



First Friday News & Views



Iowa's LGBTQ+ Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club

March 2025 | Volume 30 | Issue 3

Next Meeting
Friday,
March 7
7:00 a.m.



Location
Hoyt Sherman
15th & Woodland
Des Moines



Speaker
Susan Woody
Director of
DSM Public
Library



Website
ffbc Iowa.org



Banning Books in Iowa Schools and Libraries

by Byron Huff, Board President



I hope you can join us this Friday to hear **Susan Woody**: “I’ve done a lot of speaking on book challenges, bans, and the freedom to read. Coming from the perspective of LGBTQ+ literature – there is much to discuss! The Des Moines Public Library has an especially unique history regarding intellectual freedom. In 1938, then Library Director Forrest Spaulding penned a special document that is still in use across the country today called the Library Bill of Rights. I would love to tell your group all about this.”

In recent years, Iowa has become a focal point in the national debate over book bans in public schools. Legislation such as Senate File 496 (SF 496), signed into law by Governor Kim Reynolds in May 2023, has significantly altered the educational landscape by restricting certain materials in school libraries and curricula. This law prohibits instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation for students from kindergarten through sixth grade and bans books depicting sexual acts across all K-12 libraries.



The impact of SF 496 has been profound. A survey by *The Des Moines Register* revealed that Iowa schools have removed over 40 classic and contemporary novels from their shelves, including George Orwell’s *1984*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In total, approximately 3,400 books have been eliminated from school libraries statewide.

The enforcement of SF 496 has faced legal challenges. Initially, a district judge issued an injunction blocking the law’s implementation. However, in August 2024, an appeals court overturned this decision, allowing the state to enforce the restrictions. Advocacy groups argue that the law’s vague language and the threat of disciplinary action have led to widespread censorship, creating a chilling effect on educational content.

[continued on page 2]



The ramifications of such legislation extend beyond immediate book removals. Educators and librarians express concern over the broader implications for academic freedom and the exposure of students to diverse perspectives. The Iowa State Education Association has criticized the law, stating that it imposes undue burdens on educators and deprives students of valuable literature.

This trend is not isolated to Iowa. Nationally, book bans have surged, with over 10,000 instances reported in the 2023-2024 academic year, a significant increase from the previous year. States like Florida and Iowa have been at the forefront, enacting laws that facilitate the removal of books, often bypassing established review processes.

The chilling effect of such legislation is evident. Educators may self-censor to avoid potential legal repercussions, and students lose access to a breadth of literature that fosters critical thinking and empathy. As these laws continue to shape educational environments, the debate over the balance between protecting students and preserving intellectual freedom remains contentious.



HF 274, a dangerous bill that would strip libraries and schools of their exemption under Iowa Code 728, is moving quickly through the legislature as I write this article. Despite hundreds of public comments in opposition, the bill passed out of subcommittee and has been scheduled for a full committee hearing.

This bill would have a chilling effect on libraries and schools, undermining Iowans' First Amendment rights and opening the door to censorship and legal liability for educators and library professionals simply for doing their jobs. Obscenity is already defined by law and must be determined by the courts, not by political pressure. Removing this exemption puts access to information — and the professionals who provide it — at risk.

The Iowa Library Association lobbyist was present at the subcommittee meeting but was not allowed to speak against the bill. Sadly, we will likely see this bill passed before you read this article.



David Cotton, our Vice President, is moving away from Iowa, and we need to fill some of the tasks he performs for FFBC. We are seeking volunteers who are willing to be our webmaster for our WordPress site. Also seeking volunteers that can edit the audio and video of the speakers' presentations at our meetings that are posted to the website and to our YouTube channel. Please send a note to info@FFBCIOWA.org or contact one of the board members if you'd like to volunteer.




Thanks to Board member **Ken Hanson** for introducing our February meeting speakers, **Mike and Sally Merritt**. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website, to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our Microsoft IT infrastructure, and to **David Wilfahrt** for managing FFBC's finances. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor.

Thank you to all the contributors to our newsletter!



The **deadline** for the **April newsletter** will be **March 24**. If you have something that you would like to share, type it up and email it to Wade (wadecpetersen@gmail.com) by the deadline.

Fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have awarded over **\$495,000** for **203** scholarships 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.



A special **thank-you** to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. Contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.



