

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE Lines™

MOTOR CITY PRIDE

The Story Behind Gov. Whitmer's
'We' Pronoun Jacket

PLUS

LGBTQ+ Caribbeans in
Michigan Who Don't
Have to Hide Who
They Are

THE PET GUIDE

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That Soothed
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The *Magic* of
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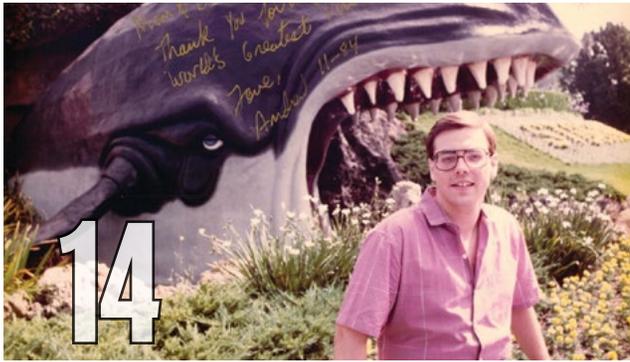
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Photo: Andrew Potter



Gov. Whitmer at Motor City Pride. Photo: Andrew Potter

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WATCH: Gov. Whitmer Reveals Becoming 'Proactive Ally' for LGBTQ+ Equality Thanks to Gay Cousin (Exclusive)

By Chris Azzopardi

'I Love You': Gov. Whitmer Affirms Michigan's LGBTQ+ Community Before Leading Detroit Pride Parade (Exclusive)

By Chris Azzopardi

Not Even Intense Rain at a Phoebe Bridgers Detroit Show Could Dampen Queer Spirits

By Jason A. Michael

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5 **Queer** Things You Can Do Right Now

BY JACKIE JONES

Don't let COVID fool you into thinking that Pride can't be fun *and* safe. And after Motor City Pride, we're here to tell you there's still more gay weekend-long fun waiting for you at Ferndale Pride, which will feature iconic performances, drag queens and circuit parties. With Pride weekend's mountain of opportunities, here's five that should keep you feeling grateful for queer community.

Attend Motorball Weekend

There's no party like a Motorball party. At least that's what can be said about the upcoming Motorball party during Ferndale Pride weekend. Starting Thursday, Sept. 30, until Sunday, Oct. 3, Motorball will offer six different dance parties for partygoers to attend throughout Ferndale and Detroit. "We've worked hard over the past year to bring back the wonderful Detroit celebration called Motorball," Andrew Karbowniczek, a Motorball organizer and Geared for Life treasurer, says. "Attendees can expect to come together in a safe, fully vaccinated environment where we've brought together the top names of the circuit party scene. This will be just the first of many more celebrations in the great city of Detroit."

For ticket information visit GearedForLife.com.



Witness Willow Smith Deliver at St. Andrews

The "Whip My Hair" sensation and poly queen is creating music again and bringing it to the Motor City on Oct. 4. With her transcendent voice and experimental sounds in tow, expect to hear her TikTok hit "Meet Me at Our Spot" echo throughout the intimate high-ceilings of St. Andrews while the crowd rages out. Upon entry, face masks are recommended for unvaccinated attendees.

For more information on guidelines and tickets, visit SaintAndrewsDetroit.com.



Photo courtesy of Gregory Smith

Experience Boylesque Drag Bingo for a Cause

Boylesque Drag Bingo is at it again with their upcoming event on Oct. 9 in Ann Arbor, where attendees will witness "a variety of talent and entertainers of all different styles and forms," Jadein Black, co-founder of Boylesque Drag Bingo, tells BTL. In between bingo, entertainers will perform while collecting donations for the Alzheimer's Association. Black assures BTL that "not a single show is the same" and "...everyone, regardless of who they are, is to feel welcomed and have fun."

Tickets can be found on [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com).



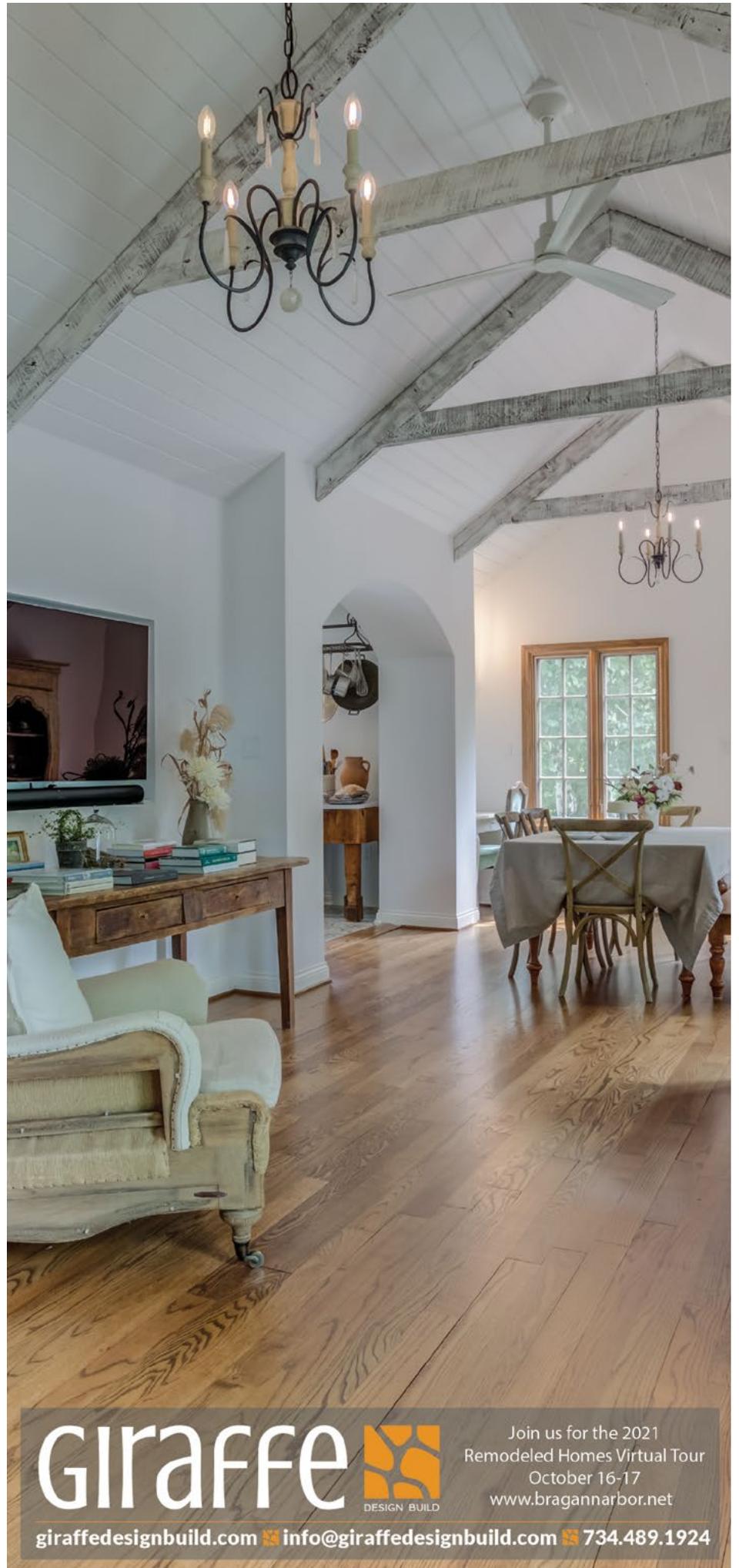
Secure a Ticket to 'Rent 25th Anniversary Farewell Tour'

Get ready to viva "la vie bohème" because "Rent" is coming to town for its 25th Anniversary Farewell Tour from Oct. 19 until Oct. 24 at the Fisher Theater, where fans can live (or relive!) one of the most iconic queer theater experiences. "When 'Rent' opens at the Fisher Theatre it will have been 842,400 minutes since our last Broadway Show," Scott Myers, marketing director of Broadway in Detroit, tells BTL. "When our fans return, they are going to experience everything that made them fall in love with live theater and have the thrill of experiencing it once again in a theater." All

guests must show proof of a negative COVID test (taken within 72 hours of the performance) or a vaccination card (at least 14 days after your second dose). Theatergoers are also being asked to wear masks. This is the last "Rent" touring event, so don't miss all 13,140,000 minutes of this iconic production.

"Rent" 20th Anniversary Tour. Photo courtesy of The Company of the "Rent 20th Anniversary Tour" and Amy Boyle

Tickets can be found at BroadwayInDetroit.com



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Register for The Politics of Puerto Rican Drag and Trans Performance

Drag is more than a show, honey. It's a political statement. At this virtual seminar on Oct. 13, the University of Michigan's Institute for Research on Women and Gender will review drag and transgender performance activism throughout Puerto Rico and its diaspora. Professors David Caron and Holly Hughes will lead a discussion drawing on the writings of Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes and his book "Translocas: The Politics of Puerto Rican Drag and Trans Performance." According to a statement, Hughes and Caron will focus on the author's "careful attention to transgender experience" while highlighting how "trans activists and performers mold their bodies, promote social change, and create community."

Visit Events.umich.edu for more information.



In Metro Detroit, LGBTQ+ Caribbeanans Don't Have to Hide Who They Are

How Two Local Jamaicans Are Living Their Best Lives a World Away From Anti-LGBTQ+ Jamaican Laws

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Kyle Constable is a young man with a promising future. The 23-year-old Jamaican, who came to the U.S. from the island nation three years ago, is studying to become a physician assistant within the emergency medicine field.

Before settling in Garden City, Michigan, Constable first lived in Illinois, then Tennessee. Next he's considering L.A. Or maybe Atlanta. "Basically, I'm traveling each state," he said. "No regrets."

But Constable's positive outlook and sense of adventure belie the precarious nature of life

for someone like him in his home country. Constable is gay. And in Jamaica, which has one of the worst records for human rights among all the Caribbean countries when it comes to LGBTQ+ people, consensual sex between men remains a crime punishable by up to 10 years in jail with hard labor.

"I actually came here because of my country's rulings towards homosexuals, and how they [treat] persons who are a part of the LGBTQ community," Constable said.

"It's really bad, actually, for part of the LGBTQ community," Constable explained. "They could be killed if a person is found out about their sexual orientation."

In 2019, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ruled that Jamaica should repeal its colonial-era ban on same-sex intimacy because it criminalizes LGBTQ+ people — a violation of international law. By order, the decision remained strictly confidential until this year. The IACHR ruling — though celebrated — was largely symbolic.

For Constable, leaving Jamaica meant leaving his family. But, he said, "Sometimes you have to make up your mind and realize that you are going to a better place, and this better place is to help to set new goals and standards for you."

In fact, Constable did find a "better place" when he came to this country. He has new

friends and a social life, a stark difference from how he felt in Jamaica.

"I would say that there's some places you feel different," Constable said. "You don't have to hide who you are." He compared that to LGBTQ+ people "not wanting to be seen" in Jamaica. Here, "it's a whole different, holistic approach to a different culture," he added.

Constable said it's unfortunate he doesn't know of other LGBTQ+ Jamaicans living in Michigan, though he's found LGBTQ+ friends representing different heritages who have helped him build a community for himself. In contrast to how he spent his free time in

See **Caribbean**, page 18

'It's Not an Island Paradise for Everyone'

Maurice Tomlinson Is Fighting an Uphill Battle Against Homophobia in Jamaica

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

When Maurice Tomlinson married his husband, Tom Decker, in 2011, he did not plan on saying goodbye to his home country of Jamaica. He certainly didn't expect Jamaica to say goodbye to him. But that's exactly what happened.

Tomlinson wasn't out in Jamaica, a country considered by some as one of the most homophobic in the world — that is, he wasn't out in his native land until he was outed. When he returned to the island after his wedding in Canada to complete the filing process for Canadian residency, he found that a photo of his wedding had been published in a Jamaican newspaper.

"I got a lot of death threats, and I had to get out of Jamaica," Tomlinson tells BTL via telephone from his home in Kingston, Ontario.

"I didn't stay away, because I realized if I did, I'd let the bullies win," he says. But going back required a "very strict security protocol."

Keep in mind, Tomlinson is one of the lucky ones.

"I realized something very important," he says. "There is a power in visibility. People fear what or who they don't know."

And fear of LGBTQ+ people is high in Jamaica. "Because the church has gotten away with preaching all this nonsense," he says, including spreading hateful lies about the gay community. In the eyes of the church community in Jamaica, gays are pedophiles who spread AIDS. Combating these stereotypes is crucial. "Without it, we will never ever achieve any kind of liberty or equality because we will always be feared," he says.

And so, Tomlinson has become a leading

figure in LGBTQ+ activism in Jamaica.

"If people don't see who this hate is directed against, then it's easy for them to buy the rhetoric," Tomlinson says. "It was important for me because I had the privilege of leaving if there was violence," unlike many in Jamaica.

"I'm not naive enough to think I will always escape," he admits. "I know that my safety is not guaranteed. I also know that with any kind of liberation movement you have to take calculated risks."

Those risks are necessary even when the stakes are high. That's why Tomlinson is involved in lawsuits challenging anti-LGBTQ+ laws in the Caribbean and is fighting to have his marriage recognized by the Jamaican government so he can return with his husband without all of their civil rights being stripped away from them.

"If I didn't attempt to make a change, then I would have to live with the Jamaica that I inherited," he says. "I have to try and change it, or I have no reason to complain; I just have to accept it, and I can't accept it."



Photo courtesy of Maurice Tomlinson

One of the reasons Tomlinson would like to return is family. "My mother died earlier this year in March, and my father is alone now," he says.

His mother's death was hard on the family — the ingrained homophobia in Jamaican culture made everything worse.

"One minister actually told my mother while she was sick and dying that she wasn't being cured because she wouldn't disown me," Tomlinson says. Even though his mother had been "a pillar of the church" for more than 50

years, the church initially balked at holding her service there. All because her son is gay.

This has been hard on Tomlinson's father, for whom the church used to be a strong support. "He's pretty much disassociated with the church," he says. "He doesn't like people around him because he doesn't trust them any more."

This isolation coupled with his father's chronic diabetes worries Tomlinson a great deal.

See Maurice, page 36

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Equality Michigan Urges LGBTQ+ Community to Get Involved in State Redistricting Effort

New District Maps Could Elevate Equitable LGBTQ+ Representation

BY JACKIE JONES

Erin Knott, Equality Michigan's executive director, is calling for more LGBTQ+ voices in the state's "once in a decade" redistricting opportunity.

Every 10 years, states get the opportunity to redistrict their maps – to create boundaries that allow for more legislative representation based on the most current census data. For weeks, the Michigan Independent Redistricting Commission (MICRC) has been working to do just that.

"It is hugely important that the commission hears from LGBTQ constituents and our allies," Knott told BTL. "We know that — if you look at the comments, if you watch the videos — individuals who aren't as concerned about pro-equality representation or pro-equality policies have been turning out in droves, providing comments and feedback as it relates to the mapping process."

Since the LGBTQ Victory Fund launched their campaign "We Belong Together" a few weeks ago, equal representation in the redistricting process has been a hot topic in the LGBTQ+ community.

"Equality Michigan is definitely grateful for everything that the commission is doing and very aware of how difficult it has been to conduct public meetings, draft maps and consider thousands of public comments," explained Knott. "We're grateful at their attempt to provide the draft map to the public."

Knott said MICRC finalized their first Senate map attempt on Sept. 15, though it has not been released to the public yet. She said the entire state government website is going through a transition and that there's a moratorium on updating government websites across Michigan. Despite this roadblock, Knott said, "[This] process has to be transparent, and this limitation will make the process more difficult for the public to engage."

Due to the lack of transparency, Knott is using her platform to ask the LGBTQ+ community and its allies to get more involved. She says the community can get involved by attending meetings and submitting written comments.

"[For] our community, this is the opportunity to gain more LGBTQ+ representation in government," she said. "The redistricting process helps to solidify the LGBTQ+ voting power within appropriately drawn districts. This includes at the local level: city council, commissions, state legislatures and congressional districts — even your school board members."

The Secretary of State's website includes a list of resources that can help people get more involved in the redistricting process. You'll find meeting notices, materials on the map-drawing process and information on how to submit testimony.

"Draft maps are going to be finalized next week and published on Oct. 8, with new public hearings starting on Oct. 11 in Flint," Knott said. "I would urge the public to show up to these meetings and provide comments on the maps, as this would be our community's final opportunity to ask the commission to make any changes and ensure the maps are equitable for all communities, including the LGBTQ+ community."



