

JUNE 2025 ISSUE 180

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JAXGAY

MAGAZINE

BE BOLD BE PROUD BE GAY



Big Gay

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THE STORY OF WHERE
JAX GAY PRIDE BEGIN

INSIDE

How **Pride Is**
Preparing For A
World Without **DEI**

Pride Journey:
Detroit, Michigan

Why June Is
LGB TQ+ Pride
Month

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Jax Gay Magazine is published every first Friday of the month (12 issues/year).

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Jax Gay Mag LLC is the ONLY LGBT+ Publication in Northeast Florida. With monthly readership of approximately 300,000.

Our mission is to promote North Florida and especially in Jacksonville, as a welcoming LGBT+ destination through marketing and events.

Jax Gay Mag produces many events throughout year. Visit www.JaxGayMag.com for more information.

Jax Gay Mag LLC also plans to launch our Jax Event Center & LGBT+ Art Gallery in Fall of 2026.

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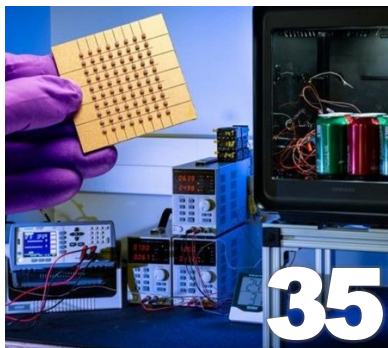
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COVER STORY

100 Days Of 100 Hilarious, Horrific, & Heinous Things Trump Did

By John Casey



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News & Politics

Florida Judge Won't Let City Stop Naples Pride Celebrating

By David Vandygriff



A judge will not put off enforcement of his decision allowing Naples Pride to unfold in Florida without restriction.

Naples city officials appealed a decision by U.S. District Judge John Steele, who earlier this month ruled the violated free speech rights by issuing an event permit with a condition that Naples Pride host its drag performances indoors and limit attendance to those age 18 and older.

The city filed a brief in federal court asking Steele to stay his ruling until appellate judges review the case, but Steele said the timeliness of his decision was important.

"Since Pridefest 2025 and its drag performance are scheduled for June 7, 2025,

and the preliminary injunction by its terms expires on June 8, 2025, granting a stay would essentially vacate the preliminary injunction," Steele wrote in a decision denying the city request.

The judge also ordered officials to reassess the excessive security costs charged. Naples initially intended to charge Naples Pride \$36,000 in security costs for the event, far more than similar-sized events at the same Campier Park venue.

Naples Pride has always kept its programming family-friendly. But in the wake of Florida passing an anti-drag law threatening venues allowing minors into live shows with "sexual conduct," the city

forced performances at Pride indoors and demanded age restrictions. However, a federal judge in Orlando struck down that law in June 2023. The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that ruling this month, and the U.S. Supreme Court already said the state cannot enforce the law even as the decision gets appealed.

Steele said the Cambier Park venue where Naples Pride is expected is a public forum where free speech enjoys high protection.

"Even if Cambier Park became a limited public forum, the location and age restrictions would violate the First Amendment because they are neither content nor viewpoint neutral," Steele ruled.

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'Wayne's World' Star's Son Comes Out as Transgender

By Michael Brayson



Wayne's World star Tia Carrere, 58, has revealed that her 19-year-old son Jude has come out as transgender. Carrere, who voiced Nani Pelekai in the 2022 animated Lilo & Stitch film, stars in the new live action Lilo & Stitch as Mrs. Kekoa, a new character. However, Carrere said that she doesn't plan on Jude, who she co-parents with ex-husband Simon Wakelin, following in her footsteps.

"He doesn't love the spotlight," Carrere told People, noting that Jude did stop to pose for pictures at the Lilo & Stitch premiere. "He's more introverted, so he definitely won't go into acting or singing like I did. But he's a great artist."

She added, "I don't know what he'll do! Maybe become a doctor or work with animals. He's working with animals right now." Carrere's turn as

Cassandra Vong in 1992's Wayne's World made her a household name alongside stars Mike Myers, Dana Carvey, Lara Flynn Boyle and Rob Lowe. But she said she is most proud of being a mother. "I did a good job with that. But I don't want to congratulate myself too much! He's his own person!" Carrere said of Jude.

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Science & Technology

Next-Gen Nuclear Reactors Use Solar Salts Against Heat

By Angie Massengill



A new multi-million dollar research effort aims to solve a central challenge for the next wave of nuclear energy: the efficient and safe management of extreme operational heat.

NANO Nuclear, a company engaged in advanced nuclear technology, is teaming up with MIT's renowned Department of Nuclear Science and Engineering to rigorously test if "solar salts," a common material in solar thermal plants, can withstand the harsh conditions inside advanced nuclear reactors.

The two-year collaboration, funded by NANO Nuclear with \$500,000, aims to fill a significant knowledge gap. While molten nitrate salts are proven performers for storing solar energy, their behavior under the intense radiation of a nuclear environment remains largely uncharted territory.

Designing Safer, More Efficient Reactors

This research will subject these salts to gamma irradiation using MIT's specialized Gammacell 220F Co-60 irradiator and provide crucial

data for designing safer and more efficient reactors of the future.

"Understanding how molten salts perform under radiation is essential to unlocking next-generation reactor designs, and this facility gives us the capabilities to do that without using any nuclear materials," said Jay Yu, Founder and Chairman of NANO Nuclear. He emphasized that it will ensure a controlled and safe research environment.

The collaboration seeks to determine if these salts can be reliably used for thermal energy storage and as coolants in advanced nuclear systems, including microreactors. Professor Koroush Shirvan, a leading nuclear systems engineering expert at MIT and the project's Principal Investigator, highlighted the sophisticated approach.

"This project offers an exciting opportunity to characterize molten nitrate salts in radiation environments with a level of precision not previously achieved," he said.

His team will deploy cutting-

edge diagnostics, including real-time gas analysis and thermal property measurements, to assess chemical stability and material degradation during and after irradiation.

"We're using real-time diagnostics, high-temperature test rigs, and modern analytical techniques to generate data that can immediately impact next-generation reactor development," Dr Shirvan explained.

Broader Implications For Nuclear Energy

The implications of this research extend beyond just one company or reactor design. Positive findings could significantly accelerate the development of various advanced reactor concepts by providing reliable data on material performance. This could lead to more robust safety models and more efficient energy conversion.

Professor Ian Farnan, Lead of Nuclear Fuel Cycle, Radiation and Materials at NANO Nuclear, sees this as a pivotal step

"The ability to assess salt

performance in radiation fields without reliance on operating a reactor gives us unprecedented flexibility and speed in advancing the development of our reactor systems,” he noted.

The research, expected to conclude in 2027, will provide

quarterly updates, feeding directly into NANO Nuclear’s engineering and design processes.

Success in this endeavor could revolutionize aspects of nuclear energy and offer insights beneficial for other clean

energy applications, such as industrial heat and off-grid energy storage.

“We are thrilled to see this groundbreaking research move forward with MIT,” concluded Professor Farnan.

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Paul Reubens Was The Victim Of An Anti-Gay Witch Hunt

By Judy Bennett



As I was watching HBO's new two-part documentary, *Pee-wee as Himself*, I couldn't help but feel like I was watching history repeat itself.

The two-part documentary series, directed by Matt Wolf, was filmed over the years leading up to Paul Reubens's death from cancer in 2023 at the age of 70. It features footage pieced together from 40 hours of interviews with the legendary actor, comedian, and children's entertainer.

