



# First Friday News & Views

Iowa's LGBTQ+ Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club

February 2026 | Volume 31 | Issue 2

**Next Meeting  
Friday,  
February 6  
7:00 a.m.**



**Location  
Hoyt Sherman  
15th & Woodland  
Des Moines**



**Speaker  
Tom Vilsack  
Former U.S. Secretary  
of Agriculture &  
Iowa Governor**

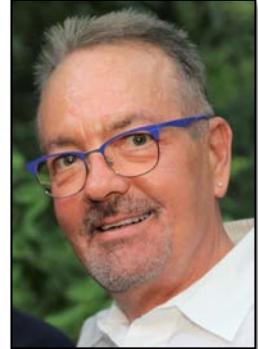


**Website  
[ffbciaowa.org](http://ffbciaowa.org)**



## Eyes on the Prize

by Byron Huff, Board President



I hope you can join us Friday, February 6, to hear Tom Vilsack who is an American politician and attorney currently serving as the CEO of the World Food Prize Foundation. The following is a little history of the World Food Prize and its connection to Iowa.

The World Food Prize is often described as the "Nobel Prize for food and agriculture," honoring individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to improving the quality, quantity, or availability of food around the world. While its impact is global, the prize is uniquely and intentionally rooted in Iowa, reflecting the state's agricultural heritage and its long-standing influence on food policy, science, and innovation.

The World Food Prize was founded in 1986 by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, an Iowa native and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Borlaug grew up on a farm near Cresco, Iowa, during the Great Depression, an experience that profoundly shaped his understanding of hunger and food insecurity. His later work (known as the Green Revolution) helped develop high-yield, disease-resistant wheat varieties that dramatically increased food production in countries such as Mexico, India, and Pakistan, saving an estimated billion lives from starvation.

After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, Borlaug sought to create a lasting institution that would recognize agricultural achievement with the same prestige afforded to advances in peace, science, and literature. The World Food Prize was his answer: a global award that elevated food security as a central moral and political issue.

Iowa's connection to the World Food Prize is both symbolic and practical. As one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world, Iowa sits at the crossroads of farming, research, agribusiness and public policy. Borlaug believed that Iowa's agricultural expertise, along with its ethic of stewardship and innovation, made it an ideal home for an institution dedicated to feeding the world.

In 2000, the prize found a permanent home in Des Moines, when former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad helped secure the relocation of the organization and its annual ceremony to the state. Since then, Iowa has served as the physical and intellectual hub of the World Food Prize.

Each October, the World Food Prize Laureate Award Ceremony is held in the Iowa State Capitol, a deliberate choice that underscores the role of public policy in addressing hunger. By hosting the ceremony in a working seat of government, the prize emphasizes that ending hunger is not only a scientific or humanitarian challenge, but also a political one.

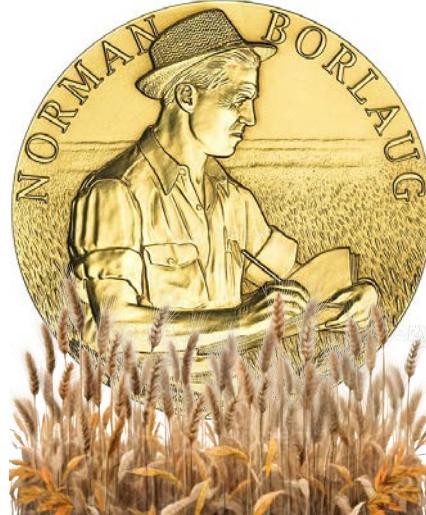
[continued on page 2]



## [“Eyes on the Prize” continued from page 1]

The ceremony draws international leaders, scientists, farmers, students, and advocates to Des Moines, temporarily transforming Iowa’s capital into a global meeting place for food security discussions.

Another key Iowa connection is the **Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates**, located in downtown Des Moines. Housed in a restored historic library building, the Hall serves as the headquarters of the World Food Prize Foundation. It is both a museum and an educational center, highlighting the achievements of laureates and showcasing the history of agricultural innovation.



The building itself reflects Iowa’s investment in the prize not only as an annual event, but as a year-round institution dedicated to learning, dialogue, and inspiration.

Beyond ceremonies and buildings, Iowa’s universities, farmers, and research institutions play an active role in the World Food Prize ecosystem. Iowa State University and other academic partners contribute research and expertise in areas such as crop science, sustainability, and soil health. Iowa farmers regularly engage with visiting international delegations, offering real-world perspectives on production, conservation and rural economies.

Through the World Food Prize Global Youth Institute, thousands of high school and college students (many from Iowa) are introduced to global hunger issues and encouraged to pursue careers in agriculture, science, and international development.



