



BURGH

QBurgh.com

Summer 2023 FREE

*Still strong,
no fear*
50 years of
**Pittsburgh
Pride**

50

+ The first Pride
was a riot,
should this year's be?
& You've been
blessed!
Sisters of
Perpetual
Indulgence

2023 Pittsburgh Pride Guide

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BURGH PRIDE



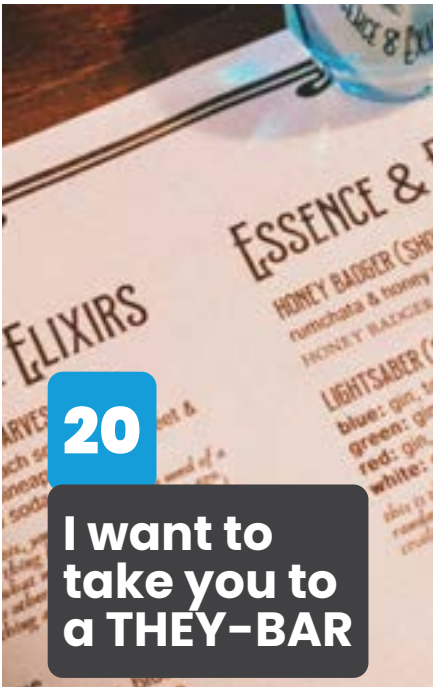
We're best known for our black & gold, but we proudly represent rainbow 365!



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some more!”
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Perpetual
Indulgence are
here to wash
away your
queer guilt.**



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Theyborhood?**



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Steel City Sports**



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Pardon the
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“Political disruptor”
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to grand marshal
Pride Parade.

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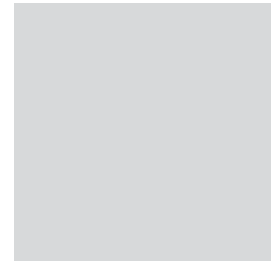
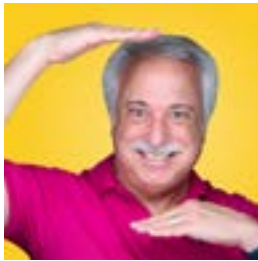
50

Pittsburgh Pride celebrates 50 years.



drag performances, gender affirming care, trans kids and adults, and LGBTQ+ books are under attack.

Should this year’s Pride be a riot?



**FREE TO THE LGBTQ
COMMUNITY OF
PITTSBURGH**



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For the forgotten,
the unwanted, the
abandoned and
alone. For all outsiders.

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ON THE COVER

Dena Stanley & Dalen Hooks, 2023
Pittsburgh Pride organizers with Jim
Huggins & Wendy Bell, LGBTQ advocates
from 1973 and the first Pittsburgh Pride.
Photo by Chad Isaiah.

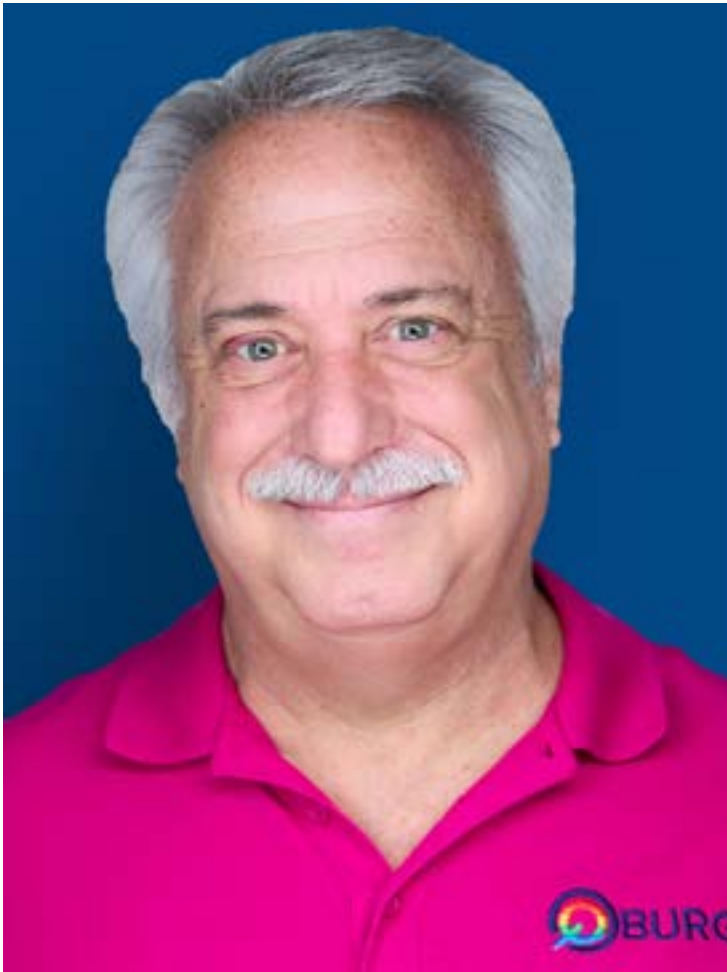


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FROM THE CO- CREATORS

NEVER ACT IN FEAR

Happy 5-0 Pittsburgh!! Amazing that it's been 50 years since the first celebration of Pride! I am in awe and wonder each time that I have reached back into our archives and read about the courageous and selfless efforts of those back in the early seventies. I only became active in the Community starting in 1981. Although during my coming out process in the mid-70's I can remember the names of Randy Forrester, Jim Huggins, Wendy S. Bell, Jim Austin, and Ann Begler to name a few. These may not be familiar names to most of you but to me, these were my leaders and people that I admired. I revered their courage to be one of the leading voices to stand out for representation and stand up for our civil rights. They were an inspiration for our community. We thank them for their hard-fought efforts in creating a path for us all.

Today we are very fortunate to have the tremendous support of our newly elected Governor Josh Shapiro and Lt. Governor Austin Davis. Locally, we have our queer legislators Jessica Benham and La'Tasha Mayes representing us in our State House of Representatives. Long-time ally Dan Frankel has tirelessly worked on the Fairness Act for over 20 years. Bruce Kraus has been an out City Councilman for 15 years. We have great allies out there fighting for us but let us not forget to fight for ourselves as well.

Fifty years ago, we were barely visible. Nowadays gay seems to be everywhere. However, if you ask some people they think there's too much gay. These adversaries are guided only by fear. A very wise woman (my mother) had a saying -- "Fear will always guide you in the wrong direction. Never act in fear. Step back. Think. And then think again." Let us take this astute advice and never act in fear. Let us be fearful of attacks against our Community but act with fearless intention. Let us be led by our uniqueness and strengthened by our commonality. Let us proceed with "No Fear."

Together in Pride,
Jeff Freedman
Co-Creator
QBURGH

PRIDE, NEVER STOP

I came out when I was 17 years old in 2004. It feels like a lifetime ago. This was an era marked with increased homophobia and transphobia. George W. Bush was president and that year he advocated for an amendment to the Constitution of the United States defining marriage as between one man and one woman. Multiple states across the country were amending their state constitutions with the same "marriage protection" amendments. "Gay" was routinely thrown around the lunch room or locker room as a pejorative. Everything in society around me was telling me that I was bad or wrong or evil for simply being who I am. I had a lot of fear.

We find ourselves again in an era marked with increasing and rampant transphobia and homophobia. Those who seek to silence, erase, or harm us are more organized, louder, and emboldened than seemingly ever before. Over 460 legislative bills have been introduced in states across the country in 2023 that target drag performances, gender affirming care, trans kids and adults, and ban LGBTQ+ books.

When I find myself slipping back into fear because of what QBurgh reports on a daily basis, I remember the LGBTQ trailblazers who came before us. Movement icons like Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and the Stonewall revolutionaries who kicked off all of this that fateful night in New York City in 1969 by throwing rocks, shot glasses, and pennies at their oppressors.

LGBTQ Pittsburghers like Randy Forrester, Jim Huggins, Wendy Bell, David March, Cindy Spell, Fred Gormley, Chuck Cole and more. Many involved in the planning of the first Pittsburgh Pride march from their apartments in Squirrel Hill and Shadyside. Jim Austin, the publisher of Pittsburgh's first LGBTQ publication, the "Pittsburgh Gay News", which QBurgh considers among its predecessor publications.

In spite of any fear they may have had, they set off from Market Square at 1 o'clock on Sunday, June 17, 1973 to make the three mile trek to Schenley Park and they never stopped. They kept going. They kept going because they could taste the freedom and liberation that march symbolized and would bring.



2023 is a different era than 2004. My fear has given way to hope as I will marry the man that I love this year. 2023 is vastly different than 1973 but we find ourselves confronted again by the same foes that seek to stop our queer liberation. Let our fear give way to resolve.

Resolve to keep going and never stop because we have tasted the freedom to live our lives just the way that we are.

And when we march on Saturday, June 3 in celebration of Pittsburgh Pride's golden anniversary, in determination to prevail against the forces that seek to eradicate our community, and to finally secure LGBTQ liberation, we do so with no fear.

Jim Sheppard
Co-Creator
QBurgh



WHAT'S QUEER GOING ON?



1
Too Hot for July
with Dreamdoll



Pittsburgh Pride 2-4

Friday, June 2
Pride Festival,
Allegheny Commons Park West

Saturday, June 3
Pittsburgh Pride March & Parade
Line up 10 AM, Step off 12 PM

Pittsburgh Pride Festival
Opening Ceremony 1 PM, Allegheny
Commons Park West

Pride on the Shore with Ava Max & Fletcher
5 PM, Stage AE

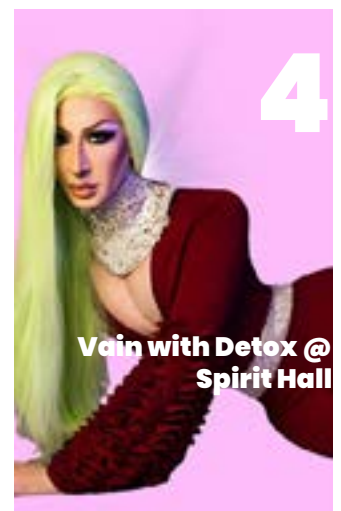
Sunday, June 4
Closing Out Pride Festival
12 PM Bloomfield



2
Disco Revolution
iCandy @ P Town



4
HONCHO
Honcho Boat Party



4
Vain with Detox @
Spirit Hall



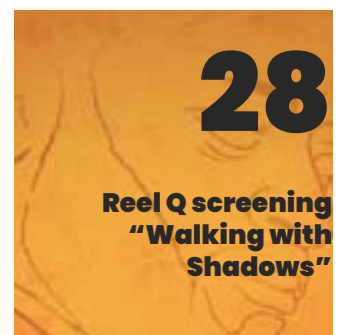
15
Steel Carabiner
Steel Carabiner @
Blue Moon



25
People's Pride
Swissvale

SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2023

PARADE AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

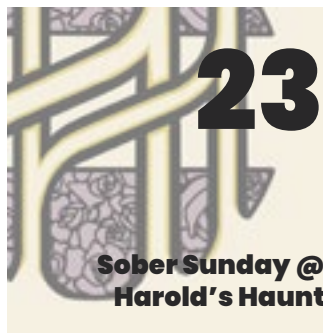


28
Reel Q screening
"Walking with
Shadows"

**NOT ENOUGH PRIDE?
FIND MORE ON PAGE 42!**

JUNE

JULY



**EVEN MORE
EVENTS ON
QBURGH.COM/EVENTS**



GAY- BORHOOD? THEY- BORHOOD?

Visitors from other major cities may be curious where Pittsburgh's "gayborhood" or "theyborhood" is. While Pittsburgh does not have a formal "gayborhood" like Philadelphia or New York, the entire city is welcoming to our LGBTQ families. Shadyside, the North Side, the Strip District, Lawrenceville and Millvale are where you will find the most LGBTQ and welcoming bars, clubs, and organizations.

Check out 5801 Video Lounge's spacious rooftop deck, P Town's new back bar the "Baum Shelter", and Blue Moon's cozy corners.

Brewer's, Pittsburgh's oldest gay bar, is always great to watch a game during the day or take in a drag performance at night. If you're feeling adventurous, check out the second-floor boys and dance floor of the Real Luck Cafe (Lucky's), or getaroomatClubPittsburgh.

Swing over to Millvale and check out Harold's Haunt and the witches of Maude's Paperwing Gallery starting their own "theyborhood".

1. Brewer's, 3315 Liberty Ave
2. True T Pittsburgh, 4623 Liberty Ave
3. Shepherd Wellness Community, 4800 Sciota Street
4. P Town, 4740 Baum Blvd
5. 5801 Video Lounge, 5801 Ellsworth Ave
6. Allies for Health + Wellbeing, 5913 Penn Ave
7. Square Cafe, 134 Highland Ave

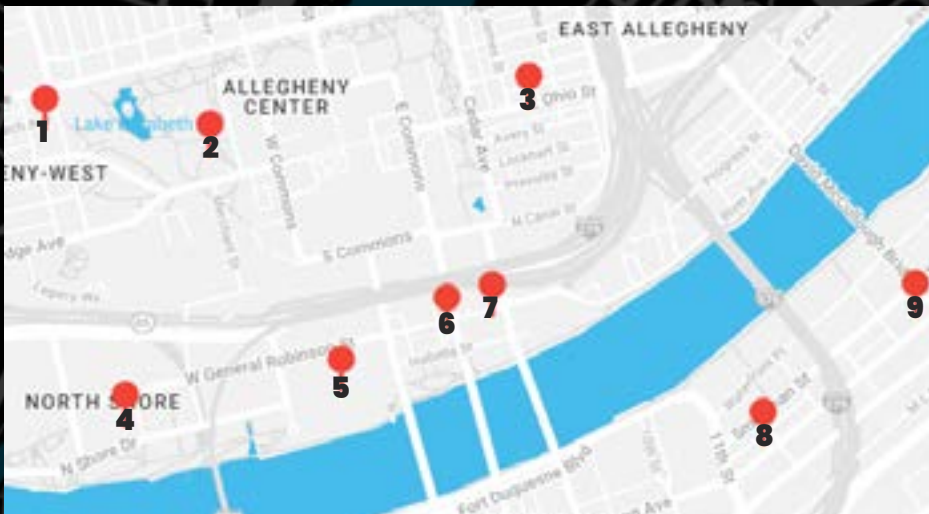
Parties

Check our calendar for more details

- Honcho
- Hot Mass
- Jellyfish
- G2H2
- Crush Hour
- iCandy
- Steel Caribeener

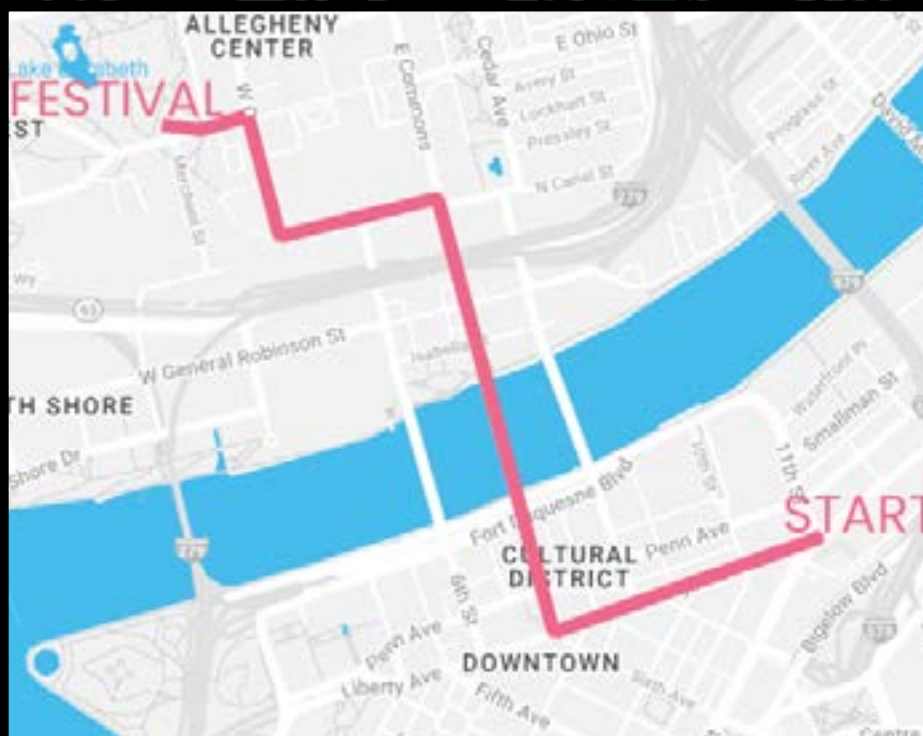
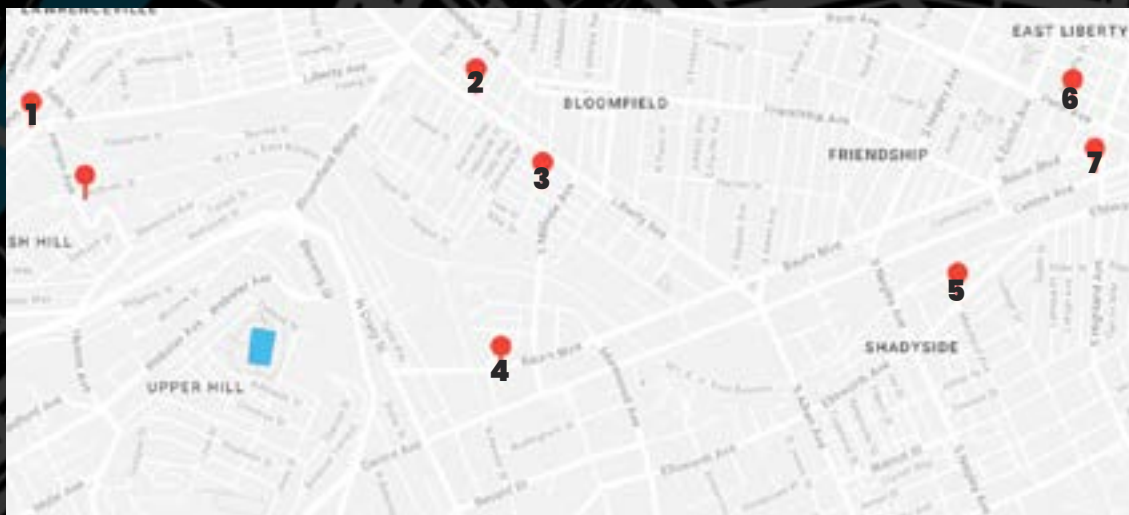
FIND IT ALL & MORE ON QBURGH.COM/DIRECTORY

