

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

## HUGE CROWD fills Uptown Charlotte for No Kings rally



Shows and events  
for the upcoming  
season  
- pg 18

The importance of  
self-care during  
the holidays  
- pg 12





# WHITE RABBIT

GET TANGLED UP IN OUR WEB.



WRABBITNC



WHITERABBIT



SHOPWHITERABBIT

# 920 CENTRAL AVENUE

CHARLOTTE

704 - 377 - 4067

NORTH CAROLINA



**connect**  
qnotescarolinas.com

twitter.com/qnotescarolinas  
facebook.com/qnotescarolinas  
instagram.com/qnotescarolinas



### contributors this issue

Writers: Joey Amato, L'Monique King, Brandon Kingdollar, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore, Terri Schlichenmeyer, Liz Schob, Gregg Shapiro, Anna Claire Vollers

### on the cover

Graphic Design by Danny A. Mannanov  
Photographer: Liz Schob

### Mission:

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

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

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

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

Sales: x201 adsales@qnotescarolinas.com  
Nat'l Sales: Rivendell Media, ph  
212.242.6863

Managing Editor: Jim Yarbrough, x201,  
editor@qnotescarolinas.com  
Director of Strategic Initiatives:  
Liz Schob

Digital Engagement Specialist:  
Tim Kendra-Dell

Sr. Editor: David Aaron Moore,  
Editor@qnotescarolinas.com  
Copy Editor: Bailey Sides

Production: Danny A. Mannanov, x205,  
production@qnotescarolinas.com  
Printed on recycled paper.

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

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

# inside this issue



## feature

- 14 Charlotte shines bright  
for the season



## news

- 4 Conversion therapy for  
LGBTQ+ minors goes  
before SCOTUS
- 5 North Carolina  
republicans plan to  
redraw state's  
congressional districts
- 6 Qnotes launches  
Press Club to power  
LGBTQ+ media across  
the Carolinas
- 6 Second 'No Kings' rally  
and march held in  
Uptown Charlotte
- 6 North Carolina ranks  
eighth nationwide for  
bullying, new study finds
- 8 Mosaic UMC brews justice  
in Wilmington



## Qnotes launches Press Club

Hard at work to power LGBTQ+ journalism across the Carolinas, Qnotes is inviting readers to have a voice in our commitment to trusted and independent news and features. For nearly four decades, our publication and website has been a vital resource that informs and connects communities across the two-state area. Join us and help hold leaders accountable and focus on stories that matter the most.

PAGE 6

## Our People: Craymon Garner

A native of Winston-Salem and a graduate of UNC Charlotte, Garner chose to stay in the Queen City once he obtained his undergraduate degree in biology and sociology (with a minor in psychology). In addition to serving as the Director of Prevention at Powerhouse 2.0, he's the Chief of Creative Cool at Craymon Garner Design and Lifestyle, focusing on special events, floral design and more.

PAGE 19



## The People speak on Social Media



## a&e

- 17 Out in Print:  
'Bog Queen'
- 18 Out on Film: 'Plainclothes'  
make the men



## life

- 9 Resources and recreation  
for LGBTQ+ seniors
- 12 Self-care during  
the holiday season
- 16 Pride Journey:  
Manchester, England
- 19 Our People:  
Craymon Garner



## views



## events

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

"Hitler didn't  
steal the power,  
his people voted  
for him, and  
then he destroyed  
his people."

– Pope Francis



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

SUBSCRIBE!

**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 = \$62 ☐ 1/2 yr - 13 issues = \$32

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

name: \_\_\_\_\_ phone: \_\_\_\_\_

address: \_\_\_\_\_

city: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

card #: \_\_\_\_\_ sec. code: \_\_\_\_\_ exp. date: \_\_\_\_\_

signature: \_\_\_\_\_



# Conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ minors goes before SCOTUS

Case could impact state laws around the country with bans

by Anna Claire Vollers | NC Newsline/Stateline

The U.S. Supreme Court began hearing oral arguments Tuesday, Oct. 7 in a case that could impact state laws around the country that ban “conversion therapy,” a controversial counseling practice for LGBTQ+ youth.

The case challenges a 2019 Colorado law that bans “conversion therapy” for children and teens. Conversion therapy is a catchall term for efforts to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ people. Sometimes called “reparative therapy,” it can range from talk therapy and religious counseling to electrical shocks, pain-inducing aversion therapy and physical isolation. The therapy has been widely discredited by medical groups.

More than half of states — including some led by Republicans — have banned or restricted the practice for children and teens since California became the first to do so in 2012, according to the Movement Advancement Project, a left-leaning non-profit research organization that tracks LGBTQ+-related laws and policies.

In recent years, however, Republicans in several states have worked to reverse bans, with some success. A poll in June by Data for Progress, a liberal think tank, found that although less than half of Republican voters, 43 percent, support or strongly support conversion therapy, more than half — 56 percent — said the Supreme Court should allow states to ban it.

A decision in the Colorado case, expected next year, could have far-reaching ramifications for dozens of other states.

“I think we’re all really worried about the implications,” said Cliff Rosky, a professor of law at the University of Utah. Rosky helped draft Utah’s

2023 law prohibiting licensed professionals from practicing conversion therapy on LGBTQ+ youth. That measure unanimously passed the Republican-controlled legislature.

“We certainly hope the court will uphold the right of states to regulate the behavior of therapists that it licenses and protect children from a lethal public health threat,” he told Stateline.

The impact on other states’ laws would depend on the scope of the high court’s ruling. But most of those laws are similar to Colorado’s, Rosky said.

“Certainly, a broad ruling against Colorado’s law would jeopardize the constitutionality of all the other laws.”

In *Chiles v. Salazar*, a licensed counselor in Colorado Springs, Kaley Chiles, sued state officials in 2022 over a law that bars licensed

mental health professionals from conducting conversion therapy on clients under 18. She argues the law violates her First Amendment right to free speech and interferes with her ability to practice counseling in a way that aligns with her religious convictions. Chiles is represented by conservative religious law firm Alliance Defending Freedom.

“The government has no business censoring private conversations between clients and counselors,” Jim Campbell, chief legal counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom, said in a news release when the group filed its opening brief in June. “Colorado’s law harms these young people by depriving them of caring and compassionate conversations with a counselor who

Weiser said. “The science, however, says that this practice is harmful. It doesn’t work.

“Regardless of how it’s performed, there can be real harms from this practice. And those harms can include depression, self-hatred, loss of faith, even suicide.”

The key question in the case is whether Colorado’s law regulates professional standards of conduct and speech, or whether it attempts to regulate the right to free speech, said Marie-Amélie George, a legal historian who has published extensively on LGBTQ+ rights and is a professor of law at Wake Forest University School of Law.

“What is really interesting about these laws is that most licensed health professionals don’t offer conversion therapy

ous or ineffective, and that states have a long and established history of regulating professional standards of care.

Colorado isn’t the only recent battleground over conversion therapy, as conservative majorities in the courts, state legislatures and at the federal level have opened the door for Republican lawmakers and conservative Christian groups to reinstate the practice.

Earlier this year, Kentucky’s Republican-controlled legislature passed a bill canceling Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear’s 2024 executive order that banned conversion therapy for minors. Beshear promptly vetoed the bill, but the legislature overrode his veto in March.

In April, a coalition of Republican attorneys general from 11 states, led by Iowa and South Carolina, appealed a January decision by a U.S. district court judge to uphold a 2023 Michigan law that’s similar to Colorado’s. It prohibits mental health professionals from trying to alter a minor’s sexual orientation or gender identity. The case began when Catholic Charities of three Michigan counties filed a lawsuit targeting Michigan’s law in 2024 on behalf of a licensed therapist.

In July, a Virginia court partially struck down the state’s 2020 ban on conversion therapy for minors. Republican lawmakers in Michigan introduced a bill in July to repeal their state’s ban, while Missouri’s Republican attorney general sued to overturn local conversion therapy bans.

From the mid-1990s until the mid-2010s, LGBTQ+ rights advocates won a lot of cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, said George, the Wake Forest professor.

“But in the years since, the Supreme Court has been more hostile to LGBTQ+

rights claims,” she said. “I think, with the political environment of the court, it will be interesting to see what they do given how they have treated other LGBTQ+ rights cases in recent years.

“States are extremely similar in the laws they have enacted, so the decision in this case will probably affect all of the conversion therapy bans in this country.”

Stateline reporter Anna Claire Vollers can be reached at [avollers@stateline.org](mailto:avollers@stateline.org).

*This story appears courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline and was originally produced by Stateline, a part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network, which includes NC Newsline and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501(c)(3) public charity. Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.*



Although the American Psychiatric Association formally acknowledged conversion therapy is harmful in 1998, the U.S. Supreme court is currently hearing arguments on that topic now.

helps them pursue the goals they desire.”

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, a Democrat, said in an August news conference that the law doesn’t prohibit a provider from sharing information or viewpoints with a patient, and that therapists are still allowed to talk with patients about conversion practices offered by religious groups.

But he called conversion therapy a “substandard, discredited practice.” Conversion therapy has been denounced by major medical organizations including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

“This practice has been used in the past to try to force patients to change their sexual orientation or their gender identity,”

because professional associations across the board have condemned it as extremely harmful,” George told Stateline. After the mainstream mental health community disavowed efforts to change people’s sexual orientation by the late 1980s, conversion therapy “became primarily the province of religious and lay ministers,” she said.

State laws like Colorado’s don’t restrict clergy and lay ministers from engaging in conversion therapy, she said. They address only the small subset of state-licensed mental health professionals who wish to use it.

In August, attorneys general in 20 states and the District of Columbia filed an amicus brief supporting Colorado’s law. They argue the First Amendment doesn’t shield mental health practices from regulation when the state deems them danger-



# North Carolina republicans plan to redraw state's congressional districts

Latest redistricting follows Republican-leaning maps in Texas and Missouri

by Brandon Kingdollar | NC Newsline

Republican lawmakers in North Carolina plan to pass a new congressional map to help the GOP maintain its control over Congress in the 2026 midterm elections.

North Carolina House Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) announced an agreement between state House and Senate leaders to redraw the state's congressional districts to yield an additional Republican representative from North Carolina.

"President Trump earned a clear mandate from the voters of North Carolina and the rest of the country, and we intend to defend it by drawing an additional Republican Congressional seat," Hall said in a statement Monday.

