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Est. 2020 Vol 5. No 6. NOVEMBER 2026 || FREE

What's Queer & Going on || Page 16

IT'S ANDI! THE COMEDY CROWN IS HERS!



The wigs were high, the jokes were outrageous, and the competition was fierce! Pittsburgh's funniest drag entertainers brought the camp, chaos, and comedy to Arcade Comedy Theatre on October 24 for the Miss City of Bridges Comedy Queen 2027 pageant.

When the laughter settled, Andi Whorehol snatched the crown, earning the title of Miss City of Bridges Comedy Queen 2027 and the opportunity to represent Pittsburgh at the National Miss Comedy Queen pageant in Orlando.

Hosted by Pittsburgh drag legend Dixie Surewood and produced by Leia Way LeStat, the night celebrated everything we love about drag. Outrageous creativity, unapologetic self-expression, and the power of making people laugh.

Long live the queen of comedy!
Check out all the photos on page 4

Photos by Marianne Santoro



COMMUNITY

THOUSANDS OF MEALS. 10 YEARS OF TRANSGIVING.

What began with 13 meals prepared by two trans women has grown into a decade-long Thanksgiving tradition serving Pittsburgh's LGBTQIA+ community.

Pittsburgh's Transgiving celebration will mark a major milestone this Thanksgiving as TransYOUniting prepares to celebrate 10 years of bringing the transgender and LGBTQ+ community together around food, fellowship, and chosen family.

The annual celebration returns Thursday, November 26, 2026, with an ambitious goal: serving more than 1,000 Thanksgiving meals to community members and neighbors across the Pittsburgh region.

Continue reading pg. 2

PITTSBURGH EQUALITY GALA TO HONOR LGBTQ CHANGEMAKERS

From trailblazing advocates to the creators of Pittsburgh's newest sapphic gathering space, five honorees take the spotlight at this year's Equality Gala.

Page 3

ANETRA WALKS THAT DUCK STRAIGHT ON TO ELLSWORTH!

Anetra brought the star power, Pittsburgh's drag royalty brought the scares, and 5801 brought the party for Shadyside's frightfully fabulous Nightmare on Hellsworth. Check out all the photos!

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DAILY NEWS *on* QBURGH.COM

November 2026 | Volume 5, Issue 6
ISSN 2831-9451 | QBURGH LLC

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(Transgiving cont'd)

Organized by TransYOUniting, a Black trans-led Pittsburgh nonprofit, Transgiving has grown from a small gathering in a private kitchen into a community tradition that offers more than a holiday meal. For many attendees, it is an opportunity to experience connection, belonging, and celebration during a season that can be particularly isolating for LGBTQIA+ people.

FROM 13 MEALS TO A DECADE OF COMMUNITY CARE

The story of Transgiving began in 2016 when two trans women, Dena Stanley and Mimi, prepared 13 Thanksgiving meals for other transgender people in Dena's kitchen.
What started as a simple act of care has grown into an annual celebration that has served more than 2,000 Thanksgiving meals through 2025. Ten years later, Dena and Mimi are still cooking for the community.

The celebration reflects a longstanding tradition of mutual aid within transgender communities, where people have created their own networks of support, safety, and care when traditional institutions and family structures have fallen short.

At its heart, Transgiving is about ensuring that transgender people have a place at the table, both literally and figuratively.

MORE THAN A THANKSGIVING DINNER

For many LGBTQIA+ people, the holidays can be complicated. Family rejection, strained relationships, financial hardship, and social isolation can make a season traditionally associated with togetherness feel especially difficult.

Transgiving offers an alternative: a welcoming Thanksgiving celebration where transgender people are centered, their identities are affirmed, and community connections can flourish.

While the event centers transgender community members, the celebration also welcomes the broader LGBTQIA+ community, families, and neighbors.

The gathering provides an opportunity for people to share a meal, reconnect with friends, build relationships, and celebrate the holiday in an affirming environment.

The organization's commitment to community care also extends beyond the dinner table.
In 2020, Transgiving introduced home meal deliveries to reach community members who could not attend the celebration in person. That effort continues as part of the event's mission to ensure that neighbors who face barriers to attending can still enjoy a Thanksgiving meal.

A BIGGER TABLE FOR 2026

To celebrate its 10th anniversary, TransYOUniting is setting its sights on serving more than 1,000 Thanksgiving meals through a combination of in-person dining and home deliveries.

Reaching that goal will require support from volunteers, community partners, local businesses, and individual donors.

The organization is seeking contributions to help cover food, serving supplies, transportation, meal deliveries, and other expenses associated with the celebration.

TransYOUniting is also inviting local farmers and food providers to contribute fresh ingredients, while businesses and community organizations can support the event through sponsorships, donated goods, or volunteer teams.

Contributions support different aspects of the celebration, from volunteer check-in materials and meal supplies to transportation and food purchases.

Community members and organizations can also contribute food, desserts, meal containers, printing services, transportation, or time spent preparing and delivering meals.

TEN YEARS OF MAKING ROOM AT THE TABLE

From 13 meals in a Pittsburgh kitchen to a Thanksgiving tradition reaching thousands over the years, Transgiving demonstrates how an act of generosity can become an enduring source of community connection.

As TransYOUniting prepares for its largest Transgiving goal yet, the message behind the celebration remains much the same as it was in 2016. Everyone deserves a hot meal, a welcoming space, and a place to belong.

The 10th Annual Transgiving celebration takes place Thursday, November 26, 2026, in Pittsburgh, with meal pickup available from 1 to 7 p.m., home-cooked meal deliveries from 1 to 8 p.m., and a sit-down Thanksgiving dinner from 2 to 6 p.m. Seating for the in-person dinner is limited, and the venue will be announced soon.

The deadline to request a Thanksgiving meal is Tuesday, November 24. Request a meal at ***transyounitingpgh.org.***

Community members interested in sponsoring, volunteering, or supporting Transgiving can contact TransYOUniting at info@transyounitingpgh.org or visit transyounitingpgh.org.



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EVENTS

PITTSBURGH EQUALITY CENTER TO HONOR FIVE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY LEADERS AT 2026 EQUALITY GALA

From pioneering HIV/AIDS advocates to the founders of Pittsburgh's newest sapphic gathering space, this year's honorees represent generations of queer community building.



The people who helped build Pittsburgh's LGBTQ+ community and those creating its future will take center stage when the Pittsburgh Equality Center hosts its second annual Pittsburgh Equality Gala on Friday, November 13, at the Kamin Science Center on the North Shore.

This year's celebration, themed "A Home for the Next 50 Years," will recognize five individuals whose contributions span decades of LGBTQ+ advocacy, civil rights protections, legal representation, and the creation of welcoming spaces for queer Pittsburghers.

The 2026 honorees are Kathi R. Boyle, who will receive a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award; attorney Kathleen D. Schneider, also receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award; Rachel S. Shepherd, named Ally of the Year; and Samm and Aerin Adams-Fuchs, the married couple behind Garfield's The Soft Spot, who will share the Community Members of the Year honor.

"Every one of these honorees made room for someone who didn't have a place," said Pittsburgh Equality Center Board President Ray Sidney-Smith in the announcement.

"Honoring them together is how we remember what our community was built on, and it's a promise that Pittsburgh Equality Center will keep building that kind of room for the next generation."

HONORING A LEGACY OF CARE AND ADVOCACY

Kathi R. Boyle, who died May 31, 2026, will be remembered with a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award for more than four decades of advocacy and service to marginalized communities.

As executive director of the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force, now known as Allies for Health + Wellbeing, Boyle helped expand the organization's HIV/AIDS response to better serve women, Black communities, and young Black gay men.

Her leadership also extended into Pittsburgh's ballroom community, providing space for local ballroom houses at a time when welcoming venues were difficult to find.

Later in her career, Boyle focused on the needs of LGBTQ+ older adults, championing inclusive services and housing opportunities. Her advocacy helped lay the groundwork for Mosaic Apartments in Oakland, which opened in November 2025 as Western Pennsylvania's first LGBTQ+-friendly affordable senior housing community.

Boyle was also recognized as a Pittsburgh Pride Grand Marshal in 2011.

Her wife, Betty Hill, will accept the award on her behalf.

