

# PTOWNWEST

No Place Like Home



## P TOWNWEST

*The mission of Ptownwest is to reconnect,  
promote and create gay community*

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### Northampton Assisted Living Community Embraces LGBT Training

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Building a more inclusive community for elderly people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender begins with open and sensitive conversations, says Teresa Weybrew, director of marketing and admissions at Christopher Heights Northampton.

In October, the assisted living community on Village Hill Road received an LGBT Cultural Competency Accreditation through SAGECare, an LGBT training program for health care providers for older populations. The agency, SAGE, has awarded Christopher Heights with its highest rating of platinum, the first in western Massachusetts. Christopher Heights also has assisted living communities in Attleboro, Belchertown, Marlborough, Webster and Worcester. In Northampton, there are a total of 83 units, some of which are for low-income seniors.



*Carol Drexler visits with longtime friends Pru Smith, left, and Sharon Gensler at Drexler's home at Christopher Heights in Northampton. STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS*

Over the course of a two-day training, nearly all of the 45 members of staff and management at Christopher Heights learned a variety of ways to improve communication with and create a more welcoming space for LGBT residents – whether they are publicly “out” or not – as well as for residents who have family members who identify as LGBT, Weybrew said.

“We have to tread carefully, but we are doing it very mindfully and very authentically,” Weybrew said. “We want our residents to feel like they can be who they are.”

A 2018 AARP survey of its membership found that more than a third of LGBT seniors were concerned they would have to hide their identity in order to find suitable housing as they age. At least 60% of LGBT seniors said they were concerned about neglect, harassment and abuse.

“There may be – and must be – gay 80-year-olds elsewhere, and I can bet they are not out,” said Carol Drexler, 88, a resident at Christopher Heights since last July. “And it’s from a lifetime of fear.”

Drexler noted that conversations around sexual orientation and identity are complex for staff and residents to navigate. “The private conversation is probably old, or older, than the public conversation, which is a very risk-taking conversation for those people in this current decade.”

“We are just beginning to get more active, and it will be an educational job here,” said Drexler, who has done gay advocacy work through the University of Massachusetts.

Drexler participated in one of the largest-ever gay rights marches in Washington, D.C., in 1979, an event that drew between 75,000 to 125,000 people.

Throughout the mid-1970s and 1980s, Drexler worked as a counselor for the Everywoman’s Center at UMass (now the Center for Women & Community), where she provided counseling for lesbian women.

“There was nothing for gay people,” before the Everywoman’s Center, Drexler said. “Women began to come from all over, not just for counseling but to be able to talk to someone.”

‘We need allies’

A 2015 report by the Massachusetts LGBT Aging Commission found that an estimated 65,000 “LGBT older adults” were living in the state at the time.

This past November, the Boston Public Facilities Commission approved a proposal to convert a Hyde Park middle school into a 74-unit complex that will be designated as an LGBT-friendly senior housing facility, the first in New England.

Weybrew said that LGBT residents may have faced discrimination in the past, and the SageCARE training is intended to help staff members create a community where residents can freely express themselves without fear of judgment or discrimination.

“This generation – the average age is 83 (at Christopher Heights) – this particular age group faced major challenges,” Weybrew said. By becoming a more inclusive community, Weybrew said she hopes that residents do not have to hide their sexual orientation as some may have done in the past.

There have been changes at Christopher Heights, big and small, that show sensitivity to its LGBT population. Staff members have begun wearing rainbow flags on their name tags. The organization is rethinking everything from its application form to welcoming letters for new residents to make Christopher Heights inviting to a wide variety of people, according to Weybrew.

Tim Johnston, the senior director of national projects for SAGE, said the training their programming provides is intended to raise awareness for the staff at living communities such as Christopher Heights, especially for those who remained “closeted” as a means to survive.

“It’s about not making assumptions about heterosexuality or cis-gender ... and creating the opportunity to come out if they are comfortable,” Johnston said. “One of the most important messages is that we need allies in this. Allies have a huge possibility to help advance this cause for LGBT residents.”

Still, becoming a more inclusive community is a learning process, Weybrew said. Every year, staff members will have to undergo training to retain their accreditation, and Weybrew is developing programming to foster a close LGBT community.

