



Making History

Andrew Shaffer on Madison's history of out elected officials, now part of the preservation efforts at the LGBTQ Archive.

In 1973, Judy Greenspan announced her candidacy for Madison's School Board. Greenspan, a local activist and member of the Madison Gay Liberation Front (GLF), was outraged by the School Board's decision to ban the GLF from speaking in public high schools, and saw her campaign as a way to circumvent the policy.

As a political candidate she appeared in debates in local schools, in front of the School Board, and in numerous interviews in local media outlets. Greenspan ran on a platform that advocated the passage of a high school student bill of rights, an end to discriminatory practices against women in education, and

the right of queer people to live and speak openly in schools. She garnered more than 6,000 votes, and made gay rights and sexism in the schools into defining issues of the campaign. While her bid was ultimately unsuccessful, the campaign was historic in its own right, making her the first known out lesbian ever to run for public office in the U.S.

While Greenspan laid the groundwork for out candidates, Jim Yeadon, a gay law student, was the first to gain a place at the table for the local community. In 1976, Yeadon was appointed by the Madison City Council to complete the term of a resigned alderman. He came out in the papers the day after being appointed and ran for re-election six months later, becoming the fourth out candidate to win an election in the country.

By 1989, Madison was home to more than 20% of all out LGBTQ elected officials in the nation. That year Ricardo Gonzalez, longtime owner of the Cardinal Bar, ran for and won a seat on Madison's City Council, becoming the country's first openly gay Latinx elected official. He built on his experiences as a business owner, running on a platform of downtown revitalization and was a strong advocate of the construction of Monona Terrace.

Madison has a rich legacy of queer activism and engagement, yet rarely do we reflect on the history that has happened all around us. Judy Greenspan, Jim Yeadon, and Ricardo Gonzalez each contributed to shaping our city, and their impact is still visible for those who know where to look. The Madison LGBTQ Archive is working to document and preserve these memories before they fade away. This archive is for all of us—to create a permanent statement that we are here, that our stories are important, and that our lives belong in the pages of history. Find out more about the archive and how you can get involved online at go.wisc.edu/LGBTQ60s or on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at @MadisonLGBTQ.

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