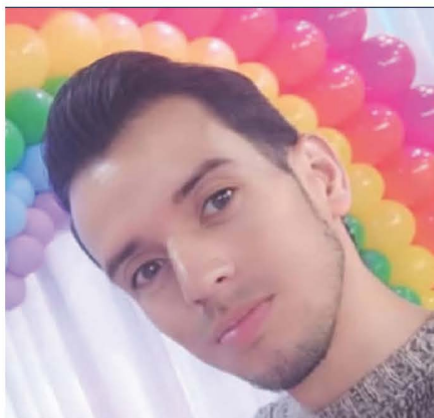




Reel Out film fest screens 'Duino'



Trump deports
gay man to
El Salvador

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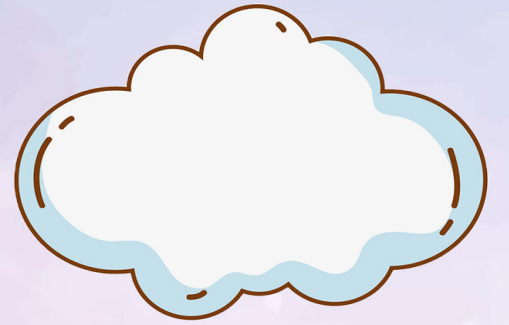
Memorial
performance for
Kasey King

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

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Our People: Jeff Reeves

Renaissance Man Jeff Reeves has been at the heart of Carolina Queer Culture since the late seventies. He's owned multiple nightclubs, held the title of Mr Catawba Pride 2015 and continues to perform as his drag alter ego Nancy Newton. Learn more about the man and his many sides in this exclusive profile.

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Small Town LGBTQ+ Life

As property prices increase and working from home allows you to live just about anywhere, some individuals and couples in our communities are choosing to embrace the experience of small town lives. Some say they appreciate the slower pace, while others say it's a lifestyle that needs to be tread lightly.

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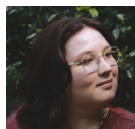
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Trump's deportations are dangerous to all, including the LGBTQ+ community

A gay man seeking asylum and a father of three were deported to El Salvador



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

In the months following the second inauguration of Donald Trump, headlines documenting the mass deportations of undocumented and legal immigrants have taken over the news cycle. Accounts of men, women and children being taken from their homes, places of work and cars, placed in handcuffs and, in some cases, being shipped off to international prison camps in dictator-ruled countries like El Salvador and Venezuela.

One case taking over international headlines is the case of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Maryland father the Trump administration has continued to claim is affiliated with the MS-13 gang. Abrego Garcia's attorneys and wife have described him as a responsible father and a caring family man whose life was shattered when he was arrested by ICE agents on March 12 and sent three days later to a notorious Salvadoran prison known as CECOT.

"The government asserts that Abrego Garcia is a terrorist and a member of MS-13. Perhaps, but perhaps not," the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit wrote Thursday. "Regardless, he is still entitled to due process. If the government is confident of its position, it should be assured that position will prevail in proceedings to terminate the withholding of removal order."

Abrego Garcia's story is one of thousands like it, including for some in the LGBTQ+ community.

According to Funders for LGBTQ Issues, there are an estimated 904,000 LGBTQ+ immigrants in the United States (both undocumented and documented), which means that more than one in 10 LGBTQ+ adults are immigrants. Nearly one third of those queer-identifying immigrants are undocumented, making it more difficult for them to receive education, healthcare and economic opportunity.

It also means now, under a new Trump administration hellbent on deporting as



Images showing prisoners at El Salvador's notorious CECOT prison.
CREDIT: Facebook

many immigrants as possible, LGBTQ+ immigrants are more vulnerable than ever. According to the UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, up to three percent of non-U.S. citizens living in the U.S., or 640,000 people, identify as LGBTQ+. This includes as many as 288,000 who are undocumented, making them among the first affected by President Trump's immigration policies.

In fact, the deportation of these LGBTQ+ migrants has already begun.

Asylum seeker and gay man Andry Hernandez Romero, 31, was a stylist from Venezuela who realized the country's political unrest, violent crime and social decline made him a direct target for harassment and potential harm. That fear prompted him to make the massive trek to the United States, even crossing the 60-mile, thickly vegetated and swamp-like region known as the Darien Gap. Government agents detained him when he initially attempted to cross the border for a prearranged meeting with a US government official to seek asylum.

A slight man with youthful features, he was "forcibly removed" from the U.S. on March 15 and sent to El Salvador. His attorneys from Immigrant Defenders Law Center Litigation and Advocacy said the reason behind their client's deportation was allegations he was a member of Tren de Aragua, a Venezuela-based gang. That, however, has since been debunked. Romero's tattoos, done while he was still a teen, were initially an acknowledgment of his involvement with a youth drama club and later enhanced to pay homage to his parents. Regardless, an agent at California's Otay Mesa detention center, according to a report from The Guardian, insisted the tattoos were gang-related. With no other evidence, he was deported to the El Salvadoran prison.

"It's very flimsy," said Immigrant Defenders Law Center Litigation and Advocacy Director Alvaro M. Huerta. "These are the types of tattoos that any artist in New York City or Los Angeles would have. It's nothing that makes him a gang member."

According to reporting from the Washington Blade, Huerta said U.S. officials on Monday confirmed Romero is "indeed in

El Salvador. Directing Attorney of Policy and Advocacy at the Immigrant Defenders Law Center Margaret Cargioli said the LGBTQ+ asylum seeker was one of the nearly 200 Venezuelans sent to CECOT, a prison with more human rights violation allegations than one could count.

Videos posted by El Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele show men, including the 200 men sent from the U.S., in white uniforms, with their heads shaved, running bent over while being moved into the mega prison. Other images have shown cells with rows upon rows of bunk beds, overcrowded with men who have either committed crimes against humanity or committed the crime of fleeing to America for protection, as in the case of Romero.

ABC News reported CECOT — the prison where Hernandez and Garcia are being held — has been on the watchlist



for an infinite number of human rights advocacy organizations.

Juanita Goebertus, the director of the Americas Division of the advocacy group Human Rights Watch, has said detainees in CECOT are denied communication with their relatives and lawyers, only having appearances in court remotely via the internet in online hearings and in groups of several hundred detainees at the same time.

"The Salvadoran government has described people held in CECOT as 'terrorists,' and has said that they 'will never leave,'" Goebertus said. CECOT prisoners only leave their cell for 30 minutes a day and sleep on metal beds in overcrowded cells, according to Cargioli. "They only have about half an hour outside of their windowless cells to be outside in a hallway of the prison," she explained. "They are overcrowded within each of the cells, and they're sleeping on metal."

Amnesty International, an international non-governmental organization focused on human rights, has published reports of alleged systematic abuse of detainees and "patterns of grave human rights violations."

In fact, these same findings were actually acknowledged by the U.S. Department of State in a 2023 human rights report which also claimed there have been significant human rights issues in Salvadoran prisons.

"Amnesty International has extensively documented the inhumane conditions within detention centers in El Salvador, including the Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT) where those removed are now being held," Ana Piquer, the Americas director at Amnesty International, said in a statement. "Reports indicate extreme overcrowding, lack of access to adequate medical care, and widespread ill-treatment amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

Now, the same government which deemed prisons like CECOT a walking international law violation is sending its own people to be incarcerated in a place known to never release its imprisoned.

The images coming from CECOT and other detention facilities hold eerie similarities to the pictures of Auschwitz and other concentration camps in Europe during the Holocaust — gaunt figures with shaved heads, emaciated bodies, the life and hope drained from their eyes, as those who keep them captive rob their very humanity.

Yes, there are real terrorists and criminals sent to these prisons. However, individuals like Andry Hernandez Romero and Abrego Garcia definitely don't belong in these concentration camps disguised as prisons. We can't turn a blind eye — it's clear Trump has an agenda, and that agenda is to ship off those he sees as criminals to places where they will be tortured, or worse.

This isn't fear mongering — this is Trump's America, where his appointed counter-terrorism czar Sebastian Gorka has said those who side with Abrego Garcia are "on the side of the terrorists," and could be prosecuted for "aiding and abetting."

"It's not left and right, it's not even Republican or Democrat. There's one line that divides us: Do you love America, or do you hate America? It's really quite that simple," Gorka told Newsmax on Wednesday. "We have people that love America, like the president, like his cabinet, like the directors of his agencies, who want to protect Americans. And then there's the other side that is on the side of the cartel members, on the side of the illegal aliens, on the side of the terrorists ... you have to ask yourself: Are they technically aiding and abetting them? Because aiding and abetting criminals and terrorists is a crime in federal statute."

Trump, Gorka and the entire administration won't stop at immigrants. They will continue to chip away at the powers protected in the Constitution they swear to uphold but continue to violate, the very foundation of our nation's values and what truly makes America great. This isn't an attack on immigrants — it's an attack on America itself.

