

## Special Trans Awareness Issue



- Trans Healthcare
- Trans folk we've lost
- San Fran helps trans homeless

Our Trans Home SF

The SF LGBT Center

The Golden Gate Bridge



**Our People:**  
Artistic Renaissance  
man Jordan Robinson  
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**Gay Republican  
Peter Boykin  
runs for Lt. Gov.**  
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## Mission:

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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## Scorpio displaced by mega 'Elevation' Church

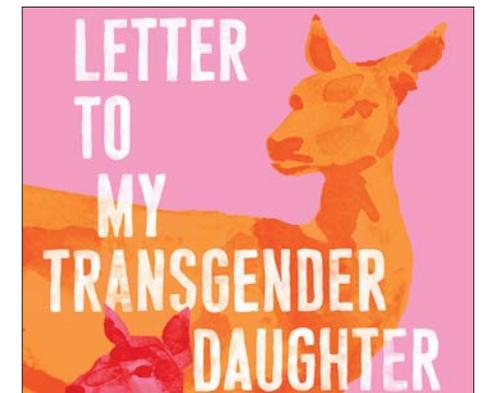
Carolinas' historic LGBTQ+ nightclub Scorpio displaced by evangelical mega worship franchise 'Elevation Church,' hunt for new club location on

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## Man pleads guilty to obstruction in murder of South Carolina trans woman

According to a press release dated Oct. 26 from the U.S. Department of Justice, a South Carolina man known as Xavier Pinckney has pleaded guilty to obstructing an investigation into the murder of Pebbles LaDime “Dime” Doe, a Black trans woman.

Doe was found dead in a car parked on a rural road in Allendale County, S.C., Aug. 4, 2019, after being shot three times in the head. Court documents revealed Pinckney, 24, provided false information to state authorities who were investigating Doe’s homicide.

“The defendant is being held accountable for trying to obstruct an investigation into the tragic murder of a Black

transgender woman,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “Acts of violence against LGBTQ+ people, including transgender women of color, are on the rise and have no place in our society. The Justice Department remains steadfast in its commitment to investigating and prosecuting those who target LGBTQ+ people with acts of violence or who try to unlawfully obstruct investigations into these heinous crimes.”

Daqua Ritter, 27, is being charged with first degree murder in the death of Doe. According to the release, Pinckney told investigators he failed to disclose his phone and text conversations with Doe on the day

of her murder. He also didn’t mention he saw Ritter the morning of Doe’s death.

“Hate has no place in South Carolina,” said U.S. Attorney Adair F. Borroughs for the District of South Carolina. “The senseless murder of Dime Doe, and any act of violence against the LGBTQ+ community, confirms the need to confront hate in all its forms. Our office will continue to pursue justice for those impacted by bias-motivated crimes.”

Pinckney is facing a maximum of 20 years in prison for obstruction. A federal district court judge will determine the sentence based on aggravating and mitigating factors presented by the legal teams. A sentencing date has not been established.

“The defendant’s guilty plea underscores our commitment to holding individuals accountable for their actions in the pursuit of justice,” said Special



**Pebbles LaDime Doe was found dead in a car parked on a rural road in Allendale County, South Carolina, on August 4, 2019. CREDIT: Facebook**

Agent in Charge Steve Jensen of the FBI Columbia Field Office. “The FBI and our partners remain determined to investigate crimes against marginalized communities and those who perpetrate them.” ::

—Qnotes Staff

## LGBTQ Center of Durham to host virtual AARP workshop

The LGBTQ Center of Durham will host a workshop with the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) for individuals older than 50 years of age. The BACK TO WORK 50+ workshop is meant to help unemployed workers over 50 build the skills and confidence to compete for new jobs. The Back to Work event will take place virtually from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Nov. 16.

According to the AARP website:

“Being over 50 can make it harder to find a job. If you’ve been out of work for some time, AARP Foundation can provide expert guidance for your job search. Our Back to Work 50+’ program offers progress check-ins, virtual interview tips and support from career coaches in your community or online. Get back on track with professional job search coaches who understand the challenges job seekers

over 50 may face.”

The LGBTQ Center of Durham is one of 12 partners with the AARP Back to Work program. The workshop is free to attend and offers free in-person and online workshops on best practices and strategies to get hired. Participants will receive a workbook for the workshop, help with creating resumes, job interview practice and more.

According to AARP, the program is specifically tailored for people who have moved to a new city to be close to family and need to start a job search from scratch, haven’t worked in a long time but need and want to work, feel stuck in their job search, caregivers who need to work from home so they can care for their spouse, people who were laid off from a job they’ve had for decades and those who work for an hourly wage and need



**The LGBTQ Center of Durham is one of 12 partners with the AARP Back to Work program, which will be hosted on November 16. CREDIT: Adobe Stock**

less physically strenuous work.

According to the website, the program has helped job seekers over 50 find employment in all kinds of fields, from customer service and administrative roles, to accounting, IT, healthcare and human resources positions. The workshop serves AARP members and non-members alike. If you’ve ever wished

there was someone who could help you update or refine your job search and interviewing skills, you’ve come to the right place.

Interested participants can register for the Zoom workshop by checking out this story on our website and following the links. ::

—Taylor Heeden

## U.S. Congressman introduces bill to create LGBTQ+ history museum

With LGBTQ+ History Month coming to a close, Wisconsin Democrat Mark Pocan filed two bills to start the process to create an American LGBTQ+ History Museum.

“As our community faces unprecedented attacks and attempts to erase our history, we must preserve and protect our stories for future generations,” Pocan said in a statement. “It is vital to remember our collective past – particularly when certain states, and even Members of Congress, seek to constrain and repeal existing rights by passing bills that harm LGBTQ+ youth and our community at large.”

This isn’t the first time a LGBTQ+ history museum was proposed. Flashback to 2013 — former Smithsonian researcher

Tim Gold and his husband Mitchell Gold worked to raise funds for a queer history museum. However, that project never came to be.

The two bills filed would create a committee to study what it would take to create the museum and then bring it into the Smithsonian institution. Both bills would have to be voted on and signed into law in order to form a new Smithsonian museum addition.

The first bill is designed to establish an eight-member commission made up of experts in museum planning and/or LGBTQ research and culture. This commission would take the lead in an 18-month-long study seeking to deter-

mine the viability of establishing the museum. This would include, but isn’t limited to, developing fundraising plans, looking at the costs and availability of collections and submitting a plan to Congress to establish and construct the museum. Once the commission has completed its study, Congress would vote on the second bill which would, if approved, officially designate the museum.

“Let’s tell these stories, the good and the bad, and honor the many contributions the LGBTQ+ community has made to this nation with a museum in Washington,



**Mark Pocan filed two bills to establish an American LGBTQ+ History Museum within the Smithsonian Institution. CREDIT: Facebook**

D.C.,” Pocan said. “I look forward to the passage of this legislation and to visiting this museum in the near future. ::

—Taylor Heeden

# Republican candidate for Lt. Gov. calls out other candidates' homophobic attacks on queer North Carolinians

Peter Boykin, an openly gay candidate for Lt. Gov., says Republicans such as Mark Robinson have hurt themselves by taking anti-LGBTQ+ stances



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Peter Boykin isn't the stereotypical conservative candidate for political office. The Mebane resident does hold a lot of the same right-leaning beliefs as other Republican candidates; he stands for the "extreme reduction of abortion," is in favor of an immigration moratorium and is staunchly pro-gun.

However, as many Republicans have aligned themselves with a widespread anti-LGBTQ+ movement, Boykin has found himself frustrated by the direction the conservative movement is heading.

"All these organizations were okay with gays and stuff like that, but now, it's all anti-gay stuff," he said. "Like, what the hell?"

Now, Boykin is making a run to become North Carolina's lieutenant governor in 2024, but he's taking a different route than his peers. Instead of spewing hateful rhetoric at the LGBTQ+ community, Boykin said he wants to leave the name calling out and focus on what he calls "real issues." He criticized the North Carolina General Assembly for prioritizing passing three anti-LGBTQ+ laws over the summer instead of focusing on passing a state budget.

"The Parents' Bill of Rights is a bunch of bullsh\*t," Boykin said. "It boils down to this: You have the right to your child except for if we don't like the way you raise your child."

Boykin — who is openly gay — runs his own blog called "Go Right News," where he writes about current events and gives monologues on hot button issues happening in conservative politics. Boykin was also the founder of Gays for Trump, which was created for LGBTQ+ voters who supported former president Donald Trump.

LGBTQ+ people played an integral role in the 2020 election, with 81 percent of LGBTQ+ voters voting for President Joe Biden and 14 percent voting for Trump. According to a

story carried in Newsweek, a survey conducted by the gay social network Hornet prior to the election showed that out of the 14 percent of Trump LGBTQ+ voters, 45 percent of the gay men surveyed said they planned to vote for Trump. It remains unclear if the end result was what Hornet predicted.

Regardless of possible past LGBTQ+ support for Trump and the GOP, Boykin believes it is important to sound the alarm on the Republican Party's increasing attacks on LGBTQ+ people, citing incidents like the transphobic hate campaign against trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney from right wing legislators and even attacks on his character.

"They're trying to call me a pedophile and a groomer," Boykin said.

