

Live Love by Mary Beier, Metal Sculptor
more artworks and interview - pp 12-17

PFLAG

**COUNCIL OF
NORTHERN ILLINOIS**

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Open Doors

April 2024

SPRING

The onset of spring may not be obvious yet, but it's coming in full force very soon. And I don't only mean this literally, as the change of seasons and weather patterns. I feel that spring is coming to our world, metaphorically speaking, in human relations and politics, in economics and science, in kindness and knowledge. Yes, it may be hard to believe that we are on the verge of a positive change when so many things look bleak and scary. But I am certain that this winter is soon going to end. Human history follows cycles, and we are overdue for a cycle of positive breakthroughs.

I think that we are about to witness a new era—a new golden age.

I attended a meeting of PFLAG Deerfield in March where Dan Hemmer from PFLAG DuPage made an inspiring and educational presentation: "**LGBTQ+ Allyship Where to Begin - A Little Knowledge, Open Mind, Open Ears and Love.**"

Something that he said struck me as a revelation, even though I felt it before without putting it into words. Dan said that LGBTQ+ individuals are a GIFT to our society. Indeed—

this is so clear now that I heard it! The community and its allies should not be asking for tolerance or acceptance. These words can carry connotations of guilt or fault. There should be a **celebration** of these individuals and **appreciation** of their leadership in making the world better and kinder! And that's what PFLAG work should be about!

More than 20% of adults aged 18-26 identify as LGBTQ+. That's a tremendous force of young people who will be leaders in business, politics, science, and arts in the coming years. Any attempts to curtail the freedoms of this marvelous community are doomed to fail.

Let's keep working to welcome the new Golden Age faster! Let's not be afraid of negative news! Let's share our kindness and creativity with the world! As the spring of human advancement approaches, let us sow seeds of love and compassion to harvest a future rich in diversity and unity.

Andrew Zanevsky (he/him)

PCNI President



Unconditional Love from PFLAG Parents

As we approach our Mother's Day fundraiser, "Unconditional Love from PFLAG Parents", we are looking for **3 more volunteers**:

1 for the 3:00 to 4:30 shift and 2 for the 6:00 to 8:00 shift.

The event is held at Sidetrack, 3349 N Halsted, Chicago.

Sidetrack is a favorite Chicago LGBTQIA bar that graciously welcomes PFLAG for the afternoon/evening on Mother's Day. Dress accordingly for the weather!

Please email Deb Smollen at casey971@att.net or call 630-936-1660.

Thank you for your support to make this fundraiser a success!

Chapter Grants

Last year, PCNI received a generous grant from the AbbVie Foundation. The Council decided to allocate a portion of that grant for projects implemented by chapters to expand beyond monthly meetings. We formed a Grant Committee that received proposals from chapters, reviewed them, and allocated funds.

Some chapters are planning to implement Event Kits, to make it easier to staff tables at outreach events and represent PFLAG; some are funding their book clubs, one chapter is going to purchase a button maker machine and join our growing button-making team, another is organizing a Pride Parade in its community, several chapters are funding marketing campaigns to raise awareness of PFLAG.

The Grant Committee was impressed with the creativity and out-of-the-box ideas in the chapter grant proposals. We are very excited to see how these projects will get implemented, and we are planning to write about them in future issues of Open Doors.

Chicago Pride Parade – June 30, 2024

We have started preparations for the Chicago Pride Parade 2024.

The Parade Committee has agreed that trolley registration will be open:

- for paying PFLAG members of PCNI chapters – May 1st to 31st
- for non-paying members of PCNI chapters with mobility issues and parents with small children – June 1st to 7th
- for other non-paying members of PCNI chapters – from June 8th

Guests from organizations that partner with PFLAG are welcome to join, up to 10 individuals from one organization.

Everyone marching with PFLAG must wear PFLAG-branded attire or general Pridewear and accessories. No logos, insignia, and brands of organization other than PFLAG are allowed. Rules of the organizers and the City of Chicago must be followed.

WARNING: While some of the following stories describe legislative actions to celebrate and affirm LGBTQ+ people, many cover legislation targeting the LGBTQ+ community, particularly trans and non-binary youth. Please be kind to yourself and use your discretion while reading this section.

FEDERAL MATTERS

White House responds to Pride flag ban in spending bill. The White House issued a statement reacting to an anti-LGBTQ+ provision in the omnibus spending appropriations bill signed by President Joe Biden on Saturday saying that the administration would “continue to work with members of Congress to find an opportunity to repeal it.” [Note: The measure does not preclude Pride celebrations or signage inside of federal buildings, only external flags.]

STATE MATTERS

Florida - Settlement reached in lawsuit over Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” law. The settlement, which was submitted on March 11th to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, makes clear that the law doesn't bar Florida teachers from making references to LGBTQ+ people and issues. The settlement also makes clear that the law does not ban LGBTQ+ student groups, guarantees anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people in schools, and reinforces anti-bullying measures.

Mississippi - State House passes anti-trans erasure bill. The House passed a bill on March 13th which would define sex narrowly to be binary and immutable, essentially barring state recognition of trans, non-binary, and intersex Mississippians.

Texas - The Texas Court of Appeals, Third District, upheld injunctions in Doe v. Abbott and PFLAG v. Abbott against the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and Commissioner Masters, barring them from implementing the agency’s rule expanding the definition of child abuse to presumptively treat the provision of gender-affirming care as child abuse.

California - Sacramento becomes ‘sanctuary city’ for transgender people after city council resolution passes. The resolution was proposed by Councilmember Katie Valenzuela who recently conceded in her reelection race for District 4 and was unanimously approved by Sacramento City Council.

Washington - Amid book bans, DEI cuts and 'Don't Say Gay' laws, 7 states will mandate LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed Senate Bill 5462, a law that includes a mandate for the state’s public schools to teach LGBTQ history.

GLOBAL MATTERS

Poland - Same-sex couples await civil union bill. The new Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, promised to legalize civil unions for same-sex couples within the first 100 days of his tenure. A bill is expected to be debated in parliament at some point in March.

United Kingdom - England’s National Health Service (NHS) bans puberty blockers for trans and nonbinary youth. The NHS announced the ban will remain in place until a study into the effects of puberty blockers can be completed and eligibility criteria decided upon.

MEDIA MATTERS

Anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes in K-12 schools quadrupled in states with anti-LGBTQ+ education laws. A Washington Post analysis of FBI data on anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes taking place in K-12 schools and on college campuses, published on March 12, found that anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes more than doubled across the country in recent years. However, this rise in school hate crimes was more pronounced in the 28 states that have enacted anti-LGBTQ+ policies including restricting LGBTQ+ students' self-expression and limiting how teachers can talk about gender and sexuality in school - more than tripling on K-12 and college campuses and more than quadrupling in K-12 schools alone.

Share of adults who identify as LGBTQ+ reaches new high. According to a Gallup survey, 7.6% of adults in the U.S. identify as LGBTQ+, up from 5.6% in 2020. More than 20% of adults 18-26 (who are part of the “Gen Z” generation) identify as LGBTQ+, as do almost 10% of adults aged 27-42 (Millennials).

PFLAG National premiered new short film Pieces of Me on Saturday March 20th. The film—directed, produced, and written by Nick Oceano-Armendariz—centers on the life of New York-based artist and transgender activist Joslyn DeFreece and creates a filmic collage about the growth and healing that comes from art, love, family, community, and courage.

This is a small sample of articles from Policy Matters, a weekly email publication by PFLAG National.

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PFLAG

HINSDALE

by Barb Medley (she/her)

Our March 3rd speaker was Michelle Langheld, the Parent Program Leader of Rainbow Sprouts, which is part of Youth Outlook. She's also a Youth Outlook volunteer and President of PFLAG Homer Glen/Lockport. She's a Business Intel Analyst and a mom. Youth Outlook is celebrating its 25th anniversary, and their stated mission celebrates, empowers, advocates for, and provides services to meet the ever-evolving needs of LGBTQ+ youth and their families, friends, and communities.

Rainbow Sprouts is a program for kids from grades kindergarten through 6th. Michelle is the Program Leader. Rainbow Sprouts started about a year and a half ago. They meet twice a month, and the children and their families and caregivers attend. They begin by reading an affirming book and then break into groups. The children enjoy activities like art and games. The families and caregivers meet for discussion and support.

Rainbow Sprouts' support message is the same as that for older children. Their additional services include pointing to resources for puberty blockers, affirming healthcare, and name and birth certificate changes. Illinois is a leader in legislation protecting students in areas such as bathroom access and name and pronoun usage.

Michelle noted the importance of self-care for parents and caregivers. She stated we can't help anyone else unless we take care of ourselves. This is one of the reasons PFLAG is so important! Youth Outlook information can be found at www.youth-outlook.org.

We don't have a speaker for April 7th but will meet as always to support new visitors, catch up, and discuss issues of importance.

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PEORIA

by Amy Orwig (she/her)

Hello from PFLAG Peoria! We're busy in the heart of Illinois, leading with love, PFLAG style! We participated in the Peoria St. Patrick's Day parade, which is something we have done every year, since our chapter opened, (not counting the year the world was shut down due to the pandemic). This year we had the largest number of participants ever, and a float - for the first time!

It was great fun 🍀 ❤️ 🏳️‍🌈

Our chapter is very grateful to have received a portion of the Abbvie grant to put towards our Cocoon Gender Diverse Clothing Resource. Watch for updates on our progress!

