



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



Spring Activity!

Gardens, parks,
neighborhoods, home
tours and more

Liza Minnelli

my memoir



A queer
icon releases
her memoirs
- pg 13

Qnotes celebrates
40 years with
a party
- pg 5

QnotesCarolinas.com

40th
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Celebration

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Mission:

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

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

P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222
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Printed on recycled paper.

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Obama vs. Trump

Since re-installment in the oval office last year, Trump has talked about finding a workaround that would allow him to run again in 2028. If such a loophole was discovered, or an amendment to the amendment (unlikely) was put into place, should Obama run for a third term?

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SC mourns trans activist's death

On March 3, Myrtle Beach community leader and trans activist Veronica Walters passed away at age 70 in a local hospital. A much-loved resident, she was the vice chairperson of the Myrtle Beach Human Rights Commission and founder of T-Time, a support group for trans people.

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The People speak on Social Media



"It's perfectly all right with me. Some of the most gifted people I have met or read about have been homosexual. How can you knock it?"

~Lucille Ball on gay rights

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

40th ANNIVERSARY Celebration
QNOTESCAROLINAS.COM/CONNECT THE SCORPIO APRIL 26, 2026 6-10 PM

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CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

Despite own ties to convicted sex offender Whatley calls Cooper 'soft on crime'

Republicans frequently hold themselves to a lower set of standards than what they expect from Democrats



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Former Republican National Convention chair **Michael Whatley** and former Governor **Roy Cooper** both secured their nominations as the Republican and Democratic candidates, respectively, to run for one of North Carolina's two U.S. Senate seats. In the weeks leading up to and following the primary election, Whatley and Republicans have painted Cooper as someone who was "soft on crime" throughout his tenure as the state's attorney general and governor.

These allegations against Cooper focus on specific policy decisions made during his governorship, particularly regarding inmate releases during the COVID-19 pandemic, his Racial Equity task force and vetoes of legislation targeting immigration and riots.

Whatley has continued targeting Cooper for his supposed lax approach to public safety, but a recent revelation within the North Carolina GOP has shown the opposite of what they say is the case.

Whatley, the former chairman of both the state and national Republican Party, is now at the center of a growing controversy after helping elevate **Harvey L. West Jr.** to a position of power. Whatley appointed West to oversee the GOP's First Congressional District committee in the state's eastern region, as well as to lead the influential Plan of Organization committee, which holds significant control over party rule making.

West, now 54, was a 28-year-old police officer in Washington, a small town in Beaufort County near the Outer Banks, when he was arrested in 1999 on charges of statutory rape involving three girls — two who were 14 and one who was 16. This charge is one of the state's most serious felonies, defined as sexual intercourse with someone aged 15 or younger when the perpetrator is at least six years older, with no defense of consent.

West ultimately pled guilty to 16 lesser charges related to indecent liberties with a child and served six years in prison. As part of his plea agreement, he was also required to register as a sex offender in North Carolina for at least 10 years after his release. After serving his prison sentence, West regained his right to vote under North Carolina statute.

Despite his felony convictions and decade-long sex offender registry listing, West became involved in North Carolina's Republican Party. Following his release, he quickly reentered local GOP leadership and was chosen as an alternate delegate for the 2012 Republican National Convention. However, once news about his criminal history resurfaced, he stepped down. Despite all this, West continued to operate behind the scenes, carving out a role for himself as a fundraiser in an emerging political landscape.

In 2018, when North Carolina began holding partisan elections for judicial offices, including appellate and state Supreme Court positions, West saw an opportunity

to influence the race. Recognizing many judicial candidates were inexperienced in fundraising, he and his wife launched the annual Down East Judicial Picnic to raise money for these campaigns.

With backing from Whatley, current state GOP chair Jason Simmons, and prominent figures like Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Newby and Associate Justices Trey Allen and Philip Berger Jr., the event became a key fundraising stop and a major source of judicial campaign funds. Over time, West's past faded from the public eye, and the few concerns raised by party members were quickly dismissed by Whatley and other allies, who maintained that West had served his sentence and should be given a fresh start.

In recognition of West's growing influence, the 2025 fundraiser was rebranded as the North Carolina Judicial Picnic, showing the event had grown to have statewide significance. Held at West and his wife's riverfront home near Albemarle Sound in Plymouth, the event featured Allen as master of ceremonies and attracted high-profile figures, including state Rep. Sarah Stevens, the GOP's candidate for the state Supreme Court.

However, as the Epstein scandal drew national attention, concerns about West's prominent role in the state party, which had previously been downplayed, began to surface more loudly. This all came to a head in January when the Dare County Republican Party hosted a candidate forum prior to the March 3 primary. West was asked to moderate the forum, as he is the most senior GOP leader in the area. Many voters were concerned with West moderating, particularly because the forum focused on school board candidates.

Amanda "Mandy" Haage Fuller wrote in the Outer Banks Insider that West moderating a forum for school board elections "was an odd/unsettling choice, as pointed out by many, for a forum that would deal with school children." After the revelations regarding West's past, some Republicans running for office were quick to denounce West — some even going as far to say he should resign from his position.



Teddy Daniels, a candidate for Dare County sheriff, made attacking West's past the cornerstone of his campaign, even as he peddled dubious claims of close ties to President Trump. In a lengthy Facebook post on a local community page, Daniels condemned the notion that West had "served his time," calling it a "dangerous lie." He went further, stating that West's continued involvement in public life was a "glaring failure" of the justice system.

While the criticism of West reignited scrutiny of his criminal history, it didn't do much to boost Daniels's political career



Former Democratic NC Governor turned Senate candidate Roy Cooper (left) and Republican gas lighter Michael Whatley are vying for the same seat.
CREDIT: Facebook

as he ended up finishing dead last in the Republican primary.

In a meeting held March 7, the Mecklenburg County GOP introduced a proposed amendment to the governing charter for the party, appearing to target West specifically:

"[T]he North Carolina Republican Party, in its official Party Platform declares that the Party stands for 'strong moral values' [and] the commission or guilt for a felony sex crime raises serious questions about the moral values of any person convicted of such a crime...[N]o person who has pled guilty, nolo contendere to [no contest], or been convicted of any felony or serious crime should hold a leadership position at any level of the Party."

The proposal was approved by an overwhelming majority of the Mecklenburg County GOP membership, and other county's GOP offices are preparing similar resolutions targeting West and his past. Despite this, it remains unclear if this will lead to any change. Previous attempts to quietly remove

West from leadership have failed.

Henderson County GOP activist Michele Woodhouse told the Asheville Watchdog she supported a resolution barring the state

GOP from hosting official events at a "venue owned by a convicted felon." However, Woodhouse said the resolution was effectively killed at the direction of Whatley, who is now the Republican nominee for U.S. Senate in North Carolina.

Whatley is attempting to pave his path to victory on the narrative that Gov. Roy Cooper is directly responsible for the death of Iryna Zarutka, a young Ukrainian refugee murdered on Charlotte's light-rail train. The alleged killer, Decarlos Brown Jr. — a convicted felon with a documented history of mental health-related arrests — had been

released early from prison. This was an action Republicans falsely tied to Cooper's decision to release prisoners during the COVID pandemic to reduce overcrowding.

Whatley is pouring significant resources into attack ads accusing Cooper of being "soft on crime" and suggesting he has "blood on his hands" for Zarutka's death. However, these attacks risk backfiring, as Whatley's own connections to West — a known child sex offender — could become a point of contention, especially with the national spotlight on sex crimes in light of the Epstein files.

Woodhouse, the former chairwoman of the Republican Party's 11th Congressional District, which includes Buncombe and Henderson counties, bluntly referred to Whatley's ties to West as "the worst-kept secret in the Republican Party."

The fallout from West's involvement may extend beyond Whatley's campaign. Several Republican candidates have received support from West, including Sarah Stevens, the GOP candidate for state Supreme Court, who is challenging incumbent Anita Earls. Stevens was photographed with West at his annual fundraising picnic last September.

Another race that could feel the ripple effects is the contest between Democratic U.S. Rep. Don Davis of North Carolina's District 1 and Republican challenger Laurie Buckhout. The district drew national attention after it was redrawn by the Republican-controlled legislature at the behest of President Trump to flip it from Democratic to Republican.

While Davis faces a tough challenge, the controversy surrounding West's ties to Republicans like Buckhout could work to his advantage. Buckhout attended West's fundraiser last summer, and Davis is likely to raise the issue during the campaign.

Republicans in North Carolina now face their ultimate test when it comes to how to handle West and his deep roots within the modern North Carolina GOP. What will be their fate? ::

Qnotes to host 40th anniversary celebration

Event on April 26 will bring together community with music, performers and more



by Liz Schob
Qnotes Staff Writer

For 40 years, *Qnotes* has documented the lives, challenges and celebrations of LGBTQ+ communities across Charlotte and the Carolinas. On Sunday, April 26, that work comes full circle as we host our 40th Anniversary Celebration from 6 to 10 p.m. at The Scorpio, located at 225 Fairwood Avenue in Charlotte.

The event, produced in partnership with The Mimosa Way, will bring together readers, community leaders, *Qnotes* staff, activists, partners and friends for an evening centered on connection, reflection and celebration. The night will feature DJs and performers, along with light hors d'oeuvres and a specialty cocktail, creating space for the kind of gathering that has always been at the heart of our work.

The celebration will also recognize individuals and organizations whose work continues to shape the community. *Qnotes* will honor the 2025 Nonprofit of the Year, the Freedom Center for Social Justice, and the 2025 Person of the Year, Dr. Holly Savoy,



executive director of Charlotte Trans Health. Founded in 1986, *Qnotes* has served as a dedicated source of LGBTQ+ news in the Carolinas, covering local events, cultural milestones and policy decisions that impact daily life. Over four decades, we have also built an archive of community history that might not otherwise be preserved,

documenting both moments of progress and ongoing challenges.

