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LEVI ROLLINS (FRONT ROW IN RED SHIRT)
AND HIS HUSBAND, ERIC MUÑOZ (IN
PURPLE SHIRT), ARE CO-OWNERS OF
URBAN EATS. JASON GRIEGER (IN SUS-
PENDERS) IS THE CHEF. (SEE PAGE 27.)

Photo courtesy Urban Eats
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OutSmartMagazine.com



WEB EXCLUSIVE

- A review of the musical *Into the Woods*, now available on DVD

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Equality Texas Optimistic Despite Record

by John Wright

AUSTIN — It's the best of times and worst of times for the LGBT community at the Texas Legislature.

At least 20 anti-LGBT proposals were introduced before the March 13 filing deadline, believed to be the most in the history of any state. But more pro-LGBT bills were also filed this year than ever before in Texas.

Unfortunately, given the makeup of the Legislature, the anti-LGBT bills have a better chance of becoming law. But as the biennial session headed into its final 60 days, Equality Texas legislative director Daniel Williams remained optimistic.

"I think the opponents of equality are seeing the world wake up to the reality of the discrimination faced by the LGBT community, and are increasingly finding themselves on the wrong side of history, and that's a very uncomfortable place to be, and I think they're responding out of that sense of discomfort," Williams said. "There's every reason to believe we will be successful in defeating all of the bad legislation if we can keep up the level of pressure that we have put on lawmakers to date, and we have put a lot of pressure on lawmakers to date."

Equality Texas got a boost recently when the Texas Association of Business—the state's powerful chamber of commerce—came out against two measures that would enshrine a "license to discriminate" against LGBT people in the state Constitution, prompting one of the authors to back down.

The amendments are among several religious-freedom proposals that would allow businesses—and in some cases government employees—to refuse service to LGBT people based on sincerely held religious beliefs.

Other bills target same-sex marriage,

seek to bar cities from adopting or enforcing LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination ordinances, and aim to restrict access to restrooms and similar facilities for transgender people.

Williams said he's particularly concerned about the anti-trans measures. Proposals from Rep. Gilbert Peña, R-Pasadena, would make schools and businesses liable for damages if they allow trans people to use restrooms and similar facilities according to how they identify, effectively placing a bounty on the heads of violators. Bills from Rep. Debbie Riddle, R-Tomball, would also make it a crime for trans people to use restrooms according to how they identify.

"We are spending a lot of time and energy working to educate lawmakers on both sides of the aisle about the issues faced by the transgender community," Williams said. "Everybody's got to use the bathroom. It doesn't get much more fundamental than that."

A group of 25 trans activists from Houston descended on the Capitol in March for an impromptu lobby day to fight the proposals from Peña and Riddle. Equality Texas also staged two more formal advocacy days, for people of faith and LGBT families.

Meanwhile, anti-LGBT groups rallied for the second time in as many months against same-sex marriage, with hundreds gathering on the south steps to hear from Alabama chief justice Roy Moore.

Moore, who recently ordered probate judges in Alabama not to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, encouraged Texas lawmakers to resist rulings from federal courts declaring the state's marriage ban unconstitutional.

Days later, a House committee held a hearing on a bill that would bar Texas officials from issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, or recognizing their unions, regardless of court decisions. More than a dozen witnesses, mostly against the bill, gave nearly two hours of testimony. The proposal from Rep. Cecil Bell (R-Magnolia), was ta-

bled, and Bell said he planned to introduce a substitute that addresses fiscal concerns.

A week earlier, the same committee held the session's first hearing on a pro-LGBT bill—a proposal to allow same-sex couples to have both names on the birth certificates of adopted children. That hearing provided a ray of hope when the Republican chair of the committee, Rep. Byron Cook, smacked down a witness from the anti-LGBT group Texas Values.

Williams said pro-LGBT lawmakers have introduced "the most comprehensive set of nondiscrimination bills ever filed in the Texas Legislature," covering housing, education, public accommodations, employment, state contracting, and insurance.

But he said the birth certificate measure, along with a proposal that would extend protections for age-appropriate dating to gay youth, have the best chance of passage.

"They're both clear structural inequities in the statutes that both negatively affect children," he said.

Now that the bill-filing deadline has passed, Williams said the LGBT community has entered a "danger zone" before deadlines in May for legislation to be heard on the floor of the House and Senate.

The goal is to run out the clock on anti-LGBT legislation, but there's always the risk that Republican Gov. Greg Abbott will call a special session.

Equality Texas is sponsoring three more lobby days in April and May, including two geared toward transgender issues.

"It's not just about beating back the bad stuff this session," Williams said. "It's about laying the groundwork that's going to allow us to pass the good stuff in the future."

