



# First Friday

# News & Views



Monthly Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.

April 2023 / Volume 28 / Issue 4

## Next Meeting

**April 7**

**7:00 a.m.**



## Location

**Hoyt Sherman Place  
15<sup>th</sup> & Woodland  
Des Moines**



## Speaker

**Sheriff Kevin  
Schneider**



## Website

**ffbc Iowa.org**



## Meet the Board Members

by Byron Huff, Board President

This month's newsletter continues the focus on our 12 FFBC Board Members. If you are interested in becoming a Board Member, contact me at [info@ffbcIowa.org](mailto:info@ffbcIowa.org). The Board meets once a month on the Tuesday following the monthly member meeting.



## Joe Raetz



Joe (left in photo) has been a member of FFBC for many years; he was elected to serve on the Board in 2019 and most recently has served as Secretary.

Joe works as an Account Manager/Project Coordinator for a local branding company; they help companies with their branding standards and work with their members to achieve that look.

Joe grew up in a small town in northeast Missouri between Mark Twain's Hannibal and his birthplace of Florida, Missouri. After college

at Truman State (NMSU), Joe moved to Des Moines.

Joe met his husband, Brad Holland (right in photo), at First Friday Breakfast Club in 2002. For the first 10 years they were acquaintances (as they were both in relationships with other people). On April 1, 2012, Joe's partner of almost 22 years passed away suddenly; near that time, Brad's relationship of 15 years ended. A couple of months later, Brad invited Joe to a movie night with his family. Following the movie, they talked in the parking lot for two hours. Brad and Joe were married on September 26, 2015, by Donna Red Wing on the lawn of the state Capitol.

Brad and Joe enjoy bike riding, hiking on the north shore of Minnesota, going to movies, and dining with friends. They moved to a new condo recently and are working to make renovations as they hope this will be their last home.

[continued on page 2]



["Meet the Board Members" continued from page 1]

## David Cotton

David Cotton joined FFBC in 2019 and the Board in 2020. During COVID, he kept us connected by hosting our meetings over Zoom. He continues to support our technology needs during our in-person meetings as well as maintaining our website. He also serves on the Scholarship Committee.



The Newton, Iowa, native is a graduate of Iowa State University where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science. He received Master of Arts degrees from Webster University in Computer Data Management and Personnel Management, and the U.S. Air Force Air University in Strategic Studies. He also spent a year living in Toronto, Ontario, training with the Canadian Forces. David served almost 30 years in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a brigadier general in 2011. During his service he was either the unit commander or member of units cited as the best in the Air Force. In 2001, he was the Director for Communications and Command & Control Systems at Joint Task Force Southwest Asia at Prince Sultan Air Base, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After the attacks of 9/11, he was responsible for planning and directing the time critical enhancement of the Saudi-based U.S. command center, supporting IT systems and theater infrastructure, needed to enable the command and control of multinational air forces at 16 locations in two combat theaters (Iraq and Afghanistan) in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

Following retirement from active duty, he continued to serve as a Deputy Chief Information Officer for the Department of Defense (DoD) as a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), overseeing the programs supporting key global networks, capabilities, and programs for DoD agencies and military services.

Following his government service, he was a cybersecurity vice president for a defense and intelligence contractor, Iowa State University's first Chief Information Security Officer (CISO), a Chief Information Officer (CIO) for a regional telecommunications company, and most recently a consultant for a local cyber security firm.

David Cotton told his coming out story on two podcasts, *Graying Rainbows* and *The Vulnerable Man*. Both are accessible via his website, [www.davidcotton.me](http://www.davidcotton.me), as well as resources he found helpful during his coming-out journey.

[continued on page 3]



## Briefs & Shorts

Thanks to **Neil Salowitz** for introducing **Mark Stringer**, our March speaker. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website and to **Nicholas Williams** for managing all of our Microsoft IT infrastructure. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our contributors to the FFBC newsletter!*

The **deadline** for the **May 2023 newsletter** will be **April 24**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade ([wadecpetersen@gmail.com](mailto:wadecpetersen@gmail.com)) by the copy deadline.

