

A drag queen with long blonde hair, heavy makeup, and a large red beaded necklace is wearing a voluminous, shiny gold sequined outfit. They are leaning over a pool table with green felt, holding a pool cue and aiming at a white cue ball. A red ball is visible in the foreground. The background is a brick wall.

QUEER KY

A Love Letter & an Invitation

*Celebrating Queer People and
Places in the NKY Region*

SPECIAL ISSUE

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BOURBON & BELONGING

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Letter from the Executive Director, Missy Spears

@missy.spears



Dear Travelers,

Kentucky is gay. Like, really gay.

I know you may be frozen in shock, but underneath all that nightly news coverage is a Bluegrass-loving homo of a state just waiting to show you a good time. And Northern Kentucky is my sleeper pick for where you want to head first in the state. It can be hard to stand out when you're made up of forty individual cities, and constantly overshadowed by our larger (and singular) cities to the north (Cincinnati) and south (Louisville and Lexington), but let me tell you: NKY is a Queer gem.

From the 859 Taproom in Florence to Strasse Dog in Covington, we hit above our weight in the quantity and quality of LGBTQ+ businesses and heavy allies across our forty cities. And our arts scene is insane with Broadway level productions at The Carnegie (Thanks Tyler!) and world class street art across the city of Covington from artists like Faile and London Police. (Check out my favorite piece tucked away in Innovation Alley. Look for the wolf). I don't know if I can actually put into words how much I love this region. Where else can you still find the perfect old fashioned for ten bucks, only a rainbow crosswalk away from that taxidermied fox you never knew you wanted to buy?

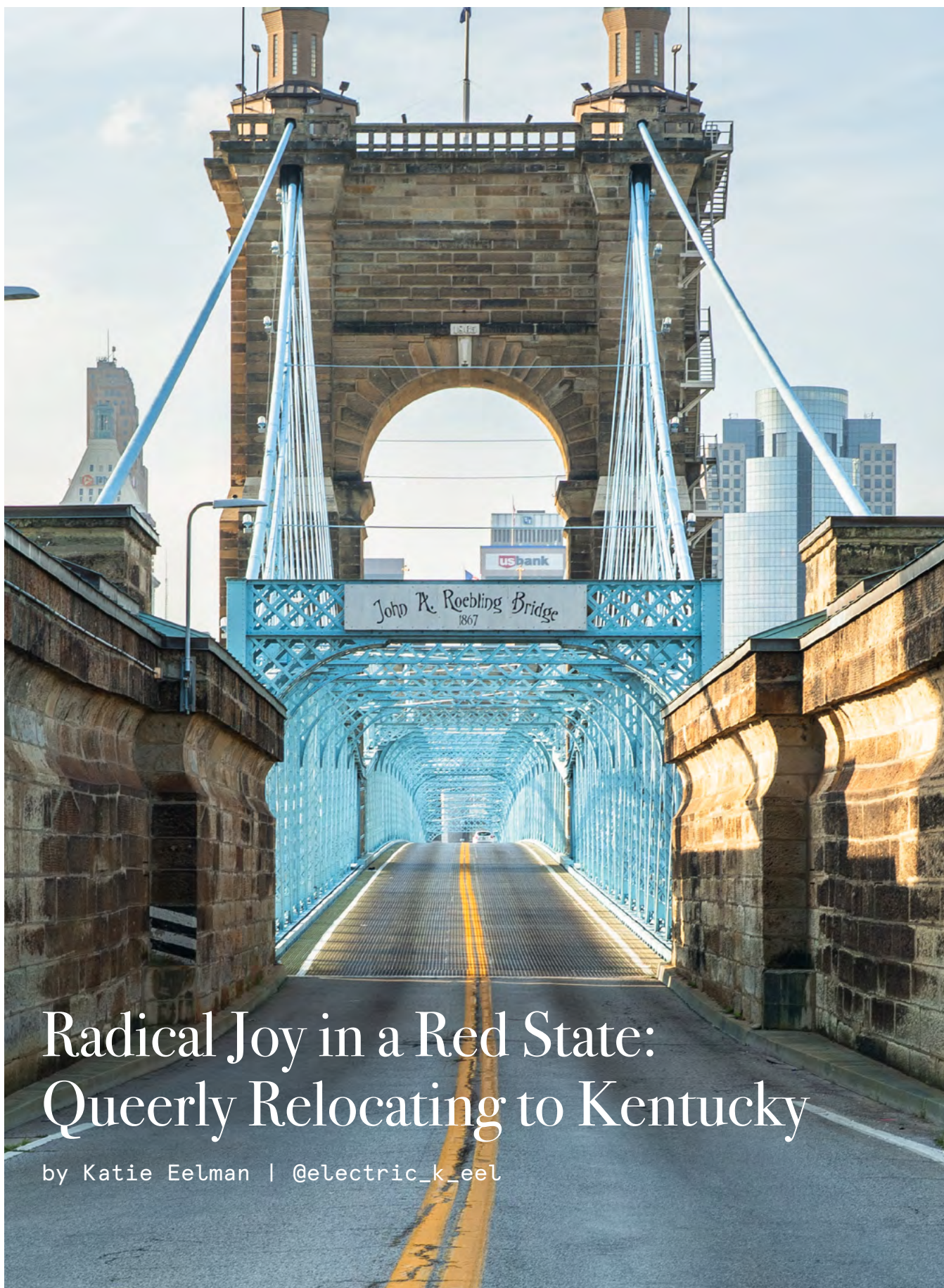
This issue is a love letter to our region, but more than that, it's an invitation. An invitation to come and see river cities through our own eyes. So please enjoy this issue, but also come out and visit.