March Speaker

Sue Woody



Sue Woody is the Executive Director of the Des Moines Public Library system. Her career has been dedicated to young readers. “Early literacy is a passion of mine,” she says. That was reflected in her early years with Border’s Books and at the Alligator’s Tale, a shop she created for young readers in the late 1990s. In fact, she came to the public library system as a coordinator of children’s programming.

Sue will speaking to FFBC about numerous topics. “I’ve done a lot of speaking on book challenges, bans, and the freedom to read. Coming from the perspective of LGBTQ+ literature – there is much to discuss! The Des Moines Public Library has an especially unique history regarding intellectual freedom. In 1938, then Library Director Forrest Spaulding penned a special document that is still in use across the country today called the Library Bill of Rights.”

CHECK IT OUT

LGBTQ+ FREE LEGAL CLINIC

Saturday, March 8, 2025
 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
 Des Moines, IA
Location provided after registration

Get FREE legal help with:

- Iowa legal name change
- Sex designation change on Iowa birth certificate

**Limited funds available to assist with filing fees.*

Register → 

OR VISIT: bit.ly/drakelgbtqclinic



Affirmed LGBTQ+ SUPPORT GROUP

New LGBTQ+ Support Group Launch!

Looking for a safe and welcoming space to connect with others in the LGBTQIA+ community? We’re launching a new support group where queer, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals (ages 18+) can come together, share experiences, and build community.

This is not a religious group, though it is hosted at a church. No matter your faith background—or if you don’t have one at all—you are welcome here.

Join us for open conversations, support, and a place to celebrate the joys and navigate the challenges of being a sexual or gender minority in today’s world. Whether you want to share your story or simply be in a space with others who understand, you are invited.

First Meeting:
March 9 at 6:00 PM

Grace United Methodist Church
 3700 Cottage Grove Ave, Des Moines
 Questions? Contact us at: admin@gracedesmoines.org






Law of Unintended Consequences

by Jonathan Wilson



First Friday Breakfast Club
Founder **Jonathan Wilson**

We have a serious problem with drug abuse in the United States. We're hearing more about building a wall on our southern border, and threats of tariffs against Mexico and Canada unless they do more to stop the flow of illicit drugs across our northern and southern borders.

Defining a problem accurately is the first and crucial step in finding an effective solution. That should almost go without saying, but it needs to be said.

A wall and tariff-induced efforts on our northern and southern borders are perfect examples of *not* accurately defining the problem. A "wall" on the southern border would supposedly help. The Chinese, over the course of many years, showed the world how to build a wall, a real wall. None of the barriers suggested for our southern border compare to the engineering marvel of the Great Wall of China, and it did NOT work (other than to create a present-day tourist attraction which, assuredly, was not the purpose for its construction).

The threatened tariffs against our allies and key trading partners, Mexico and Canada, have thus far netted nothing more than what each had previously done or offered to do to reduce cross-border movement of illicit drugs.

Both the wall and increased policing along our northern and southern borders are intended to improve interdiction in the flow of illicit drugs. Improved interdiction is, superficially, thought to be a solution, or at least a good step in the right direction. This is a perfect example of a failure to accurately define the problem.

The actual problem is *demand* for illicit drugs in the United States. The demand for illicit drugs is such that the drug cartels already have built into their business model

some successful interdiction by law enforcement authorities in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. For the sake of argument, let's assume that 20% of illicit drugs are successfully intercepted. The actual percentage isn't important; it could be more or less, but the cartels know what it is and, whatever it currently is, it has already been included in the cartels' profit calculations. Drug cartels are for-profit operations.

So, what happens as a result of improved interdiction? Let's say we could go from stopping 20%, to as much as 30% or even 40%. If the demand remains (particularly for an addictive product), it simply means that the price goes up. It's as simple as recognizing that if the cost of distribution goes up (whatever the product), the price to the end-user will go up.

Here's where the law of unintended consequences comes into play. According to the master's thesis of Michael A. Powell, "most illicit drug-users commit ... economic crimes [read: robbery, burglary, and theft] to support their expensive habit." When (not if) the price of illicit drugs goes up, there will be a corresponding increase in other crimes.

I don't offer here a solution to the actual problem of *demand* for illicit drugs. That's for another day and another article. I just know that interdiction is not a solution, and we're fooling ourselves, or we're being fooled, to think otherwise.

