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A YEAR IN REVIEW

2024

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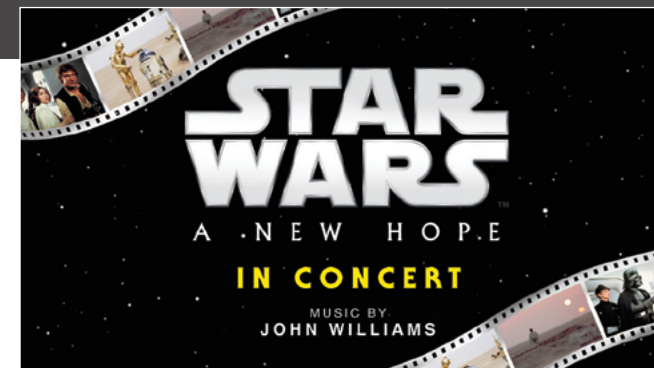
MSO at the Movies



Kyle Knox, Conductor



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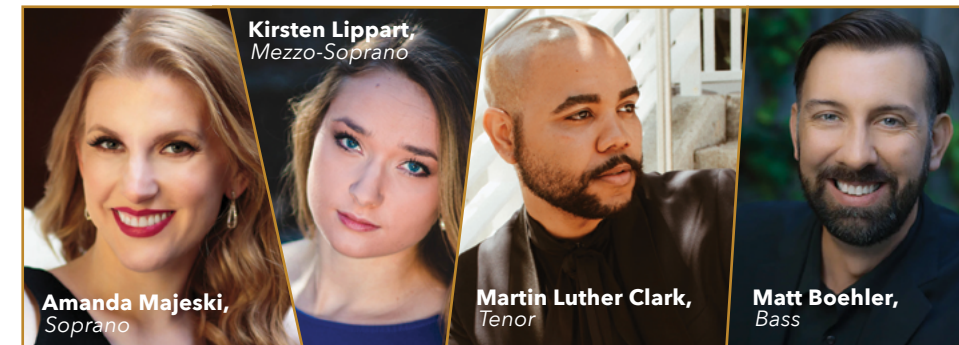
mar 14-16

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TABLE OF CONTENTS **LOVE & MARRIAGE** JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2025

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 PUBLISHER'S NOTE & HUMOR
- 7 OBITUARIES

FEATURES

- 26 CELEBRATING YOUR SPECIAL DAY, DONE YOUR WAY
Wisconsin's LGBTQ newlyweds.
- 32 THE LOVE LIST
Wisconsin's LGBTQ relationships.

CONNECT

- 11 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW
- 12 NEWS BRIEFS
- 14 ORGANIZATIONS UPDATE
- 22 OUR ORGANIZERS
Ali Treviño-Murphy & Underground Self-Defense.
- 24 OUR ARTISTS
Madison resident Rae Senarighi (known as Transpainter) at Art Basal.

IMPROVE

- 44 OUR CULTURE
The accusational harm from Madison's mass shooting.
- 46 OUR RIGHTS
Protecting yourself & your family as we move into 2025.
- 48 OUR TASTE
Flour Girl and Flame's Dana Spandet.
- 50 OUR YEAR
A look back at what *Our Lives* looked like in 2024.

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ARTS / ARTISTS / ART SUPPLIES

- p. 3 Madison Symphony Orchestra
- p. 24 Monroe Street Framing
- p. 7 Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra

ATTORNEYS

- p. 47 Balisle Family Law

AUTOMOBILES

- p. 25 MINI of Madison

BANKING / FINANCIAL ADVISING

- p. 33 Shannon M. Anderson
Ameriprise Financial
- p. 2 Summit Credit Union
- p. 51 UW Credit Union

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- p. 8 New Harvest Foundation
- p. 22 OPEN
- p. 13 OutReach
- p. 17 PBS Wisconsin
- p. 12 Wisconsin LGBT Chamber

COUNSELING / SUPPORT

- p. 18 Alexander Einsman, MS MFT
Atlas Counseling

EYEWEAR

- p. 14 Ulla Eyewear

FOOD & BEVERAGE

- p. 45 Capitol Centre Market
- p. 49 Dinotto
- p. 39 D'Vino
- p. 49 The Sow's Ear
- p. 23 Willy Street Co-op

HEALTH/WELLNESS

- p. 15 Barefoot Hands
- p. 21 Dental Health Associates
- p. 21 Forward Fertility, LLC
- p. 14 New Health Chiropractic
- p. 43 Public Health Madison & Dane County
- p. 9 Smart Dental
- p. 20 Wildwood Family Clinic

HIGHER EDUCATION

- p. 17 UW-Madison School of Social Work

INSURANCE

- p. 5 Colleen Frentzel Agency
American Family Insurance
- p. 5 David Ryan-Sukup
American Family Insurance

INTERIOR DESIGN / HOME

- p. 35 Bethke Heating & Air Conditioning Inc.
- p. 18 Chad's Design Build
- p. 16 Kool View
- p. 6 Renovation Sells
- p. 37 Quigley Decks & Cable Rails
- p. 35 Time 2 Remodel

JEWELERS

- p. 18 Goodman's Jewelers
- p. 27 Jewelers Workshop

OUTDOORS

- p. 19 Rutabaga

PAPER SUPPLIES & CARDS

- p. 31 Anthology

PETS

- p. 41 Angel's Wish
- p. 41 Bad Dog Frida
- p. 39 EarthWise Pet Supply

PHOTOGRAPHY

- p. 13 Dutcher Photography
- p. 15 Melanie Renee Photography

REALTY

- p. 41 Vivienne Anderson
- p. 6 Vicki Kenyon
- p. 37 Lauer Realty Group

SENIORS

- p. 52 Capitol Lakes

UTILITIES

- p. 10 Madison Gas & Electric

WEB DESIGN & SUPPORT

- p. 49 Design.Garden



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PUBLISHER'S LETTER

PATRICK FARABAUGH



WE'RE GOING TO NEED EACH OTHER

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

—Martin Luther King Jr



I'M REMINDED of this quote from Dr. King at a time when things are beginning to feel dark. I truly believe that at least the next four years are going to test our resilience as a community while we face what I am expecting to be an onslaught of political and social attacks from every level of government and facet of corporate culture. Already one of the first actions Trump took was an executive order intended to erase our trans siblings, and Idaho has already set into motion what I suspect will be the overturning of federal marriage equality. Corporations are rapidly abandoning the values they've spent fortunes trying to convince us of, just to acquiesce to the anti-DEI agenda coming out of the White House now. It's not lost on me that all of this is happening while I am working to produce our annual Love issue. This issue has been true north for me, reminding me of how much joy, beauty, and strength there is in our ability to love each other. And we're going to need to do that even more to ensure we come out the other side of this stronger. Now is the time to engage and strengthen your connections to our community and its resources. It's the time to figure out what you have to offer, and who in our community could use the help. We're in this together, and I can't express how grateful I am to be in it with you. ■

HUOMR NIK SHIER HEARTBRAIN.ORG/QUEERJOY



Nik Shier (they/them) is an artist and storyteller from Menasha, Wisconsin. While they love creating art that inspires the full range of human emotions, they are IN LOVE with Queer joy. And making art from trash. To see more of their work, check them out on Facebook or Instagram @Nik.Shier

OBITUARIES

ERICA GITTINGS, JANUARY 10, 1983 – DECEMBER 16, 2024



THERE WASN'T MUCH Erica Gittings couldn't fix. Dubbed the reverse tornado, Erica tackled—with good football form, of course—any mess, conflict, or project. A force of nature, she would quickly identify the problem and act on a resolution. Those witnessing Erica in her element would watch in awe as she cleared obstacles and resolved conflicts.

We lost our unstoppable and unforgettable Erica on December 16. A cherished mother, wife, daughter, friend, and colleague, Erica was 41.

Erica was born on January 10, 1983, at Victory Memorial Hospital in Waukegan, Illinois, to Linda and Francisco Plaza. At Wausau West High School, Erica was both the captain of the cheerleading squad and a thespian. She majored in journalism and strategic communication at UW-Madison, graduating in 2005 Summa Cum Laude with a 3.99 GPA.

Erica earned her law degree from the University of Wisconsin in 2008 and began practicing family law. In the 12 years that followed, Erica became a top litigator and senior management partner at a large international family law firm, overseeing more than 300 attorneys in offices across the U.S. and London. Despite this success, Erica's true professional passion lay not in conflict or litigation, but with healing and mutually beneficial resolutions. In July 2021, Erica opened Wisconsin Divorce Solutions—a family mediation firm dedicated to helping families navigate divorce gracefully.

Working from home and meeting with couples in her living room, Erica had a talent for guiding her clients through the tumultuous emotional waves of conflict toward a previously elusive compromise. Prioritizing the children's welfare, her mission, embodied in her business' symbol of the phoenix, was to help the family forge a healthy path forward. She excelled at establishing a foundation for the recently separated couple to thrive as co-parents.

Erica met Leslie in 2008 while both were members of the Wisconsin Wolves—the women's tackle football team based in Madison. They began dating that May and married in New Haven, Connecticut, on September 20, 2010. Erica and Leslie played five seasons together, winning a championship in 2009. Erica was a stellar outside linebacker, known for her quick hands and heads-up plays, earning all-star status.

They have two children, Grayson, 9 and Savi, 6, both students at Pope Farm Elementary. Creating a joyful life was a priority for Erica. What child wouldn't love a family pasta night where the rules are no utensils or plates? Together time was a given. Early in their lives, family bike rides were a weekend staple. The "perfect Saturday" included cycling to the Original Pancake House for breakfast, then to the Union Terrace, and finally, Henry Vilas Zoo. Erica taught both kids how to ride bikes, and on a trip last year to Paris, the family peddled along the Seine.

Erica took great pride in Grayson and Savi, teaching them to show compassion to others, and, in general, how to navigate life. Here, she drew on her professional chops, gleefully instilling in Grayson and Savi the secret to successful negotiation—learn what the other person wants, provide the goods, and get what you want in the process. As Leslie can attest, that's exactly how Erica demolished her opposition when she played Settlers of Catan.

Erica regularly volunteered at her children's schools, serving two years on the board of directors at Preschool of the Arts in Madison. She was also a Big Sister for nine years and a volunteer with the Boys and Girls Club. She brought the same joy, optimism, and love of life to those commitments as she did to everything else.

Erica traveled enthusiastically, as long as the destination was warmer and sunnier than Wisconsin. The beach was her happy place. There she could feel the sun on her face, wiggle her toes in the sand, and listen to the waves.

Erica was kind, generous, and exceedingly positive in her outlook. She saw little benefit from anything negative: "Let that shit go. Focus on what matters," reads the sign in her office. When her wife asked her how one person can have such a net positive impact on the world, Erica shrugged and replied simply, "I just care."

Erica and her superpowers will persist. If you find yourself a little more thoughtful, more empathetic, or radically more efficient, understand that Erica might be lending you a hand.

Erica will be dearly missed by her family, many, many friends, clients, and acquaintances. She is lovingly celebrated by her wife and two children, rescue dogs Buddy (5) and Lovie (1), her mother Linda Plaza, brother Mario Plaza, sister-in-law Jocelyn Plaza, and nephew Oliver.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation in Erica's name to Agrace Hospice Care. A celebration of Erica's life is planned for the spring, the start of her favorite weather. ■



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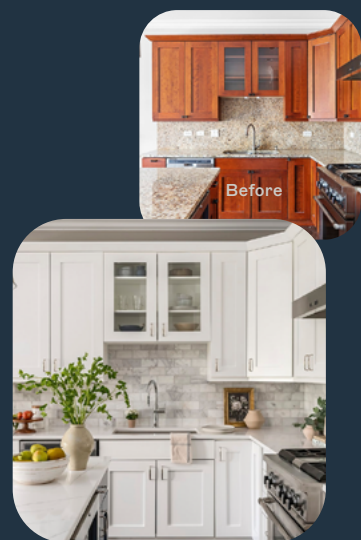
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OBITUARIES



ERWIN UECKER, JULY 2, 1932 – NOVEMBER 14, 2024

ERWIN (ERV) UECKER said, when asked about his life goal: “To leave this human family in a little better condition than I found it.” And that he did, in spectacular fashion, his whole life long.

Erv was born in Chicago during the 1932 Democratic National Convention there. Franklin D. Roosevelt and his motorcade drove past the hospital, and Erv’s grandfather remarked, “There goes one president, and here comes another president,” referring to the birth of his grandson.

Erv enjoyed a very rich life, both personally and professionally. He met the love of his life, his husband Ross Walker in June, 1957 through a mutual friend. “It wasn’t ‘love at first sight,’ we were ‘friends at first sight,’ said Erv. And they remained the best of friends through all their 67 years together. Perhaps that’s the key to a relationship which took them from a Lutheran parsonage in Chicago, to a horse breeding farm in Wisconsin, and finally to Milwaukee, where they were instrumental in keeping the BESTD Clinic operating.

Erv was ordained as a Lutheran Minister in 1968, and for 10 years he was the pastor at Chicago’s St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, where he directed a staff of four associate pastors. Although the church was in a middle class, blue-collar neighborhood, the couple lived together in the parsonage. “Everybody did what they had to do to deal with it,” said Erv. “Some people thought we were brothers until both our mothers showed up at church one day.”

The two bought a farm in Oxford, Wisconsin where they bred horses for about 12 years. In 1983, the couple stopped in Milwaukee on their way through to sell a property. “We were going to retire at Marco Island, Florida. But, we met some friends in Milwaukee, and we decided we didn’t need Florida,” Erv said.

That fateful decision was Milwaukee’s gain. Erv and Ross got very involved in the BESTD Clinic. They both worked full-time, without pay, for the clinic. They were also instrumental in the founding of the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. In addition to activism and personal time, they provided the initial funds by making a long-term pledge toward rent and operating costs of a true community center.

In 2015, Erv took on the role of pastor once again when he served as Interim Pastor of Pilgrim UCC Church in Grafton for six months, after the departure of Pastor Franz Rigert, to keep the church moving forward during a critical period of transition.

Erv will be greatly missed by his devoted husband, Ross, and by many extended family and friends, including those at Alexian Village, where he has lived for the past 14 years; the LGBT communities he was such an integral part of; and the many church congregations that were blessed to have Erv as their pastor. ■



DANIEL E. LEAMY, JUNE 13, 1973 – DECEMBER 18, 2024

DANIEL E. LEAMY, age 51 of Madison and Bloomington, passed away from an apparent heart attack on December 18, 2024 at his Madison home. He was born on June 13, 1973, the son of David and Shirley (Adrian) Leamy.

Dan attended Bloomington High School. He had a variety of jobs, having worked at Wisconsin Badger Camp as a counselor, and a case manager for REM in Madison. He then returned to Bloomington to work at the Ace of Clubs, then purchased the restaurant in 1997—changing the name to Danny’s Ace of Clubs. His next professional career was case management for individuals with HIV. He proudly served 13 years as a HIV Case Worker at the former AIDS Network, now known as Vivent Health.

