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# Between THE Lines<sup>TM</sup>

## ENDANGERED QUEER SPACES

Why Gay Bars Don't  
Always Survive

## A TRANSPHOBIC RANT IN TRAVERSE

It's a Very FAFO Mood  
Online For One Salon Owner

## FIGHTING BACK IN HAMTRAMCK

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(Clockwise, from top left) Ryan Bernier as Dorothy, Vince Kelley as Blanche, Christopher Kamm as Sophia and Adam Graber as Rose. Photo: Murray and Peter Present

## CORRECTION

In "Honoring the Past, Defining the Future" in the July 6 issue, we used the incorrect pronouns for Jupiter Contreras. They use they/them/their pronouns. We are sorry and regret the error.



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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It might feel like the world is nothing but wildfires, angry transphobes and an endless air travel nightmare, but actually, we're sitting in a sweet spot. The next presidential election is still 15 months away, and distractions from the news abound. Tune in to what really matters — spending time with people you love (or at least like), doing things that make you happy. Hit up a sweet Barbie brunch and screening, pick up some adventurous creations at a queer artist market, see a fun prom-themed musical or join a meetup for queer Jewish families at a local park.

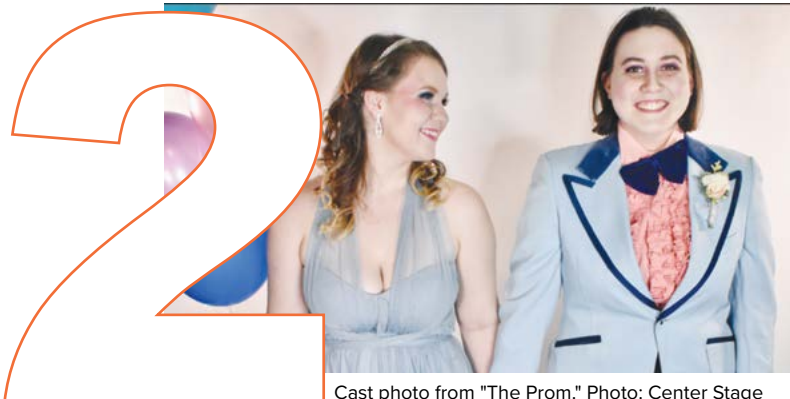


## Do Brunch with Barbie

Let's go Barbie! A recent Fox News headline proclaims: "'Barbie' Film 'Forgets Core Audience' in Favor of Trans Agenda and Gender Themes," but that's not the only reason to go see the new flick — there's also an opportunity to add brunch to the experience at The Maple Theater. Mark McMillan of McMillan Behavioral Health and Addiction Services, which is hosting the event on July 23, says, "Join us for a booze free brunch at The Maple Theater, then grab a popcorn and a soda and be amongst the first to see 'Barbie.' Barbie herself will be joining us for brunch, so get ready for your best Barbie photo."

The event features a strolling brunch, fun mocktail bar open throughout brunch, popcorn/drink specials and, of course, a screening of the new "Barbie" movie. Each ticket includes a donation to Ferndale Pride. "MBHS has been a proud supporter of Ferndale Pride for several years with our sponsorship of the Recovery Education Zone, so this fundraiser event seemed like a natural fit," McMillan adds. "Wear pink, have great food and have a fabulous time watching the 'Barbie' movie in a safe and sober environment."

July 23, The Maple Theater (4135 W. Bloomfield Road, Bloomfield Township). Brunch starts at 11:30 a.m., followed by "Barbie" screening at 12:30 p.m. Buy tickets at [bit.ly/3K0c3Ky](https://bit.ly/3K0c3Ky).



Cast photo from "The Prom." Photo: Center Stage

## See 'The Prom'

The Center Stage production of "The Prom," the big Broadway hit and feature film, is particularly well-timed, given the ongoing culture wars centered on young adults in the LGBTQ+ community. In the musical, high-schooler Emma simply wants to take her girlfriend to the prom, but winds up becoming the face of a movement when the PTA throws up a roadblock and four Broadway has-beens arrive on the scene to save the day. "'The Prom' captures all the humor and heart of a classic musical comedy while delivering a universal message of love and acceptance," promotional materials read.

Aug. 2-11, Midland Center for the Arts (1801 W. St. Andrews Road, Midland). Reserve tickets at [bit.ly/43qhxoQ](https://bit.ly/43qhxoQ).



## Go Greek with the Detroit Black Pride Society

The Detroit Black Pride Society will host its annual gathering, named "We Black Outside Weekend," July 28-30. This year, the focus will have a Greek theme. Festivities include the Colors of Pride Ball on July 29 featuring Detroit ballroom houses at The Compound, a Greeks N Athletes Cookout and an open mic night hosted by NuEra Sunshine entitled, "The Greeks, The Greats and The Geniuses 3: We Back," where attendees can share poetry and comedy. Most events are free, but advance, ticketed registration is required for the ball at [bit.ly/3K31R3M](https://bit.ly/3K31R3M).

July 28-30, various locations. Learn more at the above link.





### Attend a Queer Artist Bazaar

In the market for unique gifts (for a loved one, or just for you)? Not Sorry Goods is the place to be July 30, when the store will kick off its second annual Queer Bazaar Artist Market at its flagship location in Ferndale. Local queer artists will be on hand to share their crafts and vintage finds. You'll also find live, all-ages drag performances featuring Eros Lee, Astoria Addams, Jessi Hex and Zoey Gaychanel, a chance to participate in a live embroidery class, music by DJ J Peacock and drinks. Featured vendors include Black Sun Creations, Bob Toast, Cuddles & Blunts, The Dom Press, Wiggly.JPG, Stay Within and live airbrush art by ffty.

July 30, 1-5 p.m., Not Sorry Goods (22963 Woodward Ave., Ferndale). Visit [notsorrygoods.com](http://notsorrygoods.com) for more info.

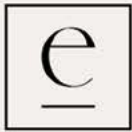


### Join Other Queer Jewish Families at the Park

The Detroit JCC and Queer Jewish Families invites LGBTQ+ Jewish families to a party in the park July 30. The event, geared toward families with babies and kids under 10, will be held at Normandy Oaks Park in Royal Oak starting at 11 a.m. Highlights include the park's splash pad, popsicles, snacks and organized summer games. Learn more about Detroit JCC's JFamily program, which offers experiences "from bump, to birth, to B'nai Mitzvah & beyond," at [jfamily.jccdet.org/welcome](http://jfamily.jccdet.org/welcome).

July 30, 11 a.m., Normandy Oaks Park (4234 Delemere Blvd., Royal Oak).

Please check [lgbtdetroit.org](http://lgbtdetroit.org) for the most up-to-date scheduling information.



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# Why This Detroit Queer Club Flamed Out

## Two Weeks After Flaming Embers Opened, It Was Gone

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Those planning to dance the night away at downtown Detroit's newest queer bar and nightclub, Flaming Embers, have already missed the opportunity.

Back in April, Detroit Sports Bar and Grille, located outside Comerica Park on the first floor of Broderick Tower, swapped their game-day concept for a queer sensibility. The space was rechristened Flaming Embers — just as it had been named years ago when it was an upscale steakhouse — then reopened, but only for a flaming hot minute. Following a soft opening in April and a big event in early May, the establishment abruptly changed course and reverted to its previous identity as a sports bar on May 18.

DjCent Detroit, a 30-year veteran

of the club scene, was hired as a DJ for the grand opening of Flaming Embers. She told BTL she was “shocked” it closed so soon, especially after what was seemingly a very successful night. With a majority white male clientele, the two-floor club was packed, she reports. DjCent Detroit added that by the time of the grand opening, a decision had been made to obscure the windows on the first floor; originally, the interior of the club was visible to the public.

“Beautiful club, beautiful space,” DjCent Detroit said. “I only heard good praises [from] the patrons that came. [The] majority of them that I did hear from after the party had a ball.”

Not all patrons were as enamored with the effort. University of Michigan graduate student Matthew Bakko said he enjoyed the music when he and his

friends attended the grand opening of the club — but that's the only thing about Flaming Embers that impressed him.

“It was not good,” Bakko said. “It was strange. It did not feel like any queer or gay bar that I have really ever been to. So, first, it was basically unmarked. Everything was so gray and so drab.”

He said the only thing that indicated it was a queer bar was that they had “RuPaul's Drag Race” playing on the TVs over the bar. “It didn't feel very welcoming at all,” he said, adding that he felt those in charge were phoning it in.

Clearly, Bakko and DjCent Detroit had different experiences at Flaming Embers. Bakko said he and his friends knew immediately they wouldn't be back and that he wasn't at all surprised that it closed. He compared it to an

event he attended earlier that night that the Detroit Square Dance Society put on, a queer dance and potluck.

“It was one of the most fun and inclusive queer spaces I've been to in the city,” Bakko said. “Flaming Embers couldn't compete.”

Detroit's Tiger Onyx wasn't able to make it to Flaming Embers while it was open. His friends checked it out and reported back.

“I heard that it had potential,” said Tiger, who was named Mr. Michigan Leather from 2020 to 2022 and Mr. Liberty Leather 2019 to 2022. By day he works for Avalon Healing Center as the advocacy services coordinator. “We were joking that it could be the new summertime spot for us. The location was good coming in from Tiger Games and [for] when we do ‘Sunday fun day’ after brunch. We were excited for having it right there

near the park.” He explained on Sundays a large group of friends meet for brunch and socializing.

Tiger said he was surprised it closed so quickly, but added the community has noticed that queer bars can't seem to survive in Detroit. Longtime queer bar The Woodward burned down last year and Briggs Detroit is no more. He said pop-ups and parties at places like Bookie's are where the community gather for lack of options when it comes to queer nightclubs these days, but adds that there remains an unmet need for the community to gather and party at a dedicated queer space.

“I'm not sure,” Tiger said, as to why queer bars have lacked longevity in downtown Detroit, “but I think if we actually had one that was able to come and stay, we could definitely turn it

See **Flaming Embers**, page 10



# The Supreme Court Ruled in Favor of Anti-LGBTQ+ Website Creator. What Does It Mean for Michigan?

## Community Leaders Fear the Ruling Could Open the Floodgates for Anti-LGBTQ+ Discrimination

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

In a very sad ending to Pride Month, the Supreme Court ruled Friday, June 30 in favor of a Colorado web designer who, citing religious objections, refuses to design websites for same-sex weddings. This decision marks, according to the ACLU, the first time the Supreme Court has permitted a business open to the public to turn away customers in defiance of a nondiscrimination law such as the one Colorado has in place.

The case was brought at the behest of Lorie Smith of 303 Creative, who told CNN following the ruling that “the court’s decision yesterday protects speech not just for me but the LGBT website designer and every other artist out there,” said Smith. “Nobody should be punished by the government for speaking consistent with their beliefs. I create speech for a living. When speech is involved, speech should be protected.”