While the first episode covers Reubens's rise as an artist and how he came up with the character known as Pee-wee Herman, the second episode starts to chart his fall from grace, which included a 1991 arrest for "indecent exposure" at an adult movie theater and a 2001 police investigation for possession of child sexual abuse material.

Reubens's 1991 arrest for "indecent exposure" in an adult movie theater in Hollywood, FL became a major news story that immediately changed his career from one of the most beloved children's entertainers in the world to a pariah. As a

result, Reubens also lost his anonymity, as photographs of the performer (not dressed as his Pee-wee persona) were published in various publications alongside headlines labeling him as a sexual deviant.

Reruns of *Pee-wee Herman's* show were taken off the air. One clip in the documentary showed comedian Sam Kinison calling for Reubens to be "executed" for his activities "because he was involved with children." Children's entertainer Soupy Sales also appeared in the documentary arguing, "We do not like our children hanging out or having anything to do with perverts."

It's hard to imagine it in 2025, when porn is accessible from every phone. But when Reubens was arrested, porn was less widely available, and it was a common culture for men to masturbate during screenings of many adult theaters. In most places, these acts were technically illegal, but law enforcement generally looked the other way.

Beyond his act as Pee-wee Herman, Reubens had been known as a collector of many

kitsch, camp, and vintage items. In 2001, police came to his house to investigate his art collection on a tip that he owned child sexual abuse materials. During said investigation, police found vintage homoerotic art and examined hundreds of thousands of photos, magazines, and films of archival gay erotica — some of which Reubens had reportedly not even opened yet.

In the end, no pornographic materials containing underage people were discovered. "I could find the exact collections in some of the biggest universities in the country in their LGBT archives," attorney Blair Berk says in the documentary. "I had defended folks in child pornography cases, and this was just not child pornography. This was a homophobic witch hunt. You know, there's a trope that's quite dangerous about pedophilia and the LGBTQ community. It goes on today."

The district attorney investigating the case decided that no charges should be filed. However, Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, who had political aspirations,

decided he would file one count of misdemeanor child pornography.

"Delgadillo was the newly elected city attorney," Berk says in *Pee-wee as Himself*. "He was very ambitious and had announced that he was particularly focused on child abuse issues. It was increasingly clear to us that this was a political case. Had Paul been a regular citizen, none of this attention would have been given to him."

Ultimately, to avoid a public trial, Reubens pleaded guilty to an obscenity charge. He was forced to go to mandatory counseling, couldn't have unsupervised contact with children, and he had to register as a sex offender for three years.

Reubens's friend, Allison Berry, who worked on several *Pee-wee* projects and raised her daughter around Reubens for her entire life, said she had to sign a letter saying it was okay for Reubens to be alone with her children.

And yet, the damage was done, and Reubens never fully recovered from the scandal.

We're now seeing the echoes of that "witch hunt" in the modern treatment of drag queens, trans people, and authors of books (with queer themes) that were written for children and young adults. Right-wing pundits and politicians are once again claiming that they don't want "perverts" in kids' media — though, by their definition, anyone who is gay is labeled a

"pervert," and any storyline deemed "gay" is interpreted as "obscene."

Police aren't just raiding vintage erotica collections; they're raiding school libraries. They're not just banning erotic magazines that show naked young men; they're banning children's books, comics, and any other published works that talk about being gay or trans in any positive or neutral way. One book was classified as sexually explicit material solely because the author's last name was Gay.

Memoirs about queer celebrities figuring out their sexualities are being called pornography. Young adult novels with two boys exploring their love are called pornography. Parents who take children to drag shows, even if they are in a library with a drag queen dressed like Mother Goose reading nursery rhymes, are said to be exposing their children to sex.

This new, modern-day witch hunt is only becoming more popular. Now, it's not just city and state legislatures passing these laws; President Trump is promoting similar ideas on the national level.

In the documentary *The Librarians*, which premiered at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival alongside *Pee-wee as Himself*, school librarians from states like Texas and Florida talk about how they've lost their jobs, faced verbal hate, and were threatened with physical violence for letting children check out books like *All Boys*

Aren't Blue and And Tango Makes Three.

Those librarians weren't giving children erotic materials. They were allowing young people to read books about a penguin with two dads.

This is the sad and scary progression of the kind of witch hunt Reubens was the victim of. It is now even easier for that rhetoric to start, and much more likely for it to ruin a person's life.

Toward the end of this two-part HBO documentary, Reubens opened up about what it felt like to be accused of such a heinous crime while doing nothing abnormal. "The moment someone labeled me as, I'm just gonna say it, a 'pedophile,' I knew it was going to change everything moving forward and backwards," he explained. "I wanted to talk about and have some understanding of what it's like to be labeled a pariah, to have people scared of you or unsure of you or untrusting. Or to look at what your intentions are through some kind of filter that's not true."

Reubens added, "I wanted people to understand that occasionally, where there is smoke, there isn't always fire. I wanted people to understand that my whole career, everything I did and wrote, was based in love and my desire to entertain and bring glee and creativity to young people and to everyone."

Pee-wee as Himself is now streaming on HBO Max.

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OUT & HEALTH

HHS Deletes Mental Health Report On Utah's Trans Kids

By Janet Drake

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has quietly deleted reports tracking the mental health of transgender youth in Utah from its webpage, the Salt Lake Tribune reports. HHS did not delete reports using the same datasets to evaluate the mental health of cisgender youth who were straight, gay, bisexual, and unsure in the state.

The "Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention" (SHARP) survey asks students to answer questions about their health and well-being. In 2023, 51,890 students took the voluntary survey in grades six, eight, 10, and 12. Of those students who responded to the question asking if they were transgender, 729, or 1.4 percent, responded affirmatively, although children in grade six were not asked about their gender identity.

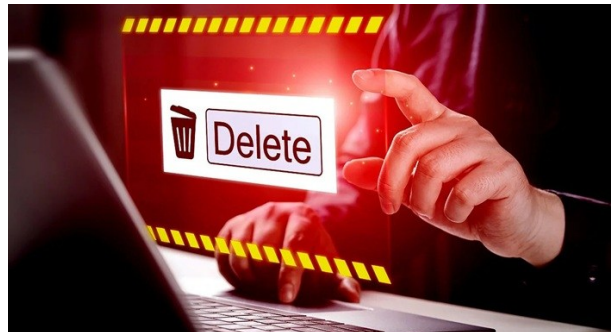
The compiled datasets were evaluated and available in "Transgender Student Profile Report[s]" on the Utah Office of Substance Use and Mental Health on February 2, but disappeared by March 4, the Tribune reports.

"Your willingness to participate

has helped families and communities throughout the state in many different ways," the SHARP website says of the survey. "The knowledge we've gained from the SHARP survey is invaluable – because it tells us where to look for problems and solutions."

The data had also been deleted from the website of the CDC, until a federal judge ordered the data to be restored online. The CDC now issues the following disclaimer on its website.

"Per a court order, HHS is required to restore this website as of 11:59 p.m. ET, February 11, 2025," the site notes. "Any information on this page promoting gender ideology is extremely inaccurate and disconnected from the immutable biological reality that there are two sexes, male and female. The Trump Administration rejects gender ideology and condemns the harms it causes to children, by promoting their chemical and surgical mutilation, and to women, by depriving them of their dignity, safety, well-being, and opportunities. This page does not reflect biological reality and therefore the Administration and this



Department rejects it."

The compiled data showed warning signs for transgender children, with roughly 60 percent saying they had contemplated death by suicide in the previous year, while nearly 25 percent reported they had attempted to die by suicide.

