

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

# Between THE Lines™



## SHIELDING OUR FAMILIES

How the recently passed Michigan Family Protection Act paves the way for equal legal protections for LGBTQ+ families

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

**MOTOR CITY PRIDE**  
Find Out Who Made  
Our Performer Wish List

**ABIGAIL'S PRIDE PERSISTS**  
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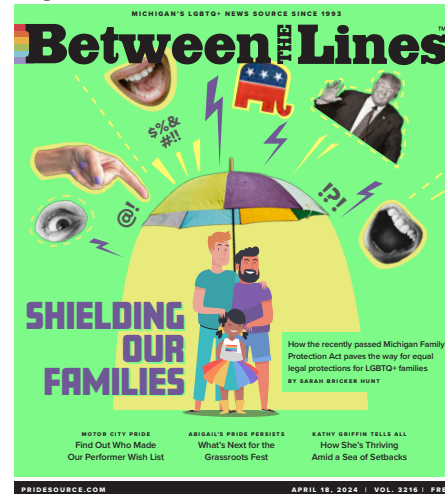

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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It's time for some spring cleaning. Whether that means weeding out the negative Nancys clogging up your social media feed, literally cleaning up your homestead after a long winter's hibernation or just clearing the cobwebs of your mind, these events will help you hit the reset button. Check out an event focused on batting down rampant Republican-led book banning efforts, donate spring cleaning supplies to a homeless youth organization, attend a gender-affirming beauty workshop, see the Reality Gays Podcast Live on tour or learn about the mysterious art of the tarot deck in a queer-affirming local space.



## 1 Join the Movement to Stop Right-Wing Book Censorship

Right-wing activists have made it a priority to ban books with LGBTQ+ content from public and school libraries nationwide and right here in Michigan. Join the conversation April 25 at an Oakland County Democratic Party event, Beyond Book Banning: The Current State of Intellectual Freedom in Libraries. Panelists include public library and school librarians and library board members who will discuss what libraries face today, including First Amendment issues and the right to read, how libraries select books and why representation matters. Register at [mobilize.us/oaklandcountydems/event/615944](https://mobilize.us/oaklandcountydems/event/615944).

April 25, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Bloomfield Township Public Library (1099 Lone Pine Road).



## 2 Contribute to the Ozone House Spring Cleaning Drive

Ozone House in Ypsilanti provides free shelter and support services to homeless youth and their families, including LGBTQ+ youth who are overrepresented among the homeless population. The non-profit invites the community to contribute to its annual Spring Cleaning Drive, focused on cleaning products and other household basics. Drop off new, unopened items and household basics directly to Ozone House or purchase items from an Amazon wish list. Specific needs include things like paper goods, dish soap, detergent, trash bags and bathroom and kitchen cleaning supplies. Find a complete list at [OzoneHouse.org](https://OzoneHouse.org).

Drop off items Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at Ozone House (1600 N. Huron River Drive, Ypsilanti).



## 3 Attend a Gender-Affirming Beauty Workshop

Are you trans or gender non-conforming and ready for a new spring look? Head over to Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, on April 27 for a gender-affirming beauty workshop. Hair and beauty professionals with an expertise in helping LGBTQ+ clients will be on hand to dispense tips on enhancing your already fabulous self. Affirmations Community Engagement

Manager Justin Bettcher told BTL, "We are partnering with Kortney Castro, a competitor for the Trans USA National Pageant and hairstylist, to create an event that centers the trans community in an industry that often leaves them out. At Affirmations, we seek opportunities in which our trans community is uplifted and the Gender-Affirming Beauty Workshop is the perfect collaboration to do that."

April 27, 12-3 p.m., Affirmations (290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale).





Matt Marr and Jake Anthony. Photo: Instagram

## Catch the Reality Gays Podcast Live! Tour

If you're not listening to the "Reality Gays with Mattie and Poodle" podcast, you're missing out, and that's true even if you're not as obsessed with reality TV culture as hosts Jake Anthony and Matt Marr. The duo provides hilarious recaps about drama-filled episodes of shows like "90 Day Fiancé," "Love Is Blind" and "Too Hot to Handle" that are often more entertaining than the shows themselves. Jake and Matt will bring their unique energy to the stage April 20 when the Reality Gays Podcast Live! tour arrives at the Majestic Theatre. As the guys say, "At the end of the day, aren't we all just lonely hearts, looking for love in all the wrong places?"

April 20, 7 p.m., Majestic Theatre (4140 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Tickets at [majesticdetroit.com/event/13467253/reality-gays-podcast](http://majesticdetroit.com/event/13467253/reality-gays-podcast).

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## Embrace Your Witchy Side at a Queer Tarot Class

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CHICAGO SUN-TIMES



# How You Can Get Involved in the 2024 Election

What you can do before the ballot box to protect queer rights in Michigan and beyond

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The election season is officially heating up in Michigan, with a special focus on queer voters. On April 10, local and statewide community leaders and elected officials gathered at Affirmations in Ferndale to mark the launch of the national Out for Biden-Harris program, which aims to mobilize LGBTQ+ voters, communities and leaders across the country.

Participants like Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter, state Sen. Jeremy Moss and state Rep. Jason Morgan spoke about Biden's accomplishments in office and warned against a second Trump term, which several speakers said could quickly dismantle the progress made by President Biden and Vice President Harris and Michigan's Democrat-led legislature.

In a campaign video about Out for Biden-Harris, Vice President Harris said, "We will do what we have always done in this movement, in this community, which is collectively, we will continue to build unity. We will continue to build a coalition. We will always be fueled by knowing we have so much more in common than what separates us. We will be fueled by knowing we are all in this together."

"Reelecting Donald Trump would be a disaster for the LGBTQ+ community. If you look at his record, and what he did, and how it affected people with Michigan, we cannot go back," said Coulter at the event. "We have a champion in President Biden and Vice President Harris, and we need them in Washington to continue to work ... they're [also] working every day to make sure that LGBTQ+ people can live their authentic lives and be themselves in every environment and every community. ... That is the difference between this



Sen. Jeremy Moss speaks at the Out for Biden-Harris event at Affirmations on April 10. Photo: Biden-Harris Campaign

administration and the previous."

"LGBTQ+ voters are becoming one of the largest voting blocks in America. And in a state like Michigan, our voting power is undeniable," said Moss. "And in 2024, we are not going to let Donald Trump and his MAGA allies create a dystopian world where we can't be who we are, live our authentic lives and marry who we want to."

"Donald Trump and his allies want to repeal the Affordable Care

Act, rip away gender-affirming care, and encourage dangerous rhetoric against LGBTQ+ Michiganders and Americans..." said Morgan. "As someone who married the love of my life six months ago, now, in a state where same-sex marriage is still in the woods, this is personal. We are not going to let Donald Trump turn back the clock in our lives. We are fired up; we are ready to turn out the vote for President Biden and Vice President Harris."

Roland Leggett, chair of the Michigan Democratic LGBT and Allies Caucus, said he is excited that Out for Biden-Harris chose Affirmations for the launch. "It's hardly a 'launch' though, as the Biden-Harris administration has been the most progressive in terms of policy and practice when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community. I'm ready to get to work and talk to voters about why President Biden and Vice President Harris are the best and only choice for our

community at the top of the ticket this year."

Ready or not, the time has come for all queer Michiganders and allies to protect the rights we've won and to strengthen LGBTQ+ representation in the state house. Leggett shared some tips for how anyone can get involved in the 2024 election, from knocking on voters' doors to important things you can do from the comfort of home.

See **Election**, page 24





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# Ferndale-Based Hate Group Church Militant: Gone For Good?

Org has history of virulent anti-LGBTQ+ activity

BY HANK KENNEDY

We fighters for LGBTQ+ rights have to take our victories where we can get them. As state governments continue to try to take our rights away, as right-wing bigots fulminate about eliminating us from public life, as we reel in horror from the death of Nex Benedict, it's nice to get some good news. What kind of good news? How about an anti-LGBTQ+ hate group shutting down?

This month, the Southern Poverty Law Center-designated hate group Church Militant closed its doors and shut down its website. The group's two story headquarters was on Hilton Street, incongruously in our gayborhood of Ferndale. Former broadcaster Michael Voris was the brainchild behind Church Militant. Voris was reportedly displeased by what he viewed as inaccuracies about Catholicism presented in the book and film "The Da Vinci Code" and sought to clear up misconceptions through the website and YouTube channel RealCatholicTV.com, later renamed Church Militant.

Obviously, no one should have their religion slandered or defamed, but it appears that Voris's true goal was less clearing up misconceptions about Catholicism and more spreading hatred and intolerance. Church Militant insinuated that more liberal Catholics were gay in an attempt to force them out of the church. Composer of Catholic hymns Dan Schutte was called "an active homosexual." The group garnered even more publicity by calling the Archbishop of Washington D.C. a Black man, a "Marxist" and "African Queen." These racist and homophobic slurs were too much for the Detroit Catholic archdiocese, who officially rebuked the organization in 2020.

