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State Admits Error, Retracts Letters Demanding Same-Sex Married Couples Pay More In Taxes

BY JAN STEVENSON

Approximately 130 same-sex married couples recently received threatening letters from the Michigan State Department of Treasury demanding an explanation as to why the income on their 2013 personal taxes differed from what appeared on their federal tax returns. Couples were told they risked having their bank accounts seized if they did not respond by a deadline or pay a large additional state tax. But in an about-face, on May 12 the Department of Treasury put out a statement that the letters were sent in error.

Between The Lines contacted Treasury to ask why these letters were sent out to same-sex couples who complied with the regulations imposed by the state at that time. Since the U.S. Supreme Court decision in June 2015 that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, all couples, including same-sex couples, now can file as married both federally and with the state. This letter felt like harassment of same-sex couples by requiring them to go backwards in time to when their marriages were deemed unequal by the state.

It was explained to the state that for many couples complying with the demands of this letter, it is time intensive and expensive. Tax accountants BTL has interviewed said they have had to prepare extensive documentation to explain why the 2013 federal and state tax returns do not agree.

The statement released to Between The Lines from the Michigan Department of Treasury Office of Communications reads:

“The Michigan Department of Treasury was recently made aware of letters being sent out erroneously. Taxpayers’ state returns are reviewed to ensure consistency with federal returns. Unfortunately, when this review happened for the 2013 tax year returns, some returns were flagged as mismatched based on inconsistent Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) figures that were actually correct.

This happened to approximately 130 Michigan taxpayers - most of whom were same-sex couples who were allowed to file a joint federal income tax return but were not yet able to file a joint state return. We are mailing out a second letter to inform affected taxpayers that they can disregard our first letter.

If someone is in this situation and does not receive a second letter from Treasury, they should reach out to the contact identified on their first letter so this situation can be resolved. These taxpayers do not owe an additional tax and no further action is required on their part. Treasury deeply regrets this error and apologizes for any hardship our actions may have caused taxpayers,” said Ron Leix, Deputy Public Information Officer.

Couples should soon receive a second letter informing them that they can ignore the first letter.

EQMI’s Department of Victim Services Reaches Across the State

Expanded Office Hours Available in Grand Rapids, Traverse City and Soon, Midland

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

As the founding member of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, Equality Michigan is committed through their Department of Victim Services to providing support and advocacy services for LGBTQ, SGL (Same Gender Loving), and HIV-affected people experiencing various forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, hate violence, harassment and discrimination.

“We have an incredibly important and unique role to play,” said Stephanie White, executive director of EQMI. “We take it seriously and have invested a good amount of time, energy and resources in strengthening the depth of skills on our team and the geographic reach to serve people all over the state. We will do whatever it takes to serve the full breadth of our LGBTQ community.”

Three EQMI staff members have made this possible over the last 18



Equality Michigan’s Department of Victim Services: Jaynce Poindexter, Serena Johnson and Genny Maze. BTL Photo: Jason A. Michael

months - Director of Victim Services, Serena Johnson; Lead Victims Advocate, Genny Maze; and Transgender Victims Advocate, Jaynce Poindexter.

“I have to give credit to Serena for building this team,” said White. “She took the helm and has been spectacular at finding good people, creating an environment that is professional and collaborative, fighting for extra funding to support their work, and leading them to reach all their goals. I get nothing but great feedback from everyone who interacts with them.”

In addition to its work in Metro Detroit, the Department of Victim Services has expanded across the state already with pop-up office hours in Grand Rapids and Traverse City. A victim’s advocate visits each city at least once a month. Soon, they will establish a presence in Midland.

“We are a statewide organization and it’s not enough to say we are a statewide organization and if you need us, call us

in Detroit. We do office hours in these cities as well as community events or we go speak to other people in the community,” said Maze, noting they are careful during the process.

“We don’t give a resource until we check it out first,” she said. “I don’t want a victim to come in and then I send them to a resource that re-victimizes them.”

Having Poindexter on staff as the agency’s first ever transgender victims advocate has been a real coup. The agency estimates they’ve seen a 30 percent increase in transgender clients since she started last year.

“Trans people feel safer to report the injustices and the victimization because they feel connected with someone who is also a part of that community,” said Poindexter. “When they

look at me they somewhat look in the mirror.”

White said she couldn’t be happier to

See next page

DVS Office Hours

Detroit

Equality Michigan
19641 W. Seven Mile Road
Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids Pride Center
343 Atlas Ave. SE
Second and fourth Tuesday of the month until June 9, 2-7 p.m.
Second Friday of the month after June 9, 2-7 p.m.

Traverse City

Imagine Health
121 S. Garfield Ave., Suite A
Fourth Monday of the month
11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Ferndale-based Church Militant Proclaims Anti-LGBT Views in Documentary

BY BTL STAFF

A group of radical Catholics in Ferndale believe they can “save” people by spreading the Catholic culture via the internet.

Known as the Church Militant (formerly St. Michael’s Media), this rapidly growing far-right media organization – that reaches 1,500,000 people every month online - was featured by The Atlantic in a documentary released May 9.

Video Producer Daniel Lombroso said The Atlantic embedded with Michael Voris, the organization’s controversial founder, for close to a week – the biggest investigation on the group to date.

A total of 35 people on staff are fighting against what they see as the “tyranny” of a liberal America, referring to an “emasculated society” committing “sins” of homosexuality, abortion, contraception, divorce and remarriage.

Voris’ denies his early to mid-life “confusions.” In the documentary, he admits to several “live-in relationships with homosexual men” during his 30s as well as “frequent sexual

liaisons with both adult men and adult women” in his 20s.

Voris explains his “come-to-Jesus” moment occurred when his brother died suddenly from a heart attack, and just before his mother died of cancer.

“She said ‘I never believed you were homosexual or gay. You were acting out in response to how I had created this situation at home that you didn’t know how to deal with.’”

And with that, Voris returned to his faith to build what is being referred to as “multimedia empire.”

The Detroit Free Press wrote an in-depth feature in February about this right-wing fringe group. Read it online www.freep.com.



Simon Rafe, executive producer of Church Militant.com. Courtesy photo

► Victim Services

Continued from p. 4

have Poindexter as part of her team.

“When I joined EQMI at the end of 2015, our community had just experienced a heartbreaking spike in violence, particularly against trans women of color,” she said. “One of my first goals and accomplishments was to increase our funding and hire a capable and respected trans woman of color to lead this work. We feel lucky to have hired Jeynce for this position. She’s just what our community needed and our work is much stronger with her skills and relationships added to the mix.”

White confirmed the organization received an individual gift of \$10,000 from a family foundation at the end of 2016 and were recently awarded \$60,000 from the Open Society Foundation from their Communities Against Hate grant.

“Serena and I made those pitches together,” she said. “She’s been fighting for the funding her team needs and getting results. I’m impressed, frankly.”

Maze said that she and Poindexter make good partners.

“Jeynce and I have become the Thelma and Louise of Equality Michigan,” she said. “We travel long hours. We get a lot of time to talk. We learn from each other. And we have a great leader in Serena.”

The Department of Victim Services recently inked a deal with Providence Hospitals in Southfield and Novi to train their staff.

“We’re going to be training them in diversity and inclusiveness in the emergency rooms for transgender and gay and lesbian people,” said Maze. “They want to hang a sign that says ‘this is a safe place’ so people will open up about who they are because their medical needs may be different.”

A lot of their cases are not quick and easy fixes and can actually remain open for quite some time.

“We don’t just go in, just give a resource and we’re done with them,” said Johnson. “Our cases are long-term.”

When asked how the Department of Victim Services handles challenging cases that seem helpless, Poindexter said, “I never like to think that there is no positive resolve. I think when you come from a place of a pure heart and a sense of love and real support then you always find a way for your client. Now it may not be the result they were hoping for. But be it a bus ticket, a listening ear, a reference, a referral, a link to help...that literally can save someone’s life.”

Maze agreed.

“Then we get back out in the community and try to tear down that wall,” she said. “Do we get frustrated? Sure. But we keep going.”

Connect with the Department of Victim Services at 313-537-7000, Ext 114, online www.equalitymi.org/victim-services, and email jpoindexter@equalitymi.org or gmaze@equalitymi.org. Submit a report online <https://equalitymi.org/report> or email report@equalitymi.org.

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Federal Court Orders Trump to Produce Giuliani Travel Ban Memo

In response to a recent joint lawsuit filed by the Arab American Civil Rights League, the ACLU of Michigan and others, a federal judge on May 11 ordered President Donald Trump to turn over key documents related to his Executive Order banning travel from six Muslim majority countries and freezing the refugee resettlement program.

Among other things, the order—which applies to pre-election communications among high-profile Trump campaign advisors about his proposed “Muslim ban”—specifically called for the release of a memo from a commission created by Rudolph Giuliani, whom Trump tasked with implementing the ban. Giuliani has publicly said that Trump wanted the commission to find the “right way to do it legally.” That commission reportedly included disgraced former National Security Advisor Gen. Michael Flynn.

The order, issued by Judge Victoria Roberts of the Eastern District in Michigan, ordered the memo released by May 19, with the remaining documents due by June 2.

“We believe these documents will show exactly how the Muslim Ban that Donald Trump called for on the campaign trail turned into the Executive Order he issued a week after taking office,” said Miriam Aukerman, senior staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan. “If the administration now still refuses to turn over these papers, the question will be: What is it trying to hide?”

The judge’s order also applies to transition period communications involving congressional staff members who reportedly were involved in drafting the Executive Order.

The government has not yet said whether it will continue to oppose release of the documents, although it previously argued that the documents were covered by executive privilege and therefore exempt from disclosure. The court, however, noted that the government has repeatedly said that Candidate Trump’s anti-Muslim statements should not be considered in evaluating the constitutionality of the Executive Order because he was not yet President. “Defendants cannot repeatedly make that argument, only later to assert an executive privilege objection to discovery regarding information related to pre-inauguration Trump,” wrote Judge Roberts.

After the ban was challenged in courts across the country, the Trump Administration has denied that the Executive Order equates to a Muslim ban.

“Despite his campaign rhetoric, President Trump keeps trying to convince the country that this is not a Muslim Ban,” said Nabih Ayad, attorney for the Arab-American Civil Rights League (ACRL). “But yet he is fighting incredibly hard to keep the public in the dark about any background information related to his Executive Order. The court’s ruling will help shed light on what his true motivations were. For more information, contact the ACLU of Michigan online www.acluofmichigan.org



Back Row Left to Right: Jewish Ensemble Theatre Production Stage Manager Harold Jurkiewicz, HELP-Corktown Health Center Chief Development Officer Patrick Yankee, Director of Theatre Promotions at Wayne State University Devon Redmond, AEA Liaison Committee Chair Dana Gamarra, UNIFIED President and CEO William VanHemert and Executive Director of World AIDS Day Detroit Maxwell Cameron. Front row: AEA Liaison Committee Co-Chair’s Trudy Mason and Peggy Thorp, Barbara Locke-Jones and Christina Fluker with the Community Health Awareness Group. BTL Photo Alex Godin

Equity Theatre Group Gives Back to HIV/AIDS Organizations

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

FERNDALE - Members of the Detroit area Actors Equity Association Liaison Committee presented checks on May 8 to organizations in the community fighting against HIV/AIDS. Representatives from UNIFIED - HIV Health & Beyond, Detroit World AIDS Day, Health Emergency Lifeline Programs (HELP), and the Community Health Awareness Group were invited to the Matrix MAC Health Office in Ferndale to receive their awards.

A total of \$11,000 to share with these organizations was made possible by the Equity & Friends Fight AIDS campaign established in 1988 to collect donations from audiences in professional theatres to be used for education, research, support and care for people living with HIV/AIDS in Southeast Michigan.

“We strongly believe in helping these community groups to do their good work,” said Peggy Thorp, AEA Liaison Committee Co-Chair and EFFA Co-Chair. “Every nickel that is raised stays here.”

That wasn’t always the case when the Actors Equity Association launched their national campaign known as Broadway Cares in the mid ‘80s to raise money for HIV/AIDS support. This grew into an

“We have been amazed at the response. Patrons have been incredibly generous,” said Peggy Thorp, pointing to this year’s participating theatres: Detroit Repertory Theatre, Hilberry Theatre, Jewish Ensemble Theatre, Meadow Brook Theatre, Tipping Point Theatre and Williamston Theatre.

annual movement to involve Equity theatres from coast to coast and their patrons, but Thorp said not enough money was being generated in the Detroit area.

Since its inception 30 years ago, EFFA has raised over \$135,000 for this cause. The campaign has traditionally been started in November around Thanksgiving and runs for a couple weeks leading up to and in honor of World AIDS Day on December 1. However, the group has received donations from theatres at all times of the year depending on when it is appropriate to their season to run the campaign. Cast and crew members

deliver heartfelt appeals to audiences after their performances to donate.

“We have been amazed at the response. Patrons have been incredibly generous,” said Thorp, pointing to this year’s participating theatres: Detroit Repertory Theatre, Hilberry Theatre, Jewish Ensemble Theatre, Meadow Brook Theatre, Tipping Point Theatre and Williamston Theatre.

Past supporters include Two Muses Theatre, Purple Rose Theatre, Detroit Public Theatre, The Ringwald Theatre, Gem & Century Theatres, Abreact Theatre, Plowshares Theatre, Performance Network Theatre and University of Detroit Mercy.

“We are all volunteers who have been doing this for a long long time,” said Dana Gamarra, AEA Liaison Committee Chair. “People have come together to contribute their monies to something way beyond themselves. This is something we are very proud to be a part of.”