While the decision was framed by Smith and her lawyer, as well as the conservative majority on the court, to center on free speech and not religious freedoms, the decision did not fool the three liberal justices who apparently saw it for what it was.

“By issuing this new license to discriminate in a case brought by a company that seeks to deny same-sex couples the full and equal enjoyment of its services, the immediate, symbolic effect of the decision is to mark gays and lesbians for second-class status,” Justice Sonya Sotomayor wrote in her dissent, which she insisted on reading out loud in its entirety — some 20 minutes’ worth — in open court. “The opinion of the Court is, quite literally, a notice that reads: ‘Some services may be denied to same-sex couples.’”

Sotomayor went on to say the ruling could open the door to allowing venues to eventually discriminate against others, such as interracial couples. Justice Neil Gorsuch responded curtly to the accusation. “Our decision today does not concern — much less endorse — anything like the ‘straight couples only’ notices the dissent conjures out of thin air,” he said.

Here in Michigan, the ruling was hailed as a victory by the owners of homophobic wedding venue The Broadway Avenue in Grand Rapids, which has been under fire since opening last year and revealing that their religious beliefs would not allow them to hold same-sex weddings in their space. This

violated Grand Rapids’ non-discrimination ordinance, but even after being cited, the venue held its ground and celebrated last week’s ruling on social media.

“Over the past year we have learned what it truly means to stand for Jesus in all that we do,” the venue said via a Facebook post following the ruling. “We have learned to be completely dependent on Him which is where He loves to meet us in our needs with such tenderness and care.”

Unfortunately, owners Hannah and Nick Natale apparently do not believe Jesus’ tenderness and care extends to queer people. Instead, they choose to send a hateful message of exclusion and division. Thankfully, not all venue owners in the state share the Natales’ closed-mindedness.

Tabitha Mason is a managing partner of Zingerman’s Cornman Farms, a Dexter venue that hosts weddings and private parties. She was particularly bothered by the ruling.

“I was raised that looking after the marginalized is one of God’s characteristics, too,” said Mason, who said she grew up in a religious home and that her first name is Biblical. Tabitha, found in Acts 9, was known for her good works and acts of love. “It’s bigotry, fear and hate — not faith — spurring homophobia. The recent Supreme Court rulings are incredibly disappointing.”

Mason went on to say that venues that discriminate based on gender identity or sexual orientation only hurt the wedding industry. “Venues and vendors that refuse to serve LGBTQ+ couples should find another industry to be in. They aren’t welcome in my world. We celebrate love, not hate.”

What’s more, Mason said, is that The Broadway Avenue, which she connected with via social media before they opened, “disgusts and infuriates” her. “But, also, I’m glad to know how they really feel. ... I was excited to have made a venue owner ‘friend.’ When the story first broke and I discovered their anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs, I immediately stopped connecting with them.”

Mason said Sotomayor summed up her own feelings succinctly.

“She said, ‘LGBT people do not seek any special treatment. All they seek is to exist in public. To inhabit public spaces on the same terms and conditions as everyone else.’ I am not interested in working with, providing support to or spending money with any business that chooses to discriminate against any group of people.”



## What’s next?

The ruling, legal experts worry, might just be the opening of the floodgates as it relates to businesses discriminating against queer people. “The Supreme Court ruled for the first time in its history that some businesses have a constitutional right to discriminate against LGBTQ+ customers,” said Jay Kaplan of ACLU of Michigan’s LGBTQ+ Project. “While the decision was written in a way that should apply to a quite narrow set of businesses, the fact that the high court has used free speech to override non-discrimination protections even in limited circumstances is a seriously disturbing milestone. Everyone should be worried about the damage the court may do to our civil rights laws in the future.”

Kaplan reiterated that the ruling applies only to services that are customized and contribute to the overall message that the

business conveys in its product. Despite that, Kaplan said that since the conservative majority on the high court is “so focused on expanding the scope or religious liberty and rolling back civil rights protections, I fear that this decision may be interpreted to license discrimination by many more businesses.”

Erin Knott, executive director of Equality Michigan, agreed.

“This unprecedented decision will have a harmful impact on the LGBTQ+ community,” she said. “It’s dangerous and outrageous, especially during a year when the LGBTQ+ community continues to be targeted by extremist politicians and leaders across the country, and right here in Michigan, with anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, policy proposals, etc.”

No one should face discrimination for who they are or who they love, Knott added, but “the Supreme Court’s ruling threatens to normalize such prejudice and discrimination.”





Miss Woodward 2018. Photo: Andrew Potter

# Our Endangered Queer Spaces

## A New Book Tackles Why Gay Bars Are Dying — and Why We Shouldn't Let Them

BY AARON FOLEY

When The Woodward caught fire and subsequently closed in 2022, Metro Detroit lost not only a central gathering place for LGBTQ+ residents, but a crucial site of queer history. But even if it hadn't come to an untimely demise, its status as a bar that catered to a primarily Black clientele was always endangered.

"The fastest declining types of gay bars have been bars serving people of color and bars serving men's kink communities," says Greggor Mattson, an Oberlin College professor and author of "Who Needs Gay Bars? Bar-Hopping Through America's Endangered LGBTQ+ Places."

One could also point to the former R&R

Saloon, a leather bar in Southwest Detroit that closed in the 2010s and has had some false starts of revival since. Is it that Detroit doesn't have room for these kinds of bars, or is there something to be said at large about gay bars?

Mattson tackles the latter question in his book, in which he details hitting the road across America, stopping at 39 states and racking up 10,000 miles on his car while visiting. Small towns. Midsize metros. Big cities. Mattson noticed at least one commonality everywhere: Every bar was vital to the queer community because it was their community, particularly in smaller places where being out isn't always tolerated.

But Mattson also noticed that gay bars varied in how they treated patrons of color, how they

treated older gay men and how they treated straight patrons. Some — like The Woodward, which Mattson cites as a standout gay bar — do well with race and other identifiers, but many don't take into consideration anyone other than "white, cisgender, middle-class men," Mattson says.

"I think owners are increasingly recognizing that they need all of us in order to survive financially, and I think it's incumbent on those of us in the community with privilege to encourage our owners and staff to look around the room and see how we can make this place represent all of us, and be there for all of us," Mattson says.

That's why places like The Woodward were crucial, Mattson said, because it was a safe

space for Black gay men. Mattson, who is white, details a story in one chapter about how he and his partner, who is Black, were out at a gay bar in northeastern Ohio. It's one of the few places that Mattson feels comfortable as a "middle-aged" gay, but, when it comes to his partner, "some of the old, white, cis guys are creeps."

"Who Needs Gay Bars?" wrestles with that conundrum and other paradoxes throughout the book. On one hand, gay bars are a necessity because of their historic role as sites for organizing the fight for civil rights and their role as fundraisers for various marginalized communities beyond their own. But Mattson also calls into question who is responsible for the slowly declining number of gay bars.

If kink bars are disappearing, Mattson



argues, some of that can be attributed to intra-community judgment of those who don't fit a more heteronormative — and socially acceptable — ideal of queerness.

"Today when people say that there's too much kink in bars or too much kink at Pride, they are part of a long but ultimately losing tradition of trying to boundary keep who gets to be in the community and who gets to be deemed respectable," Mattson said, noting that in his research he found fewer than 60 "back rooms," bear bars and kink bars open across the entire country.

Kink or no, all interactions at gay bars must be treated with respect. A realization during his research was that Mattson was violated in several ways while frequenting gay bars, as the bar for consent around touching has shifted in recent years.

"The number of times that someone has tweaked my nipple and it has caused pain have been many, and it really was from my students that they were like, 'That's nonconsensual.' I was like, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa, isn't that putting too heavy a word on it?' But no, we can teach consent in small ways."

Gay bars can get to their North Star, Mattson says, by remembering their roles as not just providers of safe spaces, but by understanding how money flows through the community. As many readers might learn as they read

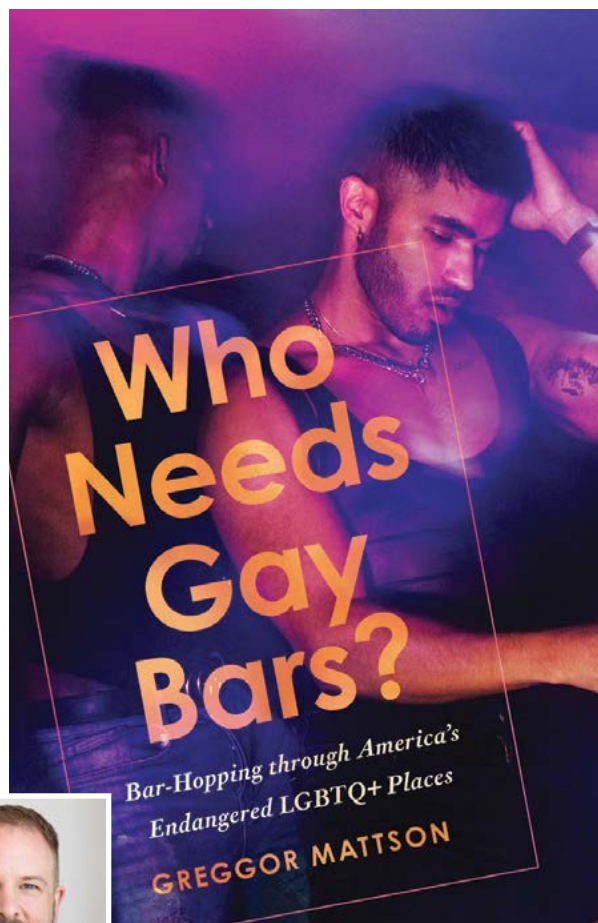
Mattson, "the fetish and kink community is probably the second largest fundraising part of our community in terms of raising money for charities." That's second only to drag queens, who Mattson notes are unsung heroines in their role in getting people to pony up.

In some cities, gay bars are embedded enough into the community at large where fundraising can go beyond LGBTQ+ concerns. Should they be lost, a well of funding for causes would dry up and drag queens would be out of a job.

As Mattson was writing, drag queens have already been mainstreamed outside the queer community, and this factors into the finished product. But he didn't foresee the current attacks on drag-themed events or critics referring to them and trans individuals as groomers.

"One of the most significant things about the attacks on drag and trans people is that it's happening at a time of unprecedented visibility. They're targeting the fact that drag and transness is now everywhere, and they're trying to put the genie back into the bottle — and it's not gonna work."

That's where gay bars are positioned to become places of activism in addition to entertainment. The Stonewall Inn in Manhattan's Greenwich Village is, of course, the granddaddy of queer civil rights sites. In the decades since, gay bars across America



Greggor Mattson.  
Courtesy photo

have continued to be on the front lines of the fight, which is sometimes just a fight to exist.

"What activism looks like is very different in a small town in Texas or Indiana than it is in a big city like Detroit or Los Angeles. So in some of these smaller cities, just merely being an open place is radical, providing a place for LGBTQ folks to gather together," Mattson says.