Additional information was added to this story by Qnotes staff. ::



Andry Hernandez Romero, a gay man and stylist (seen here with actress and model Marlene Gonzalez) sought asylum in the United States, but was deported to an El Salvadoran prison.
CREDIT: Facebook

Trump's pal Orbán squashes LGBTQ+ rights in Hungary

The law prohibits LGBTQ+ community functions and much more



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

On Mon., April 14, Hungary's parliament passed a constitutional amendment that allows the government to ban public events put on by LGBTQ+ communities throughout the country.

The amendment, through its wording, declares that children's rights to moral, physical and spiritual development supersede any right other than the right to life, including the right to peacefully assemble. Where it required a two-thirds vote to pass, 140 members voted for while 21 voted against. The law came from a proposal out of the Fidesz-KDNP coalition, which is led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

The law also enables authorities to use facial recognition tools to identify people who attend any prohibited events put on after the passing, and can fine individuals for up to 200,000 Hungarian forints, equivalent to \$546 USD.

Similar to Donald Trump's 2025 executive order made on day one of his administration, the amendment explicitly recognizes two sexes, male and female, expanding on an earlier amendment that prohibits same-sex adoption by stating that a mother is a woman and a father is a man.

Trump has frequently cited Orbán as influential and a good friend, which raises questions about Trump's plans for more anti-LGBTQ+ executive orders or legislation for the future of the United States. In a statement from the American Civil Liberties Union, the organization made references for its plans to fight back against "Trump's expected efforts to weaponize the Constitution and federal laws to require discrimination against LGBTQ people by state and local governments and private entities." Is what we are seeing now, and have already seen in Russia a potential preview for Trump's dystopian America? Will our country fight back as Hungary has attempted to?

Ahead of the Hungarian vote, a combination of protesters and opposition

lawmakers tried to blockade the entrance to the parliament parking garage while linking each other together with zip ties. Police had to physically cut the ties in order to remove the demonstrators.

Dávid Bedő, a lawmaker with the opposition Momentum party who participated in the attempted blockade, was quoted before the vote, stating that Orbán and Fidesz for the past 15 years "have been dismantling democracy and the rule of law, and in the past two or three months, we see that this process has been sped up."

Adding to this, as the next set of elections approach in 2026, and as Orbán's party has been lagging in the polls behind other announced opposition challengers, Bedő stated that Orbán and company "will do everything in their power to stay in power."

Hungary's government has been using its then proposed "child protection" policies to campaign against LGBTQ+ communities for quite some time. The policies forbid the availability of any material that mentions homosexuality to minors, arguing that they are needed to protect children from what it calls "woke ideology" and "gender madness."

Critics call out the measures, stating that they do little to protect children and are being used to distract from other more serious problems facing the country, and instead aim to mobilize Orbán's right-wing base ahead of elections.

"This whole endeavor which we see launched by the government, it has nothing to do with children's rights," said Dániel Döbrentey, a lawyer with the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, calling it "pure propaganda."

One of the most disconcerting issues at play with the new law is the ability for police to utilize facial recognition tools to identify any attendees at future Pride events in the country. Hungary has used the technology since 2015 to assist police in criminal investigations and finding missing persons. Given the new law, the tools could be utilized in broader and ways, such as monitoring citizens and deterring future political protests.

"Salient in this case is the effect on the freedom of assembly, specifically the



Viktor Orbán, Hungary's Prime Minister, with Donald Trump.
CREDIT: Facebook screen capture

chilling effect that arises when people are scared to go out and show their political or ideological beliefs for fear of being persecuted," said Ádám Rempert, a lawyer with the HCLU

One of the last issues the amendment poses for the Hungarian public, particularly those who hold dual citizenship in non-European Economic area countries, is that it allows citizenship within Hungary to be suspended for up to

10 years if a person is deemed to pose a threat to public order, public security or national security.

Orbán, the self-described "illiberal" leader, has accelerated his longstanding efforts to crack down on critics such as media outlets and groups devoted to civil rights and anti-corruption, which he claims have undermined Hungary's sovereignty by receiving financial assistance from international donors. ::



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Wedgewood Justice Community hosted screening of 'God & Country'

For its 2025 Film series selection, the Wedgewood Social Justice Community invited Charlotteans and others to a screening of 'God & Country' at Eastway's Visart Video this past Sun., April 13.

Directed by Dan Partland, 'God & Country' dives deep into the rise of Christian Nationalism in the United States, examining how it distorts Christianity and threatens the fabric of American democracy. The documentary is a timely and urgent piece that sets the stage for honest and necessary conversations about the intersections of faith, politics and justice.

Partland is familiar with covering politics in his documentary stylings, having pursued

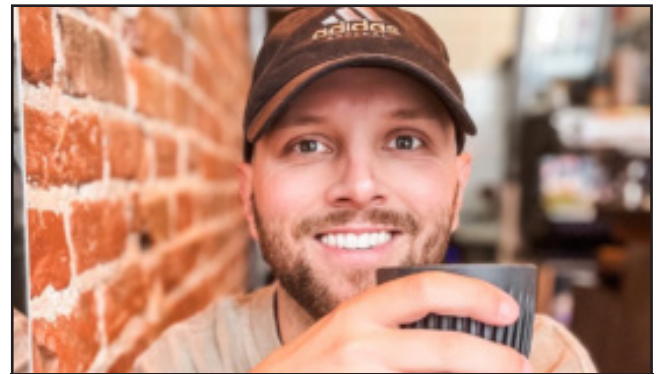
other topics dealing with the rise of right-wing politics as well as Donald Trump on a few occasions. He is also known for pop culture topics, such as with his immersion into the effects of being constantly online in 2022's "Digital Addiction" and 2019's chronicling on fashion through the decades in "American Style."

Following the screening, Dr. Shea T. Watts, a theologian, author and Director of Contemporary Music and Worship Arts at Covenant Presbyterian Church, offered a community dialogue around the film's themes. His upcoming book, relating to the film's themes, explores the connections between Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and white Christian

nationalism, offering valuable insight into the ways worship and ideology intersect in modern America.

In addition to the film screening and group discussion, attendees had an opportunity to connect with local organizations that promote and advocate for social justice initiatives in Charlotte and the Greater North Carolina region. The organizations that had information tables available to offer resources and ways to take action include The Freedom Center for Social Justice and the Reproductive Rights Coalition.

The Wedgewood Social Justice Community is an interfaith community committed to peace, justice, equality and the care of Mother Earth. Through



Following the screening, theologian and Dr. Shea T. Watts offered a community dialogue around the film's themes. CREDIT: Instagram

programs like the Wedgewood Film Series, Wedgewood encourages interfaith dialogue and action on critical social issues.

To learn more about the group you can find additional information at wedgewoodcharlotte.org.

—Jonathan Golian

The DHHS cuts millions in HIV programs and research grants

On Tues., April 1, following the massive amount of employee layoffs at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Trump administration also saw fit to gut several programs and grants that support health research, which directly impacts the LGBTQ+ community.

According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) official that reached out to NBC news while remaining anonymous for fear of reprisals, one of the programs cut surveyed HIV transmissions among gay men. Coming from a similar source that also wished to remain anonymous, a lab that conducted specialized testing and assessing of drug resistance among bacterial STIs, including gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis, was also eliminated as a part of the cuts.

These two examples are a small look at many of the programs slashed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), now helmed by Dr. Jay Bhattacharya

who took over the director's role. In an emailed statement issued on Wed., April 2, Bhattacharya said that the NIH remains "committed to supporting research aimed at improving the health and well-being of every American" but noted that it would be shifting its priorities "away from politicized DEI and gender ideology studies" in accordance with the president's executive orders.

On the same day, the American Public Health Association and other organizations sued the NIH in federal court over the canceled grants, including those backing HIV-prevention research. Asserted through the evidence collected, the lawsuit claims that the cancellation letters originally were developed by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency before being used by HHS and NIH. "For example, metadata associated with at least one such notice shows it was authored by 'JoshuaAHanley.'" An attorney named Joshua A. Hanley, a 2021 law school graduate, works at DOGE,"

the suit states.

Taken from a batch of the grant cancellation letters obtained by NBC News, each in part reads: "Research programs based on gender identity are often unscientific, have little identifiable return on investment, and do nothing to enhance the health of many Americans. Many such studies ignore, rather than seriously examine, biological realities. It is the policy of NIH not to prioritize these research programs."

Dr. Chris Beyrer, the director of the Duke Global Health Institute, said that the past few weeks have reminded him of the horrors he witnessed in the 1980s.

"When I started my career in HIV research, there were really no dedicated funds" for LGBTQ-specific research, he said. As of recent, he added, he had been haunted by that period in his career, four decades ago, when he cared for babies dying of AIDS. This was a time when gay men perished of the disease by the tens of thousands while then-President Ronald Reagan refused to discuss the topic during his time in office.