Ilan Meyer, a distinguished senior scholar at the Williams Institute at UCLA, which studies gender and sexual identity issues and policies, cautioned that the climate for the well-being and mental health of transgender children will not get better by denying their existence.

"Whatever it is that LGBT youth are going through is continuing, and just not knowing something doesn't really address the underlying problem," Meyer, of the Williams Institute, told the Tribune. "By not knowing, you're not going to be able to address it at all. And maybe that's the point."

If you or someone you know needs mental health resources and support, please call, text, or chat with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or visit 988lifeline.org for 24/7 access to free and confidential services.

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Life and Style

Why June Is LGBTQ+ Pride Month

By David Joshlin



“Pride started with a protest.”

That’s a slogan used often to remind us of the origins of LGBTQ+ Pride Month, celebrated each June in the U.S. and many other countries. It’s used especially by those who feel Pride parades and festivals have become too corporate and not as political as they should be, although 2025 Prides will doubtlessly feature acts of protest against the Trump administration. But Pride Month and the attendant events endure, having survived pandemics, hostile politicians, and internal controversies. Here’s a look at why we observe Pride Month in June.

The Short Answer Is Stonewall. But There’s More To Pride History Than That

As most reasonably informed LGBTQ+ people and allies know, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in New York City’s Greenwich Village, early in the morning of June 28, 1969, led the patrons to fight back, with riots in the area of the bar over the next several days. The Stonewall uprising is shrouded in myth and mystery about who was there, who threw the first brick, and so on. But what’s

unquestionable is that the community showed it wasn’t going to take harassment and brutality lying down. It had shown that before, but Stonewall was the “Big Bang” that jump-started the movement at the end of a tumultuous decade, as historian Lillian Faderman wrote in the book *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, published in 1994.

There had already been other protests against the oppression of LGBTQ+ people — early on, referred to less inclusively as gays, gays and lesbians, or even homosexuals, even though bisexual and transgender people were very much part of the movement.

In 1959, drag queens and hustlers protested police harassment at Cooper’s Donuts in downtown Los Angeles, a popular gay hangout. In 1966, there were demonstrations and riots against similar mistreatment at Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco. As patrons of the Black Cat Bar in L.A. rang in 1967, police raided the gay establishment, arresting those dressed in drag or kissing a member of the same sex. Gay Angelenos responded with

multiple protests, and the Black Cat demonstrations led to the publication of a newsletter that became *The Advocate*.

The first annual observances in support of LGBTQ+ rights were the Reminder Day Pickets in Philadelphia. The demonstrations were held each July 4 from 1965 to 1969 at Independence Hall. Pioneering activists including Barbara Gittings and Frank Kameny were involved in the protests. After Stonewall, organizers of the Reminder Day Pickets suggested commemorating that date in the last weekend of June. See Library of Congress footage of a 1968 Reminder Day event below.

The first Pride marches or parades observing the Stonewall anniversary came in 1970 in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Activists were encouraged by the turnout and began planning repeat annual events, and other cities soon took up the cause. Boston’s first one came in 1971, Dallas’s and Philadelphia’s in 1972, Seattle’s in 1974, Washington, D.C.’s in 1975, and on and on. Pride celebrations spread overseas too; London’s first was in 1972, Sydney’s in 1978, Montreal’s in 1979. The

international WorldPride was first held in Rome in 2000; Washington, D.C., is hosting it in 2025.

Now Pride is observed in cities large and small, and not always on the Stonewall anniversary, for reasons of convenience and more. For instance, in Palm Springs, California, located in a desert area, June is too scorching for parades, so Pride is held in early November. Los Angeles and West Hollywood usually hold Pride in early to mid-June, and in other cities it happens in July, August, or later.

Spreading Pride To A Week Or A Month

Some cities began celebrating a Pride Week in the 1970s, sometimes with official recognition from political leaders. For instance, Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman declared a Gay Pride Week in 1977. Now mayors, governors, and more are declaring Pride Month.

In 1999, Bill Clinton became the first U.S. president to proclaim June as Pride Month — it was then dubbed Gay and Lesbian Pride Month. Clinton was and is a Democrat; when Republican George W. Bush moved into the White House, he declined to recognize the month. When the next Democratic president, Barack Obama, took office in 2009, he began proclaiming Pride Month annually.

Again, with Donald Trump, a Republican president failed to declare Pride Month, although he sent out a tweet in 2019

calling for “solidarity with the many LGBT people who live in dozens of countries worldwide that punish, imprison, or even execute individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation.” It amounted to “be grateful we don’t execute you,” as The Advocate’s headline noted.

But when Democrat Joe Biden was president, Pride Month again had White House recognition. The 2024 proclamation declared June as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Pride Month. “I call upon the people of the United States to recognize the achievements of the LGBTQI+ community, to celebrate the great diversity of the American people, and to wave their flags of pride high,” he wrote. Also during the Biden administration, Vice President Kamala Harris hosted Pride Month receptions.

With Trump back in the White House, it remains to be seen if he’ll recognize Pride Month, but odds are that he won’t, and if he does, any recognition will undoubtedly be trans-exclusionary.

The Burgeoning Of Dyke Marches, Black Pride, And Trans Events

As Pride celebrations spread, many women, people of color, and trans people became frustrated that they, like LGBTQ+ activist groups and society at large, were dominated by white cisgender men. So they not only fought to make general Pride celebrations more inclusive but

founded their own.

The first Dyke Marches were held in 1993 in New York, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Events centering queer women were held sporadically in cities around the nation before then, but they didn’t become continual occurrences. After 1993, many other cities began holding Dyke Marches. Here’s list of the Dyke Marches for 2025.

Annual Black LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations have been held since 1991, with DC Black Pride being the first. These events are now in U.S. cities from coast to coast and in many other countries as well.

Trans people have often been marginalized even in the LGBTQ+ community, despite the importance of trans activists such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera to Stonewall and the beginning of the modern LGBTQ+ movement. Trans people and drag queens have sometimes even been barred from Pride parades. So in the 21st century, trans marches have been organized in many cities, with San Francisco’s, which started in 2004, being most likely the largest and oldest.

Weathering Storms

In 2025, during a second Trump presidency, many Pride organizations are facing challenges. WorldPride saw a major corporation scheduled to sponsor the event, defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, withdrew after it ended its

diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. The company cited Trump's executive orders against DEI.

Numerous other companies have dropped DEI programs, in response to pressure either from Trump or from far-right activists, and that has imperiled Pride funding. However, in a case of turnabout, Twin Cities Pride, which holds the largest Pride celebration in Minnesota, dropped Target as a sponsor after that company ended DEI efforts, even though Target executives assured the group they would support the event nonetheless. Twin Cities Pride turned down \$50,000 from Target but raised even more from other sources. Many other Pride events are turning to alternative funding.

WorldPride has had other repercussions because of the anti-LGBTQ+ White House. Organizers pulled events from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, now under

the control of Trump and his loyalists, once it became clear the venue would not be a safe or inclusive space. Still, some federally affiliated institutions are hosting events tied to WorldPride, such as a screening of Alice Wu's film *Saving Face* at the National Museum of Asian Art. Activists in some countries have called for a boycott of WorldPride, and WorldPride organizers have warned trans people from overseas about potential risks of coming to the U.S. However, WorldPride has characterized attendance as an act of resistance and has scheduled a huge protest march and rally for June 8. Many Prides this year will undoubtedly feature acts of protest against the Trump administration.

