

Perceptions

Saginaw Valley

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Serving the Tri-City Area LGBT Community



Free

September 2010

A History of Local LGBT People, Places and Events in the Saginaw Valley, Page 4



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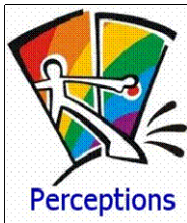
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Mid-Michigan's
leading
resource for
enriching and
empowering
LGBT individuals
and their
community

Perceptions is a 501 (c) (3) charitable
organization. Your contributions to Perceptions
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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.



Time to Volunteer for the AIDS Walk

[Shawn Nicholes](mailto:ShawnNicholes@perceptions.org)

This year's AIDS Walk will be upon us before we know it. Now is the time to get organized and start collecting pledges to help people in our area who are living with HIV/AIDS. The walk will be held on September 25th in downtown Bay City's Wenonah Park. Registration begins at 9:30 am with the walk itself starting at 11:00 am. Seeing so many people gather in support of others is truly inspiring and has to be experienced for yourself. Please contact me if you would like collection envelopes, information, or just to let us know you will join our team. If you would like to sign up or donate online, do the following:

IF YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE WALK: Go to www.aidswalkmichigan.org and click on Bay City/Midland/Saginaw in the left column. Then click on the "Register Here" button. Follow the easy step-by-step instructions.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SPONSOR A PERCEPTIONS WALKER: Go to www.aidswalkmichigan.org and click on Bay City/Midland/Saginaw in the left column. Then click on the "Sponsor Walker" button. On the next screen type in the first and/or last name of the walker you would like to sponsor. Scroll down to that person's name, click on it and then follow the easy step-by-step instructions. You may also give your donation in person to the walker you would like to sponsor.

I can be reached at nicholes911@yahoo.com or at many of Perceptions' events. We would love for you to join our team and make this our most successful year yet to assist those in need in our area. They are in need of the services that Sacred Heart Rehabilitation provides and all the funds raised are given to that organization to help people in our local area. It helps in so many ways. Please help us to help them. You may even have a good time in the process!

Pictured on the cover: (Top) A Meet & Greet at the Riverside Restaurant in Freeland; (Middle, left) Leo Romo, (Middle, center) Terry Zajac, (Bottom) Garnet Lewis.

PFLAG Tri-Cities: Celebrating 20 Years and New Beginnings

Denise Malosh

[PFLAG Tri-Cities](#) will celebrate twenty years of offering support to families and LGBT individuals at the September meeting. The chapter was started on September 9, 1990 by the founders Richard & Barbara Kormelink, Helen King and Richard. At that time, they decided to give it a trial of one year to see if there was a need for such a support group in the area. Twenty years later, it is still in existence. PFLAG Tri-Cities has been meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Midland since that time. The group has helped numerous families, offered education through speakers, supported advocacy through a Safe Schools Program and donations to other LGBT groups, and has partnered with Perceptions for fundraising events and support.

Attendance at PFLAG meetings the past couple of years has been decreasing, and as with all volunteer organizations, leaders come and go and are sometimes hard to replace. As the board has struggled with keeping the group going, a number of options were considered, including changing the meetings to either Bay City or Saginaw. The August meeting was held at Our Savior Lutheran Church, at 2525 Hemmeter Road in Saginaw. Attendance was good, many newcomers attended and others have called the helpline indicating an interest in attending Saginaw meetings in the future. The board has decided to try meeting at this new venue for the next year, beginning in October and we hope to see many of you at our new location. Although the group leaves the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (UUF) in Midland with sadness, they are excited to kick off this new chapter for PFLAG Tri-Cities. A 20th Anniversary PFLAG Tri-Cities Celebration will be held at the regular monthly meeting on September 26 at the UUF in Midland, 6220 Jefferson at Wackerly. The meeting will begin with support groups, followed by a potluck dinner. As always, the meetings are open to the public and our Perceptions friends are invited to join us. Please contact Denise Malosh at (989) 941-1458 or malos1dm@charter.net if you have questions.

Marvin Alviso to Talk at September Meeting



Join us on September 16th at the Unity Church in Bay City, for the first Perceptions General Membership Meeting of the Fall. The highlight will be a talk from Marvin Alviso. Marvin was born and raised in the Philippines, and moved to Michigan, shortly after finishing medical school at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. He is currently a senior family medicine resident at Synergy. He plans to do a year of fellowship training for HIV for primary care and ultimately serve as a primary care provider for the LGBTQ population in the Tri-City area.

