



PERCEPTIONS

SAGINAW VALLEY

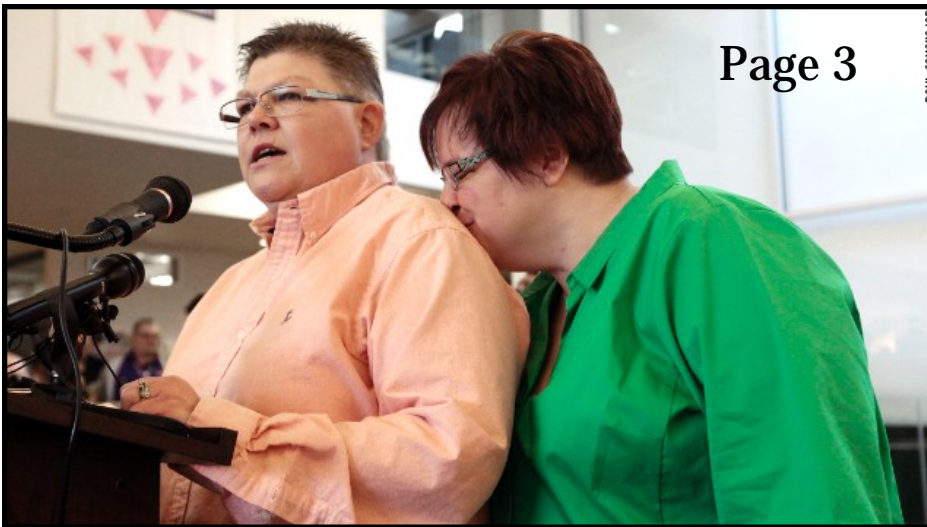
Serving the Tri-City Area's LGBT Community

March/April 2014

www.PerceptionsSV.org

Free

300 Michigan Same-Sex Couples Wed Before Stay is Issued



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Left: April Deboer and Jayne Rows. The couple took on Michigan's marriage amendment and won.

Perceptions Holds Annual Chocolate (and More) Party

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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.

February Meeting Involves Strategic Planning

Beth Sibray

Thank you to the Perceptions members and friends who attended this month's Perceptions General Session. Your willingness to share your candid thoughts and ideas contributed to a provocative and energetic Perceptions SWOT Analysis. During this two-hour session on Thursday, March 20, a group of 19 LGBT supporters worked in teams to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Perceptions.

The feedback resulting from the SWOT analysis will be used at the upcoming Board meeting on Saturday, March 29 in which Terry King will facilitate a strategic planning session to develop our Perceptions strategic plan. This strategic plan will be our blueprint for identifying the 2014 goals and objectives which will be reviewed at next month's Perceptions General Meeting.

As we transition into our second decade of advancing the interests of the LGBT community in Saginaw Valley, we all have a voice in the planning effort; strategic planning is not the exclusive responsibility of the Board. Planning for our future success will incorporate the views of all affected by the plan and all who have a role in its implementation.

We look forward to your continued support in the planning process by attending next month's General Meeting on April 24th as we work together to identify our 2014 goals.

Beth Sibray serves as the newly appointed Vice Chair of the Perceptions Board. She and her partner of over 20 years moved to Midland two years ago as a senior Human Resources leader with The Dow Chemical Company. She is a member of the Dow GLAD Midland Steering Committee selected as the GLAD Community Liaison, and is an active member of PEO, an international women's philanthropic educational organization.



DeBoer vs. Synder: Michigan's Marriage Amendment Found Unconstitutional

Leo Romo

Michigan's ban on same-sex marriage was overturned Friday, March 21, in Detroit. U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman declared that Michigan's marriage amendment, defining marriage as only one man and one woman, was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment.

April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, nurses from Hazel Park, sued the state, claiming their constitutional rights were violated when they were prohibited from jointly adopting their three children.

While gays in Michigan can adopt children, same-sex couples cannot adopt children jointly. This is why DeBoer and Rowse sued the State in 2012. In a 2013 adoption hearing, Friedman indicated that they might have a better chance if they challenged the state's gay-marriage ban. DeBoer and Rowse then challenged Michigan's marriage amendment. Friedman surprised everybody by delaying his decision until after the Supreme Court ruled on a trial with the Defense Of Marriage Act (DOMA), so that he could be instructed by their opinion. The Supreme Court found DOMA unconstitutional on June 29, 2013.

After the DOMA ruling, Friedman set up a trial for February 25, 2014, so the lesbian mothers could challenge Michigan's marriage ban.

In a nine day trial, the State said that the marriage amendment was 'the will of the people,' since 59% of voters approved the ban. In the written ruling, Judge Friedman wrote, the "state defendants lost sight of what this case is truly about: people." He continued, "No court record of this proceeding could ever fully convey the personal sacrifice of these two plaintiffs who seek to ensure that the state may no longer impair the rights of their children and the

thousands of others now being raised by same-sex couples...Today's decision is a step in that direction, and affirms the enduring principle that regardless of whoever finds favor in the eyes of the most recent majority, the guarantee of equal protection must prevail."