The North Shore & the Strip District



1. Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation, 925 Brighton Road
2. Pittsburgh Pride Festival
3. QMNTY Center, 525 E Ohio Street
4. Pride on the Shore, stage AE
5. PNC Park
6. Andy Warhol Museum, 117 Sandusky Street
7. Central Outreach Wellness Center, 127 Anderson Street
8. Club Pittsburgh, 1139 Penn Ave
9. Lucky's, 1519 Penn Ave

East End



Pittsburgh Pride March & Parade Route Saturday, June 3

Line up begins at 10:00 AM,
Step off at 12:00 PM.

Best viewing locations:

- Liberty Avenue, Pittsburgh's historically LGBTQ district.
- Fort Duquesne Blvd, The parade will cross through the Three Rivers Arts Festival.
- Andy Warhol Bridge, Span & north end. Special Pride experience.

ALL WELCOME TO MARCH



PURSUE YOUR HAPPINESS

It is my pleasure to join with QBurgh to welcome everyone gathered for the 2023 Pittsburgh Pride Month celebration.

William Penn founded our Commonwealth on the principles of fairness and tolerance, and I believe we must continue to be a

place that pays faithful tribute to those core values. Together, we are creating a Pennsylvania that is committed to being an environment that supports greater diversity and inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community and beyond. My record on LGBTQ+ rights and nondiscrimination has been clear; as long as I am Governor, Pennsylvanians will have the right to marry who they love and be who they are. I applaud QBurgh for advocating for LGBTQ+ acceptance and non-discrimination through education, social involvement, and outreach endeavors. This organization and its partners have touched the lives of countless people and we must be committed to continue working

together to get further LGBTQ+ protections passed. For those attending various events throughout the month, I am proud to recognize your determination to face and overcome adversity, your commitment to breaking down barriers, and celebrating who we are as Pennsylvanians.

As Governor, and on behalf of all the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I am honored to welcome everyone to Pittsburgh Pride Month. Please accept my best wishes for a memorable event and continued success.



Governor Josh Shapiro



FREE TO

Celebrate Pride 2023 and focus on Radical Joy and Resistance. We are celebrating all queer individuals, regardless of race, gender, class, or identity. In 2023, we want to celebrate the joy and love within the queer community, while still recognizing the LGBTQIA+ community's need to resist.

carnegielibrary.org

explore include resist **PRIDE** intersect





PITTSBURGH IS FOR EVERYONE

On behalf of the residents of our great city, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Pittsburgh in celebration of LGBTQIA+ Pride Month!

Pittsburgh is a place where every member of the LGBTQIA+ community is valued for who they are, and we honor and celebrate everyone in our great city. We are working hard to make Pittsburgh be a city where every member of the LGBTQIA+ community can feel safe and welcome and has opportunities to thrive.

Pride celebrations that will occur over the next month embody the spirit of a city that is welcoming, diverse, and accepting of all people. Pittsburgh is home to LGBTQIA+ history makers, artists, and entrepreneurs.

We're also home to 15,000 acres of public parks and green spaces and world-class architecture. And with more than 32 museums, 30 concert venues, and 19 public libraries, our arts community rivals any other major American city. Throughout Pride Month, I encourage everyone to join in the festivities and enjoy all that Pittsburgh has to offer – from our beautiful rivers to our diverse neighborhoods.

I would like to commend QBurgh for organizing the annual Pride Guide magazine that lifts up and celebrates all that the community has to offer as well as recognitions of our local LGBTQIA+ history, and spotlights on many of the incredible accomplishments of Pittsburgh's LGBTQIA+ Community.

Happy Pride Pittsburgh,

Ed Gainey
Mayor
City of Pittsburgh
he / him / his

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P TOWN PRESENTS

50 Years of PITTSBURGH Pride

**FRI
7PM**

DISCO REVOLUTION

**JUNE
2ND**

Entry \$10 | Music by Dancing Queen | Hosted
by iCandy Pittsburgh | 7PM to 11PM

11PM

BLACKOUT GLOW PARTY

Music by DJ Burning Bridgett | 11PM to 2AM

**SAT
7PM**

ABOVE THE CLOUDS

**JUNE
3RD**

No Cover | Music by DJ Winston | Shot Boys
& Dancers | 7PM to 11PM

**SUN
9PM**

SIPS N' STUDS

**JUNE
4TH**

No Cover | Clothing Optional | Gear
Encouraged | Dancers | 9PM to 2AM

OPEN 6PM TO 2AM EVERY DAY
4740 BAUM BOULEVARD PITTSBURGH, PA 15213

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TEREMANA
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BATCH TEQUILA





SHOULD YOU NEED US

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
Move over Whoopi, there's a new Sister Act in the Steel City.

by Roy J Gloeckl II

If you've been to a Pride event, you may have found yourself wondering why you saw a white-faced, possibly fully-bearded nun in a colorful ensemble. If you have, consider yourself blessed, because that means you crossed paths with one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence -- an order of 21st century queer nuns whose mission is to "promulgate universal joy, expiate stigmatic guilt, and look goddamned fabulous while doing it."

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence is a charitable organization that started as a social movement in San Francisco in 1979. The organization was founded by a group of gay men who were looking to express their sexuality, creativity, and spirituality in a time when the AIDS epidemic was ravaging the LGBTQ+ community.

The group's name was inspired by

the Catholic Church's concept of the "indulgence," a sort of "get out of jail free" card that you could purchase to reduce the punishment you received for sinning. Convenient, right? The Sisters adopted this concept as a way to challenge the Church's authority and create a new kind of spiritual practice that was inclusive of LGBTQ+ people.

Over the years, the Sisters have become known not only for their elaborate drag performances, which often involve religious and cultural iconography reinterpreted through a queer lens, but also their involvement in activism and community outreach, supporting HIV/AIDS education and prevention, LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, and more.

Today, there are Houses of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in cities all over the world, including right here in Pittsburgh! The Abbey of Trinity Rivers is home to the Nuns of Steel

and was founded in the summer of 2016 in response to the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Our hometown Sisters partner with local organizations like the Pittsburgh Equality Center to support members of the community in a variety of ways.

One of the founding Sisters, Petra Pyper Pictapekhov Pickled Peckers, says that a huge impediment to health and wellness in our community is guilt and shame that isn't their own, but a stigmatic mark that was laid upon them by others. Those feelings can lead to unsafe sex practices, a reluctance to receive STI testing, or shame in seeking counseling, transition support or other necessary services.

"We have our own variations of blessings, confessions, and penance to help wash away the guilt of things that people don't need to carry around," Sister Petra says. For some who have been rejected by their faith, having

SISTER FACTS

- The Nuns of Steel's cornette (nun headwear) honors the three "sister" bridges of Pittsburgh and the saint-like individuals for whom they were named: Roberto Clemente, Rachel Carson, and Andy Warhol.
 - The Sisters refer to their fellow nuns who have passed as "Nuns of the Above."
 - The Nuns of Steel's patron saint is David Bowie's character from Labyrinth: Jareth, the Goblin King.
 - The white face creates a sense of anonymity which helps members of the community feel comfortable opening up to Sisters and practicing difficult conversations, like revealing HIV status or coming out to a loved one.
- ← The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence first manifest on Easter Saturday 1979 in the Castro and Lands End in San Francisco.





such structure and rituals can be incredibly powerful. “Many people don’t have access to rites of passage, life markers and such,” she added.

The Sisters not only co-opt the religious iconography for its power, but also to bring awareness to the abuse of that power, especially the things that have been done by the Catholic Church.

Exactly what types of services can one expect? Well, the Sisters will bless people with bubbles and kazoes at Pride events, help officiate weddings or naming ceremonies, and even hold funerals for dead names. “The person can do something as simple as thanking their dead name and the mask they wore as the thing that kept them safe until they were ready,” says Sister P. “And then letting it go.”

Such services can also be helpful for families to let go of the illusion and expectations they had as they learn to accept their loved one. “All change is trauma and all trauma has grief, so this is giving them a chance to say goodbye to what they thought they had,” Sister Petra says.

The Sisters are very sex-positive, pro-living life with joy, and all about indulging in life and helping you do so without guilt or shame.

“We are sacred clowns,” says Sister P. “Like the jesters of old, we can speak truth to power and we’re like rodeo clowns.”

Sisters will often set themselves up between protesters and Pride events to draw the attention





away from those who cannot handle the hatred coming their way.

As such hatred spreads and inspires hate-fueled laws, the Sisters feel it is more important than ever to keep the community's spirits up and to continue to spread joy just as they did during the AIDS epidemic.

"Anger is useful, anger is powerful," says Sister P. "But joy is the reason that we have something to be angry about. You can't take our joy, you won't take our joy."

If you want to have your own religious experience with the Nuns of Steel, be sure to grab tickets to Outrageous Bingo at Rodef Shalom, where the Sisters are regularly seen helping out with the 50/50 raffle that benefits the Shepherd Wellness Community and the Pittsburgh Equality Center.

And as the Sisters love to say, "Go and sin some more!"

Do you feel the call to be a holy fool? Contact the sisters via email at trinityrivers412@gmail.com. 🌈

**"You can't take
our joy, you won't
take our joy."**

-- Sister Petra Pyper Pictapekhov Pickled Peckers.

LOVE IS KOSHER

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I WANT TO TAKE YOU TO A **THEY BAR**

by Alasdair Blackwell

Gay bars have been a staple of queer culture for decades. There, queer folk could connect and explore themselves beyond the scrutiny of cisheteronormativity of the day, finding camaraderie among their peers in the nightlife. Long-lasting friendships and romances have sparked in these safe spaces. The LGBTQ+ movement blossomed from riots defending gay bars from homophobic and transphobic police intrusions. While the community now no longer has to hide in the nightlife and gathers in other public places, many queer folk still call these bars home and lament the loss whenever one closes.

So when the owners of Howard's Pub put their business up for sale, the witches who run Maude's Paperwing Gallery swept in to save it. Athena Flint and the Flint family bought the property in mid-2022 in order to keep it out of the clutches of a faceless corporation and within the local community. Queer themselves, they understood how integral Howard's Pub had been to Millvale's LGBTQ+ scene, as tumultuous as it has been, and the importance in maintaining that space.

Instead of running the business

as the same, they rebranded. The y renamed Howard's Pub to Harold's Haunt, after the temperamental ghost that loiters in Maude's. Harold's Haunt shares Maude's esoteric, mystical vibe. The two businesses are only a block apart and run in conjunction with each other, events moved from the shop to the pub. One can purchase witchy & queer commodities at Maude's then swing by Harold's Haunt for a drink and a bite to eat surrounded by protest posters and pride memorabilia. Anyone of age can linger there, as stated by their tagline: "Pittsburgh's ghostly They-Bar, for spirits of all kinds."

What's a they-bar?

The term "they-bar" was coined by Athena's sibling, Jasper. It's a spin on the phrase "gay bar" to center transgender people. Athena had been amazed by her sibling's gender journey, but knew many trans folk today still don't find themselves in an accepting environment that appreciates them growing into their authentic selves.

Gay bars have been a staple of the LGBTQ+ community, but it's an open secret they have not always been a safe space for everyone. Historically, many gay bars catered

to white cisgender gay men and discriminated against people of color, women, trans folk, and other marginalized members. Featuring drag and gender nonconformity as entertainment did not necessarily entail being free of transphobia.

By deeming Harold's Haunt a they-bar, it explicitly emphasizes that trans people are welcome here. They are free to stop masking and express themselves authentically, explore their identity, heal from their traumas, and nurture their beautiful queerness to blossom. It's an inclusive, diverse space for anyone across the whole gender spectrum to hang out. The spirit of Pittsburgh's trans community flourishes, facilitating personal growth and the magic of communal uplift with love, care, and guidance.

No transphobia is tolerated within these walls. Of course, not everyone has unpacked the transphobic nonsense they may have been socialized with. The witches want Harold's Haunt to facilitate community building, which means accepting one another and firm guidance to dismantle any bigotries someone may walk in with. Yet, Harold's Haunt is not a classroom. The comfort and safety of the trans patrons comes first.

People are welcome to learn why their behavior is not acceptable and to amend their wrongdoing. If they don't, they're out.

"I want to make sure that people feel safe, I want to make sure that people feel welcome, and I want to make sure that people who are there to create trouble find their way back out the door," says Athena. "If I can create space for the trans community, then I fucking will."

Harold's Haunt also welcomes those who practice sobriety – yes, at the pub. Alcoholism is an addiction that has long plagued the LGBTQ+ community, and bars serving as the main queer hangout doesn't help those struggling or in recovery – in fact, it can be isolating. Being surrounded by people who are also drinking makes alcohol consumption more tempting in order to fit in. Younger people, even those of legal age, have been abstaining from drinking altogether, which puts them off from bars. But where else do they go? There are a dearth of sober spaces that explicitly cater to LGBTQ+ people. Other explicitly sober spaces may be religious or otherwise not queer-friendly.

So every first and third Sunday at Harold's Haunt is a Sober Sunday – bartenders don't serve alcohol. They turn the tap handle at the bar down so they cannot physically serve beer and hide liquor bottles behind curtains. In place of alcohol, the menu offers plenty of specialty nonalcoholic mocktails called "potions" and tasty, hearty meals made right in the kitchen. Some days are chill and nonchalant. Other days, Glittersty comes in and hosts a themed party celebrating sobriety. Previous festivities have included the Patio Party, Crooner Classics, Fearless Femmes, and several CommUnity Fundays dedicated to making the pub accessible to many. There are games to play, tarot card readings, and friendly fellow queer folk to mingle with.

This takes the social pressure to consume alcohol off of those abstaining, no matter the reason. One can participate in the queer nightlife in an environment free of inebriated individuals. Even outside of Sober Sundays, alcohol-free options are always available for anyone who doesn't want to drink. The kitchen also caters to those with dietary restrictions and they often partner with local catering services such as Lemon Tree Coffee, so no one goes hungry.

Harold's Haunt serves a venue for events of all kinds – the nerdy, the quirky, and the spooky. Witchy Wednesdays are a staple of the bar with a nightly ritual led by one of the witches. Maude's monthly queer coven meet-up ends with an afterparty at the bar. For those interested in TTRPGs, once a month a DM leads a Dungeons & Dragons one-shot that is beginner friendly. For the summer, they're planning on participating in Pride Millvale, hosting a Pride Prom, and a Summerween celebration. Come take advantage of the many pokéshops around Millvale on Pokermanz Community Days, Jenny Sais Quoi hosts spectacular drag shows, Asher O'Briant hosts variety shows & open mic nights, book nerds can find reading material at the Book Bazaar, on Gaymer Nights

you can bring in board games or video games – it's almost as if there's something for everyone!

