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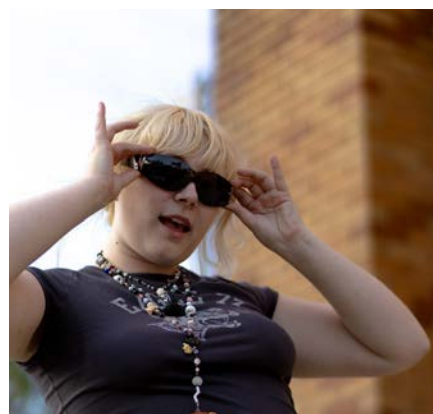
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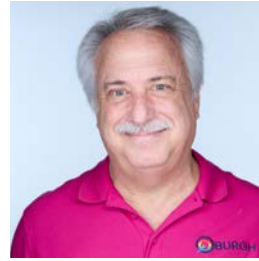


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ON THE COVER

Joey Young, Miss Blue Moon 2025 and
Miss Continental Newcomer 2025.
Photo by Ava Grace. Styled by Brian David.



For the forgotten,
the unwanted, the
abandoned and
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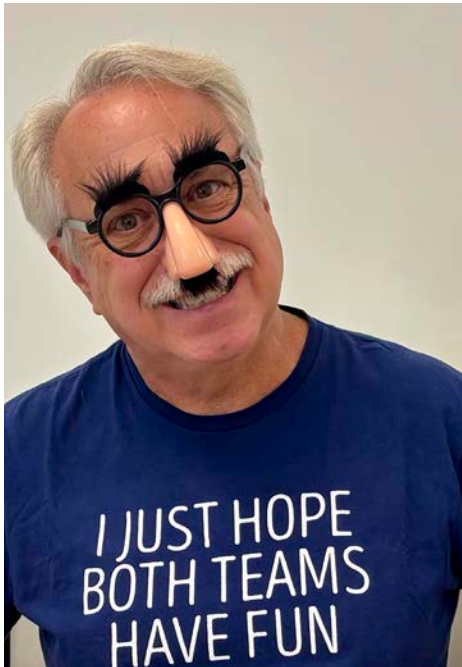
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FROM THE CO-CREATORS

FIVE FIERCE YEARS OF QBURGH

Happy Birthday, QBurgh!

Five years ago, a simple idea was born from a profound need, to create a space where our community could find strength and connection. It was the height of the pandemic, a time when we were at our most vulnerable and isolated. We knew we had to bring people together, even when we had to stay apart.

Today, as we proudly celebrate our fifth birthday on October 11, we are filled with immense gratitude and awe at the incredible journey we have shared. What started as an idea has grown into a vital and indispensable resource for the LGBTQ+ community of Pittsburgh and its allies. We love this city, and we've poured our heart and soul into building QBurgh to be your trusted source for local news, events, and supportive businesses.

We know these are once again turbulent times. But let's remember our greatest strength has always been our ability to face challenges together, as a unified front. Never underestimate the transformative power of our community. We will emerge from this stronger, more resilient, and more united than ever before.

We are excited for the next five years, knowing that QBurgh is, and always will be, for and by the LGBTQ Community of Pittsburgh. We are incredibly grateful for your invaluable suggestions and feedback, which are the lifeblood of our growth. Thank you for entrusting us with the privilege of serving you.

While QBurgh will always be a free and accessible resource, we are grateful for your generous contributions, which allow us to continue our mission and grow together.

Here's to many more years of building a stronger, more vibrant, and more connected community.

Stay Proud Pittsburgh!

Jeff Freedman
Co-creator
QBurgh



PERMISSION TO REST, RESET, AND REVEL

For the past six issues, I've used this space to rally us. To remind you that our LGBTQ community has been under attack, that we've had to stand tall, dig in, and fight. And we have. And we will. But this time? I don't want a war cry. I want a toast.

It's okay to rest. It's okay to reset. It's okay to say "yes, the world is a mess, but look at us! We're still here, still fabulous, still throwing the best damn party in Pittsburgh".

This season, I want you to celebrate.

Celebrate the camp, the wigs, the rhinestones, the audacity. Celebrate the art, the drag, the poems, the messy glitter-covered canvases.

Celebrate the pure chaos of dancing until your eyeliner runs and your shoes are begging for mercy. Flirt shamelessly. Kiss boldly. Laugh so loud the walls shake.

Because joy isn't frivolous, it's revolutionary. Every sequin is a middle finger to the people who want us quiet. Every drag number, every queer kiss in public, every mural, every magazine is proof that we're not just surviving, we're thriving.

Pittsburgh's LGBTQ family is brilliant, brave, and just the right amount of unhinged. And that's worth pausing to revel in.

So take this issue as your permission slip. Wear the look, take up space, start the band, paint the mural, make the move. Rest when you need to. Rise when you're ready. And never, ever stop shining.

With glitter and grit,

Jim Sheppard
Co-creator
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WHAT'S QUEER & GOING ON?



OCT 5

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OCT 7

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OCT 9

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OCT 10

**O'NOIR
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OCT 11

OUTFEST
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OCT 11

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OCT 11

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CENTER STAGE & FULL CIRCLE



Mils "M.J." James on Queer Legacy, Black Art, and Coming Home to Pittsburgh

For actor, singer, dancer, and director Mils "M.J." James, returning to Pittsburgh isn't just a homecoming, it's a mission. Born and raised in the city, M.J. built a global artistic career based in New York, performing with legends and lifting new generations of talent. But in 2024 and 2025, the spotlight brought him back to his roots in a major way.

In early summer 2024, Mils played Cordero in *Fishy Woo Woo*, Monteze Freeland's all-Black, all-queer sitcom-style comedy at Pittsburgh Playwrights' Madison Arts Center. And in 2025, he returned again to perform and design costumes for *Fences* at the August Wilson House, a historic production mounted by Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. Two defining moments. One powerful hometown return.

"I'm a Pittsburgher through and through," he says. "I come back to Pittsburgh to give back. They gave me so much. If we don't go ahead and collect the gifts and bring them back, how do the fruits of the land continue to grow?"

Fences wasn't just another show, it was sacred ground. "To be here at the house, on the soil that August Wilson comes from, to have worked with this man and to have him put his hand on my shoulder and approve my work, it's a full circle moment," M.J. says. "It's not something that you pass up or take lightly. People around the world would die for this opportunity."

As Lyons, Mils brought nuance and gravity to a role rooted in intergenerational struggle, performance, and manhood. And as the production's costume designer, he added another layer of meaning: reclaiming style as cultural expression and history.

Long before queer visibility became a hashtag, Mils lived it on stage, on tour, and back home where it wasn't always safe.

"Coming from Pittsburgh, it wasn't easy being Black. It wasn't easy being queer. It wasn't easy being gifted," he says. "And I made it look easy because it was just

natural. I'm just who I am when I show up every day, unapologetically."

