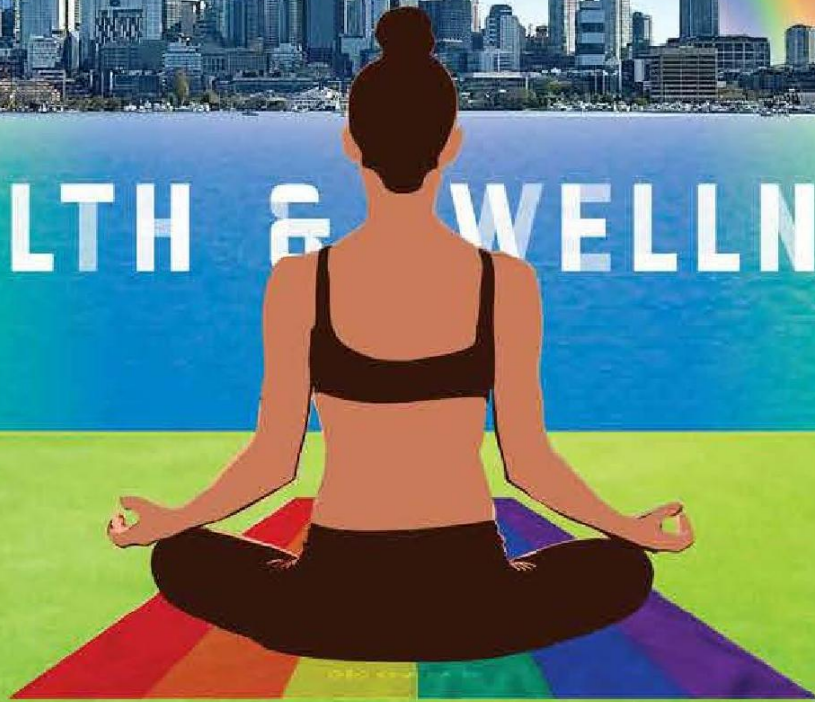




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OP-ED


Our identity shouldn't prevent us from living our American dream

BY CARTER BROWN

Many of us have spent our lives pursuing our American dream. For me, this meant getting a college education, building a career, and starting a family.

But for many LGBTQ+ people, achieving this dream remains out of reach. Across the country, LGBTQ+ people like me still face the harsh reality of being at higher risk of discrimination and bias, including at work.

I know this firsthand. I was living my dream, successful at my job, and making a name for myself in the real estate and mortgage industries. My wife and I bought our first home and welcomed our daughter.

Then, one day at work, everything changed when colleagues began focusing only on my personal identity instead of my work performance. They asked me if I was a woman, an identity I had shed long ago. That moment — being outed as a Transgender man in my workplace, on somebody else's terms, and against my will — completely changed my life. I had intentionally decided not to come out at work, partly because it had no impact on my job function and partly because of the fear it would turn into a nightmare. These fears became my reality.

In the following months, I experienced discrimination from colleagues, managers, and Human Resources. People whispered about whether I was Gay or had "the surgeries," because I "looked so real." Others simply walked the other way when they saw me coming.

Then, simply for being who I was, I was fired.

I'm not alone. Concerningly, 50% of LGBTQ+ Americans have also been harassed, fired, or denied a promotion at work because of who they are. This discrimination can manifest in a multitude of ways: being rejected as a job applicant, denied a promotion, or fired, or experienc-

ing verbal, physical, or sexual harassment.

It's no wonder that only half of LGBTQ+ employees are open about their identity with their supervisors. When we're forced to hide who we are, we're not able to bring ourselves to work, which impacts not only our well-being but also the overall success of our team.

What's more, the effects of workplace discrimination aren't confined to the office. In fact, LGBTQ+ adults are twice as likely to experience homelessness as compared to the general population, and since more than half of Americans get their health insurance through their employer, being fired — or not hired in the first place — affects one's access to health care.

Simply put, workplace discrimination can have a profound impact on a person's life. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Coworkers can educate themselves on LGBTQ+ experiences and the various manifestations of bias and discrimination. A wealth of literature on the subject exists, including online resources like the Love Has No Labels website. Knowledge ben-

efits us all and can help correct misconceptions and ensure that your LGBTQ+ colleagues feel supported.

Employers can start with explicit antidiscrimination policies that cover gender and sexual identity, and back them with concrete actions, like using gender-neutral language and offering inclusive benefits such as parental leave and spousal insurance for all.

Beyond policies, education is key. Regular training on LGBTQ+ issues, unconscious bias, and allyship helps build understanding.

We all have our own American dreams, but our collective strength lies in everyone having the opportunity to live theirs. Together, by fostering understanding and opposing discrimination, we can create a future where everyone, no matter their identity, can thrive and contribute their best.

Carter Brown is the cofounder and executive director of the National Black Trans Advocacy Coalition. This piece originally ran in the South Florida Sun Sentinel.

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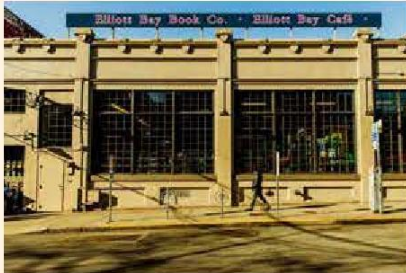
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National politics reach Seattle Public Schools and LGBTQ+ youth

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

After Election Day, the Trevor Project saw its highest crisis service volume since providing around-the-clock services in 2019, spotlighting the growing fear LGBTQ+ students across the nation have about the upcoming Trump term.

The nonprofit suicide prevention organization analyzed all postelection conversations across its classic crisis services — Lifeline, chat, and text — and saw how those that included election-related content increased by nearly 5,200% when compared to averages leading up to Election Day.

In a statement provided to the *SGN*, Senior VP of Crisis Intervention Becca Norden said the increase indicates how Trump's win is taking a tremendous toll on the mental health of LGBTQ+ students.

"A 700% increase [in calls, texts and chats compared to prior weeks] across our classic crisis services is staggering, and yet our crisis counselors remain steady and unwavering in their commitment to be there for every young person who needs an ear to listen," Norden said. "It's clear that this is a challenging moment for many LGBTQ+ young people. But, we want to remind everyone that no matter what they are feeling right now, we can — and we will — get through this together."

It's estimated that 30% of people who reached out to The Trevor Project after Election Day identify as BIPOC LGBTQ+ youth, and that over 40% are Transgender or Nonbinary youth. Additional research from the organization highlights how 90% of LGBTQ+ youth reported how recent politics has negatively impacted their well-being. Suicide attempts in the past year among Transgender and Nonbinary youth have increased by about 72%.

"We will continue to fight for every LGBTQ+ young person to have access to safe, affirming space — especially during challenging times," CEO Jaymes Black said in a previously released statement. "LGBTQ+ young people: your life matters, and you were born to live it. The Trevor Project will always be here to support you, to listen, and to offer you the care you deserve."

A Trevor Project representative told the *SGN* that volume remains higher than normal, but that the organization will continue to support the community as state and national policies shift.

Seattle Public Schools
Seattle Public Schools (SPS) has also seen an increase in concerns from families as it relates to legislation and policy



ROSEMARY KETCHUM / PEXELS

changes.

"Among the concerns raised, select families have expressed fear regarding potential requests for documentation, such as birth certificates, immigration status, or gender assigned at birth," a representative of the SPS told the *SGN*. "A small number... have voiced concerns about their children being in classrooms with LGBTQ-identified teachers or staff, and there have been heightened concerns about the identification and participation of LGBTQ students in clubs and groups."

While the concerns aren't necessarily tied to specific data trends before and after elections, the SPS said the uptick shows an increase in fear and anxiety among some community members.

The SPS said it's addressing all concerns

by working closely with school leaders, staff, families, and students to ensure that all understand their rights and current policy language.

"We also continue to offer resources, including classroom-based curriculum materials that support inclusivity, and referrals to community-based organizations, including mental health services. Our focus remains on fostering an environment where every student feels respected, supported, and empowered to succeed," the representative said.

Every other year, the school district administers the national CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey alongside the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey. Both will be given to students in October 2025.

Fears of the more conservative city council ripple through Seattle's LGBTQ+ Commission

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

Seattle's LGBTQ+ Commission held a meeting on December 19 to discuss its workplan for the new year, which includes socioeconomic empowerment, commission sustainability, and health equity. Another pressing issue that arose was the more conservative city council — more specifically, the behavior that led to Councilmember Tammy Morales's resignation, and the lack of collaboration from other councilmembers.

The commission's work is to advise the mayor, council, and city departments on issues brought forth by the LGBTQ+ community. At the meeting, the group tried to figure out how, if at all, they can work with the city council, and noted specific issues with Councilmember Cathy Moore.

"We have no relationship with Councilmember Moore. We've tried... to engage, but we do not have that relationship," one commissioner said, noting that since taking office this year, Moore never attended an LGBTQ+ Commission meeting but has sent her chief of staff to one.

The group believes that Councilmember Moore is attempting to silence LGBTQ+ community input as it relates to the new SOAP (Stay Out of Area Prostitution) and SODA (Stay Out of Drug Areas) zones, which the council approved earlier this fall by a vote of 8-1. This relatively new law gives judges the power to prevent people accused of prostitution and drug-related offenses from certain areas of the city. The commission does not support the council's decision to implement these zones.

Uncertainty

Discussion at the meeting highlighted how Moore's office encouraged them to look more toward the future rather than back at previous laws and policies.

"Councilmember Moore seems to take things personally, even when they are not intended that way. It happens [to be] that we are opposed to her legislation. Asking us to be more forward thinking is a cover. This is an incremental action to silence public input," according to the commission's minutes displayed during the meeting.

The commission has prepared a Powerpoint presentation about the Queer community's input on SOAP and SODA, but members were concerned about even bringing it to the council. They pondered whether to modify it to find more common ground, or if that decision would be sacrificing some of the community's voice.

One attendee, named Red, said that they had reached a fork in the road and will have to make a decision shortly.

"It's more powerful for us — we've spent a lot of time on this workplan to make it very specific to what our community needs. We can publish our workplan outside of City Hall and say it was not accepted," Red said, adding they could broadcast a decision to no longer work with the city council, or to meet in the middle for cooperation.

Commissioner Steven Pray said the Powerpoint is benign, and if elected officials take issue with it, then he's concerned about other issues.



COURTESY COUNCILMEMBER CATHY MOORE

"I don't think Councilmember Moore is losing sleep over this, or thinking about this for more than a few passing seconds," Pray said.

The commission will focus on relationship-building with other councilmembers, like the newly elected Alexis Mercedes-Kinck. It will meet again in February of the new year.

Workplan goals

According to the workplan Powerpoint presentation, under the socioeconomic empowerment portion, the commission seeks to support Queer career development and job creation, and increase funding to

LGBTQ+ people, businesses, and organizations by partnering with the GSBA and potentially creating a small-business advisory committee.

"Commission sustainability" includes diversifying and retaining membership through growing a social media following.

The health equity aspect includes increasing the visibility of Queer-specific health and wellness needs that intersect with poverty and homelessness, and launching a community-health advisory committee to generate a list of LGBTQ+ mental health providers.



The SGN looks back on 50 years of local LGBTQ+ coverage

BY ARUL GNANASIVAM, AUDREY OSCARSON AND HANNAH SAUNDERS

In 2024, the *SGN* celebrated five decades of bringing local LGBTQ+ news to the community here in Washington State. As we prepare to head further into 2025, writers at the *SGN*—the third oldest LGBTQ+ newspaper in the U.S.—revisited archives to see how the paper advocated for our community, brought us together, and created positive change for us all.



'70s

In 1974, the Seattle Gay News (formerly a project of the Seattle Gay Community Center) was launched. Over the years, when the AIDS epidemic was ravaging Queer communities nationwide, physical violence and hate speech was the norm, and LGBTQ+ people did not have protections under the law, the *SGN* worked tirelessly to educate the public, whether about legislation, initiatives, support groups, or events.

On July 1, 1974, the paper reported on the Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities and the Gay Community Center starting a joint effort to collaborate with Gay people who were incarcerated at the Monroe State Reformatory. "Other than some religious groups, there is practically no one willing to work with Gay prisoners. Thus, many who could have been long ago released are still behind bars because of the lack of prisoners," the article stated.

While prison is isolating in general, the *SGN* highlighted how Gay prisoners experience the worst of it: many inmates at Monroe who were sexually assaulted were transferred to maximum security cells for their protection. "This in effect means that they are being penalized for the crimes of their assailants who remain free to roam the prison," the *SGN* wrote, providing contact information for those wishing to support incarcerated Gay people.

During Pride Month 1976, David C. Neth, the director of the Gay Community Center, wrote an open letter to Mayor Wes Uhlman asking him to issue a proclamation to recognize June 21–27 as "Gay Pride Week" and cited how the 1969 NYC Stonewall Riots were a catalyst for change regarding LGBTQ+ human rights.

"It was the needed inspiration to congeal the emerging Gay consciousness of the time into an outspoken, upfront, nationwide move-

ment," he wrote. "Your refusal to issue such a proclamation last year was disconcerting. In a front-page article in the *Post-Intelligencer* last year, columnist Rick Anderson reported that you have issued proclamations for such things as 'Liver Week,' 'Salad Week,' and 'German Shepherd Weekend.' Your staff member told him that 'Gay Pride Week' was the only request he could ever remember being turned down!"

On Nov. 10, 1978, the *SGN* front page celebrated the defeat of Initiative 13, which would have repealed city ordinances on housing and employment rights on the basis of sexual orientation. "WE WON!" crowed the headline. "The results of the election battle against Initiative 13 were a staggering victory for Seattle's gay community — a victory way beyond all predictions of success... 62.9 percent against the initiative and 37.1 percent in favor." This was a turning point after a string of defeats in 1977 and 1978 around the country.

In 1979, the *SGN* covered police harassment of Gays in Washington state. The topic, stemming from a string of assaults against Lesbians in Washington, DC, was discussed at the Washington Advisory Committee in downtown Seattle.

Later that year, a letter addressed to the paper commented on the focus on "disco and theater," rather than the mistreatment of Gay men. It came from an inmate of the Washington State Penitentiary, who struggled with how Gay men were treated there, noting that young prisoners were "bought and sold"

Eastlake location to East Pike Street. By this point, circulation had hit 10,000, up from 1,000 five years earlier.

In 1982, the five women started the Lesbian Heritage Group, a collective aimed at correcting the distorted and suppressed history of the Lesbian community. The group collected all and any documents that dealt with the lives of Lesbians, whom they described as "strong women, women loving women, gay women, amazons, dykes, invertas." The *SGN* published some of the pieces collected in the October issue.

In 1985 a reader of the *SGN* brought up the topic of taxation without representation, stating that she "opposes... tax dollars going towards heterosexuals," explaining that if institutions are displaying homophobic behavior, then they should not receive her tax dollars.

The Seattle City Council attempted to implement a curfew for those under the age of 16 in 1986, prompting a letter to the mayor that was published by the *SGN*. The proposal aimed to reduce drug- and sex-related crime among minors but was ruled unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court.

On Christmas Day in 1987, the Northwest AIDS Foundation ran a promotion to provide sex education at parties. The *SGN* reported that locals could invite NWAF to a party they were throwing, and the foundation would bring a variety of toys to promote safe sex. The "stocking stuffers" included condoms, feathers, fur gloves, tit clamps, and lubricants.

1988 marked a huge political milestone, as the *SGN* reported that Lesbian activist Jean O'Leary was appointed as an at-large member of the Democratic National Committee. O'Leary was the first out Lesbian to be named to the governing body of the national party.

In July of 1989, the *SGN* ran a full-page ad to promote a community meeting ahead of the 1990 legislative session, hosted in the Off Ramp Cafe — which is where a small band would make their debut before going on to worldwide fame: Pearl Jam.

'90s

Sometimes dubbed "the Gay '90s," the decade was a monumental era for progress, full of protests and legislative victories and setbacks. Hate crimes were frequent, and often Queer people and establishments were targeted, including bomb threats.

"Even in Seattle, where we pride ourselves on our diversity and our commitment to human rights, we are not immune to senseless acts of bigotry," said Mayor Norm Rice in the May 18, 1990, issue of the *SGN*. In 1991, the Seattle Police Department appointed a new hate crime coordinator to reduce the number of attacks and provide better resources to the victims. A police riot in 1992 during an anti-Nazi march brought into question the issue of excessive force and why the protestors were attacking a Gay bar.

The effects of the AIDS epidemic was



still being felt during the '90s, as legislators and others wrestled with how to reduce its transmission. Almost every week, the *SGN* printed almost a full page of obituaries of those who lost their lives to AIDS.

The University of Washington adopted a policy in 1991 to prevent doctors and dentists who had tested positive for HIV from performing "invasive" operations, which elicited much pushback. In 1998, the Supreme Court deemed that people with AIDS were covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, securing rights for those facing discrimination because of their status.

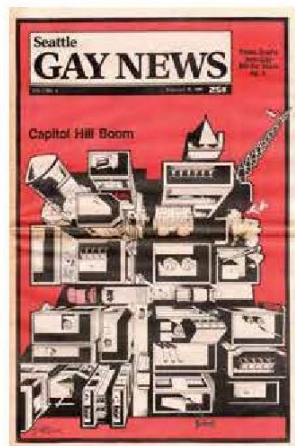
The Chicken Soup Brigade, an organization supporting those with AIDS, opened a new location in 1992, with community meeting rooms and a food bank. "We've been ready to explode [in our old space] like a tick on a dog," said Carol Stedling in the May 15, 1992, issue, "People are just packed in there."

Effective treatment for HIV began to be administered in the mid- to late 1990s, which saved many lives and turned the virus into a chronic, manageable condition. Adverts in the *SGN* at the time urged people to get tested, receive medical care if necessary, and practice safe sex.

Sherry Harris, sworn in in 1992, became the first openly Lesbian woman of color to hold elected office in Seattle, having won a city council position. "The city council now has a female majority, and many new members who certainly bring innovations and creativity to the challenges facing the city," as said in the January 10, 1992, issue.

Queer people were being discharged from the military because of their homosexuality, but many of them fought the laws that kept them from serving their country. President Clinton, who won the 1992 election, had promised to immediately lift the ban on Lesbian and Gay people in the military. But facing a backlash, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy was introduced months later, which allowed Queer people to serve — as long as they weren't vocal about their identity.

In 1994, Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer,



'80s

1980 brought the second annual Gay fiction contest, held by the *SGN*. The entrance fee was \$1, and the first-place prize was \$50 (equivalent to \$191 today). The paper also reported on the opening of Seattle's first clinic for venereal health, which provided STI and STD checkups free of charge, and care and services specifically tailored to the Gay community.

The *SGN* made its big move to Capitol Hill in June of 1981, migrating from the old

who had served in the Washington National Guard, won her court case to be reinstated after having been discharged for being a lesbian, the judge deemed the ban unconstitutional. (DADT was finally repealed in 2011). "I feel a little like a general who has just won a war," Cammermeyer said in the June 3, 1994, issue.

In 1993, the March on Washington was held to support the lifting of the military ban and the passage of a Lesbian/Gay rights bill. About a million supporters showed up for the Queer community's biggest demonstration. Attendees called out President Clinton on his promise to lift the military ban and for his inaction on the AIDS epidemic, which was still killing people daily.

Hands Off Washington (HOW) was launched in 1995 to stop anti-Gay initiatives from making the 1996 ballot, following the establishment of Bigot Busters (a spinoff of Queer Nation) the year before. Both groups were successful, as none of the anti-Gay initiatives made it to the ballot either year.

