

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



It's Pride season and time to celebrate!



IN
FOCUS
TRIANGLE Page 11-15



PMBA gears up for drag fundraiser

-pg 7

New book on LGBTQ+ ally Bette Midler

-pg 10



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front page

Graphic Design by Will Kimbrough
Photography/Illustration: Adobe
Stock

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, enter-
tainment, news and views content in
print and online that directly enlight-
ens, informs and engages the readers
about LGBTQ life and social justice
issues.

Pride Publishing & Typesetting, Inc., dba
Qnotes

P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222
ph 704.531.9988 fx 704.531.1361

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

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Printed on recycled paper.

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Our People

Vance Haywood (seen here with President Biden) is the senior pastor at St. John's Metropolitan Community Church. In Our People he discusses his past, present and future, changing careers in mid-life and trading in bandages as an EMS provider for bibles as a clergy member. He also talks life in Raleigh (home since 2004) and spreading love, comfort and affirmation to those around him.

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Project 2025: the guide to dismantle Democracy as we know it

This four-pillar plan highlights the plan for the first 180 days of a conservative presidency



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Election Day is fast approaching with just over five months left until November 5, and Democrats and Republicans are kicking their campaigns into high gear after primary elections. However, campaigns aren't the only entities working tirelessly to ensure their candidates reign victorious this fall.

Super PACs and partisan think tanks work behind the scenes through lobbying and organizing to help uplift candidates who best serve their interests, even if the candidates present more of a harm to American society than a benefit.

Dozens of right-wing political organizations have come together to create a comprehensive plan for the next conservative president, laying out a road map to dismantle the government as we know it and replace it with their vision for a country. The plan: Project 2025, which when implemented, will destroy democracy as we know it and replace it with an administration who serves a very vocal minority.

What is Project 2025?

There are four elements, or "pillars," that make up Project 2025: policy, personnel, training and playbook.

The initiative lays out its plan for policy in a nearly 1,000 page make-shift manifesto called *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*. This book, which was written by Trump allies and former Trump appointees, lays out every federal government agency and how the next conservative president could do away with Biden administration directives and organize around right wing ideals.

What's important to note is this 920 page book suggests a strategy different from the traditional conservative approach of limiting the federal government by cutting federal taxes and slashing federal spending. Instead, the mandate suggests gutting the "administrative state" from within by purging federal employees and initiatives believed to stand in the way of a conservative president's agenda. From there, the president could replace those pushed out with more "like-minded" officials to help fulfill the mission behind Project 2025.

This is where the second pillar comes into play — personnel. The project's funding arm, the Heritage Foundation, is working to create a database of tens of thousands of folks willing to serve in the next conservative administration. Interested parties fill out a questionnaire, which will be analyzed and reviewed before being added to the Presidential Personnel Database.

The third pillar, training, establishes something called the Presidential Administration Academy. The Heritage Foundation describes the academy as a "one-of-a-kind educational and skill-building program designed to prepare and equip future political appointees



CREDIT: Graphic by Taylor Heeden Larkins

now to be ready on day one of the next conservative Administration." The website for the academy says participants will learn about a wide array of topics, which include "the intricacies of the federal budget process, how to work with the media, managing congressional and stakeholder relations, the federal procurement process and dozens of other topics."

The last pillar is one of the most crucial for Project 2025: the playbook. Within the *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, conservatives lay out a plan for the first 180 days for the next conservative president. The plan proposed: cracking down intensely on immigration, vanquishing LGBTQ+ and abortion rights, diminishing environmental protections, overhauling financial policy and taking aggressive action against China.

How Project 2025 Targets LGBTQ+ Rights and Other Marginalized Groups

Critics of Project 2025 have called out the Heritage Foundation and other organizations involved in the project for the "dehumanizing" language directed toward LGBTQ+ people within the 920 page roadmap.

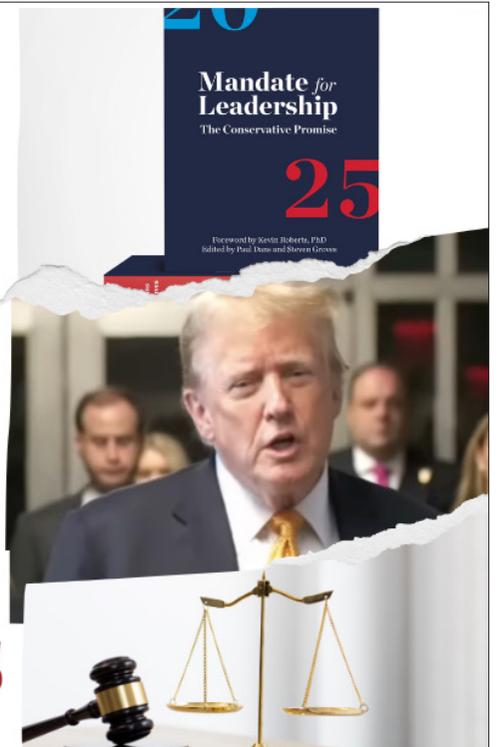
"The dehumanizing language is consistent with the way the right talks about LGBTQ+ people overall," said Sasha Buchert, director of the Non-Binary and Transgender Rights Project for Lambda Legal. "They're never talking about transgender people or gay and lesbian people, it's always referring to them as

Breaking down Project 2025

QNOTES DEMOCRACY

Project 2025

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PROJECT



an ideology of some kind, or an 'ism'. There's no humanity involved ... Not even the presidential candidates in the Republican debates are embracing this kind of rhetoric."

its spread should be shuttered."

Roger Severino, Heritage Foundation vice-president of domestic policy, wrote: "The president should direct agencies to rescind regulations interpreting sex

discrimination provisions as prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status, sex characteristics, etc."

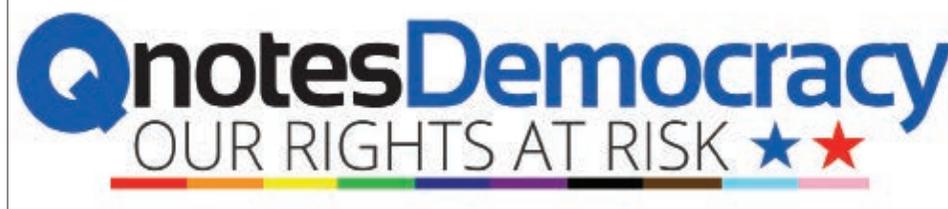
Progressive political scientist and activist Rachel

Bitecofer sounded the alarm on Project 2025, saying it "purges the civil service of all (perceived) political 'enemies' [and] advises to ignore checks and balances of the constitution."

Buchert said they believe Project 2025 is an attempt to suggest ideas to help move the Overton window (a political science concept describing "policies that are widely accepted throughout society as legitimate options") more right.

"Clearly, they're embracing ideology, not what the American public wants or needs," Buchert said. "This is being driven by a far-right desire to turn America back to the 1920s, or even further back.

"It's not just about LGBTQ+ people. It's about women's rights — It's about the right to obtain education that reflects your existence as an African-American person in this country. There are so many strands where you can see it clearly being pushed by a small fraction of the country doggedly pursuing their ideology." ::



Kevin Roberts, president of the Heritage Foundation, sets the tone regarding the attitude toward LGBTQ+ Americans in his introduction of the mandate.

"Children suffer the toxic normalization of transgenderism with drag queens and pornography invading their school libraries ... Pornography, manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children ... is not a political Gordian knot inextricably binding up disparate claims about free speech, property rights, sexual liberation, and child welfare. It has no claim to first amendment protection."