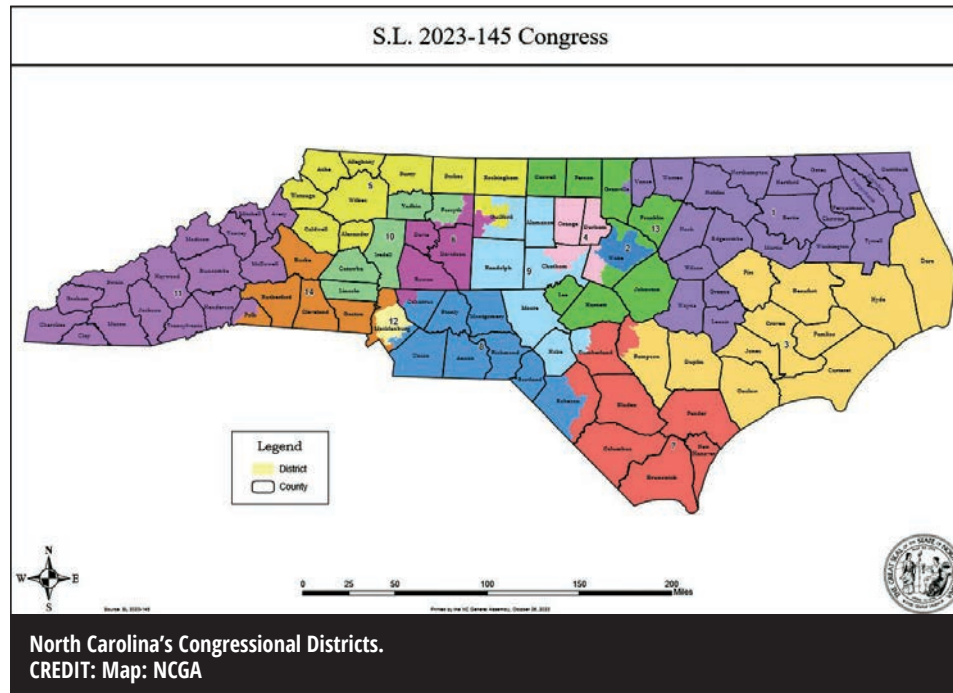
There's little to stand in their way. Passing a new congressional map requires only a simple majority vote in both chambers of the General Assembly, and Republicans hold majorities in both. The new districts are not subject to Stein's veto. Judicial action is also unlikely, as both the U.S. Supreme Court and North Carolina Supreme Court have held that partisan gerrymandering falls outside of their purview.

Hall cited efforts by California Gov. Gavin Newsom to overturn independent maps in his state to create more Democratic seats, which itself came in response to redistricting at President Donald Trump's urging in Texas and Missouri.

"Our state won't stand by while Democrats like Gavin Newsom redraw districts to aid in their efforts to obtain a majority in the U.S. House," Hall said. "We will not allow them to undermine the will of the voters and President Trump's agenda."

Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) – who first floated the idea of a new map last month – said protecting Trump's agenda requires "safeguarding Republican control of Congress."

"Picking up where Texas left off, we will hold votes in our October session to redraw North Carolina's congressional map to ensure Gavin Newsom doesn't decide the congressional majority," he said.



House Democratic Leader Robert Reives (D-Chatham) said in a statement that the Republican effort is tantamount to "stealing a congressional district." He condemned the state GOP for making a rapid push for new maps while failing to fully fund Medicaid.

"Republican lawmakers made clear today that they plan to come back to Raleigh and disenfranchise the voters of this state," Reives said. "Instead of lowering costs for families or ensuring Medicaid can stay afloat, they are hellbent on consolidating as much power as they can."

"The General Assembly works for



North Carolina, not Donald Trump," said Democratic Gov. Josh Stein, adding that Republican leaders have "failed to pass a budget, failed to pay our teachers and law enforcement what they deserve, and failed to fully fund Medicaid. Now they are failing you, the voters. These shameless politicians are abusing their power

to take away yours."

North Carolina Democratic Party Chair Anderson Clayton denounced Berger and Hall directly and said the redistricting effort was "corruption" aimed at shielding Trump from voter backlash.

"North Carolina Republicans Phil Berger and Destin Hall are weak, subservient cowards, willing to steamroll the people of our state so they can give Donald Trump what he wants — power without accountability," she said. "Let me be clear: maps should not give you power; voters should."

North Carolina's congressional map already heavily favors Republicans, with 53 percent of the congressional vote giving Republicans a 10-4 majority in the House delegation. Only Rep. Don Davis (D-N.C.) holds a competitive seat, winning by less than two percent of the vote in the state's 1st Congressional District in 2024.

The announcement comes weeks after a poll commissioned by Common Cause North Carolina found 84 percent of voters in the state oppose gerrymandering, including 78 percent of Republicans.

Melissa Price Kromm, chair of voter advocacy group North Carolina For The People, criticized the move as harmful to voters, calling instead for systemic reform and redistricting led by independent commissions.

"These new redistricting wars aren't about fairness; they're about power," she said in a statement. "Every time politicians redraw maps to cling to power, trust in our democracy erodes."

Kromm said "it's telling" that House and Senate Republicans are able to come to a speedy agreement on redistricting while failing to pass a state budget. "They're prioritizing power over people, again," she said.

Stein said in September that the prospect of mid-decade redistricting in North Carolina is "ridiculous" and damaging to democracy.

"We just redistricted for the second time last cycle. So every two years is the theory that we're gonna redistrict, so we can maximize the political advantage to stick it to one party and enhance another party?" Stein said. "We cannot get into this maximalist political power worldview because it will destroy this country." ::

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

**LOW COUNTRY**  
**BLUE RIDGE**  
**MIDLANDS**  
**GRAND STRAND**  
**TWIN CITY**  
**GATE CITY**  
**METRO**

clgbtcc.org

**CAROLINAS**  
LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce

**WE ARE THE CAROLINAS**

JOIN TODAY!

**Connie J. Vetter, Esq.**  
**Attorney at Law PLLC**  
**Your LGBTQ+ Law Attorney**

**Talk/Text 704-333-4000**  
**or online**




# Qnotes launches Press Club to power LGBTQ+ media across the Carolinas

Strong communities need strong local news. For nearly four decades, *Qnotes* has been a trusted source for journalism that informs, inspires and connects the LGBTQ+ community across the Carolinas. From breaking news and in-depth features to coverage of arts, culture, and politics, *Qnotes* has served as both a mirror and a megaphone for the voices of the region.

This week, the publication officially launches the Qnotes Press Club, a new membership program designed to keep that work strong and sustainable. The Press Club invites readers to become members and directly support the reporting that makes *Qnotes* a vital part of LGBTQ+ life in the South.

By joining the Qnotes Press Club, readers help power local journalism that holds leaders accountable and shines a light on the stories that matter most. Memberships start



**The Qnotes Press Club invites readers to help power trusted, independent LGBTQ+ journalism across the Carolinas.**

at five dollars per month and directly fund newsroom operations, community coverage, and the publication's ongoing Democracy Project, which focuses on elections, civic engagement, and policy. Each tier reflects the impact of reader support on the newsroom's ability to produce trusted, independent journalism that centers LGBTQ+ voices, with annual options available for those who prefer to give once a year.

The Press Club campaign carries a clear call to action: Join the Club. Power the Press. Help Us Tell Our Stories. The goal is to welcome 200 new members by Dec. 31 and 1,000 by June 2026. Each contribution helps ensure that LGBTQ+ stories from across the Carolinas continue to be told with accuracy, care, and depth.

So far this year, *Qnotes* has published more than 300 stories, covered 82 LGBTQ+ events and produced 19 Democracy Project features focused on elections and policy.

Behind each of those numbers is a story made possible by community support. Membership contributions directly fund the newsroom's journalism and help document the challenges and triumphs of LGBTQ+ life in the region.

The Press Club underscores a simple truth: Every story, every event, and every voice *Qnotes* uplifts exists because of readers who believe that trusted, independent LGBTQ+ journalism matters. Joining the Press Club ensures that the publication can continue reporting on the issues that shape daily life for LGBTQ+ people across the Carolinas, from education and healthcare access to housing, culture and civic engagement.

Each membership helps power the press, protect LGBTQ+ news and keep the voices of the Carolinas visible and strong. For additional details, readers can learn more or join the Qnotes Press Club at [qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub](https://qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub). ::

— Liz Schob

## Second 'No Kings' rally and march held in Uptown Charlotte

Millions of people across the country took part in No Kings rallies across the country in a nationwide day of protest organized by the 50501 Movement and local partners. In Charlotte, Indivisible CLT and other community organizations hosted a rally and 1.1-mile march on Saturday, Oct. 18, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at First Ward Park.

The No Kings movement began earlier



**Demonstrators filling the streets of Uptown during the October No Kings rally and march in Charlotte.**  
CREDIT: Facebook

this year with a coordinated series of protests held on June 14, coinciding with Flag Day, the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Army, and President Donald Trump's birthday. Organizers said that event, which drew an estimated five million participants nationwide, was the largest single-day protest mobilization since Trump took office. Demonstrations filled city streets from New York to Los Angeles, with marchers carrying American flags and banners declaring "No Kings."

The rally held in Charlotte is said to have attracted more than 7,000 people, according to a report in *The Charlotte Observer*. Additional rallies took place in the Charlotte Metro area in Concord, Cornelius, Denver, Gastonia, Huntersville, Monroe and Waxhaw.

Nationwide, an estimated 7 million protesters (up two million from the previous rally count) took to the streets in all 50 states, according to organizers and various media outlets.

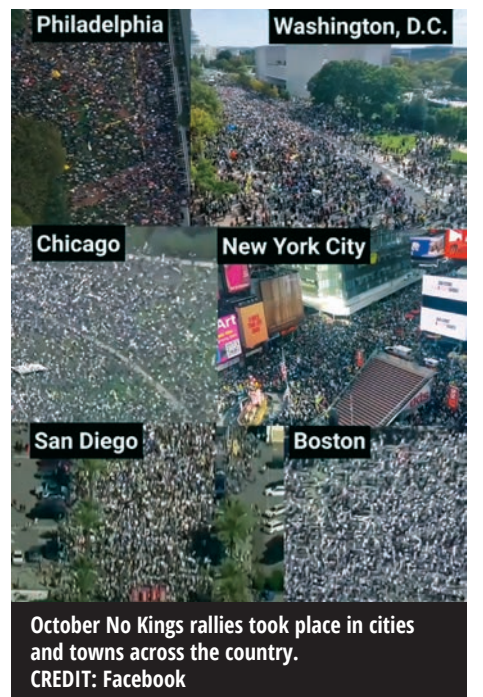
The protests were organized by the 50501 Movement, a national coalition of

volunteers that stands for democracy and against what it calls the authoritarian actions of the Trump administration. The name 50501 represents "50 states, 50 protests, one movement." The group's website states that it was founded by "everyday Americans" who reject political corruption, voter suppression and the concentration of executive power.

