indie, and punk rock from Milwaukee. Featuring guitars, bass, keyboards, and drums, we collectively write original music we enjoy and sometimes share it with our friends.

**Damsel Trash** | [damseltrash.com](https://damseltrash.com) | Damsel Trash is the queer punk duo of Emily Mills and Meghan Rose. Celebrating their 10th anniversary in 2024, DT combines silly-but-serious lyrics and diverse sonic influences. Their songs have tackled subjects ranging from fiercely political diatribes to queer/trans love and liberation, reflections on bicycle safety, toxic masculinity, general horniness, celebrity crushes, misogyny in the music scene, and dogs they like.

**Dana and the Joanis** | [facebook.com/Danaandthejoanis](https://facebook.com/Danaandthejoanis) | Dana Perry is a powerhouse producer, vocalist and rhythm guitar player, with poignant original songs of an evolutionary folk rock variety. Jenna "The Joanis" provides smooth grooves on multiple live and recording projects playing drums, percussion, guitar, and bass.

**Emily AF** | [RockstarElise.com](https://RockstarElise.com) | Emily AF has been a live sound engineer and producer in Madison since 2007. A lifelong musician, her long dormant project, Rockstar & Elise, was given new life after she came out as transgender and began transition in early 2022. Though not explicitly about being trans or queer, her songs often speak of survival, struggle, and trying to make it through darkness to the other side.

**J-Star Domino** | [@JStarDomino](https://@JStarDomino) | Julia McConahay is a contemporary violin player, multi-genre MAMA winner, music creator, stage producer, and general collaborator.

**Jessie Waggoner** | [queermadisonmixtape.bandcamp.com](https://queermadisonmixtape.bandcamp.com) | One of the founders of the Queer Madison Mixtape project, they are drawn to songwriting themes such as rural queers, trans trucks, big hair, and femme utopias. Past projects include a drag gospel quartet, a femme-fronted Meatloaf cover band, Corn Palace, and Mary Okie.

**jilip** | jilip is where angst meets the ethereal, with catchy hooks and rad, socially conscious lyrics; an anarchist folk punk lo-fi solo project in progress for progress. Inspired by reimagining our social reality, ze makes music that speaks to hir soul and hopefully yours, too.

**Jinx Ogé** | [linktr.ee/jinxoge](https://linktr.ee/jinxoge) | A non-binary, Jamaican-American artist, songwriter, and fashion designer from Wisconsin. They gained recognition with a mix of pop, dance, and R&B songs and visuals. They were also part of a music number on the hit television show *Empire* and have an

upcoming single and music video, "Lavender Skies."

**Johannes Wallmann** | [johanneswallmann.com](https://johanneswallmann.com) | Wallmann is a jazz pianist, composer, and recording artist on Shifting Paradigm Records, a Yamaha Piano artist, and the inaugural holder of the John and Carolyn Peterson Chair in Jazz Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His latest album, "Precarious Towers," was named a "Best of 2022 Album" by Something Else! and a "Best of Bandcamp, June 2022" album.

**Kat and the Hurricane** | [katandthehurricane.com](https://katandthehurricane.com) | Kat and the Hurricane is an all-queer and trans synth rock/indie-pop band from Madison composed of guitarist/vocalist Kat Rhapsody (they/them), keyboardist/vocalist Benjamin Rose (they/them), and drummer Alex Nelson (they/them). The band has stirred up a storm across Wisconsin and the Midwest since 2017. Their debut full-length studio album "Got It Out," their most ambitious project yet, is available October 4, 2024 and explores themes of mental health, healing, and learning to love who you are.

**Killcrop** | [facebook.com/Killcrop](https://facebook.com/Killcrop) | The solo project of Josh Killcrop, one half of the founding members of psychedelic-industrial band Gentleman Loser, the experimental electronic music draws influences from indie rock.

**Ladyscissors** | [facebook.com/ladyscissorswi](https://facebook.com/ladyscissorswi) | Prolific and longtime Madison musician Stephanie Rearick joins forces with Brent George and Anne Bull for a boppy rock project with an irreverent core.

**LINE** | [linktr.ee/linesoundslike](https://linktr.ee/linesoundslike) | A queer indiepop band unafraid to play with labels, LINE weaves singer-songwriter sensibilities with multigenre arrangements. Vocalist Maddie Batzli works with bandmates Austin Lynch, Esther Chun, Charlie Coz, and Emily Mills to create songs that include harmonies, slap basslines, folk instrumentation, and synths.

**Little Red Wolf** | [facebook.com/littleredwolfmusic](https://facebook.com/littleredwolfmusic) | Bringing together the creativity and collective talents of Meghan Rose, Kelly Maxwell, Emily Mills, and Laura Detert. Formed in 2008 in Madison, LRW combines elements of indie rock, bluegrass, alt-country, and the harmony-heavy vocals of swing-era ensembles, over the course of three albums and numerous singles that are silly, earnest, dark, and joyful.

**Maceo** | [linktr.ee/macy\\_cray](https://linktr.ee/macy_cray) | An independent artist and singer/songwriter from Baltimore. He has auditioned for *American Idol*, *The Voice*, *ANTM*, *Xfactor*, and *Sunday Best*. In 2020 his fourth project titled D.E.E.P was released followed up by his Debut album "1330" which honors his grandmother and the home he grew up in.

**Meskales** | [flowcode.com/page/meskales](https://flowcode.com/page/meskales) | The Latin ska band from Madison takes the genre that had a brief commercial dalliance with punk in the 1990s, and marries it with Latin and surfer rock elements. The end result is a chirpy, high-energy, and brass-heavy sound.

**Michael Darling** | [michaeldarling.com](https://michaeldarling.com) | An artist, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer based in Madison. Compared to a wide range of artists such as Harry Styles, James Taylor, Perfume Genius, and Father John Misty, he blends elements of indie pop, folk rock, and jazz to create lyrically reflective and emotionally charged subversive music.

**RAT BATH** | [linktr.ee/rat.bath.mke](https://linktr.ee/rat.bath.mke) | RAT BATH is an all trans band that reclaim queer-coded villains from their childhood as heroes in their storytelling and strive for visibility in the music industry. They have been called Bubble Grunge, Alternative Emo, Dirt Americana and Melodic Hardcore. "Can't Stand The Thought of Us Ever Being Apart," released in September, is an autobiographical collection of songs in which vocalist, Fred, appears as himself at a different age in each track.

**Rin's Violin** | [facebook.com/RinQRibble](https://facebook.com/RinQRibble) | Genre bending violinist, currently operating with the groups Five Points Jazz Collective, Ribble & Rightley, and Frank Martin Busch and the Names.

**Schola Cantorum of Eau Claire** | [scholac.org](https://scholac.org) | Schola Cantorum of Eau Claire, directed by Jerry Hui, is a 12-voice chamber choir in the Eau Claire area dedicated to the historically informed performance of a cappella vocal music of the medieval, renaissance, and baroque.



**ELIZABETH HOLDEN**

**Author** | [facebook.com/holden.elizabethann](https://facebook.com/holden.elizabethann)

**ELIZABETH HOLDEN** (she/her) moved to Madison in 2006, mostly because of all the good restaurants. She was immediately intrigued by Madison's newly formed roller derby league and started regularly going to games. It took her nine years to work up the nerve to start playing the sport herself, then another nine years to publish a novel about it.

Backing up: Before her move to Madison, Liz went to college at Northern Illinois University, where she got bachelors and masters in physics. She'd started college as a journalism major, but switched to physics after taking an astronomy class that rekindled a childhood love for the topic. Her reasoning? She could still pursue writing with a physics degree, but it's hard to be a physicist with a journalism degree.

