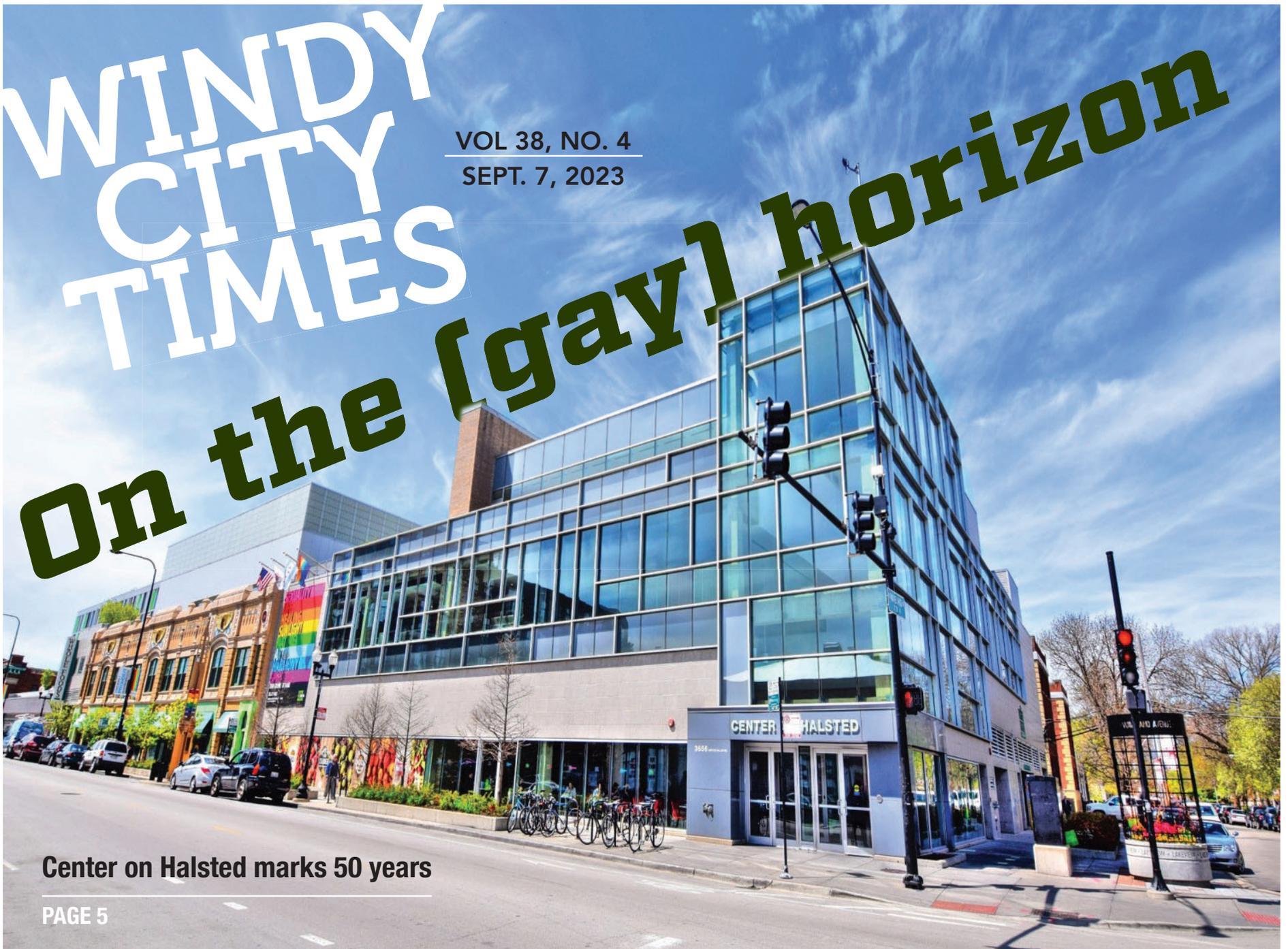


WINDY CITY TIMES

VOL 38, NO. 4
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On the [gay] horizon



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IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY® and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

(bik-TAR-vee)

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HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

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- ▶ Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5.
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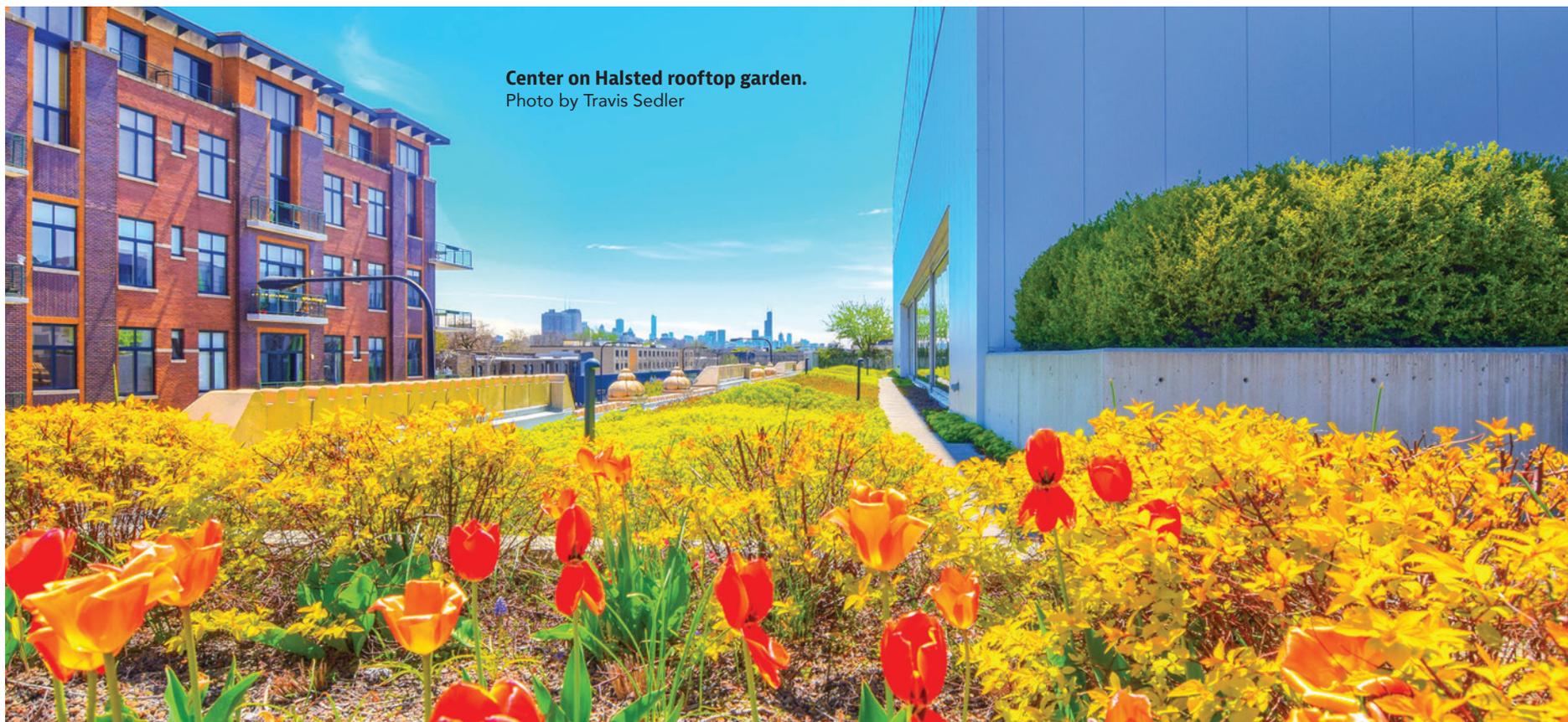
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Center on Halsted rooftop garden.

