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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.

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

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Printed on recycled paper.

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goqnotescarolinas.com/events-calendar.



Latest on Andy Tench case

D'Shaun Robinson has pleaded guilty in connection to the death of Andy Tench (shown here), a gay man from Belmont who was reported missing in March 2024 and later declared deceased. Court records show Robinson entered guilty pleas to multiple charges, including concealment of a death, identity theft and more.

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Belinda Carlisle talks about life and new music

Throughout her music career Belinda Carlisle has kept us guessing and entertained. From her groundbreaking, all-female, platinum-certified band The Go-Go's, and into her nearly 40-year stint as a Grammy-nominated solo artist, Carlisle is the very definition of a chanteuse. Now she's got a new album: "Once Upon a Time in California."

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The latest law targeting transgender North Carolinians

Before Senate Republicans turned House Bill 805 into an anti-trans torpedo, it was originally created to combat human trafficking and help women remove non-consensual content from the internet



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

On July 29, the North Carolina General Assembly overrode 16 vetoed bills – pushing them through to become law despite Gov. Josh Stein’s official stamp of disapproval. One of these bills – which started as a bill aimed to target pornography – puts a bullseye on the backs of the approximately 80,000 transgender North Carolinians, as well as medical providers and even schools in the state.

House Bill 805 (HB 805) originally started as a bill aimed at regulating online pornography, specifically to combat human trafficking and help women remove non-consensual images and content from the internet. The issue garnered unanimous backing in the House, where lawmakers voted 113-0 in favor of the bill in May.

The original language of the bill was co-sponsored by Reps. Laura Budd (D-Matthews) and Neal Jackson (R-Robbins), and Budd told NC Health News she didn’t find out about the changes in the language of her and Jackson’s bill until right before it came before a Senate committee proposing the changes.



“This is a bill that had very real-world impacts for women and men,” Budd said. “[The addition] took a really substantive piece of legislation, that would have had a practical impact for the positive, and just co-opted it for purposes for which it wasn’t intended.”

Once the bill with the original language was passed, Republican State Senator Buck Newton (R- Greene, Wayne, Wilson) saw an opportunity to add language targeting North Carolina’s transgender and gender-nonconforming residents. He, along with the committee established to rework the bill for a formal Senate vote, added amendments making it so the state would only

recognize male and female sexes, as well as stating gender identity will not be treated as a legal equivalent to biological sex.

It would also define biological sex based on “reproductive potential or capacity, such as sex chromosomes, naturally occurring sex hormones, gonads, and non-ambiguous internal and external genitalia present at birth, without regard to an individual’s psychological, chosen, or subjective experience of gender.”

“This section ensures that our state follows federal policy and aligns with President Trump’s executive order,” Newton told members of the Senate Judiciary Committee during the reworking of the bill. “This ensures our state maintains eligibility for any and all federal funding.”

Those aren’t the only provisions in HB 805 concerning the LGBTQ+ population in North Carolina. One of the new amendments requires state officials to keep a person’s original birth certificate and new birth certificate on file together in a multi-page document after their sex designation has changed, which forces trans people to out themselves in situations where a birth certificate is needed.

The bill also bans the use of state funds for gender-affirming care for transgender people in state prisons or otherwise in the custody of the Department of Adult Correction, making it impossible for incarcerated transgender folks to receive the care they need. The amendments also extend the time a patient has to bring a medical malpractice lawsuit in cases involving gender-affirming care, which critics say is an attempt to intimidate providers and prevent them from providing often life-saving care to North Carolina’s transgender community.

And it doesn’t stop there – HB 805 also targets transgender students and LGBTQ+ topics in classrooms. The bill allows for parents to both prohibit their child from checking out certain books in the school library for any reason as well as pull their child from any classroom activity or discussion that they believe burdens their religion. The new law also states students on overnight field trips must be housed in lodgings correlating with their assigned sex at birth, forcing transgender youth to use facilities that could result in further ostracization or worse.



North Carolina has now passed nearly 10 anti-trans pieces of legislation.

Senator Mujtaba Mohammed (D-Mecklenburg) questioned why a bill garnering such bipartisan support would seek to address such partisan issues far away from the bill’s original intention.

“We reached out to our state agencies, and they confirmed that they’ve never authorized sexual procedures, there’s never been gender affirming care, there’s never been any authorized gender affirming surgeries,” Mohammed said to Newton during the debate period. “As a Republican, supporting limited government, why are we coming up with unnecessary laws?”

Sen. Lisa Grafstein (D-Wake), who is also one of the only LGBTQ+ elected officials in the General Assembly, said Newton’s proposal reminded her of the hurricane Helene recovery bill — a bill which originally had bipartisan support until state Republicans packed the legislation with partisan amendments.

“The idea that we’re going to put into law that you cannot be transgendered, or that you cannot be all the things that you are railing against is a fool’s errand,” said Grafstein.

Rep. Nasif Majeed, D-Mecklenburg, was the lone House Democrat to vote to override the veto, giving Republicans exactly the

three-fifths portion they needed to put HB 805 into law. When asked by WUNC about why they decided to vote with Republicans, Majeed said there were some “moral issues” where he had “some deep sentiments.” He refused to elaborate on what those issues were when asked.

After the General Assembly voted to override Stein’s veto, the governor went on the record to call the move as he and many others saw it: an attempt to barrage, demonize and attack an entire community who calls the state home.

“My faith teaches me that we are all children of God no matter our differences and that it is wrong to target vulnerable people, as this legislation does,” Stein wrote.

Stein said while he agreed with the portions of the bill protecting people from exploitation on pornographic websites, the sections addressing LGBTQ people are “mean-spirited.” It’s clear state Republicans are determined to ensure North Carolina falls in line with whatever the current presidential administration orders, even if it means altering bipartisan legislation after its approval in one chamber to fulfill whatever agenda they want to force onto North Carolinians. ::




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Man pleads guilty in Andy Tench case

Family and friends still seeking answers after partial resolution



by Liz Schob
Qnotes Staff Writer

D'Shaun Robinson pleaded guilty in connection to the death of Andy Tench, a gay man from Belmont who was reported missing in March 2024 and later declared deceased. Court records show that Robinson entered guilty pleas to multiple charges, including concealment of a death, identity theft, two counts of felony financial card theft, financial card fraud, larceny of a motor vehicle and three misdemeanor counts of financial card fraud.

He admitted to placing Tench's body in a dumpster after finding him unresponsive following a night together in Charlotte. He also admitted to using Tench's credit card. Tench's remains have still not been recovered.

Robinson was sentenced to 2.5 and 4.5 years in prison. Court documents indicate he could spend as little as one to one and a half years due to a 477-day credit he received for time already served.

The plea marks a significant development in a case that has drawn sustained public attention. Tench was last seen alive on March



Andy Tench's disappearance and death have drawn widespread attention and calls for justice. CREDIT: Facebook

24, 2024, after celebrating his birthday at The Bar at 316, the now closed LGBTQ+ bar in Charlotte's Dilworth neighborhood.

When he failed to return home, his

family reported him missing, launching extensive search efforts and continually pressed for updates from law enforcement throughout 2024 and 2025.

Family statements played a pivotal role during court proceedings. In March 2025, a judge rejected an earlier plea deal after hearing emotional victim impact statements. That hearing reflected the family's insistence on full accountability.

"It's hard," Tench's sister, Natasha Newman, said. "It's like a little bit of closure but it's not really the closure we want. I'm not sure that there will ever be justice. Maybe a little bit of closure, but not really justice." Without knowing where her brother's body is or how he died, Newman said, there can be no true justice.

Investigators have said there is not enough evidence to conduct a targeted search of any landfill where Tench's body may have been taken.

Supporters and advocates for missing persons say the case underscores the challenges of prosecuting cases when a body is never found. Without physical evidence, charges often focus on secondary offenses such as fraud or concealment, leaving families without full answers.

While the plea resolves some aspects of the case, the exact cause and manner of Tench's death remain unknown. Loved ones continue to call for information that could lead to the discovery of his remains and the closure they are still waiting for. ..

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Heritage Foundation targets UNC Chapel Hill over courses on culture

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is facing scrutiny from the Heritage Foundation's Oversight Project after its president, Mike Howell, submitted a sweeping public records request targeting more than 70 university courses that address LGBTQ+ topics, racial justice or diversity. The request seeks access to syllabi, assignments, lecture slides and internal communications tied to any materials referencing terms such as "LGBTQ+," "gender identity," "transgender," "cisgender," "intersectionality," "white privilege," "restorative justice," "critical race theory" and others.

Among the courses flagged are Gender and Sexuality in Islam, Transnational Black Feminist Thought and Practice, Islam and Sexual Diversity, Race and Gender in the Atlantic World, Black Families in Contemporary Contexts, and several others focused on cultural diversity, education and literature. The Oversight Project has framed

the request as an attempt to investigate whether public institutions are engaging in what it describes as ideological indoctrination. The effort aligns closely with Project 2025, a far-reaching policy agenda led by the Heritage Foundation that outlines plans to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives across federal and public institutions.

University spokesperson Beth Keith confirmed that the university will comply with the records request as required under state law but also emphasized that UNC-Chapel Hill remains committed to academic freedom. The move has sparked concern among faculty members, academic freedom advocates and civil rights organizations who warn that ideologically motivated public records requests are increasingly being used to intimidate educators and restrict classroom instruction.

"Whatever they're claiming the legal right is, it's a violation of academic freedom,"

said Joan Scott, a member of the American Association of University Professors' Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure and one of the founders of Chapel Hill's women's studies program. "It's a violation of individual free speech rights and it's an intrusion into the teaching of university faculty in the name of, it seems to me, a right-wing ideological agenda."

Scholars note that course syllabi and curricula are the result of years of research, peer-reviewed scholarship and subject mat-

ter expertise. They argue that efforts to target certain keywords or course themes ignore the intellectual foundations of these disciplines and instead reduce them to political talking points. The concern is not just about transparency but about the chilling effect such requests may have on faculty, particularly those teaching about race, gender, sexuality and other marginalized experiences.

This action at UNC is not occurring in isolation. It reflects a growing trend of right-wing efforts to monitor, suppress or eliminate content related to LGBTQ+ identity, racial justice and DEI in higher education. Critics argue that this strategy is designed to undermine public confidence in academic institutions, silence inclusive scholarship and roll back hard-won civil rights gains under the guise of accountability.

As of now, the university has not made any further public comment beyond confirming its intent to comply. Meanwhile, students, faculty and advocates across the state are watching closely as pressure continues to mount on educators who choose to teach the truth about identity, history and power in the classroom. ::

— Liz Schob



UNC Chapel Hill faces scrutiny over courses on race, gender and LGBTQ+ topics. CREDIT: Facebook

Roy Cooper makes his bid for North Carolina's open Senate seat official

Former Gov. Roy Cooper formally launched his campaign for U.S. Senate on the morning of July 28, making a long-rumored candidacy official and cementing himself as the all-but-certain Democratic nominee in 2026.

In a video announcement, Cooper says he "really never wanted to go to Washington." But now, he'll seek to head there as the successor to retiring U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, a Republican — hoping to flip the seat blue.

"Right now, our country is facing a moment as fragile as any I can remember," Cooper said. "And the decisions we make in the next election will determine if we even have a middle class in America."

Cooper served two terms in the governor's mansion, with prior stints as attorney

general and a state senator. He's a Nash County native and attorney. His launch comes just days after he teased his run in front of state Democrats at the party's annual fundraising dinner.

He is currently joined in the Democratic field by former U.S. Rep. Wiley Nickel, who is reportedly set to suspend his campaign. And his Republican opponent will most likely be Michael Whatley — the Republican National Committee chairman and former head of the North Carolina GOP.

Early campaign messaging from Cooper and Democrats signal that he will lean on his reputation and accomplishments in elected office — including working with lawmakers to expand Medicaid and raise teacher pay.

