

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



Get ready for Charlotte Black Pride



**Doug Spearman
reprises the lead
role in 'Noah's Arc'**
- pg 15

**What's next for
LGBTQ+ gaming
in Charlotte**
- pg 9



DRIPPING WITH PRIDE



SHOP
WHITE RABBIT

FOR ALL YOUR PRIDE GEAR

WHITE RABBIT

920 CENTRAL AVE.

CHARLOTTE N.C. , 28204

(704) 377-4067

FOLLOW US @



WHITERABBIT



WRABBITNC



SHOPWHITERABBIT





contributors this issue

Writers: Lynn Bonner, Jonathan Golian, Clayton Henkel, L'Monique King, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore, Terri Schlichenmeyer, Gregg Shapiro

on the cover

Graphic Design by Danny A. Mannanov
Illustration: Adobe Stock

Mission:

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

Pride Publishing & Typesetting, Inc.,
dba *Qnotes*

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

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

Sales: x201 adsales@qnotescarolinas.com

Nat'l Sales: Rivendell Media, ph
212.242.6863

Managing Editor: Jim Yarbrough, x201,
editor@qnotescarolinas.com

Director of Strategic Initiatives:
Liz Schob

Digital Engagement Specialist:
Tim Kendra-Dell

Sr. Editor: David Aaron Moore,
Editor@qnotescarolinas.com

Copy Editor: Bailey Sides

Production: Danny A. Mannanov, x205,
production@qnotescarolinas.com

Printed on recycled paper.

Material in *Qnotes* is copyrighted by Pride Publishing & Typesetting © 2025 and may not be reproduced in any manner without written consent of the editor or publisher. Advertisers assume full responsibility — and therefore, all liability — for securing reprint permission for copyrighted text, photographs and illustrations or trademarks published in their ads. The sexual orientation of advertisers, photographers, writers, cartoonists we publish is neither inferred nor implied. The appearance of names or photographs does not indicate the subject's sexual orientation. *Qnotes* nor its publisher assumes liability for typographical error or omission, beyond offering to run a correction. Official editorial positions are expressed in staff editorials and editorial notations and are determined by editorial staff. The opinions of contributing writers and guest columnists do not necessarily represent the opinions of *Qnotes* or its staff. *Qnotes* accepts unsolicited editorial, but cannot take responsibility for its return. Editor reserves the right to accept and reject material as well as edit for clarity, brevity.

inside this issue

feature

- 9 The future of Charlotte's gaming scene lays with LGBTQ+ leaders
- 10 Charlotte Black Pride celebrates 20 years

news

- 4 NC county elections boards shift from Democratic to GOP control
- 5 Anti-LGBTQ+ policy revisions could take protections out of Johnston County schools
- 6 Trump admin to cut LGBTQ+ suicide prevention hotline in July
- 6 Supreme Court rules in favor of anti-LGBTQ+ parents
- 7 'No Kings' protest brings out thousands in CLT and surrounding regions
- 7 CLT Roller Derby brings out a double header "Rainbow Riot" for Pride 2025
- 7 Connie Vetter receives Charlotte Black Pride's Inaugural Achievement Award
- 8 NC Senate votes to approve bill targeting trans people and public schools

life

- 11 Know Your LGBTQ+ History
- 12 Know Your LGBTQ+ History (Answers)

a&e

- 13 'Lavender Men' seeks to take love out of the closet, past and present
- 14 Out in Print
- 15 Taking his Chance: An interview with gay actor Doug Spearman

views

events

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



Know your LGBTQ+ Pride and cultural history

Bayard Rustin was an openly gay man during a time in history when such a thing was unheard of. He worked directly with Dr. Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights movement and he was arrested during a protest in Chapel Hill. Learn about him and more.

PAGE 11

Trump admin to cut LGBTQ+ suicide hotline in July

As Republicans, Conservatives and MAGA devotees continue their war on our community, the latest service for our people to come under fire is the LGBTQ+ suicide prevention hotline that has offered specific help for individuals in our community.

PAGE 6



The People speak on Social Media



For entertainment only. *Qnotes* does not vouch for factual authenticity.

These rates only cover a portion of our true cost, however, our goal is to serve our community

Mailed 1st class from Charlotte, NC, in sealed envelope.

Subscription Rates: 1 yr - 26 issues = \$48 1/2 yr - 13 issues = \$34

Mail to: P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222

name: _____

address: _____

city: _____ state: _____ zip: _____

credit card - check one: mastercard visa discover american express

card #: _____ exp. date: _____

signature: _____

SUBSCRIBE!

NC county elections boards shift from Democratic to GOP control

GOP gerrymandering continues to impact the state

by Lynn Bonner | NC Newsline

North Carolina's elections shakeup extended to all 100 counties Tuesday as local boards flipped from Democratic to GOP control and State Auditor Dave Boliek appointed Republican chairs to lead them.

The changes expand GOP control of elections to the local level.

Last month, Boliek appointed a Republican majority state elections board under a new law that took appointment power away from Democratic Gov. Josh Stein.

Stein has sued over the law, but state appellate courts have allowed it to go into effect. Historically, the governor's party has held majorities on the state and county boards.

Reporter Bryan Anderson was first to identify the partisan switch.

Local boards of election are the on-the-ground decision makers that pick polling locations, set early voting schedules and hours, and decide whether provisional ballots should be accepted.

Local board majorities appoint county elections directors with approval from the

state Board of Elections executive director.

The new Republican state Board of Elections made quick use of its power to replace the state elections director with Republican Sam Hayes last month at its first meeting.

"I hope we'll continue to have an election board that is focused on upholding the laws of the state of North Carolina and not involved in the partisan politics," Sen. Ralph Hise (R-Mitchell), one of the Senate Elections Committee chairmen, said Tuesday afternoon.

Greg Flynn was a Democratic member of the Wake County board who was not reappointed Tuesday. Flynn said in his years on the Wake board, most of its votes were unanimous and members "worked together pretty well."

The change "I think will have a big effect on early voting site decisions," he said.

In 2018, when local boards were split 2-2, Wake Republicans voted against opening an early voting site at NC State University, Raleigh's News & Observer reported. In 2014, a dispute over a proposed early vot-

ing site at Appalachian State University in Boone reached the state Supreme Court, WRAL reported.

The state Board of Elections met Tuesday to approve a plan to collect missing identification numbers from voters who don't have them attached to their names in the state's electronic voter database.

About 98,000 of these voters, those who registered after 2004, won't be able to have their ballots automatically counted until they provide a partial Social Security number or driver's license number. The Board is going to send information to these voters asking for the information next month.

Mail will go out later this summer to about 96,000 voters who don't have that information attached to their files, but who showed ID when voting. They will vote on regular ballots.

A third mailing will go out to voters who haven't responded to previous notices.

The mailings will include pre-addressed, postage-paid envelopes.

Additionally, county elections officials will review the electronic files for data that is missing even though the voters supplied it.

The Trump Justice Department sued the Board of Elections last month claiming that the missing government numbers violate federal law.

Hayes told the Board the Justice Department has tentatively signed off on the plan and it could result in an agreement to resolve the lawsuit.

The DOJ lawsuit echoed claims that GOP Appeals Court Judge Jefferson Griffin, the failed candidate for a state Supreme

Court seat, made as he tried to overturn his Democratic opponent's November victory.

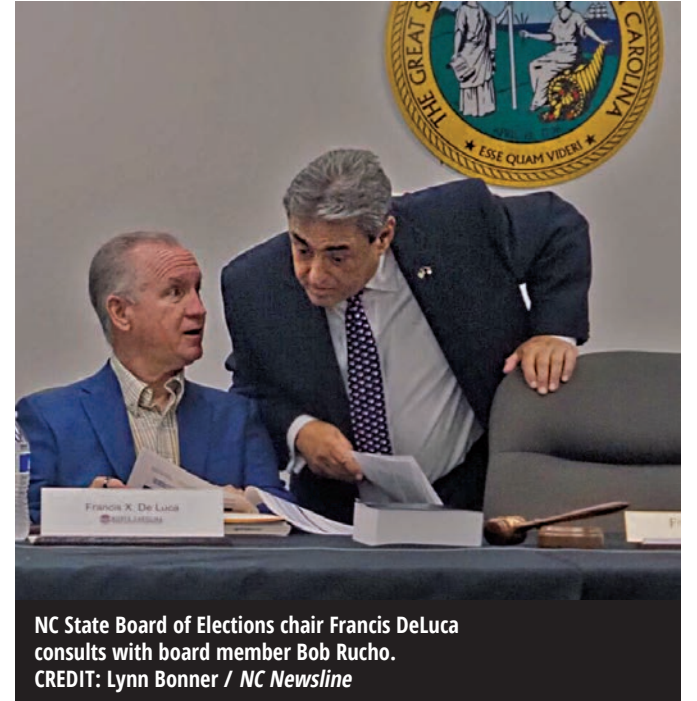
The Republican National Committee and the state Republican party made the same claim when it sought to purge 225,000 voters from the rolls.