That energy pulsed through Fishy Woo Woo, a celebration of Black gay friendship in which Mils played Cordero. The play was wild, hilarious, and deeply real. "There are a lot of gay people in the Hill District," noted playwright Monteze Freeland. "They deserve to feel represented in their neighborhood."

Mils has worked with theater royalty. Billy Porter, Hinton Battle, George Faison, but his legacy lives most clearly in how he lifts others.

"I give back with my art by creating opportunities for other LGBTQ artists to know that their voice matters," he says. "If I can take you to the door and walk you through it, I will. Just like someone once did for me."

As the founding artistic director of Reflections Theatre CO-OP in New York, and as a mentor, teacher, and choreographer, Mils doesn't just talk about community, he builds it.

Asked what Pride means to him, Mils returns to the mirror.

"Having pride means being able to start your day in the morning, look in the mirror, and say, 'Hey, I love

you.' Good, bad, and indifferent," he says. "Not just LGBTQ, but as a person living, trying to make it."

Back in New York, Mils continues to create, inspire, and thrive. But his imprint on Pittsburgh is permanent. Whether he's bringing sitcom chaos to the Hill or honoring August Wilson with reverence and flair, Mils "M.J." James shows us what it means to live with pride, purpose, and power, onstage and off. 🌈



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Photos by Ava Grace



The Making of Joey Young

A rising star and the chosen family behind the crowns.

by Michael Buzzelli



Whether she's slithering around in a shiny red latex body suit in her sexy single, "Scorpio," or tossing love letters into a bonfire in "Love Letter," or crying behind her keyboard at the Hard Rock Café in "Breakthrough," or singing with the Pittsburgh Pride Choir, Joey Young is putting herself out there, and the exposure is paying off.

This year, Joey Young is wearing two crowns; in January, the dynamic diva was crowned Miss Blue Moon 2025 at the Blue Moon Bar in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville, and in April, she garnered a second bejeweled crown when she became Miss Continental Newcomer 2025 at the second annual Mr. & Miss Continental Newcomer Pageants at the Baton Show Lounge in Chicago, Illinois. The Miss Continental Newcomer title is a recent addition to the pageant pantheon. It is a subdivision (one of four that includes Mr. Continental, Miss Continental Plus, and Miss Continental Elite) of the Miss Continental pageant system.

But Joey wasn't ready to stop her meteoric rise to the top. Over Labor Day Weekend, Joey Young entered the larger Miss Continental 2026 competition, placing in the Top 5, winning the interview portion, and leading in a very successful Q&A. The Miss Continental competition

"I looked at Joey Young and said, 'I want to be her when I grow up,' only to find out that I'm a year older!"

- Anemia Blunt-Young

has long been a test of endurance for iconic queens, including Candis Cayne (Miss Continental 2001), Sasha Colby (Miss Continental 2012), and Brooke Lynn Hytes (Miss Continental 2014).

Joey attended the competition with a cavalcade of queens, including Anemia Blunt-Young, Warren Munroe, L.A. Gaga, and Primadonna. Even RuPaul's Drag Race and All-Stars competitor extraordinaire, Pittsburgh superstar, Lydia Butthole Kollins, showed up for support.

Young grew up at the confluence of the Monongahela and Youghiogheny rivers in McKeesport, right outside of Pittsburgh. Lydia B Kollins often remarks that Joey Young is "home-grown to the bone."

Young was born to be a performer. Barely a month old, Young appeared as the Baby Jesus in the local nativity scene as far back as 2001. A star was born.

Young said, "As a small child, I used to perform routines from 'Hannah Montana,' 'The Cheetah Girls,' and other Nickelodeon and Disney shows. I used to charge my parents to sit on the couch and watch me sing and dance. It was five dollars per person."

Always get the money up front.

Before drag, the young Young appeared in a plethora of theatrical performances, as part of the McKeesport Little Theater's Juniors (grades 5 through 12). Joey said, "I was my sister Jen's shadow. I wanted to do anything she did.

When I saw Jen in a production of 'True Tales of Robin Hood,' I was hooked. I had to do theater."

Young went on to perform in "Seussical the Musical," among many other shows at the theater.

Director Lora Oxenreiter cast Young in a production of "Over the Tavern," a comedy-drama about a Polish family living in Buffalo, New York, in the late 50s.

Oxenreiter said, "I met Joey when she was fifteen. I cast Joey against type. I cast her as the high school jock in 'Over the Tavern,' and she worked her ass off for that part. Joey Young was born to be a performer. She is amazing. I'm so happy she found her bliss."

Young laughed, "I had to play this boy who was addicted to nudie magazines. It was a whole new experience for me."

Young began her journey into the limelight, writing and singing in cafes and coffee shops. Young said, "I went out to Jeanette, PA, to perform at the Keynote Café. I brought outfit changes and wigs. I called it 'drag lite.' I didn't let anyone discourage me from being me."

At seventeen, Joey was dancing at Chrome Empire Pole Fitness Studio in Robinson. Young said, "When she was teaching at another studio, Ebony Seskey advocated for me, but I wasn't wanted at the place she was teaching. Then, she opened Chrome Empire, and she made it an inclusive space."





Young said, "My parents have been very supportive. They came to Chicago to see me perform in the Miss Continental pageant."

It wasn't always easy. Young grew up in a conservative home. Young said, "My aunt Andrea was my first ally. She was a flight attendant and had a lot of queer and trans friends."

When Young was sixteen, her beloved Aunt Andrea passed away. Months later, her father, a firefighter who was called to New York City to aid in the rescue efforts at 9/11, contracted lymph nodal cancer, most likely due to the toxins in the air at the site of the World Trade Center. Young believes that the cancer diagnoses helped her father come to terms with Joey's journey. Young said, "My dad knows who I am in my heart."

Anemia Blunt, from the House of Young, and Joey's drag daughter, said, "I met Joey two and a half years ago at the Hard Rock Café. Joey has such an endearing personality. She brightens up every room. When I met her, I was just a drag enthusiast at the time, and I looked at Joey Young and said, 'I want to be her when I grow up,' only to find out that I'm a year older!" Blunt, who resembles Lydia when in drag, laughed.

Warren Munroe, who takes her last name from Ororo Munroe, the X-Man known as Storm from the iconic Saturday morning cartoon, met Joey when Munroe moved here from New York. Warren is an effervescent queen, titillated by Joey's rise to fame. Munroe said, "Joey has always given me such great advice. She has encouraged me to be social, make friends, and branch out. Joey is a Pittsburgh icon!"

Anemia and Warren were members of an elite posse of hard workers who spent all night stoning a beautiful black and white gown with thousands

of rhinestones the night before the Miss Continental competition. Munroe said, "We were up till six a.m. stoning that gown."

Jim Flint, who founded the Continental pageants, gave Joey Young the highest compliment. On stage, he said, "Joey Young reminds me of a young Maya Douglas." Douglas won the Miss Continental title in 1985 and the Miss Continental Elite title in 2006. His pronouncement nearly made Joey's mascara run.