Instead of moderating their message after this rebuke, Church Militant promoted Holocaust denier and Trump-dinner guest Nicholas Fuentes and hosted a fawning interview with conspiracy theorist and self-proclaimed Christian nationalist Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene. Within Ferndale, they attempted to get their neighbors on city council to fly their flag but, wisely, the council decided it would be a mistake to fly the flag of a hate group. In an episode that showed the group's influence within the wider conservative movement,



Church Militant unsuccessfully tried to force the Ferndale City Council to fly the Sacred Heart Flag during Pride Month in 2023.

Donald Trump's head of the Federal Elections Commission, James E. Trainor, gave an interview to Church Militant. In the interview, Trainor called the separation of church and state "a fallacy" and declared that the 2020 presidential election was "a spiritual war."

Church Militant worked hard to earn their hate group designation. They also endorsed the discredited and harmful practice of conversion therapy. They published homophobic headlines like "Episcopal Sodomy: Exposing the Enablers" and "The Gay Rainbow is the Mark of the Beast." They targeted a queer-owned bakery by asking them to bake a cake with a homophobic message.

The one and only time I encountered Church Militant was during a counter-protest in Royal Oak last March. They were there, along with the 11th District Republican Committee led by fellow bigot Shane Trejo (who once hosted a podcast named after the Nazi slogan "Blood and Soil"), to protest a Drag Queen Story Time event at Sidetrack Bookshop. Happily, they were vastly outnumbered. An estimated two dozen protested the event but there were 1,000 joyful counterprotesters. Church Militant and friends could not halt the event and had to slink away in defeat. No children were harmed by any bigots, or the storytime.

An obvious influence on the group was notorious historical resident of metro Detroit: The antisemitic "Radio Priest" Father Charles Coughlin. Coughlin broadcast his radio program in Royal Oak, at the Shrine of the Little Flower on 12 Mile and Woodward. Like Church Militant, Coughlin spewed hate against minority groups and theorized that foreigners and Communists were secretly controlling the United States. Also like Church Militant, Coughlin used modern media to spread his message. In the 1930s that was radio; today it is the internet. Church Militant seemed aware of the connection given that they posted an article to their website recommending Coughlin to members as a fighter against Communism and the welfare state. (For obvious reasons, they avoided the swastika-covered elephant in the room of Coughlin's Nazi sympathies.)

A few months ago, Vorhis stepped down. He had admitted in a 2017 Atlantic documentary that he had "live-in relationships with homosexual men," but claimed he was now no longer gay. Apparently that change did not take since he had been allegedly sending out shirtless selfies to male staffers at Church Militant, surely embarrassing behavior for such a virulently anti-LGBTQ+ organization. After that misfortune, the group was sued

for defamation by the Rev. Georges de Laire due to Church Militant publishing an article calling him unstable and vindictive. The costs of the lawsuit settlement are so great that Church Militant will have to shut down in April. When I mentioned at a recent vigil for Nex Benedict in Ferndale at Affirmations that Church Militant would no longer be in operation, there were cheers and applause.

It appears, however, that some of that praise may have been premature. Last week it was reported that a new email claiming to be from Church Militant has sprung up. Ferndale residents can rest easy knowing that the new Church Militant, if it exists, will no longer trouble their hometown. It looks like the hate group found a more hospitable political climate in Texas. Yeehaw.

Whether Church Militant is truly gone or not, it's clear that eternal vigilance is the price to pay for our liberties. Even before Church Militant shut down, the group CatholicVote.org brought their homophobic "Hide the Pride" campaign to the Ferndale library. It's a necessity that we be ready to battle against any of these dark satanic mills of propaganda, whoever they are or whatever they call themselves.



# The Under-the-Radar Republican Amendment That Kills the Rainbow Flag

Longtime activist weighs in on what the move means for the oppression of LGBTQ+ people



BY MARK SEGAL

Republicans did something recently that went almost unnoticed. Through one simple act in 1970, the United States became the world's leader in making our community visible. Thanks to a Republican amendment in the federal budget that was signed in March, a sad end has come to that leadership.

In 1970, we created what we then called Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day — the world's first Pride. That day, which came from a resolution written by Craig Rodwell and Ellen Broidy, changed not only America but the world.

During that era, probably 99.9% of our community was in the closet, and there were fewer than 100 members of the community who would speak out for our rights. Then the Stonewall riots happened in 1969, and to celebrate its first anniversary and the community we had created in that first year, Rodwell and Broidy proposed what we now call Pride.

During the Obama administration, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested ambassadors fly rainbow flags outside our embassies around the world. Soon, other embassies of other countries followed suit. In recent years, that program has increased to the point where you see rainbow flags on embassies every June in places where they imprison or even kill members of our community. They fly the flag in Uganda, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Russia. I've personally witnessed members of our community in countries where it is illegal to be LGBTQ+ walk past the flag and pause. Then I'd see a tear coming down their cheek. At a London dinner I was speaking at last year, a prince of one of those countries that kills gays came over to me and said that he hoped someday I could come and speak in his country. I asked what would happen if someone today put out a rainbow flag. He sobbed, then voiced his wishes — “hopefully one day,” he said.

In March, Republicans added an amendment to the annual government spending bill that basically states that no embassy can fly a rainbow flag. They have

taken away the hope of freedom from oppressed LGBTQ+ people. Whether in Moscow, Hungary, Abu Dhabi, Gaza or Iran... 65 countries criminalize same-sex activity, 41 of them against women, 12 countries



give the death sentence. Fourteen countries criminalize gender identity, and we're not even discussing honor killings or rape.

According to the text, “None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be obligated or expended to fly or display a flag over a facility of the United States Department of State.” There's a list of exceptions, and surprisingly, the rainbow flag is not included. The White House is vowing to repeal the provision — we'll see what happens.

We invented the idea of Pride, which was meant to end our invisibility in society. Later, the rainbow flag was added to make that message universal and bring Pride to places where it was dangerous.

Pride may have been founded in 1970 in the U.S. by a few thousand, but today it is international, and millions come out around the world to celebrate. The Republicans are now abetting those countries that kill members of our community. But why should we expect humanity from the Republicans? They don't care about the health of women, they don't believe in voting rights and they call immigrants murderers. With this amendment, they assist those countries that imprison and kill LGBTQ+ people. Republicans have blood on their hands.

*This article is courtesy of Philadelphia Gay News as part of a shared media partnership.*

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## Lies, Lies — and the Conservatives Who Tell Them in Order to Assert Their Dominance



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

I know that this is going to come as a shock to everyone, but I have to say it: The folks who want to ban transgender people from public bathrooms and overturn the Supreme Court's marriage equality ruling are the same folks who want to ban abortion across the country in all forms and for all reasons.

OK, this obviously is not shocking news. But it is important for LGBTQ+ people to know that the fight over abortion rights and the fight over LGBTQ+ rights is the same fight.

I remember when I first started writing this column two decades ago; I would often say that straight people act like they have no stake in the fight for LGBTQ+ equality, but they absolutely do. I warned over and over that the right wing wouldn't stop at curtailing LGBTQ+ rights. They would come after abortion. They would come after birth control.

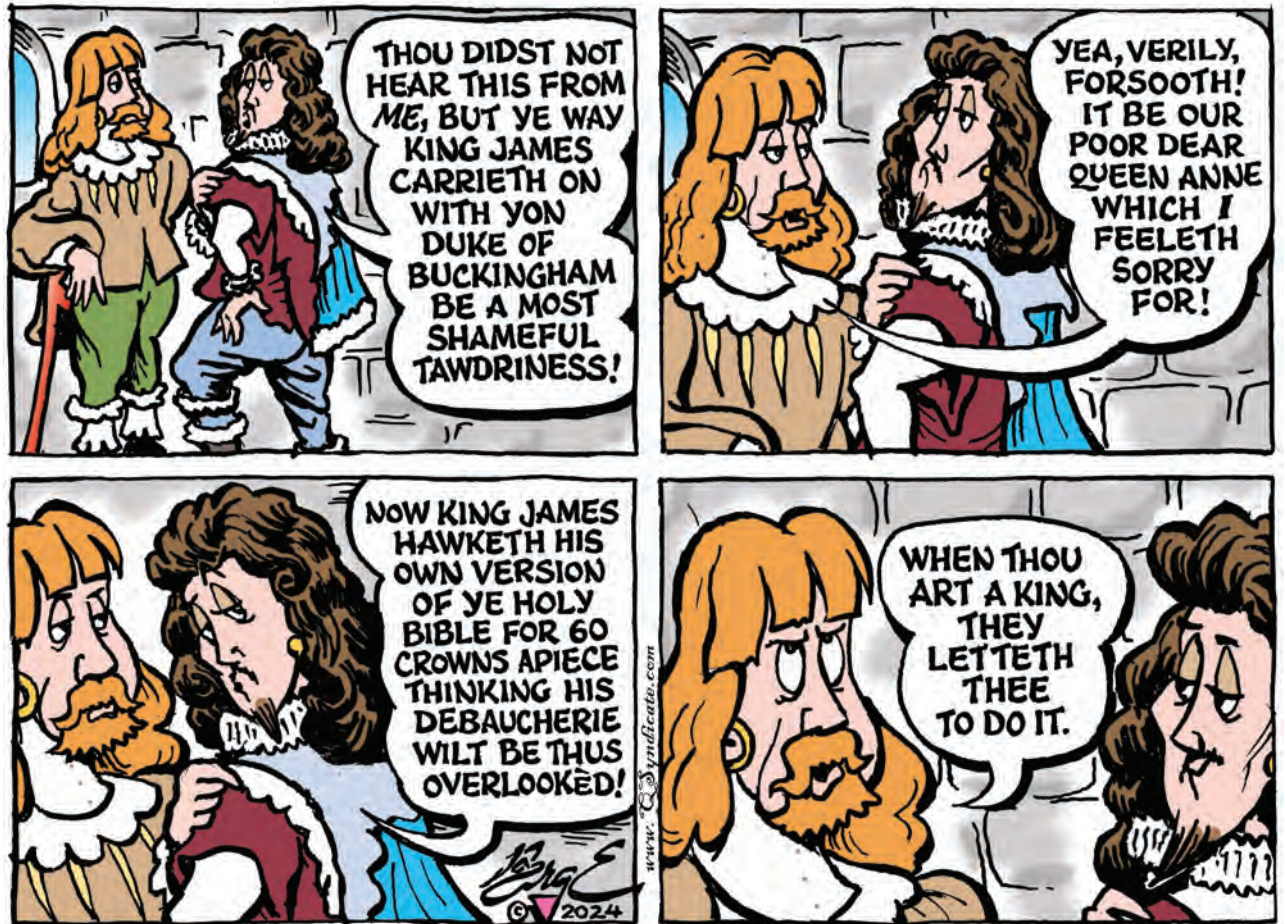
And here we are.