As part of Griffin's suit, the state Court of Appeals ordered the Board to gather the missing voter information.

The goal of the data collection is to comply with the Court of Appeals order and resolve the lawsuits, Hayes said.

"I intend to follow the law, both the letter and spirit," Hayes said. "I believe that this will instill confidence in our elections, and I have said election security and voter access are just two sides of the same coin." ::

This article appears courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline through Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



NC State Board of Elections chair Francis DeLuca consults with board member Bob Rucho. CREDIT: Lynn Bonner / NC Newsline

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

GET TESTED

FREE Confidential Testing
Rapid HIV | Rapid HEP C
Chlamydia & Gonorrhea

WALK-IN TESTING

Monday - Thursday
8:30 am - 6:00 pm
Friday 8:30 am - 4:00 pm



STAY HEALTHY

Gay Friendly Primary Care
HIV Specialty Care
PrEP and PEP

Affinity

HEALTH CENTER

877.647.6363
455 LAKESHORE PKWY.
ROCK HILL, SC 29730

affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested



clgbtcc.org




WE ARE THE CAROLINAS
JOIN TODAY!

Anti-LGBTQ+ policy revisions could take protections out of Johnston County schools

The revisions come out of a majority right-leaning school board representing the system



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

Schools in Johnston County – home to North Carolina towns like Smithfield, Clayton and Benson, among others – may soon see a crackdown on LGBTQ+ protections through a few revisions set to go up for vote this summer. The same set of policy changes could also eliminate Pride flags from all school buildings.

The Johnston County School Board is considering a set of agenda items that come from prior LGBTQ+ related complaints made by parents and students in the school system and by a few of the board members themselves, as reported on by *Raleigh News and Observer*.

In one of the changes, the board is considering revising the policy on the distribution and display of non-school material, in addition to seeking the removal of the Pride flag from all school buildings, inside and out.

The revised policy says “principals and teachers will limit displays such as signs and flags in schools and classrooms there to only display materials that represent the United States, the state of North Carolina, Johnston County, the school name, mascot, post-secondary institutions, school sponsored events, sponsorships, military flags, family photos, student art and or the approved curriculum.”

Citing complaints about some teachers having Pride flags in their classrooms by

parents, Board member and chair of the Policy Committee Kevin Donovan said he was told Pride flags are becoming a distraction in the classroom. He also stated that some students have raised similar issues. “We are supposed to be student centered, all students. So take it all out and just focus on the curriculum, that’s it,” Donovan said.



Johnston County, N.C. wants to remove all references to LGBTQ+ culture from all of their schools.

“Students are a captive audience within a classroom,” said Board Chair Lynn Andrews. “They don’t have a choice, and we’re just trying to make sure that our focus is the main thing.”

A few members on the board were more outspoken in their comments. Board member Michelle Antoine, referencing a bill that passed the NC House that bans all but official government flags from flying on government property, including schools, said that the wording was added to the district policy because of the “objectionable” things that some teachers display in their classroom to promote personal agendas.

Board member April Lee questioned Antoine’s comment concerning agendas, who confirmed it was the display of Pride flags, that they were not curriculum related, and could lead to values in students that

parents could have a problem with.

Lee pushed back on Antoine’s round of comments, arguing that the display of the Pride flag is a way for teachers to let LGBTQ students know that they’ll be respected for who they are in that classroom.

“We have teachers who have different views about that, and if they choose not to have it up, that’s fine,” Lee said, “but nobody’s actively trying to teach a kid how to be gay by putting up a Pride flag.”

In addition to the removal of Pride flags, the board is also considering removing sexual orientation and gender identity from its policies on cyber bullying, discrimination and employee hiring. The original proposal on the term removals came last March, around the time that DEI purges were happening in the federal government by orders from the Trump administration. A vote on the issue had been tabled since then, only to come back in a new, yet more sanitized version of the previous version.

The updated policies no longer lists any specific group as being protected against discrimination, including race, color, religion and ancestry. In their place, the policies would include a hyperlink to a state statute on school bullying. The state statute does

mention specific groups, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

“What is a gender identity?” Antoine said at the meeting, “I don’t know. I have no idea what a gender identity is. I know there are two genders. I mean, you just want to get down to brass tacks.”

Antoine added that the change is needed due to the Trump administration’s threat to cut federal funding from schools that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. “We are trying to comply with the federal mandate from the executive order and not lose federal funding and also comply with the state mandate of the statute.” Antoine said this policy does both things.

The board’s non-Republican members have urged their colleagues to hold off on the policy changes. “My concern is we are setting ourselves up,” said Carroll. “We’re digging ourselves in a hole for a whole lot of issues, accusing teachers of pushing personal agendas.”

Of those on the school board, a majority of members identify as Republicans, and there’s a bill in the legislature to make the elections partisan, to try to increase GOP control. Johnston is North Carolina’s seventh largest school district, with 37,000 students. ::

psst....

Knowing Looks Good on You!

FREE TESTING: • RAPID HIV • HEP C • SYPHILIS

RAO RAO ASSIST .ORG

ASK ABOUT PrEP

Schedule an appointment online or call 704.237.8793

Connie J. Vetter, Esq.
Attorney at Law, PLLC

Your LGBTQ+ Law Attorney
serving Clients from across
North Carolina

Website/Email at CJVLaw.com

Talk/Text 704-333-4000

Trump admin to cut LGBTQ+ suicide prevention hotline in July

As of July 17, the National Suicide Prevention Hotline will no longer offer specialized support to LGBTQ callers, by order of the Trump administration.

The Trevor Project, the nonprofit that has provided the specialized lines for callers identifying themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ community, had received a stop-work order for the extra service on Wednesday. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the agency within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) overseeing the hotline, confirmed the decision.

The potential cutting of the LGBTQ+ 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline had been leaked in a 2026 budget draft last month. In reaction to the news at that time, more than 100 House members had signed a letter urging the health department to preserve the LGBTQ+ option, with seven senators writing and signing their own response to

the lifeline cuts.

In a statement that referred to "L.G.B.+ youth services," noticeably omitting the "T" for transgender, SAMHSA said that the decision was based on a desire to "no longer silo" those services and to "focus on serving all help seekers." A spokesman for the White House responded to an inquiry by referring to that statement, while a spokeswoman for H.H.S. said that the LGBTQ+ section had "run out of congressionally directed funding" and that continuing to fund it would jeopardize the entire hotline.

For clarity, the hotline will still maintain the same overall funding of \$520 million. By cutting the specialized lines to the LGBTQ+ section, only \$33 million will be saved by the effort.

The White House Office of Management and Budget previously had an entirely different reason for getting rid of the hotline section, stating that the line was a place "where children are encouraged to em-

brace radical gender ideology by 'counselors' without consent or knowledge of their parents."

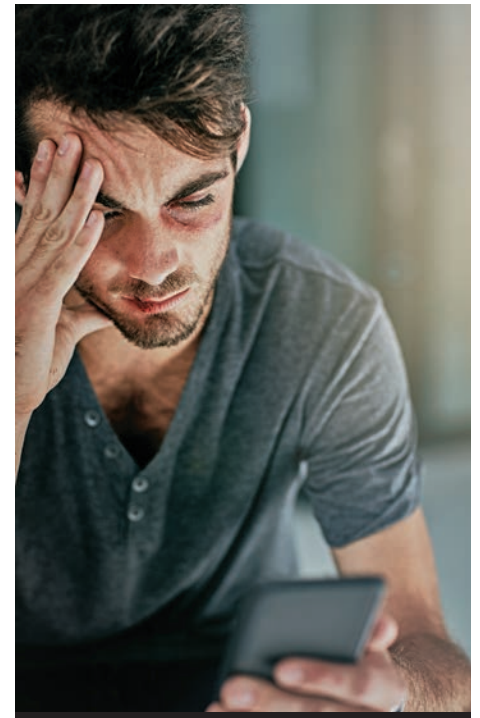
In a response to the cuts, The Trevor Project issued a statement, saying it would continue to provide crisis services through its own hotline.

"I want every LGBTQ+ young person to know that you are worthy, you are loved and you belong, despite this heartbreaking news," said Jaymes Black, the organization's chief executive. "The Trevor Project's crisis counselors are here for you 24/7, just as we always have been."

While the Trevor Project has made clear their intention to provide counseling services for LGBTQ+ youth, no word has been forthcoming about any such services available for senior or middle age members of our community in need.