In fact, Boykin has called out some of North Carolina's most infamous homophobes, including current Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, who has repeatedly likened the tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ North Carolinians to "maggots" and "filth."

Boykin said he used to see Robinson during events for Boykin's run for the North Carolina General Assembly, and in fact, he saw Robinson as a "political buddy" at the time.

"We talked, and he was always nice to me," Boykin recalled. "He came to my rally when I did a rally against the March for our Lives



Peter Boykin, who is making a run for North Carolina's Lt. Gov., called out fellow GOP candidates for hateful and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. CREDIT: Facebook

— he came and spoke with that. We spoke afterwards, I [went] to his rally. We spoke a few times when he was running for office."

According to Boykin, Robinson's original campaign staff when he was running for lieutenant governor included several LGBTQ+ people and had LGBTQ+ supporters. However, all of that reportedly changed when Robinson secured the Republican nomination.

"He had gay people working for his team and a lot of gay supporters, and we were all there [at his primary event], and he was already letting the win get to his head," Boykin said. "Instead of mingling with us, he waited to be announced like he was some kind of superstar before coming out. I haven't spoken to him since."

After winning the lieutenant governor seat, Boykin said that's when he started to see the hateful side of Robinson — one where he called LGBTQ+ people evil, filth and more.

"People say stupid stuff all the time," he explained. "But then when I saw the video of him preaching, basically saying that straights are superior and the gay people don't produce anything good, I'm like, 'Jesus. What the hell?'"

Boykin's largest hurdle in the race for lieutenant governor is facing a pool of candidates who vehemently oppose his existence, in-

cluding Robinson's handpicked running mate, Allen Mashburn. Qnotes profiled Mashburn earlier this month, noting his history of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and dehumanizing tactics.

Mashburn wrote in an opinion piece for the The Tennessee Star:

"The decision to dedicate an entire month to celebrate moral degradation is a step too far ... I never envisioned a day where transvestites would lecture us on human biology, or sterilizers would pose as health professionals advocating for human rights. It seems that our nation has descended into a state of utter madness, where men can now claim pregnancy and the number of genders rivals the alphabet."

Boykin challenges the notion from Mashburn and other Republicans that the conservative movement is supposed to be a religious crusade. Rather, he said the Republican Party needs to step away from demonizing queer voters on the basis of religion and get back to dealing with "real issues."

"I really believe in the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for all people, including for the gay community," he said. "It isn't supposed to be the ultra religious Republican Party that some want it to be ... Republican or Democrat, I don't care, I'm not closing my door on people who need help."

Editor's note: Boykin has been called out by other LGBTQ+ news organizations for previous statements he made about trans people in the military. In an article from LGBTQ Nation, Boykin said he believed President Trump's ban on trans people in the military was a good thing, as well as saying he believed trans people shouldn't have access to weapons.

"People already have enough problems with PTSD, I don't think it's a good idea to give someone going through that type of change a weapon," he said. "They might snap and turn it on their fellow soldiers." ::

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# Scorpio displaced by mega 'Elevation' Church

Controversial 'contemporary Christian' church known for anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Within days of being listed as the longest running nightclub in a QNotes story recognizing historic gay bars in North and South Carolina, Charlotte's Scorpio (located on Freedom Drive in West Charlotte) announced they would be closing, with plans to reopen in the near future.

Following up that disclosure comes another dubious announcement: The controversial evangelical mega worship franchise known as Elevation Church will occupy the property and Scorpio has been informed it's time to go.

The club, which originally began business in 1968, opened early this past Sunday, Oct. 29 with a reunion evening for long-time patrons of the club. Perhaps short notice and lack of promotion led to the sparsely attended event, although a handful of patrons did show up for the historic celebration. The evening's presentation included music by Lin Benfield, a popular DJ at the club during a large portion of its 20th century operations and DJ Ghost, Scorpio's current resident DJ. Drag performers included Angela Lopez, Ivy Carter and Jayla Serena Mitchell.

Among patrons in attendance was QNotes publisher Jim Yarbrough, who has long been a supporter of the club. He spoke with Scorpio General Manager Michael Sharpton over the course of the

that he was unaware of what the new property owners had in store for the site, or who they actually were, though he did confirm their final day of operation was Oct. 31.

According to Yarbrough, Sharpton has since verified the business was notified by property owners they would need to be out of the space by Nov. 10.

Throughout its history Charlotte has captured attention for a number of specific identifiers: a leader in textile industries and finance; high crime rates and a few years spent at the top of the most murders per capita in the United States list, and – perhaps ironically given the crime and murder labels – the “city of Churches,” because of its over sized number of Christian worship facilities.

To date, the only label for Charlotte still identified with the city is finance hub, or Bank Town, as many visitors and residents refer to Charlotte. According to the website Rentech International, Charlotte is currently home to around 350 Christian churches, a significant drop since the 20th century, but still a sizable number, which does not



increased to more than 26,000.

Two things remain unclear: Will Charlotte have enough interest to support yet another Elevation Church and especially in a city with such a sizable number of churches, will it even be possible to fill more pews? According to Sharpton, the building is currently not slated to be demolished and plans are in place to repurpose the structure.

In an OpEd carried by QNotes written by author Steven Lovegrove, the writer talked about his experiences with Elevation and confirmed Furtick's position on sexuality: “A few minutes into the first sermon ... Steven Furtick admitted that his church often gets asked about their position on sexuality. Apparently, this is a common question about Elevation and one he seems to be tired of hearing. Furtick explained that their position is very simple. He quotes I Corinthians 7:2: ‘Each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband,’ then repeats it patronizingly. He says it's that easy — if you don't have a wife, you don't get to have sex. Then he moves on.”

Elevation's policy on LGBTQ+ people has consistently remained vague throughout its history. Multiple former members have talked about their experiences after coming out in the church and stated they were shunned and not allowed to hold leadership positions because of their sexual orientation.

The website churchclarity.org indicates that Elevation's history has indeed remained consistently nebulous, listing their attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community as “unclear.”

The closing of a historic LGBTQ+ gathering place like Scorpio is a huge loss for Charlotte. The fact that an entity such as Elevation, seemingly masquerading as a center of welcoming and love, which reportedly holds such contempt for the LGBTQ+ community and will erase part of that history, suggests the move is rooted in some sort of ulterior motive. ::



evening, who informed Yarbrough of the latest developments.

The club's concept and branding are currently owned by local investor Johnny Martin. The property the building sits on, according to public record, was purchased in 2020 by an entity identified only as Freedom Drive Investors, LLC. No additional public record indicates the property has been bought or sold again since that time.

When Sharpton spoke with QNotes about the closing of the club for a story that was published Oct. 13, he inferred

include temples, mosques and other places of worship.

Elevation Church, according to Google, has more than 20 facilities located across the Eastern United States and Canada. Founder Steven Furtick and seven other families from Christ Covenant Church in Shelby relocated to Charlotte, meeting in Providence High School. On Feb. 5, 2006, the first Sunday worship service was held, with 121 people attending. News analysis from the website premierchristianity.com reported in July of this year, weekly attendance has since

# Q+ Equality Foundation Expands Q+ Workplace Designation

Fostering openness and equity in employment



by **Joey Amato**  
Qnotes Contributing Writer

Launched in Q4 2022 as a 501(c)(3), the mission of Q+ Equality Foundation is to empower Q+ talent and cultivate workplaces where inclusivity thrives, and every identity is celebrated. Q+ Equality Foundation strives to serve as a nexus between students, colleges, businesses and Q+ professionals.

Currently, over 1.2 million Q+ individuals join the workforce each year with around 30% facing deliberate or unintentional discrimination. Additionally, in the existing workforce, less than half feel comfortable being out. The Q+ Equality Foundation has worked with SMBs, Fortune 500 companies, and LGBTQ+ individuals to establish the Q+ Workplace designation, aiming to set a higher standard of inclusivity and provide better opportunities for Q+ talent, particularly in sectors lacking Q+ representation.

The Foundation's efforts are focused on elevating Q+ voices in the workplace and promoting equality. Their network includes nearly 100 Equality Ambassadors: mid-to-senior level Q+ professionals volunteering their expertise to foster inclusivity in other organizations and mentor emerging Q+ tal-

ent. Notable partnerships include companies like American Express, Applovin and LocumTenens.com.

Q+ Equality Foundation has witnessed rapid growth! "From partnering with about 40 workplaces and 70 schools at the end of Q1, we have expanded our reach to over 100 workplaces and 850 schools by the end of Q3," mentioned Q+ Equality Foundation Executive Director, Thomas Ryan-Lawrence (he/him). "We never anticipated establishing relationships with so many schools so quickly! In order to keep up with the increased demand of new Q+ talent using our resources, we need more organizations that wish to earn the Q+ Workplace designation." Ryan-Lawrence continues to say, "We pride ourselves on being a resource to all organizations that hold the Q+ Workplace designation. Sharing our best practices, removing the guesswork and helping each organization create welcoming workplaces all while raising the standard of inclusion and allyship is what we do."

