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40th ANNIVERSARY Celebration

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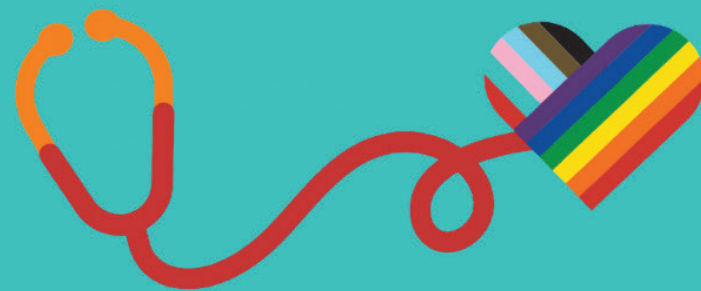


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Thank you



When Rosedale Health and Wellness and Dudley's Place was founded 20 years ago this October, our goal was simple but powerful: to create a safe, compassionate space where people could receive HIV care without fear or judgment. Over these two decades, we have grown and evolved, expanding our services to include general medicine and prevention care, always keeping the well-being of our community at the heart of everything we do.

Throughout this journey, Qnotes has been a steadfast partner. Together, we have worked to reach, support, and uplift our community in meaningful ways. We have always valued spending our limited resources in places that do more than just advertise—they build connection and foster understanding.

We want to take this moment to express our deep gratitude to Qnotes, and especially to Jim, for their unwavering commitment not only to educating but also to entertaining and informing our community. We look forward to continuing this valuable partnership as Qnotes embarks on a new chapter in their journey.

Thank you for standing with us—and
with the community—every step of the way.



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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.

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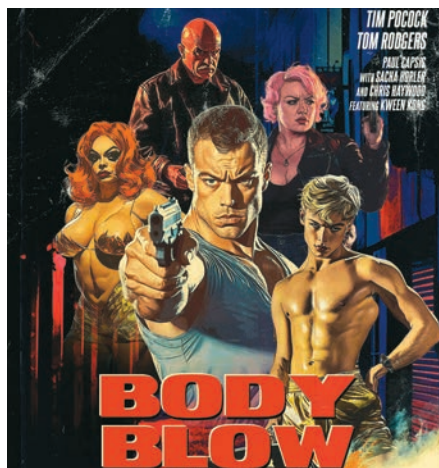
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events

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



Reel Out Charlotte LGBTQ+ film festival

The Reel Out Charlotte film festival kicks off with a special opening event and free movie screening at Bar Argon (4544 South Boulevard) on May 13 at 7 p.m. "Body Blow" tells the story of a young cop on an undercover mission that leads him to a male sex worker and a drug lord drag queen. But that's just opening night. The festival continues through May 17, with feature films, film shorts and more.

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Interview with poet and author Steven Reigns

More than 45 years after the first newspaper article about AIDS appeared in the New York Times, Steven Reigns continues to write about it as a reminder the health crisis is far from over. The subject is front and center in his new book, "Outliving Michael." "My writings have always been a representation of what I'm grappling with at the time," Reigns offers. "Writing is how I make sense of things."

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ANNIVERSARY Celebration

QNOTESCAROLINAS.COM/CONNECT THE SCORPIO APRIL 26, 2026 6-10 PM

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PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Charlotte is home to a vibrant and diverse community, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other LGBTQ+ residents whose contributions strengthen the cultural, civic, and economic life of our city; and

WHEREAS, for four decades, Qnotes has served as a trusted source of news, storytelling, and connection for LGBTQ+ communities across Charlotte and the Carolinas, helping ensure that local voices and experiences are represented and preserved; and

WHEREAS, founded in 1980s as a grassroots publication, Qnotes emerged at a time when LGBTQ+ voices were largely absent from mainstream media, providing one of the first platforms in the region for accurate, affirming, and community-centered reporting; and

WHEREAS, through its coverage of public health, civil rights, arts and culture, and community life, Qnotes has played a critical role in documenting local LGBTQ+ history, including the HIV/AIDS crisis and ongoing efforts to advance dignity, safety, and inclusion; and

WHEREAS, as local journalism declines nationwide, Qnotes continues to serve as an essential community resource, strengthening public understanding, fostering civic engagement, and contributing to a more informed and connected Charlotte.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Vi Alexander Lyles, Mayor of Charlotte, do hereby proclaim April 24, 2026 as

“QNOTES DAY”

in City of Charlotte and encourage all residents to join in recognizing this special observance.

WITNESS MY HAND and the official Seal of the City of Charlotte.


Vi Alexander Lyles
Mayor

I am excited!

Qnotes is celebrating 40 years as a newspaper

It seems like just a few years ago when Robert Sheets asked me to join the board of **Queen City Quordinators (QCQ)** as the treasure. When I accepted, that started my journey of work in and for the LGBTQ community. At the time I had no idea it would become my purpose in life. It led me to sitting on other boards and committees like MCC Charlotte and Pride Charlotte.

The people I have worked with have been an inspiration. The memories I have will stay with me forever. The struggles our community has gone through and the triumphs we've made have been life-changing.

The most rewarding work I have been a part of is *Qnotes*. Right after I joined the QCQ board of directors, Robert had the vision to bring back the halted newsletter produced by QCQ a couple of years earlier. *Qnotes* was printed on copy paper and was a news and information source for the LGBTQ community for about 18 months in 1983 and 84.

Sheets envisioned a real newspaper. With his direction and the hiring of Don King, a local LGBTQ+ activist who worked at the Charlotte Observer, the *Qnotes* newspaper came to life in June 1986.

Around the same time, QCQ was producing a Drummer contest and the event was the first cover story of the new newspaper.

Now 40 years later, some 900 issues of the paper and over 15,000 articles written, we have seen our community go through a lot of challenges and breakthroughs, like *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down all sodomy laws across the country; and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which gave us marriage equality. Now we're dealing with the current administration in Washington, trying to erase us and our history.

This is why local trusted LGBTQ+ media is so important. That is why *Qnotes* and *QnotesCarolinas* have been here all this time. Independent media organizations are vital to our democracy. Like we have

printed, at the top of the paper in red, for the last few years – "Our democracy is at risk! If we are complacent it will FALL."



Jim Yarbrough during his time as treasurer of QCQ in 1986.
CREDIT: Qnotes Archives

With that said, it has been a real struggle to do the work we are doing. COVID-19 was devastating to advertising and grants are few and far between. We have a reader revenue system called the *Qnotes* Press Club. You can join for as little as five dollars (\$5) per month. Members get some perks and are able to give us feedback on what they would like to see us cover. Please go to *QnotesCarolinas*.



com and join today. This will help us be of service to you with trusted local LGBTQ news, information, entertainment and views.

Over the 40 years of *Qnotes*, the paper has experienced a number of changes. In 1996 we started publishing biweekly instead of monthly. In 2006, we bought the Front Page, a Raleigh-based LGBTQ newspaper that was started in 1977. Then in 2021 we started distributing papers in grocery stores because so many venues and businesses were closed due to COVID.

Now we're making the largest change to date. This is one of the reasons I am so excited. *Qnotes* is evolving with the times

and moving to a video, digital and multicast model. This 40 Year Anniversary issue of print will be the last biweekly issue. We will still be doing a few special issues a year in print. The first one will be August and will celebrate Charlotte Pride.

People want their media on their phones, and they want it quicker than ever. They want video. They want their news to be entertaining. They want it with as little effort as possible. They want it to come to them wherever they are. So, we are striving to meet you, our readers, where you are and in the way you want your news.

Keep an eye out for us online. Please remember to like and share our post. Follow us on all the social media platforms and join the *Qnotes* Press Club.

We'll see you online.

Jim Yarbrough
Publisher, *Qnotes* and *QnotesCarolinas*



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'Voter fraud' in North Carolina is a fraud

In nearly 40 years, there have only been 123 cases of voter fraud in NC

by Larry King | NC Newsline

Is voter fraud as rampant as folks on the right claim? Well, first let's define voter fraud: Voter fraud occurs when individuals cast ballots despite knowing that they are ineligible to vote, in an attempt to defraud the election system. Let's look at the record of voter fraud in North Carolina. The Heritage Foundation (author of Project 2025!) has developed a map showing the number of voter-fraud cases in each state. Data in Table 1 were taken from this website.

• **Buying Votes**

In 1986, the FBI operation Project Westvote in western North Carolina resulted in 41 convictions for vote buying. In 2002, in the race for sheriff of Caldwell County, four people were convicted of paying people \$10 to register to vote and \$25 to vote for the incumbent sheriff.

• **Ineligible Voting: Undocumented immigrants**

In the 19 years from 2003 through 2022, 36 non-citizens made the false claim of citizenship, then registered and voted.

• **Ineligible Voting: Felon**

In the eight years from 2012 through 2020, 20 people were convicted of voting before completing their sentences — including any periods of probation, parole or post-release supervision.

Type of Fraud, 1986 - 2025	Cases
Buying Votes	46
Ineligible Voting: Alien	36
Ineligible Voting: Felon	20
Fraudulent Use of Absentee Ballots	9
Duplicate Voting	7
Elections Overturned due to Fraud	3
False registration	2
TOTAL	123

Table 1: Types of voter fraud.
CREDIT: NC Newsline

• **Fraudulent Use of Absentee Ballots**

Eight of these nine cases involved people working for political activist McCrae Dowless, who was working for the congressional campaign of Republican Mark Harris in 2018. The individuals would unlawfully collect ballots from voters, falsely claim to have witnessed the voter casting his or her vote, and then mail the ballots in a manner to conceal that the voter had not mailed the ballot. In the ninth case, a woman submitted an absentee ballot for her deceased husband.

• **Duplicate Voting**

In the five years from 2011 through 2016, seven people voted more than once: Three voted during early voting and again on election day; three voted in multiple states; and one voted by mail and again on election day.

• **Elections Overturned Due to Fraud**

In 2014 and 2016, municipal elections in Lumberton and Pembroke were overturned and new elections held due to voting irregularities.



• **False Registration**

In 2021 and 2022, two non-citizens tried to register to vote.

So, there have been 123 cases of voter fraud in North Carolina from 1986 to date. As an aside, one might argue that vote buying, while illegal, is not voter fraud because the voters voted legally – their choice of candidates was influenced by money. But to keep this voter fraud analysis

2 (see image) shows that 664,041 ballots were cast per one fraud case. As a reference, the population of the City of Raleigh plus the population of the Town of Cary is 662,305. Thus, in a hypothetical situation, if the total population of Raleigh and Cary voted in an election, only one vote would be fraudulent.

Total ballots cast, 1986 - 2025	81,677,000
Fraud cases	123
Fraud cases as percent of ballots cast	0.0002%
Ballots cast per one fraud case	664,041

Table 2: Total number of ballots.
CREDIT: NC Newsline



conservative, I kept the 46 cases of vote buying in the data set. Over the 39 years when these cases occurred, 39 elections were held and 81,677,000 ballots were cast.

Another way to compare ballots to fraud cases is to compare the number of ballots cast per one fraud case. Table

Now let's consider a graphical representation of ballots versus fraud cases. One often hears that North Carolina stretches from Murphy to Manteo. The highway distance between these two cities is 544 miles (see image).

Let's make those 544 miles represent the 81,677,000 ballots cast. Now, if we started walking from Murphy to Manteo, how far must we walk for the distance to be equivalent to those 123 cases of voter fraud? (Drum roll, please): 4.3 feet. You could take two steps and account for all the fraud cases! Yep, just two steps out of 544 miles and you've accounted for 39 years of voter fraud in North Carolina!

That is why voter fraud in North Carolina is a fraud. ::

This article appears courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline, via Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Larry King is treasurer for the advisory board of Common Cause N.C.

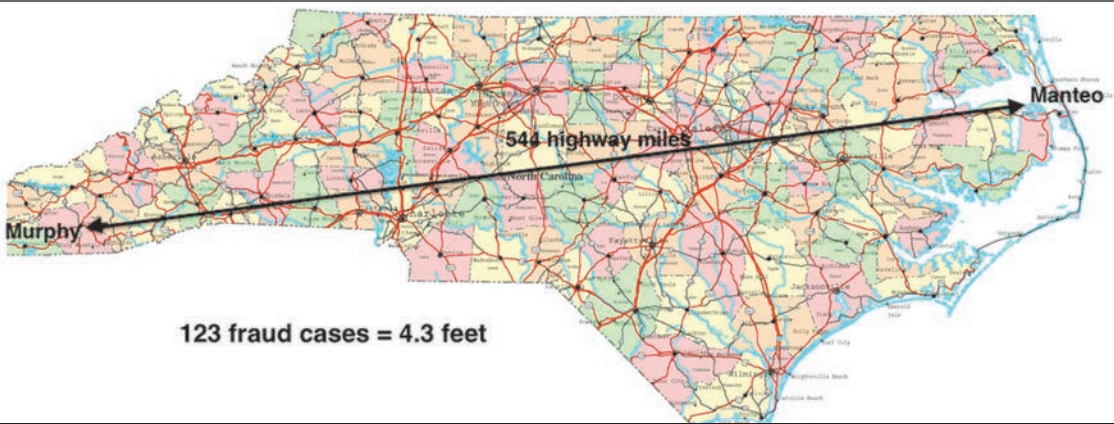


Table 3: Actual cases of voter fraud.
CREDIT: NC Newsline

Invisible Histories: Finding pieces of the puzzle

Documenting and preserving LGBTQ+ history is one of the most important things we can do



by Josh Burford
Contributing Writer

Do you feel like you don't know enough about LGBTQ+ history? If so, you are not alone. Access to the rich and complex history of the lives of LGBTQ+ people is mostly absent from our shared history in the United States, and it remains missing from our textbooks and archives.



Josh Burford and Maigen Sullivan are co-founders of Invisible Histories.

archiving is resistance to oppression and history leads to liberation. In our work, we center joy and community while never erasing the painful and complicated experiences of our folks.

