



PERCEPTIONS

SAGINAW VALLEY

Serving the Tri-City Area's LGBT Community

May 2012

www.PerceptionsSV.org

Free

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Perceptions Saginaw Valley is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your contributions are deductible as charitable donations for federal income tax purposes.

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

MISSION STATEMENT

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

Laramie Project at Midland Center for the Arts

By Daphne Barkley

When I first heard that the Laramie project was coming to Midland, I was quite surprised. Midland has a bit of a reputation for leaning on the conservative side. I was impressed, actually, that the Midland Center for the Arts decided to bring the production to the public in three performances over the weekend of April 13, 2012.

The Laramie Project recounts the brutal beating and subsequent murder of Matthew Shepherd, a young openly gay college student in Laramie, Wyoming. The performance is told from multiple vantage points taken from actual interviews with people in the town. The performance really touches the heart and opens the mind. The cast, made up entirely of local performers, gave their all to bring this story to life. One of the points that seared right through me as I was watching the performance was a character lamenting that things like that "don't happen in Laramie" but realizing that "things like this do happen in Laramie." I think this is something many of us feel, the concept of "that couldn't happen in my backyard." In reality, hatred can happen anywhere and that is something we must be mindful of.

After each performance, the cast held a talkback session with the audience. Questions were posed to the cast and people were given a chance to discuss issues such as how can a young person who is vehemently anti-gay be taught not to hate. The overall theme the audience brought up was "how can we make things better?" (and specifically how can they be made better in Midland) As I listened to the participants in the talkback session who overwhelmingly represented our straight allies, I have to admit, my eyes welled with tears. I even had the once in a lifetime opportunity to meet the entire cast backstage after the performance. I was invited backstage so that the cast would have the opportunity to sign the "Don't Change yourself, Change the Law" petition we are gathering signatures for. Each and every cast member in that production lent their signature to the petition.

Sometimes it is hard to see that progress is being made but I truly feel that slowly but surely the wheels of change are starting to squeak to life, even in Midland.

Chocolate Party Review

By Kay Sural

Chocolate cookies, chocolate cakes, chocolate candies and not chocolate chips and dip were just some of many delicious treats at this year's annual Chocolate Party. The annual event is hosted jointly by Perceptions and PFLAG at Terry Z's Victorian home in Bay City. There are always new things to discover at Terry's home and always new treats to eat at the Chocolate Party. The party was held on Saturday, March 24th. A wonderful mix of old and new friends gathered for conversation and chocolate. This is an annual event so if you missed it this year, be sure to put it on your calendar for 2013! We raised just over \$500 which was divided between PFLAG and Perceptions.



Dave Garcia Enlightens and Inspires

by Jim Kleinsorge

Like many of us, Dave Garcia came from a small town where growing up is great until you find you're 16 and gay and everything isn't so great anymore. After graduating from high school, in his capacity as the community services coordinator at Swartz Creek schools, he tried to start a Gay-Straight Alliance and found out the hard way that LGBT people can legally be fired from their job just for being who they are. So started his career in LGBT advocacy. Dave is currently the Executive Director at [Affirmations](#), a LGBT community center in Ferndale, and has become a state-wide voice for LGBT justice.

Before his position at Affirmations, Mr. Garcia served as executive director at the [Kalamazoo Gay and Lesbian Resource Center](#). Among his other accomplishments, he produced "Candy Corn, Christ and the Convuluted Creation of Golf" a play which takes an unconventional and humorous look at Christ and various stories in the bible. Mr. Garcia's work played to sold-out audiences.

Mr. Garcia refers to Michigan as "clearly the Mississippi of the civil rights movement when it comes to gay politics." Why? Not only can same-sex couples not get married, but those famous last words 'or for any similar union or purpose' that were added to our state constitution in 2004's Proposal 2 makes our state a very unfriendly place for those in our community. More recently, House conservatives wrote into an anti-bullying bill, by unanimous vote, a religious exemption to bullying whereby bullying is alright if it's for religious reasons. Only when exposed by the national media which shined a light on their bigotry, this language was removed from the Senate version of the bill. Second parent adoption is also unavailable to us. Only one parent in a couple can be the legal parent of a child, making the other parent a legal stranger to the child. These and other initiatives make Michigan one of the most anti-LGBT states in the union.