Backing further up: Physics was, of course, not the only thing that interested Liz as a child. She's been writing stories since before she could literally write, initially dictating them to her mother, who faithfully recorded Liz's deranged tales of CareBears getting kidnapped and My Little Ponies taking pregnancy tests. As she got older, she never stopped writing. Age 10: Two sisters win a contest to become princesses, then solve an attempted murder. Age 13: A serial killer gets his comeuppance, in a story inspired by the song "Hotel California." Age 16: One weekend away forces an awkward tween girl to confront her older sister's coming out and her parents' toxic marriage.

That last story, written for her high school lit mag, coincidentally has some themes in common with Liz's debut novel, *Mighty Millie Novak*, which was published by Flux Books in August.

Millie Novak is a mess. She's been home-schooled for years, and now, at almost-16, she's joined a roller derby team. Her older brother has moved out, her parents are finally divorcing after a lifetime of fighting, and all her teammates seem infinitely cooler than her. Millie is desperately lonely and terrified of rejection. If only she weren't such an awkward mess, she's confident she could get her teammates to accept her—and get that cute girl on the all-star team to fall for her.

She's determined to reinvent herself, and, with the help of her friend Pumpkin, crafts a plan to impress her teammates and get her crush to fall for her. Reinvention isn't easy, and she's tangled up in her own lies.

Liz was inspired by her experiences with anxiety, derby, and ridiculousness. *Mighty Millie Novak* is available wherever books are sold. ■

**Sister Agnes** | [nebulousthey.bigcartel.com](https://nebulousthey.bigcartel.com) | The ALTAR ego of C Nelson-Lifson (visual artist and member of band Proud Parents). Using a drum machine and throbbing basslines, Sister Agnes attempts to set to music the sacred oath of devotion and sexual repression.

**The Stolen Sea** | [storiesofthestolensea.bandcamp.com](https://storiesofthestolensea.bandcamp.com) | Hannah is a Clarinetist, with a varied background of Music Education, Music Therapy, as well as a lifetime of recitals and orchestral performance. It indicates a wealth of influence that has informed Hannah's perception of music and given her the opportunity to create ethereal layers of sound by using field recordings, children's toys, and her arsenal of wind, keyed and stringed instruments. Combining new ideas, new instrumentations, and new technologies Hannah's music is truly unique. Hannah has a solo album out called "Somersault," and her music collective, The Stolen Sea, released two new albums this year.

**threadfall** | [threadfall.bandcamp.com](https://threadfall.bandcamp.com) | An indie pop band fronted by Angie Remington (former bassist of Sassy Come Home, Token Minority, and Turbo Loogie). She writes numbers about love and awkward situations.

**Versatile Voice Academy** | [versatilevoice.co](https://versatilevoice.co) | Founded by Jen Shanin, Versatile Voice Academy provides voice, piano, and guitar lessons in an artist-focused, positive, and fun environment. We proudly offer abundant performance opportunities so our students build connections with other artists, nurture their creativity, and grow their confidence.

**Woke Up Crying** | [wokeupcrying.bandcamp.com](https://wokeupcrying.bandcamp.com) | A 90s alternative/grunge queercore project fronted by Doug Rowe (they/them).

**Wynter Bates** | [linktr.ee/wynterbates](https://linktr.ee/wynterbates) | Milwaukee native singer and songwriter Wynter Bates is advancing the R&B world by navigating life's tumultuous nature in their music, incorporating warm-yet-entrancing vocal harmonies. Wynter has a warm, enticing voice like Syd and produces explorative tracks resembling Solange's style. Wynter's love of music started in childhood and evolved into studying music at Columbia College Chicago. They later became a music and vocal instructor and continued writing, producing, and performing R&B and Neo-Soul covers and originals.

#### LITERARY ARTISTS

**Annie Menzel** | [gws.wisc.edu/staff/menzel-annie](https://gws.wisc.edu/staff/menzel-annie) | A political theorist, former midwife, and abortion access advocate, her first book, *Fatal Denial: Racism and The Political Life of Black Infant Mortality*, is now available from the University of California Press. She's also at work on a second book, *Birthing Paradox: Race, Colonization, and Radicalism in US Midwifery*, which seeks to understand the contradictory politics and practices of the homebirth midwifery movement since 1970.

**Ashling Meehan-Fanning** | [poemsbyashling.com](https://poemsbyashling.com) | Ashling Meehan-Fanning is a poet based in Madison whose work often includes themes of magic, ancestry, and the American Midwest. She spends a lot of time thinking about ghosts and trees. Ashling's collection *Colossal Girl* was self-published in December 2020. Her recent work has been featured in *Troublemaker Firestarter Vol. 4*, *Thó Wijn Magazine*, *Written Tales*, and *The Crackling Kettle*. In Spring 2024 she was the featured poet in the collection *Terra Verse* by Elixir Verse Press.

**Bridget Birdsall, MFA** | [bridgetbirdsall.com](https://bridgetbirdsall.com) | An award-winning author who overcame dyslexic challenges to balance a life in business and the arts. Her 2015 YA novel, *Double Exposure*, won numerous awards and outstanding reviews for its portrayal of an intersex character. In August 2022, she was ordained as a Minister of Walking Prayer (Cross-Cultural Studies) through the Center for Sacred Studies.

**Callen Harty** | [callenharty.com](https://callenharty.com) | Author of 24 produced plays, 50 monologues, and numerous articles, essays, and poems in various print/online sites. He has published 10 books with his 11th coming up. His

monologues for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum's annual cemetery tour, Talking Spirits, won awards from the Wisconsin Historical Society and the American Association of State and Local History. He is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association, Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and a lifetime member of Broom Street Theater.

**Elizabeth Holden** | [linktr.ee/elizabeth.holden.author](https://linktr.ee/elizabeth.holden.author) | Author of *Mighty Millie Novak*—now available wherever books are sold—Liz was inspired by her own (plentiful) experiences with anxiety, roller derby, and ridiculous schemes.

**Em Rowene** | [emrowene.com](https://emrowene.com) | Em is an author of queer fantasy that trends toward the gothic and the mysterious. Their works include *Fractured Magic*, a gothic high fantasy, and *The Case Files of Sheridan Bell*, a detective fantasy series à la Sherlock Holmes.

**H Warren** | [heatherwarrenpoetry.com](https://heatherwarrenpoetry.com) | H (they/them) is a poet and musician from Fairbanks, Alaska. Their debut poetry collection *Bound* was published with Boreale Books / Red Hen Press in 2023 and discloses their reality of living nonbinary in the rural context of Alaska. H received their MFA from University of Alaska Fairbanks and they are a MSW candidate with the University of New England and a 2019 Rasmuson Individual Artist recipient.

**Harper Hazelmare** | [brownhorseherbal.com](https://brownhorseherbal.com) | Harper Hazelmare (she/they/we) is an author and visual artist living in Madison. When not loving the color yellow in nature, they can be found in her home studio working with found objects and writing speculative fiction.

**J. Sargent Rady** | *From the Gravel Roads of Mudbrook*, an autobiography, is a journey of growing up gay in rural America. The struggles of self-doubt, understanding who you really are, painful losses and heavy grief. Triumphs and tragedies throughout, an open and honest telling of one man's path to acceptance.

**J.B. Corgard** | [buckygamgee95.wixsite.com/jbcorgard](https://buckygamgee95.wixsite.com/jbcorgard) | A transgender female author in the sci fi-fantasy genre including titles *Eldrida's Call to Arms* and *Subzero Quest*.