Connect with Equity & Friends Fight AIDS at 1645 Pinecrest Drive in Ferndale. For more information, email masonmacdearborn@gmail.com or peggity111@gmail.com. Learn more about the Actors Equity Association online www.actorsequity.org.



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Comey Firing Heightens Suspicions of Trump Wrongdoing

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, WASHINGTON BLADE

President Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey as he was conducting an investigation of the Trump campaign's ties to Russia has stunned America and ignited a firestorm of controversy – and LGBT advocates are among those railing against the termination as evidence Trump has something to hide.

Comey was dismissed months after he acknowledged in testimony to Congress the FBI was conducting a probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election and potential coordination with the Trump campaign on those efforts. Trump's firing of Comey raises serious questions about whether the president sought to thwart the investigation and potential charges against him.

Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, said Comey's firing as he was conducting an investigation into Trump's ties with Russia raises concerns over the rule of law.

"The fact that Comey was investigating possible wrongdoing in connection with Trump's relationship with Russia makes this deeply troubling and creates an appearance that Trump is seeking to impede that investigation," Minter said. "The lack of process and respect for the traditional independence of the FBI is breathtaking. This administration is inflicting serious damage on our institutions and shared values, including respect for the rule of law."

The White House announced late May 9 Trump had fired Comey at the recommendation of U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Deputy Attorney Rod Rosenstein. Provided by the White House was the termination letter in which the president says Comey informed him "on three separate occasions he's not under investigation."

Also made public were letters recommending the termination by Sessions and Rosen, who cited Comey's handling of the investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server and the decision to hold a news conference announcing charges wouldn't be pursued as grounds for dismissal.

The nation's largest LGBT group, the Human Rights Campaign, was out of the gate early after news broke of the Comey firing calling for the appointment of a special prosecutor to continue to investigate Trump ties to Russia.

"Donald Trump just fired the man leading the investigation into his ties to Russia. He did so on the recommendation of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who had promised to recuse himself from that probe after lying under oath

before the Senate Judiciary Committee," HRC President Chad Griffin said. "There is no time for delay in appointing a special prosecutor. Our democracy depends on it. We've been down a similar path before. Congress must put patriotism before party and do what's right for the country."

Comey's dismissal adds fuel to the fire of those regularly protesting the Trump administration. HRC co-sponsored a protest at the White House on May 10 and at the Russian ambassador's residence on Tuesday. The Equality March for Unity and Pride is slated for June 11 in Washington with dozens of other solidarity marches around the country and world set for the same day.

Renewing the call for a bipartisan, independent commission to investigate Russian involvement in the election was Rep. David Cicilline (D-R.I.), one of six openly LGBT members of Congress and a co-chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus.

"The American people deserve the truth," Cicilline said. "The truth about Donald Trump's business interests in Russia. The truth about collusion between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin. And, most importantly, the truth about what the president knew and when he knew it. It's now more important than ever that Congress establish an independent, bipartisan commission outside Donald Trump's Justice Department to uncover the whole truth."

The firing of Comey puts Democrats in a strange position of objecting to his termination after they expressed outrage with Comey's handling of Clinton's email scandal and blamed her loss on a letter he sent to Congress days before the election informing lawmakers of a new email investigation. Comey announced the investigation concluded and no charges would be pursued on the day before the election.

The stated reasons for firing Comey also marks a turnaround for Trump because as a candidate he drew on the ongoing email investigation as a major reason why voters should reject her – at one time pledging as president to appoint as a special prosecutor to continue the investigation after Comey recommended no charges. (At a White House event at the beginning of the Trump administration, Trump jokingly blew kisses at Comey and said he's become "more famous than me.")

At the White House on May 10 following a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Trump made brief comments to the press that Comey was fired "because he was not doing a good job."



President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey on May 9. Photo by Rich Girard

During an interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper May 9, White House counselor Kellyanne Conway said the firing "has nothing to do with Russia."

"Somebody must be getting \$50 every time (Russia) is said on TV," Conway said. "(This) has everything to do with whether the current FBI director has the president's confidence and can faithfully execute his duties."

It's unknown who Trump will nominate to replace Comey, although the successor likely won't pursue the Russian investigation with the same vigor as his predecessor because that person will be screened by Trump before the appointment. New York Magazine, after stopping Trump supporter and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani at D.C.'s Trump International Hotel, reported he's under consideration for the role.

The Center for American Progress, a progressive think-tank that advocates for LGBT rights, issued a statement May 10 calling on the U.S. Senate to refuse to confirm a new FBI director until a special prosecutor is in place.

"We need a special prosecutor, and we need one right now. Every step of the way, President Trump has tried to stifle or kill the Russia investigation," Center for American Progress Senior Fellow Ken Gude said. "Any notion that Trump would fire FBI Director Comey over his handling of the Clinton email investigation is a red herring. No new

FBI Director should be confirmed until a special prosecutor is appointed to lead a truly independent investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia."

During testimony before Congress on May 8, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said he's not aware of any evidence suggesting Trump colluded with Russia to undermine the U.S. election, but that might have changed after he departed his role because he was not aware of an ongoing FBI counter-intelligence investigation.

The New York Times reported May 10 that days before Comey was fired, he requested a significant increase in funding for the Russia investigation. Comey reportedly made the request to Rosenstein, who later made the recommendation to fire the FBI director.

Gregory Angelo, president of Log Cabin Republicans, declined to comment on the Comey firing, saying it's the organization's policy to "always and only comment on issues through the prism of LGBT rights and equality."

"In this instance, I can see no such perspective," Angelo concluded.

At the time of his appointment during the Obama administration, Comey was considered an LGBT-supportive Republican. Comey was among the 131 Republicans in 2013 who signed a friend-of-the-court brief in the case against California's Proposition 8 urging the U.S. Supreme Court to rule in favor of marriage equality. (Comey didn't sign a similar 2015 brief when he was serving as FBI director.)

Jon Davidson, legal director for Lambda Legal, said the Comey firing is outside of his organization's mission when asked to comment on potential concerns it raises for the rule of law, but added Trump has plenty of other officials worth firing.

"Lambda Legal indeed is concerned about the president's commitment to the rule of law, as evidenced by his disparaging comments about judges who are doing their jobs enforcing our nation's laws, including the Constitution," Davidson said. "As for James Comey, he was not on our list of those who currently pose the biggest threats to the LGBT community and to people living with HIV. If the president is in the mood for firing more people, we'd suggest he consider Jeff Sessions, Tom Price, Betsy DeVos, and Roger Severino."

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

Groundswell Announces Fund to Support Women of Color, Trans People of Color

'Liberation Fund' Aims to Ensure Reproductive and Gender Justice by Supporting Grassroots Organizing Efforts

BY BTL STAFF

In the wake of a game-changing election, Groundswell Fund, the largest funder of the U.S. Reproductive Justice movement will launch a new national Liberation Fund to support the strongest grassroots organizing efforts led by women of color and transgender people of color across social justice sectors.

Groundswell's leadership believes that strong grassroots organizing that holds public officials accountable in their home districts is critical to protecting and advancing rights; and that, in the era of Trump, the two groups that bear the greatest burden of white supremacy and misogyny in the U.S. – women of color and transgender people of color – have a vital leadership role to play in the larger resistance movement.

The fund will launch with an initial \$500,000 dollars, and its first set of grantees will be curated by 15 advisors,

“The Liberation Fund will make it easier for donors and funders to identify and resource some of the most effective and innovative organizing at the grassroots led by women of color and transgender people of color.”

- Co-founder of Black Lives Matter and advisor Alicia Garza

organizations are doing just that, energizing newly-engaged people to drive a sea change for greater freedom and justice. Now is the time for funders and donors to meet that level of boldness in their giving strategies,” said Linda Sarsour, fund advisor and CEO of MPower Change.

Co-founder of Black Lives Matter and advisor Alicia Garza adds, “The Liberation Fund will make it easier for donors and funders to identify and resource some of the most effective and innovative organizing at the grassroots led by women of color and transgender people of color. To elevate women of color and trans people of color at a time when our communities are under extreme duress is not only smart, but essential for our survival. There’s never been a better time for donors and funders to put their money directly where change is happening.”

The Liberation Fund’s expansive approach advances Groundswell’s mission of reproductive justice - ensuring we all have the power to make decisions about our bodies, families and futures.

“The greatest force in any fight against fascism is solidarity,” said Vanessa Daniel, Groundswell Fund executive director. “The Trump Administration is trying to divide us. If there is one thing that grassroots organizing efforts run by women of color and trans people of color understand better than anyone else, it’s that, as Audre Lorde once said, none of us live single-issue lives. Our fates are intertwined. If we can’t ensure our

children aren’t deported, shot by the police, or poisoned by polluted drinking water - we don’t have true reproductive justice or freedom. If we can’t stand together to defend those under greatest attack, then we will lack the backbone to protect anyone. Women of color and transgender people of color are shining the light on the path of solidarity that the larger progressive movement must travel in order to win. We must invest in their leadership. The Liberation Fund is dedicated to doing just that.”

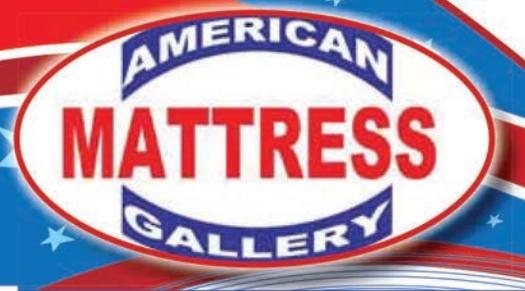
The first fund grants will be awarded in the summer of 2017. “At a time when trans women of color experience and face

disproportionate amounts of violence at the hands of the state and society, it is so critical for movements and resources to amplify the voices of TWOC leaders and community-based organizations that are empowering our most vulnerable” said Isa Noyola, director of programs at the Transgender Law Center. “This fund is a show of support and signal to the movement that we must do better to protect, defend, and uplift TWOC-led work.”

For more information or to make a donation, visit <https://groundswellfund.org/liberation-fund>

prominent women of color leading in a variety of sectors – from environmental, racial and economic justice, to immigrant, Native and transgender rights. The fund is now accepting donations online at <https://groundswellfund.org/donate>.

“Millions of Americans are hungry for leadership that ignites our political imagination and offers clear, concrete pathways forward. Women of color and LGBTQ people of color led



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Parting Glances

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Fog, Er, Log Cabin Redux

A concerned group of Log Cabin gay men – presumably all tied-in-the-Woolite Republicans – who voted for Donald Trump – are very worried that their presidential choice has doomed their collective chance of obtaining Heaven and eternal salvation.

These Log Cabin gays – who number about 250 and live mostly in borderline blue states with red state redemptive theocratic tendencies – now call themselves Born-Again Log Cabin Gays.

Spokesman for the fledgling movement is Watson L, Wishlist, a former theocratic journalist and Doctor of Divinity at Southern Comfort Baptist Seminary. He edits and devotedly tithe-funds the B-A.L.C. monthly publication: One Way or Another!

“O.K. let’s face it. Let’s be honest and say we goofed in supporting Trump for president from the get go,” writes Dr. Wishlist, in a recent, publication issue. “These last 100 days are proof positive that America’s numero 45 is no friend to us. He’s turned our political log cabin into a shaky lego ‘out’ house.

“In our heart of hearts we prayed for ‘The Donald’, believing him to be a man of intelligence, honor, and redemptive justification for gay Republicans of many, many church backgrounds. (We weren’t too worried about our gay Democrat brothers who, as most everyone knows, are a free-thinking lot, mostly not worthy of sharing the spiritual time of high-noon day.)

“But let’s be honest. Let’s give our gay Democrats the heads up on one thing. Being gay isn’t a choice. It’s a biological predisposition. And a political birthright! There’s consensus on that score. Unfortunately Donald Trump has screwed things up royally for everybody.

“He’s opened the revolving door to bully boy clout to too many churches, with too many ‘entry fees’ into heaven. (Most, of course, are tax free, but that’s another story.)

“Truth of the matter is that thanks to the Big DTease and his political, golf-caddying appointees, churches can now legally shut and seal our Log Cabin door. And that’s not fair game.

“It’s time for we who now call ourselves Born Again Log Cabin Gays to announce to the world our ‘Sure Fire Plan of Salvation By Faith for All Gay Republicans’.

“We ask all of our 250 membership to honestly sign our Sure Fire Pledge and to put into practice these steps to ensure that the afterlife will not be slammed in our Republican faces. (Sorry, gay Democrats you must fend for yourselves). Pledge the following:

“(1): Be baptized both by sprinkling and by total immersion, in the name of the Trinity and by Jesus’s name; (2) Attend church both on Sunday and on Saturday, the unchanged Sabbath Day; (3) Keep all Holy Days of Obligation, fasting on Friday and by eating fish only; (4) Learn to speak in tongues, especially at Republican gatherings; (5) Wear a Mormon Temple-blessed undergarment, and (6) Just to be on the safe side, have a Mormon proxy baptism for yourself and a Democrat person, if your spouse.

“Statement to be signed, with two non-Democrat Party witnesses for notary affixation: I, the undersigned member in good standing of the Born-Again Log Cabin Gays, do signify that, as a true believer in the possibility that Republican LGBTs are entitled to be welcomed in Heaven, I wholeheartedly agree – perhaps with just a hint of cautious reservation – to follow the Authorized Steps for Full Political Salvation.

“NOTE: Weekly confession is certainly a plus. As long as your priest is not a Democrat!” Amen and Abe Lincoln.