**Fundraising efforts** are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over **\$475,000** for scholarships that are awarded to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution** online or by sending a check.





## ["Meet the Board Members" continued from page 2]

David enjoys socializing with friends, his regular workouts, yoga, and cycling (when it's warm outside). He's also active in the Des Moines Community ManKind Project men's group.

David is the proud father of two children; his daughter teaches elementary school in Spokane, WA, and his son is a software engineer with Microsoft in Redmond, WA. In February of this year, he "retired" and decided to "focus on things that bring him joy"...supporting FFBC, the ManKind Project, and his new endeavor as a life coach at [www.DavidCottonCoaching.com](http://www.DavidCottonCoaching.com).



## Scott Kuknyo

Scott Kuknyo has served on the Board for approximately nine years, supporting portions of the treasury function early on, mailing distribution initiatives, coordinating annual holiday party logistics, and staffing the registration table.



Scott's professional life includes a background in human resources with Carlson Wagonlit Travel (now simply known as CWT as a result of the pandemic). His employer is the leading global travel management company, and he has been employed with that organization since 1999.

Scott provides support to over 1000 CWT employees in different lines of business that include both commercial and military offerings from all over North America, using his expertise coaching management through strategic initiatives, policy creation/interpretation, and employee relation functions.

Scott has earned several accreditations including holding both Professional and Senior Professional Certifications through the Society of Human Resources (SHRM) and has been a member of both Central Iowa and Arizona SHRM chapters.

Scott was born in Cicero, Illinois, and lived in several different states including Indiana, Florida, and Arizona before permanently relocating to Des Moines in the winter of 2013. His partner, Jonathan Wilson, attributes his relocation to his animal magnetism. There is some truth to that.

In his spare time, Scott enjoys visiting with family and friends, hiking, and bicycling. Scott and Jonathan regularly travel between Des Moines; Milton, Iowa; and Phoenix.



## Speaker Series

[Tickets are free, but you must register online]

### April 13 | 6:00 - 7:00 | Temple Theater Generational Panel

Everyone has their own story, but what is the experience of being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer across different generations? Join us for a panel discussion from members of each generation to discuss the issues of how the generation gap can separate us but also bring us together.

### April 20 | 6:00 - 8:00 | DSM Art Center Finding Mark Lowe Fisher



Mark Lowe Fisher was a gay man and activist from Iowa who turned his death from AIDS in 1992 into the ultimate political act. The architect's body was carried in an open casket procession, in the pouring rain, from Judson Memorial Church in New York City's West Village, for almost 40 blocks north up 6th Avenue, to West 43rd Street in front of Republican headquarters on the evening before that November's Election in 1992. Mark's political funeral was an active indictment of then President George H.W. Bush—highlighting his callous and complete inaction to do anything to help fight HIV/AIDS, which by 1992 had taken the lives of nearly 200,000 American citizens and caused Mark's premature death.

Before he died, Mark explained his desire for a political funeral in a document entitled *Bury Me Furiously*: "I have decided that when I die, I want my fellow AIDS activists to execute my wishes for my political funeral. I suspect—I know—my funeral will shock people when it happens. We Americans are terrified of death. Death takes place behind closed doors and is removed from reality, from the living. I want to show the reality of my death, to display my body in public; I want the public to bear witness. We are not just spiraling statistics; we are people who have lives, who have purpose, who have lovers, friends, and families. And we are dying of a disease maintained by a degree of criminal neglect so enormous that it amounts to genocide. I want my death to be as strong a statement as my life continues to be. I want my own funeral to be fierce and defiant, to make the public statement that my death from AIDS is a form of political assassination. We are taking this action out of love and rage."



## Report on the J6 Report

by Jonathan Wilson

I have finished reading, cover to cover, the Official Report of the House January 6th Insurrection Probe. My version is 692 pages (the longest book I've read in a long time). The version of the Report that I read has a foreword written by Ari Melber, is divided into eight "chapters," and each chapter had literally hundreds of authoritative footnotes. I periodically checked a footnote, and impressively, they were consistently right on point, and they often provided links to additional authorities available on the internet.