**R.B. Simon** | [rb-simon.com](https://rb-simon.com) | Rene Livingston-DeTienne, is a queer, disabled, fat, black, poet, visual artist, and recovery advocate. Under the pen name R.B. Simon, she works as the Managing Editor for a small press house, Harbor Editions. She has been published in multiple journals, including *Not Just the Fire* from Cornerstone Press. Her next book, *Bird, Bone, Blood* will be released in early 2025 through Milk & Cake Press. She has showcased art in several collections and offers commission work as well. She brings lived experience of mental health and substance use challenges to her work, and often engages in public speaking on these and other topics.

**Raphael Kadushin** | An award-winning travel and food writer, with work appearing in a wide range of anthologies, including three editions of *Best Food Writing*. He is the editor of two travel anthologies: *Wonderlands* and *Big Trips*.

**Rita Mae Reese** | [ritamaereese.com](https://ritamaereese.com) | Rita Mae Reese (she/her) is the author of *The Book of Hulga*. She designs Lesbian Poet Trading Cards for Headmistress Press, is in the bluegrass band Coulee Creek, and serves as the Co-Director at Arts + Literature Laboratory in Madison.

**Sami Schalk** | [samischalk.com](https://samischalk.com) | An Associate Professor of Gender & Women's Studies at the UW-Madison. She's the author of *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race & Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Duke UP 2018) and *Black Disability Politics* (Duke UP 2022). She identifies as a fat Black queer disabled femme and a pleasure activist.

**Tessa Jade Price** | [linktr.ee/tessajadeprixe](https://linktr.ee/tessajadeprixe) | Tessa Jade Price (she/they) is a multimedia artist and trans woman who writes articles and writes and records acoustic, indie pop, and electronic music under the name T. Price. She does everything from web design to advocacy and direct

work with the community. They work with Trans Advocacy Madison, platforming queer and trans arts, politics, and events, along with helping organize events, rallies, and protests. Tessa enjoys learning new things and meeting new people.

#### VISUAL ARTISTS

**Adam Raiford Wilson** | [adamraiford](https://adamraiford.com) | Adam moved to Madison from Arkansas in 2020. Adam's multimedia projects include "found item" style incorporations with layers of paint.

**Angela Richardson** | [angela-richardson.com](https://angela-richardson.com) | Richardson's work often explores the idea of "community"—how communities form, operate, and how art plays a role in their vitality. As a teaching artist, she's led classes at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, Center for Healthy Minds, Madison Children's Museum, and Madison Public Library.

**Anna Campbell** | [annacampbell.net](https://annacampbell.net) | An artist and professor, their sculptures, installations, and ephemera mine history and queer desire.

**Ari Gochberg** | [ari.g.ink](https://ari.g.ink) | Ari is a white, trans, and autistic tattoo artist at Red Clover Tattoo Collective who focuses on fine line illustrative works in black and gray or soft colors. He draws inspiration from manga and anime, botanical illustrations, mythology, art history, queer sexuality, and the human form. They believe in tattooing as a form of body reclamation and healing from the trauma carried in our bodies. They strive to create a consent-driven environment.

**Kelly Jane Goodman** | [cara.app/kjgoodman](https://cara.app/kjgoodman) | Kelly Jane Goodman is a painter who uses her art to explore her sexuality and her mental health. Her paintings often either depict a wide spectrum of human sexuality or her personal Inner World that she has developed as treatment for her range of mental illness diagnoses.

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EMILY AF

**Musician** | RockstarElise.com

**EMILY AF** has been a live sound engineer and producer in Madison since 2007. A lifelong musician, her long dormant project, Rockstar & Elise, was given new life after she came out as transgender and began transition in early 2022. Like other "Pandemic Trans," she was born anew into profound darkness, which you can hear throughout her music.

Emily makes what she calls, "Synth Driven Nostalgia Pop," because the songs often call back to other worlds and different eras, but no genre properly contains her. Some of this sadness is lamenting the time lost by not transitioning earlier, but it's also about looking to a past that in retrospect, felt less dark and hopeless. Though not explicitly about being trans or queer, her songs often speak of survival, struggle, and trying to make it through darkness to the other side. Others, like her third single, "Mixtape," are about using music to overcome awkwardness to find new friends, or in her case, other musicians to work with. Her first single, "Makeup," is about the armor we clad ourselves in, being literal makeup, or a shirt you feel invincible in.

As a child, she grew up in a bluegrass house, but came of age in the rock and industrial music of the late 80s and early 90s. A live sound engineer professionally, many other genres crept in over time, from traditional string music of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, to classical, to modern pop and hip hop. On any given day, she's equally likely to be listening to Skinny Puppy, Taylor Swift, or Alison Krauss. You can hear in her music this push to evolve and incorporate sounds and elements of all the music she loves and is inspired by.

Her September release, "The Future," is by far the darkest to date. It's a trio of songs about collapse, be it global, the end of a long relationship or career, and the most personal, the rapidly dimming hope that she, and most other trans people feel everyday, as the world closes off the ability for us to live openly in society, with access to health care, and to live without fear of arrest for just being ourselves. As she ramps up to live shows in the late fall, in which she plans to bring arena-level show production to the small stage, one large question of identity looms over her. She is proudly and openly trans and queer (and married), but she doesn't want to be trapped by that definition. She wants to be someone's favorite new artist who happens to be trans and queer. Find Rockstar & Elise anywhere you stream music. ■

**Babette Wainwright** | [babettewainwright.com](http://babettewainwright.com) | As a youth, Babette exhibited at the Centre d'Art of Port au Prince, Haiti. In the U.S., her work has been shown in Baton Rouge, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Chicago, Iowa, North Carolina, and Madison. In 1998, she discovered the pleasure and power of expressing herself with clay, making sculptures which are informed both by her African roots, and by the work of the pre-Colombian people of Haiti, the Arawaks.

**Bear Cunningham** | [redclovertattoocollective.com](http://redclovertattoocollective.com) | A queer tattoo artist at Red Clover Tattoo Collective specializing in fine-line minimalist and illustrative design. They love working with a range of subject matter from florals, pop culture references, celestial bodies, and occult imagery, to pin-ups, portraits, and anything involving queer forms and identity.

**Benjamin D. Rinehart** | [benrinehart.com](http://benrinehart.com) | Benjamin's images depict an autobiographical narrative critiquing relationships between people and identity. As a member of the LGBTQ community, Benjamin uses personal experience to raise awareness about issues affecting under-represented and marginalized people. Each piece is intended to have numerous readings beyond the initial view, contributing to a wider dialog.

**Bernie & Zuzu** | [bernieandzuzu.com](http://bernieandzuzu.com) | Bernie Witzack is the current Artist-in-Residence at Pinney Public Library. They believe everyone deserves to have more beauty and joy in their lives, adding it through hand painted, printed and dyed home goods, accessories, and prints.

**Beth Racette** | [bethracette.com](http://bethracette.com) | Beth Racette's visual art spans a variety of media—acrylic ink paintings, sculptures, and installations. She generally likes to use her artwork to delve into a topic. Since 2010 she has been working on a series of paintings, called Gaia, in which she explores Earth as a living being. She has also worked on an extensive exhibition in which she examined the U.S. prison system as a legacy of slavery.

**Bryon L. Hobbs Photography** | Bryon is a Madison photographer specializing in urban landscapes, nature images, and concert photography.

**bumblechub** | [bumblechub.com](http://bumblechub.com) | Jess Draws is a digital artist who loves bugs and exploring themes of fatness, disability, and queerness.