But since the beginning of Pride celebrations in 1970, the queer movement has faced many challenges, from hostile politicians and religious leaders to internal dissension. Pride

parades in large cities are now big enough that marchers and onlookers can ignore any anti-LGBTQ+ protesters who show up, and in progressive areas, politicians are eager to participate in Pride parades and festivals, which certainly wasn't always the case. The AIDS epidemic devastated the community, but Pride went on, and the fight against the disease birthed many fierce activists. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of numerous Pride events, but celebrations have come back strong now. And debates have raged about whether corporate sponsorship of Pride is a good or a bad thing and whether the participation of uniformed police is appropriate. These debates will undoubtedly continue to go on, but so will Pride — both for veteran activists and the new generations coming out.

Happy LGBTQ+ Pride Month!



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COVER STORY

Big Gay Picnic Where Jacksonville Gay Pride Began

By Josh Garcia



Willowbranch Park and the adjacent Willowbranch Library have had a place in Jacksonville's LGBTQ history for six decades. The site of thousands of hushed meetings and boisterous celebrations over the years, one local pastor describes it as "holy ground." The park dates to 1916, when it became a new public space in an expanding part of Riverside. The Mediterranean Revival-style library opened in 1930 as the city's third branch library, after the main Downtown library and Wilder Park Library in Sugar Hill, which served African-Americans during the period of segregation.

A comparatively well-to-do neighborhood in the early 20th century, Riverside saw its housing values drop in the 1960s as white flight and suburbanization led tens of thousands of Urban Core residents to move to newer, more remote developments. However, Riverside's cheaper rents drew in a more bohemian element, and soon the neighborhood was full of musicians, artists, hippies and

LGBTQ folks from far and wide. Riverside became Jacksonville's first substantial "gayborhood," and residents hosted the city's first Gay Pride Festival at Willowbranch Park in 1978, nine years after the Stonewall Riots in New York galvanized the gay rights movement. The original event was a picnic at the park, and it was such a success that the event continued. While Jacksonville's early Pride celebrations received pushback from community reactionaries, they succeeded in the goal of increasing the visibility of LGBTQ people in the city. River City Pride has evolved into a massive celebration each October (to beat the June heat of Pride Month) featuring a parade through Riverside and a week of revelry in Five Points.

Willowbranch Library has its own LGBTQ history. At a time of severe oppression, the library became a popular spot for LGBTQ Jaxsons to meet and organize in relative safety. Among those who met here were the founders of LGBTQ youth organization JASMYN, one of Jacksonville's most prominent LGBTQ nonprofits.

JASMYN traces its roots to 1992, when teenager Ernie Selorio left a note seeking solidarity on the library's bulletin board. Selorio had been outed when his mother found his journal, and feeling isolated and alone, he asked others to meet him to form an LGBTQ youth support group. About 10 people turned out for the first meeting, and JASMYN was born. Now based in nearby Brooklyn, JASMYN continues to provide support to LGBTQ teens and young adults across the city.

The mural on the Willowbranch Creek culvert. In the 2010s, organizers and the city launched a renovation of Willowbranch Park dedicated to its long LGBTQ history and to victims of the AIDS epidemic that devastated the gay community in the 1980s and 90s. Volunteers began reforesting the park along Willowbranch Creek to create Love Grove in honor of Riversiders lost to AIDS, and sponsored a sunflower mural painted on the culvert where the creek flows under Park Street. Advocates hope to add a public artwork that would be Florida's second AIDS

memorial.

Four years ago David Vandygriff launched the Big Gay Picnic to memorialize the First Gay Pride Event in Jacksonville held at the Willowbranch Park & Stonewall Pride. This year the Jax LGBT Chamber Foundation will host the third such event. Free hot dogs and hamburgers with Live DJ music. There will be FREE vendor spots for everyone. Bring you own dishes, blankets, and enjoy an family friendly event.

AMP (AIDS Memorial Project) is planning some fun activities such as a drag high heel race. Wonder if we could get our City Councilman Jimmy Peluso to participate? Many more games and fun activities are the name

of the game when it comes to Richard Cerilo and Dan Hutton with AMP. You don't want to miss their wonder HOT MESS Train.

Off Duty JSO Officers will be proved for security as will porta potty's for public use. Save your spots as a vendor now by contacting info@jaxlgbtchamber.org

Saturday June 28th 12pm – 4pm. Be sure to pick-up after yourself so we can keep Willowbranch Park Jax Gay 'Holy Ground.'

At The Big Gay Picnic, we handle the essentials to create an inviting and fun atmosphere. From setting up canopies and tables to providing entertainment and securing

event permits, we've got it covered. While we encourage attendees to bring a dish or drink to share with 6-8 people, or consider donating to help keep the event going, everyone is welcome to join in —whether or not you bring anything. Our goal is to create a space where our diverse community can connect and thrive.

Our mission is to create a welcoming and inclusive space where people of all backgrounds and identities can come together in community and friendship. Through our picnic in Willowbranch Park, we aim to foster connections, celebrate diversity within the LGBTQ community, and build a sense of belonging for everyone—pets included.



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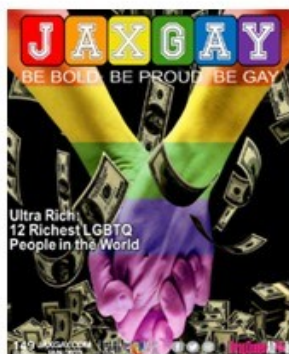
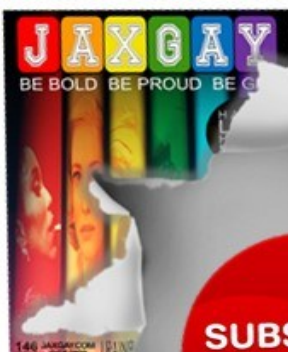
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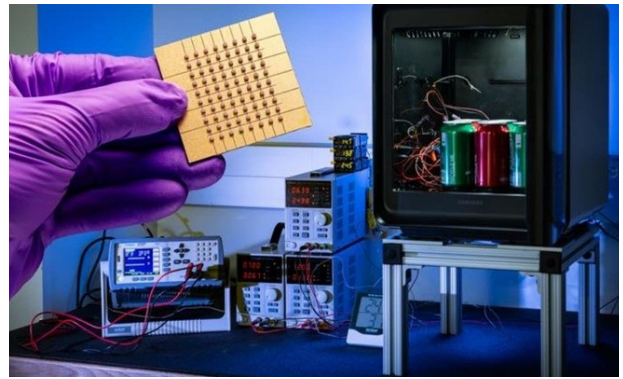
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Science & Technology

Samsung Team Hit 100% Cooling Efficiency With No Refrigerants

By Brandon Alsop



Korean electronics giant Samsung has teamed up with scientists at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in Maryland in the US, to develop solid-state thermoelectric-based refrigeration technology that will be a viable alternative to compressor-based refrigeration being used worldwide today.

Using nanoengineered materials, the researchers achieved twice as efficient devices as previously achieved using bulk thermoelectric materials, a press release said.

Globally, cooling requirements are met through compressor-based systems, where a refrigerant is pumped through a series of coils to transfer heat. While effective, these systems are bulky, energy-intensive, and use chemicals that harm the environment.

As the global population swells and demand for cooling balloons, more efficient alternatives to compressor-based cooling are needed. This is where thermoelectric cooling can

help, where electrons carry out the job of the coolant by moving heat through specialized semiconductor materials.

This negates the requirement for moving parts and chemicals, making next-generation cooling systems much more compact, reliable, and sustainable.

Nanoengineered Thermoelectric Cooling

Previous attempts at using thermoelectric cooling have relied on bulk materials to achieve cooling demands similar to those of commercially available refrigerators. However, this approach was marred by its low efficiency and heat-pumping capacity.

