



LGBTQ+ students in the spotlight following legislated hate

- How youth groups are helping
- What's happening at CMS?
- Study shows more students coming out



The big B in LGBTQ: #BiWeek

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CIAF returns for second year

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The focus of *QNotes* is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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Angry in shock after UNC shooting

Hundreds of students and community members rally to demand gun reform after UNC+Chapel Hill shooting of Associate Professor Zijie Yan.

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Annual Durham Pride festival takes place September 23

Durham's LGBTQ+ Pride, held in the city regularly since 2018 with roots dating back to 1982, returns for 2023 with a parade, festival, vendors, food, performers and more.

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Political Voices

By Andrew Gary | Guest Commentary

My name is Andrew Gary, and I have been interning with Equality NC for a year. In this time, I've gotten the chance to work on policy tracking and analysis specifically dealing with the state legislature and school boards. Over this past year, I've gotten to learn about the LGBTQ+ community and watched as significant policy changes have happened that impacted the lives of thousands of queer people. Prior to getting involved, I didn't think that citizen involvement was effective or advocacy groups really made a difference. After interning with ENC, I learned how important it is for people to get involved with their local and state government, and how big of an impact it can really have. It is crucial to get involved because oftentimes inaction is worse than failing.

It is a common retort that people in general do not engage with state and local governments. I understand why: It's boring and there are other things to do. I would hazard a guess that most people don't find discussing the finer details of zoning ordinances or retirement plans interesting. In general, people are unlikely to even make even smaller contributions of their time, like simply voting in local elections. A research study by Portland State University found that "turnout in 10 of America's 30 largest

cities was less than 15%. In Las Vegas, Ft. Worth and Dallas, turnout was in the single digits." It is concerning that people are so disengaged, since state and local governments shape important areas of policy that affect your life every day.

Take school boards, for example. It is almost impossible to describe what school boards do; a better question would be, what can't they do? They have near ultimate authority within school districts to set policies on administration and the specifics of course materials. Unfortunately, despite this power, most people do not engage much with their local school board, which can cause problems. School boards don't represent communities as a whole. Instead, they represent the people that engage with them. The best way to ensure that local government is representative of the people is to make sure that you are telling the government what you believe in and care about.

A great example of the power of community engagement can be seen at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The University maintains a system for student organizations to apply for funding from the student government and receive reimbursement for funds spent. However, the system to reimburse individuals was incredibly dysfunctional. It was overly complex

and took weeks to get students their money. Students came together and lobbied the student government for changes. Elected and appointed members of the student government spent months working with University administrators to improve the broken reimbursement system. After weeks of discussion, the University took action to overhaul the reimbursement to address the concerns of the student body. I think this example is particularly important to think about as students are increasingly facing an environment where policy changes are being made about them but not with their input. Students and young people in particular must remember that there are ways to influence events even if you can't vote for who is in charge.

If you don't like what is happening, then the burden is on you to get involved. The easiest way to get involved is to call your local and state government officials or write them letters. Don't underestimate the impact that a letter-writing campaign or even a simple phone call can have on government officials. This takes a bit more time, but you can also go to meetings and offer public comment. Politicians need to hear from their community, and this is a very impactful way to ensure that your voice is heard. If you have the time and are willing to make a



long-term commitment, volunteer for a local advocacy group or a candidate's campaign. These are the groups that have the resources to commit to long-term action to achieve policy goals. Supporting their efforts is a way to come together as a group, allowing you to be more successful than on your own. If you are really committed to making change in your community, run for office yourself. The most direct way to influence policy is to make it yourself.

If you only remember one thing from this article, it is that you should get involved because things can change if you try. It won't be easy, and it might take time, but participating in government is valuable. You can make a difference; it will just take effort. ::

Southern Campaign for Equality hosts emergency town hall on new laws

Activists talk HB 808, HB 574 and SC 49



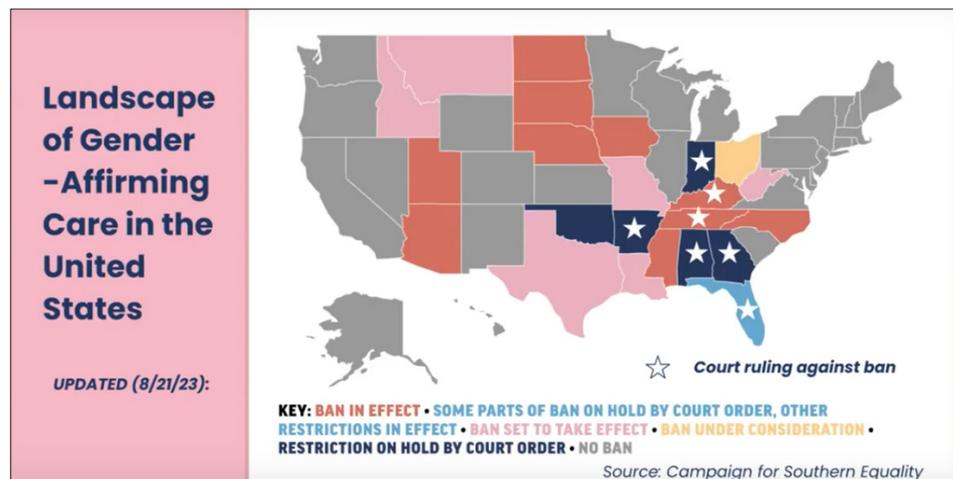
by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

The Campaign for Southern Equality held an emergency town hall on Aug. 21 to discuss three new anti-LGBTQ+ laws now on the books in North Carolina — HB 808, HB 574 and SB 49. The meeting came about after the North Carolina General Assembly passed these laws on Aug. 9, adding to the slew of policies targeting trans and queer identifying youth across the United States.

"Last week, we saw the NCGA ran through a set of laws that we know are flatly unconstitutional," Allison Scott of the CSE said. "We know that folks have questions about what these laws mean, how they can take action to protect themselves and their families."

The town hall was designed to help educate families on what these policies mean and how they will impact their lives. One of the bills with the largest spotlight was HB 808, which prohibits the initiation of any gender-affirming care in North Carolina for people under the age of 18, including puberty blockers, gender-affirming hormone therapy and surgery.

However, this policy doesn't prevent people who've already started receiving gender-affirming care from continuing their treatment, according to representatives with



CSE. Emma Chen with CSE said trans youth and their parents should ask their health-care providers how they're interpreting the language of these bills.

"We've gone over sort of what the law says, but ... it doesn't prohibit anyone from leaving North Carolina to access care in a state where it is legal to do that, and a court would likely agree that it's unconstitutional to block people from traveling to other states to get care," Chen said in the town hall.

Carolyn Jones with the CSE added there are grants and financial aid options for families who will need to travel out of state to ensure their loved ones receive the care

they need, which includes \$500 emergency grants, frontline grants for organizations helping these families and more.

"We've mapped providers of gender-affirming care nationwide, and we can help you identify care, including telehealth options as close to you as possible," she said. "There will be options for your child, and we're here to help you figure out what those options are."

Attorney Chris Brook from Patterson Harkavy LLP in Chapel Hill came in to talk about the legal ramifications of the passage of HB 808 and other anti-LGBTQ+ bills. He said there have been many legal challenges to similar legislation in other states, many of

which have resulted in the laws being ruled unconstitutional.

"Seven federal judges in Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee have ruled that similar measures are unconstitutional, as well as the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which upheld a preliminary injunction on blocking Arkansas's law," Brook explained. "What courts have said when they have struck down or put these sorts of bills on hold, is that they constitute sex discrimination, and they need to have an exceedingly persuasive justification ... there's simply no strong basis in medical ethics, or in regulating medical care that would permit these sorts of laws to be upheld, and that's why they've been put on hold in a number of these instances."

At the end of the town hall, Scott reemphasized to families there are legal options organizations like CSE are going to pursue. However, those will take time, and one of the most important things to do is remain informed and be prepared to stand up against unconstitutional policies.

"We just want to reiterate right now that we know this is a very, very challenging time for everyone," Scott said. "One of the things we battle when these laws come out is misinformation. We can bring to the table these town halls and all of our partner groups, because we know the people here in North Carolina and the groups you've heard from tonight, they're the ones getting things done." ::

Angry and in shock: students and community gather to demand gun reform after UNC shooting

Many UNC employees were not told of 'active shooter,' left in life threatening situation



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

On Wednesday, Aug. 30 at 1:02 p.m., the Bell Tower at UNC-Chapel Hill chimed three times signifying the time of death of associate professor Zijie Yan, who was shot and killed on Monday afternoon in Caudill Labs.

Hundreds of students wielding signs gathered at Polk Place for the This Is Our Reality Rally — hosted by UNC Young Democrats, March for Our Lives and Students Demand Action — to honor Yan's legacy and urge North Carolina and federal policymakers to pass more gun control legislation.

"I am angry, I am pissed, and I'm disappointed because two days ago a gun was brought to our campus — one shot was fired, but an entire community was injured," UNC March for Our Lives Vice President and junior Luke Diasio told the crowd. "More than 300,000 American students have been on a campus during a shooting since 1999, and two days ago, we were all forcibly added to that statistic."

Wednesday's rally was organized after UNC graduate student — now murder suspect — Tailei Qi allegedly shot and killed Yan, who was also Qi's advisor. UNC is home to around 30,000 students, all of whom were locked in classrooms, lecture halls, bathroom stalls and dorm rooms for almost four hours with limited communication from administration or law enforcement during the shooting.

Students were left traumatized, fearful and angry in the wake of Monday's murder, which was captured in Wednesday's front page of the Daily Tar Heel, UNC's student-run publication. Its front page was filled, top to bottom, with messages sent from students and faculty in lockdown on Aug. 28. Some of the messages included:

- "I'm scared, I'm so scared"
- "Can you hear any gunshots?"
- "Are you safe, where are you?"
- "I wish this never happened."
- "I'm gonna f*cking throw up."



UNC freshman Danielle Kennedy holds a sign during Wednesday's This is Our Reality Rally after she experienced her second active shooter lockdown in less than a year.



