

ILLUSIONIST

Otis Mack: Heavy Diva's show goes on

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

Otis Mack, also known as "Chicago's Heavy Diva," does not take entertainment lightly. CEO and founder of HeavyDiva Productions and creator of The Chicago Warriors, Mack celebrates milestones on the stage.

Born in Houston, and then moving to Chicago at the age of 3, Mack was brought up in a religious Christian home with accepting parents. At Prairie View A&M University, he majored in mass communication and minored in music theory.

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INCLUSIVE
Proud & Included is for LGBTQs with disabilities.
 Photo of Donyetta Barnes courtesy of Proud & Included

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Otis Mack.
 Photo courtesy of HeavyDiva Productions



CHILD WELFARE SERIES
WCT concludes investigation on trans kids.
 Photo of Dr. Dana Beyer from Beyer

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 Photo by Rebecca Ciprus

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 GlitterGuts.com Photography

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RENEE WSOL
Planned Parenthood patient becomes advocate.
 Photo courtesy of Wsol

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The ERA

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Homeless

**Tuesday, April 25, 2017
Noon - 3pm at the State Capitol**

www.illinoiswomenmarchonspringfield.org

WINDY CITY TIMES

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PAL JOEY

WCT talks with former New Kid on the Block Joey McIntyre (left).

Photo by Jerry Nunn

THE INDIE CITY



Local dishes (such as the Indie Ocean, above), a Candis Cayne book and a documentary of the LA Riots are among Five Worth Finding.

Photo by Andrew Davis

'ART'-FELT

WCT reviews the book The Art of the Affair.

THAT'S SHOW BIZ

Find out the latest about Andrew Rannells, Janelle Monae and Stranger Things.

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DAILY BREAKING NEWS

YOUR PERFECT DAY



IT STARTS HERE

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Illinois Women March on Springfield April 25 for agenda, budget

Comptroller Mendoza, Rev. Jesse Jackson, candidates for governor among speakers

Almost 100 organizations and dozens of politicians have endorsed the Illinois Women March on Springfield event Tuesday, April 25. Coming the first day that legislators are back to work for the final weeks of the Spring session, the march is focused on dozens of progressive bills, and the passing of a responsible budget in Illinois.

The day begins at noon with a rally at the Lincoln Statue outside the Capitol Building. Among the scheduled speakers are elected officials and constituents impacted by legislation being proposed. Speakers include State Comptroller Susana Mendoza; Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr.; state Sens. Mattie Hunter and Heather Steans; state Reps. Sara Feigenholtz, Litesa Wallace, Kelly Cassidy and Will Guzzardi; Khadine Bennett of the ACLU; Planned Parenthood's Brigid Leahy; William McNary of Citizen Action Illinois; Maaria Mozaffar from CAIR-Chicago; Mony Ruiz-Velasco of Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights; and Alice Johnson of the Illinois Nurses Association.

Following the rally there will be a march around the Capitol Complex, and then lobbying inside. At 2:30 p.m. there will be a final rally in the rotunda, with speakers including gubernatorial candidates Sen. Daniel Biss, Ald. Ameya Pawar and J.B. Pritzker.

Deborah Lane, a union leader with Amalgamated Transit Unit 241/308, will be the featured singer at both events.

The list of bills people can choose to lobby state reps and senators on include women's health and choice, labor issues including the Fight for \$15, protecting childcare and homecare programs, immigration, homelessness, criminal legal reform, the environment, LGBTQ, gun safety efforts, healthcare, economics, education, the ERA and passing a responsible budget in Illinois.

The complete agenda, with more bills expected, is available at IllinoisWomenMarchOnSpringfield.org.

"This march includes a wide range of groups, including unions, women's groups, grassroots activists and more," said organizers. "While many groups have their own individual agendas, this is an effort to build bridges and lobby across interest lines. Together we are more powerful."

Illinois Women March on Springfield is co-chaired by Jaquie Algee (SEIU Healthcare and Women's March on Chicago); Tracy Baim (Windy City Times and Pride Action Tank); Jennifer Camille Lee (Action Illinois and Women Rising-Illinois); and Jessica Scheller (Women's March on Chicago).

The program will start at noon with a rally in front of the Lincoln Statue at the Capitol Building, followed by a march around the capitol



complex, and lobbying elected officials inside. At 2:30 p.m., there will be a final rally in the rotunda, including next steps on organizing support for the legislation still pending in Springfield. People are encouraged to make April 25 appointments now with their representatives and senators, and lobby for legislation from now until the end of May, when this session ends.

Available on site April 25 will be thousands of pink post cards, which individuals can use to send or drop off a message to their elected officials on legislation they support. The website has printable and shareable post cards and social media, so people can lobby in advance for bills.

The website also has a process where organizations and elected officials can join the effort. The site also has transportation suggestions, including some free buses, and legislative tips.

The Champion partners of the march are: Action Illinois, Indivisible Illinois, Pride Action Tank, SEIU-Healthcare IL and IN, Windy City Times, Women Rising-Illinois, Women's March on Chicago, and Chicago Women Take Action. Funding support provided by Women's March on Chicago, Alhaward Foundation, Chicago Foundation for Women, Crossroads Fund, SEIU Healthcare and Woods Fund.

Other partners for the March include the Planned Parenthood, the ACLU, Illinois NOW, CAIR-Chicago, Chicago Teachers Union, Equality Illinois, Amalgamated Transit Union 308 (ATU), AFSCME, G-PAC, Citizen Action, OFA, Mujeres Latinas en Accion, Fight for \$15 Chicago, National Immigrant Justice Center, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Women Employed, Women's March Illinois, Illinois Federation of Teachers, Lambda Legal, and the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago. See many more online.

Website: <http://www.illinoiswomenmarchon-springfield.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Illinois-Women-March-on-Springfield-1293918460687078/>

Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1411568288899392/>

RELATIONSHIPS & THE LAW TODAY



BY MATTHEW J. RUZA

New IRS notice allows same-sex couples exclusions for estate tax

The IRS, in conjunction with the Supreme Court's decision in *Windsor*, 133 S. Ct. 2675 (2013), issued Notice 2017-15, which now spells out the procedures same-sex married couples should use to recalculate the transfer-tax treatment for property transferred to spouses before the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

DOMA, which was enacted in 1996, defined marriage for federal law purposes as the legal union of one man and one woman. Under Section 3 of DOMA, same-sex marriage was not recognized for any federal purposes, including the filing of joint tax returns and the unlimited marital estate tax deduction. In *Windsor*, the Supreme Court held that Section 3 of DOMA was unconstitutional because it violated the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause by denying equal protection to same-sex couples who are lawfully married in their states.

This notice will prove to be very valuable for same-sex couples. According to the notice, the applicable exclusion amount from estate or gift taxes, originally only allowed for opposite-sex couples, now will be applied retroactively to same-sex couples. Same-sex couple taxpayers will now be permitted to establish that the estate tax or gift tax transfer qualified for the marital deduction and recover the applicable exclusion amount previously applied on a return.

What is even more valuable to same-sex couples is that this exclusion amount may still be applied even if the statute of limitations for that return has expired. If the limitations period has not expired, a same-sex couple may just file an amended return. However, if the limitations period has expired, the new IRS Notice allows the same-sex taxpayer to recalculate the exclusion amount as a result of recognizing the taxpayer's marriage to the

taxpayer's same-sex spouse.

This complicated tax matter is best viewed through an example. Suppose, pre-*Windsor*, that John and Jim were a same-sex married couple and wished to purchase a home. John, the wealthier spouse, bought the house but placed the title in both John and Jim's names. If John and Jim had been opposite-sex couples during this time, John would not have used his gift tax exclusion amount by giving Jim half of the home. However, because DOMA caused John and Jim's marriage not to be recognized under federal law, John would have had to file a gift tax form because he gifted half of the house to Jim. If the purchase price of the house was \$2 million, John would have made a gift to Jim of \$1 million, and John would have had to pay \$217,500.00 in federal gift taxes. Now, after the new IRS Notice, John can file an amended return (assuming the statute of limitations has not run) and re-claim the \$217,500.00 tax he then had to pay to the federal government.

As you can see, prior to *Windsor*, if a taxpayer made a gift to his or her same-sex spouse, no estate or gift tax marital deduction was allowed and the taxpayer's applicable exclusion amount would have automatically applied to reduce the amount of the gift or estate tax due. This new IRS notice, now garners the same protections as every other opposite-sex couple under the eyes of federal tax law.

For same-sex married couples who were denied federal tax benefits prior to the issuance of the *Windsor* decision, the Notice is a major step towards the reconciliation of constitutional law concepts and the practical effects when applied to federal tax statutes. While it remains to be seen how the IRS will implement the relief described, the notice does not appear to be complex on its face and should allow for a simple procedure for same-sex couples.

Matthew J. Ruza is an Associate in the Litigation Practice Group in Clark Hill's Chicago Office.

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Emanuel reaffirms N.C. travel ban

BY MATT SIMONETTE

Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced, on April 13, that he would introduce a resolution reaffirming the city's previous ban on non-essential travel to North Carolina for employees on city business. The resolution was slated to be introduced at the April 19 City Council meeting.

"As a welcoming city for all, we are clear on our values of tolerance and inclusion, and we won't stand by idly when discriminatory policies threaten the rights of any single group or community," said Emanuel in a statement. "Until North Carolina acknowledges the rights of the LGBTQ com-

discrimination. We have made so much progress toward improving inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in recent years, and this action makes clear that Chicago stands up for the rights of all individuals and against discrimination in any form."

"Today's commitment by Mayor Emanuel shows that Chicago will not tolerate discrimination," added 44th Ward Alderman and LGBT Caucus chair, Tom Tunney. "While it's unfortunate that discriminatory practices are being upheld by the State of North Carolina, the City Council stands with people regardless of sexuality or gender identity, and is steadfastly committed to ensuring Chicago remains a haven for all people."

A similar ban was approved by the Cook County Board of Commissioners in April 2016.



Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.
Photo by Gretchen Rachel Hammond

munity and treats all individuals fairly, the City of Chicago will be taking our business elsewhere, and we encourage others to do the same."

Emanuel announced an executive order banning travel to North Carolina in March 2016. That state recently rescinded HB 2, the initial bill that, among other components, banned transgender residents and visitors from using public accommodations of the gender with they identified. But its replacement law was regarded by rights-advocates as equally oppressive, as it forbade municipalities from implanting their own anti-discrimination ordinances.

Mona Noriega, chair and commissioner of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, said the April 13 action "demonstrates that Chicago remains committed to protecting all groups from

Chuck Hyde memorial May 21

A memorial for former Sidetrack manager Chuck Hyde will be held Sunday, May 21, 1-5 p.m., at Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St.

Hyde, 55, a longtime general manager of Sidetrack bar in Chicago, passed away April 6 in Florida of heart disease.

Hyde, who was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame (now the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame) in 2001, went to work at Sidetrack in July 1982, just three months after it opened; he was at one point a co-owner of the bar as well. After serving in various capacities over the years, Hyde settled into the role of general manager.

He moved to South Florida in August 2016 and had been working at the Hunters Nightclub Fort Lauderdale.

See "Chuck Hyde Chicago Memorial" on Facebook.

Trailblazing judge found dead in N.Y.

Judge Sheila Abdus-Salaam—the first African-American woman to serve on New York state's highest court—was found dead April 12 in the Hudson River. She was 65.

The New York Police Department said that the medical examiner will determine the cause of death, and that the case is under investigation.

Lambda Legal issued a press release mourning Abdus-Salaam's passing. Associate Legal Director and Director of Constitutional Litigation Susan Sommar said, in part, "Judge Abdus-Salaam saw clearly how damaging it was to keep LGBT parents from their children. We owe her a tremendous debt of gratitude. She touched the lives of many New Yorkers; her legacy will live on."



GARDEN OF EVE
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Howard Brown Health invites Chicago's LBQ women, trans people, and allies to come together for an evening of dancing, entertainment, full bar, light bites, and community!

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Howard Brown
Health

Can the child welfare system handle trans children?

Transgender youth being removed from homes by child welfare agencies

**FINAL PART OF A 3-PART SERIES
BY GRETCHEN RACHEL HAMMOND**

LGBTQ activist Dee McCord has spent her adult life engaged in ensuring equality for all while building her four Chicago businesses with a comparable pride for the history of the city.

In the summer of 2015, McCord leased and renovated the 102-year-old Alvin Theatre on Chicago's West Side, transforming it into The Shapiro Ballroom.

The dilapidated building not only became an exquisite space for weddings, corporate and non-profit events but a studio called I Do Dance where McCord could impart her skills as a dance instructor to couples and in-laws in order to make that first dance of the wedding reception as unforgettably beautiful as the ceremony which preceded it.

I Do Dance is welcome to "all sexual orientations and gender presentations" and McCord's work as an activist has made her plenty of influential friends both within and outside of the LGBTQ community.

None of this immunized McCord or her two children (aged 5 and 3) against an unexpected and disturbing visit from an Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) investigator in the fall of 2016.

Her five-year-old Clara (alias) is a transgender girl who McCord recalled to Windy City Times as "telling us she was female as soon as she could talk."

According to McCord, in June 2016 her ex-husband was charged with felony child abuse after breaking Clara's arm.

"He was not supportive of her transition," McCord said. "As one of his defenses, he tried to deem me an unfit parent by having one of his friends anonymously call DCFS."

In the first week of November, a DCFS investigator arrived at McCord's home.

"I am a single, working mother," she recalled. "The case worker came to my house multiple times during the school day and claimed that, because nobody was home, I was dodging [DCFS]. If I had been home with the kids, DCFS would have told me I was 'keeping my child home from school.' The case worker left me her phone number and, when she finally did come to my house, I assumed it was due to the open criminal case against my ex-husband."

"She was not aware there was a case," McCord added. "She was not aware that we already had a DCFS worker assigned to it. She came into my home and refused to tell me what the charges were about until I told her that I knew my rights."

The documents the investigator carried alleged that McCord was raising her children in a home that was unfit and neglectful.

"I have a housekeeper and a full-time nanny," McCord said. "The case worker went into our

kitchen and saw that there were child safety locks on all the stoves and cabinets and that there were outlet covers. She accused me of only having these measures because she gave me 24 hours' notice that she was coming and it wasn't a surprise visit."

Then the investigator began to interrogate McCord's children.

"She thought I had three kids and that one of them was missing because of Clara's male birth name," McCord remembered. "I told her 'No. My child is transgender and that should be in your records.'"

"The case worker then looked at my transgender child and said, 'You have a penis. You're a boy. You should dress like one and play with boy toys like your brother,'" McCord said. "My daughter was very distraught, started crying, looked her straight in the eye and said, 'I'm a girl.' The case worker refused to use proper pronouns and then she told me she would do a future surprise visit to prove that I was neglecting my children. She said that I was psychologically damaging my daughter by allowing 'him' to dress as a female. I was absolutely terrified."

McCord noted that the DCFS case worker assigned was Eraina Ross-Burleson.

Records indicate that, as of 2016, Ross-Burleson was a DCFS Child Protection Specialist.

After Ross-Burleson left her home, McCord contacted a private attorney, the Cook County State's Attorney LGBTQ and Hate Crimes Specialist, the Lurie Children's Hospital Gender & Sex Development Clinic, the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois (ACLU) and state Rep. Kelly Cassidy (14th District).

"I had every single organization I knew make a call to [Ross Burleson's] supervisor," McCord said.

A legal case was prepared against DCFS alleging harassment. After a month, McCord said that the investigation against her was dropped with very little fanfare.

"We never got any official letters," she recalled. "We were moving and we had to call DCFS to update them on our new address and they told us that they didn't need the information because there was no case anymore."

McCord belongs to a number of secret social media groups populated by parents who are raising their transgender children in affirming homes.

Windy City Times' investigation uncovered an almost universal terror on the part of these parents concerning DCFS and child protection agencies nationwide.

Many of the families who were investigated or are currently being investigated refused to speak openly because of a fear of DCFS retaliation or because of a gag order placed by the juvenile court judge deciding their case.

These secret social media groups are, therefore, among the few confidential arenas where families can talk with each other about their transgender

children. They are so frightened of personal information being compromised or used by child protection agencies against them, that the general public and in particular the press are not invited.

McCord said that, from information received by these private social media groups, she was made aware of "countless numbers of families of transgender children who have been subjected to DCFS investigations."

Windy City Times knows of at least 10 cases nationwide.

"Because these parents didn't have connections, they were struggling through the legal system to make sure their families didn't get torn apart," McCord said.

One such family is currently in DCFS Illinois juvenile courts. Unlike criminal or civil cases, juvenile court records are sealed. It is therefore extremely difficult for the media to be able to access details of cases and so raise awareness of any wrongdoing or discriminatory practices on the part of DCFS.

Outside of the Illinois Office of the Inspector General (OIG), there is very little that is done in terms of internally policing the agency. The wide-ranging powers it wields in the name of "protecting children" have, according to a number of sources Windy City Times spoke with both on- and off-the-record, led to instances where that power has been abused.

A Suburban Family

Through anonymous sources and its own investigation, Windy City Times was able to piece together a series of events which trapped a south suburban Chicago family and their 5-year-old transgender daughter in a system many advocates believe was rigged against them from the very beginning, simply because they chose to be affirming parents.

The family's problems began at Advocate Hope Children's Hospital—a faith-based institution in the Oak Lawn suburb of Chicago where they were taking their daughter for medical issues unrelated to her gender identity. [Detailed in Part One of this series.]

According to a friend of the family who asked to be called 'Lilly,' doctors and staff members at Advocate Hope refused to recognize the child's gender identity.

Windy City Times discovered that one of those pediatricians received his medical school training at Catholic Health Partners (now Mercy Health) which is guided by the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services as defined by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

In late January 2017, the family asked for the child to be transferred to Lurie Children's Hospital.

Instead, Advocate staff made a call to the DCFS hotline in Springfield.

Lilly claimed that, although the child appeared in good health, a DCFS investigator and two police officers appeared at the family's home Feb. 3 and ordered them to take the child to Advocate.

The family were unceremoniously removed from the child's hospital room by Advocate security

staff three days later. Lilly said only one subsequent visit to the child was permitted for the family over the next 34 days.

Halema Townsend, an investigator from the DCFS regional office in Harvey, Illinois, was assigned to the case. The mother was charged with "Medical Child Abuse (Factitious Disorder by Proxy or Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome) [FDBP]."

DCFS Deputy Director of Communications Veronica Resa asserted that the charges were "unrelated to LGBTQ issues."

LGBTQ Nation reported that both parents passed a subsequent psychological evaluation.

The transgender child and her family's case was given a temporary custody/shelter care hearing which lasted from March 7-13 in a Cook County Juvenile Court presided over by Judge Robert Balanoff.

