



The
Pitch

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Summer Guide '25

Choose the Baer
by Emily Wheeler

Soul Juggernaut
by Nick Spacek

Crowned Underground
by Sophia Lail

CHECK IT OUT ONLINE thepitchkc.com

Photo by Travis Meier



Desperate business owners demand crime solutions from flailing city government

In September 2024, 111 Kansas City businesses were burglarized. From some of the most beloved small businesses to apartment buildings, break-ins, robberies, and vandalism remain an incredibly large issue within the metro, specifically in urban areas. Kansas City announced a Back to Business Fund to help aid owners who have been victims of these crimes. With 109 total applications, the city announced in December it would distribute \$70,000 to 30 businesses in the area. Obviously, this does not cover even close to half of the businesses that applied, let alone those who have seen crime affect their endeavors since the funding was dispersed. On April 8, voters approved an extension of a 20-year, quarter-cent sales tax to fund the building of a new city jail. Community leaders are at odds over whether or not the future facility will truly help put a halt to the immense amount of crime that the city has seen in recent years.



Decoding Missouri's White Christian Nationalism and extreme misogyny

Over the last several months, *Pitch* columnist Michael McGrady Jr. has been exploring just how widespread Christian nationalism is across the Show-Me state. Conducting nearly 50 interviews with different individuals from political and psychological experts, religious leaders and members, and the average Joe, along with hours spent researching the topic, McGrady dives into the impact that the notion is currently having on our state in comparison to others. Uncovering what is truly taking place in Missouri in correlation to the current administration is necessary now more than ever. McGrady's reporting is here to make that easier for you, all in one place through a three-part series titled "Show Me Hate" where he will buckle down on the different factors that play into the harmful ideologies that make up Christian Nationalism.



Art by Teddy Rosen

Photo by Don Ipock



fire work stages a delightfully dystopian collision between Charles Schulz and child labor

This play is exactly what we yearn for when we crave clever satire, and the Orwellian comedy of the whole thing does what satire has failed to do in our modern era: find a way to escalate beyond how fucking bad things have gotten. Comparing this cast of characters directly to their *Peanuts* equivalents: Charlie Brown and Lucy are struggling in domestic despair as Peppermint Patty rallies the rest of the

schoolyard to revolution. Sally is in danger of falling into machinery at her factory, Marcy is quickly becoming a Marxist, Snoopy has been rendered mute by forced labor digging in the mines, and all of this takes place to the benefit of the robber baron, Linus. Pulling from *Mad Max*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Disco Elysium* equally, comrades everywhere would be remiss to miss KC native Mary Glen Fredrick's script, wherever it gets staged next.



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Come As You Are

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BY BETH LIPOFF



Cover Photo by Tarik Sykes
Design by Teddy Rosen

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Letter from the Editor

CAUGHT IN THE UNDERTOW

By Brock Wilbur

Greetings dearest reader, and welcome to the May print edition of *The Pitch* magazine, grown right here in beautiful Kansas City.

As per tradition, this month's issue is our Summer Guide. The S.G. is an O.G. project—one dedicated to laying out the most exciting, delish, delightful, or even demented highlights of the warm season ahead. Each year, it's a chance for us to make a conspiracy yarn wall of everything cool, cross-check it with everything that you might not hear about without this kooky calendar, and then threaten you with a good time. It doesn't just involve the process of whispering in the ear of party planners and venue owners to ask, "Psst, what hasn't been announced yet that we can debut to our readers," but equally a moment for our team to ask, "Hey, do you think *anyone* in this area does [random wild thing] because I would personally love to try [random wild thing]."

The end result is a calendar that contains too much joy, exploration, and innovation for any single Kansas Citian to possibly embrace fully, but—if you're like me—you're welcome to nearly kill yourself trying to have it all.

We like the issues where we get to 'look ahead' as a concept. Our New Year's resolutions issue in January, our Summer Guide—these are specific prompts to not just tell you about the world as it exists right now but to dream [and plot] for how better worlds are possible. In some magazines, that takes the form of planning how to fight back collectively against the seemingly unstoppable encroachment of draconian forces. In other

magazines, that takes the form of figuring out how to make it to a Lavender Festival, a Royals game, and an open bar at an art gallery unveiling, all in the same 12-hour stretch. Sometimes, you find a way to fight fascism and catch a Freedom Affair album release party on the same night. This is, of course, the optimal way to disco in 2025.

My bedrock of summer is finding a way to anything and everything in the orbit of the KC Current. The team represents the only thing in my adult life that I've allowed to evolve from casual awareness to all-encompassing hyper-fixation... or at least the only one that I didn't burn out on almost immediately. The transition from a life spent ac-

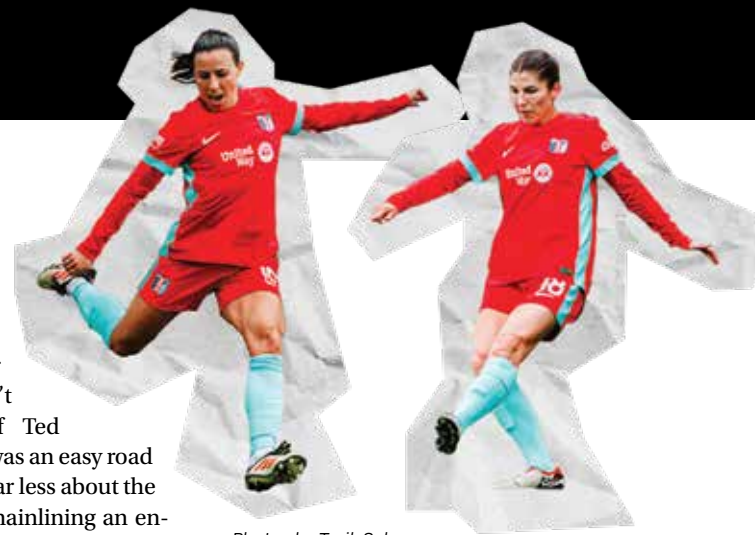
tively avoiding soccer to making it my number one sports fandom isn't particularly notable—If Ted Lasso paved the way, it was an easy road for me to travel. No, it's far less about the sport and more about mainlining an entirely new vein of energy from the people of the metro.

We've written about Claire Hutton, Rocky Rodríguez, Kayla Sharples, Izzy Rodríguez, Kristen Hamilton, Michelle Cooper, LaBonta, Debinha, and of course this issue's cover star Temwa Chawinga... just this first fraction of our roster is stacked with players that, at any other team, could be the sole foundation upon which their club relies. When you've got one of the youngest players in league history (Alex Pfeiffer) to the (undisputed?) best female soccer player in the world, there's no 'correct' number of words to deep dive into these personalities, their playstyles, their lore, or even the Biblical definition of "awesome" that strikes me about being in their proximity. [Cooper recently scored and then looked in the direction of my section to shout that we weren't celebrating loudly enough. I thought she was yelling at me personally, and I've had an actual nightmare about it.]

We've previously written at length about the team's approach to the game itself, including the shared strength of being the NWSL team where, last season, they set a new record for the most individual players with a goal—showing just how much this group of superstars has found their greatest strength in sharing the spotlight. We've also covered fan groups like the Blue Crew, who provide live musical accompaniment to every match, alongside volunteer programs that do fundraising in the community. We've even gone deep on how the stadium itself is both an achievement of design but also a promise for future citywide improvement—when the space starts being utilized for farmers markets and a concert venue.

Rather than retread that ground, I thought I'd simply share what makes the Current such a cornerstone angle to kicking off our Summer Guide issue: frustration.

Sure, that might not have been the word this felt like it was building toward, but I think it highlights a connective tissue across KC. See, getting to CPKC Stadium lately has been a goddamned nightmare... (and not the good kind, where Cooper is yelling at you). Development of the Riverfront area, as we highlighted in last month's issue, is moving forward at warp speed, and infrastructure is struggling to remain functional amid all



Photos by Tarik Sykes

the construction. A school bus shuttle from downtown parking to reach the stadium itself is currently nearly an hour-long slog in both directions. At a concert, at another sports event, or even in my day job commute back in L.A., this would've been cause for open rebellion. Amid all of this turmoil between you and the folks getting funneled up and down narrow paths, through fenced-off areas and open construction sites, there's one thing noticeably absent: complaints.

Certainly, I'm not the only one thinking 'this fucking sucks,' but I've yet to hear another game-goer say the quiet part out loud. That says a lot about the power of the day.

Everyone is just so happy to be there, to see *our* team in *our* stadium. Even the folks trying to navigate the walking paths on bikes post-game, who cannot get folks to make a path for them, are bringing a lack of frustration and a depth of empathy that I don't see out in the Normal World. The gnashing of teeth and the passive-aggressive jostling I would expect to see any given Wednesday at my Trader Joe's is just nowhere to be found.

