Tom Barrett
Mayor Of Milwaukee
Office of the Mayor
200 E Wells St #201
Milwaukee WI 53202

August 6, 2018

Mayor Barrett:

Since 2010, more than 20 North American cities – ranging from Key West to Vancouver—have implemented rainbow crosswalks to commemorate their local LGBTQ community.

Today, we ask the City of Milwaukee to honor the incredible legacy of LGBTQ Milwaukee with a decorative rainbow crosswalk at the intersection of Jefferson and Wells Streets. This crosswalk will highlight not just the hard-worn path to a longtime favorite tavern, but the long and proud journey of all LGBTQ Milwaukeeans from persecution to tolerance to acceptance to equality.

Since 1968, This Is It (419 E. Wells St.) has been a safe, welcoming and meaningful haven for the LGBTQ people of Milwaukee. The bar is a cornerstone of local culture, a contributor to a stronger and more connected local community, and a catalyst for the thriving Cathedral Square entertainment district. This month, we celebrate not only the bar’s 50th anniversary, but also the heritage of longtime owners June and Joe Brehm.

In a city with hundreds of bars and taverns, This Is It is no ordinary establishment. Based on national research, This Is It ranks among **the nation’s top 10 longest-operating LGBTQ bars**, and quite possibly among the top 5. It shares a national historic distinction with Provincetown’s Atlantic House, New York’s Julius’, Oakland’s White Horse Tavern and New Orleans’ Café Lafitte in Exile. While these four locations are widely believed to be the oldest “gay bars” in America, they did not openly identify, advertise or publicly position themselves as LGBTQ-friendly from the moment they opened, mainly because homosexuality was considered both criminal offense and psychiatric illness.

The Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, a program of Milwaukee Pride, Inc., has documented over three dozen “gay bars” that opened before the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Similarly, these businesses did not and could not identify, advertise or publicly position themselves as LGBTQ-friendly. **This Is It is the one and only pre-Stonewall survivor in the City of Milwaukee and the State of Wisconsin.**

This Is It has continuously operated, at the same address, with the same name, within the same architecture, as a self-identified LGBTQ landmark for 50 years. This Is It began with June’s brave and bold dream: to create a safe and respectable place for her gay friends that would be just as good, if not better, than any other bar in town. Today, owners George Schneider and Michael Fisher continue to deliver that dream to emerging generations, seven nights a week, 365 days a year.

This crosswalk, as the first Milwaukee monument to LGBTQ people, will be not just a symbol of historic local pride, but of our community’s historic local triumph. On June 17, 1989, approximately 500 people marched from Walker’s Point to Cathedral Square, where another 500 people had gathered for a rally. The first Milwaukee Pride March earned regional media attention as well as the first-ever endorsement from a Milwaukee mayor and county executive. Today’s Milwaukee Pride Parade and PrideFest continue this proud legacy each and every June as the kickoff of the summer festival season. This crosswalk will honor the path from exclusionary activism to inclusive celebration.

Milwaukee Pride, and our undersigned proud partner organizations, fully support any course of action that facilitates this project further. We appreciate your consideration, support and advocacy for a stronger, healthier, and more engaged local LGBTQ community.

Sincerely,

Michail Takach
VP-Communications
Milwaukee Pride, Inc.

Chez Ordonez
Acting Chair
City of Milwaukee Equal Rights Commission

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