BY MICHELLE E. BROWN

Viewpoint

Channeling Our Anger to Bend the Arc

I t’s been over 100 days and I’m still angry. I’ve been angry since November. It’s not sour grapes just because my candidate did not win. This is anger, righteous indignation!

I’m angry that the promise, the American dream, is not just a dream deferred but – for millions seeking equality, justice, refuge from oppression, poverty and war – it’s a dream that got flushed down the political crapper.

I’m angry that on an almost daily basis, something comes out of Washington, D.C. that not only insults my intelligence but the intelligence of the global community.

I’m angry that despite the sheer madness of these activities a deluded group of partisan politicians continue to support and fail to do what they were sent to Washington to do.

I’m angry that the bearers of these daily mad tidings – the decision makers, the mansplainers and stepford-wife/fembots – not only don’t look like my neighbors, family and community, but haven’t a clue about our

lives.

I’m angry that the same level of political dysfunction extends beyond Washington, D.C. and is equally rampant in state houses across the country.

I’m angry that after struggling without healthcare before the Affordable Care Act, I’m rushing around now trying to get procedures done because I’m afraid that I will be one of the 24 million Americans unable to afford insurance under Trumpcare - that is if I am even able to get coverage because of my preexisting conditions. I remember those days without healthcare - putting off standard procedures, deciding which every day expense was more important than my medicine, and the overwhelming burden of medical expenses for an uninsured visit to the emergency room - too many of us remember.

AIDS/HIV, Alcohol or drug abuse, Alzheimer’s/dementia, Anorexia, Arthritis, Bulimia, Cancer, Cerebral palsy, Congestive heart failure, Coronary artery/heart disease/bypass surgery, Crohn’s disease,

See next page

► Brown: Bend the Arc

Continued from p. 10

Diabetes, Epilepsy, Hemophilia, Hepatitis, Kidney disease/renal failure, Lupus, Mental disorders (including Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder and Depression), Multiple sclerosis, Muscular dystrophy, Obesity, Organ transplant, Paraplegia, Paralysis, Parkinson's disease, Pneumocystic pneumonia, Pregnancy, Sleep apnea, Stroke, Transsexualism are just some conditions considered pre-existing conditions.

Who doesn't have or know of someone who has one of these conditions? So, what are we to do with our friends, families even ourselves if we have one of these pre-existing conditions?

But the vote wasn't about the health and welfare of the American people. It was just another notch in the political maelstrom of this new GOP reality. And then they got on busses to head to the White House and drink beer to celebrate pushing through the AHCA that, for the most part, none of the GOP Congressmen had even read – oh hell yeah I'm angry!

I'm angry that millions are spent for trips to and security for unauthorized white houses (i.e. Trump properties in New York, Florida, New Jersey, etc.) while families in Flint, MI and other urban areas don't have safe water. Money that could prevent cuts to programs like meals-on-wheels. Meals that aren't gourmet fare – just basic meals - that provide low income, and often homebound seniors a hot, nutritious meal delivered to their doorstep. Money that could go to federally funded after-school programs that can boost academic performance, reduce risky behaviors, promote physical health, and provide a safe, structured environment for the children of working parents.

I'm angry that every frigging week-end, instead of putting my dancing shoes on, I'm lacing up my boots and taking it to the streets marching – for women, for science, for immigration rights, for education, for the environment, for LGBTQ rights, for families, for Planned parenthood, etc.

I mean it's every damn weekend for basic human rights, for battles we thought we had already fought and won.

Yes, I'm angry but I'm still lacing up my shoes and marching. I'm taking a deep breath and having conversations with folks who didn't vote or voted for Stein or Sanders. I've even had a conversation with a repentant trump supporter who admitted voting on one issue – abortion – and now realized the short sightedness in her decision.

I hear Howard Beale's words from the movie NETWORK echoing in my head "I'm mad as Hell

and I'm not going to take this anymore!" But this isn't a movie, its real life right now in America.

As an African American, queer, woman, parent, environmentalist, artist, activist and so much more, I stand in the crosshairs of my intersectionality. I can't stay safely in any one

lane of my multiple identities and hope the rest will work itself out. They've put a bull's eye on my back so doing nothing simply is NOT an option.

I'm having conversations with folks across lines of race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, ages, sexual orientation and gender identity. Conversations that connect the dots across our varying identities to form a picture of our humanity. Our lives are not a one-lane road. They are an intersectional multi-laned superhighway and if we all want to make it to the finish line for the world, the environment and our humanity, we had damned well better learn how to navigate.

So in the face of opposition, obstacles and discouraging lack of leadership we must PERSIST even if that means marching every day, every weekend, every month. To borrow

from a gospel hymn we can't feel no ways tired. We've come too far from where we started from. Nobody told us that the road would be easy.

When they try to give us fake news, double talk and straight up lies we must INSIST on accountability, demand our legislators do the job we elected them to do. That means showing up at their offices, signing petitions, writing letters, making phone calls, sending faxes and if they still ignore us, exercising our power and voting them out of office.

2018 elections are right around the corner. Your vote can count but you have to vote for it to count!

And more than ever we must RESIST. Resist the urge to give up and be silent. Resist apathy and despair. Resist the urge to only cast blame and not find solutions. But most importantly resist giving up our humanity and succumbing to the fear, polarization and vitriolic rhetoric that brought us to this place.

When receiving the "Profile in Courage Award" President Barack Obama said "I believe what

Dr. King said, that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice," but I've also said it does not bend on its own. It bends because we bend it, because we put our hand on that arch, and we move it in the direction of justice and freedom and equality and kindness and generosity. It doesn't happen on its own."

It's time we step up our efforts and put our hearts, minds and spirits on that arch.

Let's PERSIST, INSIST and RESIST and bend it once again in the direction of justice, freedom and equality for all.

Michelle E. Brown is a public speaker, activist and author. Her weekly podcast "Collections by Michelle Brown" airs every Thursday at 7 p.m. and can be heard on Blog Talk Radio, iTunes, Stitcher and SoundCloud. Follow her on Facebook at Collections byMichelle Brown.

Creep of the Week

Donald Trump

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

As Benjamin Franklin was leaving the Constitutional Convention of 1787 somebody asked him what kind of government the U.S. was going to have. "A republic," he replied. "If you can keep it."

And for over 200 years we've managed to do that. Our Republic is still standing. It hasn't been easy. In fact, at times it's downright ugly. But we have ideals, damn it, and we keep trying to get it right.

But are we honestly even trying anymore?

Ever since the election of Donald Trump I've heard Franklin's voice in my head saying, "If you can keep it" over and over. (For the record, Franklin's voice sounds exactly like radio DJ Alan Almond, a voice that used to terrify me as a child.)

Trump's on a rampage and he's leaving democratic norms crumbling in his wake. Meanwhile, Republicans, who have the majority in the House and Senate, are just standing by and watching. Actually, they're helping him do it by not doing their jobs.

The fact of the matter is, we have never had a president this dangerously ignorant before. This contemptuous of the Constitution. This petty and gross.

But here we are.

Some people say that Trump makes them miss George W. Bush and, furthermore, maybe we were wrong to criticize Bush so much. I disagree. Bush was a terrible president. He sent us to war based on lies. He appointed right-wing yahoos to his cabinet and the federal bench. He supported amending the Constitution to deny same-sex couples the right to marry.

Was he better than Trump? Well, yes. But that's a low bar. Trump is the worst. So much progress made by Obama is being walked backwards: LGBTQ rights, environmental protections, voting rights, criminal sentencing reform, expanded access to health insurance, even encouraging kids to eat vegetables. It's painful to watch.

Most painful of all is watching as all of the parts that work to "keep" the Republic are torn apart and flung here and there like an exploding cartoon cuckoo clock.

Except this isn't a cartoon. But Trump is certainly a caricature. He's a clownish buffoon who has been nothing but honest about himself with the American people. Yes, he lies about everything, even things that are easily disproved with a quick Google search, but his lying is part of



Trump is the worst. So much progress made by Obama is being walked backwards: LGBTQ rights, environmental protections, voting rights, criminal sentencing reform, expanded access to health insurance, even encouraging kids to eat vegetables. It's painful to watch.

his honesty about who he is. "I'm a liar!" he screams. "I care only about myself! I shouldn't be trusted. I'm a terrible person." He's been telling us for decades.

Yet he was elected anyway.

And now? A lot depends on the Republicans in Congress who have already shown that they're more than happy to kiss Trump's ass if it gets them closer to giving tax cuts to the wealthy and taking away health care from the poor. I'm not holding my breath.

Many people have their sights set on the 2018 midterms, hoping for a Democratic wave to take the Republicans out and put grown ups in charge. I hope for that, too.

But I worry that Democrats think that Trump's abysmal reign is going to do all of the work for them. It won't. Millions of people voted for this man even after he told us, showed us even, that he was unfit. The Democrats have their work cut out for them.

A man who hears "If you can keep it" as a dare instead of a warning is a lunatic, not a leader. Lunatics can be entertaining, but they can also be dangerous. We are not obligated to let Trump lead our Republic off a cliff. In fact, in a functioning Republic we are obligated to stop him. So I guess this is the test. I sure hope we pass.

White House 'Not Aware' if Trump Briefed on Chechnya Anti-gay Abuses

The White House said May 9 it was unaware of whether President Trump brought up the issue of anti-gay abuses in Chechnya with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during a meeting May 10. In fact, it's not clear that Trump has been briefed on the abuses at all.

Under questioning from the Washington Blade, White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders couldn't speak to whether anti-gay abuses in Chechnya came up in the meeting when asked about the omission of the issue from the White House readout.

"I mean a lot of times there are parts of the conversation that aren't specifically included in a readout, but I'm not aware," Sanders said. "I have not had that conversation. So I do not know, I was not part of that meeting. So I cannot speak to every detail and I would have to refer you to the readout on the specifics of what I know was discussed."

Asked whether Trump has been briefed on the issue generally, Sanders replied, "That is something I would have to get back to you on. I am not 100 percent sure."

UPDATE: Michael Anton, a White House National Security Council spokesperson, said via email to the Washington Blade the issue of anti-gay abuses in Chechnya "did not come up in the meetings" with Lavrov.

Concern persists over reports from Chechnya that local authorities have arrested more than 100 gay men and sent them to secret prisons



White House spokesperson Sarah Huckabee Sanders said she's not aware if President Trump has been briefed on anti-gay violence in Chechnya. Screenshot via CSPAN

for torture. At least four men have reportedly died as a result. On May 9, the Human Rights Campaign held a demonstration outside the D.C. residence of Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak over the reported abuses.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley has spoken out against the atrocities, but President Trump himself and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have said nothing. Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Theresa

May has spoken out and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she raised the issue during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The readout of the meeting Trump held at the White House indicates Trump raised the issue of Syria, Ukraine, cooperation in resolving conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere and a general "desire to build a better relationship between the United States

and Russia." But the readout says nothing about Trump bringing up the issue of anti-gay abuses in Chechnya.

Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO of GLAAD, lambasted the White House in a statement for not being able to disclose if Trump was even aware of widespread reports of the anti-gay violence.

"It is shocking that the White House can't even confirm if President Trump is 'aware' of the anti-LGBTQ violence in Chechnya. It seems President Trump is only aware of news that includes his own name," Ellis said. "If President Trump doesn't join Ambassador Haley and other world leaders in condemning this humanitarian crisis, it is only further evidence that his administration is working to force LGBTQ people around the globe back into the closet."

Trump held the meeting with Lavrov the day after he terminated former FBI Director James Comey, who was investigating Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election and potential collusion between Trump and Russia in the effort.

The Blade has placed a request with the Russian embassy in the United States seeking comment on whether the issue of reported anti-gay violence in Chechnya came up during the meeting.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

49 House Members Urge HHS to Restore LGBT Questions to Elder Survey

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, WASHINGTON BLADE

A group of 49 U.S. House members last week called on the Department of Health & Health Services to restore questions allowing responders to identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual to a federal survey for elders.

The letter, dated May 11, says the questions must be restored to the the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants, or NSOAP, because the survey examines whether services such as meal home delivery and caregiver support are reaching all elders.

"LGBT seniors deserve to have their specific needs examined," the letter says. "To erase LGBT demographic questions from the NSOAP is to pretend the needs of older LGBT Americans do not exist. Indeed, it is to pretend that LGBT older Americans do not exist."

Much to the dismay of LGBT advocacy groups, the Trump administration indicated in

March it would remove questions seeking to identify the sexual orientation of respondents from the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants, or NSOAP. (A Federal Register notice indicating the survey would not be changed, although an examination of proposals reveals the questions are removed.)

At the time, HHS said the LGBT questions were part of a pilot test and removed because the sample response "has not been sufficient enough to date to allow for reliability and reporting."

The lead for the letter was Rep. Ted Deutch (D-Fla.), chair of the LGBT Aging Issues Task Force, who said in a statement "it's important to recognize the unique needs of LGBT seniors" in the effort to fight for LGBT rights.

"Older LGBT Americans often face new levels of discrimination as they age and struggle with higher than average levels of poverty and social isolation," Deutch said. "Federally funded programs should not



Rep. Ted Deutch (D-Fla.) is calling for the restorations of LGBT questions in an elder survey. Photo public domain

contribute to this terrible homophobic and transphobic culture. We need the data from these surveys to better ensure that LGBT seniors are receiving the care they need and

deserve, without prejudice."

The letter is signed by four of the six openly LGB members of Congress: Reps. Jared Polis (D-Colo.), David Cicilline (D-R.I.), Mark Takano (D-Calif.) and Mark Pocan (D-Wis.). Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-N.Y.), who's gay, and Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.), who's bisexual, didn't sign it. The bipartisan letter is also signed by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), an LGBT-supportive Republican.