That role remains especially important as local newsrooms continue to shrink and attacks on the LGBTQ+ community continue to increase. *Qnotes* continues to focus on the stories happening in this region, connecting readers to the people, organizations

and issues shaping LGBTQ+ life in Charlotte and the Carolinas.

The April 26 celebration offers a chance to reflect on that history while also looking ahead. It is both a recognition of what has been built over 40 years and a reminder that this work continues.

Tickets are available in multiple tiers. An Early Bird Special ticket is available for \$4 for a limited time in honor of the 40th anniversary year. General Admission tickets will be available for \$14 beginning March 23, 2026, and Week-Of Event tickets will be available for \$24 beginning April 20, 2026.

As part of our anniversary year, we are also inviting readers to participate in our "\$40 for 40 Years" giving campaign. Readers can also support ongoing work through the Qnotes Press Club, a membership program that helps sustain local LGBTQ+ journalism year-round.

More information about the event is available at qnotescarolinas.com/connect/. To learn more about the giving campaign or join the Press Club, visit qnotescarolinas.com/pressclub/.

As *Qnotes* marks 40 years, the focus remains the same: telling the stories of this community and ensuring they continue to be told. ::

If Trump tries to run for a third term, could Obama do the same?

Speculation running rampant on internet



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Donald Trump is well known for firing off unconfirmed and unfounded statements on just about any topic, from fighting COVID with aquarium cleaner to his plans for conquering Greenland.

Since his re-installment in the oval office last year he has continued to claim the 2020 election was stolen from him and has even talked about finding a workaround so that he could run for a third term in 2028.

But would that be a bad thing? If such a key loophole was discovered or some kind of work around legalese was put into place, wouldn't that potentially be just as advantageous for both parties? If Trump decided to run again, why couldn't President Barack Obama run for a third term, as well?

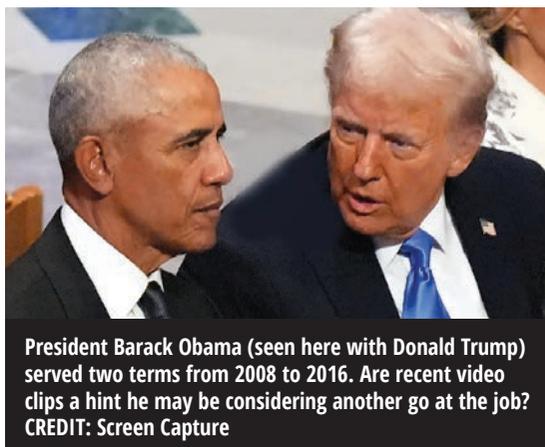
Only one president in American history has served more than two terms. That was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who served as the 32nd President of the United States from March 4, 1933, to April 12, 1945.

It was his four terms in office that inspired the 22nd amendment to

the Constitution, which was ratified in 1951. This amendment explicitly prohibits any person from being elected to the office of president more than twice.

Verbatim: "No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once."

Yet, Trump seems to be on board for another run if he can successfully uncover a legal loophole or convince Congress to modify the 22nd amendment, which seems unlikely.



President Barack Obama (seen here with Donald Trump) served two terms from 2008 to 2016. Are recent video clips a hint he may be considering another go at the job?
CREDIT: Screen Capture

Interestingly enough, it's a topic that is coming up in conversation beyond the Trump administration.

Says Trump about running for a third term: "I'm not joking," he told NBC News in reference to exploring methods for the possibility. Although he acknowledges that it could be difficult. "There are methods which you could do it," he said.

In fact, Representative Andy Ogles, a Tennessee Republican, introduced House Joint Resolution 29 in early 2025 to amend the Constitution to allow Trump to be elected to another term. It was, however referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary the same month and has remained there since.

President Obama has vaguely addressed the thought of running for a third term in very roundabout ways, but has acknowledged that the 22nd amendment would preclude him from such an opportunity.

Regardless, in an interview with David Axelrod that included discussion about a hypothetical win in 2016, Obama expressed confidence that his vision of Hope and Change still held majority support.

President Obama's positive impact on the LGBTQ+ community

During his time in office, President Obama achieved significant LGBTQ+ milestones, including repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," signing the Matthew Shepard Hate

Crimes Act, enforcing workplace protections for federal employees and appointing the first transgender White House staff member. His administration also ceased support for the Defense of Marriage Act, which paved the way for Marriage Equality.

Why is this topic in the news again?

A video posted by the Obama foundation, which has sparked online speculation over a possible future "political announcement."

The clip was posted to X/Twitter on March 15. In it Obama is found being distracted by mobile phone calls over and over again before announcing he has "unfinished business."

That comment prompted many to speculate about a potential 2028 presidential run for Obama, in the event it was made possible through some yet to be determined legal means or an amendment to the amendment.

On March 17, the Obama foundation released a vague response through a follow-up video, which shows the earlier clip was part of a "light-hearted sports promotion" to promote the upcoming Obama Presidential Center. While any definitive clarity has yet to appear, two things remain certain: Obama's favorability rating is 59 percent, while Trump's approval rating is approximately 36 percent. And although such a match remains unlikely, a 2028 hypothetical matchup poll showed Obama leading with 44 percent, compared to Trump's 33 percent. ::

The creeping acceptance of conversion therapy

Federal and state organizations are challenging bans on conversion therapy



by Jaylen Jones
Qnotes Staff Writer

The American Civil Liberties Union has tracked more than 400 anti-LGBTQ+ bills nationwide since 2026. Many anti-transgender bills and LGBTQ+ book bans have been accepted at the state and federal levels. As the Trump administration pushes for conservatism, the Supreme Court has reviewed cases that challenge state bans on conversion therapy.

On March 25, 2025, three Republicans on the Supreme Court filed a petition to review the *Chiles v. Salazar* case. The case questioned whether Colorado's ban on conversion therapy was against the First Amendment. Petitioner Kaley Chiles filed a lawsuit against Colorado Law, arguing that it restricted her freedom of speech. Halting "any practice or treatment" – including talk therapy – that "attempts or purports to change" a minor's "sexual orientation or gender identity."

The Colorado courts continued to keep the ban on conversion therapy, but the Supreme Court offered its insight into the case, filing an amicus curiae or "friend of the court" brief. The Trump administration

stated that the ban went against free speech and religious freedom. The administration claimed that there was no evidence of harm from conversion therapy, but opponents claim conversion therapy is harmful and ineffective. Clinical reports have confirmed that conversion therapy forces individuals to attempt to identify with sexual orientation and gender identity that is in direct contrast to their authentic true selves by inflicting mental anguish, guilt and humiliation.

In North Carolina, the Human Rights Campaign has actively supported efforts to ban conversion therapy. While a statewide legislative ban on the practice by licensed professionals is not currently in place, North Carolina has taken steps to restrict the funding of such practices. Key details on the status of conversion therapy in North Carolina include:

Executive Order 97 (2019): In August 2019, Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order No. 97, which prohibits the use of state and federal funds for conversion therapy on minors, an action lauded by HRC as a "crucial step forward."

Funding Restriction: This order bans the use of taxpayer funds (such as NC Medicaid and NC Health Choice) by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) for conversion therapy.

Limitations of the Order: The executive order does not stop private or religious entities from performing conversion therapy, and it does not explicitly ban licensed professionals from practicing it, according to Equality NC.

As of early 2026, North Carolina is one of only eight states with no comprehensive law to ban the practice, with roughly seven percent of LGBTQ+ youth in the state reporting they have been subjected to it, according to reports, also cited by Equality NC.

Many who have gone through conversion therapy have experienced long-lasting trauma. According to the Trevor Project, queer people and youth are more than twice as likely to attempt suicide. Their 2021 National survey stated that 13 percent of LGBTQ+ youth have gone through conversion therapy, and the majority said they were under the age of 18. Besides the mental trauma, researchers found that conversion therapy can negatively affect the socioeconomic status, self-esteem and education of young people.

The Trump administration currently supports the practice of conversion therapy – they refer to it as "gender exploration therapy" and attempt to legitimize it through the guise of the right to "religious liberty."

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and a Trump appointee, stated, "Our duty is to protect our nation's children – not expose them to unproven and irreversible medical interventions." He continued, "We must follow the gold standard of science, not activist agendas."

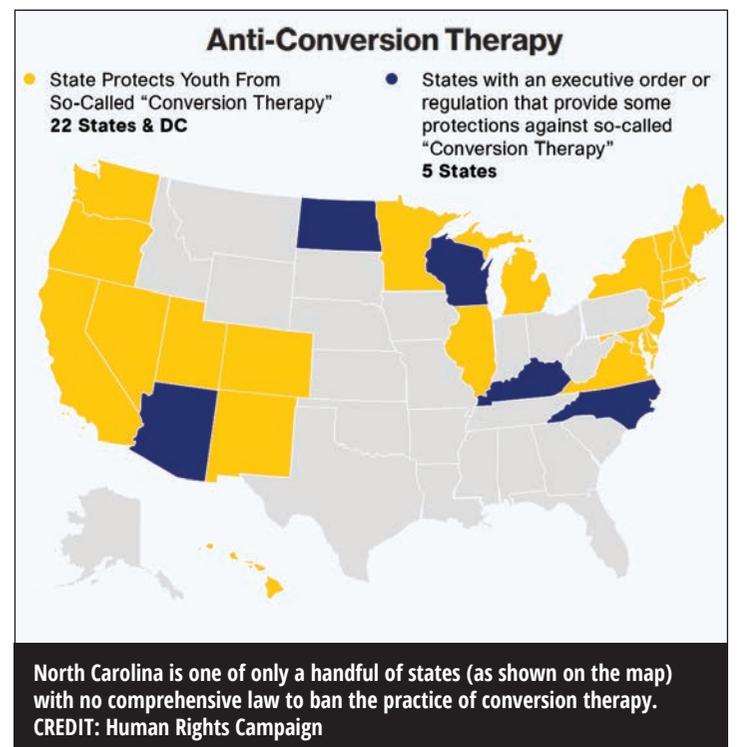
Trump has attacked the LGBTQ+ community through health care, education,

finances and everyday life by removing transgender members of the armed forces from military service, issuing an anti-DEI executive order and canceling grants approved for LGBTQ+ organizations.