I had already watched all of the J6 Committee hearings and came away from those with the conviction that ex-president Trump was in cahoots with other individuals and groups in a preplanned series of increasingly desperate steps geared toward overturning the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Having finished the Report, I am of the conviction that there was undeniably an attempted coup against the American government, and ex-president Trump was in on the successive steps that led up to the failed January 6 insurrection.

There was an Executive Summary of 193 pages and 762 footnotes, many of which had links to additional authority on-line. For those, like me, who tuned in religiously to watch the televised hearings, the chapter titles were both intriguing and predictable: Chapter 1 is "The Big Lie." Chapter 2 is "I Just Want to Find 11,780 votes." Chapter 3 is "Fake Electors and 'The President of the Senate Strategy.'" Chapter 4 is "Just Call it Corrupt and Leave the Rest to Me." Chapter 5 is "A Coup in Search of a Legal Theory." Chapter 6 is "Be there, Will be Wild." Chapter 7 is "187 Minutes of Dereliction." And, Chapter 8 is "Analysis of the Attack." The chapters have a total of 2670 footnotes, many of which provide online links for more evidence, and there is also a website for accessing the "full appendices." There was an average of 333 footnotes per chapter.



In addition to the nine bipartisan Select Committee members, there were 89 people involved in assembling evidence, organizing the evidence, presenting the scripted hearings, writing the Report, proofreading (I found only about half a dozen typos throughout), and publishing in a remarkably readable account of what led up to and during what happened on January 6, 2021, that the entire world watched thanks to live TV coverage.

The Report makes abundantly clear that there was an attempted coup against the United States government, and the then-sitting president of the United States was clearly and culpably implicated in the attempt. It was unsuccessful -- so far. But remember, if the American revolution from Great Britain had been unsuccessful, George Washington would have been hanged or killed by a firing squad. The axiom is true that an attempt to overthrow the government (depose the king), if unsuccessful, leads to serious consequences for the perpetrators. We are seeing that axiom played out in real time, and if true, there will be (and should be) serious consequences.

If that doesn't happen, there will almost certainly be further attempts. Our democracy remains in serious jeopardy. I'd be surprised if more than 1 in 100 members of Congress have read it cover-to-cover. The Report should be required reading for all who still believe in democracy in the USA. At every future "town hall" held by any member of Congress, the question should be asked, "Have you read the entire Report?" The Report is remarkably readable, very understandable, and utterly compelling.

**"If warnings are ignored and there is no accountability for the plotters at the top, a failed coup may become a training exercise."**

-- Report intro from Amazon.com



## April Speaker



# Sheriff Kevin Schneider



Sheriff Kevin J. Schneider is a veteran of the Polk County Sheriff's Office, serving the citizens of Polk County since 1981. He has extensive knowledge and experience within every division of the Sheriff's Office. He is a graduate of the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy with several specialized classes in the field of law enforcement, including the 5-Star Leadership Program. He earned a degree in criminal justice, is a graduate of the Northwestern University School of Police Staff and Command, and a graduate of the Iowa Certified Public Managers program from the State of Iowa and Drake University.

Sheriff Schneider is also a member of and volunteers for several community organizations.

## Des Moines'

## LGBTQ+ FILM FESTIVAL

2023 marks the first year for the LGBTQ+ Film Festival, empowering storytelling through film. The film festival is dedicated to providing a vibrant cultural experience to Des Moines through unique expression of films.



[VARSITYDESMOINES.COM](http://varsitydesmoines.com)



PRESENT

## VARSITY PRIDE

at Varsity Cinema



April 4th, 7pm

### *In From the Side*

Following a drunken encounter, two equally attached men from a cash strapped and divided gay rugby club unwittingly sleepwalk into an adulterous affair but must conceal their growing feelings or risk destroying the club they love.



April 28th, 7pm

### *Joyland*

As a patriarchal family yearn for the birth of a baby boy to continue their family line, their youngest son secretly joins an erotic dance theater and falls for a transgender starlet.