The fear of this kind of social frustration, in myself and in others, has kept me from attending so many events in the past. But the Current games have been a beacon to me of late, showing that when we're all looking for an escape into joy, people are capable of making a path. That's good to keep in mind as you scan the pages of our Summer Guide. It would be easy to say "That looks great, but will I want to get out of the house that day? To struggle with that crowd? To brace that heat?" The answer should be 'Yes.'

Go for it. Whatever overstuffed hindrance you've built up in your head is going to dissipate the moment you show up and find yourself among like-minded escapists.

So take this as a personal challenge. Don't just read this Summer Guide calendar, use it. Make this city what you want it to be, don't waste a moment of the next few months, and remind yourself of how good we have it.

Pitch in and we'll make it through,

Brock Wilbur

P

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FRIDAY, MAY 23



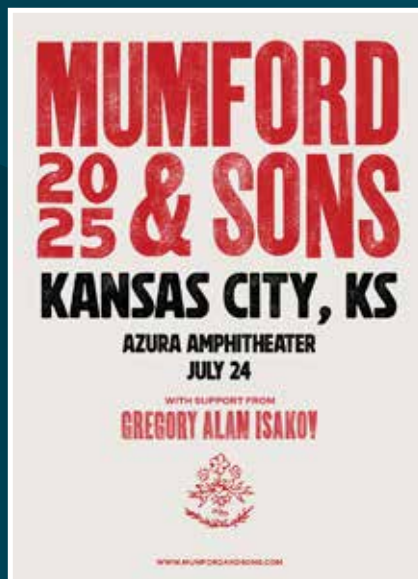
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SUNDAY, JULY 13



THURSDAY, JULY 24



FRIDAY, JULY 25



SATURDAY, AUGUST 9



THURSDAY, AUGUST 21



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The Pitch

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PRESENTATIONS

JUNETEENTH

MAY 31
4th Annual Miss Juneteenth Pageant,
Gem Theater

JUNE 6
Juneteenth First Fridays Celebration,
18th & Vine Jazz District

JUNE 7
Juneteenth Cultural Parade, Begins at
Benton Plaza
**Juneteenth at the Johnson County Arts
& Heritage Center,** Johnson County Arts
& Heritage Center

JUNE 12
Juneteenth Celebration, Nelson-Atkins
Museum of Art

JUNE 15
**13th Annual Juneteenth Heritage
Festival,** 18th & Vine Jazz District

JUNE 21
14th Annual JuneteenthKC, 18th & Vine
Jazz District

PRIDE

MAY 10 & 11
All-Inclusive Show-Me State Rodeo,
Hale Arena

JUNE 6-8
KC PrideFest, Theis Park

JUNE 7
Lawrence Pride, Downtown Lawrence
KC Pride Parade, Begins in Westport

JUNE 12
KC Royals Pride Night,
Kauffman Stadium

JUNE 14
KC Current Pride Night, CPKC Stadium

JUNE 21
Kansas City Pride Bar Crawl,
Sinkers Lounge

THE PITCH'S SUMMER GUIDE

By Joe Ellett, Sophia Lail,
Sarah Sipple, Emily Wheeler,
Brock Wilbur

2025

STAGES

MAY 3
Save Ferris, The Bottleneck
Sturgill Simpson, Cable Dahmer Arena
Red Hot Chili Pipers, Ameristar Casino and
Hotel

MAY 4
Mereba, The Bottleneck
Empire Drags Back: A Space Drag Show,
Funny Bone Comedy Club

MAY 5
Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, Music Hall
Kansas City
Teen Mortgage, ENCORE at Uptown
Theater

MAY 6
Future Islands, Madrid Theatre
Black Violin, University of Kansas
Lied Center

MAY 6 & 7
Ice Nine Kills, Uptown Theater

MAY 7
Lucy Dacus, Midland Theatre
Forrest Frank, Cable Dahmer Arena

MAY 8
bodie, Uptown Theater

MAY 8-10
Emo Phillips, Comedy Club KC

MAY 9
Steve Aoki, KC Live!
**Jason Bonham's Led Zeppelin
Evening,** VooDoo Lounge at
Harrah's Kansas City
Get the Led Out, Uptown
Theater

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SHERATON AT
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July 10, 7 p.m.

Surfin' USA

August 7, 7 p.m.

Alex Abramovitz and
His Swing'n Kansas City Jazz Band

STAGES

MAY 9 & 10

James Murray, Funny Bone
Comedy Club

MAY 10

Lucero w/ The Menzingers,
The Granada
Katy Perry, T-Mobile Center
Julien Baker, Liberty Hall
Samantha Fish, The Truman

MAY 11

Magdalena Bay, Midland
Theatre
Beth Hart, Uptown Theater

MAY 12 & 13

Conner O'Malley, Comedy
Club KC

MAY 13

Youth Lagoon, The Bottleneck

MAY 14

Hovvdy, recordBar
Shakey Graves, The Truman
George Clanton, Madrid
Theatre

MAY 15

Sierra Ferrell, Midland Theatre
Roast Battle League, Comedy
Club KC

MAY 16

Nekrogoblkon, The Granada
Brewgrass Festival w/ Amigo
The Devil, Grinders
No Cure, recordBar
Jeremy Camp, Uptown Theater
Queensrÿche, Ameristar
Casino and Hotel

MAY 16 & 17

Earthquake, Funny Bone

Comedy Club
Ben Rector w/ The
National Parks,
Midland Theatre

MAY 17

Allison Krauss & Union
Station w/
Willie Watson, Starlight
Theatre
The Steeldrivers,
Knuckleheads
Dusty Trails Country Festival,
Grinders

MAY 18

Toadies, The Truman

MAY 20

MIKE, The Bottleneck
Leon Bridges, Midland Theatre
AngelMaker, recordBar

MAY 21

Patti LuPone, Kauffman Center
for the Performing Arts

MAY 23

Alabama, Azura Amphitheater
Orion Sun, The Truman

MAY 23-24

Steve Byrne, Funny Bone
Comedy Club

MAY 24

Alex Warren, The Truman

MAY 25

Baroness, recordBar

MAY 27

Wallows, Grinders

MAY 29

Sarah and the Sundays,
recordBar

MAY 30

Bailey Spinn, recordBar

MAY 29-31

Jeremiah Watkins, Comedy

Club KC

MAY 29

The Vincents, Knuckleheads

MAY 30

Ozark Mountain Daredevils,
Kauffman Center for the
Performing Arts

JUNE 1

Breaking Benjamin w/ Staind,
T-Mobile Center
Drew Hernandez, Comedy
Club KC

JUNE 3

Brit Floyd, Midland Theatre

JUNE 4

Honey Revenge, Madrid
Theatre

JUNE 5

Flatland Cavalry, Grinders

JUNE 7

Samia, The Truman

JUNE 11

Billy Strings, T-Mobile Center
James Arthur, Uptown Theater

JUNE 13

Marshall Tucker Band,
Knuckleheads

JUNE 14

Boulevardia, Crown Center

JUNE 16

MJ Lenderman, The Truman

JUNE 17

Static-X w/ Gwar, Grinders
Jack's Mannequin, The
Truman
A.J. Croce, Uptown Theater

JUNE 18

Artemas, The Truman

The Head And The Heart,
Uptown Theater

JUNE 19

Perfume Genius, The Truman

JUNE 20

Whiskey Myers, Starlight
Theatre

JUNE 21

Tacos & Tequila Festival,
Legends Field
Key Glock, Uptown Theater

JUNE 24

Modest Mouse, Grinders

JUNE 26

Luke Bryan,
Azura
Amphitheater
Greensky
Bluegrass, Uptown
Theater

JUNE 27

Two Friends, KC Live!

JUNE 28

Chicago, Starlight Theatre

JUNE 29

The Driver Era, Starlight
Theatre

JULY 1

Elvis Costello & The
Imposters w/
Charlie Sexton, Uptown
Theater

JULY 2

Styx w/ Kevin Cronin, and
Don Felder, Starlight Theatre

JULY 8

Incubus w/ Manchester
Orchestra,
Starlight Theatre

JULY 11

311 w/ Badflower, Grinders
Dave Mason, Ameristar Casino and Hotel
Haywire, Uptown Theater

JULY 12

Everclear, Ameristar Casino and Hotel

JULY 13

Slightly Stoopid, Azura Amphitheater

JULY 13-27

KC Fringe Festival, Multiple Venues

JULY 14

The Crane Wives, The Truman

JULY 16

Live w/ Collective Soul, Starlight Theatre

St. Paul & The Broken Bones w/ The Wood Brothers, Grinders

Robin Trower, Uptown Theater

JULY 17

The Office Trivia w/ "Todd Packer", Comedy Club KC

Tyler Hubbard, Ameristar Casino and Hotel
Lyle Lovett and His Large Band, Uptown Theater