Michigan's First Legal Same-Sex Marriages and Same-Sex Marriage Licenses were suspended. On Saturday, March 22, 2014, Glenna DeJong, 53, and Marsha Caspar, 51, became the first same-sex couple to be legally married in Michigan, in Mason, Ingham County. About 300 Michigan gay and lesbians were legally married in four counties - Wayne, Ingham, Oakland and Muskegon.

Michigan's state attorney general, Bill Schuette, filed a notice of appeal to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, that made a temporary injunction. Issued Saturday, it stopped same-sex marriages, at least through Wednesday, March 26. The appeals court said the time-out will "allow a more reasoned consideration" of the state's request to stop same-sex marriages.

Michigan Public opinion regarding same-sex marriage: While 59% voters approved of the marriage amendment in 2004, a February 2014 Michigan State University (MSU) poll found that 54% of Michigan residents now support allowing same-sex couples to marry.

Read the decision:

<http://www.freep.com/assets/freep/pdf/C4220110321.PDF>

Editor's Note: The preceding article was written shortly after weddings were put on hold by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Saturday, March 22. Watch the weekly messages for more current updates, as they happen.

2014 Chocolate (...and more) Party: 150 guests attended with a 34% annual increase in proceeds!!

Greg Gwaltney

“Momma always said life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.”

Although Forrest Gump said it on the silver screen, Perceptions and PFLAG guests entered the Wolfarth House on Saturday, March 15th, knowing exactly what they’d get. Beyond the beautiful wooden entry way lay a spread of magnificent chocolate delicacies and drinks unparalleled at any other event!

Perceptions & PFLAG joined forces for the 23rd Annual Chocolate (...and more) Party! The event, hosted by Kevin Rooker & Bill Ostash in their handsomely restored Wolfarth House in Saginaw’s historic Cathedral District, brought in approximately 150 guests! – One of the largest P&P chocolate parties in our history.

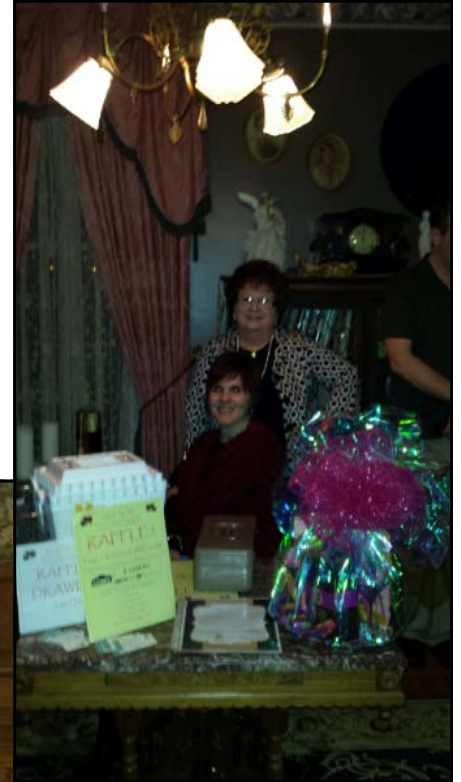
This year’s chocolate party’s biggest success was its diversity of guests. The rooms were filled with young adults, women, allies, men, politicians, activists, and a wonderful representation of our area’s cultures. As the crowd maneuvered around tables of chocolate cakes, cupcakes, candies, chocolate-covered pretzels, a chocolate fountain, as well as pinwheel sandwiches and veggies, everyone mixed in conversation, laughter, hugs, and debate of current events. Everyone left happy and satisfied, knowing they met new friends and reconnected with old ones.

This year’s party featured a \$100 gift card raffle. This proved popular with everyone. Our lucky winner



was Tony Krasinski, a great supportive ally who bought 3 times his height in raffle tickets! Congratulations Tony!

Perceptions and PFLAG thank all our guests, volunteers, donors, and especially our gracious hosts for making this year’s event the most successful yet. This year’s Chocolate (...and more) Party raised over \$1,700, 35% more than last year! Both organizations will use the proceeds to further their missions and provide educational, support, and networking opportunities for the LGBT and ally community!



Chocolate (and more) Party Planning Team

Chris Lauckner
Leo Romo
Kevin Dedicatoria
Greg Gwaltney
Mike Mercer
Bill Ostash
Joel Payne
Kevin Rooker

Chocolate Business Donors

The Gourmet Cupcake Shoppe
Grand Traverse Pie Company
The H Hotel
Pat & Jerry's Restaurant
The Savoy
La Estrella Del Norte Bakery
Elena Maria's Bakery



View From the Chair

Chris Lauckner

The past weeks have found me reflecting on many things. It's probably a good diversion from looking out the window, continuing to see snow and reading the near freezing numbers on the temperature gauge outside the kitchen window.