However, in the wake of the dismantling of the vast slews of programs, Dr. Kenneth Mayer, medical director of Fenway Health,



Trump appointee Dr. Jay Bhattacharya justifies actions: the NIH is shifting its priorities 'away from politicized DEI and gender ideology studies.' CREDIT: Public Domain

a leading LGBTQ-focused health center in Boston, expressed some hope as to the pushback and rebuilding that will need to occur after all is said and done. "One thing that I tell students is LGBT people have been fighting for more than 100 years for our rights," he said. "So, I think this just reminds us that we need to continue doing that."

—Jonathan Golian

Journalists who use pronouns are the latest reason for WH Press to avoid questions

The Trump administration's press office has regularly disengaged with reporter emails, but announced recently those who have listed identifying pronouns in their email body signatures will not be allowed access to the White House briefing room or any other White House media events. In the same manner that federal workers have been barred from listing their preferred pronouns as of last January, press aides within the White House are refusing to speak with any reporter who has them listed.

Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, spoke about this latest nonsense when responding to a New

York Times journalist after being asked about the closing of a climate research observatory. "As a matter of policy, we do not respond to reporters with pronouns in their bios," Leavitt stated in her email response. In a different messaged response when being asked why that extra line of detail was so important, Leavitt reasoned, "Any reporter who chooses to put their preferred pronouns in their bio clearly does not care about biological reality or truth and therefore cannot be trusted to write an honest story."

This view has started to echo throughout other communications channels in the administration, showing

that Donald Trump's cabinet continues to walk largely in lockstep with his views relating to gender ideology.

Steven Cheung, the White House communications director, and Katie Miller, a senior adviser at the Department of Government Efficiency, have also spoken recently on the trend.

"As a matter of policy, I don't respond to people who use pronouns in their signatures as it shows they ignore scientific realities and therefore ignore facts," Miller wrote in a response to another Times reporter, adding afterward "This applies to all reporters who have pronouns in their signature."

"If The New York Times spent the same amount of time actually reporting the truth as they do being obsessed with pronouns, maybe they would be a half-decent publication," Cheung accused the publication of scathingly.

In its own reply to much of the blocking The New York Times had been encountering, the publication said in a statement, "Evading tough questions



Karoline Leavitt during a briefing in the White House press room. CREDIT: Facebook

certainly runs counter to transparent engagement with free and independent press reporting. But refusing to answer a straightforward request to explain the administration's policies because of the formatting of an email signature is both a concerning and baffling choice, especially from the highest press office in the U.S. government."

—Jonathan Golian

Charlotte Gaymers Network launches Project Save Point

The Charlotte Gaymers Network (CGN) is proud to announce the launch of Project Save Point, a groundbreaking mutual aid fund designed to provide direct, life-sustaining financial assistance to low-income LGBTQ+ individuals –with a priority focus on trans community members living in or near Mecklenburg County.

Inspired by the “save point” concept from video games – a moment to pause, recover and prepare for the next level – Project Save Point offers tangible relief for those facing financial hardship, especially those left behind by traditional support systems.

With an initial funding pool of \$10,000, Project Save Point offers flexible, confidential assistance across essential categories including: grocery assistance, medical support, transportation, gender-affirming care, legal aid, mental health services, emergency housing and other

urgent justified expenses.

Applicants must be over 18, identify as LGBTQ+, and reside in Mecklenburg or surrounding counties (Cabarrus, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Union, York County, South Carolina, etc.). Those serving in leadership roles within organizations (official or unofficial groups) are excluded to ensure the fund serves individuals with the least access to support.

“I am truly excited to be a part of a mutual aid project focused on supporting the LGBTQ+ community,” said Morgan Callahan, chair of Project Save Point’s Fund Committee and lead organizer for the Carolinas Trans Network.

“This initiative aims to directly address the financial and resource based challenges faced by individuals, particularly those who encounter systemic barriers to healthcare and

attaining their basic needs. Together, we are building a more inclusive and resilient community where everyone has the opportunity to live authentically and safely. I’m excited about the impact this fund will have, and I am committed to its success.”

Funds will be disbursed monthly or on a rolling basis, with aid delivered via prepaid Visa cards or store-specific gift cards to preserve privacy and dignity. Applications take less than five minutes to complete and prioritize applicants with multiple or urgent needs.

“We’re not waiting for institutions to catch up – we’re building the support we need, now,” said Jonny Saldana, executive director of the Charlotte Gaymers Network. “Project Save Point is more than a fund – it’s an act of care, solidarity



and survival.”

Applications open May 2025 with a full disbursement goal by June 2025, in time for Pride Month. For more information or to support Project Save Point, visit charlottegaymersnetwork.com or follow @charlottegaymersnetwork on social media. ::

—Jonathan Golian

NC Republicans Aim to Restrict Abortion Further in New Bill

North Carolina Republicans have officially filed a piece of legislation that, if put into law, would be one of the most restrictive abortion bans in the United States.

House Bill 804, titled the “Human Life Protection Act of 2025” and filed by Republican Representative Keith Kidwell (District 79), would make abortion after conception illegal except only to save the life of the mother, with no exceptions for rape or incest. HB 804 defines an unborn child as “an individual living member of the homo sapiens species from fertilization until birth, including the entire embryonic and fetal stages of development.” Representatives Ben Moss (District 52) and Donnie Loftis (District 109) joined Kidwell in sponsoring the bill.

According to the bill, once made into a state law, anyone who is involved in performing or receiving an abortion could be found guilty of a felony, which also means they could spend up to life in

prison. The bill also allows for physicians or medical professionals to have their licenses revoked if they’re involved in administering abortions.

“We support all pro-life bills because we believe unborn babies are humans that deserve protection from the moment of conception and we believe that children have the right to life,” said Tami Fitzgerald, executive director of NC Values Coalition. “We believe that protections are in order for unborn babies that are greater than just 12 weeks, because right after Senate Bill 20 was passed, as good as it is, we got new abortion statistics that showed that 92% of all the abortions in North Carolina are performed before 12 weeks.”

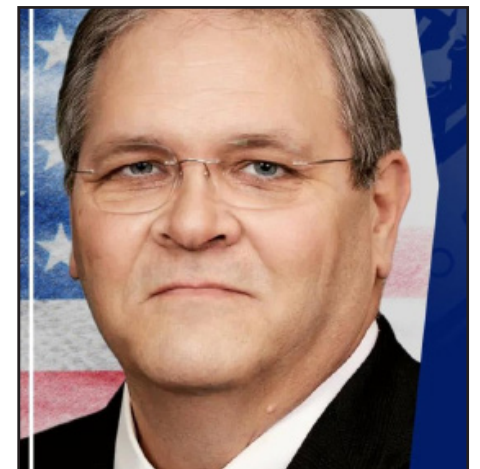
Senate Bill 20, the bill Fitzgerald referred to, was passed two years ago despite then-Governor Roy Cooper attempting to veto it, whereas the super majority of Republicans overrode his move. SB brought to North Carolinians

a 12-week limit to abortions in the state, along with other additional restrictions.

Jillian Riley, state director of public affairs with Planned Parenthood South Atlantic, said in a statement, reacting to the bill, “Year after year, we have extreme politicians introduce the same heinous bill that would ban abortion and turn North Carolina into a forced birth state. That’s exactly what this bill is. So, no, I wasn’t surprised, but I’m definitely disappointed.”

“We should not be moving to restrict access to abortion care any further. It’s absolutely ridiculous. There are already so many restrictions on access to medication abortion and access to abortion care in general for North Carolinians. We’re seeing North Carolinians have to leave the state in order to be able to access care. And that is not something that should be happening right now.”

The measure passed on first reading and was referred to the Committee on Tuesday. It remains to be seen if there’s enough support, even among Republicans, to move it forward. Unlike in 2023, when Republicans held a supermajority in both chambers, the party now only holds a super majority in the



Representative Keith Kidwell (R-79) has filed House Bill 804, the ‘Human Life Protection Act of 2025.’
CREDIT: Instagram

Senate, meaning they would need to win over Democratic support in the House to override a veto should it ultimately land on Governor Josh Stein’s desk. ::

—Jonathan Golian

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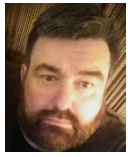
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Small town life in the Carolinas

Skyrocketing house prices force LGBTQ+ city dwellers to towns with more affordable homes



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

During the first decade and a half of the 21st century, housing in large cities like Charlotte were often much more reasonably priced. For individuals with lower to middle incomes, home ownership was not something beyond the grasp of reality.

The world is a different place these days. Especially in Mecklenburg County where less expensive houses in distressed condition can go for as much as \$380,000.

Prices vary across the two state regions, with homes in rural and small towns in North and South Carolina typically going for substantially less than what one would pay in a large city.

The old tale that same-sex individuals and couples generally have more expendable income because they don't have children can be accurate, depending on a number of factors, like family income at the time of your birth, level of education achieved, mental health, race and even how attractive you may be perceived by others.

But just being queer in America doesn't mean you have a whole lot of money. According to a study by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), LGBTQ+ individuals tend to make less money than their heterosexual counterparts, which makes the possibility of finding affordable housing even more challenging.