Keep leading with love and keep on being awesome! ❤️



PFLAG

GENEVA/TRI-CITIES

by **Elaine McClure (she/her)**

Greetings from PFLAG Geneva/Tri-Cities!

We had our Meet & Greet introduction to the community in March and we were thrilled with our turn out of 22 attendees! We didn't realize until the night of our event that PFLAG had their first meeting 51 years earlier. That left us feeling a bit surreal and extremely excited!

We had asked for donations for the charity Out of the Closet and our guests delivered! We are also excited to announce we are partnering with Out of the Closet! We will share more information about our partnership in the coming months. They are an amazing charity and resource that we think will just continue to grow and provide amazing services for the LGBTQ+ community.

With all the love and excitement we felt, we are also hit with the hard reality that there is so much work to be done. That is why we are here.

If you are looking for a support meeting & are in our area, please join us on April 8th from 6:30-8 pm in Geneva, IL. Reach out to us at pflaggenetrices@gmail.com for our location. Also, don't be afraid to attend different PFLAG chapters! I've "meeting hopped" and it's an amazing way to connect with more people. It takes us all to create the change that is needed.



PFLAG

DEERFIELD

by **Jodi Zavos (she/her)**

True to form, March was unpredictable. We had planned to meet on Zoom and on a Tuesday. Instead, we ended up with a hybrid meeting on a Wednesday. Many regulars were not in attendance possibly due to these changes, and we missed them. But members of other chapters did attend, and it was

an honor to host them. We welcomed guests from Tinley Park, DuPage, Chicago PTI and even Colorado Springs!

No doubt our visiting guests came to hear our speaker, Dan Hemmer (he/him) of PFLAG DuPage. Dan's presentation, "LGBTQ+ Allyship Where to Begin- A Little Knowledge, Open Mind, Open Ears and Love" was educational and engaging. I personally enjoyed how Dan sprinkled his love of movies and music throughout his talk. Dan's presentation prompted open and honest dialogue about allyship including the use of pronouns. Dan reminded us that that to be an ally we must be active; and that an allyship can be as simple as one act of random kindness at a time.

Deerfield will be holding elections in April 2024. Our beloved leadership team of Sue Ginsburg, Barb Levie, and Mike Wilson is stepping down after years of devoted service. Sue, Barb and Mike have truly "led with love". Deerfield will forever be grateful for their leadership.

PFLAG

OAK PARK

by **Tara Chavez (she/her)**

Hello from PFLAG Oak Park Area! Our monthly meetings are still HYBRID so members have the choice to join remotely or in person.

February and March have been a bit quiet but we are always available to provide support for all who need it. Membership update: **PFLAG Oak Park Area is now up to 37 paid members and counting!** This number is up from just 8 back in 2020! This is truly wonderful news for our chapter.

During the month of March 2024, our chapter suffered a huge loss with the passing of **Kate Kroker**, former PFLAG Oak Park Chapter President and wife of current board member, Phil Kroker. An excerpt from Kate's eulogy provided by their daughters, Emily and Meta, is below.



(Meta) Everything I ever needed to know about my mama, I learned the day she decided to surprise me at my very first Pride Parade. I was freshly out of the closet to my immediate family, most of my friends, and like an excited gay puppy, I decided it was time for a Pride Parade. I went down with my sister Emily, and her bestie Katie, all of us wide-eyed and curious. If you've ever been to a Pride Parade, you know it is a total vibe, and the energy is unreal. We were having a good time, dancing around, marveling at the revelry when the energy of the crowd started building in a different way. I craned my neck to see what was up, and saw signs being held by the group coming next, it was PFLAG. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. The crowd started cheering, clapping, shouting out so loudly, I joined them because PFLAG, man, what an amazing group of people. All of the sudden, I see someone familiar, then I see Katie take off running towards this familiar person. That person was Kate Kroker. Kate Kroker was marching right there with PFLAG, right next to those people holding the signs saying they were proud of their gay kid. There she was. Of course, my dad was there, but I only saw my mama. The hug we had when she & my dad finally got to me felt like a movie. There were people around us, clapping, crying, not believing they were seeing one of those happy gay stories. It was the 90's, there weren't tons of those back then. That was the best day of my life. I was lucky enough to be able to tell her that before she left.

That was the jumping off point for Kate and her LGBTQ+ Warrior Era. She was absolutely the perfect mom to have a gay child, I've said this so many times and I mean it. Coming out is exciting but scary, Kate was excited for my new life, but no doubt a little scared for me. So, she fully armed herself with her shield, her sword, stood in front of me, and went to the front line to fight FOR me. She fought harder for me than I have ever fought for myself. She was my warrior. As a woman, a feminist, a believer in equality, and in the idea that all means all, support for the LGBTQ+ community was a no brainer. But once I came out? She didn't just start donating to things, or

watching Ellen to relate to me, she went full on warrior and became the president of the Oak Park chapter of PFLAG, a role she cherished for 15+ years. She knew things would be harder for me, she knew that things could be dangerous for me. So she fought endlessly to make things easier for me, and safer for me, just like mamas do. As active members in PFLAG, that first parade was certainly not her last. She marched in the year after year after year, until her health held her back. Sometimes after marching, she would come to our friends after party to kick it with us, and I would share my mama with some of those kids that weren't as lucky as I was. They would cry to her, laugh with her, sit on her lap, she would hold them, and hug them, and be their mama too. A kind of Pride Parade Santa, if you will. It was quite a thing to see how she loved on my friends, and how our friends loved her.

(Emily) Most of all lately, we've heard about how much people loved her and how much they are going to miss her. And I mean, same. But we know she's with us and always will be.

We are so grateful for the support and love. For all the stories we've heard, there are so many more. For all the photos we put together, there are so many more photos. And so many memories that live only in our hearts and minds. But all of it is a reflection of her truly awesome life.

As president of the chapter, Kate always said that "PFLAG's job is to put itself out of business." We are not there yet and have a ways to go so the fight will persist. For those who were fortunate enough to know Kate, know that her passionate, witty, and sassy personality will be sorely missed. Above all else, Kate's big heart who loved her daughters, husband, and PFLAG family fiercely will leave an everlasting impression as her legacy will live on in our chapter forever. ❤️

Our meetings are held every fourth Sunday at First United Church of Oak Park, 848 Lake St, Oak Park, IL 60301.

Please enter through the double doors (in the rear of the building) from the parking lot off Kenilworth.

Our next meeting will be held (still hybrid: in person and via Zoom) on April 28th at 3PM. Mark your calendars!

PFLAG

GRAYSLAKE / ROUND LAKE

by Kristal Larson (she/her)

Greetings from Grayslake / Round Lake! We recently had a major board turnover in January and have been generally quiet as we learn all the in's and out's of running a chapter. A huge thanks to Andrew, Jim and the team at PFLAG Council of N. Illinois for all their assistance and guidance.

We continue to hold our support meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of the month and generally see between fifteen and twenty people show up. In February we had a volunteer bring in materials for making pronoun buttons and had a great time working together as a community. We are currently looking for speakers to join us from 6:30-8pm in future months. Recommendations are certainly welcomed!

In addition to our regular meetings, we are deep in planning for the 4th Annual Better Together Pride Parade held in downtown Grayslake this June 9th at noon. Building on previous years, the Grayslake Parade is a celebration of the rich and diverse LGBTQ+ community. We are fortunate to have strong support from the Village of Grayslake and local civic organizations who have helped us get all the necessary permits secured. We are currently working to renew partnerships with prior year supporters and build on those successes with other local businesses along the parade route. We are also working on getting all the volunteers in place to host this wonderful event.

We will be attending two other community events in June – the Lake County PrideFest on June 8th and Grayslake Summer Days on June 15th.

Finally, we are partnering with our local LGBTQ+ Center Lake County to install a permanent **Little LGBTQ Lending Library** to make queer-related reading materials more widely available to the community. We are excited to be able to expand access to books and PFLAG materials in our area.

PFLAG TINLEY PARK

by **Kathy King-Watters (she/her/ella)**

PFLAG Tinley Park has been doing a lot of connection building and outreach in March. We started the month with a table at a mental health resources fair at Tinley Park High School. Seeing the students get excited to see PFLAG, saying "This is MY table!" was so heartwarming. We gave out hundreds of buttons to the students in addition to Safe Space cards and information.

Our March speaker was Jeff Pastiak, a school counselor who is a native of the south suburbs. He met his now husband back when they were students at Stagg High School! He discussed the challenges of supporting LGBT students, especially if their parents aren't affirming. School personnel are walking a tough line because the students are under 18. He also discussed how important visible representations of support are to students, like our Safe Space cards or a rainbow sticker on a lanyard.

Speaking of meetings, we joined the PFLAG Deerfield meeting for Dan Hemmer's presentation, which was excellent. Dan is a really passionate and articulate speaker and willing to share his presentation at other chapters. After attending the Deerfield meeting, we decided we'd like to attend other chapter meetings as time and distance allows to make more connections and see what best practices we can bring back to Tinley Park. So don't be surprised if Ray and I show up this summer!

Ray and I also attended "Donuts, Faith, and My Coming Out Stories" at the United Church of Hyde Park, which is a member of the Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches. We met so many friendly people, listened to stories, and made several new friends. The chapter has been invited back for their next Donuts and Faith event in June and hopes to partner with them on other events in the future.

