



INSIDER NJ'S 2021 INSIDER OUT 100:

LGBT POWER LIST

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FOR NJ SENATE



***Congratulations
Out 100 LGBTQ
Power List
Honorees***



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Designed in house. Paid for by Solomeno for Senate, P.O. Box 186, Hazlet, New Jersey 07730.



WELCOME TO INSIDERNJ'S 4TH ANNUAL OUT 100 LGBTQ POWER LIST

a tribute to **politically influential LGBTQs** in NJ Politics.

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★★★★★★



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They called it “the gayest corner in town” because it *was* the gayest corner in town.

When I contemplate the scene at Paddock Bar, a 1950’s-era gay bar in Asbury Park on the Jersey Shore, a few smells come to mind: there’s cigarette smoke because everyone smoked back then, some diesel exhaust from Main Street, and there’s also the smell of sweaty, furtive patrons.

It’s sweaty because central air isn’t really a thing in the 50’s and it’s furtive because everything was furtive back then for LGBTQ people in an era when tools of the state were routinely harnessed to punish Queer people.

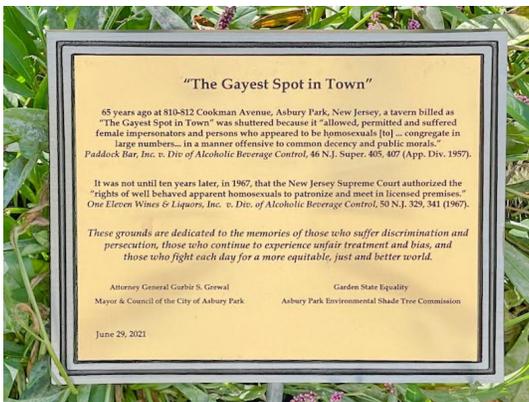
For example, up until 1967, it was illegal in New Jersey to serve alcohol to an LGBTQ person.

NJ’s Alcohol Beverage Commission (ABC) was explicit, routinely harassing and shuttering bars that “allowed, permitted and suffered female impersonators and persons who appeared to be homosexuals (to) ... congregate in large numbers ... in a manner offensive to common decency and public morals.”

Earlier this year, New Jersey’s then-Attorney General Gurbir Grewal acknowledged “the systematic targeting of gay bars between 1933 and 1967” by ABC, a division of the his office.

“More than 50 years later, there is little that I can say, except that I am sorry,” Grewal told the crowd on a scorching summer day near the erstwhile “gayest spot in town” where Paddock Bar once hosted LGBTQ people from near and far.

“I am sorry on behalf of our Attorney General’s office, I’m sorry on behalf of our ABC. I am truly sorry about what we did. Rather than protecting New Jersey’s residents, we hurt them. Rather than advancing the cause of justice, we set it back. You deserve more from your government, and your government failed you. While we cannot undo the past, we can ensure that nothing like it ever happens again,” Grewal said, hoping to partially atone for decades of anti-LGBTQ treatment at the hands of our own government.



There’s now a plaque at the Braddock Bar’s former site to commemorate and to reflect on.

Grewal’s apology included a symbolic act of contrition: he vacated over 125 infractions still on the books against dozens of bars who lost their liquor license simply for hosting and serving Queer people.

Crazy huh? Crazier still: for decades, our liquor laws (ie: tools of the state) were weaponized against LGBTQ people and I had no idea this ever took place. I knew about the Stonewall raids, but never quite made the connection to systemic state-sanctioned violence against LGBTQ people that was happening all over the nation at that point. That’s partially my own ignorance. But it also reflects a historical narrative that routinely overlooked/omitted anything that might cast queer people sympathetically.

Stonewall didn’t unfold at a think tank or a college campus or in the halls of power. It happened at a gay bar where, on a fateful night in June of 1969, Stonewall patrons finally fought back.

But weaponized liquor laws, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Systematic oppression was also codified into tax laws, inheritance laws, employment laws, marriage laws, adoption laws and on and on.

Before gay marriage became Federal law in 2015, there were no survivor's benefits from Social Security for gay couples. Think about how many LGBTQ people died and those benefits went, not to a grieving partner, but back into the US Treasury instead. Achieving marriage equality in 2015 was a remarkable milestone but it didn't much help our Queer elders who fell into poverty, victims of Social Security laws that systemically discriminated against same-sex couples.

I could go on but you get the idea. And you'll get a fuller idea of the systematic oppression I'm talking about when you read the following tributes about 100 people who've already changed the world.

Last year's edition didn't include politicians who we listed separately. So if the ranking of your fave took a dip this year, that's probably why. If you don't see yourself listed this year, I'll say thanks for making room for over a dozen new faces.

Finally, there's a big election in New Jersey on November 2 and the two men running for Governor have radically different philosophies about what LGBTQ liberty looks like.

In one corner, there's the GOP candidate for Governor Jack Ciattarelli, recently quoted out on the campaign trail fearmongering about "sodomy." And yes he actually used that word in an attempt to reduce the entire LGBTQ experience into a sex act.

Meanwhile, Governor Phil Murphy, the Democratic Incumbent had this to say about the people on this list:

"From advocacy to government service to the private sector, these individuals have distinguished themselves as leaders in our state's vibrant LGBTQIA+ community," Governor Murphy said. "My Administration will continue to work closely with all honorees to build a stronger, fairer, and more inclusive New Jersey."

New Jersey Votes
NOV 2

Sincerely,
Jay Lassiter

A portrait of Rhonda Schaffler, a woman with long dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a black blazer over a purple top. The background is a teal color with a subtle pattern of small white dots.

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WITH RHONDA SCHAFFLER

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NJ PBS

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1. ANDREW BRUCK

The Attorney General is New Jersey's chief law enforcement officer.



Earlier this summer, Gov. Phil Murphy announced that Andrew Bruck will serve as Acting Attorney General for the remainder of Murphy's four-year term. Mr. Bruck took the helm following the departure of former AG Gurbir Grewal.

"I am pleased to announce that Andrew Bruck will step in to serve as Acting Attorney General and continue the office's mission of fighting for equal justice for everyone who calls our state home," said Gov. Murphy. "Andrew's wealth of experience will serve him well in this role and his historic appointment reflects our continuing commitment to ensuring that our state government reflects the rich diversity of our people."

This appointment is historic because Mr. Bruck is the first LGBTQ person to lead NJ's Office of Attorney General.

Mr. Bruck took the lead shortly after Mr. Grewal's historic apology for decades of anti-LGBTQ abuse and harassment by the Alcoholic Beverages Commission, a division of the AG's office. Mr. Bruck was Grewal's top deputy at the time.

Mr. Bruck helped paved the way for the office *he now leads* to reexamine the often uneasy relationship between law enforcement and LGBTQ people and to re-codify every law that doesn't explicitly protect Queer people and spaces.

When he's not busy rolling back decades of systemic oppression, Andrew Bruck has his hands full, for example, protecting NJ from gun violence and punishing those who illegally profited from NJ's insatiable appetite for opioids.

Previously, as First Assistant Attorney General, Andrew played an important behind-the-scenes role in the LGBTQ-related accomplishments of his successor. When it came to the Transgender Equality Task Force, Mr. Bruck made sure the

AG's Office was giving the Task Force support. He also worked hard actually *implementing* the recommendations to improve the lives of transgender New Jerseyans.

Mr. Bruck knows the important role of law enforcement in our state. On his first day as Acting AG, he met with two dozen openly LGBTQ+ officers to share his story and to hear about their experiences as LGBTQ law enforcement officers, including as LGBTQ law enforcement officers of color. When Mr. Bruck marched with LGBTQ+ law enforcement officers at a Pride event, the symbolism was almost too much to believe, especially for LGBTQs of the Stonewall generation.

Beyond LGBTQ+ rights, Andrew also worked closely with law enforcement officers to go after interstate gun trafficking networks, to prevent the sale and distribution of ghost guns, and to get illegal weapons off our streets. And he has supported efforts and policies to expand police-community trust, always done in a collaborative and common-sense way.

NJ's Acting Attorney General Andrew Bruck has an uncommon gift for building cooperation between advocates who might not be natural allies. His smarts, toughness, empathy, and diplomatic skill could make him a transformational leader and one of NJ's best ever Attorneys General. It's time to remove the word "acting" from his job title and fully, properly confirm him.



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Insider NJ Insider Out 100 LGBT Power List!*



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2. REBECCA WILLIAMS



A second-term Union County Commissioner, Rebecca Williams is one of the highest-ranking LGBTQ elected officials in New Jersey. Previously, Ms. Williams was a city councilmember in Plainfield where she twice ran off-the-line for council, snatching victory both times.

Because of NJ’s quirky ballot design, the much-coveted “county line” virtually ensures victory in places with one-party rule. By curating who gets the line, NJ’s county and municipal party chiefs are endowed with tremendous power. And historically, those gatekeepers choose people like themselves (ie: not gay) to run for office.

New Jersey’s overwhelmingly heterosexual political landscape reflects that reality.

Undaunted and not content to wait her turn, Rebecca Williams’ multiple off-the-line wins were a testament to her toughness and her political savoir faire. But mostly those maverick victories prove that Rebecca Williams knows how to connect with voters and her constituents.

Previously forced to play gate-crasher, Ms. Williams is now firmly ensconced as Vice Chair of Union County’s Board of Commissioners. Beyond her powerful defiance of those who told her to get in line, Rebecca Williams provides a template for LGBTQ candidates who dream of higher office.

Rebecca Williams remains determined to honor a generation of Queer activists whose stories and contributions long went unsung. The late Marsha P. Johnson, a Union County native, cemented her place in American history at the Stonewall uprising in 1969. Some say she threw the first brick. That melee, provoked by police violence, set the table for marriage equality, gay adoptions, and workplace protections. A statue of Ms. Johnson’s likeness is planned in Elizabeth, Ms. Johnson’s hometown, to honor the contributions of a Queer American hero.

That effort to honor Marsha P. Johnson is led by, among others, Rebecca Williams.

“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.”

-Winston Churchill

***Congratulations
to our very own
Jeannine LaRue
and all of the Honorees for
always being their
true selves!***



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3. SHAWN LaTOURETTE



Commissioner Shawn LaTourette runs New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection where he's responsible for developing and enacting environmental policy while directing programs that protect public health and safeguard New Jersey's natural and historic resources.

It's basically his job to implement Governor Phil Murphy's environmental agenda.

Mr. LaTourette is NJ's first openly gay environmental commissioner with an agenda that includes clean water and clean air for all New Jerseyans regardless of ZIP code.

"Just like the LGBTQ community was long oppressed by the dominant culture, we now have communities that are oppressed by the blindness of our environment policy," Mr. LaTourette said, highlighting that leafy suburban towns export their trash, recycling, and sewage to less affluent places to clean up.

And that, friends and family, is systematic oppression.

"If you're a member of a marginalized community it's incumbent to stand up for every marginalized community,' Mr. LaTourette added. "I'm supposed to bring that view into the work that I do."

Commissioner LaTourette has worked to revitalize the DEP's program to recover natural resource damages (a practice abandoned during the Chris Christie era) while the supercharging DEP's Community Collaborative Initiative to hasten brown-field redevelopment. And most critically Shawn LaTourette has helped the DEP to prioritize, cultivate, and expedite the State's response to climate change.

Mr. LaTourette has become the Murphy administration's de facto gay ambassador, traveling the state at night and on the weekend to show up at Pride events and elsewhere to promote fairer environmental policies. It's an exhausting schedule that Mr. LaTourette embraces because he knows that representation matters more than ever.

4. CHRISTIAN FUSCARINO



Christian Fuscarino is executive director of Garden State Equality, NJ's largest LGBTQ rights organization. A leader with modern sensibilities, Mr. Fuscarino's influence transcends the conventions of his predecessors whose bandwidth was more typically devoted to securing marriage equality.

Here's what a typical week in the life of Christian Fuscarino might look like:

On Monday, he's in Atlantic City working to curb HIV transmission rates by preserving South Jersey's only needle exchange program, a service that especially benefits LGBTQs who are 4x more likely to use IV drugs. Standing up for drug users is wildly unpopular work. But protecting them from HIV is the only path to an AIDS free generation.

On Tuesday, Christian's with his team in Asbury Park working to implement NJ's historic LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. Queer people – our experiences and contributions - have been conscientiously and conspicuously stripped from most historical renderings and this new curriculum changes that. (For more on that, see #20)

Wednesday is media day because transgender kids are under attack from right-wing politicians who want to ban them from sports. To fight back, Mr. Fuscarino lined up back-to-back zoom calls with a half dozen reporters 1) to defend the rights of LGBTQ athletes and 2) to articulate why this matters (because that's how you change hearts and minds.)

If it's Thursday, Mr. Fuscarino's probably in Trenton to help restore state benefits to LGBTQ Veterans discharged from the military in the years before they could openly serve.

Not resting on the laurels of a busy week, Christian will spend Friday, for example, sending letters to each of NJ's county jails to protect incarcerated transgender, intersex, and non-binary people incarcerated in New Jersey.

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None of these issues are easy or popular. But that won't stop the indefatigable Mr. Fuscarino from suiting up every day to fight.

And in case you're wondering, Christian Fuscarino's weekends are often devoted to fundraising and electing LGBTQ people to office, especially this time of year.

That's a relentless schedule by any measure. And that's a testament to the level of sacrifice it takes to roll back the systematic oppression LGBTQ people have faced since forever.



5. REED GUSCIORA

You may know him as the Mayor of Trenton, but Reed Gusciora's political career stretches back several decades to a very different era.



When he first ran for a seat in the New Jersey General Assembly back in 1995, Mayor Gusciora was still closeted and it's easy to understand why. There were very few legal protections for LGBTQ people at that point. For example "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" forced LGBTQ service members into the closet to serve. Then there's the so-called Defense of Marriage Act which delayed marriage equality for a generation. Those are examples of systemic oppression of LGBTQ people that took decades to undo.

That was the political climate when 35-year-old Reed Gusciora won his campaign for Assembly in November of 1995.

Much has changed since then which enabled Reed Gusciora to publicly "come out" a decade or so later to become the first openly LGBTQ state legislator in NJ history. Reed Gusciora's presence at the table helped usher in marriage equality and marijuana reform, two issues Reed owned long before it was the thing to do.

His reward for all that pioneering prescience? In 2011, Reed Gusciora was orphaned by the redistricting process when Princeton, his hometown, was drawn into another (predominantly Republican) district. That basically stripped Reed Gusciora of incumbency by grafting him into a district full of brand new (to him) voters.

Redistricting, by the way, happens after every census, a once-a-decade opportunity for politically-appointed partisans to redraft New Jersey's political boundaries. The Democrats on the 2010 commission wanted to move blue towns (like Princeton) from liberal districts to better compete in places long-represented by Republicans. And it worked. Districts elsewhere became more politically competitive on the back of Trenton's first (and often only) LGBTQ member. That's because redistricting is dominated by self-interested partisans who are all about that status quo.