The following are *some* of the things on my mind which concern our Perceptions organization and its primary mission of "education," "community building/networking" along with the advocacy that we provide as an LGBT organization:

- Proposing of The Bay County Ordinance by Commissioner Don Tilley and the county governance attempt to safe guard sexual orientation and gender identity in the county's employment practices and those vendors and contractors who do business with Bay County.
- Assisting members of our organization and non-members, alike, who struggle with depression, grief, loss due to a break up of a relationship, the death of a partner, employment, aging, "self" by living up to the expectations of others, living out of a fear that... "I can't be myself" because I might lose my job or might be able to live where I would like...fearing discrimination.
- Listening to the needs of high school students and their parents living in our northern counties, a part of our LGBT community, and looking for a support system and looking to Perceptions for some answers.
- Acknowledging and respecting that there are people, identified as LGBT and residing in the Great Lakes Bay Region, who do not feel comfortable with their coming out and may need assistance with the process.
- Watching the momentum build as the country continues to grapple with and accept our right to "marry" as well as adopt children.

"What a time in which to be living!" I've heard that quote many times over the past weeks. I, for one, totally agree! Yet, on the other hand, there is still much work to be done. Certainly, there is still much education that remains to be accomplished and support systems

that need to be maintained and continued.

So, what is it that Perceptions Saginaw Valley is called to do? Is it to perpetuate the "sameness" of the organization or does the organization need to move forward with the many changes that our culture and environment is showering upon us? It seems, that in order to remain vibrant, relevant, and true to our mission, Perceptions, as an organization, needs to evaluate itself. By evaluation, I am speaking about reviewing internal organizational processes, obtaining feedback from members, friends, and allies, and determining the number of supportive individuals that Perceptions enjoys.

In an effort to gain input from members, friends, and allies the Board of Trustees invited, as many individuals who wished to attend, to a General Meeting that was held Thursday, March 20th. Attendees were led through a SWOT analysis where Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats regarding Perceptions were identified. The feedback received from this event will be followed up on in another General Meeting and will be reviewed during the Board's Strategic Planning Process that will be taking place on Saturday, March 29th with Mr. Terry King leading the process.

You might be asking: "What will be achieved?"

My hope is that there will be an identification of achievable goals and objectives that will offer a renewed direction for Perceptions Saginaw Valley. A direction allowing Perceptions to be more visible in the Great Lakes Bay Region, and at the same time, utilizing its resources for the greater good of the LGBT Community that is being served.

The needs are many; however, the resources are limited. What should be priority areas for Perceptions? How can we assist a broader base of the LGBT Community? I'd be very open to listening and hearing your comments. Please email me:

chris@PerceptionsSV.org or phone: 989-708-4536.

In the meantime, and as your Board of Trustees continues to work on your behalf, know that you will be kept informed as to our progress.

Make it a GREAT Spring ... keep a spring in your step!

All the best,
Chris

Current Events

PerceptionsSV.org/events

▼ **Tues., April 1st - Men's Discussion Group** 7:00 to 8:30 pm. This gathering is intended as a discussion and informal support group for gay and bisexual men. The group will be facilitated by Chris Lauckner. You may contact him at Chris@PerceptionsSV.org for additional information or to let him know that you'll attend. Light snacks will be provided. **St. John's Episcopal**, 123 N. Michigan Ave., Saginaw.

▼ **Thurs., April 3rd - Perceptions Transgender Group** 7:00 to 8:30 pm. **Populace Coffee**, 1003 Washington Ave., Bay City. The group offers an informal gathering, taking a more 'light-hearted' approach to allow transgender individuals in the Tri-City area an opportunity to connect with one another for socializing and support. Contact AmyCMU@yahoo.com if you have any questions.

▼ **April 4th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions friends this week at **Cuatro Amigos** Mexican Restaurant, 310 East Midland Street, Bay City. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Fri.

Sat., April 5th - Affirmations Spring Bash Celebrating 25 years of service, Affirmations presents Silver Jubilee at **Cobo Hall**. Guests will enjoy a transformational experience at this epic event recognizing Affirmations 25 year commitment to the community. General Admission tickets are \$175, VIP \$300 and Sponsor level tickets are \$500. Enjoy a General admission ticket for a limited time only at \$150! For more information, go to www.goaffirmations.org. Cobo Hall, 1 Washington Blvd., Detroit.

Thurs., April 10th - "A Fish Out of Water:" Screening and Discussion 6:00 pm. Join Unison and Delta's LGBT Awareness Committee for a special screening of "A Fish Out of Water." This genre-bending documentary combines animation and interviews to examine controversies related to sexuality, gender, and the Bible. Light refreshments will be served, and after the film, members of Unison, Delta's organization for LGBTQ students, will facilitate a discussion. Don't miss this chance to engage with your community about what some call the civil rights issue of our time. Believer or atheist, queer or straight, this film has something important for you. Read more about it here: www.fishoutofwaterfilm.com With any questions or to request disability accommodations, e-mail laurensmith3@delta.edu. **Delta College**, Main Campus, Rm S-125, 1961 Delta Rd., University Center.

▼ **April 11th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions friends this week at **Pat & Jerry's Family Restaurant**, 963 W. Midland Road, Auburn. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Fri.

Sun., April 13th - PFLAG Genesee County Support groups at 2:00 pm followed by refreshments and presentation at

3:30 pm. Guest speaker Rev. Dr. Deane Oliva presents "The Bible Loves You: Responding to the Radical Right" - How do we respond when people spew hatred and ugly words, particularly when they quote the Bible as their source for condemnation? The meeting takes place at the **UU Church of Flint**, 2474 S. Ballenger Hwy.

