MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between the Lines™



STRONGER TOGETHER
Why our movement depends on collective action

AN ALLY VOICE RISING
Mallory McMorrow talks activism and U.S. Senate run

TRINITY THE TUCK
The drag icon chats before her Lansing Pride gig

The Ally Issue

As she prepares to leave office, Gov. Whitmer reflects on allyship, LGBTQ+ progress and the work still ahead

By Chris Azzopardi

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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein







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Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at Motor City Pride, June 2026. Photo: Andrew Potter

More Online: Your 2026 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar

Michigan's Pride Season is just heating up! Don't miss Lansing, Holland and Monroe County Pride fests on June 27 or July events in Battle Creek, Flint and Ypsilanti. Check out our online Pride fest calendar at pridesouce.com, with details about the celebrations still to come in 2026 through late September.



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Official Pride Month might be winding down, but we're still pretty wound up. Over the next few weeks, you can cheer on drag royalty in the making, dance to live music in the woods or bring out a Y2K outfit so fierce and fabulous that you won't begrudge the place it's had in your (literal, not metaphorical) closet for more than two decades.

Whether it's community, culture, competition or campfires you're seeking, here are five great opportunities to hang out with your fellow queer mittenfolks.



Lilith Von Tal. Photo: Instagram/@lilithvontal

1 Cheer, Queer and Be Merry at Queer Coded

Sure, winter holiday traditions are cute with their presents and stockings and resolutions and all, but queers know how to celebrate all year round. Queer Coded, now going on its fourth year, is one of those traditions. Once again, Lilith Von Tal's legendary showcase will combine drag, burlesque, live music and enough sequins to briefly alter local weather patterns. Add an interactive photo booth, a room full of queer joy and the kind of crowd that applauds enthusiastically whenever someone removes even a glove with a flourish and you've got a Friday night to remember.

June 26, 8 p.m., Planet Ant (2320 Caniff St., Hamtramck). tinyurl.com/QueerBurlesque.



2 Connect at the Black Pride Ypsi Y2K Cookout

Dust off your best Y2K fits for Black Pride Ypsi's Cookout at Growing Hope's Indoor Farmers Market, a nonprofit dedicated to fostering equitable food access and a sustainable local food system in downtown Ypsilanti. Celebrate queer joy and resistance with free food, three DJs, games and community connection. The event honors Black Pride Ypsi's year-round work supporting LGBTQ+ folks throughout Washtenaw County.

June 27, 5-10 p.m., Growing Hope Indoor Farmers Market (16 S. Washington St., Ypsilanti). tinyurl.com/YpsiBlackPride.



Anna Rexia. Photo: Instagram/@_xo.anna_

3 Root For Royal Oak's Next Drag Superstar

Every intensely watchable reality competition show asks the same question: Who wants it the most? Hosted by local drag performer Anna Rexia, Glam Slam All Stars brings that energy with an ongoing multi-week drag battle: one performer from each week advances toward the finale at Pride Royal Oak on July 25. So it's not just a show, it's a showdown! The organizers promise jaw-dropping looks, cutthroat talent and enough energy to light up all of Royal Oak. Plus, you get to vote on who survives (metaphorically, of course) the slam and takes the stage at Pride!

July 2, 9:30 p.m., continuing Thursdays through July 25, Pronto! (608 S. Washington Ave., Royal Oak). tinyurl.com/GlamSlamAllStars.



Nikki Holland. Photo: Instagram/@nikkihollandmusic

Marvel At Music in the Moonlight

If you've ever wondered what would happen if somebody combined a music festival, summer camp and a queer family reunion, here's your answer. The Saugatuck LGBTQIA Music Fest offers live performances throughout the resort, an amateur drag king show, karaoke, acoustic brunches, bonfires and moonlight swims. Headliners include Nikki Holland and the Dirty Elizabeths, but half the fun is wandering from stage to stage, discovering artists you've never heard before. The other half is sitting around a campfire with new friends, wondering how someone could bring this many talented queer musicians to one place.

July 10-12, Campit Resort (6635 118th Ave., Fennville). facebook.com/SaugatuckLGBTMusicFest.



Hide a Little Queer Hope

Write a note to the next LGBTQ+ person who opens a queer-themed library book. Tell them they're not alone. Tell them life gets better. Hope they find community and love. Slip it inside your favorite queer novel and return it to the shelf. You may never know who finds it — a questioning teenager, someone newly out, anyone having a hard week — but that's the magic. Quiet acts of queer care matter, especially in June.

Any time, your local library. Free.



FEATURED EXHIBITIONS

HOW WE HOLD
by Quinn Faylor | June 12 - Aug. 26, 2026
A2AC GALLERY
Detroit-based queer, non-binary artist Quinn Faylor creates vibrant sculptures and paintings exploring care, transformation, connection, and joy.

IDENTITY PASSPORT
by Teddy Keeling | June 5 - July 22, 2026
A2AC SPOTLIGHT GALLERY
Featuring small batch, home created zines and prints exploring queer identity, complex feelings, and creating a space to visually communicate freely.

PRIDE PROGRAMMING ALL SUMMER LONG

Art. Community. Creativity. Joy.

June 26: Clay Workshop: Pride Garlands
July 10: Clay Workshop: Rainbow Cups
July 11: A Cup of Pride Drop-In
August 1: Pride Craft Carnival (during Ann Arbor Pride)
August 3-5: Balance & Play: Mobile-Making Workshop w/ Quinn
August 7: Pride: Give It a Whirl (wheel throwing)
ALL SUMMER LONG: Be Exactly Who You Are!

EXPLORE PRIDE PROGRAMMING
annarborartcenter.org
A2AC THE ANN ARBOR ART CENTER

GRETCHEN WHITMER

IN HER OWN WORDS



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at her home. Photo: Andrew Potter

She's leaving office. She's not leaving the fight. Here's what she wants you to know.

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

She walked into the room in a rainbow sweater her gay daughter refused to keep, and immediately started dressing her dogs in Pride accessories for the photo shoot. If you needed a single image to capture who Gretchen Whitmer is as an ally, that might be it — warm, a little extra and both unselfconscious and acutely aware of the power of her representation as a high-profile ally.

But Whitmer's allyship runs deeper than a great outfit. As Michigan's governor since 2019, she has used her office as a shield for LGBTQ+ Michiganders, signing the landmark Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act amendment that added sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as protected classes, banning conversion therapy and passing the Michigan Hate Crime Act. She did it all while overcoming obstacles including a hostile state legislature, a hostile federal government and — in her words — some "really wild, scary times." She also did it personally. Whitmer didn't know her daughter Sherry was gay until Sherry came out just before heading off to college. That combination of the political and the deeply personal is what runs through everything she does on these issues.

Now, with her tenure ending in January 2027, the community she has fought for is grappling with what comes next — and what could be lost. At a moment when 575 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were tracked in a single year nationally and the Supreme Court has already taken aim at conversion therapy bans like Michigan's, the stakes of her departure feel real.

True to form, she keeps showing up anyway. On June 7, Whitmer marched in Motor City Pride, working the barricades — high-fiving, hugging, greeting the crowd the way she always has. I sat down with her at her Lansing residence this past April for the conversation that follows. She talked about her daughter, her platform, her fears about what comes after her and why, despite all of it, she's not going anywhere.

We've got a few months left with you as governor. And I just want to know: How do we keep you?

Well, thank you. We've been doing this in some really wild, scary times. And there's got to be a feeling of trepidation because change is happening every day and another administration could look very different. And so I'm thinking about that too. The work that we've done, I'm really proud of. I do it because I think it's the right thing to do. I do it because I've been working on these issues for a long time. I do it for my own family and for you and yours. And while I'm not going to be serving as governor after the end of this calendar year, I ain't going anywhere and I'm not leaving the fight. And I've got a lot of gas in the tank. I don't know how exactly I'm going to expend it, but we've made a lot of progress and I'm determined to make sure we don't go backward.

How do you hope history remembers you as an LGBTQ+ advocate?

I hope that people look at what we've

accomplished and the body of work and see these long fights are worth having. That if you stay grounded in the work and you try to find solutions, and you don't compromise your values, you could actually get a lot of good things done. And that we were able to, whether it is thinking about how different our state looked back in 2004 [when] you couldn't get married if you were gay in Michigan to now. Not just the ability to get married, but protections in your home and in your workplace, the work that we've done to keep this community thriving and feeling supported. It's been good for our economy. It's been good for our people. It's good for our ability to recruit people to Michigan. Whether you're a member of the community, an ally to the community or just trying to get on with our daily lives in Michigan, we all benefit from those policies.

Of all the pro-LGBTQ legislation that you have signed off on, what is the one that you look back on that makes you think, "God, was I glad to be governor"?

Signing the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights law with my daughter standing next to me. I didn't know that I was raising a gay woman. My daughter, who I love just as much as her sister and more than anything else on the planet, she came out to me while I was governor, when she was getting ready to go off to college. I became a member of an LGBTQ family in my nuclear family and signing that law so that she would be protected as would everyone else, the LGBTQ family, felt really good. I'd fought for that for many years and then to be able to sign it into law with my daughter standing there was really a powerful moment.

