Finding Family, Creating Connections
by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

The end-of-year holiday season is hard for me now that my parents have passed. Thanksgiving had always been my Jewish family of origin’s time to gather. My brother and I have continued to celebrate Thanksgiving with our immediate families and his wife’s parents, but the absence of our parents makes the occasion bittersweet. I miss them, too, at Hanukkah, when we always lit a menorah and exchanged gifts. I’m finding comfort this year, however, in a new project to uncover and preserve our family history.

Our adventure began about a month before Thanksgiving, when my brother connected with a long-lost cousin via a genetic testing service. The cousin shared some documents related to relatives who had immigrated from Eastern Europe, and that allowed us for the first time to identify the specific town where they had lived—information we had thought was lost forever. We even discovered that not all of our relatives had left their homeland—some stayed in the town and were killed in the Holocaust—a sadly common story for Jews of the era, but one that we had never before linked directly with our family.

All of this set my brother and me off on a quest to discover more. Both of us have graduate degrees in history; the scent of genealogy was like catnip to kittens. We opened an account on Ancestry.com and began constructing our tree, searching through census data, immigration papers, and military records. While I fervently wished our parents were still here to contribute their knowledge and share in the exploration, I was thrilled at the idea of preserving some family history for my son. Our work is still in progress, but we’ve been able to identify the previously unknown names of some direct ancestors in the 19th century; discover the varied jobs that a great-grandfather held, from toy maker to real estate dealer; and connected with some living cousins across the country and around the world. It turns out, too, that I’m not the only rainbow sheep in the family.

My spouse got in on the excitement, adding connections from her side of the family—an easier venture in some ways, since we have been in the U.S. for a more generations and have several sprawling Catholic branches. We are leaving it up to our son whether to ever add his anonymous donor or to pursue donor siblings or other donor connections.

And yes, although the defaults on Ancestry.com are for “Mother” and “Father,” the software easily allows one to indicate same-sex couples. (At least)

Complacency a concern as AIDS treatment improves in Africa

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA
Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP)—AIDS has no cure. HIV is still here. But some people are forgetting that.

Those are some of the bold messages Uganda’s leader is emphasizing as health officials try to stem stubbornly high infection rates among young people in this East African country that years ago won praise as a global leader in fighting the epidemic.

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the region most affected, fewer people are dying from AIDS as treatment is more widely available and patients live normally. Yet some officials and activists worry that success may be encouraging a sense of complacency.

The head of HIV prevention at Uganda’s AIDS agency, Dr. Daniel Byamukama, recently asked leaders of a popular church that organizes a retreat for young people to give him 20 minutes to make a presentation about AIDS. They turned him down, saying “AIDS is common sense” these days.

Many young people believe “HIV is gone,” he told The Associated Press.

In Uganda and neighboring Kenya, countries with two of the world’s highest AIDS rates, campaigns point to lower-than-satisfactory HIV testing rates among adult men, early sexual experiences among many adolescents, inadequate knowledge of HIV and reproductive health and even what UN-AIDS calls “a crippling fear of buying condoms” among many Ugandans.

Now Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, who earned praise in the 1980s for his government’s openness to indicate same-sex couples. (At least)

A Magical Ride

By Jules Becker

It is very curious how differently an adapting playwright and a master director may perceive a classic original work. Ken Ludwig considers the mystery “Murder on the Orient Express” akin to a comedy. It should come as no surprise that the author of a comic hit like “Lend Me a Tenor” would express such a view. Admittedly, there may be characters in the mystery with humorous touches—notably the great Belgian sleuth Hercule Poirot himself.

Agatha Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express, Lyric Stage Company of Boston, through December 22. 617-585-0678 or lyrictage.com

By Lisa Keen

Keen News Service

U.S. Senator Kamala Harris withdrew from the Democratic presidential field Tuesday afternoon, saying her campaign “simply doesn’t have the financial resources we need to continue.”

“T’m not a billionaire. I can’t fund my own campaign,” said Harris, in a statement released to supporters and the press. “And as the campaign has gone on, it’s become harder and harder to raise the money we need to compete.”

Billionaire former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who entered the race for the Democratic nomination only last week, immedi-

"Camila [Cabello] was performing with that man, Shawn Mendes. They’re still trying to make us believe that he’s into her... if you know what I’m sayin’, and I think you do. He looked so awkward up there with that girl. How you dopin’, Shawn?’

— Wendy Williams, after watching the American Music Awards. Yes, she just said what we’ve all been thinking.

find Billy Masters on page 11!
Utah banning ‘conversion therapy’ with Mormon church backing

By BRADY McCOMBS
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—Utah is on its way to becoming the 19th state to ban the discredited practice of conversion therapy in January after state officials formed a proposal that has the support of the influential Church of a Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Republican Gov. Gary Herbert announced Tuesday night that church leaders back a regulatory rule his office helped craft after legislative efforts for a ban on the therapy failed earlier this year.