Welcome to NKY.

Missy Spears
Queer Kentucky Executive Director



Ballpark Feast by Kara Henry | @chunkofchina



Radical Joy in a Red State: Queerly Relocating to Kentucky

by Katie Eelman | @electric_k_eel

Four years ago, I moved from Boston, MA to Covington to be closer to my long-distance partner. I was confident that many of the things soon to be changing in my life were going to bring me joy: I was leaving behind terrible icy winters for a longer summer, a cost of living I couldn't afford on my nonprofit salary for an affordable city, and hundreds of miles of distance between me and the person I wanted to be with. I had just one serious concern: I was a Queer woman moving from a sanctuary city to a red state.

This wasn't my first big move. I had moved to Boston for college in 2009 from a Philadelphia suburb. I had come out as bisexual my junior year of high school when I started dating a girl, and the harassment that came from being openly Queer convinced me that there were only certain cities that would feel comfortable and safe to me. Boston was one of those cities. I wanted to walk down the street holding hands with whomever I wanted, and never catch a second glance. I wanted lesbian bars and book clubs, concerts full of Queers, a community built on something shared, and so many gay friends.

For a while, Boston was a welcome change. I attended Emerson College where being Queer was basically the norm. The Duck Boats that toured the historical downtown would joke about the "chain smoking bisexuals" that the college

churned out, and I was proud to represent. I lived with my girlfriend, and we were rarely bothered. But after college and as time went on, my Queer identity felt like a practice that was only personal. I had no community in Massachusetts. It's not that Boston wasn't gay-friendly. Massachusetts was the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. There are Pride flags on the buildings, Queer-owned businesses, and legislative protection. But I felt isolated from anything Queer and bigger than myself. There were two gay bars accessible to me, and both were frequented solely by gay men and straight bachelorette parties. When I did try to make Queer friends in public spaces, I found myself challenged. As a super feminine bisexual cis woman who dates men, I felt I had to come out again and again with every new introduction. I grew tired of it. It almost felt as though part of me had disappeared into the safety of a sanctuary city. When I decided to leave Massachusetts for Kentucky, I was resolved to find people and places that would make me feel safe and seen. I was only worried that it wouldn't happen.

Ahead of my move and in the depths of COVID-19 quarantine, I joined Lex, a social app for Queer people. I was surprised by how many folks reached out in response to my post about moving to the area and looking for friends. I started

chatting with a fellow East Coast transplant who was living in Newport. While still living in Boston, I joined her Northern Kentucky Queer book club, and attended my first meeting on Zoom. Even if I had just this one Queer friend and this little Queer book club, I thought, I would be OK.

When I arrived, my new friend took me to what I can only describe as a gay bagel shop. If I have this one Queer friend, this little Queer book club, and this Queer-ass bagel shop, I will definitely be OK, I thought.

But Kentucky kept opening to me. In Covington, I became an organizer of the book club I joined, and it grows a little bit each month with members of varied age, gender, and orientation. Folks join from rural areas north of Cincinnati and south of Newport. We have all shown up for each other during hard times, even though we meet just once a month. I live two blocks away from an intersection where the pedestrian crosswalks are painted as rainbows, and gay bars face off on the corners. Even closer to home, my block has a strong Queer contingent, and we are a small community within our larger one: we are pet sitters, parcel carriers, diligent watchmen, and well-wishers, checking in with regularity.