May you live as long as you want.

And never want as long as you live.

Irish Blessing



2024-25
CAPITAL CITY PRIDE
SPEAKER SERIES




**THURSDAY, MARCH 20,
 6-7 P.M.
 TEMPLE THEATRE**

PREREGISTRATION REQUIRED

Jim Fielding
 Join us in welcoming Jim Fielding, a retail and media veteran, philanthropist, and author of *All Pride, No Ego*, as our next Speaker Series guest, sharing insights on leadership, innovation, and creating safe spaces for all!



DES MOINES
 GAY MEN'S
 CHORUS

Twin Cities
 Gay Men's Chorus



**RECLAIM &
 RISE**

SPRING CONCERT

WITH SPECIAL GUEST CONDUCTOR
GERALD GURSS
 ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, TWIN CITIES GAY MEN'S CHORUS

SATURDAY, MARCH 22

MARCH 31ST IS

**TRANS
 DAY
 VISIBILITY**

trans day of visibility

glad

March 31, 2025

FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to all members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies.

We welcome EVERYONE, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Meetings are held the first Friday of every month at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines.

Membership Rates

The following rates help us to cover food and facility costs:

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

No charge to attend via Zoom

Payment Options

We accept cash, checks, or **credit cards** at the meeting.



Meeting Schedule

6:30 a.m. - Doors open

6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service begins

7:00 a.m. - Meeting begins



I Wish You Would Meet Them

by Tim Schreck, Former FFBC Member & Scholarship Chair

Tim Schreck recently moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and joined a friend group made up of “mostly angry, straight, liberal artists who meet on Friday mornings.” After an intense meeting, the leader suggested that members create something positive to share at their next meeting. The following is what Tim had to say about FFBC’s Scholarship Program.



For most of the 10 years I lived in Des Moines, I took part in a high school graduate scholarship program as a part of **First Friday Breakfast Club** (an educational group for LGBTQ+ persons and their allies which meets for breakfast and a speaker each month). Any high school senior from across the state could apply for a scholarship, as long as they demonstrated their efforts in support of the queer community and efforts to fight homophobia.

Each year, FFBC’s Scholarship Committee reviews 25-40 applications from students in school systems with 20-700 graduating seniors. Which means over those ten years, I learned the stories of hundreds of Iowa graduates, both queer and not-queer. These days when I hear the fear being expressed about queer/trans kids, I want to respond with the stories of...

- the openly gay boy and his straight twin brother as two students in a graduating class of 23
- the gregarious lesbian in the small Iowa town which had a “Fuck Biden” sign 1-2 blocks from her school
- the queer kid who was also the favorite part-time day care instructor in his community
- the young man who knew he was gay when he was 6, but waited until age 9 to formally come out
- the trans boy with very clear, established plans for a career in politics
- the trans farm girl with a blossoming modeling career
- the openly queer athletes shining in their chosen sports – cross country, track, football, wrestling, rugby, soccer, cheer
- the queer artists, actors, musicians, poets, spoken-word performers, and yearbook editors
- the asexual boy who was willing to explain himself on a regular basis
- the young gay man living with his straight best friend’s family after being banished from his own home
- the kids still not ready to come out whose first bold steps were to complete the scholarship application, to finally say the words to someone



There are so many stories of courage, wisdom, growth, determination, residual pain, and self-awareness. For the scholarship winners, committee members and I presented to and recognized each awardee at their school’s annual senior awards event (as well as at a big ceremony in Des Moines in June to honor them at the breakfast club meeting). And we met...



- proud, humble parents blown away by the accomplishments of their child
- gracious friends and neighbors housing kids with nowhere else to go for their final year of high school
- grandparents whose love never changed as their grandchild transitioned
- single moms doing the best they could while supporting a child who doesn’t fit all the traditional boxes
- reluctant dads who were a little uncertain in the spotlight of their child
- joyful school counselors seeing the rewards of their efforts to encourage, support, and nurture students who just needed that extra space

I’ll carry the memories of these young queer Iowans and their circles of support for many years to come. But if you, or more likely someone you know, has a fear of the trans kid, lovely queer boy, or exuberant lesbian in their community, well, **I just wish you would meet them.**



First Friday Breakfast Club 2024 Scholar Updates

Bekah Schurz

It's crazy to think my first semester of college is over already. I have LOVED it!!! I cannot thank you guys enough for granting me a scholarship. Drake is a pricey school but they have made me feel so at home and given me a great community and support system.