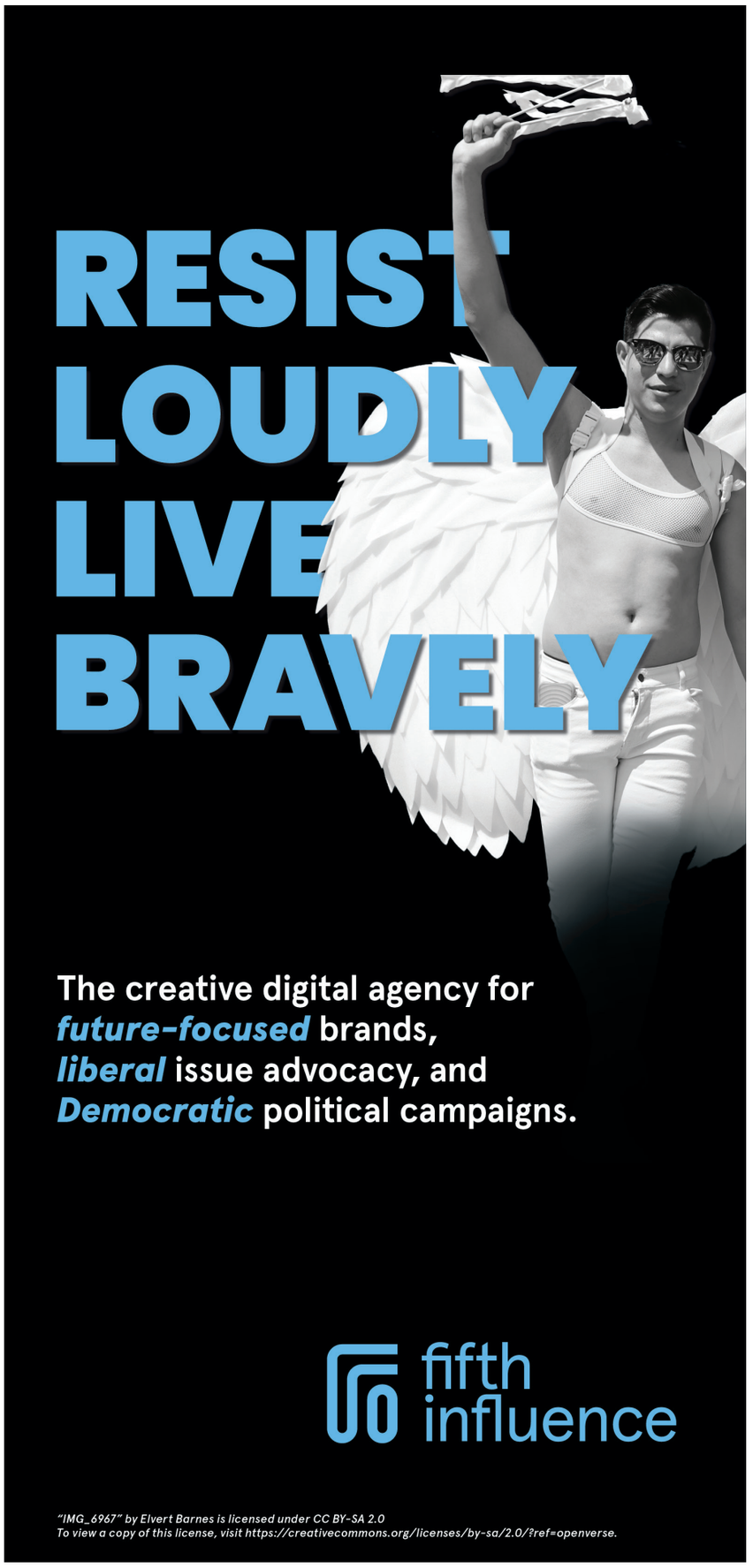
Fellow Lifetime Achievement honoree Kathleen D. Schneider has spent more than 30 years helping LGBTQ+ Pittsburghers navigate legal systems that historically failed to recognize or protect their relationships and families.

An attorney and certified public accountant based in Regent Square, Schneider has assisted same-sex couples with adoption, estate planning, and divorce, while helping transgender clients navigate legal name and gender-marker changes.

Her influence also reaches into Pittsburgh's lesbian and feminist history.

Schneider was among the women involved in Bloomers, the South Side bar, café, and performance space that became an important gathering place for lesbian and feminist communities during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Continue reading pg. 5



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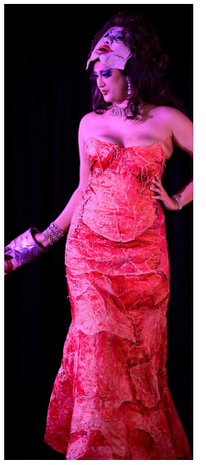
(City of Bridges Comedy Queen Photos)















Embrace every "hugh" of you.

81% of trans Pennsylvanians who were out or perceived to be trans during K-12 reported experiencing mistreatment.

Hugh Lane's youth programs and services provide support to LGBTQ+ youth by helping them build community and love who they are. Email info@hughlane.org to learn more.

Source: 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey: Pennsylvania Report (2026) A4TE

HUGH LANE



(Equality Gala cont'd)

Her broader community involvement has included the Mayor's Advisory Committee on LGBTQ Issues, the Allegheny County Bar Association's LGBT Committee, Renaissance City Choir, and GALA Choruses.

Together, Boyle and Schneider's recognition highlights the often-unseen work of building community infrastructure, from legal protections and healthcare access to spaces where LGBTQ+ Pittsburghers could gather, organize, and find support.

PROTECTING CIVIL RIGHTS IN PITTSBURGH

Rachel S. Shepherd, executive director of the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations, will receive the Ally of the Year Award.

Shepherd leads the city agency responsible for investigating discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, including cases involving sexual orientation and gender identity.

A third-generation City of Pittsburgh employee, Shepherd joined the Commission in 2016 and worked her way into its leadership.

Under her direction, the Commission has emphasized community engagement and education, including outreach at Pittsburgh Pride and other LGBTQ+ events.

Her recognition comes at a time when questions about LGBTQ+ civil rights protections, particularly those affecting transgender and gender-diverse people, remain central to political and legal debates across the country.

The Commission's work serves as a reminder that local civil rights protections continue to matter, even as federal policies and interpretations change.

CREATING THE QUEER SPACES PITTSBURGH NEEDS NOW

While this year's Lifetime Achievement Awards recognize decades of community-building, the Community Members of the Year honor celebrates a newer addition to Pittsburgh's LGBTQ+ community.

Samm and Aerin Adams-Fuchs, founders of The Soft Spot in Garfield, will be recognized for creating a sapphic-centered community gathering place that offers an alternative to traditional nightlife.

Opened in early 2026 on Penn Avenue, The Soft Spot was designed as an intentionally sober, accessible space where queer people can connect without alcohol being the center of the experience.

The café welcomes people under 21, families, and community members looking for a place to gather outside of bars and clubs.

Built with crowdfunding and volunteer support, The Soft Spot has hosted poetry readings, craft nights, support groups, and community celebrations, including a Lesbian Day of Visibility gathering.

The couple has also been outspoken about the importance of queer visibility and the need for spaces where LGBTQ+ people can find connection amid growing political hostility.

Their recognition underscores an ongoing conversation within Pittsburgh's queer community: what does it take to create spaces that are not only welcoming, but accessible, sustainable, and genuinely inclusive across generations?

In many ways, their work carries forward the same community-building tradition represented by this year's Lifetime Achievement honorees.

2026 Pittsburgh Equality Gala
Friday, November 13, 2026

Kamin Science Center, 1 Allegheny Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15212

VIP reception begins at 6 p.m.; general admission begins at 7 p.m.

General admission is $125; VIP admission is $300. Tables of 10 are also available.

Sponsorship opportunities are also available. Interested organizations can contact Raymond Sidney-Smith at ray@pghequalitycenter.org.

COMMUNITY RALLIES TO HELP BRIANNA AFTER DEVASTATING HOUSE FIRE

On October 24, Brianna Serenity, a member of Pittsburgh's LGBTQIA+ community, lost her home in a devastating fire. The blaze also impacted her home-based business, Brianna's Mobile Workshop.

As Brianna navigates the loss of her home, insurance claims, and an upcoming surgery in November, her community is stepping up to help.

Friend Gage Ryder has organized a GoFundMe to assist with immediate living expenses, replacing essential belongings, temporary housing, and recovery costs.

Brianna has shown up for Pittsburgh's queer community. Now it's our turn to show up for her.



NEWS

AARON BERNSTINE GIVES UP HOUSE COMMITTEE POSTS AFTER REPORTED ANTI-GAY SLURS

The Western Pennsylvania Republican remains in office and continues to deny PennLive's report that he used a homophobic slur and an AIDS smear against gay Black Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta. Kenyatta calls the move an "important first step" but says Bernstine should still resign.



State Rep. Aaron Bernstine has resigned from his Pennsylvania House committee assignments less than a week after PennLive reported allegations that the Western Pennsylvania Republican used racist and homophobic language about openly gay Black state Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta.

Bernstine, who represents portions of Butler and Lawrence counties, has not resigned from the legislature and continues to deny the allegations.

Officials announced during Tuesday's House session that Bernstine had stepped down from his assignments on the Insurance, Transportation, Intergovernmental Affairs & Operations, and Labor & Industry committees. The move is the first tangible consequence for Bernstine since PennLive reported last week that he allegedly launched into a tirade about Kenyatta during a confrontation at McGrath's Pub in Harrisburg.]

According to PennLive, Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council officials who witnessed the encounter said Bernstine used a homophobic and racist slur to describe Kenyatta and falsely claimed the Philadelphia Democrat's significant weight loss was because he had AIDS.

Kenyatta was not present during the alleged remarks.

Bernstine has denied making the comments, calling the allegations a "political attack."

Kenyatta welcomed Bernstine's departure from the committees while making clear he does not consider the matter resolved.

"Today is an important first step in accountability," Kenyatta wrote on X. "To every Pennsylvanian who has experienced hate, bigotry or bullying, they should know they are not alone and that, as a commonwealth, we are better than this."

Kenyatta again called for Bernstine to resign from the House.