By the way, this month we also connected with Gemma Billings, who coordinates the Pride Squadron for the 501st Midwest Garrison and the Rebel Legion Nar Shadaa Base, two Star Wars cosplay groups that do charitable

appearances in the Chicagoland area. The Pride Squadron is made up of LGBTQ members and allies and they are very willing to appear at pride events if you'd like to have them. Email pflagtinleypark@gmail.com for contact information.

Finally, I attended Congresswoman Robin Kelly's LGBTQ Task Force meeting on behalf of PFLAG Tinley Park. Adrian Shanker, Senior Advisor of LGBTQI+ Health Equity for the Department of Health and Human Services was the keynote speaker and touched on the many things HHS is doing to promote health equity for our loved ones. From the 988 National Suicide Hotline, to access to Prep, to medical competency for LGBTQ healthcare, and so much more, it was wonderful to see what is being done to protect LGBTQ people at the federal level. Bringing LGBTQ affirming resources, especially gender affirming care, to the south side and south suburbs was an often repeated desire by those who attended the meeting. People were very welcoming to me as a PFLAG mom and were pleased to know we are here in the south suburbs and that we are very interested in advocacy in our area.

We've made wonderful connections this month and are very excited about how we can partner with our new friends in the future.

PFLAG DUPAGE

by **Bonnie Clemens (she/her)**

We dedicated our March meeting to providing support for each other. We started with our sharing circle where we go around the room and give each person a chance to say as much or as little (none is ok) as they like. I think it's fair to say that almost everyone finds this time and space to be restorative or at the very least validating. It truly is a blessing to be surrounded by those with whom you can confide and find support.

Our circle was followed by social time where folks hung around to chat and/or play games.

Looking forward to April, we will be beginning our active season of event participation which brings its own joys in community.

PFLAG

PTI CHICAGO

by **Francey Oscherwitz (she/her)**

We began our March gathering by screening a 20-minute video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7eAffZLibE>) featuring Lucy Sante, author of the newly published *I Heard Her Call My Name: A Memoir of Transition*.



Sante existed in a “prison of denial” until age 66, when she decided to check out a gender-swapping smartphone app: there, for the first time, staring back from the tiny screen, was the face of her true self—the woman she knew herself to be. Within weeks she came out via email to friends and family (including children and two ex-wives). When asked

why she had harbored this most intimate of secrets even from her romantic partner of the last 16 years, she replied, “I hadn’t even told myself yet!” The 1960s and ‘70s of her youth had been a time when trans matters were “either comedy or beyond the pale.” To her fellow secret sufferers and late bloomers, she promised “It will bring you joy like you’ve never experienced.”

Sante’s story was powerful. Her message was affirming. Her joy was contagious. One parent remarked, “She’s so much happier—more outgoing and confident. These are the things we want for our kids!”

And why not? The world has changed. We’re long past the ‘70s, when “gender” was a baby academic discipline.

But age and experience matter.

Lucy Sante was a mature human when she came out. She had already spent 45 years as an adult in the real world, pursuing career and family. She had learned to overcome obstacles, survive rejection, negotiate risk. Individuals coming out as teens and young adults face dramatically different challenges, a kind of “double” transition. While working to discover their gender truth they are also struggling to “launch”—to find their way in the grownup world of work and responsibility. This is a mindboggling feat—especially given that today’s teens and young adults suffer higher rates of generalized anxiety, major depression, PTSD, and other major mood disorders than preceding generations. They also report being lonelier, more stressed out, and more fatigued.

Some move back home, having lost a job or opted to leave one that was not queer-friendly. Many self-isolate behind the closed door of their room—feeling misgendered and hopelessly misunderstood by everyone except “friends” online.

**The 1960s and ‘70s of her youth
had been a time when trans
matters were “either comedy or
beyond the pale.”**

When one disheartened mother described the intense financial and emotional strain of supporting their grown child—a highly trained out-of-work professional—another reminded us that “our kids may not be on the timetable we want, but everything we do to support them contributes to the ticking clock of their transition.”

One parent confided that she had joined a “secular prayer group,” where members create a list of hopes and intentions to contemplate and “pray for” daily. This parent’s first intention was that her trans daughter—who was struggling—would find a job. The daughter found out, was touched by this non-intrusive gesture of ally-ship, and before long was hired for an entry-level job—a beginning. Other “intentions” followed and were likewise eventually realized.

“It really worked!” the mom said, beaming.

Everyone was beaming from their little box on the Zoom screen. Such happy outcomes! More contagious joy. Someone remarked how easily this parent had introduced the seldom-discussed topic of spiritual engagement—hope, faith, prayer—without a deep dive into religion.

It felt vaguely magical—and lifted up our secular souls.

We hope you’ll join our next meeting! We are a vibrant community—even on Zoom—with a wealth of experience and resources to share. We continue to welcome many first-time parents and grandparents of the extended LGBTQi+ community.

This month our Book Club is turning three! Every few months, we devote the first hour of our regular meeting to discussing works by trans authors and allies—on everything from pronouns to politics. On April 11th we’re discussing Carolyn Hays’s memoir *A Girlhood: Letter to My Transgender Daughter*, which has excited great interest in our reading community. (Even those who don’t manage to read the books find the conversations engaging and topical.) The second hour will be devoted as always to confidential sharing and discussion.

For a list of past Book Club readings and recommendations, contact Francey (she/her) at Franceyo101@gmail.com.

PTI Chicago gathers via Zoom on the second Thursday of each month, so **our next meeting is Thursday, April 11th from 7:00pm to 9:00pm**. A few days before the meeting, participants will be sent an email with the meeting link and password.

Parents, guardians, or family members of transgender, nonbinary, or gender-nonconforming individuals who would like to join us for the first time should e-mail PTI Chicago co-president Francey Oscherwitz (she/her) at Franceyo101@gmail.com.

PFLAG

OTTAWA

**by Rev. Jennifer Amy-Dressler
(she/her)**

PFLAG Ottawa meets the fourth Sunday of the month, which in March fell upon Palm Sunday. Most of our members are churched by background, choice, or cultural osmosis. We spent the afternoon viewing and discussing a 2016 documentary entitled “The Gospel of Eureka.”

Eureka Springs, Arkansas, is home to a production of The Great Passion Play, an outdoor drama offered from late spring to early autumn since 1968. Eureka Springs was also a draw for counterculture folks, including LGBTQ+ folks, during the 1960-70’s. The documentary looks at the complicated dynamics in this small rural community, including a vote on a local nondiscrimination ordinance. Much of the film moves skillfully between scenes of the Passion Play being performed and drag queens in the local LGBTQ+ bar performing numbers such as “You Can’t Pray Away the Gay.” Most fascinating are interviews with locals on their own experiences and views. Lee and Walt, for instance, are owners of the bar. A gay Christian couple, they will challenge many assumptions viewers might have about the compatibility of holding both these identities.

While Ottawa is ten times the size of Eureka Springs, we still found much to relate to about the community depicted. The documentary helped us recognize our own tendency to pigeon-hole persons, and reminded us just how complicated individual lives and communities can be. While it may not be paradise, there is good news for LGBTQ+ rights and community, even in places like Eureka Springs.

Email opendoors@pflagillinois.org to publish your artworks, photography, essays, poetry, movie/book/theater reviews, and event reports in **Open Doors**.

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Mary Beier

Metalworks Art
Artist & Creator
of Metalworks
Art Paintings

Interview by Ann McAuliffe (she/her)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

I am a Metal Worker AND a Painter ... I created Metalworks Art in 1998 by combining my metal and painting worlds ... not sure at the time if it would work, yet here I am over 25 years later still doing my thing! It still feels like it's just been one Big Happy Surprise. I'm so Lucky to be able to do what I Love, and that is what's most important ... find what you love and do it!!

ABOUT THE ART

My Canvas of choice is Aluminum. First, I shear sheets of metal in every size possible, then I grind/etch the base design into the aluminum. I use an angle grinder to free-hand the design into each piece as well as create patterns to add depth and movement. Next, the painting begins ... each color is applied in many, many, many layers to create the desired boldness. I utilize between 1-30 layers per color ... definitely a labor of Love! Last, but not least, I add all the small details using tiny brushes and pencils ... AND reading glasses!

All my work on Metal is Original, created by me, by hand, one at a time! I hope it makes you smile.



Instagram: [@marymetalworksart](https://www.instagram.com/marymetalworksart)
Facebook: [Metalworks Art / Mary Beier](https://www.facebook.com/MetalworksArt/)
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INTERVIEW

Mary Beier, Metal Sculptor / Painter, Phoenix, Arizona

Open Doors: Welcome to Open Doors, Mary! How did you discover your passion for metal sculpting and painting? When did you decide to be an artist? What is your design background, education, and/or training?

Mary Beier: I think maybe Art picked me.

I have been Creating things with my hands since I was a kid, anything I could find or scrounge up ended up as some form of Art project. Art, in some ways saved me in school, as it gave me confidence & kept me out of trouble, ... so in my 30's I went back to college to get a teaching certificate to teach Art to kids. Funny thing is, in the process I took a welding class (just because I could!). I was the only female in the class, surrounded by a bunch of farmers, who were there to fix wheelbarrows ... seriously, true story! I had so much FUN making metal sculptures and I just couldn't get enough of it! It got to the point where the farmers were following me around making whatever I was. It's such a good memory for me!

Urban Houses ↓



Family Trees →



After I worked in metal sculpture for years, I truly wanted to bring some Color into my line ... I guess you could say it was a little more like me. It took a bit of trial & error, but then I just figured it out, ... and I felt like I was the kid on the bike with arms stretched out just going for it!