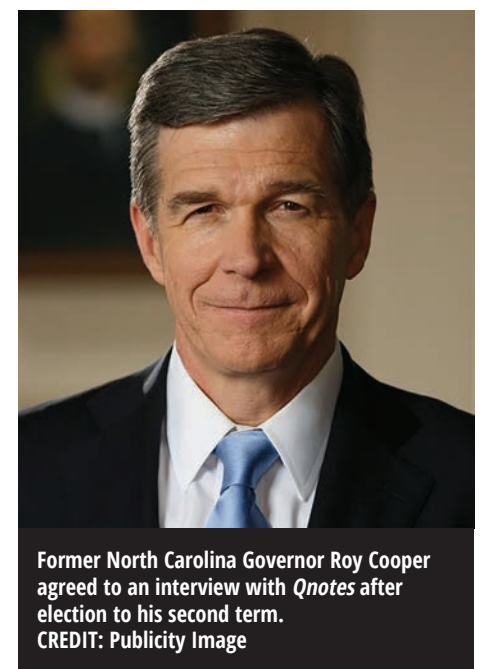
North Carolina Democratic Party chair Anderson Clayton said in a statement she was "confident he will flip this seat in 2026." And Senate Majority PAC, one of the main campaign fundraisers for Senate Democrats, said Cooper's entry "confirms the state is a prime pick-up opportunity."

Republicans, meanwhile, see him as a frequent target of criticism and controversy, which they'll seek to capitalize on.

U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson, who chairs congressional Republicans' campaign operation, said Cooper "spent decades dragging North Carolina left, and now he wants to do the same to America."

Senate Republicans' campaign arm called him a "wreck" in a digital ad criticizing his record. And the Senate Leadership Fund, a PAC for the Senate GOP, blasted him for the state's hurricane response and key vetoes on transgender rights and immigration. ::

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Former North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper agreed to an interview with Qnotes after election to his second term. CREDIT: Publicity Image

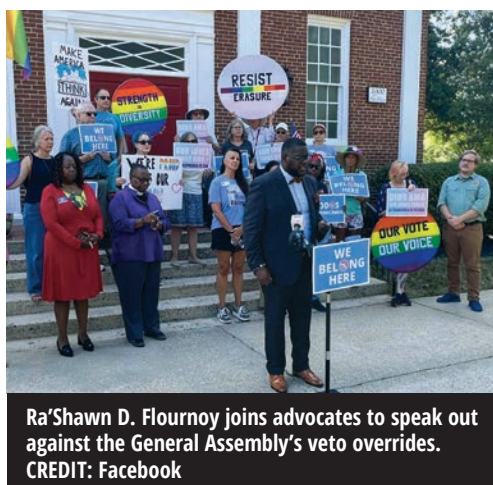
NC lawmakers override vetoes for anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-immigrant bills

On July 29, the North Carolina General Assembly voted to override eight of Governor Josh Stein's vetoes, ushering in a slate of laws that threaten LGBTQ+ rights and compound harm for marginalized communities. Among them is House Bill 805, a sweeping law that narrows legal recognition of sex, restricts access to gender-affirming care and targets LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools.

HB805 legally defines the terms "male" and "female" in state law to be defined strictly by reproductive anatomy and genetics at birth, excluding gender identity from legal recognition in nearly all contexts. The bill also bans the use of state funds for gender-affirming care in prisons and extends the window for malpractice lawsuits related to gender-affirming procedures for non-minors to ten years.

In public schools, HB805 grants parents

the right to review library materials, opt their children out of instructional content



Ra'Shawn D. Flournoy joins advocates to speak out against the General Assembly's veto overrides. CREDIT: Facebook

based on religious or moral objections, and request that students not be required to share sleeping quarters on overnight trips with peers of a different "biological sex." Advocates say these provisions open the door to discrimination against trans and nonbinary youth and further stigmatize LGBTQ+ students.

"HB805 doesn't just target policies, it targets people," said Ra'Shawn D. Flournoy, executive director of Quality Comprehensive Health Center, at a press conference on Tuesday. "Every transgender and nonbinary individual has the right to access the care they deserve with dignity, without fear and without delay."

The General Assembly also overrode Stein's veto of HB318, which requires county jails to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement, including holding people past their scheduled release for ICE pickup. El Pueblo and a coalition of immigrant justice organizations issued a statement warning that the bill will increase racial profiling, enable unconstitutional detentions, and deepen fear among undocumented residents. The group condemned

the bill as a direct attack on immigrant communities, emphasizing that HB318 is "not an isolated effort, but part of a broader, coordinated national campaign by anti-civil rights forces to scapegoat and criminalize immigrants for political gain."

Other overridden vetoes include HB193, allowing private school employees to carry firearms on campus, and SB266, enabling Duke Energy to raise customer rates to fund new nuclear facilities. All eight override votes passed with the support of the Republican majority and three Democrats: Reps. Carla Cunningham, Nasif Majeed and Shelley Willingham. Their decision to break party lines has drawn sharp criticism from LGBTQ+ and immigrant advocates alike.

"This is a hard day," wrote Cameron Pruette, executive director of the Freedom Center for Social Justice. "Today's veto override votes will have harmful, lasting impacts on the people of our state. The fight continues, and we can't forget the names of those who stood for us and those who didn't." ::

— Liz Schob

Charlotte educators group to take part in Pride parade again



Social media image shows a mix of students, supportive families and educators.
CREDIT: Facebook

They're not officially part of the Charlotte Mecklenburg School system, nor are they specifically affiliated with any state college or university.

They're known simply as the Charlotte Educators Pride Parade group, and the organization is composed of students, supportive parents, teachers, professors and others connected in one way or another to education in the city of Charlotte.

And, they are either part of the city's LGBTQ+ community, or a supportive ally.

Charlotte Educators Pride Parade has a social media presence, but it is seemingly limited to a single Facebook group that lists around 260 members. In order to join the group you have to answer two questions: Why are you interested in joining this group, and at which school are or were you a staff member?

In the world we live in today, it only makes sense to take precautions and make certain your membership is verifiable.

According to information about the Facebook group (available to anyone who has a Facebook account), they were originally created in 2022.

Students and teachers *Qnotes* has talked to are elated the group exists and allows them the opportunity to network and participate in the Charlotte Pride festival.

Said one CMS teacher who declined to use their name but wanted to share their thoughts: "They've been around for a few years now," he said. "And we've never had a problem. "It's a great opportunity for stu-

dents, educators and allies to come together in a very family-friendly environment."

Despite the political atmosphere surrounding LGBTQ+ students and practically anything related to community culture being discussed in schools, CMS remains supportive of all of their students and discrimination or harassment of any sort is not allowed. While CMS did offer a post of support during Pride month in 2021 (shown), there is no evidence they have repeated a public endorsement since.

Regardless, and according to the digital flyer Charlotte Educators sent out, they will be participating in the Charlotte Pride parade again this year.

"Save the date Sunday, Aug. 17. Please join us," the flyer reads. "Charlotte [Educators] will be marching in the Pride parade again this year. This is a family friendly event and all are welcome to participate. Children and students must be accompanied by an adult." ::

— David Aaron Moore

'Pride at The Carolina' brings film, drag and comedy to Uptown Charlotte

The Carolina Theatre is celebrating Charlotte Pride week with "Pride at the Carolina '25," a vibrant lineup of LGBTQ+ centered events, which began Aug. 13 and continues through Aug. 17. From cult classic films and high-energy drag to queer comedy and community celebration, the historic Uptown venue is embracing its role as a gathering place for queer joy and creativity.

The series kicked off Aug. 13 with a screening of the 1988 Bette Midler tear-jerker "Beaches," part of the theatre's Lost Years Summer Blockbuster Series, and continued Aug. 14 with the beloved 1995

camp comedy "To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar."

Friday, Aug. 15, brings LOLGBTQ+, a high-energy Pride variety show presented by Queen City Comedy. The show begins at 8 p.m. and features a lineup that includes host and drag royalty Devida, stand-up from LA Redd, sketch comedy by The Lynns, live music by MonaLisa Musiq and Maggie Lowe, spoken word by Adrian Parrish, and a set by Swell Music Improv.

Saturday, Aug. 16, at 7 p.m. brings Legends, Divas and Stars, hosted by Tommi Rose and featuring celebrity illusionists including America's Got Talent



The Carolina Theatre recently announced their lineup for "Pride at the Carolina '25," a week of LGBTQ events in Uptown.
CREDIT: Facebook

star Delighted Tobehere and RuPaul's Drag Race alums Trinity K. Bonet and Gigi Monroe. With over a century of collective stage experience, the performers promise a standout show. The event also serves as a fundraiser for Time Out Youth, with \$20 from each ticket and 50 percent of net proceeds benefiting the Charlotte-based nonprofit.

The series concludes Sunday, Aug. 17, at 11 a.m. with a Pride Parade Viewing Party. Guests can enjoy a cool, indoor view from the theater's glass lobby, with concessions, risers for better viewing and a VIP package option that includes four drink tickets. ::

Tickets and full event details are available at TheCarolina.com.

— Liz Schob

Franklin Graham criticizes gay couple for appearance on the Magnolia Network series 'Back to the Frontier'

For years, Franklin Graham – the son of Billy Graham and founder of the Boone-based national non-profit Samaritan's Purse – has lived in the shadow of his late father. His life has seen continuing controversies, including a history of excess with alcohol and drug use in earlier years and an over-sized compensation package for his work with Samaritan's Purse and his role as the CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

While it's unclear what exactly Graham's specific aims are, one thing is certain: he has no great love for the LGBTQ+ community and he never hesitates to snatch an opportunity to spew out words of intolerance and condemnation.

As reported in *Qnotes* in 2022, he railed against the Biden administration and transgender individuals as "evil" and "wicked" and has never spared his harsh words when it comes to same-sex marriage. Now he's at it again, this time complaining about Chip and Joanna Gaines for including a same-sex married family – Jason Hanna and Joe Riggs and

their two sons – on the Magnolia Network series "Back to the Frontier."

Graham's words from mid-July as posted on Twitter/X:

"I hope this isn't true, but I read ... that Chip and Joanna Gaines are featuring a gay couple in their new series. If it is true, it is very disappointing. While we are to love people, we should love them enough to tell them the truth of God's Word. His Word is absolute truth. God loves us, and His design for marriage is between one man and one woman. Promoting something that God defines as sin is in itself sin."

The Gaines duo, who identify as Christian, responded to the criticism on the same social media platform:

"Talk, ask [questions], listen.. maybe even learn," Chip wrote. "Too much to ask of modern American Christian culture. Judge 1st, understand later/never. It's a sad Sunday when 'non believers' have never been confronted with hate or vitriol until they are introduced to a modern American Christian."

This isn't the first time Graham has set his sights on entertainment production for being inclusive.

As previously reported in *Qnotes*, Graham also joined in on the chorus of conservatives calling for a boycott of Disney because the company spoke out against Florida's "Don't Say Gay" law, which bans the mention of LGBTQ+ people in elementary school and limits it in other grades.

"Disney is indoctrinating children with the LGBTQ agenda – and they don't even try to hide it," Graham wrote. "I certainly hope parents wake up to what Disney is trying to do and protect their children and grandchildren from the lies this once-great company is now so willing to promote."

Despite criticism from Graham and others who oppose the presence of the Hanna and Riggs family on the program, Chip and Joanna Gaines are continuing to support the married male couple and their sons. Hanna and Riggs replied to the fracas on Instagram.

"Representation matters deeply," Hanna wrote on Instagram. "Especially for those who are still finding the courage to live their truth. When families like ours are visible, it opens doors for others to feel safe, loved and validated. Visibility isn't just



Married gay couple Jason Hanna and Joe Riggs with their two sons on the TV series 'Back to the Frontier.'
CREDIT: Instagram

about being seen; it's about making sure no one feels alone." ::

New episodes of *Back to the Frontier* are available on the Magnolia Network and HBO/Max Thursdays at 8 p.m. It's also available for streaming on both platforms.