JULY 18

Earth, Wind & Fire, Starlight Theatre
Railroad Earth, Grinders



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STAGES

JULY 18-20

David Koechner, Comedy Club
KC

JULY 19

Father John Misty, Uptown
Theater
Crystal Gayle, Ameristar
Casino and Hotel

JULY 22

Stone Cold & The Jackal,
Funny Bone Comedy Club

JULY 25

Old Dominion, Azura
Amphitheater
America, Midland Theatre

JULY 26

The Lumineers, T-Mobile
Center

JULY 27

of Montreal, recordBar

JULY 29

Shinedown, T-Mobile Center

AUG 1

Scene Queen, Madrid Theatre
Buena Vista Orchestra,
Uptown Theater

AUG 1-2

Akaash Singh, Comedy Club
KC

AUG 2

Toad the Wet Sprocket,
Grinders

AUG 4

**Dropkick Murphys and Bad
Religion**, Grinders

AUG 5

Ghost, T-Mobile Center
**Herb Alpert & The Tijuana
Brass**, Kauffman Center for the
Performing Arts

AUG 8

Penelope Road, Uptown
Theater

AUG 9

Cyndi Lauper, Azura
Amphitheater
Men I Trust, Midland Theatre

AUG 13

Big Time Rush, Starlight
Theatre

AUG 14

Hardy, T-Mobile Center
Modi, Funny Bone Comedy
Club
Psychostick, recordBar

AUG 15-17

Luis J Gomez, Comedy Club
KC

AUG 21

**Indigo Girls w/ Melissa
Etheridge**,
Starlight Theatre
**Avett Brothers w/ Blackberry
Smoke**, Azura Amphitheater
TopHouse, recordBar

AUG 21-23

Carlos Mencia, Comedy Club
KC

AUG 22

**Goo Goo Dolls w/
Dashboard Confessional**,
Starlight Theatre

AUG 23

Teddy Swims, Starlight
Theatre

AUG 24

Alabama Shakes, Starlight
Theatre

Ben Bankas, Comedy Club KC

AUG 28

**Gregory Alan Isakov w/ Ocie
Elliott**,
Midland Theatre

AUG 29

**Pop 2000 Tour w/ Chris
Kirkpatrick of NYSNC**,
VooDoo Lounge at Harrah's
Kansas City

AUG 31

Linkin Park, T-Mobile Center

ARTS & EXHIBITIONS

MAY 2-4

Brookside Art Annual, 63rd
and Brookside Blvd

MAY 3

**Kansas City Burlesque
Festival**,
Folly Theater

MAY 10

Lenexa Art Fair, Lenexa Civic
Campus
Chalk Walk, Concourse Park
INFERNO "A Night on Fire"
by Nomada, In The Lowest
Ferns

MAY 16

The Brother Brothers, The
ArtsKC Gallery

MAY 31

The Art of Being AANHPI,
Zhou B Art Center

JUNE 7

Art On The Side, Downtown
Liberty

JULY 14-18

**Art of the Imagination
Summer Camp: Beyond the
Galaxies**, The
National
Museum of Toys
and Miniatures

JULY 20

**Kansas City's Lawn
Party**,
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of
Art

OPENING AUG 12

**Soundings Making
Culture at Sea**, The
Spencer
Museum of
Art

OPENING

AUG 26

**My Mother's Tongue
Ties Me Together**, The
Spencer Museum of Art



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The Pitch's Summer Guide 2025

FOOD & DRINK

ONGOING

Kansas City Tap Tour, Online
through Visit KC

MAY 4

**Cinco de Mayo Margarita
Tasting Celebration**, Westport

MAY 8

**Annual Boulevard Brewery
Bash**,
Boulevard Brewing Tours &
Recreation Center

MAY 10

Turkic Food and Art Festival,
Dialogue Institute of Kansas
City

MAY 17

KC Crawfish Festival, St. Pius
X Church

MAY 29

**Guac Your World Taco Chef
Competition benefiting KC
Shepherd's Center**, Corrigan
Station

JUNE 6

Jazzoo, Kansas City Zoo &
Aquarium

JUNE 7

**Global Neighbors and Flavors
Fest**, Lenexa Public Market

JUNE 14

Wine, Brew, & Spirits Too,
Independence Square
Boulevardia Taps & Tastes,
Crown Center

JUNE 20-22

Q BBQ Fest, GEHA Field at
Arrowhead Stadium

JUNE 21

Tacos and Tequila Festival,
Legends Field

JUNE 27

Great Lenexa BBQ Battle,
Sar-Ko-Par Trails Park

JULY 19

KC Summer Brew Fest,
Kauffman Stadium

JULY 21-27

The Pitch Burger Week,
Locations Vary

AUG 15

**The Pitch Margarita
Experience**, The Guild

WELLNESS

MAY 3

Rosedale Urban Hike, Begins
at Fisher Park

MAY 6

KC Royals Bark at the Park,
Kauffman Stadium

JUNE 8

GEHA Field at Arrowhead 5k,
Arrowhead Stadium

JUNE 8 & 29

**Strawberry Hill & Downtown
KCK Urban Hike**, Begins at
Strawberry Hill

JUNE 12

The Pitch Golf Tournament,
Painted Hills Golf Course

JUNE 21

Yoga, Kauffman Center for the
Performing Arts

DAY TRIP

MAY 17

**Nighttime Food Truck
Festival**, Evergy Plaza, Topeka

MAY 23-25

Busker Fest, Downtown
Lawrence

JUNE 7

AKMA Art Fair, Albrecht-
Kemper Museum of Art, St.
Joseph

JUNE 13 & 14

HawkFest, Coleman Hawkins
Park, St. Joseph

JUNE 14

Symphony in the Flint Hills,
Cottonwood Falls

JUNE 20

Midsummer Night on Mass,
Downtown Lawrence

JUNE 21

Topeka Renaissance Festival,
The Woodshed, Topeka

JUNE 29

Outlaw Music Fest, Thunder
Ridge Nature Arena, Ridgedale

JULY 3

Summerfest Artisan Fair,
Douglas County Fairgrounds,
Lawrence

JULY 24-AUG 2

Ozark Empire Fair, Ozark
Empire Fairgrounds and Event
Center, Lake of the Ozarks

JULY 29-AUG 2

**Leavenworth County
Fair**, Leavenworth County
Fairgrounds, Leavenworth

AUG 7-17

Missouri State Fair, Missouri
State Fairgrounds, Sedalia

MAY 10, JUNE 14, JULY 12, AUG 9

Junque n' Donuts, Louisburg
Cider Mill, Louisburg





Sound Minds Day

Wednesday, May 14

A Day of Music and Healing

On Wednesday, May 14, The Bridge will feature songs and stories connecting music to the experiences of people coping with mental health challenges. Throughout the day, hear music and testimonials from Johnson County Mental Health Center and Zero Reasons Why.

Do you have your own story about the songs and artists that got you through tough times?

Email us at soundminds@bridge909.org.

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Mano a Mano

THE ART AND AMUSEMENT OF MODERN MEDIEVAL DUELS

By Emily Wheeler

If you've ever dreamed of controlled combat while attempting to look heroic, Baer Swords School of Western Martial Arts is the place for you.

Baer Swords offers a range of classes to suit every knight's needs, from one-handed and two-handed sword techniques to specialty classes like stage fighting and lightsabers. Whether you're a beginner or advanced, Baer Swords is the place to give it a stab.

Founded in 2015 by Western Martial Artist Baer Kenney and his wife, Kat, Baer Swords has become a cornerstone for sword-fighting enthusiasts in Kansas City. "Almost everyone picks up a stick and plays 'swords' when they're little. Whether you're fighting a sibling or the neighborhood tree, you can picture yourself as a gallant knight or hero/heroine. I simply never stopped," Kenney says.

What started as a childhood obsession eventually led Kenney to competitive fencing in high school.

"I soon graduated to the ultimate nerd heaven, Renaissance festivals, and fought there for a couple of decades," he says. He later developed his "Fight a Knight" system, offering people the chance to duel with skilled swordfighters like him. Eventually, this led to teaching students regularly.

"It was my wife, actually, that got me to make the leap to an actual school," Kenney says. "Our first two months were in a field near our home before we got our act together and moved into an indoor facility." Over a decade later, the couple continues to run the school.

When the opportunity to try sword fighting came up, I wasn't sure what to expect. Naturally, I roped in a few hesitant family members to join me in a two-handed sword class.

Before Baer Swords, my only experience in sword fighting came from Wii Sports Resort. In my youth, I spent hours flailing a plastic Wii-mote too close to the screen, trying to defeat my most longstanding enemy—my older brother. Fun, sure. But I wasn't exactly preparing for the big leagues.

So, when I walked into Baer Swords, I had zero idea of what I was getting myself into. Sword fighting at Baer Swords requires much more control. Plus, you get to wield something more substantial than a sweaty Wii remote.

Baer Swords provides all the necessary gear: swords, jackets, gloves, and helmets. Just show up in comfy clothes and tennis shoes. The first class is only \$10, and subsequent classes are \$20 each. For regulars, memberships are available to help reduce the cost.

