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LGBTQ Restaurant Directory

May/June 2025

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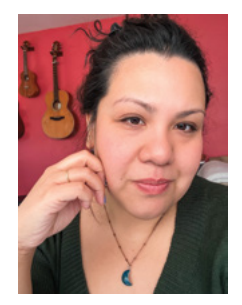
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EDITOR'S LETTER ALEXANDRIA DELCOURT



JUST GETTING STARTED



AFTER THE LAST presidential election, I, like most people I know, acutely felt the abrupt change in the political and cultural landscape of the country. We all responded to that surge of fear and devastation in our own ways, but I have always been the kind of person who likes to try and fix things rather than sitting with my emotions (my therapist has things to say about that). And so, when I saw that *Our Lives* was looking for a new Editor, I jumped on the

chance to apply thinking that it would be a great opportunity for me to get involved with work that felt like it mattered in the moment. After all, what better way to combat the ever-increasing threat of oppression, silencing, and erasure, than by helping to champion, platform, and promote the voices of LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized communities around me who are directly experiencing the effects of those threats?

So, hi. I'm Alexandria Delcourt. I'm *Our Lives*' new Editor, and I'm so happy to finally be introducing myself to you now. This is the first issue I have worked on and help build, and I'm so thankful to Patrick and everyone who works on *Our Lives* for welcoming me into the fold and giving me the chance to stretch and grow as a creative in this space. As someone with a background primarily in creative writing and academia, it has made such a welcome and meaningful change to feel more on-the-ground, engaged with current events, politics, and news, and connected to community builders, changemakers, and creatives from around the state—people I probably wouldn't have had the chance to meet otherwise. Even after just a couple of months, I can feel my world expanding, and my sense of safety and connection growing. And I think that says a lot about the power of our collective voices, of reaching out and talking to each other, of hearing each other's points of view, and of listening to each other's stories. It's what we all need right now, and I'm thrilled to be part of bringing this collection of stories to you.

Inside this issue, you'll find a list of LGBTQ+ owned third spaces from around the state, a travel itinerary for anyone interested in exploring and connecting with nature in Wisconsin's driftless region, a profile on a nonprofit helping to build resilience and community for kids through soccer, an article Paradigm, a coffee shop and music venue that serves as a safe community hub for Sheboygan, and so much more. In particular, I'm excited to highlight Amilinda, Milwaukee's vibrant Spanish-inspired restaurant owned by chef Gregory León, who was recently nominated for a James Beard Award for the fourth time. In doing this work, it is my hope that these articles and stories will help you find places to build community, connect with each other, and share broaden your own—and all of our—networks.

Thank you for doing this work with me. ■



JULY / AUGUST 2025

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SOPHIA VOIGHT is a journalist who has covered politics, business, and entertainment across the Midwest. Her work has appeared in *The Post-Crescent* in Appleton, USA TODAY, and PolitiFact. In her reporting career, Voight has carved out a space to explore the culture of the LGBTQ+ community and the issues they face. Her work has highlighted influential queer history in rural communities, dazzling drag nightclubs and performers, and salon owners providing gender-affirming beauty care.

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.

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When **GLEND MITCHELL** started a family, it was important for her to capture memories and highlight the differences that make people shine. GM.CREATIVE Photo has given her an outlet to recognize the beauty of every "other" person and now, 10+ years in, she's still in love. She serves the Greater Milwaukee area and the state as a whole, specializing in portrait and lifestyle photography.

HUMOR 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

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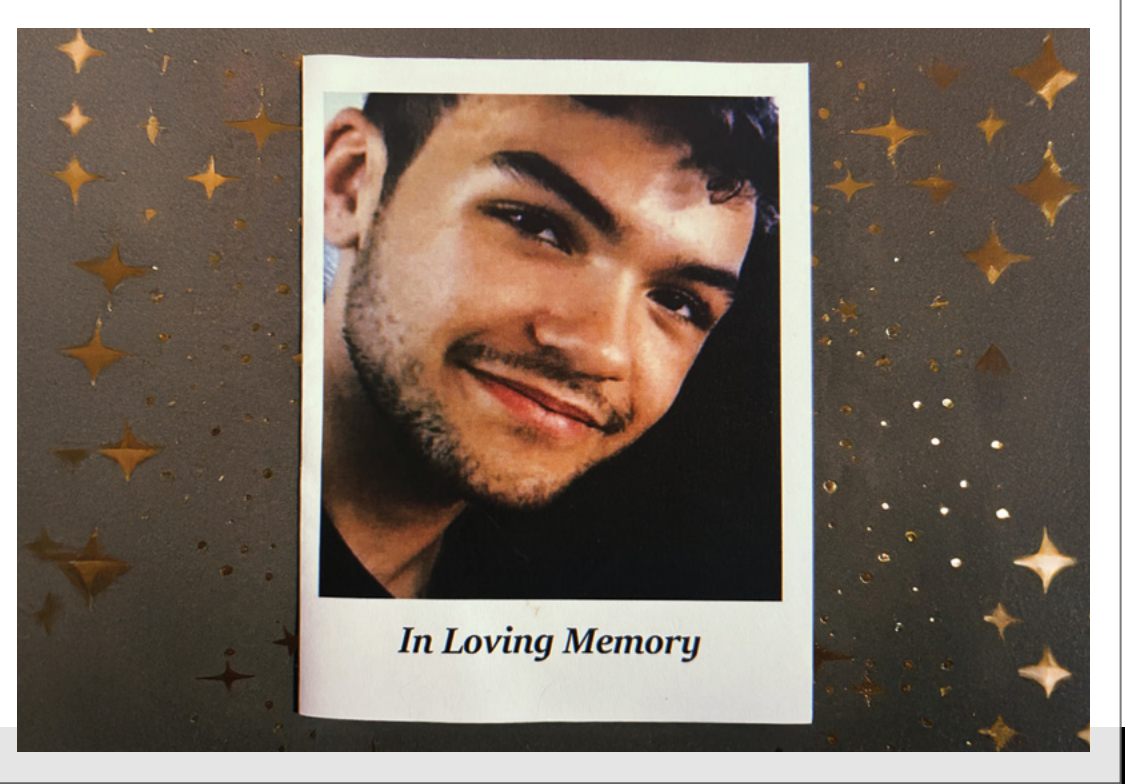
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The Long Fight for Justice

Kevin Price was shot and killed by Fitchburg Police. Now his family and friends are fighting for justice and awareness of unnecessary police brutality.

NEWS | POLITICS & LAW | ADVOCACY | POLICE BRUTALITY | QTBIPOC

ON AUGUST 12, 2024, 28-year-old Kevin Price called 911 to report a domestic altercation with his boyfriend at their apartment in Fitchburg.

Price called a little before 8:00 a.m., and through heavy breath said, "There's an issue. We have no contact orders, and we saw each other. And he tried to break my neck." The dispatcher asks where this happened. "Nevermind," Price said and hung up.

The dispatcher immediately called back and heard Price breathing before he hung up, according to a Dane County Public Safety Communications incident report.

About an hour later, Fitchburg police officer

Peter Johnston shot Price three times. Price died three days later at SSM-Health St. Mary's Hospital in Madison.

There are many unanswered and disconcerting questions surrounding the shooting of Kevin Price, and his family members and close friend, PJ Chamberlain, are now calling for greater police accountability in fatal shootings. The work they are doing is raising questions about law enforcement's role in crisis intervention, especially since this incident is just one in a much longer history of troubling interactions between local police and people in marginalized communities in the Madison area.



PRICE WAS "VERY CREATIVE AND CARING"

Price grew up in Racine with his two brothers and was known as a kind and thoughtful person from an early age. Price's grandmother, Ruthann Mork, remembers him as "a great kid, who everybody liked and had tons of friends. He was a talented artist, and everything Kevin touched he was wonderful at."

Price graduated from Racine Lutheran High School in 2014, where he excelled in classes and joined the National Honor Society. The same year, he started attending UW-Madison on a full academic scholarship.

Chamberlain, who has been on the front lines of telling Price's story in pursuit of justice, met Price in 2016. The two soon bonded over shared interests in video games and TV shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Chamberlain called Price a "very creative and caring" person who was easy to talk to and get to know. He expressed his creativity through painting, drawing, cooking, and gardening. Chamberlain remembers often receiving pictures of flower arrangements from Price that he had picked from his garden.

PRICE CALLED 911 FOR HELP

Within minutes of Price's 911 call, Fitchburg officers arrived at his apartment.

According to the Dane County incident report, Fitchburg officers Johnston, Michael O'Dell, and Clint Dretske arrived at Price's apartment and knocked on the door but received no answer.

Officers Johnston and O'Dell left while Dretske remained at the apartment and spoke with a neighbor who told Dretske she witnessed an argument between Price and his boyfriend Javier DeLuna earlier that morning. She showed Dretske a video she had taken of the argument and confirmed that Price and DeLuna's cars were still in the parking lot.

Johnston and O'Dell then returned to the apartment and noticed the window blinds had been closed. The officers inferred someone was home and decided to force entry into the apartment to check on Price's welfare. At this time, Fitchburg officers Lisa Heitman and Jean Pierre Contreras were called to the apartment to help.

Body camera footage shows the officers gave multiple warnings that they planned to enter the apartment, and after no response, all five officers entered. Inside the apartment, they found the rooms cluttered, which officers described as a hoarding situation. As officers made their way into the apartment, DeLuna

walked out from the hallway with his hands in the air. He was escorted outside, where he told officers Price was still inside, possibly hiding in a bedroom closet with a knife.

Officers located Price in a bedroom closet behind piles of boxes and clothes, blocking any clear path for officers to reach him. Body camera footage shows Johnston entering the bedroom with his gun drawn. O'Dell entered soon after with his foam baton launcher, a non-lethal intermediate force tool.

Officers ordered Price to show himself and to come out of the closet. Once Price began to stand up and exit the closet, officers asked him if he had a knife and Price responded that he did. As Price attempted to climb over the piles of belongings, officers yelled for him to drop the knife.

From several feet away, Johnston shot Price three times in the chest. At the same time, O'Dell deployed his foam baton round at Price.

O'Dell later told state investigators the room was too cluttered for them to exit quickly, and "If they waited any longer, [Kevin] could have lunged at them and gotten pretty close to them pretty fast."

Price was then taken to St. Mary's Hospital in Madison. He spent three days in the hospital without his family knowing before he died. The DOJ's investigation of the incident acknowledged Johnston's shooting resulted in Price's death. Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne determined no criminal charges would be filed against Johnston and responding to Price with deadly force was permitted under law.

PRICE'S IDENTITY AS GAY & BIRACIAL PUT HIM AT RISK

Chamberlain says Price's identity as both gay and half-Black put him at an increased fatal outcome risk when interacting with police.

In the U.S., Black people are 2.8 times more likely to be shot and killed by police than white people, according to 2025 data from Mapping Police Violence, a nonprofit group that tracks police shootings. In Wisconsin, those disparities are higher, with Black people over 5.3 times more likely to be killed by police than their white counterparts.

Similarly, according to a 2023 report from the Madison Police Department, a Black individual is over eight times more likely to be arrested at least once than a white individual in the city. Gregory Gelembiuk, data analyst for Madison's Office of the Independent Police



Price was then taken to St. Mary's Hospital in Madison. He spent three days in the hospital without his family knowing before he died. The DOJ's investigation of the incident acknowledged Johnston's shooting resulted in Price's death.

Monitor, said racial disparities in Madison's policing have largely remained stagnant in the past decade. "If there has been any improvement, it hasn't been dramatic."

LGBTQ+ people also disproportionately report mistreatment from police and experience higher rates of police-initiated contact than non-LGBTQ+ people, according to a national 2024 report from the American Civil Liberties Union. The report goes on to state that LGBTQ+ people who are multiracial are three times as likely to have experienced insulting language by the police than non-LGBTQ+ multiracial people and twice as likely than white LGBTQ+ people.

And compared to non-LGBTQ+ people, LGBTQ+ people experience higher rates of police-initiated contact, including being stopped, searched, arrested, or held in custody. LGBTQ+ people of racial groups report higher rates of police-initiated contact throughout their lives compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts.

Chamberlain, who works for the Community Pharmacy, a worker cooperative whose mission is to promote health and wellness in Madison, said people carry inherent biases against others who don't look like them or don't share their identity. "Whether or not the officers involved were aware of their biases or aware of how Kevin's race or sexuality could change the way they interact with them, you never know," he said.

CALLS FOR POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Chamberlain runs the @justice4kdp Instagram, where he shares information about

Price's shooting and raises questions about why police shot Price instead of using crisis intervention methods to safely approach Price, who they knew was hiding with a weapon.

But Price's death isn't the first time Madison area activists have raised questions about police shootings and called for accountability following deadly police encounters of Black and biracial individuals. A number of police accountability protests rippled through Madison following the police killing of

19-year-old Tony Robinson in 2015.

Like Price, Robinson was a biracial man killed by a white officer after police were called to perform a wellness check. A friend of Robinson called the police saying Robinson was yelling and jumping in front of cars after ingesting psychedelics. MPD Officer Matt Kenny responded to the "check-person" call and fatally shot Robinson in an apartment stairwell. Ozanne also cleared Kenny of legal wrongdoing in Robinson's death.

Following Robinson's death, there were numerous protests and calls for justice.

Around 1,500 protesters, many of them high school students who had staged a walk-out, filled the state capitol and marched down

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State Street on March 9, 2015, to protest against Robinson's killing. Robinson's grandmother, Sharon Irwin, has fought multiple times to get Ozanne to reopen the case and bring charges against Kenny.

Those calls were amplified five years later during Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin.

Gelembiuk said these protests and continued calls for police accountability spurred city leaders to establish the Police Civilian Oversight Board and the Office of the Independent Police Monitor in 2020, and that these oversights have helped shrink officer-involved shootings in the past decade within the Madison Police Department. However, the board and the monitor only work with Madison police, so this level of oversight isn't seen in neighboring cities like Fitchburg.

Even with these accountability measures in place, Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement member Kai Rasmussen said there hasn't been enough meaningful change within police departments. Rasmussen pointed to Rashad Nelson, Aaron Willis, and Aajayah Rai, who were killed in a car crash during a police chase on New Year's Day in 2024. The pursuit was initiated by a Monona police officer, who decided to pursue their vehicle because it looked "suspicious." That pursuit continued for three miles and ended in the town of Cottage Grove when the vehicle crashed into a tree. All three passengers who died from the crash were Black, and the Monona police officer did not face criminal charges.

Members of the Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement carried a banner at the People's March on January 18 with Price's

name and the names of three individuals who died in the police chase, along with the words "jail killer cops." Rasmussen said the banner now hangs in Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement's office, and that it's challenging to look at the names of people killed by police and not see the police officers being charged, noting that, "Every time we raise their names up, nothing has changed at all."

LGBTQ groups in Madison have also protested against their interactions with police as the community faces disproportionately high rates of targeting and arrest at the hands of law enforcement. In the leadup to Madison's fifth annual OutReach LGBTQ+ Pride Parade, residents questioned police participation in Pride events. Community members and those involved in the event became divided over whether to include law enforcement groups in the parade and MPD Pride's (Madison Police Department's LGBTQ+ employee group) sponsorship of the event.

OutReach eventually pulled MPD Pride and the UW Police Department sponsorship applications from the event. The group went on to invite LGBTQ+ and allied officers to participate in the parade so long as they were off-duty, unarmed, and out of uniform.

As the conversation around justice for victims of deadly police interactions reignites in Dane County, Chamberlain says he hopes for greater police training around mental health support and domestic violence responses.

"I'm trying to bring awareness to the ways people with mental health issues and people in domestic violence situations are interacting with people," Chamberlain said. "I want people to know how interactions with the police can go wrong and change it for the better." ■

NEWS BRIEFS WRITTEN BY **ALEXANDRIA DELCOURT**

MADISON REPRESENTED ON GREAT AMERICAN BAKING SHOW

ON APRIL 11, Season 3 of the *The Great American Baking Show* aired on Roku. The lineup included Daniel Freiburger, a home baker and Epic employee who lives in Madison.

Daniel has been baking seriously for the last 10 years, a passion that he first discovered while on a trip with his family. "I bake to eat, and my favorite thing to eat is cake," Daniel said while discussing his time on the show. "I wouldn't say it's my specialty, but I do end up making a lot of cake."