Parkland shooting survivor and gun reform activist David Hogg (center) spoke to community members at UNC-Chapel Hill on August 30 after the murder of Zijie Yan on campus. CREDIT: Alex Slitz file photo

Wednesday's rally served as a platform for students, faculty and community members to come together and demand for change. There were multiple notable activists speaking at the event, including Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivor and March for Our Lives co-founder David Hogg.

"As a generation, we've been told to run, hide and fight, and it's time for our generation to repurpose the meaning of that," Hogg exclaimed to the crowd. "We need to run for office to replace and change our government. If they won't change the gun laws here in North Carolina, it's time to change the government."

Hogg talked to QNotes in an exclusive interview after Wednesday's event, where he talked about how LGBTQ+ people and people of color are disproportionately impacted by gun violence. He said queer women, specifically, have played a huge role in the work he's done with March for Our Lives.

"If it wasn't for queer women, March for Our Lives would not exist, period, and they've never gotten the credit they deserve," Hogg told QNotes. "I think it's important to state the fact they're almost always at the center of these movements and not to leave them out of that conversation."

The Sandy Hook Promise nonprofit organization released a survey which showed queer-identifying people are more than two times as likely to be a victim of gun violence. The statistics also showed one out of three trans youth are threatened or attacked

with a weapon at school and almost 50 percent are bullied.

North Carolina Democratic Party Chair Anderson Clayton also spoke to rally attendees Wednesday afternoon about how gun violence impacts marginalized North Carolinians, including LGBTQ+ residents. In a fiery and passionate speech, the 25 year-old called out North Carolina Republicans after the supermajority was able to pass SB 41, which repealed the Pistol Permit and made it easier for people to access firearms.

"They're offering thoughts and prayers when months ago, they repealed the pistol permit, allowing more guns in our streets, in our communities, on our campuses, and in places where guns have no right being," Clayton said. "They're attacking us, and instead of fixing problems like the one we're seeing on UNC campus, and in Jacksonville right now, they are sitting there and persecuting our citizens by trying to say the LGBTQ+ community shouldn't exist on this campus. That's not okay."

Many students shared their experiences on Monday and beyond, including UNC sophomore Nancy Garcia Villa. The morning after Yan's death, Garcia Villa woke up with an overwhelming sense of dread and loss. However, she knew it was important to continue to take care of her physical and mental health after those traumatic hours in lockdown.

She made her way to Lenoir Dining Hall and was instantly comforted when she saw her favorite Carolina Dining Services worker. When the two started talking about the previous day, Garcia Villa realized CDS staff — the majority of which are people of color and/or low-income — were not made aware of the lockdown during the active shooting.

"I realized that I was the one that had to break the news to her about what happened here at UNC on Monday because no one cared to inform CDS workers or the janitors or the housekeepers of what had happened because their lives are not considered worth protecting," she emotionally told attendees. "During that three hour lockdown CDS workers, our central employees, were still working there, still cleaning the hall, they were still serving food because UNC did not care to tell them that their lives were at risk."

Senior Eszter Rimanyi, who has also been very involved in gun reform advocacy work, spoke to students Wednesday. She expressed her frustration with inaction on gun reform, stating she'd been fighting for legislation for over five years.

"Since my high school walkout in 2018, I have protested at the local school district level and in DC. I dedicated one year [in to] the pandemic to lead a virtual field office of Students Demand Action, and yet, five years later, in my last semester of college, I am walking out again to protest gun violence, but now because of an incident on



Four UNC students hold corresponding signs during the This is Our Reality Rally on August 30.

my own college campus," she said.

Rimanyi warned the crowd there would be a nationwide attempt to try to use Monday's shooting as a way to divide communities. However, she said the Carolina family needs to stay united today and beyond.

"They're going to minimize our conversations and make us turn against each other, but we cannot allow it," she said. "In those moments, I want you to remember the solidarity we felt coming out of this traumatic event, and I want you to refrain from this division." ::

Following NC passage of anti-LGBTQ laws, CMS wants parents' signatures on 'Student Information Form'

Mother of two students feels questionnaire could harm children

By Taylor Heeden | David Aaron Moore

Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, one of the first systems in the state to comply with the recently passed laws impacting LGBTQ+ students, began sending out emails the first day of class that make it mandatory parents sign off on an online document identified as a "Student Information Form" (SIF).

The questionnaire specifically asked parents to identify their child's pronouns, confirm whether or not their child can take part in "reproductive health" education classes and requires approval for children to take part in what is vaguely described as "protected student information surveys." While those are listed in the online form as CMS Student Engagement Survey, Panorama Student Social-Emotional Learning Survey and Youth Drug Survey, a link that offered specifics led to a another section of the website that only displayed the words "this page is unavailable."

Sarah Castleman, a mother of two students currently attending Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, is concerned going into the 2023-24 academic year after the North Carolina General Assembly approved SB 49, which forces teachers to out students to parents and forbids

discussions around gender identity in grades K through four.

As a bisexual woman who is very involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy work, Castleman's concerns were only solidified after she received the SIF email from CMS. It requires her to sign off on documents that would provide what many view as private information about her children and family.

"I'm having the double challenge of not only being queer and this is my work, but it's also now affecting me as a mom," she explains. "We moved here from Florida, and it was much better here. Never had any issues at all. Now,



Some parents are concerned CMS's 'Student Information Form' is potentially dangerous. CREDIT: Adobe Stock

it's not even a matter of myself - what could this mean for kids?"

Castleman said the survey's intentions were unclear to her, and she said it feels CMS's request for the students' pronouns is a way to keep tabs on how students identify.

"They (the schools) want pronouns, because they want proof at some point during

the school year in case a child decides to change pronouns or change names," she says. "How many kids are out there that might be going through this right now and want to change their name and they don't live in a safe environment, which is why they don't come out at home? It scares me because those kids that obviously are not safe at home, they're going to be outed to

their parents, and that just puts them in an even more unsafe environment."

Castleman said the new law is also unclear about how children can talk about LGBTQ+ topics. With her and family members being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, Castleman is afraid her children won't be able to talk about their lives at home while in their classrooms.

"If my nine-year-old is sitting, talking to friends, is he not allowed to talk about me," she offers. "Is he not allowed to talk about our family friends? Is he not allowed to talk about our community?"

Castleman believes the Parents' Bill of Rights isn't about protecting students or giving parents "more of a say" in their children's education - it's about erasing an entire community from history. She went on to say this bill isn't just hateful - it's dangerous.

"Some of our biggest senators on the federal level have openly trans kids or grandkids, and they are still fighting for this stuff," she explains. "I just don't understand [how] any parent at all - I don't care where you fall in any spectrum - would think that this is safe for a child." ::

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Annual Durham Pride festival takes place September 23

Event includes march, festival and independent parties at local watering holes

By Taylor Heeden | David Aaron Moore

Bull City (aka Durham) will celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride Saturday, Sept. 23, from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., at Duke University's East Campus. The event will kick off with a parade, followed by a festival filled with vendors, food, entertainment and more.

Additional events occurring around the city and designed to coincide with and celebrate Pride include:

- "Pride on the Pitch"

Hosted by The Eno River Rugby Club and performer Stormie Dale at Bull McCabe's Irish Pub, located at 427 West Main Street. The fun kicks off Friday, Sept. 22 at 5 p.m. and continues through 10 p.m. Stormie Dale begins the evening with Drag Queen Story Hour at 5 p.m., followed by a performance by Batala Brazilian Drums at 6:45 p.m., as well as an evening drag show at 7 p.m. Admission benefits Enno River Rugby.

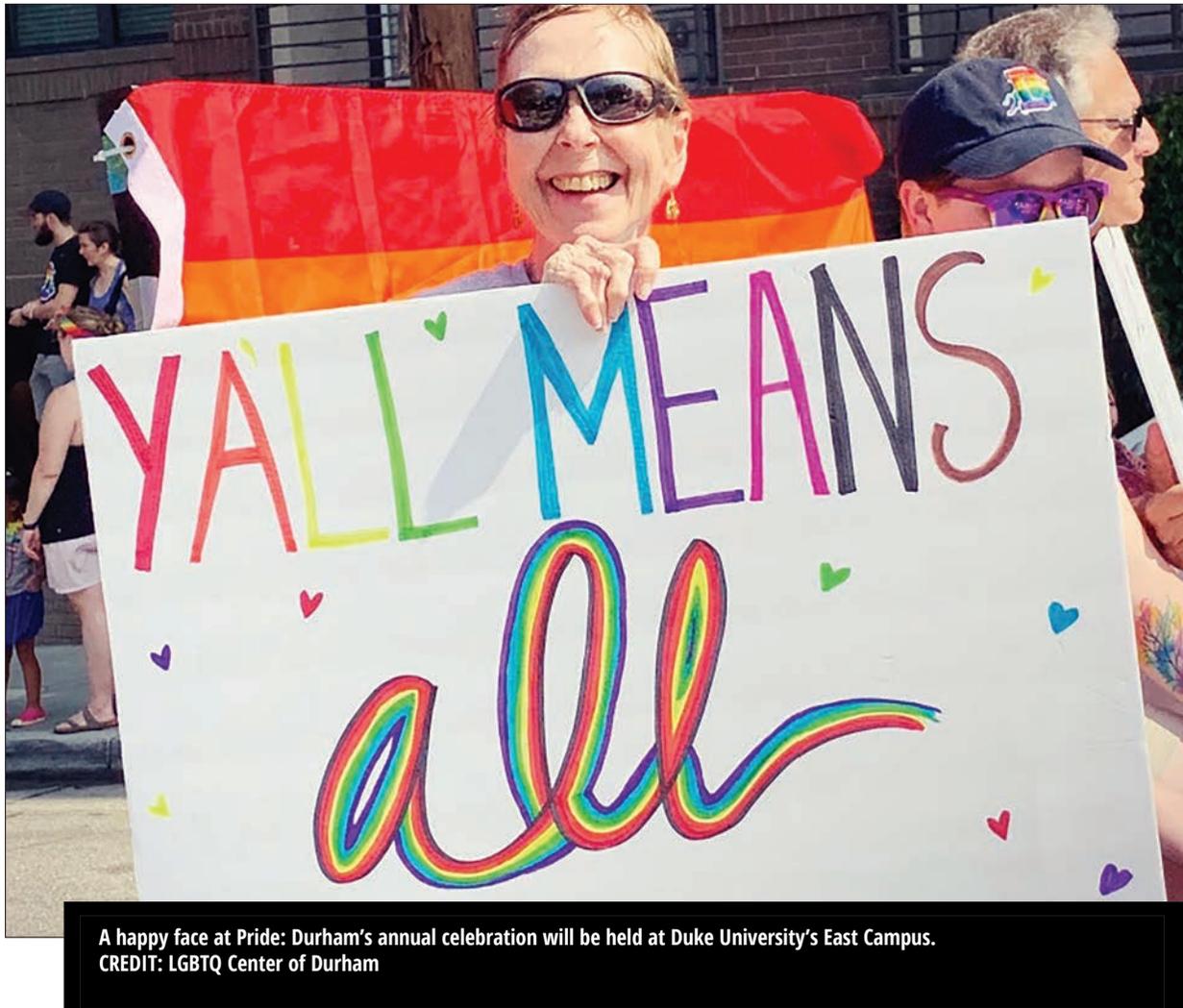
- "The Pink Triangle Celebrates Durham Pride"

Takes place at the Accordion Club, located at 316 West Geer Street. The party starts at 4 p.m. on Sept. 23. It includes performances by Stormie Dale and Alex the Rabbit with music from DJ By Durham. Admission is free.