Roberts goes on to suggest various punishments for what he calls "Purveyors of pornography," writing: "are child predators and misogynistic exploiters of women. Their product is as addictive as any illicit drug and as psychologically destructive as any crime. Pornography should be outlawed. The people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned. Educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders. And telecommunications and technology firms that facilitate

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Plus Collective announces 2024 grant recipients

The Charlotte-based organization known as The Plus Collective – previously known as the Charlotte Lesbian and Gay Fund – is managed by the Foundation for the Carolinas. Celebrating their 20th anniversary this year, the Plus Collective continues to provide financial grants to LGBTQ+ and allied organizations that support our community.

Hot off the heels of a successful 20th anniversary party -- “The Celebration,” held May 16 – the Plus Collective eagerly announced as of May 22 their list of recipients for 2024:

Charlotte Black Pride, a celebration of Black LGBTQ+ culture and heritage, is self-described as a convergence of identities that embodies perseverance, strength and more.
\$13,000

Charlotte Gaymer’s Network is an inclusive group that includes individuals

from all walks of life based in Charlotte and the surrounding area who share a passion for all things related to gaming.
\$8,000

The Charlotte Pride Band offers the opportunity of performance for LGBTQ+ and allied musicians of all abilities and levels and welcomes all interested parties to be entertained.
\$14,000

The Charlotte Royals Rugby Football Club is a gay and inclusive rugby club.
\$8,000

The Charlotte Transgender Health Group is a collective of healthcare providers from diverse backgrounds dedicated to providing healthcare for individuals in the trans community in need.
\$10,000

The Gay Men’s Chorus of Charlotte encourages musically inclined individuals of all levels from the community to

participate in musical presentations that reflect the values of and respect the LGBTQ+ community
\$12,000

One Voice Chorus, now celebrating their 34th season, is welcoming to and performs for all individuals in the LGBTQ+ community and those who identify as allied.
\$14,000

Time Out Youth offers various services and an opportunity to find a sense of community for individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and are between the ages of 13 and 24.
\$15,000

The Twirl to the World Foundation provides social advocacy and hardship assistance for members of Charlotte’s LGBTQ+ community
\$11,500

Additional funded organizations listed include:

- Queen City Rugby \$4,000



- The Be More Foundation \$6,000
- Theater Gap Initiative \$5,000
- Carolinas Care Partnership \$5,000
- Hearts United for Good \$5,000
- The Social Justice Center \$2,500
- WayFinders \$2,000
- We Rock Charlotte \$4,000

The entire amount of funds provided for the organizations listed comes to a total of \$140,000. ::

—David Aaron Moore

Libertarians choose gay man for presidential candidate

After a hard pass on Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Donald Trump as potential presidential nominees, the Libertarian Party has chosen Chase Oliver, a gay Atlanta man, to serve as the libertarian candidate for president.

Libertarian Party Stats

As of May 2024, there are roughly 178 libertarians that hold elected office in the United States. At last report, there were approximately 742,000 registered libertarians in the 29 states and the District of Columbia, which report libertarian registration statistics.

Who Is Chase Oliver?

Chase Oliver was previously a Democratic Party member and supporter of Barack Obama. A native of Georgia, he was reportedly born in Snellville (a small Metro Atlanta suburb town with a population of approxi-

mately 22,000) but has called Atlanta proper home since sometime around 2011. Despite his long-term residency in the city, it appears he has had scant involvement in local LGBTQ+ politics and culture. There is no mention of him in local queer press. In mainstream Atlanta media, one story began with the line, “Who in the heck is Chase Oliver?”

Oliver’s Platform

Some aspects of Oliver’s presidential platform are positive, while others are questionable and contradictory. For example, Oliver supports access to abortion for all, but does not believe the federal government should fund family planning clinics.

If elected president, he plans to do away with foreign aid to Israel and Ukraine, but said as a nation the United States would

always offer “moral support” to countries that maintain friendly relationships with the United States. While he has said he wants to “end genocide in Gaza,” as reported in the New York Times, it’s unclear how that would come about, given his non-involvement perspective.

Additionally, he has said that he believes all Americans should have access to firearms, he wants to abolish the death penalty, decriminalize marijuana and pardon individuals convicted of nonviolent drug offenses.

For more information on the Libertarian Party platform, you can go here: <https://www.lp.org/platform/>.

Will His Candidacy Impact Biden’s Run for a Second Term?

While Oliver will reportedly appear on 37 ballots across the United States, including North Carolina, there simply aren’t enough registered and active libertarians to make much of a dent in the campaigns of the big two: Biden and Trump. Across all the leading cable news networks, anchors, reporters and



pundits have posited that Oliver’s run could potentially sway the election in favor of Biden or Trump, but it seems extremely unlikely. In the last presidential election, the candidate running for office won only one percent of the vote. ::

—David Aaron Moore

FBI and Department of Homeland Security issue terrorist warnings for Pride month

Although Charlotte holds its annual Pride events in August, multiple towns and cities throughout the Carolinas celebrate Pride during the nationally recognized month of June.

Venues serving the LGBTQ community, as well as Pride celebrations and related events have been under fire for decades in some form or another, ranging from explosive devices placed in nightclubs to right-wing protesters at Pride celebrations.

According to the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), threats from foreign terrorist organizations now loom as a dangerous possibility for Pride events taking place during the month of June.

While the revelation is frightening, it likely won’t prevent the LGBTQ+ community from celebrating Pride events in both Carolinas, although it is important to keep in mind the United States and other Western countries are

currently experiencing a heightened terrorist threat environment.

Last year English language ISIS messaging featured an article focused on anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and rallied against the growth and promotion of the LGBTQ+ community. The same source called for followers to conduct attacks on targets that are perceived to be easily accessible. None of those targets have been specifically named.

Also last year, and during the month of June, three reported ISIS sympathizers attempted to attack a Pride parade in Vienna, Austria using knives and a vehicle as part of the attack.

June 12, 2024 marks the eighth anniversary of the Pulse Nightclub Orlando shooting, during which the attacker killed 49 individuals and wounded 53 others. Following the Pulse shooting, pro ISIS messaging praised, celebrated and supported the high profile attacks.

DHS and FBI officials are encouraging all individuals involved in Pride events at any level to remain alert to possible indicators or potential threat activity. For those who refuse to be rebuffed by the potential reality of terrorism against our community, here’s what you need to know.

Possible Indicators of Potential Threat Activity:

- Violent threats made online, in person, or via mail.
- Unusual or prolonged testing or probing of security measures at events or venues.
- Photography of security related equipment, personnel, or access points related to surveillance without a reasonable alternative explanation.
- Unusual surveillance or interest in buildings, gatherings, or events.
- Attempts to gain access to restricted areas, bypass security, or impersonate law enforcement officials.
- Observation of or questions about facility security measures, including barriers, restricted areas, cameras, and intrusion detection systems without a reasonable alternative explanation.
- Eliciting information from facility personnel regarding the nature of



- upcoming events, crowd sizes, busiest times of day, etc. without a reasonable alternative explanation.
- Attempts to enter a restricted area, bypass security, or impersonate law enforcement officials.

Please visit the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) website for additional information, resources, and training for community partners (<https://www.dhs.gov/nationwide-suspicious-activity-reporting-initiative>). ::

—David Aaron Moore

Charlotte's Shalom Park hosted LGBTQ+ Pride event

Shalom Park Foundation in Charlotte kicked off LGBTQ+ Pride Month on June 2 with its annual Splash Into Pride luncheon. The event, hosted by the foundation's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, was held from 10 a.m. to noon at Lerner Hall.

Splash Into Pride focuses on educating allies on how to be a strong supporter of the queer community. Participants were able to learn how to:

- Expand their understanding of LGBTQ+ history, language and terminology, as well as examine and implement strategies to support LGBTQ+ people
- Engage with one another and program facilitators to expand understanding of LGBTQ+ identities
- Learn about community organizations and resources that support LGBTQ+ people.