The evening will begin at 7:00 pm with twenty minutes for socialization and refreshments. Then, Marvin will talk about health concerns of the LGBTQ community and his plans for the future. He will then answer questions from the audience. The evening will wrap up by 9:00 pm. Perceptions Meetings normally take place at St. John's Episcopal Church in Saginaw, but because the church is unavailable, this month's meeting will take place at the **Unity Church, [3736 State Street Rd, Bay City.](#)**

FROM THE EDITOR

In the three years I've been coming to Perceptions events, I've heard it suggested that we need to be writing down our history. Well, some of us have. Leo Romo has a collection of nearly 100 articles about our shared LGBT history in the Tri-Cities. He also keeps a timeline of LGBT developments over



the years. Jim Kleinsorge has the articles all on computer disc and keeps excellent records of Perceptions, as well. Leo has joked in the past about writing an LGBT history article for the newsletter and being as busy as he is, I decided to do it for him. Boy, did I open a can of worms.

I've been bombarded with emails over the past month from people asking me to include this person or that group. On the flip side, I've had people say, "you don't want to include that insignificant detail, do you?" Well, yes. If there's one thing I've discovered this summer, it's that there has been a *lot* of LGBT activity in the Saginaw Valley, these past three decades. I've uncovered some history on Flint and Mt Pleasant as well, but I've been forced to limit the scope of the article, just to fit it all into 3 pages.

We also have an interview with Scott Withers this month that runs another 2 pages, plus. Scott likes to talk. So, you may find that the font is a little smaller this month. If your eyesight is poor, I apologize.

—Brent Theisen

There will be no highway clean up in September, due to construction on I-75. Hope to see all of you next year, when the clean ups resume.

A Rich LGBT History in the Saginaw Valley

Brent Theisen

For the past quarter century, LGBT people in the Tri-City area have had a variety of places to go, where they can feel comfortable and interact with each other. The Saginaw Valley has had a rich history of LGBT organizations and establishments that goes back over 25 years.



Barbara Kormelink, seen here at the 2009 Pride Banquet, and her late husband Richard, were two of the founders of PFLAG Tri-Cities.

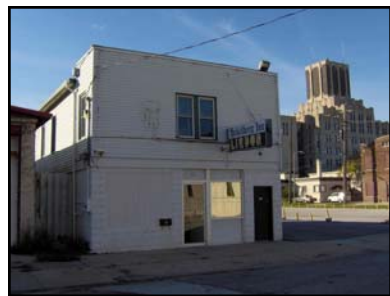
An early major local LGBT organization on the scene was a Bay City chapter of [Dignity](#), back in 1984. A branch of the group had come to Flint nine years earlier. The Bay City group was started by **Michael Brancheau** and **Richard**, who won a Lifetime Achievement Award for his many contributions to the community, at the Pride Banquet this past June. The group sponsored a variety of activities geared towards the LGBT community, during the late eighties.

Although both the Bay City and Flint Groups are no longer active, the organization can still be found in Detroit.

But the eighties had some downs, as well as ups. In 1987, a bar owner with a gay son in southwest Saginaw decided to convert her bar, which was doing poorly, into a gay bar and called it **Whispers**. Business picked up, but the neighbors picketed it relentlessly, broke windows and vandalized cars. There were even threats to burn the place down or blow it up. Two Episcopal priests, **Rev. William Boli** and **Rev. Judith Boli**, would organize a group to combat the violence called Citizens United Against Violence, but after a few short months, business dwindled and it was forced to close.

"Sadly, I was just coming out when the whole Whisper's drama began playing out," recalls Perceptions board member, Brian L. Carstensen, "so I only went there a couple times."

But other bars would come and go over the years, with more success in serving the LGBT community, most notably the **Heidelberg** and **Bambi's**. The latter started out in the early



The Heidelberg was a popular LGBT hangout for years in Saginaw. The owner died in 2009 and the establishment closed.

eighties, under different ownership, as **Dutch's**, but was purchased by a new owner in the late eighties and renamed **Tallulah's**. In 1991, the building was purchased again and named Bambi's Bottoms Up.

Around this time, current Perceptions board member **Tim Atkinson** began keeping track of

local LGBT resources in the area. During the nineties, he maintained a website called **MBS Nexus** that was a useful tool for finding LGBT resources in the Saginaw Valley. Tim was recognized at the 2010 Pride Banquet. The late eighties also saw the original **Womyn's Room** begin. It was a popular place for lesbian and bisexual women to connect, throughout the nineties.

In 1990, [PFLAG Tri-Cities](#), the local chapter of Parent, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, was founded by four people: **Richard** from Dignity, **Helen King**, and **Richard & Barbara Kormelink**. The Kormelinks received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2009 Pride Banquet. PFLAG has



The Maloshes have been active members of PFLAG in recent years. The organization came to the Tri-Cities in 1990.

been invaluable in offering support to LGBT people, their families and friends for two decades. In addition to support, PFLAG encourages the advancement of the LGBT cause and sponsors many guest speakers. For 20

years, it has been meeting at the **Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland**. With weak attendance in meetings and retiring leaders, PFLAG Tri-Cities meetings are moving to **Our Saviour Lutheran Church**, in Saginaw, beginning in October, with the September meeting remaining in Midland. See the article on page 2.