Photo by Travis Sedler



On the [gay] horizon:

Center on Halsted marks 50 years

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

In 1973, a group of Chicagoans organized a telephone hotline, which they named Helpline, allowing the community to more easily find and assist one another. This was a time when LGBTQ+ bars were still regularly raided by the police, and members of the community had few guarantees for their safety when they gathered together.

That group of organizers could never have imagined that Helpline would be an integral component of all that morphed into what is now known as the Center on Halsted. The Center has become a world-renowned LGBTQ+ institution with many notable events, a comprehensive list of services and over 1,000 visitors per day to its Lake View neighborhood location on Halsted Street. The organization has grown exponentially since its founding 50 years ago.

The '70s:

Changing the coming-out process

Michael Bergeron, a Chicago activist who published the Chicago Gay Crusader newspaper, is credited with founding the Helpline and also what became Gay Horizons. He opened Beckman House, the location of the Helpline, in 1974 at 3519-1/2 N. Halsted Street.

There had been several previous attempts at launching community centers prior to and concurrent with Beckman House. In 1971, a location at 171 W. Elm St. had been leased by a member of the Chicago Gay Alliance (CGA) for community meetings, while the Tavern Guild of Chicago raised funds for the Rodde Center on North Sheffield later in '70s, for example.

Gay Horizons became an official non-profit in 1974 (formed by volunteers remaining from

Beckman House and concerned healthcare professionals). In 1975, the organization moved above the now-defunct Astro restaurant at 2745 N. Clark. This location also featured a drop-in center.

Gay Horizons at several points in its history was a springboard for other organizations and agencies that would later be important for LGBTQ+ Chicagoans. A group of gay and lesbian medical students formed Horizons Clinic under the Gay Horizons banner to treat community members with STI's. Horizons Clinic became a separate organization in 1975, and would eventually morph into the present-day Howard Brown Health.

From early 1975 to early 1976, Lee Newell was chairperson of Gay Horizons and the first person to serve an entire year in leadership. When asked about his time at the organization, Newell said "One thing stands out. When Gay Horizons was about to collapse, the whole community put aside their differences and came together to ensure its continuance. Without the Rogers Park Gay Center keeping the Helpline going, the lifeline to Gay Horizons would have been lost. The amazing community of activists, bar owners and volunteers coming together is what made this all so incredible."

In 1976, Gay Horizons expanded its mental health and social services, including peer counseling, under the Gay People's Counseling Service banner—now called Educational and Support Services. A youth program, now under the youth and family services slate of programming, started that same year allowing Gay Horizons could do outreach to that part of the community.

In 1978 Joe Loundy, who was then the chairperson, took on the role of volunteer executive director. Loundy stayed in that position until 1984. He called his time at Gay Horizons "the most fulfilling experience I had as a social worker. Along with many other talented volunteers, we ushered in the birth of LGBTQ+ affirming social services. The programs we created at that time have stood the test of time and continued, uninterrupted, up to the present day. At that time, the general belief was that being gay/lesbian was a psychiatric disorder that would seriously threaten family relations, job opportunities and social acceptance.

"Gay Horizons provided a framework for transforming all those negative false beliefs into a valuable reservoir of understanding and empathy to support the people who came to us for service. We facilitated the restoration of hope. Gay Horizons was in the forefront of reframing 'Coming Out' as a normal developmental phase."

In the early days of Loundy's tenure, a Women's Union was formed to reach more lesbian and bisexual women, and the Gay Switchboard was renamed the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard to be more inclusive.

Gay Horizons continued to grow in 1979 at a new location at 3225 N. Sheffield. The organization hosted the first Identity Conference, provided space for a research center and library (which was the antecedent for what is now known as Gerber/Hart Library and Archives) and a legal services program for all LGBTQ+ people, including those who could not pay, among other endeavors.

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Center on Halsted staff social celebrating Pride month 2023.

Photo by Travis Sedler



Left: Center on Addison. Right: Center on Cottage Grove.

Addison photo by Jim Klein; Cottage Grove photo by Betty Akins

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The '80s:

Gay Horizons gets a boost—from Nancy Reagan

In 1980, the first Gay Horizons Coffeehouse opened for LGBTQ+ people who wanted to socialize outside of the bars, especially those who were underage. That same year, the Gay Horizons board reorganized and welcomed its first Black board member. The organization also began tackling the emerging AIDS epidemic; that endeavor grew into the AIDS Action Project which, in 1984, became a part of Howard Brown Health.

Also in 1984, Bruce Koff took over Loundy's volunteer executive director role and, for the first time, a part-time administrative assistant was hired. Koff stayed in that volunteer role until 1986 when it became a full-time paid position. He continued to work in that capacity until 1990.

Koff told Windy City Times that Gay Horizons' outreach to LGBTQ+ youth in the early days was "noteworthy, but relied entirely on volunteers and had no capacity to expand outreach and awareness, especially to schools where LGBTQ+ youth were most vulnerable.

"Fortunately, later on, when then-First Lady Nancy Reagan was promoting the expansion of anti-substance abuse programs for youth called 'Just Say No'... we qualified for some of that funding through a consortium of local youth-serving agencies. I always found it pleasantly ironic that Nancy Reagan's efforts led directly to assisting LGBTQ+ teens in Chicago."

Gay Horizons began to garner attention beyond the LGBTQ+ community in Chicago in 1985 with both a Metropolitan Business Association award of merit and the Oprah Winfrey Show inviting the organization's youth members on her TV show.

Additionally in 1985, Gay Horizons changed its name to Horizons Community Services, Inc. (Horizons). According to Koff, the name change "was controversial and was not taken lightly ... It is hard for people now to understand this but, in those days, no mainstream foundation would support the organization. We were told—point blank—that we would not access such funding with the word 'gay' in our name. We realized there was no way we could accomplish what we hoped to do by just relying on bar fundraisers and private donations. To provide more services for LGBTQ+ youth and adults ... we needed mainstream financial support. So we swallowed hard, [and] changed our name while remaining forthright about our mission."

That same year Horizons started a support group called Passages to educate gay and bisexual men who were at risk for HIV/AIDS transmission, as well as conducted its first community-wide needs assessment.

"In the mid-1980s, a wonderful man named Chris Clason came to me in my capacity as ED of Horizons with an idea," said Koff. "He wanted to start an organization run by and for people with HIV that would empower those impacted to take charge, develop resources and educate each other. The problem was no one wanted to publicly acknowledge their HIV status for fear

of discrimination, so Chris was having a hard time finding HIV+ people to join him.