HOW continued its work in the coming years to introduce legislation to protect the rights of Queers, including combating legislation that would have required a record of people who had tested positive for HIV. (However, its pro-LGBT rights initiative, I-677, lost at the ballot box in 1998.)

Sen. Cal Anderson, Washington's first openly Gay elected official, passed away in 1995 due to complications from AIDS. Anderson's funeral was attended by a wide range of people from all walks of

life, and he was remembered for his activism on behalf of the community. "I wish I had the linguistic capability to describe the contribution that Cal made," Gov. Mike Lowry said in the August 11 issue. "Cal stood for openness and fairness. He personified political and personal integrity."

While marriage equality was not yet legal, domestic partnership laws were in place to give more rights to Lesbian and Gay couples regarding sick leave. President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act into law in 1996, which banned same-sex marriage and defined marriage as between a man and a woman for federal purposes. The same year, in contrast, the Supreme Court ruled that a discriminatory constitutional amendment in Colorado, passed in 1992, violated the Constitution.

A "culture war" was sprouting up across the country, and religious fundamentalists protested the growing recognition of Lesbian and Gay people, leading to violence and hate crimes. A bill similar to the Defense of Marriage Act went into effect in Washington in 1998, even though same-sex marriage was not legal. "The new law is more insult than actual injury to the Gay/Lesbian community, because the status of same-sex marriage in Washington state is the same as it was before this new law was passed. It was then and is now illegal," said the February 13 edition of *SGN*.

Early 2000s

Although people feared that Y2K might bring the end of the world, the turn of the millennium happened without a hitch, and Queer people in Seattle looked forward to the decade with hope.

A growing number of laws banning discrimination on the basis of sexual identity protected over 60 million LGBT people. In 2003 the Supreme Court struck down sodomy laws in the Lawrence v. Texas case and ensured a right to privacy for Gay and Lesbian couples across the country. "We share this victory with Gay people in all 50 states who are better off today than they were yesterday thanks to this ruling," said John Lawrence in the June 27 issue.

Schools begin to make progress in being more inclusive, with more young people getting involved and starting Gay-Straight Alliances at their schools. People began talking about the harassment and bullying they experienced at school because of their sexual orientation, and in 2001 the Safe Schools bill was passed in Washington, requiring stronger policies against bullying in schools.

Domestic partner benefits were expanded in Washington, with the introduction of benefits for Gay state employees in 2000.



The following year, the state Supreme Court ruled that same-sex unmarried partners would be considered couples under a law that had protected heterosexual couples for decades.

The first Gay couple was married in 2004 in San Francisco, marking a historic achievement for Queer people all over the country and setting off a series of lawsuits — both by couples that also wanted to be married and by anti-Gay activists who wanted to ensure that marriage was only between a man and a woman. A few months later, Massachusetts became the first state to officially allow same-sex couples to get married.

Issues specific to Transgender people also gained more visibility and entered more conversations. Discussions of gender became more normalized, with help from activists like Aiden Key, and events such as the first official Transgender Day of Remembrance, which was held in Seattle in 2001. "We will not be erased, nor will we be silenced," said Dr. Anne Lawrence at the event, covered in the December 7 issue. "We have always been here and will always be here."

Religious fundamentalists grew increasingly outspoken in their attacks against Queer people, with Fred Phelps hosting a demonstration at Ferndale High School's graduation. A study released in 2001 claimed Gay people could become straight if they tried hard enough, though it was quickly denounced by the American Psychiatric Association.

In 2001, a federal court ruled that doctors could not withhold treatment based on personal religious beliefs, which was a "total victory" for the LGBTQ+ community. "Today's decision says that everyone has to obey civil rights laws," said Leslie Cooper in the March 23 issue.

Washington State passed legislation in 2006 that prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment and housing, among other things. AIDS was still prevalent in the Queer community, and an outbreak of syphilis and other STDs occurred in 2002. Activists continued to fight for safe-sex education and funding for HIV/AIDS research to help reduce the number of infections. A new HIV vaccine was trialed in Seattle in 2003.

Micah Painter was attacked during the summer of 2004 because he was Gay by three men with a broken bottle, which resulted in a long, contentious trial. A year later, his attackers were all found guilty, though not of the more extreme charges many were hoping for. The attackers received varying sentences, from nine months to three years.

In June 2005, the annual Pride parade attracted over 100,000 attendees. In the *SGN*, Marketing Director Dale Kirshner of the Seattle-Pride Committee recalled booths selling out faster than ever before. Given the momentum, the committee announced the decision to move the march to Seattle Center the following year, marking a moment of increasing publicity and impact.

In 2006, Seattle Pride added a new event in conjunction with Three Dollar Bill Cinema: the Queerstock Festival, a showcase of music, poetry, and more, combining art and accessibility. The AIDS epidemic continued to expand in King County in 2007.

An estimated 6,188 residents were living with HIV at the time, with that count rising by 370 each year.

Still, the community's support never wavered: over 3,700 people participated in the annual Seattle AIDS Walk. At the same time, the King County Board of Health introduced a plan to reduce HIV cases by 25% by 2015.

Spearheaded by Queer councilmembers, the plan included such actions as promoting safe sex and drug use, as well as identifying current residents who unknowingly carried the virus.

2009 marked a major victory for the Queer community with the passing of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Named after victims of gruesome bias-related murders, the law expanded the definition of federal hate crimes to include bias based on a victim's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, and disability. It also provided tools and resources for local law enforcement to prosecute such crimes. At the time, the FBI found one in six hate crimes to be related to the victim's sexual orientation.

On April 17, 2009, the 13th annual Day of Silence protest took place across Washington schools. Despite advancements in the rights of Queer people, bullying remained prevalent. The introduction of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) benefited students, but for those at the wrong institution, the consequences of a homophobic culture were deadly. One mother commented, after her 11-year-old son committed suicide due to bullying, "I have been homeless, but Carl made it through. I was a victim of domestic violence, and we made it through. The one thing we couldn't get through was public school."



2010s

On April 27, 2011, the University of Washington selected Michael Young as its next president. The *SGN* was hit with dozens of calls from faculty and students due to Young's involvement with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a historically anti-LGBTQ organization. However, a closer look into Young's past showed a long legacy of inclusion.

Despite some mixed opinions from students, his track record earned him a note of approval from the *SGN*, which regarded him as "pretty damn progressive."

In 2012, marriage equality finally came to Washington state. An enormous 24,000 postcards were sent to the Senate advocating for the bill. The final vote was 28-21, three more than expected, and a huge victory. Gov. Christine Gregoire signed it into law on February 17, 2012. Opponents mounted a referendum to repeal it, but that was defeated by voters in November. The first legal marriages then took place on December 9 that year.

Former state Sen. Ed Murray was elected Seattle mayor in 2013. An openly Gay man, Murray boasted a long record of activism for the Queer community, especially in the legislature. One of Murray's achievements as mayor was increasing the minimum wage to a national high of \$15. However, his career was marred by a string of sexual abuse scan-

dals that ended with his resignation in 2017.

The long-overdue recognition of same-sex marriage secured a victory for Joe Krumbach, who fought for years to recognize his union with Jerry Hatcher, a veteran who passed away in 2008. Since marriage wasn't legal at the time of Hatcher's death, Krumbach couldn't claim Veterans Affairs benefits for a surviving spouse. After years of fighting, Krumbach finally won his benefits and legal recognition of his marriage in 2015. His victory set a precedent and helped others claim what was rightfully theirs.

In 2015, the *SGN* reported on the ruling that a Denver bakery did not discriminate when it refused to bake anti-Gay cakes for a Christian customer. The case gained attention at the time for its interpretation of a business's right to refuse service and what crossed the line into discrimination.

Parker Perry Z, a drag queen, was attacked outside of a show in Olympia in September 2016. Despite eyewitnesses, the police dismissed the case within days and didn't report it as a hate crime. It took an uproar from the public to bring the case back into light. Drag King Cesar Hart hosted a fundraiser to help pay for Perry Z's medical bills, highlighting not only the violence that had occurred but the lack of affordable healthcare.

The *SGN*'s April 14, 2017, issue was filled with events related to Donald Trump's presidency. The paper covered Trump's appointment of an anti-Gay official. An contributing writer also spoke about how Trump was the reason for the fall of public television. Finally, the *SGN* ran a two-page antifascist ad titled "Drive Out the Trump/Fence Regime!"

In 2018, the Trump administration refuses to sign a declaration supporting marriage equality. In the local scene, Three Dollar Bill Cinema presented its first-ever Date Night Shorts and Queer Fast Flirting, just in time for Valentine's Day.

Representation in politics took a turn for the better in 2019, as the *SGN* reported that more openly LGBTQ candidates had been elected into office than ever before. As of November 6, 144 out of 382 out LGBTQ candidates had won their races.

In 2021, following the outbreak of the pandemic, the *SGN* reported on LGBTQ sentiment about the vaccine. Around 92% of the community had received at least one dose of the vaccine, a statistic that the *SGN* attributed in part to the devastating effects of COVID. A report showed that 21% of the LGBTQ community had lost a friend or family member to the virus.

On the final days of 2022, the *SGN* wrote a profile of Helena Greer, a Washington resident who had published a Queer romance novel. Despite having not written in 15 years, Greer's first work was a hit. The paper also dove into seasonal depression, offering resources for Queer people, including the Trans Women of Color Solidarity Network, Somos Seattle, and Lambert House.

In 2023, the *SGN* covered Jason Graber, a Spokane pastor who was recorded saying that parents of Trans kids "need to be convicted in trial and immediately shot in the back of the head, and then we can string them up above a bridge so the public can see the consequences of that kind of wickedness."

Organizations around the state, including other religious figures, condemned his words.

On a more positive note, Western Washington University's Planned Parenthood Generation Action found an eccentric use for expired condoms: a fashion show. The event not only promoted safe sex but also highlighted the creativity and confidence of designers from the school.

In 2024, the *SGN* reported on key election wins, like Dave UpTheGrove breaking a glass ceiling by being the first out LGBTQ+ statewide executive office holder in state history. It also highlighted how Sen. Jamie Pedersen's election for the Senate majority leader position made Washington the first state in the nation to have two out LGBTQ+ legislative leaders serving at the same time, with Sen. Pedersen joining House Speaker Laurie Ankins.



The legacy of Seattle's Queer self-defense scene

BY ORLANDO JAYARE

GWEN ROOTE (L) SHOWS STUDENTS THE BASICS OF JIU-JITSU
ORLANDO JAYARE

Fear of hate crimes has been on the rise for people in the LGBTQ+ community. There is no true way to know when an incident will occur, whether that is walking home late at night from the club, coming out of the light rail station, or simply going to the grocery store. When it comes down to any given moment that could potentially lead to a harmful outcome, one question does arise: How can a person defend themselves and navigate their body to respond in a way of protection?

In September 2024, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) released information from the FBI's 2023 [report on crime in the nation]. The statistics revealed [that that year] there were 2,403 reported incidents of hate crimes related to the victim's sexual orientation. According to the HRC, "1 in 5 of any type of hate crime is motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ bias."

When face-to-face with fears of being a target of hate, people in the community have always supported each other. Seattle has a rich history of protecting one another. The common factor of hate and fear throughout the years has led to the rise of self-defense through the Queer lens.

A community targeted

During the late 1970s, Capitol Hill started to become a hub for Seattle's LGBTQ+ community, with many dubbing it the city's "gayborhood."

However, visibility came with its fair share of opposition. On May 12, 1990, a trio of neo-Nazis had their plans uncovered by FBI agents. Their target had been the Capitol Hill Gay nightclub Neighbours, on Broadway and East Pike Street. The three men — Robert John Winslow, Stephen E. Nelson and James P. Baker — were convicted of conspiring to bomb the nightclub.

While left physically unharmed, the Queer community was shaken by the planned attack — but ready to mobilize.

"We were all pretty shocked by it," said Michael Ross, a Neighbours employee interviewed by the *Seattle Times* at the time. "It's enough to make me think about joining the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment."

The coalition was a local effort, as stated on the National Archives website, to "end harassment and violence by stopping individual and organized bigotry ... in the Northwest." The NCAMH was created in 1987 in response to an annual Aryan Nation meeting being held in Idaho. The

nonprofit entity had over 200 affiliated private and public organizations and operated until 2003.

Self-made community defense

In 1991, a year after the plot to bomb Neighbours, a [subgroup of Queer Nation Seattle] — along with some allies — formed the safety patrol group Q-Patrol, short for "Queer Patrol," according to a 1993 study on Gay and Lesbian street patrols by Kirstin Dodge. The formation of the group came in reaction to the perceived lack of efforts from the city and specifically the Seattle Police Department (SPD) to keep the community safe.

Q-Patrol donned berets similar to the Guardian Angels, a New York City-based group that influenced and even trained members of Q-Patrol. Q-Patrol was never armed, but members could be seen walking Capitol Hill six nights a week, carrying flashlights and radios, from the evening hours to early mornings. In lieu of being armed, members were taught self-defense and de-escalation tactics to navigate incidents.

According to Dodge, the group's "statement of purpose" was similar to that of other activists around the country. It clearly stated who the group was and what its goals were: "Q-Patrol is a group dedicated to stopping the violence against us, commonly known as Gay-bashing. To end the harassment, threats and physical assaults, we will visibly walk the streets of Capitol Hill." It also specifically [mentioned] members not arming themselves, but [reminded] them to be "prepared to intervene to prevent bashing and malicious harassment."

Q-Patrol's statement ended by calling out the system: "We can no longer wait. While the bureaucracy collects statistics and talks about the problem, Q-Patrol takes action!"

A contemporaneous article by the *Seattle Times* reported that, by 1996, Q-Patrol had grown to a team of six full-time and about 30 part-time volunteers coming from a variety of occupations, including lawyers, students, a scientist, and a computer programmer. Initially, the SPD doubted the group, but in 1996, it partly attributed a reduction of crime in Capitol Hill to Q-Patrol's efforts. Between 1993 and 1995, violent crime fell 41% in Capitol Hill, compared to 34% citywide.

Due to the group's effectiveness in crime prevention, Q-Patrol's operations expanded into other neighborhoods, including Pio-

neer Square and the University District.

Eventually the group disbanded in 2005, according to a 2016 post on the group's official Facebook page.

In 2017, an entirely new Q-Patrol was begun, with a focus on harm reduction efforts, as a response to a spike in hate crimes reported in the neighborhood. This iteration was ignited by a rising concern [over] gentrification and the results of the 2016 presidential election. The original Q-Patrol did not have any direct link to the new group.

Q-Patrol was not the only community safety organization that emerged in Seattle; 1993 saw the rise of Home Alive, a self-defense class that promoted the benefits of people being able to protect themselves

from potential attacks. Home Alive was a direct reaction to the July 7, 1993, Capitol Hill-area rape and murder of Mia Zapata, lead singer of the popular local punk band The Gits. Zapata was attacked while walking home in the early morning after playing a show at the Comet Tavern, on East Pike Street and 10th Avenue.

Home Alive filled a gap by providing training relevant to attacks that occurred in the city. It shut down the common message from other classes of the time telling women to dress more conservatively and never walk alone at night.

Home Alive closed down its nonprofit operations in 2010 due to constant financial ups and downs, but it continues to function on a smaller, volunteer basis.



The city's response to continued violence

In recent years, the City of Seattle has taken some strides to improve safety for its Queer community. In 2015, Seattle's then-Mayor Ed Murray, who was also the city's first openly Gay mayor, put together a 30-person task force composed of social workers, community organizers, and members of the SPD to address a rise in "reported bias crimes and verbal attacks perpetrated against LGBTQ+ people," according to the action plan's release document.

Additional citywide initiatives became more visible, such as installing rainbow crosswalks and beginning Safe Place campaigns. As to whether that program has been effective, folks in the Queer community have [expressed that] they still feel unsafe when engaging with local law enforcement.

Murray also signed an executive order in 2015 that required city staff to "be trained in the rights of Transgender people," as well as [designating] single-occupant restrooms in city-operated facilities and private places ... "all gender" by March 2016.

Queer self-defense today

Echoes of the past continue to put those in the LGBTQ+ community up against uncertain circumstances. A day after the

2024 presidential election, a Gay man was assaulted in Capitol Hill by a Trump supporter.

Although the SPD is investigating the crime for "bias elements," no matter what the department determines, Queer people still sense a threat facing their safety, even in places and neighborhoods that are supposed to feel welcoming.

When it comes to going to local law enforcement, Queer people have had a long history of instead protecting one another from threats. The slogan "We keep each other safe" is used by many groups, including among LGBTQ+ folks, as a reminder that community members are each others' best support.

Patterns of mistrust in law enforcement have shaped major movements in Queer history, from the Stonewall riots of 1969 to ACT UP demonstrations during the AIDS epidemic, [among others]. In April, the ACLU released statistics highlighting the poor relationships between LGBTQ+ people and the police. Among that data, the ACLU reported that 26.8% of Trans people "reported experiencing physical force by police," while Black Trans people were the most likely to experience physical force from the police compared to LGBTQ+ people of other races.

Additionally, the ACLU found that Trans and Nonbinary respondents "were significantly

more likely than LGBTQ+ cisgender men to have experienced insulting language by the police."

As the community braces for the incoming second Trump administration, which has built its platform on attacking the well-being and rights of Queer people, some feel the need to be able to learn to protect themselves from an incident.

While legacy self-defense groups like Q-Patrol and Home Alive are not currently active, community members continue to equip others with resources and knowledge about different types of self-defense.

The group Queer Trans Combat Arts Seattle, on Instagram as @qt.combatarts206, provides resources [so] people can locate Queer- and Trans-specific combat classes. Some of these events are held at Ballard Jiu Jitsu (BJJ).

Gwen Roote, a jiu-jitsu instructor who leads a class focused on welcoming LGBTQ+ folks at BJJ every other Sunday, said martial arts offers a way for everyone to feel more in touch with what their body can do.

"A lot of people like finding [that] their limits for movement are more expansive than they had thought," Roote said.

"You don't have to be super athletic to defend yourself," Roote continued. "I think that's one of the coolest things about jiu-jitsu — that you can just learn a couple of

mental skills, and then it's, wow, your body is a weapon."

At Peer Seattle, a Queer community center in Capitol Hill, Kylie Ylenia shares that attitude of empowerment. They help teach Queer self-defense and movement classes every Tuesday at the community center. Ylenia's main focus is on movement, the body, and how to develop an intentional philosophy around how the two coexist.

"So it's not just about the way you physically defend yourself," Ylenia said of the classes, "but also how you carry yourself and how you think about your body in relationship to the conflict you're engaging with."

They said having a safe space where everybody is eager to learn and engage with each other can inspire confidence. That means people feel able to respond to a harmful situation, even one self-directed.

Ylenia acknowledged a shift in classes since the presidential election, as well as the recent attacks on Capitol Hill.

"Everybody just definitely has their ... safety on their mind a lot more right now," Ylenia said. "I also think that a lot of us are looking for a community."

"I think we really just wanted to have a space where we can provide for each other in some way."

This piece originally ran in Real Change

SGN REGIONAL NEWS

Extremist group highlights anti-LGBTQ Washington win: Initiative 2081

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

A Washington citizen's initiative, passed during Pride Month, that may increase the risk of abuse and violence of LGBTQ+ students was recently highlighted by Moms for Liberty (M4L) in its 2024 impact report. While it paints itself as a grassroots organization dedicated to preserving American life, GLAAD points out that it is an extremist organization that relies on connections to national anti-LGBTQ+ groups and politicians to move their agenda forward.

