

# WINDY CITY TIMES



VOL 38, NO. 1  
DEC. 8, 2022

# RESILIENCE

Special weekend notes losses—and strengths—in trans community

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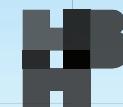
# WINDY CITY TIMES

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As we approach a new year, we are grateful for the communities keeping us rooted in LGBTQ+ liberation and we look forward to all that we will accomplish together in 2023.

**Jeff Berry.**  
Photo by John Gress



## Chicago activist

# Jeff Berry

## discusses advocacy for aging persons living with HIV

BY MATT SIMONETTE

For longtime Chicago activist Jeff Berry, becoming the first executive director of the Reunion Project—a national alliance centering aging persons living with HIV, which Berry co-founded in 2015—was a significant but logical professional leap.

Berry, who started in the new post in Sept. 2022, had been editor-in-chief at the publication Positively Aware since 2005 (he was named interim editor-in-chief the previous year as well). Positively Aware focuses on HIV/AIDS treatments and related information.

Berry co-founded the Reunion Project with San Francisco-based HIV advocate Matt Sharp, who was active for a number of years in Chicago. According to its website, the Reunion Project collaborates “with local and national HIV advocates, providers and researchers. Together, we convene and connect individuals and communities, sharing our experiences of survival and loss while honoring our past, and developing successful strategies for living and supporting one another—today and into the future.”

Sharp and Berry first collaborated on the organization “at a time when people were starting to talk about long term survival and what that means,” Berry said. “For those of us who survived the early days of the epidemic, we felt left behind by the very organizations that we had helped to create. The Reunion Project sprang out of this need for us to share our stories on survival and talk about resilience, and connecting to get our-

selves out of isolation.”

The issues facing long-term HIV survivors have long been expected by advocates.

“We were seeing long-term side effects from [HIV] medications,” Berry said. “But we also are starting to see people with a greater number of co-morbidities than our [HIV-] negative counterparts. We’re also seeing mental health issues—is-issues around isolation, issues around PTSD from all the trauma we experienced during the epidemic.

“We were losing our friends, family and community. Folks weren’t there to pass the torch to us. We had to build these systems and organizations. Yet when we needed services around HIV and aging, they didn’t exist.”

The Reunion Project is now there to fill in the gaps as providers contend with what Berry called a “silver tsunami” of aging persons living with HIV.

He explained, “As our entire population is aging, I don’t think our country—our society as a whole—is prepared for the baby boomers who are aging, let alone people with HIV who are aging. I think that there is an opportunity for community there.

“It’s up to us to step up and help to build those systems that are going to be there to provide quality care and culturally appropriate care that’s going to help us age with grace and dignity into our golden years.”

Back in 1989, shortly after being diagnosed

with HIV, Berry too was seeking services to help him live a healthful and productive life with the condition. He sought those services from the HIV/AIDS service provider TPAN, and also made personal and professional connections that would change his life.

He recalled, “I was at TPAN for almost 30 years. ... I went there seeking services originally, and what I found was a community of people like me who were also struggling. That was how we exchanged information back then—through support groups, meetings. This was before the age of the internet.

“I kept getting this magazine [Positively Aware, which is published by TPAN] in the mail, ... I had retired from my job DJ-ing at [gay nightclub] Bistro Too, and was kind of just in this space where I was ready for what was next.”

Berry responded to an ad in the magazine seeking volunteers. That eventually led to a full-time position in Nov. 1992.

“I was always working on the magazine in one capacity or another,” he explained. “I started out just answering phones. ... Then I started doing distribution, and working in a number of different capacities, including maintaining the website and working on advertising.”

After years of working for Positively Aware though, Berry was ready for a change: “I realized that I had done all that I had set out to do with the magazine all that I had set out to do. I real-

ized that it was the perfect opportunity to kind of pass the torch and move on to something that I was passionate about.”

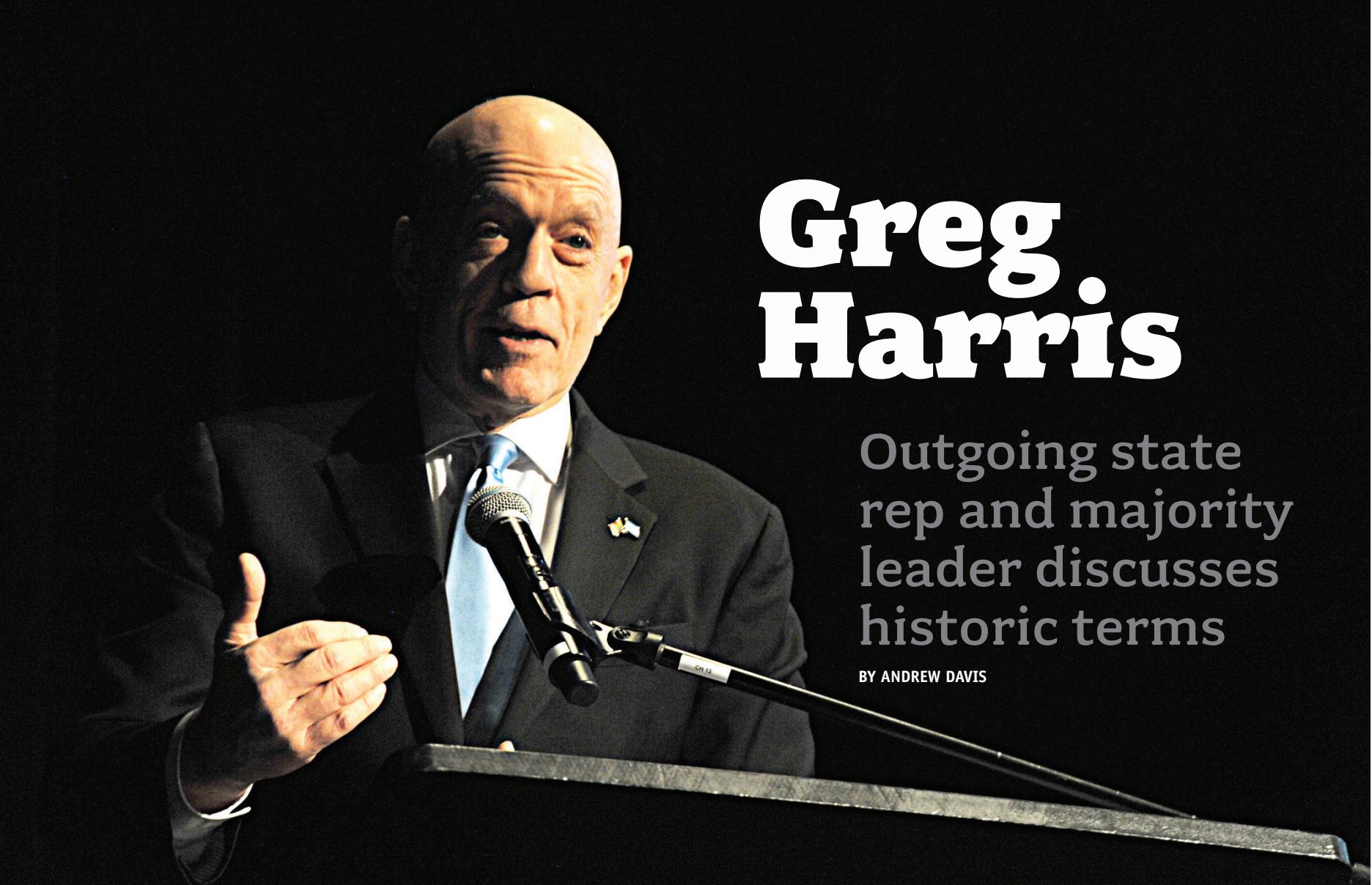
Berry and the Reunion Project are now hiring a full-time senior program coordinator, and planning a series of nationwide town hall meetings that assist in developing, alongside existing local community organizations, programs for long-term survivors of HIV/AIDS. Reunion Project also programs events providing resources for persons with HIV returning to work after a long time outside the work force.