One could argue that gay bars aren't needed anymore as acceptance has become more widespread on topics like the ballroom movement, drag going mainstream, gay marriage being upheld, the rise of gay apps and straight people becoming better allies. Maybe gays should just start bringing their boyfriends and friend groups to straight bars, the argument goes.

It's an argument Mattson is ready to have.

"I wonder whether straight places will be as resolute in the face of political attacks, whether they have the resources to do that, and I also wonder whether they are able to cater to the breadth and depth of our community," Mattson says. "It's dangerous to over idealize gay bars because they haven't always included all of us, and at the end of the day they are small businesses that need to pay their bills. But it's equally dangerous to dismiss them, given the important and life-saving role they play for so many of us at some point in our lives."



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# The Internet Does Its Thing in Response to Michigan Salon Owner's Transphobic Rant

## It's a Very FAFO Mood Online For This Traverse City Transphobe

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

A small hair salon in quiet Traverse City has been putting Michigan in the news for all the wrong reasons, and the internet has big feelings.

The controversy began when Studio 8 owner Christine Geiger, apparently inspired by the recent Supreme Court decision 303 Creative LLC vs. Elenis, a ruling in favor of an anti-LGBTQ+ website designer, took to Facebook with a transphobic rant. Geiger's declaration read in part, "If a human identifies as anything other than a man/woman please seek services at a local pet groomer. You are not welcome at this salon. Period."

While Geiger took the post and the studio's social media accounts down when things didn't go her way (to the tune of hundreds of super angry responses and angry-face reactions), we all know everything



on the internet is potentially immortal. Like so much Canadian wildfire, screenshots of the post spread quickly, and a would-be localized story about a single anti-trans hair stylist in a quiet Michigan town soon had an international scope.

The internet did its thing,

inspiring responses that continue to pour in, ranging from amusing to threatening.

In response to a Detroit Free Press tweet promoting an article about the salon being dropped by a hair product line, Twitter user @CTopia089 shared a meme that reads, "It was the fuck around

of times, it was the find out of times," attributed to Charles Dickens.

The hair product line, Jack Win Pro,



posted a lengthy explanation about its decision to part ways with the salon on Instagram. "It has come to our attention that disturbing comments have been attributed to one of our product users," the statement read in part. "We want to make it clear that we disapprove of and reject hate speech in any form. Such actions go against the very values we hold dear and strive to uphold."

Responses to Jack Win Pro's post have been overwhelmingly positive, including one from user

See **Studio 8**, page 14

### ◀ Flaming Embers

Continued from page 6

out, make it happen."

Roland Leggett is another LGBTQ+ Detroiters who thinks, given the right ingredients, a queer bar or nightclub could thrive downtown long-term. Leggett is chair of the LGBT & Allies Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party and principal of Roland Leggett Strategies.

Leggett not only knows the LGBTQ+ scene in Detroit, he knows business too. He shared why a queer nightspot hasn't lasted downtown and what it will take to make it a reality.

"I think it's a combination of not having the proper types of queer-focused economic development resources and a business model that is sustainable," Leggett said. "Consistent programming and services are huge factors as well. I think the owners of Pronto! [in Royal Oak] and Soho [in Ferndale] are great examples of what should be done downtown."

But DjCent Detroit suspects there's more to it than that. While the right business model, owner and team are essential, perhaps that specific location wasn't ideal because of its prominence — which some thought would be a selling point.

"I would put it this way," DjCent Detroit said, considering her words carefully. "The homophobic arena of Detroit has always been never really in the spotlight. It's never been something that you always talk about, but you know it's there, at least in my actions of being around the LGBT community for 30-some-odd years. And I'm just talking more so on the Black side."

"You just have never really seen that magnitude of a gay bar [like Flaming Embers] hitting in such a business area of Detroit," she added.

For lack of parking options, folks arrived in long lines of Ubers and Lyfts

for the grand opening, noted DjCent Detroit. It was clear they were queer and headed to a queer establishment. She doesn't think that was considered ahead of time. "So it becomes sort of

*"Beautiful club, beautiful space. I only heard good praises [from] the patrons that came. [The] majority of them that I did hear from after the party had a ball."*

— DjCent Detroit

a closet thing; I'm not sure if Detroit eyes was ready for that."

Yet, despite that mindset, DjCent Detroit was surprised Flaming Embers didn't at least wait for feedback from patrons. "I'm not sure what type of feedback or what discomfort the

owner felt to where they say, 'Well, no, we're not even going to do this,'" she said.

DjCent Detroit concurred with Tiger and Leggett that a queer bar and nightclub downtown would be enthusiastically supported by the LGBTQ+ community. But she isn't holding her breath.

"I think we're in a place now where it should be happening," DjCent Detroit said. "But that's easier to say than done. And so until it can officially happen, I will probably still bet more 70/30 that it won't happen. Not in my lifetime, not on Woodward. No. Like I said, if you put it on maybe Madison or Adams or a block or two away, it may have a chance. But on Woodward in that location, I don't see it happening."

General manager Robert Guzman sent the following statement to BTL on the closing of Flaming Embers:

"The issue was internalized homophobia," Guzman said. "The bar we created very much catered to the queer community. Our opening party had 300 people through the night and was the start of something we felt passionately about. I was asked to take down my Pride flags and I refused. I chose to move on from the location because the owner decided to go back to its original sport bar theme. I was asked to continue managing but turned down the offer because I couldn't imagine working at a place where the culture did not match what I was looking for or agreed to promote."

"I was very excited to help facilitate a safe queer space for us all and saw the possibilities," he continued. "I tried really hard despite red flags starting the very first day. I will always be thankful for the love and support the community so genuinely offered. It is my hope to find a new place and create something special in the future, if possible."



# Thank You For Being a (Longtime) Friend

## Michigan-Based 'Golden Girls' Production Is Touring Nationally

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Picture it: Royal Oak, 2023. While “Golden Girls” productions are nothing new to the Metro Detroit area (The Ringwald Theatre is known for its plays featuring the fab four), a new show, entitled “Golden Girls – The Laughs Continue,” is, by far, the largest scale “Golden Girls” show to hit Michigan yet. Heck, it might be the biggest “Golden Girls” tour ever.

The production explores what life might be like if Dorothy, Blanche, Rose and Sophia were still around. Murray Hodgson of Murray & Peter Present, the show’s producer, says they plan to keep the show on the road in the U.S. and Canada “for a minimum of 2-3 years with our ultimate goal of setting down on Broadway.” In addition to a Grand Rapids run that wrapped in June, the production will offer two stops in Michigan, including Royal Oak in late July and Saginaw in mid-September.

The “Golden Girls” show is something of a first for Murray & Peter, who developed quite the reputation for producing tours with various “RuPaul’s Drag Race” contestants in starring roles over the years, selling out shows across the country. They’ve also done live theatrical performances, though never on the scale of this tour and never on this subject.

Hodgson said Murray & Peter Present decided to do the show as part of an effort to develop more touring shows for wider audiences. Robert Leleux wrote an original script “about what the gals might be doing if they were still alive,” said Hodgson. “We encouraged him to include naughty predicaments, adult themes and hysterical shenanigans.”

To that end, “The Laughs Continue” finds Sophia out on bail after being busted by the DEA for running a drug ring for retirees, while Dorothy is occupied with a sex-crazed younger man. Blanche and Rose, meanwhile, are busy creating a sex app for seniors.

“When [Leleux] suggested that



Vince Kelley as Blanche (left), Ryan Bernier as Dorothy (top), Adam Graber as Rose (right) and Christopher Kamm as Sophia (bottom center). Photo: Murray & Peter Present

Blanche and Rose should create a sex app for seniors, we knew we were in for comedy gold,” said Hodgson.

The show, directed by Eric Swanson, stars Ringwald alums Vince Kelley as Blanche, Ryan Bernier as Dorothy, Adam Graber as Rose and Christopher Kamm as Sophia. Kelley, at 36, is the oldest member of the cast.

Kelley said he remembers

watching in his younger years with his grandmother. “When I’d stay the night at my grandmother’s house, I’d say, ‘I don’t want to watch the old lady show,’” Kelley recalled with a laugh.

By the time he was a teenager, the “Golden Girls” were off the air. However, cable network TV Land began airing the show and Kelley said his appreciation for the Girls started to grow. “I watched it pretty

religiously,” he said of the time. “It’s like, ‘Yes, I’m gay. I’m supposed to love this show.’ It’s part of who we are.”

Yet, Kelley could never imagine he’d one day be playing Blanche in a stage show honoring the Girls. For him, playing the slutty one is “so much fun,” he said.

“I love Blanche because she is a slut,” Kelley added. “She loves being the butt of the joke, just having that

attention, whether it’s good or bad or indifferent. That’s so much a part of her. She’s so much an archetypal character. She’s like a Tennessee Williams character. She’s Vivien Leigh.”

The biggest challenge of the production, said Swanson, was bringing the essence of the TV

See *Golden Girls*, page 15



## Lance Armstrong Reveals How to Solve 'Real Simple' Trans Athlete Issue



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

It seems that everybody these days has an opinion about trans athletes. And many of these opinions are not great!

Case in point: notorious cycling cheat and yellow wristband merchant Lance Armstrong. He is participating in a Fox reality series called "Stars On Mars." The premise of the series is that a bunch of celebrities live together in a base camp that is set up to simulate life on Mars. It's hosted by William Shatner.

On a recent episode, the issue of transgender athletes came up, and Armstrong was compelled to give his very bad take.

"Listen, this is real simple," Armstrong said. "You want to transition, let's do it. You have your own category. We're gonna have a whole new division. We'll celebrate you just like we celebrate everybody else. Let's go. What's unfair about that?"

Armstrong added, "By the way, I sound like a right-wing lunatic. I'm not. I'm the most liberal person."

*The anti-LGBTQ+ right would have you believe that trans athletes are taking over sports — specifically women's sports — at all levels across the country. But it just isn't true.*

First of all, you should always be suspicious when someone begins speaking about an issue with any degree of nuance with, "This is real simple." This is especially true if it's a white cisgender heterosexual guy claiming to be "the most liberal person" when speaking about a historically marginalized group of

people.

Secondly, Armstrong is not only oversimplifying the issue, his proposal that transgender people just compete in their "own category" in "a whole new division" is pretty insulting. After all, if trans people have

to have their own separate sports divisions, then that means that a lot of transgender athletes won't be able to play sports because there just aren't enough trans players of any particular sport in one place to make that work. You're essentially cutting these athletes off from participating in the sports they love

in any meaningful way.

Also, by separating trans athletes out, you're essentially saying that you do not believe that they are "real" men and women — not to mention the fact that gender queer/non-binary people don't fit into this "real simple" scenario.

Armstrong's comments were not welcomed by the majority of the "Mars" cast mates. Singer Tinashe said, "I think we just have to care about if you otherize people."

Ariel Winter accused Armstrong of "ostracizing" people.

