Qnotes

LGBTQ+ Local News, Voices and Community
JUNE 20-JULY 3, 2025|VOL 40 NO 5
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QNOTES 39 YEARS OF REPORTING

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

Young, accomplished and making an impact

Documentary on Pee-wee Herman now on HBO/Max
– pg 13

Durham LGBTQ+ center director resigns
– pg 7

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Mission:

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

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

Books for Pride

You've done your share of marching. You're determined to wring every rainbow-hued thing out of this month. The last of the parties hasn't arrived yet, neither have the biggest celebrations but you need a break. Pull up a chair, take a deep breath, and read these great books on LGBTQ+ history, movies, and more.

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Pride Playlist

Non-binary folk singer/songwriter Olive Klug is just one of the queer indie musicians included on Q-Music's second playlist for Pride month. Check out such artists as Baker and TORRES, Juanita & Juan, Talia Keys and Cat Ridgeway for a distinctive sound that you'll find nowhere else.

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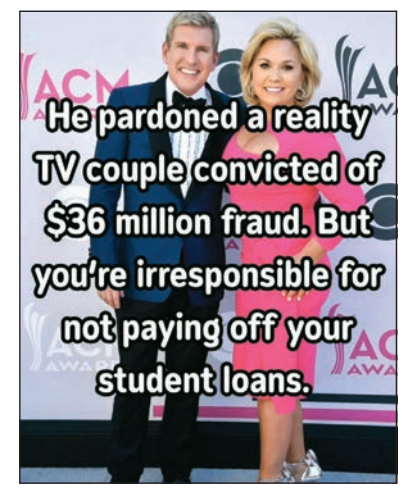
The People speak on Social Media



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Musk and others call empathy a 'weakness' while it's actually America's greatest strength

Empathy has been recognized as a key strength in strong leaders

by Taylor Heeden Larkins
***Qnotes* Staff Writer**

The term "empathy" is one that was often thrown out during former Vice President Kamala Harris's campaign – one often villainized by the MAGA movement. Elon Musk, who has since been ousted from the current administration, referred to empathy as a quality of weakness in American society .

"The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy, the empathy exploit," Musk said. "... they're exploiting a bug in Western civilization, which is the empathy response."

Empathy, he said, has been "weaponized."

Though Musk is wrong almost 100 percent of the time, he is right about one thing: empathy can be taken advantage of, and used a weapon. However, he underestimates its strength and ability to create permanent and positive change.

In a cultural landscape often confusing emotional sensitivity with fragility, a growing body of research suggests empathy is not only a powerful social tool – but one of the strongest human traits. Recent studies from psychology, neuroscience and leadership development reveal empathy – when understood and practiced with intention – fuels resilience, effective leadership and healthier relationships with those around us.

A 2023 Forbes article outlines how empathy is increasingly valued as a top leadership trait.

According to a 2019 *Psychology Today* article by Dr. Shawn M. Burn., empathy requires "deep insights and balanced emotions," making it a trait that demands – not weakens – emotional control. Burn emphasizes that true empathy involves separating your own emotions from those of someone else, allowing for compassionate action without becoming overwhelmed.

"In short, readily taking the perspective of others and feeling other people's distress makes you more likely to take responsibility for the welfare of others and act to help them," she writes. "Empathic people counter the more selfish and ruthless people that are also among us. No doubt about it, we need empathic people in this sometimes cold, hard world."

Meanwhile, neuroscientific research published in the *National Center for Biotechnology Information* (NCBI) confirms that empathy activates brain regions like the insula and anterior cingulate cortex—areas responsible for emotional awareness and decision-making.

Researchers warn, however, that this biological wiring can become a "double-edged sword" if not regulated. High emotional resonance can lead to stress and burnout, especially in helping professions. Empathy is an incredibly strong emotion, one which can cripple even the strongest of humans. Still, with proper self-regulation, these same neural circuits drive what scientists call "prosocial behavior" – compassionate actions linked to better mental health and community cohesion.

Compassion and empathy also has been proven to be economically beneficial on many occasions. A 2023 *Forbes* article outlines how empathy is increasingly valued as a top leadership trait.

"Showing compassion has traditionally been misconstrued as a weakness or a sign that a leader can be steamrolled by their charges. It was believed that an authoritarian presence was necessary to maintain a tight ship and keep the team working consistently toward their goals," the article reads. "However, great leaders understand that empathy is not a sign of weakness but a powerful tool for building trust, fostering collaboration, and driving organizational success. Contrary to the belief that leaders must be tough and unyielding, embracing empathy allows them to connect on a deeper level, inspire their teams and create a positive, more productive work environment."

Psychologists and leadership coaches now agree: empathy is not about collapsing under the weight of others' experiences. It's about being strong enough to feel, while staying centered enough to act wisely. As the evidence grows, one thing becomes clear – empathy isn't weakness. It's strength with heart. And in today's emotionally charged world, that kind of strength might be more vital than ever.

QnotesDemocracy
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Examples of empathy as an American strength

There have been instances in the United States' history where a leader's empathy directly resulted in positive and permanent change.

President Teddy Roosevelt created the Progressive Party (also known as the "Bull Moose Party") and ran for reelection after serving as president from 1901 through 1909. When he lost to Woodrow Wilson in 1912, he gave a powerful speech, where he said the government should be used to be "an efficient agency for the practical betterment of social and economic conditions throughout this land."

"As a people we cannot afford to let any group of citizens or any individual citizen live or labor under conditions which are injurious to the common welfare," he went on to say. "It is abnormal for any industry to throw back upon the community the human wreckage due to its wear and tear, and the hazards of sickness, accident, invalidism, involuntary unemployment, and old age should be provided for through insurance."

Franklin D. Roosevelt took a unique approach to show empathy to Americans during the Great Depression – through radio broadcasts which were dubbed the "fireside chats." In these radio shows, Roosevelt would vocalize the emotions a majority of Americans were feeling – he didn't sugarcoat or condemn the people's feelings, rather, Roosevelt used his platform as the president to let Americans know he not only saw their pain, but he felt it and wanted to give them one constant in a world that was always changing.

"Americans did not overcome economic depression and fascism because Roosevelt had the answers," a Washington Post article by Jeremi Suri reads. "Instead, Roosevelt empowered the people to help themselves, as one would expect in a democracy. The president provided citizens with motivation and the means to make collective improvements, working together. Teamwork produced public goods – from schools and roads to trees and art – not the other way around."

Empathy has pulled Americans through some of the toughest of times, and that's something members of the current administration appear to have forgotten. Empathy is a trait in all great leaders – from civil rights leaders to the suffragettes, empathy has been the main catalyst in creating the America promised by the Founding Fathers. The only way to guarantee the United States adheres to its founding principles is to hold our leaders to the standard of their predecessors. The President of the United States must be empathetic to all, even those who don't agree with them or support them. Ultimately, that's what will continue to *form a more perfect* Union. ::

Trump on Pride Month: There's no evidence he supports the LGBTQ+ Community

Donald Trump remains dismissive of LGBTQ+ history and culture

by Jonathan Golian
***Qnotes* Staff Writer**

Burning desire? Trump and his administration appear intent on canceling queer culture in the U.S.

Only a small number of individuals in our community – mostly Log Cabin Republicans – believe Donald Trump supports LGBTQ+ citizens. Most question his support of anything that isn't far right, evangelical and Caucasian.

While there is little doubt for most LGBTQ+ individuals and allies of the community about Trump's lack of support, there are those that would argue that Trump does show some degree of LGBTQ+ tolerance by allowing queer Americans in his administration, such as billionaire Treasury Secretary Scott Bessant and Trump loyalist Richard Grenell, who is the current interim director of the Kennedy Center.

A gay political action group that routinely acknowledges that "support," the Log Cabin Republicans, (LCR) are a mostly white and gay male conservative organization that rarely wavers in their support of the re-elected president.

"He's working to establish common sense once again," said Ed Williams, LCR's executive director. "On the whole, we think he's the best president ever for our community. He's managed to support us in ways that we have never been supported by any administration. We are vastly accepted within our party now."

Despite Williams' claims of Trump being "the best president ever," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in an early June press conference that Trump had "no plans" to issue a proclamation recognizing June as Pride Month.

Leavitt's statement, combined with actions from other members of the administration, makes it clear efforts to cancel LGBTQ+ culture is a top priority. In an outright attempt to dissolve recognition of Pride Month, the U.S. Department of Education, under the direction of Linda McMahon, announced recognition of June as "Title IX Month" on June 2, purporting to honor the fifty-third anniversary of Title IX.

"June will now be dedicated to commemorating women and celebrating their struggle for, and achievement of, equal educational opportunity. Throughout the month, the Department will highlight actions taken to reverse the Biden Administration's legacy of undermining Title IX and announce additional actions to protect women in line with the true purpose of Title IX," the opening paragraph reads.