With the recent political climate becoming increasingly hostile to the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender individuals, Harold's Haunt is a haven right here in Pittsburgh. Harold's Haunt is part of a broader movement curating intentionally inclusive queer social spaces and sober venues where many will feel welcome.

Though running two businesses is difficult work, Maude witches are committed to cultivate this community that loves and embraces their members' authentic selves.

"There was this little trans baby got a hug and their whole face lit up and I, like, cried about it," Athena recounts. "So I don't care that I'm washing dishes at 3am... I'm so honored to be a part of this thing that's happening. It's very heartwarming."

Wonderful queer joy flourishes at Millvale's one and only they-bar. Like the gay bars of the past, friendships form and thrive there and individuals are free to be themselves among a colorful, diverse community that stands together. 🌈



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Live Your Truth



Happy Pride! I'm looking forward to celebrating Pride this year with so many of you in Pittsburgh and throughout the state. As the first out queer woman in the PA General Assembly, Pride means living my truth every day and fighting for our community, even when it is difficult.

I'm thrilled that the number of out legislators has grown to six this session, with three of us from Allegheny County. Because of our lived experiences, we fight differently on these issues, even as we are joined by many straight allies.

I currently have the honor of serving as co-chair of the legislature's bicameral, bipartisan LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus alongside Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta. As co-chairs, we have two goals – champion legislation that protects and supports our community and fight back against any anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that our colleagues introduce. As in many states across this country, we are seeing an increasing number of bills targeting our community, especially our Trans siblings, but thankfully because of the Democratic majority and Governor Josh Shapiro, those bills will not see the light of day in Pennsylvania.

Instead, our caucus is proactively moving legislation forward to protect our community. Our efforts to enshrine non-discrimination into law through the PA Fairness Act is just the beginning – a foundation, a floor on which to build. In this time of growing uncertainty and fear, we hope you take the time to build with us and advocate alongside us for legislation that protects our rights.

I hope that during this Pride season, each of us has the opportunity to celebrate our true selves, while not forgetting that a crucial part of Pride is the fight for justice for all of us, leaving no one behind. I'll hope to see many of you at the parade and other celebrations, so please come say hi if you see me!

In solidarity,
Jess Benham
State Representative
District 36

PITTSBURGH PRIDE GUIDE 2023



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Luna & Indi's event at a Primanti Bros in WV had to be cancelled because of threats of violence.

Chi Chi's holiday, family-friendly event had to be moved to an undisclosed location because of threats of violence.

THE FIRST PRIDE WAS A RIOT. SHOULD THIS YEAR'S BE?

In 2023 alone, more than 460 bills have been introduced in State Legislatures across the country targetting drag performances, gender affirming care, trans kids and adults, and LGBTQ+ books.

— by Lisa Cunningham —



LGBTQ+ activists call on Pittsburghers to stand up and speak out against growing conservative threats

This year's Pride Month comes at a time of uncertainty and fear for many members of the LGBTQ+ community. Across the country, drag shows are being canceled, a record number of hateful legislation has been put forth, and anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes continue to rise. The White House has declared an "epidemic of violence" against trans women and girls, especially people of color. And while there are still wins to celebrate, local activists are calling for both community members and allies to stand up and speak up against threats to their safety.

"Show up. Speak out. Take these attacks seriously," says Chi Chi de Vivre, a Pittsburgh drag queen who was recently subjected to hateful online posts from right-wing conservatives opposed to her performing at a family-friendly political fundraiser.

Her incident is just one of many anti-LGBTQ+ incidents making headlines. And it's not just hateful rhetoric that's at play.

In late 2022, five people were killed and 17 were injured during a drag queen's birthday celebration at an LGBTQ+ club in Colorado Springs, Co. This followed a 2016 mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla., where 49 people were killed and 53 more were wounded.

Pittsburgh resident Sue Kerr has spent the last decade chronicling the violent deaths of trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming folks on her award-winning Pittsburgh Lesbian Correspondents blog, she says to both "celebrate their

lives but also diving into the circumstances of their deaths." In the past 10 years, she's written nearly 300 obituaries.

"Make no mistake, if they are coming for the trans and nonbinary community, we are next — 'we' being everyone," says Kerr. "If they are coming for BIPOC, that includes QTPOC ... We would be fools not to learn from the past."

In Chi Chi de Vivre's case, the hateful attacks against her drag performance forced organizers to move the fundraiser to a new location, but they were able to safely continue with the event elsewhere.

A growing number of politicians, however, want similar drag performances — along with countless lifesaving services like LGBTQ-positive education and gender-affirming health care — made illegal.



"SHOW UP.

SPEAK OUT.

TAKE THESE

ATTACKS

SERIOUSLY."

- Chi Chi de Vivre



Chi Chi de Vivre

Many Pennsylvanians breathed a sigh of relief when Democratic Attorney Josh Shapiro defeated far-right Republican Senator Doug Mastriano in the Pa. Governor's race in November. Mastriano, known for his hateful stances against LGBTQ+ rights, has likened LGBTQ-positive education to "grooming" and pornography, went on record saying he thinks gay marriage should be illegal, and said that it was "madness" to want to add gender identity to anti-discrimination laws.

Gov. Shapiro, on the other hand, has vowed to protect the rights of his LGBTQ+ constituents, telling QBurgh, "As Governor, I will continue to stand with the LGBTQ+ community and fight to protect and expand the rights of LGBTQ+ Pennsylvanians."

But the hateful rhetoric of Sen. Mastriano and other conservative politicians remains a threat to LGBTQ+ Pennsylvanians, even after his loss.

In January, following outcries from far-right lawmakers over a queer prom in Eastern Pennsylvania that featured drag performances, Mastriano proposed banning drag shows in public places, a bill that would label drag performances as "adult-oriented businesses." If passed, this would not just ban shows like Chi Chi de Vivre's but essentially put an end to all Pride events across the commonwealth.

"In Pennsylvania, there has been an alarming uptick in drag performances that appeal to children," Mastriano wrote in his

memorandum announcing his upcoming legislation.

But Chi Chi de Vivre says drag performers have no interest in grooming children into their lifestyle, but instead "hopes the exposure will be fun and help in shaping them into more of an open-minded and tolerant little human." She points out that family-friendly drag has also existed for decades, pointing out the "OG drag queen, Bugs Bunny, and classic movies like Mrs. Doubtfire."

Pittsburgh is also no stranger to queer proms. The Andy Warhol Museum in the North Side has been providing students a safe space to celebrate at its LGBTQ+ Youth Prom for years.

"Many young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer do not attend their official high school proms. This can be a result of bullying, harassment, and even unsupportive faculty and

administrators," Mona Wiley, The Andy Warhol Museum's inclusion programs coordinator, tells QBurgh. "Prom night is a recognized milestone in the life of a young person. The Warhol's LGBTQ+ Youth Prom is a unique, inclusive event that creates lasting memories, a sense of belonging, and the ability to participate in a significant coming-of-age milestone."

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's 2021 National School Climate Survey backs up this need, reporting that 78.8% of LGBTQ+ students avoided school functions because they "felt unsafe or uncomfortable."

But despite efforts by many to educate the public, threats continue.

In 2019, the Carnegie Library and the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh both canceled Drag Queen Story Hour programs, events featuring drag queens reading stories to children in venues like libraries and community spaces, after threats were posted on social media. This year, threats against such programs continue in Pennsylvania and nearby states.

Since the beginning of 2023, at least 32 bills like Mastriano's targeting drag performances have been filed across the United States. In February, Tennessee became the first state to officially ban drag performances in public venues or anywhere minors might be present.

For Rick Allison, the longtime host of OUTrageous Bingo, a monthly event featuring drag queens and benefitting the Pittsburgh Equality Center and the Shepherd Wellness Community, attacks on the LGBTQ+ community have led to him increasing security as a way to provide a safe space for his patrons.

Indi Skies

"We have had no incidents at our events, but with



recent anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric and actions, we have increased security measures,” reads a disclaimer on the event website. This includes entry scanning, bag searches, and armed guards courtesy of the venue, Rodef Shalom.

Pittsburgh trans woman Nikki Burfield grew up in Wadsworth, Ohio, which recently made national headlines when more than a dozen nazis invaded a “Rock and Roll Drag Queen Story Hour,” a fundraiser raising money in remembrance of the victims of the Colorado Springs massacre. As a young student, Burfield says a truancy officer brought in a closeted, gay member of the military to subject her to conversion therapy, a practice that attempts to change someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity, after she wore a skirt to class.

“I did what I could do to survive in a town like that, and then I got the fuck out as soon as I could,” she says. As a parent, Burfield says she now tries to create a more loving and accepting environment for her own children.

In 2022, Pennsylvania became the 26th state to at least partially ban conversion therapy for minors, with then-Gov. Tom Wolf calling it “junk science.” But the commonwealth still faces other discriminatory practices.

Spotlight PA reports efforts by some Republicans to restrict LGBTQ+ curriculums in schools. PublicSource reports a need for improved gender-affirming health care services for trans Pittsburghers.

For trans man Ollie Gratzinger, having access to gender-affirming health care services was a lifesaver.

“Being transgender right now is sort of surreal, because I wake up and suddenly see that there’s some trending article or event debating whether or not I have a

right to exist as I am,” Gratzinger tells QBurgh. “It’s sometimes hard to put into words. There’s a sense of dread about what’s yet to come, and a grief for what’s come and gone.”

This February, Gratzinger had top surgery, a bilateral mastectomy performed to alleviate gender dysphoria, and he credits it as “the best decision I’ve ever made.”

“I feel so happy and at peace inside my own skin, and I can’t even put into words how much that means to me,” he says. “All because of access to gender-affirming care! Every trans person deserves access to this if they want it.”

August Copeland, executive assistant of Black-led Trans YOUNiting, a nonprofit providing resources to Pittsburgh’s trans community, says he believes politicians like ones putting forth anti-discrimination laws are the biggest single threat to the safety of the LGBTQ+ community.

“The fear-mongering and trans bashing done publicly by elected officials across the board is a huge problem, especially from people who don’t seek to understand but use these tactics to reach a demographic of people who also do not understand or seek to,” says Copeland.

In early May, the ACLU was tracking over 450 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in the United States, including three in Pennsylvania, five in Ohio, and 12 in nearby West Virginia.

Even the White House recently condemned “shameful, hateful and dangerous” political attacks against LGBTQ Americans.

“Just think about a kid who’s sitting at home in this community, who’s listening and hearing elected officials talking about how they want to take away their rights, or how they want to even threaten their parents with felony charges for seeking healthcare for their children,” said White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre in March.



*“I DID WHAT I COULD
DO TO SURVIVE... THEN
I GOT THE F**K OUT
AS SOON AS I COULD.”*

- Nikki Burfield

Nikki Burfield



It's LGBTQ+ children who inspire Black Pittsburgh trans woman Ciora Thomas to keep fighting.

Thomas, the founder and director of local Black- and trans-led nonprofit SisTers PGH, which provides resources like transitional housing to members of the trans community, says she wishes she had been exposed to a program like hers when she was younger.

"If I can just be some type of smile, and light for our youth, you know, in all of this," she tells QBurgh. "I keep my head up as high as I can, and I inspire them to keep their heads up too, because I've been talking to a lot of our trans youth, and they're all going through it."

Ke'Juan Hall, a 15-year-old Black trans girl, is one example. She faced discrimination in 2022 after her Observatory Hill neighbor hung up a nine-foot-tall transphobic sign, "Transing kids is abuse and homophobia," facing her bedroom window.

"The sign has made my daughter feel unsafe. It is detrimental to her mental health. It puts my daughter and our entire family at risk from small-minded bigots like our neighbor," her father Sean O'Donnell wrote in a Facebook post about the incident.

"A year later and my family continues to feel the after effects of that sign," O'Donnell, who lives with his husband and four children, tells QBurgh. "It's hard to believe that a few words hastily scribbled onto a piece of poster board could cause such harm. But here we are. And yet still we know that we are fortunate because we had each other through this process, and not every person who finds themselves at the receiving end of this type of harassment has a support system behind them."

In January, a Moon Township library faced backlash from online conservatives after featuring a children's book, "The Hips on the Drag Queen Go Swish, Swish, Swish," as its Book of the Day. Pittsburgh City Paper reports that the library was forced to temporarily close due to those violent threats.

"We must recognize that LGBTQ young people face stressors simply for being who they are that their peers never have to worry about," says Amit Paley, CEO & executive director of The Trevor Project, a national nonprofit working to build a "safer, more inclusive world" for LGBTQ+ youth.

The Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation on Pittsburgh's North Side focuses a lot of its own work on programs and services for LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

"We're seeing huge increases in legislation targeted at trans and nonbinary youth that's attempting to take away access to affirming care, safe adults, recreational activities, and supportive educational environments," says Executive Director Sarah Rosso. "Knowing people in your life (family, co-workers, neighbors, etc.) support these measures, and knowing people in positions of power feel LGBTQ+ identities need to be hidden, silenced... that's so harmful to our wellbeing at any age, but it's having a very real, harmful and lasting impact on our youth."

At the college level, LGBTQ+ students in Pittsburgh are also facing similar obstacles.

This spring, students took to the streets in protest and gathered over 11,000 signatures in a petition to "Hold the University of Pittsburgh Accountable in Protecting LGBTQIA+ Individuals," following a string of events they called an "egregious display of transphobia and hate" at the Oakland university.

This included a speaker condemning trans women competing in college sports, and a debate hosted by Pitt student group the College Republicans on "transgenderism and womanhood," featuring Daily Wire host Michael Knowles who has said, "transgenderism must be eradicated



Akasha L. Van-Cartier used to host drag story time at the library. Those events have been cancelled due to threats of violence.



Sean O'Donnell

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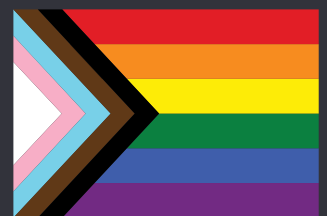
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from public life entirely — the whole preposterous ideology.”

Pitt isn't alone. Carnegie Mellon University faced anti-trans rhetoric across its campus in 2021, with The Tartan student newspaper reporting anti-trans stickers appearing in bathrooms and other public spaces on campus.

Laura Stravach, the president of University of Pittsburgh's student LGBTQ+ group Rainbow Alliance, says they believe the biggest threat to their community is miseducation, which has “made the campus feel a little bit less of a safe space.”

Over the past two semesters, they say LGBTQ+ students have seen “a rise in some anti-trans rhetoric going around on campus, anti-trans stickers being put around on campus, some of the conservative student groups being a little bit more vocal.”

The Rainbow Alliance's response? Combat the negativity with positivity.

“I think the first thing within a community is making sure they're aware of it, like, it's no good to hide what's going on,” Stravach says. “I think we need to all be sharing what's happening and being very vocal about our kind of outrage about what's happening.”

But after that, they say they “want to combat rhetoric with rhetoric.” Stravach says they've gotten a lot of positive feedback after hanging trans-right posters around campus so LGBTQ+ students can know they're accepted and loved.

Experts say having a support system is crucial to the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. According to The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 45% of LGBTQ youth “seriously considered suicide” in the past year and nearly one in five trans and nonbinary youth attempted suicide, with higher rates reported for LGBTQ youth of color.

“Feeling at risk for your identity is a huge attack on mental health,” says Pittsburgh therapist Elizabeth Sherman of Heart of Gold, who stresses the importance of community. “It's hard to build mental health or mental wellness if you're constantly exposed to a context or an environment where it's not safe.”

Locally, there have been some wins in the political sphere. In 2022, La'Tasha D. Mayes (D-Morningside) became the first out lesbian elected to the Pa. House, joining Jessica Benham (D-South Side), the first out bisexual state representative.

Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey also made history when he was sworn in as the city's

first Black mayor in 2022, and again when he named former SEIU Healthcare union communications professional Maria Montañó as his press secretary, the first trans woman to serve the position.

“Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals bring unique experiences, perspectives, and voices to our city,” Gainey posted to his social media pages on this year's Trans Day of Visibility. “They deserve to exist in a community that is safe and inclusive and that welcomes them in open arms.”

But Thomas says liberal politicians should be doing even more, calling out elitism and religion as barriers to change.

“We are not being a part of those conversations when we're talking about what trans folks need within the community. Even those that are our allies, in those spaces, they don't always know what to say,” she says, stressing that politicians should be adding more trans folks to their elected committees. “You can be good-willed and loving and supportive of our community, but you also have to bring us to the table.”

Thomas alleges that a lot of members of the CIS community are hesitant to have those larger conversations because they're afraid of losing their jobs. But, to enact change, she says “we need that unapologetically support allyship that you might lose your job or you might get slandered by these people who are opposed of your allyship to us.”