Shalom Park's 52-acre campus is home to numerous Charlotte-based Jewish organizations, and according to the foundation's DEI statement, they operate under the mindset that all people are "created in the image of God."

"Jewish text and tradition teach that all people are created 'B'Tzelem Elohim,' in the image of God ... [and] ... we strive to recognize and tend to that divine image in our encounters with each person," the statement reads. "We are also commanded 'v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho' — love your fellow human as yourself — from which we understand that it is up to each of us to care for each other. As such, the Foundation of Shalom Park exists to create a safe and healthy environment for all."

June 2's Splash Into Pride event will have multiple speakers, including **Mollie Burkholder, the Educational**

Programs Manager for PFLAG Charlotte, and O'Neale Atkinson, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 15 years of experience.

"We recognize that in society at large, barriers to success and well-being exist for everyone, who enters Shalom Park regardless of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, family status or disability," the DEI Committee's mission states. "Our organization is committed to acting as a catalyst to remove these obstacles for the benefit of everyone who works at and visits Shalom Park."

"Shalom Park was founded and continues to operate on the principle of respect for and embracing the diversity of Jewish religious belief and practice. Building on that ideal, our organization is committed to cultivating a harmonious workplace and community throughout all areas of the



campus that is: inclusive of employees, members, visitors and vendors of different backgrounds and beliefs; recognizes and embraces the value and benefits of cultural diversity; promotes respect and fair and equitable treatment for all individuals associated with Shalom Park including (but not limited to) staff, guests, members, congregants and vendors." ::

—QNotes Staff

Pauli Murray Bar Association celebrating second anniversary with latest drag event

During the month of May in 2023, former NC Bar Association (NCBA) President Clayton Morgan made the spectacularly inappropriate and unpopular decision of canceling the organization's drag queen trivia night, which would have been held in Durham the following June 8 and served as a professional networking event for gay and straight attorneys.

LGBTQ+ NCBA members were angry and immediately pointed a finger at Morgan, insisting his reaction was fear of retaliation from the Republican majority in the North Carolina legislature. "Pay us the respect of speaking plainly," Charlotte attorney Michael Roessler, who is gay, told Morgan during the hour-long session, according to a recording acquired by The Charlotte Observer. "The political reality is that there is a homophobic, anti-queer super majority in the North Carolina General Assembly, and you're afraid of them. That

is the bottom line. ... Cut the bull****."

The NCBA released a prepared statement in the firestorm of controversy that followed.

According to that release, the event was canceled because it would "most likely be interpreted as a political statement on behalf of the NCBA by many within the organization, the profession and the state," which would impact "the effectiveness of the NCBA with regard to many of its initiatives, including the important discussions and work that need to happen with respect to LGBTQIA+ issues."

A significant number of LGBTQ+ attorneys left the organization, aligning themselves with The Pauli Murray Bar Association (PMBA), and the event was rescheduled, continuing as planned and successfully raising \$60,000.

Now, a year later, the issue remains unaddressed by the NCBA, and no apology

has been forthcoming.

In an email to **QNotes**, Candelario Saldana, PMBA President, addressed the issue.

"The NCBA has yet to issue an apology or [take any] steps to correct their past actions," Saldana explained. "Therefore we are hosting our second annual Pride drag event on the evening of the first night of their annual conference, here in Charlotte."

"This year's theme is 'Unapologetically Still Here,' a reminder that LGBTQ+ individuals will not be erased and we will continue to be our whole selves."

The event will be held at Tabbris Innovation Center, located at 1300 South Boulevard, on June 20 beginning at 6:00 p.m. and continuing to 9:00 p.m. Performers slated for the presentation include RC Cola, Nova Stella, Lolita Chanel and Oso Chanel.

The fundraising event is open to LGBTQ+ and ally legal professionals, as well as all community members who wish to show their support and enjoy an evening of networking and entertainment.



Tickets for members are \$50 and \$75 for non-members. For ticket purchases you may visit the organization's website at lgbtqbarn.com. ::

—David Aaron Moore




Lee Robertson voted next President-Elect of 26th Judicial Bar

Vote held at NC's 26th judicial bar annual association meeting



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Mecklenburg County's Lee Robertson will serve as North Carolina's 26th Judicial Bar district President starting on July 1, 2025, according to an announcement from his law firm Robertson & Associates.

Robertson is a Charlotte-based lawyer and the managing partner of Robertson & Associates. He practices commercial litigation, construction law and employment defense and is a member of six bars, which include North Carolina, U.S. District Court Western District of North Carolina, U.S. District Court Eastern District of North Carolina, U.S. District Court Middle District of North Carolina, U.S. Court of Appeals 4th Circuit and U.S. Supreme Court.

Judicial bar districts are geographical divisions within a state sorting the legal community — such as lawyers and judges — into manageable segments for administrative and regulatory purposes. In North Carolina, these districts play a crucial role in the functioning of the state's judicial and legal systems.

"There are 44 judicial districts, and so those 44 judicial districts, in some cases, are multiple counties grouped together,"

Robertson explained to Qnotes. "In other cases, it's just one county, and that's how Mecklenburg [County] is."

There's a variety of Bars within the state, including the North Carolina State Bar which every lawyer who practices law in North Carolina must be a part of. Robertson will serve as the President-Elect for the 26th Judicial Bar district starting July 1 and will then transfer into the role of president the next year.

"There are certain things that we are responsible for, for example, grievances — any complaints against lawyers — ... certain judicial elections when a judge steps down [in] the middle of their term, we handle the election to fill that vacancy," Robertson explained.

There are also voluntary Bars lawyers and justices can opt into, including the North Carolina Bar Association, which has chapters across the state. Robertson has been a member of the The North Carolina Bar Association and the Mecklenburg Bar Association, and he said something he wishes to do is open the world of law to everyone.

"The practice of law and the composition of lawyers is changing, and I think that's a necessary and welcome change," Lee explained. "So I am proud to be a part of that."

The North Carolina Bar Association has a history of excluding diverse perspectives

when it comes to those it allows into its ranks. Just last year, a drag presentation was scheduled by the association to celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride month and commemorate the queer, trans and gender-nonconforming lawyers and judges. Bar association leadership, however, decided to cancel the show.

Robertson said after the state's association decided to cancel it, the Pauli Murray LGBTQ+ Bar Association elected to host its own drag show. In fact, Robertson's firm (which is completely separate from his position as President-elect of the 26th Judicial Bar) is a sponsor for the event.

While Robertson — an openly gay man himself — has supported inclusivity efforts publically, his position with the 26th Judicial Bar is meant to serve as an unbiased administrative role.

"I am heavily involved in supporting those various efforts, but it's different from what I'll be doing in this role which is established by the government," he states. "That's why I think being involved personally is an important thing, because I can stay involved there without it being in some official capacity."

Mecklenburg County is home to over 6,000 practicing attorneys, all of which will be members of Robertson's Bar. He said he is



Lee Robertson will be the president-elect of the 26th Judicial Bar. CREDIT: Facebook

excited to continue his work with the Bar, and hopes to help make it a more inclusive and diverse space.

"I think [Mecklenburg County] is a good place to practice law," Robertson said. "I'm excited to continue my involvement in this way and hope to continue doing so." ::

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Pride, globally speaking

Organizations like InterPride help LGBTQ+ Pride planners around the globe



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

For most people, including those in and out of the LGBTQ+ community, it's easy and familiar history that global recognition of the month of June as Pride month has its roots in the Stonewall Riots, which took place over several days beginning June 28, 1969. Following a police raid on the gay bar Stonewall Inn, located in New York City, members of our community fought back against harassment from local police.