“What we don’t want to ever do is go into a community or city and say, ‘Here we’ve got this program for you. Isn’t it great and wonderful?’ Then we leave two days later,” Berry said. “Rather we work with a community for a program that they want and they need, so that we can spark a network of long-term survivors in that community. That’s how we build our alliances.”

He added, “We’re very proud of what we’ve done so far and what’s coming in the years ahead.”



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# Greg Harris

Outgoing state rep and majority leader discusses historic terms

BY ANDREW DAVIS

**Illinois state Rep. Greg Harris.**  
Photo by Vern Hester

In November 2021, Illinois House Democratic Majority Leader Greg Harris announced that he would not run for another term—bringing an end to a historic era.

Harris was first elected in 2006, succeeding former Rep. Larry McKeon, who was part of the LGBTQ+ community and HIV-positive. However, Harris became the first openly gay individual with HIV/AIDS to be elected and eventually lead his/her/their party in the Illinois General Assembly. He also became known for, among many other things, his fights for civil unions and marriage equality before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. Constitution guarantees same-sex marriage.

Harris recently talked with Windy City Times about his accomplishments and the future, among other topics.

**Windy City Times: I'm going to start with the most basic question: Why now?**

Greg Harris: Every two years, we have to decide if we're going to pass petitions and get our names on the ballot so it's always a question: Do I want

to keep going?

So it's been 16 years. A lot of the things I came in to do [were things] I got done: marriage equality, fighting for trans rights. I've been through four governors, one of whom we impeached and one who we bitterly fought to preserve union rights and to avoid gutting human services. That was a huge fight and marriage equality was a huge fight. We had the Great Recession and COVID. It's been a lot and I've done a lot—but at some point, you've got to say, "I've done the things I want to do and it's time to move on and make way for people who want to do new and different things."

There are a lot of younger folks who are chomping at the bit to get into politics and to begin making policies for their generation—but if those of us who are there don't get out of the way, it makes it harder for them to do that. That was on my mind during the change of speakers. [Editor's note: The new speaker is Emanuel "Chris" Welch.] In my mind, it had to be a person from a different generation and it was important to support our first Black speaker. All of those

things were on my mind.

**WCT: Was being chief of staff to Ald. [Mary Ann] Smith [for the 14 years before being in the General Assembly] the catalyst that stoked your political fire?**

GH: Actually, not really. It certainly gave me the basis for getting involved. I didn't go to that job thinking I was getting ready for a bigger job.

I went to that job because of AIDS hitting Chicago. I moved to Chicago in 1977 and, up to that job, my involvement with the gay community was bars and clubs—that kind of thing. There weren't that many LGBT organizations at that time, anyway, but I didn't seek them out then. AIDS came to Chicago and all my friends were getting sick and dying. That's when we all decided that we had to get into the fight and respond. That's when I got involved in community stuff. I had a good background: I was in management and I understood marketing and fundraising—skills that were easily transferable to this new thing. Then I learned about advocacy and political/community organizing as part of the AIDS movement.

But nowhere along the line did I think that I'd go be a state rep or elected official. As time went on, though, I looked at things that still needed to be done for the LGBT community—and a lot of them were things that came out of Springfield and state government: healthcare policy, equal rights, legal policy, family and domestic laws. So when the opportunity came along—when my predecessor, Larry McKeon, decided not to run again—I thought, "Here's a chance. I'm going to throw my name into the mix." I think there were about 11 candidates then.

**WCT: You never faced an opponent in a general election. That got rid of some worries.**

GH: But you've got to work every year to be sure—especially in a diverse district like this one, with 91 languages spoken on a daily basis—that you're on top of things. You have to be helpful year-round. Some politicians coast during the year and then [rev things up] during the campaign season.

**WCT: Take me back to the Greg Harris of 2006, when you were first in the General Assembly. Were you idealistic and hopeful?**

GH: Yes; I was idealistic and hopeful—but, having had some government experience, I knew you had to have long-game strategies for some of these ideas that involved taking people along with you. I had seen coalitions get built so I saw how that worked. I also saw opponents can work behind the scenes to kill your ideas. Also, I had relationships with a lot of people and interpersonal relationships make a lot of these things work.

But, yes, I had a lot of hopes. I remember being introduced as the guy who was going to pass marriage equality. It turned out that a lot of people I was introduced to laughed and said, "That's not going to happen anytime soon." It happened seven years later—but now it looks kind of quaint. People look back now and ask, "Was that a struggle? Was that a fight?"

**WCT: It's interesting how time can change perspective.**

GH: Yes, but the general public's perception of marriage equality has changed so much. Even when we were doing that, a lot of the national pollsters marveled at the fact that, in the decade they had polled about marriage equality, it was [approximately] 70% when DOMA [the Defense of Marriage Act] was introduced. When we passed marriage equality in 2013, the numbers were about 64% to 70% in favor. At the time we started on the trek to civil unions, the polling data showed that wanting equal rights was the most persuasive argument at the time. But just a couple years later—as people got to know more LGBT people—the most persuasive argument became that families just want to have their relationships, experience love and have a better world.

**WCT: How concerned are you about marriage equality being lost in the wake of Roe v. Wade being overturned? [Editor's note: This question was asked before the developments regarding the Respect for Marriage Act that Congress is considering.]**



Illinois state Rep. Greg Harris and then-Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan at the Chicago Pride Parade in 2015.

Photo by Ed Negron



Illinois state Rep. Greg Harris and then-Illinois Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon at Chicago nightspot Sidetrack celebrating the passage of the state's marriage-equality bill.  
WCT photo



Photo by Matt Simonette

GH: Oh, I think it's a real concern. Illinois was the last state that was able to pass marriage equality; national strategists didn't see another real opportunity. We were also the last state to pass it before the Supreme Court decided. At that time, the president was an Illinois native so, also, what did that say about the White House?

It's one of these things where MAGA nationalist Republicans... No one ever thought the arc of the moral universe would turn and bend the other way, but these people are intent on taking us back to a different time where, if you're not like them, you don't deserve a place in society. People have been warning us about Roe for many years.

Now Illinois has its local laws so if the Supreme Court says, "The states should figure this out," then we're protected. But what happens if you go on vacation in Florida? I talked with [a couple] who are traumatized; they're asking, "What are we going to do about documents and stuff like that if we go to a state where our family's not recognized?"