The letter is similar a different one last month led by Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Bob Casey (D-Pa.) that was signed by 19 senators urging HHS to restore the question to the survey.

The Washington Blade has placed a request in HHS seeking comment on the letter.

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DNC Hires First Lesbian CEO

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, WASHINGTON BLADE

The Democratic National Committee has for the first-time ever hired an out lesbian at its chief executive officer, appointing the former head of EMILY's LIST to the top leadership position.

The DNC named Jess O'Connell as CEO after she served four years at EMILY's LIST, which seeks to elect pro-choice women to public office. Her appointment comes shortly after the election of Tom Perez as DNC chair.

"Every single day we are witnessing unprecedented activism and excitement across our nation," O'Connell said in a statement. "I am thrilled to join the fight at the national party to make sure we translate this moment into a movement, and a movement into votes. The DNC has incredible potential and, under the leadership of Chair Perez, I'm ready to jump in and help make this organization more inclusive, effective, and influential."

As CEO, O'Connell will oversee the day-to-day operations and DNC-wide restructuring as the organization undergoes a transition after Democratic losses in the 2016 election. The goals of the DNC are to strengthen the organization, increase collaboration with progressive partners and better serve state parties, territory parties and Democrats abroad.

"Jess has an impressive progressive track record and I am honored that she will lend her talents to rebuilding our party and electing Democrats," Perez said in a statement. "She knows that we as a party need to get back



to basics. We need to organize in every zip code and better communicate our message of inclusion and opportunity. We know what happens when Democrats don't win, because we are bearing witnesses to the chaos and harm to working families that results with Republicans at the helm.

Soon after his election as DNC chair, Perez asked all top level officials who were previously at the organization to submit their letters of resignation. But O'Connell's appointment isn't a consequence of that action. A DNC spokesperson said there was no one in the role of chief executive officer at the time Perez came to the DNC.

Prior to her work at EMILY's List, O'Connell was senior vice president and chief of staff for the Center for American Progress and served as a progressive activist for more than 20 years. She lives in Maryland with her spouse Holly, a librarian with Montgomery County Public Schools.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

Gavin Grimm to Speak at Capital Pride

BY LOU CHIBBARO JR., WASHINGTON BLADE

Gavin Grimm, the transgender male student at a Virginia high school who petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to gain the right to use the school bathroom that matches his gender identity, will be a special guest speaker at D.C.'s Capital Trans Pride events on May 20.

The 2017 Capital Trans Pride takes place at D.C.'s Studio Theater at 1501 14th St., N.W.

Organizers say the event consists of a full day of nine workshops that address a wide range of transgender issues; the showing of the award-winning film "Major!: A Documentary Film," which showcases the life of a black transgender elder who has been advocating for the rights of trans women of color for over 40 years; and a Resource Fair that includes participation by more than 25 organizations providing services to the trans community.

Grimm graduates this year from Gloucester High School in Gloucester County, which

is considered part of the Norfolk-Virginia metropolitan area. He brought suit against his local school board after his school refused to allow him to use the men's bathroom. His case became the subject of national media reports, making him a spokesperson for transgender rights.

"Capital Trans Pride brings together the community for both a celebration and to share important information that has the potential to change the lives of those who attend," said Bianca Rey, executive director of Capital Trans Pride. "We've made significant progress regarding visibility, empowerment, and rights, but now more than ever, we must all continue to work to secure full equality," Rey said in a statement.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

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Poll: Support for Same-Sex Marriage at All-time High

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, WASHINGTON BLADE

An all-time high of 64 percent of Americans now support same-sex marriage nearly two years after the U.S. Supreme Court's historic decision in favor of marriage equality nationwide, according to a Gallup poll.

The poll, published Monday, finds support for same-sex marriage is at the highest since Gallup since first polled the issue in 1996 -- when support for gay nuptials was at 27 percent. The level of support in 2017 is three points higher than when Gallup polled on the issue last year and found 61 percent of Americans back same-sex marriage.

Despite finding record support for same-sex marriage, Gallup says the results are "not meaningfully different" from last year. The margin of sampling error for the poll, which was conducted by phone interviews between May 3 and May 4, is plus-or-minus 4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, legislation continues to percolate through state legislatures that would allow businesses to opt out of offering wedding services to same-sex couples and government officials to refuse licenses to them.

The poll found support for same-sex marriage among Democrats is 74 percent followed closely by independents at 71 percent. Meanwhile, support for same-sex marriage among Republicans is comparatively low and at 47 percent, although that level of support is the highest ever recorded for that party.

For the first time, the poll found a majority of Protestants, 55 percent, favor same-sex marriage. A majority of Catholics (despite the opposition to same-sex marriage from church leadership) have consistently supported same-sex marriage since 2011. This year, Gallup found 65 percent of Catholics support same-sex marriage.

President Trump in his 2016 presidential campaign opposed same-sex marriage, but after his election said he's "fine" with the Supreme Court decision and considers the issue "settled.

Log Cabin Meets with Education Dept. Over Trans Issues

BY CHRIS JOHNSON, WASHINGTON BLADE

In the aftermath of the Trump administration revoking Obama-era guidance assuring transgender kids have access to school restrooms consistent with their gender identity, the Log Cabin Republicans met with Education Department officials May 9 to propose a new plan that would support transgender kids and local authority in schools.

At the meeting, the Log Cabin Republicans presented a white paper by Log Cabin and Liberty Education Forum to make the case for its proposals along with its Transgender Leadership Caucus.

In a statement that called the Obama-era regulations "onerous," Gregory Angelo, president of Log Cabin, said the white paper "marks the culmination of weeks of work on behalf of transgender students, but it does not mark the end of our efforts."

"Log Cabin Republicans remains committed to the safety of transgender students and the equality of all students, and we look forward to continued conversations with the Trump administration to achieve that end," Angelo said.

In February, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and Attorney General Jeff Sessions revoked the guidance, which was jointly issued by the Education and Justice Departments in the final year of the Obama administration. The guidance informed schools they could be at risk of losing funds under Title IX if they discriminate against trans students or refuse to allow them bathroom access consistent with their gender identity.

The white paper makes the case for federal guidance that protects transgender students and respects local control as courts across the country are finding Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 requires states to allow transgender students to use the restroom consistent with their gender identity.

"There exists an important need to provide basic liberties to all students while still respecting the diverse municipal landscapes which comprise the thousands of school districts in our nation," the paper says. "A transgender student's freedom needs to be handled in the same responsible manner that applies to their non-transgender peers. If consistent accommodations are being made for non-transgender students, those same accommodations must be made for their transgender peers."

The white paper recommends the renaming of single stall, single-sex restrooms as



Log Cabin meets with the Education Department officials. Photo courtesy Twitter

single stall, gender-inclusive restrooms; inspecting multiple stall restrooms to ensure they possess adequate locks for security; and providing curtains and partitions for locker room changing areas. Each of these changes, the white paper says, would come at infinitesimal costs, citing seven schools throughout the country that made similar changes at minimal expense.

Members of Log Cabin's Transgender Leadership Caucus who were present at the meeting were Jordan Evans, Regina Roberts, Jennifer Williams and Susan Maddison, according to the organization.

"The promise of the Trump phenomenon was that LGBT people could get our full rights protected under a Republican president, without our having to serve as cannon fodder for the Democrat[ic] Party," Maddison stated. "That hasn't happened yet, but today's meeting is a first step toward realizing that promise. If the meeting leads to solid actions, our community may finally get liberated from the stifling ideological cages, and America will come out much the stronger for it."

The meeting took place after Log Cabin faced criticism when Angelo reportedly didn't denounce anti-trans remarks at a recent forum in New York City for gay conservatives. Log Cabin responded on Twitter that Angelo did speak in favor of transgender rights (although those remarks didn't seem to be in response to the anti-trans comments).

Whether Log Cabin's proposals will be accepted by the Trump administration or other LGBT advocates remains to be seen. The National Center for Transgender Equality didn't immediately respond to the Blade's request for comment on the Log Cabin white paper.

Angelo declined to comment on which principals attended the meeting, citing the off-the-record nature of the discussion. DeVos' public schedule had no meeting with Log Cabin scheduled for Tuesday and instead indicated she was in Salt Lake City for a conference.

If DeVos had attended the Log Cabin meeting, it wouldn't be the first time she met with LGBT advocates as education secretary. In March, representatives from a trio of LGBT advocacy groups -- the National Center for Transgender Equality, GLSEN and Equality Michigan -- met with DeVos in the aftermath of the rollback of the Obama-era guidance.

The Education Department didn't respond to multiple requests from the Blade May 9 to comment on the meeting.

This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

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Unconditional Love Trumps Prejudice

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

Jason Karoumy will never forget the day he came out to his parents. His text message read, "I'm gay. I'm engaged to the person you thought was my friend and I'm getting married this year."

Three bombs dropped all at once. "They didn't take it well," he said. "I didn't do it the best way though. It was really really bad to text them, but I was too terrified to do it face to face or to call."

What happened next though was even more terrifying for 27-year-old Karoumy.

"They kept calling, wanting to argue," he said, noting his mom, a traditional Middle Eastern woman, has a bad

temper. "When I didn't answer the phone, they came to my house. I didn't answer the door. I kept hearing loud noises outside. It was scary so I called the police and had them removed."

The arguing continued for weeks.

"They told me they don't want to talk to me and I'm not their son anymore," he said.

Karoumy's parents are from Iraq. Their conservative Christian beliefs are extremely prejudice towards his lifestyle as an Arab gay man.

"A family's reputation is huge in the Arabic community. This was the worst thing I could do. They would rather I marry a woman and do this on the side," he said, adding that his mom took the news much harder than his dad. "She might never fully accept it and probably

would have reacted the same way regardless of how I told them."

Admitting who he truly is came at the cost of losing his family.

"It was very rough," said Karoumy about the price he was willing to pay for the freedom to be himself, but he was tired of being "fake" and having to live a double life.

And he was in love.

"It was instantaneous," he said. Karoumy met with Jason Ripley, 37, for the first time in person at Starbucks in Royal Oak in April 2012.

"I was most attracted to his confidence, energy, and openness. We talked on the phone once before meeting and I felt so comfortable around him as if we had known each other for a long time," said Ripley. "I would later marry him for this



“I was most attracted to his confidence, energy, and openness. We talked on the phone once before meeting and I felt so comfortable around him as if we had known each other for a long time.”

– Jason Ripley

Jason Ripley and Jason Karoumy were married on October 24, 2015. Photo courtesy of Jeffrey McIntyre Fine Art Photography & Design

and that he shares my motivation to achieve goals, be active, and most importantly he loves my children.”

Ripley is father to Zachary and Abigail, a gift from his previous marriage to a woman. After telling his wife he was gay, Ripley said things worked out for the best.

“We separated very amicably and still talk to each other often as we still are parents to two wonderful children. My family and friends were nearly all supportive. Looking back now, I know I would make the same choice even if I knew things would not turn out as well for me.”

Karoumy said he enjoyed being a father figure to six younger siblings, a few of which he is still close with.

“I actually liked the fact that he has kids. I always wanted to have kids,” he said, describing the first time he met Ripley’s kids

as “exciting and not awkward at all. They are pretty open-minded and we clicked.”

Just as he clicked with the rest of Ripley’s family.

“They are very accepting, the exact opposite,” said Karoumy, realizing that his situation is a lot to deal with. He said Ripley “only put up with this because he wanted to be with me.”

On their three-year anniversary, Ripley proposed at the same coffee shop where it all began.

“This has been eye-opening to say the least. I was very unfamiliar with Arabic culture before I met Jason and was not prepared for the level of close-minded, hurtful, and even violent response there was to his coming out,” he said. “Even two years after coming out, it is torture for me to watch his parents

See Marriage, page 18




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► Marriage

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torment him while I can do nothing to help the situation.”

Ripley said he recognizes the struggle and can “only be there to love and support him along the way in any way that I can each day.”

This is a commitment he made during their wedding on October 24, 2015 at the Lakeland Banquet Centre in St. Clair Shores. Officiant Robert Yelverton married the couple in front of 150 of their friends and Ripley’s family.

Not one in attendance was from Karoumy’s family.

“They knew about it. I was scared they would do something so we had security there,” said Karoumy. “It shouldn’t be terrifying on this day, but it was. Threats were made, but we kept pushing through. I told them this is what I want and I’m sorry that you don’t accept it. Thankfully nothing happened.”

Despite not having his family there, Karoumy said their wedding was complete with a bow tie-themed ceremony and reception. Several of their best “groomsmen” were at their sides. Their colors of choice were Orchid and silver. Their three-tier vanilla and banana cake was made by Mannino’s Bakery in Sterling Heights.

Upon return from their Carnival Cruise Line honeymoon for 11 days, the couple settled into their Royal Oak home together.

Karoumy said he is in a better place now.

“I am so much more relaxed. I no longer have anxiety attacks,” he said.

Although Karoumy does not see his family as often as he might like, he still gets his cultural fix in a number

of ways.

“Jason appreciates my ethnicity. I speak Arabic. He tries to learn. What’s amazing about him is that he cooks Arabic food. It tastes a little different, but it’s his version of it. I cannot cook, but I am glad he can,” said Karoumy. “He follows recipes to make all the meals. We eat a lot of Thai and Indian food, too. And we like to travel to different countries together.”

Ripley said they are both happier having made the choice to be together.