As Young moves up on the pageant circuit, she remembers those who came before her. Young said, "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for Luna Skye, Calipso, Indi Skies, Joe My Gosh, Jaxa Froot, and, of course, Scarlet Fairweather."

Young praised the Pittsburgh community. Young said, "The community helped form who I am."

Scarlet Fairweather also called Joey Young a Pittsburgh icon. Fairweather said, "I remember watching Joey coming up through the open stages, winning Pride pageants, and making their mark on this city. Any time they met with a negative comment, Joey proved naysayers wrong not by being petty but by showcasing their talent."

Fairweather added, "Watching Joey win a national title, place top 5 in continental and win 2 categories, and the Blue Moon pageant all in the same year has been a treat. That kid's going places and we're all lucky to be here for the ride. Joey has consistently proven that with a lot of work, and a strong community, anything is possible. They are an unstoppable force, and I can't wait for their run for president (or at least the opening of the Joey Young Arts Department at McKeesport High School)." 🌈



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Photo by Ava Grace

DESIGNING WOMEN

by Michael Buzzelli



On the day of Joey Young's QBurgh photoshoot at Opya Studios in the South Side, Brian David was, literally and figuratively, serving looks, wheeling in a rack of long, black, zipped-up garment bags, filled with elegant dresses in various shades of red from vermillion to maroon. He dressed L.A. Gaga, Primadonna, Warren Munroe and Anemia Blunt, all ladies in red.

David, owner of Brian David Designs, loves dressing drag queens, especially Joey Young. David accompanied Young to Chicago with a coterie of queens to aid Young at the competition.

At the Miss Continental pageant, David created a quick-change look for Joey, because Young had to present as Miss Continental Newcomer and come right back on stage seconds later for the Miss Continental pageant. David made a tearaway dress with another underneath and Young was able to strip off the top layer, strutting off stage and returning within seconds. It was a quick-change worthy of a magician on "America's Got Talent."

David is a self-taught designer who grew up sewing. He said, "There wasn't a time in my life that I didn't know what I wanted to do."

He designed and sold his first prom dress in 1997, when he was fifteen years old. By his senior year, he had four dresses for his high school friends.

The designer has a flair for Old Hollywood glamour. He credits Marianne Krostyne and Krostyne Studio for his early success. He worked beside Krostyne for years before venturing out on his own. David said, "I was supposed to fill in for six months at her studio, but I tried to make myself indispensable. I ended up staying for seventeen years."

David said, "I started designing dresses because women's wear is more fun, more creative. You have to be very precise when designing men's clothes. Men's wear is meticulous, down to the thread. They're all straight lines, and the pockets have to be in the same place. If they're too high up, everyone notices. I like creating women's clothes. If you alter a man's suit too much, it appears feminine.

I like to mix different textiles."

Marcy Metelsky, a management consultant by day and bon vivant by night, said, "Brian David is simply a genius-level couturier of the rarest kind."

Metelsky, who wore several of Brian's designs, including a long, beaded green dress for the Ballet's Emerald Ball, and a long red and black statement skirt for the opening of the musical, "Something To Live For" at the Kelly-Strayhorn, said, "When we collaborated on a few custom pieces, I clearly recognized that the depth of his design knowledge was not defined by how many years he had lived, but by how fully he had embraced and excelled in his craft. His background in theater and pageants, combined with his studies in design and fashion, creates a stunning balance of artistry and craftsmanship. Every piece feels like wearable art. Each custom design that he has created for me reflects his gift for transforming fabric into statement pieces that exude confidence and personality. He doesn't design just clothes, but experiences; pieces that empower the wearer and inspire admiration."



There are a few, select names that as soon as you hear them, it screams horror; whether it's Michael, Freddy, Chucky, you are bound for a delightful fright. But for fans of cult horror, the name Romero is a family business steeped in horror tales.

For the next iteration in the family business of horror, Tina Romero, daughter of the late “Godfather of the Dead”, George A. Romero (Night of the Living Dead), has conjured up a new stance for indie film goers to revel in. *Queens of the Dead*, which stars a full-blown gaggle of LGBTQ+ characters from some of the most watched shows in the world (i.e. RuPaul’s Drag Race and Pose, to name a few).

Queens of the Dead stars Katy O’Brian (Love Lies Bleeding), Margaret Cho (Fire Island), Jack Haven (I Saw The TV Glow) and Cheyenne Jackson (American Horror Story).

The film centers around a party in Brooklyn, where a zombie-apocalypse breaks out during a warehouse party, all while a group of drag queens, club kids and so-called frenemies have to band together to remain intact (but also still serving) and use their unique skills to fight against the undead.

“The zombie apocalypse is such a rich sandbox to play in when it comes to social commentary. I can’t be my dad’s daughter without making an attempt at saying something with zombies,” Romero recently told Entertainment Weekly. “I did want this to be a film in which I am paying homage to the world and the monster he created, but I’m also introducing my own voice.”

Romero states that her father and her bonded together growing up by watching films, with one of the biggest films to have an impact on them both was *West Side Story*. As she explained to Bloody Disgusting, “it would just move him to tears, and he would weep in front of me just as if it were nothing. I just saw from a young age the power that movies have to move people. That’s kind of where the bug really bit me, seeing the power that cinema can have over a person.”

The Romero family is quick to establish a social cache to their products, with the films having a sort-of social commentary. As to whether or not her father would have produced a film like this, Romero is quick to state to Bloody Disgusting that “I’m really proud of how this is not a George Romero movie. This is a movie that he would not have made. He was a bit more

of a pessimist than I am.”

Romero continues telling Entertainment Weekly “It’s very much not a film he would make, but it is using his vocabulary and is playing by his rules. As far as the queer element, on one hand, I just feel like the gays need a zombie film. It’s time that we get to have a big gay zombie movie.”

Shudder’s Director of Acquisitions and Productions, Adam Koehler, said in a recent statement, “We’re beyond thrilled to bring this wildly original vision to audiences - a fearless, glam-drenched ride that’s as funny as it is ferocious. With razor-sharp direction and a fierce cast, *Queens of the Dead* is a thrilling new chapter in a legacy of horror royalty.”

The cast of characters joining the films stars include a few familiar names, including Nina West (RuPaul’s Drag Race), Jaqueline Pivey (Mean Girls), Tomas Matos (Fire Island), Quincy Dunn-Baker (No Hard Feelings), Becca Blackwell (Bros), Shaunette Renée Wilson (Black Panther), Dominique Jackson (Pose), Riki Lindhome (Knives Out), and Eve Lindley (Bros).

Queens of the Dead will sashay into theaters on October 24, 2025. 🌈

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Courtesy photos.



THE KING OF CAMP

by Michael Buzzelli



Meet the host, producer, & glam-ringmaster behind 'Match Gayme' and 'Wheel of Drag: Joe King.