The deadline to register for Freedom Advocacy Day on April 13—the group's main lobby day—is April 6. For more info, visit equalitytexas.org and click on the "Event Calendar" tab.

More News →

Community

Photos by Dalton DeHart



Marathon Oil Corporation representatives Stefanie Ruddick, Alisha Jackson, and Tim Fischer presented AIDS Foundation Houston CEO Kelly Young with a check for \$65,000 during the AIDS Walk Houston 2015 on March 8.



A candlelight vigil was held for Juan Carlos Ramirez on March 17 at the Montrose Remembrance Garden. Pictured are Council Member Ellen Cohen, Rev. David Meeker-Williams, Rev. Troy Treash, Rev. Lynette Ross, Rev. Lura Groen, Rev. Dr. Michael Diaz, Rev. Marilyn-Meeker Williams, Rev. D.D. Fennell, and Rev. Seido.



On March 1, co-chairs Ryan Lindsay (l) and Tammi Wallace (r) presented Mayor Annise Parker (c) with the first annual Annise Parker Leadership Award during the 2015 Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund Houston Champagne Brunch held at The Corinthian.



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Supreme Court to Hear Marriage Equality Case this Month

by Megan Smith

The Supreme Court of the United States will hear oral arguments in a challenge to state bans on same-sex marriage on April 28.

The high court will be faced with two questions presented in this case: Does the 14th Amendment require a state to license a marriage between two people of the same sex? And does the 14th Amendment require a state to recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed in another state? The first question will be allotted 90 minutes during arguments, while the second question will have 60.

The case, deemed *Obergefell v. Hodges*, is the product of six legal challenges from four different states—Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee—consolidated into one. In November 2014, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit—which includes these four states—became the only federal appeals court to uphold bans on same-sex marriage, prompting the U.S. Supreme Court to consider hearing the case. Prior to the appeals-court decision, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg explained that if the 6th Circuit did indeed uphold the bans, causing a “circuit split,” it would create “some urgency” for the high court to weigh in on the matter. In January 2015, the Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments on the case.

Following the announcement of the April hearings date, Google, Inc., American Airlines Group, Inc., Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., and 376 other prominent businesses joined together to file a friend-of-the-court brief in favor of same-sex marriage. The Human Rights Campaign also filed a historic “people’s brief,” boasting more than 200,000 signatures calling for the high court to expand marriage equality nationwide. The first signature on HRC’s brief belonged to Edie Windsor, the 85-year-old lesbian who was victorious in striking down a key section of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013. Even some prominent conservatives, such as former National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlman and billionaire David Koch, filed an amicus brief in support of same-sex

marriage, stating that “conservative values are consistent with—indeed, are advanced by—affording civil marriage rights to same-sex couples.”

Marriage equality opponents, however, are not backing down. In recent months, outliers such as Texas senator Ted Cruz, Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal, and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee have reiterated that they would still like to see a

constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage nationwide. Court rulings in favor of marriage equality are “a real danger to our liberty,” Cruz said.

At press time, the question remains as to who will be arguing this issue in front of the Supreme Court. LGBT-rights activ-

ists continue to debate as to whether a local attorney (who is already familiar with the case’s couples) or a national expert on equality law is best for the job. “There is a feeling that the advocate should have a strong connection to the community,” Columbia Law School professor and former Lambda Legal attorney Suzanne Goldberg told *The National Law Journal*. “That’s not to say that the advocate has to be gay, but the sense that he or she should have long experience handling gay rights cases, as well as experience arguing before the Supreme Court.”

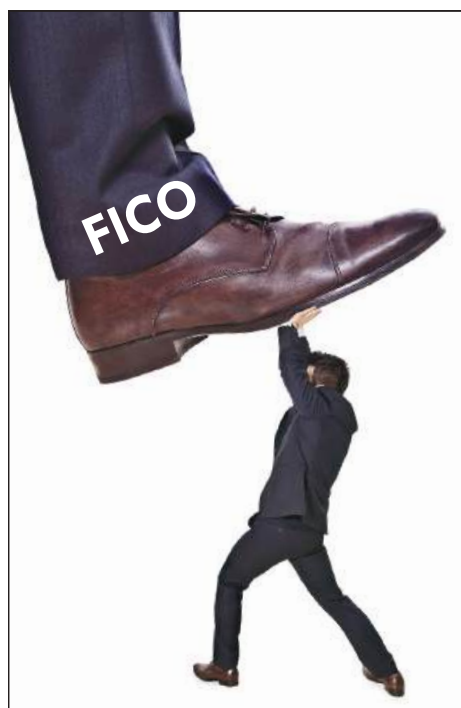
Currently, 37 states plus the District of Columbia have legalized marriage equality, although the Supreme Court of Alabama continues to defy a federal court decision that cleared the path for same-sex marriages to begin in the state.

