

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

# Finding the steps to economic mobility in Charlotte



**Out in Music:**  
**Nation of Language**  
**plays Chapel Hill**  
- pg 14

**Another trans life**  
**lost: Tiara Love**  
**Tori Jackson**  
- pg 9







**LGBTQA+  
Primary  
Care**

**HIV and STD  
Treatment**

**Transgender  
healthcare**

**Lab and  
pharmacy  
onsite**

***Fall into better  
healthcare today***

**Call 704-977-2972**

**ROSEDALE**  
HEALTH + WELLNESS





connect

qnotescarolinas.com

twitter.com/qnotescarolinas

facebook.com/qnotescarolinas

instagram.com/qnotescarolinas



### contributors this issue

Writers: Galen Bacharier, Lynn Bonner, Clayton Henkel, L'Monique King, Taylor Heeden Larkins, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore, Liz Schob, Gregg Shapiro, Terri Schlichenmeyer

### on the cover

Graphic Design by Daniel A. Mannanov  
Illustration: Adobe Stock

### Mission:

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

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

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

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

Sales: x201 adsales@qnotescarolinas.com

Nat'l Sales: Rivendell Media, ph  
212.242.6863

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

Director of Strategic Initiatives:  
Liz Schob

Digital Engagement Specialist:  
Tim Kendra-Dell

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

Copy Editor: Bailey Sides

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

Printed on recycled paper.

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

charlotte  
NEWSALLIANCE

charlotteobserver.com/1166/  
a local news partner of  
The Charlotte Observer

# inside this issue



## feature

- 11 A guide to Charlotte's LGBTQ+ entrepreneurial ecosystem
- 12 Reshaping DEI language for grants, education and publicly funded programs



## news

- 5 Madison Cawthorn running for office in Florida
- 6 Ex-South Carolina lawmaker RJ May pleads guilty to child sex crimes
- 6 16 states and Washington D.C. sue Trump administration
- 6 Atlanta's Rainbow Crosswalk remains a city fixture as Delray Beach's is lost
- 7 Former N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper warns Medicaid expansion is 'in danger'
- 7 Suspect accused in deadly Southport shooting held
- 7 anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs
- 7 Pete Buttigieg envisions a way forward at Duke University
- 8 Kimmel back on air, Trump says 'let Jimmy rot'
- 9 Charlotte Trans woman murdered, suspect arrested



## a&e

- 13 Out in Print: 'The Elements'
- 14 Out in Music: Dance like you're gay



## life

- 10 LGBTQ+ Chambers of Commerce in the Carolinas
- 15 Our People: DJ Spinn



## views

- 4 Attacks on immigration go against American ideals



## events

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



### Our People: DJ Spinn talks about life and music

DJ Spinn has been a part of Charlotte's dance club music scene since the 1990s. These days, he's still playing at clubs and he's got a gig on The Soul 105.3 FM every Monday night from 9 to 10 p.m. "I'm kind of a music geek, so when I'm not DJing, I'm still working on music. I'm researching music, I'm listening to new music ... It's always homework for me even when I'm not working."

PAGE 15

### Pete Buttigieg speaks at Duke University

"Big picture, we are in the middle of witnessing an energetic and largely successful attempt by people running our government ... to take full control of the levers of official policy and power in this country, but also to wield unprecedented levels of control over the pillars of our civil society, including law, science, technology, medicine, entertainment, press and academia."

— Pete Buttigieg

PAGE 7



## The People speak on Social Media



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

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

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

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

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

name:

address:

city:

state:

zip:

credit card — check one: ☐ mastercard ☐ visa ☐ discover ☐ american express

card #:

exp. date:

signature:

SUBSCRIBE!



# Attacks on immigration go against American ideals

Numerous immigration judges fired or decide to resign



by Taylor Heeden Larkins  
Qnotes Staff Writer

As the Trump Administration continues its attacks against the immigrant community, there remains one critical defense against these unprecedented assaults on the Constitution and American ideals: judges.

The job of immigration judges, who are considered employees of the U.S. Department of Justice, is simple: preside over administrative hearings to decide whether a non-citizen should be allowed to remain in the U.S. or be removed. They interpret and apply immigration laws and regulations to cases involving charges from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) — which U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operates under — of violating immigration law. Judges also hear testimony, review evidence and rule on applications for immigration benefits, such as asylum or green cards.

Immigration judges are appointed by the Attorney General after a competitive application, rigorous evaluation and interview process conducted by the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). Unlike judges who work under Article III of the Constitution, immigration justices are hired directly by the EOIR and do not require Senate confirmation. Under “normal” circumstances, immigration judges don’t undergo partisan scrutinization — they are employed based on their merit and legal experience to ensure qualified candidates are selected to serve in these critical roles.

However, these aren’t “normal” times we’re living in. Since Donald Trump was sworn into office on Jan.

20, a significant faction of all the immigration justices across the nation have been fired from their positions. In 2024, the total number of immigration judges was around

700. Since the beginning of 2025, more than 125 immigration judges have been fired or resigned since the start of 2025, according to reports from NPR, CapRadio and the American Immigration Council.

Just last month, 20 immigration judges received emails this month informing them that they are being let go. Some say this move appears to contradict the Trump Administration’s claimed prioritization on immigration enforcement. Administration officials countered the judges targeted have not managed mounting caseloads effectively.

JJ Mulligan, an immigration attorney

at the UC Davis Immigration Law Clinic, told CAP Radio in California a lot of the targeted justices were appointed under President Joe Biden and were nearing the end of their two-year probationary period. According to him, this will only make it more difficult for immigrants to stay in the U.S.

“If you think about this in the criminal court context, imagine someone going without a public defender and the prosecutor saying, ‘This guy’s guilty of so and so crime,’ and the judge is just going along with whatever the prosecutor says,” Mulligan stressed. “You can imagine how many people in criminal court would be going to jail or pleading out to these terrible charges even if they’re innocent just because they don’t know anything about the legal system.”

Another issue with the firing of justices is the impact it will have on the ability to handle these cases in a timely manner. NPR followed Chelmsford Immigration Court, located just outside of Boston, which has become one of the most understaffed courts in the country in the Trump second term. Attorney Stephen Born, who often argues cases for clients at Chelmsford, told NPR his clients are already being impacted. Some clients have waited for more than a decade for their right to their day in court, and now, Born says that opportunity is being ripped away.

“So the little light at the end of the tunnel for these people who have been following the American dream and playing by all the rules is increasingly being snuffed,” he said.

The most recent wave of terminations followed the passage of a major congressional spending package that designated more than three billion USD for immigration-related operations within the Justice Department. This funding includes resources to expand the number of immigration judges, with the goal of reducing the massive backlog of nearly four mil-

lion pending cases. However, bringing new judges on board and preparing them for the role can take over a year.

In recent months, leadership at the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) has expressed concerns over how judges are handling their caseloads. They’ve urged adjudicators to make their asylum rulings more efficient, including favoring oral decisions



How much military intervention will Trump use to take over government function and domestic law enforcement?

for dismissing cases rather than issuing written ones.

What’s the Trump administration’s goal here? If their goal is to deport as many illegal immigrants as possible, why would they fire the judges who could potentially help speed up that process?

The answer can be found in the pages of Project 2025. In the Mandate for Leadership published by the Heritage Foundation, it lays out a blueprint for exploiting the presidential powers to use the military to take over certain government functions and domestic law enforcement. This includes the use of the military for immigration enforcement, such as using military personnel and equipment to block crossings at the U.S. border. Trump has also suggested on his own he would also be interested in weaponizing the military to enforce immigration laws.

Has this happened yet?

American People Against Invasion,” which significantly revokes previous immigration policies and increases cooperation between ICE and other federal agencies. The executive order specifically mandates ICE to increase the number of agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies under the 287(g) program “to the maximum extent permitted by law.” The 287(g) program delegates federal immigration enforcement authority to local law enforcement officers.

Trump has also deployed the military to U.S. cities — such as Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Memphis, and XXXXXXXX — to “restore law and order,” but many say it for what this is: an overstretch of executive power and weaponizing the military against the country’s own citizens.

Around 600 military attorneys were recently approved in September by the Department of War, formerly the Department of Defense, to serve as temporary immigration judges. The Justice Department also revised eligibility criteria for these temporary positions, easing previous requirements and no longer mandating prior immigration law experience.

Project 2025 — the very same plan Trump claimed to know nothing about — is being followed step by step for all of the world to see. This isn’t what makes America great — this is what makes America fall. ::

**“Project 2025 — the very same plan Trump claimed to know nothing about — is being followed step by step for all of the world to see. This isn’t what makes America great — this is what makes America fall”**

**QnotesDemocracy**  
OUR RIGHTS AT RISK

On his first day in office, Trump signed an executive order titled “Protecting The



# Madison Cawthorn running for office in Florida

Republicans turned on former N.C. Rep after he accused them of drug use and sex parties

by Clayton Henkel | NC Newsline

Former North Carolina Congressman Madison Cawthorn announced on Wednesday his bid to return to Congress – this time, representing the state of Florida.

Cawthorn said he had been pondering a return to politics for some time, but the death of conservative activist Charlie Kirk helped him make the decision.