Would it surprise you to learn that Indiana ER doc and current Indiana state Sen. Tyler Johnson, one of the plaintiffs in the case to try to ban mifepristone, also hates LGBTQ+ people? Mifepristone is a drug that is used in the

*It is important for LGBTQ+ people to know that the fight over abortion rights and the fight over LGBTQ+ rights is the same fight.*

majority of abortions in the U.S. and has been used safely for decades.

According to The New Republic (TNR), Johnson has sponsored "legislation that would ban access to hormone therapy, puberty blockers and surgery for trans youth in Indiana. Johnson called such treatment, which meets the current standards of care for trans youth, 'irreversible, unproven and life-altering procedures.' In January 2023, he introduced Senate Bill 480, which allowed for civil penalties against health care providers who offered anyone under the age of 18 that treatment or who 'aided and abetted' another



practitioner to do the same.”

Welp, gay people can't have cake any more, the Supreme Court said so. It is now the law of the land that cake is intended only for one man and one woman to eat [...]

Welp, SB 480 passed the Indiana Senate. This is in part thanks to help from the Alliance Defending Freedom, an extremist right-wing group that is also behind the lawsuit to ban mifepristone. ADF came to Indiana to testify in support of this anti-trans legislation. And while they were there, I'm sure they checked in with their boy Johnson for a little chat.

As TNR puts it, "That ADF and Johnson's legal paths cross like this isn't a conflict of interest so much as a perfect alignment of purpose: one in which people must surrender their own health

and well-being, their gender and their sexuality, or risk the penalty as set by the likes of groups like ADF?"

Indeed. Banning trans athletes and banning abortion is about both punishment and control. ADF has an extremely narrow and regressive worldview where only straight couples are allowed to marry, only two genders will be recognized and gender expression will be strictly enforced — and of course, anyone with a uterus must hand their reproductive rights over to the government. Mind you, the ADF and many other organizations are against government control of any kind in any facet of life unless that government is controlled by right-wing conservatives.

Nor does it matter that the worldview of the ADF and friends is not shared by the majority of Americans. The majority of Americans support legal abortion and marriage equality. Americans are more divided on the issue of transgender rights, but that is due in large part to the extremist right's laser focus on dehumanizing transgender people for the last few years, pushing the issue of transgender rights to the forefront of the news cycle with pearl-clutching about Target restrooms and preferred pronouns.

Most of the extremist lies against why they should control everybody's body besides the cis het white males are just that: lies!

"There is no truth to Johnson and ADF's claims about the safety of mifepristone or hormones and puberty blockers," reports TNR. "In fact, there is no outcome in this case that would make mifepristone any safer; it's hard to believe that safety was ever the point."

Hard to believe, indeed.

Sadly arguments don't have to be true, they just have to be effective. And right-wing arguments are incredibly effective. They know what people are scared of and they are also not ashamed to be absolutely reprehensible.

Then there is the fact that their arguments have little to no nuance: This is right, and this is wrong, and that's that! This makes them very easy to understand and very easy to repeat.

After all, it's a lot easier to say "abortion is murder" than to explain the complexities of abortion care and the wide variety of reasons people choose to have abortions and to justify why you think Roe v. Wade was unfairly overturned.

There are always going to be guys like Tyler Johnson and groups like ADF. Keep pushing back; never concede. The truth is on our side.



# THE SCROLL

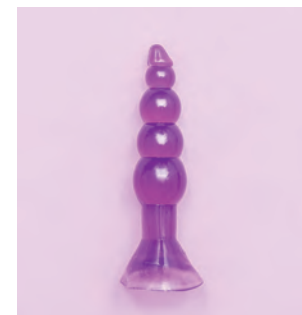
## QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

### Adult Prom Season Returns — Get Your Tickets Now

For some, high school prom is a warm memory, the bad hair photo tucked away in a box somewhere safe. For others, the arrival of the big event was painful for a host of reasons that seem to exemplify why high school felt like a minefield — this is especially common for queer folks who weren't exactly living out in the open during their teen years. But getting a prom redo in adulthood can bring some healing catharsis. Case in point: the recent Pride Prom held at the University of

Michigan on April 8, which drew more than 100 people to a night dedicated to celebrating the school's LGBTQ+ community.

Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center Affirmations will offer its annual Prom ReDeux on May 18. "Prom ReDeux is a fantastic party but for many of us, it's also a chance to rewrite a formative moment in a way that is true to who we are," says Marisol Dorantes-Silva, Affirmations marketing and communications senior manager. "Experiences that normalize and validate our queerness can be incredibly healing — this one just happens to include tarot readers and spiked punch!" Learn more and reserve tickets at goaffirmations.org/promredeux.



### Celebrate Anal Sex Day

Yes, it's a real thing, and while the annual observance was created based on a joke by comedian Jim Jefferies, it's become an occasion to reflect on this intimate endeavor. Jefferies' joke centered on an anti Valentine's Day sentiment, for men, a day just for men's pleasure, but of course, many women enjoy this activity, too.

If you celebrate, play it safe with plenty of lube, remember that STIs are frequently passed through anal sex (including HIV — PrEP is very effective at preventing it, however) and prioritize communication with your partner(s). Need to restock your supplies? The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services will send condoms directly

to your home, for free. Just send an email with your name and mailing address to MDHHS-FreeCondoms@Michigan.gov.



Willow. Photo: Instagram

### Fun Fact: Lesbians Have More Orgasms Than Straight Women

It's official. On average, lesbians and bisexual women are simply more skilled at pleasing their sexual partners.

According to a recent study of nearly 1,500 straight, lesbian and bisexual participants published in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science, both lesbians and bisexual women partnered with women reported more clitoral stimulation and more orgasms than women in

mixed-sex pairings.

The typically-portrayed "heterosexual script," researcher Grace Wetzel wrote, "prioritizes the man's orgasm, as intercourse alone is associated with the lowest orgasm frequency for women."

Another factor could be at play here — Wetzel wrote that women may simply feel more comfortable expressing their needs to other women, adding that all couples should "work to make their sexual encounters more pleasurable in general by including those sex acts that are most likely to result in orgasm for their partner," regardless of whether orgasm is the ultimate goal.



### New LGBTQ+ Bar Set to Open in Ann Arbor

Cheers, queers! According to a liquor license application filed in February with the city, a new space called Uplift will soon open on First Street in downtown Ann Arbor. The application describes Uplift as a "bar, dining and event space tailored toward the LGBTQ+ community," and a user on social network Mastadon dishes that the owner has a partnership with Circ Bar. We'll keep you posted!

### Parents Willing to Discuss Gender Nonconformity with Doctors

A recent study co-sponsored by the University of Michigan investigated whether parents of young children are willing to talk about their child's gender identity with their doctors. Nearly 88% of 2,680 surveyed parents said yes. "These findings illustrate how parents were broadly willing to discuss their child's gender identity, and that gender identity is often more complex than a binary," said Matthew Diemer, UM professor of education and psychology. Read more at bit.ly/3TZsr23.

### Willow Set to Release 'Emotional' Album

Bisexual 23-year-old Willow told Rolling Stone that creating her new album, "Empathogen," due out May 2, was an exercise in emotionality. "I was going through so much," she told the magazine. "There was so much anger. There was so much resentment. There was so much need to just express myself." Bonus — bisexual singer-songwriter St. Vincent appears on the track "Pain for Fun."