# Stringer Addresses FFBC

by Gary Moore

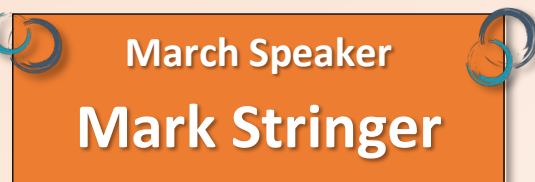


March Speaker

On March 3, over 35 LGBTQ and/or their allies attended a gathering of the First Friday Breakfast Club. President Byron Huff introduced several guests to make announcements. **Robert Warren**, CEO of Hoyt Sherman Place, announced their signature event "Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Future" (celebrating 100 years on the Hoyt Sherman Stage, a celebration on March 29th that will pay homage to the many nationally known celebrities who have graced the stage over that 100 years). It sounds like a remarkable evening of entertainment. **Max Mowitz**, Program Director for One Iowa, addressed the group expressing the dire need for everyone to speak up, step up, and help in contacting legislators about the myriad of anti-LGBTQ legislation that is emerging this session at the Iowa Legislature, most of which seems to be aimed at trans youth. (\*interesting note: 11 years ago Max was one of the FFBC scholarship recipients.) And last, **Ryan Crane** mentioned the upcoming play, *Kinky Boots*, coming to the Des Moines Playhouse.



FFBC's March speaker was introduced by Neil Salowitz. **Mark Stringer** began as the Executive Director of the ACLU of Iowa in May 2017, following a 16-year tenure as the Senior Minister of the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines. Those familiar with the First Unitarian Church know that for many years it was a progressive voice in the community and the church of the O's, a gay couple that commanded the respect of the community. Mark has addressed the FFBC several times over the years, the first time in 2007 after Mark had the honor of officiating at Iowa's first legally recognized same-sex wedding. The last time he spoke to FFBC was in 2017 shortly after receiving the helm at the Iowa ACLU. That was when the ACLU challenged one of the nation's most restrictive abortion laws passed by the Iowa Legislature. The Iowa Supreme Court would uphold the ACLU's challenge.



Mark noted, when first moving to Des Moines and Iowa in 2001, he had felt he had found his home and took pride in how Iowa was a leader in civil and human rights. Times have changed now that one party has taken control of state government and relentlessly has attacked civil rights in Iowa. Primary among those challenged rights are abortion, the right to marry, book banning, and recognition of trans rights.

Today's one-party control and attempts to roll back well-established rights by the courts demonstrate the need for vigilance if we are to protect those rights. The ACLU will continue to seek the protection of those rights with the support of Iowans. But the Iowa legislature continues to roll out bills deeply concerning that are based on a worldview not compatible with the lived realities of the LGBTQ community.

Many of the bills would eliminate the help schools can lend to parents by not allowing even the mention of lived realities. Often the issues arise quite early for LGBTQ youth as many of us can attest to. Issues of depression and self-harm cannot even be discussed under proposed legislation.

Despite all of the bad news for civil rights of recent, Mark did note one possible bright spot and that is **eviction expungement**. Under present Iowa law, if you have one eviction notice it is on your record forever. Even bankruptcy and foreclosure can be expunged with time. An eviction notice, even if shown to be not fair, remains and has been shown to keep people from getting jobs and future shelter. Black renters are five times more likely to have an eviction notice. This is the third year the ACLU is working to have records sealed with time so someone can again get back on their feet. Hopefully, it looks like there may be a fix to this issue.

Mark noted the ACLU will be progressing with additional legal staff and hopefully can bring attention to what bad legislation will produce in the future. Mark closed his remarks with a quotation from Courtney E. Martin, the author of four books and a popular newsletter called "Examined Family," which expressed hope for the future that lies with our youth. **[quotation included on page 8]**



# March Meeting Photo Gallery

Photos by  
Gary Moore & Wade Petersen



Max Mowitz, One Iowa



Neil Salowitz



Mark Turnage  
FFBC Movie Reviewer



“That’s the thing that some people don’t seem to understand these days. There’s no way to redact or micromanage the American inheritance. Generational change cannot be censored or banned or burned; it’s a light inside of each one of these little kids, as inevitable as the sun rising each day—cyclical, inevitable, unstoppable. They will remake the nation by their very existence, whether you let them read the books that scare you or not. They will sing a new song, and you won’t be able to stop them because the lyrics are forming in real time, born from their collective genius, belted out from their mycelium lungs. Listen and you will hear the future of this country, thrumming sweetly under all the cacophony of adult fears. It’s one of the most painful, sweetest songs I’ve ever heard.”