Christopher Heights recently partnered with Rainbow Elders of Greenfield to host a panel with elderly members who are bisexual, gay and transgender to speak about their experiences. They promoted open communication and consistent education, Weybrew said.

For Drexler, the undertaking of making Christopher Heights a more welcoming LGBT community is a continuation of her life’s work.

“It’s the same way as the ’70s and ’80s – it’s a revival,” Drexler said. “It’s a revival with some of the same cast.”

## Swedish Crown Princess Makes History with First-Ever Visit to an LGTB Organization

Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden and her husband Prince Daniel have made a historic royal visit to an LGBT+ organisation, sending a clear message of support in the face of growing nationalist politics.

The royals were given a tour of RFSL and RFSL Ungdom's national office in Stockholm to gain an insight into the challenges experienced by LGBT+ people in Swedish society today.

It was the first time the crown princess visited an LGBT+ organisation and was requested by the royals themselves. The princess reportedly wanted to know more about how attitudes towards LGBT+ people were changing in her country.

RFSL's president Deidre Palacios said it was "a critical time" for the organisation as the presence of the rainbow flag and the work of RFSL is being threatened by "nationalist forces".

"Therefore, it is a symbolically meaningful event that the crown princess couple indicates an interest in LGBTQI work and have decided to visit Sweden's biggest and oldest organisation for LGBTQI persons," she said.

The royal couple showed a particular interest in RFSL's ongoing work with sports and senior citizens' issues. They also spoke about immigration and asylum.



Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden, Duchess of Västergötland, and her husband Prince Daniel, Duke of Västergötland, at their wedding in 2010 (Pascal Le Segretain/Getty)

RFSL presented Victoria and Daniel with gifts - trans flag sweaters from the project Sports for all bodies, and a rainbow flag with the inscription: "To the crown princess couple to enjoy those days when a rainbow is needed. From RFSL anno 2020."

"That the crown princess couple, as spokespersons for Sweden, comes here to learn more about young LGBTQI people's situation is incredibly important for us," said RFSL Ungdom's president Jêran Rostam.

"Especially in the light of that the convention of the rights of the child at this year's end was incorporated into Swedish legislation. That means that LGBTQI children should have the opportunity to live their lives based on their gender identity and sexuality."

## Senate Passes Anti-LGBT Adoption Bill

NASHVILLE – The Tennessee state Senate started the 2020 legislative session passing its first bill of the year: a controversial measure that protects religious adoption agencies if they choose to discriminate against same-sex couples.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Paul Rose, R-Covington, declares that no licensed adoption agency would be required to participate in a child placement if doing so would "violate the agency's written religious or moral convictions or policies."

It also prohibits the state from denying an agency's license or grant application for public funds because of the group's refusal to place a child with a family based on religious objections. The adoption agency would also be protected from lawsuits for such a refusal.

The Senate passed the bill 20-6, with five Republican members declining to vote on the measure, including Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge.

The House passed the bill in April, and eight other states around the country have passed similar legislation. The bill, which never made its way to the Senate floor in 2019, will now head to Gov. Bill Lee for his signature.

Lee's office on Tuesday afternoon confirmed that the governor would be signing the bill as soon as it reaches his desk.

In a rare move, McNally left his speaker's chair Tuesday to debate the legislation on the floor, arguing that Tennessee has already implemented strong religious freedom protections. He suggested Rose's bill could potentially threaten those.

Lee on Tuesday morning said he would not be commenting on the legislation when asked about whether he supported it.

But along with McNally, multiple Republican members on Tuesday argued against passing the bill, despite only casting neutral "present" votes.

Sen. Steve Dickerson, R-Nashville, was among those debating the bill, challenging Rose's intentions and arguing that the state would suffer financial and economic development impacts for such a "bad public policy."

He was the sole Republican to join the chamber's five Democrats in voting against the legislation.

Dickerson said he has spoken with representatives from the tourism industry who, over the past six months, have inquired about the status of the bill on behalf of various conventions and large events eyeing Tennessee.

He mentioned the NFL draft, NCAA basketball playoffs, NHL events and businesses eyeing the state.

"I think we can probably kiss that goodbye," Dickerson said.

Sen. Jon Lundberg, R-Bristol, pointed to the Tennessee Religious Freedom and Protection Act passed in 2009, while Lundberg was serving in the House, and said Rose's bill language seemed to duplicate that.