Gov. Whitmer in her custom-made "We" jacket. Photo: Andrew Potter.

The Story Behind Gov. Whitmer's Motor City Pride 'We' Pronoun Jacket

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

If you attended the Motor City Pride parade, you no doubt noticed that not only did Gov. Gretchen Whitmer participate, but she also was wearing a very special jacket. On the back of a black leather jacket the word "We" is written in large white letters. Overlaid are the words: "They/Them, She/Her, He/Him," each word a different color of the rainbow.

Needless to say, this left some people wondering where the jacket came from. Turns out the jacket is a one-of-a-kind piece designed by Julia Pickett, Whitmer's senior photographer/videographer.

"The governor and I were brainstorming ideas for Pride and the idea for the jacket was born from that conversation," Pickett tells BTL via email. "We wanted to make sure that the governor had something to wear that she was comfortable and confident in and that showed her strong support for the LGBTQ+ community."

The jacket came from Gov. Whitmer's own personal wardrobe. Pickett modified the jacket by designing the artwork and painting it directly onto the leather. "It took me a couple of days to figure out what I wanted the message to be," she says. "Once I had the concept down, I played around with the design and fonts on the computer before finally painting on the jacket."

Gov. Whitmer did not see the design beforehand.

"I kept the design a surprise until the day of Motor City Pride, and it turned out exactly how we had both hoped," Pickett says. "She loved it!"

Pickett is very proud of the way the jacket turned out. "Both as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and as a member of her staff, it meant the world to me to see her wear the jacket," she says. "I've worked in the governor's office for over two years now and have seen firsthand the impact her actions have had on our community."

Pickett says having an ally in the governor's office is important for all of Michigan's LGBTQ+ community and that having a boss who trusted her to design the jacket for her Motor City Pride appearance is "so amazing."

She added that the response so far to the jacket has been "incredible." "It shows how strong and widespread Michigan's LGBTQ+ community and our allies are," she says.



Julia Pickett and Gov. Whitmer at Motor City Pride. Photo: Twitter / @GuliaPickett



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- 4:00 - 4:30 p.m. Reginald Hawkins
- 5:00 - 5:30 p.m. Klashing Black
- 6:00 - 6:30 p.m. J. Santino
- 6:45 - 7:45 p.m. Drag Show presented by Motorcity Drag Kings

HEADLINING

- 6 - 7:30 p.m. DJ Dan Slater
ft. Alan Gendreau
- 8:30 - 10 p.m. DJ Deanne



HEADLINING

- 8 - 8:45 p.m. Siena Liggins *Beaumont*
- 9 - 9:45 p.m. Alise King

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At UWM, the Bottom Line Matters, But People Matter More

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Casie Jones, a leadership trainer at United Wholesale Mortgage (UWM) in Pontiac, is a straight shooter with a single-minded goal: fostering a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive work environment through education and awareness.

“Diversity is huge here,” she says. “And we promote it in our culture.”

Before making the transition to her position as a leadership trainer, Jones spent time working on UWM’s Resolutions team, gaining experience that informs her new role.

It all started when Jones responded to a call for team suggestions about how UWM could improve its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. Her idea was simple, but impactful — why not raise the rainbow banner in support of the company’s LGBTQ+ community? “My idea was centered around awareness and looking for allies,” she says.

Soon, Jones was invited to join a UWM Leadership Development team committee focused on creating inclusivity through outreach to internal team members. As Jones found herself planning events and building relationships throughout the company, she realized she wanted to do this kind of work full-time. “I found my passion,” she says. As soon as a position opened

up on the Leadership Development team, Jones went for it.

These days, it’s clear that Jones’ passion has yet to wane. “I love what I do,” she says.

“Be You Here”

The UWM slogan “Be You Here” provides the framework for the environment Jones is building. “It means something special to everyone,” she says.

For Jones, one aspect of being her true self at work means feeling comfortable acknowledging her girlfriend Tiara Saunders, a UWM senior underwriter. “I identify as a lesbian, and I can openly say that here,” Jones says. “I can bring my spouse to functions, I can introduce her. I feel loved, respected, and my family matters; my family’s family matters.”

Jones has firsthand experience working for employers who were not as tuned-in to the vital importance of DEI. “In a previous workplace, it was a great place to work, but there wasn’t much diversity,” she says. “It definitely was not a place where you could openly be yourself.” She says it wasn’t surprising her previous work environment, where she first met Saunders, felt restrictive — she cited a recent study that showed around 46% of U.S. LGBTQ+ employees feel closeted at work.

Feeling forced to stay in the closet at work “takes a toll on your mental health and mindset,” Jones

says. “We spend the majority of our days at work, so it’s crucial that we create a safe environment that supports who people are.” She says she works to ensure that UWM team members feel comfortable discussing their partners, that their preferred pronouns are acknowledged, that everyone feels safe and protected, and that no one needs to constrict who they are.

Jones says she is driven by making sure every team member feels heard and seen — that their culture matters and that they feel valued. “It’s not just lip service,” she adds. The company encourages team members to take a “Be You Here Day,” additional PTO that’s dedicated to celebrating or observing dates important to them that may not appear on the list of federally observed holidays and remembrances. Jones says she used a Be You Here Day to celebrate Juneteenth this year. Throughout the year, the company recognizes cultural observances through internal announcements and in-person celebrations.

Jones’ approach to training leaders about how they can create more diverse, inclusive work environments is one she hopes team members will carry over to their personal lives, as well. “It’s about the whole person,” she says. Providing leadership classes on important — and sometimes, sensitive — issues is one way Jones reaches out to the UWM community.

A key example is her work educating team

leaders about unconscious (or “implicit”) bias — commonly held social stereotypes focused on certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own consciousness. Jones says that when we are aware of some of our own unconscious biases — everyone has them — we can work to overcome them and keep them in mind when developing relationships inside and outside of the workplace. “Unconscious bias training helps us to make better decisions,” Jones explains. “It helps us to treat one another better, creating safe spaces for everyone to feel supported, protected and heard.”

Classes aimed at “opening the mind to different perspectives,” she says, help to drive awareness about diversity and inclusion in the everyday actions we all take part in.

A Day in the Life

A typical work day for Jones revolves around applying the best techniques to build leadership abilities. She leads interactive boot camps for new leaders to prepare them to coach their team members. “Throughout this training, we make sure we’re putting a huge emphasis on relationship building,” she says. “It’s a family-oriented culture here and concepts like ‘servant leadership’ are important.”

Connection is at the heart of UWM’s approach

See **UWM**, page 22

COME AS YOU ARE

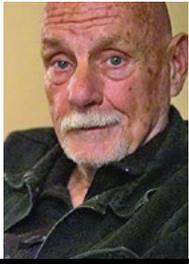


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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Three Days to Consider

Monday, Oct. 11 offers three choices: LGBTQ+ celebration, Native American reconsideration, and some conflict of interest to Chris Columbus 1492 believers.

As everyone knows, this date marks National Coming Out Day (and the assumption is that our readers have already done so, or will be encouraged to do so, with or without fanfare or publicity, unless, of course, you're a mega star, big-name pops or blues singer, TV or off-Broadway playwright, actor, producer or baseball, basketball or football hero! Better late than never.)

“Two-spirited people are believed by some to be lucky in love and able to bestow such luck on others.”

This day is also known as Indigenous Peoples Day, in celebration of Native American history, its estimated 570-plus tribes and their cultures and traditions. (Recently footprints have been found on our corner of the planet that are determined to be 20,000 years old.)

Lastly, there's the federally-sanctioned Christopher Columbus Day, which is rarely, if ever, honored these days, because of the abuse of Native Americans occasioned by Columbus in 1492 and during the following decades.

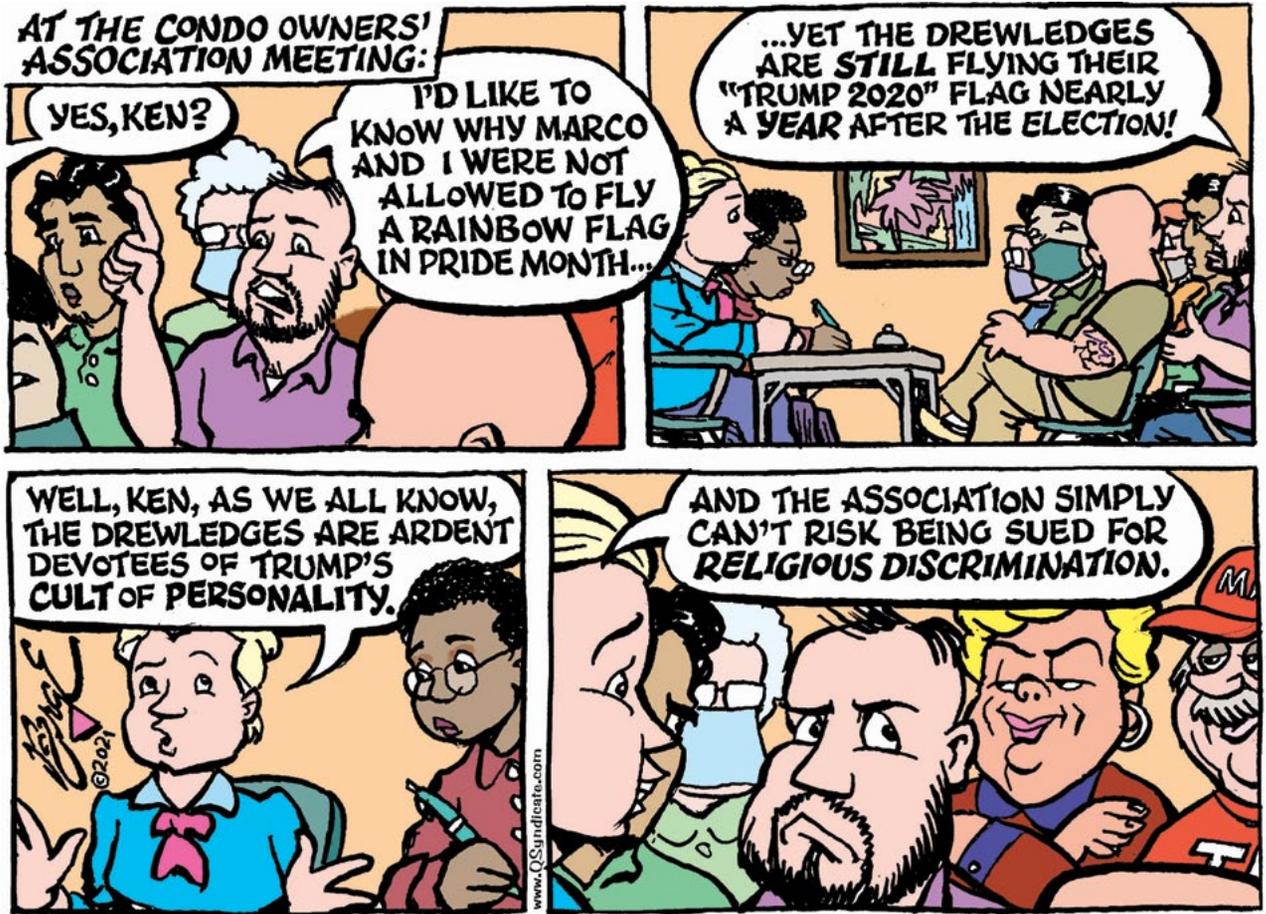
In 1992, the 500th anniversary of the Columbus landing, Berkeley, California formally stopped celebrating Columbus Day. Twenty-two years later, in 2014, Santa Cruz officially called its reconsidered support “First Peoples Day.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 6.79 million Americans, or 2.09% of our total population, have past or present tribal ties or ancestry. Fifteen states have 100,000 or more residents with indigenous ancestry. Michigan's native population is 45,569.

Among the more well known tribes are Navajo Nation, Cherokee, Choctaw, Sox, Apache, Iroquois, and Eskimo (but don't ask ex-Alaska Gov.#9 Sarah Palin).

A concept shared by many indigenous tribes is the presence of two-spirited persons: those whose intrinsic mental make up and resultant actions and interests are both male/female or female/male, gendered in varying degrees,

Indeed! Among these: Lakota, Mohave, Crow and Cheyenne. Two-spirited people are believed by some to be lucky in love and able to bestow such luck on others. (Alas, Chris Columbus hadn't a clue.)



BY JUAN MICHAEL PORTER II

Stigmatizing Language Prevents People From Accessing HIV Care

HIV stigma has long been acknowledged for alienating and pushing people living with HIV (PLWH) out of care retention. As Donja R. Love, the award-winning, Afro-Queer playwright who is living with HIV, recently revealed to TheBody in an interview about positive-communication with medical professionals, after encountering stigma at the clinic where he received services, he stopped seeing his doctor and taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) for two years.

But the manifestation of HIV-stigma does not appear solely in person-to-person encounters. On July 26, during a performance at the Rolling Loud Festival in Miami, Florida, the rapper DaBaby launched into a speech that asked audience members who “didn't show up today with HIV/AIDS, any of them deadly sexually transmitted diseases that'll make you die in two-three weeks,” women whose “(pussies) smell like water,” and men who “ain't sucking dick in the parking lot” to lift their cell phone lighters.

The offensiveness of DaBaby's speech is clear, though hardly without precedent. The previous week in Italy, thousands of Twitter users sent the term #HIVPass trending across the country. As reported by Gay.IT!, the flare up began on July 21 after politician Claudio Borghi responded to inquiries about his vaccination status, by saying that journalists should ask “an LGBT if he is HIV positive and if he is taking prophylaxis.”

Soon afterwards, #HIVPass was trending in protest to Italy's proposed green pass, or vaccine passport, using the failed logic that PLWH should be required to present a similar document to protect people who are seronegative, all while ignoring the fact that HIV is a bloodborne infection and, unlike COVID-19, is impossible to transmit by breathing in close proximity to others.

Though some Twitter users denounced the stigma and inaccuracy of these messages, once such misinformation is disseminated, it is difficult to correct, particularly when discussing a subject as

widely misunderstood as HIV.

The harm of 'HIV-infected'

Though unsettling, discovering HIV misinformation and stigma among uneducated provocateurs is not unexpected. It is considerably alarming, however, to encounter when engaging with scientists and medical professionals, as recently occurred during the 2021 International AIDS Society (IAS) conference.

On July 20, British HIV Association chair Laura Waters, M.D., shared that she'd come across 13 abstracts using the term “HIV-infected” at the conference, as well as many instances of use during sessions. This instead of using people-first language, which affirms the personhood of “people living with HIV.”

In his reporting on the matter, INTOMore's editor-in-chief, Henry Giardina, revealed that a cursory search of the IAS abstract archive pulled up over 100 examples of the term in 2020 alone. TheBody independently verified Giardina's

count, finding that the terms “HIV-infected” or “HIV infected” appeared 280 times, and were used at least once in every single one of IAS’ 124 archived abstracts from 2020.

In these abstract briefs, HIV-infected was used to describe a wide range of subjects and people, including blood, women, drug-users, children, adolescents, Asians, Kenyans, mothers, pregnant women, participants, individuals, men and patients. In some instances, as with the abstract “HIV associated microbial translocation identified between 16S sequencing,” the terms “HIV-infected” and “healthy humans” were juxtaposed with each other as if to imply that PLWH cannot be healthy, with zero regard for the fact that PLWH can be healthier than people who are seronegative.

Changing the standard

In an interview with TheBody, Waters made clear that the use of stigma-laden language to describe PLWH was hardly unique to the IAS, pointing out that she’d encountered it numerous times at this year’s CROI conference and elsewhere throughout her career. For Waters, the issue is that people-first language has long been upheld as the preferred standard when administering or referring to PLWH.

Waters referenced the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) guidelines as a good starting point for discussing PLWH. Since 2015, they have suggested that instead of “HIV-infected” or “AIDS-infected,” “refer to people as being HIV-positive or a person/people living with HIV (if serostatus is known/disclosed).”

In response to TheBody’s inquiry about the appearance and use of stigma-laden language in its approved abstracts, Bijan Farnoudi, the IAS director of communications and public wrote: “The IAS strongly encourages speakers and presenters to use the UNAIDS terminology guidelines at the conference. We believe that a people-centred HIV response requires people-centred language. We all need to use language that dismantles rather than perpetuates stigma and discrimination and we work to educate our audiences in that way.”

Hopefully, this encouragement will lead to a transformation in the language that is used at IAS’ 2022 conference.