A Look at NC Pride and Durham History

Durham's pride event developed in the wake of the violent murder of 46-year-old Ronald Antonevitch, who was targeted and murdered by two men who were reportedly yelling anti-gay threats at Antonevitch and the three others he was sunbathing with.

"When the murderers were brought



A happy face at Pride: Durham's annual celebration will be held at Duke University's East Campus. CREDIT: LGBTQ Center of Durham

to trial, there was great fear that the court system would let them off or lightly punish them due to the gay aspects of the case," according to Durham's LGBTQ+ Center's history webpage. "A group of local gay men and lesbians banded together for the first public demonstration for gay civil rights in North Carolina at the Durham Court House during the trial in 1982."

The demonstrations evolved into the statewide event NC Pride, which traveled to major cities around the

state to advocate for LGBTQ+ equality, and Durham was the first city to host the event and march. However, the NC Pride march disbanded, and it was Durham residents who came together to create a new kind of "march" to fit in with the change in times.

From the Durham LGBTQ+ Center's website: "This plan was exceptionally successful, sprouting many Pride festivals in the cities of NC including Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Salisbury, Charlotte, Asheville and the Outer

Banks. After a long legacy, NC Pride dissolved and its organizers moved on to new endeavors. To continue the legacy and grow toward inclusion of all peoples, The LGBTQ Center of Durham took the reins with the support of the community to lead the newly created Pride: Durham in 2018."

Thus, Pride: Durham, NC was born. The annual celebration always has a theme, and this year's focuses on the strength and resilience of North Carolina's transgender community. The theme, "Give Them Their Flowers," honors and thanks the courage and leadership of trans residents, particularly Black and brown trans women and non-binary folks.

The Pride Durham page of the local LGBTQ+ center offered the following assessment: "Our events this year will provide opportunities for us to center and celebrate members of the LGBTQ+ community who boldly certify our public standards for human dignity, all while facing physical violence, hateful legislation, and other harmful experi-

ences. We intend to commemorate our ancestors who sowed past seeds that still bear fruit today and to pay tribute to the people who help us be our best selves now, embodying our highest values and greatest visions for a more whole, safe and liberated Durham..."

This year's festival will not only work to show the hard work of LGBTQ+ identifying residents and allies, but it will also bring the Durham community together in a safe, supportive space.:

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LGBTQ+ Center in Winston-Salem celebrates anniversary and reopening

The North Star LGBTQ+ Community Center in Winston-Salem reopened its doors on Saturday, Sept. 2, after closing its physical location last month to complete renovations to its facility at 930 Burke Street in downtown and will continue with services moving forward.

From a community center press release: "We are thrilled to announce that the North Star LGBTQ+ Community Center is ... reopening in September. [It] represents more than just a physical space; it symbolizes our commitment to fostering a safe haven where everyone can express their true selves, find solace and build lasting connections."

Founded in 2013, North Star's mission is to create LGBTQ+ community involvement across intersecting identities through advocacy, compassion, education and service.

Treasurer Kasey Mayfield said in a video for the center that the organization serves as a place where queer folks in the Winston-Salem area can come together and feel safe

and validated. "Now, more than ever, we are committed to expanding alongside our community and focusing on having a safe and sober space for our youth and adults alike to have a place that they can just be themselves," she said.

The center's reopening comes at a crucial time, following the North Carolina General Assembly's override of Governor Roy Cooper's veto on three bills relating to LGBTQ+ issues in the state. After those became law, individuals and families in our community across the state have felt unsafe and targeted by their own politicians.

"Regrettably, North Carolina has now joined the ranks [of] states to prohibit the provision of essential gender-affirming care for transgender and non-binary minors," the North Star Center said in a press release. "In times like these, it's crucial to remember that our community is built on a foundation of resilience, unity and unwavering support for one another.

While the road ahead might seem challenging, we firmly believe that brighter days are on the horizon. Amidst these challenges, we are excited to share a glimmer of hope that shines through the darkness."

Following the soft opening, the community center will hold a reception to officially celebrate their tenth anniversary with a public grand reopening Sept. 23.

"North Star LGBTQ+ Community Center's grand reopening is a celebration of resilience, progress and the unwavering spirit of our community," says Cindia Gonzalez, chair of the board of directors of the Center. "We are immensely proud to reach this milestone and extend our gratitude to the community, partners and allies who have supported us throughout the years. As we embark on this new chapter, we renew our commitment to providing a safe haven for self-discovery, advocacy and empowerment."



The North Star LGBTQ+ Community Center's 10th anniversary and grand reopening event invites all members of the LGBTQ+ community, their allies and supporters to attend and share in the celebration. Giveaways and gift bags will be given out to visitors, while supply lasts.

For more information about the North Star LGBTQ+ Community Center's grand reopening event and its ongoing initiatives, please visit www.northstarwnc.org or follow the center on Facebook and Instagram. ::

—Taylor Heeden

Two NC universities make Campus Pride Best of LGBTQ+ campuses list

Two North Carolina universities – Elon University and Guilford College – made Campus Pride's 2023 Best of the Best LGBTQ-Friendly Colleges and Universities list, according to a press release sent by the organization.

From the Campus Pride website: "For the last seventeen years, Campus Pride has been the most trusted, reliable educational resource for students and families who want to find the best campuses for LGBTQ inclusion and safety. The organization works alongside students, faculty, staff and administrators at 1400+ campuses annually to help support and improve the quality of campus life for LGBTQ people."

The Campus Pride index is used to quantify and organize what college campuses across the county have resources for LGBTQ+ students, whether that includes

residential communities, affirming campus health services and more.

Elon University scored a five out of five stars in the index and is among one of the most accepting universities in the country for LGBTQ+ students, according to Campus Pride's data. Elon received almost perfect scores in every category, which includes:

- LGBTQ Policy Inclusion: 4.5 of 5
- LGBTQ Support & Institutional Commitment: 5 of 5
- LGBTQ Academic Life: 4.5 of 5
- LGBTQ Student Life: 5 of 5
- LGBTQ Housing & Residence Life: 4.5 of 5
- LGBTQ Campus Safety: 5 of 5
- LGBTQ Counseling & Health: 4.5 of 5
- LGBTQ Recruitment & Retention Efforts: 4.5 of 5

Guilford College in Greensboro also received a five star rating from Campus Pride, which confirms the college boasts the The Bayard Rustin Center for LGBTQIA Activism, Education and Reconciliation, which is "a space dedicated to affirming the lives, histories and experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Allied students, faculty and staff at Guilford and beyond."

Additionally, the college employs a LGBTQIA Coordinator who provides resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex and allied students through the Bayard Rustin Center for LGBTQIA Activism, Education, and Reconciliation and Guilford PRIDE.

Executive Director of Campus Pride Shane Windmeyer said having a resource where LGBTQ+ students can see where they're welcomed and encouraged is crucial in today's political climate.



"LGBTQ youth and families want to know what campuses are doing when it comes to inclusive policies, programs and practices. The 'Best of the Best' highlights the Top 30 this year across various regions throughout the country," he explains. "Campus Pride applauds the growing number of campuses that are 'coming out' and wanting to be the 'Best of the Best' each year." ::

—Taylor Heeden

Canada issues travel advisory to LGBTQ+ travelers visiting US

The Canadian government has updated its U.S. travel advice, warning LGBTQ+ citizens that laws passed in some U.S. states may directly impact them while visiting.

The update, posted August 29 under the "Laws and culture" section of Global Affairs Canada's United States travel advice, reads as follows: "Some states have enacted laws and policies that may affect [LGBTQ+] persons."

It further advises travelers to research state and local laws in areas they plan to visit.

In recent years, Republican state lawmakers across the U.S. have been working to pass anti-LGBTQ+ bills, many of which directly target transgender Americans. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, over 80 state-level anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been signed into law in 2023 alone.

As the CBC notes, Canada's travel advisory does not mention any specific laws and does not advise travelers to avoid specific U.S. states. However, a spokesperson for

Global Affairs Canada pointed to state laws passed this year banning drag shows, restricting transgender people's access to gender-affirming care, and banning trans athletes from participating in sports. U.S. critics of such laws have argued that they are a direct attack on trans and nonbinary Americans' ability to exist in public.

"The information is provided to enable travelers to make their own informed decisions regarding destinations," the Global Affairs Canada spokesperson said. "Outside Canada, laws and customs related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics can be very different from those in Canada."

At a press conference Tuesday, Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, a former foreign affairs minister, said that the country's travel advisories are "done very professionally."

"We have professionals in the gov-

ernment whose job is to look carefully around the world and to monitor whether there are particular dangers to particular groups of Canadians. That's their job and it's the right thing to do," Freeland said.

According to the CBD, Freeland would not say whether President Joe Biden was informed of the new travel advisory before it was issued.