According to Mr. Garcia, we allow the conservative religious and political right to dominate the word morality. When the LGBT community is accused of being immoral by these groups, he rarely hears us defend ourselves against these claims other than perhaps a weak 'no we aren't'. He would like to hear us talk about OUR morality. Young people coming out knowing what consequences they'll face, gay soldiers fighting for our country, lesbians taking care of gay men during the early days of the AIDS crisis...those are examples of gay morality. Contrast that to a president that didn't mention the word AIDS for the first 7 years of a worldwide epidemic or a national communications director that called AIDS "nature's revenge upon the gay community." Parents kick their children out of their homes for being LGBT. Where's the morality in that? Dave asks us to show our morality, without apology, and not allow them to hijack a word that has always belonged to us. His passion was apparent at this point and it's clear that his message is a powerful one. Dave also points out that all churches are not anti-LGBT. We need the support of gay-friendly churches and they can be an important resource in our quest for equality.

Mr. Garcia spoke of the importance of involving our straight allies. Just as abolitionists in the days of slavery, just as progressive-thinking men who worked arm in arm with women to get the right to vote, just like white people who marched with Dr. King, it is the straight ally who we need to encourage, if not outright challenge, to come out of the closet. He says it's no longer enough for straight people to simply say 'I have a gay friend,' just as it's not enough for white people to say I have a black friend. He says we should encourage our straight friends to give to LGBT causes, talk to our elected officials, volunteer for LGBT organizations, advertise in our publications, and so on. It's the same role that has played out in every other social justice movement in this country and they can play a very important role in helping us gain equality. Many allies want to help, but don't know what to do. Giving them concrete examples of ways they can help will go a long way to get them involved.

Mr. Garcia answered questions from the crowd and also talked to people one-on-one once the program was over. The best quote of the evening from Mr. Garcia was "Anytime someone actively denies someone else opportunities and privileges that they themselves enjoy, they are the immoral one...they are a moral hypocrite and they need to be called out on it."

Equality Action Day

Equality Action Day is being coordinated by [Equality Michigan](#) for Thursday, May 24th. The objective of Equality Action Day is to mobilize LGBT people and allies from across the state and meet in Lansing to stage a rally on the steps of the Capitol and lobby legislators to encourage them to defeat legislation that harms LGBT people and support legislation that prevents discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Perceptions will be organizing car pools to go to Lansing. We hope to have a good showing from the Tri-Cities. Like Perceptions, other members of the Community Centers Network will be encouraging their constituencies to attend. The Community Centers Network is an association of LGBT organizations and community centers from across Michigan. The participating organizations are [Affirmation](#) (Ferndale), [The Kalamazoo Gay & Lesbian Resource Center](#), Perceptions, [The OutCenter](#) (Benton Harbor), [The LGBT Net-](#)

[work of Western Michigan](#) (Grand Rapids), [Jim Toy Community Center](#) (Ann Arbor), KICK (Detroit), and [Ruth Ellis Center](#) (Detroit).

The schedule of events for Equality Action Day were not available at press time. Event organizers are carefully monitoring developments in Lansing and will make a decision on which bills and issues we should focus on based on current legislative actions. Besides the rally, the day will include brief training on lobbying and the opportunity to meet your representative (in small groups) to make your argument for equality. Other activities will be available if you don't wish to meet your representative in person. These options may include phone banking or learning about get out the vote initiatives. Make plans now to join us on Thursday, May 24th. Request the day off work, if necessary. Details will be announced soon through our email distribution list. If you have any questions, contact info@PerceptionsSV.org or call 989-891-1429.

Perceptions Yard Sale 2012

HELP! Perceptions is in need of your donations for this year's yard sale. Please remember us when you are spring cleaning and have items that you don't need or want. Organization of this year's Perceptions charity yard sale to benefit AIDS Walk 2012 Great Lakes Bay Region is now taking place. We ask that there not be any clothes donated because they do not sell well. Perceptions has had good luck in prior year yard sales and with your help we intend on doing the same this year. Sale location and time will be announced soon and will be posted on the Perceptions web site and in our weekly email messages. This year's organizer is Shawn Nicholes. You can contact him at nicholes911@yahoo.com Thank you in advance for your donations.



