

DISCOVERY THROUGH DRAG

BY EMILY BATTMER, Features Editor

Even as a child, senior Zachary Peasall liked wearing his mom's high heels around the house. Now, Peasall wears his own five-inch stilettos to express his confident, sassy side and support a good cause.

Drag is something Peasall said he has always done in some way, shape or form. When he was younger, Peasall said he remembers dressing up as Dorothy, Anastasia and Britney Spears for Halloween. During high school, he dressed in drag for a Relay for Life event, but his real drag experience started at Truman State, when he performed at Oktoberfest last year.

While he was nervous about performing, he said his confident drag character, Portia Valentina, takes control when he's on stage.

"I feel like in that character, when you're doing drag, you're kind of just untouchable," Peasall said. "People are like, 'I can't believe you're up there doing that,' and that just gives you more support and confidence."

Confidence is important when trying to fight stereotypes, Peasall said. While many students at Truman are open-minded and accepting, he said the larger community of Kirksville might not share that mindset, and that can be intimidating.

"The statement that I could make was so much greater than that fear," he said. "You can do good with drag, you can have fun with drag and it's such a fun experience."

His performance at Oktoberfest received a positive response and set the stage for Drag for Donations, an event he organized during March 2012 with Prism to benefit the Trevor Project.

The Trevor Project is a national organization dedicated to providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth, according to their website. Peasall said he is fortunate to have undying support from his family and friends, but not everyone in the LGBTQ community has the same support.

"It almost makes me feel bad,

coming out, doing drag and having so much support from them," he said. "Hearing other people's stories of how their families have disowned them just breaks my heart."

Senior Brandon Eychaner was one of those students who didn't have as much support. As president of Prism, Truman's gay-straight alliance, Eychaner said he had a personal reason for choosing the Trevor Project when he worked with Peasall to organize and perform for Drag for Donations last semester.

Raised a southern Baptist, Eychaner said he and his family had strong anti-gay beliefs. Eychaner said he believed he was possessed by Satan, and prayed every night for God to remove his possession.

When Eychaner's prayers went unanswered, he took a handful of sleeping pills into the bathroom with him.

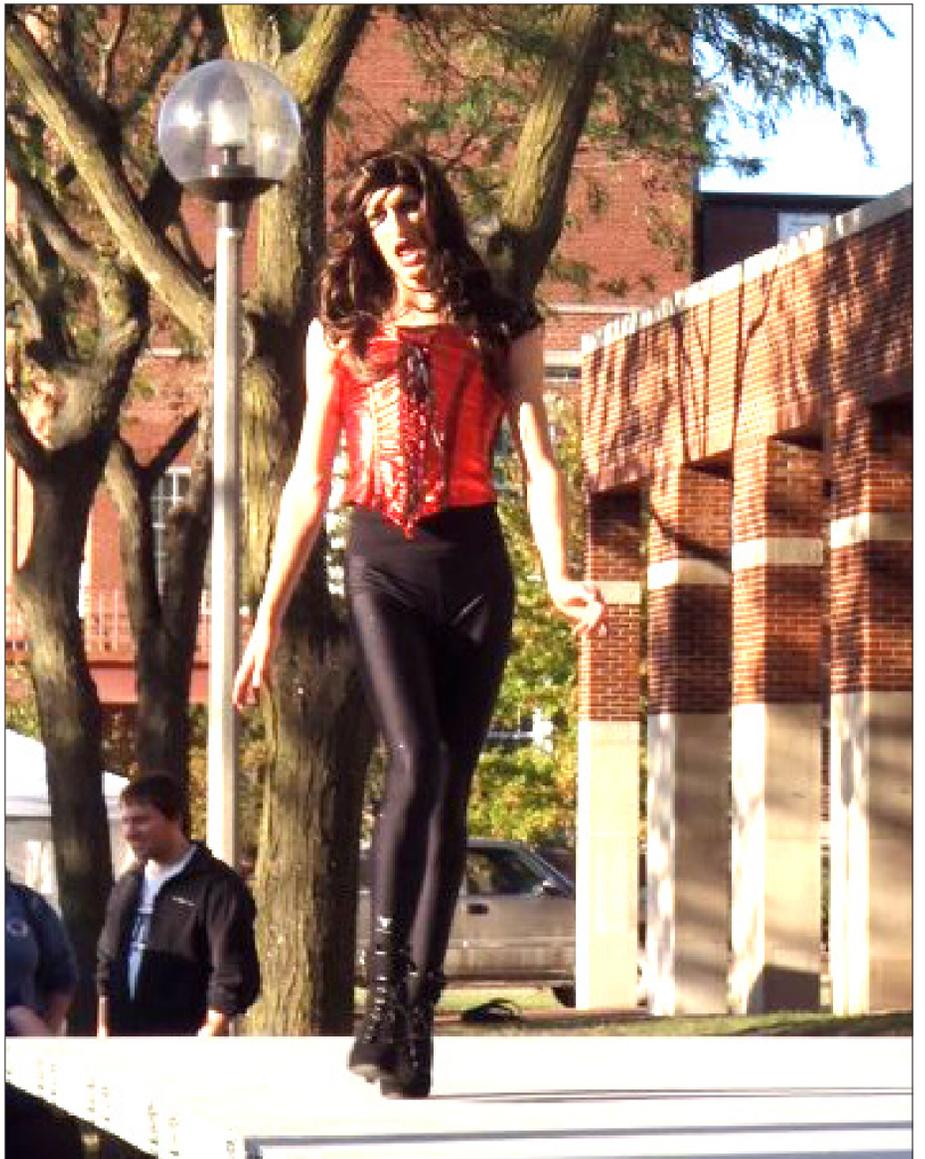
"I didn't take them, but I could have," he said. "That was kind of a wake-up call and everything from that point changed."