And in NJ politics, the status quo has always been heterosexual.

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If you've ever wondered why, in the Year of our Lord 2021, the NJ General Assembly is still 70% male with zero LGBTQ people, now you know a huge reason why: redistricting, a tool of systematic oppression that's used to lock LGBTQ people out of the political process for decades at a time.

For his part, Reed Gusciora took the redistricting sleight in his stride. He moved to Trenton (which he represented for decades) and went on to win several more stints.

When Reed gave up his seat in the Assembly to run for mayor of Trenton, he wasn't the odds-on favorite to win in his adopted hometown. Leaving a safe

seat in the State House is a risk most politicians would never take. But Reed's not most politicians. He embraced his underdog status, worked his butt off, and ultimately scored the most votes. He proved his mettle and strategic campaign acumen by scoring that upset win. Two wins actually. The campaign squeezed into a run-off and then pulled off the election day victory a few weeks later.

Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora is busy running for reelection this year.

(But he's not too busy to throw a parade for 2-time Olympic champion Athing Mu, Trenton's highly-gilded queen. photo: David McMillan)



6. JEANNINE LaRUE

Going on 5 decades in New Jersey politics, Jeannine LaRue has seen and done it all: chief of staff, super-lobbyist, advocate, professor, mentor, and media pioneer. Currently, Ms. LaRue is a Senior VP at Kaufman Zita Group, a blue-chip government relations firm. She's also a newly-christened board member at Garden State Equality, NJ's oldest LGBTQ rights org.



Just recently, Governor Murphy appointed Ms. LaRue to the Wealth Disparity Task Force to address income inequality in New Jersey.

Ms. LaRue's 2021 was filled with recognition for her tireless advocacy in New Jersey and beyond. The Advocate, America's premier LGBTQ magazine, gave her the 2021 Champion of Pride Award and counted Jeannine among 100 change-makers in our community nationwide.

Ms. LaRue also received the National CROWN Award sponsored by DOVE and the CROWN Coalition for quarterbacking passage of legislation that bans discrimination in NJ against individuals for ethnic hairstyles. Remember the time a South Jersey high school wrestling official refused to allow a (non-white) varsity athlete to compete without first shaving his head? That's illegal in NJ now.

Next month, Jeannine will be one (of 5 persons) to receive the NJ Pride Network Award.

When she's not receiving accolades, Ms. LaRue's at the table hammering out policies, lobbying on bills, and surveying questionnaires for possible endorsements for candidates seeking public offices. With the advent (we hope) of cannabis regulations in NJ any day now, Jeannine has expanded her repertoire to help cannabis license applicants beef up their social justice *bona fides*.

Busy as ever, Ms. LaRue excitedly awaits NJ's upcoming (not-so-lame) lame-duck session where she's principal lobbyist on three major issues: reproductive freedom, same-day voter registration, and harm reduction programs in NJ.

(This is the second time harm reduction has come up and we're only at #6. If you still can't wrap your head around clean needles for drug users, try thinking of it as a good way to keep drug users out of the hospital during a pandemic.)

Going on 5 decades in New Jersey politics and Jeannine LaRue isn't slowing down anytime soon.



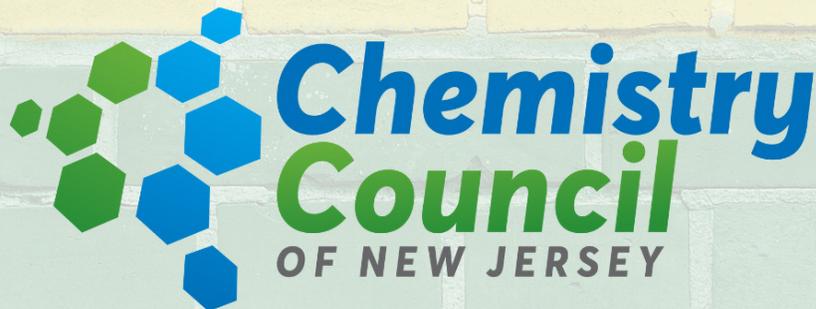
Congratulations

to our colleague

Elvin Montero

and to all the **OUT** and **PROUD**

New Jersey leaders on the
2021 Insider NJ Out: 100 LGBT Power List



Equilibrating Equality



Dennis Hart



Elvin Montero



Ed Waters



Samantha Jones



Ben Graziano



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7. THOMAS PROL

Thomas “Tom” Prol is one of the most brilliant legal minds and policy advocates in New Jersey. He’s also a long-serving executive board member at Garden State Equality, providing stability and continuity to NJ’s largest LGBTQ organization since its inception. Garden State Equality has passed more than 222 laws (and counting) to benefit LGBTQ people and Tom Prol’s fingerprints have been on every single one of them.



Mr. Prol shines brightly without being showy. He's quietly and deftly deployed behind-the-scenes strategy for LGBTQ equality for the better part of two decades, most recently working with the Attorney General to vacate historical laws targeting our community. Mr. Prol’s legal sleuthing led to unprecedented action by former Attorney General Gurbir Grewal who, with Pride month winding down, apologized for the systemic harassment of gay bars by the AG office’s Alcohol Beverage Control division from 1933 until 1967.

During those years, the systemic harassment of gay bars was quite literally NJ’s official policy, codified in statute.

Until this past June, 126 anti-gay enforcement actions remained on the books suspending and/or revoking the liquor license for bars who served LGBTQ people. Thanks to Tom Prol, those 126 cases have been vacated, a symbolic gesture to complement the more substantive moves by NJ’s Office of Attorney General to amend their historical mistreatment of LGBTQ people.

“This unprecedented action by Attorney General Grewal represents a profound and meaningful acknowledgment of the unfair discriminatory treatment visited upon the LGBTQ community in the past by state law enforcement officials,”
Mr. Prol said at the time. *“The very people who were supposed to protect my community were actually the ones who led the charge in persecuting us – often viciously so – and they lost their jobs, homes, friends and families by those devastating actions. Attorney General Grewal and his senior staff should be commended for taking this deep dive to explore these terrible law enforcement practices, expose the truth, and reconcile with members of the LGBTQ community.”*

As the past (and first openly gay) president of the New Jersey State Bar Association, Tom Prol remains a committed environmentalist who, in his spare time, is often mentoring and encouraging the next generation of LGBTQ lawyers to aim high.



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Political Action Committee

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8. FRANCELINE EHRET

One of the most powerful and influential Labor leaders in New Jersey, Fraceline “Fran” Ehret is the New Jersey State Director of the Communication Workers of America. CWA represents more than 70,000 working families in The Garden State.



Communications Workers of America represents 700,000+ workers nationwide.

Fran’s recent appointment by Governor Phil Murphy to NJ’s LGBTQ Taskforce prioritizes issues like youth homelessness (including young adults aging out of housing) and housing discrimination against LGBTQ seniors.

Ms. Ehret’s detailed accounts as a Queer woman doing battle within the so-called Boy’s Club has humbled some of the most powerful men in NJ politics. By fighting back, Mr. Ehret left a better climate for future generations.



9. WESLEY MCWHITE III



Wesley McWhite III directs NJ's Cannabis Regulatory Commission's office of diversity inclusion. He's there to ensure the same communities long over-policed by the War on Drugs get their fair share of the economic dividends of legalized cannabis.

Mr. McWhite's background means he's uniquely qualified for the job. Because if there's one thing I know about cannabis – two things, actually – it's this: America's pot laws have long been weaponized against people of color the heavy lifting to change those crappy laws in Queer communities.

We did that.

As New Jersey embarks upon its own experiment with marijuana legalization, I feel an urgent need to remind the world that AIDS set the table for marijuana reform in America. *The catalyst to reform America's marijuana laws was Queer people with AIDS and their caretakers.* Their sacrifice changed enough hearts and minds that within a generation, America was ready to embrace marijuana reform.

McWhite's appointment to the CRC continues a long and venerable tradition of LGBTQ people reforming America's backwards and remorseless marijuana laws. It's also a resounding reminder that the days of ensnaring Black kids into legal trouble for a dime bag are rapidly winding down.

"As a Black Gay man, whose family has roots in Trenton spanning generations, I am honored and excited to join the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. The War on Drugs has devastated poor, minority and LGBTQIA communities for too long and we have a responsibility to include those that have been most impacted in this process and industry from the start," Mr. McWhite said.

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Epstein Becker Green
congratulates everyone
recognized on the InsiderNJ's
2021 OUT 100 Power List,
including our very own Karl Riehl!

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10. PAT HANSEN & EDDIE FREEMAN III

Pat Hansen and Eddie Freeman III are both members of Evesham Township Council. Together they comprise 40% of Evesham Town Council. The fact that Evesham town council is nearly half gay is a remarkable transformation for a once-conservative stranglehold in Burlington County's largest town.

Let's go back in time to see how much Evesham has changed.

It was 2006 and I was newish to NJ politics and the liberal blogsite Blue Jersey dispatched me to Evesham to cover a kerfuffle over a movie with the temerity to portray a gay family as a normal thing. (*We are* normal, by the way.) Anyway, back then lawmakers and most school board members were adamant about forbidding a sympathetic portrayal of LGBTQ families to elementary school kids. This, in an era when Queer people were mostly absent in the media.

Rosemary Bernardi was Evesham School Board president at the time of the controversy which she noted "garnered local, state, and national attention as controversial."

Opposition to a benign depiction of gay people was frenetic and seething with contempt. There are echoes of that same fearmongering – that LGBTQ people are somehow a threat to your kids – in opposition to the state's LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.



*“I cast the lone vote (7-1) to keep *That's a Family* (a movie) about different types of families including a same-sex family,” Ms. Bernardi told InsiderNJ. “The video was shown to 3rd graders as part of a state-mandated health curriculum, which requires students to ‘identify different kinds of families and explain that families may differ for many reasons.’ I recall the level of vitriol and hate regarding this issue. The video became a polarizing distraction for the school district. While it was removed, the work to fulfill the curriculum strand continued.”*

Fast Forward to 2021, and you find that Evesham, population 47k, is now filled with swing voters who do what swing voters do. That now means electing a very gay township council. Ms. Hansen, a former transportation expert, and Mr. Freeman, a lawyer whose 9+ year stint in the Army Reserves included a deployment to Afghanistan, are now leaders in a town that once used tools of the state (ie: school boards) to erase LGBTQs from the picture.



A man with a beard and a woman are smiling and looking towards the camera. They are outdoors, with a body of water and trees in the background. The man is wearing a maroon polo shirt, and the woman is wearing a light blue button-down shirt.

how far would
you go if they
were sick?

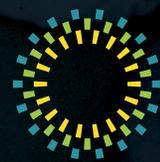
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CO-10 JEANNE LOCICERO, CJ GRIFFIN & KAREN THOMPSON

It's inconceivable that ACLU-NJ's remarkably talented triumvirate could fall outside of the top 10. So we made room.

JEANNE LOCICERO

Legal Director, ACLU of New Jersey

Jeanne LoCicero has led litigation at the ACLU-NJ since she became legal director in 2018, after 10 years as deputy legal director. No other organization in the state apart from the government itself appears before the New Jersey Supreme Court as often. Under Jeanne's strategic leadership, the ACLU-NJ's legal team has achieved monumental wins for the First Amendment, racial justice, and LGBTQ rights, just to scratch the surface. Jeanne's team is known for a collaborative spirit and a focus on each individual's autonomy. That sharing of opportunity and recognition comes directly from Jeanne's skill as a leader.



CO-10 CJ GRIFFIN

Partner and Director of the Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center, Pashman Stein Walder Hayden Vice President, ACLU of New Jersey Board of Trustees

When they argue before the New Jersey Supreme Court, it's not uncommon for CJ Griffin to hear justices cite precedents with deeply familiar names. That's because CJ personally argued many of them. CJ is known for their historic, pioneering work in open government cases, but their groundbreaking work extends beyond those cases. When it comes to racial justice, freedom of the press, free speech, LGBTQ rights, privacy, police accountability, and countless other issues, CJ has strengthened the rights of New Jerseyans and made New Jersey better.



KAREN THOMPSON

Senior Staff Attorney

The New Jersey Law Journal named Karen Thompson its 2021 Attorney of the Year, and for good reason: her pioneering work has contributed to building justice and confronting racial inequity in the law. Two New Jersey Supreme Court cases she argued in 2021 struck blows to racial discrimination in jury selection and racial profiling through police stops based on “obstructive” license plate frames. Ask someone to describe her, and you’ll hear about her dazzling brilliance, and her kindness, humility, and grace as a person.



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ECEA LGBTQ+ Chair Micah Gary-Fryer**

and all the honorees listed in the 2021 Insider NJ Out 100

11. KARI OSMOND & JULIA FAHL



The consummate power couple, Kari Osmond and Julia Fahl combine brilliance, resilience (and a touch of glamour) on their way to becoming role models for a new generation of LGBTQ activists.

Ms. Osmond demonstrated her boundless potential while still in college studying in Mayor Reed Gusciora’s poli-sci class at TCNJ back in the day. She’s now the chief of staff for Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman.

After a productive stint at Planned Parenthood Action to ensure women gets to choose, Ms. Fahl became Mayor of Lambertville in Hunterdon County. Ms. Fahl's also the Vice President of Legislative Affairs at TBA, a bluechip lobbying firm with state – and regional influence.

12. MICHAEL “MIKE” DeFUSCO



Michael DeFusco is a second term city councilman in Hoboken. He became the first openly gay man to hold an elected position on the municipal level in Hudson County when he bested a 21-year incumbent in 2015 to represent downtown Hoboken’s increasingly vibrant First Ward.

A former two-term zoning commissioner, Mr. DeFusco now chairs the LGBTQ+ Caucus for Hudson County’s democratic committee.

13. MARIANNA PONTORIERO



Marianna Pontoriero is a family law attorney who sits on City Council in Brick, NJ's 13th largest town, population 75,667. Among her many considerable talents is Mariana's ability to attract voters from across the political spectrum.

Just one year after voters in Brick chose Donald Trump in a landslide, they went back to the polls to choose a new City Council. The top vote-getter that day was a big-hearted incumbent Democrat by the name of Marianna Pontoriero, a proud Italian-American who also happens to be gay.

A lesbian dominating on election day in a very Trumpy town might seem like a hard result to top.

But Marianna's successful battle against cancer is surely her biggest, most inspirational victory yet.