While there are several instructors, we had the master himself, Baer Kenney, as our teacher. His voice could easily double as an announcer for a gladiator fight. A "Hear ye, hear ye!" would have fit right in. I half expected him to emerge in chain-link armor and start quoting Shakespeare. Not that I'd mind.

Kenney begins each class by explaining the fundamentals of the two-handed sword. Beginner classes are open to everyone, mixing new and experienced students. Each session introduces a new technique, so everyone has something to learn or refine.

At first, we were all overwhelmed. There was a lot of aimless swinging during the first hour or so, but Kenney did an excellent job of teaching the fundamentals: footwork, hand placement, and basic defensive and offensive moves.

Once the basics were covered, we moved to sparring. This was the moment to test (or try to) what we had learned. Of course, everything I had absorbed vanished the moment I stepped into the duel. My footwork was likely offensive to anyone with an eye for technique.

Naturally, I had an agenda when I invited my family to come with me. The time had come for me to finally face off against my older brother. After all, what's a family outing

without a chaotic medieval duel?

Neither of us are known for our hand-eye coordination skills, so I'm sure it was a sight to behold. I was channeling my inner Inigo Montoya, but I probably looked more like someone aggressively swatting at a fly. I swung with purpose but very little accuracy. But for us (or maybe just me), it was the controlled fighting we'd prepared for for over two decades.

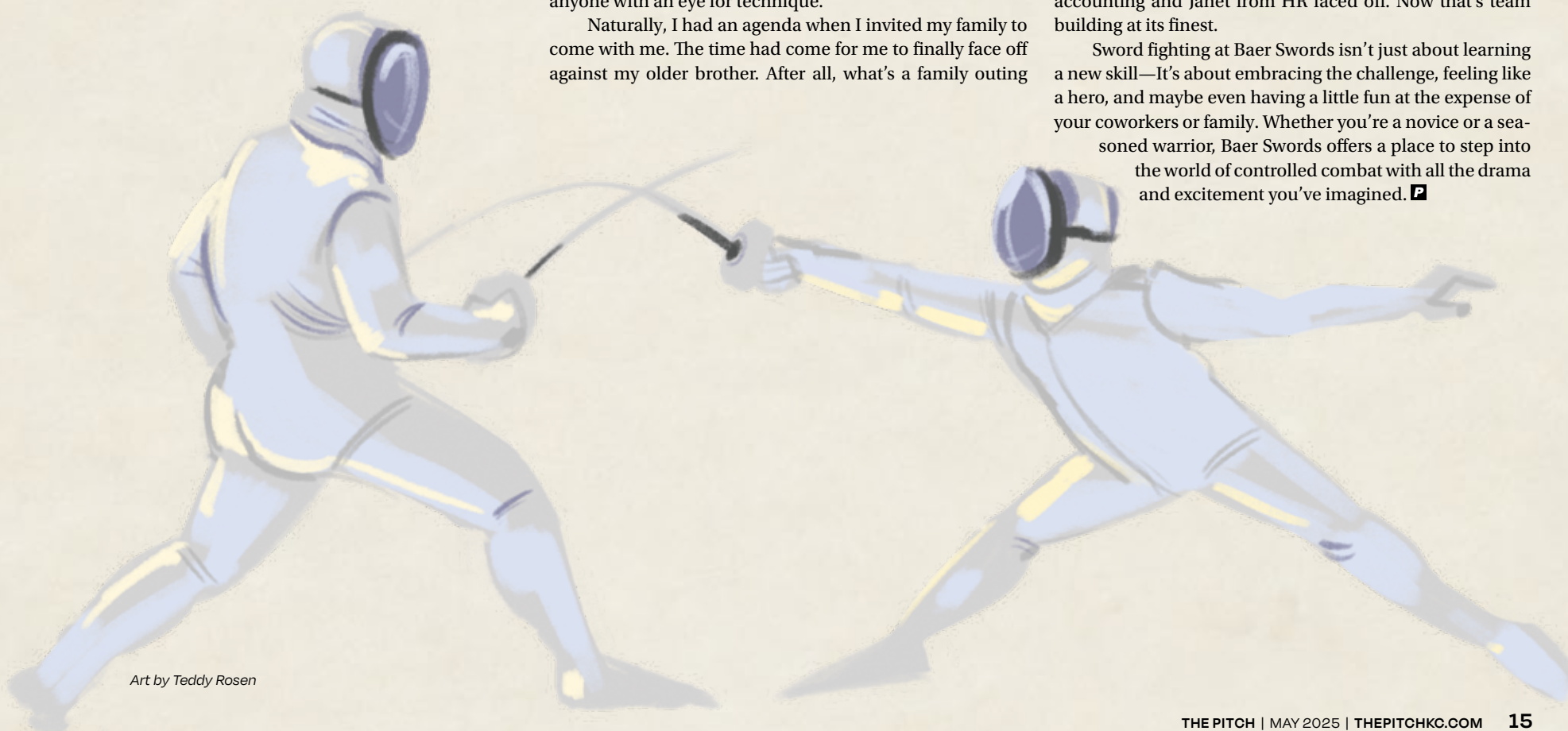
In the end, I'd argue victory was mine, though anyone familiar with Western Martial Arts probably thought that there were no winners in this junction.

By the end of class, we were all drenched in sweat. It was an intense full-body workout, amplified by the sauna-like effect of the jackets, gloves, and helmets.

And let's not forget how much fun this could be with a significant other or friends. Picture this: a Saturday afternoon, you and your partner suited up in helmets and gloves, ready to settle who's choosing the movie for the night.

If you're really feeling adventurous, why not challenge your coworkers? Nothing breaks the ice like a full-on duel, and I guarantee no one will ever forget the time Greg from accounting and Janet from HR faced off. Now that's team building at its finest.

Sword fighting at Baer Swords isn't just about learning a new skill—It's about embracing the challenge, feeling like a hero, and maybe even having a little fun at the expense of your coworkers or family. Whether you're a novice or a seasoned warrior, Baer Swords offers a place to step into the world of controlled combat with all the drama and excitement you've imagined. **P**



Art by Teddy Rosen

Carefully Curated Concoctions

JOHN BROWN'S UNDERGROUND IS WHERE COCKTAIL MEETS HIGH-CONCEPT INSPIRATION

By Sophia Lail

James Beard Award semifinalist John Brown's Underground perfects the intersection of cocktail and concoction.

Bartending sometimes emulates pop culture's take on witchcraft; combining elixirs, potions, and spirits. Liquor is carefully measured, herbs are pestled, and recipes are nailed down to a science. Some of Kansas's best mixologists who craft these drinks that emulate potions are right outside the metro and are definitely worth the day trip.

John Brown's Underground has sat quietly on a side street off of Lawrence's famous Massachusetts St., but the cocktail lounge's impact on the world of mixology has not been so silent. This year, they were named a James Beard Award semifinalist. As the Kansas City metro has begun to buzz about the talents of John Brown's Underground, their mixology expertise and witty take on the upscale cocktail lounge has been no secret to locals.

With a seasonal menu crafted in-house and table service, John Brown's Underground *is not like other girls*—at least the other girls in Lawrence. Alongside their tight-knit team, manager Dante Colombo can be attributed to the bar's unique take on the somewhat redundant art of going

out for a drink.

"It was kind of like this natural thing that happened here; It's rare for a bar, especially in a college town, to operate on table service. That's not typical," Colombo says. "When we think about the people who we look up to and things we strive for, they are mostly bars in places like New York, London, Singapore. All these places do this sort of high concept cocktail bar operation. It's a pretty new phenomenon, relatively."

Instead of fighting to get the attention of bartenders, whether by passive-aggressively staring at them or flashing your credit card, the bartenders come to you. Dare I say, it's refreshing after years spent wiggling elbows between people to claim a chance at ordering a drink.

Their current menu, A Day in The Park, takes bar-goers' senses through the infamous parks of major cities across the world, such as New York City, Mexico City, Tokyo, Havana, London, and of course, Lawrence.

When flipping through the menu, you're met with experimental cocktails with a long list of ingredients, and likely some words you don't recognize. Capurro pisco? Sure. Cocchi demerara reduction? Sounds... good to me! Despite the daunt-



ing lists of ingredients, the cocktail lounge finds the perfect balance of cocktail creation.

From the Mexico City sub-menu is a drink titled Time For Slurp—a corn-washed margarita with Urupan Charanada Blanco, mellow corn, nixta corn liquor, charred corn, lime corn salt, topped with a Lawrence local Caramelo corn chip. This elixir really puts the *corn* in corn.

Unexpectedly, the drink is tangy and fresh; Yet, with its slight Frito-Lay esque taste, it challenges the usual cocktail. If you're into the weird and off-kilter, this might just be the drink for you. Despite its unusual corn theme, it is genuinely a pretty safe drink to order, as it is wildly palatable.

Another favorite off their menu from the Lawrence sub-menu is Let Me Be Clear—a fruity tart tiki drink with a twist. With Probitas rum, Clairin Le Rocher, Worthy Park jungle rum, bitter bianco, clarified pineapple, and lime acid, it is truly a

crowd-pleaser. On the menu, it is coined as a "clarified jungle bird"—a revered tiki drink that originated in the '70s.

