

“Authentic Lives.”

“So many of us at WQED work here because we genuinely care about the community and always want to try to find opportunities to encourage access to education and understanding of our neighbors,” Warren told the Post-Gazette via email.

“With the ‘Authentic Lives’ series, we hope to shed light on the joy and talent that lives deep in the heart of Pittsburgh’s LGBTQIA+ community and in the process foster some awareness and respect amongst our diverse audiences.”

The queer professionals Cooper and Warren approached for this first batch of episodes all seemed enthusiastic about being “a part of something that’s bigger than the individual work they’re doing,” according to Cooper. That included interview subjects like Eriko Hattori, a queer Japanese American artist from Morgantown, W. Va., who now lives in Spring Hill.

Hattori moved to Western Pennsylvania in 2017 and has so far enjoyed “largely pretty positive” experiences with the city’s art, LGBTQ+ and Asian American communities. Immersing himself in “all these spheres in the city that exist” made it easier for Hattori to continue infusing their art with imagery that captures “how those aspects of my life collide.”

Warren knew Hattori through a mutual friend and reached out to them about “Authentic Lives.” Hattori appreciated being given the chance to discuss “my experi-



Robin Walker, left, gives a client a haircut at Bloomfield-based Robin Walker’s Barber Salon in the pilot episode of the WQED digital series “Authentic Lives.”

WQED photos

ences as a queer person in the arts in Pittsburgh” and was further heartened by how Warren and Cooper zeroed in on queer people of color in the show’s first two episodes.

“It’s really important to watch and learn about these communities that are doing the things to celebrate themselves and who

they are,” Hattori said. “To be able to see us forge our own ways of finding joy and community and expressing ourselves, it’s important to bear witness to it all.”

And it’s not just non-LGBTQ+ Pittsburghers who could benefit from something like “Authentic Lives,” Cooper noted.

They didn’t come out until their mid-



Spring Hill-based artist Eriko Hattori shows off one of their pieces in the second episode of the WQED digital series “Authentic Lives.”

-20s, and there are dozens of other topics Cooper would like to explore in future “Authentic Lives” seasons that they hope make queerness look like something to celebrate, not hide.

“I want to make something that isn’t being made, but I’ve also never really seen content like that,” Cooper said. “I think if I had something like that and had seen queer people living their lives and being successful and happy not in spite of queerness but because of it, I think I may have come out earlier and been a lot happier earlier.”

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