"One of the principal responsibilities of the federal government is to understand how to work with our U.S. neighbor. I think our government has shown that that's a priority for us and that we work hard at it, and that we're able to manage that relationship regardless of the choices that the people of the United States make," she explained. "Even as we work hard on that government-to-government relationship, every Canadian government, very much including our government, needs to put at the center of everything we do the interests and the safety of every single Canadian, and of every single group of Canadians. That's what we're doing now. That's what we're always going to do."

Canada's travel advice comes just months after two prominent LGBTQ+ rights



Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland explains the country's concerns for LGBTQ+ travelers visiting the US. CREDIT: Screenshot/Cable Public Affairs Channel

organizations in the U.S. issued travel warnings for LGBTQ+ Americans visiting Florida. In May, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) – the nation's largest LGBTQ+ rights organization – joined Equality Florida to issue a travel advisory for the state in the wake of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation signed into law by Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis.

This article appears courtesy of our media partner LGBTQ Nation. ::

—By John Russell | LGBTQ Nation

Buster Murdaugh goes public amid rumors of involvement in Stephen Smith death

"I never had anything to do with his murder, and I never had anything to do with him on a physical level in any regard."

Buster Murdaugh spoke to the camera, nodding in acknowledgement to Fox Nation's Martha Maccallum in an interview for a documentary titled "The Fall of the House of Murdaugh," which takes a deeper dive into the trial of Alex Murdaugh — who was convicted in the double-homicide of his wife and other son, Paul. The documentary also sought to address claims of the Murdaugh family's involvement in the death of Stephen Smith, an openly gay classmate of Buster's.

Smith was found on a Hampton, South Carolina road in 2015, and his death was initially ruled as a hit-and-run. However, after further investigation, the case was reopened and determined to be a likely homicide.

After continuing the investigation, an attorney for the Smith family announced last month there had been "substantial progress" made on the case. Eric Bland, who

is co-representing the Smith family with Ronnie Richter, said he was updated on the case during a biweekly call with South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) Chief Mark Keel.

"He said, 'Look, Eric, I am optimistic in a positive way, I see progress being made, real progress,'" Bland explained to WIS 10 News. "We think that we've talked to a number of people, and we think that there's five or six people that have information. We've learned some things we didn't know already," he told me."

Around the time of Smith's death, small-town rumors were going around that Smith and Buster were in a romantic relationship — they were classmates at Wade Hampton High School and played on the same baseball team. However, there hasn't been any evidence presented to support the relationship's existence.

The speculation surrounding Buster only intensified after the Smith family exhumed their loved one's remains to have a second

autopsy conducted. In response, Buster released a statement earlier this year calling out the "vicious rumors" surrounding him.

"I don't want to be rude here, but have you ever been accused of murdering somebody?" Buster Murdaugh asked. "Well, let me tell you, this is very, very, very, very, very, it's a terrible thing to place on somebody with absolutely no fact. I mean, it has harmed my reputation. I mean, people perceive me as a murderer."

Maccallum asked Buster where he was the night of Smith's death.

"The night Stephen was killed, I was at our Edisto Beach house," he replied.

MacCallum followed up by asking, "With your family?"

"With my mom and brother," Buster explained.

Buster's mother and brother, Maggie and Paul Murdaugh, were murdered on June 7, 2021 at their Islandton home about an hour from Hilton Head Island. Buster's



Buster Murdaugh (left) claims he was with his since murdered mother and brother the night the body of Stephen Smith (right) was found near the Murdaugh family property. CREDIT: Screen Capture

father, Alex, was convicted in the double slayings on March 2 of this year and is now serving two life sentences. Buster testified at his father's trial and in the new documentary, he claims the trial was "not fair."

"I was there for six weeks studying it, and I think it was a tilted table from the beginning," Buster offered. "And I think, unfortunately, a lot of the jurors felt that way prior to when they had to deliberate. It was predetermined in their minds, prior to when they ever heard any shred of evidence that was given in that room." ::

—Taylor Heeden

A new COVID variant has arrived, Charlotte hospitalizations on the rise

COVID-19 hospitalizations are rising in Mecklenburg County, but new boosters could soon be available to protect against the latest variant. EG.5, also referred to as "Eris," is the newest omicron subvariant rapidly spreading nationwide, according to the World Health Organization.

Symptoms of EG.5 are similar to those caused by previous variants and include fatigue, sore throat, runny nose, fever, muscle aches and loss of taste and smell, the WHO said. According to the World Health Organization, the variant currently "presents a low public health risk at a global level," but health officials are monitoring it.

Moderna, Pfizer and Novavax will offer new versions of their COVID-19 vaccines and boosters that will target the XBB.1.5 omicron subvariant, CBS News reported. Experts say the shots will be effective against the EG.5 variant since the two are closely related.

Booster doses should be available in Charlotte by late September after the Food and Drug Administration approves them, a Mecklenburg County Health Department spokesperson told The Charlotte Observer in an email.

According to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, rising COVID-19 virus particles in wastewater can be an early sign of community spread. At the Mallard Creek plant in Charlotte, an average of 15 million viral gene copies per person were recorded on July 4, according to the most recent data available from NCDHHS. By Aug. 5, that number climbed to 78 million.

As COVID-19 wastewater levels rise, so have the number of hospitalizations related to the virus. From July 30-Aug. 5, there were 48 COVID-related hospitalizations reported in Mecklenburg County, a 50 percent increase from the previous week, according to

the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Teens and adults are expected to be eligible for all three vaccines, and children as young as two years old will be eligible for one dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, CBS reported.

Children as young as six months may require two or three doses for a complete regimen.

According to Pfizer, the following side effects have been reported in past vaccine versions. It is not clear if the new shots will cause the same symptoms. According to Pfizer, some of these symptoms, including fainting, irritability, fatigue and vomiting, are particularly common in children.

Although the COVID international public health emergency was declared on May 5 to be over, the "WHO continues to urge Member States to maintain, not dismantle, their established COVID-19 infrastructure. It is crucial to sustain surveillance and reporting, variant tracking, and early clinical care provision," the agency stated.

Mecklenburg County encourages the public to wear a mask, particularly a KN95 or



A new COVID-19 vaccine will soon be available to protect against the omicron variant known as EG-5 or 'Eris.' CREDIT: Adobe Photo Stock

N95 version, when close to others and wash their hands with soap and water frequently. If you feel sick, stay away from others, take an at-home test and get treatment.

Health officials also recommend testing at home for those feeling sick, washing hands with soap and water more than usual, covering your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze, and cleaning surfaces often.

This article appears courtesy of our media partner The Charlotte Observer.::

—By Evan Moore | Charlotte Observer

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The big B of the LGBTQ+ community: the importance of Bisexual Visibility

Bisexual Visibility Week is meant to recognize the ‘invisible majority’ in queer spaces



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

Alexander the Great. Amy Winehouse. Eleanor Roosevelt. Cardi B. David Bowie. Drew Barrymore. Marilyn Monroe. Joan Crawford. Freddie Mercury. Frida Kahlo. James Dean. Lady Gaga. Miley Cyrus. All of these notable figures from history and popular culture have one thing in common: they all identified or identify as bisexual.

Bisexuality is defined by the American Psychological Association as “people who have the capacity to form attraction and/or relationships to more than one gender.” Gallup revealed three out of five LGBTQ+ Americans identify as bisexual in a survey conducted earlier this year, resulting in bisexuals being dubbed by many researchers the “invisible majority” within the LGBTQ+ community.

However, bisexuality has historically been overlooked, ignored and/or discounted by, not just cis, heterosexual society, but by the LGBTQ+ community itself. The San Francisco report found that bisexual people are consistently “ignored, discriminated against, demonized, or rendered invisible by both the heterosexual world and the lesbian and gay communities. Often, the entire sexual orientation is branded as invalid, immoral or irrelevant.”

In an article found in TIME magazine, many “toxic misconceptions” have surrounded bisexual people, including labeling bisexuals as promiscuous and unfaithful, confused or experimenting, lying about their orientation for attention, or simply identifying as bisexual for “the trend.”



James Dean CREDIT: Facebook



Among some of the more famous bisexual individuals in world history: Cardi B CREDIT: Facebook

A 2019 study showed a majority of people who identify as bisexual experience bi-negativity “from both heterosexuals and lesbian and gay individuals, as well as the LGBTQ community more broadly.”

In an interview with The Hill, V Varun Chaudhry, a cultural anthropologist at Brandeis University who studies gender and sexuality, shared her thoughts on the matter. “There’s this assumption that you’re either gay or straight and you will ultimately fall to one side or the other. People might say, ‘Oh, you’re not really committed to this relationship because your last partner was the other gender.’”

According to GLAAD and the Bisexual Resource Center, bisexual-identifying people experience greater levels of anxiety and depression, as well as a higher STI contraction rate than their heterosexual, gay and lesbian peers.

Bisexual Visibility Week is celebrated every year from September 16 through September 23, and it serves as a reminder to people in the LGBTQ+ community and its allies that bisexuality is real and valid. Qnotes has created a guide for bisexual history to honor the “invisible majority” in our community.

The psychology behind bisexuality

According to an article written in TIME magazine, one of the earliest researchers to examine bisexuality was Havelock Ellis, a psychologist from the United Kingdom who lived from 1859 until he died in 1939. His case studies, while they did contain some negative stereotypes, were among some of the first to include positive statements regarding queer people. In fact, the first edition of Ellis’s book, “Sexual Inversion,” was ruled “obscene” in an English court because he wrote about queer lives without denouncing or invalidating the queer experience. Ellis had to pitch his book multiple times before it was ultimately published in 1927.

One of the most famous researchers on the topic of sexuality was Alfred Kinsey, a biologist at Indiana University. Kinsey was one of the first researchers to hypothesize a spectrum approach to sexuality, and from this, the Kinsey Scale was born.

The Kinsey Scale is used to categorize sexuality in numbers — zero being strictly heterosexual and six being strictly homosexual. Kinsey’s research shocked the world

when his studies with the scale revealed that 25 to 50 percent of people “had homosexual and heterosexual desires.” Kinsey also criticized other researchers who believed people could only be gay or straight, saying human sexuality is made up of “endless intergradations.”