Researchers at APL in Maryland used nanoengineering to build controlled hierarchically engineered superlattice structures (CHES) to make thin films to achieve cooling. Initially aimed for national security applications, the approach has since been used for noninvasive cooling therapies. Partnering with Samsung, researchers at APL

have now transferred their technology for a large-scale application.

"It marks a significant leap in cooling technology and sets the stage for translating advances in thermoelectric materials into practical, large-scale, energy-efficient refrigeration applications," said Rama Venkatasubramanian, chief technologist for thermoelectrics at APL, in the press release.

Setting New Benchmarks

The research team at APL compared refrigeration modules using bulk thermoelectric materials and those using CHES-based thin films in standardized refrigeration tests and found that the latter achieves 100 percent efficiency improvement over traditional counterparts when operating at room temperature.

Modules built with CHES materials will be 75 percent more efficient overall, while a completely integrated refrigeration system will deliver a 70 percent improvement in efficiency, the press release added.

The feat is commendable not

just because of the improvement in efficiency but also because of how it was achieved. Nanoengineering thermoelectric materials made using CHESS thin-film technological approach use significantly lesser amount of material to be built.

For instance, during the experiments, each refrigeration unit operational was cooled using only 0.003 cubic centimeters of starting material, which is about the size of a grain of sand. This paves the way for large-scale deployment of the thermoelectric cooling

technique while requiring a small amount of starting material, making it cost-effective to deploy as well.

Interestingly, the researchers adopted a widely available approach to manufacturing high-efficiency solar cells and commercial LED lights for nanoengineering their thermoelectric materials.

“We used metal-organic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD) to produce the CHESS materials, a method well known for its scalability, cost-effectiveness, and ability

to support large-volume manufacturing,” added Jon Pierce, a senior research engineer at APL, in the press release.

“This thin-film technology has the potential to grow from powering small-scale refrigeration systems to supporting large building HVAC applications, similar to the way that lithium-ion batteries have been scaled to power devices as small as mobile phones and as large as electric vehicles,” concluded Venkatasubramanian.

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BUSINESS & TRAVEL

Pride Journey: Detroit, Michigan

By Joey Amato



There's a distinct pull to Detroit. Built on industry and powered by music, it's a city that wears its grit like a badge of honor. But beneath the steel and soul lies something softer: a place that opens its arms to creatives, dreamers, and outsiders. For LGBTQ travelers, Detroit isn't just rising—it's already resonating, thanks to its authenticity and inclusive spirit.

My stay began at the AC Hotel Detroit at the Bonstelle, where old meets new in the most seamless way. Adjacent to a historic theater in Midtown, the hotel blends sleek design with rich history. By night, the AC Lounge turns into a chic yet relaxed spot where LGBTQ travelers can enjoy expertly mixed cocktails and light bites. The location couldn't be better—close to Detroit's top theaters and Little Caesars Arena, it's the perfect launchpad for your Motor City adventure. The rooms at the AC Hotel Detroit are spacious and modern. My corner room came complete with luxurious linens and a beautiful view of the sunset.

Detroit's queer roots run deep. From underground ballroom scenes in the 1980s to today's thriving grassroots movements, the city's LGBTQ identity is woven into its culture. Unlike cities with one defined "gayborhood," queer life in Detroit is everywhere. You'll find it on the dance floor at Menjo's Complex—a historic venue where Grace Jones once graced the stage—or at Gigi's, a community staple known for its electric drag shows.

Each June, Detroit turns up the volume for Motor City Pride. Held at Hart Plaza, it's a vibrant celebration packed with music, performances, and community connection. But the celebration doesn't stop there. LGBTQ organizations keep the spirit alive year-round with art shows, advocacy panels, and public events that welcome locals and visitors alike.

Organizations like the Ruth Ellis Center have been pillars of support for decades. Named after a Black lesbian trailblazer, the center offers critical services for LGBTQ youth, including housing, health care, and mental health support. Its newest addition, the 44,000-

square-foot Clairmount Center, reflects the city's ongoing investment in its queer community.

Meanwhile, the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce uplifts LGBTQ professionals through mentorship, networking, and resources. Their commitment to economic empowerment proves that inclusivity and entrepreneurship go hand in hand.

Just a few block away from the hotel is Detroit Shipping Company—a lively collective of eateries, art spaces, and hangouts. Whether you're there for the beer garden, open mic nights, or Bollywood High Tea, it's a spot that celebrates Detroit's diversity in every sense. I loved the community feel of the space, which is welcoming from the moment you step through the door. They even organize a monthly event where local DJs can take turns spinning their favorite music.

Detroit's story isn't only told through its nightlife. One powerful stop was the Henry Ford Museum of American

Innovation in nearby Dearborn. It's more than a showcase of machines—it's a museum of progress. Standing before the bus where Rosa Parks made history was a humbling reminder that Detroit is at the crossroads of civil rights, past and present. The museum also highlights other modes of transportation and even features an old locomotive which guests can climb into. It's like stepping back in history.

You'll feel that same spirit at Michigan Central Station. Once an abandoned relic, it's been transformed into a gleaming center for tech and innovation, thanks to Ford's vision and investment. Today, it's a stunning symbol of Detroit's rebirth—and yes, a top-tier photo op.

Book lovers, prepare to be amazed at John K. King Used & Rare Books. Spanning four floors and over a million titles, this former glove factory is a labyrinth of stories. From well-worn paperbacks to rare first editions, it's the kind of place where you could lose an entire afternoon—and love every minute of it. I purchased an entire Britannica collection of books for under \$300. I probably would have ended up spending more time there, but it was a beautiful day outside,

so I wanted to take in the sun.

Nature and culture collide on the Detroit Riverwalk, a stunning 5½-mile path along the water. It's one of the most scenic stretches in the city, perfect for biking, strolling, or simply soaking in skyline views and public art.

For a quick bite, head to Jose's Tacos—a humble Midtown eatery where the flavors speak for themselves. Fresh tortillas, savory fajitas, and warm hospitality make it a local favorite, and a great spot to connect with Detroit's diverse food scene. If you are hungry for something sweet, head over to Astoria Pastry Shop in Greektown. You will want to try everything there.

Walk off lunch with a peaceful afternoon stroll at Belle Isle Park. This 982-acre island oasis is packed with hidden gems like the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory and the Belle Isle Aquarium—both steeped in history and beauty. Although the Aquarium was closed that afternoon, I did spend time wandering around the Conservatory as well as the grounds of Belle Isle.

And of course, no visit is complete without a stop at the Detroit Institute of Arts. With more than 65,000 works and a

long-standing commitment to showcasing diverse voices, the DIA stands as one of the nation's most progressive art museums. From exhibitions exploring gender and identity to pieces by renowned LGBTQ artists, it's a reflection of Detroit's cultural heartbeat. I've been to many museums around the country but the DIA exhibits one of the most extensive collections of historic works I've ever seen.

Dinner at Empire Kitchen & Cocktails closed out my day on a high note. The restaurant staff was stylish, the atmosphere intimate, and the food was packed with flavor. I ordered the white pizza which is something I don't usually go for, but was blown away. The garlic béchamel, spinach, sausage, and fresh mozzarella were balanced to perfection. Enjoying a Detroit-style pizza was high on my list of experiences.

Detroit doesn't need to impress—it just shows up, bold and unapologetic. It's the kind of place where you can be 100% you, no filter, no fuss. For LGBTQ travelers, that vibe isn't just cool—it's downright empowering.

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'Thunderbolts' Is Marvel, And Florence Pugh, In High Gear

By David Vandygriff



As they so often do in Marvel Land, worlds collide in “Thunderbolts.”