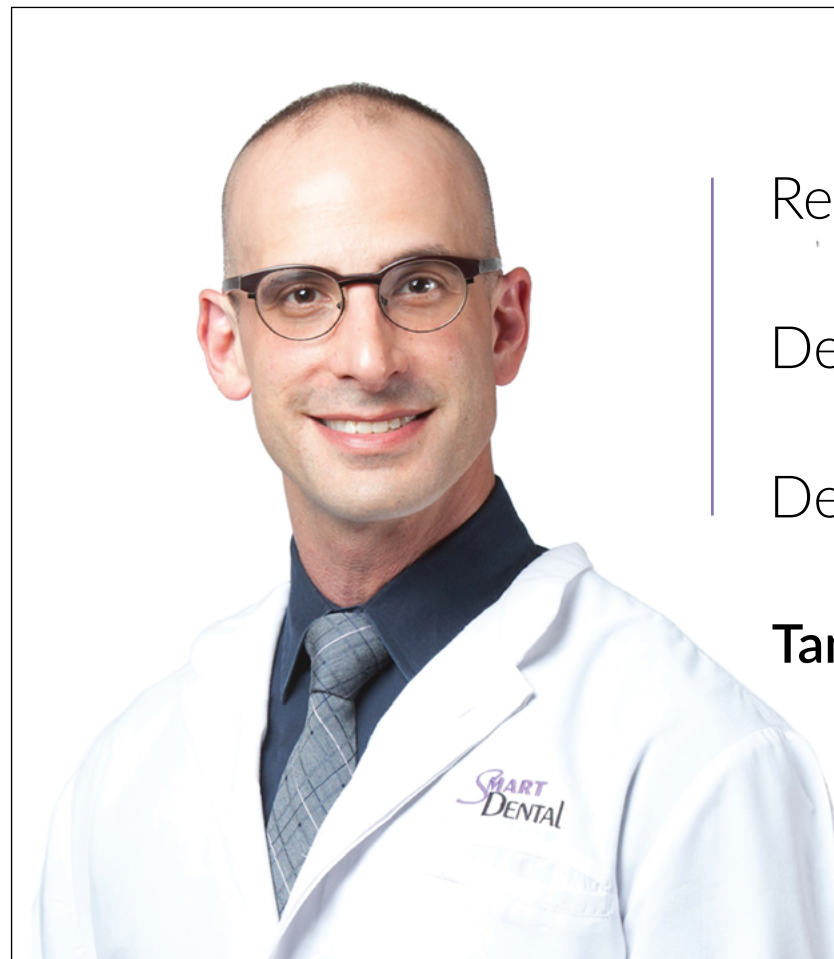
Most recently, Dan was the Human Services Program Coordinator for the AIDS/HIV Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. He also loved serving as a volunteer EMT with the West Grant Rescue Squad and as a part-time charter bus driver for WARCO Transportation in Bloomington.

Dan took great pride in touching and impacting the lives of so many. He was the “fun” son, brother, boss, coworker, and friend. Dan loved to cook and share his creations with family and friends. He was loved by many and had a significant impact on the lives of others. ■

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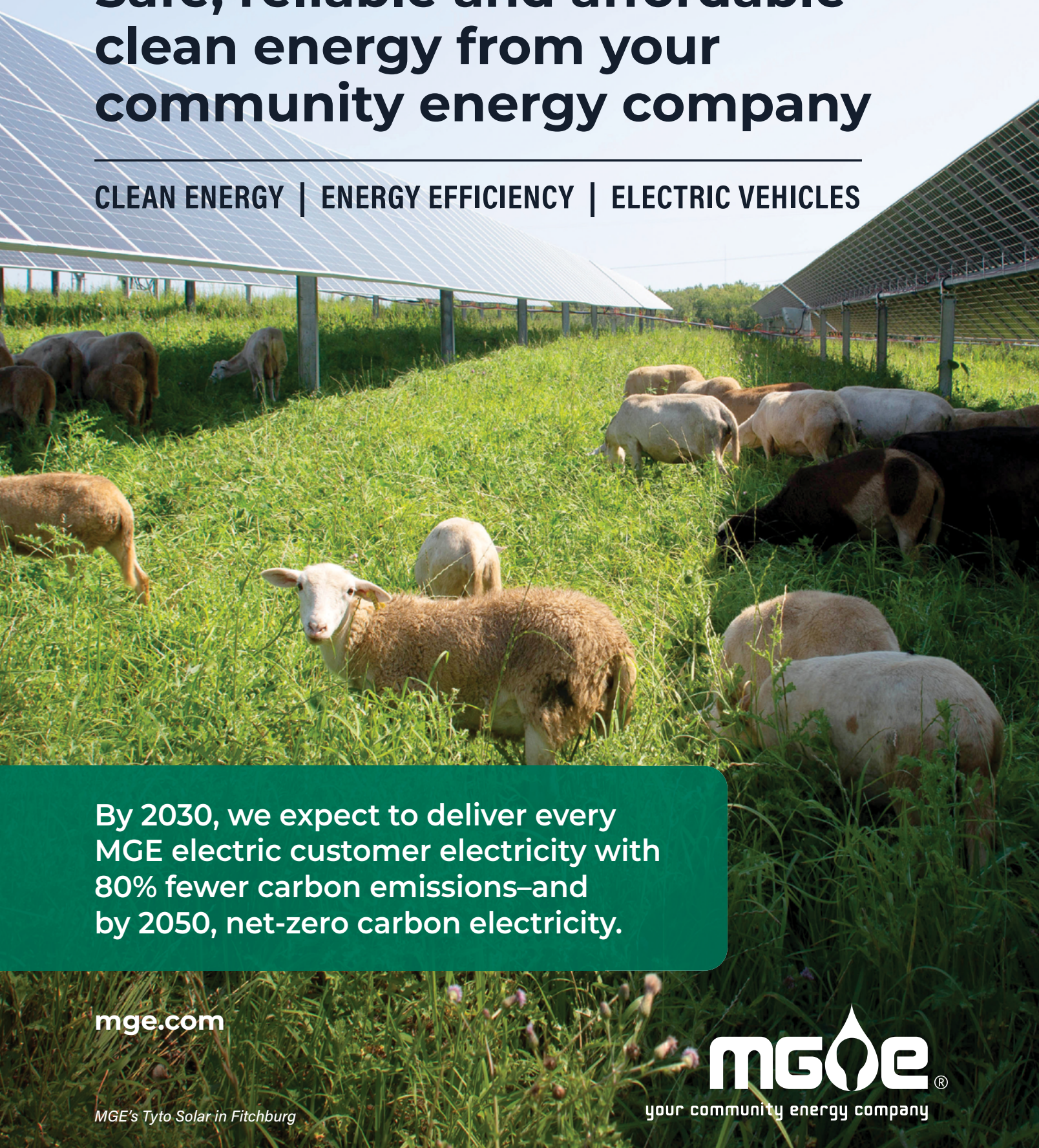
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OUR NEWS

Leading News & Local Stories



Progress & Resilience

We take a look back at some of the **local, national, and international events** and **people** that made headlines throughout 2024.

IT WAS THE BEST of times, it was the worst of times. Extreme conservative pressure tested our patience, endurance, and even our humanity, but these attacks also unleashed something unexpected: The collective strength and resilience of a united LGBTQ community. Across the state, LGBTQ individuals and organizations rose to the challenge of a volatile sociopolitical climate by exercising their voice,

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

vision, privilege, and power. From month-to-month we take a loob back at some of the progress and setbacks that we experienced in 2024 from every corner of Wisconsin and our world. Reflect with us on moments of joy and tragegy—moments that we'll take with us as we move into 2025. Find inspiration in our tremendous community pride because our battle has just begun. ■



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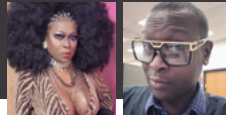
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January

4

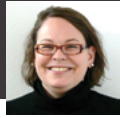
Tempest Heat (aka Jonathan Carthell Hughlett) passes away at age 41 in Milwaukee from a health condition. Tempest was a former Miss Gay Madison, Miss Courage MKE, Miss WI USofA At Large, and Miss La Cage.



February

2

Megin McDonell, executive director of Fair Wisconsin, announces her departure from the organization after 13 years of service.



25

Our Lives Media launches the Wisconsin First Archive, a year-long research project chronicling the legislative path to Wisconsin becoming the first Gay Rights State in the nation in 1982.

29

Kathy Flores, formerly of Diverse & Resilient, is honored as one of USA Today's Women of the Year. "I am most proud of passing laws to protect transgender people in my community," said Kathy.



March

1

Art*Bar Milwaukee celebrates its 20th anniversary serving Milwaukee's Riverwest. The venue has sold over \$1M in artwork for local creators while growing into an entertainment complex.

6

La Cage (801 S. 2nd Street, Milwaukee) honors four decades in Walker's Point. Under the leadership of Dave Wolz, the club pivots into stage performances, cabaret, and new forms of entertainment.



13

Gallup reports that 22.3% of Gen Z adults identify as LGBTQ, noting that every generation is twice as likely as the previous to be part of the community. Nationwide, 7.6% of American citizens identify as LGBTQ today.

15

Courage MKE hosts an open house and ribbon-cutting for the C2 Apartments (2030 W. National Ave.) which will provide a safe and affirming shelter for unhoused young adults.



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NEWS BRIEFS  WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES

LOVE MAKES A FAMILY MAKES NEWS IN WISCONSIN

LGBTQ+ AND ALLIED FAMILIES in Menomonee Falls are protesting the removal of *Love Makes a Family*, a book that shows several family structures, including those with two parents of the same gender, single parents, and others. The ban prompted a family of two women and their children to file a discrimination complaint against the Menomonee Falls School Board. According to TMJ4,



the district's HR director, school board, and superintendent dismissed the complaint. The parents are now taking their case to the Department of Public Instruction, a statewide agency, with the hope of having the book reinstated. Milestorow.com, a website that is an inclusive children's book club, says of the book, "This fun, inclusive board book celebrates the one thing that makes every family a family... and that's LOVE. Love is baking a special cake. Love is lending a helping hand. Love is reading one more book. In this exuberant board book, many different families are shown in happy activity, from an early-morning wake-up to a kiss before bed. Whether a child has two moms, two dads, one parent, or one of each, this simple preschool read-aloud demonstrates that what's most important in each family's life is the love the family members share."

Board President Nina Christensen read the following statement aloud at a school board

meeting on December 9, "The Menomonee Falls School Board is aware of concerns about how a specific appeal is moving through our internal processes. Given the nature of the complaint, the board wishes to avoid any implications of bias or impartiality in decision-making. Thus, the board directed the appeal to the Department of Instruction, which is part of the process. The School District of Menomonee Falls looks forward to the DPI's decision." As of January 2, the DPI had yet to publicly weigh-in.

U.S. SUPREME COURT DECLINES TO HEAR A CASE CHALLENGING A WISCONSIN SCHOOL DISTRICT'S GENDER SUPPORT POLICY

IN DECEMBER, in a surprising turn of events, the U.S. Supreme Court passed on hearing a conservative-led challenge to Eau Claire School District's gender support policy. The policy does not require the schools to inform parents if their children choose to change their name, gender identity, pronouns, and use the bathrooms for their identified rather than assigned gender. The guidance goes on to "encourage transgender students to reach out to staff members with concerns and instructs employees to be careful who they talk to about a student's gender identity, since not all students are 'out' to their families," according to an article by Wisconsin Public Radio. The complainants, a group calling themselves "Parents Protecting Our Children," alleged that their constitutional rights were violated in not being informed.

The Supreme Court did not take the case, according to WPR, because none of them were

actually affected by the policy, and therefore their rights were not being violated. Sixteen conservative-led states urged the court to take up the case, but "the justices left in place an appellate court ruling dismissing the parents' lawsuit. Three of nine justices, Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas, would have heard the case," according to the same article. Alito stated in his dissenting opinion, "Whether a public school district violates parents' fundamental constitutional right to make decisions concerning the rearing of their children when, without parental knowledge or consent, it encourages a student to transition to a new gender or assists in that process. We are told that more than 1,000 districts have adopted

such policies." Despite threats to continue with similar lawsuits, Eau Claire School Board President Tim Nordin is eager to get back to work running a school district. "As a district we are always trying to do our level best to help our students and families," Nordin said. "We're going to just continue to work through our district mission of helping students to lead creative, fulfilling, and responsible lives." Brian Juchems, senior director of education at GSAFE, applauded the decision, arguing that the lawsuit was an attempt on the part of some families and parents to "dictate for all families how schools should do their work to make sure kids feel safe, available for learning, and alive." ■

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March

31

Transgender Day of Visibility lands on Easter for the first time in years, resulting in a political clash between presidential candidates. Trump declares an “assault on the Christian faith,” while Biden proclaims a day to honor the extraordinary courage and contributions of transgender Americans.

April

3

Governor Evers vetoes a bill that would ban transgirls from participating in K-12 female sports. Evers objected to “codifying discrimination into state statute.”



10

GSAFE announces Tyrone Creech as executive director, as part of a new leadership structure.



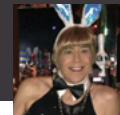
12

The Day of Silence, founded by student Maria Pulzetti in 1996 as a silent protest for LGBTQ rights, officially becomes the Day of (NO) Silence. Melanie Willingham-Jaggers, executive director of GLSEN, vows the event will now encourage students to use their voices against bigotry and homophobia.

April

14

Ginger Baier, longtime transgender community advocate, passes away at age 73 in Madison.



30

The United Methodist Church begins to reverse a series of anti-LGBTQ policies. “Self-avowed practicing homosexuals” are allowed to serve as clergy for the first time, and the church condones same-sex marriage for the first time. One-quarter of its U.S. member churches—more than 7,600 congregations—leave the organization in protest.



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LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

GENERAL NEWS

Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.

ACLU OF WISCONSIN encourages all to read at aclu-wi.org how a bill becomes a law. The 2025–26 Wisconsin legislative session has now begun, and in April Wisconsinites will elect a new Supreme Court justice who will weigh in on issues important to LGBTQ+ individuals.

COURAGE MKE served youth from a dozen counties this year. The average length of stay for a resident is 163 days. Thanks to support from generous donors, Courage was additionally able to give out holiday gifts to almost 50 families in their neighborhood.

CHIPPEWA VALLEY LGBTQ+ CENTER has announced that the Andrew Cray Higher Education Fund application is open, now through April 27, 2025. In order to be considered eligible for the 2025 Andrew Cray Higher Education Fund (HEF), applicants must:

- Be LGBTQ+
- Be a class of 2025 high school senior
- Live in & attend high school in northwestern Wisconsin
- Be in good academic standing for graduation
- Have a minimum of a 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale
- Plan to attend an institution of higher education such as a university, college, or technical school during the 2025–26 academic year.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT is urgently seeking funds to help transgender individuals obtain name changes in advance of potential policy changes in the Trump administration. They have begun holding Self-File Name Change Clinics to support individuals navigating the process.

FREEDOM INC. continues to pay school meal debt for MMSD students. They have currently wiped out over \$5,000 of school meal debt. Access to food is a human right and a vital resource to help students feel supported in schools.

GSAFE raised more than \$40,000 at their annual Quilt & Fiber Art Auction to support trans and queer youth, their families, and their educators across Wisconsin. More than 100 artists donated to the event.

MATA group at OutReach LGBTQ Community Center put together 96 gifts during their annual Holiday Trans Care Package drive. Each year trans, non-binary and gender expansive adults can register to receive a gift.

MILWAUKEE PRIDE mourns the passing of Carl Bogner. The organization wrote, “Carl was an incredible human being and his impact on our city and LGBTQ+ community will be remembered for generations. Carl was a kind soul, a talented artist, and compassionate individual that authentically connected people and through that,

helped tell stories. He was a curator of all things community. For years, we had the privilege to work with him and UWM on the LGBT Film Festival. The man’s work is everlasting. Thank you, Carl, for all you’ve given this world, and thank you for making it a better place.”

OUTLOUD LGBTQ CENTER will be starting the new year in a new space in Wausau, and they are building a book and resource library. Go to their Facebook page for a link to their book wishlist.

OUTREACH LGBTQ CENTER continues to offer free safer sex supplies, emergency contraceptives, harm reduction items, and HRT supplies. Staff can help to navigate legal name and gender marker changes, ID updates, and healthcare access. OutReach is a safe place to meet up with your friends, use the computer center, and spend time in the LGBTQ+ library. Outreach also offers space for community members to host meetings or events.

