

News about Holland area LGBT people and their allies

LGBT Times



November 2019

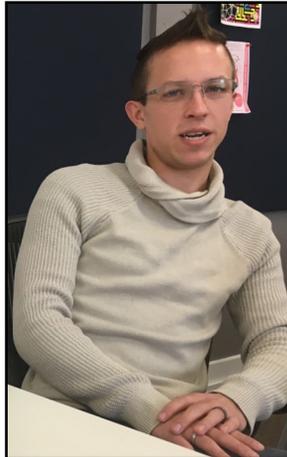
New OOTL director passionate about helping

Jeffrey Sorensen remembers the day well.

His father was driving him home from high school track practice when they noticed a fire and his dad suddenly pulled over, prompting Jeffrey to ask why he was headed to a compete stranger's house near their home in tiny Little Lake in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

"There is a fire in their yard and they need our help until the fire department can arrive," his dad answered simply.

"It's kind of a no questions asked community. If someone needs your help everyone's there,"



Jeffrey Sorensen

Sorensen added. "That really stuck with me. I've always enjoyed helping people."

Now Sorensen is helping people in Holland. As Out On The Lakeshore's first director, he's taken over the helm of the non-profit group that advo
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Mayor's race looms in Holland

An incumbent who has voted against adding LGBT people to those protected by the city's anti-discrimination ordinance and a challenger who vows to fight for LGBT people are vying for Holland mayor in the Nov. 5 general election.

The mayor's race is one of two Holland City Council seats being contested in the Tuesday, Nov. 5 election. Polls are open from 7 a.m.-8 p.m.

Current mayor Nancy DeBoer is being challenged by attorney Nathan Bocks for the two-year term. DeBoer was one of five Holland City Council members who voted in 2011 against adding LGBT
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Unless otherwise noted, all events are at the Out On The Lakeshore Community Center,

| NOVEMBER 2019 | | | | | | |
|---------------|--|---|-----------|---|--|--|
| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
| | | | | | 1 | 2 4-6 pm: Gender SAFE |
| 3 | 4 | 5 General election. Don't for- get to vote!* | 6 | 7 7-9 pm: Adult Game Night | 8 | 9 10 am- noon: Lakeshore Hope |
| 10 | 11 2-5:30 pm: Equality Michigan Pop Up Hours | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 7-9 pm: PFLAG meets at Grace Episcopal ** | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 6:30-7:30 pm: Adult Book Club | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 10 am- noon: Lakeshore Hope |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |

* Out in Faith meets on Nov. 5 from 7-8:15 pm

**Gender SAFE also meets on Nov. 15, from 6-8 pm, also at Grace Episcopal Church

Bocks challenges DeBoer for Holland mayor

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people to those protected by the city's anti-discrimination ordinance. Bocks has said he would vote for such protections.

DeBoer has a bachelor's degree from Calvin College and was a high school teacher. She is the volunteer executive director of the West Michigan Character Council, has 17 years experience on the council, and has served four years as mayor. She is married and has three children and three grandchildren.

Bocks owns and operates Central Park Law, where the attorney specializes in real estate, estate planning and small business. He and his wife, Elizabeth, a Hudsonville teacher, have three children. He and his wife both went to Hope College.

In order to educate readers on where the two mayoral candidates stand, they were asked the following four questions:

1. What specific qualities do you possess that would make voters want to cast their ballots for you rather than your opponent?

Nathan Bocks: Holland should be more



Nancy DeBoer

than just a city that works. It must be a community that works for everyone. I love Holland. I love to serve. I have worked hard to accomplish real change for Holland over the last 20 years of service to the community. I have served on 15 different boards and commissions and more often than not, was elected chair. I have had great success leading groups of talented individuals to not only cast a vision, but to achieve tangible goals for the community. Among others, I was on the Library Board for 12 years, chaired the Tulip Time Board, the Zoning Board, the Habitat Board and helped form Jubilee Ministries. I co-chaired the Civic Center fundraising campaign and am currently the chair of the Civic Center Board. Two years ago, when the Civic Center Project was underfunded and off the rails, the mayor called me to lead the fundraising effort and get the project back on track. I put together a team that raised the needed funds and led the Civic Center Place Board to finish the project two months ahead of schedule and under budget. A mayor needs to be



Nathan Bocks

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Mayor candidates outline main issues

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more than just another member of City Council with some ceremonial duties. A mayor needs to lead council discussions and bring them to consensus so, as a group, they can cast a vision for the future and accomplish real change that benefits the entire community.