One year later on the anniversary of the riots, the first Pride marches were held in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City. In the years that followed other large cities would jump on board (North Carolina would see its first Pride events in June 1981 in Charlotte and Durham) creating their own Pride events here in the United States and, gradually, around the globe.

In the 21st century, it has become relatively commonplace to see Pride events held in smaller towns and communities, which were once places that LGBTQ+ individuals often fought hard to escape from.

With the explosion of Pride celebrations here and abroad, activists and event planners became acutely aware of the need for – and benefits of – a way to connect Pride communities both nationally and internationally. From that school of thought was born an organization that has since come to be known as InterPride.

In October 1982, the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Pride Coordinators was formed in Boston, Massachusetts. An initial membership of six Pride organizers, all based in the United States, helmed the original group.

In the years that followed membership has grown to include Pride organizers from around the planet. That development led to a new name for the organization – InterPride – and a membership that, as of 2021, totals over 300 organizations for more than 60 countries.

And the growth shows no signs of stopping. Beginning in 2015 and continuing at an ever-increasing rate membership from outside the United States has grown from 21 percent to 49 percent. Trends indicates that reflects participation from Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, Micronesia and Polynesia) and the global South, which includes Africa, Asia and South America.

What does InterPride do?

Today InterPride is an international organization with official status and recognition from the United Nations, which advances the Pride movement, by coordinating with global partners who share a common goal: celebrating pride in our community through visibility.

In order to increase that visibility, Interpride works with and supports development of networks around the globe, which contributes to the presence and influence of Pride efforts in national, regional and local levels.

In short, InterPride brings together organizers from around the world to share their knowledge and experience, to network and learn how to increase their impact on communities everywhere.

Talking with InterPride

To gain some additional inside into InterPride, Qnotes spoke with two of the organization's three presidents.

"I joined InterPride in 2018 as an attendee at the annual general meeting," says Natalie Thompson, one of the presidents. "[That was] in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, alongside my colleagues from Capital Pride Alliance in Washington, DC. The conference was an opportunity to network with Prides



InterPride Co-President
Natalie Thompson
CREDIT: Facebook

from around the world and develop goals for the organization for the next year.

"In 2019, I was elected to the board as a vice president of global outreach and

partnerships, working directly with Pride organizations in the United States, Africa and Europe. In 2022 at our conference in Guadalajara, I was elected to serve as one of the co-presidents.

"As a BIPOC leader in these spaces, I'm dedicated to continuing the conversations around how we are centering equality in our work. It is important to me that we are consistently creating spaces where all our intersectional identities are represented and celebrated within our Pride movement."

Rahul Upadhyay is also a co-president of InterPride.

"I am from India," he explains. "As an advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights,

I have dedicated my efforts to fostering inclusivity and representation through various organizations. My journey began in 2018 when

I founded a group named Orenda. Through



InterPride Co-President
Rahul Upadhyay
CREDIT: Facebook



Orinda I became associated with InterPride."

"In 2019 I founded the Ganhindagar Queer Pride Foundation (GQPF) furthering my commitment to the LGBTQIA+ community. Through GQPF, I became a member of InterPride and have since been deeply involved with the organization in several capacities.

"Currently I am honored to serve as a co-president of InterPride. I am committed to bringing the diverse voices from the Asian region to the forefront. My goal is to ensure that our perspectives and experiences are represented and heard on the global stage, fostering a more inclusive and equitable world for all."

Both of the organizational leaders are clearly enthusiastic about their involvement with the organization, and it's importance on global queer rights and culture.

Says Upadhyay: "I believe that one of the crowing achievements of InterPride is its ability to be a truly global organization, welcoming diverse voices from marginalized communities. InterPride continuously strives to achieve its goal of being an inclusive global entity. Partnering with various organizations and delivering some spectacular projects is another significant achievement, for example global Pride 2020 stands out as a remarkable success."

Thompson shares Upadhyay's perspective on Global Pride 2020.

"That is a moment I carry with me. InterPride's participation in bringing Global Pride 2020 to our community during the pandemic. In partnership with other Pride organizations we developed a 27-hour

virtual Pride event during the pandemic and raised money for organizations negatively impacted by the effects."

While Pride events continue to grow in popularity and size around the globe, current political developments have left events facing some challenges.

"InterPride has indeed faced significant challenges amid current world politics," says Upadhyay. "One of the most pressing issues is the rise of far right politics, which has increasingly targeted the LGBTQ+ community. Our members are deeply concerned about the instrumentalization of our rights as political pawns in these contexts. This political climate has led to heightened queerphobia, racism, misogyny, and other forms of discrimination and oppression."

Despite the challenges facing LGBTQ+ people around the globe, InterPride still encourages the travel-minded to take advantage of Pride events everywhere to experience new aspects of queer culture.

"For ... LGBTQ+ travelers from the US looking to have their first international Pride experience, a great place to start would be our neighbors to the north and south. There are some amazing opportunities to engage with pride events happening in Canada and Latin America," says Thompson. "When you decide you're ready to travel, do your research on destinations and network with Pride organizers in that area. Participating with InterPride for the US Association of Prides is a great place to start."

For more details on InterPride visit <https://www.interpride.org>.

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“On Bette Midler: An Opinionated Guide” by Kevin Winkler

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Qnotes Staff Writer

“On Bette Midler: An Opinionated Guide” by Kevin Winkler
c.2024, Oxford University Press
\$29.99
232 pages

Superb. That word’s appropriate in this situation. Fantastic, that’s another. Transcendent or celestial, if you’re of that mind, or perhaps anointed. There are many adjectives you can use for a performer who transports you, one who sings to your soul. Sensational, breathtaking, outstanding, or – as in the new book “On Bette Midler” by Kevin Winkler – another, better word may be more suitable.

Born in Hawaii a few months after the end of World War II, Bette Midler was named after film star Bette Davis. It was a perhaps auspicious start: Despite a minor disparity (Midler’s mother thought the movie star’s first name was pronounced “Bet”), young Midler

seemed at a young age to want to follow in her almost-namesake’s footsteps. By age 11, she’d won accolades and prizes for her performances, and she “yearned to be a serious actor...” As soon as she could, she headed for New York to seize her career.

Alas, her “unconventional” looks didn’t help win the roles she wanted, but she was undeterred. Unafraid of small venues and smaller gigs, she “just blossomed” in New York City. Eventually, she landed at the Improv on 44th Street; the owner there helped her negotiate some minor work. Another man became her manager and secured a job for her at the Continental, a New York bath house strictly for gay men. She was hired for eight summer nights, Fridays and Saturdays only, for fifty bucks a night.

