

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE Lines™

THE DARK SIDE OF ADVOCACY
By Award-Winning Local Trans
Advocate Julisa Abad

OHIO TARGETS TRANS PATIENTS
How Michigan Is Helping
Families Left Behind

'DRIVE-AWAY DOLLS'
The Coen-Directed Lesbian Movie
We Didn't Know We Needed

LGBT Detroit Turns 30

Leaders reflect on the legacy of North America's
largest Black-led LGBTQ+ organization

By Jason Collins



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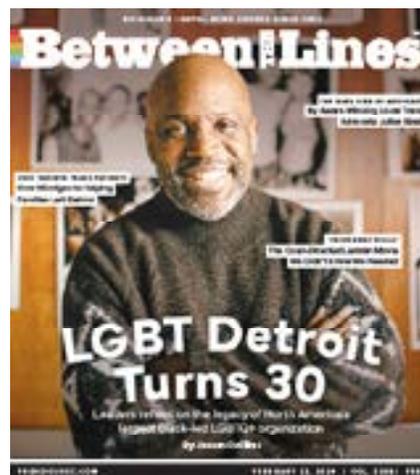


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A. Nzere Kwabena, executive director of LGBT Detroit.
Photo: Andrew Potter

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Don't let Black History Month slip by without taking advantage of some of the many events taking place in Southeast Michigan, including queer-imbued happenings like a newly restored documentary focused on LGBTQ+ icon James Baldwin and a new DIA exhibit focused on decades of archival materials portraying the contributions of Black cinema creators. Also, head to St. John's Resort in Plymouth to indulge in a five-course meal created by local Black chefs or pick up a new read by a Black queer author.



James Baldwin. Photo: Still from "I Heard It Through the Grapevine."

See a Restored James Baldwin Documentary

Head to the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit on Feb. 22 or 29 to see a newly restored documentary, presented by Cinema Detroit, centered on the life of highly influential Black gay writer, activist and intellectual orator James Baldwin during the Civil Rights Movement. Released in 1982, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" focuses on Baldwin's return to the Southern U.S. after spending years living in Paris.

Feb. 22 and 29, 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. showings each night, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (4454 Woodward Ave.) Reserve tickets in advance at bit.ly/42PyWIP.



Buzz Thomas on the CBS Detroit "Michigan Matters" show. Courtesy photo

Tickets Available for Colours Pride Awards Gala

Tickets are available now for the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce annual fundraiser, the Colours Pride Awards Gala, themed "Purple Reign." The event, set for June 14, raises funds to support local LGBTQ+-owned and operated businesses and to increase training and resources for young Metro Detroit entrepreneurs. Former Michigan state senator and LGBTQ+ trailblazer Buzz Thomas will receive the chamber's Equity Champion of the Year Award. Audience members will also have the opportunity to vote on the winner of a grant based on a live competition.

June 14, 6-10 p.m., Motor City Casino (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit). Tickets available at detroitlgbtchamber.com/coloursawards.



The Nicholas Brothers in a scene from "Stormy Weather" (1943). From left, Fayard Nicholas and Harold Nicholas. Photo: Margaret Herrick Library/20th Century Fox

See an Art Exhibit Featuring Lost Black Cinema Footage

A new exhibit at Detroit Institute of Art (DIA), Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898-1971, honors the enduring and oft-overlooked legacy of Black filmmakers and actors from the early days of filmmaking through the aftermath of the Civil Rights Era. Museum visitors can examine lost and forgotten films, filmmakers and performers through a collection of historical photographs, costumes, props, posters and interactive elements. Contemporary works created by artists like Glenn Ligon, a queer Bronx-based creator, are featured alongside the collection. "Regeneration," the DIA writes in press materials, "highlights the agency many Black artists asserted in their respective crafts despite challenges of systemic racism, revealing their tenacity, immense talent and unwavering commitment to creative expression."

Through June 23, DIA (5200 Woodward Ave.). Free admission for Macomb, Oakland and Wayne County residents. Learn more at dia.org/events/exhibitions/regeneration.

Pick Up a Memoir by a Black Queer Author

This Black History Month, intentionally support Black queer authors by reading works based on their lived experiences. Here are four unique picks:

- **“Quietly Hostile” by Kalamazoo-based memoirist Samantha Irby (2023)** — a truly hilarious memoir based on the best-selling author and “And Just Like That...” writer’s experiences as a Black queer woman from Chicago figuring out Michigan life.
- **“How to Live Free In a Dangerous World: A Decolonial Memoir” by Shayla Lawson (2024)** — a travel memoir from a Black, femme, nonbinary and disabled writer exploring how travel itself can be a political act.
- **“Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago” by Kemi Adeyemi (2022)** — Adeyemi examines how Black queer women in Chicago use dance as a political statement, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods.
- **“Bless the Blood: A Cancer Memoir” by Walela Nehanda (2024)** — a memoir and poetry collection exploring the medical racism and misgendering Nehanda experienced after being diagnosed with leukemia at 23.





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Chef April Anderson of Good Cakes and Bakes. Courtesy photo

Bring Your Appetite to a 5-Course Black History Month Dinner

St. John’s Resort in Plymouth will host a 5-course “Soulful Dining” dinner in honor of Black History Month created by five Michigan-based Black chefs on Feb. 29. The meal, which will support charities chosen by each of the chefs, includes chicken and waffles prepared by Chef Reniel Billups (Occasions Catering and Party Planning), deviled egg salad from Chef April Forbes (Menagerie Lounge), Low Country Crab Rice by Chef Reva Constantine (Reva Constantine Events) and Family BBQ by Chef Tricia Holt (Nomad Grill). Lesbian Detroit-based chef April Anderson (Good Cakes and Bakes) will prepare a sweet potato cheesecake for dessert.

Feb. 29, 6 p.m., St. John’s Resort (44045 Five Mile Road, Plymouth). Reserve seats at bit.ly/3ws188l.




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‘What Now?’

How Michigan is stepping up for patients left behind as Ohio bans gender-affirming healthcare

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In what feels like a scene from a horrifying Orwellian nightmare, thousands of transgender Americans lost their lifelines in January when a bill banning gender-affirming care was passed in Ohio, Michigan’s most populous neighbor to the south. It’s a story playing out across the country in a clearly coordinated effort on the part of the national Republican party — a story that increasingly includes anti-trans representatives in places like Michigan that have so far remained safe

for trans patients.

As of this writing, almost half of U.S. states have enacted laws restricting access to gender-affirming care and transgender athlete sports participation (including adult college students), and face criminal penalties for using the bathroom that aligns with their gender in certain public spaces like schools and state-sponsored colleges and universities. This is despite the well-documented benefits of gender-affirming care for minors and long-established criteria by major medical organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American

Medical Association. Targeting the estimated 300,000 transgender youth across America has become a winning right-wing wedge issue in the 2020s.

Ohio’s anti-trans success inspires Michigan Republicans

Rep. Josh Schriver, a Republican from Oxford, Michigan, was recently recorded in an online strategy meeting headed up

by Rep. Gary Click, who authored the recently enacted Save Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) bill in Ohio. In the audio recording released Jan. 26, Schriver is adamant that restrictions on gender-affirming care must extend to adults. “In terms of endgame, why are we allowing these practices for anyone?” Rep. Schriver asked, as reported by independent journalist Erin Reed on her Substack, Erin in the Morning. “If we are going to stop this for anyone under 18, why not apply it for anyone over 18?” Later, Schriver compared gender-affirming care to “self-mutilation”

and “euthanasia.”

Michigan Representatives Brad Paquette and Tom Kunse and Michigan Senators Jonathan Lindsey and Lana Theis, all Republicans, also took part in the call, which included a focus on how Michigan could emulate Ohio when it comes to chipping away at the rights of transgender Michiganders to access medical care and exist peacefully in public. For now, the state remains a relatively safe haven for transgender patients, but these activities underscore how important it is for the LGBTQ+ community that Democrats retain their majority in Michigan’s statehouse.

Ohio law will force patients to seek care out of state

Following the Senate vote in Ohio on Jan. 24, Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson issued a statement that read in part, “These legislators have abdicated their responsibility to do what’s right for the Ohioans they represent, casting votes that they know full well will harm innocent children, all to appease the leader of the MAGA agenda. Despite the fact that they have no medical training, these politicians believe they know better than parents and transgender youth seeking health care. It’s shameful.” The Ohio Democrat Party is leading an effort to get a measure on the November ballot aimed at ending the rampant gerrymandering in that state, a move advocates feel would dramatically improve the legal landscape for LGBTQ+ Ohioans.