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## SECOND GLANCES

# 25 and Out!



Clockwise from top left: Ruth Ellis with Jordan, the son of a Ruth Ellis Center board member; stockings from a Christmas long ago; the late BTL writer Brent Dorian Carpenter; the late Yolanda King; a scene from Motor City Pride predecessor Pride Fest; an early AIDS walk in Detroit; part of the author's "Golden Girls" collection; the author and the late BTL writer Charles Alexander. Photos: Jason A. Michael



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

I am 52 years old and incredibly corny. As I write this, my final column, I keep hearing television variety show sign-off songs in my head, whether it's Carol Burnett tugging on her earlobe and singing "I'm so glad we've had this time together" or Donny and Marie sweetly duetting to "May God keep you in his tender care until we're together again." You get the point — I'm struggling to figure out how to say goodbye.

I've lived in my house a dozen years now. I get a new used car about twice a decade. There are very few things I can lay claim to doing for 25 years. Writing for *Between The Lines* since April 1999 is one of them. Oh sure, there have been small gaps here and there. But for the most part, I have consistently written for the paper for the last quarter century.

I was 27 when I started, still studying journalism at Wayne State University. I was eager and energetic, ready to apply what I learned from journalistic greats like Jack Lessenberry and Ruth Seymour. I had always had something of a gift for words. After a brief stint as a psychology major, I realized I had always been a writer and it was time to take what came naturally seriously.

Journalists are not known for becoming rich. It's not a lucrative profession unless you go into broadcast and manage to make a name for yourself. BTL had just gone weekly

when I started. The paper was struggling. They matched my secretary's salary when I first came on and I was so happy to be a full-time reporter that I took it, gladly.

Working for BTL has always been more than just a job for me. It's my activism in action. Reporting on the good and bad happening to our community, chronicling our progress and our pitfalls. I've seen a lot in the past 25 years. Marriage equality was a distant hope when I first started. You couldn't be out and serve in the military. Millennials may not be old enough to remember, but the queer landscape looked totally different back then.

In my time with the paper I've covered murder trials, interviewed police chiefs, and had the pleasure of talking to such stars and childhood idols as Patti LaBelle, Boy George, Dionne Warwick, Dolly Parton and many, many more. There's not a section of the paper I've not written in. I've done it all — news, entertainment, local, national, commentary, even editorials. OK, the classified section is one I never touched. But you get my point.

I owe a great debt to former publishers Susan Horowitz and Jan Stevenson, who saw something in the writing I'd done for WSU's *The Sound End* newspaper and gave me a chance. They were and are leaders in the community and I learned a lot from them. To be honest, Susan and I clashed from time to time. We're both temperamental Capricorns

See **Second Glances**, page 26





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# How the Recently Passed Michigan Family Protection Act Will Safeguard LGBTQ+ Parents and Families

Democrats dismantle 1988 law that criminalized surrogacy, paving the way for equal legal protections for LGBTQ+ families

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Michigan Democrats have held a “trifecta” of power since late 2022 when the party flipped both chambers of the House and won the governorship and the attorney general seat, but Rep. Samantha Steckloff says the party is still cleaning up from issues left behind by Republicans over the past several decades. It was the state Republican party that criminalized surrogate parenthood here in 1988 — Michigan was the last remaining U.S. state to have such a law on the books until April 1, when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed a package of bills focused on reproductive rights into law.

The Michigan Family Protection Act package addresses several reproductive and parental rights issues impacting LGBTQ+ families and many others across Michigan, primary bill sponsor Steckloff told BTL. Steckloff, who was sworn in as a state rep in 2021, focused her election campaign on bringing this kind of legislation to the statehouse floor. “I have been passionate about this for so many years,” she said. “Everyone should have the right to be able to start or grow their family.”

Lt. Gov. Gavin Gilchrist echoed that sentiment, telling BTL, “In Michigan, we’re committed to expanding opportunities for all, and that means supporting individuals and families as they make their personal decisions.”

Openly gay Rep. Jason Hoskins, who authored House Bill 5210, which provides that children born through surrogacy or assisted reproduction are legal children for the purposes of inheritance, told BTL late



*There are so many medical advancements nowadays that allow people to start to grow a family who typically may have never been able to do so. We should be celebrating that, and now we can...*

— Rep. Samantha Steckloff

last year when the bills were going through committee, “In a political landscape that can often be cruel, I’m happy to be a part of a positive change so that everybody, including people like you and I, can have

a shot at the family of their dreams.”

Steckloff points to many reasons why a couple or individual might access options like in-vitro fertilization (IVF), surrogacy or adoption — among them, fertility issues and health concerns like the ones she faced in 2015 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. “I remember the devastating news of my own fertility no longer being my decision, and I started looking into options that hopefully I could have one day,” she recalls. “Like most people do when searching for these types of answers,

I went searching and found out surrogacy was illegal in Michigan. I was completely beside myself — it really opened my eyes and it’s why I decided to run for state representative.”

Because of laws enacted under various Republican-led state legislatures, Steckloff says Michiganders have faced barriers to accessing modern medical advancements that can help people become parents.

“There are so many medical advancements nowadays that allow people to start to grow a family who typically may have never been able to do so,” Steckloff said. “We should be celebrating that, and now we can, by changing the way things have always been done in the state of Michigan on this front.”



Michigan parents have used out-of-state surrogates since the ban on paid surrogacy went into effect in 1988, but as parents and surrogates testified during committee hearings, the practice has been onerous and expensive, with families facing lengthy adoption processes for their own biological children born through surrogacy and assisted reproductive methods like IVF. “Can you imagine having guardianship of children who are legally not yours?” Steckloff pondered. “And for 40 years, no one has been able to fix it because we’ve had a Republican-led legislature. It literally took a trifecta to change a 1988 law that should have never happened.”

Lt. Gov. Gilchrist pointed to the public testimony of a Michigan mother as an example of what Michigan parents have faced on the road to parenthood here and why Democrats have felt so driven to pass the Family Protection Act. “Tammy Myers fought a long legal battle to adopt her biological twin children who were born via surrogacy,” he said. “She then testified in the legislature about how our laws made it too difficult for families to be recognized. That’s when we got to work to repeal this outdated law and make sure that all families had an opportunity to be together. Every person can make big change in their government. And we are going to be with them every step of the way to amplify their stories and make sure they’re heard.”

Of the 72 Republican state legislators, only two — Sens. Mark Huizenga and Jon Bumstead — voted for the bill package. “And either you support families, or you don’t,” Gov. Whitmer said at the signing. “It’s pretty clear there is a dividing line here where Democrats are making it easier for people to decide when and whether to start a family and how they pursue starting a family. Republicans say no to all of that. And it’s incredibly cruel and anti-family.”

Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt, responding to criticism in a statement on April 1, claimed Democrats ignored “dangerous pitfalls of commercialized surrogacy that have been banned in other western countries due to the threat of exploitation of women and human trafficking.” In a House floor speech in March, GOP Sen. Thomas Albert said the bills “create whole new paths to parenthood.”

Anti-abortion group Right to Life of Michigan, which spearheaded the 1988 effort to ban surrogacy, has been front and center in the current debate, as well. The group takes particular umbrage to a provision that allows for payment to surrogates. “Providing payment for services rendered turns the generous acts of being an altruistic surrogate into a money-making proposition, which in turn creates a market that can and does exploit poor and vulnerable women,” wrote Genevieve Marnon in a Senate committee hearing. Marnon serves as legislative director for

the organization.

Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, who wrote House Bill 5214, which allows alleged and intended parents of children born through assisted reproduction or surrogacy to sign a legally binding acknowledgment of parentage, told BTL the Act was signed into law at a critical time. “We’re seeing attacks against the LGBTQ+ community, our families and our reproductive rights,” she said. “Ensuring that Michigan provides legal protections not just in terms of ability for LGBTQ+ people to start their families, but also in ensuring the ability of parents to establish custody once their children are born, is of the utmost importance.”

The Family Protection Act includes nine bills, House Bills 5207-5215, aimed at supporting LGBTQ+ legal equality, parents who have grown their families through assisted reproduction and children born through surrogacy or IVF. Specific provisions include:

- Changes to state laws that have required LGBTQ+ families to go through expensive, lengthy processes to gain legal parental recognition
- Repealing the ban on paid surrogacy and developing a legally-protected process that protects surrogates legally and requires medical screening
- Legal protections for children born through surrogacy and assisted reproductive methods like IVF
- Reducing the costs and streamlining the process of gaining formal parental relationship recognition through the state

Pohutsky said the fact that Michigan had been the last remaining state to have a criminal ban on surrogacy contracts demonstrated “how little previous legislatures cared to bring our laws into modern times and why it is so important to maintain a Democratic majority in the House this November.”

Rep. Jason Morgan, who authored House Bill 5212, which removes the determination of parentage for children born through assisted reproduction or surrogacy from the Revocation of Paternity Act, told BTL the Act ensures LGBTQ+ families receive the legal recognition and security they deserve. “By removing barriers to parentage determination for children born through assisted reproduction or surrogacy, we affirm the principle that every family deserves equal rights and protection under the law — including LGBTQ+ families who have often faced discrimination in forming their families.”