OD: Mary, you are a painter and sculptor – your method is to paint on metal, aluminum is your canvas (since 1998). Your works are colorful, vibrant – you focus on everyday life, people, places & moments. Your art feels joyful & whimsical. Can you talk about the quote on your website: “If I can feel it, I can see it. If I can see it, I can create it” and how it informs your work?

MB: I have always felt that if I feel something, I can see it, and then I can Create the picture in my head. I think most Art is created by feelings. For me, one of my first images etched into metal was a big Heart high in the sky, growing out of the ground, towering over everything else, in Bright Red, that was titled "Love Grows". Simple perhaps, but for me it means LOVE is so Big and it just keeps growing.

I am so fortunate to have the Love of my life next to me every day (24 years)



One World

“I think maybe Art picked me.”



I See You



Just Us



Soul Bird

and to have the LOVE of my big crazy family who love me for just being me! I like to think there is a little Heart & Soul in every piece I create.

OD: I've noticed you have favorite images & themes within your art: Birdies, Flowers, Houses, Hearts. Words and word clusters are embedded in your art which appear to be inspirational and/or celebratory. Can you talk about these themes and what they mean to you? Have you made a conscious decision to have your art reflect positive energy out into the world?

MB: My Designs are based on my impressions of the world around me ... my neighborhood, houses, nature, family and Love ... Especially LOVE! I use Bright, BOLD colors, because they are happy, with words weaved in to send out positive thoughts ... there is a lot going on in this BIG World we live in, We all NEED more good positive energy!

OD: What are your favorite sources of inspiration for your work?



All Are Welcome



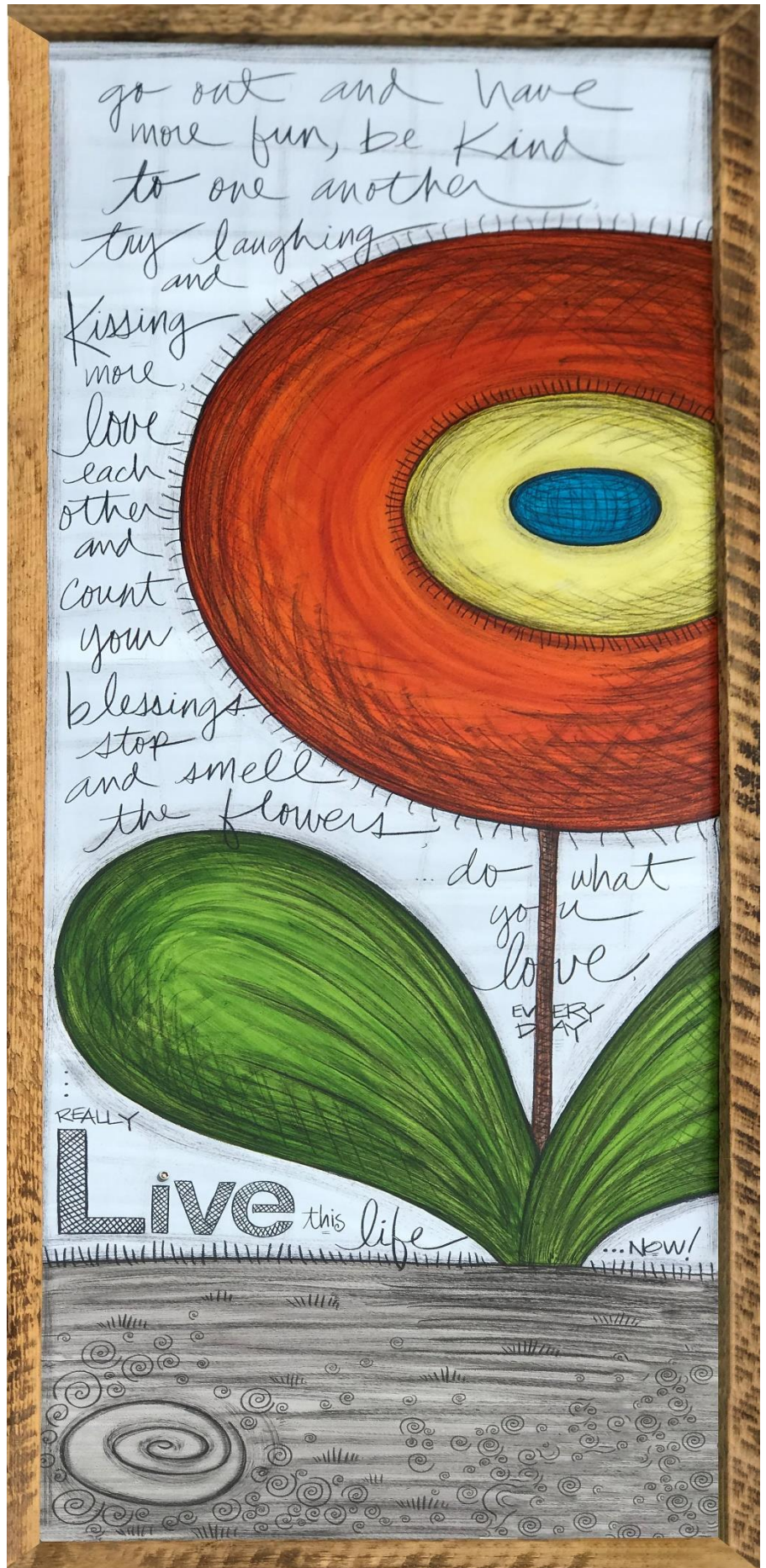
The Neighborhood

MB: Best source of inspiration is my Family. I'm grateful for this wonderful gift! I feel so Lucky to be making art every day and sharing it with the world.

I have a home & Studio in Phoenix, AZ that I share with my Wife, she is a jeweler (February Artist for PFLAG in fact) and we travel to Art shows all year long, primarily in the western U.S. I love participating in Art shows, ... I get to connect with people and share my story. I'm grateful for their support through all these years. It's such a happy feeling when someone walks in my booth at a Show and says "we came for you" ... that is an honor.

Love & Peace ↓

LIVE Now! →





Feed Your Soul

OD: What is on your bucket list?

MB: Art Bucket list: Probably Glass Blowing ... but maybe not another job with open flames!

Life Bucket List: Walking around France & Italy to see all the Art, Architecture, & amazing food!

OD: What, in your opinion, may strengthen human rights in the long term?

MB: LOVE & Kindness, we as Humans reaching out, Helping each other, ... find your tribe, ... do whatever you can, big or small to bring awareness.

OD: Describe your perfect day.

LM: Oh wow, I have so many! I think it changes every day, just like my favorite Color or Song!

Today: a calm morning with good Coffee, watching the Ocean with the Love of my Life, fabulous food & Chocolate, ... ending with a sunset! ❤️



Happy Cactus



To Do's & Color Panels

I KEEP BELIEVING IN MYSELF!

by Wendy Cole

I was born transgender! It's not like people like myself never existed before. We've always existed in hiding. It's one of those things of nature that nothing is ever completely black and white. Nature doesn't necessarily follow societal norms imposed by man. The hetero societal norms and standards, called "socialization", begin with our parents, through school and into our adult and work life. Before we're born, the question family wants to know is, do we wrap it in a pink blanket or do we wrap it in a blue blanket? We're told certain ways of thinking and behaving. This socialization is generally based on your "sex" assigned at birth. Socialization is certain expectations you need to meet to be perceived as male or female. And it is initially based your physical anatomy at birth. Most of the time, doctors get it right. But "gender", male or female is between your ears not between your legs. And with me, they got it all wrong! I knew most of the things expected of me from early childhood were wrong for me. But I was without any other options having grown up in the fifties and sixties.

I found ways to avoid change and what I NEED to do...

I realized in late 2014 it's now possible to do something about how I feel. As of 2012 it became possible to live authentically with therapeutic and medical care, that didn't exist before this century. Until then, I found ways to avoid change and what I NEED to do. It's so scary and such a significant change. I made excuses, believing I couldn't be myself. I received this from a listener following the airing of one of my podcast interviews.

"I just heard your interview and really appreciate your story as an older transitioning woman. I will turn 60 in the next few weeks and am considering transitioning and see a lot in our experiences. I've kept my female desires hidden and repressed and now am feeling the dysphoria of years of suppression.

I keep telling myself that I was born as a man, married and had a family and made commitments, but I don't think I'll be able to keep that up. Someday and somehow, this will get me one way or another and have thought of all the things you have.

Thanks again and appreciate you sharing your story.

Hugs and all the best,"

I'm always grateful to hear from listeners. Age is one of many typical excuses all people use to avoid any change and there are many more. But how old do you have to be to not be yourself?

Or do what you need or want to do? How old do you have to be before you decide to stop your suffering?

Guilt for all the people I've let down by living a lie...

From age ten to twenty-two I tried to deal with how I was born and become who I knew myself to be. At twenty-two, I had a disastrous experience with a psychiatrist. I was miserable! I repressed myself as best I could, living with depression, anxiety, shame, fear, and guilt. Especially the guilt for all the people I've let down by living a lie.

I was mentally never a man...

Forty-five years later, I hit a wall, like so many of us do. Transition or Die! So, yes, I totally understand the listener's comment and have heard so many similar comments. I was mentally never a man! The incongruence between my mind and body was a perpetual conflict. In fact, now in my coaching, I help my clients get past these conflicts and stop making excuses. I help them untangle their perplexing mindset from past abuse, trauma, and difficult life changes, which we all face in different situations. I work with transgender people and women going through significant life changes. So, how did I get to this point and finally become the woman I've always been?