For a moment, it appeared that Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine had taken to heart the testimony and meetings he had with transgender youth and their families. After the legislature passed HR 68, which banned transgender healthcare and transgender sports participation for minors and college students, DeWine vetoed the measure. “Were I to sign House Bill 68, or were House Bill 68 to become law, Ohio would be saying that the state, that the government knows better what is medically best for a child than the two people who love that child the most, their parents,” DeWine said in a press conference after the veto.

However, the governor also announced administrative rule proposals that would have catapulted Ohio to the top of the list of states with the most barriers to gender-affirming care access — not just for minors, but for adults, too, including those who have been receiving care for decades.

The proposed rules, which have since been removed from the proposed rule changes after fierce advocate pushback, would have required patients of all ages to establish care plans with a team that includes a psychiatrist, endocrinologist and a medical

ethicist. Patients under 21 would have been required to undergo at least six months of mental health counseling before starting gender-affirming medication or surgery.

Still, a rule that providers would be barred from referring minors to treatment elsewhere, including clinics in nearby states like Michigan, remains under consideration. It is already common for patients outside Michigan to travel to the state for their care, especially in the Southeast Michigan area, where comprehensive programs at places like Henry Ford Health attract so many minor patients that there is often a months-long waiting list for an initial evaluation.

After DeWine’s veto, the Ohio Congress and then the state’s Senate worked overtime to override it, laying the issue to rest Jan. 24 when the Senate cast a 24-8 along party lines. As news of the override rolled in, a private Facebook group focused on the parents of transgender youth across the country lit up with inquiries about where parents in Ohio could find the care their children would still need after the ban goes into effect April 23.

“What now? My kid has been on puberty blockers for years, but isn’t old enough for estrogen yet” a parent from northwest Ohio wrote on the page. “We’re screwed because we aren’t grandfathered in, right? Can we get estrogen in Michigan??” Another parent replied that they currently make bi-monthly, 10-hour road trips from Missouri to access care at a hospital in Michigan for their teen. “Get ready to spend a lot of time and money,” they wrote.

Michigan preparing for changing gender-affirming care landscape

Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBTQ+ Project, tells BTL that organizations and providers across the state are paying close attention to the rapidly changing gender-affirming care legal landscape. “We’re asking ourselves what this means for our state,” he says. “Are there programs available in our state that might be able to assist families who aren’t moving to Michigan but would be willing to travel out of state to obtain gender-affirming care for their children?”

Until a more formalized network of resources is established in Michigan, parents of trans kids will need to continue building the kind of ad hoc approach that’s become the norm in the current era. Parents will continue relying on word-of-mouth recommendations in Facebook groups, scouring the internet

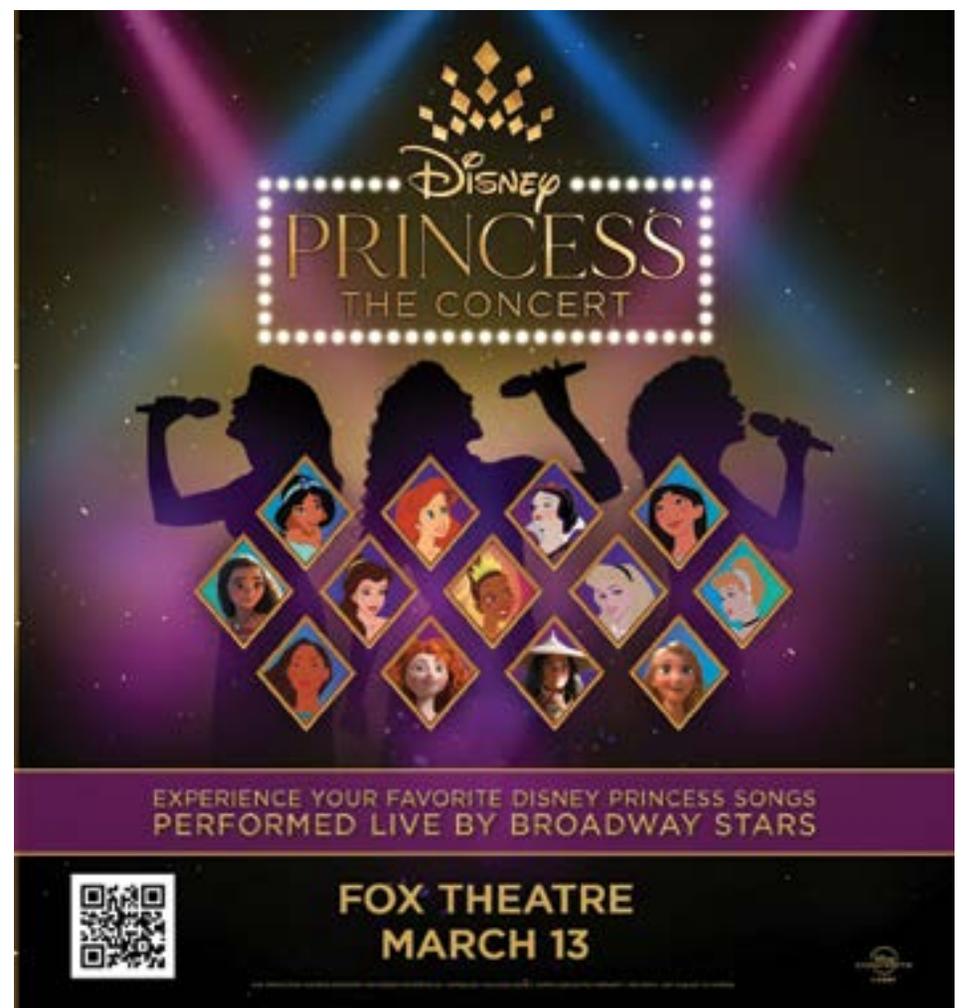
See **Trans Laws**, page 22



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LGBT Detroit Turns 30

Leaders of North America's largest Black-led org reflect on its legacy



LGBT Detroit staff (from left): Christopher Sutton, Kelley Stone, Kai Saale, A. Nzere Kwabena and Wayne Moore. Photo: Andrew Potter

BY JASON COLLINS

At a time when LGBTQ+ issues are at the forefront of American politics, for queer folks, finding affirming community can feel like a lifeline. LGBT Detroit, North America's largest Black-founded and led LGBTQ+ non-profit, has been growing that kind of community for nearly three decades.

The organization will celebrate its 30th anniversary in October. Ahead of a

special birthday gala that month, LGBT Detroit leaders and volunteers have been working on a special initiative — the In 30 Seconds Campaign, which celebrates the organization's commitment to the local community via 30-second-long, community-submitted videos answering the question, "How has community saved you?" The organization is also running a \$30 for 30 fundraising campaign in honor of the momentous occasion.

The organization known as LGBT Detroit

today was created by Kick Publishing Company and was first known as KICK: The Agency for LGBT African Americans. In 1994, KICK was only the third Black American LGBT media company in the U.S., and they were what placed Detroit's Black LGBT community on the map. A. Nzere Kwabena, the organization's executive director, told BTL that LGBT Detroit came into existence because of the surrounding environment during the late '80s, namely HIV and AIDS.

Kwabena explains, "The health crisis started, and a lot of us, including myself, were just trying to save ourselves. By the time the company [Kick Publishing Company] started, HIV was still a gay, bi and trans epidemic."

From then on, Kwabena wanted to help share the stories of this community, volunteering to become the editor-in-

See **LGBT Detroit 30**, page 12

How Ruth Ellis Inspired My Early Activism Helping Queer At-Risk Youth



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

My friendship with the late Ruth Ellis predates my time with *Between The Lines*. But just barely. I first interviewed her for *KICK!* Magazine. I

was managing editor of the publication, and we were putting Ruth on the cover in honor of her upcoming 100th birthday.

For the interview, I traveled to Ruth's place. She lived in a senior apartment building downtown, where she was still self-sufficient and very active. A bundle of energy, even at such an advanced age, she ran errands and made store trips for neighbors.

She greeted me warmly when I arrived and gave me a hug. Ruth was a kind and gentle woman. She loved people, and she loved life. She had run her own printing shop for years until her home, out of which she ran the business, was torn down in the name of urban revitalization.

But even after she retired, she still stayed active. She was an avid bowler. She'd gotten into photography, and she loved to dance. Ruth also loved young folks and their new ideas and thoughts.