- Courtney E. Martin



## The 18th Annual Governor's Conference

ON LGBTQ YOUTH

*The largest LGBTQ Youth Conference in the Country!*

iowa



**April 28, 2023**

**Prairie Meadows Event Center**

**Adult Registration - \$100**

Access to all conference workshops, keynote sessions, and exhibitors.

**[iagovcon.org](http://iagovcon.org)**

**First Friday Breakfast Club  
will be an Exhibitor!**

## FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to men who self-identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender, and their allies. We welcome all guests, regardless of sexual orientation or gender. Meetings are held the first Friday of every month from 7:00 a.m. - 8:15 a.m. at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines. The following membership and guest rates help us cover our food and facility costs.

### **In-Person Meeting Rates** **(Members & Guests)**

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

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

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

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

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

**There is no charge to attend  
via Zoom.**

### **Payment Options**

**Cash or check at the meeting**

**Credit card prior to the  
meeting at [www.ffbciowa.org](http://www.ffbciowa.org);  
visit the Membership tab**

### **Meeting Schedule**

**6:30 a.m. - Doors open**

**6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service  
begins**

**7:00 a.m. - Meeting begins**





# Polk County Conservation



by Supervisor Matt McCoy  
Polk County, 1<sup>st</sup> District

As we hope spring will come, I want to provide an update on the exciting projects happening at Polk County Conservation. In 2021, Polk County voters overwhelmingly passed the **Polk County Water and Land Legacy Bond**. Their promise was to spend the dollars in each of the following categories:

- Water Quality Project: \$25 million
- Parks: \$20 million
- Land Acquisition: \$10 million
- Trails: \$10 million



## Planning to Re-wild Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

In 2023 Polk County's ecologists will work with Public Works staff to design a strategic plan for the park's drainage system. The goal is to correct the hydrology of the land so the water will flow in more "wild" or natural patterns, rather than through engineered drainage ditches. It's a long and complicated process, making the 2023 strategic planning a critical step forward. 💧

## Installation of Snowflex at Sleepy Hollow

What is snowflex, you ask? It's an all-weather turf surface that will be installed on the tubing hill. Yes, that means once installed the public can fly down the hill in the height of summer! Crews will begin earthwork in the spring with installation occurring mid-late summer. The goal is to open in August 2023. 💧



## Timber Stand Improvements

All along the Fourmile Creek Greenway natural resource technicians will be working to improve the quality of the timber stand. This requires removing invasive trees and ground cover that are not beneficial to the local ecosystem. In some cases it will be done using a large forestry mower, in others it will be done manually. The team is even hiring a herd of goats to eat up invasive plants near Easter Lake Park! 💧

Looking Ahead: 2023



# Construction of Athene North Shore Recreation Area

Starting late spring 2023 heavy equipment will move in. From earthwork to building construction the beachfront of Easter Lake will transform into one of the most accessible parks in the country. The official opening is slated for spring 2024. 💧