I am so blessed to be able to learn from such talented and kind proffers. I have joined some clubs and organizations on campus that work to give back to the community and that has been so great to be a part of!



Brody Petig

I have really been enjoying my time at the University of Denver! So far, my favorite course is my Art History class, Highlights of American Art, where I have studied American art from the pilgrims to the modern era. The coursework for this class has been stimulating and so enjoyable that I enrolled into another art history class next quarter. I also took courses over the Israel-Palestine conflict, Public Policy, and French! I am looking forward to returning to campus in January to continue my studies! Thank you for all your support and have a happy holiday season!



Claire Opdahl

I've been doing well, and I'm really enjoying college life so far. I love how LGBT-friendly Iowa City is, especially compared to my hometown, and it's been a lot of fun making so many new queer friends. I'm first-gen, so adjusting and navigating the rigor of college coursework hasn't always been easy, but I like the classes I'm taking so it feels worth it.



Jasper Wirth

Your scholarship has helped me so much, it's allowed me to get through schooling without having to worry about rent or other expenses!





Capital City Pride is thrilled to invite you to the 2025 **Pride Gala and Awards**, an unforgettable evening of celebration, community, and connection. This year's theme, **"Reflections of Pride,"** honors the beauty of diversity, unity, and the light we reflect in one another, like a radiant prism creating endless possibilities.

Date: Saturday, March 8, 2025
Time: VIP Reception 5:30 PM
 Main Doors 6 PM/Event 7 PM



Join us as we recognize inspiring leaders and changemakers and celebrate milestones of progress and perseverance. Enjoy the most fabulous gala of the year! The evening will feature a stunning program with dinner, live entertainment, and the presentation of the Pride Awards, all set in a dazzling atmosphere inspired by prisms that symbolize the way we amplify each other's light.

Dress Code: Formal attire with a flair of your pride!

"People used to think I was a monster. And for a long time, I believed them. But after a while, you learn to ignore the names that people call you and you just trust who you are."

[Shreckl]



LGBTQ Day on the Hill 2025

Tuesday, March 11 @ 10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

**RALLY AT THE CAPITOL. TALK TO YOUR LEGISLATORS.
 FIGHT FOR LGBTQ IOWANS.**

The **LGBTQ Day on the Hill** provides Iowans with the opportunity to engage directly with lawmakers at a critical time when anti-LGBTQ legislation continues to be introduced. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the legislative process and learn how to advocate for equality and fairness.

The event will start with a training session at the Conservatory, followed by a march to the Capitol. At the Capitol, there will be a rally in the Rotunda. After the rally, participants will meet with their legislators.

- 10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.: Legislative Process Training 101
(Conservatory, 315 E 5th St, Suite 2)
- 11:45 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.: Break
- 11:50 a.m. - 12:50 p.m.: Storytelling Training Workshop (Conservatory)
- 12:50 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.: Lunch
- 1:30 p.m.: March to the Capitol
- 2:00 p.m.: Public Rally in the Capitol Rotunda
- After the rally: Meetings with Legislators



Travels with Ken & Wade

by Wade Petersen

Ken Hanson and Wade Petersen spent 2 ½ weeks in Europe, making stops in several countries, to celebrate their 15th wedding anniversary (22 years together) and Wade's 60th birthday. Articles in the coming months' newsletters will feature their experiences.

An afternoon train ride from Salzburg, Austria, brought us to a rainy **Venice, Italy**. We decided against navigating the “water taxi” and trudged (or sloshed) along the walkways bordering the **Grand Canal** to reach our hotel. Even though Venice seems to be 50% tourist shops and 50% restaurants, who could pass up such an iconic city? Note: When I was last there in 1986, the canals were full of trash and the city smelled. I am glad to report that the trash is gone and only the faint smell of garbage pickups (into carts and boats) in the early morning remain.

Despite rainy weather, getting to see the grand bridges of Venice, like the **Rialto** (below) makes everything better. Its beauty literally transports you back in time.



We also began our love affair with homemade pastas and sauces from the local restaurants. And the pizza...!