The government's decision to end the specific LGBTQ+ aspect of the 988 service could drastically impact the number of people the Trevor Project serves. In 2024, counselors there helped about 500,000 people, of which 231,000 came through the 988 line, said Zach Eisenstein, a spokesman for the organization. ::

— Jonathan Golian



The Trevor Project will continue to offer emergency support for LGBTQ+ youth.

Supreme Court rules in favor of anti-LGBTQ+ parents

A day after the tenth anniversary of the landmark case decision that legalized same-sex marriage, *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of parents seeking to opt their kids out of reading LGBTQ literature.

In a 6-3 vote, with the conservative members making up the majority vote, the court backed the opinion of parents who want to pull their elementary school-aged children from lessons involving queer-themed books, if they have religious objections to the material.

The case had been brought to the high court by Maryland parents who had objected to the Montgomery County Board of Education's decision not to allow an opt-out possibility for their children, claiming that their First Amendment rights to religious expression had been violated.

In 2022, the school board of Montgomery, which sits just outside of Washington, revised its English language arts curriculum to include more story

books with LGBTQ+ elements in an effort to better reflect some of the families whose children attended their schools. Among the approved books were "Uncle Bobby's Wedding," which features a gay character who is getting married, and "Born Ready," about a transgender child who wants to identify as a boy.

Challenging the move, religious members of the community, as well as a parent group called Kids First sued the school system. The groups stated that they had a right to protect their children from being taught content that conflicts with their religious beliefs by expressing support for same-sex relationships and transgender rights. A federal judge, along with a Richmond, Va.-based Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, ruled in favor of the school board, forcing the issue upward to the Supreme Court.

Writing the opinion for the majority in this case, Justice Samuel Alito wrote the following: "The board's introduction of the 'LGBTQ+ inclusive' storybooks, along with

its decision to withhold opt-outs, places an unconstitutional burden on the parents' rights to the free exercise of their religion."

In a rare move and signal of her profound disappointment in the ruling, Justice Sonia Sotomayor announced her dissent from the bench. Joined by Justices Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson, Sotomayor wrote that public schools "offer to children of all faiths and backgrounds an education and an opportunity to practice living in our multicultural society."

"That experience," she continued, "is critical to our nation's civic vitality. Yet it will become a mere memory if children must be insulated from exposure to ideas and concepts that may conflict with their parents' religious beliefs."

Justin Driver, a law professor at Yale, said the decision was deeply problematic.



The Supreme Court has backed previous religious rights cases, most recently in 2023. CREDIT: Facebook

"This decision succeeds in opening a Pandora's box in countless classrooms located in our nation's public schools," he said. "It unwisely grants parents and students the authority to, in effect, veto individual school lessons and assignments, thereby wrecking educational havoc." ::

— Jonathan Golian



Jim Yarbrough
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

Executive Offices For Rent

PO Box 221841 • Charlotte • NC • 28222

Ph. (704) 965-5214 Fx. (704) 531-1361



'No Kings' protest brings out thousands in CLT and surrounding regions

In opposition to the Trump administration for the increasingly hostile immigration operations ICE has employed throughout the country, the "No Kings" march and rally was held in Uptown Charlotte June 14. The multitude of events also acted in direct response to the military parade Donald Trump ordered to honor Flag Day, the 250th anniversary of the Army's establishment, and Trump's birthday.

The main event kicked off around 11 a.m., with Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officers estimating around 6,000 people coming out to demonstrate in First Ward Park, several carrying signs with slogans protesting the harm caused to fellow citizens.

"As the daughter of an immigrant, it is so disheartening to see so many of our neighbors, our community members, our people just being forcibly taken from their home," one person told WBTV as they attended the rally.

From 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD)

noted they were aware protests were taking place in advance and planned on maintaining the safety of individuals coming to demonstrate peacefully, as is their right under the First Amendment.

"The safety of Charlotte residents and visitors is our top priority," a spokesperson for the local agency wrote. "We're committed to protecting everyone's right to peacefully gather and encourage everyone coming to Uptown to enjoy the city responsibly."

Charlotte was not alone among the cities where demonstrations took place. Nearby towns such as Albemarle, Waxhaw, Concord, Monroe, Davidson and Mooresville are just a few among an estimated sixty protests that took place in the state.

Monroe police made a similar statement, echoing those from the leadership of CMPD, saying they "respect and support everyone's right to peacefully assemble and express their views."

"Our duty is to protect the entire com-

munity – residents, businesses, visitors and demonstrators alike," Monroe police said. "We are coordinating with our law enforcement partners and are prepared to respond and maintain the safety of the public and the integrity of a lawful protest. Anyone who breaks the law or disrupts public order will be held accountable."

As reported by the National Public Radio service, The No Kings demonstrations were put together by a coalition of more than 200 organizations, including MoveOn, the American Civil Liberties Union, American Federation of Teachers and the Communications Workers of America.

Protests were not planned in Washington, D.C., where the military parade was held, in order to draw "a clear contrast



Over 6,000 locals came together in First Ward in Uptown on June 14th, lending their faces and voices to protest ICE immigration raids that have taken place since Trump returned to the White House. CREDIT: Facebook

between our people-powered movement and the costly, wasteful, and un-American birthday parade in Washington."

As of this writing, no widespread follow-up protests have been planned or announced. ::

— Jonathan Golian

CLT Roller Derby brings out a double header 'Rainbow Riot' for Pride 2025

The Queen City's Charlotte Roller Derby (CRD) team came in hot for Pride Month 2025, bringing the "Rainbow Riot," a double-header set of matches to the Grady Cole Center on June 21.

The team opened up the doors for fans at 3 p.m. Around 4:15 p.m., the starting match commenced as CRD split up for an exhibition session, with members of the team split into the Chromatic Crushers and the Neon Knockouts. After the winners were decided between the two sides for the day's first game, Charlotte's team took on the visiting team, Kansas City's Roller Warriors (KCRW) around 6:25pm.

The KCRW comes from a similar background as CRD, starting off from a

collection of underground games in 2004 and growing into a distinct sport league that has captured the hearts of fans in their home turf of Kansas City. The Roller Warriors organization is also one of the founding members of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, playing an active role in growing the sport and its appeal worldwide, along with CRD.

During the proceedings of the day, Charlotte's own Drag Queens and Kings took center stage, bringing additional style, flair and fun to the CRD track. The featured cast included Lolita Chanel, Liam Laughin, Dahlia DialUp and Will Charmer.

A day with the CRD team would not be complete without the fans' inclusion into

the halftime sections. In between the day's first match, the track was dedicated to letting kids and beginner skaters in on a few fun matches. During the second halftime break, everyone was invited to take part in the team-centric mayhem that was Adult Hungry Hippos and Chuck-A-Duck. There was also a raffle, with tickets going toward winning VIP seating for the next home game, as well as CRD swag and a photo with the team.

After the game, the team invited all that



The Charlotte Roller Derby team's LGBTQ+ members regularly stun fans with their athletic bravado at the Grady Cole Center. CREDIT: Lee Flythe

attended to come out for an after party at East Charlotte's Tommy's Pub. ::

— Jonathan Golian

Connie Vetter receives Charlotte Black Pride's Inaugural Achievement Award

On June 14, Charlotte Black Pride held the "Black & Bold" Gala, celebrating 20 years that the LGBTQ+ organization has been at the forefront in helping and advocating for Charlotte's black queer community. At the event, longtime supporter Connie Vetter was awarded the Inaugural Achievement Award for her contributions to the city and CBP.

The Inaugural Achievement Award is given to recipients by CBP in recognition of early efforts dating back to the organization's inception and the lasting impact by those recognized.

Vetter traces her efforts in the Charlotte LGBTQ+ community back to the early '90s when she served as an activist for marginalized communities. In 1994 she opened her first law office in Charlotte. She continues to practice law

focusing on the needs of the LGBTQ+ community today.

"Absolutely," said Vetter. "That's part of why I went to law school, was to marry my activism and be able to use what I was learning as an attorney," Vetter told Qnotes.

In the many years that CBP has been active, Vetter has been a dedicated asset in one form or another. Whether dedicating her time when able, or providing for other needs of the organization, Vetter has been a constant supporter.

When asked about how she felt about Charlotte Black Pride's efforts and their many years of activity, Vetter gave a glowing endorsement. "I love their work, and from where they've started to what all they're doing is phenomenal and much needed, especially in this time. And you know, they've got a number of events going

on. They do things throughout the year, and I just couldn't believe in them more," Vetter said.

Jesse Roberts, a member of Charlotte's LGBTQ community as well as a friend of Vetter's, had this to say in reflection of the award on June 14, as written in a Facebook post.

"To say that I am proud of this incredible human would be a gross understatement.. [She] received the Inaugural Impact Award for her contributions to Charlotte Black Pride over the past two decades," Roberts wrote. "The action she puts behind her passion for diversity, equity and the inclusion of all people is inspiring, to say the very least. She is more than an incredible attorney – she is an advocate. Her friendship continues to challenge me to be a better version of myself on so many levels."