Especially around age 10 or so, I just knew I had to tell my mom...

Well, first of all, I was born this way. This is not a choice. I knew at a very, very young age, say around three or four that there was something different about me. I enjoyed playing with the other girls. A lot of my mother's friends had daughters. I would end up playing with the girls. And it felt perfectly natural, much more so than playing with boys. I didn't have words to put around all of that. I couldn't really define it. But as I got older, especially around age ten or so, I just knew I had to tell my parents. I was so hopeful for help especially from my mom!

I tell my mom I'm a girl...first pivotal point in my life...

I used to enjoy dressing in my mother's clothes that would fit me. Then scramble and take everything off before my mom came home. One day, I decided I'm done. I'm getting dressed. I'm doing my nails. I'm putting on makeup as best I can. I'm waiting for my mom to come home. I'm going to tell her I'm a

girl. End of story! I repeated that several times. It didn't go well for me. This became the first of several pivotal points in my life.

Once he has a career, wife, house, family, he'll forget about being a girl...

I grew up about fifty miles north of New York City in Fishkill, New York. My parents took me to a psychiatric center along the Hudson River between Beacon and Cold Spring New York called the Craig House. I was ten years old sitting with my parents in front of a psychiatrist. He was talking past me to my parents saying once he grows up, has a career, has a wife, has a house, has a family, he'll forget all about being a girl. I spoke up and said, "No, I'm a girl!" And that was particularly terrifying to me, but I couldn't hold back. I was in front of my father who was adamant that I was his son. Unknown to me at the time, he had gone to great lengths to have a son. And no son of his would be a girl. I had declared in front of him to the psychiatrist, "No, I'm a girl". After five sessions with the psychiatrist my parents told me, "Forget you are a girl. That's not going to happen. You get that out of your mind. You're a boy and that's how you're going to be. And if you don't stop behaving this way and insisting you're a girl, you're going to be committed and fixed at the psychiatric center." This was in the late 1950s and I was scared to death.

People like me are everywhere and this doesn't go away...!

By today's standards this threat could be considered abuse! It's BS because this is not a choice! Gender doesn't work that way. And this never goes away. It is who I am! My brain developed as female. My body unfortunately developed as male and that's how I was stuck. I have talked with people coast to coast, blue state, red state, doesn't matter. People like me are everywhere and this doesn't go away! So I began my life of hiding and repression. I lived with complete inner turmoil knowing who I really was. And knowing that there was nothing I could do about it.

I forced myself to go to an all-male college trying to fit in...

My teen years in high school were a struggle trying to fit in. Dating, forget it! I was afraid. I was afraid of girls because girls might figure me out and I had this big secret to hide. I'd forced myself to go to an all-male college. That way I could try and fit in. I did try dating in college which worked out for a time, until I felt I had to tell her. And yet another person I hurt by living a lie. The pressures and conflicts I felt were so powerful and intense. So that didn't work either. I was able to get through repressing

until my senior year of college. The pressure of graduating combined with not knowing how to deal with my feelings and life was overwhelming!

I knew at some point I needed to deal with this...

Anything I had tried to do to fit in just did not work. It didn't feel right. I didn't feel good. And I had the big secret I had to hide. When I was about to graduate from college, which is another big life change, I knew at some point I needed to deal with this. I found a psychiatrist who agreed to help me. I started coming out to people in my local town, as he told me to do. I didn't come out to anybody on the all-male campus.

A quarterly meeting of about twenty area psychiatrists...

I found a psychiatrist to help me during my senior year of college. This was my second major pivotal point really trying to transition. At age ten, the first pivotal point, I had told my parents how I felt. And now I was really reopening the whole situation trying to deal with it. My psychiatrist wanted to take me as his case study to a quarterly meeting of about twenty other psychiatrists from the area. We met in the hospital conference room in upstate New York. And keep in mind, at this point in New York State, and even New York City, I would be arrested for appearing in public as a girl. I would be heavily fined, arrested and thrown in jail. It was against the law. So, I was dressed as male attending the meeting.

"You're a freak! You should move to New York City..."

I'm sitting in the hospital conference room talking with the psychiatrists about my life. One of the doctors stood up. He said, "Well I'll see you all next quarter. I've had enough today." He then looked at me and said, "You're a freak! You should move to New York City and turn tricks like the rest of them." I was devastated. That ended meeting and my trust or desire to get help from doctors. That ended everything for me! During my next appointment with my psychiatrist, he explained, "This is a psychological condition with no treatment or cure". This was 1970 the first time I had heard this. We didn't have the internet back then and very little available information. And I tried numerous libraries. It was called transsexualism then. The word transgender did not exist then.

I discovered my diagnosis from 1970 changed in 2012...

1970 was the last time I attempted to transition. I repressed even thinking about it until 2015, forty-five years later. It was when I discovered my diagnosis changed in 2012 to a "condition

"if you don't stop behaving this way and insisting you're a girl, you're going to be committed and fixed at the psychiatric center"

I was born with, now treatable by therapy, hormones and any necessary surgeries”. January 2015 I began therapy with no idea where this will lead me, but I had to see. I am 67, I'm going to turn my entire life inside out, upside down, and everything about myself was going to change. I had no idea if I could even do this and there are no guarantees. But trying to authentically live as the woman that I always knew I was, or even just trying, had to be better than continuing to suffer the way I have been. I didn't know if I could ever blend into everyday life as any other woman.

I began deconstruction of all the male socialization...

When I began to “transition”, the first thing I focused on was getting back into mindfulness. I began to overcome all the debilitating thoughts and emotions I had as a result of repressing myself for years. Socialization from childhood as someone that wasn't me is damaging at best. And the repression, shame and guilt was not easy to stop either. It had been my lifelong habit. I began deconstruction of all the male socialization I was forced to experience for over six decades. I came to believe that we all have possibilities in life. It's our beliefs, formed by our thoughts and emotions that block or mask our possibilities. The beliefs are enshrined in our brains. Those are the unhelpful thoughts that I had to change to see what was possible for me.

There is no looking back and no back button on this...

I've been Wendy now for nine wonderful years. There is no looking back and no back button on this. All life changes begin and exist 80% between your ears. All the rest is just the physical aspects and the window dressing. Our society loves to put people in boxes. What I needed to do was just not acceptable to many. I found compassion for the part of me that was in pain. It's been absolutely amazing. Wonderful! And I love it. I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm now grateful to my male representative for not killing me. It has been an intense experience and one I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. But I survived and have personally grown. And now I thrive!

You're getting the benefit of somebody who has lived this...

I found out through this experience I love helping other people overcome significant life changes. We all go through changes in life. A common belief is transition takes a long time and it's very difficult. Sure. If that's what you believe, it will be. But with my guidance, it doesn't have to be. The mentoring I provide is definitely not one size fits all. I provide the guidance my clients' need, based on experience and research. It will help you take necessary steps forward. Once moving forward, you start letting go of all the doubts and fears and begin shifting to more supportive beliefs. And you will continue to evolve. You're getting the benefit of somebody who has lived this and who knows what you're going through and thinking. I help you

overcome your fears, anxieties and your self-doubts by challenging your beliefs. The mental work involves changing your outlook, learning to become self-aware and self-accepting for who you really are. This is critical to living your new life confidently and to making it easy and exciting for you.

I let go of the stress of the baggage of someone I wasn't...

I did not see or speak with my father after 1980. My relationship with my mom was strained at best. I have forgiven my parents for forcing me to repress this. They were products of their generation and time. The time wasn't right for me. Society wasn't right at that time. And my parents were trying to protect me from society! Now I don't carry resentment because that would really just be punishing myself. I embrace who I've always been. Carrying resentment would be a burden. I had found ways to get through the really horrible experiences. And I learned through all of this to embrace who I am, be authentic and be real. I have actually developed self-love to the point where I am taking care of myself. I hated myself before. And I let go of the stress of carrying around the baggage of somebody I wasn't meant to be.

I keep believing in myself!

When facing the hard things a lots of us would just say, you know what? I've been living my life this long. I've missed my opportunity. I'm too old. I'm too whatever. I'm too tired, I'm too weary. But I said, “Hey, I have an opportunity here”. I could either embrace this change or I can just take my lumps and like it. I decided I'm going to change what I can. I'm going to change my perspective no matter how old I am. There are always opportunities for me if I keep my eyes open and I keep believing. What do I keep believing? I keep believing in myself!

It is NEVER TOO LATE!!!

Resources I offer:

Schedule a conversation

<https://calendly.com/wendycoletm/discovery-conversation>

Coaching for Gender

<https://wendycoletgm.net/gender-change/>

All those unhelpful messages from so many years of social conditioning and repression don't go away overnight. Learning to manage your thoughts and emotions is all important to your success; it permeates every aspect of your being and journey. With my guidance this can be an exciting experience.

Coaching for Parents of Transgender

<https://wendycoletgm.net/parents-of-transgender/>

My goal is to help you get comfortable with this significant change in your family and provide guidance, understanding and peace of mind.

“I survived and have personally grown. And now I thrive!”

The 6th Annual Trans Youth & Family Summit: “Under the Sea”

by Ann McAuliffe (she/her)

On Saturday 3/16/24, the 6th Annual Trans Youth & Family Summit was co-hosted by the Youth Services and Center on Halsted organizations. The Summit was held at Center on Halsted located at 3656 North Halsted in Chicago. It is truly a beautiful facility with multiple, spacious meeting spaces – both large & small.