The decision to establish the Foundation stemmed from the realization that SMBs historically struggled to implement effective Q+ inclusion strategies due to limited resources and a lack of expertise. Before the Q+ Workplace designation launched, Q+ talent was failing to reach their full potential while businesses were facing higher than average turnover and missing out on attracting top

Q+ talent. "Our original objective was to provide direct support to Q+ talent, primarily students and recent graduates," says Ryan-Lawrence. "However, as we progressed, we recognized our true potential for

impact lies in our ability to assist small and medium-sized businesses in enhancing their inclusivity efforts. The more organizations we partner with and designate as a Q+ Workplace, the more opportunities Q+ talent have to find somewhere to call home where they can be their true selves."

Achieving the Q+ Workplace designation signifies a strong commitment to progressive values and social responsibility. This recognition enhances an organization's reputation and solidifies its position as a preferred choice for people who prioritize inclusivity. This is especially valuable for prospective and current Q+ employees, as the designation mitigates apprehension, fosters openness and fosters a sense of representation.

Looking ahead, the Foundation aims to continue its trajectory of growth, with an emphasis on increasing the number of Q+ Workplace designations. "We've seen more and more SMBs beginning to understand the benefits of having an inclusive culture, not just for Q+ talent, but for all people," says



Ryan-Lawrence. "While one of the biggest challenges is ensuring everyone feels included in a multigenerational workforce, we absolutely love helping organizations solve that problem. After all, inclusion is a two-way street; it's not just about the marginalized group...every person matters," he concludes.

Cristina Gutierrez, VP of People Operations for American Express, remarked, "I'm proud to work at an organization where I feel comfortable bringing my whole self to work and where I am able to create a safe and authentic environment for others." American Express was a proud sponsor of Q+ Equality Foundation's "I Am Q+" campaign, launched on National Coming Out Day, to raise awareness and create a meaningful impact by empowering others to be out in the workplace, any day of the year.

To nominate a business for the Q+ Workplace designation, join the "I Am Q+" movement, make a donation, or simply learn more, visit [iam.qplusequality.org](http://iam.qplusequality.org).

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# In Memoriam: Honoring those trans lives lost to violent deaths over the past year

Record highs of transgender and non-binary violent deaths continue to soar



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

The last few years have resulted in a drastic increase in transgender and non-binary violent deaths, with 2020 being the the worst recorded year in history. So far in 2023, there have been at least 25 reported murders of transgender and gender non-conforming people according to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

The HRC reported at least 41 trans and gender non-conforming deaths in 2022, with a majority of the victims being Black and Latinx transgender women. **Qnotes** reported on the HRC's findings last year, and since November 2022, there have been at least 34 deaths.

According to the HRC:

"These victims, like all of us, are loving partners, parents, family members, friends and community members. They worked, went to school and attended houses of worship. They were real people — people who did not deserve to have their lives taken from them."

**Qnotes** would like to honor the memory of our trans and non-binary brothers and sisters this November whose lives ended far too soon. Each person on this list was brutally murdered or killed, and we honor their ability and courage to be true to themselves this Transgender Day of Remembrance.

## In Memory of Those We Have Lost

**Forty-year-old Kelly Loving** was one of



two trans people killed in the Club Q mass shooting in Colorado Springs on Nov., 20, 2022. Kelly was

described by her sister in an interview as being "loving" and someone who was "always trying to help the next person out instead of thinking of herself. She just was a caring person."

**Twenty-eight-year-old transgender man Daniel Aston** was



one of two trans people killed in the Club Q mass shooting in Colorado Springs

on Nov. 20, 2022. Daniel was a well-known bartender at Club Q, with the Associated Press reporting that he could often be seen "letting loose,



sliding across the stage," entertaining patrons and helping make Club Q a welcoming space in Colorado Springs for the LGBTQ+ community.



**Diamond Jackson-McDonald**, a 27-year-old Black trans woman, is remembered by friends and family as a loving person and a gem. Linda Jackson, Diamond's mother, told local press: "I just want the world to know

that Diamond was my rock, my shoulder, my child ... I love with every inch of what I have left to give." Diamond was killed on Thanksgiving Day 2022 in Philadelphia.



**Destiny Howard**, a 23-year-old Black transgender woman who was fatally shot in Macon, GA on Dec. 9, 2022. The Bibb County Sheriff's Office is currently investigating Destiny's death.



in Philadelphia, PA on Dec. 12, 2022 — his 33rd birthday.



**Twenty-seven-year-old Latina transgender woman Caelee Love-Light** is remembered by friends as someone "who loved to read."

Caelee was killed in Phoenix, Arizona on Dec. 17, 2022.



**Seventeen-year-old Morgan Moore**, a trans boy, had a natural talent for music and loved to cook. Morgan was disabled and lived with multiple sclerosis, diabetes and long COVID. Morgan was the victim of criminal neglect at the

hands of his parents, which resulted in worsened health issues and his eventual death. Authorities in Montgomery, MA charged Morgan's parents with second-degree murder and six counts of neglect of a minor.



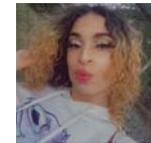
**Jasmine "Star" Mack's** sister, Pamela Witherspoon, said that Jasmine was "a sweet person." She also said that her sister "loved to sing gospel songs and was an excellent

actor." Mack was killed in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 7.



**KC Johnson's** partner Bulla Brodzinski remembered her as being "kind and car-

ing." The 27-year-old transgender woman was found murdered in Wilmington, N.C. on Jan. 14 after being reported as missing on the day prior.



**21-year-old Unique Banks**, a Latina trans woman, was killed in a mass shooting along with her mother, Alexandra Olmo, on Jan. 23 in Chicago. Unique's father

Omar Burgos said that his "heart is torn apart" and that he had hoped for her to live with him in Florida.



**Zachee Imanitwitaho**, a Black transgender woman, was described as someone who was "well-loved by family, friends, and coworkers, and that she lived her life bravely and authentically." She

immigrated to the U.S. from Rwanda and was killed on Feb. 3 in Louisville, KY in the parking lot of her workplace.



**Maria Jose Rivera Rivera**, a 22-year-old Latina transgender woman, was described by her immigration lawyer as "lively, funny, and dynamic" and "a joy to work with." On

Jan. 21, Maria Jose was found fatally shot in Houston, one of two people found dead at an apartment complex in an apparent murder-suicide.



**Chashay Henderson** was described as "a bubbly spirit with a down to earth, tell it like it is personality," who was "as beautiful as can be, inside and out." Chashay was

shot in Milwaukee on Feb. 26, 2023.



**Tortuguita**, a 26-year-old Indigenous queer and non-binary environmental activist and community organizer, is remembered as a "radiant, joyful, beloved commu-

nity member" who "brought an indescribable jubilation to each and every moment of their life," and "fought tirelessly to

honor and protect the sacred land of the Weelaunee Forest. Tortuguita was shot and killed by Georgia state troopers in Atlanta, Georgia on Jan. 18 during an ongoing protest alongside other self-described "forest defender" protestors against a proposed \$90 million, 85-acre police training facility deemed "Cop City" by activists, slated to be built in the Weelaunee Forest in Atlanta.



**Tasiyah Woodland** was a Black "high-spirited" transgender woman who was "protective of those she loved." On a GoFundMe page, Tasiyah's aunt, Lizzy Woodland, said "she made everyone around her know that they were loved." Tasiyah was tragically killed in St. Mary's County, MD on March 24.



**Ashley Burton** was a 37-year-old Black transgender woman who was described as "a courageous fighter" by her cousin. Ashley was killed in Atlanta, GA on April 11, 2023. Her brother Patrick praised her authenticity as a trans woman saying, "The way my sibling moved in life, it was...take it or leave it. 'This is how I am.' You can respect it or neglect it, but Ashley put it out there and let that person know. It's not going to be a secret."



**Koko Da Doll** was a 35-year-old Black transgender woman, a successful rapper who was working on new music, and starred in the barrier-breaking, award-winning Sundance Film Festival documentary, "Kokomo City." Tragically, Koko was found shot to death near an Atlanta shopping plaza on April 18.



**Banko Brown** is remembered as being "brilliant" and as someone who made "everybody laugh." He was killed on April 27 in San Francisco after an altercation with an armed security guard at a local Walgreens store. Julia Arroyo, the co-executive director of the Young Women's Freedom Center where Brown was working as a community organizing intern, said Banko "made friends easily and connected deeply with others."



**Ashia Davis** was a 34-year-old Black transgender woman from Detroit who was full of joy, devoted to her faith and a loving dog owner to a Yorkie named Clyde. On the second day of Pride Month, Ashia was found dead in a

Highland Park Michigan hotel room.



**Chanell Perez Ortiz**, a 29-year-old Puerto Rican transgender woman, was a cosmetologist. She was interested in fashion, makeup and hair styles. According to PGH Lesbian, Channel "shared a lot of playful, fun content, and clearly had strong friendships with people who are grieving her deeply." Channel was killed in Carolina, Puerto Rico, on June 25.

**Jacob Williamson**, an 18-year-old



transgender man, worked at a local Waffle House and was beloved by coworkers and even had moved in with one of them about a month prior to his death, according to his coworker's TikTok account. Jacob loved to sing and draw. Jacob was killed in Monroe, S.C., on June 30. Qnotes reported on Williamson's death in July. Family friend Promise Williams said Williamson was "a loving, caring soul that only wanted to be loved and accepted by everyone."