At 99, she had few contemporaries. She had outlived so many, including her longtime partner Ceciline "Babe" Franklin. The two were popular among queer people of color back in the day. Ruth used to host parties in her house, very downlow but popular events. She also put up more than a few folk after their homosexuality had been exposed and they were thrown out of their houses. Heck, a couple she even helped through college.

After retiring, she left that life behind her

and, in a way, retreated back into the closet. She and Babe were no longer living together. And the folks in the senior building weren't very savvy on gay rights and liberation.

As she got older, however, she was rediscovered by the LGBTQ+ community. It all started after she took a self-defense class with martial arts instructor Jaye Spiro. Ruth knew a lesbian when she saw one, and she struck up a conversation with Spiro after class. The two became fast friends.

Spiro started taking Ruth out and introduced her to a whole new generation of gay folk. Ruth traveled, attended the



Ruth Ellis. Photo: Ruth Ellis Center

Michigan Womyn's Music Festival multiple times and just basically lived her best queer life. She was hailed as the matriarch of Detroit's Black, queer community. Ruth loved the attention she received but it confounded her at the same time.

At that first meeting in her tiny apartment, Ruth told me she couldn't understand why

See **Second Glances**, page 14

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Tennessee Republicans Attack Marriage Equality, Vie for Title of Most Dangerous Legislature for LGBTQ+ People



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Marriage equality is finally a thing in Greece, the first Christian Orthodox-majority country in the world to let love rule. And

on Feb. 15, the day after Valentine's Day, no less. Isle of Lesbos, coming through!

According to The Advocate, a conservative Greece politician warned that legalizing marriage equality would "open the gates of hell and perversion" in the country.

You know, just like it did in Canada way back when. As a matter of fact, when you do a Google Earth search of Ottawa, it looks like a Hieronymus Bosch painting. And you can get that painting on a tote bag or coffee mug for just \$20. All proceeds go to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Zombie Relief Fund.

In all seriousness, though. Congratulations, Greece! We love some good queer news.

Meanwhile, 5,700 miles from Lesbos, how

“Conservatives are going after marriage equality, just as so many predicted.”

did Republicans in Nashville, Tennessee spend Feb. 15? Perhaps issuing a formal proclamation congratulating Greece on its entrance into the world of marriage equality?

Ha. Hardly. Instead, Tennessee Republicans passed a bill to make it easier for people to discriminate against queer couples looking to get married in the state.

The bill "could potentially allow individuals to refuse to officiate marriages based on their personal beliefs, including objections to LGBTQ+ weddings," The Advocate reports.

"The legislation, Senate Bill 596, declares that 'a person shall not be required to solemnize a marriage if the person has an objection to solemnizing the marriage based on the person's conscience or religious beliefs.'"

Of course, the Tennessee Republicans HAD to do this in order to protect the religious rights of everyone who attends the No Homo Megachurch because such protections did not exist elsewhere, right?

Come on. You know where this is going.

"Tennessee law already permits individuals to decline to officiate at marriages if they choose," reports the

Advocate.

So now the law, like, what? Extra permission to tell queer couples to pound sand?

Eric Patton, a minister in Tennessee, told WKRN "the open-ended wording of the bill would allow anyone permitted to solemnize a marriage to refuse to solemnize marriages between interracial couples or even heterosexual couples."

Sounds bad!

"The way it's worded, you can discriminate

against anybody for any reason, which is terrible," Patton said.

If Tennessee already legally protects people who don't want to solemnize a particular marriage, then why on earth pass this bill?

"There's nothing in the law right now that says anybody has to do any kind of marriage at all, so there's no clarification that this bill provides," Eric Patton, a minister in Tennessee told WKRN. "This bill does nothing, essentially, except open the opportunity for a lawsuit."

Ding, ding, ding! It's all about the suit, baby. Drunk on their power after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade, conservatives are going after marriage equality, just as so many predicted.

"The way they have vaguely worded this is that they're trying to invite a Kim Davis-type lawsuit to go up against Obergefell because they're wanting to test the marriage equality law as it stands," Patton said.

Obergefell v. Hodges is, of course, the landmark Supreme Court decision that made marriage equality a nationwide thing in June of 2015. Kim Davis was a municipal clerk in Kentucky who made a name for herself after she refused to issue a marriage license to a same-sex couple in August of 2015 because she was just not feelin' the Supreme Court case.

Conservatives hope that today's Supreme Court, stacked with ultra-conservative

justices appointed by disgraced former president Trump, will overturn Obergefell just like they did Roe. And, sadly, they absolutely will.

And Tennessee wants to get in on the ground floor! Republicans there have been very busy! According to HuffPost, "Last year Tennessee introduced — and passed — more anti-LGBTQ laws than any other state."

Quite the achievement considering how many state legislatures across the country have made hurting LGBTQ+ people their number one priority like it's a competition. A competition that I, frankly, do not want to see anyone win.

"The Tennessee House of Representatives continues to be one of the most dangerous legislative chambers in the country for LGBTQ+ people," Tennessee Equality Project Executive Director Chris Sanders said in a statement last year.

And they've only gotten worse since then.

"The idea that you can discriminate against anybody is just wrong-headed and general Tennessee nonsense," Patton said.

Ooooh. "General Tennessee Nonsense." A new state motto, perhaps? Right now Tennessee's state motto is "Agriculture and Commerce." Like, how is that even a motto? It sounds like a boring pre-req for an MBA. But clearly, they are in the business of foolishness and owe it to the people to accurately reflect that truth.



THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

LGBTQ+ Michiganders Urged to Voice Opinion on New Proposed District Maps



In what has become a years-long process, the citizens commission established during the 2018 election to redraw Michigan's election district maps is once again holding public sessions on a set of proposed maps that could dramatically change the landscape of the Michigan electorate. A federal judge ruled in December in the Agee v. Benson case that the maps submitted by the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) violated the Voting Rights Act and the

14th Amendment by diluting the votes of Black Detroit residents.

The judge ordered the MICRC and a special court-appointed master to draw up new maps and will choose which map to accept in the coming weeks. In the meantime, the MICRC invites residents to voice their opinions at a Feb. 22 hearing at Second Ebenezer Church or online at michigan-mapping.org, where you can learn more about the process. Importantly, the new map could establish a new LGBTQ+ community of interest that encompasses Ferndale, Detroit's Palmer Park neighborhood and smaller nearby areas like Pleasant Ridge, strengthening the power of the queer vote in Southeast Michigan.

Read more about the potential impact of new election maps at PrideSource.com.



#HateWontWin Lobby Day Announced



Equality Michigan's second annual #HateWontWin Lobby Day is set for April 25 at the State Capitol in Lansing. The free event brings together LGBTQ+ organizations, community members and allies from across the state to discuss, plan and rally together in support of pro-equality policies.

The chief focus of the 2024 event will be on House Bills 5300-5303, which would remove onerous barriers to legal name changes and codify access to accurate gender markers for trans and non-binary Michiganders. Attendees can also participate in training on meeting with legislators and their staffers, network with like-minded community members and get some face time with local representatives.

Breakfast and lunch to be provided. Sign up at equalitymi.org/news-events.



Michigan Husbands Win Big on 'Wheel of Fortune'



Lathrup Village husbands Greg Ruvolo and Tom Bayer appeared on the classic game show earlier this month during Sweethearts Week — only the second time in the show's four-decade history that a same-sex couple has appeared. While they didn't manage to win an especially tough bonus round, they still walked away with \$6,000

in cash and a trip to Paris and Normandy. The couple held a viewing party at the Birmingham Village Players Playhouse, where Ruvolo serves as president.

"The best part of being on 'Wheel of Fortune' was to be able to experience it as a couple and, eventually, share that experience with our friends and family," Bayer told BTL. "We had so much fun," Ruvolo added. The couple will jet off on their trip to France in the fall.

Read more about the couple's trip to California for the taping at PrideSource.com.

New Season of Drag Queen Reality Show 'We're Here' Announced



Season four of "We're Here," on HBO and Max, centers on popular drag queens Sasha Velour, Priyanka, Jaida Essence Hall and Latrice Royale as they travel through small-town America to spread the Gospel of Drag. The new season, premiering April 26, will take the performers to Tennessee and Oklahoma and dive into the recent national wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and its effect on the community.