"Looking ahead to 2025, I feel more hopeful and energized than ever. We're just getting started," Tina Descovich, executive director of M4L, said in the report. "This year was a stepping stone to even greater voices. Together, we will continue to grow our chapters, win back school boards, and fight to protect the innocence of our children."

M4L, which has chapters in King and Benton Counties, launched about four years ago and has about 130,000 members in the US. This year, the group focused its efforts on key swing states, like Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina, ahead of the presidential election.

The report states how the organization helped win 69 school board races across the country and helped pass 32 state legislative bills related to parental rights.

"Our wins are not only found in bills that reach a governor's desk, but also achieved in those we oppose." Charlie Misseijer, director of policy and legislative affairs at M4L, said in the report. "This occurs more frequently in 'blue' states like Colorado and Illinois, where our parents helped kill gender-affirming health care bills, and another in New York that sought to allow [minors'] medical treatment without parental consent."

Title IX

The report mentions the Biden administration's Title IX rewrite, which was issued

in April and strengthens protections against sex-based harassment, while clarifying protections for LGBTQ+, pregnant, and parenting students, according to the National Women's Law Center. The rewrite states that Title IX has always protected Queer students under gender equality, and clarifies that legislation and policies that attack students because of their gender identity, sex characteristics, and sexual orientation violate nondiscrimination laws at the federal level.

The passage of I-2081 in Washington brought M4L one step closer to defeating the rewrite. The *SGN* previously reported on the initiative, which allows parents and legal guardians to receive public school records, like vocational counseling and medical records. It also allows parents to opt their children out of surveys, assignments, questionnaires, and any other student engagement activities that relate to a child's sexual orientation and experiences.

When the *SGN* spoke with the Gender Justice League in June, Kai Aprill-Tomlin, communications manager, said the organization was deeply concerned that I-2081 would break students' trust in adults, ultimately leading to more harm. Furthermore, this initiative can lead to the outing of LGBTQ+ youth to their parents or guardians.

Let's Go Washington, a conservative group, collected 454,372 signatures from supporters for the initiative. Rather than placing the measure on the November ballot for voters to decide, Washington lawmakers chose to enact it as is.

WA legislators fight back, with more pushback to come

Sen. Jamie Pedersen (D-43) and Rep. Nicole Macri (D-43) coauthored an op-ed in the *Seattle Times* earlier this year, stating that about 90% of the initiative is already state law or commonly practiced. They added that they believed the initiative did not pose a threat to Queer youth, but that



ZEN CHUNG / PEXELS

they stand ready to fight if it causes harm.

This November, Sen. Pedersen was elected Senate majority leader, making Washington the first state to have two LGBTQ+ legislative leaders serving at the same time, joining House Speaker Laurie Jenkins (D-27). In an interview with the *SGN* shortly after, he noted how the state has strong laws and protections for the Trans community.

"One of our first actions in the 2025 session will be to amend Initiative 2081, the so-called 'Parents Bill of Rights,' to make it clear that the initiative does not change or undermine our robust protections for Trans youth, and young people seeking reproductive healthcare or mental health care," Sen. Pedersen said.

Gaining traction

M4L saw a surge in social media followers in 2024: its YouTube page's followers and viewership increased by 48%, while X (formerly Twitter, now owned by billionaire and MAGA Republican Elon Musk) saw a 50.8%

increase, according to the report.

For years, M4L has not only gained traction but has also thrived while pursuing its anti-Queer agenda, partially due to funding and organizational support from anti-LGBTQ+ nonprofits, like from the Heritage Foundation in 2022.

The Heritage Foundation is a think tank spearheading Project 2025, a 180-day conservative agenda for the Trump administration that seeks, among other goals, to restrict LGBTQ+ rights: under the Department of Health and Human Services section, the third goal listed is to promote nuclear families composed of heterosexual couples.

"Unfortunately, family policies and programs under President Biden's HHS are fraught with agenda items focusing on 'LGBTQ+ equity,' subsidizing single-motherhood, disincentivizing work, and penalizing marriage," the Project 2025 document states. "These policies should be repealed and replaced by policies that support the formation of stable, married, nuclear families."



State Rep. Cyndy Jacobsen introduces legislation to restrict gender-affirming care for youth

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

KATHY WILLENS / AP

Although Washington is generally considered a safe state for the LGBTQ+ community, on Dec. 11, state Rep. Cyndy Jacobsen (R-25) prefiled House Bill 1038, which would prohibit the use of puberty blockers, hormone therapies, and gender transition surgeries on minors.

If passed, healthcare providers would not be able to provide gender-affirming care to minors, including the administration of hormones like testosterone, estrogen, and progesterone.

"Our youth can read the writing on the walls — they know that anti-Trans legislation aims to legislate them out of existence," Kai Aprill-Tomlin, communications manager for Gender Justice League (GJL), told the *SGN*. "It's almost impossible to articulate the horrific impact on your mental health of seeing politicians across the nation attack your right to healthcare — in essence, attacking your right to live."

HB 1038 has several exemptions, such as for the treatment of infections, injuries, diseases, or disorders caused or intensified by gender-transition procedures. Services provided to intersex minors are also spared, as are those "provided to taper a minor off of any puberty-blocking medications or other hormones," according to the bill text.

If minors suffer from physical disorders, injuries, or illnesses that would put them in immediate danger of a major bodily function impairment or death, then treatment could be conducted. If a physician determines, through biochemical or genetic testing, that a minor is without "normal sex chromosome structure," according to the bill text, then treatment would be permitted.

Rep. Jacobsen did not respond to the *SGN*'s numerous requests for comment.

Effect of anti-Trans legislation

"Our legislature has supported fact-based, best medical practices for years. I do not see that changing. They rely on medical experts who are educated and trained in caring for this population. Terrorizing young people and their families should not be the business of any policymaker," Lisa Keating, executive director of the Washington State LGBTQ Commission, told the *SGN*.

Aprill-Tomlin said the GJL does not expect HB 1038 to receive a hearing. In the 2024 legislative session, Rep. Jacobsen

cosponsored HB 1223, which would have removed Trans men from men's prisons and Trans women from women's prisons if they committed a sexual offense against a person of the same gender. That bill did not receive a hearing.

But, she added, "introducing anti-Trans bills, even if they don't get a hearing, has a significant impact on Trans youth. There is a well-documented relationship between increased suicide attempts and violence against our communities following the introduction of anti-Trans legislation."

Following Election Day this year, crisis calls to the Trevor Project — a suicide prevention and crisis support organization for LGBTQ+ youth — spiked by 700% due to fear, confusion, and anxiety about the

results, according to the organization.

An ACLU research brief titled "The Impacts of Anti-Transgender Laws and Policies" states that in the past year, a record-breaking number of anti-Trans state and federal bills were introduced.

According to the report, "research also points to a growing fear, lack of safety, and increase in anti-LGBTQ+ violence as a result of these laws. Trend analysis of FBI crime data and social media harassment indicate an uptick in violence against LGBTQ+ people following anti-Transgender legislation, which is substantiated by firsthand reports from youth, caregivers, and medical providers."

Keating mentioned how this type of legislation singles people out and implies that

they are less than.

"Trans and Nonbinary youth [deserve] to thrive without persecution, same as their cisgender peers," she said. "History has shown that the State of Washington values the lives of LGBTQIA2S people of all ages. At the Washington State LGBTQ Commission, we are focused on continuing to improve the lives of the people we serve."

Aprill-Tomlin suggests that those who feel strongly about HB 1038 to write to the health committee chair, Rep. Marcus Riccelli (<https://housedemocrats.wa.gov/riccelli/contact>), and encourage him to not hold a hearing on this bill.



CYNDY JACOBSEN (CENTER)
COURTESY WA HOUSE REPUBLICANS

MONROE CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX

A first in Washington state history: Transgender woman transferred to men's prison

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

COURTESY WASHINGTON STATE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



AMBER KIM / FACEBOOK

The ACLU has filed a court petition stating that the transfer of Amber Kim, an incarcerated Transgender woman, from the Washington Corrections Center for Women to the all-male Monroe Correctional Complex, following an infraction, constitutes

cruel and unusual punishment. The infraction dates back to March, when Kim was caught having consensual sex with a cellmate.

She is the first Trans woman in Washington to ever be moved to a men's prison — and it happened during Pride Month.

"For the three-and-a-half years I was housed at WCCW, I used my time there to learn, to grow, and to contribute positively to the WCCW," Kim said in an ACLU press release. "Being singled out for exceptional punishment — and transferred to a men's prison — over a single infraction harms [not only] me but every other incarcerated Transgender person."

The ACLU argues that the state's Department of Corrections (DOC) has put Kim in harm's way by forcing her into a men's prison that doesn't align with her gender identity. In the Monroe facility, she risks experiencing physical violence, harassment, and sexual assault.

The DOC claims the women were

guilty of a "504" infraction, which states that "engaging in a sex act with another person(s) that is not otherwise included in these rules, except in an approved extended family visit." The ACLU says that during Kim's time at WCCW, 33 "504" infractions were recorded there.

"None of those women were transferred to another prison as a result — except Ms. Kim. Furthermore, DOC had the option to keep Ms. Kim in close custody at WCCW but chose to transfer her instead," states the ACLU press release.

An hearing was held after the infraction. Kim and her cellmate were placed in "close custody" — an area at WCCW with heightened security, and which limits the amount of time people spend outside of their cells. Kim and the ACLU have noted how, at first, the DOC found her placement there to be suitable, but that after five weeks it claimed she was a safety risk.

A transfer to Monroe was recommended during the hearing. Kim was put in soli-

tary confinement, while her cellmate spent two months in close custody before being moved back into her original medium-security area.

Solitary confinement is a form of torture, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). The amount of time spent in such a cell can range from days to months, to years.

"People of color are disproportionately locked in solitary, as are transgender and gender-nonconforming people, young people, and people with mental health conditions," states a NAMI post titled "How Solitary Confinement Contributes to the Mental Health Crisis."

Placing a person in a cell with minimal access to all forms of human connection and engagement — for any amount of time — leads to devastating consequences, exacerbated existing mental illness or the rapid onset of mental illness, according to NAMI. Half of all suicides in prisons and jails occur in solitary confinement.

Trans student athletes face possible new restrictions in Washington state

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

Restrictions on Transgender student athletes, seen in other states around the country, are popping up now in Washington State. Recently, Sen. Phil Fortunato (R-31) prefiled Senate Bill 5012, which would separate athletes based on their gender identities and chromosomal makeup (see below). At the same time, a large number of public schools are seeking to make amendments to the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association's handbook to limit who can play for which teams.

"The WIAA's policies on gender identity participation must follow Washington state law, and the current rules do so," Sean Bessette, the WIAA's director of communications, told the SGN.

The WIAA encourages all students to participate in athletics regardless of their gender identity or expression, and while most sports programs are offered separately for boys and girls, "athletes will participate in programs consistent with their gender identity or the gender most commonly expressed," according to the WIAA handbook.

A total of 17 Washington schools submitted proposals for Amendments 7 and 8, with some districts pushing for both. The proposed Amendment 7 would prohibit Transgender girls from participating in girls' sports or girls' divisions with athletes that were assigned female at birth. Proposed Amendment 8 would create an entirely new division of sports teams: an open division strictly for Transgender athletes.

The school districts advocating for the amendments are: Blaine, Brewster, Cashmere, Colville, Eastmont, Grand Coulee Dam, Lake Chelan, Lynden, Mansfield, Mead, Moses Lake, Okanogan, Omak, Oroville, Thorp, and Tonasket, as well as the Lynden Christian School.

"The WIAA has a membership-led year-round amendment process, and every proposed amendment was submitted by 5+ member schools or the WIAA Executive Board," Bessette said. "The language and content for each amendment will be discussed and finalized by the WIAA Representative Assembly during Winter Coalition in late January."

Bessette explained how 53 school leaders (35 high schools and 18 middle schools) make up the Representative Assembly, which is responsible for voting on the proposed amendments.

"For an amendment to pass, 60% approval is needed from voting members of the Representative Assembly. A total of 32 votes are needed for a middle-level/high-school amendment to pass, while 21 votes are needed for a high-school amendment to pass, and 11 votes are needed for a middle-level amendment to pass," Bessette said.

Many who sit on the Representative Assembly receive guidance from their league or WIAA district on how to vote on amendments, said Bessette, adding how the proposed amendments will be voted on on April 9-18, and any passed amendments will become effective on August 1.

"The two proposed amendments sur-



COTTONBRO STUDIO / PEXELS

rounding gender identity participation will continue through the process," Bessette added. "If a passed amendment violates Washington state law, the WIAA will be unable to implement the amendment."

A look at SB 5012

Prefiled in the state legislature on December 3, SB 5012 would group interscholastic activities into five groups in order for students to participate:

- Students with XX chromosomes who identify as a woman or girl
- Students with XX chromosomes who identify as a man or boy
- Students with XY chromosomes who identify as a woman or girl
- Students with XY chromosomes who identify as a man or boy
- Students who do not meet the above criteria

These groupings do not apply to K-6 students.

Although Sen. Fortunato refused to comment, the bill's text states that "a student's eligibility for a particular grouping may

be determined by any medical documentation that demonstrates the chromosomal makeup of the student."

Students and school districts that are harmed by a violation of the groupings are entitled to injunctive relief, which, according to the Legal Information Institute at Cornell, "restricts a party from conducting certain acts and requires them to behave in a certain way... when there is no other remedy at law and when irreversible harm will occur if relief is not offered." According to the bill's text, relief may include monetary damages — like those for psychological, physical, and emotional harm suffered — and reasonable attorney costs and fees; those seeking civil actions must have initiated them within two years of the alleged harm taking place.

"No penalty may be imposed on a student or students unless the student or students knowingly violated the rules or unless a student gained a significant advantage or materially disadvantaged another student through a rule violation," states the bill text.



Western Washington University to present “Seattle Gay News Celebrates 50!” exhibit in Bellingham January 13 to February 20

RICHARD ISAAC

BY RICK MCKINNON
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

The University of Washington Libraries’ exhibit “Seattle Gay News Celebrates 50!” — displayed at the UW’s Allen North Library last spring and at the Seattle Public Library’s Central Library Level 8 Gallery last summer — will be presented at Western Washington University’s Viking Union Gallery, 516 High St., Bellingham, WA, this winter, from January 13 to February 20.

“The *Seattle Gay News*, one of the longest-running LGBTQ+ newspapers in the world, is officially 50!” the Seattle Public Library wrote in promoting this exhibit. “Explore the history of a newspaper that has served the Seattle Gay community since March 1974, reporting on arts, culture, health, politics, civil rights, and

more.”

This exceptional exhibit will be on display for Western students, faculty, and staff, as well as for the general public, during regular Viking Union Gallery hours, which are Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. In addition, plans are being discussed to open the gallery on some or all Saturdays (from noon to 5 p.m.) during the run of the exhibit, so as to offer a weekend viewing option.

“This exhibit and preservation effort is a great example of how partners, including our amazing UW Libraries student employees, can work together to accomplish something bigger than each of us could do on our own,” said Jessica Albano,

UW Libraries news librarian in comments to the Seattle Public Library. “It is also a great reminder of the important role news plays in our communities. Preserving and providing access to these primary sources are critical to learning about and understanding [our] history.”

There will be an opening reception on January 14 from 5 to 7 p.m., during which guests are expected to make remarks. A closing reception will be scheduled from 5 to 7 p.m. the week of February 20. A special event for Western students related to the exhibit is also expected to be organized.

In addition, Bellingham’s intergenerational monthly LGBTQ+ potluck, Generations of Pride, sponsored by LGBTQ+

Western Washington University, Bellingham Queer Collective, and PFLAG/Bellingham, will be held at the Viking Union in conjunction with the exhibit, with the date and details still to be determined.

Finally, celebrate Valentine’s Day and Freedom to Marry on Friday, February 14, at the “Seattle Gay News Celebrates 50!” exhibit at the Viking Union Gallery.

For questions about the exhibit, including possible Saturday hours during the exhibit’s almost six-week run, contact the Viking Union Gallery at campgallery@uw.edu. For directions, contact the Viking Union information desk at (360) 650-3450.

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Footprint Wine Tap and Pink Moon Farm are “Queer to Stay”

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

COURTESY PINK MOON FARM

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) recently awarded Footprint Wine Tap and Pink Moon Farm grants through its fifth annual “Queer to Stay” program, which focuses on the preservation of LGBTQ+-owned businesses. Since its launch in June 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, 90% of businesses that previously received grants remain open.

“As extremist politicians continue to try and take away our rights and push us back into the closet, these businesses stand as a shining reminder that when LGBTQ+ businesses thrive, America thrives,” HRC President Kelley Robinson said in a press release.

A total of 30 small businesses across 19 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC were grant recipients. Footprint Wine Tap, located in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood, is the first Black/Asian- and Queer-owned wine producer in the state of Washington and the first and only keg-wine on-tap operation in the Pacific Northwest. The business places an emphasis on reducing its carbon footprint while uplifting diverse

communities in the wine, restaurant, and hospitality industries.

“As an LGBTQ+ business, it is so important at this moment for us to continue and build upon our service and representation of who we are and how we can support our community,” owner Ken Dillon told the *SGN*. “We are intentional in being visible, a safe space, representative, inspiring, and supporting others as much as possible.

“These funds will significantly bolster our working capital so we can continue to pay rent, be accessible, visible, and present, and provide potential client, cultural, and social opportunities for our community.”

With its laying hens, sheep farm, and vegetables, Pink Moon Farm serves the Puget Sound region. Under a Community Supported Agriculture program, it provides weekly bags of produce to mostly Queer and Trans residents. Pink Moon products can be found at farmers markets, food banks, and restaurants and co-ops.

“People often choose to buy from our farm because we are Queer and Trans,

either because they want to support our communities or because it is meaningful to them to have someone with shared identities growing their food,” owner Grayson Crane said.

Pink Moon also partners with community organizations and employs LGBTQ+ seasonal workers to provide career and mentorship opportunities to Queer and Trans people.

“At a time when we are experiencing intense institutional transphobia, we are proud to be an out-Queer- and Trans-run rural business that works directly with our local community, growing for food banks and working to feed our neighbors,” Crane added.

Stop by Footprint Wine Tap at 1222 E. Madison St., and visit <https://pinkmoonfarm.org> to learn more about the business.



COURTESY PINK MOON FARM

WA issues landmark LGBTQ+ survey to help inform government decisions, policies, and legislation

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

The Washington State LGBTQ+ Commission is sponsoring a comprehensive, statewide survey of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people to identify disparities and to strengthen advocacy efforts when it comes to pertinent laws, policies, and legislation.

The commission, which will close the anonymous survey on January 31, 2025, hopes to receive 10,000 responses by then. It is available at <http://www.walgbtsurvey.com>.

“The statewide LGBTQ+ survey aims to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the LGBTQ+ community in Washington by collecting data on key areas such as demographics, access to health and public services, economic development, school and workplace safety, and mental health access,” Rachael Brister of RCB Communications told the *SGN*. “This data will directly inform policies by highlighting specific needs and disparities experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals across the state.”

Such information has been in short supply since sexual orientation and gender identity data were removed from the 2020 national census. Identifying areas where Queer people face the greatest barriers to

healthcare, mental health services, housing, and public services will allow Washington to allocate resources more effectively and equitably, Brister said.

“Washington state lawmakers will likely be called upon to do even more to protect and serve our community. This survey data will paint a picture of this community in a way that legislators have yet to see,” she added.

Brister mentioned that another goal is to conduct additional surveys in the future that examine and highlight the needs and experiences of the LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit community. The upcoming Trump administration, however, creates uncertainty regarding Queer-related legislation, due to demonstrated hostility toward these groups.