Nancy DeBoer: I have been listening and helping residents and community members with government-related issues for 14 years. I have watched leaders in government and learned from them. I have developed my own style of leadership which involves listening and connecting visions; it is a collaborative approach that tries to make others successful. The heroes of Holland are the residents. I'm here to help them connect. I love to be a part of conversations when people lean in to help solve someone else's problem. It happens often in Holland.

2. What do you think are the main issues facing the City of Holland and how would you address them?

DeBoer: We need to keep working on providing clean, safe neighborhoods for people to call home. We want to grow our housing availability to help support our businesses with great employees who can live near work and give back to the community. We would love to grow our fiber optic network into the neighborhoods to help home businesses and education. We want to provide places to play as well with

the development of the waterfront with public access.

Bocks: Holland's main issues are a challenge, an opportunity, and an aspiration. Our biggest challenge is housing. We can no longer keep this on the back burner. We need a mayor who can think creatively and work collaboratively to build the housing Holland wants and needs. As the former chair of the board of Lakeshore Habitat for Humanity and a founder of Jubilee Ministries, I understand the need for and way to create affordable housing in the Holland area. As a real estate attorney for the last 27 years, I have worked with developers to create hundreds of housing units in the forprofit world. I am uniquely qualified to see both sides of the housing equation. We need to be creative, work collaboratively, and be proactive in seeking out developers and projects that will address Holland's specific housing needs. Our biggest opportunity is our waterfront. We have a once in a lifetime chance. We need a mayor with vision. Let's get it right. I was brought on to help rescue the Civic Center project when it was under funded and floundering. I understand the mistakes that were made and what we can and should have done better. I will take that experience to the Waterfront project. This is not a two- or five- or 10-year project. It will take decades of work with the community and waterfront land-owners to create and implement a plan that benefits all of us. There is no need to rush.

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Mayor candidate stance on housing

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Let's be deliberative in connecting our community to its waterfront. Our biggest aspiration is to create a community that works for everyone. Holland is a rich tapestry of people. But significant parts of the Holland community do not feel valued, or welcome, or included. Inclusion is more than a welcome packet; it is an attitude and message and sincere invitation that everyone in Holland has value and has something to contribute. As a community we need to welcome all of our residents and their contributions. That attitude must start with the mayor. As your mayor, I will celebrate the value of everyone who calls Holland home.

3. What should the City Council do to bring more affordable housing to the city?

Bocks: The City Council needs to be more proactive in its approach to affordable housing. Council's current attitude is to review projects and entertain the ideas of developers that come to them. If the types of projects and developers that Holland needs now are not finding their way to our door, we need to go looking for them.

Further, the city needs to streamline the process for development and assist developers along the development path. The city's current proposal for the development process is a 31-step flowchart. Even city staff do not know how long it will take for a developer to complete the process. When

faced with that daunting a process, developers will choose to go elsewhere. We do need standards and processes; they do not need to be unnecessarily burdensome. City Council also needs to understand that transportation is a critical component of the housing equation. There is not enough land in Holland to build all of the housing that we will need in the future. We must work collaboratively with surrounding townships and communities to build housing and create a reliable transportation system to get people from their homes to their jobs.

DeBoer: Council is working hard to address affordable housing. It isn't easy or simple, but we have partners such as the CFHZ (Community Foundation Holland/Zeeland) and its \$1 million fund to incentivize developers to include some affordable units. We are working hard on our UDO (Unified Development Code) to help make development clearer and appropriate. We plan, zone, abate, and invest as a government to help grow the vision of more housing in Holland. We can't build housing, but we can encourage great developers to come here. As we grow the quality of life in Holland, more and more people are investing in property and businesses. We have a 200-unit apartment complex for Workforce Housing going in south of town and 175 units market rate, east of town. There are also 10 and 20 units or so of single family/duplex developments proposed. By Habitat

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Mayor candidates stance on LGBT issue

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and Jubilee Ministries working together to help 30-120% of the median income families. Partners for Renewal also keeps redoing properties in important locations in the city to grow goodness in the housing stock. We will keep working.