“There is only one course of action for those of us who want to live in a free, prosperous, and safe land to do: Be extremely shrewd, fearless in the face of backlash and resistance, and to stand up and fight for our country,” Cawthorn wrote Wednesday on social media. “The left here and abroad knew they could never beat Charlie in a debate so they shot him. Well in his place 10,000 more will rise. This is what I am capable of doing, I hope you have the courage to do what you’re capable of doing.”

Cawthorn, now 30, was the youngest member of Congress when he was elected to North Carolina’s 11th congressional district in 2020.

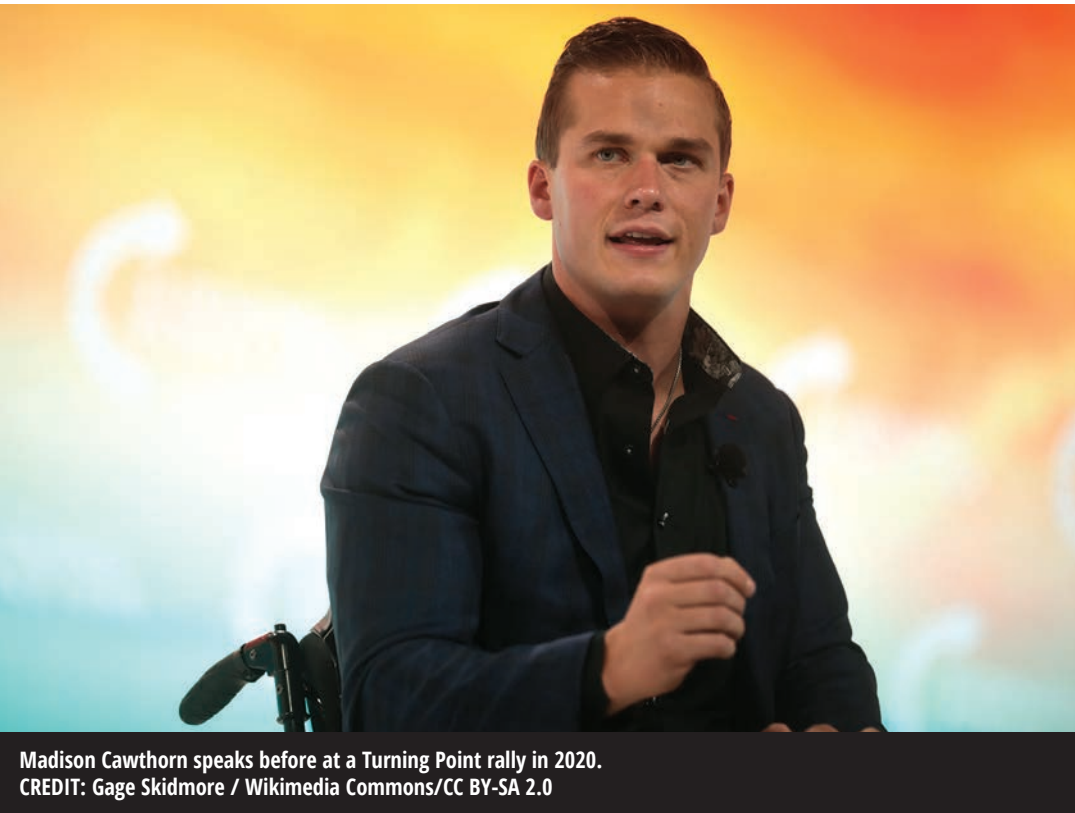
He lost his Republican primary in 2022 to current Rep. Chuck Edwards, who went on to win the general election.

Cawthorn hopes voters in Florida’s 19th congressional district, represented by Republican Rep. Byron Donalds, will return him to the U.S. House of Representatives. Donalds opted to run for governor in 2026 rather than run for reelection.

A one-time rising star in North Carolina Republican politics, Cawthorn notably appeared at the Jan. 6 rally ahead of the Capitol riot, questioning the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. He used his extensive social media following to falsely claim the election was stolen from Donald Trump.

But he drew Republican backlash with claims that his colleagues on the Hill used cocaine and invited him to an orgy. After those comments, photos leaked of Cawthorn wearing women’s lingerie.

U.S. Senator Thom Tillis called on the House Ethics Committee to investigate Cawthorn in April 2022 for possible insider trading. Leading up to his North Carolina primary, a political opposition group leaked



Madison Cawthorn speaks before at a Turning Point rally in 2020.  
CREDIT: Gage Skidmore / Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 2.0

a sexually suggestive video of Cawthorn [with another man]. Cawthorn described it as “crass” and said it was made years before with a friend.

“Blackmail won’t win. We will,” said Cawthorn at the time.

Other run-ins with the law include citations for speeding and driving with a revoked license. In 2023, he pleaded guilty to carrying a loaded handgun through a checkpoint at Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

In a video released Wednesday announcing his Florida campaign, Cawthorn said that he is running for Congress to stand with President Trump and “defeat the radical left every single time.”

Western Carolina University political scientist Chris Cooper told NC Newsline it’s going to be tough for Cawthorn to find electoral success in Florida’s 19th congressional district.

“His past behavior and dalliances with the law are certain to be brought up in what was already a crowded primary field. He can’t even argue that these indiscretions are all dated — he was charged with failure to appear in court just three weeks ago,” Cooper said. “If he can make it out of the primary, of course, his odds will increase considerably as Donald Trump won the district by more than 20 percentage points in 2024.”

Cawthorn’s campaign ad features him speaking at a Turning Point USA event, along with a 2020 tweet with an endorsement by Kirk.

Cooper said he expects to see a spate of candidates in 2026 cite Kirk’s death as a factor in their decision to run for Congress. With Cawthorn, though, Cooper said it is worth noting that he was rumored to be planning his return to Congress a week before Kirk’s assassination.

Cawthorn has said he will focus his Florida campaign on fighting insurance costs, crime and illegal immigration. ::

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

**Connie J. Vetter, Esq.**  
**Attorney at Law, PLLC**  
**Your LGBTQ+ Law Attorney**  
**serving Clients from across**  
**North Carolina**  
**Talk/Text 704-333-4000 or online**





**TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH**

**GET TESTED**  
**FREE Confidential Testing**  
**Rapid HIV | Rapid HEP C**  
**Chlamydia & Gonorrhea**

**WALK - IN TESTING**  
**Monday - Thursday**  
**8:30 am - 6:00 pm**  
**Friday 8:30 am - 4:00 pm**





**STAY HEALTHY**  
**Gay Friendly Primary Care**  
**HIV Specialty Care**  
**PrEP and PEP**

**Affinity HEALTH CENTER**

**877.647.6363**  
**455 LAKESHORE PKWY.**  
**ROCK HILL, SC 29730**

**affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested**



## Ex-South Carolina lawmaker RJ May pleads guilty to child sex crimes

Former South Carolina Rep. RJ May, a Republican lawmaker known for sponsoring anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, has pleaded guilty to federal charges of distributing child sexual abuse material.

May, 38, entered his plea in federal court on Monday, admitting to five counts of distributing child sexual abuse videos. In exchange, prosecutors agreed to drop five other counts. He faces five to 20 years in prison on each charge when he is sentenced next year. Under the terms of his plea agreement, he must also register as a sex offender and pay \$40,000 in restitution to funds that support victims of trafficking and child sexual abuse.

The charges stem from a federal investigation that began in spring 2024, when the messaging platform Kik flagged suspicious activity to authorities. Court records

show that an account using the name "joebiden69" shared 220 images and videos of child sexual abuse material in less than a week. Prosecutors said they linked May to the uploads by showing that he was emailing work files, making phone calls, and conducting web searches for his political consulting work at the same time he was on Kik requesting sexually explicit content.

May was arrested in June and initially pleaded not guilty. He resigned from the South Carolina House of Representatives shortly after his indictment. At the time of his arrest, he faced 10 federal counts, each carrying potential prison sentences of five to 20 years. Under his plea agreement, he admitted guilt to five counts while the remaining charges are expected to be dismissed at sentencing.

First elected in 2020, May quickly established himself as one of the most conservative voices in the South Carolina legislature. He represented District 88 and was a founding member of the House Freedom Caucus. May aligned closely with groups like Moms for Liberty and sponsored bills to restrict gender-affirming health care for transgender youth, eliminate nondiscrimination protections and expand state control over public education.

On the House floor and in public forums, he regularly cast these efforts as defending "family values" and safeguarding children from what he portrayed as harmful influences. That record now stands in sharp contrast to the crimes he has pleaded guilty for, undermining the very platform on which he built his political career.

At Monday's hearing, May represented himself despite not having a law degree. His downfall has drawn attention not only because of the severity of the charges but also because of his role in South Carolina's political battles over LGBTQ+ rights. In January 2024, months before investigators



Former South Carolina Rep. RJ May built his career pushing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. CREDIT: Facebook

tied his devices to the child sexual abuse videos, May declared during a debate on transgender care for minors, "We as legislators have an obligation to ensure that our children have no harm done to them."