“I’m not a very religious person. I understand and respect other’s beliefs, when they aren’t affecting me,” he said. “However, I’ve found it is simpler to live by my own set of morals and to strive to be a good person rather than follow the direction of others, especially if they are telling us it is a sin to be who we are.”

When asked what he would say to other Arab men who struggle with being gay, Karoumy said he say to them what he said to himself.

“Do you want to be consumed by worry? Or do you want to live comfortably and happy? What is more important to you? What people think of you? Or your own happiness. Just be yourself.”



Above: The couple’s bow tie-themed wedding cake was made at Mannino’s Bakery in Sterling Heights. Below: Jason Ripley with his children, Zachary and Abigail, and his husband Jason Karoumy. Photos courtesy of Jeffrey McIntyre Fine Art Photography & Design

Finding Commonality: Dr. Farha Abbasi

BY TODD A. HEYWOOD

Dr. Farha Abbasi came to the U.S. in 2000 to escape the growing radicalism and political chaos in Pakistan. While she was a medical doctor in her homeland, the U.S. required her to re-certify under U.S. laws and in the process she discovered psychiatry. In January of 2009, Dr. Abbasi was awarded the American Psychiatric Association SAMSHA Minority Fellowship. She used the grant money to create awareness about cultural competency, to redefine it as not just tolerance for others but rather acceptance. Her areas of interest are cultural psychiatry and teaching medical students how to provide culturally appropriate care to Muslim patients. She works directly with the Muslim American community to encourage integration rather than isolation from main stream society. Dr. Abbasi is a professor and clinician at Michigan State University. As a leading voice in the Muslim community specializing in mental health, she is trying to create a safe place for LGBTQ youth in the community.

You came here after winning a visa in a lottery. But you were originally reluctant to move to the U.S. Why did that change?

The thing that was really scary was when people you knew were being randomly kidnapped or killed or kids being kidnapped and held for ransom. All that. The values in the country started changing. Women had to cover their head before coming out of the house. You saw the TV channels were propagating a militant kind of religion. We were not comfortable. That's not how I was raised...I had three girls. I didn't want them to be raised where they have to be segregated or have to have armed guards for their protection in order for them to do anything. I was raised in a family where education was very important. Never in my house was I told, "You are a girl. You cannot do it." The only time I think my father said 'no' to me was when I really wanted to run the family owned newspaper and he said, 'No, I have to pass it onto a son. That's how the country works. You won't be able to handle (it).' Now things are changed. There are a lot of females running their own newspapers, but when I was growing up they wouldn't let me go into journalism as a career, medicine was considered a far safer choice.

What role do you think that experience of seeing the religious extremism taking over the community that you grew up in? What role does that play in informing that view of mental health?

I always say faith is like a knife. If in a surgeon's hand, it can be used to save lives. If in the wrong hands, it can be used to take life, right? That's why I think it became really important for me because I'm a very religious person. I'm a practicing Muslim, but I am not righteous, thinking I am the only right person around. I believe that spirituality, religiosity, or whatever you practice, is a very important part of your resilience...We cannot have policies or have treatments where we are not taking that into context. At the same time, I also believe that in religion there is no room for intolerance. Religion should not be used as a war weapon or a political jargon. And if we are going to bring up statistics Muslims that are more religious and therefore more knowledgeable on the topic of Islam are far less likely to have radical views, thus I think we need to look at factors beyond religion to understand

See Abbasi, page 18

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► Dr. Abbasi

Continued from p. 19

extremism.

You talk about religion not being intolerant. But Islam has often times been painted as being incredibly anti-LGBTQ.

One thing is the belief, the faith, and ideology and the other thing is the people who practice it. That impacts the perception of the religion. As far as LGBT people are concerned, it's not Islam only, overarching systems and culture affect how every religion is practiced, we see that with groups such as the Westboro Baptist Church. There are approximately 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, all from different countries, speaking different languages with different values. Often times these values are based on culture more than religion, but that's diving into a different conversation. Although I know there are Muslims who identify as more "conservative" are hold certain views, I also know Muslims who are inclusive and intersectional. In fact there are groups such as Muslims for progressive values and Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity, who are doing incredible work. Additionally, I think it is reductive to paint these two marginalized groups at odds when they in fact may overlap.

What role has patriarchy played in this interpretation against LGBTQ people?

Historically we have seen that in all the major religions, there is a deliberate patriarchal interpretation of the text. Islam clearly talks about the equality between men and women, but patriarchy exists in the cultures where it is practiced. Patriarchy functions to oppress women and also anyone who does not fall into the gender binary, or identifies as straight, I think anti-LGBT sentiment in any population has everything to do with this. My work with LGBT youth has been focused on creating a safe space. I know that these kids have high vulnerability to harm themselves, they suffer in silence and die without seeking help. That's the first thing I discussed after the Orlando shooting, that this was not a hate crime based on religion as how many kids at that night club might have been Muslim too? Nobody talks about that. It's just unfortunate that we have created this idea, like being Muslim means something different, some one with horns or a tail and you will know one just by looking at them. You might be surprised to know, your physician, teacher, fire fighter or a friendly neighbor might be one.

Tell me something about Islam that western society might not be familiar with?

Islam actually is inherently feminist, which comes as a surprise because (it has) not necessarily been practiced that way. If you have really read the Koran...the first person who validated the prophecy of Muhammad



Dr. Abbasi

(PBUH) was his wife. She was the first Muslim. Female infanticide was common in many regions before Islam, but the religion was introduced and prohibited this practice. There are Quranic verses that uphold women's rights of identity, entrepreneurship, right to vote and the right to divorce. It is very empowering to me. Unfortunately, most of the cultures that Islam came into were patriarchal societies which could not do justice to the true spirit of Islam.

How does a Trump presidency affect your ability to create safe spaces for young people?

In order to feel safe, you need to feel secure and in order to feel secure you need to be able to trust, for trust to foster, you need a sense of fairness and for justice to prevail. All these have been the major causalities of this election process, we continue to live in unpredictability waiting for the other shoe to drop, where do u start to trust or feel secure or safe...

What are some of the changes you have witnessed in your capacity of observation in the Muslim youth community, specifically amongst LGBTQ youth?

We have seen a tremendous increase in the vulnerabilities of these populations, more depression, anxiety, insomnia and post traumatic stress disorder. The rampant increase in bullying, violence and aggression all contributing factors to the worsening of their mental health challenges. They are afraid to come out and seek care. The stigma and shame perpetuates the conspiracy of secrecy. We absolutely need to break the silence and create safe places for our youth. LGBT Muslims face even more challenges because they are being ostracized on one hand for identifying as LGBT, harassed for being Muslim or both, because people don't realize that LGBT Muslims exist. They exist and they matter.

BTL Senior News Editor Kate Opalewski contributed to this report. Connect with Dr. Farha Abbasi at 517-353-5372 or at farha.abbasi@hc.msu.edu.

Wharton Offers 'Fun Home' in June

BY ENCORE STAFF

The 2015 Tony Award winning Best Musical *Fun Home*, with book and lyrics by Lansing native Lisa Kron, will be part of the 2016-2017 Broadway at Wharton Center Series.

Based on Alison Bechdel's best-selling graphic memoir, *Fun Home* introduces us to Alison at three different ages as she explores and unravels the many mysteries of her childhood that connect with her in surprising new ways. A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, *Fun Home* is a refreshingly honest, wholly original musical about seeing your parents through grown-up eyes.

Fun Home features music by Jeanine Tesori, book and lyrics Lisa Kron and direction by Sam Gold, whose work on this production earned them Tony Awards for Best Score, Best Book and Best Direction. With this win, Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori also made history by becoming the first



Judy Kuhn, Oscar Williams, Zell Steele Morrow, Sydney Lucas, and Michael Cerveris in *Fun Home*. Courtesy photo

female writing team to be awarded the Best Score Tony Award.

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Somewhere Over the (Randy) Rainbow

Trump Satirist on His Journey to Becoming an Internet Sensation & His Famous Parodies

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

If laughter really is the best medicine, political satirist Randy Rainbow just might be your Prozac for the next four years. His buzzy, self-produced video parodies, from last year's Clinton vs. Trump debates to a recent poke at presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway's claim about recording-capable microwave ovens, can't change that we have an imbecile playing president – but they sure as hell ease some of the pain.

As the South Florida native, who now lives in New York, likes to say, "It's terrible for our country, but fabulous for my career." (And, clearly, for the rest of us.)

The current administration's embarrassing disregard for the truth (#BowlingGreenMassacre) and endless parade of senseless spewing has done wonders for Rainbow's rising visibility as a comedian, singer and theater performer. Below his video titled "Alternative Facts," which Rainbow turned into a jingle to the tune

of "Jellicle Cats" from Broadway's "Cats," the lead comment reads, "The only good thing from this hellish election cycle was discovering this channel."

Rainbow's channel launched in 2010 with videos of him phoning imaginary boyfriends such as Kirk Cameron, Mel Gibson and Charlie Sheen. Later came the "GOP Dropout" series, which targeted the likes of Marco Rubio and Ben Carson. Then, in 2016, he turned to the presidential primaries, and when "the shit hit the fan with this election," he says, "is when I started really seeing the numbers and getting the feedback I've always wanted."

In a new interview, Rainbow shared some non-fake news about the reality of his party-bridging political rebukes – and why they just may be the kind of unifying breakthrough this country needs.

With a name like Randy Rainbow, you were born to be a star, right?

Well, I mean, I had to do something! I couldn't be a football player with that fuckin' name,

that's for sure. It's worked out now for me, but it was a very difficult childhood, I'll say that. I'm kind of joking, but it's just kind of lucky that I turned out to be a gay comedian and entertainer with that name; otherwise, I don't know what would've happened. Back before all that was going on, it was just me and my name, and I was just some awkward gay kid named Randy Rainbow in high school.

With your videos, what do you think you've tapped into that people are seeking right now?

Any excuse to laugh at this nightmare is welcome (laughs) – I think that has a lot to do with it! It's an important thing to laugh at, because it can be scary sometimes if people really are drawn to it.

At first, it seemed just gay people were posting your material. But then, I was seeing straight friends post your videos, which must mean you've made it.

Yeah, I'm mainstream now! You know how

I know I've made it? I sell T-shirts on my website, and my mom will wear them to the gym and people will go up to her and say, "Oh, I love him too!"

On a first date, how do you describe your career to someone?

I go through a whole list of things, because I still don't know exactly what to call it. But, first, I say I'm a comedian, and then I say... it's so obnoxious, what am I gonna say? "Internet sensation"? That's obnoxious!

"YouTube celebrity"?

I never liked YouTube celebrity. First of all, my numbers are bigger on Facebook, but I'm certainly not gonna say I'm a "Facebook celebrity." Internet sensation is what I say when I have to categorize it, but first and foremost I'm a comedian and performer and writer. My whole Grindr feed is people knowing who I am now: "Oh my god, are you really Randy Rainbow?"



What's your background as a comedian, performer and writer?

I've been on the stage since I was a little kid. I started in ballet when I was 6; it went from that to musical theater. Musical theater was mostly my background. Theater, camp and regional theater all through childhood and high school and a little bit in college, and then I dropped out of college and worked on a cruise ship and sang a little. So, mainly musical theater was my first love and what my background is in, and then then I started writing. Once I moved to New York, I started developing my comedic voice and, a few years after, put the two together and that's how I came up with all this.

How different is your comedic voice from your everyday persona? Do people expect you to be the Randy Rainbow they see on the internet?

Sometimes. I guess everyone who is a comedian goes through that. Anyone who does anything funny has to deal with inevitably disappointing people in person. But I would say that my comedian persona is kind of a heightened reality of my real persona – maybe me after a couple of drinks.

When did you know that you wanted to make parody videos?

I've had a couple web series on BroadwayWorld.com, which came from them knowing about my first videos that went a little viral that were always hot-topic stuff like Mel Gibson when his (ex-girlfriend tirade) tapes were released six years. I figured it was a good place to sneak in my musical chops a bit. I started with the musical stuff, and that led to Kim Davis (the Kentucky county clerk who refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples) over a year ago when I did "Cell Block Tango" and it got, like, 4 million views, so I was like, "This is working."

What is your most viral video at this point?

It's still (the first 2016 presidential debate parody) "Braggadocious," with 30 million views on Facebook.

You recently wrote new lyrics for a parody of "Officer Krupke" for the cast of "Will & Grace." Might you be involved in the forthcoming "Will & Grace" reboot?

I hope! I don't have any news yet, but I've heard from the whole cast – I know they're fans – and I've actually heard from (series co-creator) Max Mutchnick who said they're fans and he'd love to speak, so we're kind of setting that up. It didn't sound like (he had) any particular agenda, but if there's any fucking way that I can be a part of that, that would be a dream come true, absolutely.

What is your process for making a parody?

Sometimes it's just wordplay, like the "Braggadocious" thing, for instance. Sometimes it's as simple as that. I'm a big show queen – no surprise! – so sometimes it's a situational thing. When Kim Davis was in jail, immediately I thought "Cell Block Tango."

Now, I have a nice, big following, so sometimes I'll take suggestions.

Do you think you're gonna keep on the political streak you're on?

My thing has always been the hot topics, so right now, what else is everyone talking about but that? Certainly, I'm known for it now, so I'll keep doing it as long as it's necessary and as long as there's material. At this point, I don't see it dwindling... unfortunately, for America.

I'm making some legitimate money on my YouTube channel now, so I can devote more time to my own stuff. And I'm traveling a little bit now and I'm booked all through gay pride all over the country. I'm doing gay prides. I'll eventually have a calendar assembled on my website, but it's coming together now. I'm doing PrideFest Milwaukee, I did Tampa Pride, so that pays.