This year we are partnering with *Qnotes* on the eve of their 40th anniversary to make certain we are saving every piece of LGBTQ history that we can find. Invisible Histories is actively collecting in six Southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and North & South Carolina) and building a repository of our lives, memories and the objects we have created together as we build community all over the South.

My particular obsession is with LGBTQ+ newspapers and newsletters, which is why our partnership with *Qnotes* is so important. Since the beginning of the movement to liberate queer and trans people, our community has found its voice in our publications and newsletters. In a culture that tries its hardest to silence us, our publications have given us an unfiltered place to speak about our experiences, share our joys and pain, and a place for us to connect. From the very first publication of the Mattachine Society in the '50s, called *One* magazine, we have found ways to connect to each other as a whole community of disparate personalities and needs as well as ways to discuss the things that are unique about our lives.

The South has created some of the most incredible publications and since the '70s we have been putting our thoughts and desires onto paper – not for the consumption of straight people, but for ourselves and our communities.

Lesbian Front, published in Water Valley Mississippi in 1972, was part poetry and part community gossip magazine, *The Barb* out of Atlanta (called the South's groovy gay mag) gave us nightlife and queer businesses to support.

The desire for connection to a national queer and trans community inspired five friends in Pensacola, Fla. to start the Emma Jones society, which led to the largest Memorial Day queer event in the South.

Right here in Charlotte in the 1990s alongside *Qnotes* and *Front Page*, the newsletter *All the Beautiful People* was written by and for trans people and their partners. In every instance these publications gave us a way to combat loneliness, train ourselves as activists, generate mutual aid for those in need, or in the case of *Wimminspace* out of Jackson, Miss., combine all the numerous lesbian potlucks happening into one usable calendar.

There is so much for LGBTQ+ people in the South to be proud of, and while many times the rest of the country seems hell bent to paint us all as backwards and lacking in basic community, it is through our history that we can see the legacy and the impact our communities have had on the lives of all LGBTQ+ people living in the U.S.

Since we started collecting LGBTQ+ southern history in 2018 we have preserved over 200 collections of archival documents and materials going all the way back to 1912. Our history is connected to one another. It is progressive and radical, and it shows a region that has been fighting to make things better and building communities that are strong. The difficulty in collecting LGBTQ+ southern history is not that it doesn't exist, it's that all the individual pieces of our history are scattered among our organizations, individual people's homes, our lived experiences of being at these events, and our collective misunderstanding of the place of queer and trans southerners in the history of this country. That's why we need all of you to help us find these missing pieces and stories.

Invisible Histories will be providing a space for you to scan old photos, come in and do an oral history interview, and as always you are welcome to come and browse through our collections from all over the South to learn about the folks who came before us. Our space is your space, it is a community space. We look forward to learning even more and bringing you on this journey with us. Thank you to *Qnotes* for this partnership and for providing a voice to the community these last 40 years.

We can't wait to meet you all. ::

Visit our website at www.invisiblehistory.org, and follow us on social media.

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Asexual people report declining acceptance in new survey

Asexual people are experiencing sharper declines in acceptance, visibility and openness than LGBTQ+ adults overall, according to a new analysis from the Human Rights Campaign.

The analysis, released April 3, 2026, examines responses from asexual participants in the organization's 2025 Annual LGBTQ+ Community Survey, a large-scale survey of LGBTQ+ adults. The findings show that 50.9% of asexual respondents said there was less acceptance of LGBTQ+ people over the past 12 months, compared to 29.7% of LGBTQ+ adults overall. Nearly two-thirds, 63.7%, said they felt less visible, and 57.3% said they are less open about their identity than they were a year ago.

Asexual respondents made up 4.7% of the survey sample. Of that group, 16.9% identified only as asexual, while 83.1% reported additional identities such as aromantic, demisexual, or panromantic. More than half, 58%, also identified as transgender or gender-expansive.

The data shows differences within the asexual community. Among those who identified only as asexual, 71.7% said acceptance had worsened, compared to 46.1% of those who identified as asexual alongside other identities. Respondents with multiple identities reported feeling less open (60.9%) and less visible (66.7%) than those who identified as asexual.

Asexual activist Yasmin Benoit, who partnered with the Human Rights Campaign on the analysis, said the findings reflect longstanding gaps in recognition and support.

"The asexual community has long been regarded as one of the least visible groups within the wider LGBTQIA+ community," Benoit said. "We are still one of the communities least likely to come out, to be represented, to have legislative recognition, or to receive support from LGBTQ+ groups and organizations."

She said the past year has reversed some of the limited progress.

"In an increasingly hostile environ-

ment, and with lower levels of community support, asexual people who were gradually approaching the point of feeling safe enough to be open are retreating backward again or deeming it necessary to stay in the background," Benoit said.

"The significant overlap between the trans community and the ace community means that the impact of these rollbacks is felt even more," she added.

That overlap is reflected in the survey results. Among asexual respondents who were also transgender or gender-expansive, 71.4% said they felt less visible than a year ago, compared to 45.9% of cisgender respondents.

The findings come just days before International Asexuality Day on April 6, a global campaign focused on advocacy, education, celebration, and solidarity across the ace spectrum, with an emphasis on increasing global awareness and visibility.

Asexuality is an umbrella term that exists on a spectrum. People who identify as asexual may experience little or no sexual attraction, or may experience attraction in ways that do not align with dominant expectations.

The analysis reflects a subset of people who identify as asexual within the LGBTQ+ community and does not capture the full range of asexual experiences.

Asexual respondents are reporting larger declines in acceptance, visibility and openness than LGBTQ+ adults overall, with many reporting they are less visible and less open about their identities. ::

— Liz Schob



Yasmin Benoit warns acceptance of asexual people is "retreating backward." CREDIT: Facebook

Faith leaders react to Supreme Court decision on conversion therapy ban

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Tuesday, April 1, that Colorado cannot enforce a law restricting how licensed therapists discuss sexual orientation and gender identity with clients, finding the state's conversion therapy ban violates free speech protections. The decision is expected to prompt legal challenges to similar laws in more than 20 states.

The case was brought by Kaley Chiles, an evangelical Christian therapist who argued the law prevented her from counseling clients seeking to align their identities or behavior with their religious beliefs. In an 8-1 decision, the Court found the state had improperly limited what therapists can say in sessions.

The ruling does not address whether conversion therapy is effective or safe. It focuses on whether states can regulate communication between therapists and clients, a distinction likely to shape how lower courts evaluate similar laws.

Conversion therapy generally refers to ef-

forts to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Major medical and mental health organizations, including the American Psychological Association, have rejected these practices, citing evidence they can cause harm, including increased risks of depression and suicidal thoughts.

Some Christian therapists said the decision protects their ability to respond to client requests grounded in faith. Psychologist Mark Baker told NPR he has worked with people who accept their same-sex attraction but choose not to act on it.

"I'm aware of people who went through therapy who can accept their same-sex attraction, but they choose to want to have kids and get married," Baker said. "I'm just going to manage that in my life." He said therapists should be able to support clients in making decisions shaped by religious belief, while acknowledging that therapy does not change sexual orientation.



Conversion therapy generally refers to efforts to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

"That's really damaging to the entire faith-based movement that is trying to help people live [as] who they are meant to be," said Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, the world's oldest and largest organization working for the justice, equality, and full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Catholics within the Church and society. It was founded in 1969.

LGBTQ+ people of faith and affirming religious leaders said the ruling could make it harder to protect vulnerable people, particularly minors who may not have control

over their care.

"Conversion therapy is not only medically spurious," said the Rev. Sofia Betancourt, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, linking the practice to religious efforts to frame LGBTQ+ identity as something that must be changed.

"Most of the time, it's happening in the church basement around the corner from your house," said Timothy Schraeder Rodriguez, who has spoken publicly about his experience with conversion therapy. He said the effects can take years to work through and are often minimized when described as religious guidance.

Advocates say the decision could limit how states regulate licensed providers while leaving religious settings largely unaffected. Many existing laws apply only to therapists, not clergy or ministries, where similar practices may continue.

Some organizations are expanding access to affirming care and connecting LGBTQ+ people with supportive faith communities.

Legal challenges to state-level conversion therapy bans are expected as courts begin applying the Supreme Court's ruling. ::

— Liz Schob

Trump admin agrees to keep flag flying at NYC's Stonewall monument

The Trump administration has agreed to allow the Rainbow Pride flag to continue flying at the Stonewall National Monument, marking a significant reversal after months of controversy and legal challenges.

The decision follows a settlement with LGBTQ+ advocacy and historic preservation groups after the flag was removed in February under federal guidance restricting which flags could be displayed on government property. The removal sparked widespread backlash, with activists arguing the move erased a key symbol tied to the site's legacy as the birthplace of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

Under the agreement, the Pride flag will be displayed alongside the American flag

and the National Park Service flag on the monument's official flagpole, and will only be removed for maintenance or practical reasons. As of this writing, the flag, which was originally taken down in February and re-raised days later by supportive New Yorkers continues to fly. A judge still has to approve the order to make it official policy.

In a statement, Lambda Legal attorney Karen Loewy said the earlier removal was "another act...to erase the LGBTQ+ community," adding that the government has now committed to restoring "this important symbol back to where it belongs."

The Human Rights Campaign also praised the outcome. In a written response, the organization said the Pride flag "rep-

resents resilience and visibility," calling its return "a powerful reminder that LGBTQ+ history cannot be erased, even in the face of political opposition."

Local New York City advocates echoed that sentiment as well. "Stonewall is sacred ground for our community," said New York-based activist Miguel Santiago. "Seeing the Pride flag fly again sends a message that our history and our lives matter."

The Gilbert Baker Foundation, which helped support the legal challenge, described the resolution as a reaffirmation of the flag's historic and cultural significance.

The monument commemorates the 1969 Stonewall uprising, a pivotal event in LGBTQ+ history. The Pride flag, first installed at the site in 2022, had become a powerful visual marker of that legacy.

While many advocates celebrated the decision, some noted that the controversy underscores ongoing ten-

sions over LGBTQ+ representation in public spaces. Still, supporters say the outcome ensures that one of the movement's most enduring symbols will remain visible at one of its most historic landmarks. ::

— Liz Schob



The Rainbow Pride flag continues to fly at Stonewall, per an agreement with the Trump administration.

Shooting at local LGBTQ+ night club in Myrtle Beach

Just before 11 a.m. on April 1 a shooting occurred at the Pulse Ultra Club in Myrtle Beach, a man in a silver car stopped outside of the property and shot at the windshield and back window of the club owner's SUV. Camera footage shows the car stopping on a highway with a man's arm extending out of the passenger window.

The owner of the night club, Ken Phillips explained to ABC news, "I was in my office doing paperwork, and I heard bang, bang, bang, bang, about five or six shots. So I go to my side door from my office and look outside and didn't see anything."

After he heard the shots Phillips called the police and rushed over to his car; that's when he noticed broken glass on his seats and bullet holes in his door. He later realized that there were also bullet holes near his office window. He told reporters that the

event "shook" him and had no idea what the shooter's motives were.

A few hours after the initial call to the police, Timothy Truitt, Jr. was arrested for the shooting. An officer pulled him over at a traffic stop and noticed a gun and bullet shells scattered across his backseat. Truitt was charged with shooting into a dwelling, shooting within city limits, malicious injury to property, possession of a weapon during a violent crime, and hate intimidation. He is currently in Horry County jail with a bond of \$312,000.

Truitt was the first person arrested under the Hate and Intimidation Ordinance in Myrtle Beach. South Carolina is one of the few states without a hate crime law. That is why it was important for groups like Myrtle Beach's Human Rights Commission to draft this ordinance in 2024.

Many believed that the shooter was



Myrtle Beach's Pulse Ultra Club.
CREDIT: Facebook

crime law," Hayes explained, referring to the lax anti-hate laws in South Carolina.

The ordinance's goal is "to protect visitors from and to deter crimes motivated by bias or hate towards person or persons... because of the actual or perceived race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, physical or mental disability, or national origin..." Now, local authorities and people can use this ordinance to stop hate and violence, like the Pulse Ultra Club shooting.

After the shooting, Phillips said he planned to strengthen his security. "I've been in business for 14 years, and my customers and my clientele feel very safe here."

Now that safety has faded, leaving Phillips worrying about what's next.

"Whether they know I'm gay and it's a gay hate crime or whether it's a community thing, and I was just the only vehicle in the parking lot. Either way, it still gives me great concern," Hayes added. ::

— Jaylen Jones

South Carolina calls on SCOTUS to overturn marriage equality

A coalition of lawmakers in South Carolina is urging the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit and reverse its historic decision that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, according to reporting by the state's ABC News 4. Their goal is to shift authority over marriage laws back to individual states rather than leaving it at the federal level.

Jace Woodrum, executive director of the ACLU of South Carolina, argues that state lawmakers do not have the power to strip marriage rights from couples across the country. "Lawmakers in South Carolina cannot undo marriage for all committed couples in this country," says Woodrum. However, Republican Representative Jordan Pace of Berkeley County takes a different view: "The reality is, most of the states never legalized [same-sex marriage]," Pace says. "This was a faulty

court decision."

The resolution under discussion in the South Carolina House centers on a decision made by the state nearly ten years ago regarding same-sex marriage. Woodrum has criticized the effort, describing the lawmak-



'Lawmakers in South Carolina cannot undo marriage for all committed couples in this country.' – Jace Woodrum, executive director of SC ACLU.
CREDIT: Screen Capture

ers behind it as extreme.

The group behind the resolution, known as the Freedom Caucus, (a group of 30-40 South Carolina Republican politicians) contends that the Supreme Court's decision on marriage equality was invalid. They argue it depended on a misreading of the 14th Amendment and claim that two justices should not have participated in the case because they had previously officiated same-sex weddings. The caucus maintains that marriage laws should be set by states, not determined by federal courts.