On Twitter, Armstrong posted in his defense, "Have we really come to a time and place where spirited debate is not only frowned upon, but feared? Where people's greatest concern is being fired, shamed or canceled? As someone all too familiar with this phenomenon, I feel I'm uniquely positioned to have these conversations."

Is this man serious? Armstrong's claim to fame is winning the Tour de France a record seven times in a row. But then he was busted for performance enhancing drugs which he then admitted he'd used for most of his career. In other words, he's a total fucking fraud. He canceled and shamed himself.

So, yeah, I would say that Lance Armstrong should also STFU.

And I'm not alone in this. One of Armstrong's co-contestants is none other than Adam Rippon, the first openly gay American man to qualify for the 2018 Winter Olympics

where he won a bronze medal.

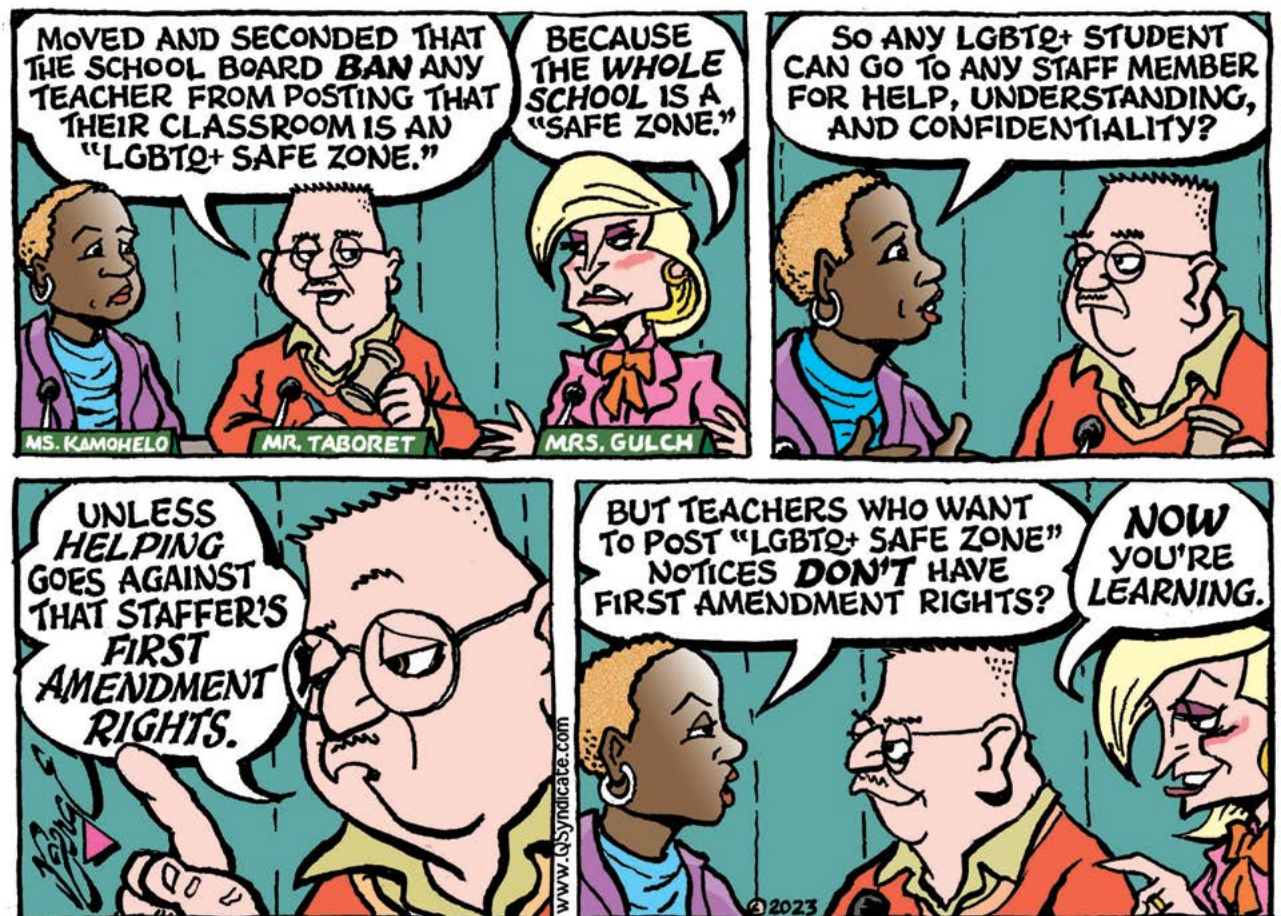
"I'm not afraid of having difficult conversations," Rippon told The Daily Beast. "But if we're going to fully open that particular conversation, I want trans athletes [present], I want people who are doing research into this [to be there], and people who are real proponents of seeing women's sports succeed. I don't need to hear what the greatest cheater in American history has to say about what he thinks is an unfair advantage."

A truly amazing response.

"It was so personal to me, and to my own experience," Rippon continued. "We'd just had Pride Month. I hate to see the way that trans people are talked about, because it wasn't too long ago that that was the way that queer people, gay people, lesbians, were talked about. And all anyone is trying to do is just live their life."

The anti-LGBTQ+ right would have you believe that trans athletes are taking over sports — specifically women's sports — at all levels across the country. But it just isn't true. Nor is it true that trans athletes are super humans whom nobody can possibly defeat. Yes, there are trans athletes. But there have ALWAYS BEEN TRANS ATHLETES. It's just that now more and more trans people are refusing to live as if who they are is a shameful secret they must never reveal.

They are, if you will, demanding that they be allowed to live openly, live proudly and Live Strong.





# Living My Life Like It's Golden (Girls)



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

For inspiration, I look to “The Golden Girls.” I was 13 when the show first aired in 1985. I remember those early episodes. I loved them from the very beginning, and I started recording the show on our new VCR. Video cassette recorders were something brand new on the market. My parents paid over \$400 for ours at the time, if you can imagine.

Barely pubescent when the show first came on and barely legal drinking age by the time the series ended after seven seasons, a lot of the jokes flew right over my young and hopelessly naïve head. Actually, even to this day, I will still watch the show and occasionally finally get a joke after all these years. I didn't know who Fess Parker was for decades. Now, I do.

At the age of 18, I left all I had known behind. Three days after I graduated from high school, I hitched a U-Haul to the back of my red 1987 Mercury Topaz filled with all my meager belongings and overflowing with all my dreams and hopes for a new, better life.

In Miami, GG was still on the air and also in syndication at the same time. Set in Miami, my new hometown, the fictitious address of 6151 Richmond Street became a second home to me. I had no family in Miami, and watching the Girls gave me comfort. Like spending time with my favorite aunties.

At the time, no one could have ever predicted that the show would become such a phenomenon. Nearly 40 years after it hit NBC's Saturday night lineup, you can still catch episodes on various cable networks. Today, with all the beloved ladies of the show having gone on to Hollywood Heaven, “Golden Girls” merchandising is a bigger enterprise than ever.

For me, it started with T-shirts. I must have 15 different GG tees and they always produce a nice response

when I wear them out. I also have five different pairs of GG socks. But it's more than just apparel. I have GG coffee cups and glasses in the kitchen as well as a GG lunchbox. (I'll never use it, but it looks lovely on display.)

My beloved friends know that I love the Girls, and so on my birthday and at Christmas, they inundate me with GG merchandise. I have a GG shower curtain, a GG wall clock, a GG wall calendar, a GG 1,000-piece puzzle, GG Chia Pets and some random stuff that I appreciate but will never use, including two complete sets of Funko POPs figurines, a GG checkers set and a GG change purse. I'm forgetting some stuff here. But I trust you get the point.

Truthfully, I don't really watch the Girls much anymore. I don't have to. I know every episode — and have them all on DVD — forward and backwards. All the lines. All the jokes. And yet, when I do catch an episode on TV or feel the nostalgic need to pop one in the DVD player, I still laugh at the jokes. Sometimes even at the ones I still don't understand.

It's their delivery. Sometimes just a look from Sophia or Dorothy, my favorites if I had to choose, is enough to crack me up. And speaking of favorites, my favorite episode is “Yes, We Have no Havanais,” the season four opener with Fidel Santiago, a suave Cubano

who somehow ends up dating Blanche and Sophia simultaneously. In the episode, Fidel brings Sophia home to find Blanche in one of her countless negligees. After a little spat between the two girls, Blanche takes her exit, announcing she is going to take a bath and fill the tub with just enough water to cover her “perky bosoms.” To which Sophia replies, deadpan, “You're only going to sit in an inch of water?” I still can't watch it without laughing, and I must have seen it 100 times.

I often wonder if while they lived, the real-life Girls — Bea Arthur, Estelle Getty, Rue McClanahan and Betty White — grew tired of their GG popularity. For them, the show was seven years out of careers that lasted, on average, 50 years or more a piece. I remember watching a reunion show. They attempted

to talk about their favorite and funniest episodes, but they couldn't seem to remember much.

To them, I suppose, it was just a job. Bea announced her intention to leave the show while it was still drawing great viewership. Rumor (and Page Six) has it that she and Betty didn't get along. It breaks my heart to consider that the show was just a gig for the ladies. A good gig. But just one of many, many roles they played.

I choose to acknowledge none of that. The ladies touched my heart and tickled my funny bone more times than I could ever count. I choose to believe they loved each other, that the show was as special to them as it was to me and millions of viewers across the globe. The thought might be as fantastical as that time Blanche and Rose

were caught dressed as nuns and explained it away by saying they were collecting lingerie for “needy, sexy people,” but that's OK.

I still thank all four of the Girls for being a friend to me, as the theme song goes, in such a special way. They've cheered me when I've been down, comforted me when I've been lonely and have seen me through heartbreak. In some ways, they've been more of a constant in my life than many of the real people in it.

It might seem silly to you, dear readers, how much I love the show. Perhaps it is. But the Girls have enriched my life. They may all be gone, they might not have even liked each other in real life, but they were not just friends to me. They were family. And I hold them firmly in my gay little heart.



A selection from writer Jason A. Michael's “Golden Girls” collection. Photo: Jason A. Michael





A performer at Planet Ant Theater's "Rogue Review" show. Photo: Eartha Kitten

# Reacting to Hamtramck Pride Flag Ban Through Performance

## Alphabet Fest Offers a Chance to Celebrate Queer Joy

BY DREW SAUNDERS

In early June, Hamtramck's City Council banned the Pride flag from being flown on public property, a move that has prompted a wave of backlash across the community, including a surge in social media posts aimed at the move and a stream of angry community members taking the mic to express their concern at council meetings.

But Hamtramck's Planet Ant theater is taking a unique, action-oriented approach with an LGBTQ-affirming event aimed at raising

funds and giving local LGBTQ+ members and allies a chance to gather together for a night of positivity and supportive community.