During that hearing, Windy City Times and a group of family witnesses and supporters from the Trans Liberation Collective witnessed Balanoff misgendering the child twice.

An anonymous source who was privy to the hearings but unrelated to the family or their defense counsel told Windy City Times that, once the witnesses were asked to leave and the closed hearings began, the misgendering continued from Balanoff, Townsend, the State's and DCFS attorneys present and the Cook County Guardian's office.

Resa denied such misgendering ever took place.

In an interview with Windy City Times, DCFS Associate Director of Behavioral Health—Clinical Division Juliana Harms said that, in cases involving transgender children, the agency's Statewide LGBTQ Coordinator Jane Kelly "would certainly be a part of information gathering. She might have contact with the family or with the child."

The mother's attorney Rina Infelise of the Davi Law Group told Windy City Times that "I have never spoken with Jane Kelly. She never made contact with my client. Once I learned of her position [after the March hearing], I reached out to her several times and I continue to await and look forward to a response."

McCord said she and her attorney also tried to reach out to Kelly without success.

The anonymous source noted that among the evidence considered during the hearing in Balanoff's courtroom was the color of the child's pull-ups and what kind of toys she played with.

None of the parent's witnesses were called to testify during the hearings and the contents of the child's safe folder (containing letters from professionals, neighbors and relatives affirming the child's gender identity) remained undisclosed. According to a family friend, Townsend refused to even look at it.

The source said that the bulk of the testimony which resulted in Balanoff's decision was given by Townsend and the state's attorney.

A scene was described which occurred before the final hearing began on March 13. Townsend claimed to the state's attorney that she had evidence pertaining to the case but refused to share it with Infelise. Townsend allegedly said that she didn't have enough copies and walked away.

Within a matter of hours, Balanoff ruled that the child be awarded temporary custody to DCFS.

To do so, he was required to find probable cause of child abuse or neglect along with an urgent and immediate necessity for the removal of the child from the home despite reasonable efforts made by the state to keep the child there.

Why a diagnosis of Munchausen by Proxy made by Advocate staff members against the mother but not verified by a psychological examination indicated a probable cause for Medical Child Abuse is unclear.

Why evidence, which allegedly demonstrated such probable cause, was permitted from an individual with a publicly issued (although, according to DCFS, misinterpreted) bias is unclear.

Why the family was only permitted one visit to their child during her over-month long stay at Advocate and why that visit constituted a reasonable effort to keep the child with the family is unclear.

Windy City Times has filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the Illinois Office of Inspector General (OIG) to determine if there were any complaints previously for the investigator on this case, and if any had to do with LGBTQ children. As of the date of publication, no response from that office has been received.

A full trial is supposed to occur within 90 days of Balanoff's decision to temporarily remove the child, during which the state must prove their case through a preponderance of the evidence. Sources inside DCFS claim that the case being heard within that timeframe is doubtful.

Meanwhile, LGBTQ Nation reported that the child is in an environment where she is undergoing conversion or reparative therapy.

Nationwide Problem

Windy City Times uncovered cases across the country—New York, California, Indiana and Michigan—where the mother of a child has been or is currently being investigated by child protective agencies in those states following a hotline call claiming that a child was being “forced” to be

transgender.

The calls came from concerned members of the community, other family members who did not agree with the affirming way in which the parents were raising the child or mandated reporters such as pediatricians and hospital staff who diagnosed the mother with FDBP.

Although it still appears in the DSM-V, the existence of Munchausen by Proxy is still a matter of debate among academics. However, in two documented cases with DCFS Illinois, it seems to have been enough to not only trigger an investigation but for that investigation to conclude the accusation of abuse as “indicated” and for further action against the family to be taken.

Numerous studies such as the National Transgender Discrimination Survey have reported that “transgender and gender non-conforming people frequently experience discrimination when accessing health care, from disrespect and harassment to violence and outright denial of service.”

Are pediatricians acting in a similar manner and is that discrimination resulting in calls to Child Protective Services hotlines? If so, how are pediatricians able to make a serious allegation such as FDBP even though they do not, in general, possess a degree in psychology?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) boasts more than 66,000 members nationwide.

In 2002, the AAP's support for LGBT health and wellness and, in particular, the organization's affirming stance on gay adoptions led to a number of members leaving in protest and forming the American College of Pediatricians (ACP). The core values of the ACP's membership state that “there are absolutes and scientific truths that transcend relative social considerations of the day.”

In 2016, ACP joined Catholic organizations in speaking out against the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) mandate barring discrimination by healthcare providers and insurance companies against transgender individuals.

A January 2017 report by the ACP concluded that “Conditioning children into believing a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of

the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse.”

This is not an opinion shared by the AAP, which participated in a 2017 amicus brief in support of Gavin Grimm—a Virginia high school student fighting for his right to use a restroom in accordance with his gender identity.

Dr. Lynn Hunt, MD is the chair of the AAP's Section on LGBT Health and Wellness (SOLGBTHW). Among their core beliefs: “There are many normal variations in gender presentation, gender identification, and sexual orientation. Each pediatrician should strive for inclusion and reject stigmatization of all children and families.”

The SOLGBTHW offers a number of resources for medical professionals including policy statements and educational information such as webinars and booklets. One booklet, co-authored with the American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), focuses upon “Supporting and Caring for Transgender Children.”

“We've seen some amazing advocacy by people like our immediate past president Dr. [Benard P.] Dreyer and our Executive Director Karen Remley,” Hunt said. “But people have to have their consciences raised enough to know what they don't know. The profession of pediatrics is sort of like the rest of the country in that [transgender issues] just aren't on the radar.”

One of the authors of the DSM-V's text regarding Gender Dysphoria (which removed it from the list of mental illnesses) is surgeon, columnist, politician and nationally celebrated trans rights activist Dr. Dana Beyer, MD.

She agreed with Hunt.

“The AAP have come out with great statements of support and they've done good work but if you don't notice a statement when it comes out or you're not paying attention to it because you've never seen a trans kid, then you're going to miss that,” Beyer told Windy City Times. “It needs a generational change. It's not an easy thing to do. One would hope that the average physician would be open-minded enough to understand when he

or she sees a patient or a condition about which they know little and that they would then refer that patient to somebody who does.”

To that end, on Aug. 3, 2016 then-AAP President Dreyer asserted in the organization's newsletter that “Pediatricians should not be transgender children's first bully.”

“The pediatrician's office, and the entire health care setting, should be a safe, accepting place,” Dreyer wrote. “I was sad to receive an email from one of the parents telling of another family's encounters with the health care system when they bring their 5-year-old transgender daughter in for care for her serious chronic disease. The doctors refuse to treat her as a girl until she is older, and some have even called child protective services claiming the mother is harming her child for allowing her to live as a girl.”

Hunt stated that an official AAP policy statement on transgender children which addresses an affirming approach to the child is currently being drafted.

“That means listening to the children, to what they are saying, supporting them wherever they are and not trying to change that,” she said. “Data is very strong that children who are supported with their gender identity and expression do much better as adults health-wise than children who aren't.”

However, to be effective, a policy statement also requires education and training on transgender issues.

“Making such education available the way the American Academy of Pediatrics makes education available for everything is important,” Hunt said. “I feel like the more educational opportunities we have [about] transgender kids, the better. Medical school and residency training are equally as important to the [AAP] as training for practicing physicians. I have mixed feelings that legislating or mandating certain things for the whole population works out the way it's intended. But I think making opportunities repeatedly available

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CHILD WELFARE from page 7

and keeping the discussion going will move the needle. We need to keep the issue alive and realize that particularly trans research is going to be operating in a resource-poor environment for the next few years and governmental support for that research may not be robust."

"Medical school programs and residency programs need to have LGBTQ competence," Beyer agreed. "Not all programs do. It's on our national organizations like the National Center for Transgender Equality [NCTE] or the [National LGBTQ] Task Force and the like to ensure that we're educating the general public about the [affirming] clinics that are available in Boston, Seattle, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh and Chicago. Parents need to know about those but many don't."

While not necessarily focused on trans issues, today's parents do have access to an ever-increasing flow of online medical resources at their fingertips.

WebMD, KidsHealth or The Mayo Clinic, for example, offer the ability for a parent to determine a possible diagnosis through an overview of the symptoms. They also suggest courses of treatment. Although, these websites urge consultation with a physician, parents often make healthcare decisions based on their own research.

In a number of cases where the staff of a hospital has called a child protective agency hotline accusing a parent (almost always the mother) of FDBP, it has been due to a parent disagreeing with doctors over a diagnosis or a course of treatment.

Sometimes a parent takes their child to the emergency room one too many times.

In Illinois in 2014, a teenage boy named Isaiah Rider, who was suffering from neurofibromatosis, was taken from his mother by DCFS after a hotline call made by staff at Lurie Children's Hospital. News reports indicated that the mother Michelle had asked for pain medication for Isaiah which Lurie physicians didn't believe he required.

According to Neurofibromatosis Midwest, chronic pain is a common challenge for those living with the disease.

Isaiah remained separated from his mother by DCFS until well past his 18th birthday.

As to how a pediatrician can diagnose psychological illnesses in parents such as Munchausen by Proxy, Hunt admitted that, "It's a very gray area. It's complex and requires negative confirmation such as fictitious fevers which keep getting work-ups. Ultimately, I think the pathology is the parents receive some sort of attention or validation by the attention that the child's getting which evolves over time. As a mandated reporter, if your suspicion [of abuse/neglect] is raised, you must call it in."

Unfortunately, if and when that report is made to a child protective agency hotline, transgender children and their families find themselves in what Beyer called "judicially probably one of the most archaic in our society."

"The Federal Circuit Courts and many state courts are much more advanced with their understanding with the biology of sex and gender and what gender identity is and how it manifests itself," she said. "Because of the dynamics of the situation of dealing with children and family



Above left: Dr. Erica E. Anderson, Ph.D. Above right: Dr. Dana Beyer, MD. Below (left to right): Defense attorneys Kent Dean and Marie J. Taraska.



courts, if a person is transphobic and wants to cause damage to the trans community, this is its soft underbelly."

Fighting Back

Those dynamics are extraordinarily complex and many parents do not understand that the only way to navigate them is to immediately hire an attorney.

The Family Defense Center is a Chicago-based advocacy group which has helped thousands of parents who have found themselves charged by DCFS.

Diane Redleaf is the organization's founder and legal director. She told Windy City Times that the burden of proof which DCFS must meet in juvenile court is very low.

"In criminal cases the state has to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt," she said. "DCFS has to prove its case as 'more likely than not.' There can be a ton of doubt and they can still win. I think the system has been set up to give [DCFS] a huge amount of discretion over other people's lives."

DCFS told Windy City Times that the agency is replete with "checks and balances" to protect transgender children and their parents.

Yet, Redleaf stated that the Family Defense Center has documents in which the same, what she called, "bad actors" among DCFS staff members continually show up in cases where a family

has been wrongfully accused.

"No agency polices itself," Redleaf said. "It's difficult to hold these bad actors accountable and we've got a public that believes they're on the right side."

For defense attorneys working within the DCFS system like Kent Dean and Marie J. Taraska, this can mean an uphill battle.

During law school, Dean paid the bills with a social work job and then work in an emergency room overnights and on weekends. His post-law school career began with three years in the Public Defender's Office Juvenile Protection Division.

"At that time for advancement in that division in the Public Defender's office, you have to have a minimum number of termination [of parental rights] trials which we referred to as the 'death penalty' of child welfare cases," he said. "I didn't do enough termination trials because many of my clients were doing well and I got the kids home, but it's funny how the office had inverted the criteria for who was doing a good job."

In 2008, Dean instead decided to go into private practice.

"Once you're in [juvenile] court, all the different parties have their interests injected into the situation and those interests don't necessarily coincide with the family or the child," he said. "So you really want to avoid that by not fumbling the investigation in the first place. If you are dealing with an investigation as a defense attorney,

you have to know about ANCRA [the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act]. If a parent talks to an attorney who does not know ANCRA, that attorney has no business getting involved with an investigation."

A 19-year law veteran, Taraska started her career in the Child Support Division of the Cook County States Attorney's Office and then as a prosecutor in Juvenile Court abuse and neglect cases.

"I get cases at all different stages," she said. "When I get a call because a family has been indicated for abuse or neglect or the case is going to court, one of the things I hear a lot from families is 'I contacted a criminal attorney and they told me not to speak.' Although that may be great advice if there are criminal cases pending, there are many situations when telling a family not to speak is incredibly detrimental and can hurt them a lot during a DCFS investigation."

As a piece of legislation, ANCRA is continually evolving. It recently increased the list of mandated reporters to include abortion providers. Dean said he had even heard discussions of a proposal to add hair stylists and barbers.

"The fact it was even discussed is alarming," he said. "These people have no training whatsoever. They're not medical people. Let's face it, politically it's always a safe bet to position yourself as protecting children. It's also part of the reason evidentiary rules and everything get short circuited. Emotion gets put in front of logic and what you should have learned in law school."

Regardless of who calls the hotline, when a DCFS investigation is initiated, the case worker assigned must make a "good faith" attempt to make contact with the child within 24 hours.

In cases Windy City Times has examined, that attempt runs the gamut from a business card left on the front porch of a home, to a DCFS investigator showing up at the front door flanked by law enforcement demanding to be allowed inside.

The initial reaction from parents has been a mixture of confusion and alarm.

"My first recommendation would be to contact an attorney when at all possible; the moment you get that card on your door," Taraska said. "If you are actually answering the door to someone from [DCFS], you may not have time to make that call."

"If DCFS shows up to your door and you aren't expecting them, let them at least see the children," Dean advised. "If you don't, they may turn around and seek a juvenile arrest warrant which will give DCFS and law enforcement the authority to come right through your door and take the child. It takes nothing for them to get one and you won't know it's coming."

"When DCFS shows up and I am not immediately accessible, allow them to see your children," Taraska agreed. "But tell them, 'I want to cooperate and I intend to cooperate but I have contacted an attorney and, with all due respect, no one will be giving any interviews without my attorney present including my children, including myself. However, we are cooperating with you so come on in and see the home and see the child.'"

"I see lots of people writing online, 'Don't let [DCFS] in your door,'" Dean said. "You can stand on that Constitutional principal, but it's not going to work."

According to Dean, the reason why it does not work is due to an issue of competing Constitutional rights. Those rights were seemingly ignored during the Illinois case witnessed by Windy City Times.

"There's the parent's right to raise the children as they see fit but there's also the child's right to be safe, which are both legitimate," he said. "The standard of proof is abysmally low considering the dire nature of the potential outcomes and the fundamental Constitutional and human rights at stake. The state can only intervene in those rights when there is a 'compelling state interest.' Across the country, almost every state has recognized the children's right to be safe as compelling. In order to effectuate that, they drill holes in evidentiary expectations and reduce the standard of proof to the point where the amount of evidence needed to make a finding [of abuse/neglect] is shocking to most people."

Redleaf noted that in temporary custody procedures, "Hearsay is liberally allowed."

"The temporary hearing requirements for a judge are summarily ignored in these kinds of cases," she said. "It depends on the position of the guardian ad-litem. In Cook County, the guardian is appointed to be both the attorney for the child and the guardian ad-litem. They will very often act as an advocate with the state against the parent and become allied as a prosecutor. That's a very critical problem. They see their role as protecting the child from the parent before there's been evidence establishing that the parent shouldn't be the voice of the child."

The Role of Transphobia

What if an anti-transgender bias is shown during those hearings, whether through misgendering the child or through an investigator providing evidence having demonstrated transphobia on a public forum?

Malcolm 'Skip' Harsch is the director of the American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. In his conversation with Windy City Times, Harsch stressed that he was speaking for himself and not necessarily providing the opinions of the ABA.

"There's probably a lack of [transgender sensitivity] training actually happening," he said. "But there are free resources available to both public and private attorneys and judges that can be easily utilized. We can look to city and local bar associations to push that information. The Illinois State Bar and the Chicago Bar [Associations] both have done programs involving implicit bias in the legal profession but, when it comes to those trainings, they're probably not as transgender focused as they should be. Lawyers have to get continuing education credits in every state. There are some states that mandate that you have to take Elimination of Bias for credits. Illinois is not of those states."

To Harsch, acknowledging implicit bias in the legal profession is "about knowledge and understanding the things that are going on in your subconscious that you don't even realize are making you biased against a specific subset of the population."

"The ABA has come out publicly via policy saying that every state should adopt Elimination of Bias credits," he added. "The rules that ap-

ply to judges are different. Attorneys, especially public defenders, and judges who have not been exposed to this kind of bias training don't even realize that an implicit bias exists or that they have one."

"I would like to see our advocacy groups deal with this more forcefully as far as judicial education and to help family court judges on LGBTQ issues because they don't get a lot of this stuff right," Beyer stressed. "Often that's the first and last court in which LGBT kids or their parents have their day and it doesn't turn out that well."

However, according to Dean, an agency like DCFS is grounded in a culture which makes it fertile ground for problems such as bias and personal opinions superseding factual evidence to exist.

"Say a kid goes home after some hearing," he said. "Say the kid gets hurt. Whose name's going to be in the newspaper? The judge. Which is not fair at all to the judge because it is the Department that largely shapes the evidence that is presented. From the investigator all the way up the entire Department operates under CYA—Cover Your Ass. DCFS will come down hard on an investigator and her whole team if they didn't remove a child and the child gets hurt. If you send a child home after an investigation, there's no reward in that. The investigators don't get a pat on the back. The way the reward system is set up is you only get rewarded if there's a removal. You never get rewarded if you leave people alone. The incentives are completely backwards."

In 2015, DCFS released statistics which indicated an increase in reports of abuse and neglect of 0.3 percent over the previous year. The number of cases in which those reports were discovered to be "indicated" (findings of abuse or neglect) was up by 24.7 percent compared with 2014.

"If a DCFS DCP [Department of Child Protection] investigator gets a reputation for not taking kids because she's really drilling down and making sure that evidence is there before leaning on a family, it's not going to help her move forward in her career," Dean added. "A DCP who's yanking kids left and right is thought of as aggressive and can be made a supervisor. There's a certain contingent of DCPs who are really hard on people. There are also a lot of front line investigators who are fair minded but their supervisors are stuck in the culture of CYA. I cannot tell you how many times in the last 10 years or so that I've had an investigator call me saying they are going to recommend to their supervisor to leave a family alone. Then, a day or two later, the supervisor overrules them."

"Sometimes it's just power and control," Redleaf said. "We have a child abuse reporting system that we might call the Child Welfare Industrial Complex. It's a massive system where there's government money involved, where people are told what they should and should not do and biases are running wild. There's all sorts of factors."

