



Published on *East Lansing Info* (<https://eastlansinginfo.org>)

Home > East Lansing Progressive on LGBT Civil Rights but No Gay Bar in City Limits

---

## East Lansing Progressive on LGBT Civil Rights but No Gay Bar in City Limits <sup>[1]</sup>

Tuesday, June 21, 2016, 5:18 pm

**By:**

Telaina Eriksen and Casandra Eriksen



Forty-four years ago, the City of East Lansing was the first community in the United States to offer its gay citizens civil rights protection under law. But strangely enough, this progressive city has never been home to a gay bar.



### *Hart*

Bruce Hart, a Los Angeles actor who appears in the digital series "Old Dogs & New Tricks" <sup>[2]</sup>, attended Michigan State from 1977 to 1982. He said those years were a liberal time on campus and in the Lansing area, but none of the gay bars were in East Lansing. "There were three bars located in Lansing. And they were located in a fairly rough neighborhood. Going to a gay bar for the first time was incredible. I was on a date with a guy who had a car, which is probably why I dated him, and we went to Trampp's in Lansing. It was both a bar and a disco. It had small dance floor lined with mirrors. My first trip there the bar was having a drag show, another first for me. I could not believe these glamorous ladies were men, until they started talking. I didn't understand drag and found it entertaining but alien. Another first for me in that club was seeing two men kissing," Hart said.



### *Williams*

Eric Williams, who now lives in San Francisco and attended Okemos High School and Michigan State University in the early 80s said the main social outlet for area teens and college students in the area was the three gay bars in existence then. All were in downtown Lansing on Michigan Avenue, near the Capitol Building. The main bar was called Trampp's. It was a disco, of course. Half a block up the street toward East Lansing was a divey bar called Joe Covello's. It was more of a lesbian bar back then, although older local gay men would go there as well. The third bar was Bonnie and Clyde's. It closed during the time I was at MSU and I have just very dim recollections--it was a two-story building with a lot of red decor. I don't think I visited B&C's more than once or twice. Trampp's was the social focal point in our lives back then. Thursday nights were unofficially student nights. We were in that bar EVERY Thursday night. Saturday nights, too. Friday nights, Trampp's was more of a locals Lansing denizens night, but students went there occasionally on Fridays, too. Trampp's was hugely important to us. We felt safe. We felt exhilarated to be open, dancing, drinking, trying to hook up with the cutie in the corner, etc.,? Williams said.

Hart also remembers Joe Covello's Next door was a bar called Joe Covello's which was predominately for women. We didn't frequent it as much but it was almost a carbon copy of Trampp's with a small dance floor. The crown jewel of night clubs that only lasted a couple years was Bonnie and Clyde's. A large club with two dance floors. Two circular bars upstairs and down and--a coat check. Very chic. The most exciting feature was the upper dance floor because it was translucent and lit up in varying colors as people danced. This bar had a cover charge so we didn't go there as much. But when we did it was an event. Dressing up in our finest disco attire.?

Hart said that getting to the clubs was difficult from East Lansing. There was a bus that would take you there and drop you off by 9:00 p.m. but it offered no return bus. So basically once there you were on your own to either beg a ride home later or hook up with someone. And make no mistake about it. This was the time for free love. It was a very sexual time with little fear of consequences. You could only risk getting a minor STD which could be cured by antibiotics...right?? Hart said.

Williams said he wasn't sure a gay bar would have thrived in East Lansing then. Part of the allure of Trampp's was that it was outside the mainstream bar scene in E.L and we felt safer, more anonymous being farther from the student body--many students weren't completely out yet and would not have wanted necessarily to be seen entering or exiting a known gay

establishment.?

But taking the bus to Lansing had its own hazards. ?One moment of homophobia I clearly remember is that the bus driver refused to stop and drop people off at the bus stop in front of the bars. If he sensed you were gay, he dropped you off a few blocks away and made you walk the rest of the way,? Hart said. According to a Pride Source timeline <sup>[3]</sup>, this was also around the time men began to be arrested outside of Joe Covello?s and Trampp?s. Undercover officers would stand outside the bars and when gay men approached them for conversation, they were arrested. Many gay men were also harassed and issued jaywalking and other minor traffic violation tickets.