NEWS

ERIE-AREA STUDENTS STAND UP FOR TRANS HOMECOMING QUEEN AFTER ONLINE BACKLASH

Students at an Erie, PA high school voted Sammi their homecoming queen. When adults attacked their choice online, classmates and teachers rallied behind her.



Students at a high school near Erie, Pennsylvania, are standing firmly behind their homecoming queen after her election sparked a wave of anti-transgender backlash online.

Sammi, a transgender student at Fairview High School, was crowned homecoming queen during the school's September 26 homecoming celebration after receiving the most votes from her fellow upperclassmen. But what should have been a joyful high school milestone quickly became the target of hateful social media posts from adults upset that a transgender girl had won the crown.

Her classmates, however, weren't having it.

"Sammi was voted by the students, and some parents didn't like that," student Preston Johnson told Erie television station Your Erie. "I think that's quite silly. The whole point of homecoming king and queen is the student votes. And we voted, and Sammi is our homecoming queen."

The controversy began after news of Sammi's election spread online, attracting attention from anti-LGBTQ+ social media accounts, including Libs of TikTok, which has millions of followers. The account's operator, Chaya Raichik, posted about Sammi's victory while misgendering the teenager and accusing the school of allowing a transgender student to take the crown from cisgender girls.

But the students who actually voted in the election had already made their choice.

Rather than allowing the online attacks to go unanswered, members of the Fairview school community organized a public show of support for Sammi.

According to Your Erie, a teacher helped organize a group to attend the Fairview School Board meeting on Monday, September 28, just two days after the homecoming dance. Dozens of students and supporters filled the meeting room, leaving standing room only.

Despite expectations that the meeting could draw heated public comments from both supporters and opponents of Sammi's election, no one spoke against her during the meeting. One student addressed the board on behalf of those who had gathered to show their support. Fairview School District Superintendent Donald Stark also defended the student-led selection process and emphasized the district's commitment to inclusion.

"Fairview School District has student-led festivities, homecoming being one of them. That includes the selection of homecoming court," Stark told Your Erie. "We promote inclusion. That reflects our vision statement which emphasizes respecting and embracing the uniqueness of each individual in the pursuit of their personal success."

Stark also urged people to remember that a real teenager was at the center of the controversy. Speaking with the Centre Daily Times, he reminded critics that there is a young student on the receiving end of their comments who is still growing into the person she wants to become.

The outpouring of support in Fairview stands in sharp contrast to the hostility Sammi faced online. While strangers debated whether a transgender girl should be allowed to wear a homecoming crown, the students who knew her had already elected her to represent them. The response also highlights the role that classmates and educators can play in creating supportive school environments for LGBTQ+ young people, particularly when those students become targets of public harassment.

In this case, students chose their homecoming queen through the same voting process used to select homecoming royalty. And when that decision drew national attention and hostility, members of their school community showed up to defend it.

The online backlash may have brought unwanted attention to Sammi's homecoming celebration, but it didn't change the outcome of the election.

Her classmates voted for her. She won. And when others challenged that decision, they stood by their queen.

METRO COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER HITS THE ROAD

With two new food offerings, Metro Community Health Center is tackling food insecurity, bringing fresh flavors to Pittsburgh, and putting community care on the menu.

By Michael Buzzelli

On Thursday, October 22, Metro Community Health Center rolled out the red carpet for Roasted Roots Catering, a food truck that will travel around the Pittsburgh area, serving fresh foods and exciting menus.

Metro Community Health Center brought out two new food trucks to better serve the community: Rolling Roots, stocked with fresh produce and meats for its constituents, and Roasted Roots, a catering service that will support Metro Community Health Center with delicious, nutritious food.

Roasted Roots Catering promises to deliver thoughtfully crafted, personalized menus prepared by Joe Comunale, Executive Chef of Metro Community Health Center, while supporting a good cause.

Michael J. Mingrone, President & CEO of Metro Community Health Center, said, "We are removing barriers for those in our care, and food insecurity is one of those barriers. With the food trucks, we can support our patients and our community."

Mingrone added, "We will be serving the needs of the community and our patients with the highest quality meats and produce. There's nothing we serve our patients that I, personally, wouldn't eat."

Katherine A. Homrok, MD, Chief Medical Officer and a founding member of the organization, said, "Our Roasted Roots Food Truck is another way to generate revenue to serve our community best."

Metro Community Health Center is a community-based organization that provides comprehensive primary and preventive care, including medical, oral health, and mental health services, to people of all ages and identities, regardless of ability to pay or health insurance status, including LGBTQ+ people. The organization advocates "whole-person care," striving to treat and care for every aspect of an individual's health, mind, and body.

Chef Joe Comunale is an experienced executive chef with over 30 years in the culinary industry and joined the organization over a year ago. He said, "I've been a chef with some big flag hotels, but I find this work so rewarding. It is an amazing organization."

The chef produced fifteen appetizers for the Rolling and Roasted Roots truck debut. After a tasting, Metro chose six appetizers for their event.

Homrok said, "In the mid-1990s, clinical services declined when Forbes Health System sold Forbes Metro Hospital and relocated its physicians to other parts of the county. After the hospital closed, several private practices and the hospital emergency room in the neighborhood also closed."

Homrok did not want to leave the community without health services and joined other medical professionals to form Metro Family Practice, which eventually became Metro Community Health Center.

Their website, which offers services to everyone regardless of identity, income, insurance status, or ability to pay, is available at metrocommunityhealthcenter.org.

The Roasted Roots Catering has customized menus for corporate meetings, fundraisers, community events, and private parties. For inquiries, contact Paige Jones at pjones@metropgh.or or 412-539-7138. QBurgh connects thousands of LGBTQ+ readers through fearless local journalism, community stories, arts, culture, events, and advocacy.





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PITTSBURGH PINK PAGES

LGBTQ Pittsburgh Community Directory

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(412) 773-1120

Allies for Health + Wellbeing
211 N Whitfield Street Suite 500
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
(412) 345-7456
alliespgh.org

Central Outreach Wellness Center
centraloutreach.com

Aliquippa PA
2360 Hospital Drive, Upper Suite 1
Aliquippa, PA 15001
(412) 322-4151

Northside, Pittsburgh
127 Anderson Street, Suite 101
Timber Court Building
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
(412) 322-4151

Washington, PA
817 Jefferson Avenue
Washington, PA 15218
(412) 322-4151

Metro Community Health Center
1789 S Braddock Ave #410
Pittsburgh, PA 15218
(412) 247-2310
metrocommunityhealthcenter.org

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Pittsburgh, PA 15232
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5801pgh.com

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335 High Street, rear
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(304) 292-2010
babylonmorgantown.com

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Pittsburgh, PA 15201
(412) 781-1119
bluemoononbutler.com

Brewers & Underground
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Pittsburgh, PA 15201
(412) 904-2821

Club Pittsburgh
1139 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(412) 471-6790
clubpittsburgh.com

Harold's Haunt
142 Grant Avenue
Millvale, PA 15209
(412) 283-6023
queerwitches.com

Lucky's / Real Luck Cafe
1519 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(412) 471-7832

Lucy's Place (Johnstown, PA)
520 Washington Street
Johnstown, PA 15901
(814) 539-4448
facebook.com/lucillesjohnstown

Mary's
5128 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15225
maryspgh.com

P*Town Bar & Baum Shelter
4740 Baum Blvd
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 621-0111
ptownbarpgh.com

HEALTH +WELLNESS

CENTRAL OUTRACH OPENS NEW HEPATITIS C CENTER ON PITTSBURGH'S NORTH SIDE

The new HepCMyWay Center of Excellence combines hepatitis C testing and treatment with HIV and STI testing, PrEP, harm reduction, and connections to opioid-use disorder treatment.

By Jim Sheppard

Central Outreach Wellness Center has opened a new hepatitis C treatment center on Pittsburgh's North Side, bringing hepatitis C care, sexual health services, harm reduction, and recovery support together at one location.

The new HepCMyWay Center of Excellence is located at 925 Brighton Road and offers hepatitis C testing and treatment alongside HIV and STI testing, PrEP, HIV care, naloxone and overdose prevention education, healthcare navigation, and referrals to substance-use disorder treatment and recovery services, according to Central Outreach.

The center is open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Wednesdays.

"Our integrated care coalesces Hepatitis C treatment with prevention, harm reduction, and recovery support so we can address the whole person, not just one diagnosis," Kathi Scholz, Central Outreach's Director of Hepatitis C Elimination Programming, said in announcing the center.

"The Center of Excellence allows us to meet people where they are, reduce barriers to care, and connect patients to the services they need in one accessible setting," Scholz said.

The model puts services that are often accessed separately under the same roof. For LGBTQ Pittsburghers, that includes sexual healthcare such as HIV and STI testing and PrEP alongside hepatitis C care and harm-reduction resources. Central Outreach also announced a partnership with JADE Wellness Center to bring its Access to Immediate Medication Services, or AIMS, mobile unit to the Brighton Road location every other Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. According to Central Outreach, the partnership will provide same-day medication services for opioid-use disorder through both in-person and telehealth options and connect patients with continuing treatment and recovery services.

HEPATITIS C CARE AND HARM REDECUTION UNDER ONE ROOF

The new center comes as Central Outreach has expanded its hepatitis C outreach efforts across Allegheny County.