CONGRATULATIONS

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EACH AND EVERY MEMBER OF
THE LIST**

**FOR YOUR DEDICATION, YOUR
BRILLIANCE, YOUR VISIBILITY AND
YOUR COURAGE**

**THANK YOU, INSIDERNJ AND JAY LASSITER
FOR RECOGNIZING AND LIFTING UP THESE VOICES**

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NJ LGBTQ DEMOCRATS**

LAUREN ALBRECHT, CHAIR

JOE FORTE, VICE CHAIR



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14. TONIO BURGOS



A legendary multi-state superlobbyist + DNC member from NJ. The following evergreen tribute was written by former Gov. Jim McGreevy.

Louis XIII had Richelieu, Henry VIII had Wolsey, New Jersey and New York governors had Burgos. Mindful of Richelieu's insight that "nothing is as dangerous for the state as those who would govern kingdoms with maxims found in books," Tonio was blessed to learn his earliest lessons on the harsh streets of Spanish Harlem. Having no familial financial wealth but a loving family, Tonio's native keen intellect witnessed, catalogued, and applied the successive power plays of difficult playgrounds and school yards, NYC rough and tumble brass politics, and eventually the marbled corridors of Albany.

Tonio's greatest patron was born of an Italian immigrant family. Mario Cuomo quickly identified the young Puerto Rican Burgos for his astute political acumen, exceptional strategic skills, and his superlative ability to foster relationships with persons regardless of adverse political interests. Tonio's sensibilities, skills, and sapient advice ensured his status as "operative extraordinaire" for the then rising New York Secretary of State, next to become Lieutenant Governor, and eventually Governor.

As Appointments Secretary, Burgos held great sway toward ensuring that the politics of the Cuomo Administration were protected. As Director of Executive Services, Burgos exerted his far ranging influence upon the government.

From his appointment as Commissioner, Port Authority and numerous boards and committees, including with Trans-Hudson Corporation for PATH, Lower Manhattan Economic Development Corporation, NJEDA, NJSCC, Camden Economic Recovery Board, NYC Police Foundation, President Clinton's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, Robert F. Kennedy Center, and the DNC. Tonio moved effortlessly in corridors of power, effectuating the objectives of the leadership he served, while being devoted and partial to the Latino community, which was his family, and the LGBTQ tribe to which he belonged.

Tonio Burgos, his persona, gifted abilities, and access and ability to effectuate power have made him a powerful and influential person. For a man of his generation, to be in these places required wisdom, discretion, and subtlety. The practiced skills of Tonio have benefited not only the principals for whom he served, but our community in times of distress on both the national and state stage.

15. DAVE PARANO



The president and CEO of Parano and Associates, Dave Parano is among the shrewdest campaign managers of his generation.

He is probably leading a small army out on the campaign trail at this very moment.

Dave wins the tough races in imaginative ways with a singular focus on the prize: 50% + 1 on election day. His wizardry has propelled numerous LGBTQ candidates into office including Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora and Lambertville Mayor Julia Fahl.

A NJ operative who's not afraid to battle NJ Machine Politics, Mr. Parano's stellar track record also includes wins for Governor Phil Murphy, Congressman Bill Pascrell, and NJ Senator Loretta Weinberg.

Christina Zuk is one of NJ's top government affairs pros.

"Dave Parano remains a go-to for LGBTQ candidates and causes," Ms Zuk said, "Now with a team of associates who focus on grassroots organizing and traditional campaign field work, Parano is extending his reach beyond the State's borders and engaging in issue-advocacy and political campaigns up and down the East Coast."



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16. SUE FULTON



Long before she became President Biden's choice to be Assistant Secretary of Defense and well before she served in Phil Murphy's cabinet, Brenda "Sue" Fulton was a 1980 graduate of West Point, part of the Academy's first class to admit women.

So safe to say, Ms. Fulton has been breaking barriers her whole life.

But if Army Captain Sue Fulton spent her career proving that Gay people are tough and smart enough to serve in the military, she did so in from the closet in an era when being Gay could get you drummed out less-than-honorably. Roughly 100,000 LGBTQ Vets were booted from service with a less-than-honorable discharge between WWII and 2011, when LGBTQ people could finally openly serve. Barring openly LGBTQ Americans from serving in the military is the most brazen example of systemic homophobia you'll find anywhere on this list.

Pending confirmation, Captain Fulton's presumptive appointment to Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs would dispatch her to the Pentagon "to set the conditions for a sustainable, seamlessly integrated and complementary total force" with responsibility for "overall policies and procedures of [U.S.] Total Force manpower, personnel and reserve affairs".

Ms. Fulton's confirmation hearing by the US Senate Armed Services Committee was bumpy at times with GOP members taking a dim view of some of Ms. Fulton's tweets. Apparently clapping back at anti-gay bigotry by Evangelical Christians was too much for GOP lawmakers who never miss an opportunity to complain about mean tweets now that Trump is gone.

17. KATHY AHEARN-O'BRIEN



Kathy Ahearn-O'Brien is the executive director at the Hyacinth AIDS Foundation New Jersey's oldest and largest AIDS service providers in New Jersey. In past years, we likened Ms. Ahearn-O'Brien to Xena the Warrior Princess. But instead of battling bad guys, she fights HIV/AIDS and the stigma that (sadly) still persists.

We still love the metaphor.

It's Kathy's job to ensure US Senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez bring more federal dollars to NJ for people with HIV/AIDS. When COVID blew holes in NJ's budget Kathy Ahearn- O'Brien stood up to remind Governor Murphy that, when it comes to a pandemic, an ounce of prevention is (still) worth a ton of cure.

18. DR. NINA DAVIS & RICH ROCKWELL



Nina Davis and Rich Rockwell (still) comprise 1/3 of City Council in Bloomfield, NJ, an Essex County town with a population of 53,105 per the 2020 Census. Both are at-large council members who represent the entire town.



Dr. Davis was a full professor of political science at William Paterson University where she's now Associate Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Mr. Rockwell is a committed environmentalist and history buff who sits on his town's historical preservation commission.

Bloomfield is not the only town with multiple LGBTQ municipal lawmakers. Evesham has two. So does Red Bank. And there's tiny Interlaken (Monmouth County) as well, where municipal government is dominated by LGBTQs.

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Deputy Executive Director

19. GARY PAUL WRIGHT



A venerable warrior and peerless elder statesman, Gary Paul Wright has fought for LGBTQ liberty since the 1970s. His in-the-trenches fight to combat HIV/AIDS is why Queer people (like me) aren't dead of AIDS. Please let that sink in for a minute. Gary Paul Wright currently runs the African American Office of Gay Concerns, an HIV/AIDS resources in Newark, the Garden State's largest city.

"Gary Paul Wright is the Godfather (and Godmother) of the LGBTQ community in New Jersey," Garden State Equality chief Christian Fuscarino told InsiderNJ. "Most importantly, Gary Paul has made great contributions to slowing the spread of HIV and eradicating AIDS. Staying true to his beginnings in the movement back in the 1980's Gary Paul gives all of himself to ensure people of all ages, especially young people, know the importance of using a condom and getting on prevention medication."



20. LGBTQAI+ INCLUSIVE ED SQUAD

**LORI BURNS, STEVE KOUMOULIS,
ASHLEY E. RIKER, CHRIS CANELLA,
KATE OKESON (+ ALLISON CONNOLLY,
ALLY EMERITUS)**



Lori Burns, Steve Koumoulis, Ashley E. Riker, Kate Okeson, and Chris Cannella have each made individual contributions to LGBTQ equality. But alongside Allison Connolly (who's straight but not narrow) their work spearheading NJ's historic queer-inclusive curriculum made them this year's top ensemble cast.

So what does LGBTQ inclusive curriculum mean? And why does it matter?

Since basically forever, Queer people and our experiences and contributions have been conscientiously and conspicuously stripped from the narrative.

Take WWII for example.

You may know that the Nazis rounded up queer people (and those perceived as gay) for torture and extermination. Perhaps you've also heard about the Enigma machine, an encryption device used by the Nazis to protect military communication and to propagate their genocidal madness.

Did you know that a British man named Alan Turing, a gay computer scientist (with a PhD from Princeton) ultimately cracked the Enigma code to turn the tide of WWII? Alan Turing's reward for saving humanity from Hitler's madness? He was prosecuted for being gay and chemically castrated by his own British government in 1952. He died by suicide 2 years later at 41 years of age, a victim of state-sponsored oppression that left no Queer person unscathed, not even one of Britain's most heroic wartime geniuses.



Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey

Congratulations to Insider NJ's 2021 OUT 100 Honorees!

Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey thanks all of our statewide leaders who pledge to protect and expand access to reproductive health care services.

For more information on ways policymakers can take action to support legislation that advances this goal, such as the Reproductive Freedom Act, visit our website at www.PPActionNJ.org.



Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey is a nonprofit, non-partisan group advocating on behalf of the tens of thousands of New Jerseyans who rely on Planned Parenthood health centers for high-quality, affordable reproductive health care.

www.PPActionNJ.org

Eventually, history caught up.

There's been a Hollywood movie. In 2013, Alan Turing received a pardon from the Queen which followed an official apology from the British government for the "appalling way he was treated" which honestly sounds like the understatement of the century. Now widely recognized as one of the most consequential figures in modern world history, Alan Turing's face appears on the British £50 note, opposite Her Majesty.

That's the sort of thing that NJ middle- and high school students might learn in history class thanks to a curriculum that includes the contributions of LGBTQ people. This curriculum gives our students a fuller version of history and teaches them to think critically.

There are lawmakers out there who disparage NJ's inclusive curriculum. They twist the next curriculum's true intent to gin up anger and contempt among those who hate LGBTQ people.

We won't let them win.

And as Alan Turing proved, history won't let them win either.

It takes a village to pass laws and to implement laws like these. And it takes persistence to swat down the ignorant characterizations of those who prefer their gays at the back of the bus.

We honor Lori Burns, Steve Koumoulis, Ashley E. Riker, Kate Okeson, Chris Cannella, and Allison Connolly for that work here.

21. ELAINE HELMS



Elaine Helms founded the Reaching Adolescents in Need (RAIN) Foundation in East Orange after noticing the high rate of prostitution among homeless LGBTQ kids who engaged in so-called "survival sex" out of desperation. It's gritty, wildly unpopular work and Elaine Helms is (still) there in the trenches lifting up our most vulnerable youth and helping them reach their vast potential.

This past year, Ms. Helms' organization (literally) broke ground in Newark's West Ward on new housing for 11 homeless LGBTQ individuals. In the long run, supportive housing saves money and saves lives in a vulnerable, often stigmatized population that's disproportionately queer.

Ms. Helms, whose vision to serve began after she was injured on 9/11, won the support of powerful politicians like NJ Governor Murphy, Essex Co. Executive Joe DiVincinzo, and Newark Mayor Ras Baraka who already pledged support for RAIN Foundation's 2nd and 3rd supportive housing communities.

"We need helpers," Mayor Baraka said at the groundbreaking. "And I thank God for giving us the RAIN Foundation to be helpers who are making sure that we have housing for a particular set of individuals in our community who have been left out for a very very long time. Count us in when you're ready to do projects number two and number three. Because we will be here."

CO-21 SHARRONDA WHEELER



Sharronda Wheeler is Board President at Newark Pride, Inc, an annual regionally-anticipated Pride event drawing thousands to Downtown Newark in honor of Sakia Gunn, a Black teenage lesbian who was murdered in a hate crime in 2003. Ms. Gunn was stabbed to death on the way home from hanging out and having fun with her friends.

Sakia Gunn was only 15 years old.

Pride is about more than rainbows. And it's Sharronda Wheeler's mission to ensure Newark Pride is fun and reflective in equal measure.

22. PETER YACOBELLIS

Peter Yacobellis survived Don't Ask, Don't Tell and conversion therapy to become an at-large councilmember in Montclair, an Essex County town, population 41k. He's Montclair's first openly LGBTQ+ elected official.



Since 2004, Mr. Yacobellis has advised elected officials around the U.S. about LGBTQ issues. He's also founder of the Trevor Project NextGen Volunteer Organization.

This year, Mr. Yacobellis pushed Montclair's local government to enact a sweeping LGBTQ+ equality agenda that updated township policies and put in place three new laws to ensure LGBTQ+ people were protected from discrimination in hiring, appointments, town procurement and use of single-use restrooms. He also launched Out Montclair, including Out Montclair teens – a safe space for 12-17 year old LGBTQ+ youth.

Mr. Yacobellis also formed Out Montclair 50+ for a growing, oft-neglected demographic in our community.

23. DON GUARDIAN



Currently, there are zero openly LGBTQ state lawmakers serving in Trenton. This November, Don Guardian, a moderate Republican and former Mayor of Atlantic City, is poised to break that streak to become the third openly gay state lawmaker in NJ history. Mr Guardian is currently running for the NJ General Assembly in NJ's 2nd legislative district. Based in Atlantic County, the major cities in LD2 include Egg Harbor Township, Pleasantville, and Atlantic City.

His is perhaps the most competitive race anywhere on this year's ballot and there's a lot on the line: namely making history as Trenton's only Gay assembly member and NJ's first ever out GOP state lawmaker.

When Atlantic City voters overwhelmingly choose a gay, white Republican to be their mayor in 2013, it was a bombshell result. His reward for one of the most stunning upsets in New Jersey political history: the unenviable task of stabilizing a city in economic free-fall. Mayor Guardian fought Gov. Chris Christie's takeover of Atlantic City while putting AC on the path to stability. Don Guardian stopped the bleeding in Atlantic City and he doesn't get enough credit for that.

He only got one term as mayor before getting beaten by a well-funded Machine Democrat who's now in jail. Guardian's predecessor, also a Democrat, ended up in jail as well. Mr. Guardian is still fighting the South Jersey Democratic machine, an organization that, for all their happy talk about equality, has never once advanced an LGBTQ candidate for office.

24. JEREMY FEIGENBAUM

Jeremy Feigenbaum is NJ's State Solicitor, the top appellate advocate in the state. That means he argues on behalf of the Office of Attorney General on issues before the U.S. Supreme Court, federal circuit courts, and the New Jersey Supreme Court.



He's been busy. This year Mr. Feigenbaum managed a docket ranging from defending the Governor's Executive Orders (he's still undefeated!) and Attorney General Directives to firearm safety litigation to enforcement actions.

Mr. Feigenbaum is a clever and cunning linguist. By employing legal idiom favored by conservatives, he successfully defended the Immigrant Trust Directive (which limits state and local law enforcement involvement in federal immigration enforcement) in front of a conservative-majority panel of the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals, and won 3-0, in an opinion authored by Judge Hardiman a former Trump SCOTUS short-lister.

Showing his prowess at the NJ Supreme Court level, Mr. Feigenbaum also successfully defended NJ's Major Discipline Directive which required disclosure of serious law enforcement discipline which greatly expands law enforcement transparency.