**Camdyn Rider** was eight months pregnant at the time of his murder, which occurred on July 21 outside his home in Winter Park, FL. Camdyn recently had posted on Facebook about how excited he was to welcome a child into the world. Camdyn was killed by his partner, Riley Groover, during an argument. Groover then died by suicide. Sheriff's deputies investigating the murder revealed that Groover had a history of prior domestic violence incidents.



**DéVonnie J'Rae Johnson** was a vibrant artist who was born in Tulsa, OK. She had moved to Los Angeles in order to transition. DéVonnie was shot and killed on

August 7 during an altercation with a security guard just one day after her birthday, according to news reports and social media.



**Thomas 'Tom-Tom' Robertson** was working as a cook at a local IHOP restaurant in East Chicago, Ind., having relocated there from Chicago, Ill, when he was killed on August 17. Thomas frequently changed the color and style of his hair, posting photos online showcasing his creativity.



**YOKO** was a talented nonbinary artist and DJ. YOKO was killed when they were struck and killed by a driver of an SUV on Sept. 19 in New Orleans. YOKO loved their family and their friends, who remember YOKO as "an exceptional, joyful, absurdly talented, and extremely loving and gentle human."



**Luis Ángel Díaz Castro** studied at The Universidad de Puerto Rico en Arecibo and worked at the Department of Education. He also loved Latin music. At just 22-years-old, Luis Ángel was tragically murdered on Aug. 12 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



**Chyna Long** was a 30-year-old Black transgender woman and dance choreographer who was shot and killed on Oct. 8 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her life was honored by friends, family and the local LGBTQ+ community in Milwaukee at the Zao MKE Church.



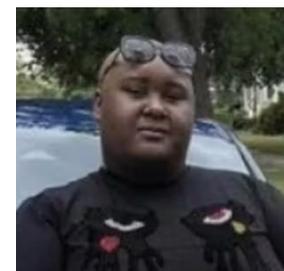
**Sherlyn Marjorie** was a drag performer who one friend remembered as "the best impersonator in Tijuana, my second Edith Marquez." She was beloved

by her local LGBTQ+ community in Albuquerque, N.M., where she was killed on Sept. 17.



**A'nee Johnson**, who was also known as A'nee Roberson, was a 30-year-old Black transgender woman from Washington

D.C. On October 14, A'nee was killed in D.C. during an assault when she was pushed into a roadway and hit by a car. The driver of the car, who was not involved in the assault, stayed at the scene. Homicide detectives are searching for the person who assaulted her and caused her death.



**Dominic Dupree**, who was also known as **Dominic Palace**, was a 25-year-old Black gender non-conforming person from Gary,

Ind., who operated companies including Private Protection Division LLC and Hondo IV Lawncare and Snow Removal LLC. Tragically, Dominic was fatally shot in Chicago on October 13.



**Lisa Love** was described by a friend as "funny, smart, beautiful and a breath of fresh air to this world." Lisa's cousin remembered her "an all-

around good person who did not deserve this. A loving, caring, free-spirited person. Always smiling and laughing." Lisa was fatally shot on October 17 while walking home in Chicago from a friend's house.



**London Price**, a 26-year-old Black transgender woman, was described by her aunt as being "always beautiful and pretty," saying, "She'll give you the shirt off her back, and I think

that's kind of what put her in this situation to get her hurt." London was fatally shot in Miami-Dade County on October 23. ::

# Trans patients and their doctors dealing with confusion, fear under healthcare bans

Young people barred from gender affirming care in NC can face greater mental health challenges and higher rates of suicide

By Joe Killian | NC Newsline

When Sage, a 14-year-old non-binary person from Greensboro, came out as transgender, they had a lot going for them: the support of their family and friends, a culture that was becoming more aware and accepting of transgender people and their needs and access to good and affordable medical care.

After consulting with doctors, Sage and their family chose to use puberty blockers for about two years. The extra time allowed Sage to more consciously work through their gender identity and strategies to prevent gender dysphoria – the distress that comes from a misalignment of one’s body and gender identity.

The process was simple, safe and reversible, Sage and their family said, and the difference it made was life changing. “They weren’t sure yet exactly what they were going to want in the future,” Sage’s mother, Debra, said. “But this allowed a pause to figure things out.”

This sort of treatment has been in use for four decades, during which studies have repeatedly shown it leads to better mental health outcomes for transgender youth, dramatically lower levels of depression and the lifetime chance of suicidal ideation. It’s broadly supported by the nation’s largest and most respected medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychiatric Association and the Endocrine Society.

In North Carolina, after a legislative session that saw broad assaults on LGBTQ people, their visibility and their allies, it is now illegal.

## “A Lot of Confusion and Fear”

House Bill 808 became law when the General Assembly’s GOP majority overturned Gov. Roy Cooper’s veto in August. It bans all gender-affirming medical care – from puberty blockers and hormone treatment to various surgeries – for anyone under 18, irrespective of their doctor’s advice and parents’ consent. The law also prohibits state funds and Medicaid dollars from being used for such care, directly or indirectly. Doctors providing such care could face civil penalties and lose their medical licenses under the new law.

For families like Sage’s – and the doctors who treat transgender youth – the ambiguity of the law’s language is already causing confusion and fear.

A section of the law states medical professionals “shall not be prohibited from continuing or completing a course of treatment for a minor that includes a surgical gender transition procedure, or the administration of puberty-blocking drugs or cross-sex hormones, if all of the following apply:

1. The course of treatment commenced prior to Aug. 1, 2023, and was still active as of that date.
2. In the reasonable medical judgment



Charlotte Trans Health continues to work with youth 16 and over to obtain gender-affirming care in Mecklenburg County and other areas of the state. CREDIT: Courtesy Charlotte Trans Health

of the medical professional, it is in the best interest of the minor for the course of treatment to be continued or completed.

3. The minor’s parents or guardians consent to the continuation or completion of treatment.”

The law’s language does not specify what qualifies as “a course of treatment” that has commenced.

Would a diagnosis of gender dysphoria after consultation with psychologists and physicians qualify?

Would they be required to have begun a course of physical treatment, such as puberty blockers? If so, could they proceed from that treatment on to other treatments, or only complete the most recent course of treatment?

In an environment in which Republican state lawmakers and conservative activists have compared voluntary treatments that are the standard of care for transgender people to child abuse, forced sterilization and lobotomies, who decides whether a doctor’s medical judgment is “reasonable?”

“We didn’t have the answer to any of those questions,” said Debbie, Sage’s mother.

Their solution, after consultation with a local doctor, was to move up the timeline of Sage’s hormone treatment so medical records reflected it would already have begun by the time the law took effect. Sage was grateful the doctor was so proactive and that they’ll be able to get care in the future, but worries about those who haven’t been so fortunate.

Transgender patients, their families and doctors filed a federal lawsuit last month over the new law, saying it bars transgender patients from treatments and procedures widely available to and in use for cisgender patients of all ages.

“This treatment is medically necessary, safe, effective, and supported by every

major medical organization in the U.S.,” said Dr. Riley Smith, a family physician and an assistant professor at UNC School of Medicine during the press conference announcing the suit.

“Laws banning gender-affirming care will have dire consequences for transgender youth,” said Riley, who is a plaintiff in the suit. “We do not need politicians in the exam rooms with us, overriding the decisions of families and their doctors or putting our professional licenses at risk for doing our jobs.”

“Instead, providers in North Carolina should be able to provide the highest quality, evidence-based care to their transgender patients, just like we do for our other patients,” Smith said.

Newsline spoke to doctors who work with transgender patients across the state this month about how they’re reacting to the law and what it will mean for their practices and patients. Several declined to comment on record, citing threats of violence to their practices or their homes from people opposed to their work. Others spoke on the condition they, their hospitals or practices not be directly identified because of violent threats and fear of political retaliation from the legislature.

“There’s a lot of confusion and fear right now,” said Katherine Croft, a nurse working in trans health care and board member of the LGBT Center of Raleigh. “It results in a lot of patients not knowing the right thing and maybe getting multiple different answers as to whether they can continue this medically necessary care. And there’s a lot of apprehension for those who were identified as trans earlier, were on track to get care but maybe hadn’t by the [August 1] date.”

For a variety of reasons, most trans-

gender people still come to identify as trans and take steps to socially and – if they feel it medically necessary – transition after puberty, Croft said. But for many, doing so earlier can make the process much easier, she said.

“For those who are able to identify themselves early and have supportive families that are willing to investigate treatment, see if it’s right for them, being able to do something like puberty blockers, and then move into hormone therapy is much more beneficial to those patients,” Croft said.

In addition to alleviating the psychological turmoil of experiencing a puberty that doesn’t align with their gender identity, those who are able to transition earlier can often opt for less treatment later. Including, Croft said, less utilization of gender affirming surgery to alter aspects of the body changed in that puberty.

With trans young people now barred from gender affirming care in North Carolina, Croft said, they will likely face greater mental health challenges, higher rates of suicide and a steeper climb when they do transition later in life.

## A Double-Edged Sword

Croft, who is herself transgender, said it is becoming more common for people to identify as trans earlier than people of her generation often did. But that’s because trans visibility and acceptance have increased in much the same way it has become more socially acceptable for gay, lesbian and bisexual people to be out of the closet with their friends, families and in their workplaces.