First Ever Downriver Pride Fest Announced



Set for June 21-22 in Wyandotte, the first-ever Downriver Pride will feature all the familiar trappings of a good Pride fest, including food, drink, entertainment and rainbow-infused good times, in a part of the state that seems to be growing more queer-friendly every year. Learn more about the event at downriverpride.com.

Kristen Stewart's Super Queer Photo Shoot



When Kristen Stewart sat down with Rolling Stone, the conversation was a wild, freewheeling romp into the actor's upcoming wedding to her writing partner, director Dylan Meyer, her flexible views on gender and sexuality, cutting her own mullet, and what she wanted to do for the article's photoshoot. Was the jockstrap her idea? We may never know, but clearly there was some genius involved, because we may have never seen such a perfect photo representation of queerness.



chief of a Black gay men’s support group newsletter. “That newsletter became a hit locally, and from that, we formed a company called Kick Publishing Company.” People responded to the voice coming out of the Midwest, which had been lacking. Kwabena shares, “People sought us out to hear what it is to live in the intersections of the identity of both race and [being a part of] America’s heartland.”

Kwabena points to its longtime mission as something unique about the organization: “LGBT Detroit is rooted in the promise of a better life.”

Soon after its founding, LGBT Detroit introduced its annual Hotter Than July celebration, America’s oldest Black, gay non-profit Pride celebration. Robert E. Tate, the organizer of the Detroit social group Billionaire Boys Club, was one of the event’s co-founders and had been a part of the LGBTQ+ scene in Detroit before Kick Publishing Company was even a thing.

The publisher launched the magazine around the same time Tate founded Imagine This Productions, an upscale event production company. Tate knew back then that KICK was going to go far. “I’ve seen how LGBT Detroit has grown from the beginning until now. I’ve seen positive things coming out of that organization, and I like to be a part of positive things,” he told BTL. Tate worked with Cornelius Wilson, who had organized the Men of Color group, to establish the first Hotter Than July event.

With LGBT Detroit’s 30th anniversary on the horizon, Tate reflects on being a part of this community: “With me being there, seeing stuff, I can say that 30 years is really a milestone of all of the different programs that LGBT Detroit has, and I can see that going further and further into the future.”

When Kick Publishing Company started, Kwabena said people weren’t consciously performing advocacy work — they were “people who were just trying to care for one another.” By 2003, though, KICK had established itself as a non-profit organization supporting numerous programs and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals.

In 2015, KICK changed its name to



A. Nzere Kwabena at the LGBT Detroit offices. Photo. Andrew Potter

“

The health crisis started, and a lot of us, including myself, were just trying to save ourselves. By the time the company [Kick Publishing Company] started, HIV was still a gay, bi and trans epidemic.

LGBT Detroit, and in 2016, they moved into permanent headquarters, affectionately nicknamed #SafeBraveSpace. Since then, LGBT Detroit has grown to include around 800 registered members and diligently works to provide a safe space for all members of the community to work, live and play. An additional nearby property was acquired, which was turned into a campus, making LGBT Detroit the largest Black-founded and led LGBT organization in North America.

With the success of Hotter Than July came Cold as Hell, a winter Pride event that celebrates a “fetish fusion.” Cold as Hell was created to cater to men who wanted to express themselves in “a very unique way.” “Kink is a part of LGBT culture, although

it isn’t just LGBT, and kink has been celebrated for decades,” Kwabena elaborates. The event was produced as a result of the growth of an emerging Black kink fetish over the past 10 years, which is what the event celebrates.

Cold as Hell, Kwabena says, offers an educational opportunity for people to understand kink.

Service pup and gear enthusiast Wolf Pup Saturn and Bobby the Fire Marshal, a sensory and bondage specialist, host the event, which consists of a variety of live demonstrations, interactive experiences, a gear show and informative panel discussions. This year, Cold as Hell’s campaign is focusing on a multi-pronged HIV anti-stigma campaign called Togethr.

Today, LGBT Detroit is an integral part of the community, and younger members also have the opportunity to feel supported and support others. Luis Gutierrez, an executive assistant to Kwabena and the organization’s

operations coordinator, has been a part of the organization since 2020. He says after graduating high school, “[I] didn’t really know what I wanted to do. One of the previous teachers was very close with Nzere and he recommended me to volunteer.”

Gutierrez got involved during the pandemic, starting with work on the Hotter Than July event, playing an integral role in creating a virtual event. The experience helped Gutierrez gain a good sense of the type of community LGBT Detroit helps create. At 30 years old, he represents one of many younger people who are newer to LGBT Detroit. While working with the older members, Gutierrez finds it interesting to hear the stories about how Hotter Than July was planned years ago and appreciates that the team listens to ideas from younger members.

Kwabena looks back proudly on how far LGBT Detroit has come since 2015. “The company has flourished,” he says. As the organization’s 30th anniversary gala approaches, LGBT Detroit is taking this time to reflect on its journey, people and accomplishments.

And so is Tate. LGBT Detroit, he says, “has been a really positive thing for the Black community — to have an agency that can supply different perspectives or different programs that are part of this organization that is Black-led is a big thing, and it is a positive thing that a Black organization can exist for these many years and have a positive image.”

The Dark Side of Advocacy

A leading Michigan trans advocate gets real about the toll of community activism

BY JULISA ABAD

On July 31, 2021, I woke up feeling so grateful for another day, but this day was an especially important one. That night, I would be acknowledged with a Humanitarian of the Year award for the work I do, presented by Motown Honors. I've received many awards for the strides I've made for the LGBTQ+ community, but this one felt different — it felt like the first time I'd really been seen by my peers. That night at the awards ceremony, I wore a red dress and sat at a table with my colleagues and my best friend Ashia Davis, excited and a little nervous about the evening ahead of us — but let's go back a little to understand how I got here.

I was born into a middle-class Latin family, and I knew at 6 that I was different. I didn't know what that meant then, but by 15, I identified with being transgender. I had dreams of becoming a flight attendant or a fashion designer. At 18, I left home to be able



Julisa Abad. Photo: Instagram/@Julisa_Abad

to truly be my authentic self, and in 2016, I relocated to Detroit, specifically the Six Mile and Woodward area. After one week, I realized it was the concrete jungle, where all demographics and different identities do survival sex work, and that this part of Detroit is known for crime. Like many trans people, particularly trans women of color, I couldn't gain employment anywhere due to the social stigmas — at the time, gender identity and sexual orientation were not protected by the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.

Later that year, when I saw our prosecutor Kym Worthy and our now attorney general Dana Nessel on TV forming the Fair Michigan project, which combats crimes against the LGBTQ+ community, I knew I wanted to be involved. We started in Wayne County in 2016.

At this point, we have prosecuted more

See **Dark Side of Advocacy**, page 20

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Air Earhart
 Puzzle can be found on page 21

◀ **Second Glances**
 Continued from page 9

everyone was making such a fuss over “li'l ol' Ruth Ellis.” A documentary had been made, and it was scheduled to be shown during the annual Hotter Than July/Black Gay Pride celebration. The film was riveting. In it, Ruth traveled back to her native Springfield, Illinois and visited her old high school. She reminisced about her first crush, her female gym teacher, and even took a lap around the old gym to show she still could.

The documentary, “Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100,” was a critical success. Its Detroit premiere took place in Wayne State University’s Community Arts Auditorium. I actually ended up in a seat a few rows in front of Ruth, needing to be close enough to take photos of the evening’s speakers. Somehow, li'l ol' Ruth Ellis spotted me in the crowd. “Is that Jason?” she called out. I waved, delighted she’d remembered me.

Following the screening, I took several pics of Ruth. She was the belle of the ball and, literally, the star of the show. It was her night. Actually, as she turned 100, it was her year.

But no matter how much energy she had, her 100th year was a bit grueling. She went on tour to promote the documentary and perhaps took on a little more than she should have. Still, at her 101st birthday party, conveniently held in Spiro’s Ferndale studio, she was in good spirits.

It was a special evening. Friends paid tribute, several young folks performed and read poetry, and Ruth’s dear friend Kofi Adoma played the violin. Ruth was still vital, and she had a good time.

At the same time all this was happening, an initiative had begun. A group of community leaders gathered in attorney

John Allen’s office with the goal of creating some type of emergency housing for queer teens who may otherwise end up on the streets. At that first meeting in June 1999, I, as a member of that committee, voted with the rest of those in attendance to name the initiative the Ruth Ellis Center (REC).

This really tickled Ruth. She was present when the REC opened their first drop-in center at the corner of Woodward Avenue and Six Mile Road. With a little assistance, she cut the ribbon and posed for photos with fans both young and old.