Currently, over 1,300 therapists nationwide still offer conversion or advocating for "gender exploration" therapy. Gender exploration therapy is still considered a form of conversion therapy. GLAAD, an organization of LGBTQ+ watchdogs, calls gender exploratory therapy another way to "promote the harmful and discredited practice of so-called conversion 'therapy.'"

Licensed therapists, counselors, social workers, unlicensed practitioners, "advocate for and or directly engage in" conversion therapy claiming to help clients, "align their behavior with their faith."

As of right now, 22 states and the District of Columbia have banned conversion therapy since 2025. If the Supreme Court and the Trump administration continue to promote "conversion therapy" or "gender exploration therapy," more state governments will likely follow. ::



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Charlotte Pride announces return of scholarship and internship program

Charlotte Pride is excited about the return of its scholarship program and summer internship, which aims to improve the economic mobility of LGBTQ and allied college students from the Charlotte metro area attending accredited two or four-year colleges by funding college scholarships and a summer internship opportunity. Recipients are eligible for up to \$10,000 for the 2026-2027 school year.

The program is made possible through a grant from the Principal Foundation, a global, independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity (established in 1987) dedicated to fostering financial security and inclusion in communities where the Principal Financial Group operates. It provides grants to over 140 organizations across 25+ countries, focusing on essential needs, financial inclu-

sion and social connections.

"We are thrilled to continue the work of the Charlotte Pride Scholarship and Internship Program for a fourth year," says Meredith Thompson, managing director of Charlotte Pride. "It's an honor to be able to uplift and support dozens of talented and ambitious future leaders. Complementing our annual Charlotte Pride Job Fair, this program helps us foster economic growth and upward mobility – a key area of programmatic focus in our year-round work."

Ideal applicants are high school seniors or college students from the Charlotte metro area (including Mecklenburg, York, Gaston, Cabarrus, Iredell, Rowan, Cleveland, Lancaster, Lincoln, Stanly, Chester, Catawba, Chesterfield, Alexander or Anson Counties, as well as Union County NC) with a GPA of 3.0 or

above on a 4.0 scale. LGBTQ or allied students who have demonstrated service to the LGBTQ community or strong desire to serve the LGBTQ community are encouraged to apply.

The Charlotte Pride Scholarship Program offers 12 scholarship awards, including one Champion of Pride Scholarship (\$10,000); one Legacy Scholarship (\$5,000); two Empowerment Scholarships (\$2,500 each); two Leadership Scholarships (\$1,250 each) and five Visionary Scholarships (\$1,000 each).

Along with the aforementioned awards, Charlotte Pride has proudly named a new scholarship this year: the Valdez Visibility Scholarship (\$2,500), in honor of its outgoing board director and former board chair, Daniel Valdez, who was also a Charlotte Pride Champions of Pride "Stonewall" Award winner in 2022 and a Charlotte Pride Parade Grand Marshal in 2023.

The program also provides a summer internship experience with a \$5,000 summer stipend. The intern will spend eight weeks working alongside Charlotte Pride staff during the busy summer Pride season. Only one



Charlotte Pride's scholarships for college students and an internship opportunity: Could you be a candidate?

intern will be chosen, serving eight weeks for 40 hours each week over Summer 2026, reporting for their first day on Monday, June 8.

You can read more about the new Valdez Visibility Scholarship and see details about the program and its awards at <https://charlottepride.org/scholarship/>.

According to the organization's website, all applications are due on April 19, 2026, by 11:59 p.m. Eastern and no late applications will be accepted. ::

— Qnotes Staff

South Carolina community mourns trans activist's death

On March 3, LGBTQ+ community leader Veronica Walters passed away at age 70, in Myrtle Beach Grand Strand Memorial Hospital after battling multiple health issues. A tall, kind and commanding woman, Walters, walked into rooms wearing extravagantly bright outfits. She cultivated and advocated for trans rights by educating and building space for people to thrive.

A Myrtle Beach resident, Walters was the vice chairperson of the Myrtle Beach Human Rights Commission and founder of T-Time, a support group for trans people. Founded in 2005, the non-profit provides transgender, intersex and non-binary people with an opportunity to share experiences and learn from other communities.

CareTeam Plus, a non-profit health organization, expressed their condolences

on social media, "Throughout her life, she provided guidance for those who felt lost, comfort for those who felt alone, and education for those willing to learn. To know her was to love her, and she will be deeply missed." Walters was a board member on CareTeam Plus for almost 10 years.

Walters ensured that anyone who wanted to attend a T-Time session could. If someone didn't have the means to join, she'd drive her truck to pick them up and drop them off in the center.

"She kind of lived the word empathy," said Brandi Willis, one of the leaders from T-Time. "If someone else is hurting, she was hurting because that person was hurting."

To ensure the LGBTQ community in Myrtle Beach was safe, Walters served on the Commission for 12 years and joined



Veronica Walters was the vice chairperson of the Myrtle Beach Human Rights Commission and founder of T-Time, a support group for trans people. CREDIT: Facebook

Grand Strand Pride in 2013. Adam Hayes worked alongside Walters on the human rights commission for six years.

Hayes described Walters as "relentless" because of the hard-hitting questions she asked during commission meetings. She'd show up to every event, protest, festival and government meeting that included LGBTQ+ people. When protesting, Walters never shied from the front lines. If any hate groups seemed to pose a danger to the protesters, Walters could often be seen providing protection.

At the time of her passing, many people from across the state mourned her death. With kindness and resilience, Walters fought for everyone. "Even if she was having personal health issues, she would get in that truck and show up," said Adam Hayes, vice chair of the Myrtle Beach Human Rights Commission, referring to Walters' older pickup that she often drove. "That woman was there to do something." ::

— Jaylen Jones

DOGE and its impact on the LGBTQ+ community

Two employees from the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) testified on Jan 23. The two defended their use of OpenAI to cut any organization's funding associated with DEI. Justin Fox and Nathan Cavanaugh stated they used ChatGPT to decide which organizations went against Trump's executive order to remove DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). DOGE canceled more than 1,400 active grants, amounting to \$100 million in funding.

Trump's executive order "directs that the U.S. government will not base Foreign Service recruitment, hiring, promotion or retention decisions on an individual's race, color, religion, sex or national origin, nor embed discriminatory equity ideology within any element of the Foreign Service."

Fox and Cavanaugh used ChatGPT to go through thousands of organizations' funding. The AI was prompted: "Does the following relate at all to DEI? Respond factually in less than 120 characters. Begin with 'Yes' or 'No.'" There was no definition of DEI given to the AI system.



Former DOGE employees Justin Fox (left) and Nathan Cavanaugh testified they used ChatGPT to determine what government funded organizations were considered 'too DEI.' CREDIT: Facebook

Fox compiled what he believed to be the "craziest" grants. He used key words that included "LGBTQ," "BIPOC," "Tribal," "ethnicity," "gender," "equality," "immigration," "citizenship" and "melting pot."

Fox explained that any grants associated with the LGBTQ community could be flagged for cancellation. He said grants "Promoting an LGBTQ study, offering a stipend for research on gender fluidity," stood out in the review process.

The Modern Language Association, the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Historical Association filed a motion against DOGE. The organizations state that DOGE "Unlawfully terminated grants connected to scholarships on race, gender and LGBTQ+ communities." They added that the organization has violated the Federal Equal Protection Clause, the Fifth Amendment and the Federal Records Act.

DOGE's impact on LGBTQ+ programs and grants

DOGE has affected many organizations in North Carolina. Several grants for the LGBTQ+ community have been impacted negatively and many grants that revolve around universities and federal agencies supporting Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) were terminated.

Locally, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) has been impacted by DOGE, which canceled \$200 million in funds that were associated with immunization efforts, infec-

tious disease monitoring, and substance use disorder services.

Health issues impacted

According to the NC DHHS, in 2024, 79 percent of North Carolinians aged 15- 29 had chlamydia.

Ahead HIV, a national data collection tool for HIV cases, counted that about 1,357 people in 2024 received an HIV diagnosis. Of those diagnoses, 81.7 percent of those people receive medical care. In Mecklenburg county 273 out of 100,000 people were diagnosed with HIV. Though HIV and STD transmissions have fluctuated, the people in need of testing and medication could be affected by DOGE's actions.

Nationally, a grant for an LGBTQ+ inclusive teen pregnancy prevention program for transgender boys was defunded. The grant focused on creating programs that focused on inclusive sexual health education. The program claims that "data suggests that AFAB trans-identified youth may be less likely to use condoms when having sex with people who have penises..." The grant hoped to create access to inclusive sexual education, condoms and sexual health around the nation. With \$620,000 striped from funding, it will be difficult for the grant to prosper. ::

— Jaylen Jones

LGBTQ+ candidates win their primaries, here's what they plan to do

Victory Fund candidates win their elections, building strength for Democrats



by Jaylen Jones
Qnotes Staff Writer

Seven LGBTQ+ North Carolinians endorsed by the Victory Fund have won their primary elections. Here's information about the candidates and what they plan to do for their communities.



John Arrowood

John Arrowood – NC Court of Appeals, Statewide

Arrowood has served as a judge for 11 years. In 2018, he became the first openly gay person to be elected to a statewide office in the South. Currently, he serves as a judge of the NC Court of Appeals (2017-present). Arrowood has drafted a total of 650 opinions and sat in 2000 cases. Outside of his professional work, Arrowood is a member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Charlotte and is committed to his community. He has served on the Board of Trustees for the Mint Museum of Art and the Board of the Charlotte Urban Ministry Center, an organization dedicated to assisting the homeless. To learn additional details, visit Arrowood's home page.



