

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between the Lines™

FALL ARTS PREVIEW

Michigan stages lean
into queer discovery

PAINTING DETROIT

Muralist Bakpak Durden
on capturing beauty

ADAM LAMBERT, STILL REINVENTING
Queen frontman talks dystopia,
defiance and hope

The Arts Issue

The Disco Daddies Bring Queer Joy to Life

'The Voice' alums dazzle Michigan with
disco, comedy and camp

By Keith Langston

Dr. Paul Benson's

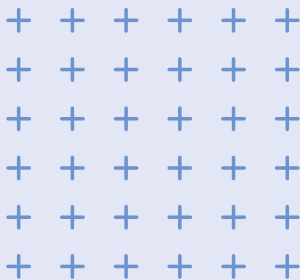
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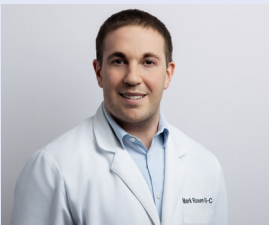
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Introducing the Pride Source Michigan LGBTQ+ Events Calendar

Keep up on LGBTQ-friendly events happening across Michigan at our new Michigan LGBTQ+ Events page. Sort by event type, location, date and more and submit events that should be on our radar, all at pridesource.com/events.

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Jerome Bell-Bastien of the Disco Daddies. Courtesy photo

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

Summer may theoretically be winding down, but apparently nobody told Michigan's queer calendar. The next couple of weeks offer everything from an old-school picnic to sword swallowing, open-stage drag and an all-new way to find an endless parade of LGBTQ+ events throughout Michigan. In other words: Summer isn't over until the queers say it's done.



Rachel Crandall Crocker. Courtesy photo

Picnic With Pride

Transgender Michigan's Transgender Pride in the Park (say that five times fast) returns for its 26th year, bringing together trans folks, friends and allies for an afternoon of food, entertainment, speakers, vendors and excellent company. Bring your own picnic or buy food on-site, then settle in and make some new friends.

This gathering also commemorates the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria Riot, when trans people in San Francisco fought back against police harassment years before Stonewall. Transgender Michigan co-founder Rachel Crandall Crocker knows something about making history herself: She created International Transgender Day of Visibility, now observed every March 31.

Aug. 22, noon–6 p.m., Martin Road Park (1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale). tinyurl.com/MItranspicnic



Experience Camp Camp

Did you spend your middle school summer camp years thinking, "This would be considerably better with less talk of boy crushes and more acting out of girl crushes?" You're in luck, because Midwest Sapphic Society and LGBTQ+ campground Campit Outdoor Resort are joining forces for Sweat HER Weather Weekend, which is basically lesbian camp for grown-ups with the instructions to "grab your tent, your camp chair, your emotional support Stanley, and at least one flannel." Waiting for you? Midnight swims, campfires, dive-in movies, a drag king contest and karaoke. On Saturday night, you'll experience — and this is why that particular red checked shirt must go in your duffle bag — the legendary Flannel Ball. Claim your spot before it's gone.

Sept. 11–13, Campit Outdoor Resort (6635 118th Ave., Fennville). tinyurl.com/flannelweekend



Maggie McMuffin. Photo: Instagram/@maggie_mcmuffin

Run Away With the Sideshow

Sideshows and queers go together like BLT sandwiches and summer, so how lucky are we that the Coney Island-born, queer-inclusive Hot Fix Sideshow is bringing its gloriously weird traveling show to Detroit this August. Be prepared for fire performance, sword swallowing, glass walking, aerial arts, mentalism, escape acts and feats of strength. The Detroit stop features sideshow performer Cyclone Jack Sullivan, fire eater and sword swallower Kita St. Cyr, burlesque performer Maggie McMuffin and Latinx burlesque performer Queensiñera.

Aug. 29, 8 p.m., Tip-Top Showbar (440 E. Lafayette Street, Detroit). tinyurl.com/sideshowMI



Give Drag a Chance

Watching drag is one of the most lovely things on earth. Watching someone else work up the nerve to try drag for the very first time? That's heavenly. Pronto's "You've Got Drag" is an open stage welcoming performers whether they're seasoned pros, developing a new act or finally ready to find out what happens when the bedroom lip-sync makes contact with an actual audience. That makes it a particularly fun night for spectators, too: You never know exactly what you're going to get, and you get the pleasure of being part of the crowd cheering performers on.

Aug. 20 and 27 (and ongoing), 10 p.m.-1 a.m., Pronto Lounge & Showbar, Royal Oak.
tinyurl.com/trydrag

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Visit pridesource.com/events

One Link to Rule Your Queer Calendar

Drag bingo on a Tuesday, a trans hiking club on Saturday, a queer moto ride, a lesbian night, a Dungeons & Dragons campaign for teens. Michigan's LGBTQ+ community stays busy, and now there's one place to keep up with all of it: Pride Source's brand-new Events hub, live now at pridesource.com/events.

Filter by vibe (nightlife and drag? arts and culture? support group?), by city (Metro Detroit to Traverse City and everywhere between) or by budget (free events only, we see you), pulling hundreds of listings from partners like Affirmations, Necto and UP North Pride, updated constantly.

Got an event? Submit it at pridesource.com/submit-event.

5

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Detroit Disco Daddies Bring Queer Joy to Life



Adam and Jerome Bell-Bastien, known collectively as the Disco Daddies. Courtesy photo

Viral ‘The Voice’ duo dazzles with disco, comedy and celebration

BY KEITH LANGSTON

If you’ve ever gone out clubbing around Detroit and stumbled across two men dressed to the nines in disco attire, singing their hearts out to covers of hit songs like “It’s Raining Men” or “I Feel Love,” then you’ve probably met AJ and Bookie, better known as the Detroit Disco Daddies.

The Daddies, a staple at the cocktail bar Lowkey in Detroit, are couple Adam (AJ) and Jerome (Bookie) Bell-Bastien, and together they dress up, dance and sing all around Michigan. “It’s a live disco fantasy,” Adam tells BTL, “where we step into our alter-egos and invite everyone to celebrate with us.” Next month, the Disco Daddies will perform during the Arts, Beats & Eats festival at 6:45 p.m. Sept. 6 at Pronto! in Royal Oak.

When the Daddies perform, the night is filled with not just disco, but also disco remixes, and even a few original songs (yes, the Daddies sing live and are so good they even brought Kelly Clarkson to tears when they competed on “The Voice” in 2018). The Disco Daddies incorporate camp and comedy into their performances, dressing up like vintage disco stars and even partying with the crowd after their shows are finished. “Our motto is come sexy, leave sweaty,” Jerome says.

But their surreal fantasy goes beyond their shows. Adam and Jerome’s romance feels like a real-life fairytale. Despite both originally living in New York City, the two didn’t meet until they were flown out to a film shoot in Minnesota. “I was Adam’s love interest in a music video he was working on,” Jerome says, before recalling their instant chemistry that turned into a whirlwind weekend romance. “It was immediate, the second I saw him. I went back to New York and told my best friend that I met the person I’m gonna marry.”

After returning home, the duo started dating and collaborating on music. That’s when they got a call from the producers of “The Voice,” who had heard their recordings. During season 15, Adam and Jerome competed as the duo OneUp. During their blind audition, three of the four judges turned their chairs around and a battle broke out between Kelly Clarkson and Jennifer Hudson, who both wanted them on their teams. Ultimately, the Daddies went with Clarkson.

Exposure from the show was massive, and Adam and Jerome suddenly found themselves being written about in publications like People, Entertainment Weekly and TV Guide. “That put us in a whole new bracket,” Adam says. Their performance on “The Voice” also landed them an agent, who quickly placed them in a disco tribute band called Disco Nights.

Everything seemed to be going perfectly for the duo. Adam even felt so secure in their careers that, in January 2020, he decided to buy a house in Michigan, where he’s originally from. With all the touring they were doing with their band, they



Disco Daddies during one of their popular live shows. Courtesy photo

assumed their new Detroit home would simply be a retreat between gigs. But just a few months later, the pandemic shut down the world and brought their careers to a halt.

Still, they had each other. "When you finally find your person in life, and you get married," Adam says, "one of the most amazing things about it is that you can be as weird as you are with that person, and they celebrate that with you."

The silver lining, too, was that the couple now had all the time they needed for their own artistic pursuits. "The pandemic really gave us time to find our own sound and discover who we wanted to be with our music," Adam says, revealing that the answer was a style "heavily rooted in disco."

As the pandemic started to fade, Adam and Jerome had a friend opening up a new disco club nearby called Apartment Disco. "They asked if we'd be interested in doing music for the club," Adam says, "and that's really where the Detroit Disco Daddies were born."