While Trump has never issued Pride Month proclamations in either of his terms, there is a minor exception of support that exists. Trump referenced Pride when he attempted a global campaign to decriminalize homosexuality in 2019 with an initiative led by Grenell, then the U.S. Ambassador to Germany and the highest-profile openly gay man in the administration at the time.

Despite that minor past acknowledgment and the small number of gay men serving in his administration, Trump – as expected – continues to push for his administration to cull any information that might be considered even remotely DEI-related in the federal government, which includes major LGBTQ+ community contributions and protections.

Another of the administration's latest efforts comes at the hands of U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who on June 3 ordered the Navy to remove the name of gay rights icon and military veteran Harvey Milk from one of its ships, a generally taboo action among armed forces culture. A statement released by the administration reportedly confirmed the action of removing Milk's name during Pride Month was intentional and that the move was part of "reestablishing the warrior culture" in the military service, as reported by *Military.com*.

In other military related activities from the administration, Trump has gone out of his way to re-introduce and embellish the ban on transgender people from joining the military (he originally did so in 2017). He is currently in the process of dismissing those actively serving, doing away with any exceptions he made during his first term. ::

Cities across the US hoist Pride flags and light displays in solidarity

Seen across the internet June 1, national LGBTQ+ communities and allies posted imagery of all kinds, signifying the start of Pride Month, a 30-day slate of events celebrating LGBTQ+ culture. A variation of that action has been on full display in cities all over the United States over the last few days, with some flying Pride flags in defiance of right-wing efforts to ban the gesture.

Since Donald Trump's return to the White House, there has been a surge of bills from the GOP side of Congress to crack down on any DEI representation, which includes displays from LGBTQ+ community. Even before the new administration, Republicans nationwide have sought to ban the display of Pride flags on government buildings and in stateside schools, with recent examples being Florida and Utah.

However, multiple state governors and city mayors have decided to choose inclusion over disenfranchisement for their LGBTQ+ residents by displaying Pride flags in defiance of growing censorship.

In Florida on June 2, instead of going by Governor Ron DeSantis' (R-FL) order to have a bridge in Jacksonville be decorated in red, white and blue for June, the local community worked together to make a lightshow along the structure displaying full Pride rainbow colors. On the Friday before June 1, a Pride flag was flown high at Salt Lake City Hall, kicking off a week of Utah Pride activities and punching back at the Utah Legislature's ban on the rainbow banner flying over government grounds, which is currently a law as of March 2025.

Many other states followed along, both in politically red and blue districts, including Montana, Ohio and Wisconsin.

In Hawaii's case, despite the crackdown on progressive culture across the states in 2025, this year marks the first time that officials will join in on the month's festivities by raising the Pride flag at the state capital.

Rainbow colors adorn a bridge in Jacksonville, Fl., in defiance of Gov. Ron DeSantis's efforts to squash Pride Month in his state.
CREDIT: Facebook

"Flying the Pride flag at our state Capitol is a proud reflection of aloha, as well as our deep commitment to inclusion," said Gov. Josh Green (D) at the ceremony. "While other places are pushing people to the margins, Hawaii is leading with compassion and courage, recognizing that our Mahu and LGBTQIA+ communities have always been a valued part of our story, and always will be." ::

— Jonathan Golian

New poll shows LGBTQ+ adults mixed on overall lived experiences in 2025

In a set of Pew Research Center surveys published on May 29, LGBTQ+-identifying adults were questioned about their experiences regarding acceptance for themselves and the greater community. Based upon the findings, the report indicates there has been a marked increase in the number of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual, versus non-binary and transgender.

The study itself is a follow-up on a previous one conducted in 2013, prior to *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which would grant the right to same-sex marriage across the United States two years later. Before that historic ruling, many felt attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, especially in the trans community, remained extremely intolerant.

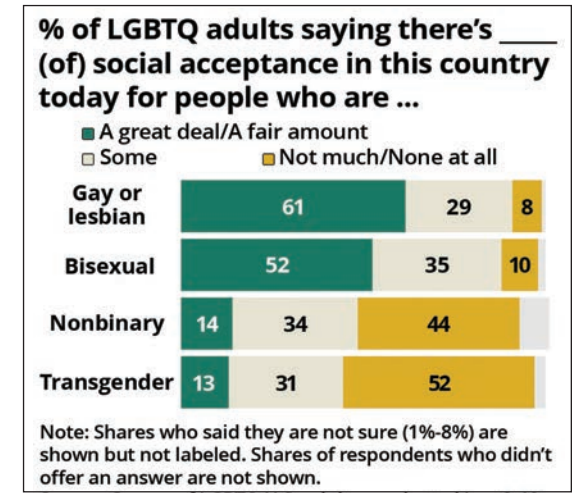
Of the key findings from the focus group, 61 percent of LGBTQ adults say there's at least a fair amount of acceptance for people who are gay or lesbian. Around half, 52 percent, say the same for people who are bisexual. In direct contrast, fewer say there's a increased acceptance for people who are non-binary, at just 14 percent, or transgender, at 13 percent.

Compared with the results taken over ten years ago, there is an upward trend in the statistics, with most pointing to a more frequent and positive representation in entertainment and politics, as well as more religious leaders offering their support.

Two-thirds of LGBTQ+ adults felt that the same-sex marriage decision made the greater population feel more accepting of same-sex couples (47 percent), while only 20 percent believe it to have had a greater impact.

A majority of the polls asking how each participant felt about their safety saw an overwhelming amount of LGBTQ+ adults are concerned about their safety, with transgender surveyors ranking at 70 percent, followed by those gay or lesbian identifying at 52 percent and bisexuals at 28 percent.

Transgender individuals who participated in the polls, when compared to others, feel most connected to the LGBTQ community at 41 percent, while those identifying as gay, lesbian and bisexual ranked between 24 and 18 percent.



More findings from Pew Research Center are available here. ::
https://pewrsr.ch/45O00vs

— Jonathan Golian

Wrongfully deported gay Venezuelan man's immigration case dismissed

With no word on the return of Andry José Hernández Romero, the 32-year-old Venezuelan man forcibly detained and moved with 250 others to El Salvador's notorious CECOT mega-prison, Immigration Judge Paula Dixon granted the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) motion to dismiss asylum proceedings.

Hernandez, a gay man who worked as a makeup artist for a state TV station in Venezuela as well as an actor, came to the United States in 2024 seeking asylum from persecution relating to his sexual orientation and political beliefs. DHS pointed to Romero's tattoos as evidence that he was part of the Tren de Aragua gang, using that as the reason for taking him into custody.

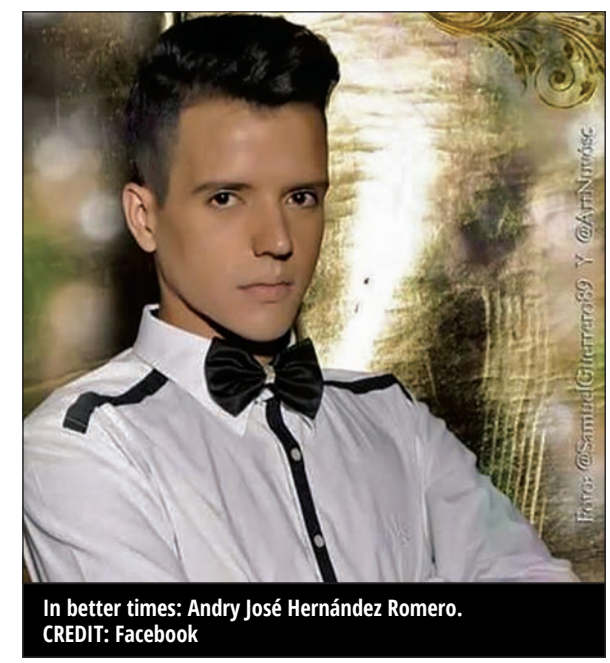
However, Romero's legal team disputes that the tattoos, a crown on each wrist and a snake on his forearm, were not anything like what would be identified as matching the Venezuelan gang's iconography. Unfortunately, like with so many of the victims taken by the DHS under Donald Trump's administration, neither Romero nor his legal team had the opportunity to rebuke the allegations in court, with all due process being currently wrongfully dismissed by the administration.

Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef) President and CEO, Lindsay Toczylowski, released a statement in response to the latest development in Andry's immigration case. "It seems the government's intention in dismissing these cases across the country is to complete the disappearance of people to El Salvador, to end their legal proceedings, and to act as though they weren't here seeking asylum in the first place," Toczylowski said.

"DHS is doing everything it can to erase the fact that Andry came to the United States seeking asylum and he was denied due process as required by our Constitution. We should all be incredibly alarmed at what has happened in Andry's case. The idea that the government can disappear you because of your tattoos, and never even give you a day in court, should send a chill down the spine of every American. If this can happen to Andry, it can happen to any one of us.