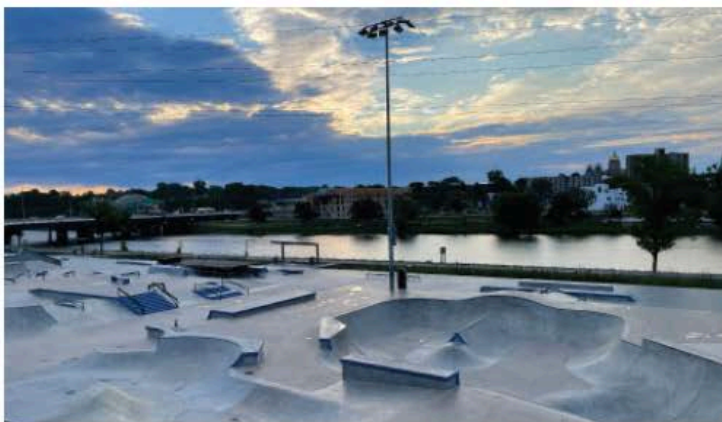


## Critical Park Upgrades

When the weather turns warm, park and construction staff will be running in high gear. At Jester Park the staff is installing new restrooms and shower houses at critical campsites. And Thomas Mitchell Park is getting a new playground. 💧

## Programming Near You

In summer 2023 the naturalists are designing programs to be hosted at parks in some of Polk County's underserved neighborhoods. Expect nature hikes, STEM learning, survival skills programs and more, at places like Fort Des Moines Park, Easter Lake Park and Yellow Banks Park.



## Proposed Parking Lot

In partnership with the Board of Supervisors, Polk County Conservation will construct a 100-space parking lot to serve the Lauridsen Skatepark, Riverwalk Dogpark, and future recreation trail. The lot will ease traffic flow and increase safety for all pedestrians in the area. The project, slated for Fall 2023-Spring 2024 is creating easier access to the nation's largest skatepark which sees 220,000+ visitors annually. 💧





## Deadline Approaches for FFBC Scholarship Donations

Last June, the First Friday Breakfast Club awarded **12 \$3,000 scholarships** due to the generosity of our donors; **we cannot do this without your support!** We are nearing the end of our fiscal year for scholarship donations on **April 30**. If you have not yet donated, we hope you will give it serious consideration.



We have received **35 applications** for the scholarships this year, showing not only the need for financial assistance, but for the continued work of these students to advocate for inclusion, to fight homophobia, and to educate their schools and/or communities about LGBTQ+ issues. FFBC contacts every high school in the state of Iowa with a letter and brochure about the scholarship. The committee also compiles an email list of every counselor in the state. This allows us to send digital versions of our application materials.

These young people have served as an inspiration for their LGBTQ+ peers – standing up to bullies, fighting through adversity, brushing off judgment, and leading by example. Strong student leaders can often make the difference for LGBTQ+ students who might struggle at home, in their churches, and in their schools. Our scholars really do show them a better path.

Scholarship requests go through a rigorous scoring process to select the recipients, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity to award those who have distinguished themselves through courageous efforts.

The Board of Directors and Scholarship Committee members put in many hours of work without compensation because we believe in the mission of FFBC. This means that **100%** of your donation goes **directly** to these brave students; not many nonprofits can make that statement.

We look forward to the in-person presentation of the scholarships this year on June 2, 2023, in the beautiful art gallery of Hoyt Sherman Place. Please make a donation and plan to join us for this heartwarming event.

**We sincerely thank you for your financial consideration!**



# Future Speakers

**May 5:**

**Kathie Obradovich**

Iowa Capital Dispatch

**June 2:**

**Zach Wahls**

Iowa Senate Democratic Leader

**July 15:**

**FFBC Donor Recognition & Member Party**

John Schmacker's House & Gardens



**August 4:**

**Kendra Weston**

Exec. Director Lavender Legal Center

**September 1:**

**Darwin Goodspeed**

Director of VA  
Central Iowa Health Care





# The Prom

A Retro Netflix Review by Mark Turnage



Feel-good family musicals are cut out for tougher work these days--and so are LGBT characters with compelling plotlines. Director Ryan Murphy's *The Prom* is a star-studded Netflix adaptation of the Tony Award-nominated stage musical of the same name that fans of his earlier TV series *Glee* will instantly be comfortable with. Yet despite decent performances from its younger leads, *The Prom* suffers from patronizing writing, wasted star-power, and an overall message that feels lazy and inauthentic instead of embracing the magic of theater and the free-spirited LGBT youth it claims to be moved by.