Jeremy Feigenbaum's biggest "win" came last month when, after years of litigation, the proposed PennEast natural gas pipeline "ceased all further development of the (120 mile) project" citing legal and regulatory hurdles. Residents along the proposed route didn't want 1,000,000,000 cubic feet of highly toxic and flammable compressed natural gas gushing through their community every day. So if you like your nature natural and and/or prefer renewable energy options instead, please send Jeremy Feigenbaum a thank you card for his herculean efforts.

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25. BRIAN MCGINNIS



Collingwood's Brian McGinnis is the newly minted president of the Independence Business Alliance where he'd served on the board since 2017. (The IBA is the LGBTQ+ chamber of commerce and official affiliate of the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce for the Greater Philadelphia area.)

IBA operates in New Jersey (Camden, Gloucester, Burlington, Salem, and Mercer Counties) as well as Philadelphia and several counties in Pennsylvania and Delaware. It's a goal of Mr. McGinnis' tenure to significantly expand their NJ footprint.

Previously, Mr. McGinnis was part of Blue Jersey's original lineup and spent much of the previous decade disrupting and pioneering the media landscape we're living in. After a long stint doing communications for Garden State Equality and later in the General Assembly, Brian went to law school. His practice as an employment attorney involves advising employers on how to proactively include and support their LGBTQ+ employees--including training, harassment/ discrimination prevention, and in developing policies for affirming and supporting transgender employees.

He frequently presents on these issues in both NJ and Philadelphia.

His close ties to the Camden Machine complement Mr. McGinnis' grassroots, boots-on-the ground pedigree.

Mr. McGinnis continues to be sought out by elected officials and activists at various levels for his policy/political thoughts on a wide range of progressive issues like LGBTQ equality and curbing gun violence.

26. CHRISTOPHER HILLMAN



One of the most high-profile LGBTQ politicians in the state, Hasbrouck Heights city councilmember Christopher Hillman has done more to promote LGBTQ names onto the ballot than anyone on this list.

After 11 years as a legislative chief of staff (with Assembly members Connie Wagner & Tim Eustace) Mr. Hillman did a stint at HPAE which helped him build up his Labor bona fides. A former NJ Democratic LGBTQ Caucus Chair, Chris now works at the Motor Vehicle Commission where he's the director of Legislative Affairs.

27. JENNIFER WILLIAMS



Repping the moderate wing of NJGOP, Jennifer Williams is Trenton's longtime GOP municipal chairwoman. It's a post she won unanimously, a testament to her grassroots prowess and her commitment to party building. A barrier-breaker, Ms. Williams was also the first openly transgender delegate at the Republican National Convention in 2016.

When Ms. Williams ran for a seat in the NJ General Assembly in 2019, she made history as the first transgender candidate to run for the state house. Along the way, Ms. Williams snagged nearly 10,000 votes. That impressive tally is 2000+ votes more than both Republicans received (combined) in 2015, the last year the Assembly candidates topped the ticket.

Knocking on all those doors and changing all those hearts and minds along the way is an important part of Jennifer William's legacy which also includes decades of service to NJ's Republican party.

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28. JAKE HUDNUT

A special tribute by his fiancée, Tyler Neasloney



Jake has been chief prosecutor of Jersey City since 2018 and has brought our prosecutor's office out of the dark ages, immediately halting marijuana convictions in Jersey City since 2018 (three years before the state could get its act together to legalize marijuana), and leading a sweeping reform of the prosecutor's office, resulting in the first civilian-led, community-driven quality-of-life task force, which protects our most vulnerable residents from abusive landlords, holds irresponsible businesses accountable for local pollution, and employs a team of over 60 civilians (read: not police) to respond to low-level violations and calls for service across Jersey City.

We've been begging for changes to law enforcement, and he's making them happen.

And on top of answering the national call for law-enforcement reform, he's spent the last year straddling city agencies to lead Jersey City's enforcement of COVID-related regulations, helping us flatten the curve (and helping local businesses survive) during the darkest months of the pandemic by guiding business owners through the ever-changing maze of restrictions and safety guidelines.

If these last four years have taught us anything, it's that government on every level needs a new crop of progressive problem-solvers who can not only join the conversations, but also translate them into action.

Couldn't be more proud to stand with him on this path to change.

29. SHEP PETTIBONE

(feat. Asbury Park)

Through thick and thin, Asbury Park has always been NJ's LGBTQ capital. But considering the past several governors celebrated victories there, Asbury Park now looks like NJ's political capital as well.



Shep Pettibone is one of the most talented and celebrated music producers in American history. His writing and production credits include hits with Madonna, George Michael, Janet Jackson, Paul McCartney, Erasure, New Order, and Elton John.

As a DJ and producer, Mr. Pettibone gave us the soundtrack of Queer Liberation for the past several decades through the AIDS crisis until today.

But there's more to the Shep Pettibone story than that.

In 1998, Mr. Pettibone purchased the venerable-but-mothballed Empress Hotel in Asbury Park, a town long friendly to LGBTQ folk that fell on hard times. Shep, born in nearby Ocean Grove, opened Paradise nightclub the following year. The once-grand Empress Hotel re-opened in 2005, as Asbury Park's remarkable renaissance kicked into a high gear.

Asbury Park is now one of most popular towns on American's East Coast. All summer, hotel rooms sell quickly and you're probably (definitely) fighting for a parking spot at Gay Brunch. That would've been hard to imagine a generation ago.

But Shep Pettibone imagined it. Then he built it, so to speak, and LGBTQ people came from near and far to catalyze change and to mend and rebuild a town long-neglected. All that set the table for the Asbury Park we know now, with Queer people like Shep Pettibone leading the way.

Queer people have always been tastemakers and cultural trend-setters. But as Shep Pettibone has proven in Asbury Park, unprecedentedly good things happen in places where Queer people feel free to dance.

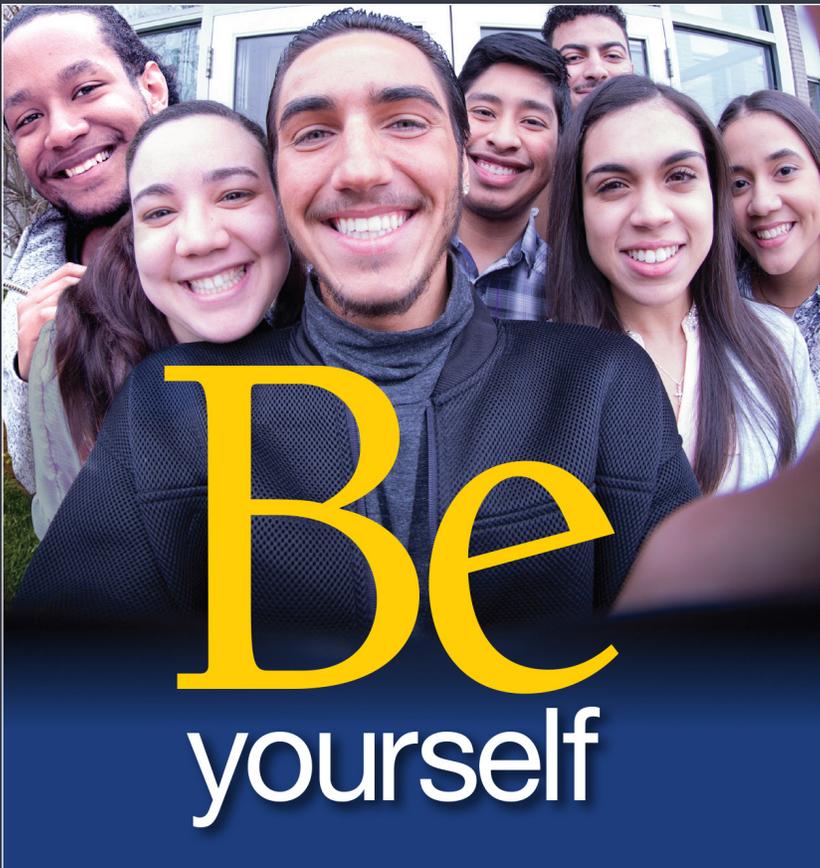
30. SHANNON CUTTLE

A special tribute by Monclair Councilman Peter Yacobellis



I've known Shannon for over 13 years and in that time I've only ever seen someone completely and exclusively rooted to both their own authenticity and their laser-focused efforts on ensuring schools throughout our state are safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth.

In a year when a gubernatorial candidate like Jack Ciattarelli decides to threaten that safe space for his own personal political ambition, I'm glad we have someone like Shannon in a position of authority to protect and ensure a quality education for all children in the Maplewood - South Orange school district and to advise leaders both at the state and national levels.



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31. BETSY DRIVER



Betsy Driver is the first-term Mayor of Flemington Borough, population 4,500, in Hunterdon County. Previously, she spent 1 year on borough council. Ms. Driver is the first intersex person elected to office anywhere in American history.

Ms. Driver was also selected as one of 10 international community heroes for the 50th World Pride Parade in New York City.

I don't typically cover the anatomical or reproductive characteristics of anyone on these pages but as Mayor Driver told InsiderNJ, "once you're quoted in the *New York Times* talking about your genitals, there's not a lot you're afraid to talk about."

In the ever-changing alphabet soup to describe the Queer community, the "I" in LGBTQI+ stands for Intersex. This refers to an innate (ie: born this way) or congenital variation of sex characteristics, including anatomical characteristics (ie: what you see) and reproductive traits that are usually not self-evident.

Ms. Driver was born with something called congenital adrenal hyperplasia which, in her case, means she was born with sex characteristics that were not clearly male or female.

Ms. Driver's genitals were mutilated at 8 months of age by a surgeon who, after deeming the infant's clitoris too large, cut it "to the nub," those exact words appearing in Ms. Driver's medical record, a revelation she discovered in her thirties.

Ms. Driver's family was led to believe her condition was incredibly rare, that they were the only ones. But they weren't the only ones. Some estimates suggest that 1%-2% of Americans are born Intersex, rivaling the population of Los Angeles, roughly 4,000,000 people.

Mutilating the genitals of an 8-month-old infant is a barbaric practice we Americans might attribute to uncivilized, backward people in faraway places and certainly not here, and certainly not anymore.

As it turns out, what happened to Ms. Driver back in the 1960s is still happening today in children's hospitals all over America, perpetuating a stigma while diminishing for a lifetime the sexual pleasure associated with what was taken without consent. It's a practice that is rooted in homophobia, transphobia, and leaves a legacy of shame.

"When you talk to people about what happens to children born with an intersex variation and the nonconsensual surgeries, they tend to be pretty horrified by it. I think there's a lot

of respect out there for anyone who is trying to change that,” Ms. Driver told the media.

Boston Children’s Hospital and Lurie Children’s Hospital in Chicago no longer perform the kind of surgery Ms. Driver endured.

Boston Children’s Hospital explained to 19thnews.com that it “will not perform clitoroplasty or vaginoplasty in patients who are too young to participate in a meaningful discussion of the implications of these surgeries, unless anatomical differences threaten the physical health of the child.”

It’s past time to end the practice of infant genital mutilation in New Jersey as well, a cause Ms. Driver is actively pursuing in Trenton’s halls of power.

32. LAUREN ALBRECHT & JOE FORTE



This duo leads the NJ Democratic State Committee LGBTQ Caucus, where Lauren Albrecht is president and Joe Forte is VP. Lauren and Joe remain the conscience of NJ’s Democratic party.

Lauren Albrecht is the loudest, most durable voice in the room for greater LGBTQ representation in politics at all levels of government and she’s your “ride-or-die” best friend on election day: sleeves rolled up, bending over backwards, knocking on every door win or lose.



Joe Forte is our community’s point-of-contact on all things LGBTQ Affairs. In 2020, 2019, and 2018 Joe was described as a “workhorse,” “diligent,” and a “well-respected political operative.” Since our last editions, his recent recognitions include serving as New Jersey’s Co-Event-Chair for U.S. President Joe Biden’s Presidential Inaugural Committee National Day of Service Event in 2021, being awarded Business Equality Magazine’s 2021 40 under 40, and a “Rising Star” by the Mercer County Democratic Committee. In addition, Joe has been assisting with Murphy’s fundraising efforts. To top it off, Joe serves on the National Board Member of the LGBTQ Victory Fund National Campaign Board, and is a Zoning Board Member in Lawrence, New Jersey.

As work horses in a world full of media-hungry show ponies, Lauren Albrecht and Joe Forte have never gotten the credit from Democratic party leaders they truly deserve. We honor their all-too-often unsung efforts here.

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33. ALYSSA KAYE DAWSON

Once the youngest councilwoman (Westwood) in New Jersey history, Alyssa Kaye Dawson is the chief of staff for NJ Senator Holly Schepisi (R-Bergen.)



Ms. Dawson won an eye-popping 70,686 votes in her longshot bid to become a Bergen County commissioner.

34. MEG COLUMBIA-WALSH

Meg Columbia-Walsh is among the most successful female tech entrepreneurs in the county. A shatterer of glass ceilings, Ms. Columbia-Walsh is dedicated to advancing the rights and protections of women, same-sex families, and LGBTQ+ executives in the state and in the workplace. In addition to being on the board of Lambda Legal and Emeritus of Family Equality, Ms. Columbia-Walsh is one of the most successfully exited female tech entrepreneurs and CEOs in the country building and selling 4 companies to the Fortune 200 and an IPO. Recently, she received the StartOUT Ogilvy Innovator of the Year Award, one of her most cherished.



“It is critical to have a return-on-investment as an individual to be able to count the women and LGBTQ+ executives and entrepreneurs you have actually helped,” Ms. Columbia-Walsh told InsiderNJ. “To have real examples of promotions, referrals, recommendations, jobs, funding, board positions and exposure. This action versus talk is critical to help build equality minded executives that can become role models and leaders themselves.”

Corporations are beginning to put real effort into Diversity and Inclusion, but until the actions match the public relations, Meg Columbia-Walsh keeps fighting because we have tremendous work left to do, especially in states where being LGBTQ can still get you fired.

35. JEN SCIORTINO



Bordentown City, population 3,792, is the kind of place where it's still possible to campaign door to door the old fashioned way: pressing the flesh, one or two voters at a time. That was Jen Sciortino's plan when she ran for Bordentown City Council in May.

Jen Sciortino easily won her council race but it gets better! By snagging the most votes that day, Jen Sciortino became Mayor of Bordentown.

Campaigning door-to-door has probably given Bordentown Mayor Jen Sciortino is a pretty idea of what's on voters' minds. But doing it the old fashion way, one voter at a time, has reinforced the importance of representation and role models.

"If I had to pick the best part about campaigning this spring, hands down it was getting to meet so many LGBTQ residents who I didn't know lived in Bordentown City," Mayor Sciortino told InsiderNJ. "The icing on the cake was getting to speak to a group of high school students recently for Pride month. These soon-to-be adults make me so excited for our future. I'm so happy they get to live their lives out and proud in ways that weren't conceivable 25 years ago when I was coming out."