During the first six months of 2026, the organization says its HepCMyWay outreach team performed 645 hepatitis C tests in Allegheny County, identifying 23 people who were newly diagnosed and reengaging 128 people already living with hepatitis C.

As of Central Outreach's July report, 85 people were progressing through its care continuum and 15 had completed treatment and achieved a cure.

Hepatitis C is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact and can remain undetected for years because an infection may produce few or no symptoms. Modern antiviral medications can cure the overwhelming majority of hepatitis C infections, with treatment commonly completed in eight to 12 weeks, according to Central Outreach.

Central Outreach reported 552 chronic hepatitis C cases in Allegheny County in 2024, down from 573 in 2023 and 615 in 2022. Those figures were included in the organization's July announcement previewing the North Side center.

The new facility is intended to address more than the infection itself. Central Outreach says patients can also receive navigation and referrals for housing, transportation, food assistance, behavioral health services, and other needs that can make accessing and completing healthcare more difficult.

Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato recently toured the new center ahead of its opening.

The HepCMyWay Center of Excellence is located at 925 Brighton Road on Pittsburgh's North Side. It is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central Outreach directs people seeking additional information about the center to hepc@centraloutreach.com.



COMMUNITY

PENNSYLVANIA DRAG PERFORMERS INVITED TO STATEWIDE COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSION

The virtual November 18 event will give drag artists across Pennsylvania an opportunity to discuss safety, community needs, and building stronger connections.

Pennsylvania drag performers are being invited to speak up, share their experiences, and help shape conversations about the future of their community.

Governor Josh Shapiro's Advisory Commission on LGBTQ Affairs will host a virtual Drag Community Listening Session on Wednesday, November 18, 2026, from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. The statewide gathering aims to bring drag artists together to discuss challenges, identify resources, and explore ways to strengthen connections among performers across Pennsylvania.

Topics will include improving communication about drag events and performance opportunities, identifying safety resources for Pride celebrations, and addressing challenges facing drag artists.

The commission also wants to hear how performers can better support one another, share resources, and ensure more voices are included in community conversations.

Whether they're longtime performers or just getting started, drag artists at every stage of their journey are encouraged to participate. The session is intended to create space for conversation and collaboration rather than arrive at predetermined solutions.

The event is free to attend virtually; online participation details will be provided to registered attendees.

RSVP USING THE QR CODE



COMMUNITY

PENGUINS CELEBRATE PRIDE NIGHT WITH 4–0 SHUTOUT VICTORY

Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ Hockey takes the spotlight as the Penguins celebrate queer visibility and community on the ice.



The Pittsburgh Penguins gave fans plenty to cheer about during their annual Pride Game on Thursday, October 22, shutting out the Florida Panthers 4–0 at PPG Paints Arena in a night celebrating Pittsburgh's LGBTQ+ hockey community.

Goaltender Arturs Silovs stopped all 26 shots he faced for his second shutout of the season, while Nick Robertson scored twice. Evgeni Malkin and Hendrix Lapierre each contributed a goal and an assist, helping the Penguins snap a four-game losing streak.

But beyond the scoreboard, the evening was about something bigger: making space for LGBTQ+ players, fans, and community members in a sport that hasn't always made queer people feel welcome.

The Penguins' Pride Game highlighted Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ Hockey, a local organization helping build community and visibility for queer hockey enthusiasts. The celebration brought attention to LGBTQ+ people who love the game and are challenging outdated assumptions about who belongs on the ice.

Hockey has long been associated with traditional masculinity, making LGBTQ+ representation in the sport especially meaningful. Events like the Penguins' Pride Game help challenge those expectations and remind queer fans, particularly younger generations, that hockey belongs to them, too.

The evening also offered opportunities to support Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ Hockey. Through a special group ticket promotion, $10 from each qualifying ticket was designated for the organization. Participating group members were also invited to take part in a postgame Shot on Goal experience at PPG Paints Arena.

Fans could commemorate the celebration with an exclusive Penguins-branded Pride wearable offered through a special ticket package as part of the team's Drawn to the Game initiative, which celebrates Pittsburgh's diverse communities through artist-designed merchandise and special game experiences.

While a 4–0 victory made the evening especially memorable, the bigger win was the recognition of Pittsburgh's queer hockey community on one of the city's most prominent sporting stages.

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ARTS + ENTERTAINMENT

ORVILLE PECK ON HIS QUEER 'STREET FIGHTER' VILLAIN, HIS SOBRIETY ALBUM 'MULE' AND, YES, THE BUTT

The gay country star says the 'Street Fighter' villain was his childhood pick, and that showing off the butt was the plan from day one

By Chris Azzopardi, photo by Gordon Nicholas

Orville Peck would like you to look at his butt. For the art.

"I told the director from the start, 'I think we really should show off the butt,'" says Peck, who squatted his way into Vega's matador tights for "Street Fighter," the new live-action take on the '90s arcade staple.

It's character work, technically. Vega, the claw-wielding Spaniard with the porcelain mask and a serious mirror habit, has been read as queer-coded by fans for decades, and for Peck, the role reaches back further than most. Long before the fringe, the Grand Ole Opry and his Broadway run in "Cabaret," he was a low-income gay kid in South Africa, playing "Street Fighter" with his older brothers and picking the pretty, dangerous one every time.

Now he's about to hit the road with "Mule," his most personal album yet, a song-by-song account of addiction and recovery that takes the mask off in a way no costume change could.

Below, Peck talks about Vega as a childhood queer awakening, why he thinks the character is "like an incel," singing about his sobriety on "Mule" and when the mask comes off.

Last time we spoke, you told me that when someone shuts you out, you want to kick the door down and not just get a seat at the table, but put your feet up on the table.

[Laughs.]

Sounds like something I'd say.

Is a gay country singer playing a claw-wielding fighter in a Hollywood action movie the biggest door that you've knocked down yet?

I mean, when you put it that way… I don't know if that's the biggest one I've knocked down because I think in my mind it's the same as when I got cast on Broadway in "Cabaret." I think people were like, "Why are they casting a country singer?" But for me, those things feel natural to me because I grew up as an actor. I think "Street Fighter" is a very specific type of performing. It's this heightened type of character work and that stuff is really fun for me. So these were easy doors.

These are doors that opened for me, which was actually really incredible. And it's a real testament to Kitao Sakurai, the director, and Cale [Boyter] from Legendary Entertainment. They were so truly brave and open-minded about this casting, to the point that everyone reacted and they thought that these people had lost their minds casting all these comedians and musicians. But they were so on the nose right about their choices. As soon as we all got to set, we could see everyone was so their character and such a right pick for each of these roles.

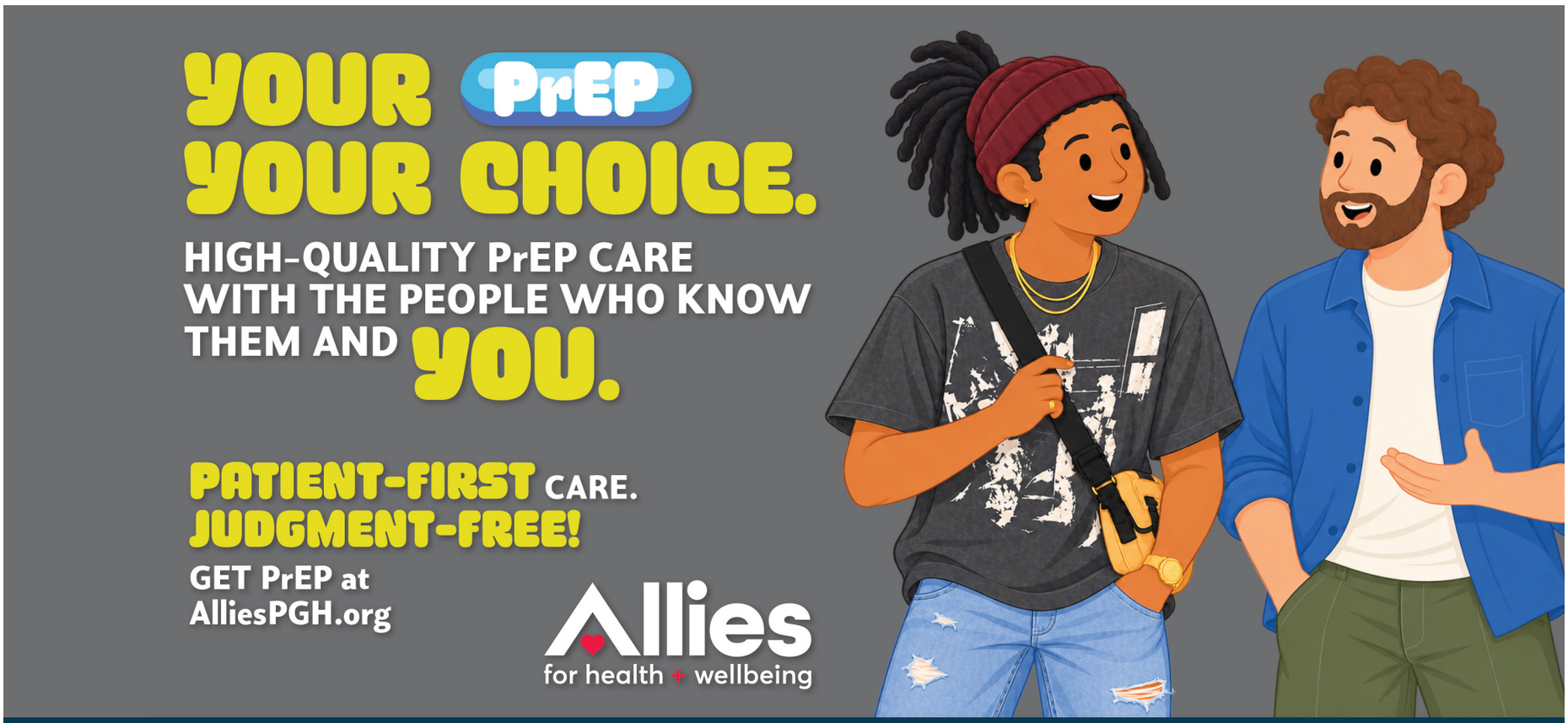
You told the director that playing the "Street Fighter" game as a kid was part of your sexual awakening. What drew you to Vega as a kid?