1991 was the first year that **Terry Zajac** hosted a **Chocolate Party**. The first few parties were benefits for **Wellness**, a local organization that promoted HIV/AIDS awareness. Wellness also had a social component for the local gay community. Later parties benefited PFLAG and are now a yearly event that benefits Perceptions as well.

Around the middle of the nineties, an LGBT social group for men, called **Friends Tri-Cities**, was begun and lasted for about two years, under the guidance of Tom Caylor. Attendance started out strong, but faded. Earlier in the nineties, Caylor had a group for bi-sexual married men.

On January 1, 2001, the **Triangle Foundation** lost **John Monahan**, one of its founders. Jeff Montgomery, the former Executive Director at the Triangle Foundation, had this to say about him: "John, along with Henry Messer and I, founded Triangle Foundation in the early 1990s. Actually, for a brief time the organization was known as the Lesbian and Gay Foundation of Michigan. In any case, John Monahan was a front-runner for LGBT rights in Michigan. Coming to prominence in the Saginaw, mid-Michigan area, John mastered the art of dealing with legislators in Lansing and Washington, DC. John

was a genial fellow and that's what made him successful. Gays and lesbians in mid-Michigan, Saginaw and statewide owe John deep gratitude.

"John was a total gentleman, sometimes to a fault. He has never really received the level of recognition that he earned in forging the LGBT progress we've achieved in Michigan."

Around this time, Midland was becoming famous as the home base of **Gary Glenn**, whose **American Family Association**, has been a negative force for LGBT acceptance in Michigan. So it was ironic that Midland was about to become the home base for a new pro-LGBT group, as well, one that would start out as part of the Triangle Foundation.

In 2001, Triangle sent several LGBT individuals and their allies to a national conference. They returned from the conference and on November 29th of that year, they held an organizational meeting at the UU Fellowship in Midland, which was attended by 50 or 60 people from the community, as well as Triangle members.

"They were so articulate, passionate and organized," says Perceptions Advisor, Leo Romo. "All were amazed by the number of people who attended the meeting. People liked the idea of something LGBT in the area. It was an exciting time."

On January 9, 2002, **Triangle Saginaw Valley Chapter** was officially formed and announced at a public meeting at the UU Fellowship, which was attended by over 70 people. Monthly meetings continued, still drawing large crowds. The co-directors were David Bailey and Cassey Fecht, who hoped to serve Saginaw, Midland, Bay, Huron, Tuscola, Gratiot, Isabella, Clare, Gladwin, and Arenac Counties.

But after a short time, the board members announced that they would be a separate entity from Triangle, with a different name, and on March 21, 2002, **Perceptions Saginaw Valley** was officially recognized as a corporation, and began an organization that today sponsors support groups, weekly dinners, fundraisers and a scholarship fund, among many other things. In the early years, there was a male and female co-chair. A former board member recalls that the current name Perceptions was thought up by the board, in an attempt to find a word that would be suggestive of changing people's preconceived notions about the LGBT community. This was considered an essential part of the group's mission.

In 2007, Perceptions would move their meetings to **St. John's Episcopal Church** in Saginaw. A few times of late, **Unity Church** of Bay City has opened their doors to house General Meetings (including this month's September meeting), when St. John's was unavailable. Currently, the board is looking into the possibility of renting a permanent office/meeting space specifically for the organization. Details on the search for a facility and how you can help raise money, will appear in the October issue.

The Perceptions Newsletter has continued to evolve over the years, from 2-4 pages about the organization into a

longer, more news oriented format. Since 2004, the torch has passed from **Paul Hayes** to **Vanessa Marr** to **Tana Michaels** to yours truly. Tana was instrumental in pushing for the current booklet, partially color format.

One of Perceptions most popular activities began in October 2004. "I had sent out an email to many friends in my address book," remembers Jim Kleinsorge, "asking if they would like to meet for dinner at **The Savoy**, which was fairly new at the time. Many responded and everyone had a good time. (It was) suggested we make it a regular event and everyone thought that was a good idea. That was the beginning of the Friday Night Dinners." Many have taken up the job of arranging the dinners, over the years, including Tim Atkinson, **Alan Shinaver**, Vanessa Marr and **Troy Rhyan**. Jim now arranges them and received the Volunteer award at the Pride Banquet in 2009, for this and other reasons. The aforementioned Savoy has catered the past two Pride Banquets and it received the Business Award, this year.

By the middle of the nineties, Triangle would take notice of key people in the area and a few people would receive recognition. In 2004, **Leo Romo** would be awarded the Catalyst Award from the Triangle Foundation for his activism in the Saginaw area and beyond.