"Is this not just a restatement of our 2009 legislation?" Lundberg asked.

Senate Majority Leader Jeff Yarbrow, D-Nashville, unsuccessfully tried to amend the bill to only offer protections on licensing and legal challenges to adoption agencies who are not receiving public funds.

He argued that there is no movement afoot in Tennessee to shut down religious adoption agencies.

"There is no threat by the federal government, there is no threat by the state government," Yarbrow said. "I am unaware of anything that is trying to close these things down."

Sen. Raumesh Akbari, D-Memphis, told a story about her childhood friend who grew up in the foster care system and suffered sexual and physical abuse.

Her friend is now an adult in a same-sex relationship and has adopted two children, who "had an alternative to be essentially an orphan," Akbari said.

"To me, it boils down to safety," she said. "It boils down to hem being happy, being free from abuse, and to feel like they belong.

Among the groups supporting the bill has been the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

The Tennessee Equality Project, a statewide LGBTQ advocacy group, has opposed the bill, arguing it will lead to discrimination against same-sex couples who are turned away by religious agencies and result in longer wait times for children to be placed into homes.

On Tuesday, Lambda Legal, a national pro-LGBTQ legal group, released a statement urging Tennessee senators to call on Rose to pull the bill.

Tennessee's attorney general determined in 2007 that there was no prohibition in state law against gay and lesbian couples adopting children.

### **New Jersey Public Schools Begin Teaching Children LGBT History**

A New Jersey law requiring that public schools teach LGBT history isn't set to go into effect until this fall, but several schools across the state are already participating in a pilot program.

Twelve schools, including those in Hackensack, Newark and Asbury Park, began teaching LGBT history this month as part of a pilot program for new LGBT-focused curriculum, NorthJersey.com reported.

The new law, signed last year by Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy, requires public schools to teach students about the "political, economic, and social contributions" of "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people" and persons with disabilities. It applies to middle school and high school students



and must be taught in all public schools beginning in the 2020-21 school year.

LGBT groups championed the new law, which made New Jersey the second state - after California - to require the teaching of gay history. (Illinois recently became the third.)

“We want students to see themselves in the stories that are told,” Ashley Chiappano, safe schools and community education manager for Garden State Equality, told NorthJersey.com. “We want to make sure they are getting accurate, appropriate and historically relevant information about the community and the strides that have been made.”

The law’s intent, supporters told the website, is for LGBT curriculum to be woven into multiple subjects. Examples of the lessons include gay victims of the Holocaust and a discussion “about the memoir of a boy forced into gay ‘conversion therapy,’” NorthJersey.com reported.

Christian and social conservative groups, though, say the new law treads on parental rights. The Family Policy Alliance of New Jersey launched a petition to urge the governor and legislature to allow parents to opt their children out of the curriculum.



*“Parents should know that the scope of these changes affects every subject in school, and it takes away their right to opt their children out of the questionable instruction,” the Family Policy Alliance says on its website. “In many ways, this instruction will directly challenge Biblical teaching on homosexuality and what parents choose to teach children at home.”*

## The Center on Colfax Exhibit Champions LGBT Pioneers of Women’s Music

The Center on Colfax has long staked its identity on the fight for LGBTQ equality, producing events such as Denver’s PrideFest and year-round programming that supports and connects diverse communities.

While its new exhibit still focuses on the hard-won victories of a marginalized community, organizers are also hoping to tap into the larger, national celebration of the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote in 2020.

“Last year, we had a successful experiment where we devoted our programming and lobby to the 50th anniversary of Stonewall,” said Rex Fuller, CEO of The Center. “The space is fairly small, but we definitely saw a noticeable increase of people visiting for that, and then we carried that theme over to PrideFest.”

A lobby exhibition sounds modest compared to touring blockbusters at the Denver Art Museum, which has lately drawn sold-out crowds to its survey of Claude Monet paintings.

But The Center has a reputation for doing a lot with a little, evolving over its 43-year history to become the largest LGBTQ community center in the Rocky Mountains. Taking on the centennial of the 19th Amendment puts The Center shoulder-to-shoulder with institutions such as History Colorado and The Center for Colorado Women’s History at the Byers-Evans House Museum.