Mark and Neil Hoffman were married in 2022. They recently relocated from Roanoke, Virginia, to Orangeburg, South Carolina. But both had made multiple moves from larger cities previously and had established careers. The decision to move to a small town came at the behest of a friend who discovered sizable but older, yet good condition and affordable homes in many of the smaller towns of South Carolina.

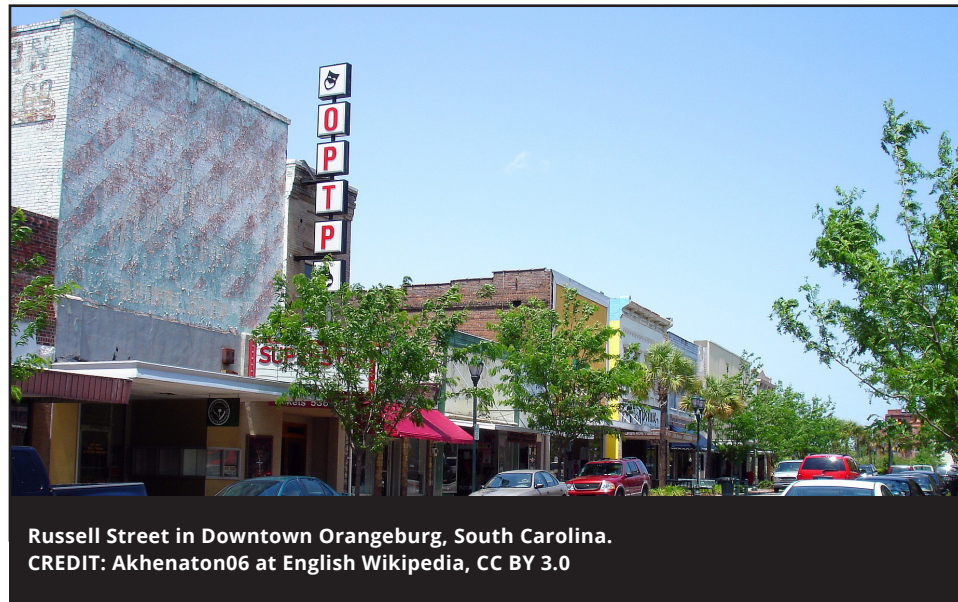
After experiencing significantly higher rental costs and home prices in Roanoke and some of the other cities they had lived in, the choice was an easy one: move to a less pricey state and purchase property in a smaller town or rural region at a much lower price.

Originally from Miami, Florida, Neil spent a large portion of his youth there before moving to New Jersey and living in multiple suburban towns that were always a stone's throw from New York City. He maintained a steady career in finance before moving to Roanoke in 2020.

Mark's story was a bit different. He joined the military and spent many years as an enlisted man. During that time he lived in South Carolina, Texas and a few different towns and cities in Virginia before settling in Roanoke in 2004.

That's where the two began their lives together approximately 16 years later. Neil says his reasons for wanting to leave Roanoke are more than just financial.

"I was very dissatisfied living in Southwest Virginia," he says. "Roanoke is very remote from other points of interest. The coast, other cities, etc. Another factor was a general feeling of discomfort. Roanoke is a blue dot in a red sea. The area where you would find culture, or anything hip or Bohemian was a tiny area



Russell Street in Downtown Orangeburg, South Carolina.
CREDIT: Akhenaton06 at English Wikipedia, CC BY 3.0

of downtown. Outside of that boundary there were Trump signs everywhere. People were not shy about wearing their political beliefs on their sleeves. That something I call 'visual bullying.'

Mark's reasons for leaving Roanoke to move to Orangeburg?

"I was getting restless in Roanoke. I felt like I wanted to go somewhere that would allow me to be a lot closer to the things I like. Columbia is around 40 miles away, the beach, for instance, isn't far away at all. A trip to Charleston is about 70 miles. Greenville is another larger city and it's about twice that distance. And it's the same distance to Charlotte. Then there's the cost of housing. Things are just a whole lot more affordable here and you get a lot more space for your money. Plus you don't have to travel very far to be involved with the world outside of Orangeburg."

Closer access to things Mark liked; the potential to be in a more desirable location for both; leaving political bullying behind -- a hot button topic for Neil; and more bang for your buck when it comes to housing, another plus for both of them.

So off they went to the Palmetto



The house the Hoffmans bought: more space, lower price, fewer local amenities.
CREDIT: Courtesy owner image

State, with a few months' pit stop at a friend's 1920s farmhouse in the small town of Cameron (estimated population 371). That gave them the time they needed to look for an appropriate property nearby to call their own.

In just a few months, they ended up in the small town of Orangeburg, (approximate population of 13,280) as the proud owners of a 3,000+ square foot ranch/split level with total brick construction, a two-car garage, five bedrooms and three baths.

Both men are fans of the mid-20th century modern period. While the house had been kept up, maintained and consistently repaired as needed, it had never been updated. The result? A retro turnkey in nearly perfect condition and a lot that boasted nearly an acre and a half of land. At just over \$300,000, a similar home would cost around \$900,000 in Charlotte and \$700,000 in Roanoke. Both Hoffmans agree they love their house and are enjoying their lives in Orangeburg.

Says Mark: "The house is amazing and in great condition. It gives us a lot of space to spread out and have room to move and display so many of the things we've collected over the years, and really enjoy seeing them."

"As for the town itself, it's easier to wrap up my day and any errands I can get done quicker because the town just isn't that large, and the people you come in contact with are very friendly. But you know, on the downside, because there are so many brick and mortar store closings, the shopping here is not adequate and there isn't a lot going on in the immediate area culturally."

Neil concurs.

"There is definitely a lack of amenities," he says. "Not that we really go to clubs anymore, but there are none here, of course. And you have to drive 10 miles to buy groceries. Technically though, Orangeburg is part of the Columbia metropolitan area, so our current location has more of a suburban feel and folks are generally more friendly and sociable."

So we understand housing affordability and size are a definite win. Friendly neighbors are a plus. Scant amenities are a drawback. But what about the big question? What's it like to be part of the LGBTQ community there, and what is it like to be out?

"I'm not really sure I'd call it a community, but we keep a pretty low profile here," says Neil.

"Everyone pretty much does," Mark responds.

"I don't think a lot of people socialize," Neil continues. "And I think a lot of that is because of [social media]."

"A lot depends on where you're at in life," Mark offers. "I wouldn't recommend a young gay couple do this. I think you need to be more mature when you do this kind of a

move and you're gonna' live in an area like this. I would recommend larger urban areas for younger people.

Neil chimes in: "In this region of South Carolina, I would definitely say somewhere like Columbia. Not huge, but it still has a city feel and a progressive and welcoming environment."

Columbia's population is close to 150,000 residents. Townhouses and moderate-sized homes can still be purchased for less than \$100K and studio and one bedroom apartments are available for rent as low as \$600-\$700. The state's capital even has a thriving LGBTQ+ Community Center, known as the Harriet Hancock Center.

"And that's something -- the community center -- we look forward to experiencing more ourselves," Mark continues. "But, if you want to live in a small town or rural area, I would recommend just being polite, and keep your personal business to yourself, you know, within reasonable limits. You don't need to advertise a gay flag out in front of your house or things like bumper stickers on your car. I don't recommend it nowadays. I think the culture is too violent and you're inviting violent acts on yourself. It's sad for me to say that, because I know many people are proud and want to express themselves or express solidarity with others who might do these things, when they may not even be applicable to them at all. But I recommend that you keep your cards close and take a cautious approach. Don't tell everybody your business in the first five minutes and give the people you meet the test for a while. Make sure you're dealing with simple, sane, credible people."

Another point both of the men agree on is financial consideration.

"You need to have a decent amount of savings, in case the experience doesn't work for you," Mark explains. "It's not so great for you to uproot, and have to move again. I believe if you can save enough so you're not just putting everything into one move, and you're not busted for like, three years or something like that, trying out this kind of life can be worth the effort, and a good way to slow down the pace. It's definitely working for us."

A brief look at Orangeburg

The town that Mark and Neil Hoffman call home is indeed interesting, in many ways. Often referred to as "The Burg," it is the county seat of Orangeburg County. Located on the north fork of the Edisto River, it covers an area of just over nine square miles. Originally founded as a trading post in 1704 for trading fur with the area native tribal population, it was named after a British Royal named William IV, the "Prince of Orange" and the son-in law of then King George II of Great Britain. It is home to two HBCUs: Claflin University and South Carolina State University. The population is a mix of mostly Black (currently listed at 8,577) and Caucasian (3,758).

In 2007, Orangeburg hosted the first Democratic U.S. presidential candidate debate of the campaign season at Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium, on the campus of South Carolina State University; future president Barack Obama was one of the debaters. In 2021, President Joe Biden visited Orangeburg to deliver a commencement address at South Carolina State. ::

Rural and small town LGBTQ+ resource guide

Support and community are closer than you think



by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

Asheville Gay Men's Chorus, Asheville, N.C.