"DCFS investigators have a lot of power and they scare the heck out of families," Taraska said. "What I try to do is bear the brunt of that. So, I try to make the first contact [with DCFS]. One of the things I encounter is that workers won't talk to me. They will tell a family, 'Until you sign a release, we are not going to speak to your attorney

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CHILD WELFARE from page 9

because we are bound by confidentiality.”

Both Dean and Taraska confirmed that they know of cases where DCFS has actively discouraged people from getting an attorney.

“What often happens is that the [accused] family finally gets over the initial shock of an investigation and they ask, ‘Shouldn’t I have a lawyer?’” Dean said. “The common answer DCFS gives is, ‘Oh don’t get a lawyer. That’ll just delay things.’”

“That’s completely false and absurd,” he added. “In a number of the cases I’ve been involved in, were it not for my guidance, my explaining things to my clients or telling them when they can say ‘no,’ they would have gone right over a cliff and lost the kids.”

“My understanding is that it happens a lot,” Taraska acknowledged. “It happens even after I’m on a case. If it does, I immediately call and say, ‘Why would you say that to a family? You know they are allowed to have legal representation and they want it. I get a lot of blowback from that. I get, ‘Why would they contact an attorney if they didn’t do anything wrong?’ My response is, ‘Are you kidding? You tell someone there’s a report of abuse or neglect, why wouldn’t they contact an attorney?’”

Dean added that DCFS discouraging families from seeking representation is tantamount to handing out legal advice, which he recommends families absolutely reject.

“If for no other reason than you have a right to have someone in an official capacity sitting with you during your interview taking notes,” he said. “Quite often I have to intervene because a question is put so badly to the client that I say, ‘Don’t answer it. Answering a question you don’t understand will get you into trouble every time.’”

“The fundamental right of every American to raise children of any gender is so important and so ingrained emotionally that in my opinion, someone saying, ‘I’m going to take your children’ is scarier than someone saying, ‘We’re going to arrest you and put you in jail,’” Taraska said. “To have someone come in and say, ‘Because you are allowing your children to be who they are, you are doing something wrong and we’re going to take them out of your home’ is so terrifying to parents, they will do whatever that investigator tells them to do.”

The Consequences to the Child

The consequences to a transgender child who is removed from an affirming home are just as devastating.

Dr. Erica E. Anderson, Ph.D. is a professor of clinical psychology at John F. Kennedy University in San Francisco. A practicing clinical psychologist since 1980, Anderson is one of two psychologists at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Child and Adolescent Gender Center Clinic—one of the world’s leading centers for health-care for transgender and gender nonconforming children.

“We are accumulating data but we know, from our experience, that all-important to transgender children is having a supportive family,” she told *Windy City Times*. “Children who grow up with an affirming family do not have higher incidents of

many of the unfortunate things that affect the transgender community including mental health problems, social adjustment, issues with bullying in school and school avoidance, family conflicts and ultimately depression, suicidal thoughts and actions. Transgender kids who have a long period of growing up with supportive families resemble typical children in the population.”

Anderson asserted that for an official such as a pediatrician, teacher or member of the law profession to assert that a child as young as five cannot determine her/his/their gender identity is a “very ignorant perspective which flies in the face of what we know scientifically and by observations of many children.”

“Children develop the ability to absorb information, to listen to and see what’s going around them and reflect on it and, although they might be young and might not be able to have abstract thinking as they would as an adult, they are in a position to perceive what’s going on, how they are treated and have the ability internally to compare that with how they feel about themselves and who they are,” she said. “There are children who assert their gender identity well before the age of five and continue in persisting in that identity.”

“If a child who asserts their gender identity is met with affirmation, they are going to feel more comfortable being honest and open with those they are surrounded by,” Anderson added. “A child who is met with resistance or, worse, hostility is going to use a very different set of tactics. They might withdraw, they might censor what they do which can cause them to hide aspects of themselves that they are worried about meeting with disapproval.”

Before the transgender child in Chicago was seized by DCFS and placed in the care of Advocate Children’s Hospital for “therapeutic separation” from her affirming family, family friend Lilly described her as “a bright, amazing, energetic little girl.”

Once DCFS took control and placed her in the care of Advocate whose staff did not affirm her gender identity, addressed her with a male name and forced her into wearing traditionally male clothes while coercing her to play with toys more enjoyed by boys, Lilly remembered that she kept “looking up at her mom and I to protect her but there was nothing we could do. She looked over and whispered, ‘Should I just be a secret girl?’”

Ironically, even though the family has been limited to two visits per week the child has had to be returned to Advocate for treatment.

Expert Advice

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) released a report, “Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth contains a Professional Consensus on Conversion Therapy with Minors,” in October 2015.

“Variations in gender identity and expression are normal aspects of human diversity and do not constitute a mental disorder,” the consensus asserted. “Interventions aimed at a fixed outcome, such as gender conformity or heterosexual orientation, including those aimed at changing gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are coercive, can be harmful, and should not

be part of behavioral health treatments. Directing the child to be conforming to any gender expression or sexual orientation, or directing the parents to place pressure for specific gender expressions, gender identities, and sexual orientations are inappropriate and reinforce harmful gender and sexual orientation stereotypes.”

“The level of knowledge of transgender issues is so variable in America,” Anderson said. “There’s only a small number of people who are tuned into it and the rest of society has no clue. We hear all the time politicians say, ‘There are only two genders, so let’s legislate it with bathroom bills.’ It flies in the face of scientific fact that every species has variations and variation is a normal part of nature. People are acting upon their own notion of something that they have no objective knowledge about and it’s appalling.”

In April 2016, the Orlando Sentinel reported that Florida’s Department of Children and Families (DCF) “repealed proposed protections for gay and transgender foster youth—including one that would have banned the highly controversial practice of conversion therapy intended to make gay teens heterosexual.”

The Sentinel noted that the decision came following testimony at provided by the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Florida Baptist Children’s Home at a January hearing.

Less than a year later, the Alabama State legislature introduced HB 24 in March 2017 which would “prohibit the state from discriminating against child placing agencies on the basis that the provider declines to provide a child placement that conflicts with the religious beliefs of the provider.”

According to the Human Rights Campaign, the bill would “would allow state-licensed child-placing agencies to disregard the best interest of children, and turn away qualified Alabamians seeking to care for a child in need—including LGBTQ couples, interfaith couples, single parents, married couples in which one prospective parent has previously been divorced, or other parents to whom the agency has a religious objection. The measure would even allow agencies to refuse to place foster children with members of their own extended families—a practice often considered to be in the best interest of the child. A qualified, loving LGBTQ grandparent, for example, could be deemed unsuitable under the proposed law.”

Both decisions raise questions as to how parents in Florida and Alabama who offer their child an affirming home feel about the threat of their state’s child protective agencies given the level of fear exhibited in states like Illinois.

Discrimination protections are on the books in Illinois but agencies like DCFS have been seen to act with a sometimes unilateral disregard for them whether through a culture of cover-your-ass or implicit bias which has gone unaddressed.

“Don’t get me wrong, 90 percent of the time when the department does intervene, either with a safety plan or even temporary custody, there is a problem and a child is at some risk,” attorney Dean stated. “It is the 10 percent or so where I perceive there is a significant gap in the evidence or the department becomes overbearing in light of the actual risk. It is those 10 percent cases that keep me up at night.”

Advocate Beyer stressed that many of the cases

in which the parents of transgender children are investigated or have their children removed from their homes occurred or are occurring because of the progress that the trans community has made in recent years in terms of both societal perceptions and civil rights.

She called it “a silver lining” to what is often a bleak outlook for parents of transgender children who find themselves caught up in a child welfare system which is being and has been successfully utilized as a blunt instrument to remove a child by someone who has a political or religious objection to the affirming home offered by the parents.

The political and religious commentary against transgender-affirming parents offered by right-wing pundits such as Dennis Prager and associations such as the American Family Association (AFA) or the ACP have increased exponentially since marriage equality became the law of the land and gay and lesbian couples found a larger societal acceptance.

Now that the transgender community is at the bulls eye of hatred, parents are just as easy a target.

“Parents are listening and trying to do what they can in order to prevent their children from becoming severely anxious or depressed or attempting suicide,” Beyer said. “We’re taking major steps forward but there are always people out there who want to throw a wrench in the works and they will look for the most vulnerable spot or people.”

Because of both the confidentiality with which juvenile cases are handled and the terror exhibited by families who have been accused of abuse and neglect which makes them reluctant to speak out even if they aren’t under a judge’s gag order, the numbers of times that wrench has been thrown successfully are not quantifiable.

A lack of interest on the part of LGBTQ advocacy groups to address the problem further heightens the mystery of a seemingly clandestine activity by DCFS and child protection agencies nationwide.

Parts One and Two of this series are online.

Windy City Times would like to thank the following agencies for their support during the course of this investigation: Family Equality, the ACLU of Illinois, Lambda Legal, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), Gender Spectrum, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Bar Association (ABA), the Woodhull Foundation, the Los Angeles LGBT Center, the Family Defense Center, Dr. Erica E. Anderson, Dr. Kenneth Haller, Dr. Dana Beyer, Dr. Caitlin Ryan, Kent Dean, Marie J. Taraska, Malcolm ‘Skip’ Harsh, Isabel Rose, Marsha Aizumi, Dee McCord, the Trans Liberation Collective and each of the mothers who spoke out about their experiences despite their fears of child protection agency retaliation.

The following advocacy organizations had not released statements regarding this report at the time of publication: the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), the Transgender Law Center, GLAAD and the Human Rights Campaign.

Homeless advocate: Uptown decision sets course for appeals

BY MATT SIMONETTE

A homeless advocate said that an April 14 ruling by a Cook County judge—though it affirms the city's position in an ongoing dispute over the status of numerous persons experiencing homelessness in Uptown—nevertheless registers as “a small victory” in making that dispute part of the public record and setting the course for future appeals.

The case, more than anything, “is about the unconscionable harassment of the homeless in Chicago in general,” said activist Andy Thayer of Uptown Tent Cities Organizers (UTC) and Gay Liberation Network (GLN).

UTC, in September 2016, had suggested that persons experiencing homelessness move their tents to a space in front of the former Stewart Elementary School, 4525 N. Kenmore Ave. But a construction company, backed by Chicago police,

fenced off that space and no construction ever took place there in subsequent months. UTC applied for a new permit once the construction company's permit expired and removed its fencing, but was turned down. Thayer filed an appeal.

In March, a city official contacted Thayer and acknowledged that the construction company's permit was illegal and asked Thayer to withdraw the appeal. Thayer complied, but the fencing was then reinstated almost immediately. Thayer refiled his appeal, at which time the fences were removed again.

“The city has clearly been playing games with this,” Thayer said.

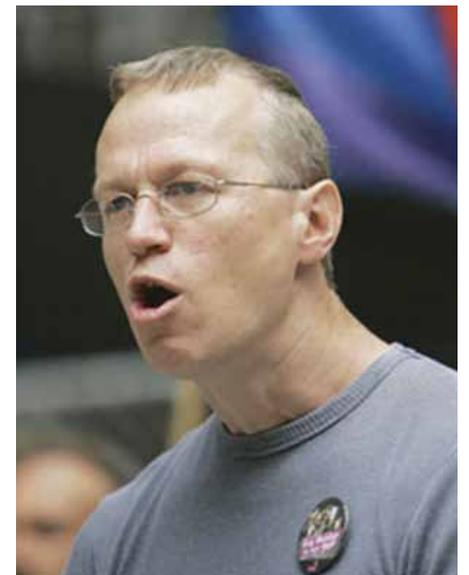
At a subsequent April 12 hearing, Thayer and

his attorney maintained that the city, in requiring public use permits to erect tents—which it is in this case—was in violation of the 1st and 8th amendments of the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Constitution, the Illinois Homeless Bill of Rights and Chicago's Public Assembly Ordinance.

The April 14 decision, written by Administrative Law Officer Frank Lombardo, upheld the city's current refusal. Lombardo wrote, “The Appellant [Thayer] sets forth various Constitutional arguments under the first and eighth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, as well as under Article 1 section 5 of the Illinois Constitution and the Illinois Homeless Bill of Rights. This body does not have jurisdiction to decide Constitutional issues and therefore the Constitutional arguments were permitted to allow the parties to make and preserve the record for possible appeal.”

UTC has 35 days to appeal the ruling.

“What's hanging in the balance is that those viaducts [off Lake Shore Drive, where many persons experiencing homelessness reside] are scheduled to be repaired this summer and those folks need a secure place to go,” said Thayer.



Andy Thayer.
Photo from Thayer

BREAKING NEWS - UN ambassador condemns LGBTQ attacks in Chechnya

United Nations (UN) Ambassador Nikki Haley has condemned reports of violent attacks on gay men in Chechnya. The criticism came after GLAAD urged her to do so in light of reports that more than 100 gay men were being detained in Russian-controlled Chechnya because of their perceived sexual orientation—with three men allegedly being killed..

In a statement, Haley said, “We continue to be disturbed by reports of kidnapping, torture, and murder of people in Chechnya based on their sexual orientation and those persecuted by association. If true, this violation of human rights cannot be ignored—Chechen authorities must immediately investigate these allegations, hold anyone involved accountable, and take steps to prevent future abuses.

“We are against all forms of discrimination, including against people based on sexual orientation. When left unchecked, discrimination and human rights abuses can lead to destabilization and conflict.”

Haley also said that “the United States will lead a first-ever meeting on human rights in international conflicts in the UN Security Council to underscore our commitment to addressing human rights abuses wherever they threaten international peace and security.”

Some of those who have also publicly condemned Chechnya's reported torture include the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. House LGBT Caucus, former Vice President Joe Biden, President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani and Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop.

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Renee Wsol: From Planned Parenthood patient to advocate

BY DAVID THILL

It's uncertain what the future holds for Planned Parenthood, but Renee Wsol isn't waiting to find out.

A single mother and a Medicaid beneficiary since 2012, Wsol, 34, of unincorporated Central Stickney in Stickney Township, feared the Trump administration and the Republican-led Congress might cut Planned Parenthood's Medicaid funding.

So, on Inauguration Day, she made an appointment to visit the organization's Orland Park clinic.

"Planned Parenthood offered me the flexibility I needed," she told Windy City Times. "I can go to any [Planned Parenthood clinic] I want....That's invaluable to me as someone who has to travel all over the city for my son's therapies." (Wsol's four-year-old son has special needs.)

Since that February visit, Wsol has lobbied six U.S. representatives in Washington D.C. and traveled to Springfield to push for the passage of reproductive rights legislation at the state level. At press time, she was organizing a rally outside the office of her own U.S. representative, Dan Lipinski of Illinois' Third District—who received a 22 percent rating (out of 100) on Planned Parenthood's 2017 Congressional Scorecard—in the hopes of convincing him to improve that score.

But she didn't anticipate doing all that when she made her appointment on Inauguration Day.

(In response to a request for comment, Lipinski wrote in part, in an email to Windy City Times, "I have and am willing to meet with any individual or group to talk about any matter related to the federal government....I encourage all of my constituents to continue reaching out to me about issues that are important to them." The congressman's full comments, including those regarding Planned Parenthood and LGBT issues, can be found below.)

From central Stickney to Washington, D.C.

Talking to the nurse during her initial visit to Planned Parenthood, Wsol expressed her fear that under the new administration, she and others like her would lose access to health care provisions like birth control. "I was just going on and on and on and on," she said. The nurse provided Wsol with contact information for Julie Lynn, manager of external affairs for Planned Parenthood's Illinois branch, who wanted to hear from patients like Wsol. Unsure of what to expect, Wsol reached out.

"I told [Lynn] I feel powerless," said Wsol. "All these terrible things are going to happen, and I think people don't think that they will. But they

are [happening], and they're going to continue."

After hearing Wsol's story, Lynn invited her to a "lobby day" in Washington D.C. So, on March 1, Wsol, along with about 150 Planned Parenthood advocates and care providers from across the country, traveled to Washington—her first time in the nation's capital—and told her story to lawmakers.

Though she was nervous at first, Wsol soon found her footing, realizing that it was important to be direct in making her case.

"You can't afford to be shy" when talking to legislators, she said. And for anyone who is nervous before they start, "you're not going to be after you do it." She stays polite in her meetings with lawmakers, but she also keeps in mind one fact: "These people work for me, and they work for the other constituents in their district."

Constituents often feel like their voices don't matter, Wsol said. "But they do." She pointed out that many moderate Republican representatives refused to vote for repeal of the Affordable Care Act because of the pressure they felt from constituents. "We need to put the pressure on," she said.

But where should that pressure fall?

The push for HB40

"When we talk about 'defunding' Planned Parenthood, that means taking away Medicaid reimbursements" for the organization, Lynn, the Planned Parenthood of Illinois manager of external affairs, wrote in an email to Windy City Times. Over one-third of Planned Parenthood's 60,000 Illinois patients rely on Medicaid coverage, she said. That includes patients like Wsol.

Though the organization could potentially find itself in the crosshairs of April budget appropriation talks, multiple studies indicate that a large majority of Americans support continued Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood. (And as Lynn pointed out, Planned Parenthood provides more than just abortion services.)

Republican legislators, including House Speaker Paul Ryan, reportedly want to avoid the issue in budget talks, since that debate could lead to the kind of government shutdown the Republican-led government wants to avoid. But Planned Parenthood could then be targeted in an upcoming tax overhaul, which, as part of the Senate reconciliation process, would only need 51 votes in that chamber—and, therefore, no Democratic support—to become law.

But while uncertainty reigns at the national level, Wsol and others have taken their cause to the state capital.

During Wsol's trip to Springfield, organized by Illinois Women Moving Forward, she brought to



Renee Wsol outside U.S. Rep. Daniel Lipinski's office.

Photo from Wsol

lawmakers' attention HB40, originally introduced by Illinois Representative Sara Feigenholtz of the 12th district. The bill, which was approved by committee in February and is now up for a full House vote, removes language from the Illinois Abortion Law of 1975 that proponents argue would criminalize abortion in Illinois should the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision be overturned.

"I really hope it goes through, but I'm not sure if it will," Wsol said of HB40. To help it get passed, she hopes voters lobby their lawmakers on behalf of the bill. And "if you can't get out there [in person], then make phone calls," she said.

"It's not scary; it's not intimidating. Nobody's going to yell at you," she said. She emphasized

District 113 passes trans-inclusive policy revisions

BY MATT SIMONETTE

The board of Township High School District 113—a district composed of Highland Park and Deerfield high schools—on April 12 unanimously voted to add language to school policies clarifying that no student would be denied access to programs, activities or services based on their gender expression.

"This is something that we do not take lightly, and this is something we've worked on for a great deal of time," said President Annette Lidawer at the board's April 12 meeting. "We've received several letters both in support and in opposition to this."