The LGBTQ+ community has seen some of the highest increases in reported hate crimes from 2020 to 2021, second only to crimes against race, according to data collected by the FBI. And the number of actual hate crimes is likely to be higher, since hate crime laws often leave out gender. The Movement Advancement Project lists only 23 states with anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination laws, and The

Sarah Rosso

Marshall Project details a 2019 federal Bureau of Justice statistic stating the number of hate crimes reported by the FBI is actually 250 times less than what was actually reported.

While the U.S. Supreme Court granted workplace protections from sex-based discrimination in 2020, it did not include housing or public accommodation. In Pittsburgh, city council unanimously passed a bill several years ago to include gender identity and gender expression into the city's non-discrimination law, and other Southwestern Pa. municipalities have followed with similar legislation. However, as of press time, Pennsylvania still lacks state-wide discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ residents.

In April, the Pennsylvania house judiciary committee advanced the "Fairness Act," a bill that now awaits action in the house appropriations committee and would add sexual orientation and gender identity and expression to the

commonwealth's nondiscrimination law if passed by both the state House and Senate.

"This policy is baseline," said Mayes, one of the sponsors of the bill, in a statement. "We are talking about basic human rights for LGBTQ+ folks in Pennsylvania. It's deeply disappointing that there is even a debate over this bill."

While Shapiro has also given his support for the legislation to pass, calling it "an important step towards building a better, stronger Commonwealth," all Republicans on the judiciary committee voted no, with one arguing the bill would force medical practitioners to do things they might morally disagree with, including gender reassignment surgery.

"We need everyone to register to vote, and get out there for every special, small, local, and regular election," says Rosso.

Homosexuality itself was illegal in almost every U.S. state in 1969 when New York City gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, was historically raided by police. At the time, it was illegal even for bars to serve gay patrons or have gay employees behind the bar. On the night of the attack, the LGBTQ+

community fought back, leading to six days worth of protests and a new movement of gay-rights activism. One year later, on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, the first Pride march in New York City was held, marking the beginning of June being recognized as Pride Month.

But if New York City was unsafe, so was Pittsburgh.

Jim Austin, the founding publisher of now-defunct, revolutionary LGBTQ+ publications Pittsburgh Gay News and Pittsburgh's Out, says that violence directed at LGBTQ+ individuals was even greater 50 years ago than it is today because "there was a lot less understanding and empathy towards the LGBTQ community then."

Austin recalls being attacked and beaten up multiple times as a gay man in the 1960s, crimes he says were reported to the police but not resulted in "little to no investigation, certainly no arrests."

"I recall it being a common occurrence for small groups of anti-gay young males to wait in hiding, targeting individuals and couples near gay bars and other places we congregated then," he says. In more recent times, he says he has seen the hate shift to better-organized attacks inspired by the alt-right.

"We could be at a dark turning point if we don't take it more seriously," Austin says. "Our enemies seem to be."

He says protests can be "an effective way to combat hate crimes, and hold our elected officials' feet to the fire if our safety isn't being taken seriously," adding that folks "should praise action by law enforcement against hate crimes when warranted, and be very public in protest when it isn't."

Kerr has responded to hateful attacks like the one against O'Donnell's family, by launching a campaign to "Protect Trans Kids," distributing over 1,200 yard signs across the region to spread the anti-hate message.

"My neighbor thought that she could silence and shame us with her hateful sign about our child, but she underestimated us, and she absolutely underestimated the city of Pittsburgh," O'Donnell tells



Luna Skye



QBurgh. "I have seen 'Protect Trans Kids' yard signs in every Pittsburgh neighborhood that I have driven through in the past year. I find that to be an incredible testament to the community spirit of Pittsburgh."

Kerr also suggests folks share LGBTQ+ content online, including her published reports of trans deaths, even when it's depressing.

"If we aren't using our social media capital to express our outrage and horror," she says, "why would anyone expect us to use our political or economic capital to actually address the problems?"

Copeland agrees, calling for community members and allies to "show up and show out."

"When you uplift the most marginalized, it becomes a domino effect for the greater good of us all," he adds. "Someone once said 'to remain silent is to remain complacent.' We are not in a capacity

of Pittsburgh right now to stand down or sit back when it comes to the issues of our marginalized and ostracized communities."

In recent years, Pride festivities in the city have included a mix of the political and polarizing. But even celebratory events can be a big win for young LGBTQ+ members in need of community, according to Gratzinger.

"Seeing a pride display in Target might feel like rainbow capitalism to us, but to a young queer person who is searching for a bit of themselves reflecting back from their society, it could mean everything," he says. "And I think that's what LGBTQ visibility is about — proving to each other and the next generation of queer kids that we've always been here, we're here now, and we're going to continue to be here. Things are hard, they've been hard before, and they might still be hard tomorrow. But tomorrow will come, and we'll be there when it does." 

*"We've
always
been here,
we're
here now,
and we're
going to
continue to
be here."*

- August Copeland

HAPPY PRIDE

We're infinitely proud to be a part of Pittsburgh's vibrant and diverse LGBTQ+ community and wish everyone a very meaningful Pride month.

Join us June 1st–4th for our Pride celebration!
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5001



GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

by Tia Bailey

Gender affirming care is something that non-trans people may not be familiar with, but for those in the trans community it can be life-saving.

Missouri's Attorney General recently established an emergency rule that makes gender affirming care unavailable to certain groups of people. However, this has been met with backlash due to the importance of gender affirming care.

Mary Bockovich, the Chief Operating Officer of Allies for Health + Wellbeing, shared that gender affirming care is a way to help transgender people feel more like their authentic selves. She stated that there are both medical and non-medical parts of the care.

"Part of the trans experience is being told that there is something wrong with them," Bockovich said. "They often feel like they were quote-unquote 'born in the wrong body.' And gender affirming care is really trying to bridge that gap between how they physically present and how their internal identity and the two matching lead to a greater sense of well-being."

Some different forms of gender affirming care that trans people are given include hormone therapy and puberty blockers.

"Oftentimes people who feel gender dysmorphia will want to speak with a mental health professional about learning to accept their identity, learning to embrace themselves for their own identity whatever that identity may be," Bockovich said. "They may want to have different pronouns than they were initially using when they were younger. These are kinds of non-medical expressions. And then medically, depending upon the age of the person, it can be puberty blockers if they're very young, or it can be hormones, or it can be surgery, or it can be adaptations like tucking your genitals or binding your chest so that outwardly you appear more the gender you identify with."

Allies for Health + Wellbeing, an organization in Pittsburgh whose mission is to improve health and well-being by providing medical care, supportive human services, and education for individuals with or at risk of HIV, viral hepatitis, and STIs, is one organization in Pittsburgh that provides gender affirming care.

"We work predominantly with hormone therapy--whether its estrogen to be feminized or testosterone to have a traditionally masculine presentation," Bockovich shared. "We don't perform surgery here."

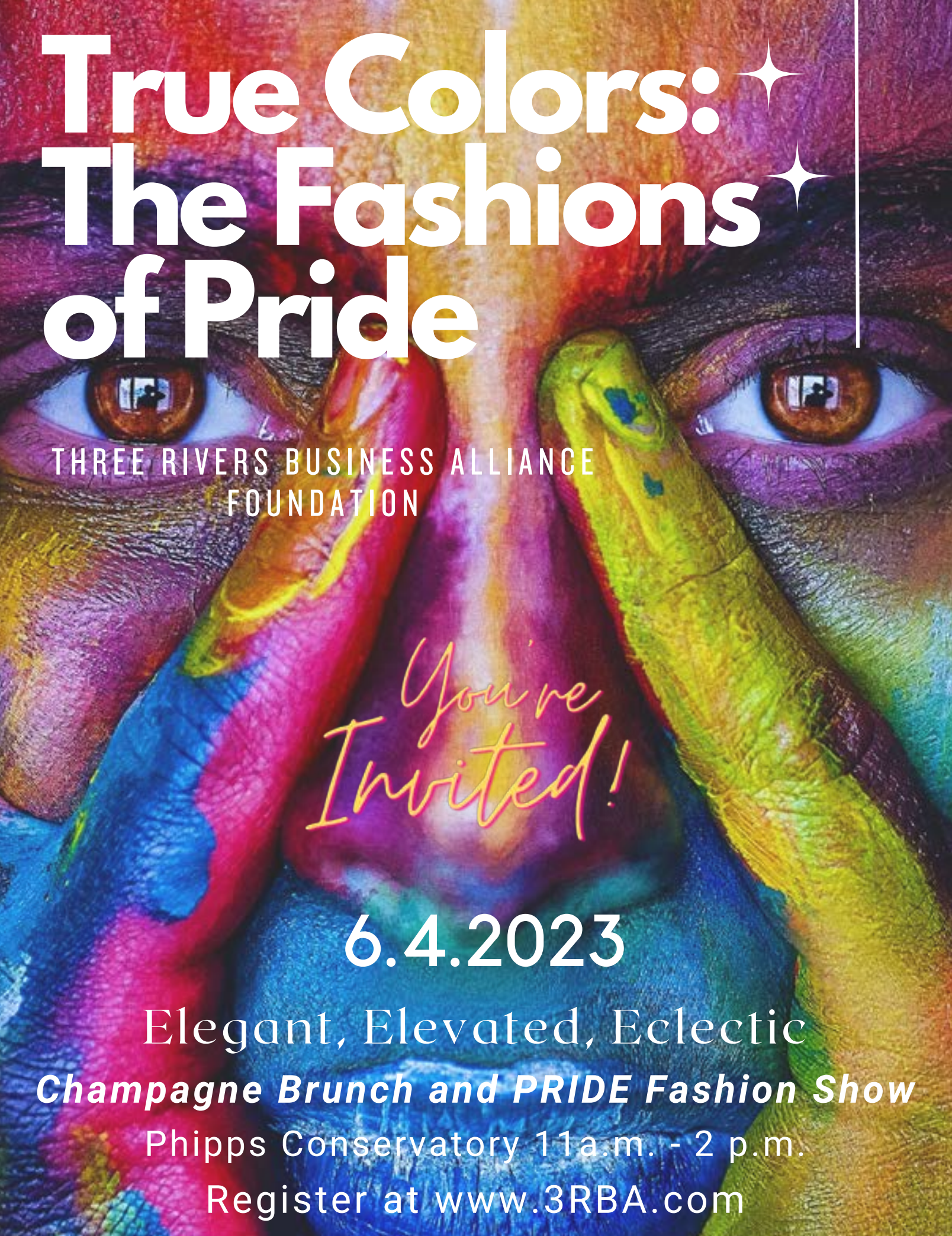
Additionally, the organization offers therapy to those who are transitioning and wish to take part. It is not a requirement.

Bockovich shared that people tend to spread misinformation about gender affirming care.

"There's misinformation floating around that people who undergo gender affirming care--whether it's hormonal or surgical or both--often regret it, and that's actually not the case," she said. "They regret their family's and society's reaction to it."

Gender affirming care is incredibly important to the health of transgender people.

"We're all human and we should be allowed to be our authentic selves," Bockovich said. "And it's not something to be afraid of. We're just people, same as everybody else." 🌈



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QMNTY CENTER PROVIDES SAFE SPACE FOR LGBTQIA+ PITTSBURGHERS

by Tia Bailey

A new community center on the North Side is run by queer people for queer people. The QMNTY Center (pronounced Community) is run by local LGBTQIA+ organizations Proud Haven and TransYOUning.

Proud Haven's Lyndsey Sickler shared that the center emerged from the "consistent collaboration" between the two organizations over the years.

"Proud Haven initially only focused on mutual and emergency housing of LGBTQIA+ youth 18-25. TransYOUning focuses on the Trans and Queer, Black and Brown community, providing mutual aid and other types of support around housing, peer

support, transportation, workshop, leadership, and skill building," Sickler said. "Over the last several years Proud Haven has expanded to serve not only houseless youth and young adults but, also high-risk young adults through our collaborative program, YOUTH Drop In. High-risk youth include any and all youth who have experienced homelessness, poverty, neurodiversity, difficulty accessing care and/or food insecurity. It was through these expansions and our continued partnership with TransYOUning that we were finally able to open our shelter, Haven House, which focused on housing trans and non-binary youth and young adults 18-30, started in November of 2021."

They explained that as the organizations' focus and needs grew,

so did their need for a space. Proud Haven was looking for a new office, and they knew TransYOUning was as well. Sickler asked Dena Stanley, founder and Executive Director of TransYOUning, to see the space they had toured.

"Then our respective exec board members visited and it was decided that we would deepen our working relationship that already existed to open this shared, collaborative space," Sickler said. "It just made sense in so many ways. Separately neither organization could afford the space, but by continuing to work together collaboratively, we could do it better, together."

After the decision, the organizations had to wait a period of time for construction in the space to finish up. The QMNTY Center officially opened on December 1, 2022.

"The QMNTY Center is the collective office of both Proud Haven and TransYOUning as well as a mixed-use community space not only for our individual events, workshops, and gatherings but also for the community at large to use as well, whether for individual, organizational, or project events," Sickler explained.

The center is also accessible, being a block away from several bus stops and minutes away from downtown. Sickler shared that the space also has a "QMNTY closet" with items such as clothing, shelf-



stable goods, and more for the community. The space also has a youth library.

Another perk of the space is the adaptability. The area allows the organizations to host any event they put their mind to. Thus far, Sickler lists: vogue practices, sex positivity therapy groups, movie nights, dance parties, drag shows, and more.

"It's such a versatile space and is able to hold at least 100 people, for a variety of events and happenings, I think adaptable, culturally competent and LGBTQ-welcoming our community as a whole is always in need of," they said.

Sickler says the center is a place to get "tangible support to a friendly face, to a place to just exist."

The center has been in full-swing for several months now. The QMNTY Center has Youth drop-in hours every week Monday-Friday

from 12 p.m.-6 p.m. Additionally, there is QMNTY drop-in as well for people 18+ from 6 p.m.- 10 p.m. The center also hosts a pro-bono sex positivity therapy group weekly on Wednesdays. The center always has something going on for the community.

Sickler shares that they see the QMNTY Center as "a mustard seed of faith in the continuing strength and growth of our various and diverse communities to work together." They said that while the road is long and hard, the organizations can do the work to bring the community together.

"It is so important, especially in today's political climate to utilize our collective resources to best serve the folxs that matter most, not our individual selves, not our unique agencies, but our collective community," Sickler said. "It is our hope that the QMNTY Center is just the beginning. We hope to continue to be an active and

thriving addition to any and all collaborative work being done for, on behalf of, and with the Trans, non-binary, gender nonconforming, and queer community."

The QMNTY Center is located at 525 East Ohio St. on the North Side. The organizations have many events scheduled, and can be found on their website www.QMNTYcenter.com and their Facebook page QMNTY Center .

"We are sincerely grateful to our kids, our volunteers who came from near and far, and our board members that helped to make the move happen," Sickler said. "We literally couldn't have done it without you." 🌈

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A photograph of two men standing on a city street. The man on the left has a red beard and is wearing a green beanie with a small circular logo and a grey sweater. The man on the right is clean-shaven and wearing a blue denim shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the left. The background is a blurred city street with various signs and buildings.

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YOUR PRIDE ITINERARY

June 1

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5:00 to 11:00 PM outside of KLVN Coffee Lab, 6600 Hamilton Avenue. Featuring Dreamdoll. Presented by AIDS Free Pittsburgh and True T PGH.

June 2

Pittsburgh Pride Festival Day 1

Allegheny Commons Park West next to the Aviary and Lake Elizabeth. Entertainment, vendors, Food, games, arts and crafts all kick off at 1pm

June 3

Pittsburgh Pride March & Parade

Line up begins at 10:00 AM downtown at Liberty Avenue and 11th Street. Step off at noon. All welcome to march. Best viewing along Liberty Avenue and the Andy Warhol Bridge.

June 3

Pittsburgh Pride Festival Day 2

The second day of the 50th celebration of Pride kicks off on Sat June 3rd at 11am at Allegheny Commons West Park, Behind the Aviary. Opening ceremony at 1PM

June 3

Pride on the Shore

Featuring Ava Max, Fletcher, and more. Stage AE. Gates open at 5:00 PM.

June 3

Pride Night with the Pittsburgh Riverhounds

Take in a soccer game from Highmark Stadium with stunning views of the city skyline with the Pittsburgh Riverhounds.

June 4

Closing Pride Festival in Bloomfield

third and final day to kick off Pride Month as we move the festival to Bloomfield! We will be on Main St between Penn Ave and Liberty, by Tracey Brewing! 1:00 PM.

