MPR News | Minnesota Now Former Lavender Magazine staffers launch Q Minnesota, a new outlet by and for LGBTQ+ community 01M4BRCPNGFDJ6F131R0J4H63B

NINA MOINI: A new LGBTQ-plus magazine has launched in Minnesota. It comes three months after *Lavender Magazine* shut down its operations after a 30-year run. Lavender was a mainstay for the LGBTQ-plus community here in Minnesota. *Q Minnesota* was created by several former *Lavender* staffers. The very first issue came out last Thursday. Two of the *Q Minnesota* staff are here to tell us more about the launch and what's ahead.

First, we have with us Nell Gehlhaus, who's vice president of digital content and marketing. Thanks for being with us now.

NELL GELHAUS: Yes, thank you for having me.

NINA MOINI: We're also really happy to have Andy Lien, editor in chief and publisher. Thanks for your time as well, Andy.

ANDY LIEN: Hi, Nina. Thanks for having us on. It's great to be here.

NINA MOINI: It's great to have you. I'm sure you know people were so happy to hear that *Q Minnesota* was formed and that it felt like such a big gap for people when *Lavender* was going to be going away. So I'm wondering how did it come together so quickly a few months after? Were where you preparing beforehand? How did it happen?

ANDY LIEN: Oh, I can't say we were preparing at all. It came just as much of a shock to us as to everyone else that it happened. Two of us haven't been there for many, many years, over nine or 10 years Nell, and I haven't been there for over 10 years.

But Barry was on staff at the time when it closed, and some of it took some time to just reel, reel with the rest of the community. But Nell and I have already been working in this space of publishing and digital publishing, so it was an easy topic to talk about between us. Meanwhile, Barry was having his own discussions, and we came together and said do you want to get the band back together. And that's what we're doing.

NINA MOINI: And, Nell, I understand you left *Lavender* a decade ago. What made you want to be part of building up *Q Minnesota?*

NELL GELHAUS: I have always wanted to be a part of this type of work here in Minnesota, and it was just serendipitous that it all happened at a time when Andy and Barry and I were all available. So the timing there was good for us even though *Lavender* closing was certainly a shock to everybody.

But honestly the support from the community from the moment we announced and even more since our first issue came out, they've just met us with so much love. I think that they are as hopeful as we are, but every message, every magazine they pick up is really just fired us up to keep going.

NINA MOINI: And now I'm curious, too, to how you all came up with the name *Q Minnesota.*

NELL GELHAUS: That was Barry. Andy, do you want to tell that story?

ANDY LIEN: Well, Barry loves the idea-- because he's our sales person. He loves the idea of something being memorable and very, very easy to describe and explain and understand. And *Q Minnesota* tells you exactly what it is. It's for the queer community in Minnesota and beyond.

But right now, the name Minnesota, the state has a lot of cachet, too. It's-- we're a refuge state. And so we're the queer publication of the refuge state I suppose.

NINA MOINI: Now how do you see *Q Minnesota* I guess as different or the same? I think folks are just going to wonder what does this mean compared with or after or in addition to *Lavender.* And I don't mean that in a way to put anything down, of course. I think it's just what people are going to wonder how the two will be similar or different.

NELL GELHAUS: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, we've been-- we've heard a lot. Is it*Lavender 2.0.* And we certainly want to build on what *Lavender* did. *Lavender* did a lot of good for the community as well. Just being out there for 30 years is a feat in and of itself.

But we really hope to build on that by, number one, expanding our digital presence. That was one of the areas-- *Lavender* really focused on the print edition, and we are going to have just as much if not more of a focus on the digital piece of that. We're really wanting the site to not just be a place where people come to read stories but where people are coming to find each other, to connect with each other.

We've got an online business directory of queer and affirming businesses that people can look through. We have an events calendar of all the events going on in the city and lots of other ways for them to be in touch with one another. So we-- that combined with our social presence, we're really hoping that we stay engaged with the community on a regular basis much, much more so.

NINA MOINI: And, Andy, what do you think are the parts of life that need to be told or the stories that need to be told? Why is it so important for people when they did lose a resource like *Lavender,* why do you think it means so much to people to have *Q Minnesota* now?

ANDY LIEN: Losing a publication and saying that rights have been achieved is an act of erasure, and this community, especially now, needs to be very clearly existing. So not only is it a validation of the existence of the community, but also it's a way that we amplify the voices of the community and everything the community is doing. So it needs to not just focus on the hard stuff, the politics, but also the joy and the resilience and the resistance and the art and the creativity, the love, the relationships, the choices of homes, the reasons why this is such a great place to be.

And we are doing our best to make sure that the door is open, the tent is big enough, the table's long enough for everybody in this community to feel like they belong and see themselves in it. So it's nothing about us without us. If you can see it, you can be it. It's all of those little catchphrases that come to mind why this needs to exist now.

NINA MOINI: Now would you add anything to that?

NELL GELHAUS: I would just say that when-- the national conversation right now about LGBTQ-plus folks is getting louder and maybe a bit more mean, I really feel that our local queer media really matters a lot more. It has a lot more impact, and we want *Q Minnesota* to not only cover some of those topics that politics that had not previously been covered but also be a place for our queer joy, our history, about who we are and not only that but written by us, written by the folks that are living those experiences.

NINA MOINI: And just, Andy, I want to make sure people, again, just know where to find*Q Minnesota,* the ways that they can access it and how they can access you all to perhaps even send you story ideas if you just want to let us know.

ANDY LIEN: Absolutely So QMinnesota.com is the website, but also there's a digital edition on there if you can't find one of the 10,000 print editions or copies around the Twin Cities metro area. We are expanding out of the metro with our next distribution drop as quickly as we put this together. That was one of the things that we couldn't quite nail down right away.

So we'll get further out with our distribution, and we will also enable subscriptions in the future. But then you can get a hold of us by sending info@QMinnesota.com, and then there are other addresses on our website. And we hope to hear from people. Nell put out some good calls for writers. Send us stuff and we'll get to it. We promise eventually. There is a backlog. We've had a few things going on.

NELL GELHAUS: And that's a good problem.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, right. Well, Andy and Nell, I wish you both the best. Thank you so much for coming on and sharing with us. Thank you.

NELL GELHAUS: Thank you, Nina. That was Nell Gelhaus and Andy Lien from *Q Minnesota.* The first issue was out now.