The protests came in direct response to a wave of new federal actions since the summer, including the deployment of the National Guard to several U.S. cities, the government shutdown and renewed efforts to centralize executive authority. Stephen Miller, White House Deputy Chief of Staff, recently claimed during a live CNN interview that Trump had "plenary authority" to send federal forces anywhere in the country. Legal experts have described that phrase as meaning "broadly construed and often limitless" power.

According to the No Kings website, the movement's message is rooted in the nation's founding ideals. "The president thinks his rule is absolute," it states. "But in America, we don't have kings, and we won't back down against chaos, corruption, and cruelty."

In what read like a statement of desperation, Trump responded to the rallies, saying that "the people weren't representative of America" and that he "wasn't a king." ::



**October No Kings rallies took place in cities and towns across the country.**  
CREDIT: Facebook

More information is available at <https://www.nokings.org/>.

— Liz Schob and David Aaron Moore

## North Carolina ranks eighth nationwide for bullying, new study finds

North Carolina ranks eighth in the nation for bullying, according to a new study released by Innerbody Research for National Bullying Prevention Month. The report analyzed national survey data on school-based and online harassment, finding that bullying is most widespread in the South.

There is no single federal law defining or regulating bullying in the United States. The U.S. Department of Education offers guidance, but each state determines its own definitions, policies and disciplinary standards. That patchwork approach means protections can vary significantly across state lines, and even the definition of bullying itself can differ from one jurisdiction to another. All 50 states require schools to have anti-bullying policies, but how those policies are enforced, and whether they include counseling or restorative practices, varies widely.

In Innerbody's report, Louisiana, Alaska, Mississippi, West Virginia and Arkansas

reported the nation's highest rates of bullying. North Carolina followed close behind at number eight, while North Dakota, Delaware, Massachusetts, Indiana and Maine ranked lowest.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents said they "always" or "often" see hurtful comments on social media, highlighting the ongoing overlap between in-person and online harassment.

State data reflect similar patterns. The 2021 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that nearly 40 percent of middle school students and 14 percent of high school students reported being bullied on school property during the past 12



**North Carolina ranks among the top 10 states for bullying, underscoring the need for stronger school support systems and inclusive policies.**

months. The Cyberbullying Research Center estimates that about 58 percent of North Carolina youth have experienced online bullying at least once in their lifetime.

While North Carolina law requires school districts to define and prohibit bullying, it does not require schools to offer counseling or follow-up mental health services for students involved. Responses to incidents depend heavily on local resources. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 students per counselor, but North Carolina averages

roughly 333 students per counselor, with the highest ratios found in rural counties.

National data show that students in rural areas report bullying more frequently than their urban or suburban peers, which may help explain some of North Carolina's elevated rates. Many rural districts face persistent

teacher shortages, limited staff training and fewer prevention programs, leaving students with less access to consistent support.

LGBTQ+ students remain particularly vulnerable. According to GLSEN's 2023 National School Climate Survey, nearly 70 percent of LGBTQ+ students in North Carolina reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. Only about nine percent attend schools with comprehensive anti-bullying policies that explicitly include LGBTQ+ protections.

Bullying is closely tied to youth mental health outcomes. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death among North Carolinians ages 10 to 18, according to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. While recent surveys show modest improvements in student well-being, nearly one in five high school students still report seriously considering suicide. Advocates like NAMI North Carolina argue that reducing bullying requires more than school rules or awareness campaigns. It demands consistent funding for counselors, inclusive education policies and community-level action to make classrooms safe for every child. ::

— Liz Schob



# JOIN THE QNOTES PRESS CLUB.



Power the Press.  
Protect Local LGBTQ+ News.

Be one of the first 200 members to join the press club by the end of 2025. Your membership keeps trusted, independent LGBTQ+ journalism alive so we can tell the stories of our community across the Carolinas.

Join today at  
[qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub](https://qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub)



Memberships\* start at  
just \$5 per month.

Community Supporter: \$5/month  
Amplifier: \$10/month  
Champion: \$25/month  
Catalyst: \$50/month  
Trailblazer: \$100/month

\*all member benefits available on our website

300+ STORIES  
PUBLISHED SO  
FAR IN 2025

82 LGBTQ+  
EVENTS COVERED  
SO FAR IN 2025

19 DEMOCRACY  
PROJECT STORIES  
PUBLISHED SO  
FAR IN 2025

39 YEARS  
SERVING THE  
CAROLINAS



# Mosaic UMC brews justice in Wilmington

Church becomes a coffee shop to support LGBTQ+ youth and the homeless



by **Liz Schob**  
Qnotes Staff Writer

In Wilmington, one church is reimagining what faith can look like when community comes first.

Mosaic United Methodist Church, founded during the COVID-19 pandemic, plans to open a nonprofit coffee shop inside its building in downtown Wilmington. The project, led by Pastor Kelley Finch, will turn an underused space into a social enterprise that funds direct support for the city's LGBTQ+ community.

"We were gifted the deed to a 1960s cinderblock church building in downtown Wilmington," Finch said. "It sits empty most of the week. A coffee shop is low startup and high revenue, and every dollar of net revenue can go right back to our community."

According to the church's GoFundMe campaign, all proceeds from the café will fund mini grants for low-income LGBTQ+ youth and unhoused queer residents. The fundraiser covers construction costs, accessibility upgrades and plumbing improvements needed to prepare the space for business. Mosaic's goal is to raise \$36,000 to renovate the space and open the coffee shop early next year.

Finch said the idea for the shop

emerged from Mosaic's mission to repair the harm that churches have historically caused to LGBTQ+ people. "For the last three years, we have deconstructed and rebuilt the church with our queer and neurodiverse community," she said. "Our whole focus is on repairing the harm the church has caused and social justice."

Before acquiring its current building, Mosaic operated out of a rented house known as the Rainbow House. It quickly became a refuge for queer people in need of rest, support and affirmation. "We had trans siblings who did not feel safe in the homeless community," Finch said. "They needed a safe place to take a shower, to sit and rest and to hear that everything they had been told about our scriptures was not true, that they are beloved and created in the image of God."

Those early experiences inspired the church to think creatively about how to sustain that mission long-term. Finch, who once owned a coffee shop, saw the potential for the space to generate ongoing support without relying on tithes or membership dues. "We wanted to find a way to provide real, consistent financial support instead of just asking the people in our pews," she said. "We looked around at a space we only use on Sunday mornings and thought, this could be something that helps our community every day."

To manage the project, Mosaic formed



Pastor Kelley Finch inside Mosaic UMC's sanctuary, soon to be transformed into a community coffee shop.  
CREDIT: Kelley Finch

a separate nonprofit board to oversee the café's operations and decide how the revenue will be distributed. Finch said the funds will go directly toward practical needs for queer youth and families, such as a bike for a homeless friend and fees for safe queer camps. The church also plans to distribute monthly coffee cards for unhoused residents and LGBTQ+ teens, allowing them to buy drinks, access Wi-Fi and gather in a safe and affirming environment.

"There are so many queer youth and adults who just need a safe place to exist," Finch said. "This coffee shop will give them that, while also funding the help they need."


The project has already gained momen-

tum online, thanks to Finch's large TikTok following. Early supporters have donated five- and ten-dollar gifts, while others have contributed larger amounts to help reach the fundraising goal. Finch said the outpouring of encouragement has outweighed the backlash that often follows her public advocacy. "Doing something positive always draws anger," she said. "We take that as a sign we are doing something powerful and good."

Mosaic's weekly gatherings attract between 20 and 50 people, many of them queer families with young children. The church also hosts weekly "stitch and bitch" nights and other community events that draw people from across Wilmington who are seeking inclusive, justice-focused spaces. "We're not a titling or membership-based church," Finch said. "We are a justice church."

For Finch, the coffee shop is more than an innovative fundraiser. It is a model of what the next generation of faith spaces could become. "We're showing possibilities of what a church can be," she said. "Through this coffee shop, we can pay reparations to those who have been harmed and create something life-giving in its place." ::



To learn more about Mosaic UMC or support the coffee shop project, visit [mosaicwilmington.org](http://mosaicwilmington.org) or [gofundme.com/f/help-us-open-a-non-profit-coffee-shop](https://gofundme.com/f/help-us-open-a-non-profit-coffee-shop).




psst....


## Knowing Looks Good on You!

FREE TESTING: • RAPID HIV • HEP C • SYPHILIS

Schedule an appointment online or call 704.237.8793







## PROFESSIONAL BODY PIERCING & FINE JEWELRY

Experienced Piercers • Safe & Sterile • Award-Winning

# www.sadupiercing.org



1515 Central Avenue  
Charlotte, NC



Services By Appointment - Book Online



# Resources and recreation for LGBTQ+ seniors

A look at what's available for Carolina community members in their golden years



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

America is a youth-oriented society. Not a judgment, just an observation. In popular culture the devaluation kicks in between 35-40. In American culture at large, the second devaluation begins at 50 with near total erasure by 60. Any age above 65 and beyond is practical invisibility.

Many Americans in their 60s feel largely invisible because of ageism, loss of social roles and increased isolation. Cultural obsession with youth and stereotypes of older adults as frail or out of touch can contribute significantly to this feeling.

In our own community, we frequently see organizations, fundraisers and assistance ready and available for LGBTQ+ youth, but rarely for our seniors who might be in need. Throughout the country and here in the Carolinas there are some welcoming resources for seniors that can provide connectivity, activity, friendship and help with daily living, but they are limited.