Also, there's the question of how businesses handle this issue. If the Supreme Court dissolves marriage equality on a national basis, then what do you do if you're in Indiana? I'm not sure some people get how suddenly this could all disappear.

**WCT: What do you wish you had accomplished during your years in the Illinois House?**

GH: [Pauses] There are a lot of things that I wish we could do more of, but that's building on previous successes. I'm having a hard time thinking of things I wish I had gotten done. There are some healthcare reforms that I wish were passed, especially for low-income people.

**WCT: What's your advice for your successor [Hoan Huynh, who became the first Vietnamese American in the General Assembly when he was elected Nov. 8]?**

GH: I've been giving him plenty. We've been talking about basics. The first six months to a year, I'd listen to people debate topics and I'd go, "I don't even know what this is." [Laughs] I think he's doing the right thing—building relationships and seeking experts in the fields he's interested in, like healthcare, housing and immigration. Also, I've told him to make sure that your word is your bond; that goes a long way—don't BS people. The other thing that I said to him—that took me a while to learn—is that you can have all the policy positions in the world but you have to have the political power and understand the process to get things done. The rules in the chamber can help bring you success or used to torpedo you in no time flat.

**WCT: What's in Greg Harris' future?**

GH: I have no idea. We have a veto session ahead.

**WCT: Do you see yourself running for political office again down the line?**

GH: Well, that's a long time to look forward.

**WCT: So anything can happen?**

GH: [Harris nods.]

**Arthur Johnston and Pepe Pena in a scene from the documentary *Art and Pep*.**  
Courtesy of Daisy May Films



# 'Art and Pep'

## documents the accomplishments by and love between Chicago activists

BY MATT SIMONETTE

While giving a speech at a party early in the new documentary *Art and Pep*, activist and Sidetrack co-owner Arthur Johnston says, "The only ones we gay people can rely on is each other."

*Art and Pep* depicts how Johnston and longtime partner/co-owner Pepe Pena reached that conclusion, one that is born more out of commitment to community than resentment at the world outside the LGBTQ+ community. The film traces several narrative threads: Johnston and Pena's childhoods; the beginnings of their nearly five-decade relationship; their opening of Sidetrack on North Halsted Street; and their activism around HIV/AIDS and anti-gay discrimination in the '80s and '90s.

The film debuted in October as part of the Chicago International Film Festival.

One other threat unexpectedly reared itself as the film was in production: the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Johnston and Pena had to close Sidetrack for a month. Johnston also became gravely ill from the virus.

Filmmaker Mercedes Kane, a longtime Chicagoan who now lives in Atlanta, said she was inspired to make the film after marketing executive Kevin Hauswirth, who would eventually be an executive producer on *Art and Pep*, told her about the couple.

"My first thought was, 'This needs to be a documentary,'" Kane recalled.

The film shows how Johnston, a former schoolteacher, met Pena when the latter was bartending and, ironically, dating another man named Arthur. In 1982, inspired by a San Francisco video bar called the Midnight Sun, they opened Sidetrack as Chicago's first video bar.

Kane documents hard challenges for the couple: vandalism against the bar, an arrest of Johnston, and an AIDS crisis that robbed Johnston and Pena of so many friends. But she also shows the triumphs in which the couple take part, among them the mobilization of the gay and lesbian community to both care for and fight for the rights of people living with AIDS, and Johnston's

helping form the "Gang of Four" alongside activists Rick Garcia, Laurie Dittman and Jon-Henri Damski. That group eventually morphed into the Equality Illinois advocacy organization.

Convincing the couple to take part in Kane's project took some time—both Johnston and Pena, despite often being in the public eye, value their privacy. "They were definitely reluctant subjects," Kane said. But when I met with them, I was definitely able to see their love for each other. ... I sort of fell in love with their love in that moment."

Kane doesn't remember a depiction of such long-lasting love between two men on any screen, she said. "There are a lot of reasons for that. One is the AIDS crisis, which prevented many of those relationships. The other is that there has not been a lot of attention given to it."

The film was shot over two years. Kane said that COVID—so difficult a hurdle for both the filmmaker and her subjects—ironically allowed

all involved to build an extra level of trust.

"We sort of fast-tracked that trust," Kane said.

She was present while Johnston and Pena, like all bar and restaurant owners in the city, were faced with orders to close their businesses during the pandemic.

"Sidetrack is a really big small business," Kane said. "They have 65 employees and customers who come in weekly, and some who come in daily. It was a fracturing of that community and a hardship for many people."

It took time for Pena to grow comfortable around Kane's camera, she said. While Johnston was used to being interviewed by the media, he also needed time to get used to Kane being present in their private moments.

"There was that scene where they were in bed together," Kane recalled. "They did not want to let us get that shot. They just said, 'You don't need that.' I said, 'Listen: If this were a love story between a man and a woman, these sort of intimate shots would be in the film and no one



Images utilized by filmmaker Mercedes Kane in the documentary Art and Pep, including one (below) of Arthur Johnston and Pepe Pena in the the '80s.

Courtesy of Daisy May Films

would think anything of it. If we don't include any of that, it's going to look like a purposeful decision to not include that. That's part of your love story."

After seeing the film, Johnston told Kane, "The best thing we ever did was let you into bed with us."

Art and Pep also addresses inequities disproportionately felt by transgender people of color. Kane spoke with, among numerous activists and public figures, E3 Radio's Anna DeShawn, who the audience also sees interviewing Johnston and Pena. Johnston says at one point, "There was a time when all gay people were treated the same way Black trans people are treated today."

"That year [2020] had just so much unrest happen, and Art and Pep had been a part of that unrest for so many years," Kane said. "The community still has big fights, now more than ever. This film became even more significant politically because of everything going on right now."

She added that the film had to show that

struggles against inequities were not finished, and that "there was a new generation of people who have taken the torch from Art and Pep's generation and have taken it forward in all these unique ways."

Kane said that, above all else, she "loves telling real people's stories. I say on my website that they are 'everyday exceptions'—people in the community you pass by and not realize that they are doing the work to change the world around them."

She recently finished a film about historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), although she is not yet sure about its distribution.

"Living in Atlanta, there are so many HBCUs, and I was able to work with a really diverse crew there, and I learned so much. That's another thing I love about writing stories and making films—you learn so much about history, people and their motivations."

See <https://www.daisymayfilms.com/art-and-pep>.

Stephenson's map illustrating findings from their project, LGBTQ+ Spaces Chicago.



## Chicago scholar focuses their work on LGBTQ+ seniors

BY CARRIE MAXWELL



When we think about how LGBTQ+ age, helping people feel connected and "seen" is just one of the many ways a community can care for LGBTQ+ elders. It can contribute to their mental health as they navigate the other challenges of aging. Frencia Stephenson is helping compile their histories.

When Stephenson, a self-described nerd for LGBTQ+ history, was faced with their masters thesis at School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), they focused their research on Queer People of Color (QPOC) and transgender seniors' experiences in Chicago LGBTQ+ spaces from the '70s-'90s.