She noted that, just that afternoon, she'd received a letter calling her a "marketer of evil," adding that such responses "should remind us as a community why it's important that we

that legislators don't expect constituents to be experts on the law. And if voters do face questions they can't answer, resources are available to help them find those answers, including organizational policy experts. (At Planned Parenthood of Illinois, that person is Brigid Leahy, director of legislation.)

"This is all we can do," said Wsol. "We have this, and we have 2018," she added, referring to the congressional midterm elections. Voters' action now, she said, "paves the road" for what happens then.

Comments from Daniel Lipinski, Democratic representative of Illinois' Third U.S. district

In response to a request for comment from Windy City Times, Daniel Lipinski, U.S. representative of Illinois' third congressional district, wrote the following in an email:

"I have and am willing to meet with any individual or group to talk about any matter related to the federal government. Regarding Planned Parenthood specifically, it was the focus of much of my well-attended Town Hall earlier this year and I recently met with several smaller groups of PP supporters at my offices in the district. In addition, I had a good meeting with Equality Illinois just a few days ago, and I will continue to talk with them and others about how we can work together on issues important to the LGBTQ community.

"My constituents know that I'm very accessible to them and am always interested in hearing their thoughts and views. I represent 812,000 people and not everyone is going to agree with every vote I cast. Sometimes people believe that if I don't vote the way they would like me to vote on a particulate (sic) issue that I am not hearing their voice. That is not the case. I encourage all of my constituents to continue reaching out to me about issues that are important to them."

have these protections in place."

The revised policies addressed equal educational opportunities as well as rules pertaining to bullying and sexual harassment.

A number of individuals spoke in support of the policies during public comments in the meeting.

Highland Park High School student Andrew Brooks said, "I have many friends who are part of the transgender [and] gender-neutral spectrum, all of whom want to feel they belong and are comfortable in the place they belong most of the time."

Sandra Wichner, a Highland Park High School physical education teacher, said that when she makes accommodations for transgender students, "There's a world of difference. ... They are so happy when I treat them just like everybody else and we make sure that they have the same opportunities as everybody else. Yes, we want to make sure that we are providing a learning community free of discrimination, but we want to be a learning community that is also supportive to all the needs of our students."



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Howard Brown hosts transgender-focused 'A Call to Action'

BY DAVID THILL

With eight reported deaths of transgender women of color throughout the country so far in 2017—including 24-year-old Keke Collier of Englewood in February—Howard Brown Health is aiming to bring together Chicago's transgender community, particularly transgender women of color. As part of this effort, the organization hosted "True Voices: A Call to Action," a town hall discussion at its Sheridan site April 13 that Teyanna Veasy, PrEP navigator at Howard Brown, moderated.

One in five transgender individuals have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, said Lia Stokes, research assistant of SPNS at Howard Brown, quoting the National Center for Transgender Equality. She noted wide disparities for transgender people in areas of employment, health care, and subjection to violence. (More than one in four transgender people have experienced a bias-driven assault, according to the NCTE, and rates are higher for transgender women and transgender people of color.)

Stokes remembered one of her own friends, 24-year-old Christian Paige, a transgender woman murdered in Chicago in 1996. "Her murder has

been unsolved for 21 years, as so many other murders of Black trans women, and trans people in general, go unsolved for so many years," said Stokes.

Community activist Tania Cordova spoke of challenges facing transgender people of color throughout the world. In other countries, she said, people are criminally prosecuted for being transgender. Originally from Mexico, Cordova said she was the victim of a hate crime there, and almost didn't make it to the United States. Though she eventually did, she said, many of her friends were murdered before they did the same.

"What are we going to do in order to help our neighbor?" asked Cordova, who said that many transgender people in other countries are seeking asylum from dangerous discrimination.

"Though we exist in the midst of violence, we must first make sure that we ourselves are a united front," said Channyn Parker, TransLife manager at Chicago House. Parker later noted that while gatherings like the one at Howard Brown often engage people on the North Side of Chicago, they fail to draw in youth from the West and South sides, who face very different challenges from their North Side counterparts.



From left: Trisha Holloway, Tania Cordova, Teyanna Veasy, Lia Stokes and Channyn Parker.

Photo by Erik Roldan

Speaking bluntly, Parker said that gender-neutral bathrooms—a highly publicized issue in the transgender community right now—don't matter to the transgender youth from those parts of the city that she has talked to, many of whom are more worried about where they are going to sleep each night or whether they will be subjected to life-threatening violence as a result of their gender identity.

Parker acknowledged that issues such as public accommodations are important. But, she said, "We forget that we ourselves have this amazing privilege to highlight what we deem as important," adding that in the process, "We forget that there are a lot of other voiceless individuals out here who are not being spoken for." She said she would like to see people be more thoughtful of the whole transgender community.

Uniting across the whole city and finding other people to trust within the community are important steps in resisting violence from outside the transgender community, panelists and audience members said. Many attendees noted that they witness conflict within the transgender community. They said that if transgender community members refrain from judgment of other people who identify as transgender, it will help bring them together.

Trisha Holloway, program manager of SPNS TWOC at Howard Brown, finished by emphasizing that "this is a call to action. We want to start a trans coalition and we want to start a trans coalition for women of color."

To take part in that coalition, Howard Brown invites interested readers to contact Holloway at TrishaH@howardbrown.org.



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Left: Howard Brown Health's board of directors, staff and friends.

Photo by John Wes

'Garden of Eve' to celebrate women's health

BY MELISSA WASSERMAN

Howard Brown Health celebrates queer and lesbian women's sexual and reproductive health at "Garden of Eve: Forward" on Friday, April 28, at Venue SIX10.

"Garden of Eve is one of our signature events that brings together Chicago's LGBT women and allies to celebrate queer and lesbian women's sexual and reproductive health," said Lia Taylor Stokes, lead research assistant with Special Projects of National Significance for Trans Women of Color (SPNS/TWOC) at Howard Brown Health Center and Garden of Eve: Forward co-chair.

Garden of Eve is an annual fundraiser that has been running with its current name since 2009. The festive event raises funds to enable Howard Brown Health to continue providing clinical, behavioral health and community health services, including gynecological care, alternative insemination, breast and cervical cancer screening, HIV and STI testing and prevention and wellness education for the LGBTQ community.

"Howard Brown remains diligent in building its relationship to the community as a whole," said Stokes. "For many years, people did not access healthcare via Howard Brown because of assumptions that we only catered to gay white men. We are proud to have had such an astounding increase of trans visibility over the last six years. [During] 2009-2015, we saw an incredulous 495-percent increase in trans patients, and that number continues to climb."

The addition of "forward" in this year's event title, Stokes explained, comes from the idea of moving forward in the future in terms of women's health and the different disparities and issues.

"We're at really crucial time in healthcare where women, diversity, healthcare, the LGBTQ community, we're under attack," said Stokes. "So, something like the Garden of Eve is very empowering for the community and it's very important at this point right now. It just gives us a chance to recognize and celebrate all of the minority identities that we provide for here at Howard Brown."

Stokes, a trans woman, added that many trans women of color do not have access to health care. Stokes shared that April is national minority health and disparities month and for her, getting

involved as a co-chair with this event was a way to contribute.

"There's been a recent rash of murders in the trans community, primarily targeting trans women of color—African American trans women—who have been murdered and it's just a call to action that this has to stop," said Stokes of the trouble happening in the trans community. "It's something we can no longer sweep under the rug because this is happening and we're tired of it."

At Garden of Eve: Forward, attendees will be able to enjoy food, cocktails a photo booth, silent auction, raffle and dancing. DJ Slo 'Mo will spin the music. More than 300 people are expected to attend.

"We all vary by age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity here," said Stokes. "It's just a wonderful thing because there are a lot of events that are involving women's health, but this is one of the few that recog-



DJ Audio Jack, Kristen Kaza and Tess Kisner.
GlitterGuts.com Photography

Platform for LGBTQ people with intellectual disabilities launches

BY SARAH TOCE

The Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities has partnered up with Neumann Family Services to offer a one-of-a-kind platform for LGBTQ people in Cook County with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD).

Proud & Included is an ambitious project to marry community and inclusion for people with IDD. The initiative will deliver ongoing peer support, education and self-advocacy training for adults with IDD who identify as LGBTQ, and will educate Chicagoland LGBTQ Community leaders and organizations about the need for delivering inclusive programs and services that welcome people with IDD who identify as LGBTQ.

"Adults with IDD are often marginalized and excluded from the mainstream community, and this is particularly true for adults with IDD who identify as LGBTQ," said Director of Institutional Giving at Neumann Family Services Joe Moag.

Neumann Family Services is a distinguished social service agency located on the north side of Chicago, providing services to adults with developmental disabilities and mental illness.

Moag is also project director at Proud & Included.

"This initiative will connect people together to find support and community, and will work with the LGBTQ Community to expand its inclusion and embracing of all LGBTQ brothers and



Donyetta Barnes, case manager at Neumann Family Services.

Photo courtesy of the agency

sisters that is its hallmark," said Moag.

"I'm thrilled, ecstatic!" said Sandra Clymo, a self-advocate for people with IDD who identify as LGBTQ. "I think too many years went by for people with disabilities who are LGBTQ and didn't have a place to go or have someone to give support or [a place to ask questions]."

Proud & Included Project Consultant Linda Sandman of Blue Tower Solutions will spearhead inclusion efforts and fine tune self-advocacy

trainings throughout the IDD LGBTQ population.

Blue Tower Solutions joins The Center on Halsted, the Illinois Self-Advocacy Alliance and Griffin Centre of Toronto, Ontario on the Proud & Included Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has been designed to help the project reach its goals.

"Our Steering Committee members are vital to the success of this project," Moag said. "The Center on Halsted is the premier provider of LGBTQ Community services in the Midwest; Blue Tower Solutions, Inc., and the Illinois Self-Advocacy Alliance are world-class providers of self-advocacy training for people with IDD; and Griffin Centre in Toronto, Ontario, is an agency that pioneered this type of outreach and community-building programming for people with IDD who identify as LGBTQ."

Regarding potential hurdles, hiring staff members is the immediate need for Proud & Included to get off the ground.

"We're in the hiring staff phase, with activities starting in a couple weeks once staff is in place," said Moag.

Currently, Proud & Included is seeking a full-time project manager to handle day-to-day management of the project's outreach, community-building and inclusion education efforts. This is a one-year position funded through a grant that ends March 31, 2018. Additional funding to continue the project and this position beyond that date will be sought. Interested parties should contact Moag at jmoag@neumannfamilyservices.org or 312-607-4990.

Find out more about Proud & Included by visiting the Neumann Family Services website at <https://neumannfamilyservices.org>.



in the LIFE

Joel Morales

TEXT BY ANDREW DAVIS
PHOTOS FROM MORALES

- **Age**
37
- **Job title**
President of ext. 54 PR agency
- **Orientation**
Gay
- **First concert**
Paula Abdul
- **Neighborhood**
Uptown
- **Dream vacation spot**
"I want an adventure, like in the Amazon."
- **Hobbies**
Crossfit and SoulCycle
- **Pets**
Two labs and a white husky
- **Personal mantra**
"Keep it simple. Work hard and do good."

Joel Morales apparently knows what he wants—and, for a long time, he craved a career in public relations.

"I actually started at a small boutique agency in Chicago," Morales said. "I was able to learn a lot very quickly, and I went to work for W Hotels after that."

However, in college, he studied painting and photography. Another aspect of his creative side—public relations—emerged in graduate school. "As soon as I found marketing and PR, I decided to go back to school and get my MBA in 2003," he said.

Morales is a Southern guy, hailing from Nashville. "My education [going to NYU for undergraduate school] led me out of there. However, it was a really great opportunity to grow up there, although I had that itch to get out of a small town—it was small back then."

It wasn't all roses for Morales in Tennessee, though. "I did feel that minority status," he said. "There were only two or three minority kids in school, [and] I definitely felt that. I think it's different in Nashville now; it's more diverse."

As for the PR agency he leads, ext. 54, Morales came up with the name in an interesting way. "I spent most of my career in-house—in hotels, mainly. I had developed a lot of pet peeves with agencies, and one thing I wanted to do was to address some of those. One of those was that it always seemed to be some sort of disconnect—and I wanted clients to feel that we were some sort of extension of their marketing departments and be as cohesive as possible. The 54 is actually the year my mom was born."



Telling this story actually sparked this writer as being "hard outside with a chewy center"—to which Morales responded, "I like that! I'm going to use that."

Morales added that the best part of his job involves "the people I get to work with—the diversity. We're able to help so many different types of clients. That allows me to be very passionate about those I represent." As for the biggest challenge, he said it involves "the stigmas. People come in with preconceived ideas of what you do, and you have to re-educate them."

As for dream clients, he listed brands such as Target and Audi, "who know how to speak to the consumer. I'd love to work with them."



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**Dana
RUDOLPH**

MOMBIAN

Love and science: How science has helped LGBTQ families

This coming weekend, the March for Science in Washington, D.C. and hundreds of other global locations will encourage science that “upholds the common good” and allows evidence-based policymaking in the public interest (marchforscience.com). I thus thought this was a good time to look at how science has specifically helped LGBTQ parents and our children.

First, and perhaps most obviously, science has helped create many LGBTQ families (my own included) through assisted reproduction techniques such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and gestational surrogacy.

Second, science has given us studies of LGBTQ families that can help us to be better parents and give medical, educational, and other professionals a better idea of how to support us—for example, research that shows how we find resilience, how we deal with stigma, and how we relate to donors, birth parents, surrogates, and donor siblings.

Third, scientific analyses have helped drive policy and law around LGBTQ families. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) list of mental disorders. They were swayed by “the weight of empirical data” in addition to “changing social norms” and the development of a politically active gay community, says Gregory Herek, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of California-Davis and a widely recognized authority on anti-LGBTQ bias, at his website (psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/).

That move had a lasting effect. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy mentioned it in his 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the case that established marriage equality throughout the country, and noted that now, “psychiatrists and others [have] recognized that sexual orientation is both a normal expression of human sexuality and immutable.”

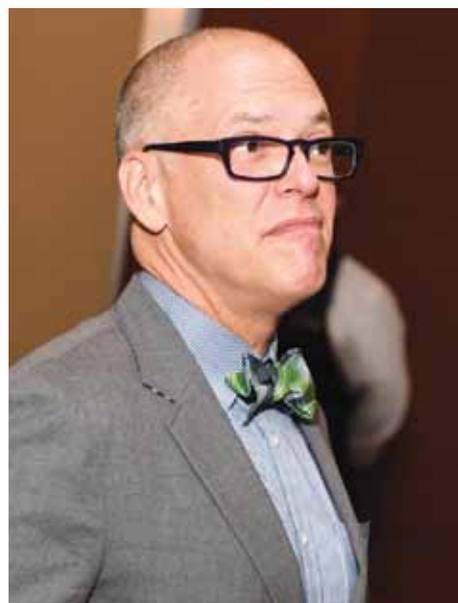
Beyond the DSM, the research of psychologists, sociologists, medical and mental health professionals, economists, demographers, and others has been used extensively in friend-of-the-court (amicus) briefs in key LGBTQ cases including ones on marriage equality, sodomy laws, military inclusion,

and anti-gay discrimination by the Boy Scouts.

In *Obergefell*, for example, the brief from the American Psychological Association (APA) offered a plethora of “scientific evidence” as to the normalcy and stability of same-sex relationships, including numerous studies that show “same-sex couples are no less fit than heterosexual parents to raise children, and their children are no less psychologically healthy and well-adjusted.”

Demographic studies swayed the court, too. In *Obergefell*, Kennedy cited demographer Gary Gates of UCLA’s Williams Institute in noting, “Hundreds of thousands of children are presently being raised by [same-sex] couples”—children who suffer stigma and financial strain if their parents cannot marry.

In family law, the decoupling of homosexuality and mental illness has also helped in matters



Jim Obergefell, the plaintiff in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

Photo from WCT archives

of child custody. Prior to 1973, almost no lesbian mother could gain custody when divorcing a husband, because the DSM said she had a mental illness, explains Nancy Polikoff, LGBTQ family law expert and professor of law at American University, on her blog. The DSM change “transformed that mother into a parent with a legitimate claim that her lesbianism should not be automatic grounds for denying her custody. Forward thinking judges began awarding custody to openly lesbian mothers.” In 1976, Polikoff adds, the American Psychological Association “passed a resolution opposing use of sexual orientation as a primary component in custody, adoption, or foster-parenting determina-

tions.” (beyondstraightandgaymarriage.blogspot.com)

That shift in thinking still resonates. Last week, the Washington Supreme Court overturned a trial court decision that had improperly denied a mom custody because she was a lesbian. The ruling stressed that a parent’s sexual orientation may not be considered in custody decisions “absent an express showing of harm to the children.”

Transgender parents, too, have benefitted from scientific backing. The DSM in 2013 stopped saying that trans people had “Gender Identity Disorder”—“disorder” implying a mental illness—and instead said they experienced “Gender Dysphoria,” a discomfort or conflict between their assigned gender and the one with which they identify. This change has helped doctors in child custody cases give expert testimony that trans parents do not have a serious mental illness (and are thus unfit to parent) simply by being trans.

The ACLU and the National Center for Transgender Equality have also produced a guide for parents and lawyers “to give parents and their attorneys an idea of the kind of scientific evidence that is available if needed” when providing expert testimony in custody cases.

School policy as well as law has been informed by scientific thinking. Herek, for example, provided testimony for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights’ 2011 hearings on ways to protect students from bullying and harassment. GLSEN’s biennial National School Climate Survey on LGBTQ students is replete with statistical analysis—and was cited by the Obama Administration’s Education Department in a 2011 memo reminding schools receiving federal funds that they must provide all student groups, including LGBT ones, with equal support.

And leading medical and mental-health organizations as well as 60 other scholars, including demographers, economists, and psychologists, recently contributed amicus briefs in support of Gavin Grimm, a transgender student fighting in federal court for the right to use the school bathroom that matches his gender identity.

This is but a brief sketch of how science has assisted LGBTQ families (and hasn’t touched on how it has benefitted LGBTQ people in other ways, notably in enabling appropriate medical and mental health care for LGBTQ individuals), but I hope it helps show that while love may make a family, science may play a supporting role. Championing the goals of the March for Science may be as important as any advocacy we do for our families in the current era.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (Mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.

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To 'Yee' or not to 'Yee'

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WCT reviews *King of the Yeas*.

Photo of Francis Jue and Stephanie Soohyun Park by Liz Lauren

DANCIN' FEATS

The Post-Butoh Festival: Transgression during Chicago Dance Month

BY JOANNA FURNANS

Originating after World War II as an act of resistance to the Japanese government, Westernization, traditional gender and sexual norms, plus conventional dance techniques, butoh is a Japanese hybrid dance form known for its taboo and fraught depictions of humanity. Butoh performances have a reputation for extreme physical endurance and powerful imagery that is both grotesque and profoundly beautiful.