Data analysis

The survey is led by WSU’s Murrow College of Communication, data2insight (a Queer and Trans research team), and Prevention at the Intersections. It’s open to those aged 11 years and older, although adolescents aged 11-17 require permission from a parent or guardian to participate.



To increase respondents in the 16-25 age group, Brister said there has been outreach to colleges, universities, and LGBTQ+ youth centers, and even survey administration events, such as one at the Spokane Public Library.

With about 4,300 respondents having already taken the survey as of December 1, Brister said responses are particularly needed from the Latinx and Asian Queer communities.

“The closing date allows four months for data analysis, visualization, and report writing before sharing the findings in June 2025,” said Brister. “Washington State University is leading this study and managing the anonymous dataset and has already begun analyzing the existing data.”

The final dataset will undergo analysis with the assistance from the largest university-based survey research center in the Pacific Northwest: WSU’s Social & Economic Sciences Research Center.

“The research team will [identify] patterns in the data. The report of findings will

share interpretations and conclusions based on data analysis, [tied] to findings to previous research,” Brister added.

The demographics of the sample will be summarized and compared to representation in the state’s population across multiple categories, such as location, age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Testing for differences between people in marginalized groups against the overall sample will be included in the analysis.

“The survey findings will shed light on a broad set of topics for the Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community. They will include a summary of the laws that community members have found helpful, mental health in the community, most valued aspects of living in Washington, and what type of resources people have to support them,” Brister said.

Visit <http://www.walgbtsurvey.com> to take the survey.



Newberg school district to pay \$90,000 to settle teacher's whistleblower retaliation suit over LGBTQ+ support

BY MAXINE BERNSTEIN

COURTESY THE OREGONIAN

The Newberg School District [in Oregon] has agreed to pay \$90,000 to settle a whistleblower suit filed by a teacher who said the district retaliated against her for advocating for LGBTQ+ students.

Under the settlement, the district does not admit liability but has agreed to make a public statement affirming its commitment to creating an "inclusive school and work environment." It also will post discrimination complaint forms on its website and print complaint forms in school counselors' offices by the beginning of the 2025-26 school year, according to the settlement.

Eileen Brennock of Tigard alleged that Mountain View Middle School Principal Terry McElligot told staff during a Sept. 10, 2021, meeting something to the effect of "it's not okay to tell kids it's okay to be gay or trans," according to the suit. McElligot, who is now retired, also told staff

they should not display any Pride or Black Lives Matter signs or flags if they had not put them up before, to avoid appearing as if they were trying to "poke the bear," the suit said.

The alleged statements by the principal at the staff meeting came a month after the school board voted to enact a policy banning LGBTQ and Black Lives Matter displays. The board then expanded that ban to include all political or controversial signs and symbols. A Yamhill County judge ruled a year later that the ban was unconstitutional and the school board quietly rescinded it.

"Brennock bravely reported anti-LGBTQ+ comments made by her principal," her lawyer Diane Sykes wrote in the suit.

Four days after the staff meeting, Brennock reported to the assistant principal,

Lindsay Kopacek, that she heard the principal tell staff it was not OK to support LGBTQ+ students. But Kopacek told her the principal never made such a statement and suggested that Brennock was hearing something that was never uttered "due to cortisol and stress levels" in her body, the suit alleged.

Brennock, according to the suit, responded to Kopacek that if a student came out as Gay to her, she would not tell them "it's not okay" but rather say to the student, "Me too!"

Kopacek then cautioned Brennock that she could get in serious trouble, and the district subsequently subjected Brennock to a hostile work environment, the suit contended.

Brennock, who taught Spanish at Mountain View Middle School, filed a grievance with the school district regarding the prin-

icipal's alleged statements, but the district ruled that the remarks could not be substantiated, according to the suit. Brennock then filed a complaint with the Oregon Department of Education, which issued a preliminary order in Brennock's favor, finding that the district had more likely than not violated state antidiscrimination laws.

The district entered into a "conciliation agreement" with Brennock to remedy the discrimination complaint but then subjected her to continuing harassment in violation of the agreement, Brennock claimed in the suit.

In late October 2023, the state Education Department found the district had violated the agreement by undermining staff training on LGBTQ+ issues and surveys of LGBTQ+ students and teachers, which were both required as part of the conciliation agreement. Under the agreement, the



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district agreed to move Brennock to Chesham Valley Middle School but also told her she wouldn't be able to return to Mountain View Middle School, because her position there was being eliminated, according to the suit.

The district argued that the principal never said what was alleged in a staff meeting, but if she did, the remark was not discriminatory because it was "not intended to be" and was never intended to be a directive to staff, according to the state ruling.

But the Education Department said in its ruling "The district misunderstands what constitutes discrimination under the law."

Any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment, intended or unintended, based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, marital status, age, or disability violates Oregon's antidiscrimination law, the department noted.

The principal's alleged comments "clearly articulated that teacher conduct toward students belonging to certain protected classes should be different than conduct toward other students" and subjected teachers who supported "the Pride and Black Lives Matter movement" and LGBTQ+ students to different rules than support for other movements," the department found.

Brennock argued that the district thwarted steps it was supposed to take to educate staff about LGBTQ+ issues by "constantly undermining and ridiculing the staff" about the information they presented and releasing information about the LGBTQ+ status of training presenters despite prior conversations about the sensitivity of such details. The district also changed the wording of the agreed-upon introduction of the antidiscrimination presentation, referring to sexual orientation/

gender identity as a "lifestyle" and that people who identify as LGBTQ+ are from the "opposite side of the fence," according to the suit.

It also claimed that then-Superintendent Stephens Phillips used a Gay slur and said he did not understand how that word was any different from a vulgar term for someone's buttocks and said something along the lines of "I've had a lot of kids, and when it's a boy, it's a boy," the suit alleged.

Phillips' lawyers, Karen M. Vickers and Beth Plass, argued in court papers that Phillips was entitled to qualified immunity from the allegations in the suit.

Phillips, who took over as superintendent in May 2022, this year filed his own civil suit against the Newberg-Dundee Public School district in Yamhill County Circuit Court. The suit, filed in September, alleges the district falsely blamed him for a budget crisis and [that] he took a medical leave

in June because the stress was harming his health. He asked his deputy superintendent to lead the district until his return. Instead, the board named its own interim superintendent and ultimately voted in late June to give Phillips a one-year notice that it ended to terminate him without cause, his suit said.

In his suit, he pointed to an outside investigator the district hired to look into complaints against him and his deputy superintendent related to "highly charged LGBTQ issues." He said the investigator found that neither he nor his deputy superintendent had broken any policy or law or engaged in discrimination, according to his suit.

First reported in and reprinted with permission from The Oregonian



Anti-Trans provision in defense bill heads to Biden's desk, a setback for the Trans community

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

GEORGE PAK / PEXELS

An anti-Trans provision within the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which would prevent the children of military servicemembers from receiving gender-affirming care, is heading to President Biden's desk. Both Washington senators voted in favor of its passage.

Now, America's Transgender community watches on, waiting to see if Biden will veto it — as he has previously promised to do when it comes to anti-Trans federal legislation.

"This decision to pass this NDAA was a grave mistake — one that preemptively concedes to an administration that will surely test our nation's values and our commitment to a multiracial, gender-diverse democracy," Jaelyn Scott, executive director of the Lavender Rights Project, a Seattle-based organization that's dedicated to protecting the lives of Black Trans community members, said in a press release.

Back in Pride Month, the Senate Committee on Armed Services approved the NDAA for fiscal year 2025, with an anti-Trans provision in Section 708. Under TRICARE, the health insurance program for active-duty servicemembers, among others, minors are to be prevented from receiving hormone therapy, puberty blockers, and gender-affirming surgeries.

"Medical interventions for the treatment of gender dysphoria that could result in sterilization may not be provided to a child under the age of 18," states Section 708.

A 2023 research study titled "Caring for Military-Affiliated Transgender and Gender-Diverse Youths: A Call for Protections," published in the *American Journal of Public Health* dissected TRICARE youth enrollment. In 2017, about 2,500 minors sought out care for gender dysphoria — a clinical diagnosis related to the psychological distress Transgender people may experience regarding their gender identity — under the TRICARE Prime insurance plan. An additional 900 received puberty blockers or gender-affirming hormonal therapy that year, according to the study.

Opposition

About 21 US Senate Democrats attempted to erase the provision, with Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) leading the charge. In a previously released statement, Sen. Baldwin said, "I trust our servicemembers and their doctors to make the best health care decisions for their kids, not politicians. . . Unfortunately the amendment was not brought for a vote."

In a statement to the SGN, Sen. Patty Murray said she strongly opposed the anti-Trans provision that House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) inserted into the act, and that she was one of those 21.

"Attacking kids for who they are and having the government deny our military families evidence-based health care is wrong — and it's incredibly troubling that Repub-

licans continue trying to find ways to single out and target Transgender kids to score cheap political points," Sen. Murray said.

When the final vote came, however, Sens. Maria Cantwell and Murray voted to pass it.

Disappointment

Scott said it's challenging to stem the rise of transphobia and attacks against people of color, but the Lavender Rights Project must keep a record of these harmful actions.

"This record will serve as a tool for holding those in power accountable, and for seeking justice when history, as it always does, eventually rights itself," Scott said, expressing her disappointment with the votes of Sens. Murray and Cantwell.

The Lavender Rights Project calls on our state's senators and House members who voted in favor of the NDAA, as well as those who attempted to remove the anti-Trans provision, to engage in meaningful dialogue with Trans leaders in the state.

Looking forward

The Lavender Rights Project said it wants Washington to join other states, such as Minnesota, California, and Maryland, in combatting the rise of transphobic, misogynistic, and racist policies, which requires bravery and community collaboration. The nonprofit highlighted the work of Washington Rep. Adam Smith (D-9), who fought

hard to remove the anti-Trans provision.

Because of this provision, the lives of children may be put at risk, and it may force thousands of members of the military to choose between serving their country or ensuring that their children can receive healthcare they need.

"Blatantly denying healthcare to people who need it — just because of a biased notion against Transgender people — is wrong," Smith said in a December statement.

Smith called out Speaker Johnson, who he said had a clear path to the possibility of a bipartisan compromise.

"Rather than take that path and ensure [that] service members and military families get the support they need and deserve, he chose to pander to the most extreme elements of his party in an attempt to retain his speakership," Smith added.

If Biden does not veto the NDAA (which is not expected), Sen. Murray said she will push to hold the Trump administration accountable for any efforts to target Trans youth.

"I will strongly oppose the inclusion of this language in any future legislation, and will fight back against any and all efforts from the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress to attack LGBTQ+ Americans simply for being who they are," she said.



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Recovering together: Substance use disorder in the LGBTQ community

BY AUDREY O SCARSON

AUDREY OSCARSON

Rates of substance use disorder (SUD) are much higher among LGBTQ people than their cis-het counterparts. Research by the Trevor Project released in January 2022 shows that LGBTQ youth under 21 are more likely to use substances such as alcohol or cannabis. Queer adults are twice as likely to use stimulants and hallucinogens, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

"This disparity is deeply rooted in the collective experience of marginalization, which takes a significant toll on many of us," Marc Sheffo, program director at Peer Seattle, told the SGN. Peer Seattle provides services to the LGBTQ community, lots of which aid in recovery from substance use disorder (SUD). As a large number who suffer from SUD also struggle with mental health or homelessness, it also provides resources for them.

"According to the Williams Institute at UCLA Law, LGBTQ+ adults are twice as likely to experience homelessness compared to the general population," Sheffo said. "LGBTQ+ youth account for 25-45% of unhoused young adults, a staggering overrepresentation compared to their cis-gender, heterosexual peers."

With a variety of programs and support groups, Peer Seattle aims to help LGBTQ people in every aspect of life. From one-on-one peer coaching to support groups and employment assistance, it meets people where they are at and provide the resources to better their lives. It runs a fully stocked Narcan vending machine, which also supplies fentanyl tests and safe-sex kits as a form of harm reduction.

"Many LGBTQ+ individuals who seek help do so while navigating fresh trauma or ongoing crises like domestic abuse," Sheffo said. "Addressing these challenges

requires a comprehensive, multipronged approach that includes medical support, social services, and a strong, family-like community. This network provides the strength, resources, and hope necessary for [them] to find safety and stability."

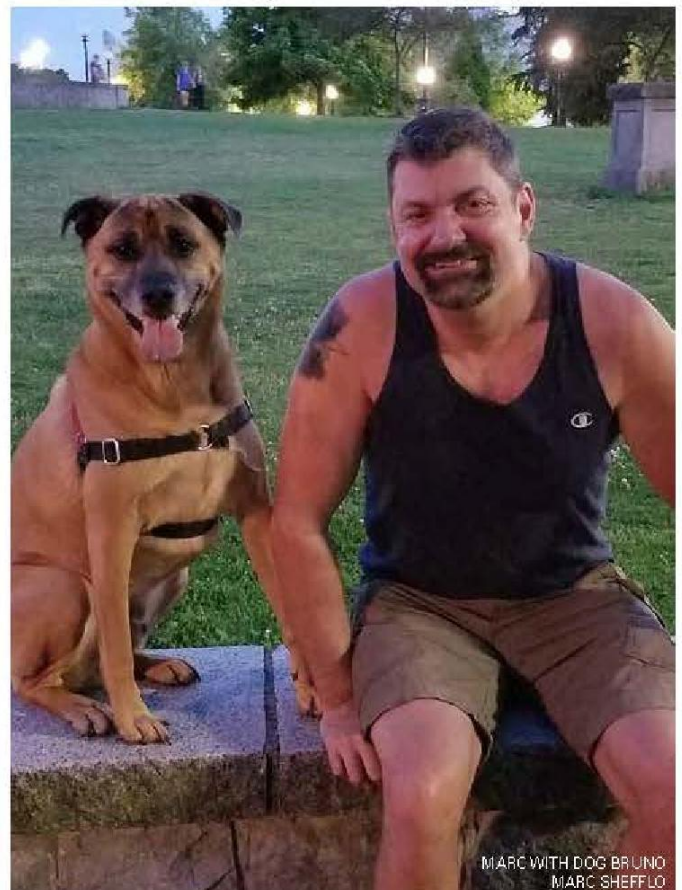
Sheffo, a Queer person who has struggled himself with SUD and homelessness, understands the way it can be dehumanizing.

"The cornerstone of my work is meeting people exactly where they are, without judgment or perpetuating shame," he said. "I aim to help others recognize their agency and the power of choice in their lives. Recovery is most transformative when it is self-directed, offering healing on multiple levels. As a peer, my role is to support this process by asking individuals what they believe is the next best step toward their goal — whatever that may be."

There are numerous resources for those struggling with SUD in the city. Northpoint Seattle offers an outpatient program for LGBTQ people that considers the complexities they often face and treats the person as a whole. Integrated Counseling Services offers counseling by therapists who are informed about the struggles many LGBTQ people experience alongside SUD.

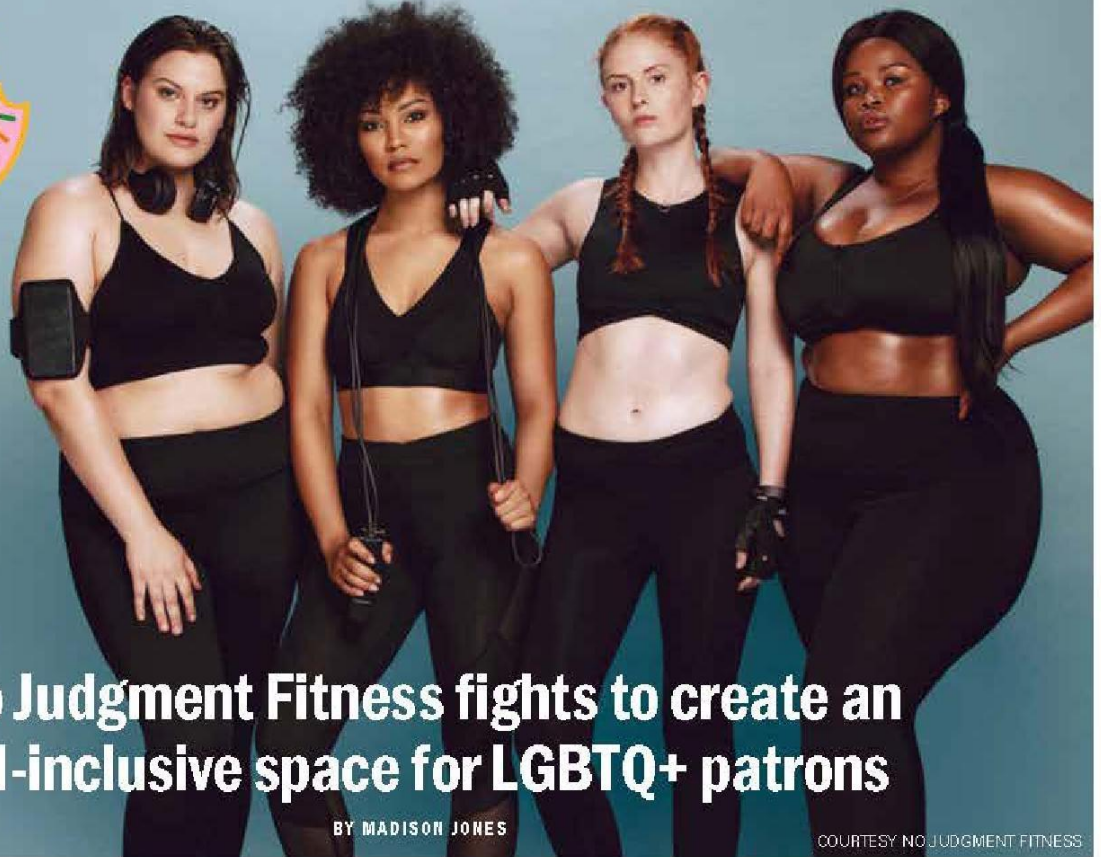
"The path to true connection, however, lies in choosing the long game," Sheffo said. "It's in doing the hard, messy, and rewarding work of reclaiming ourselves and building authentic, supportive relationships. While that process takes time, it's the foundation for genuine healing and transformation."

For more information visit <https://www.peerseattle.org>.



MARC WITH DOG BRUNO
MARC SHEFFLO

NO JUDGMENT
FITNESS



No Judgment Fitness fights to create an all-inclusive space for LGBTQ+ patrons

BY MADISON JONES

COURTESY NO JUDGMENT FITNESS

No Judgment Fitness, a Queer woman-owned small business in White Center, was founded in 2022 by personal trainer and former UK soccer player Sophia Walker, who identifies herself as “super Gay.” Over the past few years, Walker has taken pride that No Judgment is a place where people can come to learn how to “do more, not be less,” contrasting itself from the toxicity and machismo found in mainstream health and fitness culture. On the gym’s website, you can find photos of Walker wearing a backwards baseball cap, flexing her biceps, and eating the gym’s logo: pink, frosted, sprinkled donuts.

No Judgment stands out from other gyms by primarily focusing on serving Transgender people. Walker writes that she “explicitly wanted to make a place where trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people could feel safe.”

How the gym upholds that is through its rules: Walker reserves the right to turn people away, with any negativity toward other people’s bodies or identities resulting in an immediate ban. Misgendering works on a three-strikes system: first a warning, then a talk with Walker, and finally a ban. Also, the person who is misgendered does not pay for that session; the one who misgen-

ders will. Thankfully, Walker says there has only been one instance of that, with the rest of the cis-het patrons who may have struggled having since been taught those expectations.