But it wasn't just the nightlife keeping the Daddies in the Motor City. They ended up finding a community they loved. "We met an amazing queer scene here," Jerome says, "and people were just so friendly and reached out and introduced us to their friends." That community also helped the duo develop their new personas as the Disco Daddies. "As artists, it felt like we could be really authentic here."

To fully lose themselves in their characters, Adam and Jerome started going by their childhood nicknames, AJ and Bookie, while performing. Born in Louisiana, Jerome admits that even he isn't entirely sure where his nickname came from, though he thinks it might originate from the Japanese word kabuki. "You know Southern people," he says. "Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason on how you get a nickname."

If you see the Daddies performing these days, you'll be met with a dazzling spectacle of music, fashion and dancing — something that Jerome says is heavily inspired by the

drag community. "When we put on our wigs and our outfits, it's like anything goes," he says. "I feel that same sense of freedom. Our shows are super camp, and we're unapologetically ourselves."

Adam adds that the connection between disco and queerness isn't new either. It's been rooted in the genre since its inception. "Disco, and even all the remixes of disco, like house and techno, were all birthed in the queer community," he says. "So queerness and a sense of freedom are really baked into the music already."

Detroit's history is also ingrained in the Daddies' style. "Motown birthed a lot of different sounds," Adam says about the genre being an early building block for disco. "Anytime someone hears a sound, they put their own spin on it and it creates something new." Decades later, Detroit became the epicenter of music yet again, which the duo says further influenced their performance style. "Detroit is also the birthplace of techno music," Adam continues, "and in the '80s and '90s, the dance scene here was insane."

This year has been a big one for the duo. On top of numerous shows during Pride Month, the couple is also working on releasing an original Christmas song called "Let Me Come Home," which is dedicated to members of the LGBTQ+ community who have been estranged from their families. The song features the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus.

Since their inception, the Disco Daddies continue to gain popularity. Adam says he thinks they keep finding success because their shows are leaning into fun and a sense of community as a form of protest. "With the state of our country right now, I think it's important to do anything to combat the negativity that's taking over," he says. "It reminds us there's still a reason to be joyful and have hope."

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Choosing to seek help for a substance use disorder takes courage, and taking the first step toward recovery isn't always easy. For members of the LGBTQ+ community, worries about being accepted or understood can make that decision even more difficult.

At Macomb County Community Mental Health (MCCMH), we believe everyone deserves compassionate, affirming care. We offer person-centered care to help everyone take the next step toward recovery. No one should have to navigate substance use or mental health challenges alone.



Why LGBTQ+ individuals face greater risk

Research has repeatedly shown that LGBTQ+ individuals experience substance use disorders and mental health conditions at significantly higher rates than the general population.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, LGBTQ+ adults experience higher rates of substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health conditions than heterosexual and cisgender adults. In fact, LGBTQ+ adults are more than twice as likely to use marijuana, opioids and alcohol as the overall adult population, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

These disparities are not caused by a person's identity. Instead, experts point to the

chronic stress many LGBTQ+ individuals experience, including discrimination, harassment, social isolation and stigma.

For some individuals, substances become a way to cope with anxiety, depression or painful emotions, particularly if they do not feel safe expressing who they are or have not shared their identity with family and friends.

While data by county and state vary, national research makes it clear that this community faces unique behavioral health challenges.

Care that starts with respect

These findings underscore the importance of ensuring that everyone has access to welcoming, affirming care when they decide to seek help. At MCCMH, that commitment starts with

creating an environment where every individual feels respected, supported and understood.

Our staff receives cultural competency training and is committed to providing person-centered, respectful care that honors each person's identity and experiences. Rather than expecting people to fit into a predetermined program, we focus on understanding their unique needs and helping them identify the services that will work best for them.

Treatment also isn't one-size-fits-all. Substance use programs often include group therapy, but when appropriate, individual counseling may also be available for those who are more comfortable in a one-on-one setting. Many programs also offer treatment for co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, recognizing that these challenges often arise together.

That same person-centered approach extends to recovery housing. Recovery housing can present unique challenges, particularly for transgender and nonbinary individuals, because many homes are designated as either male or female. Fortunately, more recovery homes are adopting inclusive practices and welcoming individuals of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

Recovery is about connection

One of the most important parts of recovery is knowing you don't have to do it alone. Isolation can make both mental health and substance use challenges worse, and finding someone who understands your experiences can make all the difference.

For individuals experiencing an immediate substance use crisis,

the MCCMH Substance Use Engagement Center provides a safe, welcoming place to begin. This short-term intervention facility offers a supervised environment where individuals can stabilize, have a meal, take a shower, and talk with caring staff, including Peer Recovery Coaches who understand the recovery journey firsthand.

We also partner with Recovery Community Organizations, such as CARE of Southeastern Michigan and Live Rite Recovery Structured Corporation, which offer recovery meetings, art groups, yoga and other activities that help people build healthy, supportive relationships while maintaining recovery.

Taking the first step

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use and isn't sure where to begin, call MCCMH at 1-855-99-MCCMH (1-855-996-2264). Our team can help identify the services that best fit your needs, connect you with appropriate resources, or answer your questions. If you're not ready for treatment, attending a meeting through one of our Recovery Community Organization partners can be a meaningful first step.

While we primarily serve individuals in Macomb County, those needing mental health and substance use services can access similar community mental health agencies in their area.

No matter who you are, how you identify or where you are on your journey, we are here to help.

This content is made possible through our partnership with Macomb County Community Mental Health.

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 **MACOMB COUNTY**
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"The World of Anna Sui" exhibit will run Oct. 21-Feb. 28 at Cranbrook Art Museum. Photo: Cranbrook Art Museum

Stages, Galleries and Music Bring Queer Energy to Michigan This Fall

From an astronaut musical to a fashion retrospective, the season leans into identity and discovery

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Michigan art organizations are spending the fall inviting audiences to explore identity, community and discovery — whether through a new musical about astronaut Sally Ride, exhibitions reconsidering women’s places in art and fashion, or queer choruses opening new doors to holiday traditions.

Theater

Michigan stages are raising the

curtain on both familiar queer classics and new work between now and the end of the year. **“Discovery”** — Michigan State University’s Department of Theatre and Wharton Center open the season hoping to be part of Broadway musical history. Their annual collaboration with Broadway professionals will workshop this new musical by Dan Gibson and Alex Higgin-Houser, Sept. 24-27, exploring Sally Ride’s journey from astronaut to queer public figure. The show launches MSU Theatre’s

season of **“Becoming: Who We Are. Who We Are Told to Be. Who We Choose to Become.”** “The productions in this season explore moments of change,” interim department chair Kirk Domer wrote in the season brochure. “Characters discover who they are. They challenge expectations. They confront impossible choices. They resist pressure to conform. They imagine new futures for themselves and for others.” **“Equus”** and **“Mamma Dearest! Here We Joan Again”** — In

Ferndale, The Ringwald offers both darkness and camp this fall. **“Equus”** runs Oct. 9-Nov. 2, followed by **“Mamma Dearest! Here We Joan Again,”** Dec. 4-21 — a campy holiday parody filled with queer characters, ABBA music and a collision of **“Mamma Mia!”**, **“Feud”** and Joan Crawford lore. **“Kinky Boots”** — Western Michigan University Theatre revisits a staple of the queer musical canon, Oct. 30-Nov. 15. **“Perfect Arrangement”** — Kalamazoo College presents this comedy set during the Lavender

Scare, Nov. 5-8, about two gay State Department employees who marry each other’s partners to conceal their relationships. **“Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde”** — The University of Michigan stages Moisés Kaufman’s play, Nov. 19-22. **“Rent”** — Flint Repertory Theatre features Jonathan Larson’s iconic musical Nov. 27-Dec. 13. Kevin O’Callaghan, who directs the production, says the show

See **Fall Arts Preview**, page 22

Bakpak Durden Paints the Beauty of Becoming

The Detroit muralist sees transformation — not arrival — as the driving force behind their art and life

BY EMELL DERRA
ADOLPHUS

When most people first encounter Detroit artist Bakpak Durden, they're looking up at a photorealistic mural more than four stories tall. Towering above the Fisher Freeway Service Drive in downtown Detroit, the portrait introduces the interdisciplinary painter as larger than life. Finished in 2023 by Australian artist Sam Bates and commissioned by a New York-based street art nonprofit for its "Detroit Be The Change" campaign, the mural represents Durden's physical form has been interpreted through another artist's eyes.

"Previous to that, I never wanted to be painted by anybody because I didn't feel like anyone was seeing me how I saw me," Durden says. "I didn't want to be captured and stuck in time like that."