Within the United States, the federal government’s source for information about HIV, HIV.gov, uses the terms “people (adults, adolescents, or persons) with HIV,” or “living with HIV,” in all of its clinical guidelines, except for on the resource space that has been dedicated to treating children. That page has not yet been updated with people-first language

and continues to use “HIV-exposed” and “HIV-infected.”

According to The Global Network of People Living With HIV (GNP+), an organization that was founded in 1992 to improve the lives of PLWH, stigma is a significant barrier preventing people living with HIV from accessing healthcare. In 2016, BMJ Journals published a study that formally examined this claim. The study used six electronic databases of articles that reported on the associations between HIV-related stigma and health-related outcomes, between 1996 and 2013.

The study concluded “that HIV-related stigma has a detrimental impact on a variety of health-related outcomes in people with HIV,” and maintained that its review could help to develop interventions to reduce the impact of HIV-related stigma on well-being of PLWH.

The personal stake

But no study can speak to the personal devastation that stigma inflicts upon PLWH. In an interview with TheBody, Gina Brown, the director of strategic partnerships and community engagement of Southern AIDS Coalition, spoke about how stigma has affected her clients. She says that while working at a health clinic that offered mental health services, syringe exchange services, as well as testing for HIV, “people would come get tested in disguise because they didn’t want others to see them. When they came in, they would get off the elevator on the top and then walk down the stairs to our floor.” Brown explained that one client refused to come in for services unless she met him at a nearby store and walked him over, as if they were friends, heading somewhere other than the clinic.

“People don’t realize what stigma does to people who are living with HIV,” she said. “And it’s not just the external stuff that people are saying about us; it’s all the things we say about ourselves. Especially in small towns. Say you go to the doctor to get HIV care, and the same people who you go to church with see you there. Before you walk out, everybody in town is gonna know about your business. Many people would rather sit in their houses and slowly die. Stigma kills.”

That’s what is so harmful about DaBaby’s comments and using language like “HIV-infected.” When people hear that language, what they hear is, “I’m not just living with this infection,” added Brown. “I am this infection and every part of me must be infected. It doesn’t feel good. But if you’re newly diagnosed and don’t know another term or haven’t found your advocacy legs yet — even

See [Stigmatizing Language](#), page 47

Creep Of The Week

Liz Cheney Makes Brave Public Declaration: Her Sister Is Human and Deserves Human Rights

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) is not going to save us.

I know it’s all the rage to point to her as the one reasonably sane Republican in a sea of seditious liars, but it’s just not that simple.

First of all, hooray for Cheney for being one of two whole Republicans to be like, “Uh, what happened on Jan. 6 was really bad, and we should probably look into it and also, Trump is terrible and embarrassing.” Truly NOT a position of courage. And yet, no other Republican besides Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) could bring themselves to touch the third rail of Republican politics: reality.

Cheney is not a moderate. She just looks moderate compared to the rest of the party since they are off in the deep-end, advocating for fascism. Again, it’s not a courageous stance to argue that we should continue to be a functioning country with democratic elections.

And it’s also not a brave and bold stance to say that you now support marriage equality after years of saying you didn’t even though you literally have a lesbian sister who is married to a woman.

Don’t get me wrong. People evolve. We’ve watched many elected leaders change their minds on this issue, including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. It’s a normal part of being human. We can change what we believe based on new information. Or, at least, we should.

Hand washing is a good example. Back in the day, doctors didn’t wash their hands. They would literally go from handling a dead body to delivering a baby and scratch their heads about why that lady didn’t survive childbirth. But then we discovered germs and stuff, and doctors were told by science nerds to wash their hands, which pissed some doctors off a great deal! How dare anyone tell them what to do! But, as we now know, washing hands saves lives. It can keep you from getting sick. And it can keep death cooties away from the birthing suite.

Anyway, during a Sept. 26 interview on “60 Minutes,” Cheney utters three words that Republicans only ever say now in order to explain away any past criticisms of Trump: “I was wrong.”

“I love my sister very much,” she says. “I love her family very much. And I was wrong.”

Admitting you’re wrong is a sign of strength. So, good work!

“It’s a very personal issue,” she continues, “and very personal for my family. I believe that my dad was right. And my sister and I have had that conversation.”

And it went well, based on what Mary Cheney posted on Facebook: “I love my sister very much and am so proud of her. It took a ton of courage to admit she was wrong in 2013 when she opposed marriage equality. That is something few politicians would ever do.” And then Mary added, “I told you so.” Oh, sisters.

OK, so Mary and Liz have apparently hugged it out. But let’s be honest: it’s terrifying to think of former Vice President and Iraq War enthusiast Dick Cheney being right about anything. But he did give public, albeit tepid, support of his lesbian daughter on a 2011 episode of “The View,” saying, “You ought to have the right to make whatever choice you want to make with respect to your own personal situation.” Poetic stuff.

Speaking of LGBTQ+ rights more broadly, Liz Cheney says during her “60 Minutes” interview, “[As] human beings...we need to work against discrimination of all kinds in our country, in our state. We were at an event a few nights ago, and there was a young woman who said she doesn’t feel safe sometimes because she’s transgender, and nobody should feel unsafe.”

True and right! And yet. There are legitimate concerns.

“[Cheney] saying she was wrong on same-sex marriage and saying that ‘no one [gay or trans] should feel unsafe’ doesn’t explain why she voted against the Equality Act TWICE. She’s smart. She knows better,” journalist Victoria Brownworth posted to Twitter.

Veteran and trans rights advocate Charlotte Clymer tweeted, “I will trust Liz Cheney’s statement on trans rights on ‘60 Minutes’ when she supports the Equality Act in its current form. Because just a few months ago, she voted against it. Why? Because it fully supports trans rights.”

Apparently, Cheney’s new and improved LGBTQ+ equality stance is very new. And maybe not very strong. At least when it comes to people who are not her well-connected sister who is already insulated from the kind of discrimination and danger that so many LGBTQ+ people face.

Just saying, Liz Cheney has a long way to go before she gets to be a grand marshal at a Pride parade.

Until Legal Ruling, Disneyland Banned Same-Sex Dancers

BY MATTHEW S. BAJKO

Deemed the “Happiest Place on Earth” Disneyland sadly didn’t live up to that billing for same-sex couples during its first three decades. Opened in 1955 by the late Walt Disney, the family-oriented amusement park was built on a former orange orchard in Anaheim, California.

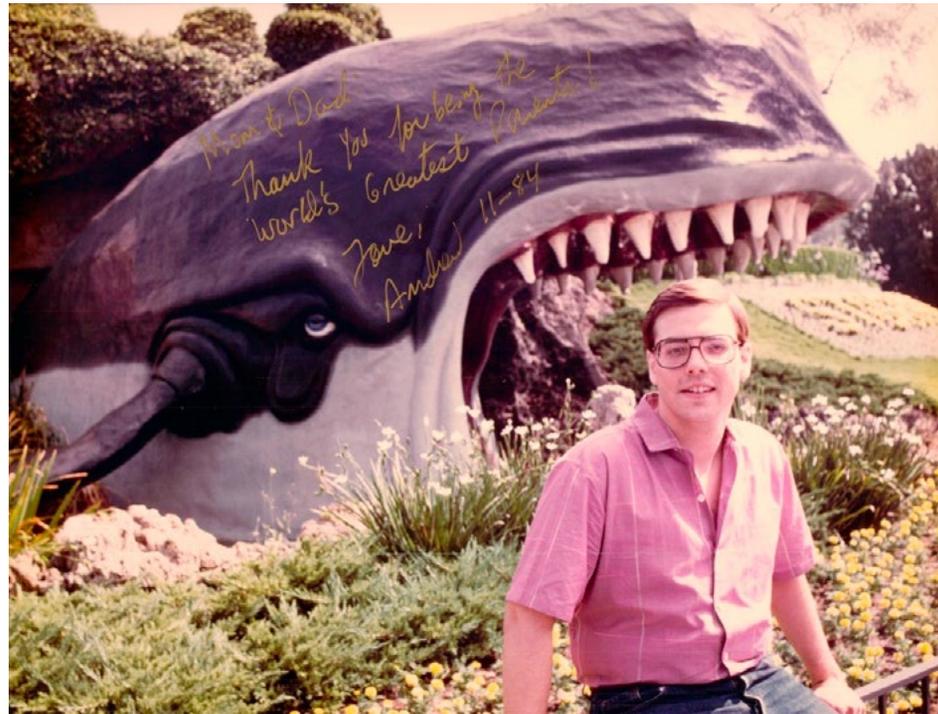
Two years later, with it launching “date nights” that featured dancing under the stars to lure local Orange County couples, especially teenagers, on weekends, Disneyland management adopted a strict policy for who was allowed to show off their dance moves. The rule made clear that “couples only are allowed on the dance floor (male/female)” but did make an allowance that “small children may dance as non-couples if floor space permits.”

The park’s security officers strictly enforced the homophobic policy, quickly breaking up any couple that deviated from it. So was the case when a young lesbian showed up at the park in 1980 and was told she couldn’t dance with other girls.

Her roommate at the time was Andrew Exler, who had grown up less than two miles from Disneyland and often attended the theme park, even at times skipping school to spend the day among its fantastical lands. A young gay activist who had already tangled with his local school district over its censorious policies pertaining to students who wanted to provide public comment during school board meetings, the 19-year-old Exler sprang into action.

He wrote and called Disneyland executives to raise objections about the dancing restrictions. Disappointed in the response he received, Exler enlisted a 17-year-old Shawn Elliott, another gay teen he had befriended at their local LGBTQ+ community center, to help him protest the policy during date night on Saturday, September 13, 1980.

None of the local reporters Exler had contacted to give them a heads up agreed to document their dance floor rebellion, telling him they doubted park employees would do anything so harsh as to kick them out of the park. Undaunted, and clad in a dragon-adorned light blue kimono he had bought at a Judy’s department store “Gear for Guys” section – “we called it Gear for Gays,” he recalled – Exler arrived at the park that evening with Elliott and headed to the Tomorrowland Terrace in the space-themed land of the park to join the dance floor.



Andrew Exler, who has since changed his name to Crusader, sits in front of a whale at Disneyland in a photo that he sent to his parents. Photo: Stephen Stewart

“I probably stuck out like a sore thumb. Shawn was in more normal stuff clothing,” recalled Exler, 60, who legally changed his name to Crusader in 1995, in a recent phone interview with the Bay Area Reporter.

The pair of platonic friends soon were grooving to disco tunes along with the other dancing couples. Never did the young men touch each other or embrace for a slow dance, as Crusader noted in a guest opinion piece published in the October 17, 1991 issue of the B.A.R. marking the 11th anniversary of their ejection from the park.

“Our crime was disco dancing,” he wrote. “We didn’t touch, we didn’t kiss, we didn’t bump and grind. We simply danced to the sounds of some horrible disco band.”

Nonetheless, it didn’t take long for park security officers to approach them and demand they leave the dance floor or find girls to dance with them. Security officer William Acker would later recall that he told the teenagers their dancing together “was of a controversial nature at that point, and I believe specifically I said something to the effect of alternate lifestyle that wasn’t in keeping with the traditional aspects of the company, of what Disneyland represents.”

Crusader remembers one security officer tried to break up the two teens by standing in the middle of them.

“I danced around him. I just moved and danced around and got to the other side of Shawn,” said Crusader, who was living in Fullerton at the time and working as an administrative assistant at Cedar Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles.

By then five security officers had surrounded them on the dance floor. One grabbed Crusader on his left side, another grabbed him on his right.

“They brought me to a complete stop,” he said. “They escorted me and told Shawn to follow your partner.”

After a brief exchange near the dance floor where the security personnel explained the park’s ban on same-sex couples dancing, the friends were led to the front entrance to Disneyland. They held hands as they walked down the park’s Main Street.

“People must be thinking, ‘What the fuck did they do?’ In the security office they interviewed us to get our names, addresses, ages,” said Crusader. “Then they said you can stay tonight in the park as long as you don’t dance together.”

While they were told they had to leave and couldn’t return that night, Crusader remembers being informed they would be welcomed back any other time. The next day he granted an exclusive interview to a Los Angeles Times reporter, and her story was featured in the Monday edition.

Lawsuit filed

It resulted in a flurry of local press coverage, and the two teens sued Disneyland claiming its same-sex-dance ban violated their rights under California’s Unruh Civil Rights Act. The nondiscrimination code applies to businesses serving the public and at the time expressly prohibited discrimination in public accommodation based upon sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, and medical condition.

As detailed in their lawsuit filed September 22, 1980 with the Orange County Superior Court, the two friends “desire to return to Disneyland and to consensually dance with other males on the dance floor but are prevented from doing so by Disneyland’s enforcement of its no-same-sex-dancing policy.”

Taking the case was attorney Ronald Talmo, a straight ally a few years out of law school with a solo practice who had worked with Crusader on a free speech lawsuit against the local school district. Speaking to the B.A.R., Talmo said he did so because he was confident they had a compelling legal argument.

“It was blatant,” said Talmo, of the discriminatory policy Disneyland was enforcing. “The idea was even though you are a place of public accommodation and think you can exclude whoever you want, you can’t.”

No one thought he and his clients had a chance in court. Other gay people told Crusader he was “too flamboyant” and shouldn’t be taking on Disneyland.

“The Disneyland case, the gay community didn’t give two shits about,” he said, as it received little coverage in the gay press at the time.

Fellow lawyers told Talmo they didn’t think he could win, and a lesbian attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union’s Los Angeles office tried to persuade him to drop the case for fear it would set back the fight for gay rights.

“Other lawyers told me I was nuts to take it,” said Talmo.

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Taking on a giant

Reflecting its clout both as a behemoth in the entertainment industry and the largest private employer in Orange County, Disneyland had never lost a legal battle in court. Until then the lawsuits filed against it largely had to do with people claiming they had been injured in the park.

“I was told Disneyland usually was sued 50 times a year since it had opened in 1955. Although it settled a case here and there, which is rare, it never lost one,” said Talmo. “Until ours.”

Initially, it looked like Disneyland would score another legal victory. The state courts declined Talmo’s request for an immediate injunction against the park’s dancing policy, with the case then sent back to the local superior court to be heard on its merits.

A lucky break then came for Talmo and his clients when the scheduling judge in Orange County deliberately assigned the case to Judge James R. Ross, who had practiced law in Los Angeles County. Years later Talmo would learn about the scheduling subterfuge.

“The master calendar judge knows what the case is about. He says, ‘You know I had to decide who to give this case to. The courtrooms open I wasn’t going to send you to because I thought you should win, and I didn’t think you were going to get a fair trial anywhere,’” recalled Talmo.

With an “out of county” judge not from Orange County assigned the case, Talmo expected that Ross would be the sole person to hear the lawsuit and decide on their injunction request to end the same-sex-dancing ban. Their lawsuit initially had sought \$10,000 in statutory damages for the plaintiffs, but Talmo had decided not to seek any money from the company for his clients, which negated the need for a jury.

Yet the lawyers from the firm Disneyland hired to defend it — Hill, Farrer & Burrill — surprised Talmo and Ross during their first meeting about the lawsuit by pulling out a 28-page brief arguing to have an advisory jury weigh in on the case. The jurors would proffer a decision that Ross could then accept, or reject and issue his own ruling.

“The judge says, and I remember this really clearly, ‘Let’s impanel a jury, this should be fun.’ That’s how we ended up with a jury,” recalled Talmo.

At first Talmo had his doubts about seating an impartial jury. During juror selection one man who looked to be over 6 feet tall with tattoos covering both his arms told the judge the case offended him as a Roman Catholic.

“I turn to Andrew [Crusader] and say, ‘We are in trouble buddy,’” recalled Talmo, even though the man was dismissed.

Disneyland’s legal team argued that the same-sex dancing prohibition didn’t

discriminate on the basis of the teens’ sex or “sexual preference.” Rather they argued it is “a regulation of specific conduct that is rationally related to the services performed and the facilities provided at Disneyland.”

In effect, the lawyers argued that the policy was merely an “innocuous department regulation” that meant “no one has the right to dance at Disneyland except upon those terms Disneyland permits.”

Richard Nunis, then Disneyland’s president, had helped formulate the rule in 1957 and testified during the trial that the regulation wasn’t adopted to preclude homosexuals from dancing with each other. Such a possibility wasn’t even discussed at the time, he claimed, and their focus was how to keep the dance floor from being overcrowded.