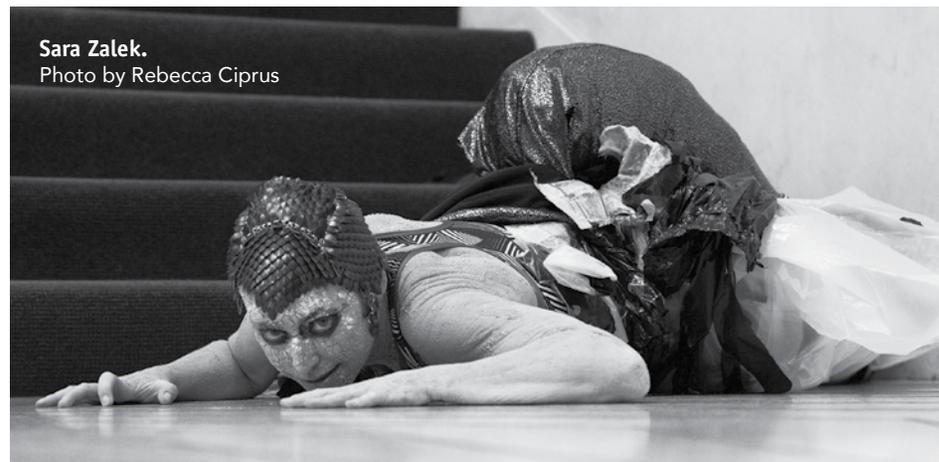
Fast-forward five decades to modern-day Chicago, where butoh Chicago founder, dancer and artist-at-large Sara Zalek—along with fellow performer Holly Chernobyl and their post-butoh cohorts—stage a monthlong festival of workshops, films and performances. Now in its third year, the Post-butoh Festival occurs each weekend in April in non-traditional venues across the city. Zalek coined the term “post-butoh” to honor the lineage of the form but refers specifically to the next generation of practitioners. In an interview with Windy City Times, Zalek described this new wave of artists as “pursuing the form further into unexplored or re-re-explored areas in contemporary art practice, politics, and social networks.” Chernobyl and Zalek discussed their genesis with butoh, its inherent queerness and how butoh finds a home within the Chicago dance community.

“Who doesn’t love an exaggeration?” asked Holly Chernobyl when asked how she began to study butoh. Chernobyl has always been interested in

performative representations of transgression; even before she began studying butoh, her work often centered around the body and issues of sexuality. With a background in theater, she began her performance career in the Pacific Northwest creating vaudevillian-style performances as a “one-woman disaster character” peppered with a little obscene comedy, poetry and song. She eventually began working in puppetry with Seattle’s notoriously twisted Monkey Wrench Puppet Lab, which has roots in bunraku, the traditional Japanese puppet theater.

At that time, Chernobyl was aware of butoh and was attracted to its characteristically dramatic aesthetic, but was wary of it as a practice due to concerns related to cultural appropriation and Japanese fetishization. It wasn’t until years later when an admired artist friend encouraged her to investigate butoh that she fell in love with the form. Chernobyl has now been studying butoh and creating performance work under that umbrella for the past six years. Perhaps her most influential teacher is Ken Mai, a Finland-based butoh artist whose work is featured with Chernobyl’s April 29 at the Japanese Culture Center. Her performance pieces maintain the earlier comedic elements but now more frequently explore the “precipice of crisis” and toe the lines between horror and comedy, attraction and repulsion.

Zalek came to butoh more intuitively. She had been making her own rigorous, “fantastical,” body-based performance art work for years when, in 2005, a friend asked if she had ever



Sara Zalek.

Photo by Rebecca Ciprus

seen butoh. Zalek began to investigate the form and quickly realized that many of the concepts housed in butoh aligned with the ideas that she was already exploring and wanted to develop further. She was attracted to butoh because of its deep roots in and of the body and “it offers an element of danger that dance doesn’t usually have.”

“I’ve always considered myself a collager of experimental arts,” Zalek said. Indeed, Zalek (a 2015 Chicago Dancemakers Forum Lab Artist) has an impressive and unconventional resume whose credits include everything from dancer, writer, and vocalist to producer, teacher, and administrator. Not the sort of person who waits for others to make opportunities happen, Zalek took it upon herself to help bring international butoh artists to Chicago as a way to support those artists, continue her own training and expose fellow dance and performance artists and audiences to this incredible work. Thus began the first Post-butoh Festival in 2014 and the advent of butoh Chicago, an organization dedicated to growing the butoh community in Chicago through research, workshops and performances.

In a city that tends to draw strict lines between what is considered dance, performance art and

theater, some say it is a feather in Chicago’s dance cap that it is also recognized as a welcome hub for experimental butoh in the United States. There is no doubt that Zalek and her community of collaborators (especially this year’s co-curator, Rebecca Ladida of the In/habit roving art series, and Antibody Corporation as fiscal sponsor) has helped garner this positive international reputation for Chicago.

And to make it even better, “We are all a bunch of queeros!” said Chernobyl with a laugh. “Sexuality has always played a major role in butoh. Gender fluidity is a real value in the form.” Indeed, the portrayal of human experience, unconfined by gender binaries, is one of the most thrilling and poignant aspects of butoh. Depictions of vulnerability and strength within the body combined with a spirit of defiance and opposition make this work incredibly well-suited to reflect the struggles of our current cultural climate.

“Transgression is queer. Resistance is queer. It’s important to engage in problematic art forms,” Chernobyl said. For those who have yet to engage with such forms in Chicago, now’s their chance.

For a complete line-up of remaining weeks of the Post-Butoh Festival, plus tickets and workshop registration, visit ButohChicago.com.

THEATER REVIEW

For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday

Playwright: Sarah Ruhl

At: Shattered Globe Theatre at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave.

Tickets: 773-975-8150 or

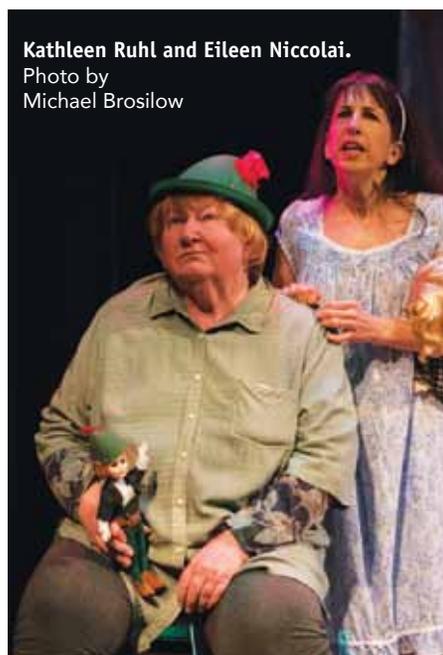
ShatteredGlobe.org; \$35

Runs through: May 20

BY SCOTT C. MORGAN

With the Chicago premiere of Sarah Ruhl's 2016 play *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*, Shattered Globe Theatre has already laid claim to the casting coup of the season. Ruhl wrote this play in honor of her theater-loving actress mother, Kathleen Ruhl, and she herself is playing her daughter's dramatized version of herself.

Like other Ruhl plays (*The Clean House*, *eu-rydice*), *For Peter Pan...* is filled with the playwright's usual dreamy mix of whimsy and seriousness. And since Ruhl has J.M. Barrie's most



Kathleen Ruhl and Eileen Niccolai.

Photo by Michael Brosilow

famous creation to riff on, *For Peter Pan...* can be especially potent and poignant in exploring faith, familial love and lost childhood.

The play begins with Kathleen Ruhl sharing anecdotes about playing Peter Pan as a child in Davenport, Iowa, and getting to meet arguably the most famous Peter Pan of the 20th century, the Broadway star Mary Martin. But the meat of the play really deals with Kathleen and her four grown siblings in the 1990s.

Ruhl dramatizes the before-and-after moments when the five adults realize that they are no longer technically children. It's the hospital death of their last surviving parent, George (Doug McDade).

The siblings then hash out the happy/sad memories of their childhood, career choices and questions of faith and belief. These arguments that then veer into angrily divisive political views which almost feel shoehorned in. The brothers played by Patrick Thornton, H.B. Ward and Ben Werling are all aggressively conservative, while Ruhl and her sister played by Eileen Niccolai are both defensively liberal.

THEATER REVIEW

King of the Yees

Playwright: Lauren Yee

At: Goodman Theatre, 170 N. Dearborn St.

Tickets: \$10-\$40

Runs through: April 30

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Lauren Yee's play is a chronicle of San Francisco's Chinatown that refuses to turn a blind eye to its corrupt politicians and gangster warlords. It's also a tour of the district, with exotic xenophile-pleasing sights cited by names and addresses, in addition to cute parade lions, CGI action-movie violence and silly fortune-cookie games.

Its dramatic universe encompasses the theater we occupy, along with mythical realms associated with Joseph Campbell-styled odysseys (cf. Mary Zimmerman). It's about exploring your roots and talking with aged parents before their voices are forever silenced. What it is *not* is an elegy for a halcyon past, thanks to the intercession of a clan patriarch so exuberant and audacious—is there a Chinese word for chutzpah?—that he cannot help but assume command of the narrative (cf. Mel Brooks).

The evening begins with characters representing Lauren Yee and her father, Larry Yee, on the occasion of the latter's 60th birthday, lamenting the legendary West Coast neighborhood's loss of its ancestral identity under pressures of gentrification and assimilation, but five minutes into their dirge, the actors playing them are interrupt-

ed by actors playing the *real-life* Larry and Lauren Yee—stay with me, now—who commence bickering over the content of the play-within-a-play in process. Assisted by the three fictional-persona players and flanked by the clubhouse doors of Yee Fung Toy, the isonymous fraternal organization providing community to lonely Cantonese immigrants for generations, Larry proceeds to recount genealogical tales spiraling farther and farther off-topic so that Lauren is forced to reassert control over her project. Upon returning after intermission, though, she discovers her progenitor missing, and herself charged with finding him, lest he be lost to the memory and his legacy with him.

This is a big load of meta-theatrics to pack into a mere two hours, but Goodman Theatre's world premiere production roots its spectacle firmly in

the familiar—a thunderclap whenever crime boss Raymond “Shrimp Boy” Chow's name is uttered (cf. *Young Frankenstein*), a dance score that segues from traditional Sino-centric instruments to MC Hammer, Korean and mixed-ethnic actors commiserating on the vagaries of show-business Asian stereotypes—all blooming under Joshua Kahan Brody's direction at a velocity that ensures that our attention never wavers.

Ultimately, however, the evening belongs to real-life actor Francis Jue, whose Larry Yee emerges a mensch transcending all cultural boundaries. Once you meet him, you won't forget him.

THEATER REVIEW

Linda Vista

Playwright: Tracy Letts

At: Steppenwolf Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St.

Tickets: \$20-\$94

Runs through: May 21

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

It's been said of the United States that everything not fastened down eventually rolls westward to California, so it's unsurprising that we meet our AARP-aged protagonist adrift in San Diego, where cheap bachelor apartments come with two bedrooms, a swimming pool, cactus-fruit margaritas and a Vietnamese immigrant colony next door. A series of disconcerting events—the birth of his son, his wife's wish to be near her family and his pending divorce—have conspired to convince former Chicago news photographer-turned-camera repairman

Dick Wheeler that he is a terminal screw-up whose every scheme is doomed to end in shame.

Well, some men—and women, too—are simply not meant to move mountains or spawn dynasties. The wise ones freely acknowledge their aversion to conventional career-paths, thus minimizing the damage to themselves and their less perceptive acquaintances. Wheeler has not yet achieved this epiphany, however, instead chafing under discontent propelling him to engage in rants so protracted and vehement, you'd think this was a play by David Mamet and not Tracy Letts.

Wheeler's misanthropic outlook is not improved by his married friends rushing to pair him with a needy “life coach” (who whines, after just one month, “I thought we were falling in love!”) nor by his subsequent preoccupation with a pregnant waif who feels stifled by his overeager efforts at second-fatherhood. Only when our aging pilgrim abandons the expectations imposed on him and returns to his natural calling as, not a shaper, but an observer of his

universe, do we see glimmers of redemption.

Given the alternatives Letts offers, redemption comes none too soon: Wheeler's best buddy, Paul, is more resigned than content with his marital lot, while camera-shop owner Michael's recitations of pornographic fantasies is bred of isolation, rather than libido. Three of the four women figuring in Wheeler's existential journey fare no better, being illustrative of different stages in the futile quest for fulfillment-through-partnership, leaving Wheeler's friendly coworker the sole individual exhibiting the patience and savvy to determine her destination before inviting others to follow.

These characters could easily be refitted to the dimensions of a TV comedy, but the always-intelligent director Dexter Bullard rejects threadbare Mars/Venus guffaws to draw forth performances steeped in insight and compassion from a cast of Steppenwolf's finest. If you have ever known a Wheeler—or maybe you *are* a Wheeler—you will have no trouble empathizing with this flawed hero for a perplexing age.

CRITICS' PICKS

Beyond Caring, Lookingglass Theatre Company, through May 7. The company that usually transports us skyward to the realms of fantasy this time plummets us to the depths of minimum-wage squalor for a bleak 90 minutes and dares us to remain detached. MSB

Born Ready, Factory Theater, through April 29. Forget your cheap and silly camp—Stacie Barra loves those mid-20th-century Hollywood “women's pictures” too much to make fun of them. MSB

In To America, Griffin Theatre at Den Theatre, through April 23. This verbal concert offers words spoken/written by American immigrants from 1607 'til now, opening eyes by portraying slaves as forced immigrants, and Mexican immigrants to Spain's California. It's a timely reminder to the perils and aspirations of the journey. JBA

Ruthless! The Musical, Steel Beam Theatre, St. Charles, through April 30. It's worth a day trip to the suburbs to see this campy, over-the-top musical comedy. Fans of *The Bad Seed*, *Gypsy* and *All About Eve* will be in heaven seeing this 1992 spoof on showbiz ambition. SCM

—By Abarbanel, Barnidge and Morgan

THEATER REVIEW

The Mystery of Love & Sex

Playwright: **Bathsheba Doran**

At: **Writers Theatre, 325 Tudor Ct., Glencoe**

Tickets: **847-242-6000;**

WritersTheatre.org; \$35-\$80

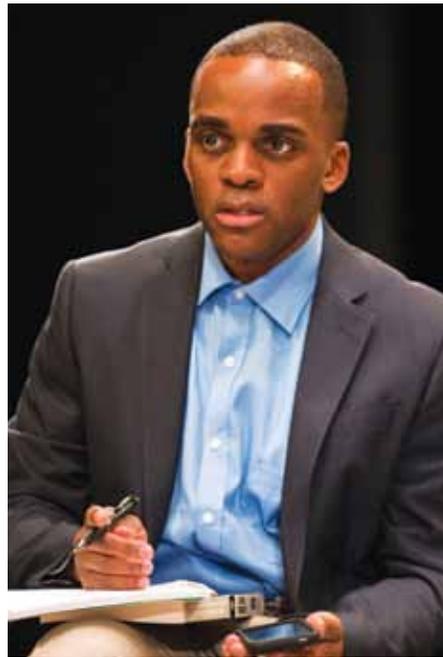
Runs through: **July 2**

BY **JONATHAN ABARBANEL**

Despite its title and a provocative program photo, this contemporary comedy-of-manners concerns sexuality rather than sex. Charlotte and Jonny have been best friends and next-door neighbors since they were nine, in an affluent Southern city. As college roommates they seem destined to marry, yet both have their first sexual experiences (unseen in the play) with others and then both come out. Over several years they carve out successful careers (she/politics, he/academia), find fulfilling relationships and then have a huge falling-out on the brink of Charlotte's wedding before a final reconciliation.

Charlotte (Hayley Burgess) and Jonny (Travis Turner) are attractive, bright and glib, but their story is relatively commonplace and wouldn't be very interesting if that's all there were. However, there are complications. For instance, Jonny won't come out as long as his strict Baptist widowed mother (unseen) is alive. Far more complicating are Charlotte's parents, Howard (Keith Kupferer) and Lucinda (Lia Mortensen), he a displaced New York Jew and successful author of detective fiction and she a Southern aristocrat whose family disowned her for marrying "a kike."

Charlotte and Jonny's relationship frequently is seen through the eyes of her parents, who have no qualms about religious differences or the kids' sexuality and apparently are unconcerned that Jonny is Black. He grew up with Charlotte, and Howard regards Jonny as a son. However, Jonny sees things differently. He teaches a course on covert racism with Howard's detective novels as his prime example. When Howard discovers this, his titanic hurt and sense of betrayal break Charlotte's friendship with Jonny. The schism lingers even after Howard and Jonny reconcile. Even more, while the young adults are finding their way in love and sexuality, Howard and Lucinda



Travis Turner in The Mystery of Love & Sex.
Photo by Michael Brosilow

lose theirs as their marriage dissolves.

Under director Marti Lyons, the production is flawless in an intimate alley staging, with a giant old tree dominating Andrew Boyce's warm, simple-looking set. Kupferer is an assured master of Howard's sarcastic-but-caring persona and Mortensen is slyly salacious as the slow-to-fade southern belle. Burgess and Turner are ever-so-appealing as the clever but self-absorbed youngsters. All four are effectively vulnerable so we can empathize.

But where is my focus supposed to be? I know that Charlotte is the center of the play, or Charlotte and Jonny, but the parents continually pull focus, especially Howard. The only key incident we actually see onstage is Howard's Act II confrontation with Jonny. I'm not certain of playwright Doran's message, but it seems to be that (a) friendship is love and love requires friendship and (b) friendships must be nurtured to be lasting. I believe most people know these things, which makes this play stylish but not particularly revealing—just as a comedy of manners should be.

SPOTLIGHT

Die-hard fans of composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim won't want to miss Porchlight Music Theatre's rare revival of **Marry Me a Little**. The 1980s revue conceived by gay playwright Craig Lucas and Norman René features cut "trunk songs" by Sondheim to tell the story of two lonely New York singles whose apartments strangely combine into one. Expect plenty of musical magic since the production stars Jeff Award-winner Austin Cook (Sondheim on Sondheim) and Bethany Thomas (Empire). **Marry Me a Little** continues through Sunday, May 21, at Stage 773, 1225 W. Belmont Ave. Tickets are



\$40-\$51; call 773-327-5252 or visit Porchlight-MusicTheatre.org.