150 attendees were present and the waiting list was overflowing. Attendees ranged from “littles”, tweens & teens, to adults (both young & parental units). There was literally something for everyone!

The Theme was “**Under the Sea**” - a celebration of the biodiversity within our world’s oceans and the magic of Merpeople, often celebrated as a symbol of trans power, joy and beauty. The Littles had their very own Mermaid Parade, Fantastic game, Out-Sand-Ing workshop, Drum circle & Rainbow story time.

There were 3-hour long workshops sessions to choose from. At any given workshop session, there were 9 to 10 available choices. 25+ workshops were offered in total: 12 Youth Only, 6 Adult Only, 7 Mixed sessions where everyone was welcome.



Illustrated by Andrew Zanevsky (he/him) in Midjourney AI

One of my favorite sessions was the **Panel of Trans Adults**. Hear from a group of trans, nonbinary, and gender expansive adults about their lives, navigating the world as a trans person and their transition experiences. There will be an opportunity to ask questions of these community members. Interestingly, the 7 & 8th graders in attendance created many of the questions the Moderator used.

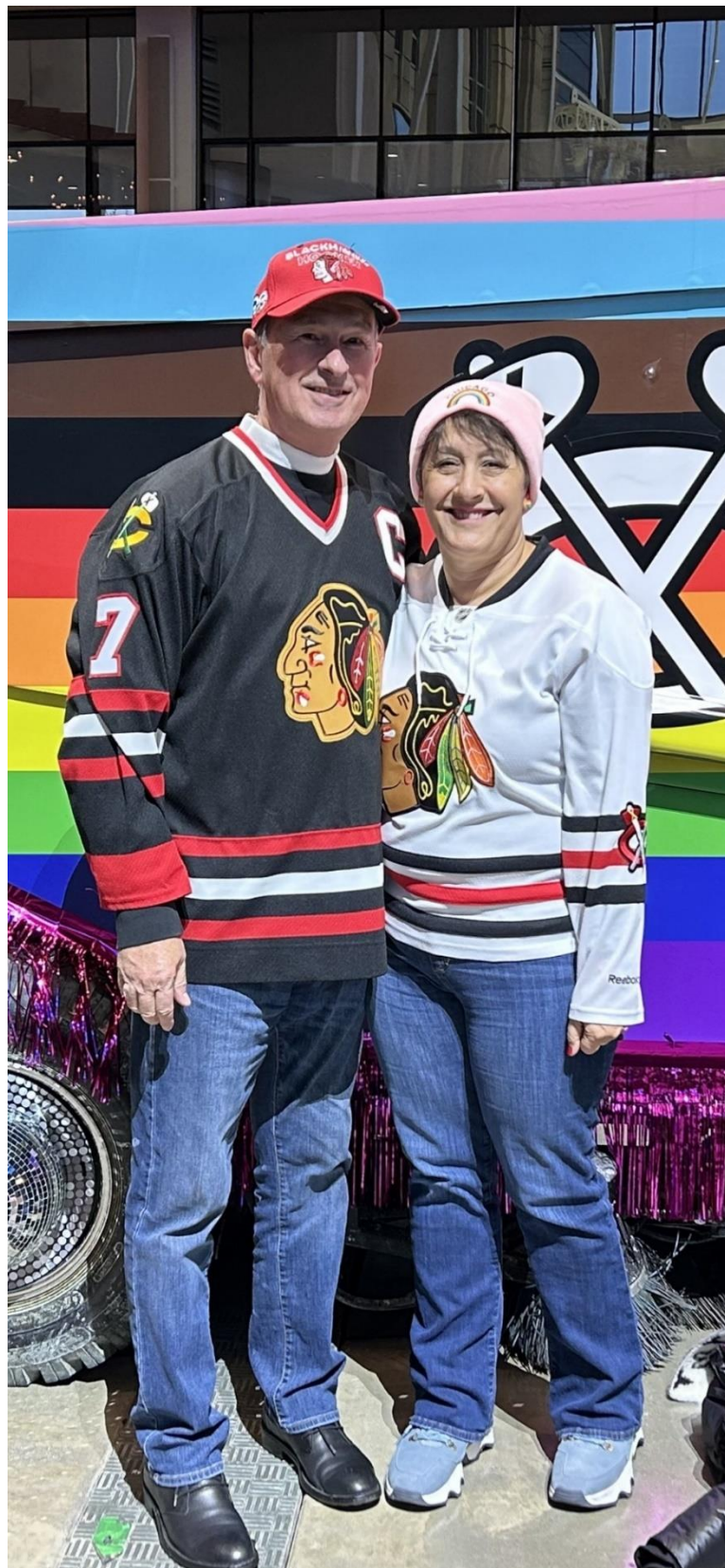
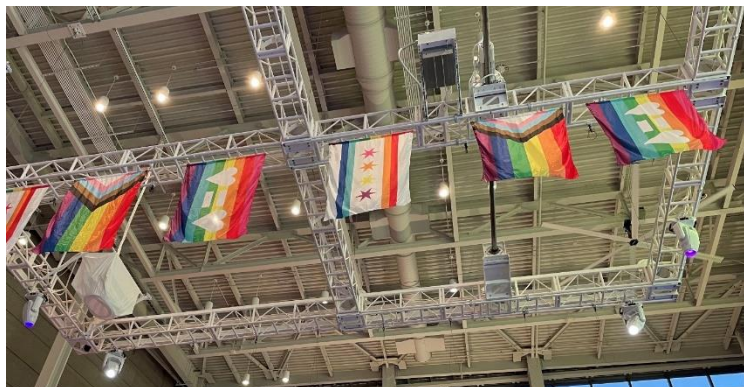
Equally as powerful was the **Transition: it means lots of things!** Workshop. While we often focus on legal and medical strategies for transition, this workshop will explore the many different ways that trans people can experience gender harmony. After a review of the variety of methods people may use, we will spend some time creating our own transition roadmaps.

We participated in a lively Resource Fair at the end of the day. PFLAG’S table was represented by Kelly & Dan from PFLAG DuPage & Ann from PFLAG Deerfield/PCNI. We handed out PFLAG literature, business cards, our always popular **BUTTONS** as well as build your own “Rainbow Pins”.

Kudos to the Summit Planning Team (Eli, David, Michelle & Lizzy), the staff at Youth Services, Center on Halsted, Presenters, Volunteers and Attendees of all ages – it was an incredible day to share space with you and Learn with Love!

Photos from the Chicago Blackhawk's Pride Night 2024

by Jodi Zavos (she/her)



Future Outlook 2024 Conference



April 16-17, 2024
Joliet, IL

Join us for two days of expert-led sessions, networking, and professional development opportunities.

Perfect for Educators, Mental and Physical Health Practitioners, Social Services Providers, and anyone working with LGBTQ+ youth and their families. Enhance your skills while earning CEUs, CPDUs, and CMEs.



Conference Topics

Educator, Health, General, and Intermediate tracks will cover topics including:

Empowering Education and Advocacy

Strategies for supporting LGBTQ+ youth through education, advocacy, and community support

Supporting Health and Wellbeing

Mental health support, gender-affirming care, and safe practices for LGBTQ+ youth

Building Inclusive Environments

Creating safe spaces and supportive ecosystems in schools, healthcare settings, and workplaces

Networking & Resource Fair

Network with other professionals and discover helpful local resources. Affirming and inclusive organizations can discover resource fair and sponsorship opportunities [here](#).

Register today for special early-bird pricing!

- One and two-day tickets available
- Includes breakfast and lunch
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**REGISTER
HERE**



YOUTHOUTLOOK



Spotlight on Community Partners: TaskForce Prevention and Community Services

by Ann McAuliffe (she/her)

Welcome to the inaugural column of **Spotlight on Community Partners**. Our first article will introduce you to TaskForce Prevention and Community Services and their incredible Executive Director, Dr. Chris Balthazar. Here's a little background on the organization, their history, mission, program and service offerings followed by a conversation with Chris.

TaskForce Prevention and Community Services is committed to addressing the health and wellness of adolescents and young adults living in systematically disenfranchised communities with limited resources by providing HIV/STI prevention education, testing, treatment, and care services. The organization also offers access to a food pantry, clothing closet, workforce development support, housing referral services and mental health support. At the center of the organization's work is the Chicago Vogue School, which is a program that offers a safe space for young LGBTQ+ identified youth to build a sense of community and connectedness with other LGBTQ+ identified youth. The Chicago Vogue School also offers an opportunity for youth to learn about Queer history and how Voguing played an

important role in the Gay Movement. TaskForce is proud to serve 260 LGBTQ+ young people each month, including hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth each year.

Our History: Founded in 1990, **TaskForce Prevention & Community Services** is located on the west side of **Chicago**, in the heart of the **Austin** community. The agency's board of directors, staff, and community stakeholders work together to approach preventive healthcare holistically.

Our Mission: **TaskForce Prevention & Community Services** is a grassroots organization committed to improving the **sexual health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth of color in Chicago** by providing a safe space for fellowship, HIV/STI screening and education, and on-site referrals to medical, housing, and other social services. We are dedicated to making a difference by working towards solutions in partnership with our community in order to improve our overall quality of life.

Our Service Model

Our service model reflects the reciprocal relationship between our grassroots history, our community led programming and

services, and our commitment to evidence based and informed practice.