What has Sherry taught you about how to be the best ally that you can be?

When I was getting ready to sign Elliott-Larsen and texting with my daughter, she was at Michigan in undergrad, and I said, "Is this something you might want to come and attend?" I never put pressure on my kids to attend, but I always invite them and they can make their own decisions. And she said, "Absolutely." And I said, "OK, can I refer to you as a member of the community?" And she texted back, "LOL, Gretchen, you're ridiculous." And I'm like, "Oh god, what did I do wrong?" And she just said, "You refer to me as a gay woman or a lesbian, please." And I was like, "OK." And I said, "Thank you for the advice, gay woman." And she goes, "You're welcome, non-community member," because she's making fun of me.

We got a big chuckle at that. But I think just making sure that the way that I address issues is current and inclusive. I think that there are a lot of people who have the right motivations and values, but sometimes get nervous that they don't know the verbiage to use. And so I've learned a lot from my own child. I've learned a lot from the awesome people on my team who help advise and make sure that we are recognizing the trans community in the appropriate way at important moments. And so I'm grateful that I have them and that they're willing to spend a little extra time with 54-year-old Gretchen who's got all the right motivations and maybe sometimes the wrong words.

There are a lot of parents who are in your shoes. And they keep fighting for their children.

Yeah. My daughter laughs at me. I'm that mom who buys her the rainbow stuff and she's like, "Gretchen, please." She doesn't always call me Gretchen, but when she's criticizing me, she does. [Laughs.]

But does she have this outfit?

I bought this for her and she was like, "You're ridiculous." I'm like, "I love it. I'm going to wear it." I am that mom on TikTok.

I'm glad that you are the proud owner of that outfit.

[Laughs.] I love it. And I always get compliments on it. I told her if she wants to steal it back, she can.

I've heard you say many times that you've always wanted to be governor because you wanted to make a difference.

> *I'm not here to play games. I want to do meaningful work. I want to make real progress. And when I get feedback from the community and allies of the community, it tells me we've had that real impact.*

How do you measure the impact you've had on LGBTQ+ Michiganders?

I can just tell it when I'm running into people and they recognize the work that we've done. Just even in my State of the State earlier this year when I acknowledged the LGBTQ community — and the trans community, in particular — the feedback that I got was overwhelming, just the gratitude for staying there when it feels like some allies have gotten quiet. The fact that a sitting governor used her platform to uplift the community had real meaning. And so it tells me that what we've done is meaningful. And I think that's the most important thing. I'm not here to play games. I want to do meaningful work. I want to make real progress. And when I get that feedback from the community and allies of the community, it tells me we've had that real impact.

Will the ban on same-sex marriage in the state constitution be removed by the time you leave office?

I don't believe that we will see any big changes in LGBTQ rights between now and the end of this calendar year, but I don't want to predict too far in the future. I don't want anyone to get complacent. I think that because we've made such progress that we assume that we'll continue to make progress. We have to fight for it every single day.

Can you share a story that really brought home to you what's at stake for the LGBTQ+ community?

Absolutely. I've been really touched by a lot of my friends in the community. I served with Chris Kolb, who was the first openly gay legislator in the Michigan legislature. He and I came into office together. He was one of my closest friends. My friend Richard Brown, who has been on a long journey and came out, I think, in his late 50s, and my friend Jeynce [Poindexter]. Jeynce is such a great trans advocate and trans woman who has just become a really good friend. I've learned so much from each of these people.

Any fights that they were up against that impacted you in a way where you felt like, "I have to fight for this person"?

I just think about the stories from people who weren't able to see their loved ones in the hospital because they didn't have a formalized relationship that was acknowledged by the state or the medical community. The people that have children together, but then their union doesn't stay together and then they don't have the ability to have real custody and parenting rights, even when both parents want that and it's in the best interest of the child. Every person deserves to live the life they want with dignity and protection and respect, and that's the bottom line.

See **Gretchen Whitmer**, page 16



Mallory McMorrow Built a National Profile Defending LGBTQ+ Kids. She's Not Done Yet.

The Royal Oak Democrat on allyship, her viral pro-LGBTQ+ Statehouse speech and running for U.S. Senate

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT



Mallory McMorrow. Courtesy photo

For LGBTQ+ community members in Michigan and beyond, assaults from the anti-queer federal government have felt unrelenting — and show no sign of letting up.

Since the Trump administration returned to power in January 2025, the federal government has moved with remarkable speed to dismantle LGBTQ+ protections that took decades to build. Executive orders signed on day one redefined "sex" under federal law to exclude transgender people, stripped anti-discrimination protections from workplaces and schools, and banned gender-affirming care in federal prisons and detention centers. The administration has removed LGBTQ+ data collection from federal surveys and directed agencies to purge references to gender identity from their policies and documents.

Into that climate steps Mallory McMorrow. The Royal Oak state senator and Senate majority whip, a former industrial designer who didn't run for office until she was in her 30s, is asking Michigan to send her to Washington to fight back. "There are moments that will break you," she said in her Senate campaign announcement video. "This is not that moment."

McMorrow knows something about moments that don't break you.

Her 2022 floor speech defending LGBTQ+ youth spread to tens of millions of people within 24 hours, turning a state senator from a Detroit suburb into a Democratic household name almost overnight. Four years later, a constituent told her he keeps the audio on his "hope" playlist, which he plays when things feel dark. Recognizing the impact the speech still has on the community is "so moving to me," she tells BTL in a recent interview from the campaign trail.

McMorrow didn't set out to give a defining speech that spring. She'd spent years watching every bill with her name on it die without a hearing in a Republican-controlled chamber and was seriously weighing whether to run for reelection at all. Then, on an otherwise ordinary morning in April 2022, a Republican colleague sent out a fundraising email accusing her of grooming children — a smear with a history of inciting real violence. Friends who remembered that the same accusation had once sent a gunman to a Washington, D.C., pizza restaurant started calling to check on her. They were worried. She was spinning, trying to process what had happened and figure out how to respond, when she looked at her calendar and saw she had a high school visit scheduled.

She went anyway.

In a meeting with students who had stayed after school, one girl raised her hand — she was queer, she said, and she didn't understand why her state hated her. The words hit McMorrow hard. However awful her own day had been, she recognized in that moment that this was how that student felt every single day, living under the governance of people who didn't see her as a full person. McMorrow went home and stayed up all night writing. Her daughter

had just turned 1, and while giving her a bath that evening — watching her laugh, oblivious to things like the current political climate — she started putting words to what she needed to say. Her first draft went after Republicans directly. She scrapped it.

"I realized that if I stood up there as a Democrat and said Republicans do X, Y and Z, nobody would listen," she says. "So I decided to talk about myself."

She was deliberate about who she wanted to reach: people who looked like her, who shared her faith background, who might be persuaded that standing up for LGBTQ+ people wasn't a threat to anything they valued. She was also in the mindset of someone who figured this might be the last speech she'd ever give and had nothing left to protect. "I might as well go down swinging," she recalls thinking.

The public response to her speech changed everything — it pulled her back into the work, and she traces a straight line from that night to her Senate campaign. "We are in a moment in our country where Donald Trump weaponizes people's differences to divide us and to make us hate each other and fear each other," she said. "We need to rebuild a country that actually recognizes we all succeed when we all succeed."

> *"The ones who are getting the most attention right now and who are the loudest are the minority, and it may not always feel that way. But I am a hopeless optimist, and I believe that we're going to come out and be OK. Just know that I'm always going to be a fighter and not back down."*

Before politics, McMorrow spent more than a decade as an industrial designer and advertising executive after earning her degree from Notre Dame. Her 2018 Michigan Senate campaign flipped a district that had previously voted Republican by 16 points, and when Democrats won control of the Senate chamber for the first time in 40 years, she was named majority whip. The legislative record that followed is formidable: She championed Michigan's red flag law, allowing family members and law enforcement to petition courts to temporarily remove firearms from people in crisis; helped expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include LGBTQ+ protections after a 50-year wait; worked to repeal the state's abortion ban; and voted to raise the minimum wage, expand voting rights and fund universal school meals. She's sponsored legislation targeting ghost guns and helped push through gun storage requirements designed to keep weapons away from children.

That record is now being tested on the biggest possible stage. Michigan's open U.S. Senate seat is one Democrats cannot afford to lose: "If we lose this seat to Mike Rogers, there is no path for Democrats to flip control of the United States Senate," McMorrow has said on the campaign trail. Republicans hold a 53-47 Senate majority heading into November, and Democrats need to net four seats to reclaim the chamber. Michigan is one of only two seats currently held by Democrats in states Trump carried in 2024, which means the path to a Democratic Senate majority almost certainly runs straight through it.

The Aug. 4 Democratic primary has been a fiercely competitive three-way contest between McMorrow, former Wayne County health director Abdul El-Sayed and U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens. Through the first quarter of 2026, all three candidates were within striking distance of each other in total fundraising, with McMorrow having raised $8.62 million over the course of her campaign compared to $8.87 million for Stevens and $7.65 million for El-Sayed. McMorrow's most recent quarter was her strongest, and she's been the most conservative spender of the three, a sign her campaign is building toward August rather than burning through resources early. El-Sayed recently landed the endorsement of the United Auto Workers, adding significant labor support in the home stretch. As of mid-June, both the Cook Political Report and Sabato's Crystal Ball rate the race a toss-up.