*Beier*

East Lansing Mayor Pro Tem Ruth Beier came to East Lansing to attend MSU in 1978. ?After college, I spent some time at graduate school in North Carolina and in Ann Arbor. I moved back to the East Lansing area when I was 25. I am not aware of there ever being any gay bars in East Lansing, which is sad. When I was a newly minted and closeted lesbian, 1981 or so, the only gay bars around were in Lansing. I remember Trampp?s from my undergrad days. The 505 was a great lesbian bar for a while in the 2000s. It closed in 2008 or 2009. There is Spiral today, which is fun although a little too much for my older gay self,? Beier said.

Hart commented on the public?s perception of gay people throughout the last decades. ?In 1988

I moved to Los Angeles where I have lived ever since. I noticed a marked difference in 1982 from 1977 in terms of the climate towards gay people. In 1977 we were the "cool fun bunch" that knew how to party and everyone wanted to go to our clubs. Then Ronald Reagan was elected and the AIDS crisis started slowly escalating. Now we were the "feared group." The "hated group." I remember someone spitting on me outside one of the bars. And in 1988 when I first moved to Los Angeles, I was severely beaten by gay bashers and hospitalized with a head injury and a severed elbow," Hart said.

Williams said he had not encountered that level of hatred. "I moved to San Francisco 14 and 1/2 minutes after graduating. I had visited a friend living in Berkeley, right across the bay from San Francisco, March 1985 Spring Break. Fell immediately head over heels in love the San Francisco and began planning my move right then. I have lived here since. I now realize what an accepting "bubble" I lived in in E.L, a university town, and now San Francisco, an even bigger "bubble". I have done extensive traveling in my life from Europe, Iceland, Japan, Vietnam, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Belize, Canada, Ivory Coast --all these places I was myself, out and not closeted, but I never felt completely comfortable as I do in San Francisco, and before SF, in East Lansing. I have traveled in the Deep South, too. I am careful to not attract unwanted attention in those areas that are intolerant. In sum, I have not really suffered any overt anti-gay affronts, an occasional anti-gay epithet notwithstanding, but largely stress-free life around that issue."

Williams said San Francisco has gone through its own evolution of perception as well. "San Francisco was a gay mecca back in the '70's and '80s. Not so much now. Even many of the most famous gay bars in SF have closed. There are still several popular bars, but mainstreaming has seen a much more diverse population in formerly gay enclaves. Straight people in droves in the Castro, gay people in droves everywhere (lol). I guess it's a good thing," Williams said.

Hart recently came back to Michigan and stopped back in East Lansing and Ann Arbor. "There didn't seem to be much of a club scene for LGBTQ people. That made me sad. I was told that everyone now drives to Detroit to go to the clubs. In Los Angeles there are a great many gay bars and nightclubs. Totally different world in California. Lots of gay protection laws. And of course it helps to have a great president like President Obama in the White House. Such a contrast to the dark days under President Reagan in the 1980s when he let the AIDS crisis spiral out of control. Even though I am in a relationship and of a "certain age" I still go to gay bars. I need the sanctuary and social aspect of being around people who share my sexuality," Hart said.



Ledesma and Carter

Morgan Ledesma, an East Lansing graduate, had a different experience being a young gay adult in East Lansing. "It wasn't easy, but it wasn't as bad as some places either. I could always feel people judging me, my peers and sadly school staff would obviously treat me different after they found out I was gay. One thing I am thankful for is nobody ever harassed me about being gay. After I graduated, I became a lot more comfortable in my own skin but that was when I noticed adults walking with their children and pulling them close to them, as if my gay would contaminate their child if they got too close. I got to a point where I could ignore the stares and go about my business without feeling uncomfortable and wanting to leave public places. Sadly after the horrible tragedy in Orlando, I'm truly terrified for my life to be taken for being anywhere and for just being myself.... It's sad."