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36. AMY QUINN



Amy Quinn is Deputy Mayor of Asbury Park, NJ's undisputed LGBTQ capital.

Under Ms. Quinn's leadership, Asbury Park has transformed its image (and its municipal budget) very much for the better over the past generation. As a leader and as a neighbor, Amy Quinn represents the long tradition of Queer people resorting luster to places long-neglected.

But the word "FEMINIST" tattooed onto her arm in all caps shows what motivates Amy Quinn's activist heart. Her commitment to electing more women to public office is legendary and peerless. Amy's a substantive policy wonk who spent years reformulating a progressive affordable housing plan for Asbury Park, New Jersey's most venerable, iconic shore shometown.

Asbury's annual Pride festival kicks off in earnest when Ms. Quinn grabs the mic to wish the crowd a very "HAPPY FUCKING PRIDE!"

37. VINCENT SOLOMENO



Never, not even once, has there been an openly LGBTQ state senator in New Jersey's long (and mostly glorious) history. Vincent Solomeno is eager to break that streak and become the first openly LGBTQ person to take that Senate oath in Trenton. An Army Veteran and former Fullbright Scholar, Mr. Solomeno ticks all the right boxes to lead and to inspire.

NJ votes November 2 and Mr. Solemeno is facing Senator Declan O'Scanlon to represent a huge chunk of Monmouth County in Trenton. It won't be easy to upset the Republican incumbent in a district where democratic voters are the minority, but Vincent Solomeno has done all the right things to put himself in contention.

Incumbency is power. And it's power never once wielded by (or entrusted to) a queer person in NJ Senate history. Let that sink in for a second.

If that's not a system perpetuating an overwhelmingly heterosexual *status quo*, then I don't know what is.

38. BRIAN HACKETT



One of New Jersey's most well-respected activists for animals and their habitat, Brian Hackett is the newly minted Legislative Affairs Manager for the Animal Legal Defense Fund's where he directs key legislative priorities to create stronger animal protection laws, as well as improve the awareness and enforcement of these policies with public officials and the general public.

He was previously the New Jersey state Director for the Humane Society of the United States. A moderate Republican with an uncanny ability to make friends on both sides of the aisle, Mr. Hackett is equally fluent in right- and left wing idiom. Mr. Hackett derives his influence and power from his own reputation as a straight shooting honest broker, a rarity in Trenton.

This year his tenacity paid off with the cancellation of New Jersey's annual bear hunt, a vestige of the Chris Christie era and a big love note to the NRA. So if you enjoy hiking in the woods without worrying about running into trigger-happy men with guns, you can thank Brian Hackett and his fellow animal rights activists for that.

39. LIZ SCHEDL



As Executive Director Hudson Pride Center, Liz Schedl secured the largest donation in the organization's history, from Lord, Abbett & Co, which will contribute \$700,000 over the next three years to Hudson Pride Center's budget. The financial support will allow them to continue providing a safe physical home for the LGBTQ+ community while enhancing the ongoing diverse programming and social services on offer.

This year Ms. Schedl and her board secured a brand new location for Hudson Pride Center with plans to open next year. Those expansion efforts were bolstered when Ms. Schedl secured funding to provide mental health referrals *and co-payments* (!) for LGBTQ+ folks during the Coronavirus pandemic. She also secured funding for emergency hotel stays for LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness. Notably, she led staff in setting up appointments for over 150 LGBTQ+ individuals to get free Covid-19 vaccines.

Ms Schedl partnered with Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop to launch the first ever Pride cross-walk murals painted throughout the city, literally weaving queerness into the city's infrastructure.

Additionally, she led a partnership with Rutgers School of Social Work to deliver a series of LGBTQ+ sensitivity training statewide. To date, over 300 social service provider staff from 66 organizations across the state of New Jersey have received the training. **THAT'S POWER!**

40. KARL C. RIEHL

Karl Riehl is the Director of Practice Management at Epstein Becker Green where he manages the Employment, Labor & Workforce Management and Business Litigation practices.



Mr. Riehl is also a founding member and chair of his firm's LGBTQ+ Outreach Group and a member of the National Diversity & Professional Development Committee.

Karl is currently the incoming President-Elect and was previously on the Board of Directors for NALP (National Association for Law Placement) and has been a frequent speaker at conferences most recently presenting the recruitment foundations course at the NALP Newer Professionals Forum.

Karl was previously the president and treasurer of LeGaL, the LGBT Bar Association & Foundation of Greater New York, one of the first bar associations of the LGBT legal community in the country and remains one of the largest and most active.

Additionally, he served on the Board of Advisors for the New Jersey Law & Education Empowerment Project and was on Essex County's LGBTQ Advisory Committee.

41. REGINALD “REGGIE” BLEDSOE



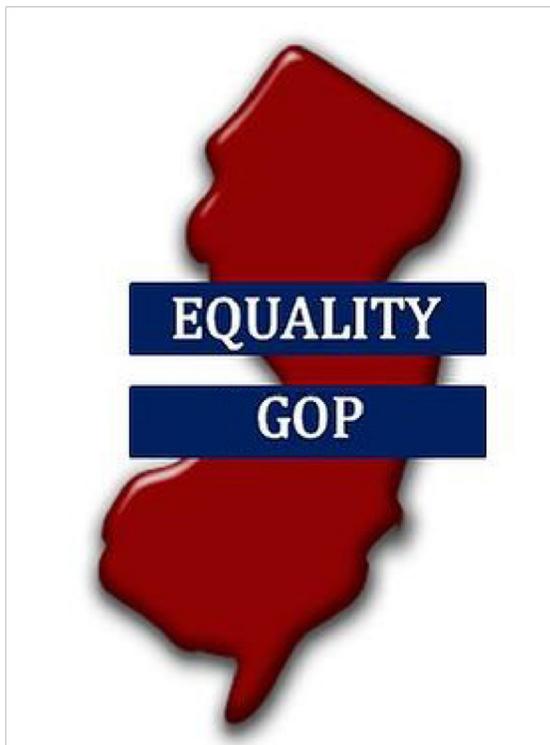
One of the most well-respected LGBTQ advocates in NJ, Reggie Bledsoe’s political Rolodex is a veritable who’s who of NJ politics. That’s a testament to Mr. Bledsoe’s reach well beyond his Newark, Essex County base.

As a member of Newark’s Board of Education, Reggie Bledsoe was the youngest male office-holder in New Jersey’s largest city during his tenure on Newark’s Board of Education.

Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. is one of the most powerful politicians in NJ. He had this to say:

“Reginald Bledsoe has brought his knowledge, expertise and energy to represent the people of Newark and Essex County to a variety of positions at the municipal, state and federal levels,” Mr. DiVincenzo told InsiderNJ. “He’s been a strong advocate for the LGBTQ community, is recognized as an authority on educational issues affecting New Jersey and has deservedly been recognized as an influential figure on several political lists. We saw his potential early and were proud to honor Reggie during our 2017 LGBTQ Pride Month ceremony.”

**Congratulations to all of the
LGBTQ leaders honored this year!**



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42. DEB GUSTON

In the last 50 years, LGBTQ rights have advanced so dramatically it can be hard to keep up. With a career spanning four decades, family law attorney Debra Guston's mission, from domestic partnerships to civil unions to marriage, has been to help LGBTQ people navigate the expanding list of civil contracts (like marriage) that our community was long denied.



Deb Guston is one of the brightest lights on NJ's legal candelabra. Past-president State Bar Association's LGBT Rights Section, Deb also sits on the board of ACLU-NJ where she's also past president.

On family law and criminal justice reform, you're hard pressed to find a more influential attorney in the state of NJ than Deb Guston.

43. ALONZO S. BLALOCK AKA PRINCE DEREK DOLL

Alonzo S. Blalock (b/k/a Prince Derek Doll) is a Newark-based performing artist, multi-media personality, journalist, entrepreneur, and LGBTQ activist. He currently serves as the Executive Vice President of Newark Pride, Inc.



The award-winning Mr. Blalock repeatedly finds new ways to utilize his platform to address LGBTQ youth homelessness, advocate for non-binary/trans rights, raise HIV/AIDS awareness, and create safe spaces for the queer community.

When he's not pressing the cause of LGBTQ liberty, Mr. Blalock's influence on culture can't be understated.

His debut performance at the 14th Annual Lincoln Park Music Festival made him the first openly gay rapper to perform on the Hip Hop mainstage. Shortly after, he made a red carpet appearance at the 37th Annual MTV Video Music Awards, garnering international recognition and placement in several publications for his fearless androgynous style.

During the pandemic he participated in several panels, hosted virtual fundraisers, and was part of the memorial demonstration committee in honor of slain transwoman Ashley Moore, Co-producer/host of Queered Millennial's web series "The Ki", Co-creator and host of NJPAC's Freeform Open Mic, resident reporter for Newark News and Story Collaborative, entertainment writer for *The Newark Times*, and most recently was the lead producer of the 16th Annual Newark LGBTQ Pride Festival.

Aside from pursuing ongoing creative endeavors, he continues to leverage his influence on public policy that will have a positive impact on the safety and health of LGBTQ persons.

44. ED ZIPPRICH & KATE TRIGGIANO

Ed Zipprich and Kate Triggiano make up 1/3rd of town council in Red Bank, population 12k, in Monmouth County. Ms. Triggiano navigated a tricky (and if we're being honest, totally unnecessary) primary and will be on the ballot in November where she has the edge. If she wins, it'll be her second term.



Elected in 2008, Mr. Zipprich has won re-election 4 times and counting. He's also the municipal chairman of the Red Bank Democratic Municipal chair.

While the duo of Kate Triggiano and Ed Zipprich represent different wings on the Democratic party (she's Bernie, he's ...not) it's still remarkable when towns elect multiple LGBTQ town councilmembers.

45. SERGIO R. BICHAO & JOE VOTRUBA



With all that drive-talk buffoonery on weekday mornings, it's easy to forget that NJ101.5 has a pretty terrific, award-winning newsroom doing good and influential work.

Sergio R. Bichao is one of NJ's most seasoned and decorated journalists. As NJ101.5's digital director, his team won a regional Edward R. Murrow Award for Best Newscast covering the COVID pandemic last year. Previously, Sergio won accolades from the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists for his coverage of NJ's pension crisis. Since then, NJ Governor Murphy has made massive contributions to stabilize NJ's pension situation. Unfortunately not all Trenton lawmakers have completely absorbed the lessons from Sergio's pension coverage. But that's not Sergio's fault. He's a journalist, not a magician.



Joe Votruba is NJ1015's longtime producer and on-air presenter. Since coming out to his radio audience in 2015, Mr. Votruba has become an outspoken advocate for the LGBTQ community. He has dedicated countless hours of air time to issues that affect the community including reparations to LGBTQ service members unfairly discharged from the military. It's easy to preach to the choir. What makes Joe unique and special is his willingness to serve digestible equality nuggets to a largely conservative audience at NJ's largest radio station.



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46. JULIO CEASAR ROMAN IIIA



Julio Ceasar Roman III currently directs a collective of 40+ LGBTQ groups nationally to address harm reduction programming in safe spaces and LGBTQ medical setting. Fighting for people who use drugs, and for policies which protect them, is wildly unpopular work. Just like fighting for AIDS once was. Needle exchange saves money and saves lives in a vulnerable population that's disproportionately queer.

Mr. Roman was also appointed a Newark LGBTQIA+ Commissioner. He's also an advisor to Ark Foundation where he created a program to address trauma for LGBTQ victims of human trafficking.

Mr. Roman's book, *Out of Space: Creating Safe Places in Unlikely Places*, debuts next month!

47. KADJA MANUEL



Army veteran Kadja Manuel wears lots of hats.

Between his work at Garden State Equality + being 3rd VP of the Trenton NAACP and becoming the first NAACP LGBTQ Committee Chair in NJ history + his work at the Trenton Health Team + *a run for Trenton City Council*, Kadja Manuel's vast potential *knows no bounds*. Number 1 through 46 better watch out!!!

Mr. Manuel seven-year stint in the US Army began in 2013, just three years after the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, a law that forced LGBTQ service members into the closet to keep their jobs.

Roughly 100,000 LGBTQ Vets were booted from service with a less-than-honorable discharge between WWII and 2011, when Congress repealed DADT, the 1990s-era

compromise on President Bill Clinton's campaign promise to allow gays in the military.

So from 1994 until 2011 when President Barack Obama signed the repeal, LGBTQs could serve but only if they remained closeted. That's a pretty big secret to hide. Not to mention the policy left LGBTQ service-members vulnerable to being "outed" and losing their job, their healthcare, and their domicile.

I'll say it again! Barring openly LGBTQ Americans from serving in the military is the most brazen example of systemic homophobia you'll find anywhere on this list.

Kadja Manuel's Army service broke barriers while proving that Queer people possess the fitness and toughness to serve. In his civilian life, Mr. Manel was a principal lobbyist to pass a bill to restore rights to LGBTQ Armed Forces service members denied an honorable discharge because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

"Our LGBTQ+ servicemembers made countless sacrifices to serve this nation, yet were discharged and denied the services and benefits they deserved simply because of who they were and whom they loved," Governor Phil Murphy said. "With today's bill signing, we are streamlining the process to provide direct assistance to these brave men and women in their efforts to revise their discharge status and attain the benefits they earned and deserve for their service."

Breaking down barriers and laying a better path for those who follow would be good enough.

Kadja Manual goes one better by honoring and tangibly uplifting those upon whose shoulders he stands.

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48. MATT ARCO

A special tribute by Terrence McDonald

What to say about my friend Matt Arco? If you pay attention to New Jersey politics, you already know he's a crackerjack reporter, he knows everyone who's anyone, he's a scoop machine, and he is incredibly fun to mock on Twitter. What you may not realize, unless you know him personally, is he's an incredibly decent person who is generous to his colleagues and peers, even if they are competition. He's going to get mad at me for revealing this side of him. Sorry, Matt!



49. CAITLIN GILES-MCCORMICK

Caitlin Giles-McCormick is council president in Flemington NJ. This year she's running for another stint on the the Flemington Borough Council. Caitlin has worked as a coordinator for non-profits for numerous organizations and agencies.



Caitlin currently serves as a Project Officer for outreach and events for the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA).

50. SAM PARKER

Sam Parker is currently the Director of Appointments for Gov. Phil Murphy. She works with senators, senior staff, the First Lady's office, and stakeholders to field suggestions for not only judicial appointments (superior court, workmans comp, etc.) but also to our many boards/commissions which govern a wide range of things things like our bridges, the gaming industry, professional boxing, and also recreational marijuana. Once resigned to the margins of NJ politics, Queer people increasingly play the roll of gatekeeper and to Sam Parker, that means weaving Queer



voices into NJ's political fabric at long last.