It's important to note the South Carolina Freedom Caucus has actively pursued a socially conservative agenda targeting LGBTQ+ rights, focusing particularly on transgender youth, gender-affirming care and school policies. Among the history of anti-LGBTQ+ taken by the South Carolina Freedom Caucus:

- Gender-Affirming Care Bans
- Forced "Outing" of Transgender Students
- Restricting LGBTQ+ Topics in Schools
- Removal of LGBTQ+ Books
- Opposition to Hate Crimes
- Blocking State Funds for Transgender Care
- License to Discriminate Bills

While the resolution itself would not

change the law, the ACLU says it highlights the priorities of certain state leaders. Advocates for marriage equality are encouraging residents and public officials to stay engaged and push back against potential future legislation.

Woodrum also noted that efforts by some lawmakers extend beyond marriage, pointing to other proposed bills affecting transgender individuals. He argues these initiatives do not reflect the views of most South Carolinians. "These lawmakers are fringe extremists," says Woodrum. "[They] do not represent the feelings and priorities of most South Carolinians. They should be spending time on Healthcare and not this. All LGBTQ South Carolinians [should] get involved in advocacy, whether your life is impacted or not."

Pace, meanwhile, acknowledged that the resolution is symbolic but said it could influence future legal debates. He raised concerns about where legal boundaries might be drawn in the future, questioning whether other forms of marriage could be permitted if limits are not clearly defined. He added that the intent of the resolution is not to target LGBTQ+ individuals, but rather reestablish what he describes as "a traditional definition of marriage." ::

— David Aaron Moore

What is an 'NSPM-7 Joint Mission Center'?

A controversial national security directive is drawing renewed scrutiny following the release of the Trump administration's latest federal budget, with LGBTQ+ advocates warning the combined policies could have far-reaching civil liberties implications.

Known as National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 (NSPM-7), it was originally issued in September 2025 and directs federal agencies to expand efforts to combat what it defines as domestic terrorism and politically motivated violence. While the directive does not reference specific LGBTQ+ communities, its broad language – including the words "gender" and "extremism" – has raised concerns among civil rights groups as the budget calls for the creation of a "NSPM-

7 Joint Mission Center."

In addition to gender, other labels the administration brands as extremist include "anti-Americanism," "anti-capitalism," "anti-Christianity" and "hostility toward those who hold traditional American views."

Hina Shamsi of the American Civil Liberties Union, has publicly warned about the dangers of broad domestic terrorism frameworks. She has argued in policy statements that vague definitions can chill free speech, disproportionately affect marginalized communities and target non-profits and activists with a false and stigmatizing label. In a statement following the release of the budget, she said this: "President Trump has launched yet another effort to investigate



Proposed 'mission center' could be used against legal protests deemed 'extremist.'

and intimidate his critics ... [and] those standing up for human rights and civil liberties."

LGBTQ+ organizations have echoed those

concerns, pointing to a broader national landscape in which transgender rights, healthcare access and public expression have increasingly become political flash points.

Legal experts note that NSPM-7 does not create new criminal statutes, but it does influence how federal agencies allocate resources and prioritize investigations – an impact that could clearly be amplified by new funding.

As Congress begins debating the budget proposal, LGBTQ+ advocates and legal organizations say they will be closely monitoring implementation and are prepared to

challenge any actions they believe overstep constitutional boundaries. ::

— Qnotes Staff

TIME's list of '100 Most Influential' includes six from LGBTQ+ community

Honorees reflect the continuing impact of our community's culture



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

TIME magazine's 2026 list of the world's most influential people – released April 15 – highlights a growing and increasingly visible list of LGBTQ+ leaders whose impact spans law, sports, politics and the arts. At least six openly LGBTQ+ figures were recognized this year, underscoring what editors describe as a broader integration of queer influence into mainstream global leadership.

From civil rights litigation to Olympic competition and Broadway stages, the honorees reflect a diverse cross-section of influence.

Among the most prominent is **Shannon Minter**, a longtime legal advocate and legal director of the National Center for LGBTQ Rights. Minter has played a central role in high-profile challenges to federal policies affecting transgender Americans, including litigation against military bans. His inclusion signals the continued importance of trans advocacy at a time when LGBTQ+ rights remain contested across the United States.



Shannon Minter

In sports, specifically hockey, **Hilary Knight** earned recognition not only for her Olympic success but also for her advocacy for gender equity in athletics. A team cap-

tain and record-setting player, Knight has pushed for increased visibility and investment in women's sports, positioning herself as both an elite competitor and a leading voice for systemic change.



Hilary Knight

The arts are strongly represented as well. **Jonathan Groff**, a Tony Award-winning performer, was honored for his continued impact on Broadway and beyond. Known for stage roles ranging from "Hamilton" to "Spring Awakening" and a starring role in Netflix's "Mindhunter,"



Jonathan Groff

Groff's recognition reflects both artistic excellence and increased LGBTQ+ representation in mainstream entertainment.

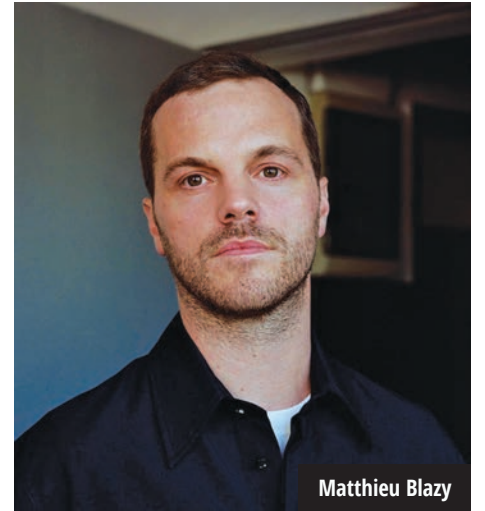
Veteran actor and cultural figure **Alan Cumming** – perhaps best known for such films as "X2: X-Men United" and "Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion" also made



Alan Cumming

the list. Celebrated for a career that spans film, television and theater, alongside his outspoken advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights. His presence highlights the enduring role of cultural figures in shaping public attitudes and visibility.

"Akeelah and the Bee" (2006), starring in Nickelodeon's "True Jackson, VP" (2008–2011), and her acclaimed performance in Jordan Peele's "Nope" (2022) is also on



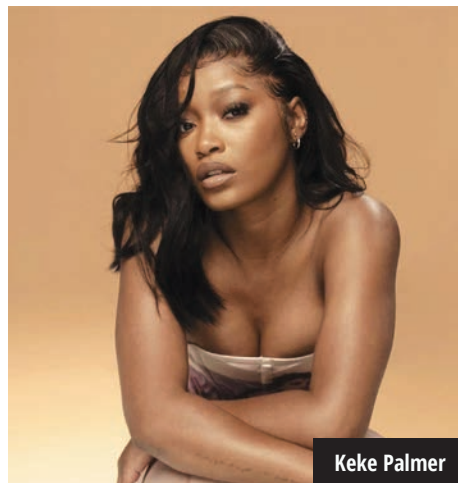
Matthieu Blazy

this year's TIME100. "Her output is prolific, driven by a fierce work ethic that elevates everything around her. And beyond the talent, it's her heart, her generosity, her grace, that truly defines her," writes film producer Brian Glazer.

From the world of fashion and design comes **Matthieu Blazy**. He was named to the TIME100 for reshaping modern luxury fashion and earning recognition as a visionary designer whose innovative leadership at Bottega Veneta is influencing the industry's creative and cultural direction. Currently he serves as the creative director for Chanel.

Together, these six honorees demonstrate the wide-ranging arenas in which LGBTQ+ leaders are shaping public life – from courtrooms and legislatures to global sporting events and the cultural stage.

The 2026 TIME100 arrives at a moment when debates over LGBTQ+ rights, particularly transgender rights, are intensifying in the United States and abroad. Editors noted that influence is not measured solely by popularity, but by the ability to shape conversations and drive change across sectors. This year's LGBTQ+ honorees continue a broader shift: Queer voices no longer emerge at the margins – they define the center of global influence. ::



Keke Palmer

Actress **Keke Palmer**, a renowned actress, singer and television personality famous for her breakout role in



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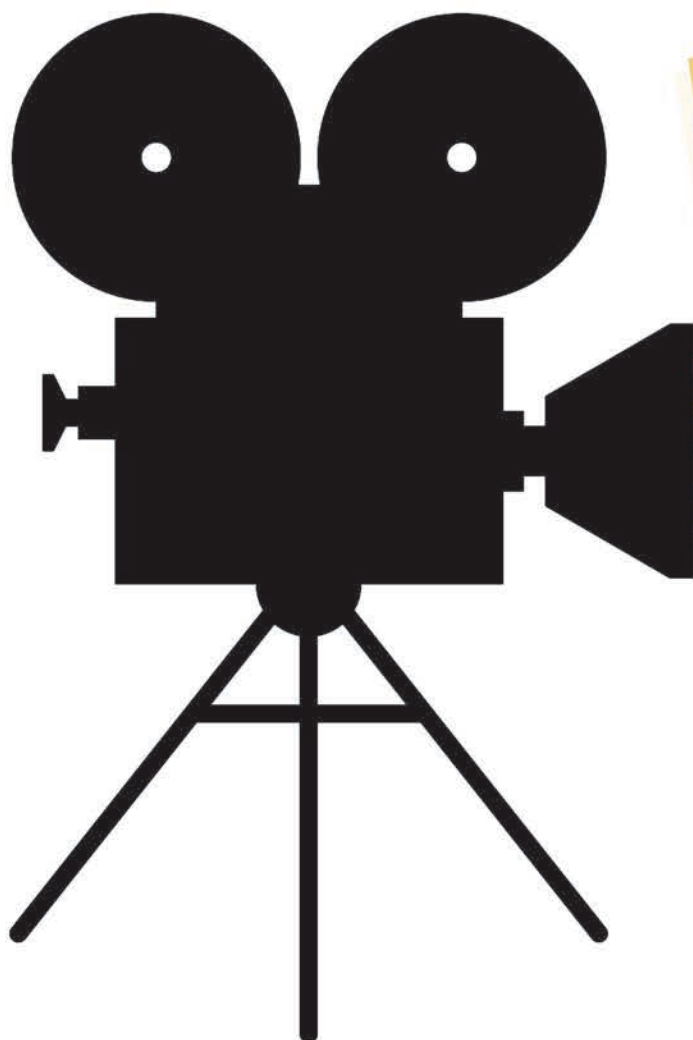
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Organizations celebrate milestone anniversaries

Long term groups have worked with our community over many years



by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

As Qnotes celebrates 40 years of news reporting, storytelling, advocacy and community, we're shining a spotlight on the organizations that have been doing the work right alongside us: lifting, serving and showing up for Charlotte's LGBTQ+ community every single day.

These milestone anniversaries aren't just numbers to applaud, they're powerful testaments to endurance, impact and love in action. For decades, these organizations have been on the front lines, often without fanfare, providing critical services, creating safe spaces and standing in the gap where it matters most. From youth empowerment to HIV support and affirming healthcare, each one represents the heartbeat of the Queen City by meeting people where they are and helping them move forward with dignity, pride and purpose.

The White Party

Beginning as a backyard garden party in 1986, the Farewell to Summer Foundation's White Party in Charlotte has grown into a premier annual fundraiser supporting local LGBTQ+ nonprofits. Focused on community connection, the event takes place in September and is famous for encouraging guests to wear white in a festive, end-of-summer celebration. Today, the celebration remains a major, long-standing and highly anticipated philanthropic gathering that continues to support the community and various non-profits like Rain, Twirl to the World and others. While the event is one of the longest running in the city, it is invitation-only and (as of this writing) there is no known internet presence, other than images shared by party-goers.

Time Out Youth

Celebrating 35 years of impact, Time Out Youth continues to serve as a vital resource and safe space for LGBTQ+ young people across the Charlotte region. Founded on April 8, 1991, the organization was created to uplift and affirm queer and trans youth, a mission that remains central today. "We are just so grateful and excited to continue to

be here doing this work and to be a part of an organization with such a legacy," said Elissa Miller, communications manager. She credits founder

Tonda Taylor with establishing a foundation that still guides the organization's purpose. "She really created this space to do the work that we're doing today; to uplift queer and trans young people and to create a more affirming world for them," Miller shared.

Over three and a half decades, Time Out Youth has grown into a trusted community cornerstone, providing programming, support and advocacy for youth navigating identity, belonging and self-expression.

As the organization marks this milestone, its focus remains firmly on the

future and the young people it serves. Says Miller: "We're just very excited to be able to celebrate and to continue planning for the future. As long as our young people need us, we're going to be here."

For more information, visit Time Out Youth at www.timeoutyouth.org and view their 35th anniversary CEO interview on YouTube.

RAIN, Inc.

For more than three decades, RAIN, Inc. has remained a steady and evolving force in Charlotte's public health landscape. Under the leadership of President & CEO Chelsea Gulden, who has been with the organization since 2010, RAIN has grown significantly in both scope and impact. Gulden reflected on that evolution, sharing that the organization has "expanded to include prevention, and so many essential support services, like mental health, ACA insurance enrollment and services for the unhoused, where they can do laundry and take showers." What began as a grassroots, faith-based response has transformed into a comprehensive model of care that continues to adapt in real time to the needs of the community. This year, RAIN will celebrate its 30th AIDS Walk, a milestone that speaks not only to longevity but to its ability to remain a guiding force. As Gulden put it, "we've had the foresight and understanding to make the changes to remain relevant and impactful for the people that we serve."

At the same time, Gulden is clear-eyed about the ongoing challenges. "It's a constant battle reminding people that HIV is not a problem that we have solved," she said, pointing to the realities that still exist for many clients. "If they're sleeping in the woods, they're not keeping up with their meds... they don't have transportation... they don't have food."

As RAIN approaches its 35th anniversary in 2027, the organization is focused on sustainability and innovation amid rising demand and shrinking federal resources. "We are holding on for the ride, and finding really new and innovative ways that we can do more with less," Gulden explained.