How does your work translate to a pride event stage?

I've done a couple of live shows. I did Birdland here in New York twice, and it depends on what the gig is. But I'll show some videos, and it'll be a little stand up and then I do the parody songs live. My hit singles.

So a lot like Mariah's Vegas No. 1s show?

(Laughs) I will be singing live, though.

How did comedy impact you as somebody who was young and dealing with being gay?

I consider myself lucky that I kind of fell into this role that I'm in now because everyone is up in arms, and understandably. But I get to be up in arms and make jokes and showtunes and that always helps.

When I hear from people, it's not just, "Hey, that was a funny video." I'm getting a lot of, "Thank you, that was so necessary." People are so grateful for comedy and for escapism now, and I realize what I'm doing is just taking two primary tools that I always used growing up as an awkward gay kid who was kind of an outsider, which, for me, was always musicals and comedy – those are the two things that always make me feel good and (help me) get through shit – and I'm just using those tools now. I'm happy that I'm able to use them to make other people feel good.

Do you think you're reaching people through comedy who may otherwise be resistant to hearing your side of the story?

I think, absolutely. I hear from more people on the other side of the fence who say, "We don't agree and I'm a Trump supporter, but you made me laugh." I think that's the thing about comedy: the root of comedy is truth, and so because of that, it's unifying. I think comedy is the ultimate unifier.

Chris Azzopardi is the editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBT wire service. Reach him via his website at www.chris-azzopardi.com and on Twitter (@chrisazzopardi).



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Hear Me Out

Mary J. Blige, Betty Who



Mary J. Blige, 'Strength of a Woman'

Fear not, weary gays, the rock that is Mary J. Blige is here to save the day with new muses – see: drama – for her latest serving of soul-nurturing fortitude. On “Strength of a Woman,” the Hip-Hop Queen and Giver of Hope in Dark Times excavates her own personal hell – she’s in the midst of a messy divorce from Kendu Isaacs – to bless us with her cut-through-the-BS brilliance that cultivates lines such as, “there’s a special place in hell for you.” But don’t go thinking it’s all hellfire and hateration: Blige, now 46 (a classy, self-proclaimed fierce woman, not the 20-something cynic who first spilled her guts in the ’90s), takes Michelle Obama’s maxim to heart, going high when she has every right to go low. And so, you have self-nourishment creeds, like “Love Yourself,” which thematically and sonically sounds cut from the “No More Drama” sessions; you have “Indestructible,” where Mary J. is the wake-up call to a man-tortured friend who needs to be woke; and then there’s “Survivor,” because of course there is. On the latter, MJB affirms that she’s gonna “rise up.” And you know she will. It’s Blige’s conviction that elevates “Strength of a Woman”

to above-average heights, even when the actual songs are far more lifeless than the spirit she showers them with. *Grade: B-*



Betty Who, 'The Valley'

For all the sweet buoyancy Betty Who brought to “Somebody Loves You,” which was so happy it inspired a gay man to propose flash mob-style to his boyfriend, the opening title ballad – yes, ballad – stops you in your tracks. Betty Who... doing Boyz II Men? Not exactly, but there’s nostalgia pouring out of the too-short prelude’s snowballing harmonies, which are reminiscent of the ’90s balladeers. But then it’s on to the parade via “Some Kinda Wonderful,” a bouncy “Hollaback Girl”-type, Mikaesque chant that basically deserves its own float. It’s right within Betty Who’s bubblegum-smackin’ wheelhouse, existing somewhere between Carly Rae Jepsen and Katy Perry. Like Jepsen, even the sad and melancholy ditties on “The Valley” are produced like they’re one big, warm hug. Her dance- and Moscato-fueled mission to rescue a friend’s broken heart,



Sheryl Crow, 'Be Myself'

A change would do you good, especially if you’re Sheryl Crow and you’ve already done country and Christmas. Now, the ’90s-born Lilith Fair fixture has some new things to say about the hindrance of modern technology on human interaction (the nostalgic-on-all-levels “Roller Skate”) and Twitter. But the best thing about her best album in years? Vibing the alt-rock sound of her 1993 behemoth, “Tuesday Night Music Club,” Crow knows that if she can’t exactly bring back the good ol’ days, she can at least revel in them yet again. And so she does, wonderfully (and on “Love Will Save the Day,” beautifully), with fighter anthem “Long Way Back” and the summertime boombox jam “Woo Woo.” Finally, all your wildest Lilith dreams come true.

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

“You Can Cry Tomorrow,” beams with enough shine to shake anyone’s doldrums, while her waxings about the one who got away on the deceptively-cheery “Pretend You’re Missing Me” are both pointed and painfully real. This is a strong sophomore effort without it, but consider this the icing on Betty’s heavily frosted cake: a dreamy take on Donna Lewis’ 1996 adult-contemporary hit “I Love You Always Forever.” Naturally. After all, Betty Who thankfully lives for everything good about yesterday. *Grade: B*

Also Out



Leela James, 'Did It For Love'

I love Adele as much as the next diva-worshipping gay, but let’s stop pretending she’s the only contemporary singer who can actually sing. One of the best vocalists you’re probably not hearing – we get it; Spotify is a musical ravine – Leela James has been recording since 2005, when her debut, “A Change Is Gonna Come,” drew her rightful comparisons to Aretha Franklin and Toni Braxton. “Did It For Love,” her sixth release, is a rich throwback to said soul sisters. And yes, the tender, piano-led love ballad “All Over Again” and the great classic-R&B slow jam “Don’t Want You Back” are reason enough to explore the depths of James’ sublime decade-long discography.



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Violin Sensation Plays the DSO

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra will celebrate their 2016-17 season coming to an end with their finale, Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. Having just performed its debut with the London Symphony Orchestra to critical acclaim, guest conductor James Gaffigan and violin sensation Nicola Benedetti present a new concerto by jazz phenom Wynton Marsalis. Performances are June 1 at 7:30 p.m., June 2 at 10:45 a.m. and June 3 at 8 p.m. at the Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave. in Detroit. Tickets are \$15-100. Call 313-576-5111, email info@dso.org or visit www.dso.org.

Happenings

OUTINGS

Thursday, May 18

Nonprofit Management Conference 8 a.m. Low-cost training and networking for non-profit professionals. Keynote speaker Anne Parsons, President and CEO, Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Troy Chamber of Commerce and PNC Bank, 3838 Livernois, Troy. www.troychamber.com/non-profit-network/nonprofit-management-conference/

SAGE Table 5 p.m. Reserve your seat with Judy Lewis via email. A free intergenerational dinner party for LGBTQ people and allies where hearty conversation will be the main course. SAGE Metro Detroit, 4750 Woodward Ave., Detroit. jlewis@SAGEMetroDetroit.org www.sagemetrodetroit.org

LGBTQ Youth Meeting 6 p.m. The Ark: Services for Youth with Christina Hayes. OutFront Kalamazoo, 340 S. Rose St., Kalamazoo. michael@kgirc.org www.outfrontkzoo.org

Relationship Skills Class 7 p.m. Build stronger connections with co-workers, family, friends and romantic partners. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-677-7226. bbudde@goaffirmations.org www.goaffirmations.org

Friday, May 19

Coffee Hour with State Rep. Jon Hoadley 3:30 p.m. Join Jon Hoadley

for coffee and good conversation about issues that matter to you most. Alcoholic beverages will not be purchased during this event. Jon Hoadley of House District 60, 1156 S. Burdick St., Kalamazoo. www.facebook.com/events/417342508647490/

Gay Ice Cream Fundraiser and Dance Party 6 p.m. 15 percent of sales benefit Ypsi Pride. Get sugared up then get down to music by various DJ's. Kissing booth for \$5, drag performances and more. Ypsi Pride, 10 N. Washington St., Ypsilanti. www.facebook.com/events/106069316635264/

Saturday, May 20

The Indivisible Fair 2 p.m. Hosted by U.S. Senator Gary Peters, Kunoor Ojha from the National Indivisible Guide, Jocelyn Benson, CEO of the Ross Initiative for Sports Equality. Meet with community activists and service groups from across the state of Michigan. Farough & Associates and Indivisible Michigan - District 11, 28600 W. 11 Mile Road, Farmington. www.facebook.com/events/1316435955113710/

Hot Daddies Contest Think you're the hottest daddy in Ferndale? Males 35+ can put their name in the running for this Hot Daddy contest to benefit Ferndale Pride. Ferndale Pride, 205 W. Nine Mile, Ferndale. www.Ferndalepride.com

Sunday, May 21

Kidney Walk 8:45 a.m. Registration at 7:30 a.m. Visit the HFHS page for details. HFHS Equity & Diversity Team, 8450 W. 10 Mile Road, Royal Oak. http://donate.kidney.org/site/TR/Walk/Michigan?team_id=204105&pg=team&fr_id=8504

"Run As You Are" In-Person Training Session 9:30 a.m. For women who want to learn how to run for political office. Seminar led by VoteRunLead.org's co-founder and board chair Shannon Garrett. VoteRunLead.org, 6427 Centurion Drive #150B, Lansing. www.voterunlead.org

PFLAG Monthly Meeting 2 p.m. Entry from parking lot behind church. Every third Sunday. PFLAG Ann Arbor, 306 N. Division at Catherine Street, Ann Arbor. 734-741-0659. info@pflagaa.org www.pflagaa.org

Monday, May 22

2017 Gathering for Trans Women of Color "Resistance as an Act of Resilience" Trans Sistas of Color Project, 2 Washington Blvd., Detroit. 313-533-7000 Ext 107. tsocproject@gmail.com www.facebook.com/TSCOPD/

SAGE Meet and Greet 5:30 p.m. Event is free, but please RSVP. Meet LGBT rights advocates, learn about SAGE and get caregiving resources and updates on policy changes. SAGE Metro Detroit, 22930 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. aperone@sagemetrodetroit.org www.sagemetrodetroit.org

Tuesday, May 23

Motor City Pride Community Meeting 6:30 p.m. Discuss plans for this year's festival and parade. Connect with the MCP planning team. Motor City Pride, 440 Burroughs St., Detroit. www.facebook.com/events/1661561134150915/

Wednesday, May 24

Volunteer Meeting 7 p.m. Call for volunteers. Visit website for more

information and to sign up. Ferndale Pride, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. www.ferndalepride.com

Thursday, May 25

LGBTQ Youth Meeting 6 p.m. Celebrate May birthdays OutFront Kalamazoo, 340 S. Rose St., Kalamazoo. michael@kgirc.org www.outfrontkzoo.org

LGBTQ Book and Movie Club 7 p.m. Meets the 3rd and 4th Thursday of

each month. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. redbellysenegal90@gmail.com www.goaffirmations.org

Red Umbrella Support Group 7:30 p.m. For individuals involved in the erotic labor industry. Sex Workers Outreach Project Michigan, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

See Happenings, page 30

Editor's Pick

Are You a Hot Daddy?

It's that time again for all the hottest daddies to compete for the title of Hottest Daddy, a fundraising contest to benefit Ferndale Pride. Don't be shy if you think you're the hottest daddy over the age of 35. Put your name in the running at 9 p.m. on May 20 at Soho, 205 W. Nine Mile Road in Ferndale. Visit www.ferndalepride.org for more information.



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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Roz Gould Keith Receives Diversity Champion Award

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

A Diversity Champion, according to the Race Relations & Diversity Task Force, leads by celebrating racial, ethnic or other diversity and also by advocating for the removal of racism, bias and barriers in our communal life.

Roz Gould Keith of Farmington does just that. It's why she was selected to receive the Diversity Champion award for which she was honored during the 18th Annual Diversity Champions Breakfast on May 4 at the Community House in Birmingham.

"This honor is significant in a number of ways. Of course, it's always nice to be recognized for contributions, but this is about making a difference in the lives of others," said Keith, who founded Stand with Trans so transgender youth, like her son Hunter, could receive the support and resources they need.

"In some cases, the work I do saves lives. We are bringing support and resources to trans youth and their families so they can be supported and find community. Four years ago, when my family began this journey there wasn't any support or resources available. We decided as a family to share our story and actively reach out to the transgender youth and allies. It's humbling and remarkable to me to see how far we've come and for a local organization to acknowledge and honor the work I'm doing."

Those are some of the reasons why Joe Grimm nominated her for the award.

"Roz has stepped into a very active role as a trans ally at a time when we are in great need for people to speak out...She lectures, she listens, she empowers people in safe, group environments and one-on-one. Roz and her family helped my class at Michigan State University know what to include in '100 Questions and Answers About Gender



Identity,' coming out this year. It is just one of the many ways she works," said Grimm, editor in residence at the MSU School of Journalism.

The Task Force invited all area businesses, non-profit organizations, public agencies and faith communities to give special recognition to an individual whose vision of diversity has caused them to have a significant impact on others. Enrollment of honorees is inclusive and non-competitive.

The mission of the Task Force is to actively promote and embrace an appreciation for diversity and to advocate for inclusivity, equality, and justice in the region. The organization comes together to develop and maintain an open, intentional community that works to overcome racism, prejudice, and discrimination through education, advocacy, and response.

For more information, visit www.racerelationsdiversity.org.

Affirmations Welcomes New Youth Program Coordinator

Met Ian Unger, who moved to Michigan from Wisconsin with his wife, and recently joined Affirmations as the new youth program coordinator.

"Ian has the education, experience and passion that Affirmations needs to lift Affirmations' youth programming to the next level," said Susan Erspamer, executive director.