We are grateful to FFBC Vice President, **Ken Hanson**, for introducing our January speaker, **Matt Russell**. Matt is the Executive Director of Iowa Farmers Union, an organization in which he has been active for over 20 years.

As always, thanks to **David Wilfahrt** for doing an incredible job in managing FFBC’s finances. We are also grateful to **Nicholas Williams** for overseeing FFBC’s Microsoft IT infrastructure. Finally, thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter and website editor. **Thank you to all our newsletter contributors!**

The **deadline** for the **March newsletter** will be **February 23**.



If you have something of interest that you would like to share, just type it up and email it to Wade ([wadecpetersen@gmail.com](mailto:wadecpetersen@gmail.com)) by the deadline.

**Fundraising efforts** are ongoing to fund our 2026 scholarship program. Since 1997, we have awarded **\$555,000** for **223** scholarships to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ+ issues in their schools and local communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution** online or by sending a check.

A **special thank-you** to FFBC members and donors who have generously chosen to designate First Friday Breakfast Club as a beneficiary through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. Contributions made through the United Way are tax deductible since FFBC is an eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit recipient of such funding designations.



# February Speaker



## Tom Vilsack



**Tom Vilsack** is an American politician and attorney currently serving as the CEO of the World Food Prize Foundation, a position he assumed on March 1, 2025. A prominent figure in American agricultural policy, Vilsack served two non-consecutive terms as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, first under President Barack Obama (2009–2017) and later under President Joe Biden (2021–2025). During his second tenure, he focused on expanding climate-smart agriculture, enhancing school nutrition standards, and increasing competition in meat processing.

Prior to his federal service, Vilsack was a two-term Governor of Iowa (1999–2007), where he was the first Democrat to hold the office in over 30 years. His political career began in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where he served as mayor and later as a state senator. Between his Cabinet roles, he served as the president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council from 2017 to 2021. He holds a bachelor's degree from Hamilton College and a law degree from Albany Law School.

PRIDE SPORTS LEAGUE OF CENTRAL IOWA

SMALL TEAMS BIG PLAYS

3v3 MONDAY NIGHTS ARE FOR BUCKETS

**BASKETBALL LEAGUE**

**MONDAYS** @ WILLKIE HOUSE 6:15-8:30 PM

900 17<sup>TH</sup> ST DES MOINES [FEB 9 - MAR 16] **\$30**

[ FREE AGENTS & TEAMS WELCOME ]

SOCIAL/BEGINNER & INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED DIVISIONS AVAILABLE



"It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong."

Voltaire





Feb. 20, 2026  
**ASPIRE TO INSPIRE**  
ERG CONFERENCE

HOSPITALITY AS LEADERSHIP | DRAKE OLMPSTED CENTER



WORKSHOP TRACKS FOR ALL:  
Building Foundations: Designed for up-and-coming ERGs and young professionals  
Shifting Momentum: For established ERGs who are looking for the next step  
Leading and Legacy: For executives and seasoned ERG leaders who are looking to elevate ERG impact at the highest level of organizational leadership.

Roundtable Discussions  
Networking Events



BISHOP WHITE  
Insurance & Financial Services, Inc.

Iowa Safe Schools is proud to host the **Aspire to Inspire ERG (Employee Resource Group) Conference** as part of their mission to support LGBTQ youth across Iowa. Many of our students frequently ask how they can find supportive and affirming employers here in Iowa. At the same time, private employers often seek guidance on how to meaningfully support Iowa's LGBTQ youth, and position themselves as potential next-steps for them.

Through this conference, Iowa Safe Schools aims to help Iowa's companies reach their fullest potential by integrating equitable workplace practices into their foundation, empowering ERGs to wield collective power through shared goals, and guiding employers to be forward-thinking in their approach to DEI. *Together, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ individuals in Iowa and beyond.*



**Location:** Drake University, Olmsted Center  
2875 University Ave, Des Moines, IA 50311

**When:** 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Friday February 20, 2026

Breakfast, snacks, lunch, and parking passes will be provided

**Adult Registration:** \$150 (access to all conference workshops, keynote sessions, and welcome mixer on Thursday Feb. 19.)



This Valentine's season, join Capital City Pride for a special private event at the Des Moines Children's Museum from 5-7:30 p.m. on Friday, February 6.

Come and celebrate the many ways love brings us together at Love Makes a Family, a family-friendly event filled with creativity, connection, and fun for all ages! From building LEGO homes to enjoying story time, each activity station invites kids and adults alike to share, imagine, and express what love means to them. Join us for an evening that reminds us all that families are built by love, in every shape and form.

