

**Our democracy is at risk!  
If we are complacent it will FALL**



## LGBTQ Athletes ready to make a mark on the Paris Olympics



**Delighted Tobe here's 'Hello, Daddy' protested in Monroe**

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**Will Chatham county's EV plant improve environment and economy?**

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front page

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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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Mary Timony's back

After a long absence of several years, musician Mary Timony is back with her latest release and multiple tunes. On her new solo album, "Untame The Tiger" she has created her most accessible compilation yet, which boasts the incredible six-plus minute opener "No Thirds," and includes the first single, "Dominoes," along with other delightful tracks like "The Guest," "The Dream," and "Not The Only One."

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Having a ball: Stonewall Sports to host leagues across the state

Last year the Stonewall Sports Sand Volleyball team of Charlotte celebrated another winning season, so it's time to get ready for 2024! No matter what recreational activity you're into, Stonewall Sports across the Carolinas has a variety of fun sporting adventures to keep you active. Charlotte's chapter (sand soccer shown here) is the largest LGBTQ+ sports organization in the two-state area, with over 2,000 players. Search for Stonewall Sports on social media and the internet, and find fun to be had, new friends and sports activities nearby waiting for you.



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For event listings, visit qnotescarolinas.com/events-calendar.

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# Democracy is bigger than any political party

Our country is in jeopardy as we enter the 2024 election



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

“Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

This saying can be found at the top of every printed edition of *The Washington Post*, and while it may seem like a bold statement, it couldn't be more accurate.

The *Post* adopted the slogan as its motto in February 2017 shortly after President Donald Trump was sworn into office after winning the 2016 election. It marked the first time the publication had a “motto” or “slogan” in its over 140 year-long history, and at the time, the move was seen as unprecedented.

The phrase (which allegedly was coined by legendary journalist Bob Woodward) has become a self-fulfilling prophecy in today's American political world. Politicians have continued to attack the rights of Americans — from the ability to have access to reproductive healthcare to targeting queer and trans youth through public policy.

Both parties — Republicans and Democrats alike — are guilty of pandering to their bases, willing to ignore facts or risk legal ramifications just to “protect their best interests.” Democracy goes beyond surface-level two-party politics — it's the life force of this nation, and if we continue to go down the path of division and hate, democracy is as good as dead.

## The History of the Two Party System

So why, exactly, do we have a two party system?

The Constitution has no mention of political parties at all, and believe it or not, it was done intentionally. Most of the founding fathers agreed having a party-based political system would be a detriment to the life of the United States — Alexander Hamilton called parties the “most fatal disease” among popular governments, and even George Washington warned of the impact parties could have.

But in the early days of American politics, there were two “camps:” Federalists, led by Hamilton; and Anti-Federalists (or Democratic-Republicans) headed up by Thomas Jefferson. The main issue these two factions disagreed on was the federal government's role in relation to its power over the states' governments, with Jefferson famously believing in a “laissez-faire” or hands-off style of governing and Hamilton standing for a more institutionalized, structured federal government.

Fast forward to the election of 1824 when John Quincy Adams won the presidency despite receiving fewer votes in the popular election than Andrew Jackson (sound familiar?). As a result of the loss, Jackson's supporters created a new political party based on Jefferson's philosophy, calling themselves the Democratic Party. Those who opposed the Democratic platform became known as the Whig Party, in which they typically preferred a more cen-

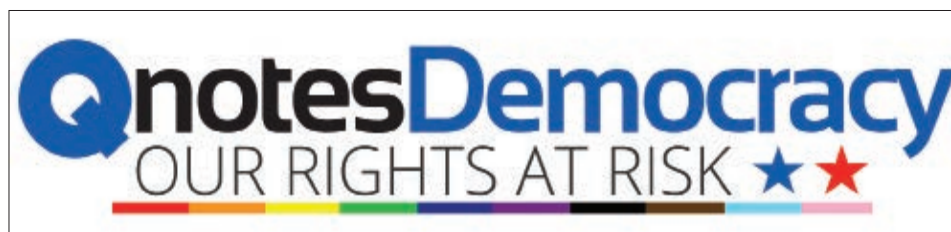


tralized government. However, the Whigs collapsed in the 1850s and from it, the anti-slavery Republican Party was born.

The Republican and Democratic parties have since remained the two major political parties in the United States, though both have gone through different shifts in their beliefs over the years. Today's Democrats mirror the Federalists while today's Republicans tend to lean toward

That lack of trust during the Obama administration — specifically from white, middle class Americans — led to an election that forever changed the trajectory of the United States and the Republican Party.

Donald J. Trump made his way down the infamous golden escalator in Trump Tower in New York City on June 16, 2015, where he announced his campaign for



what the Anti-Federalists claimed to believe in, a complete reversal of the parties' original stances.

## Democrats v. Republicans: Who Stands for Democracy?

The ideological shift between the two parties has become even more evident in recent decades, especially after the turn of the century. Some experts cite the election of Barack Obama as the beginning of a more divisive time in American politics.

Obama often spoke of bipartisanship and its importance for maintaining democracy, but it was evident he would become a divisive figure for some Americans. Supporters would argue Obama was the best president in the history of the United States. Oppositionists would say he was the beginning of the end of American ideals as a whole.

According to a poll conducted by Gallup after Obama left office, “56 percent of Americans said they had trust and confidence in their fellow citizens when it comes to making decisions in our democratic process. In 2009, 73 percent had such trust and confidence.”

president. A year and a half later, he secured 270 electoral college votes and was named the president elect, despite not winning the popular vote.

Trump's administration was riddled with scandal after scandal, including (but not limited to) separating migrant children and placing them in cage-like camps, banning trans folks from enlisting in the military, not one but two impeachments and encouraging his supporters to “stand up” against what Trump called a “stolen election,” ultimately resulting in the Jan. 6 Insurrection.

Many have called Trump's politics “authoritarian” and “a threat to democracy,” including current President Joe Biden, who defeated Trump in 2020's election.

“Instead of playing politics with the issue, instead of telling members of Congress to block this legislation, join me or I'll join you in telling the Congress to pass this bipartisan border security bill,” Biden said earlier this month during his State of the Union address. “We can do it together ... So instead of playing politics with the issue, why don't we just get together and get it done? Unless you remember who the heck you work for. We work for the

American people, not the Democratic Party [or] the Republican Party.”

## Looking at 2024

Almost four years ago, Biden and Trump went head-to-head to win the seat in the Oval Office, and this election is set to be a rematch, but this time, the stakes are higher than ever.

Though Trump left office in 2020, his legacy continues to plague the lives of the everyday American. He was able to nominate and swear-in three U.S. Supreme Court justices, giving the court a conservative majority for the first time in decades. Because of that, *Roe v. Wade* — a landmark court case which guaranteed the right for people to have a choice regarding abortions — was overturned, marking the first time in American history the Supreme Court gave and then took away a constitutional right.

The former president also emboldened those with bigoted views, specifically regarding the LGBTQ+ community. There's been a wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation across the country from Republican politicians, including in North Carolina where the Republican-led General Assembly has passed a multiple anti-gay laws, including our own version of Florida's “Don't Say Gay” bill.

It's become clear the Republican Party has strayed from focusing on saving democracy and has become completely loyal to the ideas of one somewhat successful businessman (although that itself is questionable). Proof of this can be found in the official National Republican Party's platform from 2020, where it explicitly states where their allegiances lie.

“The RNC, had the Platform Committee been able to convene in 2020, would have undoubtedly unanimously agreed to reassert the Party's strong support for President Donald

Trump and his Administration,” it states. “The 2020 Republican National Convention calls on the media to engage in accurate and unbiased reporting, especially as it relates to the strong support of the RNC for President Trump and his Administration; and any motion to amend the 2016 Platform or to adopt a new platform, including any motion to suspend the procedures that will allow doing so, will be ruled out of order.”

Democracy is defined to be “a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives,” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. It's clear the Republican Party is shifting its ideology once again, but this time, it's heading toward a world where one man's ideas are the law of the land. America needs to shine a light on this clear shift and show the rest of the world we're better than a party who attacks its own people. Otherwise, democracy will die in darkness. ::



# Town of Monroe protesting drag and twisting LGBTQ culture again

Mayor and town council members join in 'to protect children'



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

A crowd gathered inside the Dowd Center Theater in Monroe on Friday evening, March 22, to see an encore presentation of "Hello Daddy."