May is scheduled to be sentenced on Jan. 14, 2026. He faces the possibility of spending decades in federal prison. ::

— Liz Schob

## 16 states and Washington D.C. sue Trump administration

Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have filed suit against the Trump administration, alleging that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is illegally threatening to withhold federal sex education funding from programs that acknowledge gender identity.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Oregon, challenges HHS guidance issued in August that directs states to remove references to gender diversity from federally funded curricula or risk losing millions in grant money. At issue are two long-standing programs: the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) and Title V Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) program. These initiatives provide millions in funding to states for lessons on abstinence, contraception, pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections.

The new directive from HHS warns that grants will be cut if curricula contain language affirming transgender or gender-diverse students. Plaintiffs argue this condition violates federal law, exceeds the agency's authority, and forces states to either comply with unlawful restrictions or lose critical resources for public health education. The complaint states that the directive is an attempt to erase transgender and gender-diverse people from federally funded programs and denies students access to accurate, inclusive information about their health.

California has already experienced the consequences of refusing to comply. The state recently lost a \$12 million PREP grant after maintaining lessons that include references to LGBTQ+ students. Attorneys general involved in the lawsuit warn that

other states could face similar losses if the policy is not overturned. The filing estimates that plaintiff states together risk losing at least \$35 million in federal funding.

Washington, Oregon and Minnesota are leading the legal challenge. Washington Attorney General Nick Brown said in a statement that HHS threatened to cancel his state's PREP funding if schools continued teaching that "people of all sexual orientations and gender identities need to know how to prevent pregnancy and STIs, either for themselves or to help a friend." Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison called the directive "unacceptable," arguing that it forces states to choose between stripping curricula of inclusive lessons or sacrificing vital education funds.

The plaintiff states are Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington and Wisconsin, along with the District of Columbia. The coalition argues that the federal government is unlawfully conditioning funds on restric-

tions never approved by Congress.

Since returning to office in January, President Donald Trump has made efforts to legally recognize only male and female gender categories. The lawsuit describes the HHS directive as part of that broader effort, stating it is "the latest attempt from the current administration to target and harm transgender and gender-diverse youth" by excluding their experiences from federally supported health education. ::

— Liz Schob



Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. CREDIT: Facebook

## Atlanta's Rainbow Crosswalk remains a city fixture as Delray Beach's is lost

Rainbow-painted crosswalks, a visible celebration of LGBTQ+ identity and inclusion, have become a flashpoint in debates over public art, traffic safety and political power. In two Southern cities, the outcomes could not look more different. Atlanta's rainbow crosswalks are here to stay. In Delray Beach, Fla., the designs have been erased, but the community is looking for new ways to show Pride.

Atlanta officials announced this summer that the brightly painted intersections in Midtown would remain untouched despite

a federal recommendation urging municipalities to remove non-standard markings. The Federal Highway Administration has pushed for uniformity in traffic signals and crosswalks, but the agency's guidance does not apply to city-owned roads. That means Atlanta has the authority to preserve its Pride crosswalks. For residents, the decision represents more than a technical exemption. It is an affirmation that one of the city's most recognizable LGBTQ+ landmarks will not be sacrificed to outside pressure.

The story has unfolded differently in Florida, where Gov. Ron DeSantis's administration has aggressively targeted rainbow crosswalks across the state. In Delray Beach, the Florida Department of Transportation ordered the city's Pride crosswalk painted over, insisting it violated safety standards. City officials initially resisted, arguing the colorful design functioned as community art rather than a traffic control device. The dispute quickly became a high-profile test of local authority. Hearings were held, residents rallied in support, and the city painted and repainted the intersection in an attempt to hold its ground.

But after months of back and forth, Delray Beach commissioners voted in early September to drop their legal challenge, citing the mounting cost of litigation. For many, the decision felt like a painful defeat. At the same time, city leaders pledged to create a new Pride display, signaling that while the rainbow crosswalk itself has been lost, the community's visibility will not disappear. Plans are underway for a re-imagined installation that cannot be as easily erased.

Other Florida cities have faced similar clashes. In Orlando, a rainbow crosswalk near the Pulse nightclub memorial site was painted over by state workers, prompting outrage from city leaders and grief from survivors. Protesters attempted to restore the colors with chalk, only to face arrest. In Key

West, residents responded to the removal of their crosswalks with both protest rallies and creative symbolism, showing up in brightly colored clothing to form a "human crosswalk." Each episode underscores the emotional weight these installations carry.

Together, the examples of Atlanta and Delray Beach illustrate a cycle of resistance and return. One city has secured its rainbow crosswalks as a permanent landmark. Another has been forced to concede to state power but is determined to reinvent how Pride is displayed in public space. In both places, the message is clear: Rainbow crosswalks may be temporary paint, but the fight for LGBTQ+ presence and visibility on the streets is ongoing. ::

— Liz Schob



The Rainbow Crosswalk in Atlanta's Midtown neighborhood. CREDIT: Facebook



Delray Beach's rainbow crosswalk before and after Florida Department of Transportation-ordered repainting to standard markings. CREDIT: Facebook



## Former N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper warns Medicaid expansion is 'in danger'

Former Gov. Roy Cooper said Friday, Sept. 19, that congressional Republicans' tax and spending bill had put Medicaid expansion in North Carolina "in danger."

Cooper, a Democrat who is now running for U.S. Senate, oversaw the passage of Medicaid expansion while serving as governor. He frequently touts it as one of the highlights of his eight-year administration.

"It doesn't have anything to do with waste, fraud and abuse," Cooper said, pushing back on Republicans' arguments that the bill will cut trim costs and bureaucracy. "They were creating this ... so they could

give people tax breaks."

His criticism of the GOP-led "big, beautiful bill" came during a roundtable focused on health care costs and Medicaid — one of his first public appearances since formally launching his bid for Senate. And Cooper criticized his Republican opponent Michael Whatley's support of the package.

"D.C. is broken," Cooper said. "It is absolutely chaotic and broken."

Whatley, the former chair of the Republican National Committee, has called the bill "the embodiment of our agenda," and said it should be a key part of Republican

messaging going forward.

Cooper was joined Friday by Kody Kinsley, who served as health secretary during his administration, as well as a physician, child care business owner and mother of a child with cerebral palsy.

Kinsley described a "ticking time bomb of health care costs for individuals, right around the corner." And Dr. Michael Baca-Atlas, a Raleigh-based family physician, said he expected that "we will lose patients" who have come to his practice under Medicaid expansion. ::

*This article appears courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline.*

— Galen Bacharier / NC Newsline



Former Governor turned U.S. Senate Candidate Roy Cooper speaks during a roundtable about health care costs at Chavis Community Center in Raleigh. CREDIT: Galen Bacharier / NC Newsline

## Suspect accused in deadly Southport shooting held anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs

Authorities have charged a Marine veteran with murder after a mass shooting at a waterfront bar in Southport, N.C., left three people dead and five others injured.

The suspect, 40-year-old Nigel Edge, appeared in court on Monday. He was ordered held without bond and assigned counsel from the Capital Defender's Office. Edge faces three counts of first-degree murder, five counts of attempted murder and five counts of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill or injure. Prosecutors said they are weighing the death penalty.

Police allege Edge opened fire just after 10:25 p.m. Saturday from a boat outside the American Fish Company, a popular bar on the Southport waterfront. Patrons were gathered on an outdoor

deck listening to live music when the attack began. Southport Police Chief Todd Coring said the shooting was "highly premeditated" and described Edge as acting alone.

Edge was arrested about 30 minutes later by the U.S. Coast Guard, who spotted him loading his boat at a public ramp on nearby Oak Island. He was taken into custody and questioned before being charged.

Military records show Edge served in the Marine Corps from 2003 to 2009, rose to the rank of sergeant, and was awarded a Purple Heart after deployments to Iraq. He later changed his name from Sean William Debevoise in 2023.

Court records and reporting have revealed that Edge frequently expressed anti-LGBTQ+ views in recent years. Filings re-

viewed by *The Advocate* show that in a 2024 lawsuit, he claimed to be the victim of "a Hate Crime (LGBTQ toward a straight man)" and accused his parents of being "LGBTQ White Supremacist Pedophiles." In other suits, he alleged acquaintances conspired with "LGBTQ/Terrorist" groups and wrote that the Department of Veterans Affairs was poisoning him as part of an "LGBTQ code." Judges dismissed the filings as frivolous and, in some cases, struck portions of the language as scandalous.

Investigators said the attack appeared to be targeted but have not confirmed a motive, noting that the case remains under review. District Attorney Jon David said his office is considering capital punishment and emphasized that prosecutors must prove intent, not motive. "People frequently want to know what happened and why," David said at a press conference. "As prosecutors, we have to prove intent. Intent and motive are very different things."

North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein visited Southport on Monday and praised law

enforcement and the Coast Guard for the quick arrest. "Your excellent police work may have saved additional lives," Stein said.

Edge's next court date is set for Oct. 13. ::

— Liz Schob



Booking photo of 40-year-old Nigel Edge, released by Brunswick County Sheriff's Office. CREDIT: Brunswick County Sheriff's Office

## Pete Buttigieg envisions a way forward at Duke University

First, the big question. Is former U.S. Transportation Secretary and Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg going to run for president again?

Buttigieg told a Duke University audience Thursday, Sept. 25 that he doesn't know.

"I'm not just saying that because we're supposed to be cagey," he said during the question and answer portion of his appearance on campus sponsored by the Sanford School of Public Policy.