The campaign faced a PR quagmire in late April when a CNN KFile investigation revealed McMorrow had deleted thousands of old tweets, including posts critical of the rural Midwest and others in which she expressed nostalgia for California. Questions also surfaced about her residency timeline,

See **Mallory McMorrow**, page 20



Chuck Tingle's 'Bury Your Gays' Gets the Big Gay Read Treatment For 2026

Ann Arbor District Library embraces horror, queer storytelling and AI anxieties with Chuck Tingle's darkly funny novel

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT



Chuck Tingle. Courtesy photo

The Ann Arbor District Library's sixth annual Big Gay Read is diving into "Bury Your Gays," a darkly funny horror novel by masked author Chuck Tingle that somehow predicted the exact AI controversy currently roiling Hollywood. The author recently brought his one-man show spectacular to the library to launch a month of community programming around the novel.

This year's selection follows a gay screenwriter navigating Hollywood monsters both literal and figurative when studio executives pressure him to kill off his queer characters for the algorithm. The annual community book club amplifies a single title across a month of events, with readers gathering around a shared story and participating in programs designed to deepen their engagement with the text.

Jacob Gorski, an AADL staffer who helps select the Big Gay Read each year, explains the library chose "Bury Your Gays" because the book "oozes with queerness, and humor and horror." It also touches on timely topics such as AI in the entertainment industry and how queer narratives are told. Gorski notes the book "addresses pertinent queer issues from a bombastic, joyful, irreverent point of view." Until this year, he says, the Big Gay Read had yet to select a horror novel. "It felt right to choose a book that honors the legions of queer horror fans out there."

Tingle, a USA Today bestselling author and recipient of the 2025 Loud Hands Award for Autistic Storytellers, has written roughly 400 books across genres. When asked what drives that level of output, Tingle traces it to something fundamental. "It is my natural state. I am just always making things. But to tell the truth, I think that's true of everyone."

Everyone, he says, has the capacity to create. "We've defined what creation is too narrowly. Creation is a walk in the park. It's the meal you made for lunch. It's a heartbeat. You are a valid creator, always putting part of yourself into the universe. You have the power to create an entire universe with a tiny little choice. And you can prove love and make something even more beautiful than you could ever fathom."

When he was writing "Bury Your Gays," Tingle says he feared readers would reject the AI subplot as unbelievable. The book features an Academy Awards scenario where the first entirely AI-generated performance is nominated. "When I was writing it, I thought I was going to have to come up with something new to insert there because no one would understand what I was talking about," Tingle recalls. "And within the year of me writing it and it coming out, the entire world changed."

For Tingle, reflecting on the book after audiences have engaged with it adds dimension. "I think of art as not just the product — it's my interaction with the audience, what the audience thinks of it. Art is not static, it is evolving with how people react to it."

"Right now we are in a massive canyon, a big dip," Tingle acknowledges, but adds, "In times of darkness, that's when the light shines the brightest. The message of love is so much more powerful in times when it is needed. What is really powerful is when you wake and it's a stormy, horrible day and everything's going wrong and you say, 'This is my chance to prove love.' Your power in those times is multiplied by 10."

Drawing on advice from a queer mentor, Tingle distinguishes between allies and accomplices. "There are allies and then there are accomplices. Libraries are accomplices to everything we're trying to build in society and in community."

The Big Gay Read's programming leans directly into Tingle's themes of AI, datafication and queer storytelling, with events ranging from crafting workshops to a lecture on how algorithms shape on-screen LGBTQ+ representation. The library, Gorski says, aims to build community through multiple entry points. "We want to generate opportunities for queers and their allies to make a friend, look at life from a new perspective and maybe learn something along the way — or you can also just come to the library and sew a felt cryptid with us."

All Big Gay Read events are free and open to the public. Pick up a copy of "Bury Your Gays" at any of the five Ann Arbor District Library branches or access it as an e-book or audiobook. This content is made possible through our partnership with Ann Arbor District Library. Learn more about the Big Gay Read at aadl.org/thebiggayread.

THE BIG GAY READ

FEATURED EVENTS

Bring-Your-Own-Craft Movie Night: *The X-Files*
WED JULY 1 • 5:30–7:30PM
DOWNTOWN LIBRARY

Cryptid Creature Sewing Craft
FRI JULY 3 • 6–7:00PM
DOWNTOWN LIBRARY



The Algorithm's Gonna Get You: What Datafication Means to Queer Stories and AI in Hollywood
WED JULY 15 • 6:30–7:30PM
PITTSFIELD BRANCH

Cross Stitch Black Lamb
MON JULY 20 • 6–7:30PM
DOWNTOWN LIBRARY

Horror Movie Trivia
WED JULY 29 • 6:30–7:30PM
PITTSFIELD BRANCH

Community Craft Night
FRI JULY 31 • 6–7:30PM
DOWNTOWN LIBRARY

aadl.org/thebiggayread

ANN ARBOR DISTRICT LIBRARY

A Second Shot With Trinity the Tuck

The ‘Drag Race’ winner talks Lansing Pride performance and why she sometimes struggles to break out of her pageant queen image

BY KEITH LANGSTON



Trinity the Tuck. Courtesy photo

Trinity the Tuck may have never won Miss Congeniality on “RuPaul’s Drag Race,” but she certainly deserves it for agreeing to do two interviews with me after I ran into technical difficulties conducting the first one from a janitor’s closet at the gym.

Yes, a janitor’s closet.

I was excited to speak with Trinity ahead of her headlining Lansing Pride set on June 27. Most people know her from competing on “Drag Race” three times — and making herstory as one half of the show’s first-ever double crowning, when she and Monét X Change were jointly crowned winners of “All Stars 4.”

With a spot in the Drag Race Hall of Fame and more than 1.2 million Instagram followers, I was understandably looking forward to the conversation.

Then my phone rang while I was mid-workout.

When a “Drag Race” queen calls you, you pick up no matter what. So I grabbed my things, spotted the closest door I could find and ducked into what turned out to be a janitor’s closet — questionable decision-making, but journalistically motivated nonetheless. After we wrapped our call, I was horrified to discover the recording apps I was using on my phone didn’t work. I had no recording.

The next day, I texted Trinity with my tail between my legs to ask if she’d be willing to do it all over again. And honestly, the second interview was better for it. Having already talked through her story once, I was able to go deeper — into her first time in drag, her thoughts on queer celebration and what Pride means to her now.

First off, thank you so much for chatting again. I promise I’m recording this time! I want to start by asking what people can expect from a Trinity the Tuck performance at Lansing Pride?

They can expect to be entertained. I think that’s the most important part of any drag show. I want people to leave feeling entertained, inspired and like they’ve had a good time. Be yourself, be safe and always remember the true meaning of Pride.

With so much anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the U.S. right now, does performing at Pride change anything about your show?

I don’t generally do politically driven

performances because I think drag inherently is a protest. It's always about going against the grain and society's norms. I've always viewed Pride as a way for people who don't feel comfortable in society to finally have a safe space where they do feel comfortable. There doesn't always need to be a message because performing at Pride is the message. I want to give people an escape where they can forget about what's going on in the world and just have a good time.

Do you remember your first Pride?

I had just turned 18, and I was terrified. I didn't know what to expect, but then once it was over, I was like, wait, that's all it was? I'm from a really small town in Alabama, and we don't have Pride. So going to the closest major city, which was Birmingham, and seeing that Pride… I just didn't know what it was going to be, and I was scared. But then afterwards I was like, wait, I'm totally fine!

For anyone who might be scared or nervous about attending Pride like you were, what would you say to them?

I think, especially with everything going on right now, Pride is a protest. Yes, it's a time for our community to come together and have fun and celebrate, but it's also a great way for us to show that we're here and we're not gonna hide in the shadows. Pride is your chance to be seen.

I'm curious how you went from a scared kid at their first Pride to being an award-winning drag queen. How did that happen?

It was actually a dare! All my major gayness and queerness formed really quickly and kind of all hit my life at the same time around 18, because I was finally able to go out. I met a friend who was at the beginning stages of their drag career and they were always like, "You should do drag!" and I was always like, "Ew, no! I'd never do drag."

I had this notion in my head and believed a lot of the stereotypes people used to have about drag queens. Like that they were deadbeats, or on drugs, or were sex workers. Obviously, I don't care if someone is a sex worker now, but back then I was very sheltered, so my perception of everything was really skewed.

What finally got you to take the leap and try it?

My friend was like, if you enter this contest, you can win $100. As a broke 18-year-old back in 2003, I was thinking, wow, that's a lot of money. I'd have to work two shifts as a server to make that. So they put me in drag, and I did the contest…and I lost. But in that moment, I knew that I had really loved the adrenaline, and I'm super competitive, so I kept doing it until I won. It took me three tries, and then after that I was totally hooked.