The 29th annual AIDS Walk, coming up on May 30, was originally founded by RAIN 1997. It will serve as both celebration and reminder that the community is "still here, still gathered, still energized." For more information, visit RAIN, Inc. at <https://carolinarain.org/>.

Charlotte Pride

With roots that can be traced back to small, underground events dating back to June 1981 at UNC Charlotte (which featured a softball tournament and roughly 100 attendees), Pride in Charlotte has a long history. Although they often faced potential backlash in the early years, it continued to grow from word-of-

mouth beginnings to include more public picnics and events over the next two days.

The modern era started with the first annual Charlotte Pride Festival in 2001 and a parade introduced in 2013. Now, Pride is held in August and they typically draw over 200,000 visitors to Uptown Charlotte and they're the largest LGBTQ+ celebration in the Carolinas. As they prepare for their 25th anniversary, Charlotte Pride will likely feature a massive festival, diverse performances and a vibrant, city-wide street parade showcasing community, acceptance and cultural pride.

For more details visit their website at <https://charlottepride.org/>.

Charlotte Black Pride

As Charlotte Black Pride celebrates their founding in 2005 and their first event in 2006, the organization continues to stand as a vital pillar for Black LGBTQ+ individuals across the Queen City. Charlotte Black Pride has grown into a trusted space for connection, advocacy and culturally responsive programming. "We're proud to still be here doing this work," said Board Chair Miles A. Perry. "This is about more than events. It's about creating a space where Black LGBTQ+ people feel seen, supported and celebrated."

Over the years, the organization has expanded its reach through health initiatives, community partnerships and annual programming that centers joy while addressing disparities impacting the community.

Reflecting on the organization's journey, Perry emphasized both resilience and responsibility. "There's a legacy here," he said. "We're building on what others started, and we have to honor that by continuing to show up for our community." That commitment shows up in Charlotte Black Pride's focus on health equity, HIV awareness and safe spaces that affirm identity and belonging. Looking ahead, Perry shared a forward-focused vision: "We want to continue growing, reaching more people and making sure our community has access to the resources they need not just during Pride, but year-round." As the organization celebrates this milestone, its mission remains clear. Uplift, empower and create lasting impact for Black LGBTQ+ individuals in Charlotte and beyond. For more information, visit Charlotte Black Pride at <https://charlotteblackpride.org/>.

Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte

Founded in 2006 by John Quillin, the Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte (GMCC) was established to give voice to LGBTQ residents and encourage community through music. The chorus has performed for over 150,000 people, featuring in promi-

nent performances like the Hornets' Pride Night and conducting extensive community outreach. As of 2025, the organization is thriving with over 50 members, encouraging inclusion and creative expression.

You can find more information at <https://www.gmccharlotte.org/>.

Quality Comprehensive Health Center

Celebrating 20 years of service, Quality Comprehensive Health Center continues to expand its reach and impact across the region. CEO Dr. Ra'Shawn Flournoy shared that "20 years mean continuing to push the work that we have to do," noting the organization is "just at the brink" of what's possible. Plans to "expand and open up multiple locations," launch a mobile clinic for rural communities, and use "energy-efficient vehicles to deliver prescriptions" reflect a forward-thinking approach to care. Their first fundraising gala at the Charlotte Museum of History marked a milestone moment.

"We didn't reach our goal, quite," Flournoy explained. "The biggest thing was actually just getting started."

At the core of that work are the lives being transformed every day. "I'm really proud of when patients come in, and they get the change in the treatment they need," said Flournoy, pointing to individuals who have moved from homelessness to stability through wraparound services.

"Nothing makes me happier than being able to get flagged down by one of our patients with a story like this," including those overcoming domestic violence and substance abuse. As funding challenges persist, the organization has shifted its model to use pharmacy-driven revenue. Flournoy shared, the goal is "to expand our reach and be able to help folks that can't pay," ensuring continued access to critical, life-saving care. For more information, visit Quality Comprehensive Health Center at <https://www.qchealth.org/>.

Rosedale Health and Wellness

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, Rosedale Health and Wellness reflects a journey rooted in resilience, continuity and community care. Founded in October 2006, the organization emerged when Dr. Cruikshank and Program Director Dale Pierce made a bold decision during a time of transition. "We just went out, found space, and picked up from where

we left off," Pierce offered, emphasizing their commitment to ensuring patients, especially those living with HIV, experienced no disruption in care.

"The staff was the same, the continuity of care was the same. We were just in a different building." What began with a small team of four has grown significantly,



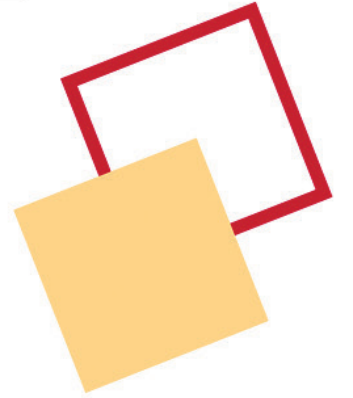
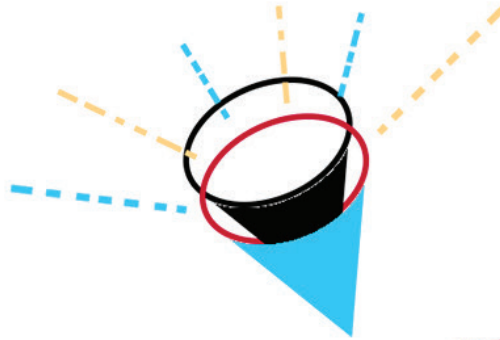
See **Organizations** on page 15

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Remembering the visionary behind Qnotes

Roberts Sheets was a significant contributor to Charlotte LGBTQ culture



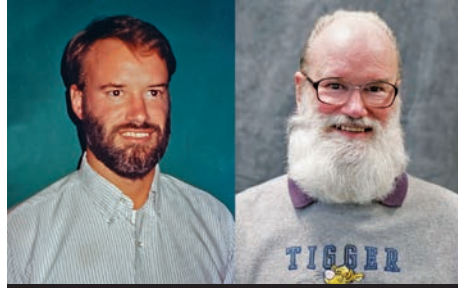
by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Looking back over Charlotte's LGBTQ+ cultural history, some names are remembered, honored and revered. Many in our community remember the names of individuals like political activist Don King, cultural contributor Dan Kirsch and drag legend Boom Boom LaTour.

Far too often, people who make a difference slip through the cracks. They don't have awards named after them and the homage they deserve never happens. Not everyone needs that kind of attention, but it doesn't mean they're any less deserving.

One of those people is Robert Sheets. Born Jan. 9, 1951 in Charleston, W. Va., he spent several years living in Charlotte beginning in the early 1980s. Public records show his last residence in Charlotte was vacated Jan. 23, 2003.

So who was Sheets, and just what did he do? He was instrumental in founding Queen City Quordinators (QCQ), an LGBTQ+ action and community organization known for some of the city's earliest gay and lesbian media, Pride picnics at Bryant Park and local cultural events.



A young Robert Sheets was instrumental in visualizing the idea of Qnotes as a newspaper. CREDIT: Qnotes Archives / Courtesy photo

As a member and president of QCQ for a time, he was key in the creation of *Qnotes* and served as an original publisher.

"I met him in early '86, or late '85," recalls *Qnotes* Publisher Jim Yarbrough. "And he asked me to join the board of Queen City Quordinators. He was the president, and I joined as the treasurer. He visualized *Qnotes* as a newspaper and at the same time he wanted to produce a Charlotte-based leather contest associated with the National Drummer Contest.

"So we produced the event, it was a preliminary to Mr. Drummer, which was held in Chicago. We had this contest at the Grady Cole Center, and it was really out there,"

Yarbrough laughed. "It was well attended. People came from all over the country to participate and compete. It's definitely history for Charlotte. After it was all over with the city told us, 'don't ever do that again or you'll be arrested.' We featured the contest on the first edition of *Qnotes*," Yarbrough added.

Fortunately, QCQ turned its attention to producing *Qnotes*. Although Sheets was really the idea man in this case, he eventually drifted towards other projects.

Of all his efforts and accomplishments in the Queen City, Sheets was probably best known as the first openly gay man to run for Charlotte City Council. Not just once, but twice. Regrettably, he also lost twice. But he was a presence to be reckoned with and he dared to tempt the societal standards of the times to provide representation for his community.

"That's correct," Yarbrough recalls. "He did run twice and he didn't win either time. But he was there, and he was the first gay man in Charlotte to attempt it."

Multiple attempts to track down Sheets prior to his passing on July 9, 2024 were unsuccessful but additional information on his later years can be gleaned from an obituary posted from his hometown of Charleston, W. Va.

"Robert was an icon to Charleston, not only the gay community. His love and compassion showed in every selfless act

he took," wrote one friend on his memorial guest book. "I will certainly miss seeing you around and always being greeted with your big smile and wave," posted another. "And a kind word when we would speak."

Sheets was listed as 73 years of age when he passed away at the Charleston area Medical Center. Although he didn't win a seat on the Charlotte City Council, he did serve as a City of Charleston council member for three consecutive terms, between 2007 to 2022.

He was lauded in the obituary for much more: his role as an LGBTQ+ activist in the area; his job as the former manager of a local establishment known as The Tap Room and for founding the annual Pride picnic held in Charleston's Coonskin Park.

But it didn't stop there. Sheets was the president of Charleston's chapter of Prime Timers, the vice president of the Living AIDS Memorial Garden; a long time member of the Kanawha County Democratic Executive Committee; a Power of One recipient and a mentor to multiple nonprofit organizations.

While he may have stayed out of the social media spotlight, comments on his obituary from friends show that he was well loved for his efforts here in North Carolina and West Virginia.

Although Sheets is no longer with us, be a part of *Qnotes*' history and an important early contributor to Charlotte's LGBTQ+ history. ::



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The man behind the pages: Jim Yarbrough

How he became the publisher and owner of Qnotes and plans to keep it going



by Jaylen Jones
Qnotes Staff Writer

Jim Yarbrough was born in Alabama and moved to Duluth, Ga., a small town north of Atlanta, at the age of nine. After high school, he worked in fast food and studied accounting. He would later take on a management training program in Roses Discount department stores.

Moving around Georgia and South Carolina, he worked as a senior manager for six years until he was fired for being gay. Yarbrough was working at a store in South Carolina until his boss explained that the vice president wanted to see him in the corporate office. He drove to meet the vice president, who told him to take the weekend off. He said he would call Jim back on Monday and let him know "where your next assignment will be."

On Monday at 5 p.m., Yarbrough called back to follow up. His vice president responded, "Your services are no longer needed, and don't worry about calling a lawyer, it won't do you any good." Yarbrough explained, "I don't think I'll ever forget those words."

After he was fired, Yarbrough moved to Charlotte, managing Wendy's restaurants and later convenience and office supplies stores.

In the mid '80s, Yarbrough received a proposition from his roommate, Robert Sheets, president of Queens City Quordinators (QCQ) and asked Yarbrough to serve as treasurer of the organization.

He agreed. "I paid the bills, wrote the checks and did the bookkeeping." As Yarbrough handled finances, Don King, who worked for the Charlotte Observer at the time, was hired to be the editor and handle production. As the organization grew, so did Yarbrough's role; he moved from treasurer to vice president to president of the organization.

QCQ provided information, emergency phone lines, a speaker's bureau and fundraisers to support the gay community. The organization would later create the Qnotes newspaper in 1986. The first cover story was on the QCQ-produced Drummer contest, a leather event hosted at the Grady Cole Center next to Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) in June 1986. Once the newspaper gained traction, the team felt empowered. "It was exciting," Yarbrough recalls. "I don't think any of us had the vision that it was gonna last this long. We knew the paper was needed."

Needed it was, as Qnotes was one of the few queer newspapers in the south, along with Atlanta, Florida and Raleigh's paper, *The Front Page*, which merged with Qnotes in 2006.

All of those publications existed during an oppressive and anti-LGBTQ+ government, both locally and nationally. Many people lived their lives in secret, and it was often challenging to find writers and individuals to interview who wanted to share personal information, like their full names, or any name at all.

"It was a hard time in the '80s..." Yarbrough continued, "We [Qnotes team] needed to be there to tell those stories and let people know who to vote for."

For safety, the newspaper did not disclose the addresses of some events and fundraisers; instead, people called the number attached to the event's description. Jim added, "We didn't want to publicize where we were meeting, or where groups like AA were meeting - because it was dangerous to do so." The only locations that gave address information were gay bars and churches, but their safety wasn't guaranteed.

"People were genuinely scared of losing their jobs..." Yarbrough continued, "And their safety as well. It wasn't unheard of for people to be gay bashed [assaulted because of one's sexuality]. I had someone come to my front door with a baseball bat once," he recalled. "You had to be cautious."

Fear didn't stop Yarbrough and the Qnotes team from supporting their community, and people were grateful. "We would go through thousands of copies just in Scorpio. It was amazing how much the paper got picked up, and people valued it," Yarbrough said. "That's where people could go to be themselves and pick up the paper when they left that night."

As the papers' audience grew, so did the visibility of queer people. Towards the '90s, people's perception of the LGBTQ+ community started to move from fear to acceptance. More people were living out and proud, and Qnotes felt that change. This was amplified as the 1987 national march on Washington was approaching.

Then in September, Yarbrough received a call from King. After a few minutes King said, "Oh, by the way, there won't be another Qnotes; I don't have time to do it anymore." Yarbrough answered back, "Yes, there will be another Qnotes. Somehow we'll get it done."

Three board members of QCQ - Yarbrough, plate maker Dean Gaskey and graphic designer Joel Smith - began work. Their first issue in October 1987 was only four pages long and a week late, but it still had a special place in Yarbrough's heart. The next issue had a panoramic photo of the 1987 march on Washington taken by Yarbrough himself. QCQ sponsored an adventure to DC by train with about 30 people to capture the historic moment. "It was amazing, that gave me energy to push this [Qnotes] forward."