Joe King started his career as a game show host. When he was 17, King hosted Kennywood Park's "It's You Review," a show that featured volunteers from the audience learning tricks backstage before performing. It was part "Wheel of Fortune," part "Gong Show," where the audience participated in skits and games for prizes. King cohosted the show with Darcy Vollero and Nancy Murray.

King said, "We used to do that bit from 'I Love Lucy' where you pretend to throw knives at someone, and the knives pop out from behind the board behind the victim.... er... volunteer's head [Season 3, Episode 5 "Lucy Tells the Truth"]" He added, "We had a puppet stage, a balloon squashing contest, and more."

The review kicked off the summer in the Coaster Capital of the World

but traveled to other amusement parks. King went on tour with the show, departing from Pittsburgh to travel to Spokane, Washington. He stayed with the show for two years.

From there, King caught the theater bug. "I was working as a docent for the Children's Museum when I met Don & Leslie Brockett. They were attending a fundraiser, and I was their guide. We hit it off, and he learned that I was a theater kid. He offered me work as an extra doing Industrials and holiday character work. I quickly became an assistant producer and events manager. I quit my museum job and started working for Brockett Productions full-time. Working alongside Don, I was fortunate enough to perform gigs for the Pittsburgh Symphony, The Cultural Trust, USX, and 53 Fortune 500 companies. Sharing the stage with Fred Rogers, Carol

Channing, Eartha Kitt, Leslie Caron, Lenora Nemetz, Billy Porter, Marvin Hamlisch, and more."

King performed at the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's first Fiddlesticks concert.

Now, King is the creator and host of "Match Gayme" and "Wheel of Drag."

The shows have taken place at a variety of venues and still travel, but King's "Match Gayme" and "Wheel of Drag" have found a home in the Strip District.

King cohosts "Wheel of Drag" with Kierra Darshell, Pittsburgh's First Lady of Drag. It is a monthly event. On "Wheel of Drag," the drag contestants spin a giant, "Wheel of Fortune" roulette-style wheel with categories such as Set List; twenty-one songs the queens were given



in advance, Queen's Choice; three of their favorite songs to perform; Broadway, three Broadway songs such as "I'm Just a Girl Who Can't Say No," from the "Sound of Music, or "When You're Good to Mama," from "Chicago; Mystery, which could be any song; Prop, which featured a prop ranging from a jump rope to sock puppet; and Audience Favorite, songs selected by the audience. Monday, August 28th show had a bowl of treasures that included "The Theme from the Love Boat," "Tainted Love," and "Crocodile Rock". Once a category is chosen, the queen must perform the selected song. The audience's vote determines the winner.

Kierra Darshell said, "My long-standing collaboration with Joe has been rewarding both professionally and personally. Joe is a trailblazer in integrating drag into classic American game shows like 'Match Gayme' and 'Wheel of Drag.' His professionalism and keen eye for detail create a fantastic environment for innovative entertainment." Darshell added, "The audience interactions highlight how his vision has helped elevate and normalize drag performances in mainstream media, enriching the cultural landscape and providing representation that resonates with diverse audiences."

On July 28th, "Wheel of Drag," Ari Nova, a tall, slender queen, somersaulted her way into

first place with a rendition of "Good Morning, Baltimore," from "Hairspray."

"Match Gayme" is like the original "Match Game," where celebrities play a fill-in-the-blank game with contestants. "When I began, I got local celebrities to participate. Mayor Peduto, Billy Porter, and Chet Welch from 'Survivor' were among the early celebrities, performing alongside drag queens. Shortly after that, I flipped the coin on that, and we began doing themed events."

The first themed event was "The Golden Girls Match Gayme," with similarities to RuPaul's "Snatch Game," another variation of the NBC classic game show.

Howard Elson played Stan Zbornak (a role made famous by Herb Edelman), Dorothy's ex-husband, in the "Golden Girls Match Gayme." Elson said, "I've known Joe for decades since we both worked with Don Brockett. I don't know anyone who is more full of joy and appreciation. I even got to dress up, though not nearly as glamorous as the Ladies!"

King has gone on to host a variety of themed "Match Gayme" events, including "Pee Wee's Playhouse," "Death Becomes Her," and "Hocus Pocus."

On August 9th, King hosted a

Sunday Brunch themed after the iconic drag movie, "To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar".

Longtime fan Marcy Metelsky was honored to join the "Too Wong Foo" cast as Carol Ann (played by Stockard Channing in the original film in 1995). She said, "Joe King's creativity and drive to entertain are unparalleled. He is the embodiment of both the charisma and eye for talent of a new-age Johnny Carson, and the cutting-edge bravado of Johnny Castle (one of my favorite Patrick Swayze roles). Joe blends those personas when engaging audiences of all generations in his many game-show style productions."

Metelsky, who has attended most of the shows, said, "These productions are sheer perfection. Every single 'Match Gayme' reminds us how to laugh until our stomach hurts, while also raising money for several local non-profits. Joe's genius productions showcased Pittsburgh's powerhouse of talent (drag queens, improv and theatrical actors, poets, and the occasional Broadway or RuPaul Drag show veterans). Each willing participant performs characters from iconic and beloved shows such as The Brady Bunch, Schitt's Creek, The Golden Girls, PeeWee's Playhouse, and Death Becomes Her. Not to mention the epic showdown of Hocus Pocus vs Beetlejuice! The

audience was the clear winner that night."

Metelsky said, "Joe expertly produces and hosts shows filled with pure joy, guaranteed to put smiles on every face."

Patrick Jordan, actor, producer, founder, and artistic director of Barebones Productions, said, "Joe King is an icon and legend for a reason (in addition to being an incredible friend.) Some of the best times I have had on stage have been when Joe's invited me to perform small roles in Match Gayme. The talent he assembles is world-class, and he selects movies and themes that hit nostalgia and pop culture just right. My favorite has to be when I played Captain Carl in his Match Gayme Pee Wee's Playhouse edition (Death Becomes Her is a close second). He shows everyone such care and respect, and he is meticulous about every detail. If I told you how many rubber waders I have in my possession now because

of that role, no one would believe it. His shows are great because he is great. We're so incredibly lucky to have his talent and generosity in Pittsburgh."

Actor, singer, and comedian, Missy Moreno said, "I got to play in an 80s wonderland when Joe asked me to be Tammy Faye in 'Match Gayme.' Having been a long-time fan of Joe, I was swept away into a magical Time Machine of 70s/80s game show Heaven, dripping in sequins and puns. And getting to feel fancy with the actual glamour and high-quality details he and his team bring to a show - my scrappy Munhall comedian self has been honored to get to play in Joe's playground." She added, "I truly think Joe makes Pittsburgh more fabulous and makes everyone feel like a star! I'm honored to be part of his world of classic queer comedy and will literally do anything he asks me to do. It's a yinzer honor...with bedazzled fries on top." 🌈



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10 Years Strong

AIDS Free Pittsburgh's work to end the HIV epidemic, Pittsburgh style

by Tia Bailey

AIDS Free Pittsburgh (AFP) is celebrating 10 years of working to end the HIV epidemic. The nonprofit will host a celebration this winter to commemorate the anniversary and the many milestones it has achieved in the process.