Though at times Ruth appeared superhuman, she was, alas, simply human. She died Oct. 5, 2000, less than three months after turning 101. I continued to watch with a certain pride as the Ruth Ellis Center grew and quickly expanded from a tiny one-room space on the second floor to a much larger space on the first. Executive Director Grace McClelland deserves a lot of credit for the agency’s growth. She oversaw the opening of the office space and a giant, new drop-in center in Highland Park. She also acted as project manager when the center bought their first house, Ruth’s House, soon after.

Today, the Ruth Ellis Center is bigger and more successful than ever — much larger than those of us at that first meeting could have hoped for. Much larger, still, than I’m sure li'l ol' Ruth Ellis could have ever imagined. Through the agency and its good work, my friend Ruth lives on. And that makes me smile. Li'l ol' Ruth Ellis was really larger than life, and she lives on through the agency that bears her name.

I’ve thought of her over the years, each time I’ve written a story about the agency’s incredible growth. She’d be so proud of all that’s been accomplished in her name. Yes, li'l ol' Ruth Ellis has made it to the big time, right where she belongs.

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Dishing with an ‘On Your Feet!’ Cast Member

Performer Jake Dylan on why the Gloria and Emilio Estefan musical resonates with queer audiences

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Detroiters will have only a brief opportunity to see the Broadway hit musical “On Your Feet! The Story Of Emilio & Gloria Estefan” when the touring production comes to the Fox Theatre Feb. 24.

The musical features the Latin-pop hits that made Gloria Estefan a household name, from high-energy dance numbers like “Conga” and “Rhythm Is Gonna Get You” to ballads like “Coming Out of the Dark,” the 1990 single that still resonates with many queer fans today. Director Luis Salgado, who appeared in the original Broadway production of “On Your Feet!,” said in press materials that the story exemplifies the American Dream through the eyes and work ethic of Cuban immigrants. “The Estefans have given us permission to dare to dream bigger,” he writes. “They allowed their truth to resonate through their music, penetrating all of us, whether you’re Latine or not. This joy is a gift we want to give to our audiences.”

Queer cast member Jake Dylan, who plays record executive Phil, sat down with BTL recently to talk about what it’s like to tour with

the production and why he thinks queer fans have held Gloria Estefan in such high esteem throughout her decades-long career.

Can you speak to being a queer cast member on this tour, especially as that might relate to Gloria’s influence on the community over the years?

Luckily, I work around such a big queer community, so it’s not out of the norm. I would say it’s probably abnormal to not be, but still that doesn’t take away from the significance of having that representation in professional theater in this show specifically. I would equate

Gloria Estefan to what she was in the ’80s is now probably what Lady Gaga is right now or what Madonna has always been, but Gloria has been a trailblazer for sure. Knowing that she’s an ally still in her 60s is just so important because she definitely was creating music for queer people to feel safe in a time that it wasn’t as accepted.

Do you have a favorite song or two from the show?

Definitely “1-2-3” is one, and honestly, I didn’t know it before I was doing the show, but I love all of that song in our show and how it’s done and definitely “Conga” just by the nature of it being my exposure to her initially, and I just feel like that’s a universal party type song.

What has been the most surprising

thing about the tour for you?

So the crazy thing for me was when I first joined the show in the summer, it was in a theater in Maine where we were for five weeks, and I really got to know everyone on the crew and how it all works behind the scenes. There are so many small things making the show happen, and for me, something like a costume change, something that can seem so minor can change the whole show. You figure out the small things like “This is where I put this costume. This is how this change happens.”

Why do you think this show is important?

I believe this show is so important and shares such an important message about inclusivity, and it’s just fun. I haven’t heard anyone see it not enjoy themselves in that two and a half hours, across the many regions of the country we’re touring. Even if I wasn’t a part of it, I’d say this is a very worthwhile show to get out and support.

To read the full interview, head to [PrideSource.com](https://pridesource.com). Buy tickets for “On Your Feet!” at bit.ly/48uPlnr.



Jake Dylan in “On Your Feet!” Courtesy photo

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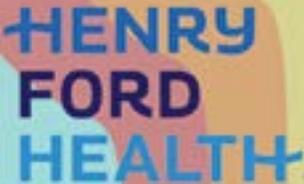
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How Tricia Cooke's Lesbian Sensibility Infuses 'Drive-Away Dolls,' Co-Created with Her Husband Ethan Coen



Filmmakers Tricia Cooke and Ethan Coen. Photo: Jennifer Fisher

The film is Cooke and Coen's first major film collaboration

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Ethan Coen, half of the filmmaking brother duo known for cinema touchstones such as “The Big Lebowski” and “Fargo,” lays it all out very simply after I mention that “Drive-Away Dolls,” his latest, is the queer film I didn’t know I needed: “We felt that there was an underserved community that needed a dumb gay movie.”

The “we” this time, though, doesn’t involve his brother Joel, but his wife of 34 years, Tricia Cooke, who calls it a “silly lesbian movie.” Silly it may be, but “Drive-Away Dolls” also tucks timely socio-political commentary on queer oppression into all its frivolity, and it does so with a DeSantis-like politician played by Matt Damon, lots of dildos and same-sex soccer players who make out while Linda Ronstadt’s “Long Long Time” plays over the scene.

“I mean, putting a whole basement full of lesbian soccer players together, it’s just like my fantasy,” Cooke says. “It’s fiction. It’s certainly not meant to depict reality, but yeah, I mean, I hope that young people who see it are inspired.”

In the film, friends Jamie (Margaret Qualley) and Marian (Geraldine Viswanathan) take a road trip to Florida and, while en route, find themselves running from government officials who want what they didn’t even know they had in the trunk of their rental car. While the movie’s utter ridiculousness is clearly imagined, contemporary themes involving Florida, a state that has put queer people in danger, are pulled straight from real life headlines. Dildos and Miley Cyrus, both of which have iconic cameos, may not be able to save us, but if you’re going to make a movie that mirrors some of our country’s queerphobia, at least it can be dumb and gay with a purpose.

For Cooke, the screwball-comedy tone was the result of what she thought queer cinema had been lacking: “lesbian comedies that didn’t end in some kind of tragic or unhappy way.”

It's hard to imagine this film even existing at all if Cooke, a lesbian, and Coen weren't in an open marriage. After they married in 1990, they had two children. In fact, there's a good chance that, without their personal relationship, there'd be no "Drive-Away Dolls," an idea the couple dreamed up together more than 20 years ago.

"We were always open personally and privately," Cooke says. "I mean, being open in a public way, it feels almost the same. I was just like, 'Really, people are going to care? OK, whatever. I mean, I think it's really great to present a kind of non-traditional or more unconventional relationship in a way of like, 'This is how the world exists, and it can be very healthy and rewarding,' and so I'm happy to do that."

Coen has similar feelings about their dynamic, calling it their "boring, everyday reality."

"It doesn't seem interesting to us," he adds, "and if anyone else is interested, well, OK, that's interesting. I guess it is to some people. We've been in an open relationship for over 20 years, and so it's good people are coming around."

Before "Drive-Away Dolls," which Cooke co-wrote and co-directed, she served as editor on many Coen brothers films, including "Fargo" and "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" Cooke leaving her lesbian stamp on "Drive-Away Dolls" makes for the queerest work in the Coen repertoire (even gayer than Brad Pitt as personal trainer Chad in "Burn After Reading," a notion that elicits this guffawed response from Coen when I ask if Chad was gay: "You'd have to ask Brad, but I'm sure he would be tickled by the idea.")

"Drive-Away Dolls" originated from

self-proclaimed "filth elder" and pioneering DIY filmmaker John Waters.

"We wanted to just do something transgressive," she says. "I mean, we could never reach the kind of genius level of John Waters, but we were trying to be subversive in our way."

Cooke also imparted her own personal experiences as a lesbian in the early 2000s, when she began drafting the screenplay with Coen. At the time, she was spending some of her nights at Meow Mix and Cattyshack, two lesbian bars in New York. The lesbian bars in "Drive-Away Dolls," including one called The

PinkCupid.com — and Cooke, who has been involved with the Queer Liberation March as an organizer and archives committee member, has seen a lot change for LGBTQ+ people since "Drive-Away Dolls" first hit the page. The goal was to "make a movie that felt representative of my community at the time."

