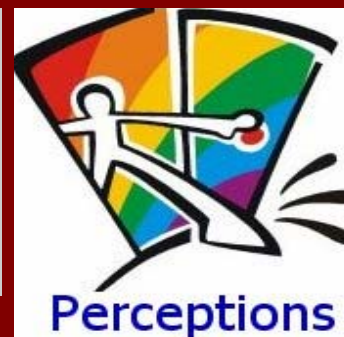


Perceptions

Saginaw Valley

Serving the Tri-City area LGBT Community

January 2008



Membership has its Rewards

By Rebecca Dunn



Rebecca Dunn

A couple of months ago, I was asked by the board to write this year's membership drive letter. I was at a loss as to what I would say to all of you. After all, you had been here for awhile and I was the 'new kid' here at Perceptions. Okay, I know I'm not a kid. You can stop laughing now.

to convey to you the importance of family. I wanted you to know that in the end, family will get you through. If you have no other family out there, know that you have one here. Like all families, we may not always agree and sometimes may experience hurt feelings, More often than not, what we experience is a connection with people who know and understand us and accept us as we are. This is the power of family and with family comes responsibility. Who is



Meet & Greets



I thought of my own story and how I got here to this place and to this point in time. Have so many years passed by? On some days the pain I experienced during my pre-transition years is a distant memory and other days it is very fresh and very real. Ultimately it was the love of family that got me through.



Respect Fest 2007



2007 Chocolate Party

Family. That's when I thought of us.

I wanted

out there waiting for you to reach out? You may be the one person who turns somebody's life around. Yours may be the one voice that gets through to soften someone's heart. *Cont. next page*

Memberships!

Memberships expire in January. Don't let your membership lapse! Click [here](#) or go to our website www.perceptionssv.org and click on "Membership" at the left. Complete the on-line registration and then pay thru Pay Pal or send in your \$25.00 check to:

**Perceptions
Saginaw Valley
P.O. Box 1525
Midland, MI
48641**

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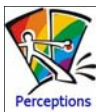
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Mid-Michigan's leading resource for enriching and empowering GLBT individuals and their community

Perceptions is a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. Your contributions to Perceptions which exceed the minimum amount to qualify for membership are tax deductible.

Mission statement: Our mission is to provide superior educational programs, networking opportunities and services for the well being of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender individuals and their community.

For many years, I thought of joining Perceptions, but saw it as a kind of social club. I certainly didn't take it seriously as an agent of change. This past summer when I was asked to fill a vacancy on the board, I began to really examine this organization. Who are you? What are you all about? What is your true purpose? I read your mission statement:



Lansing Pride March 2007



“Our mission is to provide superior educational programs, networking opportunities and services for the well being of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender individuals and their community.”

I realized that this organization is serious about “being the change” in the world. As one of my personal heroes, Mohandas Gandhi said, "It just needs people like you and me to step up and get involved to make it happen."



“Our mission,” it says. Not, “the Board’s mission.” Not, "some commit-

tee’s mission.”
Our mission.

When you join Perceptions, you are joining together in this

work of providing educational programs, networking opportunities, and services not only to other LGBT individuals, but their community as well.



When you join Perceptions, you are saying that you stand together, you believe in the mission, and you are willing to do what you can to bring it to fruition.

Sure, the events are done in fun ways; after all, being gay practically requires you to have fun, doesn't it?

Our biggest fundraiser of the year is in the form of a holiday party, but it is still first and foremost



Camp Out Michigan Bike Tour 2007

a fundraiser. **Respect Fest** and its related events were a blast, but they were primarily fundraising and consciousness-raising events. They take a lot of work by a relatively few people. We have started to become a more visible presence in the community by speaking out in the newspaper on issues of importance, such as the letter posted on the door at

See **Membership** page 4



Life After Death:

This Doug's Life

By Douglas Solosky

Another Death

I have been alone for a little over 3 years and 5 months. In that time, I have had a few "encounters."