When we talked the first time, I remember you mentioned that you used to do a lot of pageants. Is that competitive spirit what got you into that?

Sort of. I mean, yes, the competitive part of me loves pageants. But in Birmingham, back before there was TV drag, if you wanted to travel as a drag queen, you had to do pageants.

> *"Pride is a protest. Pride is your chance to be seen."*
>
> — Trinity the Tuck

Back then there were only a few very famous drag queens you'd see on TV, like RuPaul or Lady Bunny, who were actually traveling and doing drag.

If you weren't them but wanted to be a celebrity in the drag world, you had to do pageants. So that's what I did, and because I'm competitive, I loved it. But I think If I had grown up in a bigger city, I probably wouldn't have gone the pageant route. I probably would have went more "Dragula." I love horror drag, alternative drag and club kid drag. But because I'm from Alabama, the influence that molded me was pageants.

We touched on that horror influence during our first interview, and I remember you saying your main horror inspiration is zombies. Do you think you could ever blend your horror and pageant worlds together?

Oh, I do! Especially during October, that always opens the door for me to do it more. But here's the problem: When you've been on "Drag Race," the show kind of brands you as a specific type of queen, and then your fans expect you to be that kind of queen all the time. It can actually feel a little hard to break away from that brand and image. But I do get to experiment sometimes, and I love it.

Trinity the Tuck will perform at Lansing Pride on June 27 in Old Town. Visit lansingpride.org for more information.



Trump Administration, Drowning in Corruption, Still Has Time to Hurt Trans Kids



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Dear Reader,

In an effort to thwart the rise of AI, I am choosing not to use a computer to write this week's column. I am, instead, writing it by hand using both manmade and natural materials. You will notice various shades of green and a certain American Flag Blue throughout.

That's right. I am writing on peeled scraps I've salvaged from the bottom of the Reflecting Pool in D.C. as well as whatever algae I could scrape from the surface of the water. It is both my most ambitious and most politically charged column to date.

I am, of course, kidding. I am nowhere near the Reflecting Pool geographically. And even if I were, I don't get paid enough to write this column to go through that kind of trouble (sorry, editors).

But Donald Trump would like us all to believe that there are some antifa agitators wading in the water, slicing through the newly redone bottom of the pool with large blades while others hurriedly dump algae into the pool.

"WOW, who would do such a thing?" Trump posted to Truth Social on June 21. "SICK, DERANGED PEOPLE!"

> *The Reflecting Pool is just more blatantly obvious proof that Trump is corrupt, ignorant and incapable of accepting accountability.*

But, of course, the sick and deranged people who vandalized the Reflecting Pool are the people he paid millions of dollars to "fix" it. The Reflecting Pool, which Trump was in such a hurry to beautify before his big July 4th celebration, will not, in fact, be ready in time for America's 250th anniversary. So many millions of dollars literally poured down the drain.

In case there's any doubt, it's his fault. Obviously. The Reflecting Pool is just more blatantly obvious proof that Trump is corrupt, ignorant and incapable of accepting accountability.

And we're not even halfway through his second term. He's literally just getting started.

But don't worry. Trump isn't so busy destroying Washington D.C. landmarks that he can't find time for other policy priorities. Like making lives as hard as possible for transgender people.

Trump may be intent on dismantling the Department of Education Department, but as long as it's still around, he's keeping it busy investigating school districts that dare treat transgender students as fully human.

The latest schools targeted are in Michigan. The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is investigating Ann Arbor Public Schools, Monroe Public Schools and the Chippewa Valley School District.

"OCR will determine whether the Districts violated Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) by allowing athletes to participate on boys' and girls' athletic teams and use locker rooms based on their self-professed 'gender identities,'" states a department press release. Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

That's right. OCR is being deployed against these schools for the crime of transgender kids playing sports. Is this OCR's purpose? To go after already marginalized kids? No.

According to NPR, "OCR's staff of civil rights lawyers are tasked with protecting students in K-12 schools and universities from discrimination based on disability, gender, race and national origin."

Or they were before Trump, anyway. OCR clearly has other priorities now. Like policing kids' bodies.

They are literally investigating these school districts based on just a few kids.

"The government said it had received a complaint that Ann Arbor schools allowed a transgender girl to compete on one of its volleyball teams for girls and also allowed the girl to use female-only locker rooms," reports the Detroit Free Press.

Imagine, for a moment, that you're this kid. Or this kid's family. And the full weight of the federal government is coming down on you for the crime of playing volleyball.

It's a disgusting act of intimidation and abuse of power. But that's what Trump does best.

It's the same story in Monroe. The district is being investigated because their girls volleyball team played against another team that included a transgender player. And that player used the locker room. Oh, the horror.

And in Chippewa Valley, a transgender athlete was also apparently allowed to use a locker room.

Given the small number of transgender students involved in this investigation, it's quite possible that the same trans student is the subject of each one of these complaints. That's how small the pool of trans high school athletes is in this country.

The Department of Education under Trump has decided that their most important role is not to protect the civil rights of students or to ensure that students with disabilities get the education they are entitled to. No. The purpose of this department is to terrorize transgender kids under the guise of protecting girls and girls sports.

May Trump, his entire administration and all who enable them wade into the Reflecting Pool and never again emerge.



THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Supreme Court Appears Ready to Back Transgender Athlete Bans

The Supreme Court appears likely to uphold state laws that ban transgender athletes from competing on girls' and women's sports teams, based on more than three hours of oral arguments in January focused on cases from Idaho and West Virginia.

A majority of justices seemed to agree the laws can remain in place, though it's unclear how broadly their ruling might extend. The court is considering whether these bans violate the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause and Title IX, the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education.

The Court's decision could affect similar laws in more than half the country. Idaho was the first state to enact such a ban in 2020, with West Virginia following a year later. The cases involve Lindsay Hecox, a 24-year-old trans woman in Idaho, and B.P.J., a 15-year-old trans high school student in West Virginia who has competed on track and cross-country teams.

Michigan doesn't currently have a blanket ban on transgender athlete participation, but advocates are watching this case closely. A decision is expected by late June 2026. Whichever way the court rules, the implications for transgender youth in Michigan's schools will be significant.



New Survey: Support for LGBTQ+ Issues in Decline

Public support for LGBTQ+ issues is declining after a two-decade rise, according to a Gallup Values and Beliefs survey conducted in May.

Support for same-sex marriage, the morality of gay and lesbian relationships, and endorsement of gender changes are all down from their early 2020s highs, with support for same-sex marriage dropping six points from its 2022-2023 peak to 65%. Gender transitioning saw the sharpest decline, with only 38% agreeing it's morally acceptable — an eight-point drop in five years.

The shift is attributed to conservative leaders pushing back against diversity, equity and inclusion programs intended to foster greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. The decline is particularly steep among Republicans and, to a lesser extent, independents. Democrat support has remained stable.

Detroit LGBT Chamber Rebrands, Focuses on Statewide Representation

The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce is rebranding to the Michigan Pride Chamber of Commerce as it expands statewide, signaling a shift toward economic development and advocacy for LGBTQ-owned businesses across Michigan.

According to a statement from Kevin Terrell Heard, president and executive director of the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the rebrand represents "a clear commitment to strengthening Michigan's inclusive economy." The organization held its first-ever LGBTQ+ Reception at the Mackinac Policy Conference this year in partnership with the LGBTQ+ Commission of Michigan.

The move reflects growing momentum around supporting queer entrepreneurs throughout Michigan. Chamber leadership is calling on state officials to invest in LGBTQ-owned businesses in their districts and extend economic development support to local communities. Learn more at detroitlgbtchamber.com.

Billionaire Donates $45 Million to Trevor Project

Philanthropist MacKenzie Scott donated $45 million to The Trevor Project, the national nonprofit focused on suicide prevention and advocacy for LGBTQ+ youth. The donation supports the organization's mission as it addresses mental health crises among young people in the community. Trevor Project CEO Jaymes Black said the funding will help "accelerate our progress toward a world where every LGBTQ+ young person knows they are loved and supported."

Drag Comedy Series Debuts on Revry

Fresh streaming drag content that brings the laughs? We're in. Revry's "I'm Dead" is a new 12-episode half-hour series that blends stand-up, reality-style confessionals and thematic storytelling featuring "Drag Race All Stars" contestant Salina EsTitties and comedians including Pressure K and Kaycee Conlee. Sometimes more really is more. Out now on Revry.

Mel C Praised For 'True Allyship'

Former Spice Girl Mel C appeared on "The Mitch Churi Chat Show" on TikTok to talk about her time in the group. When Churi asked, "Did you get accused of being gay because you were the Sporty Spice?" Mel C gently corrected him, saying she'd never call it an "accusation," but rather an "assumption." Fans loved her response. "That's a true ally right there," wrote one commenter.



Mel C. Photo: Instagram/ @melaniecmusic

Continued from page 7



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer at Motor City Pride, June 7, 2026. Photo: Andrew Potter



Read our in-depth look at Gov. Whitmer's legacy of allyship, featuring perspectives from across Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, in Pride Source magazine — on newsstands now.

When did you realize you were having an influence on LGBTQ+ issues as governor?