Lt. Gov. Gilchrist added, “In a time when other states are moving backward, Michigan is moving forward to prioritize the well-being of its people and build a stronger and more inclusive future for all.”



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# Who Should Grace Detroit's Motor City Pride Stage?

From Detroit's own DJ Minx to Tracy Chapman, 5 artists on our Pride performance wish list

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

A lot goes into selecting Motor City Pride performers — including the all-important money consideration. And so you won't find Mariah Carey (if only), who headlined L.A. Pride in the Park last year, on this list.

In fact, MCP entertainment coordinator Alex Delavan didn't beat around the bush when BTL spoke to him last year, basically (but not exactly) saying that you can dream all you want about a Beyoncé and Taylor co-headlined Pride, but at the end of the day, Pride money isn't free money.

"Some Prides have absolutely huge budgets and can have really big names," Delavan told BTL. "As for us, our entire organization is volunteer-based and our entire budget is based off of donations. So trying to land the biggest and best acts I can all within those constraints is the most challenging aspect of what I do."

Don't worry, Alex. As Motor City Pride gets ready to roll into Detroit on June 8 and 9 with a long history of queer and ally performers who've graced its multiple stages, we're keeping our expectations in check as we fantasize about those we'd love to see getting a queer crowd going in Hart Plaza.

## Machine Dazzle

The internationally celebrated New York-based queer maximalist artist and costume designer — wearable sculptures, if we're being honest — is known for turning trash into treasure, as he has been in Ann Arbor this entire year while rolling out his ambitious

three-act installation at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. While Ouroboros is now on display at UMMA — it will continue to transform into an even bigger spectacle of reused found objects and locally sourced materials all through June — I can't stop thinking about one specific moment near the end of Machine's Penny Stamps artist talk in March, which he did in full costume that included multiple performances. A month later, I haven't forgotten what was on that giant screen near the end: Machine's face, with heavy eye makeup, peeking through a very rippled, pale pink costume, an artistic representation he said was of Donald Trump's asshole. He'll be here at least through June. Given Pride's origins as an audacious change agent for the queer community, the kind we could really use during this precarious election year where drag bans could just be the beginning of a backward swing on LGBTQ+ rights, now is the perfect moment for Machine's own brilliant version of art as activism.

## Chappell Roan

Mariah, Taylor, Beyoncé — we love and need our iconic allies and their big platforms. But in recent years, Prides across the country are finally putting money back into the community by giving the mic to actual LGBTQ+ artists. Luckily, given that decades of artists sacrificed their careers to be their authentic selves, more openly queer artists are just a contract away from being on a Pride stage. We say give a big chunk of it to delightfully campy, openly queer artist Chappell Roan, at least before her asking price



Chappell Roan performing at Detroit's Saint Andrew's Hall in October. Photo: Lucienne Nghiem

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goes the way Lady Gaga's certainly did after she transcended beyond the queer sphere and into the mainstream spotlight — a path Roan is on herself. Roan, who brought Cyndi Lauper vibes to her recent Tiny Desk performance, is already well on her way, currently playing to sold-out arena crowds on Olivia Rodrigo's massive tour. She even has a great Michigan connection — she attended Interlochen, where she wrote her first major label single. Motor City Pride, get her while you can.

## Orville Peck

If a stud is going to grace the stage (what's Pride without one or two?), it might as well be one who's sending shock waves through country music by shaking up the beer-and-babes status quo with "Brokeback Mountain" vibes and Willie Nelson by his side in their new single "Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other." With a new album on the horizon, Orville is well on his way to becoming the openly gay male country superstar the genre has been lacking. Soon, his summer Stampede Tour will get off the ground, and it just so happens that Orville's opening June Pride Month right here in Michigan, as he stampedes into Rochester Hills for a gig on June 4 at Meadow Brook Amphitheatre before another local concert in Grand Rapids the very next day at Meijer Gardens. Is it too much to ask that he postpone his



Above: DJ Minx performing at the Movement Music Festival. Courtesy photo. Right: Machine Dazzle during his Penny Stamps talk. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

Ohio and Indiana shows during Motor City Pride weekend to stay all week in Michigan? Can we all show up in chaps if he does?

## DJ Minx

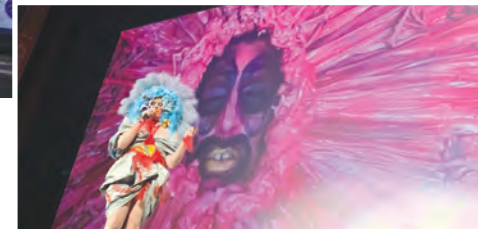
We might need to clone her if we want to see Detroit techno icon DJ Minx at Motor City Pride (which we certainly do!) — ever since coming out in 2021 after decades in the closet, her schedule is packed with Prides, among other spring and summer gigs, like Detroit's own Movement Music Festival. But after interviewing DJ Minx recently, I can't

think of very many out Detroiters with a rich music history like hers. DJ Minx is at the height of her career while being exactly who, as an openly lesbian woman married now to another woman, she always wished she could be — all this after decades in the closet. In so many ways, Minx embodies the spirit of Detroit and so does her edgy, immersive techno-house music that you can't help but groove to. It's not just about the bump-and-grind, even though it is about that too — it's about knowing that wherever she

and her music go, so does a community who loves you no matter what.

## Tracy Chapman

It doesn't matter that Tracy Chapman has never made a public statement about her sexual identity (even if her former partner, Alice Walker, author of "The Color Purple," did) — there are generations of queer people who connect deeply to Chapman's genderless songs, where all people can see themselves in the rich storytelling she's presented in her music since her rise in the 1980s. If Chapman wanted to make a statement about her own identity, doing it on any Pride stage would certainly be a moment a lot of lesbians I know would cherish for the rest of their lives. But she could also just show up, her hair in braids and her smile beaming, and sing "Fast Car" like she did recently at this year's Grammys alongside Luke Combs. It was then that Gen Z'ers felt her power for the first time, and queer elders were reminded of a power they've always known — to transcend beyond the confining boxes of gender and sexuality to just... be.



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RuPaul Doesn't Rue the Day  
Puzzle can be found on page 25



# Ortonville Denies Abigail's Pride Permit for a Second Time, Shocking No One

Forced out of downtown, organizers will hold annual fest in new location

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Ortonville, located in northern Oakland County, is somehow not a fictional place from a long-lost Dr. Seuss book, filled with Grinchy Whos and a bubbling undercurrent of homophobia, though we wish this was a story pulled from the land of make-believe. Instead, it's a place where community members packed the March 25 village council meeting in response to the recent denial of a Pride festival permit. Most were there to support 18-year-old Abigail Rowe and the annual Pride event she started planning at the age of 14 as a show of support for kids like her, who have felt alone and unwelcomed in this conservative pocket of Southeast Michigan.

In news that is shocking to, well, no one, the Ortonville Village Council has once again denied the permit for the third annual Abigail's Pride event with a 4-2 vote. The Council had voted in February to deny the nonprofit's original application, citing safety concerns and the impact of road closures on local businesses and upheld that decision with a new vote on March 25.

After the council denied the event permit for a second time, Abigail's Pride announced a new plan for the annual Pride fest, moving the event out of downtown Ortonville to the nearby Brandon Township Park from 4-8 p.m. on June 1. Community comments continue to pour in on the organization's Facebook page, overwhelmingly in favor of supporting Rowe and her Pride fest.

At the meeting, the council allowed one hour for comments from the packed crowd of attendees who overwhelmingly spoke in support of an Abigail's Pride event in the small downtown corridor. The event has been held in 2022 and 2023 with no reported incidents.

Ahead of the meeting, community members and far-flung supporters contacted Abigail's Pride and the Ortonville Village Council in support of the festival, including Affirmations in Ferndale and the Michigan LGBTQ+ Commission, which issued a public letter:

Dear Ortonville Village Manager and Village Council,

The Michigan LGBTQ+ Commission is writing to express our sincere support for

Abigail's Pride and their annual pride festival in Ortonville. We find it disheartening to learn of the Village Council's decision to deny the permit for this important event, especially considering its profound significance to the LGBTQ+ community and the positive economic impact it has brought to the town in previous years.

Under the dedicated leadership of Abigail Rowe, Abigail's Pride has tirelessly worked to cultivate a safe and inclusive space for individuals of all ages, particularly youth, within the LGBTQ+ community. The festival serves not only as a celebration of diversity but also as a beacon of acceptance and belonging for everyone in Ortonville.

The festival has undeniably become an integral part of the community fabric, fostering unity and promoting understanding and respect among its residents. The vibrant display of rainbow colors and open expression of identities at the festival speak volumes about the profound impact of such events in fostering a more inclusive society.