**Caramel Comics** | [caramelcomics.com](http://caramelcomics.com) | Caramel Comics is an illustration and craft studio focused on creating art of nature, fantasy, food, and queer pride. Our motto is "A Little Art For Everyone" and we strive to have diverse, inclusive, and sustainable products.

**Claire Warhus** | [snaggletootharts.com](http://snaggletootharts.com) | Claire Warhus has been a freelance artist for 12+ years and translated that skill set to tattooing (currently at Wayward Tattoos). Illustrative organic subject matter is what calls to her the most, especially portraits and animals mixed with plant life.

**David Wells** | [finearts.edgewood.edu/art-department/faculty/david-wells](http://finearts.edgewood.edu/art-department/faculty/david-wells) | Gallery Director at Edgewood College and former Executive Director of Edfred, the creative residency program of the Terry Family Foundation. Wells also serves as Director of Ernest Hüpeden's Painted Forest and Study Center, Edgewood College's restored folk art site in Valton, WI.

**Elaine Pasinski Thomas** | Visual artist, painter of portraits and landscapes in oil and acrylic. Elaine's paintings are of elderly, disabled, poor, and oppressed persons in a manner that is compelling to the viewer to see their humanity. Elaine's landscapes are intended to illustrate the beauty of Creation.

**Goldie Raye** | [goldieraye.com](http://goldieraye.com) | A freelance illustrator, designer, fine art photographer, and printmaker, her art work focuses on gender identity and defining the female queer gaze.

**Heather C. Williams** | [drawingtogether.com](http://drawingtogether.com) | Heather is an ontological artist and the author of Drawing as a Sacred Activity. An ontological artist listens to their heart and soul and draws out a song, a dance, a drawing, a painting, a poem, and more. Since Heather was a child, drawing has been a way to learn about the world around and within.

**Janis Nussbaum Senungetuk** | [janis-senungetuk.pixels.com](http://janis-senungetuk.pixels.com) | After 40+ years of fine art education/working in a variety of mediums and exhibiting,

Janis' focus now is the healing power of art. Janis' images of farmers' markets, gardens, flowers, and the wildlife living/visiting the park nearby, capture the vibrant colors, textures and light. Janis' work is included in the collection of various hospitals locally and in Europe.

**Jaundy Brunswick** | [jaundybrunswickart.com](http://jaundybrunswickart.com) | Jaundy's work explores and critiques personal identity and highlights the space between self-perception, others' perceptions, and how easy it is to alter those perceptions.

As a woman of color, raised by white parents in a predominantly white farm community and education system, Jaundy has spent life balancing the urge to blend in while simultaneously needing to feel heard.

**Kaci Sullivan** | [ksullivandesignsit.wixsite.com/timecapsule](http://ksullivandesignsit.wixsite.com/timecapsule) | A visual artist who works in both traditional and digital mediums. Currently he runs KS Strategy & Design, a business that focuses on virtual spaces and events. He's known for his paintings and oceanic porcelain sculptures, as well as his organization: Trans Liberation Art Coalition.

**Karin Wolf** | Karin serves as the Arts Administrator for the City of Madison, curating events, running grant programs, and advocating for all things arts and artist. She goes to neighborhoods for local art projects and learns of the community's concerns and addresses them through art.

**Kimberly A. Blanchette** | [kimberlyblanchette.com](http://kimberlyblanchette.com) | An author (poetry, plays, inspirations), artist (painter, photographer), activist, officiant, and comedienne. Kimberly currently resides in Janesville with her wife Colleen and is a member of a local comedy improv troupe called Steadily Improv'ing.

**Lisa Kidd/The White Dog Studio** | [instagram.com/the\\_whitedogstudio](http://instagram.com/the_whitedogstudio) | My voice as a contemporary, abstract, expressionist artist using mixed media is influenced by feelings and nature. A lifelong artist, I love being in the state of flow from my subconscious through my spirit to the canvas. Painting the rhythm of life's emotions; blemishes, vulnerabilities, joy, challenges, and the pursuit of beauty in every experience and the opportunities to continue life's journey.

**Lisa Lauren** | [instagram.com/kettleblacksilver](http://instagram.com/kettleblacksilver) | Specializing in creating jewelry through silversmithing, she uses stones, crystals, bones, fur, leather, silver, copper, and a variety of other natural/found materials.

**M. L. Wright** | I am a photographer, a minimalist poet, and I teach a watercolor class. I am a volunteer photographer for non-profit organizations. I enjoy poetry open mics and poetry slams. Madison is the best city I have lived in.

**Mar Gosselar** | [@theseboneshavefeelings](http://@theseboneshavefeelings) | Mar (they/them) is a white, queer, and mad artist. They strive to engage with tattooing at Red Clover Tattoo Collective as a consensual, trauma-informed practice that centers collaboration and the client experience. They make art inspired by vintage illustrations, woodcuts, naturalist paintings, pattern-making, and their clients' input.

**Melanie Renee Photography / Dulcy Dog Photography** | [melaniereneephoto.com](http://melaniereneephoto.com) & [dulcydogphotography.com](http://dulcydogphotography.com) | Weddings, people, branding, and lots of dogs. Melanie is also a regular *Our Lives* contributor of both photos and writing.

**Michael Velliquette** | [velliquette.com](http://velliquette.com) | Michael Velliquette is an artist internationally renowned for his intricately crafted works in the medium of paper. Cut exclusively and assembled by hand, Velliquette's works can take hundreds of hours to complete. They are at once abstract forms made from colored paper, and also structures that from one moment to the next suggest fortress-like constructions, tiered mandalas, or complex mechanical gears.

**Natalie Hinckley** | [hinckleyproductions.com](http://hinckleyproductions.com) | A Director and DP with passion in supporting entertainment, LGBTQ, and recovery communities. She is founder of the creative studio Hinckley Productions, specializing in brand storytelling, commercial cinematography, live streaming, and event production.

**Nicole Bresnik** | [nicolebresnick.com](http://nicolebresnick.com) | Nicole Bresnick paints portraits and landscapes with acrylics on canvas. Her latest show was her first one in Chicago, earlier this year. Her mentor said painting is a form of meditation that puts positive energy into the universe. She treasures her painting time for both of these reasons. It wasn't until after transition that she began to paint seriously.

**nipinet** | [nedpines.com](http://nedpines.com) | A Michif, Anishinaabe, Nêhiyaw and mixed-European descent Two-Spirit tattoo artist working in Teejop at Red Clover Tattoo Collective. Their art focuses on the intersections of identity; culture; queerness; and deep, nasty, complicated emotions. They tattoo with bright color gradients and bold lines and love beadwork, ledger art, anime, decomposition, the natural world, and the human form.

**Nykoli Koslow** | [instagram.com/nykoli.koslow](http://instagram.com/nykoli.koslow) | An artist working in the realm of painting and drawing, fusing figuration with abstraction to explore notions of gender, sexuality, and agency. Part autobiographical and part research-based, his work pulls from ancient history, mythology, religion, mysticism, and a kind of theoretical physics infused with sci-fi.

**ohlain** | [instagram.com/ohlain](http://instagram.com/ohlain) | My name is Lain (they/he) and I'm a queer and trans artist specializing in 2D character art, both in realism and cartoon styles, as well as both digitally and traditionally!

**Owen Tuohy** | [instagram.com/tuohy15](http://instagram.com/tuohy15) | Owen Tuohy makes nice things. Illustration & design concepts, woodburning, mixed-media sculpture, custom lighting, and silly doodles. Pronouns: They/He.