When considering whether to run for an office, Buttigieg said he asks himself what the office calls for at the moment, what he offers, and whether those two things fit.

His somber assessment of the state of the country and the world started with an acknowledgement of the "season of political violence" and the shooting deaths of state lawmaker Melissa Hortman and her husband in Minnesota and conservative activist Charlie Kirk in Utah.

He continued with a summary of the upending of modern political norms.

"Big picture, we are in the middle of witnessing an energetic and largely successful attempt by people running our government not only to take full control of the levers of official policy and power in this country, but also to wield unprecedented levels of government

control over the pillars of our civil society, including law, science, technology, medicine, entertainment, press and academia," he said.

Buttigieg said he wasn't discouraged despite all this, and told audience members they shouldn't be either.

### Three principles

He offered three principles to "fashion something dramatically better."

Don't be wedded to the status quo and be willing to rethink and refashion aging organizations. "Good things are being destroyed right now," he said. "Useless things are being destroyed alongside them. It is time to be rigorous and thoughtful about which is which and to think creatively about what to put in their place."

Get back to basics. "We need to find ways to explain everything we believe in in terms of concrete results, and hold ourselves accountable for those results."

Work across boundaries, which requires getting offline. "We've got to be connected in ways in which the algorithm simply will not support."

Asked what he would do if he had 100 days to reform the government, Buttigieg said he would get rid of Citizens United, a Supreme Court ruling that allows unlimited

political spending by corporations, unions and other outside groups. Buttigieg added that he's not convinced the Supreme Court has the right number of justices or that the House of Representatives has the right number of members.

### Expectations for a gay presidential candidate

There was no mention of former presidential candidate Kamala Harris's new book, where she wrote he was her first choice for a running mate and would have picked him if she thought the country was ready for a Black woman and gay man on a presidential ticket.

In answer to a question, he described running as a gay presidential candidate in 2020.

"You're carrying the expectation of a community, but that's not all you set out to do," he said. "I wasn't running to be a gay president. I ran for president because I thought the presidency was a way to achieve the

things that I believe in. And I was gay.

"Being able to be who you are. Being able to be as much or as little defined by that as you wanted to be. And just being able to live life and not get fired, or beat up, or worse. I just thought I'd be who I am. There were some people who thought I wasn't being gay enough." ::

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

— Lynn Bonner / NC Newsline



Former presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg spoke to students and other invited guests at Duke University Sept. 25. CREDIT: Pete Buttigieg / Facebook



# Kimmel back on air, Trump says 'let Jimmy rot'

MAGA curve ball at Kimmel misses the mark



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Unless you've been underneath a rock for the past few weeks, you're well aware late night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel was suspended from his television talk show. Largely because of his ongoing battle with Trump and the MAGA movement supporting him, although they would have you believe it was all about Charlie Kirk.

Kimmel returned to the network and his program the evening of Sept. 23. He strolled onto the ABC stage with his usual swagger, but his words were a mixed blend of humor, regret for the violence surrounding Kirk's assassination and thanks for the support he's received. He also offered up praise for Kirk's widow, who has said that she forgives Kirk's reported killer.

"I'm not sure who had a weirder 48 hours. Me or the CEO of Tylenol," Kimmel cracked. "So it's been overwhelming. I've heard from a lot of people over the last six days. I've heard from all the people in the world over the last six days, everyone I have ever met has reached out 10 or 11 times.

"Some that I do especially want to mention are my fellow late-night talk show hosts,

my friend Stephen Colbert," Kimmel continued. "He's found himself in this predicament. My friends Jon Stewart, Seth Meyers, Jimmy Fallon, John Oliver, Conan O'Brien, James Corden, Arsenio, Kathy, Wanda, Chelsea, even Jay (Leno) reached out. I heard from late-night hosts in other countries, from Ireland and from Germany. The guy in Germany offered me a job. Can you imagine? This country has become so authoritarian, the Germans are like, 'Come here. Cut loose.'

Kimmel also responded to support that came from conservatives who were outraged that Kimmel's right to free speech had been trounced.

"And maybe, weirdly, maybe, most of all, I want to thank the people who don't support my show and what I believe, but support my right to share those beliefs anyway. I never would have imagined it. Like Ben Shapiro, Clay Travis, Candace Owens, Mitch McConnell, Rand Paul, even my old pal Ted Cruz who, believe it or not, said something very beautiful on my behalf.

"If the government gets in the business of saying ... what you can and can't say, what you the media have said [and] we're going to ban you from the airwaves if you don't say what we like, that will end up bad for conservatives," Cruz said on a video clip.

With his voice occasionally breaking emotionally, Kimmel said he understood

why his comments about the suspected shooter seemed "ill-timed, or unclear, or maybe both." He added, "It was never my intention to make light of the murder of a young man."

Kimmel asserted he in no way agreed with Disney's decision to temporarily can his show, but thanked the company, which owns ABC, for defending his right to poke fun at politicians and for allowing him back on the air.

"Unfortunately, and I think unjustly, this puts them at risk," he said. "The president of the United States made it very clear he wants to see me and the hundreds of people who work here fired from their job. Our 'leader' celebrates Americans losing their livelihoods because he can't take a joke."

As expected, Trump took to his social media site Truth Social in advance of Kimmel's expected monologue, making up false claims regarding the show's ratings and insinuating he would file a lawsuit against the network. "I can't believe ABC Fake News gave Jimmy Kimmel his job back," Trump wrote. "The White House was told by ABC that his show was cancelled! Something happened between then and now because his audience is GONE, and his 'talent' was never there. Why would they want someone back who does so poorly, who's not funny and who puts the Network in jeopardy by playing 99% positive Democrat GARBAGE," Trump wrote in his post.

"I think we're going to test ABC out on this. Let's see how we do," Trump continued. "Last time I went after them, they gave me \$16 Million Dollars. This one sounds even more lucrative. A true bunch of losers! Let Jimmy Kimmel rot in his bad Ratings."

Kimmel's "indefinite suspension" came about following comments he made about Tyler Robinson, the suspected assassin of far right wing MAGA activist and social media personality Charlie Kirk.

"... the MAGA gang [is] desperately trying to characterize this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them, and doing everything they can to score political points."



Jimmy Kimmel returns to most ABC affiliates, including Charlotte's WSOC-TV.  
CREDIT: Screen capture

While that's not untrue, the statement was enough to send Trump and his MAGA devotees into a fury, demanding Kimmel apologize and make a financial donation to Turning Point USA if he wanted to keep his job.

Kimmel did not capitulate and his suspension proved to be slightly less than a week.

His reappearance on the airwaves was the result of a mass campaign from viewers of the successful show and supporters of the American Constitution, which specifies the right to free speech. Across the nation Americans outraged by ABC and parent company Disney's decision to cave into the Trump administration's demands lead to Disney's stock falling by an estimated 2.39 percent between Sept. 17 and 23, representing a loss of approximately \$4.99 billion, according to The Economic Times.

As indicated by the financial loss, the move backfired on Disney.

While his program did return to most ABC affiliates, it did not return to all. Stations owned by Sinclair Media, among them KOMO in Seattle, WJLA in Washington, KDNL in St. Louis, KTUL in Tulsa and KATU in Portland refused to carry the program. Nexstar Media responded similarly, with stations like WKRN in Nashville, KTVX in Salt Lake City, WGNO in New Orleans, WRIC in Richmond, and WATE in Knoxville were also blacked out, replacing Kimmel's show with reported "local programming."

**SADU**  
BODY MODIFICATIONS

**PROFESSIONAL BODY PIERCING & FINE JEWELRY**

Experienced Piercers • Safe & Sterile • Award-Winning

[www.sadupiercing.org](http://www.sadupiercing.org)

1515 Central Avenue  
Charlotte, NC

Services By Appointment - Book Online

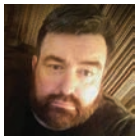
[clgbtcc.org](http://clgbtcc.org)

**CAROLINAS** WE ARE THE CAROLINAS JOIN TODAY!



# Charlotte trans woman murdered, suspect arrested

Tiara Love Tori Jackson shot dead, suspect Darris Dee Martin arrested



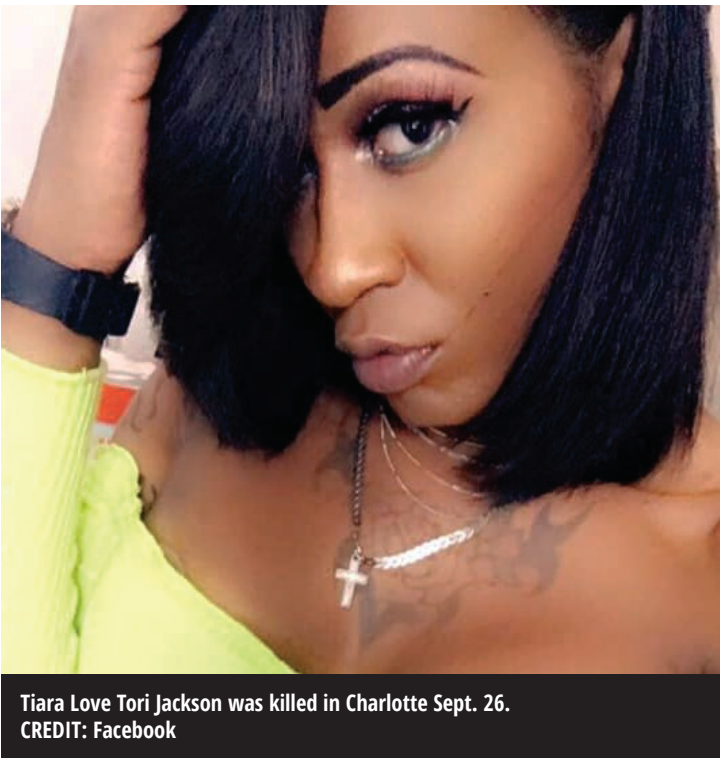
by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

A Charlotte area trans woman, known as Tiara Love Tori Jackson was shot dead sometime around 9:00 a.m. on the morning of Sept. 26.