Although there has been no communication from Romero since his deportation to El Salvador, he is the lead plaintiff in a high-profile lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) against the Trump administration in Washington, D.C., on behalf of the hundreds of other Venezuelans deported to a Salvadoran mega-prison under the Alien Enemies Act.

The immigration judge who dismissed Hernandez's asylum claim is allowing for the possibility that the case be reopened if Hernandez returns to the U.S., according to a copy of the dismissal order reviewed by *NBC News*. While this gives Romero and victims like him the possibility of asylum should he be released, no details on Romero have been released from the Salvadoran government. ::



In better times: Andry José Hernández Romero.
CREDIT: Facebook

— Jonathan Golian

LGBTQ Center of Durham's Executive Director Natalie Watson resigns

News from Durham dated June 12 confirms that Natalie Watson, executive director of the city's LGBTQ Center, has made the decision to resign and move on to another as-of-yet unidentified role. Watson has been involved with the Center since 2014 in different capacities as a board member as well as staff. Their involvement in the Center has been crucial during times of need, and board members expressed their gratitude to Watson for all they have done for the Center and the community during that time.

During the transition period, the center's board has worked with the staff to appoint two leaders currently working for the Center to share the responsibility of moving the facility forward as Interim Co-Executive Directors.

"We are thrilled to have Vanity Deterville and Raye Dooley step in to ensure the Center continues to support the staff and community during this time," a statement from Durham's LGBTQ Center reads. "Both Vanity and Raye have experience leading programs within the Center as program directors and we are excited to work with them in the coming months. We want to give a huge thanks to Vanity and Raye for stepping into this role as well as thank the staff for all the work that they have done and continue to do to serve the community."

The Board will be working closely with the interim co-executive directors and staff to ensure a magical path forward for the Center so that we can continue to service the Durham and NC Queer community in the best way possible. ::

— Qnotes Staff

Natalie Watson leaves the LGBTQ Center of Durham after more than 10 years of service CREDIT: Facebook

Applications for Hurricane Helene home building program open

North Carolina's post-hurricane home building program began accepting applicants June 16, eight months after Helene deluged the western mountains. But as the critical program inches closer to reality, questions and moving pieces remain on all levels of government. Applications will be open through the end of 2025.

A key block of federal money has not yet been unlocked for the state to pay for the program. "[The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development] has not made the funding available for our purposes quite yet," Matt Calabria, director of Gov. Josh Stein's western recovery office, said Monday. Once it is, he said, "we'll begin assigning homes for construction shortly thereafter."

The home building program will use $1.4 billion of "community development block grant" federal dollars. North Carolina's plan for how they will use the money and conduct the program has been approved by HUD. State officials have set an initial timeline of three years, with the possibility of extension. The program will be heavily scrutinized, with state lawmakers wary of the state's prior struggles with home building in the east after Hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

North Carolina has tapped Horne, a Mississippi-based firm, to manage the program. State officials are in the process of selecting additional contractors, including those for construction.

The next tranche of state relief funds remains in limbo as lawmakers negotiate the budget. The House has passed a separate bill with $464 million in new relief; it includes money for long-requested small business grants. The Senate, which passed its version of the budget first, opted to include relief money within their budget bill. It remains to be seen which approach will win out with the budget deadline approaching on June 30.

In the meantime, advocates from Western North Carolina have continued to urge lawmakers to approve relief as quickly as possible. A group of small business owners and local government leaders, hosted by Rep. Lindsey Prather (D-Buncombe) and western Democrats, came to the legislative building last week to speak to members. And on Monday, the NC Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network held a press conference in an effort to keep their communities at front of mind.

Households in the area of North Carolina struck by the hurricane began applying to the Helene home building program on June 16.

"It is getting harder and harder, each time we come to Raleigh, to hear the words 'don't worry, we're just getting started,'" said Sam Stites of Just Economics of Western North Carolina. ::

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— Galen Bacharier / NC Newsline

Nancy Mace used former staffers to bolster online profile, report alleges

Representative Nancy Mace (R-SC) is in the news again. A report from Wired Magazine dropped on May 28 after several former congressional staffers claimed much of their time was spent online being made to boost her image through burner accounts.

Under the condition of anonymity in fear of retaliation from their former boss, staffers who worked for Mace spoke not only on what they've seen of Mace's knowledge and fascination with technology, but also what she's used it for most. Allegedly, according to the conversations had with the publication, the Republican lawmaker would frequently monitor her image on social media, even creating bots to post in support of her.

"We had to make multiple accounts, burner accounts, and go and reply to comments, saying things that weren't true – even Reddit forums," one former staffer said to Wired. "We were congressional staff, and there were actual things we could be doing to help the constituents."

If the reported actions prove to be true, it would mean that on taxpayer dollars, Mace had her staffers familiarize themselves more so with her social media presence than what South Carolina policies could be added and improved for the residents in the state she represents.

"It would be a slap in the face to taxpayers across the country for me to spent [sic] time on their dime commenting on my bosses [sic] personal life," Sydney Long, Mace's communications director, wrote in an email to WIRED about the comments. "The only relationship the Congresswoman cares about is her one with South Carolina. She is married to her job and that is all the media should care about."

Wesley Donehue, whose firm did consulting work for Mace's 2022 and 2024 reelection campaigns before firing her as a client, hits a sort of middle ground between the two viewpoints in a deposition he wrote, which was first reported by the right-leaning outlet *FITSNEWS*.

"You need to know that Nancy Mace is quite the – when I use the word 'nerd' or 'geek,' it's always favorable – but a computer nerd or a computer geek," Donehue said. "She programs her own bots. She sets up Twitter burner accounts. This is kind of a thing she does. She sits all night on the couch and programs bots, because she's very, very computer savvy. She controls her own voter database, she programs a lot of her own website, she programs Facebook bots and Instagram bots and Twitter bots. It's what she does for fun."

Qnotes has reported previously on how the congresswomen does not seem interested in speaking to the people she directly represents, holding more space for Donald Trump and attacking the LGBTQ+ community who she had previously advocated for. ::

— Jonathan Golian

SC Representative Nancy Mace continues to be an embarrassment to the Carolinas. CREDIT: Facebook

Town of Morrisville allows anti-LGBTQ company to host a table at Pride event

Questionable business may be linked to Beaufort harassment case in early 2023

by Jonathan Golian & David Aaron Moore
***Qnotes* Staff Writers**

The town of Morrisville celebrated their annual June 'Pride in the Park," event June 7. Much of the fanfare from the prior year, with local vendors, food stands, drag bingo and live music, stayed the same. Unfortunately – much to the dismay of some onlookers – another similarity mirrored the town's 2024 event: a Beaufort-based anti-LGBTQ concrete company was allowed to return for the event, apparently approved by the town's local governing body, which handles the annual celebration.

The concrete company, calling themselves First Amendment Concrete, had reportedly been a part of the vendors who bought tables at the event for at least the last two years, and possibly more.

Separated from the rest of the vendors present, with their tent placed at the entrance of the park, the three representatives present sat with nothing but two millstones crafted by the company, one painted with a rainbow and the other with the colors of the transgender flag. The stones themselves, as per a comment made to the region's alt-weekly publication *INDY*, represent allusions of pedophilia and Babylon, symbolically linking the LGBTQ iconography to the concept of sin.

While the company representatives themselves had not reportedly gone out of their way to harass the festival-goers, their inclusion still upset those who noticed them and knew they were there as opposition to the town's Pride event.

Some of the town's residents and other vendors took action against the concrete company and protested their inclusion in the event. One such vendor, local transgender artist and community organizer Eli Cameron, had been supportive of the town's push to have its own Pride event over the last few years, but for 2025 had decided to step away.

"I was accepted as a vendor this year, but I've stepped back from participating because I cannot risk further exposure to hate speech under the guise of "free speech" at a Pride celebration," Cameron told *INDY* via email.

When the concrete company appeared at the event in 2024, there was dissent in response to a company not local to the area and its anti-LGBTQ+ message.

Two men and a woman helm the booth for First Amendment Concrete at Morrisville Pride (right) and the threatening 'millstone' (left) at Beaufort Cru in 2023.
CREDIT: Facebook

"I'm honestly really surprised that the issues with the Morrisville Pride in the Park event aren't being discussed on a wider scale in the local LGBT or market communities," Izzy Hall, a resident of Garner, wrote in a Facebook post about the event last year. "The fact that a city-sponsored event that required a detailed application (and, I had thought, a selection and vetting process) allowed an organization whose mission is to make LGBT people uncomfortable (and maybe throw them in the ocean with millstones around their necks?) into a Pride event, as a vendor without an actual business, absolutely floors me."

"Y'all know I'm not super smart about bible stuff so it's not as triggering for me, but seeing how many distraught LGBT adults and youth there were in my booth who knew more about this messaging really broke my heart. Pride is supposed to be a safe place, and I hope someone decides to apologize."