After a San Antonio-based federal judge ruled Texas’ ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional in February 2014, the case was appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit. The appeals court heard oral arguments in the case in early January 2015, but has not yet issued a ruling. It is uncertain whether that court will rule prior to the Supreme Court’s impending decision.

Audio transcripts of the April 28 Supreme Court arguments will be released later that day on supremecourt.gov. The high court’s decision is expected in late June. ■



The people have spoken: The Human Rights Campaign delivered its “people’s brief”—which included over 200,000 signatures calling for marriage equality nationwide—to the Supreme Court on March 6.



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'LMNOP: A New Muzical'

Banning the use of certain letters in the alphabet?

CLAIRE MCADAMS



TUTS Underground, the edgy sister of American musical theater, this month brings to Houston *LMNOP: A New Muzical* by Scott Burkell and Paul Loesel. Based on the Mark Dunn novel *Ella Minnow Pea*, it's the story of an island, government extremism, mob mentality, and a single lone voice of reason. Basically it's about letters that start falling off a monument, and then the government bans the people

from using those letters. Only one teenage girl rebels against the ban.

TUTS calls it "part romance, part clever word game, and part adult fable that reminds us of how precious our liberties are and how important it is to have the courage to stand up for what we believe."

On April 10 there will be a free post-curtain discussion with a panel of judges, lawyers, and law enforcement about censor-

ship and freedom of speech.

A captivating story you'll n_v_r forg_t! —Marene Gustin

LMNOP: A New Muzical
April 7-19
tutsunderground.com

🔊 Radio ★ Performing Arts 📺 Art & Photography 🔄 Ongoing + Other Things 📅 Save The Date

1

Multiple Art Exhibits 📺 thru 25th
box13artspace.com
What I Learned in Paris 📺 thru 12th
A romantic comedy. "OUT! at The Ensemble Theatre" is April 3.
ensemblehouston.com

2

Legally Blonde: The Musical ★
thru 11th The first of several free performances this month at Miller Outdoor Theatre.
milleroutdoortheatre.com

3

Montgomery's Got Talent ★
Montgomery County talent show.
crighton-theatre.com
This and the Wall 📺 thru 11th
An exhibit by Cassie Phan.
artleaguehouston.org

4

Ray Hill Roast

A roast and gala for the LGBT activist. **kpft.org**

6

Rising through the Infinite 📺
thru May 6 An exhibit by Bret Shirley.
blafferartmuseum.org
The One and the Many 📺 thru June 21
An exhibit of Project Row Houses.
projectrowhouses.org

7

Urban Ecologies 📺 Last day for this exhibit. **galvestonartscenter.org**
Barney Frank Book-signing + See article on page 17. **hcdla.com**
LMNOP: A New Muzical ★ thru 19th
See above. **tutsunderground.com**

8

Vanities, the Musical ★ thru May 3
Captures a snapshot-sharp portrait of the lives, loves, disappointments, and dreams of these young women growing up.
theaterlabhouston.com



9

Modigliani Quartet ★
chambermusichouston.org
The Heidi Chronicles ★ thru 18th
 A Rice Players production.
theatre.rice.edu
Gender, Health, Well-being Lecture +
 by Rayna Rapp cswgs.rice.edu

10

Emily Hearn ★ In Concert.
houseofblues.com
Destroyed. The End. ★ thru 18th
 A performance by Suchu Dance.
suchudance.org

11

The Grand Kids Festival + Galveston.
grandkidsfestival.com
Iron and Ambiguity 📅 Last day of
 exhibit. rudolphblume.com
HRC Annual Gala Dinner + See article
 page 17. gala.hrcheouston.org

12

Houston Compassion Week + thru 18th
 What you can do to serve others.
compassionatehouston.org
Swan Lake ★ St. Petersburg
 State Russian Ballet's last day.
houstonfirsttheaters.com

13

Showgirls + Paul Verhoeven's terrible
 1995 film is hosted and annotated
 live by openly gay writer David
 Schmader at Alamo Drafthouse,
 1114 Vintage Park Blvd.
draffhouse.com/houston



15

**Dining and Discourse: A Discussion
 in Three Courses** 📅 thru May 10
 HCCC's exhibit. crafthouston.org
Spectacular Reubens 📅 thru May 10
 Monumental tapestries from Peter Paul
 Reubens. mfah.org

16

4th Annual Houston Improv Festival
 + thru 18th Some of Houston's most
 talented improvisers join forces with
 troupes from Austin, Chicago, Los
 Angeles, and New York.
houstonimprovfestival.com

