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## Business of Pride: Ben Willis guides architecture firm's local growth after planting flag in Philly



Image: Jamie Stow Photography, ACBJ Photo Illustration

Ben Willis is associate principal at Union Studio Architecture & Community Design.

JAMIE STOW PHOTOGRAPHY, ACBJ PHOTO ILLUSTRATION



By [Lara Schwartz](#) – Special Projects Editor, Philadelphia Business Journal  
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*This profile is part of the Philadelphia Business Journal's 2026 Business of Pride series, highlighting individuals and companies advancing and supporting the region's LGBTQ+ community.*

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## **Ben Willis – associate principal, Union Studio Architecture & Community Design**

Ben Willis relocated to Philadelphia with his husband in 2019, bringing the Providence, Rhode Island-based architecture firm he was working for with him. Willis pioneered Union Studio Architecture & Community Design's first satellite office and has grown its presence to seven full-time employees. Under his leadership, the firm has won local projects including the renovation of the Henry Ossawa Tanner house in Philadelphia and a new mixed-use building with 42 affordable houses for adults with intellectual disabilities. It is currently working on a new apartment building specifically for older LGBTQ+ residents. His work at Union Studio has won regional and national awards, including a 2025 AIA Philadelphia Merit Award and EPiC Firm Recognition from the AIA Pennsylvania chapter.

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**Originally from:** Erie

**Education:** B.Arch, [University of Notre Dame](#)

**Who was the coolest person in the world to you when you were a teenager and why?** My sophomore world history teacher: he had an effortless confidence born from living his values and approached all things with curiosity about the bigger contexts in which they fit.

**What does pride mean to you?** Pride is an invitation for reflection: to honor previous generations who kicked down the doors, to celebrate the impact and presence of the current LGBTQ+ community, and to look out for, and lift up, those who are still on the margins.

**What advice would you give to your younger self about overcoming setbacks?** Surround yourself with good people who will journey alongside you and invite you to see your setbacks outside of your own perspective.

**What career accomplishment are you most proud of?** Being asked to be a mentor by younger colleagues.

**What's the biggest strength of Philadelphia's LGBTQ+ community?** How fully integrated our community is in the city: from politicians, to artists, to academic and civic leaders, to mascots (Gritty is queer, right?). There is no sector where we're not visibly at the table and being celebrated for our impacts as much, if not more than, the fact that we represent part of the LGBTQ+ community.

**Favorite book, podcast or TV show:** "One More Thing: Stories and Other Stories" by B.J. Novak.

**Favorite Philadelphia-area hidden gem:** The pedestrian path on the Ben Franklin bridge: spectacular views of the city and good hill training.

**An LGBTQ+ icon or advocate I admire:** Parents who are fiercely supporting their trans kids!

**A bucket list item:** Find a go-to karaoke/open-mic song.

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