Caption: Austin Cook and Bethany Thomas in Porchlight Music Theatre's Sondheim revue of **Marry Me a Little**. Photo by Michelle Leatherby

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NUNN ON ONE: MOVIES

Matthew Aaron taps a 'Landline'

BY JERRY NUNN

Out actor Matthew Aaron wrote, directed, and starred in the new indie film *Landline*. It stars Tom Arnold, Betsy Brandt, and Jim O'Heir. This the first sports related film that features LGBT leads working with Major League Baseball. Cubs player Ryne Sandberg plays himself in *Landline*.

Aaron has hosted *The Matthew Aaron Show*, an internet radio gig in which he has interviewed many celebrities. His films *The Way We Talk*, *Bromance* and, now, *Landline* will all be available to stream and on VOD.

Windy City Times: Hi, Matthew. So *Landline* is about disconnecting from technology?

Matthew Aaron: Yes. I felt a little lost in America. I felt there was a story to be told here. My character gives up something so major in society.

WCT: Why the Cubs angle?

MA: I am just a huge Cubs fan. I knew it would be a cute film not a Sundance edgy film. I needed something that would really speak to Chicago. We even predicted in the film that they would win the World Series.

WCT: What was the most personal element of yourself in the movie?

MA: The personal thing for me as both an actor and an artist is with the LGBTQ aspect of it and this being a family film in that genre. It is not G-rated, but there is no cussing. There is no sex in the film. It is something for everybody.

On top of that I don't think there has ever been a production with LGBTQ themes combined with a major sports corporation before. Major League baseball really stepped it up. They have made a film starring gay men, and a trans actor. I look at that as such an achievement. That is what matters most to me personally.

WCT: Is there a lesbian in the movie to represent every letter of the LGBT?

MA: No, unfortunately. Many of my friends have told me I need to have one in my films.

WCT: Maybe your boss in the film is a lesbian.

MA: That could be true. We don't know much about her personal life. Betsy does have that hot lipstick lesbian vibe going on!

WCT: Maybe she's the B. Talk about the trans character in *Landline*.

MA: Avi Roque plays George. They just blew me away. They are someone I definitely want to continue working with.

I was really nervous about writing for a trans person. I can't speak from those experiences so I was intimidated about writing the character. I made sure with Avi everything was kosher. I am respectful about speaking from the experience. They gave me notes and we made sure it was up to par.

Almost none of this happened. Two weeks before I was going to stretch my acting chops and play straight with a wife. There was a schedul-



Matthew Aaron.

Photo by Timothy M. Schmidt

ing conflict with our actors. I had already made two films with LGBT themes. I told the baseball people to trust me. I changed a male role to a trans role. I just decided to go for it. Since we got permission to make a LGBTQ film with the sport team we did not know if that would happen again so we used every opportunity that we could. We wanted to represent as many people as we could.

WCT: How was working with Tom Arnold?

MA: Tom was great. I had heard mixed things about Tom. I think Tom will say that is accurate. He is a family man and a great guy. His brain just works differently than others. You really have to be patient with him in the creative process to allow him to express himself.

I think Tom and Jim are fantastic in this film. I wanted Jim to be a little more over the top. I wanted him to be the top!

I think because Tom just had his first kid at age 55. He's the father of this movie. You see it. It is great to see a more weathered, more serious Tom Arnold.

WCT: What other films do you have?

MA: *Bromance* is a film about my dislike for labels, although I do feel they are needed. All

of my films have pros and cons to them. I don't give answers to my films. I try not to. I like to say there is a happy compromise to everything.

It is about a guy questioning himself. He is surrounded by straight friends. It is very personal.

It is like *Landline*. It is not a film about being gay, but it stars LGBTQ actors. What I am trying to do is make films where you don't even think about it really. I want people to think it is just like their life. I believe my partner in *Landline* and I were talking like any husband and wife you will meet. I want people to see that. I think the only real differences people will see is what goes on in our bedroom, and I don't think that is anyone's business.

WCT: Have you thought about moving away to do more films?

MA: I lived in LA for four years. I sold a few pilots. I had one with Dermot Mulroney and Common called *Dine and Dash*. It was a great experience, but I decided after this one experience that I would pay for it myself. My friends are blue collar dudes, so we all pooled our money and started making movies. That is how they got made.

I am from Chicago. I love it here. I wanted to

show aspects of the city that you don't see in those big studio movies. They don't care about Chicago much. It is just a landscape to film and it looks good.

I respect Michael Bay, but he doesn't care how Wicker Park is represented.

WCT: He's not personally invested.

MA: No, he's not. I am really invested in this city. I want to keep making movies that show that.

WCT: Do you pay for films through crowdfunding?

MA: I don't know how we are going to pay for our next film. I just signed with new managers. We are trying to figure it out.

I have three scripts that are ready to go. One is a multi-million dollar picture, one is an almost million dollar picture, and one is a half million dollar picture. What it is going to come down to is which one will be made first.

We have made our choice. It is very timely, local and political. I am hoping it comes together. I have my fingers crossed!

Landline is available on CableVision, iTunes, Vudu and Google Play, among other platforms.



Michelle Shocked.

PR photo

Michelle Shocked in town this summer

Controversial singer Michelle Shocked will perform three shows at City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph St., this summer.

The performances form what's being called a "trilogy residency," with shows focused on the albums *Short Shapred Shocked* (June 27), *Captain Swing* (July 27) and *Arkansas Traveler* (Aug. 23).

Shocked initially acquired a large lesbian following in the 1990s, and she even came out as bisexual in *Outlines* newspaper (which purchased and merged with *Windy City Times* in 2000). However, in 2013, she told a San Francisco crowd that "God hates fags" and that she lives in fear of same-sex marriage. In the wake of that, her tour was cancelled and she reportedly tried to have the anti-gay rant erased from YouTube (while claiming the comments were taken out of context).

The singer often expresses herself on social media, and even got into an exchange on Twitter with a Chicagoan named Susana Darwin. At one point, Shocked directed several people, including Darwin, to "'Truth VS Reality' with Michelle Shocked (<https://vimeo.com/97973389>)." The open letter at this site, written by "J.C.," addresses what the poster calls Shocked's "completely unsubstantiated vilification as a 'homophobe.'"

In an email exchange with Darwin, City Winery Marketing Director Dan Conroe said, "We understand the outrage that followed Michelle's comments on stage in 2013 and we certainly do not agree with the statements that she made. But we do not believe that we should only present artists who share our views and we do not believe that we should silence artists who make controversial statements."

"We understand that some of her fans (and fans of City Winery) will choose not to attend these shows and we absolutely respect that. We very much appreciate your support of City Winery and we do hope that you will join us again soon."

Tickets are \$26-\$35 each; visit CityWinery.com.

Queer Harlem event at Center on April 23

The Legacy Project's "Harlem Comes to Halsted"—a jazz-and-blues tribute to The Harlem Renaissance—will take place Sunday, April 23, 12-3 p.m., at Center on Halsted, 3656 N. Halsted St.

There will be live music, a gourmet brunch, a silent-art auction and period costumes. The event will also honor the first bronze memorial under contract for the fall induction to Chicago's Legacy Walk.

Lucy Stoolie will emcee; others slated to appear include Diva Honey Brown, DJ Marc "Moose" Moder, Tovi Khali and historian Kevin Mumford. The art of Johnny Botts, Doug Etheridge, Darren Jones, Jay Strommen, Krzysztof Wasko and Joey Wozniak will be featured.

Admission is \$20-\$100; see <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/harlem-comes-to-halsted-tickets-32818430810>.

FILMS

Putting the LGBT in the CLFF



Luis Fernandez in Tamara.
Movie still from CLFF

BY JERRY NUNN

The Chicago Latino Film Festival (CLFF) turns 33 this year and there is a big presence planned for lesbians, gays and bisexuals, with a finale involving a famous transgender figure. The International Latino Cultural Center of Chicago attained not-for-profit status in 1987, fulfilling a mission of promoting Latin culture through the annual festival. The organization's goal of building bridges is again putting its money where its mouth is.

Films and special events are running April 20

through May 4. Opening night begins with the Argentinian romantic comedy *One Night of Love*, and there will be a screening and post-show gala. The film's lead actress, Carla Peterson, will be at the gala on April 20.

A kickoff party held at Fulton Market Kitchen on April 10 packed in the crowds. Pepe Vargas (the founder and executive director of the festival) attended, along with a roomful of many supporters.

Several LGBT dramas and comedies are featured in the two-week film fest.

Brazil's *Public Intimacy (Intimidade Publica)* accomplishes much in a short period of time. Four stories are divided into seasons covering homophobia, prostitution, a transgender teacher and a ghost. This is all with a running time of 71 minutes.

Take Me for a Ride is another short but sweet story. It's a coming-of-age film set in a high school where the main character Sara meets Andrea. Sparks fly as they learn to deal with their new relationship and disapproval in their surroundings.

Extra Terrestrials (Extra Terrestres) is a Puerto Rican/Venezuelan mix of a coming-out story. Astronomer Daniela plans to marry her longtime girlfriend and wants to invite her dysfunctional family. Her conservative father runs a poultry plant while her nerdy bird rescuing nephew almost steals the show without speaking. Everyone has their secrets with this heartwarming character piece that deserves to be seen.

Spain's *Illusive (Inexistentes)* is another family drama depicting the relationship of a gay son named Raul with his mother. Life is a drag until things get better.

There are two musicals offered during the festival run with *At Your Doorstep*, about housing, and a Peruvian musical called *Crazy in Love* that includes two screenings, four female cousins and one rendition of Ana Gabriel's "*Cosas del Amor*."

Filmmaker Elia K. Schneider's *Tamara* finishes the festival by telling the true story of the first transgender person elected to Venezuela's parliament. Tomas Adrian, played by Luis Fernandez, becomes Tamara after a long journey of trying to fit into society as a lawyer with a wife and two children.

Tamara's event, slated for May 4, will take place at AMC River East 21 with a post-screening gala at the Embassy Suites Hotel next door. The director, producer and several of the stars are scheduled to attend.

For a complete schedule and full event information, visit ChicagoLatinoFilmFestival.org. Films are shown with subtitles unless otherwise stated.

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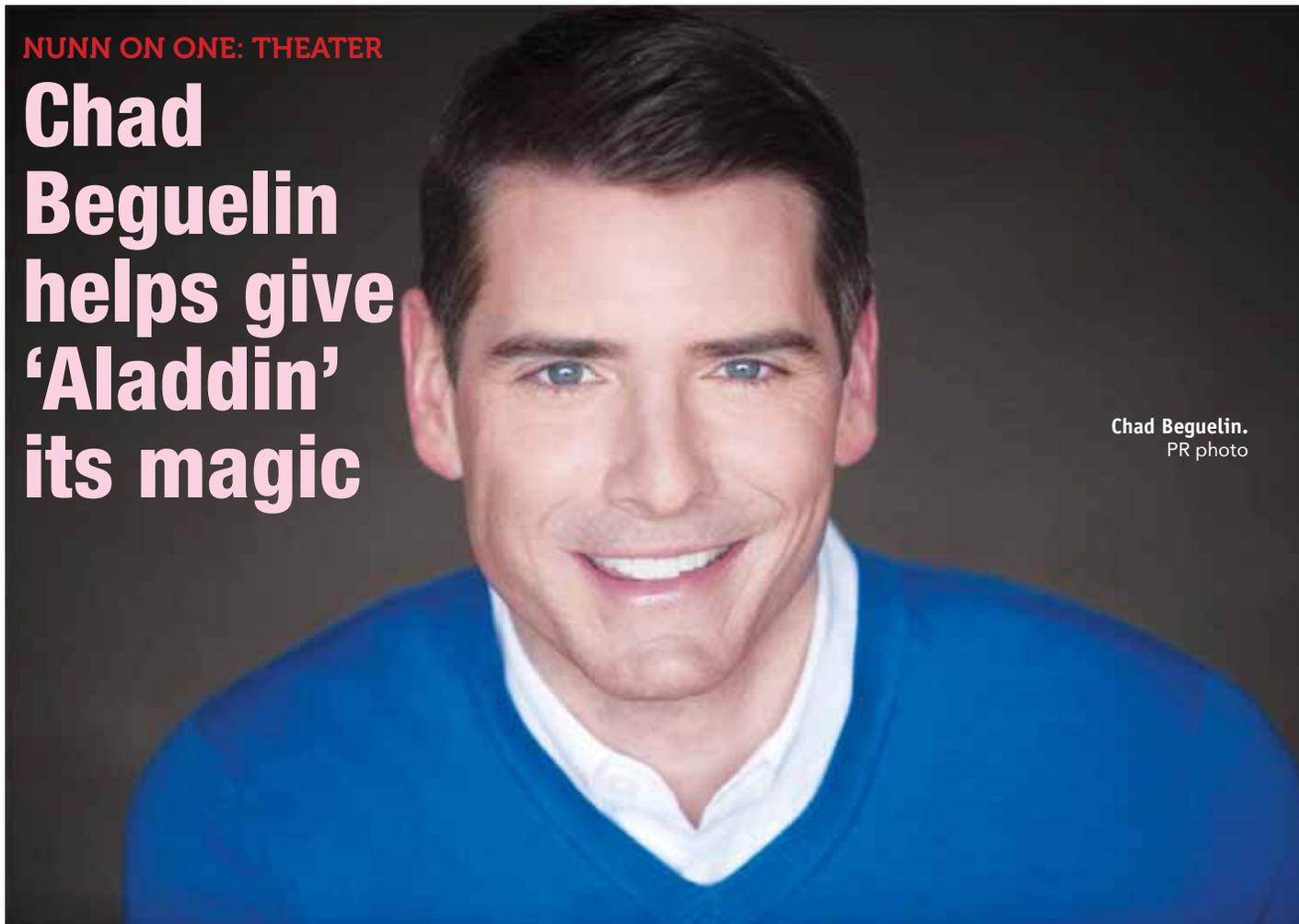
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NUNN ON ONE: THEATER

Chad Beguelin helps give 'Aladdin' its magic



Chad Beguelin.
PR photo

BY JERRY NUNN

The musical version of Disney's Aladdin takes the popular cartoon and gives it even more of a shine. The story follows a young man discovering a genie in a lamp. He uses his wishes to pursue a princess and battle an evil Grand Vizier. The book was written by Chad Beguelin, who also wrote lyrics along with Tim Rice and Howard Ashman.

Before this project, Beguelin wrote the book for the musical *The Wedding Singer* and the lyrics for *Elf the Musical*. He was nominated for two Tony Award with *The Wedding Singer* making him a four time nominee.

He wrote the book with Bob Martin for the film-based musical *Gotta Dance* (now titled *Half Time*) since its Chicago debut in 2015.

Disney Theatrical launches the North American tour in Chicago, and *Windy City Times* called Beguelin to talk about it.

Windy City Times: Hi, Chad. So you are originally from Illinois?

Chad Beguelin: A little town called Centralia, Illinois. It is very Southern.

WCT: Did you visit Chicago often while growing up?

CB: We did. My parents and I came there to see theater a lot. There are a lot of fond memories from my childhood in Chicago, so it is great *Aladdin* is opening there.

WCT: Do you have a favorite musical of all time?

CB: When I was a kid, I was obsessed with *Evi-*

ta. My birthday cake one year was the cast album cover. It ran deep!

WCT: What did you think of Madonna's version?

CB: She was good. I, one day, dream of seeing Lady Gaga do it.

WCT: Had you worked with Disney before *Aladdin*?

CB: Many years ago the theme park, which is completely different than the theatrical department, approached me to write a 30-minute version for California Adventure at the Hyperion Theater. It ran for a gazillion years afterwards.

Unbeknownst to the Broadway producers, they brought me in for several scripts that they could license out to schools and regional theaters. *Aladdin* was on the list. I told them it was my favorite. That is how it all came about.

WCT: How did you approach writing it?

CB: Originally, it was never destined for Broadway. My first script I did a very true to the movie version. They sent it to composer Alan Menken, who wanted to meet with me. I thought he would love it, but instead he wanted it thrown out. He wanted me to incorporate as many of the songs that were cut from the movie that he had written with Howard Ashman as possible. Suddenly I had a whole batch of songs that not people knew of.

It became a puzzle of getting these songs into the show. There are characters that sang the songs that don't exist in the movie. It became a different process.

I am a huge Howard Ashman fan. I was eager to

have his songs heard. He is the reason I wanted to become a lyricist.

WCT: Did you add LGBT content?

CB: There might be some winks here and there. I don't want to spoil anything.

In the story, I can relate to it as a gay man because it is about someone pretending to be something he is not. His dreams don't come true until he comes out and lives his true life and true self.

WCT: Do you think the genie role is better the more flamboyant it is played?

CB: Before Robin Williams was part of the mix, Howard Ashman and Alan Menken had the idea to make him a Cab Calloway character, a 1930s club act. We ran with that. We were blessed to have James Monroe Inglehart, who was amazing and made the role his own. There is a lot of sass in there!

WCT: Does the Chicago cast member make it his own? Is improv allowed?

CB: He puts his own spin on it. We make sure the improv is reined in a little bit. We do want to get people out on time.

WCT: There are differences from the movie I read. Is Iago a person [instead of] a parrot?

CB: In this production, he is a henchman. It is inferred that he was once a bird.

We considered animals like Jasmine's tiger, but we thought no one is going to do animals on-stage better than *The Lion King*.

WCT: How did it feel to receive Tony nominations?

CB: It was exciting to be there and be a part of it. We didn't originally get rave reviews so we had to work hard and rewrite it. It was a happy surprise when we got it to Broadway that we felt we got it right. It is a testament to how hard everyone worked.

WCT: How was [your experience with] *The Wedding Singer: the Musical*?

CB: It was my first show ever on Broadway. It has an afterlife. My husband and I just went down to Puerto Rico because my nephew is going to high school there. They did *The Wedding Singer* there. We went to see it, which was surreal.

They just kicked off a new UK tour. It is funny how something we wrote so long ago keeps popping up.

WCT: Talk about your new project, *The Prom*.

CB: We just did it in Atlanta, and waiting for a new theater in New York. Right now every theater is completely booked.

It is a story about a lesbian who wants to take her girlfriend to the prom. The school board says no. A bunch of out of work Broadway actors hear about it and go to throw a rally to change minds. They are so ego maniacal that they make it worse before they make it better.

WCT: Are you coming to Chicago for the premier of *Aladdin*?

CB: There is a conflict because the Melbourne kick off is the same night. I am going to be in Australia. I will come back to see the Chicago show afterwards.

WCT: Weren't you in town for the *Gotta Dance* premiere?

CB: I was and in Chicago for three cold months. I was writing the book for that. It is called *Half Time* now. It will be at the Paper Mill Playhouse in 2018. We are going to do more work on it and get the old gang together. No pun intended...

WCT: That was a cold night at that red carpet. Does your dog go with you to the red carpets?