"I'm going to continue going to all public city meetings, fighting through those channels. I know people are planning protests and marches. Lots of businesses and individuals are hanging flags on their public property, which is great. But I think it's also important to remember that it's very important to celebrate," Planet Ant Executive Director Darren Shelton told BTL.

The result is the pay-what-you-can

Alphabet Fest, set for July 28. The Fest comprises several shows that celebrate the LGBTQ+ community across three stages, creating a choose your own adventure style night celebrating queer life and identity.

On the Ant Hall Stage, the theater will host a networking and social hour starting at 6 p.m. featuring political representatives and local organizations, followed by a queer- and ally-led improv show and a dance party hosted by local queer DJ Raedy Lex.

On the Independent Comedy Club Stage, attendees can see the queer and

allied standup comedy show, Friends of the Room, starting at 9 p.m. The Shit Show, an open mic comedy show, will follow.

The Ghost Light Bar Stage will feature live music beginning at 9:30 p.m., including The DeCarlo Band and other local acts.

Hamtramck's decision to ban the Pride flag has triggered a back and forth between the LGBTQ+ community and its allies and a group citing religious freedom in making the decision. The city doubled down on its stance on July 11 when it removed two commissioners from the city's Human Relations Commission after they flew a Pride flag on city property. Timothy Price, a Detroit resident and chair of Hamtramck's Arts and Culture Commission who has been helping foster the LGBTQ+ community since the 1990s, is helping Planet Ant coordinate talent for the event in his private capacity.

Price said that he is looking forward to "being a resource for the community within Hamtramck. Just so people know that there's resources, support, that there's a safe place to go, and we're continuing. We're not going to put our tail between our legs and fold. We always have to come up with a plan B and move forward."

Mayor Amer Ghalib has insisted to the press since the resolution's passage that the decision to restrict flags on city property is not intended to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people. While declining an interview request, he did provide a statement which says, in part, "We did not ban the LGBTQ flag, we banned all religious, political, ethnic, racial or sexual orientation groups flags. That closes the doors in front of any other group that wants to fly their flags on government and public spaces.

Our community is [diverse], many groups and many subgroups within each group, and when they heard that some flags might be flown, some started preparing to fly their own groups flags, and I didn't want that scenario to happen, where you can see all kinds of unknown and maybe undesired flags flown in our city and public properties, so we decided to ban them all except government flags and [prisoners of war]."

Shelton, who disputed that claim, says that so many people contacted Planet Ant to find out what they can do to support the theater's efforts to



A performer at Planet Ant Theater's "Rogue Review" show. Photo: Eartha Kitten

celebrate the LGBTQ+ community that they had to set up a dedicated email address: [pride@planetant.com](mailto:pride@planetant.com).

Meanwhile, Planet Ant held a fundraiser for Alphabet Fest that ended at the end of June to improve security for LGBTQ+ people. However, the non-profit theater does take donations of any amount at any time at [planetant.com/donate](http://planetant.com/donate); those donations can go to an LGBTQ+ cause.

*Alphabet Fest is set for July 28 starting at 6 p.m. at Planet Ant Theatre in Hamtramck (2320 Caniff St.). Learn more and find tickets at [planetant.com](http://planetant.com).*

### ◀ Studio 8

Continued from page 10

@jenniferdezeuw4597, who replied to the post, "I have been with the stylist in question for 13 years and had to say goodbye to her yesterday. I was gutted by her statement because I have a Trans child that she knows and has cut their hair. There is no room for this kind of hate. Be better, do better and above all else be Kind to one another."

User @theriveroaksredneck responded, "THIS is what being

an Ally means. Thank you for your prompt affirmation to support our community."

Many reactions to news on Twitter about Salon 8's bold announcement pointed to a misinterpretation of the recent Supreme Court decision. MLive tweeted a quote from a recent article highlighting the salon's apparent misunderstanding of the implications of 303 Creative: "Now legal experts say that not only is the business misinterpreting a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the topic to refuse service,

but that it may be running afoul of discrimination protections in Michigan."

After the City of Traverse City published a public statement denouncing Studio 8's anti-trans stance and promising to investigate the business, a Facebook group called Overheard in Traverse City posted a statement. While most responses were positive, a few Facebook users were bold in their support (but quickly rebuked by others).

When user Thomas Bucco

responded to the post with "This whole letter is hypocritical. Freedom of speech and ability to trespass for any reason allows this. Your freedom to avoid the place should be your only response," another user, Madyson Oster, shot back, "There's a freaking constitution for a reason. First she won't serve transgender people...then what? Black people? People in interracial relationships? Hispanic people, white people, asian people? You are not allowed to discriminate based on any protected class for any reason and

this is EXACTLY why. Your beliefs do not trump the human rights of other people."

And finally, over on TikTok, user @coolhairboi posted a lengthy video response to the news, teasing viewers with the status "Brb changing my business listing to 'pet groomer'" in reference to Studio 8's directive to trans people to use pet grooming services for their haircutting needs.

Later, the same user posted a TikTok outlining some of the virtiolic responses they've received about the video.



## Golden Girls

Continued from page 11

show to the stage in the most intimate form possible. “The set resembles the show exactly. It’s a replica. When that curtain opens, it looks like you’re watching the TV show.”

But both Leleux, in his writing, and Swanson, in his direction, were careful not to make the show a parody.

“Murray and Peter were approached about another production of ‘Golden Girls’ and we really weren’t interested in producing a parody. We didn’t want to make fun of or do something that’s been done often and nationwide. All the big gay stops had all parodied the show and we didn’t feel that was the right move for us.”

Instead, the goal was to come up with something fresh. A continuation of the show, an original storyline — a new episode, so to speak. If you can pretend it’s the present day and the Girls are all still alive, it’s really a GG lover’s dream.

“We just picked up where the last show left off and placed it in the modern day,” said Swanson. “Of course, we joke about how old that would make them. But we’re a part of the joke.”

Updating the show to feel contemporary, the question was, what issues would the Girls tackle now?

“If you watched the show, they addressed

so many big ticket items, such as interracial marriage, women’s rights, gay rights, the AIDS epidemic, everything under the sun. So we wanted to pick the hot issues today.”

The script writers of the original show were “very good at playing pass the potato,” said Swanson. “In each show, every single one of the girls had a funny moment or a storyline you were following. It didn’t really have a star. ... They passed the potato in a beautiful way and Robert tried to emulate that and I think we were successful.”

Putting the show together resulted in “side-splitting rehearsals,” Swanson said. “It was a ridiculously fun process. You have to be willing to go there in rehearsals.”

“We wanted to take it to the next level,” Kelley added. “That’s what so fun about our show. It’s not your grandmother’s ‘Golden Girls.’ It’s like they moved to HBO because they’re saying some things you can’t say on television.”

“These are icons — everyone has an attachment to these characters,” Kelley added. “Betty White is like the grandmother of the nation.”

*“Golden Girls – The Laughs Continue” will play the Royal Oak Music Theatre, located at 318 W. Fourth Street, July 27-30. Tickets are available at [goldengirlstour.com/tour/2023/](http://goldengirlstour.com/tour/2023/). The show will also play the Dow Event Center in Saginaw Sept. 22-24.*

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# Bringing Decorum Back to Eastpointe

## The City's Recent Anti-Pride Action Motivated This LGBTQ+ Activist

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW



Mike Klinefelt. Courtesy photo

Mike Klinefelt, candidate for mayor of Eastpointe, stepped off the campaign trail recently to advocate for his community: the LGBTQ+ community. He was galvanized to do so after the city council's shameful failure to pass a Pride Month resolution May 16, which led to a protest at city hall organized by Eastpointe resident Tim Kniaz.

Klinefelt, who spoke at the protest, said it was well-attended with a diverse crowd, many of whom he recognized as residents of Eastpointe.

"I was just thrilled to see it and actually was excited to see that there's a large queer population in our city that's really engaged in following what's going on," Klinefelt said. "I think that the protest more accurately reflects the attitude in Eastpointe than the actions of city council."

While she wasn't named, it was clear Klinefelt was alluding to Mayor Monique Owens. In 2019, Eastpointe became the first community in Macomb County to declare June Pride Month. A resolution was adopted in subsequent years, though not unanimously and without the support of Owens. Eastpointe's first Black mayor, she has been lauded by some and criticized by others. The latest scuttlebutt is a felony charge in connection with the CARES Act. She, Klinefelt and two others will face off in a primary challenge Aug. 8.

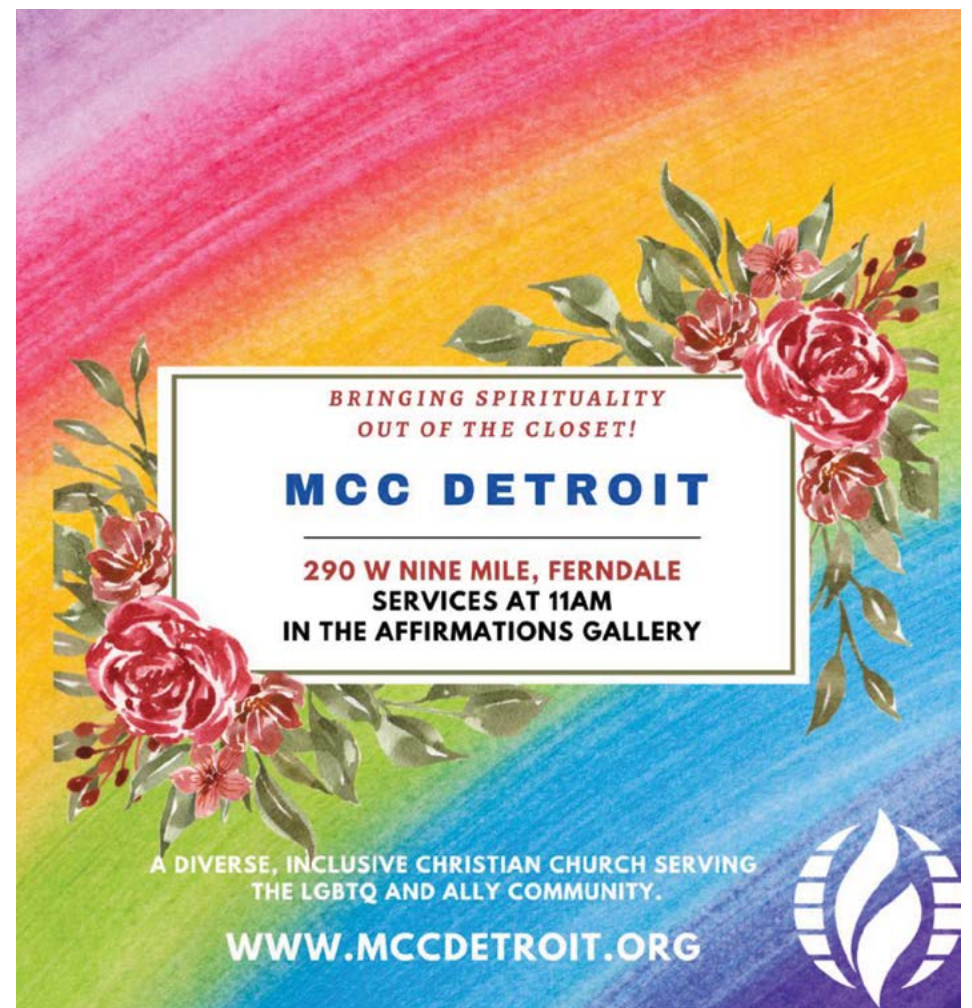
Due to the various scandals and city council skirmishes

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that have plagued Eastpointe over the past four years, Klinefelt is troubled by the direction the city has taken. “I love the city,” Klinefelt said, “and I think we have to repair the reputation and the way city business is conducted. I think some of what our residents have seen over the past four years have affected how other communities view us and even how we view ourselves. And I think we have to correct that and get on the right path.”