4. Would you vote yes or no for including LGBT people among those protected by the city's anti-discrimination ordinance? Please explain why you would vote that way.

Bocks: If an ordinance similar to the one proposed in 2011 came up for a vote again, I would definitely vote for it. And I would work to have a similar ordinance come before Council. Holland is losing talented people because they do not feel safe in their jobs and their housing. I know of many members of our community that do not dare bring their partner to a public event because they fear that their employer or board of directors will find out they

are gay and force them from their jobs. I know of landlords who have denied housing to gay couples. This is wrong and makes no sense economically. If we are going to attract and retain a rich talent pool in Holland, we need to assure that every member of our community has the same protections for housing and employment. Many of our larger employers already understand this. The city needs to understand it as well. It is the right thing to do ethically and economically.

DeBoer: If you are referring to the city's housing policy that is now in compliance with the Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act (editor's note: The Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act does not include protections for LGBT people), I believe that everyone deserves to be protected from sexual identity discrimination. We need to find a way to balance protective freedoms. My vote would be dependent on the wording of the proposed ordinance change.

Here's why Nov. 5 election is important to LGBT allies

Why is it important for Holland's LGBT residents and their allies to vote in the Nov. 5 election?

Because the results could provide enough votes for the passage of an anti-discrimination ordinance that would protect LGBT people.

When the City Council voted on the measure in 2011, it failed by a 5-4 margin.

Mayor Nancy DeBoer voted against such protections and is running for re-election on Nov. 5. She is being opposed by Nathan Bocks, who said he would vote for protecting LGBT people.

Lyn Raymond, who is running for the at-large City Council seat now held by Wayne Klomparens, also said she would vote for such an ordinance and is being opposed

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Raymond responds to election issues

The two candidates for Holland's at-large City Council seat have a clear difference of opinion on whether LGBT people should be protected from discrimination.

Both candidates were asked by the LGBT Times to respond to questions about issues facing the City Council but only Lyn Raymond responded. Her opponent in the Nov. 5 general election, Vicki-Lynn Holmes, did not respond to repeated requests for information about where she stood on the issues.

But Holmes, when asked at a community forum whether she would support extending anti-discrimination protections for LGBT people, stated "I want to say no." And a flyer that she and Mayor Nancy DeBoer recently handed out described LGBT people as a "a protected class which has a fluid and solely self-identified membership" and that it would be "inequitable" to grant them protections.

Raymond has consistently supported protecting LGBT people against discrimination.

Raymond graduated from Hope College with degrees in psychology and Spanish and taught Spanish for three years before working in community development. She worked with refugees on the Texas border, with a human rights organization in Washington, DC, and with women artisans in Guatemala and Mexico.

Since returning to Holland 20 years ago

she has studied housing and homelessness, engaging with people in a variety of community space and advocating for those experiencing social injustice. She is currently the director of the Lakeshore Housing Alliance, a group that works collaboratively to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. She lives in the center city of Holland with her husband, Larry, and their dog, Boe. Following are her responses to the questions posed to both candidates:



Lynn Raymond

she has studied housing and homelessness, engaging with people in a variety of community space and advocating for those experiencing social injustice. She is currently the director of the Lakeshore Housing Alliance, a group that works collaboratively to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. She lives in the center city of Holland with her husband, Larry, and their dog, Boe. Following are her responses to the questions posed to both candidates:

What specific qualities do you possess that would make voters want to cast their ballots for you rather than your opponent?

I am committed to Holland's Master Plan goal of maximizing livability for all Holland residents. This requires an open-mind and innovative thinking. It also requires a deep understanding of the issues facing Holland. Because of my involvement on the Planning Commission and on the Neighborhood Improvement Committee I am well-informed about key initiatives such as Waterfront Holland and the Unified Develop
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Raymond addresses city's main issues

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ment Ordinance. I know the importance of including the input of people with lived experience at all stages of strategic planning and design and this is reflected in how I communicate and collaborate with residents and community partners. Throughout the campaign my team and I have worked hard knocking on thousands of doors seeking diverse input from constituents in every neighborhood in order to understand what livability means to people in the community. I regularly hear how residents appreciate what Holland has to offer and they often express concern about neighbors who are struggling. My ability to listen and to be empathetic is a result of years of providing direct service to people in housing crisis. My role as the director of the Lakeshore Housing Alliance, and my future role on City Council, is enhanced by that experience and facilitated conversations with community partners are richer.