“I’ve known that I was trans from a very young age,” Croft said. “I can go back to when I was six or seven and very clearly see that I had that incongruence in my gender. But I tried to transition in 2005,



‘Laws banning gender-affirming care will have dire consequences for transgender youth.’ – Dr. Riley Smith CREDIT: Screen Capture



According to trans healthcare nurse Katherine Croft (above) a lot of patients don't know what options are available to continue medically necessary care. CREDIT: Courtesy Katherine Croft

must be shielded. The rhetoric is not that different from previous moral panics around gay and lesbian people decades ago, Croft said – but this one has a new and different dimension.

“When it comes to transgender people, there is an aspect of this that is about access to health care,” Croft said. “The medical community recognizes and agrees that this care is lifesaving, and we’re seeing these attempts to legislate it out of existence.”

“Waking up and constantly looking at the news and finding another article that is debating whether you should exist as a person is very demoralizing and can make you feel very negative,” Croft said. “It adds this extra layer of fatigue and stress on top of an already very stressful existence, this misunderstanding and demonization of trans identity as a whole and trans health care as a part of that.”

Debra, the mother of trans youth Sage, said she knows her family is lucky to have access to good, gender-affirming health care in an environment that has grown increasingly hostile to it. But she knows families who aren't so lucky – and some who are contemplating moving to states where such bans aren't in place.

“I do believe that's one of the goals of all of this,” Debra said. “You take a state like North Carolina, a purple state that still has plenty of progressive people, and you make it increasingly a hostile place for them and for their families. They leave and suddenly the state gets redder, you have less political opposition.”

#### Moral Panic and Glimmers of Hope

With North Carolina joining a national anti-transgender wave that threatens access to much needed healthcare, a new program in the state's largest city is looking to provide a lifeline.

Last month non-profit Charlotte Trans Health announced the Providing Access to Trans Health (PATH) program – an effort to connect trans people 16 and older with the care still available to them. The program, supported by Mecklenburg County with funds from the American Rescue Plan

Act (ARPA), will provide case management services to help find trans-friendly doctors through its well-established network and cover the cost of mental health care and prescriptions like those used in hormone replacement therapy. Services for those living outside Mecklenburg County are covered by donations.

“We formed 11 years ago,” said Holly Savoy, a psychologist and executive director of Charlotte Trans Health. “We were 13 providers gathered together to try to kind of fill that void, to better educate ourselves and create some visibility of the limited resources that were there at the time for transgender patients.”

Charlotte Trans Health has since grown to a robust non-profit network of providers, from therapists and family physicians to specialists in transition care, working around and increasingly beyond the Queen City.

“We’ve seen so much demand and particularly with all the telehealth going on, we’ve had providers from other areas get involved as well,” Savoy said.

Recent legislation may have – for the moment – closed the door on treatments like puberty blockers and hormone replacement therapy for trans youth, Savoy said. But connecting young trans people with the mental health care they need and the doctors who will be able to help them when that treatment becomes available is important work. For so many trans people of all ages, good care from medical providers who understand their lives and concerns feels out of reach, she said – but it doesn't have to be.

When trans healthcare bans began proliferating across the country, North Carolina was for a time a haven for trans patients from nearby Tennessee, Savoy said. Now, North Carolinians are looking to neighboring Virginia and South Carolina – states that don't yet have such bans in place – to get care.

“There are growing networks and collectives of providers around the country who are coming together to really collaborate in supporting one another and navigating all the legisla-

tion throughout the country,” Savoy said. “We have people in states like North Carolina and Texas, but we’re also in touch with providers and networks of providers in other states, where maybe treatment is available across state lines.”

It's a demoralizing time for both patients and providers trying to navigate vague and hostile new legislation, threats of lawsuits and even violence, Savoy said. But she tries to remember – and remind others – of why this sort of care is suddenly being threatened.

“It's just awful to have to go through what's happening right now and how it's affecting peoples' lives,” Savoy said. “But in facing all of this backlash, I try to remember that it's because of all the wonderful progress we've made in recent years. And we are going to find our way back to that progress. That's a little glimmer of hope.” ::



'It's awful ... to go through what's happening right now.' - Holly Savoy, Executive Director, Charlotte Trans Health Credit: Holly Savoy/Charlotte Trans Health

just around the time I turned 18. And even at that time, there was not any real clear discussion around me of trans people. I didn't even know that medical care really existed for trans people.”

That's changed drastically, with transgender and non-binary musicians like Kim Petras and Janelle Monáe enjoying mainstream stardom, trans actors like Laverne Cox and Elliot Page sharing their transition stories and transgender athletes and models breaking barriers and making history.

That increased visibility can be a double edged sword, with conservative activists and lawmakers seeing increased openness about sexual and gender identity as a “social contagion” threatening children who would otherwise be straight and cisgender. Those sentiments have provided fuel for a national movement to drive LGBTQ people from the public square. Politicians like Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson – now running for governor – have described even the mention of LGBTQ people as “filth” from which children

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# How San Francisco is addressing the challenge of Trans homelessness

Municipal government and community partners have created programs to assist those in need



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Homelessness among LGBTQ+ identifying people is far more prevalent than in other communities, with trans and gender non-conforming people unhoused at the highest rate in our community.

According to the Texas Homeless Network and the Trevor Project, one in three transgender people in the United States have experienced homelessness. In addition, 63 percent of transgender people and 80 percent of nonbinary people experiencing homelessness were unsheltered, with the Texas Homeless Network citing discrimination and societal stigmas around trans identity as a major factor in those rates.

Many cities and towns across the country are grappling with the current housing crisis, with homelessness rates on the rise and what feels like no sign of relief. San Francisco has one of the highest homelessness rates in the country, with 7,754 people reported to be unhoused — living in tents, cars, or other places not meant for human habitation — in 2022.

However, according to the 2022-2023 City Performance Report published this past July, the unhoused population has decreased by 15 percent since 2019. It also revealed homelessness itself decreased at a rate of three percent. What strategy was implemented to have this result?

Specialized organizations and municipal entities were tailored to addressing the issue of homelessness in the local trans community, and they have come together to create a multifaceted approach to addressing housing solutions for trans San Franciscans.

## Office of Transgender Initiatives and the work of advocacy organizations

The city established the Office of Transgender Initiatives (OTI) in 2017 to advance equity of transgender, gender non-conforming and intersex (TGNCI) people in San Francisco. The office's Manager of Communications Asri Wulandari just joined the office's staff this year, using her position to "uplift and center the transgender community" in the city.

"Our office was formed in 2017, when then-Mayor Ed Lee and founding director Theresa Sparks created the Office of Transgender Initiatives to institutionalize a bridge between local government and trans, nonbinary, gender non-conforming and intersex people in acknowledgment of the serious inequities this community faces," she explained to Qnotes.

According to the San Francisco Youth Homeless Count And Survey of 2022, out of 1,073 youth who are homeless in 2022, four percent identify as transgender, and two percent identify as gender non-conforming. Wulandari also noted TGNCI communities face high risk of homelessness because of factors such as family rejection, discrimination in employment and education, and



This historic San Francisco building, formerly a hotel, now provides housing for Transgender residents in need. CREDIT: Taylor Heeden

barriers to gender-affirming health care.

OTI works to address these major issues from the perspective of policy, community engagement and education, and Wulandari said aiding unhoused gender non-conforming people is one of the office's top priorities.

"In tandem with the relatively high number of homeless TGNCI youth, we've also seen an uptick of violent threats received by community organizations that provide services to TGNCI youth," Wulandari offered. "From this, we can see how the plight of homeless TGNCI youth is now exacerbated by the current political climate that targets them."



Asri Wulandari of San Francisco's Office of Transgender Initiatives confirms TGNCI communities face a higher risk of homelessness. CREDIT: SF Office of Trans Initiatives

One of the most crucial pieces of the OTI's model is the Trans Advisory Committee (TAC), which is made up of community leaders representing TGNCI-focused community organizations across the city.

TAC's work focuses on budget and policy advocacy based on input from trans, gender non-conforming and nonbinary residents and community members.

Among the organizations and groups represented in TAC is the Transgender District, a geographical area in San Francisco, California, created to celebrate, support, and empower the transgender community. It was started by three Black transgender women in 2017 with a mission to preserve and protect the transgender cultural district in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco, concentrating on honoring and uplifting history, culture, and contributions of trans individuals.

Carlo Gomez Arteaga is the co-executive director of the Transgender District, which he said has helped to provide a safe space for trans, nonbinary and gender non-conforming people.

"The mission of the Transgender District is to establish an urban space that nurtures the vibrant history, culture, legacy and empowerment of transgender individuals, deeply rooted in the southeastern Tenderloin neighborhood," he explained. "It endeavors to stabilize and economically empower the transgender community through ownership of residences, enterprises, historical and cultural landmarks and the provision of safe communal areas."

The Transgender District often collaborates with organizations and local leaders to enhance the quality of life for the SF trans community, including its position with the TAC. As the political climate becomes more divisive, trans and gender non-conforming folks have become a target of hateful rhetoric and threats of violence. Arteaga said because of that, emphasizing the importance of safe spaces like the Transgender District are crucial to the safety of queer people.