There are no limits to what Unger can accomplish under the direction of Liliana Angel Reyes, who said Unger has worked with marginalized youth, specifically transgender youth, to give them the resources they need to be their authentic selves.

Reyes, program services director, said, "His passion for youth empowerment moves Affirmations to a greater reach with youth and their intersections."

What is your favorite book?

"Harry Potter," hands down, is my favorite book series. Specifically, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" is my favorite book in the series as well. However, if I had to pick something other than "Harry Potter," I would say "Ready Player One" by Ernest Cline." Dystopian alternate realities are some of my favorite literature.

What is your favorite thing about Affirmations?

The sense of community and inclusion is my favorite thing about Affirmations. Within days of starting, everyone from staff to community members felt like I'd known them for a long time. It was great to be able to start my position and feel immediately supported and welcomed, and hearing the feedback from community members that they also feel welcome and safe in this space is fantastic.



What is your favorite non-work weekend activity?

I enjoy going on small adventures and road trips with my wife, discovering new locations and restaurants, spending time at state parks, or going to museums.

Do you have a favorite meal?

I rarely eat the same thing more than once, because I love trying new food. But my go-to for a more creative dinner is going out for sushi.

Why do you do this work?

This is always a fun question, because I kind of just fell into this line of work and ended up loving it. I earned a business degree in college, but realized that I wanted to do something for people. While I was in college, I was extremely involved in the LGBT organization there as the president and an intern at their LGBT resource center. When I discovered Affirmations existed, I was excited to know I could continue that activism as a career.

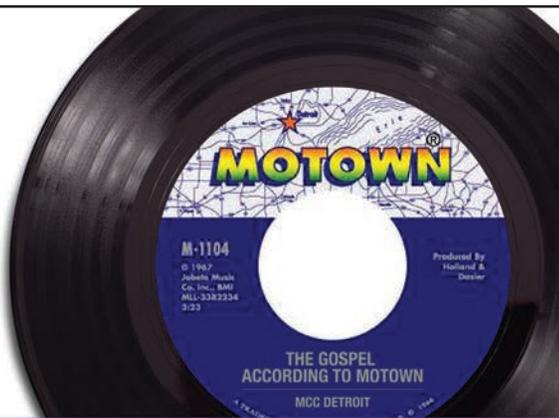
Where is the place you long to vacation?

I would love to trek across Asia at some point. There is so much history and culture that we simply don't get to learn enough about, and experiencing that firsthand would be amazing.



As MCC Detroit prepares to celebrate our 45th anniversary later this year, during the month of May we will focus on the "Motown Sound" in our **The Gospel According to Motown** series. It will be fun as we take titles of popular Motown songs and apply a practical and gospel message for our community.

You are invited to join us each Sunday's at 11:00 am.



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BTL photos: Alex Godin

Community Gathers for 'Love Is Love' Rally

Members of the community gathered at Geary Park in Ferndale on May 7 for the "Love Is Love" rally hosted by the non-partisan Metro Detroit Political Action Network as part of its Detroit solidarity movement.

MDPAN's goal, according to its Facebook page, is to empower people to become proactive to fight global corruption and stand up for civil rights. "The bigotry the Trump administration is enforcing in society must be resisted."

Other organizations that joined MDPAN for the event were Putting the People First, Taking Back Orange, Planned Parenthood,

No Space for Hate, Studio 416, GLSEN-Southeast Michigan, Equality Michigan, Fair Michigan, Civic Direct Detroit, Detroit Light Brigade and Michigan For Choice.

Speakers included Joseph Fournier, co-founder of MDPAN; Bill Cobbs, a candidate for Governor of Michigan in 2018; Jenny Elgin with No Space for Hate; Brianna Dee Kingsley, treasurer, board of directors for GLSEN-Southeast Michigan; and Dana Nessel, president of Fair Michigan.

For more information, check out the group's Facebook page www.facebook.com/metrodpan.

Annual Fundraiser at Boys & Girls Club Helps LGBTQ Youth Torch Club Raises \$100 for The Trevor Project

BY KATE OPALEWSKI

ROYAL OAK – Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24. To raise awareness about the number of young people who attempt to kill or do kill themselves each year, six youth between the ages of 11-13 at the Boys & Girls Club of South Oakland County came up with an idea for their annual fundraiser to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Month.

Members of the Torch Club chose to collect funds to benefit the Trevor Project, the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people ages 13-24.

"We wanted to help kids to get back to a stable life and go to school and feel like normal kids and not get bullied," said Katelyn Hudson, a member of the chartered, small group leadership and service club, which teaches young people how to build good character, gain confidence, develop social skills and a sense of responsibility.

"We chose them because we wanted to support people who are considered different from others," said Emma McGee.

Fellow club member Charlotte Claeys agrees, "We all strongly believe in supporting them."

While none of the youth openly identify as LGBTQ, Torch Club

See Fundraiser, page 31

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A DISCUSSION & BOOK SIGNING

Black LGBT Health in the United States

The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation
Published by Lexington Books

June 2, 2017

6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Ruth Ellis Center and Health Clinic
77 Victor St.

Highland Park, MI 48203

Join Authors

Dr. Lourdes Dolores Follins, Editor

Associate Professor,
Kingsborough Community College/CUNY

Dr. Jonathan Mathias Lassiter, Editor

Assistant Professor of Psychology, Muhlenberg College

Dr. Amorie Robinson (Kofi Adoma), Contributing writer

Licensed clinical psychologist serving Wayne County
Third Circuit Court adjudicated youth at the
Clinic for Child Study in Detroit.

Moderated by Leseliey Welch, Deputy Director
of the Health Department for the City of Detroit.

Refreshments will be served. There is no charge for this event. Common
Language Bookstore will provide copies of the book for purchase.

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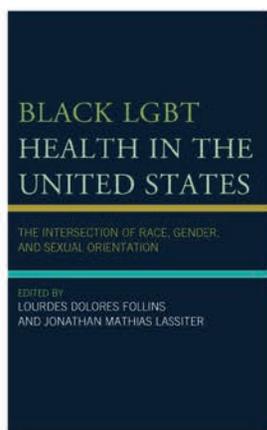
Between The Lines

LGBT Detroit

Metro Detroit Association of Black Psychologists

Ruth Ellis Center

SAGE



Editor's Pick

'Queen of Soul' Headlines Detroit Music Weekend

What just may be her last live performance in her beloved hometown, Aretha Franklin will headline a free outdoor concert at 6 p.m. on June 10 on the Madison Central Stage during Detroit Music Weekend June 8-11 in the downtown area. The festival includes some of the most popular Detroit-bred musical acts from R&B to rock, to hip hop, to techno and even country and gospel. For more information, visit www.detroitmusicweekend.org.



Happenings

Continued from p. 26

Friday, May 26

Burlesque, Body Positivity, and Fun 7 p.m. Part of the Healthy Living Series with Luna Legare. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, **Ferndale**. 248-398-7105. www.facebook.com/events/513406792176014/

Saturday, May 27

LezRead 4 p.m. Email Kerene Moore to join Ann Arbor's premier book club for lesbians. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor**. kerenem@jimtoycenter.org www.jimtoycenter.org/

Sunday, May 28

Drag Queen Bingo 11 a.m. Tickets: \$20-\$30. Reservations required. 18+ Five15, 515 S. Washington Ave., **Royal Oak**. 248-515-2551. www.five15.net

Monday, May 29

Transition 2.0 7 p.m. Facilitated by Hannah Hartley, this group is focused on the art of transition. Integrate safely and positively into society. Open to all. Affirmations, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, **Ferndale**. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

Whole Lives, Healthy Lives Adult Support Group 7 p.m. This one-of-a-kind program in Berrien County helps attendees support each other in healthy ways through active listening and caring feedback. OutCenter, 132 Water St., **Benton Harbor**. 269-925-8330. www.outcenter.org

Factory Monday 9 p.m. Goth-industrial night. Main room: DJ Void6 hosted by MC Yoda. Red Room: DJ Madisi. Tickets: \$1-3. Necto, 516 E. Liberty, **Ann Arbor**. www.necto.com

Tuesday, May 30

Recycle Your Old Used Eyeglasses 10 a.m. Drop off your old, used eyeglasses to benefit New Eyes for the Needy. 20/20 Vision, 3110 Walton Blvd., **Rochester Hill**. 248-375-0040. www.new-eyes.org/

Sexual Assault Survivors Groups 4 p.m. Youth group, ages 13-17, meets at 4 p.m. Adult group, ages 18 and over, meets at 5:15 p.m. OutFront Kalamazoo, 340 S. Rose St., **Kalamazoo**. www.outfrontkzoo.org

Sexual Assault Survivors Support Group 4 p.m. Facilitated by LGBTQ Victim Advocate/Counselor Brooke Lindley. Youth group (13-17) from 4-5 p.m., adult group (18+) from 5:15-6:15 p.m. OutFront Kalamazoo, 340 S. Rose St., **Kalamazoo**. 269-345-5595. blindley@ywcakalamazoo.org www.outfrontkzoo.org

MUSIC & MORE

Cabaret 313 "LaChanze "Feeling Good"" Tickets: \$25-125. Marlene Boll Theatre at the Boll Family YMCA, 1401 Broadway St., Detroit. 7 p.m. May 20. 313-405-5061. <http://cabaret313.org/shows/lachanze-may-20-2017/>

Benefits/Social Events

Jim Toy Community Center "Equality On Tap" The establishment will donate \$1 to JTCC for every drink sold. Bill's Beer Garden, 218 S. Ashley St., Ann Arbor. 6 p.m. May 18. www.jimtoycenter.org/

Kalamazoo Pride "Vox Vidorra with Caj Monet" Tickets: \$10 (21+) All proceeds benefit OutFront Kalamazoo. Bell's Eccentric Cafe - Back Room, 355 E. Kalamazoo Ave., Kalamazoo. 8 p.m. May 19. www.facebook.com/events/1773416249639637/

NECTO "VIP Meet and Greet: Shea Coulee" Shea Coulee from RuPaul's Drag Race Season 9 will perform. Tickets: \$50 to benefit JTCC's OUTFest, Ann Arbor's Pride Festival. NECTO, 516 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. 11 p.m. May 19. www.necto.com

Pleasant Ridge Foundation "57th Annual Auction & Gala of Historical Pleasant Ridge" Tickets: \$40-50. Pleasant Ridge Community Center, 4 Ridge Road, Pleasant Ridge. 5:30 p.m. May 20. www.pleasantridgefoundation.org

Vault of Midnight "LGBTQ Game Night" Tickets: \$10. Proceeds to benefit Jim Toy Community Center in Ann Arbor. Raffles, games, coffee and other goods donated by local businesses. Literati Coffee, 204 S. 4th Ave., Ann Arbor. 6 p.m. May 26. www.vaultofmidnight.com

Festivals

Movement "Movement" Electronic music festival. Hart Plaza, Detroit. May 24 - May 29. www.Movement.us

Film & Video

FIM A2/Ypsi and JTCC "Screening of "Gender Revolution" and discussion" 2017 documentary film about gender identity, produced by Katie Couric. Optional discussion from 3-4 p.m. Jim Toy Community Center, 319 Braun Court, Ann Arbor. 1 p.m. May 21. 734-995-9867. www.jimtoycenter.org/

THEATER

Benefits and Fundraisers

"As We Go On" Coming Out Stories True coming out stories told live by members of the Ann Arbor LGBTQ community. Tickets: \$40 or \$15 for students. Proceeds benefit the GR Community Foundation's "Our LGBT Fund" and Out On The Lakeshore's new community center in Holland. LGBT Fund at The GR Pride Community

Foundation, Saugatuck Center for the Arts, 400 Culver St., Saugatuck. 3 p.m. May 21. www.sc4a.org/Happenings/As-We-Go-On.aspx

Civic/Community Theater

Countdown to the Happy Day Tickets: \$17-20. Detroit Repertory Theatre, 13103 Woodrow Wilson, Detroit. May 25 - June 25. 313-868-1347. www.detroitreptheatre.com

Three Sisters Tickets: \$12. Slipstream Theatre Initiative, Slipstream Theatre, 460 Hilton Road, Ferndale. Through June 4. 313-986-9156. www.slipstreamti.com

Professional

Failure: A Love Story by Phillip Dawkins Tickets: \$20. Planet Ant Theatre, 2357 Caniff, Hamtramck. Through May 20. 313-365-4948. www.planetant.com

Silence! The Musical Tickets: \$10-25. The Ringwald Theatre, 22742 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Through June 5. 2485455545. www.theringwald.com

Taking Shakespeare Tickets: \$25-30. Students: \$10 with valid ID. Williamston Theatre, 122 S. Putnam Road, Williamston. May 18 - June 18. 517-655-SHOW. www.williamstontheatre.org

ART 'N' AROUND

Affirmations "Visibility & Artivism: A Showcase of Transgender Activism" Exhibit highlights the activism, courage and artistry of the transgender community. Pittman-Puckett Gallery, 290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale. April 1 - May 27. 248-398-7105. www.goaffirmations.org

Imagine This Productions "An Evening of Art" Featuring the work of Clay Drew, Demetrius Green, DL Perrett and Kerone Sims. A portion of the proceeds benefit Hotter Than July. Charlevoix Gallery, 14505 Charlevoix St., Detroit. 5 p.m. May 20. www.facebook.com/DetroitHTJ/photos/a.533929229985242.1073741825.426345237410309/1514646951913460/?type=3&theater

Integrity Shows "Kensington Metropark Art Fair" Free admission, park pass required. Kensington Metropark, 4570 Huron River Parkway, Milford Charter Township. May 27 - May 29. 810-227-8910. www.metroparks.com/parks/kensington-metropark/

Scarab Club "Under the Surface" Works by photographer Myles Gallagher. Opening reception, April 7, 5-8 p.m. Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, Detroit. April 5 - May 20. 3138311250. www.scarabclub.org



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



Boys & Girls Club of South Oakland County Torch Club Members Charlotte Claeys, Katelyn Hudson, Emma McGee, Brandon Canty, Lydia Maggi and Jessie Rateloff. BTL Photo: Alex Godin

► Fundraising

Continued from p. 29

Advisor Erin McClaine said, “This is an issue that matters to them a lot. They are a loving, open-minded, open-hearted group of kids. They want to see a world where people are loved and accepted. This sends a message, whether LGBTQ or ally, that we are a safe place.”