It's not just Covington that has proven welcoming—my first trip to Louisville showed me



even more. At Revelry Gallery I spent nearly an hour admiring the art and wares from local artists, a huge number of whom were Queer. There I picked up the first print edition of *Queer Kentucky*. I was overjoyed to find a publication dedicated to Queer stories in the state. I had never seen such a thing, certainly not in Pennsylvania or Massachusetts where I'd lived before. The stories inside were inspiring in their diversity of voices. In Louisville I learned about the Kentuckiana Pride festival. I coveted a sweater from Crybaby, whose focus on community safety and harm reduction — in addition to their gorgeous chain-stitch pieces — felt like an answer to a question I couldn't name.

Some time later, I finally got to explore Lexington and ended the night with a drag show at the Bar Complex, a huge gay nightclub. Bar Complex felt entirely too good to be true: in all my years dancing and drinking in Boston, there had never been a place that felt so close to home.

In all of these towns and all of these spaces, I've been greeted with a smile. I have been looked after and I have looked after others. I have not even been on the receiving end of a sidelong glance when I enter a Queer event with a straight date. In Kentucky, I feel invited by my community to celebrate my Queerness for longer than the month of June.

My position is unique, and I will not suggest that Kentucky, or any place in America right now, is not a dangerous place to be Queer—especially for folks who are also of color or are immigrants. But I often wonder if adversity has a strengthening effect on the community. Perhaps when the government would like to erase our existence, we are less likely to take one another for granted. We resist by welcoming one another. There is nothing more Queer than an insistence on being ungovernable, and in Kentucky we are. I am thankful that we are here to see each other, to fight for each other, and to rejoice in one another. ♦



Don't Dream It, Be It at The Carnegie

by Richie Goff | @richiegoff



Photo by Mikki Schaffner | @mikkischaffner

Since the inception of theatre, the stage has been a place for the expression of the human experience in its purest form. From comedy to tragedy, we learn what it means to be human by watching actors embody characters who reflect different pieces of ourselves. But sometimes we find as Queer people that we don't find ourselves reflected in traditional stories. Luckily, Covington has a professional theatre looking to explore these stories and "open hearts and minds in ways nothing else can."

The Carnegie is a theatre, gallery, and educational space dedicated to the power of the arts, producing shows that reflect its community. Last year's *The Rocky Horror Show* was one of their best-selling shows in its history, with more than half the attendees visiting The Carnegie for the first time. This was due to an exceptional, colorful production and the star power of Dusty Ray Bottoms, a RuPaul's Drag Race girl and Louisvillian, and Pam Kravetz, a Cincinnati artist, activist, and icon.

Most may not think of Covington as a hot spot for queer theatre, but The Carnegie's Theatre Director Tyler Gabbard says, "Covington exemplifies this great intersection of tradition and transformation. It's a city with deep roots and a bold, creative identity. There's a vibrant Queer community here that deserves to see themselves reflected on stage as the complex, powerful, joyful humans we are. By centering Queer stories, we're building a space where people feel seen, celebrated, and safe."

Past shows have included *Kinky Boots*, *RENT*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, and most recently *The Color Purple*, all featuring different facets of Queerness that Gabbard has been intentional about exploring. In fact, the 2025-2026 season features a Queer person on the writing team for every musical. Next season touts *La Cage Aux Folles*, which will be the first professional production in Greater Cincinnati. "It's glittery and has a chorus of drag queens and a big, brassy Broadway

score," Gabbard says, "but it's ultimately this really sweet, honest story about family."

This year's season—along with *Always... Patsy Cline*, *Grease*, and *Anything Goes*—includes *The Rocky Horror Show* for the second year in a row, so everyone has the chance to do the Time Warp... again! Dusty Ray Bottoms will be stepping back into the role of the sweet transvestite Dr. Frank-n-Furter, which had been a dream role for the revered drag queen. "I've wanted to play Frank for years," Dusty Ray Bottoms reminisces, "and I'm honestly glad it didn't happen until now. Pursuing a career in theatre and acting eventually led me into the world of drag, which is its own form of theatre. So being able to bring everything I've learned as a drag queen to this role, to really drag Frank up, was incredibly fulfilling."