June 6

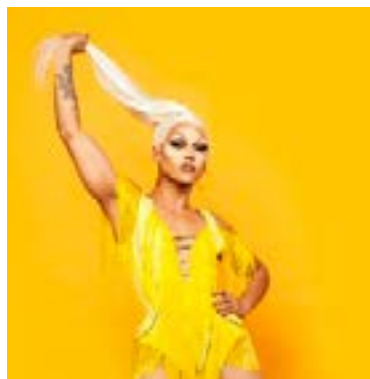
Pride Night with the Pittsburgh Pirates

The bucos take on the Mets at 7:05 and PNC Park. Pride festivities throughout the stadium.



Pride on the Shore

Line Up



family
PRIDE
NIGHT
JUNE 30



June 8

Fox Chapel Pride in the Park

Annual gathering to connect and celebrate in the Fox Chapel Area. Arts, crafts, games, photo booth and more. All in Allegheny Rivertrail Park.

June 23

Morgantown Pride

Head down to Morgantown WV for their annual Pride Parade Friday, June 23 at 4:00 PM

June 17

Mt. Lebo Pride

Held at the Commissioner's Lot of Mt. Lebanon Main Park on Cedar Blvd. The 2nd annual Lebo Pride promises to be a party for all ages.

June 10

Washington, PA Pride

Its the second year of Washington PA Pride. Free and fun for all ages! Featuring local food vendors from around the region, as well as artisan vendors, local businesses, and wellness/resource vendors.

June 24

Pride Millvale

The third annual Pride Millvale is a free event along the business district of Millvale organized by all volunteers.

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June 24

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Featuring live music, drag performances, food trucks, an artist market, and performances by Feralcat & the Wild, The Argonauts, Colonel Eagleburger Band, LezPaul, Krystal Klear, The Junior Chamber of Commerce Players, and more all along Potomac Avenue.

June 24

Vandergrift Pride in the Park

All are welcome at this family friendly event with live performances, music, games and food all at Kennedy Park.

June 30

Pride Night at the Pittsburgh Zoo

Bears, and otters, and silver foxes Oh My! Head on down to the zoo for Pride night with the animals!

June 25

SisTers PGH Swissvale Pride

SisTers PGH present Swissvale Pride with special guest Durand Bernarr at Dickson Elementary Field in Swissvale.

July 8

Ohio Valley Pride

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"PRIDE IS A PROTEST"

LA'TASHA MAYES TO GRAND MARSHAL PITTSBURGH PRIDE PARADE

by Drew Praskovich

"I've always created new spaces for communities to thrive and new intersections to different groups of people. In this city of tunnels and bridges, I'm always seeking the ways we can make greater connections." That's exactly what Representative La'Tasha Mayes wants to do serving as Grand Marshal for the 2023 Pittsburgh Pride Parade, its golden jubilee, celebrating 50 years. "I'm excited and honored to be Grand Marshal. It's really incredible to serve as State Representative as the first out lesbian." Rep. Mayes will be joined by Jim Huggins and Wendy Belly, advocates involved with the LGBTQ

community in 1973 during the first Pittsburgh Pride.

La'Tasha Mayes, a self-proclaimed political disruptor, wants to remind us that Pride is a protest. "I hope Pittsburgh Pride is an opportunity for those of us living our experience as LGBTQ+ people and for those who support us to show up for Pride weekend to express our love for our community and also our resistance. The magnitude of what our coalition has been able to do is nothing less than remarkable."

She reflected on the evolution of Pittsburgh Pride, especially within

the past 20 years she has lived in Pittsburgh. "Truth be told," Mayes said, "I hadn't been a participant in Pride for a long time." She felt the former Delta Foundation's "long history of bad decision making" was more focused on corporate interest and the centering of cis white men rather than creating room for true diversity. "It pushed certain parts of the community to the margins." As an out black lesbian, Mayes had to create spaces on her own since she felt like Pride wasn't one that reflected her experience.

However, Representative Mayes attended last year when Billy Porter served as the Grand

Marshal and thought the march was incredible. "Now, it feels reflective of the expansiveness of the LGBTQ+ community and is fully grassroots driven."

She believes this expression is vital in the face of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (especially targeting trans people) and the fight for reproductive justice which has been central to her work as an activist before serving in the PA House. Mayes is the Founder and Executive Director of New Voices for Reproductive Justice which is devoted to the health and well-being of Black women, femmes and girls. "Who you are, what your gender is, and who you love is all reproductive justice." Recently, Mayes spoke out vocally about the University of Pittsburgh hosting an anti-trans speaker and debated with a Republican colleague introducing anti-trans arguments over House Bill 300 which seeks to expand human rights and civil protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. Though our communities might be vulnerable right now with this political trend across the state and country, Mayes believes our community is uniquely resilient and amazing.

Mayes has a signature style, sporting sleek hats, sharp glasses frames, and tailored suits and ties. The evolution of this style has been a big part of Mayes' own journey of gender and personal expression. She isn't afraid of bold colors or graphic prints as she uses fashion to impress herself in terms of being, "the gayest, most lesbian, most masculine" that she can be everywhere she goes. She teased her outfit for Pittsburgh Pride saying she was determined to raise

the bar after red carpet sensation, Billy Porter.

There are many reasons Mayes feels Pride in the 24th District she serves. From businesses and organizations like Tazza D'oro in Highland Park to True T Studios on Liberty Avenue which provides human services and an insight into ballroom culture for young, black, and queer trans individuals. "Plus, I got the gayest block in the city- Ellsworth Avenue." Mayes cites Ellsworth as a place she feels safe as an out black lesbian.

Countless people have amplified La'Tasha Mayes' journey and her own sense of pride like Kelly e. Parker, "her Gay mother", Bekezela Mguni, her best friend as well as fellow New Voices and Black Unicorn Project Founder, Aya Eliza-Christie, her best friend, midwife, and "general rabble rouser", Rev. Shanea Bishop Leonard, Carmen Alexander, Reverend Deryck Tines, Judge Hugh McGough and Kris Rust, and Alma Speed Fox, who Mayes describes as "the Mother of Civil and Women's Rights in Pittsburgh who lead the effort of the City of Pittsburgh to include sexual orientation in the local Human Relations Law."

This network of support is sure to grow as La'Tasha Mayes and her partner, Heather Reel, are expecting a baby. "The fight for justice and queer and trans liberation is even more personal. This is about the world I want for my child." And the world Mayes wants is one in which we get to live the truest expression of who we are in a community- together. 🏳️‍🌈

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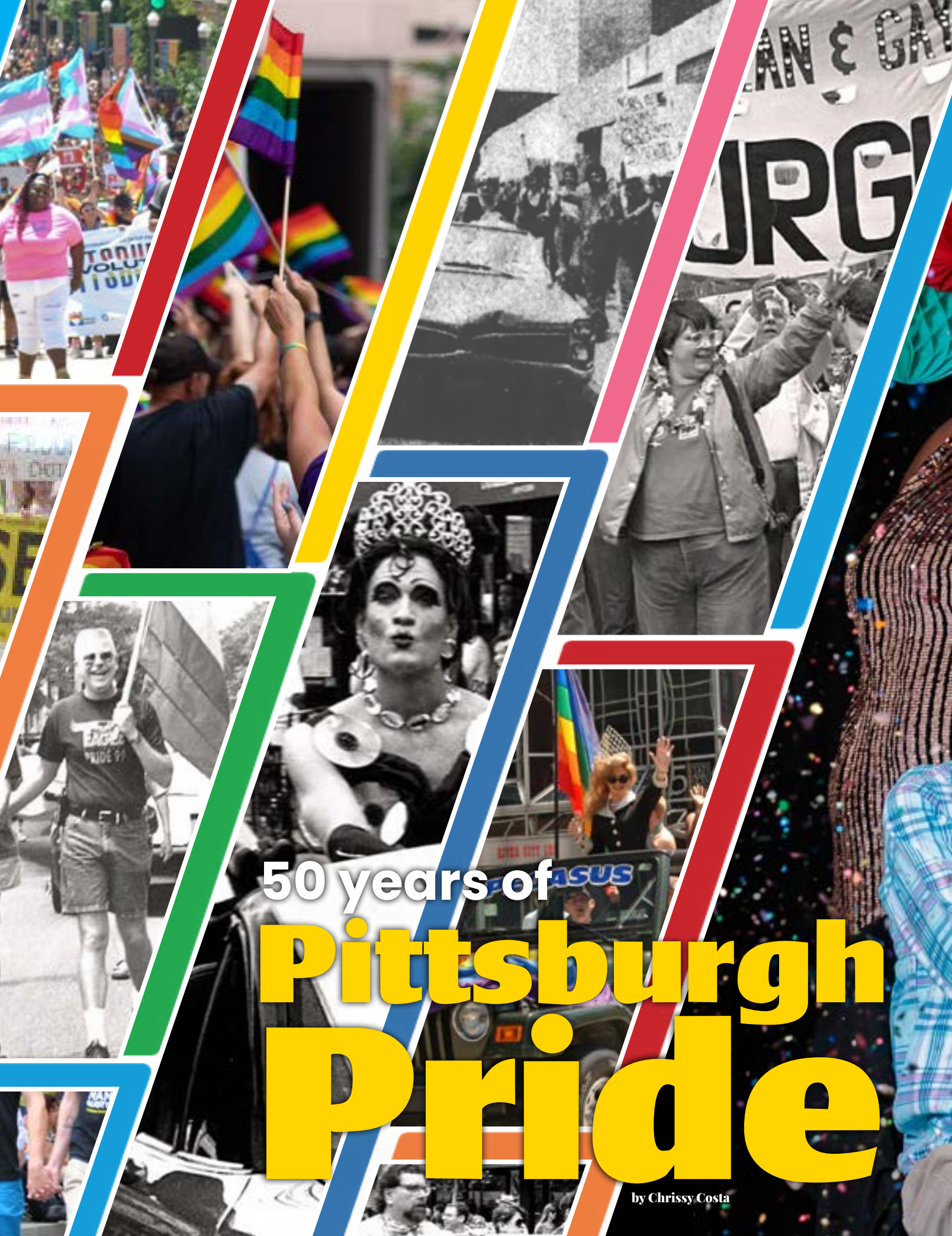
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50 years of
**Pittsburgh
Pride**

by Chrissy Costa





Very few pictures remain from the first Pittsburgh Pride march in June 1973. QBurgh found these three.

Fifty years ago, fifty brave members of the LGBTQ+ community marched from Market Square to Schenley Park in commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall Riots. June 17, 1973 will always be remembered as Pittsburgh's first LGBTQ Pride Parade. Though it was unlike the modern parades most of us have become accustomed to, it was by far the most significant in our city's and community's history. There were no floats, no joyous dancing in the streets, no elected officials walking as allies, and no rainbow Pride flags. Chants such as, "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" were echoed through the streets of Pittsburgh. There were protest signs and banners held by men and women who feared for their safety and possible repercussions as they made the 3-mile march in solidarity. It was a proclamation by the LGBTQ people of Pittsburgh who wanted their human rights. This was a time when being gay was still criminalized in many parts of the United States. When gay bars and establishments were raided and people inside were arrested for being gay. People were afraid to be out, as it was dangerous.

Participants were permitted to start the march downtown but were not allowed to congregate there so they ended in Schenley Park. As they continued from Forbes Avenue to Bigelow Boulevard more people joined. By the time the marchers reached Flagstaff Hill, the crowd had doubled in size. Upon arriving at Flagstaff Hill, a short rally was held before the first ever Pittsburgh Pride concluded with a planned picnic in North Park. The picnic was attended by several hundred people, most likely due to its isolated location.

According to Jim Huggins, who had organized some of the other events for the first Pride Week (June 12-17, 1973) Pittsburgh Pride was successful. Huggins and his late partner Randy Forrester also marched that day.

"When I moved to Pittsburgh in 1972 to live with Randy, there were a few queer bars, no organizations, churches, political or social groups. There were periodic police raids at the bars and people could be arrested for being there. The prejudice, hatred, and discrimination were ever present. You could be

fired from your job, denied housing, denied public accommodations (like hotels), denied credit, denied entrance into the military, and you could be dishonorably discharged from the military because you were queer. You certainly couldn't be married. Your children could be taken away from you if it was discovered that you were a member of our community, especially if there was a custody battle with a heterosexual spouse. Queer people were frequently determined by the



Randy Forrester

This June, we march again. To those who were there at the beginning, WE THANK YOU. To those who joined in the years following, WE THANK YOU. To those yet to come, WE MARCH FOR YOU.

courts to be unfit parents. Some children ended up being placed with grandparents instead of their queer parents. Being assaulted was common. It's hard to imagine if you didn't go through it," Huggins told QBurgh.

"Being in the first Pittsburgh Pride was a thrill. In 1973, there were very few of us who were openly out, so it was very gratifying to see how many people joined us in the parade. By today's standards, we were a very small group, but I was very proud of everyone because we were all taking a risk. We didn't know if we would be taunted or physically harmed because no one in Pittsburgh had done what we were doing – being open and prideful about our community. Some bystanders were appalled by our presence and let us know that, but no one physically assaulted us. Pride Week was fantastic. The city had never seen anything like this. So many people put so much time and energy into making all the events happen. It

was truly a successful community project."

Jim helped create GAP (Gay Alternatives Pittsburgh) and was its first president. Members of GAP organized the first Pittsburgh Pride Week. Jim, Randy, and a secretary helped other groups get started, like Metropolitan Church, PFLAG Pittsburgh with Randy's mother as the first president, the Gay and Lesbian Community Center now known as the Pittsburgh Equality

Being in the first Pittsburgh Pride was a thrill. In 1973, there were very few of us who were openly out, so it was very gratifying to see how many people joined us

Center, a lesbian and feminist group, and more. As a result, other people started groups and services and, over time, our community became what it is today.

Wendy Bell talked about her experience, as well as other women's experiences during this time.

"The Gay Pride Celebration in 1973 was a little bit different for us lesbians than it was for the men. We were experiencing the Women's Movement then and the process of redefining ourselves with female centered images and rejecting male-based definitions of ourselves was a tumultuous process. Many of us chose to become "separatists" and remove ourselves entirely from



Jim Huggins & Wendy Bell.

activities that involved men and that included gay men, some of whom could be biting misogynist. So, we retreated to our consciousness raising groups. We called those groups "Defucking Sessions" for obvious reasons. They consisted of small groups of women who met in the small rooms, told their stories, shed their male-defined selves, recreated themselves in our own images and made lifelong friends. And we benefited from the guys marching," Bell recalled.

"In addition to this recreating activity, I also went with Jim Huggins to universities and churches, by invitation, to speak to straight groups of people about the gay experience and answer their questions. In doing this we presented real life examples of everyday gay folk to counteract some of the myths propagated by the media, religious bigots and homophobes in general in the straight culture of the day. It was eye opening for us, too. We learned that there were people out there who were not bigoted and did not hate gay people. It gave us a glimmer of hope there at the beginning of our movement."

Jim and Wendy made a lifelong



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connection back then and Jim notes that he took a page out of the Women's movement 'rulebook' on how to start a movement.

Between the first Pittsburgh Pride until now, there have been many changes. It's been quite an evolution. As Wendy puts it, "It never looked back. It got bigger and bigger with more and more people. More impact." Pittsburgh Pride has been planned by different organizations over the course of 50 years from Gay Alternatives Pittsburgh, Three Rivers Pride Committee, the Gay and Lesbian Community Center, the Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh, and now the Pittsburgh Pride Group, a consortium of Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ non-profits and community groups lead by TransYouning. Alternative Prides popped up along the way as well.

Under the Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Pride grew exponentially and some thought that to be a good thing at the beginning. However, there was much controversy over the years with Delta at the helm. Rick Allison, creator of OUtageous Bingo, was active with the GLCC from 2001 to 2021, and served as Pride Chair for several of those years. Rick says that the Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh approached the GLCC and gave

them an ultimatum to give up Pride or be put out of business. He said the Delta Foundation threatened to have their own Pride on the same day that the GLCC held Pittsburgh Pride. The GLCC didn't have the resources to spend the money the way that the Delta Foundation could so the GLCC handed over Pittsburgh Pride.

We learned that there were people out there who were not bigoted and did not hate gay people. It gave us a glimmer of hope

"Those years when we had a few hundred people at Pride were just as important to the community as it is now. It's many people's first opportunity to be out in public and see others like themselves and celebrate. Most people are overwhelmed in a good way at their first Pride experience. It was always a group of the people, for the people without any corporate sponsorship. Like a hometown Veterans parade.

I think we did a pretty good job," Rick told QBurgh.

The Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh was the sole planner of Pittsburgh Pride events from 2008 until 2015 when cracks began to show that the LGBTQ community's best interests were not at the heart of the foundation or its employee.

Local activists formed Roots Pride Pittsburgh in 2015, organized by The Garden of Peace Project, as an alternative to the Delta Foundation Pride events after the Delta Foundation booked Iggy Azalea to headline Pride in The Street. Iggy Azalea was known to make racist and homophobic comments and tweets on social media. Roots Pride Pittsburgh was the first set of alternative Pride events — pitched as more inclusive of queer and trans people of color.

In 2017, People's Pride Pittsburgh was formed by SisTers PGH after the Delta Foundation sold the naming rights of the Pittsburgh Pride parade to EQT, an oil and gas corporation, and the centering of Delta's Pride events around corporate interests. Pittsburgh Pride had become something completely different than what the 1973 parade stood for.



Allegedly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in August of 2020 the Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh announced the cancellation of Pittsburgh Pride and that the organization would close its doors. The next day, the Pittsburgh Pride Group was formed and announced that they would reclaim Pittsburgh Pride for the community. Their goal was a more inclusive and diverse Pride centered on community. However, in a desperate last attempt to hold on to Pittsburgh Pride, the Delta Foundation filed to own the trademark "Pittsburgh Pride" in September of 2020. QBurgh LLC, the publisher of this magazine, sued the Delta Foundation to prevent that ownership and in August of 2022 the Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh formally withdrew their application to own "Pittsburgh Pride."

Pittsburgh Pride had been liberated for the community.

2023 is the third Pittsburgh Pride thrown by the Pittsburgh Pride Group with an emphasis on community, diversity, and accessibility. Local, neighborhood Prides have begun to pop up and flourish spreading the power of Pride to Millvale, Swissvale, Mt. Lebanon, Fox Chapel and more.

We've come a long way since June 17, 1973.

"Fifty years later, I stand in awe of how much progress has been made in securing civil rights for our community," says Jim Huggins. "I did not believe that I would be able to legally marry another man in my lifetime. A gay man being a serious candidate for president – in 1973, I couldn't imagine that ever happening. At the same time, I'm afraid that the far right will systematically erode our rights. The hateful targeting of the trans community breaks my heart."

support the LGBTQ+ right to live their lives without oppression and violence. We've come a long way from the days when one couldn't congregate in a bar and dance with one's partner without fear of arrest. But, we also have a long way to go so that all of our community can live without fear and abridged rights."

This June, we march again. To those who were there at the beginning, we thank you. To those who joined in the years following, we thank you. To those yet to come, we march for you. 🏳️‍🌈

Fifty years later, I stand in awe of how much progress has been made

Wendy Bell is still in disbelief over marriage equality. As for the modern-day Pride events Wendy said, "I remember getting off the trolley stop downtown and it was wall-to-wall rainbows. It was amazing." Wendy also notes, "There are still the haters out there, as evidenced by the evil persecution of trans people that is going on today. But there are a majority of people who





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WE WILL GATHER, WE WILL MARCH, WE WILL CELEBRATE



I sat down to write this column any number of times over the last weeks, and each time stumbled as I struggled to find positivity within such troubling times.

In the now fifty years that I have lived my life openly as a gay man, I am hard pressed to remember a time when there has been such an organized

and orchestrated effort to damage and dismantle our community and all we have struggled to achieve within these past decades.

Messaging paraded so carelessly and caustically about, as though to imply that all that is wrong with

our world today can be laid at the feet of LGBTQIA+ people, what we stand for and all we attempt to be and achieve.

Hard fought advances we have made to undo the harm created by political and religious systems, with the purpose of vilifying us and poisoning public institutions against our community, are now deeply in danger of surviving and thriving.

While we may be powerless to control the “noise” that permeates the daily airwaves, and the damage and destruction it intends, the power we do own lies within the truth of who we are and all we continually contribute to create and maintain a better world. Regardless of those who would seek to harm us, we flourish in the knowledge of who we inherently are and all that God intends for us to be and become in this life.

In celebrating this PRIDE we will shed the shackles of hate and oppression that some would have us to wear, and freely rejoice with the ones we love and the ones who love us. We will mark our milestones and plan for our futures. We will take the time to be present in this moment in time, and claim our right simply to be and become.

We will gather, we will march, we will dance, we will laugh, we will sing, we will celebrate and in so doing we will create a better world for us all. We will recognize our love of ourselves and of one another. In this moment our minds will take rest from the fight, and we will acknowledge our rightful place in the world and all we offer humankind.

No one can take from us what we don't willingly surrender. So take refuge from these difficult times and find comfort in the celebration of us. Because regardless of those who would seek to undo us, we will always reach for the stars and all that is possible, because it is who we are.

And we are! And we are going to be!

Happy PRIDE my family of friends!

Bruce Kraus
Pittsburgh City Council
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FINDING THE COMMON UNITY IN COMMUNITY

by Jason Shavers

A Conversation About Ageism with Brian Broome & Leaf Williams

Greetings from the afterlife!

What? Are you wondering why I would say something like that? Well, since I'm many years past the age of 30, many younger queers don't think I matter anymore. I'm looked down upon as obsolete, irrelevant and, at times, stupid. Sometimes, when I go to gay bars, I feel like an intruder in a place where I once sought solace from the outside world simply because I'm not as young as I used to be. I get met with stares that seem to say that I've worn out my welcome so I should just stop embarrassing myself and go home. But that's just ridiculous because I, and other people my age and older, blazed the trail for these younger queers to have the lives they have today. We fought for the freedoms these kids enjoy and they don't even have the decency to appreciate the struggles we went through. Well, I'm not the stupid one. They are. And we're supposed to trust these kids with the fight for equity and inclusiveness? Yeah, ok. We'll see what kind of progress they'll make without wisdom from us older people.

That was quite the intro for an article in a queer publication during Pride, right? Unfortunately, I felt the need to make up that stream of consciousness to highlight that there are still aspects of queer life that we should not be proud of. Ageism runs rampant through society as a whole, but it hits extra hard when it affects an already marginalized group such as us queers. And try as we might, none of us are impervious to these intrusive ageist thoughts. I, myself, notice phrases like "ooh, these young folks" and "the younger generation" followed by something less than kind entering my vocabulary more and more often as I get older, and you may have noticed the same. I also remember being on the other end of the spectrum when I was younger. These thoughts do nothing but cause division, and in this current world, we, as queer folk, need to be as united and strong as we can be. So what do we do to combat this?

While trying to figure this out, I looked at the word 'Community.' Without getting into the actual etymology of the word, it just looks

like the word 'Common' combined with the word 'Unity.' Soooo...to find 'Community'...look for something you have in 'Common'...to find 'Unity'! Sounds pretty simple. Well, the easiest way to learn what you may have in common with someone else is to simply have a conversation, so that is what I decided to do in order to fight ageism within the LGBTQIA+ community: facilitate a conversation between an older queer person and a younger queer person to try to find some common ground. I intentionally chose two people with some similarities, but also obvious differences, so I could potentially witness a true difference being made and share that with others. Enter Brian Broome and Leaf Williams.

Brian Broome

Brian Broome is an author and professor who has found quite a bit of success in the past couple of years. His debut memoir, *Punch Me Up to the Gods*, is a New York Times Editor's Pick and the winner of the 2021 Kirkus Prize for Nonfiction, The GLAAD Award for Gay Nonfiction, the Publishing Triangle Randy Shilts Award, and was voted an American Library Association Stonewall Honor Book.

He is a contributing columnist at The Washington Post and his work has also appeared in The Guardian and Esquire Magazine. When I met him in 2010, he was battling addiction, and throughout the years, I witnessed him turn things around for himself. He went to rehab, started writing and returned to school to earn his MFA. Brian is smart, resourceful, creative and also quite hilarious. He was an obvious choice in my mind to be the older queer in my equation.

Leaf Williams

Leaf Williams hails from a small town in Georgia but now lives here in Pittsburgh, PA. After moving here, they began performing under the name soft boy, using drag as a vessel to explore identity and the rules of masculinity. I met Leaf through friends in the nightlife scene in Pittsburgh. I also had the opportunity to spend a few days with Leaf last year at Honcho Campout. What I learned during those few days is that Leaf is a vibrant young person who is politically-minded but also knows how to balance that with a fun and nurturing side. It did not take me long to realize that Leaf would be the perfect counterpart to Brian in this conversation.

What do these two have in common besides being friends with me? Well, not a whole lot besides both being members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Pittsburgh. Their differences definitely outnumber their similarities. Brian is a cisgender man and Leaf is non-binary. Brian is Black and Leaf is Hispanic. Before this conversation, they had never met or spoken to each other. Brian had never seen a soft boy performance and Leaf had never read any of Brian's written work. And that was just what I wanted. When any kind of stereotypical, discriminatory thoughts enter our minds, they're usually about people we don't even know. I needed to know: can a conversation with an individual we

don't know potentially change our outlook on people in general?

Early in the afternoon on a Saturday, I introduced Brian and Leaf. I let them know that I had some questions for them to help guide the conversation and assured them that we were safe with each other. I encouraged them to speak as freely and openly as they felt comfortable with. What followed was a quite profound hour. Now, I'd like to share some excerpts from this conversation:

The Conversation

JASON: "What was coming out like for you?"

BRIAN: "There was no big moment. Coming out was a process for me. In college, I joined a group called The Gay and Lesbian Taskforce. I actually think about this a lot now. There was no other category. It was at the University of Akron. It was just cisgender men and women. That was my first step towards coming out. I transferred schools to University of Pittsburgh and I joined a group called BiGayLa. Now we had three categories, bisexual, lesbians and gays and no mention of anything else. At that time, their idea of diversity was to include bisexuals. It was over a number of years though that I came out. It was sort of a creaking closet door for me. There was no kicking it down."

JASON: "Brian, did you find it difficult coming out in the late 80s and early 90s?"

BRIAN: (nodding yes) "I think that there was more overt homophobia in the past. I also believe that there was more overt racism and more overt misogyny in the past. I think it's still as repugnant and poisonous as it's ever been but that was a different time. I'm not saying that it's not difficult for people today but the environment in which I came out was different. I feel that it was more hostile. The further you go back, I think the less enlightened

we were as a society."

JASON: "How about you, Leaf?"

LEAF: "I've come out a few times in my life. I first came out when I was a junior in high school. I come from a very small, really religious, Southern Baptist area so when I came out, it wasn't a question of acceptance. It was 'which conversion therapy are we taking you to?' And so it was a hostile, tumultuous and scary time for me. Ultimately, it led to me leaving home at 17 and living on my own."

I was a bit afraid that this conversation would be a series of monologues created solely to prove a point. Anyone who has been on social media in the last decade knows what I'm talking about. But my fears were eased quite early on. In response to Leaf's revelation about leaving home at 17, Brian said this:

BRIAN: "What did you do?"

LEAF: "When I turned 18, I started working the streets. I did all sorts of things just to survive. Coming out in the south, I was basically taught that all I was supposed to think about was sex and that I was just a sex object. That's all anyone in the south thought about gay people, at least in my field of view."

BRIAN: "Isn't it weird how straight people automatically think about sex when it comes to queer people? They're oddly fixated on it. Even now with the opposition to drag queens. They're calling drag shows overtly sexual. I don't think that I've ever been to an overtly sexual drag show outside of a bar at midnight where there are only adults present. It's very strange how they do that."

LEAF: "I completely agree. It's so bizarre. When I was in high school, I wondered why everyone was



sexualizing me when I was just trying to figure out my identity."

Common ground was being discovered. Matching opinions were being discussed. I moved on:

Jason: "What was your first Pride event like for you?"

BRIAN: "My first Pride parade was very small and very scary. It wasn't like the Pride parades of today. It was only a few of us, maybe a hundred of us. We marched in downtown Pittsburgh and people on the sidewalk were just jeering and pointing and laughing at us. You felt very exposed and I was terrified."

LEAF: My first Pride experience was here in Pittsburgh when I was 18. When I came out at 16 as gay, I was also very confused internally with my gender. My journey with my gender has been an ever-evolving process and I'm only just now allowing myself to feel what I feel. But at the time of my first Pride, I felt that I had to fit a certain mold and check certain boxes. So when I went to Pride, I felt like I had to perform, in a sense. I felt so desperate to connect while also feeling so unrested internally. It was hard for me to even enjoy myself. But even then, just being around queer people didn't feel real. But I was alone. I didn't have many friends in Pittsburgh at the time. I had this idea in my head that Pride would be a place to connect with people but it was hard. There was a concert and people were doing their own thing. It was cool being surrounded by queer people but I still didn't think I had my community yet."

BRIAN: "If I'm being honest with myself, I think I went to my first Pride because I really wanted to find a boyfriend. I think that want or yearning drives a lot of people to come out. But I also think I was a bit

annoyed that I had to be exposed in order to find community."

LEAF: "It's hard to always feel exposed. It's hard to always feel ripped open for people to assess your life. Straight people, cis people, they don't always have to feel that."

BRIAN: "They just go and live their lives. Our existence is some weird bellwether for politics. People debate whether we should even exist literally every year, all year long. When you wake up with that every day, you feel that heaviness every day."

JASON: "So what does Pride mean to you now?"

LEAF: "For me, I think a lot about my inner child. I think about what I needed when I was 5, when I was 10, when I was 13 and when I was 20. Pride to me is wearing my existence for my inner child who couldn't. It's a sense of freedom. Growing up very religious, I was taught that Pride is literally a sin. So now it's celebrating yourself, celebrating your community, celebrating your existence and allowing yourself to take space, giving yourself the right to exist as freely, as large, as small as you want to be for yourself."

BRIAN: "Audre Lorde has a quote that goes like this: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.' THEY don't want us to exist. I used to abuse myself in so many ways. I'm a recovering alcoholic and drug addict and that was the act of me destroying myself. They love that. They love when we have horrible endings. Now, I try take care of myself and the other people in my life who are queer so we can be respectful and keep showing up. I have a friend who has a daughter who is 16 and to her, queerness is a non-issue. It just doesn't matter to her. I see a lot of young people like that now and I believe that is a result of queer people continuing to show up and being their authentic

selves. To some people, we are still as scary as we have always been because they want to stay in that bubble where everything that is not like them is a threat. But what showing Pride has done, what being visible has done is it's made queer people less scary to a lot of people."

We discussed a lot in our time together. There was never more than just a few seconds of silence. We talked about our experiences in the past and present, and our hopes for the future. And what was the result? Well, many things were learned and minds were definitely changed:

JASON: "What are we taking away from today? For example, Brian, do you still think you had a more difficult time with being queer in the past?"

BRIAN: "I think I might've changed my mind on that because of something Leaf said earlier in the conversation: individual stories are individual stories. I can look back at my experience and see benefits that I had that Leaf didn't. I never struggled with gender. I had an opportunity to leave my family and still be supported by them but the truth is the isolation still feels the same, regardless of access to resources. The self-hatred can still be there despite access to resources. I don't think it was rougher back then anymore. It can still be rough."

LEAF: "What I think I will take with me from this conversation is that while experiences may be different, the feelings we share as queer people are very similar. And that there does not need to be a separation between generations. The queer story is still being written and society does not want us to cherish each other. But we can continue to make queer history. We can honor each other. We may be different individually, but as queer people, supporting each other is what's important."

BRIAN: "As an older gay person, I recognize how we can dismiss younger people by saying things like "oh, they have it so easy! We did all of the heavy lifting so they can have it so easy." We can feel a bit of resentment about that. But it's more complex than that. I do recognize that being young isn't easy. But I also remember being out in the bars when I was 26 and seeing an older person and wondering why they were even there and I think that is still happening. That needs to stop but older people also need to stop assuming younger people don't know their queer history and learn to appreciate the things that they are trying to do. It's crazy to me how much we forget when we get comfortable. There's still someone behind you who hasn't gotten their due, that hasn't gotten their recognition, that hasn't gotten their rights yet. That's what I've realized from this conversation and I'm going to start challenging my friends that are 'anti-youth' a bit more."

Instead of writing off a fellow queer simply because they are either older or younger than you, I encourage you to talk to them and, most importantly, be open to what they might teach you. Brian and Leaf closed this conversation with a hug, but they also opened the conversation with a hug. They were ready to discuss and hopefully, learn, and that's exactly what happened. It was truly inspiring to watch. I am wildly grateful to both of them for being willing to participate fully.