WOMEN’S VOICES MILWAUKEE has begun performing again for the first time since 2019. They put on a show entitled “All The Shows We Would Have Done...” and hope to continue performing in 2025. They are a vibrant community of women united by a shared love of music. Their mission is to elevate women’s voices, celebrate diverse musical expressions, and contribute to the cultural fabric of our community.

STAGEQ is helping to raise funds to replace the elevator in the Bartell Community Theatre. Accessibility isn’t a luxury—it is a necessity. The elevator gives patrons of all levels of abilities access to performances in the Drury space.

TRANS LAW HELP has released a Wisconsin Legal Name + Gender Marker Change Guide, newly revised after the election. It can be downloaded from translawhelp.com.

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May

7

UW Health earns an LGBTQ Healthcare Leader designation from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, which specifically recognizes its Gender Services Program.



11

The LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin celebrates its 15th anniversary of serving Racine, Kenosha, and neighboring counties.

18

HerLounge MKE, a new lesbian "pop-up" bar, hosts its first event in Milwaukee. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of lesbian bars doubled to 32.



31

Governor Evers raises the Pride flag over the State Capitol for the sixth year. In 2024 Wisconsin has the largest number of hometown prides in its history, with nearly 50 announced.

June

1

The Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project launches The Summer to Be Seen, a 30th anniversary statewide tour.



2

"We Will Always Be Here: Wisconsin's LGBTQ+ Historymakers," a traveling display from the Wisconsin Historical Society, is exhibited in Columbus and Stoughton. It has 10 stories, including Ralph Kerwineo, Lou Sullivan, and Judy Greenspan.

6

Wisconsin celebrates the 10th anniversary of marriage equality. More than 600 Wisconsin couples were married in the first three days after Judge Barbara Crabb's historic ruling.

18

Thailand passes marriage equality, becoming the first Southeast Asian country to legalize same-sex unions.



20

The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection is denied space at "A Night of Love," a Pride month concert hosted by the Valley View Rotary in La Crosse. Rotary president Peggy Derrick claims the decision is supported by a long-standing policy against "political advocacy."



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accessible by paying for one person living with HIV in each of the states where they operate (Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Texas, and Wisconsin) to attend AIDSWatch, an event that brings hundreds of people living with HIV from across the country together to meet with their members of congress. The event will be held March 16-18 in Washington D.C.

WISCONSIN LGBTQ HISTORY PROJECT is bringing back the Summer to Be Seen tour for 2025

with a new exhibit featuring and on-site interview opportunities. The project celebrated their 30th anniversary last summer with a road trip spanning every corner of Wisconsin. Their team of volunteers brought a traveling exhibit to over 20 hometown pride celebrations, summer festivals, and civic events in every corner of Wisconsin—a route spanning more than 7,000 miles! With nearly 50 pride organizations in Wisconsin, there are more opportunities than ever before. They would like to hear from local pride

organizers, sponsors, and donors to support this work. Contact wislgbtqhistory@gmail.com.

AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

Special thanks for those who do good.

BADGERLAND SOFTBALL

held their End of Season Banquet and announced award winners. Hall of Fame - Jimmy Kohler & Steve Moore MVP Awards, Summer Rec League

- Red - Brian Zuern, Orange - Emilee Taxman, Yellow - Melissa Breitbach, Green - Berkly Catura, Blue - Ann Glavan, Purple - Valerie Hill
- MVP Awards, Summer Open Competitive
 - Big Cheese - Rafael Plaza, Mustangs - Christian Tormos, Delta - Troy Meyer, Axolotls - Megan Callahan, Free Agents - Christa Lowe
- MVP Awards, Fall Rec League
 - Dorothy's Destroyers - Kacey Spoerl, Blanche's Bombers - Jocie Luglio, Sophia's Slammers - Nik Spittlemeister, Rose's Rebels - TJ Johnston
- Commissioner's Award
 - Chris Verhaeghe - 2021, Jimmy Kohler - 2022, Eveyln Kahl - 2023, Kyle George - 2024
- Doug Hinderliter Character Award - John Ferguson

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June

23

Filmmaker Matt Kliegman screens *Markie in Milwaukee* at Milwaukee's Oriental Theater, a film honoring Markie Anna Wenzel, a Wisconsin woman battling a crisis of faith with her gender transition and detransition.



Wenzel, born in 1960, died in 2023.

28

After significant financial challenges, the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center exceeds its fundraising goals, raising over \$65,000. Ritchie Martin, interim executive director, announces a plan to ensure sustainable services for the community.

July

2

Fair Wisconsin names Abby Swetz as executive director. Swetz, a GSAFE Educator of the Year, has experience in policy, advocacy, and public education.



3

Black Pride Milwaukee, Inc. launches as a new non-profit, with a mission to celebrate and empower the local Black LGBTQ community.

July

13

The Transperience, an exploration of trans femme identity, opens at the Neville Museum in Green Bay. The exhibition, operated by Bay Area Council on Gender Diversity, later hosts a run at UW-Green Bay.

17

More than 1,000 Grindr users report a service outage in Milwaukee during the Republican National Convention.



20

Sister Clarice Sevegney, 83, passes away. As one of the Racine Dominican Sisters, she began an LGBTQ ministry in 2007.



28

Hamburger Mary's Milwaukee ceases operations in Walker's Point after eight years. Owners Brandon and Ashley are searching for a new location.



August

5

The Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, in partnership with the Wisconsin Historical Society and community partners, dedicates Wisconsin's first LGBTQ historic marker. The marker is one of the first to honor a Black trans woman.



11

Sheboygan's Blue Lite bar closes after 32 years, stating that "LGBTQ people are welcomed across the city..." The bar was the only queer space between Green Bay and Milwaukee for over a decade.

16

The Supreme Court blocked President Biden's request to enforce Title IX protections in Republican-led states challenging the provisions.



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COMMUNITY SHARES recognized GSAFE volunteer **Fox Coenen** as a "Backyard Hero." Coenen is a regular and reliable volunteer for GSAFE, an org that works to make schools safe for LGBTQ+ youth. Whenever she can, Fox responds with an enthusiastic "yes" to help with GSAFE events, including their Quilt & Fiber Art Auction, Trick or Trot Walk/Run, Celebration of Leadership, and more. Fox and her partner Kalen also help GSAFE with mailings and even involve their beloved dogs in fundraisers.

COURAGE MKE received the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee's 2025 Social Responsibility Award on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

GSAFE awarded three pieces as "Best on Theme" at their annual Quilt & Fiber Art Auction. The winners were: "Bookcase of Queer Joy" by the **Queer Joy Book Club**, "Sew Happy Together" by **Colene Acker**, and "Stars Together" by **Robyn Wimmer**.

VIVENT HEALTH president and CEO **Brandon Hill** was recognized by *BizTimes Milwaukee* as a notable leader in the healthcare industry. Vivent serves approximately 85% of all Milwaukeeans living with HIV. Of those served, 87% are LGBTQ+ and 31% identify as Black.

WISCONSIN LGBTQ HISTORY PROJECT named **Bill Wardlow** a Volunteer of the Month. Bill was part of the team that made the Celebrating 80 Years of Gay fundraiser happen. Thank you, Bill, for being a community advisor and a long-time community leader! Additionally, community advisor **Victor Macias-Gonzalez** received a Dr. P.B. Poorman Award for Outstanding Achievement on Behalf of LGBTQ+ People from the Universities of Wisconsin.

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.

COURAGE MKE is hiring a new Director of Development to provide strategic leadership for fund development. This is the first major investment in this work by Courage MKE and as such, this role will do a lot to build and maintain systems for all aspects of fund development.

FREEDOM, INC. has been forced to lay off several staff positions in 2025 as a result of reduced

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August

20

Harley-Davidson, a longtime supporter of LGBTQ causes, announces it will discontinue DEI, supplier diversity, LGBTQ sponsorships, and Human Rights Campaign support, under pressure from right-wing conservative activists.



31

In honor of Transgender History Month, the Dane County Board of Supervisors honors historian Ulysses Swanson for his support of gender non-conforming pioneers throughout Wisconsin history. Swanson has chronicled over a century of trans history since 2017.



September

8

Cream City Foundation grants 20 LGBTQ students at eight universities with \$2,500 scholarships. Since 2015, the foundation has invested over \$270,000 in Milwaukee's future LGBTQ leadership.

9

Molson Coors Beverage Company, owners of Miller Brewing Company since 2016, abandons all DEI practices.



September

10

GSAFE and Fair Wisconsin file a joint Title IX complaint against the Kettle Moraine School District for violating the federal civil rights of LGBTQ students. On October 9, four additional complaints were filed for the school districts of Muskego Norway, Winneconne, Hartford Union, and Abbotsford. On November 22, the Waukesha School District was named in a separate civil rights complaint.

11

The Green Bay Area and Janesville school districts ban bullying based on gender identity to make school easier for LGBTQ students.

23

After the Menomonee Falls School District bans 33 books from the high school library, grassroots Menomonee Falls volunteers hand out 250 copies of *Love Makes a Family*.

24

ABC reports that while violent crime is down 3%, hate crimes are up across the U.S. According to FBI statistics, sexual and gender identity bias were the cause of 2,936 reported incidents in 2023, an increase of nearly 9%.



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funding. **Kabzuag Vaj** will serve as interim executive director overseeing the leadership team through the organization's transition.

GENDER & SEXUALITY CAMPUS CENTER has announced the departure of Outreach Specialist **Gabriella Hartlaub**. They've also announced that **Sanders Weinberg** will be serving as Program Coordinator. Sanders is a queer, trans masc from St. Louis. He has a master's degree in Higher Education from the UW-La Crosse. They come

from more than six years in the restaurant industry, where he focused on bettering work environments for queer and trans staff.

VIVENT HEALTH has announced that **Brie Anderson** will serve as their new Chief Health Services Officer. She has provided multistate and multidisciplinary operational leadership and care transformation across several previous roles, including Chief Patient Experience Officer. Based in Vivent Health's Kansas City health

center, this promotion marks the first member of the Executive Leadership Team seated outside of Wisconsin.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in.

STAGE Q January 24–February 8 *Dr. Ride's American Beach House* is being performed at Bartell Community Theatre. It's 1983, the evening before Dr. Sally Ride's historic space flight. Hundreds of miles from the launch, a group of women with passionate opinions and no opportunities sit on a sweltering St. Louis rooftop watching life pass by. Their uncharted desires

bump up against American norms of sex and power in this snapshot of queer anti-heroines.

WI LGBT CHAMBER February 4 Join us for a special "LOVE IS LOVE" edition of the Milwaukee Area OUT After Work on February 4 at 5:00 p.m. at Pilot Project in Milwaukee.

BLACK PRIDE MILWAUKEE February 8 The Winter Lights Gala & Awards Show will be held at the UWM Wisconsin Room (\$125). A celebration of resilience, visibility, and solidarity, this inaugural formal affair unites us in honoring the incredible work being done by Black queer individuals and their allies. Together, we can ensure this community not only survives but thrives. ■

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October

30

Cuban-American educator, community activist, lesbian, and changemaker Lucia Nuñez passes away. In 2006 she became Madison's first director of the Department of Civil Rights.



3

Phillip Brede, an Ashland School District English teacher, resigned in response to a hostile environment. Brede was mocked by students, condemned by parents, and cited for "insubordination" for screening the film *Love, Simon*. Following his resignation, Superintendent Rob Prater launches an investigation that confirms endemic homophobic bullying and harassment throughout the district.



18

BlaQtoberfest, Milwaukee's first Black pride event in over a decade, hosts its inaugural weekend.

6

Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin narrowly wins a third term, defeating Eric Hovde by 29,000 votes.



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SELF-DEFENSE

MARTIAL ARTS

FAMILY BUSINESS

QUEER-OWNED BUSINESS

Underground Self-Defense

Ali Treviño-Murphy grew up with the martial arts and self-defense studio nestled for decades on Madison's State Street. At **Underground Self-Defense**, she and her co-owners work to empower everyone who takes a class to feel their own self-worth, and to learn the essential life skill of self-defense.

ONE OF THE OLDEST businesses on State Street is Underground Self-Defense, a cooperatively owned martial arts and self-defense studio that's been serving the community since 1989.

Ali Treviño-Murphy, a queer black-belt karate master and a co-owner, works alongside other co-owners to teach and empower every individual that walks through the door, ensuring they know they are "worth defending."

Treviño-Murphy grew up in a "martial arts family" and has been practicing martial arts since she was only three or four years old. Her parents moved from Montreal, Canada back to Madison in the 80s, where they opened Fred Villari's Studios of Self-defense (part of a franchise). Treviño-Murphy was teaching at the studio by the time she was in high school. When her parents moved away in 2007, she adopted the family business.

Several years later, Treviño-Murphy decided running the studio on her own was too much and began transforming it to a cooperative, called Villari's Martial Arts Cooperative.

Like many businesses, the cooperative adapted during the pandemic. The studio closed for over a year, moving online. While



locked down, she says, they really doubled down on self-defense offerings. "We became clearer about who we've always been, which is a studio that really focuses on self-defense."

As the future took shape, the co-owners changed the studio's name to Underground Self-Defense to reflect its new focus. The State Street location is literally underground, but the name touches on something deeper. "It speaks to the part of us that you might not see on the surface," Treviño-Murphy says. Not everyone may see themselves as capable of practicing self-defense, but everyone has "the power to protect ourselves and others."

Martial arts is a hobby, Treviño-Murphy says. Kickboxing is something people tend to see as fitness. But, self-defense is an essential life skill. "We realized we needed to put the self-defense foot forward," she says. "That's who we are, and what people will always need."

December

4

United States v. Skrametti, a landmark case questioning if gender-affirming care bans violate the constitutional rights of transgender Americans, is heard by the United States Supreme Court. "Tennessee's ban... is an active threat to the future my daughter deserves," said Brian Williams, plaintiff.

6

The Cardinal Bar (418 E. Wilson St., Madison) celebrates its 50th anniversary with a weekend honoring founder Ricardo Gonzalez. Green Bay earns its first 100% score on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index. Six other Wisconsin cities are listed, including Madison (100), Milwaukee (100), Appleton (99), Oshkosh (95), Racine (81), and Kenosha (62).

23

The American Civil Liberties Union reports that 574 anti-LGBTQ bills are active in state legislatures across the country. All 14 Wisconsin bills in 2024 were either defeated in legislative session or vetoed by Governor Tony Evers. Across the country, 92% of anti-LGBTQ legislation was defeated in 2024.

Underground offers two types of class structures: short courses and weekly drop-in classes. Typically the self-defense classes are short, and the drop-in classes teach kickboxing or martial arts. There are options for holistic traditional martial arts, fitness, and self-defense. "We do a little bit of everything," Treviño-Murphy says.

Several years ago, Underground started a pride self-defense course during June. Treviño-Murphy has always taught the course herself, in part because she loves to be surrounded by other queer people. She's proud of the environment she and her team have fostered. "We understand how to respect and keep people physically and emotionally safe," she said.

Over the years, queer and trans students have told Treviño-Murphy how much it means to them to see an instructor who is out and queer in a position of leadership. Martial arts is a "pretty male dominated" industry that falls into "traditional gender roles around masculinity," she says. As a queer woman in martial arts, she believes it is "really important for people to be able to see possibilities for themselves."

In the weeks after the election, Underground received an influx of emails inquiring about self-defense courses, many of them from groups who are specifically concerned about LGBTQ people. "I think private workshops create opportunities to craft a space that's

unique," Treviño-Murphy says. "Being able to offer something private allows people to have the experience that they really want to have."