Despite being open two years, the gym has intentionally avoided publicity, as Walker admits “we have had to turn down marketing opportunities in order to keep a low profile.” The gym has sadly been subject to threats and harassment since its inception, over the phone and online through email and reviews. Walker mentioned a man from Tennessee who for several months made it his mission to tank the gym’s Google rating. It finally took her getting Google itself involved to block the man and restore the gym’s reputation.

Local Queer-owned gyms like No Judgment Fitness are doing the work to push back against the racism, sexism, and transphobia in fitness spaces. Walker stressed to us that her primary focus is always the well-being of her patrons, stating that as a personal trainer, “you’re supposed to make people feel better about their bodies, and not cause any harm.” She also recommends checking out the “Maintenance Phase” podcast, which dispels harmful misconceptions about health and well-being ped-

dled by the fitness industry.

In addition, Walker offers free and reduced-price classes to those who financially struggle, with monthly schedules and priority given to BIPOC people first. Any money donated to the gym she matches with her own funds to ensure that more low-income people can participate. She also continues to enforce a double vaccination check and masking mandate in all her classes to mitigate COVID-19 risks.

In the past year, No Judgment has struggled, like many other businesses in Seattle have. So if an all-inclusive Trans-friendly gym sounds enticing, then perhaps give No Judgment Fitness a go.

For more information visit www.nojudgmentfitness.com



SOPHIA WALKER
COURTESY NO JUDGMENT FITNESS

NICK DURAN, LMHC

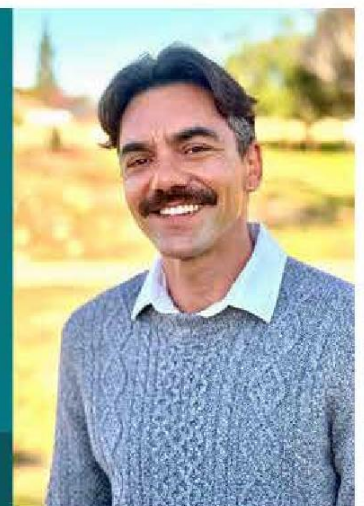
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To heal and connect deeply with oneself and one’s community





Pike Place Market's South African-inspired yoga studio and café foster connection

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

COURTESY PROTEAYOGA

In Pike Place Market's Butterworth Building, a new wellness studio, Protea Yoga, dedicated to an inclusive environment and fostering connections, has been unveiled. Named after the king protea — South Africa's national flower — the studio is inspired by the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasize the interconnectedness of people with the societal and physical worlds.

"At Protea Yoga and Karoo Cafe, we've created a space where everyone — including members of the LGBTQ+ community — can feel truly seen, celebrated, and at home," owner Olivia Vermaak told the SGN. "Inspired by the South African philosophy of Ubuntu, which means 'I am because we are,' we believe in connection, belonging, and growing together."

Protea instructors have a diverse range of experience, like that of Michaela Campbell, who brings a community-focused approach to her calming classes while encouraging mindfulness and connection. Vermaak said the instructors are dedicated

to creating welcoming, authentic, and safe experiences for all visitors.

This January, the location is introducing an array of new classes, like family yoga. Leah Adams will lead cancer-survivor-focused sessions on the first Sunday of each month.

Vermaak, a South African native, is also the owner of Karoo Café, located below the studio. After completing their wellness session, customers can drop downstairs for food and beverages, like the Khaya Botanical cocktail, which combines Ritual gin and aperitif with Mediterranean tonic, and an orange wheel for a South African home-stead feel.

"Karoo Café has quickly become a Queer-adjacent lounge and a cherished safe haven for Nonbinary and LGBTQ+ people in Seattle. With a majority Queer staff and a strong commitment to inclusivity, it's a space where everyone is welcome to celebrate and connect," Mlindi Ngema, Protea and Karoo host, told the SGN.

Ngema said Sundays at the café have naturally flourished into vibrant celebrations of Queer culture with ballroom-inspired brunches and Lady Gaga singalongs.

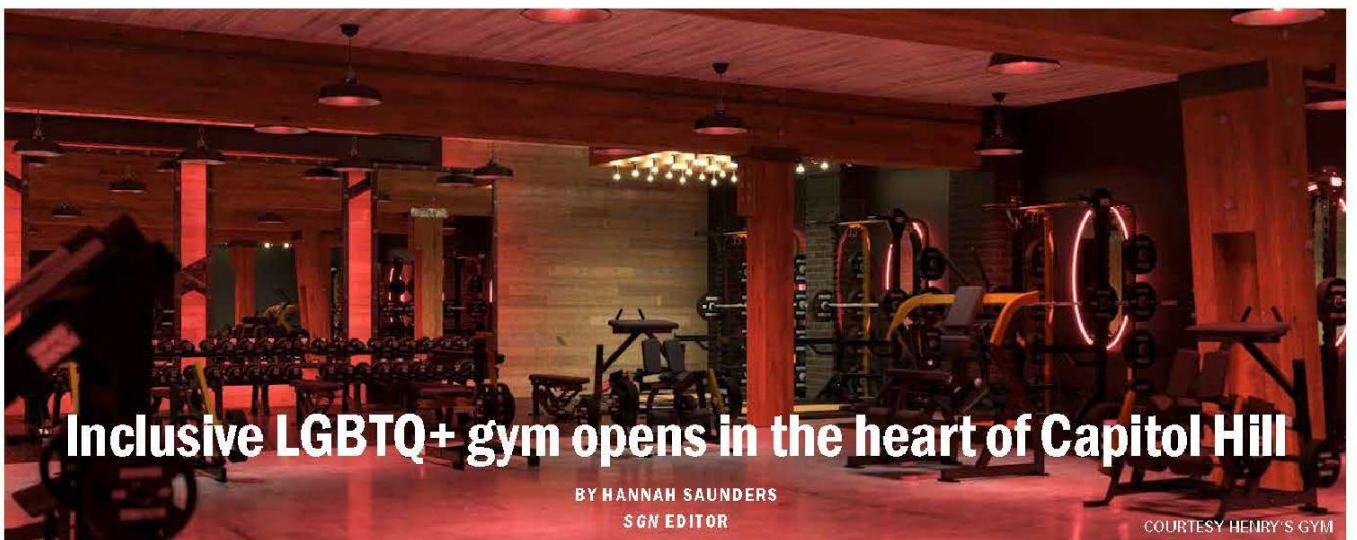
"Karoo Café actively supports mental health and body positivity in the LGBTQ+ community," Ngema said. "The newly opened Protea Yoga studio upstairs provides an inclusive space for those of all shapes, sizes, and abilities to focus on well-being, manage stress, and embrace self-care."

"For us, this is more than just a yoga studio — it's a sanctuary," Vermaak said. Whether you're flowing through a joyful Vinyasa class, unwinding with a restorative sound bath, or joining one of our community workshops, our goal is to offer a place where you can express yourself, heal, and connect."

Visit Protea Yoga at 1921 First Ave. or online at <https://proteayoga.com>. Karoo Café is online at <https://karoo.cafe>.



INSTRUCTOR HANNAH ERASMUS
COURTESY PROTEAYOGA



Inclusive LGBTQ+ gym opens in the heart of Capitol Hill

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

COURTESY HENRY'S GYM

After successfully launching Henry's Gym in the Queen Anne neighborhood during the COVID-19 pandemic, owner Glen Swain has brought the inclusive and colorful atmosphere to the heart of the Capitol Hill neighborhood. On December 2, Henry's opened its second location, in the 100-year-old Boylston Garage, located at 1617 Boylston Ave.

"We're community-oriented and focused on truly celebrating diversity while honoring the human spirit and community history through art," Swain said in a press release.

Fitness and exercise are at the forefront of people's minds each new year, but Henry's

Capitol Hill location is dissimilar to corporate gyms in the area, due to its emphasis on inclusivity and community. It features carefully curated artwork that celebrates the LGBTQ+ community, including over a hundred pieces across the gym. There are three full-wall murals, including one dedicated to the 1969 Stonewall Riots, and another to politician and activist Harvey Milk.

Henry's has strength-training and cardiovascular equipment, free weights, Gym80 cardio machines, German-made Gym80 Life-Fitness equipment, a stretching area, and a studio for group high-intensity, interval-training sessions. Customized train-

ing programs and tailored fitness plans are also available, based on an one's 3D body scan analysis, which determines lean body mass, postural structure, circumference measurements, and body fat percentage.

Cutting-edge therapies that aim to decrease stress and boost circulation, immunity, and energy are included in the comprehensive recovery suite, where members can hop in a Finnish sauna, engage in cold-plunge therapy, receive a hydromassage, or undergo red-light therapy.

The location also has a full-service bar, offering pre- and post-workout beverages, such as beers and wines, as a way to provide a social hub for members to unwind

and build relationships. Unlike the Queen Anne branch, Henry's on Boylston has its own spa, where members can receive Botox and laser treatments to firm and smooth skin.

As part of Henry's commitment to the community and inclusivity, a portion of all guest fees at Boylston will be donated to Lambert House each month. The gym is open seven days a week, and monthly membership fees start at \$79.99.

For more information visit <https://henrysgymnasium.com/>



Pharmacy benefit manager reform could move us closer to health equity

BY KEVIN B. KIMBLE

SUE OGROCKI / AP

On the campaign trail, President-elect Donald Trump declared that America needs a health system that will “take care of everybody,” not just those who can “pay for it.”

It's easy to understand why tens of millions of Americans — of both parties — agree with this basic moral sentiment. Every major faith tradition teaches that we should help “the least of these.”

Turning that promise into reality is easier said than done, of course. But it *can* be done — and both parties actually agree on one of the best places to start: reining in the power of the pharmacy benefit managers.

PBMs are middlemen in the drug supply chain. In theory, they help insurance companies negotiate bulk discounts and rebates on medicines. But in practice, they have

distorted the system to enrich themselves, jacking up drug prices while delivering few tangible benefits to patients.

The Federal Trade Commission recently took notice of the problem. Its recent lawsuit against three PBMs for inflating insulin prices reveals the human cost of this broken system.

And it's not hitting all Americans equally. The same communities that have historically faced barriers to health care access — Black, Hispanic and Native Americans — are bearing the brunt of these inflated prices.

This is how systemic inequities compound. A broken market mechanism leads to inflated prices, which disproportionately impact communities of color, which leads to worse health outcomes, which creates

economic instability through medical debt and lost work days, which makes it even harder to afford medication. The cycle continues, transforming a market failure into a driver of racial health disparities.

But change is within reach. Congress is poised to act, with two critical bills on the table that would rein in PBM practices and lower drug costs for Medicare patients. These proposed reforms target the core issues driving up drug prices.

One bill aims to restructure how PBMs make money, removing their incentive to steer patients toward more expensive medications. This would force PBMs to compete based on the value they provide to patients and the health care system, not on how much they can inflate prices.

Another would ensure that the discounts

PBMs negotiate actually reach patients. By requiring PBMs to pass along a significant portion of these savings at the pharmacy counter, we can directly reduce out-of-pocket costs for those struggling to afford their medications.

The lame-duck session of Congress is our moment. Now that the divisive election is over, PBM reform stands out as a rare bipartisan area of agreement. Both parties recognize the need to lower drug costs. By acting this year, Congress can prove our political system can still deliver for the people.

Kevin B. Kimble is the founder and executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Global Policy Initiative.

The struggles of obtaining VA benefits for LGBTQ service members

Local Gay veteran hopes to obtain pardon before Trump inauguration

BY MADISON JONES

Steve Marose is a Gay veteran from Renton, WA, who is seeking a pardon from Pres. Biden before the 82-year-old incumbent leaves office.

In 1993, Marose, an Air Force officer, was arrested under Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice on charges of sodomy for having sex with men and spent two years incarcerated. Like many other LGBTQ veterans, he continued to suffer from the discriminatory policies and practices of the US military and Department of Veterans Affairs.

The enforcement of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” from 1994 to 2011 resulted in the discharge of more than 13,000 service members. It is only since two months ago that the Department of Defense has decided to allow “proactive” reviews for veterans dismissed under the DADT policy to obtain honorable discharges and qualify for VA services.

But the VA has also been a popular stomping ground for presidential admin-

istrations to enact anti-LGBT policies. Transgender veterans have become the new subject of ridicule for incoming President Trump. He has promised in interviews that he will not only ban Transgender Americans from serving in the US armed forces but also prevent any Transgender veterans from using their VA benefits to obtain gender-related healthcare.

The current VA mission statement regarding LGBTQ+ veterans under the Biden administration has been “...working to reduce minority stress and engage sexual and gender minority veterans in order to provide healthcare that addresses their needs.” VA Puget Sound Health Care’s website page on LGBTQ+ veterans contains a list of services, including referrals for surgeries, hormone replacement therapy, and legal name and sex marker change support, among others. But these may now be under serious threat.

The SGN reached out to Bridget Repos, the LGBTQ+ veteran care coordinator and

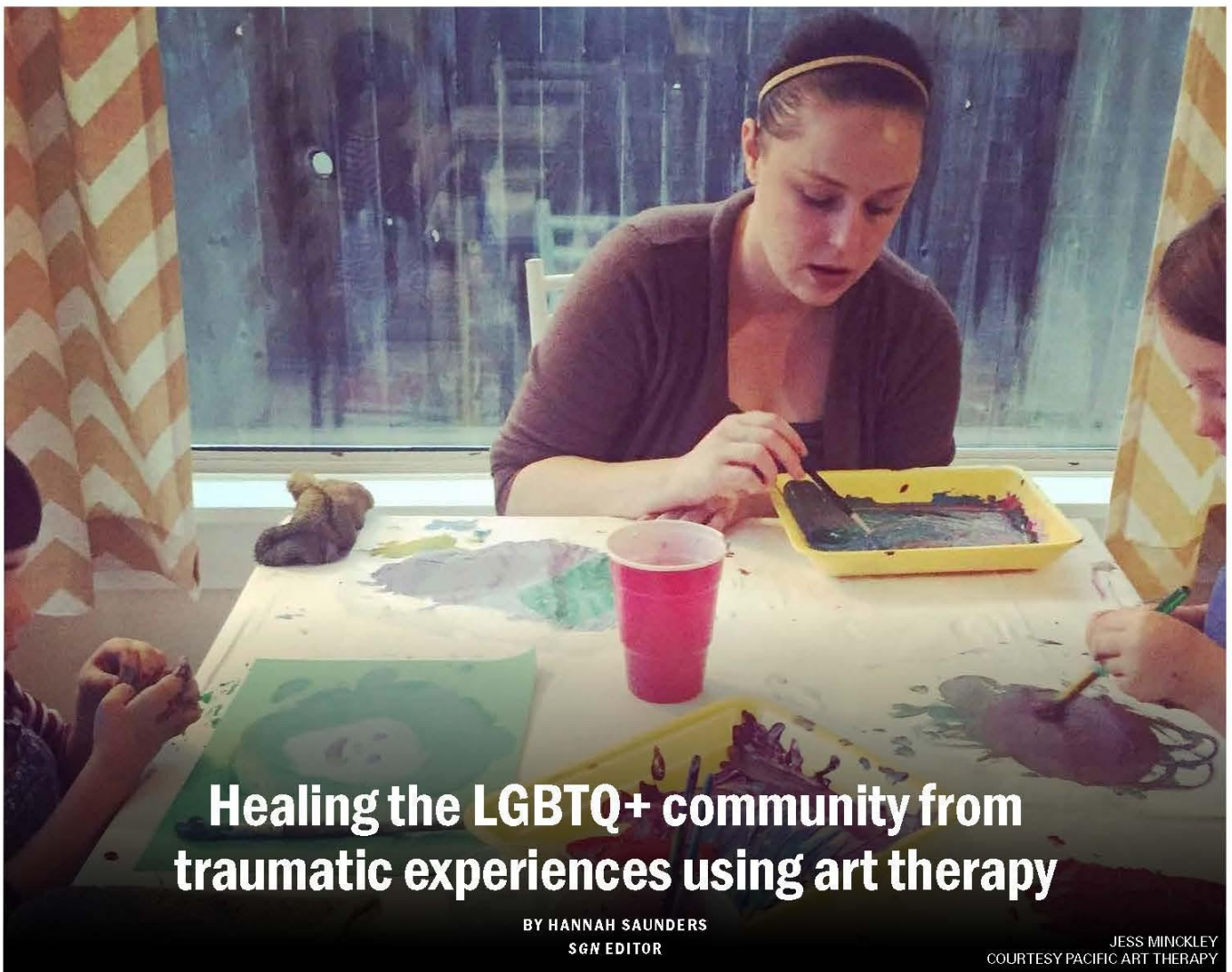


MATT RADICK / THE STATE NEWS

patient advocate at VA Puget Sound Health Care to comment but did not receive a reply, however, Robin Lang, the LGBTQ+ veterans outreach coordinator at the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs did respond. Regarding the upcoming change in federal leadership, she wrote that “nothing has changed about the way we are serving and plan to serve LGBTQ+ veterans. We are implementing legislation passed during the 2024 Legislative Session which updated our state’s definition of veteran and partnering with other agen-

cies who provide veterans benefits at the state level to answer questions and assist in developing their internal processes.”

In the next four years, obtaining VA healthcare for LGBTQ service members may well result in a similar situation to US abortion access: the level and quality of care received may unfortunately be dependent upon which state you reside in. In Washington state, LGBTQ servicemembers can rely on the state DVA to be able to access care, while those who live in more conservative states will be less fortunate.



Healing the LGBTQ+ community from traumatic experiences using art therapy

BY HANNAH SAUNDERS
SGN EDITOR

JESS MINCKLEY
COURTESY PACIFIC ART THERAPY

As an educator, Jess Minckley found that many of her students had mental health challenges that she couldn't assist with due to the ethical scope of her role. But now as a registered art therapist at Pacific Art Therapy, Minckley is able to help patients heal from traumatic experiences.

"Art therapy can happen on a Post-it with a number 2 pencil, or it can be a huge 3D painting over time, or it can span to a whole community effort to make a mural, or a quilt, or a whole mosaic wall," Minckley told the SGN.

She explained how talk therapy only uses the left side of the brain — the part that controls logic, sequences, numbers, language, math, and time — while art therapy uses the right side, which controls emotions, senses, dreams, imagination, and creativity.

"It's very weird how we attempt to solve right-brain problems, which is where trauma lives, using only left-brain tools. Art therapy uses both sides," she said.

Art therapy is more capable of fostering an integrated brain, Minckley added,

because it utilizes the nonverbal, creative, and imaginative parts.

"Even the most stifled, repressed software engineer can still use both hands to scribble, and that brings online this whole part of you that is lost, oftentimes because people are encouraged to stop doing art roughly when they're eight," Minckley said.

Queer joy

Minckley did her internship in Georgia, which provided her with helpful experiences, since she was counseling Queer youth in rural areas.

"I think it was a really hard time for Queer folks, and I just got a really different perspective, because the culture [there] is basically the opposite of Seattle," Minckley said. "The LGBTQ community experiences something like 75% more traumatic experiences than the average Joe, so we just go into working with them knowing that they have been oppressed."

Since all children make art, doing so as an adult can transport one back to a time

when one's attachment and understanding of the world began. Minckley, however, doesn't force her clients to make art. First sessions generally involve the creation of a genogram on a Zoom whiteboard, which displays an illustration of a person's family members based on colors. They then make circles and connect lines that show further connections. Minckley later sends this genogram to clients so they can continue to work on it in their spare time.

The art portion of the therapy session takes about 10 minutes of the 50-minute session. They talk through the genogram with patients, and sometimes play calming music during the art making.