## North Carolina

### Carolina Aging Alliance

This nonprofit, based in the Triangle region, serves LGBTQ+ adults over 50. Originally founded as the Gay & Gray Initiative, it became SAGE Raleigh before evolving into its current form. It focuses on easing social isolation and advocating for the needs of older adults. Follow them on social media or visit their website at <https://www.carolinaaging.org/>

### LGBTQ Center of Durham

The center provides a range of resources and programming for the LGBTQ+ community, including specific support for older adults and job coaching services for individuals over 50. <https://www.lgbtqcenterofdurham.org/>

### LGBT Center of Raleigh

This center offers health and wellness programs and once had an active SAGE affiliate, SAGE Central North Carolina, which provided social connections and advocacy for older LGBTQ+ people. Although that specific aspect has been phased out, services and connections for all community members will be available once the center completes their move to their new location in downtown Raleigh. <https://www.lgbtcenterofraleigh.com/>

### Out Wilmington LGBTQ Seniors

A program of the LGBTQ Center of the Cape Fear, this group offers a safe space for older LGBTQ+ individuals and their caregivers. It provides discussion groups,

educational seminars, and social activities through the **Silver Pride Circle program**, which aims to enhance the well-being of LGBTQ+ people over 50 by fostering social connection and empowerment. <https://lgbtqcapefear.org/what-we-do/elders/>

### Blue Ridge Pride

Asheville-based organization works to create an inclusive community in Western North Carolina and is a resource for LGBTQ+ people of all ages. <https://www.blueridgepride.org/>



Physical activity and recreation with others is important and readily available in both Carolinas.

## South Carolina

### Harriet Hancock LGBT Center

As the state's first LGBTQ+ resource center, it provides resources, social events and educational opportunities for the Columbia community, including monthly dinners open to all ages. <https://www.harriethancock-center.org/>

### Queer Wellness Center

This Greenville-based non-profit serves LGBTQ+ people in the Upstate of South Carolina with mental health programming and a resource closet. While not senior-specific, its services are available to all LGBTQ+ community members. <https://www.queerwellnesscenter.org/>

### Lowcountry Senior Center and Waring Senior Center

While not exclusively for LGBTQ+ individuals, these Charleston senior centers on James Island and in West Ashley offer a wide range of activities for older adults, including fitness centers and computer labs. Lowcountry: <https://www.lowcountrysenior-center.com/lowcountry-senior-center/>

Waring: <https://www.lowcountrysenior-center.com/waring-senior-center/>

## National Resources

### National Resource Center on LGBTQ+ Aging

The national LGBTQ Aging Center offers extensive resources and guides for LGBTQ+ elders, their families and caregivers, including information on equitable healthcare and support services. <https://lgbtagingcenter.org/>

### LGBT National Senior Hotline

This peer-support hotline is available for callers age 50 and above. You can reach them by phone at 1-888-234-7243 or visit their website for additional info at <https://lgbthotline.org/senior-hotline/>.

### SAGE

The national organization provides services to LGBT older adults. A list of partners around the country can be found on its website and specific online programs that can be helpful are SAGEYou, a virtual

### Charlotte Senior Expo

A free event held at The Carole Hoefener Center that connects older adults with various local organizations and services. <https://expo4seniors.com/charlotte-nc-6-24-26/>

### Charlotte Senior Games

A competition for ages 50 and up that includes a variety of athletic events. <https://parkandrec.mecknc.gov/activities/athletics/senior-games>

### Paint and Sip Events

Events like "Sip and Serenity" offer a relaxing, mindful painting experience with calming music and light refreshments. <https://cityartroom.com/public-events-1>



Keep in touch with long-time friends and be ready to make new ones.

Perhaps more than ever, LGBTQ+ communities around the country must be there for one another, regardless of cultural or generational differences. During this politically volatile time, with increasing intolerance aimed at our community, it's important we all stand together and united.

community hub with online programs and resources for LGBTQ+ elders. Visit their website at <https://www.sageusa.org/>. Additional details can be found at <https://sageyou.org/>.

## Special interest and seasonal events

### Senior walking programs

In **Charlotte** can be found through Walk with a Doc and the Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation (which offers walking clubs and classes at senior centers like the Tyvola Senior Center). Additionally, programs like Walk with Ease are available for arthritis sufferers, and independent seniors can explore local parks or walkable neighborhoods like Uptown's Fourth Ward. Senior walking programs in the **Raleigh-Durham** area can be found through local community centers like the Durham Center for Senior Life, which offers various fitness and walking groups. The state-sponsored Walk With Ease program is another resource for guided walking. Senior walking programs and opportunities in **Columbia, S.C.**, are available at places like the Harbison Community Center and the Lorry Center. Additionally, SilverSneakers provides community classes, some of which are outdoor walking groups. Senior walking programs in **Greenville, S.C.**, can be found through organizations like Senior Action, which offers programs for adults over 55, and, like Columbia, through the SilverSneakers program, which includes community walking groups and classes. Look for senior-focused fitness classes at places like the Kroc Center, which also hosts activities for older adults. <https://agingoutreachservices.com/>

In order to encourage connectivity across intergenerational lines, structured programs, educational opportunities and social events are key. These efforts help bridge generational gaps by creating safe spaces for different age groups to share experiences, build empathy and learn from one another. If your LGBTQ community is lacking in services and activities for seniors, be the bridge. Consider initiating programming such as these to connect and unite our entire rainbow family.

### Shared meals and social gatherings

Organize regular *family meals* or drop-in social programs at community centers and LGBTQ-welcoming restaurants, providing informal settings for conversation and community building.

### Intergenerational Arts Projects

Reach out to your fellow community members and allies to collaborate and create arts workshops, like theater or visual art, where participants work together to explore topics of age and identity. These projects can be a powerful way to express shared experiences and celebrate queer creativity.

### Positivity Celebrations

Host events that celebrate queer joy across generations, such as drag shows, LGBTQ+ film screenings or queer-owned restaurant tours. Research has shown that witnessing joyful LGBTQ+ elders can be inspiring for younger people.

### Recreational activities

Sponsor game nights, trivia contests, indoor or outdoor walks or bingo events that appeal to a wide range of ages, with a special outreach to LGBTQ+ seniors. ::



# Why Choose Senior Living at Windsor Run?

## 1. Get the **best value** for your money.

Enjoy a vibrant community lifestyle with convenient services and predictable monthly spending.

## 2. Enjoy more **amenities and activities!**

Gain everything you need to stay active, social, and engaged, just steps from your door.

## 3. Feel confident with **on-site care.**

Experience peace of mind with the convenience of our on-site medical center.





# At Windsor Run, You Really Can Have It All!

We're Southeast Charlotte's premier senior living community. Enjoy a beautiful maintenance-free residence and exciting amenities and services, all for an incredible value!



“We know if we have a need, it will be met by the community and **we're not going to be on our own.**”

—Gil and Linda D.,  
Community Residents



Get your free brochure.  
Call **1-888-307-1679** or visit  
**WindsorRunCommunity.com** today!

  
**Windsor Run**  
BY ERICKSON SENIOR LIVING®

Matthews  
[WindsorRunCommunity.com](http://WindsorRunCommunity.com)





# Self-care during the holiday season

Tips on finding peace, presence and connection



by Wendy Lyons  
Qnotes Staff Writer

The holidays often arrive wrapped in light, laughter and the familiar rhythm of tradition. For some, they bring the sweet scent of baked pies, family hugs and joyous reunions. For others, they stir memories, financial pressure, loneliness or the ache of loved ones no longer near. This season, as cheerful as it might look on the outside, can potentially be much more emotionally complex than years before.

Between parties, travel plans, and the push to make everything “perfect,” our capacity for peace and presence is tested. It’s precisely during this time that self-care becomes essential and not a luxury. Taking care of your emotional and mental well-being helps you show up fully for others and yourself.

During our exploration of what self-care looks like amid the celebrations, we spoke with four people whose perspectives span generations and experiences: Charles Gomez, Hope Barnes, Leila Turner; and Norena Gutierrez (MS, NCC, LCMHC), owner of Mehana Wellness in Matthews. Their candid reflections remind us that even in seasons of joy, tending to our inner lives remains vital.

## Traditions that ground the heart

For Gomez, the holidays are a bitter-sweet blend of gratitude and grief. “I try to be with friends and family because I still feel the emptiness of being alone on the holidays,” he shared quietly. “People that claim to be family don’t even have time to call or come. That’s hard to sit with.”

Despite the ache, he’s found solace in creating connection. “I host a small ‘frankly gathering each year with food, music, laughter. I invite people who may not have anywhere to go. It’s simple, but it fills some of the empty spaces.”

Barnes finds joy in comfort and consistency. “Every Christmas Eve, my family does dinner in our pajamas,” she said with a smile. “We eat, laugh, play cards and play games. We also go see Christmas light shows. There’s something about the sparkle that reminds me how beautiful life can still be, no matter what’s happening.”

Turner, an elder in her late seventies, spoke with warmth that could melt winter

chill. “I love, love family gatherings,” she began. “Sometimes I haven’t seen some family members in months or since the last holiday. We eat, play games, get caught up on what’s going on. The smiles, hugs and kisses; it’s that togetherness that helps keep loneliness away.”

Turner’s voice turned thoughtful as she added, “Don’t forget the elderly. Some of us can’t drive or have disabilities. There’s technology now: video calls, Zoom. Include us! Loneliness is a dark place when you’re forgotten.”

Her plea was simple but powerful: Remember those on the margins of celebration.

## The challenges beneath the cheer

While the holidays sparkle with promise, they can also highlight what hurts.

“Loneliness and isolation are two of the most common struggles I see this time of year,” said Gutierrez, a clinical therapist. “There’s also being overwhelmed, trying to meet everyone’s expectations. There’s tension around differences, especially political or generational, that can show up at the Thanksgiving table. Ask for no conversation on politics this year.”

Gomez nodded when in agreement. “Even surrounded by people, the emptiness can linger. When those you expect to show love don’t, the hurt runs deep,” he said. “I’ve learned to manage it by focusing on who shows up, not who doesn’t.”

“People feel alone or feel they don’t have enough; not enough money, not enough support, not enough peace,” Barnes said. “And then social media adds pressure to look happy when you might be struggling just to get through.”

For Turner, the greatest challenge is invisibility. “Most families mean well, but they forget about their older loved ones. They get busy. They forget to call or visit,” she shared. “That kind of exclusion breeds depression. We start to remember times when we were all together and wonder why have I been left out?”

Gutierrez pointed out that these feelings



For some, the holiday season can bring on feelings of depression, loneliness and isolation. Help is out there.

are common and valid. “People think sadness during the holidays means something is wrong with them, but it’s human,” she said. “The season can magnify loss or loneliness. Acknowledging that doesn’t make you ungrateful; it makes you self-aware.”