In 2006, **Beth Rakestraw** would receive the Catalyst Award as well. Beth is a former chair of Perceptions and served as minister at the **Metropolitan Community Church** in Midland and Flint. The Midland chapter of MCC is yet another example of a place LGBTs can feel at home in the area.

Jackie Anderson of Hope, near Midland, served on the Detroit-based Triangle Foundation as a board member from June 2004 to January 2010. She was elected Chair by the Board of Trustees in 2005, serving for 17 months until 2007. Then she became chair of the Triangle Action Fund, the organization's political arm. Jackie resigned from the Triangle Foundation Board when the group merged with the Michigan Equality to form [Equality Michigan](#).

In 2005, the first **AIDS Walk** for Bay City - Midland - Saginaw was held in Bay City, and was organized by



Rev. Beth Rakestraw and Leo Romo (pictured above) have both received honors from the Triangle Foundation for their contributions to the community.



Perceptions, circa 2004, at Day of Caring

BASIS-Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Center, an organization that has done great service in the area to combat the spread of AIDS and treat those who have contracted HIV. The Tri-City AIDS Walk has raised the most money in the state for the past few years. For more on this year's AIDS Walk, see page 3.

In late 2006, under the guidance of Sacred Heart's **Tom Brubaker**, Perceptions began a monthly support group for men, called the **Men's Discussion Group**, which meets at the Zauel Library in Saginaw. It attracts many gay and bisexual men each month.

2006 was also the year that the **Mixx/Metro Grille** opened in downtown Saginaw. People of all kinds gather there, straight or gay. The Mixx's owner, **Robb Wiersum**, has given much back to the LGBT community, as well as the community at large, sponsoring the AIDS Walk, the Lawn Chair Film Festival in Saginaw and raising money for Hearth Home and the Saginaw Bay Symphony Orchestra. He received the Business Award at the 2009 Pride Banquet.

In 2008, **Rev. Rebecca Dunn** began a **Transgender Support Group** for Perceptions. Rebecca was the winner of the Unity Award at the 2009 Pride Banquet. "We are not like the typical support group," says the group's current leader, Rachel Prenzler, "because (we) don't dwell on the negative. Instead, we take on a more "light-hearted" approach to allow people who are transgender, as well as their allies, a chance to connect with one another for socializing and support." The group is currently searching for a new home, due to a change in hours at the **Magic Bean Cafe**. But, the Magic Bean still hosts a monthly Perceptions Meet & Greet and last month hosted Las Vegas Night II to benefit the AIDS Walk.



Kathy VanBuskirk of Divine Light Interfaith Ministry, which sponsors three local support groups.

Three local groups are sponsored by **Divine Light Interfaith Ministry**, and have been serving the local LGBT community over the past few years. **Womyn's Room II** takes its name from the original Womyn's Room, which closed down around 2000. The new group began in January of 2009. The group's leader, Rev. Kathy VanBuskirk, remembers that DLIM "was getting ready to start the group when they were contacted by Perceptions that a similar group which had been held

in Bay City at the Y was stopping due to lack of funding. The ministry decided it was definitely time to go ahead with their plans." This month's meeting will be a bonfire at Rev. Kathy's home. See Current Events Page for contact information.

DLIM sponsors a group for disabled LGBTs, as well. This June, the group adopted the name **Open Hearts Positive Thinking Group**. "The ministry was looking for more support groups to start that would benefit the LGBT community," Kathy says, "because they desire to be of assistance to them. A community member suggested the disability group. The group is for disabled LGBT peoples but also for anyone who has a need to discuss things causing stress to them or

concern." Both groups meet at the Butman Fish Library in Saginaw.

The **Men's Friendship Room** is hosted by Rev. Kathy's brother David Younk and is held at his home. He has a BA in Sociology and worked for many years as a social worker.

In addition to support groups, DLIM has also recently started a lending library and is looking for book donations. Kathy has this to add, "Most people know I am lesbian. My ministry has done an adult coat drive for 5 years and the last one actually collected more than 200 coats. This is a thing for the LGBT community to feel proud of." The ministry also has a personal needs pantry that is struggling because it needs a place to store things.

The list goes on and on. There are strong LGBT groups at Delta College and SVSU, as well. **Charissa Urbano**, who has emceed the past two Pride Banquets, was instrumental in forming the Prism Alliance at Delta. **Stuart Barbier** is now the leader. Perceptions has, in the past, had joint events with the SVSU Gay Straight Alliance, and they have sponsored several Drag Shows over the past few years, which have benefitted the AIDS Walk.

Finally, a few openly gay politicians have made their mark on the Saginaw Valley in recent years. In 2008, Perceptions member **Garnet Lewis** was a candidate for the state House's 98th District. She lost the election, but is still quite active in the Democratic Party. Last month, **Scott Withers** ran for the Democratic nomination for Michigan's 5th Congressional District but lost as well. His story is on page 9.

