BY NATALIE TRIMBLE



Small Town, Big Gays:
Your Friendly Queer Neighbors in Wisconsin

Podcasts are a hot commodity in the current age. With everyone jumping on the bandwagon, it's hard to find one that truly feels unique and informative. "Small Town, Big Gays" is a Wisconsin-based podcast that covers queer life in a smaller town.

It was Nov. 15, 2024, when Travis Gorell and Chance Smith released the first episode of the "Small Town, Big Gays" podcast.

Smith, who grew up in New Lisbon, Wis., and later moved to Eau Claire, Wis., was working at a bar in town when he was introduced to Gorell through a mutual friend who asked Gorell, aka Khloe Wold, to start doing drag performances at the bar Smith worked at. It didn't take long for the two to become friends shortly thereafter.

The STBG podcast, which is currently being recorded in Gorell's living room in Eau Claire, covers a vast array of topics pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community; everything from queer hookup culture to politics is discussed on this platform and a new episode is released every Friday.

The candidness of the podcast provides listeners with an escape from reality for an hour at a time, where they have the opportunity to relate to or learn from two queer people navigating life in a smaller town.

"We can be your queer friends who are way out in Wisconsin and you just hear all of our shenanigans," Smith says.

Their listenership contains several queer audience members and far more allies than they anticipated tuning in. They even have one fan in Nebraska who interacts with their YouTube channel immediately following the release of a new podcast episode, which streams across various social media platforms.

One recurring critique that Gorell and Smith receive regards their decision to categorize Eau Claire as a small town. To that, they simply say it's all about perspective.

"In gay terms, it's still a very small town," Smith explains. "I consider any town that can't sustain more than one gay bar to be a small town."

They hope to expose their audience to new perspectives on queer lifestyles in smaller towns, with both of them having grown up or lived in small rural towns in Wisconsin nearly their whole lives. They feel it's important to emphasize that the queer identity exists beyond the walls of urban environments.

"I think the good thing about the podcast for us is that it puts a face to a perspective for people that may not see or understand what queer life is, especially in smaller towns," Gorell says.

Aside from being an Eau Claire-based drag queen, Gorell is an active

Photo courtesy of Chance Smith

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community member who regularly participates in events with the Eau Claire LGBTQ+ community center. He and Smith have done drag story hours, queer youth events and bi-weekly drag bingo nights to create positive experiences and set good examples for others in their small town.

"I think a lot of queer people have this inherent urge to move to a bigger city to find more …" Gorell says. "You can go and find those experiences, or you can just create those experiences right in your community. Chance and I have really been working hard to create the things that we want to see happen."

Photo courtesy of BigStock/dolgachov

Smith and Gorell also wanted to respond to fears in their small-town queer community about the legal protection of their rights and freedoms.

"We are standing on the backs of people who fought greater odds and worse violence to get us to where we are now," Smith says. "Just because we are seeing backlash to that at a national and international level doesn't mean that we cower in a closet."

So, on they went with their participation in queer events around town and the release of their weekly podcast episodes; discussing political updates, Grindr stories and their day-to-day lives.

"I think it's important for queer people to raise their voices however they can and say, 'We're here, we've always been here and we always will be here,'" Smith says.

While the podcast is still relatively new, the feedback Gorell and Smith have received from their listeners has been uplifting and supportive. It encourages them to continue the hobby they love and hopefully make monetary gain from it in the future.

Smith, who has a background in videography, is responsible for all of the behind-the-scenes production tasks. This includes, but is not limited to, editing the audio and video footage for the weekly episodes, managing STBG's social media profiles and operating his own multimedia production company, STRANGEHAVENS.

Gorell and Smith hope to eventually turn STBG into a larger operation, with a proper recording studio and upgraded equipment, but for now, they're simply enjoying the creative experience and building a stronger community within their town.

The STBG podcast releases episodes every Friday and can be streamed on Spotify, YouTube or wherever you get your podcasts, and you can follow them @stbgpod on TikTok and Instagram. ▮

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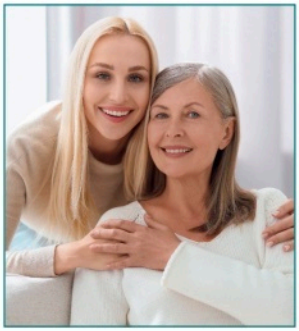
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