## Statistics that remind us we’re not alone

Data backs up what these voices express from the heart:

- The American Psychological Association found that 41 percent of adults report increased stress during the holiday season.
- Among those with pre-existing mental health conditions, 64 percent say their symptoms worsen during the holidays (NAMI).
- Nearly 38 percent of Americans report mood decline in winter months (American Psychiatric Association, 2023).
- One national survey revealed that three in five adults feel emotionally drained by the end of December.

These numbers aren’t meant to discourage, but to remind us that we are not alone in the struggle to balance joy and overwhelm.

## Practicing self-care: Wisdom from experience

When asked for advice on staying grounded, each person offered deeply personal but practical reflections.

Gomez emphasized the power of small steps. “Sometimes I just breathe five minutes, deep in and out. I remind myself that it’s okay to rest. Boundaries are healthy. I don’t go to gatherings that feel forced. Instead, I check on people I know might be alone. That helps both of us.”

Barnes focused on mindset. “Surround yourself with as much positivity as possible,” she said. “Grace, kindness, love, patience, forbearance; they can all be gifts. They won’t put you in debt, but they can lift someone’s heart.”

Turner stressed inclusion and presence. “Make time to call or visit elders. We don’t always say it, but we feel forgotten. If you can’t come, call or video chat,” she said. “And for ourselves, we can choose peace. We can still smile, pray, or light a candle for the ones we miss.”

From a therapist’s perspective, Gutierrez encourages simple structure.



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



"Breathe!" she said with a laugh. "That's first. Then reach out to family and friends proactively. Don't wait until you're overwhelmed. If you're hosting, make a plan and break down tasks over several days. You don't have to do it all at once."

She added a fresh idea that's catching on: "Consider changing the big Thanksgiving dinner from Thursday to the weekend. It gives people time to travel, decompress, and show up with more ease. The point is connection, not the date on the calendar."

#### Simple ways to care for yourself this holiday season

Drawing from these conversations and the lessons they model, here are ways to nurture your own peace:

- Reimagine the holiday rhythm. Let go of "perfect." Focus on presence, not performance.
- Pause and breathe. A single mindful breath can reset your mood.
- Plan early. Break tasks into smaller chunks to prevent last-minute stress.
- Rest intentionally. Guard your sleep; exhaustion fuels irritability and sadness.
- Nourish your body. Eat mindfully, hydrate, and move daily, even gently.
- Set loving boundaries. You can say "no" with grace. Protect your energy.
- Reach out first. Don't wait for others to call. Connection starts with one text or check-in.
- Include those on the margins. Call the elderly, single neighbors, or friends who might be grieving.
- Find quiet gratitude. End each day not-

ing one thing you're thankful for and one worry you release.

• Serve with heart. Volunteer, donate, or simply offer a kind word. Helping others expands joy.

#### Ways to give back and rekindle joy

Small acts of service can ease loneliness and spark meaning. Try volunteering at a local food pantry, Crisis Assistance Ministry or a Homeless Shelter, donating winter coats, writing cards to seniors, or sponsoring a family in need. Even a brief visit or meal drop-off can remind someone and yourself that community still exists.

"When you shift from what you lack to what you can give, your perspective changes," Gutierrez reflected. "The heart softens. The season becomes lighter."

#### Resources for support and healing

If the holidays bring more pain than peace, professional and community support can help:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – Call or text 988 for 24/7, free, confidential support.
- Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741741 to chat with a trained counselor.
- The Trevor Project – LGBTQ+ Youth crisis counseling. Call 866-488-7386.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – Call or text 988 for 24/7, free, confidential support.
- Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741741 to chat with a trained counselor.
- SAMHSA National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for free, confidential mental health and substance-use resources.

• National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) for information and local support groups.

• Local faith communities, support circles, and senior centers – Many offer free gatherings or emotional wellness workshops during the holidays.

• Here in the Charlotte Metro region, Norena Gutierrez's Mehana Wellness Center offers counseling, workshops, and holistic support for individuals and families. It is located at 907 Matthews School Road in Matthews. For more information call 704-492-3147 or visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/p/Mehana-Wellness-Center-61558657497652/>.

#### Closing thoughts: A season of grace

Self-care doesn't erase every ache, but it builds space for healing, gratitude and renewal. It's about giving yourself permission to breathe, to step back, and to be present in your own life even when it feels imperfect.

Says Gutierrez: "It's okay to take things slow. Breathe, plan ahead, and focus on what truly matters, connection and love. That's what the holidays are supposed to be about."

Gomez reminds us to keep inviting hope even in solitude. Barnes teaches that kindness is currency that never runs out. Turner shows us the strength in remembrance and inclusion. Together, they reflect a truth worth holding onto:

**The holidays are less about perfection and more about presence.**

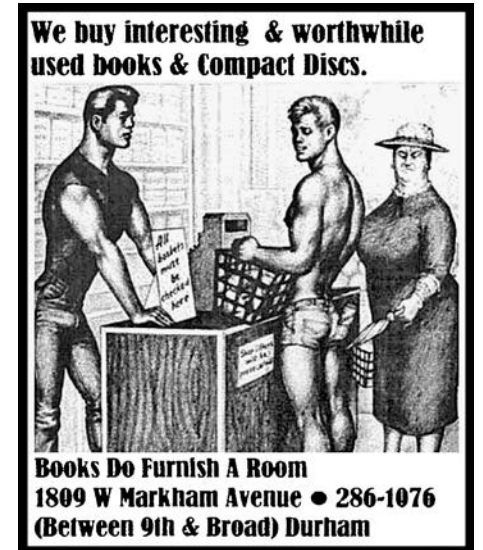
This season, give yourself compassion, let your heart rest easy, and may peace find you right where you are. ::



**Lupie's Cafe**

**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



# JOIN THE QNOTES PRESS CLUB.

Power the Press.  
Protect Local LGBTQ+ News.

**39 YEARS SERVING THE CAROLINAS**

**82 LGBTQ+ EVENTS COVERED SO FAR IN 2025**

**19 DEMOCRACY PROJECT STORIES PUBLISHED SO FAR IN 2025**

**300+ STORIES PUBLISHED SO FAR IN 2025**

Memberships\* start at just \$5 per month.

Community Supporter: \$5/month  
Amplifier: \$10/month  
Champion: \$25/month  
Catalyst: \$50/month  
Trailblazer: \$100/month

\*all member benefits available on our website



Be one of the first 200 members to join the press club by the end of 2025. Your membership keeps trusted, independent LGBTQ+ journalism alive so we can tell the stories of our community across the Carolinas.

Join today at [qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub](http://qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub)



# Charlotte shines bright for the season

Shows and events for the holidays



by Wendy Lyons  
Qnotes Staff Writer

We're just on the cusp of the holiday season and Charlotte is already aglow with lights, laughter and celebration. From Halloween thrills and Thanksgiving gatherings to Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's Eve, this time of year reminds us of everything that connects us to each other.

It's the season to come together, sing a little louder, laugh a little longer, and share warmth wherever we go. Whether you're gliding across an ice rink, taking in a concert, or soaking up the glow of holiday lights, there's something magical waiting for everyone this year in the Queen City. Some events are free, some are ticketed and there's definitely plenty to keep you entertained!

**Nov. 12-13**

**The Jinx & DeLa Holiday Show: An Intimate Preview**  
Booth Playhouse at Blumenthal Arts Center, 130 N Tryon St, Charlotte

Beloved drag icons Jinx Monsoon and BenDeLaCreme return with their witty, heartfelt and delightfully campy holiday spectacle. Expect hilarious storytelling, original songs, and plenty of queer holiday cheer. A must-see for fans of comedy and community. 8 p.m. [blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/the-jinx-de-la-holiday-show](https://blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/the-jinx-de-la-holiday-show).

**Nov. 13-23**

**Southern Christmas Show**

Park Expo & Conference Center, 800 Briarcreek Rd, Charlotte

A Charlotte classic where holiday dreams meet local craftsmanship. Explore hundreds of vendors, themed designer rooms, Christmas Tree Lane and live performances that will keep you in the spirit all day long. <https://www.southernchristmasshow.com/>.

**Nov. 21 - Jan. 4**

**Speedway Christmas Drive-Through and Village**

Charlotte Motor Speedway, 5555 Concord Pkwy S, Concord

Cruise through four miles of dazzling lights synchronized to music, then stop by the infield Christmas Village for rides, cocoa and Santa sightings. It's one of the Southeast's largest holiday light displays. [charlottemotorspeedway.com/events/speedway-christmas](https://charlottemotorspeedway.com/events/speedway-christmas).

**Nov. 22 - Dec. 23**

**Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer**

Children's Theatre of Charlotte, 300 E Seventh St  
Musical adaptation of the beloved television special. Filled with hits like "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and "A Holly Jolly Christmas." Features all of your favorite characters including Santa and Mrs. Claus, Hermey the Elf, Bumble the Abominable Snow Monster, Clarice, Yukon Cornelius and, of course, Rudolph. More info at <https://ctcharlotte.org/>.

**Nov. 22 - Jan. 4**

**Ice Skating at The Bowl**

The Bowl at Ballantyne, Charlotte

The Bowl's open-air concert venue transforms into a glittering outdoor ice rink for the holiday season. Enjoy skating beneath twinkling lights with family and friends, plus festive concessions, warm beverages and cozy fire pits. It's a fresh alternative to the city's larger attractions. Monday - Thursday 4-9 p.m., Friday 4-10 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m.-10 p.m. and Sunday 12-9 p.m. <https://thebowlnc.com/>.

**Nov. 26 - Jan. 4**

**Light the Knights Festival**

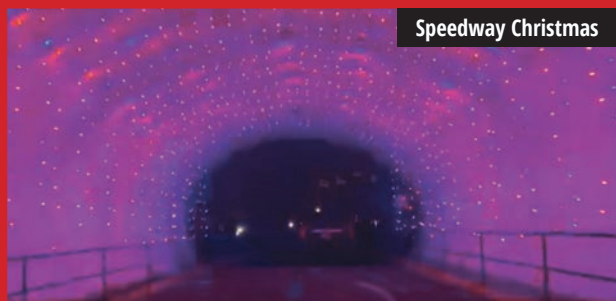
Truist Field, 324 S Mint St

Charlotte's uptown baseball stadium transforms into a holiday playground with sparkling lights, Christmas Village pop-ups, an ice rink and snow tubing lanes. Visit Santa's Workshop, sip cocoa under the skyline and take in the twinkling city views. It's one of Charlotte's most festive outdoor experiences. More details at [milb.com/charlotte-knights/ballpark/christmas](https://milb.com/charlotte-knights/ballpark/christmas).