Almost immediately, her authenticity, her raunchy language and her ability to relate to her audience made her beloved in the gay community. Midler’s tenure at the Continental expanded, and though legend points to a longer time, she worked at the bath house for just over two years before moving on and up, to television, recording stu-

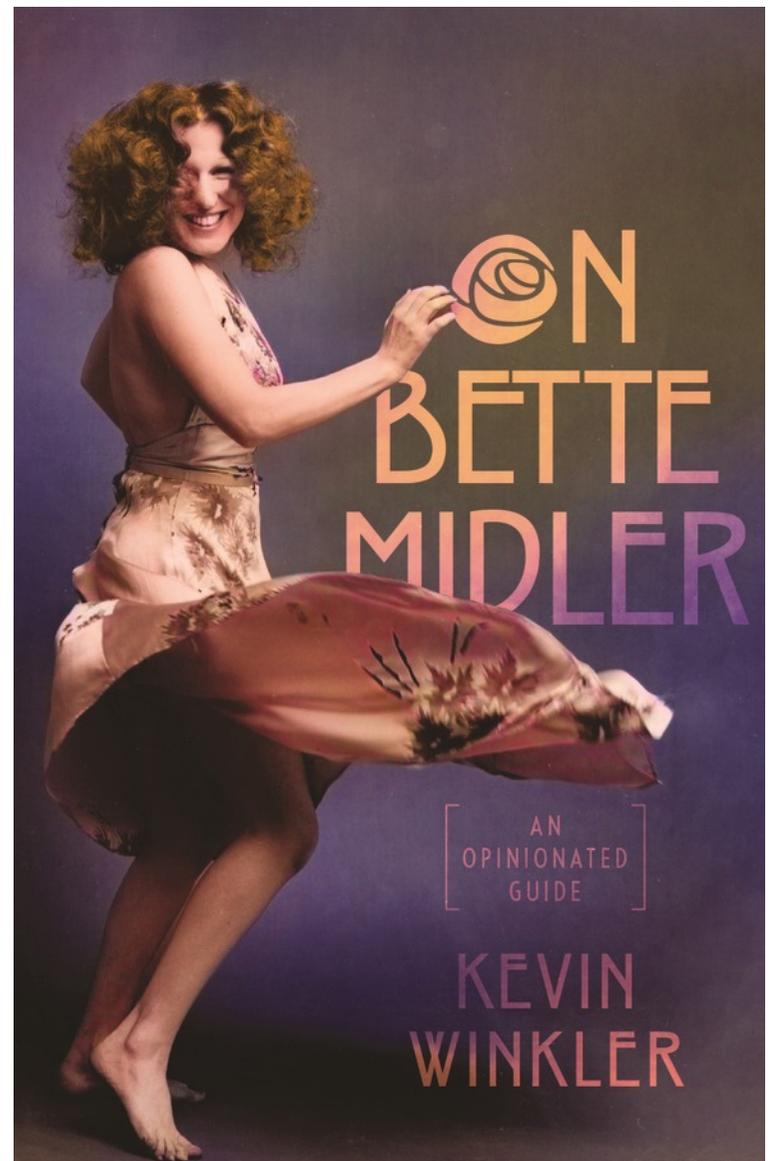
dios, movies and into the hearts of her fans. Still, asks Winkler, “Did it really matter what stage she was on? She touched audiences wherever she performed.”

In his earliest words – and, in fact, in his subtitle – author Kevin Winkler reminds readers that “On Bette Midler” is a book that’s “highly opinionated, filled with personal contemplations...” He is, in other words, a superfan, but that status doesn’t mar this book: Winkler restrains his love of his subject, and he doesn’t gush. Whew.

That will be a relief to readers who wish to relish in their own fervor, although you’ll be glad for Winkler’s comprehensive timeline and his wide, wide look at Midler’s career. Those things come after a long and fascinating biography that starts in 1970, takes us back to 1945, and then pulls us forward through movies, television appearances, stage performances and songs you might remember – with appearances from Barbara Streisand,

Barry Manilow and Cher. It’s a fun trip, part confidential, part charming, part nostalgic and very affectionate.

Despite that this is a “personal” book, it’s great for readers who weren’t around during Midler’s earliest career. If you were and you’re a fan, reading it is like communing with someone who appreciates Midler like you do. Find “On Bette Midler.” You’ll find it divine. ::



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919-843-5376
lgbtq.unc.edu/

North Carolina Central University LGBT Resource Center
nccu.edu/lgbta/index.cfm

North Carolina State University GLBT Center
oied.ncsu.edu/divweb/glb/

NC State University GLBT Center
glbtcenter@ncsu.edu.
(919) 513-9742
diversity.ncsu.edu/glb/

NC Central LGBT Resource Center
nccu.edu/life-nc-central/health-and-well-being/lgbta-center

Addiction Recovery D-icers CMA Meeting
dicerstriangle@gmail.com

North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
loftinwilson@gmail.com
919-370-0671
nchrc.org/

Pipe Down - CMA Meeting
725 N Boylan Ave, Raleigh NC 27605
pipedownnc@gmail.com

Business / Professional Raleigh Business and Professional Network (RBPB)
RaleighBizNetwork@gmail.com
raleighnetwork.org/
Bull City LGBTQ Professionals
tacnc@aol.com

RBPB - Raleigh's LGBT Chamber of Commerce

RaleighBizNetwork@gmail.com
919-349-0063
raleighlgbtchamber.org/

Community Service ReachOUT NC
info@reachoutnc.org
gayforgood.org/raleigh-durham/

Community Support Wake County HIV Support Group, Under One Roof Compass Center
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919-968-4610
compassctr.org/

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lgbtcenterofraleigh.com/

Oak City Cares (formerly Oak City Outreach Center)
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aas-c.org/

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durham.va.gov/services/lgbt/index.asp

Rebecca Kooistra, Family Nurse Practitioner
quickl@piedmonthealth.org
919-545-3420
piedmonthealth.org/locations/moncure-community-health-center/

Dr. Louise Metz • Mosaic Comprehensive Care
abanning@mosaiccarenc.com
919-240-7269
mosaiccarenc.com/

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plannedparenthood.org/health-center/north-carolina/raleigh/27603/raleigh-health-center-3338-90860

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Student Health Action Coalition HIV Free rapid HIV testing
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UNC Infectious Disease
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contact@acluofnc.org
919-834-3466
acluofnorthcarolina.org/

Equality North Carolina
equalitync.org/

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)
linebacka@gmail.com
hrc.org/local-issues/community/the-triangle

NC AIDS Action Network
lee@ncaan.org
919-914-0311
ncaan.org/

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https://legends-club.com/
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Sunday 8 PM-1 AM
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Friday 9 PM-2:30 AM

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615 W. Hargett St, Raleigh, NC 27603
http://www.flex-club.com/
(919) 832-8855
Saturday 5:30 PM-12:30 AM
Sunday 4 PM-12:30 AM
Monday Closed
Tuesday - Thursday 7PM -12:30AM

Friday 5:30 PM-12:30 AM
Sundap
Monday - CLOSED
Tuesday - Saturday 7 PM - Midnight

Ruby Deluxe
415 S Salisbury St, Raleigh, NC 27601
https://queerraleigh.com/
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Sunday 1 PM-4 PM
Monday - Tuesday CLOSED
Wednesday - Thursday 8 PM-12 AM
Friday 8 PM-12 AM

The Night Rider
416 W South St, Raleigh, NC 27601
https://queerraleigh.com/

https://www.facebook.com/TheNightRiderRaleigh/
Sunday 3 PM- 12:00 AM
Monday - Tuesday CLOSED
Wednesday - Saturday 5 PM- 2AM

The Wicked Witch
416 W South St, Raleigh, NC 27601
https://queerraleigh.com/
5 PM- 2 AM
Sunday 3 PM- 12:00 AM
Monday - Tuesday CLOSED
Wednesday - Saturday 5 PM- 2AM

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Cocktail Bar
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Raleigh, NC 27601

Mon-Tues - CLOSED
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Brunch 10am - 3pm
libations317.com

440 Nightclub
2526 Hillsborough St #301, Raleigh, NC 27607
https://www.facebook.com/440nightclub?_rdr
(984) 444-9292
Saturday 10 PM- 3 AM
Sunday 9 PM-12:00 AM
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Friday Open 24 hours

Pinhook
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https://thepinhook.com/
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Out! Raleigh Pride festival welcomes crowd to celebrate diversity and inclusion

The annual festival will be from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on June 22



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

The vibrant and inclusive spirit of Raleigh will be on full display as the city gears up for the annual Out! Raleigh Pride festival, set to take place on June 22 in the heart of downtown on Fayetteville Street. This year's event promises to be a spectacular celebration of the LGBTQ+ community, drawing thousands of attendees from across the southeast.