Stormie Forte

Stormie Forte – Raleigh City Council-at-large

Forte is a Raleigh native and a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill. She's also a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and host of the podcast "The Art of Listening with Stormie Forte." Forte's priorities are affordable housing (specifically in disenfranchised communities). She looks forward to ensuring the stability of city infrastructures and improving mobility. Says the councilwoman: "Being able to effectively balance what's in the best interest of the district and its residents, as well as economic opportunities are what's important to me." Visit Forte's website here.

Lisa Grafstein – NC State Senate, District 13

Grafstein is the president of the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys and the Women's Forum of North Carolina. She was also a lawyer defending

2022. Now she's running for the position again in 2026. Maris has served in both criminal and civil courts focusing on traffic and domestic violence. She was the Co-founder of the Durham Expulsion and Restoration Program, the first court referral program to help Durham residents and others obtain new opportunities in employment, housing and education. As before, she plans to continue working on issues that impact youth & families and to promote a court system that provides fair administration of justice for everyone. Judge Maris's campaign page is located here.



Jessica Rivera

Jessica Rivera – NC State Senate, District 4

Rivera is an openly gay woman and a Marine Veteran. She has a small business named Garrison Barber and Parlor. From Rivera's website: "Jess believes leadership means showing up, doing the work and putting people before power." Rivera plans to focus on rural education, healthcare and jobs. By creating strong transitional services, housing stability, fair pay and dependable public services she hopes that all families and veterans can thrive. More information on Jessica Rivera is available on her website.



Winn Decker

Winn Decker – NC House of Representatives District 37

A son of two public school teachers and raised in rural northwest Tennessee, Decker learned the value of hard work, service and community. Now he calls North Carolina home and plans to focus on education and workforce policy. He works with all parties, like former Governor Jim Hunt, to strengthen public schools and expand college access. Issues he hopes to address are affordability for seniors on fixed incomes, managing debt and borrowing cost and increasing the ratio of social workers and counselors. More details are available here.



Lisa Grafstein

cases of sexual harassment and gender discrimination. Grafstein's plans to create a just economy through living wages, fair tax policies, safe working conditions and funding public schools. She wants to create a renewable North Carolina by reinstating the Renewable Clean Energy Credit and incentivizing a shift to solar power. To learn more about Lisa Grafstein, go here.

Amanda Maris – District Court Judge, District 16

Maris was first appointed to the bench by Governor Roy Cooper in July 2017 and retained by voters in 2018 and



Amanda Maris



Karen Stegman

Karen Stegman – NC Orange County Commissioner-at-large

A native of Orange County, Stegman is currently raising her two children there with her wife Alyson Grine. Stegman served on the Chapel Hill Town Council for eight years. As a councilwoman, she made changes in affordable housing, environmental protection and economic development. She plans to protect farmlands and rural areas. She's created a 30-year plan for transit-supported housing, parks, greenways, amenities and she has also adopted Chapel Hill's first climate action and response plan to create a sustainable future. Go here for more details. ::

Charlotte Royals Rugby makes move to include all LGBTQ+ community

Royals move to new open division to support trans players



by Jaylen Jones
Qnotes Staff Writer

The Charlotte Royals rugby team have moved to the new USA Rugby Open Division to protest new policy changes. In response to Executive Order 14201, which requires women's sports to be limited to biological females, USA Rugby updated its eligibility, prompting the clubs to shift to an inclusive "Open" category rather than exclude trans women.

Trump signed Executive Order 14201 on Jan. 20 to protect women's rights and change the definition of "sex" referring to people's biological gender. Order 14201 states, "The erasure of sex in language and policy has a corrosive impact not just on women but on the validity of the entire American system. Basing Federal policy on truth is critical to scientific inquiry, public safety, morale and trust in government itself."

Trump writes, "It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female." He continues, "The Executive Branch will enforce all sex-protective laws to promote this reality." Order 14201 has caused public and federal organizations to change their programs, including USA Rugby.

To appease the Trump administration's anti-trans order, USA Rugby requires that all players participate in divisions that match their gender at birth. Posted on the USA Rugby website the organization states, "In response to the United States Administration's issuance of Executive Order 14201, which the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee has determined applies to all National Governing Bodies (NGBs), USA Rugby is required to comply and update the terms that identify eligibility for gender categories."

The organization understands that many rugby players will be affected by these changes so they have added a new division. "In accordance with the policy update, USA Rugby will now have three competition categories; Men's Division,

Women's Division and Open Division." USA Rugby explains. "The Open Division will permit any athlete, regardless of gender assigned at birth and gender identity, to compete in USA Rugby-sanctioned events, whether full contact or non-contact. Open Division events will be granted following a review process and approved on a per-tournament basis."

As a form of protest a couple of Rugby teams have moved to the Open Division. The Charlotte Royals have gained the most attention for transferring.

Formed in 2004, a group of gay men saw little space for queer players. After joining other teams' scrimmage the group believed "the Queen City was ready for some royalty, and formed the Charlotte Royals," founding the team on principles of equality and inclusion.

Now the Royals have over 40 players and welcome anyone, regardless of their knowledge on the sport. The team prides itself on supporting the LGBTQ+ community so there is no surprise when the team states, "The Charlotte Royals believe that trans women are women. Banning trans players hurts everyone in the sport and the larger community. We will be using the Open Division for any sanctioned matches we engage in, and encourage other clubs/unions to do the same."

Mother Ruckers, a women's rugby team (also based in Charlotte), joins the Royals in the "Open" division. On Feb. 28 the team posted information discussing the changes made in USA Rugby. They added that other teams should join them in the Open division as a protest. In another post, teammate Mads McDonald comments, "While I find myself at a loss of words, I know it's more



The Charlotte Royals rugby team have moved to the new USA Rugby Open Division in solidarity with trans team members.
CREDIT: Facebook

division and people have expressed a new found interest in rugby because of the teams' support in the LGBTQ+ community.

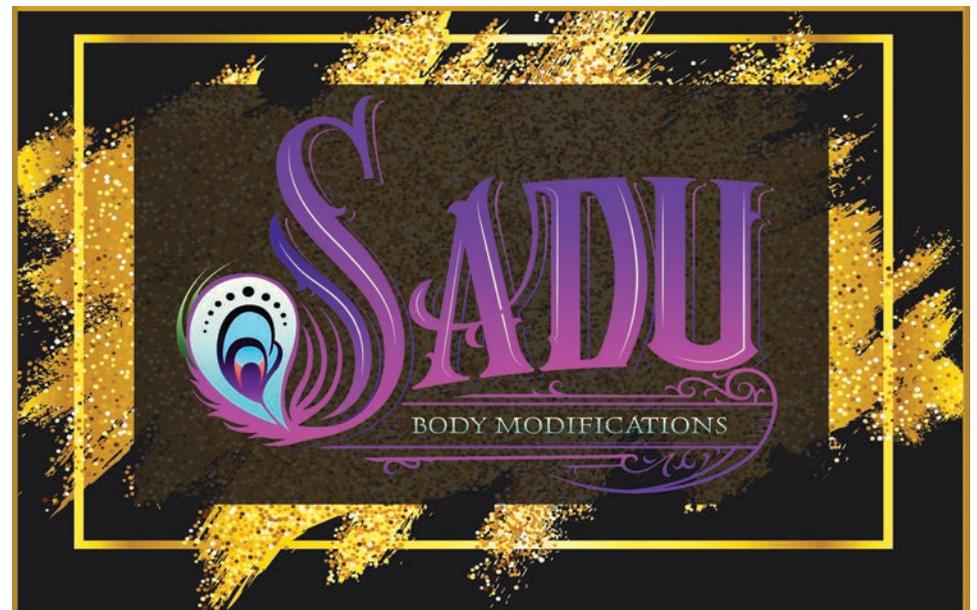
But there are others that aren't as welcoming to the Open Division.

The Independent Council of Women's Sports (ICONS) is a network and advocacy group made up of former and current collegiate and professional athletes, families and others. When they heard about the "Open" division they felt it focused on trans women rather than biological women. They told Fox News, "Rather than solving the problem, USA Rugby updated its policy with a feeble attempt to claim compliance with USOPC's [United States Olympic and Paralympic Community] directive while appeasing these men by creating a new "Open" division alongside the existing men's and women's divisions."

The group continues, "In practice, however, dominant voices within the sport are leading many women's teams to declare they will compete in the Open division so that male players can continue to siphon off opportunities from women's rugby. USA Rugby is failing in its obligation to ensure fair competition and to expand and protect the future of women's rugby." ::

important than ever to keep talking about the policy, emailing USA rugby, contacting our unions, and using our voices for solidarity!"

Many fans are excited that teams are supporting trans players and switching to the Open division. Comments on the Mother Ruckers and Royals page commended the teams for shifting to the



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Charlotte tours and destinations for spring

The city proper and surrounding areas offer tours of neighborhoods, homes, gardens, parks and more



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Spring in Charlotte arrives like a gentle mix of cool and warm breezes drifting through tree-lined streets, calling neighbors outdoors and awakening the city's layered beauty. In historic districts such as Dilworth, Fourth Ward, Myers Park, Plaza Midwood and others, home and garden tours become a celebration of craftsmanship and care. In some places, wraparound porches are surrounded by blooming azaleas, wrought-iron gates framing carefully tended courtyards, and the scent of fresh-cut grass mixed with magnolia blossoms. Every location tells a story.

Just beyond the polished walkways, quieter histories rest in other outdoor destinations like Elmwood and Pinewood Cemetery. Here, beneath canopies of budding oak and dogwood, time slows. Sunlight filters across weathered and artistic headstones, with hundreds of sculptural markers and vibrant greenery offering a quiet contrast to the nearby hustle and bustle, inviting both reflection and reverence.