When Sam Parker isn't busy building the bench of seasoned LGBTQ operatives in in NJ, she's probably lending her expertise to curb teen suicide, an issue that disproportionately affects Queer kids. The founder of the Asbury Park Dyke March, Sam Parker is always ready to lace up her marching boots when necessary.

51. MICHAEL SPADORO

Michael "Mikey" Spadoro, son of former long-time Edison Mayor, George Spadoro, is political and finance director to Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman's reelection campaign. He is also the director of Garden State Equality's annual "Equality Walk Weekend," the organization's largest annual grassroots fundraiser. This year, for the first time in-person since the pandemic began, GSE outreached its \$50,000 goal by over \$15,000.



Michael has previously worked for the NJ Democratic State Committee, the Monmouth County Democrats, as well as New Jersey's 2013 democratic gubernatorial campaign.

Michael is a former Chairman of the Middlesex County Democratic Organization's LGBTQ Caucus, and the New Jersey Young Democrat's LGBTQ Caucus.

52. MICAH GARY-FRYER

Longtime educator and Union labor leader Micah Gary-Fryer is the LGBTQ+ caucus chair for the Essex County Education Association, one of NJ's most influential county-wide teachers unions.



Micah is one of the very few openly HIV+ names on this year's list, a testament to a powerful stigma that forces many with HIV back into the closet. That same stigma makes Mr. Gary-Fryer's openness both remarkable and impactful. Standing on the shoulders of the ACTUP generation of queers who demanded a better

Federal response to the AIDS crisis, Micah's longevity is a powerful reminder that HIV treatment has come light years thanks primarily to the activism of LGBTQ folk.

When COVID struck, the response globally and in America was to aim a firehose of money towards vaccine development and within a year, lines were forming at vaccine clinics around the nation. That's stark contrast to the malignant neglect of AIDS by our own federal government. There's still no AIDS vaccine because that's how it goes with diseases that primarily affect Queers and drug users.

America's neglectful response to the AIDS crisis is the most ghastly example of systematic oppression of Queer people you'll find anywhere on this list.

Micah Gary-Fryer's good health and ability to lead both repudiate an approach that left LGBTQ people on the margins.

53. JOE SIMONETTA

A widely respected lobbyist and fundraiser, Joseph "Joe" Simonetta is a senior partner at Public Strategies Impact, a bluechip government affairs firm in Trenton. His advocacy helped NJ's vibrant arts community stay afloat during the pandemic.



54. KOREN FRANKFORD

A one-woman political Chief Financial Officer of the NY Senate Democrats juggernaut, Koren Frankford also sounded the loudest and earliest alarms about the sexual assault culture that's long prevailed NJ politics.



Long before folks like Weinstein, Epstein, and Cosby (et al) finally faced the music, a woman from New Jersey named Koren Frankford demanded an honest (and long overdue) discussion about rape and about sexual harassment culture in New Jersey politics.

Sadly, New Jersey wasn't yet up to the challenge, a pity considering all the harm that took place in the meantime. Fast forward to the #MeToo era, and it's obvious that Koren Frankford was right all along. In fact, Ms Frankford's words now appear more profetic than ever. Koren Frankford's trenchant examination of rape culture in NJ politics left behind a better climate for others than the one she found. Thus Ms. Frankford joins long list of tough and courageous Queer people to usher in long overdue socitial change (often times at their own professional and emotional peril.)

When she's not dealing with the trauma caused by men behaving badly, Ms Frankford is one of the most prodigious and well-respected political fundraisers in New Jersey and the region.

55. TERRENCE T. MCDONALD

Terrence McDonald is a veteran journalist who's covered political shenanigans at all levels for the better part of two decades. Mr McDonald is currently the editor of the New Jersey Monitor, an indy, nonprofit/ nonpartisan site for news about government and politics.



If they're striving to be a good government watchdog, the gang at New Jersey Monitor have already succeeded.

The winner of 22 New Jersey Association awards, Mr. McDonald has also snagged two prestigious Tim O'Brien Awards for Investigative Journalism using the Open Public Records Act from the NJ chapter of Society of Professional Journalists. If you're not following Terrence on Twitter, you're missing out!



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**LATINA CIVIC FOUNDATION PRESIDENT
ANDREA MARTINEZ-MEJIA**

**LATINA CIVIC PAC PRESIDENT
LAURA MATOS**

56. KATIE WERTHEIMER

Still young but already a veteran of New Jersey's halls of power, Katie Wertheimer was a long-time chief of staff for Assemblywoman Valerie Huttie, the most pro-LGBTQ lawmaker in Trenton history. Prior to that, Ms Wertheimer's time at Planned Parenthood Action Fund was especially fruitful ensuring New Jersey remains a place where women and couples can decide for themselves when to start (or to grow) their family.



Katie Wertheimer is now a top Lieutenant on the Phil Murphy for governor reelection campaign.

There's an opioid crisis still raging in New Jersey. Ms Wertheimer's advocacy for harm reduction programs, such as syringe access, to curb HIV transmissions in the drug-using population continues to save lives while keeping drug users out of the hospital during the Covid pandemic. LGBTQ people are at a 3 to 4x greater risk of dependence than the general population. That makes this unsung (and often undervalued) work even more critical to our population. That, my friends, is the result of systematic oppression of Queer people.

CO-56. ERIC PINCKNEY

A tribute by Joe Grillo

To know Eric Pinckney is to love Miss Savannah Georgia and vice versa.

Community volunteer, Kiwanis Club board member, and arguably the first-ever elected school board member moonlighting as "your favorite old-school glamour drag queen diva", Eric embodies that vital intersection of gay nightlife, deep community involvement, and LGBTQ activism with grace, aplomb, and Asbury Park attitude.



When I ran with Eric for the Asbury Park school board in 2017, I asked him how he would feel if there was potential backlash about Miss Savannah during the campaign. His response: "Oh, let 'em try. I'll win with even more votes!" And he was right.

As humble of a man that Eric can be, his can-do spirit reminds me that Stonewall didn't happen in a classroom, a church basement, or a library. It happened at the bars, in the nightclubs, and in the streets.

57. JARED LAUTZ

Working for the county executive in NJ's largest County, Jared Lautz is on the inside for all decisions made. From trans-inclusive healthcare, non-gendered bathrooms, hosting New Jersey's largest GSA summit + a task force on youth homelessness, Jared is guiding the Bergen County government to be more inclusive for the LGBTQ community in Bergen County.



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58. DANNI NEWBURY

*A special tribute by Linden Councilman
John Francis Roman*



For as long as I've known Danni Newbury, she's always been willing to help those in need. As CASA volunteer, an advocate for LGBT adoption rights, or as the first director of Union County's Office of LGBTQ Services, you'd be hard-pressed to find another as well-versed in LGBTQ family policy.

Danni is the model public servant, the model wife, the model mother to her two beautiful girls, and a model friend to those lucky enough to know her. She continues to be a role model to our youth and to all those she serves as Councilwoman in Rahway.

59. CELESTE FIORE

*A special tribute by Montclair Councilman
Peter Yacobellis*



Celeste is one of those people who not only figured out how to survive and thrive, but also to educate themselves and go to work for others like them who are struggling. As a partner at Argentino Fiore Law and in their many advisory and voluntary capacities, Celeste has been both a trailblazer and champion for non-binary people by focusing on family law, civil rights litigation, school law, special education and anti-bullying work, as well as providing legal assistance for the transgender and non-binary identified community, all the while, advocating for the advancement of LGBTQ rights in general. I'm proud to know Celeste not just as the head of the Trans Affirming Alliance but also as a Board of Trustee Member for Out Montclair.

60. DIANE BRUESSOW



Diane Bruessow has for decades straddled the line between academia, clinical practice, and activism/community service. One of NJ's most preeminent experts on transgender health issues, Ms. Bruessow was recognized by the Barack Obama Administration in 2016 for innovations in transgender health care delivery.

Ms. Bruessow has a long history of service: from chairing the National Organization for Women's (NOW) Lesbian Rights Task Force 30 years ago, to serving the National Coalition for LGBT health for over a decade ago, and serving on HRC's Healthcare Equality Index National Advisory Council during its initial years.

Diane Bruessow is currently a Clinical Ambassador for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) End the HIV Epidemic campaign.

61. CARA PARMIGIANI



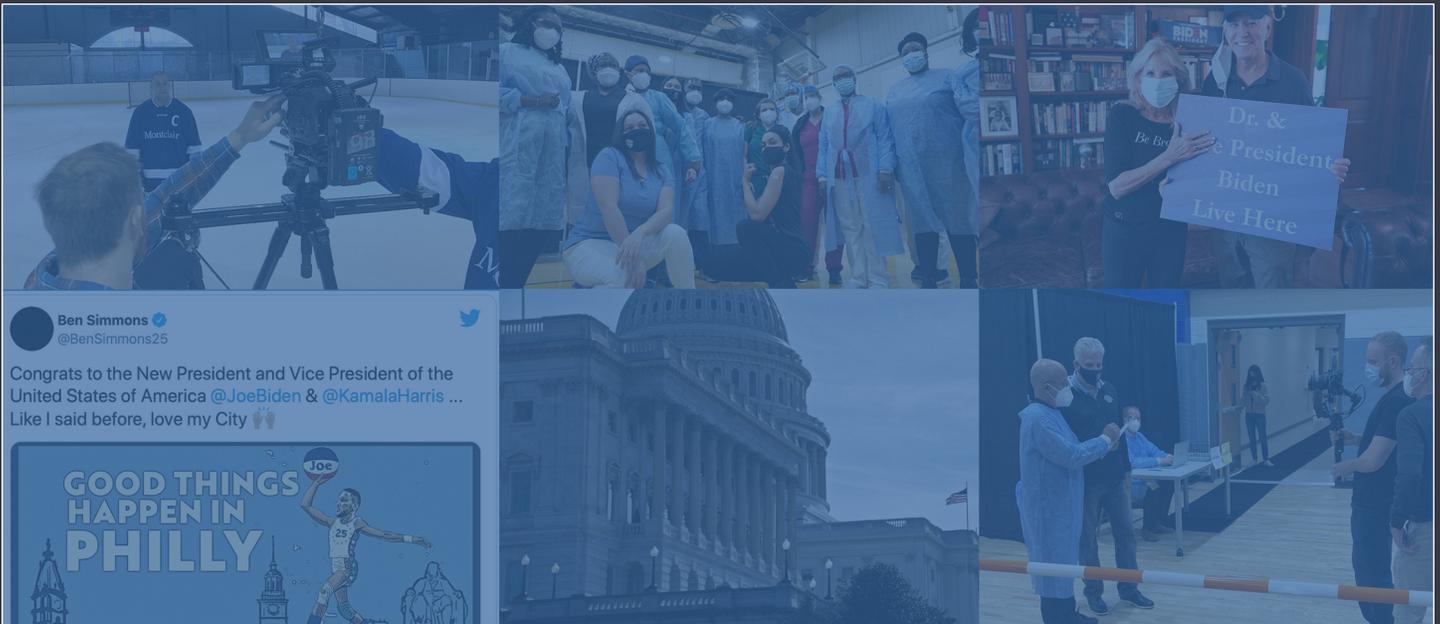
One of NJ's sharpest legal minds, Cara Parmigiani was the first openly LGBTQ+ candidate to run for Morris County Commissioner. She was the highest Democratic vote-getter in Morris County in 2019.

She remained active in the Morris County LGBTQA+ community by co-founding Morris County Pride (with Sean Dorsa) and is the founding chair of the Morris County Democratic LGBTQA+ Caucus. Additionally, Cara serves as a founding board member of Elect Women NJ, and serves on the Advisory Board of the Stonewall Community Development Corp.

A longtime GOP bastion, Morris County has in recent years grown more politically competitive. With help from Cara Parmigiani and Morris' LGBTQA+ caucus, two Democrats, Mikie Sherrill and Tom Malinowski, got reelected to Congress in very competitive districts last year.

I'm not saying The Gays made all the difference in Malinowski's narrow victory.

But I'm not *not* saying it either.



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62. ELVIN MONTERO



Elvin Montero is the newly minted Deputy Executive Director for the Chemistry Council of New Jersey, which represents the state's largest manufacturing sector. in Trenton's halls of power.

A Trenton native of Puerto Rican descent, Mr. Mortero is known to both Democrats and Republicans and since 2004, he's among the few openly gay people working in senior leadership for a major trade association in New Jersey.

In his previous role as director of communications, Mr. Montero worked closely with state and local officials to ensure the lifesaving products his members manufacture were available for the state's COVID-19 mitigation, preparedness, and response efforts.

The first openly gay person to run for city-wide office in Trenton, Mr Montero is vice-chair of the Mercer LGBTQ Democrats and serves on the executive board of both the Trenton Democrats and Mercer County Democrats. He remains one of Mayor Reed Gusciora's most trusted advisors after co-chairing his transition team. He was integral in organizing Trenton's first LGBTQ Pride Festival.

Elvin Montero is a member of the Board of Directors of the Capital City Redevelopment Corporation and The Passage Theatre in Trenton; he also is a member of the Columbia Care New Jersey Advisory Board.

63. DAN FATTON

A special tribute by Elvin Montero



Dan Fatton is a proud member of the LGBTQ community who has been a longtime advocate for environmental issues and has advised several administrations on such issues, including advocating for policies to make electric vehicles more accessible in our state.

He is currently the New Jersey State Director for Energy Foundation, and is generous with his time volunteering to serve as chair of the City of Trenton's Planning Board, and on the boards of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, among many other contributions.

64. ROSIE DRISCOLL

A tribute by Jay Lassiter



One of the biggest weapons against systemic homophobia is cross-generational nurturing and mentorship. I first met Rosie Driscoll while she was enrolled in Mayor Reed Gusciora's government class at the College of New Jersey. Reed was professor and I guest lectured about something (probably pot) and it was pretty obvious then that Ms. Driscoll was destined to do big and meaningful things. (Ms. Driscoll isn't the only one whose path to success included a stop in Professor Gusciora's class at TNCJ.)

After a 1½ year stint at Planned Parenthood (where she worked to keep the government out of your womb) Rosie Driscoll is now the Outreach Advisor to Robert Menendez, NJ's senior US Senator.

Senator Menendez was effusive with praise.

"For the past two years, Rosie has led my state office's health care portfolio, and it has been a pleasure to watch her grow and excel in her role," Senator Menendez told InsiderNJ. "When COVID-19 ravaged our state, Rosie worked around the clock to ensure our hospitals, community health centers, and health care providers had the resources and critical information they needed to protect their staff and patients. Because of her strong work ethic, deep institutional knowledge of New Jersey, and her passion for women's issues, health care policy, and the LGBTQ+ community, she has become an emerging leader in our state."

65. KRISTI MARCIANO

A rising star for whom the sky's the limit, Kristi Marciano is a senior associate at Kivvit, a politically-wired NJ communications firm, where she specializes in immersive research projects, social media strategy, and campaign development.