"A couple years later, things were begin-

ning to open up a little bit," and QCQ, "had outlived its usefulness," Yarbrough continued, "but the one thing that [we] did not want to go away was Qnotes."

Yarbrough bought Qnotes from QCQ in 1989 and set up a company called Charlotte Advocacy Network to run the paper. The idea was to share ownership with all of the people who were involved, 32 in total. That model collapsed when one of the contributors stole most of its assets from their office. Being the majority shareholder, Yarbrough dealt with the loss and got back on track without missing a beat, running things out of his home.

In the early nine-ties, Qnotes moved to a two-room office suite in the Varnadore building - often called the Gay Tower. It was home to MCC Charlotte and a few small LGBTQ+-owned businesses and nonprofits, including Time Out Youth.

The paper flourished, with 2007 being one of its best years before the recession that hit the following year complicated things. In 2009, Qnotes was the last tenant to move out of the Gay Tower when the owner shut the building down due to maintenance issues, notably the air conditioning system. After a two-year span on Commonwealth Ave., Qnotes permanently made its home in the back of White Rabbit, which Yarbrough had bought in 2007.

As Qnotes scaled back, other barriers rose, creating more challenges for Yarbrough and his team. To help, Yarbrough took on the role of editor and tried to figure out how Qnotes could thrive after its major setback in 2008.

Today, Yarbrough is still the publisher of Qnotes and can be found in the back of White Rabbit almost every day. He and his current team of writers and editors have made monumental decisions to ensure that Qnotes stays for another 40 years.

This 40th anniversary print edition will be the last of the regular biweekly news-



papers as the publication moves towards digital and multicasting. Though it will be sad to leave print in the past, Yarbrough is excited about Qnotes' future.

"It's time we move on with the times," If you're gonna be relevant, you have to evolve... and that's what we're doing. I think it's going to be a good thing." ::

Writer's Note: I began interning for Qnotes in February, and throughout that time, I've had the pleasure of getting to know the paper's publisher, Jim Yarbrough. The first time we met, he introduced himself with a smile and an open heart. This kindness wasn't a one-time occurrence. He has spent decades dedicating himself to the LGBTQ+ community and, against all odds, has remained passionate about Qnotes and queer visibility. The conversations I've had with him have revealed how special Yarbrough is and has been for the community. He has faced personal and professional challenges that could have broken anyone's determination, yet he prevails. Though I've only heard bits of Yarbrough's story, the 40th edition of Qnotes has allowed me to learn more about his journey.

Organizations from page 12

now serving more than 5,000 patients through clinical services and nearly 2,000 through support programs. Over the years, Rosedale expanded its reach through clinical trials, Ryan White-funded services, and a holistic care model.

"Most of the HIV medications that have come on the market in the last 20 years have

run through our clinical trials department," Pierce noted, underscoring the organization's impact beyond the local community.

For Pierce, the 20-year milestone is both meaningful and hard-earned. "It's significant that any organization doing primarily HIV work can last 20 years but we haven't just sustained, we've grown," he said. That growth includes the launch of Dudley's Place in 2020, a nonprofit extension provid-

ing critical support services, and a broader evolution into a safe, inclusive healthcare space. "We're really taking care of the whole patient," Pierce explained. "People want to know they have a safe space where their healthcare is not going to be judged."

Looking ahead, Rosedale is focused on expanding mental health services, outreach and prevention efforts while staying grounded in its mission.

"We always say we're here to reduce the barriers to care," he said. "And while there is still a need, we want to make sure we're right here when people need it." Reflecting on the future, Pierce added a powerful perspective: "I would love to be put out of business... but while there's still a need, we'll continue doing the work."

For more information, visit Rosedale Health and Wellness at www.rosedalehealth.org. ::

40 years of Qnotes coverage

Decades of history confirm growth and strength of LGBTQ+ community

by *Qnotes* Staff

As a newspaper, *Qnotes* has been serving Charlotte for 40 years. We've collected here some of the most significant stories that have appeared on our pages and online during that time. There are more, so many more. We tried to keep it to one big story a year. And we did, mostly. Although there are a few years where you'll find a couple of stories. But we simply didn't have the space to include them all. We hope you'll be enlightened, entertained and educated with this look back over the past 40 years. As we move towards the future, we plan to share the accomplishments that have yet to be achieved, as our community continues to grow.



Charlotte launches nine new LGBTQ+ groups (1986)

• **1986**
Charlotte launches 9 new LGBTQ+ groups

As our world began to expand, Charlotte saw the launch of 9 LGBTQ groups. They were: One Nation Indivisible (political activism); Queen City Friends (lesbian); Gay/Lesbian Switchboard (sexual ambivalence about sexual orientation); The Tradesmen (leather men); PFLAG (Charlotte chapter); Gay Parents Coalition (those with children); Closet Buster Production (forum on Cablevision); Charlotte Lambda Chorale (choir); and New Life Players (MCC/New Life dramatic productions).

• **1987**
Police take aim at gay men cruising

The biggest story to affect the LGBTQ community was a relentless surge in arrests in parks, adult bookstores, and entrapment by vice squad officers from the Charlotte Police. Other stories instruct how to handle an arrest, how a man was able to get some support from his employer, and how Don King created a group for arrested men.

• **1988**
Raleigh adopts LGBTQ+ supportive policy

In positive news, the Raleigh city council adopted a city ordinance that amended the city laws to make discrimination based on one's sexual orientation illegal.

• **1989**
New terms for HIV/AIDS

With the advent and spread of AIDS, the language that described the stages of the disease, along with other markers, was highlighted. Putting HIV/AIDS into perspective helped to increase the understanding of the pandemic.

• **1990**
Harvey Gantt talks with *Qnotes*

Former Charlotte mayor, Harvey Gantt, was extensively

interviewed in his bid for the U.S. Senate on his thoughts about his opponent, Sen. Jesse Helms, Gantt's support of the LGBTQ community, and human rights.

• **1991**
Cracker Barrel fires gay employees

Activists took to the streets to fight rampant discrimination concerning gay firings at Cracker Barrel Country Stores. This became both a local initiative and a national campaign. Protests ensued, including Sunday lunch sit-ins where participants took over tables and only ordered water, keeping the tables occupied to affect business profits.

• **1992**
Time Out Youth

Charlotte's youth-focused Time Out Youth celebrated its first anniversary, with the organization's board voting to make founder Tonda Taylor the first executive director.

Charlotte Police cancel meeting with LGBTQ+ community

LGBTQ community members were scheduled to have a historic first town meeting with local law enforcement and parks officials to discuss arrests, hiring policies, and treatment of gay crime victims.

• **1993**
Durham YNCA welcomes same-sex couples

Durham's YMCAs announced that it would welcome LGBTQ couples as "household" members within the organization. The YMCA wanted to be more accepting of the broader community.

• **1994**
North Carolina ends anonymous HIV tests

In a blow to those affected by or concerned about their AIDS status, the North Carolina Commission for Health



Carrboro elects NC's first gay mayor Mike Nelson (1995)

Services decided to end anonymous HIV testing. At the end of the meeting, activists complained about broken promises from the state, questioning the value of the new state AIDS Advisory Council and going to court.

Triangle area town approves Domestic Partnership

Carrboro, N.C.'s Board of Aldermen unanimously approved a domestic partnership ordinance as a precursor to gay marriage. It was sponsored by then-Alderman Mike Nelson.

• **1995**
Carrboro elects NC's first gay mayor

Mike Nelson became the state's first gay mayor, presiding over Carrboro, N.C. He was also one of five openly gay mayors in the U.S. He remarked that he was not a gay politician, but a politician who happened to be gay.

• **1996**
'Angels in America' controversy

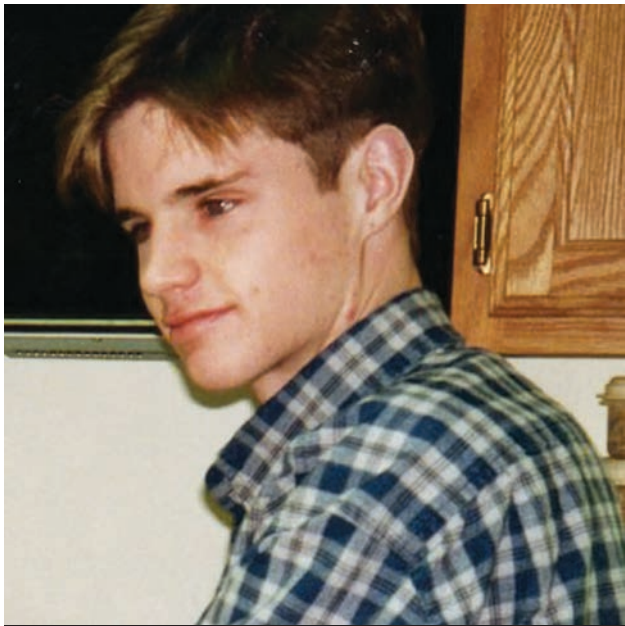
Arch-conservative Rev. Joe Chambers whipped up major controversy over the staging of "Angels in America" in Charlotte due to its nude scene and simulated gay sex acts. This went on to having funding pulled from the Arts & Science Council and extensive governmental discussions. The Pulitzer Prize-winning show had had successful runs in Greensboro and Durham. To cap off the first decade for *Qnotes*, North Carolina's General Assembly banned same-sex marriage in a nine-day railroaded legislative bill. After a mere 28-minute discussion, it passed by a vote of 98-10, although it was later overturned.

• **1997**
Alleged gay killer linked to Versace murder

Andrew Cunanan began his killing spree on April 27, 1997, murdering Jeffrey Trail in Minneapolis. He then killed David Madson, Lee Miglin, and William Reese before fatally shooting Gianni Versace in Miami Beach on July 15, 1997, ending a cross-country spree that shocked the nation. He would never pay for his crimes or be apprehended by police. He took his own life while hiding out in a rarely used houseboat in Miami July 23, 1997. The boat sank five months later.



Cracker Barrel fires gay employees (1991)



Matthew Shepard (1998)

• 1998
Matthew Shepard killed

Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming, was brutally attacked on October 6, 1998, near Laramie Wyoming by Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. Left tied to a fence and severely beaten, Shepard died six days later on October 12, 1998. Both of his killers were later convicted and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

MCC Charlotte announces plan to buy building

The Metropolitan Community Church of Charlotte announces their plans to purchase a church, located at 1825 Eastway Drive, for \$775,000. The congregation would move into the church July of 1999, and stay there until 2015, when it was announced that it would be sold.

• 1999
Mecklenburg County Commission restores funding for arts

Nearly two years after enacting policy on April 1, 1997 for Charlotte Mecklenburg that prevented funding for the arts that depicted LGBTQ+ characters, story lines or artistic depictions, the newly elected Mecklenburg county board of commissioners voted eight to one on February 16 to rescind the policy and restore funding to arts regardless of any themes related to sexual orientation.

• 2000
Community gets national landmark at Stonewall

After recognition by the federal government as a part of the National Register of Historic Places, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated the Stonewall Inn a national monument on March 1, 2000. It continues to serve that purpose today, despite the Trump administrations attempt to remove the Rainbow Progress flag from the site in early 2026. Trump & Co. later reversed course and the flag has been allowed to remain in place.

• 2001
Andrew Reyes disappears

He lived the life of a high-stakes roller and a mover and shaker in Charlotte's LGBTQ+ community, served as the head of the Mecklenburg County Democratic party and attempted a run for political office. Then he abruptly disappeared during a drive to the northeast, after the family of his recently deceased employer and the federal government began to question why and how he suddenly had a seemingly endless flow of cash. Turns out he was skimming millions from his employer's bank account, and moving it to his. *Qnotes* would follow this case for several years, including his capture and arrest, conviction and eventual early release from prison.

• 2002
Sue Myrick moves head first with support of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation

Former Charlotte mayor turned U.S. Representative Myrick was never an ally for the LGBTQ+ community, so

it came as no surprise she gave her unyielding support to all anti-LGBTQ+ legislation introduced in 2002. Among Myrick's extremist right wing accomplishments covered by *Qnotes* over the years: opposition to Marriage Equality, opposition to Workplace Protections, a no vote on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a yes vote on banning adoptions by same-sex couples and support for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Myrick no longer holds office and is 84 years old.

• 2003
Lawrence v. Texas

The landmark case *Lawrence v. Texas* began on September 17, 1998, when Houston police entered John Lawrence's apartment after a false weapons report and arrested him and Tyron Garner for engaging in consensual sex. The U.S. Supreme Court issued its final decision on June 26, 2003, ruling 6-3 that Texas's "Homosexual Conduct" law was unconstitutional. This historic ruling effectively decriminalized same-sex activity nationwide

Suspect in Atlanta Olympics and gay club bombing captured in North Carolina

Eric Rudolph, a domestic terrorist motivated by anti-abortion and anti-gay views, was captured on May 31, 2003, in Murphy, North Carolina, after five years on the run. Rudolph was responsible for the Centennial Olympic Park bombing on July 27, 1996, in Atlanta, along with 1997 bombings at a lesbian bar and abortion clinic, and a 1998 deadly clinic bombing in Alabama. He hid in the Appalachian wilderness, becoming one of the FBI's most wanted before his arrest behind a grocery store. Rudolph pleaded guilty in 2005 to avoid the death penalty and is serving life without parole at a Supermax prison in Colorado



Lawrence v. Texas (2003)

• 2004
Julia Bozeman elected first Lesbian North Carolina state senator

Julia Boseman made history in November 2004 as the first openly gay person elected to the North Carolina General Assembly. Representing District 9, the Democrat served three terms in the state Senate from January 2005 to January 2011, advocating for education and civil rights.

• 2005
HIV infections in US reach 1 million in 2005

In June 2005, the CDC estimated that over 1 million people were living with HIV in the U.S., marking a significant milestone. On a positive note, the rise was largely attributed to improved, long-term survival due to antiretroviral therapies, rather than just new infections.