The Asheville Gay Men's Chorus entertains, advocates and connects community through choral excellence. <https://ashevillegaymenschorus.org/home/about/>

Blue Ridge Pride Center

The mission of Blue Ridge Pride is to foster an informed, engaged and supportive LGBTQIA2S+ community through intersectional belonging, equity, liberation and joy work under our 4 pillars: advocate, celebrate, educate and serve. <https://www.blueridgepride.org/about-blue-ridge-pride>

Catawba Valley Pride, Hickory, N.C.

Our purpose is to produce and promote pride events for the Catawba Valley/Unifour area of North Carolina. <https://www.catawbavalleypride.org>

Fayetteville Pride, Fayetteville, N.C.

Fayetteville PRIDE was started in 2017 as an interest meeting, in a local library, where a group of like-minded individuals came together to organize a Pride celebration. <https://www.fayettevillepride.org>



[org/about.html#/](https://www.lgbtqcenterofthecapefear.org/about.html#/)

LGBTQ Center of The Cape Fear Coast

To serve LGBTQ+ elders, youth and everyone in between. <https://lgbtqcapefear.org>

New Life MCC Gastonia, Gastonia, N.C.

<https://www.newlifemccgastonia.org/how-to-find-us.html>

OBX Pride, Outer Banks, N.C.

Outer Banks Pridefest is a gay pride festival, FULL of events and ALL INCLUSIVE for all LGBTQ folks and our supporters and friends. <https://www.obxpridefest.com>

Onslow County LGBTQ+ Community Center, Jacksonville, N.C.

The Onslow County LGBTQ+ Community Center encourages, supports and advocates for the well-being and acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in the Onslow County, N.C. region through service, recreational, educational and cultural programming. <https://safespacealliance.com/listing/onslow-county-lgbtq-community-center/>

Outright Youth of Catawba Valley, Hickory, N.C.

Creating a safe space and providing support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) youth and their allies in the Catawba Valley, since 2010.

<https://www.outrightyouthcv.org/about>

PFLAG

PFLAG is creating a caring, just and affirming world for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them. <https://pflag.org>

PFLAG Alamance

<https://pflagalamance.org>

PFLAG Apex

<https://pflagapex.org>

PFLAG Asheville

<https://www.pflagasheville.org/>

PFLAG Greenville

<https://greenvillepflag.wordpress.com/>

PFLAG Hickory

<https://www.pflaghickorync.com/>

PFLAG Salisbury Rowan

<https://salisburyrowan.pflag.org/>

PFLAG Southern Pines

<https://southernpines.pflag.org>

PFLAG Winston-Salem

<https://www.pflagws.org>

Sacred Journey MCC, Hendersonville, N.C.

MCC Sacred Journey (MCCSJ) is an affiliated congregation with Metropolitan Community Churches. <http://www.mccsacredjourney.org/> ::

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2025 Small town Pride Events throughout NC

Multiple Pride celebrations will be held throughout the year



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

As Spring breaks into early summer this coming June, so too will cities and towns around North Carolina bloom into the yearly Pride season. It's no surprise to find major Pride festivals happening in bigger cities like Charlotte, Raleigh and Durham, but there's a lot going on in smaller towns and rural areas, as well.

Here is your handy guide to the many smaller events and communities worth tapping into this upcoming 2025 Pride season. The dates range from this coming June to October, so if you are looking for multiple happenings to shine on at, we've got you covered. Especially in a year full of hate politics, everybody could use a little bit more love and tidings, including in the places less traveled.

Cullowhee Saga Pride

Date: August 26, 2025
Location: Plaza by the Catafount, Cullowhee

Time: TBA
Current Details: Come out and meet different vendors and LGBTQ+ community members. Sponsored by the Sexuality And Gender Alliance of Western Carolina University.

Link: <https://wcu.campuslabs.com/engage/event/11139922>

Hi-Wire PrideFest 2025

Date: June 1, 2025
Location: 1020 Princess St. 28401

Time: TBA
Current Details: Business Community sponsored Pride Event will be held at Hi-Wire Brewing.

Link: N/A

Pittsboro Pride Festival

Date: June 6 - 7, 2025
Location: 220 Lorax Lane, 27312

Time: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Current Details: Event Schedule TBA

Link: <https://www.pbopride.org/>

Chapel Hill-Carrboro Small Town Pride

Date: June 7, 2025
Location: 140 West Franklin Plaza, 27514

Time: 12 to 3 p.m.
Current Details: Chapel Hill and Carrboro's Pride festivities will start off with a gathering at 139 East Franklin Street, at the Peace & Justice Plaza. After a host of speakers ring in the day, all attendees are welcome to leisurely stroll over to 140 West Franklin Plaza for the rest of the afternoon. There will be a street market, music and sweet treats available for the public, all wrapping up around 3 p.m.

Link: <https://www.chapelhillarts.org/festivals-events/smalltownpride/>

Hendersonville Pride

Date: June 7, 2025
Location: 801 4th Ave E, 28792

Time: 12 to 5 p.m.
Current Details: Event Schedule TBA

Link: <https://www.hendersonvillepride.org/>

Foothills Pride

Date: June 7, 2025
Location: Moondog Pizza, 304 S. Sterling St, 28655

Time: 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Current Details: Moondog Pizza, together with other businesses around the area, will be hosting Morganton's Second Annual Pride Celebration. The pizzeria will open its doors at 11 a.m., with the vendor areas setting up around the same time, going on until 5 p.m. Later in the evening,



From Appalachia to the coast, township LGBTQ+ communities are looking to celebrate Pride in style.

Moondog will put on its yearly talent show.
Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/9544282145652043>

Sandhills Pride Fest 2025

Date: June 7, 2025
Location: Weymouth Center for Arts & Humanities | 555 E Connecticut Ave, 28387

Time: 12 to 5 p.m.
Current Details: Event Schedule TBA

Link: <https://sandhillspide.org/>

Wilson Pride Block Party

Date: June 7, 2025
Location: 100 Pine St. W, 27893-3292

Time: 9 a.m.
Current Details: Wilson's Pride Block Party is back, and bigger than ever! Starting at 9 a.m., the main area will be packed with vendors, resource stands, food trucks and local businesses ready to share their wares. There will also be a "Treat Yo'Self" bakery event, a talent showcase and open stage area dubbed "WERK THE BLOCK" and entertainment scheduled for the after hours.

Link: <https://www.wilsonpridenc.com/>

ORGULLO LATINX Pride

Date: June 14, 2025
Location: 301 W. Main Street, 27510

Time: 5 to 8 p.m.
Current Details: Come out for local food trucks, drag shows, music and crafts for the kids. This is a space to celebrate and share the diverse cultures, identities and experiences of the local Latinx LGBTQ community. Organizers from El Centro Hispano aim to create an event that encourages unity, inclusivity and empowerment by showcasing our community's talents while providing social, healthcare, advocacy resources and family fun.

Link: <https://townofcarrboro.org/2706/Pride-Month>

Fayetteville Pride Festival

Date: June 21, 2025
Location: 1960 Coliseum Dr., 28306

Time: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Current Details: Get ready for the biggest Fayetteville Pride Fest yet, as the events move to the Crown Expo Center and extend their hours into the evening! Featuring main stage performances throughout the day, craft & food vendors and educational workshops. Local LGBTQ+ organizations will also be in residence to offer resources and opportunities to work closer with the community.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/987965839361787>

Huntersville Pride 2025

Date: June 22, 2025
Location: 201 Huntersville-Concord Rd., 28078

Time: 1 p.m.
Current Details: Huntersville brings Pride to the township this year with the help of local businesses! Come on out and support this family-friendly event, starting at 1 p.m., There will be live entertainment, local vendors, food trucks and community resources, all designed to bring people together in a welcoming and supportive space.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/544696358625889>

Newton Rainbow Celebration

Date: June 23 - 29, 2025
Location: All around Newton
Time: Various, see social media.
Current Details: First ever Newton Pride event includes networking party, drag fundraiser, and festival with vendors, speakers, performers and leaders from the NC Democratic party and more.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61568191096662>

The Fourth Annual Fuquay-Varina Pride Celebration

Date: June 28, 2025
Location: 341 Broad St., 27526
Time: TBA
Current Details: Just announced via Fuquay-Varina Pride's Instagram site is their 4th Annual Pride Celebration. For this year's festival, expect music, entertainment, food trucks vendors, and more! Additional details, including the start time and schedule, to come soon.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/FVPrize>

New Bern Pride Prom

Date: June 28, 2025
Location: 203 S Front St., 28560
Time: 4:30 to 11 p.m.
Current Details: New Bern Pride returns to the city for 2025! Set for the day is a vendor fair going from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., with a Pride Prom starting off at 7 p.m. More information to come!

Link: <https://www.newbernpride.com/>

The Salisbury Pride Festival

Date: June 28, 2025
Location: 101 South Church St., 28144
Time: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Current Details: Don't miss the biggest party of the year! Join up at Bell Tower Green in historic downtown Salisbury for their annual Salisbury Pride festival that's full of food, music and fun entertainment.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/3833431446907721>

Haywood County Second Annual Pride Parade on Main!