— David Aaron Moore

Transphobic Nancy Mace launches campaign for South Carolina governor

U.S. Representative Nancy Mace has officially launched her bid for governor of South Carolina in the 2026 election. She announced her candidacy at The Citadel in Charleston, where she became the first woman to graduate from the military college's Corps of Cadets in 1999. This choice of venue underscores a theme of her campaign: breaking barriers while upholding what she sees as conservative values.

Framing herself as "Trump in high heels," Mace aims not just to align with Donald Trump but to embody his combative, populist style in a state where his influence remains strong. Her messaging sends a clear signal to the far-right base of the Republican Party that she intends to carry their banner.

Her platform blends fiscal conservatism with hot-button cultural issues. She is calling for the elimination of the state income tax and a major overhaul of the judiciary. She has also prioritized expanding school

choice and parental rights. Among her most controversial proposals is a ban on transgender youth participating in school sports or using facilities aligned with their gender identity, a position that places her firmly in step with national efforts to roll back LGBTQ+ rights. On the campaign trail, Mace has framed these positions as a fight against "corruption, career politicians and the woke mob."

Mace joins a crowded Republican primary that includes Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette, Attorney General Alan Wilson and U.S. Rep. Ralph Norman. Early polling points to Evette and Wilson as early frontrunners, but Mace brings a national profile and a loyal grassroots following, built through regular cable news appearances and her reputation for provocative statements. While Trump has not yet issued an endorsement, her campaign launch video featured a clip of the former president calling her "a fighter."

Mace's record on LGBTQ+ issues has shifted significantly over the past few years. Once considered a moderate, she supported the Fairness for All Act and voiced support for same-sex marriage. By 2023, however, she had begun openly aligning with anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. In 2025, she publicly called herself a "proud transphobe" and introduced legislation targeting transgender access to restrooms on federal property, singling out Delaware State Sen. Sarah McBride by name.

Critics say her language has crossed into misinformation and hate speech. She has also been accused of using burner accounts to coordinate online attacks and has faced scrutiny for avoiding in-person town halls in her district.

If elected, Mace would become the second woman to serve as South Carolina's governor, following Nikki Haley. Her candidacy, marked by ideological polarization and high-profile rhetoric, sets the stage for a fiercely contested GOP primary that will be closely watched both statewide and nationally. ::

— Liz Schob



"Proud Transphobe" Nancy Mace is running to become South Carolina's second female governor. CREDIT: Facebook

Freed Andry Hernandez Romero finds resilience through art and fashion

In late July, Andry Hernandez Romero returned to Venezuela for the first time since his release from CECOT, the notorious mega-prison in El Salvador. The Venezuelan makeup artist had spent 125 days imprisoned after being arrested in the United States while seeking asylum based on his sexuality and political beliefs.

"This is the big controversy that has caused me too much harm," he says in an interview with *The Guardian*, showing the crown tattoos dedicated to his family. While awaiting his asylum hearing, U.S. immigration officials flagged him as a suspected member of the Tren de Aragua gang based on those tattoos. But Hernandez Romero and his family insist the symbols are tied to his hometown's Three Kings Day festival, where the crown is a central motif. Now back home, he is already preparing for the next celebration.

"I'm already working on my suit. My mom is happier. Everyone wants to help me with the design and the fabrics," he said in the interview. "What they still don't know is that in CECOT I had so much time to think. The suit is already designed."

During his four months in CECOT, Hernandez Romero was isolated from his family and denied due process. Of the 250 Venezuelans sent to El Salvador, 90 percent had no U.S. criminal record. After returning home in a prisoner exchange, many, including Hernandez Romero, reported abuse such as beatings, rubber bullets, isolation and spoiled food. He also alleges sexual assault but has been advised not to speak further until a formal complaint is filed. Venezuela's attorney general has pledged to investigate El Salvadorian President Nayib Bukele, whose office has not responded to media requests.

When Hernandez Romero arrived home on July 23, his family welcomed him with a warm meal and open arms. He said the people of Capacho stood by him throughout the ordeal, and his parents never stopped fighting for his freedom.

Now working with his lawyers, he is focused on clearing his name and those of the others who were deported. He insists none of them were affiliated with Tren de Aragua and believes they were wrongfully targeted. He holds former President Donald Trump and President Bukele responsible for the suffering they endured and is urging international leaders to act.

A proud gay man, Hernandez Romero has long used makeup and fashion as forms of expression and empowerment. He has returned to his art as a form of healing, creating dozens of dress sketches. But the trauma remains.

Advocates in the U.S. have warned that he may still face threats in Venezuela due to anti-LGBTQ discrimination. While those risks keep him from speaking openly about politics, they

haven't silenced his mind. He still dreams of a career in fashion and of launching Ángel de Dios, a foundation to support children with HIV and cancer.

"I'm still the same person," he said. "I care about makeup, about justice and about lifting up the LGBTQ community." ::

— Liz Schob



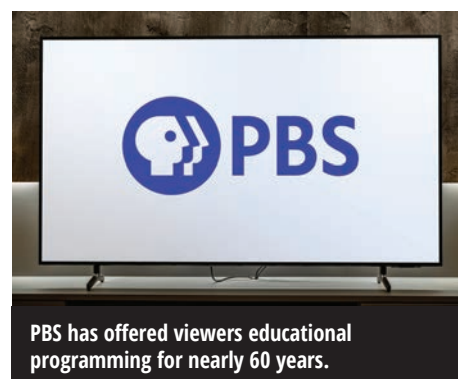
Andry Hernandez Romero returns to his home in Venezuela after enduring 125 days in the notorious mega-prison. CREDIT: Facebook

Corporation for Public Broadcasting closes doors after Trump finance cuts

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting has announced that it will be shutting down. The announcement came Aug. 1, just one day after a major Senate appropriations bill omitted funding for the nonprofit that funds public media and a week after President Donald Trump signed a bill into law that yanked \$1.1 billion in previously approved spending for CPB.

CPB, which Congress authorized in 1967, provides funds for National Public Radio, the Public Broadcasting Service and hundreds of local stations across the United States. President Donald Trump and fellow Republicans have criticized NPR and PBS of left-leaning bias, an accusation the public media organizations have rejected.

"Despite the extraordinary efforts of millions of Americans who called, wrote and



PBS has offered viewers educational programming for nearly 60 years.

petitioned Congress to preserve federal funding for CPB, we now face the difficult reality of closing our operations," Patricia Harrison, president and CEO of CPB, said in a statement.

"CPB remains committed to fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and supporting our partners through this transition with transparency and care," Harrison said.

She added that "public media has been one of the most trusted institutions in American life, providing educational opportunity, emergency alerts, civil discourse and cultural connection to every corner of the country."

CPB said employees were notified Friday that the majority of staff positions "will conclude with the close of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, 2025," and a small transition team will stay through January 2026.

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday approved the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spend-

ing bill for fiscal year 2026, which did not include any CPB funding.

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, the top Democrat on the panel, expressed her disappointment over the lack of a CPB allocation in the bill during a committee markup.

"It is a shameful reality and now communities across the country will suffer the consequences as over 1,500 stations lose critical funding," Murray said.

In a win for the Trump administration, Congress passed a rescissions package in July that clawed back \$9 billion in previously approved spending for public broadcasting and foreign aid, including \$1.1 billion for CPB.

Trump signed the measure into law just days later. ::

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— Shauneen Miranda / NC Newsline



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Former The Go-Go's lead vocalist Belinda Carlisle talks about latest solo album

Vocalist releases classic



by **Gregg Shapiro**
Contributing Writer

You never know what California-native and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, Belinda Carlisle is going to do next. Throughout her music career she has kept us guessing and entertained. From her punk origins in the Germs and later in the groundbreaking, all-female, platinum-certified band The Go-Go's, and into her nearly 40-year stint as a Grammy-nominated solo artist, Carlisle is the very definition of a chanteuse. Her new album "Once Upon a Time in California" (Demon Music) is another fabulous chapter, one on which she covers 10 chestnuts from the golden age of AM radio, adding her distinctive, sun-kissed touch to songs by Nilsson, Bacharach and David, Leon Russell, Gordon Lightfoot and others.

Gregg Shapiro: Do you remember what was the first 45 single you ever bought as a child with your own money?

Belinda Carlisle: It was "Aquarius" by The 5th Dimension. I still love it.

GS: Yes, it's a classic. What about the first LP you bought?

BC: I can tell you that I won it, I didn't buy it. The first LP was "Pet Sounds" (by The Beach Boys) and I won that at a baseball tournament.

GS: When I initially saw the track listing for "Once Upon a Time in California," I thought about The Go-Go's 1982 rendition of "Cool Jerk" and your wonderful cover of Freda Payne's "Band of Gold" on your 1986 solo debut album. Would it be fair to say that your interest in classic pop started long before "Once Upon a Time in California?"

BC: Yes. This album was inspired by all the songs that inspired me as a young girl to want to be a singer. California radio, and I love the transistor radio reference you made, because I lived for music growing up in California. 93 KHJ and KRLA were classic California radio. A good pop song is a good pop song, and a great one stands the test of time. I think that the songs on this album are timeless.

GS: The selection of songwriters covered on the album, including Gordon Lightfoot ("If You Could Read My Mind"), Harry Nilsson (writer of "One" and singer of Fred Neil's "Everybody's Talkin'"), Leon Russell ("Superstar") and Burt Bacharach ("Anyone Who Had A Heart"), is exceptional. Did you ever have the chance to meet any of these songwriters before they passed?

BC: I used to hang out with Harry Nilsson. My husband [Morgan Mason] had a restaurant in Brentwood called Mason's. He [Nilsson] used to come every single night and hang out in the bar and hold court. He was such a kind man; just wonderful. I would like to think that he very much approved of my renditions that I did of his songs.

GS: I found it fascinating that while these songs were written by men, some of the most popular and cherished versions were recorded by women. Like Dionne Warwick and "Anyone Who Had a Heart," the Carpenters' and Bette Midler's renditions of "Superstar" and Marilyn McCoo and the 5th Dimension's cover of "Never My Love." When you were selecting the

GS: During the period represented on the album, 1963-1972, there were also numerous female songwriters, including Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon, who were also part of the Laurel Canyon scene, as well as Roberta Flack, Laura Nyro, Aretha Franklin and Dolly Parton. Could you foresee recording an album dedicated to female songwriters?

BC: Oh, my God, that's such a great idea! I might have to steal that, and I'll give you credit. That's an amazing idea.

GS: Would you say that your inclusion of "Get Together," which is often described as the "quintessential 1960s love-and-peace anthem," is a political statement on your part?

chaos happening then, and I think even more chaos now. At least it seems so. I just think they're really timely lyrics, but I didn't think in terms of politics at all with that song. I thought in terms of polarization and what a fractured society and fractured world we live in.

GS: I think because I was one of those especially sensitive little gay boys, who somehow was aware of "All My Sorrow" and "Sad Tomorrows" at age 10, I personally want to thank you for your cover of Marmalade's "Reflections of My Life," a song that still makes me cry all these years later. Why did you include that tune?

BC: It's funny that you're mentioning that because I was about 10 when that came out, and I loved that song. I kind of understood what they were saying. But singing it as a 66-year-old woman who has had a ton of experience and lots of love and lots of loss, I can really relate to it. It still makes me cry. I thought about that song probably at the end of last year, because we just finished this album in January of this year. I thought, "Oh, my God, the Marmalade song would be a perfect way to end the album and the whole story. It fits in really well.

GS: Your version is beautiful. Now that I'm an especially sensitive gay man, I also want to express my gratitude to you, as the mother of a gay son, for being such an outspoken advocate for the LGBTQ community.