Emma (Jo Ellen Pellman), an out gay high-schooler in the small city of Edgewater, Indiana, is working with her friendly and caring high school principal (an excellent Keegan Michael-Key) to battle right-wing PTA president Mrs. Greene (a convincingly firebrand Kerry Washington) who is offended gay couples might attend their school prom. She's raised enough community support to cancel the event in protest of the school's "inclusionist" policies. This makes Twitter headlines that are noticed by fading Broadway stars Dee Dee (Meryl Streep), Barry (James Corden), and Angie (Nicole Kidman), whose recent Broadway production bombed in part because they're seen by the greater community as insufferable narcissists. In an effort to better their public image, they decide to adopt Emma's cause and travel to Indiana to "help" her--whether she likes it or not. Think *The Producers* meets *Love, Simon*.

Emma has experienced problems of her own--she's been kicked out by her parents for being gay and lives with her grandmother, her girlfriend Alyssa is the closeted daughter of the PTA president, and the girls have been dating in secret for over a year (no easy feat in high school). Yet this is a feel-good musical, so no unpacking that pesky gay trauma--it happens safely offscreen, is discussed in one or two throwaway lines, and Emma isn't worse for wear because of it. The same goes for Barry's character: he's convinced by Dee Dee late in the film to try reconciling with his parents, who disagreed with his "lifestyle choice" and even tried to put him through conversion therapy. Yet the bigots onscreen inconvenience, insult, and even forgive more than dehumanize, and that's *The Prom's* problem: they're mean, but in a cute, impermanent way. Sugarcoating the actual bigotry LGBT youth experience guts the film of its emotional integrity and robs the triumph from the teenagers at the story's center. Being the only out gay teen at a conservative school, one would think there'd be less smiles from Emma and more... well, rage. But that's a bit too dark for *The Prom*, even if it's a road a lot of us know from experience.

Which brings me back to Barry's character. James Corden, a straight actor, plays Barry as a wildly flamboyant caricature that's meant to be funny, but often comes across as grating and insulting, even when Meryl Streep shares the scene. Compare and contrast with Robin Williams in 1996's *The Birdcage*: a straight actor playing a gay role, but the humor in that film isn't contingent on stereotyping because being gay is only a \*component\* of the character, not its entirety, as Corden's portrayal of Barry is. In terms of character development, *The Prom* doesn't give you anything unrelated to how gay Corden's Barry is. Fun fact: the original Broadway actor who played Barry, Brooks Ashmanskas, is a gay actor who was Tony-nominated for the depth he brought to the same role. Most of the humor in this production falls flat or is overbaked, and for a sunny film filled with LGBT people/allies, it means something's wrong with the formula.

Speaking of wrong, in a Bob Fosse homage song, the legs of the two performers (Emma and Annie) are hidden behind living room objects and a staircase railing for the number, and most of the choreography is performed with hand movements. It's a weirdly inexplicable choice that feels more like a straight person thought of it than any kind of affirming homage to Fosse's craft.

It could be argued that the true antagonists of *The Prom* are the Broadway group of Dee Dee, Angie, and Barry, who unironically refer to themselves as "liberal elites" and constantly demean the residents of Edgewater (even the helpful ones). There's also something to be said about the way these characters constantly force their way into the town's conservative social circles only to tell them how smart and inclusive they are compared to how awful and stupid their audience is--it's evangelism flipped on its head. But instead of punching down or dialing up the Proud Boys, these Edgewater conservatives start to think, "Huh, maybe they're not so wrong!" Anywhere else, this could be played for laughs. Here, it's an awkward, conflict-free, wish-fulfillment fantasy that feels more at home in a Hallmark movie, and it's the theme that carries the film all the way through to its conclusion: love wins, but it didn't really have that much to fight in the first place.

Here's the deal: *The Prom* isn't meant to be provocative or challenging for LGBTQ folks, it's meant to be heartfelt and palatable for wider audiences, but it succeeds only with the latter.