The next morning, we began our trek to visit **St. Mark's Square** (*Piazza San Marco*). The square was magnificent! Normally, its restaurants would have their tables set up in this huge square, but due to the rain (and some minor flooding with elevated walkways) not many travelers were willing to dine in the drizzle.

The real treat of the morning was a tour of the **Doge's Palace** (*Palazzo Ducale*). This is one of several venues where I pre-purchased “skip-the-line” tickets (an expense well worth it to avoid spending hours standing in line to get into many popular attractions in Europe).

The **Doge Palace** is built in Venetian Gothic style (the “Doge” was the supreme authority in old Venice). Built in 1340, this impressive edifice has been extended and modified several times over the centuries. It not only served as a residence/palace, but also housed many of the political institutions. Ken and I were awestruck by the amount of gold used for the walls and ceilings. It seemed like every room brought a grand level of decoration.



In the afternoon, we signed up for a tour of three nearby islands: Murano, Burano, and Torcello. **Murano** is home to the famous glass-making factories. We loved the demonstration of glass blowing in Murano. Of course, they have to usher the tourists into their glass store afterward in the hopes of making some sales of their amazing artwork.



Burano, the second island, is home to the lace artisans. You can wander around various workshops to see lace making (which, by no surprise, leads to their numerous tourist shops). Burano is also known for its multicolored buildings and homes. We stopped for gelato and had to sample some of the local cannoli (Ken's favorite had a pistachio filling; I opted for the chocolate Nutella filling). The third, and smallest island, **Torcello**, is home to the *Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta*.

Of course, no trip to Venice would be complete without a ride in a **gondola**! My dream has always been to return to Venice for a romantic gondola ride with someone I love. Ken is my forever someone. Our gondolier was very skilled and even sang a little as we made our way through the small canals. We did not pre-book our gondola trip; we had advice just to walk along the pier and have cash! An hour ride is a standard price of 90 € (about \$98). To me, the experience and its lasting memories are priceless!



Our travel stories and photos will continue in the coming months with visits to Florence and Rome, Italy.



21/25 SEASON: CAP T A L C I T Y P R I D E

MARCH:

PRIDE BOOK CLUB

WEDNESDAY, MAR. 12, 6-7 P.M.

THE SLOW DOWN COFFEE CO.
3613 6TH AVENUE, DES MOINES

CAP T A L C I T Y P R I D E

THE LAST SATURDAY OF THE MONTH

BLAZING SADDLE

BINGO!

THE BLAZING SADDLE
SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2-5 P.M.

416 E 5TH ST
DES MOINES, IA 50309

Central Iowa
Trans Lives Festival
CALL FOR PARTICIPANT SUBMISSIONS

Who can participate? **ALL TRANSGENDER, GENDERQUEER, & NON-BINARY**

*Artists	*Writers	*Performers	And
*Craftpersons	*Musicians	*Singers	Other
*Poets	*Dancers	*Food Vendors	Creators

Submit your request to: tag@ucdsm.org

How can you participate? Include your name, contact info, and type of work, along with a sample of your work, if possible (photos, docs, links, etc.). We will contact you with more info. *No registration fee required.*

Participants may offer their works for sale - all sales and proceeds belong to participants.

Spaces filled as applications come in, until full.

Submission Deadline: March 1, 2025

When and Where? **Saturday, March 29, 2025, 10am - 5pm**
(set up 8am-10am)
First Unitarian Church, 1800 Bell Avenue, Des Moines, IA

ADA Accessible
Security provided so everyone can enjoy a safe & fun event

What is the Trans Lives Fest? In honor of the International Transgender Day of Visibility, the Central Iowa Trans Lives Festival will provide a safe space for trans adults and youth to celebrate & present their creative work to the LGBTQIA community and other allied members of the public. Sponsored by the Queer and Transgender Action Group of First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, an LGBTQIA Welcoming Congregation & member of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

(More info at ucdsm.org & uua.org)

Future Speakers

April 4:
Greg Edwards
Catch Des Moines

May 2:
Ryan Crane
Executive Direction of NAMI/Iowa
National Alliance On Mental Illness