This is a private after-hours event for our community. Register online. Cost is only \$2/child and \$3/adult.



**"Woke is not merely a state of awareness; it is a force that dismantles the walls of ignorance and complacency. It is the unwavering commitment to truth, justice, and equality, igniting a flame within the hearts of those who seek a better world. To be woke is to rise above the shadows of indifference and confront the uncomfortable realities that permeate our society."**

- D.L. Lewis



# 30 Years of Logos



January 1996 –  
June 1996



July 1996 –  
February 2005



March 2005 –  
May 2012



June 2012 –  
October 2020



November 2020 –  
Present

## The Story of the FFBC Logo

In 1620, Sir John Melton wrote: “If a man walking in the fields find any four-leaved grass, he shall in a small while after find some good thing.”

LGBTQ+ people are like four-leaf clovers.

We are perfectly natural and authentic, just with a beautiful variation. Whether you search one out or simply discover one, your life is supposed to be luckier with fortunate connections.

Some believe that each leaf represents a different virtue: faith, hope, love, and luck. If so, we think this is exactly what you will find in LGBTQ+ people.

Each of us is like a four-leaf clover.





## Medicare

by Jonathan Wilson

I'm of a certain age – 81 – and I'm on Medicare. I have been for 15 years or so.

I grew up learning basic math like adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing. Something that I particularly disliked were what we called "story problems." Those were narrative descriptions of a hypothetical fact situation, and the challenge was to come up with an answer, given the stated facts. The student had to sort through the given facts, and construct an equation that would generate the correct answer using basic math skills. On reflection, I reluctantly recognize that they were important challenges/lessons; they forced students to demonstrate a "real life" understanding in applying math and equations.

And, that brings me to Medicare. I regularly get a report from Medicare detailing a record of medical procedures that I've received. Listed are various healthcare providers, some of which I recognize and some that I don't. Our medical system is broken. I can have a doctor's appointment and that is listed, but there are also other providers listed that I've never heard of: the radiologist, the anesthesiologist, and any others involved in the appointment. I've been reduced to ignoring the identified healthcare providers and merely confirming that they are all billing for the same date as my doctor's appointment.

Beside each healthcare provider's name are columns; one saying what was charged, one saying what Medicare approved, one saying what Medicare actually paid, one saying



First Friday Breakfast Club Founder **Jonathan Wilson**

what my supplement plan actually paid, and one saying what I may owe for the billed services, if anything. The most recent report that I received actually said that Medicare approved MORE than the stated medical service that was billed, and Medicare still didn't pay the amount billed. Go figure.

The problem is that the numbers don't add up. Basic math cannot be applied to double-check anything on the reports. I assume that the billing entity simply takes the underpayment as a loss, but who knows, and it leaves me to wonder why the healthcare providers consistently bill more than Medicare is willing to approve. Presumably those charges are being billed to those receiving healthcare services but who don't have Medicare looking out for them.

I'm reduced to checking one column on the monthly reports – do I owe anything. It's almost always \$0. Beyond that, getting those reports is meaningless. It won't discover fraud, and it won't test your basic math skills, story problems or otherwise. The reports are a waste of paper and needlessly killing countless trees.



Board Members Ken Hanson and Phil Williams represented FFBC at Des Moines Public Schools' Multi-Language Career Expo on Saturday, January 17, at North High School.



Pride Book Club

Wednesday, Feb. 18, 6 p.m.  
Shelf Love DSM

CAPITAL CITY PRIDE  
SPRING 2026 SERIES  
WEDNESDAYS | 6-7 P.M.

OUTDRAWN by Deanna Grey

OUTDRAWN A RIVALS TO LOVERS ROMANCE  
DEANNA GREY

SPRING 2026 SERIES  
WEDNESDAYS | 6-7 P.M.  
OUTDRAWN  
Heated Rivalry  
Pageboy  
Elliot Page  
We Burn Darker  
Fire



**“You don’t fall in love with the gender. You fall in love with the person.”**

\* Andy Biersack



## National LGBTQ+ Calendar

- February 7: National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
- Week After Valentine’s Day: Aromantic Spectrum Awareness Week
- February 28: HIV is Not a Crime Awareness Day



## FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to all members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies.

We welcome **EVERYONE**, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Meetings are held the first Friday of every month at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines.

### Membership Rates

The following rates help us to cover food and facility costs:

**Annual Rate: \$180  
(12 consecutive meetings)**

**Quarterly Rate: \$48  
(3 consecutive meetings)**

**Month-by-Month: \$18**

**First-Time or  
One-Time Attendee: \$15**

**Full-Time Student: \$8**

**No charge to attend  
via Zoom**

### Payment Options

We accept cash, checks, or **credit cards** at the meeting.