The dramatic musical/comedy one-person stage show is the brainchild of actor Clay Smith, a popular drag performer also known as Delighted Tobehe. Produced in conjunction with Union County Pride and Queen City Performing Arts, the show attracted an enthusiastic and supportive audience.

Outside, however, protesters lined the rainy streets in relatively small numbers, but holding a variety of virulent protest signs with a myriad of fictitious claims such as: "Grooming Event Held Here Today," "Stop Sexualizing Children," "This is Child Abuse," "Here Today: Men Wearing Lingerie Dancing in Front of Children," and "Stop Grooming Children."

The crew involved with the production insists there's nothing in "Hello, Daddy" that

is inappropriate for youth.

According to an interview with Union County Pride president Cristal Robinson on WBTV news, the show is "a heartfelt exploration of self-discovery for an aging drag performer" and is told through the character's experiences as a young gay man, a performer and being gay in the south.

Robinson confirmed plans for the the staging of the show in Monroe began in November of last year when Union County Pride organizers arranged to host "Hello, Daddy" at the theater and a contract was signed with the city of Monroe for rental of the facility. Plans were reportedly moving along smoothly until protest posts began to appear earlier in March. That led to extensive debate between the Monroe Town Council and organizers of the production, with Monroe ultimately honoring the previously signed contract.

Among the residents of Union County protesting the event was Monroe Mayor Robert Burns, who has spoken out against drag shows on multiple occasions and reportedly pleaded with the council to shut down "Hello Daddy" completely.

"I support the parents right to choose, yes, as long as it doesn't harm our children," he said to a reporter covering the story for the news department of the local television station WCNC.

When asked why he wanted to prevent youth from watching the show along with their consenting parents or guardians he appeared to momentarily stall while trying to justify his actions.

"That's a good question," he replied. "Uhm, because, I'm a protector, man. I believe our children are our future."

Following what amounted to discussion about the role LGBTQ+ youth of today would play in tomorrow's future, Burns attempted to backtrack, albeit unsuccessfully.

"I don't want anybody to feel marginalized by any stretch of the imagination," he said. "This is not about communities fighting against each other. This is standing for what is right. This is standing for the protection of children."

Kara Murphy, who is also a member of

the Union County Pride committee shared her thoughts about the play.

"It's about as tame as it gets," she said in an interview with WBTV News. "There is a segment of the populace that thinks if we present a positive or even neutral presentation of people living their lives in this way that it's bad for children."

Said Michelle Ball, one of the protest organizers in Monroe in response to the program's lack of scandalous content: "I haven't looked into it to see if it was tame or not because, really, that doesn't matter to me. That's even more so like 'let's get them in the door and offer them something tame so they get used to drag.'"

Much of the response on social media to anti-LGBTQ comments and the protest itself were practically tailor-made in response to Ball's comments.

"This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever read and yet, this stuff continues to come up. How can you judge anything when you haven't even seen it," Anderson resident Patty Finley wrote on Delighted Tobehe's Facebook page. "Here's a thought," she continued. "Teach your children to be open-minded and develop critical thinking skills so they can think for themselves."

Despite the negative response from some Union County residents, the Queen City performing arts and the Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte has called the event a boom.

They posted on social media the following: "Honestly, we've never done anything that garnered us so much



Monroe's Dowd Theater was the scene of anti-drag protests March 22. CREDIT: Screen Capture

media attention. All the protesters did was sell more tickets for us. Oh, and they got soaked to the skin and cold as frogs. I'd have to say this joint production of Queen City Performing Arts and Union County Pride was a huge success."

Supported in part by a grant from the North Carolina Arts Council, "Hello, Daddy" has one remaining encore performance at the Fullwood Theater in Matthews on March 29. ::



Monroe Mayor Robert Burns said the protest was about 'protecting children.' CAPTION: Screen Capture



Multi-talented drag performer Delighted Tobehe. CREDIT: Facebook

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## Applications open for Charlotte Pride Scholarships

Charlotte Pride is bringing back the annual scholarship and summer internship program, which was made possible with support from the Principal® Foundation. The program, “aims to improve economic mobility for LGBTQ and ally college students from the Charlotte metro area by funding college scholarships and a summer internship opportunity,” according to a statement from the organization.

Those selected by the organization to receive scholarships will be eligible for up to \$10,000 for the 2024-2025 school year at an accredited two or four-year college. In order to qualify, applicants must:

- Be from the Charlotte metro area (see county list below and map at right for reference) with a GPA of 3.0 or above on a 4.0 scale
- Be an LGBTQ+ or ally student who has demonstrated service to the LGBTQ+

community or strong desire to serve the LGBTQ+ community.

- Have a demonstrated, significant unmet financial need
- Be enrolled or intend to enroll at an accredited two or four-year college for the Fall term of the 2024-2025 academic year
- Be from one of the following counties: Mecklenburg, York, Union, Gaston, Cabarrus, Iredell, Rowan, Cleveland, Lancaster, Lincoln, Stanly, Chester, Catawba, Chesterfield, Alexander or Anson

“While we consider your GPA and test scores, we place greater emphasis on your passion for education and demonstrated service to the LGBTQ community or a desire to serve the LGBTQ community,” a spokesperson for Charlotte Pride said.

The scholarship levels are as follows:

- One (1) Champion of Pride Scholarship (\$10,000 award)
- One (1) Legacy Scholarship (\$5,000 award)
- Two (2) Empowerment Scholarships (\$2,500 award)
- Two (2) Leadership Scholarships (\$1,250 award)
- Five (5) Visionary Scholarships (\$1,000 award)

Applicants may apply for an internship or scholarship, but not both. We suggest that you compile all the information you will need to complete the application, including basic demographic data (name, address, age, etc.), high school/college GPA and transcripts (unofficial transcripts are accept-



able), work history, community involvements, and extracurricular activities (you may submit a resume), and one personal statement of 500-800 words.

The deadline to submit an application is May 5 by 11:59 p.m. ::

—QNotes Staff

## Transcend Charlotte’s Queer Prom to return to the Queen City

Come join in on the fun as Carolinas CARE Partnership, which now includes Transcend Charlotte, sets up for its second ever annual 18+ Queer Prom. The event will kick off at 7 p.m. on May 18 at Resident Culture Brewing.

This year’s prom will include entertainment by our friends at Vanity House Charlotte and celebrity guests, including Johnàe Thee Egyptian Goddess, J Vanna Vanity and Ken Sings.

“Whether you partake in alcoholic beverages or not, we have something for everyone,” the event’s listing states. “Enjoy tasty treats and beverages, enter the drawing to be chosen for our gender-inclusive prom court, or take a break in our low sensory area!”

Transcend Charlotte’s mission is to

“pursue equity and social justice for transgender and gender expansive communities through education, advocacy, mental health and social support services,” according to the organization’s website.

“Our vision is a world where people of all gender identities live their authentic truth, free from discrimination and oppression,” their mission statement reads.

Transcend Charlotte originally put the Queer Prom on last year, but since joining Carolinas CARE Partnership, this year’s event is set to be even bigger and better. Carolinas CARE Partnership is a collaborative organization focusing on justice through health and housing, according to the group’s mission statement.

“To us justice means equity for communities that the system wasn’t built

to protect,” their mission statement says. “Today CCP is a center for LGBTQ+ communities and people living with, or at risk of, HIV. We provide wraparound services for every step of a person’s unique journey and create affirming spaces for folk to connect with one another.”

Last year’s prom was a success, and this year’s is set to break records set by last year’s event. Food will be provided from many Charlotte establishments, including Krispy Kreme, Shake Shack, Liquid Death and Common Market. Other sponsors for Queer Prom include Piedmont, Viiv HealthCare and Make a Move moving and delivery services.



Tickets are still available and can be purchased at <https://www.transcendcharlotte.org/event/2024-queer-prom-for-lgbtq-folk-allies-18-may-18/>. ::

—Taylor Heeden

## Wake County confirms limited mpox outbreak

In February, Wake County Public Health (WCPH) announced there had been a small outbreak of mpox — a virus in the smallpox family which results in a painful skin infection. As a result, WCPH was reminding people who are at risk they qualify to receive a vaccine to help combat potential infections.

“[We’re] working with local health departments and community partners to identify and respond to every case of mpox,” spokespeople from the North Carolina Dept. of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) said. Addressing disparities and advancing health equity is central to our response.