I have two older brothers. We would play a lot of "Street Fighter," and I was always drawn to these mysterious, I'll say, sexually ambiguous type characters. I was such an "X-Men" fan as a kid, and my favorite "X-Men" was Gambit because I always felt like he had this bisexual energy. I was not allowed to say it when I was a kid, obviously, but I was drawn towards these characters that I could almost see myself in a bit. That's what's so beautiful about something like "Street Fighter." It was this amazing game where they had all these different characters. And in the game, none of them are necessarily better than the other for any reason, other than the fact that you can choose which one appeals to you. And Vega was mine, which I think makes a lot of sense. I think he's an honorary queer icon.

Fans have long read Vega as queer-coded. How did you explore his sexuality as the person playing him?

For Vega, his focus is elevating himself to the level that he believes he should always be at,

Continue reading pg. 11



(Orville Peck cont'd)

which is better than everybody else. He doesn't have the time to even be thinking sexually about other people because he looks down on everyone so badly. I don't think anybody could ever be good enough. So I think he's like an incel in a way, the way I played him.

He's so focused on just his own end game and his own superiority. I don't think he could ever find someone that maybe he would be attracted to because he's just repulsed by everyone except for himself. So I think that's where I go with him in terms of sexuality. What's his sexuality? I don't even think it's on his mind because I don't think he has the capacity for it. I think he's just so narcissistic and egotistical. In my mind, that's how he plays. That's how he thinks.

But you're aware, though, of some bisexual energy there, right?

Yeah, I mean, he's European. I think he would go there. He's Spanish. I don't think it bothers him. [Laughs.]

It's like whoever, whatever, whenever.

Yeah. He's in the mirror doing some weird "American Psycho"-type stuff.

And he's a villain, so how much do we want him on our team?

Exactly. I mean, listen, I've met some narcissistic gays. They exist.

I've been loving the internet lately because it's been paying a lot of attention to your Vega glutes. Was that part of the training plan or a happy accident or just something you keep up with?

Well, yeah. I mean, listen, when I got the role, the first thing I did is I wanted to go into the other source materials and just think about this character, what was the original intention of him, all that stuff. And in the anime and the series, he's in these matador tights all the time, and his legs are always really big and beautiful and his butt's always out there. And I just thought, "I got to start really doing some squats and get that." I told the director from the start, "I think we really should show off the butt because I think it's going to be only to our benefit."

But also, there's no other male character in "Street Fighter" that has this sort of self-obsession. And I think he's the kind of person who probably stares at himself in the mirror for five hours a day and admires himself. He wants people to admire him. That's where his worth comes from. So yeah, it was intentional in terms of working on it for sure. I wanted to really put some effort in down there.

How many of your fight scenes did you get to do yourself?

Everything. So aside from the acrobatics, because of course I'm not doing that, I had an incredible stunt double, and he is an amazing Cirque du Soleil acrobat. So all of the wall jumps and things like that, the stuff on the wires is him flying on top of the bar and those things. But in terms of fighting, I got to do a pass at every single fight.

When I watched the movie the other night, I can always tell which is me and which is my stunt double. There's a little thing that I can see that I won't reveal, but I was really pleased to see a lot of my fighting was me.

Is that just wild, knowing how much little Orville would have loved to do this?

Yeah, it's incredible. Listen, I was a low-income little gay kid in South Africa. The fact that I was at the Chinese Theatre at a premiere for a movie where I'm playing one of the most iconic villains in fighting games, that's an insane, insane thing. It's actually very hard to process, but it doesn't escape me. A lot of us were really just like, "Wow, I can't believe we're here and this is what we're getting to do." We get it. We are aware of how special that is.

You grew up with straight guys as friends through skateboarding and punk bands. This set had WWE wrestlers, 50 Cent, Jason Momoa. Did that feel familiar to you?

It did. That's easy for me, those kind of guys, because that's exactly what I grew up with. But yeah, man, the really lovely thing is everybody in the cast became such good friends because we were in Australia. There's really nothing else to do except hang out with one another. We would all go to set to watch each other on days we weren't even filming. And then after the set, we would all go have dinner. On the weekends, we'd hang out. So we became a really tight-knit group of friends.

We still have a group chat that we always...

Continue reading pg. 12



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(Orville Peck cont'd)



text. I mean, I text with [WWE wrestler] Cody Rhodes on a very regular basis. I love Cody to death. I made a lifelong friend in Callina Liang, who plays Chun-Li, which was awesome because we got to be best friends off set and then mortal enemies on set. So it's this funny dynamic we get to have. But I do like me some simple-dog straight man energy. I know how to handle it, for sure.

On "Mule," you take the mask off figuratively. How does it feel performing songs this close to your life?

It's hard sometimes. It's funny: You think that you'll become desensitized to it after doing it enough or whatever, and it won't feel as raw. It still does feel raw. Some nights it'll be fun, but then some nights it'll hit me for some reason, for sure. I think when you're singing about things that you're not necessarily proud to sing about, it feels sometimes like shame comes in and feelings of remorse, and I'm still constantly making amends to people in my life, even now from that era when I was just such a mess. So it's forever evolving, but yeah, it is hard sometimes, but it's cathartic. It's a good thing.

What is the one song that is the hardest for you to perform from it?

"The Fall" is hard still. The bridge is pent-up anger and resentment coming out for a moment, and I don't think I've ever written a song in that way. When I get to that part in the song, I still feel like old resentments come up, and it reminds me I have to constantly clean house because that can so easily take me back to this victim mentality and this addiction. So that part is interesting because as I'm singing it, I feel a shift literally within myself that reminds me, oh yeah, you have this anger and this resentment that you have to always be in check about.

We've seen you maskless now on stage in "Cabaret," and you're wearing a different mask in "Street Fighter." Where does the mask stand for you now at this moment in your career, especially with this new album out?

I think it's a permanent and important part of my expression as an artist. For "Cabaret," the distinction for me was that I was playing a character who obviously does not need to wear a mask and I didn't want to make it about me. I wanted to play the character. So for more acting that I do in the future, if there is a role that comes up that I really want to play and it doesn't involve a mask, I'll take the mask off for that. And then I'll put it back on for when it's my personal expression.

I've become a lot more comfortable with the idea of that. I used to be so, so pedantic about that, but I love acting. It was the first kind of expression I ever did when I was young, and it's always been something I wanted to return to. So yeah, of course. I mean, I think the mask will come off if it's required to come off, for sure.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.








FACES & PLACES

Nightmare on Hellsworth

Drag, Drama, and Halloween Frights in Shadyside

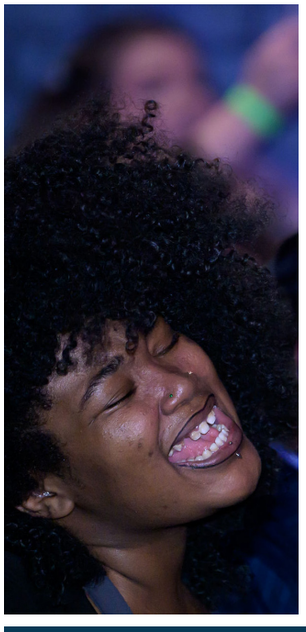
Photos by Marianne Santoro

Things got wicked on Ellsworth Avenue on Saturday, October 24, as 5801 Video Lounge & Cafe transformed into a haunted haven of drag, glamour, and Halloween mischief for ***A Nightmare on Hellsworth.***

Presented by 5801 and Central Outreach Wellness Center, the spooky spectacular was headlined by RuPaul's Drag Race Season 15 finalist and fan favorite Anetra, bringing her signature fierce energy to Pittsburgh. The evening also featured a frightfully fabulous lineup of local drag talent, including Dixie Surewood, Kaydence McQueen, Alejandra J Love, Ryder Slowly, Snoozy Q, Calipso, and Savannah Ray, with DJ Ronnie keeping the party going.

Check out more Faces & Places at QBurgh.com/tag/faces-places/









OPINION

THE REPUBLICAN FIXATION ON TRANS KIDS MAKES ALL KIDS LESS SAFE

By D'Anne Witkowski

On Oct. 15, 2026, Silver Rail Elementary in Oregon became the latest site of a mass school shooting. Though by the time this is published, it's entirely possible another school will take the title of "latest," bumping Silver Rail to the title of "recent," then to "past," then to the dumpster that houses this country's collective memory.