SAVE THE DATE-PRIDE BANQUET

Rick Farrand

Remember to save the date Tuesday June 26, 2012 Saginaw Valley Pride Awards Banquet.

We also need your help with nominations. It's not too late to nominate someone who you think has done an outstanding job for the GLBT Community.

You have until Thursday, June 7, 2012, to send in your nominations. We always sell out fast.... so don't wait until the last minute to get your tickets. You can go [online](#) now or buy them from any Perceptions Board Member. Be sure to get yours today!

Current Events

events.PerceptionsSV.org

▼ **Friday, May 4th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions this week at **Café American**, [1535 Washington Street](#), Midland. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ **Saturday, May 5th - DTMC PastaFest Fundraiser** 5:00 until 9:00 pm. All you can eat Spaghetti Pasta Buffet, salad, garlic bread, and totally fabulous desserts. Chorus performances at 6, 7, and 8:00 pm. Silent auction. \$15 per person (children under 8 are free); tickets available at the door. All proceeds benefit [Detroit Together Men's Chorus](#). Zion Lutheran Church, 143 Albany St., Ferndale.

▼ **Wednesday, May 9th - Freeland Meet & Greet** 6:00 to 8:00 pm. **Riverside Restaurant**, [8295 Midland Road](#) (M-47), Freeland. Private room. Famous homemade pies.

▼ **Wednesday, May 9th - Open Hearts** 6:00 pm. Positive thinking group for disabled members of the LGBT community. Discussion, speakers and support. Meets at Butman Fish Library in Saginaw. For info call Rev. Kathy VanBuskirk at 989-755-2618.

▼ **Friday, May 11th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions friends this week at **Super Buffet**, [3823 Bay Rd.](#), Saginaw. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ **Sunday, May 13th - Genesee County PFLAG Meeting** 2:00 - 4:30 pm. The meeting takes place at the UU Church of Flint, [2474 S. Ballenger Hwy.](#) For more info, contact pflagflint@yahoo.com.

▼ **Monday, May 14th - Together in Faith Conference** Inclusive Justice - Together in Faith presents "Reaching the Moveable Middle Conference." Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ, 125 S. Pennsylvania Ave., Lansing. 1:00 pm Keynote by **Macky Alston** followed by workshops. 5:15 pm Dinner. 6:30 pm Screening of "Love Free or Die." Love Free or Die is the award-winning documentary about the extraordinary struggle for Gene Robinson in becoming the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church. Macky Alston, acclaimed documentary film-

maker, will introduce the film and take questions after this special showing. \$40 registration or \$5 for just the movie. Visit www.inclusivejustice.org for more info.

▼ **Tuesday, May 15th - Men's Discussion Group** 7:00 to 8:30 pm. **The Alderton**, [301 Cass St.](#), Old Town Saginaw. 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.

▼ **Wednesday, May 16th - Womyn's Room II** 6:00 pm. This women's group is designed as a safe place for Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender women, who are out or not, to come for support and socialization. For more info. contact Rev. Kathy VanBuskirk at 989-755-2618.

▼ **Wednesday, May 16th - Men's Friendship Room** 7:00 pm. Men's Friendship Room is designed as a safe place for Gay, Bisexual and Transgender men, who are out or not, to come for support and socialization. It meets at David Younk's home in Saginaw. For more information, contact David Younk at 989-771-9721 or DavidY513@hotmail.com.

▼ **Thursday, May 17th - Perceptions General Meeting** 7:00 pm. Our guest speaker, Tom Brubaker, Master Gardener, will do a hands-on presentation on container gardening. All are welcome. **The Alderton**, [301 Cass St.](#), Old Town Saginaw. For more information, contact [Perceptions](#).