"It's a staple on the menu. The body on it is so round and luscious, and I love pineapple. It's just such a well-crafted, well-rounded drink, I'll never get sick of," bartender Mac says.

As their menu reflects the soul of their operation, Colombo decided it would be best to fully immerse himself and his staff in the collaboration and creation of the menu, resulting in a quarterly week-long closure of the bar until their aspirations for their next menu come to fruition.

"Generally, we start with a conceptual idea," Colombo says. "The first questions we ask ourselves is 'What story do we want to tell? What's inspiring to us right now? What haven't we done yet? What's a cool way to think about artistically translating art into drinks? Is there a concept in an art style that we think makes sense for this mo-





ment?”

“We don’t always have the thesis statement right away, but we often will agree on a general idea for something, and then we kind of refine that as we go next. We think a lot about our format. It’s a long process that we’ve obviously chosen, no one’s making us make it hard on ourselves, but that is where we find joy, and where our clientele finds joy as well. So we take it seriously.”

As the seasons begin to change, their team is starting to brainstorm their next menu. Despite not having a clear direction, there’s one thing they’re sure of: Summer-themed drinks are a must. A current contender? A frozen raspberry gin and tonic.

So, we’ve made it official: A cocktail patio moment is imminent. How much will it run you, though? Currently, their menu drinks range from \$12 to \$23; But they pack a punch.

“It’s all fun. Yes, these costs more than your average drink, certainly in this town, but the idea is hopefully that you want to come and have a whole experience and enjoy our whole process—the creative process,” Colombo says. “That’s our baseline; Do the drinks taste good? Yeah. But where we really find joy is the people and each other and the whole community.”

Their current menu is anticipated to be available for most of May, with their upcoming summer menu just around the corner. Although the theming is still in the works, get ready for something that reflects the best of what summer has to offer.

John Brown’s Underground is located at 7 E 7th St, Lawrence, KS 66044. **P**

Photos by Sophia Lail

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EAT THIS NOW:

STREET TACOS AT RICOS TACOS “LUPE”

By Sarah Sipple

Ricos Tacos “Lupe”
802 Southwest Blvd
Kansas City, MO 64108

Best street tacos I’ve had. That’s it—article over.

Fine, I’ll elaborate.

On a Southwest Blvd. block brimming with eateries, Ricos Tacos “Lupe” rests subtly behind an orange exterior with a glass door. A few picnic tables out front extend seating for the small restaurant.

Like the exterior, street tacos are simple by nature, which requires each ingredient to pull its own weight. A small tortilla with meat, onions, and cilantro is usually easy to get right, but tough to stand out. Here, the



Photo by Sarah Sipple

onions—yes, onions—live rent-free in my mind. Finely diced onions add the crispiest crunch yet a gentle flavor, while seasoned chicken or carne asada brings

a richer intensity. In fact, I was torn between picking up the chicken pieces with my fingers to devour them on their own or putting them back in the taco for more complete bites.

Other protein choices are offered, such as al pastor, chorizo, barbacoa, and more—all for \$2.50. I simply had no critiques of this taco, and both the texture and the flavor (especially of the chicken) stuck with me.

At this pictured meal, my sister and I complemented the tacos with a couple of tender tamales, guacamole, and the chips and sauces provided at the table. Afterward, we walked to Panaderia de Las Americas Bakery for some giant cookies to take home.

With no website and scant social media presence, Ricos Tacos “Lupe” has survived (hopefully thrived—I don’t know their books) on reputation. Deservedly so. **P**

DRINK THIS NOW:

SOUTHERN SMOKE AT CHAR BAR

By Tiffany Watts

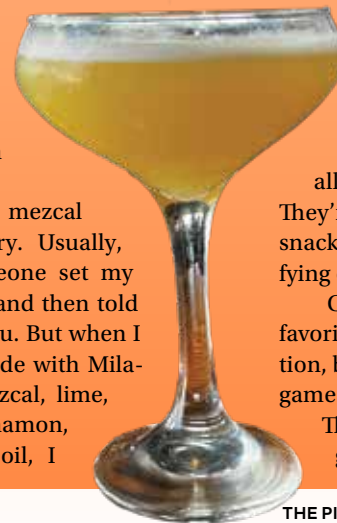
Char Bar
Westport, Parkville, and
coming soon to Olathe

Every now and then, a cocktail dares you to reconsider your entire stance on an ingredient.

For me, that ingredient is mezcal, and that cocktail is the Southern Smoke at Char Bar in Westport.

To be clear, mezcal and I have history. Usually, it tastes like someone set my taste buds on fire and then told me to say thank you. But when I saw this drink, made with Milagro Reposado, mezcal, lime, pineapple, cinnamon, and Fresno chili oil, I

Photo by Tiffany Watts



felt oddly compelled. Maybe it was the pineapple. Maybe it was the promise of spice. Maybe I just wanted to give mezcal one last shot in the name of character development.

Whatever the reason, I ordered it. And I must say, I was impressed.

The smoke is there, yes, but not in an aggressive ‘bonfire-in-a-glass’ way. It’s balanced. The pineapple cuts through with tropical brightness, the cinnamon adds warmth without feeling seasonal, and the Fresno chili oil? It’s the secret sauce. It may only bring a tiny bit of heat, but it makes things interesting—sort of like a clever plot twist in an otherwise predictable story. The result is a layered, grown, and sexy drink that’s bold without being obnoxious.

To round out the experience, I ordered the Jumbo Smoked Chicken Wings—whole wings brined in red-eye coffee and finished with a spicy BBQ drizzle. These wings are a masterclass in flavor. The coffee brine infuses the meat with a rich depth that plays beautifully with the smoke, while the BBQ sauce ties it all together with a sweet-spicy finish. They’re massive, too. This is not a light snack; This is a commitment. And a satisfying one at that.

Char Bar has long been a Westport favorite for its patio vibes and beer selection, but if you’re only coming for the lawn games and drafts, you’re missing the point.

The cocktail menu is where the story gets interesting. **P**



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Mise en Place

CHEF KAY PEE THINKS OF THE LAOS HOUSE AS A LABORATORY FOR HIS EVER-FLOWING IDEAS
By Sarah Sipple

When I asked Chef Kay Pee how he relaxes, he said he just doesn't. Well, sometimes he'll sit down. But the ideas never stop flowing.

Kay Pee is no longer denying the part of himself that loves cooking, and now that the tap has opened, it doesn't turn off. With his event pop-ups, The Laos House spot in Iron District, catering, and expansion plans, it must take a lot of Lao-ritos to fuel Kay Pee's go-getter energy.

After seeing the long lines at Laos House event tents, including at the AANHPI Festival, I knew I had to try it on my next Iron District visit. My first, ridiculously filling meal of crab rangoon rice balls and a Lao-rito carved out a rich spot in my memory.

Mark your calendars for this year's AANHPI Heritage Festival on May 31, but don't wait for that to try Chef's generously-portioned far-east fusion dishes.

The Pitch: Tell us about yourself.

Chef Kay Pee: I became a chef by mistake. I always loved cooking, but I actually refused to be a chef, telling myself it's not something I want to do. But deep down inside, I knew I was really good at it. I was always told you have to be an engineer, doctor, etc. It's Asian culture. When our parents came to America, they thought children were supposed to do certain things.

What do you wish more people—specifically in Kansas City—knew about Laos culture?

I wish they knew the difference between Lao and Thai food. Everything: the marinade, the sauces—It's all different but similar.

What improvements have you made after your first year at Iron District?

Just adapting to the crowd, making it more presentable for a Midwestern palate. It was very spicy at first—like four times hotter. Customers loved it, but I would see people turn red. But also service: From the time someone orders, it's got to be ready in a reasonable time. I get a lot of good feedback. That's the best feeling in the world.

If you could fix one issue in the overall food industry with a snap, what would it be?

Going outside the box, especially around here. If you travel to the East and West Coast, they've tried everything. We're behind on a lot of things. I'm not saying I'm the first to do what I'm doing now and I won't be the last, but I'm trying something different. I mean we're a melting



Mise En Place is a series of questions, answers, recommendations, and culinary wisdom from the food and drink masters that push KC flavor further. The following answers have been edited for length and clarity.



CHEF KAY PEE, LAOS HOUSE


Laos House
1599 Iron St, Suite D
North Kansas City, MO 64116
Photos by Tommy Vean

pot. Do you know the story behind The Laos House name?

No, please tell me.

I was like, 'How can I get somebody to pronounce *Laos* the correct way?' It rhymes with *house*, so I put Laos House. When I started the spot at Iron District, I started to change the name because I'm not doing traditional food—I don't want people coming up to me asking where's the "real" Laos food. But I'm glad I stuck to it.

Describe your perfect day of eating in KC.