However, in order to get through the lengthy



Daniel Freiburger

audition process, Daniel had to demonstrate his experience in all the baking disciplines. After having produced a long written audition, taken a baking quiz over the phone, met with casting directors via Zoom, baking live in a tasting

audition in Chicago, and participating in a film test, Daniel was selected as one of eight contestants to appear on the season to compete for the title of "Best Amateur Baker."

The contestants, who hailed from all over the United States, filmed last July in one of the two infamous "Bake Off Tents" in the UK, with Paul Hollywood and Prue Lieth judging their creations. In the second episode of the season, one of the challenges was to create a show-stopper meal that represented the contestants' hometown. "I went with a Wisconsin theme," Daniel said. "It was cool. I got to represent the state, and I chose to lock into the cheese theme."

"It was a dream come true," he continued. "To bake in the tent for people that I see on TV was surreal. It was an incredible experience. And then you go through it with these seven other incredible bakers, and we're still really close. We text every single day. I didn't expect to be such close friends after being together for just a month."

When asked about what he wanted people to know, Daniel said, "The process of applying was actually really enjoyable. So if you're interested in applying you should apply. They select cast members from all over the country, so it could be you." You never know.

The entire season is now available to watch on any Roku device. And for those who don't have Roku, you can download the Roku app and watch on a phone or other device.

DINA NINA MARTINEZ-RUTHERFORD WINS RE-ELECTION TO CITY COUNCIL

IN WISCONSIN'S high-stakes April 1 election in which Susan Crawford was elected to the State Supreme Court, Dina Nina Martinez-Rutherford was re-elected as an alder to serve on the Madison City Council.

Two years ago, Martinez-Rutherford became the first transgender woman to serve on the council, and represented District 15, which encompasses the Schenk-Atwood, Yahara, Starkweather, Eastmorland, and Lake Edge neighborhoods. While she began a campaign for re-election in this cycle, she ultimately dropped out of the race to focus on her health and for other personal reasons.

Despite the fact that she ultimately endorsed her opponent, Ryan Koglin, by the time she suspended her campaign, the deadline to be removed from the ballot had already passed. She was re-elected to her alder seat by a margin of over 200 votes, and was then faced with the decision of whether or not to continue to serve.

After taking time to consider, Marti-

nez-Rutherford decided to remain on the council, noting at her press conference that, "Over the past two years, I've had the profound honor of serving this district. Of walking alongside families, hearing your stories, and being shaped by this community—especially by the children and young people who've seen a reflection of their future in me. That is a gift I carry in my spirit. To everyone who believed in the possibility of this moment: Thank you. Let's keep believing. Let's keep building, because possibility lives right here—in all of us."

Her re-election serves as a beacon of hope in a time when anti-trans legislation and sentiment has been put in the forefront of our state and national political landscape, and a strong message of support for the work that she put in during her first term on the Council.

FAIR WISCONSIN LAUNCHES "BILL TRACKER" FEATURE TO WEBSITE

FAIR WISCONSIN INC., an advocacy-focused nonprofit that works to make Wisconsin a fair, safe, and equitable place for the state's LGBTQ+ community, has launched a new feature on their website to help folks keep track of legislation that seeks to limit protections, allow discrimination, and target LGBTQ+ people.

According to their website, "In the last few years, Wisconsin has seen a record number of bills that attack LGBTQ+ rights, especially

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transgender youth. Fair Wisconsin has been on the frontlines, monitoring, tracking, and defending against these attacks.”

The tracker lists the bill number, the subject of the bill, and what, if any, actions have been taken to date by the State Assembly, the Senate, and the Governor, and whether the bill will positively or negatively affect Wisconsin's LGBTQ+ community.

It can be exceptionally difficult to stay up-to-date on every piece of legislation introduced at any given time, so tools like these are important. That is especially true in political climates like the one we currently find ourselves in,

where controversial legislation can sometimes fly under the radar while people are focused on other stories or national headlines.

As of the time of this writing, there are nine bills currently being tracked on the website, five of which would negatively impact Wisconsin's LGBTQ+ community, three of which would have positive effects, and one of which has the potential to affect people either way, depending on how the final bill is worded. The bills in question range in topic from trans athlete bans, trans healthcare bans, forced outing, non-discrimination protections, identity documents, and other issues. ■



LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

GENERAL NEWS

Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.

BADGERLAND PRIDE SOFTBALL invites the community to come join in cheering on our Rec/Social League players out at Olbrich Park this year on Monday nights on two fields from May 15 to July 28. Registration is still open for the Competitive League until June 1, and Sunday games begin on June 22 at McGaw Park in Fitchburg.

COURAGE MKE is offering +YOU training across the state. +YOU is Courage's community-focused initiative, offering programs for nonprofits, organizations, businesses, allies, and anyone eager to learn. From a one-hour LGBTQ+ crash course to a comprehensive 6-week allyship training, we believe education is the foundation for lasting change. We offer customizable classes for both youth and adults, designed to meet any specific needs. Email Alisha at alisha@couragemke.org for more information.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION is excited to announce that applications for the 2025 LGBTQ+ Scholarship Program are now open. The scholarships are available to LGBTQ+ identifying

Wisconsin residents pursuing full or part-time undergraduate, professional, graduate, technical, or vocational degrees. Applications will close on May 31, 2025 at 11:59 pm.

The foundation is also now seeking sponsors for 2025 events. Information and sponsorship packets are available at creamcityfdn.org/2025es/ for the 2025 Summer Social and Business Equality Luncheon.

MINOTAURS RUGBY now has club merch available for purchase on their website. Fans can purchase hoodies, tees, socks, stickers, water bottles, and more with the club logo or other artistic designs. You can also go to the website to view their games live streamed!

OUTREACH LGBTQ CENTER is no longer receiving a distribution of canned items from The River and is requesting community support to fill their pantry shelves. Donations of new/unexpired non-perishable foods, new personal care items (especially sample sizes), first aid supplies, cleaning soaps/sprays, household paper products, diapers (child or adult) are welcome. Please drop off to the center between 12:00 to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays.

PFLAG WAUKESHA raised funds to run an image



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with the Progress Pride Flag stating “YOU ARE LOVED” on Waukesha Metro buses for three months.

WI LGBTQ HISTORY PROJECT had a successful winter fundraising campaign raising \$10,000 (2x their goal) to support visible, accessible, and inclusive LGBTQ landmarks throughout Wisconsin. They additionally raised more than \$2,600 to support Sharon Dixon, lesbian pioneer and community elder, who recently found herself unhoused when her long-time home was demolished. Eleven talented performers, hosted by Karen Valentine and Diane “Legs” Gregory, donated their time and talent to host an old-fashioned LaCage cabaret fundraiser honoring Women's History Month. The event also marked the 50th anniversary of the Sugar Shack, Wisconsin's first lesbian bar for women by women, opened by Sharon and JoAnn Kilsdonk in March, 1975.

AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

Special thanks for those who do good.

ENCORE STUDIO announced that it has been awarded a two-year, \$200,000 grant from the Ruth Foundation for the Arts in support of a major preservation and legacy project. Ten projects were selected overall by a national jury for their emphasis on public knowledge-sharing and uplifting historically underrepresented communities, their commitment to equitable partnerships, and for encouraging creative change in the region.

Encore's 25 Years of Original, Dynamic Theatre for People with Disabilities was selected for a Wisconsin Special Project Grant. This funding will support Encore's efforts to preserve and share its body of original, disability-led theatre. The project will include a digital archive, a published book of selected scripts, and recordings of past productions.

MKE GAY SPORTS NETWORK donated \$2500 each to Pathfinders of Milwaukee and Ascent Wellness from the proceeds of 2024's Grant Heffelfinger Big Gay 5K Run/Walk.

OUTREACH LGBTQ CENTER has received a grant from the Dane County Bar Association for transgender individuals to change their name and gender marker on vital records and identification. If you need assistance with obtaining a name or document change, please contact Outreach.

THE HOUSE INC has received a \$6,000 grant from the Madison Community Foundation to upgrade their center. These upgrades will have

a positive impact on their meal program, electronic infrastructure, teen zoning, studio maintenance, and accessibility.

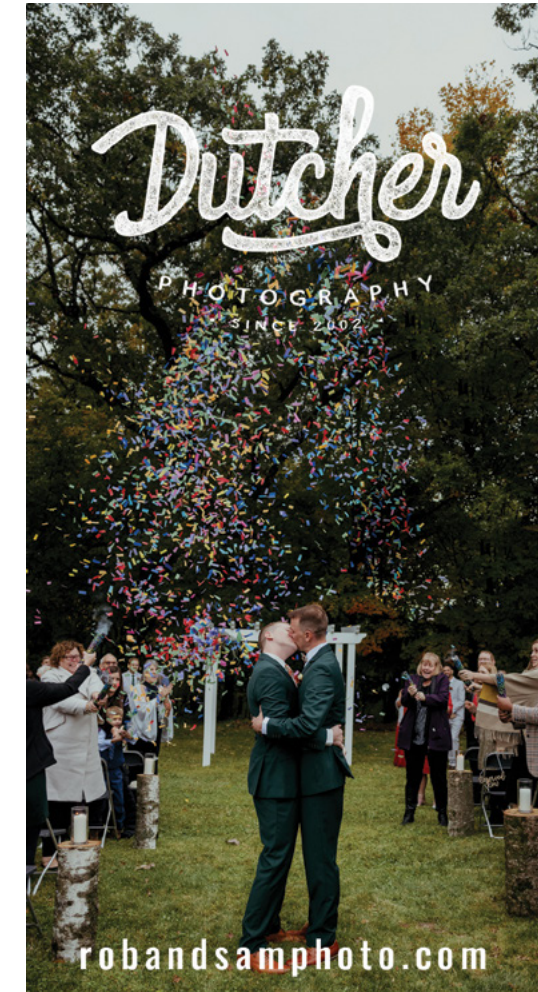
VIVENT HEALTH has received a grant of \$55,000 from Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. This award will help to fund their Milwaukee Food Pantry along with those in Chicago and Austin.

WI LGBTQ HISTORY PROJECT would like to recognize a generous donation of \$1,200 from The Tarlton Theatre. On Friday, March 28, Mark Mariucci debuted *Legends of Drag in Tiletown*, a two-hour retrospective spanning five decades of local drag history, at the Historic Tarlton Theatre. The documentary, composed of archival video footage Mark lovingly restored over a year's time, featured legendary performers past and present, some of whom attended the opening night celebration in person. Mark hopes to bring the event to Milwaukee and Madison later in 2025.

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.

COURAGE MKE is excited to introduce three amazing new staff members who've just joined — **Keturah Hayes-Jinor**, **Lu Clark**, and **Gaby Chaparro!**



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These three are the very first team members to be trained in a new hybrid role, meaning they'll be working closely with youth at both Courage House and C2 Apartments. This innovative approach allows for deeper connection, consistent support, and even stronger community between the programs.

OUTREACH LGBTQ CENTER has opened and hired two new positions this spring. **Lo Villarreal-Black** has been brought on as an HIV Prevention Coordinator under a grant from ViiV healthcare. Before coming to OutReach Lo served the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce as their BIPOC/Trans programming manager.

Outreach has also hired **Chez Dickson** as their Development Director. This new position is supported in part by a matching grant from the Madison Community Foundation given to strengthen the organization in sustaining services and operations. Chez Dickson joins the OutReach team with a background as an Account Executive for the event and technology industries. Chez has also served as the Founder and President of the outdoor recreational non-profit, Boardslide Mission.

OutReach Program Director **AJ Hardie** has moved home to care for aging family and taken a position as the Executive Director of an environmental nonprofit. OutReach will go through a hiring process to fill the position, and in the interim Program Direction duties will be absorbed into other roles and fulfilled by Executive Director Steve Starkey, Harm Reduction Services Director Tarah Stangler, Willma's fund coordinator Becca Bedell, and Grants Manager Doug Rowe.

OutReach has additionally added at-large members librarian **Mark Jochem** and project manager **Youngjin Ki** to their board.

PROJECT HOME has just announced that Executive Director **Denise Matyka**, who has been with the organization for almost 30 years, will be retiring on September 30. Matyka, who was featured in *Our Lives* alongside her partner Margaret McMurray in 2012 when they adopted their daughter from Russia, played a pivotal role in expanding Project Home's staff, budget, facilities, and ability to help low-and-moderate homeowners repair, weatherize, rehab, and modify their homes to make them safer, warmer, and more energy efficient.



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Matyka's legacy also includes her role as former President of the National Organization for Women, a nonprofit that holds the title for the largest feminist organization in the United States, and decades of activism work focused on gender equality. She also served as co-executive director of Community Shares of Wisconsin, which raises funds for, and awareness of, the local social and environmental justice movement.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in.

OUTREACH LGBT CENTER **May 17** Trans Joy — The Madison Area Transgender Association and OutReach present the return of TRANS JOY at Warner Park. This event will be held 1-4pm rain or shine.

MADISON MINOTAURS **May 17** VS the Chicago Dragons — At the Wisconsin Rugby Sports Complex (Cottage Grove). The Chicago Dragons were the first rugby club in the Midwest established to invite members from traditionally under-represented groups, particularly gay men, to engage in the world's third most-popular team sport.

MILWAUKEE BEER BARRONS **May 17** Round Robin — The Milwaukee Beer Barons will play a Round Robin of games with the Columbus Kodiaks and the Minneapolis Mayhem.

GSAFE **May 17** 29th Annual Celebration of Leadership — Plan now to help us honor student and adult leaders from across Wisconsin for their efforts to create safer, more affirming schools for LGBTQ+ youth.

PERFECT HARMONY CHORUS **May 17 & 18** Spring Concert: Shine Together — Madison's premier LGBTQ+ choir aims to be a light in the dark that both lifts the spirit and instills the will to strive for a brighter tomorrow. This season's program spans multiple genres to inspire both returning and new audiences. There will be two performances at Christ Presbyterian Church - an open and affirming church, with a fully accessible facility, and both onsite and nearby street parking (\$10-35 pwyc).

OUTREACH LGBTQ 50+ ALLIANCE **May 24** Meet-up at Forward Madison — Join in for this Inter-generational meet-up at Madison Forward soccer with the OutReach 50+ family. All ages are welcome to join us. The ticket price includes the pre-game party, seating together in a section, and support for Madison's LGBTQ 50+ Alliance. Tickets are \$35, including all you can eat and unlimited soda. The \$41 ticket includes all you can eat and unlimited beer. Pre-game party starts when gates open at 5:00 p.m. We'll all be in the same section when you purchase your tickets at this link: tinyurl.com/cyyrkxke

MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER **May 30** TGIF — A monthly social hour that is held on the last Friday of the month from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Every month we visit a different LGBTQ+ venue giving us a taste of what Milwaukee and the surrounding areas offer.

OUTREACH LGBT CENTER **May 31** Chip in Fore the Community — this is a yearly fundraising event at The Meadows of Sixmile Creek to support Willma's Fund. Willma's Fund is a program of OutReach that offers financial support to those in the LGBTQ community experiencing housing instability.

MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER **May 31** Derby in the Gardens — We're excited to invite you to the first annual Big Day Out: Derby in the Garden on Saturday, May 31, from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the breathtaking Sanger House Garden! Enjoy an afternoon of delicious appetizers, refreshing drinks, and fabulous Derby-inspired fun, all while supporting the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center.

MILWAUKEE PRIDE **June 5-7** PrideFest Milwaukee — At the Milwaukee Summerfest grounds. Food, drinks, dancing, and performances on multiple stages.

WI LGBT CHAMBER **June 11** Milwaukee Area Coffee Connection — This free event will be held at Milwaukee City Hall and is an opportunity for Chamber members to connect with other business owners and professionals who share their values. Alderman Peter Burgelis and Alderperson JoCasta Zamarripa will be on hand to celebrate Pride Month and give a brief presentation about the municipal ID program.