Eychaner said he never wants anyone to feel the way he did or to go through a similar experience. His story has fueled his involvement with Prism and his participation with Drag for Donations, which he sees as another step toward breaking LGBTQ community stereotypes.

"There's definitely a lot of prejudice against the LGBTQ community, and part of overcoming that is the coming out process — and that's hard enough in itself," he said. "What made [performing in drag] easier was it was for a cause, and other people were doing it with me."

Still, Eychaner said he was nervous about his performance last year. Once he got on stage though, he said cheers from the crowd helped him loosen up and made the experience enjoyable.

He said he was surprised at how much support the event generated last year, and it gives



Submitted Photo

Senior Zachary Peasall struts across the stage during Oktoberfest last fall at Truman State. Since this event, Peasall has continued to dress in drag to raise money for charities such as the Trevor Project.

him hope that Prism will continue to gain strength and be a positive force in the community.

It's gratifying to know people are growing more comfortable with the idea, he said, and he hopes it will encourage other students to be more accepting of their own sexuality.

"I feel like some people might ridicule us, but other people — especially people in the closet — will see it and think, 'oh, this is really happen-

ing and people are going and there's hope," he said. "It's being accepted on campus and hopefully we will find other people to reach out to."

Senior Anna Jaeger, who worked behind-the-scenes with Peasall prepare to prepare for the drag show last year, said she agrees that drag can be a freeing experience which encourages others to be comfortable with who they are.

Jaeger always has been in-

involved with the equality movement, she said, and was happy to see Peasall use drag to support a cause.

She also was proud of her friend for making such a powerful statement, she said.

"I think drag shows that you shouldn't be afraid to do whatever you want, be whoever you are, push those boundaries related to gender and sexuality," she said. "I think it really empowers a lot of people."

The Trevor Project Programs

The Trevor Lifeline: 866-488-7386

Only nationwide, around-the-clock suicide prevention and crisis intervention line for LGBTQ youth.

Trevor Chat

Free, confidential messaging service that provides help through the Trevor Project website.

Trevor Space

Online social network for LGBTQ youth and their friends.

Dear Trevor

Online Q&A forum monitored by Trevor Project Counselors.

Trevor Survival Kit

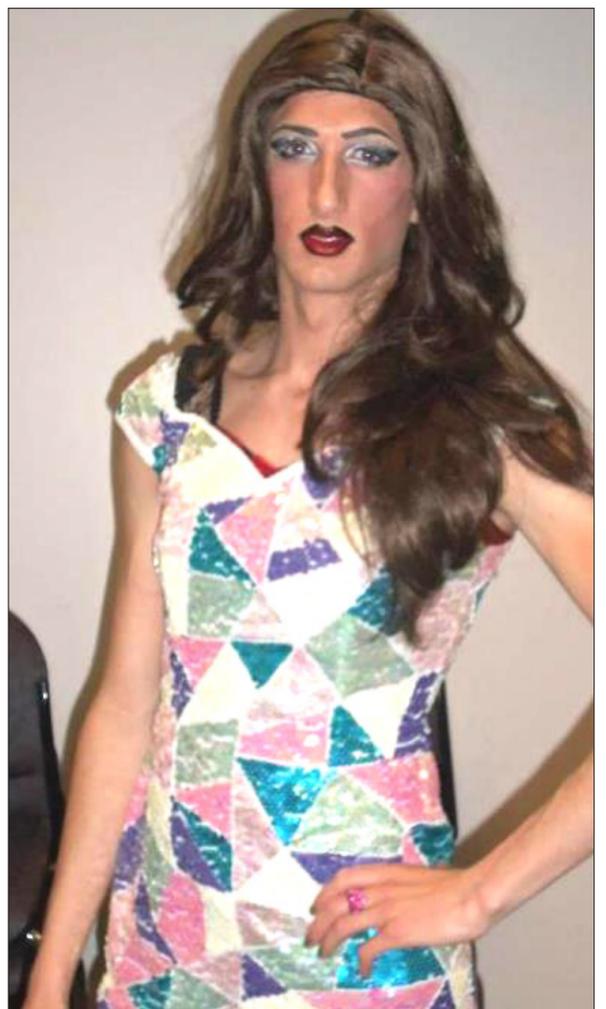
Educational kit distributed to schools and youth service providers.

Trevor Lifeguard Workshops

Trained facilitators address topics including sexual orientation, gender identity and suicide prevention skills.



According to: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/Programs>



Submitted Photo

Senior Zachary Peasall dressed as his drag character, Portia Valentina. Peasall performed in drag to raise money for the Trevor Project as a part of Oktoberfest last fall at Truman.

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