"As Horizons was then operating support groups for people with HIV, I offered to send all of them a letter about Chris and his idea so that they could contact him directly about it. Chris agreed. We sent the letter out to those clients, and many of them subsequently joined Chris in founding Test Positive Aware Network (TPAN), which is still a vital organization in Chicago for people with AIDS. Small gesture, huge impact."

Horizons celebrated Helpline's 5,000th night of continuous operation in 1987 and in 1988 a Youth Director was hired. Also in 1988, Horizons became the first in the nation organization to have a federally funded LGBTQ+ exclusive Anti-Violence Project. This project brought public attention to the rising scourge of anti-LGBTQ+ violence in the community that continues today.

In 1989, Horizons hired its first development and group services staff members and became the first LGBTQ+ organization in the Midwest to gain membership as an official member agency of the United Way.

The '90s:

New respect from the community

To usher in a new decade, Horizons relocated again to 961 W. Montana St. with its 15 paid staffers. Koff handed off the executive director role to Ellie Emanuel in 1990. Also in 1990, Horizons received the 1990 Glynn Sudbery Award from the IVI-IPO Independent Gay and Lesbian Caucus. Then, in April 1992, Tom Buchanan became the executive director until December 1996.

Buchanan told Windy City Times that at that time, "Horizons was going through a rough patch and for nine months had no ED. It was in debt and morale was low. But dedicated volunteers kept the place afloat, and I knew it needed to thrive. I applied for the job of ED and in the process met my future husband, Robert Bell. I left my career with an international NGO and came to Horizons for about half of what I'd been making. I never regretted it.

"With a group of incredible staff and volunteers and a solid board we became financially solvent, nearly doubled staff and built a volunteer corps of over 400. Horizons' reputation was great, with programs helping thousands of people through eight program areas. By the end of 1996, when I was preparing to go back to working internationally, a small group of us realized Horizons could be much more: a full community center where people would celebrate, learn and grow together. It was a joy to see that dream become real in the years after I left."

While Buchanan was executive director, Horizons held its first annual Human First Gala.

Bell, who was then the Horizons board chair, told Windy City Times that, "We chose the name 'Human First' because it embodied what and who we all are. We wanted it to be totally inclusive and transcend sexual orientation and gender identity—remember this was 1990. Human First occurred because the preeminent (gay, of course) Chicago event planner contact-

ed me and said Horizons should consider hosting such a party. We naively thought he would be doing this for free—which was not the case. However, we went ahead with planning without knowing whether anyone would even attend—especially at \$100 a plate.

“We hosted the event in Lincoln Park. The first recipient of the Human First award was John Callaway, a well-known and respected radio and television journalist, for his allyship and in-depth reporting on the LGBTQ+ community.”

Additionally, under Buchanan’s leadership, Horizons was inducted into Chicago’s LGBT Hall of Fame in 1992, the same year its board achieved gender parity. The organization received other accolades in the early ‘90s, including the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS in 1992, and Dignity Chicago’s John Michie Award, specifically for the Anti-Violence Project.

For a six-year period (1997-2003), the executive director role was held by Liz Huesemann, Roger Doughty and Frank Oldman Jr. at various times. An older LGBTQ+ adults programming and advocacy started under the name Mature Adults, Motivated and Active launched at that time as well. In 1999, Horizons launched its first website, which has since grown to include a significant social media presence as well.

The 2000s:

A new century, new home and new name

Horizons began the new century eyeing an expansion of its physical footprint in the Lake View neighborhood with its then 24-person staff and over 300 volunteers. When Chicago Park District property on the corner of Halsted and Waveland became available in 2000, Horizons negotiated with both the Park District and City of Chicago to acquire that land. The transaction took place the following year, and officially launched the beginning of what is now the Center on Halsted.

To understand the needs and interests of Chicago’s LGBTQ+ community, Horizons undertook research to determine what their new building would need to be a successful community resource. Northalsted Merchants Association donated the first seed money for the building in 2001, with \$350,000 from the City of Chicago the following year.

Programming at Horizons also continued to grow in the early to mid-2000s, with a new computerized database for Helpline; a community technology center; both a young women’s and mentoring programs added under the Youth Services umbrella; and an expanded Just4Adults program.

In 2003, Horizons officially became Center on Halsted, with a new board of directors and programs reorganized under three departments—mental health, youth and community and senior services. Modesto ‘Tico’ Valle, who was then the Center’s director of development and volunteer services, took over as acting executive director that same year.

In 2004, the Center held its first annual Anti-Violence Vigil and launched the public fundraising phase of its capital campaign, resulting in donations from many prominent people. This was also

the year that Robbin Burr took on the executive director role, with Valle as deputy executive director. She did that job for the next three years.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place in June 2005, with then Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and other prominent elected officials in attendance. The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation awarded the Center with a design grant for Green Building. Among the other monies received were a grant from the Kresge Foundation, philanthropists Miriam Hoover and her nephew Michael Ippen, the City of Chicago and the federal Fiscal Year 2006 HUD appropriations bill.

On June 5, 2007, the three-story, 185,000-square foot Center opened its doors at 3656 N. Halsted St. with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The new space was designed to facilitate multiple meetings and events with its rooftop garden, multi-functional theater space, a gym, technology room, kitchen and other amenities as well as indoor access to the Whole Foods next door.

“I was honored to be recruited and selected as executive director during the birth of Center on Halsted’s new building,” Burr recalled. “To watch years of so many people’s collective dreams, fundraising efforts and planning materialize into bricks and mortar was thrilling.

“The first time I walked into the Center’s lobby after Whole Foods opened, I saw just what we had dreamed about for that space. There were trans youth, heterosexual couples with babies in strollers, seniors, women, men, high schoolers and young children all representing a variety of races and socio-economic statuses. I was so moved I cried like a baby.”

Following Burr’s departure as executive director in 2007 after the Center’s grand-opening, Valle officially took on that role. Then in 2008, Valle’s title was changed to CEO, and he held that position for the next 14 years. In 2008, the Center received a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Silver Certification for its status as a green building.

Over the past 15 years, the Center continued to grow and evolve to address the needs of the entire LGBTQ+ community in Chicago with expanded youth services, vocational programming and job placement services, including a culinary arts training program that is now named Silverfork; the nation’s first LGBTQ+ Homesharing program, for elders to age in place with a renter who agrees to do the household chores in exchange for a reduced rental rate; a partnership with Northwestern’s IMPACT Program, which researches LGBTQ+-specific health and wellbeing issues; and serving as both an incubator and residence for community partners that are listed on the Center’s website.

New Endeavors

To address the needs of the growing LGBTQ+ elder population in Chicago, the Center announced plans to build the Midwest’s first affordable LGBTQ+ senior housing facility in 2011 in partnership with Heartland Alliance, which was called Town Hall Apartments. The six-story, 79-unit building is adjacent to the Center at



Robert Kohl (from left), Patrick Sheahan, Robbin Burr and then-Mayor Daley at the 2007 ribbon cutting for the Center on Halsted.

Photo by Tracy Baim



From top: Bruce Koff; Joe Loundy.