We do food adventures all the time. We start at Cafe Cà Phê and then sometimes we'll walk to Opera House and get coffee again, or a smoothie, then walk around City Market. We love to get the pita at Habashi House. Next, we'll get Muni before taking the train—go all the way down, just anywhere. At the end of the day, we always end up at some type of Asian spot, like New Peking in Westport, ABC Cafe, etc. 



Smoked, Baked, and Sauced

WORLD'S FIRST MUSEUM OF BBQ OPENS APRIL 12 IN CROWN CENTER

By Beth Lipoff

Like a home-cooked meal, the Museum of BBQ is a tasty labor of love from founder Jonathan Bender. Located on the second floor of Crown Center, the 4,300 square-foot museum held its grand opening on April 12.

What Bender craves more than a dinner of smoky burnt ends is the chance to interact with people and share stories of the cuisine's past and present from all over the country.

"I like the idea of kind of being your barbecue best friend," Bender says.

It's a concept that's been marinating a long time. Bender had his first meeting with Crown Center representatives in March 2020. With all the pandemic delays, Bender thought the museum might never actually come to be.

And it goes way beyond looking at the favorites of Kan-

sas City's barbecue scene.

"I really felt like from both the regional and local and national audience there were so many stories of barbecue that were unexplored both historically and culturally, and then from a food perspective," Bender says.

That meant diving into barbecue from many different angles. For those who like a hands-on experience, there's a pig puzzle that lets you put together where your favorite cuts come from on the animal. (Hint: The ham's at the other end.)

Another display has stacks of different woods used for smoking meat, from hickory to cherry. One wall has spots for you to sniff the different spices you might find in a dry rub. And for the more agile visitors, there's a plastic baked bean ball pit where you can literally dive right in.

"I want you to understand what happens to the meat as you're cooking it, why smoke is so important, but I also want you to enjoy it and take a moment to play while you're learning," Bender says.

A big part of the historical content is sharing stories of those who made barbecue what it is today. Much of the research came from digital archives, but Bender also brought in his own experiences from previous visits to many barbecue hubs.

"To me, the most engaging aspects of barbecue are often the people involved. Pitmasters and butchers can be really colorful humans, filled with great stories, and I love the idea of introducing people who aren't familiar with barbecue to them," Bender says.

Bender used his background as a longtime local food writer to shape the exhibits, but he also had help from business partner Alex Pope, who co-owns Local Pig and Pigwich.

"I don't just want this to be empty calories. I want it to be fulfilling, and that's a large part of my background is that I get great joy in teaching other people and having education be a part of it," Bender says.

After the introduction to the basics of barbecue comes the tour of the different regions and their styles. The exhibits look not just at Kansas City's tomato and molasses barbecue, but also Tennessee, Texas, North Carolina, and more.

"You start in the Carolinas, and you learn about the difference between North Carolina barbecue on the Eastern side, where they use a vinegar-based sauce, and then on the Western side, Lexington style is a mix of tomato and vinegar," Bender says. "And then there's also the mustard belt, which is that mustard-based sauce that runs down the central part of South Carolina."

All the information panels are on four-by-eight-foot framed panels that can be updated or switched out in the future. Bender isn't sure how often exhibits will change but hopes to keep things fresh.

Right now, you can privately book a variety of events such as personal museum tours and sauce tastings, but Bender hopes to add some to the museum's public calendar later in the year.

In addition to Visit KC, the museum has the financial backing of several industry players including Prairie Fresh, Bush's, Southern Pride, and the National Barbecue and Grilling Association.

And if all that makes you hungry, the museum's gift shop carries a multitude of snacks, and the closest barbecue joint, Burnt End BBQ, is just one floor down. Pope has found a variety of sauces and rubs from all the different places mentioned in the exhibits that are also for sale in the gift shop. **P**



Soul Juggernaut

CHOSEN FAMILY SPARKS SONIC SUCCESS FOR THE FREEDOM AFFAIR'S NEW ALBUM

By Nick Spacek



Photos by Kyle Braun



While waiting for our food at the Tiki Taco on Troost, the two children of Chris Hazelton—band leader for Kansas City soul sensations The Freedom Affair—are being watched by his parents. When vocalists Seyko Groves and Paula Saunders each show up, the kids go running to them like they're aunties, not just ladies with whom dad works. It's the perfect encapsulation of just how close these band members are.

The nine unrelated musicians are, undeniably, more family than familiar these days.

"The fact that it's been this long, and we're still doing it, proves the chemistry is not a fluke," Groves points out. "Because nine different people, personalities—we've been on tour and had a good time, and people are like, 'How did you do that?' Well, we're all very talented, but we are not stuck up about it. And that's rare."

The Freedom Affair—with the mastery of Hazelton on keys, Cole Bales on guitar, Branden Moser on bass, Dave Brick on drums, Pete Carroll on trumpet and flugelhorn, and Brett Jackson on tenor and baritone sax—is perhaps most

lauded for the vocal prowess of Groves, Saunders, and Shon Ruffin.

Normally, if a band has three vocalists, one is singing lead, and the other two fade into the background. This isn't Diana Ross & The Supremes or Beyoncé. This is The Supremes or Destiny's Child. This is a trio, where every part supports the other, with certain songs that play to everyone's strengths.

"Each of us can do this one thing that's really great, and then you can hear us all together, which is also impressive," says Groves. "It's not like there's one strong one and the other ones just hang on."

"I would take it a step further and say that this next record even shines a light on each one of these ladies in ways that you haven't heard them before," Hazelton adds—and he's so very correct.

The band's new self-titled album *The Freedom Affair* comes nearly five years after their full-length debut, *Freedom Is Love*—a recording which might've slotted right in alongside the music released on Daptone or Colemine Records the past decade or so, yet the project sounds like

a lost '70s Southern soul record. From the opening swampy guitar notes of "With You" to the protest soul of "Get My Share," all the way to the one-two knockout punch of the gospel soul standout "Anchor" and dancefloor filler "Coming Home" that end the record, this is an album you'll be hard-pressed to remove from your turntable.

"All of the songs were written with a very clear intention of, 'This is the sound we're going for, these are the songs that belong on this record together,'" Hazelton says of the LP's ten tracks.

None of this would have happened without a trip the band made to Royal Studios when on tour in spring of 2023. While standing outside the building and marveling that this was where Al Green cut the likes of "Let's Stay Together" and Ann Peebles did "I Can't Stand the Rain," manager and engineer Lawrence "Boo" Mitchell came out and asked if they wanted to come in and take a look around.

"We went inside and we're all just starstruck," Hazelton recalls. "That was the pivotal moment of like, 'Okay, this is a sign. We need to do a record here. We need to lean into this sound that people are responding to the most.' We really got the ball rolling pretty quick after that."

The Freedom Affair had workshopped songs for the record and road-tested a few live—a necessary process, as the nine members only had four days to record the entire album.

"A lot of the tracks you hear were first takes," explains Hazelton. "We tracked the rhythm section live, and a lot of the time, the final vocal take was recorded live with the band and wasn't overdubbed. It was the true, honest, first performance of it."

That's a big part of why The Freedom Affair—and by extension this album—feel so real. They're influenced by so much of the music that came from past eras, but they come by it naturally. The band doesn't feed on nostalgia, nor are they trying to replicate the past. It's a fresh sound borne of a lifetime listening to Sly and the Family Stone, Bloodstone, and more.

Hazelton is willing to grant there are a lot of nods to that specific era on *The Freedom Affair*, especially as the band was in the studio where it happened, meaning there are little Easter eggs all over the record—be it the electric conga set from "I Can't Stand the Rain" or the Coca-Cola case Al Green stomped on while recording "Love and Happiness." The vibe, however, isn't so much kitschy or gimmicky as it is, "We got this here. Why don't we use it?"

"We're not copying and it's not trendy," Saunders says. "This is honestly who we are, right? If we weren't in this band, we would be fans of this band, which is why it works so well together."

The Freedom Affair's self-titled album will be available on vinyl, compact disc, and digitally on Friday, May 9. **P**



- 5/6 Ice Nine Kills
- 5/7 Ice Nine Kills
- 5/11 Beth Hart
- 6/6 Chris Distefano
- 6/11 James Arthur
- 6/13 I Love The 80's Tour with A Flock of Seagulls
- 6/17 A.J. Croce
- 6/18 The Head and The Heart
- 6/21 Key Glock
- 6/22 George Thorogood and The Destroyers
- 6/23 Greensky Bluegrass
- 6/27 Flux Pavilion and Doctor P
- 7/1 Elvis Costello
- 7/11 Social Distortion
- 7/16 Robin Trower
- 7/17 Lyle Lovett
- 7/18 idobi Radio Summer School
- 7/19 Father John Misty
- 8/17 We Came As Romans
- 9/6 Yacht Rock Revue
- 9/16 UB40
- 9/20 RuPaul's Drag Race
- 10/23 Russell Dickerson
- 11/22 Kathleen Madigan



- 5/14 George Clanton
- 5/24 Napalm Death x Melvins
- 6/4 Honey Revenge
- 7/11 Valley
- 8/9 The Aquabats!