When it comes to ageism in our own community, it's time we take our own advice. When we are faced with hate, we encourage our haters to learn a bit more about us so they can realize that we are human just like them. Well, we need to apply the same to ourselves. This Pride season, please remember a united front is stronger than a divided one. If a simple discussion can help us in that regard, go ahead and have that talk. There's no LGBTQIA+ community without a common unity. Happy Pride! 🌈



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the L word:

PITTSBURGH

by Chrissy Costa

Imagine a space filled with women; all dancing, laughing, conversing. These women are lesbians, so lots of conversing I might add. A place where even for only a few hours, everyone feels safe and free to be themselves. This is not an illusion. It's a lesbian bar, and once upon a time in Pittsburgh, there were quite a few.

Long before the 'All Are Welcome Here' inclusion signs, it was a typical weekend for many women to head to Shawn's 1209 (Shawn's) bar in Uptown to have a drink, socialize, dance, and play pool. Some went to The Norreh Social Club (Donny's), while others would head to The Tender Trap (Now Casbah in Shadyside). Lesbians and feminists who wanted more than a bar scene would find themselves at Wild Sisters in the South Side. Wild Sisters was the first feminist bar, cabaret, and restaurant in Pittsburgh, and later became Bloomers.

Bloomers was also considered to be more than a club. It was a women's space with open mics, where support groups met up, and benefits were held. Many lesbians ventured to clubs succeeding these initial landmark bars. Places such as Zack's Fourth Avenue where the ladies took over the upstairs dance floor. Other popular lesbian hangouts were places such as Players, Bubba's, the Frog Pond, and Skylights. And lest we forget CJ's on West Liberty Avenue. That was the only lesbian bar still around when I first came out, and I remember forgetting a lot of nights there.

If you're a lesbian of a certain age, you will likely recall those times with bittersweetness. Society was not as evolved, and we could only live our truths in certain rooms in certain pockets of time.

Gone are those days, thankfully. Sadly, also gone are those bars that got us through some unbelievably hard times.

We are without a single lesbian bar in Pittsburgh and have been for quite some time. We are not alone, however. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were upwards of 200 bars that catered to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women across the United States. Currently (as of November 2022) there are an estimated 27 lesbian bars remaining. 27 bars in

just 17 states. The red state of Texas has two bars, while Pennsylvania has zero. BOOOOOOOOO!

Some of the current and remaining lesbian bar owners have speculated such a decline due to the assimilation of queer folks, gentrification, and the prevalence of dating apps. The majority of bar owners have noted the economic barriers the most vulnerable within the LGBTQ+ community face as another reason.

"The wage gap discrimination is a huge part of this," said Ally Spaulding, general manager of A League of Her Own in Washington, D.C. "Obviously, women earn less than men, and on top of that, Black women, Latino women, Asian women earn significantly less. So, if you're looking at the capital of white cis gay men versus the capital of white, Black, brown, Asian, Latina, queer women, the disparity is huge. And therefore, it takes twice as much work for us to gain the capital because we are underpaid across the board."

Personally, I've always felt the lack of lesbian sex in bathrooms has been a reason we lesbians couldn't sustain the bars or have our own Club Pittsburgh. I digress.

The Lesbian Bar Project cites demographic changes, the wage



gap, and other city-specific reasons for the more than 200 lesbian bar closures since the 1980s. The Lesbian Bar Project is a campaign created by New York City-based filmmakers Erica Rose and Elina Street to “celebrate, support, and preserve the remaining lesbian bars in the US.” They decided to create a fundraiser to provide financial support to lesbian bars across the country.

The project launched on October 28, 2020 with a PSA video narrated by Lea DeLaria (Big Boo of Orange Is the New Black) that announced a 30-day fundraising campaign to support the last 21 lesbian bars left in the country, many of which were financially threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. By November 2020, the project had raised \$260,000 and many attribute that as the reason more of these bars continued to stay open. Since the project was launched, additional lesbian bars have opened.

After the last lesbian bar closed in Pittsburgh, we found ways to meet up outside of the gay bars typically occupied by droves of gay men. They don't call us resourceful for nothing! We found non-LGBTQ+ spaces that had 'gay nights', such as The Muse in Shadyside, which devoted one night a week to the lesbian crowd. We met for coffee and stayed for cocktails at Tuscany Cafe in the South Side. I also went there for the Queer As Folk nights with the gay boys. I loved Brian Kinney (Gale Harold), sue me. We flocked to CC's in Sharpsburg for unofficial ladies' nights, where I can't verify if we were actually invited. Either way, we had a blast with DJ Kelli Burns.

Then in 2008 Victoria Bradley gave us Lez Liquor Hour. What a time to be alive. For those who weren't there, Lez Liquor Hour was a monthly lesbian meetup at various restaurants, venues, and clubs all around Pittsburgh. At times, there would be 300+ women in attendance. It was the women's

equivalent to the G2H2 (Gay Guy Happy Hour) men's happy hour. Lez Liquor Hour (LLH) preceded several lesbian/queer social groups and lasted until 2014.

In late 2013, iCandy Pittsburgh came onto the scene. iCandy Pittsburgh was created by Eileen Halloran to enhance the LGBTQ community's options for fun ways to mingle and meet new friends.

“I wanted to create a fun, flirty night out on the town for our LGBTQIAA+ friends”, said Eileen. “iCandy has grown exponentially since our first event at Cruze Bar. We have made many wonderful connections with beautiful people in our community through our events. We have hosted a variety of live music events, dance parties, picnics, fundraisers, art shows, an 80's boat cruise, and many comedy shows featuring lots of wonderful local and nationally known comics.” I can attest to that. iCandy and Eileen have given me the opportunity to meet and work with many amazing comedians over the years. As for that 80's boat cruise, you really had to be there. Who wouldn't want to be ensconced on a boat with 120 women you may or may not have scissored once or thrice?! “We're gonna need a bigger boat!”

iCandy took a hiatus during the pandemic but is now back and ready to party.

In 2019, Kristin Fezar, Ashley Durham, Cassie Lloyd, Emily King, and Mary DeMino collaborated to create Crush Hour. Crush Hour is a monthly/Friday happy hour for Pittsburgh's queer ladies and non-binary people.

“In a time where queer spaces are closing up shop, and the most viable ways to meet someone new is through an app or playing a sport, we really need and deserve as many choices as possible. Trans & non-binary inclusion is massively important to us. We want everyone



to feel welcome and have a place to find friends and make connections. We are averaging 150 people per event. Queer spaces in PGH are curated for cis white gay men and while we love and support those spaces we have to be an active part of creating spaces for everyone in our community. We vet every space that we go to to ensure that spaces are queer affirming. It's just good to know as many safe spaces as possible even if they aren't queer owned bars. We're a group of softball players and rec sport athletes that came to the realization that if we didn't play a sport in Pittsburgh, we wouldn't have found some of our closest friends and for some of us, our partners. We are so grateful that people continue to come out and party with us.” - Crush Hour

We also welcome Steel Carabiner to the LGBTQ community.

“Steel Carabiner is a bi-weekly Lesbian, Dyke, Sapphic Appreciation Party held at Blue Moon Bar. It started back in October 2021. Venus Doom is the host and producer of the event. We have drink specials and free pool starting at 5pm and Dj to curate a dance party from 9pm until 2am. We also have pop up performances from all different kinds of sapphic artists (drag, burlesque, comedy, dancers, poets, etc) from all over Pittsburgh and the surrounding states generally around 10pm and 11pm. There is on occasion special event nights where we raise money to donate to local LGBTQIA+ organizations, such as TransYOUning, Proud Haven, and Change Rape Culture. Always



fresh and exciting! We are focused on creating a space for sapphic folks and those who support the community.” - Steel Carabiner

While the times have changed, one thing remains. Our resilience. We may no longer have specific buildings devoted to us, but we’ve carved out spaces for ourselves and we’ve taken others along with us. We continue to grow, learn, and heal.

If you’re of my generation (Gen X), or the generations preceding, you probably get nostalgic thinking back. Though society once kept us hidden in the dark, crammed into small, often undisclosed spaces, there was a sense of family, a home there in those rooms. A safe

haven. Our sanctuary. Something our biological families, straight friends, and younger LGBTQ persons may never understand. Though I am grateful to now live my life out loud, I think fondly of those moments when I’d discover another gay woman at work or in a grocery store, or gym and we’d give that nod of acknowledgement. It was like the gay Jeep wave. The friendly salute that without words said, “I see you. I am you. Let’s go back to my place.” Okay, I made the last one up.

And while I’d still love to create the lesbian dating version of Grindr and call it CuddlR or



CRUSH HOUR AT
THE ALCOVE

ScissR, I also can’t help but believe that we will see another lesbian bar here in Pittsburgh in our future. Until then may we forge ahead like Ilene Chaiken. (We’ll see you again, Jennifer Beals.) May we withstand the crumbling world around us with fortitude, like Lucky’s Bar... 🌈

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HOCKEY IS FOR EVERYONE!

by Michael Buzzelli

In 2008, Mike Marisco and Adam Knoerzer met on the ice. The two cis-gender gay men were both living in New York City and playing hockey with the New York City Gay Hockey Association (NYCGHA), an adult league for LGBTQ+ players. Knoerzer was wearing a Pittsburgh Penguins hat, and Marisco sidled up to him and said, "That's my team!"

Their meet-cute spun out into a full-fledged romance, and in 2011, they decided to move to Pittsburgh together.

"It was a mutual decision, and it was conveniently located for work and our respective families," Knoerzer said.

In 2015, not only did the two devout Penguins fans marry, Marisco and Knoerzer held their wedding at the PPG Paints Arena (at the time, it was the CONSOL Energy Center). The grooms took center ice, but the reception was in the Lexus Club, a sumptuous space with large floor-to-ceiling windows and gorgeous views of the Pittsburgh skyline.

But Pittsburgh, unlike New York City, Toronto, and several other metropolitan cities, did not have a gay hockey association. The avid hockey fans wanted a Queer-

friendly hockey team in their hometown.

"We wanted a competitive space for LGBTQ+ players to play without fear of being hassled or judged because of their sexuality," Knoerzer said.

Marisco and Knoerzer formed the Tigers, an LGBTQ+ team. "We got friends and family together. Friends of friends. We even reached out on Craigslist and found players from across the LGBTQ+ spectrum," Knoerzer said.

"We wanted a safe, inclusive space for players like us," Marisco added.

It started with a simple desire to play hockey, but it's grown. Knoerzer said, "We started with seven or eight players. Now we have twenty to thirty players."

One of the Tigers is Kayden Maclay who also plays on Team Trans, a national all-Transgender hockey team.

"There's talk about expanding the Tigers. We'd like to have beginning, intermediate and advanced teams out on the ice," the Wisconsin native said.

The Tigers play against other

adult leagues in the Tri-state area and, thus far, no team has refused to play them. Knoerzer said, "We go up to Canada in October and play against other LGBTQ+ teams from Montreal and Toronto."

The Toronto and Montreal Gay Hockey Associations team up to host a unique LGBTQ+ hockey tournament, the Coupe Canada Cup (previously called the Eastern Canada Cup). It rotates between the two cities during Canadian Thanksgiving, which takes place in early October.

Pittsburgh's first gay hockey team has been around for a few years, but their visibility has increased recently, and the Tigers give a lion's share of the credit to Brian Burke, former President of Hockey Operations for the Pittsburgh Penguins and, who along with his son Patrick co-founded the You Can Play project, an organization dedicated to ending homophobia and transphobia in sports. Burke's son Brendan, who died in a car crash, was a gay athlete and hockey enthusiast who advocated against homophobia in hockey.

"There was a culture in hockey that would have discouraged a player from coming out, but I think that's all changed," Burke shared in a recent interview. "I remember

talking to my players about it in Toronto. The first guy who comes out will be welcomed. The whole key is [the player] who can help us win. It doesn't matter who you go home with. That's the whole mission of You Can Play. It doesn't matter who you go home with, what religion you are, it doesn't matter what color you are. If you can help us win, you can play."

"The Penguins have done a lot to support us," Marisco said. Knoerzer added, "We are visible at Pride Night at the Pens games, and we marched with the Brian Burke and the Penguins at Pride."

In the 2020-2021 NHL season, the Penguins organization hosted the NHL's first-ever joint Pride Game with the Buffalo Sabres to celebrate our LGBTQ+ community. The partnership continued, and Pride Night at PPG Paints Arena is becoming an annual event. The Tigers even have a dedicated spot on the Penguins Foundation social media platform at.

In 2021, during the first Pride game in Pittsburgh, then-Penguins

forward Jared McCann said, "I think who you love or how you identify, it doesn't change who you are as a person. We want to serve as allies and help create confidence and comfort for everybody."

"Growing up, I didn't play hockey," Maclay said. "It wasn't a safe space for a queer kid."

The Tigers are serious about making it a safe space for everyone. While they play at the UPMC Lemieux Center in Cranberry, they have held open skates and events at the Hunt Armory in Shadyside.

In February, Mandie Spudich founder of the LGBTQ+ Youth Craft & Social Group of Westmoreland County took the club to the free Ice-Skating Night at the Hunt Armory hosted by the Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation and PFLAG. The LGBTQ+ Youth and Craft Social Group skated with the Tigers.

"I heard about the event, and I thought it was fantastic," Spudich said. Spudich, who drove from Irwin to Shadyside with a group of teens in her car, added, "Some of the kids

have never skated before!"

The team is building enthusiasm for their favorite sport. Marisco enjoyed skating with the young adults. He joked, "We were all young once."

The Tigers are aware that hockey is an expensive sport and not easily accessible.

"We have some donated and used equipment," Knoerzer shared.

There is a social component. The Tigers have watch parties and regularly go to PPG Paints Arena to watch the Penguins.

"I'm a Seattle Kraken fan, but I've come to enjoy the Pens games," Maclay admitted.

"You want to play the sport, you can play the sport," Knoerzer said.

"Join us," Maclay added.

If you want to play, you can find the Tigers at

www.pittsburghgayhockey.net. 🌈



LET'S GET PHY

by Michael Buzzelli

Things are getting sporty in Pittsburgh. The Stonewall Sports franchise - and its parent organization, Stonewall Alliance - is sweeping through the LGBTQ+ community all over Allegheny County. They have a host of games and activities to keep everyone engaged, including kickball, sand volleyball, bocce, bowling, dodgeball, Ultimate Frisbee and yoga.

It all started with kickball. In 2010, Martin Espinoza, Mark Gustafson, Melvin Thomas, Scott Moorehead and Scott Filter gathered in Washington, D.C. to play kickball. They started a league that blossomed into Stonewall Kickball. By 2014, they opened five new chapters, including Pittsburgh. That year, the organization added dodgeball. Soon, the group of players became a national organization under the 501c3 nonprofit tax filing Stonewall Alliance, and they added more sports and activities to their expanding roster.

This spring, Stonewall Sports Pittsburgh elected five new commissioners to oversee their burgeoning list of games. Longtime

Commissioners Brian McCollum (Bowling), and Justin Coy, (Bocce), are joined by incoming commissioners, Bill Bainbridge (Ultimate Frisbee), Heather Brinker (Kickball), Harry Caskey (Sand Volleyball), Nikki Nastasi (Dodgeball) and Michelle Kaminsky (Yoga).

McCollum, an avid, life-long bowler, brought his favorite sport to Pittsburgh through Stonewall Sports in 2016. McCollum, who has been bowling since he was seven years old, was running his own league, Three Rivers Rollers, out of Forward Lanes, but saw the merits of hooking up with Stonewall Sports to broaden his base of players.

"Bowling is for everyone," McCollum said. "It's for any shape and size."

Bocce Commissioner Justin Coy feels similarly, having said, "We call Stonewall bocce a socially competitive league." He was very particular about the branding.

"It's random people and groups of good friends engaging in community and connecting through

pitching glowing balls in a field," he added.

In Pittsburgh, Stonewall Bocce began in fall 2016 with six teams and close to sixty players. From there, the sport grew exponentially over the six seasons.

"Last Fall, we welcomed forty teams and 350 players to our new home in Swissvale," Coy said.

"On game nights, we've been hosting food trucks and having local organizations visit us each week at the field at Les Getz Memorial Park. It's a fantastic opportunity for the community to get to know us," he added.

This year, Bill Bainbridge brought Ultimate Frisbee to Stonewall after playing with another league, Pittsburgh Ultimate. It will be the first time Frisbee will enter the pantheon of games in any of the Stonewall Sports' nationwide locations.

"I used to play pick up games in high school," Bainbridge said. "It's a sport but it's competitive and fun. It's a game for everyone."



PHYSICAL

He reiterated that Frisbee is an inexpensive sport, “All you need is a Frisbee and some cones.” Unlike some of the other Stonewall Sports, Frisbee is self-refereed.