"I felt like the world that I knew, at least in the lesbian bars, was very specific to that time and that generation," Cooke says. "And I mean, not that I haven't evolved as well, but it felt like I wouldn't be able to represent an authentic kind of world if it was contemporary. Some of the jokes are so dated.

or as Coen puts it: "We have more lesbian movies in us." Next up is the detective story "Honey Don't," set to shoot in March, which Margaret Qualley will return for, while also adding Chris Evan and Aubrey Plaza to the mix. "And since there are two of them, you can't do two and not do a third, so we've got a third one we've been talking about," he adds. Cooke says that film will be called "Go Beavers."

As Coen and Cooke work together to bring queer diversity to cinema with their lesbian B-movie comedies, the two reflected on the entirety of representation in Hollywood.



Tricia Cooke and Ethan Coen on the set of "Drive-Away Dolls." Photo: Jennifer Fisher

We wanted to just do something transgressive. I mean, we could never reach the kind of genius level of John Waters, but we were trying to be subversive in our way.

Cooke's desire to see more of the films she says were "hugely impactful" to her: '90s-era LGBTQ+ films like "Go Fish" ("a good, important kind of fun movie for me") and "But I'm a Cheerleader."

Queer classics like "La Cage aux Folles," from 1979, and "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean," released in 1982, were also on her mind. The latter two, she says, shaped her understanding of her sexual identity in her teen years. Another big influence on her and "Drive-Away Dolls" was

Butter Churn, are influenced by that period in Cooke's life. "I wanted for those to feel authentic," she says.

Details on her experiences at those lesbian bars shaped the writing, but then the script sat so long that Meow Mix and Cattyshack now no longer exist. "We didn't manage to get it made then," Coen says, "and just put it in a drawer, then came back to it and did some rewriting."

Throughout the film, the old-school charms of gay life in the mid-aughts are omnipresent — when it comes to dating, there's no

But we kind of wanted to keep that very naïve, innocent feel."

One running joke (spoilers ahead on Cyrus' role) is literally from another time and, in fact, based on a real person: Cynthia Albritton, aka Cynthia Plaster Caster. Caster was known for making plaster casts of famous musicians' erect penises, and when the filmmakers approached Cyrus, they explained the basis of her character.

"When we approached her, we knew her music and we knew her from 'SNL' and some performances, but we didn't know the extent of her fascination with phalluses," Cooke says, sharing that they went into more detail than was necessary about her role in the film. "She's like, 'I thought that's why you hired me.' She just assumed that we knew that she performed with gigantic dildos and had a dildo room in her house. She said, 'Yeah, they interviewed me in Town & Country in my room, in my dildo room.' All of those cool things together: Town & Country, dildo room and Miley Cyrus."

Looking ahead, this is just the beginning of the Coen and Cooke filmmaking partnership,

Coen brought up "Star Wars," a franchise that has been critiqued for limiting people-of-color roles.

"I watch movies from all over the world. New things are interesting. Diversity is interesting. I'm almost tempted to say things I shouldn't say, but who wants to watch 'Star Wars'? It's the same issue," he says.

Cooke elaborated, suggesting that franchises and blockbusters like "Star Wars" offer studios a level of financial security that a film like "Drive-Away Dolls" can't.

"Because they're high stakes when you're making a movie, because they're expensive to make, I feel like getting funding to make a movie is hard, and there wasn't as much trust in people who hadn't done it before," she said. "But the fact that new people within marginalized communities are being trusted to make movies, and those movies are not only important, good movies but making a lot of money, it's kind of changing the trust level in the world of queer cinema or Black cinema. It's just important to give people a chance."

Stevie Baka Encourages Detroit Community to Reimagine ‘Arts & Scraps’

East Side non-profit repurposes unusual trash-bound materials

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Some jobs are just jobs, but for Stevie Baka, their daily commute brings them to a job that feels more like a personal mission. Baka serves as community store manager at Arts & Scraps, a 35-year-old educational non-profit housed in a nondescript warehouse on Detroit's East Side. There, Baka helps customers take resources out of the waste stream and transform them into art or projects that give trash-bound items new life.

“It’s so great to be a part of this,” Baka said, a Detroit native who lived for a time in both Seattle and Chicago before returning to Michigan seven years ago. “I honestly had no idea what a creative reuse was when I moved back. I didn’t even know that it existed?”

Nevertheless, Baka applied for a job as an instructor and then, “my whole world opened up,” they said. Baka, speaking in between taking care of customers, is pricing a vintage E.T. child’s suitcase as they start talking about their love for their work. Instantly, Baka’s face lights up.

“Creative reuse,” Baka explains, “is about using recycled industrial scraps to help people of all ages and abilities think and learn.”

People can donate virtually anything and then the items are transformed by customers and students who reimagine these unconventional materials. Imperfect socks are turned into hand puppets. Foam sticky pads used to line the inside of a radio panel on cars are affixed with paper and ribbon to become a mosaic. The only limit is one’s imagination.

“It’s really giving one last life to these objects before they are cast off,” said Baka. “People doing creative jobs, entrepreneurs, they come here and make stuff for their own businesses. It is such a community hub here in Detroit, and it’s the best job I’ve ever had.”

Personally, Baka said, they love seeing young minds opened when student groups come in.

“We challenge people to change the way they view education,” they said. “We teach STEM education, but we do it in a way where we encourage kids to just create and make mistakes to learn to push through that space of actually letting their brains figure things out.”

Arts & Scraps gets scrap wood donated from Point Hardware. A local woman donates tiny “sock loops” used in knitting that Arts & Scraps uses for finger weaving. The store also gets a lot of “weird packing materials,” said Baka. “We have these black gears, and they’re just circles with little edges on the outside. They were used



Stevie Baka at Arts & Scraps. Photo: Jason A. Michael

to hold an item on a conveyor belt ... and then thrown away.”

But at Arts & Scraps they get a second life.

“They’re wheels,” Baka said. “They’re goggles, they’re ribbon dancers, they’re all this stuff, and you just get to see how they’re reused again and again. Honestly, the coolest thing is the way we take all this stuff that was destined to end up in a landfill. ... We’re just the last stop before it goes into the waste stream.”

Baka said that there’s something for virtually everyone in the store. Fabric is popular. So are greeting cards and various ephemera. Paper plates, Styrofoam cups and things like basic party supplies. “I encourage people,” they said. “You might buy organic, recyclable tableware for your party. But it’s also great to come here and buy something that was going to go straight to a landfill. You might be uncomfortable using Styrofoam cups, they are new in the package and they’re going to be wasted.”

Old magazines are stocked for scrapbooking and collage, something that was not done before Baka came on board. “They weren’t saved,”

they said. “They were just tossed out. Now we have these different estate sale groups that will donate to us.”

If the list of materials found in the store is endless, the price of it all is flexible. “You’re actually resourcing people with fun, creative stuff that they want,” said Baka. “And you can lower the price based on where people’s income bracket is. I love that.”

On the flip side, sometimes items can prove to be quite valuable. Baka recalled when Judith, a store regular who usually buys buttons, found a tiny copper tea set pounded out of pennies. It was in the middle of the beads section.

“I looked it up and they’re like hundreds of dollars, and she just like found it in the buttons, over there randomly,” said Baka. “I’m like, ‘good for you. I love you getting it.’” In the end, said Baka, “It’s a constant treasure hunt of seeing what you can find. It’s awesome.”

Baka’s joy about their job seems to generate the same response from their customers.

“Arts & Scraps is one of my all-time favorite spaces in the city, and I find myself raving

about it to anyone who might benefit from the people and materials inside,” said Rachel Lott, a teacher from Detroit who has visited the store often since 2020. Lott discovered the store while trying to source sustainable and affordable resources for her jewelry business. “I immediately fell in love with the store upon walking in. It’s an organized paradise of historic art materials and crafting gems.”

It’s more than just the materials that make Arts & Scraps so charming, according to Lott — it’s also Baka. Lott mentioned the store manager’s warmth and the way they care about customer accessibility. “[Stevie] is attentive and patient and appears to be endlessly knowledgeable about a wide range of art supplies and materials,” she said.

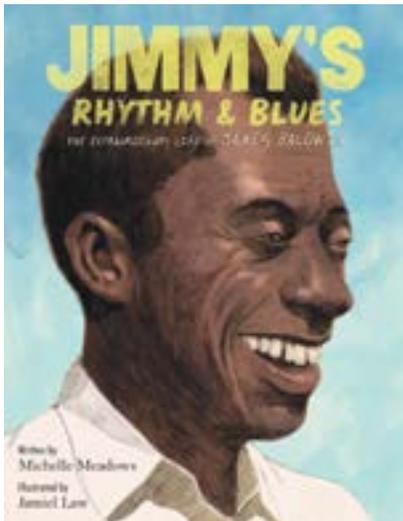
Arts & Scraps is located at 16135 Harper Ave. in Detroit. The store is open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday, as well as 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, email store@artsandscraps.org.