When I first became single, I thought I'd spend the rest of my life by myself. Then one glorious day, while running my antique shop, this gorgeous man came in. The next night, we had an encounter. I thought this was wonderful, I could remain closeted and still have love.

I was wrong. That meeting was sheer luck. Time was passing. I was becoming very anxious. That encounter showed me how much I needed someone. I reached out for help, any help, and found Perceptions. But I digress.

Could there be another long time relationship out there for me? Doubt was creeping into my mind. Then one evening, a friend visited me. He had just come from a funeral. He said there was someone in the car. I told him to ask him in. Oh no, he's not comfortable in new surroundings. Ah hell, that's not a problem and I got him to come in.

Having just come from the funeral, he was stunning in his black outfit with silver jewelry. I told our mutual friend you can leave now. Not a ripple. I repeated myself. Still nothing. They left.

The next day I asked our friend, "Are you deaf or just plain dense? I wanted to be with him!"

"You did?" he asked. To which I said, "DUH!"

Later, we did meet and a relationship did develop. It was both glorious and rocky. He was younger

than I and having been with the same man for 36 years (my deceased partner) I was having difficulty knowing what to do. After about a year, we parted ways.

I loved him very much but we couldn't reconcile our differences.

Actually, he was more mature in these matters than I was, so he went on with his life. It took me another year to get over him and to move on with mine.

For me, meeting and falling in-love with him so soon after the death of my partner was both wonderful and tragic.

**Then one glorious day,
this gorgeous man came
in.**

On one hand, I thought I had found my true love. I couldn't have been happier, and then it was over. I was living another death. The death of a second

love.

They say, what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. I'm not too sure that is always the case.

"The very size and vibrancy of our movement, nationally and locally, is a testament to the power of Creating Change."

—Ann DeGroot,
Executive Director of OutFront Minnesota

**Detroit Marriott
Renaissance Center**
Detroit, Michigan

The National Conference on LGBT Equality

Creating Change

February 6–10, 2008

www.creatingchange.org

National Gay and Lesbian
Task Force

CREATING CHANGE



Now there are more overweight people in America than average-weight people. So overweight people are now average. Which means you've met your New Year's resolution.



-Jay Leno

New Year's Day... now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual. -Mark Twain

Membership *Continued from page 3*

Baltic Treasures and the formation of the GSA at Bay City Central H.S. (see 'Community Presence' page 7) Now, we are embarking on what may be the most important work we will undertake: the exploration of the viability a LGBT center here in the Tri-Cities.



Potluck picnics

You and I together can make a world of difference. But we need to work *together*. Somebody recently made a comment about how once a board member completes their service, you never see them again. I'll let you in on a secret: these people are tired. I'm serious. These folks are physically exhausted. They all have full-time jobs on top of the work they do for this community, but they keep pressing on because they care and they know how important it is to keep moving forward.



Adopt-a highway

can't. It doesn't have to be financial. You can offer your time and your talents. Trust me when I say that your time given to service is like giving *gold*. It's precious. We understand that and we appreciate all that you do and all that you are. If you're not sure how you can get involved, sit down with one of us and ask. We'll be happy to tell you about the many



2007 Luau

ways you can share yourself with the community. Maybe you have some ideas of your own that you can share with us.



Wine Tasting Event

New Year brings you prosperity and abundance that surpasses your expectations.

I hope your holiday season has brought you peace that passes all understanding, joy that knows no bounds, and love that is without end. And that the

I also hope you take time in the New Year to share your Perceptions with others.

2007 Holiday Party



Spirit Gone...a Soul Decays pt. 3

by Carrie Williams



Editor's Note: *This is the final installment in a 3 part series that began with the newsletter's November issue, (<http://www.perceptionssv.org/newsletter/2007-11.pdf> page 5).*

****WARNING**** *This series contains graphic descriptions of medical procedures.*

This morning, Tuesday, I was wiping away my tears and hugging my pillow, softly biting and chewing on the corner of the pillowcase. I had juice and popsicles for breakfast. I crushed my popsicles into the juice and slowly sipped on my slushy, still somberly staring out my window, wondering but no longer caring.