During the pandemic when I got a lot of national news because I was struggling to get help for people of Michigan and I was taking a lot of heat from the president and people started to notice. But it was really when I was in New York doing an event with the LGBTQ community, and I assume Michiganders know who I am, but it was really a surprise to find out that others did too, but didn't just know me because of the news coverage around the pandemic; [they] were much more familiar with the work that we were doing, the policies that we were pushing, the actions that we took on the conversion therapy ban, which obviously is something that will continue to be a part of public discourse as we see what's going on in D.C. right now. That was one of those moments there that it was like, "Oh my god, what I'm doing, this platform is a lot bigger than just Michigan and when it comes to responsibility to use it right."

As you leave office, what do you hope the next generation of Michigan leaders, including the next governor, carries forward for the LGBTQ+ community?

I hope we continue the progress, we fight to protect what we've done and that we keep going. There's always more work to do in this space, and there's always going to be loud voices on the other side who are trying to amass power. And so my goal is to train and elect as many LGBTQ members and allies into our legislative bodies and into positions of power across different governmental levels. I think that it's going to continue to be very important. And Michigan is a state [where] we've made a tremendous amount of change in a short period of time, and that's great, but it also tells you that it can swing the other way in a short period of time. And so we can't, for one second, make an assumption that the work will continue. We've got to do it.

Do you worry that, when your tenure is up, the work that you've done for the community could be reversed?

Absolutely. This isn't about me, this is about our state. This is about our people. This is about Michigan's future, Michigan's economy. These policies have to transcend a change in administration. Obviously, administration that shares these values coming in is going to be really important to me. I'm going to work my tail off to make sure that that happens. No matter who it is, though, it's on all of us to keep the pressure on in Lansing and in Washington, D.C. to elect people who will do the work and be unapologetic about it, but also be smart operators about getting stuff done. I love a candidate who's got all the same values, but we need a candidate who has that and knows how to get things done.

What do you remember about your first Pride as governor?

Just the hugs, the joy, the gratitude. [My] first year as governor, we hadn't had a lot of accomplishments. I had a tough legislature. I stood on principle and was able to get some things done through executive directive, but I didn't have a legislature that was going to work with me to codify Elliott-Larsen, for instance. They were fighting me on all sorts of things. It was an overwhelmingly Republican, anti-LGBTQ legislature. But to show up at Pride events and just that power of showing up and using the platform, I saw how impactful that was and important, and that was ... I'll never forget that. And the hugs. People say, "Can I hug you?" And some people would have tears that a governor showed up, much less was there to warmly receive and listen.

How did you read that kind of emotion?

The depth of the meaning of it, right? How people do feel excluded. It was like a release for them. They felt protected. And that for me said, "OK, that's my job. That's what I'm here to do: to help, to protect, to support, to uplift."

If you could create a new Pride tradition, what would it be?

Oh my god, what would you suggest it be? How would you answer that question?

I would love to see some kind of educational facility that teaches the next generation about the true meaning of Pride: that it's not just a party. It's gone back to its roots. It is what it was during Stonewall.

I love that. During my first campaign for governor, we had a big room where people would just walk in off the street and they'd volunteer. They'd make yard signs. Two very different age spectrums: the older, retired crowd and the young kids who were in high school and college. They sat together and the conversations they had were spectacular. And so when you think about education effort, I would love to be a part of transcending those divides as well, because I do think that there are a lot of good, supportive people out there who don't know how to help or do the work.

And we could enlist an army of people if we gave them the tools and the way in. Being a part of that is something that really fires me up and, as we're workshopping this, maybe that's going to be part of the conversation.

We'll continue the dialogue.

All right, let's do it.

This interview was condensed and edited for clarity.

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More Than a Pin: LGBTQ+ Healthcare Allyship Beyond the Symbol

Medical providers who display rainbow pins don't always deliver the fundamental care that protects their patients

BY KELLI DUNHAM



In healthcare, we love an in-your-face symbol. A laminated poster. A mission statement in 800-point bold font. A tasteful rainbow pin that says "We Care" right next to the hand sanitizer container.

As a provider, LGBTQ+ health advocate and self-identified Big Huge Queer, I appreciate the gesture. But I also need providers to not misgender me when they're performing intimate exams. Unfortunately, those two things don't always go together.

Every day in my job and every evening in text messages from friends, exes and strangers who found me online, I see a massive gap between providers who want to be allies (or at least say they do) and the actual, practical behaviors that make LGBTQ+ patients feel safe, believed and cared for. Right now, when anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is spreading across the country, that gap matters even more.

But here's the good news: Quality healthcare for LGBTQ+ people has a lot in common with quality healthcare for everyone. Clear communication, careful check-ins about consent, accurate documentation, respect for patient identity and understanding of a patient's support system are baseline competencies, not rare niche skills.

"LGBT people live in a world where harm and bias from healthcare providers is assumed to be the default," said Michael Ioerger, MD, a Northville-based physician and coach for healthcare providers. "As a result, it's up to providers to clearly set themselves apart and prove themselves to their LGBT patients."

The first five seconds

Patients know, even before the examination, whether they feel safe with a provider. Ioerger recommends a "universal approach to meeting patients that minimizes assumptions." That can be as simple as providers asking, "What name would you like me to use?" and "Who did you bring with you today?" It sounds basic. For patients who have been harmed before, it's everything.

"Previous negative experiences make LGBT patients hypervigilant, so even small things can help to build trust," Ioerger explains. Your patient is already scanning for danger. You can either lower the temperature or accidentally turn the stove on high.

When you mess up on pronouns (and you will)

You will probably make pronoun errors. Congratulations, you're human. The question is not whether you make an occasional misstep; it's what you do next.

The gold standard: Briefly correct yourself and move on. No TED Talk about how you're "still learning." No commentary on how complicated or surprising modern pronouns are. Just say a quick but clear, "Sorry, they," and continue the visit. Because here's what patients notice: Are you centering their care or your own discomfort?

Your chart is not decorative

When providers juggle packed schedules, no one expects every line of the chart to be treated like literature. But the chart isn't background noise. Often, it's where a patient has already tried to meet you halfway.

Sometimes the chart itself has limitations. Fields are restricted. Options are outdated. The system was clearly designed by someone who thinks there are exactly two genders and everyone is married to a person named Steve.

But Tay M., a genderqueer lesbian in Grand Rapids who

See **More Than a Pin**, page 28

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Mallory McMorrow
Continued from page 9

since she voted in California after saying she had relocated permanently to Michigan. Her response, both to CNN and to BTL, was to lean into the broader point. "I tweeted normal things like a normal person," she told CNN, "and people are desperate for authenticity — that is what we need in November." She told BTL she hopes we're moving into an era where politicians who didn't manufacture their entire public lives in anticipation of running for office aren't punished for it. "There's something really freeing in letting go of any expectations and just doing what you think is right," she says. "People seemed hungry for somebody to just go for it."

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, in a recent interview with BTL, described hearing gratitude from LGBTQ+ Michiganders who were glad she'd stayed visible when some allies had gone quiet. McMorrow doesn't hesitate when asked about it, and says she's found it depressing, watching members of her own party pull back from LGBTQ+ issues since 2024, particularly when it comes to trans kids. Her answer to why she won't do the same thing is disarmingly simple. "I just want everybody to have the same rights that I have," she said. "That doesn't mean that anybody is taking anybody's place."

Her daughter, who just turned 5, is part of why McMorrow stayed in this work after 2022, and part of why she's running now. On rare days off the campaign trail, she hands the day entirely to her pre-schooler — art projects, neighborhood runs that end with lemonade from a neighbor's porch, repeat viewings of "The Iron Giant." The world she wants for her daughter and the world she's fighting to build for LGBTQ+ Michiganders are, in her mind, the same world. "I want my friends to feel free and safe," she says, "because that's what I hope for in my life."