Jackson was residing at the Woodsprings Extended Stay Motel, located at 1625 Deboer Ave. in the Arrowood area of Charlotte.

Police were called to the area following sounds of gunshots. On their arrival they discovered Jackson, with a gunshot wound. She died before medics could take her to a hospital.

According to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department a suspect identified as Darris Dee Martin, 33, has been arrested and charged with murder and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. Martin was reportedly arrested when police responded to



Tiara Love Tori Jackson was killed in Charlotte Sept. 26.  
CREDIT: Facebook

brave to be her authentic self in our small hometown, back before trans and non-binary were more acceptable," wrote Jessye J. Blige.

Ra'Shawn D'Angelo Flournoy, Pastor of Rebirth Cathedral of Praise, First Vice President of the Charlotte branch of the NAACP and the Executive Director at Quality Comprehensive Health Center offered his thoughts about Jackson on his Facebook account.

"Tiara was unapologetically herself. Raw. Real. Relentless. Baby, she'd have a blunt in her hand and still be on Facebook

live inviting people to church. And the truth is, because of that, she reached people we never could.

"She made the kingdom accessible to those who wouldn't have stepped foot in here otherwise. She was proof that God can use any vessel to get his glory.

"I'll never forget those Sundays midway through my sermon, here comes Tiara walking in because it took her forever to get ready. No shame. No hesitation. No apology. She came in like she belonged, because she did. Didn't miss a beat. And you better believe she always had on a heel when she pulled up! That was her signature, walking tall, walking strong [and] walking into the presence of God her way.

"Her car was her ministry. Her house was her sanctuary. Her life was her sermon. She opened her doors when no one else would, filled her car, and carried people into the presence of God. That's who she was and that's why this hurts so much."

Originally from Michigan, Jackson called Saginaw her hometown. An upcoming memorial service and show is scheduled for Sunday, Oct. 12 at Rob's G Bar in Flint, Mich. ::



CMPD mugshot of Darris Dee Martin.  
CREDIT: Facebook

another shooting incident at a different location, where he was reportedly found with a non-lethal gunshot wound. He was taken into custody and transferred to a local hospital for treatment before he was handed over to the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Department. Marshall reportedly appeared in court on Monday, Sept. 29.

A report from Queen City News indicates investigators believe an argument between the two occurred at the hotel before the shooting.

According to a Facebook post a memorial service was held for Jackson Oct. 3, along with a balloon release. Proceeds from a life celebration held that same day are reportedly going to Jackson's mother.

Scant information is available about Jackson, although social media posts have provided some details.

"She was a pioneer not only in Saginaw but also Michigan and beyond. She was

psst....

# Knowing Looks Good on You!

FREE TESTING: • RAPID HIV • HEP C • SYPHILIS

RAO ASSIST .ORG

ASK ABOUT PrEP

Schedule an appointment online or call 704.237.8793

# NETWORK

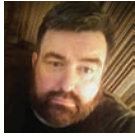
print and online advertising solutions with qnotes and qnotescarolinas.com

call or email us today  
704.531.9988  
adsales@qnotescarolinas.com



# LGBTQ+ Chambers of Commerce in the Carolinas

Organizations offer networking and pathways to a better way of life



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

There are many kinds of people in the world. Some are gifted with artistic creativity, others come with enviable mechanical and construction skills (in a multitude of fields from building to surgery), while others have a finally tuned understanding for finance.

Rarely do we come across that unique individual who can excel in all of those areas. While we're not saying they don't exist, the differences in humanity often make our personal and professional relationships symbiotic.

No matter how much you may dedicate yourself to the concept of art for art's sake; finding unknown answers for challenging questions or making sure your small business or larger company is functioning at its optimum level, chances are you're going to benefit from networking and advice when it comes to finances.

As much as some people may find that topic of discussion personally invasive, LGBTQ+ Chambers of Commerce and business guilds can offer professionals and business owners in our community the opportunity to connect with other like-minded individuals on the path to increasing wealth, equity and a potentially secure and better future.

In the Carolinas, there's no shortage of organizations and opportunity.

Based in Charlotte but offering membership opportunities throughout the two state region, is the **Carolinas LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce (CLGBTCC)**.

According to the Commerce website, their list of members includes LGBTQ+ and allied businesses and professionals from North and South Carolina. Among those in North Carolina are Charlotte Metro, the Blue Ridge Network (comprised of Asheville and Western North Carolina); Gate City (the Greensboro and High Point area); and the Twin City Network (also known as the Winston-Salem region). In South Carolina membership includes the Grand Stand District (covering Myrtle Beach and the surrounding area); the

Low Country District (Charleston) and the Midlands Network, for those in and around Columbia.

In May of this year, CLGBTCC moved

business leaders can connect. The multi-purpose room, Wi-Fi lounge, co-working space and training hub will be available to members and partners, and can be re-

Harmony describes who they are and their purpose as follows:

- To establish and nurture a network of business and professional resources
- To encourage fellowship and support among businesses; professionals, and charitable pursuits;
- To provide and promote positive role models in the LGBT communities
- To oppose prejudice in society at large and within the homosexual community on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, physical or mental impairment, or political affiliation
- To oppose the exploitation of anyone because of age, gender, or lack of power; and
- To promote communication, tolerance, and mutual support among gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people and accepting heterosexuals.

Harmony's address is listed as 1204 Village Market Place #267 in Morrisville, North Carolina. For more information and requirements for membership, visit their website at <https://www.harmonync.org>.

In Greenville, South Carolina is the **Upstate SC LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce**, which serves members in areas like Abbeville, Anderson, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Qconee, Pickens, Spartanburg and others. These counties form the northwestern area of the state which is a region historically known as the Upcountry.

As the first and only LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce specifically dedicated to our community in the state of South Carolina, Upstate identifies as LGBTQ+ professionals and allies who understand that diversity, equality and economic empowerment are vital for any healthy community.

From the website: "We're here to help you connect with businesses that enhance your life and to help those businesses grow. From creating connections and professional development opportunities to providing resources and advocacy, our Chamber is here to support you."

Their physical address is listed as The Poinsett Club, at 807 E Washington Street in Greenville, South Carolina. More information on the organization and membership is available at <https://upstatelgbt.org>.



Networking in our community and with those that support us can lead to success.

their headquarters to the Impact Center for the Carolinas, located at 2838 Queen City Drive, Suite A, in Charlotte. With over 2,800 square feet, the center serves as the administrative home for the Carolinas LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, offering a co-working and training hub, providing resources and guidance for entrepreneurs and small business owners; a multipurpose room for educational programs, events, workforce development initiatives, and professional training; and a Wi-Fi lounge & collaboration space, creating an environment where professionals and

served. For more details and membership information, visit their website at <https://www.clgbtcc.org>.

Headquartered in Raleigh is the **Harmony North Carolina LGBTQ+ Allied Chamber of Commerce**, which includes members from as many as 50 counties in the Eastern region of the state. The organization provides resources and networking opportunities for professionals and businesses in our community and those allied throughout Eastern North Carolina, with a central focus on Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill.



God loves YOU,  
just the way you are!

NEW LIFE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH  
SUNDAYS at 7:00 P.M. 1201 SOUTH NEW HOPE ROAD GASTONIA  
Rev. Dawn Flynn, Pastor [www.NewLifeMccNC.org](http://www.NewLifeMccNC.org) [NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com](mailto:NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com)

Relax...

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

704.651.6899

4 hands available, by longest couple doing so.

Jim Yarbrough  
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

**Executive Offices For Rent**

PO Box 221841 • Charlotte • NC • 28222

Ph. (704) 965-5214

Fx. (704) 531-1361



# A guide to Charlotte's LGBTQ+ entrepreneurial ecosystem

Discover the chambers, nonprofits and initiatives creating opportunities and building community



by **Liz Schob**  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Charlotte once carried the label of being one of the most difficult cities in America for residents to escape poverty. In 2015, WBTV reported on a national poll that placed Charlotte at the very bottom of the list for economic mobility. By 2024, the city had climbed 12 points in that same poll. That improvement shows progress, but it also serves as a reminder that challenges remain.