As an interdisciplinary artist, Durden considers their own varied portfolio of paintings and murals a visual extension of their inner self. "So every painting that I've done, I'm usually the subject of it. They're all self-portraits in some way," explains Durden, who has over a dozen murals across the state and whose work has been exhibited at the Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills and Heron Art in San Francisco, California, with some pieces extending as far as the Gangway Gallery in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In an alley off Riopelle Street in Eastern Market, a mural titled "Untitled: Sketch" appears to be a simple depiction of floating Black hands braiding a child's hair, but it takes on new meaning when the viewer walks from left to right to see that floating gray hands are also helping to braid. Durden confirmed that the image is a commentary on ancestry and how previous generations continue

watching over those who come after them. In another mural three blocks away titled "Tell Me How You Feel Part II," the image is more confrontational: floating hands pull a skull apart as a candle burns down in the forefront.

Underpinning all of Durden's work is an interest in emotions, people and places undergoing transformation. The artist, who identifies as Black trans post-gender, adds that the same applies when it comes to their feelings around gender expression.

"When it comes to my gender expression, I don't use 'transition,' as it feels finite," Durden says. "If someone who is not within the [LGBTQ+] community were to ask, 'Have you transitioned?' They have an idea in their head about what they think that means, but that doesn't mean that it reflects what's in my body and how I feel. So I'm just like I'm always transforming, always transmuting, and I'm transitioning, but I'm not 'transitioned.'"

On a July day in Eastern Market to tour some of Durden's murals, their work stands out among over 150 other murals with Durden's signature use of floating triangles, hands, arms, skulls and people depicted in motion. According to Durden, what makes their "queer art" queer is that it was

created from their perspective.

All of Durden's creative works come through the filter of their life experiences and influences. "So you can't say that something is not a 'queer' work because my identity and involvement in my own life has influenced this work to be produced in the way that it has to draw on the themes and the metaphors and analogies," Durden says. It's a "complicated" approach but it also moves Durden to entrust viewers to "read between the lines." "And if they miss it, then they figure something else out about themselves."

Rather than explaining the meaning behind certain works, Durden finds joy in letting viewers fill in the blanks. "I just enjoy when people get to go by it, and they don't have to be told an answer for what they're seeing. They just get to translate it to their life, experience it, and relate it. It doesn't have a static meaning," Durden says.

In the art world, there is "freedom" in "not being definitely outlined," says Kat Goffnett, associate curator of collections at Cranbrook Art Museum. "Detroit's art scene operates on so many different levels — from scrappy self-made installations

See **Bakpak Durden**, page 23



"[Show Me] Where Ya From" by Bakpak Durden

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When Family Ties Start to Choke, Sometimes You Need to Get Out the Knife



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

A recent New York Times opinion piece titled “Cutting Your Parents Off Isn’t the Answer” has resulted in a lot of chatter by people I follow on Bluesky about whether or not queer people who aren’t accepted by their parents or other family members should cut ties with them. The author of the piece discusses her relationship with her father and how both of them worked to repair that relationship. Which, you know, good for them. But it is hardly a universal experience.

Michael Hobbes, co-host of “If Books Could Kill” and “Maintenance Phase,” two of my favorite podcasts, posted a screenshot of the piece’s headline with the comment, “lol come the fuck on.”

The piece, as Hobbes points out, contributes to the “media industrial complex dedicated to telling us that we are too mean to conservatives.”

While politics driving a wedge between family members is nothing new, there’s a particular brand of this division that has gotten considerable attention since the beginning of the Trump MAGA movement. The whole “fuck your feelings” aesthetic widely adopted by Trump supporters doesn’t exactly scream, “Reconcile with us!”

For too long, we’ve been expecting LGBTQ+ people to appease those who do not recognize, respect or accept our full humanity.

Trumpism has harmed this country in many ways, but one of the most pernicious is the way his racism, misogyny and self-centeredness have given people the permission to gleefully let the worst parts of themselves become their whole personalities.

Your uncle who used to merely grumble about immigrants now talks like a eugenicist at the Thanksgiving

table. Your sister-in-law who has always been a little light on facts when it came to medical science is now a walking megaphone for the anti-vax movement. Your neighbor who has never interacted with a trans woman or attended a single girl’s sporting event is now railing against “men in women’s sports” at school board meetings.

All of these folks are actively promoting ideas that feed policies that make this country a more cruel, a more sick and a less equal place for everyone. Including themselves.

And papers like the New York Times have been trying for years to get liberals to approach this kind of hateful nonsense from a place of understanding and love. But as many people have pointed out, it’s rarely the other way around, especially for queer people who have been rejected by loved ones.

Instead we get served the same “love the sin, hate the sinner” style bullshit, which, of course, puts the onus to change on the queer person (i.e. “the sinner”). It is not complimentary to tell

someone, “I love you. But I hate who you are.”

As Hobbes put it, sarcasm clear, “Rank and file Republicans are turning against LGBT acceptance and GOP politicians are leaning into bigotry in both rhetoric and policy. But it is you, the progressive queer or ally, who needs to open your mind and consider other people’s feelings.”

I spent a good deal of my life considering other people’s

feelings. I was closeted until 18 and then still partially in the closet for years after that. That was a really painful way to live. And anyone who expects you to live like that for their sake? Well, they’ve made their feelings very clear, haven’t they?

It’s not like I don’t consider other people’s feelings any more. I do, but I’ve learned that other peoples’ feelings aren’t always more important than mine.

The song “These Dreams” by Heart is stuck in my head right now. “These dreams go on when I close my eyes. Every second of the night, I live another life,” Nancy Wilson sings. “Every moment I’m awake, the further I’m away.”

It’s a song about how our lives really are versus how we dream our lives to be. And I think that a lot of LGBTQ+ people straddle these two worlds when it comes to family. Of course we’d prefer that all of our family members love and accept us. But that’s just not reality for everyone.

For a lot of LGBTQ+ people, the choice is not between embracing or rejecting their families. The choice is actually between two different kinds of pain. The pain of being part of a family that does not make you feel loved and whole, or the pain of cutting ties with that family in order to feel loved and whole.

It’s not just a political disagreement we’re talking about. For too long, we’ve been expecting LGBTQ+ people to appease those who do not recognize, respect or accept our full humanity.

The thing is, going along to get along isn’t a fair request when it means having to compromise your own authentic self to appease people who believe that your authentic self is something too terrible to accept.

You either let them clip your wings or you fly. Sometimes, the only way out is out.



Equality Michigan Urges Providers to Resume Trans Youth Care

.....

A new federal rule finalized Aug. 11 will block federal Medicaid funds from covering gender-affirming care, including puberty-delaying medications, hormone therapy and surgeries, for transgender patients under 18, along with CHIP funds for those under 19, according to Equality Michigan. The rule takes effect Oct. 13, though legal challenges are expected.

The restriction applies only to federal funding. Care can still be covered through state-only Medicaid dollars, private insurance or other sources, and the rule does not affect coverage for supportive mental

health care. Patients currently receiving hormone therapy will have a six-month tapering period, though that provision does not extend to puberty-delaying medications. The change does not alter the legal status of gender-affirming care for young people in Michigan, and it does not affect Medicaid coverage for anyone 18 or older.

Equality Michigan is calling on the University of Michigan and Corewell Health to resume gender-affirming care and has launched a petition urging Michiganders to keep pressure on both health systems. Families affected by the rule are encouraged to contact their providers directly to discuss care options. Sign the petition at bit.ly/4gaBzfu.



Corewell Health headquarters. Photo: WMrapids, Creative Commons license

Michigan's First Transgender and Nonbinary Pride Month

.....

Michigan is marking its first Transgender and Nonbinary Pride and History Month this August, an initiative organized by Michelle Fox-Phillips, who serves on the boards of MiGen and the Gender Identity Network Alliance. The timing aligns with the anniversary of the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riots, an early flashpoint in transgender resistance.

Fox-Phillips said she wanted to give the community its own moment of visibility and connection, especially now. "Because we're being scapegoated by the government, it was time to show our pride," she told BTL.

A screening of "Screaming Queens," which traces that history, kicked things off, and ACLU of Michigan attorney Jay Kaplan appeared Aug. 18 to talk transgender rights. Actress and playwright Julia Marsh closes the month Aug. 25 with her one-person show at Affirmations in Ferndale. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has issued a proclamation recognizing the month.

Remembering Woodward Bar & Grill Manager Jeff Smith

.....