AFP was started in 2015, with the mission to achieve an AIDS-Free County (meaning no new AIDS cases), and to reduce the rate of HIV infections by 75% by 2030. The nonprofit was started by a group of people who worked in the public health sector and wanted to address the HIV/AIDS crisis in Pittsburgh. They had seen the success of other places like San Francisco, and wanted to do the same for a city of our size.

"We were looking at ways to really improve how we maximize the work that's being done and minimize the amount of money spent so that we can all align our resources in better ways," says Richard Smith, one of the founding members of AFP.

The group set out to provide the community with information about PrEP, which wasn't well-known at

the time, and to make HIV testing routine in primary care.

Their first focus was making sure newly diagnosed patients got the care they needed as soon as possible, with the original goal being a 72-hour turnaround.

"One of the things I'm most proud of with this project and what the hospital systems and all the clinics have worked on, is I can confidently say that if someone is newly tested HIV positive, we get them in care probably within less than 12 hours, excluding outliers like weekends," Smith says. "But for the most part, we almost immediately get people linked to care."

This is a major development for the nonprofit, considering that was not the standard of care common when they first came together. Another huge step for the organization was being backed by UPMC and Allegheny Health Network.

In the past, both providers and pharmacists were not as educated on PrEP and HIV care, some even denying PrEP to patients or not testing altogether. AFP, with the help

of UPMC and AHN, were able to help get the message and care standards out to medical professionals.

In order for the health facilities to be involved, a third party to facilitate everything was needed. The Jewish Healthcare Foundation has been that third party, and has worked closely with AFP to help address AIDS and HIV in Pittsburgh.

"JHF has supported [AFP] with well over \$300,000 to provide administrative costs, programming costs, any kind of gaps that we've had in our needs for funding," Smith says. "They've been extremely generous with their assistance, too."

Addressing the crisis takes a village, and the Allegheny Health Department is also part of it. They provide data to AFP, which enables the nonprofit to accurately track changes and understand how to move forward, addressing the current needs of the community. When they receive the data, they can game plan and identify specific communities that may require more outreach or information.

"We got an extra boost from the state of Pennsylvania to do a media

campaign to educate individuals who are HIV positive,” Smith shares. “We were also able to use some of the funding from H3 Pittsburgh to expand that to do PrEP education and general HIV/AIDS education.”

The campaign was not exclusive to Pittsburgh, but reached 11 counties that make up Western Pennsylvania. Something unique about the media campaign in Pittsburgh was AFP’s use of recognizable figures in the local queer community.

“We used every community member that wanted to be a part of it in the photoshoots,” Smith says. “We wanted to make sure when people saw the ads, they felt a familiar feeling to them.”

He explains that AFP wanted to make sure the campaign accurately represented those who were actually receiving care in the city. Whether you recognize someone in the ads or it’s a new face, you know they are an active member of your community.

“If we’re making this for our community, shouldn’t our community be the ones who are making it?” Smith says. “So we really wanted to make sure the project was equitable to our community.”

The nonprofit will celebrate their 10 year anniversary this December, with an event that will serve both as a celebration and a remembrance of those lost.

“We want to treat it as both, to remember those lost but also to celebrate the gains that have occurred because of the work that has been done,” he says.

The event, titled “A Journey of Remembrance,” will take place on December 6 at the Union Project and will feature food, music, people in the community sharing their stories, and more. The night, as well as the work the nonprofit does, will be centered firmly on community.

“We believe in community and community matters,” Smith says. “You’re not going to be successful if you’re not involving the community in your choices.” 🌈

AIDS Free Pittsburgh is your resource for finding resources and services for those living with HIV. Just enter your zip code, select a service area and find providers near you.

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Courtesy photo

PITTSBURGH PRIDE CHOIR STEPS INTO 40TH YEAR LOUD AND PROUD

by Tia Bailey

In June of 1985, gay men inspired by a San Francisco gay choir wanted to bring the same idea to Pittsburgh. Later that winter, the group became known as Renaissance City Choir and performed their first holiday concert.

40 years later, the group formerly known as Renaissance City Choir is celebrating their 40 year anniversary with a name change that conveys the changing times. The new name is the Pittsburgh Pride Choir (PPC).

"The choir has continued to grow and grow, and we're now at 120 plus singers, which is great," says Endy Reindl, PPC Marketing Chair. "That alone is a sense of community, and it is its own community within the LGBTQIA+ community."

The original name of the choir was in reference to Pittsburgh's nickname shortly after World War II. In the 80s, members felt it

would be precarious for the group to have the word "gay" in it, and Renaissance was a widely known reference to the city. However, with times changing and years passing, the name didn't invoke the same familiarity and understanding that it did back then.

"It's not as commonplace a term anymore for this city," Reindl explains. "So there was a lot of conversation at the board-level of, is this name indicative of the group? Does this really personify the joy and the community and the singing that this organization does?"

With the current political climate, the board wanted to lean into the community unapologetically and with pride.

"As an organization, we want to be leaning forward and advocating and saying that this organization is here, and we're very, very proud," Reindl says. "Hence why it is

Pittsburgh Pride Choir, with pride being a special point for us."

The name isn't the only thing that has changed about the choir over the last 40 years. The choir has grown exponentially, and so has the talent. Reindl praises the level of musicianship and artistry that those on the choir possess.

"They do actually know what they're singing, there's some depth to it," he says. "There is a level of musicianship, despite having members from all ranges of musical backgrounds or lack of musical backgrounds – there's a wide variety. But yet the level of musicality continues to exceed anyone's expectations."

"The thing is, it's not just community, it's not just singing – it's the awareness and the positive reinforcement of truly being yourself, sharing your gifts in that community, with allies, and just

being unabashedly grateful and proud of that,” says Reindl.

Community is a leading principle of the choir, and it always has been. There was a separate Renaissance Women’s Choir formed, which would meet up with the men’s choir to perform together at every concert. The choir moved into their current home where they are the resident artists, East Liberty Presbyterian Church, in 1996. In 2008, the men’s and women’s choir joined together into one choir, which then went on to record a holiday concert CD with the Edgewood Symphony Orchestra.

PPC has continued to grow and receive more opportunities, such as singing with Hugh Jackman, performing at former Pennsylvania governor Tom Wolfe’s inauguration, and performing at Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato’s inauguration.

Between the talent and the feeling of community, the PPC’s performances mean a lot to those

performing and supporting.

“We have a variety of individuals from all backgrounds of musicianship, and it could be your neighbor who you didn’t realize sings, or a loved one who you’ve never seen perform in this capacity,” Reindl says. “But when you come to the concerts, when you share in that community, you feel that joy.”