TaskForce's Programs & Services:

Vogue School/Outreach

Our Chicago Vogue School program is a vibrant hub for the LGBTQ+ community, offering a safe space for expression, education, and empowerment. The drop-in program offers a safe space twice a week for LGBTQ+ youth to connect and access resources. Through our partnership with After School Matters, we provide specialized Vogue workshops that foster creativity, personal expression. We also collaborate with Chicago Public Schools to bring mini-workshops directly to students, focused on educating about Vogue in the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, through our PrEP4Teens initiative, we ensure access to vital healthcare information and services.

Essential Services

Our essential services are the backbone of our community support network, providing a lifeline to those in need. From fresh produce and food pantry access to personal hygiene kits and clothing options, we ensure that basic needs are met. We also offer assistance with housing referrals, navigating government assistance programs (such as SNAP benefits), and workforce development, empowering individuals to build a stable and fulfilling life.

Prevention and Treatment Services (Health Services)

Promoting health and wellness is at the core of our prevention and treatment services. We offer confidential HIV/STI testing, insurance navigation, and linkage to care services. Our PrEP navigation program provides information and access to PrEP for HIV prevention, while our sexual health education program, Empowerment, empowers individuals with knowledge. We also

provide comprehensive care and case management for those living with HIV through our Ryan White program.

Mental Wellness and Violence Prevention

Mental wellness and violence prevention are paramount in our community. Our programs include education and support for gender-based violence (GBV), mental health support groups, and counseling services referrals. We also offer GBV case management and mental health first aid training, ensuring that individuals have the resources and support they need to thrive.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a cornerstone of our mission, as we work to create a more inclusive and just society. In partnership with Equality Illinois, we advocate for gender markers on state IDs, name changes for those formerly incarcerated, and culturally responsive training for medical providers. Additionally, our partnerships with Howard Brown and HireTransNow focus on creating more inclusive work environments and hiring practices, fostering diversity and acceptance in the workplace.



Dr. Christopher Balthazar is the Executive Director of TaskForce – the lead community-based organization on the PrEP4Teens project. Chris recently appeared in the February issue of Open Doors.

Open Doors: Chris, welcome back to Open Doors. Congratulations on your successful PrEP4Teens Launch. From the pictures, it looked like everyone had a lot of fun. The February article detailed the extensive messaging and branding research the team conducted to reach your target audience. How was the message received? What else do you have planned to increase PrEP4Teens adoption?

Chris Balthazar: Thank you for having me back! The message was received very well. I think many of our young people feel more comfortable talking openly about PrEP and are facilitating more discussion. I think the more we can talk about PrEP as an option for prevention, the more we can educate young people about it and reduce shame and stigma that is often attached to being concerned about your sexual health.

We have a lot of new and exciting things coming! We hope to facilitate more creative workshops so that more young people can help positively influence PrEP messaging for teens across this city. We also plan to facilitate discussions about PrEP on social media. Our teen ambassadors will lead much of the discussions. We hope to continue to facilitate more dialogue about PrEP.

OD: In your service model graphic, the organization is committed to evidence based and research informed practice. Your website lists several Community – Academic partnerships. Research is a prominent theme in your work. How have you been able to successfully combine your research career with your passion for equitable healthcare, community service and uplifting young people?

CB: Great question! Research is often the starting point for program and service development. I think of research as a strategic way to gather information (or data) about a topic or phenomenon and it does not always have to be this large expensive clinical trial. Sometimes, it is as simple as conducting a needs assessment to determine how might a service benefit a community or not. When designing any program at TaskForce, we often go to our community to collect information to inform how that program is designed and implemented. We also evaluate our programs and services to continually inform various aspects of our service and delivery approach. Research has taught me how to use data to inform what we do and how we do it. It also helps us to better partner with our community members, recognize and honor their expertise by simply listening to them and following their lead.

OD: When we met in January, you told me of all the programs and services you offer, there is one of which you are the most proud. Which one is it and why is it so important?

CB: HINT: The Chicago Vogue School! Yes—the Chicago Vogue School is a place where young people can come together and build a sense of community and connect with other youth who are LGBTQ+. I say that this is the most important program because I think most cis-gendered and heterosexual-identified individuals often don't have to think about feeling accepted in any space. For our young people, the Chicago Vogue School is one of the few places where they can receive that experience and it is one of the few spaces where they can be around others who are like them. Some of them are the only trans kid in their school or in their families, but at the Chicago Vogue School, they learn that they are not alone. These spaces are necessary for the healthy psychological development of our young people, and I am glad that we can offer that to them. Also, the Chicago Vogue School allows young people time to get to know TaskForce before participating in any of the other services the organization offers. It is often the gateway to the other services, which is also important to understand when serving youth.

OD: You became the Executive Director in April of 2020. Your 4-year anniversary is right around the corner. What is TaskForce

currently focused on? What's next – what are your plans and dreams for the future?

CB: We're excited to share that we're in the process of transitioning to a larger, more accommodating space. Our current location, while cherished, has become a space that we've outgrown and is also showing signs of wear. Collaborating closely with our architects, youth participants, dedicated staff, and supportive board members, we're in the early stages of actively conceiving this new space to better suit our needs. With plans to begin fundraising soon for renovations of the new space, we aim to officially make the move to the new location by Fall 2025. This expansion is crucial as it will enable us to reach even more young people, fulfilling a growing need in our community. While we understand the immense impact our new space will have on the community, we know that this initiative is going to require the collective effort and support of our generous donors and community members.

OD: How can PFLAG partner with TaskForce on your endeavors?

CB: PFLAG and the community can support our organization in several meaningful ways. One option is by making a monetary donation through our website, www.taskforcechicago.org. Additionally, we welcome donations of food and personal hygiene items, which can be purchased from our Amazon wish list, co-created by our youth. On the third Wednesday of each month, we distribute 200 fresh produce grocery bags to local community members in need and rely on volunteers to help assemble and distribute these bags. Finally, sharing information about our work with others is invaluable in helping us garner more support to continue serving our youth.

OD: How can people reach you?

CB: The best way for people to connect with me is via email at chris.balthazar@taskforcechicago.org. For more information on TaskForce and our programs, people can visit our website at www.taskforcechicago.org.

The logo for TaskForce is displayed in a light gray rectangular box. The word "TASK" is written in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. Below it, the word "FORCE" is written in a large, bold, pink sans-serif font.

The Elmhurst Pride Collective, Art & Gratitude

by **Stephanie Wargin & Kelli Mitchell**

The team at Elmhurst Pride Collective is still basking in the glow of a fabulously inspiring weekend of radical self-love with visiting artist Rae Senarighi / Transpainter in March!



Friday night at Michael Symer Studios in Elmhurst was an evening of art, compassion, and community. We were amazed at the massive talent and giant hearts in the room. Sunday at Elmhurst Art Museum featured Rae's speaking event, which outshone the morning sun with its universal themes of love, kindness and respect; Rae's words and remarkable energy resonated with everyone in the room. The fun workshop that followed Rae's talk provided a beautiful opportunity for artists of all abilities and ages to make their own Creative Affirmation works of art based on Rae's popular prints.

THANK YOUs are in order! Sending great big thanks to everyone who joined us over the weekend; to Michael and Jodie at Michael Symer Studios for welcoming us into your studio and making everyone feel comfortable and safe to explore their art; to Elmhurst Art Museum for hosting these events in your beautiful space; to the DuPage Foundation - JCS Arts, Health and Education Fund for their financial support. And, most especially, to Rae for opening his heart and his world to all those willing to learn and grow as artists and as humans.





Tidbits: small actions, BIG impact

by **Ann McAuliffe (she/her)**

When you log on in the morning, do you find “Inspiration in your Inbox”? I’m always looking for things that are educational, informative, and entertaining to help me along my ALLY learning curve. Here are several of the newsletters I subscribe to - to elevate my morning routine in less than 5 minutes! **Happy Reading with Love!**

	<p>This monthly newsletter is the companion to Jeannie Gainsburg’s book, <i>The Savvy Ally, A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate</i>.</p> <p>In 2018, Jeannie founded Savvy Ally Action, a small business that offers fun, accessible, and encouraging workshops and videos on how to be an ally to the LGBTQ+ communities. In 2020 her book, <i>The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate</i>, was published by Rowman & Littlefield. The newly revised second edition of <i>The Savvy Ally</i> was published in March 2023.</p> <p>You can subscribe at www.savvyallyaction.com. There are 3-minute videos (not to be missed!), free downloadable handouts, workshops and information on her book.</p>
 <p>Better Allies</p>	<p>Better allyship starts here. Each week, Karen Catlin shares 5 simple actions to create a more inclusive workplace.</p> <p>Know someone who wants to be a better ally? Forward our newsletter to them. Received a forwarded copy? Sign up here to get 5 Ally Actions delivered to your inbox every Friday.</p> <p>While Better Allies focuses on tips for the workplace, I’ve found them so helpful, they work ANY place!</p>
	<p>Action Tuesday! You guessed it – this weekly update arrives every Tuesday.</p> <p>It includes the latest on what is happening in the state on the legislative front, when witness slips are required, workshops, advocacy opportunities, etc.</p> <p>Equality Illinois builds a better Illinois by advancing equal treatment and full acceptance of the LGBTQ community. Learn more, act, and support our mission at www.equalityillinois.org.</p>
	<p>Let’s not forget the amazing work that comes out of our very own PFLAG National on a variety of current events! The resources are impressive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brian K. Bond CEO • Policy Matters • Team PFLAG National • Leadership Learnings <p>www.pflag.org</p>