Detroit's LGBTQ+ community is grieving the loss of Jeff Smith, longtime manager of the former Woodward Bar & Grill in Midtown Detroit. LGBT Detroit shared news of Smith's death in an Aug. 18 Facebook post, describing him as far more than a

bar manager to the community he served for years. Under Smith's leadership, The Woodward Bar & Grill became a nationally recognized gathering place, especially for young adults, transgender women and Black LGBTQ+ Detroiters. The bar hosted LGBT Detroit's quarterly Tea Party, and Smith supported the organization's first standalone business location for more than five years. He also backed LGBTQ+ causes financially, including Hotter Than July and provided housing to

marginalized community members. LGBT Detroit Executive Director Nzere Kwebena wrote in the post that Smith will be remembered well beyond the bar's walls. "His legacy lives in the people he welcomed, the friendships he nurtured, the safe spaces he created, and the joy he brought to countless lives," Kwebena wrote, adding that even after fire destroyed the Woodward, Smith kept finding ways for people to gather and celebrate.

Sing Out Detroit Serves Drag at Five15

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Sing Out Detroit's second annual Sing Out & Werk Drag Cabaret Fundraiser hits Five15 in Royal Oak on Tuesday, Aug. 25, from 7-9 p.m. Doors open at 6:15 p.m. for a night of drag, live entertainment and community, supporting the chorus's mission to foster acceptance and belonging through music. Whether you're a longtime supporter or a first-timer, it's a fun excuse to gather friends and back a local LGBTQ+ nonprofit. Tickets at singoutdetroit.org.

Ypsi Pride, Take Two

.....

Ypsi Pride, postponed from its original July 18 date due to dangerous air quality from Canadian wildfire smoke, is back on track for Sunday, Aug. 30 in Ypsilanti's Depot Town. Expect live entertainment, local vendors and family-friendly programming throughout the day. After a rocky road to get here, this one's worth the wait. Grab your friends, select your best Pride fit and get ready to celebrate. Visit ypsireal.com for details.

Trans Swimmer Makes Great Lakes History

.....

Trans marathon swimmer Lev Goldberg has become the first trans person to swim across Lake Huron, launching from Port Sanilac, Michigan, on Aug. 5 and swimming nonstop for roughly 29 hours before reaching Ipperwash Beach, Ontario, the next day. It's his second Great Lake, following Lake Ontario last year, part of a five-year quest to cross all five. He's raising money for LGBTQ+ youth along the way. Check out his progress @lev.swims.lakes.



Lev Goldberg. Photo: Instagram/@lev.swims.lakes

Art as Refuge in Rural Michigan

How a Detroit transplant builds queer community up north, one surprisingly subversive stained-glass art piece at a time



Brooke Brewster. Courtesy photo

BY BROOKE BREWSTER

The first time I set up a table at the local farmers market, people barely made eye contact, let alone opened their wallets. I was a tattooed, masc, blue-haired

transplant selling stained glass that had nothing to do with the barns and birch trees everyone else up here paints. It would be years before that same work — sold through queer-owned pop-ups, displayed at art retreats I helped

build from nothing — became the thing that finally made this small town feel like mine.

Like many small-town queers, I dreamed of moving to the city in hopes of finding my authentic self. And I did just that after high

school. Growing up in the early 2000s, everything was “gay,” but nobody wanted to be “the gay.” Hilary Duff’s “Think Before You Speak” campaign came out well beyond my youth. The only gay person I actually knew growing up was a middle school teacher who died of AIDS, and the story of Matthew Shepard, which has never left me.

Honestly, I was so unaware of gender and sexuality that I’d convinced my younger self I was born a boy and my parents wanted a girl so badly (I have two older brothers) that they changed my sex at birth. I wasn’t aware of my queerness in a conscious way until I left for college.

If I said my wife and I never fell into the stereotypical “U-Haul syndrome,” I’d be lying. But once we began hanging out, her stuff was sprawled all over my house, and she basically never left after that.

After living in downtown Detroit through Covid, the BLM protests, resigning from my teaching job and the passing of my wife’s grandfather, we were exhausted. The place I thought would save me became a constant reminder of trauma. It was time for a change. What began as a grief-stricken trip “up north” ended as a transcendental life change that swept us up quicker than a lesbian romance.

We didn’t have any ties to Northern Michigan, or really any prospects, before moving. But within a month we closed on a house and essentially ghosted the city of Detroit. We wanted what everyone longs for in the rural countryside: peace and quiet. We ended up in a small town that was totally reminiscent of the community I grew up in.

I think the one thing the LGBTQ+ community can agree on is how isolating and lonely life can be at times, regardless of where you’re living. What we didn’t realize came along with the peace and quiet was the isolation. Winters are a whole new season up

here. I didn’t realize how moving back to the country would bring all those lonely childhood feelings back. That closeted tomboy who suppressed every feeling and hid in heterosexual relationships was back. Except this time I embraced my queerness and have come to realize that all those feelings I censored are what I’ve come to love about myself.

There are no queer spaces, meetups or virtually any visibility or community where we live. I can count rainbow flags on one hand, and two are ours. One year we removed our Pride signs after finding countless profanities and trash in our yard, including a brick. One of our straight friends even suggested we “just put them in the backyard,” and it felt like being told to go back in the closet. In a world where we’re unsure if someone will react with violence, I still find myself in many situations introducing my wife as something other than that — a roommate, a friend. We’ve had a car come toward us as the people inside screamed hateful things and threats, simply for existing next to each other. I’d be lying if I said moving back to Detroit wasn’t a recurring conversation we’ve had.

Living in a rural community, you discover quickly that a social life needs planning. Unlike the city, where there are countless things happening at every hour, finding a cool event up north is about as rare as catching the northern lights, let alone knowing if it’s a safe space. Fortunately, I also learned there are far more gays living here than I knew downstate. Some are transplants and some are homegrown queers. Some are visibly out, but a lot aren’t, and many are older than me. Wherever they were from, I knew we needed each other, and if I couldn’t find safe spaces to be social, I was going to create them.

As a stained-glass artist, I desperately wanted to find places that wanted to display and sell my work, places that were queer-affirming and vocal about their

support of the LGBTQ+ community. In time, I found quite a few. Don't get me wrong: The first few years were a struggle of toggling art with picking up work on the side. I even tried my luck at the local farmers market my second year, and, to no surprise, people barely made eye contact, let alone opened their wallets to buy from me. Not only was I a tattooed, masc, blue-haired weirdo wearing a Bernie Sanders T-shirt, I'm not exactly replicating nature like most Northerners. This type of art excludes me from most galleries around here and just created another layer of isolation.

To combat that isolation, and to make good on my commitment to create safe spaces for others like me, I began curating pop-up art shows and classes with other businesses owned by LGBTQ+ community members or allies, people I'd now consider friends. As a result, I was meeting more and more queer people and building community. Through that, I met the owner of Motel Bear Lake, and we've thrown a handful of queer-friendly art retreats at the motel that have only grown in numbers, justifying the need for these queer spaces to be accessible for all ages and backgrounds. The last queer art retreat we hosted even brought people from out of state, reminding me that there's a need for community not only here, but everywhere.

I hope that one day, kids will be able to live authentically and freely, especially in rural places. I want everyone to realize there are gay farmers, trans factory workers and queer construction workers, even in rural backwoods areas, and they've always occupied those spaces. The people you may think you hate may be the people you love, you just don't know it yet.

We want the same quiet, peaceful life that every other transplant longs for. For some, that means more visibility. Putting a small sticker of acceptance in the window of your business, or a rainbow sign in your yard, can go a long way for a gay kid who feels alone in the world, especially when we're continuously being canceled or erased. With visibility comes questions. As an elder queer, I have to be open to helping others understand the younger generation of gays. I used to hate when little kids would stare, until I realized I'm probably the only nonbinary person they've ever seen, let alone one living happily married. It's hard for people to understand things they've never been exposed to.