But in this refreshingly earthbound iteration of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the collision isn’t a matter of interplanetary strife.

“Thunderbolts” has been touted as the unlikely meeting of two of the dominant forces in 21st century American movies: Marvel and A24.

This isn’t a co-production, but much of the creative team and many of the stars have ties to the indie studio. “Thunderbolts” is directed by Jake Schreier, who has directed many episodes of the A24 series “Beef,” and was written by Joanna Calo (also a “Beef” veteran) and Eric Pearson (a Marvel veteran). The connections go further: cinematographer Andrew Droz Palermo (“A Ghost Story,” “The Green Knight”), editor Harry Yoon (“Minari”) and a score by the band Son Lux (“Everything Everywhere All At Once”).

Some trailers for “Thunderbolts” have highlighted these connections, perhaps in hopes of a little A24

auteur cool rubbing off on Hollywood’s superhero factory. It’s also a sign of how rough things have gotten for Marvel that, after a string of misfires, it’s leaning on the studio behind “Swiss Army Man” for its latest would-be blockbuster.

Does that make “Thunderbolts” a hipper superhero movie? Can you expect “Babygirl”-like scenes of Black Widow drinking a glass of milk? The answer, of course, is that “Thunderbolts” has no more indie cred than “Avatar.” What it is, though, is the best Marvel movie in years.

“Thunderbolts,” about a group of MCU rejects who band together after CIA director Valentina Allegra de Fontaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) tries to erase them and their covert program, is both a return to form for Marvel and something a little different. While there’s plenty of franchise building going on, “Thunderbolts” — the title of which bears an asterisk — is pleasantly stand-alone, and its spurts of spectacle more deftly proceed out of an tenderly told story.

If there’s an influence on “Thunderbolts,” it’s less A24

than James Gunn. It borrows a little of the misfit irreverence of “Guardians of the Galaxy” and “The Suicide Squad.” But Schreier’s film is leaner and less antic than those movies, and it serves as an IMAX-sized platform for the increasingly obvious movie-star talents of Florence Pugh.

In the opening moments of “Thunderbolts,” Pugh’s Yelena Belova, a veteran of the Soviet assassin Black Widow program, melancholily stands atop a skyscraper. “There’s something wrong with me,” she says. “An emptiness.” She drops, a parachute opens, and her narration continues. “Or maybe I’m just bored.”

It’s a telling opening for a film that wrestles sometimes earnestly, sometimes a little glibly, with malaise and depression. Yelena is searching for meaning in her life, dragged down by guilt and shame from her past, a pain that even her relentlessly chipper father Alexei, the self-proclaimed Red Guardian (David Harbour, magnificent), can’t quell. When Yelena, on a mission, brutalizes a hallway full of armed guards — a shot that, as I critic, am contractually

obligated to note is styled after the famous one from Park Chan-wook's "Oldboy" — Schreier films it from overhead in a shadowy ballet.

Shadows and death drape "Thunderbolts." When Yelena is dispatched on what she says will be her last job, she's surprised to encounter others like her — include the disgraced John Walker (Wyatt Russell) and the fight-mimicking Taskmaster (Olga Kurylenko) — sent to the same location. After some initial tussling, they realize they — like the protagonists of "Toy Story 3" — are standing inside of an incinerator. Adding to the confusion of their predicament is a guy with no apparent powers who simply introduces himself as "Bob" (Lewis Pullman, bringing a sensitivity rarely found in these movies).

They aren't quite a bizarre Avengers, but they — including Sebastian Stan's Bucky Barnes, who joins later — are all the products of dubious government programs that instill less patriotism than their more plainly heroic counterparts. As a group, they're plagued by doubt and uncertainty, and they're more inclined to bicker than give rousing speeches. And whenever anyone brushes too closely with Bob, they drift back

into the darkest chapters of their own pasts that pull them like a deadweight toward suicidal thoughts.

Who, exactly, Bob turns out to be furthers this theme in "Thunderbolts," which never feels like it's lurching from one action set piece to another. That the final act of the movie is essentially set in a headspace, rather than above a threatened metropolis, is a testament to the interiority (not a word that often comes up in Marvel movies) of "Thunderbolts," a film that finds vivid comic-book imagery to render authentic real-life emotions.

That's always been the promise of a good comic book, but it's fair to say that the Marvel movies have recently found that tone elusive. When Louis-Dreyfus, looking just as home in Washington, D.C., as she was in "Veep," as De Fontaine declares, "The Avengers are not walking through that door," it's an acknowledgment — like then-Celtics coach Rick Pitino once vowed of Larry Bird — that "Thunderbolts" is here to make the most of what it's got. Of course, that there are, in fact, more "Avengers" films on the way slightly diminishes the sentiment.

But they won't be missed in

"Thunderbolts." All the assembled parts here, including an especially high-quality cast (even Wendell Pierce!) work together seamlessly in a way that Marvel hasn't in some time. Most of all, Pugh commands every bit of the movie. It's less a revelation than a big-budget confirmation of the screen power of an actor who also has gone from A24 ("Midsommar") to Marvel stardom with ease.

"Thunderbolts," a Walt Disney Co. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for strong violence, language, thematic elements, and some suggestive and drug references. Running time: 126 minutes. Three stars out of four.



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Life and Style

How Pride Is Preparing For A World Without DEI

By Becky Nixon



For Pride events across America, the Trump administration's federal funding threats have led to a minefield of new challenges. Public parks, school districts, and corporations alike are bending the knee to avoid losing financial resources, as the president strong-arms an unpopular agenda rooted in Christian nationalism. The message so far has been clear: Do as we say or be punished.

Fortunately, the people who put together your local Pride each year are tough. Really tough. They have the type of "make it happen" energy and leadership it takes to gather communities and push back, qualities we need in abundance right now as LGBTQ+ erasure becomes part of the national political agenda. You want your local Pride leader in your corner, and this year, they want you in theirs too.

I asked five Pride organizers what they're seeing in the field this year; here's what they had to say.

"If we don't like something, we will call it to action"

Recurring Twin Cities Pride title sponsor Target is headquartered in Minneapolis.

When Executive Director Andi Otto received word that the organization would be updating its stance on diversity and inclusion efforts, he and his team made the decision to decline the \$50,000 sponsorship and crowdfund the resulting budget hole. The pivot occurred at the moment anti-DEI executive orders were making national headlines, which led to a blitz of donations. By the end of March, the crowdfunding effort had brought in \$113,500 from 1,691 donors, according to the organization.

"I always want to be really clear that [Target] continues to offer support and sponsorship to us. But it just didn't sit right with me," Otto says. He said the DEI changes that most influenced the decision include Target's choice to no longer participate in the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, a voluntary corporate scorecard that has been around since 2002.

"My question was 'Why?'" Otto says. "To me, that screams, 'We're hiding something.' The HRC [index] is self-reported. If you're not committed to saying, 'Hey, we have these policies,' what are you changing? I felt as though I wasn't given a clear

picture."

Otto says the crowdfunding effort surpassed expectations. "Never in my wildest dreams did I think the response would be what it was. What's even more powerful than us getting the funding is the very clear statement [the community made] to the entire population that we will put our money where our mouth is. If we don't like something, we will call it to action."

Still, at the time of our interview, Twin Cities Pride was navigating a \$200,000 shortfall. "Corporations just aren't responding to us. That seems to be the road they're taking."

"TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE"

In Whiting, Indiana, a town of 4,500 people just southeast of Chicago, Pride organizers fought to exist from the start.