The future looks bright for the area, in terms of meeting LGBT needs, even though the need for these places is less. As LGBT people become more and more accepted by the rest of society, the need to separate ourselves is waning. However, as long as the need is there, the Saginaw Valley will surely continue its tradition of filling the niche.

Have you, or someone you know, been active in the struggle for LGBT acceptance in the Saginaw Valley? Are there important places or events that we've forgotten? Please write us at Editor@PerceptionsSV.org and we will print your additional information in the next issue.



Perceptions member Garnet Lewis was a candidate for a seat in the Michigan House in 2008.

This article would not have been possible without the help of Leo Romo. Several others were also invaluable, most notably (in alphabetical order) Tim Atkinson, Brian L. Carstensen, Jim Kleinsorge, Jeff Montgomery, Rachel Prenzler, and Kathy Van Buskirk. Information was also obtained from articles appearing in *the Advocate* and *the Saginaw News*. Thanks go out to all who answered my questions and provided data.

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CURRENT EVENTS PAGE

▼ September 1st, Wednesday - Saginaw Meet & Greet

7:00 - 9:00 pm. An informal gathering for the Tri-Cities' LGBT community. Join us at the **Magic Bean Café**, [5789 State St.](#) in Saginaw. All are welcome. Meet your old friends and make some new ones. Enjoy hot and cold drinks, baked goods and gelato.

▼ September 3rd - Friday Night Dinner **7:00 pm.** Join Perceptions members and friends at **Lone Star Steakhouse**, [2255 Tittabawassee Rd.](#), Saginaw. If you plan to attend, please respond to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ September 8th, Wednesday - Freeland Meet & Greet

7:00 to 9:00 pm. Join us at **Riverside Restaurant**, [8295 Midland Road](#) (M-47), Freeland. Private room. Famous homemade pies.

September 8th, Wednesday - Open Hearts **6:30 pm.** Positive thinking group for members of the LGBT community who are disabled or anyone having issues they are dealing with. Come for discussion, speakers and support! The group meets at **Butman Fish Library**, Saginaw, and is facilitated by Kathy VanBuskirk and Carm Audas. For info call 989-755-2618

▼ September 10th - Friday Night Dinner **7:00 pm.** Join Perceptions members and friends at **Los Cabos**, [7467 Gratiot Rd.](#), Saginaw. If you plan to attend, please respond to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

September 12th, Sunday. - Genessee Co. PFLAG Meeting **2:00 - 4:30 pm.** The meeting takes place at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Flint, [2474 S. Ballenger Hwy.](#) For more info contact pflagflint@yahoo.com.

September 14th, Tuesday - Isabella Area LGBT Community Group **7:00 pm.** The group is established for the purpose of connecting, networking, and social support for the entire LGBT Community. All are welcome. St. John's Episcopal Church, 206 W. Maple St., Mt Pleasant. For more information contact Erin Moers (989-317-0811 or erin.moers@yahoo.com) or Rev. Wayne Nicholson (989-773-7448). Repeats on the 2nd Tues of each month.

September 15th, Wednesday - Womyn's Room II **6:00 pm.** Designed as a safe place for Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender women, who are out or not, to come for support and socialization. This month it will meet at Rev. Kathy's home for a bon fire. For directions and address, contact Rev. Kathy 989-755-2618 or Rev_KathyV@yahoo.com.

September 15th, Wednesday - Men's Friendship Room **7:00 pm.** Designed as a safe place for Gay, Bisexual and Transgender men, who are out or not, to come for support and socialization, Men's Friendship Room meets at David Younk's home in Saginaw. For more info. contact David at 989-771-9721 or DavidY513@hotmail.com.

▼ September 16th, Thursday - Perceptions General Membership Meeting **7:00 - 9:00 pm.** **Unity Church**, [3736 State Street Road](#), Bay City. All are welcome. Marvin Alviso will talk about LGBT health issues and his plans to serve the medical needs of the LGBT community in the Tri-City area. Please note that we will be returning to our regular meeting place in October.

▼ September 17th - Friday Night Dinner **7:00 pm.** Join Perceptions members and friends at **Cafe American**, [1525 Washington St.](#), Midland. If you plan to attend, please respond to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ September 21st, Tuesday - Men's Discussion Group **7:00 to 8:30 pm.** Zael Memorial Library, [3100 N. 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 for additional information or to let him know you'll attend. Light snacks will be provided. You may bring your own beverage into the library as long as the container has a cover or cap.