WCPH reported three new cases of mpox for the first time in months this past February, reminding at-risk people they are able to receive vaccines for the virus at

WCPH clinics. Qualifying individuals include anyone who has or may have multiple or anonymous sex partners, anyone whose sex partners are eligible per the criteria above, people who know or suspect they have been exposed to mpox in the last 14 days or anyone else who considers themselves to be at risk for mpox through sex or other intimate contact.

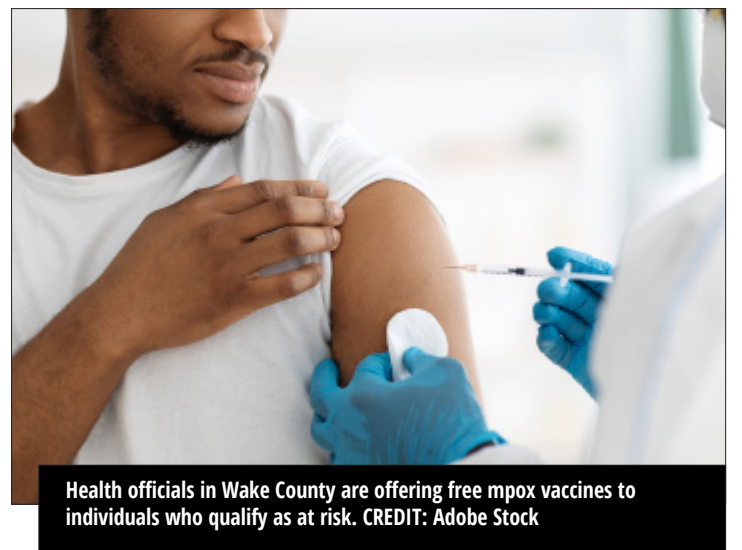
According to NCDHHS, mpox can be spread person-to-person through bodily fluids, items which came in contact with infected fluids or lesion crusts and respiratory droplets.

The symptoms of mpox include headache, fever, chills, body ache, fatigue and swollen lymph glands. The incubation period for the virus usually ranges from one to two weeks, but it could take upwards of three weeks before symptoms manifest.

The first case of mpox in North Carolina was reported on June 23, 2022, and according to NCDHHS, most of the cases in North Carolina have occurred in men who’ve had sex with men. Around 96 percent of cases in the state have been in men and 67 percent of those cases have occurred in Black North Carolinians.

There have been almost 27,000 mpox vaccines administered in North Carolina, and because of that, NCDHHS claims the spread of the virus in the state has been minimal.

According to the NCDHHS website:



Health officials in Wake County are offering free mpox vaccines to individuals who qualify as at risk. CREDIT: Adobe Stock

“Vaccines are free and available, regardless of immigration status. Vaccination can protect against mpox infection or to reduce disease severity if infection does occur.” ::

—Taylor Heeden



# Having a ball: Stonewall Sports to host leagues across the state

Some sports being played this season include kick ball, pickleball, bowling and more



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Stonewall Sports is a renowned organization that has made significant strides in promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion and community engagement through recreational sports. Founded on the principle of creating safe and welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals and allies, Stonewall Sports operates across various cities, offering a diverse range of sports leagues and events.

From dodgeball and kickball to volleyball and bowling, Stonewall Sports provides opportunities for people of all skill levels to participate and connect. Beyond the competitive aspect, the organization fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie, emphasizing the importance of teamwork and mutual support.

Through its inclusive approach, Stonewall Sports not only encourages physical activity but also champions diversity, equity, and social empowerment within the LGBTQ+ community.

Three of North Carolina's largest cities — Charlotte, Raleigh and Wilmington — have their own Stonewall Sports leagues, each of which are gearing up for the spring and summer seasons of recreational sports.

QNotes has created a guide to sporting games each Stonewall Sports league offers and how people can get involved. You can find more information on each area's organization by going to their respective websites.

## In Charlotte

Stonewall Sports in Charlotte is gearing up for its spring and summer seasons, with the Charlotte chapter offering six sports: kickball, pickleball, volleyball, bowling, cornhole and dodgeball.

Kickball and volley both have outdoor and indoor leagues, according to the website.

Some of the sports are already underway for the spring season, including bowling, kickball and pickleball.

The spring season for bowling started in February and will go until April at AMF University Lanes at 5900 N. Tryon St. Kickball will start at the end of March and will run through May at Veteran's Park on Sundays. Pickleball is offered year-round but is split into seasons based on the time of year, according to the organization's website. The spring season is already underway, but summer registration will open on May 6. The summer season will start in June and will conclude at the end of July.

Sand volleyball is also available over the summer and registration for that will open April 8. The season will take place through June and July in the form of four-on-four matches and six-on-six matches. Each match will be played as the best of 3



Charlotte

sets. The first two sets of a match will be played to 25 points. If the set score reaches 24-24 (or 14-14 in the third set), the first team to reach a two-point advantage (e.g. 26-24 or 19-17) will be the winner of that set. Matches are limited to 40 minutes of playing time.

Cornhole is also offered three times a year — in the spring, summer and fall. The spring cornhole season is already in progress, but summer registration will open on April 29. Cornhole is a game played with bean bags and boards, with players throwing the bags on the boards into the hole. Two players from each team stand across from each other in the same lane and pitch four bags each, alternating with the other team. All players will keep score at each frame during the game and report the final score result — win or loss — to the main scorekeeper.

For more information about each sport and when to register, go to the Stonewall Sports Charlotte website at <https://www.stonewallcharlotte.org/>.

## In Raleigh



Oak City's chapter of Stonewall Sports has several sports happening over the spring and summer. There are multiple teams already kicking off their seasons with Raleigh's chapter, two of which are indoor volleyball and kickball.

Kickball started at 1 p.m. on Sunday, March 17 at Chavis Memorial Park, where teams competed for the first time. Some of the team names for this year's league are rather creative, with some of them including "The Cream Team," "Social Poppers," "The Gay Agenda" and "Shady Pitches." Registration for this sport has already closed, but games will be on Sundays from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. every week until May 5.

Indoor volleyball kicked off its season on March 20 at the Halifax Center in Raleigh. Games take place on Wednesdays and Thursdays starting at 6 p.m. and continue until 9 p.m. The season opener took place over two days and featured 12 different teams, including "Bareback Sets," "Need a Bump," and "Serve and Slay." Registration for this sport has also officially closed.

Softball season for Stonewall Sports Raleigh kicked into high gear March 23 at Millbrook Exchange Park. As the season moves forward, games will take place on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and the season will last through June 8, according to the organization's website.

Bowling started for the Raleigh Stonewall Sports chapter on March 25 and is set to run through April 29. Games will take place on Mondays from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at Penny Lanes at 1140 Parkside Main St. in Cary.

Tennis will kick off in the Raleigh area starting on April 19 at the Optimist Community Center at 516 Dennis Ave. This season the organization will allow up to 8 teams and each team may have

10 to 16 players.

Billiards registration opened March 24 and the season will begin on May 16. Games will start at 7 p.m. on Thursdays at Pantanas Pool Hall & Saloon. According to the registration page, teams must have a minimum of seven players but no more than 10.

For more information about registration or other details for any of these sports, visit the Stonewall Sports Raleigh website at <https://stonewallraleigh.org>

## In Wilmington



Stonewall Sports Wilmington is slightly smaller than the other two Stonewall Sports chapters, but they offer just as many opportunities for LGBTQ+ folks and allies to come together and have a good time.

This spring, the organization will have tennis and kickball for people to take part in. Tennis has already kicked off for the Wilmington chapter, with the first games taking place on March 22. Matches will continue on Fridays from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. until May 24. The matches will be at Empie Park in Wilmington.

Kickball is still allowing players to join the waitlist for the ongoing season. Games take place from noon to 4 p.m. on Saturdays at the MLK Center in Wilmington, according to the Stonewall Sports website. The season is expected to wrap up on May 19.

For more information about Stonewall Sports Wilmington, you can visit their website at <https://stonewallwilmington.leagueapps.com/leagues>.



# The Paris Olympics are open to a global list of LGBTQ competitors

Many queer athletes are welcome, while some trans athletes face discrimination



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

If you've ever lived in or visited a city that was hosting an Olympic game you can fill the excitement in the air, even if you're not a sports fan. For the host location the excitement begins the moment they find out they've been awarded the games. But the big burn explodes in the year that proceeds the actual event.

