

ENTERTAINMENT

Milwaukee's This Is It!, one of country's oldest LGBTQ+ bars, permanently closes Sunday



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This Is It!, one of the country's oldest LGBTQ+ bars and a Milwaukee institution, closed its doors permanently Sunday.

The Covid-19 pandemic and an eight-month closure of East Wells Street last year "put the business in a position that we could not ultimately overcome," the bar said in a Facebook [post](#).

"This is It! has been so much more than a nightlife spot for the queer community. It has been a gathering place, a safe place, a second home, and the memories made at the bar will stay in our hearts forever. We want you to know that we did everything we could to keep our doors open for you," the post read.

This Is It! opened in 1968, making it the state's oldest continually operating gay bar. It's also one of the oldest LGBTQ+ bars in the United States. June Brehm, who [died in 2010](#), and her son Joseph Brehm were the original founders. Both have been recognized by Democratic U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, herself the [first openly gay senator elected to Congress](#).

Drag superstar and Wisconsin native Trixie Mattel [became a co-owner with George Schneider in 2021](#), after seeing about five gay bars close in Los Angeles during the pandemic and many others turn to GoFundMe to stay afloat.

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"Everyone in town has a personal story or anecdote, or sometimes even a night they can barely remember. The exterior has rainbow accents that invite all walks of life into the space, and remind people to come in and act right," Mattel said [previously in a statement to the Journal Sentinel](#).

This Is It! closed from mid-March to mid-June in 2020, and the business was in "survival mode," Schneider [previously told the Journal Sentinel](#). The bar received help from the Small Business Administration, plus other grants from the city, county and state.

The pandemic hit a little more than a year after This Is It! reopened in 2019 after a massive renovation project. Schneider bought space next door formerly occupied by Louise's restaurant, expanding the bar's space by about 1,200 square feet.

The bar gained a reputation well beyond Wisconsin. This Is It! [drew "The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City" to Milwaukee last year](#). Cast member Whitney Rose, who knows Mattel, wanted to host a party there. The cast went on to visit other Milwaukee locations, including Potawatomi Casino Hotel and Fiserv Forum.

"On behalf of the city and the entire community, we want to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude to This is It! for its incredible and far-reaching impact over the years," Alderman Peter Burgelis and Alderwoman JoCasta Zamarripa wrote in an emailed joint statement Sunday. "For nearly six decades, this iconic establishment has been more than just a bar — it has been a sanctuary, a safe space, and a vital gathering place for Milwaukee's LGBTQ+ community."

"To the dedicated staff, talented performers, and unwavering friends who made This is It! a home for so many, we thank you. Your passion, commitment, and spirit brought this place to life, creating a legacy of love, joy, and inclusion that will never be forgotten."

This story was updated to add new information.