## Board of Directors

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Ken Hanson       Wade Petersen  
Brad Holland      Joe Raetz  
Byron Huff        David Wilfahrt  
Scott Kuknyo     Phil Williams

Jonathan Wilson (Emeritus)

Contact Us At: [info@ffbciowa.org](mailto:info@ffbciowa.org)

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## Newsletter Editor

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## Publication

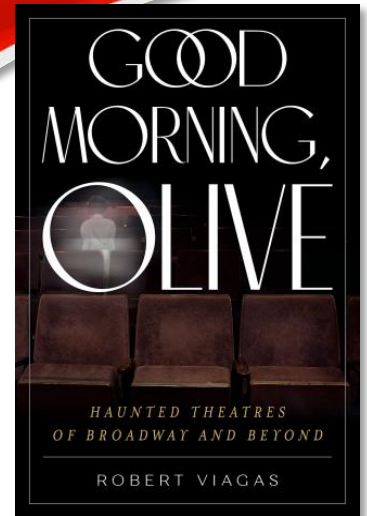


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FFBC Board  
of Directors

First Friday Breakfast Club  
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# Good Morning, Olive

Book  
Review by  
Steve Person



*Good Morning, Olive: Haunted Theatres of Broadway and Beyond* by Robert Viagas is without a doubt the most fascinating nonfiction book I've ever read. I first heard of this book while listening to "On Broadway" on my car's SiriusXM radio. Viagas authored 19 books on the performing arts and is on the nominating committee for the Tony Awards. He obviously is a man who knows his subject well.

Olive Thomas, at one time thought to be the most beautiful girl in New York City, captured Florenz Ziegfeld's attention when he wanted to star her in *The Midnight Frolic* of The Roof Theatre above the main stage of the New Amsterdam Theatre on Broadway. The Ziegfeld's Follies showcased the most popular singing stars, comedians, and show business luminaries on the cavernous downstairs stage of The New Amsterdam. To back up these showbusiness successes, he employed beautiful girls in stunning costumes that sometimes bordered on the racy side but never went the way of being salacious.

*The Midnight Frolic*, on the other hand, took many of those star performers upstairs for a more "adult" theme of entertainment after the main show downstairs emptied of patrons. Up there, costumes displayed more skin and would be akin to today's post-closing activities that many bars employ. Olive Thomas headlined in that venue.

Olive, married quite young in western Pennsylvania to an older man, Bernard Krug Thomas, found life stifling while living not only with Bernard, but also with his parents. By the age of sixteen, she bolted and left for New York City. It didn't take long for her to become noticed, and as the star of *The Midnight Frolic*, her costumes ranged from the filmy drape of a Greek goddess to one of only balloons that male patrons popped with their lit cigars as she danced around the room. Hollywood took notice. Myron Selznick offered her an exclusive contract, and she went west.

Olive attracted the eye of Jack Pickford, the younger brother of the silent superstar, Mary Pickford. Jack relished his playboy image, and the two married in 1916. The marriage faltered because of Jack's continuing reckless behavior. In 1920, the couple decided to take a second honeymoon in Paris. Unfortunately, Paris proved to be the end for Olive. It was there that Olive discovered Jack had syphilis. Worse yet, he passed the disease along to her. On the evening of September 5, Olive awoke and went to the bathroom ostensibly to take some aspirin. Instead, she ingested a full bottle of mercury bichloride, a so-called cure for syphilis in those days. She lingered for a week before succumbing to the poison in her system. Was it murder? Accidental overdose? Suicide?

Shortly thereafter, stagehands at The New Amsterdam Theatre began seeing Olive backstage. When told she was dead, they insisted she had spoken to them many times. This was the beginning of the haunting of The New Amsterdam Theatre by Olive Thomas. Strange happenings began to be reported of missing or misplaced props, unexplained noises, occasional sightings, and even of Olive appearing on stage in an attempt to disrupt a performance by an actor who failed to greet her upon entering the theatre. A large painting of Olive hangs inside the stage door of the theatre, and to this day, if actors or employees enter without saying, "Good morning, Olive," they can be sure she will retaliate in one way or another.

Viagas reports of other ghostly sightings of theatres in New York, London, and elsewhere. Those who encounter these ghosts are not crackpots or wackos. They're hardworking actors and employees. I think you will become convinced of their presence if you read this book.