### Meeting Schedule

6:30 a.m. - Doors open  
6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service begins  
7:00 a.m. - Meeting begins



# AN LGBTQ+ VOCABULARY TUTORIAL

## Glossary of Terms

### How Well Do You Know LGBTQ+ Vocabulary?

source: [thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/](http://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/)



## PART 1

**advocate** – 1 noun: a person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group. 2 verb: to actively support or plea in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance or educate others.

**agender** – adj.: a person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless.

**ally** – noun: a (typically straight and/or cisgender) person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ+ community. We consider people to be active allies who take action in support and respect of any LGBTQ+ issues or people.

**androgyny** /“an-jrah-jun-ee”/ (androgynous) – 1 noun: a gender expression that has elements of both masculinity and femininity; 2 adj.: occasionally used in place of “intersex” to describe a person with both female and male anatomy, generally in the form “androgynous.”

**androsexual / androphilic** – adj.: being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to men, males, and/or masculinity.

**aromantic** /“ay-ro-man-tic”/ – adj.: experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior. Aromanticism exists on a continuum from people who experience no romantic attraction or have any desire for romantic activities, to those who experience low levels, or romantic attraction only under specific conditions. Many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (see demiromantic). Sometimes abbreviated to “aro” (pronounced like “arrow”).

**asexual** – adj.: experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior. Asexuality exists on a continuum from people who experience no sexual attraction or have any desire for sex, to those who experience low levels, or sexual attraction only under specific conditions. Many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (see demisexual). Sometimes abbreviated to “ace.”

**binder** – noun: undergarment used to alter or reduce the appearance of one’s breasts (worn similarly to how one wears a sports bra). **binding** – adj.: the (sometimes daily) process of wearing a binder. Binding is often used to change the way other’s read/perceive one’s anatomical sex characteristics, and/or as a form of gender expression.

**biological sex** – noun: a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female or male or intersex. Often referred to as simply “sex,” “physical sex,” “anatomical sex,” or specifically as “sex assigned at birth.”

**biphobia** – noun: a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, invisibility, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have or express toward bisexual individuals. Biphobia can come from and be seen within the LGBTQ community as well as straight society. **biphobic** – adj.: used to describe actions, behaviors, or individuals who demonstrate elements of this range of negative attitudes toward bisexual people.

**bisexual** – 1 noun & adj.: a person who experiences attraction to some men and women. 2 adj.: a person who experiences attraction to some people of their gender and another gender. Bisexual attraction does not have to be equally split, or indicate a level of interest that is the same across the genders an individual may be attracted to. Often used interchangeably with “pansexual.”

**butch** – noun & adj.: a person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally, or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.

**cisgender** /“siss-jendur”/ – adj.: a gender description for when someone’s sex assigned at birth and gender identity correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, and identifies as a man). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not transgender, they are cisgender. The word cisgender can also be shortened to “cis.”

**cisnormativity** – noun: the assumption, in individuals and in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to trans identities and people. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities.

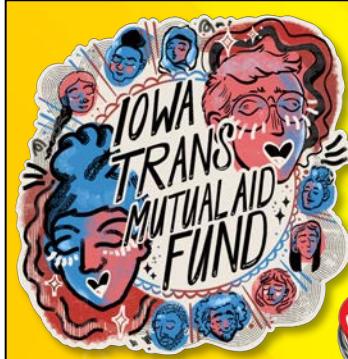
**closeted** – adj.: an individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons such as fear for one’s safety, peer or family rejection, or disapproval and/or loss of housing, job, etc.

**coming out** – 1 noun: the process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one’s own sexuality or gender identity (to “come out” to oneself). 2 verb: the process by which one shares one’s sexuality or gender identity with others.

**cross-dresser** – noun: someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

**demisexual** – adj.: little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic connection is formed with someone, often within a romantic relationship.

**down low** – adj.: referring to men who identify as straight but who secretly have sex with men. Down low (DL) originated in and is mainly used in communities of color.



Help make a bigger difference! Donate at:



[www.iowatransmutualaidfund.org](http://www.iowatransmutualaidfund.org)

The Iowa Trans Mutual Aid Fund financially supports Trans, Nonbinary, and Gender Diverse Iowans as they access gender-affirming care.