McClaine said the Torch Club set humble fundraising goals to collect almost \$100 from other club members. That amount might not seem like a lot, but \$1 donated helps fund one minute of crisis intervention and suicide prevention with a highly-trained and accredited crisis counselor on the Trevor Lifeline. So that money can keep their lines going for two hours.

Once the Torch Club reached their fundraising goals, they were able to participate in what they call Dare to Care challenges. After raising \$20, they performed improv acting skits for younger club members to enjoy. They decorated cakes blindfolded after raising \$30.

Once they reached their final goal of \$50, staff members DJ Shepherd, Devin Carmen and Corinne MacInnes helped McClaine organize a free throw basketball challenge in the Jack and Patti Salter Community Center in Royal Oak on May 12. Around 60 youth filled the gymnasium to cheer on the Torch Club while they shot hoops blindfolded.

Even though 11-year-old Luke Liszak was the only participant to make a basket, which he said he felt “happy” about, everyone received a prize following the event. But it’s about more than winning.

“This is teaching them how to talk with people by having to explain what the charity is they are raising money for and why it’s important, in addition to planning and organizing. They are learning leadership

skills,” said McClaine, which allows them to continue their personal growth and advance to the Keystone Club for teens ages 14-18.

Four of the Torch Club members – McGee, Hudson, Claeys and Canty – are graduating this year.

When asked what she enjoyed so much about her experience in the Torch Club, McGee said, “I made friends, helped different people and went on field trips. I developed real world skills. It was really fun.”

The Boys & Girls Club of South Oakland County is located at 1545 E. Lincoln Ave. in Royal Oak. Learn more at www.bgca.org or call 248-544-4166. Share the Trevor Project’s 24-hour suicide hotline 866-488-7386 or visit www.thetrevorproject.org.

‘As We Go On’ Performance to Benefit Holland Community Center

True coming out stories will be told live by members of the Ann Arbor LGBTQ community during the performance of “As We Go On” at 3 p.m. on May 21 at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts, 400 Culver St.

Casts members, who range in age from 17-86, will take the stage for a joint fundraiser to benefit Out On The Lakeshore’s new community center in Holland at 451 Columbia Ave. and the Grand Rapids Community Foundation’s “Our LGBT Fund.”

The personal stories about coming out are said to be “funny, witty, sad, infuriating, uplifting and touching.”

Tickets are \$40 each or \$15 for students and can be purchased online at <http://gaybe.am/vi>. A cash bar will be available.

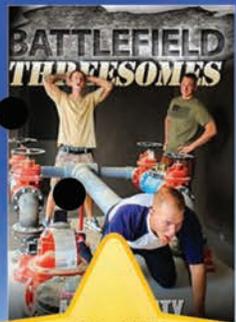
OOTL’s Community Center will open later this month to provide a place for LGBTQ people in the Holland area to find support and gather in a central, safe place. It will also be headquarters for OOTL, which was formed two years ago by uniting Holland is Ready and Holland PRIDE.

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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

Paul Verhoeven and a lesbian nun walk into a bar...

If you saw Isabelle Huppert's Academy Award-nominated performance in last year's "Elle," then you know that director Paul Verhoeven is no stranger to tough material featuring extremely complicated women in often harrowing circumstances. His next film will be no different. "Blessed Virgin," starring French actress Virginie Efira (who had a supporting role in "Elle") is about the troubled life of Sister Benedetta Carlini, a 17th-century nun who was celebrated as a visionary, but was later imprisoned for 35 years on charges of fake miracles and lesbianism. The movie is based on the book "Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy," by historian Judith C. Brown, and begins shooting this summer. The production announcement features a breast-baring model wearing a nun's habit, which is so Verhoeven we thought it might be a parody ad. But it's not. So we'd like to take this opportunity to thank the man who gave us "Showgirls" for his ongoing contributions to cinema, and for staying on-brand. We'll be waiting excitedly for this one.



Revisiting the bad old days of '1985'

Cory Michael Smith ("Gotham"), Michael Chiklis and Virginia Madsen are set to star in "1985," the latest indie from director Yen Tan, whose film "Pit Stop" was successful on the LGBT film festival circuit. Expanded from his short film of the same name, a project that won the special jury prize at 2016's SXSW, it will also star Noah Schnapp ("Stranger Things") and Jamie Chung ("Big Hero Six"), and begins shooting this summer in Texas. The film focuses on a young man living with AIDS in 1985 (Smith). He returns home to his estranged family to explain it all, but his visit is complicated by a reconnection with his young brother and ex-girlfriend. With popular culture's narrative always eager to view the '80s through a cheerful lens, one where everybody was dancing to Wang Chung and drinking wine coolers, it's important that stories like this get told. So cheers to younger filmmakers tackling this subject matter and preserving the brutal history of AIDS during the horrifying Reagan years, whether through documentaries like "How To Survive a Plague" or with narrative work such as this. Never forget.

Seth Rogen and Billy Eichner are "The Lion King's" new Timon and Pumbaa

In case you weren't already aware that Disney is taking all its old animated features and remaking them as live-action films (OK, not "Song of The South," for obvious reasons), then you are probably living in some kind of cave where your only friends are bats. But for the rest of you, here comes Jon Favreau's live-action version of "The Lion King." And for fans of "Billy on The Street" (that "should" be all of you, please), the good news is that Billy Eichner will be taking on a character. He and Seth Rogen will team up as Timon and Pumbaa (no second chances on guessing which actor is the meerkat and which one is the warthog) and, presumably, sing their own version of "Hakuna Matata." Unless they can't sing, and then they'll probably just sing anyway. Also, we don't know if this one's going to look more like Broadway's Julie Taymor incarnation or like the latest "Beauty and The Beast" where Ewan McGregor was simply the voice of a candlestick, but we're still on board for this casting news.

Why can't there just be two Madonna movies?

Madonna is reportedly furious about the Madonna movie (for reference: see all news stories about "Blonde Ambition," just set up at Universal, all about her young, hungry, early days). That's because Madonna will not be in control of the Madonna movie. Here's why: other people wrote a lot of her early hits. If they consent to have them used in an unauthorized biopic, there's nothing to be done about it. But we have a solution. Let's have dueling Madonna movies. It happens all the time. There were two Truman Capote films. The next "Jungle Book" adaptation is due in theaters sooner or later. There's plenty of room for two Madonna movies, especially if she directs and produces it. Total control. She can get experimental and cast six different actors, like when Todd Haynes made the Bob Dylan film. She can use most of her own song catalog. She can rip on the other movie "in her own movie." This makes perfect sense to us. Don't get mad, Madge; get even.

Romeo San Vicente is burning up for your love.



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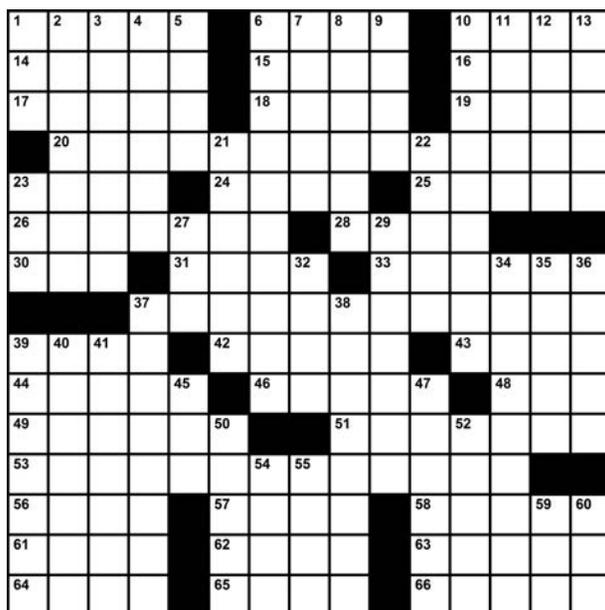
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37 Motel doorhandle sign
39 Latin homo leader?
42 Screwed up
43 Part of Liberace's style
44 Topsoils
46 Events at Barneys
48 Sorbonne summer
49 "The Importance of Being ___"
51 ACT UP member, at times
53 Designer with book titles at 20- and 37-Across
56 Judy Garland's "Meet Me ___ Louis"
57 Composer Boulanger
58 "My Fair Lady" composer
61 Cock attachment
62 "Forbidden" perfume
63 One way to mark errors
64 Swimmer you can eat
65 Kind of dunk, to Sue Wicks
66 Beasts with long ears and butts

11 Veronica of "Sotto, Sotto"
12 Looker in a gay bar?
13 Poke in the backside
21 First aid antiseptic
22 The Brewers, e.g.
23 Woman's promise to her wife, e.g.
27 GI mail drop
29 Females in fairy tales
32 Big name in razors
34 Masters of farm animals that don't breed
35 About to blow
36 "Li'l" guy of Dogpatch
37 Like Ian McKellen as Richard III, e.g.
38 Orgasmic rapture, for example
39 Some Whitman works
40 Greek city of old
41 Basket rummy
45 Taxpayer's ID
47 Reagan Court appointee
50 Fouls, to the Pinball Wizard
52 Princess Diana and Diana Ross
54 Small vessel
55 Napoleon's exile isle
59 Pee-___ Herman
60 Wood and others

Between the Covers

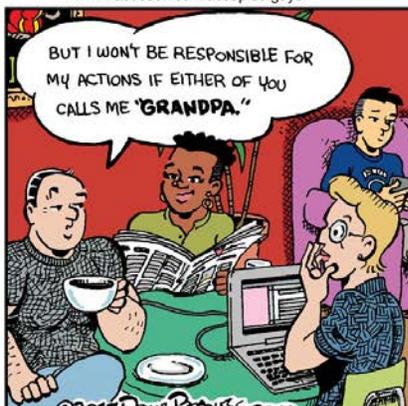
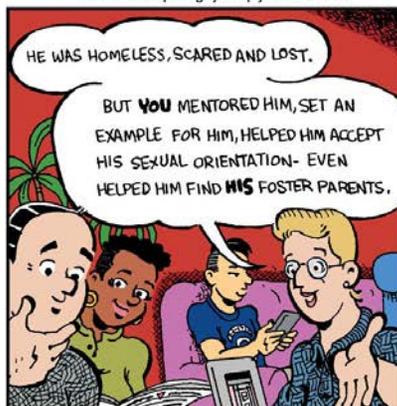
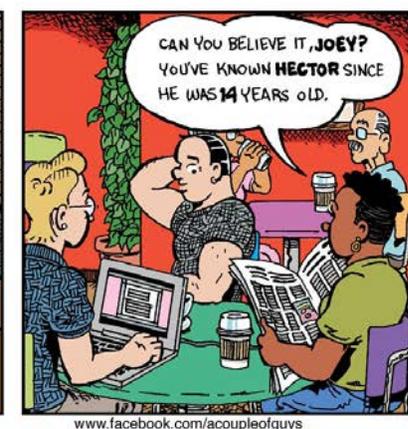
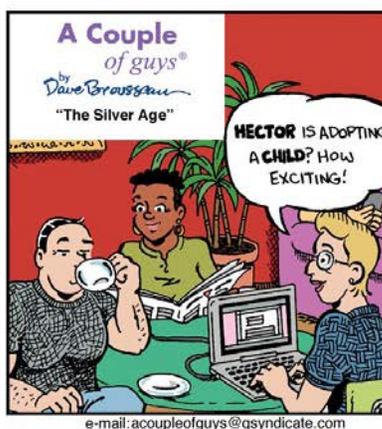
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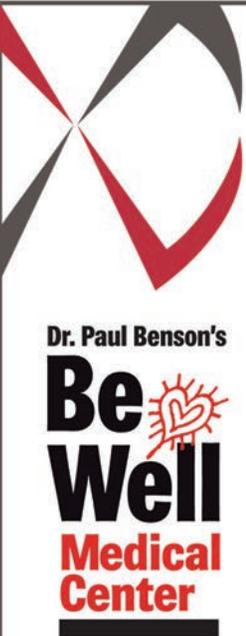
1 Chat room request
6 Eat semi-firm noodles, e.g., with "up"
10 Joe.My.God, for one
14 Get a bead on
15 Position at sea
16 Villain of "Otello"
17 "Alexander" director Oliver
18 Cub slugger
19 His grandmother had a Woody
20 Single guys
23 You may pick up one with gaydar
24 By mouth
25 "I took you for that cunning ___ of Venice" ("Othello")
26 Anthem of Jane Siberry's land
28 Jannings of old films
30 Bentley of "American Beauty"
31 Edible pocket
33 No zip

Down

1 Carrier to Swed.
2 Computer clickers for lesbian porn?
3 They reproduce without sex or adoption
4 "Back to the Future" bully Biff
5 One way to cook fruit
6 They help guys to sing soprano
7 Island glad-hand word
8 Give a loafer a new bottom
9 Steady guy
10 Olympian that go both ways?

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