Photos by Hal Baim

3600 N. Halsted St. and, on the first floor, also houses the Center’s Senior Services program under the name Center on Addison. The Town Hall ribbon-cutting ceremony took place in 2014 with many luminaries in attendance. What also makes this site unique is it was once the former location of the police precinct headquarters that was utilized to carry out the many years of raids and arrests at the local LGBTQ+ bars for so-called “illegal” acts.

The Center also opened a new South Side hub called Center on Cottage Grove at 6323 S. Cottage Grove Ave. in a storefront of the historic Strand Hotel apartments in 2022. This hub is a program of Center on Halsted, as a part of its mission to expand its geographic reach in Chicago. A main focus of Center on Cottage Grove is HIV outreach and testing to reduce HIV transmission rates on the South Side, as well as LGBTQ+ youth housing.

Valle told Windy City Times that, “It has been an honor and privilege to follow in the footsteps of great leadership that founded Gay Horizons. My 21 years of service have been an incredibly inspiring and humbling journey; serving our community during the AIDS pandemic, the expansion of program services and building the most comprehensive community center in the Midwest. This journey has been possible because of the hundreds of volunteers, staff and donors who wanted to create something positive for our LGBTQ+ community.

“Today, the Center continues to be a vital resource for the LGBTQ+ community in Chicago. In addition to providing support and services to individuals, the Center also advocates for LGBTQ+ rights and works to create a more inclusive and safe society for all including the Center on Addison senior center which offers a safe space for older LGBTQ+ adults to find support and connect with peers. As the Center celebrates its 50th anniversary, it remains a beacon of hope and resilience for the LGBTQ+ community in Chicago and beyond.”

Valle stepped down last year and until a new CEO is chosen, the Center’s Chief Program Officer, Editha Paras, is also serving as the interim CEO.

See centeronhalsted.org/ and windycitytimes.com/lgbt/Center-on-Halsted-leaders-discuss-transition-and-organizations-future/75391.html.

Intersex activist **Pidgeon Pagodis** speaks on their life and new memoir

BY ANDREW DAVIS

In the book *Nobody Needs to Know: A Memoir*, intersex activist Pidgeon Pagonis details their journey through a sea of trauma that consisted of lies, misdirections and surgeries. It wasn't until their college years that Pagonis figured out what had been happening: They had been born intersex (with such individuals composing up to 1.7% of the population, according to various sources)—but had been raised as a girl. Initially immersed in curiosity and pain, Pagonis gradually turned their discovery into moments of truth and healing.

In a candid and sometimes emotional conversation, Pagonis talked about their memoir and name—as well as what they would like for themselves more than anything else right now.

Note: This conversation was edited for clarity and length.

Windy City Times: First of all, we're going to provide Intersex 101. For our readers, what's your definition of intersex?

Pidgeon Pagonis: [Pauses] I don't want to give the same answer, so I'm trying to think of another way of saying it.

First, being intersex is to exist and to be human. And it's existing in a spectrum of biological sex traits. People who are labeled intersex tend to fall in the spectrum where they're not 100% male or 100% female—and I hate saying that because I don't think anyone is 100% male or 100% female, and it supports this binary model.

Technically, intersex is an umbrella term for people born with sex traits—which can be gonads, chromosomes, sex organs, etc.—that don't fall into either category of male or female. By the way, intersex traits can be seen at birth but sometimes they don't appear until later, like around puberty. And sometimes people don't even know that they're intersex because those traits are internal and they don't see them. Also, there are at least 25 variations of being intersex—and within those variations, there's so much variation.

About 2% of the population is born with traits that could have the people classified as intersex. This is roughly equal to the amount of people in Japan.

WCT: I also saw where the number of intersex people is roughly the same as the number of identical twins and redheads.

PP: Yeah—those are roughly about 2% of the population as well.

WCT: And how did you arrive at "Nobody Needs to Know" as the title of the memoir?



Author Pidgeon Pagodis

Photo by Sarah Joyce

PP: I love the title. Thank you for asking me about it.

The title came to me while I was thinking about the doctors who told me that nobody needs to know my secret and that nobody needs to know my medical information—my truth, basically. I was told that I should never let [the information] out—not at school, not to people I'm dating [but] maybe after I get married.

So I thought this should be the title because so much of my life journey has been about learning how to reject the advice and letting everybody know the truth about what happened to me.

Now that I say it out loud, it sounds similar to what people who have survived other [forms] of trauma have gone through—like sexual abuse. The people abusing them will tell them not to tell anybody else or they'll hurt somebody. People with authority can maintain this hold over others and have them keep this secrecy. And coupled with that is the shame or stigma that occurs naturally in our society; so many things are not known about being intersex that there is this natural stigma that comes with it.

Our society is so rigid and obsessed with being "normal" and being defined by binaries and categories. And there's no intersex person like you when you grow up. There's no one in storybooks like you; there's no one in Disney movies like you; there's no one on TV, in books or in your family like you; and there's no one in school like you.

If you have the luxury of knowing you're intersex and knowing the truth, you already have shame and stigma attached—but, on top of that, you have medical professionals who are



older than you that [tell you] nobody needs to know.

My book—and my life, from about the time I was 20 or 21—has been about telling people the truth and encouraging [others] to tell their stories. Before that, people were telling their stories in secret. There's a part in the book about this support-group meeting I first went to; we had badges that read "Women's Support Group" so no one knew we were intersex. I want this book to be a direct challenge to stigma and shame.

WCT: And the book also answers the question of how you arrived at your name. The story is beautiful, although I'm not the biggest fan of the bird itself. However, your story made me appreciate the bird a lot more.

PP: [Smiles] Yeah—it's an amazing bird. I actually couldn't care less about pigeons today. It started out being cute, but people started giving me pigeon pictures, paintings—anything. A friend gave me refrigerator clips in the shape of pigeons. People just assume that I'm obsessed with them, but it's all about one pigeon. When I named myself, it wasn't because I loved birds—especially pigeons. It was just that one particular pigeon made me laugh.

I then started to identify with the bird more because I discovered that the history of intersex people is rooted in being a monstrosity or freak. Intersex people were relegated to freak shows. There's this lore about intersex people that we're subhuman—and pigeons, out of all the birds, seem to be the most hated. If pigeons could understand us, they might feel shame and stigma, too. Pigeons and intersex people are misunderstood—and I root for the underdog.

You know what's funny, though? My [birth] name, Jennifer, is actually built into "pigeon"—and I didn't know that. It's a phonetic thing, like if you say "pidge-Jen." My Twitter [now X] name is actually spelled "Pidgejen" because "Pidgeon" was already taken. And then I found out that my last name means "peacock" in Greek. So, in English, my name is "Pidgeon Peacock." [Laughs]

The one thing I like about my name is that it's recognizable. There are probably a million Jennifers and a lot of Jennifer Pagonises, but there's no [other] Pidgeon Pagonis—but I'm thinking about changing my name.

WCT: I can't even imagine the emotions you went through once you found out the truth about yourself. Was that the hardest part of writing the book?