PROUD THEATER MADISON **June 13 & 14** Rage Room — Rage hits the stage in an exciting evening of theater and performance pieces written by and starring the talented youth of Proud Theater Madison, the city's premier LGBTQIA+ and Allied youth theater troupe. "Proud Theater: Rage Room," is a powerful expression of

identity, resilience, and defiance in the face of a world that often tries to silence queer voices. The youth of Proud Theater are speaking out, unapologetically and with courage, as they reclaim their stories, their space, and their power. In a time when it feels dangerous to be yourself, they say "Here I am." Friday, June 13 at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 14 at 2:30 p.m. and at 7:30 p.m. MYArts Center, 1055 East Mifflin Street, Madison. Tickets: \$15 at the door (\$12 for students and children).

STAGEQ **June 13-21** 4th Annual CapitalQ Theater Festival — StageQ takes over the Bartlett Theatre Drury stage for TWO weekends this year to present brand new play readings, 10-minute shorts, and one-act plays by up-and-coming queer playwrights from around the country.

WI LGBT CHAMBER **June 18** 2025 Pride Luncheon — Celebrate Pride with the Chamber in Appleton at the Riverview Gardens. Inspiring speakers will share their story and vision for a more inclusive world. You'll also have the opportunity to network with other members of the LGBTQ community and our allies, as well as a delicious lunch. Vegetarian option available. Tickets are \$50 for members and \$60 for non-members. All tickets include complimentary parking and lunch.

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CENTRAL WI PRIDE June 19-21 LGBT Spring Campout — Thursday, June 19 Campgrounds open at Noon. Set up your campsite or RV and enjoy a potluck supper at 6:00 p.m. Friday, June 20 there will be River Tubing Float, "New Comers" Drag Show, Miss & Mr. Central WI Pride Pageant, Meet & Greet Party, Vendors, Food & Drinks and Karaoke Night. Saturday, June 21 the Vendors, Food, and Museum Open. There will be Drag Queen Bingo, Early Drag Show (G), Fashion Show, Featured Drag Shows (PG-13), Mad Hatter Dance Party. Sunday, June 22 stay for the Champagne Drag Brunch and more River Tubing. The campgrounds close at 5:00 p.m. See you there.

Forward Marching Band, Food Trucks, and a FREE concert featuring the disco band V05.

MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER June 27 TGIF — A monthly social hour that is held on the last Friday of the month from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Every month we visit a different LGBTQ+ venue giving us a taste of what Milwaukee and the surrounding areas offer.

MCFARLAND PRIDE June 29 Third Annual McFarland Pride in the Park — At William McFarland Park from 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. A day of family-friendly activities, arts & crafts, entertainment, food, vendors, and live music.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION June 24 Summer Social — A Pride Month Party @ Radio Milwaukee with fantastic entertainment and exciting prizes!

SAVE THE DATE
BADGERLAND PRIDE SOFTBALL August Badgerland Royalty Fundraiser

PFLAG MOUNT HOREB June 25 10th Anniversary — There will be a Pride Walk led by the

MKE GAY SPORTS NETWORK September 14 2025 Grant Heffelfinger Big Gay 5K Run/Walk —

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Sunday September 14th at 10a. Registration will start at 8:30a at Veteran's Park.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION October 9 Business Equality Luncheon — Network with other Milwaukee professionals at the Pfister Hotel as we celebrate our 2025 scholarship winners & support LGBTQ+ workplace equality!

COURAGE MKE November 7 Courage+ Family Gala — At The Baird Center in Milwaukee.

OPEN Queer Empowerment Hour – A virtual lunch-and-learn event held every other month to discuss queer experiences in the workplace, provide education, and foster community connection. (the last installment was held in February - no April date announced)

OPEN Fall Career Summit – A full-day event featuring a career fair, workshops, speakers, and a community celebration (more details TBA) ■

Please see our online calendar for a complete list of upcoming events.

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MINOCQUA TRAVEL RURAL COMMUNITIES DESTINATIONS

Minocqua: A Place to Feel at Home, Even if Just for a While

Krystal Westfahl, President and CEO of Minocqua Area Visitors Bureau, shares her journey to the beauty of and community in Minocqua.



Krystal grabbing lunch at the Boathouse restaurant.

COLLEGE “UP NORTH”

When I was old enough to move out, my first instinct was to head north. I chose to attend college “Up North” and live at our family cabin. Along the way, I met many like-minded people who shared their experiences, what drew them to the North, whether permanently or part-time, and the diverse backgrounds that shaped their perspectives. I cherished these stories, each offering a unique lens on the world.

AND THEN I MET THIS WOMAN

And then I met Tina—the woman who would become my wife. We met in our hometown as non-traditional students, loving the college atmosphere and embracing a lifelong love of learning. I was finishing my final year of guiding sea kayak expeditions in the Apostle Islands when Tina came along for the ride. We quickly realized that what we shared was an unfathomable love for the wilderness.

DISCOVERING A LOVE OF NONPROFIT WORK

For a few years, we moved around, living in upstate New York while Tina finished her degree at Ithaca College and I worked as a Naturalist for the New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. During that time, I also transitioned into nonprofit work, something I had long felt drawn to, by taking on the Directorship of the Sampson State Park WWII Museum. During this time that I realized nonprofit work wasn’t just a job for me, it was the life’s work I wanted to pursue.

LANDING IN MINOCQUA AND A DREAM COME TRUE

When the directorship position opened up at what was then the Chamber of Commerce in Minocqua, I saw it as more than just a job; I saw it as a calling to serve communities, preserve stories, and help shape a better future. I leapt into that role wholeheartedly, excited to bring that mission to life in a place I already loved.

Minocqua became the answer to that long-held Northwoods dream for both of us. Tina and I weren’t looking for flash or noise; we wanted rhythm and stillness, a life where the pace matched our values. In other places, we’d felt out of sync, like we were always reaching for something that didn’t quite fit. But here, the mornings start slow, with coffee in the backyard under the tall pines, and loons calling in the distance.

We found endless waterways to explore, places where we can lose entire afternoons paddling, side by side, moving in quiet tandem with the lake and each other. We found a small-town community that felt like an extension of home, a place where people show up for each other, in times of crisis and moments of joy. It wasn’t just that Minocqua was beautiful, though it is, it’s that it made space for a life rooted in nature, in simplicity, in shared effort and shared celebration.

Now, with more than 10 years living in Minocqua and helping to evolve our organization into the Visitors Bureau distinction it has today, I keep discovering new things to love about the place we call home. Tina and I were married on the banks of a Northwoods lake, and today,

WHEN I WAS A KID, my family cherished our trips “Up North” to the family cabin. We went as often as we could. I remember sitting in the back seat, watching as the scenery transformed from endless farm fields to towering pine trees in just a few short hours. That shift in the landscape always brought me a deep sense of bliss, as if I were crossing into a world where time slowed down and adventure awaited.

A CHILDHOOD SPENT OUTDOORS

My love for the outdoors was ingrained in me from the beginning. I grew up hunting and fishing with my family, spending endless hours outside, my skin perpetually sun-kissed and weathered from time in the woods and on the water. Four-wheeling, boating, and swimming in lakes were just part of life. Hiking with the dog often led me deeper into the wilderness than I should have gone, making my dad concerned enough that he taught me how to use a compass at a young age. Northern Wisconsin wasn’t just a place we visited; it was a place that shaped me.

EXPLORING THE TOWNS ENROUTE

As I grew older and gained independence, my trips Up North took on a new layer of excitement. I made it a point to stop in the small towns along the way, exploring their quirky shops and soaking in their Northwoods charm. These places, once just passing landmarks on my childhood journeys, became destinations of their own. The specialty stores stocked with novelty T-shirts featuring bears and walleye, and shelves filled with homemade fudge and old-fashioned candies each added to the magic of my northern experience. It wasn’t until adulthood that I realized these businesses weren’t just part of my nostalgic road trips; they were the heartbeat of the communities I would one day call home.

we share our lives with three dogs and live in the cutest little piece of history, a 1917 one-room schoolhouse converted into a home.

THE NORTHWOODS EXPERIENCE

As a destination marketer, I’ve come full circle, inviting people into this community of Northwoods dreamers who carve out a living in our tourism economy. Here, the Northwoods experience is at everyone’s fingertips. Every type of outdoor recreation and activity is available, and I love nothing more than introducing visitors to their newest outdoor obsession, or new store, or attraction when they step into our visitor center.

I think our region has sometimes gotten an unfair reputation for being unwelcoming, which is hard for me to wrap my head around. While no place is perfect, my experience has shown me that our community is made up of kind, hardworking people who care deeply about the place we call home and the people who visit. I’ve always believed that with an open mind, a cup of coffee, and a good conversation, most misunderstandings can be worked out. In a world that sometimes feels increasingly divided, I hold onto the idea that connection starts with simple moments, welcoming a newcomer, sharing a story, or extending a bit of curiosity instead of judgment. That’s the kind of hospitality I know exists here, and it’s what I strive to foster every day.

TRAVEL IS GOOD FOR THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE WORLD

Mark Twain said it best: “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”

For the queer community, travel is more than just an escape or an adventure, it’s a vital act of self-discovery, visibility, and connection. For LGBTQ+ travelers, experiencing different cultures, meeting like-minded individuals, and finding spaces where they feel safe and accepted can



On one of the many trails in the area.

For the queer community, travel is more than just an escape or an adventure, it’s a vital act of self-discovery, visibility, and connection. At the same time, their presence in new communities helps shift perspectives, demonstrating that diversity is not something to be feared but embraced.

be life-affirming. Travel allows queer individuals to see that they are not alone, that love and identity exist in infinite forms, and that there are places where they can truly be themselves without fear. At the same time, their presence in new communities helps shift perspectives, demonstrating that diversity is not something to be feared but embraced. Every journey taken is not just a personal experience; it’s a step toward a more open and accepting world.



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AN INVITATION

I invite you to experience our Northwoods communities, not just as a visitor, but as someone stepping into a way of life that's slower, more intentional, and deeply connected. Through our personalized itineraries, we'll help you find more than just scenic views and charming shops—we'll guide you toward the kind of meaningful moments that have shaped my own life here. Whether it's paddling a crystal-blue quiet lake at sunrise, sharing a meal in a place where the owners greet you by name, or feeling the warmth of a town that rallies together in both celebration and hardship, these are the experiences that stay with you. This isn't just a destination, it's a place to feel at home, even if just for a while. ■



Krystal inside the Gaslight Square Shoppes in downtown Minocqua.

MINOCQUA VISITORS' ITINERARY

DAY 1: ARRIVAL & EXPLORATION

MORNING Arrival in Minocqua – Welcome to the heart of the Northwoods! Start your adventure with a stop at the **Minocqua Visitor's Center** for a warm welcome, fresh popcorn, maps, and your complimentary welcome bag filled with local goodies.

Minocqua Museum: Dive into the area's fascinating history, logging heritage, and cultural evolution. (Open 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., early June to Labor Day. Free admission; donations appreciated.)

Stroll & Shop at Gaslight Square Shoppes and Downtown Minocqua: Discover handmade gifts, Northwoods décor, local art, and unique boutiques like: **Earth Goods** (eco-friendly products and natural gifts), **Imaginity** (puzzles, games, and quirky finds), **Minocqua Popcorn & Puffs** (grab some flavored popcorn for the road!).

LUNCH **Thirsty Whale:** Savor classic Wisconsin fare like fish fry, burgers, or whitefish tacos with a lakeside view. Patio seating is a favorite in summer!

AFTERNOON ATTRACTIONS

Northwoods Wildlife Center: Take a guided tour of Wisconsin's first wildlife rehabilitation center. Great for families and animal lovers alike. You might even meet an owl or fox!

Northern Waters Distillery (handcrafted small-batch spirits) or **Rocky Reef Brewery** (family-friendly atmosphere and board games!) – Enjoy a flight and learn about the production process. Many offer seasonal flavors like maple bourbon or cranberry ale.

HIKING OPTIONS

Bearskin State Trail: Take a short walk or rent a bike for a peaceful ride through scenic forest and wetland areas.

The Minocqua Island Trail: A flat, easy 1.5-mile loop trail with picturesque views of the lake makes for a perfect afternoon stroll.

HOTEL CHECK-IN Choose from cozy resorts, lakeside cabins, or a boutique inn. Favorites include: **The Waters of Minocqua**, **Northwoods Inn & Suites**, **The Pointe Hotel & Suites** (right on Lake Minocqua).

DINNER **The Boathouse:** Upscale-yet-approachable dining featuring steaks, seafood, and a well-curated wine list. Ask for seating near the water for the full experience.

EVENING **Min-Aqua-Bats Water Ski Show:** Sit back and enjoy this legendary performance under the stars. Bring a blanket or camp chair for the best view at the Aqua Bowl.

DAY 2: OUTDOOR ADVENTURE & WILDLIFE

MORNING ADVENTURES

Wildwood Wildlife Park Zoo & Safari: Feed giraffes, walk with kangaroos, and take a safari tram ride through acres of wildlife. It's a family-friendly must-see!

Minocqua Pontoon Cruises: Cruise the Minocqua Chain of Lakes with a guide sharing stories of the area and local lore.

Hinterland Musky Guides: Hire a local guide and try your hand at catching musky or walleye!

LUNCH OPTIONS

Great Northern Coffee Traders: Casual bites and strong coffee.

Picnic at Torpy Park: Just off downtown, with beach access, playgrounds, and plenty of shady spots to relax.

AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

Hiking in Northern Highlands American Legion State Forest: Choose from popular trails like: **Fallison Lake Nature Trail** (1.5-mile loop, interpretive signs), **Raven Trail System** (Offers a mix of difficulty levels and gorgeous lake views), **Ziplining at Northwoods Zip Line Adventure Tours** (A thrilling canopy tour perfect for adrenaline seekers!).

DINNER **Norwood Pines Supper Club:** Famous for prime rib and cozy pine lodge ambiance. Don't forget the ice cream drinks for dessert—it's tradition!

DAY 3: UNIQUE TOURS & ENTERTAINMENT

MORNING ACTIVITIES

Hillestad Pharmaceuticals Tour: Take a behind-the-scenes look at how natural supplements are made, with insights into their 70+ year legacy. Tours are free, informative, and surprisingly fun!

Northwoods Art Tour Stop (if dates align): Meet local artists in their studios. Great for art lovers or those looking for a one-of-a-kind souvenir.

LUNCH On-the-Go Meal at **Hoggie Doggie's:** A retro drive-in spot with homemade root beer, classic hot dogs, and fish baskets. Outdoor seating makes it a perfect summer lunch.

AFTERNOON **Scheer's Lumberjack Show:** Cheer on world-class lumberjacks as they saw, chop, and splash their way through a lively, family-friendly performance. Great for all ages, with snacks and souvenirs on-site.

DEPARTURE Before heading out, grab a final coffee or ice cream cone from **Kilwin's** or stop at **Dan's Minocqua Fudge** to take home some tasty treats!

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Marcus Truschnski, Much Ado About Nothing, 2024. Photo by Liz Lauren.





SPORTS RESILIENCE QTBIPOC INSPIRATION EQUITY

Poverty Into Power

Born into a harsh world of poverty and hardship in London, **Ziggy Odogun** found her strength and resilience through sports. Now, living in Monona, she passes on her life lessons as an inspirational speaker, trainer, and youth soccer coach through her organization, **The Zinovae Foundation**.

I AM ZIGGY. I wear my upbringing like a badge of honor. For me, being a first-generation Black Brit of African and Jamaican descent meant that excellence wasn't a choice—it was an expectation. Anything less than an "A" was unacceptable in my household, but the stakes were bigger than just grades.

I didn't really have a childhood. I was thrust into adulthood before I knew what innocence felt like. My mother, Serina, was 16 when she had me, so in many ways, we grew up together more like sisters than mother and daughter. When my grandmother kicked us out after I was born, we found refuge in foster care—together. That's where I met Wilma Khan-Biorris, a Trinidadian woman who became my real grandmother in every way that mattered. Her love filled the gaps life had left in me.

Growing up in South East London was survival training. Violence, gangs, and crime were my backdrop. It became clear early on that if you don't eat, you'll be eaten, so I couldn't be scared to walk those streets. Any clout I earned came from standing my ground, but the real power I found came from learning to rise above that world.

WHAT SAVED ME: SPORTS

My mother and grandmother were warriors—fierce, unwavering, and eternally dissatisfied. In their world, growth was non-negotiable. There were many times where the expectation to be the BEST was forced upon me. That type of thinking bled into every relationship I had and into everything in life that I pursued. I strived to be THE BEST, and if I wasn't, I degraded myself and ostracized everyone around. Now, as I teach and coach, I make sure to pass on empathy as well as kindness toward mistakes and upset. I refuse to carry those generational curses.