Its new exhibit, “Breaking the Sound Barrier: The Women’s Music Movement 1970s through 1990s,” opened on Wednesday with a free performance from Take Note!, an a cappella ensemble from the Denver Women’s Chorus. (The Chorus also has an upcoming concert, “Make Them Hear You,” dedicated to voting rights, Jan. 24-25 at Denver’s Central Presbyterian Church at 1660 Sherman St.).

Fuller hopes to follow that with monthly performances that draw more visitors to the exhibition, using text and photos from the Stonewall National Museum & Archives to tell the story of the folk-based music revolution that paved the way for Grammy-winning artists such as k.d. lang, Tracy Chapman and Melissa Etheridge.

“Some of the pioneering names may not be well-known – Holly Near, Cris Williamson, Meg Christian – but they created this autonomous community of artists, producers, sound engineers and labels in a time when every aspect of music was male-dominated,”

The potential to illuminate that history is great, according to Fuller. Last year’s PrideFest and Coors Light Denver Pride Parade (the latter of which The Center also produces), drew about 525,000 total attendees. That’s an impressive showing for a nonprofit with only 20 full-time employees and limited funds; nearly half of The Center’s \$2.3 million annual budget is devoted to producing PrideFest.

But Fuller also estimated that 52,000 people visited The Center’s headquarters last year – all of them passing through its lobby. When The Center launches a big project, people pay attention.



Singer-songwriter Cris Williamson sings at the Women’s March in Denver on Jan. 21, 2017. (Andy Cross, The Denver Post)

“For the last four years we’ve had the Colorado LGBTQ History Project, and we’ve been working very hard on documenting that while donating items to History Colorado and the Denver Public Library,” Fuller said. “Our exhibit on the LGBTQ influence on the Harlem Renaissance is also traveling (currently at the Michener Library in Greeley), and we’ve got even more planned for later in the year.”

When the album covers and concerts photos in “Breaking the Sound Barrier” disappear on April 30, they’ll be replaced by “100 Years of Women’s Activism,” an exhibit that further honors the lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who have engaged in successful social and political activism over the years.

For now, Fuller is just happy just to have a low-pressure, high-interest exhibit greeting The Center’s daily visitors.

“It was an extremely important movement, because it made women musicians feel they could be out and proud,” Fuller said. “And it’s all because of these women who came before them.”

### Rent Rises Force Revered LGBT Bookshop Out of Paris’s Gay District

In the window of [France](#)’s best-known gay bookshop, above the display of Lucian Freud art books, opera singer Maria Callas’s memoirs and a history of the Pride movement, a poster warns in giant red letters: “Cultural heritage in danger.” An urgent note on the door adds: “We need your help!”

[Les Mots à La Bouche](#), a 40-year-old Paris institution, is the top LGBT bookshop in France and considered one of the best in the world - a focal point of Paris’s historic gay neighbourhood in the Marais district. But as property speculation in central Paris reaches dizzying heights - it is estimated that at certain times of year there are more [Airbnb](#) rentals than residents in the Marais - the bookshop is being forced out by rising rents.

Its departure is a blow to Paris’s gay community as activists warn that central [Paris](#) is destroying its cultural identity by allowing luxury fashion shops aimed at rich tourists to force out local businesses, including gay bars.

As the local cabaret star, [Yvette Leglaire](#), said: “The gay Marais is dying.” The Paris tourist board still promotes the Marais as “an authentic yet trendy little village” but its gay scene, which began in the 1980s when the area was still working class, shabby and cheap, is slowly being eroded. Several historic gay bars have closed in recent years as fashion labels from Lacoste to Chanel move in.

The Marais’ Jewish area, situated around Rue des Rosiers, is not immune, with commercial rents doubling between 2012 and 2018. There are fears that, as with Barcelona or Venice, property speculation and commercial pursuit of profit from tourism will strip central Paris of its originality and local appeal. One long-term resident says the onslaught of luxury fashion brands is turning the Marais into “a giant, open-air duty free shop”.

Sébastien Grisez, manager at Les Mots à La Bouche, says: “Paris city hall promotes the gay history of the Marais and it has painted the crossroads here in rainbow colours, but no longer having our bookshop here seems absurd.”

The shop, which has been in the Marais since 1983, is open seven days a week until 11pm and stocks more than 16,000 titles. But like many historic gay bars that closed under pressure from rising rents, the shop has been given until March to find a new location elsewhere in Paris. There are rumours that a Doc Marten shoe shop will take its place.