Stephenson's interest stemmed from exploring the community-additive Queering the Map online platform when they were not in class at SAIC; that's when Stephenson first learned about the now-defunct Belmont Rocks.

"Belmont Rocks was an extremely significant example of LGBTQ+ people claiming public space for decades, only for it to be demolished," said Stephenson. "I [yearned] to know more about LGBTQ+ spaces in Chicago. The previous semester, I had joined the LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project, an organization that brings LGBTQ+ college students and elders together in conversation and community. Through that experience, I formed friendships with those elders."

Their thesis project took shape in a course titled Art as a Social Force, where Stephenson interviewed five LGBTQ+ elders—four queer people of color and one transgender elder—about their

history with LGBTQ+ spaces in Chicago.

"I originally wanted to know which spaces were the most meaningful to them," Stephenson recalled. "From the interviews, I created short audio clips about two spaces each elder identified as being meaningful. These were plotted on a Google map I named LGBTQ+ Spaces Chicago, alongside archival research of queer spaces of color and transgender spaces from the '70s-'90s that was compiled at the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives."

The LGBTQ+ Spaces Chicago map is a work in progress, according to Stephenson. They are hoping to embed the audio clips within the map to make it more interactive but need to hire a designer to make it happen.

The map is at [tinyurl.com/2t2hc9ah](http://tinyurl.com/2t2hc9ah).

Stephenson found three of these interview subjects through the LGBTQ+ Intergenerational Dialogue Project. Two were already friends with Stephenson. They quickly became friends with the third person. The fourth person came to Stephenson through one of the dialogue members. Stephenson found the fifth person because they were interested in talking to him after seeing him in the Out and Proud in Chicago documentary. Stephenson is also reaching out for their next cohort of interviewees.

"I also interviewed Owen Keehnen, a prominent LGBTQ+ historian, especially about the Belmont Rocks," they added.

Stephenson called the interviewing process "incredible. I love it and get a lot of energy and

## For more information on LGBTQ+ elders resources

[centeronhalsted.org/senior.html](http://centeronhalsted.org/senior.html)

[sageusa.org](http://sageusa.org)

[aarp.org/home-family/voices/lgbt-pride](http://aarp.org/home-family/voices/lgbt-pride)

[lgbtmap.org/policy-and-issue-analysis/lgbtq-older-adults](http://lgbtmap.org/policy-and-issue-analysis/lgbtq-older-adults)

[lgbtelderinitiative.org](http://lgbtelderinitiative.org)



**Frenicia Stephenson.**  
Photo by Megan Stephenson

"Most of the people I talked to said they have experienced ageism within the LGBTQ+ community where they now feel invisible in certain spaces when that was not the case when they were younger," said Stephenson. "This has made them feel isolated, and that was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic lock-downs."

For their next cohort, Stephenson will talk to three new elders and also do a deeper dive with three of the previous interviewees. Additionally, they will speak with Windy City Times Co-Founder/Owner and Chicago Reader Publisher Tracy Baim and transgender historian Andre Perez.

The results will be made available in the Spring but Stephenson hopes to continue with the project after they graduate because they still want to talk to many more QPOC and trans elders and learn about additional LGBTQ+ Chicago spaces.

"I hope people can see how LGBTQ+ people live(d) and occupy spaces all over Chicago," said Stephenson. "I hope the audio stories I create help audiences visualize the space and picture it in space, regardless of whether it still exists or not. I also want to emphasize that QPOC and transgender people's, as well as elders', stories are so very important, especially when white cis voices are prioritized. With the rampant attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, especially the rights of trans people, I hope my project can make a statement that we have existed and will continue to exist, and that our lives and experiences are important."

Stephenson said that if QPOC elders over the age of 55-60 and trans elders over the age of 40 who still live or have lived in Chicago or the surrounding suburbs would like to be interviewed for this project, they should email them at [ssteph5@artic.edu](mailto:ssteph5@artic.edu).

They are also looking to pay a web designer to make the necessary changes to their LGBTQ+ Spaces Chicago map and have asked that prospective hires email them as well.

See [LGBTQ+ Spaces Chicago](#) and [generationliberation.com](#).



**Caring  
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# Michael Horvich

## A caregiver remembers his talented husband

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Michael Horvich has had many roles in his lifetime, among them teacher, photographer and author.

However, one of his most important was being caregiver to Gregory Maire—Horvich's husband of 41 years, who died in 2015.

Maire was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in the 29th year of their relationship (2003); he was 55 years old.

"For the longest time I didn't want to be called a caregiver," Horvich said. "That would reduce Greg to being my patient and that was never the case. Our relationship was always built on respect and communication for more than 41 years."

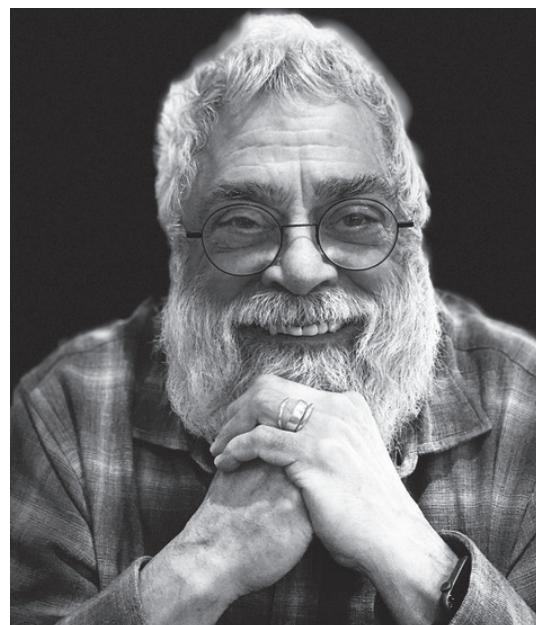
"However, as things progressed, it did turn into caregiving—and it turned into a lot of nursing care. Helping him with a lot of things he couldn't

negotiate his way through their Evanston building became difficult for Maire, underscoring how every aspect of the couple's lives changed because of the disease.

In addition, Horvich recalled that it was difficult to gauge what Maire would remember: "I would ask, 'Greg, did you take your meds?' and he'd say, 'Yeah, I did'—but when I double-checked, he hadn't."

Furthermore, there were other aspects to contend with, Horvich said: "Another thing that complicated things with the coming and going of cognitive ability is that you never really knew what he knew or didn't know."

"And [I had] to do that in a way that allowed me to deal with my own emotions, but not put those emotions on him. For example, I learned



**Michael Horvich.**  
Courtesy of Horvich

to become childlike. I remember that he got lost in a Whole Foods and there was such a frightened look on his face."

As for family and friends, Horvich said, "They were supportive. People are always good-natured and asked, 'What can I do to help?' It's hard for a caregiver to decide or ask, so it's always nicer if the person says, 'I'm bringing dinner over.' In other words, it helps to be proactive."

When asked what he'd like people to remember about Maire, Horvich listed several of his late husband's talents. "He was a high-end architect/interior designer. He had a great knack for listening to his clients and creating [the right] scenarios for them. He was also talented with historic renovations.