After breakfast the nurse came into my room for a quick check and told me the doctor would be visiting me shortly for my post-operative exam. Then she noticed the blood staining my bed sheets. Out of anger and frustration, I had pulled out my catheter and I was trying to rip out my stitches.



The nurse called the doctor and he came, with nurses and several medical students in tow. Everyone was quiet ... the nurse pulled the stirrups from the bed and set them in the upright position. "Let's get your feet in, sweetie, and scoot your bum down a little." I did as I was told, without remark, having no fight left in me.

The doctor pulled a sheet over my spread knees and took a light underneath the tent for a peek. He started telling me exactly what he was doing, so as to keep me calm and to avoid any surprises. "This is just my fingers, probing you", he said. He did something and my back arched in pain ... me squeezing my fists tightly and gritting my teeth. "Sorry about that ... " he said. He turned to the nurse, "Get me a tray, would you please."

The nurse returned with a tray of medical instruments. Under more favorable circumstances, this would be one of my bondage dreams come true. But this was no dream; it was a living nightmare. The surgeon grabbed a few things and went underneath the tent created by my spread thighs and the sheet. Once again ... the pain ... arching my back in pain, squeezing my eyes shut, holding my fists tight. The doctor's hand reached out of the tent for more instruments and returned to his work, nurses and med students watching silently. Still, I tried to remain calm and patient.

The doctor finished and everyone except one nurse left my room. The nurse, who had seen me through everything during the last two years, was absolutely quiet. She returned the stirrups into the bed and helped me get cleaned up. I laid back in my bed, staring up at the ceiling, a few lonely tears escaping. There were no explanations ... there were no words between us ... she just patted me on the knee and left the room.

Eventually, the nurse returned with the doctor. "Get dressed. If there is any more bleeding, give me a call. Otherwise, I don't need to see you again." I was still in shock, still void of any feeling, still empty inside ... he said the words ... and I collapsed.

The nurse, still quiet, helped me up and helped me get dressed. "It's been a long difficult journey for you, but it's over now, honey. You can become part of the living again." I took my discharge instructions and walked out. As I walked through the main lobby, I caught a glimpse of my reflection in a window. Alien, I thought, rode hard and put away wet, no longer resembling anything female.

See "Soul" page 12



Board-R Line

News from the Board of Trustees

Become a Board Member

by Tim & Tana



Some of our current board members are very tired and... I mean, their terms are expiring this month and elections will be held to fill some of those vacancies.

Three trustees whose terms are expiring are running for re-election. We still have openings for up to four more Trustee's positions.

If you'd like to become a board member, or to nominate someone, contact Alan@perceptionssv.org before **January 3rd**.

Elections will be held at our Annual Membership Meeting on **Thursday, January 17, 2008, at St. John's Episcopal Church** (Court & Michigan) in Saginaw.

Notes from the Treasurer

New IRS regulations require individuals to have receipts for charitable donations if they are deducting the donations on their 2007 income tax returns. Cancelled checks no longer qualify as appropriate documentation to substantiate a charitable deduction.

In January, right in time for gathering all your income tax information, Perceptions will

mail out letters to all our donors thanking them for their contributions. These letters will serve as sufficient documentation to substantiate your donation(s). However, if we don't have your mailing address, we can't mail you a thank you letter.

Diversity Circles: Getting to know your neighbor

by Joy D. Clark

It was my pleasure to take part in the last Diversity Circle sponsored by the Bridge Center for Racial Harmony this past fall. I was asked to take part in the six, 2-hour dialogue sessions because of my involvement with Perceptions and my leadership in the creation of Respect Fest.

