

# The Rainbow Connection

May, 2012

The Rainbow Connection is published by the Prairie Pride Coalition (PPC). Send correspondence to P.O. Box 5048, Bloomington, IL 61702-5048, or e-mail [info@achr-il.com](mailto:info@achr-il.com)

PPC Board: Dave Bentlin; Peggy Burton; Gary Gletty; Margo Mendoza; Donna O'Crowly; Elizabeth Anvick; Suzie Hutton; Olemuel Ashford; Ryan Mishler; Tony Thieman-Somora; Tony Somora

***Save the Date or Participate:***

## **“Dear Harvey” Coming to Central Illinois**

Prairie Pride Coalition (PPC) will be presenting a free staged reading of Patricia Loughery's tribute to Harvey Milk, “Dear Harvey,” at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, June 8, in Kemp Recital Hall in the north end of Centennial East at Illinois State University.

Audition date(s), time(s) and place will be announced shortly on the PPC Facebook page and website for those who want to participate. The script calls for three females and four males.

According to the play's publishing company, “Dear Harvey” is “extensively researched and beautifully constructed, [a] documentary-style ensemble play recounting the life and lasting impact of groundbreaking LGBT activist and politician Harvey Milk, as told by the people who knew him best.”

The play combines spoken word with multimedia and music. The ensemble cast represents the identities of real-world figures who were prominent in the events of Harvey

Milk's life.

“This spirited play reaffirms his impact and the continued relevance of his campaign towards equality, three decades after his assassination,” according to publishers.

Commissioned by the Diverisary Theater in San Diego and written by Patricia Loughrey in 2007, the play is the result of years of work by Loughrey interviewing community leaders and peers and friends of Milk.

“These stories about Harvey Milk are from the people he knew and the lives he changed,” said Loughrey. “I've had the remarkable privilege of talking with

people close to him, and it's exciting to be able to share these intimate, sometimes surprising stories with our community. We lost Harvey too soon, but in these stories, we get to hear the impact of his love and courage.”

Some of the people interviewed for the play include Tom Ammiano, Toni Atkins, Jackie Grover, Cleve Jones, Christine Kehoe, Anne Kronenberg, John Laird, Stuart Milk,

***Story continued on pg. 4***



*Logo courtesy of Barron Henzel*

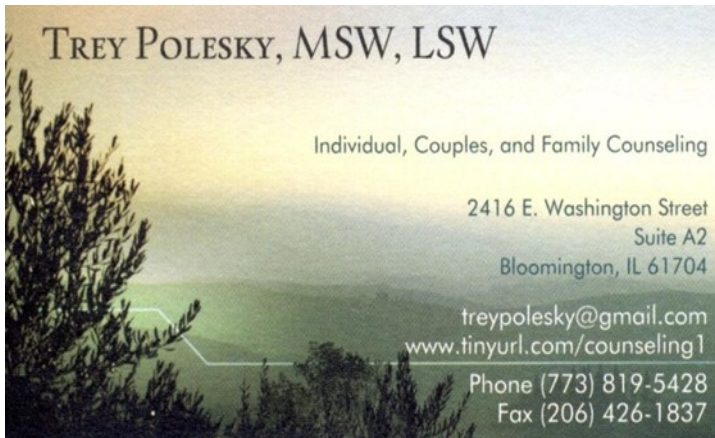
## Community Loses Longtime AIDS Activist

The Bloomington/Normal community lost a friend and activist when Ed Bruner passed away last month at the too-young age of 45.

Ed had worked at the Centers for Disease Control and was co-chair of the Illinois HIV Prevention Community Planning Group. Locally, many of you will remember Ed from his longtime service to the McLean County AIDS Task Force; he served as chairperson of the task force board for several years and was instrumental in the development of programs such as the Open Door Youth Center.

Ed was a bon vivant, a master of many trades during his short time on this earth. He was a licensed funeral director, emergency medical technician, a deputy sheriff, and all-around good guy. More than anything, he will be remembered as a fervent activist working for the rights of people with HIV/AIDS and equality for the LGBT community.

Memorials to honor Ed can be directed to the Red Ribbon Trails program at Easter Seals Timber Pointe Outdoor Center, 20 Timber Pointe Drive in Hudson, IL 61748.



TREY POLESKY, MSW, LSW

Individual, Couples, and Family Counseling

2416 E. Washington Street  
Suite A2  
Bloomington, IL 61704

treypolesky@gmail.com  
www.tinyurl.com/counseling1

Phone (773) 819-5428  
Fax (206) 426-1837

## Save the Date for a Good Cause

The McLean County AIDS Task Force is again sponsoring an AIDSWalk/Run for life, this year on Saturday, July 21 at the north pavilion of Tipton Park.

The annual event began in 2006 and has grown over the years into a significant fundraiser for the organization.

Look for additional information in the June and July issues of The Rainbow Connection.

## MCATF Open House

McLean County AIDS Task Force will be hosting an Open House at their new location inside the Unity Church, 1100 N Beech St, Suite 11, Normal, IL on Saturday, May 19.

The open house will begin at 7 p.m., followed by a Candlelight Memorial service at 8:00 pm to honor those lost to HIV/AIDS.

For more information please email [mcatf@mcatf.org](mailto:mcatf@mcatf.org) or call 309-827-2437.



Law office of  
Allison & Mosby-Scott

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**Michelle Mosby-Scott**  
Attorney at Law  
*Caring help when you need it most*

Phone: (309) 662-5084 · Cell: (309) 310-1154 · Fax: (309) 662-2994



# Looking Back: *Ellen*, Plus 15

by Dave Bentlin

I love April: The warmer weather, farmers in the fields, birds migrating back to the area, and a general feeling of renewal and hope.