Producer Susie Bright on the making of **Dykes to Watch Out For: An Audible Original Series**

BY RO WHITE

From 1983 to 2008, Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* offered playful, incisive commentary on lesbian culture. Forty years after the comic's inception, it's been adapted into an audio series produced by author-journalist Susie Bright.

The *Dykes to Watch Out For* Audible Original series launched on June 1. In July, the series won an AudioFile Earphones Award and was named a "hilarious, heartfelt, and utterly compelling adaptation of a lesbian classic."

Like the original comic—which was published in newspapers, online, and in a handful of bound collections—the Audible series follows Mo, a moralizing (though well-intentioned) "left of left" lesbian feminist, and her rag-tag group of friends and lovers. Together they navigate the ups and downs of love, work, friendship, and the 1980s gay rights movement.

"I tell straight people it's like *Doodles*, but better," said Bright, who discovered the comic strip in its early days when she was "a young dyke about town" in San Francisco.

"Alison Bechdel had this brilliant, satirical view on what was inside the inner lesbian anarchist, granola-making, separatist, quarrelsome, dyke drama-riddled commune," Bright said. "It was clear that her politics were to the left—us against the man, dykes against heterosexist hegemony. She was clearly one of us, but at the same time, she made fun of our inner foibles and flaws and silliness in a way that was so right. She brought us all together."

Bright saw herself reflected in the *Dykes to Watch Out For* comics—sometimes literally. Characters' bookshelves occasionally featured issues of *On Our Backs*, the first women-produced sex magazine, which Bright co-founded and edited from 1984 to 1991.

In 2008, after a 25-year run, *Dykes to Watch Out For* stalled while Bechdel completed *Are You My Mother?*, her second graphic memoir. Eight years later, the 2016 presidential election necessitated the dykes' return in three, brand new strips published in *Seven Days*. Then Mo and her pals went silent again, but that wasn't the end for Bechdel's beloved renegades.

In 2019, while working as an acquiring editor at Audible, Bright called Bechdel with a pitch: An audio series based on the early *Dykes to Watch Out For* comics. Alison said, "Oh, it's not going to work. Now way," Bright recalled.

Then Bright and Bechdel read some dialogue aloud over the phone. "We both started giggling, because it really is funny," Bright said. "I thought about all the early *Dykes to Watch Out For* read-

PP: No. The hardest part—and I didn't expect this—was the childhood stuff.

I think it's because—in my work, throughout the years—I talked about the surgeries a lot. But I never really delved into what my childhood was like. During the pandemic, when I was home alone a lot and writing this book, I had to tap inside the younger person who was still inside of me and handle the spaces that were still inside my brain, like the house I grew up in.

I did so much time-traveling into my past, and it was unexpectedly devastating. To go through that experience without the knowledge of what was going on—and to go back and relive it—was doubly hard. They told me there was surgery for my bladder but I know today that it was vaginal-reconstruction surgery that left me with scar tissue and nerve damage, along with so much trauma.

The other day, I went by a house where I grew up and I had my cousin take a picture of me on the steps. I realized then that I have such a longing for home—and I feel like that's a chapter that I never got to finish in my life. [Voice breaking] Me, my mom and dad had this perfect life for a few years, even though they would argue behind the scenes—but we had a house and a yard, with a block of kids I could play with. We had all that for a few years, and then it was gone.

I've lived in an apartment since I was seven, and I just have such a longing for a house. There's something about a house that I just love.

I think my childhood was just extremely sad; my family has a deep, deep sadness within it. There's so much pain and trauma, and they don't talk about it—which just made me think of the book's title. I thought my uncle died in a car accident, and it wasn't until I read a book that he was murdered by the Mafia. I never knew the pain my grandmother went through after her son was murdered. And then they did the same thing with me: keeping secrets.

The second-hardest part had to be everything else, like the sex part with my boyfriend. When I was writing the book, his phone number came into my head. I texted it and he answered it; he still has the same number after 25 years. We had a long-ass conversation and he apologized to me. He fully supported me writing the book and talking about us, even though he's straight, married and has two kids.

But everything was hard about writing this book—except maybe the successful parts at the end. It took me to some dark places.

WCT: What does this memoir say about you?

PP: I think it says that nobody can tell me what to do and that nobody can shut me up. It says that I'm really strong. I think that some people feel I'm too young to write a memoir but I feel like I've lived so much already. This book says that I'm resilient.

Nobody Needs to Know: A Memoir is now available at all major online retailers, as well as Pagonis' own website, pid.ge/.



Madeleine George, Alison Bechdel and Leigh Silverman

Photo courtesy of Susie Bright

ers who probably quoted the comics out loud." Once Bright secured playwright, screenwriter, and Pulitzer-Prize finalist Madeleine George (*Only Murders in the Building*) as the series' script writer, the project was officially in motion.

Bright took the reins as producer. "I said, 'We're going to do this, and we're going to cast our favorite people.'"

The Audible series cast is a star-studded who's who of today's queer pop culture milieu, including Carrie Brownstein (*Portlandia*), who expertly captures Mo's fervor and neuroses; Roberta Colindrez (*A League of Their Own*), whose swoon-worthy voice brings Lois to life; Roxane Gay (author of the *New York Times* best-seller *Bad Feminist*), who shines as the serious, yet compassionate Madwimmin Bookstore owner Jezanna; and more. Jane Lynch (*Glee*) elegantly propels the story with an affect that's part fairytale narrator, part host of a wildlife special.

Dykes to Watch Out For was directed by Obie-winner and Tony nominee Leigh Silverman (*Violet*) and features original music by Faith Soloway, Bitch and Alana David. Its soundtrack includes hits by Ferron, Holly Near, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Cris Williamson and Joan Jett, plus

recordings from the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, where the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was displayed for the first time.

Much of the dialogue in the Audible series was ripped directly from the early comics, and the deft voice acting, narration and sound design give the text a life beyond its original pages. Despite making its way onto a mainstream audiobook platform, the series never shrinks back from its source material.

"We weren't going to get fans by dumbing ourselves down," Bright said. "Yes, we faced battles along the way, but that's what happens when the work you're creating is intellectually and politically acute."

Removing the word "dyke" from the series was never even a question.

"People think, 'Isn't ['dyke'] an epithet?' And sure, if the wrong person says it in the wrong tone of voice, they'll get punched in the nose," Bright said. "But for us, it's how we show our love for one another and how we show each other we're comrades."

*You can listen to *Dykes to Watch Out For* on Audible.*

‘We’ve had a ball’:

Prominent activists Jim Darby and Patrick Bova celebrate 60th anniversary

BY KAYLEIGH PADAR

One of the first couples to be legally married in Illinois is celebrating their 60th anniversary this year.

Jim Darby and Patrick Bova fell in love decades before they became the lead plaintiffs in Lambda Legal’s lawsuit that led to the legalization of same-sex marriage in Illinois in 2014.

Darby first spotted Bova walking along the street reading a book on July 17, 1963.

“I whistled at him, but he didn’t hear me,” Darby recalled. “Later that night, I was headed home and unchaining my motorcycle, when I saw someone looking in the window of a bookstore and it was the same guy I’d seen hours before. I thought, ‘This is fate.’ I ran right over and asked him if he had a lighter, and that was it.”