## Queer Olympic History

During the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta – the most recent to be held in our country – neighboring counties in South Carolina and Georgia were part of the excitement because the Olympic torch was scheduled to pass through their regions. Unscrupulous politicians, however, decided to cash in on the resulting notoriety and announce that their residential areas were not compatible with “the gay lifestyle” (their words at the time not ours). In the end all they got was a reroute of the torch around their counties and no media attention.

What does that history blurb prove? The Olympic Committee generally has our backs. They did in 1996, and they're trying to in 2024.

## What the IOC Is (and Isn't) Doing Now

In stories carried by the LGBTQ+ website Outsports, the International Olympic committee confirmed they are committed to allowing all athletes the “equal opportunity to express themselves” and that athletes will be allowed to speak out against homophobia, transphobia and other issues impacting the LGBTQ+ community as it relates to sports. However, displays of the rainbow flag at the Paris Olympics, when not done in protected locations and times, will be given consideration on a “case by case” basis.

As the battle over trans rights in the United States continues to spill over like a toxic stew infecting other western countries, the International Olympic Committee, has not escaped scrutiny from anti-trans organizations. Initial guidelines from the IOC allowed any trans female athlete to compete in cisgender women's competitions as long as their testosterone levels were below 10 nanomoles per liter at least 12 months before competition.

That has since changed. In March of 2021, the Olympics World Athletics governing council made the decision to ban trans female athletes who passed puberty before transitioning from any high-level cisgender female competition. Later that year in November 2021, the IOC designed what they called a “Framework for Fairness” program, which placed the decision-making process for the allowance of trans individuals taking part in Olympic



sporting events in the hands of competing sports organizations.

Furthermore, the Union Cycliste Internationale, organizers of World Cycling in Switzerland, the Disc Golf Pro Tour, World Athletics, the British Triathlon Federation and the International Rugby League has changed or adopted new “transgender participation policies” that – for the most part – ban trans women from competing with cisgender women.

While all of that is disheartening and smacks of discrimination, it doesn't exactly mean that trans Olympic hopefuls can't compete at all.

As indicated from some of the athletes covered in this story, trans competition is continuing, despite the offensive overtones of intolerance.

## Acceptance of LGBTQ Athletes in the Olympics

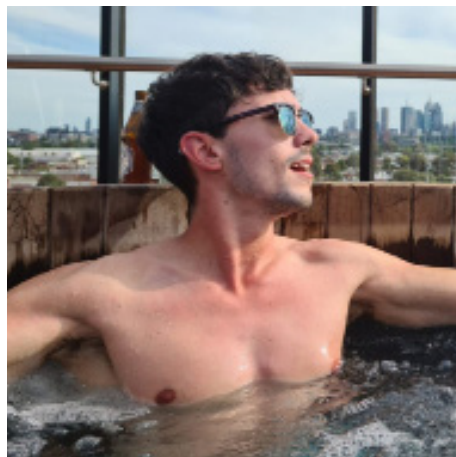
As far back as 1996 and the IOC provided an LGBTQ Welcoming Center for athletes that are members of our community. That became a generally standard practice, at least until the games were held in Russia in 2014.

Tokyo carried on with the tradition at the summer games in 2016, when an estimated 186 out and proud LGBTQ+ and non-binary athletes came to one of the world's largest cities for Olympic competition. That was more than triple the number of out individuals who participated in the 2016 Rio Games. This year the numbers are expected to reach as high as 300.

Set to kick off July 26 in Paris, here's a list of athletes who identify as part of the

LGBTQ+ community.

## Australia



**Campbell Harrison**, an Australian gay man, will compete in Paris in rock climbing this year. In a social media post, Harrison shared his feelings about the opportunity to participate in the Olympics.

“The only way I can truly express how I felt in this moment is by showing it to you. This was the culmination of more than a decade of blood sweat, tears and heartbreak.

“The pressure I felt going into this final was physically painful, to the point where I didn't know that I could stand it.

“Coming into the lead round with everything on the line I ... erupted at the top of the wall [with] fury, joy and pride. I cried like I've never cried before because it's an accomplishment of a magnitude I could never truly comprehend.”

## Canada



**Kadeisha Buchanan** identifies as queer and will represent Canada when they compete in women's soccer at the Paris Summer Olympic games. After growing up and the Toronto Metro area, Buchanan played football, basketball and soccer, in addition to volleyball. She shot to notoriety in 2015 when she became the FIFA women's World cup best young player. She was also named Canadian player of the year in 2015, 2017 and 2020. Much-loved in her native country, it's easy to understand why when she talks about Canada. “I am proud to be Canadian,” she offers. “Canadians are the nicest people on the planet [and] very multicultural. I take a lot of pride on being the first generation Canadian in my family.”

## Canada



They go by the singular name **Quinn** and identify as non-binary, although they sometimes identify as transgender. Blazing pathways in Olympic competition for the



LGBTQ+ community, the soccer champion, is expected to be a high level contender at the Paris Summer Olympic Games. Assigned female at birth, they continue to play professional women's soccer and are proud of their opportunity to serve as a role model for trans youth. "I want to be a visible figure for young trans folk [and] for people questioning their gender and exploring their gender."

**New Zealand**



Openly gay **Robbie Manson** is a rower from New Zealand. Born into a family of professional rowers, his father Greg was the singles lightweight national champion in 1985 and his brother Carl has also competed internationally. Robbie won a bronze medal at the 2015 worldwide champions and will compete in the Paris Olympics representing his home country of New Zealand. A former Olympic contender, he's excited about another chance at the games. "It's cool to be nominated! I figure I'm probably not gonna win it, but I hope to get my followers and supporters [back] on board!"

**New Zealand**



Yet another New Zealander and a rower, **Emma Twigg** identifies as a lesbian and is married to her wife Charlotte, so with him she shares a son. Twigg is very familiar with Olympic competition; she will be competing in the Paris Olympics this year, following a string of appearances and multiple Olympic events, including 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2016. In 2014 she was recognized as the world champion and one gold in her fourth Olympics and Tokyo in July 2021. With so many Olympic years under her belt, she has wise words to share. "For anyone who's had a little bit of failure...just keep at it. If you

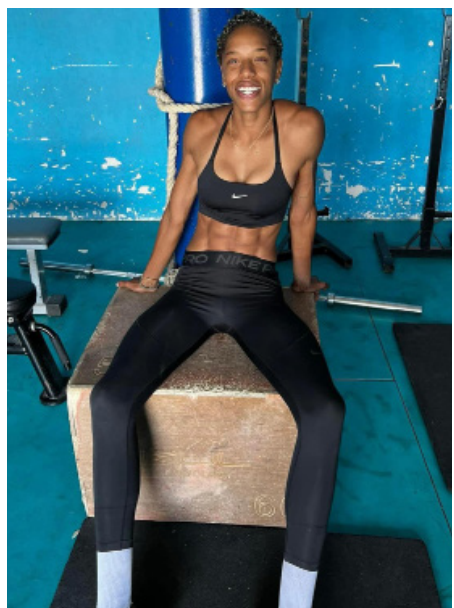
believe you can do something and you know your worth, then the world's your oyster."

**United States**



**Sha'carri Richardson** is a native of the United States and identifies as bisexual. Often referred to as the fastest woman in the world, Richardson accomplished her highest personal best to date with a 10.72 second run, making her the sixth fastest woman of all time and the fourth fastest American woman in history. She qualified for the 2020 Olympics after running 10.83, but later tested for cannabis in her system and was disqualified. She will be running in the 2024 games in Paris as the team leader. While it is fairly common knowledge Richardson has faced her own fair share of challenges, she has proudly bounced back far stronger than before. Said Richardson after peeling off her fake nails and an orange wig at a track competition: "I had to shed off the old to reveal the new!"

**Venezuela**



Venezuelan **Yulimar Rojas** is a track and field champion who will compete at the Paris Olympics this year. She is exceptionally out, loud and proud and says that her identity and orientation is an important part of her life and her career. "You can achieve anything," says Rojas. "There is nothing you can't accomplish if you push for it." ::

# Embracing Opportunity Through Scholarship

by Liz Schob (she/her), Director of Operations and Communications

*The Charlotte Pride Scholarship & Internship Program returns for another year thanks to the Principal® Foundation's generous support.*

In the vibrant Queen City, opportunities abound for those willing to reach out and seize them. For LGBTQ+ and ally college students, one such opportunity has emerged as a beacon of hope and empowerment: the Charlotte Pride Scholarship & Internship Program. Generously supported by the Principal® Foundation, this initiative is back for another year, ready to make a difference in the lives of young people pursuing higher education.