Pittsburgh Pride Choir is launching into their 40th year strong, currently preparing for their upcoming fall season. For those interested in joining, auditions are held before the fall, before the winter cabaret season, and before Pride. Auditions entail a short vocal placement audition with the choir’s artistic director. Those interested in joining the Pittsburgh Pride Choir may email Dr. Kym Scott at director@pittsburghpride.org.

“It really is about the earnest expression of joy in music as an LGBTQIA+ choir,” Reindl says. 🌈



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Kiss Me Deadly tour
courtesy photo.

Lip Sync Lovers

Kori King's Pittsburgh Era Begins

by Michael Buzzelli

It's no surprise to fans of "RuPaul's Drag Race," Season 17, that the Steel City's Lydia Butthole Kollins is dating the Black Barbie of Boston, Kori King. In a bizarre twist of television fate, the two lovers had to Lip-Sync For Their Lives against one other.

Ultimately, Lydia sent Kori packing (in more ways than one). After RuPaul declared Butthole the winner, Lydia marched over to Kori and the two embraced one another with a kiss that sent shockwaves all the way from the Las Palmas Sunset Studios in Los Angeles, California, to 5801 Ellsworth Avenue in Pittsburgh, PA, and beyond. It was a passionate Kori King kiss.

The climactic moment didn't ruin their relationship; their bond only strengthened.

After an off-air conversation, the two romantic partners decided to stay together. They began to make plans to live in the same city. For Kori King, the choice was easy to leave Beantown and move to the Steel City.

King told QBURGH, "It was easy to pick Pittsburgh. Lydia is closer to her friends and family."

While they live in the same city, they are not yet living together. "Lydia is under a lease, and I need more space. I moved into a place with four bedrooms – for all of my stuff. You know, honey, I need a lot of room," said King.

King hasn't had much of an opportunity to see Pittsburgh, because the queens are booked out on tours. Lydia is off to Europe, and both queens go to Europe early in the fall.

Both queens also head to Australia in this fall.

King said, "When I'm here, I stay in my house most of the time. Lydia has shown me around a bit. She likes going to P Town, but when I'm not on the road, I'm mostly here in the house."

King spends most of the time making content for her YouTube channel and recording Cameos.

King is excited to be living in Pittsburgh, because "Dance Moms"

was shot here. King said, "I found out that Abby Lee Miller still lives in Pittsburgh. Meeting Abby is a dream of mine. I hope someone can set up a dinner with Lydia, Abby, and me. Lydia and I were watching an episode together, and Lydia said, 'Wait, I know that place. It's 5801, a gay bar here in Pittsburgh,' I was like 'No way! I couldn't believe it.'"

King has yet to make it to 5801, where the Dance Moms celebrated Leslie's departure with shots, lots of shots.

King is forthright, funny, and very candid. The TV star said, "If anyone wants to know anything about me all they have to do is go to my YouTube Channel. I put it all out there on my YouTube."

King and Kollins are preparing for their trip to Australia, where they will tour several metropolitan cities Down Under for their "Kiss Me Deadly" tour. But America's Favorite Drag Couple will be in a show in Pittsburgh on October 5. The two queens will be performing with their former Season 17 rival, Suzie Toot, in BUTTTOOTKING at the Pittsburgh Improv. 🌈



BIPARTISAN BILL SEEKS TO REINSTATE NATIONAL SUICIDE HOTLINE FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

by Orion Rummeler

In July, Trump cut LGBTQ+ youth services for 988, the suicide crisis hotline that launched in 2022.

Sens. Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat, and Lisa Murkowski, a Republican, introduced a bipartisan bill on September 17 to re-establish national emergency suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ youth — which have been stripped by the Trump administration at a time when the vulnerable group needs it most.

In July, the Trump administration terminated the 988 hotline's LGBTQ+ services, which connected young people in crisis with counselors trained in supporting LGBTQ+ youth. This new bill, backed by the LGBTQ+ youth suicide prevention organization Trevor Project as well as the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, would modify the Public Health Service Act to reinstate those services and require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to maintain them. The bill now moves to committee.

The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ+ young people seriously consider suicide each year in the United States, as they face high rates of bullying, assault and discrimination. And when the 2024 presidential race was called for Donald Trump, calls and texts to the Trevor Project's own crisis hotlines spiked by 700 percent, as LGBTQ+ youth felt afraid about the outcome of the election.

"Given that LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers, the need for these services remains pressing,"

said Jaymes Black, CEO of The Trevor Project, in a statement. "This is not about politics, or identity; this is about doing what is best to support our country's highest risk populations — and save young people's lives nationwide."

During his first term in 2020, President Trump signed a bipartisan law to create 988 as a more accessible resource for mental health emergencies. The free hotline launched in July 2022. Since then, millions of people in crisis have turned to 988. And nearly 1.5 million of those calls, texts and chats were sent by young Americans seeking specialized LGBTQ+ services.

"We are in the middle of a mental health crisis, and the 988 lifeline saves lives, plain and simple," said Baldwin, who wrote the original legislation to create the 988 hotline. Cutting funds for specialized services within 988 puts the lifeline in jeopardy, she said in a statement.

"There is absolutely no good reason that Donald Trump took away this specialized help for our LGBTQ youth. Mental health does not see partisan lines or geography," the Wisconsin Democrat added. 🌈

If you or a loved one are in crisis, please call or text 988 or text HOME to 741741 to connect with a live volunteer crisis counselor.

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Senator Tammy Baldwin (D)