In fact, one of Klinefelt’s main goals as mayor would be to repair the public’s perception of the city. “Decorum has lost its meaning at the council table and I believe it has come at a great cost,” Klinefelt said. “It has spurred negative media coverage and, more importantly, it has affected how residents view our own city.” As mayor, he vows not to stifle dissenting opinions. He believes that in city politics, egos should take a back seat.

Klinefelt is also focused on the infrastructure of Eastpointe. He says they need to be more aggressive with planning and implementation. Considering that Eastpointe is an older community in need of infrastructure repair, Klinefelt would like to further develop the city’s long-term plans to fix its roads, sewers and public safety buildings. In addition, the city faces financial challenges that Klinefelt would like to address. He wants to ensure the city is able to afford to staff Eastpointe’s police officers, DPW workers and other civil servants that it will need in the future.

With an undergraduate degree in political science from Michigan State University and a law degree from Wayne State University, Klinefelt currently works as an assistant prosecuting attorney in the homicide division of the Wayne County prosecutor’s office. “Not to get too dark or heavy,” Klinefelt said, “but I really like that I get to work on cases that I care about and definitely feel like at the end I’m helping bring a sense of justice to victims who have either lost their own lives or to the families of those victims.” Before his work for Wayne County, Klinefelt was a legislative aide for Judge Steven Bieda when Bieda was a state senator. Previously, Klinefelt worked for the Free Legal Aid Clinic INC.

Klinefelt has served on numerous commissions and committees in Eastpointe and pointed to his service on the Ethics Ordinance Committee as a particularly meaningful experience. Because the committee had been inactive for years, the new members were tasked with creating a process for reviewing ethics complaints that residents have with city staff or city officials.

During his tenure as mayor pro tem from 2015 to

“We’re not in a zero-sum game when it comes to showing compassion for others.”

— Mike Klinefelt

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Puzzle on page 25



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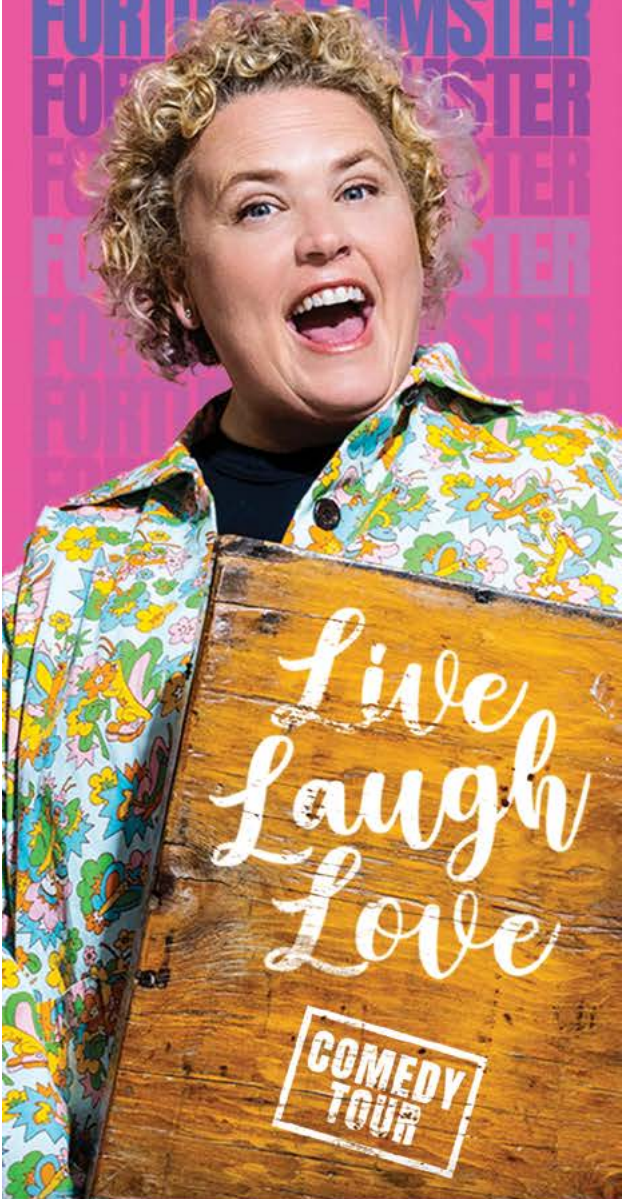
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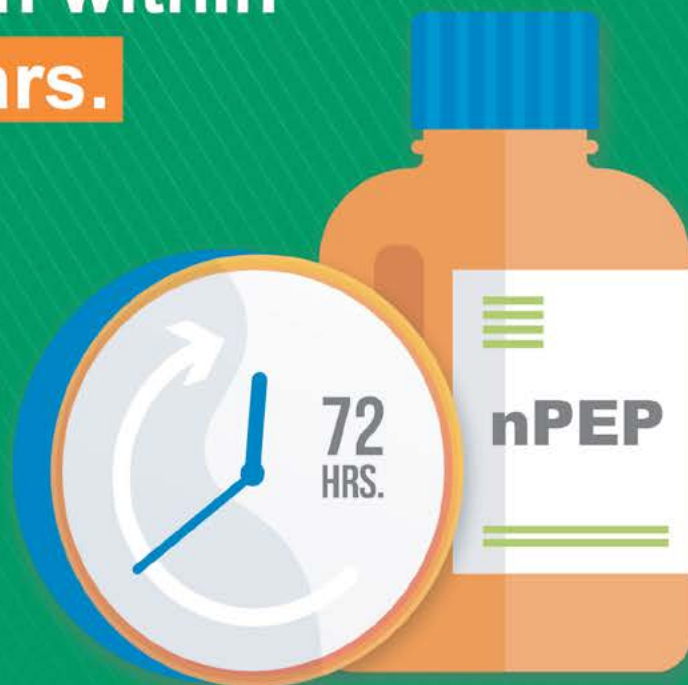




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## Mike Klinefelt

Continued from page 17

2019, Klinefelt acted as liaison to the Arts & Cultural Diversity Commission. That's where he became better acquainted with Macomb County Pride volunteer Alysa Diebolt. "I got to work with him firsthand," Diebolt said. Diebolt's husband, Cardi DeMonaco, is currently on city council.

Diebolt said she is impressed with Klinefelt's intelligence and ability to listen. As a resident, she has found the past four years frustrating and she's looking forward to a time when the council will operate collaboratively.

"Out of the four candidates, I think [Klinefelt] has the best track record in bringing people together," Diebolt said. She described a joint project with Roseville Parks and Recreation where neither community left feeling cheated. "He has done really well in advocating for Eastpointe to get investment in more parks programming while still not making sure Roseville gets none," she added. "That's not the point."

When it was suggested that he was likely the first openly LGBTQ+ city official in Macomb County, Klinefelt paused.

"You know, that's funny," said Klinefelt, who is 35. "That's something I never actually thought that much about." Until the dust up over the Pride Month resolution, Klinefelt said he was unaware of homophobia in Eastpointe and hasn't experienced it while campaigning.

With his prior city council experience and

an even temperament, Klinefelt believes he stands out from his competitors. He also happens to be the son of Eastpointe's current state senator, Veronica Klinefelt.

Klinefelt will be competing against the same mayor who eked out a win over him in 2021. (Owens beat Klinefelt by 19 votes.) She's also the same mayor who has exhibited hostility toward queer Eastpointe residents like him in her refusal to recognize Pride Month.

"I think it's fair to say her views are shortsighted," Klinefelt said. "And I think she has the misunderstanding that recognizing one community somehow takes away from others. I don't think that's the case because



Mike Klinefelt (left) with friend Josh Fedney. Courtesy photo

we're not in a zero-sum game when it comes to showing compassion for others."

Learn more about Mike Klinefelt at [mikeklinefelt.com/about](http://mikeklinefelt.com/about). Primary Election Day is Aug. 8. Early voting began June 29.





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Rev. Joe Summers. Courtesy photo

# New Leader, Same Pro-Queer Morals

## Outgoing and Incoming Reverends at Ann Arbor Church Share a Goal to Center and Uplift Non-Normative Voices

BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE

After serving as pastor of Episcopal Church of the Incarnation for 36 years, Reverend Joe Summers, an outspoken ally of the LGBTQ+ community, is retiring. Stepping into the role is Reverend Dean Aponte-Safe, whose husband is also a newly ordained Michigan Episcopalian priest.

Reflecting on how he secured the position at the progressive and welcoming Ann Arbor congregation, Aponte-Safe says, “It’s a funny story.” Mainly because his husband,

Gerardo Aponte-Safe, actually interviewed for the same spot first, but ended up taking a position at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Royal Oak instead.

“Being leaders of spiritual communities, it really comes down to a desire to help people know that they are loved, using spirituality as a vehicle to address the injustices of our society,” Aponte-Safe says. “We both find that work deeply compelling and that really forms the basis of our relationship, how we think about our spirituality as a lens to improve people’s lives.”

Hoping to instill this belief during his time at Incarnation, Aponte-Safe has been serving as co-pastor at the church for the past nine months to learn from Summers while allowing the church community to get familiar with him.

“I deeply appreciate Joe’s mentorship, this dance that he takes each and every time in thinking about liberation and how liberation is inherently intersectional,” Aponte-Safe says. “I deeply appreciate that reminder and how he preaches and lives his life. That’s something that I hope to carry forward too. He has

been a pastor that really, I find, leads from those convictions, and that underscores the work that he does.”

When Summers arrived in 1987, Incarnation was already committed to inclusion, he says, but one story created nationwide change. In 1992, Jennifer Walters, Summers’ co-pastor at the time, made history as the first openly partnered lesbian to be ordained in Michigan, and one of only a few across the country. Walters’ story made it to the front page of the Detroit Free Press, Detroit News and Ann Arbor News.

“It caused our bishop to be one of three bishops that was brought up on charges that, because he did this, he had somehow violated the church’s rules,” Summers says. “It was his being found innocent of that, that helped open the door to bishops around the country being able to ordain gay and lesbian people.”