Darby described their relationship as a 60-year “ping-pong match,” since they’re always “going back and forth” with each other. Darby is Irish and Bova is Italian, but at the end of the day they’re “pretty much alike,” Darby said.

“We’ve just had a ball through everything,” Darby said.

Darby taught in public schools from 1963 to 1992, while Bova was a librarian at the National Opinion Research Center until he retired in 1998. Throughout their lives, the couple was dedicated to fighting for LGBTQ+ rights.

Darby served in the military and founded Illinois chapter of Veterans for Equal Rights in 1991. At the time, LGBTQ+ people were prohibited from joining the military, so service members were forced to keep their sexualities a secret.

Darby was arrested in front of the White House during a demonstration against the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in 1993. Later, Darby was invited to the White House to celebrate the policy getting repealed.

“It was like bookends, getting arrested and then getting invited inside 25 years later,” Darby said. “It was really ironic and delicious and fun.”

Nowadays, Darby and Bova live in Hyde Park, where they enjoy watching movies and spending time outside in their large yard.

“We’re boring as hell,” Darby said.

When Darby and Bova first met, the couple didn’t even consider marriage a possibility. They liked to joke with each other about how they were “living in sin,” Darby said.

“In the early days, marriage was out of the question,” Darby said. “You never even thought about it because marriage was an impossibility. We weren’t very interested in it because I didn’t



Patrick Bova (left) and Jim Darby

Photo by Hal Baim

need society to sanction our relationship.”

Since then, they’ve been married four times and are considering a fifth wedding that they hope will be inside a church, Darby said.

“We decided we’ll go through with it again and just do it privately,” Darby said. “We’ve had four public marriages already, that’s enough for anybody. But, I kind of want to beat Elizabeth Taylor.”

After spending a few decades together, Darby began asking “priests, ministers, rabbis, reverends and anybody [he] saw,” if they’d marry him to Bova.

At a wreath-laying ceremony for Leonard Matlovich—the first veteran that came out as gay—in the historic Congressional Cemetery in Washington D.C., Darby asked a reverend if she’d marry them.

“She said yes, but I didn’t even hear it,” Darby said. “I walked away, because I was expecting a no. A few minutes later, she came over and she said, ‘Well are you ready?’ I said, ‘For what?’ She said, ‘You asked me to marry you and I’m going to.’”

The couple had two minutes to figure out their vows and then they were unofficially mar-

ried in 1992, Darby said. In 2011, the couple was legally joined in a civil union alongside 15 other couples.

That’s when they were approached by lawyers with Lambda Legal and asked to be plaintiffs in a lawsuit for marriage equality.

“I thought, ‘I don’t have a boss anymore, I don’t give a shit about anything,’” Darby said. “We went to court about five times and it was a lot of fun. We enjoyed the ride.”

At one point during the process, a reporter asked Darby and Bova why they wanted to get married.



Jim Darby (left) and Patrick Bova, with then-Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, at their June 2014 wedding at the Chicago History Museum. The media attended the celebration that marked their wedding.

Photo by Tracy Baim

"I said, 'I've been to so many weddings. I've bought so many toasters and irons for wedding gifts. I just want somebody to buy me a toaster.' And they put it on the front page. When they asked Patrick, he said 'I want to get my hands on all his money,' and the Lambda Legal guy grabbed the reporter and told him not to put that in the paper."

When marriage equality took effect in Illinois in 2014, Darby and Bova were officially married

at the Museum of Contemporary Art and celebrated afterward with their friends, lawyers and some of Bova's family members.

"When you're going to make the obligation of marriage, that's serious," Bova said. "But it can be fun too. Like any relationship, you have to respect the person you're with and if things aren't quite right you have to talk about it. Nothing is different about that when you're gay."

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Legendary coach Dorothy Gaters

on her career, being part of the LGBTQ+ community

BY ANDREW DAVIS

One thing became apparent during a recent talk with iconic John Marshall Metropolitan High School girls' basketball coach Dorothy Gaters.

She IS Marshall High School.

Even though the talk took place in an office (alongside her two great-grandsons, Tristian and Darius), several friends—former students who were her “girls,” as she called them—stopped by to chat with her, trade phone numbers and/or playfully banter. (Gaters rightfully boasted about several of her former players, including one who is a retired judge.)

But if that's not enough, the innumerable awards and photos of Gaters and her team in the trophy case—as well as the basketball court that bears her name—point to how much she is revered at the school on Chicago's West Side.

Gaters—who stepped away from coaching in 2021—is a member of another group she has not previously discussed publicly: the LGBTQ+ community.

Always a part of Marshall

Any conversation with Gaters has to start with how integral she has been and is to Marshall High School, beginning with her years as a student.

Gaters remembered attending Marshall fondly, having graduated from there in 1964. (“There were 5,000 students here then; now, there are only 200. There was a large Jewish community when I went here and now it's 98% Black.”) There was no girls' basketball team then, which was years before Title IX, which bans discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.

So who were Gaters' role models while attending Marshall? “I didn't have any real role models [at that point],” Gaters said. “I just watched basketball on TV, but we had a very successful boys team, even when I attended. Marshall is the first Chicago team to win a state tournament, in 1958.”

And that love of basketball blossomed. “When I graduated from college [DePaul University], they asked me to come back here to teach and, shortly after that, there were intramurals—and that's when I started to learn about the game.

“When I started teaching here, I also worked at the park district. I'd go over and watch the boys play there. Basketball was always in my background. At first, I didn't know anything

technical—just that you're supposed to put the ball in the hole,” she added with a smile.

“Then, I was asked to take the program as a club here at Marshall called GAA—the Girls' Athletic Association,” she continued. “We only played four games our first year; we won one game and lost three. The next year we won three and lost one.” This was still before Title IX was implemented.

However, Gaters did not just stick with basketball. “I [also] coached volleyball and softball,” she said. “My same little group did everything so I would say, ‘We did this—now let's go to this.’”

Then, a pivotal figure entered Gaters' life: John B. McLendon—the first Black basketball coach at a predominantly white university (Cleveland State University, where he coached from 1966-69) and a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. “That's my mentor; I call him my godfather,” Gaters said. “I didn't have a godfather, so God sent him to me. He was just a great, great person.”

Gaters started coaching in 1976, ultimately amassing more than 1,100 wins and collecting 10 state titles, while coaching players like Cappie Poindexter and Marie Christian. However, one of her regrets was not winning a state title with one of her most talented players: Janet Harris, who ultimately attended (and played for) the University of Georgia, “and became a three-time college All-American,” Gaters said, adding with a smile, “That's my kid.” She also noted with pride, “At the 1985 [NCAA] Final Four, three of the teams had players from Marshall [who were Harris, Christian and Annette Jones]—a testament to Gaters' success and skill. “Unfortunately, I couldn't go because we had our own state tournament, which we won.”

Gaters also talked about her first full season of coaching, which turned out to be pretty successful and was the start of the career that ultimately led to becoming a 2018 inductee in the National High School Hall of Fame. She admitted, “I knew I didn't know a lot. I felt my job was just to manage [the players] and tell them things like, ‘Don't act up’ and ‘Don't talk back to the officials.’”