After the City Council and the mayor rejected requests for a Pride proclamation in 2023, an estimated 50 people spoke at subsequent council meetings to voice their support. A three-hour block party was eventually allowed, giving organizers one month to put together the inaugural Whiting Pride. The event attracted 400 people and raised about \$5,000, mostly

through cash donations.

"There are some big organizations here, so we considered putting together different sponsor level packages, but due to the current political climate we want our community members to have grassroots activism," says Bridget McCullough-Favela, Whiting Pride's corporate secretary. Last year, the event had 12 booths, a benchmark the organizers expect to build upon now that they've had a full calendar year to prepare.

"What would be productive is for people to continue to show up, not be discouraged by the rhetoric that's going around, and take a more active role instead of being a bystander and taking events like this for granted," she says.

"We're going to find the money"

At San Francisco Pride's March member meeting, the organization announced a shortfall of about \$300,000 and named five sponsors that had not renewed in an effort to alert the community, said Executive Director Suzanne Ford.

"We didn't disclose with prejudice. I provided what they said about a lack of funds," she says. "I did say that all of them had been sponsors with us for years, and it was out of the blue that they went away. I'm trying to put a face on it because those companies have been with us so long." At the time of our interview, at least one sponsor had re-initiated sponsorship conversations as a result.

"We're going to find the money," Ford says. "People are looking to make a statement that they don't agree with what's happening out of Washington. Here's a concrete way to do that."

Ford also emphasized the importance of not letting anger and malaise overtake the queer experience. SF Pride's 2025 theme is "Queer Joy Is Resistance."

"We cannot let them take our joy. We cannot just become an angry bunch of people," she says. "There is a verifiable reason to have anger, and I want people to have the ability to express that. But I also want people in our community to be with each other and enjoy each other. We can do both."

"I wanted to have community in my community"

In 2018 Jason Rocha helped start a Pride festival in The Woodlands, a Houston suburb in a county that voted 72 percent for Donald Trump last year. "I wanted to have community in my community," he says of The Woodlands Pride. In 2023 the organization joined a lawsuit against the state of Texas regarding Senate Bill 12, legislation that would criminalize any type of performance in front of minors deemed "sexual" (essentially, a drag ban). A federal court declared the law unconstitutional, and while that ruling has been appealed, the ban remains blocked from enforcement.

"We had a conservative oil

company sponsor us for our second or third year, so I intentionally put them at the front of the park where they get the most traffic," he says. "I wanted them to see that it's not bad. Just turn off Fox News and live real life with real people. They were thriving; every time I walked by, they had a packed house."

After the lawsuit, the company and others dropped future sponsorship ("at least they said why — others quiet-quit us," Rocha says). Because the organization has focused on smaller donors since its inception, it's been able to absorb the funding blow. Rocha explains how, even for elements like security, it can be difficult to fully disentangle from resources that are federally funded and therefore subject to political pressure.

"We hire off-duty police officers because that's required for the permit," he says. "We're paying them, but they're wearing uniforms that I assume are provided by the county. The guns that they carry are provided by the county. And the county gets federal funding. They're going to pull little bits here and there until it all unravels and you're stuck with a picnic at a private park."

"You have to be a chess player"

DEI mudslinging aside, recession fears are also shaping the sponsorship landscape. Julia Music at Ferndale Pride in Michigan said the organization usually has

next year's naming rights sponsor lined up by the end of the current year's festival. But last year, that didn't happen. Some non-LGBTQ+ factors have been giving sponsors cold feet, Music says.

"One of the [past sponsors] is alcohol, and they're very concerned about the tariffs," they say. "They have no idea what that looks like, as far as how things are changing, so some of them are canceling any event that doesn't sell liquor, and we don't sell liquor at our Pride festival."

Music emphasizes the distinction between corporations themselves and their employees, with whom many Pride organizations have had fruitful, years-long partnerships. "That's been hard, because the people inside those companies are LGBT people," they say. "They're fighting to get that

money back. They want to come to the Pride festival and show off what they do. So we're trying to be gentle with those situations. You just have to be a chess player and play the long game."

How to support Pride efforts this year

You can, of course, post selfies and jam out to the DJ at Pride this year (and every year). There are also actions you can take that will more directly support organizations as they grapple with various new resourcing challenges.

First, if you can donate money, please do so. When you donate to an organization, you become more invested in its mission, and this sense of purpose can be an antidote to feelings of isolation or emptiness (there's also a tax deduction here, so keep those receipts). "Set up a recurring

donation to your Pride organization, just \$5 a month," says Rocha. "If we had half of our attendees donate \$5 a month last year, that'd be \$60 times 4,000 people – that's a lot of money."

If your budget is too tight to donate money, remember that you can also donate your time. Several directors said day-of volunteering makes a huge difference; consider sprinkling a volunteer shift into the day's festivities to lend an extra set of helping hands.

"A lot more people want to participate on some level," Music says of the vibe shift this spring. "I see a lot of people energized around the festival itself. They want to volunteer, or want to host a fundraiser. There's all sorts of energy going on around the event, and I think because of that we're going to be able to make it this year."



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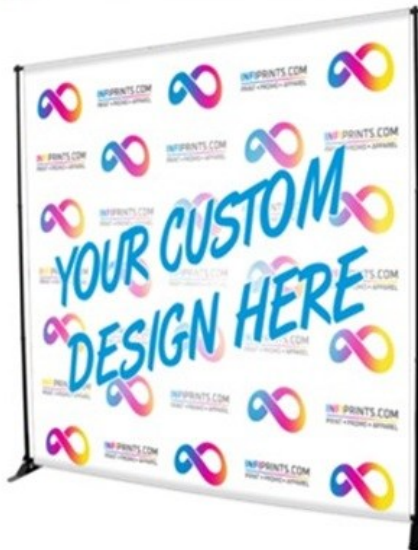


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Kevin Aviance Is 'Lucky To Be Alive' After Serious Health Scare

By Brian Griffin



Kevin Aviance, the iconic drag artist and Black queer New York City nightlife legend whose music helped define a generation of ballroom and club culture, is recovering in the hospital after a life-threatening health emergency, his team announced Monday.

In a statement posted to social media, Aviance's family said he began having trouble breathing at home over the weekend and initially believed it was an asthma attack. But his condition worsened rapidly, and he was rushed to the emergency room. There, he was diagnosed with pneumonia and septic poisoning. Sepsis, also known as septic poisoning, is a dangerous complication that happens when the body's response to an infection spirals out of control, triggering inflammation that can shut down vital organs. According to his team, doctors told Aviance he's "incredibly lucky to be alive."

The statement says he remains hospitalized, is on oxygen, and is being closely monitored. If his recovery continues smoothly, he may be discharged within a few days.

"This is an emotional time for Kevin, his family, and all of us who love him," the statement read. "Sometimes our bodies whisper before they scream. We have to listen and slow down."

"Kevin is currently on oxygen and under close medical supervision to ensure the septic infection is fully cleared from his body," Aviance's publicist, Len Evans stated. "He is still battling pneumonia and remains in stable condition while resting. We ask everyone to please keep Kevin in your thoughts and prayers during this time."

Evans said the health scare followed weeks of nonstop work. "He stretched himself too thin working nonstop the last few weeks to release his new single," Evans said. "He's spent many hours in the recording studio finishing up his album and doing back-to-back gigs—it just all caught up to him."

After surviving a brutal anti-gay hate crime in 2006 and retreating from the spotlight, Aviance experienced a career renaissance in recent years.