When I express my frustrations with living here, I'm told, "Just move, it's more liberal there." And they're probably not wrong. But we don't want



The artist at work. Courtesy photo



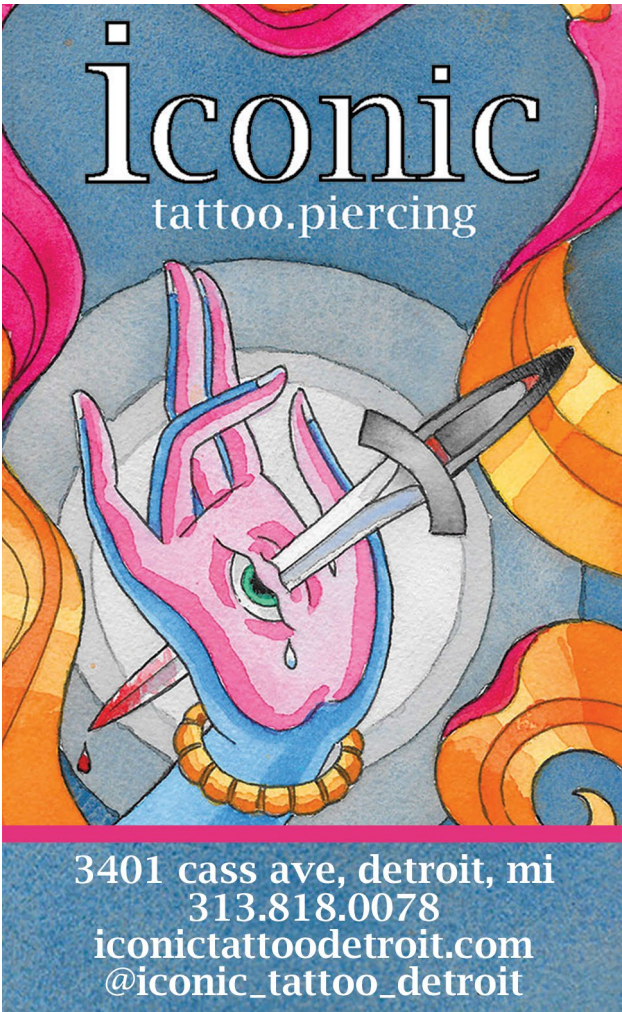
Stained-glass artwork by Brooke Brewster. Courtesy photo

to move. This is our home. We want change.

Most small-town folks want the same thing no matter what they believe: a living wage and a healthy life. We're not asking for special treatment. We're asking for safety and visibility in a place where people still face stigma,

fear and risk. I had to leave my small town to find an accepting community that allowed me to be fully myself. Kids shouldn't have to leave home to find their authentic selves.

It's time to claim queer joy in rural places, a place some of us will always know as home.



17 Years After ‘American Idol,’ Adam Lambert Is Still Reinventing Himself

On his new album ‘Adam,’ the singer talks dystopia, defiance and seeing the good in people

BY KEITH LANGSTON

At this point, performing on a national stage is second nature to Adam Lambert, who shot to fame 17 years ago during the eighth season of “American Idol” in May 2009. Just six months later, Lambert went on to release his hit album “For Your Entertainment,” which included the Billboard Top 10 single “Whataya Want from Me.”

“I have a better sense of what my voice can do,” Lambert tells BTL, reflecting on his career, which has since led to numerous milestones like his second album, “Trespassing,” hitting No. 1 on the Billboard 200 album chart, touring with Queen and, in 2024, making his Broadway debut in “Cabaret.”

Recently, Lambert released his sixth studio album, “Adam,” which he describes as a “brutalist” record filled with deep but relatable emotions, creating a “maze of possibilities.” From rock anthems to power ballads, the album is a journey through various styles, with each song feeling like a distinct scene, all coming together to create a musical voyage.

In mid-July, while preparing to perform a second song backstage at the “Today” show, here’s what Lambert had to say about his career and his new album.

One thing I noticed about “Adam” is that it almost feels like a story. The first song, “Rat City,” is like the opening to a musical where you’re setting the scene.

Yeah, “Rat City” feels like it’s a song that sets the stage and the tone. I’m giving you a place. As a whole, the album is pretty universal stuff, like relationship ups and downs, highs and lows. But it’s all set in a strange, dystopian, sort of post-apocalyptic background. I wanted it to have a dark underbelly, which I thought was important to set up as the environment, because it reflects a lot of what we’re going through right now.

There’s a lot of anxiety and a lot of stress over the way the world is being run, and governments and AI and all that shit. So I wanted to acknowledge that and make sure it was very clear sonically and emotionally that this was the setting.

It’s interesting hearing that from you because your career has put you in a unique spot to see different groups of people that many queer artists

probably don’t. You’re huge with straight moms — my mom being one of them — and touring with Queen probably has you interacting with a lot more Gen X and baby boomers than other gay musicians. Do you think that’s what has you hopeful?

Yeah, I had a bit of a rude awakening right after “American Idol.” I had been in a bubble in L.A., amongst theater people, club kids and creatives, so I was very comfortable with myself and my sexuality. Then suddenly, I was put on a national stage, and I quickly saw that there is homophobia and hatred. I hadn’t experienced too much of it until that moment.

What did you do as an artist to combat that?

I think it’s all about making good art and making stuff that connects with the public. I think that’s a big first step. If it’s honest, about real life stuff and has real emotional relevance, then you can start connecting with people. And if you’re connecting with them and they’re connecting with each other over that music, that’s how you start to shift consciousness.

I also think that just existing as a queer artist and being out there in public is an act of defiance and activism itself. Like, yeah, I’m a gay man and proud of it, but that doesn’t mean my music is only for gay people. Music is universal. Emotions aren’t exclusive to one identity or group, they’re experienced by everybody.

This brings up something me and my mom were talking about last night. You famously performed as Judas in “Jesus Christ Superstar” alongside Cynthia Erivo. My mom, who’s hardcore Catholic, thought you were amazing and saw it as a radical protest, whereas I hate religion and feel like if anyone ever asked me to be in a religious musical I’d probably say, “Fuck no.”

[Laughs.] That’s probably one of the reasons I was drawn to the role of Judas! I found a lot in common with him, oddly enough. He doesn’t go with the rest of the group. He’s the one who speaks up. He’s like the voice of reason. He’s anxious, worried and afraid. Those are all things I can identify with and have felt in my life, and that have gotten in my way and led me down



Adam Lambert. Courtesy photo

the wrong path.

I’m not religious either, but honestly, it’s not a religious role. He’s the skeptic. Judas is literally fighting against his own sense of faith. He’s like, “I don’t think I believe this,” so I identified with him a lot.

I’m thinking about what a varied and wildly successful career you’ve had. Have you developed more courage or comfort to tackle things in your new album that you might not have had the confidence to in your earlier releases?

So there’s a ballad in the middle of the album, “Am I OK?,” which is super vulnerable. I had never been in a situation where I was writing about something while I was still in the midst of it. I was right in the middle of all those feelings when I wrote that song. Compared to the beginning of my career, I trust my instincts a lot more now. I have a better sense of what my voice can do, and this album goes in a lot of different directions, like dynamically, the textures and

See **Adam Lambert**, page 26



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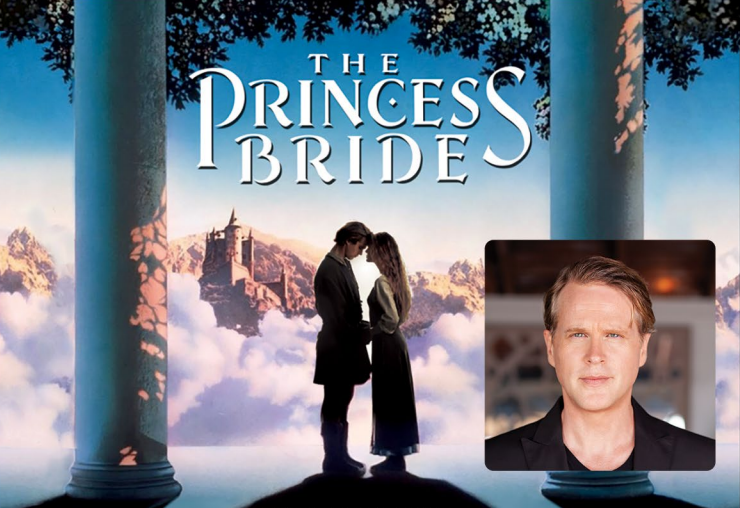
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Life has a way of sneaking up on us, even when things seem to be going well. Moments like these can leave you feeling overwhelmed, uncertain, or knocked off balance. You don't have to navigate those experiences alone. Reaching out for support is a quiet act of courage—not a sign of weakness or brokenness. It reflects an understanding that you deserve care, clarity, and a space to make sense of what you're carrying. In therapy, I offer an environment grounded in compassion, honesty, and neutrality, where you can explore your experiences, reconnect with your values, and align your actions with the person you want to be.

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Democrats Are Trying to Disqualify Trans Candidates. Here's How

Michigan's Whaley and Mua faced Democratic primary challenges over their trans identities — echoing a national pattern

BY HOPE PISONI FOR
UNCLOSETED MEDIA

Editor's note: Uncloseted Media is an independent, queer-led newsroom doing the kind of sustained investigative work that national outlets often miss, and we like to spotlight that work when we can. This piece also hits close to home: Joanna Whaley and Toni Mua, two of the candidates featured here, ran in Michigan's Aug. 4 primary and were part of BTL's own election coverage this cycle. Seeing their races alongside similar fights in Ohio and Massachusetts shows this isn't a Michigan problem so much as a national pattern, and we wanted our readers to have that fuller picture.