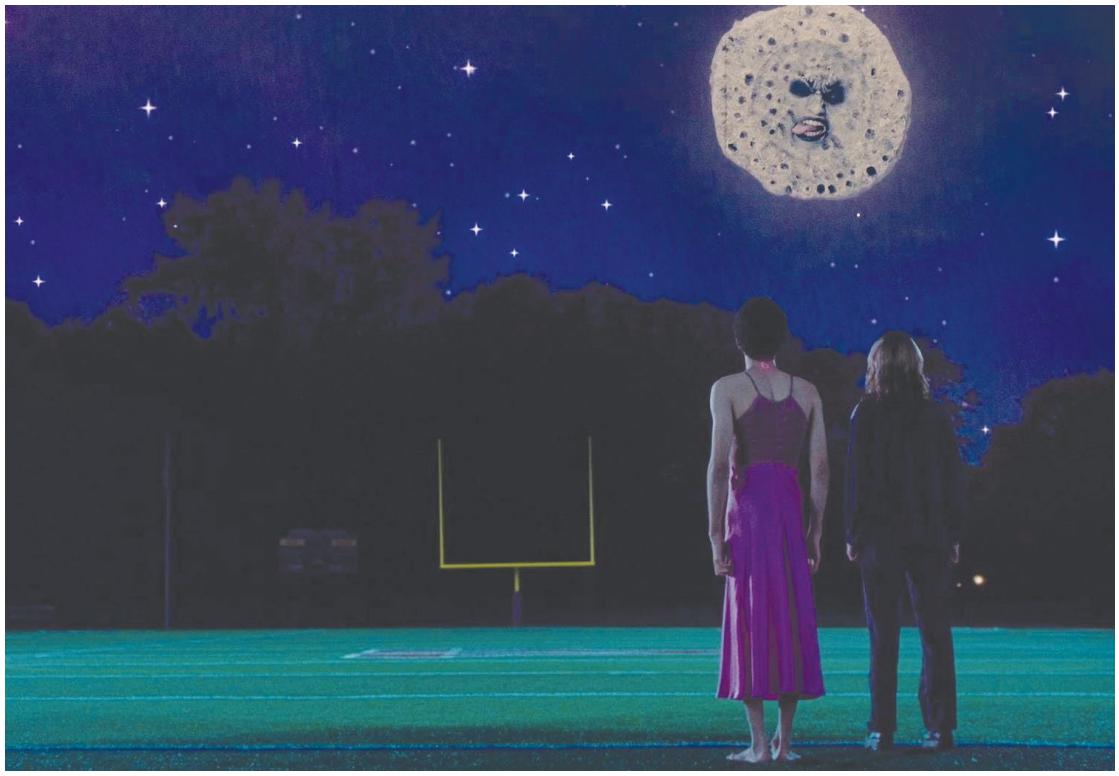
For LGBTQ+ Michiganders who are worn out and scared right now, McMorrow has a message she is determined to get out. She has met people on the campaign trail who moved to Michigan from other states both because of her speech because of the protections the Legislature has passed. She does not take that lightly.

"I just want all of your readers to know that most people are good people," she says. "The ones who are getting the most attention right now and who are the loudest are the minority, and it may not always feel that way. But I am a hopeless optimist, and I believe that we're going to come out and be OK. Just know that I'm always going to be a fighter and not back down."

The stakes could not be much higher this fall — and McMorrow, who once gave the speech of her political life because she thought she had nothing left to lose, seems to understand exactly what she's fighting for.

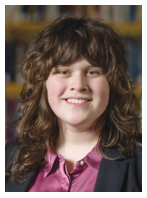


Mallory McMorrow with her daughter. Courtesy photo



Why Trans Representation in Film and TV Demands Trans Creators

From 'I Saw the TV Glow' to Cannes, why authentic TV and film requires lived experience



BY LYRA OPALIKHIN

Growing up in suburban Michigan, I was fascinated with the media and narratives around me, unknowingly latching onto them as an escape from the confusion and monotony of a closeted life. I've since come out as transgender and have lived comfortably as a woman for years, but movies, TV shows and other forms of narrative-based media continue to live in my life and influence the lives of many others.

That's why we need more transgender stories on screen that include transgender voices in the creative process.

Over the decades, transgender representation in film and television has ranged from misleading to harmful. Transgender characters have often been subjected to uninformed tropes that portray them as villainous, subversive or victims of violence and harassment. The underrepresentation of trans creatives and actors behind these stories has allowed tropes and outside perceptions of the community to overshadow genuine experiences.

The negative representations and tokenized depictions of trans identity move beyond the story and cause real harm for the community. Uninformed audiences accept these depictions as truth, dehumanizing the community and normalizing anti-trans bias. To see my identity be constantly abused as a punchline or exploited for its victimhood is disheartening, to say the least.

There needs to be a greater push for stories based on the lived experiences of those in the transgender community, especially as networks and studios continue to shy away from featuring transgender narratives for fear of public backlash. These stories must involve transgender voices across the creative process to counter the harmful tropes and dehumanization that have long dominated mainstream representation.

I tend to follow the release of new movies and media closely to see how representations of the trans community continue to develop. Jane Schoenbrun's 2024 film "I Saw the TV Glow" provides a look into the filmmaker's experiences pre-transition, encapsulating the whirlwind of emotion and confusion from discovering one's gender identity while telling a cautionary tale about the consequences of denial. For many members of the community, like myself, seeing my experiences reflected in the film's story and sensations provided solace and validation. Though "I Saw the TV Glow" is a window into one creator's experience with transness, allies with different backgrounds have much to learn from this film about life as a transgender person.

More recently, the premiere of "Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma" at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival in May and its upcoming release in August are exciting. The horror-slasher film, written and

See **Trans Representation**, page 30



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Allies Aren't Just Nice to Have. They're How We Win.

Our community needs the protection and visibility allyship provides

BY KEITH LANGSTON



I've noticed that for many people in the queer community, allyship can be a difficult concept with numerous pros and cons. For example, every time a straight actor portrays a gay character, it helps break down barriers. But it also takes a potential role away from queer actors, who already face diminished Hollywood prospects. Or welcoming straight people to Pride celebrations helps broaden queer acceptance and normalization, but it can also make some LGBTQ+ people feel uncomfortable, or like they can't fully let their guard down in what should have been a queer space.

I get the two-sided argument. but ultimately I feel that allies are incredibly important, and that their inclusion and embrace adds many more benefits than hindrances. So much so that I think it shouldn't even be a point of contention within the LGBTQ+ community. The reality is that we need allies. They aren't just a benefit, they're crucial for creating long-lasting equality.

A few years ago, an editor at another publication wanted me to write a piece about a gay anti-gun group. I told him that it could easily feed into homophobia since the types of people who fervently obsess over gun ownership aren't exactly allies of the gay community. That's not just opinion either. NPR and Reuters both reported in 2024 that gun manufacturers were marketing AR-15s as a way to attain masculinity, and results of a 2024 experiment published in the National Library of Medicine found that men who had their masculinity questioned were more likely to turn to firearms.

He still didn't get it, so I tried to lay it out for him as bluntly as possible: Gun lovers are afraid of being seen as weak or emasculated — the same reason why so many men are afraid of being perceived as gay.

I understand his fear. The idea that certain groups within America hate us so much that our words mean nothing is horrifying. It's a symbol of the deep-rooted hatred we're forced to live with on a daily basis. Even worse, one of the scenarios where it often feels like our words mean nothing is when we fight for our own civil liberties and our right to live safe, healthy lives in America. Queer people usually have the least say in queer rights, and that's an appalling shame.

But at the same time, we can't act surprised about this anymore. LGBTQ+ oppression didn't just start; it's been happening in this country for generations. We need to stop letting the weight of disenfranchisement crush our spirits and learn how to fight back. I've always believed that activism isn't just the ability to cry out that you're oppressed. Activism is knowing how to work towards a solution — and that's where allies come into play.

First, let's assess the situation: We live in a queerphobic country that unfortunately seems to be getting even more queerphobic as we continue our regression into toxic conservatism. Republicans are scapegoating the LGBTQ+ community on a daily basis, and the rampant homophobia, misogyny and faux-alpha-masculinity crisis that's dominating the right is turning more and more people against us because toxic masculinity is often at the core of queerphobia.

The result is a growing number of people who hate us, and an even larger number of people who don't necessarily know what to think of us.

We need to accept and recognize that, unfortunately, as members of the LGBTQ+ community, our voices mean less to many groups of people. A queer person can cry and scream at a homophobe about how much their oppression has hurt us, but the homophobe won't care. In fact, most homophobes will probably relish our misery.

Then there's the broader group of Americans in that middle, grayish area. The ones who don't outwardly hate us, but have been influenced by the culture around them, that's taught them we're different. That we're not like them. That we're the "other."

Getting diehard homophobes to change will be nearly impossible. But the other group, the one that I believe makes up most of America, can probably be reached. The question is how. And the answer is allies.

People are much more open and receptive to hearing things when they feel comfortable. People crave familiarity and stability, and that's why new ideas often scare them — especially when those ideas are currently one of the hottest and most demonized political issues of the moment. If we're the "other" and straight people are the "normal," those who are on the fence about queer rights will be much more receptive to hearing about equality from a cishet straight person because it feels like it's coming from a shared perspective.

I know this is unfair and shouldn't be the way the world works, but at a certain point, the queer community needs to recognize that this is the way the world works. You are welcome to complain about it, to share how angry you are about it, and to demand change. But change rarely comes simply because a minority community demands it. Change takes work, strategy and requires a coalition of voices coming together. It's a numbers game.

The LGBTQ+ community is a minority. By definition, that means there are fewer of us. If the only people fighting and voting for equality is the queer community, we will never have the votes to enact change or the critical mass to alter social norms. So that creates a two-fold benefit of having allies within the community. First, they're another voice and vote in our favor. Secondly, since they can potentially have more sway with other cishet people, their voices can help change more minds, bringing even more allies into the equation.

I know some queer people feel that allies will never fully be part of the community and will never fully understand us since they're not "one of us." But remember, the only reason the queer community exists as its own subculture is that we were rejected by mainstream society. It isn't an exclusive club that requires membership. It's a club that was created because of rejection and resistance. And in the modern era, allies absolutely need to be a part of that resistance. Let's also remember that the full LGBTQ+ acronym has bloomed into LGBTQQIAAP2S — and one of those A's is for allies.