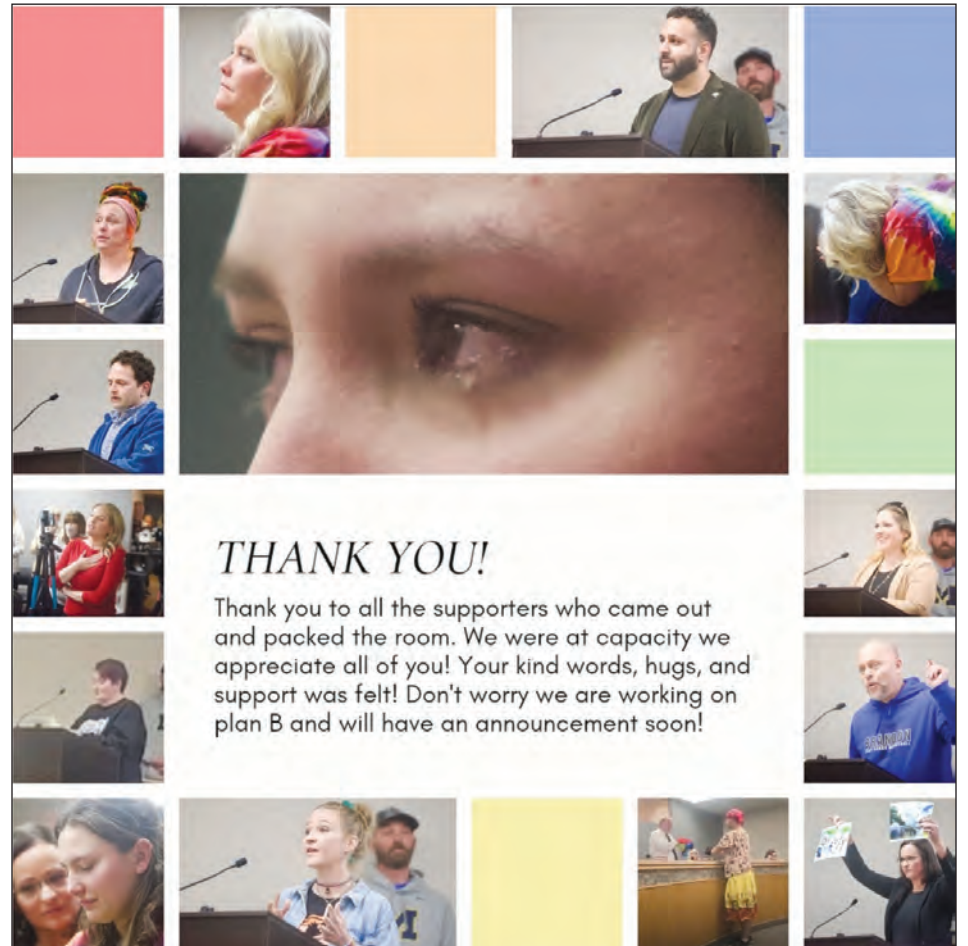
While we acknowledge the valid concerns raised by the Village Council regarding safety, road closures, and local business impact, it's imperative to note that Abigail's Pride has a commendable track record of organizing successful and well-managed events. Furthermore, the denial of the permit appears disproportionate, especially when compared to the approval of similar events with longer road closures.

The Michigan LGBTQ+ Commission urges the Village Council to reconsider its decision and collaborate with Abigail's Pride to address any concerns or logistical challenges. By supporting the pride festival, Ortonville has a unique opportunity to demonstrate its unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and the well-being of all its residents.

We, the LGBTQ+ Commission, stand firmly with Abigail's Pride and the LGBTQ+ community in Ortonville, and we fervently hope that together, we can ensure the continued success and prosperity of the pride festival for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Raúl Hernández-Guzmán, LGBTQ+ Commission Administrative Chair, Office of Global Michigan



Graphic via Facebook (Abigails.Pride)

While the council had stated a concern about the potential impact of road closures on local business, one local small business owner said, "During Abigail's Pride... I have my documentation with me. My sales were 466% higher on Abigail's Pride than on any given Saturday the entire year." On the flip side, another commenter claimed that local businesses face a "really bad situation" when they are confronted and "asked to make a public opinion."

Rowe has been adamant that her organization was unwilling to compromise on road closures. "It's a safety concern," she told BTL in March. "I can't hold the event in good conscience without having the roads close for the safety of our vendors, volunteers

and everyone attending the event."

After the vote, Abigail's Pride posted to Facebook, "We are saddened (but not surprised) to announce the village council denied our permit 4 to 2. Have no fear we have been working tirelessly behind the scenes working on our back up plan. More information soon."

Facebook user Mark Heil commented on the post, writing, "Screw the permit, turn it into a real protest march!"

Alex Guo, another Facebook user, wrote, "I'm disgusted but not surprised by this council... Thank you for all that you all are doing. Sending you lots of love! Know that you have a huge community here to support you all no matter what."

"We find it disheartening to learn of the Village Council's decision to deny the permit for this important event."



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# Kathy Griffin Keeps on Surviving



Kathy Griffin. Photo: Jen Rosenstein

On her first tour in six years, the longtime LGBTQ+ ally is doing what she does best — making a comeback

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Kathy Griffin has been through even more than you probably know. She lost a lung to cancer, lost her mother and lost many of her close friends. In 2020, the same year her beloved mom Maggie died, she attempted suicide. All the while, she was being investigated by the Department of Justice for a viral 2017 photo that depicted her holding up a severed model head covered in fake blood that resembled Donald Trump, resulting in a career-dismantling fallout. She is also now in the middle of a divorce.

So much has happened to Griffin in just the last seven years that it's easy for something like her three-year-old court battle with Tennessee resident Samuel Johnson to slip under the radar, which Griffin says it has. The comedian is being sued by Johnson, who is blaming Griffin for losing his CEO-level job after she tagged his employer in a post on X, formerly Twitter, in response to his recorded altercation with a teenage boy in downtown Franklin who he called "disgusting" for wearing a long red dress to prom in 2021, reports *The Tennessean*.

During our call this week, Griffin, hoping to reach LGBTQ+ advocacy groups like GLAAD and the ACLU, spoke with a sense of urgency when she called attention to her court case, imploring the LGBTQ+ community to understand that this fight that she says she is fighting alone could be any of us. "The decision could have broader implications on the jurisdiction — and legal liability — of free speech in online platforms," writes Angele Latham, a First Amendment reporter for *The Tennessean*. In an era when more than 470 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in state legislatures nationwide over the past few years, many of them targeting queer youth, who can blame Griffin for standing up for a bullied kid in a dress? Even

before her Emmy-winning hit Bravo show "My Life on the D-List," which aired from 2005 to 2010, gave her a major platform to be the LGBTQ+ activist she is, that show of allyship came naturally to Griffin.

On her first tour in six years, aptly titled "My Life on the PTSD List," which stops at the Royal Oak Music Theatre on April 19, Griffin isn't just giving play-by-plays on Paris Hilton and her vacation gone awry with Sia — she's using her stage to get people to vote. Because if anyone knows that the stakes are high this year, it's her.

**How are you doing, Kathy?**

How are *you* doing? Are you ready for the interview of a lifetime?

**I'm always ready.**

Honey, we're going to top it this time. We're going for the fucking gold.

**Let's do it.**

I'm going to rock Royal Oak, Michigan, even though I had to look it up on a map, and I'm a Midwesterner.

**You grew up in Illinois, about a five-hour car ride from here, and I was actually wondering if you ever spent any time in Michigan, but I think I just got my answer.**

First of all, honey, the Griffin idea of a fancy family vacation was that we used to go to Saugatuck, but this is how old the story is: We used to go to Saugatuck every summer for five days, and rent a cabin for nothing, and we'd all sleep on the floor. We were going to Saugatuck when it was still heterosexual!

**It's hard to believe there was ever a moment in which it was.**

Honey, there was a moment in time where there was maybe one or two random gays, and now, you people took it over and flipped it and made it fabulous. Hold on. I'm giving you a standing ovation. [Griffin's dogs start barking as she claps.] And now all my dogs, they're going crazy. Doggies, no. Oh, shit. Sorry, I did that to myself. All right, so anyway, how are you?

**I'm good. But how are you? I have not gone through what**



**you have.**

I have PTSD, Chris. Complex PTSD, which I thought was only for combat veterans. Holy shit, I can't believe it... I was diagnosed by my oncologist and my psychiatrist, and I've got to laugh about it, because I'm somebody that runs around on stage making jokes about the Kardashians, and now, I've got this crazy diagnosis. I decided to make the show about it, because once again, like oh so many things that have happened to me in the last six years, I just did not think it would happen. I start the show with the laundry list. Are you ready?

**Yeah, give it to me.**

Because people want to know, "Come on, how did you get complex PTSD? You're exaggerating, blah, blah, blah," which is also always so pleasant, when people are like, "You're lying." Obviously, the Trump thing started six and a half years ago. I was investigated by the Department of Justice, which seriously considered charging me with conspiracy to assassinate the President of the United States — it's never happened in the history of this nation to a comedian. No-fly list, not able to tour, my own industry turning its back on me. Most of my friends turning their backs on me permanently, by the way. And then what do I do? Leave it to me to be 57 years old and then become addicted to fucking prescription pills, like "Valley of the Dolls," and I was Neely O'Hara. Well, naturally, I wanted to be Neely O'Hara, but I was probably more like Susan Hayward. I love that you get that reference. I was ripping my wig off in the bathroom and ready for a cat fight. Then, of course, I have to get into recovery, but before that, I tried to take my life.