Nunis explained to the jury that the real concern had to do with pairs of women overtaking the dance floor. Back then, he said, it was common for two women to dance together in public if they had no men to dance

Its lawyers in their August 9, 1985 brief before the state’s 4th Appellate District court referred to various marriage rights cases such as *Perez v. Sharp* and *Loving v. Virginia* in making their point that “in California, by statute, people of the same sex do not have the right to marry” nor by extension to dance together at a theme park.

“Homosexuals, as a class, are not barred from dancing. They are simply required to dance in the traditional manner, with partners of the opposite sex, as are heterosexuals and bisexuals,” the lawyers argued, stressing that it applied to every dancing duo at Disneyland. “The rule prevents any same gender couple from gaining access to the dance floor, regardless of the sexual preference of the two individuals.”

Coincidentally, it was another case Talmo had filed on behalf of a man upset at being denied the discounts that nightclubs, bars, and car washes offered women on so-called “ladies nights” that torpedoed Disneyland’s appeal. Three days before they were to argue in that

same-sex-dancing ban, he noted, and other businesses were put on notice that they could be held legally liable for their own homophobic policies. In terms of the legal fight for LGBTQ+ rights, Talmo sees the case as helping to lay the groundwork for rulings in future cases.

“Other than a large corporate American business tried to defend family values in the way they saw the definition of family and they lost, I think it was one of just many small steps that happened accumulatively in California and nationwide,” said Talmo, 70, who is considering retiring from the law next year. “It fits in with the small steps that were made redefining or making a deeper analysis really of what is family, what are relationships.”

According to a story in the L.A. Times, Disneyland relaxed its dancing policy in 1985. Al Flores, a spokesman for the company, had told the paper that because the park’s Videopolis dance club venue was popular with teenagers, “we see a lot of situations where two girls come together and want to dance and ask to. We have always said no, but we changed our minds.”

Yet, in 1988, three gay UCLA students sued Disneyland after they said security personnel stopped them from slow dancing at Videopolis. This time Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, the LGBTQ+ legal advocacy nonprofit, represented them in court.

According to an OC Weekly story, the suit was dropped after Disneyland pledged it would no longer discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. The newspaper reported that Crusader returned to Disneyland in 1989 with a group of eight male couples who danced the night away without incident.



An editorial cartoon poked fun at Disneyland’s ban on same-sex dancing. Illustration: Tom Johnson

with them.

Stunning decision

The jury wasn’t swayed by Disneyland’s reasoning and advised the judge to side for the plaintiffs, which Ross readily agreed to in May 1984. His decision so stunned Talmo that the young attorney began to uncontrollably sob as it sunk in that he had scored a legal victory against Disneyland.

“I started bawling, not tearing up. I am bawling and sitting down. One of the jurors walks over to the witness stand, grabs the box of tissues, and puts it in front of me,” said Talmo. “I never felt pressure from the people telling me to drop it. I didn’t think it had got to me, as I always brushed it aside. Apparently, I hadn’t brushed anything aside. It was just overwhelming that Disneyland case.”

Disneyland did file an appeal of the ruling.

case, the California Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision in *Koire v. Metro Car Wash* that the businesses were in violation of the Unruh Act.

Disneyland no longer had a legal defense for why its same-sex-dance ban should be allowed to remain. Its lead attorney called up Talmo to congratulate him on the win in the other case and offered a settlement agreement in *Exler v. Disneyland*.

The company paid Talmo \$25,000 to cover most of his legal fees in the case, dismissed its appeal, and allowed the trial judge’s ruling to stand. Although it only applied to Crusader and Elliott, the ruling did have a wider impact, contended Talmo.

Groundwork for future cases

The company could never again use the same defense in court if it was sued again over its

Hits and misses

Since then, Disneyland and its parent company have become strong advocates of the LGBTQ+ community, financially donating to LGBTQ+ causes and nonprofits. It unofficially welcomes LGBTQ+ attendees of annual Gay Days events at its parks in Anaheim and outside Orlando, Florida, while a few years ago Disneyland Paris became the first of its theme parks to officially sponsor a Gay Days event.

George Kalogridis, a gay man who was president of both Disneyland and Walt Disney World between 2009 and 2019, recently was presented with his own window on a Main Street building at the Magic Kingdom theme park in Florida, one of the company’s highest honors for its employees. Yet Disney and its divisions still have a ways to go in fully representing LGBTQ+ people on-screen.

While it has touted the inclusion of out characters in several of its movies and animated programming, often they are easy to miss unless the viewer is clued in. In this summer’s release “The Jungle Cruise,” for example, a main character is clearly gay though the word “gay” or “homosexual” is never uttered.

And Disney continues to face claims of anti-gay bias in court. In June, Joel Hopkins, the vice president of production finance at



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→ Caribbean

Continued from p. 6

Jamaica, Constable sees a big difference in terms of the number of social activities available to him in the U.S.

“It’s pretty good,” Constable said. “You know, it’s all different. I get to know more about their culture and how they go about their daily activity.” Some of that includes going to different parks and clubs, listening to music “and meeting new friends...without being ridiculed or anything like that.”

Although being LGBTQ+ in Jamaica is far from easy, Constable does not feel his identity as a Jamaican and as a gay man are in conflict. The only conflict he observes is the way in which some Jamaicans choose to perceive LGBTQ+ people.

In the U.S., Constable said he feels more confident and comfortable about expressing himself. “That really helps, even motivates you to assist or help or be an activist for other persons — especially living in Jamaica — who are going through the same thing,” he said.

Like Constable, Tony Dunkley is of Jamaican descent. Raised in Detroit, Dunkley currently lives in Sterling Heights and works for a mortgage company. He’s never been to Jamaica, but he said his Jamaican aunt has always wanted him to go. For a while, though, she’s been worried it’s not the right time. That’s because Dunkley is transgender. Even today, the travel guide Frommer’s warns LGBTQ+ tourists against visiting the country.

“I’ve just heard different stories growing up,” said Dunkley, who first came out when he was 12 years old. He’s now 27. “My dad’s side of the family are all from Jamaica, so I wasn’t too sure how they would handle the situation,” he said. “I am very fortunate that my dad was very accepting for the most part.”

To illustrate the conditions for LGBTQ+ people in Jamaica, Dunkley described a documentary his father showed him about a gay Jamaican police officer who was brutally beaten as other police officers turned their backs.

Although it’s likely safer in the U.S.,

Dunkley knows firsthand it isn’t always easy being transgender here, either, or really anywhere. Because he has been able to pass as a cisgender man, Dunkley said he’s found greater acceptance from the public perhaps than others.

At first, “People were just really confused and didn’t understand,” Dunkley said. “And some people were just kind of mean and refused to understand, like, ‘Oh, I know you as ‘such’ — I’m not going to call you anything different.” Since then, as he’s transitioned, there’s been a huge difference in how people treat him, he said.

Dunkley talked about his small circle of other trans men whom he considers his community. He doesn’t know other LGBTQ+ Jamaican Michiganders — but he’d like to.

“There’s a Jamaican LGBT community...I follow through Instagram,” Dunkley said. “And I hope to be able to find the Caribbean community [here], just with more LGBT people. That would be awesome. But for now, I just have my small group of trans men friends here in the metro Detroit area.”

Dunkley said he’s happy to be Jamaican, and that he wants to connect more with his Jamaican culture — but it’s difficult. For one thing, the reggae and dancehall music he loves often contains anti-gay messages. “It’s when I’m hearing certain songs from back in the day, I’m like, ‘Oh, I can’t even listen to this,’ ‘cause it just makes me feel kind of uncomfortable,” Dunkley said.

“But now even that’s changing, and things are changing for the better,” he continued. “And I’m just hoping that things just continue to go in the right direction.”

Earlier this year, with the support of the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Joint United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the advocacy group TransWave Jamaica launched the Trans and Gender Non-Conforming National Health Strategy, the first of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean. Not only does it seek to make change in the health care system, the initiative envisions societal changes necessary to achieve equality for transgender people.

Although neither Constable nor Dunkley has yet to find an LGBTQ+ Caribbean community in the metro Detroit area, both men have made connections with others of Caribbean heritage at the Caribbean Community Service Center (CCSC) in Detroit.

Among them are some of the 2,000 to 3,000 foreign-born people from the Caribbean (around 800 are Jamaicans) currently living in Detroit, according to 2019 U.S. Census data. Because these figures only represent people born outside the U.S. and currently residing within the city, Sophia Chue, executive director and director of community advocacy for CCSC, thinks these figures don’t show the whole picture.

Chue, whose multicultural identity is Jamaican and Chinese, said the Caribbean organizations that have existed in the area — the oldest since 1929 — largely serve a social function. “They don’t do what we do, which is typically advocacy and community service work,” Chue said.

“One of the reasons our organization was designed...was to make sure we meet the needs of our community: to ensure that there’s a welcoming environment for them, for one; and for two, to connect them with the networks that they need to make sure that they achieve the American dream or do what it is that they came to this country for,” she added.

CCSC was founded in 2017 and serves the Caribbean community largely through partnerships and collaborations. And although CCSC itself doesn’t provide programming specifically designed for the LGBTQ+ community, Chue emphasized how important inclusion is to fulfilling the organization’s mission.

“I am very deliberate about ensuring that the LGBTQIA community is involved at all levels,” Chue said.

Part of the reason Chue is a tireless advocate for the LGBTQ+ community is that she is Jamaican and she has family who identify as LGBTQIA. She’s well aware of what conditions are like for LGBTQ+ people in the Caribbean.



Kyle Constable. Photo courtesy of Kyle Constable

“We are extremely deliberate about making sure that their voices are heard,” Chue said, noting that after their 2019 fundraiser, CCSC contributed funds to J-FLAG, an LGBTQ+ advocacy organization in Jamaica. Further, she said, even at their social events performers and DJs are told there will be no homophobic jokes or music.

Sometimes, a small effort can have a big impact on individuals like Constable and Dunkley. “Our aim in this entire exercise is to ensure that their humanity is recognized when it comes to how we treat, how we talk about, how we involve LGBTQIA in the conversation,” Chue said. “And I want it to be commonplace.”

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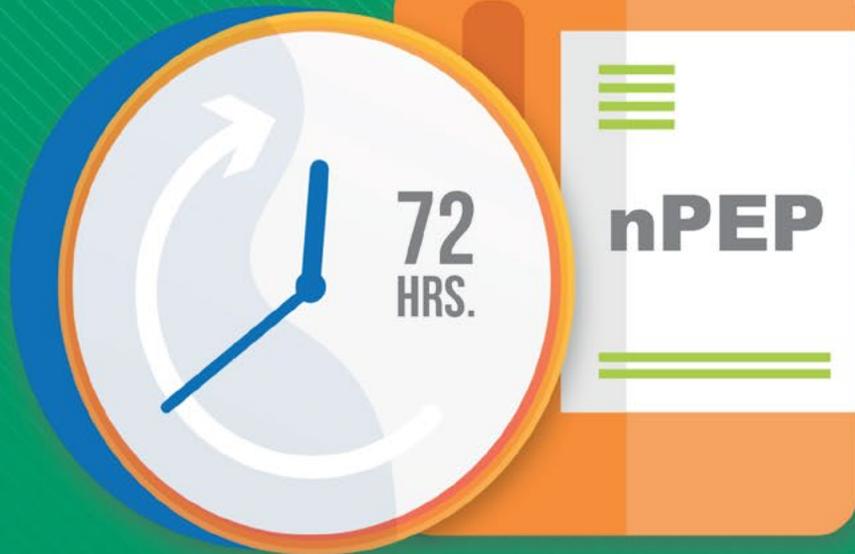
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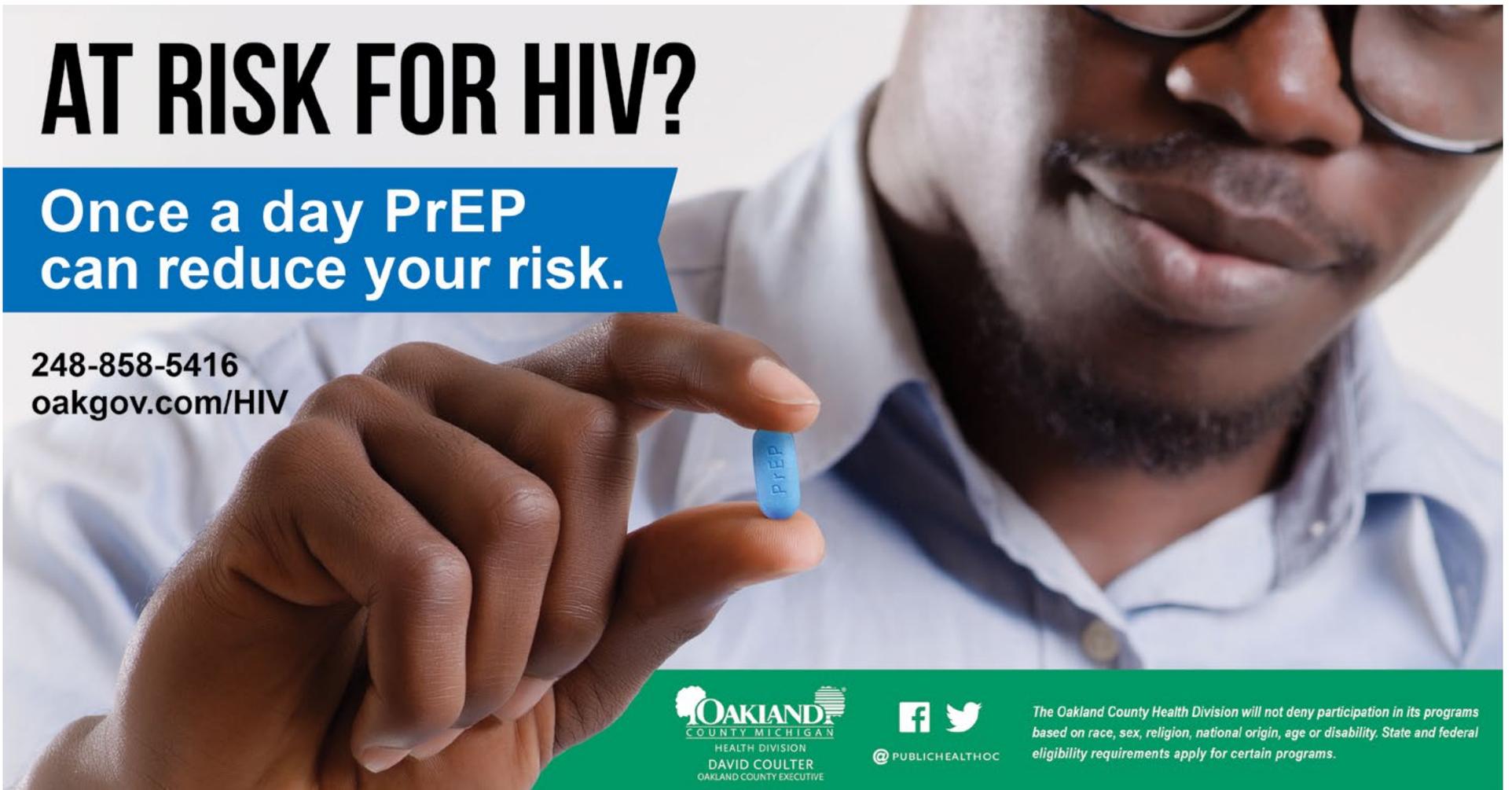
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The Magic of Jason Misleh



DJ Jason Misleh at Urbanrest Brewing Company in Ferndale. Photo: Andrew Potter

DJ Jace M Expects to See You at Ferndale Pride

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Jason Misleh is not a magician, nor is he a puppeteer. He is, however, an expert in making bodies move.

Misleh, better known on the club circuit as DJ Jace M, has 20 years of experience choosing the perfect songs and crafting the perfect beats to get people onto the dance floor.

It starts with a love of music.

"Music is my go-to for everything," Misleh tells BTL. "It literally is my life," he says, whether he's sitting down listening to music, writing his own or playing music for crowds of people in a club.

Misleh has been playing instruments his entire life and has studied music theory, a background he says lends to his DJ skills.

"This all started with me playing the piano," he says. "I was forced to play the piano, and I fucking hated every second of it. Now I have a grand piano in the house, and I play it all the time." He laughs. "So I guess my parents did something right."

That's not the only thing his parents did right. When Misleh came out as gay, they were immediately accepting.