We need allies. Not just because it's great to have cis straight friends who aren't bigots, but also because their voices can help amplify our cause. So let's start embracing allies. They're more than just our friends and family, they're an important key to creating change. They can reach people we can't, and they are exactly what we hope all cishet people can be — totally fine with us just the way we are.

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Rooting for the Villain

Reclaiming the queer-coded baddie, Bosco launches ‘Miss Gender’ national tour

BY BENJAMIN JENKINS

Bosco has never wanted to be the hero. Not on “RuPaul’s Drag Race All Stars,” where the Seattle queen’s razor-sharp instincts and unapologetically villainous aesthetic made her a clear favorite with Ru as well as one of the most talked about competitors in recent memory. And not in her drag performance either, which has always leaned dastardly — she’s a dark lady at heart.

She’s not even aiming for heroic in “The Marvelous Miss Gender,” her new touring one-woman show, which arrives in Metro Detroit on July 8 at the Royal Oak Music Theatre as the inaugural stop on a national tour built entirely around her reclaiming the queer-coded villain. The show intentionally incorporates art by real artists, including fully illustrated animated backdrops and signature numbers by trans women performers who shaped Bosco’s drag education.

Away from the stage, Bosco cohosts “Spell Slayers,” a Magic: The Gathering podcast with her podcast partner Irene the Alien that’s connecting with an audience well beyond the drag world. She spoke with BTL about making art without shortcuts, what it means to make RuPaul laugh and why queer people will always ride for the villain.

It’s Pride season! I could start with the obligatory, “What does Pride mean to you” question, but where’s the fun in that? What’s the most insufferable part of Pride, and why is it the twinks?

Twinks are pretty high up there. But Pride is for everybody under the queer umbrella, so I’ll allow them this one. My main issue is it being such a physical sport that has to take place in the dead of

See **Bosco**, page 26



Bosco. Courtesy photo

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Bosco
Continued from page 24

summer. Drag is famously not a well-temperature-regulated art form.

I feel so bad for my fellow divas smothered in couch cushions and giant synthetic hair, melting in front of thousands of people, outside, in daylight, overhead-brow-highlighting-type lighting. If it were up to me, we would move Pride to the middle of winter.

You've talked about evolving from a spooky, vampy look to something more showgirl: more skin, more razzle dazzle. Watching you on "All Stars," it felt completely natural. What's the throughline that makes it still unmistakably Bosco, no matter what era?

It's interesting to have an aesthetic that people get to watch in real time [to] kind of adjust and reformulate. And I do feel like I have to navigate very carefully, because sometimes you just pop out and you're like, well, that doesn't look like anything I would wear. And I found over the years what my style language is and what makes sense for me to be wearing.

I'm never a particularly girly dresser. I'm never particularly princess-y vibes. Everything's always a little dastardly. Everything's always a little bit villainous. Even if I've moved into a little bit more razzle dazzle type of aesthetic, it's still very vampy, it's still very dark lady, very noir. And that vibe will always be there, no matter what aesthetic that I'm mining. And I feel like having that compass that's always pointing north, I'm able to find Bosco in any sort of situation.

So even if I wanted to do, like, a Western era, I know I could find Bosco in there because there could be vampy gothic bandito Bosco. There's a way to channel villains in any sort of aesthetic.

The show, "Miss Gender," leans into the queer-coded villain, reclaiming that narrative. Queer audiences have always had a more complicated relationship with who the "villain" really is. Tonya Harding is a classic example. Who else comes to mind for you?

I think queer people always want to align themselves with the other. I feel like our lived experience does not give us a bunch of empathy for the main character, because for a lot of us who come from smaller towns, we didn't really get to feel like a main character in a lot of these different spaces.



Bosco. Courtesy photo

I feel like gay people will always ride for a woman who is being beaten down and portrayed incorrectly. The whole catalog of Disney villains [is] a very queer-coded catalog. I don't know what gay was in the writer's room, but he made sure that we were getting our people in. We have Ursula inspired by Divine. Jafar, super queer. Scar, super queer.

Cruella de Vil is based on Tallulah Bankhead, who's a bisexual chain-smoking lady from the 1920s and '30s who had famous quotes like, "My father warned me about men and booze, but he never said anything about women and cocaine." There's so many cool intricacies and nuances with the villains that you never get with the protagonist. The protagonist always has to be so boring.

I know most of Murray and Peter's shows kick off in Detroit — that was the case with the Christmas show, which we got to see you at. You were fantastic. I was just sad I wasn't in the splash zone for the drink number.

There's gonna be another chance to be in the splash zone for this show, so don't you worry.

What does the prep process look like for "Miss Gender," and has there been a moment yet where it's started to feel genuinely real?

Murray and Peter tours usually begin at their home base. That's where we do

tech, formulate plans, load up the bus. For this show I'm going out a week early to hammer things down with so many moving pieces. The first time I'll see everything all in one place is going to be in Detroit, which is going to be a really special and terrifying moment.

Right now it's incremental. Every day I wake up to new pictures of set pieces being finished. Next week I'm heading to L.A. to get choreography nailed down. It's piece by piece, but that first week in Detroit is really going to make a difference.

Without spoiling anything: What is quintessentially Bosco in this show? Things a casual viewer might miss but a real fan would clock immediately?

Well, there's a few numbers in the show that are either referencing some of my numbers that I do very often or numbers that are very influential to me. There are two professional performers from the '90s, early 2000s that were trans women that — one of them has passed, but one of them is still around — that are really pivotal to the way that I view drag and the way that I like performing. One of them is Sierra Fox from Orlando, and the other is Monica Munro who was Ms. Continental in '93. They both have signature numbers that a bunch of girls do their own spin on. They're part of the drag standard — the jazz book, essentially, for drag.

And a few of those songs are going to be popping up in the show, and those feel very, very Bosco to me. I also have been working with an artist who is rendering backdrops that are fully illustrated. It's very "Batman: The Animated Series." And those are going to be like set pieces within this whole thing. There's going to be rollboards that have these different scenes on it; there's going to be videos of these different scenes. And I think having a very signature art style is going to make the show feel especially Bosco.

You've been vocal about keeping AI completely out of this show. What's driving that for you?

As somebody who is partially a visual artist, my face and my likeness is run through AI all of the time. I see things that are generated of me that have never happened, that never existed. And it just feels soulless and dehumanizing. I don't understand the need or the want to create computer programs that replace art.

Like, I want AI to be solving cancer. I want AI to be doing my taxes. I don't want AI to be drawing pictures for me. That just feels so, so anti-climatic. It feels just so anti-human. I just don't understand the appeal of taking that shortcut with art, where part of the process is suffering and sucking and being bad and learning how to do better. And I feel like AI will eventually take that away from us and make art less human.

So I'm very passionate about making sure that we are doing things that you can reach out and touch, that everything that you're seeing is created by a human being. And that we're trying our best to make sure that AI is not informing any part of this show, and it's a really important part of the process for me.

> *"I feel like gay people will always ride for a woman who is being beaten down and portrayed incorrectly."*

Watching how Ru responded to you during your season, there are a lot of winners of the show but fewer queens that Ru seems genuinely exhilarated by. What does that feel like?

It feels really special. RuPaul sees hundreds upon hundreds of drag queens. To feel like I have some sort of connection with her in that moment really feels special.

I think it boils down to knowing and speaking the same language, having enough of a gay education to go back and forth with her. And there's a similarity between the way that me and Ru approach drag. We take our jobs very seriously, but we don't take ourselves very seriously. I work really, really hard at drag, but at the end of the day, I'm still like a lip-syncing gender party clown. Being glamorous, yet being stupid really speaks to that lady.

Are you following the current season of "Drag Race" at all?

Yeah, I have a few friends that are on this season. I did my original season with Jasmine Kennedie, so I'm excited to see what that maniac has in store for us. She was created in a lab to torture people on television, so I'm so excited to see her back in her element.

I've gotten pretty close with Crystal Methyd. We've toured together. So it is a very, very fun season. It's a lot of girls that I've worked with and a lot of girls I'm excited to see back. Every single episode is kind of a twisty, turny little situation where I don't know what's going to happen.

Do you have any favorites?

Crystal and Silky are both incredible this season. I was crazy impressed with what Silky pulled in the last episode. I did not see it coming at all.

Oh, she was *playing* TV. I love a girl who's good at drag, but I adore a girl who's good at TV.

You've been hosting "Spell Slayers" with Irene. Are you planning to keep recording on the road?

We banked, like, 15 episodes at the beginning of the year, so we're drawing upon that bank while we're on the road. We can't do full game recordings on the road, but we might do some vlogs of us visiting local game stores or unveiling new sets as they drop. And we're going to bully everybody on the crew into being in a pod at the end of each show — a lot of people I tour with play Magic.

If Bosco was a character or card in Magic the Gathering, what would her ability be?

I think she would have some sort of sacrifice mechanic where I could sacrifice lesser drag queens to increase my own clout.

Basically what you did on "All Stars."

Exactly.