- 9/20 Skeptics' Guide to the Universe
- 10/25 Welcome to Night Vale



- 5/23 Alabama
- 7/13 Slightly Stoopid
- 8/9 Cyndi Lauper
- 8/21 Avett Brothers
- 9/25 Three Dog Night & Little River Band



- 5/24 The Unlikely Candidates
- 5/25 Baroness
- 5/29 Sarah and the Sundays
- 6/5 Peelande-Z
- 6/17 Provoker
- 6/24 Bear Hands



- 5/2 Covers Night
- 5/16 Amigo The Devil
- 5/17 Bayker Blankenship
- 5/27 WALLEWS
- 6/5 Flatland Cavalry
- 6/17 Static-X
- 6/24 Modest Mouse
- 7/11 311
- 7/12 Primus
- 7/16 St. Paul & The Broken Bones + The Wood Brothers
- 7/18 Railroad Earth | Daniel Donato + Yonder Mountain String Band
- 7/26 Michael Franti & Spearhead
- 8/2 Toad The Wet Sprocket
- 8/4 Dropkick Murphys & Bad Religion
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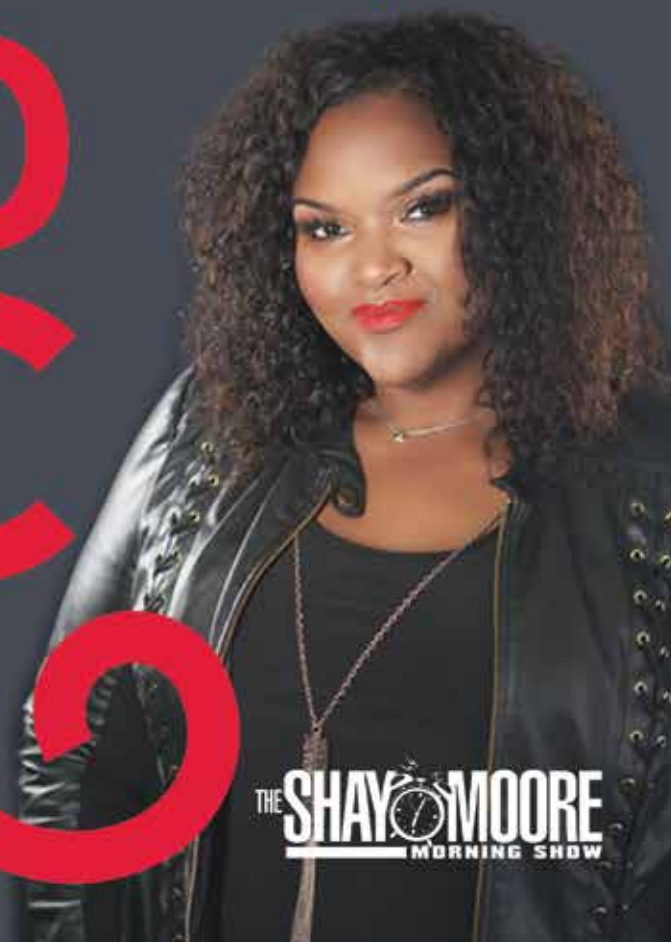
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MODERN INTIMACY REQUIRES MODERN MEN

The release of Netflix's *Adolescence* has set off another round of online discourse about the "male loneliness epidemic" and boys' behavior, but most people discussing the topic are focused on the symptoms, not the sickness. The real crisis is a cultural disconnect growing between men and women. The chasm is growing wider as many young American men drift ideologically to the right while women grow more progressive, more autonomous, and more emotionally fluent.

Our culture is not dealing with a shortage of good available women—or even a lack of nice guys. We're dealing with a gap in emotional intelligence, mutual respect, and the skills required for modern intimacy. If anyone wants to solve the so-called loneliness epidemic, we have to stop treating emotional connection like a fringe benefit

and start recognizing it as the foundation of any valuable relationship.

Scott Galloway—an academic and entrepreneur who has somehow positioned himself as a cultural commentator on a variety of topics—was recently interviewed on *The Diary of a CEO* podcast alongside behavioral scientist and Hinge's Director of Relationship Science Logan Ury. They discussed the Centre for Social Justice's recently released *Lost Boys* report.

"We are truly in a dating crisis right now, and there is a huge mating gap between the type of men that women are looking for and the type of men that are available," Ury said during the episode. "This is a critical conversation around truly the future of humanity because marriage rates are down, that means birth rates are down, and so this conversation is extremely im-

portant."

In response, Galloway made a number of outdated and overly simplistic assertions about why men are flailing. He cited statistics that show single men are more depressed, less employed, and less sexually active than ever before. He brought up research from author and Brookings Institute Fellow Richard Reeves that shows men's adulthood issues often stem from having few to no male role models close to them during boyhood, and added that this has come at a time when women's rights have advanced.

Galloway described this as a crisis of masculinity where women are "leveling up" and men are being left behind in the dating pool. He brought up the heavily imbalanced numbers between how many swipes men vs women make on dating apps, claiming the difference is accounted for by women's higher expectations producing fewer connections.

While it's true that surveys show men swipe right 15 times more often than women, it's also true most men swipe based on photos and then maybe go back to look at profiles to check for compatibility after a match, whereas women report looking at a profile before choosing to swipe left or right. Of course, behavior like this could make men feel like this huge group of women isn't interested in them, regardless of details from some of the profiles such as hobbies and political interests that would show a lack of things in common.

Galloway casts women's increasing selectiveness as the problem rather than men's stagnation. He's saying, "Women have raised their standards, and now men are suffering." But the question he should be asking is: Why haven't more men risen to meet those standards?

Some believe that men must be suffering right now because more women are thriving compared to previous centuries. This belief that the advancement of one group leads to the decline of another is the definition of a zero-sum game.

"I think everyone is struggling," Ury said. "I think life is hard, but what's happening now is we need to have empathy for young men and we need to bring them up, because this isn't just a problem about young men, and patriarchy doesn't just hurt women. When there is a very narrow definition of 'men,' everyone is hurt by that."

A current dating trope is that women don't like 'Nice Guys.' Producer Benny Blanco snagging pop star Selena Gomez has been the internet's latest masterclass in how a man who is emotionally intelligent, confident, and kind will snag a beautiful and successful woman. On a shallow, surface level, Blanco and Gomez are the epitome of the Average Joe/Hot Girl couple that leaves the 6'5 blue-eyed finance bro befuddled.

They were recently engaged and appeared together on the *On Purpose with Jay Shetty* podcast to discuss their relationship.

The episode has over four million views in its first two weeks. They revealed that their first kiss was while playing the popular card game 'We're Not Really Strangers.' Games like this are designed to allow for deep dialogue about difficult topics while removing the stigma of asking such forward questions unprompted.

Research has shown that asking a person, even a stranger, deep and personal questions can create bonds quickly, such as with the 36 Questions to Bring You Closer Together—designed by a team of social psychologists testing if they could facilitate interpersonal closeness between participants via a series of increasingly personal questions. The answer was yes, they could. Participants

"Emotional intelligence is the new currency in dating."

formed long-term friendships, relationships, and even marriages came out of that lab.

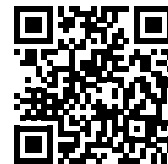
Why do we become deeply bonded after deep conversations? Because they build comfort, safety, and trust—three keys for long-term relationship health. When we find common ground and see the other person's humanity, we bond quickly.

Blanco said in the episode that partners will tell you what they need. "I think people's biggest problems, especially men, are we don't listen. Just shut up and listen to what they are saying. A woman is going to tell you exactly what she needs. When guys are like 'I don't know what she wants!' She told you already. You're just an idiot. You're not listening."

"Emotional intelligence is the new currency in dating, but these guys were raised not to be emotionally intelligent, but to be a provider," Ury said. The solutions to closing the gap between women and men are multipronged, but it won't be best solved by women simply lowering their standards, yet challenging what their standards are based upon can be worthwhile.

Ury believes we need a new definition of the modern masculine man. Men must become role models for one another and seek connections in their community with one another that offers healthy, kind, and healing spaces. It doesn't even have to always be male-exclusive to provide the benefits of community-building and bonding. ■

You can find Kristen @coach_kristen_ on Instagram or [openthedoorscoaching.com](https://www.openthedoorscoaching.com). Check out her podcast *Keep Them Coming*.