The Rocky Horror Show is so much more than a Queer-affirming world played out on stage; it's something that extends to the audience as well—call-and-response moments, props

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Being Queer means having the ability to see the world not just as it is, but as it could be.”



for audience members to use, and the allowance of out-of-this-world costumes have all contributed to making *Rocky Horror* a Queer cult classic for over 50 years. (Side note: I grew up going to *Rocky Horror* at Baxter Avenue Theatre in Louisville, and nothing felt more authentic than seeing a weird 70's movie at midnight in nothing but underwear and body glitter). At its core, *Rocky Horror* is a world of possibility.

Gabbard says, "I often think about Queerness in relation to possibility. Being Queer means having the ability to see the world not just as it is, but as it could be. I'm certain this comes from the long history of Queer people having to fight to claim our place in the world. We envision it and then we make it so."

The Rocky Horror Show runs October 24 – November 2, 2025, and you can find information for all their productions on The Carnegie's website. ♦





LGBTQ+-Affirming Businesses Help Shape Northern Kentucky's Growing Inclusive Community

by Evan Millward | @evanmillward

Northern Kentucky is the gateway to the Bourbon Trail, full of historic river cities, and has an identity all its own. Some Queer-owned and Queer-affirming businesses have been around for decades, others have just opened. They all show a growing community of LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs and increasing support for Queer spaces.

This isn't an exhaustive list, so let us know your favorite Queer-owned or -affirming businesses in Northern Kentucky!



Roebling Books

306 Greenup Street - Covington

601 Overton Street - Newport

Roebling Books & Coffee, with welcoming locations in Covington and Newport, is a cozy, LGBTQ-friendly bookstore and café that truly bridges books, beans and being. Both locations host an array of community-driven events: Drag Storytimes, meet the author events featuring LGBTQ+ writers like Nico Lang, book-club discussions, and celebrations like Bookstore Romance Day. It's a warm spot to browse thoughtfully curated titles—especially LGBTQ+ genres—sip fair-trade organic coffee, connect, and feel fully seen.

roeblingbooks.com



Creative House of Art and Design

609 Main Street - Covington

On Covington's Mainstrasse, there's an arts store that features classes, summer camps, drag drawing events, and a secret bar. "Mr." Chad Cruz opened the store in December 2020 to be the space he wanted as a kid and found he still wanted as an adult: a space where people could be creative and be themselves. Even when the store isn't open, Cruz and his team can be found leading art classes around the region.

creativehousead.com



Rekas Butchery and Delicatessen

401 Scott Street - Covington

Established in fall 2024, this woman-owned butcher shop set out to fill a void in the river cities. All the meat comes from a 90-mile radius, with a specialty in Ohio-raised wagyu. All the produce is local too. Shelbi Nation and her wife Ashley bring their years of experience running their sister shop, the Wyoming Meat Market, to this and bring an inclusive, knowledgeable butcher to the growing river cities.

instagram.com/rekas_butcher



Wagz n Pawz Pet Supplies

609 York Street - Newport

Jaron Byrum saw an opportunity in 2024 to continue to develop his and his husband's neighborhood while pursuing a dream of opening a pet store and grooming business. Specializing in customer service, the store offers private shopping for anxious dogs, human-grade treats, free food delivery, custom orders, a rewards/loyalty program, a self-wash station, and the brand new I-to-I grooming.

shopwagz.com



The Crazy Fox Saloon

901 Washington Avenue - Newport

When Carl Fox bought "The Saloon" in 1999, he brought the same philosophy that served him well at the bar he had just sold: Rosie's Tavern in Covington. He calls it an "everybody-bar" because it's neighborhood-focused and accessible (and affordable) to all. The philosophy is based on the belief that walls break down when people get together over a drink. Fox says he has been welcomed in the neighborhood for the past 26 years.



The 859 Taproom

8720 Bankers Street - Florence

A suburban sports bar that flies a Pride flag. Owners Jeff and Mandy Kaplan worked in hospitality for years and dreamed of running their own restaurant: one where everyone feels comfortable and supports every aspect of its community. Inclusion is factored into everything—from the menu to the bar to the workplace culture. That includes support for the Queer community and closing for NKY Pride so the staff can be part of the parade and festivities.

the859taproom.com



Piper's Ice Cream Bar

520 W 6th Street - Covington

In a prime location near Goebel Park's festivities, Piper's opened as a cafe on Oktoberfest weekend 2012. Since 2020, owner Chip Adkins and his husband have doubled down on frozen treats, expanding their menu this year to include vegan ice cream. They get customers of all stripes, but keep a rainbow painting up year round as a sign the cafe is a safe space where everyone is welcome.