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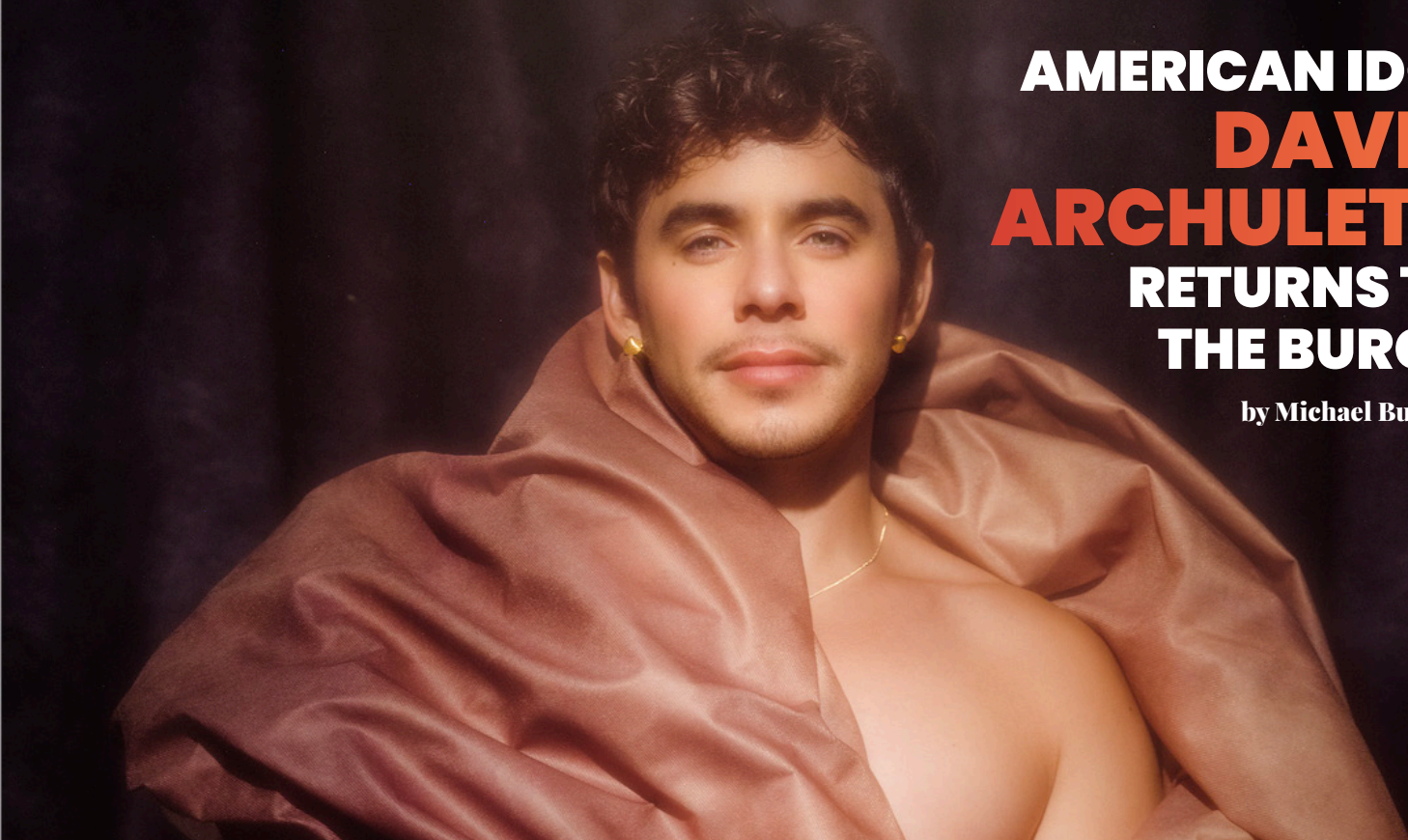
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AMERICAN IDOL DAVID ARCHULETA RETURNS TO THE BURGH

by Michael Buzzelli



Fresh off his most recent visit, Pittsburgh Pride headliner David Archuleta is returning to the Steel City on October 14 at the Thunderbird Café and Music Hall in Lawrenceville during a multi-city “Earthly Delights Music Tour.” The former American Idol star has even more music to share with his fans. Archuleta said, “I’ve got some of the stuff I played at Pride and some new stuff.”

Archuleta grew up in a musical family. His mother, Guadalupe, Lupe Marie Bartholomew (affectionately known to the Archies as “Mama Lupe”), a salsa singer and dancer, and his father, Jeff, a jazz musician, introduced him to music at a young age. Archuleta said, “My father brought home the soundtrack to ‘Les Misérables,’ and I loved hearing the sounds. I loved repeating what I heard. There was, within me, a natural pull toward music. Maybe it’s genetic.”

He began singing at the age of six. He began performing publicly at the age of ten, participating in a

local talent competition where he sang “I Will Always Love You” by Dolly Parton. By age 12, he became the Junior Vocal Champion on the second season of “Star Search.” In 2008, he gained a massive new fan base competing on the seventh season of “American Idol,” on one of the show’s top ten fan-favorite seasons. Archuleta placed second in the television show, losing to David Cook.

Archuleta was born in Miami, Florida, but his Latino family moved to Sandy, Utah, when he was six years old. Archuleta and his siblings were raised in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon Church or the LDS Church.

In 2021, sparking a media frenzy in the national news, Archuleta came out as gay and left the Mormon church. His mother, Mama Lupe, left the Mormon church when Archuleta did. She said, “If you’re going to hell, then we’re all going to hell with you.” It’s the subject of his song, “Hell Together,” on the

“Earthly Delights” album.

His much-publicized journey to finding his own personal freedom is the subject of his new book, “Devout: Losing My Faith and Finding Myself.” The memoir details his struggles with his spirituality and his sexuality, and how the two disparate cores of his being wrestled for dominance. The Idol entertainer contemplated suicide.

The book is scheduled to launch in February 2026. Archuleta said, “My book is about reflecting on my past, my music is about moving forward.”

Since coming out, Archuleta has reinvented himself. He is happier and more centered. He enjoys touring. While touring the country, Archuleta said, “Each city has its own character, its own culture, its own etiquette.” He added, “Pittsburgh is a great city with great energy.”

David Archuleta comes back to Pittsburgh on October 14 at the Thunderbird Café and Music Hall. 

Photo by Tanner Knapp

Lilly Kubit:

Storytelling Through Trinkets, Textures, & Tenderness



Lilly Kubit's world is one of vivid color, found objects, layered meanings, and love. A self-described multidisciplinary artist with roots in Mt. Lebanon, a suburb of Pittsburgh, Kubit creates with intention, humor, and a punky sense of care. Her artistic output ranges from evocative photography to handmade jewelry, upcycled accessories, and zine-like visual storytelling, all under the creative umbrella of her brand, Pound Mutt Procurements.

Kubit's pop-up space at Haven (a community arts space run by Post-Genre) feels like stepping into her brain, tactile, vibrant, and disarmingly honest. Her work radiates what she calls "trinket, crow-core energy," with playful pieces built from reclaimed charms, stuffed animals, beads, yarn, vintage plastic, and other oddities gleaned from places like Creative Reuse or gifted by friends.

"I use art as therapy," she says. "As I move with my hands, I process what's going on in my brain. It's a way to check in with myself."

This check-in has led her down several creative paths. Trained in photography, Kubit has been documenting life since childhood, when she'd borrow her mom's

Nikon DSLR or snap sunsets on an iPhone. After receiving her first DSLR in 2016, she taught herself portraiture, assisted professional photographers, and contributed visual stories to publications like The Communiqué, Trib Total Media, and PublicSource. But over time, she expanded her practice to include printmaking, jewelry-making, and textile work, each new medium becoming a building block toward her maximalist vision.

"I think of each new skill like a tool on my belt," she explains. "Learning how to solder let me make a chandelier out of a bike tire. Leatherwork helped me reimagine bags. I'd love to get into woodworking next."

Through Pound Mutt, Kubit reclaims discarded materials, just like her family reclaimed Moose, their rescue pit bull and the brand's namesake. "Moose came from an abusive background, and we gave him a second chance," she says. "That's what I'm doing with my art: giving forgotten things a new life."

Her work and outlook are also deeply influenced by her queer identity and mental health journey. "Pride, to me, means acknowledging who you are and staying true to it,

no matter what the world throws at you," she says.