The faith known widely as the Mormon church opposed a previous version of the rule because it wanted assurances that church leaders and members who are therapists would be allowed to provide spiritual counseling for parishioners or families—which were included in the latest conversion therapy ban plan.

The faith opposes gay marriage and teaches that intimate same-sex relationships are a sin. The religion has stuck to that belief while urging members to be kind and compassionate to LGBTQ people.

Conversion therapy is a practice used to try to change peoples’ sexual orientation or gender identity.

The rule would ban Utah therapists from subjecting LGBTQ minors to the practice that the American Psychological Association has said is not based in science and is harmful to mental health. The Utah rule proposal is set to go to a 30-day public comment period beginning Dec. 15 and take effect as soon as Jan. 22, Herbert said.

The success in getting the church’s crucial support for the regulatory rule generated praise from LGBTQ advocates and conversion therapy survivors who had expressed frustration with the yearslong battle in Utah to ban conversion therapy. The rule uses language from a state legislative proposal that failed this year despite church leaders saying they would not oppose it.

“It means youth will be getting adequate services that will help them rather than harm them,” said Nathan Dalley, 20, who had conversion therapy when he was 16. “This is a change that’s been needed for so long. It’s too late, but I’m happy it is here.”

Dalley grew up as a member of the Latter-day Saint faith and said he was told during his therapy to snap a rubber band on his wrist every time he felt attracted to men. His therapist also scrutinized his posture, his walk, his gestures and interests. Dalley said the experience deepened his feelings of depression and culminated in a suicide attempt.

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LGBT activists in China seek to change marriage civil code

By YANAN WANG
Associated Press

BEIJING (AP)—It was only after her partner’s death that He Meli realized the full meaning of marriage.

As a lesbian couple in China, He and Li Qin kept their ties largely unseen, sometimes introducing themselves as cousins. “This rarely bothered He until Li succumbed to complications from lupus in 2016, and Li’s parents demanded that He hand over the deed for their apartment and other property documents under Li’s name.

He, a 51-year-old nonprofit worker in southern China’s Guangzhou city, has joined LGBT activists and supporters in an appeal to lawmakers to allow same-sex marriage, using a state-sanctioned channel to skirt recent government moves to suppress collective action.

“I realized if LGBT people don’t have the right to marry, we have no legal protections,” she said. “Others will also experience what I did—and be left with nothing.”

Under Chinese President Xi Jinping, space for civil society and advocacy has shrunk. Human rights activists and their lawyers have been detained, while internet censorship has increased.

LGBT activists have turned to a novel tactic: submitting statements to the National People’s Congress, China’s legislature, which is soliciting opinions from the public on a draft of the “Marriage and Family” portion of the Civil Code through Friday.

“A lot of people told me that this is the first time they’ve participated in the legal process,” said Peng Yanxi, director of LGBT Rights Advocacy China, one of several groups running the campaign.

The Marriage and Family section is among six draft regulations for which the legislature began seeking comments at the end of October. As of Thursday afternoon, the website showed that more than 200,000 suggestions had been submitted either online or by mail, the greatest number of any of the outstanding drafts. It was not clear what proportion of the suggestions pertained to same-sex marriage.

In social media posts, campaign participants held up their Express Mail Service envelopes along with rainbow Pride flags. In their suggestions, they shared stories of coming out, the challenge of gaining family members’ acceptance and running into legal roadblocks when trying to share their lives with someone of the same sex.

A teacher wrote about experiencing discrimination at her workplace; others wrote about not being allowed to make medical decisions for their ailing partners.

“Is this not just a symbolic gesture,” Peng said. “It really has an impact on our everyday lives.”

Africa

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in public campaigns against HIV, believes officials have focused too much on treatment in recent years and wants them to speak simply to young people with messages noting that “HIV is here with us.”

An estimated 500 Ugandans die weekly from AIDS-related illnesses.

“We are in a hurry to have sex at 16, at 18, and then you die, or you start having problems which you may live with all your life? Why don’t you wait, hold on, you study, finish your degree and then look for a partner at the right time?” Museveni says in a video released as part of a new campaign backed by UNAIDS, a United Nations agency.

More than 37 million people were living with HIV worldwide in 2018, with Africa accounting for nearly one in every 25 adults infected with the virus, according to the World Health Organization.

Africa’s young people, especially girls, are among the worst affected. Girls made up 7% of new HIV infections in people ages 10 to 19 in East and southern Africa in 2017, according to UNAIDS.

More than 90% of deaths worldwide from AIDS-related illness among adolescents occurred in sub-Saharan Africa in 2017, UNAIDS says. And infection rates among young people likely will rise as Africa experiences a youth boom, with its population of over 1.2 billion expected to double by 2050, according to the UK-based AIDS charity Avert.