Let's get one thing straight: Access to sports should never be earned—it should be given freely and equitably. But in America, sports are a privilege reserved for those who can pay. This pay-to-play system excludes the very kids who need sports the most—kids like me.

While chaos reigned at home, sports became my sanctuary. School wasn't just for learning—it was my escape. Breakfast clubs, sports, after-school activities—I lived for those hours. I was fast, strong, and tenacious, but never the best. That meant there was always room to grow.

At 12, my life shifted. I joined Long Lane Junior Football Club in Kidbrooke, England, which is where I met Mick Northwood, the man who saw beyond my tough exterior and nurtured the broken child within. Mick gave me the name "Ziggy" because of the zigzag pattern in my braids. But he gave me so much more as well—belief, discipline, and the audacity to dream.



Mick didn't just coach me; he raised me in the way I needed. He taught me to question everything, refuse to take no for an answer, and keep pushing even when the world doubted me. Because of Mick, I climbed to the top—playing professionally for Crystal Palace, Millwall Lionesses, and Chelsea FC before moving to America in 2013.

THE BIRTH OF THE ZINOVAE FOUNDATION

When Mick let me know he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in late 2024, I channeled my grief into something bigger—something that would honor his legacy and continue his life's work. The Zinovae Foundation is that legacy.

Let's get one thing straight: Access to sports should never be earned—it should be given freely and equitably. But in America, sports are a privilege reserved for those who can pay. This pay-to-play system excludes the very kids who need sports the most—kids like me.

If I had grown up in the U.S., I wouldn't have had a chance. I would have been another statistic—another kid left behind because financial barriers stood in the way of my potential. But I refuse to let that happen to the next generation.

At The Zinovae Foundation, we are tearing down the financial barriers that keep talented kids off the field and out of opportunities. We serve underrepresented and marginalized communities, prioritizing those from low-income households and single-parent families. We don't just invest in players—we invest in people.

Our mission is clear:
Access: Provide equitable opportunities to play, learn, and grow.
Mentorship: Offer guidance that goes beyond the game.
Skill Development: Nurture talent rooted in passion and perseverance.
At The Zinovae Foundation, we know that soccer is more than a sport—it's a lifeline. It builds resilience, discipline, and leadership, shaping young athletes into community leaders who will one day create a better world.

At The Zinovae Foundation, we are tearing down the financial barriers that keep talented kids off the field and out of opportunities. We serve underrepresented and marginalized communities, prioritizing those from low-income households and single-parent families. We don't just invest in players—we invest in people.

But The Zinovae Foundation is more than just a pathway to elite soccer. We are building future leaders. Through mentorship, workshops, and skill-building programs, we prepare young people to excel off the field as much as they do on it. Our focus is not on just creating great athletes—it's on cultivating strong, empowered individuals who will one day give back to their communities.

We emphasize mental resilience, emotional intelligence, and leadership development because we know that true success isn't measured solely in goals and trophies. It's measured by how much these young people are prepared to lead, inspire, and transform their communities. By teaching life skills alongside technical excellence, we ensure that Zinovae scholars don't just survive—they thrive.

FROM ADVERSITY TO ACTION

People often admire my light and growth, but what they're really witnessing is a product of my environment—poverty turned power. They don't see the battles I fought, the wounds I healed, and the strength I had to cultivate to become the woman I am today. But what the world will see soon enough is the impact of collective action—when we come together to change lives, one child at a time.

This isn't just about soccer. This is about equity. About dismantling systems that lock out marginalized communities. About giving kids the tools they need to succeed—not just on the field, but in life.

ZIGGY'S JOURNEY: FROM PLAYER TO POWERHOUSE

When I moved to America in 2013, I didn't just bring my soccer skills—I brought my vision. I saw a broken system that priced out the most vulnerable, denying them access to a tool that had saved my life. I refused to sit idly by while talented kids were pushed to the sidelines because of money.

So, I took action. I went beyond being just a coach. I pursued a master's degree in Organizational Leadership and Change to gain the tools I needed to dismantle these barriers from within. I learned to navigate systems designed to exclude, and I reshaped them to center equity and inclusion. I used my voice to advocate for marginalized communities, ensuring they had a seat at the table—and a place on the field.

Now, as the founder of The Zinovae Foundation, I've come full circle. I'm not just giving kids a chance to play—I'm giving them a chance to win in life.

The Zinovae Foundation is more than an organization. It's a movement. A revolution built on the belief that every child deserves a chance to thrive. But we can't do this alone. It takes a village. Join us in leveling the playing field. Together, we can ensure that no child is left behind, no talent goes unnoticed, and no dream is out of reach.



Let's create a system where the next generation doesn't just survive—they soar. It all starts with one simple question: How can you make a difference today? ■

Ziggy Odogun was born Ashante Ese Odogun-Williams in London, England, to a teenage mother. Ziggy defied the odds, turning the weight of her past into a force for change. Her story isn't just about survival—it's about rising, thriving, and igniting the same fire in others. Through The Zinovae Foundation, she is ensuring that young athletes with untapped potential have the chance to shine, no matter their circumstances.

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SPORTS HOCKEY COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

Finding Community Through Hockey

Susan Nolan found community and unexpected joy through Madison's Gay Hockey Association.

A DRAFT OF COLD AIR struck me as I stood in front of the vast expanse of barren ice. It pierced my padded torso like a splinter to my heart. The chill crept down my heavy gear, sinking down all the way to my poorly tied skates. It's here, at the maw of the frozen dragon that a thought drifted over me: "What am I doing here? Why would I try hockey, let alone skating, for the first time in my thirties? What does hockey mean to me anyway? It's just some stupid sport."

The doubts weighed my mind, pushing me down into my skates that had called to the ice and frozen me in place.

"Doing okay?" A voice rang out, cracking into the frozen grip that

had begun to encase my entire being. Though still too frozen to turn toward the source, I felt my lips could still answer.

"No," I answered candidly. "I think I may be having a panic attack." I threw out my lifeline, hoping that while the rink seemed to open and swallow me whole, I could be myself and not have to hide my feelings.

"That's okay. Is it alright if I stand by you then?" his warm voice floated toward my frozen terror. He didn't slip by me like others, but yet did not assume I needed saving. His presence was like a flickering campfire, inviting me to stay. Warm. Cozy. Handsome.

This shattered the spell, snapping me back to the task at hand.

The invitation to stay had to be declined, lest I stay by the fire and never face the frozen beast. I turned to the rink again, realizing the fear had raked its icy fingers across my mind. Gone from my memories is the man who stood beside me, but the passion he ignited remained.

Before me, the swirling blizzard subsided. Standing now in its place, a wintery wonderland. I heard laughter and sounds of joy alongside words of reassurance and welcome from all those around. I take one last weak breath and push myself off on unstable footing into the rink. The ice sparkled and glistened, and I was reminded of the twinkle of his eyes. "His eyes! Who was he? I guess I'll thank him later," I thought.

The next time I faced the rink; I greeted it in sneakers. In return, the magical ice beckoned me in with cautious curiosity. That would be the day I found out who the others on my team were.

They had seen my hard work and determination. They appreciated that I was trying not because of my skill, but my lack of it. They knew what it was like to be in my skates and recognized me for trying my best.

Would they be new to hockey like me? Or would I be laughed off of the team for my lack of skill? I ambled about the ice making small talk with those around me. Hoping I can make a friend. A connection. Anything.

I was assured I would be assigned a team but slowly watched as group after group got called off the ice. At worst, I'd be asked to leave and never come back. At best, I'd be the last kid picked in gym class.

Finally, I, among the small handful of others all last picked, were pulled off the ice into the bleachers. Though my fears whispered I would still be axed, the figure before me announced himself as our captain. He introduced his husband, another captain, who passed around cookies. Our team color, he announced, would be white; as if the ice rink still mocked me with its frost.

As we chewed on our baked goods, we began to introduce ourselves.

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

This one has been with the MGHA for a few years, that one for a few more. This other one transferred from another league, and another practiced all summer. I introduced myself and told my tale of new beginnings on the ice. They listened and laughed at my stories and woes and assured me I'd fit right in. I then headed home with doubts held close and waited for our first game.

Game day came too quickly, and we met in the locker room. Only this time, I was not alone with my nerves as they lingered in the air. Our captains had an announcement: The name of our ragtag group. We were declared "We All Scream"—an ode to ice cream and my insides.

Though the name implied it, I was still taken aback by the sweetness all around me. One woman took me under her wing and taught me that it was a hockey pun. My co-captain helped to tie my skates, and the whole team agreed how shot our nerves were.

The time had finally come for us to head out on the ice. The rink had shifted again, casting a deafening silence all around. I was to start the first game of the season on the ice, known as the starting line. I wobbed my way to position, face-to-face with my opponent. His terror did not match my own.

And then, unceremoniously the puck dropped; the game had started. There had been no gong, no starting gun, nothing grandiose. I did not, as I had hoped, magically gain skill to fit my narrative. Instead, I watched as the players around me moved at both lightning speed and slow-mo. I decided to make my move, and as I did, my skates decided against it. I lay flat on the ice looking for some hint that the rink itself had tripped me. Slowly, I began to realize that I had tripped on my own.

With panic and embarrassment, my body called for the safety of the bench. Without the skill to stand up, I made the only choice I could. On hands and kneepads, I crawled across the ice. When I reached the side-line, my teammate took my position on the ice without comment. Did they not see me? Were they too fighting their own battle with the rink? Or was I finally in a place without judgment?

I pondered this during my escapes from the ice. Each shift was like a spoonful of ice cream with a stomachache. I watched the time tick backward on the clock until finally my sentence was served. The buzzer shrieked across the rink ordering my release. The game had ended in a tie. My coaches explained to me a tie was the best outcome. They said a tie implied each team was balanced. I don't remember the other team's player that had to crawl off the ice.

As we shed our equipment in the locker room, my coaches pointed out plays and players that had done well. They awarded players with a puck, signifying their hard work and awarding them player of the game. Though not excluded from the praise, my swelling feet and welling tears caused any of their words to fall on deaf ears. The only words I could make out were, "See you next week."

The following week, I was absent from the game. As I laid in my bed with my stuffed-up nose and sore throat, I couldn't help but wonder if the ice was to blame. Even though I was feeling better than days prior, I still had felt the growing numbness of my frozen core. "I should skip this week," the chilled voice echoed in my head. "It's just some dumb sport."

I knew I was going to miss the following week since the beginning of the season. I had a concert to go to with my family and had not touched my skates in weeks. I figured I would have more fun at the concert anyway. And maybe, I thought, I would skip the next week, too. That would bring me to the winter break, and I could pick it up next year.

But just as the thought had formed, it was crowded out by a push notification that appeared on my phone. An email. From one of my coaches. Both of my coaches? I had received a few. They were worried about me and hoped I was doing well. They did not berate me for missing games or even mention it at all. They had just reached out to make sure I was okay. They cared.

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I thought back to the frozen tundra of an ice rink where I had fought to survive several weeks earlier. Moments ago, I was sure it was a dangerous pitfall, that I would be foolish to return to. But then the frozen blizzard shifted, and I saw my coaches skating upon it. The winter winds blew quickly by, but as I focused, I saw faces. My coaches were joined by the woman who had helped mentor me, and my other teammates. One by one they joined me on the ice; laughing, smiling, eating ice cream. As they passed me by, each one invited me to join them. During a break in the line of skaters, I looked toward the center of the rink as the whirlwind raged on. Staring straight back at me was a warm, burning campfire. Sitting at the fire stood the twinkling eye of the storm.

The following week was met in the locker room with warm greetings and hearty welcomes. We talked about my concerts and my sickness, but never my absence. That was handwaved with a simple, "We're happy to have you back." They helped to tie my skates, and we made our way onto the rink for the game. But this time I did not greet the ice alone. My team had helped to warm my heart, and I was determined not to let them down.

We lost that game. The other team was skating fast and playing hard. We lost by one point. It was exhilarating to try and keep up with them, and everyone was having fun. I was still full of adrenaline as we made our way back to the locker room. It pumped through my ears so loudly, I could barely hear my coaches announce me as player of the game!

I did a double take. Me? Surely not. I was nowhere near as good as my teammates.

And yet, my coaches had seen past that. They had seen my hard work and determination. They appreciated that I was trying not because of my skill, but my lack of it. They knew what it was like to be in my skates and recognized me for trying my best. They welcomed me for who I was.

To celebrate, the woman who took me under her wing took me to the Eagle's Nest, a spot above the rink for players to hang out between games. There we had drinks, and I was introduced to more players from all the different teams. Each one greeted me with kindness and included me in conversation.

As most of the players moved on and conversation dwindled, I turned in my chair to see a man approach the woman who had mentored me. He was on the team we had just lost to. Even though we had not been introduced, and I wished not to eavesdrop, I could not help being drawn in by his aura. He spoke of his pets, and as he did, his passion and care for them was carried in his tone. Each word was like a loving embrace. As my eyes focused on his lips, I couldn't help but find myself falling for his adorable smile.

He finally must have felt me staring as his gaze shifted to me. It was then that I saw his eyes sparkle just like the ice on the rink. It was in his eyes I saw the magic of the ice, shifting to frozen lakes full of joy and wonder. The magic twinkled in his eyes.

Though he had invited me to his birthday, I would not see him again until New Year's Eve. With the newfound confidence instilled in me, I told him I wanted him to be my New Year's kiss. Speechless, his nodding head informed me of his approval of my plan. We kissed for the first time at Midnight, and the warmth of the fireworks of our kiss melted the splinter deep within my heart.

It is now the end of my first season of Madison Gay Hockey. Our final match ended with a victory. My team is in the finals, and my only game left is the championship match. In my hand, my second puck for Player of the Game, earned for showing tremendous growth and becoming a confident player. My boyfriend and his twinkling eyes are waiting for me in the car. I take a moment to greet my friend, the rink, and think one last time:

"What does hockey mean to me, anyway?"

The question that has led to my fairytale ending. Who would have expected that finding my community and a place to belong would lead to me discovering my truth and truly understanding that confidence comes from within. Hockey may still be just a stupid sport, but Madison Gay Hockey has meant I became more than I could ever have dreamt.

And while I may have made a home in Madison with my Prince Charming and our four pets, I have a feeling that this fairytale is far from over. There are more seasons to come and more stories to tell, but one thing is certain: Madison Gay Hockey means "happily ever after." ■



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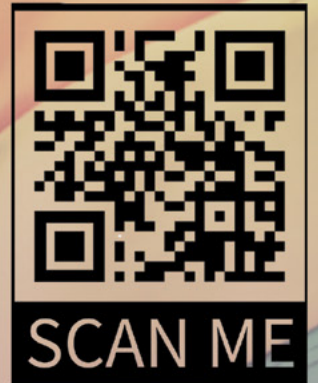
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PHOTOGRAPHY BODY IMAGE SELF LOVE INCLUSIVE SPACES

Exploring Body Image and Self Love

Sam Waldron, owner of Reverence Intimate Portraits and Dutcher Photography, describes her experience running a **Queer Body Image Bootcamp** and helping queer people see, love, and accept their bodies.

a facilitator, I knew that this was the right next step in my journey. I've struggled with my own body image for the majority of my life, and attending Teri's Body Image Bootcamp (as well as gaining certification as a facilitator) changed my relationship with my own body for the better.

One particularly meaningful exercise during Teri's bootcamp was when she had us write a list of mean things we say to ourselves. I thought it would just be a journaling exercise, but then she had us pair up and read each other's lists as though we were reading

their list about ourselves. Hearing the negative things I say to myself read aloud by someone else was heartbreaking as well as eye-opening. I truly feel that exercise changed the course of my life. Being able to repair my relationship with my body, in big and small ways, has been one of the most freeing feelings imaginable. I want others in my community to have the same opportunity.