Grisez says: “Ten years ago, there were far more gay bars here, now only a few are left. It’s true that gay sociology is changing – people are more spread out, there is perhaps less need to meet in bars when you can meet on apps. But even so, people regret that this neighbourhood meeting point is disappearing.”

Alain Lesturgez, who works for the forestry federation, has been coming to the bookshop for 20 years. He says: “This move would be the end of an era. It’s a place where a bookseller would take time to advise you. Once, the Marais had a lot of life, but now the luxury shops make it look the same as many other places in the world.”

At the Open Bar, a historic gay venue set up by rights activist Sébastien Fossa, the manager, says: “The neighbourhood is increasingly losing its soul. It started out as a working-class neighbourhood. Gradually, the arrival of luxury brands has broken the dynamic here.”

Fayçal Khiatine, who runs nearby gay bar Cox, says: “When a bookshop leaves, it’s daily neighbourhood life that will lose out.”

Christian Ducou, who was born and raised in the working-class Marais of the 1950s and 60s, looks out of his kitchen window at a shiny new two-storey Calvin Klein store. He has lived there since kids played in the street and many flats had shared bathrooms on the landing and no toilets. “The first rich person I saw was the photographer Helmut Newton when he moved here,” he says.

His wife, Liliane, says: “Strangely, these luxury shops are often empty. It’s as if they only set up here to have a Marais address. This neighbourhood just doesn’t seem to work as a place for luxury fashion shops. There are tiny narrow streets with no place for a limousine to park, yet they’re putting in the same extremely expensive shops you’d expect to see on a boulevard with chauffeur-driven cars waiting outside.”

As the spring mayoral elections approach, politicians are fretting about how to save central Paris’s soul from property speculation and intense tourism – or whether it’s already too late. David Belliard, a Green candidate, says the fact that Les Mots à La Bouche is being forced out of the Marais shows the French capital is being deformed and “now only aimed at tourists”. The local socialist mayor of the 4<sup>th</sup> arrondissement has promised to help the bookshop find a new location but, with a March deadline looming, one has yet to be found.

Sébastien Raymond, an actor, says: “This bookshop always felt like a cocoon. You knew you’d be accepted here. You felt safe.”

### America faces an epic choice...

... in the coming year, and the results will define the country for a generation. These are perilous times. Over the last three years, much of what the Guardian holds dear has been threatened – democracy, civility, truth. This US administration is establishing new norms of behaviour. Anger and cruelty disfigure public discourse and lying is commonplace. Truth is being chased away. But with your help we can continue to put it center stage. It will be a defining year and we’re asking for your help as we prepare for 2020.

Rampant disinformation, partisan news sources and social media’s tsunami of fake news is no basis on which to inform the American public in 2020. The need for a robust, independent press has never been greater, and with your help we can continue to provide fact-based reporting that offers public scrutiny and oversight. Our journalism is free and open for all, but it’s made possible thanks to the support we receive from readers like you across America in all 50 states.

*“America is at a tipping point, finely balanced between truth and lies, hope and hate, civility and nastiness. Many vital aspects of American public life are in play – the Supreme Court, abortion rights, climate policy, wealth inequality, Big Tech and much more. The stakes could hardly be higher. As that choice nears, the Guardian, as it has done for 200 years, and with your continued support, will continue to argue for the values we hold dear – facts, science, diversity, equality and fairness.”* – US editor, John Mulholland

On the occasion of its 100th birthday in 1921 the editor of the Guardian said, “Perhaps the chief virtue of a newspaper is its independence. It should have a soul of its own.” That is more true than ever. Freed from the influence of an owner or shareholders, the Guardian’s editorial



independence is our unique driving force and guiding principle.

We also want to say a huge thank you to everyone who supported the Guardian in 2019. You provide us with the motivation and financial support to keep doing what we do. We're asking our readers to help us raise \$1.5m to support our rigorous journalism in the new year. Every contribution, big or small, will help us reach it.



### Russian LGBT Activist Under House Arrest is Facing New Charges

Russian feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) [activist Yulia Tsvetkova](#), already under house arrest for two months on bogus charges of pornography distribution, faces new charges of allegedly violating Russia's "gay propaganda" law.