At its core, the Charlotte Pride Scholarship & Internship Program is all about breaking barriers and fostering success. Designed to improve economic mobility for LGBTQ+ and ally college students in the Charlotte metro area,

als, the program not only transforms lives but also strengthens the fabric of our community.

The success stories of past scholarship recipients serve as a testament to the transformative power of this initiative. These individuals have not only pursued their academic aspirations but have also become advocates and leaders within the LGBTQ+ community. Their experiences highlight the importance of programs like the Charlotte Pride Scholarship & Internship Program in creating pathways to success for all.

Last year's Champions of Pride Scholarship recipient Monisha Pirela had this to say, "The scholarship means so much to me because it acknowledged my efforts to promote solidarity and be of service to the LGBTQ+ community as well as my commitment to doing well in my studies. Although I did



CREDIT: Adobe Stock

this program offers more than just financial assistance. It provides a pathway to academic and professional achievement, empowering recipients to pursue their dreams with confidence and determination.

From the prestigious Champion of Pride Scholarship to the Visionary Scholarships, there are opportunities available for students at different stages of their academic journey. What's more, recipients of the summer internship experience gain valuable hands-on experience working alongside Charlotte Pride staff, along with a \$5,000 stipend and \$2,500 scholarship for the following academic year.

But the impact of the Charlotte Pride Scholarship & Internship Program extends far beyond financial support. It's about recognition and empowerment. It's about celebrating diversity and inclusion. Ideal applicants are high school seniors or college students with a GPA of 3.0 or above who have demonstrated service to the LGBTQ+ community or a strong desire to do so. By investing in these individu-

not expect to win the award, I am honored to be among so many other distinguished local LGBTQ+ scholars."

As we embark on another year of empowering futures, we extend our gratitude to the Principal® Foundation for their unwavering support. Their generous donation has enabled us to expand the reach and impact of this program, providing even more students with the resources and support they need to thrive.

To those considering applying for the Charlotte Pride Scholarship & Internship Program, I urge you to seize this opportunity. Whether you're a high school senior with big dreams or a college student ready to take the next step in your academic journey, this program is here to support you every step of the way. Together, let's build a future where all individuals can thrive and succeed.

For more information and to apply, visit Charlotte Pride's website at <https://charlottepride.org/scholarship/>. ::





# Change is coming: with VinFast and other industries coming to Chatham County, a community prepares for the impact

Chatham County leaders prepare for the environmental impact of economic development



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Chatham County is one of North Carolina's "Triangle adjacent" counties, located south of Chapel Hill and west of Wake County. It's home to the towns of Pittsboro, Siler City, Goldston and Moncure. Along with its rural unincorporated communities, the county is home to nearly 80,000 after experiencing a 25 percent population growth between 2010 and 2022.

That growth is only expected to increase as multiple industries — including the electric vehicle manufacturing company VinFast — make their way to the region.

"North Carolina is quickly becoming the center of our country's emerging, clean energy economy," said Gov. Roy Cooper at the announcement in 2022. "VinFast's transformative project will bring many good jobs to our state, along with a healthier environment as more electric vehicles take to the road to help us reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

According to site plans for the plant, VinFast's factory will reside on a 1,977 acre (800 hectare) plot with three main areas: electric cars and buses production and assembly, EVs batteries production and ancillary industries for suppliers.

VinFast's arrival in Chatham County, North Carolina, marks a significant milestone not only for the county but also for the automotive industry in the United States. VinFast's focus on electric vehicles aligns with broader trends in the automotive industry towards sustainability and reduced carbon emissions. By manufacturing electric vehicles in Chatham County, VinFast not only aims to meet the growing demand for eco-friendly transportation options but also to leverage the county's resources and infrastructure to enhance its production capabilities. It would help to expand the EV market in America, in turn, helping to make EVs an accessible option for Americans.

However, several have expressed concerns regarding the potential environmental impact a manufacturing plant like VinFast would have on surrounding communities. According to reporting from NC Newsline's Lisa Sorg, Chatham County is a "pollutant-prone" area, with several industries including Arauco (who has a history of air quality violations), the Shearon Harris nuclear plant, the former Brickhaven mine and Duke Energy's retired Cape Fear coal-fueled power plant.

"The VinFast project is an enormous site in Chatham County, with a mission to increase electric vehicles and reduce carbon emissions," Haw Riverkeeper Emily Sutton said in an interview with Sorg. "But this company that has touted an environmental conscience has submitted a proposal that would destroy thousands of feet of streams, cross the Haw River, and permanently fill



The VinFast manufacturing plant will reportedly cover 1,977 acres.  
CREDIT: Publicity image

dozens of acres of wetlands."

QNotes has spoken to several officials in Chatham County about VinFast and other developments, and what they're doing to prepare for their arrival.

## Who Is VinFast?

VinFast is a Vietnamese automotive manufacturer that was established in 2017 as a subsidiary of Vingroup, one of the largest conglomerates in Vietnam. The company made headlines with its ambitious plans to become a major player in the global automotive industry. VinFast aims to produce high-quality vehicles, including electric cars, scooters and electric buses, with a focus on innovation, design and sustainability.

VinFast's flagship electric car models include the VinFast VF e35 and VF e36, which offer features and performance comparable to other electric vehicles on the market. The company has also ventured into other segments such as electric scooters and electric buses in an effort to provide "greener" solutions for urban mobility.

In addition to its focus on product development, VinFast has pursued an aggressive expansion strategy, both domestically and internationally. The company has built manufacturing facilities in Vietnam and is now working to establish a presence in other markets, including the United States and Europe.

VinFast's entry into the automotive industry has been met with both excitement and scrutiny. While the company has garnered praise for its innovative approach and ambitious goals, it also faces challenges such as establishing brand recognition, building a global distribution network and navigating regulatory requirements in various markets.

## A History Riddled With Pollution

Chatham County has weathered several environmental crises, one of the most infamous being the continual contamination of the Haw River from upstream industries.

worked to improve its own infrastructure. Town Manager Hank Raper said through a Special Order by Consent (SOC), the town has been able to meet guidelines in order to continue improving the town's infrastructure and keep development moving.

## What Communities Are Doing to Prepare for the Growth

Towns like Siler City are working to prepare for the environmental impact of VinFast and other industries, including a semi-conductor chip manufacturing plant coming specifically to Siler City.

Mayor Donald Matthews, who has lived in Siler City for most of his life, said he's trying to ensure the town keeps its residents in mind when moving onto planning things.

"Personally, I'm looking at it from the standpoint of how it's going to impact our current risk," he told QNotes. "How do we take care of them? And how do we make sure they don't get lost in the shuffle of all of this?"

That's why Siler City is asking its residents for input on studies it's having completed to evaluate water rates, stormwater infrastructure, a strategic plan and more.

All of these plans will help ensure the town has a written down set of goals and relative timelines for when projects will be completed and issues will be addressed.

"We don't have water and sewer now, we have a very limited amount under an SOC — that comes nowhere near the demand that we have coming our way," Raper said. "We're hoping that within the next couple of years, the state will give a few 100,000 gallons, which we have way more demand than that, so that's going to require the future growth of the town, despite the fact we have VinFast... we are still going to be behind on the housing need all these people need to live here."

Raper said as an economically distressed community, Siler City had not done everything it needed to do to prepare for this magnitude of growth. However, he said the town is working diligently to prepare for the incoming industries.

"Were there things in the past that could have been done that would have helped us out today? Sure," Raper explained. "This town has been economically distressed for a long time. So I can't sit back and say the town has a half a billion dollars in water and sewer needs and then sit here and say, if we only raised the water rate enough, we could figure out how to raise half a billion dollars. It's not a solvable problem by local controls — it's a much bigger problem than that."

Matthews said he believes the town will be able to take on challenges as they arise.

"Something new pops up that was not expected or was not planned for all the time," he said. "You have to adjust accordingly to make sure that it's taken care of." ::

One of the towns in Chatham County, Pittsboro, directly draws its water from the river, thus resulting in several instances where the town's drinking water would be dangerous for its population to drink.

In 2021, then Pittsboro mayor-elect Cindy Perry went to a Greensboro city council meeting, where she confronted them on the issue of discharges of 1,4-Dioxane — an unregulated chemical often used as an industrial solvent.