I know it sounds dark, because what isn't these days, but I even talk about that in the show. I won't tell you what I did, but the way I tried to take my life was so over the top that I actually just started cracking up. I do it in front of the audience, and they actually laugh. The reason I do that is because I firmly believe truly, at your lowest, darkest moment, you have to somehow find the humor. It's there. It's there, and sometimes, it's dark as fuck.

Then I get sober, and a year after I'm sober, I get diagnosed with lung cancer, even though I never smoked, which my dear departed mother Maggie would call the luck of the Irish, which means bad luck. By the

way, Maggie is in heaven having a box of wine, or Two Buck Chuck, with the Lord Jesus. She died during that period as well. Then I was on a 5150 psych hold, which was crazy. And then, during my lung cancer surgery, they took out half of my left lung. Chris, I don't like how you're flaunting your two lungs in my face right now. I think it's rude.

**This is why I said we're doing this as a phone conversation, not a Zoom conversation.**

See, because I can hear you breathing right in my fucking face, Chris. I have feelings.

**I'm trying to hold my breath.**

I have half a lung now and I can hear your breath. I got injured during the lung cancer half-a-lung removal, so I have a permanently paralyzed left vocal cord. It's not like I'm a comic and use my voice for a living or

You saw Anderson [Cooper] and Andy [Cohen] take my [New Year's Eve] gig. You saw it.

**But you've had so many close LGBTQ+ people in your life. Did they rally around you? Did you feel loved and supported by close queer friends and your queer fan community?**

No. The power gays absolutely abandoned me, and I say that with such a heavy heart. I'm going to try not to cry. For example, I would say the civilian gays 100% rallied around me. My friends that aren't in the business who are gay were appalled, and they buoyed me, and they held me up, and they were my friends, and I owe them for the rest of my life. But the power gays in Hollywood, the ones who could have lifted a finger, the ones who could have just given me five lines in anything, the ones who could have put me in

tweeted about it after it had already gone viral on TikTok. I wasn't even on TikTok at the time; I am now, but I wasn't then. It had already been seen by millions of people, and millions of people said he should be fired.

Then I said he should be fired. He got fired, and he's suing me. He goes on Newsmax, and he goes on Fox, and says, "I'm going to be the one to drag Kathy Griffin to Tennessee federal court, and let's see how she does with her Hollywood elite attitude in a Tennessee witness box." Nobody's helping me. I've been fighting this case for three years by myself. Thirty years of performing and showing up at [LGBTQ+] events, and I'm left all alone, and I don't know why. Lambda Legal, anybody? ACLU said, "No, we don't want to help you. We don't care." I said, "This is just me fighting for these two kids." They were minors being harassed at their prom photo shoot in a hotel lobby. This guy

have said nothing, but I'm a real ally, and I've been one since I was in grade school, for Christ's sake. I need people to know I'm fighting this fight, because this guy is out there shooting his mouth off.

**What you've gone through in the last seven years, and are currently going through, is a real testament to your resilience and survival.**

That's what I want it to be. I don't mean to come off as woe is me, and honestly, that's why I do make the show funny. I even talk about all my wacky treatments that I get for the PTSD. After this, I'm having Kundalini yoga, and I don't even know what the fuck that is. I don't know if Kundalini is a person, if I should meet him or her, but I just fucking do it. I get that cupping — remember when Gwyneth Paltrow was getting those fucking scars on her back? Well, I do that shit, I don't even think it works. I get acupuncture, I don't even think it works. I talk about all of it in the show, because I think in a way, our country is going through a bit of a PTSD. Let's face it, Covid was not our finest moment. We did not handle that well.

I'm going to get serious for one more minute, which is, these shows are so important to me, and having gay people show up to my shows, because I do feel, and you know this, your civil rights are being rolled back. The Supreme Court is now illegitimate. I want to make gay people laugh, and I want to stand there and go, "I'm OK." I might have a bit of an altered voice, and it sounds like I have a cough, but honestly, I'm not in one bit of pain. My voice is just like this now, and the headset mic really helps a lot. Don't be fooled. I do a rant every show, and my agents don't like that I do it, but I don't care. I say, "Gays, remember, elections are not just every four years, or every two years. They are every year, and often, the down-ballot is more important than the presidential. Go to your gay organization that you trust, and they'll do the work for you, but get your voter guides, because the sheriff matters, the judges matter, the congressman matters, the local senators matter, the U.S. senators matter."

The great Gloria Steinem... I spoke to her recently, and I'm

See **Kathy Griffin**, page 22

**“***Being an ally isn't just showing up at a parade with a rainbow shirt on. Sometimes, being an ally means being in Tennessee federal court for three years, and being in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, where I just lost a motion.***”**

anything! I have an aperture above my cords, so my voice is a bit altered, as you can tell, but I wear this very sexy headset microphone.

**I feel like you've gotten some of the voice back, though.**

Yes, I've had five surgeries on my left cord so far. I'm making my life sound real fucking dreamy right now. By the way, I'm getting texts from Rosie O'Donnell right now. She's like, "Griffin, it's O'Donnell. Are you awake? I'm awake."

**During this period in which you felt abandoned by some people who were really close to you, did you at least feel like your gay friends were standing by you as they have in the past?**

just a little part in a TV show or a movie or directed a comedy special or something, anything, they did nothing.

Honey, I showed up and hosted every free charity event. I've had so many legal issues since this MAGA thing. I have a case in Tennessee federal court right now, and I'm asking for your help, because I need the gay community to support me. I don't think they know I'm fighting this fight, and I'm out there flapping in the wind by myself. Now, there's a video, you can look it up. Write this down: Samuel Johnson. If you look up "Kathy Griffin, Samuel Johnson," this is a CEO, and the video went viral. You probably saw it. He's a MAGA guy that was harassing two trans kids at their prom photo shoot. One of the boys was wearing a red dress, and he was bothering them. I

should have been fired. It's like a Karen video. He's basically a Karen. But because it's Kathy Griffin, and because Trump keeps coming for me, I'm the target, and I'm out there fighting this thing by myself. You hear the kids in the video; they're so scared. They keep saying to the guy, "Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Go away. Go away." These kids are scared in the video. Being an ally isn't just showing up at a parade with a rainbow shirt on. Sometimes, being an ally means being in Tennessee federal court for three years, and being in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, where I just lost a motion.

Let me tell you, if I lose this case, it has real repercussions for anybody posting about anybody who's harassing gay people. If I lose this case, it has real repercussions for the gay community. This isn't about me. I'm not fighting for me. I could



## ◀ Kathy Griffin

Continued from page 21

bragging, but I did. She said, “You tell your gays, this is it. This is it.” As you know, your own civil rights, if Trump gets reelected, not only

### Are you really doing two hour shows on this tour?

The other night in Phoenix, I accidentally did two hours and 20 minutes. Don't be late. Whatever time the show starts, that's when I start, and I do two hours if I'm a

down on fucking ribbons. Give me a break. I love Taylor, don't make the Swifties come after me. I'm terrified of them. I love Taylor. Haha, I'm kidding. I didn't mean anything. I love them.

### How do you feel comedy can

the D-List.” Something about that show. I didn't say it was a gay show, because... it's like my mom and dad were activists in their way without coming out and saying it. My mom and dad, they literally went to gay bars for happy hour, because as my mom would say, “The gay bars had the best free appetizers.” They just were always around gay people, and accepting of gay people. It wasn't like the reality shows today, where people are fighting. It was really a comedic reality show. It didn't hit you over the head with a hammer, but for some reason, lots and lots of people have come up to me over the years, saying, “There was something about the humor of that show that made me feel safe enough to tell my mom or dad that I'm gay.” I think the humor, when couched in a certain way, sometimes it can be humor with a little activism thrown in. Sometimes I write stuff that's just shallow.

I don't even mention Trump in my new show. Newsflash: I don't even mention him. It's not that I'm scared to, but I made a whole movie about it, called “Kathy Griffin: A Hell of a Story.” But I have a great story about going to Paris Hilton's Christmas party, so there's lots of celeb gossip. I have a great story about going on vacation with Sia, where everything went wrong. It was like Lucy and Ethel take Mexico. I think just getting people to be around one another, because as I get older, it's funny, my audience has become gay guys, lesbians, straight women, and also, I'm getting more hetero couples. They're a little older, but that's OK, because I love it when I'll have a heterosexual guy say to me after a show, “Man, I didn't think I knew any gay people, but I'm sitting here in the audience, and now I feel like I know a thousand gay people.” And I always say, “You do.” Sometimes it's the simple act of gay people and straight people just laughing together that creates a bridge. I know that sounds silly, and philosophical, but it's true. Laughter is a unifier.