What do you think are the main issues facing the City of Holland and how would you address them?

The overarching issue facing the City of Holland is sustainability. How do we sustain the quality of life Holland offers and ensure all have an opportunity to participate? Sustainability includes housing, equity, energy efficiency, talent retention, and development. The lack of housing affects most acutely people who are most in need. The city must consider prioritizing afforda-

ble housing -- not just increasing stock at all levels in order to decrease demand.

This strategy will not address the needs of the most vulnerable in our community. Currently the city is undergoing a complete rewrite of the zoning code which will inform future development in commercial, industrial and residential areas. This has been a thoughtful and detailed process and success depends on the city's ability to incorporate diverse opinions. At the same time, designs for waterfront development are being considered, which will have long term implications for the city. City staff sought public comment which clearly pointed to including public access to the waterfront. Equity is the thread running through many of these issues. Holland will need to address inclusion in a deliberate way so everyone feels welcome and a part of the community. The decisions we make today will create the kind of community our children want to be a part of, and others will want to join. Holland will remain a great place to live, work and play.

What should the City Council do to bring more affordable housing to the city?

Creating affordable housing is a complex process, one that can't be reduced to a tagline. The City of Holland needs to be more proactive in its efforts to increase housing choice. The City Council must first define what is meant by affordable housing.

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Raymond addresses LGBT issue

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-ing, and then prioritize resources at the city's disposal to increase housing opportunities. There are several financial tools designed to incentivize developments and I believe these should be prioritized for developers willing to include an affordable component. City Council should also direct staff to proactively encourage developers, even market rate developers, to take advantage of these incentives. Zoning often hinders the ability to create affordable housing and it is something we are currently addressing on the Planning Commission. As president of the Lakeshore Fair Housing Board, mine is a valuable voice on the Planning Commission ensuring access to safe, and hopefully, affordable housing. The municipal government needs to be an effective part of the solution.

Would you vote yes or no for including LGBT people among those protected by the city's anti-discrimination ordinance? Please explain why you would that way.

Yes, I favor including protections for the LGBTQ community in Holland's anti-discrimination ordinance and I would vote to ensure those protections. The responsibility of the Holland City Council is to protect the health, safety and welfare of all residents of the City of Holland. There is nothing more fundamental to one's welfare than safe housing and the ability to participate in gainful employment. As an advocate for people experiencing homelessness, I understand the impact the lack of

access to housing has on individuals and families. Ensuring all Holland residents have the ability to contribute to the life of the community makes us a more vibrant and inclusive community.

Here's why Nov. 5 vote is important to LGBT allies

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by a candidate, Vicki-Lynn Holmes, who has said she would likely vote against it.

Council members Jay Peters and David Hoekstra, unopposed in this year's election, are also in favor of LGBT protections, as is Nicki Arendshorst, who is unopposed for the 4th ward seat now held by Brian Lynn.

"If I voted against such an ordinance, I would be voting in favor of allowing discrimination," Arendshorst said. "An ordinance such as this would prohibit someone from being fired because they were straight. Of course, that would never happen, and that difference is why we need this kind of ordinance--people do get discriminated against due to sexual orientation."

Thus, if Bocks and Raymond were elected on Nov. 5 it would provide the necessary five votes to pass an anti-discrimination ordinance protecting LGBT people. Even if one of the two were elected, it could provide enough votes for its reconsideration and passage.

New OOTL director passionate about helping

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advocates for and supports LGBTQ residents from its home at the OOTL Community Center on Columbia Avenue. He started in his new job on Sept. 8, handling the day-to-day operations of OOTL, its marketing and public relations and social media.

"The board wants to push Out On The Lakeshore to the next level," Sorensen said. "It's my responsibility to do so."

He comes to OOTL after having graduated from Grand Valley State University with a degree in advertising and public relations and spending about five years working in those fields at Gun Lakes Casino. He often worked far more than the typical 40-hour week there until leaving in June so he could focus full time on getting his next job.

"I told my husband my next role won't take me away from my family," Sorensen said, while referring to the long hours at Gun Lake Casino.