The text and literature were geared toward talking about issues facing racial, cultural, and religious minorities. As a short, Caucasian, American woman, I felt like the majority until we all made our initial introductions – we were asked to introduce ourselves, our heritage, and our marital status. I heard people introducing themselves as either “Caucasian American,” “Jewish American,” “Hispanic American,” or “African American” – I heard “married with three kids,” “grandmother to four” and “happily married to the same man for over 40 years.”

As the introductions rounded the table and got closer to me, I had to make that decision that we all have to make in the LGBT community. “Do I tell them or not?” Do I take part in this 12 hour conversation about diversity within our community as a Caucasian Female or as a Homosexual, Caucasian Female? A small bead of sweat broke out across my forehead as I was faced with this decision. I thought of every lesbian whose life partner is mistaken for a “husband,” every gay man who is asked why he left his “wife” at home. I thought of every

As a short, Caucasian, American woman, I felt like the majority until we all made our initial introductions.

transgender person who is discriminated against. I took a deep breath and decided to attempt to educate this sampling of the community and said, “My name is Joy D. Clark, I am a Caucasian lesbian of

Czech decent (Bohemian Czech not Moravian Czech), happily married to my partner, Becky, for 4 years, mother of a fabulous little girl, age 11, and I would like to see the definition of diversity here not be limited to religion and race but I would like to include topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, physical and emotional disabilities, persons living with disease, and any other issue that sets people apart.”

see **Board-R-Line** page 8

Community Presence

Recent letters to local papers

"We have started to become a more visible presence in the community by speaking out in the newspaper on issues of importance" -Rebecca Dunn

Hate only begets hate

Friday, December 7, 2007

Editor, The News:

On Nov. 10, Old Town Saginaw store owner Barbara Klimaszewski found a note with racist overtones taped to her storefront. The offensive note was signed by an individual or group calling itself the "Committee to clean up West Saginaw."

Perceptions Saginaw Valley condemns bigotry in all its ugly forms. Hate only begets hate in a never-ending vicious cycle, always with the possibility of spiraling out of control and degenerating into something potentially more dangerous. We, like all civilized people, find this kind of behavior repugnant and feel it is necessary for all good people to speak out against it.

While Perceptions Saginaw Valley primarily serves the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community, we are part of the larger community, and we stand firm in the promotion of respect for the diversity and dignity of humanity. We stand with our brothers and sisters of color and with all those who are marginalized, oppressed and discriminated against because of who or

what they are.

We reaffirm our commitment to positive community-building and the creation of a better, safer and more peaceful Saginaw Valley for all its residents.

Rev. Rebecca M. Dunn
Perceptions Saginaw Valley
Board of Trustees

Anyone who believes that homosexuality is something that can be promoted as if it were a choice would benefit from the information that GSAs provide. –Beth Rakestraw

Rakestraw

**People's forum,
The Bay City Times;**

Friday, December 21, 2007

Misinformation

Voice: Beth Rakestraw,

Kimberly Bublitz's Dec. 12 letter to the editor (People's Forum) and her remarks in a Dec. 13 news article point out exactly why the Gay-Straight Alliance at Central High School and any high school is needed: Anyone who believes that homosexuality is something that can be promoted as if it were a choice would benefit from the information that GSAs provide.

While Ms. Bublitz's opinion

that the abuse of gay students is heart-breaking and that gay students should be protected is commendable, she perhaps does not understand how misinformation about homosexuality, such as the idea that homosexual persons have an agenda they are promoting or that homosexual persons choose to be gay directly contributes to the abuse that these students experience. Not allowing students access to information about homosexuality beyond prevailing myths and stereotypes is itself a form of abuse. The work that GSAs do to counteract misinformation is vital.

I am tremendously grateful for the courageous leadership of the student leaders of this GSA, as well as the leadership of school district officials in this matter.

*Beth Rakestraw is a former
Chairperson of Perceptions.*

**PFLAG meets the
4th Sunday
of each
month at the
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of
Midland,
6220 Jefferson, MI
2 - 4:30 pm.**





Board-R Line *continued*

I exhaled with great relief when everyone agreed that diversity within our community is not just color and nationality and we all embraced each other with open minds.