Other winners of the 2025 Inaugural Achievement Award include Earl D. Fowlkes Jr., Pastor Roger Hayes, David & Tracy Taylor and Dianna Ward. ::

— Jonathan Golian



Connie Vetter poses next to fellow community member Jermaine Lee with her award at Charlotte Black Pride's "20 Years: Black & Bold" Gala. CREDIT: Facebook

NC Senate votes to approve bill targeting trans people and public schools

'We cannot ignore the biological realities.' – Sen. Buck Newton

by Clayton Henkel | NC Newsline

The North Carolina Senate voted Tuesday to approve a controversial bill that defines biological sex and recognizes only male and female genders, mirroring one of President Donald Trump's earliest executive orders.

"We cannot ignore the biological realities," Sen. Buck Newton told the Senate chamber in a recent floor debate.

House Bill 805 started as a noncontroversial measure to prevent the sexual exploitation of both adults and minors. It passed the House in May 113-0. In recent weeks, however, Senate Republicans transformed it into a catchall for a collection of conservative social agenda priorities, including provisions that target transgender individuals

and provide parents with expanded rights to challenge school library books.

The vote on the bill, which was 27-4, precipitated a lengthy and intense debate about Senate rules and an additional series of procedural votes. Most Democratic senators said that they chose to vote "present" on the matter because of their objection to the way a consensus bill was amended with items they argue were not germane to the original subject and therefore in violation of Senate rules.

As the Senate voting machines do not include an option for members to vote "present" like many other legislative bodies, however, Senate Republicans responded by moving to treat the "present"

voters as if they were excused from voting — a status they argued would bar those members from taking any further votes on the bill if it were to come again before the Senate.

At one point, citing an 18th Century law that purported to impose a fine of \$10 on lawmakers who fail to carry out their duties, **Senate Democratic leader Sydney Batch of Wake County** offered to make a payment of cash for each of her members who voted "present."

In the end, Senate Rules Chair Bill Rabon (R-Brunswick, Columbus and New Hanover) used a procedural move to advance the bill to its third reading where it was approved on a voice vote — thus diffusing the controversy.

amended bill, saying, "They're [Republicans] playing politics. They don't actually care. They're doing it for a show. They're doing it to go ahead and get us to be silent."

Newton responded by offering yet another amendment that would prohibit public school students from sharing sleeping quarters with a member of the other biological sex during field trips or school sponsored events. The amendment was approved on a partisan vote.

Democratic amendments that would have raised the age to marry to 18, appropriated more funds for the state victims' compensation fund, and required the surrender of a firearm upon the issuance of a domestic violence protective order were rejected by the Republican majority. Republicans also defeated a motion by Sen. Kandie Smith (D-Edgecombe, Pitt) that would have divided the bill into two different sections so that she and her colleagues would have been enabled to vote in favor of the bill's noncontroversial provisions.

The Senate's version of HB 805 would also ban the use of state funds for transgender surgeries for any prisoner incarcerated in the state correction system.

The statute of limitations on medical malpractice lawsuits brought by people who have undergone a gender transition procedure would be extended from three years to ten. The legislation would also require that the original birth certificate be preserved at the state and county whenever a transgender person seeks to have their gender changed on that legal document.

The original portion of the bill, which won unanimous support in the House, enacts guardrails on online pornography. It creates age verification and consent requirements for individuals appearing in pornographic images, provides for the removal of those images, and creates enforcement mechanisms. The Attorney General would be empowered to impose a fine of up to \$10,000 a day for each day a pornographic image remains online when non-consensual content is not removed after 72-hours of being notified.

HB 805 was further amended last week to excuse students from specific classroom discussions, activities or assigned readings that the student, parent or guardian believes would impose a substantial burden on the student's religious beliefs. Parents would also have access to a searchable list of school library books, with the power to mandate which library books may not be borrowed by the student.

The North Carolina Values Coalition said the bill attempts to solve "the obscenity problem in our schools" related to curriculum and library books. The ACLU of North Carolina said the legislation amounts to harmful attacks on transgender people, and a desire to push them out of public life. ::

Rob Schofield contributed to this report. This story appears courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline through Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Sen. Buck Newton reworked a Bill intended to protect people from sexual exploitation to one that targets gender affirming surgery and public school library books. CREDIT: Facebook



Senate Democratic leader Sydney Batch of Wake County. Credit: Facebook

During the debate on the original vote, Senator Batch said the bill that was written to protect children was "hijacked, gutted" and loaded up with culture war amendments. After the session, Batch blasted the

PROFESSIONAL BODY PIERCING & FINE JEWELRY

Experienced Piercers • Safe & Sterile • Award-Winning

www.sadupiercing.org

1515 Central Avenue
Charlotte, NC

Services By Appointment - Book Online

HOME OF THE EMPTY PLATE CLUB!

2718 Monroe Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28205
704-374-1232

101-A Old Statesville Rd.
Huntersville, NC 28078
704-948-3959

Email: lupie@lupiescafe.com
www.lupiescafe.com

The future of Charlotte's gaming scene lays with LGBTQ+ leaders

Will Jeffcoat-McLeod and Noel Mills continue the work laid out by previous local organizations?



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

Even before retro arcades like Pins Mechanical and Abari made their debuts in Charlotte, our city had a rich history of players coming together to embrace gaming with the larger community. In the 2010s, organizations like Koyobi, Set Play, Potions & Pixels and PVP Hub operated & collaborated, bringing a variety of fighting game tournaments along with exhibitions of newer titles for those who couldn't afford the \$60 and up pricing on day one.

To this day, P&P and PVP Hub are still set up at venues in the city, bringing Charlotte's community together to experience titles past and present, including independent games made by local teams and solo developers. Their work continues to extend the legacies of those who came from a golden area of gatherings, stretching from Concord to Belmont, UNCC to Central Piedmont Community College, and sets the stage for newer organizations to thrive, bringing about a similar energy.

Curiously, two of the newest organizations staking their own claims come directly from the LGBTQ+ community. While Charlotte Gaymers Network has been around since late 2020, the organization itself is still relatively new in terms of years in operation. The newest of all, Gaming Lounge CLT, comes from the mind of Noel Mills, both a casual gamer and collector that looks to bring group experiences to the Queen City's general public.

As of mid-2025, CGN took flight under new management, as Will Jeffcoat-McLeod took the helm as executive director earlier in June, giving CGN a new vision for its future.

McLeod has less than two years of being a part of CGN. His initial inspiration for joining the organization comes from a sunny day during Charlotte Pride in 2023.

"I saw the Charlotte Gaymers Network float during the Pride parade and thought right then, 'Oh, that's kind of a cool thing,'" McLeod recounted to *Qnotes*. "A friend of a mutual friend of mine and my husband invited me to their Discord, and that's where I got familiar with everyone."

"Within three weeks, I had signed up for the Patreon and started going to the Insider Bash house parties. By December, I had signed up to become a Discord moderator, because something that I wanted to do was to give back to the community."

McLeod also mentioned that at the time he and his husband hadn't heard of any gaming organizations over the border in their hometown of Columbia, S.C., so coming up to volunteer with the organization occasionally became a special event. From volunteer to online moderator, and then on to assistant director of operations, as positions opened and time was poured into the organization, McLeod redoubled his time



Despite any challenges faced in recent years, Charlotte's LGBTQ+ gaming community continues to boom.
CREDIT: Robbie Bussard / Noel Mills

in different roles. And now, as we see in the present, McLeod has taken on the lead position in the non-profit.

With the turning of leadership, McLeod is also attempting to focus on a bit of clean-up left to him by the last director. During the five years that CGN has been around, Jonny Saldana made many connections near the beginning, allowing the organization to lift off at a quick pace, but in the process, there were also many relationships that were damaged, particularly in the long-held gaming scene of the city.

Inside and out, McLeod is looking for a way to change the script and be open to the issues that exist. "I'm here to listen," he says.

"I want to see what our community as

a whole needs, and not just the LGBTQ one, but also the gaming community," McLeod explained. "I want us to be inclusive to everyone, because our motto is 'Welcome Home.'"

"I've had a few people tell me that they don't feel welcome, not because of Jonny, but just in general. And that is something that I strive to [do] - make our people feel they are welcome at our events, at any of our events."

While the new director did hint he had productions in the works, McLeod said that his main focus for the moment was to stabilize the organization and get used to the role. McLeod has also told *Qnotes* that all who have something to share should contact him at CGN's future events or on the organization's Discord.

Like many of those who came before him, Noel Mills was a regular at arcade venues in Charlotte, as well as some of the gaming events that occasionally popped up. However, it was his visits to South Charlotte's Sidelines and conversations with owner Kevin Cooper that brought the idea of his own traveling game setups to life.