Once I became a certified facilitator, I wanted to expand on the concept, which tended to center women only, and offer an exclusively Queer Body

Image Bootcamp experience for queer folks of any gender presentation (or lack thereof). I wanted to offer a safe environment for queer folks to explore their body image challenges, including some of the unique difficulties that come with being a queer person in our politically charged world. I knew the venue had to have the right "vibe" (cozy, safe, comfortable, eclectic), but it also needed to be ADA-accessible, have furniture for a variety of body sizes and shapes, and be a place where queer people would feel welcome (as they should be in every space). I searched for what felt like months and kept coming up empty, until my friend mentioned Parlor Hotel, a queer-owned boutique hotel in Princeton, WI. While the words "boutique hotel" brought to mind images of small rooms and narrow hallways, I was surprised at how many things I was able to check off my list: Two ADA-compliant rooms, catering options, exclusive use of the hotel for our group, and the place was cute as heck. THIS was the place to host Queer Body Image Bootcamp—I was thrilled!

There were enough registrants that I was even able to offer a scholarship spot, which was important to me from a financial accessibility standpoint. As we approached the bootcamp weekend, I was busy prepping goodie bags, coordinating with my co-facilitator, Nik Shier of Heartbrain, and making sure everyone was prepared.

Before I knew it, the time had come: 2:00 on Thursday, March 20. While attendees shared ahead of time how nervous they were, I could see their big smiles as they arrived and took in the space. Their nerves fell away as they chatted with each other. That first day was focused



on settling in, having dinner, and hopefully getting to know each other before diving into body image work on Friday morning. I'd asked Nik to facilitate some ice breakers, but to my great joy, attendees were naturally and effortlessly getting to know each other—no ice breakers needed.

On Friday, folks slept in and ate some breakfast before we got down to business. Day one of "class time" consisted of exploring how body image is formed and what contributed to each attendee's body image in their youth. Some of these exercises were emotionally challenging—there's a reason I included tissues in everyone's goodie bags. The acts of care and compassion shown by each attendee, like actively listening, validating others' experience, and holding space for those around them, had a positive impact on how comfortable each person felt in sharing their stories and insights. We broke for a catered dinner at the Horseradish Kitchen, owned by the same queer couple that owns Parlor Hotel, where we laughed, ate some delicious tacos, and let ourselves relax after a hard day of emotional work. After dinner, I made everyone delicious mocktails and we definitely had a little Chappell Roan sing-a-long.

On Saturday, we focused on identifying negative body image thoughts and practical tools for reframing or redirecting them toward body neutrality or body positivity. Each attendee took a moment to say something to the child version of themselves. Just hearing each person speak so lovingly toward their "little me" in that moment was so powerful. Many of us think we hate ourselves because we're so used to near-constant negative self-talk. We assume everything we think about ourselves is true, so to see each attendee fiercely loving and protecting their child-self in that moment with words of encouragement, affection, and love was truly a gift, and it reminds me of the importance of this work.

We had another belly-filling dinner and got to toast the 10-year anniversary of Horseradish Kitchen with owners Matt and Greg, as well as their team. It was a sweet and serendipitous way to end the day.

Sunday was our graduation day. Each attendee received a mini boudoir + empowerment session with me, and then we had a graduation ceremony where attendees were able to place sparkly stickers, glitter, and gems on areas of each other's bodies that needed extra love. Finally, each attendee was crowned with a rainbow paper crown handcrafted by co-facilitator, Nik. The smiles, tears, and hugs were overwhelmingly tender and beautiful. Each attendee shared with me that they gained something deeply meaningful out of the experience, in expected and unexpected ways. The experience was magical, and I am honored to have been able to help facilitate this kind of healing and walk alongside the attendees for this part of their body image journey.

Queer Body Image Bootcamp will now be offered on an annual basis! If you missed this year's bootcamp, and would like to be the first to know when registration is open for 2026, head to reverenceintimateportraits.com/newsletter-signup to sign up for the newsletter. It is possible to have a better relationship with your body. We are so often told what's wrong with our bodies and how they need to be fixed. But I'll let you in on an important secret I hold deep in my heart: You are valuable and worthy, in the exact body you are in right now. ■



WHO HAS TWO THUMBS and needs to work on their body image? Probably everyone you know.

The ways we view and judge (or accept) our bodies is deeply personal and can sometimes be difficult to talk about. Our body image is influenced by many factors, including the people around us and the media we consume—both as children and as adults. Body image is also heavily influenced by our unconscious biases toward Eurocentric beauty standards, which prioritize whiteness, thinness, and being able-bodied above all, to our collective detriment. As a photographer, I have seen firsthand how my clients struggle with their body image, and I knew I wanted to help people heal their relationships with their bodies. I particularly wanted to create a secure and comfortable environment for queer folks to feel safe connecting with themselves and others as they engage in the hard work of learning to love themselves.

My desire to become a body image educator started with Teri Hofferford, a Canadian body image educator who developed the Body Image Bootcamp concept. When Teri began offering certification to become



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Outstanding Chef León

Chef Gregory León, owner of **Amilinda** in Milwaukee, discusses his restaurant, the culinary scene in Milwaukee, his community charity work, and being nominated for four James Beard Awards.

FOOD & DINING | MILWAUKEE | RESTAURANTS | AWARDS

AMILINDA is an upscale-yet-approachable restaurant featuring Spanish and Portuguese-inspired cuisine in an eclectic mix of warm, Mediterranean tilework and quirky, inviting décor—a feel that was unexpected behind the stony visages of Milwaukee’s Historic Third Ward neighborhood. The Milwaukee hotspot is owned by Chef Gregory León who just received his fourth nomination for a prestigious James Beard Award.

From the moment I walked in, it was clear that the open space was meant to feel like the kitchen of a close friend. The room was filled with calm chatter beneath the soundtrack of Spanish guitar, and the vibes were unmistakably “chill.” The staff were welcoming and interacted freely with the guests, and the workflow seemed devoid of the stressful rush that’s stereotypical in restaurant kitchens—a dynamic that was intentionally cultivated by Chef León.

CREATING COMFORT FOR DINERS & EMPLOYEES ALIKE

“When people come into the restaurant, we don’t want them to feel intimidated or uncomfortable,” León said. Even the way they list items on the menu is meant to be accessible. As he noted, “We list the cut of meat we’re using, and then name the ingredients in the dish rather than giving a very long explanation. We just want to make it approachable to everyone, because I’ve seen fellow diners feel uncomfortable if they don’t know what they’re ordering. We want people to come in, relax, and enjoy sitting at Amilinda. There’s enough stress and weirdness in the world, and we don’t want to add to it.”

After becoming a finalist for a James Beard award in the category of Best Chef: Midwest in both 2022 and 2023, he became a semifinalist for the national category of Outstanding Chef in 2024, and was listed as a semifinalist once again for the Outstanding Chef award this year.

That philosophy extends to Chef León’s leadership and entrepreneurial style as well. He said, “I want our employees to feel like they have some sort of ownership in the restaurant. It’s a serious business, but we don’t want them to come in and say, ‘Oh my god, I’m going to be stressed if I don’t do the right thing. I’m going to get yelled at or get in trouble today.’ I want people to wake up in the morning and think, ‘Oh, cool. I get to go to work today.’ Everybody here has a say. I expect my Chef de Cuisine and Sous Chef to give me lots of input, and we collab-



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For many years, I was hesitant to be very vocal about being an LGBTQ+ business owner. Then in 2017 or 2018, I realized that it is what it is. Sometimes I worried that it would affect the restaurant or my employees, but right now I think it's incredibly important to be visible and stand your ground.

struck me when I came here was a sense of community amongst many restaurant owners and chefs. It was something I had never experienced before. I tell my friends who work in the restaurant business in other cities, and they don't believe me or they think I'm exaggerating, but it's awesome. I think that's part of why Milwaukee didn't have so many closures during the pandemic. We were all looking out for each other and trying to help each other."

The restaurant, whose name is a combination of León's parents' names, Amilcar and Linda, doubles as the name of his family house in Venezuela. At Amilinda, Chef León serves dishes inspired by the Iberian Peninsula, which is then infused with his unique vision and style. "We take flavors and techniques that we enjoy and apply it to the ingredients we can get here in Wisconsin," noted León. "We're always mindful to make it approachable because we know that not a lot of people have had a chance to travel to Spain or Portugal."

A ROTATING MENU

In order to simplify the workflow without limiting the team's creative expression, many of the menu items at Amilinda change weekly. On my visit in late March, I was excited to order the Takoguiça appetizer, a takoyaki-style dough ball filled with a spicy Portuguese linguica sauce, Manchego cheese and topped with hot honey. I also tried the Carcamusa, the most tender pork shoulder braised with warming spices and a hint of juniper, and served with Spanish chorizo and fried onions over a potato purée, and a Hen of the Woods mushroom dish served with eggplant purée and a garlic toum sauce. The food was bursting with flavor, filling, homey, and beautiful. And to my particular delight, I enjoyed the meal with a lovely cocktail called the Citizen Cosmo, an orange-lover's take on a classic Cosmopolitan. I finished the meal with a decadent chocolate bundt cake served with dark chocolate sauce and an espresso whipped cream and left feeling both full and relaxed, exactly as I had hoped to.

COMMUNITY WORK & FUNDRAISING

"At first, all I really wanted to do was open a little restaurant where I could cook, feed a couple of people, make some money, and do some traveling," noted León as he spoke about the early days as a restaurateur. While Amilinda has become a notable name with a formidable following both locally and nationwide, over the last 10 years, the restaurant has morphed into much more than that. "I'm always quite surprised at how much this place means to so many people," he said. "It just kind of happened naturally. It wasn't like I woke up one day and decided to change what we were doing and make the restaurant a place to help refugees and raise money for organizations. It was just a safe space on its own and the community work came because of that. There are also a lot of standup human beings in this city who will donate their time and their restaurants to raise money for a cause, which was something I hadn't really experienced anywhere else."

Today, a big part of Amilinda's work is wrapped up in frequently donating their space and resources to raise money for various charities and organizations. "We have done dinners for Hanan Refugees Relief Group, Vivent Health, the ASPCA, and many others," said León. "For me, it boils down to the fact that I have a space, so why not use it to make change in the community around me a little bit? People always ask me why I do this, but my answer is always, 'Why wouldn't I?' I just don't understand why I wouldn't."

I asked him where he thought his desire to help people came from, and he told me, "My parents were very community-minded. They weren't hosting fundraisers, but they were the kind of people who would help others when they could. They were very good about in-

stilling in my brothers and me that nobody is better than anybody else. We're all the same no matter how much money you make, what you do for a living, or where you live."

VISIBILITY MATTERS

From there, our conversation turned to the topic of activism and visibility. "I'm very outspoken," said Chef León. "But that wasn't always the case. For many years, I was hesitant to be very vocal about being an LGBTQ+ business owner. Then in 2017 or 2018, I realized that it is what it is. Sometimes I worried that it would affect the restaurant or my employees, but right now I think it's incredibly important to be visible and stand your ground. I know that's easier said than done, but the city of Milwaukee and our clientele have been incredibly welcoming."

"It's the same with being HIV positive," he said. "I was always very concerned that people were going to say, 'I don't want to eat there because I don't want to get AIDS with my food.' And I'm sure there are some of those people out there. With what's going on right now in the world, and in the administration, I felt like it was time for me to step up to the plate and say, 'Hey, you can go eat at a restaurant where the owner or the chef is HIV positive, and nothing is going to happen to you.' We take this moment to try to educate people and so far, we haven't seen any real backlash."

Quite the contrary, this year Chef León has much to celebrate. After becoming a finalist for a James Beard award in the category of Best Chef: Midwest in both 2022 and 2023, he became a semifinalist for the national category of Outstanding Chef in 2024, and was listed as a semifinalist once again for the Outstanding Chef award this year.

"It's very humbling. I looked at the list of people who've been nominated for this before, and it's made up of these amazing chefs—some I've looked up to my whole career. So it's quite an honor to be included in the same list as they are," reflected Chef León. "But really, it's not just about me. It's a reflection on my team. I don't do everything in the restaurant nor would I want to. Even though I'm the one that's nominated, this really should shine a light on how amazing this team is. In the last six months, we have really achieved a cohesive sense of teamwork, which has helped us all excel. My Chef de Cuisine, Ethan Daugherty, is insanely good, and I never need to double-check anyone's work because everyone just gets it. We have reached this balance with each other, which means I can step away and do other things if I need to."

SEAMLESS WORKFLOW & SERVICE

And indeed, the balance León referred to is very evident, even as a first-time visitor to Amilinda. On top of the delicious meal, I found myself watching what I would describe as the "choreography" of the staff with servers flowing between making drinks, delivering food, hosting and interacting with guests, and the cooks putting out plates quickly without ever seeming rushed.

"I'm not a very scientific person," reflected León. "But being able to do something that's going to affect somebody for a little while, hopefully in a good way, is the ultimate goal. Maybe we help them forget about the bad day they had, maybe we help bring up a happy childhood memory or we bring someone a sense of happiness and fullness. I really enjoy that. I think it's important to show that food can be more than just something that you need, that it's more than just nutrition."

"At the end of the day, I think back to the fact that I have a very big family on my dad's side. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, our house was full of people, and everybody was cooking," he said. "There was always music and people dancing and that's what showed me that food can be more. It is a vehicle to make people happy—and hopefully make their lives a little bit better. That's what we try to do at Amilinda." ■

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

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

- Baked Lab
- Cargo Coffee
- Cinn City Smash
- D'Vino/Dinotto
- Delta Beer Lab
- EVP Coffee Company
- Fair Trade Coffee House
- FIVE Nightclub
- Fromagination
- Giant Jones
- Herbiery Brewing
- Java Cat Coffee House
- Michael's Frozen Custard
- Oasis Cafe
- Square Wine Co.
- The Old Fashioned
- The Shamrock Bar & Grille
- Willalby's Cafe
- WOOF's

Help Us Grow

What businesses are we missing? Let us know at: contact@ourliveswisconsin.com

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

- Amilinda
- Flour Girl and Flame
- MOXIE Food + Drink
- POP
- Style Pop Cafe
- Todo Postres

AROUND THE STATE

- Allen Creek Coffee House
- Cash & Olive's Pub/Millie's Coffee and Eatery
- Chandler House Bakery
- Commerce Street Brewery Hotel
- Get Real Cafe
- Great Northern Distilling
- Horseradish Kitchen + Market
- Paradigm Coffee and Music
- Pyramid Event Venue
- Wolf River Roots

OTHER BUSINESSES

- Bee Charmer
- Crossroads Community Farm
- D-Bar Bakery
- Driftless Market & Deli
- Luna Circle Farm
- Simply Served
- Stubborn Mule Catering
- Young Earth Farm

MADISON-AREA LGBTQ-OWNED RESTAURANTS & THIRD SPACES

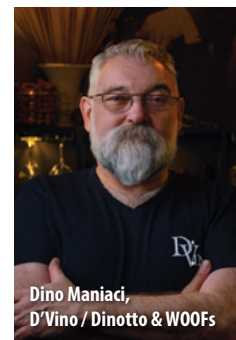
THE BAKED LAB 931 E Main St, Suite 18, Madison Founded by pastry chef Shawn J. Bolduc, Baked Lab blends classic techniques with innovative flavors and modern vibes. Specializing in creative pastries, wedding desserts, and hands-on baking workshops, they bring a fresh, contemporary twist to the bakery experience.

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

CINN CITY SMASH Food truck – Madison area Owned by Maximus (Noodle) Perdomo and Rutger Schiesser, this eye-catching purple truck is hard to miss. It features a vibrant mural of Madison transformed into a battleground between a burger monster and a churro monster. Known for their delicious burgers, churros, and truffle fries, they've also crafted a menu that's inclusive for everyone. Whether you're vegan, gluten-free, veggie, or part of the LGBTQ+ community, Cinn City Smash has something for you.



Tamí Lax, The Old Fashioned



Dino Maniaci, D'Vino / Dinotto & WOOFs



Lynn Lee, Cargo Coffee



Andrea Hillsey, Square Wine Co.



Brian Cummins, Great Northern Distilling



Matt Trotter & staff, Horseradish Kitchen.

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

DELTA BEER LAB 167 E Badger Rd, Madison Owners Pio and Speedy are crafting change in the Madison community. Since opening in 2019, more than \$237,000 has been directly donated to Delta's local nonprofit partners all while making damn good beer. Always keen on a wide selection of beer styles and collaborations, Delta has added cocktails and wine to their drink line-up.