"I think self defense has two functions. One is it helps you to be safer, but another one that is equally important is it helps you to feel safer. Especially right now, I think a lot of people in the LGBTQ community feel a lot of uncertainty about our future, and so self defense can be an activity that can just bring you back in tune with your sense of personal power."

Treviño-Murphy explains a self-defense class can't change who is in office, but it can give queer people the courage and confidence needed to meet all sorts of challenges in life. ■



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HIV/AIDS ART ART ACTIVISM

A Space for Reflection

During Miami's glamorous **Art Basal** week, Madison resident **Rae Senarighi** (known as **Transpainter**) participated in a collaborative exhibit representing the various stages and feelings experienced by someone processing an HIV/AIDS diagnosis.



IN THE HEART of Miami's Wynwood neighborhood, an arts district full of cocktail bars and Zoomers juggling their coffee, texts, and diamond-studded leashes for their tiny dogs, sits R House. R House, a favorite neighborhood drag venue partnered with the non-profit AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), to join Miami's Art Basel by hosting "Art as Activism," a pop-up installation about the psychological stages of processing an HIV/AIDS diagnosis.

INVITED ARTISTS

Curator Warren Brand, of Branded Arts, brought together six artists: Emma Hac, Hiero Veiga, Sam Kirk, Bikismo, Antonyo Marest, and Madison's much-loved Transpainter, Rae Senarighi, for a collaborative exhibition from December 4 through 11 during Miami's Art Week. Each artist took over a small room

within a large yellow tent in R House's outdoor space. The resulting multiroom exhibition created a journey through various reactions and stages of processing an HIV diagnosis from crisis to acceptance and adaptation.

ARTS AS ACTIVISM

Amid hundreds of installations included in Art Basel, this unique temporary installation was actually given a shout out in *Forbes*. When my friend, Edgewood Assistant Professor of Art History Sarah Stolte, and I emerged from our ride to R House, the music was already pulsing, and a bouncer was guiding us into "Arts as Activism" rather than the packed drag brunch. The joyous energy of that brunch became the perfect soundtrack for an installation about health, identity, and community. It was as if the "Art as Activism" at R House was celebrating that HIV/AIDS is no longer talked about in hushed whispers but is now in open dialogue with community support.

THE CONTINUUM OF A DIAGNOSIS JOURNEY

The six-room structure could have felt didactic or overly literal in less skilled hands. Instead, each space flowed into the next, creating a narrative arc that felt both personal

and universal. The artists created a delicate balance—being both specific enough to honor the experiences of those directly affected by HIV/AIDS while remaining accessible enough to draw in viewers who may be less familiar with these realities.

The beauty of Brand's selection of several different artists to create their own intimate, contemplative spaces, is that the resulting



installations represented the disparate inner dialogs characteristic of moving through a life-altering health crisis. And though Senarighi, who was likely selected because of his reputation for painting vibrant celebrations of trans identity, has never experienced receiving an HIV diagnosis, he has lived through cancer. His survivor's journey informed his understanding of processing a life-threatening illness and navigating the emotional terrain that goes along with that diagnosis.

On one wall, a strategically placed mirror invited self-reflection. It was framed by empowering messages. "YOU ARE" above it, and to the left of the mirror, the word, "WORTHY" and to the right, the word "LOVED" and beneath it, "SACRED" and beneath that, in smaller writing, "RIGHT NOW. IN THIS MOMENT."

On the opposite wall, a chalkboard became a living document of audience engagement where Senarighi created a place for visitors

to craft their own affirmations, and they did. Statements such as, "My Voice is Powerful," "Be true to yourself always," and "Stop caring what people think about you" were handwritten all over the wall.

AFFIRMATIONS TO GO

Like a float in a Pride parade turned in on itself, every other remaining surface of the room was festooned with flowers. Free cards bearing messages of self-worth—"You are Beautiful," "You are Inherently Worthy," and "You are Enough" on one side and "You are Loved" on the other side—offered reminders for visitors to carry with them, extending the installation's impact beyond its temporary walls.

The timing of "Art as Activism" during Art Basel, when the high rollers of the art world party and purchase in spaces of tension between consumerism and social critique, added another layer of complexity. Here amid the joy-filled ambience of a champagne drag brunch, on top of a backdrop of an even larger party-like atmosphere taking place city-wide, is a space for reflection. AHF, R House, Branded Arts, and the invited artists offered a reminder that art does not only serve an elite population for the purpose of hyper-consumerism, art is a force that can change the world and can foster understanding, empathy, and even self-worth. —Karin Wolf

GINA SENARIGHI.

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Jada & Maria Carter



Kaya & Megan Greenwood



Derek & Justin Strom

LGBTQ MARRIAGES

Celebrating Your Special Day, Done Your Way

Wisconsin's LGBTQ newlyweds share their wedding day experiences.



Allie Krause & Lena Lambrigtsen



Daniel & Michael Lynn



Becky & Marissa Hagen



Cassidy & Kelsey Campbell



Josh Ayala & Mattheis Carley

Drag for the Whole Family // Derek & Justin Strom

February 24 // Engaged 10.2.22 // Stoughton

OUR WEDDING WEEKEND was an absolute blast! Since we didn't need to spend the morning getting our hair and makeup done, we decided to host a drag queen bingo and brunch on the morning of our wedding. Over a hundred guests joined us, and we had the pleasure of hiring two renowned queens, Kayos Mirage and Bianca Lynn Breeze, to host it.

For many, it was their first time meeting a drag queen. We were thrilled to see everyone fall in love with the art of drag and have a great time. One of the main reasons we wanted a full-blown wedding was to set an example for our niblings. Watching them enjoy themselves at drag bingo was one of the best feelings! **Photographer:** Brianna Tracy

Forever Young // Amy & Andie Yonker

April 21 // Engaged 2.11.23 // Memorial Union, Madison

OUR WEDDING was a sunny Sunday brunch, filled with love and laughter. It was light and bright, just like we'd always dreamed. But the most magical part came when Amy orchestrated a surprise for Andie.

Andie was casually taken into another room for something uneventful, and when she entered the hall again, the entire room of 150+ guests was gathered. She was ushered up the hall and sat down on a chair waiting for her on the stage, with Amy next to her. The whole group broke into song, singing *Forever Young* by Bob Dylan. It was a wish for our life together, one that we'll carry with us always. Surrounded by family and friends, we felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude and joy—the perfect start to our forever. **Photographer:** Thrive Photography

Our Classic Wedding // Bradey Engen & George Hege

May 11 // Engaged 1.28.22 // St John's Lutheran Church, Richland Center

IT WAS A LOVELY DAY celebrating with family and friends. We were

married by our pastor in the beautiful church where we are members. Our pastor gave us a template, but George actually laid out the entire service and tweaked each piece: The hymns, the scripture readings, the vows, the exchange of rings, the lighting of the unity candle, and more.

Many in our community don't get a church wedding. Our church is a big part of our lives, and it was special to us to be married there.

Childhood Friends // Alexandria & Juniper Starr

May 11 // Engaged 12.16.22 // Rib Mountain State Park, Wausau

OUR DAY was anything but traditional! From us being queer, to wearing all black while the rest of our decor remained soft pastels of pink and green. Our wedding took place in a state park, and we couldn't have asked for a more beautiful location! The day was bright, the wind was soft, and nature had something special for us the night of our wedding: Northern Lights! It seemed like our wedding date was meant to be.

We grew up as childhood friends starting in elementary school, and we were huge art kids! Alex drew our cake topper as a reminder of this! We also had all our childhood friends join us to celebrate—one driving eight hours on the day of the wedding to be there!! Our found family have always been our biggest supporters, and it was surreal to have them there! **Photographer:** Alyssa Lentz Photography

A Plant-Based Pairing // Jak Maliszewski & James Valona

May 24 // Engaged 1.26.22 // Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, Bayside

WE COULDN'T have imagined a more special day. We picked a location where we could have Mother Nature as a witness to our love. Surrounded by trees, wildlife, and rain, we got married by our friend and officiant, Jenni Nordstrom, in front of our our closest friends and families as well as some special visitors—a snapping turtle, owls, a hawk, and an eagle cared for by the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center—as well as a



JEWELERS WORKSHOP

You see yourselves in each other,
WEAR YOUR STORY





Jak Maliszewski & James Valona



Sam Phillips & Michael Radloff



Braden Baumann & Fae Nachtigal



Amy & Anne Stanislawski



Allie Krause & Lena Lambrigtsen



Ames & Desiree Barker

performance by drag performer B.J. Daniels.

All of our guests commented on the food—some of the best wedding food they’ve had, provided by Hidden Kitchen, which was a large buffet of plant-based dishes. This will forever be a day to be remembered, thanks to all of the people who helped and shared in the festivities.

Photographer: Brandon J. Brown at Roost Photography

A Most Colorful Wedding // Sam Phillips & Michael Radloff

June 1 // Engaged 11.13.21 // MMoCA, Madison

WHEN WE CHOSE our wedding as the first day of Pride Month, we had an obligation to make the most colorful wedding. Our wedding party formed the rainbow, we assembled as many LGBTQ+ vendors as we could, and took the day to blend our families—chosen and birth.

From the beautiful ceremony on the rooftops of iconic State Street, featuring vows loaded with our myriad of inside jokes; a reception fueled by gay dance anthems and a live cover of *Proud Mary*, to closing down the Rigby at our afterparty, it was truly a day that we and our guests won’t soon forget! **Photographer:** Melanie Renee Photography

A Day in the Dells // Lynn Mayer & Gigi Vail

June 1 // Engaged 8.2.22 // Wisconsin Dells

CELEBRATING OUR LOVE and friendship with family and friends began as a “Day in the Dells.” We filled an original Dells Duck with laughter and joy! We spent the afternoon enjoying pizza, followed by mini-golf and dinner at a Mexican restaurant. Games, conversation, and laughter filled our evening. Tears of happiness, laughter, and love embraced all!

As our friends and family gathered to celebrate our wedding, the sky blessed us with rain! The shelter at the beach was draped with plastic curtains. Kelly and Kathy, two of our attendants, came to us as we were changing, to alert us to a new concern. So many of our guests had

shown up, we needed to move our ceremony from the gazebo to the shelter. They helped to relocate our altar without disturbing it.

We then began the ceremony, surrounded by our guests. Another fast outfit change, and we entered the shelter to share our love of dance with all! This day, soggy as it was, turned into a beautiful memory for all.

Whose Line Is It // Kaya & Megan Greenwood

June 2 // Engaged 12.23.22 // The Nature Place, La Crosse

OUR DAY was an intentional celebration of queer joy! We had a small wedding, surrounding ourselves with our closest friends and family.

We wrote our vows separately and heard each other’s vows for the first time during the ceremony. We often joke how we say the same things at the same time because we are so in tune with each other, and that was further proven when we both had the same line in our separate vows. We also both ended up including quotes from songs by our favorite queer musicians—Brandi Carlile and boygenius.

From our siblings co-officiating to our Polaroid guest book, our day felt like a celebration of us and our love. **Photographer:** Maureen Cassidy

When It Rains // Becky & Marissa Hagen

June 15 // Engaged 7.15.23 // Taylors Falls, MN

A BEAUTIFUL WEEKEND started with a Friday cookout. We met up Saturday for the scenic riverboat cruise down the St. Croix. Friends and family shared the ride amongst a little rain. Rain is said to bring newlyweds luck; well, it poured all day! It was full of so much love and a lifetime of memories from family and friends. **Photographer:** Joanna Carina

Everything We Hoped // Amy & Anne Stanislawski

July 27 // Engaged 2.2.24 // The Loft at 132, Sun Prairie

OUR DAY was everything we hoped it would be: Celebrating with friends



Kalea Bicoy & Isabel Vreeke



Patrick & Steve Sisson



Lynn Mayer & Gigi Vail



Bri Andersen & Jenny Witt



Alexandria & Juniper Starr



Jeffrey Montoya & Matthew Werlein

and family, eating great food that represented special moments in our relationship, and a reception full of memories. I wish we could do it all again! We loved that we were able to use our wedding as an avenue to support some queer vendors. **Photographer:** Dutcher Photography

A Kilt and a Quiaich // Axel (nee Larson) & Robert Sharp

September 7 // Engaged 12.31.22 // Madison Club, Madison

ON A BEAUTIFUL, sunny-yet-cool day, Rob and Axel tied the knot at the elegant Madison Club. Rob honored his heritage in a kilt with his family tartan, while Axel looked stunning in a tuxedo. Their intimate ceremony radiated love, setting the tone for an unforgettable celebration.

Guests were welcomed with champagne and enjoyed two signature cocktails: The timeless Last Word and the Aviation. Dinner followed, highlighted by a meaningful Quiaich ceremony, a nod to Rob’s Scottish roots. Their first dance to Peter Gabriel’s *The Book of Love* captured hearts, and the evening concluded with cigars on the patio paired with fine Scotch. **Photographer:** Melanie Renee Photography

Cooking It Up // Allie Krause & Lena Lambrigtsen

September 21 // Engaged 6.23.22 // Green Bay Botanical Gardens

WE HAD A BEAUTIFUL DAY! There’s a height difference between us, and we playfully acknowledged that during the ceremony by having random attendees bring cookbooks for Lena to stand on for our first kiss. It was a surprise and so much fun for the audience, and we enjoyed involving more people we love in our wedding!

Photographer: Ashley & Christina from I Uncharted - Shana Joseph

Three Times Over // Braden Baumann & Fae Nachtigal

September 21 // Engaged 1.21.22 // Santorini, Greece

WE WERE ABLE to have three celebrations for our wedding. The first was

a Laotian family blessing in Oklahoma. Then we privately exchanged vows in Santorini Greece, where we stayed during a honeymoon nine-day cruise. In October, we celebrated in Madison with all our friends and family at a park, then at Five Nightclub. We’re so blessed with the capacity to travel and be greeted with so much love when we come back home. **Photographer:** Karen Peck

All the World’s a Stage // Patrick & Steve Sisson

September 22 // Engaged 7.1.23 // Goodman Center, Madison

STEVE AND PATRICK met working on a musical. The theater remains a big part of their lives and was a cornerstone of their engagement and wedding. Steve secretly planned the engagement. It started with Pat’s friend calling to say she needed help shopping for a 4th of July party. She took him to seven places of significance to the couple, and at each stop there was a special person who gave another clue. A friend from New York took photographs, Mom appeared via Zoom, friends filed into a dance studio, others came up from Chicago, and all ended up at the couple’s home after telling Pat what they liked about him and the relationship. In a procession ala Michael Scott, Pat proceeded down a line of friends who offered proposals. He said no to each before saying yes to Steve.

The wedding was also planned by the two avid entertainers. They facilitated conversations between participants by giving them a “Wedbill” playbill of activities, which included nametags, Karaoke, silent auction, dinner theater, a puzzle featuring the couple, Christmas ornament making, and a shrinky dink table. Somehow there was still energy for an afterparty at I/O Arcade. **Photographer:** White Willow Studios

Grandma’s Gotta Be There // Robert & Spencer Rohloff

October 3 // Engaged 9.15.23 // Kohler Andrae State Park, Sheboygan

WE DECIDED to do a small, intimate wedding spur-of-the-moment. We



Amy & Andie Yonker



Jada & Maria Carter



Brady Engen & George Hege



Michael Braatz & Willian Cano Hernandez



Carly & Jessica Graverson



Robert & Spencer Rohloff



Sydney Cain & Maddie Rubrich

wanted to have a big wedding with all of our family and friends, but we had to change our plans. Robert's grandma is battling stage 4 cancer, and he couldn't imagine getting married without her being there on his special day. She raised him alongside his mom, and she is his angel.