"One of our conversations eventually led into him wanting to start a gaming bar, which I offered to help him kick that off by just bringing my games every Thursday since I was already there," Mills recounted. "And when he would eventually start this bar, [I reasoned that] its name would already be associated with games, and it's already been inside a bar."

After some time solely at Sidelines, Mills had already seen its potential to bring people out with the prototype Gaming Lounge outgrowing its previous home. From Super Abari to Chasers, Divine Barrel to 7th Street Market, the project became a weekly practice for Mills, bringing out the games to public spaces around Charlotte. "...at that point, I decided to make it an organization," Mills said.

The Gaming Lounge, depending on the night and place, adds up to a curated selection of titles and systems, all varying on console generations and what Mills thinks the crowd will enjoy most on a night. The secret to his success? Listening to the people already enjoying what he is doing.

"I try to bring games that people played when they were growing up, or games that the parents have played. Particularly when I'm at places like [Super] Abari, I get a lot of parents playing games they played when they were kids [and] with their kids, showing them some of the little secrets. Or if I'm at Sidelines, I'll get a lot of the older crowd hovering around the NES or Super Nintendo games that they grew up with," Mills explained to *Qnotes*. "The whole goal is to let people relive their childhood."

When asked where he finds everything that plays a part in his setups, Mills said that everything comes from local retro shops in the region. Whether hitting the Grid on Wilkinson Blvd., or heading out to Gamer's Alley in Gastonia, whatever funds Mills has goes right back into the ecosystem that makes his team's efforts possible.

In a post-COVID world, where the pandemic disrupted much of the previous ideas of coming out into group settings, people like McLeod and Mills, among others in the city, face an uphill battle in their pursuits to continue where other organizations left off. There is also the current and next generation of gamers that never got the chance to enjoy third spaces like arcades or a world where an internet connection doesn't make gathering in front of a television necessary.

By bringing the close social ties back to video games, while the process will likely be long, both organizations endeavor in a worthwhile effort of connecting people to one another. ::



Will Jeffcoat-McLeod, reportedly the next executive director of Charlotte Gaymers Network (left), and Noel Mills, creator of the non-profit Gaming Lounge CLT (right).
CREDIT: Robbie Bussard / Noel Mills

Charlotte Black Pride celebrates 20 years

Annual festivities honor the culture of Charlotte's Black LGBTQ+ community



by L'Monique King
QNotes Staff Writer

Charlotte Black Pride is celebrating a milestone: their 20th anniversary. In an effort to capture the spirit, origin and hopes for the future, we've come at the story from multiple angles and talked with original founders, current organizers and attendees for the event. Here's our look at what Charlotte Black Pride has meant to so many, beginning with the recollections of **Roxanne Stanard**.



Roxanne Stanard

Four years had passed since Stanard had last visited Charlotte from Newark, New Jersey when she returned to the Queen City and also attended the first Charlotte Black Pride (CBP) celebration.

Her move to the area was a reluctant labor of love. She didn't want to leave her partner Chris Roseberry (1948-2013), who was soon to be a grandmother and wouldn't be able to join Stanard permanently until a year later. However, she wanted and needed to be near her mother – who was experiencing some health issues.

Despite those challenges, the couple longed to establish connections in Charlotte's Black LGBTQ+ community and hoped Roseberry would find a connection with a masculine colony of women. Their hopes and needs led them to Charlotte's first Black Pride celebration, and a series of events held at different venues all over the city. It was a welcome relief for the two northern transplants, who found what they were looking for, and more.

"It was good," Stanard recalls. "It was slightly disorganized, but in a good way <chuckling> and you got to pick and choose

what you wanted to do, what event, what venue. Everyone was given name tags with their names and pictures on them. Somehow, our photos and names were reversed. My picture had my partner's name and hers had mine <joyous laughter>. We had a great time and kept those name tags forever."

It's clear Stanard misses the partner she shared a life and love with for nearly 23 years, and numerous CBP events. When asked about her thoughts of the event in recent years, she beamed. "Today it's more structured – with more people, more events and the expo is bigger. I like that it has evolved and grown. It's something I look forward to every year."

But why did Charlotte need a Black Pride? What's the big deal you might ask, especially considering the city had a general pride celebration (complete with a parade) that predated CBP with a history dating back to the late 20th century. Says CBP Co-Founder, Jermaine Nakia Lee: "For 20 years, Charlotte Black Pride has hosted a cultural celebration that amplifies African-American LGBTQ+ identity, history and vitality. Every year, I meet individuals, couples and families attending their first Pride celebration. The sense of joy, belonging and affirmation they express overwhelms my heart and makes me incredibly proud."

As for the celebration's sustainability, he's pleased but not surprised. "Interestingly enough, my co-founders and I (Damon Blackmon, Lynkoya "Korey" Handy and Monica Simpson) were very sure that the Charlotte community was suited to sustain a Black pride Celebration. That confidence might have been coupled with a pinch of ego and naivete, but it all worked out.

Monica Simpson, the only woman of the original founding members, has since relocated to Atlanta where she continues to be engaged in pride initiatives, social justice



Monica Simpson



Charlotte Black Pride in 2024.
CREDIT: Facebook

and reproductive rights work. She recalled her time on the CBP board, and is proud she helped create affirming and celebratory spaces for the Black LGBTQ+ community. "I wanted to see us reflected in the larger LGBTQ+ community and see our culture being centered," she offered.

As for what has since been built from the groundwork she helped lay, Simpson said, "I'm very proud to see the legacy is continuing. It's also powerful to witness how new leadership is taking on organiz-

ing. This is a time, a critical time, where we [must] be on the front lines of the work for LGBTQ liberation."

Today CBP's board has grown to include 11 board members. Shann Fulton, Chair; Miles Perry Co-Chair (youngest board member); Markis Williams, Director of Operation; Gelisa Stitt, Treasurer; Cany Neverson, Secretary; Rell Lowery, Trans Liaison; Clarence Williams, Youth Liaison; Quandrico Rutledge-Wade, Director of Entertainment and Pageantry; Lorenzo Tucker, Volunteer

Charlotte Black Pride: Black & Bold Events

July 12

Event: Charlotte Black Pride Black & Bold Kiki Ball
Location: XLNC Dance Studio, 3716 W. W.T. Harris Blvd.
Time: 3 - 8 p.m.
Link: <https://charlotteblackpride.org/>

July 13

Event: Charlotte Black Pride 2025 Pageant
Location: Club Cabaret, 101 N. Center St., Hickory.
Time: 6 p.m. until ?
Ticket price: \$10
Link: <https://charlotteblackpride.org/>

July 17

Event: What's the LGBT? Charlotte Black Pride Townhall
Location: Wonderworld West End, 1545

W. Trade St.
Time: 6:30 - 9:45 p.m.
Link: <https://charlotteblackpride.org/>

July 18

Event: The Kick Back CBP Meet & Greet
Location: The Starlight on 22nd, 422 East 22nd St.
Link: <https://charlotteblackpride.org/>

July 19

Event: Charlotte Black Pride Festival
Location: West End Complex, 1600 W. Trade St.
Description: Annual free event also includes the opportunity to take part in the VIQ (Very Important Queer) Experience (ticket price \$75) and includes a party on the roof with bar, swag, performers and more.
Time: 12 - 6 p.m.

For more information, visit <https://charlotteblackpride.org/>

Coordinator; Rayvon Moore, Chaplain, Sherman Jones, Member at Large (newest board member) and **Kelsey Jones**, Marketing and Communications Director.

Jones, who joined the board last year, happened upon CBP without too much of an idea of just what the organization offered outside of the social scene. "So I joined the board and learned that it was more. It was education, awareness and real community."



Kelsey Jones

As for the organization's future goals, Jones said: "We want to reach the people and let them know we are here, queer and Black and brown! Personally, I am excited (about this year's events), the power in bringing community together and the legacy of CBP. Others may have started it, but the fact that it's still happening means there's a commitment to resilience, to Black excellence, to Black Queerness."

As Pride Season continues, CBP is gearing up for another memorable week of celebrations and events. "We have five amazing events July 12 -19," Jones offered enthusiastically. "This year will be the first year of rebranding the Expo - Charlotte Black Pride Fest, which will feature hotter talent, bigger and better corporation partnerships and more information centered

on health awareness. It's not something you want to miss."