"We don't really care what it looks like, but having a by-product of a therapy session is having something someone can look at [to help] remember what they were talking about," Minckley said, noting how this doesn't happen in talk therapy.

Minckley highlighted how humans have engaged in the arts since evolution, like singing, dancing, and cave drawings. Due to social norms and repression, she said

people need to be reminded of what brings them joy — and that Queer joy is needed.

"We're doing world making here: making a world that is full of Queer joy. It's a process, and [with the election and inauguration], I think the focus has been extremely weighted toward fear," Minckley said. "Fear kills joy, so an antidote is to focus on ... healing through pleasure, because we can experience joy by ourselves in a bathroom stall on a break from work anytime we want, but we forget that listening to a song on Spotify helps improve our light."

Since access to care remains a challenge for many, Minckley encourages people to connect with various social programs, like Peer Seattle, which is provides "peer emotional support and development services to the LGBTQ community impacted by addiction, mental health and/or HIV."

"It's unfortunate, because the discipline is relatively new and thus it's not completely accepted, although the winds of change are coming," Minckley said.



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Monét X Change's *Life Be Lifin'* tour kicks off in Seattle on Jan. 9

BY AISHA MISBAH
SGN ENGAGEMENT EDITOR

COURTESY MONÉT X CHANGE

Comedian, opera singer, and *RuPaul's Drag Race* winner Monét X Change is bringing her coming-of-age story to the Neptune Theatre this January. The one-woman show, *Life Be Lifin'*, will inspire laughter one minute and bring tears the next.

Written by Monét (who asked to be referred to by her stage name) and directed by prominent Seattle drag queen BenDeLaCreme, it will tour the US and Canada from Jan. 9 to Feb. 2.

"I want my Seattle folk to come out to the show and sell that bitch out!" Monét told the *SGN*.

"This show talks about me finding my voice," she said, "whether that was an experience jerking off in a basement with school friends or getting broken up with in a Gay

bar. Or just the rigmarole of going through college as an 18-year-old kid [and] finally becoming an adult and collecting STDs. I kind of talk about all of it."

Monét's first venture into one-woman productions was *Call Me By Monét*, a drag show performed in New York City and later worldwide. She said *Life Be Lifin'* is different: more intentional and thought-out. She credited BenDeLaCreme for helping her streamline her thoughts and craft the narrative of her life.

"It ebbs and flows beautifully, and it's emotional, funny, and witty," Monét said. "I guess my inspiration behind this was to tell a little more of my story, about how I found my voice."

One topic she touches upon is Queer youth who may be struggling with being

their authentic selves. Monét emphasized that while there is pressure for people to come out and "just be you," no one acknowledges how much work it takes, and how hard it can be for some.

"Everyone comes into their own and to their understanding of themselves differently, at their own pace and time. I've never subscribed to the notion that everyone should 'just do it now, girl, just come out, let the world know!' Like, no, that means different things for different people," Monét said.

Albums

Monét released her R&B album, *Grey Rainbow Vol. 1*, in May. With the latest Spotify Wrapped recently, Monét saw hundreds of thousands of people streaming her

music, and even made it to some listener's top artists.

"I'm not someone who comes from a big label. I don't have any machine behind me. I just literally make music and put it out there. When anyone listens to me for hundreds of minutes out of the year, I think that's really cool. I love seeing that."

She revealed that her next album, *Grey Rainbow Vol. 2*, will be released in the spring of 2025, almost a year after the first. It will contrast the contemplative and reflective sound of the first through a tonal shift: more upbeat, loosening its shoulders, and letting itself dance.

Tickets for Life Be Lifin' are currently on sale at <https://www.obsessedwith.com/monet-x-change-live>.



COURTESY MONÉT X CHANGE



GREY RAINBOW, VOL. 1 ALBUM ART



Heather Shaw, the Lesbian Jim Carrey

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

COURTESY HEATHER SHAW

With a face like hers, Heather Shaw was born to do comedy. The standup performer always shared an uncanny likeness to the legendary comic Jim Carrey. At eight years old, friends and family pointed out the resemblance. "As a kid, Jim Carrey's comedy movies were huge in my life, so they probably were an inspiration, which is ironic," she told the SGN. "But I've always wanted to do standup."

Despite the physical similarities, Shaw's onstage presence differs significantly. "He's super physical. I have some physical acts, but I don't do imitations," she said. "I just look like that guy." Shaw describes her routines as "goofy," which can be similar to Carrey, but unlike his standup from the '80s and '90s, Shaw leans more on

expanded one-liners.

Shaw is also not afraid to get dirty on stage. "I'm goofy, a little dark, dirty, unhinged," she said. Comedians with more risqué acts are sometimes pressured to clean it up. But Shaw's most successful when she stays true to herself.

She found that there's a right way to do dirty jokes, and most cis/het white dudes haven't figured that out yet. "If you're gonna do those kinds of jokes, you've got to be clever about it or funny," she said.

Shaw started her career a decade ago in Orlando, Florida, which she describes as "hell on earth." "That state should sink," she said. "It's a decent city to come up in, but there's only so much you can do there. It's not like New York or LA or even Austin

now." She did as much comedy as she could in Orlando's scene before touring around the country.

Despite starting her career in homophobic states, Shaw hasn't experienced much homophobia on the comedy scene. "There are funny Gay people that don't get opportunities, or they're overlooked, but not me, personally," she said. "I've been able to skate by, because the guys think I'm a guy, and the women think I'm a woman. It's like I get to play both sides."

A TikTok star and her future

Shaw's career exploded on TikTok when she started posting pandemic videos claiming to be Carrey's illegitimate daughter. "I was so bored, and I was like, 'I'm just

gonna convince TikTok that I'm Jim Carrey's long-lost daughter.'"

"That was the joke, and people took it seriously, so I had to be like, 'Just kidding, don't sue me,'" she said. "That's really what catapulted [my career] into being able to tour and do shows and sell tickets."

Unlike Carrey, Shaw's sticking with standup for the time-being, although she's open to the possibility of making it onto the big screen.

Shaw will perform at the Spokane Comedy Club on January 22 at 7 p.m. and the Laughs Comedy Club in Seattle on January 23 at 8 p.m.

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Resolutions that build us up: Renewing LGBTQ+ community and hope in 2025

BY ALAN MOTLEY
SGN NIGHTLIFE COLUMNIST

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Having entered the new year, we find ourselves once again considering New Year's resolutions. Many familiar intentions are back: going to the gym more regularly, advancing our careers, improving our diet, deepening mindfulness, or finally picking up that creative project we've been dreaming about. These are all worthwhile goals—no doubt about it.

But what if, this year, we aimed beyond traditional notions of self-improvement and focused on strengthening the very community that sustains us?

For those of us in Seattle, 2025 arrives at a time marked by both progress and profound challenges. We celebrate hard-won rights and greater visibility, yet these victories coexist with unsettling trends: rising isolation, mental health struggles, and new forms of internal division. While we honor how far we've come, it's vital to recognize the fractures that have opened up among us, the loneliness lingering at our gatherings, and the unhealthy coping mechanisms many of us still rely on. If we truly want a better year ahead, we need resolutions that champion collective well-being, affirm identity, and prioritize meaningful connection over shallow validation.

Stark realities and sobering statistics

According to the Trevor Project's 2023 US National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People, 41% of LGBTQ+

youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year. More than half who wanted mental health care couldn't get it. Fewer than 40% found their homes affirming. Nearly one in three said their mental health was poor most or all of the time due to anti-LGBTQ+ policies and rhetoric.

These are not abstract figures, they represent young people — friends, siblings, neighbors — feeling unwelcome, unheard, and unloved right in our midst.

This crisis isn't confined to youth. The US surgeon general warns of a nationwide "loneliness epidemic," and men — Gay men in particular — often report struggling with isolation and a lack of close friendships. A growing number have few or no confidants. In Gay male communities, loneliness is often worsened by dating apps that prize physical attraction over emotional bonds, and by internalized homophobia that leads some to form superficial hierarchies. This isolation fuels depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation.

The data make it clear: we're facing a mental health emergency that demands collective intervention.

Examining the "Gay 'mean girl' epidemic"

Compounding these challenges is what some call the "Gay 'mean girl' epidemic."

Certain social circles — particularly among Gay men — mirror exclusionary, manipulative behaviors associated with "mean girls" in popular culture. Instead of solidarity, these cliques spread rumors, indulge in body shaming, and seek status at others' expense. Social media amplifies this dynamic, turning human beings into curated avatars to be ranked and judged.

Being excluded or targeted by your own community can be devastating. Spaces that should feel like havens instead become battlegrounds of insecurity, leaving many feeling even more isolated.

The roots of this behavior run deep, often stemming from internalized homophobia and the scars left by growing up in a world that shamed LGBTQ+ identities. As a result, some try to reclaim worth by wielding the very tools of exclusion that once marginalized them. This cycle of hurt obstructs the path to genuine connection and healing.

Why affirmation and inclusion matter more than ever

These hardships underscore a fundamental point: affirmation isn't just nice — it's lifesaving. When Queer youth have their identities validated at home and at school, rates of suicidal ideation decrease. When Gay men form friendships grounded in empathy rather than appearance, mental health outcomes improve. Compassion and solidarity are powerful antidotes to despair.

Seattle, known for progressive values and vibrant cultural scenes, should serve as a model of inclusive affirmation. We have a robust Queer history, a thriving arts community, and organizations dedicated to advocacy and support. Yet even here, many feel adrift. "The Seattle freeze," a term for perceived social aloofness here, can intersect with Queer isolation to create emotional barriers. Too often, digital connectivity fails to translate into meaningful, face-to-face support. We yearn for a sense of belonging that can't be measured in likes or filtered selfies.

Learning from the past

Our community's struggles with exclusion aren't new. Historically, Queer bars, coffeeshouses, and community centers served as sanctuaries in a hostile world. Yet these havens also mirrored societal preju-

dice. Racism, transphobia, ableism, ageism, and classism seeped into our spaces, fracturing unity. Hierarchies based on masculinity, youth, and "passing" privilege have long marginalized those who don't fit a narrow ideal.

Still, we have a legacy of resilience and resistance. From the activists at Stonewall to those who organized during the AIDS crisis and today's advocates for Trans rights and racial justice, we've repeatedly chosen solidarity over division. Remembering this history helps us envision a future where we consciously dismantle the barriers that keep us apart.

Turning awareness into action: Resolutions for 2025

How do we turn recognition into tangible change? How do we ensure that 2025 isn't another year of merely acknowledging problems without addressing them? Consider these resolutions as starting points, not rigid rules. They offer pathways toward collective empowerment, emotional well-being, and authentic connection.

1. **Resolve to show up in person:** Put down the phone and step into community spaces. Attend forums at Gay City, visit Lambert House's youth events, join a workshop at Ingersoll Gender Center, or browse Queer literature at Elliott Bay Book Company. Discover the Seattle Queer Film Festival, or visit galleries highlighting LGBTQ+ artists. Face-to-face presence fosters trust and reminds us that we are more than profiles and follower counts.
2. **Resolve to listen and validate:** Ask genuine questions and listen without judgment. Whether supporting a Trans friend anxious about anti-LGBTQ+ legislation or comforting a Gay man feeling excluded by his peers, empathy transforms isolation into belonging. Consider joining a peer support group, attending a body positivity workshop, or simply having deeper conversations over coffee. Listening costs nothing yet yields profound change.
3. **Resolve to affirm identities and resist stereotypes:** Use correct pronouns, challenge racist or trans-



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phobic jokes, and celebrate diverse body types. If you sense internalized biases — such as dismissing someone who doesn't fit conventional beauty norms — acknowledge and unlearn them. Affirmation means recognizing the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ experiences, including those radically different from your own.

4. **Resolve to confront the “Mean Girl” mindset:** If you see gossip, shaming, or status-driven cruelty, speak up. Challenge the notion that superficial popularity matters more than kindness. Ask yourself: Are my social behaviors inclusive or exclusive? Do I seek validation by belittling others? Such reflection can break habits that fuel unnecessary division.
5. **Resolve to volunteer and mentor:** Give back to the community. Volunteer at nonprofits supporting LGBTQ+ homeless youth, become a mentor through local programs, or host inclusive social events. Direct action can mend the very wounds we've opened. By lifting others up, we also lift ourselves.
6. **Resolve to advocate for policy and cultural change:** Show up at city council meetings, write op-eds, support organizations fighting for LGBTQ+ rights, and insist on inclusive curricula in schools. Systemic changes — funding mental health services, reinforcing antibullying policies, supporting gender-affirming healthcare — create an environment where everyone can thrive.
7. **Resolve to seek and offer help:** If you're struggling, reaching out for professional support isn't weakness — it's courage. LGBTQ+ affirming therapists, online support groups, and local resources can help. Also, keep an eye on friends who may be suffering in silence. A simple “I've been thinking about you. How are you holding up?” can open a crucial lifeline.

Rethinking nightlife: The sober-curious movement and beyond

For generations, the Gay bar functioned as our cultural epicenter — often the first place we found our tribe. Yet times are changing. Gay bars are closing in many cities, and Queer nightlife is evolving. While some lament these closures as losing essential safe spaces, others note that many

Queer people struggle with substance use at higher rates than their cisgender, heterosexual peers. The sober-curious movement prompts us to ask if the bar should remain central to our social life.

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that “excessive drinking” accounted for one in five deaths among Americans aged 20–49. Substance abuse disorders are all too common in our community, linked to internalized shame, stress, and the long-standing tradition of equating nightlife with bars. While these venues once provided refuge from discrimination, they also normalized the idea that we needed intoxication to connect or express ourselves.

As some Gay bars close, new sober spaces and community-oriented alternatives arise elsewhere: Queer-owned coffee shops, sober hangouts, community centers, and wellness studios that celebrate identity without relying on alcohol or drugs. From LA's Cuties café to GMHC in New York and Berlin's Village, these spots emphasize presence, vulnerability, and mutual support.

Here in Seattle, right Capitol Hill — long a hub of LGBTQ+ nightlife — consider creating a dedicated sober community space, a place where we can relax, converse, and feel affirmed without the pressure to drink?

Embracing these alternatives doesn't erase the importance of bars. Nightlife will always be integral to Queer culture. Yet it's vital to acknowledge that not everyone thrives in a bar environment, and many seek healthier relationships with their bodies and minds. Diversifying our options, in Capitol Hill and beyond, reflects a maturing community — one that understands multiple pathways to belonging exist and that sober or substance-light spaces can be as vibrant and essential as traditional nightlife.

Addressing shame and moving toward healing

Therapists who work with LGBTQ+ clients often stress the need to confront shame head-on. We can't simply replace shame with pride and hope it fades. True healing requires naming shame, talking about it, and witnessing others do the same. Community dialogues — whether in support groups, workshops, or casual gatherings — dissolve shame by bringing it into the light.

For those struggling with substances, various approaches exist. Some find harm reduction methods effective, others need abstinence-based programs and 12-step

meetings. No single method fits everyone. Normalizing open discussions about addiction, recovery, and mental health encourages more of us to seek support. Affirming that pleasure, love, and self-worth can be found without numbing agents breaks a harmful cycle and helps us embrace healthier, more authentic lives.

Telling our stories, celebrating our strengths

Art, film, literature, and performance remain powerful tools for community healing. Seattle's arts scene teems with Queer writers, poets, filmmakers, dancers, and painters who capture our struggles and triumphs. By engaging with their work, we celebrate diverse experiences and remember that we are not alone.

From indie films at festivals to zines featuring disabled Queer voices, from drag shows that defy gender norms to podcasts in which Trans activists share their journeys, cultural production affirms that our differences are strengths. We learn that vulnerability is not weakness and authenticity trumps superficial conformity.

Ensuring lasting change: Making resolutions stick

Resolutions often fade by February. How do we ensure that our community-focused commitments endure?

- **Accountability partners can help:** Pair up with friends who share your goals of inclusivity and connection. Check in monthly: “How have we stood up for inclusivity? What have we done to foster authentic connections?”
- **Set measurable goals:** Attend one community event a month, volunteer quarterly, or donate to a Trans youth fund once a year. Concrete actions transform intentions into reality.
- **Allow for reflection and adaptation:** If large events trigger anxiety, opt for smaller meetups or one-on-one conversations. Share resources widely and let your resolutions evolve as you learn more about the community's needs.
- **Celebrate progress:** Acknowledge when a friend finds a Queer-affirming therapist, when harmful cliques dissolve, or when a new sober community space opens. Recognizing these wins fuels hope.

Envisioning a more compassionate 2025 and beyond

Imagine a Seattle where LGBTQ+

spaces feel genuinely welcoming and affirming. A city where newly out teenagers easily find empathetic mentors, where Gay men form friendships beyond body shaming, and where Trans and Nonbinary people confidently lead. Picture a community that values vulnerability over perfection, empathy over status, and diverse expressions of gender and sexuality over narrow archetypes.

This vision acknowledges our complex history — the bars that saved lives even as they sometimes reinforced harmful norms, the activism that advanced rights but left some behind, and the pride that coexists with shame. It honors those who overcame substance abuse, those who found new ways to connect, and those still searching for solid ground.

By centering our 2025 resolutions on community care, intersectional understanding, and mental health support, we reclaim the core purpose of community: to support one another in adversity, celebrate authenticity, and ensure no one stands alone. This isn't just about surviving another year — it's about thriving, cherishing our collective resilience, and expanding how we come together.

As we revise our personal resolution lists, let's add “show up for others,” “challenge exclusion,” “listen without judgment,” and “create spaces for all.” By weaving these commitments into our daily lives, we push back against isolation, cynicism, and fear. In doing so, we guarantee that our community remains a place where healing, growth, and love are not the exception but the rule.

In embracing these resolutions, we honor the legacies of those who fought for our right to live openly and proudly. We prove we deserve a world where every LGBTQ+ person — regardless of age, race, body type, gender identity, ability, or socioeconomic status — can find genuine community, feel supported, and know they are never alone.

LGBTQ+ subnetwork crisis/support line

The 988 Lifeline has a specialized line for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit teens and young adults aged 13–24.

To connect with a crisis counselor who can provide LGBTQIA2S+ affirming support, call, text, or chat 988 and choose option 3.

Know YOU ARE NOT ALONE, though it may feel that way sometimes.



ISTOCK



Can-Can's Wonderland • December 26 - January 5

Can-Can's Wonderland
Date: Thursday, December 26- January 5
Time: 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Venue: Can-Can Culinary Cabaret, 95 Pine St, Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$64.00 - \$799.00

Celebrate the holidays as our cast of professional performers swing from the chandeliers into a show full of classic beauty and flirtatious artistry

Falsettos and Sunsets
Date: Friday, January 3
Time: 7-8:30 p.m.
Venue: Theater Puget Sound, The Armory, 305 Harrison St, Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$10.00 - \$25.00

Falsettos and Sunsets is the story of Richard Begaldix and George Lamps, a pair of cartoony guys who fall in love and stumble through the world of polyamory with outrageous physical comedy, startling emotional honesty, and slapstick existential confusion

MOTH StorySLAM LIVE @ Fremont Abbey
Date: Saturday, January 4
Venue: Fremont Abbey Arts Center, 4272 Fremont Ave North, Seattle, WA

The Moth StorySLAM is an open-mic storytelling competition in which anyone can share a true, personal, 5-minute story on the night's theme.

Wet City Wine-os:
Wine Tasting hosted by Ricci Armani and Joe Dombrowski
Date: Saturday, January 4-5
Time: 10:30 p.m.
Venue: Madame Lous, 2505 1st Ave, Seattle, WA

Co-hosted by Ricci Armani and Joe Dombrowski, we're bringing the vibey wine bar to Madame Lous. Laughs and libations with wine selection focused on small-production, natural, and unique wines.