So we got married on National Mean Girls Day, so it was perfect! The weather was beautiful, the sun was shining, and the water was as gorgeous as it was the day Robert proposed at the same location. We had Robert's sister officiate our wedding, a full circle moment as his sister was the first person he came out to. His mom and grandma walked him down the aisle as well as Spencer's dad. It was a small wedding, but it was perfect. **Photographer:** Leilani Alaniz

High Church to High Gay

Jeffrey Montoya & Matthew Werlein

October 5 // Engaged 3.8.24 // Christ Church & LaCage Nite Club, Milwaukee

THE WEDDING DAY of Dr. & Mr. Montoya-Werlein started with a ceremony at Christ Church, officiated by eight of our favorite clergypersons. It included readings, vows, and holy communion, with music on organ, violin, trumpet, and guitar. The first reading, a selected passage from the Supreme Court Decision *Obergefell v. Hodges*, set the tone of marriage equality. The sermon was entitled "Love out Loud." Our goldendoodle, Lucy, was the best dog.

Our brunch, a Harry Potter-themed reception, was held at LaCage Nite Club. Easton Boyd was the Master of Ceremony. Ramona the Drag Queen performed numbers from Madonna, Cher, and Whitney Houston. Matthew likes to say our wedding went from "High Church to High Gay!" because of the transition from a traditional religious to flamboyant celebration.

Photographer: Rahimi Saidan

Well Worth the Wait // Josh Ayala & Mattheis Carley

October 5 // Engaged 10.9.17 // Mercantile Hall, Burlington

MATTHEIS AND JOSH were introduced in 2014 through their good friend Jack D. We started a pen pal relationship for a year, then finally decided to meet in the summer of 2015. We dated for two years, realized we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together, and were engaged in 2017 on a trip to Austria.

It took us seven years to say two words, "I Do." You can say we were in no rush to tie the knot, and our wedding was well worth the wait. It was everything we dreamed of, and more. One hundred of our family and friends traveled from nine states to celebrate the best weekend of our lives. One of our friends even made the trek in from New Zealand, winning the furthest traveled award.

15 Years in the Making // Ames & Desiree Barker

October 19 // Engaged 4.10.22 // Baraboo Arts Center, Baraboo

IT WAS the most wonderfully queer day with those we love. It was the perfect culmination of our 15-year journey. We most certainly experienced what it means to feel the purest version of love and happiness. And we believe our friends and family shared in this feeling through our expression of emotion and the personal details present at our event.

Photographer: Melanie Renee Photography

Tears of Joy // Daniel & Michael Lynn

October 19 // Engaged 8.13.22 // The Tinsmith, Madison

AFTER 12 YEARS together, it was a perfect, sunny day in October when we finally walked down the aisle to say "I do" surrounded by our friends and family. Our two pups, Penny and Frankie, were able to join

us for some of our favorite photos of the day. We wrote our vows personally and there wasn't a dry eye in the room as the ceremony ended. After the ceremony, we ran off for photos in the Arboretum to capture the beautiful fall colors before returning to The Tinsmith to dance the night away. **Photographer:** Dutcher Photography

A Fairytale Wedding // Jada & Maria Carter

October 26 // Engaged 6.22.23 // Milwaukee

WE ORIGINALLY eloped in Denver back on June 23, 2023. We wanted to do something private and romantic for just us but planned a big wedding for our friends and family. It was a beautiful day. Our daughter walked our mothers down the aisle, and our four boys walked each of us down the aisle (two with each of us). It was like a true fairytale.

What made it even more special was that one of our moms officiated our wedding. There were many tears, laughs, and smiles. We included an excerpt about when gay marriage was legalized and how it came about. It was so touching, and we felt even more grateful to be joined in a legal union. We highly suggest eloping and then planning a big party! It's way less stressful. **Photographer:** Anais Photography

Love on the Farm // Sydney Cain & Maddie Rubrich

November 9 // Engaged 10.8.22 // The Fields Reserve, Stoughton

OUR SECOND DATE was at Trienen Farms. We dated for a year and had some adventures before eventually returning to the farm to get engaged.

Our wedding was a beautiful day, bringing our families together to celebrate our love at another farm in two pretty barns. We had a large wedding party: All of our best friends and siblings were our bridesmaids. There were 14 of us in total, and there were 60 people that attended the wedding. **Photographer:** Melanie Renee Photography

Stress Free // Michael Braatz & Willian Cano Hernandez

December 1 // Engaged 11.8.24 // Wisconsin State Capitol

WILL & MICHAEL met at Five Nightclub. Michael had just finished performing in a show and saw Will at the bar. They made eye contact, and Michael wrote his number on a napkin, handed it to Will, then left without saying a word. Will texted Michael a couple days later, and Michael proposed to Will almost two years later on the stage at Five Nightclub, shortly after the election.

We had a small informal wedding at the State Capitol. It was stress-free and simple, surrounded by close family and friends followed by plenty of celebration. After the ceremony, we gathered at The Rigby pub for food and drinks, continued our celebration by bar hopping around town, and of course ending the night at Five Nightclub.

Photographer: Little Dragon Photography

Nothing Short of Magical // Bri Andersen & Jenny Witt

December 7 // Engaged 9.24.24 // Gates of Heaven, Madison

SEPTEMBER was a dream for us. We took a road trip to Maine and got engaged in Acadia. Come November 6, reality set in as the election results came in. With the fear of possibly not being able to get married in a year or so, we decided against our larger dream wedding to have a mini-wedding in December. That day, we planned almost our entire wedding (including buying rings, a suit, and booking the venue).

Even though it was all arranged in such a short period of time, our wedding day was nothing short of magical. We got married with 10 of our closest family and friends at the Gates of Heaven in Madison, followed by dinner at The Harvey House's train car. We laughed (and cried), and even though we had only been fiancés for a few weeks, being wives felt so right.

Photographer: Melanie Renee Photography

Island of Love // Kalea Bicoy & Isabel Vreeke

December 8 // Engaged August 12, 2023 // The Tinsmith, Madison

WE MET in high school (Isabel's junior year and Kalea's sophomore) when we both were cast in the school musical. Every year we've been together we have taken a trip to Washington Island in Door County. Isabel's favorite spot on the island is the Stavkirke church. Isabel had grown up kind of wanting to get married there, but unfortunately you have to have a Christian-forward ceremony with the local ELCA pastor. It wasn't going to work to do the ceremony there, but since Kalea knew it was such a special spot to Isabel, she picked this as the proposal spot.

We got to the island for our seven-year anniversary and stopped by the church. Lucky for us, we were the only visitors. Kalea proposed with a ring she hand-designed from Bernie's Rock Shop. Isabel had a small inkling the proposal might happen on the trip and came prepared with her own ring she had found at a local store in our hometown—and proposed right back to her! It was really lovely because then we had a whole week on the island to celebrate being engaged, just the two of us.

Isabel's best friend of 20+ years, Rachel Seizer, was our only wedding party member and worked with Felly's Flowers to select flowers that were in season. She put together every floral element besides corsages and boutonnieres. This isn't something she does for a living or even really has tried much before, she just really had a passion for it—and really knocked it out of the park! **Photographer:** Heidi Hodges

SUBMITTED IN 2024, BUT MARRIED IN 2023

Sunshine of Love // Carly & Jessica Graverson

June 17 // Engaged June 5, 2021 // 1841 Farms & Vineyard, Burlington

WE LEARNED just how much love surrounds us—not only from our families and wedding party, but truly from an entire community that rallied around us and our love. Getting married during Pride Month, with a queer officiant, was very important to us. Not only was our marriage a symbol of our love for each other, but we made sure it was a celebration of all the queer folks who have even made our union possible. As our officiant so eloquently stated, "It is our responsibility to ensure that love like this is seen and celebrated in the way it deserves. We are standing in the beautiful sunshine today—we're not allowing queer love to stay confined to the shadows." **Photographer:** C. Mae Photography

A Dog Day // Cassidy & Kelsey Campbell

November 12 // Engaged April 28, 2022 // Mercantile Hall, Burlington

WE GOT TO HAVE our dog with us throughout the whole day! It was so fun and special to have him there with us. We also shared personal notes that were arguably even more heartfelt and personal than our vows. We did this privately right after our first look before the ceremony. It was so special and emotional! **Photographer:** C. Mae Photography





- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>BAY VIEW
17 Jinx & Micah Ogé</p> <p>BEAVER DAM
6 Micah & Scott Topel
4.5 Libby Falck & Leah Steuer</p> <p>BELLEVILLE
35 Ken Cameron & Brian Thompson
10 Andrea & Sheena Hirschfield
7.5 Cindy & Stephanie Jorenby</p> <p>BELOIT
22 Joanne & Tina Lenz-Mandt
16 Andrea & Genia Stevens
7 Philip Gorman & Mark Spreitzer</p> | <p>BLACK RIVER FALLS
8 Angela & Rachael Merry</p> <p>BOSCOBEL
49 T.J. Meehan & Larry Ortt</p> <p>BROOKFIELD
24 Lynn Carlson & Lisa Rouskey</p> <p>BURLINGTON
13 Ethan & Faith Parnell</p> <p>CHETEK
15 Krissy Gotch & Jennifer Holm</p> <p>CHIPPEWA FALLS
15 Jill Meunich & Laura Webster</p> | <p>COLUMBUS
7 Jordy Wilke-Egli & Shalene Wilke-Egli</p> <p>COTTAGE GROVE
10 Peg Zizmann & Rachel Zizmann
5 Dustin Barman & Tyler Ratkowski ♥</p> <p>DEFOREST
24 Holly Anderson & Colleen Marsden
14 Edwin & Jeffrey Roman-Carney
3 Jennifer McFarlane & Crystal Schermerhorn ♥</p> <p>EAU CLAIRE
14 Jazmine Brennan & Nicole Tourville
5.5 Claire Durgan & Sarah Ovsak ♥</p> |
|---|---|--|

Bold
Married couples.

♥
Engaged couples.

★
Straight allies.

1 2 3
Relationship Age.

+

Registered as domestic partners.

For the Love of Love

2025 LOVE LIST: CELEBRATING WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

By being a part of the Love List, **hundreds of LGBTQ relationships** from across Wisconsin are helping us recognize and celebrate LGBTQ love while also creating connections and visibility for our entire community. We hope this helps to create a portrait of love that reflects our diverse community.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: To protect against trans* and bi erasure, **only LGBTQ-identified relationships** are represented in photos. Allies only appear in text list.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>AFTON
34 Shelley Anderson & Nancy Buzzell</p> <p>APPLETON
33 Elizabeth Miller & Maureen O'Gara
26 Helen Boyd & Rachel Crowl
21 Joshua Cobbs & Benjamin D. Rinehart
18 Chuck Erickson & E-Ben Grisby
18 Kathy Flores & Zephyr Kendzierski
16 Russ Casperson & Jeffrey Jansen
15 Patrick & Ryan Platta
14 Ryan Merkel & Jake Tulogeski</p> | <p>6.5 Brent Mecikalski & Nick Ross ♥</p> <p>ARGYLE
24 Steve Engles & Richard Johnson</p> <p>ARLINGTON
8 Randy Anhalt & Nicholas Rich</p> <p>ATHELSTANE
35 Teresa Dziak & Mary Willard</p> <p>BARABOO
25 David & Ryan Berahn
12 John Shumaker & Clint Zurbuchen</p> |
|---|---|



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Bold

Married couples.



Engaged couples.



Straight allies.

1 2 3

Relationship Age.



Registered as domestic partners.

All submissions appear in the text list, however all photos are submitted for our consideration. We do our best to publish as many as space allows.

To safeguard against trans* and bi invisibility, our policy is to only publish photos of LGBTQ-identified couples.

EDGERTON

- 21 Amy Kongsli & Michelle Paulman
- 20 Brian Rennard & Patrick Zimmerman
- 14 Liz Tlougan & Marnie Tlougan
- 5 Wendi Kent & Liv Von Blomberg

FITCHBURG

- 29 Eric Schmidt & Carrie Waters Schmidt ★
- 19 Brian James & Wade Richardson
- 18 Ryan Parkos & Chris Sina
- 16 Christopher Peguero & Anthony Potter
- 14 Ryan Crose & Steven Heller
- 12 Daniel & Michael Lynn

FOX LAKE

- 5 Destiny Beaugrand & Lisa Beaugrand

FRIENDSHIP

- 48 Ann Jakel Stormoen & Peggy Stormoen

GLENDALE

- 12 Phillip Bailey & Jason Rae
- 12 Matthew Bowe & Kevin Woodard ♥

GRAFTON

- 25 Lynn Johnson & Charlene Strouf

GREEN BAY

- 19 Kevin Garrity & Michael Larkey
- 10 Angela Baerwolf & Abigail Swetz
- 10 Teresa Ninneman & Jamie Shiner
- 4 Danielle Maes & Rachel Maes

GREENFIELD

- 15 Marco Briceno & Vince Tripi
- 1.5 Elizabeth Ramirez-Mancilla & Jessica Ramirez-Soto

HALES CORNERS

- 1 Robin Cain & Shelly Nowacki

HARTFORD

- 3 Katie Rider & Mason Rider

HOWARD

- 0.7 Noki Heroux & Eli Trembl

HUBERTUS

- 33 Daniel Gorman & Robert Schmitt

JANESVILLE

- 35 Eilene & Lisa Coulter
- 20 Kimberly Blanchette & Colleen Frentzel
- 12 Daniel & David Malchow-Davis
- 5 Cori Link & Joy Link

JEFFERSON

- 18 Sheryl & Tarrah Spooner
- 6.5 Sarah Harebo & Amanda Kidwell

KENOSHA

- 20 Terry Cowles & Timothy Zimmer
- 3 Alyssa Lentz-Underwood & Holly Underwood

LA CROSSE

- 34 Tara DeLong & Willem Van Roosenbeek
- 28 Beth Cherne & Cindy Killion
- 18 Nicholas & Reegan Jensen-Shafer
- 5 Criss Gilbert & Mark McDougal
- 4 Kourtney Grekoff & Jade Grekoff
- 3 Ames Barker & Desiree Barker
- 1 Orion R & Sam D

LAKE MILLS

- 20 Nathaniel Basting & Shaun Dow

LUXEBURG

- 4 Tonja Mason & Jan Scoville ♥

LYNDON STATION

- 16 Erick Fenton & Jason Fenton

MADISON

- 50 Raphael Kadushin & Thomas McGhee
- 48 Betty Harris Custer & Corkey Custer ★
- 48 Sunshine Jones & Jo Kelley
- 47 Paul Grossberg & Dean Ziemke
- 44 Louie Phillips & Brian Schultz
- 42 John Cannon & John Fritsch
- 42 Sue Currier & Janis Senungetuk
- 42 Melissa Keyes & Ingrid Rothe
- 41 Tom DeChant & Paul Gible
- 40 Darren Bush & Stephanie Bush ★
- 40 Phil Biebl & Kevin Grohskopf
- 39 Stella & Vica-Etta Steel
- 38 Rob Latousek & Brian McCormick
- 38 Valerie Hodgson & MC Reisdorf
- 36 Linda Crubaugh & Beth Ann Workmaster
- 36 Dale Decker & Chad LaFlash
- 33 Maggie Dugan & Melanie Witte
- 32 Dale Daulo & Christopher Walters
- 31 Michael Austin & Bob Stindt
- 31 Callie Bell & Beth Thigpen
- 31 Karen Bennett & Carolyn Virginia
- 30 Rigoberto Gallegos & David Wahlberg
- 30 Peter Hoff & Paul Patenaude
- 30 Michele Perreault & Stephanie Spoehr
- 29 Deborah Daniel & Linda Novinger
- 28 Catherine Briggs & Marty Fox
- 28 Linda Curtin & Mary Ray
- 28 Michelle Shelhamer & Julie Visger
- 27 Denise King & Nancy Smider
- 27 Jennifer Wagner & Rebecca Wennlund
- 26 Eric Appleton & Rick Bristol
- 26 Keith Borden & Johannes Wallmann
- 26 Liz Dannenbaum & Donna Winter ✦
- 26 Bob Klebba & David Waugh
- 26 Amber Lefers & Rachel Veltman
- 25 Scott Bennett & Landon Petersen

K-Pop Across the Americas



LILI HERNANDEZ & ASHLEY HIEBING
MADISON | 9 YEARS

Whenever people ask how Lili and I met, I can't help but laugh. It wasn't through the usual means—an app, at work, or via mutual friends. We met in 2014 on a tiny, obscure online forum for lesbian fans of Girls' Generation, a Korean pop group. Little did I know that the stranger I decided to private message out of the blue would eventually become my wife.