Beginning with a focus on criminal justice reform, Incarnation has consistently aimed to uplift marginalized communities. Over the years, they have advocated for women’s rights and LGBTQ+ rights and have actively worked toward ending climate change and gun violence.

“Our congregation was founded by a group of 10 to 15 Black construction students at Washtenaw Community College and our building is built out of recycled and reclaimed materials,” Aponte-Safe says. “So we really strive to be telling the story correctly of who needs to be heard. What needs to be addressed in our society?”

Currently, Aponte-Safe is continuing to expand his knowledge as a Doctor of Ministry student at the Pacific School of Religion, writing his dissertation on rurality, spirituality and sexuality. “In my experience, those three things have always been interlinked,” he says. “I knew from the age of 13 I was different, but didn’t have language for what that meant. I grew up in a very rural, very conservative community, but I also knew from my experience at church, as a baby, as a child, as a teenager, that church was a very safe place.”

Aponte-Safe acknowledges, though, that many people, whether religious or not, may perceive churches as judgmental and

unwelcoming due to the harm some churches have caused. However, both he and Summers are dedicated to changing this perception by opening their doors to all, including those who have been hurt by religion in the past.

“Because of the harm that churches have done, it’s very understandable why people would want nothing to do with churches,” Summers says. “On the other hand, for people like me, I want to go to where the problem is, because it’s when I’m close to the problem that I can do something about it.”

Aponte-Safe agrees, and says he is aiming to cultivate a space that goes beyond traditional notions of sexuality and challenges dominant narratives.

“I think it’s so incredibly important that we offer progressive religious spaces because you can walk into the vast majority of congregations and experience a sense of shame, a sense of ‘you need to change,’ a sense of these are the



Bishop Michael Curry delivers the Eucharist in 2020. (Left to right) Deacon Thalia Johnson, Bishop Curry, Rev. Summers. Courtesy photo

rules you need to abide by in order to be loved or accepted,” Aponte-Safe says. “There are other voices who affirm and love and accept who you are. And I think we have an obligation to at least speak back to the dominant narrative.”

One big question that Aponte-Safe wants to address in his work at Incarnation is: “How do we create spaces that are queer beyond sexuality?” which he says means anything that is against the norm.

One step he is taking toward this goal is learning about polyamorous relationships. “I have seen in my own life relationships that adhere to ethical non-monogamy, and it contributes to how we understand what it means to love each other, what it means to be in community,”



# As Megan Rapinoe Retires, a Look at Other LGBTQ+ Game Changers

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

As women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe gets set to retire from Seattle's OL Reign, BTL is taking a look back at some other LGBTQ+ athletes who have drawn attention (for better or worse, in some cases) to their respective sport.

Rapinoe, who came out as lesbian a decade ago, has been in the headlines several times over her career, from taking a knee in support of Colin Kaepernick to going up against Major League Soccer in the name of gender-equitable pay for women. She's also been outspoken about trans athletes competing in sports.

Rapinoe's position has put her at odds with many, including lesbian tennis legend Martina Navratilova, who has been openly anti-trans when it comes to the matter. Rapinoe recently called out transphobia — and Navratilova — in a new feature in Time magazine.

"When Martina [Navratilova] or Sage [Steele, an ESPN anchor] are talking about this, people aren't hearing it just in the context of elite sports," Rapinoe said in the story. "They're saying, 'The rest of my life, this is how I'm going to treat trans people.'"

Earlier this year, Rapinoe, an Olympic gold medalist, was recognized at Time's Women of the Year gala. Upon accepting her award, she dedicated it to the trans community.

"It's particularly frustrating when women's sports is weaponized," Rapinoe told Time. "Oh, now we care about fairness? Now we care about women's sports? That's total bullshit. And show me all the trans people who are nefariously taking advantage of being trans in sports. It's just not happening."

These seven game changers have left their marks on both their sports and the wider conversation about LGBTQ+ athletes.

## Billie Jean King

Tennis legend Billie Jean King was the first women's tennis player to come out. But it wasn't exactly by choice. King spoke to NBC News



Megan Rapinoe (top) with her partner, WNBA player Sue Bird. Photo: Facebook

back in 1971 about how she was outed by a former lover in 1981. It was a different world back then, and King could have easily denied the accusation. Instead, she bucked her lawyer and publicist who advised her to do just that.

King decided to confirm it and come out publicly.

"I said: 'I'm going to do it. I don't care,'" she told NBC News. "This is important to me to tell the truth.' The one thing my mother always said, 'To thine own self be true.'"

When NBC News asked if, looking back, she'd have done anything differently, King was blunt.

"I'd come out earlier."

## Michael Sam

Sadly, the Michael Sam experiment did not go as planned. The All-American and Southeastern Conference Defensive Player of the Year in 2013, Sam was poised to become the first out player to play for a professional football team. Heads rolled when Sam was captured kissing his boyfriend after receiving the news that he had been drafted by the NFL's St. Louis Rams.

This made him the first out gay player to be drafted by the NFL. But before he could realize his dream, Sam was released by the Rams during the final preseason roster cuts. He went on to spend time on the Dallas Cowboy's practice squad but was eventually waived.



Billie Jean King. Photo: Jonathan Exley, Billie Jean King Enterprises, Inc.

See Megan Rapinoe, page 24

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Brandon Scott Jones in "The Other Two." Photo: HBO

# On His Own Shoulder

## Brandon Scott Jones Just Wants to Help Young Queers Feel Seen

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

This year, Brandon Scott Jones is showing up in the most random of places. There's his series regular role in "Ghosts," portraying the spirit of American Revolutionary War officer Captain Isaac Higgintoot, who is gay. There's his part as Drew's BFF Curtis on "The Other Two," HBO's abundantly queer absurdist comedy, which just announced that its latest, third season would be its last. And earlier this year, he could be seen on the big screen alongside Nicolas Cage's Dracula in the horror-comedy "Renfield," now streaming on Peacock.

The Maryland-born actor, who has also appeared in "Isn't It Romantic," "The Good

Place" and "Can You Ever Forgive Me?," recently chatted about the niche queerness of "The Other Two," finding comfort in LGBTQ+ content in his youth and how he hopes that his latest projects are doing the same for others.

**"The Other Two" really is so perfectly stupid and yet so moving at the same time.**

Let's make that the tagline. Wild how they strike that tone. It's cool.

**It's not an easy thing to pull off, but this show does. When was the moment you knew you could make a career out of being funny?**

This isn't going to sound funny, but I remember I was on a family vacation and my

mom, dad, sister and I were driving through deep Georgia on our way to Florida, and it started to torrentially downpour, and my mom started screaming at my dad to pull off the road, and my dad kept gripping the steering wheel, screaming that he couldn't see. He's like, "I can't see!" And I remember thinking to myself and turning to my sister and we're like, "We're going to die." And thinking to myself, "This is terrifying," but very funny to see my parents do this in front of their children.

**I can see this as a sketch on a comedy series.**

I can 100%. Literally, there's no chill in the back, and my sister and I were just sitting

there, stone-faced, like, "Oh god." I have a memory of being like, "Oh, I want to write about this." So that was the first time I thought, "Oh, maybe I enjoy comedy." I've been lucky enough that I've gotten to work with people in my past doing lots of comedy that have brought me in to do other projects that maybe more people were able to see, and then also just trying your hardest to put yourself out there. And I remember the first time I put my comedy writing live on stage, and to see the reaction to that, then the reaction on the business side to that, was really, really encouraging.

**When you got the script for this season of "The**



**Other Two,” what was the scene you couldn’t wait to shoot?**

Oh, god, there’s a couple. One, I think you get to see some different levels of Curtis where he’s sort of been very silly in a lot of fun ways and a good friend. We got a little taste of his good friendship with Cary last season, but this year we had two separate moments that Drew [Tarver, who plays Cary] and I both called “the hard scenes,” and we called them the hard scenes because they’re definitely a little bit more emotional for the two of us. I think in addition to all the comedy that we get to play, there’s a scene or two toward the end of the season that we were both excited to really sink our teeth into.

**“The Other Two” really does know queer culture inside and out. What’s it like to be able to go so deep into niche LGBTQ+ culture within this show?**

It’s really fun. It is a very queer focused, queer-forward show in a lot of ways. I mean, for example, last season when

Cary had this hole pic come out. I think the idea of taking a picture of your hole to send someone and then accidentally blasting it to the world is a thing that starts out as something very relatable, but is also probably a fear we all have, a little bit.

I think trying to stay involved [and in] that world and understanding also the lens through which we look at it — which is sometimes through the entertainment industry — I know me and Drew, as queer actors, you get to see all of these little nuances of [how] people want you to be a certain way, they want you to act a certain way, and that usually corresponds with pop culture.

**While doing this interview, it’s hard not to think about the first episode of this current season, where you navigate the promo of a TV show. That must seem very meta to you right now. Who’s the person on your shoulder as you go through this today?**

It is funny to be doing interviews or hosting things on TV and also then doing them in real life. There is that meta element to it. It’s almost... I’m the person on my shoulder; it’s still this constant back and forth that I have with myself of, “Am I being enough of the person that I want to be? Am I not being enough of the representation?” And you kind of feel the weight of it a little bit, not to add self-importance or self-indulgence, or some sort of ego to it, but I think there’s people that have inspired me and there’s so many different people that you want to be like, and I think you just wonder if you’re falling short sometimes.

**Can we get a spinoff of the “Gay Minute,” your show within a show this season?**

Do you want a full half hour of “The Gay Minute”? I would totally do it. Just a sad, real-time show of this person trying to film it.

**As someone who’s aware of the representation you bring to the TV and films you’re in, what media helped you feel seen?**

When I was younger, I really loved “Will and Grace,” and I didn’t know, necessarily, a world outside of that. It was really fun to see those characters come up, but then a lot of the stuff that I really, really identified with, I didn’t even recognize to be queer culture. I was a big Madeline Kahn fan. I was a big Rosalind Russell fan. I would watch these madcap heightened movies — “Clue” or “Bringing Up Baby.” And all of these things that I now recognize as an adult, it’s like, “Oh, wait, I wasn’t alone in liking those things.” Do you remember “Me and My Shadows,” the

Judy Garland TV movie?

**Yeah. You thought you were the only person who saw it?**

I thought I was the only person who sat there and saw it. It was a two-night event, and I did not miss either night. It’s this thing that, as you get older, you find other people that also did that, and you’re like, “Oh, all of this.” I sank myself into these things, and I was doing it for a reason, even if I didn’t fully know what it was. And it becomes so personal.

**Looking at your career as a whole, when did you understand that the roles you choose are important and they matter?**

I don’t know if there’s ever been one point, but I know that it’s been really nice between this show and “Ghosts” to see the fan reaction on Twitter of people either recognizing queer moments or, on “Ghosts,” I have a coming out [arc], which it’s been very nice to see the reaction to that. So I don’t necessarily know if I personally have that following, but I know that you still want to put out the authentic version of yourself for that person that might find you and might identify with who you are.