Date: June 28, 2025
Location: 215 N. Main St, 28786
Time: 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Current Details: Event details coming soon. Keep tabs on the Facebook event page for updates.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1195642178805975>

Cape Fear Coast Family Pride Festival

Date: June 28, 2025
Location: 314 Pine Grove Rd., 28409
Time: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Current Details: Join up for Wilmington's Annual Family Pride Festival at Long Leaf Park! Expect to see crafts,

games and fun for the whole family! This year the organizers will also have a vendor market and food available for purchase.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/657708446810326>

The Pride of Holly Springs Festival 2025

Date: Sept. 6, 2025
Location: 300 W Ballentine St, 27540
Time: TBA
Current Details: Announced via Pride of Holly Springs Instagram is the 2025 Annual Edition of the festival! Details to come, keep tabs via their social media.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61560543521901>

Lexington Pride

Date: Sept. 6, 2025
Location: 211 East 4th Ave, 27292
Time: 12 to 4 p.m.
Current Details: Announced via Lexington Pride's Facebook. More details set to come closer to the date.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1131270558647956>

OBX Pride Festival

Date: Sept. 13, 2025
Location: 1 Festival Park, 27954
Time: 12 to 6 p.m. (Friday to Sunday)
Current Details: Outer Banks Pride is back this year for its 14th annual weekend of events! Sat., Sept. 13th will be the main day for the LGBTQ+ Pride festival, free to enter at Roanoke Island Festival Park. Enjoy an afternoon of live bands, food vendors, craft vendors, face painting, games, entertainers and more.

Link: <https://www.obxpridefest.com/pridefest-events/>

The Statesville Pride Parade and Festival

Date: Sept. 27, 2025
Location: 104 Court St., 28677
Time: 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Current Details: Get ready for live music, amazing vendors, family-friendly activities and a vibrant display of Pride as Statesville brings back its festival for 2025. Expect an afternoon full of celebration, community and love.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/651982250744116>

The Wake Forest Pride Festival

Date: Oct. 11, 2025
Location: East Owen Ave., 27587
Time: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Current Details: Wake Forest Pride has officially announced its Second Annual Pride Fest for 2025. More details on events and happenings to come closer to the date, keep tabs on updates via their social media.

Link: <https://www.wakeforestpride.org/>

The Fourth Annual Union County Pride Festival

Date: Oct. 11, 2025
Location: TBA
Time: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Current Details: Union County is excited to celebrate their 4th Annual Pride Festival for 2025. As always, there will be food, fun, entertainment, friendly faces, welcoming spaces and a good time exploring vendors and resources from our local area. More details, such as this year's location, to come closer to the date.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/626631936780067>

Sylva Pride

Date: September 5 - 7, 2025
Location: TBA
Time: TBA
Current Details: TBA
Link: TBA ::

'Pronoun Trouble: The Story of Us in Seven Little Words'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Qnotes Staff Writer

'Pronoun Trouble: The Story of Us in Seven Little Words'
by John McWhorter
c.2025, Avery
\$28.00
240 pages

Punctuation matters.

It's tempting to skip a period at the end of a sentence. Tempting to overuse exclamation points!!! very tempting to MeSs with capital letters. Don't use apostrophes. Ask a question and ignore the proper punctuation commas or question marks because seriously who cares. So guess what? Someone does, punctuation really matters, and as you'll see in "Pronoun Trouble" by John McWhorter, so do other parts of our language.

Conversation is an odd thing. It's spontaneous, it ebbs and flows, and it's often inferred. Take, for instance, if you talk about him. Chances are, everyone in the conversation knows who him is. Or he. That guy there.

That's the handy part about pronouns. Says McWhorter, pronouns "function as shorthand" for whomever we're discussing or referring to. They're "part of our hardwiring," they're found in all languages, and they've been around for centuries.

And, yes, pronouns are fluid.

For example, there's the first-person pronoun, I as in me and there we go again. The singular I solely affects what comes afterward. You say "he-she IS," and "they-you ARE" but I am. From "Black



English," I has also morphed into the perfectly acceptable Ima, shorthand for "I am going to." Mind blown.

If you love Shakespeare, you may've noticed that he uses both thou and you in his plays. The former was once left to commoners and lower classes, while the latter was for people of high status or less formal situations. From you, we get y'all, yeet, ya, you-uns, and yinz. We also get "you guys," which may have nothing to do with guys.

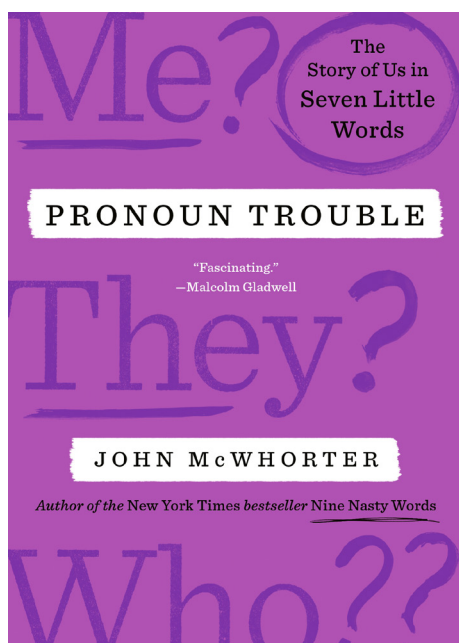
We and us are warmer in tone because of the inclusion implied. She is often casually used to imply cars, boats, and - warmly or not - gay men, in certain settings. It "lacks personhood," and to use it in reference to a human is "barbarity."

And yes, though it can sometimes be confusing to modern speakers, the singular word they has been a "shape-shifter" for more than 700 years.

Your high school English teacher would be proud of you, if you pick up "Pronoun Trouble." Sadly, though, you might need her again to make sense of big parts of this book: what you'll find here is a delightful romp through language, but it's also very erudite.

Author John McWhorter invites readers along to conjugate verbs, and doing so will take you back to ancient literature, on a fascinating journey that's perfect for word nerds and anyone who loves language. You'll likely find a bit of controversy here or there on various entries, but you'll also find humor and pop culture, an explanation for why zie never took off, and assurance that the whole flap over strictly-gendered pronouns is nothing but overblown protestation. Readers who have opinions will like that.

Still, if you just want the pronoun you want, a little between-the-lines looking is necessary here, so beware. "Pronoun Trouble" is perfect for linguists, writers, and those who love to play with words but for most readers, it's a different kind of book, period. ::



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Spring Forward, Fall Back

Liberation isn't always a linear path

by Freedom Center of Social Justice Staff

Progress is often thought of as a straight path, a constant raising line of battles towards justice, equity, and liberation. But those of us who live and work in the intersections of identity know that this has never been the case. At the Freedom Center, we've experienced both the joy of forward movement and the heartbreak of regression. We have celebrated many wins

relationships we've built, the movements we've nurtured, and the voices we've uplifted still matter, now more than ever. Even when legislation moves against us, our people continue to persist, resist and rise.

At the freedom center we see this every day. We see it in the members of our Trans advisory council guiding us on how to better serve the



in recent years and have hurt alongside our communities at our losses. We know what it means to spring forward, and we know how deeply it hurts when we're forced to fall back.

Over the past few years we've seen powerful wins, Trans and gender non-conforming people have taken up space and told their stories, leading conversations more than ever before. Immigrant communities have stood in solidarity fighting for their rights and demanding dignity. Queer Black and brown folks have shifted culture and brought faith and justice into the conversation in transformative ways. These aren't small steps, they are monumental shifts that come from resilience, vision and deep rooted community organizing.

Alongside those victories, the backlash has been quick and drastic. Across the country, and particularly here in North Carolina, we're witnessing a coordinated effort to take back rights and silence voices. Trans youth are being targeted with cruel policies. Access to healthcare, education, and safe housing are under attack. Immigrant families live with constant threat of separation and displacement. Voter suppression and disenfranchisement efforts are on the rise, attempting to take away our political power and voice before it can be fully realized.

It's miserable. It's exhausting. And it is, above all else, deeply personal for many of us.

When you've worked so hard to move forward, falling back can feel like erasure. Particularly when it's due to systems that were never built for your survival. It can feel like every bit of joy and progress was temporary and fragile, or that it was a manipulation to hush the masses and divert attention. But let us clear: progress is never truly undone. It is only made more urgent.

We are not starting from scratch. The

community. We see it at every rally and every protest as people fight for their rights and for what is right. We see it in faith leaders stepping up and not just offering words from the pulpit but when they advocate in policy spaces and demand radical inclusion.

We are still building and we are still fighting. And we will not stop.

We understand that liberation is not a final destination but it's a path that we are walking together, even when the road is rough. Progress may stall, we might lose some ground. But everything we've learnt, what we've built, and who we have become in the process cannot be taken from us.

To our LGBTQ+ friends and families, to our immigrant kin, to every black, brown and marginalized person feeling the weight of these times, please know that you are not alone. All of your fears are valid, but so is your strength. So are we all together as a community. And so is the vision we carry together for a world that affirms, protects, and uplifts us all.