17

Compagnie Käfig: Correria Agwa ★
 All-male dance. spahouston.org
Ohlsson Plays Chopin ★ thru 19th
houstonssymphony.org
Council on Alcohol and Drugs + Tom
 Arnold. council-houston.org

18

A Trip to Bountiful ★ thru May 3
crighton-theatre.com

19

M.E.N. Inc Crawfish Boil + Music,
 crawfish, more. meninhoustone.org

20

**Design Fair 2015: Learn. Shop.
 Connect.** + thru 26th A premier
 market featuring cutting-edge design.
lawndaleartcenter.org

21

Shanghai String Quartet ★
 At the Asia Society Texas Center.
dacamera.com
Houston Go Red for Women Luncheon
 + Take a stand against heart disease.
houstongored.heart.org



23

**An Intimate Evening with Lee
 Daniels** + Houston Arts Alliance's
 dinner fundraiser features openly gay
 actor, film producer, and director Lee
 Daniels (*Precious*, *The Butler*, *Empire*).
houstonartsalliance.com

24

Tonal Impact ★ thru 25th Music and
 dance with NobleMotion Dance and
 Musiqa. noblemotiondance.com
Tribute to Marvin Hamlisch ★ thru 26th
 Performance by the Houston Symphony.
houstonssymphony.org



26

**For a New World to Come:
 Experiments in Japanese Art and
 Photography, 1968-1979** 📅
 Last day. mfah.org



28

**11th Biennial Florescence
 Competition** ★ thru 29th An artistic
 flower exhibit hosted by the Museum
 of Fine Arts Houston. mfah.org

30

Dine Out for Life + For one day of
 the year, we are encouraged to dine
 out and fight AIDS at more than 30
 restaurants across the Houston area.
 Benefits AIDS Foundation Houston.
diningoutforlife.com

5/3/15

**2nd Annual National Mental Health
 & Dignity Day** 📅 Raise awareness,
 celebrate wellness, and speak out for
 rights of persons living with mental illness.
 10:30 a.m. Tranquility Park. [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthdignityday)
[.com/mentalhealthdignityday](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthdignityday) →

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Calendar of Events

continued from page 15

CounterCurrent Festival

April 14-19

14-19

A week of free performance art around the city sponsored by the University of Houston Mitchell Center that includes musical and dance performances, artists' lectures, and parties. Montrose gallery She Works Flexible



pairs artists Sofia Cordova and Autumn Knight in *I perceive the other and lose myself* (see photo above), an exploration of erasure, memory, laughter, and survival explored through multimedia installations and a series of accompanying performances on April 17.

countercurrentfestival.org

U.K. Rocks

April 2-4

2-48

The Houston Symphony salutes the United Kingdom. Storm Large from the group Pink Martini and J. Robert Spencer of the Midtown Men perform songs ranging from The Beatles to contemporary artists such as Coldplay and Adele. With hits like "Moondance," "Wish You Were Here," and "Every Breath You Take." Michael Krajewski conducts this British pop program.

houstonSymphony.org

Barney Frank Book-signing

April 7

7

Harris County Democratic Lawyers' Association presents former Congressman Barney Frank for a book-signing and wine and cheese reception at Brazos Bookstore. Frank, the most prominent openly gay politician, discusses his new memoir *Frank: A Life in Politics from the Great Society to Same-Sex Marriage*. hcdla.com

HRC Houston 18th Annual Gala Dinner

April 11

11

The Human Rights Campaign celebrates some of Houston's most influential individuals at this annual dinner and silent auction. The event at the Westin Galleria features special guests HRC president Chad Griffin, singer Ty Herndon, and comedian Dana Goldberg.

gala.hrchouston.org

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by
Susan
Bankston

You Never Know

Do we need drones and eight-foot fire-truck ladders?

I'm fixin' to tell you an absolutely true story. Many years ago in a galaxy far away, I was a young reporter at a small-town city council budget meeting. The fire chief presented the fire department's budget for the upcoming fiscal year. To me, the budget seemed a bit extravagant for a small town in south-east Texas. Among other fancy-pants big-city things, the fire chief wanted an eight-story fire-truck ladder.

A councilwoman seemed genuinely confused about this item and asked, "Chief, why do we need an eight-story fire-truck ladder when the tallest building in town is only two stories?" She asked it nicely, because she assumed it was something she didn't understand about fire ladders.

The chief thought silently for a full 30 seconds and then puffed himself up all tall, smug, and knowledgeable before answering, with a completely straight face, "Because you never know."

Writing a straight news story about that answer was the hardest writing I have ever done.

You never know.

Only sometimes you do. You kinda know you won't need an eight-story ladder to fight two-story fires.