▼ **Friday, May 18th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions this week at **Heather's Restaurant**, [205 Third Street](#), Bay City. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ **Sunday, May 20th - Charity Fashion Show** Fundraiser to benefit Underground Railroad entitled "Spring into Encouragement, Fall into Empowerment." Sponsored by 400 Court Street Studio, Saginaw. Event includes food, refreshments, entertainment, and silent auction. St. Andrew School, 405 Hayes St., Saginaw. Tickets are \$30. Call 989-797-6000 for more info.

▼ **Sunday, May 20th - PFLAG Meeting** 2:00 - 4:30 pm. Meeting at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, [2525 Hemmeter Rd.](#), Saginaw. For more info, contact pflag@pflag-mbs.org or 989-941-1458.

▼ **Thursday, May 24th - Equality Action Day** LGBT advocates and fair-minded people from across the state will converge in Lansing to ask our elected leaders to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The day will include a rally on the Capitol steps and the opportunity to meet with your representatives to tell your story and explain why it's important to change the law.

▼ **Thursday, May 24th - Saginaw Meet & Greet** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions friends at **The Mixx**, [115 N. Hamilton St.](#), Saginaw, for food and conversation and perhaps try your luck at a board game or cards.

▼ **Friday, May 25th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions friends this week at **Diamond Jim's**, [101 E. Main St.](#), Midland. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Friday.

▼ **June 2nd & 3rd - Motor City Pride** Hart Plaza, Detroit. The pride weekend celebration is a project of Equality Michigan. For more information, visit motorcitypride.org

▼ **Saturday, June 9th - Women's Golf OUT-ing** Come PAR-TEE at the 2012 Annual Women's Golf OUTing at St. John's Golf Course in Plymouth while supporting two essential community organizations, the Ruth Ellis Center and Equality Michigan. Join more than 100 golfers competing for terrific prizes. Golfers will challenge each other for prizes that area awarded for Longest Drive, Longest Putt and other games of skill and chance. The only skill necessary is the ability to have a good time. Shake it all up at the morning Bloody Mary Bar and enjoy the tasty baked goods donated by Avalon Bakery. Get all the details and sign up at equalitymi.org/golf

▼ Event sponsored or endorsed by Perceptions.

To be informed about upcoming events, simply send a blank email to: PerceptionsSV-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

MAY 2012

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Don't Change Yourself, Change the Law

By Tim Atkinson

Perceptions and several LGBT community centers across Michigan are participating in a campaign called "Don't Change Yourself, Change the Law." The campaign is a project of [The Unity Michigan Coalition](#), a group that works to ensure that all Michiganders are treated fairly in the workplace by advancing nondiscrimination policies. The coalition includes the [ACLU of Michigan](#), [Equality Michigan](#), [Affirmations](#), [KICK](#), the [Ruth Ellis Center](#), and the [Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion](#).

The objective of the Don't Change Yourself, Change the Law campaign is to inform the general public that in Michigan (and 28 other states) you can be fired for being gay or even for being perceived to be gay or transgender. While employment nondiscrimination laws are on the books to protect workers on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, height, weight and marital status, no such protections exist for employees who are singled out for their sexual orientation or gender identity. The campaign intends to spread the word that Michigan laws need to be changed so that all hardworking Michiganders have the chance to earn a living and provide for their families without fear of being unfairly fired for reasons that have nothing to do with their job performance.

Michigan's workplace anti-discrimination law is the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act. To end employment discrimination against hard-working gay and transgender people in our state, we need to amend the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act to specifically include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity.

Perceptions will be collecting signatures



on a petition to ask House Speaker Bolger to change the law to protect all Michiganders. These petitions will be available at most Perceptions functions between now and July. We'd also like to identify a few volunteers to collect signatures. We can provide you with toolkits containing materials to prepare yourself to spread the word and collect signatures. The toolkits include talking points, a canvassing script, information on the campaign, petition forms, and tongue-in-cheek "How to look Not-Gay posters and "Not-Gay Interview Tips."