These rough times are not the end of our story. It's a call to deepen our roots and broaden our reach. It's a time to organize, to educate, to advocate, and to keep fighting. We will bear the fight together, we will celebrate the wins and remember that falling back is not a failure. It's a reminder of how far we've come and how far we are willing to go.



Reel Out film fest comes to Independent Picture House

The Charlotte Pride series kicks off May 14 with cinematic shorts



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

In a year with a growing number of film festivals set to kick out the red carpet in Charlotte, one of the city's original screening weekends makes its return to the Independent Picture House. The Reel Out Charlotte LGBTQ Film Festival brings a queer-centric set of feature-length and short films to the city for a week of thought, critique and discovery. From domestic to international creators, viewers will get a taste of LGBTQ culture, perspective and nuance that normally may not be seen.

The genres this year range from romance dramas (300 Letters & I Don't Know If I'll Have to Say Everything Again) to the comedic (Sisters & Scattered), and with a great offering of documentary stories about the people in our own world (Light Up & I'm Your Venus).

Many of the nights will also feature commentary from some of the feature creators who will pay a visit to Charlotte for the festival, along with some of Charlotte's community leaders. Set to run from Wed., May 14 to Sun., May 18, each night will have themes designed and explored by creators and commentators and enjoyed by the viewing audience.

While the dates and times of each screening and film commentary talk are still being finalized, here is what attendees can expect the rough schedule to look like:

Wed., May 14

5:30 p.m. – Opening Event
7:30 p.m. – FREE Annual LGBTQ Shorts Night

Thurs., May 15

6 p.m. – Feature Film & Talkback

Fri. to Sun., May 16 to 18

Feature Films & Talkbacks (TBD)

A description of most of the films coming to Reel Out Charlotte 2025 is

included here, with more to be added soon to the list:

Features

300 Letters (300 Cartas)

Release Year: 2025

Director: Lucas Santa Ana

Description: Jero (25) and Tom (25) are the perfect couple everyone wants to be. Jero takes care of his aesthetics and his cryptocurrencies. Tom is alternative and loves poetry. On the day of their first anniversary, Tom abandons Jero and, as his only explanation, leaves a box with 300 letters. Jero, reading them, discovers a different Tom and the great love story they were living collapses under the title of "The Jero Project". But all pain has an end and the hope of a new love could be the cure for their suffering.

Duino



Release Year: 2024

Director: Juan Pablo Di Pace & Andres Pepe Estrada

Description: Actor and co-director Juan Pablo Di Pace (The Mattachine Family, Mamma Mia, TV's Fuller House) draws on his own life for this film about the universal aching nostalgia of first love. Through flashback and meta-narrative, DUINO breathes fresh life into a classic gay coming-of-age tale by exploring the passionate memories of a just-out-of-reach lover that audiences will find both tender and crowd pleasing.

Executive produced by the late TV legend Norman Lear.

I'm Your Venus

Release Year: 2024

Director: Kimberly Reed

Description: This moving and timely documentary sets the stage for the investigation of the unsolved murder of Venus Xtravaganza, one of the iconic stars of Paris Is Burning, the legendary 1990 documentary about the ballroom scene of New York City. Venus died during that film's shoot and now, 35 years later, the spotlight is back on Venus as her two families, biological and ballroom, stand united to discover the truth, challenge the system and honor the legacy of their sister. The road for justice is a difficult one as they revisit old wounds, examining every event and detail to find a path toward healing and positive change.

Light Up



Release Year: 2024

Director: Ryan Ashley Lowery

Description: In this documentary, Director Ryan Lowery breaks barriers and tells a universal story of queer men and transgender women. It only covers a minimum side of the diverse LGBTQ+ community that has found a voice in today's times. Nevertheless, the testimonies he addresses are enough to offer the audience an intimate glance at a world that's often been overshadowed by prejudice and

hatred, out of the underrepresented LGBTQ+ community in Atlanta.

Sisters

Release Year: 2024

Director: Susie Yankou

Description: Sisters is an American comedy film, directed by Susie Yankou and released in 2024. Best friends Lou (Yankou) and Esther (Sarah Khasrovi) are each other's "chosen sisters," friends whose close sisterly relationship knows no bounds. However, Lou discovers at her father's funeral that she has a real half-sister named Priya (Kausar Mohammed) whom she never knew, and begins to prioritize getting to know Priya over her friendship with Esther.

The Rebrand



Release Year: 2025

Director: Kaye Adelaide

Description: Nicole, an eight months-pregnant bisexual videographer, is hired by a lesbian lifestyle influencer couple to film a redemption documentary after they've been publicly cancelled, but Nicole quickly discovers that the couple have nefarious ulterior motives.

Short Films

Circle

Release Year: 2024

Director: Joung Yumi

Description: A young girl draws a circle on the sidewalk. Strangers curiously step

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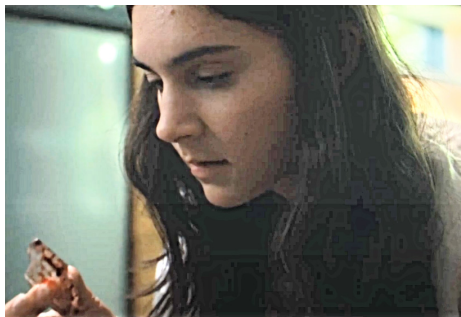
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inside it, crowding together. The circle fills with a community of diverse people.

Clementine



Release Year: 2022

Director: Zachary Ramelan

Description: When a rebellious girl is trapped in her secure smart home, she attempts to break out, only when the power is disconnected and intruders break in, she must rely on her own skills to protect herself.

Dragfox

Release Year: 2024

Director: Lisa Ott

Description: Struggling with their gender identity, eleven-year-old Sam feels alone and confused, not quite sure how to express the way they feel. That is, until a mischievous neighbourhood fox (voiced by Ian McKellen) jumps through their window late one night, taking Sam

on an all-singing, all-dancing journey of self-discovery and acceptance.

I Don't Know If I'll Have to Say Everything Again (Eu Não Sei Se Vou Ter que Falar Tudo de Novo)



Release Year: 2024

Director: Vitoria Fallavena & Thassilo Weber

Description: When Fernando meets his mom at their favourite cafe in Rio to tell her he's going to marry Raphael, is her forgetfulness down to her Alzheimer's, or deliberate?

Parallel Lines

Release Year: 2018

Director: Phuong Nguyen

Description: Parallel Lines is a modern day love story dealing with obstacles of tradition that break a bond shared between two people. Connie (Christine Virata) and Rahul (Issa Kabeer)

are best friends who never expressed their true feelings.

Scattered



Release Year: 2024

Director: Neil Fennell

Description: Patrick's estranged father's ashes are delivered in the mail. Now, Patrick has to figure out where to scatter this man who turned his back on him. With the help of his friends and a wild trip around New York City, he finds grief, love, laughter and the peace to move on.

That's Family

Release Year: 2022

Director: Puppett

Description: Lynne and Gloria's "special date night" is thrown for a loop when dad drops in unexpectedly with some surprising news.

Yellow Inside



Release Year: 2024

Director: Jade Jenise Dixon

Description: In a quaint coffeeshop, Josephine finds solace in her poetry, her fingers dancing across the keyboard. Unexpectedly, her verses catch the attention of Sydney, an old high school acquaintance Josie once admired from afar.

Each of these films are slated to screen at this year's Reel Out Film Festival, with more to be added running up to the starting day. Keep an eye on <https://charlottepride.org/reelout/> for what's to come, including show dates and times.


Individual screening tickets are \$10 plus a processing fee, and returning attendees are encouraged to purchase the All-Access passes, which allows entry into all festival screenings, both paid and free.

Tickets will be up for sale soon on the Independent Picture House website, <https://independentpicturehouse.org/>, after this article is published. The Reel Out Charlotte Film Festival will run from Wed., May 14, to Sun., May 18. .:

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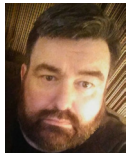
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Memorial celebration and show for Kasey King held April 13

Crowd gathered at The Hideaway in Rock Hill for memorial celebration of life and bar reunion



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

It's been nearly five months since Charlotte drag legend Kasey King passed away at the age of 68. Since her death, a funeral service was held by King's family, which welcomed friends and fans from the LGBTQ+ community and a memorial drag show took place at Club Cabaret in Hickory.

One thing's for certain: Kasey King was well-loved and, even with the passage of time, her absence is still felt by many in Charlotte's LGBTQ+ community.

That's likely why a handful of Charlotte's long time drag performers, who considered King a true friend and a talent to be reckoned with, came together for a recent event memorializing the late drag diva.

For organizers, it served a dual

purpose as both a memorial and performance presentation in honor of their friend King, and a reunion event for patrons of the former Charlotte gay club Oleen's, which opened in 1968 and closed its doors just short of 30 years in business in 1997.