In the new charges, police claim Tsvetkova, 26, violated the country's notorious "gay propaganda" law by [posting on social media her drawing](#), depicting two same-sex couples with children and the caption "Family is where love is. Support LGBT+ families!" Tsvetkova already faces up to six years imprisonment for the pornography charge.

In a recent [interview](#), [Tsvetkova said](#) she made the drawing last year in [support of a same-sex couple](#) with two adopted children who had to flee Russia after being targeted by authorities.

In December, a court in Komsomolsk-on-Amur [fined Tsvetkova 50,000 rubles](#) (US\$800) for [violation of the "gay propaganda" law](#) over LGBT-friendly and [feminist posts](#) in 2 social media groups which she administers. Among other things, the judge was

unfazed by the fact that both groups had "18+" age markers even though Russia's "gay propaganda" ban only concerns "propagating non-traditional sexual relations" to children.

The "gay propaganda" law, adopted by Russia in 2013, was [condemned as discriminatory](#) by the European Court of Human Rights in 2017. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has also [denounced the law](#) because it "encourages the stigmatization of and discrimination" of LGBT people. However, instead of repealing the law, the Russian government uses it to silence LGBT activists, [suppress peaceful protests](#), and [censor online expression](#).

Tsvetkova came under police scrutiny last year after a [homophobic agitator Timur Bulatov](#), who in his view leads a "moral jihad" against LGBT people, filed written complaints against her. Bulatov is particularly known for identifying allegedly LGBT teachers, outing them to school principals, and demanding their dismissal to guard children against "gay propaganda." In 2016, he [boasted that 65 teachers](#) lost their job as a result of his complaints. Bulatov's attacks on Tsvetkova forced her to [close a youth theater project](#) last spring over security concerns.

Russian authorities should drop all charges against Tsvetkova, finally repeal the propaganda law, and end its targeting of LGBT people which facilitates hate campaigns like that of Bulatov.



Illustration reading, "Family is where love is. Support LGBT+ families."  
© 2019 Yulia Tsvetkova



## Petition revives calls for LGBT Street Names



A man has started a petition to change the name of Isis Street to Harvey Milk Street. Photo: Courtesy Twitter

A petition to rename a South of Market street after Harvey Milk has reignited the issue of honoring LGBT leaders with street names in San Francisco.

Last week, a change.org petition (<https://bit.ly/2uNuSg9>) was created that asks Mayor London Breed and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to change the name of Isis Street, a small side street in the South of Market neighborhood, to Harvey Milk Street.

As of Tuesday, it had garnered 45 signatures toward a goal of 100.

The first such proposal to rename a street after Milk failed to gather steam back in 1999. Milk was the first openly gay man elected to office in San Francisco and California when he won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977. He was assassinated the next year.

But now the creator of the petition – David Collins, 59, a straight ally who owns property on Isis Street – said he would be open to renaming the street after someone else, after members of the LGBT community indicated in Facebook discussions after the Bay Area Reporter's initial January 15 article online that a street in SOMA should be named for a member of the leather community, or that Milk should be honored with a different street.

"Maybe instead of Isis Street, it could be something that has a patriotic connotation like Veterans Street," Collins said in a January 17 interview with the B.A.R., adding that he may rework his efforts to reflect that. "The most compelling thing is to take the Isis name off.

"The LGBT community is in a better position to name Harvey Milk street, and I would support that," he added.

Terry Beswick, the executive director of the GLBT Historical Society, wrote on Facebook that he would support renaming Market Street for Milk. The 1999 proposal would have renamed a section of Market Street for Milk.

Gerard Koskovich, also of the GLBT Historical Society, suggested renaming Isis Street for Michel Foucault, the French philosopher who frequented the SOMA LGBT scene and died of complications from AIDS in 1984.

At least two San Francisco supervisors expressed their support for the idea after the initial petition was launched. District 6 Supervisor Matt Haney (Isis Street is in his district) wrote to the Bay Area Reporter via text message, "I love it."

"I'm definitely for more streets named after our local LGBT heroes, and it'd be amazing to have a street named after Harvey Milk in West SOMA," Haney wrote. "It's a great location for that. I'll check in with the community about it and next steps."

Gay District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, the lone LGBT member of the board, wrote to the B.A.R. that he supports having a street named for Milk, but would prefer it if such a street would be in the Castro neighborhood that Milk represented.