pipersicecreambar.com



Rosie's Tavern

643 Bakewell Street - Covington

Affordable drinks in an approachable setting. Rosie's was built as a bar in 1869 and has been a welcoming space since the 1990s. Owner Dianne Gamble says she's seen the area get more accepting of a neighborhood bar that's a staple in the Queer community. It's considered one of the friendliest bars in the area, and it's been around long enough to outlast any naysayers.

rosiestavernky.com



Revival Vintage Bottle Shop and Bar

614 Madison Avenue - Covington

You can taste bourbon history inside this two-story love letter to Kentucky's native spirit. Started in a smaller location in August 2020, Revival Vintage Spirits provides an intimate and affordable (and legal) way to take part in the booming vintage and rare spirits craze. It's a combination of passions for co-owner Shannon Smith, who started her law firm in 2013 and got interested in vintage spirits a few years later. She says the goal is to make it accessible to more people - and the store has been getting international attention ever since.

revivalky.com



Artmarkit

1131 Holman Street - Covington

Former middle school art teacher Katie Kit Threet calls her business a creative reuse hub and inclusive third space. It's equal parts a secondhand art supply store, classroom, creator space, and event space. Her approach to private events and workshops is all personal, letting kids and customers decide what type of art to create. She says her eight years in the classroom showed her that children need safe, affordable spaces to be creative, and small businesses can help build that community.

artmarkitcov.com



Jerry's Jug House

414 E 7th Street - Newport

More than just a neighborhood bar, Jerry's has been a package wine and liquor store in the East Row since the 1930s. An extensive renovation in 2019 revitalized the staple, which co-owner Mark Ramler says brought much of the neighborhood back. He says the managing philosophy is to be a bar that is welcoming to everyone. The bar is also featured on NKY's B-Line bourbon trail.

jerrysjughouse.com



Galerie Candy

3380 Langley Drive - Hebron

At age 16, Rick Ross helped his mom's store become the second distributor of Jelly Belly. Now, his company is the 21st largest candy company in the country. Galerie's products can be found in every major retailer, as well as on its own website and colorful outlet store at the company's Hebron facility. Some of its creative confectionery treats and toys feature beloved brands. And all of its products are designed to create smiles, memories, and joy.

galeriecandy.com

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Where else can you still find the perfect old fashioned for ten bucks, only a rainbow crosswalk away from that taxidermied fox you never knew you wanted to buy?”



Bi-Furious by Kyle Kaffman



Big Wigs, Bigger Hearts

Penny Tration and Molly
Moremen Reflect on Drag,
Identity, and Community
in Northern Kentucky



A conversation between Molly Mormon and Penny Tration at Rosie's Tavern

“At Rosie’s Tavern in Covington, local drag icon Penny Tration — a RuPaul’s Drag Race Season 5 alum and founder of Cincinnati’s Cabaret — sat down with fellow entertainer Molly Mormon— Empress XXV and XXVIII of the Imperial Sovereign Queen City Court of the Buckeye Empire, Miss Gay Miami Valley Ohio 2023 and a Northern Kentucky resident—for a candid conversation about life, identity and the region’s Queer culture.

In their discussion, Penny invited Molly to reflect on how her drag persona reclaims parts of herself once suppressed by a strict Mormon upbringing, the evolving art of drag in the Midwest, and the sense of belonging she’s found in Northern Kentucky’s LGBTQ+ community.

Together, their exchange offers a vivid portrait of resilience, creativity and the powerful role drag plays in shaping local queer spaces.”

Penny

I feel like people know who Molly Mormon is on stage, but who does Molly Mormon think Molly Mormon is?

Molly

Molly Mormon is everything that Michael Wilson hated about himself or wasn’t allowed to be growing up Mormon in Utah. It’s taken me forty years to turn that pain and resentment on its head and change it into something I think is pretty special. Molly gives me permission to be confident and display all the beautiful, broken pieces of myself in a way that is fun and fabulous.

Molly gets permission to do the things that Michael can't do working a nine to five in an office. It gives me a chance to step back from that corporate world and let my hair down.

Well, at least the three hairs I have left.

Penny

Ha, all three of them, huh?

Molly

Yes, having so few left helps me glue my wigs down.

But ultimately, when I look at myself holistically, I'm not sure I know how to definitively separate myself into clean, distinct parts. Michael and Molly are two halves that make a whole. They help each other because they are codependent and complement one another.

Penny

Yes, I totally agree. I hear some entertainers talk about their "drag life" versus their "real life" and I don't relate to that. I only have a life.