Touted on social media as "Oleen's Reunion 2025: Sisters in the Name of Love in Memory of Kasey King," the presentation was held Sun. April 13 at The Hideaway, located at 405 East Baskins Road in Rock Hill, S.C. The presentation kicked off at 5 p.m. and continued throughout the evening.

King's history in Charlotte dates back to 1976, when she made the decision to move here from the small town of China Grove. According to friends and some public records, King was born sometime in July 1956. On a personal level, she did not identify as trans, and instead wore the tag of gender fluid, going by both her stage name of Kasey King, as well as her birth name of Lovester Randall Murdoch.

She was loved by fans and friends for her sassy sense of humor, carefully crafted image and talent for performing upbeat R&B numbers.

Despite the previous memorial service and show, King's closest and tightly knit group of friends and extended family wanted to offer one more final goodbye. "The show held at Club Cabaret in Hickory was a wonderful homage to Kasey," explained one of the organizers for the latest event, Brittany Gwynne. "The girls in Hickory gave such a touching tribute to her. We just weren't ready to say our goodbyes yet.

"We felt her chosen family, her sisters, her daughter and her closest



Some of the performers and friends on stage at the Hideaway for Kasey King's Memorial and the Oleen's Reunion.
CREDIT: Facebook

friends, needed to hold our memorial service for those in our community to pay our last respects to the legendary Kasey King. We knew we had to say goodbye and do it in Kasey King style: fierce, funny and fabulous.

"It was also a great occasion to reunite with old friends, reminisce about our younger days, the times we had and the friends we've lost."

Gwynne called the event a rousing success. "About 150 would be my guestimate," she said. "It was a good crowd and they loved everything we put out. We did it up right in true Kasey King and Oleen's style!"

Included on the roster of performers were Amber Rochelle, Aurora Nicole, Beverly Iman and guest Jazzmine, Bloody Mary, Blush, Brooklyn Dior, Coco Chanel, Deanna Nicole, Elaine Davis, Erika Chanel, Goddess, Keisha Wellington, Kiana Lane, Kobra, Leslie Lain, Lilli Frost, Miss Kim,

Miss Mabel, Missy V. Soul, Nancy Newton, Paisley Parque, Phina 5000, Shea Allen, Sheila Williams, Sinister, Tiara Monet, Valerie Rockwell, Vanity Van Dank and Vegas Van Dank.

Along with Gwynne, other organizers for the event included longtime local based performers Tiffany Storm and Tina Terrell, who in an acknowledgment of their roots, dubbed themselves the "Sisters in the Name of Love" in a tip of the hat to the late owner of Oleen's, Oleen Love.

Special event acknowledgements go out to Joel Houston of Flowers Plus for floral arrangements; Brett York for graphic designs and owners and management of The Hideaway. For images from the event visit the Facebook groups The Legendary Oleen's Lounge and In Memory of Kasey King. ::



Charlotte based drag performance artist Kasey King passed away Nov. 26, 2024.
CREDIT: Facebook

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Our People: Jeff Reeves

NC LGBTQ+ culture maven talks about the Royal Court, drag and how he keeps it all going



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

Artistic establishments, especially night clubs, don't always survive very long in our culture, so when one does, it's to be applauded. Keeping one going for years is a trick that Jeff Reeves, the owner of Club Cabaret, knows how to do well. In addition to keeping Hickory's LGBTQ+ haven alive, he's lived a legendary life, achieving much of what he has wanted to. From traveling as a drag artist and performing as Nancy Newton, starting in the 1980s, to running the Royal Court Circuit and many established bars, Jeff is as appreciated by our community as his nightclub is. Here's the conversation he shared with *Qnotes* about his life's journey.

Jonny Golian: When did you start Club Cabaret, and how long have you been with the business?

Jeff Reeves: Buddy and I, actually, started off with Tree Tops on 14th Avenue in 1977 [in Hickory], I believe it was. Buddy and I were lovers for 25 years, and I'd worked for Lowe's companies forever. I'd worked for Lowe's and dealt with the bar at the same time. And then I got into "doing dry" and I got real lucky. I ended up winning Ms. Gay USA in '92 and then I traveled extensively across the country being Nancy Newton, and I had a whole lot of fun, met a lot of friends, and become friends to a lot of people through my travels. You know, now I'm older, if I live till July, I'll be 71 and of course, I'm still doing drag. I'm supposed to do drag Saturday night this week, because it's kind of the way the public wants me. I try to do what it does to help the business and to keep me going. I'm afraid, if I sit down, I'll never get back up, and that's what I'm really trying to do right now. I've been involved, and I actually bought Mr. Gay USA in 1992 from Jerry Bird, who originally started it, and have kept it even when we were sued by Donald Trump USA.

JG: You contended with Donald Trump?!

JR: Yeah, it was an absolute mess. That orange headed son of a bitch. He thought that he owned control of the name "USA." And this was back, you know, in the '90s, and his lawyers told me that I'm not allowed to use the name. And I said, Well, let me show you what I can do. So I changed it to "USA Unlimited," and once I added the "Unlimited" to the name of my contest, he couldn't touch me, and I still own it. If it hadn't been for my health, I would have had my new Unlimited Cover Contest, but I had so much on my plate, losing my step mother in January and dealing with my 94-year-old Daddy. I'm one of the major caregivers for my dad, and, you know, just very grateful and very blessed to be able to do [that].

JG: I read about that while doing research for this interview.



Jeff Reeves has been at the heart of Carolina queer culture since the late '70s. Pictured: Reeves at Club Cabaret in 2022 with a "Mr. Catawba Pride 2015" sash, and his drag persona, Nancy Newton, posing for a photo in Sept. 2024. CREDIT: Facebook

Condolences to your family.

JR: It's funny. I don't say as much about Jeff as I do Nancy, but I've always tried to keep my personal stuff. It's nobody's business unless I want to tell them. But, as I was saying, I've helped stop-start Catawba Valley pride. I helped start Asheville Pride and the State Pride that went on in Durham. You know, we're talking about the late '70's and early '80's.

JG: Where else have you been involved in the Carolina communities? It really sounds like you've had your hand in a lot of happenings over the years.

JR: I helped start three different gay churches in Catawba County. We would use my bar, and on a Sunday morning or afternoon, whenever church met, we would cover up all the liquor so it wouldn't be disrespectful to a higher power. And then I went to whichever Christian Fellowship Church established down in Newton, and I was the choir director for years, and this is after me being a choir director in my church just right up from my house where I was saved and I was raised. I was the choir director at the biggest Baptist Church in Wilkes County for 15 years. I majored in music in school. Band and Chorus in public school was what I taught in the early '70's.

JG: When did you start drag? Tell me a little bit about Nancy Newton, and you said you're performing at Club Cabaret?

JR: Yes. We have a big group of people coming from out of town, and we are

doing a crowning with Saniya Chanel Iman. She was a former Miss North Carolina, and we're crowning her as Miss Gay United States 2025, with Malaysia Chanel Iman doing the crowning. I started drag in 1980 and went to Miss America in '82. You know, back in the day I could sing incredible. Not so much nowadays, but I'm blessed still. My partner plays a piano, and we've been so busy getting things done that we've not actually jumped into the music room [lately]. But you know, as we're getting older, that'll be something we will do. He's good at what he does, and I'm good at what I do, and doing it together. It's just amazing.

JG: So you are crowning someone soon. Are you a part of the royal court still?

JR: Yes, I was. I was the second emperor, and Charlie Brown and I, Charlie was my drag mother, and she was the empress and I was the emperor, and then, two years later, Nancy Newton was the empress, and Mark Madison, from Wisconsin ended up being my emperor.

JG: The Royal Court system has such a history of recognizing performers in our community, and I know they've hosted events all over the country, in addition to North Carolina. When did you get involved with them?

JR: Melissa Montgomery, who just passed last year, and Raymond Ward were our first empress and emperor, then me and Charlie Brown were the second emperor and empress. Two years later

I ended up being the Empress with the guy from Wisconsin. Mark had family in Fayetteville, and he came into town just a whole lot, he was good for the contest. He was brilliant, actually, and he made a lot of people understand what we were doing. He was great at writing articles and doing things. I can talk pretty good most of the time, but I'm not somebody to sit down and write up a bunch of stuff.

JG: Our publisher told me a little bit about your involvement with the bear community, and he said you had been the president of a nearby chapter.

JR: Yeah. In 2003 and '04, I was the president of the Carolina Bear Lodge, and then again in '09, because I was one of those that would start events. We had chapters in 10 cities over in North Carolina, and at the time that I was there, we had 285 members, including a den in Charlotte.

JG: Last Question: For Club Cabaret, and all the other clubs you've managed over your life, what has been the greatest success in keeping it going? What would you attribute the long years to?

JR: And if I live 'til Nov. 7, I have been in the bar business for 50 years. And this is counting the bar in Hickory, the bar in Asheville and Delusions in Myrtle Beach. The biggest thing I can tell you? Be good to your community. Do that, and your community will be good right back. ::



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