EVP COFFEE COMPANY Four locations in Madison EVP Coffee Company, owned by Tracy Danner, has been roasting and serving freshly roasted coffee and coffee beverages since 1997. EVP has a kitchen where scones, breads, muffins, granola, and savory food items are made with lots of love and care. Serving in the spirit of Love, Kindness, and Respect is foundational at EVP.

FAIR TRADE COFFEE HOUSE 418 State St, Madison The coffee shop, purchased by Casey Thompson and Thomas Beckwith-Thompson in 2017, is both a hub for students studying and an early evening gathering place that's an alternative to bars. They prioritize serving fair trade certified coffee drinks and also have cold brew, baked goods, a selection of sandwiches for breakfast or lunch, smoothies, and other desserts. The owners also purchased Oasis Cafe in 2024.

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

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

GIANT JONES 931 E Main St, Madison Jessica and Erika Jones started their brewing company in 2018 to bring big beers to Wisconsin's

brewing scene. Their craft beers are certified organic and pack a punch at 7% or more ABV. Their taproom is open Wednesday–Saturday evenings. In collaboration with ORIGIN Breads, they offer pizza nights in the tasting room. View their website for a sizable list of additional places to enjoy their brews on tap or to-go.

JAVA CAT COFFEE HOUSE 4221 Lien Rd, Madison The coffee shop, owned by Renee Raspiller, offers coffee that is fair trade, organic, and roasted by Just Coffee. Along with sandwiches, salads, and baked goods, they serve housemade gelato, strong coffee drinks, and tea.

HERBIERY BREWING 2015 Winnebago St., Madison One of two trans-owned breweries in Madison, Herbiery uses herbs to brew instead of hops. Nia Ryan started the business in 2019 and along with Maddy McKeown opened the taproom in Schenk's Corners in 2023.

MICHAEL'S FROZEN CUSTARD 3826 Atwood Ave, Madison Michael Dix has been making frozen custard for more than 30 years. His restaurant





has a vintage soda shop vibe and offers vanilla and chocolate custard along with a flavor of the day in cones, sundaes, and shakes as well as burgers, dogs, and fries. Also available: Blue Crown Coffee (hot and iced) made from single origin USDA Certified organic beans along with bagels and a daily assortment of pastries.

OASIS CAFE 2690 Research Park Dr, Fitchburg Oasis cafe was purchased by Casey Thompson and Thomas Beckwith-Thompson in 2024 and serves locally roasted coffee and espresso, bakery, made-to-order breakfast and lunch items, and Madison's own Paul's Pel'meni.

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

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

SHAMROCK BAR & GRILLE 117 W Main St, Madison Technically Madison's oldest gay bar, the original bar began in 1985, and since 2013 owner Bob Mahr has worked to keep his downtown bar's drink specials affordable and the food menu accessible. Open seven days a week with happy hour (3:00–7:00 p.m.).

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

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

MILWAUKEE-AREA LGBTQ-OWNED RESTAURANTS & THIRD SPACES

AMILINDA 315 E Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee Located in Milwaukee's historic Third Ward, Amilinda offers a limited menu that changes weekly and features flavors inspired by Spain and Portugal. Owner and Executive Chef Gregory León crafts his dishes using locally

sourced ingredients paired with items from the Iberian Peninsula. They are open Wednesday through Saturday, 5:00–9:00 p.m.

FLOUR GIRL & FLAME 8121 W National Ave, West Allis Flour Girl & Flame is a woman-owned restaurant and mobile pizza catering company. Their mission is to foster a sense of inclusion by supporting women growers, LGBTQ+ producers, and farmers of color. You'll find us in our shop during the winter months and out at various pizza farms, festivals, and weddings during the warmer season.

MOXIE FOOD + DRINK 501 E Silver Spring Dr, Whitefish Bay MOXIE Food + Drink, the Milwaukee North Shore's premier upscale-casual restaurant, is owned by wife duo Anne Marie and Tamela. MOXIE features inspired American comfort food—steaks, seafood, and pasta—in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

POP 124 W National Ave, Milwaukee Located in the building that formerly held Switch, POP is a bright, spacious, and colorful bar with a full-service restaurant, which has recently expanded. Head in for a Packers game, RuPaul's Drag Race viewing party, or check out one of their pop icon album release parties.

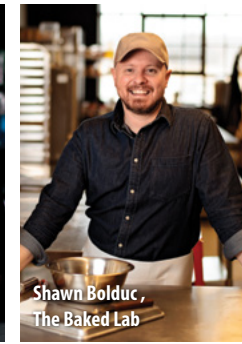
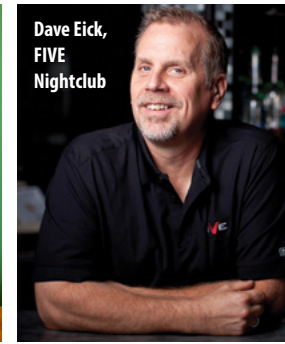
STYLE POP CAFE 934 S 5th St, Milwaukee Style Pop Cafe is a black-owned coffee and coffee-creamer brand located in the Walker's Point neighborhood of Milwaukee. They are a haven for the LGBTQ+ community, especially women and lesbians, offering a safe and inclusive space to connect and work. While they began as a mobile cafe, they opened their brick and mortar shop in April.

TODO POSTRES 958 W Oklahoma Ave, Milwaukee Pedro Garcia-Rios & Jesus Bisoso run a Latin bakery offering traditional items as well as custom sweet temptations for all occasions. Check out their social media to see their mouthwatering flan, tres leches, and beautiful occasion cakes made for an eclectic clientele.

OTHER BUSINESSES

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

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY FARM 4144 Cty Road J, Cross Plains Crossroads Community Farm is a certified organic operation co-owned by Cassie Wyss. They purposefully grow high-quality, organic



vegetables to give away to those who are struggling with food insecurity locally. They also run a CSA program in which members can receive produce boxes from June through October. This work is funded by sales to customers as well as community donations.

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

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

SIMPLY SERVED McFarland J Moe prepares meals, offers cooking lessons one-on-one or groups, serves food for special events, and sources seasonal ingredients for omnivores or those with gluten-free or vegan palates. As a personal chef, J does everything from shopping for ingredients to preparing food in your home, cleaning the kitchen, and storing meals in your fridge or freezer.

STUBBORN MULE CATERING Madison Co-owned by Ryan Meueller, Stubborn Mule focuses on creating unique events. Menus are always different, and bring fresh ideas to catering large events or personal chef services. They offer weekly meal prep, with meals cooked and delivered Sundays, and they can accommodate vegetarian, gluten sensitive, dairy sensitive, and KETO diets.

WESTFAM FARMS LLC Shiocton/Farmers' Markets WestFam Farm LLC is a charming small farm dedicated to organic practices. We cultivate gardens to provide fresh, unique produce and raise animals with

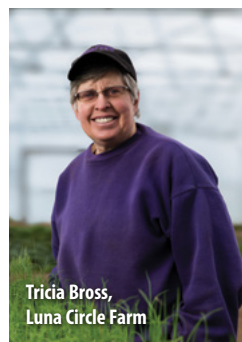
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April & Charity Chandler,
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Tricia Bross,
Luna Circle Farm



Renee Raspiller,
Java Cat Coffee House



Jesus Bisoso &
Pedro Garcia-Rios, Todo Postres



Jillian Macson & Eli Wedel,
Pyramid Event Venue

care. During the summer and fall, we host exclusive farm-to-table events, accessible by ticket only. Visit our Facebook page for upcoming events and immerse yourself in the best of sustainable farming while enjoying our seasonal delights!

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

AROUND THE STATE

AS OUR LIVES LOOKS to have a more statewide reach, we are including several businesses we are aware of outside of Madison. Want to see your business on our list? Please let us know by contacting contact@ourliveswisconsin.com.

ALLEN CREEK COFFEE HOUSE 137 E Main St, Evansville Seated next to Allen Creek in downtown Evansville, the cafe has espresso and specialty coffees, sandwiches, and fresh baked goods. They also added a service bar with craft cocktails and beer. They are open M–Th 6:30 a.m.–2:00 p.m., weekends 8:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., and from the first Friday in June until the last Friday in August, they will have live music outdoors (6:30–8:30 p.m.), with extended hours.

CASH & OLIVE'S PUB / MILLIE'S COFFEE & EATERY W9535 US Hwy 12, Cambridge Cash & Olive's Pub (owned by wife-duo Courtney Sargent and Jen Obranovich) offers made-from-scratch dishes, craft cocktails, and a dog-friendly patio just 20 minutes east of Madison. Millie's Coffee Drive-Thru serves espresso drinks and made-to-order breakfast from 6:00–11:00 a.m. Join them for monthly events—follow their social media or visit cashandolivespub.com.

CHANDLER HOUSE BAKERY 411 E Main St, Watertown Chandler House Bakery has weekly favorites and rotating flavors so there's always something for everyone! Cheesecakes, cupcakes, cookies, bars, muffins, quiche, macarons, and so much more await you in historic downtown Watertown. Open Fridays and Saturdays. LGBTQ+ and women-owned/operated.

COMMERCE STREET BREWERY 23 Commerce St, Mineral Point Commerce Street Brewery Hotel offers beautifully appointed lodging accommodations above an intimate European-styled brewpub. The hotel features five guest rooms, all with oversized whirlpool tubs, and fireplaces, housed in an 1800s-era registered landmark. The pub features house beers (brewed on-site), craft cocktails, hand-selected

wines, and tasty pub fare designed for easy sharing. All in the heart of the Driftless region—historic Mineral Point, Wisconsin.

DRIFTLESS MARKET + DELI 95 W Main St, Platteville Driftless Market & Deli focuses on organic and locally sourced food and art. They offer catering, full-service grocery, and in-store dining. Queer and female owned, they also act as a safe space for those on the fringe.

GET REAL CAFE 43 S Madison Ave, Sturgeon Bay Get Real Cafe is situated in a 100-year-old building in Sturgeon Bay. Open for breakfast and lunch, the menu emphasizes options for almost every palate and most dietary preferences. Made from scratch meals, bakery, smoothies, juices and organic coffee will satisfy every craving.

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

HORSERADISH KITCHEN + MARKET 505 W Water St, Princeton What started in 2015 as a cute little yellow awning-clad food truck serving specialty sandwiches has evolved into a brick-and-mortar restaurant with a full kitchen. Matt Trotter describes the food as “lighter, fresher, healthier” fare. June through August, “The Sunday Sessions” brings live music to the deck where you can view the Fox River and adjacent nature preserve.

PARADIGM COFFEE & MUSIC 1202 N 8th St, Sheboygan Established in June 2006, Paradigm is a community-empowered restaurant and venue that strives to bring exceptional food, beverage, and music to the greater Sheboygan area. With a focus on locally sourced ingredients, environmentally responsible practices, and a socially progressive foundation, Paradigm offers a menu stocked with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free fare. We provide a place to meet, work, eat, and live.

PYRAMID EVENT VENUE 117 S Main St, Lake Mills Childhood besties Jillian and Eli started this business to bring a little piece of city living to Lake Mills. Pyramid provides live entertainment nearly every evening including monthly drag shows and drag bingo, karaoke, Nerd Trivia, and a full range of live music in every genre. The location housed a pizza business for many years, and they continue to offer award-winning pizza baked in a well-seasoned, 40-year-old oven, plus pasta and salads. The Pickle Pizza has now replaced the Spicy Cheese Curd pizza as their most popular dish.

WOLF RIVER ROOTS W1702 WI-64, White Lake Amidst the tranquil beauty



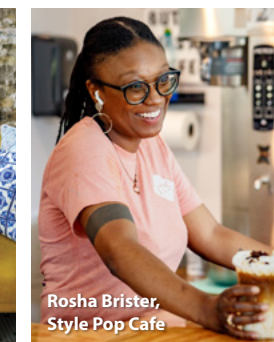
Cassie Wyss,
Crossroads Community Farm



Dana Spandet,
Flour Girl & Flame



Chef Gregory León,
Amilinda



Roshia Brister,
Style Pop Cafe



Casey Thompson & Thomas
Beckwith-Thompson, Fair
Trade Coffee & Oasis Cafe.

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

NOTABLE CHANGES

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY FARM 4144 Cty Rd J, Cross Plains The farm won silver in the Best of Madison Awards in 2024. Congratulations!

DOTTIE'S BAR & BISTRO 1200 Main St, Cross Plains Craig Kimball and his partner Kongmeng Vang sold Dottie's in June 2024. The business remains open under new ownership.

GREENBUSH BAR 914 Regent St, Madison The basement bar in the Italian Workmen's Club in Madison's Greenbush neighborhood changed owners in June 2024.

HAMBURGER MARY'S 730–734 S 5th Street, Milwaukee Hamburger Mary's, a burger joint with a one-of-a-kind menu and entertainment, is currently closed after the sale of their building last summer. They are looking for a new location and are hoping to open again soon.

MARINER'S INN & BETTY LOU CRUISES 5339 Lighthouse Bay Dr, Madison In 2000 Robert von Rutenberg joined his brothers to carry on the family businesses of waterfront dining and boat tours on Lake Mendota. Now in their 59th year of operation, Mariner's Inn serves dinner five nights. June through October, look for Lobster Boils the last Thursday of the month. Betty Lou Cruises launch from Mariner's Inn six days a week from Friday, May 24 through Sunday, October 20, but will be closing its doors after Labor Day 2025 when the owners retire.

DAISY CAFE & CUPCAKERY 2827 Atwood Ave, Madison The family-owned restaurant, which served breakfast, brunch, lunch, and cupcakes, closed in August of 2024 after 15 years in business. ■

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It Takes a Village

This directory represents a growing list of **Milwaukee-area nonprofits** that serve Wisconsin's LGBTQ+ community. *Curating the list is an ongoing effort, and this list may not be complete.*

MILWAUKEE | NONPROFIT | ADVOCACY | HEALTH



ALL FROM LEFT TO RIGHT 1. **PFLAG Milwaukee:** Dick Kaul, Dana Johnson, Joe Cox, Georgia Henry, Mike Zei 2. **Bi Pride Milwaukee:** Sarah Wallisch, Flash Gorski, Amy Luetzgen, Grace Moone, Sean Marlow 3. **Black Pride Milwaukee:** Matt Hogan and Ty Moncere 4. **Pride Rides Wisconsin:** Ed Zamora, Lenny Britz, Adrian "Johnny" Wade, Jason Jon, Jeff McKay.

IN FALL 1971, Louis Stimac filed the paperwork that created Gay People's Union, Milwaukee's first non-profit organization dedicated entirely to the needs of the gay community. This was a milestone for multiple reasons. Not only did Louis struggle to find a lawyer willing to support a gay nonprofit, he also struggled to find three other people willing to be legally outed as the founders of a gay rights organization. Thankfully, the community prevailed—as it always does—and GPU made national history many times over the next decade.

Today, Milwaukee is home to countless LGBTQ+ nonprofits—many descended directly or indirectly from Gay People's Union—that are serving the unique needs of an increasingly diverse community. We've networked far and wide to curate a directory of these local resources. However, please know this is not (and never could be) a complete list. New nonprofits are rising to the challenge every day, and for their courage and determination, we applaud them.

Want to be added to the next iteration of this directory? Contact us at contact@ourliveswisconsin.com.

BESTD Sexual Health Clinic has been offering free, comprehensive, high-quality sexual health services to the community for decades. Tracing its origins to the Gay People's Union VD Clinic of 1974, the clinic moved to its current location and was renamed the Brady East STD Clinic in 1982. Today, BESTD provides essential services to over 2,500 clients every year.

Bi+ Pride Milwaukee is a bisexual+ social, support, and advocacy group working to build a strong, vibrant, and sustainable community for non-monosexual individuals, their partners, and allies in the Milwaukee Metro area.

Black Pride Milwaukee, Inc. is dedicated to dismantling the marginalization of Black queer individuals by cultivating safe spaces, fostering community solidarity, and providing essential resources for education and behavioral health. Black Pride envisions a world where Black queer individuals experience total equity and acceptance.

Courage MKE provides services, support, and resources to LGBTQ+ youth across the state of Wisconsin. Through advocacy, housing, leadership development, give-back programs, community education, scholarships, and grants, Courage aims to ensure that all LGBTQ+ youth understand they are valued and celebrated.