**Paul Baker Prindle** | [paulbakerprindle.com](http://paulbakerprindle.com) | Paul Baker Prindle's images build on the traditions of portraiture, but quickly confound those traditions by using index, vernacular conventions, and the landscape to evoke impressions of the body that go beyond what is visually represented. This work reflects a number of strategies for engaging The Real, Gay and Queer identities, memory, and the practice of portrait making from various emotional positions including loss, isolation, trauma, and

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melancholia. Paul was recently named the new Gabriele Haberland Director of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA).

**Rae Senarighi Fine Art / Transpainter** | [transpainter.com](http://transpainter.com) | Rae is a non-binary cancer survivor inspiring self-compassion, activism, and gender resilience via unapologetic portraiture of vibrant transgender and non-binary power. On a mission to spread self-acceptance, as the creator of the “You Are Loved” campaign, Rae’s message has found a home on billboards in thousands of locations across the U.S. and Canada and sells Pride flags and LGBTQ+ affirming merchandise around the world. His partnerships with various LGBTQ+ nonprofits have raised nearly a quarter-million dollars for our community.

**Rae Sowards** | [instagram.com/raesowards](https://www.instagram.com/raesowards) | An author, poet, and fine art photographer with a special focus on shooting with film and in black & white. The photos are often beautiful and gritty at the same time, showcasing deeply personal reflections on identity, location, class, and more.

**Rolando Cruz** | [rolandocruz.com](http://rolandocruz.com) | An award-winning artist and photographer, as well as an ardent runner, who frequently explores issues of identity and race through his work.

**Rufus Jupiter** | [rufusjupiter.com](http://rufusjupiter.com) | Rufus Jupiter (they/them) is a queer-trans multidisciplinary artist in the rural Driftless region. Their practice combines ecological inquiry, improvisational movement, visual imagery, collaborative partnerships, and play. A founding member of WEdances Movement Collaborative, they instigate local queerspace dance parties and host a community radio show under the moniker “Titmouse.”

**Sarah Stellino** | [sarahstellinophoto.com](http://sarahstellinophoto.com) | Sarah Stellino uses imagery to explore the topics of intimacy, identity, and legacy. Her photographic practice is greatly informed by using a view camera, and she continues the craft and care of each photograph by creating prints by hand in the darkroom. She is driven by a deep sense of the importance of record-keeping and legacy-making and the impact that can have on future

generations. Sarah was a 2022 Finalist for the Women Artists Forward Fund and has exhibited work in Manhattan and Madison.

**Shawpawprints Watercolor** | Ashley Shaw Adams of Shawpawprints Watercolor is a watercolor artist who paints what she loves...and she loves a lot of things! Each of her pieces is inspired by her life, her friends, her family, and her preferred methods of escapism. From florals to fantasy, Ashley enjoys painting it all.

**SNollPhotography** | [snollphotography.com](http://snollphotography.com) | Artistic photography of people, places, and things. Specializing in portrait, boudoir (all genders), events (theater, drag), and sports.

**Sursiq** | Digital artwork inspired by movie and video game posters.

**T.L. Luke Park** | [tl-luke.com](http://tl-luke.com) | A professional illustrator providing printed goods, custom commission services, and art business consultations. In 2018, she started illustrating empowered g\*rls, exploring whimsically dark and often spooky worlds.

**The Art of Dena Tullis** | [linktr.ee/denatullisart](http://linktr.ee/denatullisart) | Dena Tullis is a southern Wisconsin-based artist who loves to share her whimsical ideas. You may find her and her art at conventions around the Midwest, local Wisconsin markets and festivals, or even hidden in a planter at an amusement park—she loves to do Art Drops! Email to inquire to have her join your festival or event. Commissions available.

**Trans Artists Collaborative** | [thetransperience.com](http://thetransperience.com) | We are a group of trans-gender fluid artists who are dedicated to using various forms of art to raise awareness and understanding of the transgender experience. The centerpiece of our work is The Transperience—which has been described as an immersive contemporary, multi-medium art experience showcasing an impactful cinematic exploration of gender diversity. Previously shown at the Neville Public museum in Green Bay from November 11 to 17, it will be installed and open to the public at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay Student Union.

**Vintage Lulu & Vintage Moon Photography** | [vintagelulu.mypixieset.com](http://vintagelulu.mypixieset.com) | Specializing in capturing the essence of all body types and genders, our LGBTQ+ owned business is dedicated to creating empowering and inclusive wedding, family portraits, and boudoir experiences. Hartford, Madison, Milwaukee, Chicago, and beyond.

**Will Kiley Santino** | [patreon.com/willsantino](https://www.patreon.com/willsantino) | Best known for his *New Yorker* cartoons, but he has been drawing, writing, and making up new worlds and stories for his entire life. Will’s creative practice is multifaceted.

**Woody Olsen** | [woodyolsen.com](http://woodyolsen.com) | An abstract painter, his acrylic, watercolor, and mixed media paintings are rendered primarily in bright, floating, overlapping metallic colors. A graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, his work has been featured in juried shows throughout the Midwest. With a studio in Janesville, he is a member of the Association of Wisconsin Artists.

#### CRAFTERS/MAKERS

**After While, Craftodile** | [afterwhilecraftodile.com](http://afterwhilecraftodile.com) | Geometric mobiles and sculptures inspired by folk-crafts and the full moon. Think Himmeli, Pajaki, Puzurs, etc., things for your mantle, altar, home, and life. Made of a combination of things: brass tubes, nylon string, beads, crystals, love, and attention. They are sparkly and pleasing to the eye in the light. I hope they bring a bit of happiness and inspiration to you and your life.

**Angie & Kal Jones** | [itsjustus.shop](http://itsjustus.shop) | Angie and Kal are a mother and son company that takes resin and digital art and mash them together. Kal paints and draws while Angie does the rest. We do custom colors, ideas, and painting to customers’ liking and put things together to make happiness.

**Artery Ink** | [arteryink.com](http://arteryink.com) | Gloria and Mara are the artists, founders, and owners of Artery Ink. Their mission is to create hand-drawn anatomi-

cal designs for healthcare professionals while building community and inspiring you to love your insides! From custom apparel for healthcare teams to raising awareness for organ donation, mental health, childhood cancer awareness and more, they have something for everyone!

**Bruce Seeds** | [bruceseeds.com](http://bruceseeds.com) | A former architect who has been making quilts since 2008.

**C3 Designs** | [facebook.com/AwardWinningFineJewelry](https://www.facebook.com/AwardWinningFineJewelry) | Chris is the owner of C3 Designs, a fine jewelry store in South Milwaukee. He has been designing jewelry for more than 20 years and is the recipient of more than 30 design awards. All his designs are handcrafted to the highest standards in the store studio where he regularly works with clientele to craft that one of a kind jewelry creation to last a lifetime.

**Darn Queers/Universal Friend** | Kandra Shefchik is a multi-disciplined artist, sewist, painter, creator of wearable sculpture. They love to teach sewing at the monthly Darn Queers meet-up.

**Gremlin Goods** | [@gremlin\\_goods](https://www.instagram.com/gremlin_goods) | Two queer creators who view art as a way to bring together our community. All our items are handmade with unique stories and themes behind each piece. We make a variety of items ranging from jewelry, clothes, furniture, and more.

**Haus of Ogé** | [instagram.com/hausofoge](https://www.instagram.com/hausofoge) | A Wisconsin fashion brand created by Jinx and Micah Ogé. The brand features signature designs with a strong emphasis on LGBTQ+, drag, non-binary, femmes, and more. From high fashion echoing pop culture, 80s and 90s trends, barbiecore, and futuristic-themed looks and beyond.