June 6:
Ian Roberts
Superintendent
Des Moines Public Schools

July 12:
**Member/Donor
Summer Party**

August 1:
Brent Johnson
President, Iowa Farm Bureau

September 5:
Carl Voss
DSM City Council Member

February Meeting Photo Gallery



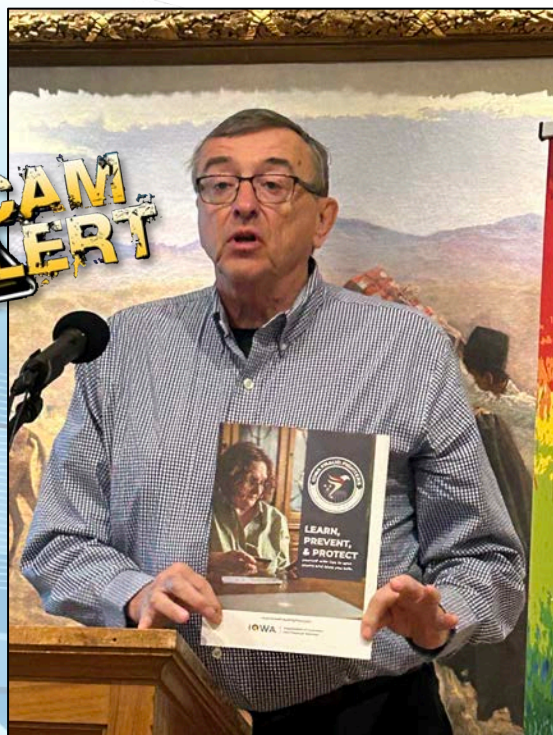
Ken Hanson, FFBC Board Member and Scholarship Chair, asked for volunteers to be on this year's Scholarship Committee and also introduced our speakers.



Lynne Melssen, from United Way of Central Iowa, encouraged members to get involved with volunteering around our area, such as reading to young students in our schools.



www.IowaFraudFighters.gov



Mike Merritt supplies our attendees with a brochure with tips and pointers to avoid falling victim to investment scams and fraud in our state.



Sally Merritt discussed various types of consumer scams and the tactics used to try to convince us.



SPOTLIGHT ON

Prime Timers of Central Iowa

P T C I

A Chapter of Prime Timers Worldwide

Who are the Prime Timers?

- Prime Timers are men who identify as gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.
- They are of all ages, including fathers, caregivers, businessmen, entrepreneurs, and retired people.
- They come from all walks of life.
- Its worldwide organization has various U.S. state chapters (including Iowa).

What do Central Iowa Prime Timers do?

- Meet for monthly potluck dinners.
- Meet for monthly movie nights.
- Meet for morning breakfasts at local restaurants the 2nd and 4th Mondays.
- Meet for “Coffee & Cookies” at various members’ homes.
- Meet monthly to dine out.
- Develop friendships by socializing with other Prime Timers in Central Iowa.
- Enjoy the opportunities that come with being gay at any age in a supportive community.

JOIN US

Prime Timers of Central Iowa

Interested? Contact:

President: Jim Sterba

Email Contact: ptcipresident68@gmail.com

Private Facebook Page:

www.facebook.com/groups/PrimeTimersIowa



Only Facebook members can see who is in the private group and what they post.



The Substance

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage



THE SUBSTANCE

As a cinematic genre, horror is particularly remarkable for how its films explore survival, cultural anxieties, and even expand upon themes of social justice. In the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' (Oscars') 97-year history, just seven horror films have been nominated for Best Picture and only one has won: Jonathan Demme's "The Silence of the Lambs" in 1991. Coralie Fargeat's 2024 film "The Substance" is the seventh horror movie to be nominated for Best Picture at this year's Oscars; the film also makes Fargeat the ninth woman to be nominated for Best Director, and "The Substance" won Best Screenplay at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival. So how did a bloody disgusting body horror movie collect so many accolades, and what makes it worth seeing? For those who can stomach it, "The Substance" takes satirical wit, practical effects-fueled disgust, and bloody camp horror and cleverly packages it into a stunning and stomach-churning commentary on the psychology of body dysmorphia, risks of quick-fix beauty products, and keeping up with impossible pop culture body standards.