Young, passionate, incredibly talented, with ambition to spare, Kristi's currently earning a Master's degree (in science writing) while running major clients at a blue-chip firm.

66. TYRA GARDNER EBONY

An award-winning activist from Jersey City, Tyra Gardner Ebony is the Mpowerment Coordinator and LGBTQ Team Supervisor at the PRIDE Center in Newark. Ms. Gardner recently won the Marsha P. Johnson lifetime achievement award for her powerful voice and advocacy for transgender women of color during her 12+ year stint at the PRIDE Center.



67. MIKE STRACCO

A longtime English teacher with a penchant for theater, Mike Stracco leads the Pride Alliance in Hawthorne – a first for the Passaic County town. Under Mr. Stracco's stewardship, Hawthorne's Pride Alliance has hit the ground running, determined to have a positive impact in town. The entire town council, mostly Republican, hopped on Mike's bandwagon proving the old adage that, if you build it, they will come.



68. ALANA BURMAN

Alana Burman is an accomplished government affairs professional who rose up the ranks from campaign staffer on Gov. Murphy's 2017 campaign to Assistant Director of Gov't Affairs at Duane Morris. Most recently she took her considerable skills to the Anti-Defamation League where she's the Associate Regional Director for New York and New Jersey.



Alana has brought a new skillset to the ADL that they have been missing over the years: local and state government relationships. This past year alone, Alana has been part of drafting multiple pieces of anti-bias legislation that has worked its way through the Assembly. Drafting bills and changing crappy laws. That's power.

An avid Nazi hunter, Ms. Burman also enjoys a sassy cross stitch and spending time with her cats Mr. Boo Bear and Miss Bijoux.



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69. AXEL TORRES MARRERO

Axel Torres Marrero is Senior Director of Public Policy and Prevention for the Hyacinth Foundation, New Jersey's first and largest AIDS service provider. With an eye on an AIDS-free generation, Mr. Torres Marrero worked hard this year to, among other things, decriminalize the sex lives of HIV+ people.



70. MARIA RODRIGUEZ-GREGG

Yes, it's true. And for anyone close to her, the clues that Maria Rodriguez -Gregg is bisexual have been there the whole time. A former two-term state lawmaker from Burlington County, Ms. Rodriguez is one of the more high-profile voices working to curb domestic violence in New Jersey. As a Republican member of NJ's General Assembly, she sponsored the original bill permitting transgender New Jerseyans to update gender markers on their birth certificates.



Her bi-weekly show "Maria and Fernando-Talking Jersey" with Fernando Uribe has produced solid traffic and insightful analysis on the political climate in the Garden State. Examining the gubernatorial race, legislative candidates, and culture war issues has made this a very interesting program. She has been a champion for the LGBTQ community when discussing issues and especially when challenging her co-host for some comments that can be viewed as polarizing during the broadcast. She continues to be an advocate for the LGBTQ community in all facets of her life.

Maria knows there's a big difference between being out to a few friends and being out to the whole world. She agreed to be on last year's list to highlight her ongoing efforts to pass LGBTQ- inclusive domestic violence legislation here in New Jersey.

71. AARON POTENZA

Aaron Potenza is one of the most well-respected transgender advocates in NJ history. He took a step back this year to focus on fatherhood. He and his husband adopted infant twins in January. Mr. Potenza is putting together an LGBTQ public policy consulting business and despite fatherhood he remains a prominent voice on the prevention of sexual assault.



72. IAN MOSLEY

The Democratic municipal chairman of Lindenwold (Camden County,) Ian Mosley is one of the very few LGBTQ municipal chairs in New Jersey. A Biden delegate in 2016, Mr. Mosley is also a New Jersey State Democratic Committee member.



73. ANYONE IN THE CLOSET

Even in 2021, the closet remains a lonely, damaging place. With all the recent advances on LGBT rights, it's easy to forget that there's still plenty of anti-LGBTQ stigma out there. It's important to bear witness to that loneliness. We do that here.'



74. TAHTIANNA FERMIN



Tahtianna Fermin is the founder and CEO of Bridges4Life which works to help teens and young adults living on the streets and in foster care become responsible, self-sufficient, confident, and educated adults. Bridges4Life provides supportive housing, prevention services, and support for young people aging out of foster care system.

Ms. Fermin recently won Garden State Equality's Babs Siperstein Prize for a lifetime of advocacy for a marginalized, stigmatized population that's disproportionately queer.

75. ZOE HEATH



Fighting for LGBTQ equality is harder in Sussex County, one of NJ's last right-wing bastions, than it is in Montclair or Collingswood. But that didn't deter Zoe Heath, Sussex County's rainbow rabble rouser, from pressing her case for equality in the halls of power

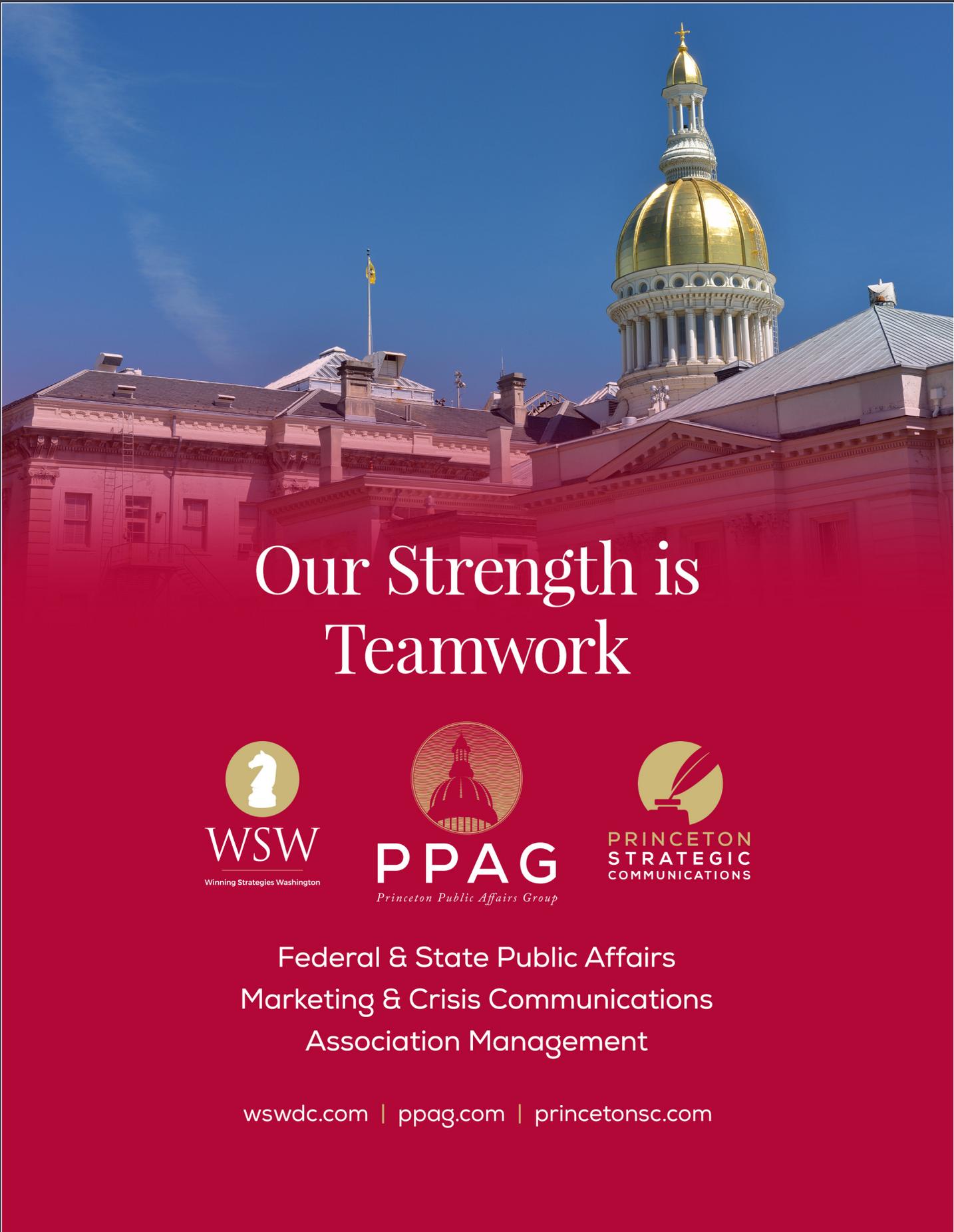
Along with her ongoing work for Sussex County Pride (where she's founder and executive director) Ms. Heath spearheaded proclamations and history-making Pride rallies. Ms. Heath is also the inaugural chair of the Sussex County LGBTQ+ Democratic Caucus and vice chair of the county party's young Dems caucus.

76. T.C. McCOURT



T.C. McCourt is running for Morris County Commissioner in a longtime GOP bastion that's trending more politically competitive in recent years. Part of a ticket that includes two LGBTQ candidates (historic for Morris County) Mr. McCourt is seeking to capitalize on a shifting political landscape and bring a new voice and a new perspective to Morris County.

Born and raised in Virginia, a state that enshrined a ban on same-sex marriage in its Constitution in 2006, T.C. McCourt grew up wondering if he'd ever be truly happy. And



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then he met a special guy from New Jersey and it was love at first sight. T.C. and his husband have lived in Dover since 2015. In June of 2018, T.C. was appointed to his town's Planning Board. In 2020, he was appointed by the County Commissioners to serve on the Morris County Heritage Commission.

One of the founding members of the Morris County Democratic LGBTQA+ Caucus, T.C. immediately got to work trying to ensure the caucus would have the resources it needs.

This year, T.C. McCourt decided to be one of those candidates by running for Morris County Commissioner, a position Democrats haven't held since the 1970's.

77. DAVE D'AMICO

He's a longtime member of Garden State Equality's executive board, but it's Dave D'Amico's work to foster better relations between police and the LGBTQ community that stands out. Mr. D'Amico's efforts to build bridges between law enforcement and queer people is among GSE's most important and innovative work.



There's still work to build trust. But Dave D'Amico, a gay man who spent his entire career in law enforcement, is a reminder of the progress made toward better relations between LGBTQs and police.

78. A.J. OLIVER

A.J. Oliver is one (of two) LGBTQ candidates who's running this year for County Commissioner in Morris Co (population 509,285 per the most recent census.) The Morristown Democratic municipal chairman, Mr. Oliver is also a Captain in the New Jersey Army National Guard.



History is not on his side. No Democrat has won countywide in Morris since Doug Romaine in 1973. A.J. Oliver appears to possess the tools to break that streak. And if he does, look for his ranking to skyrocket next year.

79. WILLIAM PLACEK



William Placek is Chapter President of PFLAG Jersey Shore. PFLAG is one of America's more venerable LGBTQ rights organizations.

William remains eager to press the case for equality in the business – and corporate world. William also presented programs at New Jersey Natural Gas and later to 400 employees of Ocean County social services and many other businesses and organizations, all focused on advocating for and improving the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Recognizing the need for support services for LGBTQ + youth, William formed a collaboration with Ocean Partnership for Children, and Monmouth Cares to create social support groups for LGBTQ+ children and teens, and connect with community leaders to promote the mission of PFLAG Jersey Shore.

Not all towns and counties are created equal. LGBT activism is easy in places like Montclair and Asbury Park. William Placek gets bonus points for waging the equality battle in Ocean County, historically one of the most conservative in the state.

80. LENAEE GRANT



LeNae Grant is Program Director for the City of East Orange in Essex County.

One of NJ's more prominent and well-respected transgender activists, Ms. Grant worked closely with Garden State Equality to ensure East Orange (pop. 64,367) provided comprehensive health care for its transgender employees. LeNae epitomizes the very best in local, community organizing and advocacy.

Ms. Grant was a principal lobbyist to ban the so-called "panic defense" cited repeatedly by those who do violence to LGBTQs, especially to our transgender sisters who are repeatedly targeted for living openly.

"We deserve to live with dignity and safety in our communities," Ms. Grant said. "Knowing that the 'panic' defense is banned in New Jersey is another victory and moment of empowerment for black trans women like myself, but there's still more work to do for our community."

81. ERIC HAMILTON



Eric Hamilton parlayed an internship with the Monmouth County Democrats into a bigtime gig in 2018 as deputy field director for Tom Malinowski for Congress, a high profile race that saw Malinowski prevail in a nailbiter.

Eric now serves as Congressman Malinowski's outreach coordinator where he collaborated with the 2020 Census Congressional liaison to create and execute a district-wide strategy to target hard-to-reach communities in NJ's 7th Congressional District. The result: the highest self-response rate of any Congressional district in the state, a positive reflection of Mr. Hamilton's outreach. This matters because towns under-counted by the Census, end up with fewer resources like schools transportation dollars.

While we're on the topic, 2020 was the first year the US Census counted same-sex couples by permitting respondents to specify if they're in a same sex relationship.

It's a small but important step forward for a Federal Government that (quite literally) still doesn't count us. The Census still doesn't collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity issues either , one of the most flagrant displays of systematic oppression you'll find anywhere on this list.

Think about it: nothing says "you don't count" than not being counted.

82. KRIS BERRIOS



Despite his recent move to Somerset County, Kris Berrios has remained active with the Union County LGBTQ Affairs Ad Hoc Committee which recently announced plans to honor Elizabeth, NJ native Marsha P. Johnson, the transgender AIDS activist who probably threw the first brick at the Stonewall Rebellion back in 1969.

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83. DAVID GRANT

A Florida native with strong Bergen County ties, David Grant is a founding member of the NJ Democratic State Committee's LGBTQ caucus. Currently the deputy strategist and client specialist for Xenospi, a national political consulting firm with Jersey roots, Mr. Grant also has close ties to US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.



Mr. Grant was previously chief of staff for Assemblyman Tim Eustace, one of only two openly Gay state lawmakers in New Jersey's centuries-long history. During his time in Trenton, David Grant did more than just about anyone to set the table for marriage equality in New Jersey and nationwide.

"David worked tirelessly in my office on policy and public outreach," Mr. Eustace told InsiderNJ. "He was in the mix as we fought to reach some of the goals that New Jersey has achieved for LGBTQ equality."

David recently got married and decamped to Philly with his new husband Brad. But as long as he's got a permanent place to crash in Asbury Park, there's always room for David Grant on this list.

84. MARIO DE SANTIS

A teacher in the Collingswood public school district, Mario De Santis is running for the House of Representatives in NJ's 1st Congressional District.



Mr. De Santis' run for Congress is deeply personal: his partner is from a country where LGBTQs are routinely beheaded and harassed. Until being gay is explicitly codified into American immigration policy, Mario De Santis is fighting to protect LGBTQ couples with mixed immigration status.