She walked up to the podium, with a water bottle — and some paper cups — in hand.

The bottle contained potable water from Pittsboro's treatment plant, the same water which has, for the last few weeks, contained traces of 1,4-Dioxane contamination resulting from a Nov. 3, 2021, discharge into the Haw River of the likely carcinogen from Greensboro.

"It's a health crisis for our children, vulnerable citizens and all of us," Perry said. "There is not a solution yet, and the source of the poison is still unknown."

"It is not an exaggeration to say it is a matter of life and death."

Mountaire in Siler City had previously been named as one of the largest polluters in the region, and according to further reporting from Sorg, the NC Dept. of Environmental Quality has repeatedly cited the plant for many violations, including exceedances for fecal coliform, nitrogen ammonia and aquatic toxicology standards.

Because of this, Siler City could no longer allocate water or wastewater to approved developments, effectively shutting down growth until they met with the terms and conditions from the state.

"We know we have extreme limitations on our ability to grow," Siler City Town Manager Hank Raper said in an exclusive interview with QNotes. "We have limitations on our ability to discharge wastewater ... so we need a long term alternative, because, obviously, we need safe, clean water."

Since then, the town of Siler City has



# How switching to organic pads and tampons can benefit the environment

Organic menstrual products have become a more eco-friendly option for those who experience periods



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

On April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day was born, drawing 20 million Americans into the streets in support of environmental protection after a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, in 1969. This historic event spurred the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the passage of landmark environmental legislation, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Over the decades, Earth Day has evolved into a global phenomenon, with millions of people worldwide coming together to raise awareness, advocate for sustainable practices, and take action to protect the planet for future generations.

One way to remain environmentally conscious is to switch to more sustainable and eco-friendly replacements to everyday items. An example of this would be purchasing an electric vehicle over a gasoline powered car. A much less expensive choice that people who menstruate can make is switching from their normal pads and tampons to organic options.

Organic menstrual products hit the market in 1989 from Natracare and by 1996, Natracare became the first certified organic cotton tampons.

Susie Hewson, Founder and CEO of Natracare, said cotton is one of the crops most likely to contain chemicals from things such as pesticides and fertilizers.

"Cotton is the world's most heavily sprayed crop, so choosing certified 100% organic cotton can reduce exposure to hazardous pesticides and herbicides as well as helping to minimize such chemicals in rivers and soil," she said. "The Global Organic Textiles Standards (GOTS) inspects and monitors from field through processing to finished product that also considers fair working practices and conditions for all workers.

"These are the best reasons for us to choose organic cotton, as well as the won-



Organic pads and tampons are sold in stores across the globe.  
CREDIT: Promotional image

derful quality and softness."

Using organic pads and tampons can offer additional benefits compared to conventional options. Here's what you need to know about organic menstrual products.

### Reduced Exposure to Chemicals

Organic pads and tampons are made from natural materials such as organic cotton, which means they are free from synthetic chemicals, pesticides, and bleaches often found in conventional products. This reduces the risk of exposure to potentially harmful substances, which could otherwise cause irritation or allergic reactions.

### Gentler on the Skin

Organic materials tend to be softer and more breathable than synthetic ones. This can be particularly beneficial for individuals with sensitive skin or those prone to allergies or rashes. By using organic pads and tampons, you may experience less discomfort and irritation during your menstrual cycle.

### Environmentally Friendly

Organic pads and tampons are typically biodegradable and produced using sustainable farming practices. Conventional menstrual products, on the other hand, often contain plastics and other non-biodegradable materials that contribute to environmental pollution. By choosing organic options, you can reduce your environmental impact and support eco-friendly manufacturing processes.

### Absorbency

Despite the absence of synthetic materials, organic pads and tampons are still highly absorbent. Organic cotton, for example, is known for its ability to effectively absorb moisture, helping you stay dry and comfortable throughout your period.

### Reduced Risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) — which can occur when using tampons — is a rare but potentially life-threatening condition caused by bacterial toxins. TSS can

occur when these bacteria multiply and release toxins into the bloodstream, leading to a systemic inflammatory response. Symptoms of TSS may include sudden high fever, low blood pressure, rash resembling sunburn, vomiting, diarrhea, confusion, muscle aches, and redness of the eyes, mouth and throat. TSS can progress rapidly and may result in multiple organ failure and death if not treated promptly.

While TSS is rare, it is a potentially life-threatening condition associated with the use of certain types of tampons, particularly those made with synthetic materials and super-absorbent fibers. Organic tampons typically do not contain these materials, reducing the risk of TSS associated with their use.

### Supporting Sustainable Agriculture

By opting for organic menstrual products, you support sustainable agricultural practices that prioritize soil health, water conservation, and biodiversity. Organic farming methods also promote the use of natural fertilizers and pest control methods, which are safer for both the environment and farm workers.

### Ethical Considerations

Some people choose organic menstrual products for ethical reasons, such as concerns about fair labor practices and worker conditions in conventional cotton production. Organic certification often includes criteria related to labor standards, ensuring that workers involved in the production process are treated fairly and paid a living wage.

In summary, using organic pads and tampons can provide numerous benefits, including reduced exposure to chemicals, gentle materials for sensitive skin, environmental sustainability, and support for ethical farming practices. These factors make organic menstrual products a healthier and more eco-friendly choice for individuals looking to prioritize their well-being and minimize their environmental impact. ::

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# Huntersville native Renee Rapp wins GLAAD media award

Singer and actor says she feels 'very lucky' to be recognized by those she admires



by Taylor Heeden  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Singing sensation and Huntersville native Renée Rapp received the outstanding music artist award at the 2024 GLAAD Media Awards on March 14. Rapp, who identifies as lesbian, rose to fame for her role as Regina George in the Broadway show 'Mean Girls The Musical' and for her role as Leighton Murray in "The Sex Lives of College Girls."

"I feel very lucky to be recognized among these artists and creatives that I admire," Rapp said during her remarks on March 14. "I really love my identity, and I feel lucky that we have spaces and organizations like GLAAD that recognize us for our talent and for, of course, how hot we are — yes, the hottest people are gay, no one is surprised."

Rapp in recent years has shifted her focus to music. She released her first full studio album "Snow Angel" in 2022. She has become a voice for young queer folks and others, talking about a wide array of issues ranging from mental health and eating disorders to events happening across the globe.

In fact, one of the largest defining moments of Rapp's speech was when she



Rapp used her acceptance speech at the GLAAD Awards to call for a ceasefire in Gaza.  
CREDIT: Screen Capture

called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

"We're in a room of very influential people, and very privileged people, which is exciting and also is a huge privilege to be a part of that ... Having said that, I'd like to take the opportunity to show support and call for an immediate ceasefire and perma-

nent ceasefire in Gaza," she said.

Rapp is among many LGBTQ+ artists — some of whom include Billie Eilish and boygenius — who have publicly called for a ceasefire in Gaza after Israel's military began an attack on critical infrastructure in Palestinian-controlled Gaza. These bombings and ground attacks started after

Hamas — an armed, Palestinian militant group — stormed Israeli cities outside of the blockaded Gaza Strip on Oct. 7, which resulted in 1,200 casualties.

Since then, Israel has continued its attacks on Palestinian infrastructure and resources. Some of these included the bombings of hospitals, residential buildings and schools. According to the Gaza Health ministry, over 31,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 13,000 have been children.

GLAAD has been called out by many pro-Palestine activists for the organization's silence on the crisis. According to reporting from them.us, the organization did put out a statement on Oct. 16 expressing grief for "the loss of civilian lives in Gaza and Israel," but it fell short on calling for a ceasefire. GLAAD has yet to officially call for a ceasefire on the matter.

Rapp said it was important to use her platform to advocate for those in Gaza whose voices continue to be oppressed. She encouraged those in the audience last Thursday to do the same.