Health authorities and campaigners in Uganda, with over 70% of its population under age 30, say the fear factor once associated with HIV has dissipated, partly encouraging risky sexual behavior. Only 9% of men aged between 30 and 44 used a condom when they had extramarital sex in 2018, according to official statistics showing a declining rate of condom use.

That’s a shift from the past.

Uganda, with its ABC strategy—for abstinence, faithfulness and condom use—brought the HIV rate there from 18% in 1992 to under 10% by 2005. Although the HIV rate now stands at just over 6%, the population has swelled from 15 million in 1986 to over 42 million today, and in some parts of the country the rate is higher than the national average.

“Too many of the young people, now adolescents, were not old enough to see the old HIV, how aggressive it was,” said Dr. Nelson Mwineba, chief of the Uganda AIDS Commission. “We are telling them that... if you are not an adult, please abstain.”

Ugandan students of a certain generation often were shown videos of the devastating toll of AIDS on the body and then told to postpone the first act of intercourse. That bluntness was widely seen as effective in discouraging risky sexual behavior.

Ruharamba Rutunga, a Ugandan campaigner who has lived with HIV for 35 years, said it is clear the current view of AIDS as just another chronic disease partly encourages risky behavior as people know there is medicine one can take shortly after sexual contact to prevent HIV.

“There is this thing that there is medicine, and the psychological part of the problem is almost forgotten,” he said. “Prevention is being misunderstood.”

Earlier this year Ugandan health authorities released a report saying an estimated 1,000 people get infected with HIV every week, 43% of them between ages 15 and 24.

In Kenya, 51% of all new HIV infections in 2015 occurred in people between 15 and 24, up from 29% in 2013. One in three of all new HIV infections in Kenya occurs among teenagers aged 15 to 19, according to official figures.

Rahab Mwanki, a campaigner with the Kenya AIDS NGOs Consortium, cited the problem of “early sexual debut,” saying it leads to teenage pregnancies and exposes many to HIV in a country where 1.6 million people have the virus.

Both Kenya and Uganda have intensified efforts to promote self-testing. An oral HIV self-test kit, pioneered in Kenya, was launched in Uganda in September by authorities who say they hope it will encourage more men to know their status.

Of the 1.4 million Ugandans living with HIV, 14% are not aware of their positive status. It means they are not getting treatment and can infect others.

HIV testing “in their privacy and their convenient time” shields men from the rampant stigma preventing many from seeking HIV services in a hospital setting, Mwanki said.

Health officials have similar worries about HIV and youth in southern Africa, the world’s hardest-hit region. In South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa’s most developed country, just 23% of young men have “correct and comprehensive knowledge” about the virus, according to UNAIDS. South Africa has more than 7 million people living with HIV, the most of any country.

The U.N., which in August named Ugandan activist Winnie Byanyima to lead its AIDS agency, is leading efforts to end the global epidemic by 2030.

Byanyima, who has lost many relatives and friends to AIDS, said after her appointment that while the goal is within reach, “I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead.”

She has since spoken of the need in Africa “to remove the barriers and harmful social norms” which leave young people, especially women, more vulnerable to getting HIV.

Associated Press writers Tom Odhiambo in Nairobi, Kenya and Ana Araujo in Johannesburg contributed.

Theater

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with his signature walk.

Stell Agatha Christie buffs (including this critic, who read most of her mysteries in his earlier days) might argue that this mystery gem has more in common with film noir than with the Lyric Stage Company’s 2019 staging of “Agatha Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express.”

With that affinity in mind, Veloudos has ingeniously created a kind of atmospheric symbiosis with Bryna Bloomfield’s stylish scenic design and Seaghan McKay’s artistic projection design. Bloomfield’s train interiors design calls to mind the ethnically diverse suspects—particularly the ethnic Chinese suspect and Leger. McKay provides film noir exposé—telling observations to the audience—who are seeing an intimate play within a play.

The supporting cast members work well with their signature walk. Airaldi and with each other. Kerry A. Dowling Repertory Theatre among others) turns Poirot’s most difficult case into a tour de force.

Veloudos’ sharp ensemble make the interrogations by Poirot and the brilliant denouement fully convincing. Standout Remo Arlaldi has all of Poirot’s charm, wit and Sherlock Holmes–rivaling smarts. The veteran actor (with notable work at the Lyric Stage Company and American Repertory Theatre among others) turns Poirot’s telling observations to the audience—who are close enough to the stage to feel as though they are fellow passengers—and his solution to his most difficult case into a tour de force.