Statistically, school shootings in the U.S. are a rare occurrence (though compared to other countries, we're No. 1). Most U.S. students will never be in a school while people are being shot at and killed, let alone be shot and left to bleed to death in a hallway or under a desk. But some will. And as a country we've chosen to accept this even though it should be completely unacceptable. We chalk it up to the cost of freedom to bear arms. As a country we've chosen, over and over, to protect guns over kids.

It's not like Democrats have done a whole hell of a lot on the issue, but with Republicans in charge of both houses of Congress, the presidency and the U.S. Supreme Court, I'm sure not holding my breath that the Silver Rail shooting will move the needle.

Besides, Republicans have other priorities when it comes to protecting kids. Republicans have decided that the biggest threat to children is the existence of transgender people, especially transgender students playing sports. In case you need proof (in other words, in case you have been in a bunker somewhere without any connection to the outside world), check out the many ballot measures that people will be voting on across the country in the midterm election. An alarming number of them are about transgender people.

In Arizona, Colorado, Nebraska and Washington voters will decide whether trans students can play sports on teams that align with their gender identities. Washington's measure is especially horrific given that it will require "every girl in the state to have her sex assigned at birth verified by a doctor — through either genetic or hormone tests or an examination of her reproductive anatomy — to determine eligibility for K-12 sports," The 19th reports.

It's telling that there doesn't seem to be any mention of boys having to undergo invasive and humiliating examinations to play K-12 sports. But we can thank misogyny and toxic masculinity for that. After all, we live in a country that hates women (Trump winning twice is pretty solid evidence, but this is a hatred that goes way back) and you can't hate women without also hating girls. Therefore, the worst thing any boy or man could do is to become a girl or a woman. Note that I'm using these terms in a binary way to exemplify the lack of nuance inherent in discussions about transgender people, not because that's what I believe.

The very people who want to inspect the genitals of a girl before she can join the volleyball team will tell you, and themselves, that they are only trying to protect girls. That they cannot imagine any reasons other than sexual deviance and predation that would compel a male to identify as female illuminates how little they think of women … and men for that matter.

In Colorado and Missouri, voters will decide the fate of gender-affirming care.

"[Colorado voters will] decide whether to ban transition-related surgeries for minors, and whether state or federal funds, Medicaid reimbursements or insurance coverage can be used to help pay for them," reports The 19th. The Republican fixation on transition-related surgeries is deeply concerning because they clearly do not understand what the hell they're talking about. And this lack of understanding is causing them to believe some really wild things.

Trump himself has alleged multiple times that kids are going to school and coming home having had such surgeries.

Continue reading pg. 15



(Republican Fixation cont'd)

In september he addressed a Wisconsin rally, saying, "Can you imagine you're a parent and your son leaves the house and you say, 'Jimmy, I love you so much, go have a good day in school,' and your son comes back with a brutal operation? Can you even imagine this?"

To answer his questions: Yes, I can imagine this, just as I can imagine riding a unicorn made of cotton candy instead of driving a car. Because it isn't something that happens. It's imaginary.

"There is no evidence that a student has ever undergone gender-affirming surgery at a school in the U.S., nor is there evidence that a U.S. school has sent a student to receive such a procedure elsewhere," NBC News reports.

There are many very real dangers to children that actually exist (gun violence, sexual exploitation, abuse, environmental pollutants, previously eradicated diseases like measles, malnutrition, homelessness, etc.), but those dangers aren't anything Republicans are interested in addressing. So they have to fixate on a danger that doesn't exist. Which doesn't make anyone safer.

COMMUNITY

STEEL CITY FETISH CON CELEBRATES 16 YEARS IN PITTSBURGH

Four new titleholders crowned as Pittsburgh's leather and fetish communities gather for a weekend of celebration.
By Jim Sheppard
Photos by Jaye Frances Imagery.



Pittsburgh knows a thing or two about champions, and this weekend, the city's leather and fetish communities welcomed four more to the family.

The 16th annual Steel City Fetish Con brought leatherfolk, kinksters, pups, bears, and fetish enthusiasts together October 9 through 11 for a weekend celebrating identity, community, and the enduring traditions of Pittsburgh leather culture. With events spanning Spirit in Lawrenceville, Brewer's Bar, 5801 Video Lounge, and Club Pittsburgh, the convention continued its long-running tradition of bringing the city's fetish community together.

The centerpiece of the weekend was Saturday night's title competitions at Spirit, where four new representatives were selected to carry Pittsburgh's leather and fetish titles into 2027.

PITTSBURGH CROWNS ITS 2027 LEATHER ROYALTY

The evening's competitions welcomed a new class of titleholders, each stepping into a role that carries opportunities for community visibility, connection, and service.

Valentine was crowned Ms. Pittsburgh Leather Fetish 2027, returning to the competition after appearing among the contestants for the 2026 title last year. Valentine was previously introduced to QBurgh readers as a proudly butch competitor with a deep appreciation for leather history. Their return to the contest stage marks a new chapter in their involvement with Pittsburgh's leather community.

Elmar earned the title of Mr. Pittsburgh Leather Bear 2027, succeeding Brad Dunlap, whose reign followed years of involvement in Pittsburgh's bear community and events.

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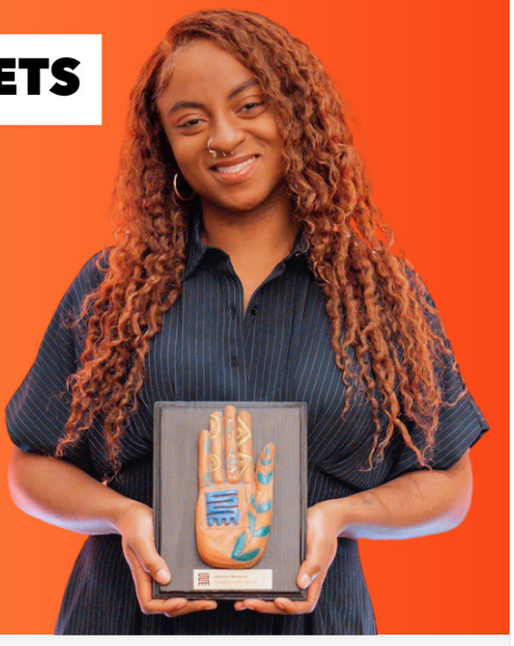
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WHAT'S QUEER AND GOING ON

NOV.

Nov. 4 | Glow Up 2:
All Ages Intro to Drag Night
The Soft Spot

Nov. 7 | TWIRL
Bottlerocket Social Hall

Nov. 8 | Pitch, Please!
Pitch Social Pittsburgh
8th Annual Miss Tri-State
All-Star Pageant
Forge Urban Winery

Nov. 11 | Blade Matthews Bingo
*P*Town Bar*

Nov. 13 | Crush Hour
Margaux
Pittsburgh Equality Gala 2026
Kamin Science Center

Nov. 15 | Make Out Club
318 Fourth Avenue

Nov. 17 | Gaysgiving
Hazelwood Brewhouse

Nov. 19 | YWCA 2026 Equity Awards
The Westin Pittsburgh

Nov. 20 | Transgender Day of Remembrance
City-County Building
414 Grant Street

Nov. 21 | Chrissy Chlapecka
Thunderbird Music Hall

Nov. 27 | Sapphic Pool Club
Squirrel Hill Sports Bar
SNOOZEFEST
(Miss P*Town 2026 Step Down Show)
*P*Town Bar*

Nov. 29 | Mx. P*Town Bar Pageant 2026-2027
Games & Glamour:
Press Start to Serve C*nt
*P*Town Bar*

DEC.

Dec. 1 | World AIDs Day

Dec. 3 | Three Rivers Business Alliance
My Business My Pride Awards Gala
The Rivers Club

For more events and full event details
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Have your events listed for FREE, visit ***QBurgh.com/submit-event***

(Steel City Fetish cont'd)

The title of Mr. Pittsburgh Leather Fetish 2027 went to Ian Neft, who succeeds 2026 titleholder Gage Ryder.

Rounding out the new class of titleholders, Opossum Jaxon was named Iron City Pet 2027, following Princess Lavender, also known as Dionysus, who brought a playful and service-oriented spirit to the title during the previous year.
Together, the four winners represent the next chapter in a local leather tradition that has made Pittsburgh a recognizable presence in the broader fetish community.

EXPERIENCE BEHIND THE JUDGES' TABLE

The competitions brought together an accomplished group of judges whose experience spans leather, bear, pet play, and fetish communities across the country.

The Mr. Pittsburgh Leather Fetish and Mr. Pittsburgh Leather Bear competitions were judged by outgoing Mr. Pittsburgh Leather Bear 2026 Brad Dunlap; Mr. Mid-Atlantic Leather 2025 Jason Elliott; Keystone Leather Bear 2025 and Mr. Woods Bear 2025 Jordan Bailey; Mr. Eagle562 Leather 2018 and Mr. Fetish SoCal 2024 Pup Yoshi; Three Rivers Leather Club Road Captain 2027 Stephen Kuhn; and Mr. Double L Leather 2012 Josh Pennington.