As for what the future holds, original co-founding member **Jermaine Nakia Lee** left us with thoughts on what message he might give to CBP leadership making things happen 10 years from now



Jermaine Nakia Lee

in 2035. "Prayerfully, conditions for queer folk in America have advanced, not further eroded. So, I offer this, 'Never forget why we began. We started Charlotte Black Pride to create space where Black LGBTQ+ people could be fully seen, celebrated and empowered - because those spaces didn't exist for us in Charlotte two decades ago. Hold tight to that spirit of visibility, resilience and radical joy [and] stay rooted in community. Pride isn't just a weekend of parties and performances - it's protest, healing, remembrance and cultural preservation. Listen deeply to your elders and uplift our youth. Continue to make room for the most marginalized among us - especially our Black trans siblings, our artists, our advocates and those who feel unseen.

"And finally, *protect the legacy*. Charlotte Black Pride must remain Black governed and managed. Document the journey, honor those who paved the way and lead with vision — not ego." ::



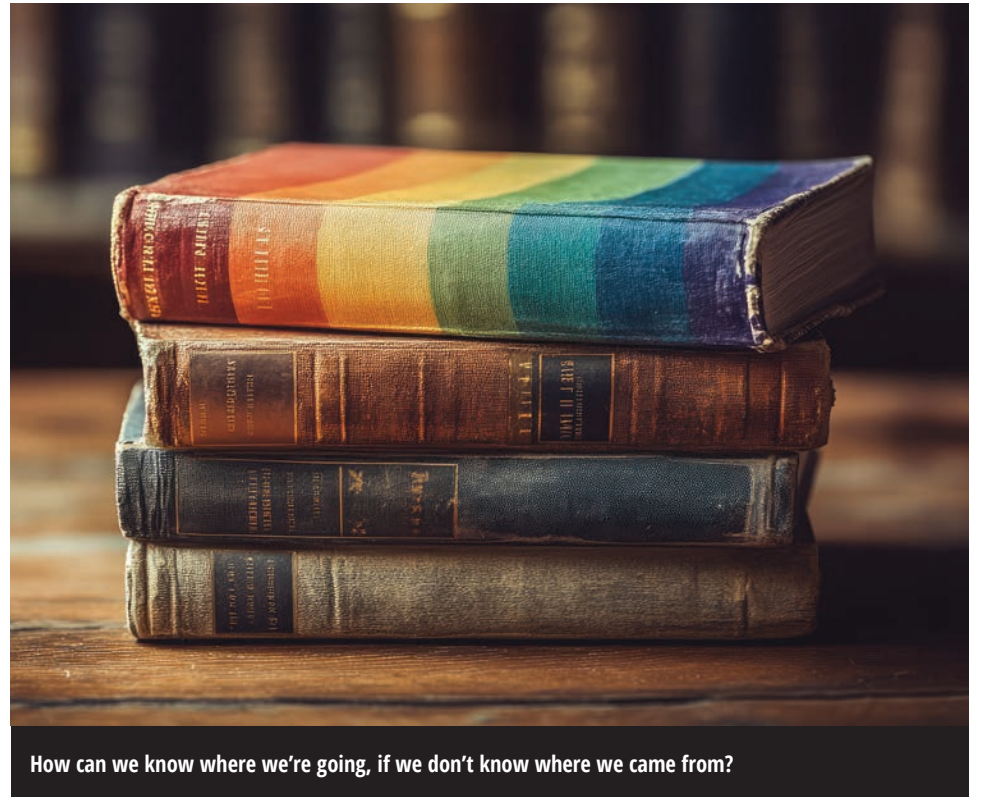
Jermaine Nakia Lee, Damon Blackmon, Ontario St. James and Essence Iman (first Mr. and Mrs. Charlotte Black Pride), Monica Simpson, Lynkoya "Korey" Handy at the first ever Charlotte Black Gay Pride. CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough

Know Your LGBTQ+ History

Part 1 of 2 Q&A examines local, regional and national aspects of Queer and Pride culture

by Jonathan Golian, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore | Qnotes

Looking back at events in our history and taking note of happenings in the here and now can sometimes provide us with insight about how we should proceed in the future. Here's our first installation in a series of two that looks at key aspects of LGBTQ+ culture and related events in Charlotte and the United States at large. Take a look at our questions here, then visit **the next page** to find the answers and test your own level of knowledge.



How can we know where we're going, if we don't know where we came from?

1. What date did the series of events known as the Stonewall Uprising occur, marking a pivotal moment in LGBTQ+ history?
2. What event for the LGBTQ+ community did the Stonewall Uprising directly inspire?
3. Which two cities in the United States had the most attendees for their Pride Parades in 2024?
4. The National MX Pageant is a drag competition that welcomes contestants who identify as male, female, non-binary, trans or any other gender identity. Who was the winner of the 2024 contest?
5. What is the name of a prominent figure in the LGBTQ+ community (now deceased), who is often recognized for their contributions to civil rights and has connections to North Carolina?
6. What is the significance of the rainbow flag in LGBTQ+ Culture?
7. Who was North Carolina's first openly gay mayor?
8. What was the first year Charlotte hosted a large-scale Pride parade?
9. What Charlotte-based organization supports LGBTQ+ youth?
10. What year was the first Charlotte Pride festival, as it is known today, held?
11. What is the name of the LGBTQ+ library at UNCC?
12. Who was the first LGBTQ+ person to run for city Council in Charlotte?
13. What popular drag bar in Charlotte in the 1980s is now a Dunkin Donuts?
14. Who is the most well-known LGBTQ+ city council person in Charlotte?
15. Who was the most widely known LGBTQ+ activist in Charlotte during the 1970s?

Know Your LGBTQ+ History

Answers to the trivia questions on page 11

by Jonathan Golian, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore | Qnotes Staff

Here you'll find the answers to our collection of questions examining multiple aspects of LGBTQ+ Pride, Queer culture and other significant related events.
Know your history, know your self.

1. The Stonewall Uprising took place beginning on June 28, 1969. The six days that make up the protests over LGBTQ+ rights are most often now referred to as a rebellion, or uprising, especially by veterans of those events. The change of language from "riots," which the period in time is sometimes referred to, is rooted in how police spoke of the landmark events, justifying their use of force.



2. The Stonewall Uprising directly inspired the creation of Pride Month. On an unknown specific date in 1977, students at UNCC celebrated with a campus Pride event. The year 1981 would see the first North Carolina Pride held in Durham and would mark the first Charlotte event, created by a local group called the Queen City Quordinators.



3. The two cities with the largest-attended Pride parades in the United States for 2024 were New York City and San Francisco. The NYC Pride March and Parade brought out an estimated 2.5 million, while San Francisco's series of events brought over a million.



4. Charlotte's Nova Stella (shown right), who also captured the titles of MX Charlotte Pride in 2022 and Miss East Tennessee 2020.



5. Bayard Rustin (shown), a human rights activist known for his work with the Civil Rights Movement. Rustin served as a key organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, working with Martin Luther King Jr. as an advisor. The openly gay man and Queer Black icon's connections to North Carolina began when he tested the first of the Freedom Rides through the state, at that time called "The Journey of Reconciliation," a non-violent protest against segregated interstate bus travel. He and other activists were arrested for violating the state's segregation laws after refusing to move to the back of the bus. Rustin and others arrested were forced to serve twenty-two days on a chain gang.

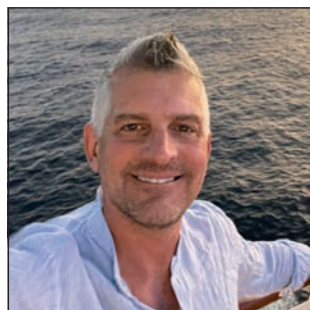


first gathering, four LGBTQ+ youth attended



6. The Rainbow flag directly symbolizes LGBTQ+ pride and the multiple aspects of the social movement. The colors reflect the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community and the spectrum of human sexuality & gender. Created by artist and activist Gilbert Baker (shown below), it was first displayed in San Francisco on June 25, 1978.

7. Mike Nelson (shown right) served as Mayor of Carrboro, North Carolina from 1995 to 2005. He was also County Commissioner for Orange County from 2006 to 2009 and a co-founder of Equality North Carolina. Nelson remains the longest serving Mayor of Carrboro and currently lists his place of residence as Sofia, Bulgaria.



8. The year 1994 would be the first time that Charlotte would hold one of



the state's biggest Pride Parades, winning the bid for the state's traveling NC Pride parade in 1993. The Pride Parade that year happened on the second day of Pride-centric events over the weekend.

9. Since April 8, 1991, Time Out Youth has served tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ youths in their journeys of self-discovery. The idea for the organization originally came from Tonda Taylor (shown with other Time Out Youth staff and volunteers), a Charlotte resident who was attempting to help a friend find support for a teenager coming to terms with their own identity. Taylor discovered no programs existed in the city at the time and brought together a small group of human services professionals, educators, physicians and clergy who agreed with the need. In that

first gathering, four LGBTQ+ youth attended



and the organization's programs have continued to grow.