I learned a lot in our 12 hour conversation over the course of 3 weeks. I learned that our past sets us apart but our future is what brings us all together. Everyone who took part agreed that as we look toward the future, we all envision a time when Diversity Circles were not needed - a time

I learned that our past sets us apart but our future is what brings us all together.

when everyone takes time to get to know their neighbors without being coaxed. I feel that segregation within a commu-

nity happens because people like to be around others who are "just like them." We all agreed that it is important to step out of our comfort zone and ask people, whom we perceive as different, about their struggles to understand how to bridge gaps. We all need to take the time to get to know each other and in the end we find that we have more in common than we originally thought.

We talked about our community and what great assets Saginaw and the surrounding areas have. We even listed a number of organizations, centers, and community events that need support so we can move toward the future together as one community. I was greatly encouraged when other members of the Diversity Circle took the time to ask questions about our LGBT community and found that we take an active part in the community at large. We are all people after all. I want to take this opportunity to encourage you to get involved in the greater community and if you ever have the opportunity to take part in Diversity Circle, please do - you will take away a lot more than you contribute, as I did.

A Night in Old Town Saginaw

by Joy D. Clark

On Friday, December 21, 2007 the Mixx Nightclub hosted a fabulous Dinner and Entertainment experience. The evening kicked off with a cocktail hour and a rockin' good time with Deb Barber at the helm. She belted out many of the crowd's favorites as well as a few of her own songs while everyone enjoyed a great meal prepared by the Mixx staff. As usual, Deb's performance was excellent and if you have never seen her perform, she is a MUST see attraction!

Jason Jewel, a renowned street magician, wowed the audience as they ate and enjoyed the music. Jason's slight of hand is no less than amazing and we are blessed to have such talented performers in the Saginaw Valley.

The Mixx sure knows how to throw a great party as the evening continued with Lesbian Comedian, Mimi Gonzalez. A Detroit native, Mimi travels the country making thousands laugh and the crowd at the Mixx was no exception! Mimi had everyone rolling with her descriptions of 'well-hung lesbians' and the concept of being a stealth butch - she looks like the women she wishes to attract. Mimi applauded Perceptions, or 'Perspectives,' on the work that they do in the community. By the way, did you know that you can get a \$150,000 home for \$30,000 if you find body parts in the foundation?

A special thanks goes to Robb and the Mixx for a first rate show and a great night of dinner, dancing, and entertainment. This lesbian looks forward to many more surprises from our new local hot spot.

**Your Heart Pounds...
Your Breath Quickens...
And You Haven't Hit the Dance
Floor yet...**



THE **Mixx**
NIGHTCLUB

115 N. Hamilton
Saginaw, MI
989-498-4022



Current Events

January 2, Wed - Saginaw Meet & Greet

7:00 - 9:00 pm. An informal gathering for the Tri-Cities' GLBT community. All are welcome. Meet your old friends and make some new ones while eating fantastic baked goods. Enjoy hot and cold drinks in a non-smoking environment. [Bambi's](#) by Java Dave's, 4632 State Street, in the Green Acres Plaza.

January 3 & 17, Thurs - Womyn's Circle

5:30 - 7:00 pm. This program provides support to Tri-County lesbian women and facilitates community awareness projects in partnership with Perceptions and PFLAG. It has provided safety and help to many women and their families experiencing hostility, abuse and isolation. The free, confidential support group sessions are facilitated by Mary Jo Hall, MSW, LMSW. Meets at the YWCA located at 3405 Midland Rd. in Bay City.

January 4, Friday Night Dinner 7pm

The Savoy, 127 S. Franklin, Saginaw. Join Perceptions members and friends this week. If you plan to attend, please reply to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

January 9, Wednesday - Freeland Meet & Greet

7:00 to 9:00 pm. **Riverside Restaurant**, 8295 Midland Road (M-47), Freeland. This event will repeat on the 2nd Wed. of each month.