Look, people don't know this, but I have plenty of Republican friends. I just saw George Conway last week. I teased him about being a double agent, but we're friends. Kathy and Rick Hilton, I've known them for years. They go to Mar-a-Lago. I wish they wouldn't. We have a two-party system, and we should. There's ways to remind people that we're going to get through this crazy phase. By the way, for shits and giggles, I'll tell you, I've never seen anything like it in my whole career, as divided as the

country is. We need the laughs. We need to laugh right in its face, but we also need to gossip about Paris Hilton.

### Speaking of gossip, do I need to come to the show to hear what in the world is going on behind the scenes of “Queer Eye”?

Yes, you do.

### You know something I don't?

No, I don't, but there's some shit going down, and there's trouble in paradise, and those gays better get it together, or else they're going to lose their gig. Listen to Aunt Kathy — once you have a gig, you want to parlay that gig into as many seasons as possible. If I was on that show, I'd get along with everybody and take the check and buy a house.

### It was recently announced that you'll be playing Carnegie Hall again and breaking a significant record in the process.

For the sixth time. I'm so thrilled.

### What would Joan Rivers say?

Joan would be my biggest supporter because Joan and I were tied for the record of the only single female comedian who played Carnegie by themselves, five times in a row. I matched Joan's record, and now I get to break our record. I miss her every day, and I think of her all the time. I learned so much from her, and trust me, Joan would say that about the “Queer Eye” boys in a heartbeat. She'd say, “Don't be ridiculous. Do whatever it takes. Get the check, get the money. Screw the ones you don't like. Who cares? Go have your friends off set. Who gives a shit? Take the check. Cash the check.”

### My last question is, when are we going to Saugatuck?

You name it, honey, because I would be so A-list there. Let's cut the shit. Saugatuck is basically a gay cruise on land, and I have done 18 gay cruises. I even talk about that in my show, so beware. Just so you know, I will be making fun of Royal Oak right to your faces. Every city that I go to, I start with local material, and I love to make fun of the audience right to their face, and they take it right on the chin.



Kathy Griffin. Photo: Jen Rosenstein

kiss marriage goodbye, it's going to be real fucking hard to be an out gay person in Trump's America. There's my rant. I'll go back to the funny, but I just think, because I'm talking to you, I just want you to tell, especially the young gays that think their vote doesn't matter, your vote matters even if you live in a blue state.

good girl, and I do two hours and 20 if I'm a bad girl.

### This is your Eras Tour.

[Laughs.] By the way, let's just cut the shit. Taylor Swift is amazing, but you know Pink wants to blow her brains out, because Pink is looking at Taylor Swift walking around the stage, and Pink is singing upside

### serve as a tool for LGBTQ+ advocacy and visibility in this climate?

Look, the greatest compliment that I get, and I get this a lot and it really makes my heart swell with love, is — and I can't tell you how many gays and lesbians say, “I came out while watching ‘My Life on





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## ◀ Election

Continued from page 6

### 1. Find out what's on your ballot

One of the simplest ways to jump in is to become an informed voter. When you know who is running for office and are up to speed on any ballot initiatives you'll encounter in the fall, you can make informed decisions and help get the word out to fellow community members. An informed electorate is a stronger electorate. Leggett suggests checking the Michigan Voter Information Services website as well as local county clerk websites:

- Michigan Voter Information Services – [mvic.sos.state.mi.us](http://mvic.sos.state.mi.us)
- Oakland County Clerk – [oakgov.com/government/clerk-register-of-deeds/elections-voting/voter-information](http://oakgov.com/government/clerk-register-of-deeds/elections-voting/voter-information)
- Wayne County Clerk – [waynecounty.com/elected/clerk/election-information.aspx](http://waynecounty.com/elected/clerk/election-information.aspx)
- Washtenaw County Clerk – [washtenaw.org/304/Elections](http://washtenaw.org/304/Elections)

### 2. Sign up to protect election integrity

"Election protection is hugely important," Leggett says. "We're talking about empowering people to vote safely, freely and fairly." Any voter in Michigan can sign up to be an Election Day poll worker, also known as an election inspector. Poll workers set up polling locations, help guide voters through the voting process and ensure state and federal laws are followed. Leggett suggests signing up early so you can make plans for the required training. Bonus: Many poll worker roles are paid positions!

Visit the Michigan Secretary of State (SOS) website ([michigan.gov/sos/elections/pollworker#BecomeAPollWorker](http://michigan.gov/sos/elections/pollworker#BecomeAPollWorker)) to sign

up to become a poll worker. The SOS will forward your information to your local county clerk's office.

### 3. Put your money (or your free time) where your mouth is

Once you've identified causes and candidates you care about, consider making a donation. "Even five dollars to a local candidate like a city board or school board candidate can make a huge difference," Leggett says. If you've been following BTL coverage of what can happen when activist right-wingers take over school boards and county commissions, you know exactly how important those races can be.

Don't have extra cash to donate? Campaigns are happy to take your donation of time and effort, too. "If you don't have that five bucks, your time is incredibly valuable," Leggett says. "Working a phone bank shift or knocking on doors for an afternoon is incredibly helpful, and it's an easy entry point for people to connect to candidates."

### 4. Run for something

Leggett notes that many people who could be effective political leaders feel intimidated by the idea of running for local office, but in fact, there are many resources available to help people run. "We need you in leadership, and the barriers you may assume are there... aren't necessarily there. And when they are, we have resources to help get around them," he says.

One place to start is the Run for Something website ([runforsomething.net](http://runforsomething.net)), where you can find information about local, progressive candidates and learn how to run for local office yourself. The non-profit org walks potential candidates through the process of identifying the right position, understanding campaign finances, and handling the red tape. No one knows your community better than you — why not throw your hat in the ring?

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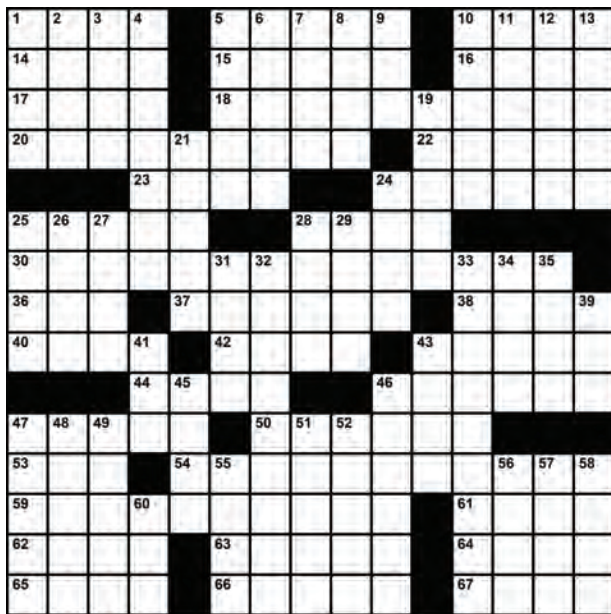


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**Across**

**RuPaul Doesn't Rue the Day**

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## ◀ Second Glances

Continued from page 12

with birthdays just days apart. But, overall, Susan was always overwhelmingly kind to me.

She sent me to Atlanta to cover *Creating Change*, just days after the 2000 election and with the results still hanging in the balance. (Anyone remember the hanging chads?) I covered and walked in the Millennium March on Washington. I've profiled more inspiring community members than I can count, and written many more obituaries than I would have liked. Many of these were for friends or people I knew. I considered it my sacred honor to send them off journalistically.

So how do I walk away now? I've been at the paper longer than anyone else currently writing for it. And perhaps that's the point. I'm a relic. I'm old. Yesterday's news.

Oh I know that sounds a little pessimistic. Fifty is the new something or other, right? Age is a state of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter. I know all the adages, including the one about staying at the fair too long.

Over the years, I've become accustomed to being "Jason A. Michael from *Between The Lines*." It's a part of my identity. Who will I be if I'm not a reporter anymore? What is my purpose? I guess I kind of thought I'd write until I die. And maybe I will. I've written

two books so far, one an *Essence* magazine bestseller. Maybe I'll write a third.

I'd love to find some queer anthologies to contribute to, but there aren't as many of those as there used to be and those that are still around are often sex-centered. Heck, what isn't sex-centered these days? Maybe it's just an example of me being over the hill. The hill, of course, is metaphysical, but make no mistake. I'm over it.

I'm a throwback to a simpler time in journalism. New ownership and management has taken the paper in a new direction. Benjamin Jenkins, our new publisher, has been very fair to me since taking over three years ago. But I'm a square peg trying to fit into a round hole.

I'm proud of my body of work. Most of all, I'm thankful to all of you who've ever taken the time to read one of my stories or columns. I did it all for the community, and I hope, in some small way, I've made a difference. At least I know I did the best I could.

So goodbye, dear readers. Thanks for the memories. You've been a vibrant and beautiful community to cover, and I have enjoyed seeing you grow. I've reached the end of my column, and I still haven't figured out how to say goodbye. So cue up Bette Midler saying so long to Johnny Carson in song. Lift a glass and let's make it one for my (imaginary) baby, and one more for the road! Thanks again. JAM out!

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