BC: Since I was a teenager, all my friends have been gay or lesbian. I remember in the punk days, and the first AIDS case, they didn't know it was AIDS then, in West Hollywood. [There] was a young man who worked at the deli on Santa Monica Boulevard. I just remember being in the thick of it because all my friends were gay men. I never even thought of it as...it was no effort, a no-brainer. I just wanted to get in there and do what I could for the community because they've always been a big part of my life. And then being the mother of a gay son, thank God, made me even more want to do what I can and to be a voice. My son [James Duke Mason] has been an activist since he was 14. I can't imagine life without being supportive of that community.

GS: We are grateful. Finally, is there any chance that there might be a solo concert tour in the works?

BC: I know I'm doing some dates at the end of this year on the East Coast. I'm thinking about maybe doing a short tour in early 2026. I don't know what that looks like, but I know it'll be short and sweet, whatever it is. ::



Publicity image for the video of Belinda Carlisle's cover of "One." CREDIT: Facebook

songs, did you know they already had a history with female vocalists?

BC: No. I never even thought of that until you mentioned it. Lyrically, those are songs that could have been written by a woman because the lyrics are all very sensitive.

BC: No, it's not a political statement. It's just an observation of how everything has become so fractured and polarized. With everything, not just politics. I remember when the Vietnam War was happening, and the Watts riots. There was a lot of

'Immediate Family' explores the life of a Black gay son who comes out to his family

Production extended through Sept. 7 at Blumenthal Arts' Booth Playhouse



by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

When a play sparks sold-out events, community-wide conversation, and a flurry of emotional social media posts, you know it's struck a chord. That's exactly what's happening with "Immediate Family," the raw and resonant new production currently captivating audiences at the Booth Playhouse, part of Blumenthal Arts in Charlotte, N.C. Originally scheduled to end Aug. 31, the show's run has been extended through Sept. 7 due to overwhelming demand.

Written by Hamilton's Paul Oakley Stovall and directed by the legendary Phylicia Rashad, "Immediate Family" is a complex and courageous comedy-drama that dives into the intersection of race, sexuality and familial expectations. Part of

interracial relationships and family expectations in a way that is both uncomfortable and liberating. It's funny, it's raw and it's so necessary."

The excitement surrounding "Immediate Family" soared when it was announced that Phylicia Rashad, best known for her role as Clair Huxtable on *The Cosby Show* and her numerous accolades on Broadway, would not only direct the show, but also appear in Charlotte on July 28 for a special community conversation alongside playwright Paul Oakley Stovall and the cast. The event sold out immediately, confirming Charlotte's growing appetite for high-caliber, inclusive art experiences.

"It's an absolute honor," said Lee. "Charlotte has become a city that doesn't just tolerate the arts; it embraces them. The leadership here is investing in culture because they understand that to be a world-class city, we must support world-class storytelling."

The cast, which includes Christina Sajous (Evy), Elijah Jones (Jesse), Freddie Fulton (Tony), Andy Mientus (Kristian), Kai Almeda Heath (Nina) and Britney Coleman (Ronnie), has been praised for bringing powerful emotional authenticity to every performance. And audiences are walking away transformed.

"Great evening, beautiful souls!" wrote P. Jackson, a local theatergoer. "Immediate Family at the Blumenthal Arts, Booth Playhouse is an unforgettable experience that will touch your heart and soul. If this powerful performance doesn't resonate deeply within you, revealing parts of yourself or

someone you know, then perhaps you need to look closer – it's truly a must see!"



A scene from the stage production of 'Immediate Family.' CREDIT: Marc J. Franklin / Blumenthal Arts

As someone who attended the show, this writer wholeheartedly agrees. "Immediate Family" stirred up a variety of emotions as it touched on real-life issues, things many of us have felt but struggled to express. The awkwardness of generational misunderstandings, the pain of hiding who you are, and the deep desire for acceptance. It's all there, wrapped in sharp dialogue, heartfelt performances and unexpected laughter.

One of the play's most nuanced layers is its handling of interracial relationships in the Black LGBTQ+ community. "It's not just about being gay," Lee explained. "There's also a deep family reaction to Jesse being in a relationship with a white man. And that's a real conversation in our culture. Some people look at it like, 'Okay, you're gay – and now you're not even dating someone

who understands your Black experience?' It's complicated."

Lee emphasized the importance of representing Black love on stage: "I've always taken pride in Black love. I see it as revolutionary. And while I believe love is love, no matter who it's with, I'm also intentional about valuing love that reflects cultural and historical understanding. That's not judgment; it's just part of my identity."

The play never preaches. Instead, it holds space for all these emotions to be felt and explored. It's a mirror for many in the audience to confront their own biases, yearnings and truths.

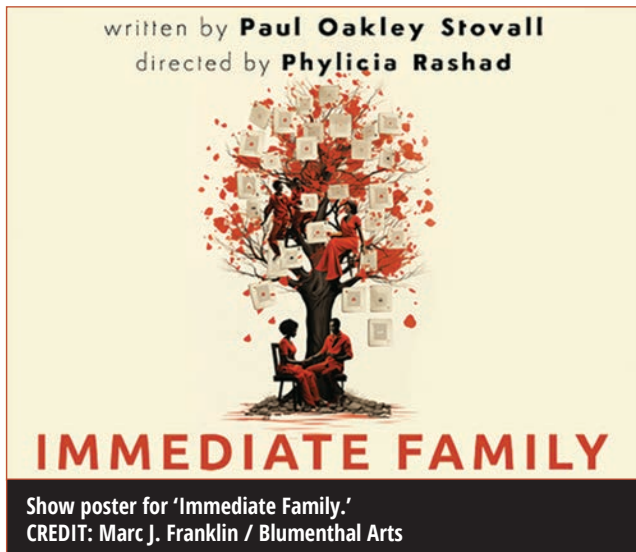
Beyond the performance, "Immediate Family" also reflects the broader cultural momentum of Charlotte itself. "Charlotte still feels like a gold rush city," said Lee. "If you have a dream, a vision, something to create—this is the place. We're not at a plateau like some other cities. There's still room and hunger for growth."

The City of Charlotte launched initiatives like the Creative Growth Grant accessible to individual artists and major organizations alike. It is clear the Queen City is prioritizing cultural development in meaningful ways.

"There are big cities that don't support their artists like this," Lee said. "Charlotte's evolving. And I'm here for it."

Directed by Phylicia Rashad with sensitivity and brilliance, "Immediate Family" is more than just a play – it's an invitation to reflect, heal and laugh. It opens hearts. It challenges minds. It encourages dialogue. ::

"Immediate Family" was written by Paul Oakley Stovall and directed by Phylicia Rashad. It is currently staging at the Booth Playhouse through Sept. 7. For tickets and additional information, visit www.blumenthalarts.org.



Show poster for 'Immediate Family.' CREDIT: Marc J. Franklin / Blumenthal Arts

Blumenthal's 2024–2025 PNC Broadway Lights series, the show marks its regional premiere right here in Charlotte, a city that continues to embrace diverse stories and world-class performance.

Set in a middle-class Chicago home, *Immediate Family* follows Jesse, a Black gay man returning home for a family wedding. When he reveals not only his sexuality but introduces his white partner to the family, a layered and sometimes explosive conversation begins. A conversation that addresses hidden prejudices, unspoken grief, sibling tension and the complicated beauty of love in all its forms.

"It is one of the most compelling comedy-dramas I've ever seen," said Jermaine Nakia Lee, Creative Consultant for Blumenthal Arts. Lee plays a critical role in shaping inclusive engagement strategies for Blumenthal, especially as they relate to Black and LGBTQ+ audiences.

"This is a conversation many families are still afraid to have," Lee added. "The play deals with Black identity, queerness,



The cast of 'Immediate Family.' CREDIT: Marc J. Franklin / Blumenthal Arts

CHARLOTTE PRIDE MAIN STAGE

AUG 16

ADORE DELANO SNOW WIFE SHAUN ROSS

PLANE JANE AMETHYST
DJ GHOST YOUNG SHILOH
KUZH JANELLE SY'MONE
CAROLINA DOWN BOYS BOS
CHRIS PIERCE LAMAR
DJ WANDERGIRL MAGGIE LOWE

JAYLA SERENA MITCHELL RC COLA DAHLIA DIALUP
FAITH N MAE GISELLE CASSIDY CARTER LULU CAVALLI
NOVA STELLA CIERRA NICHOLE MARCELINE MASHIC
PORSCHE KA'ORIE DUPREE XL
THE CHARLOTTE PRIDE 2024 DRAG COURT
EMCEES LOLITA CHANEL & MALACHI

AUG 17

CARLOS DWAYNE CHASYN SPARX
DANA ANGEL PRODIGY GEREM3
ANGEL BLACC JOHN MADDREY

THE CHARLOTTE PRIDE 2025 DRAG COURT

Performance times @cltpride on Instagram

CHARLOTTE PRIDE SCHEDULE

AUG 16-17

CHARLOTTE PRIDE FESTIVAL

SAT 12 - 11 PM

SUN 12 - 6 PM

FIRST WARD PARK

NEIGHBORHOOD MARKET

SAT 12 PM - DUSK

SUN 12 - 6 PM

FIRST WARD PARK

FLOURISH

SAT 1 - 6 PM

DUBOIS CENTER

YOUTH & FAMILY ZONE

SAT + SUN 12 - 6 PM

FIRST WARD PARK

CHARLOTTE BLACK PRIDE STAGE & DANCE TENT

SAT + SUN 12 - 6 PM

N BREVARD STREET

HEALTH FAIR

SAT 12 PM - DUSK

SUN 12 - 6 PM

8TH STREET

AUG 17

CHARLOTTE PRIDE PARADE

1 - 3 PM

TRYON STREET

CHARLOTTE  **PRIDE**

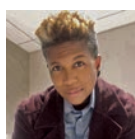
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Visit charlottepride.org for more details



Charlotte is nation's second largest financial hub, and more

The Queen City's banking and related service businesses attract steady flow of newcomers

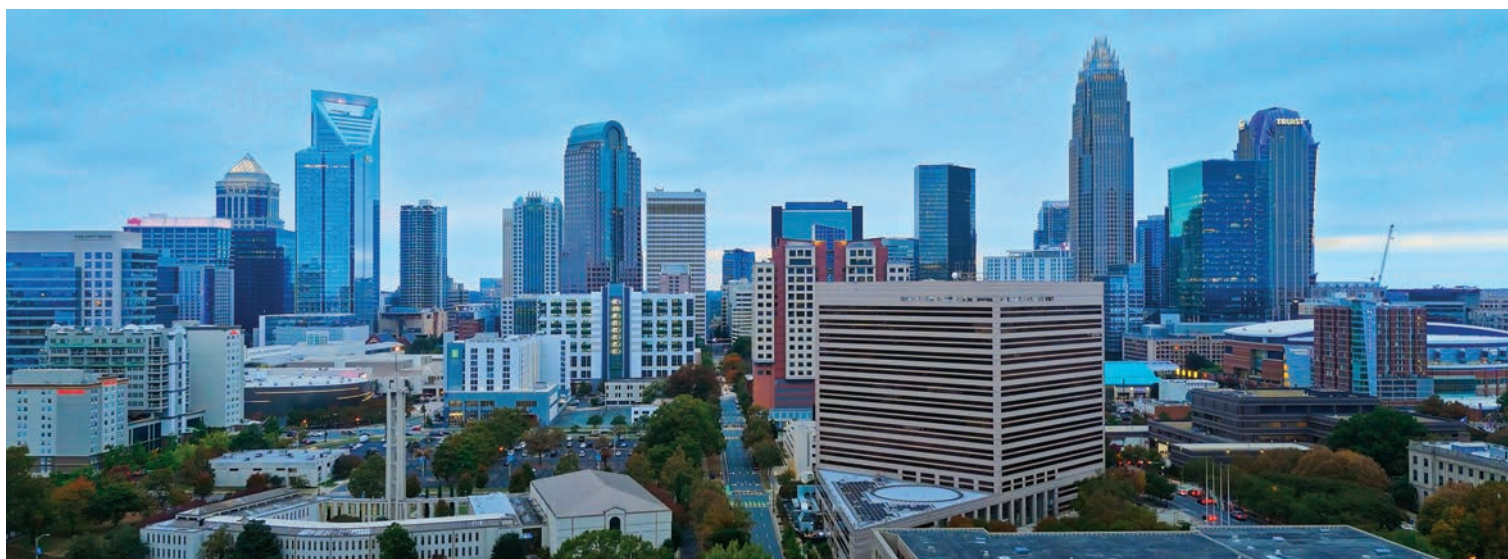


by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

Charlotte's financial prominence is rooted in its role as the headquarters of heavyweights like Bank of America, with about \$2.8 trillion in assets, and Truist Financial, which holds over \$500 billion in assets. Both are settled in Uptown Charlotte. The region is also home to major employment centers for banks such as Wells Fargo, Ally Financial, US Bank and others. Collectively, the Charlotte metro boasts over 104,000 financial services jobs, with employment growing at a rate more than 3.5 times the national average.