▼ September 24th, Friday Night Dinner **7:00 pm.** Join Perceptions members and friends at **Krzysiak House**, [1605 Michigan Ave.](#), Bay City. If you plan to attend, please respond to Jim@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ September 25th, Saturday - AIDS Walk Bay City/ Midland/Saginaw The Tri-Cities' sixth annual AIDS Walk will be held in downtown Bay City in Wenonah Park. 9:30 am Registration, 10:30 am Rally, 11:00 am Walk. AIDS Walk supports the AIDS Care Program at Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Center, providing care case management as well as free HIV testing and prevention education at several sites in the Great Lakes Bay Region. For more information, contact Tom Brubaker at Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Center via email at tbrubaker@sacredheartcenter.com or go to www.aidswalkmichigan.org

September 26th, Sunday - PFLAG Meeting **2:00 - 4:30 pm.** Potluck dinner to celebrate the chapter's 20th anniversary. The meeting takes place at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, [6220 Jefferson Ave.](#), Midland.

Saturday, December 4th - Perceptions 9th Annual Holiday Party

Mark your calendars. More details to follow.

Be informed about upcoming events

Simply send a blank email to:
PerceptionsSV-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

▼ Denotes a Perceptions sponsored event

SEPTEMBER 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																											
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19	20	21  Perceptions Men's Discussion Group 7:00 - 8:30 PM	22	23	24  Friday Night Dinner Krzysiak House 1605 Michigan Ave. Bay City 7:00 PM	25  Bay City/Saginaw/Midland AIDS Walk Wenonah Park Bay City 9:30 AM																																																																																											
26  PFLAG Meeting UU Fellowship Midland 2:00 - 4:30PM	27	28	29	30																																																																																													
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Local Politician Scott Withers Is Proud of His Showing in the Democratic Primary

Brent Theisen



I met Scott Withers at a coffee shop in mid-August to interview him for the newsletter. He had hoped to run for the 5th Congressional District of the Michigan House. He received 22% of the vote for the Democratic nomination against a 34 year incumbent, just two weeks earlier. Jim Kleinsorge was kind enough to come along. He brought his voice recorder and his partner, Shawn.

Scott talked about growing up in the small town of Vassar, why he is an advocate for small businesses, and why he feels proud of the campaign he ran. He also talked about California's Proposition 8 and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

What prompted you to get into politics?

Part of it was my growing up and education. I grew up in the small town of Vassar, in a very low income family. My dad worked non-stop at what used to be Saginaw Steering Gear, but is now Nexteer, and worked constantly around the clock, just to get by. There were points where they couldn't feed all of us kids and I had to go live with my grandparents for a while. As a kid, we weren't allowed to watch cartoons. We had to watch the news. (My mom) wanted us to get outside of just what kids do. She wanted us to know that there are things going on that impacted why we were having a hard time feeding ourselves. So that had a huge impact on me. When I worked at CNN for a while and in other television outlets, I got the bug hard. Being introduced and meeting Vice President Gore or various Speakers of the House or Congressmen; interviewing the UN Secretary General on the situation that was taking place in Haiti; it just became part of me. I had the opportunity to live all over the country and work in different types of companies, so I could see how all the various industries intersected and how they all worked. Over the course of the last decade I'd constantly come home and visit or talk to my parents and it was always the same story, over and over again. Did you know so and so just lost their house? Or they closed down this. Or so and so couldn't afford to eat. When I looked around, it was the same thing. Nothing was being done about the foreclosure rate, or the decline of the police department or the fire department. Someone had to point out that we've got serious problems here.

You ran for the 5th Congressional District against Dale Kildee, who's been elected 17 times. You also promised to limit yourself to 4 terms. Do you feel that career politicians are hurting Michigan?

The people in Washington will say career politicians are good because they have a lot of power. They know what that person's going to do every single time on every single issue. But, if you're an incumbent and you've been an incumbent for three terms or four terms or seventeen terms, it makes it nearly impossible for people like me to compete in the money war. We've got a serious problem. When the reapportionment of Congressional seats comes out after the census numbers at the end of the year, we will then go into redistricting and it is going to be catastrophic. Our district is going to get ripped apart. It's going to minimize the importance of Saginaw and Bay City.

In two years (the 5th) district is going to go away. We'll lose a Democratic Congressman. Did I say four terms? Absolutely, because I think you have to have a constant renewal of new ideas. Now, one term, you can go in there and get some stuff done. But for bigger projects, you need two or three terms.

Michigan is 2nd in the nation in unemployment. Creating jobs was a central theme of your campaign. What other issues are important to you?