"In San Francisco and beyond, the transgender community encounters disparities, notably in healthcare, economic stability, housing, and mental health," he said. "Addressing these issues requires anti-discrimination laws, inclusive healthcare policies, mental health support, housing

initiatives and fighting systemic prejudice ... Providing safe and inclusive spaces for the community is a priority."

## Our Trans Home SF

TAC and OTI has worked with several trans-issue centric nonprofits, among them Our Trans Home San Francisco (a product of collaboration between the two aforementioned organizations), St. James Infirmary and the San Francisco LGBTQ+ Center.

"In recent years, due to advocacy efforts led by TAC, our office has spearheaded the genesis of initiatives such as the City's commitment to End Trans Homelessness by 2027, the formation of the Our Trans Home programs and a guaranteed income pilot program for low-income TGNCI San Franciscans," Wulandari said.

The Our Trans Home SF program is currently run by St. James Infirmary and serves around 100 TGNCI low-income individuals through rental subsidies and the Bobbi Jean Baker House, a shelter where unhoused trans and gender non-conforming people can stay. According to the organization's website, the Our Trans Home SF program is a "coalition working to address homelessness and housing instability impacting TGI people in the San Francisco Bay Area."

Many organizations are involved with Our Trans Home SF — St. James Infirmary, the SF LGBT Center, Trans Health Consulting and more. St. James Infirmary was the parent organization of the Our Trans Home SF program and oversaw the day-to-day operations of the rental subsidy and the Bobbi Jean Baker House.

However, operations at Our Trans Home SF are changing, and fast.

"St. James announced last month that the organization is sunsetting within the next year, so we have been working with the relevant funding city departments to transfer OTH's programming to other community organizations that are competent in providing direct services to TGNCI people," Wulandari said.

Unfortunately with the current model Our Trans Home SF uses, operations slowed and continue to as the program works to transition away from St. James Infirmary as St. James begins to close down. With a lack of funds, Our Trans Home SF is at full capacity and "will likely not be able to assist" additional applicants, at least not in the near future.

"The funds are incredibly limited, we absolutely cannot guarantee this assistance for anyone," a spokesperson for Our Trans Home SF wrote in a press release. "If you do decide to apply anyway, please understand that we likely will not be able to offer any assistance for multiple months or potentially even until mid-2024 when we receive our next guaranteed round of funding."

## Community partnerships are key

A plan for Our Trans Home SF may not be finalized yet, but the organizations across San Francisco are working diligently to find stable housing

solutions. OTI is working to find Our Trans Home SF a new parent organization or organizations, but until then, San Francisco will continue to utilize a community partnership model — one where multiple voices are brought into the conversation.

“We strive to collaborate with the TGNCI community of San Francisco as much as possible, and one of the ways we do so is through our efforts to center community voices and needs in all our policy and advocacy work,” Wulandari said. “San Francisco — thanks to Mayor Breed’s strong commitment to equity — has invested more City funds into TGNCI communities than any previous Mayor/administration.

“As a result, this city has a lot of supportive services and infrastructure laid out in order to support the LGBTQ+ homeless community.”

OTI’s existence itself is just one example of the infrastructure put in place to assist the San Francisco LGBTQ+ community. In addition, the city council adopted a resolution titled “End Trans Homelessness by 2027,” which laid out a plan of how to support and help San Francisco’s unhoused trans population.

Artega shared a similar take on San Francisco’s approach to homelessness in the trans community. He said “innovative approaches” implemented by the municipal government to address the needs of the unhoused people citywide continue to help and will, hopefully, reach its goals.

“Homelessness is a challenge in most communities and throughout the world,” Artega stated. “Removing barriers to access is most helpful for unhoused communities,

especially vulnerable communities.”

The recognition of the Transgender District and the establishment of OTI were parts of the “End Trans Homelessness by 2027” plan, but Wulandari said more needs to be done to reach the 2027 milestone.

“In order to prevent high rates of homelessness for TGNCI people [in] the future, we also need to change the conditions which lead to people becoming unhoused,” she explained. “Such as ensuring that TGNCI people have access to safe education and employment opportunities, addressing economic inequities, and creating a world that allows and encourages TGNCI people to thrive.”

#### Could this be done in North Carolina?

The answer, according to activists and leaders, is simple: yes, but community partnerships are key in creating the desired result.

“Community partnerships are the lifeblood of the Transgender District, driving our operations and impact,” Artega said. “They provide crucial resources, foster inclusivity, strengthen advocacy, enable networking, and promote mutual growth.

“[They] empower the district to serve diverse transgender needs, amplify advocacy, and create an inclusive environment.”

Artega continued by saying he believes something like the Transgender District could be instituted in more urban hubs such as Charlotte, especially if the resources are available. It takes a lot to establish a geographical district — from finding a physical location for the district to the petitioning process and advocacy work that comes with the territory.



**Carlo Gomez Artega, co-executive director of San Francisco’s Transgender District believes a program to help trans homeless individuals could be created in Charlotte. CREDIT: SF Trans District**

However, it’s important to include trans voices in the forefront of the conversation.

“Support and empower local leadership to drive the initiative,” Artega proposed. “Engage with local transgender community leaders and organizations to understand the specific needs, challenges and aspirations of the community.”

Goals for a potential established district could include fostering entrepreneurship opportunities for historically marginalized groups, preserving and celebrating cultural diversity or focusing on providing equitable access to affirming healthcare services. Some ideas Artega had to address each of those elements included recognizing landmarks and cultural spaces, supporting com-

munity events centered around heritage, supporting trans-owned businesses, creating job opportunities and more.

“The replication process will demand a community-tailored approach that listens to and addresses the specific needs and challenges of the local transgender community,” he explained. “It involves a mix of cultural, economic, social and political strategies to create an inclusive and supportive environment for the transgender population.”

Despite the LGBTQ+ community’s resilience, it can’t just be up to trans and gender non-conforming people to fight for affordable housing, affirming policies and safe neighborhoods according to Wulandari. Allies need to be on the front lines alongside their queer and trans friends.

“The unfortunate reality is that TGNCI communities are working against the tide of increasing hate,” she offered. “We need more supporters and allies than ever before, and our hope is that other regions and states take similar steps to address the disproportionate rates of homelessness, poverty and violence that TGNCI people face, and do so in ways that are responsive to our communities.” ::



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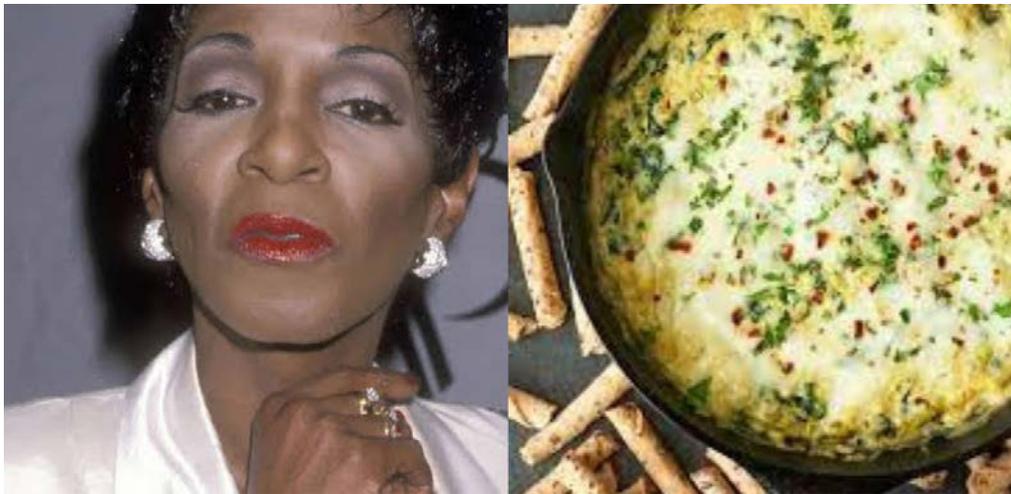
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# Qnotes collection of holiday recipies from gay icons and allies

Tasty table treats

By Qnotes Staff



### Chablis' Hot Asparagus Dip

Featured in Dining in the Garden of Good Eats: Cooking with "The Book" that made Savannah Famous by Deborah and Shane Sullivan and other Nogs of Savannah

In her autobiography, the Lady Chablis, made famous in John Berendt's book "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," said "the Doll's got many tantalizing ways of securing a man's heart," referencing the old adage of the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. "Now yknow some

uptown white bitch prob'ly came up with that theory," wrote Chablis. "But the truth is, child, I've been known to lure a man to my lair by feeding him first."

She passed along recipes like Brenda's Kickin' Chicken and Beefy Surprise, but for those upcoming holiday parties, we recommend turning to this "hot" dip to wow your guests.

#### Ingredients:

Two 15 ounce cans asparagus, cut spears

- 1 1/4 cups mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 2/3 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- Salt and red pepper
- Dash of pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon Tabasco sauce

#### Directions:

Drain asparagus, then mash up in a mixing bowl; add remaining ingredients, mixing together well. Pour into a baking dish and bake for 20-30 minutes at 350 degrees or until slightly brown and bubbling. Serve hot with crackers (also good

staple. McEntire recently came out against anti-drag laws by slamming Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and voicing her support of drag entertainers.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 can (40 oz) sweet potatoes, drained
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 Tbsp. margarine, melted
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 2 large eggs

#### Topping:

- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/4 cup pecans, chopped
- 3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour



with seasoned bagel chips).