Any tilt at the Camden Democratic machine takes big stones and, in Mr. De Santis's case, a righteous impatience. He basically got sick of waiting for Camden Machine Democrats to move past lip service on LGBTQ issues. **Can you blame him?**

85. ROBYN GEDRICH

Robyn Gedrich is the regional political director for NJ Forward in Monmouth & Ocean working for Phil Murphy's reelection campaign. It's Ms. Gedrich's job to keep the numbers tight in places Murphy's opponent must dominate. Previously, Ms. Gedrich was political director for Senator Vin Gopal, one of the most pro-LGBTQ lawmakers in Trenton.



After running for Ocean County commissioner at 23 (inspired by the late Laurel Hester) and a campaign in Long Branch with Dave Parano, Ms. Gedrich remains committed to organizing and making positive change in the state.

86. STEPHEN BLAZEJEWSKI

Throughout most of America's long history, LGBTQ people (and our families) have been incentivized into poverty by official government policies. Let's start with inheritance, Social Security, tax and marriage laws which systematically discriminated against same-sex couples who couldn't legally marry in New Jersey until 2016.



You can't get fired for being LGBTQ in New Jersey any more, but if you live here and work in Pennsylvania, **you can be**. Lacking a national transgender-inclusive non-discrimination employment policy, when queer people travel around the nation, our right to work fades in an out like cell phone reception.

I could go on but you get the picture.

A 2017 graduate honors graduate of Montclair State University, Stephen Blazejewski represents a modern wave of gay activists, all digital natives who always dared to dream bigger.

If, in previous eras, we fought just to survive, Stephen Blazejewski is fighting to ensure that LGBTQ people thrive and prosper.

Mr. Blazejewski joined Equitable Advisors, a bluechip financial advising firm, becoming the only "out" Financial Advisor in the Woodbridge office of 200 employees. Knowing that the LGBTQ+

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community has been historically underserved by the financial services industry, Mr. Blazejewski is dedicated to advancing the financial interests and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals, families, and business-owners.

Stephen became a Certified Financial Planner in October of 2021, one of the youngest in his company to do so, in order to better-empower the LGBTQ community and help them work towards financial freedom.

Stephen joined the New Jersey LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NJLGBTCC) as a volunteer and in short seven months, he became the youngest member voted onto the Chamber's board of directors as VP of Membership. During his tenure in this position, he tripled the Chamber's membership, was appointed to represent the Chamber on Governor Murphy's Restart and Recovery Advisory Council in the wake of COVID-19, and was recognized in BEQ Pride Magazine's Class of 2020 Forty LGBTQ Leaders Under 40.

In July of 2021, Stephen was voted President of NJLGBTCC. He's currently spearheading a rebranding initiative for the organization and leading discussions with Governor Murphy's office to help elevate LGBTQ-owned businesses.

87. LAWRENCE BLUESTONE

Genova Burns is one of the most astute and politically wired law firms in New Jersey and Lawrence Bluestone is Partner in the firm's Jersey City office where he focuses his practice on complex commercial litigation and appellate law matters on behalf of public and private sector clients, primarily focusing on management of multi-million dollar companies and business disputes.



88. HARMONICA SUNBEAM

Harmonica Sunbeam is part of a long and venerable tradition of LGBTQ people using the art of Drag to change the world. Ms. Sunbeam weaves a heaping helping of social justice into every performance, leaving her audiences both entertained and empowered.

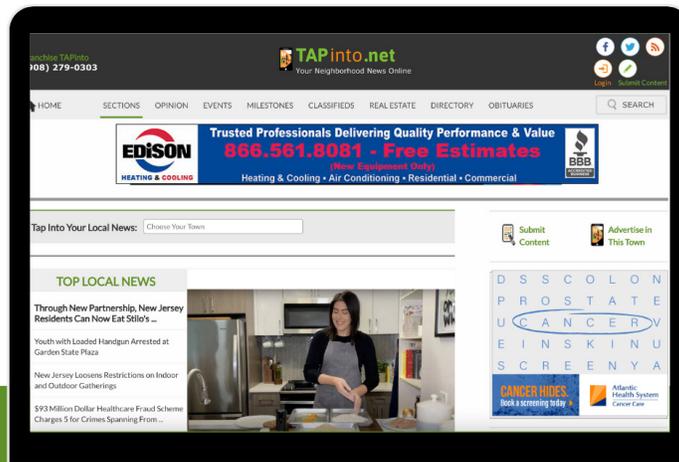




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89. BRIAN K EVERETT

Brian K. Everett first made his mark in the NJ-politico sphere when he exposed public officials conducting private business with tax-funded resources. Today, he spends a lot of his time at Rutgers University – Camden where he's an assistant dean for the Honors College. He's also an elected Rutgers University Senator. Brian regularly advocates for environmental rejuvenation both within and outside of his university life, and is also studying toward a PhD.



90. AMANDA HOFFMAN

Cannabis legalization was on the ballot last year in New Jersey. So we honor grassroots stalwarts like Amanda Hoffman who created the climate for last November's smashing pro-pot victory. After NJ voters legalized cannabis in record numbers, Ms. Hoffman was right back in the trenches to prevent politically-connected types from dominating NJ's cannabis market and charging \$500 for an ounce of crappy weed.



91. CHARLES EADER

A special tribute by Melonie Marano, Somerset County Commissioner

2020/2021 was the inaugural year for Somerset County's LGBTQ+ Advisory Board. Knowing Charles' background advocating for the community, the choice was easy to not only appoint him to the committee, but select him (unanimously) to be the chair. With his leadership, the team ran three well-attended public Zoom webinars focusing on topics of health, law, and personal histories targeting the LGBTQ population. At the culmination of the group's first full year, a picnic was held complete with entertainment, public officials, DJ, and county departments staffing tables answering questions and informing the attendees on services available.

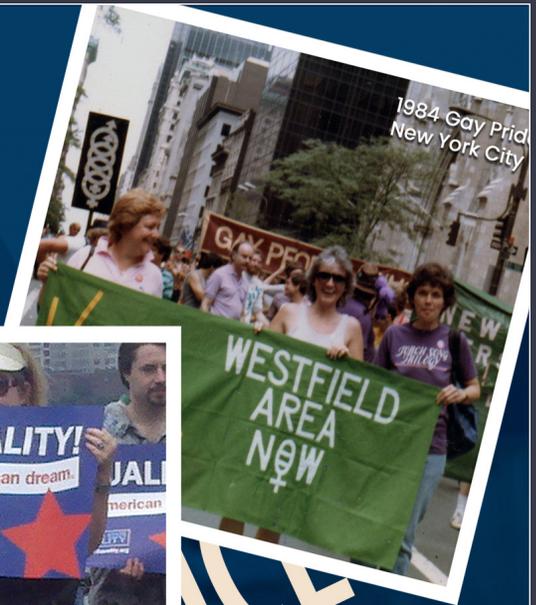
It was fitting also, that Charles was one of the featured persons on the Pride Month 2021 LGBTQ mural in downtown Somerville, which recognized prominent advocates for LGBTQ rights. Charles has committed his adult life to this cause and has earned the honor of recognition.

I fully and proudly endorse him for this honor.





1996 New Jersey Pride
Asbury Park



1984 Gay Pride
New York City



Garden State Equality Rally - 2012



Princeton Pride March - 2019



1984 Lesbian Rights

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92. TERRY WEST

For more than a decade, dependable GotV efforts by Terry West have been instrumental in getting candidates elected to office in Mercer County.

Mr. West is also the founding chair of the NJ LGBTQ Democratic Caucus of Mercer County. He began his LGBTQ advocacy efforts as the lead for LGBTQ Outreach for the Corzine campaign.

In his current role, he was instrumental in getting Mercer County to recognize LGBTQ Pride Month and has worked on bringing LGBTQ+ businesses into Mercer County.



93. JESS ALAIMO

A Monmouth County stalwart currently living in Tinton Falls, Jess Alaimo is in the chorus of activists creating a better, less rapey climate for women in politics.

Ms. Alaimo is part of a long and venerable tradition of LGBTQs using art to change the world. In Ms. Alaimo's case, that's stand up comedy.

She's also a writer at *TriCity News* where she pens the often witty, sometimes skeptical.



94. JP NICOLAIDES

JP Nicolaides sits on the Red Bank Housing Authority and the New Jersey Cultural Trust, where he was appointed by Governor Murphy. Mr. Nicolaides is also the spouse of 5-term Red Bank Councilman Ed Zipprich.





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95. RYAN ALBRIGHT

The president and founder of Pride of Evesham, Ryan Albright has worked with lawmakers from both parties to transform Burlington County's largest town into an LGBTQ-friendly bastion/destination.



Mr. Albright has spear-headed Evesham's Pride Month proclamation since 2019 and ensured a bigger and grander Pride celebration in subsequent years.

Evesham, population 46,826, was until recently a reliably conservative town governed by extremely conservative lawmakers. Fast-forward to this year's Pride Month, and there's a rainbow flag waving in front of City Hall.

Huge kudos to Ryan Albright who created the climate for change to happen.

96. ED POTOSNAK

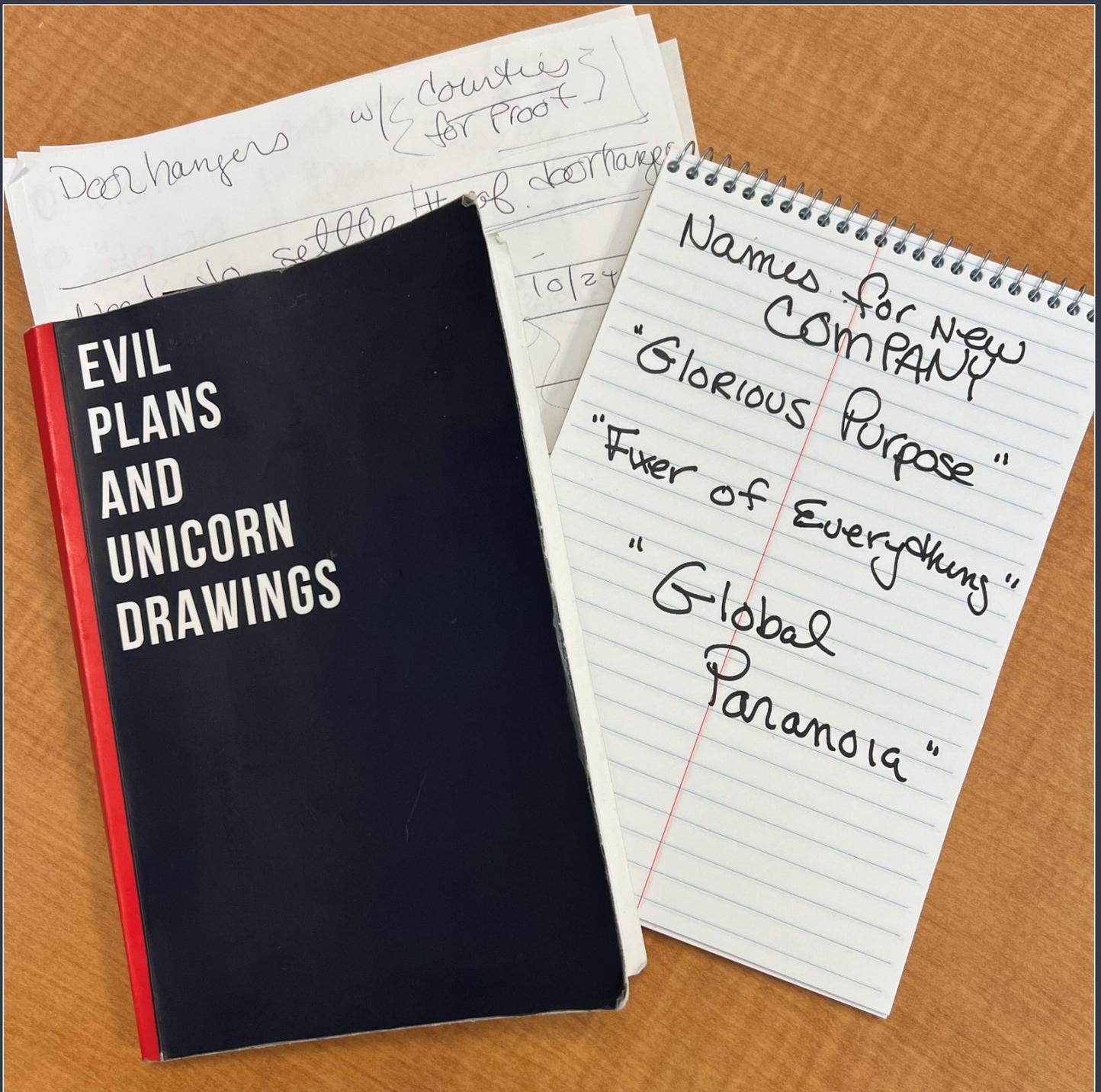
Ed Potosnak is Executive Director of New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, the leading political voice for the environment. Ed is also a local elected official on the Franklin Township Board of Education.



97. JASON DEALESSI

The principal at Fuerza Strategy, Jason is building his firm's portfolio by helping local LGBTQ elected officials and candidates across NJ. Candidates with tight budgets can rely on Jason to grow their presence and get them elected. As one of the few LGBTQ owned businesses in NJ politics, Jason is the go-to for anyone looking to spend their rainbow dollars with a rainbow company.





Congrats to all on this year's power list!

Also, a small announcement... It's time for a change...

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but it's always good to reinvent yourself

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Dave Parano

98. JOHN TRAIER & PAM DANIELS



Two well-respecting advocates for LGBTQ equality, John Traier and Pam Daniels have spent decades pressing the case for liberty, especially within their own Republican party.

99. MARSHA SHAPIRO & LOUISE WALPIN



They were the first gay couple to legally marry in the state of New Jersey which imparted instant ICON status on Marsha Shapiro & Louise Walpin. The historic wedding, held in the home of Senator Raymond Lesniak and his late wife Salena Carroll-Lesnik, was one for the ages.

100. PERRY HALKITIS



Dr. Perry Halkitis is the Dean at Rutgers School of Public Health where he's a professor of biostatistics and Urban-Global Public Health. A nationally renowned public health expert, Dr. Halkitis spent the past 18 months educating Trenton lawmakers about COVID and how to navigate a healthcare pandemic that arrived abruptly and without a rulebook. Dr. Halkitis also leads Rutgers Center for Health, Identity, Behavior, and Prevention Studies (CHIBPS) which tracks HIV/AIDS, substance use, and mental health issues facing LGBTQ people. This data is used to ameliorate healthcare disparities faced by Queer people.

Perry Halkitis belongs much higher on this list.

But I wanted Perry Halkitis, a scientist who came of age during the AIDS crisis + NJ's preeminent expert in COVID management, to be the last name you read on this list.