Fritz Klein was another famous researcher who exclusively studied bisexuality and published the book, *The Bisexual Option*, in 1978. Klein was bisexual himself, and in fact, he started a support group for other bisexual men, which turned into an affirmative therapy group whose model is used by practicing psychologists and researchers to this day. Klein built on the Kinsey Scale by creating the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, which according to the American Institute of Bisexuality, entails the following:

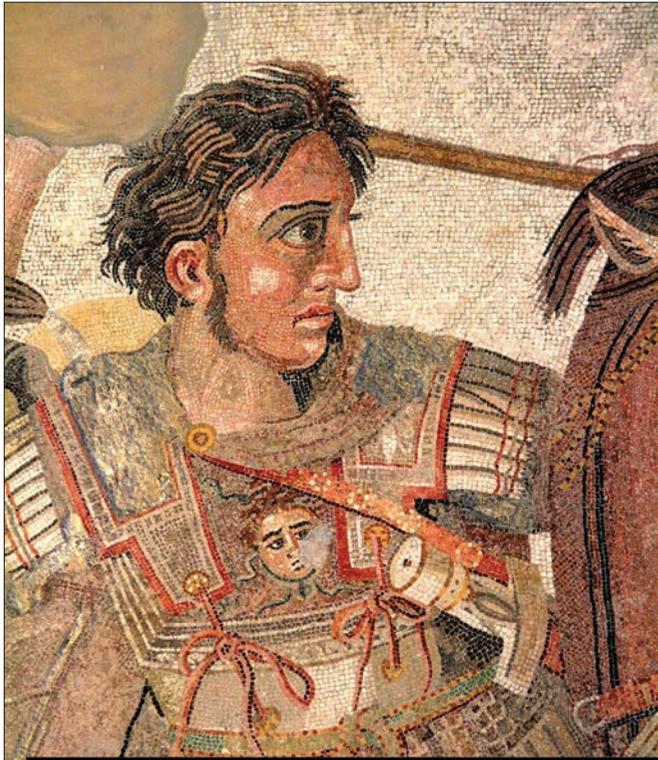
“For each person, it sets out the seven component variables of sexual orientation, listed as A through G down the left side. The three columns indicate three different points at which sexual orientation is assessed: the person’s past, their present, and their ideal. The person then receives a rating from 1 to 7 for each of the 21 resulting combinations, one rating for each empty box in the chart below. The meanings of the ratings are indicated just below the grid itself.”



Marilyn Monroe. CREDIT: Facebook

Who is the ‘B’ in ‘LGBTQ+?’

Bisexual people have also been on the front lines in advocating for LGBTQ+ equality across the country, among them Lani Ka’ahumanu. Ka’ahumanu has fought for bisexual rights since 1980 and was working in the same circle as Brenda Howard, who was coined the “mother of pride” for organizing many of the Pride protests and marches



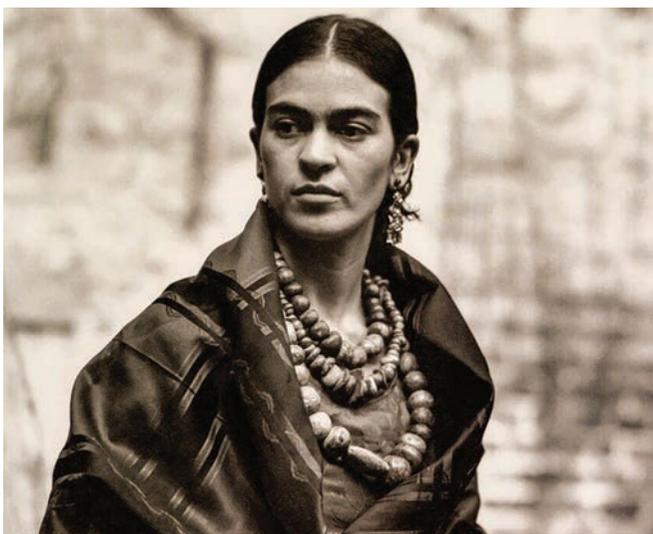
Alexander the Great CREDIT: Facebook

following the Stonewall riots.

Ka'ahumanu founded several organizations and groups geared towards bisexual people who, at the time, were often ostracized by gay and lesbian communities. She was one of the co-founders of BiPOL, one of the first bisexual political action groups in the country, and later created the San Francisco Bay Area Bisexual Network. Ka'ahumanu's advocacy is one of the main factors that led to the inclusion of the "B" in "LGBTQ+," but the advocacy for bisexual people didn't stop with that.

There are still plenty of activists working to eliminate bi-erasure and the stigma surrounding bisexual-identifying people, and there are bisexual people using their platform to promote visibility. Some of these people include, but aren't limited to:

- Kyrsten Sinema, who was the first openly bisexual person elected to Congress in 2012.
- Drew Barrymore, who came out in 2003 saying "Do I like women sexually? Yeah, I do. Totally. I have always considered myself bisexual. I love a woman's body. I think a woman and a woman together are beautiful, just as a man and a woman together are beautiful."
- June Jordan, a Black, bisexual author and poet from the 1970s who wrote about the queer experience.
- Alan Cumming, the Cabaret star who said on NPR "sexuality in this country especially is seen as a very black and white thing, and I think we should encourage the gray."



Frida Kahlo. CREDIT: Facebook

- Robyn Ochs, a bisexual-identifying activist who helped to found the Boston Bisexual Network and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Faculty and Staff Group at Harvard University.

- Rev. Lindasusan V. Ulrich, who is also non-binary, a minister with the Unitarian Universalist Association who uses their skills as a writer, musician, and activist to support inclusion and kindness within their congregations.

- Rabbi Debra Kolodny, who serves as the executive director of Nehirim – a national Jewish LGBTQ retreat and advocacy organization.

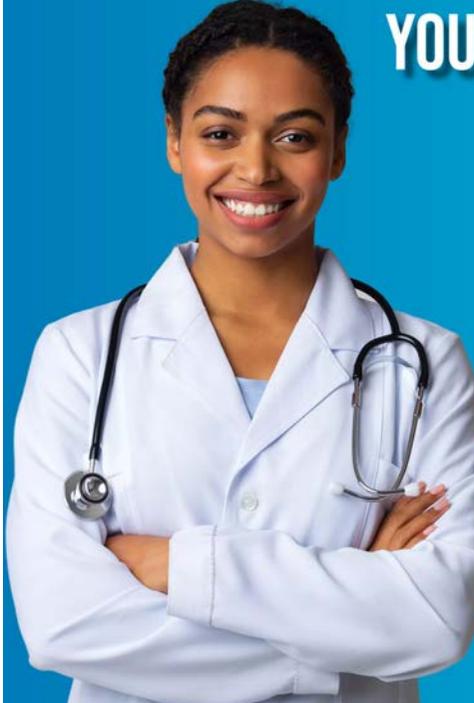
- Sara Ramirez, a nonbinary actor who played Dr. Callie Torres, a bisexual woman and orthopedic surgeon, in 239 episodes of 'Grey's Anatomy' — the longest-

running LGBTQ+ character in TV history.

- Kate Brown, who became the nation's first out bisexual sitting governor in 2015 when she was sworn in as Oregon's governor.
- Andrea Jenkins, a Black poet, playwright, writer, artist and the first person to serve as the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project.
- JoCasta Zamarripa, who not only became the first Latina woman elected to Wisconsin's legislature, but continued in that position after coming out as bisexual in a local paper during her reelection campaign in 2012.

Bisexuality Visibility Week's importance to the LGBTQ+ community is felt among its silent majority, and is shown in Ramirez's monologue from an episode of Grey's Anatomy:

"So I'm bisexual. So what? It's a thing and it's real. I mean it's called LGBT for a reason – there's a B in there and it doesn't mean BADASS. Okay, it kind of does, but it also means Bi." ::



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LGBTQ+ organizations work to support queer students in schools

A look at what local youth oriented groups are doing to help LGBTQ+ kids in school after SB 49



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

Karen Graci has a mantra she lives by: “I grow in my own allyship everyday.” It’s those words that led Graci to PFLAG Charlotte, where she now serves as the executive director.

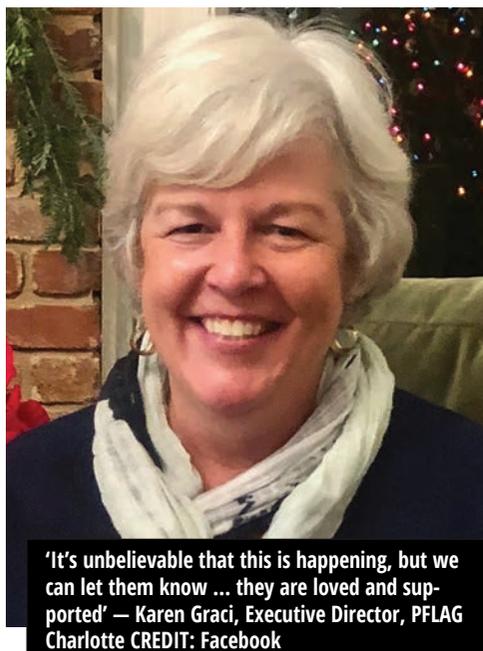
“Our mission is to create a caring and affirming world for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them,” Graci explains. “We do that through peer support, education and advocacy.”

PFLAG hosts workshops and peer support groups to educate loved ones of LGBTQ+ identifying people to help them learn about the community and what allyship looks like. PFLAG Charlotte uses four locations in its surrounding communities to reach out to families, queer folks and anyone interested in learning how to be a supportive ally to LGBTQ+ people.

“What that peer support looks like is we meet people right where they are in their journey, so for the most part, people who are showing up in our peer support spaces are parents or caregivers or grandparents, and they come from a variety of perspectives,” Graci shares. “What we find is after that educational program, a lot of parents, caregivers, grandparents, whoever was there might end up actually showing up again in a peer support space just to learn more, or because they appreciated the sense of community that they started feeling in there.”

Their work, however, may have to shift in its approach after the passage of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in North Carolina. One of the new laws, which has been dubbed the “Parents’ Bill of Rights,” prohibits the instruction of LGBTQ+ history and issues in grades kindergarten through four and forces teachers to “out” students who divulge their sexuality or gender identity.