Heart of the Home Tour

Parks across the city – especially Independence Park, Romare Bearden Park and Freedom Park – burst into motion and color. Friends and families gather beneath flowering trees and fountains shimmer as the days grow longer. Somehow, the air feels lighter, filled with bird songs and the possibility of new beginnings.

In Charlotte, spring is not just a season; it is a shared experience. It draws people into neighborhoods, nature and into the stories that shape the city – reminding all who wander that beauty, like history, is best explored in the open air.



Winghaven Garden Tour

Here's our list of select places you can go to experience the things that make Charlotte legendary for open air spring festivities and exploration.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 27-29

The Symphony Guild of Charlotte's Heart of the Home Tour

The main tour begins Friday, March 27. It kicks off at 5 p.m. and continues through 8:30 p.m. On Saturday, March 28, 2026, the fun starts at 10 a.m. and continues through 4 p.m. The presentation features five homes and Serenity Garden. You can also visit the Encore Home at Lake Norman on Saturday, March 28, and Sunday, March 29, from noon to 7 p.m. For more info, go to <https://www.symphonysguildcharlotte.org/fundraising-and-events/9th-annual-heart-of-the-home-tour/>.

April 19
Chantilly Home Tour

This historic Charlotte neighborhood, located just east of uptown Charlotte, features beautiful architecture, well-tended gardens and a friendly, intown environment known for its welcoming residents. This tour features a list of local homes including properties on Chesterfield Ave., Laburnum Ave., Shenandoah Ave., and Bay Street. Advance tickets are \$35, increasing to \$40 on the day of the event. Check-in is located at the ticket booth on 2301 Shenandoah Ave. April 18, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit their website at <https://www.ichantilly.com/home-tour> for more details.

April 24-26

Wing Haven Gardeners' Garden Tour and Sip & See Preview

A self-guided tour of four private gardens: three in Elizabeth and one in Eastover, along with open visitation at Wing Haven Garden & Bird Sanctuary. The Sip & See preview event at Wing Haven (248 Ridgewood Avenue) is scheduled for Friday, April 24 starting at 5:30 p.m. The tours are scheduled for Saturday, April 25 (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.) and Sunday, April 26 (1 - 5 p.m.). Advance tickets are \$30 (through April 24); day-of tickets are \$35. Children 10 and under are free. More details are available at their website, located at <https://winghavengardens.org/>.

April 25
Garibaldi Festival

Located in one of Charlotte's most popular metro area towns, the Garibaldi Festival is a blend of arts festival and history tours highlighting public art and historic buildings in Belmont. Enjoyable experience and perfect for breaking spring weather. This annual spring event features a full day of live music, over 50 artisan vendors, local food trucks and the Gaston County Art Guild's Plein Air competition. More information can be found here: <https://downtownbelmont.org/garibaldi-festival/>.

May 1-2
Plaza Midwood Home and Garden Tour

Charlotte's gayest neighborhood is excited as they gear up for the highly anticipated annual Home and Garden Tour, which features a mix of early mid-20th century architecture with creative landscaping and well cultivated gardens. Attendees are advised to purchase tickets in advance. Ticket pick up at The Vine will start on Friday at 5 p.m. and on Saturday at 9 a.m. You will need your physical ticket booklet in order to tour the homes. Tickets are \$45, with a special \$5 discount for Plaza Midwood Neighborhood Association members. Go to <https://plazamidwood.org/events/home-and-garden-tour-2026/> for more information.

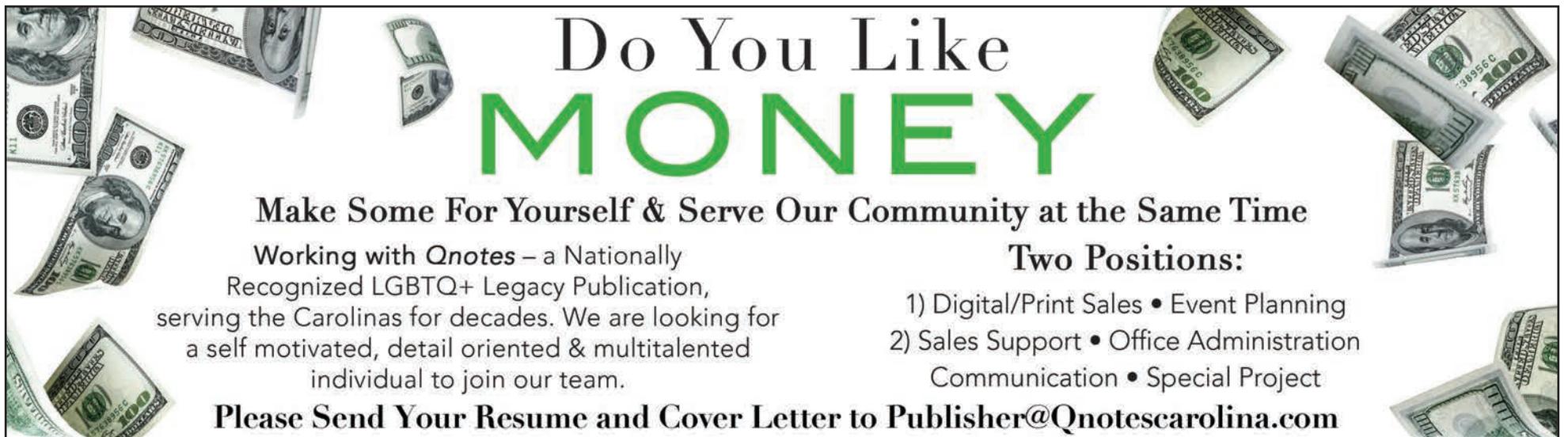


Plaza Midwood Home and Garden Tour

May 2-3

The Charlotte Garden's Club Art in the Garden Tour

This 17th annual tour, part of the annual Mint Museum slate of events, presents various beautiful private gardens paired with works from local and regional artists. New features for 2026 include a "sip and stroll" experience with local vendors like Ernie's BBQ and Revival Coffee & Ice Cream Truck. Takes place Saturday, May 2 (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.) and Sunday, May 3 (noon - 4 p.m.). \$40 per ticket. More information is available at <https://charlottegardenclub.com/art-in-the-garden/>.



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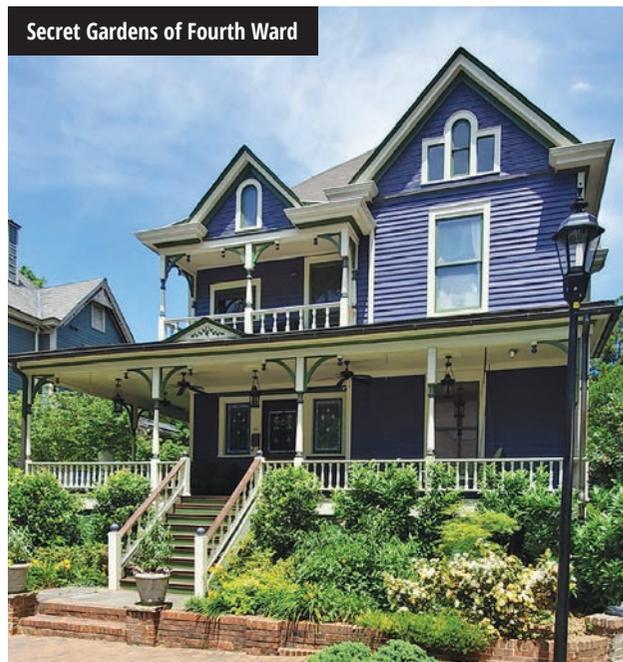
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May 16-17

Secret Gardens of Fourth Ward

This urban garden and lifestyle tour in Center City Charlotte highlights private gardens and courtyards, whiskey tastings and three interior home tours at The Garrison, and an open house at the historic McNinch House Restaurant. Includes complimentary food and cocktail tastings at participating gardens and restaurants along the route. Saturday, May 16 and Sunday, May 17, noon - 4 p.m. Details at <https://fourthwardclt.org/>.



Secret Gardens of Fourth Ward

ONGOING

Daniel Stowe Gardens and Conservancy

Located in nearby Belmont, N.C., this site features a conservatory and seasonal spring displays. The Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden - now known as the Daniel Stowe Conservancy, is a popular nature destination located on 380 acres along the banks of Lake Wylie in Belmont, N.C. It features roughly 30 acres of meticulously manicured formal gardens alongside expansive natural woodlands and meadows. Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. <https://danielstoweconservancy.org/>.

Elmwood, Pinewood and Settlers Cemetery

Historic cemeteries in Charlotte's Center City area are the final resting places for Charlotte's founders. Of the three, Settler's is the oldest with tombstones dating back to the 1700s. Elmwood and Pinewood Cemetery (with headstones dating back to the 1850s) began life as two separate side-by-side cemeteries, The discriminatory culture of the time allowed Black residents burial only in Pinewood, while white residents were buried in Elmwood. The fence that separated the two cemeteries was removed in 1969. Many individuals who live in the surrounding neighborhood use the beautiful grounds for jogging, pet-

walking and sight-seeing. Among the notables buried in Elmwood and Pinewood are actor Randolph Scott, former NC Governor Cameron Morrison and Dr. Annie Alexander. An interactive walking tour of the site can be found at <https://historicelmwoodpinewood.org/pinewood-cemetery>.