When questioned by Cameron and other residents of the area about the anti-LGBTQ company's inclusion, a communications staffer representing the town of Morrisville gave a statement.

"The Town took appropriate steps to ensure that the event remained a safe and vibrant experience for everyone attending," the statement reads. "After research, the Town Attorney advised us that, because this is a government-sponsored event held on public property, the Equal Protection Clause of both the state and federal Constitutions prohibited Morrisville from excluding vendors based on their opinions or religious beliefs."

"Morrisville is an inclusive and diverse community where people of all backgrounds are welcome," the statement continued. "In our Town, we do not condone hate speech or discrimination, and we strive to make our community a safe place for all."

First Amendment Concrete Company's poisonous plans were largely foiled by the aforementioned protestors, many of whom surrounded the booth with rainbow flags and umbrellas to obscure their anti-LGBTQ+ presentation from the view of festival-goers.

Interestingly enough, First Amendment Concrete's appearance at the Morrisville Pride event may lead to the resolution of a previously reported and unsolved case of anti-LGBTQ+ harassment against a local business located in Beaufort.

A story that appeared in *Qnotes* dated March 8, 2023, references the appearance of a mysterious "millstone" with an anti-LGBTQ+ message extrapolated from biblical text. The poured concrete disc, decorated in rainbow colors, was left in front of an LGBTQ+ welcoming wine and coffee bar in Beaufort, which is also the home to First Amendment Concrete.

Owners of Cru Beer and Wine (which is still in business) said they felt threatened by the overnight appearance of the "millstone" and police were called in to investigate. CCT camera footage showed two men and a woman place the disc in front of the business between the street and a sidewalk, though the perpetrators were never identified. ::

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WE HAVE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE

What comes after the protest?

by Cameron Pruette

Millions of people took to the streets in thousands of cities and towns across the country this weekend. From a viral TikTok of a lone man in Union, South Carolina, to the crowded images from First Ward Park in Charlotte, people showed up in force, together as a community. What united them was not just anger but also a recognition of what's at risk. It was a pushback to the rollback of human rights and our democracy. Elected officials in DC and Raleigh have been conspiring to defund our schools, slash our healthcare, and criminalize our existence. We can't be silent. In the face of these deliberate efforts to take away our rights, silence is not an option. We can't sit idly by and wait for some future election. Action is required in the here and now.

Protests are a powerful tactic. They bring people together and inspire even more to speak out. They disrupt narratives and they offer hope. They remind people that they are not alone and inspire others to act. As we receive media that only serves to confirm our biases, it is critical to have messages and events that break through social media algorithms and click-bait driven headlines. These can also be used as demonstrations to disrupt cruel and unjust actions by our leaders and government officials. Protests are not the end, they are an alert to those watching that something must change. So what comes next?

What is happening in this time cannot be normalized - it cannot continue. ICE agents are targeting the places in our communities where we should feel the safest, our schools, our churches, and our neighborhoods. They're not targeting violent criminals or drug traffickers, our government is deporting grandparents, coworkers,students, and friends only to fill a quota and cause fear. People are being denied their rights and ripped from their families. It's happening with the backing of policy decisions that dehumanize people based on the color of their skin or where they're from. We must protest and also organize. We must defend one another and build networks of protection and support. We must match this moment with action.

CREDIT: Sam Spencer

This work is all the more urgent because the systems that are meant to protect us are being weaponized against us. Every banned book, every cut to the social safety net, every anti-trans bill that passes, they are all reminders that we are in a struggle for our lives.

We must disrupt the status quo. We protest the loss of humanity, the violation of rights, and the cuts to healthcare. There are other tools and tactics at our disposal. It is important to be connected to trusted neighbors and leaders. We live in dangerous times, and it's vital we be brave and strategic. We've seen the force of our government target those who speak out and protest. This makes it imperative to not stand alone. Protests can serve as a poignant reminder that we have allies and co-conspirators.

Protests are public spaces where we can be honest about what we're feeling and what we're afraid of. They allow us to name the harm. But they also help us build connections and relationships as we march together. They allow us space to check on our neighbors, to connect with grassroots organizations and leaders we support and who continue guiding the fight when the march is over. They broaden our network with every petition we circulate, and every call we make to an elected official, they give us a space to belong together and to rely on each other, to come together as the force we are when we are united.

Of the many creative signs at the protests this weekend, one recurring message resonated with me - **"I Have Friends Everywhere."** Perhaps, like me, you've watched Andor on Disney+ and felt its relevance to our current moment. A show that looks at how revolutions to oppressive regimes are formed feels right at home today. This recurring line, I Have Friends Everywhere, is a code between spies, a password that confirms trust in a time of fear and propaganda. As we look to employ tactics - boycotts, petitions, votes, strikes, protests - we must keep an eye out for our friends.

Even as the military is deployed to streets of our own country, we must remember that we do, indeed, have friends everywhere. We the People have power, and we must be prepared to use it. Our collective actions pushback against an oppressive regime, and we all have a role to play. History gives us examples of how our voices together can get us to justice and progress. Each action we take in defiance of unconstitutional brutality is a needed part of achieving a better future.

As we saw this weekend, people are ready. We are watching. We are moving. We have friends everywhere, and that's more powerful than anything they can throw at us.