"You never know" happens just about as often as you'd expect in crazzzzzzy Texas. During any given legislative session in Austin, about half the bills fall into that twilight zone You-Never-Know category.

You know I'm fixin' to give you an example, right?

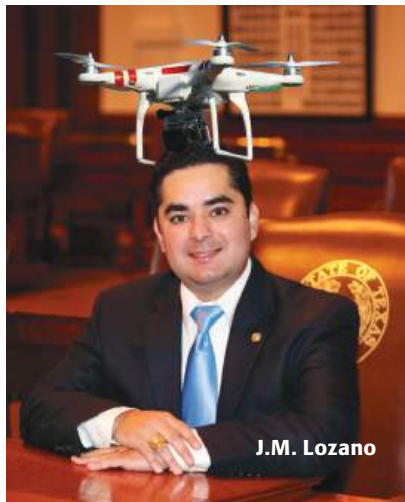


PHOTO SHOT BY BLASE DISTEFANO

Texas Republican State Representative J.M. Lozano is a man of vision. And that vision is drones. He wrote and introduced HB 3429, which reads: "As soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act, the office of the governor shall adopt the policies and procedures,

establish the unmanned aircraft program, and acquire unmanned aircraft for state agency use as required by Section 490G.001, Government Code, as added by this Act."

Lozano wants the governor to have drones. I do not know what possible reason the governor has for wanting or needing drones. Nor do I even want to know, because I'm dead-solid certain that that information will just give me facial tics. But, off the top of my head, I can think of 1,295 reasons why it's a real bad idea—and the top of my head is the first reason.

We can't pay for education. We can't pay for healthcare. We can't build or fix roads. But, bygawd, we can let the Gov and JM have a drone to play with on the weekends and crash-land on the roof of my house. Fortunately, my house is only two stories, so the fire chief has got that covered if we need to put out the subsequent fire.

A drone. I am certain, deep in my heart, that if you asked JM or the governor why we need drones, their answer would be . . . You never know.

And that ain't all that's happening in the Texas State Capitol. Welcome to Crap, Texas. Population: millions and millions.

My own personal state representative, Rick Miller, is a nincompoop. He has an impressive 94 percent approval rating from the Preservation of Damn Meanness PAC.

Miller introduced House Bill 1556, which would undo all LGBT protections instituted in a lot of Texas cities, including Houston, Fort Worth, El Paso, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin. Added up, 7.5 million Texans are covered under these local LGBT civil rights ordinances.

There's a slew of stuff wrong with Miller's bill, but two distinct things point to the fact that he's all salt and lime and no tequila. (1) Miller is a Republican who bellows "Local control!" a dozen times a day, but now—only now—he wants to override local control. And (2) Miller's son is a highly respected and perfectly wonderful proud gay man in Houston.

Miller contends that the LGBT protections enacted by cities "interfere with economic liberty and discourage business expansion." I think he's saying that he wrote a bill that removes protections from his son's life for "business" reasons. Goodness gracious, even the Mafia puts families before business.

And as the finance chairman at the Sugar Creek Baptist Church, surely Rick Miller knows that God told Abraham not to sacrifice his son Isaac.

This is the man that my neighbors elected to represent us in state government. I do not want to go outside my house. I'm afraid of these people.

If you would like to call Rick Miller, his office number is 281.980.0117. If you call, do not be mean, because Rick has already cornered the market on that. Do not be sarcastic, because I own the Texas distributorship on that. Just be nice, and remind him that all people should be protected in the workplace.

Also, instead of being worried about what we're doing, he needs to be worried about why he's worried about what we're doing.

Susan Bankston lives in Richmond, Texas, where she writes about her hairdresser at The World's Most Dangerous Beauty Salon, Inc., at juanitajeane.com.

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by
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Your Financial Future

What to look for in a financial advisor



When seeking out savings and investment advice, there are many choices available to you. Yet, it can still be difficult to find the right financial advisor. Just like choosing legal and healthcare professionals, it is important to look for a perfect fit when choosing an advisor to map out your financial future.

This is especially true for LGBT individuals, whose planning needs can be somewhat different. The good news is that there are ways to narrow down whom you work with—a process that can also help you become much more involved in planning for your financial future.

Who's the Best Person for the Job?

In many ways, choosing the ideal financial advisor can be compared to hiring someone for a job. This makes sense, as the individual who you work with should have experience and expertise, as well as a proven track record. It also helps if he or she possesses additional certifications and is someone you “click” with.