Thurs., April 17 - Comedy Extravaganza! 7:00 pm. Featured comedians: Kathie Dunbar and Mike Neubecker. Tickets only \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door. This event is a fundraiser for PFLAG Genesee County. (18 & over only.) Come Out and have some laughs while supporting PFLAG! **UU Church of Flint**, 2474 S. Ballenger Highway, Flint.

▼ **April 18th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions friends this week at **Bella Bella's**, 3124 N Jefferson Ave., Midland. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Fri.

Fri., April 18th - Living Proud's Drag Show. 8:00 pm. Tickets for Living Proud's 7th Annual Drag Show at SVSU are now available! Prices are \$5.00 for general admission and \$12.00 for VIP seating. To order online, email svsulivingproud@gmail.com and a PayPal invoice will be sent. Email Sam Boswell at smboswel@svsu.edu if you have any questions! Proceeds benefit AIDS Walk Bay City/Midland/Saginaw. Silent Auction. **SVSU Rhyder Center**, Cardinal Gym Doors open at 7:00 pm.

▼ **Sat., April 19th - Highway Clean-Up** 9:30 am. Join us in giving back to our community. We will all meet and park cars at the rest area on southbound I-75 between Bay City and Saginaw. A picnic lunch will be provided after. Please RSVP to Randy Hasso at 989-980-3171 or with any questions.

Sun., April 20th - PFLAG Tri-Cities Meeting 2:00 pm at **Our Saviour Lutheran Church**, 2525 Hemmeter Rd., Saginaw. PFLAG offers support, education and advocacy for families, friends and LGBT individuals.













▼ **Thurs., April 24th - Perceptions General Meeting** 7:00 pm. Guest speaker, Bishop Todd Ousley of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan will present "Moving Forward in Hope." **St. John's Episcopal Church**, 123 N. Michigan Ave., Saginaw. Refreshments will be served. All are welcome.

▼ **April 25th - Friday Night Dinner** 7:00 pm. Join Perceptions this week at **Coonan's Irish Pub**, 1064 N. Johnson St., Bay City. If you plan to attend, please reply to RSVP@PerceptionsSV.org by 3:00 pm Fri.

▼ **Event sponsored or endorsed by Perceptions.**

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

APRIL 2014

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																		
		1 April Fool's Day  Perceptions Men's Discussion Group St. John's Episcopal 123 N. Michigan Ave. Saginaw, 7:00 PM	2	3  Perceptions Transgender Group Populace Coffee 1003 Washington Ave. Bay City, 7:00 PM	4  Friday Night Dinner Cautro Amigos 310 E. Midland St. Bay City 7:00 PM	5																																																																																																		
6	7	8  Perceptions Board of Trustees Meeting	9	10	11  Friday Night Dinner Pat & Jerry's 963 W. Midland Rd. Auburn 7:00 PM	12																																																																																																		
13  Genesee County PFLAG Meeting UU Church of Flint 2474 S. Ballenger Hwy Flint, 2:00 - 4:30 PM	14	15 Taxes Due Passover	16	17  PFLAG Comedy Extravaganza! UU Church of Flint 2474 S. Ballenger Hwy 7:00 PM	18 Good Friday  Friday Night Dinner Bella Bella's 3124 N. Jefferson Ave. Midland 7:00 PM	19  Adopt-A-Hwy Spring Clean Up Bay City Rest Area S.B. I-75 9:30 AM																																																																																																		
20 Easter  PFLAG Tri-Cities Meeting Our Saviour Lutheran 2525 Hemmeter Rd. Saginaw, 2:00 - 4:30 PM	21	22 Earth Day	23 Admin Assist Day	24  Perceptions General Meeting St. John's Episcopal 123 N. Michigan Ave. Saginaw, 7:00 PM	25  Friday Night Dinner Coonan's Irish Hub 1064 N. Johnson St. Bay City 7:00 PM	26																																																																																																		
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Journal Notes and Reflection on Bay County Civil Rights Ordinance

Charin Davenport

I am a poet, a civil and human rights activist, a college instructor, and a trans* woman. I wear all four hats simultaneously and even at the age of 58, I am constantly on the lookout for new phrases, ideas, and causes. Unfortunately, as a trans* woman, I am also aware of my surroundings and my visibility at all times, constantly scanning my surroundings for familiar, new or unforeseen threats to my body, my health, and my ability to work and live safely in my community. It is impossible to keep all four of these aspects of my life separate from one another; even when I am in parent-mode or grandparent-mode with my three grown children and my two granddaughters, I am on alert.

I read the headline of the January 3rd online edition of the *Bay City Times*: “Bay County to consider ban on discrimination due to sexual identity or orientation at Jan. 7 meeting.” The meeting was a Ways and Means Committee meeting and it would be the first public discussion on the proposed ordinance. The committee would decide whether or not to forward the proposed ordinance on to the Board of Commissioners for their full consideration.

“Walk away from this,” I told myself. “Don’t do it.”

I put on a pot of coffee and read the article. Bay County Commissioner Don Tilley was proposing a new ordinance that would ban sexual orientation and gender identity and gender expression discrimination within Bay County government and facilities owned by Bay County. And, it would require businesses contracted by the county to include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression in their non-discrimination policies.