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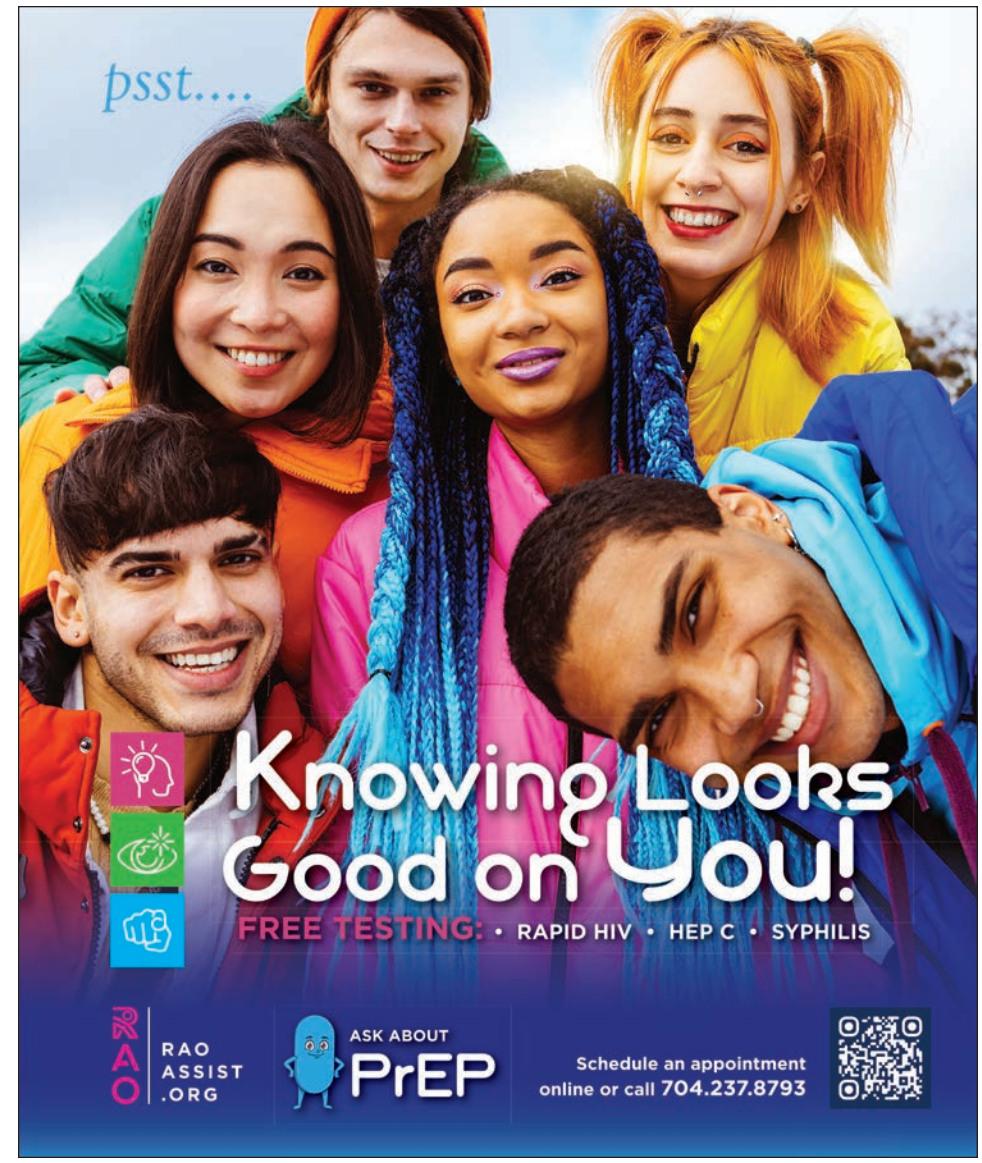
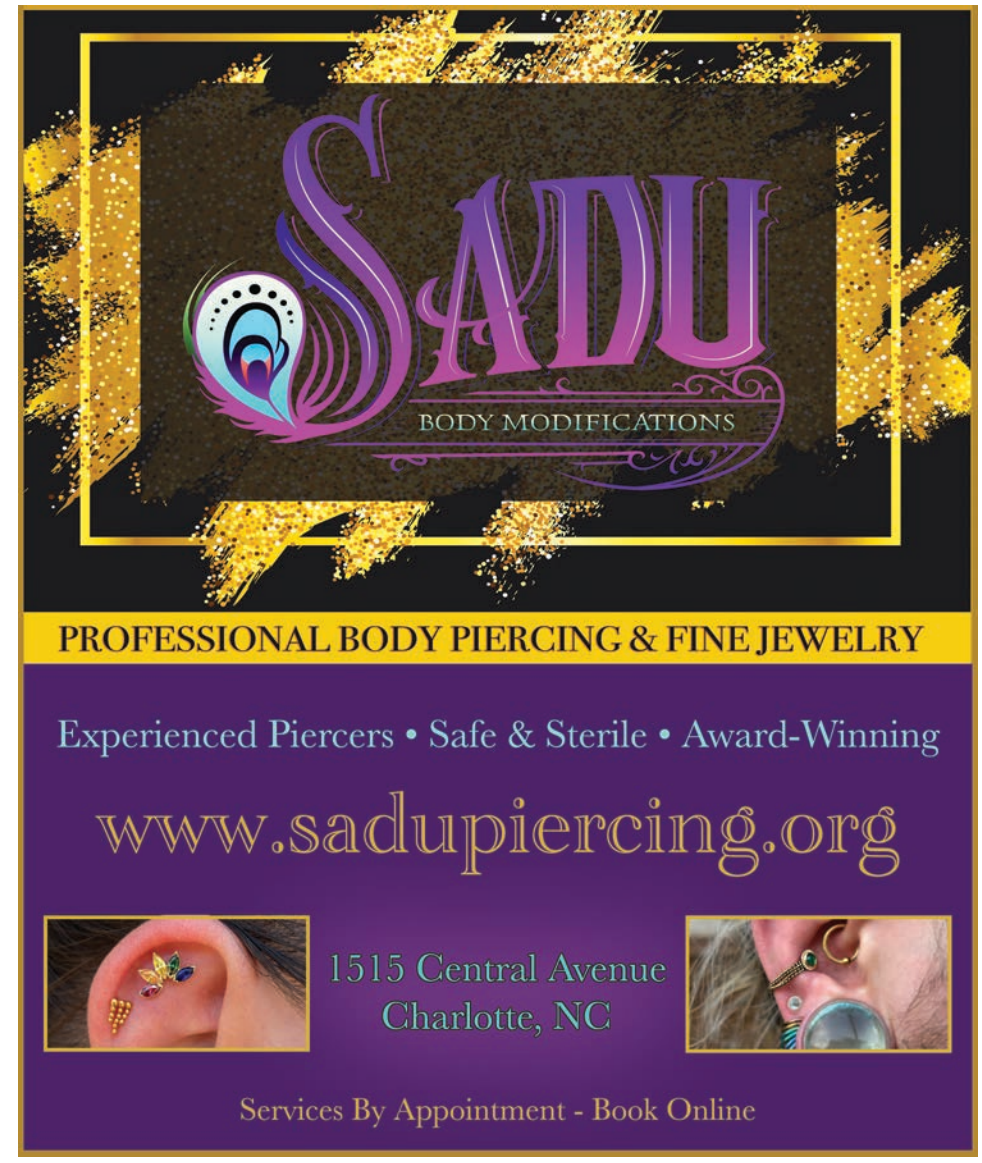




Young, accomplished and making an impact

Qnotes looks at some of the Queen City's youthful LGBTQ+ champions committed to our community

by Jonathan Golian, L'Monique King, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore | *Qnotes* Staff Writers

It takes a special kind of individual to accomplish greatness or have a major impact on those in the world around us. Not everyone can do it. For some, it comes later in life after spending years collecting knowledge and gaining experience from life lived.

For a select few, awareness can come at an earlier age, oftentimes bringing along with it a fresh, different perspective.

What is young and what is old? Sometimes it's difficult to tell. Some individuals well into their senior years are extremely active and feel and contribute in ways a much younger individual might. Then there's the young in years but "*old in soul*" crowd that have a certain spark many of their peers never will.

We make no judgment regarding any individual's years. But we have collected a handful of LGBTQ+ community members who call Charlotte home and have reached out to grab the brass ring in their young adult years. If you haven't heard of these individuals before, it's time.

Lolita Chanel

Charlotte's own Lolita Chanel, 30, is making waves. This vibrant drag queen from the Latinx community has captured hearts not only with her dazzling performances but also through fierce advocacy.

Inspired by Lolita's father and loving mother, Lolita created a space where they can live out their dreams and where other young adult drag queens can feel safe and celebrated. "If you are not happy with who you are, you are responsible for becoming who you want to be and for your own happiness," Lolita states passionately.

A 2024 National MX Pride contestant and proud mother of three in the House of Chanel, Lolita is dedicated to empowering young people and advocating for immigrants. "I'm doing a fundraiser for the Carolina Migrant Network to provide legal services for those in need," Lolita says.

Lolita's brave journey embodies the spirit of the community. It is bold, passionate and relentlessly supportive. Lolita reminds us that everyone, regardless of age, can create change. As we celebrate Pride this month, we acknowledge Lolita who stands as a trailblazer for progress, unity and unwavering commitment to helping others. — *Wendy Lyons*

Lolita Chanel

Oso Chanel

These days drag queens can be seen performing during evening events and at brunches all over Charlotte. However, as Jamie Crespo, also known as Oso Chanel, 35, can tell you, there is a lot more going on than just the queens who embody that particular style of entertainment.

Crespo, the face behind the figure, has performed as one of the area's most celebrated drag kings, donning the title of Mr. Charlotte Pride and being a constant figure at Union County Pride over the years. Throughout their career, Crespo has also been an advocate for more diversity in those spaces, attempting to, alongside their drag sister Lolita Chanel, expand on representation, especially for Latin artists. Their company, LOC Productions, was made with that purpose in mind.

With the current state of affairs in 2025, the two have invested their art in working with the Carolina Migrant Network (CMN), a non-profit in Charlotte, by being advocates for the organization as well as translating between Spanish and English, helping connect CMN with other English-limited organizations, and raising funds so that CMN can still continue their work in the Queen City's marginalized communities.

If you would like to help, Crespo, as Oso, joins in on the Crown Kings of Charlotte events every second Wednesday. Together with fellow kings Liam Laughin and Will Charmer, Oso and crew plan to bring cheer to audiences while also raising money for CMN in Summer 2025. — *Jonathan Golian*

Oso Chanel

Brianna Daniels

One part of an event is staging the setting of a place people will come to. The other equally important part is setting the scene, making them move in a way that not only brings the crowds out, but moves them outside and in. Brianna Daniels, aka Black As The Cosmos, 37, knows quite a bit about that second part, weaving together musical sets day and night through many of Charlotte's venues as one of the city's up-and-coming DJs.

Brianna Daniels

What may be even more magical than Daniels' sets is how she got her start. One day, a best friend in Durham, a fellow DJ known as Gemini, saw that future for Daniels in a dream.

"She woke up from a dream and said, You need to be a DJ," Daniels recalls. "And so I said, 'Okay, girl,' and learned the software, and then selected songs that I liked, and then the first set that I played was Black August in the Park at Pinhook, [which was] a party that's dedicated to celebrating Black femmes and trans folks."

From Petra's Bar to Lorem Ipsum and Camp North End, you can catch her mixing the sound waves all summer long. — *Jonathan Golian*

Travis Friot

Travis Friot, 33, is uniquely passionate and dedicated to making a difference in the LGBTQ community, especially for older adults. His work focuses on providing personalized support and resources. "A lot of my impact comes from working one-on-one with individuals," he explains. "In one instance, I worked in assisted living with a transgender resident who lacked resources and family support. I set up clothing donations and created a safe space for her to explore her identity."

Travis Friot

Travis emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive environments for seniors. "I want people to feel comfortable expressing themselves without judgment. It's essential to educate one's self about our culture when working with the community," he states. He founded the LGBTQ+ Care Partners group on Facebook, which provides a safe space for caregivers of LGBTQ+ older adults to connect and share experiences. "It's about creating inclusive spaces and embracing diversity," he adds.