"Please, continue to advocate for yourself, continue to advocate for your friends, for your queer friends and for those who can't advocate for themselves," Rapp urged. ::

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# “Nothing Ever Just Disappears: Seven Hidden Queer Histories”

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
Qnotes Contributing Writer

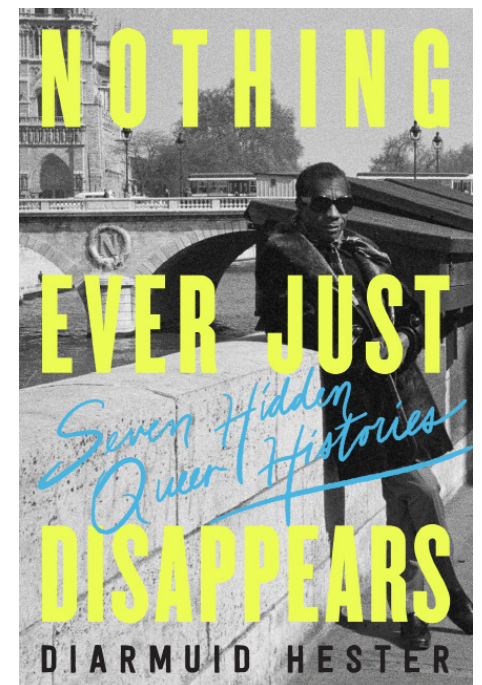
“Nothing Ever Just Disappears: Seven Hidden Queer Histories” by Diarmuid Hester c.2024, Pegasus Books \$29.95 358 pages



This is really a lovely, meaningful book – though readers may argue the points made as they pass through the places included here. Landscapes change with history all the time; don’t modern “queer spaces” count?

That’s a fair question to ask, one that could bring these “hidden” histories full-circle: we often preserve important monuments from history. In memorializing the actions of the queer artists who’ve worked for the future, the places that inspired them are worth enshrining, too.

Reading this book may be the most relaxing, soothing thing you’ll do this month. Try “Nothing Ever Just Disappears” because it really hits the spot. ::



**G**o to your spot. Where that is comes to mind immediately: a palatial home with soaring windows, or a humble cabin in a glen, a ramshackle treehouse, a window seat, a coffeehouse table or just a bed with a special blanket. It’s the place where your mind unspools and creativity surges, where you relax, process and think. It’s the spot where, as in the new book “Nothing Ever Just Disappears” by Diarmuid Hester, you belong.

Clinging “to a spit of land on the south-east coast of England” is Prospect Cottage, where artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman lived until he died of AIDS in 1994. It’s a simple four-room place, but it was important to him. Not long ago, Hester visited Prospect Cottage to “examine the importance of queer places in the history of arts and culture.”

So many “queer spaces” are disappearing. Still, we can talk about those that aren’t.

In his classic book, Maurice, writer E.M. Forster imagined the lives of two men who loved one another but could never be together, and their romantic meeting near a second-floor window. The novel, when finished, “proved too radical even for Forster himself;” he didn’t “allow” its publication until after he was dead.

“Patriarchal power,” says Hester, largely controlled who was able to occupy certain spots in London at the turn of the last century. Still, “queer suffragettes” there managed to leave their mark: Women like Vera Holme, chauffeur to suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst; writer Virginia Woolf; newspaperwoman Edith Craig and others who “made enormous contributions to the cause.”

Josephine Baker grew up in poverty, learning to dance to keep warm, but she had Paris, the city that “made her into a star...” Artist and “transgender icon” Claude Cahun loved Jersey, the place where she worked to “show just how

much gender is masquerade.” Writer James Baldwin felt most at home in a small town in France. B-filmmaker Jack Smith embraced New York – and vice versa. And on a personal journey, Hester mourns his friend, artist Kevin Killian, who lived and died in his beloved San Francisco.

Juxtaposing place and person, “Nothing Ever Just Disappears” features an interesting way of presenting the idea that both are intertwined deeper than it may seem at first glance. The point is made with grace and lyrical prose, in a storyteller’s manner that offers back-story and history as author Diarmuid Hester bemoans the loss of “queer spaces.”

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# “Tiger” burning bright

## An interview with Mary Timony



by Gregg Shapiro  
Qnotes Staff Writer

It's hard to imagine what the current female-driven music scene would be like without Mary Timony. From Sleater-Kinney to Haim, from Angel Olsen to Mitski, the influence of Mary Timony is in every note being played, every word being sung. On her new solo album, “Untame the Tiger” (Merge), with its sly nod to Joni Mitchell, Timony has brought her many years of musical experience to the fore, resulting in what is easily her most accessible release. Beginning with the incredible six-plus minute opener “No Thirds” and continuing through the first single, “Dominoes,” and gorgeous numbers including “The Guest,” “The Dream” and “Not The Only One,” Timony is assured to keep listeners purring along. Mary was generous enough to make time for an interview shortly before the album was released. [Mary Timony performs on July 27 at The Earl in Atlanta.]



**Gregg Shapiro: Mary, I'd like to begin by talking to you about your musical lives in DC and Boston. I went to college in Boston in the early 1980s and was constantly amazed by the bands of the era such as Mission of Burma, Human Sexual Response and 'Til Tuesday. I moved to DC in the mid-1980s to go to grad school, and at the time, the music scene there was dominated by go-go music, and a smaller indie music featuring BETTY and the late Tommy Keene, among others. What do you remember about the music in DC as someone who grew up there?**

**Mary Timony:** That's interesting. We kind of did a switcheroo. I'm from DC and I moved to Boston. (In DC) I learned, as a teenager, about rock shows and rock music from being involved in the punk scene, the post-hardcore scene of kids here. Those are the shows I went to in high school. Basically, the Dischord (Records) bands and stuff. I saw every single Fugazi show from when they started in '87. Before that, whatever was happening in 1985, hardcore shows by Swiz and Soulside and Kingface and I loved Ignition. Other than that, I would go see bluegrass out in Virginia and I loved go-go. I would go to see (go-go bands) Rare Essence and Trouble Funk. I was very into that stuff; that was really exciting. I think I liked Go-Go the most out of all of it, actually [laughs]. I would go to DC Space and 9:30 (Club), mostly for local (acts). I don't think I ever saw BETTY, but I was a teenager then.

**GS: Was the active music scene in Boston in the early 1990s part of the appeal for you when it came to relocating to Boston to attend Boston University?**

**MT:** The reason why I went there was because I wanted to go to a music program that was in a big university, in case I didn't wanna study music the whole time. Which is exactly what

happened. I studied classical guitar for a year and then I didn't really like the program much, so I transferred to study English. I found out about the (Boston) music scene from friends. We went to The Middle East (nightclub) and TT's (T.T. The Bear's nightclub). Then after college, I ended up living right down the street from The Middle East and I was there constantly.

**GS: Good old Central Square! As a performer playing in bands including Autoclave, Helium and Ex Hex, and as a solo artist with her own band, it's not unreasonable to say that Mary, you are someone who plays well with others.**

**MT:** [Big laugh.]

**GS: What makes you such a good team player?**

**MT:** I didn't know I was [laughs]. I've gone back and forth between doing solo stuff and being in bands. Mostly, I've done projects where I've written a bunch of songs and I'm trying to...I haven't done a ton of collaborative stuff really. Ex Hex was fun because it was more collaborative. Wild Flag, the same thing, totally 100% collaborative in every way. But Helium was really my thing, but I got some great people that totally influenced it. I've always been doing my own thing but tried to find really good people. Music really is about connection. It's never as good if it's only one person's vision. Usually, if it's good it's good because of the connection between the musicians. Music is a social art form, I think.

**GS: “Untame the Tiger” is the title of your new album. In 1999, Joni Mitchell titled her album “Taming the Tiger.” Are you, in any way, making a nod to Joni?**

**MT:** A little bit because I am a huge fan. I have been since I was 18. But, it sort of came to me because I have a song called that on the record and I'm

sure that probably came from ripping off Joni Mitchell. Then I just thought that's a cool name for a record. Then I thought, “Oh, shit!” [Laughs] It's already been taken! Then I thought about it and then I forgot about it. Then I thought about it again and finally, I was like, “It's OK. It's a little bit different.” And I love her!

**GS: I'm currently reading Ann Powers' book “Traveling: On the Path of Joni Mitchell,” which comes out in June.**

**MT:** Oh, I'm definitely going to have to read.

**GS: Yes, please add that to your reading list. “Untame the Tiger” is your first new solo studio album in 15 years. Are there things you write and sing about on your solo records that might be out of place on an album you would record with another one of your musical outfits?**

**MT:** Yes. That's why this ended up being a solo record. I guess it was because of the tuning of my guitar. They were more or less finished songs. I wanted the songs to sound kind of acoustic. I also wanted to play with a bunch of musicians who I really love. All those things just made it seem like a solo record. If I'm writing for a band, like Ex Hex, which is basically the other band that I do right now, they're not finished. I bring them in (to the band members) with that band in mind.

