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# This Is It!, Wisconsin's oldest gay bar, closes in Milwaukee

Popular gay bar opened in downtown Milwaukee in 1968

BY EVAN CASEY • MARCH 11, 2025

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This Is It! opened in Milwaukee in 1968. *Evan Casey/WPR*

Isabelle Carrell isn't sure exactly how many times she's been to This Is It!, but she'll never forget her first time at the popular gay bar in downtown Milwaukee.

Carrell, a tattoo artist who lives on the city's east side, did a flash tattoo event outside the space in 2023.

“So it was just a crazy opportunity to be able to share the love of art, and being queer and going out with a bunch of people who are like minded — it doesn't really happen very much in Milwaukee,” Carrell said.

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After driving by the bar last week, she was excited to visit it again sometime soon.

But there won't be another time — the bar closed its doors for good on Sunday.

“If I had known that there wouldn't be a next time, I probably would have stopped and gone in right away,” Carrell said.



This Is It! is located at 418 E. Wells Street in Milwaukee. *Evan Casey/WPR*

A social media post on the bar's **Facebook page** said This Is It! would have

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“Unfortunately, that celebration will not come to pass,” the post said.

“The COVID crisis and the years following 2020, coupled with the 8 month closure of our street and sidewalk last year, put the business in a position that we could not ultimately overcome,” the post added.

The current owner of the bar didn’t respond to a reporter’s request for comment for this story.

June Brehm opened the bar in 1968. It was the oldest continuously operating gay bar in the state and one of the oldest in the nation, according to the **Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project**.

Michail Takach, chair of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, said the space was a safe haven for many gay people who weren’t welcome at other establishments at the time it opened.

“She [June] opened a place to welcome and support her gay friends so that they didn’t have to have terrible cocktails in the shadows. They could actually come to a place in the heart of downtown [Milwaukee] and be together and be supported and be welcome. And not have to hide,” Takach said.

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Candles are seen outside of This Is It! at 418 E. Wells Street in Milwaukee on the morning of March 9, 2025.  
*Evan Casey/WPR*

Takach said Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project worked with other national partners to confirm that This Is It! was one of the, “top 10 oldest gay bars in the country.”

“Some of the oldest gay bars in the country have disappeared since the pandemic [COVID-19], and This Is It! is now one of them,” Takach said.

The bar became one of the more iconic gay bars in Milwaukee and Wisconsin during the 56 years it was open. Takach said the bar also hosted an alcohol-free night for people who were 17 and older.

“That was a place people could go and meet other people like themselves and feel like they weren’t alone in the world,” Takach said.

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A statement from the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project said the bar was the site of celebrations for several “historic victories,” including, “the nondiscrimination ordinance of 1980, the Gay Rights Law of 1982, the 1st Annual Pride March and Rally of 1989, Tammy Baldwin’s election in 1998, local marriage equality in 2014 and national marriage equality in 2015.”

Mo Dempsey, a Milwaukee native, has been going to the bar for a few years after she moved back home following the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I was really excited to explore the city as a newly out queer person, as an adult being able to explore my city,” Dempsey said. “So naturally, I always wanted to go to This Is It!, and being able to do so was amazing.”

Carrell called the closing a “major, major loss for so many people.” There are other gay bars in Milwaukee, but she said This Is It! was different.

“Not everybody has other places where they feel they can go and be safe and get drunk and be with people that they can trust,” Carrell said. “And that’s just gone now — it’s going to be hard to replace that. Impossible, maybe, I don’t know.”

For Takach, the timing of the closing is also concerning, as an **executive order** from President Donald Trump **declared the federal government must recognize people by their biological sex** instead of their gender identity.

“I think that we’re going to learn real quick as places like This Is It! disappear, that we needed these places more than we thought and that we needed them all along, and that they had more of a meaning than just a place to get drinks or a place to hang out,” Takach said. “There’s a spiritual component there that once it’s gone, it’s gone ... there’s no getting it back.”

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