Travis believes that both young and older LGBTQ individuals play critical roles in advocacy. "We need new perspectives to secure our rights, but also the wisdom from those who have fought for us in the past." His commitment to belonging, value and connection reflects his dedication to our senior LGBTQ community's well-being and legacy. — *Wendy Lyons*

Lakhiyia Hicks

Lakhiyia Hicks, 36, is the founder of HOMEplxce Retreat Center, a space dedicated to helping others with active healing and well-being. As the owner and CEO of

Lakhiyia Hicks

HOMEplxce Consulting & Retreats, Lakhiyia creates environments for individuals on their healing journeys, both locally and abroad. Additionally, she is a spoken word artist and author, utilizing her talents to inspire and empower others.

"I spent 12 years in LA before moving to Charlotte to continue my work in public health," she explains. "My mission is to create spaces where people can rest and rejuvenate. It's essential for those experiencing trauma, like veterans with PTSD." Her extensive travels have taken her across the United States to South Africa, Jamaica and Brazil, where she emphasizes the importance of community health.

Hicks believes in the power of young LGBTQ individuals to drive change. "We exist at the intersection of multiple identities, celebrating liberation and authenticity every day," she says. It's about creating spaces for everyone to be free to be who they are.

With an impressive vision to expand outreach and partnerships in community health, she is committed to healing and connection, ensuring that no one feels alone on their journey. — *Wendy Lyons*

Gereme McConneaughy

Also known as Gerem3, this 37-year-old is making waves as a vibrant multi-talented performing artist. Recently, he released his debut EP, "G:3," a collection of three original songs that showcases his vibrant energy as a composer and singer. "G:3" is available on all music streaming platforms.

Reflecting on his journey, Gerem3 shares, "I never dreamed the day would come I would be interviewed by *Qnotes*. A long time ago, I would sit outside club Scorpios, reading every new edition, so I'm very honored."

One of his proudest accomplishments was performing at Center Stage with Charlotte Black Pride last year. It was a huge milestone on his performing journey. "The reception I received was incredible, and I'm hopeful to perform again this year."

As he continues to dazzle and inspire others through his music and dance, Gereme3 emphasizes the importance of inspiring others. "I really want to bring back the love of music and songwriting. Believing in yourself is key." As a rising notable performer, Gerem3 looks toward the future and aims to take the music industry by storm via expanding his reach and impact within the LGBTQ community and beyond. — *Wendy Lyons*

Gereme McConneaughy

Abby Mederos

Abby Mederos

One of the best ways to get a feel of any community is to be in the thick of it, interacting and getting acquainted at the ground level. Abby Mederos, 25, is the director of operations at the Carolinas LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce (CLGBTCC). And being in the thick of it is something Mederos seems to understand and thrive in.

Hailing from Eastern North Carolina, Mederos went to college at UNC Charlotte, graduating with a degree in anthropology and psychology in 2022. Shortly thereafter, while at one of CLGBTCC's Pride in Business expos, Mederos' met Chad Turner, the organization's CEO. From going on to volunteer afterwards and seeing what CLGBTCC did for the community, a professional match was made and Mederos has been with the chamber since, counting three years this coming October.

In 2025, with Pride season here and plans to visit multiple events professionally and personally, Mederos seems more determined than ever to be a connector in the city's social ecosystem. "Community is what makes us strong, and we need now more than ever to be a community where we stand beside each other, no matter where you come from, no matter what you do. — *Jonathan Golian*

Rayvon Moore

At just 32, Chaplin Rayvon Moore aims to "make a difference by breaking down barriers regarding the view of the LGBTQ community." However, he engages with other vulnerable populations as well, like the residents he supports daily at a senior living facility where he works. Moore, who also serves as chaplain for Charlotte Black Pride, is a spiritual care specialist and faith advocate who feels strongly about the importance of Pride season. "It's very important and it's needed, because it displays the resilience in our community, especially considering the current political environment and the stigma being displayed." When it's time to recharge and gain the strength necessary to continue breaking down barriers while providing spiritual support, Moore finds pleasure in going to karaoke bars, though he said in a joyful chuckle, "I don't sing, but I really enjoy going." — *L'Monique King*

Miles Perry

For Miles Perry, 27, one visit to Charlotte sealed the deal on moving to The Queen City. Drawn into the fabric of Charlotte LGBTQ advocacy by a rousing Charlotte Black Pride festival, Perry (CBP youth liaison) became and still is the organization's youngest member. Perry aims to reify the voices of the LGBT community members while nurturing intergenerational bonds. Leaning on elders is something he's no stranger to, whether for support, advice or the laughs he knows he can always count on with his "pretty comedic" father. Says Perry about the upcoming Charlotte Pride season he is excitedly working towards: "It's a mission of seeing Charlotte Black Pride becoming a destination Black Pride, in the same sense that folks go to DC or Atlanta and know where their events are every year." As a youth advocate, Perry is here to remind us, "Right now it may feel like the road is long and feels almost too far to travel, but every step lays a brick for someone else, making the journey easier [for those to follow]." — *L'Monique King*

Cameron Pruette

"We made quilts that were displayed on May 17 for the kickoff of World Pride on the National Mall," announces Cameron Pruette, executive director of Charlotte's Freedom Center for Social Justice (FCSJ). Pruette, 35, a native North Carolinian, was proudly speaking of the center's participation in the ACLU's (American Civil Liberties Union) 2025 "Freedom to Be" initiative.

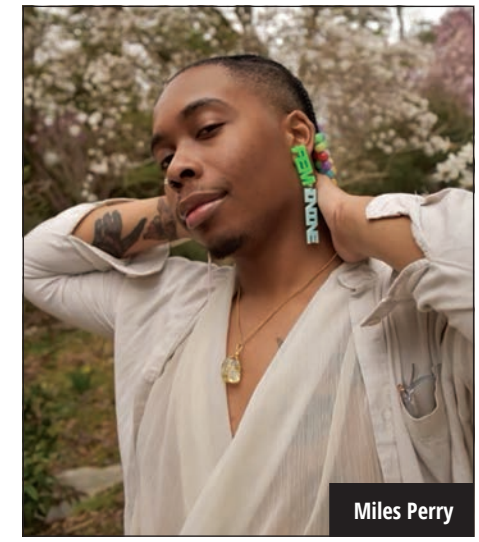
Pruette says he looks forward to attending Pride events in some of the more rural areas of North Carolina like Sylva and Huntersville. Pride in life, love and celebration is important to this individual who works tirelessly to bring together individuals of different talents including faith leaders, LGBTQ organizations, political leaders, immigrant rights groups and racial justice advocates. — *L'Monique King*

Alex Baerwald Simard

Part of curating events for any scene is the hope that a given space reflects the desired presentation. Alexx Baerwald Simard, 35, is just such a dedicated individual. Through her relatively recent slew of event series in Charlotte, she has aimed to create more welcoming and inclusive spaces for both the greater LGBTQ+ community and the lesbian/sapphic crowd that has seen those friendly zones diminish.

"It feels like it's finally catching on, like stars aligning. It feels like what I'm sort of meant to be doing at this point," Simard told *Qnotes*.

Rayvon Moore



Miles Perry

Cameron Pruette

Alex Baerwald Simard

From Ultraviolet to the Queer Icon Dance Party and The Big Gay Picnic, Simard's got love and creative energy to spare, and everyone is invited to be a part of the good times. — *Jonathan Golian* ::

Pride and protest: A look at the evolution of our movement into modern day

Can our history show us how to fight for our rights through direct action now and in the future?

by Jonathan Golian
***Qnotes* Staff Writer**

A key moment in queer action history (left) and a scene from 21st century Pride in Charlotte. Will revisiting the past be the key to saving our future?
CREDIT: Facebook

In the years that have passed since the early 2010s and where we are now – the 2020s, the atmosphere surrounding Charlotte's Pride weekend in August and the national celebration month of June has felt very much like a party of sorts, from the parades and food vendors to the smiling faces and dancers with rainbow fans, drag and musical performances, and the crowd we've grown to love. In Charlotte's community, it's a festive type of mood that sprawls from one end of North Tryon to the other for an entire weekend, with accompanying events at venues around the city throughout August.

This isn't an isolated type of view just in our city, of course. From June to November, Rock Hill to Raleigh, around the Carolinas there is one happening after the next, and it's all about celebrating our communities and ourselves. Those are great things to be able to do, and we need that release from the belittling and erasure we see coming from the current administration.

But that wasn't what Pride marches were about in the beginning. Pride events dating back to the 1970s and 1980s were a very different animal – one that was about fighting for our rights and showing the rest of our country we deserved respect, rights and acceptance.

The choice of June for Pride month comes not only from the Stonewall uprising, but from the marches that came after that pivotal event. A year after Stonewall, on June 28, 1970, major marches in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles took place, drawing thousands of LGBTQ+ individuals from around the country in an effort to both commemorate riots in 1969 and to demonstrate for equal rights.