The Ms. Pittsburgh Leather Fetish judging panel featured outgoing titleholder Camilla Ashton Queen, NEPAH Pet 2024 Dagger Deschiennes, Mx. Philly Leather 2020–2025 and Ms. Keystone Leather 2025 Diamond Anthony, Ms. San Francisco Leather 2025 Madam Folly, and Minion, founder of PKOC and PBU.

The Iron City Pet competition was evaluated by outgoing Iron City Pet 2026 Princess Lavender; head judge Lt. Mittens, Iron City Pet 2025; Cleveland Person of Gear 2026 Pup Drell; Mr. Virginia Leather 2026 Pup Voyage; and Woods Pup 2025 and Keystone Pet 2025 Pup Dalton.
The range of titles and experiences represented on the panels reflects the connections between Pittsburgh's leather community and the larger network of fetish organizations, contests, and chosen families that extend well beyond western Pennsylvania.

SIXTEEN YEARS OF LEATHER FETISH, AND COMUNITY

Since its beginnings in 2011, Steel City Fetish Con and Pittsburgh Leather Pride have helped sustain a space for leather culture, fetish expression, and community connection in the Steel City.

What began more than a decade and a half ago has become an annual tradition that brings together established community members, emerging titleholders, and people exploring their place within leather and kink culture.

Leather culture has long been intertwined with LGBTQ+ history, creating spaces where queer people could explore identity, sexuality, belonging, and chosen family. From leather bars and social clubs to contests and community gatherings, these traditions have helped generations of people find connection through shared interests and values.

That history is particularly meaningful in Pittsburgh, where leather organizations, titleholders, and community members have built a legacy of visibility and participation in regional and national fetish culture.

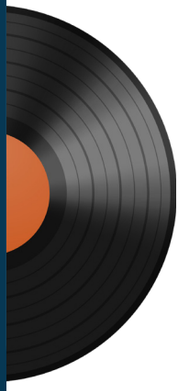
The convention's 16th year offered another opportunity to recognize that legacy while making room for new people and perspectives.

BEYOND THE CONTEST STAGE

While Saturday's competitions at Spirit provided a focal point for the weekend, Steel City Fetish Con extended across Pittsburgh's nightlife scene.

Events at Brewer's Bar, 5801 Video Lounge, and Club Pittsburgh

Continue reading pg. 17



On Heavy Rotation

What's keeping Pittsburgh's DJs, drag artists, and nightlife icons moving? Every month, we ask a member of our community to share the five tracks soundtracking their life right now.

THEOCRACY'S TOP 5

This month, Theocracy, Pittsburgh's drag chameleon and king, queen, and thing of many faces, shares 5 tracks that keep the transformations coming and the queer chaos on full blast. Follow Theocracy on Insta @__theocracy__

Blue Monday by **New Order**
Zanzibar by **Billy Joel**
Look Sharp! by **Joe Jackson**
50/50 by **Jockstrap**
Fast As You Can by **Fiona Apple**

DJs, Artists, Performers! Send us your top five heavy rotation and we might feature it next month!
Email us at HeavyRotation@qburgh.com!

(Steel City Fetish cont'd)

helped carry the celebration beyond the contest stage, connecting the convention to venues that serve different corners of the city's LGBTQ+ and fetish communities.

That variety is part of what makes a gathering like Steel City Fetish Con meaningful. Leather and fetish culture are not confined to competitions or formal titles. They also live in the social spaces, friendships, shared traditions, and everyday acts of community participation that sustain the scene year after year.

For some, leather is a deeply held identity. For others, fetish culture offers opportunities for sexual exploration, creativity, performance, or connection. Those experiences are not mutually exclusive, and the community encompasses a wide range of identities, practices, and relationships.
At its best, leather culture celebrates that diversity while emphasizing consent, mutual respect, and the freedom to express oneself authentically.

THE NEXT CHAPTER OF PITTSBURGH LEATHER

As Valentine, Elmar, Ian Neft, and Opossum Jaxon begin their 2027 title year, they join a lineage of Pittsburgh leather and fetish titleholders whose contributions have helped shape the city's community.

Titles may be awarded in a single evening, but their significance extends beyond the stage. They create opportunities for representation, education, service, and connection throughout the year.

Sixteen years into its run, Steel City Fetish Con remains a celebration of the people and traditions that make Pittsburgh's leather community distinctive.

The gear may change, the titleholders may come and go, but the spirit of leather pride, chosen family, and unapologetic self-expression continues.



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LGBTQ HISTORY

HE FOUGHT AGAINST HIV DISCRIMINATION IN THE MILITARY (AND WON). WHAT'S NEXT FOR KEVIN DEESE?



Kevin Deese fought the Pentagon over HIV discrimination and won. After an unsuccessful run for office, he's finding new ways to fight for health care, dignity, and a seat at the table.

By Lana Leonard

"When it rains, it pours," Kevin Deese said, leaving a vet's office in upstate New York with his sick dog in late July. Not only had he just lost the Democratic primary election for a State Assembly seat representing the Buffalo area; he recently lost his job, too.

But even though these setbacks have added undue burden for Deese, he's never down for long.

When Deese witnessed the second Trump administration's devastation of funding for HIV care and prevention, he decided to run for a seat at the table and do what he could to thwart federal overreach from degrading his home state of New York. However, this isn't the first time Deese decided to take a stand against unjust federal policy.

Deese joined the Naval Academy in 2010 to follow in his brother's footsteps. At the time, he considered a role in the military "the clearest picture of what it looked like to be of service." Yet, he first became widely known for pushing back against the Navy's efforts to prevent him from serving due to his HIV status. During that process, he developed a different idea of what it means to be of service: to protect vulnerable people when and where one can.

CALLED TO ACTION

In 2018, Deese, with the support of Lambda Legal and Modern Military Association of America (MMAA), sued the Pentagon for its discriminatory policy against people with HIV who are already in the military deploying or being commissioned as officers. The U.S. Department of Defense changed that policy in 2022, and Deese's case was ultimately settled in 2024. He is currently serving in the Navy Reserves on commission.

However, on Feb. 18 of this year, the Fourth Circuit court reversed a ruling that had struck down the military's ban on enlistment of people living with HIV. (The court did clarify that qualified people living with HIV can still join the armed forces while the case moves forward, according to The Advocate.)

Meanwhile, since Trump re-entered the presidency, defunding the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), more than 1,700 treatment clinics and related service sites have closed worldwide, leaving more than 16,000 health care workers unemployed.

While these changes have not yet affected Deese directly, he worried that his health care through the Navy Reserve Tricare could be taken from him at any moment due to the social and political stigma around his status. So, he took a shot at running for public office in New York State's 149th district, in part to oppose the Trump administration's efforts to weaponize HIV-related services and prevention efforts.

"I ran because I knew I was qualified for the job. I felt that I had a lot to bring to the table in that role and in a campaign. Win or lose, I just couldn't stay on the sidelines," Deese said. His journey of fighting to move ahead with his service in the Navy taught him a lot about what happens when broken systems fail the people who have to deal with the conditions of that system, who want a good life for themselves and their family, he added. (Deese requested that TheBody note that his views on HIV and military policy are personal opinions and not official

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(Kevin Deese cont'd)

...positions of the Department of Defense or Department of the Navy.)

"You can't legislate on our community without our community at the table with an active voice — an active role — in creating solutions" to ending the global HIV pandemic, Deese said.

THE BATTLE FOR HEALTHCARE

Weeks before the primary, Deese lost his job at a large regional bank, where he had been working for several years. Fortunately, he wasn't reliant on his former employer for health insurance due to his military coverage.

"As someone living with HIV, I can't really roll the dice when it comes to access to health insurance," explained Deese. To simultaneously lose work and health insurance as a person living with HIV would have put him in a difficult position both medically and financially, he said. And it would be so for most people, too, which is why he ran on a platform of affordability, opportunity, and democracy.

"Running for office is not easy," said Deese. "There are a lot of things in life that are difficult to do, but people have the potential to try, and a desire to try," he continued. The extent to which health insurance depends on employment "holds people back," he said.

This is why, even after his primary loss, Deese is still championing policies like the NY HEAT Act and the New York Health Act, which seek to reduce the costs of basic needs like energy and health care for state residents. The New York Health Act is the only bill currently in the New York state legislature that would guarantee comprehensive, high-quality health care for every New Yorker, according to the Campaign for New York Health.

This is especially notable given that, on July 1, nearly half a million New Yorkers were kicked off their essential coverage health insurance plans due to a $7.5 billion federal cut as a result of last year's One Big Beautiful Bill Act. The Campaign for New York Health states that the New York Health Act would save New Yorkers money; expand care to include dental, hearing, vision, and long-term care; and cover prescriptions, while still allowing individuals to choose their doctors and hospitals.

These are crucial elements of health care often missing from long-term health care policy that would significantly benefit New Yorkers living with HIV, Richard N. Gottfried, the state assembly member who authored the New York Health Act, said in an email to TheBody. He stated that a universal single-payer health care system would provide people with health coverage without facing restricted provider networks or restricted drug formularies.