That she lived in Mexico never felt like an insurmountable obstacle, no matter how incredulous our friends were that we could make it work. I won't pretend it was easy; we saw each other every few months, and often only for a weekend at a time. But we kept busy—she as a medical resident and me as an engineering student—and got through it with a healthy dose of stubbornness and the belief that one day the goodbyes would end.

In 2018, we decided we needed to take the next step and see how well we could handle a long-term visit. Lili lived with me for six months, the maximum her tourist visa would allow. Needless to say, my marriage proposal at the end of those six months did not come as a surprise. It would take another year of wading through the immigration process (so much paperwork!), but eventually Lili was approved for a marriage visa, and on September 30, 2019, after five years of planes and Skype dates, we were finally together for good.

We assumed things would settle down after that, but life had other ideas. Though the COVID pandemic began not long after our wedding, even that felt minor compared with what would come in September of 2021, when Lili was diagnosed with retroperitoneal liposarcoma, a rare and unpredictable cancer. We spent our second wedding anniversary in the hospital while she recovered from surgery to remove a massive tumor in her abdomen.

The diagnosis upended our lives, but more than that, it completely changed our perspectives. Things that always seemed so important became insignificant, and things we took for granted—health, time, life itself—became invaluable. After multiple rounds of chemotherapy and more surgery, Lili is currently in remission, and we're making the most of it by traveling around the world to watch our favorite K-pop group perform. It's a reminder of our past and a promise for the future: Treat every day together as a gift. ■

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A Love That Burns Brightly



SHAMMARA MCMULLIN & ZIGGY ODOGUN-WILLIAMS
MADISON | 3 YEARS

This is a love story that began in 2022 when we were both in very uncomfortable positions in life personally, emotionally, and mentally. We came together at a moment where life left us very uncertain of the future.

How would I, Ziggy, describe our love? I would describe it as infinite, unwavering, and one that is dreamt about. It sometimes feels out of reach because of how rare this love can be. In our life together, we have found a form of partnership, best friendship, and companionship that we never knew could exist. We have a passion that burns daily for one another, our love is proof that one can change their entire life, discarding that which does not serve them in the midst of pursuing a life in an unforeseen reality. In the past three years, we have gone from passing strangers, to friends, to lovers which has then transpired to life partners, complete with a family under one roof in our new home.

While uplifting each other, we hold one another accountable through acknowledgement of daily reminders related to our lifelong nesting commitments. We are vehemently in love with the privilege of facing challenges together, pushing one another into growth, as well as being effective communicators about maintaining this lifelong relationship. We have found a partnership that knows no boundaries or limits in what we choose to pursue to better ourselves, each other, and our communities.

How would I, Shammara, describe our love? Vivid, joyful, fun, fiery, uplifting, truthful, and growth-filled. With Ziggy by my side, I have had the courage to completely upend the life that I was living to pursue an authentic, albeit sometimes scary, yet limitless life. Her love is so intense and unwavering. I feel firmly grounded in our foundation yet limitless with possibility. With her, I see life clearer. I have found my heart, and my home.

It is important to stress that with a love like ours followed by the decision to grow as one, maintaining a relationship like this one is not for the faint hearted. Our desire to grow together is unmatched and like no other. The adaptability and clarity that a successful relationship takes is one that comes from continued education through therapy, sharing quality time, purposeful intimacy, and radical self awareness. We are in tune with what we need individually, which helps us both see what our counterpart may need at a moment's notice. Our relationship has allowed us to practice gratitude, healing, and vulnerability, and it has opened up a world for us where we can unapologetically embrace self love and rejuvenation.

We are best friends, lovers, and partners, but most importantly, we truly enjoy each other's company. We aren't foolish to think that love is the only factor that brought us together. We're aware that the reason we work well is of our ability to dig a little deeper than our minds want us to sometimes. We do the work and choose to live a life of freedom and peace. ■

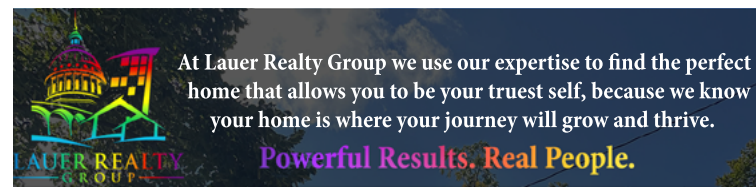


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Bold
Married couples.
♥
Engaged couples.
★
Straight allies.
1 2 3
Relationship Age.
+
Registered as domestic partners.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 25 Jordan Bingham & Heather Stouder | 20 Michael Velliquette & Tehshik Yoon | 16 Lana Lawrence & Louise Stout ✦ |
| 25 Diane & Monique Brockley-Drinkman | 19 Eric Borchert & Timmo Dugdale | 16 Gina & Rae Senarighi |
| 25 Patrick Hoeth & Keith Lupien | 19 Philip Renner & Marco Torrez-Miranda | 16 Tonya Shaver & Valerie Shaver |
| 25 Lee Johnsen & Rex Piercy | 18 Amanda & Dawn Siebert-Evenstone | 16 Ali Treviño-Murphy & Amy Winkelman |
| 25 Carol Nelson & Nancy Speir | 18 Jeff Clark & Tim Hagen | 15 Anna Celaya & Sherry Holly |
| 24 Jen Ferstl & Jamesetta Fousek | 18 Judith Davidoff & Rhonda Lanford | 15 Juliet & Marlo Darken |
| 24 Terry Heiliger & James Moe | 18 Cindy Desch & Lynn Olson | 15 Jilip & Joey Nagler |
| 24 Daniel Lippit & Glenn Mitroff | 18 Ann & Cindi Gonzagowski | 14 Bryon Hobbs & Mike Hoelzel |
| 23 Barb Arnett & Ellen Sullivan | 18 Lauren Lebwohl & Katie Wilkin | 14 Jami Degrazio & Holly Hieronim ♥ |
| 23 Cynthia & Jess Bachhuber | 18 Bradley Tabor & Tim Walters | 14 Kris Kalb & Robert Von Rutenberg |
| 22 Olwen & Shelley Hansen-Blake | 17 Missy Dittmer-Herrmann & Molly Herrmann | 13 Mabel & Sarah Carr |
| 21 Amanda Berg & Becca Schmitz | 17 Beth Hanson & Kandis Severin | 13 Lukas Dietz & Jordan Siegler ♥ |
| 21 Randall Cornell & Jess Salek | 17 Katy Conley & Leonie Dolch | 13 Shawn Ramsey & Kelly Staerzl |
| 21 Kris Glodoski Wolf & Lesley Wolf | 17 Jeanine Hutcherson & Tricia Johnson | 12 Shannon & Nick Ballhorn-Wagner ★ |
| 21 Jacinda Tessmann & Teri Weiland | 17 Donna Vance & Jenni Vance | 12 Martin Batchelor & Jeremiah Kasdorf |
| 20 Karen Darcy & Beth McConnell | 16 Julie Beauchamp & Brenda Stanley | 12 Jason Fowler & Grant Stroobants |
| 20 Wilma Flynn-stone & Steve Starkey ✦ | 16 Jay Edgar & Joshua Feyen | 12 Roz Klaas & Kari Rongstad |
| 20 Virginia Harrison & Melissa Peyton ♥ | 16 Allison & Ashley Foxborn | 11 Leah Clark & Terry McLaren |
| 20 DaddyDean Nett-Strozak & Alan Strozak | 16 Robyn Laskowski & Kris Olds | 11 Jose Vega & Mike Webber |
| | | 11 TeKema Balentine & Megan Bentley ♥ |

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Bold

Married couples.



Engaged couples.



Straight allies.

1 2 3

Relationship Age.



Registered as domestic partners.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 11 Anne Cupelli & Monica Cupelli | 9 Amy Kue & Betsy Moyer | 7 Jess Zitkus & Skye Zitkus |
| 11 Patrick Farabaugh & Sedrick Huppert | 8 Kalea Bicoy & Isabel Vreeke | 6.5 Danny Atwater & Sid Richards |
| 11 Andre Glass & Ron Gratz | 8 Lauren Altaweel & Niko Nelson | 6.5 Lynn Mayer & Gigi Vail |
| 11 Elizabeth & Krista Hagermoser-Bayley | 8 Whitney Anderson & Caitlyn LoMonte | 6 Tyrone Creech & Trevor Powless |
| 11 Robert Kobuch & Mark Sannito | 8 Andrew Carlson & Rikuma Nozaki | 6 Lachele Fisher & Rachel Strauch-Nelson |
| 11 Ashley & Sara Wenten | 8 Nick Drake, Emily Mills & Chez Dickson ♥ | 6 Mario White & Kieran Sahasrabudhe |
| 10 Sandy Eichel & Nancy Noet | 8 Erin & Katie Danielson | 6 Amy Yonker & Andie Yonker |
| 10 Laura & Shari Henning | 8 Andrew Goldsby & Jeremy Pagel | 5.5 Brad & Ryan Branwell |
| 10 Stephanie Budge & Megan McDonald | 8 Brian & Ryan Maulana-Ponce | 5.5 Jim Chiolino & Terry Svaglic |
| 10 Aaron Carreno & Ryan Piskowsky | 8 Diana Miller & Emily Peffer | 5.5 Mady Greene & Robin Matthies |
| 10 Jen Fish & Mel Fish | 8 Jillian & Katy Werginz | 5.5 Mark & Lucas Long |
| 10 Bradley Grochocinski & Lance Lattimer | 7 Angie Alcorta & Mel Paugel ♥ | 5 Sarah Airozo & Chelsea Cornelius |
| 10 Liliana Hernandez & Ashley Hiebing | 7 Olivia Biller & Alex Dudek | 5 Todd Baur & Oscar Cabeza-Guerra |
| 10 Brianna & Meghan Johns-Hill | 7 Charley & Gillian Blake | 5 Sarah Birkholz & Abby Churchill ♣ |
| 10 Abbey Scott & Haley Scott | 7 Michael Bruno & James Smith | 5 Stacey Garbarski & Rachel Seizer |
| 9 Josh Ayala & Mattheis Carley | 7 David & Matt Clark-Sally | 5 Jazzmine Haygood & Anna Landry |
| 9 Becky & Jess Barnes | 7 Fox Coenen & Kalen MacAdam | 5 David Heuer & Ted Ketterhagen |
| 9 Cass Downing & Ryan Mueller | 7 Zack Henderson & Riley Willman | 5 Adrian Lampron & Maxwell Laubenstein |
| 9 Hannah & Libby Hankins | 7 Shaun & Ryan LeCloux | 5 Star Merchant & Rowan Strange ♥ |

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How It's Supposed to Work



DJ NICHOLS & LEE STRATTON
OSHKOSH | 9 YEARS

Like so many love stories in recent years, we met on an app. Tinder, to be specific. DJ was visiting Chicago from Kentucky in 2015, where he had just finished law school and had to use-it-or-lose-it the rest of his PTO. Lee was in his first year of general surgery residency. We (DJ, from his best friend's pull-out couch, and Lee, in a hospital call room while working nights) swiped right on each other, called each other charming, and agreed to meet for a Tuesday morning breakfast before DJ left town.

After almost canceling the date after DJ's late night at Musical Monday at Sidetrack, we split the breakfast special (a French toast flight), Lee drove DJ back to his friend's house, and DJ attempted to kiss Lee on the cheek to say goodbye (Lee turned his head to go in for a kiss on the lips, resulting in DJ kissing Lee right in the eye).

Six months later, after many respective trips to Kentucky and Illinois, DJ moved to Chicago for work. We lived separately and agreed there were no promises of forever with the move—long distance to short distance was going to be an adjustment, so we wanted to make sure we liked each other more than just texts and weekend visits. We did.

Fast forward through moving in together, a two-year, long-distance stint while Lee finished his residency in North Carolina (UNC-Chapel Hill), the adoption of our first dog (Karen), Lee's endocrine surgery fellowship (University of Chicago), a pandemic-informed move to a Wisconsin lake house (Oshkosh), and the adoption of our second dog (Benji), we were married in 2022. Given that our first date involved sharing French toast, we thought it was only fitting that we share a French toast (champagne this time) for our wedding, and we were married near Bordeaux, with 50 of our closest friends doing—as Britney directed: partying in France.

We've been to 20 countries together, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, walked the Great Wall of China, swam with whale sharks in the Philippines, partied with Olympians at the Olympics, and wore lederhosen in Munich, all while making friends all over the world. We are always on the go, whether it's Southern Decadence in New Orleans, a night out in New York City, or making last-minute New Year's Eve plans in Amsterdam.

In our almost-decade together, we have pushed each other to be our best selves, depending on each other's strengths to make up for our own short-comings, talking through disagreements while also standing up for ourselves, and making sure we laugh more than we do anything else. No relationship is perfect, and all of them take work (see Britney reference above), but we are stronger together than the sum of our parts, and that's how love is supposed to work. ■

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♥
Engaged couples.

★
Straight allies.

1 2 3
Relationship Age.

+

Registered as domestic partners.

All submissions appear in the text list, however all photos are submitted for our consideration. We do our best to publish as many as space allows.

To safeguard against trans* and bi invisibility, our policy is to only publish photos of LGBTQ-identified couples.