Aviance, 56, a member of the House of Aviance and one of the most celebrated figures in

LGBTQ+ nightlife, is best known for hits like "Din Da Da" and "Cunty"—the latter sampled by Beyoncé on 2022's *Renaissance*. His influence spans decades and genres, from club anthems and fashion runways to recent DJ sets across North America, including his CVNTY Ball Tour-backed by The Advocate's parent company, equalpride.

News of Aviance's hospitalization prompted an immediate wave of love and support from fans and fellow performers.

"Sending Love, Light, and Healing prayers," wrote music icon Crystal Waters. Comedian and *Hey Qween!* host Jonny McGovern called Aviance a "legend," adding, "Sending all my love and good energy to our queen."

Drag artist and *RuPaul's Drag Race* alum Nicky Doll wrote, "Sending all the positive energies possible your way Kevin!"

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News & Politics

Tennessee Student Banned From Graduation After Coming Out

By Glenda Rutherford

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cats outta the bag 🌈



A student-athlete who was banned from graduating with her classmates after she came out in a social media post is suing her high school, local NBC and ABC affiliates WSMV and WTVB report.

Morgan Armstrong was a senior at Tennessee Christian Preparatory School (TCPS), a private Christian school in Chattanooga. She played on the school's basketball team and earned her diploma.

Then she came out.

"Cats outta the bag," Armstrong wrote in the post dated April 23, according to court documents obtained by WTVB. The post contained pictures of Armstrong with her girlfriend, including the pair kissing.

Armstrong subsequently posted a separate comment urging others to like and comment on the post.

"go like and comment on my post guys bc if no one on my socials knew I was gay then they sure as hell do now so this is a big thing tbh, also I'm kinda scared about the facebook comments bc I have some ruthless trump supporting "jesus" mfs on there,"

Armstrong wrote in the comment.

Following the post and comment, Armstrong and her family were summoned to the school and told that she was suspended and prevented from further school activities.

The school claimed the comment was "vulgar and disrespectful" and "produced the wrong perception of who Tennessee Christian is and what we represent, Christ." The letter said the comment, not the post, "reflected on the institution, faculty, staff, alumni, and students in the most negative possible way."

The letter also contained a threat that "records of posts and messages will be forwarded to colleges and universities as part of a comprehensive student file."

"I was shocked and then I went to anger," Monica Armstrong, Morgan's mother, told WSMV.

In her lawsuit, Armstrong claims she was not talking about folks at school but "members of Morgan's own family with whom she was connected on social media — people who, in Morgan's view, profess but do not practice

Christian principles of love, acceptance, and compassion."

Armstrong is claiming the school violated its policies on suspensions, noting that she received a far harsher penalty for a first-time violation, as well as breach of contract.

The school's 2024-2025 Parent-Student Handbook appears to apply a blanket agreement between the student and the school regarding social media activity.

Students at the school agree to a set of rules about their social media posts to "TCPS-sponsored sites or other websites or social media (including but not limited to Text messages, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.)."

"Students who choose to post editorial content to websites or other forms of media (texts, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) must ensure that their submission does not reflect poorly upon the school nor violate behavioral guidelines as outlined in the school Parent and Student handbook," the handbook states.

School administrators issued a statement denying the

allegations in the lawsuit.

"Tennessee Christian Preparatory School firmly rejects the misleading allegations outlined in a recent lawsuit supposedly filed against the school. As of 11:00 AM on May 22, we have yet to be served with process for the alleged lawsuit. The administration and Board of Trustees express deep disappointment over the inaccuracies contained in the alleged filing by Daniel A. Horwitz with Horwitz Law in Nashville.

Despite this supposed legal dispute, Tennessee Christian remains fully committed to delivering Morgan Armstrong's diploma. Our goal continues to

be the academic and personal success of each student, even in the face of conflict or disagreement. We wish Morgan Armstrong the very best as she continues her academics in college."

Armstrong is asking that her school records be cleared of the incident, that the school refrain from "sabotaging Morgan's college admissions process," and that she and her parents be awarded unspecified compensation for monetary losses.

She and her family staged a mini-protest outside the school on the graduation night.

"It was difficult having to stand across the street knowing that

the people I've grown up with for the last four years were able to walk across the stage and I wasn't allowed to," Armstrong told WSMV.

The school follows a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and Christianity. The handbook classifies same-sex sexual relations on the same level as sex with animals and incest.

"We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God," the handbook states.



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BUSINESS & TRAVEL

Regardless Of Corp Retreat, Queer Businesses Are Still Here For LGBTQ+ Communities

By David Lauterstein



I've been celebrating Pride since 1993 when I came out of the closet and embraced my truth as a queer human being. Back in the 90s, the groups that marched in the parades were largely community organizations and local businesses that directly supported LGBTQ+ people. However, for the past decade or so, Pride Month has become an opportunistic season in corporate America: rebranded rainbow logos, capsule merch collections, and hashtags full of supportive intentions. As a gay man and the CEO of a clothing company that serves the queer community year-round, I watched this shift with both cautious optimism and a wary eye. On one hand, visibility matters. On the other hand, commodification does not amount to liberation.

But this year feels different.

Some of the same companies that once proudly displayed the Pride flag now seem to have folded it up and relegated it to the back of the closet. Citing security concerns for their employees and changing consumer sentiments, many of

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our "corporate allies" have turned their backs on our community. When our representation depends on a quarterly risk report to shareholders, we must recognize that we are line items in their marketing budgets, not living, breathing human beings deserving of dignity, visibility, and respect.

So let's be clear: Pride was never designed to be a marketing event, nor did it start out as a party. Pride was born out of protest. In 1969, queer people — many of them trans women of color — stood up to the indignity of police raids in gay spaces like the Stonewall Inn. Filled with fury and an unshakable conviction that they too deserved life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, our queer ancestors fought back against society's oppression. Their actions are not just historical facts, they are the foundation upon which modern Pride celebrations and our rights as equal citizens are built.

After over 50 years of incremental progress, the pendulum seems to be swinging back against us. As a

community, we are watching attempts to erase us happen in real time, from regressive legislative initiatives to misguided culture wars to scaled-back corporate campaigns. Businesses are showing us that they are willing to turn their backs on us as soon as we become inconvenient.

So now, more than ever, we need to have each other's backs.

Those of us in the queer community and our true allies understand that visibility is not a seasonal campaign. It doesn't just happen in June. It is a daily act of courage to exist authentically in a world that too often tells us we should do no such thing. For us, Pride isn't optional. It is rooted in our very survival. It is not defined by who sponsors it. Pride belongs to us.

We see Pride in the grassroots fundraising efforts to fill in the gaps where corporate and federal funding has dried up. We see Pride in the community-organized marches and dance parties that give queer people spaces to rejoice in their

identity. And we see Pride in every individual who walks down the street, living their truth, even when it might feel unsafe to do so.

So yes, Pride might look different this year. Shelves may not be filled with rainbow-adorned t-shirts and tablecloths. The hashtags may be fewer. The corporations may be quieter. But we will not be quiet. Our joy, our resilience, our solidarity—none of that is for sale. And none of

it can be erased by the absence of rainbow paint jobs in June.

To our allies: Thank you for not turning your backs on us in the face of enormous pressure. You show up not just with words, but with actions. Your support of queer-owned businesses, your willingness to speak out against anti-LGBTQ+ policies, and your desire to educate yourself and others is the definition of real allyship.

To my fellow LGBTQ+ people: Our existence is not up for negotiation. Our identities are not marketing trends. We are more visible and more powerful than ever.

We are still here. We are still queer. And we are not going anywhere.

David Lauterstein is the CEO and co-owner of Nasty Pig, an NYC-based queer brand that has served the LGBTQ+ community for over 30 years.

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