Charlotte's financial prominence continues to attract major investments. Just recently, Citigroup announced plans to create more than 500 new jobs here with expected average salaries of \$131,800. The announcement underscores the city's appeal as an ongoing financial hub.

The Queen City has long held national attention as the second-largest banking and finance center in the United States. But ask the people leading the city's workforce and economic transformation, and they'll tell you: Charlotte is more than just a financial



town. It's a hub of innovation, opportunity and inclusive business growth.

During conversations with Danielle Frazier, special assistant to the City Manager for Workforce Development, and Cathay Dawkins, chairman of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Black Chamber of Commerce (CMBCC), a more expansive portrait of the city emerges; one that reflects deep investments in talent development, small business support and economic growth.

More Than a Financial Capital

Charlotte's strong financial roots continue to serve as a magnet for major corporate investment and both public and private leaders stress that the city's value proposition has diversified.

"We're still known across the country as the second-largest financial hub," says Frazier. "But we've evolved. Technology, logistics, healthcare and advanced manufacturing are sectors that are driving growth alongside banking."

There's also momentum in food systems, real estate, construction and creative services, according to Dawkins. "Banking helped put Charlotte on the map," he explains. "But now, entrepreneurs and innovators are helping shape what comes next – from food systems and creative services to clean energy and logistics."

Small Business, Big Impact

As Chairman of the CMBCC, Dawkins has

a front-row seat to the rise of entrepreneurship in Charlotte.

"Our Chamber has over 400 members. These are restaurateurs, consultants, developers, artists, wellness coaches – you name it. And they are building legacies right here in Charlotte."

Charlotte's growing list of business resources also includes the Small Business Resource Center, Carolina Small Business Development Fund, SCORE Charlotte and the Women's Business Center of Charlotte.

"Charlotte doesn't just attract corporations – it creates an ecosystem where micro-businesses and solopreneurs can thrive too," Dawkins says. "That's a differentiator."

Building a Workforce for the Future

On the workforce side, Danielle Frazier is helping to lead the charge in developing talent pipelines that align with the city's evolving business needs. "Businesses start with one of the top three reasons they relocate and that's access to a skilled workforce," Frazier offers. "That's a major advantage we have in the Charlotte region."

We have a wealth of educational institutions; UNC Charlotte, Central Piedmont, Johnson C. Smith University, Queens University and other technical and trades training providers. Charlotte is uniquely positioned to provide a deep talent pool for industries across the board.

"Our office focuses on two lenses," said Frazier. "Supporting internal talent within the City of Charlotte and investing externally in our community through workforce development programs."

That includes 17 registered apprenticeships through the city's status as a Department of Labor Apprenticeship Ambassador, supporting 17 apprenticeship roles across departments, a six-month Career Training Academy with a 70 percent retention rate and the Education-to-Employment program, which offers high school graduates full-time roles with the city.

Last year alone, the city invested \$4 million in grants to community partners to support career navigation, training and job placement.

"We work with everyone from grass-



Cathay Dawkins, chairman of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Black Chamber of Commerce.



Danielle Frazier, special assistant to the City Manager for Workforce Development.

roots organizations to workforce boards and chambers to ensure we're meeting people where they are and connecting them to opportunity," Frazier offers.

Logistics, Location and Lifestyle Appeal

"Charlotte's strategic location gives us a major edge," Frazier explains. "With our international airport we're the sixth busiest airport in the world for departures and arrivals. The seventh busiest for most passengers, around 58 plus million a year. In addition, we've got highways 77, 85 and 485 which give businesses incredible mobility. These major thoroughfares are moving people and goods."

Dawkins agrees: "It's a city where you can run a business, catch a direct flight and still have time to attend your child's soccer game. There's a strong faith community, a growing arts scene and genuine Southern hospitality. That matters."

Charlotte also offers green space, culture, family-friendly amenities and a cost of living significantly lower than many coastal peers.

"Opportunity is what brought me here over 20 years ago," Frazier recalls. "And I've never looked back."

Planning for Growth and Growing Pains

Both Dawkins and Frazier acknowledge that Charlotte's rapid growth brings challenges, especially in transportation and affordability.

"With more than 100,000 people commuting into the city each day, we must expand our transportation infrastructure," says Frazier. "We're looking at rail, more bus routes, microtransit and roadway improvements to stay competitive."

Housing and capital access also remain key concerns. "Growth without inclusion isn't real growth," says Dawkins. "We need policies that ensure **micro- and minority-owned** businesses aren't pushed out, but instead pulled in."

Looking Ahead: Charlotte's Next Chapter

In the next five to ten years, both leaders see Charlotte rising to the top of the nation's economic mobility rankings.

"From 50th to 38th, and now we're the third-fastest improving city in economic mobility," Frazier noted. "Our goal is to get to number one and that starts with training, awareness and opportunity from K-12 and beyond."

Final Thoughts

As a transplant this writer relocated from Pennsylvania over 25 years ago and watched Charlotte and the surrounding region boom. The infrastructure, logistics and lifestyle are powerful draws for businesses and people.

Both Dawkins and Frazier agree, Charlotte's growth is driven by more than incentives and tax breaks. "There's community here. There's opportunity," Cathay noted. Frazier summed it up: "We're building a Charlotte where anyone regardless of their background, can see themselves thriving. That's the future we're working toward." ::

Resources:

Carolinas Asian Chamber of Commerce: <https://caacc.com/>

Charlotte Area Chamber of Commerce: <https://www.charlotteareachamber.com/>

City of Charlotte Workforce Development: <https://charlottenc.gov>

Charlotte Mecklenburg Black Chamber of Commerce: <https://www.cmbcc.org>
Small Business Resources in Charlotte Include:

Carolinas LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce - Supports LGBT+/Allies businesses with events, training, and vendor opportunities. <https://www.clgbtcc.org/>

Charlotte Business INclusion - A City of Charlotte program supporting MWSBE-certified businesses. <https://www.charlottenc.gov/Growth-and-Development/CBI>

Latin American Chamber of Commerce Charlotte: <https://www.lacccharlotte.com/>

Small Business Resource Center - Centralized support for startups and small businesses. <https://oed.mecknc.gov/small-businesses/small-business-consulting>

SCORE Charlotte - Mentoring and workshops for small business owners. <https://www.score.org/>

Women's Business Center of Charlotte - Specialized resources and training for women entrepreneurs. <https://theinstitutenc.org/programs/wbcc/>

CHARLOTTE AREA LGBTQ+ NIGHT LIFE



Bar Argon
VJ & DJ/Dance. Video Lounge.
4544-H South Blvd. • 704.525.7787
barargon.com



Chasers
Drag. Pool. DJ/Dance. Dancers.
3217 The Plaza • 704.339.0500
chaserscharlotte.club



Petra's
Art. DJ/Dance. Live Music.
1919 Commonwealth Ave.
<https://petrasbar.com>



Hattie's Tap & Tavern
DJ/Dance. Pool. Games.
2918 The Plaza • 980.938.6228
hattiescharlotte.com



Hide-A-Way
Drag. Pool. DJ/Dance.
405 E. Baskins Rd., Rock Hill, SC
803.328.6630 • thehideawaysc.com



The Scorpio
Drag. DJ/Dance.
225 Fairwood Ave. • 704.373.9124
thescorpio.com



Sidelines
Pool. Games. Sports.
4544-C South Blvd. • 704.525.2608
thesidelinesbar.com



The Woodshed
Drag. Pool. DJ/Dance.
3935 Queen City Dr. • 704.394.1712
woodshedlounge.com

CAROLINAS LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce
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clgbtcc.org

Charlotte's urban oasis: The Whitewater Center

It's a mix of adventure, community and safe haven



by **Wendy Lyons**
Qnotes Staff Writer

Just a few miles west of Uptown Charlotte near the Paw Creek community, the U.S. National Whitewater Center pulses with a kind of kinetic magic. It's where urban meets untamed, adrenaline meets serenity and locals and visitors alike come to breathe deeply, play hard and connect with nature, others and themselves.

At first glance, it might seem like a haven for hardcore adventurers. After all, the Whitewater Center is home to the largest man-made whitewater river in the world, drawing Olympic-level kayakers and thrill-seeking rafters alike. But take a step into its 1,300+ acres and you'll quickly discover: This place is for everyone. The Whitewater Center is one of Charlotte's most affirming, inclusive and accessible spaces for outdoor recreation, relaxation and reflection.

A highly favored place in Charlotte where many go to relax, reconnect and revive their spirit, the U.S. National Whitewater Center is not just a destination, it can truly be an outdoor home away from home and a great location for a relaxing staycation.

This writer designates the Whitewater Center as a place to visit often. Sometimes alone, sometimes with friends and always when family comes into town. The family dog loves to connect with other canines in the off leash area or walking around the whitewater river. The Whitewater Center has become a personal tradition, a local love affair and a peaceful yet energizing space to decompress. It's a place where you can breathe deeper and mentally and spiritually recharge.



Qnotes writer Wendy Lyons relaxing at one of her favorite spots.
CREDIT: W. Lyons

For Reese Compton, a Charlotte local and outdoor enthusiast, it's all about the feel of the place. "Honestly? It's the vibe," Reese says. "The Whitewater Center feels like a little pocket of adventure tucked into the everyday. Whether you want to be fully active or just vibe out by the water with a drink, it somehow meets both moods."

Compton visits the center several times a season. Sometimes it's for heart-pumping



Whitewater rafting at the Whitewater Center.
CREDIT: Facebook

whitewater rafting and zip lining. Other days it's about winding down with a good book in one of the shaded hammock nooks or catching a concert with friends. "The trails are peaceful, well-marked and full of natural beauty, which makes it easy to lose track of time and miles," Compton adds.

With over 45 miles of trails, zip lines, rock climbing walls, stand-up paddle boarding, yoga and a variety of food and drink options, the Whitewater Center has built an environment where outdoor fun isn't limited by age or experience level.

"There's something for everyone," Compton confirms. "You don't have to be super athletic to enjoy it.

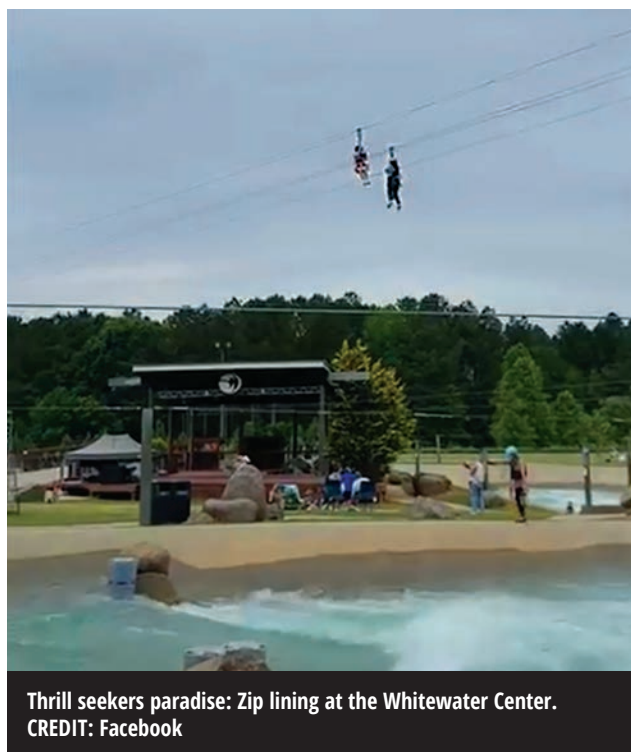
I've seen toddlers running around the splash area, teens conquering rope courses, and grown folks in their 40s attempting yoga on paddle boards like pros, or at least trying not to fall in!"