People can also sign an online version of the petition at dontchangeyourself.com/change-the-law

In addition to the signature gathering initiative, there are other actions you can take to help change the law. First, get the facts you need to become an advocate for change. Contact Perceptions for a toolkit or visit dontchangeyourself.com. Call and write your legislators. We can provide sample letters. Write a Letter to the Editor of your local newspaper or submit an Op Ed. We can provide tips for writing letters that you can use to be an opinion leader in your local community. Meet with your elected officials or write them a letter. We can provide advice on how to have an effective and productive meeting with your elected official and how to write an effective, attention-grabbing letter. Join us in Lansing on Thursday, May 24, for Equality Action Day that will include a demonstration at the Capitol and a training session before having the opportunity to meet with your representative. Finally, ask a few friends, relatives, or neighbors to call their state legislators and ask them to support amending the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity.

For more information, contact Tim@PerceptionsSV.org or Daphne@PerceptionsSV.org

Innerlink Considers Perceptions a Community Partner and Resource

By Virginia Blakely, Innerlink SVSU Intern

[Innerlink Runaway Services](#) has been in the Saginaw Community since 1973, serving runaway, throwaway, and homeless youth. Innerlink offers a crisis center, which provides shelter for youth 12 to 17 years, a crisis shelter for teen mothers 17 and under, and a transitional living program for youth 17 to 21 years old. The agency is open 24/7, and serves Saginaw, Midland, Gratiot, and Tuscola counties. Innerlink is located at 1110 Howard Street in Saginaw, MI. The crisis line: (989) 753- 3431. Recently, the agency has made changes as part of a process in becoming a Safe Space.

Innerlink made these changes because it recognizes the need to be prepared to welcome and work with LGBTQ youth and families. Twenty percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ, and as an agency serving homeless youth, changes need to be made at agencies across the United States (The National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). As an initiative to be more inclusive and representative of LGBTQ youth, Innerlink has updated in many areas from policies, to staff trainings, to inclusive language changes. One major change was the anti-discrimination policy, which now includes gender identity or expression and sexual orientation. In addition, the agency has adopted a safe space symbol, which will be added to the pamphlets as well as displayed in the entry doors. Innerlink deems the symbol's visibility necessary so all youth and families who come through the doors know the agency is safe and inclusive. A safe space is the environmental product of a conscious set of decisions and actions taken to promote equality, fairness, non-violence, and affirmation of the unconditional value of *all people*, where youth are free to grow, thrive, and express individual identities.

Innerlink is excited to add Perceptions as a contact and referral link for youth and families, and Innerlink would like Perceptions and its members to view the agency as a resource for them as well.

May General Meeting

by Thomas Brubaker



Our Perceptions' General Meeting on May 17th will be a lot of fun as our focus turns to spring and gardening. Tom Brubaker, Perceptions board member and Master Gardener, will present a "hands on" educational session on creating "Container Gardens." These special gardens are perfect for gardeners who have limited space such as an apartment or condominium, or simply don't have the time to commit to a traditional space. Many gardeners are also featuring containers on their porches and decks. Container Gardening has grown in popularity during the past 10 years.

A few attendees will be asked to get their hands dirty and help with the gardening demonstration. At the conclusion of the demonstration, three container gardens will be given away. **Don't miss out on your oppor-**

tunity to win a free container garden!

Brubaker will also bring several resource manuals and books, as well as answer any questions.

This meeting would be a great opportunity to introduce new friends and allies to our organization. If you have a friend, neighbor, co-worker, or relative who may enjoy learning about container gardening and who might also be an ally to the LGBT community in our quest for acceptance, equality and social justice, please invite them to attend and meet some of our members, friends, supporters and other allies.

The meeting will be held at The Alderton Building (2nd floor), [301 Cass Street](#), Old Town Saginaw. Doors open at 7:00 pm. Refreshments will be served. All are welcome. For additional information contact Perceptions at 989-891-1429 or info@PerceptionsSV.org

Delta College Hosts Partner Benefits Debate

By deidra knox

Delta College's Auditorium served as the venue and "Equality Denied or Preservation of Traditional Values?" was the headline for a very interesting discussion of Partner Benefits for Same-Sex Couples. The public was invited to the free presentation and some Instructors invited students to attend as part of the classroom discussion.