The supporting cast members work well with Arlaldi and with each other. Kerry A. Dowling captures Helen Hubbard’s talkative nature and Midwestern directness; this gifted singer even gets to sing briefly from “The Lullaby of Broadway.” Celeste Oliva makes Countess Andrenyi charming and alluring enough to make Poirot wish that he were younger. Rosa Procaccino combines Mary Debenham’s vulnerability and nervousness, and Davon Monroe has her lover Colonel Arbuthnot is properly protective as Poirot questions her. Monroe also convives in the minor but flashy role of murder victim Samuel Ratchet. Sarah de Lima catches Dragomiroff’s haughtiness in her voice and her body language, while Marge Dunn finds her maid Greta Ohlsson’s diffidence.

Poirot’s solution—or ‘two solutions’—resembles “a magic trick.” Likewise Veloudos’ direction of “Agatha Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express” itself proves magical.
Community woven in struggle
Memorials remind us of grace others taught us

by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net

one other genealogy site I know of does not do so.) Users can also indicate biological, adopted, step, and foster children, and designate a person as a “Friend,” which can be useful in some chosen-family situations. The software could still, however, be more inclusive of donors, surnames, families with more than two parents, and other “non-traditional” family types. It also doesn’t allow one to specify genders other than “male” and “female.” One hopeful sign is that a physician and genealogist Stewart Blundon Trained, according to his blog, gave a presentation on LGBTQ genealogy at Ancestry.com in August, for books that were nonetheless on the shelves. And off in the mist, a beautiful boy of 20, now 62, whose sunlight simply was not made to turn my way, but who, it turns out, still follows my writing.

My virtual Church is built on moments of connection, undeserved, unexpected, sometimes glimpsed in my first South American peoplo, whom so many of the bishops re- sist. He has his flaws, such as ignorance of the science of gender identity, which includes brain chemistry.

Mombian
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Memorials remind us of grace others taught us...
The Definition of Insanity
by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

I’ve often heard it said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Even though I’ve come to see the truth in that statement, when it comes to using my time effectively and to taking care of both my physical and emotional bodies, I seem to be a slow learner.

Lately I’ve been reminded of that fact, as I’ve been going through a stressful time; over the past two years I’ve been buffeted by a string of losses, times when ‘man planned and God laughed. I’ve felt like a swimmer trying to escape the pull of a rip tide, straining for the beach while the waves fall in on themselves, collapsing one into another. To top off those losses, I was recently diagnosed with an intestinal infection, which requires medication and a major lifestyle change—sweets, carbs and grains are verboten.

Finding out about my condition may be beneficial in the long run; now I know why I often wake up tired and why I’ve been losing weight. But in the here and now I need to manage the stress and fatigue that is simply part of daily life. And that brings me back to my version of insanity and my inner teenager, who is all about short-term gratification and ignoring the voice of my adult, the one with sixty-plus years of life experience, who has learned a few things along the way. Though I’ve flirted with meditation for many years, I am a terrible sitter; even when I’m ex-
School’s Paul Tsai China Center who has worked on legal reform programs promoting LGBT rights in China. “Calls for gay marriage often get dismissed as being too marginal and unimportant to get onto the political agenda, or as being inconsistent with Chinese traditional culture,” Longarino said.

Few legal protections are available for same-sex couples in China. One party can apply to be the other’s legal guardian, but those accompanying rights are just a fraction of those enjoyed by married couples, Longarino said. He gave the example of a lesbian woman who bears a child in China, with no way for her partner to become a second legally recognized parent of that baby.

At a briefing in August, a spokesman for the National People’s Congress Standing Committee’s Legislative Affairs Commission suggested that same-sex marriage does not suit Chinese society. 

“China’s current marriage system is built on the basis of a man and a woman becoming husband and wife,” said Zang Tiewei, director of the commission’s research department, when asked whether same-sex marriage will be legalized.

“This regulation is in line with China’s national conditions and historical and cultural traditions,” Zang said. “As far as I know, at the moment most countries in the world don’t recognize the legality of same-sex marriage.”

LGBT advocates have garnered growing support from the Chinese public, using social media to raise awareness even as they face frequent censorship. They won a victory over the censors in April 2018, when one of the country’s top social networking sites backed down on a plan to restrict content related to LGBT issues. Users flooded Weibo with hashtags such as “#flushmGayNotePervert” after the Twitter-like platform said “pornographic, violent or gay” subject matter would be reviewed.

But misconceptions and discrimination persist. A 2015 survey by the Beijing LGBT Center found that 35% of mental health professionals in a sample group of nearly 1,000 believed that being gay is a mental illness. Around the same percentage supported the use of conversion therapy. When Bohemian Rhapsody, the hit biopic about Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury, came to China, viewers were treated to a version without any references to Mercury’s sexuality or his struggle with AIDS.