**If Charlotte continues to invest in equity and visibility, it can move beyond its reputation as a city where mobility was once out of reach.**

For LGBTQ+ residents, those challenges are greater. National studies show LGBTQ+ adults experience higher poverty rates and greater economic insecurity. For LGBTQ+ people of color, immigrants, women, femme-identified people and individuals with disabilities, there are obvious barriers that – far too often – are compounded by systemic racism, gender-based discrimination, ableism and xenophobia. Limited access to family wealth, language barriers and discrimination in housing or lending create layers of disadvantage that go beyond sexual orientation or gender identity alone.

At the same time, LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs have long used small business ownership as a path to stability, independence and visibility when other doors were closed. For many, starting a business has been a way to sidestep workplace discrimination, create jobs in their own communities and build intergenerational wealth that has often been denied. In Charlotte, where economic divides remain stark, small businesses are more than income streams; they are vehicles for belonging and local leadership.

This makes resources especially important. In Charlotte, programs, chambers and nonprofits are working to ensure LGBTQ+ business owners can access funding, training and networks that understand their lived experience.

## Government & Public Programs

Charlotte's public sector has built a wide array of programs to help small businesses start, grow and thrive. For LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, these initiatives offer tools, funding and connections to broader markets.

At the City of Charlotte, the Charlotte Business Inclusion (CBI) program expands opportunities for minority-, women- and small-business enterprises in city contracting. The city also runs Amp Up Charlotte, powered by the national nonprofit Interise, which equips diverse entrepreneurs with advanced business training and peer

with technical assistance and mentoring, can make the difference between a business idea and a sustainable enterprise. For LGBTQ+ founders who may not have traditional banking relationships or family wealth to rely on, these entry points into contracts, capital and training are especially important.

## Chambers of Commerce and Identity-Based Networks

For LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, the most valuable support often comes from networks that understand identity as part of the business journey. Charlotte has a growing number of

chambers, nonprofits and grassroots organizations that provide resources and a sense of belonging.

The Carolinas LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce is one of the most visible entry points. It hosts networking events, offers a monthly Lunch and Learn series, and helps members pursue certification as LGBT Business Enterprises® through the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, which opens doors to corporate supply chains and contracting opportunities.

Charlotte is also home to a wide range of culturally focused

chambers that create important bridges for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs who hold multiple identities. The Latin American Chamber of Commerce of Charlotte, the Carolinas Asian-American Chamber of Commerce, the Colombian Chamber of Commerce of the Carolinas, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Black Chamber of Commerce and the Carolinas Chinese Chamber of Commerce all provide mentorship, networking and advocacy tailored to their communities.

But chambers are only part of the picture. Charlotte's nonprofit and foundation community has also built programs that turn ideas into enterprises.

## Nonprofits, Foundations and Community Programs

Charlotte's small business ecosystem includes a wide mix of nonprofits, foundations and accelerators that provide training, capital and wraparound support. The Women's Business Center of Charlotte offers business counseling, training and access to capital for women and minority entrepreneurs. The Carolina Small Business Development Fund, a nonprofit community development financial institution, provides loans and technical assistance statewide. The Charlotte Small Business Growth Fund and the Beyond Open CLT grant program, administered by

Foundation for the Carolinas with funding from Wells Fargo, both deliver targeted financial support for underrepresented founders.

Several programs also strengthen Charlotte's startup pipeline. The Boost Pad, a nonprofit accelerator, advances equity for diverse founders through mentorship, training, and access to capital. Innovate Charlotte (INCLT), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, serves as the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem hub, offering structured mentoring and investor-readiness support. PitchBreakfast gives early-stage entrepreneurs a platform to test ideas and receive feedback from investors and peers.

Philanthropy plays a key role alongside these efforts. The CLT Alliance Foundation, the charitable arm of the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance, invests in programs that strengthen workforce development and long-term mobility. Grassroots microgrant initiatives, such as those led by Charlotte Is Creative, provide small but meaningful boosts that help entrepreneurs test ideas, launch projects and expand community impact.

## Looking Ahead

Charlotte's progress on economic mobility shows what is possible when a city commits to change, but the work is not finished. For LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, building lasting equity will mean sustaining today's momentum and learning from models that have worked elsewhere.

In Atlanta, the Trans Housing Atlanta Program has paired shelter with workforce support, helping members of the transgender community move from instability into employment and entrepreneurship. Across the country, LGBTQ+ retirement communities have shown how intentional design can create spaces where identity and stability reinforce each other. These models remind us that mobility is not just about income. It is about belonging, security and opportunity.

For Charlotte's LGBTQ+ business community, the opportunity is here. The programs, chambers and nonprofits outlined in this story are ready to be used. Entrepreneurs can apply for grants, attend training, pursue certification and join networks that recognize both their identity and their ambition. Taking advantage of these resources is not only a way to grow a business. It is a way to claim space in a city that is still rewriting its story of who gets to succeed.

If Charlotte continues to invest in equity and visibility, it can move beyond its reputation as a city where mobility was once out of reach. The city has the chance to become a national model for inclusive growth, showing how targeted support for small businesses can rewrite the story for entire communities. That future depends on ensuring that LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, and especially those who carry multiple marginalized identities, are not only included but prioritized in the region's economic strategy. It can become a place where LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs do more than survive. They can thrive, lead and shape the region's future economy. ::



# Reshaping DEI language for grants, education and publicly funded programs

Will palatable terminology for conservatives help nonprofits survive?



by Wendy Lyons  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Language carries weight. It tells us who is seen, who is prioritized, and who gets access to resources. Since the beginning of this year, entire public programs, university offices and nonprofit proposals have shed or been forced to shed words like diversity, equity, inclusion and transgender. The shift is rhetorical, has altered how money flows, and who is recognized as deserving of public investment through the lens of the current administration.

For queer communities, particularly in North Carolina, this shift is not academic. It is survival. When words vanish, programs and budgets often follow.

## Intentional Scrubbing of Words

Earlier this year, The New York Times published an interactive investigation showing how federal agencies under the current Administration systematically removed DEI-related words from their public websites. Pages once dedicated to “diversity” and “gender identity” were either erased or rewritten with neutral terms like “customer service” and “workforce readiness.” Entire sections acknowledging systemic racism or LGBTQ+ rights disappeared.

This was no accident. In January 2025, an executive order directed federal agencies to dismantle DEI offices and identity-based initiatives. What followed was a widespread digital “scrubbing” of agency websites, confirming in public view what internal memos had already made clear; language itself was intentionally being legislated. When agencies shift language, grant solicitations and reporting standards follow. The absence of “equity” in official documents signals a shrinking appetite for data collection, targeted outreach or dedicated programming.

## The Impact of Legislated Language on Program Funding

The impact reaches deeply into organizations that rely on public funding. In many states, including North Carolina, public universities and community nonprofits are rewriting their applications, tailoring every word to avoid flagged terms.

Here are some of the words now widely reported as restricted or discouraged in public-facing grants and agency communications:

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) • Equity/equitable • Allyship • Anti-racism • Systemic oppression • LGBTQ • Transgender • Nonbinary • Social justice • Critical race theory • Gender identity/gender expression • Evidence-based, science-based (in certain contexts) • Female/Feminism/Woman/Women

A phrase such as “gender-affirming support for transgender youth” has been changed to politically align with “support



Nonprofits seeking to help communities waste time with language revision in order to keep the funds flowing.

for youth experiencing identity-related challenges.” The phrase previously used “transgender health services” now has to be changed or replaced for federal grant application purposes with something like “underserved population outreach.”

These word changes protect eligibility but erode visibility. Restating or rephrasing words does not erase the community or people in need of the services. It just erases them from the grant provider’s list of priorities and places them in their radar.

## North Carolina in the Crosshairs

North Carolina has not passed restrictions as sweeping as Florida or Texas, but legislative proposals to limit DEI staffing in higher education and state agencies have gained traction. Already, UNC system schools have been instructed to review DEI-related expenditures, and some student affairs offices have been forced to scale back programs.

On campuses, LGBTQ+ resource centers have faced budget reviews and heightened scrutiny. At the nonprofit level, organizations that once leaned on “equity” framing now speak cautiously in terms of “broadening participation” or “improving student success.” The work continues, but under a cloud of uncertainty and constant recalibration.

Organizations are spending more time wordsmithing, which leads to time wasted that could otherwise be used helping individuals and families. It’s a sad time for our country when peoples’ lives and health has come down to a political game of Scrabble!

## How Organizations Are Adapting

Despite mounting barriers, nonprofits,

schools and agencies are finding creative strategies:

### • Reframing outcomes

Instead of “closing equity gaps,” proposals highlight “increasing completion rates across student groups” or “broadening access.”

### • Embedding specificity in data

Some reports avoid sensitive words in the narrative but present disaggregated outcomes in tables or appendices.

### • Citing statutory requirements

Programs lean on Title VI, Title IX, and ADA compliance as justification for tracking disparities.

### • Decentralizing DEI work

Training once housed in DEI offices is now carried by HR, compliance or student safety departments.

### • Maintaining dual reports

Organizations prepare one “funder-safe” version and another community-facing version that speaks directly about race, gender identity and sexuality.

These wrap-around practices keep the lights on, but they also reflect a defensive posture, and the labor of translation falls heavily on small nonprofits, which already stretched thin.

## The Attack on Our Trans Community

Individuals in our trans community in North Carolina are among those most at risk from linguistic erasure. When “transgender” disappears from grant applications and federal websites, trans communities lose not just visibility but measurable path-

ways to funding. This comes at a time when trans youth and adults already face higher rates of homelessness, unemployment and health disparities.