"My mom knew. When I left for college, she was just like, 'I know.' My dad didn't care. I had a really easy coming out story," he says. "I know it really sucks for some people, and I feel like I'm rubbing it into people's faces that I have the parents that I have." His younger sister, who lives in Detroit, also embraces Misleh.

The Misleh family moved to Michigan from Washington D.C. when Misleh was a high school student. After graduation, Misleh attended Michigan State University, where he majored in computer science.

In addition to being a DJ, Misleh is also a computer engineer for the well-known cloud computing company VMware.

"I love it," he says. "It's challenging. I've been working there a long time. It's a great company to work for. We have a lot of really cool diversity and inclusion programs. I love being able to be out at work."

While computer engineering doesn't directly give him an advantage as a DJ, Misleh says it does help him as a music producer.

"Music production in 2021 is very software-driven," he says, adding that you no longer have 10 different people coming into a studio to play 10 different instruments. It's all done on the computer. "I understand production software a lot quicker than I probably would have if I were a doctor," he says.

Part of Misleh's job as a DJ is remixing songs

See **DJ Jace**, page 24



Photo by Chelic Towers

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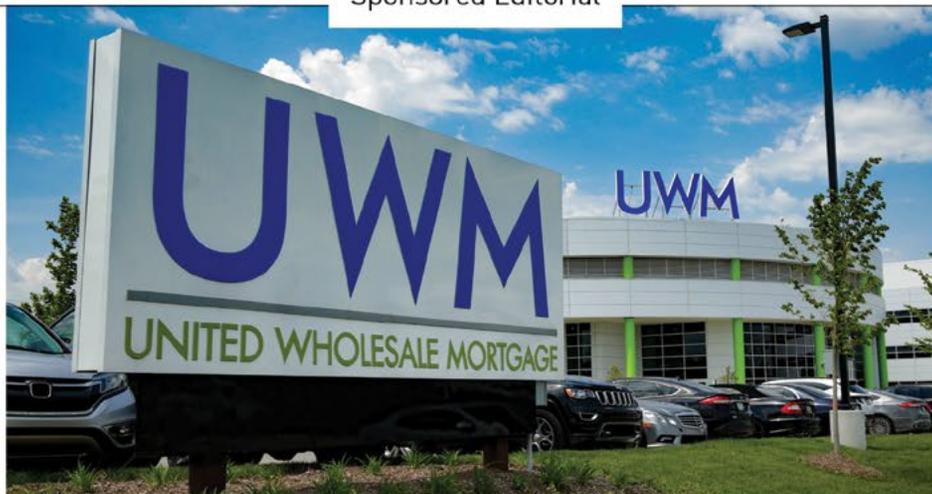
→ UWM

Continued from p. 10

toward fostering an inclusive workplace and building strong teams. Jones says she and her teams are always working toward making more personable, relatable connections — “It’s helpful when team members can think of their leaders as more than just their bosses,” she says. Incorporating storytelling as part of the company’s leadership training initiatives helps to connect those dots. “We focus on storytelling because it’s part of building relationships and it’s part of understanding on a deeper level,” she explains.

“It’s about figuring out the ‘Why.’ I can tell someone you have to buckle your belt, for example,” she says, “but if I tell you a story about why it’s important, you’re more likely to resonate with that and feel more inclined to buckle up.” Teaching about emotional intelligence, empathy and caring help leaders understand team members at a deeper level.

Jones spends a good deal of her time reaching out to leaders individually, letting them know she’s a person who can help if they are feeling overwhelmed. She also shares resources like webinars and podcasts, some of which can be accessed through the company’s Diversity and Inclusion Academy, a storehouse of D&I resources for leaders and team members.

**Hire-to-Retire: The UWM Way**

While working for a welcoming, inclusive company is perhaps the biggest “perk” UWM offers, Jones says she appreciates a long list of benefits the company offers like an on-site gym and the Uperks program that gives team members discounts on things like doggie day care, childcare, concerts and more. “I also love the campus itself,” she says, “especially bike riding.” With a campus that sits on 200+ acres, there’s plenty to explore.

Jones says UWM goes all out during the holiday season, hosting huge holiday parties featuring national acts like the Chainsmokers

and Ludacris. This particular perk might seem like reason enough to stick around for a while, but UWM is focused on more than “a while.” The company strives to create a hire-to-retain employee life cycle. Though she’s been at UWM for just two years, Jones says she can “100%” see herself retiring with the company.

Reaching the 10-year mark is one of the first big goals that UWM rewards as an incentive to encourage team member loyalty. When team members reach their 10th anniversary with the company, they receive an additional 10 PTO days and \$2,500 to “live their dream.” Jones says team members look ahead to this milestone with anticipation, with some investing the money and time into vacations and others investing the time

and money in different ways. “It’s for whatever you choose,” she says.

Looking Ahead

Jones plans to keep building on the foundation she and her teammates have been building. She says the company is responding to requests for more representation and awareness about specific cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds.

To that end, the team provides educational “culture posts” that focus on groups like veterans and supports a variety of resource groups, including a Black team member group and a Latin American/Hispanic group. That awareness has also spread into the diverse fabric of team members, who on any given day can be spotted sporting one of the company’s “Diversitees,” a collection of shirts that celebrate and support the cultures and observances that are important to team members with proceeds going to select charities. “It all starts with education,” she says. “The more people are aware, the more diversity we see, and the better off we all are.”

Above all, Jones says her work will continue to center on issues beyond numbers and production. “These things matter, of course,” she says, “But people matter more.”

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DJ Jason Misleh at Found Sound in Ferndale. Photo: Andrew Potter

→ DJ Jace

Continued from p. 20

to make them work for gay dance floors. “I think when I hear songs, it’s very easy for me to understand how that song will do on a dance floor,” he says, adding that he hears production components the average listener would not necessarily notice, like whether the hi-hat hits on the upbeat or the downbeat. “In dance music, a lot of top 40 stuff has to be re-engineered to fit the vibe of an event.”

Remixing a song, he says, “is very involved.” The goal is to take a top 40 pop song that is, say, 80 beats per minute (BPM) and make that song work to fit 126-132 BPM.

“You’re essentially rewriting everything except for the lyrics and the melody of the song,” he says. And you can’t simply speed it up. “Because then you’ve got Alvin and the Chipmunks.”

Misleh just finished a remix of Coldplay’s “Fix You,” an unlikely dance floor anthem, at the special request of Luiz Misleh.

“He happens to be married to me, so he gets a lot of what he wants,” Misleh says.

Luiz and Jason met in Miami and married on Sept. 2, 2020, but because of COVID, it was an intimate event with just a few people present. “We’ll have a big wedding party once things have settled down,” Misleh says.

Being married is “great,” he says. “We are very happy and, knock on wood, if we haven’t killed each other during COVID, I think we’ll be good for a long time.”

Misleh and his frequent remix partner Toy Armada spent a lot of time on “Fix You.” “We made probably 12 different versions of this song before we picked the one,” Misleh says.

The result is a dance song perfect for ending a night at the club.

“It’s a chill song to get you ready

to go home,” he says. “It does great on the dance floor.”

Another example of his recent work is Brett Oosterhaus and Debby Holiday’s “Love & Beats,” which he also remixed alongside Toy Armada. The lyrics are especially appropriate for Misleh: “I know exactly what I want, and I know just how to get it. What I want is love and beats.”

As a DJ, Misleh gets both. “I get paid to play my favorite songs for people,” he says. “We are all connected on the same level when it comes to music.”

And, yes, a real live DJ is a must-have. A Spotify playlist isn’t going to cut it.

“There’s a lot of things that people don’t know that go into playing in a nightclub,” he says. For one, you can’t play everyone’s favorite songs early in the night, or people will leave. “If you play too many high-energy songs without any breaks, people are going to get tired, and they’re going to go home.” And if you don’t have

any downtime, then patrons “never go to the bar to buy drinks, and now the club owner’s pissed.” These aren’t calls a Spotify playlist can make.

“Anyone can quickly learn how to match beats together,” he says, “but it’s really the experience of understanding the flow of a club and being able to read people’s body language on the dance floor to really decide what direction something needs to go.”

Through his production company Thots & Prayers, Misleh will play a key role in both Ferndale Pride and Motorball.

Misleh is the production manager for Motorball, which takes place Thursday, Sept. 30 through Sunday, Oct. 3.

Thots & Prayers is also sponsoring and producing the dance pavilion for Ferndale Pride on Oct. 2. And he fully expects you to be there.

“Pride to me is a celebration of who we are and who we’ve become, but also, more importantly, I believe

that Pride is something that we should all participate in because it’s a time for people who aren’t out... to come out and see that things are OK and they’ll be accepted,” he says. “Maybe not right this second in their life, but that, eventually, life is going to be OK.”

Misleh wants to make clear that you aren’t too good for Motorball or Ferndale Pride — skipping to go to Chicago or another major city’s Pride is “unacceptable.”

“You’re not going for yourself,” he says. “You live three blocks away. Stop being a bitch, get your shit together, and let’s go.”

In other words, it isn’t all about you.

“I think that there is a responsibility attached,” he continues. “You get to have fun in this specific responsibility, but I do think that we are responsible for creating a place for people who are having trouble or struggling to be themselves [to] know it’s OK.”



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1 p.m. Sing Out Detroit

Since its 2008 inception, this LGBTQ+ and allies chorus has traveled throughout Michigan, performing at Five15 showcases and First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit. The group started with only four members, but now includes more than 20. As a part of GALA, North America's leading LGBTQ+ chorus group, Sing Out Detroit believes in "empowering LGBTQ choruses" as they change the "world through song."

2 p.m. Ella X

Ella X, a singer, songwriter and producer, will take the main stage with her piano in tow. On Instagram, Ella X is known for her intimate rehearsal reels and passionate vocals. Ferndale Pride is one of the many performances she has these next few weeks; she said in a recent post that she's "so excited for everything coming up."

3 p.m. Maria Montoya

Rock and pop artist Maria Montoya (and her ombre purple to blue hair) will bring her unique sound to the main stage this year. While Montoya's career didn't take flight until the mid-2010s, she's been dancing, singing and acting since she was a kid.

4 p.m. Reginald Hawkins

Fresh off their most recent EP, "Black Popstar," and an energetic performance with Big Freedia, Detroit-based pop and soul artist Reginald Hawkins will pour that energy into a not-to-miss Ferndale Pride performance. Hawkins, a self-styled "melting pot of ingenuity," has also performed with local producer Caz Aglets and Grammy Award-winning engineer Stuart Hawkes.

5 p.m. Klashing Black

Twins Kane and Kyle Benner have been making music as Klashing Black since 2015. Since the Ohio-based duo released their first EP, "You," in 2017, they've kept busy, putting out three releases including 2020's "Thoughts on the Matter" EP.

6 p.m. J. Santino

Santino burst onto the Detroit music scene at 2019's Motor City Pride, and he's been belting out his Mariah Carey/Beyonce-inspired pop songs for happy crowds ever since. These days, he's a veritable Michigan Pride circuit staple. Ferndale Pride will mark his fourth Pride performance in the Southeast corner of the state.

6:45 p.m. Drag Show

Presented by Motorcity Drag Kings

8 p.m. Siena Liggins

Pop sensation Siena Liggins will swing in from her

See **Pride Performers**, page 32



Photo courtesy of Chuck Schwarting

The Double Life of Reginald Hawkins

BY JACKIE JONES

Ferndale Pride performer and Detroit-based Reginald Hawkins is living a double life. By day, they're a college student worrying about a looming lab deadline. By night, they're becoming a pop and dance music sensation, expressing their gender non-conforming self online and performing at shows with Big Freedia at the Majestic Theater.

"It's kind of crazy because I had school," they humbly told BTL as they reflected on their most recent show with icon Big Freedia. "I had my physics lab, so I had to go rush to get all my shit done for the show, then I did the show."

Hawkins, 21, is in their last year at Wayne State University, where they study public relations and music technology.

"I just really want to be a pop icon," they said. "Like, that's really what I see myself as. I don't think I've ever imagined life as anything different. I feel like everything [that] I'm doing is on a path to get to this bigger goal that I see for myself, as far as my career."

They admit they've been working towards that goal all their life. In fact, they've been "doing music" and singing "since [they were] young."

"I started writing music in seventh grade and recording when I was 17," they explained.

Always "booked and busy," Hawkins performed in talent shows and sang the national anthem at school events and basketball games.

"I remember performing in my very first talent show in the fifth grade," they said. "I sang Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep,' and after that, I just kept doing it and doing it."

It seems they were made to be a star.

"I had three grandmas, so I would listen to what they were playing all the time," they said. "Black singers, Black female singers, specifically, from back in the day. Listening to them today, they really inspired me vocally."

As Hawkins grew, their music interest evolved. Early Y2K sounds and late 20th-century house music started to grab their attention. The club scenes they began to experience in college pushed them to explore dance and house music. Soon, they were performing and creating original content.

"I did my first [live] performance in 2019 of my original music, and from there, I started doing my own shows," they reflected.

It paid off. Earlier this summer, they released their highly emotional EP "Black Popstar," which came to them after overcoming COVID obstacles. Hawkins said it was the increase in virtual interactions that made them transition their work "to a digital space."

"[I] had to present myself online," they explained.

A quick scroll on their Instagram reflects the dedication they put into crafting their identity. Up and down their feed, there are pictures of Hawkins and their friends, as well as shots of them performing on stage. The feed reflects a social person and an active performer. More than that, it shows Hawkins' style.

As a gender-fluid, non-conforming artist, they express themselves through style — clothing, in particular. Shrugging off limitations, they choose to dress in whatever they want, no matter what society says. For them, clothing is an extension of who they are as an artist.

"When I go shopping, it takes a long time because I'm looking at the whole store," they said. "I'm not looking at the men's section or the women's section. I'm just looking at clothes to see what looks best on my body. To see if it fits my personal style. Like, finding what I like, rather than trying to dress like what a man or woman should dress like."

Their visuals for "To Each His Own" and "Tricks in the City" exemplify these ideas. In one scene, they're in a gold-chained crop-top, and in another, they're sashaying across the

See **Reginald Hawkins**, page 38

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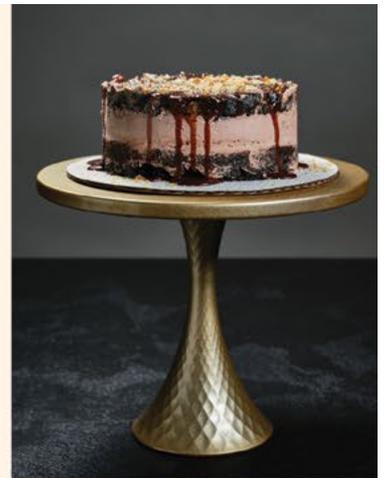


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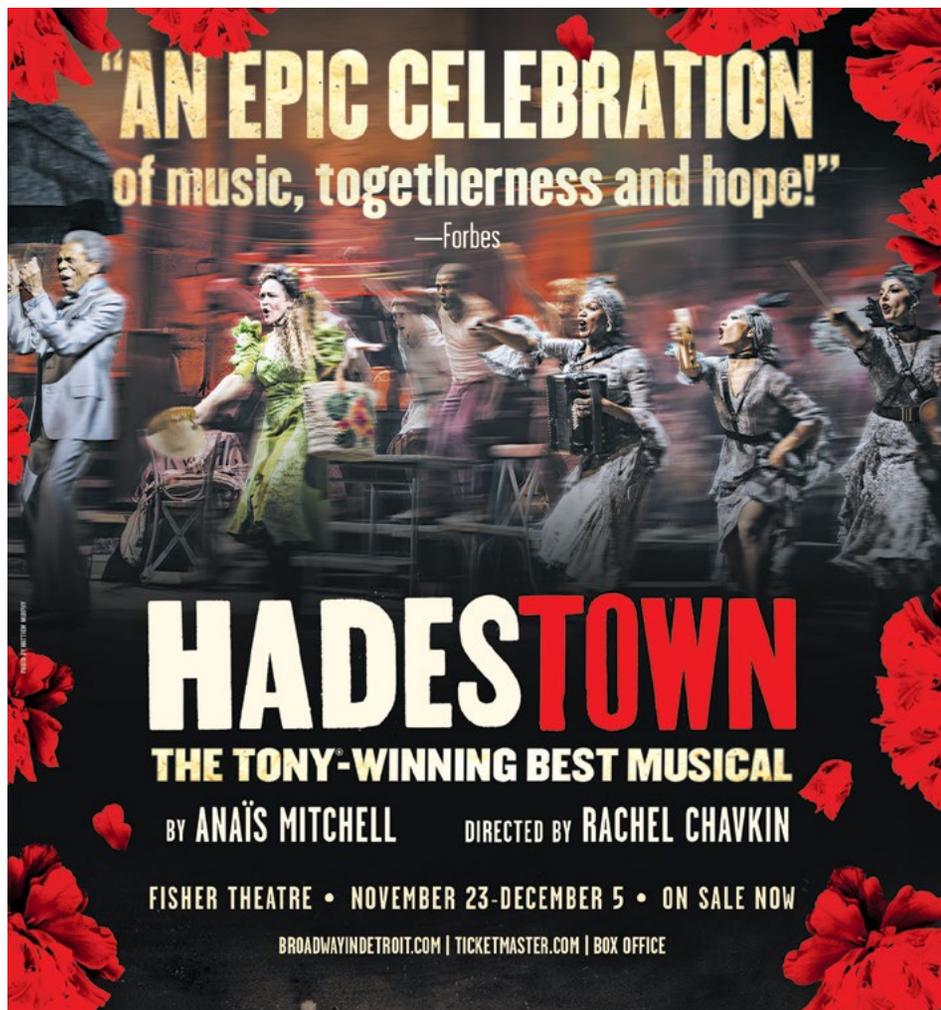
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A Queer Detroit Homecoming

Motor City Pride Was Where 'Everybody Was So Happy to Come Together Again'

STORY BY JACKIE JONES
PHOTOS BY ANDREW POTTER

Being at Motor City Pride for many from Sept. 18-19 was like coming home. After a 15-month wait due to COVID, Michigan's LGBTQ+ community members came out in droves from throughout the state to attend the event at Hart Plaza. According to Dave Wait, chairperson of Motor City Pride, around 40,000 were there.