**Nov. 26**

**Charlotte Annual Thanksgiving Parade**

Uptown Center City on Tryon St, Charlotte  
Annual parade to usher in the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday season is held the night before Thanksgiving and features lights, music, marching bands, floats, beauty queens, local elected officials in convertibles and more. 5:30 p.m. Additional information available at <https://www.novanthealththanksgivingparade.com/>.



Speedway Christmas



Light the Knights



SAVE THE DATE!  
SOUTHERN CHRISTMAS SHOW



Ice Skating at The Bowl



Thanksgiving Parade



**Dec. 1 - Jan. 1**

**McAdenville Annual Christmas Town Lights**

All streets of McAdenville, Gaston County

Once a tiny mill village, this Charlotte metro town has been getting dressed up with holiday lights for the Christmas season every year since 1956. Visitors come from miles around to make the winding drive back and forth through town streets for miles of lights and holiday music. Make sure your car is in good running order and brace yourself for the traffic. Lights are usually on from 5:30 through 10 p.m. <https://townofmcadenville.org/visitors/christmas-town-usa/>.

**Dec. 1**

**A Motown Christmas**

Knight Theater, 430 S Tryon St, Charlotte

Get ready for smooth harmonies and soulful holiday grooves. Legendary Motown performers bring beloved hits and Christmas classics to life in a show full of rhythm, sparkle and spirit. 7 p.m. More information available at [blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/a-motown-christmas](http://blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/a-motown-christmas).

**Dec. 2**

**Mannheim Steamroller Christmas**

Belk Theater, Blumenthal Arts Center, Charlotte

The signature sound of Mannheim Steamroller fills the hall with soaring arrangements, symphonic beats and pure Christmas nostalgia. This concert delivers holiday magic in full surround sound. More info at [blumenthalarts.org/celebrate-the-holidays-with-bpa](http://blumenthalarts.org/celebrate-the-holidays-with-bpa) and <https://www.mannheimsteamroller.com/>.

**Dec. 4-6**

**Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte: JOY!**

Galilee Center, 3601 Central Ave, Charlotte

The GMCC fills the season with powerful harmonies, laughter and heartfelt moments. Their concert blends classic

carols, pop favorites and uplifting messages of inclusion and hope. You'll leave smiling from ear to ear. For more info visit [gmccharlotte.org/joy2025](https://gmccharlotte.org/joy2025).

**Dec. 5-21**

**Charlotte Ballet: The Nutcracker**

Belk Theater, Blumenthal Arts Center, Charlotte

A dazzling holiday tradition returns with Tchaikovsky's timeless score, a full live orchestra and stunning choreography. Experience the wonder of Clara, the Nutcracker Prince and the Land of Sweets in this must-see performance. <https://charlotteballet.org/nutcracker-2025/>.

**Dec. 5-14**

**Theatre Charlotte: A Christmas Carol**

501 Queens Rd, Charlotte

Join Scrooge, Tiny Tim and the Ghosts of Christmas for this heartwarming local favorite. Theatre Charlotte's production captures the spirit of redemption and generosity with humor and heart. [theatrecharlotte.org/christmas-carol-2025](http://theatrecharlotte.org/christmas-carol-2025).

**Dec. 13-14**

**One Voice Chorus: Pride & Joy**

First United Methodist Church, 501 N Tryon St, Charlotte

Charlotte's LGBTQ+ and allied chorus delivers an inspiring performance celebrating unity, love and the magic of the holidays. Expect soaring vocals, inclusive energy and plenty of cheer to fill your heart. 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. <https://one-voicechorus.com/event/ovcs-holiday-concert-2025-pride-joy/>.

**Dec. 14**

**Charlotte Pride Band Holiday Concert: Tuba Christmas**

NoDa Bizarre Market at Johnston YMCA

3025 N Davidson St, Charlotte

The Charlotte Pride Band celebrates the season with a joyful brass performance featuring holiday favorites and community pride. This inclusive event combines music, friendship and festive spirit in perfect harmony. 2 p.m. More details at <https://www.charlotteprideband.org/tubachristmas>.

**Dec. 18**

**Festival of Lights: A Hanukkah Concert**

Knight Theater

430 S Tryon St, Charlotte

Join the Charlotte symphony for a concert featuring local cantors and choirs, along with a sing along of favorite Hanukkah songs. 7:30 p.m. More details at <https://www.charlottesymphony.org>.



McAdenville Christmas Lights



A Motown Christmas



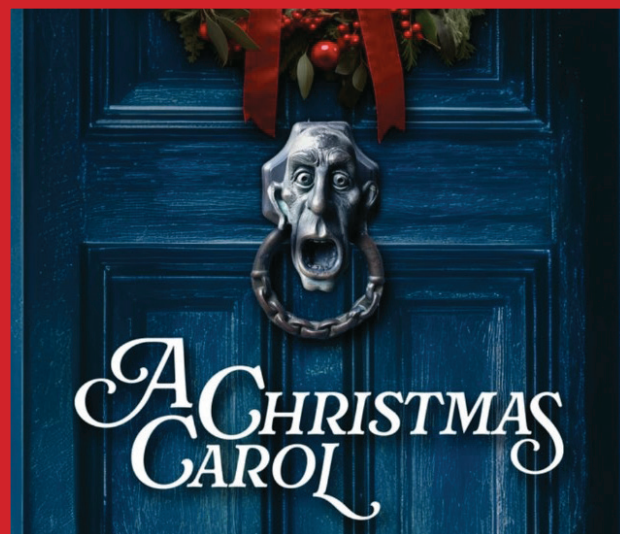
MANNHEIM STEAMROLLER'S CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR



GAY MEN'S CHORUS of Charlotte JOY!



The Nutcracker



A CHRISTMAS CAROL



One Voice Chorus



Charlotte Pride Band PRESENTS

TUBA CHRISTMAS

December 14, 2024



Festival of Lights



# A vibrant tapestry of culture, history, and LGBTQ+ pride

## Pride Journey: Manchester, England



by Joey Amato  
Guest Contributor

Manchester, England, is not only famous for its industrial heritage, music scene, and football clubs—it's also home to one of the most vibrant and historically significant LGBTQ+ communities in the UK. Often referred to as the "gay capital of the North," Manchester has been a pioneer in LGBTQ+ rights, visibility, and celebration, cultivating a culture of inclusivity that continues to thrive today.

The roots of Manchester's LGBTQ+ history stretch back centuries, but it was during the 20th century that the city truly became a hub for activism and progress. In 1880, a scandal known as the "Manchester Drag Ball" brought national attention to the city when police raided a fancy dress ball attended by men in drag. Though the incident was used to stigmatize the community, it also marked one of the first widely publicized moments of queer expression in the city.

Manchester is home to several institutions that preserve and celebrate queer history. The LGBT Foundation, based in the city, is one of the UK's leading LGBTQ+ charities, providing health and support services as well as educational resources.

The city is also immortalized in pop culture as the backdrop for *Queer as Folk*, the groundbreaking 1999 television series created by Russell T Davies. The show, set in Manchester's Gay Village, helped bring the realities of LGBTQ+ life to mainstream audiences and played a pivotal role in shaping public attitudes.

Manchester, is a city that lives and breathes resilience. It's a place where cobblestone streets echo with the voices of industrial workers, punk rockers, activists, and proud members of the LGBTQ+ community. I came here seeking stories—some hidden in old libraries, others pulsing



One of the murals in Manchester's Gay Village.  
CREDIT: Joey Amato

through neon-lit streets—and left with a sense of belonging I hadn't expected.

My base for this journey was the magnificent Kimpton Clocktower Hotel. Located in a former insurance building dating back to the 1890s, it seamlessly marries historic grandeur with modern luxury. Walking through its doors felt like entering a different era. The soaring ceilings, intricate tilework, and dramatic staircases told stories of old Manchester, while the in-room record players spinning tracks by Oasis made sure I knew exactly where I was.

The heart of the hotel is The Refuge—a restaurant and bar that buzzes with energy. Whether sipping cocktails beneath the Winter Garden's lush greenery or sharing small plates that borrow flavors from around the world, I felt immersed in the city's welcoming vibe. Even in its luxury, the Kimpton feels like a place for everyone, especially when there is a DJ spinning some cool jazzy beats.

One thing I loved about this property is their "Forgot it? We've got it" service. Whether its toothpaste, a shaving kit or phone charger, the helpful staff have you covered. I tend to forget at least one necessity on every trip. The Kimpton's central location places guests within walking distance of Manchester's vibrant cultural scene, including the Palace Theatre, Canal Street, and various shopping and dining options.



Joey Amato at the John Rylands library.  
CREDIT: Joey Amato

My first stop in Manchester was the John Rylands Library—an architectural marvel of neo-Gothic design. I was there specifically to view "The Secret Public" exhibition. It traces Manchester's underground art scene, especially its ties to queer culture and punk resistance. Flyers, magazines, and photographs are on display.

And while we are on the topic of LGBTQ+ history, the best way to understand Manchester's queer roots is by talking to the locals. The Free Manchester Walking Tours offers a Queer History Tour, led by passionate guides who have in-depth knowledge of the city's LGBTQ+ history and culture. We began our tour in Sackville Gardens, home to the Alan Turing Memorial and the Beacon of Hope—a tribute to those affected by HIV/AIDS. It's a space for reflection, nestled just beside Canal Street's constant thrum. For those not familiar with Alan Turing, he was

a pioneering mathematician and computer scientist, best known for his role in cracking the German Enigma code during World War II—a breakthrough that helped shorten the war and save countless lives. Often regarded as the father of modern computing, Turing laid the theoretical foundation for artificial intelligence. Despite his monumental contributions, he was persecuted for being gay, ultimately leading to his tragic death in 1954. Today, he is celebrated as both a scientific genius and a symbol of the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights.