For those just starting their fitness journeys, the center is a motivating space. "I've even trained individuals there, helping them get started with running," Compton offers. "The trails are the perfect distraction from the challenge of learning how to run and breathe consistently at the same time. It feels less like work and more like play."

The Whitewater Center feels less like a public park and more like a giant, welcoming backyard for the whole community. "It's laid-back but still feels intentional," Compton explains. "You'll see families

with strollers, kids chasing each other on the trails and plenty of pups living their best lives."

Gail Blackshear, who visited while spending time with family in North Carolina, remembers falling in love with the space during last summer's weekly concert series. "There was a summer fest with different bands playing every Thursday night. We attended every week until it ended. It was pet-friendly, and everyone respected each other. It's festive with the cool breeze off the waterfront, and there's plenty of space to set up your lawn chairs or blankets."



Thrill seekers paradise: Zip lining at the Whitewater Center.
CREDIT: Facebook

Though she's not a Charlotte native, Blackshear's enthusiasm is contagious. "The Whitewater Center is extremely enjoyable. I wish St. Louis had such a wonderful center."

Throughout the year, there are a variety of events that combine recreation, community, and culture. Highlights the Whitewater Center hosts include:

- **Green River Revival (March):** A St. Patrick's Day celebration with green-dyed rapids.
- **Tuck Fest (April):** Outdoor lifestyle festival with music, competitions and vendors.
- **River Jam (May-Sept.):** Weekly concerts by the river.
- **Labor Day Celebration:** Fireworks, food trucks and family fun.
- **Flow Fest (Sept.):** Blended yoga practices, wellness, workshops, vendors and live music into a one-day festival.
- **Holiday Lights & Ice Skating (Nov.-Jan.):** A glowing winter experience.

While the rafting and ropes might grab headlines, it's the simple moments that leave a lasting impression. "One summer," Compton recalls, "my friends and I did the zip line and whitewater rafting combo, and I laughed so hard I cried. Our raft guide cracked jokes the whole time, even as we got totally drenched. We wrapped it up with live music and tacos by the river."

Other times, it's slower moments that stand out. "I remember sitting on a bench with friends," says Compton, "playing Phase Ten as the sun set. It was one of those feel-good moments where time just slows down and you remember how healing it is to be outside with people you love."

While the Charlotte location is the flagship and home to the only whitewater river, the Whitewater brand is growing. Other locations such as Big Creek Lodge in Mills River, N.C. and Middleburg in Charleston, S.C. are part of the organization's commitment to environmental stewardship, outdoor recreation and community building. Each center is designed to preserve natural beauty while encouraging people to engage with the outdoors year-round.

But the Charlotte location, with its energy and accessibility, remains the heart of the experience. Whether you're tackling class IV rapids, relaxing in a hammock with a cold beer, cheering on a local band, or helping your kid conquer their first climbing wall, the U.S. National Whitewater Center is more than an outdoor destination. It's an experience.

In a city growing by the minute, it's rare to find a space that feels untouched and yet entirely accessible to everyone. The Whitewater Center offers that balance. It's a refuge from the chaos of life, a rush and a rhythm. In every step, splash, and sunset, the Whitewater Center is calling for you to take advantage of everything it has to offer. ::

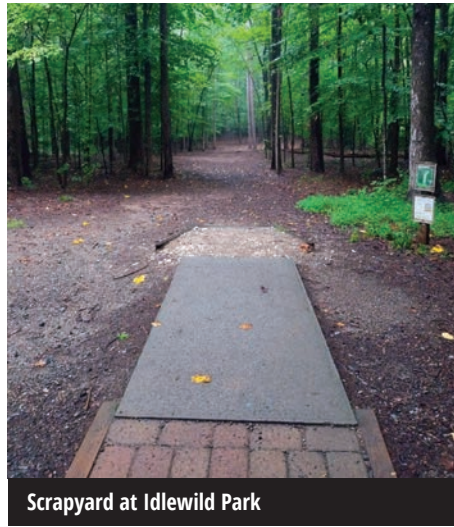
The U.S. National Whitewater Center is located at 5000 Whitewater Center Parkway in Charlotte. For more details visit www.whitewater.org

Disc golf in Mecklenburg County

compiled by Liz Schob | *Quotes Staff Writer*



Hornets Nest Park



Scrapyard at Idlewild Park

Angry Beaver at Elon Park (11401 Ardrey Kell Rd., Charlotte, NC 28277)

Bailey Road Park (11536 Bailey Rd., Cornelius, NC 28031)

Bradford Park (17005 Davidson-Concord Rd., Huntersville, NC 28078)

Crooked Creek Crossing (5900 Oakwood Ln., Indian Trail, NC 28079)

Eastway Park (423 Eastway Dr., Charlotte, NC 28215)

Hornets Nest Park (6301 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte, NC 28216)

Kilborne Park (2600 Kilborne Dr., Charlotte, NC 28205)

Nevin Community Park (600 Statesville Rd., Charlotte, NC 28269)

Plantation Ruins at Winget Park (12025 Winget Park Rd., Charlotte, NC 28278)

Reedy Creek Park (2900 Rocky River Rd., Charlotte, NC 28215)

Renaissance Gold at Renaissance Park (1536 W. Tyvola Rd., Charlotte, NC 28217)

RL Smith Park (1604 Little Rock Rd., Charlotte, NC 28214)

Robbins Park (17738 W. Catawba Ave., Cornelius, NC 28031)

Scrapyard at Idlewild Park (10436 Idlewild Rd., Matthews, NC 28105)

Squirrel Lake Park (1631 Pleasant Plains Rd., Matthews, NC 28105)

Sugaw Creek Park (941 W. Sugar Creek Rd., Charlotte, NC 28213)

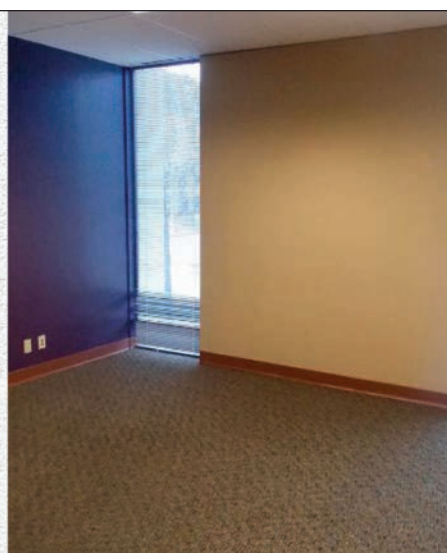


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SUPPORTING TRANS PEOPLE BY EMBRACING THE POWER OF FAMILY AND FAITH

by Rev. Diego Miguel Sanchez | *PFLAG National*

When I was five, as my parents and I sat at home for supper, I told them that I was born wrong.

They silently left the room for what seemed an eternity. My folks said that I could tell them anything, but I was afraid. Could this be the line that erases their love?

Mom re-entered the room. She sat and said, as she unrolled a magazine with Christine Jorgensen on the cover, "I don't know if there are other people like you who were born a girl and think they're a boy. But this person was born a boy, grew up as a man, and finally became herself." Mom continued. "If it's okay for her now, by the time you grow up, I think it will be okay for you."

From that point, my parents dually socialized me as a boy and a girl, just in case I became unsure. They didn't have a handbook. They gave love. My parents did this 11 years before PFLAG's founder, Jeanne Manford, marched in the Christopher Street Liberation Day March (New York Pride's precursor). She was invited to march by her gay son Morty, who had been beaten for being gay. It was before young marchers asked her to create PFLAG meetings in church basements to guide their parents on raising their LGBTQ+ children, leading with love.

In these most challenging times, we need our best assets in rooms that would exclude us and in front of people who would erase us. Parents and grandparents are our most powerful assets because they most closely resemble the people we need to be educated or influenced. They have extra power because, other than their LGBTQ+ children, they most closely witness how we are helped or harmed, and they are invested in us and offer their own feelings and experiences.

Fortunately, reliable, relatable resources and communities exist, including the nation's first and largest mom-created family asset for support, education and advocacy, PFLAG, which offers its 350+ chapters and 550,000 members and supporters in-person or virtual meetings, tools to take action, and actual community connection. Our loving families will win. Our battles are historic, and many of us have been here before. For me, this momentum is intertwined with a foundation of faith that moves me forward, and that link started in North Carolina.

My foundation blends family and faith, and it started here in North Carolina. Historically, first in Charlotte and later in Durham, The Freedom Center for Social Justice created an annual faith retreat for transgender people called Trans Faith and Action Network (TFAAN), a vision realized by Bishop Tonyia Rawls. It wove together a cloth that made every thread stronger. Weeks ago, the 13th class of trans seminarians, their faculty and other trans faith leaders celebrated in prayer, reflection, rest and rekindling ways to make the trans community more fortified, embraced and loved.

The surest efforts to reach the pinnacle of our potential involve finding and flexing our deepest sense of fulfillment. For trans and nonbinary people who are most fortunate, we might find ways to create both family and a sense of trust, of faith and of self-love.

With so much dissonance and high-volume noise intruding on the peaceful and prosperous lives we deserve, it takes tremendous



determination and courage to dare to reach for and seize what our best dreams tell us should be ours.

Working at PFLAG National, I frequently experience loving families fighting for the freedoms their trans and nonbinary children deserve, seeking only what their other children are granted.

And the PFLAG network grew by 34 chapters just this year, reaching 350+ with 500,000 members and supporters nationwide.

Families can be fierce and the primary place of belonging, when we are fortunate enough to be born into, or adopted or fostered by ones who support us. Trans people are industrious and resilient. Many of us create our family if not granted one that supports us. Whether given or built, families are central and hold the key to affirming identity, finding safety and support, and helping navigate continuity of care. These are some of the challenges that families with trans kids face today.

For myself and many near me, the power of faith intermingles with the supportive force of family. Faith can give us a sense of foundational purpose. Congregations can create community, including or beyond family. Faith, whether belief in a higher power or individual spirituality, can also multiply strength to surmount adversity or struggle. I believe the most powerful strength is blending family and faith as we deliver on our promise to protect and love our trans and nonbinary youth.

I believe that the melodic harmony of family and faith can affirm a trans or nonbinary person living authentically and should be celebrated, protected and loved.