Freedom Park

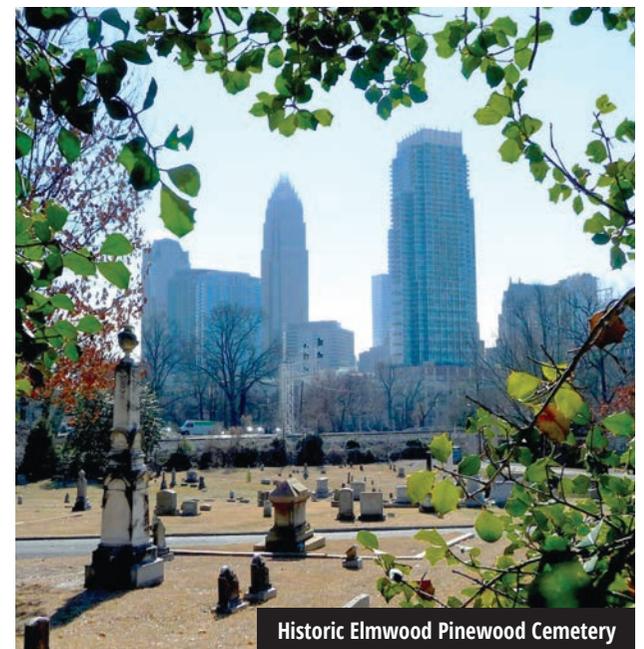
Freedom Park is a 98-acre central city park located between Charlotte's Dilworth and Myers Park neighborhoods, surrounding a scenic seven-acre lake. Established in 1949, this popular urban oasis features extensive walking trails, playgrounds, numerous sports courts and is located next to the Discovery Place Nature Museum, which exhibits animals and plants of the Piedmont region. <https://www.charlottesgotalot.com/things-to-do/outdoors-adventure/freedom-park>.

Historic Rosedale House Tours

Located at 3427 North Tryon Street, Historic Rosedale is a preserved 8.9-acre destination featuring a restored 1815 Federal-style plantation home. It offers guided tours of the period-furnished house and landscaped gardens, showcasing 19th-century Piedmont history. Wednesday through Saturday, 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. <https://www.historicrosedale.org/>.

Independence Park

Ideally situated at 300 Hawthorne Lane, Independence Park is 24-acres of historic beauty in Charlotte's Elizabeth neighborhood and is notable as the city's first public park (established 1904). It features a unique, sunken design offering tranquil, shaded walking paths, a rose garden, a reflecting



Historic Elmwood Pinewood Cemetery

pool and scenic views of the skyline. <https://www.charlottesgotalot.com/things-to-do/outdoors-adventure/independence-park>

Maple Walk Garden

Located at 4255 Kingswood Road, this 2.25-acre, privately owned residential site is renowned as the city's most-visited residential garden. It's open daily, dawn-to-dusk for free and features over 100 Japanese maple varieties, 125+ camellias and 20+ dogwoods, with extensively tagged specimens set along stone-lined paths in a lush, tranquil setting. <https://www.maplewalkgarden.com/>

Romare Bearden Park

At 300 South Church Street, Romare Bearden Park is 5.4-acres in Uptown Charlotte, honoring the renowned artist and Charlotte native. Inspired by his collages, it features lush gardens, interactive digital chimes, a color-changing waterfall and scenic skyline views, offering a cultural and relaxing space for concerts, picnics and community gatherings. <https://uptowncharlotte.com/go/romare-bearden-park>.

Serenity Garden

A serene retreat with sculptures and water features, The Charlotte Serenity Garden is a hidden, four-acre woodland located at 3600 Jonny Cake Lane in the Mountainbrook neighborhood of South Charlotte. It is a privately owned garden at the Reames Estate that the owners open daily (8 a.m. - 5 p.m.) to the public for free. <https://www.charlotteserenitygarden.com/>.

UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens

Located at 9090 Craver Rd. in University City South, UNC Charlotte's Botanical Gardens, founded in 1966, features a diverse collection of native and exotic plants across three main sites, offering year-round interest for the student body and the visiting public. Open Monday - Friday (9 a.m. - 4 p.m.). <https://gardens.charlotte.edu/>.



The Daniel Stowe Gardens and Conservancy

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Starting a spring garden, one step at a time

A practical, beginner-friendly guide to planting, timing and finding rhythm in the season



by **Liz Schob**
Qnotes Staff Writer

As winter gives way to spring, my attention has slowly shifted back to the garden. In recent weeks, I've been planning what to plant, preparing seed trays and clearing weeds from pots that will soon hold herbs, vegetables and flowers. Gardening in a rental means most of my plants live in containers that move between my front porch, back porch and indoors depending on the season. On warm days, I've started bringing them outside again, though I know better than to leave them there permanently until the last frost passes.

There is a quiet rhythm to this time of year, when perennials need pruning to prepare for new growth and seed trays wait on the kitchen table. My hydrangeas are beginning to wake up from winter dormancy.

Outside, the birds seem to know the season is changing before the rest of us do. After a quiet winter, they've returned in full force, gathering at our feeders in what feels like a feeding frenzy. This is the moment when gardening starts to feel possible again.

Late March and early April are an in-between season in Charlotte, full of warm afternoons and lingering uncertainty. It can be tempting to plant everything at once, but this is also one of the best times to start a garden, whether you have raised beds, a backyard, a balcony or just a few containers by the door.

Charlotte is in Zone 8a, which means a relatively long growing season and a good deal of flexibility. Even so, frost dates still matter. The Old Farmer's Almanac estimates the last spring frost around April 6, based on data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That means there is still some chance of frost before or after that date, and local microclimates can make a difference.

Spring gardening is less about rushing and more about paying attention.

One of the most common mistakes beginners make is planting for the weather they want instead of the weather they actually have. A few warm days can make it feel like summer is already here, but this is still the time to move carefully, especially with warm-season crops that are sensitive to cold nights.

Cool-season vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, radishes, carrots and peas can usually be planted now and often prefer these early conditions. Many can be directly sown outdoors and will grow quickly as temperatures gradually warm, making leafy greens and herbs a good place to start.

Warm-season crops, on the other hand, require more patience. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash and melons should wait until frost risk has mostly passed and overnight temperatures are more stable. For now, that often means starting them indoors or holding off just a little longer before committing them outside.

That pause can be frustrating, but it is often the difference between plants that stall and plants that thrive.

Patience matters, but so does understanding your space. Before buying seeds or seedlings, it helps to start with a basic ques-



Start warm-weather crops like tomatoes and peppers indoors in March so they're ready to transplant after the last frost.
CREDIT: Pexels

tion: How much sun do you actually have?

Most vegetables and many herbs need at least six hours of direct sunlight a day. If your space gets less, you can still grow plenty, but you will need to choose accordingly. Parsley, mint, cilantro and some leafy greens tolerate lower light better than sun-loving crops like tomatoes and peppers. Taking a few days to watch how sunlight moves through your space can save a lot of frustration later.

You also do not need an elaborate setup to garden successfully. Raised beds are great, but so are containers, and in-ground planting can be just as effective when the soil is well prepared. Containers offer flexibility, allowing you to adjust placement as temperatures dip or light conditions shift.

What matters most is giving your plants a strong start, and that begins with soil. For containers, that means using potting mix rather than yard soil. For in-ground beds, spring is a good time to add compost or organic matter.

Drainage is just as important. Every container needs holes at the bottom so excess water can escape. Without them, roots stay soggy and plants struggle.

Watering is less about precision and more about consistency. Check the soil regularly. If the top layer is dry, it is probably time to water, especially since containers dry out faster as temperatures rise.

If you are just start-

ing out, it also helps to start smaller than you think.

A few herbs, a tomato plant, a container of lettuce, maybe a pepper plant are more than enough to begin. Gardening is a skill built through observation and repetition, not perfection, and each season teaches something new about what grows well in your space.

That learning process is part of the appeal. A growing body of research has found that tending plants and working with soil can reduce stress, improve mood and strengthen a sense of connection to the natural world.

For many LGBTQ+ people, those benefits can carry particular weight, especially

in a climate where stress often feels constant. Gardening offers something different, creating space to slow down and reconnect with a steadier rhythm.

Gardening requires patience. Seeds take time to sprout. Plants need consistent care. Growth happens gradually, often in ways that cannot be rushed. In that sense, gardening can feel like a quiet form of resistance to the pace of modern life.

For some, it becomes a daily ritual. For others, it is seasonal, returning each spring. Either way, it offers a reminder that growth is possible even after long periods of dormancy.

For me, gardening is not only about what eventually grows, but also about the rhythm of paying attention. Seed trays on the kitchen table, pots moved outside for a few hours of sun and pruning back what is dead all become part of that rhythm. In a political climate that often feels relentless, there is something grounding about focusing on a task that cannot be rushed.

Gardening and the resulting growth often happens gradually, sometimes invisibly, until one day it is suddenly there. That is part of what makes it so satisfying. The first seedling, the first basil leaves, the first flower and the first tomato that ripens on the vine are small but meaningful markers along the way. You do not need a perfect yard or a big budget to experience that. You just need to begin with what you have.

This time of year that might mean sowing cool-season seeds while waiting a little longer on tomatoes and peppers. It might mean cleaning tools, refreshing soil or setting up a trellis before plants need it. Or it might mean noticing that the season is changing and deciding to participate in it.

Later in the spring, when everything is greener and fuller, I know I will find myself back in the hammock, surrounded by blooms and birdsong, grateful for whatever managed to grow. Getting there does not require expertise or perfection. *It just requires starting.* ::



With patience and proper care sprouts initially cultivated indoors can yield a bountiful harvest.
CREDIT: Adobe Stock

Queer key takeaways from the 98th annual Academy Awards

Conan O'Brien in drag, legendary musicians in 'Singers' and a memorable kiss



by Jaylen Jones
Qnotes Staff Writer

On Sunday, March 15, celebrities and artists walked into the Dolby Theater for the 98th Annual Academy Awards. Though there weren't a lot of queer moments, there were a few that shone brighter than the Oscars. The films "One Battle After Another" and "Sinners" battled

for the front runner positions.

Hosting the Awards for the second time, Conan O'Brien surprised the audience in drag. Dressed as "Weapons" villain Aunt Gladys in a red bob, O'Brien took to the stage. Later, the actress who portrayed Aunt Gladys, Amy Madigan, won the Best Supporting Actress award.