Out! Raleigh Pride, now in its 12th year, has become a cornerstone of the city's cultural landscape, championing diversity, acceptance and love. Organized by the LGBT Center of Raleigh, the festival offers a welcoming and friendly environment where people of all ages and backgrounds can come together to celebrate and support the LGBTQ+ community.

History of Out! Raleigh

The annual festival started in 2011 with the idea of taking a supportive and inclusive approach to traditional pride celebrations. This meant adding activities children, crafts and performances.

"Most pride events are known for being inclusive and colorful but also highly sexualized," reads a blog post from Out! Raleigh Pride's 2011 event. "Out! Raleigh stands out as a festival which is safe for the little members of our families to enjoy entertainment that is geared towards them."

The inaugural event for Out! Raleigh Pride also featured five faith-based organizations, which is something the LGBT Center of Raleigh said was important to include.

"Many of them spoke and gave their support to a community that is often excluded from spiritual and religious sects of society," the blog post states, referring to other pride festivals. "Five churches participated in that first festival, and we were treated to a confirmation of support from Mitchell Gold of Faith in America, who encouraged the community to be themselves and spread love and kindness."

Hundreds of thousands of people have attended Out! Raleigh Pride over the years, including many entertainers and performers who make the pride celebration the coveted event people look forward to every year.

A Day Full of Festivities

This year's pride festival will feature an array of activities and entertainment, including live music, drag performances and engaging speakers. Among the performers are Dawn, Jorgegeous, DJ Wicked and more.

Local bands and artists will take the stage throughout the day, providing a lively soundtrack to the festivities. Some local groups performing include the Triangle Pride Band, Triangle Gay Men's Chorus and Common Woman Chorus. Attendees can also look forward to a diverse lineup of food trucks, offering everything from classic southern fare to international cuisine.

For those attending with kids, there will be plenty to keep them occupied in the KidsZone, which will be packed with fun activities such as face painting, crafts and games. The festival will also host a variety of vendors and community organizations, offering everything from handmade crafts to information about local LGBTQ+ resources and services.

In addition to entertainment, Out! Raleigh Pride serves as an important platform for raising awareness about critical issues facing the LGBTQ+ community. This year's event will feature several informative booths and vendors sharing information and resources on topics such as LGBTQ+ rights, healthcare and intersectionality. These discussions aim to educate attendees and foster a sense of solidarity and activism within the community.

A highlight of the day will be the grand parade, which will wind through downtown Raleigh, showcasing colorful floats, vibrant costumes and spirited participants. The parade is always a crowd favorite, embodying the joy and resilience of the LGBTQ+ community.

A Few Words From Some of the Planning Committee Members

Kori Hennessey (they/them) is the Director of Education and Programs at the LGBT Center of Raleigh and is the head of the Out! Raleigh planning committee. This year marks their sixth year planning the pride festival.

"Every year leaves me in awe of how incredible our community can be, especially since the last few years have been tumultuous for queer and trans folks," Hennessey said. "This year marks the 55th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Pride is not only

a time for celebration, but also a time to remember and honor those that paved the way for us to celebrate."

Cotie San (she/they) is the new Development Manager for the LGBT Center in Raleigh, and this year marks their first year going to Out! Raleigh. She said for her,

this year's pride will be special.

"To me, Pride means celebrating our unique identities and being in community with other LGBTQ+ people and allies, and refusing to let anyone take away our joy," San said.

Gwendolyn Love is the program coordinator for Raleigh's LGBTQ Center. She received her Bachelor's Degree in African and African-American Diaspora Studies with a concentration on Black Sexuality Studies and Women and Gender Studies. She said for her, Pride is freedom to be herself.

"To me, Pride means being able to live in my true authentic self without explanation or concern for what others may perceive: being able to showcase all the best parts of my identities, and never having to worry about dimming my light," she explained.

John Hull has worked on the festival planning committee for "a number of years," according to his biography on the Out! Raleigh Pride website. He said he continues to volunteer his time to the event as he believes it provides a safe space in a state where not every community is accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals.

"There weren't resources for me to learn about being gay or places where I felt accepted and loved," Hull recounted. "Out! Raleigh Pride is a safe space to celebrate our diversity and to find resources."

Amy Cox and Bree Petrillo are with Deep South Entertainment — a Raleigh-based entertainment agency. Cox is the company's senior vice president, while



Festival attendees at last year's Out! Raleigh Pride event.
CREDIT: Facebook

Petrillo serves as the events coordinator.

Cox said Deep South Entertainment has helped to organize Out! Raleigh Pride since its inaugural event in 2011, and she's very glad to be a part of the process.

"When a collective of volunteers/leaders from the LGBT Center of Raleigh approached Dave Rose and myself in 2010 about doing the Out! Raleigh festival, Deep South was 100 percent on board and ready to support the efforts," Cox said. "As an ally in the community, I have thoroughly enjoyed producing this very inclusive festival that is for everyone."

Califonza Thompson (he/him) is also on the planning committee. He said Pride has different meanings for each person, but for Thompson, it's about honoring those who came before him.

"Pride is about honoring ourselves and our ancestors who laid the groundwork for us to be recognized and celebrated," he said. "It is also a time to remember that Pride started as an uprising against police brutality. Pride is our time to celebrate our culture and living ... without fear or repression."

As Raleigh prepares to celebrate Out! Raleigh Pride, the anticipation and excitement are palpable. The festival not only highlights the city's commitment to inclusivity but also serves as a reminder of the progress made and the work still needed to achieve true equality for all.

For more information about Out! Raleigh Pride, including the schedule of events and volunteer opportunities, please visit the official website at <https://outraleighpride.org>.

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Triangle Gay for Good chapter offers volunteer opportunities for LGBTQ+ folks

Organization has mobilized numerous volunteers for service projects and strengthened local partnerships



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

In a world where unity and compassion often seem in short supply, Gay for Good stands as a beacon of hope and solidarity. The nonprofit organization tirelessly works to connect the LGBTQ+ community with broader society through acts of service and volunteerism, their mission simple yet profound: to promote understanding and cooperation across diverse communities by engaging in charitable and social initiatives.

With chapters in cities across the United States, including Raleigh-Durham, Gay for Good has successfully mobilized thousands of volunteers to participate in a wide array of community service projects. From environmental clean-ups and food drives to assisting at animal shelters and supporting underprivileged youth, the organization's reach is as broad as it is impactful.

The History of Gay for Good

The story of Gay for Good begins in 2008 by three friends — Tony Biel, Steve Gratwick and Frank Roller in Los Angeles, Calif. on a trail below the Hollywood sign after the passage of Proposition 8, which abolished same sex marriage in California. The founders envisioned an organization with the goal to “inspire more LGBTQ+ involvement in local and global societal issues and activities, provide social welfare and environmental service organizations with much needed volunteer labor in support of their worthy endeavors, and serve as a vehicle to bring people of different backgrounds together for a shared purpose,” according to the Gay for Good website.

In its early days, Gay for Good focused on small, local initiatives. Volunteers participated in park clean-ups, food drives and community events, gradually building a reputation for reliability and dedication. These initial efforts were instrumental in laying the foundation for what would become a national movement.

As Gay for Good grew, so did its ambitions. By 2013, Gay for Good had established chapters in several major cities, including Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. Each chapter operated with a high degree of autonomy, allowing them to address specific needs within each of their communities

while staying true to the overarching mission of Gay for Good.

Growth brought about a wave of new volunteers and partnerships, collaborating with a diverse array of nonprofits, schools and civic organizations. This period was marked by a series of high-profile projects, such as the renovation of a community center in New York City providing resources for homeless LGBTQ+ youth and a large-scale environmental clean-up in Los Angeles with the Los Angeles Waterkeeper.