These marches were followed for decades by many others, giving into more activism and organization, following in part the actions and traditions of the "Reminder Day Pickets" held in Philadelphia at Independence Hall from 1965 to 1969.

It was those organizers, operating under the name "Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations" (ERCHO), formed from 13 voting organizations, that in November 1969 originally suggested that they should shift focus from planning the Reminder Day Picket to organizing an annual demonstration in commemoration of Stonewall.

From the conference held that November, a resolution was made, stating, "We propose that a demonstration be held annually on the last Saturday in June in New York City to commemorate the 1969 spontaneous demonstrations on Christopher Street and this demonstration be called CHRISTOPHER STREET LIBERATION DAY."

And, from that collection of organizations, came the Christopher Street Liberation Day Umbrella Committee (CSLDUC), whose goal was to take the protests and activism further, linking in other cities and townships across the country into one massive march, culminating into an unofficial Gay Pride Week, spanning June 22 to June 28.

That's a good bit of the core history, so where does ours come from? According to the City of Charlotte's government website, it wasn't until a few decades later when those efforts made by CSLDUC finally trickled down here, though more as a possible inspiration.

Before getting to how Pride marches came to Charlotte, it is essential to know what the foundation was made from that brought them here. From spaces springing up in the late '60s like The Scorpio Lounge and Oleen's, to gay-centric publications like the *Charlotte Free Press* (1975), *Sinister Wisdom* (1976) and *Qnotes* (you're reading it now), which traces its roots back to 1983 when it served as the newsletter of the early LGBTQ+ action group known as Queen City Quordinators. At that time, it was a fundraising-focused organization that put together some of North Carolina's first-ever Pride events. Charlotte's drag scene had also gained prominence in the state, starring a collection of performers that would put on crowd-drawing events like the annual Ms. Renaissance Drag Review, starting off at the Metrolina Fairgrounds in 1978.

Timeline cornerstones like these, along with the *Metrolina AIDS Project* (MAP) (1985), forming out of the needs to combat and educate about the disease for Charlotteans, to artistic outlets like *One Voice Chorus*, all create an outward identity that the city can lean on, and mostly likely did in bringing our first large Pride marches here.

The first official NC Pride march formed in Durham in 1986. It later took on the form of a rotational event shared by North Carolina's larger cities in 1994, when Charlotte hosted the event and expanded on the idea of the city's own Pride. The LGBTQ+ community of the time brought in additional performance elements to combine with the activism the event was built upon. Eight years later, in 2001, Charlotte Pride would form with the same concept in mind, including entertainment as part of the festivities.

Twenty-four years later, Charlotte Pride brings in hundreds of thousands of people each year, all coming to celebrate themselves and those that identify as they do, along with allies and onlookers.

In the year that we've faced under Donald Trump and company's constant attacks, it is hard not to contemplate the earlier days of our community. Can we look at our record for guidance? What is civil disobedience? How do we stage a protest driven by the need for equality and achieve results? How do we find the strength to overcome the fear?

Is just being visible, out and proud enough?

We are seeing the curtain lift over what the Trump administration, along with many conservatives, would rather have our country look like. Although our world has changed dramatically since those early days in the 1960s, some of the conservative vision has always been with us. While not on Donald Trump's watch in 2022, his fingerprints are indelibly marked on the Supreme Court that, now right-leaning, would go on to overturn the case that gave Americans the right to abortion, *Roe v. Wade*.

Soon after, Justice Clarence Thomas stated an opinion about revisiting the established ruling that allowed same-sex marriage to be a right, 2015's *Obergefell v. Hodges*. In statements taken after Roe fell, Thomas called the concept substantive due process, a term in constitutional law that essentially allows courts to oversee what we see as rights – matters like love, intimacy and sex.

"In future cases, we should reconsider all of this court's substantive due process precedents, including Griswold, Lawrence and Obergefell. Because any substantive due process decision is 'demonstrably erroneous,' we have a duty to 'correct the error' established in those precedents," Thomas wrote, as part of the ruling overturning a woman's right to reproductive freedom.

The present examples just from this year include multiple executive orders attacking the transgender population, dismissing them from military duty and taking away their healthcare, the erasure of DEI initiatives and removing references from historical documents that recognize the LGBTQ+ community. There are also multiple state and city governments attempting to ban Pride events and rainbow flags, based on personal religious "beliefs" and sometimes nothing more than intolerance. The list goes on for a bit, and it can be expected that there is more to come.

During Pride this year, it may be time to bend less towards the cheer and festivities, and lean more on the marches, demonstrations and protests that started the ball rolling in the first place. Presence as protest still has its place, because we all deserve to be here and be identified for who we are, but a change of pace in showing who we started out as may show a seriousness many may have forgotten about.

Revisiting our history of Pride, protests, demonstrations and political action may very well be the way to save our future. ::

‘Pee-wee As Himself’ reveals Paul Reubens’ life in raw form

From highlights to catastrophes, Matt Wolf helps Reubens tell his final tales in a two-part documentary

by Jonathan Golian
***Qnotes* Staff Writer**

By the time this writer had grown into any sort of consciousness that could recall Saturday morning shows, Pee-wee Herman had already gone off the air and Paul Reubens, the man behind the boy, was just out of his first controversy, an arrest for “indecent exposure” at an adult theatre in Florida.

Reubens, in most of his life on and off camera as Pee-wee, succeeded what he had set out to accomplish. The nearly four hours of “Pee-wee As Himself,” a documentary that Reubens reluctantly agreed to film with director Matt Wolf, gave viewers a close look at the actor through his words and reflections of his life and career.

If you grew up in the late ‘70s and ‘80s, chances are you may already know a good portion of Reuben’s story, but only from the viewer’s perspective. That’s because of what was made painfully clear by both Wolf and Reubens: the very private life the actor led.

Reubens nearly took all of his secrets with him to the grave when he passed away in 2023 from acute myelogenous leukemia and metastatic lung cancer (according to a death certificate attained by People magazine). Even Wolf didn’t know about Reubens’ health issues until he died before finishing a final interview that was planned for the docuseries.

From his upbringing in New York, his career in the Los Angeles entertainment industry that led to finding his way into comedic stardom and the controversies that followed, the series does as thorough a job as Reubens allowed.

Another factor the audience sees through the two movie-sized episodes is the tug-&-pull of what control Reubens wanted to have over the direction of the filming, which revealed a side of the actor we might have known before: Reubens was not the most trusting person ever.

It is that fact that adds a bit of rawness to the person being profiled. While it isn’t spoken about the entire time, there always seemed to be a line that could be pulled that led back to Reubens’ self-described one-true love, a painter he met while attending CalArts named Guy Brown. Brown is the key to Pee-wee, as is revealed in the first part of the documentary, Pee-wee’s mannerisms mostly reflect Brown’s, right down to the laugh.

Even as he, in a way, carried Brown with him, it is painful to see Reubens choose his career over his personal life, much of which he lived through the pop culture icon he created. Brown would pass away in a hospital, dying from AIDS-related causes. But Reubens rode his stardom to its peak – as demonstrated in the documentary – with regrets later in life. In his own words, back then, it was damning to a career to be out of the closet with who he truly was and how he felt, even if the wider queer community, and the general one beyond that, had their own theories.

To get to the top and bring a unique creative joy to the world is something that, through the two parts, Ruebens would stop on and speak about. The actor had two major incidents that almost shattered his career, the first being caught in an adult theater and revealing his identity to the police, the second being found with an erotic art collection after being wrongfully outed by actor Jeffery Jones, who was convicted for taking nude photos of minors.

Paul Reubens, on set for the HBO Max documentary.
CREDIT: Facebook

Both not only rocked his career, but shook Reubens at his core, making his metaphorical shell that much harder to crack open. While he would eventually make it out and back into the spotlight in a relatively positive capacity, the final 30 minutes of the series focuses on what the actor revealed from deep inside on his final day.

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, it felt as though Reubens had done what he had set out to accomplish in his life. But his final words, recorded through audio from his bedside, revealed a pain from the worry related to his encounters with the law, and former friendships that flipped on him during a time of need for support and forgiveness.

Even as stones crafted from words were thrown his way, with names like “pedophile” attached, we do get to see how the greater public, from the adults that loved him down to the kids that treasured his lessons and stories from Saturday Morning television continued to support him. While there are things in life that we may never truly get over – and clearly those stings were part of Reuben’s pain – the catharsis from speaking about those issues and revealing much about what we never saw in his private life, released him somewhat at the end.

Paul Reubens, whether as Pee-wee Herman or any of the other characters he brought to life, inspired generations with his comedic antics. He truly gave his own brand of love to the world, even though he chose to closet his own. That selflessness is his legacy. If there is an afterlife, we can hope he sees that. ::

‘Pee-wee As Himself’ is now available to stream on the HBO Max service.