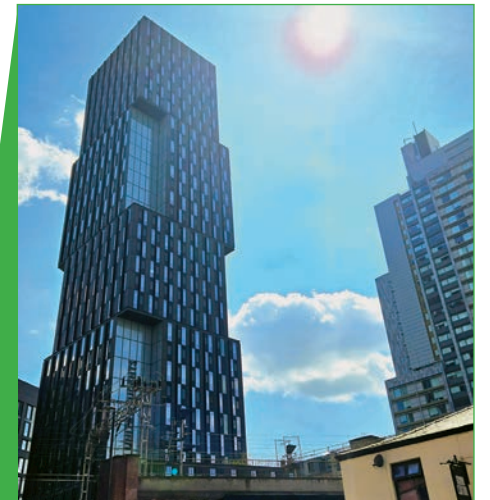
A sculpture dedicated to computer engineering pioneer Alan Turing, who was later persecuted for homosexuality.  
CREDIT: Joey Amato

No trip to Manchester would be complete without a night—or three—spent in the Gay Village. Centered around Canal Street, it's a place that radiates warmth and freedom. What once was a hidden, underground scene in the 1980s has become a global symbol of LGBTQ+ pride.

During the day, you'll find people sipping coffee along the canal and by night, the rainbow flags light up the street. Spaces like Via and The Eagle pulse with music and laughter, while Cruz 101 remains a sacred institution for dancefloor devotees. This is more than a party district—it's a cultural hub, one that has helped shape national conversations and lead by example.

Manchester's gay scene is more than just nightlife. In the Northern Quarter, I stumbled into Feel Good Club—a queer-owned café that quickly became one of my favorite stops during my trip. Feel Good Club is a café but the space also hosts workshops, mental wellness events, and spontaneous conversations with strangers who somehow feel like old friends. I ordered a bowl of apple soaked oats and I have to say, it was one of the most delicious and inexpensive things I ate during my entire trip to England. I should have asked for the recipe!

A few blocks away sits Queer Lit, an LGBTQ+ bookstore filled to the brim with stories I wish I'd had growing up. From queer romance and fiction to books on trans identity and intersectionality, the shop is both cozy and revolutionary. Queer Lit claims to have the largest selection of LGBTQ+ books in all of Europe. Beyond books, the store hosts events



Artisan Heights, located in east Castlefield.  
CREDIT: Joey Amato

such as workshops, live readings, and book clubs, providing a safe and inclusive space for the community to gather and celebrate queer literature. They also serve a variety of beverages. I would definitely recommend trying one of their hot chocolate drinks.

Though my trip didn't coincide with Manchester Pride, visitors can expect tens of thousands each August. Pride here features a blend of celebration and activism. From glitter-filled marches to thoughtful panel discussions, it's a reflection of the city itself: joyful, inclusive, and unafraid to speak truth to power. Importantly, the money raised goes straight back into the community, funding LGBTQ+ health initiatives, charities, and support services. Also in August is SCENE, Manchester's LGBTQ+ Film & TV Festival, which consists of a week of new and classic LGBTQ+ cinema and TV screenings, panels, and other events.

All this touring and learning about queer history made me hungry, so for dinner, I ventured to Maray, a Middle Eastern-inspired gem in the city center. Its signature "Disco Cauliflower"—roasted whole and topped with tahini, pomegranate, and harissa—was a revelation. The food, like the city, defied expectations. It was spicy, complex and comforting. I would also recommend trying the crispy sea bass with broccoli slaw. Maray's vibe is relaxed yet refined, a perfect place to unwind after a day of exploration. Its inclusive, welcoming spirit felt aligned with everything I'd experienced in Manchester so far.

For a more casual dining experience, head over to Freight Island, a unique food hall and entertainment venue located near Piccadilly Station. The venue features a variety of locally-owned food stalls including Mia's Arepas, Ornella's Little Kitchen and Mega Gyros. It's a great place to grab a quick bite or cocktail after work with friends.

Manchester may not be as polished as London, but that adds to its charm and intrigue. I tend to enjoy cities like Manchester over their larger neighbors. During my entire stay, I was able to walk to every attraction I visited and by experience, the best way to see a city is on foot. It's also a great way to burn off those extra calories.

Whether you're wandering Canal Street at sunset, or simply sipping hot chocolate at Queer Lit, Manchester is a place where you can be yourself and belong.

Enjoy the Journey! ::



# 'Bog Queen'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
Contributing Writer

"Bog Queen"  
by Anna North  
©2025, Bloomsbury  
\$28.99  
288 pages

Consider: lost and found. The first one is miserable – whatever you need or want is gone, maybe for good. The second one can be joyful, a celebration of great relief and a reminder to look in the same spot next time you need that which you first lost. Loss hurts. But as in the new novel, **"Bog Queen" by Anna North**, discovery isn't always without pain.

He'd always stuck to the story. In 1961, or so he claimed, Isabel Navarro argued with her husband, as they had many times. At one point, she walked out. Done. Gone, but there was always doubt – and now it seemed he'd been lying for decades: When peat cutters discovered the body of a young woman near his home in northwest England, Navarro finally admitted that he'd killed Isabel and dumped her corpse into a bog. Officials prepared to charge him.



But again, that doubt. The body, as forensic anthropologist Agnes Lundstrom discovered rather quickly, was not that of Isabel. This bog woman had nearly-healed wounds and her head showed old skull fractures. Her skin glowed yellow from decaying moss that

her body had steeped in. No, the corpse in the bog was not from a half-century ago. She was roughly *two-thousand* years old. But who was the woman from the bog? Knowing more about her would've been a nice distraction for Agnes; she'd left America to move to England, left her father and a man she might've loved once, with the hope that her life could be different. She disliked solitude but she felt awkward around people, including the environmental activists, politicians and others surrounding the discovery of the Iron Age corpse.

Was the woman beloved? Agnes could tell that she'd obviously been well cared-for, and relatively healthy despite the injuries she'd sustained. If there were any artifacts left in the bog, Agnes would have the answers she wanted. If only Isabel's family, the activists and authorities could come together and grant her more time...

Fortunately, that's what you get inside "Bog Queen:" time, spanning from the Iron Age and the story of a young, inexperienced druid who's hoping to forge ties with a southern kingdom; to 2018, the year in which the modern portion of this book is set.

Yes, you get both.

Yes, you'll devour them.

Taking parts of a true story, author Anna North spins a wonderful tale of druids, vengeful warriors, scheming kings and a scientist who's as much of a genius as she is a nerd.

The tale of the two women swings back and forth between chapters and eras, mixed with female strength and twenty-first century concerns. Even better, these perfectly mixed parts are occasionally joined by a third entity that adds a delicious note of darkness, as if whatever happens can be erased in a moment.

Nah, don't even think about resisting. If you're a fan of feminist fiction, science or novels featuring kings, druids and Celtic history, don't wait. "Bog Queen" is your book. Look. You'll be glad you found it. ::



Author Anna North.  
CREDIT: Seth Pomerantz

## 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](http://affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested)

## 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)



# 'Plainclothes' make the men:

## An interview with Russell Tovey and Tom Blyth

Out on Film



by Gregg Shapiro  
Contributing Writer

**"P**lainclothes" (Magnolia), the directorial debut by queer filmmaker and screenwriter Carmen Emmi, is not as simple as the title might suggest. There is also a double-meaning at play as neither of the main characters – Lucas (Tom Blyth) and Andrew (out actor Russell Tovey) – is dressed in their respective "uniforms" when they first meet.

Already "certified fresh" on *rottentomatoes.com*, "Plainclothes" features such stellar performances by Tovey and Blyth, that it's likely to be the movie that will not only make the actors bigger stars than they already are, but also earn them well-deserved Oscar nominations. The two made time for a Zoom interview shortly before the film was released in theaters.

**Gregg Shapiro: Russell and Tom, I'd like to begin by asking each of you to say a few words about what attracted you to the roles of Andrew and Lucas, respectively, in "Plainclothes."**

**Tom Blyth:** Lucas, for me, is someone who's going through immense difficulty and is facing up to some self-truths. I'm always drawn to characters who are trying to understand themselves in a serious, deep way. Probably because I'm doing that as well. I come at this from a psychological standpoint, so I think I'm drawn to a character who is going through psychological turmoil. And the script is absolutely beautiful. That was my main draw.

**Russell Tovey:** I second that the script is beautiful. For me, dialogue connects me straight away to a character. When I started reading Andrew, I was like, "Oh, yeah, I want to say these lines. I wanted to do a film in Syracuse. I thought Syracuse sounded like a beautiful, wonderful paradise. Parts of it are like paradise, and other parts, not so much. But it was a great experience. It's new writing and a new director. It always feels so exciting when you get a script like this. These don't happen all the time. So, it was an easy yes.

**GS: "Plainclothes" is set in 1997, almost 30 years ago, at a time before Grindr and other hook-up apps, when there were limited options available to gay men for casual interactions. Do either of you find it shocking to think about how much things have changed and advanced in 30 years?**

**RT:** Thirty years is basically Tom's whole life.

**TB:** [Laughs]

**RT:** The world just gets faster and faster, doesn't it? I mean, what can you do? It is shocking for so many other things, that it's terrifying at the speed of the way that everything's going. I miss CDs. I miss them. You can quote me on that. The way that queer people, or anybody, can find connections with people online now is fascinating and brilliant and terrifying and rewarding and depressing, and all of those feelings completely.



Out actor Russell Tovey (left) stars in 'Plainclothes' as Andrew, with Tom Blyth as Lucas.  
CREDIT: Magnolia Pictures

But there's something romantic about the way that these guys meet that feels furtive and dangerous. That's the situation that so many people were in. There weren't safe spaces created for people, so they were pushed to the margins, and they ended up in dangerous situations. This is a very dangerous situation, but through this place of adversity and danger, something beautiful grows.

**TB:** Russell and I have both talked about this recently. I do think we have this feeling, even more so this year than last year when we were making this film, that it is more necessary than ever because it does feel like we're moving backwards at the moment, politically and socially. I don't think we even knew a year ago, when we were making it, how much a year later it would feel like the wheel of time is going backwards. I'm very proud to be able to champion this film, right now especially.

**GS: Thank you for saying that, Tom. "Plainclothes" also reminded me of how police departments have changed in their attitudes towards gay men. From entrapping them in restrooms to, at least here in the States, actively recruiting them to join the force.**

**TB:** I don't know much about police policies, to be honest with you. I would be lying if I said I did. I did a lot of research on them in the '90s, but it's probably very different to now. Around the conversation of representation and policing, how can you expect people who are supposed to be bastions or representatives of a community, as a whole, without representation from that community? I don't understand the people who think that you could have a small minority of white, lower-middle-class to working-class men, policing everybody else. They won't be able to always have the empathy needed to police a community. I think that's why we run into trouble in policing. I think the idea that there should be representation in policing is integral.