“Just walk away,” I tried to convince the activist inside me. “Walk away.”

I was already upset that SVSU excluded the same provisions from their non-

discrimination policy, especially since I was the first trans* professor in SVSU history and had already lost one part-time administrative/professional position at the university shortly after coming out to my supervisor; but, the realization that the Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act (Michigan’s civil rights law) and municipal ordinances in the Great Lakes Bay Region also excluded the same provisions set off alarms inside me. It meant that real discrimination could be taking place, and there was no statistical or legal way to know because it wasn’t against the law to fire someone or refuse to do business with someone simply because they are transgender, intersex, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, queer, and so on.

“Don’t do it.”

At the bottom of the article were so many hate-filled comments from readers that I wondered if this was actually Bay County that I was reading about. I called Tilley to find out more. Surely this was a slam dunk, I thought. But what Tilley told me over the phone took me by surprise: “Well, I don’t know if there are enough votes on the committee to move it forward to the board for consideration. I’m working on it, but we really need to hear from the community.”

“Okay, I’ll do it.”

January 7, 2014

The issue of the ordinance came up for public input and I stepped up to the podium and read my prepared comments. I spoke of how the ordinance would provide employees with the confidence they needed to do their best work and how it would deliver a signal to businesses and visitors and other communities that Bay County respects and accepts everyone openly. I also spoke about how the ordinance

would reassure the LGBTQI community, especially the young, that it is accepted as full partners in society. I was sure that I had laid out an incontrovertible case in favor of the ordinance.

The Ways and Means Committee voted 5-2 in favor of moving the proposed ordinance to the full Board of Commissioners for their consideration. I was confident the ordinance would pass and Bay County would be the first county in Michigan with a civil rights ordinance that includes gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

January 14, 2014

I spent the next week on Facebook and other social media pushing all of my LGBTQI friends to get involved and to go to Bay County Commission meetings to speak in favor of the ordinance.

The first thing I notice is that the chambers are just about full. The second thing I noticed is that every member of the Bay County Board of Commissioners is also on every committee. This comforts me, since the previous vote of 5-2 went in favor of the ordinance.

My friend, Joanna Hill, who is a role model for transgender and intersex youth if there ever was one, arrives from Hazel Park and she sits next to me. She speaks eloquently in support of the ordinance, outlining a brief history of transgender and intersex people of considerable merit. "The one thing that binds the entire LGBT community together is fear," she says. "We fear job loss, we fear violence."

Others, including Leo Romo and Janelle Lake, give impassioned pleas in support of the ordinance. Our side, they say, is on the right side of history and those who speak with hate in their hearts, even as they refer to the Bible, are on the wrong side of history.

By a 5-2 vote, the board agrees to hold a public hearing on the ordinance.

February 11, 2014

No one can remember the last time the Board of Commissioners chambers were as full as they were on February 11. Chairman Ernie Krygier explains that because so many people

want to speak that a 2 ½ minute limit on comments will be imposed.

The hearing continued for more than three hours. Emotions on both sides filled the air. Still, our side remained focused on the issues of equality, civil rights, human rights, the good business sense inherent in the ordinance, and the need to treat all citizens equally.

I tell the board: "What history has shown us over and over again is that to deny civil rights and freedom and equality to anyone, anywhere, is to deny them to everyone, everywhere."

Even though those favoring the ordinance outnumbered those in opposition by two or three to one, I am left with impression that the opposition is an immovable object

It appears that the vote will go against the ordinance, 4-3.

February 18, 2014

By a vote of 3-3, the ordinance returns to the board for a final vote on March 11. The Bay City Times headline reads: "Bay County's LGBT ordinance heads to March 11 vote with waning support." I openly express my dismay with the paper's choice of words.

March 11, 2014: Why We Won

The County Board Chamber is just as packed as it was for the public hearing. I have distributed dozens of "I AM HUMAN" t-shirts to those who support the ordinance. The comments from both sides are the same comments that had been made over and over for the last two months, and the vote goes the way we thought it would go: 4-3 against the ordinance.

I am asked by a reporter how I feel. "Well," he explains. "You must not be feeling too well after such a defeat, losing the vote like that."

I look out into the lobby and I see at least 20 young LGBTQI brothers and sisters, as well as allies, and I see close to that many who are my age or thereabouts all gathered in the lobby with their freak flags flying, their t-shirts proclaiming their humanity. They are all smiles and excited and laughing.

"Look out there into the lobby," I tell the

reporter. “Does that look like we lost? No, it doesn’t, does it? And you want to know why? Because we didn’t lose. We won. When we started this whole process, we did not have an ordinance or a policy or a voice in county government that supported the LGBTQI community. Well, we’re going to get a policy because the board has promised us, publically, that we will have one. More important than that is that we now have a voice. Young people in our community now know that we can stand up to those who preach hate and even if we don’t win the vote every time, we will survive and come back and try again. And we will. We are here and we are not going anywhere, I promise.”