- 5 Kailin & Katie Rickert-Kauffman
- 4.5 Cindy Crane & Judy Mills
- 4.5 Beth Feeney & Sharlene Victor
- 4.5 Josiah Stork & Zak Stowe ♥
- 4 James Gardner & Edwin Suarez-Zayas ♥
- 4 Mary Kline & Janet Parker
- 4 Sam Phillips & Michael Radloff
- 3.5 Bri Andersen & Jenny Witt
- 3.5 Gideon Elliott & Amelia Speight
- 3.5 Neal Ellis & Pio (Tim Piotrowski) ♥
- 3.5 Kriona Hagen & Maya Robinson
- 3.5 Patrick Sisson & Steve Sisson
- 3 Logan B & Dom E ♥
- 3 Braden Baumann & Fae Nachtigal
- 3 Michael Braatz & Willian Cano Hernandez
- 3 Valerie Burzynski, Valerie Haupt & Olliver Wilson ♥
- 3 Megan Gour & Terri Gour
- 3 Ava Kempainen & Amanda Prohaska
- 3 Jay Lantz & Drew Silver
- 3 Axel Sharp & Robert Sharp
- 2.5 Nick Famularo & Sean O'Brien
- 2.5 Valeria Luna & Rae Sowards
- 2.5 Mack McKellips & Severance Savides
- 2.5 Hollis Rudiger & Heather Winesett
- 2 Tommy Crow & Sebastian Tosarr-Cattino
- 2 Julia Norton & Hannah Wilson ♥
- 0.5 Christen Lester-Jones & Seraphine Novus
- MANITOWOC**
- 8 Sapphire Garcia & Stephanie Garcia
- 5 Ashley Brown & Karey Roberts
- MARATHON**
- 44 Mark Blume & Thomas Voss
- MAZOMANIE**
- 20 Carolyn Antonie & Minda Engel
- MCFARLAND**
- 33 Judy Childers & Christina Zoschke
- 33 Chuck Mocco & Thomas Scheid
- 17 Jere M. Foley, II & Jason Strader
- 14 Kristin & Nicolette Ellis
- 8.5 Mary Meyer & Tanya Meyer
- 5 Cheryl & Michelle McCarty
- 5 Jayce Moe & Christian Swomley
- MENOMONEE FALLS**
- 7 Allison & Hailey Wilson
- 25 Sarah Thompson & Christina Vargo

- 20 Mel & Mandy Smith-Tourville & Sarah Barkdull ♥
- 11 Minta Dwyer & Camden Hargrove
- MEQUON**
- 24 Brian LeStarge & Dale Mueller
- 48 Micheal Plambeck & Harry Sutton
- MIDDLETON**
- 35 Julie Woodrick & Roberta Woodrick
- 29 Ronald Meerhoff & Michael Rhoads
- 21 Bobby Andrews & Todd Andrews
- 16 Erica & Leslie Gittings
- 1.5 Chandler Cook & Charna Halstead
- MILTON**
- 3.5 Mark Albright & Rick Ehredt
- MILWAUKEE**
- 67 Erwin Uecker & Ross Walker
- 44 Wendy Pologe & Mary Thoreson
- 44 Steven Sanders & Rand Schmidt
- 38 Gerald Coon & Stewart Dempsey
- 35 Becky Burton & Sue Robinson
- 28 John Harmon & Karter Wilkening
- 23 Mark Janetski & Ed Mullins
- 19 Scott Jones & Thomas Zigan
- 15 Elizabeth Brown & Rebecca Larson
- 15 Jessica & Dana Langill +
- 13 Jesse Ehrenfeld & Judd Taback
- 11 Gatlin Dresidan & Gerald Hyler
- 10 Serita Cheeks & Ashley Groth
- 9 Phillip Jordan & Tahj Williams ♥
- 8.5 Rick Banks & Javon Dean
- 8 Don Schwamb & Joshua Sukkert
- 8 Bruce & Jason Seeds
- 7 Crystal & Elizabeth Rocha
- 6 Barbie Charging Crow-Reding & Brandy Reding
- 6 Eric Durant & Scott Swickard
- 6 Lisa Mendez & Shay Mendez
- 6 Jess & Zoe Whorrall
- 5 Giordi & Sylvester Carmichael
- 5 Noel Johnson & Taylor Staples ♥
- 2 Jada & Maria Carter
- 2 Jak Maliszewski & James Valona
- 2 Alexandria & Juniper Starr
- 1.5 Jeffrey Montoya & Matthew Werlein
- 0.5 Rae Abney & Kelly Knoke
- MINERAL POINT**
- 23 John G Greenwood & Fred E. Vaughn

- MONONA**
- 16 Beth & Jamie Kernan
- 12 Vivienne Andersen & Kye Richards
- 7 Heidi & Jeremy Duss & Jess Blanchard
- 3 Shammara McMullin & Ashante Odogun
- MOSINEE**
- 7 Kaya & Megan Greenwood
- MONTELLO**
- 19 Cheryl Ravenscroft & Suzanne Fichtel
- MORRISONVILLE**
- 6 Emer & Kim Bursaw
- MOUNT PLEASANT**
- 2 Jonathan Korff & Eduardo Andrés Orozco ♥
- NEENAH**
- 43 David Bluma & Brad Morrison
- 4 Allie Krause & Lena Lambriqtsen
- 1.5 Robert Rohloff & Spencer Rohloff
- NEW AUBURN**
- 28 Scott McCracken & Abe Zeman
- NEW GLARUS**
- 16 Trent Gabler & Justin Miller
- OAK CREEK**
- 30 Pat Cline & Patty McKenzie
- 18 Charlie Nash & JR Witt
- 16 Thomas Darrow & Michael Houle
- OREGON**
- 27 Mark Koch & Robert Manion
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- 5 Derek & Justin Strom
- 3.5 Maggie Cedar & Erin Winkels
- OSHKOSH**
- 15 Amanda & Andrew Kramp
- 9 DJ Nichols & Lee Stratton
- PORT EDWARDS**
- 17 Shane Burkart & Kristopher Gasch
- PORT WASHINGTON**
- 20 Scott Lone & Joseph Maddalena
- RACINE**
- 18 Ann Kelso & Sarah Mueller
- 10 Kevin Berry & Anthony Gano
- 10 Gina Cesarz & Kez Cesarz

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A Life of Adventure Together



DANNY ATWATER & SID RICHARDS
MADISON | 6.5 YEARS

As I took the stage with my fellow Perfect Harmony Chorus singers to perform our spring concert, a very cute guy who I had yet to meet was in the audience. Apparently he happened to think I was pretty cute, too! He turned to his friend, pointed out “the cute redhead” on stage, and his friend said, “That’s my friend Danny. I’ll introduce you.” We met briefly after the show, and as he was leaving he turned back to catch me looking at him. He smiled that gorgeous smile, and I was hooked! So that night I did what any normal person would do—I went on Facebook, searched for “Sid,” and sent him a message. A few weeks later after some casual dates at the Bartell Theatre, The Cooper’s Tavern (a favorite to this day), and Barriques, we found ourselves on top of the Monona Terrace and declared that we were officially dating.

We had met each other as two established adults, each with our own hobbies, and our own homes. We even had our own pets—Sid with his rescued dog, and me with my two cats that Sid was allergic to! Early into our relationship, we agreed it was important to continue nurturing those individual aspects about us and resist the “urge to merge” as we would joke. This meant that the few times we would spend together each week were very intentional, and not filled with distractions or chores. Instead we would go on adventures!

Our love for each other grew, and our adventures took us to Devil’s Lake with friends, a trip to Florida to visit my parents, and to all varieties of music concerts, comedy shows, and stage productions. Less than two years into our relationship, COVID hit, and we had to figure out how to adapt our adventures. We began hiking the Ice Age Trail and touring the Driftless Area with the convertible top down to picnic at the Mississippi River. Sid even helped this non-swimmer learn to kayak and convinced me to get my first e-bike.

We strengthened our love for each other as the years ticked by, and built our lives together while still comfortably living separately. We talked about what it would be like to live together, and how important it would be to each have our own space within that home. We just didn’t see the need to rush things along!

Last June, on our sixth anniversary, we found OUR house and moved in together for the first time. Sid has his own space for him and his dog, I have my own space for me and my cats, and we intentionally make time to spend together. The first weeks living together, and the stress of unforeseen, major home remodeling projects tested us, but we have built our relationship on a solid foundation of love and respect and this has been our grandest adventure together to date! ■

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A Love That Burns Brightly



MANDY & MEL SMITH-TOURVILLE & SARAH BARKDULL
MENOMONIE | 20 YEARS & 1 YEAR

Last year, on the 20th anniversary of my marriage to Mandy, someone got us a plaque that read, “The only thing better than falling in love is staying there.” I happen to be lucky enough to enjoy both simultaneously. My name is Mel. I have been married to Mandy for 21 blissful years. I have been partnered with Sarah for 14 beautiful months.

Mandy and Sarah are great friends. The three of us, our children, two dogs, and cat enjoy a quiet, simple life on several acres in rural Wisconsin. Our lives are as exciting as the average family—we share dinners around our large family table, we do the dishes and laundry, we read to our younger children and grandchildren, and we exchange tidbits of wisdom with our teens and grown children. The seasons change, and we enjoy long drives through the fall trees, gardening in the warmth of summer, quiet nights watching the snow fall with a mug of cocoa, and the magic of spring leaves returning to our Northwood trees.

Polyamory has been an integrated part of all three of our lives for decades. We support one another’s relationships and honor one another’s journey—together and independently. Our polyamory has always included individuals who are dedicated to gentle parenting and the respectful treatment of children of all ages. We have raised many children, watching them grow into compassionate, creative, and thoughtful adults. We enjoy their company whether we are visiting their homes or having them return home for visits, especially when they bring our beautiful and absolutely perfect grandchildren and grandpuppies. We share laughter and joy. We solve challenges with care—listening, sharing openly, and building connection at every opportunity. We have created an extraordinary life out of the ordinary. We have a beautiful community of friends, family, and chosen family who walk beside us in this life.

There are days where the world looks very bleak—the madness of U.S. politics, attacks on our trans and queer loved ones, the crushing weight of capitalist economics on those trying to survive, racism and white supremacy—and the desperate need for safety and justice—pandemics and health challenges, climate crisis weather tearing through towns and cities, war and genocide that exists without disruption, deportation and family separation policies that harm people who matter, endless worries about the future that our grandchildren will inherit. It is these realities that drive us to create safety and justice and peace within the walls of our home and community.

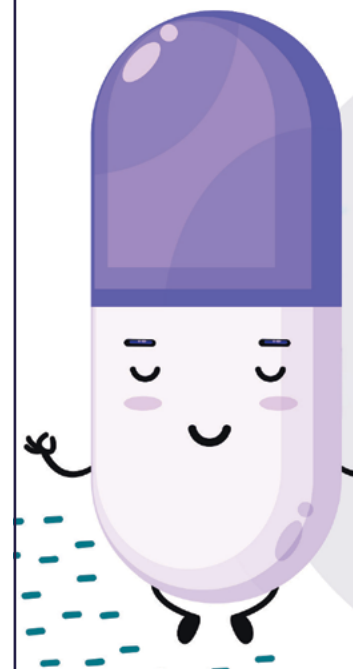
We want to do our small part to be the best neighbors, friends, parents, grandparents, caretakers of our elders, advocates, and revolutionaries that we can be. We want to love one another well and fully. May we all sharpen our focus to take care of those we love and be available to increase the justice, safety, and security of those within our midst. In these times of uncertainty, we need one another more than ever before. ■

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1 2 3
Relationship Age.
+
Registered as domestic partners.

RICHLAND CENTER

4 Bradey Engen & George Hege

SAINT FRANCIS

5 Gracie Limbach & Sydney Martinez

SHEBOYGAN

21 Julie Konik & Christine Smith

SHOREWOOD

21 Luc Maker & Susie Seidelman

STEVENS POINT

23 Lorie Dobrzynski & Melanie Kuolt

STOUGHTON

24 Walt Jackson & Dennis Outhouse

22 Todd Cieslak & Brent Eastabrooks

21 Angie & Tammy Whitiken

9 Sam Eifert & Jason Whitley

1 Nicole Henning & Melvyn Marcum

STURGEON BAY

1.5 Darrick DeMeuse & Kevin Marquez ♥

SUN PRAIRIE

26 James Candler & Paul Lorentz

15 Aleta Klicko & Patti Klicko

15 Tim Lom & Steve Noll

12 Maggie & Molly Censky

9 Eric & Gavin Logan

8.5 Kat & Steph Kosmaule

5.5 Deb Holland & Jane Kahl

4.5 Amy & Brittany Eddy

3 Meghan Champion & Kristin Ernst

2 Becky & Marissa Hagen

1.5 Amy & Anne Stanislawski

TOMAH

2 Stefany Clayborn & Kelsey Postlewaite

VERONA

18 Derek Aimonetto & Glenn Rowe

12 John W. Duncan & Rev. Tim Schaefer

11 Sam Waack & Bo Wang

10 Tracy Fitch & Harper Hazelmare

2 Amanda Ferwerda & Demi Ferwerda-Wiemann

WATERTOWN

7 April & Charity Chandler

WAUWATOSA

12 Brad & Nick Schlaikowski

8 Jake Christian & Dave Connell

WEST ALLIS

48 Garth & Roy Badger

WHITEFISH BAY

15 Anne Marie Arroyo & Tamela Greene

WHITWATER

27 Robin Fox & Kim Simes

WINDSOR

12 Paul Fritsch & Jim Hartman

3 Sydney Cain & Maddie Rubrich

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GUN VIOLENCE | TRANSGENDER | CULTURE | SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

The Accusational Harm from Madison's Mass Shooting

The **ruled false claims** that the shooter was transgender illustrate both blatant and covert transphobia while also creating a dangerous false equivalency around mental illness and transness.

THE CITY OF MADISON was changed forever in the worst of ways on December 16 as it became the latest school shooting statistic when a 15-year-old girl shot and killed Rubi Vergara (a student) and Erin West (a teacher), and injured six others (whose names have not yet been released) before taking her own life at Abundant Life Christian School (ALCS), a private, non-denominational, K-12 school located on Madison's east side.

Madison community members banded together quickly to plan a vigil at the State Capitol on December 17, and students organized a walkout and protest on December 20 with a march to the Capitol that included speeches from students and leaders that called on lawmakers and leaders to take meaningful actions to address gun violence and end school shootings.

As with the immediate aftermath of most school shootings there were unsubstantiated claims and misinformation regarding what transpired, including the age of the shooter and the identity of the person who made the initial 9-1-1 call (both of which were later corrected), as well as unfounded claims that the shooter was transgender. The claims that the shooter was transgender came even before information was released regarding the shooter's name and how she went by a different first name than her legal name. However, this piece of information helped the anti-trans discourse gain traction as people seemed to collectively forget that cisgender people also change their names and that nearly all children try out different names at some point. There was no evidence at any point in the initial reports of the shooting or in the evidence that has been subsequently released that the shooter was transgender, yet enough people were quick to believe the rumors that seemed to originate on far-right social media and were willing to villainize transgender people by spreading the lies. This was a slap in the face of the transgender community, and especially transgender kids, considering that nearly all school shootings have been committed by cisgender people, with more than 95% of those having been committed by cisgender boys/men, and of all mass



shootings that have occurred, less than 1% were committed by transgender people. Simply put, transgender people are the least likely to commit mass shootings/school shootings, and cisgender men/boys are the most likely to commit mass shootings.

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The claims that the shooter was transgender have seemingly dissipated (at least at the time of this writing), but the damage has already been done to those of us in the transgender community who saw the claims being made not only by the usual anti-trans suspects on social media, but also by friends and acquaintances. This harm will undoubtedly impact transgender kids even more than we can possibly know, especially considering they already face alienation, bullying, and discrimination at higher rates than their LGB and cisgender peers.

Kids are terrified to go to school because of the threat of violence, and particularly gun violence; they are not afraid of the existence of transgender people. Transgender kids are terrified to go to school not only due to gun violence but also due to the violence they reg-

ularly experience from peers, teachers, parents, politicians, celebrities, and random strangers (in real life and on the internet). This year alone, transgender kids have been subjected to legislation and public debate regarding their right to exist, including bills that are aimed at excluding transgender kids from: participating in sports, using bathrooms, accessing gender-affirming care of any kind, and even being able to use their pronouns. Just days after the shooting, the Senate passed the FY25 National Defense Authorization Act that included a provision banning kids of military service members from accessing health care. Senator Baldwin did try to introduce an amendment that would strike the provision, but it lacked support to be brought to a vote, despite bipartisan opposition to the provision. This is just the latest act of violence against transgender kids in a year of violence against transgender people with over 600 anti-trans bills introduced in more than 40 states, including 17 in Wisconsin alone. They normalize violence against our transgender community and then justify the violence through villainizing transgender people without evidence, and it seems that people are all too willing to believe the lies.

Despite a lack of evidence to support claims that the shooter was transgender, the rumors that caught on followed a predictable pattern of distorted thinking from the anti-trans crowd that they use to justify the cruelty that the

transgender community regularly faces. And these lies catch on when folks who would not consider themselves anti-trans (and in some cases they may even consider themselves allies) breathe life into the lie through sharing false information on social media and in their social circles, information that could have been easily refuted with scrutiny and discernment. The harm that these lies cause cannot be understated as they proliferate transphobia, sexism, and racism by reinforcing cisgender, heterosexual, and white Western supremacy that encourages violence against anyone who does not fit these ideals.