CB: Of course. My little yorkie has a bowtie!

Make a wish for tickets, as Disney's *Aladdin* run through Sept. 10 at the Cadillac Palace Theatre, 151 W. Randolph St. Visit Broadway-InChicago.com or call 800-775-2000 for more information.

'Lady X' at Mary's Attic in April-June

Hell in a Handbag Productions will open its 15th season with the world premiere of *Lady X—A Musical* on April 21-June 10 at Mary's Attic, 5400 N. Clark St.

Based on Handbag's 2010 play of the same name, *Lady X—A Musical* takes on the black-

and-white crime melodrama films of the '30s and '40s. The production will feature Chazie Bly, David Cerda, Laura Coleman, Sydney Genco, Adrian Hadlock, Michael Hampton, Ed Jones, Josh Kemper, Elizabeth Lesinski, Steve Love, Michael S. Miller and Christea Parent.

Single tickets and season subscriptions are currently available at HandbagProductions.org or 800-838-3006.

BOOK REVIEW

Trans*Am

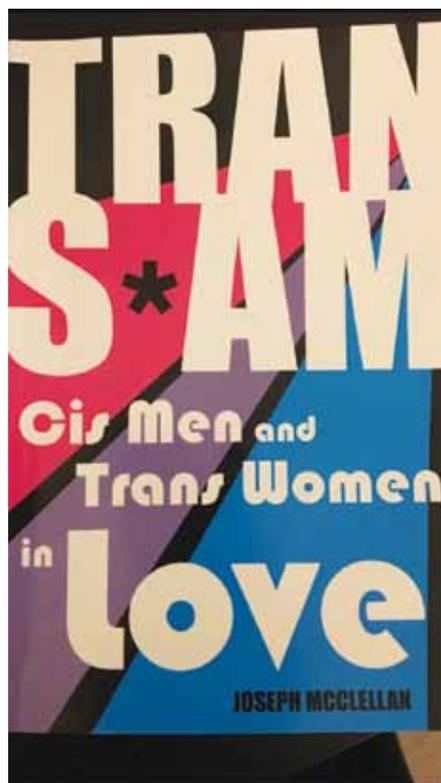
By Joseph McClellan

\$18.28; ThreeL Media; 176 pages

REVIEW BY MOLLY SPRAYREGEN

In *Trans*Am*, Joseph McClellan explores what it means to be a cisgender man who has always found himself primarily attracted to transgender women. Using a combination of theory and personal anecdote, McClellan seeks to both de-stigmatize and de-fetishize the concept of transamory by illuminating the compelling emotional and physical reasons behind his attractions.

Throughout the book, McClellan attempts to deconstruct why so many cisgender men feel ashamed of being attracted to transgender women, and in doing so he provides a captivating examination of how we view gender, sex, sexuality, and the physical body in modern day society. He discusses the external difficulties he faces when dating a transgender woman, the way being alone with his partner offers a refuge from a public that, when they decide to venture into it, always seems to demand answers to



inappropriate, judgmental questions. He also spends time investigating our society's obsession with genitals.

Why, he asks, does it remain so important to us that our partners contain the genital markers typically associated with the gender with which they identify? Why do cisgender men fear the implications of enjoying sex with a woman with male genitals, and for that matter, why should there be any implications at all? Through all of this, McClellan seems to urge his readers to worry less about labels and judgments and to focus on doing what makes them feel good and happy, as long as it also makes their partner feel the same.

McClellan also reminds readers that no matter what they enjoy, they never need to feel boxed in by a specific label. He explains that while he identifies as transamorous, it is not the only sexuality he identifies as, and he has had

meaningful physical and emotional relationships with people that did not identify as transgender women. McClellan doesn't shy away from the complexity of sexual attraction and from the many combinations of factors that lead two people into feeling mutual desire for one another. He admits that his own sexuality is complicated and cannot be distilled into any single word or phrase and so he doesn't attempt to distill it.

One of McClellan's major goals is to urge cisgender men to have greater respect for transgender women and, beyond that, to help men understand that feeling attracted to transgender women is nothing to fear or be ashamed of. This message, he explains, is crucial to the safety of transgender women, who are too often the victims of violent attacks perpetrated by men who, upon discovering a woman they like is transgender, become disturbed at their own attraction and take it out on the woman for "deceiving" them.

McClellan is shockingly open and honest, holding nothing back of his own stories and acknowledging his limitations as a cisgender man writing about transgender women. Beyond that he acknowledges the many injustices perpetrated against transgender women by cisgender men and does not attempt to abdicate responsibility for the group he represents. Instead, he merely attempts to highlight that there are many cisgender men out there who feel nothing but love and respect for transgender women and want to share their lives with them. "I offer my pound of flesh," he says, "as reparations for the abuses and obfuscations doled out by my kind, hopefully opening the door for more open communication and smoother pathways to intimacy."

The more we are educated about different types of gender identities and sexualities, McClellan argues, the safer and happier everyone will be.

Driehaus exhibiting French posters

The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, 40 E. Erie St., has announced the special exhibition "L'Affichomania: The Passion for French Posters," running through Jan. 7, 2018.

The exhibition features 45 posters dating from 1875 to 1910 created by five grand masters: Jules Cheret, Eugene Grasset, Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Alphonse Mucha.

Each of the five masters of the medium will be featured in one of the period galleries located on the second and third floors of the museum. This will allow guests to both explore the artist's individual style and to compare them with their contemporaries.

See DriehausMuseum.org.

Tattoo exhibit through April 30

As part of its newest exhibition, "Tattoo," The Field Museum is opening a working tattoo shop.

Members of the public will be able to get a natural-history themed tattoo live in the exhibition on select weekends throughout the run of the show, which ends April 30.

Visitors can choose from 42 different pieces of flash art (pre-drawn designs) created by local artists to get as tattoos. There are various tattooing time slots available to the public, on a first-come, first-served basis.

The exhibition features 170 objects telling the story of tattooing, including historical artifacts, intricate contemporary designs tattooed onto silicone models of the human body, and 14 objects from the museum's own collection.

Visit FieldMuseum.org/discover/on-exhibit/tattoo/.

CULTURE CLUB

Christian singer Trey Pearson on coming out, Chicago

BY TERRI-LYNNE WALDRON

Christian rock singer Trey Pearson recently came out to the public on his website, where he chronicled his struggles to admit to himself and then to his family that he is gay.

Now more comfortable in his skin, Pearson talked with Windy City Times about his message of love, music as therapy and male attention.

Windy City Times: I read your coming-out letter on your website and I also watched your interview on The View. Which came first?

Trey Pearson: I put the letter out on May 31 [of last year] and it was the number-one trending topic in the world on Facebook. The next morning The View called me and asked me to come onto their show. I went on The View days after the story came out.

WCT: Did writing the letter feel like a weight was lifted off your shoulders?

TP: Yeah. Being able to not feel like there's a part of me that I can't face anymore—when you don't feel like you have that—you feel like you can face the world and there's nothing to be scared of anymore.

WCT: The first video for your debut solo single, [away from your band, Everyday Sun-

day], is "Silver Horizon." The video shows you watching from the back of a church while a college-bound young man shares his message of hope, only to be embraced by a churchgoer from the pew—who may or may not be his partner—at the end of the video. A lot of the parishioners appear to be accepting of the couple.

TP: The first time you watch the video you ask, "What's going on here? Is it just me or are these guys eying each other?" When he runs up on stage and kisses him, you want to know how the people that are there will react. I wanted to portray the video in a way that's hopeful and [show] that there are more and more places that are amazing. I also wanted to show what the dream is, that a kid can grow up—no matter who they are—and feel loved by the people around them.

WCT: The video was filmed in Chicago at Ebenezer Lutheran Church. Why did you choose to film it there?

TP: That church is an open and affirming church, and one of the pastors there is a good friend of mine and the director [of the video, Stephen Cone] is based out of Chicago. It just all fell together perfectly.

WCT: The YouTube comments for the video



Trey Pearson.

Photo by Megan Leigh Barnard

have been both positive and negative. Does that surprise you at all?

TP: Not surprised at all. [Laughs] Really excited that there were people that were exceedingly moved by the video and express that to me on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Obviously, there are homophobic people out there that live in a world of fear. One of the most important things is just that I wanted this video to evoke an emotional response. I think art is so powerful—that it should. Even when it's anger, sadness or excitement, I just wanted it to do something to cause an emotional reaction.

WCT: You were married to a woman [Laura] before you came out and you have two kids with her. You have talked about how amazing she has been throughout this process.

TP: I am not married anymore, and my ex-wife and I co-parent our kids. She was really there for me when I needed her, when I came out. Even when it's the best thing for you, we're both going through different stages of grief. I wouldn't want to speak too much on her behalf, but we're doing the best we can to get through this and be the best we actually can be for our kids and get to the healthiest place we can in our lives. That's the most important thing.

WCT: Have you gotten support from other bands or artists since you came out or are they afraid about how it might affect their careers?

TP: A lot of them have supported me through text messages and phone calls, maybe not on a public level where their scared it might affect their careers. That's kind of a shame but it also gives me a little bit of hope that the world is changing.

WCT: Since coming out, have guys been pur-

suing you?

TP: A lot of guys do reach out to me. That's okay—I'm not complaining. I decided when I was going through counseling and I was able to admit to myself that I was gay, a year and a half ago, the counselor encouraged me to take that first year and not get into a relationship and really get to know myself as a gay man without having somebody else involved. So I definitely have gone on a lot of dates, but I haven't gotten to the point where I've fallen head over heels and gotten into a relationship. Just because I'm gay now doesn't mean that I need a man in my life to make me complete.

WCT: Your debut solo record is coming out later this year. With your lyrics, is it important for you to change the minds of those people who are homophobic, or just speak your truth?

TP: I definitely just really want to speak my truth. You definitely hope that your art moves peoples hearts, but writing music has always been therapeutic in my life. Part of my life has been so suppressed and [writing] has burst it open and made me overflow with creativity and things to write about—and I've certainly had a lot to write about over the last year. I think I'm making the best music I've ever made and I'm really excited to share that with people.

For more about Trey Pearson, visit TreyPearson.com.

FILM REVIEW

Staying Vertical

BY JERRY NUNN

Director: Alain Guiraudie

Starring: Damien Bonnard, India Hair, Raphael Thiery

Running Time: 98 min.

Release date: April 21 (on DVD May 30)

The new French film *Staying Vertical*—by prominent queer director Alain Guiraudie, who also wrote the screenplay—is heading to the Gene Siskel Film Center April 21-27.

Leo, played by Damien Bonnard, is a film writer who encounters a shepherdess named Marie, portrayed by actress India Hair. After a love affair, a baby is born. Marie takes her other children and abandons Leo with a brand-new son. He meets a variety of characters over the second half of the film.

Sex and sexuality is depicted throughout. Guiraudie is not afraid to show full nudity, bold sex acts and a graphic birth scene.

There are mysteries revealed and discoveries along the way of the journey. Leo being unlikely is part of the problem. He shirks his responsibilities as a father some of the time and lands himself in a load of trouble.

Ever counted sheep before? That is the pace set by this movie, which will work the nerves of many watchers. Some art-house lovers will feel



Damien Bonnard in *Staying Vertical*.

Photo from Strand Releasing

right at home watching this story unfold, while some will find it a yawn. Fans of French cinema will like the way Guiraudie injects his personal struggles into the plot. The characters are complex and unique.

Many may also admire the original storyline of *Staying Vertical* and the risks the director takes, but it left my mind wandering out to pasture.

Sense8 benefit April 23

Aimee Allegretti and Karin Winslow are hosting a benefit screening of *Sense8* for the ACLU on April 23 at 4 p.m. at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport Ave.

Two new episodes from the second season will be shown, and co-executive producer Lana Wachowski will do a Q&A afterward. ACLU of Illinois Police Practices Project Director Karen Sheley will perform the introduction.

Admission (to be donated to the ACLU) is \$20; visit <https://www.musicboxtheatre.com/films/the-aclu-presents-sense8-season-2-preview>.

Male dancers sought at Chicago Academy

The Chicago Academy for the Arts, 1010 W. Chicago Ave., is seeking three elite-level male dancers for our 2017-18 freshman class.

Selected dancers will receive financial aid and scholarships (up to the entire cost of tuition) funded by the Rusty and Jeffrey Sanfilippo Young Men's Dance Initiative.

Led by choreographer Randy Duncan, the academy's dance department is one of the leading preparatory institutions for top colleges and dance companies in the country. Contact Kitsana Salyphone, Director of Enrollment Management for more information and to schedule an audition.

Auditions will be held Saturday, May 20, at 12 p.m. at The Academy. Visit <https://www.chicagoacademyforthearts.org/ymdi>.

Brand devoted to queer women, femmes is launching events

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

A new national event brand for queer women and femmes called PEACH will hold its first series of pop-up gatherings—"Peaches Through the Ages"—April 21 at The Bedford in Wicker Park.

This '60s-themed kickoff event was created and curated by Black Thread Agency in partnership with Tito's Handmade Vodka and @LGBT_History. The event will feature music by DJ Tess and DJ All The Way Kay, exclusive PEACH signature cocktails and a specially curated drink menu featuring Tito's Handmade Vodka.

These monthly Friday evening events—May 19 ('70s) and June 16 ('80s) at The Bedford, and July 21 ('90s), Aug. 18 ('00s) and Sept. 15 (the future)—will benefit a different local LGBTQ organization. Locations and times for the final three events will soon be announced.

"To set the mood, we have partnered with Abdel Morched to transform the space for each decade," said Black Thread Agency President Bre Auberry. "We're going for a vibe that is classy, rather than campy, and that vintage aesthetic will be complemented by art installations, models and personalities in '60s outfits and DJ sets filled

with empowering oldies. Each event will have its own aesthetic."

Peaches Through the Ages will honor LGBTQ history with the finale focusing on the future.

"We know the future is ours, but sometimes you have to look back to move forward," said Auberry.

Auberry founded Black Thread Agency six months ago. Her background is in market research, event management and the music business. Auberry moved to Chicago two years ago from Florida, where she spent her childhood and college years.

Among the six principal team members, Auberry and two others are LGBTQ.

"Based in Chicago, Black Thread Agency builds events for brands that tap into the current cultural moment," said Auberry. "We are a diverse and dedicated team of specialists, and we work with local influencers to ensure the experiences we create are sensitive and authentic to each new market we enter. Though we're managing PEACH from ideation to execution, our core business will be envisioning events to sell to brands and providing the creative vision and marketing support to make them reality.

"Our goal with every event is to create some-



Bre Auberry.
Press kit photo

thing we would be excited to experience, and we're passionate about that work. Chicago's PEACH influencers are queer-identified Morgan Higgins and queer-identified Hannah Viti."

Auberry explained that she created PEACH because she saw a need for more events that cater to queer women and femmes.

"As for the name, I was inspired by the symbolism of peaches—which represent femininity, love and vitality in some cultures—as well as the mischievous contemporary usage of the peach emoji," said Auberry. "The event embodies those themes and are intended to be lighthearted and fun."

PEACH will travel to other U.S. cities following its Chicago debut. Auberry and her team will work with influencers and LGBTQ leaders in those cities to put on these events. Details and locations TBA.

Auberry said organizers plan on holding additional PEACH events in Chicago after they travel to the other locations. They will also be expanding the scope of PEACH to include other kinds of events.

To purchase early bird tickets visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/peach-peaches-through-the-ages-60s-tickets-32572003740?aff=efbeventtix>. Tickets can also be purchased at the door. Howard Brown Health's women's health programming is the beneficiary for this kickoff event and will receive \$5 of each ultimate PEACH early bird ticket and ultimate PEACH general ticket admission price.

See <http://blackthreadagency.com/> and <https://www.thepeachparty.com/> for more information.



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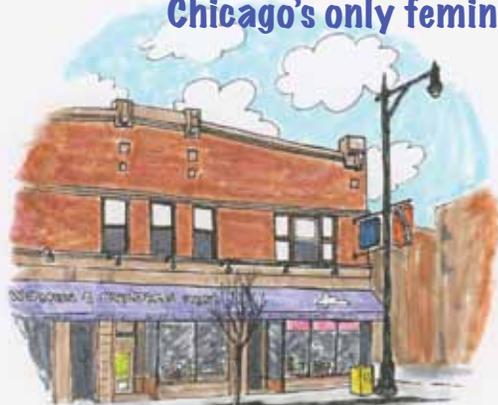
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Congratulations to the new Miss Continental Elite, Fontasia LaMour (top left photo). She was joined in the top five by (above photo, left to center) Yosemin Burge Star, Ginger Manchester, Erika Norell, and (right) Amy DeMilo.

Photos by Jack Neilsen

the DISH

Weekly Dining Guide in
WINDY CITY TIMES

SAVOR Big Jones

BY ANDREW DAVIS

As practically every Chicagoan knows, there are scores of Southern-themed restaurants in our fair city.

Some feature cuisines from specific parts of the South, like the South Carolina-based fare at Low-country, the Louisiana-themed items at Luella's Southern Kitchen or the Mississippi-oriented offerings at the forthcoming spot Delta.

Then there are more expansive places—like the (relatively) longtime Andersonville restaurant **Big Jones** (5347 N. Clark St.; BigJonesChicago.com), which has a website that says it's "inspired by the people, places and history of the American South."



The decor at the restaurant (that business/life partners Paul Fehribach and Mark Armantrout co-own) does not necessarily scream "Southern," although it does say "welcome." However, the looking at the items on the menu is pretty likely

to make one think of sultry summers, pleasantly twangy accents and mint juleps.

Cocktails make refreshing ways to start the meal, and I really liked the Jasper's Rum Punch, although there are plenty of other options, including the Chatham Artillery Punch (citrus, brandy, bourbon, rum, green tea and muscatel, topped off with cava).

The crawfish-and-cheese hush puppies were a solid culinary start to the meal, and my dining companion and I really took to the sweet-potato bisque. However, the wonderful boucherie board (in the "Starters and Snacks" section) might constitute an entire meal, with various breads, spreads, preserves and meats. (Potted duck and tete de cochon, anyone?)

I had heard about the fried chicken here, so I had to give that a whirl. The verdict? It's quite good, although the late, great Table Fifty-Two will always set the bar for me regarding fried chicken in Chicago. Big Jones' shrimp-and-grits dish is also worth savoring—as did the concluding rum bread pudding. (The only item that left me wanting was the skillet cornbread—and cornbread, interestingly, seems to be the Achilles' heel for several Southern-themed spots in this city.)

However, cornbread aside, this restaurant deserves your patronage—and I do plan on restaurant to try the scores of other dishes that remind me of my grandmother's home by a dusty road in the South.

Note: Restaurant/bar profiles are based on invitations arranged from restaurants and/or firms.