Molly

True, but I don't think about it in terms of separate lives; drag versus real life. I look at it as two jobs for the same person.

The first time I sat down and spoke to you about doing drag years ago, was in your old studio in Pendleton and I asked how much you loved it and you said, "It's a job."

Penny

It is, that's exactly right!

Molly

And that shocked me, so I doubled down and said, "but you love your job, right?"

And you shot back, "it's my job, do you love your job?"

Now, as I look back on that meeting, more than 13 years later, I have to agree. It's a job. Sure, there are parts of it I truly enjoy, but it's a lot. As an older entertainer, you learn there's so much to this craft. At this point, I've learned I need to track expenses, pay taxes, build connections, invest time and energy and money into my craft. It's not just a hobby or a casual thing I do in my spare time, it's a business that requires a lot of time, effort, and energy.

Penny

So, I know how you ended up here, like logistically, but how is it that you decided Northern Kentucky was it, and where you wanted to be?

Molly

Well, the short answer is that I wanted to say I lived in "the South."

After moving to Cincinnati for work, I lived up in the suburbs in West Chester and hated the commute, then I moved closer to the city, but when it was time again for a change, I knew I wanted to cross the river and move to Kentucky. I figured it

was time to get my Colonel Sanders on. I mean, being from Utah, KFC was my only frame of reference for Kentucky.

Penny

For you, was moving to this part of the country something you wanted to do? Was it an escape or more a situation of convenience?

Molly

Honestly, a little bit of both. I graduated college at the tail end of the recession and had a really hard time finding a job. When I finally found one, it wasn't great but it was for a huge national company.

Shortly [after] I decided to come out to my family, and it went really poorly. I knew I needed to leave Utah, so I applied for an internal role within the company and two months later I was sitting on the 20th floor of the Kroger building in downtown Cincinnati.

At the time, I told myself that even if it didn't work out, I was close enough to several other cities in Ohio and Kentucky and could even go up to Chicago or to the East Coast for other work opportunities if I wanted. Now, I've built a life here that I love, I'm not sure I'd ever leave.

Penny

What is your sense of the direction that the art of drag is taking now, especially in this area?

Molly

My first experience seeing drag of any kind was on television. Growing up, I would watch re-runs of “The Dame Edna Experience” with my Scottish mother. One of my favorite movies was *Mrs. Doubtfire*, in fact, I went as her for Halloween in the eighth grade. I’ve always been fascinated with the idea of transformation. Like you said, it’s almost magical, but it’s always been more than just the physical transformation for me, it’s also about the ability to leverage drag as an outlet to be more than who others said I was capable of being. More funny, more outrageous, freer to simply be more than the box I was put in as a young Mormon boy in the suburbs of Salt Lake City.

As I grew into myself and decided to pursue drag in my late 20s, I realized that I wanted to embody the traditional old school style of the artform. You know, the over exaggerated hair, breasts, and makeup. Along

with the sequins and sparkle, I wanted to be glamorous and campy. After seeing you and your cast at my first in-person show at The Cabaret all those years ago, I got to see how dazzling drag could be and I knew I was hooked.

One of the hardest things I’ve had to learn over the last 12 or 13 years of my career is that even if I don’t think I could do someone else’s style or type of drag, if they can do it, and it fulfills their need to be artistic and express themselves, that’s a fabulous thing for them.

And as a person who produces a lot of different types of drag shows for a multitude of different audiences, I think booking a diverse cast is the best way to marry the art of drag for the entertainer and the experience of drag for the customer.

I don’t necessarily have to like, understand, or participate in it, but as long as a new drag artist respects what I do, I can respect

what they do, and I think that that’s the direction that drag really needs to go here and in general.

Penny

Driving to Rosie’s here in Northern Kentucky for today’s interview was pretty incredible. I haven’t been to Covington in at least five years, probably before the pandemic, and I was amazed at how much it has changed. It just feels different. Has that been your experience too?

Molly

I’ve only lived here for about three years, but I can tell you I’ve come to love this community for two different reasons.

One is because it’s really and truly a regional melting pot. We get the influence of, you know, more southern cities and sensibilities, along with the stalwart midwestern influence, along with a hint of East Coast attitude.

And, secondly, what I have found here more than anywhere else I’ve lived, is that Northern Kentucky has the best sense of community that I’ve felt since leaving Utah. It’s better here than anywhere else I’ve found during my time living in the area. It’s something that I’ve really come to cherish.