"He sang; he was with the Chicago Gay Men's Chorus. We had a beautiful grand piano and he'd play gorgeous classical music; he really loved Chopin, but he did Mozart and Beethoven. For me, the concept of home was sitting and listen-

ing to him practice. When he couldn't play the piano anymore, he decided to sell it. Also, he was president of DIFFA [Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS]."

Regarding Maire, "People say, 'I'm so sorry' and I just say, 'He was ready to go,'" Horvich said. "And while I miss him terribly, I'm happy that he decided it was time. It would've been selfish of me to want him to hold on just to make me feel better."

"When you love someone, you do what you have to. A lot of people said, 'Michael, the fact that you stuck it out... I can't imagine NOT [doing that]. If you really love someone, you don't desert them at a time like that."

Horvich's website, <https://horvich.com/>, contains vast amounts of information about various aspects of Alzheimer's. In addition, *Alzheimer's: A Love Story*—a 15-minute documentary about a week in Maire's last year—is at <https://tinyurl.com/yc75e39u>.

**Michael Horvich (right) with late husband Gregory Maire.**  
Courtesy of Horvich



do for himself anymore—but in a respectful way. So I was more of a caregiving partner—or there was the caregiving team, which were me, Greg, the cats, the doctors and the specialists.

"For instance, in the beginning, when we went to a restaurant, he decided what he wanted to eat. Then, I'd make some suggestions; then, I'd pick what he wanted. Eventually, toward the end, there was this period where he lost trust in me." Horvich also talked about how everything from cooking to reading ("At one point, I brought in this brand-new technology [for Maire] called a newspaper, where you turn the pages") to nav-

how to cry in our bed without shaking it [because] that would wake him. If I had a lot of crying to do, I'd take a shower."

At one point, Maire was transferred to Skokie's Lieberman Center for Health & Rehabilitation. "If I hadn't, I would've had to turn the condo into a 24/7 medical unit," said Horvich.

"Living with Alzheimer's doesn't have to be a death sentence, although it wasn't easy," Horvich emphasized. "You can live fairly well with it, although it's certainly a degenerative type of situation. You can't make assumptions and treat him a child; he wasn't, although his abilities started



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This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

(bik-TAR-vee)

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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
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**Scan to see Dimitri's story.**

# Activist Donald Bell

## reflects on aging and intersectional identities

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Longtime Chicago activist Donald Bell, a resident of the Town Hall apartments in Lake View who has been especially active in LGBTQ+ senior-related issues is keenly aware of the significance of intersecting identities.

Bell explained, "From my lens, as an LGBT elder, having lived 73 years now—which have included the arcs of both LGBT history and civil rights history—I am of course keenly aware of the dangers which those of us in Black bodies and those of us in LGBT bodies walk around [facing] every day."

Bell, a retired higher education administrator, has given much of his time and energy in service to the socio-economic needs of his brethren in the senior-LGBTQ+ community.

Many communities, especially Black and LGBTQ+ ones, he notes, are characterized by the need for spaces where members both feel that they are safe and that they belong. Very frequently, communities will see those spaces come under attack. Those moments, he said are when members of different generations need to step up for one another.

"Club Q is not unique," Bell said, reflecting on the Colorado Springs nightclub that was in November the site of multiple shooting-deaths and injuries. "If young LGBT people are growing up without a sense of geographical awareness of where safe spaces are, then those of us who are older are failing in our responsibility to inform the youth—because those situations still exist."

"Just like mass shootings in communities of color are regular, normalized things, so are these kinds of things in LGBT communities. ... No matter where it happens in the world, we all experience it."

He recalled first becoming aware of racial injustice when he was six years old, when Emmet Till's body was returned to Chicago after Till had been lynched in Mississippi.

"I was very aware of the impact that it had on the whole community," Bell said. "Everyone was

disturbed ... That was the first time that I had seen grown-ups cry in public. Since grown-ups are the stabilizing influence in a child's experience—they were distressed so I was distressed. The whole thing left me, at the age of six, with the notion of the danger that I existed because I was born into a Black body."

Bell grew up in age when gay people were effectively erased within their communities. The only references to gay folks that he remembered were to "strange old men who were effeminate and went—someplace. They weren't out in public. Of course there was the misrepresentation linking homosexuality with pedophilia. There was danger around that."

But Bell made a profound realization as he became aware that he was gay: "The danger came not from our community, but from outside our community. It was perfectly alright to say, 'Kill that queer.' It was not only legally, but culturally reinforced. Killing a gay man could legally get a straight man off in court—that was a legal excuse."

Even as society's understanding of injustices and inequities evolve, those injustices and inequities nevertheless persist. Club Q, Bell said, was not the only injustice visited upon the LGBTQ+ community in November. In Qatar, LGBTQ+ athletes in and visitors to the World Cup were warned against activities calling attention to themselves. The injustices were not equivalent in immediate impact, he emphasized, but did originate from the same systems of oppression.

His stress on the challenge posed for older LGBTQ+ community members loudly supporting younger generations is not meant to criticize those older generations: "When I said 'failure' of our older community before, I meant rise to the level of our potential for passing on legacy to younger people. Part of that legacy is the reality of what it's like to be LGBT, particularly outside of identified LGBT spaces. ... Outside of those spaces, the coming-out experience is almost the



Donald Bell.  
Photo courtesy of Bell

same as it was before for coming out. If you're coming out on the South side or the West side, your experiences are not the same as it may be on the North Side.

"What is incumbent upon us who have lived this experience, is to make sure that younger people are aware that, while they may find safety here, and the Pride parade might be a great and glorious fun time, [those did not originate] from fun times. They came from issues of our very existence. We can't lose sight of that."

Senior LGBTQ+ community members, Bell noted, are also dealing with their own challenges, such as ageism and/or homophobia in group-setting living spaces.

The LGBTQ+ community is "a community of intent—we all come from different communities of origin," he explained, and still has much work to do to becoming sensitive to one another's needs: "I have a personal bias because I expect that anyone who is a part of any marginalized community to use their experience of marginalization to help them understand and connect with other people who have other kinds of marginalizations."

"I have different expectations from gay white men than I have of straight white men, for example. I expect gay white men to be more sensitive

to the issues of racism and sexism than white straight men because gay men have been marginalized."

LGBTQ+ communities are oftentimes no different from others in a continual valorization, if not outright fetishization, of youth. But Bell remarked on the importance of recognizing that his generation—the first especially out generation of LGBTQ+ community members—is "different and unique."

"We are the ones who have lived the arc of the moment," he added. "While the fight for the LGBT liberation goes back eons, just like everyone else's, it is critical that we have lived the experience from the civil rights era to Stonewall and the gay rights movement. When we are gone, there will be no else who is still alive who can share that experience and those perspectives."



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**Chi Waller.**  
Courtesy of Waller



# Queer rapper **Chi Waller**

## reflects on her journey, music and Chicago connections

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Many people have taken the past couple of years to take stock of themselves and take their lives in new directions (often called pivoting, of course).

Queer rapper Chi Waller has certainly done the same thing.

It was during her lowest moments in life that her creative juices began to flow like never before. However, this time she didn't recognize her voice as Aaliyah Nicole (her previous incarnation). Now, she's been "reborn" as Chi Waller, reflecting her deep Chicago ties even though she and her partner reside in Atlanta.