Moderated by **Dr. Dave Baskind**, Associate Professor of Psychology, Delta College, the following panelists were there to give their perspectives on this timely discussion in a State that has passed a referendum banning marriage (or any similar union) between same-sex couples. The scheduled panelists included:

Gary Glenn - President of the American Family Association – Michigan

Jay Kaplan - Staff Attorney for the [ACLU of Michigan's LGBT Project](#)

Darlene McKinnon - Culture of Employee Engagement, Director, Dow Chemical Corp. Darlene McKinnon was unable to attend and was replaced by **Leslie Myles-Sanders** – Attorney for Delta College

Elizabeth Ullrich - Assistant Professor of Political Science, Delta College

Dr. Baskind provided a list of prepared questions and allowed each panelist to give his/her personal perspective followed by discussion. The questions included: Tell us about your perspective and what counts as a 'domestic partner,' Is this a question of equal protection and what would it take for the courts to designate it as such? How would you describe the personal impact this would have on Michigan families? How will it impact career choices, financial security, and access to health care, etc.? Will this impact the strength of state education institutions, government departments, or the overall state economy?

From the discussion that followed each of the questions, it not only became clear who was Pro Benefits and who was Con. I did not have the opportunity to talk to each of the panelist, but I did take some notes. I add my perspective of each of the participant's view. In all fairness to Attorney Myles-Sanders, her position was rather benign. She is the Attorney for the College and it was clear that she could not afford to express her opinion. She is responsible for upholding State Law at the State-supported Institution and any personal comment on her part could be a liability. She did pose some very interesting questions that prompted further discussion. Indeed the main discussion was from the other 3 contestants. I thought it quite interesting as I read Gary Glenn's comments on his page. Despite the Moderator making it clear that Leslie Myles-Sanders was a last minute substitution and Ms Myles-Sanders making it clear that she would give no perspective, he chose to put her in the group of panelists *who favored taxpayer-subsidized benefits for homosexuals*¹.

Gary Glenn - Mr. Glenn was very well prepared and cited 2-3 sources. However, he consistently couched all of his responses with the same rhetoric such as statistics that are somewhat outdated and, in my opinion, taken out of context. My own search shows all recent studies do point to the "facts" he presented, but *Recent improvements in studies of sexual orientation and mental health morbidity have enabled researchers to find some elevated risk for stress-sensitive disorders that is generally attributed to the harmful effects of antihomosexual bias.*² I interpret that to mean that homosexuality does not cause mental illness nor does mental illness make one homosexual. I felt Mr.. Glenn used his source quotes very deftly to imply such a correlation.

Michigan taxpayer burden. In his words: "At a time when over 800,000 people in Michigan have lost their private sector jobs over the last decade, and that many or more have had their pay or hours cut back, there's not public support for another expansion of government employee benefits, regardless of the supposed justification".³ According to the American Association of State Colleges & Universities (AASCU) "As to cost, domestic partnership benefits at public universities have not been a drain on state budgets. Data from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA) indicate that only 8 percent of institutions pay all health insurance costs for family coverage; it is far more common for employees to pay for some or all of the costs associated with covering additional family members."⁴ I fail to see the logic of Mr. Glenn's argument on cost to taxpayers since the taxpayer is

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Challenges of LGBT Seniors- Part Three of a Three Part Series

by David DePeal, Guest Columnist

Note: Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE) two years ago released a report on the challenges faces LGBT seniors. The SAGE report highlights three key areas where LGBT seniors face challenges: financial security, health care and social supports. This is the third of a three part series on those challenges.

In January of 2009, Marvin Schur, a 93 year-old resident of Bay City, Michigan, froze to death in his own home because the electric company had restricted the electricity to his residence causing the furnace to shut-off in the middle of a cold snap. The story gained national attention and caused a furor locally. Sadly, Mr. Schur, a World War II veteran, had the money clipped to his electric bill, but no one to mail or drop off the payment for him. Mr. Schur's wife had died several years earlier and the couple had no children. While it is doubtful that Mr. and/or Mrs. Schur were gay, the story illustrates the challenges of many LGBT seniors that do not have traditional family structures with children and grandchildren upon which to rely.