While Ultimate Frisbee is new, Dodgeball will be entering its eighth season. Nikki Nastasi has been an active, long-time member of the Stonewall community, having played in nine seasons of kickball, seven seasons of dodgeball and sand volleyball, and three seasons of bowling. She served as the assistant head referee for dodgeball during the winter 2022 season, has been a member of competitive USA Dodgeball for the last year, and has participated in two Stonewall National Conference & Tournaments.

“I simply love the sport of dodgeball and think it is one of the best ways to have fun while involving community togetherness,” Nastasi said. I would like to promote interest, create more passion for the sport, and bring exciting new

practices for future seasons.”

Michelle Kaminsky, the new yoga commissioner, has been leading yoga for twenty years.

“It’s a great way to stretch and tone, but also become more centered,” she said. “Yoga helps you become your best self.”

She also added that Stonewall has “highly-educated, highly-trained” yoga instructors.

Newly elected Sand Volleyball Commissioner, Harry Caskey, shared that when Stonewall Sports came to the city, is when he started kickball.

Coy also started with kickball. He mentioned that a lot of Stonewall participants play several different sports.

“It’s a great place to meet like-minded individuals outside the bars and the aps,” Coy said.

Stonewall Sports are expanding all over the city and beyond. ➡

BUILD AN ALLIANCE!

Stonewall isn’t just sports. The Stonewall Alliance has a plethora of social activities to fill your Google calendar, axe throwing, movie nights, getaway weekends and Pride marches.

The Stonewall Alliance Social Scene offers safe, sober spaces where you can mix and mingle with all the colors of the rainbow.

James Belchick, a Stonewall Alliance board member, said, “The social events are a great way – an inclusive way – to bring people together.”

Scott Borelli, Communications Director and Social Scene Coordinator for Stonewall Alliance, joined Dodgeball in 2015 after a bad breakup. Borelli said, “Instead of sitting around feeling sorry for myself, I got out and I made some nice connections and some great friends.”

Borelli cites an excursion in October to “Zombies of the Corn” as one of his favorite social events. At Zombie Paintball, Borelli and a group of fifteen-to-twenty people gathered in a field in Freedom, PA to shoot paintball guns at zombies (men and women dressed up in thick, padded outfits, protective eyewear and makeup).

The Stonewall Alliance Social Scene has had many free-to-low-cost casual meetups, ranging from hiking and cycling events to a day at a local swimming pool.

Belchick enjoys the Get Out of Town events. The Stonewall Alliance Social Scene has gone on group trips to New York City, Cleveland and Columbus, with trips planned for Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

Belchick said, “We have a personal development series that focuses on home buying, estate planning. There’s a wide range of topics at our speaker series.”

Belchick said, “Stonewall Alliance’s Social Scene is a great way to have fun and build community. You get to be a part of a diverse group that allows you to engage with your peers in a wide variety of activities. Not just sports. Not just bars.”

Borelli added, “It’s a safe space for everyone.”

"Bocce started at Arsenal Park in Lawrenceville, but we had to move out to Swissvale. We weren't sure our players would follow us out the city, but they have," Coy said.

Stonewall Sports take place from Swissvale to Carnegie. Ultimate Frisbee, Stonewall Sports Pittsburgh's newest sport, is located in Carnegie Park, just off Forsythe Road. Sand Volleyball is located inside the sand volleyball courts in Highland Park, and yoga is at the QMNTY on E. Ohio Street in the Northside (both indoor and outdoor depending on the weather). Bowling takes place on Tuesday evenings at Bowlero Pittsburgh (formerly AMF Noble Manor Lanes), 2440 Noblestown Road, Pittsburgh. Dodgeball is played at the Thelma Lovette YMCA in the Hill District. Kickball is played in Meadow Park in O'Hara Township.

Both the incoming commissioners and the more seasoned commissioners have similar goals -- they all want to make the sports competitive but fun for everyone.

"My main goal is making it fun," Caskey said. "Too often in sports leagues there are competitive players and players who are playing at a more intermediate or recreational level. Safety becomes an issue. If you have a competitive player spike a ball over the net to a player who is just learning the game, it can cause an injury."

"Safe in every sense of the word," he added. "The key thing is I want to ensure players have a safe space." All of the Commissioners agreed that Stonewall Sports respects every individual's gender identity and has a zero-tolerance policy on bullying.

"If you're interested in an inclusive, fun and competitive league, come to Stonewall Sports," Caskey said.

Caskey quoted the organization's mission: "To provide an inclusive, low-cost, high fun sport leagues that are managed as a non-profit with a philanthropic heart."

While there are registration fees, Stonewall offers a Play It Forward fund, where prospective participants can apply for an opportunity for reduced pricing for Stonewall activities. Alternatively, donors can make contributions to the Play It Forward fund and sponsor a player.

The commissioners are eager to expand into other sports and social activities.

"I am looking forward to partnering up with Stonewall Alliance and other sports throughout the year to deliver more Pittsburgh events," Natasi said.

In July, players from across the gamut of games will be headed to Philadelphia for the Stonewall Sports Philly National Tournament and Summit, a four-day event will be filled with tournament play and social gatherings.

Gabe Marenco-Garcia, a Stonewall Sports – Philadelphia player and Chair of the upcoming tournament, said, "Sports can be a real triggering and traumatic experience for queer-identifying folx in their formative years. I feel it is important that we continue to remind ourselves of that as an organization."

"Joining Stonewall allowed me to break down that wall and finally enjoy sports. I'm not the most competitive or athletic by any means, but I know how to have a damn good time!" they concluded. 🌈



Bocce Commissioner
Justin Coy

Ultimate frisbee
Commissioner
William Bainbridge

Yoga Commissioner
Michelle Kaminsky

STEEL CITY SPORTS

Stonewall Sports isn't the only game in town. There are the Steel City leagues, softball and volleyball and more.

The Steel City Softball League began in 1981 and remains the longest-running LGBTQ+ sports organizations in the Pittsburgh area. The league provides an atmosphere for individuals to be themselves without fear of discrimination and is open to all members and friends of the LGBTQ+ community of Pittsburgh. Their season started in early May and ends in late August.

The Steel City Volleyball League offers up two indoor seasons, a Fall season from September to December and a Winter Season from January to May. They play on Sundays.

During the summer, Steel City Volleyball has unofficial pickup games for recreational and intermediate level players on Sunday's adjacent to the Schenley Oval Sportsplex and Competitive/Power level players meet across the net on Tuesdays.

"The Steel City Volleyball league provides LGBTQIA+ people along with allies an opportunity



The Riveters, the best team in Steel City softball.

to learn, play, and grow in the organized sport of recreational and competitive volleyball," Andrew Twigg, former board president and mentorship committee chair, said. "That includes mentorship and skill development, as well as social events for members."

Twigg shared what separates Steel City Softball League from other leagues in the city.

"There are two key features that make our league different from many others: First, there are multiple skill levels, so anyone can play whether they are a total novice or played their whole life," he said. "Second, every single member joins individually, so you don't need to know anyone to join, and everyone gets placed on a team by the board. This allows players to meet new people every season and helps prevent team cliques from developing."

Michael Immen, Chair of the Steel City Volleyball Outreach committee, shared a personal

moment about why he values Steel City sports.

"For me, I originally joined with hesitancy at the request of a friend and to fulfill a promise," he said. "I did not have an interest in volleyball and had a bit of social anxiety at the thought of being surrounded by what my mind projected as 'bitchy queens judging and shaming me.' After attending one try out session, I immediately fell in love. Don't get me wrong, the queens are definitely bitchy, but they are also inclusive, encouraging, and root for you to succeed. I've met my best friends through this network of beautiful people, and my entire life has been transformed. I cannot wait until each Sunday comes to go be with my tribe."

The Steel City Bowling League also bowls at the Bowlero Pittsburgh in Greentree. If you're an avid bowler or avid volleyball player, you can join both leagues, Steel City and Stonewall. 🌈

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COMICS ARE SO GAY!

by Michael Buzzelli

SUPERMAN HAS A BOYFRIEND!

Superman's son, Jon Kent/Kal-El, grabbed a sleek, updated version of his father's costume and began fighting crime. He took his father's mantle when Clark Kent, the original GOAT, was presumed dead in a space battle. On October 11, 2021 (National Coming Out Day), DC Comics revealed that the newest Superman was bisexual. When Jon met a journalist and online activist, Jay Nakamura, he developed feelings for the pink-haired boy, who is also a superhero named Gossamer. They shared their first kiss in issue five of "Kal-El: The Son of Superman."

Tom Taylor, the comic book's author, said, "When I was offered the job. I thought, 'Well, if we're going to have a new Superman in the DC Universe, it feels like a missed opportunity to have another straight, white savior.'"

He added, "I've always said everyone needs heroes and everyone deserves to see themselves in their heroes and I'm incredibly grateful DC and Warner Bros. share this idea. Superman's symbol has always stood for hope, for truth and for justice. Today, that symbol represents something more. Today, more people can see themselves in the most powerful superhero in comics."

Representation matters. Comics lagged behind most other mediums

in LGBTQ+ representation.

Back in 1982, Captain America met up with a friend from his old neighborhood, Arnie Roth (Captain America #268). In a surprising turnabout, Arnie outs Cap when he realizes that his friend Steve Rogers is also Captain America, considering that Steve looks decades younger than Arnie does (because Captain America was trapped in suspended animation). Arnie reveals that he has a boyfriend named Michael who was kidnapped and in need of Captain America's help. The red, white and blue superhero realizes that one of his best friends was gay. Of course, Cap saved Michael without question or hesitation. He continued to show up as a supporting character in Marvel Comics for years until the character was killed off in 1995 (succumbing to a battle with cancer in his advanced age).

While Arnie Roth only showed up in a handful of Captain America comic books, he played a significant role. He was one of the first – if not the very first – gay comic book characters, who was out and proud. He wasn't a cape-wearing superhero, though.

A whole decade later, after years of hinting around about it, Jean-Paul Beaubier, the Canadian superhero known as Northstar (first appearing in X-Men #120, 1979), came out of the closet (in Alpha Flight #106, 1992. Eventually, Jean-

Paul met Kyle Jinadu, and married him (Astonishing X-Men #51, 2012), another milestone at Marvel.

The issue where Northstar came out was a best-selling comic book issue. His wedding issue had record-breaking sales. More and more creators were adding LGBTQ+ characters to their pantheon.

Now there are a slew of LGBTQ+ superheroes and supporting characters from A to Z, or, more precisely, from Marvel's Angela (Thor's Asgardian stepsister) to indie hero Zsazsa Zaturannah (a Filipino graphic novel about a gay beautician who turns into a female superhero).

Last year (June 2022), Marvel Comics debuted Escapade, a trans superhero, in a special Pride issue, "Marvel Voices: Pride."

While DC Comics had several LGBTQ+ characters appear on their television shows, including an entire series about Batwoman, a lesbian crimefighter who patterns her costume on Gotham City's most famous vigilante, there is a rumor that Wiccan, a magic-wielding superhero, will make his debut in "Agatha: Coven of Chaos," making him the first out hero of the MCU (the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a distinct and separate place from the comic book versions of the heroes). Joe Locke will allegedly play the hero. Locke is best known from another graphic-novel-turned

television series, “Heartstoppers.”

Pittsburgh cartoonist and cartoon historian Joe Wos said, “Comics, like all great literature and art, provide us with a look at the possibilities, the greatness we are all capable of, but it also provides us with a mirror held up to society to show – not only our flaws but our strengths. The things that make us human. That mirror needs to reflect all of society to show us who we really are. Diverse in a myriad of ways.”

Wos believes that it’s important to show that everyone is capable of being a superhero in the comics, not just the mostly straight white men and a few white women that dominated the industry for decades. He added, “We all need to not just feel seen and represented – but be empowered! In some ways, comics shouldn’t be a mirror, but a prism. When we look into that mirror we see all of the colors, all of the diversity, all of the genders, all of the orientations, all of the rainbow.”

A prism, a nonconvex polyhedron

used to refract or disperse a beam of light, creating rainbows, is an apt metaphor. One not lost on Ted Abenheim, President & Events Chair of Prism Comics, an organization that has been championing LGBTQ+ diversity, visibility and inclusion in comics for twenty years.

Abenheim said, “It started with a group of dedicated comic book aficionados founded the Gay League in 2003, back when comics characters, stories and creators were still marginalized.”

Abenheim added, “It’s rewarding to see how far comics, graphic novels, films and television have come since then – to see the numbers of positive, diverse LGBTQ+ characters and stories today. It’s amazing to see how queer creators have been embraced and how the opportunities for independent creators to tell their stories have expanded with web comics, crowd-funding and self-publishing. It’s gratifying to have more young people and their families, more teachers and librarians come to our Prism Comics booths at

conventions in the last half decade than ever before.”

Abenheim believes that the LGBTQ+ community has come a long way in comics but admits that the work is not done yet. He said, “In the face of the growing reactionary backlash against the LGBTQ+ community, it’s more important than ever for readers of every age, background and identity to see themselves represented in the popular medium of comics. Several young people have told us that reading comics with LGBTQ+ characters actually saved or changed their lives. That means everything. Words and pictures can change lives and minds. We look forward to queer and queer-friendly comics voices continuing to be loud and strong, telling stories in every color of the rainbow – gay, lesbian, transgender, asexual, bisexual, polyamorous, questioning and gender queer.”

Find out your favorite new LGBTQ+ superheroes and their creators at prismcomics.org. 🌈



QUEEN OF PITTSBURGH

WHO WILL REIGN SUPREME?

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WRAP IT

by Aaron Valentic

Pride Month, for members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Pittsburgh, signals the unofficial start of the Summer season, with events lasting all month long. The young, wild and free come out in full force to celebrate, and to most, nothing is going to stand in their way.

While excitement and frivolity within the community is on the rise, condom usage sadly is not. Since the initiation of PrEP medication regimes, such as Truvada or Descovy, or bi-monthly shots like Apretude, condom usage has decreased exponentially.

During the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, the ideology around condom usage became scripture, with everyone from healthcare leaders to drag queens preaching “if you tap it, you wrap it” in order to help stop the spread of STDs and HIV.

Condoms became a security blanket for a generation of gay men, with many filled with fear and anxiety over the “what-ifs” of contracting an STD. In 2023, that notion of “what-if” has subsided to a newer, more lackadaisical feel.

The world of modern medicine changed with the introduction of PrEP in 2012 as a battle cry for help in protecting gay men from HIV. Take a pill once a day for protection and forget the rest. With that has come a new wave of ease, and fear has thus begun to dwindle (not to mention, there have been incredible advancements in treating HIV, with the understanding that an HIV diagnosis in 2023 is not a death sentence).

Among men, condom usage is down, specifically while other STDs are surging at the moment, including syphilis and chlamydia. According to a 2017 poll, nearly sixty-percent of men say they use condoms, but not every time they have sex.

The dangerous idea of PrEP is that alone, it may ward off all sexually transmitted infections. But a 2016 study by the University of California, Los Angeles demonstrated that PrEP users were almost twenty-five times more likely to get gonorrhea and nearly forty-five times more likely to develop a syphilis infection.

Even though we do not wish to impede on anyone’s fun this Pride season, it is important to protect your health, along with your partners. Wrap it up! 🌈



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ENTHUSIASTICALLY, YES

by Aaron Valentic

Picture this - you're out on a dinner date, and your date holds the door for you; they pull out your chair, they take your coat, and most importantly - they pay the bill (in this economy, yes!). They drive you home, walk you to your front door, then they ask you if they can kiss you goodnight, and see you again soon.

Sounds like it's out of a 1930s film, right? What has happened to our consent culture? Fast forward to 2023 - it's "Hey. Sup. WYD", then BAM, unsolicited dick pic. And repeat and repeat until you are bored (or until you delete, then redownload Grindr).

With the rise in popularity of online dating, obtaining a conversation or images has never been easier. If someone lives a thousand miles away, you can initiate a conversation and sext to your heart's content until all of a sudden, one of you has disappeared into the night, never to be heard of again.

Consent culture has, at least from my perspective, been on a decline for some time. In the ten years that I have been out as a gay man, I have been constantly grabbed, touched, moved, pushed - you get the idea. And normally, I love attention -- but on my time.

As a young twink in college, like many other young gay men, I was the target of an older-demographics desire. While it is a lovely idea to be adored (I'm a Leo, after all), I do not ask to be touched and grabbed while out and about, enjoying my evening with friends.

The same can be said for online dating - if I think I am having a great conversation with a potential suitor online, before I can even get a word in edgewise, I am suddenly confronted with every angle of this person's genitalia, that I simply did not ask for.

Simply put, as we enter the 2023 Pride Season, can we please add a level of consent that shares that yes, we might be hot and bothered, but let's think before we click to 'send' on that nude, or before we grab someone's ass because an enthusiastic yes is sexy! 🌈



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