Civil Rights. Equal Rights. I was extremely proud to be the only candidate in this portion of Michigan to ever be endorsed by the [National Organization for Women](#), which fights for not only women's reproductive rights, but also lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender rights, but also for minority rights. Amendment 2 here, the ban on LGBT marriages is disgraceful. The civil rights of *any* minority group, whether it be race or sexual orientation, should never be voted on by the majority. If that were the case, we would have never had the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. We would not see interracial marriages. Women would, more than likely, still not be able to vote. You can't minimize people. When you live in a society where the Civil Rights or the Equal Rights of a group are not appreciated, you see what you have going on around us now. My mom works in a position now, where she's paid less than the man that works next to her, even though she's worked there longer. My sister works on the assembly line at one of the plants here. She makes less than men doing the exact same job. It's not just about gay marriage. There are lots of minority groups of various types that just are ignored, and pushed aside. That's a key issue for me.

You received 22% of the vote against a 34 year incumbent. Do you consider it a successful campaign, even though you lost?

I won. I did not have a campaign office. I worked out of my jeep. I did not have a single paid employee. I raised and spent \$16,000, and got 22% of the vote against a 34 year incumbent. My opponent, on the other hand, spent \$155,000 plus. I was outspent 10 to one, easily, on this election. He had a large campaign office. He had a large *paid* campaign staff. He had the backing of the union. I had no way to get my message out, other than knocking on doors. Yes, he got 78%. But if you start doing the math, I spent about \$800 per one percent of the vote, where he had to spend over \$2,000 to get one percent of the vote. I sent a clear message that people wanted change. I'm not ashamed. I'm actually quite proud of receiving the amount of votes I did.

You promised to run a clean campaign. How important do you feel that is to voters?

I think it was very clean. The congressman could have easily bashed me for being gay, and he didn't. I tried to be upfront and honest and not play anything dirty and I think I did okay with that. We have serious problems. There's people that can't feed themselves. I don't think people care about who's sleeping in my bed at night, when they don't even have a roof over the head of their family.

Do you think being gay helped or hindered your campaign? Or was it a non-issue?

You know what? It was a non-issue. Nobody cared. I didn't hide it. It was on my website from day one. I did an interview with a reporter from the *Saginaw News* and it appeared in the article "Scott is openly gay." That was the last I heard of it. Nobody else cared. Nobody else said anything. Now in the November election, the Republicans would have made a hell of a lot of hay out of it, if I'd won. And there'd be some conservative Democrats that would have too. So it would have been a lot harder in the general election, but in the primary, I knew Congressman Kildee *couldn't* say anything about it. He'd been taking money from the [Human Rights Campaign](#). Not a single person ever questioned me or said anything about it. And I was ready for it, too.

Do you think Michigan is ready to appeal the amendment banning gay marriage?

No. It's not ready to appeal it. None of the amendments that are currently enforced across the country are going to get appealed. I think this sounds horrible, because I support gay marriage. I think it's a good thing. We need the California case to go to the 9th circuit, which it will. Once it gets there, the 9th circuit is going to uphold Judge Walker's decision that it's unconstitutional. Then it goes to the Supreme Court. Once it's decided in the U.S. Supreme Court, it will wipe out all the amendments. Instead of having to fight it in all 45 states, let's just get it done all at once. Because it's a constitutional amendment in California, only the state has the legal standing to defend Prop 8. The reason that (the 9th Circuit) picked early December to hear the briefs, is that the current Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the current Attorney General, Jerry Brown have already said, "we're not going to defend it." So they're waiting to see what happens in the November elections. It actually could be appealed to the Supreme Court as early as January or February. We don't have a case now, here in Michigan. My husband and I do not want to be the test case for Michigan, although we could. He'd kill me. Plus, it'd take forever. Let's just go with the fastest course possible.

Do you think Don't Ask Don't Tell will be repealed?

This is one of the biggest disappointments of President Obama. He promised he would. Now, we had other pressing issues. The economy was in the toilet. I get that. He could repeal it with an executive order, one piece of paper and a signature. I don't know why he hasn't. I think he didn't want to ruffle too many feathers before the midterm November elections, but we might get a Christmas surprise in December. If it comes out that (Democrats) hold the Senate and hold the House, he might just do it. It should never be in place. More people, more

LGBTQ, have been dismissed than before the time it was even there. Bill Clinton should never have signed it, should never have allowed it, should have fought it. It makes no sense. Not when most of our allies whose armies we work side to side with, in all of the hot zones around the world, have openly LGBTQ people. I kept saying during the campaign: "It's 2010, people, wake up. It's not 1910." So, yeah, it should have gone a long time ago. I hope (Obama) has the courage to actually do it, in December, after the elections.

Will you run again in the next election year?

Am I going to run again? I posted on [my Facebook page](#) a few days ago: "I took a couple weeks off. I'm focusing on my company. I'm focusing on my family. I'm speed walking now, and I'm running later." So, yes. I am going to run again. Do I know what district? No, because I don't know what the district's going to be. Will I be facing Mr. Kildee again? I don't know. Maybe I'll be running against Dave Camp. It makes no sense to start today, because I'm not in the general election. Let everybody fight for the general election, which is November 2nd. But November 3rd, I'm hitting the ground running.