January 11, Friday Night Dinner 7pm

China Palace, 1908 S Saginaw Rd., Midland. If you plan to attend, please reply to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

January 17, Thurs - Womyn's Circle

5:30 - 7:00 pm. The free, confidential support group sessions are facilitated by Mary Jo Hall, MSW, LMSW. Meets at the YWCA located at 3405 Midland Rd. in Bay City.

January 17, Thurs - Perceptions Annual Membership Meeting 7pm

Election of the Board of Trustees, "State of the Organization" and financial reports. Remember the new location. St John's Episcopal Church, [123 N. Michigan](#), Saginaw.

January 18, Friday Night Dinner 7pm

Pat & Jerry's, 963 W. Midland Rd., Auburn If you plan to attend, please reply to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday. Join Perceptions members and friends each week at a different venue. Sign up for our email list on [Yahoo Groups](#) to be notified of future venues.

January 24, Thursday - Bay City Meet & Greet Note new day.

7- 9 p.m. An informal gathering of the Tri-Cities LGBT community. All are welcome in this smoke-free environment. **Espresso Express** located at 916 N. Water St., Bay City, offers a variety of delicious drinks, baked goods and desserts.

January 25, Friday Night Dinner 7pm

Fuzzy's, 1924 Court St., Saginaw. Sign up for our email list on Yahoo Groups to be notified of future venues.

January 29, Tuesday - Men's Discussion Group

7:00 to 8:30 pm. Zauel Memorial Library, 3100 Center Road, Saginaw Township. This gathering is intended as a discussion and informal support group for gay and bisexual men. The group will be facilitated by Thomas Brubaker. You may contact him at Thomas@PerceptionsSV.org

February 9 - Valentine's Dinner/Dance

Held at the **Mixx** Tickets will be \$25 and available from board members and online in January.

Members are eligible for a \$5 refund at the door. Look for more details next month!

JANUARY 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																		
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Resolved

by Dawn Wolfe

Your yearly cliché is here – yes, it's January, and the following is a list of my New Year's resolutions.

(Actually, I tend to reflect on my life and make resolutions on or around my birthday in December. So while you're reading this at a clichéd time of year, resolution-wise, I'm actually writing it at a non-clichéd kind of moment. Really.)

As I write this the usual collection of resolutions are jumping and dancing around in my head, waving signs and wearing pretty costumes all designed to make sure they are picked this year. You know the ones, because you have made or are making them as well: lose that final ten (or however many) pounds, read a few more books in 2008, try to save at least a little bit of money.

But this year, I think one of my biggest resolutions is going to center on the way I think about, write about and treat others – especially those “others” who are working so diligently to restrict the rights of LGBT people because they believe that their Bible tells them so.

Long before I was out as bi, you see, I was very out as a Jesus-admiring, non-Christian shaman. In other words, I wasn't exactly a favorite among right-wing in-laws and various relatives. Add the whole bi thing, and the damage

done by religious extremists and their social policies to close friends of mine, and that particular chip on my shoulder has grown to rather scary proportions.

Anger, however, isn't getting me anywhere. It sours my stomach and my words, and in the end it hurts innocent people who mean me no harm. The ones I'm angry at don't give a damn what I think. And the fact is that many of them do sincerely believe that it is their job to save me from the nasty afterlife they believe is in store for me. In fact, the ones to slightly the right of the middle are probably just as ignorant about and afraid of me as I've allowed myself to become of them.

It's those people in the middle, though, even on the right side of that middle, that all of us who value equality need to reach. I don't reach those people when I take that chip off my shoulder and hurl it at them as a weapon.

So this year I vow to feel a little longer, and consider a little more carefully, before I attempt to communicate with or respond to anti-LGBT, right-wing rhetoric. Fear and anger lead only to more fear and anger, and it's time that one side or the other in this struggle decided to keep the peace. I can fight the lies without hurting the people who, willfully or not, choose to believe those lies. Who knows? – I may even be able to reach a few undecided hearts in the process.