5 Picture-Book Biographies of Black LGBTQ+ Americans

BY DANA RUDOLPH

In honor of Black History Month — but best read all year round — here are some of my favorite recent children’s biographies of famous Black LGBTQ+ Americans.

Brand new is the superb “Jimmy’s Rhythm & Blues: The Extraordinary Life of James Baldwin,” by Michelle Meadows, illustrated by Jamiel Law (Harper Collins). This blank verse biography honors Baldwin’s legacy in the rhythm of its text, and offers young readers just enough detail to be informative without overwhelming. It looks at Baldwin’s life from his childhood in Harlem through his outspoken and fearless work as a writer, and includes his romantic relationship with Swiss painter



Lucien Happersberger. The warm, evocative illustrations are the perfect complement to the lyrical words.

Also new is “Glenn Burke, Game Changer,” by Phil Bilder, illustrated by Daniel J. O’Brien (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a powerful biography of the first openly gay player in Major League Baseball and co-inventor of the high five. Bildner, whose earlier middle-grade novel “A High Five for Glenn Burke” is about a gay boy inspired by Burke, knows how to write action, and his punchy sentences give verve to Burke’s on-field play. Bildner also gives readers an unflinching but age-appropriate look at Burke’s later struggles, including the homophobia he encountered, how he “got into trouble with drugs and the law,” the car accident that shattered his leg, and his death from an AIDS-related illness at age 42. It is a compelling book that touches on some tough topics with thoughtfulness while celebrating the life of a changemaker.

“A Song for the Unsung: Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the 1963 March on Washington,” by Carole Boston Weatherford and Rob Sanders, illustrated by Byron McCray (Henry Holt), is a lyrical testament to Rustin and his work, not only conveying the story of his life from childhood but also helping readers emotionally connect with Rustin and the spirit of the era. Each spread includes suggestions for songs to sing, all drawn from the Civil Rights movement and Black spirituals. It’s a powerful, interactive approach to bring readers into the story. The book sits at the older end of the picture book

age range for the amount of text and complexity of vocabulary (“committed,” “orchestrated,” etc.) but nevertheless feels clear and understandable.

“Unstoppable: How Bayard Rustin Organized the 1963 March on Washington,” by Michael G. Long, illustrated by Bea Jackson (Little Bee), begins with the assertion, “Bayard Rustin was a troublemaker.” Readers soon see that he was making trouble for a good reason: to change the unfair laws and customs that kept Black people from freedom. And although some White politicians opposed the civil rights movement and attacked Rustin for being gay, and civil rights leaders worried that these attacks would harm the movement, “Bayard was proud of who he was — Black, gay and an activist for peace.” While this

doesn’t reach the lyrical heights of “A Song for the Unsung,” it is an informative, intersectional and inspiring look at the life and significance of this sometimes-forgotten civil rights leader.

“Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist,” by Rosita Stevens-Holsey and Terry Catasús Jennings, illustrated by Ashanti Fortson (Yellow Jacket), is a moving biography in verse of the acclaimed activist, attorney, and Episcopal priest, from childhood in the Jim Crow South to involvement in some of the landmark civil rights cases of the 20th century. Stevens-Holsey, Murray’s niece, and co-author Jennings note that while Murray did not use the same terminology we do today, “Transgender/is possibly/what Pauli would call herself...Pauli’s pronouns/ may have been/ they/them/their.” The life of this “unsung force” in two overlapping social justice movements deserves to be better known, and this book is a great place to start.

For a few other children’s biographies of notable LGBTQ+ Black Americans, including Laverne Cox, RuPaul and Marsha P. Johnson, please visit my Database of LGBTQ+ Family Books at mombian.com. I’ll note, too, that we could still use many more picture book biographies that show both the Black and the queer aspects of people’s identities. It’s shocking to me that there is not yet one of Audre Lorde, for example. There are many other figures, too, both historical and contemporary, whose lives could inspire and inform young people today. I urge authors and publishers to take action here as a way not only to look back, but also ahead.



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◀ Dark Side of Advocacy

Continued from page 13

than 41 capital cases with a 100% conviction rate. We have expanded to Oakland, Washtenaw and Ingham counties, and we are the first in the nation to have a trans inclusion policy. Myself and our special prosecutor Kam Towns have trained several police precincts in Detroit on cultural competency. I have trained the Wayne County Sheriff's office on how they house trans individuals. I've also spearheaded a name change program for trans people through Ford, GM and the Dykema law firm. To date, we have helped 321 trans people living in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County legally change their name with no cost to them. We have partnerships with the University of Michigan where we run a program helping people access legal services and a trauma-informed program focused on trans women of color.

I'm so humble and grateful for my role and what I've been able to accomplish, but there is another side to advocacy work that we never discuss — a darker side.

Like most trans people, I ultimately had to leave home to be able to be my authentic self. For 15 years, my father didn't speak to me. I moved to Detroit to start a new life, not knowing what my calling would be. I started advocating because of the lack of respect, resources and opportunities for myself, but also for my community.

Today in 2024, we are so much more progressive than when I started this job, but the reality is that in 2016, there weren't many opportunities for trans women. My advocacy propelled me onto TV, launching me to the forefront of the trans advocacy movement and presenting me as a pillar of my community. But it's important to remember that for all the people who love me because of the work I do, there are just as many trans women you don't see because of reasons we don't often consider — opportunities, colorism, classism, passability or simply the fact that sometimes there's only space for one person, which creates a rift in my community.

When you're placed on a pedestal, you're held to a higher standard. I always have to be "on." I can never have a bad day because I'm in the public eye, and every event I'm at is always publicized, which gives me the worst anxiety.

I work with more than seven partnerships

and have a hard time saying no, even when I'm depleted because I know this work has to get done, and if not by me, then who? I do not get to go home and turn it off, unlike a lot of my colleagues. I'm part of this community; I see my fellow community members in my free time, and they call me as a point of contact. It's constant. If I want to go out and get my hair done, my experience is different because I'm Julisa the Advocate.

Maybe most difficult of all, the work hasn't allowed me the time to grieve properly after losing the first person I was ever in love with to a murder in the Palmer Park area in 2016 — the same year six other trans

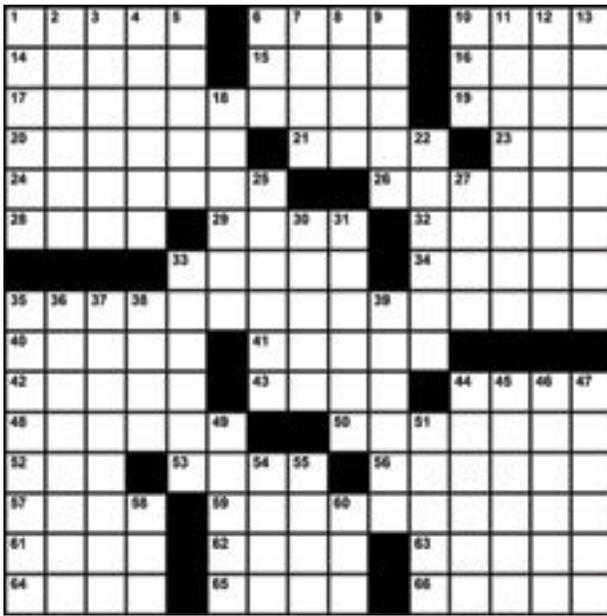
“When you're placed on a pedestal, you're held to a higher standard. I always have to be 'on.' I can never have a bad day because I'm in the public eye, and every event I'm at is always publicized, which gives me the worst anxiety.”

— Julisa Abad

women of color were murdered. Though things are different today and we have made strides, the epidemic of violence against trans women of color continues. On June 1, 2023, the first day of Pride, Ashia Davis, my best friend of 10 years, was murdered in her Highland Park hotel room. The killer is still on the loose.