**Jennifer Froh Jewelry** | [jenniferfroh.com](http://jenniferfroh.com) | Colorful anodized aluminum chainmaille jewelry and sterling silver wirework jewelry. Pride jewelry all year round! Customs welcome!

**Making Magic Market** | [makingmagicmarket.etsy.com](http://makingmagicmarket.etsy.com) | Handmade jewelry, children’s items, and accessories with pride flair!

**Mindfully Inspired** | [dot.cards/mindfullyinspired](https://www.dot.cards/mindfullyinspired) | Featuring an eclectic collection of art made using repurposed vintage jewelry, upcycled toys, and found items, Mindfully Inspired creates art without judgment.

**Orange Pops** | Orange Pops is a small art and design business owned and operated out of Milwaukee by artist Leslie Phillips. Leslie creates brightly colored mixed media art pieces (and coasters) that she sells to gift shops around the Midwest. She has been working as a full-time artist since 2012. Leslie spends much of her free time visiting her family in her “home” city of Madison.

**P&S Glassworks** | [@p.s.glassworks](https://www.p.s.glassworks) | Established in 2023 by a gay couple who make stained glass pieces, P&S Glassworks would love to bring some more color into your home! DM on Instagram for commissions.

**Queer Suave By Niko** | [queersuavebyniko.wixsite.com/queer-suave-by-niko](http://queersuavebyniko.wixsite.com/queer-suave-by-niko) | Niko makes garments from scratch for the queer community to their exact measurements, free of charge. Niko wants to stop dysphoria with fashion and garments and make it so as many queer folks as possible will have euphoria wearing garments made for them. Clothing shouldn’t have gender roles, so every piece is genderless, and anyone can wear it.

**Scott by Design** | [linktr.ee/ScottbyDesign](http://linktr.ee/ScottbyDesign) | Scott by Design’s creations reflect their love for body inclusivity, neurodiversity, queerness, thrifted finds, and all things unique. Abbey specializes in artificial floral wreaths and wall hangings, while Haley’s artistic pursuits are wonderfully eclectic—spanning painting, collaging, drawing, and more. Their art is not only an expression but also a form of therapy, reflecting their commitment to living life with kindness, authenticity, and a touch of silliness.

**SR Robinson** | [suebob.net/Beads\\_and\\_Such/0beads\\_talismans.html](http://suebob.net/Beads_and_Such/0beads_talismans.html) | An eclectic mix of ceramic beads, talismans, mugs, plates, tiles, and bowls.

**The Rat Tail Taxidermy** | [linktr.ee/therattail](http://linktr.ee/therattail) | The Rat Tail specializes in ethical and sustainable taxidermy such as bone art, wet specimens, traditional mounts, and pet memorials. The Rat Tail is trans/queer owned and they are always looking for new projects, opportunities, and friends! ■

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## Taking Care of Ourselves and Each Other

**Kristi Mason**, APSW, the Elder Advocate at **OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center** has information and advice for understanding and mitigating the causes of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

**AS THE ELDER ADVOCATE** at OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center, and an LGBTQ+ elder myself, I have had my share of concerns about how aging will impact me—especially my brain health. I'm excited to share what I have learned about brain health with members of my community. The more we learn about brain health, the more we are able to care for ourselves and each other.

In the LGBTQ+ community, we experience higher rates of Alzheimer's disease and dementia than the cisgender heterosexual community. These conditions are not a normal part of the aging process for either LGBTQ+ or cisgender heterosexual people. However, the long-term physical and emotional damage that results from stigma, discrimination, oppression, and fear of violence that LGBTQ+ people experience as a community increases the risks of developing conditions like Alzheimer's disease and dementia. This damage can be lessened by taking care of our bodies and by engaging with the community.

### WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND DEMENTIA?

Dementia is a general term that refers to changes in brain connections. These changes interfere with memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities. They are not considered a normal part of the aging process. Many different conditions fit under the dementia umbrella. Each has unique risk factors and each begins in different parts of the brain and has different symptoms.

Alzheimer's disease is one type of dementia. It is the most common cause of dementia symptoms. Alzheimer's disease begins by killing cells in the part of the brain responsible for creating memories, and within five to 10 years, it affects other parts of the brain. This impacts a variety of thinking abilities including: Making plans and following directions; managing bank accounts and medications; preparing meals; and, eventually, self-care tasks such as brushing teeth and bathing. Alzheimer's



Reducing our risk for Alzheimer's disease and dementia involves engaging in self-care and finding commonality and community with others.

Cognitive reserve simply refers to the number of connections we have between brain cells. The more connections we have, the more protected we are against the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

In the LGBTQ+ community, increased risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia can be tied to the same behaviors that are used to cope with long-term trauma, discrimination, oppression, and fear of violence.

Alzheimer's disease and dementia are not a normal part of the aging process for either LGBTQ+ or cisgender heterosexual people.

disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States; but it is not something that only impacts elders. Approximately 5% of people that have Alzheimer's disease are under the age of 65.

### RISK FACTORS FOR ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND DEMENTIA CAN BE MINIMIZED.

Having a parent or a grandparent with

Alzheimer's disease or dementia may increase your risk. Other factors such as medical conditions, alcohol and tobacco use, poor diet, and lack of exercise may also increase your risk.

Unfortunately, behaviors we have learned in order to cope with long-term trauma, discrimination, oppression, and fear of violence are the same behaviors that increase the development of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

**Alcohol and Tobacco Use:** The negative impact of tobacco and alcohol use on heart and brain health is well documented. The human brain has millions of blood vessels that feed it the energy we need to get through our day. As a result, risks to cardiovascular health are also risks to brain health. Reducing or eliminating tobacco and alcohol use are ways to decrease these risks.

**Poor Diet and Lack of Exercise:** The LGBTQ+ community has higher rates of obesity and Type II Diabetes in comparison with cisgender heterosexual people. This also impacts brain health. Our brains use up to 50% of our energy when we are very engaged with something and thinking hard. This leaves our brains vulnerable to large amounts of sugar in our blood stream. Finding a healthy balance of food that makes us feel nourished and provides adequate nutrients, in addition to getting regular physical activity, can help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's

mer's disease and dementia.

It is important to begin reversing the impact that systemic and societal oppression have had on us as a community.

### HOW DO WE REDUCE THE RISK OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND DEMENTIA?

Reducing our risk for Alzheimer's disease and dementia involves engaging in self-care and finding commonality and community with others. When we take care of ourselves, we can also participate more fully in taking care of our community.

Self-care can also help us increase our cognitive reserve. Cognitive reserve refers to the number of connections we have between brain cells. The more connections we have, the more protected we are against the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. There are many ways to increase our cognitive reserves:

- Stop smoking,
- Moderate alcohol intake,
- Exercise daily,
- Maintain healthy blood sugar & cholesterol levels,
- Engage in life-long learning, start a new hobby, and have novel experiences.

Alongside self-care, finding community is also a helpful step in building cognitive reserve. Engaging with different communities provides the opportunity to meet new people, which creates new connections within our lives



The OutReach 50+ Senior Alliance.

and in our brains. In taking care of each other, we take care of ourselves. By doing so, we make the world a better, safer, more healing place for the next generation of LGBTQ+ community members.