Dawn Wolfe is Triangle Foundation's Director of Communications. For more information about Triangle visit: www.tri.org

Top 2007 state story: Granholm bans anti-transgender discrimination in state employment

Governor Jennifer Granholm has signed an executive directive banning discrimination in state employment based on "gender identity or expression." The directive protects nearly 50,000 state employees in Michigan's Executive branch, which encompasses 95% of all state employees.

The Directive will protect any state employee who faces discrimination because they do not conform to traditional gender norms in their behavior and/or appearance. This includes unfair treatment of state employees based on masculinity or femininity.

Top Ten New Year's Resolutions

1. Only spend money in LGBT supportive businesses
2. Melt all the old jewelry from ex-lovers and get toe rings made
3. Find a way to get south of the equator
4. Forgive somebody
5. Forgive self
6. Decide between Hillary and Obama
7. Actually go to Deb Barber's website
8. Play more Scrabble
9. Exercise (yeah right)
10. Finish knitting the sweaters I started 10 years ago



2008 Membership Letter

by Rebecca Dunn

Family.

It's a word that means many things to us in the LGBT community. We sing it, we dance to it, and we refer to one another as "family." It's not a word we use lightly. For many of us, our community is the heart of our family.

When I went through my own transition and coming out experience in 1990-2, I went through it alone because my family of origin was not initially supportive and, aside from those who frequented the local gay bar, there was no visible LGBT community here in the Saginaw Valley region. I felt lost and for a while I walked the edge of the abyss, contemplating the end of my life. I know that many of you had similar experiences.

This is why the work we do is so vitally important. Our coming out, difficult as it may have been, was less so compared to those who went before us. Because of their efforts, we were able to be ourselves a bit more easily. Now, the task is ours to help make things better for the next generation of our family.

I can tell you of some of the benefits of joining Perceptions like having the newsletter mailed to you or getting \$5 back on the price of your tickets to the events, but that's not the real reason you should join. That stuff is incidental.

I'm asking you to [join or renew your membership](#) to continue the important work we do and have yet to do on behalf of the LGBT family. This community is known for its compassion and for taking care of its own. Empowerment, enjoying friendship and camaraderie, giving hope to those who have lost it, being a lifeline to those who need help, and seeing the positive transformation of those we come into contact with are the true

benefits of membership.

The strength of a family is not based on what each can take from it but on what each contributes to it. I am asking you to send in your new membership, renewal, or donation today. And more than that, I'm challenging you to become more involved.

You're family, after all. We need you.

Rebecca Dunn

on behalf of the Perceptions Board of Trustees

Soul *continued from page 5*

I walked through the main doors and outside into the heat and sunlight. I felt too weak to drive myself home... too empty inside. I sat down on a bench and took in the fresh air, noticing the sweet scent of the nearby flowers... I noticed how blue the sky was, not a cloud in sight... I noticed the little ripples of heat flowing up from the pavement.

Everything hit me at once... the tears were flowing heavily before I even realized. I sat on that bench for over an hour, crying so hard many people stopped to offer assistance. Once my tears were dry, I sat on my bench for a long time thinking about everything that I have been through.

One particular thought that struck me hard was that image of me in the window. Early in my struggle I had a consultation with an emergency room physician. He had talked to me about how I needed to get tough if I was going to survive. So, early on, I did get tough... my attitude changed into survival mode... I purged my life to rid myself of any reminders of what I once was.

Sitting on my bench, I thought that I no longer needed to be tough... I have survived... it's time to rejoin the living... I need to become whole again... and I need to become female again. I know it will be very difficult for me and I don't think I can do it alone.

But I am home now, exhausted, still in shock, still in disbelief... yet knowing that I really have survived. The physical part of my recovery is over; the emotional healing will take a lifetime. But the breezes are blowing in my favor and the moon beckons me to dance naked in her light once more.