#### February Dates:

February 1 – February 7: Applications Open

February 8 – 14: Phone Calls

February 15 – 21: Application Review

February 22 – 28: Dispersal



## LGBTQ Day on the Hill 2025

Monday, February 23  
10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

**RALLY AT THE CAPITOL.**  
**TALK TO YOUR LEGISLATORS.**  
**FIGHT FOR LGBTQ IOWANS.**



The [LGBTQ Day on the Hill](#) provides Iowans with the opportunity to engage directly with lawmakers at a critical time when anti-LGBTQ legislation continues to be introduced. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the legislative process and learn how to advocate for equality and fairness.

The event will start with a training session at the Conservatory, followed by a march to the Capitol. At the Capitol, there will be a rally in the Rotunda. After the rally, participants will meet with their legislators.

- 10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.: Legislative Process Training 101  
(State Historical Society of Iowa)
- 11:45 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.: Break
- 11:50 a.m. - 12:50 p.m.: Storytelling Training Workshop  
(State Historical Society)
- 12:50 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.: Lunch
- 1:30 p.m.: March to the Capitol
- 2:00 p.m.: Public Rally in the  
Capitol Rotunda
- After the rally: Meetings with Legislators



- March 6:**  
**Dr. Kelly Baum**  
Director, Des Moines Art Center
- April 3:**  
**Kimberly Graham**  
Polk County Attorney
- May 1:**  
**Dave Busiek**  
Retired KCCI News Director
- June 5:**  
**Scholarship Ceremony**  
TBA
- July 11:**  
**Member/Donor  
Summer Party**



# Being a Gay Disciple

by Gary Moore

Matt Russell came to speak to the First Friday Breakfast Club as the Executive Director of the Iowa Farmers Union. He was an earlier member of FFBC, and some 13 to 14 years ago, spoke to FFBC as a staff member of the Drake University Agricultural Law Center, where he worked for 12 years. He later would be the State Executive Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency in Iowa for the Biden Administration.

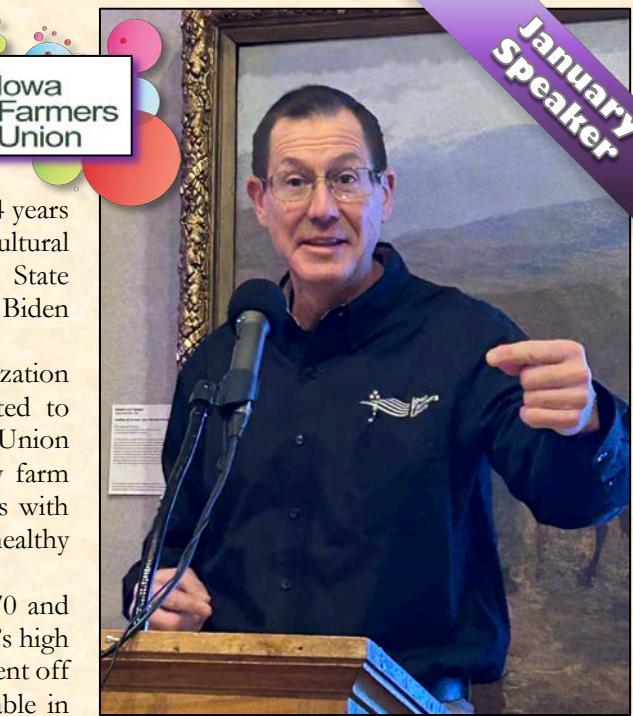
The [Iowa Farmers Union](#) is a grassroots membership organization of family farmers and ranchers, advocates, and consumers committed to promoting family agriculture in Iowa. Since 1915, Iowa Farmers Union members have worked together to strengthen the independent family farm through education, legislation, and cooperation and to provide Iowans with sustainable production, safe food, a clean environment, and healthy communities.

A fifth-generation Iowa farmer, Matt Russell was born in 1970 and raised in the rural community of Anita, Iowa. Of the 28 students in Matt's high school graduation class, 21 had been together since kindergarten. Matt went off to Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, worked for a time at a horse stable in Colorado, then entered Mundelein Seminary near Chicago with the intention of becoming a Catholic priest.

In 2001, Matt met his partner, Patrick Standley. His path became clearer. Four years later, Matt and Pat bought 110-acre [Coyote Run Farm](#) in Lacona, about 40 miles southeast of Des Moines, and began turning it into a model for sustainable farm practices. In the meantime, Matt became the Resilient Agriculture Coordinator at the Drake University Agricultural Law Center, a position he held until 2018, when he became executive director of Iowa Interfaith Power & Light, an organization empowering Iowans to find and implement faith-based solutions to climate change.

FFBC Vice President, Ken Hanson, introduced Matt with personal notes about their early years of being out. Matt had dated Ken's roommate at the time. This was before Matt and Ken each met their respective husbands of the last 20+ years. Ken suggested that people familiarize themselves with Substack and Matt's many progressive articles.