Hua Zile, the chief editor of an LGBT-focused Weibo account with 1.69 million followers, said he hasn’t publicized the same-sex marriage campaign on his microblog because he worries about the dispiriting effect it will have on the LGBT community when it inevitably fails.

“We can’t reach the sky in a single leap,” Hua said. “We should try to make progress step-by-step, or else we’ll be constantly disappointed.”

After He’s partner passed away, it pained her to think about how they kept their status in the shadows. Through their 12-year relationship, it was He who accompanied Li on doctor’s visits. She stayed with her at the hospital when lupus made her nauseous and delirious with fever, and she helped her reach their fourth-floor walk-up after her legs grew weak.

In He’s mind, they were married. But in reality, many people didn’t even know they were dating.

Friends told He that she could file a lawsuit to recover some of her Li’s shared property. She hired a lawyer to start the process, which required painstaking documentation of their relationship and signed statements from their neighbors and friends attesting to their long-term bond.

“It was like tearing open a wound over and over again,” He said. “I had to keep coming out about my sexuality. If we were married, all of this would be understood.”

In the end, He gave up on the lawsuit. It was too exhausting, she said, to have to prove their love to everyone.

Associated Press researcher Shanshan Wang contributed to this report.

Follow Yanan Wang on Twitter at https://twitter.com/yananwang.

Aging

Continued from page 5

testimony submitted to the Commission.

Since the 2015 report the LGBT Aging Commission has been studying a number of key areas including: health, housing and social connections for LGBT older adults and their caregivers, and is now completing a new round of listening sessions across the state. The final Listening Sessions will be held in Boston at Fenway Health on Tuesday December 10 from 1-3pm. Previous listening sessions were held in Barnstable on Cape Cod in June and in Pittsfield in Western Mass in September.

“These listening sessions are critical to the Commission’s work” said Senator Pat Jehlen (D-Somerville), Commission Co-Chair, “they help us understand what the current issues and challenges are across the Commonwealth. Hearing directly from our constituents allows us to listen and make recommendations to improve access to benefits and services where appropriate and necessary.”
Who’s free speech protecting these days?
by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Free speech is one of the cornerstones of American Democracy. However, what are the boundaries of free speech? In the current political milieu, the protection of free speech appears to have an amorphous and wide expanse when it comes to sexist, racist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and xenophobic rants on many social media platforms and college campuses. The recent Knight Foundation Survey polled high schoolers’ view on the First Amendment; it found that “Boys and white students are less inclined than girls and students of color to agree with the statement: The First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees.” Who’s protected by free speech calls into question what does the First Amendment to the Constitution mean when it states, “Congress shall make no law… abridging the freedom of speech.”

On November 20, Cambridge Community Television (CCTV) held a panel discussion tackling the question titled “CIVIL DISCUSSION IN AN UNCIVILIZED WORLD: Are there limits to the First Amendment?”. Ceasar L. McDowell, Professor of the Practice of Civic Design at MIT, and Jim Braude of WGBH’s “Greater Boston” and “Boston Public Radio” were the panelists.

Susan Fleischmann, Executive Director of CCTV, who was once a First Amendment absolutist, wanted a discussion on the topic because, under the present administration, hate speech appears to protect the offenders. “For over thirty years, CCTV has proudly served as a First Amendment forum from our community, and I have defended speech that has been personally very challenging. However, the needle has dramatically moved,” stated Fleischmann.

Both McDowell and Braude agreed that today, no one would dispute that there has been a steady decline in public civil discourse. People who traffic in hate speech appear to have boundless ways of disseminating their vitriol. When challenged, they push back at their opponents contesting First Amendment protection of free speech. McDowell shared with the audience that he struggles with “where are the limits of what we can say to each other, particularly with technology.” Many, like McDowell, feel that social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are not doing enough to counter hate and violent speech. McDowell acknowledges that people have the right to express their views and need venues to do so, but he wants to know what it means to give voice in public spaces. In other words, is one’s right to free speech limited by where you are, what you say, and how you say it?

For example, McDowell shared a recent incident he experienced on a crowded train from Harvard Square to Kendall Square. Two white guys on the Red Line were deliberately talking loud, spewing sexist and xenophobic epithets. McDowell wondered if the guys had a right to speak like that on a train “where people didn’t choose to be in that space for that sort of speech.” The incident highlighted for McDowell the need for civil conversations in public spaces that uphold a sense of responsibility to each other and the greater society. However, in today’s divisive climate, “We are a right space society,” McDowell told the audience (meaning protected by the First Amendment), “and not a responsibility society.

Braude advised that before you query how people use their speech in the public sphere, you have to ask, “how does everyone get the right to speak”? In other words, how does society democratize voices in the public sphere to create a level playing field, where no voice is drowned out by louder ones due to social capital, political influence, money or bullying.