10. The first modern Charlotte Pride Festival took place in 2001 at the city's Marshall Park in uptown. The event location would remain the same through 2005, when it moved to Gateway Village, and later to the main streets of uptown Charlotte.

11. The King-Henry-Brockington LGBTQ+ Archive. Named in honor of activist and Qnotes' first editor Don King (seen below), Trans activist Sue Henry and Blake Brockington, a 2014 graduate of East Mecklenburg High School who was an advocate for trans rights and was named homecoming king at his high school as an openly transgender student.



12. Robert Sheets, a president of the early Charlotte LGBTQ+ organization known as Queen City Quordinators, ran against five other Democrats in a primary for Charlotte City Council at-large on Sept. 22, 1987. While ultimately unsuccessful, Sheets is the first-ever openly gay man to run on a ballot for city office in Charlotte.

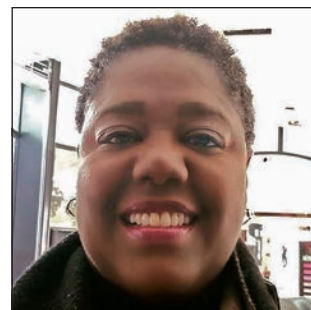


13. The Charlotte gay bar Oleen's opened in 1968. It came to be known as "The Show Bar of the South" and hosted frequent drag shows, before it closed in 1997.



The building still stands today and serves as a Dunkin' Donuts.

14. LaWana Mayfield (Democratic Party), who was first elected to the Charlotte City Council as a representative for District 3 in 2011 and remained in office until December 2, 2019. She returned to the Charlotte City Council as an at-large member on September 6, 2022 and continues to serve.



15. Don King (1942-2014) was a significant figure in the history of the LGBTQ+ rights movement in Charlotte. He was a Charlotte Observer employee who identified as a gay rights activist, at a time when such a thing was barely spoken of and a former editor for Qnotes. He played a pivotal role in promoting equality and visibility for the community. during the '70s and '80s. ::

'Lavender Men' seeks to take love out of the closet, past and present

The world is all a stage in Roger Q. Mason's film about Abraham Lincoln



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

What keeps us from being us? When it looks as though the world outside and all the people who live on this rock find something about you to be vulgar, even if you were living in a way that's true to you, does it make things safer to keep those qualities hidden?

"Lavender Men" takes a stab at that question, as well as a few related ones, from the confines of a small theater. Following an evening of work on a play about Abraham Lincoln, the stage manager, after a short but quick series of shocking incidents, takes to fantasy as they seem to summon the ghosts of Lincoln himself and a possible love interest of the former president, Elmer.

From the point the world inside the film seems to transform at most of the whims of Taffeta (Roger Q. Mason), it becomes a constant challenge to comprehend the actual reality occurring within the film. Mason, also the writer of the original stage play as well as a co-writer beside Director Lovell Holder, is masterful in how they use a thespian's imagination to such great extent.

As the hidden story of Abe (Pete Ploszek) and Elmer (Alex Esola) is told through a series of chapters, Taffeta is there through each happening, not only shifting the setting's looks when need be, but also playing any additional parts as a way to keep eyes on the two spirits as well as move their story along.

Each of the men correspond with Taffeta, whether pleading, attempting to

understand their own situation, or the occasional humorous quip to their established world-maker.

While the imaginative circumstances play out, the audience comes to know in spurts what Taffeta's interest is, showing painful moments alone along with harsh exchanges that continue to haunt the stage manager's mind. As Abe and Elmer contend with their feelings about themselves and each other, so too is Taffeta about their feelings dealing with their body image, former loves and men who only seem to use them for a cheap thrill via dating apps. The stage play coming to life within the theater is no mistake, as each player's circumstances mirror the other in one form or another.

Mason's portrayal of Taffeta is deeply sympathetic, as they depict the loneliness, longing and heart-break of the stage manager with such deep emotion. The writer, acting in their own story, makes everything feel lived and hurtfully relatable, speaking beyond queerness to the daily trial of just trying to love yourself, even when it seems like society always has something to pick at.

Ploszek and Esola's portrayals of the two friends turned eventual hidden lovers, whether true to history or just a possibility of the world Mason has created, give an amazing stage-to-screen performance. The budding love between the two is played up in such an unhurried manner that it is completely convincing by the time the "good stuff" happens, as Abe tells Taffeta during a teasing exchange. Even as each



Roger Q. Mason as Taffeta (left) gives a visual to Abe's past as both a narrator and active player through dramatic and occasionally humorous degrees.
CREDIT: Cordelia Sklansky

party involved knows the eventual end of the story, the two men draw the audience into their struggle to break fate.

The story does not have a simple way of asking "what if," and there is a beauty in that, whether glowing or sorrowful. The use of Abe and Elmer's past narratives and experiences serves only a slight purpose for Taffeta's internal struggles, as a friend and a crush are used to house the Civil War spirits throughout the film. While a happier message does come at the end, there is still a mess left behind that Mason hands over to the audience in such a raw manner, one cannot just leave things be even as the

credits roll, and we are better for it.

"Lavender Men" is sure to live in the consciousness of the viewer and their video playlist for a good while. We all have to find ways to face who we are in the light of day, and the experience can often be chaotic. However, it is incredible productions like Mason and Lovell's that bring very relatable reminders to their viewers that they are not alone in their struggles, past or present, big or small, something we all need at one moment or another. ::

"Lavender Men" is now available for viewing on most streaming services.

Q-mmunity connections 

space starting at \$22:
call **qnotes** for details
704.531.9988

Jim Yarbrough
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

Executive Offices For Rent

PO Box 221841 • Charlotte • NC • 28222

Ph. (704) 965-5214 Fx. (704) 531-1361

A Day / Night
SALON & SPA


704-713-1952

Massages 24/7

 **MCC.**
NEW LIFE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

**God loves YOU,
just the way you are!**

NEW LIFE METROPLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
SUNDAYS at 7:00 P.M. 1201 SOUTH NEW HOPE ROAD GASTONIA
Rev. Dawn Flynn, Pastor www.NewLifeMccNC.org NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com

Relax... 

to a
*therapeutic or erotic body rub
given by attractive, experienced
professionals.*

704.651.6899

4 hands available, by longest couple doing so.

www.wnoman.com

'What Is Queer Food? How We Served a Revolution' and 'Dining Out: First Dates, Defiant Nights, and Last Call Disco Fries at America's Gay Restaurants'

Out in Print

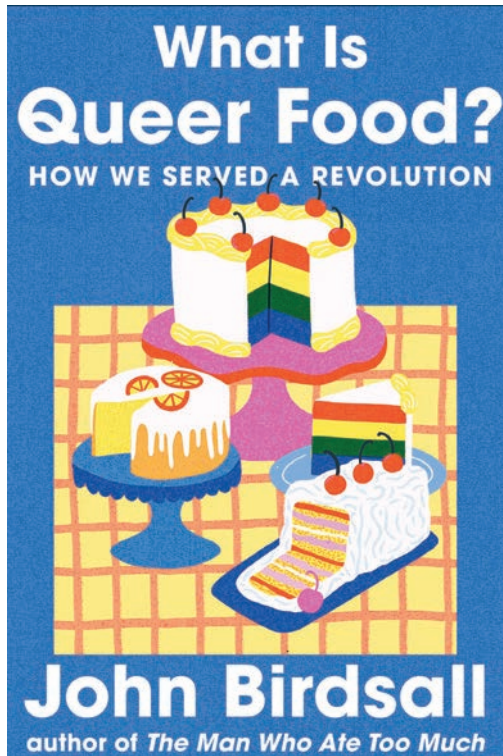


by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

"What is Queer Food? How We Served a Revolution" by John Birdsall
©2025, W.W. Norton
\$29.99
304 pages

"Dining Out: First Dates, Defiant Nights, and Last Call Disco Fries at America's Gay Restaurants" by Erik Piepenburg
©2025, Grand Central
\$30.00
352 pages

You thought a long time about who sits where. Compatibility is key for a good dinner party, so place cards were the first consideration; you have at least one left-hander on your guest list, and you figured his comfort into your seating chart. You want the con-



versation to flow, which is music to your ears. And you did a good job, but, as you'll see with these two great books on dining LGBTQIA-style, it's sometimes not who sits where, but whose recipes were used...

When you first pick up **"What Is Queer Food?"** by John Birdsall, you might miss the subtitle: "How We Served a Revolution." It's that second part that is what's important.

Starting with a basic gay and lesbian history of America, Birdsall shows how influential and (in)famous twentieth-century queer folk set aside the cruelty and discrimination they received, in order to live their lives. They couldn't speak about those things, he says, but they "sat down together" and they ate.