Without a doubt, trans-specific services risk becoming invisible in state reporting, leaving advocates with fewer data points to argue for targeted support. Anti-trans legislators are connecting words with dollars. If they don’t see certain words, they don’t see the need.

## Closing Thoughts

The battle over words is more than semantics. It’s a battle over who gets counted, resourced and recognized. The removal of DEI language from federal and state programs sends a chilling message: The needs of under-represented communities are expendable.

But it won’t happen without a fight. Across the city of Charlotte and North Carolina, nonprofits and educators continue to adapt and protect their missions under new constraints. They may change the words, but they keep their services as available as possible.

We may have to call it “access” or “underserved,” but we know it means looking out for and advocating for “The Least of These” – individuals of color, women, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants. Even when words fall short, the commitment stays strong. ::

## Resources

-The New York Times, “How Trump Officials Removed ‘Diversity’ and ‘Inclusion’ From Federal Websites” (Interactive, March 7, 2025).  
-Executive Order, January 2025: Ending federal DEI programs and offices.  
-North Carolina legislative proposals on higher education DEI funding (2024–2025 session).  
-Public reporting on state-level DEI restrictions in Florida, Texas, and other states (2023–2025).



# 'The Elements'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
Contributing Writer

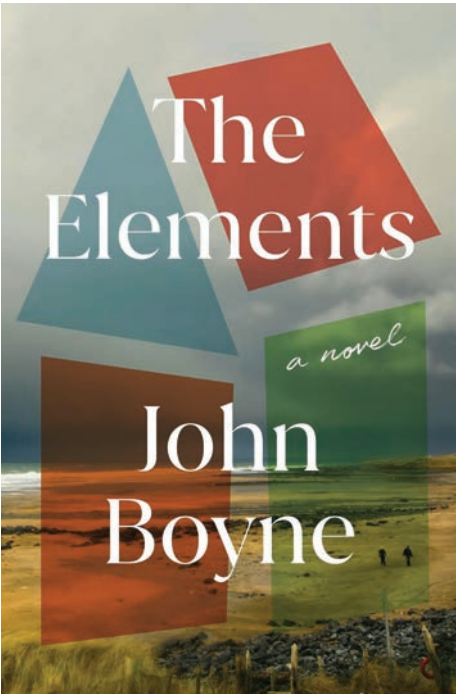
"The Elements"  
by John Boyne  
©2025, Henry Holt  
\$29.99  
496 pages

You weren't proud of it. Something you did in your past, yesterday, five years ago, a lifetime, you think of it sometimes and poke it like a bad tooth. You're not proud of it but you paid for it anyhow, with time, money, apologies or through a jury of your peers and you know this: as in the new novel, **"The Elements" by John Boyne**, the condemnation is harshest when the jury is *you*.

She changed her name again.

It was the first thing Willow Hale did when she rented the cottage on an island not far from Dublin. Isolation would help her sort things out, why her husband was in jail, why her daughter avoided her. Willow didn't want anyone to recognize her as she came to terms with her role in what happened.

Though he was born with the skills of an athlete, Evan Keogh didn't want to be a



soccer star. He wanted to be an artist after he left the island, but he wasn't talented enough. Coming to terms with that took awhile, and he sold his body to older men to get by in the meantime. When he finally accepted his athleticism, it was not because he loved the

game. It was because he loved revenge but satisfying that itch would ruin his life.

Medical students were annoyances that Freya Petrus had to endure.

Though she was a highly-regarded burn surgeon, the truth was that she disliked humanity in general, perhaps because of childhood trauma she couldn't forget. So, teeth gritted, no family, no friends, no close colleagues, she *endured* people, relying instead on a sordid hobby to soothe her memories.

Rebecca didn't ask Aaron Umber to bring their son from Australia to Ireland, but there was a reason he did so, though Emmet balked at the trip. Emmet was at a tender age, not an adult but not a child anymore, either – fourteen, the same age as when something happened to Aaron that affected him forever.

Where to begin?

How 'bout: "The Elements" is an incredible book.

How 'bout: from the very beginning of it, you'll be captured by what feels like *The Twilight Zone* without the paranormal; like reading the news, and wincing.

Here, the lush Irish background that author John Boyne so lovingly portrays is secondary to his characters, each of them flawed, maybe irretrievable so, as they wrestle with culpability and self-indulgent recognition of the past. You'll dangle from a string as four intertwined tales eke out in a delicious tease, detonating a little TNT on a

page every now and then to keep you feeling edgy and on the edge of your chair.

No spoilers here, but the end of these four stories isn't quite really an end, which will leave you flabbergasted, staring at the back cover for a few minutes after you close it.

Beware that there are adult themes inside this book, and they could potentially be triggering. If that's not a worry, let yourself be stunned by "The Elements."

Love it? Guilty. ::



Author John Boyne.  
CREDIT: Rich Galligan




**HOME OF THE EMPTY PLATE CLUB!**

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

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

Email: [lupie@lupiescafe.com](mailto:lupie@lupiescafe.com)  
[www.lupiescafe.com](http://www.lupiescafe.com)

**We buy interesting & worthwhile used books & Compact Discs.**



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

*Sweeten your love life!*



**Peaches**  
Adult Boutique & Arcade  
**OPEN 24/7**  
115 Swain Street, Fayetteville, NC, 910-339-2770  
[facebook.com/PeachesAdultBoutique1](https://facebook.com/PeachesAdultBoutique1)

**Jim Yarbrough**  
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

**Executive Offices  
For Rent**

PO Box 221841  
Charlotte NC • 28222

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





# Dance like you're gay

## Out in Music



by Gregg Shapiro  
Contributing Writer

Do you have a favorite queer band that you feel never got the love and attention it deserved? Honestly, there are probably too many to mention.

Take early '80s San Francisco duo **Voice Farm**, described as an "experimental synth-pop group and art house video collective," for example. With vocals by Charly Brown and sound design by Myke Reilly, the pair initially created experimental electroclash-style tunes, before moving into more accessible dance-pop with 1991's "Bigger Cooler



Voice Farm.  
CREDIT: Red Radio Records

Weirder." Previously available only on vinyl, never on CD or streaming, Voice Farm's 1982 debut album "The World We Live In" (Red Radio Records) has been reissued as a limited-edition cassette, in "pink passion shell." Backed by other musicians, Voice Farm perfectly captured the electronic mood of the early 1980s – think Jeff & Jane Hudson and the "Liquid Sky" soundtrack – on songs such as "Beatnik," "Mama Made Me Do It," "Double Garage," a cover of "Sally Go 'Round the Roses," and the instrumentals "Davy's Big Battle" and "Follow Me Home." Dig out your Walkman, and don't let another 40 years pass before you listen to Voice Farm.

Would we have a band such as the trio **Nation of Language** without '80s electro pioneers such as Voice Farm, OMD, or Ministry? Ministry is mentioned because the cover art for "Dance Called Memory" (Sub Pop), Nation of Language's fourth album, is a subtle tribute to Ministry's underrated 1983 album "With Sympathy." Led by Ian Devaney and featur-

ing his wife Aidan Noell (who identifies as bisexual) and Alex MacKay (who goes by he/ them pronouns), Nation of Language is at the forefront of an '80s synth-dance revival. More than half of the 10 tracks on "Dance Called



Nation of Language performs Oct. 26 at Cat's Cradle in Chapel Hill.  
CREDIT: Ebru Yildiz

Memory" are memorable dance tunes, including "Inept Apollo," "Silhouette," "In Another Life," "Now That You're Gone" and "In Your Head."

Like Ministry in its early days, **Devell** is a Chicago-based synth-pop duo. Unlike Ministry, a gay couple comprises Devell, Darrell James and Steven McIntosh. Devell's new album "Two" (Devell.com) is as much a refer-

ence to the pair as it is to being Devell's second album. The twosome combines its rock background with a healthy dose of club banger energy, meaning there's no sophomore slump here. Instead, Devell



Nation of Language.  
CREDIT: Ebru Yildiz

delivers a solid set featuring "Take Pride," "Boom Boom," "Bounce," "Let's Go" and "Feel It." Also notable are "Leather Daddy," co-written by Devell, comedian Andy Eninger and lesbian band Stewed Tomatoes (!), and an elevated dance cover of Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song."

A fierce amalgamation of post-punk band Idles and queer musician Hamish Hawk, **Model/Actriz**, led by the magnetic Cole Haden, returns with its remarkable second album "Pirouette" (True Panther/Dirty Hit). Model/Actriz practically dares you to sit or stand still, beginning with galloping album opener "Vespers," and then follows it with the equally propulsive and heart-breaking "Cinderella" (about being a boy wanting a Cinderella-themed fifth birthday party). "Poppy" blooms with an industrial blast, and "Departures" leaves gender behind. At under three minutes, "Audience" is a slamming workout, and "Doves" soars. Additionally, Model/Actriz doesn't hesitate to embrace its softer side on "Baton."