It was like a magical queer fantasyland, and even Wait couldn't help but respond to the energy of Pride's long-awaited in-person event in Detroit: "I'm tired," he told BTL, "but my adrenaline from a fabulous weekend is keeping me going."

Anthony DePaulis drove in from Woodhaven. "I remember feeling so happy that Pride was rescheduled and not canceled this year," he said. "I will admit I was a little nervous since this was my first big event since the pandemic, but I'm definitely so glad that I [got to] experience it."

Attendee Joei Redd echoed DePaulis's

sentiment, adding, "The energy and common love in Hart Plaza this year was so uplifting."

Wait, too, says he's both grateful for the support and happy that an in-person Pride could finally happen — even if it had to wait until September (the event customarily takes place in June). He noted the "picture-perfect" weather and said "things went like clockwork."

"I was so pleased with how everything came together with the volunteers and everybody helping out," he said. "Everybody was just so happy to be able to come together again."

Though some people wore masks in accordance with the event's guidelines, which requested that those who are unvaccinated wear a mask, that requirement didn't stop people from forming a line that extended from Hart Plaza to the TCF building on Washington Boulevard. Pridegoers also were seemingly unbothered by the heat.

"I was excited to be around people in general," Hazel Park Council Member Mike McFall said. "But it was [also] nice seeing people in-person again since it has been so long."

Among those people were Gov. Gretchen

MOTOR CITY PRIDE IN PICTURES



Whitmer, who made an appearance at Sunday's parade and gave opening remarks alongside Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist. Whitmer led the parade after delivering a short speech.

"Pride means opportunity for all, no matter how you identify or who you love," she told BTL exclusively before she spoke to the crowd. "Pride means recognizing how far we've come and yet continuing to lock arms and see this through and [that] we've got work yet to do."

Wait said he was grateful that Whitmer made an appearance and that her "support is amazing."

"She's so gracious to meet and pose with everyone," he added. "Her staff is wonderful to work with, and her words really summed up what we were doing [at MCP]. It was a really valuable experience."

During the event, Whitmer sported a black leather jacket with the word "We" written in large white letters. The pronouns "They/Them, She/Her, He/Him" were also painted on the back of the jacket.

As for the other Pridegoers, they were decked out in head-to-toe rainbow colors and their best cosplay looks, complete with fishnets, garters and corsets. Anna Wintour should've been there taking notes for the next Met Gala.

Dom Brooks, who sang backup for Pride performer J. Santino, praised the looks: "One of the themes for us performers was 'sexy black,'" said Brooks about their performance on the Pride Stage. "My favorite outfit was my long off-the-shoulder dress that had a leg slit on my left side, in addition to the black lace pattern that was on my back."

Santino said performing at Pride "brought back so many memories of me doing that stage [in 2019]. And I was like damn, bitch, we were here, and now we're here again."

As for the next Motor City Pride, Wait says they're celebrating their "50th anniversary of the first march [they] had in Detroit" in 2022. Organizers will begin planning in November.



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Colorful Characters p. 49

→ **Pride Performers**

Continued from p. 26

homebase in Atlanta to perform singles like "Perfect" and "Thicc." A Saginaw native, Liggins' musical style is reminiscent of Leikeli47, but she infuses an original pop and soulful sound the LGBTQ+ community can blast in any club setting.

9 p.m. Alise King

Alise King is a multi-award-winning R&B artist who has opened for Aretha Franklin, Chaka Khan, George Clinton and other well-known headliners. Her impressive vocal range and alluring stage presence are sure to transport the crowd back to a time when Motor City Records took over the Detroit music scene.

DJ Dance Stage

1:30 p.m. Weddings

3 p.m. DJ Brando

4 p.m. DJ Gaby Hemlock

Barber by day and DJ by night, DJ Gaby Hemlock will bring a little bit of Miami with her to the dance stage. Born and raised in Miami, Hemlock is now based in Detroit and is making a name for herself while performing at events like Five15 with local DJ Kenny.

5 p.m. DJ TYLR

Headliners

6 p.m. DJ Dan Slater ft. Alan Gendreau

Australian DJ and producer DJ Dan Slater has traveled the world creating remixes for Carmen Electra, Britney Spears and Cher, among others. Alan Gendreau will join Slater onstage to perform their hit single, "Pieces."

8:30 p.m. DJ Deanne

Indianapolis-based DJ Deanne will close out the night with her signature mix of tribal, tech, house and progressive house beats and rhythms. DJ Deanne will add Ferndale Pride to a growing list of memorable appearances at the Winter Party Festival, Peach Party, Miami Beach Pride and Gay Days.



Alise King. Photo: Beaj Jai Photography

→ **LGBTQ+ History**

Continued from p. 16

ABC Signature, alleged in a discrimination lawsuit against the Disney company that the television channel's CFO, Jim Hedges, ruined his chances for advancement because of his sexual orientation.

As for LGBTQ+ legal rights in the years after Exler v. Disneyland, the California Supreme Court consistently ruled that the state's Unruh Act applied to LGBTQ+ people. State lawmakers codified such rulings in the law with their passage of the Civil Rights Act of 2005. Written by gay then-Assemblyman John Laird, now a state Senator (D-Santa Cruz), Assembly Bill 1400 added sexual orientation, gender and marital status to the Unruh Act.

Former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed it into law that September. It went into effect January 1, 2006.

Papers lost

Talmo lost most of his papers related to the Disneyland case when he joined a law firm

around the time of the verdict. If anything, he wishes he had a transcript of the trial documenting the moments of levity and hilarity in the courtroom.

"It kills Andrew [Crusader] and I that neither of us have it anymore," he said. "The court reporter died, so we couldn't get it from her."

Crusader, who also waged a successful legal fight so men could attend shows of the male Chippendales dancers, told the B.A.R. he lost many of his clippings and documents from the trial when his storage unit was broken into. Elliott, who mostly eschewed the media spotlight during the trial and thereafter, died several years ago, he said.

Now living in Menifee, California (Riverside County) with his parents after being evicted from his apartment in Palm Springs in 2008, Crusader is a proofreader of court transcripts and depositions for court recorders. He helped promote the very first Gay Days at Disneyland that took place on Saturday, October 10, 1998.

"To my memory that was the last time I went to Disneyland," said Crusader.

Matthew S. Bajko is an assistant editor at the Bay Area Reporter.

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Aaron Foley's First Novel Is Based on His Dating Experiences in Detroit as a Gay Black Man

BY JACKIE JONES

Aaron Foley, a journalist and Detroit native, is taking on fiction in his first novel, "Boys Come First," a story about the dating scene for gay Black men in Detroit. The book will be published in May 2022.

"There's a lot of fiction about Detroit, but very few stories have Black characters or Black protagonists," he tells BTL. "Very few take place in modern-day Detroit. Almost none of them have any gay characters. So I wanted to do something about my experiences [and] some of the experiences my gay friends have in Detroit.

Foley's work has been featured in several Detroit and national publications, including BLAC, This American Life, Jalopnik, The Atlantic, CNN, Next City, and Columbia Journalism Review, among others.

Beyond his work as a journalist, he's written "How to Live in Detroit Without Being a Jackass" and edited a book called "The Detroit Neighborhood Guidebook."

Foley, who was born in Germany to parents in the military, grew up in Detroit. He considers himself a Detroiter and has lived on both the east and west sides, from Lafayette Park on the lower east side of downtown to Russell Woods to the west.

"I usually claim the west side because that's where I became of age, learned how to drive, went to high school and made most of the friends that I have now," he explains.

These days, Foley's finally living his dream as a fiction writer — a dream that, for Foley, began as a kid while writing short stories. "I wanted to do fiction for a long time," he says, "but I went down the journalism path professionally."

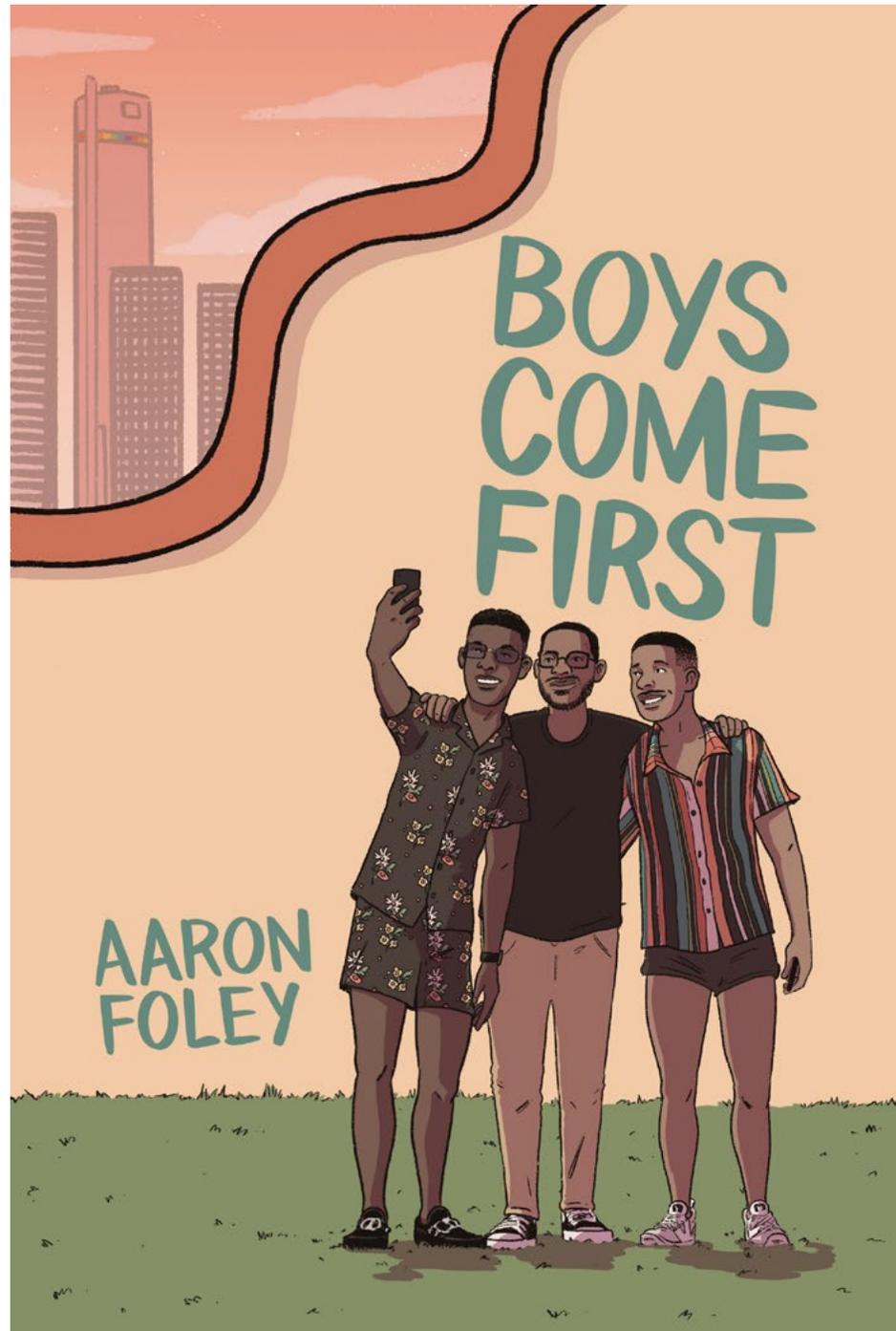
Along the way, age has changed his perspective, and now Foley wants to talk about "some real stuff" that people like him are going through.

When he and his friends started to ask questions like, "Why is it so hard to date?" and "Why is it so hard as a gay Black man?" Foley began to see the potential for a novel.

"I thought, all right, maybe I should write about this," he continues. "Some of the stories about our relationships and dating lives are too good to be true. I thought, 'This is so unbelievable. What if somebody read some of this?'"

According to Foley, Detroit's dating pool is "so small," and that since his 2020 move to New York, he hasn't had the same dating problems.

"In New York, there's a higher population, [so] you don't have to worry about dating someone who dated your cousin," he says, laughing. "In Detroit, you date one person, and later on, you find out they dated your friend. Or they've



Left: Photo courtesy of Belt Publishing. Right: Aaron Foley. Photo courtesy of Aaron Foley

already hooked up with someone you already know. That is the drawback of Detroit. It's like, if I end up with one dude, and I go to a different party, then his ex is going to be there."

Foley says his book touches on Detroit's dating complexities and the city's revitalization. "I'm just sort of waiting for Detroit to figure itself out," he admits. "It sounds kind of abstract. [But] there's a lot of new things coming to Detroit."

Those new changes are positives for the city, Foley says.

Still, he worries about Detroit's cultural preservation.

"I'm concerned about some of the change in terms of what happens when a city continues to lose population," he says. "[You] see gains in folks that are not from Detroit. So, what does that mean for cultural preservation and controlling



When he and his friends started to ask questions like, "Why is it so hard to date?" and "Why is it so hard as a gay Black man?" Foley began to see the potential for a novel.

the identity that Detroit has had so long?"

He says he ponders these questions often, and in the book, he gives the reader examples of the city's changing demographic while exploring Detroit's unique style.

"Like, one of the lead characters, he lives in furs and buffs," he explains. "Like, that does not exist in Philly or Atlanta or even other big gay cities like West Hollywood."

Besides learning more about the Detroit dating scene for gay Black men, Foley hopes people will read his book and understand that all queer people live nuanced lives beyond the narrow perspectives many people have about queer life. It's simple, really: "These are your neighbors," Foley says. "These are your co-workers."

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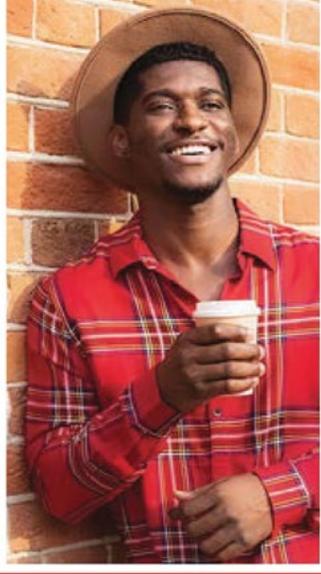
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→ Maurice

Continued from p. 7

“That’s another reason I want to go back, but I want to be able to take my husband with me. Because if anything were to happen to me on the island,” he says, “my husband is a legal stranger.” Considering his history of receiving death threats, that’s not a risk he wants to take.

Tomlinson says one of the greatest myths about Jamaica is that it’s an island paradise for everyone, an idea perpetuated by tourists who visit and only see a small part of the island.

“I’ve been to Jamaica and it looks fine, it’s safe,” Tomlinson hears people say. “No, you’ve been to a resort. You stay behind a huge wall for seven days eating and drinking to your heart’s content.”