### Reba McEntire's Praline Sweet Potato Casserole

Originally published in Good Housekeeping, October 29, 2007

It may not be "fancy," but it sure is good. Country superstar and LGBTQ+ icon Reba McEntire brings out the best in comfort food for those holiday dinners with this southern

2 Tbsp. margarine, melted

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease shallow 1 1/2-quart casserole. In bowl, mash sweet potatoes, stir in granulated sugar, margarine, vanilla, cinnamon, salt and eggs. Spoon into prepared casserole. Mix topping ingredients; sprinkle on potato mixture. Bake 30 minutes. Serves six. ::



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# “Letter to My Transgender Daughter”

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
Qnotes Contributing Writer

“Letter to My Transgender Daughter”  
by Carolyn Hays  
c.2023, Blair Publisher  
\$17.95  
282 pages

The piece of cake you cut into did not have a pastel center.

There were no pretty balloons in a box, no colorful confetti, no “Team Pink” or “Team Blue” t-shirts or bracelets. You didn’t have a gender-reveal party for your baby because you didn’t want to know. As in the memoir “Letter to My Transgender Daughter” by Carolyn Hays, you’ll let your child tell you in person.

She never expected another baby.

After seven years, Carolyn Hays thought she was done with diapers and late-night feedings, but the pregnancy test didn’t lie. This was good news. The whole family was excited to welcome another member into the household!

The baby was a boy – but as soon as he could talk, he told everyone he was a girl.

No problem; Hays’ other children rolled with it. They “saw” their sibling for who she was. Teachers were also nonplussed; they gave the girl a nickname, and extended family members quickly learned to use it.

Hays and her husband balked sometimes, though. They hoped it was a “phase.” They gave their daughter “girly” things and allowed her to wear girls clothing, but they tried “boy on the outside / girl on the inside” wordage. Their daughter patiently corrected them each time until eventually, they, too, saw the truth. Their youngest child was a girl.

They were, at that time, “a big, loud East Coast family, new to the Bible Belt” but they’d found community in the south, and a support group so Hays could parent her trans daughter better. Everything seemed to work out – until the knock on the door.

The representative of the Department of Children and Families couldn’t tell Hays who’d made a complaint about them, or when. They could only guess who was offended by their personal family matter, or their total acceptance of their daughter.

All they knew, she said, was “We could lose custody.

We could lose you.”

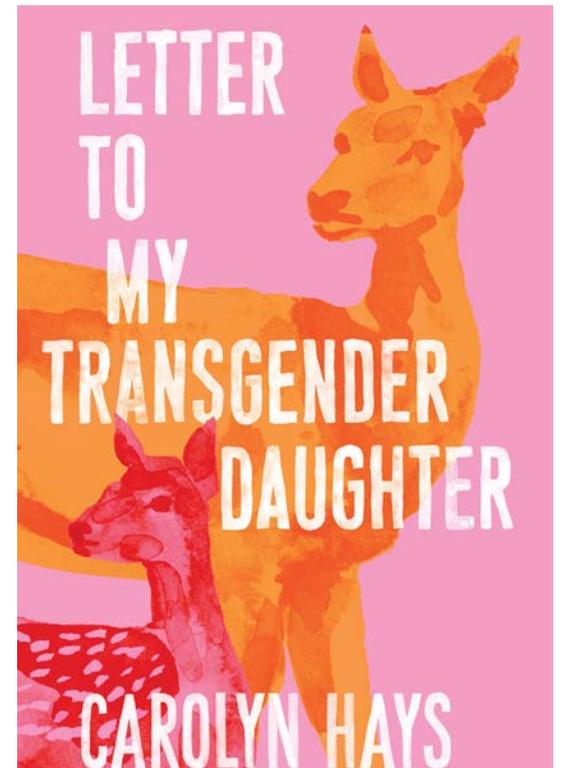
If you are someone who loves a child – any child, even a cis child – be prepared to have your heart fall out of your chest.

“Letter to My Transgender Daughter” is a nightmare, not because of the book itself but because of what very nearly happened to its author and her family.

Indeed, this “letter” in book form goes from mildly confessional to outright terrified, and author Carolyn Hays susses out all your emotions and turns them raw. Hers is an honest story, not only of a trans girl but of parents who walk through the steps of acceptance. Cue the ominous music, though: You know what’s coming but foresight doesn’t diminish the outrage and fear you’ll feel, once you get there – although Hays doesn’t completely let you roll in misery. Readers will be delighted by the precociousness and determination in her daughter’s patient steadfastness, and by Hays’ family memories.

Now out in paperback, “Letter to My Transgender Daughter” is an absolute read for parents and for trans adults. Read it – then check

the headlines and see if it doesn’t cut your heart to pieces. ::




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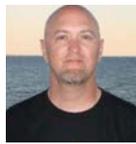
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# Hot baritone

An interview with Steven LaBrie of Il Divo



by Gregg Shapiro  
Qnotes Staff Writer

It's safe to say that not every queer person digs opera or classical music. But those who do border on being cult-like. In a way, the classical crossover genre, which has its roots in the 1980s (remember Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballe's "Barcelona" album), bridged that gap. Performers such as Charlotte Church, Jackie Evancho, Josh Groban and Andrea Bocelli have found victory in the genre. All-male quartet Il Divo is also one of classical crossover's greatest success stories. An early 21st century creation of Simon Cowell, Il Divo is still going strong after 20 years. Having survived the loss of original member Carlos Marín to COVID, Il Divo is on the rebound with new, openly gay member Steven LaBrie. A baritone with a long history in the world of opera, LaBrie was kind enough to make time for an interview in advance of the group's concert tour.

**Gregg Shapiro: I'd like to begin by congratulating you on officially becoming the fourth member of the male vocal group Il Divo. As fellow divo Sebastian has said, you are not a replacement, but more of a new member joining the group. What does such an honor mean to you?**

**Steven LaBrie:** Thank you Gregg! As you said, it is such an honor to be a part of such an iconic group that has shaped the world of classical crossover music for the last 20 years. When I first started singing in a serious way, I was about 15 years old and I remember walking through the CD section of a bookstore and seeing Il Divo's first album on the shelf. I gave it a listen on the headphones at the bookstore and thought, "Wow! What is this?!" Such beautiful music and with four good-looking classical singers! So, I have known about Il Divo my entire adult life and I met David (Miller) in person when we did a concert together about 10 years ago. He invited me to an Il Divo concert and introduced me to the rest of the guys backstage after the show. And when Carlos fell ill and sadly passed away, it was a huge privilege for me to have the opportunity to honor such an iconic artist. And now, as the new member of the band, it's an honor to carry on the legacy into the 20th year of Il Divo.

**GS: How old were you when you discovered that you had a talent for singing?**

**SL:** I have always loved to sing. I don't come from a very musical family; it was just something innate within me. When I was 11 years old, my elementary school took us on a field trip to see the opera "La Bohème" at the Dallas Opera. I was completely enamored with the music, the singing, the story, everything. I just loved it. I was so moved and when I got back to class, I announced to everyone that I was going to be an opera singer! From then on, I would practice at



home after school for hours when there was no one in the house. I loved to practice, and I still do, I would just sing whatever songs I knew at the time. When I got older, maybe around 15, I started taking voice lessons from a retired opera singer who lived in Dallas; he was also a baritone. I learned super quickly. When I started voice lessons, we didn't jump straight into classical music, we started with singing pop songs and mariachi; I'm half Mexican. It was through singing all the Mexican mariachi songs that I truly found my way into opera. They are full of passion and emotional outbursts, high notes, intimate moments. Mexican music is probably what has influenced me the most musically.

**GS: At what age did your rich baritone voice develop?**

**SL:** I was a really early bloomer. When I was 12, my voice changed in two weeks! When I started taking lessons with my first teacher in Dallas, he helped me learn how to open my throat and expand my range. From then on, I have always had a deep, dark voice, pretty much the same one I have now! Of course, things have changed throughout the years. Singing has gotten easier and more natural, and I have a lot more skills than I did then. The thing that remains the same is that I still love singing.

**GS: As you said, you grew up in Dallas. Did you participate in musical theater productions while in high school there?**

**SL:** I did! I was in a few musicals in school and in community theater. I did "Damn Yankees," "Oklahoma!," "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" and "Anything Goes." I love musicals. In the summer of 2021, I sang Billy Bigelow in "Carousel" in Colorado. It was my first public appearance since the pandemic started

and it was a magical experience. Such a great musical!

**GS: Il Divo recorded its new album in Miami. I live in Fort Lauderdale, and I was wondering if you had a chance to explore the gay nightlife scene there and in Wilton Manors?**

**SL:** Yeah, I did! I went to Wilton Manors with a few friends one night. It was super fun. I had a great time. I didn't have the chance to go out in Miami this time because I was being disciplined so I could sing well in the recording studio, but I've been to Miami many times and it's always a good time.