You grew up in Vassar. What was it like growing up in a small Michigan town? Did it affect your decision to emphasize building Michigan up through small businesses?

It did impact me, growing up in a small town, because you become close-knit, and you know everybody and you interact with everybody. But also because of the small businesses that are there. They were struggling when I was a kid and they're struggling even more now. The fastest way to spur our economy is to support our small business owner. Help them grow. Help them add a new employee. We've got 15,000 small businesses in Genesee County and if they each add one employee, that's 15,000 new jobs. Is it the long term solution? No. We need to expand our marketing capacity outside of the automotive industry. Without fixing the short term goal, we're never going to achieve the mid and long term goal, because people are going to move out, our infrastructure is going to continue to crumble, and then we're not going to be able to bring in new manufacturing.

Tell me about your small communications consulting business.

It's a little bit of everything, because I've been blessed and able to do all different kinds of media work, everything from on-air to producing and being an executive at a TV network. So what I do now is help small and medium size businesses expand and grow into social media marketing and also video production and television commercials. It's an extension to my dedication to small and medium business owners, because they can't afford large monthly retainers at a large communications company. I'm working for these people for 8 or 9 dollars an hour, because I want to help them grow their company, because I know once they start growing their company, they can add another employee. Right now I do it out of my house.

I am considering the study of journalism as a major. You worked for CNN. Do you have any advice for someone like me?

Journalism has changed in just the short period of time since I graduated. Now anyone with a laptop or a cell phone or a

camcorder can be in journalism. That was not an option when I was in college. The key to being a good journalist and not just moving up the ranks in journalism is not just focusing on the blood and guts or the flashing light stories. You've got to go out and find real stories and research them on your own and write them up and present them to your bosses. You've got to look at stories that actually have an impact and not just flash-in-the-pan breaking news type stories.

Is there anything else you would like to add to what you've said here?

I can tell you why I lost, one of the key strategic reasons why I lost. It all comes down to two words: absentee ballots. I did not have the money at the time in mid to late June, to do the robo calls or the direct mailing to the absentee voters, and they turned out in force this time. At that time, I had no news coverage. I was knocking on doors, myself. I couldn't reach everybody, and at the end of the day, they were like "well, I've never heard of this guy." If I would have had the money in June to reach the absentee voters, it would have been a significantly closer race.

Jim posed the final question: "What do you intend to do politically between now and the next election? Even though you didn't get elected, are you still going to do things to help our community?"

Yeah, but I'm not running for a local office or a county office or anything like that. Instead, my focus is going to be working

with food pantries, job creation and outsource. I'm trying to set up to teach small business entrepreneurship classes, continuing education at various high schools: how to start your own business; how you can start your own small business with just an idea and twenty bucks. I'm going to be volunteering like no tomorrow, all across our district once again for the poor, the working poor, and the homeless, because those are the groups that I care about the most. They just have no voice, because they can't spend \$100 to go to a fundraiser.

CLASSIFIEDS

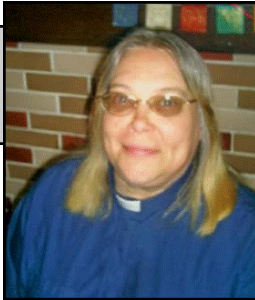
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REV. KATHY VANBUSKIRK

“Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are...”

I have over the past few years found myself amazed at how many LGBT people there are in Saginaw County. I could stop there and it would be enough, but I won't.

I first started hearing about Gay Pride in Lansing, when I came out at age 45. I initially was in the frame of mind that it was because there weren't that many LGBT around this area and that was a good connecting point.

Boy, was I wrong!!

We are here! We are many. We are strong. But unfortunately we are not public.

A wise man once gave a speech entitled "I Have A Dream". Well I have a dream. A dream that Saginaw County and the rest of the planet will recognize the beauty of every God created individual. That we will be able to walk down our streets uncloseted, safe, and proud.

In an endeavor to reach this point I would like us all to band together and I propose we start right now, planning a LGBT Pride event right here in Saginaw for June 2011. We CAN do this!

It is time, with all the notice in the national media about weddings, adoption and such, that we let people realize we are out here and not small in number. Let's be proud of who we are.

Anyone interested in being part of a committee to organize such an event, please contact me at (989) 755-2618 or at Rev_KathyV@yahoo.com

Perceptions Members Gather for a Picnic

Below left: Fred Eland assembles a “Ladder Ball” game, which everyone took turns playing, at the event at the William H. Haithco Recreation Area, in Saginaw, on August 21st.

Below right: Picnic goers enjoy a meal of brats, hot dogs and hamburgers, while swapping stories.

Bottom: Leo Romo enthralles picnic goers with his views on life.