And while Gaters has had many memorable games, the one that's the most special to her is the first state championship, which Marshall won in 1982. “Oh, yes—that's the one,” she said. “Marie Christian was our point guard, but the year before we had a better team with Janet Harris. She was the best player in the country,



Dorothy Gaters.

Photo courtesy of Gaters

as role models: the several LGBTQ+ members in the current Chicago City Council. “People can see that [LGBTQ+] people are industrious, smart and have great jobs. It's about what they're doing to benefit others,” she said. “It's the same thing you'd expect from any other group.”

As for the anti-LGBTQ+ discourse in many states, Gaters saw a certain former president as the cause. “I think Donald Trump brought a lot of this [anti-LGBTQ+ bias] to the forefront,” Gaters said. “He brought a lot of negative energy, whether it has to do with race, sex, social class, disability—just anything. Just think: Seventy-something million people voted for him a second time. You know who this man is. You have to watch out for [those voters].”

but we lost—more my fault than theirs. The 1982 team was the ‘redeem team.’”

Then in 2021, after decades of successful coaching, Gaters decided to retire.

“I do help with the boys [her great-grandchildren], as their mother works Thursdays through Sundays,” Gaters stated. “And their father [had] Marfan syndrome, so I felt it was my responsibility to step in. We try to get them involved in things like karate, because their mother is not into sports.” (Gaters' grandson died from Marfan five years ago.)

‘My life is my business’

As for being part of the LGBTQ+ community, Gaters—as always—is direct: “There was never anything official. I've just always traveled in my own lane, and it's the same thing now. My life is my business. It [my sexual orientation] was never an issue for me, although it may have been an issue for other people—especially opposing teams.

“Your kids know who they are—especially by the time they get to high school. I'm just here to get them basketball scholarships, keep this ball rolling and keep this program on top—but if a student came to me, they can talk to me, just like I would with any other student.”

When asked what it's like to be part of the LGBTQ+ community in today's America, Gaters responded, “I think it's easier [than it used to be], in some ways. There's not as much of a stigma to it, and I think that's because a lot of people have stepped to the forefront. They've said, ‘We don't fight. We don't bite. We just want to be accepted, like everybody else.’”

She acknowledged that Black and Brown LGBTQ+ people “still have it tougher.” But she also pointed out local people who she views

Legacy

“Win more games.” That's the answer Gaters gave when asked what she would do differently if she could go back in time, knowing what she knows now.

“We had so much talent,” she reiterated. “We had a very successful program. I had to do more as a coach—be more creative and just find ways to win games.

“I was always a student of the game, watching the other teams. I do that now. I've learned a lot. The kids were teaching me, they had so much talent. But it was always about the kids, and about them being successful.”

And regarding how she wanted to be remembered, Gaters quickly got to the point: “I want to be remembered as someone who cared about her kids, and who wanted to bring out the best in them—academically and athletically. I've had many [college] coaches say to me, ‘We love getting kids from your program; they're more disciplined.’”



Marshall High School logo.

Openly gay AMA president **Jesse Ehrenfeld** tackles pressing physician challenges

BY MATT SIMONETTE



Jesse Ehrenfeld is inaugurated as president of the AMA in June 2023.

Photo courtesy of AMA

Milwaukee-based anesthesiologist Jesse Ehrenfeld, MD, this past June became the first openly gay individual to take on the role of president of the American Medical Association (AMA).

"While I didn't run as an LGBTQ candidate, I know that my visibility and representation matters," Ehrenfeld said, adding that his candidacy was significant "not just to LGBTQ people, but for all physicians who are facing challenges."

Ehrenfeld, who is a professor of anesthesiology at Medical College of Wisconsin, steps into the role at a tumultuous time for LGBTQ+ Americans, as politicians across the country have taken aim at the health needs of the LGBTQ+, especially as they pertain to trans individuals.

Ehrenfeld added, "The AMA is doing so much to support LGBTQ patients and [others]. We have legislative advocacy. We have a litigation center that's standing up for transgender patients through our amicus briefs supporting legal challenges to restrictive laws."

Reducing stigma against patients with unique needs because of their sexual orienta-

tion or gender identity was another priority, he added.

"We are facing government intrusion into how we practice medicine," Ehrenfeld said. "We have a lot of challenges ahead of us."

A Delaware native, Ehrenfeld is also a reserve medical commander in the U.S. Navy, as well as a leading researcher in the field of biomedical informatics (sciences and technologies behind collecting and utilizing patient data). He has also been a high profile advocate for the rights of transgender Americans wanting to serve in the U.S. military.

Ehrenfeld likewise has been a part of the AMA's efforts in speaking out on behalf of the healthcare-related rights of transgender Americans.

"In 2021, we sent a letter to the National Governors Association calling for an end to legislative interference in healthcare for transgender patients," he said. "We continue to refer to it as a dangerous intrusion into the practice of medicine. ... Doing all those things as an LGBTQ person is pretty exciting—there's such great alignment with what I know we need to do to support the needs of the community."

Ehrenfeld noted that the Chicago-based AMA has had membership growth for 11 out of the past 12 years, which he attributed to physicians "understanding the value" that the organization brought to the practice of medicine in the country.

"I was chair of the board when COVID arrived," he recalled. "So much of that time is now fuzzy, because there was so much we had to do to support physicians and patients."

The stress of the pandemic contributed to physician burnout—and that burnout is "a real threat" to healthcare in America, Ehrenfeld added. He noted that, "Nearly two-thirds of physicians experienced burnout symptoms in 2021. Think about that. One in five physicians said they're going to stop practicing in two years."

As such, the AMA has prioritized what it calls a "Recovery Plan for America's Physicians," composed of five facets: reforming Medicare; supporting telehealth; fixing prior authorizations; fighting "scope creep" (political interference de-

termining patient care); and reducing burnout.

"That's really the focus of a lot of our activity across the organization, in [terms of] trying to support physicians today," Ehrenfeld added.

He has been active in the AMA's organizational levels for several years, and said that his colleagues have always been accepting of identity. He jokingly encapsulated his time there in one word: "Fabulous!"

But Ehrenfeld switched gears to describe the thoughts running through his head as he received the AMA's presidential medallion earlier in the summer of 2023. He wondered that evening, was the event inspiring some younger physician who had not yet come out of the closet?

"Somebody watching in the audience was struggling, because they are gay, or identify as LGBTQ," he said. "I only hope that the visibility I bring through my leadership of the AMA—the largest, most influential physician group—can give that person some hope and some sense of possibility."



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Aging LGBTQ+ Americans

face additional caregiving challenges

BY MATT SIMONETTE

While Darcy Connors was a nursing home administrator in the South, she also operated a COVID-19 recovery center.

Connors and her staff noticed that two of the patients in their charge had a strong connection with one another—they were obviously a couple but were reluctant to inform the staff.