### WHAT ARE SOME NEXT STEPS?

Although challenging, finding and talking with a provider about concerns or risk factors for Alzheimer's disease and dementia is important in understanding whether an evaluation is appropriate. As we age, many members may be increasingly concerned about having negative experiences with medical providers who are not knowledgeable in working with the LGBTQ+ community. Resources are available online and here at OutReach. ■



**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:** Kristi Mason passed away after submitting this piece to us. You can read the statement released from OutReach about her passing on page 7.

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## When You Hire a Poet as Executive Director

**Abigail Swetz**, the new Executive Director of **Fair Wisconsin**, is a former middle school teacher and GSA advisor who brings her queer experience and connection-making skills to this statewide political advocacy organization.

**I'M ABIGAIL SWETZ**, the new executive director at Fair Wisconsin, and I'm a poet.

Maybe this is an odd way to introduce myself as the new leader of Wisconsin's only statewide LGBTQ+ civil rights and political advocacy organization, but I would contend it is the most authentic way. The very first question at my initial interview for this role was to tell the board something about myself that was meaningful and relevant to the position but would not be found on my resume. I told them I'm a poet, and that being a poet means I am able to see connections between things (like challenges and opportunities) that other people might struggle to notice. I'm not much of a rhymer, but I do have a lot of insight into the connectivity of the work we do.

And I have a lot of connections directly with Fair Wisconsin, and with the work we have done over the years far before I arrived here as executive director. In fact, the signs in yard after yard after yard stating "A Fair Wisconsin Votes No" in the spring of 2006 are the reason I moved to Madison. I was living in Tulsa, Oklahoma at the time, and such a visible show of support was unimaginable at my apartment complex across the street from Oral Roberts University. So I packed my bags and rented a sublet near campus, determined to build a life in a state that was fair and just for LGBTQ+ residents. I, and Fair Wisconsin, are still determined.

A few months later, I stood along the parade route at my very first Pride. I saw elected officials, community organizations, and so many churches marching while waving rainbow flags and pumping dance music from car speakers. It was my first experience of queer communal joy. I knew I belonged here. I had found my home in Wisconsin. After all, I was born and raised in Spring Green; Wisconsin made me. Today, as I type from my home in Green Bay, I am proud to live here in Wisconsin. Proud to work here. To love here. To vote here. And



now, to lead here at Fair Wisconsin, doing the work to ensure that everyone can find this state to be as welcoming as I did.

Soon, I was a middle school teacher in a small-town school district. It was my first year teaching when a parent filed a complaint against me. Ostensibly, the complaint was about the rigor in my curriculum, but considering the timing of the complaint (the day after the GSA had announced our participation in the Day of Silence the following week), I think we all knew what was actually going on. Despite knowing I had the support of school and district administration, and knowing that the nondiscrimination law in Wisconsin protected me from employment discrimination on the basis of my sexual orientation, it was demoralizing. I vowed that it would not silence me, and I kept working with the GSA, cutting ribbons and planning for distribution stations at each entrance door. One week later, on the Day of Silence, my GSA passed out more ribbons

than the number of students who went to our school. The hallways were a sea of rainbow, and the cafeteria was eerily quiet as so many students had taken a vow of silence for the day. The experience drove home the urgency of including protections for our entire LGBTQ+ community in Wisconsin's nondiscrimination law by adding protections for our trans and non-binary family, something Fair Wisconsin is dedicated to making a reality—and I believe should be our legislative priority.

And then there was the Supreme Court marriage equality decision, made possible by one vote by one justice... and by years and years of activism by countless activists laying the groundwork for change, activists like the ones who made up Fair Wisconsin. I was moved to joyful tears on June 26, 2015, but not for the reason one might expect. It wasn't because I could get married now; it was because I could get divorced. I had separated a year before, but Wisconsin did not recognize my marriage license from another state as valid, so I could not file for divorce. Now that I could, I could truly move on with my life, and two years later, marry the love of my life under the gazebo of Olin Park. We just celebrated our seven-year wedding anniversary and are raising our infant daughter together. I, and Fair Wisconsin, know this right to marriage equality remains too tenuous for comfort, and we must (and will) work to protect it.

Even my teaching is wrapped up in Fair Wisconsin. As a Gender and Sexuality Alliance advisor and 8th grade teacher, I witnessed the brilliance, and the passion for justice, our young people show on a daily basis. I saw them take to the streets because that was the avenue to power afforded to them, and I was inspired to go to grad school and study public policy so I could get into the rooms where decisions are made and bring their perspective along with me. In my last year of teaching, GSAFE named me Educator of the Year. As I finished my acceptance speech, I shared a message directly with my current and former students at the event, telling them that building safe spaces in our classroom had been a communal effort, and that I would take them and their stories with me wherever I go. I am proud that they helped get me here, and I think they'd be proud I've ended up here at Fair Wisconsin. In fact, I know they are, or at least one of them is. Sean O'Brien, Policy and Advocacy Director at Fair Wisconsin, is a former student of mine. Now I'm his boss, but I like to think we're still doing communal work.

In the final moments of my second interview with the board of Fair Wisconsin, I read them a poem that I had written. It was in the

form of hypothetical testimony before an all-too-possibly-real elected body about to vote on anti-LGBTQ+ policies. It ended like this:

*When we say pronouns save lives  
Or one trusted adult makes a difference  
We are not talking in theoretical terms.  
There are children who are still here  
Because a teacher used "they/them" to  
describe a student's smile as their own  
Or wore a rainbow ribbon on a lanyard  
Or insisted on creating a safe space despite  
your vitriol.*

*Rainbows and pronouns and safe spaces  
do not create queerness.  
They allow it to breathe.*

Maybe it was an odd way to end an interview, but at least I knew that, even if I didn't get the job, I had brought my full, authentic self to the interview process.

And that is what I want for all LGBTQ+ people in Wisconsin. That ability to bring our full, authentic selves to all aspects of our lives. That is the Wisconsin I believe in, a truly fair one, and that is the Wisconsin the Fair Wisconsin will work to fully realize.

For more information on the work of Fair Wisconsin, please visit [fairwisconsin.com](http://fairwisconsin.com). ■

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April Chandler and her wife Charity Chandler of Chandler House Bakery.

BAKERY QUEER-OWNED SMALL BUSINESS

## Chandler House Bakery

Love is the first ingredient in everything this bakery makes.

**IN WATERTOWN**, where an armed band of neo-Nazis disrupted Pride in the Park last summer, a lesbian-owned bakery is quietly changing hearts and minds one rainbow cookie at a time. Under the direction of pastry chef April Chandler and her wife Charity Chandler, Chandler House Bakery has become known not just for treats like chocolate chip cookies, carrot cake muffins, chocolate cupcakes, and “next level” cheesecake slices, but also as a space where neighbors and elected officials alike can grab a favorite goodie or linger over a game of checkers.

“We always say that love is the first ingredient in everything we make, because it’s the most important thing in everything we do,” said Charity, whose professional background is in DEI and marketing,

though she likes to play in the kitchen, too. “And we do seek to be a gathering space and a safe space for folks. We are not shy about rainbows everywhere.”

Raised in Watertown, Charity returned to settle there with her wife five years ago. Yet they never planned to open a bakery, much less one housed in the very building where Charity and her grandmother enjoyed baked goods in days past.

But when Covid hit, April found the opportunity to share her love of baking with the couple’s social media followers from their own home kitchen. Demand was greater than expected, and before they knew it, they were able to open a brick-and-mortar business downtown. To be clear, that involved hours of working two jobs until April could quit her day job running the retail cafes at Children’s Hospital, and launching first through the Watertown Market Kitchen.