On her 50th birthday, Elisabeth Sparkle (a stunning Demi Moore) is let go from her long-running aerobics show. Her unhygienic, shrimp-cocktail-munching boss Harvey (Dennis Quaid) explains why: "At 50, it stops." When a persistent Elisabeth asks what "it" is, Harvey stumbles and bails from the conversation, but it's clear he hypocritically means "female sex appeal." After an accident she's lucky to survive, a hospital nurse discretely tips Elisabeth off to a mysterious black-market drug: the neon-coded, titular "Substance," which creates a "newer, better version of yourself" from your own

body. The catch? There's a few, but the biggest one is a "switch" between the new body and the old one required every seven days. Elisabeth ignores buying in at first, but recurring self-doubt and her desire for admiration result in the very messy, alien-like birth of Sue (Margaret Qualley), whose younger, more attractive body quickly nets her the starring role on her own show and the admiration Elisabeth wanted. Yet the more successful and hedonistic Sue's life becomes, the more Elisabeth's life—and the balance and identity shared between the two of them—suffers.

Make no mistake, disgust is a major theme in "The Substance": for other people, for food, for oneself, for one's own relationship to their body—and there's some revolting cinematography to accompany it—but it's *how* that disgust is portrayed and *what* it symbolizes that elevates "The Substance" from being more than just empty shock value. In one scene, we see Elisabeth fully ready for a date and looking beautiful before her own dissatisfaction and dysmorphia to "look better than Sue" enrage her enough to maul her own makeup in the mirror and abandon the date. Quaid and Qualley both have excellent performances, but it's Moore who embodies the heartbreaking, destructive descent of Elisabeth from dissatisfaction into self-hatred and monstrosity. But Fargeat is careful to keep viewer sympathy divided evenly between Elisabeth and Sue throughout the narrative, making their inevitable antagonism compelling and believable.

If there's anything that both unites and divides its viewers, it's "The Substance's" third act, which leans into its camp horror nature following a darker second act. While the tonal shift is jarring,

its Best Screenplay chops are most visible here: continuing to follow its characters past what most may assume is a "point of no return," and daring to ask its audience "what now?". Its conclusion reveals the core of "The Substance"—camp horror satirizing society's expectation to benefit from a vicious cycle of agism, quick-fix beauty products and body dysmorphia.

Fargeat lovingly packs her horror film with references to her own cinematic inspirations: David Lynch's "Mulholland Drive," David Cronenberg's "The Fly," Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining," and Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" all play into pivotal scenes, but succeed in being brief, stylish nods rather than extended distractions. French DJ Raffertie's industrial soundtrack ranges from spooky synths to thumping warehouse rave to 90s aerobics tapes, and keeps the film's pace pulsing like a gay circuit party.

For those with a queasy stomach, this may not be the movie for you—but if you like your horror movies smart, incisive, and memorable, see "The Substance" streaming on the MUBI app.

Board of Directors

David Cotton Gene Larson
Jim Flansburg Deb Madison-Levi
Ken Hanson Wade Petersen
Brad Holland Joe Raetz
Byron Huff David Wilfahrt
Scott Kuknyo Phil Williams

Jonathan Wilson (Emeritus)

Contact Us At: info@ffbcia.org

Chipping Away at Our Civil Rights

by Supervisor Matt McCoy
Polk County, 1st District



The dismantling of the Iowa Civil Rights Act of 2007 is a heartbreaking step backward for the State of Iowa. The enumerated protections were written and adopted during my legislative years of service. They were hard bargained and passed with bipartisan support and deep engagement of both the ecumenical communities as well as the business communities. In an effort to make Iowa a welcoming and diverse state, the Iowa Civil Rights Act represented what was best about fair-minded Iowans who believed that people should not be discriminated in employment, housing, and public accommodations simply for being who they were born to be.

I firmly believe that the chipping away at civil rights for the trans community is simply the beginning of the direction that the hate mongers intend to take the state down. As I've said, elections have consequences and the consequences of this past cycle will be felt in discrimination and in some cases, the tragic loss of life by those who will feel hopeless as a result of this misguided legislation. It's important that we continue to speak out for our trans family who need it the most right now.

First, we must affirm their presence. Second, we must speak against this legislation and this effort to erase their existence and their history. Third, we must continue to organize around candidates who will resist and oppose this shameless effort to politicize human rights. While we're all feeling the impact of this setback, we simply cannot give up or give in to our opponents' tactics. Their efforts to ultimately discourage and set back our movement will fail. This is our state. We live here. We will not be erased.



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