"I actually started this whole musical journey at 12 years old," said Waller, 30. "I grew up in the church so I've been around music all my life. I stood out to a particular member, Ricky Campbell, who was also an actor ... so I went for

it. Unfortunately, he passed away before seeing where I ended up. He set that foundation for me to start."

"From that point, I started producing my own shows and formed my first group. That's where I got that first taste [of performing]."

Waller's parents then saw how seriously she took music, propelling them to purchase software (Magix Music Maker) for her. "This particular thing changed the game for me," Waller said, adding that her mother eventually provided access to more sophisticated software and a studio. "They've always been big believers in me." From there, Waller posted music on MySpace.

Waller, at age 18, then produced her first anti-violence showcase on Chicago's West Side, where she grew up. "I was inspired to provide a platform for my peers who had nowhere to go," she said.

College (in Atlanta) was next—and it provided some intriguing opportunities. "I got the wonderful opportunity to open for R&B singer Raheem DeVaughn and to work two shows with [the late actor] Tommy Ford, who was on the show Martin. He gave me some amazing words."

Waller had been producing and making music as Aaliyah Nicole (not her birth name) since "I was 16 or 17. I was the only 'Aaliyah Nicole' you'd find, for a while—but that changed."

Needless to say, the COVID-19 pandemic hit many people very hard, including Waller. "That first year was rocky; things got really bad," she told Windy City Times. "I lost my job and we [Waller and her partner] ended up relocating to Atlanta by way of Texas. That year changed everything for me. We struggled with homelessness."

However, in the midst of this arduous trek, Waller never lost hope: "We kept [saying,] 'We got this.' And despite this dark time [2020-21], Waller said it was the best thing for her, musically speaking: "That took me to a whole new level, creatively. However, this doesn't sound like Aaliyah Nicole; this sounds like someone else."

Although Waller initially thought there was an alter ego happening, another change beckoned. "One day earlier this year I looked in the mirror and said, 'You're not Aaliyah Nicole anymore. Who are you?'"

Then a journey toward self-discovery was launched. For this new person, "I knew I wanted a name that connected me with home," said Waller (whose birth name is actually Nicole Marie). "I wanted a name that reflects where I came from. Chicagoans are passionate about where they come from and I wanted something that connected to my West Side roots. For me, it all started on Waller Street—I grew up there and my church was just a few blocks down."

And Waller has released a single entitled, naturally, "It's Chi Waller." Not only does the song—which reflects inspiration from genres such as hip-hop, soul/R&B, reggae and gospel—honor the musician's West Side roots but it also shows the various layers of this multidisciplinary artist.

The new song "just lays the foundation for where we're headed," Waller said. "This is me reintroducing myself to the masses. When all is said is done, I want [the listener] to know that I'm proud of where I come from. I want people to see all aspects of what I have to offer. Just let me welcome you to my world for a moment and show you where we could possibly go."

"But, more than anything else, I want Chicago to feel this one. I want the West Side to know I'm a product of them as well as Oak Park, where I also grew up."

And the accompanying music video was released the day after National Coming Out Day. (Upon being told this, Waller smiled with glee and stated, "I didn't even make that connection!") As for her own coming-out story, Waller (a preacher's kid) had quite the path: "There was a certain expectation, having grown up in the church. It was an interesting journey. I still find men attractive but I tend to have more serious relationships with women. However, growing up, I'd use my attraction to men to hide my attraction to women."

"But as time progressed, I really started to learn about myself. I had my first girlfriend my senior year in high school but it was a [down-low] thing. But it was in college that I was exposed to different things and discovered who Aaliyah Nicole was. My friends knew but telling the pastor and first lady? Believe it or not, I didn't officially take my power back until I was 25 years old; I dropped a video and just owned [my sexuality] and it was well-received. I was in a relationship that helped me navigate this journey."

And with her family, Waller had the proverbial happy ending. "When all is said and done, I come from love and real support," added Waller, who counts Queen Latifah, Lena Waithe and Billy Porter among her LGBTQ+ role models. "Life is great, and the acceptance and love are all there."

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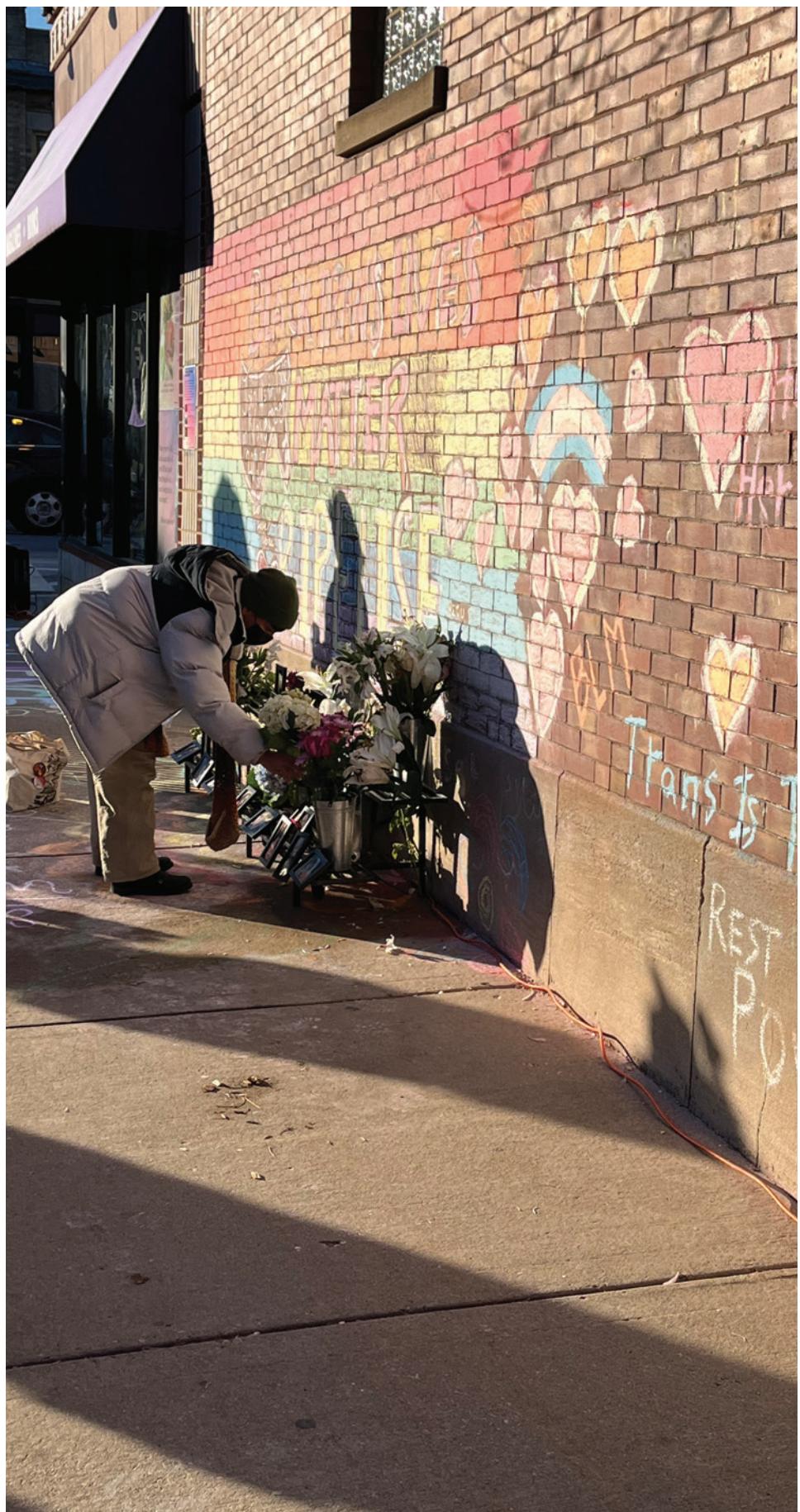
# Chicagoans observe Transgender Weekend of Resilience