When people see me now, they often focus on what seems like the finished product — my stable job and nice purses, the image of me on TV and in the courtroom doing advocacy work as Michigan's leading trans advocate. What they often forget is the homelessness, survival sex work and the struggles I once faced trying to find stability, employment and medical insurance. There is not a day that goes by that certain facts don't cross my mind: Every Civil Rights person I admire or who has made astronomical changes for the Black and Brown community has been murdered. And, according to some studies, the life expectancy for a trans woman of color is 35 years old.

I'm so proud and grateful for the strides we have made and will continue my work, but the next time you see a community advocate, please stop and give them a hug. You never know what we are internally going through — the things we don't allow our community to see.



Across

Air Earhart

- 1 Sticky-tongued critters
- 6 Cruising areas
- 10 Israeli author Oz
- 14 Bar for both gay people and straight
- 15 Kramer, to Yale
- 16 Pres. Buchanan to the military
- 17 Start of an Amelia Earhart

- quote
- 19 You may go down on one
- 20 Fairy tale guy
- 21 Soft rock for bottoms
- 23 "Delta of Venus" author
- 24 Finally became
- 26 For example, "Alas, poor Yorick!"
- 28 "Band of Brothers" event
- 29 Lairs of bears
- 32 Prefix with vitamin
- 33 Nixon's first veep
- 34 Sue ___ Ewing of "Dallas"
- 35 More of the quote

- 40 Rubber-stamping
- 41 Grand lineup
- 42 Sound of three men in a tub
- 43 Type of bell or waiter
- 44 "Out" and "Curve"
- 48 Seasonal mall employees
- 50 Fizzy fruit drink, e.g.
- 52 First letter of the F-word, for Socrates?
- 53 Coward of "The Scoundrel"
- 56 Capital of Colombia
- 57 Seep slowly
- 59 End of the quote
- 61 Counterfeiters' nemeses
- 62 "Six Feet Under" box material
- 63 Old Hollywood movie centers
- 64 Give some lip to
- 65 Haul ass
- 66 Arrow shaft

Down

- 1 Supported Metropolitan Community Church, e.g.
- 2 Readily available
- 3 Meeting outline
- 4 Big band leader Tommy
- 5 It goes under a jockey's shorts
- 6 "American Beauty" director Mendes
- 7 Rupert Everett's "The ___ to Kill Hitler"
- 8 Star quality
- 9 Notice a cologne queen
- 10 Comics outburst
- 11 "Cabaret" singer

- 12 Estimated portion of gay population
- 13 Adding fragrance to the bed, perhaps
- 18 Drain blocker
- 22 Visited (or had an O next to)
- 25 WNBA team, for example
- 27 Farm animal that's no breeder
- 30 India's first prime minister
- 31 Insect groups ruled by queens
- 33 Comfy shawl
- 35 Karen Walker and others
- 36 Rodgers and Hammerstein title song
- 37 Greatly honors, like Simba?
- 38 Judy Garland's "Meet Me ___ Louis"
- 39 They have big bags of money
- 44 Attractive body
- 45 Astronaut's point farthest out
- 46 "___ It on the Mountain" (Baldwin)
- 47 Few and far between
- 49 "Desperate Housewives," and others
- 51 Active sorts
- 54 Larger-than-life
- 55 Chloe's "Boys Don't Cry" role
- 58 Madonna's pair
- 60 Group of games, for Mauresmo

See p. 14 for answers

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◀ Trans Laws

Continued from page 7

for clinics and programs accepting out-of-state patients (especially those that accept out-of-state insurance policies), and just leaning on one another at a time when their children are being targeted by powerful governmental bodies. “It’s exhausting,” writes a parent from Toledo on a private Facebook group for Ohio parents of trans teens. “And we have resources. What would happen if we didn’t?”

Kaplan notes that gender-affirming healthcare for minors is only in question because of the political nature of the issue. “It’s politics at its most cynical,” he says. “They don’t give a damn about the welfare of these kids. If they did, they’d rely on what experts say and know that it’s not just a child saying, ‘I’m trans and I want to be on hormones.’ It doesn’t work that way. Certain criteria must be met, and it’s based on medical professional judgment and, of course, the consent of that child’s parents.”

Facts and real information are not the motivating factors for politicians attacking gender-affirming care across the country, Kaplan notes. Using transgender issues as wedge issues help far-right politicians fundraise from their base of voters.

One potential legally gray area is transferring care from a state like Ohio to a Michigan provider. Once the dust settles in Ohio, there could be a restriction on what information an Ohio provider could grant to a Michigan provider, for example. “The family would need to request a copy of their medical records and they, themselves, would bring those medical records to Michigan,” Kaplan says. Restrictions on telemedicine could also be impacted — ultimately, families may need to travel to the state regularly for the typical gender-affirming care protocol, which involves ongoing bloodwork, evaluations and assessments by multiple medical professionals.

While there are several organizations throughout Michigan that already help patients from out of state, it’s not necessarily

something they advertise widely to protect patient safety or, perhaps, to stay out of the line of sight of far-right operatives. For now, Kaplan suggests out-of-state parents reach out to Michigan organizations individually.

Several organizations, including the Michigan ACLU, are working together to identify resources to help out-of-state patients access gender-affirming care, Kaplan says. As they iron out a list of those resources and identify potential funding solutions, the information will be made public. In the meantime, reaching out to individual organizations is the quickest way for families to access the care they need in Michigan. The ACLU, for example, can answer legal questions, and Planned Parenthood of Michigan (PPMI) can answer specifics about accessing care in the state (though the organization does not prescribe hormonal treatments to minors).

Ashlea Phenicie, PPMI chief advocacy officer, tells BTL the organization is deeply concerned about the growing number of political attacks seeking to criminalize health care, trans people and providers. “No one should have to leave their state to access medical care,” she says. The organization serves as an access point for patients traveling from hostile states. “We are confident in our ability to provide gender-affirming care in Michigan’s current legal landscape. However, we know that some politicians would seek to ban this essential health care and are committed to fiercely defending the rights of all people to access care without political interference.”

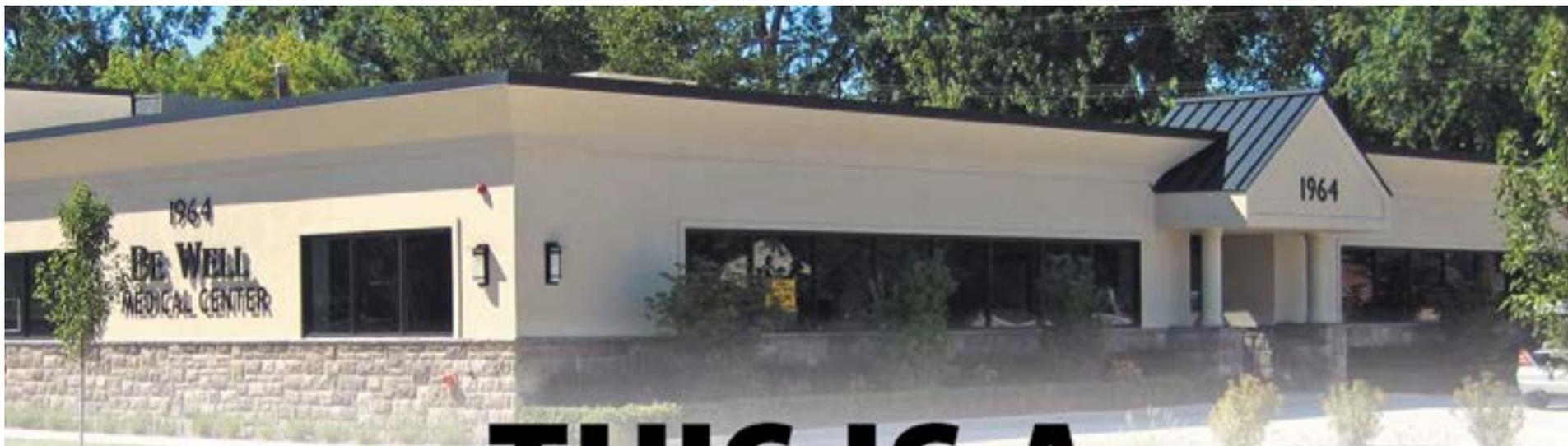
“It’s heartbreaking, and then it makes you mad,” Kaplan says. “It’s the cruelty. I find it quite cruel, this attack on probably the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ+ community, transgender young people. It’s a sad chapter in the history of the LGBTQ+ rights movement that yes, we will get through, but right now, harm is being done. For Michigan to just rest on our laurels and not think of ways we can be helpful in this situation would go against probably all our values and all that we believe in. So it’s important that we do something.”

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