One of the most significant milestones in the organization's history came in 2015 when the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in Obergefell v. Hodges legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. This victory for LGBTQ+ rights invigorated the organization and its supporters, leading to a surge in volunteerism and community engagement. Gay for Good leveraged this momentum to expand its programs and deepen its impact, launching educational workshops and advocacy campaigns aimed at addressing broader social issues such as homelessness, mental health and racial justice.

The organization welcomes volunteers from all backgrounds, emphasizing that their mission transcends sexual orientation and gender identity. This inclusive approach has been key to breaking down barriers and building alliances across diverse communities.

Triangle Gay for Good

The Raleigh-Durham chapter of Gay for Good was originally established in 2014 as ReachOUT NC, which was founded to connect members of the LGBTQ+ community with others in the Triangle through volunteer opportunities.

“When I moved back to Raleigh from San Francisco, I wanted to build a more constructive outlet as a way for people to get together and give back into the community,” said Michael Wilson, the founder of ReachOUT NC.

ReachOUT NC officially partnered with Gay For Good in 2019 with their first projects, including volunteering with the Miracle League of the Triangle and adding to the pantry of Alliance of AIDS Services-Carolina.

As word spread about the Raleigh-Durham chapter, the number of volunteers grew. The chapter diversified its efforts, participating in environmental clean-ups, supporting local shelters and engaging in educational outreach. One



The Raleigh-Durham chapter of Gay for Good will be volunteering at A Place At The Table June 15. CREDIT: Facebook

notable project was their collaboration with the Durham Literacy Center, where volunteers provided tutoring and mentorship to adults seeking to improve their literacy skills. This initiative not only helped individuals achieve personal goals but also underscored the chapter's commitment to education and empowerment.

The chapter gained momentum and visibility through its involvement in high-profile community events. Participation in the Raleigh and Durham Pride festivals became a yearly tradition, offering an opportunity to celebrate LGBTQ+ culture and promote the chapter's mission. Additionally, the chapter played a pivotal role in organizing the first Triangle LGBTQ+ Volunteer Day, which brought together various LGBTQ+ organizations and allies for a day of service across the region.

In 2019, the chapter launched an initiative focused on supporting LGBTQ+ youth. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by young people in the community, they partnered with the LGBTQ Center of Durham to provide mentorship programs, resources and safe spaces for youth to express themselves. This initiative has been particularly impactful, offering support and guidance to the next generation of leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 posed new challenges, but the Raleigh-Durham chapter adapted quickly. Volunteers participated in virtual events, conducted socially distanced service projects, and increased efforts to support local food banks and shelters, addressing the heightened needs of the community during the crisis. This period

demonstrated the resilience and dedication of the chapter's members.

The Raleigh-Durham chapter of Gays for Good has mobilized hundreds of volunteers, completed numerous service projects, and built strong partnerships with local organizations. Their work has not only improved the lives of countless individuals but also created a greater sense of community and understanding.

Upcoming Events for Gay for Good — Raleigh-Durham

Gay for Good Raleigh-Durham recently held its Pride Build Day in partnership with Durham Habitat for Humanity on June 1, bringing awareness of the challenges the local LGBTQ+ community faces with affordable housing.

Habitat for Humanity of Durham hosts Pride Build every June to bring together LGBTQ+ community members and allies to build fair and equitable home ownership opportunities throughout the county.

The Raleigh-Durham chapter of Gay for Good will be working at A Place at the Table, Raleigh's first pay-what-you-can cafe on June 15. The day is divided into two shifts — breakfast and lunch — and volunteers will be helping cook and serve food.

“Our duties will be to build community and connection by [serving] food and drink, washing and drying dishes, cleaning tables, greeting at the door and more,” the event description states. Additional information can be found at <https://gayforgood.org/events/g4g-raleigh-durham-a-place-at-the-table-breakfast-shift/>. ::

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BRENDA THE DRAG QUEEN
KING PERK
KIARA MEL
KIRBY KOLBY

New inclusive space for Durham's LGBTQ+ community

Drag performer Naomi Dix is the owner of Club ERA



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Notes Staff Writer

The Triangle area is home to several LGBTQ+ nightlife hot spots — from Legends Nightclub in Raleigh to The Pinhook in Durham. Historically, most queer bars or clubs across the nation have typically catered towards white gay men — moreso than any other demographic in the LGBTQ+ umbrella.

Now, a new bar — Club Era — is coming to Bull City with the idea of creating a space for folks of all identities and backgrounds to come together and celebrate their authentic selves. Club ERA is the brainchild of Triangle-based drag queen Naomi Dix. She recently took to Instagram to say why she felt compelled to create her own club and bar.

"As a young queer person, I always wanted a place where I could explore who I was," Dix wrote in a recent Instagram post, "but spaces often lacked representation and diversity and made it difficult to find my community."

Club ERA will be both a bar and club located in the basement of The Fruit — a popular entertainment venue in the heart of Durham. Dix, a Durham native, said this space is meant to add to the diversity of Durham's queer community, not to compete with other establishments.

"This club is not, in any way, in competition with anything," she says. "This is just us continuing the legacy of Durham and continuing the legacy from all of the other businesses that came before us."

According to reporting from the Durham Voice, Dix came up with the idea for Club ERA after having a conversation with her partner a few years ago. She spent over two years searching for the perfect space for her perfect safe haven before she was approached by The Fruit's owner Tim Walters. They recently came to a deal, and the club opened June 1 to kick off LGBTQ+ Pride Month.

Durham used to be home to a plethora of gay bars and night clubs, but in recent years, some have closed their doors. One of those clubs was The Power Company, a queer nightclub that opened in 1983, and became a place for LGBTQ+ folks in Bull City to find community during the height of the AIDS epidemic.

Kent Parks, a Raleigh native and a Power Company regular during its heyday, said he remembered making trips to Durham as a UNC student to party there. "Back in the 80s, nobody would've dared show affection to a same-sex partner in public, and there were very few places to go where queer people could be in the majority except bars, especially like the Power Company, since it was for men and women," he said.

Known as "the best gay club between DC and Atlanta," The Power Company was located on Main Street and was expansive in size. Sporting a multi-level layout with several bars, a mezzanine lounge, a dance floor lined with booming speakers, colorful lighting and several disco balls, The Power Company has been remembered by former patrons (who refer to themselves as "alumni") as a haven from day-to-day life.

"The Power Company was a gay force," said DJ Jeff Inman, who performed at the Power Company from 1984 to 1988. "It was Grand [sic] period, packed with the who's who."

The club was also known for its inclusivity and openness to all members of the LGBTQ+ community, including interracial couples, immigrants and older people. But since its closure in 2000, there's been a hole in the Durham queer community, according to drag queen Vivica C. Coxx, who is Club ERA owner Dix's drag mother.

"Drag in Durham isn't as formalized as it is in Raleigh," she said. "So what you see is a lot more DIY spaces, a lot more business-oriented drag performers versus cast-style drag performers."

Club ERA's opening comes during a time where violence against queer and trans folks is at an all time high. According to a study commissioned by Everytown for Gun Safety, the murder rate for trans people has doubled in the last four years, and though only 13% of trans folks are Black, nearly 75% of trans murder victims are Black.



Durham drag performer Naomi Dix is excited her new venture Club Era will be welcoming and diverse. CREDIT: Publicity

"I'm aware of the fact that all of this anti-drag hate is actually just anti-trans hate," Coxx said. "Every time we put on makeup, every time we put on our heels, every time we get dragged, we are reminded that might be the time we don't come home."

Dix's goal was to pull from her own experience as a queen of color, saying she wanted to create a haven for the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially for people of color.