While the primary causes of mass shootings include access to weapons, the normalization of violence, desperation, isolation, alienation, loneliness, homicidal/suicidal ideation, and seeking notoriety/fame, the discussion following mass shootings usually centers around gun control and mental illness, despite evidence that gun control measures have been historically used to criminalize marginalized people and prevent marginalized people from lawful gun ownership. There is a weak correlation between mass shootings and mental illness, with multiple studies showing that people with severe and persistent mental health issues are significantly more likely to be victims of violence.

Access to guns and ammunition in the U.S. is part of the issue of gun violence; however, gun control measures do not directly address the deeper issues related to gun culture, the normalization of violence, or how mass shooters gain notoriety and pseudo-celebrity status. Calls for gun control after mass shooting events also can lead to more people buying guns out of fear that they will not be able to buy guns in the future, coupled with increased fear of gun violence. And the cycle continues with mass shootings, school shootings, and casualties from gun violence increasing each year in the U.S.

Discussion of mental illness as a cause of gun violence is particularly harmful and ableist, and in this case, it turned extremely transphobic. While we can all agree that people who commit mass shootings are not mentally well when they commit these atrocities, there is no consistent correlation between diagnosable mental illness and mass shootings, so the association following mass shooting events



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causes further stigmatizing of mental illness. This is particularly insidious for transgender people as access to gender-affirming health care requires a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria which is classified as a mental illness, with effective treatment being access to affordable gender-affirming care and greater acceptance from family, friends, and colleagues—treatment that is actively being legislated out of existence despite opposition from healthcare professionals.

The primary causes of mass shootings include access to weapons, the normalization of violence, desperation, isolation, alienation, loneliness, homicidal/suicidal ideation, and seeking notoriety/fame.

We can agree that more money and resources for mental health care and wellness would be fantastic, but these calls for attention to mental health care are left without meaningful follow-through. Instead of investing in greater access to support and mental health resources in the wake of mass shootings, we are given active shooter training and school shooting drills that are treated as normal as fire safety drills. However, unlike fire safety, mass shooting drills do not focus on both prevention and

response. Instead of meaningfully working on addressing prevention of mass shooting events the focus is on response, as though these events are as natural and unavoidable as severe weather events. This is not normal, and it is not ok. We need to do better, and I think we can if we truly put in the work to build community in earnest and invest in violence prevention measures that are not punitive; we need to work to build a culture of interdependence, accountability, and belonging.

This paradigm shift cannot occur overnight, and no one person can solve the many ways that we need to collectively address violence. Nothing changes if nothing changes, and things need to change in order to meaningfully address gun violence, to bring an end to mass shootings and school shootings, and to bring an end to violence against our transgender community. ■

Note: We have purposely excluded the name of the ALCS shooter and any other school shooters in this article as there is a correlation between mass shootings and the desire for notoriety/fame, as well as the threat of copy cat behavior. It is important for us to know and name those whose lives were taken by gun violence and to not focus on the details of the shooters beyond what we can learn about preventing these events from continuing to occur.



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MARRIAGE EQUALITY PARENTAL RIGHTS ADOPTION IVF IMMIGRATION STATUS

Protecting Yourself & Your Family as We Move Into 2025

If you are concerned about the safety of your marriage, parental rights, and/or immigration status, Michele L. Perreault of DeWitt LLP offers some reassurance and notes of caution for these legal protections as Trump and his allies take office.

BELOW ARE SOME recommendations regarding the soundness of and/or threat to same sex marriage rights, parental rights, estate plans, immigration status, and gender identification based on legal precedent and how the systems work to support or leave vulnerable these rights.

MARRIAGE

Obergefell v. Hodges, which granted marriage equality, is the law of the United States. This federal decision relying on the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the right to marriage for every person regardless of sexual orientation and requires all state governments to recognize marriages performed in other U.S. states.

Many people are concerned that with a new administration, marriage equality may be threatened, since the United States Supreme Court was willing to overturn its prior decision granting women the right to privacy in making decisions regarding abortion. Although the U.S. Supreme Court overruled *Roe v. Wade*, a 50-year-old precedent, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, there were many lower court cases which preceded it signaling very clearly that the issue was ripe for reconsideration.

Typically, it takes years for a case to work its way through the legal system to be considered by the supreme court, thereby giving us substantial notice that an important case needs our attention. If *Obergefell* were at risk, we would have similar advance warning, as we did with *Dobbs*, that this challenge was occurring. Currently, there are no such known challenges.

The *Obergefell* decision cannot be overturned by Presidential Executive Order. The *Obergefell* decision cannot be overturned by legislation because the decision recognizes and protects a constitutional right for U.S. citizens. The only two ways the decision can be overturned is by the United States Supreme Court reversing the decision or a new federal constitutional amendment banning marriage equality. A constitutional amendment is highly unlikely and would take several years to pass.

Marriage is a legal commitment that conveys rights and responsibilities on each partner; it requires a complex legal process to undo. We do not recommend rushing into marriage out of concern that marriage equality will be overturned in some way in the near future.

If *Obergefell* were to be overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, the right to marry could be curtailed. If the right to marry is limited, it is unlikely that marriages which already exist at that time would be nullified. Legal rulings generally do not have retroactive application, and we do not anticipate any attempt to dissolve pre-existing marriages.

ADOPTION & PARENTAGE

If you have an adoption decree or a parentage order, whether you are a same-sex or a different-sex family, and that order was issued by a Wisconsin circuit court, your parental rights are constitutionally protected under the Full Faith and Credit clause of the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court confirmed this in *V.L. v. E.L.* We recommend you have a



certified copy of the court order in a safe, accessible location.

Since 2016 and the decision in *Torres v. Seemeyer*, many Wisconsin families have relied on the birth certificate issued by the State of Wisconsin listing both partners in a marital relationship as a child's parents as evidence of their familial relationship.

The *Torres* decision "ungendered" the statutes in Wisconsin which address parentage presumptions and, specifically, addressed situations where children are born with the assistance of a sperm donor. As a result, married partners of any sex who use a donor to conceive a child can both be listed on a child's birth certificate. Additionally, in Wisconsin, courts recognize that children born during a marriage are presumed to be the legal child of the two parties to that marriage, regardless of gender.

Understandably, families with both parents' names on the certificate or who have birthed children during their marriage have not taken the extra legal step to obtain a court order securing those legal connections because adopting your own child—and the screening process adoption requires—might not feel comfortable or necessary when you are already recognized on the birth certificate. We are unaware of any Wisconsin court that has done anything other than uphold the legal status of both parents for a child born during a valid same-sex marriage, despite the status being challenged in a few cases during divorce. The *Torres* decision, however, only interpreted Wisconsin law. And the granting of a birth certificate is not a court order; it is a governmental administrative act.

Having a court order provides constitutional protections and portability that a birth certificate alone does not. In line with the ACLU, LAMB-DA Legal, and other national organizations advocating for equal rights, we recommend you obtain a confirmatory adoption. This is, of course, a very personal decision, and we are happy to talk to you to discuss your family and whether this is right for you.

IVF & SURROGACY

If you are building your family through IVF, surrogacy, or the use of donor eggs, sperm, or embryos, the law of Wisconsin has not changed. The presumptions of parentage set forth in Wis. Stat. § 891.40 and the Wisconsin Supreme Court's decision in *In re the Paternity of F.T.R., Rosecky v. Schissel* stand. Parentage orders continue to be available

through the Wisconsin courts to confirm and protect the rights of the intended parents.

However, as noted above, if you used a known donor and do not yet have a court order, you may want to consider a termination of parental rights and confirmatory adoption to secure the constitutional protections of a court order.

If you are at a point where you are looking for long-term storage of embryos, sperm, or eggs, we recommend (1) choosing a storage facility in a state where the laws are favorable to assisted reproduction, (2) obtaining a written storage agreement with clear consents regarding future disposition of your frozen genetic material, and (3) having a lawyer review the consents. If your genetic material is already frozen, you will want to review the consents and, if needed, consider using a professional cryotransport service to move your embryos, sperm, or eggs.

ESTATE PLANNING—INCLUDING POWERS OF ATTORNEY

Estate planning includes much more than just directing how your property is distributed upon your death. We recommend every adult have a comprehensive estate plan including health care and financial powers of attorneys and advance directives to ensure the person you wish to make both financial and health care decisions for you is legally able to do so if you are unable to make decisions for yourself. We recommend naming an alternate health care and financial agent to ensure you are able to direct who assists you at this critical time.

Your estate planning documents should clearly identify your spouse and children by name and, if any of your heirs are transgender, you should ensure their legal name and gender are correct in your estate planning documents, but you may also reference their chosen name and status for clarity and recognition.

If you are a parent, it is essential you make a clear nomination of guardian(s) for your minor children and, if you have frozen embryos, eggs, or sperm, we recommend you include information on where they are stored and ensure your estate planning directives are consistent with your disposition instructions at the IVF clinic or storage facility.

TRAVEL & IMMIGRATION

The landscape ahead for immigration is unclear. We recommend all U.S. citizens obtain a passport now for themselves and for their minor children, if eligible, even if you don't have any current plans for international travel. As a reminder, a passport is required for travel to Canada and Mexico, as well as the rest of the world.

If you reside outside of the U.S. and are expecting a child who will be born in the U.S. via surrogacy and who is expected to move outside the U.S. after birth, we recommend—upon confirmation of pregnancy—you immediately begin working to obtain your travel documents for the country where the child will live. We recommend you contact your country's consulate (typically the closest are in Chicago) to ensure you will have a smooth travel experience and will be able to obtain the necessary travel documents for your child to return home with you.

If you're a U.S. citizen who adopted a minor child from another country at any time, please ensure that you have available all immigration paperwork showing the legal status in which the child was brought into the U.S. If the child automatically acquired citizenship under U.S. immigration law, we recommend that you have their Certificate of Citizenship in your files, even if the child has a U.S. passport by now. If a Certificate of Citizenship cannot be located, we recommend seeking legal advice to determine if a Certificate of Citizenship can be obtained at this stage.

If you are a foreign national living in the U.S. who is considering divorce, if your immigration status is connected to your spouse, we strongly recommend seeking legal advice both for family and for immigration purposes, to minimize the risk that your immigration status is impacted.

If you or your family members may be eligible for family-based immigration benefits under current law, we strongly recommend seeking legal advice and consider initiating the process sooner rather than later. We anticipate the new administration may attempt to eliminate or restrict certain family-based immigration categories, and legal options that are currently available may be diminished in the near future.

GENDER IDENTIFICATION

Unfortunately, we do anticipate numerous legislative and legal challenges related to gender identification and legal protections for transgender people. This may take many forms, from limiting access to gender-affirming care, to removing workplace discrimination protections, to prohibiting gender-affirming identification on legal documents.

If you or your child would like to amend your gender on any federal or state identification documents, we recommend you consider doing so as soon as possible. Many of these changes require a court order obtained with supporting medical documentation. Wisconsin currently requires a court order and either a male or female designation when changing the birth record. While U.S. passports currently allow for a non-binary (X) gender marker, those policies may not be continued. Currently, gender changes for a passport and social security can, typically, be completed without a court order. There are forms online to do so.

At DeWitt LLP we have a team of attorneys available to assist you in protecting yourself and your family. Please contact us at 608-255-8891 or at dewittllp.com to schedule an appointment. ■



MICHELE PERREULT is a partner in, and the Managing Partner of, DeWitt LLP's Madison office. She assists clients with matters related to Family Law, Appellate, Labor & Employment Relations, Litigation, and Trust & Estates. She practices state-wide and has represented thousands of clients in circuit and appellate courts, including the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

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MILWAUKEE PIZZA FARM-TO-TABLE CATERING

Flour Girl and Flame

In West Allis, **Dana Spandet** serves up pizza pies sourced from Wisconsin ingredients crafted by an all-woman staff. But her mission and vision is not just about good, locally sourced food; it's about community, too.

"It felt so good," Spandet said. "Working with my hands and seeing that direct correlation of people being healthy, taken care of, nurtured. That's kind of how Flour Girl was born."

SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC THROUGH COMMUNITY

The survival of Spandet's business required making things like jams and jellies that were shared by other online farmers' markets. And Spandet in turn shared the wares of those vendors. "We kind of got through this pandemic by supporting each other through trades and barterers," Spandet said. "And a lot of the people that we were working with intentionally were Black and brown farmers, people of color, LGBT growers."

Thus, inclusion and sustainability became core to Flour Girl and Flame's mission.

"We don't typically work with anyone that we haven't met their family just because we're trying to really pull in this human component with this business," Spandet said. "And we always say it was never about pizza. It's always been about community connections."

Spandet gave a shout out to one outstanding queer-owned business she loves working these days: Press Waffles, whose creations are used for Flour Girl and Flame's Chicken and Waffles pizza.

Though Spandet said it's not about the pizza, she's undoubtedly doing innovative things with food, including the aforementioned Detroit-style pizza. Made on Wednesdays only, this crowd favorite boasts a *thicc* crust and cheesy, *cronchy* caramelized edges.

Spandet's other venture, Everybody's Ice Cream, brings together the best dairy from five small batch creameries surrounding Milwaukee. It's a separate ice cream shop also available for catering.

CATERING

Outside of the brick-and-mortar restaurant, catering remains a good deal of Spandet's business—and she's proud of the number of LGBTQ+ couples who trust her with their weddings.

"When we started Flour Girl in August of 2020, we had scooped up a lot of those backyard COVID weddings, cancellations, reschedules," Spandet said. "And that first year out the gate, we really made a name for ourselves for being an inclusive same-sex wedding caterer. I would say that probably half or more than half of the weddings we do are same-sex."



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.

QUEER VISIBILITY AND SUPPORT

Spandet's commitment to the queer community runs deep. Earlier this year, she stepped in with a solution when a drag queen story hour scheduled at a friend's bakery in Menomonee Falls was shut down by the village. Spandet invited them to West Allis Ain't No Drag, featuring queens who read to children in the park next to her shop.

"It's not lost on us that we are 10 miles down the road," Spandet said. "And, you know, I hate to say that we get away with stuff because we're living our own authentic lives and selves. But we do get to do quite a bit over here that I think most people can't outside the city of Milwaukee limits."

Spandet said she loves that her job takes her outside herself and allows her to see the needs of her community. That could mean anything from making space for drag queens to opening an ice cream shop.

"One of the things that we're best known for is being a space where all are welcome," Spandet said. "We do a pretty nice job of remaining inclusive. It's so silly, but something as simple as putting a Pride flag out front, quite a few people come in saying, 'Hey, thanks for that. It's nice to see in the neighborhood.'"

The day after the election, Spandet said their inbox was full of thanks from folks just for being there. We asked if she had always been such a strong advocate. Spandet said it became increasingly important when she and her wife had kids, now ages five and seven.

"For me, it wasn't until I became a mother that it started to become about more than just me, as far as having to get health care with two moms, and being proactive, and making sure that we're seen and recognized for who we are," Spandet said.

ROLE MODEL

Spandet has overcome obstacles in her life and career but today can be proud of the role model she is to her kids and the community. One of Spandet's challenges included a moped accident two years ago that caused a traumatic brain injury. As a result, she lost her sense of taste and smell. That didn't stop Spandet from recently participating in a Best Chefs of Milwaukee 11-course dinner. Spandet chose The Trevor Project for Flour Girl's charitable contribution that evening.

"I have some really core memories of my teens, being home in my bedroom, and thinking, 'I'm probably gay,' but I thought that my life was over," Spandet said. "And I mean, this is mid-90s. I thought I wouldn't be able to lead a normal life because I just hadn't seen that out there."

"I'm sober, I'm a lesbian, and I really, really messed my life up before. But I can kind of be this shining example now. We can be a voice for ourselves and for other people that need it," she said. ■



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