Years before the current crop of queer hip hop acts Doechii, Lil Nas X, Frank Ocean and Tyler The Creator, and years before old-school artists such as

Queen Latifah and Da Brat came out, there was **Cazwell**. Queer right out of the gate in the late '90s as one half of Morplay, Cazwell went solo in the early 2000s. His best songs, including "All Over Your Face," "I Seen Beyonce," "Helen Keller," "I Buy My Socks on 14th Street," "The Sex That I

Need," "Rice & Beans," "Get Into It," "Unzip Me" (featuring Peaches) and "No Selfie Control," combined irresistible dance beats, sexy and smutty lyrics, and a distinctive sense of humor. Of the 29 tracks on the double-disc compilation "Hits All Over Your Face" (Peace Biscuit), nearly two dozen appeared on Cazwell's full-length albums "Watch My Mouth" (2009) and "Hard 2 B Fresh" (2014), including the songs mentioned above, some featuring legendary West End Records samples.

If you know any of the 1960s dances referenced in the B-52s' song "Dance This Mess Around," such as the Hip O Crit, the Shy Tuna, the Aqua Velva, or the Camel Walk, the new album "Tucson Safari" (In The Red) by **Naïm Amor and Kid Congo Powers**, would be a great opportunity to show them off. No one would dare accuse prolific gay music legend Powers of sitting idle, not even during the early days of the pandemic, when this album was recorded. Powers has also made



Model/Actriz.  
CREDIT: Diva Kane Ocean

a name for himself as a collaborator ("Jungle Cruise," his collaboration LP with Alice Bag was released earlier this year), and this collab with Amor, combining rockabilly/garage with synths, results in some superb retro



Cazwell.  
CREDIT: Roberto Hannibal

dance rock on "Stoned by the Mile," "Murder She Wrote," "Guitar Ping Pong" and "Surf Sirens," all spinning out on orange sherbet splatter vinyl. ::



Naïm Amor and Kid Congo Powers.  
CREDIT: Chris Carlone



# Our People: DJ Spinn

Local dance floor music king says 'I'm not taking my hand off a turntable until they put me in a box and close the door'



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Danish author Hans Christian Andersen has frequently been quoted for saying, "Where words fail music speaks." If there's one person who knows this to be true it would be DJ. Spinn. Born Kenneth Russell, DJ Spinn has been a Charlotte resident for almost four decades and a HOUSEhold name for many who still fondly remember him as the guy on the ones and twos (back in the day) at Club Mixx. During this interview, Qnotes talked with the local DJ who has a firm grip on spinning tunes that evoke emotion and prompt crowds to dance and shout to the music they love.

**L'Monique King: Are you a native to Charlotte?**

**DJ Spinn:** Actually, I'm not. I was born and raised in Columbia, S.C. and came to Charlotte in the mid-80s to attend broadcast school. I completed it but I didn't pursue it. I went back home to Columbia for a couple of years and worked in retail as a warehouse manager for Macy's. I started out as a temp and they were impressed with my work ethic and hired me full time within 30 days and made me an assistant manager. I was there for six years until they took their first nosedive into bankruptcy and I was laid off. When that happened, I then went to Atlanta to interview at two other Macy's stores. One made me an offer. At that time, I had friends from broadcast school who were living in Charlotte and suggesting I move to Charlotte. Thinking about the distance between Atlanta and my aging parents, I made the decision to move back to Charlotte to be closer to them. That was 1991. I've been here ever since. So Charlotte, for me, is basically home.

**LMK: Where part of town do you call home?**

**DJS:** Currently I live in the Derita area – which is between University City and Uptown. I've lived all over Charlotte. In the '80s I lived on the Eastside, then when I moved back in 1991 I lived uptown with two roommates and then I moved to NODA once I found stable employment. In 1997 I moved to the North end.

**LMK: Do you like where you live?**

**DJS:** I've been in this house for 19 years. I prayed on it and God delivered. The location is perfect; I'm not far from anything.

**LMK: Is music how you make your livelihood?**

**DJS:** No, that's supplemental income. I work for Duke Energy. Next month will be seven years that I've been with them.

**LMK: What's your favorite music genre?**

**DJS:** I don't have one – I love music. If you force me to say I'd say House (Baltimore Club specifically), underground music that's not so commercialized. Technically, before I was exposed

to House I would say all kinds of music. My musical taste is diverse. I went to a predominantly white high school where in the '80s the pop music I was exposed to [through school friends] was also played in the clubs.

**LMK: What about other DJs, who have you been inspired by?**

**DJS:** One would be Louie Vega. Second DJ Cedrick. He's from DC but he plays everywhere, North Carolina, New York, Florida, Baltimore and D.C. regularly every month. I've also discovered some very talented DJs recently in Chicago. I've been going to their annual House music festival. If you ever get to go – don't miss it. It's held annually in July – the weekend after the Fourth and at least 60,000 people attend. The DJs that participate are outstanding! DJs like Ron Carroll (RIP), Terry Hunter, Mike Dunn, Stacy Kidd and Ameer Brooks – he's only 20 years old and amazing. There's so much good talent out there that I've followed over the years.

**LMK: When you're not working your day job or playing music, how do you spend your time?**

**DJS:** I'm kind of a music geek so when I'm not DJing, I'm still working on music. I'm researching music, I'm listening to new music, I'm supporting other DJs by attending their events. It's always homework for me even when I'm not working.

**LMK: Is there music that makes you emotional – music that moves you to tears?**

**DJS:** Yeah. There's not a particular song, it's songs. Back in the day, it was slow songs, breakup songs <laughter>. But whether I'm happy or sad, what gets me every time is a good of gospel tune. I grew up in a Baptist church so it's in me.

**LMK: What would you say has been your most memorable experience as a DJ?**

**DJS:** That's easy. Before I became a club DJ, a straight buddy of mine that I met through a guy I was dating, told me about a woman who owned a Black gay club. He said she had a DJ but was still looking at her options for hiring DJs. At the time, I was making and selling mix tapes of my music but had never played in a club. I called the owner and she asked me what I was doing [at that very moment]. When I said nothing, she told me to pack up a crate of records and meet her at the club – right then and there. So, I did. When I got there, she showed me where everything was and turned on her [audio] system and the dance floor lights. She said, "This is your audition, I want you to make me feel like I'm at the club and it's packed." Then she asked me, "What are you gonna' do to make me dance?" I started to play but I wasn't watching her. I nervously had my head down, hoping she liked what she was hearing. When I finally looked up, she was dancing like her life depended on it <chuckling>. Eventually she stopped dancing, told me to turn off the music and to be at the club on Saturday. If the crowd liked me (the new guy – better than the regular DJ they were loyal to) she'd give me a shot.



DJ Spinn, aka Kenneth Russell, has called Charlotte home since the mid-eighties.  
CREDIT: Facebook

For a full month the other DJ and I played on alternating Saturdays. My style has always been to play what they like, music they know and then something the audience is familiar with. People are looking to be hooked on a new sound, a new experience. In the end, I got the gig and that's where it all started for me, at the Mixx in 1998. The Baltimore style of House music [Baltimore Club] I was playing wasn't really being played in Charlotte at the time. The straight clubs weren't familiar with it and DJ Cedrick who introduced it was the only other local DJ that was bringing it to Charlotte. Today, I'm still known for Baltimore Club and Club Mixx – I became a fixture there and it prompted my exposure for DJing at a lot of LGBTQ events.

**LMK: Wow! In all your years in the business, what would you say is the most challenging aspect of what you do?**

**DJS:** Any DJ will tell you the constant requests – more like demands. The thought is: You're getting paid and you're supposed to play whatever we [patrons] say. People don't seem to have any decorum or patience. Most challenging is having played the song someone doggedly requested and have the dance floor cleared, including the requestor and then have to get the crowd back. It's extremely challenging to get a crowd back once there's been a lull.

**LMK: Tell me something most people don't know about you.**

**DJS:** I can be very shy. People wouldn't assume that because I'm a DJ and around multitudes of people on any given day. But, before every gig, I'm nervous as shit. I've found out from other DJs, very well-known ones too, that I'm not the only one. I think it's because no one gig is ever the same. So, the thought is always in the back of your mind, I've got to nail this. For me, I'm always trying to outdo myself and I'm very grateful for the people I've worked with that have kept me relevant. Thankful for every club owner, patron and folks like Milton Howard, Tracy Taylor, Jermaine Lee, Heidi from the Sapphic Collective, The Holiday Wish Foundation, Charlotte Black Pride, Chasers, The Woodshed and Bar Argon.

**LMK: Where can people come to hear you play?**

**DJS:** I'm on the radio now on The Soul 105.3FM every Monday night from 9 to 10 p.m. (<http://thesoul1053app.com>). To hear me live come to Bar Argon's day party on any first Sunday. On second Saturdays I play at the Woodshed from 10 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. and at Chasers on fourth Saturdays.

**LMK: Sounds like a lot. How are you feeling about your career right now? Are you where you want to be?**

**DJS:** Not exactly, not yet but God knows my heart, has given me this gift so I let him lead and I'll follow. I'm about to turn 62 this year and I'm not taking my hand off a turntable until they put me in a box and close the door. ::



# WHITE RABBIT

GET TANGLED UP IN OUR WEB.



WRABBITNC



WHITERABBIT



SHOPWHITERABBIT

# 920 CENTRAL AVENUE

704 - 377 - 4067