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Out in Print

by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

Books for Pride, Part II
Various authors
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$14.99 - $34.00

You've done your share of marching. You're determined to wring every rainbow-hued thing out of this month. The last of the parties hasn't arrived yet, neither have the biggest celebrations, and you're primed but – okay, you need a minute. So pull up a chair, take a deep breath, and read these great books on LGBTQ+ history, movies and more.

You probably don't need to be told that harassment and discrimination was a daily occurrence for gay people in the past (as now!), but **"American Scare: Florida's Hidden Cold War on Black and Queer Lives" by Robert W. Fieseler** (Dutton, $34) tells a story that runs deeper than you may know. Here, you'll read a historical exposé with documented, newly-released evidence of a systemic effort to ruin the lives of two groups of people that were perceived as a threat to a legislature full of white men.

Prepared to be shocked, that's all you need to know.

You'll also want to read the story inside **"The Many Passions of Michael Hardwick: Sex and the Supreme Court in the Age of AIDS" by Martin Padgett** (W.W. Norton & Company, $31.99), which sounds like a novel, but it's not. It's the story of one man's fight for a basic right as the AIDS crisis swirls in and out of American gay life and law. Hint: this book isn't just old history, and it's not just for gay men.

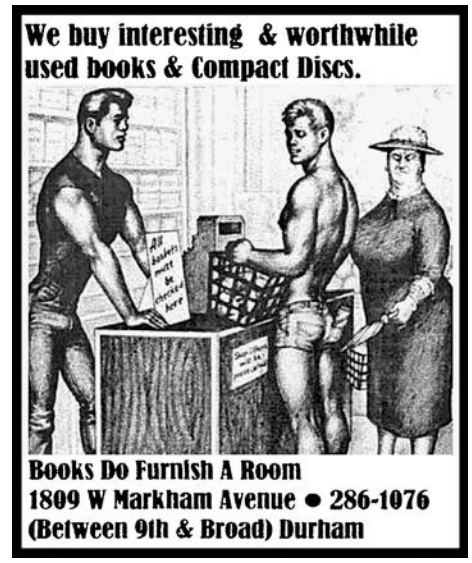
Okay, maybe you're ready for some fun, and who doesn't like a movie? You know you do, so you'll want **"Sick and Dirty: Hollywood's Gay Golden Age and the Making of Modern Queerness" by Michael Koresky** (Bloomsbury, $29.99). It's a great look at the Hays Code and what it allowed audiences to see, but it's also about the classics that sneaked beneath the code.

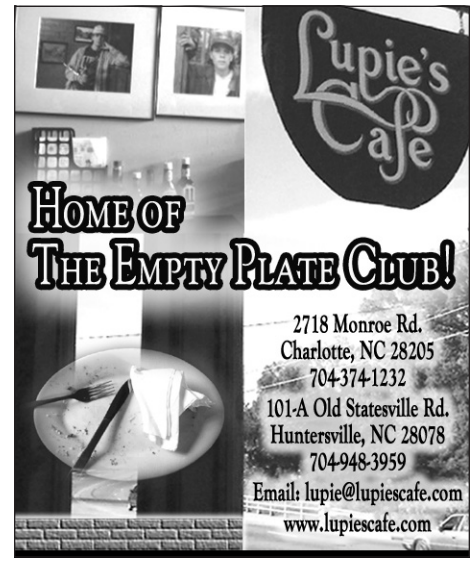
There are actors, of course, in here, but also directors, writers and other Hollywood characters you may recognize. Grab the popcorn and settle in.

If you have kids in your life, they'll want to know more about Pride and you'll want to look for **"Pride: Celebrations & Festivals" by Eric Huang, illustrated by Amy Phelps** (Quarto, $14.99), a story of inclusion that ends in a nice fat section of history and explanation, great for kids ages seven-to-fourteen. Also find **"Are You a Friend of Dorothy? The True Story of an Imaginary Woman and the Real People She Helped Shape" by Kyle Lukoff, illustrated by Levi Hastings** (Simon & Schuster, $19.99), a lively book about a not-often-told secret for kids ages six-to-ten; and **"Papa's Coming Home" by Chasten Buttigieg, illustrated by Dan Taylor** (Philomel, $19.99), a sweet family tale for kids ages three-to-five.

Finally, here's a tween book that you can enjoy, too: **"Queer Heroes" by Arabelle Sicardi, illustrated by Sarah Tanat-Jones** (Wide Eyed, $14.99), a series of quick-to-read biographies of people you should know about.

Want more Pride books? Then ask your favorite bookseller or librarian for more, because there are so many more things to read. Really, the possibilities are almost endless, so march on in. ::





Queer playlist for Pride

Q-Music

by Gregg Shapiro
Contributing Writer

"Send A Prayer My Way" (Matador) is the highly anticipated musical collaboration by queer singer/songwriters Julien Baker & TORRES. Individually, **Baker and TORRES** have established themselves as singular artists. But Baker seems to be at her best when she's collaborating, whether as a member of Boygenius (with Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus), or guesting on solo albums by Becca Mancari, Bridgers, her partner Dacus, and others. That's why this pairing of Baker and TORRES (aka Mackenzie Scott) makes musical sense. The 12-songs on the vinyl LP are steeped in modern country. "Bottom of a Bottle" (from which the album gets its title), with its reference to checking "every honky-tonk in town" after losing her woman, earns it place among torch and twang drinking songs. Baker and TORRES never fail to remind us that this is contemporary music, especially on songs such as "Downhill Both Ways," "Sylvia," "Off the Wagon" and "Tuesday." *https://julienbakerandtorres.com/*

Baker and TORRES

When it comes to the coolness factor, it's hard to top **"Jungle Cruise"** (In The Red) by **Juanita & Juan**, a musical duo with more history in their little fingers than most people have in their whole bodies. In addition to recording albums under his own name, queer musician Kid Congo Powers (Juan) has been a member of influential bands such as the Cramps, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, and The Gun Club. Alice Bag (Juanita) was a member of the highly regarded LA punk band the Bags and also appeared in the acclaimed Penelope Spheeris doc "The Decline of Western Civilization." As Juanita and Juan, they've recorded a punk-folk album that draws on their combined senses of humor (the title cut, "Aftertaste"), their political mindedness ("Put Down Your Weapons"), their bilingualism ("Interruptor," "Ven A Mi") and, most importantly their queerness ("The Prez" and "DBWMGWD," which stands for "David Bowie Was My Gateway Drug"). Adding to the album's coolness element is that it's pressed on day-glo pink vinyl and spins at 45 RPM! *https://juanitajuan.bandcamp.com/album/jungle-cruise*

Juanita & Juan

Talia Keys

Salt Lake City's **Talia Keys** is a queer multi-instrumentalist with an activist streak. You can hear it in her brand of blues-tinged folk on her new LP **"From The Ashes"** (Midtopia), available on tasty orange vinyl. When Keys sings "I haven't fought this hard in such a long time/it seems like I'm fighting everyone," LGBTQ listeners can surely relate to that sentiment now. The same holds true for "Be The Resistance," which encourages listeners to be their "own empire" in these troubled times. The sizzling soul tune "Matchstick" is fire and heats up with repeated listens. The strings on the soaring number "Sky Is Falling," take the song to thrilling heights. "Find Your Own" brings the funk while celebrating feeling different and the joy of finding your own community. Keys bring it to a close with the beaming country of "Glowin' Golden." *https://www.taliakeys.com/index.html*

Non-binary folk singer/songwriter **Olive Klug** cites Adrienne Lenker and Mal Blum among their influences, something that comes through loud and clear on their exceptional second album **"Lost Dog"** (Signature Sounds). This is 21st century folk at its best – from the distinctive lyrics to the arrangements, these songs sound like a long-awaited update to a timeless genre. "Cold War," is a perfect example of this. What's amazing is that Klug follows "Cold War" with "Train of Thought" which returns to folk's roots, complete with a train theme. It's this balancing act, which Klug makes sound effortless, that makes this record so compelling. Other examples include the title tune, "Opposite Action," "Taking Punches From The Breeze" and "What To Make of Me." *https://oliveklug.com/*

Olive Klug

Cat Ridgeway

"Sprinter" (The Orchard) by queer singer/songwriter **Cat Ridgeway** may rock a little harder than the previously mentioned albums, but that doesn't diminish its emotional impact. In fact, the sheer variety of musical styles found on "Sprinter" may cause many listeners to run towards it. The album opening title track grabs you by the collar in the most persuasive manner. Then there's that unexpected banjo on "Cursive." "Look Ma, No Plans!" sounds like it might owe a debt to Liz Phair while Ridgeway fully embraces her folkie self on "Restless Leg Syndrome." "What If?" is the album's most daring track while "Get Well Soon" and "Forced Actors" are, to quote Ridgeway, "very punk rock" of her. *https://www.catridgeway.com/* ::

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