Social media, on the one hand, have democratized voices, especially marginalized voices in society due to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and political affiliations, to name a few. On the other hand, social media have created a neo-tribalism where people connect only with those of similar views. The adverse outcomes have been the dissemination of hateful language, deliberate misinformation, and a deepening disconnection from one another and society — all protected by anonymity.

Both panelists are proponents of anti-anonymity on social media. It’s a controversial and censored stance because opponents contest anti-anonymity limits free speech, whereas proponents argue it enforces a greater responsibility to own your words. Anonymous online platforms that spew hatred dehumanizes both the victims and
Jasper J. Lawson, PH.D.
LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

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Boston Pride Announces Parade, Festival Changes

Registration Now Open for 2020 Parade and Festival Marking its 50th Anniversary

Submitted by Boston Pride

Boston Pride announced that online registration is now open for the 2020 Pride Parade and Festival to be held on June 15, 2020, the 50th anniversary of the organization. The 50th anniversary of Boston Pride commemorates the decades-long activism and advocacy of the region’s largest LGBTQ organization. The Pride Parade is the largest annual public parade in New England and the third largest in the U.S. behind New York and San Francisco.

Boston Pride also announced several changes to the Parade and Festival including an earlier start at 11 am for the Parade and the Festival moves back to Boston Common from City Hall Plaza due to anticipated construction at the plaza. Boston Pride is excited about hosting the 2020 Pride Festival on Boston Common because that’s where the first Pride march and festival originated in 1970.

“During the past 50 years, Boston Pride has been the premier LGBTQ organization advocating for equality for our community and we plan on celebrating our history in a major way,” said Linda J. DeMarco, Boston Pride President. “We have seen momentous changes in Massachusetts with marriage equality as one of the highlights, but there are still major struggles affecting the LGBTQ community which is why we will continue our fight for diversity, equality and inclusion.”

Boston Pride Board has also announced an increase in parade registration fees primarily for corporations and large businesses. The parade has increased exponentially over the past 50 years and the fees were not in line with other similar Pride parades across the country.

“The costs associated with putting on the Pride Parade have increased significantly since we began the march in 1970, and the Board made the decision to bring the parade fees in line with other Prides,” said DeMarco. Parade fees for small nonprofits and grassroots organizations will increase slightly with the major increase for the corporate levels. Other modifications to the parade were announced including a limit on number of marchers per group as well as the limit on total amount of vehicles in the parade. “We want to ensure that the Pride Parade in 2020 is a safe and inclusive event for all including marchers and spectators who will join us in celebrating our 50th anniversary.”

DeMarco says that there are many ways that people can help out. “We invite everyone to participate in the 2020 Pride Parade or volunteer to help us make our 50th anniversary truly spectacular.”

Boston Pride’s Official Broadcast Partner NBC10 Boston, Telmundo Boston and NECN will be returning in 2020 to help spread awareness of Pride Week and the 50th anniversary through special programming, news stories, live coverage and interviews, moderating events.

Boston Pride produces events and activities to achieve inclusivity, equality, respect, and awareness in Greater Boston and beyond. Fostering diversity, unity, visibility and dignity, we educate, communicate and advocate by building and strengthening community connections. Boston Pride Week 2020 will be held Friday, June 5 – Tuesday, June 16.

Report: Substitute teacher fired for berating child on dads

SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—Officials say a substitute teacher in Utah has been fired after berating a fifth-grade student who said he was thankful for being adopted by his two dads, one of whom is a former dancer on “Dancing with the Stars.”

The Salt Lake Tribune reports staffing company Kelly Services contracts with the Alpine School District south of Salt Lake City and said in a statement Monday the unidentified woman was terminated after an investigation into her comments.

“The teacher asked the children on Nov. 21 to share what they were thankful for. Students said that after the boy spoke, she lectured the 30 children on her view that homosexuality is wrong. Three girls left to get the principal. The substitute was escorted out.”

Father Louis van Arstel has said his son was deeply hurt.

AG: Transgender inmate ruling could change prison policy

LAS VEGAS (AP)—Nevada must comply with a recent federal appeals court ruling requiring that inmates receive state-funded gender confirmation surgery.

Attorney General Aaron Ford was asked about the case involving an inmate in Idaho, but said the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision applies to all states in the circuit, which includes Nevada, the Las Vegas Sun reports.

“The Court of Appeals upheld a decision in August requiring Idaho to pay for the surgery altering the sexual characteristics of an inmate to match their gender identity.”

“The court gets to decide that,” Ford said.

Inmate Adree Edmo, who suffers from gender dysphoria, requested the surgery and attempted self-castration twice while in prison, officials said. Denying the surgery would constitute cruel and unusual punishment, the court ruled saying.

The American Civil Liberties Union has pushed for years to see if this is going to be a settled issue in our jurisdiction for an extended period of time, or potentially be overturned by June of next year,” Ford said.