A Final Reflection

I find myself wondering if there was something more I could have said or done differently to get the board to pass the ordinance. Then I remember, being on the right side of things doesn’t always mean you win every time. How many marches did it take before the troops were brought home from Vietnam? How many were lost before and after Stonewall and Compton Cafeteria? I was afraid at one point that gender identity and gender expression might be dropped if it meant the ordinance would pass. So many of the comments in

opposition especially those from Gary Glenn, seemed to be aimed directly at the transgender and intersex community. Perhaps it only felt that way because of who I am. If the idea of dropping gender identity and gender expression ever came up, I never heard about it. I am glad about that.

In the end, public debate on any issue should never be about winning and losing. If you argue to win, then you are only creating enemies when you do win, and animosity in yourself when you don’t. Instead, it is about creating a sense of community and enriching the discourse that can carry a community forward. Our community, the LGBTQI community is diverse and not always in total agreement on every issue, but we certainly have set a good example of how to engage productively in public discourse and local government. With that in mind, I hope the members of our community will continue to participate in local government on all issues, not just those that pertain directly to our civil rights. Poverty is a real issue in our community because of discrimination and, as a consequence, housing and health care are real issues that need our input. We have a perspective that should be heard. Pollution and climate change affect the marginalized first, and we are certainly in that group.

Fighting for this ordinance has proven that we can be effective, even if we don’t “win.”



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**Open, Affirming,
Inclusive**

A Conversation with Local Author Shawn Vincent

Dylan Moorehead



I had a few moments to somewhat converse with local, newly published author Shawn Vincent about his new book, *It's Not your Fault*. So going through those questions that we all like to see authors answer- and even more so for those new authors, I have compiled some of those here for a bit of Q&A. Now in the interest of full-disclosure, I have known Shawn for some time, and rumor has it we may have fought over the same bouquet at a wedding. I can neither confirm nor deny that at this time. So here goes:

Why do you write?

Well, ever since I was a kid I've had an interest in writing. I've always found authors fascinating. To be able to put a story into words so well that a reader feels like they're taken away into another world or another life; it's a talent. I hope that I've been able to achieve that. And, for me, it was very relaxing and therapeutic.

What made you decide to sit down and actually start something?

A few years ago a very close friend of mine turned me on to National Novel Writing Month - (NaNoWriMo). It was half way through November that year, so it was too late to start at the time. In 2012, I forgot all about it. And then in 2013, I remembered on November 1st and just decided... well, it's now or never. It was just the little push I needed to start.

Do you write full-time or part-time?

I write part time. It would be amazing to be able to support myself being a writer, but right now that's just not the case. But who knows, maybe in the future.

Do you have a special time to write or how is your day structured?

For me, evening was my best time to write. My mind was active, and it was winter so it was dark early. Just made it easy to stay inside where it was warm, sit down at a computer, and put the words on the screen.

Do you aim for a set amount of words/pages per day?

I was aiming for 2,000 words per day. Some days I was able to write more. Some days I wrote less.

Do you write on a typewriter, computer, dictate or longhand?

I wrote mostly on my laptop, but also would take my iPad with me when I would be away so that I could still write even when I wasn't somewhere convenient. I did try the dictation method at first, but found that I was a lot better at writing than I am at talking. [Laughs]

Any writing rituals you'd like to share?

I like to turn the lights down low, turn on some quiet music, and just focus on the writing. The fewer distractions the better.

Do you let the book stew – leave it for a month and then come back to it to edit?

Actually, this book has been a bit of a whirlwind since I actually started writing. I originally came up with the idea for it back in 2005. So it's been stirring in my brain ever since then. But technically I didn't start writing until November 1st, 2013. I wrote the book during the month of November, as part of NaNoWriMo. The whole goal is to write 50,000 words in 1 month. I did that, and then in December I went back and edited and proofed it. And now here we are in January, and it's already for sale. So it's been a fairly quick process once I actually started writing. I don't think that's typical.

Talk about the cover and how it came about.

Well, I have a background in Graphic Design, so I did the design and layout for the cover. I knew right away what image I wanted for the cover. Without reading the book,

it's fairly abstract. But once you read the book, it definitely makes sense. And I knew I wanted it to be in black-and-white because it fits with the feel of the book.

Where do your ideas come from?

Oh, that is an excellent question! So the original idea for the story just came from an everyday conversation. A light bulb just came on in my head that said "wow, that would make for a really interesting story." But after I started the writing process, the book took on a life of its own and just developed organically. At some point, the characters became people to me, and they really started telling me their story.

Do you work to an outline or plot or do you prefer to just see where an idea takes you?

I really let the characters just take me away. They became people with lives and identities all of their own. I definitely guided them in a specific direction, but their reactions - and how they handled the situations I threw at them - really felt like their own.

What is *It's Not Your Fault* about?

I tell people this is Gay Fiction. But really it's a tragedy at its core. It just feels the most like real life to me. There are ups and downs in everyday life, and that's what I tried to convey in this story. Ordinary people have to overcome extraordinary things every day. It's something most people can relate to.

What's more important: characters or plot?

Plot is obviously important, it's what moves the story along. But ultimately, for me, it's the characters. They need to be relatable. They need to draw you in. There has to be at least one character that you can identify with. If you don't share anything with any of the characters, you don't get attached to them or to the story.