Kimberly Akimbo
Date: Tuesday, January 7-12
Venue: Paramount Theatre, 911 Pine St, Seattle, WA

A new musical about growing up and growing old (in no particular order!), Kimberly Akimbo is the winner of 5 Tony Awards including BEST MUSICAL.

Tim Matheson
Date: Tuesday, January 7
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Venue: The Triple Door, 216 Union Street, Seattle, WA

Tim Matheson takes to the stage to share his stories and experiences from his extraordinary life—both in front of and behind the camera.

Matt Shevrin and the Jazz French Horn All-Stars
Date: Wednesday, January 8
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Venue: The Royal Room, 5000 Rainier Ave South, Seattle, WA

Jazz French hornist Matt Shevrin will be joined by a talented group of all-star players for this special performance.

SWEAT - A Charli XCX Inspired Dance Party
Date: Friday, January 10
Time: 9 p.m.
Venue: Neumos, 925 E Pike St, Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$5.00 - \$10.00

Neumos Presents SWEAT - A CHARLI XCX INSPIRED DANCE PARTY. Playing Music By Charli, Troye, Kim, Kina, and More!

GOTH GF 4 GOTH GF: Sapphic Goth Night
Date: Saturday, January 11
Time: 10 p.m.-2 a.m.
Venue: Asylum Collective, 108 South Jackson Street B, Seattle, WA

Safe space all femme & queer goth night in a haunted pink venue in the Seattle Underground.

Railroad Ink Drag Night:
A night of drag, games, and community
Date: Saturday, January 11
Time: 7-11 p.m.
Venue: Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$10.00 - \$30.00

Join us for an evening of trains and treats in partnership with PAB's Drag Across the Bridge and Sound Transit's East Link Light Rail!

Luvvly Speed Dating In-Person First Dates
Bisexual • Ages 25-35 • Seattle
Date: Sunday, January 12
Time: 4-6 p.m.
Venue: Tapster, 1011 Valley Street, Seattle, WA

The new and better way to speed date. Follow personalized notification's sent to your phone guiding you through a mix of first dates.

"Seattle Gay News Celebrates 50!" Exhibit at WWU
Date: Opening Reception, January 14, 5-7 p.m. (Ongoing January 13 to February 20)
Venue: Western Washington University's Viking Union Gallery, 516 High St., Bellingham, WA

This exhibit celebrates the 50-year history of the SGN, documenting the history of a newspaper that started in March 1974, reporting on arts, culture, health, politics and civil rights related to the LGBTQ+ community.



WITNESS: Nate Gowdy's Lens • January 16

Schuyler Bailar Presents "He/She/They: How We Talk About Gender and Why It Matters"
Date: Thursday, January 16
Time: 7-8:30 p.m.
Venue: Seattle, WA

Join us to hear inspirational speaker and author Schuyler Bailar discuss his book "He/She/They: How We Talk About Gender and Why It Matters."

WITNESS: Nate Gowdy's Lens
Date: Thursday, January 16
Time: 6-9 p.m.
Venue: Spectrum Fine Art, 1411 34th Avenue, Seattle, WA

WITNESS: Nate Gowdy's Lens on January 6th, 2021 examines the Capitol insurrection as a theater of chaos and conviction. Exhibit on display 1/9-2/15

The Moth StorySLAM @ BLOEDEL HALL, ST. MARK'S CATHEDRAL
Date: Friday, January 17
Time: 8 p.m.
Venue: St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, 1245 10th Ave E, Seattle, WA

The Moth StorySLAM is an open-mic storytelling competition in which anyone can share a true, personal, 5-minute story on the night's theme.

Bachata and Salsa: Class & Social Dancing w/ Queerchata Seattle
Date: Saturday, January 18
Time: 6-10 p.m.
Venue: Century Ballroom, 915 E. Pine Street, Seattle, WA

Bachata and Salsa dancing with your favorite queers.

Kidstock! An Arts Celebration for Kids and Families
Date: Saturday, January 18
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Venue: Edmonds Center for the Arts, 4104th Ave N, Edmonds, WA

This free, full-day arts celebration is designed for families with children of all ages, and features a variety of live music performances, arts education workshops, and activities for kids.

Creepy Gathering for People who want to Fall in Love
Date: Sunday, January 19
Time: 5:30 p.m.
Venue: Ballard Homestead, 6541 Jones Ave NW, Seattle, WA

Are you a f***ing amazing person who just wants to meet another f***ing amazing person? This event is for you! Wanna know what it would look like if an artist came up with an antidote to cruise-y bar scenes and soulless dating apps? Come find out!

Painting the Town Red, A MLK Day tribute to the music of Billie Holiday
Date: Monday, January 20
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Venue: The Royal Room, 5000 Rainier Ave South, Seattle, WA

Listeners can expect selections from Holiday's illustrious career, in a fitting celebration of both Holiday's life and work, and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Luvvly Speed Dating Queer Men • Ages 25-45 • Seattle
Date: Tuesday, January 21
Time: 7-9 p.m.
Venue: Seattle Cider Company, 4660 Ohio Avenue South, Seattle, WA

The new and better way to speed date. Follow personalized notification's sent to your phone guiding you through a mix of first dates.

Celebrating LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Games Mixer
Date: Friday, January 24
Time: 6-9 p.m.
Venue: 5501 Lakeview Drive, Kirkland, WA

A game industry mixer for indie developers, games industry students, AAA game developers, and all sorts of game industry professionals!

Dungeons & Drag Queens
Date: Friday, January 24
Venue: The Crocodile, 2505 First Avenue, Seattle, WA
Admissions: \$27.50

Hear ye, hear ye, theydies and gentlethem: Described as "fantasy and hilarity on a magical journey" by the *South Seattle Emerald*, drag queens of the bard, druid, and paladin variety will play the legendary tabletop game of monsters and mayhem in this recurring show.



For more events visit SGN's online community calendar



Creatively imaginative *Lady Like* bio drags Lady Camden into the spotlight

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

COURTESY *LADY LIKE*

LADY LIKE
PVOD (Jan. 3)

The underdog documentary *Lady Like* makes several interesting creative choices throughout its brief 87-minute running time. This helps ground the biographical look at the life and times of *RuPaul's Drag Race* season 14 runner-up Lady Camden (aka Rex Wheeler) in universally accessible emotions that are thankfully authentic. It also makes it something of a shame that the film never resonates as fully or as intimately as director Luke Willis inarguably intends.

Still, this is a divertingly arresting spectacle of glitz, glam, and perseverance. Narrated by fellow *Drag Race* alumna Nina

West and utilizing heartfelt interviews with Camden/Wheeler, solidly realized reenactments of the drag superstar's North London childhood (centered on a lovely performance by youngster Shiloh Brody-Clarke), and pleasantly inspired animated sequences, Willis pulls out all the stops to document his subject's life story. It's hard to imagine that fans of the long-running competition program won't walk away from this doc feeling a sense of edified exhilaration.

The best bits are the segments where Rex discusses his love of dance, most notably his time at London's Royal Ballet School and subsequent work as a dancer and choreographer for the Sacramento Ballet. There's palpable joy there, and when

these remembrances are coupled with the flashbacks to the artist as a child, most of these stories hit home with genuine, heartfelt eloquence. Add in the tragic death of Rex's older brother, and there's a mountain of moving material for viewers to fervently ascend.

All of which makes it frustrating that Willis refuses to dig too far beneath the surface. He also regurgitates the same material multiple times, creating a record that keeps repeating itself. The director allows for the bejeweled razzmatazz of Rex's drag success as Lady Camden to overwhelm the proceedings far too often. This undercuts the dancer's achievements as they face the raw personal tragedies and roadblocks they valiantly strive to overcome. It also makes

the eventual heroic catharsis of the film's final sequences reverberate with far less authority than they should have possessed.

But there is an unavoidable warmth and tenderness to the documentary that I happily responded to. Rex is a dynamic performer, and it's easy to see (especially as someone who rather despises *Drag Race*) why he became a popular fan-favorite. If nothing else, I could easily see someone transforming *Lady Like* into an amalgam of rousing, crowd-pleasing, feature-length entertainment like (the admittedly dated) *Outrageous!*, *Billy Elliot*, *Step Up*, or *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. I'd buy a ticket, and I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Bland *Kraven* competently goes through the comic book antihero motions

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

KRAVEN THE HUNTER
Theaters

The good news about Sony's latest attempt to transform one of its Spider-Man rogue's gallery of villains, Kraven (the Hunter), into a viable cinematic antihero is that the finished film isn't that bad. The problem is, it's not that good either. This superpowered comic book origin story could easily be mistaken for the dictionary definition of "meh."

Too competently made to be summarily dismissed yet much too rudimentarily paced, staged, and plotted to be consistently enjoyable, this R-rated spectacle instead is instantly forgettable. Honestly? I think that's worse than if it had been an outright disaster. Maybe then there would have been something interesting to talk about.

Sergei Kravinoff (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) is the son of the notorious Russian-born gangster Nikolai Kravinoff (Russell Crowe). After being mauled by a giant African lion and saved by a mystical potion, teenage Sergei leaves home — and his half-brother Dmitri Smerdyakov (Fred Hechinger) — in the middle of the night, determined to be nothing like his deviously murderous father.

Fast-forward a little over a decade. The

young man has reinvented himself as Kraven, aka The Hunter, a notorious assassin who patiently stalks and kills members of the criminal underworld. The saying is that once you are on his list, you only get off it when you're dead.

This doesn't sit well with a different Russian evildoer, Aleksei Sytsevich (Alessandro Nivola), aka The Rhino. He kidnaps Dmitri, knowing Kraven will do whatever he has to to save baby bro's life. This will make the hunter vulnerable to assassination himself, and Aleksei has the perfect weapon to do the deed: a trickster hitman known only as The Foreigner (Christopher Abbott).

The film also stars *West Side Story* Oscar winner Ariana DeBose as a lawyer Kraven enlists to aid him in tracking down the nastiest of the nasty. She's also the one who anonymously fed him the tonic that saved his life back in Africa when they were teenagers. But DeBose has precious little to do other than to give Taylor-Johnson a never-ending series of stupefied looks, hint that she's something of an archery protégé, and confidently strut down the streets of London and a frigid Russian forest as if making her way down a Paris catwalk. Saying she's wasted is an obvious understatement.

But director J.C. Chandor (*All Is Lost*, *A Most Violent Year*) is a solid filmmaker,



COURTESY *KRAVEN*

and the same goes for the primary writer on the project, Richard Wenk (*The Equalizer* trilogy). Are there any surprises? No. But does it all still make sense, move reasonably well, and rarely insult the collective intelligence of the audience? On that front, the answer is a laudable yes.

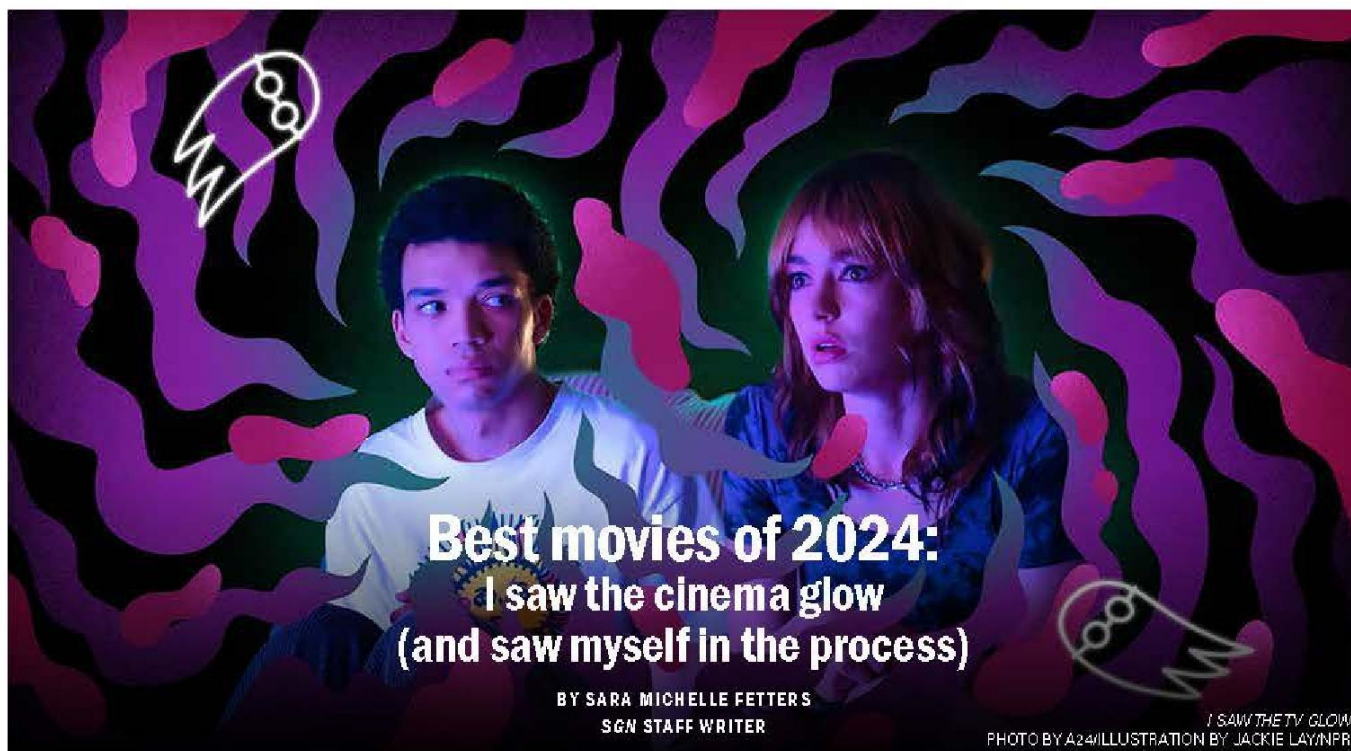
As for the technical aspects, the CG effects augmenting the on-screen mayhem are a decidedly mixed bag: Nivola's transformation into The Rhino and the subsequent motion-capture work is top-notch, while the rest often looks like excised footage from one of Sony's second-tier PS5 video games. But Chandor refuses to let the technology overwhelm the action. He relies more upon the picture's talented stunt team than any of the elements generated inside a computer. This is something I wholeheartedly applaud.

Alas, it's not enough. The heart beating at the center of the narrative is made out of papier mâché, not muscle, tissue, and blood. Every emotion is melodramatically phoned in. There is no tension. Scenes of brotherly bonding go nowhere, and if there's supposed to be a love story blossoming between Taylor-Johnson and DeBose,

all involved forgot to provide the narrative pollination that could have helped it germinate. This is paint-by-numbers stuff, and while the finished product looks reasonably okay, it's not as if anyone will be rushing to hang it up in the Louvre.

I'm unfamiliar with the comic book version of Kraven created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko in 1967, but I do know he did not have superpowers. The man was just an extremely talented big-game hunter who stalked Spider-Man and considered him the ultimate prey. I know there are legal reasons between Sony and Marvel that didn't allow for that story to be told, but it's still hard not to imagine that scenario would have been far more interesting than the one showcased here.

Funnier still, Crowe's performance is such that you can almost believe he's in that version of *Kraven the Hunter* and not this one. This makes Nikolai the most interesting character in this whole darn thing. But it also means he's in a very different film than everyone else, one I'd rather be watching, instead of the one I was stuck twiddling my thumbs through.



Best movies of 2024: I saw the cinema glow (and saw myself in the process)

BY SARA MICHELLE FETTERS
SGN STAFF WRITER

I SAW THE TV GLOW
PHOTO BY A24/ILLUSTRATION BY JACKIE LAY/NPR

There is an early moment in writer-director Jane Schoenbrun's *I Saw the TV Glow* that permanently burned itself into my psyche. Questioning seventh-grader Owen (Jan Foreman) is participating in one of those gym exercises where the entire class whips a parachute into the air and they all sit down in awe underneath the concave enclosure they've created. The colors are a series of pinks, blues, purples, and whites, and as Owen wanders with aimless indifference — or so it erroneously appears — it's clear he's on the verge of an emotionally disambiguating epiphany.

This scene is one of many from 2024 that's stuck with me: A young girl has the image of her mother's fiery death burned into her irises in *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*. A retired military hand-to-hand combat instructor and grizzled small-town police chief stare one another down in dual showcases of committed force in *Rebel Ridge*. A fiftysomething former movie star turned aerobics instructor applies and reapplies her makeup before succumbing to suffocating, internalized self-loathing born from rigid societal beauty standards she believes she can no longer achieve in *The Substance*. A high-ranking cardinal in the Catholic Church cradles an escaping turtle as he ponders who should be the next pope in *Conclave*. The list goes on and on.

I needed all of these films. For a multitude of reasons, this has little to do with the theaters themselves. Escaping the pressures of a fractured and disorienting social and political climate wasn't just beneficial, it was critical to maintaining my personal sanity. Social media was a cesspool of vitriol and misinformation. Mainstream news sanewashed reprehensible behaviors and statements that went out of fashion in the 1940s, all in the pursuit of ratings and subscriber numbers that are no longer achievable. All of this and more helped make the theater a personal sanctuary.

The strange part? This was a cinematic year in which LGBTQ+ representation (whether fictional narrative or feature-length documentary) was stronger, more complex, and more intellectually compelling than at any point in years, maybe ever. This was especially true when it came to Trans-related endeavors. Schoenbrun's *I Saw the TV Glow*, Vera Drew's *The People's Joker*, Dev Patel's *Monkey Man*, Josh Greenbaum's *Will & Harper*, Levan Akin's *Crossing*, and Alice Maio Mackay's *Carnage for Christmas* were just a few of the Trans-fueled stories that made a lasting impression.

But there's more. Edward Berger's *Conclave* made homosexuality and the Catholic Church a central facet of its theological

discussion, throwing in choice bon mots about gender and intersexuality for good measure. Acclaimed filmmaker Luca Guadagnino began 2024 with the exhilarating *Challengers* and concluded it with the phantasmagoric *Queer*. Other notable titles include the broadly mainstream (*Wicked*, *Mean Girls*, *Miller's Girl*, and *Carry-On*), international spellbinders (*Handling the Undead* and *Sebastian*), and rambunctious indie darlings (*Drive-Away Dolls*, *Love Lies Bleeding*, *Ponyboy*, *Bird*, and *My Old Ass*).

Then there is Netflix's buzzy *Emilia Pérez*. Acclaimed director Jacques Audiard's audacious musical-thriller of gender identity and moral rehabilitation recently racked up ten Golden Globe nominations — including Best Picture (Musical or Comedy) and a groundbreaking nod for Karla Sofia Gascón for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Motion Picture (Musical or Comedy) — to go along with its five awards at the Cannes Film Festival, which included the coveted Palme d'Or.

While I'm thrilled for the multit talented Gascón, *Emilia Pérez* still was not for me. I found its early sections (including a spectacularly awful musical number set in a Thai surgical center catering to Transgender patients) to be deeply offensive, its central plot to be nothing more than one-dimensional drivel, and its handling of complex issues relating to political corruption, international drug policies, and racial inequities to be shockingly tone-deaf.

Even though I'm certain the filmmakers and actors took on this project with the best of intentions, as positive Queer — especially Trans — representation is concerned, this isn't it. I felt that Audiard inadvertently supported the most heinous of rightwing stereotypes instead of subverting them, and it infuriated me seeing so many straight, cisgender critics patting themselves on the back for celebrating this messy monstrosity and misconstruing its messaging as progressive when it's anything but.