"I'm a fan of naming everything we can after Harvey Milk! Naming a San Francisco street after Harvey certainly seems appropriate, though I'd obviously love for it to be in the neighborhood he represented on the Board of Supervisors," wrote Mandelman, who now represents the Castro at City Hall. "I'm happy to have discussions about any

possibilities with community members and friends and family of Harvey's."

Isis Street is near the SF Eagle leather bar and the under-construction Eagle Plaza in the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District.

"Its name presumably had paid homage to 'Isis,' a goddess from the polytheistic pantheon of Egypt," the petition states. "Unfortunately, Isis has taken on a new, maleficent meaning, referencing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

"This petition will be presented to San Francisco Mayor London Breed and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in hopes that they will take action and change this street name to Harvey Milk St.," it reads.

Collins spoke with the B.A.R. by phone early January 16. He owns a 10-unit building on Isis Street.

"How would you like to be a disabled American veteran in your wheelchair on Isis Street?" he asked.

Collins said that his proposal is primarily about getting the Isis name off the street while honoring Milk, saying his LGBT relatives and friends might not have come out if not for Milk. The gay leader, both in his political columns he wrote for the B.A.R. and in his campaign stump speeches, implored LGBT people to come out of the closet.

"This isn't about me," Collins said. "If someone in the LGBT community wants to take the mantle, I don't mind. But if it starts with me, it's OK. I just want a more positive name for the street and neighborhood."

Collins feels that the location is appropriate because of the historic LGBT presence in the South of Market neighborhood.

"We have the Eagle Plaza on one side and Folsom Street on the other side," Collins said. "Harvey Milk would fit right in."

Robert Goldfarb, a gay man who serves as the president of the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District board, wrote in an email to the B.A.R.

January 16 he will see what people in the area think of the proposal.

"Naturally, we are in favor of ways to honor Harvey Milk and we're also interested in what the residents think of the change," Goldfarb wrote. "Additionally, we believe that on other streets in the leather & LGBTQ district, there are many ways to commemorate leather leaders and the neighborhood's rich history which would benefit everyone who visits, works, or lives in the district."

Collins said that he reached out to then-District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim "four or five years ago" about the possibility of a name-change for Isis Street and she said she would support it if Collins got a petition started. But at the time he thought that ISIS would fade from people's memories, and he was occupied with other things.

"I thought ISIS would go away, but in the meantime it's only gotten worse," he said.

Kim did not respond to a request for comment.

#### **Past effort unsuccessful**

San Francisco does not have a street named for the slain LGBT civil rights icon. San Diego had the first street named for Milk, in 2012. Salt Lake City named a street for Milk in 2016, followed by Portland, Oregon in 2018.

Twenty-one years ago a proposal to rename a stretch of Market Street from Octavia Boulevard to Portola Drive – a main artery through the heart of the city's LGBT Castro district – after Milk went nowhere. A resident and business owner of the Castro, Milk represented the neighborhood at City Hall for 11 months in 1978 until he was assassinated November 27 that year.

That proposal from the Castro Citizens Congress, a neighborhood improvement group, needed 10,500 signatures to make the November 1999 ballot, according to a contemporaneous story in the San Francisco Examiner.

It didn't make it, according to the San Francisco Department of Elections website.

But in the City by the Bay, and especially in the Castro neighborhood, Milk's name is still omnipresent.

The San Francisco Public Library branch in the Castro is named for Milk, as is the plaza above the Castro Muni station, and the LGBTQ Democratic club he founded after his 1976 election defeat (originally called the Gay Democratic Club).

Milk's name appears on Terminal 1 at San Francisco International Airport, the building that houses a Job Corps center on Treasure Island, an elementary school in the Castro, and an arts center in Duboce Triangle.

Milk also has an F Market streetcar, a bust in City Hall, a United States Postal Service stamp (2014), and a state holiday of special significance on May 22, Milk's birthday.

The U.S. Navy announced last month that it began construction on a ship named for Milk.

#### **Street names**

Any request for a street renaming faces a lengthy process. It would need to be scheduled for a supervisors committee and voted on by the full board.

Several street names in San Francisco have changed in recent decades to reflect the diversity of the city's population. Most notably, there was a bitter fight in 1995 over Army Street.