“One of the partners was hospitalized, and the other partner wasn’t able to visit him in the hospital,” recalled Connors, who is transgender and is now executive director of New York City-based SAGEServes, which advocates for high-quality, inclusive programming and service-delivery for LGBTQ+ seniors. “They both ended up in the nursing home that I was operating for recovery post-COVID. We knew the connection. You can feel someone’s love for someone else.” (SAGEServes is a division of the larger SAGE organization, which advocates for LGBTQ+ older adults.)

Connors explained to the couple that she and the staff knew their situation. She disclosed her identity and said she wanted to provide a safe space for them to have direct conversations about their care and caregivers.

“Unfortunately, they still felt that fear,” she added. “Especially with rural older adults, closeting yourself is very common. But we see that here in New York City [as well].”

Planning for the difficulties befalling any person late in life is challenging for any American. No matter the financial, emotional and physical preparations in anticipation of retire-

ment and beyond, those preparations can all come undone quickly because of unanticipated financial, health or family crises, among other factors.

That precariousness is even more pronounced for LGBTQ+ Americans, experts agree. That community must be diligent to be sure that their health and financial directives will be carried through, and that they can access high-quality and culturally competent service providers. SAGE reports that LGBTQ+ older adults are twice as likely to be single and four times less likely to have children, further complicating caregiving needs.

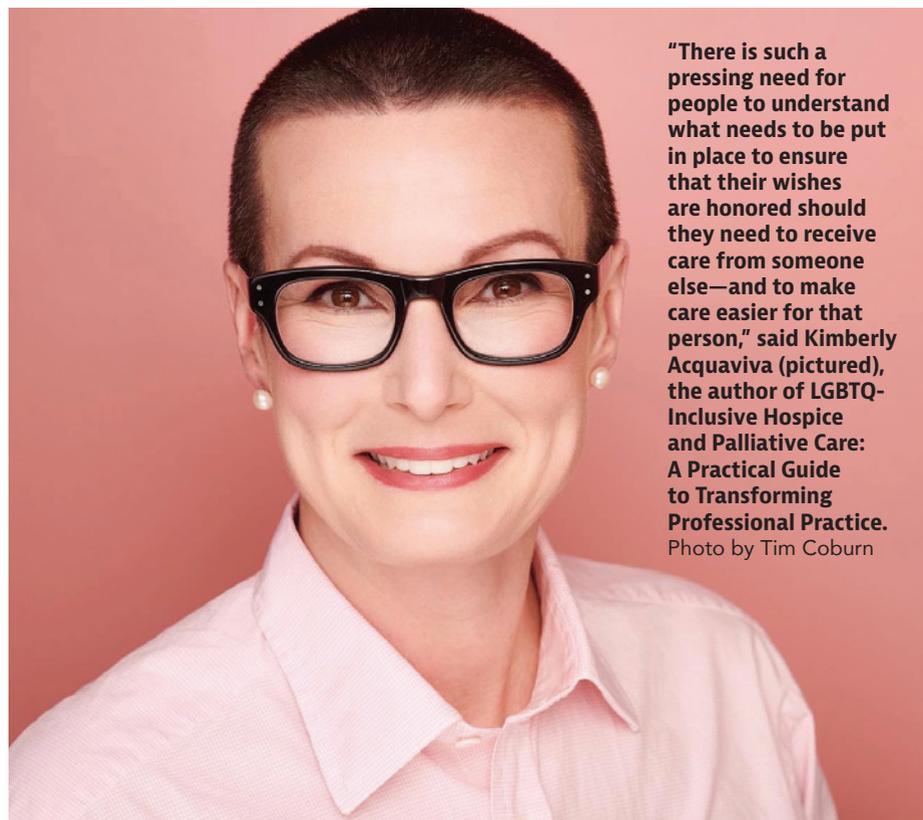
“Even [when considering] accessibility into hospitals, nursing homes or doctors’ offices, if your family is not registered in the right way legally—such as having a marriage certificate, having a caregiver that has an advance directive to support you—they might not have access to support you—there’s some stigma that goes with that,” Connors explained.

“There is such a pressing need for people to understand what needs to be put in place to ensure that their wishes are honored should they need to receive care from someone else—and to make care easier for that person,” said Kimberly Acquaviva, the author of *LGBTQ-Inclusive Hospice and Palliative Care: A Practical Guide to Transforming Professional Practice*.

Acquaviva, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Nursing, had already spent a large portion of her professional life researching the needs of LGBTQ+ older adults by the time her late wife Kathy Brandt became ill. The couple saw firsthand how many logistically fraught medical and end-of-life decisions same-sex couples dealing with a long-term illness faced.

“There’s a lot written about advance directives that will help express your wishes, like a durable power-of-attorney and a health care surrogate,” Acquaviva said. “But the other piece people don’t talk about are some of the practical aspects beyond the documents people know about. If you did need to be on the receiving end of caregiving, who’s going to be in charge of paying your bills? Where do you keep your passwords? My wife and I began brainstorming about, ‘What are all the things you need to know in a couple?’”

Additionally, LGBTQ+ folks need to ensure that their service providers are culturally competent when it comes to treating and serving community members. Acquaviva suggests both looking for providers with nondiscrimination



“There is such a pressing need for people to understand what needs to be put in place to ensure that their wishes are honored should they need to receive care from someone else—and to make care easier for that person,” said Kimberly Acquaviva (pictured), the author of *LGBTQ-Inclusive Hospice and Palliative Care: A Practical Guide to Transforming Professional Practice*.

Photo by Tim Coburn

Online Resources

SAGE: sageusa.org

HRC/SAGE’s LGBTQ+ guide for finding long-term care: <https://tinyurl.com/yw2bps2b>

AARP caregiver guide: <https://tinyurl.com/yc48e76v>

statements addressing sexual orientation and gender identity and being explicit in directives about who is to provide care and what that care will look like.

Connors knew of another situation where an older transgender woman had no designated caregivers, so her care reverted to her parents. Those parents, over the course of their caregiving, for all practical purposes, “un-transitioned” the woman.

“Everything that this person as a transgender adult had put in place was struck and reversed, including gender-affirming care and surgeries that were in place,” Connors explained.

In the last several years, organizations like SAGE and various activists have been calling attention to the difficulties LGBTQ+ folks face and providing resources that can help. In late 2021, Human Rights Campaign and SAGE joined forces to create a consumer guide to finding a long-term care community, for example. AARP also publishes a caregiving guide.

LGBTQ+ folks shouldn’t wait for a particular age or stage of life to begin consideration of their later-life plans, Connors said.

“Looking to your doctor is a good start,” she added, recalling that when she relocated to New York City, she immediately spoke with her new doctor about updating her advance-directive documentation and making sure that Connors’ wife received copies.

“It’s really easy to put off those things because it’s so overwhelming,” admitted Acquaviva. But she nevertheless advises that every LGBTQ+ member consider who in their circle they want to discuss their end-of-life planning.

“For all of us—not just LGBTQ people, but everybody—we tend to think that we’re younger than we actually are,” she added. “I’m 51, but I feel like a 27-year-old. The idea of aging can feel really far away, and the idea of needing care is tied into getting older. When my wife got sick, neither one of us were ‘old,’ but we weren’t 15-year-olds either. It’s important for us to have these hard conversations.”

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Darcy Connors

Photo courtesy of Connors