With PFLAG Charlotte and other advocacy groups’ initiatives tied closely



“It’s unbelievable that this is happening, but we can let them know ... they are loved and supported” — Karen Graci, Executive Director, PFLAG Charlotte CREDIT: Facebook



Anti-LGBTQ legislation is leaving some students in an unsafe space. What are local organizations doing to help? CREDIT: Adobe Stock

to supporting queer students within their local school systems, it’s important to understand the work these organizations do for LGBTQ+ youth.

Resources These Organizations Provide

PFLAG Charlotte offers various resources for caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth and they offer workshops for schools across Mecklenburg County and its surrounding communities. Graci said a letter is sent to all of the schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district, offering to come and teach teachers and school staff about how to support their queer students.

“What the data shows is for LGBTQ+ youth, support has a direct impact on life outcomes,” she explains. “That can look like support from the family, from school and support from other community organizations. We have worked with a number of area schools on programs for faculty and staff ... with the whole goal being to take a deeper dive into why this matters and how you respond in school to your LGBTQ+ youth does directly impact their outcomes.”

PFLAG’s training allows for teachers to learn about the LGBTQ+ community and what life as a queer student can look like. Some of the topics include, but aren’t limited to:

- Learning about the various identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella
- Understanding the challenges queer people face
- Establishing a set of “tools” to better support LGBTQ+ students

“I think educators by nature, they’re drawn to learning and so we know whenever we walk into any room, we have allies, we have LGBTQ+ community members, and we have a few that are like ‘I’m not having this conversation. Why am I here,’ and it’s all okay,” Graci says. “The goal always is to heighten education, heighten awareness and heighten visibility.”

PFLAG isn’t the only organization in

Charlotte working to support queer students in the community — Time Out Youth Center gears its programming to LGBTQ+ youth with the goal of providing “support, advocacy and opportunities for personal development and social interaction to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth ages 13-24.”

Time Out Youth provides a wide array of resources for teachers and students alike, from Gay-Straight Alliance and Genders & Sexuality Alliance support to workshops for teachers and school staff.

Three different workshops and training sessions are offered by Time Out Youth, including:

- Safe Zone Training — “participants will be able to identify issues facing LGBTQ students, articulate appropriate terminology, locate additional resources for their schools or classrooms, and increase their skill levels in supporting LGBTQ students.”
- Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students Training — “Participants will be able to identify unique issues facing transgender and gender expansive students, articulate appropriate terminology, locate additional resources for their schools or classrooms, and increase their skill levels in supporting transgender and gender expansive students.”
- Speakers Bureau — “Trained LGBTQ youth tell their personal stories of coming out and community/family acceptance, then answer questions from the audience about their experiences. Presentations can be scheduled as a stand-alone engagement of one hour for students or faculty, or they can be scheduled as a component of the above trainings/workshops.”
- Time Out Youth also provides workshops for students, including:
- GSA Workshops — discusses “topics such as growing and sustaining

club membership, structuring and leading meetings, organizing for the calendar year, supporting transgender and gender nonconforming students, healthy relationships, local LGBTQ resources and advocating for safe schools.”

- How to Be an Ally — “This workshop includes a discussion of important terms and concepts related to LGBTQ identities, obstacles this youth population faces at home and school, and how to be an ally and support LGBTQ classmates in their school.”

Moving Forward in an SB 49 World

Despite the helpfulness of these resources and workshops, the way they’re integrated into schools could change after the North Carolina General Assembly voted to override Gov. Roy Cooper’s veto on SB 49, aka the Parents’ Bill of Rights. The bill prohibits instruction related to gender identity and sexuality in grades K through 4 and will notify parents when students want to change their names or pronouns.

Graci said with the change in policy, PFLAG will most likely look at using their workshops to take a much closer inspection into the importance of supporting queer youth in schools.

“Last year ... we made our workshop into two sessions with a pretty intense case study base with lots of facts and lots of case studies,” she explains. “Most of our programs are led by an LGBTQ+ community member and an ally so we have both perspectives represented. I believe with all my heart that the goal for each one of these workshops is that somebody walks away with a better understanding so that when they have the next conversation, maybe they’ll learn a little bit more.”

Graci said after SB 49 and other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation became law in North Carolina, several LGBTQ+ community members have come to her and have expressed their interest in volunteering with PFLAG or coming to workshops.

“It’s heartbreaking what has triggered it, but honestly, we are seeing more volunteers, more people showing up in all kinds of different ways,” she offers. “Our work now is more important than ever because families need support more than ever.”

The fear within North Carolina’s queer community is evident through the conversations Graci has had with caregivers and teachers, some who have said they are thinking about moving from their homes to find a place where they can feel safe and supported.

“It’s unbelievable that this is happening, but we can let them know how much they are loved and supported by people in their communities,” Graci says. “Let’s talk about how you assert your LGBTQ+ students. If you’ve been thinking about coming to a peer support meeting, now it’s more important than ever. If you’ve been thinking about wanting to learn more, please come, to navigate your journey.”

Queer on campus

A study that looks at the quality of undergraduate experiences on campus says students are more likely than ever to identify as LGBTQ+



by Chris Rudisill
Qnotes Staff Writer

For Cynthia Bruce, attending Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C., has provided a welcoming safe space for her as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Bruce is in her fifth year at Winthrop and was one of eight volunteer interns at Campus Pride over the summer.

“As a trans woman, I have experienced pretty positive experiences on my campus,” she told QNotes in an email. “I am able to use the restroom I identify with. Nearly every class and student org I’ve been to does introductions with pronouns.”

She’s only been purposefully misgendered by another student one time and says that she’s never experienced that from the Winthrop faculty. Winthrop’s Safe Zones program is designed to increase understanding of LGBTQ+ issues and provide identified safe zones for everyone. Part of the program stresses the importance of pronouns.

According to the school’s website, “To use someone’s pronouns correctly shows them that you respect their identity and have made an effort to make them feel welcome.”

Last spring, Winthrop held its first Transgender Week of Visibility. Small trans flags were placed along the school’s Scholars Walk and the Sexuality and Gender Equality (SAGE) club hosted a table from March 28 to April 1 with different topics about the transgender experience.

According to Bruce, the university even provides a service where trans students can room with other trans students. “In terms of the LGBTQ+ community seeming visible on campus, I would say emphatically yes. While I may have a bias in who I hang out with, I consider it to be the ‘gay college’



Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C. held its first Transgender Week of Visibility in 2022.
CREDIT: Winthrop University

of South Carolina,” she said.

The close-knit relationships that queer students form not only create groups on campus like SAGE, but also spur other student-run groups and clubs around common interests, like the DnD (Dungeons and Dragons) club, an anime club, an improv group and a social justice organization. According to Bruce, they are all led by LGBTQ+ students.

1 in 4 Students Identify as LGBTQ+

The National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) reports from both North Carolina and South Carolina that QNotes was able to find online revealed that about 1 in 4 students self-identified as LGBTQ+ in 2022.

On some North Carolina campuses like Appalachian State University, 26% said they were LGBTQ+, compared to only 17% in 2018. At North Carolina Central University, 20% of students identified as LGBTQ+ (3% did not respond), a jump of 8% since 2018. Looking at previous surveys, questions about sexual orientation and gender identity were not included a decade ago.

The NSSE collects information from first-year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate experience. Earlier studies also showed that queer students were more likely to attend their top choice for college in comparison to their peers who identified

as straight.

At Charlotte’s Queens University, Dr. Kira McEntire says she’s not really surprised by the numbers. “Students these days have the language to describe their experiences more than ever before and access to online communities to learn more about different identities.” According to Queens University, 21-24% of students identify as LGBTQ+ and up to 7% of students might identify as gender non-conforming.

For 2023, NSSE is again updating options for students to self-identify. According to the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University School of Education, who administer the survey, “the gender identity and sexual orientation items are now in ‘select all that apply’ format and have new response options.”

Safe Space in an Unsafe World

“College is often the first place students have their own space to start exploring these parts of their identity,” says McEntire. “Many college age students are thinking about who they are and who they want to be.”

But despite this visible progress on college campuses, legislators in North and South Carolina continue to push anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and for many in the community, it feels like there’s a growing intensity in discrimination and violence.

Last month, the GOP-led General Assembly in North Carolina overrode Governor Cooper’s veto on three different bills. While most of the legislation targets people under the age of 18, they have an effect on others in the community. As reported in QNotes, Senate Bill 49, also known as the “Parents Bill of Rights,” prohibits instruction related to gender identity and sexuality in grades K through 4 and will notify parents when students want to

change their names or pronouns.

Student groups offer some additional support and McEntire says that queer faculty at Queens University hope to create more mentor opportunities for LGBTQ+ students. “Being social and showing students in the Queer University Queer Union (QUQU) that there is a community of support fosters a special bond,” she recently stated on the university’s website. McEntire is in the final stages of creating Queer and Questioning, an employee resource group for faculty and staff, and hopes to engage in community outreach, engagement and advocacy opportunities.

For Bruce, she and other students at Winthrop make sure that organizations on campus prioritize being a safe and welcoming space. “Whether it’s for all students or even just our friends going through a hard time, we try to offer a helping hand, or an empathetic ear,” she says.

Her circle of friends has also found themselves helping students navigate life as LGBTQ+ people. This includes helping transgender students find clothes that match their gender identity or finding healthcare and therapy options.

“We are there for each other, both physically and emotionally, and I think that really helps strengthen the community,” says Bruce.

Shane Windmeyer, executive director at Campus Pride, believes that there needs to be a new call for activism in our community. His organization has seen dramatic increased visibility, particularly through media and social media, giving students access to queer voices, queer stories and queer lives over the last two decades. It’s one reason he points out that politicians are targeting us with anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that attempts to silence or erase our history.