So when the part-time director position opened at OOTL Sorensen thought it was a perfect fit. He had a secondary job as a bartender so was not hurting for income, and the part-time position in Holland (where his brother lives) allows him to spend more time with his husband, Justin, while laying the groundwork to eventually own a PR company that focuses on non-profits.

"I never thought I'd work at an LGBT Center and I find I really like it," he said.

Sorensen, 27, said he would like to get more people to use the OOTL Community Center and expand OOTL's footprint in the community. He wants to build community partnership with Holland area companies and organizations, so they can go to one another when they need help. He's already offered to provide sensitivity training for a child advocacy center.

The Kentwood resident will be starting a monthly newsletter to let everyone know what is being offered at the OOTL Center and in December wants to start up Pride Nights at area bars and restaurants and continue them throughout the year. He also will be reviewing current programs to determine if any should be replaced with other more popular ones.

That's not exactly the stuff he expected to be doing while growing up in Little Lake, population 262, about 24 miles south of Marquette.

"Where I grew up in the U.P. they didn't have resources like this," Sorensen said while sitting in the OOTL Community Center. "So I get to be the resource I never had."

"I'm passionate about helping people and I want to use my skills to do that."

Arbor Circle to present at PFLAG meeting

Amy Bailey, the child welfare director for Arbor Circle, will discuss how parents of LGBTQ individuals can best help Arbor Circle serve LGBTQ children, teens, and adults at the Nov. 15 meeting of Holland/Lakeshore PFLAG.

Arbor Circle, with assistance from the True Colors fund, conducted a year-long community planning group to address the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth in Ottawa and Kent counties. It is now moving into the implementation stage and is looking for parents of LGBTQ youth to participate with a Family Preservation Subcommittee.



Amy Bailey

Arbor Circle has begun a Host Home program to support homeless youth in Ottawa and Kent counties and is looking for families to temporarily open their homes, particularly to youth who identify as LGBTQ. This program is run by Ben Kai-

ser, who will join Bailey at the Nov. 15 PFLAG meeting.

Arbor Circle is one of the few foster care/adoption agencies in Western Michigan that actively recruits foster/adoptive parents from the LGBTQ community. Bailey and Kaiser plan to share about these opportunities and raise awareness of this need.

PFLAG meets on the ground floor of Grace Episcopal Church, 555 Michigan Ave., across the street from Holland Hospital. PFLAG begins with a business meeting and support at 7 p.m. After a time for refreshments at 7:50 p.m. the program will begin at 8:10 p.m. Bring a snack to share, if you can.

Prior to the PFLAG meeting, Gender SAFE (Supporting All For Equality) meets from 6-8 p.m., also on the ground floor of Grace Episcopal Church. Gender SAFE is a support group that is open and welcoming to all people who are or who love someone who is transgender or gender diverse (TGD). The group also welcomes those who are gender affirmative and who are interested in learning about the TGD community.

Gender SAFE also meets the first Saturday of every month from 4-6 p.m. at the Out On The Lakeshore Community Center, 451 Columbia Ave., Holland.

Holland to observe Transgender Day

A Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) Candlelight Vigil will be held in the Hazel B. Hayes Auditorium of Herrick Library, 300 South River Ave., from 7-8 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 20.

The event will honor the lives of those lost to anti-transgender violence in 2019.

Additionally, during the week leading up to TDOR, Nov. 13-19, people and organizations around the world will participate in Transgender Awareness Week to help raise the visibility of transgender people and address the issues trans people face.

Fatal violence disproportionately affects transgender women of color, resulting from the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Transgender people are often at risk of losing employ-



Gwendolyn Smith

ment, housing, healthcare and other necessities, obstacles which make them vulnerable.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was started in 1999 by transgender advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith as a vigil to honor the memory of Rita Hester, a transgender woman who was killed in 1998.

In 2018, advocates tracked at least 26 deaths of transgender or gender diverse people, according to the Human Rights Campaign. The victims were killed by acquaintances, partners and strangers, some of whom were arrested and charged, while others have not been identified.

In 2019, at least 21 transgender people were fatally shot, or killed by other violent means, due to anti-transgender discrimination.

Each of us has the ability to make a difference. Gender S.A.F.E. (Supporting All For Equality), along with their community co-sponsors, invite you to join them as they honor lives lost in 2019. Come hear impactful stories and learn more by attending the Transgender Day of Remembrance Candlelight Vigil.