

Twin Cities Leather: The Steve Lenius and Andrew Bertke History Collection

Longtime Lavender Magazine readers may recognize Steve Lenius for his outstanding contributions as a columnist, extensively covering the leather/BDSM community within LGBTQ+ media.

His "Leather Life" column appeared in Issue 1 of the magazine and continued for nearly 30 years until 2023, when unexpected health issues resulted in him having to step away from his decades-long column.

While his days as a Lavender columnist may have come to an end, his activism efforts for the leather/BDSM/fetish/kink and LGBTQ+ communities prevail.

Lenius has released a book inspired by the contents of his Lavender columns, with a second one on the way; covered local, national and international leather title contests; and donated local and national leather history to several museums and archival institutions.

Andrew Bertke is a well-known event photographer across the leather community, having contributed as a photographer to the International Mr. Leather competition.

He was also a past president of the Leather Club and has worked extensively on the history and visual documentation of the leather and LGBTQ+ community events.

Twin Cities Leather Founder and Lead Designer Karri Plowman was thrilled when he and his business partner, Kurt Patton, chose to recognize these two individuals by naming the history collection after them.

"They should be remembered," Plowman says. "These are the two people that did the quiet work in the background that provides so much for our future generations to be able to see and learn and hear."

Plowman and Patton partnered to bring Twin Cities Leather into a new future in late 2019, following the closure of their brick-and-mortar shop, café and community space.

While TCL has explored various avenues of art and business over the years, two things have remained constant: leather and community.

Known for its leather design and unique, fully customized leather pieces, TCL operates online, at several local pop-up shops and through personal vending as far as they can drive.

"We're a leather store owned by leather people who are in the leather community," Plowman says.

Photos courtesy of Andrew Bertke

Continued on page 42



It's important to TCL that customers know that they not only sell leather products, but are active members of the communities in which these products are intended to serve.

The Lenius and Bertke History Collection is an opportunity for community members of all ages, races and sexual orientations to come learn more about the history of leather in the Midwest and how it has influenced the LGBTQ+ and fetish/kink communities at large.

The first show included in the collection will be titled "Foundations", which will include diagrams and timelines encapsulating the many clubs, titles and various accomplishments that started or flourished through the efforts of Minnesota's leather community.

It will cover history starting around the 1960s era and go through today's activity in the leather and LGBTQ+ communities. Plowman described it as if each era of history represented a different tree branch, allowing viewers to have a better understanding of the different artistic avenues TCL and its community have ventured into over time.

Plowman and Patton intend on running this exhibit for six to nine months once it's presentation-ready. They anticipate the official opening to take place during the Pride 2025 season, but have yet to set an official date.

The show that will eventually follow will be titled "Lost Voices," which Plowman finds of particular importance due to their own identity as a two-spirit indigenous person.

"I want to showcase stories of other people of color, of women, of people in the trans community that have been integral to the history of our Minnesota leather fetish community," Plowman says.

They hope that this show will educate the community on the often-silenced voices of those responsible for creating the foundation of the leather community in Minnesota and beyond.

Plowman acknowledged that none of the projects completed by TCL would have been made possible without the endless support from community members who volunteer their time and money to TCL's mission.

Plowman and Patton want all viewers of the collection to remember the importance of community.

"You're not alone," Plowman says. "You can go on to do whatever it is that you want. You don't have to fit a mold."

To contribute to TCL's mission and explore their work, please visit their Patreon, patreon.com/twincitiesleather. ▮