Information from: Las Vegas Sun, http://www.lasvegassun.com

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Baton Rouge sees big drop in AIDS diagnosis rates

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP)—Baton Rouge no longer leads the nation for its rate of new AIDS diagnoses, and officials are crediting the increased use of HIV testing at hospitals.

In 2016 Baton Rouge held the top spot for the rate of new AIDS diagnoses, but now ranks number 10. That’s according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Advocate reported.

City officials touted the change in a news conference Monday at a health clinic run by Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center and LSU Health.

Berkshire County business seeking glazier, 5+ yrs. experience and OSHA certification required. Must be willing to report to home office located near Albany, NY every Monday morning & Friday afternoon. Interested applicants can email their resumes to debbie@kapglass.com.
"The first step to stopping the HIV epidemic in Baton Rouge is awareness," Broome said. "The earlier you know, the faster our medical and social services can help."

Broome pushed to increase "opt-out" testing in hospital emergency rooms. She says people who know their status are more likely to seek treatment. Under the "opt-out" testing, any patient seeking emergency care at three area hospitals are automatically tested for HIV unless they decide they don’t want to get tested. From 2016 to 2018, the number of tests completed has gone from 6,490 to 22,875.

"Prevention and treatment go together," said Shirley Lolis, executive director at Metro Health, a local HIV/AIDS public health organization. "Testing is very, very, very important."

The city has seen an uptick in the number of new HIV diagnoses, likely a result of the increased testing.

The city-parish is currently talking to other hospitals to join the initiative, according to Jared Hymanowitz, director of the Mayor’s Healthy City Initiative. The Mayor’s Office is also using some money from a $1.5 million grant that East Baton Rouge Parish received from the Centers for Disease Control to hire a full-time staff member in the mayor’s office to coordinate its HIV/AIDS initiatives.
With Thanksgiving over, I now am finally able to focus on Christmas—as opposed to CVS, which had seasonal fare available prior to Halloween! Unlike my men, I like my holidays one at a time. Before Thanksgiving, I had more than my hands full when I went to see the iconic Sandra Bernhard at the lovely Faena Theater in South Beach. This gorgeous little gem is tucked away in the Faena Hotel, and I was there courtesy of Sandra’s musical director, the lovely Mitch Kaplan. He posted something on Facebook about the show in Miami, and I had just arrived at my Fort Lauderdale abode. Within a few hours, I was in the presence of the lady—and what a show she put on. I loved watching the audience because they clearly had no idea what to expect from Sandra. She’s not easy to categorize. She shares interesting insights, bon mots from her life, surrealist stories constructed with impeccable skill, hysteric observations, and then belts out a song with the power of a Janis Joplin. Quite a lot to take in for the denizens of South Beach. But by the end, they simply paid homage—as we all do. Sandy, Mitchy, and their motley crew will be ringing in the New Year at Joe’s Pub for the 10th year in a row. In fact, they’re doing 12 shows at the venue between December 26 and 31. Get the full schedule at Sandra-Bernhard.com.

Meanwhile on the West Coast, Debbie Allen is celebrating the 10th anniversary of her “Hot Chocolate Nutcracker”—which is always sinfully sensational. The show takes place December 5-8 at the Redondo Beach Performing Arts Center and will feature Debbie and many of her talented friends performing alongside her students. However, December 7th will feature an especially star-studded lineup, including my play mama Jennifer Lewis, Savion Glover, Phylicia Rashad, and Shemar Moore. My, my, my—a Hot Chocolate Nutcracker—with his own nut! To get tickets, head on over to DebbieAllenDanceAcademy.com. Tell ’em Billy sent ya.

After Jenny McCarthy announced her retirement from “New Year’s Rockin’ Eve”, people wondered who would replace her. Some thought Ryan would go all rogue and hire Kathy Griffin, but he doesn’t have the balls for that. Instead, he went with Billy Porter—who certainly has big ones. Actually, Billy will be hosting the event from New Orleans. Ciara will once again handle countdown duties in LA. Ryan announced who his Girl Friday would be thruly: “I’m so excited to welcome the talented Lucy Hale to the stage with me.” It’s moments like these that we all depend on Wikipedia. But, good for you, girl—you’ve got a gig.