Compared to the island as a whole, “That resort could be on Mars.”

He says employees in the resorts receive extensive sensitivity training. “There’s an expectation that LGBT tourists are more tolerated because they’re foreign,” he says. LGBTQ+ locals, however, are not accepted.

“I get irritated when I hear gay tourists rave about how wonderful their experience was and they didn’t have a problem. That’s your privilege speaking,” he says. “They have the perception that the Caribbean is tranquil and there’s nothing bad going on because there was nothing bad going on in their resort. That is so far from the truth.”

There are two realities for LGBTQ+ people in Jamaica, he says. “If you have resources, money and privilege, you can insulate yourself from violence” by, say, living in a gated community.

“Even if you do have resources, if you’re in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can be vulnerable,” Tomlinson says. “Your privilege only goes so far — once you are outside of that bubble you are reviled.”

“Then there’s the reality of people without resources,” he says, for whom no such bubble exists. “These persons are very vulnerable.”

While many countries have become more accepting of LGBTQ+ people over the past several years, Jamaica has unique challenges, including its geography.

“I think the best way to explain to people why it’s so challenging is that in the Caribbean, many of the smallest islands are like the smallest towns [but] surrounded by moats,” he says.

“It’s hard to get ideas in or out,” he explains. “There’s a movement of ideas and people that doesn’t happen in the Caribbean.” He points to cultural shifts due to TV shows like “Will & Grace” in other parts of the world. In the Caribbean, TV stations “self-censor,” claiming that since same-sex intimacy is illegal, they



Photo courtesy of Maurice Tomlinson

can’t, and won’t, promote it.

On Oct. 16, Tomlinson will be the keynote speaker for the fourth annual Caribbean Community Service Center’s “Forget Columbus Day Awards,” a fundraiser for projects and programs that “support, empower and advocate for Caribbean Nationals in the Americas.” The event is at 7 p.m. at Kola Restaurant & Ultra Lounge in Farmington Hills.

“Columbus has been mischaracterized as discovering America, but he didn’t,” Tomlinson says. “People were there before, and his arrival wasn’t a boon for the original residents; it actually led to genocide.”

He explains that this is similar to how European colonizers wreaked havoc in places like Jamaica. “They left legacies like anti-sodomy laws and homophobia,” he says, which is still being exported today. “In Jamaica, we’ve seen quite a few American, British and Canadian evangelicals coming to the country to preach homophobic hate that they cannot preach in their own countries.”

These “missionaries” have spawned a perpetual hate that helps to fuel the undercurrent of homophobia running through Jamaica. “They are a primary reason why we still have these homophobic laws. Because they are seen to come from the enlightened North,” he explains. “The law on the books in Jamaica is still a colonial law that says you go to jail for 10 years for any kind of homosexual intimacy.”

His keynote address will touch on these issues.

“What I want to draw people’s attention to is the fact that, just like Columbus, there is still a lot of harm being done by colonizers and we need to deal with the modern-day consequences of that,” he says, “and stop the export of homophobia from the Global North, particularly the United States.”

He advises people to be careful about what organizations they support. “Where is your missionary money going?” he asks. “Modern-day missionaries are keeping laws on the books that drive people underground.”

Young people are hit especially hard. “We have homeless LGBT youth as young as 10 years old that are being kicked out of their homes,” he says. “You have kids now living in sewers, selling sex to survive.”

Homophobia is also a public health issue. “People need to make the connection between the export of homophobia from the Global North and rates of HIV in the Caribbean,” he says, adding that the stigma against homosexuality drives men away from HIV prevention in a place where HIV rates are among the highest in the world. “This HIV pandemic is not going to end until we end homophobia.”

“I really want to drive home that the pandemic in the Caribbean of HIV is a direct result of something exported from the United States: your toxic religious homophobia. And you need to stop it,” he says. “This is some of the harm. People need to think what kind of modern-day neo-colonial harm is happening in the Global South by these new Columbuses that wash up on the shore.”

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Reginald Hawkins performing at Big Freedia's show. Photo courtesy of Chuck Schwarting

→ Reginald Hawkins

Continued from p. 26

screen in a pair of baggy joggers.

"I feel like what I dress like emphasizes [how] I feel about myself, as far as being sexy and being this androgynous person," they explained.

Everything about Hawkins screams originality. Even the places they choose to find their looks. On a typical shopping day, they said they could be found at a thrift store.

"I'll go to Salvation Army and Value World..." they said. "I don't even remember the last time I went to the store and bought anything. Well, maybe a bag or some shoes, but even those, I will still thrift it out. Like, that's really where I get most of my clothes from."

Hawkins said that as an artist, they're always looking for something that pushes "that artistic level of fashion" similar to how Lady Gaga expresses herself style-wise.

Hawkins is always striving to be seen as iconic, from their clothing choices to their performances. They're trying to be "memorable," to create an "experience," and to "connect with the audience."

Confidently, they share how they see their immediate future: "I just want to make pop music and dance music and be able to be a global touring artist," they said. "I want to

"I'm not looking at the men's section or the women's section. I'm just looking at clothes to see what looks best on my body. To see if it fits my personal style. Like, finding what I like, rather than trying to dress like what a man or woman should dress like."

tour, go to the studio all day and collaborate with other great artists that I feel inspired by. [Really], I just want to be a pop girl, putting on big productions."



Reginald Hawkins performing at Big Freedia's show. Photo courtesy of Chuck Schwarting

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Carlos and Fernando. Photo: Sorrell Scrutton

‘Queerantime’: A Pet Project That Soothed COVID Isolation

BY JACKIE JONES

For L.A.-based queer photographer Sorrell Scrutton, their dog Frankie really is their best friend. When COVID struck, Frankie helped them counter the isolation. Given their bond, Scrutton decided to reach

out to other queer friends to discuss how pets can help soothe pandemic-caused mental strain. Their project “Queerantime,” a queer pet owner photography series, is the result of those discussions.

“Pets have always been lifesavers, and I want to show [them] in my work as a pet photographer,” Scrutton

explains on their website. “My dog Frankie saved my life a year ago when I experienced a very personal and difficult time that was very isolating. Without her and the support of my community, I’m sure I would not have made it out.”

Scrutton says “Queerantime” offered them an outlet to create and

share queer pet relationships.

“I developed ‘Queerantime’ to be able to continue my practice as a photographer safely, and felt it important to document the collective queer experience of COVID-19 at the same time,” they told BTL. “It started with friends, and once I posted on Instagram, it quickly grew on its own. I included anyone who identified anywhere on the LBGTQIA+ spectrum.”

At the beginning of the project, Scrutton’s goal was to create 100 images of queer pet owners alongside their pets. Since then, they’ve exceeded that goal — they’re currently up to 145. Scrutton says the primary reason they launched the Queerantime project is simple: Queer lives deserve to be seen.

As their site explains: “I recognize that I am not on the front lines of the pandemic, and there are other very important stories to be told, but even the boring mundanity of our lives right now deserves to be recorded and archived.”

They say they recognize that queer lives have been pushed into isolation and that “as queer folks, we have a history with many kinds of isolation throughout our lives.” “Whether it be rejection from friends, loved ones and family after coming out, growing up in a small town without queer community support, or even going through a bad breakup or divorce, most queers you know have struggled with isolation in some form or another,” their site says. “Being told to stay home and isolate can be pretty scary for anyone, especially those who may not have a traditional family structure or the societal support they need.”

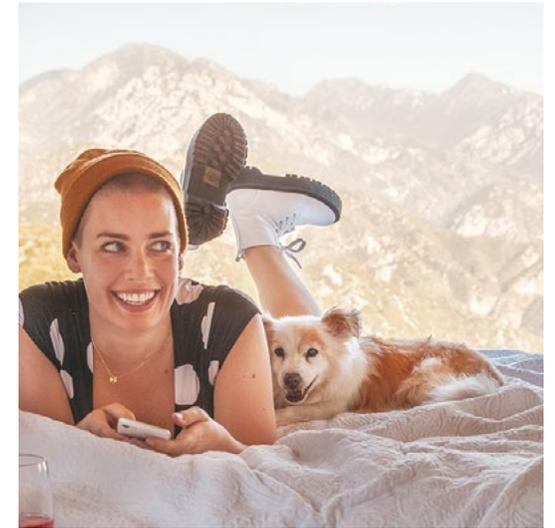
Their Instagram account, @queerantime_project, dismantles some of those ideas and gives viewers a window into queer lives. The faces, demographics and settings change, but one thing remains the same: queer owners proudly holding and showing off their pets.

Scrutton says they value all of

their subjects and pictures, “but if [they] absolutely had” to choose their favorite shoot, it would be the one with Cat and Teddy in their camper van.

They describe the setting as “magical.”

“We drove up the Angeles Crest Highway, and I photographed them



Cat and Teddy. Photo: Sorrell Scrutton

at sunset,” they said. In the picture, Cat and their dog

at sunset,” they said.

In the picture, Cat and their dog Teddy are lying on the bed. Cat has

“My dog Frankie saved my life a year ago when I experienced a very personal and difficult time that was very isolating.”

their legs crossed, toes pointed toward the van’s ceiling, and Teddy is leaning up against Cat’s side. Seen through the back of the van is a mountain landscape.

Every picture in their project captures something whimsical. Scrutton says all the photos and shoots helped them come to terms with their personal needs.

“I really had to look deep into what I needed for survival at that time, not just for my own happiness, but then basically dive headfirst into the fear of potentially not being able to continue my work,” they said. “I’ve been a procrastinator all my life and time really ran out on that, so I hustled like I’ve never done before to be able to continue to do the thing I love.”

Scrutton was not alone in their search to find happiness during

COVID's isolating months. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation study, almost 75 percent of the LGBTQ+ community experienced negative mental impacts they attributed to COVID.

"Everyone was bored and scared, and I thought this would be a fun thing to do to distract myself from potentially losing my job [and] an excuse to stay social in an otherwise isolated world," they said.

For years, photography has been Scrutton's preferred outlet for creative expression. Before getting behind the lens, they spent 15 years in front of it as a model. That's where Scrutton says they "learned pretty much everything" about photography.

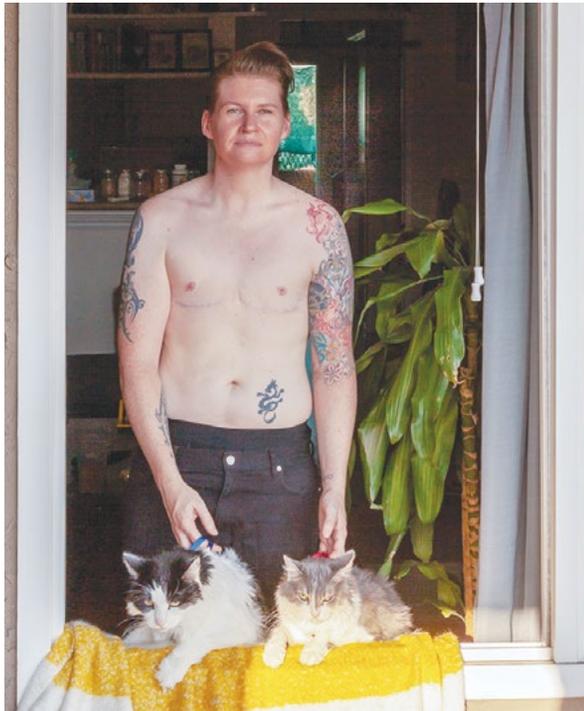
At 42 years old, they are still learning. Jokingly, Scrutton says the project made them discover that they are not as antisocial as they thought.

More poignantly, the project has made them realize that using their photography skills in this way has the power to change perspectives.

"I would hope it changes the cis-hetero perspective more than anything," they said. "[And] to show how diverse the queer community is. But it has also changed my own perspective of social media."

For Scrutton, social media was a means to socialize and gather more photo subjects. And as their project expands, Scrutton hopes to venture out more.

"I have continued the project even after restrictions have been lifted because, COVID or



Kerry, Abi and Rubi. Photo: Sorrell Scrutton

not, a wholesome queer experience is important to tell to the world," they explained. "So far, I've photographed families anywhere I could drive in a day in California to be as safe as possible. With cities and borders opening up, I would absolutely love to expand the project further to different states and countries."

Looking ahead, Scrutton says, they hope they can expand the reach of the "Queerantime" project by publishing photos from their sessions in print form.

"I imagined it in print almost immediately," they said, "and I am working on that as we speak."



Sabrina, Cowboy, Shauna and Wolfie. Photo: Sorrell Scrutton



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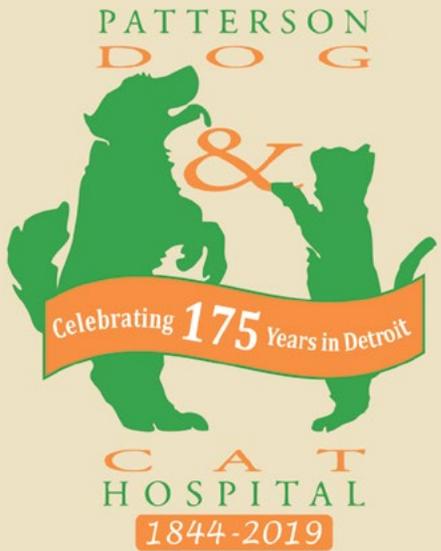
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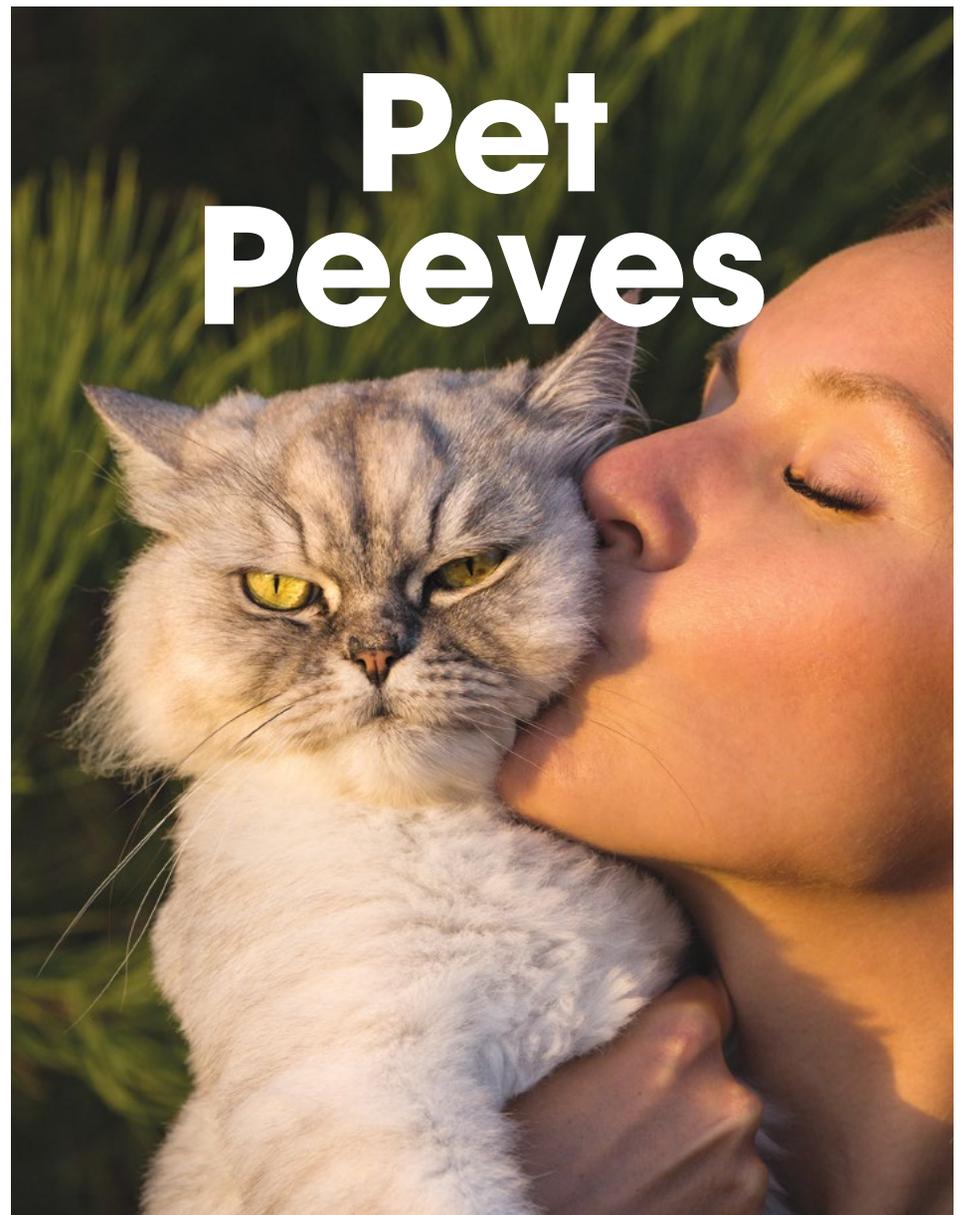
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Dumb, Dangerous and Disturbing Things Pet Parents Do That Need to Stop Now

BY MIKEY ROX

Pet ownership — or pet parenting as we like to call it — comes with much of the same responsibility as raising a human child, at least in the beginning. There are plenty of dos and don'ts to consider, lest you want to put your animal in an early grave. That's not a pleasant thought, of course, but neither are the things pet parents do, deliberately or innocently, that cause their dogs, cats and other household animals harm. Here's what needs to stop right now.