I wanted to know more about this man who spoke with a calm manner, with confidence in his tone and who has been rewarded with positions of leadership, and how those traits have contributed to his career. The fact that he attended Loras College on the next hill over from my hometown in Dubuque and my alma mater, the University of Dubuque on another hill. In trying to answer those questions, I found and have linked an [interview with OUTWORDS](#) from 2006. Much of which I share here but the interview might be so helpful to many struggling with their faith. I encourage my readers to take the time to listen to his interview about Matt's journey as a gay man, his Iowa background, his faith, and his belief that not only God made him gay but that it is a special gift to be honored. The article also describes Matt's struggle to become a disciple without needing to become a priest.



January Speaker

Iowa Farmers Union

Matt Russell

Together with his husband, they are building a culture of conservation. "The solutions aren't bigger horses and stronger harnesses. The future is partnering with nature. This is a very hopeful future for farmers. We're the point of action, we're the decision makers. The paradigm must change so that our problem solving is what gets rewarded."

Back at Coyote Run Farm, Matt and Pat hired and eventually became legal guardians to Austin and Devon, teenaged brothers who were living with a very challenging family situation down the road. "In this way, it's possible to say that Matt found a way to express his gifts for discipleship, and his faith in himself and God – not as a priest, but as a married gay man partnering with his spouse to create a family of four."



# January Meeting Photo Gallery

# JANUARY



**Byron Huff**  
conducts the annual  
FFBC meeting.



**Rick Miller**  
highlights events for  
the Pride Center.



**Ken Hanson**  
introduces the  
speaker, Matt Russell.



**Aaron Lehman**  
answers questions  
with Matt Russell.



## LGBTQIA+ Parent Study

We want to learn about your experience as a parent.

- Parents aged 18 or older.
- Who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or something similar.
- Have a kid aged 10-17.

### COMPENSATION?

Participants who complete every step will receive up to \$263.

### INTERESTED?

VISIT: GO.ILLINOIS.EDU/LGBTQPARENTS  
OR EMAIL US AT: PSYCH-HEAL@ILLINOIS.EDU



SIGN UP HERE

- Both parent and child will:
- Complete initial baseline surveys.
- Participate in an interview (~75 mins parent, ~90 mins child)
- Complete daily surveys for 7 days.

## LGBTQ+ Connection Recovery Support Group

NAMI Iowa LGBTQ+ Connection Recovery Support Group is a free, peer-led support group for any LGBTQ+ adult (18+) who has experienced symptoms of a mental health condition.



NAMI Iowa  
National Alliance on Mental Illness

Benefit from other's experiences, discover your inner strength and empower yourself by sharing your own experiences in a non-judgmental space.

Groups each Wednesday, 6-7:30pm at Mickle Center, 1620 Pleasant Street Des Moines, Iowa 50314

For more information on the next group, visit <https://namiowa.org/calendar/>.

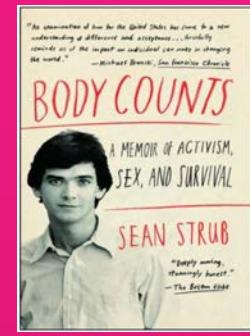
QUESTIONS? EMAIL [PROGRAMS@NAMIOWA.ORG](mailto:PROGRAMS@NAMIOWA.ORG)



The Des Moines Pride Center houses the largest Queer-only library in the state. The Pride Center is fighting to maintain a vibrant Queer future by connecting people to LGBTQIA+ literature, information, and creativity.

## Book of the Month

The founder of *POZ* magazine shares “a captivating...eyewitness account from inside the AIDS epidemic” (*Next*) and “a moving, multi-decade memoir of one gay man’s life” (*San Francisco Chronicle*).



When the AIDS epidemic hit in the early 1980s, Strub was living in New York and soon found himself attending “more funerals than birthday parties.” Scared and angry, he turned to radical activism to combat discrimination and demand research. Strub takes you through his own diagnosis and inside ACT UP, the organization that transformed a stigmatized cause into one of the defining political movements of our time.

**1620 Pleasant Street, Des Moines  
(515) 518-0530**  
[www.desmoinespridecenter.org](http://www.desmoinespridecenter.org)

**Full Searchable Catalog:**  
[www.librarycat.org/lib/DSMPC](http://www.librarycat.org/lib/DSMPC)



The  
Pride Center  
Library Collection  
is constantly changing,  
if you would like to  
donate material or  
provide support, they  
are always looking  
for community  
connections and support.