The Board of Supervisors voted to rename the street after Latino labor leader Cesar Chavez in 1995. But the name change came at a time of racial discord in California in the aftermath of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187, and many white residents wanted the name changed back to Army.

A ballot proposition to remove Chavez's name went down in defeat November 7, 1995 by 54%-45%, according to the elections department.

In more recent years, there was considerably less controversy when Phelan Way was renamed in 2018 for Latina bisexual artist Frida Kahlo, and when a block of 16th Street was renamed 1 José Sarria Court, after the first openly gay candidate for public office in the United States. Sarria, a

legendary drag queen, ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1961 and founded the Imperial Court system.

That block, where the Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial Branch Library is located, was renamed for Sarria in 2006, when he was still alive. (Sarria died in 2013.)

The city has also bestowed honorary street names that recognize LGBT community members, meaning that they do not impact the mailing addresses for businesses and residences on that block.

The 100 block of Taylor Street was renamed Gene Compton's Cafeteria Way after the business where a transgender-led uprising against police brutality occurred in 1966, three years before the more famous Stonewall riots in Manhattan.

The 100 block of Turk Street was named Vicki Mar Lane, after trans performer Vicki Marlane, who died in 2011 at the age of 76 due to AIDS-related complications.

Marlane had hosted a popular drag revue show at gay bar Aunt Charlie's Lounge, which is located at 133 Turk Street. She is the first transgender person to be honored with a street naming in San Francisco.

In 2014, Lech Walesa Alley between Polk Street and Van Ness Avenue was renamed Dr. Tom Waddell Place, due in part, to the former Polish leader making homophobic comments. Waddell was the founder of the Gay Games.

A block of Myrtle Street near City Hall is named for lesbian author Alice B. Toklas, who was born nearby. And Jack Kerouac Alley in North Beach honors the bisexual Beat Generation writer.



## Nashville Council Passes Resolution Condemning Tennessee's Anti-LGBT Adoption Bill

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (WZTV) – Nashville council members are taking a stand against a Tennessee bill that would allow some adoption agencies to deny gay couples.

During a meeting on Tuesday, Metro Council members passed a resolution to formally condemn an anti-LGBT bill, citing it could result in boycotts of businesses across the state.

“We’d like to send a message to residents and to prospective businesses that Tennessee is a welcoming place,” District 8 Council Member Nancy VanReece said.

Council members said the bill would have “terrible, tremendous negative impact on the finances of Nashville.” During the meeting Councilmember Steve Glover left the meeting, telling FOX 17 News that he’s “not comfortable discussing social issues.”



## Israel kowtows to Russia's Demands and Bans LGBT People from Adopting Russian Children

Israel and Russia have signed a deal banning LGBT+ people from adopting Russian children, after a decade of negotiations.

The agreement, signed on January 22, stipulates that same-sex couples cannot adopt children from Russia.

Ze'ev Elkin, Jerusalem affairs minister, met with a senior Russian delegation Wednesday ahead of president Vladimir Putin's scheduled Thursday visit to attend the Fifth World Holocaust Forum.

The senior Russian delegation included Russia's foreign minister, economics minister and education minister, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Israel and Russia finalised two agreements at the meeting, one on same-sex adoption and the other regarding cooperation between the two countries' foreign ministries. The adoption agreement is in accordance with Russian law and prevents LGBT+ couples from adopting Russian children.

Multiple Israeli lawmakers - including chairman of left-wing party Meretz, Nitzan Horowitz - expressed outrage at the agreement.

Horowitz said the deal was “a spit in the face of the LGBT community”.

He added: “Netanyahu is getting in line with Putin's homophobic policies and once again trampling the basic rights of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Israel who are members of the gay community.”

Eitan Ginzburg, of new liberal party the Blue and White MK, said: “The Netanyahu government is preventing us from being parents.... This is a continuation of Israel's discriminatory policies.”

Minister Elkin also discussed economic cooperation and trade, which recently passed \$5 billion per year between the two countries, as well as the possibility of a Russia-Israel free-trade agreement.

In September 2019, two gay dads fled Russia because they were afraid their children would be taken away from them.

Andrei Vaganov and Evgeny Erofeyev said they were forced to flee Russia after the government began investigating their family when it discovered that their two sons did not have a mother.

This came six years after Russia introduced what has become known as the “gay propaganda” law, which bans the promotion of “non-traditional sexual relations to minors”.