SPOT THE SPORTS IN CHARLOTTE

compiled by Danny A. Mannanov | Qnotes Graphic Designer



Charlotte Hornets
Professional Basketball
Hugo the Hornet
Spectrum Center
<https://www.nba.com/hornets>



Carolina Panthers
Professional Football
Sir Purr
Bank of America Stadium
<https://www.panthers.com>



Charlotte Knights
Minor League Baseball
Homer the Dragon
Truist Field
<https://www.milb.com/charlotte-knights>



Charlotte Football Club
Professional Soccer
Sir Minty
Bank of America Stadium
<https://www.charlottefootballclub.com>



Ascent Football Club
Professional Women's Soccer
American Legion Memorial Stadium
<https://www.carolinaascent.com>



Charlotte Checkers
Professional Ice Hockey
Chubby
Bojangles Coliseum
<https://charlottecheckers.com>



Charlotte Roller Derby
Women's Roller Derby
Grady Cole Center
<https://www.cltrd.org>



Stonewall Sports Charlotte
LGBTQ+ Sports Leagues
Bocce, Bowling, Cornhole, Dodgeball
Kickball, Pickleball, Volleyball
<https://www.stonewallcharlotte.org>



Charlotte Royals Rugby Football Club
Queer Rugby
<https://charlotteroyalsrugby.com>



Charlotte Eagles
Semi-professional Soccer
Sportsplex at Matthews
<https://www.charlotteeagles.com>



Carolina Piedmont Softball League
LGBTQ+ Softball
<https://www.carolinapiedmontsoftball.org>



Charlotte Rainbowlers
LGBTQ+ Bowling
<https://charlotterainbowlers.com>



Charlotte Front Runners
Running and Walking
<https://www.facebook.com/CharlotteFrontRunners>



Charlotte Motor Speedway
Auto Racing
<https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com>



The Girls, The Gays, and The Great Outdoors (GGGO)
Fitness and Outdoor Activities
<https://www.meetup.com/the-girls-the-gays-and-the-great-outdoors-gggo>



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- ✦ **Inclusive Gaming:** Embrace a judgment-free zone where you can be your authentic self. All genders, sexual orientations, and skill levels are celebrated.
- ✦ **Educational Workshops:** Learn and grow with workshops on LGBTQ+ representation in gaming, online safety, and more.
- ✦ **Impactful Philanthropy:** Join initiatives like Project Blue Shell, our partnership with Ridge Road Middle School, sponsoring 12 students in 2024 by contributing Nintendo Switches, games, and crucial support, including food, gas vouchers, and year-long school supplies.



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Connect, share, and immerse yourself in our inclusive gamer family! Join now or explore our volunteer opportunities

[LINKTR.EE/CHARLOTTEGAYMERSNETWORK](https://linktr.ee/CharlotteGaymersNetwork)

Charlotte LGBTQ+ Resources

Advocacy

ALCU of North Carolina
P.O. Box 28004
Raleigh, NC 27611
919-834-3466
acluofnorthcarolina.org

Campaign for Southern Equality
P.O. Box 364
Asheville, NC 28802
828-242-1559
southernequality.org

Charlotte LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce
2838 Queen City Dr., Suite A
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-837-4050
clgbtcc.org

Equality North Carolina
P.O. Box 12581
Durham, NC 27709
919-828-0343
equalitync.org

Freedom Center for Social Justice
2838 Queen City Dr., Suite A
Charlotte, NC 28208
980-729-8454
fcsj.org

Human Rights Campaign
North Carolina
northcarolina.hrc.org
facebook.com/HRCNorthCarolina/

LGBTQ Democrats of
Mecklenburg County
933 Louise Ave., Suite 101-18
Charlotte, NC 28204
980-334-3316
meckdemlgbtq.org

North Carolina AIDS Action Network
112 Broadway St., Suite B
Durham, NC 27701
704-550-1900
ncaan.org

Arts

Arts & Science Council of Charlotte
220 N. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28230
704-333-2272
artandscience.org

Charlotte Pride Band
P.O. Box 11566
Charlotte, NC 28220
charlotteprideband.org

Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte
P.O. Box 560661
Charlotte, NC 28256
704-549-9202
gmcccharlotte.org

One Voice Chorus
P.O. Box 9241
Charlotte NC 28299
980-220-2435
onevoicechorus.com

Women's Chorus of Charlotte
P.O. Box 560661
Charlotte, NC 28256
704-549-9202
gmcccharlotte.org

Faith

Beloved Community Charlotte
2647 Freedom Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-654-7429
belovedcommunityclt.com

Caldwell Presbyterian Church
1609 E. Fifth St.
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-334-0825
caldwellpresby.org

Charlotte Atheists and Agnostics
charlotteatheists.org

Charlotte Buddhist Vihara
3423 Stonehaven Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28215
704-299-8309
charlottebuddhistvihara.org

Dilworth United Methodist Church
605 East Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28203
704-333-4173
dilworthchurch.org

First Christian Church
1200 East Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28203
704-334-3771
fcc-charlotte.org

First United Methodist Church
501 N. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28202
704-333-9081
charlottefirst.org

Havurat Tikvah
P.O. Box 1714
Matthew, NC 28106
980-225-5330
havurattikvah.org

Holy Covenant United Church of Christ
3501 W. WT Harris Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28269
704-599-9810
holycovenantucc.org

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
1900 The Plaza
Charlotte, NC 28205
704-377-5439
htlcharlotte.org

Inclusion Community
21209 Catawba Ave.
Cornelius, NC 28031
inclusioncommunity.org

MeckMin
3900 A- Park Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28209
704-565-5455

meckmin.org

Mission Gathering Charlotte
420 E. 15th St.
Charlotte, NC 28206
704-412-4028
missiongathering.com

Myers Park Baptist Church
1900 Queens Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28207
704-334-7232
myersparkbaptist.org

New Life Metropolitan
Community Church
1201 S. New Hope Rd.
Gastonia, NC 28054
704-334-0350
newlifemccgastonia.org

Park Road Baptist Church
3900 Park Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28209
704-523-5717
parkroadbaptist.org

Piedmont Unitarian
Universalist Church
9704 Mallard Creek Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-510-0008
puuc.org

Sacred Souls Community Church
2127 Eastway Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28205
980-301-5863
facebook.com/SacredsSoulsCommunityChurchUcc

South Park Christian Church
6650 Park South Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28210
704-554-1066
southparkchristian.org

St. John's Baptist Church
300 Hawthorne Ln.
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-333-5428
stjohnsbaptistchurch.org

St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church
1600 Norris Ave.
Charlotte, NC 28206
704-375-9650
stlukeclt.org

St. Martin's Episcopal Church
1510 E. 7th St.
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-376-8441
stmclt.org

St. Peter's Catholic Church
507 S. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28202
704-332-2901
stpeterscatholic.org

Temple Beth El
5101 Providence Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28226

704-366-1948
templebethel.org

The Unitarians of Lake Norman
625 South St.
Davidson, NC 28036
980-689-0630
uulakenorman.org
Unitarian Universalist Church
of Charlotte
234 N. Sharon Amity Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
704-366-8623
uuccharlotte.org

Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Lake Norman
625 South St
Davidson, NC 28036
980-429-4726
httuulakenorman.org

Unity Fellowship Church
P.O. Box 44154
Charlotte, NC 28215
980-263-9093
unityfellowshipchurchcharlotte.org

Watershed Charlotte
2101 Shenandoah Ave.
Charlotte, NC 28205
704-644-0919
watershedcharlotte.com

Wedgewood Community Church
P.O. Box 18912
Charlotte, NC 28218
704-641-0454
wedgewoodcharlotte.org

Health & HIV

Affinity Health Center
Locations in Rock Hill, Clover and York
803-909-6363
affinityhealthcenter.org

Amity Medical Group
Locations in East and South Charlotte
704-208-4134
amitymed.org
Six locations:

Monroe Road
9835 Monroe Rd – Suite B
Charlotte, NC 28270
704-322-4065

Dallas Highway
824 Lower Dallas Hwy.
Dallas, NC 28034
704-874-0200

Harris Boulevard
6010 E. W.T. Harris Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28215
704-208-4134

Charlotte Park
4651 Charlotte Park Dr., Suite 100
Charlotte, NC 28217
704-461-0006

Tryon Street

Charlotte LGBTQ+ Resources

7945 N. Tryon St. #112
Charlotte NC 28262
704-503-6336

Randolph Road
2300 Randolph Rd., Suite A
Charlotte, NC 28207
704-372-9393

Anuvia Prevention & Recovery Center
100 Billingsley Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
704-376-7447
anuvia.org

Carolinas CARE Partnership
1263 Arrow Pine Dr., Suite D100
Charlotte, NC 28273
704-531-2467
carolinascare.org

Charlotte Trans Health
charlottetranshealth.org

Dudley's Place
103 Commerce Centre Dr. Suit 103
Huntersville, NC 28078
704-977-2972
myrosedalehealth.com/dudley

House of Mercy
100 McAuley Cir.
Belmont, NC 28012
704-825-4711
thehouseofmercy.org

Mecklenburg County Health Department
Northwest Campus
2845 Beatties Ford Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28216
704-336-6500
health.mecknc.gov/facility/northwest-public-health-department

Southeast Campus
249 Billingsley Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
704-336-6500
health.mecknc.gov/facility/southeast-public-health-department

Planned Parenthood
Charlotte Health Center
700 S. Torrence St.
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-536-7233
plannedparenthood.org/health-center/north-carolina/charlotte/28204/charlotte-health-center-2703-90860

PowerHouse 2.0
1401 Beatties Ford Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28216
704-461-0489
powerhousecharlotte.org

Quality Comprehensive
Health Center Medical Clinic
3607 Beatties Ford Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28216
704-394-8968
qchealth.org

RAIN
601 E. 5th St., Suite 470
Charlotte, NC 28202
704-372-7246
carolinarain.org

RAO Community Health
321 W. 11th St.
Charlotte, NC 28202
704-237-8793
raoassist.org

Rosedale Health and Wellness
103 Commerce Centre Dr., Suite 103
Huntersville, NC 28078
704-948-8582
myrosedalehealth.com

Philanthropy

Hearts United for Good
2920 N. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28206
704-626-5980
hugclt.org

The Plus Collective
220 N. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28202
704-973-4500
thepluscollective.org

Social Groups and Events

Carolina Bear Lodge
carolinabearlodge.club

Charlotte Black Pride
charlotteblackpride.org

Charlotte Gaymers Network
charlottegaymersnetwork.com

Charlotte Lesbian Kindred Spirits
meetup.com/lesbian-kindred-spirits

Charlotte Pride
charlottepride.org

Charlotte Professional
Gay Men's Social Group
meetup.com/gay-group

Girls Room CLT
girlsroomclt.com

Lesbian Friends of Charlotte
facebook.com/groups/

[lesbianfriendsofcharlottenc](https://lesbianfriendsofcharlottenc.com)

LGBTQ+ Mixers of Charlotte
instagram.com/lgbtqmixers

Makers & Mics
instagram.com/makersandmics

Prime Timers of Charlotte
P.O. Box 37541
Rock Hill, SC 29732
404-314-3863
chapters.theprimetimerswww.com/charlotte/

Queer CLT Book Club
meetup.com/charlotte-book-arts-meetup-group

Sapphic Book Club
instagram.com/sapphicbookclubclt

Southern Country Charlotte
3217 The Plaza
Charlotte, NC 28205
980-277-0330
southerncountrycharlotte.com/scc-home

The Gaming Lounge
Charlotte, NC
<https://linktr.ee/thegaminglounge>

Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party
instagram.com/ultraviolet_clt

Social Support

Alpha Psi Kappa Fraternity
alphapsikappa.org

Carolinas LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce
2838 Queen City Dr., Suite A
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-837-4050
clgtcc.org

Charlotte Uprising
facebook.com/charlotteuprising/

Crisis Assistance Ministry
500-A Spratt St.
Charlotte, NC 28206
704-371-3001
crisisassistance.org

Feed The Movement
instagram.com/feedthemovementclt/

Hearts for the Invisible CLT Coalition
heartsfortheinvisibleclt.org

Hearts United for Good
2920 N. Tryon St.
Charlotte, NC 28206
704-626-5980
hugclt.org

Pauli Murray LGBTQ+ Bar Association
lgbtqbarn.com

PFLAG Charlotte
704-942-6857
pflagcharlotte.org

Poor No More
facebook.com/PoorNoMoreCharlotte

Queen City Connects
facebook.com/QueenCityConnects

Rainbow Foster Network
facebook.com/RainbowFosterNetwork

Roof Above
roofabove.org

T4T
t4tclt.com

There's Still Hope
tshcharlotte3.org

Transcend Charlotte
carolinascare.org

Twirl to the World Foundation
twirltotheworld.org

Youth

Center for Diversity & Inclusion
at Davidson College
209 Ridge Rd., Box 5000
Davidson, NC 28035
704-894-3103
<https://www.davidson.edu/offices-and-services/center-student-diversity-and-inclusion/lgbtqia-student-support>

Gender Education Network
gendereducationnetwork.org

GLoBAL at Winthrop University
Rock Hill, SC 29733
winthrop.edu/studentorgs/global.aspx

Pride Alliance Club Central Piedmont
Community College
Charlotte, NC
cpcc.edu/student-experience/student-life/student-clubs-and-organizations

Queers & Allies at Davidson College
Davidson, NC
davidsonqanda.weebly.com

Time Out Youth Center
3800 Monroe Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28205
704-344-8335
timeoutyouth.org



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'Just Good Manners'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

"Just Good Manners: A Quintessential Guide to Courtesy, Charm, Grace and Decorum"
William Hanson
c.2025, Gallery Books
\$28.99
272 pages

So. Many. Forks. You're glad *you're* not doing the dishes at the end of this dinner - but in the meantime, what's protocol? If this event wasn't a make-or-break, filled-with-repercussions kind of deal for you, you wouldn't care; you'd use one fork, one spoon, and enjoy your meal, thank you. So please pass the salt and the new book "Just Good Manners" by William Hanson.