The "Sinners" cast performed "I Lied to You." Lesbian Brittney Howard, the lead singer of Alabama Shakes, joined Miles Caton and other Black artists onstage. In a soulful mix-up of bluegrass, hip-hop and

country, the artists "recreated genre and era-spanning wonder of the original moment," written by Queerty.

The short film "Two People Exchanging Saliva" tied with "The Singers" for Best Line Action Short film. The French lesbian film is in a dystopian world where kissing is forbidden and slaps on the face are the form of currency. "Two People..." captivated the Academy, earning it an Oscar. On stage, co-writer/director Natalie Musteata stated, "Thank you to the Academy for supporting a film that is weird and that is queer and that is made by a majority of women."

Kpop Demon Hunters' hit song "Golden," which won a Best Original Song Academy Award, topped the Billboard charts for weeks and won a Grammy for Best Song for Visual Media. Co-Writer Mark Sonnenblick cherished the win. "I also want to thank my people too. My family, some of whom are here tonight, my husband Isacc who is here tonight, but also just to say everybody who worked on this movie, all the animators, it was a real collaboration across the board"

Andy Jurgenson, the editor of "One Battle After Another" kissed his husband after his win for Best Film Editing was announced. When Bill and Lewis Pullman called his name, the camera panned to Jurgenson embracing his partner while the crowd cheered. While accepting the award he offered up multiple thanks and announced, "To my



Andy Jurgenson kisses his husband after being called to the stage.
CREDIT: Screen Capture

partner, Bill, who brings so much joy to my life everyday, and lastly, I'd like to dedicate this to my aunt, Barbara Hall, who was a film archivist for the Academy for over 25 years. She loved her job and she loved showing me old movies and teaching me about film history and I miss her every day."

Billy Crystal gave tribute to social justice and legendary actor-filmmaker Rob Reiner and his wife Michelle Reiner. The couple were long-time LGBTQ+ allies and advocates for marriage equality. Explaining the couple's accomplishments, Crystal then welcomed several of Rein's collaborators to the stage: Christopher Guest, Demi Moore, Carole King and Meg Ryan. ::

'Kids, Wait Till You Hear This! My Memoir'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

"Kids, Wait Till You Hear This! My Memoir" by Liza Minnelli, as told to Michael Feinstein ©2026, Grand Central \$36.00 421 pages

become her first husband, and life was wonderful - until she came home one day to find him in their bed with another man. Before they were divorced, she lost her beloved mother, and became "engaged" to two other men simultaneously, neither of which made it to the altar with her.

She married her second husband, the son of one of her mother's former co-stars, in 1974 but her love affairs and addictions led to a second divorce.

Her third husband was a stage manager.

She doesn't have much good to say about her fourth, and last, husband.

Overall, she says, "You gotta play the comedy for all it's worth and leave 'em laughing. Even when your heart is breaking."

Are you expecting bluntness, sass or attitude here? *Good*, because that's what you get inside "Kids, Wait Till You Hear This!" It's strong on honesty and don't-give-a-flip. It's wonderfully edited, so it moves fast. It's eye-opening and funny and a pleasant surprise for a first, and only (so far), memoir.

Even better, author Liza Minnelli (with best friend, Michael Feinstein) is really quite candid and nicely gossipy, starting from the beginning. There are some Hollywood folks, in fact, who are feeling edgy tonight, because of what's inside this book and

the secrets spilled. Minnelli and Feinstein seemed to have fun telling her story, and they comfortably lure readers in.

That's not to say that it's all a cabaret. Minnelli tells about her addictions and recoveries, her marriages and why she wed two gay men, and the losses she endured, including miscarriages, deaths and broken relationships. The bad balances well with the good for a tale that's several notches above most celebrity memoirs. "Kids, Wait Till You Hear This!" is, in fact, a real joy to read, a genuine bright spot. ::

Twenty feet in front of you, and you can't see a thing. Even the closest faces are in shadow - lit, but not quite enough for you to see for sure what the people there are thinking. Still, you can *hear* them, their gasps, their laughter, and applause. Such is life, on-stage. Now read "Kids, Wait Till You Hear This! My Memoir" by Liza Minnelli, as told to Michael Feinstein, and read about it beyond the spotlight.

Almost from the moment she was born, Liza Minnelli was famous.

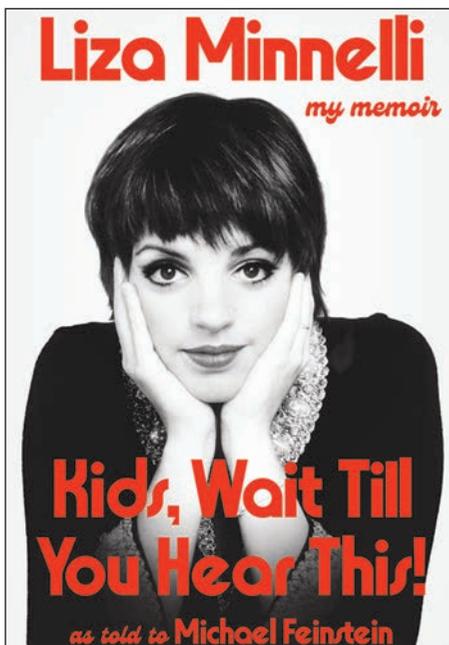
It was inevitable: Her mother was Judy Garland. Her father was director Vincente Minnelli. Her godparents were Hollywood glitterati, her neighbors were famous, her playmates would be famous someday, too.

But her life wasn't all starlight and happiness.

She made her stage debut as a toddler. She became her "mother's caretaker" at age 13.

At 16, she had a growing career of her own - one that her mother tried to stop. But, she says, "In her own way, Mama was wonderful to me. Try understanding - she was my *mother*, not a movie star.... I knew her as the person who loved me and always would."

At 19, Minnelli was working, happy and madly in love with the man who'd



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An interview with legendary musician Thomas Dolby

Out in Music



by Gregg Shapiro
Contributing Writer

It's hard to believe that "The Golden Age of Wireless," the debut album by musician Thomas Dolby was released more than 40 years ago. Regardless of its vintage, it still sounds as fresh and appealing as the day it hit record store shelves. A versatile artist who lists Joni Mitchell, Lene Lovich, Prefab Sprout and Foreigner among his many collaborators, Dolby is the definition of someone who plays well with others. As of this writing, he is embarking on a multi-city international concert tour, including several U.S. dates, but has graciously made time for an interview before hitting the road.

Gregg Shapiro: Your 1982 major-label debut album, "The Golden Age of Wireless," was re-released in 1983 to include the hit single "She Blinded Me With Science." Were you prepared for the reception that both the single and the album received?

Thomas Dolby: Totally unprepared. I never really saw myself as a mainstream act, so it was pretty amusing when suddenly I was in the mainstream. I've always been a bit of an introvert, a bit of a social hermit. I went from wallflower to the center of attention in a very short space of time. I viewed it with amusement more than anything. It never really overwhelmed me. I wasn't particularly into hedonism, partying, being the rock star figure. I never really got wrapped up in that stuff. I just found it creatively very stimulating because I started to get the most amazing offers of different projects. Musically, it was the beginning of a fascinating journey.

GS: Your debut coincided with the early years of MTV, and the "She Blinded Me With Science" video was seen by viewers on a regular basis. How do you feel about your impact on the music video genre?

TD: I think MTV was crucial for me, really. My album came out, won awards, got great reviews, and sold about three copies. The excuse given by the American [record] label was, "Well, you're a little bit hard to pigeonhole for radio programmers. Your stuff is kind of funky, kind of punky, but you're a white dude. Although MTV was accused of homogenizing its playlist. It was actually, in the early '80s, a lot more diverse than most American radio was. They didn't really care what genre of music they were playing, so long as it had a great video. As MTV got into the major markets, it was thrilling for audiences. Cool people were staying home on a Saturday night to watch MTV instead of going out to clubs and gigs. As the viewership ticked up, radio stations had to take notice of what MTV was playing, because that's what people were calling in and asking for. Suddenly, the radio situation

was reversed for me, and I was getting a lot of play across different genres of radio. Dance clubs were opening up, as well. I guess I was ambushing the public. It was a crest of a wave for the sort of new British invasion. Catchy song and catchy image, and it just worked. It all came together.

GS: While we're on the subject of radio, presently your music is in regular rotation on Sirius XM's First Wave station, where you continue to reach the fans who have been with you from the start, as well as younger people who might have been unfamiliar with your music. Do you recall how you felt the first time you heard one of your songs played on the radio?

TD: It wasn't really an overnight thing because, as a keyboard player, as a writer and producer, I had some success before.

ing a darling of that particular demographic the way, let's say, Bette Midler might have been [laughs] or somebody like Barbra Streisand. I think the appeal of my music crossed barriers. When I went to see Prince in the early days, I was amazed by the age, the race, the proclivities of his audience; it was right across the map. I think queer was a good way to describe his audience in those days. I certainly didn't put any labels on anything. But through the history of people I've played with, you mentioned a couple, there's a lot of LGBTQ people right there. In my own family, there's a lot, as well. I have three kids. The eldest is trans, the middle one is a lesbian, and the youngest is a drummer. When my eldest kid transitioned – his name now is Harper, and he's 35 – but he transitioned in his late teens. That was before there were a lot of

one of the influences for them. I think it's more to do with songwriting than genre, if anything. Over the years, when new artists have emerged, I've thought, "Oh, I bet they used to listen to me when they were young [laughs.]" In fact, I had rather a nice surprise a year or two ago when I was listening to a podcast that was made by Billie Eilish's dad, Patrick O'Connell. Billie came on, and she said, "Dad, what was that weird stuff you used to play us when you took us on camping trips?" He said, "Oh, you mean Thomas Dolby?" [She said], "Yeah, put some of that on." Billie Eilish starts singing along with my songs, "The guy is so good, but it's so weird!" I think that she and Finneas were a little bit influenced by their dad, who was a big fan, sort of ramming the songs down their throats when they went on long camping trips.