Jordan Korgood has come a long way. In 2023, she says she ran into financial difficulties while studying at Northeastern University in Boston and ended up unhoused. Ordinary shelters are hotbeds of discrimination and mistreatment for trans women like her, and the only trans shelter was full. So for five months, she slept in her car, in public libraries and anywhere she could find in order to continue her studies and campus activism.

Korgood, now 24, started a bid in March for a seat on Massachusetts Governor's Council, a state board tasked with approving judicial candidates. Despite running against an incumbent who has been in office for 41 years, she secured key endorsements from local Democrats and racked up more than 7,000 Instagram followers, the equivalent of nearly one-tenth of primary voters during the last election cycle.

But last month, her momentum was ripped away. It started when Ronald Iacobucci, one of her opponents, noticed that she was still registered to vote in the 2024 election with an old New York address. He proceeded to file an objection with the state, alleging



Jordan Korgood outside the Massachusetts State House. Photo: CJ Gunther for Uncloseted Media

that Korgood didn't meet the five-year residency requirement. While Korgood has lived in Massachusetts since 2019, she didn't have a valid address to register in the state while she was unhoused. So she used her mother's address, where she had lived before moving.

In an email to Uncloseted Media, Iacobucci wrote, "Because serious questions have arisen concerning compliance with those requirements, an objection was appropriate so the matter can be reviewed through the lawful process established by the Commonwealth. This objection was nothing personal, it was always about the integrity of the process."

While most residency challenges like this fail in Massachusetts, the State Ballot Law Commission disqualified Korgood on June 18. While she initially attempted to appeal the decision, the financial and logistical burden became too much — she estimates it drained

about 40% of her campaign funds. So on July 10, Korgood suspended her campaign. She remains off the ballot for the Sept. 1 Massachusetts primary.

"I am incredibly frustrated that this is what I have to do at this point," Korgood told Uncloseted Media. "I've spent thousands of hours, I've sacrificed my own mental health, my social life, friendships, my professional aspirations and advancement to work on this campaign, and this is how they're ruling."

"These are cherry-picking remote issues to target specific individuals," Eliot Tracz, assistant professor of law at New England Law Boston, told Uncloseted Media. "They're legitimate laws, but what they're looking for is a selective application."

Korgood isn't the only trans candidate facing barriers. While a 2025 report by the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute found that transgender representation among elected

officials has increased by more than 700% since 2017, candidates still face major hurdles.

Uncloseted Media found examples of transgender candidates running for public office in Ohio and Michigan who have been threatened with disqualification over challenges to their eligibility. Often, the challenges come from their primary opponents: fellow Democrats.

"It should be voters, not political opponents, who decide who represents them," Daniel Hernandez, vice president of political programs at the LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, a nonprofit supporting queer candidates for public office, told Uncloseted Media. "This is not a legitimate way to fight — if you have a disagreement on policy, that's one thing, but to try and target trans people just because of who they are is completely unacceptable, especially in a Democratic primary."

A growing strategy

The first widely publicized eligibility challenge against a trans candidate Uncloseted Media identified took place in Stark County, Ohio, in 2024. The Stark County Board of Elections, which has the same chairman as the county's Democratic Party, disqualified Vanessa Joy, a trans woman who was running for a seat in the state legislature. The board cited an obscure state law requiring candidates who changed their name in the last five years to list their former name on candidacy petitions — in Joy's case, her deadname.

"The original spirit of the law I kind of agree with," Joy told Uncloseted Media. "But there's hardly any information about this law ever being enforced."

Days later, Arienne Childrey and Bobbie Arnold, two other trans candidates, had their eligibility challenged based on this law. While both candidates were cleared to run, that wasn't the case for Joy, who never made it on the ballot. Childrey and Arnold each went on to lose their 2024 general election races to Republican incumbents; Childrey has since been appointed to the St. Marys City Council, becoming the first trans woman to hold an Ohio city council seat.

Tom Sutton, a political science professor at Baldwin Wallace University, told Spectrum News 1 he had never seen this law enforced in his 30 years of study. At the time, the relevant forms didn't include a space to list former names, an omission that has since been corrected.

"The only way to find out about it was to dig deep into all of the additional documents on their website," Joy says. "They used this law against me."

Similar challenges cropped

See **Trans Candidates**, page 20

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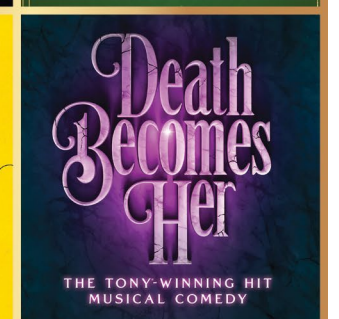
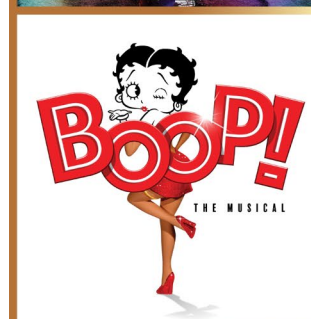
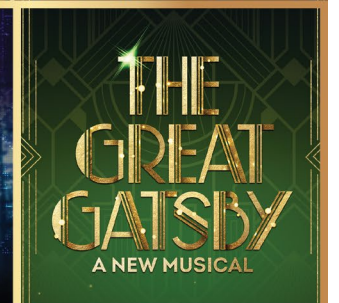
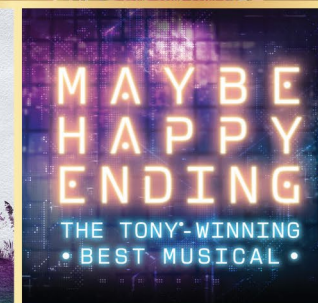
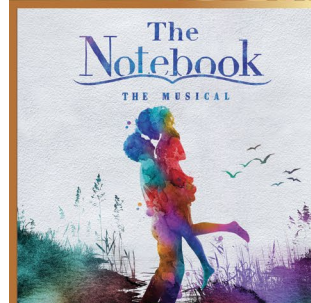
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up in Michigan this year. Joanna Whaley, a trans woman who ran for a seat representing Michigan's 2nd House District — covering Downriver Detroit communities including Lincoln Park, Allen Park, Melvindale and Southgate — faced a legal complaint from her Democratic primary opponent Frank Liberati, who claimed in April that she should have filed campaign paperwork under her deadname.

"Because both the original and amended affidavits of identity filed by 'Joanna Michelle Whaley' contain FALSE statements, she/he cannot be certified to appear on the August 4, 2026 primary election ballot," the complaint argues.

The county clerk denied the challenge, which deadnames Whaley, because she had legally changed her name. Liberati's complaint was widely condemned, with the Michigan Legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus calling it "meritless" and "transphobic."

"It completely backfired on him," Whaley told Uncloseted Media. "We tripled our cash on hand within a week because of the support that we've gotten from our community, and actually are in a stronger position now to win this race."

Whaley went on to win the Aug. 4 primary, taking about 66% of the vote to Liberati's 34%. She now faces Republican Ron Kokinda in the heavily Democratic district in November, and is favored to become Michigan's first out transgender lawmaker.

While Whaley benefited from the challenge, that's not the norm. Toni Mua, a trans woman who was running in the Aug. 4 primary for Michigan's 9th House District — a majority-Black seat covering parts of Detroit — received a complaint from political activist Robert Davis in April who alleged that she also should have run under her deadname. Mua did not advance past the primary.

One of Mua's opponents, Democrat Arthur Harrington, had discussed the challenge with Davis before it was filed, according to DeNiro Jones, Harrington's former campaign manager. Jones told Uncloseted Media he sat in on a meeting between the two where they discussed the plan.

Jones also sent Uncloseted Media

a screenshot of what he says is a text thread that Harrington sent him. In the screenshot, Davis tells Harrington, "The transgender candidate will be eliminated," and Harrington responds that "Toni also won't have the money to fight it." Those texts were from April 22, two days before Davis filed the challenge.

In an email to Uncloseted Media, Davis called this story "baseless and meritless" and referred to Mua as "an illegitimate candidate seeking attention."

"A candidate who happens to identify as transgender clearly violated Michigan Election Law and should not have been allowed to appear on the ballot," Davis wrote. "A person's sexual orientation nor identity played no part in the litigation seeking to have the person who filed a false affidavit of identity properly removed from the ballot."