I’ve been following this next story for a couple of weeks. Try and follow along. The names Barrie and Tony Drewitt-Barlow probably don’t mean anything to you. But in 1999, these very wealthy Brits won a legal battle to list both of their names on the birth certificate of the daughter they had with a surrogate. This was a landmark case for Great Britain since they were the first gay couple to fight for this right—and win! Fast forward 20 years, and the couple is splitting up. Why? Because Barrie has fallen head-over-heels in love with Scott, the ex-boyfriend of their daughter, Saffron! Not only that, but the entire family (complete with ex-boyfriend/current boyfriend) continue to live in a mansion in Florida! Here’s the best part—Scott came into the family as Barrie’s “personal assistant” five years ago, where he was often described as a pussy hound. So, lemme get this straight (so to speak)—the gay guy hires a young personal assistant, who dates the gay guy’s daughter, and then the gay guy leaves his husband to be with the personal assistant, who is suddenly into men, and they’re all living in the same house. If you’re wondering why don’t these people have a TV show, they actually filmed a pilot last year which went nowhere—probably because the couple was still together and Scott was being paid to be there (as if he’s not still getting a check). With this new wrinkle, they may get a deal. For now, you can see the pilot on BillyMasters.com.

In a far more civilized situation, our pal Anthony Rapp is engaged to his longtime beau Ken Ithiphol. No details on plans for a wedding, but unless one of them has a daughter with a hot boyfriend, this should slip by without a hitch.

While Sheppard Smith is swiddles his thumbs waiting for his non-compete clause to run out, he’s still finding ways to make headlines. Last week, he donated $500K to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The organization describes itself as “a non-profit group that advances press freedoms around the world.” Congrats.

Singer Ellie Goulding almost didn’t perform at the Dallas Cowboys’ Salvation Army halftime show on Thanksgiving. Fans explained to her that the organization opposes same-sex marriage and says that gay Christians should simply be celibate. However, it was noted that they do provide services and assistance to all people. Ellie stayed put—but I applaud her for bringing attention to the issue. It wouldn’t be the holidays without at least one scandal. A conservative group claims that a gay underwear ad has “contaminated Christmas”. So you know what I did? Found the ad—which, for the sake of clarity, I must tell you is a print ad. The company is Bonds underwear—oh, did I mention this is all happening in Australia? The ad features a real-life gay couple—Nicolas and Steve—kissing in the kitchen (one is sitting on a counter; one is leaning against it), clad solely in matching holiday boxer briefs. The caption says, “It’s the little moments that make Christmas season so special”. At least they didn’t say “It’s the little things”—how embarrassing would that have been?! Anyhoo, FamilyVoice Australia thought this was too much. “Images of two men kissing passionately while sporting only their Bonds underwear is hardly the appropriate message at any time of the year—particularly not at Christmas. Christmas is a special time that bonds faith and family. It should not be contaminated by businesses pushing explicit images into the marketplace,” says the group’s spokesperson. I don’t know how passionate it was. I didn’t see anything pop out, or get slid in—which happens at all the underwear parties I go to. But did you notice that the spokesperson says it’s “a special time that bonds faith and family”? And it’s Bonds underwear! Case closed!

Now comes the point in the column where I share “Billy’s Holiday Gift Giving Suggestions”. My goal each year is to share things that could make your festivities just a trifle more gay. One of the most popular items every year is the Orthodox Priest Calendar. But, frankly, I’m finding it hard to believe any actual priest can do that with a crucifix unless the holy water miraculously turned into lube. Therefore, my calendar choice this year will appeal to those of you who like a bit of ginger—a lovely holiday flavor. Last year, a fan sent me the Red Hot Cock Calendar, and I was impressed with what they refer to as their “fire crotchets, copper knobs and ginger nuts”. This year the ladies have outdone themselves by also providing the flip side. Yes, if you prefer your ginger face-down, you could buy the Red Hot Butt Calendar. Both calendars raise money for testicular cancer and prostate cancer awareness campaigns. Plus, a little ginger will keep you warm on those long winter nights. Grab ‘em at RedHot100.com.

“Why didn’t I think of that?” Well, the staff at Chi Chi LaRue’s Channel 1 Releasing had a thought—what if there were a way to turn any water bottle into an enema? You know—for those guys on the go, pushing a last-minute tryst. And, thus, Skwert was developed. The Skwert Water Bottle Enema will fit on most standard water bottle mouths and give you a quick pick-me-up. The Skwert Water Bottle Enema was developed. The Skwert Water Bottle Enema will fit on most standard water bottle mouths and give you a quick pick-me-up. For my readers, I’d classify this as a stocking stuffer...although what you stuff is your business. Pick up a few for surprise guests at Skwert.com.

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When I’ve got a hankering for some gingerbread men, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. I dunno about you, but I’m showing up at all holiday parties with some mistletoe wrapped around my Skwert—just in case someone’s a little thirsty! To find out how that turns out, keep reading www.BillyMasters.com, the site that’s always squeaky clean. Very quickly before we close, I want to acknowledge the passing of someone who made us laugh for years and touched our hearts. Shelley Morrison, you were truly a lady. Moving swiftly back to me, send your questions to me at Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I start interviewing candidates to be my “personal assistant”. Until next time, remember, one man’s title is another man’s bible.
Bravery reflected.

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