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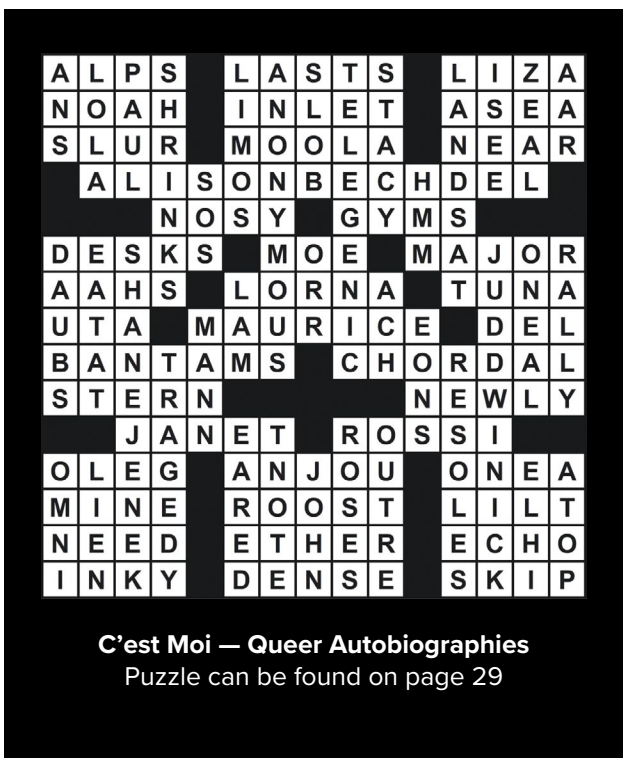
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C'est Moi — Queer Autobiographies
Puzzle can be found on page 29

More Than a Pin
Continued from page 18

asked that we use only their last initial, put it simply: "What is supportive is when a provider actually reads my chart and demographics and uses that to inform our conversation."

When that partial information is ignored, the message is clear and not neutral. It tells the patient they're starting from scratch again. For a lot of LGBTQ+ people, that "starting from scratch" feeling is exactly what makes care exhausting.

When providers do engage with available information, it shows up in subtle and important ways. "A good ally notes my identity and sexual orientation and that informs our conversation in some meaningful way, even in the things they don't say," Tay said.

Ask better questions, get better care

One of the most common ways providers accidentally derail trust is by asking incomplete or awkwardly constructed questions and then trying to build clinical decisions on that shaky foundation.

"When taking a history, provide an inclusive set of options and ask for exactly what you want to know," Ioerger said. "For example, when asking about relationship status, if someone says they are married, ask if their spouse is a man, woman or nonbinary person, and then ask if they have any additional romantic or sexual partners."

In other words, don't make your patient reverse-engineer your question. Say what you mean. Ask what you need. And critically, signal that you're comfortable with whatever the answer might be.

"Simply showing that you are comfortable discussing the full range of possibilities can go a long way to creating a situation that helps LGBT patients feel more comfortable being open and honest about themselves," Ioerger said.

What allyship actually requires

Allyship is not a declaration. It's a series of choices, repeated consistently, often under time pressure and institutional constraint. That can be difficult.

> *"I see a massive gap between providers who want to be allies (or at least say they do) and the actual, practical behaviors that make LGBTQ+ patients feel safe, believed and cared for."*

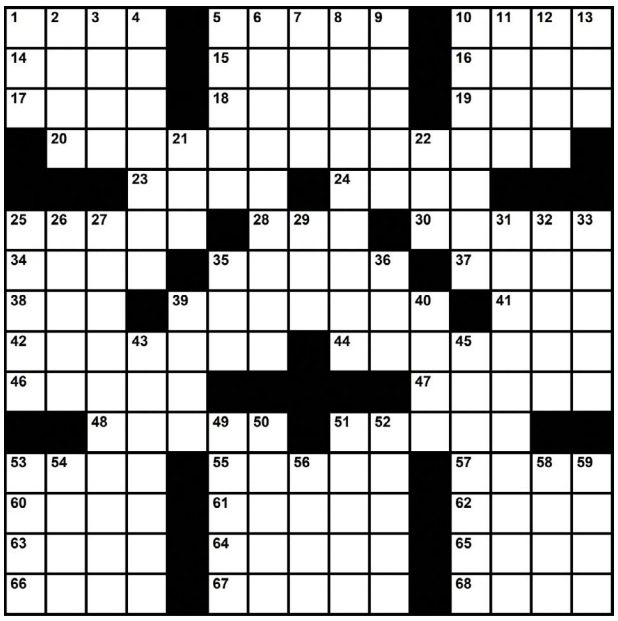
But avoiding care because you don't trust the system that's supposed to keep you alive? That's more difficult.

Keep the rainbow pin. But make sure what happens in the exam room lives up to it. "The best way to be an ally to LGBTQ+ patients is simply to listen to us," said Kaine St. Amour, a trans man in Grand Rapids.

Because at the end of the day, all the policies, trainings and laminated rainbow clip art in the world cannot replace the most basic and most powerful clinical skill we have: listening.







C'est Moi — Queer Autobiographies

Across

1 Von Trapp family escape route
5 Doesn't come quickly
10 Judy's daughter
14 Comic Trevor
15 Narrow waterway
16 In midvoyage
17 Arc on Bernstein's music score
18 Do-re-mi
19 Within earshot
20 "Fun Home: A Family Tragi-comic" author
23 Overly inquisitive
24 Hangouts of Muscle Marys
25 Study stations
28 He had a threesome with Larry and a bald guy
30 College choice
34 Sounds of satisfaction
35 Half sib of 10-Across
37 Sandwich fish
38 Hagen of "The Boys from Brazil"
39 Vellekoop who wrote "I'm So Glad We Had This Time Together"
41 "Runaway" rocker Shannon
42 Little chickens
44 Harmonic
46 Sailor's rear
47 One way to be wed
48 Susan in "Rocky Horror"
51 Vermouth name
53 Designer Cassini
55 Firm-fleshed fruit
57 Draft rating
60 "Can't Help Lovin' That Man Of ___"
61 Perching place
62 Bounce in one's step
63 Have an opening for
64 Novocain predecessor
65 Reverb
66 Pitch-dark
67 Hard to penetrate
68 Bound gaily

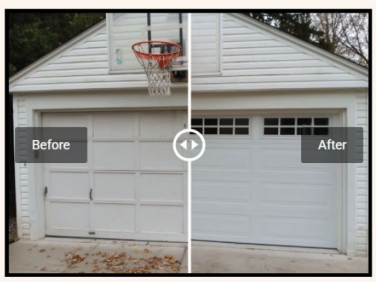
Down

1 T or F, on exams
2 Cross-dresser in a Kinks song
3 Lynde of "Bewitched"
4 Frasier and Niles
5 Transportation for Liberace
6 Faceless
7 Partner of Felix, for example
8 Loved by the camera
9 Actor Keach
10 Alights on
11 Voyeur's confession?
12 Get-up-and-go
13 Rhine tributary
21 "Mayday!" signal
22 "Very interesting..."
25 Puts on a little KY
26 Bother terribly
27 "Caught in the Act" author
29 Bruin Bobby
31 "Pedro and Me" author
32 Tatum of "The Bad News Bears"
33 Exchange at Wimbledon
35 On the ___ (fleeing)
36 Alas, in Augsburg
39 "Death in Venice" author Thomas
40 Many, many, many moons
43 "Hamlet" genre
45 Extends shoe life
49 Like cornstalks that bear
50 Gov't. interest bearer
51 Pink wines
52 Very queer
53 Prefix with potent
54 Property right
56 Glynn who wrote "Out East: Memoir of a Montauk Summer"
58 Of grades 1-12
59 Opposite a bottom

See p. 27 for answers

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◂ Trans Representation
Continued from page 20

directed by Schoenbrun, was described by star Hannah Einbinder as a "trans sapphic ode to marginalized communities." Schoenbrun, who identifies as transfeminine and nonbinary, has said the movie is inspired by their experience with sex after transitioning. Where "I Saw the TV Glow" explores the pre-transition experience, "Camp Miasma" provides a unique perspective on post-transition life — a rare counterpoint in cinema, where stories about sex are overwhelmingly told from cisgender viewpoints.

Beyond clinical definitions or abstract explanations, it's hard to explain what being transgender really feels like. No single story can cover the sheer breadth and diversity of transgender life, especially considering the compounded impacts and wholly unique journeys that trans people holding intersectional identities experience. Every new film, TV show and story provides greater context for allies to comprehend the uniqueness of transgender identity and for trans people to see ourselves reflected authentically on screen.

In a world dominated by narratives of trans suffering, anti-trans rhetoric and inhumane policy, allies must do more than feel support in silence. They must actively seek out and share stories that center transgender voices and joy — whether that's watching films directed by trans filmmakers, championing shows with authentic trans representation or amplifying the real-life stories of trans advocates on the front lines.

> *"Every new film, TV show and story provides greater context for allies to comprehend the uniqueness of transgender identity and for trans people to see ourselves reflected authentically on screen."*

Allies cannot sit in silence, comfortable that the mere feelings of support for the transgender community are enough.

Allyship means ensuring that trans people can tell our own stories, on our own terms, without apology.

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