• 2006
Qnotes turns 20, merges with The Front Page

On the year of *Qnotes* 20th anniversary, the company announced the merger of the Triangle-area based Front Page with the Charlotte area *Qnotes*. The merger allowed *Qnotes* to expand readership and coverage.

• 2007
ACLU appoints gay attorney to cover South

In April 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) appointed attorney Christine Sun to lead its LGBTQ+ and AIDS Project in the Southern United States. Sun focused on

expanding the organization's presence to combat discrimination and ensure constitutional protections for LGBTQ+ students, gay Southerners, and individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the region.

• 2008
Task Force director: HIV is a "gay disease."

In a speech on February 6 about the state of the LGBTQ movement, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman announced to more than 1,500 activists from around the world the following: "We cannot deny this is a gay disease," Foreman said, in reference to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Needless to say, that didn't go over very well. Activists and queer media called foul and discounted his remarks angrily. He quickly resigned.

• 2009
Murder in Fayetteville

An openly gay man and a popular drag performer in Fayetteville, North Carolina was found dead in the early morning hours of April 14, 2009, in Fayetteville. Jimmy McCullough was known on stage as Image Devera. Zachary Oakes was charged in McCullough's murder the following month. According to court documents he was convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole in 2012.

• 2010
Uncounted homeless LGBTQ+ youth face cold streets, few resources

In this article, *Qnotes* explored the growing epidemic of LGBTQ+ youth facing homelessness. Multiple reasons behind the occurrence were clear: the economic downturn of 2008 left many individuals homeless, including LGBTQ+ folks. The difficulty faced by many youth identifying as gender fluid and non-binary was amplified when it came to finding employment and housing. Resources for members of our youth community facing such difficulties were limited.

• 2011
Lawana Mayfield makes history as city's first openly gay elected official

Mayfield was elected to represent District 3 in 2011, making history as the first openly LGBTQ+ elected individual to serve as a council representative. She would serve four terms in this district-based role. In 2019, she chose to give up her seat to run for an At-Large seat representing the entire city. Unfortunately, she lost in the Democratic primary on September 10, 2019, but returned to office in September 2022 after winning an At-Large seat. Her current term is scheduled to end on December 6, 2027. Will she run again?



Lawana Mayfield makes history (2011)

• 2012
How does Obamacare affect me?

In the months following the passage of President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA), *Qnotes* decided to explore how it would impact the LGBTQ community. According to our report, the ACA promised to prevent insurance companies from denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions, which would be more advantageous for those coping with HIV/AIDS issues and offer substance abuse treatment, as well as counseling.

• 2013

Justice served: DOMA Prop 8 struck down

After its passage in 2019, DOMA was subject to numerous lawsuits and repeal efforts. In *United States v. Windsor* (2013), the U.S. Supreme Court declared Section 3 of DOMA unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause, thereby requiring the federal government to recognize same-sex marriages conducted by the states. Needless to say, DOMA remained in Onotes' content coverage until 2015

• 2014

Love wins out: Charlotte's first LGBTQ+ married couples celebrate

Although many have forgotten North Carolina Gained access to same-sex marriage eight months before the *Obergefell v. Hodges*, it's true. It actually happened and *Qnotes* reported on the achievement when it became legal in the state on October 10, 2014. On that date, a U.S. District Court judge ruled in *United Church of Christ v. Cooper* that the state's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional, immediately allowing same-sex couples to marry. At *Qnotes*, we explored the happiness and excitement among multiple same-sex couples ready to legalize their relationships.

• 2015

Youth activist mourned in Charlotte: Blake Brockington

Local Charlotte transgender youth activist Blake Brockington, 18, died as a result of suicide on March 23. A recent graduate of East Mecklenburg High School, Brockington was held in high regard by many. According to the story in *Qnotes*, Brockington had been experiencing depression and difficulty with transitioning.

Marriage Equality achieved with Supreme Court win

Obergefell v. Hodges (June 26, 2015) was the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. In a 5–4 decision, the Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment requires states to license same-sex marriages and recognize those performed in other states. The ruling deemed marriage a fundamental right, guaranteeing equal dignity to same-sex couples.

• 2016

Terror attacks result in multiple deaths at Florida Pulse Night Club

A mass shooting occurred at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida in the early morning hours of Sunday, June 12, 2016. The attack began at approximately 2:02 a.m. and lasted for roughly three hours before the shooter, Omar Mir Seddiq, was killed by police during a tactical breach of the building. A total of 49 people were killed and 53 others were injured.

North Carolina: First in Flight, First in gay porn?

According to a survey published by Pornhub, North Carolina is (was at that time?) among the top five states very busy visiting gay porn sites in the country! Interestingly enough, the survey also found viewing activ-

ity occurred more frequently in states dominated by Republicans and religion and requests for videos of well-endowed black men were at the top of the list for that area.

• 2017

TOY finds there's 'no place like home'

As reported in *Qnotes*, Time Out Youth closed on the purchase of a permanent home for their LGBTQ+ Youth services organization in late December of 2016. In the years to come, Time Out Youth has worked with clergy, educators and young people to change the landscape and local environment for LGBT youth. Of important note, TOY hosted the area's first LGBT youth prom and it remains in the same location today at 3800 Monroe Road.

• 2018

New 'religious freedom' rule places LGBTQ health, well-being at risk

New rules and legislation in North Carolina and the Carolinas, often driven by conservative advocates, increasingly impact LGBTQ health and well-being. These developments include efforts to restrict gender-affirming care, limit LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination protections, and permit exceptions for religious institutions, threatening access to healthcare and creating a hostile climate.

• 2019

New report details challenges, rewards for LGBTQ people in rural America

A 2019 report by the Movement Advancement Project (MAP) highlighted that 2.9–3.8 million LGBTQ+ people in rural America face unique challenges, including higher poverty rates, social isolation and limited legal protections—alongside what many consider rewards, such as strong community ties, increased visibility and a slower pace of life.

• 2020

The Pandemic

A survey by Community Marketing & Insights (CMI) "COVID-19 and LGBTQ Travel in 2020," painted a very panicked portrait during the COVID-19 pandemic. Comprised of data from an online survey of 1,864 self-identified members of America's LGBTQ community the report found 69 percent of participants indicated extreme or moderate pent-up desire to travel, while 72 percent of the travelers in the study canceled vacations because of COVID-19. It's not surprising – COVID-19 was the underlying cause of roughly 385,000 deaths in 2020.



The Pandemic (2020)

• 2022

Jerk of the Year: Mark Robinson

While we labeled him brash, delusional and a potential nut-job, former NC Lt. Mark Robinson did just about everything he could to prove our point: he called the LGBTQ+ "filth" and equated us to "maggots" and "flies." He claimed God formed him to fight against LGBTQ rights and visibility, which he argued will lead to the end of civilization. Robinson also advocated for arresting transgender women for using restrooms that aligned with their gender identity and, suggesting they instead "find a corner outside somewhere" to use. And there was so much more to come...

• 2023

Biden Signs Respect For Marriage Act

When things started to look really dark and there was hatred filling the air aplenty, President Joe Biden came to the rescue while extremist right-wingers began to contemplate ways to overturn the Marriage Equality victory. His hands were tied, but there was one thing he could do – and he accomplished it with the help of North Carolina Republican Tom Tillis: the Respect for Marriage Act. What does it do? It requires state level governments (nationwide) to recognize same sex marriages performed in their own state (if the state in question decides to invoke a state-wide amendment or already has one on their state constitution that was not removed in 2015) and recognize all same-sex marriages performed in states still allowing marriage equality.

• 2024

Misuse of Funds and the End of a Career

In the final weeks of December 2023, an unmarked envelope was dropped at the front counter of White Rabbit Books. That lead to a story we reported about that ran during the first week of January and continued to cover throughout the year. As reported by anonymous sources and confirmed legal documentation, former Campus Pride Director Shane Windmeyer had misused funds directed at the very non-profit he had co-founded. After Campus Pride Chair Candis Cox and Co-Chair and Treasurer Christopher Bylone requested attorney Lee Robertson's opinion, he suggested a forensics audit, which – at a price tag of \$20k – was not something Campus Pride could afford. Instead – and even though Windmeyer acknowledged the amount he had apparently misspent was unknown and likely a higher figure – a repayment was agreed upon of \$100,000. The community was outraged. At last contact with Cox, Windmeyer had paid most of the agreed upon settlement and danced off into furthering his drag career as the plus-sized Brunch Diva Buff Faye. Despite the fact Cox had said Campus Pride would continue, it has not. No email updates, the website has nothing newer than November 2023, and who knows what became of the money Windmeyer repaid? For all the good Campus Pride had seemingly done, it appears to have been squandered.

Project 2025: the guide to dismantle Democracy as we know it

In the lead-up to Donald Trump's campaign to retake



Marriage Equality (2015)

the oval office, something sinister was revealed: Project 2025. What was it? Trump claimed to know nothing about it, but he lied. Created by The Heritage Foundation and a host of Trump devotees and former appointees, it lays out every federal government agency and how the next conservative president could do away with Biden administration directives and organize around right wing ideals. As evidenced by Trump's trajectory since his claimed election, he has stuck to that guidebook like glue.

• 2025
Kimmel Back on air, Trump says 'Let Jimmy rot'

Donald Trump is sensitive. He gets his feelings hurt easily. And when he does, watch out! Chances are, he's coming for you. Throughout his political career, he's been non-stop comedic fodder for comedy and late night TV show hosts. If someone made fun of him, he immediately took aim with every disparaging remark he could think of. And that's what he did with Jimmy Kimmel. He poked at the network so hard, they caved and suspended Kimmel. But the American public



Rainbow Flag at Stonewall (2026)

wasn't comfortable with silencing the media, so they fought back. They called, emailed, texted and complained. And now? Kimmel's back on the job and still throwing barbs at Donald.

• 2026
Rainbow Flag at Stonewall removed, replaced then a lawsuit follows. What's next?

This might be the straw that broke the camel's back. After the federal government had declared the Stonewall Inn historic and the adjacent park a national monument back in 2000, the federal government, in their continuing effort to erase the LGBTQ+ community, decided there would be no Rainbow Flag flying at the Stonewall National Monument. So, declare the gayest spot in the country significant, then try to make it unrecognizable? That didn't last long. Within days, city officials and LGBTQ+ leaders put a flag back in place in spite of Trump and his federal property flag ordinance. As of April 16, since Trump backtracked on his flag policy and a judge upheld his decision, the flag is back where it belongs. Permanently. ::

Thank you, Qnotes family, for 40 years of service

There have been so many people that have been a part of the *Qnotes* family in different capacities during the last 40 years of serving the LGBTQ+ community. Many of these people we see or hear from on a regular basis. They are woven into the fabric of our lives and in our community. There are also a number of people who have passed on and are no longer with us. I feel sure they would be celebrating with us on this milestone anniversary if they were here. I value and appreciate everyone that's been a part of the *Qnotes* family and the contributions they made in order to provide an independent and trusted resource for needed information, views, art and entertainment, specifically for OUR community. Many thanks to all of you, no matter

when you served or for how long. Whether you were in the room in 1986 when we decided to publish *Qnotes* in a newspaper format or you're in the trenches with us today, you have been and are part of my inspiration and my strength. I want to honor all the people that have been a part of the *Qnotes* family and name those who have passed away during the last 40 year. Their names and what they did at *Qnotes* is listed below. Please forgive me if I have left anyone out. I thank you and honor all of you. Sincerely, *Jim Yarbrough* Publisher



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Reel Out: Highlighting Us on the big screen

Film festival organizers share their joys about this year's festival



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

This year, Reel Out Charlotte, the Queen City's annual LGBTQ+ film festival produced by Charlotte Pride, will kick off with a special opening event and free movie screening at Bar Argon (5/13/26 @ 7pm). For this article, two Reel Out Charlotte organizers gave Qnotes some additional insight into what this year's film screening has to offer.

Meredith Thompson is the managing director of Charlotte Pride and provides a high level of oversight for the film festival where she also serves on the event's Film Selection Committee. This year, Reel Out celebrates its 18th birthday and Thompson is enthusiastic about what the festival has to offer.

"We've gone from having it on a stage in Camp North End to a more permanent home at Independent Picture House (IPH)," she explains. "It's been really nice to offer our guests a true movie theater viewing experience. There's a nice reception area to take advantage of and a 144-seat theater to host our Annual Shorts Night."

Reflecting on the time she's spent working with Reel Out she continued, "During my four years with the festival I've seen a very diverse and robust group of committee members who love movies while also being intentional about a range of identities and stories to feature on the screen."

That diversity is also what Thompson feels is so important about the festival. "It's about representation. We had a volunteer [who had just come from seeing one of the films we featured] - I thought they were laughing but they were actually crying. They had seen a film where their life had played out on screen but [unlike historically depicted LGBTQ characters] had a happy ending. You never know the impact a film will have, especially when someone has the opportunity to see themselves. Fun and engaging is so important - but being able to see ourselves on screen is empowering and it also heightens understanding for others."

Fellow Charlotte Pride Board Member and Reel Out's Short Films Coordinator Lupe Silva couldn't agree more on the importance of the LGBTQ+ community's need for representation in film.