Bringing home an animal you know nothing about

Don't bring home a pet until you learn everything about it, begs Nora Glover, founder and editor-in-chief of cat blog Catademy.

"Animals have needs and don't have return policies like your new smartphone," she says. "They may seem very independent, but it's actually not true. Cats require quite a lot of daily care and attention from their owners to live a long and happy life. Your pet owner's duty is to know about all your cat's needs and learn how to satisfy them."

Letting cats roam the neighborhood

Outdoor cats pose several problems, like contributing to the feral feline population through procreation, killing wild birds that should be protected from unnecessary predators, and drawing the ire of your

See **Pet Peeves**, page 46

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Sex-Positive Brand Created ‘For People to Feel Free and Not Judged’

Detroit Native Introduces Thrust Silk Lube

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Detroit native Ka’Juan Hill is a man who wears many hats. By day he works in HIV/AIDS prevention and by night he hosts parties — around town and around the country — as KHAOS. He is also a model, spokesperson and the host of his own podcast, “The Let’s Talk About It Show.”

Now, the entrepreneur has also launched the Red Light Society with a line of adult products currently in development and its signature product, Thrust Silk lubricant, on sale now.

“The Red Light Society is a brand that I came up with,” Hill told BTL. “I’ve been in sexual health for about five years now and I’ve learned a lot doing outreach and prevention work. I started to think, ‘How can I make a product that people could have fun with?’”

Hill chose the name Thrust Silk for dual reasons.

“There’s silk in the ingredients. I had to let people know that. I needed something sexy, but I needed it to be ratchet, too. I wanted to cater to freaks,” he said. “I wanted people to look at the bottle and say ‘What does that say?’ Even the logo, it looks like 1984. Even the website I want to look like ‘80s porn. It took a very long time coming up with that name, too.”

Hill said he has two additional lubes in the works.

“There will be an organic lube and a silicone-based lube. The organic lube is going to cater more



Ka’Juan Hill. Photo: Beyond the Focus Photography



women who have and they have to dilate. So this will help.”

Hill mentioned his new product on his podcast, and within days the first shipment was almost sold out. Hill said in addition to

to women,” he said. “I know a lot of trans women who have had surgery

redlightsociety.shop, he one day wants to have his own physical location. “I hope to have my own store one day. After the lubes, I

want to have toys and underwear and all kinds of sexy stuff”, he said.

“I want my store to be as big as Adam & Eve or any of the local sex stores in the city,” Hill continued. “I want my products to be for everyone, but I want to cater to the LGBTQ community, the type of sex that we have, so really focusing on anal play and really focusing on teasing and doms and worshipping and also focusing on lesbian sex, too.”

Hill also sees his products helping people experiencing

sexual dysfunction. “Some women may not get wet like they used to,” he points out. “Some men may not get hard like they used to. These people need a little assistance, and I want them to come to the Red Light Society for that assistance.”

Hill plans to start splitting his time between Michigan and New York, where he’ll continue to work in sexual health while promoting his brand.

“I created this for people to feel free and not judged,” he said. “I created a society of people like me.”

“I know a lot of trans women who have had surgery and they have to dilate. So this will help.”

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→ Pet Peeves

Continued from p. 42

neighbors from doing their business in their yards. Furthermore, outdoor cats have an average life span of two years versus 12 when kept inside a loving home. That disparity in longevity alone should encourage any responsible cat owner to keep it safe indoors. If you'd like your cat to experience the outdoors, take it on a leashed walk or build an inescapable enclosure in your backyard and call it a "catio," because that sounds cute as hell.

Leaving dogs unattended outside

Small dogs left unattended outside can become snacks for predatory animals like coyotes, hawks and alligators, depending where you live. Being hit by moving vehicles is another, more likely cause of an outdoor dog's untimely death. Exposing the animal to extreme heat or cold is a giant no-no as well. And then there's the snatching, wherein criminals steal dogs to resell to an unsuspecting buyer, sell into dog-fighting rings, or hold them for ransom until your posted reward becomes high enough for the thief to pretend he or she found it wandering the streets. Happens right in pet parents' front and backyards when they're not watching. Don't let yourself be a victim by being irresponsible.

Leaving an animal in the car alone

If you're popping into the convenience store for three minutes on a cool day, sure, your dog can stay in the car with the windows cracked for that length of time. But if you're going on an hour-long Target run — because, let's face it, even if you went in there with a list, you're coming

out no less than an hour later — leave your pet at home or take it inside with you. Most stores don't bat an eye at a well-behaved dog in a shopping cart these days, so long as food isn't being served in the immediate area.

Allowing dogs to ride unrestrained in the back of a pickup truck

According to American Humane, 100,000 dogs die in accidents each year because they were riding in truck beds. These accidents don't have to involve a collision, either. Dogs can jump out, fall out, be stolen, receive eye injuries from flying debris, have paws burned on bed liners, and suffer from hypothermia in cold weather and heat stroke in hot weather. If you wouldn't make your human best friend ride unrestrained in your flatbed, why should your canine best friend have to?

Feeding your pets harmful foods

Pet discussions usually involve dogs and cats, but what about other pets, like rabbits? Grass hay should account for 75 to 80 percent of their diet and be supplemented with fresh leafy greens and pellets, according to Sarah Logan, editor of The Bunny Hub. Foods you should never feed your rabbit include chocolate (this goes for dogs and cats, too!), walnuts, avocados, bread and grains, meat, dairy, rhubarb, iceberg lettuce and potatoes. No matter what pet you have, always research what foods they can't have before feeding them anything other than their usual diet. A seemingly innocuous snack treat could have deadly consequences if you're not careful.

Blaming bad behavior on your pet's breed

Cats and dogs aren't stupid. But many people make excuses for their pet's bad

behavior by claiming the pet is goofy, can't be trained, or has a bad temperament. Too often, poorly or untrained pets end up in high kill shelters, all because a human couldn't or didn't take the time to address and eradicate the bad behavior. If you have trouble, hire a professional.

Hoarding animals because you're an 'animal lover'

Hoarding animals is a mental illness and should be addressed as such unless you're breeding pets for a living (which, in that case, you also might want to reconsider a more humane career path). The hard truth is, you can't track the health and welfare of 20 dogs or 30 cats, and nobody wants to find your inadvertent collection of feline skeletons under a ceiling-high stack of National Enquirers five years from now.

Helicopter parenting a dog

Everybody knows that one person at the dog park who spoils all the fun. Their dog can't lift a paw or get a sniff in before they're scooped up and checked for injuries. Sometimes these people are judgmental, while others profusely apologize (for what, I'm not sure). Whatever the case, they just can't seem to let dogs be dogs.

"Dogs bark, chase, and wrestle for fun; it's in their DNA," says Daniel Caughill, co-founder of The Dog Tale blog. "If you're not comfortable with a little roughhousing, please stay away from the dog park, because you prevent everyone else from letting their dogs play when you start fussing."

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyroxtravels.

→ Stigmatizing Language

Continued from p. 13

though it feels horrible to you, you don't know you can say, 'I don't like this.' And that can keep people from starting treatment or from coming back. Because no one wants to feel like they're an infection."

Upholding the personhood of PLWH

Given that stigma-laden language remains pervasive even within reputable institutions — despite guidelines and recommendations from qualified studies, researchers, and organizations — it is essential for medical doctors and providers to ensure that they are communicating with their patients who are living with HIV in a manner that upholds the dignity of their personhood.

As with discussing a person's gender expression, preferred pronouns or sexual identity, a simple way to avoid pitfalls is by asking how a patient responds to specific terms. Doctors who would like to have assistance with navigating the most up-to-date HIV terminology can visit People First Charter, a resource that follows the

World Health Organization's (WHO) directive to use positive and inclusive language when administering medical care. The website was created by Waters after her experience at IAS to help researchers avoid inadvertently using stigma-laden language.

PLWH can also use these resources to arm themselves with the most up-to-date language of care, or to initiate conversations with their medical providers about improving the way they communicate.

Additional resources include UNAIDS' Terminology Guidelines from 2015, as well as People Living With HIV's Stigma Index. The index was developed by GNP+, ICW, UNAIDS and IPPF to provide evidence on how stigma and discrimination affects the lives of PLWH and provides individual reports on 24 countries that detail the specific challenges that PLWH experience within their borders.

Juan Michael Porter II is a staff writer for TheBody and TheBodyPro. He has been living with HIV since 2015. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service. Visit their websites — <http://thebody.com>, <http://hivplumag.com>, <http://positivelyaware.com> and <http://poz.com> — for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.

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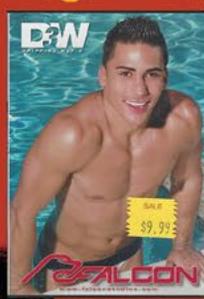
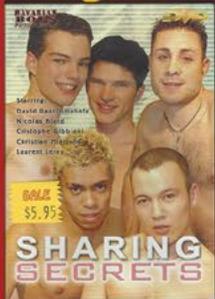
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'BROS' Will Be (All Queer) Bros

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

After two years of development, the long-awaited Judd Apatow-produced rom-com starring and co-written by Billy Eichner finally has a title and a preliminary cast. It's going to be called "BROS," and its leads, Eichner and Luke Macfarlane ("Brothers & Sisters"), will play two gay men who want to have a relationship but, you know, comedy complications keep getting in the way. It will be the first queer-themed romantic comedy from a major studio since "Love, Simon," and if that surprises you then you must be new around here. But here's what's truly surprising: an all-queer main cast. For starters, supporting players include Guillermo Diaz ("Scandal"), Symone from "RuPaul's Drag Race," Ts Madison ("Zola"), comedian Guy Branum ("Q-Force") and Miss Lawrence ("Star"). But that's not all, you see, because it turns out that queer actors reportedly will play all the roles, even the straight characters. And why not? Rock Hudson did it in every movie. "BROS" is scheduled to hit theaters in August of 2022, and now we have extremely high and extremely queer expectations. Like, we want entire dialogue sequences to mystify straight people. It's not too much to ask.



More Hollywood Dish

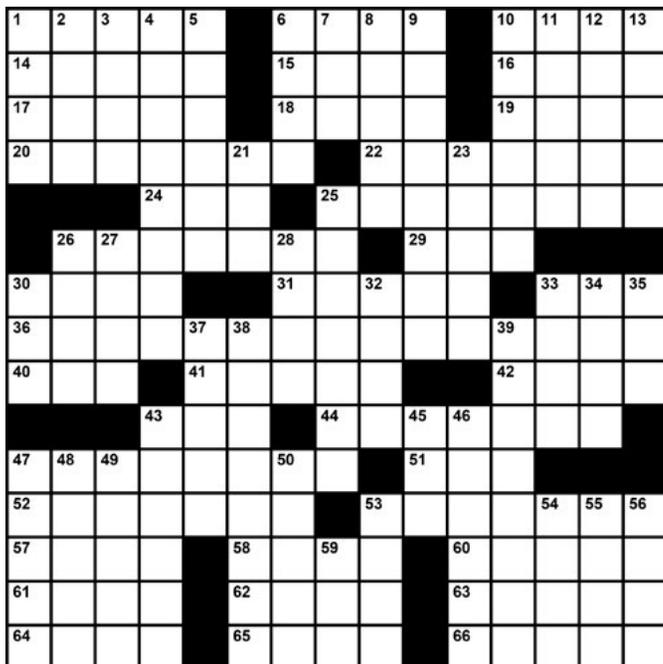
Netflix romances Dan Levy

Dan Levy's multiple-E Emmy-winning Canadian sitcom "Schitt's Creek" gained a lot of its cultural traction in the United States after Netflix picked it up from Pop TV. It was there where it enjoyed a second wave of popularity and still streams for new audiences to get hooked on. And because Netflix seemingly owns everything now, they've also closed a new deal with Levy for an untitled feature film. He'll direct, write, produce and star in the original romantic comedy, one that we assume will involve a racy-yet-also-wholesome-yet-also-very-horny same-sex plotline and a much needed dose of very queer other situations across the board. And yes, we know what happens when assumptions are made, but we're going to do it anyway because at this point in the development process, speculation is all anyone has. Whatever Levy comes up with, it'll be a quick yes from us.

Theo Germaine to star in Blumhouse conversion therapy horror film

Non-binary actor Theo Germaine, currently best known for Ryan Murphy's "The Politician" and Showtime's "Work in Progress," is one of young queer Hollywood's rising stars. And their next project is a horror movie for fright factory Blumhouse, one with a very specific killer: ex-gay conversion therapy. Currently untitled (though formerly known as "Whistler Camp"), the film will be gay screenwriter John Logan's ("Gladiator," "Skyfall") directorial debut, and will be set in an ex-gay conversion therapy camp. There aren't any plot details yet, and no other casting news, but this is a perfectly horrific setting. We think it would be a very good idea if the camp's teen prisoners mobilized into an army of "Friday the 13th"-style Jasons, turning the tables on their tormentors with slashery, splattery results. We never said we were interested in turning the other cheek.

Photo: Billy Eichner, star and co-writer of "BROS."



- 29 Boy king that goes either way
 30 Big name in stunt riding
 31 Bring to the auto repair
 33 King James affirmative
 36 Power Ranger's route?
 40 It may come before long
 41 Bundle of grain
 42 Colon in an analogy
 43 The first word in cocktails?
 44 Characters in "Rent"
 47 Power Ranger's cravat?
 51 Fingers, in a lineup
 52 Israeli artist Perez
 53 Power Ranger's place to fly?
 57 Mishima's continent
 58 In ___ of
 60 Area near the private parts
 61 Went down
 62 Parrot in "Aladdin"
 63 Eliza, to Henry
 64 Word before love, for some
 65 Like Izzard's comedy
 66 Gay rodeo target

- 10 Offering from Susan Feniger
 11 Pastoral poem
 12 One thousandth
 13 Hard to mount
 21 Org. that likes to shoot off
 23 Shut out
 25 Divvy up
 26 Out partner
 27 Soccer legend
 28 "Wouldn't ___ Lovely"
 30 Queer body part on TV
 32 Either bride after the wedding
 33 David, once of Power Rangers
 34 Avoids family cooking, with "out"
 35 "Oklahomal"'s ___ Annie
 37 Port in the land of samurai
 38 Bedroom compliment, perhaps
 39 Remove soap from
 43 Borgnine TV role
 45 Love, to Billie Jean
 46 "Mature" viewers, online
 47 Zach of "Scrubs"
 48 Cutting light
 49 Loads
 50 Story of Greeks and Trojans
 53 Channel marker
 54 stopaids.org, e.g.
 55 Trick joint, maybe
 56 North Sea feeder
 59 It gets laid

Colorful Characters

Across

- 1 You could get wet watching him at SeaWorld
 6 Mariah or Madonna
 10 WNBA hoops
 14 The ___ Spoonful ('60s band)
 15 Colorado, to Cocteau

- 16 Tamper with text
 17 Bodies of soldiers
 18 Title role for Jodie
 19 Part played by Nabors
 20 Power Ranger's pittance?
 22 Bunkers' old auto
 24 Ship, to seamen
 25 Power Ranger's dismissal notice?
 26 Etheridge concert setting, perhaps

Down

- 1 Homophobic word, e.g.
 2 Fine-tune
 3 Hot to trot
 4 A dad of Lily on "Modern Family"
 5 Not noticed
 6 Result of getting rear-ended
 7 Sodom ending
 8 "Grease" singer Frankie
 9 Provincetown's ___ House

See p. 32 for answers

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