Thomas Dolby performing with his band at Union Chapel in London. CREDIT: Facebook

GS: You're an artist with a long history of live performance and have released a few live albums over the years. Now, you're embarking on this 2026 tour, which includes U.S. dates, as well as several UK dates. In what ways would you say U.S. audiences differ from those in the UK, and in what ways do you think they are similar, if at all?

TD: It's interesting; I feel somewhat exposed when I go back to the UK. I don't think this is entirely justified, but British people are very proud of the originality and authenticity that they ascribe to their homegrown talent. The ruse in all of this is that actually what we're great at, and have been great at for centuries, is going out in the world, finding the spices and the rare gems and minerals, and bringing them home, wrapping them up, putting a new spin on them, and then re-exporting them to the rest of the world.

GS: Are you describing a kind of musical colonialism?

TD: Totally! I think there's very little true, indigenous, British pop music. Whether it was the blues, reggae, African music, electro, house, dance, techno from Detroit and DC – we would go out, and we'd snag the best bits, bring it home, and put a new Carnaby Street spin on it and then sell it back to the rest of the world. The British are actually quite snooty about anybody who does that openly. They prefer it if you grew up in the projects and every morning before you even have brewed your first cup of tea, you jotted off a couple of lyrics to new indie songs [laughs]. Like Morrissey or somebody like that. It's not to say there's none. Prefab Sprout, who I worked with. I think Paddy McAloon is a true national treasure. But there's not many of him. There's a lot of roots in American music that is truly original, albeit with a heritage of African, Cuban, whatever. I think there's more true indigenous music in the States between jazz, funk, R&B and rap and all the rest. ::

I was very surprised when Foreigner asked me to play on their album "4." When "Waiting for a Girl Like You" was a hit with this sort of dreamy synth intro that I made, suddenly, that was getting on mainstream radio. So, I heard that. I wrote "New Toy" for Lene Lovich, and that was a big hit in the UK. We were on "Top of the Pops," and things like that. It had been a gradual thing. But I think the difference with "She Blinded Me With Science" was that I created it in my own brand.

GS: Out musician Adele Bertei performed with you on the song "Hyperactive" (see link below) from your second album, "The Flat Earth," and queer musician Gail Ann Dorsey is currently touring with you. How aware are you of an LGBTQ following for your music?

TD: I'm not sure if, in the early days, it was that easy to put your finger on. I think that the gay community, in the early '80s, still had its own clubs, its own bars, its own lifestyle, which then, as we know, was decimated in the mid '80s. I wasn't aware of be-

high-profile trans people. We were living in the UK at the time, and he was an activist and very much a mentor for other kids and their families. He felt very fortunate that his parents were very progressive; that we supported him. At the time when he started down this path, we were living in San Francisco. So straight, vanilla people were in the minority there [laughs]. Then we went to the UK, and he went on BBC morning TV to talk about his experience, to help other kids, and so on. I started to get social media comments saying, "Right on! Great that you're supportive." People would start to notice things in my songs; they'd pick up on lyrical things. Even before my son transitioned, I had a song called "Simone" that was about a trans person.

GS: Thank you so much for that. Are there contemporary artists to whom you feel like you could draw a through line from you to them?

TD: A few years ago, there was synthwave. I think that for those artists, I was

Watch Thomas Dolby's music video 'Hyperactive' here: <https://bit.ly/4sZoRfC>

Our People: Lakhiya Hicks

Artist, educator and healer with one name and many gifts



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

Lakhiya Hicks wears many hats (literally and figuratively), from a fashion statement wide-brimmed dandy positioned just so, to her roles as event curator, poet, university professor and an overall creative individual. The Charlotte area transplant (originally from Rockford, Ill.) has made the Queen City her home and had an impact on the community around her in less than five years of residency.

She's the owner/operator of HOMEplxce Retreats, a welcoming space for the under served and a culturally rich environment everyone needs to experience firsthand. With views of uptown Charlotte and beyond, it's a breathtaking space that impacts all five senses.

Hicks has an undergraduate degree in communications from Northwestern University, a Masters in applied theatre arts from University of Southern California and a keen knowledge of arts and interaction with oppressed communities from study abroad at a Belfast, Northern Ireland Prison for Women. Clearly, she's an individual and a business owner with a personal and professional history who is truly the full package.

L'Monique King: What does Lakhiya mean? What's the origin of your name?

Lakhiya Hicks: My dad actually put together a few letters on a little sheet of paper in the hospital waiting for me to arrive. According to him, Lakhiya, along with my first middle name, means lovely flower. But I later learned that my name means "Home" in Haitian Creole and IsiXhosa, an official language of South Africa and Zimbabwe. It's a birthright and a reminder that I belong and don't have to plead with the world for space.

LMK: How long have you been in Charlotte?

LH: It's been about three and a half years. I moved here from L.A., I lived there for about 12 years prior.

LMK: What do you love about Charlotte?

LH: I love the pacing, the energy and it's giving granny's front porch energy, something I really appreciate after living in L.A. It's like a small big city, it feels like the best of both worlds. I also love how the city is super creative and supportive of creative entrepreneurs.

LMK: What are your pronouns? How do you identify?

LH: I've danced through using all the pronouns over the years during various stages of my life. All of them and none of them resonated fully so I've landed on just using my name. I [identify as] a Black Queer AFAB [Assigned Female at Birth] gender expansive spirit of love, having a human experience with a non-apparent disability.

LMK: What's the non-apparent disability?

LH: I've had a heart condition since childhood that no one believed me about until I passed out unexpectedly at the peak of my fitness level while playing basketball at North Western.

LMK: Who are you now sharing your heart with? Are you happily single or eagerly looking for a life partner?

LH: I am joyously self-partnered - whether or not I'm with someone I trust I will always cultivate that relationship with myself. I want to be partnered one day, but right now, I'm attending to my baby, my business baby that takes a lot of time to cultivate.

LMK: Choose your preference: the beach or the rainforest?

LH: Beach [without hesitation].

LMK: Spring or Fall?

LH: Summer? [laughs]

LMK: What motivated you to open HOMEplxce Retreats?

LH: While visiting Charlotte and doing consulting work I was attracting big hearted folks, entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, solo operating business owners (without teams) and I noticed that folks were burning out. As I was having meetings in my work from home space, I thought, what would it look like if I re-imagined my home space to look like more of a retreat center? So, I started - adding a hammock, weighted blankets and foot massagers along with activations for self-healing in certain areas, little nooks for self-contemplation and integration. The type of consulting that I do with organizations and businesses is trauma informed, because as one of my mentors [Queen Hollins from the Earth Lodge Center for Transformation] used to say, "What's coming up is coming up so it can come out." With that I began to offer trauma informed business consulting and curating the inner child healing sanctuary known as HOMEplxce Retreats.

LMK: As a business owner, what frightens you the most?

LH: Operating under a glass ceiling and not knowing that it was there. Things are rough right now. I invested everything into this space as a love letter to my fellow recovering people pleasing perfectionists who need support and often don't ask for it. But right now, HOMEplxce Retreats is financially struggling and needs funding and support to continue the work.

LMK: How do you want the space to speak to those who don't share your identity as a Black person?

LH: It's definitely a Black Queer survivor and disabled-centered space. I appreciate all folks who have the capacity to honor such centering and understand the importance of that. Everyone is welcome to visit, co-work and experience the peacefulness, the views of the city and the ability to recharge. So, I encourage everyone to book a retreat, bring staff and attend a class no matter what ancestral roots they hail from.

LMK: What about your business brings you the most joy?

LH: Seeing folks who have experienced houselessness, like I have and they walk into the space and I see their spines raise - standing erectly. Bouncing back was a reminder that we all deserved to be safe, housed, have financial security and access to food and clean water. We host many groups of individuals who have recently experienced being unhoused and seeing them come around the corner and pick up an Arnold Palmer in a champagne glass is just - whew!

LMK: When you look at your life thus far, what are you most proud of?

LH: I'm most proud of how my heart is still committed to a love ethic in the midst of and despite all that I've been through - remaining, soft, subtle and hopeful.

LMK: How do you practice self-care?

LH: I spend a lot of time in water, showers, swimming and floating. Hanging out with people who I love and laugh a lot with is healing for me. I enjoy spending a lot of time in nature and I love to create. Creating for me is a way of composting and seeing myself more clearly.

LMK: Does your family have a history of community engagement and entrepreneurship?

LH: My grandmother [who recently passed away from cancer] had the longest standing Black woman-owned business in my hometown in Rockford. Her elbows



Lakhiya Hicks.
CREDIT: Imoni & Daryl of LTL Well Collective

were blacked from leaning on display cases, counseling community members, first ladies, pastors, mayors and elders who had been forgotten. [That] greatly inspires the queer elder care that I do. She didn't just run a store, it was [like] a community center, and I plan on living up to that legacy. There must be a way that decisions we make are simultaneously good for our business and physical health. Cornell West once said, "Justice is what love looks like in public," and I believe that should be the norm.

LMK: What do you want young LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs to know?

LH: Entrepreneurship is a spiritual journey and I definitely feel that one's capacity to be transparently honest and authentic with one's self will impact your capacity to steward business ownership to the best of your ability. Part of that is not going at it alone. We need people. There's more than the options of hyper independence or co-dependence. There's also interdependence - one of the truest facts of our existence. When we get excited about that, our ventures will become all the more joyous and fruitful.

LMK: What do you want your life to look like 10 years from now?

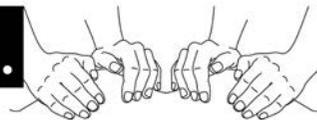
LH: I'll be almost 50 and just getting started. I trust that I'll still be moving in a spirit of play. I'll be globally engaged in this community care network - with healing and transformative justice being more of a norm; with a love ethic being the most accessible and affordable option, no matter our circumstances. ::



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