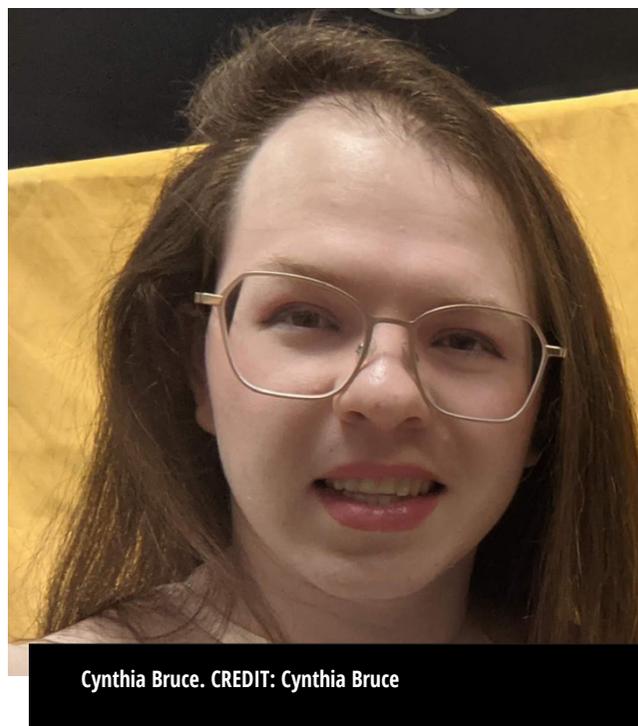
Statistics on college students might offer a glimmer of hope for our future, but only time will tell if those numbers start to decline based on this cultural and political backlash.

According to Windmeyer, “no other generation has had the strong visibility of all queer people the way we do today.” This includes access to resources and services, but he stresses “we must save ourselves, our community” from the attacks. This includes the importance of voting and a call to re-energize activism in our community.

“Be loud, be proud and advocate and fight like we did back in the 60s and through the 90s – when we were largely in the closet, being beaten in bars, dying from AIDS and being silenced in our jobs and families,” he says. “Queer young people are engaged but we all need to dig deeper.”

His advice for how we can help lift voices of LGBTQ+ students – “Never underestimate the power of individuals sharing their stories, building meaningful relationships with others to change hearts and minds.”

Bruce says it’s important to stand firm and stand together with other LGBTQ+ college students. “A big tent community is one that can withstand the onslaught they may be facing,” she says. ::



Cynthia Bruce. CREDIT: Cynthia Bruce

'For the Love of Harlem:' Charlotte resident Jermaine Nakia Lee to revive his Broadway-style musical

Musical examines the lives of cultural leaders of the time and place



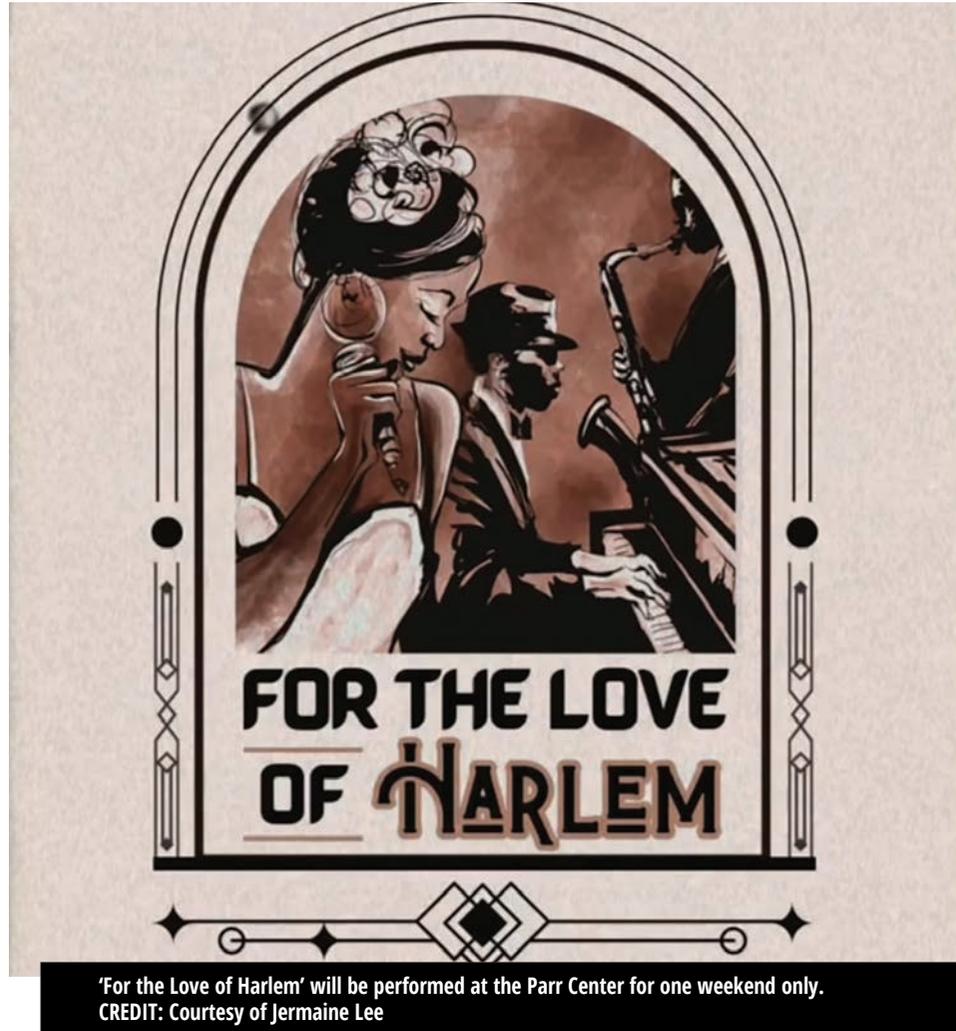
by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

From Sept. 29 to Oct. 1, Charlotte residents will have the opportunity to be transported to 1920's Harlem at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance. Charlotte resident and artist Jermaine Lee is set to bring his musical 'For the Love of Harlem' back to the stage and will provide audience members a chance to look into the lives of some of the most iconic artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

"A lot of our heroes and our icons have been glorified, which they should be because they were amazing, but they also were human beings who had struggles and challenges and insecurities," Lee explains. "Their artistic genius most audiences know about, but how they loved, who they loved, how they struggled to be recognized and appreciated and relevant, most people don't know about that side of their lives, and so it's just been a joy to watch audiences experience that."

The play is set at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance and follows a weekend in the lives of several of the most famous artists of the time — Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen and Wallace Thurman — giving the audience the chance to learn a different side of these artists. Lee said he wanted to portray the reality these individuals experienced, one where they were outcasts in their own communities.

"W. E. B. Dubois, who was a prominent thinker and African American leader during that time ... and others



'For the Love of Harlem' will be performed at the Parr Center for one weekend only.
CREDIT: Courtesy of Jermaine Lee

were a part of a sect that was more interested in homogenizing into white society, and Langston, Zora, Countee,

Wallace and the young, 'negro' artists of that time were not interested in that," Lee offers. "They didn't want to blend

in — they wanted to define Black culture and for it to stand out on its own and be recognized as its own culture."

'For the Love of Harlem's revival came about after Lee received a \$50,000 grant from the inaugural ASC (Arts and Science Council) Founders Grant program.

According to the ASC Charlotte website, the grants are meant to "support visionary artists who build and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to community in Charlotte-Mecklenburg by directly engaging residents through relevant and innovative cultural experiences."

In a previous interview with QNotes, Lee explained how important it was to tell the stories of these trailblazers, especially the aspects of their identities that often are overlooked.

"Many of the pioneers of the Harlem Renaissance were queer ... they were queer in lifestyle, culture and behavior in the 1920s, which is incredible they were that unapologetically themselves," Lee said. "It's so enlightening and empowering to know the biggest movement in African-American culture was spearheaded by Black, queer people, [and] it is important to me my community understands these people they love were a part of a community they sometimes hate."

Showtimes for Lee's production are:

- Sept. 29 at 8 p.m.
- Sept. 30 at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 1 at 3 p.m.

The Parr Center is located on the campus of Central Piedmont Community College at 1201 Elizabeth Avenue. Tickets are available at the BNS Productions website or on etix.com. ::

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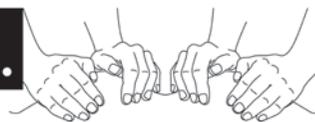
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Blumenthal's Charlotte International Arts Festival returns for another season

Organizers expect high turnout for second year of event



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

The Charlotte International Arts Festival (CIAF) is set to make its return on Sept. 15, allowing Charlotte residents to see local, national and international artists through live performances, art installations, global cuisine and more.

"The launch of CIAF last fall exceeded our expectations in every way," said Blumenthal Performing Arts President and CEO, Tom Gabbard. "The festival uniquely blends artists from around the world and around the corner. This year, we are really elevating the focus on international artists and organizations right here in Charlotte."

The festival is bringing together a global community, complete with the new International Bazaar — a two-day celebration at Founders Hall where patrons can shop and learn with vendors, music, food and more.

"Luke Jerram's GAIA, a giant inflatable of the earth created from NASA imagery, will [also] return to Founders Hall to highlight the global community we seek to bring together for 17 days," Gabbard said. "The Festival of India and Latin American Festival are now part of CIAF. The festival also returns to Ballantyne's Backyard and the soon-to-open The Amp with a variety of concerts. Most programs are free, including plentiful concerts Uptown at Wells Fargo Plaza, Levine Avenue of the Arts, and Ballantyne's Backyard."

According to the CIAF website, the festival will span:

- 17 days
- 170 free events
- 150 art installations
- 120 musical acts
- 100 Tiny Things Parade
- 75 vendors at the International Bazaar
- 9 Blumenthal Fellows
- 15+ venues, including three free outdoor stages
- 2 hit Broadway shows



The Latin America Festival will be a part of the 17-day long 2023 Charlotte International Arts Festival.
CREDIT: Blumenthal Performing Arts



The Festival of India will be a part of the 2023 Charlotte International Arts Festival for the first time in its 25-year run.
CREDIT: Blumenthal Performing Arts

As Gabbard indicated, the Festival of India and the Latin American Festival are officially partnering with the CIAF this year, marking the first time the organization has worked with other festivals.

The Festival of India — which takes place Sept. 23 — is entering its 25th year, and attendees will be able to appreciate the cultural diversity of India through Indian dance, music, art, food, and more.