**GS: What can you tell the readers about the song selection on the new Il Divo album?**

**SL:** We have been working on this album for a long time! Before we even started this tour in February, we had chosen the songs that we wanted to record and then we started working with our amazing Grammy Award-winning producer Carlos Lopez in March. We actually had two separate recording sessions because we will be releasing a Christmas EP ("A Merry Little Christmas") of four festive Christmas songs just in time for the holidays. So, we went down to Miami in April to record those, and then the second session was to record the "Il Divo: XX" album. This new album is exploring some new and modern cinematic sounds, some contemporary songs, some epic classic pop songs and one original song that was written by Carlos Lopez, Laura Lambuley and our very own Divos, David Miller and Sebastien Izambard.

**GS: Please say a few words about the new Il Divo Christmas EP.**

**SL:** You're going to love it! It's festive,

nostalgic and powerful. There is even a new and interesting take that we have done on a classic Christmas song where we have given it a Latin flare. It is sexy!

**GS: Beginning in October, Il Divo has a packed tour schedule through late December. Is your partner Adam able to join you on any of the tour dates?**

**SL:** When we finish with our tour in Asia, we will be basing ourselves in New York for a few of the concerts that are in the surrounding states, so I will get to see him then and he will join me for some of the shows in Florida toward the end of the Christmas tour. We will be so far away for most of this tour overseas, and Adam has a super busy fall. He is a very accomplished pianist and works as the artistic director of the opera program at Juilliard and will be playing a show at the Metropolitan Opera on top of concerts that he will be playing this fall. So, he is very busy these next few months as well.

**GS: As Il Divo's openly gay member, do you feel like a sort of ambassador to the community?**

**SL:** When I was growing up, I was taught by society that being gay was the absolute worst curse that could befall any individual. So, I was scared and ashamed and I wished and wished that it wasn't me. Years later, when I was coming out, a friend of mine who was gay told me that he used to feel that way too, but as he got older, he realized that being gay was a huge blessing from the universe. That completely changed my perspective and I think about that every day. I was bullied relentlessly growing up for being gay or for not being like the other boys, and now looking back, I've realized that all of those experiences have made me into a resilient person who is able to step into who I really am in a very public way and not allow criticism of any kind to break my spirit. I still get hate for being gay regularly. But, every time I do, there is an army of loving and accepting people that jump to my defense, and that is a beautiful thing to see. There are people out there who show me so much love for what I do with Il Divo, for my singing and it also happens that I'm gay. And I think that now being a part of so many people's lives as an artist that maybe haven't had so much exposure to gay people, and them witnessing the love that I have for my partner and the camaraderie that I have with my bandmates is impactful. In the end, we as humans are a lot more similar than we are different, we are just experiencing the world through different lenses.

**GS: Do you have a sense that the other members of Il Divo have an awareness of the group's LGBTQ+ following?**

**SL:** I have definitely seen people from the LGBTQ+ community at concerts. From my opera career, I know that classical music has a large gay following. And Il Divo is a mix of classical singing with Whitney Houston and Celine Dion songs. How dreamy is that? ::

# Curator, designer and artist Jordan Robinson talks politics, life and art

Our People



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

From a bedroom that is clearly inhabited by a queer artist, Jordan Robinson – still clad in his pajamas, is settling in for an early morning interview with QNotes. On this unseasonably warm day, Robinson is bathed in rainbow-esque rays of light; a reflection of the light streaming through bisexual and pansexual flags serving as his bedroom curtains.

At the start of this telephone interview, Robinson was asked where he was at the moment. In true J. Robinson fashion, he began to share his current psychological positioning and that was good. However, the question wasn't as deep as the response. We just wanted to know if Robinson was taking the call from home, from an office or even a local Dunkin' Donuts shop. Needless to say, we cleared all that up and captured Robinson's interesting and in-depth responses to all our nosy inquiries. During our time together Robinson was candid about his identity, his feelings about the current conflict between two Muslim and Jewish governments and his plans for his future.

**L'Monique King: Where are you right now?**

**Jordan Robinson:** Emotionally, I feel good – despite some ups and downs the last few months. But after reflecting and processing all that, I feel like I'm in a more stable chapter of my life. I have a stable job now that buys me time to be able to focus on projects that matter to me, like the Transparency Project." I've gotten way more than I expected from this project, in terms of personal growth.

**LMK: Can you share more on how an art exhibit showcasing the work of Black transgender artists inspired personal growth for you?**

**JR:** Transparency got me to thinking about how to be an ally – but more so, how to be in community. Since the attack on Israel and the current retaliation, it had me thinking about what it means to be in community on an international level. I have friends on both sides who are grieving. So, I've taken what I've learned so far in the Transparency Project [to help me make sense of it all]. For instance, if I want to investigate art on an activist level and how art contributes to activism and social change – I think I need to start with the personal, my inner communities and begin there.

Right now, I'm thinking about how my friends have been affected by this and how do I advocate. I want to advocate for humanitarianism. I've found resources that are designed to assist both sides providing humanitarian aid to people



Jordan Robinson, one face and multiple identities. CREDIT: FaceBook

who are affected by the collateral damage of war. I think that's more important right now than taking a side. But I do think it is my place to say, "Hey whatever the situation, you have people that are experiencing these moments that are just unacceptable across the board."

**LMK: The Transparency Project, the current Israeli-Hamas Conflict, all seem to have common threads of identity. How do you personally identify?**

**JR:** For the time being I still identify as a Black cis male who is bisexual, but I lean more towards gay. But I'm also Scotch-Irish and Indigenous/Native American. I learned all this through an ancestry search and my brother and mother who are also doing research. Though in my experience, people react to my Blackness more than anything else. So, in a way, I can't claim the others as my home. I feel the same way with my sexual identity. I identify as bisexual though physically I'm attracted to men, but romantically I'm attracted to women. Most people would assume I'm gay.

There's a specific vision of what a man should be that was projected on me when I was growing up. I think I'm pushing against that and just want to create a vision for myself of what a man should be. If I can't do that, I'll probably [eventually] identify as non-binary; just to give

the middle finger of this phenomena of what a man or woman should be.

**LMK: Again, identity seems to be a pretty big placeholder in your life, impacting what types of art projects you're drawn to, your personal relationships and quest for a deeper understanding of who you are. Where did it all start? Where are you from?**

**JR:** I'm originally from New York and grew up in Charlotte. Right now, I live in Brier Creek, a place near Raleigh. It's actually between Raleigh and Durham. I'm somewhat nomadic. I've never lived in a house for more than three years with the exception of living in a family house in Charlotte during my high school and college years. I lived there for about 10 years. By the time I left grad school my family had sold that house and moved to Greensboro. [Maybe that's why] I feel like I'm always between worlds where I'm welcome to visit but it's not my home. Like it can be with identity.

**LMK: How so?**

**JR:** [Racial and/or sexual identity] doesn't really [feel] like my home because I don't feel like I have a say in the matter. It creates a lack of a sense of belonging. Most of the time there's an assumption or projection without inquiry – no questions that would help a person really under-

stand where another is coming from. So, I'm trying to be more mindful of that myself. Making sure I'm not projecting my own stuff [onto others based on assumptions I've made], I'm human, too. In being human, we need the freedom to be and experience who we are without the constraints of others.

**LMK: You mentioned earlier that you now have a stable job. What are you doing for work?**

**JR:** I'm a presentation designer. I create PowerPoint presentations for leadership and help translate and communicate how technology is impacting the business of a company. I'm loving it. It's evolving and I'm learning a lot. Growing at my own pace is empowering and it pays me enough so that I don't have to hustle so much.

**LMK: Do you have a partner that you're sharing your wonderfully creative life with?**

**JR:** No, he went back to his ex – I wish them well.

**LMK: In seeking a new partner, who are you looking for?**

**JR:** Bears. <chuckles> I like hairy beefy guys.

**LMK: Okay, let's play a little game of This or That. Reality T.V. of Documentaries?**

**JR:** Documentary, puh-leeze.

**LMK: Michael or Prince?**

**JR:** Prince.

**LMK: Plaza Midwood or Camp North End?**

**JR:** Ooooooh, Camp North End. I love Camp North End. If I could live there and renovate an apartment I would. In fact, a possible opportunity might just put me in a position to move back to Charlotte. If it does, I hope to be able to live in the Camp North End area.

**LMK: Speaking of your future, what is Jordan Robinson doing 10 years from now?**

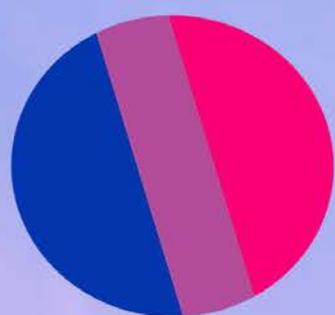
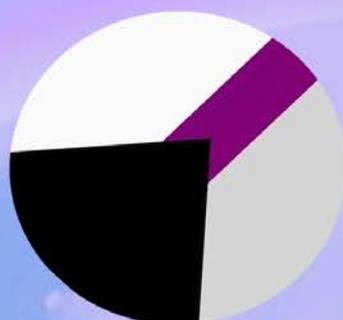
**JR:** Running a contemporary art museum as a curator and having a partner if not married.

**LMK: When you look at where the LGBTQ community stands in today's world, what concerns you most?**

**JR:** That we failed to learn the lessons from our own suffering and I think that [lesson] is, love your neighbor as yourself.

**LMK:** What an excellent note to end on – compassion for each other as human beings, we can all use more of that. Thank you. ::

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