What are you working on at the moment?

Well I'm between books at the moment. I have some ideas floating around in my head, but nothing started. I mentioned before that I'm doing all of my own marketing for this book, so that's consuming most of my time right

now. And the book only officially went on sale January 21st. It's been a real learning process to figure out how to self-publish; how to get my book on Kindles and iPads and paperback (via Amazon.com).

Which actor would you like to see playing the lead character from your book?

[Laughs] Well I have such a soft spot for Jake Gyllenhaal, (Who doesn't?- Dylan) so that would be nice. But he doesn't look the part, at least not how I picture Kyle (the main character). I think Elijah Wood more accurately fits the mental image I have of him.

What were you like at school?

Oh, I was a total nerd. Drama kid. Introvert. Not much into sports or anything like that. Never wanted to break the rules. Always wanted good grades. Yeah, a total nerd really.

Were you good at English?

I was good at English. Took AP English in High School, and even took a college-level writing course.

What are your ambitions for your writing career?

I think ultimately, I just want to write books that people will enjoy reading. It's so flattering getting positive feedback and having people actually pay money to read what I've written. It would be great if I were able to support myself off of my writing. I guess that would be the ultimate goal. To just be able to write for a living. It sounds thrilling. *It's Not Your Fault* is my first book. Before

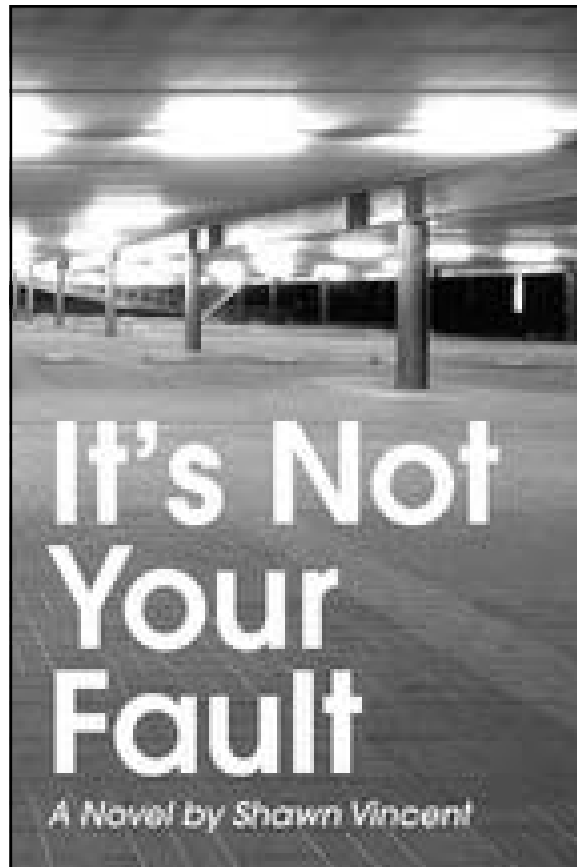
that I dabbled in writing for a few Blogs that are no longer around. I don't even keep a journal. So, yeah, this is really my first notable piece of literature.

What authors do you like to read?

Probably my favorite author would be Stephen King. But I really also like JK Rowling. JRR Tolkien. Mark Twain. Suzanne Collins.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Be confident! I was such an introvert when I was younger. I never would have put myself "out there" like I have with this book when I was younger. I would have been too afraid of people not liking it.



This Year's First Highway Clean Up is April 19th

Randy Hasso

The first Highway Clean-up for 2014 is slated for April 19th (Saturday.) The Perceptions Highway Clean-up will begin at 9:30 am. We will meet at the rest area on southbound I-75 between Bay City and Saginaw to park our cars. The cleanup takes place just south of the rest area. It has become a great way to give back to our community.

The cleanup entails an approximately two mile stretch of I-75 (both sides of highway.) The amount of roadside we clean up will depend on the number of volunteers. A picnic lunch will be provided after the cleanup on site at the rest area picnic tables.

Volunteers really do have a great time filled with laughter and bonding. Please mark this date on your calendars. The success of this Perceptions function depends on your participation. Remember: April 19th at 9:30 am. Call Randy Hasso at 989-980-3171 for questions or to RSVP.



Dollars 'n' Cents

Greg Gwaltney



In our continued effort to be transparent, we are sharing the 2014 Perceptions financial information. This quarter we'll discuss the annual budget. The Board of Trustees approves a budget each year. The budget guides the activities of the organization. The actual financial statements are compared to the budget monthly. These are the 2013 and 2014 budgets:

		2013		2014	
		Annual Budget		Annual Budget	
REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT:					
	Memberships	\$2,780.00		\$2,980	
	Newsletter Advertising Sales	\$100.00		\$100	
	2014 Events	\$19,000.00		\$19,500.00	A
	Interest	\$15.00		\$12	
	Donations:				
	Unrestricted	\$1,500.00		\$2,350	B
	Restricted	<u>\$5,300.00</u>		<u>\$4,600.00</u>	B
TOTAL REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT:		\$28,695.00		\$29,542.00	
EXPENSES:					
	Event Expenses	\$14,550.00		\$17,100.00	C
	Restricted Funds Expense	\$0.00		\$350.00	D
	Unallocated General Expenses	<u>\$13,125.00</u>		<u>\$12,075.00</u>	E
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$27,675.00		\$29,525.00	
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS:					
		\$1,020.00		\$17.00	

As you can see, certain numbers have changes significantly. Please see the descriptions below:

A This increase is due primarily to the expected increase in Chocolate Party Revenue, based on last year's results, continued PFLAG partnership, and the venue.