"There would be no prior authorization required for health care," Gottfried said. "No deductibles, copays, or out-of-network charges. Providers would be paid more than Medicare and Medicaid now pay, and not have patients who can't pay, so providers (especially those serving low- or moderate-income people) would have much more capacity and survivability. No one would go without care because of a deductible or copay or being uninsured. The scope of benefits would be as broad and broader than any existing health coverage, including covering long-term home care and nursing home care."

Currently, Medicaid is the largest source of insurance coverage for people with HIV in the United States, covering an estimated 40% of nonelderly adults with HIV, compared to just 15% of the nonelderly adult population overall, according to KFF.

Adam Bojak, who defeated Deese in the Democratic primary for the 149th district and is the frontrunner in the general election, told TheBody that all of these political toplines are intertwined and deeply personal. "Our health care is related to our housing, which is related to our employment, which is related to our transportation. These things are inextricably linked," he said. Like Deese, Bojak supports the New York Health Act.

The day after I interviewed Bojak, he went for coffee with Deese to discuss ways that they'd continue working together ahead of the general election. He recalled that the two "were in agreement on a lot of things, and certainly one of them is ensuring that every single person has the care they need no matter their background, no matter their income level, no matter what the care actually is."

CONTINUING THE FIGHT

Deese explained that, by successfully challenging the Navy's discriminatory anti-HIV policy, he received benefits that are inaccessible to many people. For example, he qualified for a VA Home Loan and health care coverage—which, in turn, gave him a level of financial stability that allowed him to run for public office.

Nobody should "have to wear a uniform or go through the rigamarole of suing the federal government" to have a stable home and accessible health care, Deese said. His loss to Bojak in the primary doesn't change that; "I wanted him to know that I want to be here in any way I can be helpful," Deese said.

"I think, in a sense, that those of us who are living with HIV who have the capacity to, and the desire to, strive to have a fulfilling life — whatever that looks like — we owe it not only to ourselves to do so, but also we owe it to those who came before us, who weren't able to do that," Deese added. In his work, he seeks to honor those prior advocates "for whom their sole purpose in life became advocating for their community, so that those who came after them — people like me — would have the opportunity to live a long, healthy, fulfilling life."

Lana Leonard (they/them) is a freelance multimedia journalist and social justice activist based in New York City. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service.

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FROM THE Q ARCHIVES



NOVEMBER 1986

Forty years ago, the November 1986 issue of Pittsburgh's Out captured a queer community confronting the AIDS crisis, fighting for political recognition, and building a vibrant cultural scene.

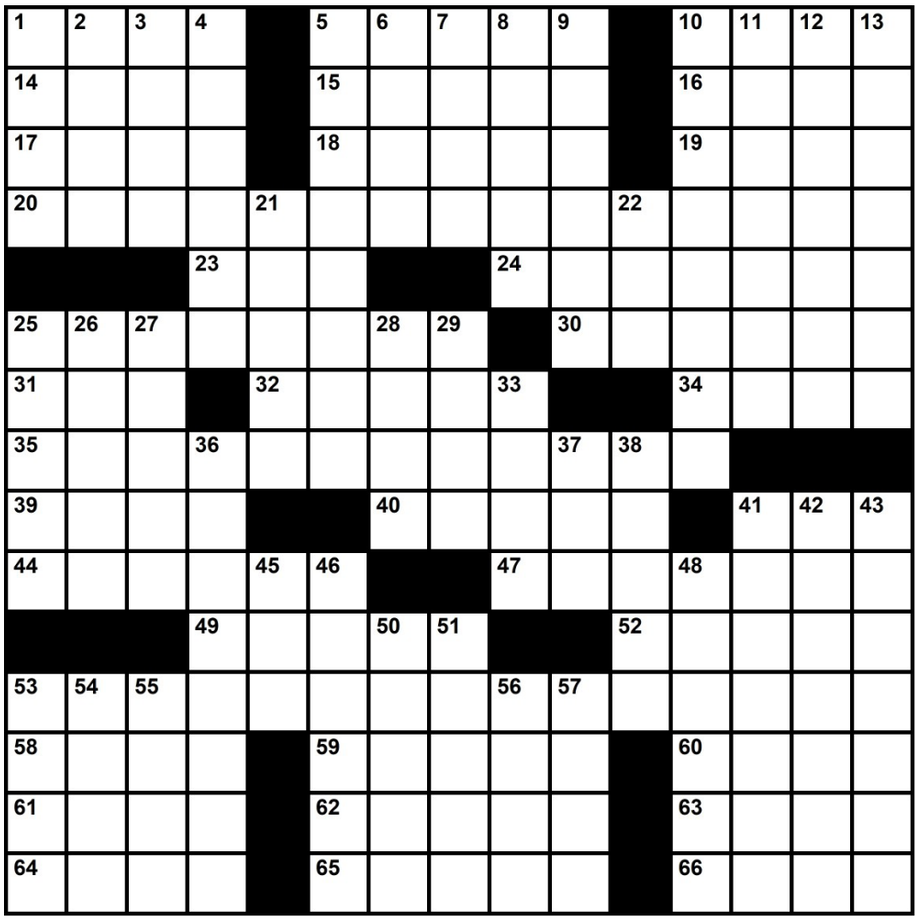
AIDS activism dominated the headlines. Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Bob Casey opposed gay rights protections but supported AIDS funding, while local advocates blasted the state's inadequate response to the epidemic. The Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force was raising money for prevention and education as early research into AZT offered cautious hope.

Queer Pittsburgh was getting political. The Stein Club endorsed Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bob Edgar, and the Lambda Awards returned with a November 15 celebration at Pegasus Lounge, honoring local LGBTQ+ activists, organizations, and nightlife.

And the scene was thriving. Comedy duo Romanovsky & Phillips performed at Chatham College, Zack's on Fourth Avenue prepared to film a music video for MTV exposure, and bars across the region advertised packed calendars of drag shows, dancing, and Thanksgiving parties.

MORE ON QARCHIVES.COM

Crossword! Latent



ACROSS

1 “Big Boned Gal” singer k.d.
5 Creator of Athos and Aramis
10 “Seinfeld” character from Pakistan
14 Put the top on the cake
15 Sister of Sherlock Holmes
16 At once, to Byron
17 Old coin of Michelangelo’s country
18 “...get used to it!” for example
19 Pulls behind
20 Start of what Trump said about Sen. Jon Husted
23 The S of RSVP
24 Madonna’s costar in “Evita”
25 You spend it in bed
30 Name of a Civil War fort
31 Gershwin lyricist
32 Gets an earful
34 The A of ILGA
35 More of the quote
39 “The ___ Love” (R.E.M. hit)
40 Western ski area
41 Biter of Caesar’s girlfriend
44 Speedster sponsor
47 Come through with the goods
49 Trick alternative
52 Pernod flavorer
53 End of the quote
58 Word after film or cafÈ
59 Associate of Happy
60 “You know how ___”
61 Request for permission
62 Literate boast?
63 Foot fetish target
64 “Diana” singer
65 Rimbaud’s turf
66 Three of Frida’s family

DOWN

1 Taylor of “Six Feet Under”
2 “Phantom” scar source
3 Peter by the piano
4 Site for many a Pole
5 Even more dangerous
6 Disengage a bra hook
7 Zoo barrier
8 Type of male
9 Bedding fabrics
10 Title role for Ruby Rose on the CW
11 Rubs some oil on
12 Men’s neckwear
13 Still woolly
21 Support Metropolitan Community Church, e.g.
22 Pre-Eppie Beatle Sutcliffe
25 Cowell of the “Got Talent” franchises
26 “Spartacus” venue
27 Candy in stockings
28 Poet Angelou
29 Boy with a bow who shot your beau
33 Force in “Milk,” for short
36 Secret seller of lingerie
37 Supporter of Patty Sheehan
38 Big name in Chinese history
41 Amelia Earhart, for example
42 Attached by the base, to a botanist
43 Stop them for breaking news
45 Boat with one tomcat and one pussy
46 Go over proofs again
48 Be firm
50 Be nuts over
51 Become narrower
53 Peruvian native
54 Let out
55 Sty cry
56 Contrary response to “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina”
57 David ___ Pierce

J.D.s Stand-up Routine



October solution: Man of Many Faces

L	I	L	I	■	U	S	P	S	■	B	R	O	O	M
A	S	A	N	■	A	L	O	E	■	L	A	R	G	O
P	E	N	N	Y	W	I	S	E	■	A	C	C	R	A
D	E	D	E	E	■	D	E	S	■	C	O	H	E	N
■	■	B	E	L	G	■	D	A	R	K	N	E	S	S
C	U	R	D	L	E	S	■	W	A	T	T	S	■	■
A	S	I	■	O	N	E	A	■	G	O	E	T	H	E
W	A	D	S	W	O	R	T	H	■	P	U	R	E	R
E	G	G	O	■	A	U	T	O	S	■	R	A	G	E
D	E	E	R	E	■	M	I	N	O	S	■	T	E	C
■	■	■	E	L	I	■	T	O	O	L	B	E	L	T
F	R	A	N	K	N	F	U	R	T	E	R	■	■	■
L	A	C	E	■	A	L	D	A	■	E	A	S	E	L
A	R	M	S	■	N	E	E	R	■	P	I	A	N	O
T	E	E	S	■	E	A	S	Y	■	S	N	O	O	P

New Crossword *Every* Month!


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