According to the LGBT organization, **Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE)** the three biggest issues affecting LGBT seniors are isolation, a lack of traditional family structures and economic insecurity, issues that are often intertwined. LGBT seniors came of age in a culture hostile to gay people. While the days of considering homosexuality a disease and a crime may be over, homophobia still severely affects the health and happiness of older gay people, often leaving them isolated, depressed and vulnerable.

"Past discrimination can have a real effect on the lives of today's seniors," said Jan Couvillion, a LGBT Senior Services Advocate. *"The jobs they took to replace their positions often were at much lower pay which had a long lasting effect on their economic security and on their well-being."* Many LGBT individuals report of being passed over for promotion and advancement due to their sexual orientation by homophobic management. Others simply report never even getting the job despite having excellent qualifications because they were perceived as being too "effeminate" or "masculine" for their gender, thus putting them at an economic disadvantage lifelong. For many LGBT individuals and couples the Madison Avenue "Affluent Gay" lifestyle is a marketing myth that does not fit their reality.

Overall, LGBT elders are half as likely as their straight peers to have a close relative to rely on for help, and elderly lesbian couples are twice as likely as heterosexual couples to live below the poverty line which is a significant factor for poor health, depression and disability, according to the SAGE report. Ironically, however, LGBT individuals are often disproportionately called upon by their heterosexual siblings to assist aging parents and family relatives as they have less perceived immediate family commitments and more personal time, reports one study.

"Coming out often meant severing family bonds for this generation of seniors. Those (lesbians and gay men) who didn't have children are often left to fend for themselves. For many (LGBT Seniors), there is the significant stress and the loss of dignity," Couvillion said. She then goes on to describe an 84-year-old lesbian client who lives alone in low income housing who manages her own incontinence issues by sleeping on a plastic sheet with no blankets.

A new study, published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, finds that LGBT seniors have considerable higher disability and homelessness rates than their heterosexual counterparts (by as much as 12 and 22% respectively) and that seniors with disabilities rated dignity and control as the two most important factors tied to overall quality of life. These LGBT older adults also faced increased psychological concerns. About 31 percent of LGBT seniors experienced depression, while 53 percent reported loneliness. Many LGBT seniors do not seek help out of fear of discrimination, which may contribute to the social isolation and limit access to

community services.

“Healthcare providers’ lack of knowledge about the needs of LGBT patients, combined with a lack of resources, make these issues all the more difficult to address,” said Dan Ashbrook, the director of Lavender Seniors of the East Bay, an organization devoted to improving the lives of LGBT senior citizens. *“Only 3% of healthcare workers have sexuality training. A lack of statistics and other data on LGBT seniors only compounds the challenges of determining how to get this population the services that they need,”* says Ashbrook. He adds, *“In addition to organizing lunches and visits to cut down on the isolation of LGBT seniors, Lavender Seniors conducts trainings to help nursing home staff offer better care to older gay people.”*

One study conducted by the National Institute for Health and by the National Institute for Aging found that only 28% of LGBT participants used programs or services available in their community, and many identified that more services were needed to cater to their specific population. Sixty-six percent of respondents identified senior housing as being the most needed service, and about half called for tailored assisted living communities specifically. Those aged 50-64 or 80 and older were more likely than those aged 65-79 to request more LGBT assisted living options. While senior housing options are the most needed according to participants, transportation and social events were tied for second, with 62 percent of respondents reporting a need.

Says Ashbrook, *“LGBT organizations will be increasingly called on to provide training, rather than direct assistance. The movements of the last 10-20 years have been successful in creating a new climate for LGBT seniors.”*

Others, however, are more cautious.