This April 30 in particular holds a special meaning and a good memory for me, for it was 15 years ago on this date in 1997 that the famous “Coming Out” episode of *Ellen* aired to much fanfare and controversy.

Star Ellen DeGeneres – who played the title character Ellen Morgan – had already been a longtime fave in the LGBT community but had been very careful in tiptoeing around the issue of sexual orientation, both in her personal life and her character’s life. She made no secret of her support for equal rights for LGBT people but always seemed reticent to take that additional step to officially be recognized as one of the peeps.

About six months before the show aired, both DeGeneres and ABC, the network that aired *Ellen*, began a highly orchestrated campaign that both piqued the curiosity of the viewers and prepared the general public for the coming out of Ellen Morgan and, as it turns out, DeGeneres herself.

DeGeneres was first, officially coming out to the world on the April cover of *TIME* with the quote: “Yep, I’m Gay.” Following that was an interview with Diane Sawyer on ABC’s *20/20* where Diane asked questions that provided DeGeneres an opportunity to expand on the reasons for her waiting so long to come out, her parents’ response, and the upcoming “coming out” episode of *Ellen*.

Locally, I remember the excitement for the episode was building. Ruth and Tana, owners of Once Upon A Time Books And Gifts – at that time central Illinois’ only source for LGBT books and gifts – planned a lavish coming out event that was attended by dozens of folks who came to watch the show that night. Looking back, our local community had been beaten up a lot. In 1996 both the Bloomington and Normal city councils had voted down human rights ordinances that would have protected gay and lesbian people from discrimination. The state didn’t offer protections either – that wouldn’t come until the next decade. And civil unions? The issue was on people’s radar screens but we knew it would take an act of God to get lawmakers in Springfield to support that one.

I remember some of the folks who attended that spe-

cial event at the bookstore. Some were out and proud, but many were still closeted – to family, coworkers, friends, some even to themselves – and I hoped that *Ellen*’s brave step would possibly give them a bit of hope, that maybe their parents or coworkers might be in the comfort of their own homes watching this special episode and that it might open a door to dialogue and understanding. That was a heavy burden to put on an episode of a comedy, but a lot was riding on *Ellen*.

I haven’t seen the episode since it aired that night in 1997, but I do remember it was laden with star power (Demi Moore, Oprah Winfrey, kd lang) and that it wasn’t as funny as I’d hoped. You could see that Ellen Morgan and Ellen DeGeneres were trying to be sure they were completely sensitive to the issue, and in the process maybe it all became a little too politically correct. Still, a lot of the content was funny and I’ll never forget the roar of our little gathered peeps when Ellen Morgan said those famous words “I’m gay.” It was joyous, heartbreaking, and historical.

*Story continued on pg. 4*



Law office of  
Allison & Mosby-Scott

**Jon D. McLaughlin**

Attorney at Law

*Caring help when you need it most*

Phone: (309) 662-5084 · Cell: (309) 319-6206 · Fax: (309) 662-2994

Jon@allisonmosby-scott.com · www.allisonmosby-scott.com

Gretchen Shelly  
Owner

309-661-1726 • 309-661-1729

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1702 W. College Ave  
Suite A-3  
Normal, IL 61761  
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## Calendar

- May 3—Heartland Community College Pride “Equality Wedding” from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the HCC Café. There will be a Civil Union FAQ workshop starting at 11:00am followed up by the Equality Wedding at 12:30 and a complimentary reception at 1:00pm.
- May 5—Cinco de Mayo at the Bistro.
- May 11—Hot Spot Show with Sharon Share a Like and guests at the Bistro

- May 14—Bloomington-Normal PFLAG meets at 5:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Church in Bloomington.
- May 18—King Show with Devin Graberass and guests at the Bistro
- May 19 McLean County AIDS Task Force open house at 7 p.m. at the new office: 1100 Beech St., Suite 11 in Normal. Candlelight memorial at 8 p.m. to honor those lost to HIV/AIDS
- May 20—the Female to Male Transgender Group monthly meetings will be held at 1p.m. in downtown Bloomington. Contact [treypolesky@gmail.com](mailto:treypolesky@gmail.com) for location and more details about the group

### “Ellen,” con’t from pg. 3

The show faltered after that episode. A lot of the ensuing episodes focused heavily on Ellen’s sexual orientation at the expense of the smart, funny dialogue that had been a hallmark of the show. Soon the series was canceled by the network and Ellen DeGeneres moved on.

I also remember that after the show’s cancelation DeGeneres was frustrated with her role as poster child for the gay and lesbian community and sometimes wilted under the pressure of that responsibility. Along the way she ran into a few other bumps in the road – the infamous Anne Heche relationship being the most memorable – but eventually she seemed to become more comfortable in her own skin and settled into a happy relationship with actress Portia De Rossi. She also has gone on to amazing career success with her daytime talk show and even a successful gig as a spokesperson for Cover Girl cosmetics.

Some of the younger generations in our community who grew up on *Will and Grace* and now *Glee* and *Modern Family* might not fully understand the importance of DeGeneres and Ellen, but that famous episode on April 30, 1997 opened the doors for the Jack McFarlands, Will Trumans, Kurt Hummels, and Mitchells and Camerons that are commonplace in television today.

### “Dear Harvey,” con’t from pg. 1

Nicole Murray-Ramirez, Daniel Nicoletta, Mary Stockton, Robin Tyler, and Dottie Wine.

Loughrey has also secured permission to use many photos by San Francisco LGBT photographer Daniel Nicoletta, and has enlisted the help of local composer Thomas Hodges to write music to underscore the play.

Check the PPC Facebook page to find out more details about upcoming auditions.

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