Cream City Foundation mobilizes philanthropic resources and fosters strategic partnerships to advance human rights and respond to human needs. Founded in 1982 as an incubator of small LGBTQ+ nonprofits, Cream City Foundation has granted more than \$1.5M to LGBTQ+ community programs in southeastern Wisconsin. In 2025, it has reaffirmed its highest priorities as Equity, Health, and Prosperity.

Diverse & Resilient seeks to achieve health equity and improve the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ people and communities in Wisconsin through an extensive portfolio of critical programs and services. Diverse & Resilient offers award-winning programs in anti-violence, sexual health, community building, youth leadership development, transgender support, and HIV prevention.

FORGE has been actively building strength and resilience for transgender communities since 1994 locally and nationally through support, education, research, and advocacy work. FORGE strives to create a world where all voices, people, and bodies are valued, respected, honored, and celebrated, and where every individual feels safe, supported, respected, and empowered.

Kenosha Pride was founded in 2013 to address discrimination and prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community in southeastern Wisconsin. Kenosha Pride advances these goals through year-round public

events and advocacy work to build an inclusive community founded on openness, acceptance, and pride.

Lesbian Alliance of Metro Milwaukee is a volunteer-led organization working to strengthen the community for women who love women in the Milwaukee area. Founded in 1989, the Alliance has been bringing women together for cultural, social, and educational events that unleash their collective power. After a brief hiatus, the Alliance is planning a next-generation relaunch in 2025.

LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin is a small-but-mighty organization providing a safe home for all LGBTQ+ communities, advocating for the rights of individuals who have experienced discrimination, and lobbying for more inclusive civic policies and ordinances. The Center offers specialized Safe Zone workplace training, specialized support groups, volunteer opportunities, and advocacy training for future leaders.

Milwaukee Black Pride Correlation is building a better, safer, and more equitable world for LGBTQ+ people and their families by addressing the unique challenges faced by Black LGBTQ+ communities, including social injustice, discrimination, health disparities, and economic inequality. The Correlation seeks to build a global movement to fight for freedom, liberation, and justice for all Black LGBTQ+ communities.

Milwaukee GAMMA was established in 1978 as a place to meet and interact at community-driven events. Each event is organized, promoted, and hosted by a member, with more than 15 to 20 events each month. Although originally a men's sporting association, GAMMA offers a variety of social, recreational, and cultural offerings, ranging from hikes to cribbage games to boat cruises to roller-skating.

Milwaukee Gay Sports Network promotes organized athletic groups and activities among the LGBTQ+ community and their allies in the Greater Milwaukee area and beyond, including Milmaids, Milwaukee Beer Barons, Milwaukee Gay Darts League, Milwaukee Gay Volleyball, Milwaukee Gay Football Club, Milwaukee Metro Tennis Club, and SSBL, one of the nation's longest-running LGBTQ+ sports leagues founded in 1977.

Milwaukee LGBT Community Center has been delivering educational, health promotion, advocacy, and community-building services that meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, adults, and their allies in the Greater Milwaukee area since 1998.

Milwaukee Pride, Inc. was founded in 1987 as the Milwaukee Lesbian & Gay Pride Committee. Milwaukee Pride carries forward a proud three-decade tradition of hosting PrideFest, the state's largest LGBTQ+ pride celebration each June. PrideFest offers visitors an array of health and wellness resources, community engagement opportunities, and multiple stages of live entertainment.

Milwaukee Pride Parade became independent from PrideFest in 2005 as a separate non-profit. The all-volunteer Parade Board is committed to creating a family- and fun-oriented celebration of LGBTQ+ pride for the people of southeastern Wisconsin. Last year's parade included a record-breaking 205 units, with 5,000 participants and more than 30,000 spectators. The 21st Annual Parade, to be held June 8 at 2:00 p.m., honors the theme of "Remember, Resist, Rejoice."

Our Voice Milwaukee is committed to creating a space for the LGBTQ+ community to come together and engage in meaningful music experiences. The chorus is inspired by the joy of singing and making music together. Our Voice has its roots in Men's Voices Milwaukee and the Perfect Harmony Chorus of Madison and was originally known as the City of Festivals Men's Chorus. Since rebranding in 2020, the group has grown from 11 to more than 100 members.

Pathfinders began in 1970 as a shelter for runaway and homeless youth on Milwaukee's East Side. Today, it's one of Wisconsin's

oldest and most effective nonprofits serving youth in crisis. Each year, Pathfinders serves 5,000 youth, with approximately 20% receiving intensive onsite services. Through the Q-BLOK program, Pathfinders provides wraparound housing, health, and wellness services for Milwaukee's homeless LGBTQ+ youth. Street Beat, the Pathfinders youth outreach team, connects youth with everyday necessities, access to services, and awareness of the Pathfinders Drop-In Center.

PFLAG Milwaukee promotes the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ people, their families, and friends through support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG is an opportunity for meaningful dialogue around sexual and gender identities.

Pride Rides Wisconsin is a social and educational organization that provides a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ-friendly motorcycle riders to participate in group rides together and to support charitable community causes. Every June, Pride Rides Wisconsin hosts the Ride With Pride, believed to be the world's largest pride-themed motorcycle event.

Trans Liberation MKE is committed to the liberation of transgender people in Milwaukee and around the world. As a disruptive grassroots organization, this group believes that no one is free until all are free.

Vivent Health envisions a world without AIDS and strives to ensure everyone with HIV lives a long and healthy life. Vivent descends from a 40-year legacy of community-centered care that began with the Milwaukee AIDS Project and Madison AIDS Support Network in 1985. Now serving nearly 17,000 clients in six states each year, Vivent Health delivers a medical home model of care including not only medical, dental, mental health and pharmacy care, but also housing, nutrition, legal assistance, and prevention services.

Wisconsin Leather Pride is an inclusive and supportive organization that hosts events, raises funds, and represents the statewide leather and kink communities at next-level state, regional, national, and international contests. The group seeks to improve the experience of underrepresented and marginalized people by reversing antiquated contest and title requirements rooted in prejudice.

Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce works to create a fully inclusive state by promoting economic growth and opportunities among LGBTQ+ owned and allied businesses, corporations, and professionals in Wisconsin. The Chamber serves as an advocate between business and government that champions equality and fairness for all. The Chamber offers its members more than a dozen programs and a dynamic monthly calendar of events.

Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project was Founded in 1994 and is working to reconnect Wisconsin with its hidden histories to inspire a more inclusive future. By researching, documenting, celebrating, and elevating local LGBTQ+ history, the Project ensures that all LGBTQ+ people (and their stories) can be seen.

Women's Voices Milwaukee celebrates the contribution of women to the musical landscape of Milwaukee. Their mission is to create a supportive space where women can unite, collaborate, and express themselves through the power of music. The group is dedicated to celebrating diverse musical expressions and contributing to the rich cultural fabric of the community.

ZAO MKE Church is a faith-based congregation that is radically inclusive, justice-centered, and rooted in the truth of Jesus Christ. Zao means "to live, breathe, be among the living" or "to have true life worthy of the name." The word was used by the Bible's authors to describe Jesus after his death and resurrection, and ZAO leaders believe it is the calling of all seekers of God to become fully alive. ZAO offers not only spiritual guidance, prayer, and training to community organizers, but monetary aid, materials, and protest support. ■



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT PERFORMANCE MEDIA GREEN BAY

A Pioneering Spacemaker

In the last 50 years, **Mark Mariucci** has played a pivotal role in shaping Green Bay and Wisconsin's LGBTQ+ community through his involvement in several gay bars, multiple community organizations, and the longest-running LGBTQ+ print publication in Wisconsin history.

MARK MARIUCCI was born in Iron Mountain, Michigan, in 1955, but he'd never call himself a Yooper. Mark's family moved to De Pere when he was a year old, and he's been part of the Green Bay fabric ever since.

"This city has come a long, long way," said Mark. "The last weekend in March was a perfect example. On Friday the 28, the Tarlton Theater presented *Legends of Drag in Tilletown*, a decade-spanning drag documentary that sold out the house. It was like an old school family reunion. There were lots of laughs, a few tears, and thunderous applause. The next night, we had another sold-out show for the Trans Day of Visibility. The mayor of Green Bay was there to read a proclamation supporting the community. There were scholars, artists, Two Spirit folks, activists—all coming together on one stage. It was just so uplifting."

Green Bay's progress is more than a fleeting weekend of queer events. The city, once last in the state on the Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index, earned a 100 percent score in December 2024.

And Mark Mariucci had a lot to do with that. Over the past 50 years, he's been involved in several gay bars, multiple organizations, and the longest-running LGBTQ+ print publication in Wisconsin history.

FINDING PASSION & PURPOSE

Like most queer kids, Mark knew he was different. He just didn't understand why.

"I was called femme at least once a day, every day, from freshman to junior year," said Mark. "It was so bad that the school guidance counselor called me into their office for a wellness check. I played it down, but it hurt a lot. A female friend wrote in my yearbook, 'Have a good life and don't steal all the boys,' so I guess people knew before I knew."

Looking back, Mark noted that De Pere wasn't just where he grew up. It was where his passion for photography was born. "My best friend Leon Wagner was just amazing with electronics," said Mark. "He was using an old camera—Kodak 620 film—and an enlarger to produce these really big negatives. I wanted to do that, so I bought my first 35mm camera, and things just kept going from there."

When Mark graduated in 1974, gay liberation was hitting new heights across the Midwest. But Mark wasn't quite convinced that was where he belonged. "I went through a really, really deep depression," said Mark. "I was even a little suicidal. That ended when I met someone I really liked. He was gay, and I had a big crush on him, although I didn't understand that at the time. It never became anything more than a platonic friendship, but the friendship really opened my mind."

"I knew I was attracted to guys, but I still wanted to be 'normal' in my mind," said Mark. "I actually used to pray that I would get over that. There weren't really any resources for us back then, except maybe *GPU News* (a national magazine published in Milwaukee). If you were questioning, there was really nowhere to ask your questions—unless you



Quest magazine was born in January 1994. After the first few issues, the print shop—which also published the *Entertainer*, a publication filled with adult entertainment advertising—refused to print any more issues based on "moral objections."

knew a gay person and were brave enough to ask them."

"I remember going to Gail's Bar (1101 W. Main) once and only once. There was an 80-year-old man sleeping at the bar and a middle-aged woman bartending. I used the phone, walked out, and never went back. I found myself in a panic wondering if that's what gay life really looked like. I thought all gay men were old, depressed alcoholics. I kept telling myself, I'm the only one who is like me."

Fortunately, Mark's good friend told him about a gay bar called The Roxy Lounge.

"When he told me about it, I said, 'I can't hang around you anymore, because you're a really bad influence,'" said Mark. "Can you imagine? I seriously thought that. Six months of invites later, I finally summoned the courage to check it out."

"We were standing outside The Roxy, and he said, 'Come on, let's go in,' and I just couldn't. There might be someone inside I knew. And my friend said, 'So what? If they are, then they're just like you.' And sure enough, we went inside and saw two people I knew."

This experience led to Mark becoming a regular. Even now, he considers The Roxy the place where he came out, and soon found himself DJ-ing. "This was around 1975—and the set-up was very crude."

After about a year, Mark found himself at a crossroads. He'd long dreamed of moving to New York and becoming a photographer, but wasn't sure he was quite ready for that. Even now, he realizes how different his life might have been—and how different Green Bay would be—if he'd made that move. Eventually, Mark ended up settling in Madison, where he took a DJ job at the Cardinal Bar.



"The Cardinal was really influential to me, because it was so different than anything I would have ever expected," said Mark. "It was very open, very fluid—a mix of gay and straight—more straight than I expected since it opened as a gay bar. It was a really exciting time. Madison had this rebellious attitude that Milwaukee didn't, and I felt like it enlightened me. It might have been the incubator that inspired me to get more involved in the community."

After that, Mark moved back to Green Bay and continued DJ-ing part-time at The Manhole, and The Body Shop, which later became Who's. "That's when he discovered a new and emerging passion: Video. I was running video cameras in the bars before most people owned a video camera," said Mark, "and I started taping drag shows for fun."

"Eventually, a friend told me that he wanted to take over Who's, and I told him he was crazy. He said, 'But we want you to DJ!' I looked right at him and said 'No, but I'll be your business partner.' I wanted to use the club as a vehicle to make the Green Bay LGBTQ community a safer, better, more fun place to be. Green Bay always felt 20 years behind the times. Very few people wanted to stay. They would move because it sucked. And that was something I wanted to change. We spent everything we had to make Green Bay a better place."

I WANT MY MTV

When Mark opened the legendary Za's Videobar on July 20, 1989, he decided the bar was going to be all video, all the time. "We didn't play any records at all. Everything was music videos. We projected video onto three screens all night long." In the beginning, Mark used Betamax videos exclusively, but soon switched to laserdisc, and then DVD.

But as he learned, it was a little harder to pull off than it looked. "Mike, who owned Body Shop, had a very old video beam projector with a curved metal screen," said Mark. "It was just a piece of crap! Every once in a while, I'd have to get out of the DJ booth, walk across the dance floor, and pound on the thing to make the video come back on."

After 11 years, Za's closed in November 2000. "After my business partner passed away, and our rent increased over 500%, I knew it was time for a change," said Mark.

"I found the Historic West Theatre, and asked a realtor to help me take a look at it. It was a 'pizza and beer' second-run movie joint that was going out of business. It was depressing, with gray carpet paneling on the walls, a water-damaged drop ceiling, and this oddly slanted liquor bar."

"I got right to work. We sandblasted all the seats, reupholstered them, and put them back together in the theater style. We built a gigantic stage

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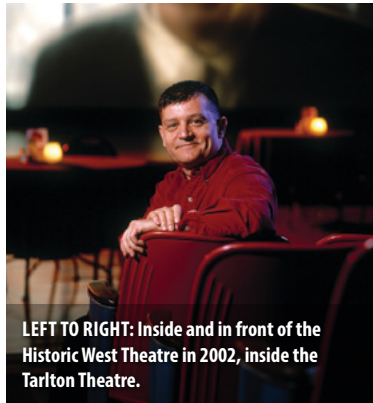


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MONROE STREET FRAMING





LEFT TO RIGHT: Inside and in front of the Historic West Theatre in 2002, inside the Tarlton Theatre.



with a flat space in front that could be used for dancing or restaurant tables. The restaurant didn't go very well, but the Friday and Saturday dance club really, really did. We would have 450 to 500 people dancing. It was a really amazing moment in time."

EMBARKING ON A QUEST

In 1995, Green Bay area bar owners hosted "Alive with Pride 95," a remarkably successful pride picnic event. Seeing an opportunity for a more cohesive community, Mark aligned the Green Bay bar owners around a common purpose. They formed a non-profit organization, Rainbow Over Wisconsin, with a mission of promoting the growth and stability of the Northeastern Wisconsin LGBT community. In its first decade, the group funded more than 60 projects from 24 groups with more than \$100,000 in Community Enrichment Fund grants.

But as Mark remembers it, "There was just one problem: It was extremely expensive for any gay bar or organization to advertise. Even *InStep*, Wisconsin's leading gay press of the era, was very pricey." That's how *Quest* magazine was born in January 1994. After the first few issues were released, the print shop—which also published the *Entertainer*, a publication filled with adult entertainment advertising—refused to print any more issues based on "moral objections."

But undeterred and committed to his craft, Mark found a used press and asked a friend to teach him how to use it. "This was just another one of my crazy ideas," said Mark. "It was a brutal process that took me 18–19 hours to print a single issue. And then, I would sleep for four hours, come back to the shop, and use their booklet maker to finish the design work. Then, I had to drive all over Wisconsin to distribute it. I wanted *Quest* to go everywhere."

"It was pretty much a bar rag!" he laughed. "But it allowed some of Wisconsin's smaller markets to have exposure and advertising. Later, with the closing of *Wisconsin Light* and *InStep*, two long-established respected publications, *Quest* became Wisconsin's only publication dedicated to the LGBTQ+ community, a title it held from 2003 to 2007.

After 25 years, *Quest* ceased publication in 2019. It holds the record for the longest-running LGBTQ+ print publication in Wisconsin history.

AN ENCORE PERFORMANCE

Mark first met Tarl Knight at a pride celebration.