That celebration of individuality is also reflected in Kubit's collaborations, particularly with her best friend, Jory, of Good Heart Gifts. The duo often share vendor tables at local markets, blending Kubit's trinket-heavy creations with Jory's whimsical crocheted goods. Future plans include collaborative bags that combine Jory's soft sculptures with Kubit's decorative flair.

While Kubit is proudly Pittsburgh through and through, "I come from coal miners and steel workers. I was raised on the Steelers," she's also carving out a space in the city's creative future, proving that art doesn't need to live in the galleries of New York or LA to matter.

"Pittsburgh is full of unique, fresh, and completely homemade art," she says. "And I want to be part of showing people that."

Whether she's styling charm necklaces or building something completely unexpected, Lilly Kubit is telling a story, one that insists on joy, imagination, and making space for everyone. 🌈



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Photo by Tanner Knapp

TATTOOING AS TRANSFORMATION

Jess Scutella on
Art, Identity, and Queer Liberation

In a small but vibrant tattoo studio tucked into Pittsburgh's creative core, Jess Scutella (they/them) is reimagining what it means to wear your identity on your skin. A tattoo artist, multidisciplinary creator, and proud member of the queer community, Jess isn't just marking bodies; they're crafting intimate experiences rooted in expression, resilience, and radical selfhood.

"I started tattooing about 12 years ago," Jess recalls. "I was already into it because of the punk rock scene, the alternative scene, the queer scene in Erie, Pennsylvania. I saw it as an outlet to expression, fun, spontaneity."

Since moving to Pittsburgh in 2018, Jess has carved out a name for themself at Kyklops Tattoo, specializing in Japanese-style tattooing that emphasizes full-body work, or horimono. This practice isn't about flash or trends, it's about depth, time, and trust.

"With large-scale Japanese-style tattooing, you get really intimate experiences with people," they explain. "Long hours with them, extremely challenging work. And it's incredible to see people's stories come out through their skin. To be a catalyst in that is an incredible experience."

For Jess, tattooing and queerness are inextricably linked. Not in a tokenized way, but in a shared philosophy: bold self-expression, defiance of norms, and a deep commitment to becoming.

"Tattooing is embedded with queer identity," Jess says. "Our expression outwardly is so political sometimes. But in tattooing, it isolates it to that person so they can express it themselves. And queerness gave me a gateway or a door to open up and say, this is who I am, damn it. I hope you like it, because if you don't, I don't care."

Their work is more than art; it's witnessing. It's listening to someone's story, believing it, and translating it into a living image that the client will carry forever.

Originally from Erie, Jess found something in Pittsburgh they hadn't experienced before: space to become. "I needed a space to explore who I wanted to be and who I am," they say. "And Pittsburgh is so vast in its small location that I felt safe here. I felt welcomed here."

Kyklops Tattoo didn't just offer Jess a career move, it gave them a launchpad for self-acceptance. "I came out here in Pittsburgh," they share. "I expressed myself as a non-binary person. And the freedom and weight that came off of that was indescribable."

Tattooing may be their primary practice, but Jess is an artist in every sense. They study bonsai and niwaki, collaborate with ceramicists through Clay Pittsburgh, and have published books of poetry and photography.

Their current obsession? Capturing queer life behind the lens.

"Photography has stolen my soul. That's all I think about nowadays, if not tattooing," Jess laughs. "I get to witness our beautiful damn community and be behind the lens. I was lucky to shoot this most recent Pride month, and I got lost in it. I wasn't even trying to be creative. I was just witnessing."

That spirit of witnessing is central to Jess's work across mediums: showing up, seeing people, and honoring who they are.

When asked what Pride means to them, Jess offers a reflection that sidesteps clichés and goes straight to the marrow.

"There's a sense of security with wearing tattoos that I struggled and survived," they say. "I suffered when I rejected who I was. And then I survived. And then I realized people loved me and supported me."

Pride, for Jess, is about change. It's about becoming, shedding, evolving. "Pride is something that comes and goes. Our queerness is ever-changing. I'm ever-changing. So I think having pride is something beautiful."

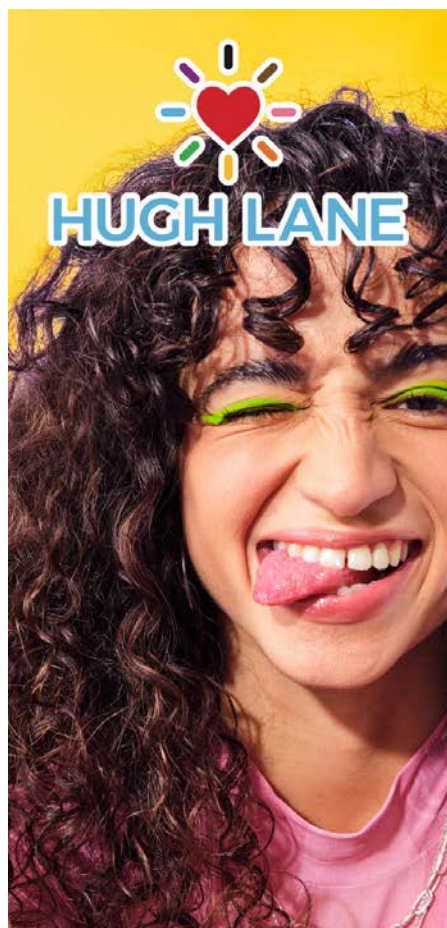
Jess Scutella doesn't just tattoo skin, they reveal truth. Through needles, cameras, clay, and community, they are building a body of work that embodies queer resilience, curiosity, and joy. In their hands, art becomes a kind of liberation. And in Pittsburgh, they've found a home to keep growing. 🌈



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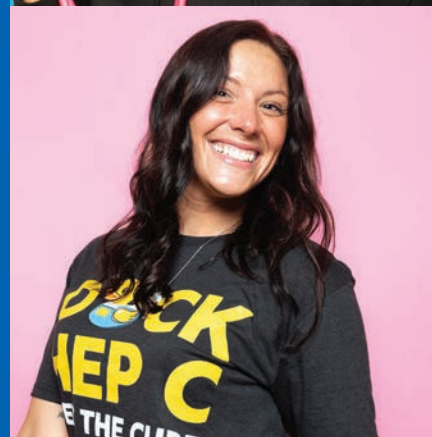
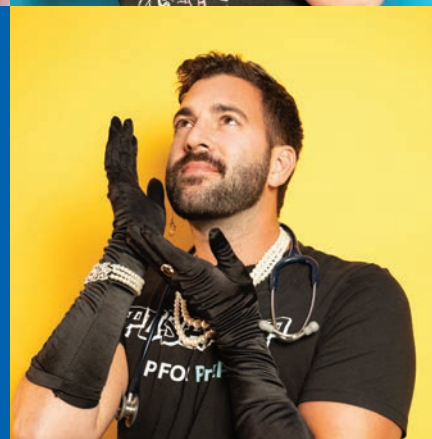
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