**GS: The thrill and risk of sex in a public place, whether a mall men's room or a greenhouse, gives "Plainclothes" a distinctive eroticism. The scene in the greenhouse was especially touching. Can you both please comment on that?**

**RT:** Well, it was hot. And we're playing that it's cold outside, so we're bundled up in layers. Not much sex goes on in the bathrooms

because everyone seems to be caught, or it's very momentarily sexy and fraught, and then it ends. So, for our characters to have that time where we can be free – it's not a bed, it's not a house, it's not domestic – it is still somewhere that's furtive. But for us to have that moment where we can close the door and be free with each other is so beautiful. Someone said the other day that when they watched it, that when you go into the greenhouse all the flowers feel like "The Wizard of Oz." It goes into Technicolor. Before that, everything's grey and muted, and that door opens and you've got all of this sort of Oz. This beautiful world where they exist and they're amongst flowers

and foliage and botanicals, and it's historical. That's so true! I'm sure Carmen's considered that, because one of his favorite films is "The Wizard of Oz." That is such a beautiful way to turn the story, and that is the truth of that scene. These guys are finally in their utopia.

**GS: "Plainclothes" is set in upstate New York which meant that you both had to master not only an American accent, but also a regional one.**

**TB:** I would never claim to have mastered anything because I'd be shooting myself in the foot. But we had a really great dialect coach called Sam Lilja. It's a small-budget film, so we didn't get a ton of time with Sam, but the time we did get was really valuable. I've been lucky enough to live in the States for the past nine years, so I often don't know what my actual voice is anymore, which I think is helpful. It makes me able to pretend to be other people.

**RT:** I've worked and lived in the States for many years. I spend a lot of time, when I go to the States, just speaking in the accent until someone British from home spots me, and they call me a freak. I will go into diners or restaurants or stores and talk in an American accent so that it just becomes second nature. That felt important. I think the Syracuse accent...it's not typically what we know as the Bronx, New York or Queens accent. It's more neutral, but there are twangs. A lot of the cast and crew, Carmen especially, were from Syracuse. So that noise you need is around you all the time. If it had been a British crew, it might have been a little harder to stay on in that sound. But I think we both were able to tune into it because everyone around us was talking in it.

**GS: The scenes throughout the movie with Lucas and his family are highly charged and reach their peak in the film's final moments,**

**while the scene where Andrew's family appears at his place of work is also emotionally devastating. Can you say something about how you prepare for those kinds of scenes?**

**RT:** You just get in the zone. The crew and the cast were incredibly professional and respectful, and liked actors. Sometimes you work at jobs, and you feel like they don't like actors [laughs], which isn't helpful. Across the board, everybody wanted this to be a beautiful experience, and it was. When we needed that time, it was available to us. I think Carmen was very sure of that. Carmen did something amazing, which I've tried to take onto every job since, is that he plays music into scenes. We all know what that feels like, when you're on public transport or in the back of a car and a song comes on and you can sort of imagine this make-believe, Hollywood ending of your life. Music is a kind of fast hack into emotions, and I think that that made a massive difference for me.

**TB:** That scene, in particular, was really intense. I remember that day being really intense. I remember leaving the scene feeling dissatisfied and feeling like I hadn't done it right. I think that's because that's how Lucas feels. Carmen said that to me. He could sense that I was beating myself up about how the scene had gone. He was like, "Why would you be feeling good about it when Lucas is feeling bad?" Lucas goes there to profess his love for a man for the first time, that he truly does love, and he basically is told to grow up, that he's being unrealistic, because Andrew has his own life and he's shown up there inappropriately to interrupt his life. He's put Andrew's life and his family in jeopardy. Andrew's protecting himself and his family, and so Lucas is incredibly angry at himself, and Andrew, and disappointed and confused. I think I felt confused and disappointed and sad, which is sometimes how it goes. You put yourself fully in the circumstances of the scene, even if that doesn't make you feel like you're doing it right. ::



In the US, Tovey is likely best known for his roles in 'Doctor Who' and 'Being Human.'  
CREDIT: Facebook



# Our People: Craymon Garner

Public Health worker and entrepreneur gives tips on holiday decorating



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Talk, dark and handsome might be an outdated adage but it's also an accurate description of a community member that is truly making an impact. From sexual health and wellness to sexy cool events, Craymon Garner has us covered. With a debonair, laid back and slightly aloof demeanor, Garner has resided in Charlotte since he moved from Winston-Salem in 1998. During this interview we learned more about Garner and his best friend Winston. More importantly, we also received some helpful tips on holiday decorating from a pro with a flair for the cool, creative and some of the best tasting pound cake you'll ever eat.

**L'Monique King: What brought you to Charlotte?**

**Craymon Garner:** I attended UNC-Charlotte. When I completed my undergraduate degree in biology and sociology (minoring in psychology) I stayed. I'm originally from Winston-Salem, but I've really enjoyed the Charlotte area and have been here ever since.

**LMK: What side of town do you live on?**

**CG:** I live uptown. I like city life, but the older I get, I've been thinking about moving into a more rural area. I love the access Uptown offers but am getting to a point in my life where I'd like a quiet space with a yard. I have a four-year-old Cockapoo named His Royal Highness Winston Clifford Garner. <laughter>. Yes, that's really his full name, it's on all his papers. He's a lovable dog and he's very particular about who he allows in his space. He's a very good judge of character.

**LMK: How do you identify?**

**CG:** I'm gay.

**LMK: And Winston?**

**CG:** Is Winston gay? I think he's DL. He won't let male dogs get close to him but the female dogs he be all on. I think he does understand my life though.

**LMK: Are you happily partnered or single and ready to mingle?**

**CG:** <Chuckling> Single and ready to mingle.

**LMK: Describe your ideal mate.**

**CG:** My ideal mate? Hmmm. <long pause> this is hard because of where I am in my life right now. What I thought I wanted didn't line up with who my last partner was. So I'm sitting with that right now and learning more about me before looking to get into anything serious and committed.

**LMK: How do you make your livelihood?**

**CG:** I'm a full-time employee of PowerHouse 2.0 where I'm the Director of Prevention. I'm also an entrepreneur and the Chief of Creative Cool at my company Craymon Garner Design and Lifestyle. My

business focuses more on the event side, where we do florals, rentals and designs for events. My most lucrative season is the winter holiday season.

**LMK: Speaking of the winter holidays, let's jump right into some tips and tricks for those of us who aren't event designers. When should people take their Christmas trees down?**

**CG:** The rule of thumb is to take your tree down before the New Year comes. That's the old school way. Nowadays, people are keeping their trees up – almost until Easter. They're leaving their trees up and redecorating them for holidays following Christmas; like Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day and Easter. There are people who have a tree up now, decorated for Halloween. As a designer I've seen many people who just don't want to take down a tree they feel is pretty and enjoy looking at beyond the Christmas holiday – especially now. The current political climate seems to have influenced that. People are seeking more joy, more reasons to smile. Holiday decorations do that – they provide a sense of joy we need now more than ever.

**LMK: What's the one thing you wished folks would stop doing when it comes to decorating Christmas trees or otherwise?**

**CG:** There are a couple of things. When it comes to designing [a Christmas tree] for your home, consider how many ornaments you have. Clients say they have a lot of stuff, but when I get to their homes I find they have a bin of ornaments, not much else and then expect me to decorate a 12-foot tree with just a few items. I like to remind people to think of tree decorating as an investment and really wish those that can would consider investing in better ornaments. Your tree will be a place to create memories around and it will forever show up in your family photos.



Garner with best friend Winston.  
CREDIT: Courtesy photo



Craymon Garner brings seasonal joy with cool creations and holiday displays.  
CREDIT: Courtesy photo

**LMK: Describe the ugliest tree you've ever seen?**

**CG:** <Heavy sigh> It was last year. I was actually called in to fix it. A mom decorated her tree and her daughter called me to fix it. Mom literally had everything on the tree but the kitchen sink. Nothing matched and it was just stuff - all over. So, I literally took everything down, donated some ornaments I had and redid it. Once I was done, mom and daughter were both pleased.

**LMK: For folks on a budget who still want that cool factor, what two items would you say are must haves?**

**CG:** Orbs and pics. If you're on a budget you'll definitely want to invest in big orbs, large bulbs. They make a bigger impact. With small ones, you'll spend a lot of time trying to fill up your tree and if you don't have a good feel for placement your end result won't be balanced and your impact will be minimal. You'll also want to invest in pics – they are fillers for your tree. Things like little branches. They come in various sizes, shapes and textures. They can look like wood, snow frosted branches or have berries on them. I like using them to give trees a realistic look – almost as though the tree was still planted and decorated outside. Adding those natural elements gives a more organic feel.

**LMK: Your floral arrangements are stunning; What motivated you to add florals to your design business?**

**CG:** I actually started with florals. Growing up in Winston-Salem, my grandmother had the prettiest flower garden ever. She had rose bushes, hydrangeas, daffodils, tulips, lily of the valley, azaleas and so many more. I just can't think of them all right now. In spring she would plant

a variety of beautiful flowers and plants. That's really where it all started for me. As I grew up, there was a time when I used to work with an event planner creating floral arrangements for weddings and other events. When I was ready to start doing my own thing, I was only doing floral arrangements. Then, one day someone reached out and asked me to design their tree and that's how that started.

**LMK: What's on your holiday wish list this year? What do you want for Christmas?**

**CG:** <Without hesitation> I want a truck for Christmas – with a big red bow. I have my eyes set on these GMC Sierras I've been seeing around.

**LMK: What is your holiday wish for the community this year?**

**CG:** My holiday wish is this: I want people to continue to trust God or whoever their higher power is and believe we're going to be okay. I think with the [political] climate we're experiencing, [it] has a lot of people fearing the unknown. Many people are in crisis right now, worrying about their jobs, their children's Christmas, survival. With all that though, you've got to keep your head, keep going and have faith. I really believe God will make a way.

**LMK: As a successful LGBT public health professional, entrepreneur and out gay man - what advice can you offer our LGBT youth community?**

**CG:** If I had a moment to speak to the youth I would say, be you, be consistent and don't change who you are for anyone. I spent a lot of time in my life trying to be everything for everybody and almost lost a sense of self in the process. So be you. ::