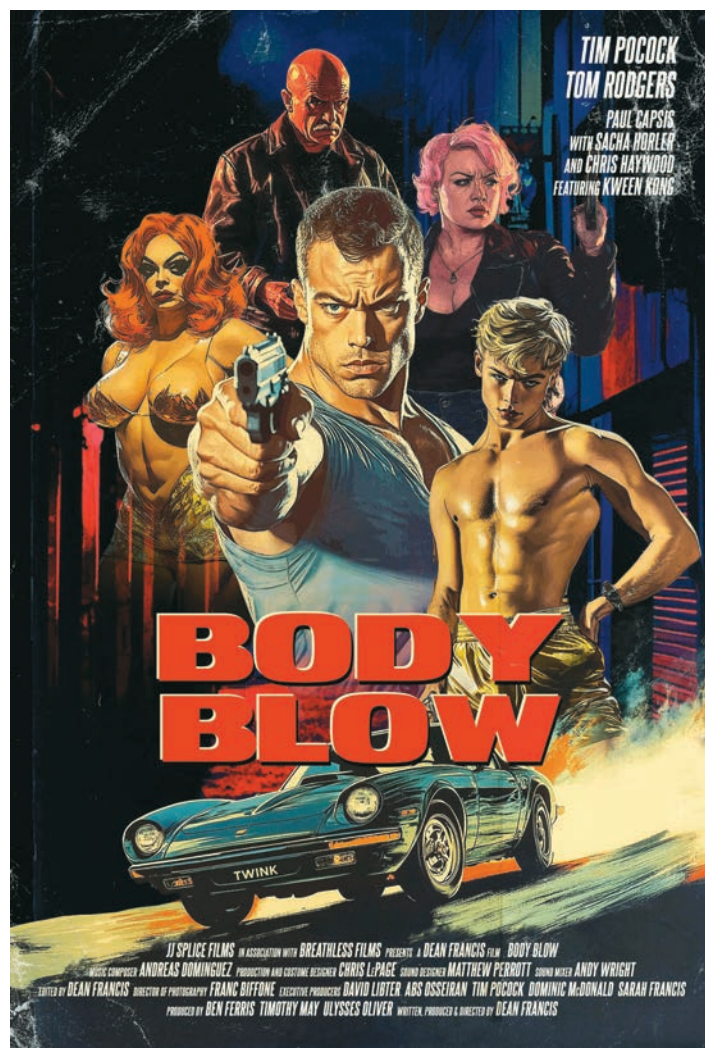
"People should go to Reel Out because it's a great event that tries to represent everyone in the community. There are not too many opportunities for us to be able to relate to what's on screen so it's very important that the community comes out to participate and support."

Silva goes on to talk about his involvement with the short film selection process. "Over several months myself and a very dedicated panel of volunteers review and discuss which films create an opportunity for our audience to say, *I can see myself*. Near the end of the selection process, we have a 'duke it out meeting' - where we voice very strongly - our selection votes and build a short films line up at that time. This year we had 27 films to view - with the task of having to narrow that down to seven great short films."

Listed below is the lineup of films we can look forward to in the upcoming festival. It includes shorts, medium shorts and feature films. The Independent Film House is located at 4237 Raleigh Street. For more details on screening times, check out social media and visit the festival's website at <https://www.charlottefilm.com/events/film/reel-out-charlotte-2>.

Wed. 5/13/26 at Bar Argon (7PM), followed by drag performances and cocktails

Body Blow (2025) - Director Dean Francis
Aiden, a young cop, embarks on a risky undercover mission where he meets Cody, a captivating male sex worker controlled by a drug lord drag queen. Aiden dives into a perilous world, getting entangled in a deadly police conspiracy.



SHORT FILMS

Fri. 5/15/26 at Independent Picture House

My Dear Watson (2026) - Director Jacob McKee
When he receives a mysterious love note, a teenage Sherlock Holmes must step outside of his comfort zone in order to uncover the identity of his secret admirer.

Ripple (2025) - Director Jacob Norris
Daniel leaves home for the summer to work as a camp counselor, unaware of the societal norms that will soon threaten his own happiness. His mother, Katherine, works as a compassionate palliative nurse

during the height of the AIDS epidemic.

Cat Sitters (2025) - Director Claren Grosz
Four friends reunite to watch scary movies while cat sitting, but an unexplained power outage and the nagging suspicion that they're not alone threatens to kill the vibe. One thing is for sure: they aren't splitting up. Cat Sitters is a queer comedy-horror that celebrates queer friendship, plot twists and a gorgeous hissy cat.

Mean Goals (2025) - Director Ahuati Amaro
An adorkable gay Latino joins an LGBTQ soccer team to bond with his father struggling with Alzheimer's over their shared passion for the sport.

Lienzo (2025) - Director César Saldívar
Through his daily activities and profession, Vito presents us with an emblematic view of Mexico City. One morning, he heads to a hospital and makes a decision that will change his life and circumstances forever.

Just Between Us (2025) - Director Zac Hug
Sam and Dustin's open marriage works... until a nosy friend asks if they ever have sex just the two of them. Sam spirals. Cue one pool, one himbo, and several bad decisions. As lines blur and intentions backfire, Sam is forced to reckon with what intimacy looks like when love isn't so black and white.

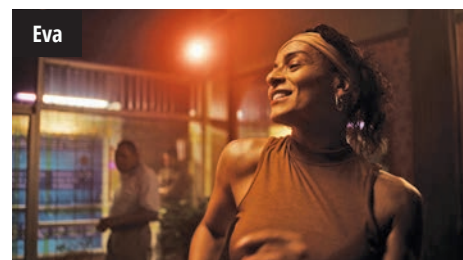
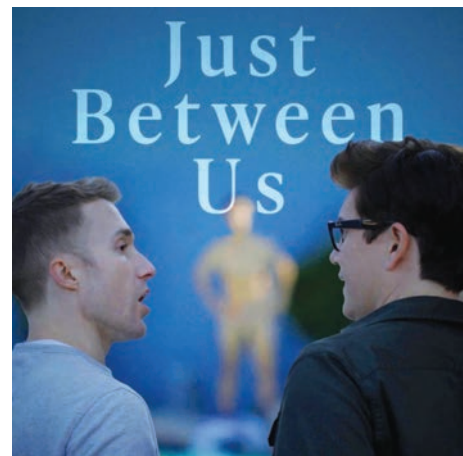
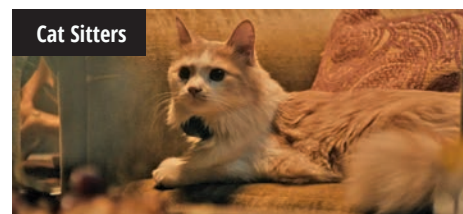
Ronita Rambo (2026) - Director Michael Doshier
Ronita Rambo, the sharp-tongued waitress of a rural Missouri diner, has everyone's order memorized - but not a clue how to text her new crush. Enlisting the help of two gay teens, she takes an unexpected leap toward love and authenticity.

FEATURE FILMS

Fri. 5/15/26 at Independent Picture House

Pillion (2025) - Director Harry Lighton
A directionless man is swept off his feet when an enigmatic, impossibly handsome biker takes him on as his submissive.

Sat. 5/16/26 at Independent Picture House
Starwalker (2025) - Cory Payette
Star, an Indigi-Queer Two-Spirit call boy, has become newly entranced by The House

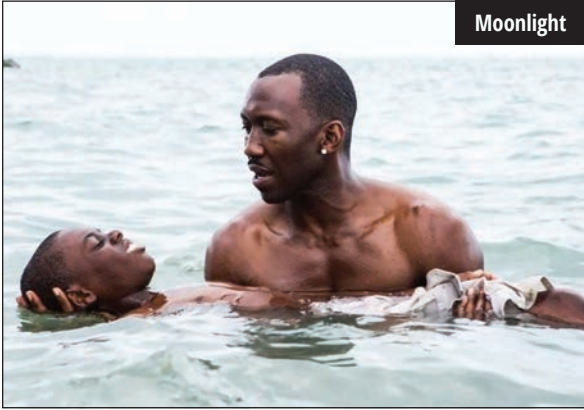


of Borealis, a popular drag house in East Vancouver. Blending drag performance with their grounded cultural spirit, a new, powerful persona emerges on stage in this musical feature film.

Eva (2025) - Director William Reyes
Eva, a trans woman, takes on the care of her granddaughter after the sudden death of her daughter-in-law. While processing her grief, she tries to help her son connect emotionally with the baby. Amid tensions, reproaches, and silence, mother and son embark on a path toward mutual understanding and the reconstruction of their family bond.

Summer's Camera (2025) - Director Divine Sung
Summer won't use her late father's unfinished camera film until she meets Yeonwoo, her school's football star. The developed photos reveal her father's past with Maru, a hairdresser, as Summer navigates first love and loss.

Moonlight (2016; Tenth Anniversary Showing) - Director Barry Jenkins
A young African American man grapples with his identity and sexuality while experiencing the everyday struggles of childhood, adolescence, and burgeoning adulthood.



Moonlight

Sun. 5/17/26 at Independent Picture House

State of Firsts (2025) - Director Chase Joynt
Sarah McBride's groundbreaking campaign becomes the first transgender Congressional victory amid anti-trans political tension; a documentary.

Submerged Queer Spaces (2012) - Director Jack Curtis Dubowsky
This special selection feature film is a documentary feature that explores San Francisco's evolving queer history through the lens of urban archaeology and architectural remains. The film utilizes firsthand accounts from eight interview subjects to uncover personal stories of displacement, cruising culture, and systemic racism within the city's lost communal hubs.

MEDIUM SHORTS NIGHT
Sun. 5/17/26 at Independent Picture House

The Reel Out Charlotte Film Festival will close with a selection

of five longer short films.
Never, Never, Never (2025) - Director John Sheedy
In a quaint Welsh fishing village, a young Shirley Bassey impersonator and a fisherman are swept into a secret romance, battling the tides of family and tradition as they search for the courage to claim their own happiness.

Pakka (2025) - Director Iniyavan Elumalai
Four gay Indian friends share an unbreakable bond on a Dutch cricket field. But when one agrees to an arranged marriage in India, their chosen family begins to unravel.

First Date (2025) - Director Hailey Vest
When the new kid gets asked out on his first date, he must navigate how to stay true to himself amidst the pressure to fit in.

You're Doing Great (2026) - Directed by Vita Mei Hewitt and Julie Lindsey
A short surreal comedy that follows a middle-aged queer maid's journey as she revisits her past regrets while cleaning a house on her birthday. With the help of her spirit guides, she reflects on love, relationships and her life trajectory in this bittersweet story.

Demon Twink (2025)- Director Steven George
In 1991, a lonely man trades his soul to a demon for youth, only to discover he must commit monthly murders to maintain his beauty. His dark path is complicated when he develops genuine feelings for his next intended victim. ::



Demon Twink

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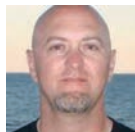
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A poet shares his thoughts: An interview with Steven Reigns

Author and poet talks about his love for the craft and lived experiences



by Gregg Shapiro
Contributing Writer

More than 45 years after the first newspaper article about AIDS appeared in the New York Times, gay poet Steven Reigns continues to write about it; a literary reminder that the health crisis is far from over. As with his previous collection, “A Quilt for David,” the subject is front and center in his new book, “Outliving Michael” (Moon Tide Press, 2025). A far more personal effort, “Outliving Michael” is a devastating poetic tribute to Reigns’ late friend Jon Michael Church, who passed away at the age of 42 in 2000. Reigns was kind enough to make time for an interview in March of 2026.

Gregg Shapiro: In late March, shortly after this interview is taking place, you are leading a writer’s craft seminar, “Poetry As Memoir: Autobiographical Poetry Writing Workshop” at the Saints and Sinners LGBTQ literary festival in New Orleans. Have you conducted this kind of workshop before?

Steven Reigns: I started teaching LGBTQ writing workshops when I was 23 years old, a couple years before my first book came out. Leading up to the book and its release, I started to hear how alienating literature and writing was to friends. Assigned books in school that don’t represent queer experiences, and queer personal writings aren’t always embraced by teachers or institutions. I realized the displeasure had more to do with what they were forced to read and the responses they received to their writings. I sought to change that and taught local workshops to a queer youth group. I wanted to connect them with the pleasure of writing, and also to expose them to literature that represented their lives and experiences. I loved those workshops and soon taught them around the country. I was then asked to teach workshops to HIV+ groups. Almost 20 years ago, I started teaching the My Life is Poetry autobiographical poetry writing workshop for LGBTQ seniors. This came about because I saw a bigger gap in elder representation.

GS: Because of the memoir-quality details of the poems in your new book, “Outliving Michael,” I was wondering if you were a journal keeper or if you relied on memory for these poems.

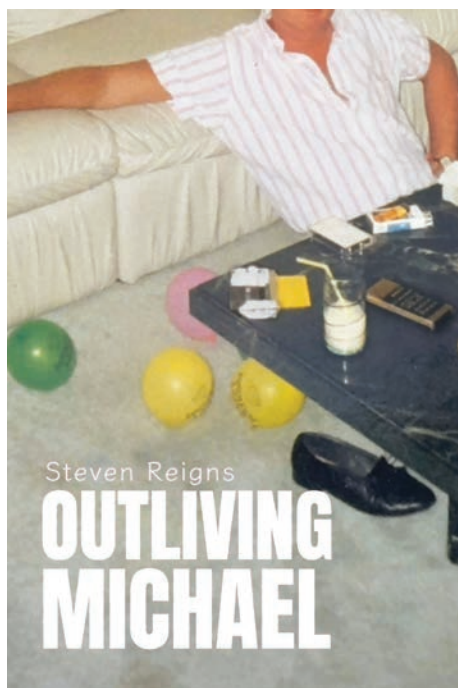
SR: I always thought that my on-again, off-again journal writing would be a goldmine when it came time to write a memoir. I didn’t consult them at all when writing this collection. Rereading about that time would have been painful, but also because what was important was what memories remain. What moments and comments haven’t left me all these years later. I was so young and impressionable. I knew so little of the world and was a sponge for information, especially hanging on Michael’s words and wisdom. My journal writing started at an early age. I first had sex at 16 with a guy, came home, and wrote it down. I read the entry to my friend Stephanie, who suggested I should be a writer. My introduction to gay sex and



writing happened all in that time; it was a moment of spontaneous combustion.

GS: The title of the book, “Outliving Michael,” comes from a line in one of the shortest poems in the book. Did you always know that this would be the title? Were there other book titles in contention?