Penny

We are about an hour and a half from four or five really large regional cities. What is your advice for other entertainers

“Molly gives me permission to be confident and display all the beautiful, broken pieces of myself in a way that is fun and fabulous.”

who may want to come and perform in Cincinnati?

Molly

This industry is about relationships.

Like any other business, it's about how you carry yourself and the relationships you build along the way. But it's more than just reaching out to a show director, it's about how you act in a dressing room, how you treat your bar staff and a venue's management. The way you treat others in our community can, more often than not, determine your success in this industry. Building positive relationships with others helps you build connections. So, if you want to work somewhere, you better be willing to get out and support the venue and its entertainers and staff who work there, too.

Penny

What do you wish people outside of the Queer community understood about drag?

Molly

The art of drag has literally been around thousands of years, right?

It doesn't matter how much you pound on your bible behind the pulpit, or get on your conservative news station, you cannot change history as much as you wish to re-write it.

Humanity has been watching men perform as women in nearly every culture and every

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Northern Kentucky has the best sense of community that I've felt since leaving Utah.”

age. Whether it was ancient Greek plays, to Kabuki and Shakespeare, women's roles were played by men.

Today we blur the lines a bit more, with both drag queens and kings being played by people of all genders, but the results are the same.

We are here to do a job, and our job is to entertain audiences. Who those audiences are determines the type of drag or performance we typically do, but it's all to the same end.

Art is meant to be consumed, and I've said it for years, there are as many different ways to do drag as there are artists who put on a face full of makeup and walk out on stage.

We've been around forever, and we're not going anywhere.

Penny

You mentioned drag today allows for a lot more flexibility with gender. How has your relationship with gender changed since you started doing drag?

Molly

That's a loaded question. I've always been drawn more to women. Not really romantically, but in my platonic relationships. I always felt jealous of how they could express themselves physically in so many more ways than the traditional, masculine man traditionally can. For years, I yearned for a way to express myself as beautifully as they did.

Now, the longer I do drag, the more I realize that there isn't a clear delineation between my gender expression. There are some months I'm in drag five nights a week. I think it's impossible not to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate my own gender and how I choose to express it when I'm spending half my time in women's clothes.

Ultimately, I've landed on identifying as genderqueer. Sometimes I want to feel beautiful and glamorous and drag allows me to do that. Other times I enjoy feeling more masculine. I hate the term non-binary; it sounds too mechanical. I am not a computer running on binary code, but being genderqueer allows a lot more fluidity and flexibility in my



identity and expression.

Penny

Drag has been that opportunity for self-discovery for years. A lot of our trans friends started doing drag as an outlet for their self-expression and used it to springboard into their authentic

selves.

Molly

Exactly, it's almost like that outdated expression for gay folks who came out in stages. We used to hear people say, "Bi now, gay later," right? But I think drag can actually serve as that

steppingstone for those who are yearning to transition into their authentic selves. It's not that way for everyone, but I'm glad it's there to help those who need it.

Penny

Before we close, is there anything else that you would like to say to our friends across Kentucky?

Molly

Most of the shows I host end with a short message. It's what ultimately became *Gay Church*, a show I've hosted off and on for years at various venues.

RuPaul ends every episode of *Drag Race* by saying, "if you can't love yourself, how the hell are you going to love someone else."

I think that's bullshit. I believe it is a lot easier to love other people than it is to love yourself. I am living proof of that.

So, my message to all the Queer folks in Kentucky and anyone else who reads this, is that you are loved, you are worthy of everything you yearn for, and you are perfect.

I know that can be hard to believe, but if you need a reminder next time you see me, let me know and I will tell you how fucking fabulous you are. ♦



ALPHABET SOUP by Kara Henry | @chunkofchina



Bourbon & Belonging: Midwestern Lesbian's Version

by Kelsey Ference AKA The Midwestern Lesbian | @midwestern.lesbianeel

During the first week of October in 2024, my partner Caitlin and I had the pleasure of experiencing the first official Queer Bourbon Week, Bourbon & Belonging with Queer Kentucky. The week was filled with different events including a kick-off party at New Riff Distilling in Newport, a Bourbon & Smoke tasting tour at The Standard Covington, a Queer prohibition drag show and dance party at Leapin' Lizard with Midwestern Lesbian, and a rooftop drag brunch at Opal Rooftop.

These were just the events that we were able to enjoy throughout the week in Northern Kentucky—Bourbon & Belonging offered so much for everyone! There were plenty of free events, sober friendly experiences, VIP tours, dance parties, dinner pairings and more!