B The unrestricted donation increase is due primarily to expectations of increased donations above membership dues. The restricted donation decrease is due to a decreased expectation in Facility Fund donations.

C The event expenses increase is due primarily to expectations of increased donation to charity resulting from the Holiday Gala.

D This increase is due to a Perceptions general donation to the Perceptions Scholarship Fund.

E This net decrease is a result of several adjustments. Five new line items were created: meeting space rental (\$1,200), grant preparation (\$500), advertising-promotional items (\$300), website expenses (\$225) and general honorariums (\$100). Significant decreases were made in miscellaneous expenses, postage, and general sponsorships.

If you have any questions regarding the budget, please contact the Perceptions Treasurer Greg (Greg@PerceptionsSV.org).



Perceptions Presents a Check to Big Brothers Big Sisters

Chris Lauckner and Greg Gwaltney presented half of the money raised by the 2013 Holiday Gala to Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Great Lakes Bay Region. Executive Director Susan Putnam accepted the check on January 31, 2014, in the amount of \$2,247.83.

Upcoming General Meeting Topics

Thursday, April 24 [NOTE: The FOURTH Thursday of the month]

7:00 PM at St. John's Episcopal Church
[Corner of Michigan Ave. & Court Street / Saginaw, MI]

Presenter: Bishop Todd Ousley
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan

Topic: Moving Forward in Hope

[Perceptions received a request from Bishop Ousley to speak at a General Meeting. It is a 'first' that an administrative representative of a religious denomination has requested to address Perceptions LGBT members, supporters, and allies.]

Thursday, May 15

7:00 PM at St. John's Episcopal Church
[Corner of Michigan Ave. & Court Street / Saginaw, MI]

Presenter: Mr. Ed Hutchison, Member
Master Gardener

Topic: "Letting Your Garden Grow"

An interactive project of selecting plants and herbs and creating your very own attractive and useful mini garden for your home, apartment, or patio. You won't want to miss this "summer starter"!!

Children in Need of Foster Homes and Adoptive Parents

Our guest speaker for the February General Meeting was Amanda Hetzner, a Foster Care Licensing Specialist at Wolverine Human Services. Part of her job is to help foster parents get licensed through the State of Michigan to provide care to foster children. Amanda wanted to educate the LGBT community about foster care and adoption opportunities. Amanda shared that she had a special interest in this type of work because she herself had been adopted as a child.

Amanda gave an overview of the services offered by Wolverine Human Services (www.WolverineHS.org). They operate programs to help youth who are experiencing issues such as substance abuse, juvenile justice, and behavioral and mental health. Wolverine's residential programs provide intensive treatment to address such issues head on. They also have community based programs that provide foster care, supervised independent living, and adoption services. She stressed that Wolverine is an inclusive agency that works with families of diverse backgrounds. They are open and accepting of LGBT families and have helped many LGBT families become foster and adoptive parents. Amanda shared a little bit about some of the LGBT families that she has worked with including a trans woman who became a foster parent for her nephew and a lesbian couple in a long-term relationship who adopted two children.

Amada spent a little bit of time reviewing current Michigan law regarding adoption and foster parenting by gay and lesbian adults. She explained that currently, single and partnered gay and lesbian adults can become foster parents. It is possible for a couple to be licensed together. For adoptive parents, only one individual of the same-sex couple can be the legal adoptive parent. With the DeBoer vs Snyder law suit pending, we can hope that conditions will improve for gay and lesbian couples who wish to adopt jointly.

Amanda emphasized that there is a shortage of both foster and adoptive parents. Once parental rights have been terminated, a stable 'family,' whether gay or heterosexual, is better for the child than the foster care system. Good parenting is not influenced by sexual orientation. Rather, it is influenced most profoundly by a parent's ability to create a loving and nurturing home. Two good parents are better than one good parent, but the parents' gender makes no difference. There is much

evidence documenting the serious damage suffered by children without permanent homes.

Children who grow up in same-sex households will be more sympathetic to differences and more likely to believe in equality for all. The record is that gay and lesbian couples who form stable relationships and give adopted children an emotionally secure home will raise well-balanced children. An estimated 65,500 adopted children are living with a gay or lesbian parent. Gay and lesbian parents are raising 4% of all adopted children in the U.S. An estimated 14,100 foster children are living with LGBT parents. Gay and lesbian parents are raising 6% of foster children in the U.S.

Amanda distributed literature about their Foster Care and Adoption Services. If you missed the meeting, you may contact Amanda Hetzner for more information:

WHS Community Based Programs
4300 Fashion Square Blvd.
Saginaw, MI 48603
Office: 989-791-4081
Email: HetznerA@wolverineHS.org