Dining at a restaurant not long ago, Hanson noticed a glaring difference between how his fellow Brits order a meal, and how Americans do it. We might share a language, he says, and we're a lot alike but we're also different in many ways. Manners are one of them.

It may seem that formal manners are

archaic, even quaint, but Hanson says that they're needed now more than ever. Manners help smooth social transactions. They leave room for grace in many situations, and they help put people at ease.

"Contemporary etiquette," he says, "is rooted in six key principles."

Humility is what ensures that everyone at your meeting or dinner is comfortable, not just you. **Hospitality** welcomes everyone to the table. Knowing one's **rank** shows respect. Says Hanson, "politeness takes **patience**" and **humor**, as manners evolve. And although it sounds counter-intuitive, manners are somewhat based on **passive-aggressiveness**, which helps you be direct, but not too much.

Here, you'll learn how to deal with introductions in different situations and what to do with a pronoun faux-pas. You'll see that merely greeting someone can be fraught with danger, so be sure you know who's who before you enter a room. Learn to avoid five "taboo" topics when engaging in small-talk. If you're interrupted, know how to kindly gain control of a conversation again. Find out how the use of slang tells a listener who you really are. Know how to be a good guest, and the kind of host people appreciate.

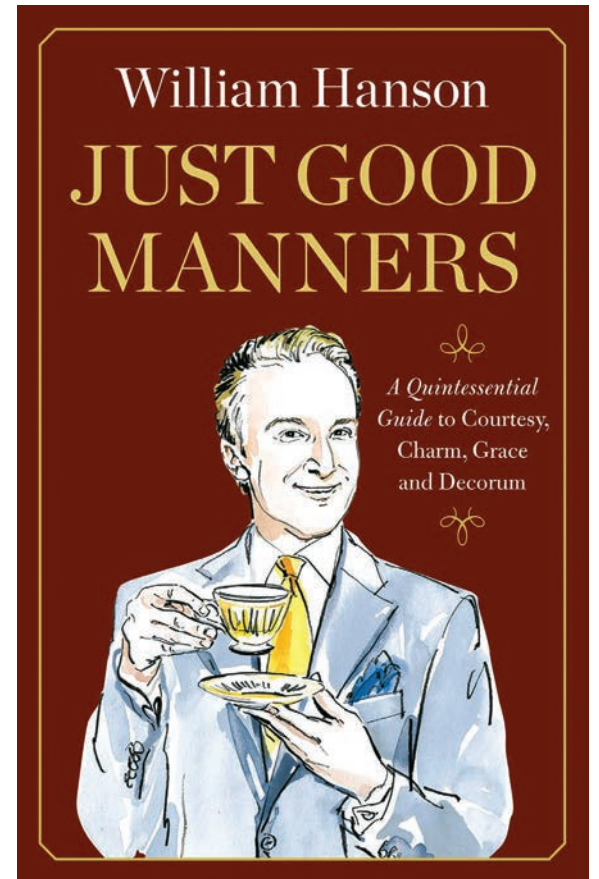
And yes, you'll learn about those many, many forks...

You do not live in a bubble. You don't

work in one, either, and smoothing ruffled feathers is needed more than ever in today's world so maybe it's time to learn how to do that from a very unruffled source. With "Just Good Manners," it could even set you apart.

Indeed, author William Hanson makes a case for politeness-as-diplomacy here, in a book that's very Brit-centric but that includes anecdotes about disastrous situations in other countries. Tales like those are fun to read, in a Schadenfreude way, but they also illustrate why it's essential to understand other cultures in business settings as well as in many casual events. If that sounds daunting, rest assured that Hanson uses his own advice, putting readers at ease with humor and charm and by taking the scariness out of manners by making them an easy, maybe even enjoyable, challenge.

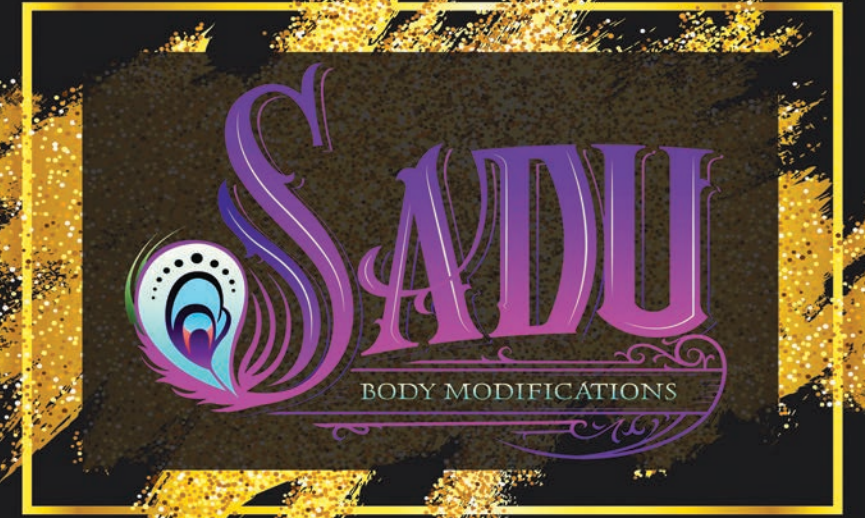
You won't feel scolded when you read "Just Good Manners," but you will learn enough to be someone people want around. It'll give you confidence. Before your next big event, it'll give you something to chew on. ::



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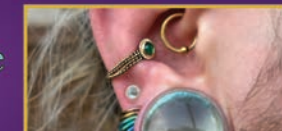
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Our People: Tiffany Crooks

A Charlotte Pride volunteer, musician and thief of hearts



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

Did you hear the one about the Crooks in Alabama and how one of them came to Charlotte? Well, no worries. We're here to spill the tea. Just kidding. In all seriousness, educator and Charlotte Pride's *Flourish* Coordinator Tiffany Crooks (originally from Huntsville, Ala.) is a warm and intuitive soul who now proudly calls the Queen City home. From her blue two-story house in East Charlotte, she spoke with us. With a passion for the arts and serving community, Crooks granted us some time to get to know her better.

L'Monique King: As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Tiffany Crooks: <Chuckling> A lot of things. A WNBA player, then an olympic volleyball player. Physical [professions] spoke to me. Somehow my interest changed around high school when I really started to enjoy signing in a choir – while playing volleyball with my team. Eventually I went to school for music education.

LMK: What brought you to Charlotte?

TC: A job in music education. I was a music teacher at an elementary school.

LMK: Do you share your life and home with anyone special?

TC: Yes, my girlfriend. We've been together for two and half years. We just recently moved into our house in December. I love my home. It's an automatic zen space. I can just relax and let the cares of the day disappear. My girlfriend loves our home too. She's decorated so nicely with her teal, emerald, green, mauve, peach color palette. She's a big earth tone person.

LMK: You sound enamored. What draws you to her?

TC: She is an amazing singer and very compassionate. She's very understanding and the person that challenged me to think about whether I seek to be understood or to understand. She has me leaning so

much more into understanding others – it's important because it provides open mindedness. You miss that many times when you solely seek to be understood. So, she's taught me to have greater empathy. MLK [having a dream for his children and the future of America] said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." When you seek to understand, you build more character. That's what I've come to understand by way of my girlfriend. I am better because of her – every moment, every day.

LMK: How are you surviving? How do you make your livelihood?

TC: I am a music educator, a music teacher and a private voice instructor.

LMK: What's your involvement in Charlotte Pride?

TC: When I'm not educating, I am volunteering. One of the first organizations I got involved with as a volunteer was Charlotte Pride. In 2018 they needed someone to coordinate for Flourish [a signature arts and culture program featuring varied performers]. They hadn't found anyone when I approached Jerry Yelton, a previous Charlotte Pride staff member. Shortly thereafter I assumed the role of Flourish coordinator.

LMK: It's Pride Season. What historical LGBTQ figure or fact do you want our readers to know that they might not?

TC: No matter how much these laws and things try to twist us, remember, we have always been here, part of society forever. I've done my own research on people who aren't as known because of the time in which they lived, people like Barbara Jordan [1936-1996; an attorney, civil rights leader, lawmaker, and the first LGBTQ woman in Congress] and others. I would encourage delving especially into Queer Southern history. There's a project called Invisible Histories that focuses on LGBT history in the deep south and it's a wonderful resource for learning more.

LMK: As an educator, a Charlotte Pride Coordinator and an LGBTQ community member, what concerns you most

about all the recent anti-LGBTQ legislation?

TC: <Sigh, long pause> People giving into the fear and not living. When I think about how much fear has surfaced because of so many laws. I just want to say get up! Protest and keep creating. Keep living. And keep loving. Loving is the complete antithesis to fear. Showing up in that love can sometimes change people's minds and free them from their own boxed fear. As an LGBTQ educator, it's always been a journey and a dance. I typically dress more masculine but I play with androgyny. You won't find me in a skirt but I may wear a more feminine shirt at times.

LMK: If you suddenly awoke as another gender what's the first thing you would do?

TC: I would still probably delve into feminine and masculine clothing but I don't think much would change for me. I am a person who chooses love, regardless of gender. So, if you're nonbinary, trans, male, female, the list goes on – it's about the connection for me. I'm pansexual.

LMK: Aside from your joy and ability in showing, sharing and experiencing love inclusively, what's your gift?

TC: There are too many to name <giggling> – I'm still discovering many and others I've run away from. <Brief reflective pause> Leadership, is a gift and something to continually develop. In leadership I am able to understand how I am inspiring and empowering people to accomplish the bigger goal. With that comes the need and ability to delegate – freeing me up to focus on other big pieces in event organization.

LMK: What would you say is your proudest moment in life to date?

TC: Successfully giving two senior recitals for my college degrees [music education



Musical educator Tiffany Crooks.
CREDIT: Morgan Pressley

and musical composition]. For one recital I had to create all the music and sing all the music for the other.

LMK: Dumbest thing you ever did?

TC: Eating slices of jalapenos without drinking anything for a one dollar bet while in middle school. I didn't know at the time that you should drink milk to calm the heat and was sick for the rest of the day. The school called my mom and she told me she already knew, "God had told her that I'd done something dumb that day." <Raucous laughter>

LMK: Outside of a glass of milk, how do you find peace during stressful or turbulent times?

TC: It's been a journey. I grew up Christian which can be turbulent in itself as an LGBTQ+ community member. I have family that does not agree with my "lifestyle" – but what has gotten me through those times is my higher power. I call it Great One Divine because it's a reminder that there is a source that I am connected to that loves me, so beautifully as I am, wanting me to grow into the person they designed me to be on this earth. ::

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