Arthur Harrington did not reply to multiple requests for comment. But in a June statement to Michigan Advance, he denied allegations that he was involved in Davis' challenge.

These legal fights cost a lot. Korgood paid her lawyer \$5,000. And while Mua defeated her challenge, she also had to use an estimated 40% of her campaign funds, or \$10,000, to fight it.

In its opinion rejecting Davis' challenge of Mua's candidacy, the state court of appeals wrote, "Plaintiff misreads the statute ... The Court of Claims did not err by concluding that Mua complied with the law or that the Wayne County Clerk did not err in rejecting plaintiff's challenge."

Quinn Allred, executive director at Let Us Lead, a youth-focused voting rights nonprofit, finds these eligibility challenges from Democrats "despicable."

"Instead of saying 'trans people shouldn't be running,' [they're entering] into this respectability politics and saying 'oh, it's actually because the names don't match up, or it's because of this residency law,'" Allred told Uncloseted Media. "[It's a] special brand of cowardice that it takes for a Democrat to target a queer person who is also running for office."

Uneven enforcement

While challenges to candidates' residency aren't uncommon in

Massachusetts, they usually fail, according to Western Mass Politics & Insight, a long-running blog by local political and legal analysts.

The blog says most officials with authority over elections have a "great reluctance ... to remove an individual from the ballot." This makes Korgood's removal unusual.



Joanna Whaley. Courtesy photo

And while the State Ballot Law Commission says it considers many factors when determining a candidate's residency and "no factor standing alone can be dispositive," it largely cited Korgood's voter registration in its decision despite other evidence that supports her eligibility, including apartment leases and membership in city programs.

"While there's an undertone of legitimacy to some of those claims, it's very selective," Tracz says. "Most of us, when we move to a new state, don't bother to go through the process of getting rid of our registration to vote in the prior state."

Throughout history, Massachusetts candidates who faced similar challenges have been left on the ballot. These include former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, who received a tax credit in Utah reserved for primary residences, and Brockton, Massachusetts, mayoral candidate Hamilton Rodrigues, who had gotten his voter registration in Brockton removed and hadn't voted in the city for more than 10 years.

Months after Joy's disqualification in Ohio, the

Mahoning County Board of Elections struck down a similar challenge against Republican Tex Fischer, a cisgender man who changed his legal name. They allowed him to stay on the ballot.

Tracz says a judge would likely find selective enforcement like this questionable.

"[That rule is] applicable to any candidate, and the question then becomes 'Is this only being enforced against a select group of candidates?'" he says. "Why are we only investigating a specific type of candidate? I think that will give some courts pause."

Making existing challenges worse

Trans candidates face hurdles beyond eligibility challenges. A June report from the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute found that nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ+ candidates face in-person harassment and nearly 80% of them face online harassment.

"Whether it's threats of violence, coordinated harassment campaigns, attempts to remove people from the ballot, the cumulative effect is the same: public service becoming more difficult and less accessible to the LGBTQ community," Hernandez says.

As she was navigating her primary election campaign, Whaley said the increased attention from Liberati's challenge brought even more harassment her way. She said she reported death threats to the police weekly and had a security detail at every public appearance. Security became her second-largest campaign expense, and for good reason — in October, her team intervened when a man wearing a Make America Great Again hat followed her around with a gun at a No Kings rally.

"At the end of the day, I want to get home to tuck my kids in bed," Whaley said. "We could be using that money for other things, but we're having to use it to just keep me alive."

Eligibility challenges distract from the candidates' policies. Childrey remembers one woman telling her she couldn't vote for her because she's "only about the rainbow people."

"Most of what [I'm] talking about is affordability, funding for our public schools ... bread and butter issues," Childrey told Uncloseted Media. "There is an assumption, because we're trans, that that's all it is."

Barriers also pile up intersectionally. Nearly one-third of trans people experience homelessness at some point in their lives, a rate eight times higher than the general population. This means barriers for unhoused people disproportionately affect trans candidates.

"Trans youth, trans people of color, students, those who are unhoused like [Korgood] was, or who are disabled or low-income — those barriers only compound," Allred says.

What could change?

Zein Murib, a political science professor at Fordham University, says these incidents demonstrate the need for more leniency with official documentation, arguing that a candidate's deadname or legal sex isn't relevant information. Today, 45 states accept common-law names, or the name a person uses in everyday life regardless of their ID, for other legal procedures, and Whaley says this should apply to campaigns as well.

Besides these policy changes, Allred says LGBTQ+ advocacy groups should allocate more funds to defend trans candidates from eligibility challenges. And Hernandez says more people should condemn these tactics and show support for those targeted.

"We need to make sure that we set the expectation that everyone ... is rejecting these tactics that are disproportionately burdening our trans candidates," he says. "We have to call it out when we see it, and we have to make sure that we are not just letting candidates fight these fights themselves."

While Korgood says she is saddened by this outcome, she doesn't intend for her political career to end.

"I'm incredibly proud of what we were able to accomplish, and while I am beyond disappointed and frustrated that this is how this is ending, I am so grateful that I earned the support and the attention of thousands of people in this race."

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Fall Arts Preview

Continued from page 10

remains relevant because the social failures surrounding its characters haven't disappeared. "Evictions were rampant, people struggled to eat, and when you supercharge it with a deadly AIDS epidemic, it really highlights the need for strong moral, social, and scientific programs and leadership," O'Callaghan says. "With the recent cuts to USAID worldwide (which has helped battle and keep AIDS at bay) or the slashing of programs in our local communities like SNAP and Medicare, we see not that much has changed. The fight continues."

O'Callaghan says this production is committed to honoring and harnessing the power of storytelling that was a lifeline for people with AIDS in the '90s. "The U.S. government turned its back on AIDS patients and the community as a whole, so people had to come together to raise funds, offer safe, expressive spaces, and create awareness," O'Callaghan says. "Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS was one of the great beacons that came out of that culture of taking care of each other through theatre and organizing. People still pass the red bucket today, which is such a great way to honor the hard work done by allies before us and continue to help find resources for those who need it."

"Pillow Fortress" and **Queer Shorts Festival** — On the west side of the state, Queer Theatre Kalamazoo opens its season with "Pillow Fortress" by Aysha Zackria, a drama about three college classmates thrown together when someone escapes from a local jail; the play explores feminism, policing, relationships and how to stay safe. It's followed by the company's Queer Shorts Festival — Holiday Edition, a collection of short plays. Dates for both shows are yet to be announced.

Music

After busy spring and Pride seasons, many of Michigan's queer choruses are prepping for the holidays. Most haven't officially announced their holiday



Fisher Building lobby and theatre entrance. Photo: Dig Downtown Detroit, Creative Commons license

dates yet, but there are several gems worth penciling into the calendar.

"**Winter Wonderland Holiday Show**" and "**Holiday Pops**" — Detroit-based Prism Chorus presents its holiday show Dec. 11-12, then joins the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra for "Holiday Pops" Dec. 19.

"**Winter's Snow and Hearth's Glow**" — One of the state's newer LGBTQ+ choruses, Queer Heart of Michigan Voices, presents its second major concert series in East Lansing this December, featuring music from "Frozen," "The Nightmare Before Christmas," "The Polar Express" and Pentatonix.

Visual art

"**Georgia O'Keeffe: Architecture**" — The Detroit Institute of Arts hosts this exhibition Sept. 11-Jan. 3. It turns attention away from the flowers and landscapes O'Keeffe is best known for, instead examining more than three decades of her architectural subjects,

from Manhattan to New Mexico, and focuses on O'Keeffe claiming power over masculine spaces and subverting the heteronormative gaze often applied to her flower paintings.

"**The World of Anna Sui**" — One of fall's biggest celebrations of modern queer-influenced style arrives at the Cranbrook Art Museum Oct. 21-Feb. 28. The exhibition is a homecoming for the Detroit-born designer, whose work has drawn freely from punk, glam, vintage fashion and queer subcultures. Curated by Dennis Nothdruff of London's Fashion and Textile Museum and adapted for Cranbrook by chief curator Laura Mott, the retrospective traces Sui's career from 1991 to the present through 12 recurring archetypes. Among them is Androgyny, highlighting the gender-fluid silhouettes that have long been part of her visual vocabulary and that helped pave the way for the modern nonbinary fashion movement.

See Fall Arts Preview, page 24

and home galleries, its mural scene to full scale art institutions in the city and metro-area.” The result is a variety of subcultures within the arts community, Goffnett explains, but “there are still connecting threads that bring people working in different mediums and modalities together.”