**GS: I love the lush instrumental section on “Thirds” and the psychedelic sounds of “Looking for the Sun” and “The Guest.” Were there things you were listening to while writing the songs for “Untame the Tiger” that were inspiring to you?**

**MT:** I was listening to a lot of music, a ton of stuff. I don't ever try to purposely emulate anything very often, but I can't help it. I'd rather be influenced by stuff without really thinking about it too

consciously. I always have loved listening to The Left Banke's instrumentation and The Moody Blues' string parts. Most of the string parts come from trying to emulate The Moody Blues [laughs] or The Left Banke. I'm obsessed with The Left Banke.

**GS: “Walk Away Renée,” right?**

**MT:** Yes. This guy, Michael Brown, was such a genius. He wrote so much stuff as a teenager. His dad was a string arranger. Anyway, I love those string parts. I was listening to this prog-rock band The Strawbs and this early (Ronnie) Dio band Elf. (The Flying) Burrito Brothers and The Byrds, too. I love Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span. Richard Thompson and I was really obsessed with Gerry Rafferty's early solo record called “Can I Have My Money Back?” I love that record. I was listening to it a ton when I was arranging the songs.

**GS: Why was the song “Dominoes” selected as the first single from “Untame the Tiger?”**

**MT:** I don't know. I let other people tell me [laughs]. I really hate sequencing records and I hate choosing singles. I'm just too close to it. I can't tell what people are going to like or not. A lot of times, the ones that I like are not the ones that other people like. I asked (the people at) the label and they suggested that. I think it's more poppy sounding. Dave Fridmann mixed that one and “Don't Disappear” and he's a genius mixer. and these mixers are always very pleasing and accessible sounding. I think that has something to do with it, too.

**GS: Earlier, we talked about your long history of playing music with others, which reminded me of your guest spot singing “All Dressed Up In Dreams,” written by gay singer/songwriter Stephin Merritt for his band The 6ths' “Wasps' Nest” album.**

**MT:** He's such a genius!

**GS: How did that come about?**

**MT:** When I moved to Boston, for a year I lived with Claudia (Gonson of Merritt's band The Magnetic Fields), who is his drummer. I lived in a group house in Cambridge. I was friends with Claudia, and Stephin lived a few blocks away. She told me he was making this record with guest singers they wanted to go over and sing on it. I went over there one day and he taught me the song and I sang on it. I think he's one of the best songwriters of the last 50 years or whatever.

**GS: I completely agree. As someone who has collaborated with Stephin, are you aware of an LGBTQ+ following for your own music?**

**MT:** I don't know. I think maybe a little bit. I'd love that. I love everybody who can connect with it, because all I'm trying to do is connect with people. ::



# Joseph Lewis

## Our People



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Just 48 hours after organ donation surgery, a gentleman sits in a Star Wars themed home office belonging to his husband. Surrounded by light sabers decorating the walls, themed rugs and R2D2 figurines, Joseph Lewis – originally from Syracuse New York – is a quintessential altruist we're proud to call one of Our People. During this interview an 'on the mend' Lewis spoke candidly about his life, his work and what it's been like living and working in Charlotte with a call to serve others through compassion and equity.

**L'Monique King: How long have you lived in Charlotte?**

**Joseph Lewis:** I moved here from Syracuse in 2011.

**LMK: Knowing you're not feeling the greatest at the moment, we thank you again for your time. Would you mind sharing a bit about why you're not feeling so well today?**

**JL:** I'm recovering from a kidney donation to someone I don't know. It was originally supposed to go to someone in Minneapolis but was diverted during the surgery to a woman in New York. Many moons ago I also opted to try to become a bone marrow donor. I haven't had the opportunity to donate marrow yet, but I may be called to give bone marrow at some part in my life.

**LMK: What made you want to donate your kidney?**

**JL:** When you start the process of donation your eyes are opened to the huge demand. For every person donating a kidney there are seven or eight waiting. American health habits have really contributed to the demand; obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, things that put stress on kidney function.

**LMK: Let's talk a little about that**



On the mend: Joseph Lewis recovering from surgery that allowed him to donate a kidney to a patient in need. CREDIT: Courtesy J. Lewis



DEI Director for Stonewall Sports Charlotte and advocate Joseph Lewis donates more than just his time to others. CREDIT: Courtesy J. Lewis

**special someone helping you on your journey to recovery. How long have you been married?**

**JL:** When it became legal federally, we got married two weeks later. It was a courthouse wedding – the following summer we had a more celebratory wedding in New York. It was at the zoo, with live animals walking around during cocktail hour. We rented out the zoo so attendees could freely walk around without public interference. It was very private. We're big animal lovers. We have 3 Chihuahuas of our own and we also foster them so they can be rehabilitated [to] forever homes.

**LMK: What do you love most about your husband?**

**JL:** He's like a child, in a good way. He's fun, keeps my seriousness in check and has a kid at heart mentality. He keeps our life more interesting and spontaneous.

Me, I'd probably just stay home and work, but he doesn't allow me to do that. It's a well-balanced relationship.

**LMK: Speaking of relationships, what's your connection to Stonewall Sports Charlotte?**

**JL:** I currently sit on the Board of Directions, serving as DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Director. I like being the Director there and I also play some of the sports – like dodgeball. We're a fun team and always bring people together in the end whether we win or lose.

My role is to look at policies to make sure they are as inclusive as possible. I look at how we market – making sure we reach diverse communities. For a very long time our demographics (those who play in our sports) looked very white, very male. But the community we serve is not. So, one of the first things I did was to get more involved with organizations like Charlotte Black Pride and other diverse organizations in Charlotte.

**LMK: Have you been involved in any other volunteer activities?**

**JL:** Previously (2015-2021) I was the treasure at Time Out Youth. Having served in these positions "if there's ever something I can do for others, if I ever have the opportunity to change someone's life I'll do it. I'm in pain right now [from the kidney donation surgery] and will be for a couple of weeks, [but] because this can literally save someone's life, [i]t's worth it.

**LMK: How do you make your livelihood?**

**JL:** I work for Guardian Life, a life insurance company that also sells group benefits. A lot of people know us for our dental insurance. There I'm on the Equity and Inclusion team as a Strategy Optimization and Insights Director. My role is to help the organization identify systems and processes that might not be inclusive and

find solutions to making the organization as equitable as possible for everyone.

**LMK: On a lighter note, if you watch television, what are your top three programs?**

**JL:** I watch a lot of home improvement and Sci-Fi shows. I also like Young Sheldon.

**LMK: Out to eat or at home, chicken or fish?**

**JL:** Neither, I'm vegan.

**LMK: Favorite Vegan haunt?**

**JL:** Mama Wok, it's in the Ballantyne area. It's a full Chinese vegan restaurant. They make great hot and sour soup, it's absolutely amazing. And the sweet and sour chicken (made with tofu) is also really good.

**LMK: Ok, it's exposé time. Enlighten our readers on something people would be surprised to know about you?**

**JL:** <Long thoughtful pause> I think for me, it would be that I've dealt with trauma in my life and use that trauma to help others. I lost a (40-year-old) brother to suicide and leveraged that [painful experience] to be able to support others. It was really rough on me and my family. I also lost my dad to a heart attack at 43 and had a niece die of cancer at only six-years-old. I had to find a way to deal with it [all], not hide it.

Mental health is often not treated as [physical] health but must be attended to. You can let trauma control you (it did for a while) or you can get help, maybe find a therapist and get support – so you can help others avoid those situations [of allowing trauma to take over].

The fun thing people don't know [about me], is that I can fix cars, literally take one apart and put it back together. My brothers built and raced race cars. As a gay person, people don't think of the LGBTQ community as mechanics.

**LMK: What do you see yourself doing 20 years from now?**

**JL:** Retired from my normal job but volunteering in the community. I don't see myself sitting still and having a drink on the beach. I'd like to think LGBTQ issues will no longer be a problem [by then] but in all honesty it'll probably get worse before it gets better – so I still see myself working within the arena of DEI of some sort and specifically in the LGBTQ lane.

**LMK: Care to elaborate on your thoughts on our current political state?**

**JL:** Divisive. We're heading in the wrong direction right now. People are too apt to hear what they want to hear instead of what will help everyone. There's so much that needs to be done to fix the inequities. In the current climate people aren't willing to talk or build bridges.

**LMK: Any closing thoughts for our readers?**

**JL:** Get involved. If you're not involved, you're just playing sideline quarterback. ::



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