In today's financial services world, just about anyone can call themselves an advisor. To narrow your search down to the real professionals, start by asking the following questions:

• **How long have you been in the financial-services business?** Time in the business is crucial. The market can have its ups and downs, so you want to work with someone who has worked through both good and bad times. Going with an advisor who only has a year or two in the business can be risky in several ways, and you may find yourself seeking a new advisor within a short period of time if that individual decides to jump ship when the going gets tough.

• **Where did you get your training?** Where an advisor got his or her training can also make a difference. For example, independent advisors who have a major broker/dealer background can bring diversity in ways of thinking to the table. Independent advisors can also be more objective, as they do not have proprietary products. Therefore, clients can feel assured that their advisors are not being encouraged to promote one product over another.

• **What is your investment philosophy?** In addition to what the advisor does, what is equally important is how the advisor does it. For example, will the advisor monitor your portfolio regularly and make any necessary adjustments in order to keep your investments on track with your goals? Will they keep you informed—in both up and down markets? You don't want someone who will keep you in the dark when things aren't going well. So be sure that the person you choose to work with will be your guide and help you to navigate your portfolio through both up and down markets in order to get you where you want to be financially.

• **What licenses do you hold?** Financial advisors are required to hold different licenses, depending on the type of products they offer. Overall, though, most should at minimum hold an insurance license, as well as a license to offer securities.

• **Have you earned any additional certifications or other accolades?** Going with an individual who has earned additional industry certifications such as the CFP (Certified Financial Planner) can be a real plus. Oftentimes, going after these additional designations means that the advisor is likely more committed to their career in the industry. Typically, in order to keep these designations, the advisor will be required to complete regular continuing-education courses. These courses can help to keep the advisor up-to-date on various industry trends, products, and topics. Recognition in the industry by peers or clients—such as the Five Star Wealth Manager award (an annual acknowledgment in *Texas Monthly*) is also a plus.

You may consider working with a friend or family member who is a financial advisor. For some, this can work well, as you know that the individual is trustworthy. In other cases, it may be uncomfortable having someone close to you knowing all of your intimate financial details. Here, it is really a personal preference.

“Do You Want the Truth, or What You Want to Hear?”

Once you have chosen an advisor to work with, one of the first orders of business will be to review your current assets. This will typically lead to developing an overall plan. This plan can be viewed as a blueprint of sorts that will help direct you toward your ultimate financial goals.

In some instances, an investor may not have enough to reach their goals within their desired time frame. This could be due to large market losses, improper asset allocation, or from simply not saving enough.

In any case, it is your financial advisor's duty to tell you whether or not you are on track—even if breaking the news →

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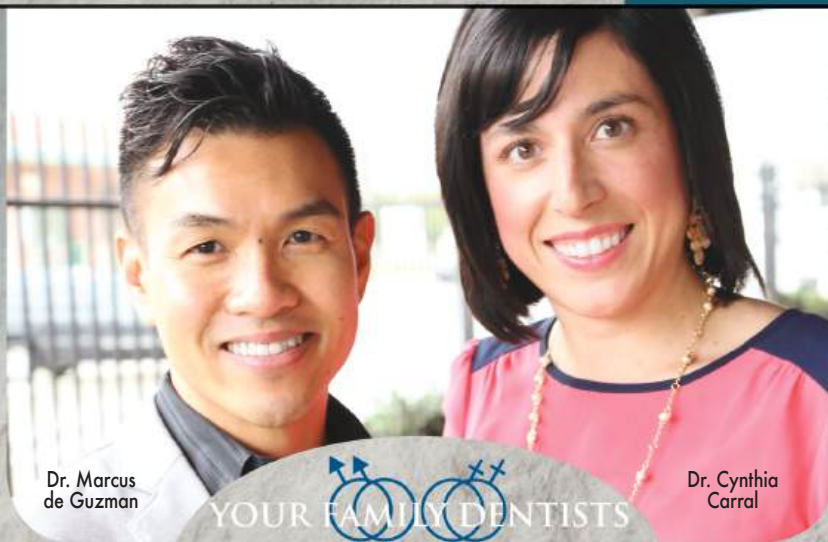
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MoneySmart continued from page 20

to you may be disappointing and difficult to hear. A truly good financial professional, however, will be able to use what you have as the starting point in developing a new or alternative route for you.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON FINDING YOUR IDEAL FINANCIAL ADVISOR

There are lots of choices when it comes to getting financial advice, and narrowing down whom you should work with can be a challenge. Whether you're just beginning the process, or you're seeking out a new professional, you need to keep in mind that you'll be handing over the reins to the growth, protection, and management of your life savings—so the decision is definitely a big one. The bottom line is that the ideal financial advisor for you will be the one who is not just experienced and professional, but the one who has your best interests at heart.

Personal finance-related questions may be e-mailed to grace.yung@lpl.com.