But we're here to celebrate the best of what I saw in 2024, not the titles that drove me up the proverbial wall (I stopped doing worst-of lists a decade ago). Thankfully, there was plenty to love. From the gory flexible wonders of *In a Violent Nature* and the cleverly retro romantic sparks of *Fly Me to the Moon*, to the DIY rambunctiousness of *Hundreds of Beavers* and the wide-open Western vistas of *Horizon: An American Saga—Chapter 1*. I could talk all day about titles as varied as *Strange Darling*, *The Beast*, *Inside Out 2*, *Thelma*, *Daddio*, *A Complete Unknown*, and *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*.

Heck, even the better-late-than-never legacy sequel *Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F* tickled my funny bone. While I adore the original 1984 Eddie Murphy classic as much as anyone, I can't say that's a turn of events I saw coming.

Without further ado, here are my ten favorite films of 2024, along with a few additional titles I felt were almost equally

outstanding, coupled with five superior documentaries. Check each and every one of them out!

Top 10 films of 2024

1. *I Saw the TV Glow* (Jane Schoenbrun)

I came out of the theater shell-shocked, inspired, devastated, hopeful. But most of all seen. Schoenbrun's brilliant treatise on storytelling, nostalgia, fantasy, friendship, and identity is an all-time stunner.

2. *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* (George Miller)

Miller does it again, fearlessly diving into the sand-drenched wilderness of a dystopian wasteland that's not nearly as far removed from our current reality as we'd all like to believe. The gonzo Aussie auteur delivers an action-packed opera of self-determination that precious few could have dreamt up, and even fewer could have crystalized into such a breathlessly kinetic reality.

3. *Love Lies Bleeding* (Rose Glass)

Love makes monsters out of saints and saints out of sinners in Glass's monumental achievement of neo-noir body-building excess. Ed Harris terrifies, Kristin Stewart steals hearts, and rising new omer Katy O'Brian triumphantly meanderizes in a role of such herculean majesty that her performance will be dissected, discussed, studied, and fawned over for generations to come.



FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA (GEORGE MILLER)
COURTESY WARNER BROS.



LOVE LIES BLEEDING
COURTESY M24

4. *Ghostlight* (Alex Thompson, Kelly O'Sullivan)

It's a literal family affair for stars Keith Kupferer, Tara Mallen, and Katherine Mallen Kupferer, a trio that digs deep to make this Shakespearean melodrama of grief, loss, togetherness, and artistic catharsis spring to life with such triumphantly heart-rending authenticity. Patient ears should attend, as they're certain to hear something magnificent.

5. *Challengers* (Luca Guadagnino)

Tennis anyone? How about a threesome? Or maybe just a vicious game of obsession with a side helping of crushed dreams and unappreciated determination for good measure? Love triangles have rarely been this sexy, with stars Zendaya, Josh O'Connor, and Mike Faist melting the screen with their collective intensity.

6. *Rebel Ridge* (Jeremy Saulnier)

Saulnier (*Green Room* and *Blue Ruin*) returns to form with a breathtaking story of a former military man (Aaron Pierre, in a star-making performance) pushed to the edge by a corrupt police force (led by an amoral Don Johnson) that uses ethically dubious — if still legal — methods to shore up dwindling budgetary resources. While not the *First Blood* clone it initially appears to be, this thriller crackles with a disquieting urgency that's impossible to resist.

7. *The Brutalist* (Brady Corbet)

This is an essential post-WWII immigrant saga that could not be coming out at a more appropriate time. Corbet's epic of a Jewish Polish architect (a never-better Adrien Brody) building a new life for himself and his family in a rapidly changing America is a propulsive tour de force of organic cinematic excess that's somehow still grounded in naked emotional truths so razor-sharp that they leave a purifying scar.

8. *Conclave* (Edward Berger)

Who knew an airplane fiction-style backroom melodrama of Catholic cardinals voting to elect a new pope would be one of the more vital pieces of LGBTQ+ storytelling to see the light of day in all of 2024? Witness the giddy fun of Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci, John Lithgow, and Isabella Rossellini going tête-à-tête over the pros and cons of each potential pontiff, then stay for the amazingly thoughtful discussion of sexuality, gender, race, faith, and identity that makes it all resonate with profoundly haunting grandeur.

9. *The Substance* (Coralie Fargeat)

Fargeat's primordial body-horror knock-

out goes right for the jugular as it drips spinal fluid, wears skintight pastel spandex, and showcases the never-ending internal battles between the selfishly giddy excesses of youth and the depressed, mournful longings of middle age. Demi Moore rages against the movie star machine with expressively carnal ferocity. Margaret Qualley is equally superb as her petulantly narcissistic doppelgänger who refuses to accept that their two is one, and that neither can live a full, healthy life without the selfless assistance of the other.

10. *The People's Joker* (Vera Drew)

In one of the best pieces of DIY filmmaking ever made — a journey of self-expression and identity like no other, inspired by the world of DC Comics — Drew's incisive and original voice magnetically sparkles with intelligently sidesplitting vitality. Moments of uproarious hilarity are ingeniously coupled with scenes of intense introspection that unexpectedly brought tears to my eyes. In ten years' time (maybe even less), don't be surprised if this homemade comedy is heralded as a bona fide masterpiece.

25 more (because I can)

Crossing (Levan Akin), *Evil Does Not Exist* (Ryūsuke Hamaguchi), *Flow* (Gints Zilbalodis), *Handling the Undead* (Thea Hvistendahl), *Hard Truths* (Mike Leigh), *Hit Man* (Richard Linklater), *Hundreds of Beavers* (Mike Cheslik), *Immaculate* (Michael Mohan), *Infested* (Sébastien Vanicek), *Juror #2* (Clint Eastwood), *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* (Wes Ball), *The Last Showgirl* (Gia Coppola), *Longlegs* (Osgood Perkins), *Lovely, Dark, and Deep* (Teresa Sutherland), *My Old Ass* (Megan Park), *The Piano Lesson* (Malcolm Washington), *A Quiet Place: Day One* (Michael Sarnoski), *A Real Pain* (Jesse Eisenberg), *Red Rooms* (Pascal Plante), *The Room Next Door* (Pedro Almodóvar), *Sing Sing* (Greg Kwedar), *Tuesday* (Daina Oniunas-Pusić), *Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl* (Merlin Crossingham, Nick Park), *The Wild Robot* (Chris Sanders), *Young Woman and the Sea* (Joachim Rønning)

Top 5 documentaries of 2024

1. *Will & Harper* (Josh Greenbaum)

I'm not sure this is actually the best documentary of 2024, but without question, it is the one that meant the most to me personally. This tale of friendship and understanding is one everyone, everywhere needs to see and hopefully learn something from.

2. *Made in England: The Films of Powell and Pressburger* (David Hinton)

I could listen to Martin Scorsese wax poetic on filmmaking titans Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger for days on end. Until that happens, I'm more than happy to watch (and rewatch) this documentary instead.

3. *Music by John Williams* (Laurent Bouzereau)

This feature had me in the palm of its hand from the very first musical queue. From *Jaws* to *Sugarland Express*, *Superman* to *Star Wars*, *Fiddler on the Roof* to the Boston Pops, it's all here. Every note. Every motif. And it's glorious.

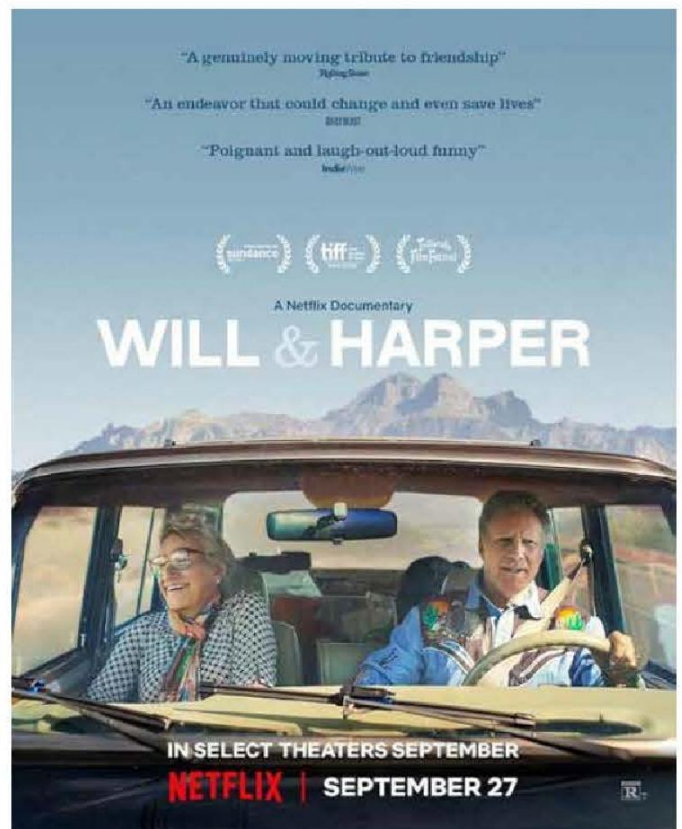
4. *Sugarcane* (Emily Kassie, Julian Brave NoiseCat)

Not for the faint of heart, this searing exploration of an Indian residential school's systemic abuse of children and how that affects the nearby community is a journalistic triumph of the first degree. Unforgettable.

5. *Rainier: A Beer Odyssey* (Isaac Olsen)

I acknowledge that my adoration for this jubilant documentary is partially fueled by childhood nostalgia for all of those crazy Rainier Beer commercials of the 1980s. But there's more to director Isaac Olsen's sublime time capsule than meets the eye, and that helps make the picture one of 2024's most energetically vibrant joys.

An honorable mention goes to Elisa Levine and the late Gabriel Miller's engrossing Seattle-set documentary *Sweetheart Deal*, which debuted at the 2022 Seattle International Film Festival and picked up the inaugural Best PNW Film award from the Seattle Film Critics Society that same year. This outstanding picture finally went into general domestic release in September, picking up additional critical raves in the process. Make no mistake, this is one of the best documentaries I've ever seen.





Charlie's Queer Books owner recommends literature to take your mind off the election

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

COURTESY CHARLIE'S QUEER BOOKS

In the days following the reelection of Donald Trump, bookstore owner Charlie Hunts noticed more foot traffic from fearful and forlorn people, all looking for the same thing: hope.

"I wasn't sure what to expect when I opened the door," Hunts told the *SGN*, reflecting on the morning after the election. "Many folks called to see if we were open. We had a lot who just wanted to walk in, who just wanted to be in the space, whether or not they were interested in books."

The colorful business serves as a hub where Queer and Trans people know they will be safe, respected, and understood. Charlie's hosts events almost every night, like a free writing group earlier last month.

"It was highly attended," Hunts said. "[People] are doing a lot of rage writing and just wanted to be in a community with each other. I think the people who wandered in wanted to be surrounded by reminders ... that places like this still exist. We're not going anywhere. We care about them."

Books for angry readers and young ones

Many came to Charlie's with intense rage or a desire for escapism in the weeks following the election. Some wanted to talk,

others were happy reflecting through silent writing, but many hoped to find comfort through reading.

"For [those] who are upset or feeling called to action or looking for hope, I tend to recommend many history books," Hunts said. "I feel like zooming out and seeing the longer arc of justice tends to help, especially looking at how other marginalized groups have handled challenges to their rights and freedoms in the past, especially by systems like the government."

Hunts recommends *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde, *Mutual Aid* by Dean Spade, and *How to Live Free in a Dangerous World* by Shayla Lawson, nonfiction books that examine how Queer and Trans people have thrived through repression, overcome hatred, and leaned on community in times of strife.

For youth who aren't of voting age but who are fearful that the Trump administration may target their rights, Hunts suggests *Small Town Pride* by Phil Stamper, a hopeful read for middle schoolers who may feel trapped by the conservative politics of rural America; and *Stay Angry Little Girl*, a children's book illustrated by local artist Michelle Chan.

Books for readers who need an escape

For Hunts, reading is healing because it reminds him that the world is never as small or narrow as our anxieties. "It's about getting perspective," he said. "If I'm left to my own devices, I can get tunnel vision very quickly, and that's not helpful for anyone, especially me. Reading helps show other experiences; it helps us see the bigger picture — whether that's at different points of history or even with historical fiction. Books can be good for that, even if you're looking to escape." (His guilty pleasures are cozy reads: fantasy worlds, low-stakes mysteries, and love stories.)

For those looking to escape American politics, he recommends *Mooncakes*, a graphic novel with a Nonbinary main character. "It's a sweet and joyful love story with demons, witchcraft, and a Nonbinary werewolf and a Queer witch," he said with a smile.

Seven Ten Split is a cheesy Sapphic romance starring a former professional bowler and her long-lost love. "It's friends to enemies to lovers. It's cozy. It's perfect for the soul," Hunts said.

He also suggests *Kiss Her Once for Me*, a Lesbian Christmas romance set in the PNW, to get into the holiday spirit. "That's

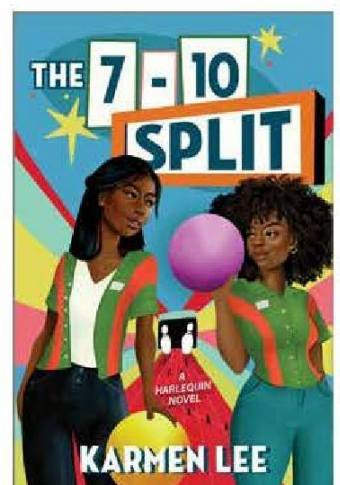
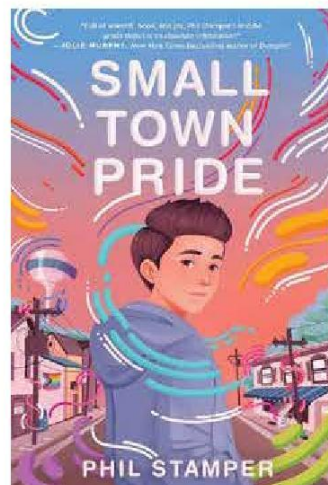
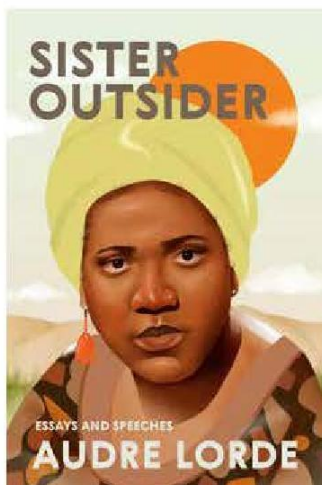
my favorite cheesy 'Hallmark' book," Hunts said. "It's got hijinks, and it's a little spicy."

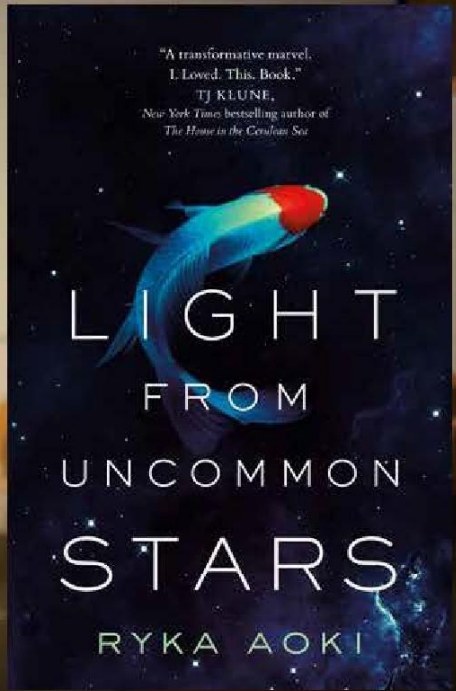
Upcoming events at Charlie's

While the election has emboldened some to become more vocally hateful — like the handful of patrons who came into Charlie's to ask for explicitly transphobic books — the store remains a safe space for those wanting to get out of their head and enjoy the comfort of Queer community. The store will host "Pictures with Santa and Mrs. Claus" on Saturday, December 7; a mushroom ornament felting workshop on Sunday, December 8; and a spooky book signing with horror author Courtney Gould on Friday the 13th.

Charlie's will also host pop-up legal workshops with QLAW for anyone with questions or anxieties about legal paperwork, especially regarding the political climate. These sessions are free and will run every Monday through January.

Charlie's Queer Books is at 465 N. 36th St. in Seattle and <https://charliesqueer-books.com>.





Delving into the world of Ryka Aoki and *Light from Uncommon Stars*

BY MADISON JONES

COURTESY RYKA AOKI

In 2021, Ryka Aoki released her novel *Light from Uncommon Stars* to much acclaim. It follows the story of Katrina Nguyen, a runaway Transgender girl with a passion for playing anime and gaming music with her violin, Aubergine. The legendary teacher and “queen of hell” Shazuka Satomi encounters her unhoused, playing in the park, and then takes her on as a protégé.

The story also sees Lan Tran and her alien family turned spaceship crew flee to Earth from the throes of their dying galactic empire, which is experiencing “the end plague.” The crew decides to go undercover in an unassuming “Stargate Donuts” shop in LA while creating an actual stargate in secret.

Three years after its publication, Aoki’s novel has won three awards, including the 2022 Barbara Gittings Literature Award. The SGN decided to check in with Aoki to discuss her inspirations and see how she has been doing since the book’s debut.

Madison Jones: What were your primary inspirations for the settings of this novel? Is it true you based the idea for Stargate Donuts on the story of Ted Ngoy the “Donut King”?

Ryka Aoki: Yes and no. The primary inspirations for this novel were the people I grew up with while in school in the San Gabriel Valley. I would look at science fiction books and television then, and not see too many people who looked like me and my friends. So I wrote this novel to give my neighborhood a chance to visit the stars too.

The idea for Stargate Donuts came from my lived experience of going to donut shops, where a bunch of Asians would be in the back working super hard. We have some of the best donuts in the country because of this. That is home to me. Later on is when I found out about the Donut King Ted Ngoy.

Fascinating how one person can have that level of impact on the community.

MJ: If you had to diagnose the current hostile political climate against immigrants and Transgender people, would you say that we are now in the middle of experiencing “the end plague”?

RA: That is a tough question. No, I do not think we are in “the end plague.” We have been through this before, and we will go through this again, because that is the nature of the way humans operate. There are times when it’s really tough to be Trans, to be an immigrant, to be the “other.” And there are times when people want to act on their suspicions against us, when we will be mistrusted, when life will become very difficult.

Is it the end of all things? No, of course not. We as humans are better than that. We are more resilient than this. And I would not be writing if I gave up on humanity and said this was the end. I would not even be doing this interview.

Don’t lose hope, but understand there may be people around you who are on the verge of losing theirs. It is important to do what we can and reach out. Reassure them it is okay to be an uncommon star, and let that person know they do not have to go at this alone.

MJ: What things in life have been bringing you joy as of late?

RA: Chatting with younger readers. I get messages and mail from young Queer and Trans writers who want to know how to write stories like mine, or tell me that my book meant something special to them and inspires them.

I tell them that we, as writers, should be helping and supporting each other by cheering one another on. Nobody can write

your book, so write the book that I cannot, write the stories that see farther than I can see. If your work is making somebody else’s life a little bit easier, as hard as life is, then it does not get any better than that.

MJ: Do you have encouraging words of advice for the Transgender people out there, like Katrina Nguyen, who are currently struggling to find a sense of com-

munity and their voices?

RA: My advice is to trust your instincts to survive, and do what is necessary. Make communities where you have to, leave communities where you have to. Preserve yourself and hang in there, because with more Trans folks in the world, the world becomes a better place. I believe in you!

STDs are Timeless



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