SR: The skilled poet David Trinidad gave me input on the collection. I was initially using a different title, which always fell short for me. David suggested “Outliving Michael,” and I immediately loved it. He has quite a bit of experience with titles, having published over two dozen books. I raved to him about what a great idea it was. After showering him with praise, he said, “You



know I just took it from a line in your poem?” I had forgotten that, and we had a good laugh.

GS: Most of the poems in the book are untitled, and some have proper titles. Why did you choose to employ that device?

SR: You’re such an astute reader [laughs]! Titles seemed to stall the storytelling. There didn’t seem a need to have more of a pause or announcement than the page break. The titled poems I wanted to stand out and set a tone. All the poems in the collection can stand alone but these poems have a different feel than the others and still contribute to the collection’s focus.

GS: How did you decide on the order of the poems?

SR: I wanted the collection to have an arch, to have the story unfold in an interesting way. Some poems also did a better job of introducing dynamics or subjects, and I wanted those to come first. I laid out the printed poems and started shuffling to find an order that would meet these goals. The final poem always felt like the way I wanted to end the collection.

GS: Were any of the poems written while Michael was alive?

SR: My writings have always been a representation of what I’m grappling with at the time. Writing is how I make sense of things. None of these were written when Michael was alive. There’s a poem in the collection about an everyday moment in my life and remembering a story Michael told me. I did the math and realized I had lived longer than he had. He seemed so much more experienced and worldly than I that I didn’t think I’d surpass him in anything, including age. Grappling with his loss and reflecting on the lasting impact of his friendship is what prompted me to write this collection.

GS: Do you know if either Andrew Holleran or Judge Judy Sheindlin are aware that they are in “Outliving Michael?”

SR: Michael introduced me to Holleran’s work, and so I’ve always closely associated the two. I’ve had a nice acquaintanceship with him for years. We first met in Provincetown in 2001. I was a young writer and thrilled to have such an exchange with a literary luminary. I teared up walking back to my hotel that Michael wasn’t around for me to call and tell him about it.

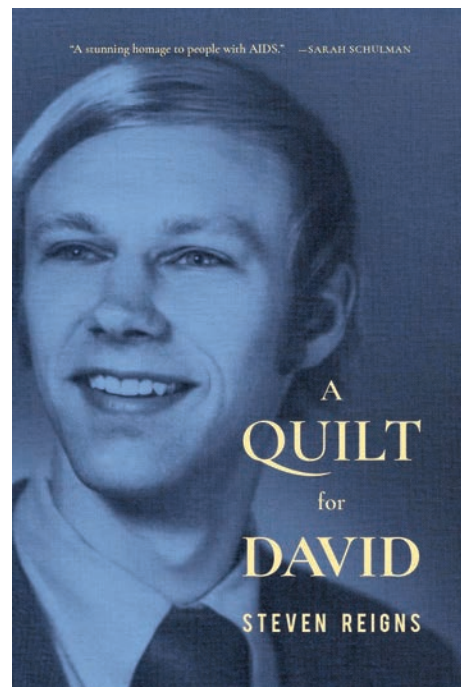
Holleran is incredibly modest for someone so accomplished. I’ve never said anything to him, not wanting him to feel pressured to respond in any sort of way. I was honored that he gave a blurb for “A Quilt for David,” calling it “a searing recreation of that horrible chapter in the early stages of AIDS.” As a Floridian, he understands the culture and what it would have been like for David Acer, living at that time on the Treasure Coast.

I didn’t fully understand Michael’s love of Judge Judy. Of course, he loved her sass and wit, but it always felt more substantial. When writing the book, I reflected on how she probably gave him a sense that there was order in

the world. That there was justice and fairness. Dying of AIDS at that time, there was neither.

GS: In a way, Florida is another character in the book. Florida also figures prominently in your previous book, “A Quilt for David.” Were the poems in “Outliving Michael: written before, after, or at the same time as the David book?

SR: With “A Quilt for David,” I thought I was writing about what happened in a Florida dental office. What I was really writing about was America at that time. I deeply understood Florida culture because I moved to Naples in 1994 and later lived in Tampa until 2005. I have so many fond memories of Florida and the people I knew. Michael Church was one of those people. “Outliving Michael” feels like the personal companion to “A Quilt for David.” In one book, I didn’t know the subject and in the other book, it felt as if I knew the subject better than anyone. I wrote the material separately. Researching Acer was all-consuming. I spent countless hours in libraries and archives, ran ads in the newspaper looking for past patients and associates, and traveled several times to Florida. For that time, it feels like all my focus was on David Acer and trying to get to the heart of what happened. Outliving Michael was much easier to write because it required no research, only sitting with my memories and memorializing a dear friend.



GS: Would you say that these books are an attempt to give a voice to the voiceless?

SR: “A Quilt for David” was very much my writing to vindicate. I never met David Acer and devoted over a decade to researching the situation. What happened to David could happen to any of us; someone points a finger, and our life and legacy get altered. It’s incredibly unfair. Poetry is the language of our emotions. With David Acer and Kimberly Bergalis, there was data that was ignored. Emotions biased perceptions at that time. I used poetry to do the labor of helping others see and feel another perspective. My book centers on David, where all media pre-

See *A poet* on page 23

'Devout: Losing My Faith to Find Myself'

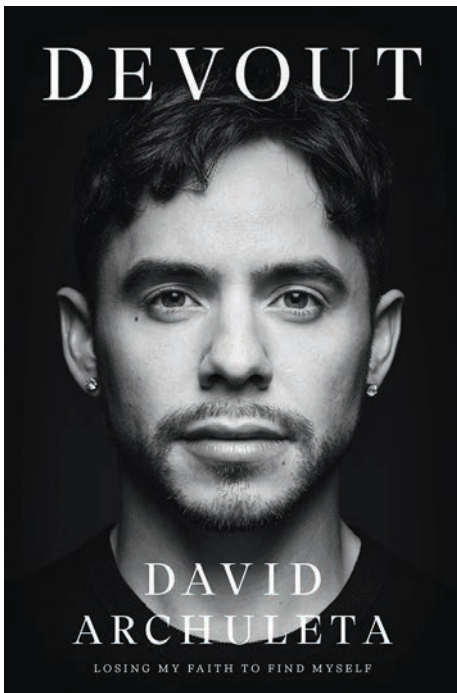
Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

"Devout: Losing My Faith to Find Myself"
by David Archuleta
©2026, Publisher
\$29.00
290 pages

So just make up your mind already. The decision is very much in your control – or, at least that's how it's supposed to be. It'll be *your* future, *your* path, and seizing it may not just be necessary, but mandatory. It's your life, and no one can live it for you. As in the new memoir



"Devout" by David Archuleta, that goes for career and for love, too.

Born to parents who both had musical careers before they wed, David Archuleta remembers an early childhood growing up in a Hispanic Mormon community in

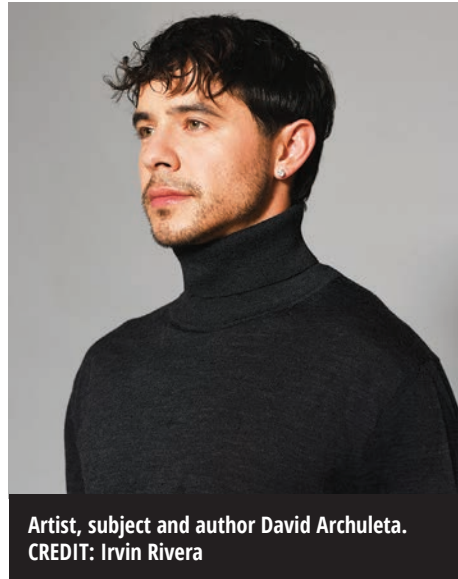
A poet from page 22

viously focused on Kimberly. Poetry is saying the unsaid and doing so with an economy of language. It's my favorite kind of storytelling. In "Outliving Michael" I feel as if I was sharing Michael with more people. Though grief is one of the book's subjects, it's actually quite a funny collection. I repeat so many things Michael said. I love reading these poems at events and hearing how much people would have enjoyed him if he were still here.

GS: Finally, you recently posted on social media about online harassment you continue to receive about "A Quilt For David." Would you say that hateful attacks of this kind have increased due to the current political climate, and do you foresee a time when this kind of provocation will cease?

Florida, where kin was always nearby. He was six when his parents moved the immediate family to Utah; the first thing he remembers about that is the snow, and how it was so cold, it burned.

Because music was in his blood, Archuleta grew up singing and dancing, often with his mother whom he calls "my rock." It was his father, however, who encouraged him to perform; first, with a gentle push, then a shove toward a career



Artist, subject and author David Archuleta.
CREDIT: Irvin Rivera

Archuleta didn't really want.

But he did want to make his father happy, so he went along with the contests, embarrassing meet-and-greets with stars, and uncomfortable introductions. Slowly, though, performing became more fun, and Archuleta made friends.

Meanwhile, back home, everything was breaking apart. A "family friend" whom Archuleta refuses to name accused his father of abuse. He was exonerated, but it affected the family's closeness and they stopped being affectionate.

That was a painful backdrop to Archuleta's soaring career, his appearances on *Star Search*, friendships with other rising stars, his runner-up spot on *American Idol*, tours, and recording contracts. His father kept pushing him.

But there was one thing missing.

SR: Those messages don't even phase me. I've lived through so much that even the nastiest message has zero impact. I'm confident in the work I put out and its perspectives. We're in a less tolerant country, and that trickles down from the top, but the uptick in attacking messages happens when "A Quilt for David" gets attention in mainstream publications. Many straight people grew up not questioning narratives, and that's something embedded in the queer experience. Queer readers can imagine the media hysteria of the time, the favoring of heterosexual narratives, the gay scapegoating and witch-hunt, and the blaming of someone with less social standing. AIDS changed the course of history, especially queer history. In these two books, I'm telling small slices of these histories and changes. In both cases, it's been an honor to devote so much time to these men who spent their last years in Florida. ::

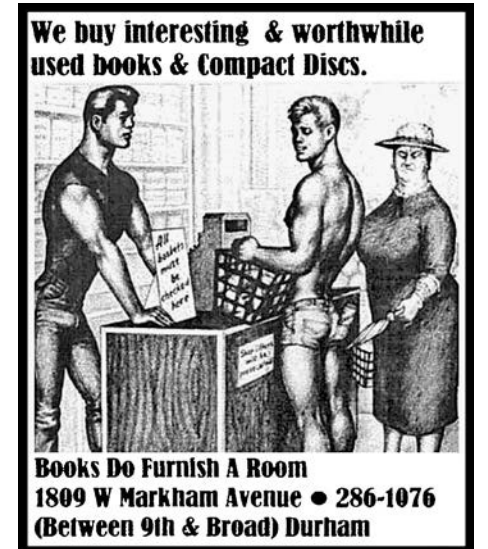
Since he was a boy, Archuleta had known that he was attracted to men, but his Mormon faith taught him that that was unacceptable. Kissing, his abuelita said, was wrong. He tried hard to date girls, in the most chaste way. Anything past that was against God – and anything at all with a man was unthinkable...

Though it absolutely favors his personal life and dwells on it a bit too much, "Devout" strikes an otherwise nice balance between that, author David Archuleta's career, his sexuality, and his faith. The latter two are loaded with controversy.

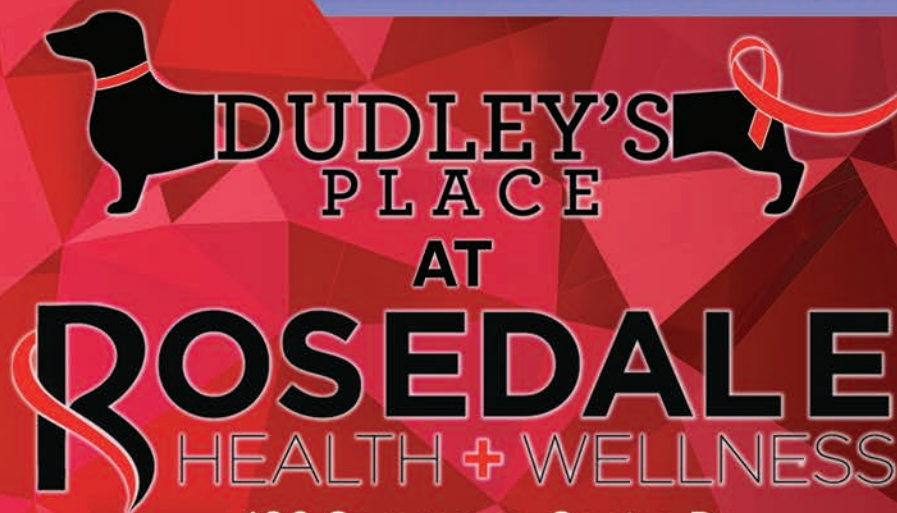
You don't need to be Mormon to fully understand the faith part; Archuleta offers non-Mormons a brief education, so readers can see the importance of the Church's teachings in his life and why he felt the need to abandon it as his understanding of his bisexuality grew. It's emotionally raw and honest, but also so respectful that it almost bears re-reading. Such candor and the heart-on-his-sleeve tone you'll sense are features in the entire book, alongside Archuleta's family's struggles and his learning to strike out alone.

It's harmonious in more ways than one, and fans will be happy.

So, too, will anyone who wants a unique memoir with a dose of faith, or someone who's an *American Idol* watcher. Find "Devout" and be sure to share. You won't mind. ::



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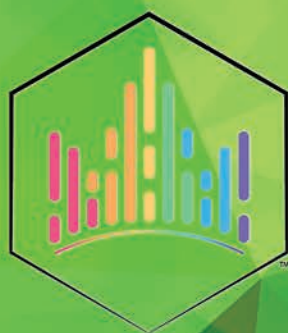
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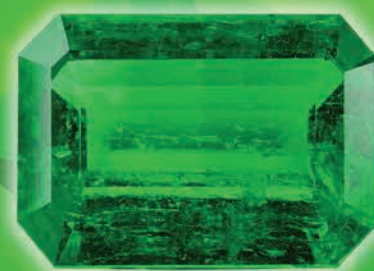
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