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## General Gayety

by Leslie Robinson . Contributing Writer

### The rainbow and TV icons

Meredith Baxter's announcement that she is a lesbian has put a — you should excuse the expression — kink in the long line of all-American TV moms.

It's not June Cleaver or Harriet Nelson who has come out, but as Elyse Keaton on "Family Ties," Baxter was a loving mother and wife, a maternal anchor on a hugely popular show that ran during most of the '80s.

Now Baxter isn't just a member of the TV-mom sorority. She's also one of those LGBT actors who played iconic straight roles. Sometimes America's favorite, most heterosexual characters were played by actors who, well, were really, really acting.

Baxter says only relatively recently did she figure out she's gay, so she wasn't consciously hiding anything. From the television audience, anyway. Whether she was hiding anything from herself is between her, her therapist and, this being L.A., her other therapist.

Elyse Keaton, a liberal former hippie, had what so many TV moms had over the decades preceding her: maternal warmth, patience, wisdom. She also had what a TV mom needed by the '80s: a job, although I admit I couldn't remember she was an architect. You could argue that handling her conservative son Alex, famously played by Michael J. Fox, was work enough.



During the '80s, Elyse Keaton was, and she remains still, one of America's best-known mothers. Now we know one of America's famous mommies was a lesbian.

Life is good.

I had no idea back in the '70s that Grandpa Walton was anything other than straight as a board on the Walton family sawmill. In fact, Will Geer was more like the curly shavings.

Grandpa, patriarch of "The Waltons," was a good-natured character. Hard-working, dedicated to his family, wise, mischievous and fond of visiting the Baldwin sisters for a nip of upscale moonshine, he was still in love with his wife of a zillion years. I'd guess that, regardless of class, race, religion or anything, many Americans would've loved to have Zeb Walton as their grandfather. He was the definition of endearing. Sort of a walrus meets a panda.

I can't think of any other grandfather on TV more appealing. Actually, I can hardly think of any other grandfather. Grandpa Munster? He was more all-Transylvanian than all-American.

When Will Geer took the role of Zeb Walton, he'd already had a long career on the stage and in film and television. He was attracted to radical politics; actress Helen Hayes once called him "the world's oldest hippie." In 1933, Geer met Harry Hay, who would later be one of the founders of gay

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## Stage set for council action

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very confident that our council has the ability to have a rational discussion about these issues and focus on what we all want to focus on, which is competitiveness and there is clearly a link between these issues and attracting talented people to our area."

Throughout the almost year-long discussion over the county's new benefits policy, Roberts argued inclusive policies will help Charlotte and Mecklenburg County compete with the private sector. She said feedback since the Dec. 15 meeting has proven her right.

"I have gotten a number of emails from people who are with companies that offer [domestic partner benefits] — both gay and straight folks who say their companies long ago decided that it helped them attract the best work force and let people know they care and are fair," she said. "They know they are not going to be discriminated against in the workplace."

City Councilwoman and Mayor Pro Tem Susan Burgess has long been among the most outspoken and visible city leaders supporting Charlotte's LGBT community. She assures the city is making plans now to address these issues soon.

"I expect we'll do something," Burgess said. "That has been the plan all along. I have talked to [Foxy] about the schedule to approach this. We are working on it, so I think something will happen. I'm not sure exactly when."

Domestic partner benefits will likely continue to be a hot-button issue, but the city will also need to consider amendments to its

employee non-discrimination policies which do not include protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender-identity. Mecklenburg County policies presently include sexual orientation.

Both Foxx and Burgess are committed to adding sexual orientation to the city's non-discrimination policy but have been vague on their positions regarding inclusion of gender-identity.

"We want to do what we can get passed," Burgess said. "We'll see how far we can go with that."

In a Q&A with *Q-Notes* after the election, Foxx said he'd be willing to look into the inclusion.

"I'd have to dig a little more into the human resources aspects of that to understand the extent to which it isn't covered by sexual orientation," he said.

The council's consideration of new policies should be made easier by the absence of long-time mayor Pat McCrory, who opposed inclusive changes in the city's employment or benefits practices.

Six other jurisdictions in North Carolina offer domestic partner benefits. Thirteen local governments include sexual orientation in their employee non-discrimination policies; four also protect employees on the basis of gender-identity. ▀

**Read more:**

Find breaking news and read more about the Dec. 15 Mecklenburg County Commissioners meeting at [q-notes.com](http://q-notes.com).