Ledesma said the only two "safe places" she has ever known were the LGBT club at ELHS and Spiral in Old Town. "No, there is no safe place to me personally and that's not just here that's anywhere. LGBT love isn't even recognized by some people. I feel like to get that space and to keep it, is the day hell will freeze over," Ledesma said.

Hart said that gay clubs are absolutely still necessary in 2016. "They provide a sanctuary and a meeting place to socialize. Things may have progressed in terms of marriage equality and a greater awareness of LGBTQ people but in many ways things have not progressed and have regressed. Witness the horrible massacre in the gay club in Orlando. And the fact that states are

now trying to pass laws to make it legal to discriminate against LGBTQ people. And they are succeeding. In many states (Florida included) you still be legally fired for being gay. So yes, we still need these private gathering places to drink, dance and socialize.?

Beier agreed. ?I would say that gay bars are important, especially to anyone who is closeted or just being quiet about their sexuality. Even though I don?t go to them often, gay bars are important to me. My appearance and sexuality don?t always fit well into the real world. I don?t have long, tortured hair and I don?t wear especially feminine clothes. Sometimes I am mistaken for male. This is usually just irritating, but it can be a problem when women in bathrooms and locker rooms feel the need to tell me that I am in the women?s. I usually just smile and tell them that I am a woman, but if a woman is aggressive about it, it can be painful and bad for my self-concept. At the same time, some men in the real world feel the need to comment on their attraction to me in spite of my orientation. I have never had any idea how to respond to that. So, gay bars are a refuge for me. I don?t feel strange there. I don?t question my fashion sense or my hair style. No one ever mistakes me for male. Gay bars have their own problems--snarkiness, labeling, gossip, boundary issues-- but even so, I feel at home in gay bars more than almost anywhere else. If there were a lesbian bar nearby, I would go often,? Beier said.

Tiana Carter, who also graduated from ELHS said East Lansing is a lot more accepting of gay people than most places. ?There was the typical ?Oh, you just haven?t had the right guy? comments and what not, but that?s everywhere,? she said.

Carter said she thinks a gay club would be good for East Lansing community, but she doesn?t know how many people would go to it. ?People view the college as a very diverse and accepting area, which it is, but a lot of the people that attend MSU come from small towns across Michigan that tend to have that small-town and close-minded view on other people and cultures, not just gay people,? Carter said.

Beier said she thought economics might be a factor in East Lansing?s lack of gay bars. ?My guess is that the demand for bar space from straight MSU students drives up rents, making it hard for a gay bar in EL to make as much of a profit as a non-gay bar,? she said.

Ledesma said a gay club would be great for East Lansing. ?It would allow more people to connect, have less people feel so lonely and outcast by the rest of the world that is judgmental toward their sexuality. Because gay clubs aren't just for gay people. Everyone in the world should be able to go out in public and be comfortable in their own skin, whether you're gay, black, white, Mexican, Muslim, transgendered, purple, pink, tats everywhere, a custodian or The President, etc. I treat everyone the same. The problem with the world is as humans we see something ?different? and we don't understand it, we just automatically ?don't like it? because it's not what we are used to seeing. I feel like if people actually got to understand some of us from the LGBT community they would see, they aren't much different from us ?queers.?"

### **Related Categories:**

[EL Rewind](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

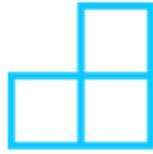
[Community](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[Arts & Entertainment](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

[LGBT Life](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

Map Pin [8]

## ELi is a member of INN and LION Publishers



Institute for  
Nonprofit News



This news is brought to you by our financial supporters!

---

**Source URL:** <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/east-lansing-progressive-lgbt-civil-rights-no-gay-bar-city-limits>

### Links

- [1] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/east-lansing-progressive-lgbt-civil-rights-no-gay-bar-city-limits>
- [2] <http://www.odnt.tv/>
- [3] <http://www.pridesource.com/gallery.html?article=67653>
- [4] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/elrewind>
- [5] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/community>
- [6] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/aande>
- [7] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/lgbt>
- [8] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/tags/map-pin>