"I never really felt as though I was able to find a space where I was accurately represented as a person of color, as an Afro-Latino, in the Triangle," she says. "I always felt like a lot of those spaces were very overrun by this idea of what society thinks a masculine gay male is ..."

"I want people to feel like they can let their hair down and they don't have to feel as though they have to dress a certain way or look a certain way in order to be within this space."

Dix said she hopes to be able to add to the legacy of queer spaces in Durham, hoping to welcome everyone from kings and queens to supportive allies.

"You know ... places that have been in Durham ... have been overrun by the change that has come into [the area]," she explained. "I just want to continue that legacy." ::

Our People: Vance Haywood

A Raleigh resident transitions from helping to heal bodies to nurturing souls



by **L'Monique King**
QNotes Staff Writer

Fairmont, N.C. sits on the border of North and South Carolina. Formerly, Fairmont was a small town sustained mostly by tobacco farming. Currently, Fairmont is a “quaint little town not many people have heard of.” It’s also the place where former EMS [Emergency Medical Services] worker Vance Haywood and his three younger siblings grew up.

Today, Haywood, a charming gentleman with a soothing southern accent has left a 20-year career behind, trading in bandages for Bibles and working in a new field as a clergy member. He’s taken up residence with friends in Raleigh, a place he has called home since 2004. During this interview, we spoke with Haywood about his past, present and future and his efforts to spread love, comfort and affirmation to all he comes in contact with.

L'Monique King: How'd you start your day? What did you have for breakfast?

Vance Haywood: I had a shake this morning, though I could eat bacon and eggs all day everyday, but my cardiologist wouldn't advise that. So today I had a shake with fruit and peanut butter. I'm trying to be healthier.

LMK: What brought you to Raleigh?

VH: My job. I was working in EMS and had found a job right outside of Raleigh. I was previously living in Wilmington.

LMK: Do you live alone in Raleigh?

VH: No, I have two male roommates. They're married and really great folks. We moved in together two years before the COVID Pandemic. I had moved into an apartment in downtown Raleigh. It was an older complex with many issues. The ceiling caved in one day and I moved in with this couple during the restoration. It was such a good fit that I remained.

LMK: Are you partnered?

VH: No. I've poured everything of myself into my career and haven't taken the time to have a life partner or husband. One of the challenges is, once I became a pastor, I realized the huge burden and pressure that would be placed on a First Gentlemen (as my spouse).

LMK: Having been involved in EMS for such an extensive amount of time, does it ever filter into your daily life now?

VH: Yes. Last year I was on a beach and cut my leg on a tent stake. Everyone with me was expecting some elaborate bandaging job [knowing my history as an EMS Technician]. <Chuckles> I grabbed some paper towels and electrical tape and wrapped it. It was what I had access to. I remember an early [EMS] supervisor teaching folks how to take care of emergencies in settings when medical supplies weren't at hand. I thought of him and remembered: We can make do with what we have, improvise and still have the ability to take care of what we need to.



A message from Pastor Vance Haywood: 'Love one another, and grow connections between one another.' CREDIT: Facebook

LMK: Share a bit with readers on what your current livelihood is.

VH: I'm the Senior Pastor at St. John's MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) – for six years now. We [at MCC] also operate the Bryant Center, which is a community outreach and overnight shelter program.

LMK: That's awesome. With affordable housing being so scarce, shelters and community outreach are sorely needed resources. What led you to ministry?

VH: I felt called to ministry and preaching at an early age – in my teens. I started preaching for the church I attended as a teenager. I eventually left because I was unable to reconcile who I knew I was as a gay male with the teachings of the church, which were fairly conservative.

LMK: Tell us about MCC.

VH: MCC was founded by a gay male, Troy Perry, in 1968. He is still alive and lives with his partner in California where they founded the first church. Troy Perry was also a co-founder of LA Pride along with two other folks. While Stonewall was happening on the east [coast], they were founding Christopher Street West [the 501(c)3 non-profit organization that produces the annual LA Pride Parade and Festival in Los Angeles].

LMK: When you think of St. John's MCC, what are you the most proud of?

VH: That's a tough question, but I think the proudest thing about us is how we embrace justice, inclusivity and diversity. It's a widely diverse congregation of people coming from all walks of life. We have folks experiencing homelessness sitting beside folks with a six-figure income. People from multiple faiths, ethnic and racial backgrounds. I grew up in a mostly white church where it would be odd to have an African

American in church. That always felt strange to me. So, I'm proud to lead a church of Christian denomination with multiple faiths and backgrounds feeling comfortable to worship together.

LMK: Churches and religious dogma have been traumatizing for many in the LGBTQ+ community. What do you say to folks who staunchly avoid church because of past negative experiences?

VH: I don't disagree with them. Many times, the church has been used and weaponized in a way that has taken lives and hurt countless people. So, I don't persuade people to attend church, but I encourage people to connect with the divine and spirituality and what that looks like for them. If you find God in nature, if that's how it works for you, then absolutely, do that. The most hurtful thing we can do is guilt people into showing up on Sunday morning. At its core, church can be a healthy and whole place when it's not following religious dogma that is used to control people.

LMK: You said earlier that there was a time when you couldn't reconcile your religious beliefs with your identity as an LGBTQ+ community member. What would you say to a young person struggling with the same issue?

VH: First and foremost, even the King James version of the Bible we love to quote says we were made in God's image. From a Christian perspective, Jesus came to abolish religion – religion was at the time and has continued to be used as a tool of manipulation, control and hurt. Religion is a human construct. So, it's not the world view of who we are it's who we know ourselves to be and we are beautiful.

LMK: Where is your happy place during stressful moments?

VH: The beach. If I need something more immediate, model railroading. I have a setup in my bonus room. It's an N-Scale [smaller model]. I've created about a 10-foot layout that starts with little farmhouses and then transitions into a downtown area with larger buildings. There are water features also. I'm drawn to water so there's that.

LMK: What gets you to the point where you just want to curse/cuss?

VH: Seeing people mistreated. Things that go against loving and caring for people.

LMK: Knowing that you're drawn to water and enjoy travel, what would you say is your favorite travel destination?

VH: I think Hawaii. I've been to Nanakuli, Hawaii; one of my roommates' parents lives there.

LMK: Is there anywhere you haven't been that you'd like to visit?

VH: Two places. I really want to go to Scotland and Uganda. We have a small group of church folks in Kampala [the largest city in Uganda]. We work with them and support an orphanage run by a gay man and his husband. We provide assistance and nutrition. In recent years we are also providing security because of the anti-LGBTQ+ policy and recent legislation that requires imprisonment for being LGBTQ+ and death sentences for people found guilty of acting on homosexuality.

LMK: Sounds challenging. Is it?

VH: Yes, it definitely is. We work with a local Metropolitan Community Church there and the church's straight cis pastor, which allows them [the church congregants] to blend in somewhat. We've had many conversations about this and things that are considered potentially homosexual, like outward displays of affection and emotion – in order to understand and protect folks while maintaining safety. Unfortunately, COVID put a pause on planning trips, so I haven't been there since.

LMK: Speaking of intolerance and hurtful bigotry and oppression, what words of advice would you give to anti-LGBTQ+ affirming fire and brimstone ministers or clergy?

VH: I would say – look towards love and let love guide your understanding of scripture and God.

LMK: When you think about your future, what do you see yourself doing 20 years from now?

VH: I hope I'm still pastoring in some form or fashion and fighting for justice and equality by advocating for marginalized people. I think I can count my life as a success if I'm still doing that.

LMK: Any final thoughts to leave our readers with?

VH: Love one another and grow connections between one another. That's what I try to do, connect folks to love. If we do things out of love, everything else solves itself. ::

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