Fried chicken at Big Jones.

Photo by
Andrew Davis



BILLY Masters

"Yes, it was extremely surprising. I wouldn't have put myself in that position if I'd thought it would happen. I've been photographed a million times in a million ways. I have a good radar. We'd been completely alone for five days. Nothing around us. There was no way anyone could get anything. So I had a moment of feeling free."—Orlando Bloom opens up about those nude photos with ex, **Katy Perry**. Using his quote is a good excuse to once again share with you his impressive appendage on BillyMasters.com.

The world is going to hell in a handbasket—which, as it turns out, is the safest way to travel these days. Everyone is still in an uproar about the guy forcibly removed from a United Airlines flight. But practically nobody is talking about the deadly scorpion that dropped from an overhead compartment into one passenger's dinner. Frankly, I'm shocked. When did United start serving dinner??

On April 21, **Caitlyn Jenner** will sit down with **Diane Sawyer** for an interview on 20/20. This is actually a promotional piece for Cait's new book, *The Secrets of My Life*, which comes out four days later. In it, Caitlyn reveals that s/he has had gender-reassignment surgery. The reason may surprise you. "I am tired of tucking the damn thing in all the time," she said. Ah, the old tuck and roll.

Speaking of trans individuals, the big news of the week was **Zeke Smith** being outed as transsexual on *Survivor*. The person who committed the outing was **Jeff Varner**, who is gay. As someone who has never watched an episode of *Survivor*, I can't believe I actually have something to add to this story. When Varner was on *Survivor* the first time, he was not openly gay, but he had quite a strong gay following. Why? You may not believe this, but 15 years ago, he was quite a looker. Back then, I wrote that although my sources told me he was gay, "don't expect Jeff to come out or lead any Gay Pride parades." Days later, Varner wrote me personally. He particularly liked that I called him "deliciously bitchy." He also said, "I would absolutely lead a gay pride parade. A lot of my friends are gay and I think that would be a trip!!!" Of course, a few years later, he actually did come out—I'm not sure if he's done a parade, yet. In those intervening years, we've stayed in casual contact, and I've always found him delightful.

But, yes, he did out Zeke—and for someone who was on the other side of an outing situation, he really should have known the pitfalls. I may not watch *Survivor*, but I get how the game is played. If you wanted to prove someone wasn't being (dare I say) straight with their teammates, making this revelation would be quite a bombshell. Since the episode aired, Zeke has come out not only unscathed, but actually thriving with the support of the public and without the burden of a secret. Varner, on the other hand, has been vilified and has reportedly lost his real-estate job. He's explained his actions, apologized and



Billy says that Ricky Martin is "Living La Vida Loca."

Photo by Nino Muñoz

seems genuinely contrite.

With **Ricky Martin**, it's feast or famine—and right now, it's feast. The Latin superstar recently got engaged and he just started headlining a show in Las Vegas called "All In"—and, as I've mentioned, I'm in. VH1 announced it will be getting into bed with Martin, so to speak, for a reality series about his Vegas residency. As if that wasn't enough, Ricky will also star in the third season of **Ryan Murphy's** *American Crime Story* that will focus on the murder of Gianni Versace. Martin will play Versace's lover, **Edgar Ramirez** will play Gianni, **Darren Criss** will play Andrew Cunanan and **Penelope Cruz** will play Donatella. Damn—I was really hoping for **Maya Rudolph!**

I got this next story from one of the many employees at BillyMasters.com. Well, "employee" is probably the wrong term—that would imply money changed hands. There's payment, but it's a more fluid situation. Let's just say this story came from one of my more enthusiastic volunteers. It's the story of Navy Chief Special Warfare Officer Joseph John Schmidt III. This 42-year-old is a highly decorated Navy SEAL. And he's married. And he has kids. And, oh yes, he's also made at least 29 porn videos over the past seven years under the name **Jay Voom**. OK—my interest is officially piqued. It turns out the bulk of his body of work has been with his wife, porn megastar **Jewels Jade**. (Sidenote: In straight porn, nobody cares about the men. The women are the stars, and they call the shots. Thank you, Gloria Steinem.)

Although this story just broke in the mainstream press, it's old news in the Navy. **Jewels** claims that her husband's activities are well-known among the naval brass. In fact, the SEALs invited her to the commandos' Coronado campus to sign autographs after she was named 2011 Penthouse Pet of the Month. The issue seems to

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be that for a SEAL to have a side job, forms must be filled out. For instance, Schmidt filled out paperwork to sell herbal supplements. I dunno about you, but I know what's happened every time I've been alone with an Herbalife salesman. As for Schmidt, it's unclear if he actually broke any rules. According to **Jewels**, she "recruited her husband to help out as an unpaid performer." See? No money changed hands. There's an investigation going on, which could jeopardize Schmidt's retirement plans. In the interim, no reason you can't check out his volunteer work/community service on BillyMasters.com.

When SEALs are going commando, it's definitely time to end yet another column. With **Christ** rising from the dead and all, we ran a bit long. So be sure to check out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that's been known to raise more than just the dead. If you have a question for me, send it to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Caitlyn shares a secret I'd actually be interested in. To the Albanians, **Krishti Ungjall**. To the Greeks, **Christos Anesti**. And to everyone else, remember: One man's filth is another man's bible.

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CALENDAR**Wed., April 19****HIV testing and sexual health resources**

Center on Halsted provides free confidential services here first and third Wednesdays. 1:00pm - 5:00pm Affinity Community Services, 2850 S. Wabash Ave. #108 <http://www.centeronhalsted.org/the-nxt-lvl/>

Chicago Bar Association celebrates 20th Anniversary of LGBT Rights Committee

A gathering of past chairs, vice chairs, legislative liaisons, and committee members to recall particular highlights in LGBT rights law over the past two decades. RSVP to CBA Committee Chair, Malcolm 'Skip' Harsch, 312.988.5137 or skip.harsch@americanbar.org 12:00pm Chicago Bar Association 321 S. Plymouth Ct. Chicago

Equality Illinois LGBTQ Town Hall

With Illinoisans facing uncertainty about LGBTQ rights in the Trump era and push back in some parts of the state, EI will present an Illinois agenda for LGBTQ equality 6:00pm - 8:00pm Gaia House, 913 S. Illinois Ave., Carbondale; <http://eqil.org>

Thursday, April 20

Violence survivors' group Reserve a spot in the group by emailing avp@centeronhalsted.org

**HAVING A BALL
Friday, April 21**

About Face Theater's Wonka Ball will take place at Venue Six10.

Photo from 2016 by Jerry Nunn

teronhalsted.org or by phone. 5:30pm - 7:30pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago 773-472-6469, ext. 438 <http://www.centeronhalsted.org>

Friday, April 21

Robie House April After Hours Drinks and hors d'oeuvres will be served. A small jazz band will perform. 5:00pm - 8:00pm Robie House, 5757 S. Wood-

lawn Ave., Hyde Park Tickets: <http://flwright.org/afterhoursrobie>

After Hours at Howard Brown Howard Brown Health is staying open late every first and third Friday of the month for transgender and gender non-conforming people ages 18 and up. Talk to a healthcare provider about your health concerns. Free refreshments with other members of the transgender and gender non-conforming communities. Medical and testing appointments are limited and scheduled on a first come first serve basis. 6:00pm - 9:00pm Howard Brown Health Center, 4025 N Sheridan Rd., Chicago <http://howardbrown.org>

About Face Theater's Wonka Ball: Forbidden Planet Strap on moon boots and asteroid belts to enjoy celestial food and cosmic cocktails, celebrate with a supernova of live entertainment, music, and dancing. Silent and live auctions for which Wonka Ball has become known. Portion of ticket tax-deductible. Early bird tickets \$175 VIP, \$125 general 8:00pm Venue Six10, Spertis Institute 610 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago https://aboutfacetheatre.secure.force.com/ticket/#details_a0Sj0000004or0hEAI

PEACH: Peaches Through The Ages: '60s A new traveling pop-up event series will pay homage to the '60s and create a space for LGBTQ+ women and femmes to celebrate one another and the community's shared history through art, music and a stylized vintage aesthetic 10:00pm The Bedford, 1612 West Division St., Chicago Tickets:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/peach-peaches-through-the-ages-60s-tickets-32572003740?platform=hootsuite#_

Saturday, April 22

Andersonville Flower Show 28 businesses with spring window displays, shop takeovers, floral-themed food, and interactive workshops. Women & Children First will feature a "Bread and Roses." Hours vary by participating businesses. Through April 23. 12:00pm Various locations <http://andersonville.org>

Asians and Friends Pajama Party Wear nighties and nasties. Not a sleepover but we'll do each other's hair, eat smores by the fireplace and talk about boys all night long. Bring a dish or drink to share. contactus@afchicago.org 7:00pm Private home, contact organizers for information 312-409-1573 <http://www.afchicago.org>

Chicago Red Dress Party Masquerade Ball, a national event dedicated to creating awareness and visibility for the HIV/AIDS movement and raising funds for organizations that provide vital community services. VIP begins 7:30pm. 9:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago <http://info45138.wixsite.com/chicagoredressparty>

Sunday, April 23

Bring In 'Da Funk, Bring In 'Da Night of Noise Entertainment, refreshments, and great company. Hosted by Illinois Safe Schools Alliance 6:00pm, Uptown Underground, 4707 N. Broadway, <http://>

uptownunderground.tix.com/Generic-Map.aspx?EventCode=957163&framed=true

Harlem Comes to Halsted Jazz and Blues-infused Boystown Tribute to the Harlem Renaissance, America's first urban queer subculture 1919-1929. Live music, drag, DJ Moose, historical artifacts, silent auction, period costumes, gourmet brunch by J&L Catering. \$100, \$40 seniors, \$20 youth. 12:00pm - 3:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted St., Chicago Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/harlem-comes-to-halsted-tickets-32818430810>

Monday, April 24

Career counseling for LGBTQ adults by TransWorks Free and confidential services to LGBTQs 18+. Monday drop-ins for those interested but not yet enrolled. 12:00pm - 4:00pm Center on Halsted 3656 N Halsted Chicago Tickets: <http://ChicagoHouse.org>

Tuesday, April 25

Illinois Women March on Springfield 50+ organizations have joined a coalition to educate and organize around dozens of progressive bills being proposed in the Illinois House and Senate this session. A day for advocacy, lobbying and a large rally. 12:00pm Springfield, IL <http://www.illinoiswomenmarchonspringfield.org>

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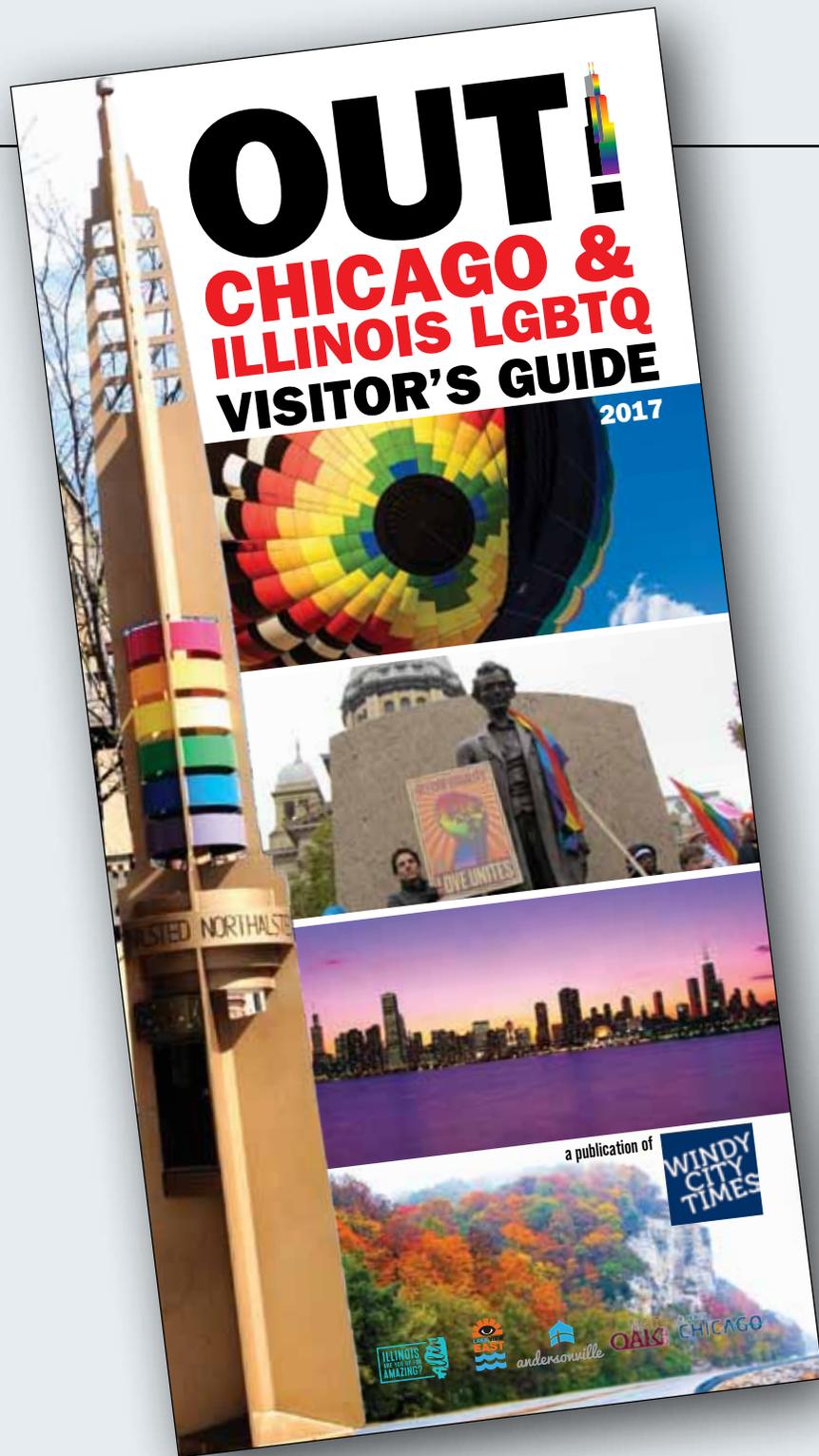
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MACK from cover

Mack, who identifies as a gay man, said he has always been an outspoken person with great stage presence. Mack said anything he dreamed of doing, he has done. He got his start as his church's radio announcer. Since then, he has taken on the roles of choir singer and choir director at his current church. Mack also stays busy working as a case aid and mentor at Children Home and Aid Society, where he has been working for 16 years, performing comedy, traveling and raising his family. Mack has been fostering children for more than 16 years and is currently a foster parent to three boys and has three adopted daughters.

"I just wanted to be somebody," said Mack of his childhood dreams. "I've always wanted to be in the limelight."

Mack's first time seeing a drag show, he said, was at Club LaRay, on Chicago's North Side. Mack eventually took over as host and promoter for the Monday-night drag/talent show at The Clubhouse for more than a decade. Reluctant to audition at first because he was a church boy, it was his first hosting spot and he added his own flair to the job. Mack mentioned Jim Flint, founder of the Baton Show Lounge, as one of his idols, saying he always liked what he does and wanted to do it himself.

"I love the glitz and the glamour," said Mack. "I love the life. What I added to the show, what made it work in my favor, once I got hired at the Clubhouse, was I wanted to add some glitz and glamour."

Mack formed his own group of entertainers, The Chicago Warriors, 23 years ago. The group included seven members who impersonated famous

entertainers. Through the years, the members of The Warriors have changed and, on April 24, the original and newer Warriors will be reuniting for a special show at the Baton, along with additional special guests. This event will also be a celebration of HeavyDiva Productions' 25th anniversary.

"I always said, 'If you want to be a lady, I shouldn't know you are a man with a dress on,'" Mack said. "If you want to portray yourself as a lady, make me believe it. That's how I came up with The Warriors. I took the girls who were the regulars there on Monday nights and hand-picked those ones I'd seen something in to make them the best of the best. I didn't want them to be called 'just drag queens.' They're the best—they're The Warriors."

Mack's magic word is "illusion," and said that is what got him into this type of show business. Explaining that while there are female strippers and

female singers out there, drag is another form of entertainment and he is embracing the illusion that people enjoy. The Warriors, he described, use various artists such as Anita Baker, Toni Braxton, Luther Vandross and Patti LaBelle as inspirations, among many others.

"My girls, they can do all of that and make you believe it," said Mack of his entertainers' talents. "We are so excited and looking forward because The Chicago Warriors haven't been together on the stage in several years, so this is going to be the talk of the town. I am overwhelmed with the response and the love that I'm getting from the community; not just here, but around the country and it's something that we've been working on, believe it or not, for the last three years."

To learn more about Otis Mack and HeavyDiva Productions, visit <https://www.facebook.com/Heavy-Diva-200841109983898/>

Chicago Zine Fest May 5-6

The Chicago Zine Fest—an annual celebration of independent self-publishing—will take place May 5-6, and will feature free workshops, discussions, readings and access to one of largest exhibition markets of zines in the country.

On Friday, May 5, at 6:30 p.m. at Co-Prosperity Sphere, 3219 S. Morgan St., a panel will take place with librarian/zinester JC, manga artist Rinko Endo and Chicago comics artist Kevin Budnik, with School of Life Design co-founder Kelly Cree moderating. An exhibitor reading will take place at 8 p.m.

On Saturday, May 6, 11 a.m.-6 p.m., at Plumbers Union Hall, 1340 W. Washington Blvd., there will be an exhibition of more than 250 self-publishers. Among other events will be the panel "Ever Evolving Bastion of Freakdom," which celebrates the 25th anniversary of Chicago's Quimby's bookstore.

See ChicagoZineFest.org.



Aimee Mann.

Photo by Sheryl Nields

Aimee Mann in Chicago on April 29

Aimee Mann will perform at Park West, 322 W. Armitage Ave, on Saturday, April 29, in support of her new album, *Mental Illness*, out March 31.

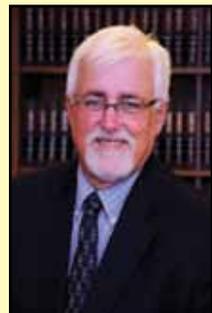
The 11-track *Mental Illness* features Mann's melancholia in an almost all-acoustic format, with a style inspired by some of her favorite '60s and '70s folk-rock records, augmented by strings arranged by her longtime producer, Paul Bryan.

The lead single, "Goose Snow Cone," can be heard at AimeeMann.com.

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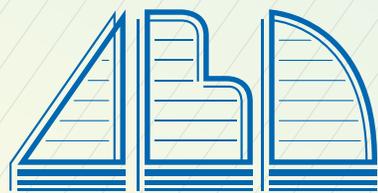
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