Community members gathered across the city the weekend of Nov. 19-20 to mark the Transgender Weekend of Resilience, set aside both to remember transgender individuals who have been lost to violence in the past year and to celebrate the community's many strengths and ambitions as well. Events, ranging from a solemn vigil to an elegant dinner, took place on the West, South and North Sides that weekend, which was unfortunately darkened with the news of the shootings of multiple members of the LGBTQ+ community at the Club Q nightclub in Colorado Springs.

At a Nov. 20 observance in Andersonville, KJ Whitehead, an activist and artist, said that transgender folks "deserve the resilience" of the rest of their communities. She then invoked a quote from Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*: "More than machinery, we need humanity; more than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness."

Whitehead then added, "No matter who you are here today, I hope you have that kindness and gentleness, before you are another hashtag."

—Matt Simonette



All photos by Matt Simonette except where otherwise indicated



**Stephanie Skora (left) and Zahara Bassett.**  
Photo by Carrie Maxwell



**Immediate right:**  
**The Transgiving Celebration.**

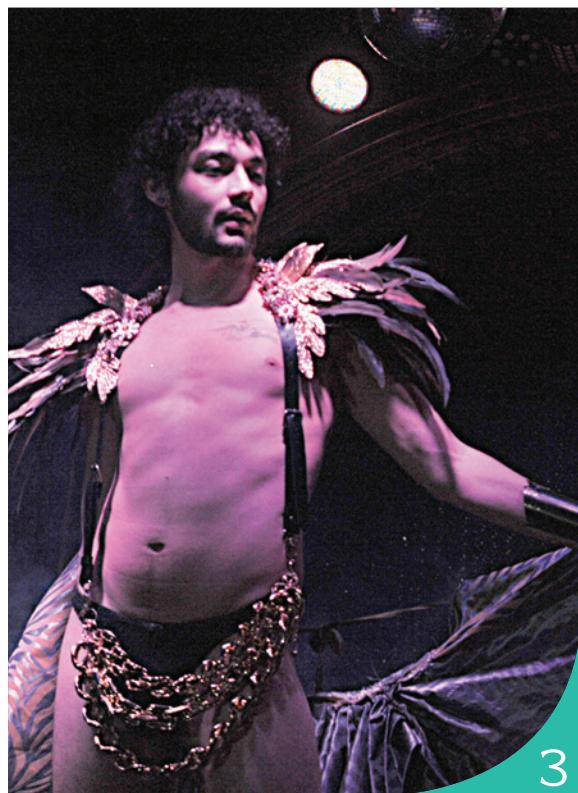
**Far right:**  
**(from left) Eve Estrella Stiles, Maya Lozano, Monica Hernandez, Reyna Ortiz and Ginger Valdez**

Photos by Vern Hester





2



3

# The art of the dance

## Baton unveils new male burlesque show

BY VERN HESTER

On the evening of Nov. 17, Baton Show Lounge, 4713 N. Broadway, presented Burlesque Royale, a new male review featuring local and national talent.

Produced by noted photographer Ramsey Prince, the sold-out show featured vocalists Danika Blake and Taylor Hall as emcees along with exotic dancers James Rabideau, Matthew Flowz and Damien Lenore, along with an appearance by Baton's Logan Aaron. The event was sponsored by Tom of Finland Vodka.

This inaugural event was similar to a turn-of-the-century vaudeville show—but updated for the new queer millennium—with Blake and Hall performing between dance segments and the dancers, particularly Lenore and Flowz, using elements of Sally Rand's storied ostrich feather fan dances.

As evidenced by the nearly overflow crowd, Baton's current plan is to present a new edition of the show on a monthly basis.



4

**1**  
Damien Lenore  
onstage at The  
Baton.

**2**  
Burlesque Royale  
producer Ramsey  
Prince (center)  
takes a bow.

**3**  
Matt Flowz  
onstage.

**4**  
James Rabideau  
in performance at  
The Baton.

**5**  
Damien Lenore in  
the audience.

**6**  
The Baton's  
Logan Aaron and  
friend.

**7**  
Danika Blake  
makes her  
entrance.

Photos by  
Vern Hester



5



6



7

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**Joey showing off the "fabulous" 39th Street District mural.**  
Photo courtesy of Joey Amato

## TRAVEL

# Pride Journey: Oklahoma City

BY JOEY AMATO

Since I began Pride Journeys 5 years ago, I have had the incredible opportunity to visit dozens of destinations around the world. Some destinations I visited once, while others left such an impression, that I was yearning to return. Oklahoma City is one of those destinations.

I first visited OKC while on a road trip to Las Vegas. While I was only there for one night, it piqued my interest when I found out they have a viable gayborhood known as the **39th Street District**. During that trip I stayed at a hotel in the neighborhood known as Habana. It has since been updated and rebranded as **The District Hotel** and served as my home base on this trip.

The property has changed a lot under its current ownership. The rooms especially have been modernized and are quite welcoming. During the summer months, the hotel is known for throwing outrageous pool parties drawing guests from miles around. There is also a nightclub, bar, and lounge on property for guests to enjoy.

The 39th Street District is quiet during the day but really comes alive at night. There are no less than eight LGBTQ nightlife establishments in a two-block radius, putting the city's nightlife scene on par with major LGBTQ destinations.

Begin your evening with a cocktail at **Apothecary 39**. The friendly bar staff and patrons will always make you feel welcome. Next, head over to **Indigo Lounge**, a newer establishment with more of an NYC-chic vibe. The owner of the bar randomly introduced herself to us and told us about her collaboration with her daughter to create an open and inviting space. She gave off such a positive energy that it made us want to stay there for a few more drinks. And by the way, the drinks in OKC are strong and inexpensive. A Grey



**Oklahoma City National Memorial.**  
Photo by Joey Amato

Goose cocktail will run you about \$7. You won't find that in NYC.

Finish off the evening at **Angle's**, the district's only true club. Angle's is open Wednesday through Saturday, so if you are in town during one of those days, be sure to swing by. The neighborhood also contains numerous murals, perfect for those mandatory Instagram posts.

Everything shuts down in OKC at 2am, so don't expect to party too late.

After a good night's sleep, head to the **First Americans Museum**. This was my first time visiting and I was so impressed by not only the modern design of the building but also the interactive nature of the exhibits.