Grace S. Yung, CFP, is a certified financial planner practitioner with experience in helping domestic partners plan their finances since 1994. She is a principal at Midtown Financial LLC in Houston and was recognized as a "Five-Star Wealth Manager" in the 2014 September issue of Texas Monthly.

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On December 12, 2014, Tjin Koy (left) and David Espinoza (right) celebrated 10 years together as a couple by getting married in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



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INFO: bunniesonthebayou.org

April 16: Pride Houston 2015 Kick Off Party and Grand Marshal Announcement

INFO: pridehouston.org

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INFO: diningoutforlife.com

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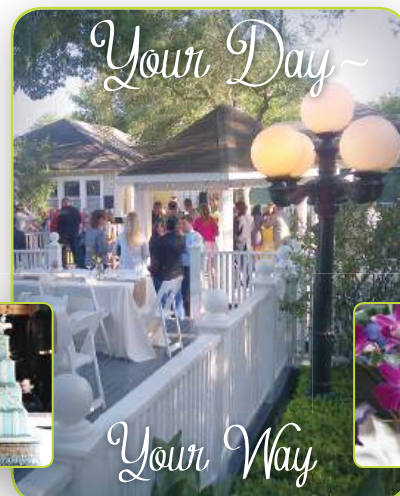


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Urban Eats

Eat, drink, shop

by Marene Gustin

Urban Eats Bistro + Bar + Market is the kind of place where you can hang out most of the morning downstairs drinking coffee and noshing fresh baked pastries before heading upstairs for a lunch of meaty Cowboy Sliders on a yeasty roll with a side of Napa Black and Blue Shoestring Fries coated in blue cheese and truffle oil, and a local brew. After lunch, head back downstairs to shop for artisanal groceries for dinner.

Oh, and maybe pick up a painting or come back for a late supper and listen to some live tunes.

Yep, Urban Eats is that kind of place—a little something for everyone at most any time of the day. “I always wanted to open a coffee shop and bar,” says Levi Lucky Rollins, “and the concept just grew.”

Lucky isn't a nickname, it's a family name. “We're a very lucky family,” Rollins says. “Both my father and grandfather are named Lucky.” And so far, Rollins has been very lucky indeed since opening Urban Eats on trendy Washington Avenue late last year. The place has stayed packed with locals, many of whom come back day after day.

Rollins, who is the co-owner and culinary director, didn't start out in the culinary world, although both his grandmothers did have restaurants and he learned to cook at an early age. “I was born in Oregon and raised in Northern California,” he says. “My mother still lives in Folsom—the city, not the prison!”

He came to Houston in 2000 as vice president of sales for makeup artist Laura Mercier. Ten years



As cool as a cucumber: Levi Rollins (front row in red shirt) and his husband, Eric Muñoz (in purple shirt), are co-owners of Urban Eats. Jason Grieger (in suspenders) is the chef. They are surrounded by their supportive team, who are LGBT or allies.

ago, he decided to start saving 30 percent of his salary to fund his dream restaurant, and it's taken him that long to build Urban Eats.

It was also 10 years ago this month that he met the man he married. “My mom came to visit, and she wanted to go to JR's,” he recalls. “She insisted I go talk to this cute guy, so I did. That lasted two dates, but it was through him I met Eric Muñoz.”

Muñoz is now co-owner and vice president of operations at Urban Eats, and the couple spends six days a week there. Rollins is hoping they'll have kids one day who will come to the restaurant and market to hang out and help.

The third principal is chef de cuisine Jason Grigar, a Houston chef with a very impressive handlebar moustache. He →



Something for everyone: Urban Eats Bistro + Bar + Market is a place where you can have your morning coffee with a pastry (upper right), a meaty lunch of Cowboy Sliders (lower right), and shop for dinner (far left). And much more!



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Urban Eats continued from previous page

was working as a bond writer when Rollins approached him to be part of the team. "I thought he was wasting his talent, and I was right," Rollins says. "He's the perfect fit to take the foods I love and bring them to the table."

Rollins and Grigar first met through Grigar's husband, since they both worked for Laura Mercier. "We always used to double-date and hang out," Rollins says. "But since we opened Urban Eats, there's no time. Sometimes I think we'll invite them over for dinner on a Sunday, but then I think that the last thing Jason wants to do is see me on our only day off."

Rollins credits their success to the neighborhood. It took him about a year to renovate the abandoned auto repair shop (his father owned an auto shop, which is what drew him to the property). Neighbors were always stopping by and asking about the progress and what kinds of food they would have when they opened, "so we had a fan base waiting," he says.