“I had never even allowed it to be a dream,” April said. With experience as a professionally trained pastry chef in high-end restaurants, April knew well what opening an establishment and keeping it afloat would entail.

“And when I started this, what I had called a creative outlet in 2020, it’s truly what it was,” she continued. Certainly, the online menus of staples and unique creations point to her skill and artistic talent. (Buffalo plaid cake, anyone?) The bakery caters as well, but regulars keep coming back for favorites like blueberry streusel muffins, anything involving lemon, and the all-important chocolate chip cookie.

“It’s pretty amazing to see just how many people every weekend will



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

walk in just to buy your chocolate chip cookie,” April said.

“One or a dozen,” Charity noted.

However, it wasn’t the promise of sweet treats that brought in some special visitors not too long ago. On their way to a nearby roller rink for a child’s birthday party, state Rep Francesca Hong and her son were attracted to the bakery’s welcoming decor.

“When they came in together, she said, ‘I saw the rainbow flag sticker on your door, and I thought this would be a place that we could spend time that would be inclusive.’” Charity recalled. They took photos, but the Chandlers didn’t make the connection until after Hong and her son stayed to chat. Charity is involved in local politics as well; she was running for school board at the time they stopped in.

Customers consistently attest to the friendliness of the space in online reviews. “Yes, you need to have good food for people to continue to come back to,” Charity said. “But at the end of the day, we want people to feel special.”

At the time of this interview, plans were underway for Watertown’s third annual Pridefest. The event was held July 27 at the First Congregational United Church of Christ with no protesters in sight; a sign of progress. And while Charity’s bid for elected office was unsuccessful, “It showed me that while we’re not as far as I would like Watertown to be, there were really a lot of folks that were incredibly supportive,” she said.

April and Charity are not shy about who they are as individuals, business owners, and members of the Watertown community. They refer to each other as wives and proudly belong to the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce. They also believe in supporting causes they care about: In just the past year, Chandler House Bakery was able to donate \$12,000 to causes involving education, animal welfare, and veterans via matching tips and personal and business donations.

And if the Chandlers have any qualms about being partners both in marriage and in business, one would never know it.

“Honestly, we’ve been referred to as a power couple more than once,” said April, whose life with Charity includes five cats and a Subaru. “We complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses. So in areas where I’m not as strong, Charity can pick up my slack. And I know that this business would not be what it is today, and it wouldn’t be as successful if it weren’t for Charity.”

Charity concurred, “And not just because I like to agree with my wife,” she said. “Yes, I love my wife. But the fact that I really just enjoy spending time with her, it’s so incredibly crucial.”

Chandler House Bakery celebrates two years at 411 E. Main Street in Watertown this fall, a time of pumpkin pie and caramel apples.

“I created memories with my grandma in this building, and that’s what we seek to do now,” Charity said. “Hopefully, these kids 20, 30 years from now will remember coming in and getting bakery from us.” ■



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DISABILITY BIRACIAL PROTEST EDUCATION DISCRIMINATION

## Things Need to Change

**Kitty Steward-Trivedi** is a disabled, queer, biracial high school student who wanted to attend a summer program at UW-Madison. Kitty was initially accepted, then disenrolled. Rather than go away quietly, Kitty took a stand.

**LAST SPRING**, I was accepted in the Pre-College Accelerated Learning Program at UW-Madison, a summer program designed for “academically talented” high school students. It was an honor to be accepted early as an incoming freshman in high school.

### TERMINATION

A day before the class started, I was terminated from the program because UW-Madison was not comfortable with my disability. I was devastated after preparing all year for something that just got ripped away from me at the last minute. I never fully understood why UW-Madison excluded me. The day before classes started, the dean at UW asked me and my mother a whole bunch of ableist questions, such as how I went to the bathroom. It was very confusing because I go to the bathroom just like everyone else. I should not have to be drilled about how I go to the bathroom when nothing in my medical papers state that I have bathroom challenges. It’s ableist to assume I can’t use the bathroom, and it was shocking that a dean was actually asking such crazy questions.

A few different investigative reporters asked UW why they terminated me, and their response has always been exactly the same: “UW-Madison is committed to ensuring all students and families have access to youth summer programs.”

How does an organization like UW-Madison accept me on paper, but change their mind after they physically look at me? Is it 2024 or 1924?

### FRUSTRATION

Quite clearly, some students have more access than others. This makes me feel sad, frustrated, annoyed, and angry. When a commitment in a relationship fails, trust is broken. UW-Madison failed in their commitment to me, and they broke my trust. Instead of trying to fix that, they ignored me.

When organizations like UW-Madison say they value diversity, then dismiss someone like me from their program unfairly, it makes them look hypocritical. I am Black, and I am Indian. I am disabled. I am queer. All I wanted to do was go to school at UW-Madison over the summer.

### DETERMINATION

A commitment to diversity and equal access to education can’t just be a random whim. When UW-Madison terminated me, I had two choices. Either stand up for my rights or go away quietly, like UW-Madison probably hoped.

Defending yourself is definitely the more difficult option. The world is not made for people like us to stand up for ourselves. I don’t know why it’s so difficult. It really should not be so hard, especially when it’s so important to make sure horrible things don’t happen over and over again.

Being the first person to stand up against an injustice feels like a guinea pig experiment where everyone is watching your next move.



Being the first person to stand up against an injustice feels like a guinea pig experiment where everyone is watching your next move.

### ORGANIZATION

This class I was enrolled in lasted 21 days. It was called “Art, Activism and Advertisements,” and it was supposed to “challenge systems of power.” I was supposed to live in the dorms to be around other like-minded kids. That didn’t happen. Instead, my mother and I ended up commuting two hours each day to sit outside the campus building where I was supposed to learn about Art and Activism. And guess what? Even though UW terminated me, I still learned something about art and activism. I also got a chance to challenge a system of power.

Soon after we began sitting outside, more students started joining us on the lawn. Then students from other parts of the country were reaching out to us on Instagram (@DisabledTeensMatter) to see how they can make sure their universities do not treat high school students the way UW-Madison treated me.

### LEGISLATION?

The last week of our protest, we met with state law-makers to advocate for changes so this does not happen again. State-funded universities and colleges should not be allowed to discriminate against high school students with disabilities. What happened to me is a total injustice. And in the meantime, UW-Madison continues to believe they are committed to ensuring all students and families have access to their youth summer programs. Really? Because the view from here looks like UW-Madison is discriminating against people with disabilities. Just saying. ■



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# Visions

FRI & SAT, 7:30 PM • SUN, 2:30 PM

**Nicholas Hersh**, *Guest Conductor*  
**Kelly Hall-Tompkins**, *Violin*

The first of several guest conductors appearing with us this season is Nicholas Hersh. In his words, "The music on this program is immensely evocative, and it's all about the relationship of the human and the supernatural." Join us for the MSO premiere of *This Midnight Hour* by British Composer Anna Clyne, a piece based on poetry by Charles Baudelaire and Juan Ramón Jiménez that is sure to evoke a visual journey for the listener. Violinist Kelly Hall-Tompkins returns to perform two works, beginning with the gentle *The Lark Ascending* by Ralph Vaughan Williams, based upon a poem by George Meredith. She then plays *Tzigane*, Maurice Ravel's virtuosic take on Roma fiddling. This program finishes with the monumental *Symphonie fantastique* by Hector Berlioz, a passionate and musical vision.

music

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

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KELLY HALL-TOMPKINS

NICHOLAS HERSH



PHOTO: Stephanie Noi

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Feel free to dress in any costume (or not) and bring a mask (or not)! Either way, please

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