Flamy is brilliant, resilient proof that nothing is sacred (but everything is holy) and shame belongs in the closet.

Tickets available at:  
[events.humanitix.com/host/pvconcerts](http://events.humanitix.com/host/pvconcerts)



Flamy Grant

Saturday  
February 7, 2026

Flamy Grant is a trailblazing drag queen and singer-songwriter from Asheville, North Carolina. She has earned numerous awards for both songwriting and stage performance, including winning the 2023 Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk Songwriting Competition, winning the Audience Favorite Award at the 2025 Asheville Fringe Arts Festival, and being nominated for the 2026 International Folk Music Award for Best Album. She consistently sets stages ablaze with blistering vocals, bold looks, brilliant songwriting, and brave storytelling.



Beautifully blending her Appalachian roots with drag artistry and musical excellence, Flamy has stormed stages from Los Angeles to London, and from New York to the Netherlands. She has racked up over 1.5 million streams on digital music platforms, with her first album reaching #1 and her second album reaching #8 on various iTunes music charts. This powerhouse vocalist, intrepid songwriter, and shame-slaying drag queen serves up a therapeutic, theatrical experience that is fearless, flamboyant, and full of hearts.





## Spotlight on National LGBTQ+ Organizations

[itgetsbetter.org](http://itgetsbetter.org)

# IT GETS BETTER PROJECT®

In September 2010, in response to a rash of suicides that claimed the lives of several LGBTQ+ youth, the first **It Gets Better** video was released on YouTube urging young LGBTQ+ people to stay true to themselves despite bullying and other challenges of adolescence.

**It Gets Better** is a nonprofit organization with a mission to uplift, empower, and connect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth around the globe.

Storytelling is at the heart of our effort to empower LGBTQ+ youth around the globe. We share stories that inspire hope, stories that spark conversations, and stories that can inform and positively influence a sexual orientation and/or gender identity journey.

### VISION

**It Gets Better** envisions a world where all LGBTQ+ youth are free to live equally, connect to their communities, and know their power as individuals.

More 2025

# Scholar Updates



### EIDANN SQUIRES

Graettinger-Terril High School

This first semester at Wartburg has been one of my dearest experiences. It has been a struggle to adjust, and I have more than my fair share of work cut out for me. It is currently finals week as I write this, and I have just completed one of my finals for the semester. As a music major, it has been difficult, but I assure you I have been having a fantastic time. Thank you all so much for your support yet again! May our paths cross in the future!



### KAITY LAUBENGAYER

Springville High School

I am doing well! Coincidentally, all but two of my classes are done already. Drawing is more mean to me than any class has any right to be, the first thing my roommate did was leave, and I quickly found a friend group! I took seventeen credits and found myself too tired for clubs, but it's mostly alright because my aforementioned friends never stop inviting me to things :].



### PEZ OWENS

Cedar Rapids High Schools

Hello, I hope you're doing well! College is going well; it's been a very welcoming environment and I'm finding a sense of belonging. The FFBC scholarship was a great reminder before going into college to take action and create the spaces you want to see. It's helped me remember to take initiative and push myself out of my comfort zone.





## Heated Rivalry

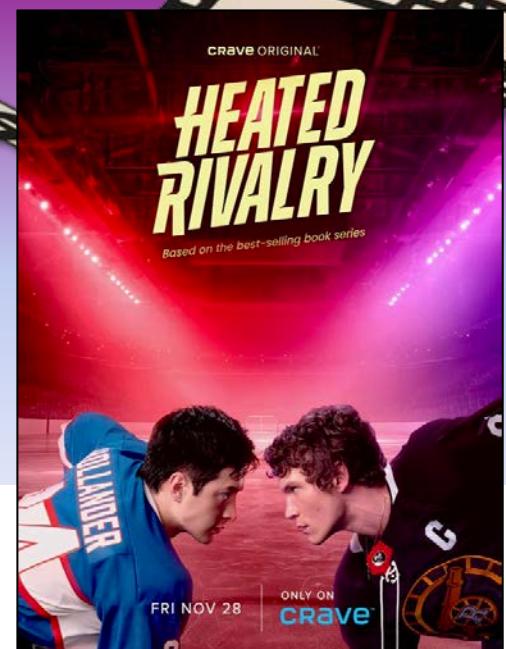
A Limited Series Review by Mark Turnage

It's the steamy queer sports romance everyone's talking about—but how “proud” can “Heated Rivalry” be when most of its main characters are closeted? Based on the novel “Game Changers” by Rachel Reid, writer/director Jacob Tierney’s trim six-episode story arc skates by some romantic realism in favor of romantic fantasy; yet “Heated Rivalry” avoids camp and instead leverages queer yearning, anticipation, and passion into narrative payoff.