"Our Queen City is home to foreign-born Americans from over 100 countries, and as immigrants, we feel a need to preserve and share aspects of our cultures with our mainstream community here," said Toni Sawhney, Festival of India founder. "For the past 25+ years, we have been showcasing the rich and vibrant diversity of Indian culture in Charlotte. This year, we are humbled to be invited to be an anchor event within the Charlotte International Arts Festival."

"We consider that to be a validation of our commitment to the core mission of nurturing artistic and cultural diversity here, and a recognition of our passion and dedication to adding a unique strand to the cultural mosaic of our beloved Queen City, which we all call home."

The Latin America Festival, also on Sept. 23, will take place at Ballantyne's Backyard and will have musical acts, cuisine, a community-organized interactive village, marketplace and dance performances, among other presentations and attractions.

The CIAF is adding more venues for its 17 day-long event, which include:

- A stage on Wells Fargo Plaza
- New Ballantyne venue The Amp
- Programming expansion in Founders Hall

The CIAF website confirms the return of Gaia, by UK artist Luke Jerram, as Gabbard referred to earlier in the article. The specifics of the work, however, are astounding: the sculpture of Earth will be suspended from above to allow for easy viewing. It's 23-feet in circumference, three-dimensional and illuminated. It will be on display Sept. 15-Oct. 1. Also Oct. 1 at Founder's Hall, a locally produced Argentinian **Tango Milonga** international dance party.

The final weekend of the festival, Founders Hall will transform into an **International Bazaar** Sept. 29 and 30, featuring 75 merchants and vendors representing local cultural groups and nonprofit organizations in a magnificent celebration of the art, food, goods and spirit that make up Charlotte's diverse and creative cultural landscape.

The Art of CIAF

CIAF released a list of the art installations on display for the duration of the festival, which include:

- **Birdmen**, from the Netherlands (Sept. 15-Oct. 1, Ballantyne)
- **Mentalgassi**, from Germany (Sept. 15-Oct. 1, Ballantyne)
- **Lotty by Moradavaga**, from Italy and Portugal (Sept. 15-Oct. 1, Ballantyne's Backyard)
- **Tablao Flamenco**, from Spain (Sept. 21-23, Uptown)
- **Epoch Tribe**, collected stories from Vietnam, Syria, Haiti, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Ethiopia, El Salvador (Sept. 30, Knight Theater, Uptown)

CIAF will have some performances in Ballantyne at the neighborhood's newest venue, The Amp. The kickoff starts on Sept. 16 with **FELA! The Concert**, a celebration of Nigerian superstar Fela Kuti, the founding father of Afrobeat. On Sept. 29, there will be a **Coco Live-to-Film Concert**, featuring a screening of the complete film with the soundtrack performed by Mexico's 20-member Orquesta Folclórica Nacional de México.

Ballantyne's Backyard will have performances, as well as large and small art galleries which include everything from enormous inflatable humanoids as seen in **Fantastic Planet**, by Australian artist Amanda Parer; to local creations by the new class of **Blumenthal Fellows**, whose work inspires joy, collaboration, provocative thought, awe, innovation and creativity; and a new parade of **100 Tiny Things**, part surprise, part treasure hunt, a playful, curious and delightfully disruptive artistic utopia that encourages the public to see the city through new eyes," according to the festival's website.

Uptown Charlotte will be where the ticketed events are located, including Broadway shows **Chicago** (Sept. 12-17) and **MJ: The Musical** (Sept. 27-Oct. 8) in the Belk Theater.

There will also be a performance in the Knight Theater Sept. 29 by West African international music superstar **Angélique Kidjo**. She's the winner of 10 Tony Awards



Dance performances and other live entertainment will be blaring through Charlotte during the 2023 Charlotte International Arts Festival.
CREDIT: Blumenthal Performing Arts

and five Grammy Awards.

The Wells Fargo Plaza will host free cultural events and concerts, including Brazilian jazz, flamenco, R&B, hip hop, a cappella and even **MJ**-themed lip sync battles.

More information on this year's festival and the schedule of events can be found on the event's website at <http://charlotteartsfest.com/>.

Our People: Natalie Watson

A Durham LGBTQ+ executive shares thoughts on affirming, self, youth and community



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

At the helm of any great thing, any monumental effort, is usually some dedicated and passionate person with a team of accomplices. Natalie Watson is one such person. Watson, practically a Durham native (living in the area since 1995) is the Interim Executive Director and former Deputy Director of the LGBTQ Center of Durham.

While totally leaning into the role, Watson is just fine with interim status, although modestly not particularly thrilled about being the face of an organization. Regardless, they revel in keeping things going in the background with vigor and enthusiasm.

Outside the walls of the center there's a wife, two cats and a very full life where warmth and compassion are exuded in all that is done. During this interview, we learn a little more about the person who serves as a guiding force at Durham's LGBTQ Center and beyond.

L'Monique King: What brought you to Durham?

Natalie Watson: My mother. She spent her formative years in North Carolina and let my father know that when he retired from the military she wanted to come back home.

LMK: Do you like Durham?

NW: I love Durham. It's not just home, it feels like home.

LMK: Acknowledging that your preferred pronouns are they/them - when did you come to the realization that the binary [her/him] pronouns did not work for you?

NW: I started using they/them pronouns in January 2017. Prior to that I started to realize I didn't like she/her but didn't know what to go by. It was one of those things where you're sitting in a room and someone asks what your pronouns are, and I really didn't know what to tell them. I just knew that when people said she, I felt icky.

LMK: Any advice for those who still struggle with utilizing they/them pronouns?

NW: Folks need to remember when it comes to pronouns, it's not about their feelings. It's about an individual's request to be respected for who they are. Part of being respected for who you are includes pronouns.

LMK: Are you partnered?

NW: Yes, I have a wife. We've been together for over five years and married for one.

LMK: You sound happy. What about your wife makes you smile whenever you think about it?

NW: When I think about her smile - I smile. It's bright, full of life and genuine.



Natalie Watson, Out front, up front and behind the scenes CREDIT: The LGBTQ Center of Durham

LMK: What would she say is your worst quality or the most nerve wracking thing about you?

NW: I read ahead when we watch horror movies, so I know the ending. [Apprehensive giggles] I pull up Wikipedia articles and read. She's a huge horror movie fan and can't stand it - but I've gotten better [chuckles].

LMK: If you do, what's your favorite or most utilized curse word and when do you use it most?

NW: Three come to mind, let's see...I say fuck a lot. I say fuck when I'm happy, when I'm sad, when I'm mad. It's full of emotion so I say fuck a lot.

LMK: Do you believe in a supreme being, and if you do, is there gender attached to that deity?

NW: Yes, I do and no I do not think they are a solid he/him. I was raised Christian but not in church. My mom is a non-practicing catholic, and my dad, I don't remember. So, I consider myself to be Christian, but I'm spiritual not religious. My relationship is with Jesus and God and no one else.

LMK: If you were growing up today, still in middle or high school, what would you want teachers to know about how to best support LGBTQ youth?

NW: My mother is a teacher, and I have had conversations with her [about this]. My mom is an amazing teacher, teaching for almost 20 years now. Specifically, during the pandemic, more and more kids were coming out as trans to her - not their parents. She's always been supportive. She lets kids know about language and tells them about her kids. She tells them about me and my brother - who has autism. They appreciate that. They understand her, understand that she gets it and why they shouldn't use derogatory terms. Her students can talk to her and she honors these children by listening to them, caring about what they are saying and using their [self-identified] pronouns.

I think teachers need to realize they have

these students longer than parents do, during the day. So, there will be questions that pop up about gender. Again, I'd remind them, it's not about your feelings - it's about creating an environment so that when you teach, students listen. It's about seeing the humanity in your students just like students need to see the humanity in their teachers.

LMK: Best meal you've ever had, where and why?

NW: [Long pause] I'm a foodie, so it's hard for me to answer this. I love eating. I love cooking. This is going to sound really corny but - it was actually the catering for our wedding. It was amazing food, and it encompassed both my wife's culture [Cuban and Puerto Rican] and my southern culture. There were Cuban sandwiches, a build your own waffle bar, build your own grits bowls with all the fixings. It was a brunch-themed wedding reception.

LMK: When you're not having delicious meals with your wife or spoiling her horror movies, what motivates you to do the work that you do?

NW: It's two-fold. I really enjoy genuinely helping the community and doing what I need to in my role to make sure services, programs and trainings are available to folks because it's so important that LGBTQ people have their humanity and their joy.

LMK: What exactly is the center's involvement with Durham Pride?

NW: We put on Durham Pride. The pride committee for Durham Pride is housed at the LGBTQ Community Center - so I work directly with the folks organizing Pride.

LMK: Durham Pride 2023's theme is "Give Them Their Flowers" and pays tribute to the courage and leadership of the trans community. Any thoughts or comments on that?

NW: I think it says enough in itself. I think the theme is a suggestion and a demand.

LMK: What can Durham Pride goers look forward to this year? Anything new on the agenda we should look out for?

NW: There will be lots more vendors, we have a new location for the concert in the center of downtown Durham and I'd like to say that our Pride has a 360 approach; we're hitting every mark with health vendors, vaccines, food, retail merchants and a lot more. I would like to mention something else special though - the City of Durham and the County of Durham are both sponsoring Pride for the first time this year.

LMK: Sounds awesome. When it's all said and done, this year and the next, what will Natalie Watson be doing say, 10 years from now?

NW: In 10 years, I see myself with my MBA, at least one kid, still living in Durham with my wife and working in a field that lets me use my operational skills while helping to improve the lives of others. ::



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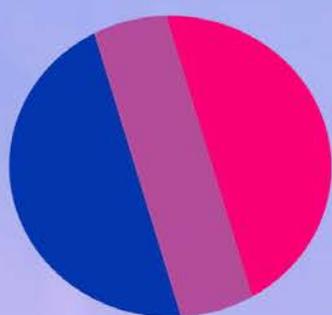
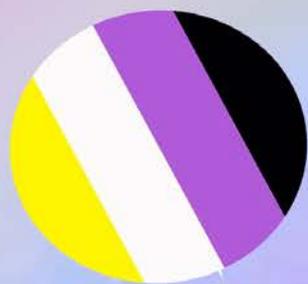


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