First Americans Museum (FAM) celebrates the 39 Tribal Nations that call Oklahoma home, although only a handful are indigenous to the state. Many were removed from their homelands

and relocated to Indian Territory. The name Oklahoma actually derives from two Choctaw words, "Okla" and "Homma," meaning land of the red people.

The museum's full-service restaurant, **Thirfty Nine**, offers a delicious brunch menu on the weekend. Some standout items include blue corn blueberry pancakes, the FAM skillet and a hearty mushroom frittata.

After the museum, it's time to do a little shopping. Swing by queer- and female-owned **Common Dear** for some rainbow-inspired gifts, then head over to LGBTQ-owned **Craig's Emporium**. This is a gem collector's dream come true. The store is enormous and features a huge variety of gems, minerals and so much more. I literally didn't know which way to turn. The store is divided into different rooms, and you can easily get lost inside.

For the best views of the city, catch a ride on the **Wheeler Ferris Wheel** or go to **Vast**, located in the Devon Energy tower, the city's tallest building.

One of the hottest attractions in Oklahoma City is **Factory Obscura**, an immersive experience created by local artists. Guests are given 3D glasses upon entry to thoroughly enjoy the venue. I have never experienced anything quite like this. It's a combination of a maze, art installation and interactive playground. I'm not really sure how to describe it, but it was very cool and fun for all ages.

What many people don't realize about OKC is that it has a thriving Asian culinary scene. The Asian District contains dozens of restaurants serving everything from traditional Cantonese cuisine to Vietnamese food, which is how it got its nickname, "Little Saigon." Try **VII Asian Bistro**, which is located in an unimpressive strip mall. But don't let the façade fool you. The food is delicious and inexpensive. I highly recommend the chicken lettuce wraps and moo goo gai pan.

Every time I visit, I like to walk by the **Oklahoma City National Memorial**, a site which honors the victims, survivors, and rescuers of the Oklahoma City bombing, which took place on April 19, 1995. A section of the old building still stands near the entrance to the memorial. The best time to go is early in the morning when you can take your time to walk the grounds without the crowds. It's a very somber experience which should not be missed.

If you happen to be in town on a Sunday, there is no better place to be than **The Boom** for Gospel Brunch starring Kitty Bob Aimes and Norma Jean Goldenstein. The drag duo had us rolling for the entire hour-long show. I was so impressed by the improv talent of the two entertainers. I was told the Bloody Marys are to die for.

Spend the rest of the afternoon exploring downtown Oklahoma City, then head to the city's **Paseo District**, a quaint neighborhood filled with shops, art galleries and restaurants.

Make a reservation at **Frida Southwest**, a modern restaurant featuring elevated Latin cuisine such as tuna tartare made with guajillo-orange marinated ahi tuna, whipped avocado and pickled onion, served with crispy corn tortillas. If you are in the mood for a heartier appetizer, try the short rib empanadas.

For an entrée, I recommend the Chilean sea bass served over a truffle corn and parmesan risotto, lobster beurre blanc and sautéed baby spinach. I've had Chilean sea bass before, but this dish ranks among the top I have ever tasted. And of course, you must complete your meal with the Mexican hot chocolate cheesecake because calories don't count on this trip. The cheesecake is made with a hazelnut cinnamon brittle, chocolate dulce and spiced cinnamon-ancho crust.

I feel like all I did on this trip was eat, but Oklahoma City's culinary scene has taken off in recent years and the city boasts so many wonderful options outside of what they are traditionally known for.

Consider visiting during their **Pride on 39th festival and parade** which is scheduled for June 2-4, 2023.

Enjoy the Journey!

# Sydney WorldPride

## plans a celebration like no other



**SPECIAL TO WINDY CITY TIMES**  
BY DANA PICCOLI

WorldPride is heading Down Under in 2023. Sydney has been named the official location for WorldPride next year, and the cosmopolitan city is planning to go all-out to welcome LGBTQ+ guests from all over the world.

Consistently named one of the most LGBTQ+-friendly countries in the world, Australia has 17 days of events and activities planned with Sydney WorldPride, with an expected attendance of half a million revelers. Whether you are looking to dance into the wee hours, experience art and culture or simply be yourself with 500,000 of your closest friends, there is something at Sydney WorldPride for everyone to explore.

According to Kate Wickett, Chief Executive of Sydney WorldPride, "Sydney's streets will be alive as thousands of people come together to celebrate the global LGBTQIA+ reunion the world has been waiting for."

With multiple events happening daily during Sydney WorldPride, here are some standouts:

**The Human Rights Conference** (March 1-3) is considered the centerpiece of WorldPride, and will focus on "global, regional and domestic human rights issues facing people based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and variations in sex characteristics." Tickets are available now and speakers include Executive Director of the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality Kenita Placide, Delaware state Sen. Sarah McBride (D) and Director of LGBT

Rights Advocacy China Yanzi Peng. It's expected to be the largest LGBTQIA+ human rights conference ever held in the Asia-Pacific region.

**First Nations Gathering Space** will be held at Carriageworks and take place over six nights (Feb. 23—28). There will be free exhibits to explore, plus theater experiences, dining and drag shows.

**Mardi Gras Parade** (Feb. 25) is the largest event of Sydney WorldPride and will celebrate

**Human Progress Pride flag.**  
Photo courtesy of Sydney WorldPride



Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras' 45th anniversary. Expect to see 12,500 marchers and over 200 floats travel down Oxford Street for the first time since 2020.

**Domain Dance Party** (Feb. 26) will be the largest circuit party in Australian history. The seven-hour party will include sets from international DJs, dancers and surprise guests.

**Ultra Violet** (March 3) celebrates the women

**Ben Graetz as Miss Ellaneous for Sydney WorldPride.**  
Photo by Anna Kucera

of WorldPride with an event curated by DJs and producers Sveta Gilerman and Jess Hill. Not just a dance party, Ultra Violet will also feature burlesque, performance art, visual art, cabaret and drag king performances.

**Rainbow Republic** (March 5) closes out WorldPride with a day full of DJ sets and live performances from artists including Muna, G Flip, Peach PRC, Alter Boy and BVT. The party will be hosted by actor/musician Keiynan Lonsdale ("Love Si-mon").

In addition to official events, there are dozens of related Pride Amplified events, from drag brunches to networking events and niche parties.

Events for Sydney WorldPride are already beginning to sell out, so if you want to join the celebration, you'll want to book your tickets sooner rather than later. You might even be able to score a special Pride flight on Qantas out of Los Angeles.

Sydney WorldPride is working with approved travel providers to ensure guests are getting access to genuine WorldPride event tickets. Guests can even bundle their World Pride and flight/ac-

commodations with approved vendors.

See [sydneyworldpride.com](http://sydneyworldpride.com).

**Dana Piccoli** is editor/project manager of **News Is Out**. **News is Out** is a pioneering national collaborative of the leading local queer media outlets. The collaborative includes 6 of the leading local and queer-owned LGBTQ+ publishers across the nation. Join the weekly **News Is Out** newsletter here: [newsisout.com](http://newsisout.com).

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