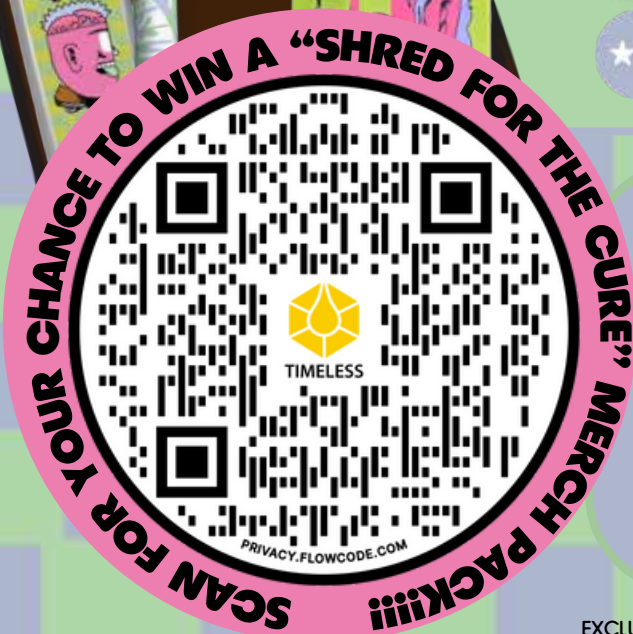


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Art by Keegan Hudspeth

just terminate our contracts.”

But the entire process has created mounting financial stress on a business sitting in limbo, as it hires increasing legal counsel to reach the DCR’s vague expectations.

“We’re talking tens of thousands of dollars, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars for us to defend the license, for the state, and all of this could be resolved with a 15-minute phone call so that we could understand where their issues were, and we would change things,” Brodsky says.

That 15-minute phone call never came to fruition as Brodsky and Dillard now sit

with a revoked license.

“We obviously completely disagree with DCR’s stance on these,” Brodsky says. “We don’t think that we ever should have gotten a NOPR at all, and now I’m kind of digging into things and looking at their logic. I think some of this might be chalked up to just they misunderstood some things in our contracts.”

Brodsky says that they plan on appealing the revocation through the Administrative Hearing Commission.

“We’re gonna defend our position to the end because this is just the twilight zone we feel.” **2**

Repeal Ordeal

WITH LITTLE EXPLANATION, 25 OF 32 LICENSES FROM THE MISSOURI MICROBUSINESS LOTTERY WERE JUST YANKED

On April 14, the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) Division of Cannabis Regulation (DCR) announced that they have revoked 25 of the 32 licenses that were under notice of pending revocation from the second round of the Missouri microbusiness license lottery.

One of the 25 revoked licenses is connected to MO Microbusiness Partner David Brodsky, who has an agreement with Ceiran Dillard, a microbusiness license second-round dispensary winner. Dillard says that he wants to get involved in the micro-business program to help pay off his student loans.

After receiving the license in July, it wasn’t until early October that the partners received a notice of pending revocation (NOPR). They claim DCR has given them no clear reasoning for the notice, and have waited weeks for guidance toward compliance.

“It has been radio silence,” Dillard says. “It just kind of says we violated these rules, generally, but doesn’t really give enough specificity to really understand what they’re getting at, especially considering that the contracts that we use were ones that were specifically approved by the department previously,” Brodsky says.

The department had expressed concerns with potential contract agreements that Brodsky and Dillard were evaluating... for the future.

“It’s difficult to try and correct that NOPR when nothing has actually been done,” Dillard says.

Brodsky says there are three possible future contract agreements—an operating agreement with a “three-manager structure” where it takes two of the three partners to make business decisions, yet they both say that all previous decisions have been made unanimously; another agreement based on a licensed fee to provide management/branding services; and a third option where an investor group would procure the funds in exchange for equity, depending on the amount

of funds provided.

“But we left those unsigned, just out of an abundance of caution with the department,” Brodsky says.

When asked how a licenseholder would go about reaching compliance when their violation is based on future agreements that technically are not set in stone, DCR Executive Director Amy Moore mentions that the cure period that individuals are granted does not necessarily mean that the department has to approve the license after changes have been made.

“How that has been interpreted by us and by the commission that reviews our decisions—the Administrative Hearing Commission—is that that doesn’t mean that every licensee is entitled to fix past violations,” she says. “You don’t have the right to violate whatever you want and be able to come back and fix it later.”

Brodsky says that the contracts are identical for both rounds, so he is unsure what could have changed—and the lag in communication has only created more questions.

“In the first round, after we made our formal response to the NOPR, the DCR engaged us in a dialogue,” Brodsky says. “They said, ‘These are the things that we want to see changed in the contracts.’ And then, lawyers made those changes, submitted them, and got feedback from DCR. This time, when our attorneys have reached out to them, they have pretty much just shut them down and said, ‘The opportunity for that has passed, and we’re not interested in having the conversation.’ When we try to ask them what we can do to fix them, they’re unwilling to engage with us.”

In the long lull, the partners terminated all potential future contracts—in hope that this entire process can start from square one.

“That was something that we kind of proactively did because we weren’t really getting solid communication from DCR,” Brodsky says. “We just said, ‘Okay, if you have problems with our contracts, then we’ll

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COME AS YOU ARE

NO DIVIDE KC PROVIDES A SAFE SPACE FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES SEEKING SELF-EXPRESSION

By Beth Lipoff

It began as a passion project, a reaction to the 2016 election results. Stacy Busch put together a benefit concert with proceeds going to help organizations working with the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and refugees.

Now, that effort has blossomed into No Divide KC—a nonprofit that’s supporting local artists of all kinds. Two of its big programs are the Come As You Are fellowship and the Queer Narratives Festival.

“Of course, we’re interested in having quality artistic opportunities for artists that are paid, but we also are interested in bringing different communities together through these events to be able to bridge some gaps in our community, as our name suggests, and bring art into the daily lives of all Kansas Citians,” Busch says.

The fellowship commissions composers and librettists to create a micro opera in partnership with the Lyric Opera. One of last year’s productions focused on a day in the life of a queer couple, while another was about the CEO of TikTok testifying before the U.S. Senate.

Partnering with other organizations is crucial to Busch.

“Early on, we were working with homeless populations and addiction, which is a personal experience of mine, and so we partnered with different organizations working in homelessness—Free Hot Soup, Care Beyond the Boulevard, other organizations—and put on a story night in the park where those organizations got to attend, got to share their stories, and kind of empower these individuals by sharing stories but also shining a light on organizations that work in these areas,” Busch says.

With the Queer Narratives Festival, No Divide KC works with the community to provide an eight-week exhibition with occasional artist-led workshops, culminating in an event featuring music, dance, comedy, spoken word, and drag performances.

Busch says that she’s heard from many people who came out during the pandemic that the festival was their first LGBTQ event and that they really felt like they were part of the community.

Poet Melissa Ferrer Civil has performed at the festival multiple times.

“I enjoy it so much. It’s such an amazing experience of people expressing themselves. It always feels like each time I do a festival, I’m reaching a new level of self-ex-

pression through the platform that they provide,” Ferrer Civil says.

Beyond those bigger events, there are lots of smaller projects No Divide KC takes on. One is Art Spark—a program providing interactive educational art workshops focused on self-expression.

“To be able to attend some of those workshops and see the kids, the progress they make in that hour or two around their personal identity or their expression or what is troubling them, and the way they move through that within that single workshop is really inspiring to see,” Busch says.

Ferrer Civil leads poetry workshops through No Divide KC’s Bicultural Poetry Program, which focuses on bilingual poetry.

“I love working with students. I used to be a teacher, so any opportunity I can have to return to talking to students about their emotions and basically the use of poetry as a form of expression always feels very rewarding,” Ferrer Civil says.

Sometimes, the organization seems like a bit of an anomaly.

“Within art institutions or in the art sphere, there is this belief that you are either doing high-level excellent art or you are doing community-based art, and it has been a real challenge to demonstrate that we do both,” Busch says. “We are an organization that artistic excellence is defined in all of our arts programs, and yet we don’t define that by traditional pedigree, and these events are public-facing and for the community.”

Right now, it’s mostly grant-funded but Busch is hoping to diversify the group’s income and focus more on donations, especially because a lot of those grants may no longer be available to them in the current climate.

Last year, No Divide KC devoted nearly half its budget—over \$50,000—to paying artists’ fees across all its programs. Busch says that remains a priority.

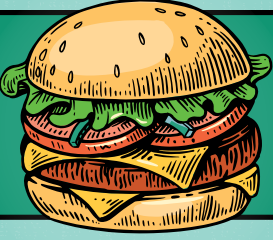
“To have a queer-based organization that supports queer artists and provides that sort of programming is very pivotal to someone learning to accept themselves, whether it be audience member or artist. I think that what No Divide does is very important, especially now,” Ferrer Civil says.

For more information on No Divide KC’s events or to volunteer to help, visit no-dividekc.org.



Photos Courtesy of No Divide KC

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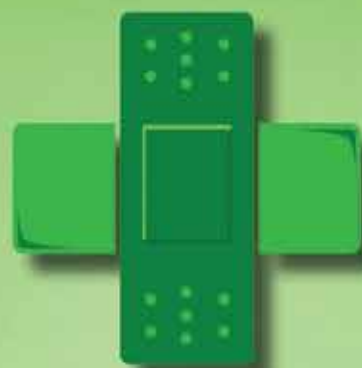


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