In 2008, Montreal’s Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) introduces himself to Russia’s Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) before they face each other in a hockey tournament playoff. On the surface, their first meeting is frigid and awkward, yet lingering glances say otherwise. Hollander is introverted and a workaholic yet close with his family; Ilya is superficially “an asshole” (as Hollander frequently refers to him), aloof with biting sarcasm, but privately has long-term family struggles of his own. After a chance encounter at the gym and cruising each other in the showers, the two rival team captains begin a secret affair, tied together by salacious texts and hotel room trysts between mutual hockey games over nearly a decade. On the ice and on opposing teams, however, the two can’t stand to lose, which the hockey league fans into major publicity. Yet the pressures of family pride, old and new flames, maintaining secrecy, and the

growing intensity of their feelings for each other threaten to drive them apart and reveal the confines of their own “closets.”

“Heated Rivalry’s” queer characters discuss and act upon their sexualities with a frankness that feels bold and authentic without being exploitative. These scenes aren’t explicit, but don’t shy away from depicting queer sex cinematically. Sure, Hollander and Rozanov are rich, masculine, young, conventionally attractive, and closeted, but the chemistry between Williams and Storrie is palpable, convincing, and yes, sometimes raunchy in the way they express mutually profound attraction they can only act upon months and years apart. It’s how “Heated Rivalry” builds romantic tension and lands emotional payoff—by using anticipation as fuel. Though conflicted by jealousy more than insecurity, characters also question and confirm their queer identities as bisexual and gay without their subplots becoming narrative dead ends. Homophobia is more nebulous and self-imposed rather than an antagonist here. Ultimately, “Heated Rivalry” is a romance about self-acceptance over external fears.



Both Hollander and Rozanov keep their queer attraction a secret within the straight, masculine culture of men’s hockey—as a result, staples of queer culture aren’t really seen outside the posh hotel rooms and lodgings of Hollander and Rozanov. We only get a peek into an *out* LGBTQ+ scene with the introduction of minor character Kip Grady (Robbie G.K.), an out, gay smoothie barista who has hunky New York hockey team captain Scott Hunter (Francois Arnaud) wander into his store wearing sweat-soaked compression gear that leaves little to the imagination. There are some moments in “Heated Rivalry” that do strain credibility, primarily in Kip’s storyline, but part of its entertainment value is underscoring hope, passion, and emotional authenticity in queer romance. Some might say Tierney’s writing is too optimistic, but I would argue this sports romance’s popularity lies within its message that in spite of everything, love can not just win, but triumph.

See “Heated Rivalry” streaming on HBO Max.



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# The McCoy Report

by Supervisor Matt McCoy

Polk County, 1<sup>st</sup> District

With Taylor Van De Krol



## SAFE Center of Iowa

## Will Deliver Justice & Dignity to Victims of Sexual Assault



Last fall, as part of Polk County's initiative to lead the way, we made a substantial initial investment to provide care for victims of sexual assault. The **SAFE Center of Iowa** was established to support survivors of sexual assault and intimate personal violence. This center will be a new clinic at DMU 32 Business Complex on Grand Ave in Des Moines. The center will serve as a beacon of hope and support for those in need.

"Polk County recognizes the pressing needs of victims and survivors of sexual violence. Our community has an obligation to provide comprehensive examinations, treatment, and support for victims in a specially designed space that will serve as a national model for how we care for victims of sexual assault," said Matt McCoy, Polk County Board Chair.

Under our current system, victims of sexual assault are referred to emergency rooms where the average wait time to receive help is 10 hours. This also includes police to be with them at all times which increases costs and strains resources. No victim of sexual assault should end up spending 10 hours in an emergency room. Many leave and never report their crime. This center will provide them the justice they deserve.

Shannon Knudsen, Executive Director of SAFE Center of Iowa, stated that the center represents an effort to enhance community services by offering specialized care designed to care for the whole needs of survivors.

The center will be staffed with specially trained sexual assault nurses who will collaborate with victim advocates and law enforcement. Additionally, victims and survivors of sexual assault will also receive counseling and therapy services at the center. All of these services will be provided free of charge.

Private fundraising is currently ongoing. However, a lead gift was secured by Don and Margo Blumenthal for \$500,000. Additionally, Polk County invested over \$500,000 in securing the lease for the space for the next three years. SLAM Architecture provided all in-kind services for the design and most of the materials being used in this medical grade facility. The overall cost of this facility is approximately \$1.5 million, and our goal is to open debt free later this summer.

If you're interested in supporting or want to learn more, visit: <https://safecenteriowa.com/>.