That suggested "a queer common purpose," says Birdsall. *"This is who we are, dahlia. This is how we feed our own. This is how we stay alive."*

Readers who love to cook, bake or entertain, collect cookbooks or use a fork will want this book. Its stories are nicely served, they're addicting, and they may send you in search of cookbooks you didn't know existed.

Sometimes, though, you don't want to be stuck in the kitchen, you want someone else to bring the grub. **"Dining Out"** by Erik Piepenburg is an often-nostalgic, lively look at LGBTQIA-friendly places to grab a meal - both now and in the past.

In his introduction, Piepenburg admits that he's a journalist, "not a historian or an academic," which colors this book, but not negatively. Indeed, his journeys to "gay restaurants" - even his generous and wide-ranging definitions of the term - happily influence how he presents his narrative about eateries and other establishments that have fed protesters, nourished budding romances, and offered audacious inclusion.

Here, there are modern tales of drag lunches and lesbian-friendly automats that offered "cheap food" nearly a century ago. You'll visit night clubs, hamburger joints and a bath house that feeds customers on holidays. Stepping back, you'll read about AIDS activism at gay-friendly



First Dates, Defiant Nights,
and Last Call Disco Fries at
America's Gay Restaurants

Erik
Piepenburg

Dining Out

establishments, and mostly-gay neighborhood watering holes. Go underground at a basement bar; keep tripping and meet proprietors, managers, customers and performers. Then take a peek into the future, as Piepenburg sees it.

The locales profiled in "Dining Out" may surprise you because of where they can be found; some of the hot-spots practically beg for a road trip.

After reading this book, you'll feel welcome at any of them.

If these books don't shed enough light on queer food, then head to your favorite bookstore or library and ask for help finding more. The booksellers and librarians there will put cookbooks and history books directly in your hands, and they'll help you find more on the history and culture of the food you eat. Grab them and you'll agree, they're pretty tasty reads. ::




Peaches
Adult Boutique & Arcade

OPEN 24/7

115 Swain Street, Fayetteville, NC, 910-339-2770
facebook.com/PeachesAdultBoutique1

We buy interesting & worthwhile used books & Compact Discs.



Books Do Furnish A Room
1809 W Markham Avenue • 286-1076
(Between 9th & Broad) Durham

BUILD THROUGH US

print and online advertising solutions with quotes and

goqnotescarolinas.com



call or email us today
704.531.9988
adsales@qnotescarolinas.com

Taking his Chance: An interview with gay actor Doug Spearman

Actor reprises role in Logo series 'Noah's Arc' in Paramount+ film



by Gregg Shapiro
Contributing Writer

There's no question that when Patrik-Ian Polk's series "Noah's Arc" premiered on Logo 20 years ago, it was a groundbreaking creation. The storyline focused on a group of Black gay men and their wonderful friendship.

The titular arc was that of the main character, Noah (Darryl Stephens), and his close-knit circle of friends, including Chance, played by gay actor Doug Spearman. This compelling and loving fraternity may, in fact, be what brought viewers back repeatedly, including a 2008 movie, "Noah's Arc: Jumping the Broom," as well as the 2020 "Noah's Arc" short, and now, a new full-length feature "Noah's Arc: The Movie," which debuted on Paramount+/Showtime on June 20.

In the movie, filled with equal measures of laughs and tears, Chance, who has faced a devastating loss, finds his dependable friends there, ready to support and comfort him at a moment's notice. We had the pleasure of speaking with Spearman on the morning of the streaming premiere of "Noah's Arc: The Movie."

Gregg Shapiro: Doug, since the early 2000s, when the "Noah's Arc" series premiered on Logo, you have been playing the character of Chance, including in the latest installment, "Noah's Arc: The Movie." What was it about Chance that appealed to you as an actor?

Doug Spearman: When Patrik (Ian Polk) called me to ask me to play him (Chance), I was at JFK airport in the baggage claim, waiting for a suitcase. He explained what the part was. The thing that stuck out to me was the fact that Chance was in a long-term relationship with another Black man. And, they had a child; they had a four-year-old daughter named Kenya. I had never seen two Black gay men raise a child on TV before. I thought it was the most revolutionary thing I'd ever seen. I immediately thought I've got to do this because that was something nobody had seen. I thought it was incredibly important to take the part.

GS: "Noah's Arc: The Movie" was, once again, written and directed by Patrik-Ian Polk, who you just mentioned, is the creator of the entire franchise. What's the secret to your long-standing working relationship?

DS: [Laughs] the whole team, all of us, are like a band of brothers. We fight like brothers, we come together like brothers, we hash things out, we talk, because we're all very different from our characters. I think the challenge of playing these guys and then uplifting these men, playing a

part, especially something written by Patrik, is like solving a math equation. There's always a challenge that's enjoyable for me as an actor: to try to find out what it is that Patrik wants, and then how do I do it.

GS: In the years between "Jumping the Broom" and the new full-length movie, many changes have occurred, and the story addresses some of them, including gay widowhood, which is something that the aging community is now confronting, as well as mental health issues. Please say a few words about how you approached those subjects in the new movie.

DS: I had a lot of loss in my life, right before we started shooting. Two months before we started shooting the first series, my mother died. I was going through the grief process through that whole first season. Since then, I've lost a lot of people in my life. In fact, when we started shooting the second season, the second week we were shooting, my ex died of a heart attack. I was having to fold that into what I was doing with my life on the set and off the set. You've got to show up and you've got to do your work. The first two seasons of "Noah's Arc" are always tinged with the memory of grief. So, when I had to deal with the death that Chance faces (in the new movie), which is a significant death in his life, it wasn't that hard to reach back, especially the scene in the graveyard. It was something that I unfortunately could pull from personal experience.

GS: Shifting gears, the movie features delightful cast surprises, including Jasmine Guy and TS Madison. Did you have a chance to interact with either or both when they were on set?

DS: No, I didn't have any scenes with Jasmine, and I missed her. I wish I had gotten to see her because I actually got



Openly gay actor Doug Spearman says he's up for a sequel to the latest version of 'Noah's Arc.'
CREDIT: Facebook

to direct Jasmine for a CBS promo shoot for "Queen," back in the early '90s. I had a huge crush on her when she was on "A Different World." So, I really would have liked to reconnect. But TS and I got to see each other every day because I was in all her scenes. It was extraordinary being around somebody like that. That is one outspoken woman!

GS: Even though Beyoncé never makes an appearance in the movie, there's a lot of talk about her. Would you say you are a Beyoncé fan?

DS: Yes! I'm breathing! Yes, I'm a Beyoncé fan. I actually got the chance to meet her. I knew her mom. Her mom was extraordinary to me. She is in the second movie I directed. She also gave us a wed-

ding gown to use in the very first scene of the movie. That family is extraordinarily important to me. Not only just to be a fan, but to be somebody who's gotten to know them and work with them and see how hard they work. I don't think anybody works as hard as Tina or Beyoncé.

GS: There was a recent news item about gay actor Benito Skinner of the Amazon Prime series "Overcompensating" being told not to bother auditioning for straight roles. As an out actor yourself, how important do you think it is for queer characters to be portrayed by queer actors, and vice versa?

DS: Being queer is a multifaceted identity. There's no one kind of queer person. I think finding the best actor that's your first circle of casting. I think one of the joys about being an actor is that you get to play different parts. I play straight guys all the time. Dads and husbands and things like that. I think a lot of people are told not to do it. In fact, I wouldn't be Chance if the actor who was originally cast as Chance hadn't been pulled out of the series by his agents because they didn't want him to play a gay character.

GS: That's amazing! Thank you for sharing that. Without giving away too much, the ending of the movie is a little ambiguous, even ending with a question mark. If there was a "Noah's Arc: The Movie" sequel, would you come back for that?

DS: Yeah! A lot of it would depend on what Chance's journey is going to be like. Patrik and I have conversations like that all the time. He's very interested and supportive of input. I hope I would be, as we all would be, part of the creative growth with these characters. They live in Patrik's head, and he writes them, but we're the ones who have to flesh them out. It's a conversation, it's always a conversation.

GS: You are currently performing in Moliere's "The Imaginary Invalid" as part of the New Orleans Shakespeare Festival at Tulane. What has this experience been like for you?

DS: It's extraordinary! I started on stage when I was seven. There's nothing like working with a live audience and having that immediacy. I'm working with an extraordinarily talented cast in a really great play, and I have some of the best scene partners I could ever want.

GS: Are there any upcoming film or TV projects you'd like to mention?

DS: I'm still a writer, and I'm still a director, and I've still got scripts that I would like to make. I have a little something that's a cross between "Treme" and "Bridgerton" that I want to do. I'm always trying to figure out what the next thing is. ::



We take PRIDE in YOUR healthcare!

Now accepting new primary care patients focused on LGBTQA+ and Women's health



Call us at 704-977-2972 for a new patient appointment