RECOMMENDED BY PFLAG NATIONAL



PFLAG SAYS
GAAAAAAY

LEADING WITH LOVE

"This is the proof people need that their voice matters. Their representation matters. Their vote matters. We have the ability to push back, find hope, and bring positive changes to our communities."
- Beth, **PFLAG Brooksville**

"Love is love, and it knows no boundaries. Acceptance and caring are fundamental to creating a world where everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, feels valued and respected for who they are."
- Daniel, **PFLAG Riverview**

"When my husband & I went to Tallahassee earlier this year with other PFLAGs and Equality Florida, we knew there was work to be done. This news brings joy to my heart and tears to my eyes - tears of exuberance! Love/Light prevailed - even in Florida!"
- Carol, **PFLAG DeLand / Volusia**

Florida PFLAG Chapters Celebrate "Don't Say Gay" Bill Settlement

Let's take a moment to shout it out again: teachers and students can say gay and trans in Florida schools! The huge victory in Florida demonstrated yet again that taking away resources that help LGBTQ+ youth thrive is a losing battle. Our PFLAG chapters in Florida have a lot to celebrate with this news! ←

Q Chat Space: A program for LGBTQ+ teens

PFLAG National is proud to partner with our friends at CenterLink and Planned Parenthood on [Q Chat Space](#), which provides live, chat-based discussion groups for LGBTQ+ and questioning teens ages 13 to 19. It is not a forum, and there is no video or audio. Everyone is chatting during the same pre-scheduled time. Chats are facilitated by experienced staff and volunteers from youth programs at LGBTQ+ centers across the United States. Learn more at [qchatspace.org!](#) ↩

PFLAG Publications

Whether you have an LGBTQ+ child, grandchild, or loved one or are looking for resources for yourself as an LGBTQ+ person, PFLAG has you covered.

[Find our publications on our website](#) in English and Spanish, both for free download and for purchase. ↓



COMMUNITY FOR LGBTQ+ TEENS

Q Chat Space

PFLAG x centerlink x Planned Parenthood
THE COMMUNITY OF LGBTQ CENTERS



Our Children
Questions and Answers for Loved Ones of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual*, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning People

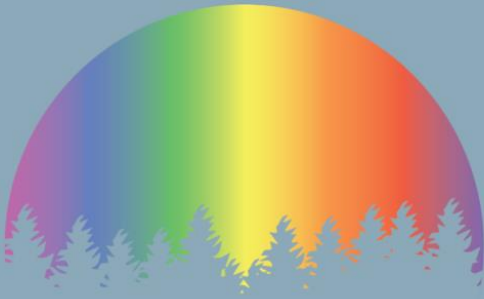
At Ease
Support for LGBTQ+ Grandchildren

Ayudando a su nieto LGBTQ+

Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Grandchild

guide to being a trans ally*

Publications



ACTION CAMP

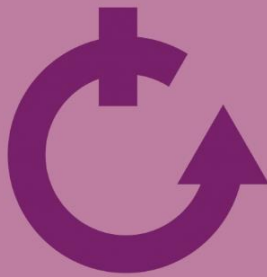
A PARTNERSHIP OF:



Save the Date for Action Camp: July 28 - August 2, 2024. APPLICATIONS OPEN APRIL 1, 2024

For more information, visit www.ilsafeschools.org/action-camp-info

RESOURCES



The Philly Trans Wellness Conference 2024 was just announced that it is coming back. This is a great learning opportunity. It will run September 5th-7th at Temple University. Registration will launch in April. www.transphl.org. Announcement video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-19HG317eSQ



[Raising Black LGBTQ+ Children: A Resource for Black Families Grounded in Affirmation and Building Community and Understanding](#)



[Learn about the history of PFLAG and how it all started.](#)



[Download the worksheet "Pronouns: Why They Matter"](#) on the Straight For Equality Website. It includes information on why sharing personal pronouns matters, common gender-neutral pronouns, and examples of when and how various pronouns are used.

In Spring's Embrace

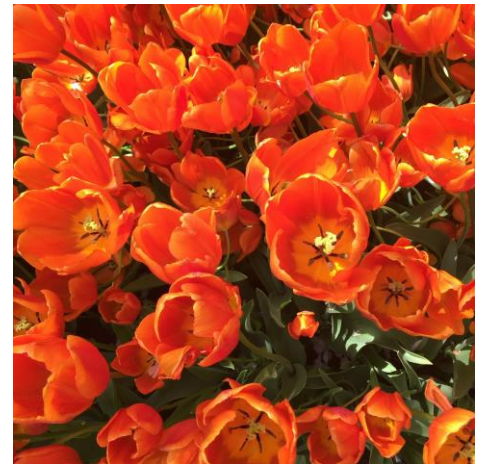
Poetry and photography by Maddie Barrett (she/her)

In Spring's embrace, the world awakes,
A symphony of colors, a dance of lakes.
Blossoms bloom in vibrant hues,
Whispers of warmth, the morning dews.

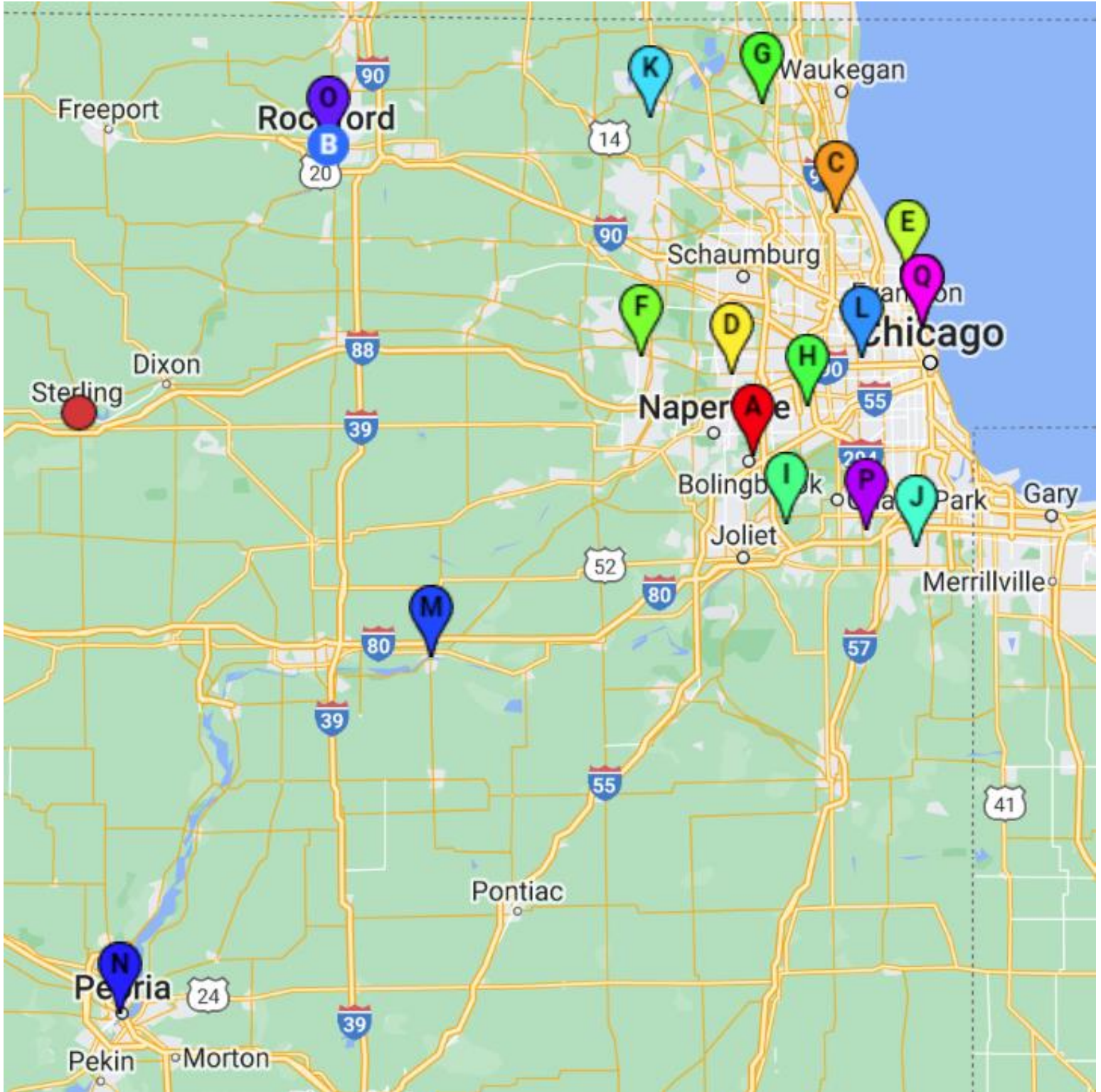
The air is filled with fragrant sighs,
As nature paints beneath the skies.
Butterflies flutter, birds take flight,
In this season of pure delight.

The earth, once sleeping, now alive,
With hope and joy, it does revive.
Green carpets spread across the land,
A gentle touch from Spring's soft hand.

New life emerges, old sorrows fade,
In Spring's sweet serenade.
So let us revel in this season's grace,
And cherish every moment, every trace.



PFLAG Northern Illinois Chapters



Click/tap anywhere on the map to open it online and find meeting dates/ times/locations. Some chapters are meeting online on Zoom, and some are returning to in-person meetings. Contact the chapter for details before your very first meeting and watch for chapter announcements if you are a member.