“Discrimination still exists,” Couvillion says, *“even in places like San Francisco thought of as gay meccas. LGBT organizations are being pushed to mainstream. I’m not sure that it’s good to put gay seniors in mainstream care.”*

The following sources contributed to this article:

Heather Tirado Gilligan, “Meeting the Needs of LGBT Seniors” [HealthyCal.org](#)

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not paying the cost except in some jobs that the Governor has banned. *When looking at cost issues pertaining to statewide employee-benefits programs, studies have actually projected cost savings. This is due to the fact that when same-sex couples assume fiscal responsibility for one another in legally recognized arrangements, they save taxpayers’ money by reducing dependence on public-assistance programs.*⁵

Jay Kaplan – As an attorney for the ACLU, Mr. Kaplan will certainly be involved in the suit charging that preventing availability of domestic partner benefits constitutes discrimination. He was the primary legal source for all of the claims Mr. Glenn cited. He gave concise statistics of his own to refute Mr. Glenn’s arguments. In fact, I used his info to research the quotes in the above paragraph.

Elizabeth Ullrich – Fully involved in her

subject, Ms. Ullrich used her time to challenge many of the statements made by Gary Glenn. She was precise in her questions and I felt, determined to at least expose the fallacy of his arguments. She, also posed scenario’s for his consideration, but he was steadfast in his rebuttal, consistently citing, in my opinion, old information/perceptions out of context, and the marriage ban as proof that Michigan citizens do not want Domestic Partner Benefits for Gays and Lesbians, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) individuals.

The Q&A segment was rewarding. The audience was very attentive to the discussion as evidenced by their questions and remarks. There may have been a large segment who see homosexuality as a sin but did not speak up. There were a number of students that told the story of self, family members and even same-sex parents and the challenges they face as a result of homosexual bias. What really stood out, for me, was that the students, on both sides of the issue, were not in favor of branding GLBT individuals. Many may well be in agreement with the

Marriage Ban but, for many in the audience, denying equal benefits and opportunity would not be their preference.

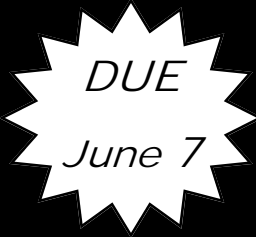
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PRIDE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

for The LGBT & Ally Pride Awards Banquet

June 26, 2012 Andersen Enrichment Center

Nominate people who have helped the Saginaw Valley LGBT community.
 Read the award descriptions below and use as a guide.
 Follow the directions in the black box (bottom).

Lifetime Achievement Award The highest award given to an individual who has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to help gain a better life for LGBT people and who has demonstrated effectiveness at reaching the goal for equality, fairness and justice for all LGBT community.

Business Pride Award Given to a business that has contributed its share of support to the success and progress of the LGBT community.

Political Pride Award Given to an outstanding leader who has worked to improve the quality for LGBT people through the political or electoral process.

Pride Award(s) Given to an individual(s) who has shown outstanding leadership and commitment through their advocacy of acceptance, equality and respect for all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. The nominee has been a model for other LGBT people and allies. The Pride Award Selection Committee may select one or more individuals for the Pride Award.

Nominees will be evaluated on the basis of leadership, impact and commitment to the LGBT community.

Pride Award Selection Committee members are ineligible for an award.

To help us to evaluate the nominees, please answer the following questions thoroughly and succinctly.

1. Describe the nominee's involvement in the LGBT community. Be as specific as possible.
2. Briefly describe why this nominee deserves an award at the Saginaw Valley Pride Banquet.
3. Describe how the nominee's participation in the LGBT community has made a difference in the Saginaw Valley, or at the state or national level.

I NOMINATE _____
First & last name of the nominee or organization.

Nominee's phone: _____

Nominee's email: _____

Name of Award: _____

My name: _____

My phone: _____

My email address: _____

Submit this form & one typed page that describes the nominee.

Mail, or scan & email to:

PRIDE Nomination Committee
 c/o Perceptions
 P.O. Box 1525
 Midland, MI 48641
 Or Pride@PerceptionsSV.org

DUE: June 7, 2012 by midnight

**Saginaw Valley LGBT & Ally
 Pride Awards Banquet**

Tuesday, June 26, 2012
 Andersen Enrichment Center
 120 Ezra Rust, Saginaw

6 pm Reception
7 pm Dinner and Program

**Tickets or info: www.PerceptionsSV.org
 or 989-891-1429**

Cost: \$25 (\$15 for students)