The week-long bourbon event spread throughout the state of Kentucky. Since Caitlin and I are based in Cincinnati, we are right over the river from Northern Kentucky, and we got to experience a variety of events in Newport and Covington.

Queer Bourbon Week started at New Riff Distilling for the official kick-off party. Featuring delicious bourbon cocktails, light bites, and a taste of New Riff's Queer Kentucky special batch bourbon created specifically for Bourbon & Belonging. The evening was filled with great vibes, good

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people, and flavorful bourbon. This was a unique experience that offered something new to LGBTQ+ folks, a glimpse into the world of bourbon that is often taken over by the straight, male community.

As we walked through The Aquifer Room, we saw people engaging with one another, talking with New Riff distillers and learning about their specialty bourbon. Each of the employees were knowledgeable about the different types of bourbon they were offering, which cocktails would be best for us, and the proper way to enjoy a glass of bourbon. As a bourbon enjoyer, I wanted a cocktail that was approachable, but with a bourbon flavor that allowed me to explore the different layers of tastes. Caitlin wanted something that was smooth, flavorful, and easier to drink. New Riff had a wide

variety of options for everyone to enjoy, and every option was delicious.

Next on our Bourbon & Belonging agenda was the Bourbon & Smoke tasting event at The Standard in Covington. As you walk into The Standard, you’re greeted by a few different bourbon options from Heaven Hill Distillery, Elijah Craig, Evan Williams, Old Forester, and more. Each brand had a variety of options of bourbons with different flavors and levels of intensity. While the bourbon brands had folks talking us through each option they had, they offered flavor profiles, tasting notes, and history of each bottle they had with them.

We also visited the bar which had a variety of cocktail options, made with the bourbon brands on site. I had a sweet honey cocktail that was smooth, filled with bourbon flavor and a hint



of sweetness—perfect to sip on while enjoying The Standard’s large patio. Each attendee also got to enjoy a buffet of delicious food, made by The Standard’s kitchen. We devoured smoked pulled pork with a bourbon glaze that left me wanting more—I am still dreaming about that sandwich. Bourbon & Smoke was a great event to relax and network, learn some new things about bourbon, and try some amazing food and cocktails.

To start off the weekend,

we hosted Gays & Dolls: A Queer Prohibition Party at Leapin’ Lizard. Imagine you’re transported back to the 1920s, where bourbon is illegal, fringe is the latest fashion trend, and jazz is mandatory. As you walk into Leapin’ Lizard, candles fill the tables, bourbon is flowing, music is playing and drag performers are dancing throughout the room.

We were joined by Lola Vuiton, Delusiona Grandeur, and Manuka Honey Stix-Chimera for a drag show straight from the

flapper era. After the show, the dance party took over the floor, with a perfect mixture of jazzy 20s tunes and modern upbeat bass. By the end of the night, we were out of breath from dancing the night away.

Closing out Bourbon & Belonging, we headed to Opal Rooftop for a drag brunch, hosted by drag performer P.H. Dee and music by DJ Bobby G. The weather was perfect to sit out, take in the views, and enjoy performances by local drag queens.



everyone. Bourbon & Belonging showed me that the Queer community wants to enjoy the things that we may not always be welcomed to. The bourbon world may be an intimidating place, but Queer Kentucky got rid of the intimidation and said, “you’re welcome here, grab a glass and enjoy some bourbon with us.” I’m so grateful to have been able to experience the first year of Queer Bourbon Week, and I can’t wait to see what’s to come for this year. Attend Bourbon & Belonging Queer Bourbon Week October 3rd to October 5th throughout Kentucky this year, visit <https://www.bourbonandbelonging.com/> to learn more. ♦

After a week of drinking, dancing, learning, and mingling, this was the perfect end to Queer Bourbon Week. Each table got up and went through the breakfast buffet that was hands down, the best breakfast buffet we have ever had. Caitlin and I still talk about how good it was almost a year later. As we enjoyed our food, P.H. Dee started the drag show, alongside Manuka Honey Stix-Chimera, Jossie G, and Alana Reign. Each performer brought their own art to each of their performances,

doing jump splits and reveals to soulful ballads with flowing gowns to add drama to the number. Every second of this drag brunch was entertaining, from the drag show, to the food & cocktails, to the music. I left with a full stomach, a nice buzz, and a smile on my face.

Bourbon & Belonging offered so much more than just what we experienced in Northern Kentucky. With four different cities and regions participating in the events, there is no doubt that there is something for