I think that my experience of coming out, and as I was growing up and getting older, it can be lonely, and I used to sink myself into film and television to quell that, and so you hope that whatever performance you’re giving, whatever interview you’re doing, there’s an authenticity there and that you’re bringing that experience to hopefully help others as well.



Brandon Scott Jones and Drew Tarver in “The Other Two.” Photo: HBO

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## ◀ Megan Rapinoe

Continued from page 21

Today, Sam plays for the Barcelona Dragons in the European League of Football. He never realized his dream of actually being the first out gay man to play in the NFL. Still, he made quite an impact on the sport.



Brittney Griner. Photo: Lorie Shaul

## Brittney Griner

If you've watched the world news in the past year or so, you've undoubtedly heard the name Brittney Griner. The two-time Olympic gold medalist and six-time WNBA All-Star plays for the Phoenix Mercury and made

headlines when she was detained in a Russian airport and arrested for smuggling cartridges containing less than a gram of medically prescribed hash oil in her luggage.

At the time, Griner was in Russia playing basketball for the Russian Premier League in the WNBA off season. Her stay was involuntarily extended when she was found guilty in a Russian court and sentenced to nine years in prison. She was eventually released as part of prisoner exchange for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Today, she's back with the WNBA and as popular as ever. Time magazine named her 100 of the most influential people in the world. What she does next — perhaps a memoir — is eagerly anticipated.

## Adam Rippon

Another of Time's 100 most influential people — this time from 2018 — Adam Rippon is a figure skater who won a bronze medal at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Prior to that, Rippon won the 2010 Four Continents Championships and the 2016 U.S. National Championships.

Rippon's trophies don't stop at figure skating. He also won season 26 of "Dancing with the Stars," the popular ABC television show. On it, he danced with partner Jenna Johnson and was impeccable. Following these wins, Rippon, who came out in 2015, became an important activist for the queer community.

Rippon guest-hosted season 11 of "RuPaul's Drag Race" Ruveal livestreams in 2019. The same year, he also appeared in Taylor Swift's "You Need to Calm Down" music video, which would go on to win the MTV Video Music Award for Video of the Year.

## Caitlyn Jenner

OK, before you say anything, Caitlyn Jenner was included in this list after careful consideration. True, she's been about the most anti-trans so-called trans activist we've ever seen. She's on the

wrong side of just about every queer issue, and her life of extreme privilege has endeared her to few. However, Caitlyn, who in 1976, many years before she began transitioning, won a Gold medal for the decathlon at the Summer Olympics in Montreal, went on to become something of a media celebrity.

Rumors of her transition began after she started obviously altering her appearance on the Kardashian clan's reality show. But no one was expecting to see her on the cover of Vanity Fair photographed by none other than Annie Leibowitz. The shoot and her 20/20 interview marked the first time a lot of people actually saw a trans person. And even if the trans person was an anti-queer Republican, still, the exposure was priceless.

## Jason Collins

Jason Collins played in the NBA for 13 years, albeit with eight different teams. He was the 18th overall pick in the 2001 NBA draft. At the end of the 2012-2013 season, Collins came out publicly as gay. In February 2014, he signed with the New Jersey Nets, making him the first publicly gay athlete to play in any of the four major North American pro sports leagues.

In an interview earlier this year with Sky Sports, Collins spoke about how the culture in the NBA has changed since he played.

"When I first came into the league back in 2001, the language was completely different," he said. "You could even say [homophobic] things in press conferences. That started to change in 2007 and 2008. They started fining people, a minimum fine was \$50,000.

"There were superstars in the league who got caught using that language and were fined," Collins went on. "If the superstars can get fined, then everybody can get fined. And that's when the culture started to shift.

## Lia Thomas

In 2022, Lia Thomas made headlines when she became the first openly transgender athlete to win an NCAA Division I national championship in any sport after taking first in the women's 500-yard freestyle event. Thomas told Sports Illustrated that she began to question her gender identity near the end of high school. By the end of her first year of college, Thomas came out as trans to her family. She began using her new name on New Year's Day in 2020.

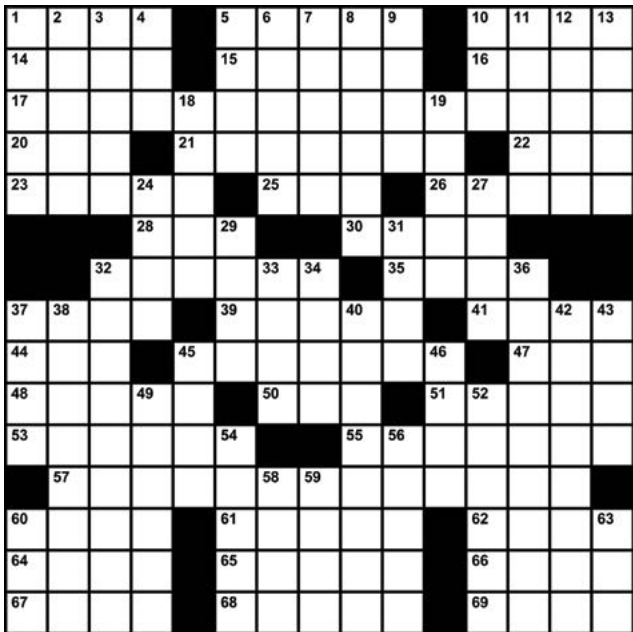
"In a way, it was sort of a rebirth," she said. "For the first time in my life, feeling fully connected to my name and who I am and living who I am. I am Lia."

In February 2022, CNN described Thomas as "the face of the debate on transgender women in sports," and in March 2022, Sports Illustrated described her as "the most controversial athlete in America."



Jason Collins. Photo: Keith Allison





Rock & Doris

Across

- 1 Dumbo's "wings"
- 5 It may be rough
- 10 Sweet spot
- 14 Respond on one's knees
- 15 What to scan in poetry
- 16 Architecture, to Philip Johnson
- 17 1964 movie of Rock & Doris
- 20 Yoko of "Double Fantasy"

Q Puzzle

- 21 Harley Quinn and Batgirl
- 22 U-turn from NNW
- 23 Bruce Wayne kept his Dick in one
- 25 Ethnic suffix
- 26 Emulated Neil Patrick Harris
- 28 Win \_\_\_ nose
- 30 Where the Dutch girl stuck her finger?
- 32 With 35-Across, 1959 movie of Rock & Doris

- 35 See 32-Across
- 37 Cheese from Gide's country
- 39 You might pick one up in an alley
- 41 "West \_\_\_ Story"
- 44 Animated dog
- 45 It can make hair straight
- 47 No to Rimbaud
- 48 Fictional Italian town
- 50 "Barney Miller" actor Jack
- 51 Erect
- 53 Most likely to use a condom
- 55 Red Guard members
- 57 1961 movie of Rock & Doris
- 60 Wang in fashion
- 61 Oral performances
- 62 Part of an old Madonna bra
- 64 Steamed up
- 65 Italian sauce
- 66 Apple that isn't a fruit
- 67 Culture Club's "\_\_\_ Miracle"
- 68 Check for electronic bugs
- 69 Anderson Cooper's area

Down

- 1 Race site in Auden's land
- 2 Gladiator area
- 3 Was excessive with the mouth
- 4 "Providence" lead role
- 5 Some Feds
- 6 Poet Vivien
- 7 Water molecule threesome
- 8 Flew in the face of
- 9 Gardner of mystery
- 10 Left in the field
- 11 "\_\_\_ my case!" (Perry Mason close)
- 12 What Shakespeare wrote in
- 13 Made less difficult to bear
- 18 Streef of "Silkwood"
- 19 Port in the land of samurai
- 24 Off-Broadway prize
- 27 Disney frames
- 29 Errol Flynn's "The Sun \_\_\_ Rises"
- 31 Agenda listing
- 32 Dress namesakes of an opera ship
- 33 Picks out, with "for"
- 34 Home of the Baylor Bears
- 36 Part of a TV archive
- 37 They're tops on the beach
- 38 "The enemy will soon come upon us!"
- 40 Rose to Dorothy, on "Golden Girls"
- 42 Non-S&M "Beats me"
- 43 They may be split
- 45 Part of a vacuum that sucks
- 46 It may be removed in SRS
- 49 Burning Man state
- 52 Vitamin B acid
- 54 Cops flirting in a tearoom
- 56 Fable fellow
- 58 Your first mate, and others
- 59 River to the Seine
- 60 Caesar's lucky number?
- 63 Playwright Albee and others, for short

See p. 17 for answers

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## ◀ Incarnation

Continued from page 20

he says. “There are ways that we theologically can honor people in polyamorous relationships, so that’s an area that I hope we can move into next.”

Aponte-Safe’s initial contract with Incarnation spans three years, with the possibility of extension through a community decision. He looks forward to the journey ahead with the congregation and expresses gratitude for the privilege of leading them through this transitional period. “I feel it’s quite a privilege to be with the community in this time as they are entrusting themselves right to their next leader,” Aponte-Safe says. “I want to honor them as a congregation, in who we will become together.”

As Summers moves into retirement, he plans to write a book exploring the paradigm of domination within the Bible. He aims to

critically examine and challenge opposing visions of religion and God presented in scripture.

“All the world’s major religions are now divided between a pole that’s about inclusion, justice, equality, compassion, versus an opposite pole, that’s about kind of upholding

patriarchy and purity codes,” Summers says.

This intersectional perspective that Summers brings to issues of liberation is one Aponte-Safe expresses gratitude toward. He strives to carry forward Summers’ commitment to preaching and living by convictions that promote justice and equality.

“Dean has incredible depth, sensitivity, is really articulate, is really committed, so it’s been mutual learning,” Summers says. “Our

congregation is involved in so many different things. I just appreciate Dean’s willingness to leap into the fire and help lead us.”

As Aponte-Safe will represent a new generation at Incarnation, Summers adds: “It’s going to be a new day at the church.”



Dean Aponte-Safe. Courtesy photo



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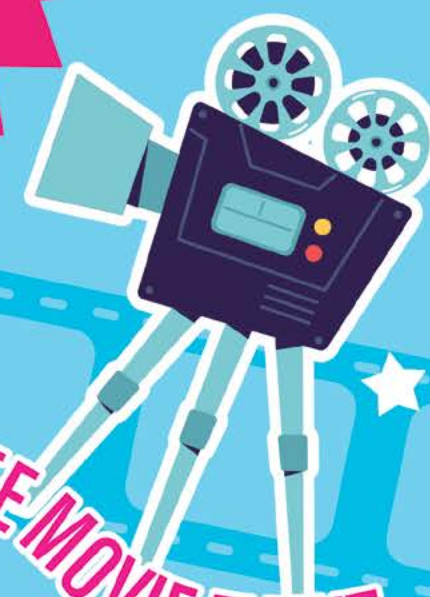


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