"He was wearing this heavy winter coat in the middle of July," said Mark, "and he was playing piano and singing with this most incredible voice. And I thought, 'Wow, he's really talented and really eccentric. I'm going to keep my eye on this one.'"

In time, Tarl and Mark got to know each other and eventually went into business together and purchased the Historic West Theatre in 2018.

Over the next six months, they carefully renovated the space to create a Streamline Moderne performance venue with not only cinema capabilities, but a full food and beverage operation.

The Tarlton Theatre opened on December 15, 2018. Since then, it's become home to the Green Bay Film Festival, Green Bay Jazz Orchestra, Weidner Downtown series, the Truck Yard food truck park, and soon, Green Bay's first LGBT Film Festival. The building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2024. Now sustained by the Historic West Fund non-profit, the Tarlton is one of the only surviving Art Deco movie theaters in northern Wisconsin.

"We're not trying to run a gay bar, or a second run theater, or an art house theater," said Mark. "This is something completely new and different. When people need a stage, we can give them a stage—without charging a lot of money. We can give them a space that isn't a tavern. The focus is on entertainment. And it's great."

On Friday, March 28, Mark debuted his latest passion project: *Legends of Drag in Tittletown*, showcasing nearly three hours of restored archival footage from Green Bay drag shows dating back to 1979. The documentary features an incredibly diverse array of performers past and present, including titleholders and fan favorites long ago departed. After the sold-out premiere, Mark hopes to take the show on the road with additional performances throughout Wisconsin.

"These videos were in various stages of degradation and decay," said Mark. "It took everything I had, for months on end, to restore, protect, and preserve this incredibly rare footage. But I'm just wowed by how everything turned out. The documentary is a visual history of drag in Wisconsin—it's a glimpse into moments in time that could never happen again. I'm so happy with how everything turned out."

GUIDING THE FUTURE

Mark may be approaching his 70, but he's nowhere near "done."

"It's funny to think about being 'done' with anything," he said, "I was done with the theater for almost 15 years. And then, I was back in, and when I got back in, I was so glad to be there. This is just wonderful, and I don't want to quit anytime soon. I want to keep going. I plan to work until I'm at least 75. I want to get involved with the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. I want to support the LGBTQ history archives. I've always dreamed about teaching analog photography to students."

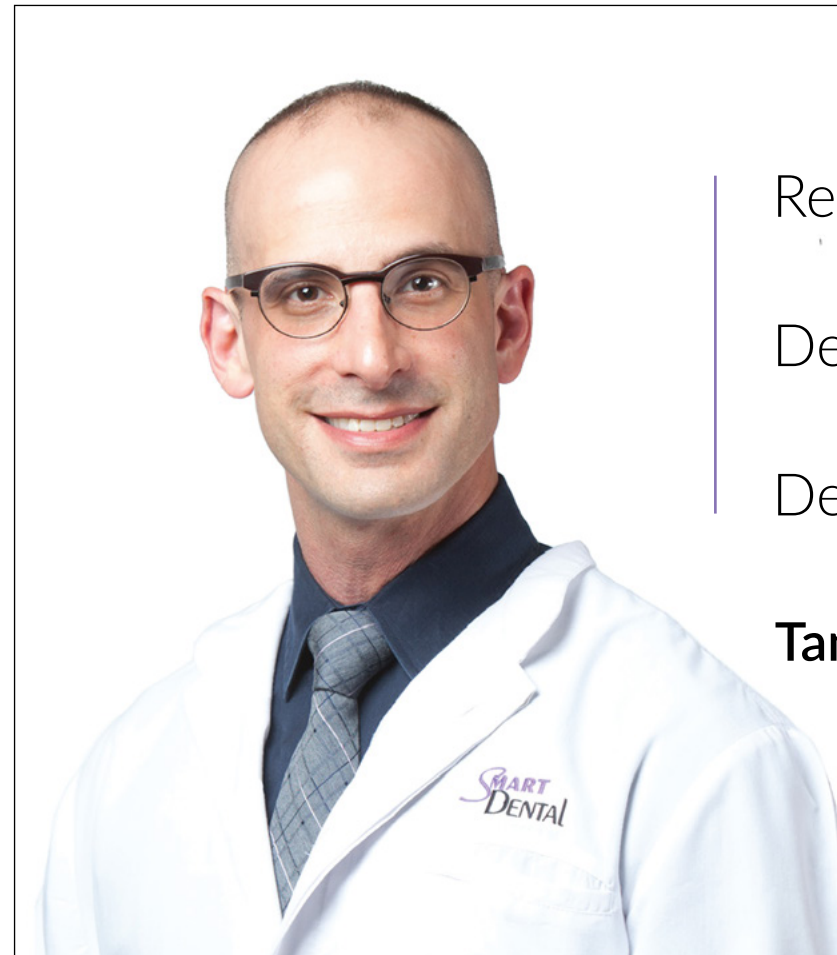
"I really, truly feel fulfilled," he said. "I can barely put it in words. I'm happy we were able to do this interview because you never know who your story might inspire. At the same time, I don't have an ego about anything I've done, because my work has brought me tremendous joy. There's no need to pound your chest and announce what you've done when you love what you do." ■

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FOOD & DINING SHEBOYGAN QUEER SPACES MUSIC SMALL BUSINESS

Facing Her Politics Outward

Kate Krause, owner of **Paradigm Coffee and Music** in Sheboygan discusses her small business journey and the importance of creating safe spaces and communities throughout her nearly 20 years in business.

WHEN SHEBOYGAN NATIVE Kate Krause was 23 “and just trying to figure out next steps,” she and some like-minded friends wanted to create the kind of community gathering space they had only been able to find in Milwaukee or beyond.

“We had the opportunity of an empty space,” Krause noted as she spoke about having worked in coffee shops previously. And so, armed with plenty of ambition, enthusiasm, and a lease, Sheboygan’s Paradigm Coffee and Music was born.

A SLOW BUILD

“It was pretty haphazard, and we hit the ground running,” Krause said. “And I would never say that we were wildly successful from the start. I would literally call my mom and be like, ‘Can you come sit here and make it look like we have customers?’”

The first show Krause booked at their original location was with friend Brianna Lane, a singer/songwriter from Minneapolis. Lane then suggested Emily White, a friend from Chicago.

“From there we just kept getting more and more great performers. There was kind of a love of the space and a found ownership,” Krause said. “It was a gem, and people wanted to treat it right. So they only sent their best people. And we grew that way in a couple of different threads through a couple different scenes, and since opening, we’ve done about 2,000 shows.”

ADDING FOOD TO THE MENU

To remain viable, Paradigm went from being just a coffee shop to adding a kitchen menu. “We started out with a small batch of sandwiches, and my sister would make the soups,” Krause said, “and then a few years into that we went vegetarian.”

Almost two decades later, Paradigm Coffee and Music is much more than its name would suggest.

Now located near the Sheboygan farmers’ market, the 4,000 square foot space offers a variety of vegan and vegetarian menu items for



breakfast and lunch (25,000 bagel sandwiches sold annually), an impressive line up of coffee drinks, teas, milkshakes, and more, plus baked goods made in-house.

A PERFORMANCE & MEETING SPACE

Evening shows featuring local talent have included a performance by Sheboygan’s Uke Club—a St. Patrick’s Day tradition—and Paradigm’s newest venture, a Community Playlist cabaret that’s raising funds for causes like a neighborhood theater for young audiences and the Sheboygan County LGBTQ Alliance. By design, Paradigm’s regular schedule includes LGBTQ-inclusive events and provides room for the community to hold meetings. And for something different, any given day might offer enrichment like a film series or art class.

“We also run a bicycle recycling shop in the basement,” said Krause, co-founder of Sheboygan Active Transportation. “I love anything on two wheels.” And until recently they organized a food co-op as well.

While Paradigm holds wide appeal, Krause insists, “We don’t have to be everything to everybody. We keep figuring it out day-by-day. We’re almost 20, and we’re doing things we’ve never done before consistently.”

TAKING RISKS

Krause and her team have found success by taking risks. One major pivot was Paradigm’s move in 2009 to 1202 North 8th Street, and ultimately ending up with a better landlord situation. The building was covered in metal, and the windows were plastered over, but they loved what was inside. “There was only one other organization that was interested in renting it, and it was the Republican Party,” Krause said. The woman in charge of renting the property told Krause she could have it if she want-



ed. Krause called that “an interesting twist,” because even as a business owner, Krause has never been shy about expressing her political views.

The memorable move was “completely non-motorized, with a four-block-long bucket brigade and farm wagons pulled by bicycle.” No problem. As a matter of fact, “It was awesome.”

When we first moved into our new space, the number one thing was we couldn’t afford anything,” Krause said, “We were honestly a bad bet for this new landlord to take us on.”

Another significant change came to Paradigm in 2016 after the Pulse nightclub shootings. Until then, Krause had chosen not to display a Pride flag because she had a strong feeling for safety first. However, after the tragedy in Orlando, “We felt we didn’t know each other enough as the queer community,” Krause said, imagining “kind of a superhighway of information and collective protection. So we formed Queer Potluck from there, and I put up a Pride flag in my window.”

Krause made a decision to face her politics and posters outward. The Pride flag would serve as a beacon to the queer community and allies, while also warding off any folks who don’t share their values. “Around that time, we developed a social media rule where we screenshot, delete, and block any comments that are anything offensive,” Krause said.

A CONSISTENT PRESENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Is Sheboygan a more queer-friendly place because of what Krause created? Krause doesn’t take all the credit. Staff, regulars, and other key players all contributed to the success of her ever-evolving coffee shop/music venue/gathering space.

At the time of this interview, Krause and her team had been planning for their annual Pride celebration for months. “Our brains are on our Pride picnic, which is June 28,” Krause said. “Last year’s got rained out, and it was a really big bummer. But at the same time, we feel a little bit ahead of the game. This year, we booked quite a few really great bands.

“I guess I can name-drop one of them, because they’re totally confirmed and they’re out of Madison. They’re called Kat and the Hurricane. We’re happy to have them.”

In the lead-up to Pride month, businesses like Krause’s often find themselves stretched, stressed, and even the target of unwanted negative attention, especially in our current political climate. But to community builders like Krause, it seems like business as usual. “I think as the world is just turning more and more upside down, these rules we set for ourselves from the beginning have helped and have made it easier for our crew and our consistency: We don’t feed trolls. We don’t get into altercations. We continue to do our thing, do what we do, and we do it well. After the inauguration, I walked into my shop, and said, ‘I know I’m on the list somewhere.’ But we’re going to keep our nose to the ground and continue to bolster our community.” ■

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YOUTH PERSONAL ESSAY BELONGING MENTAL HEALTH

Dear Fifth Grade Self

In this introspective letter to the author's younger self, Elliot, a student in one of **Madison's east side middle schools** recounts his struggles with understanding his trans identity and finding acceptance and belonging. *Because Elliot still does not feel safe and fully supported by those around him, he has asked to remain anonymous except for his first name.*

I WANT YOU TO KNOW that you're not helpless anymore, and you were never as helpless as you thought. Next year you are going to feel lost and confused. You'll feel like life is over for you, but I want to tell you that isn't the case.

The world is about to go into a lockdown. A few weeks into March, they give you a week off school, but that week turns into months, and then somehow you don't go to school for a year. During that long period of isolation, you discover more about yourself, and you struggle with big emotions. You start feeling weird. You aren't as comfortable with your long hair and the pink clothes your mother picks, or with the name we were assigned at birth. You start questioning who you want to be when you grow up, and all you have in mind is that you want to be a boy.

You always thought that was just a silly thing to want. And because you still like "girly" things like makeup, you think you are just confused. But after that, the thought of being a boy won't leave your mind. You talk to your cousin, and she says you're probably just a "Tomboy," which is confusing. You keep trying to understand.

A month later you finally discover you are Transgender. You're scared to tell your parents, so instead, you tell your best friend. You're nervous, but they're supportive.

By December of 2020, we're all staying in our houses. Your parents act out their stress on you more. You get very lonely. Your head gets pretty dark. You have no one to talk to, so you bottle up your emotions. You start hurting yourself as a way to let them out. You start thinking of suicide a lot and even attempt it a few times.

When you go back to school in person again, you're in fifth grade. Your stomach hurts every day on the way to school, or whenever it's silent in a classroom, or whenever you have to talk. You panic when people stare at you. To deal with it, you start excusing yourself to the bathroom a lot.

Eventually, you want to talk to someone, so you see the school counselor. She gives you snacks, lets you draw, plays some games with you. You tell her about hurting yourself. You tell her about your identity. She refers to you with he/him pronouns.

One day, she asks if you've told your parents. You lie and say you did. The next week, she tells them herself.

That's when everything changes. Your dad picks you up after school—something he never does. You walk to your mom's car, and the vibes feel horribly off.

Then at home, they get mad at you for hurting yourself. They threaten to transfer you to a different school, to take away your devices, to put you in a camp program without a phone where you'd feel trapped and

alone. Your mental health will get worse.

By sixth grade, all your teachers call you by your preferred name and pronouns, and you finally find a supportive friend group. But then that summer, you ghost everyone because you decide you are going to stop living. It's your lowest point. You refuse any type of help.

But your best friend sticks by you. They are worth living for.

By sixth grade, all your teachers call you by your preferred name and pronouns, and you finally find a supportive friend group. But then that summer, you ghost everyone because you decide you are going to stop living. It's your lowest point.

In seventh grade, you apologize to all your friends, which is hard to do. Some don't forgive you immediately, but in the end, you regain the friendships you lost.

Your life slowly starts to improve. You hang out with friends more, and you even go to your first concert that August: Pierce The Veil. You still struggle with thoughts of suicide and hurting yourself, but you have also grown and gotten stronger mentally.

You try to come out to your mom a few times, but it never works, or she never really understands. She says you are too young to worry about stuff like that. She says you are "confused." Somehow, she always brings religion into it.

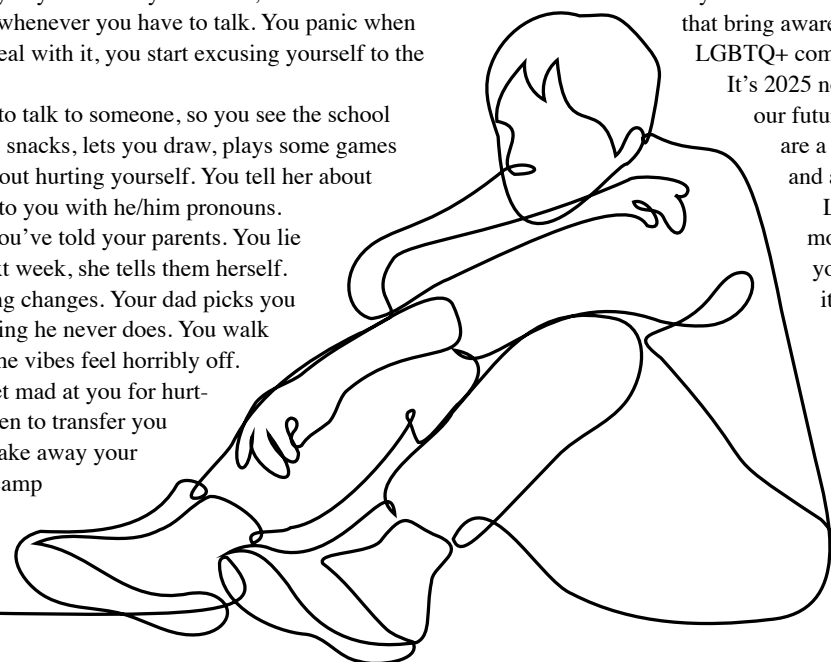
Your Catholic family has never understood their own homophobia. You try to educate them more, but you also start fighting in other ways. You make posters in school. You write essays that bring awareness to what is happening in the LGBTQ+ community. Things get better.

It's 2025 now, and to be honest, I'm terrified for our future and safety. But don't worry, there are a lot of people fighting for our rights and against the un-rightful laws and bills.

Life improves a lot for you. You have more support. You've stopped hurting yourself. It's a tough habit to break, but it is getting easier to resist the urge.

I wish that I could tell you this back when you needed it: Death is permanent, but your emotions are temporary. Don't give up. Search for the people who will help and support you. Your life is worth living.

Sincerely, your future self (Elliot) ■



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