As it turns out, Durden’s trepidation over being perceived on a grand scale reflects a long-held tension among Detroit artists: being in a big city that still feels intimate, says Goffnett. According to her, that environment is where artists like Durden can blossom. “There is a bit of an ‘ask forgiveness, not permission’ DIY attitude that influences the city, its people and its art,” she says.

Durden grew up in Detroit and was on the college track to become a doctor before shifting to fine arts and dropping out of school entirely. According to Durden that journey paralleled an inner journey of self-discovery that helped crystallize their identity.

“My mom never wanted me to go into art as a career, and I was like, ‘I’m gonna make it work,’” says Durden, who began painting around 2018. “I was like, if I’m gonna do this painting thing, this new language, I have to figure out what I’m saying. And so as I was breaking that

down: how I wanted that to look, what I was gonna say, how I was gonna present myself, I was tearing down a lot of shame that I was holding inside and putting it onto the canvas.”

Durden says establishing a strong sense of self gave them the tools they needed to navigate the pressures of the art world and the assumptions that come with being a Black trans artist. “It’s like,

explaining themselves. “There’s a community of people that are allies that are also queer who are just out there, also doing the work,” they say.

For all the places Durden’s work has taken them, Detroit remains the place where they found both artistic freedom and a sense of belonging.

“My main goal was to buy a house, establish some kind of housing security



Bakpak Durden. Courtesy photo

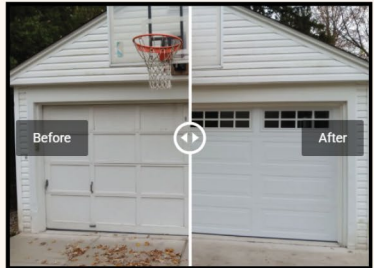
“You’re violent. You’re gonna hurt me, and then how people respond to it,” Durden says. “So I’m just like, here are ways that I’m gonna work opposite of what you think is going on.”

That work has also created a community around Durden — one that allows them to exist without constantly

because I was homeless for a number of years,” says Durden. “That affords me the privilege to travel more and take more risks. But, also, this is where my family came to raise us, and if we’re gonna start a revolution, why run away? They fought so hard for us to be here. We might as well stay and fight for it.”

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Puzzle Title
Puzzle can be found on page 25



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◀ Fall Arts Preview

Continued from page 22

Out of the box

Some of the season's most enticing events resist tidy categorization.

Paula Poundstone — Comedian Paula Poundstone comes to the Wharton Center in East Lansing Oct. 2 with the humor and audience improvisation that have defined her touring career. Poundstone, who identifies as asexual, has deep cultural ties to LGBTQ+ audiences and activism.

"Andrea Gibson: Love Letter From the Afterlife" — The Michigan Theater hosts this multimedia tribute, built around the late poet's final live performance, on Nov. 8. Gibson, the queer, nonbinary spoken word artist and former Colorado poet laureate, died in July 2025 after a four-year battle with ovarian cancer. The touring show pairs film of Gibson's last set at Denver's Paramount Theatre with live orchestral music and narration from Gibson's widow, poet Megan Falley, who conceived the tribute after a single Red Rocks concert this summer drew 10,000 people and grew into

a 14-city tour.

"A Drag Queen Christmas" — The Fisher Theatre pulls out the holly on Nov. 11. The first stop on the show's national tour, it features a rotating cast of performers



Mural outside Ringwald Theatre. Courtesy photo

from "RuPaul's Drag Race" putting a festive, irreverent twist on holiday traditions.

"The Bald and the Beautiful LIVE: Very Bald, Very Beautiful" — The Detroit Opera House welcomes Trixie Mattel and Katya Zamolodchikova on Nov. 21. Billed as "a pair of grizzled gay ghouls exploring the cultural boundaries of modern beauty through interviews with gorgeous guests," the drag stars take their popular podcast to the stage for an evening devoted to beauty, celebrity, culture and whatever strange territory their conversations happen to wander into.

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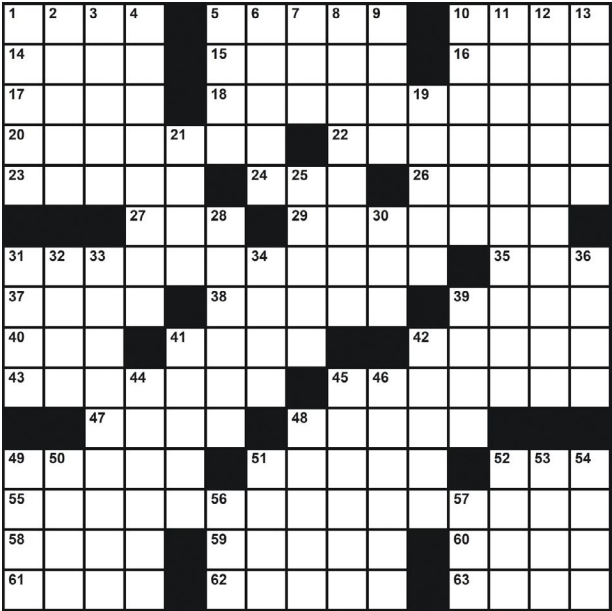


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- 17 German auto

- 18 Stationery for Aaron Copland
- 20 Price of horror films
- 22 Start of what Price said he was impersonating
- 23 Forest moon in "Return of the Jedi"
- 24 Dupont Cir., on the Metro
- 26 Box to Vidal
- 27 Set burning
- 29 Wall Street workers
- 31 More of the quote
- 35 M.I.T. or N.Y.U.
- 37 Golda from the land of the cut

- 38 Buffalo bunches
- 39 Where a cobbler puts the tongue
- 40 Boy played by Martin and Duncan
- 41 Tough place
- 42 Fingerprint ridge
- 43 Patrick of the _Moby Dick_ miniseries
- 45 Censored the word "lesbian," for example
- 47 Catcher's need
- 48 Tail feather
- 49 Overhand stroke, for Mauresmo
- 51 Strokes from Sheehan
- 52 Schnozz add-on
- 55 More of the quote
- 58 Baudelaire's liver
- 59 Nursery rhyme Peter, to a pumpkin
- 60 End of the quote
- 61 They aren't straight
- 62 Great balls of fire
- 63 Make beer

Down

- 1 Where Susan Feniger shows a range of skills?
- 2 "Climb aboard"
- 3 Erect
- 4 Medium for Rosa Bonheur, perhaps
- 5 Dramatic word for the Yankees
- 6 Is adjacent to
- 7 Your, to Proust
- 8 Musher's race

- 9 Stage crew worker, briefly
- 10 Phone receiver's spot
- 11 Mechanics' milieu
- 12 Music for "Aida," e.g.
- 13 Tops that pop
- 19 Range features
- 21 One of the Waltons
- 25 Car in the song "Fun, Fun, Fun"
- 28 Casual top
- 30 Suffix with lecher
- 31 They call balls
- 32 Like Felix of _The Odd Couple_
- 33 Like Fassbinder's work
- 34 Relief of Lincoln
- 36 Didn't give way
- 39 "A Boy Named Sue" writer
- 41 Clean up
- 42 Like the Ladies of Llangollen
- 44 Trio of genie grants
- 45 Rhett of _GWTW_
- 46 Water units
- 48 Clerk's minimum at Barneys
- 49 Love seat, e.g.
- 50 _Dial ___ Murder_
- 51 Excellent, in slang
- 52 Barbra's _Funny Girl_ costar
- 53 Make more potent
- 54 From the top
- 56 _STNG_ crew member
- Crusher
- 57 Metro area

See p. 23 for answers

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Adam Lambert

Continued from page 16

the approach. It can get soft and light, then heavy and hard. I was really able to play with all the colors and shades of my voice. Plus, from a songwriting standpoint, I've also been able to use what I've learned throughout the years.

I've also taken more of a leadership role than I ever have before. I'm releasing it independently on my own, so I'm funding it. I hired the team for all the jobs, so I feel a real sense of empowerment. That's created a very open, free space for me because I don't have to play politics with anyone and I'm not answering to anybody.

But also, this album has taught me when it's best to step back and let someone else take the lead. I think that's a big part of growing up, when you finally start recognizing where your strengths are and aren't.

What can fans expect next? Any big projects on the horizon?



Adam Lambert. Courtesy photo

I've actually been working on a musical on the side, so that's something that's in development. I've also been looking to get into some more

acting roles in film and TV. Doing "Cabaret" on Broadway was a full-circle moment for me because it had been 17 years since I'd done a stage musical. It was nice to get back to that and be a theater person again. The acting bug really bit me again after that.

What's the musical you're working on?

It's an original musical that I'm writing, so not about me and not a jukebox musical. It's about a real-life person from New York in the '70s who was a musician. I think that's all I can reveal at this point!

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