But it is the food, the drinks, and the company that keeps the regulars coming back. If you're popping in to shop, do check out the pastas, pâté, sauces, olives, and prepared casseroles and side dishes. The Truffled 3 Pig Mac & Cheese (bacon, ham,

and pancetta) is a good bet for an easy dinner—and don't forget to pick up some monkey bread (Muñoz's nickname is Monkey) and an addictive lemony tart for the next morning's breakfast.

Diners feast on salads, soups, and sliders, along with artisan cheese and charcuterie plates and the popular braised Brussels sprouts pan-seared with bacon and onion.

There's live music after 9 p.m., and vivid paintings by local artist Cheryl Burgess liven up the space. Rollins and Muñoz plan to rotate the art every few months to showcase local artists.

The couple currently lives in Missouri City with their three cats, but they plan to move closer to the restaurant soon. "The commute is a real killer," Rollins says. "I do love the space, but I don't have time to do any gardening or enjoy the house."

He pauses for a moment before adding, "Frankly, our Christmas tree is still up."

Such are the drawbacks of owning a successful restaurant.

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Marlene Gustin is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



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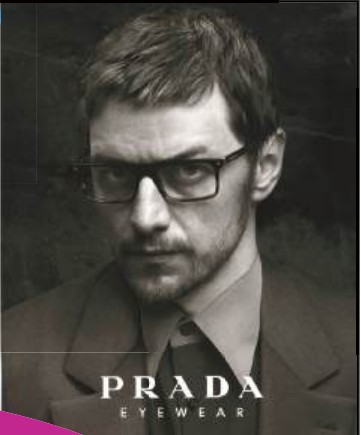
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For the Love of Coffee

Nova Coffee Company's catering brings the brew straight to you

by Megan Smith

Photos by Elise Greff



Caffeine queen: out lesbian Brittany Weinstein founded Nova Coffee Company, Houston's newest coffee catering business, in early 2015. When you hire Nova for any special event, a skilled barista will attend and provide guests with high-quality espresso drinks.



When Brittany Weinstein is asked to describe coffee, she replies with a simple, one-word answer—"nostalgia." It reminds her of sitting on the front porch as a child with her grandmother, while they both sipped a hot cup of Joe. "It's like coming home," Weinstein says. Now 21 years old and the founding owner of Nova Coffee Company, this Houston native is setting out to share that same sense of warmth with others.

Launched in early 2015, the city's newest coffee catering business provides the perfect addition to any special event. Simply pick one of Nova's three customizable catering packages, and a knowledgeable Nova barista will attend your event, set up a full espresso bar, and provide your guests with specialty coffee

drinks ranging from lattes to cappuccinos to Americanos and more. An added bonus: all of her espresso is locally roasted.

Weinstein recalls that her first experience with coffee was far from the high-quality drinks that Nova prides itself on serving. At age three or four, her grandmother would give her carton-packaged coffee drinks, which she calls "pseudo cappuccinos." "It was not real coffee, of course—it was chock-full of sugar and chemicals," she laughs. "I would say 'Cappuccino, cappuccino!' and she would give me more." When she was in early high school, Weinstein finally admitted to her mom (who is a non-coffee drinker) that she had been drinking the real

deal for years and got up the courage to ask for her own coffee maker. "It was almost like coming out," she jokes.

At 17, Weinstein was hired as a barista at a local coffee shop, and transitioned from coffee lover to coffee professional. After moving to Austin for college, she continued to hone her skills as a barista for another independent coffee shop. Upon graduation, she returned to Houston and worked as a barista for the catering service of a local roaster, providing specialty espresso drinks for open houses, weddings, business meetings, luncheons, conventions, birthday parties, and more. "That was my first experience with coffee catering," Weinstein says. "It was often hard having to wake up at 3 a.m. and go to bed at midnight, and then doing it all over again. But it is so fun, and I absolutely wouldn't do anything else. And now, I'm doing it on my own with Nova."

Weinstein explains that she views Nova as a literal and figurative journey that she's excited to share with others—a concept she took into consideration when choosing her company's name. Rather than waiting in line at Starbucks or pushing a button on a coffee maker, Nova's clients can have

a quality coffee experience brought directly to them. And on a more personal note,

Weinstein adds, it serves as a nostalgic trip back in time that has evolved into both a career and an avenue to make →

"My favorite thing on earth is showing someone that they can have a good coffee drink, like it, and want to drink more."

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others fall in love with coffee. "People come in with these preconceived notions that coffee tastes bad," she says. "My favorite thing on earth is showing someone that they can have a good coffee drink, like it, and want to drink more."

Having a Nova espresso bar at an event is a great addition or alternative to serving alcohol, Weinstein adds, as it provides non-drinkers with options other than water. "I was at this wedding convention for Indo-Pakistani people, and the majority of that community doesn't drink," she explains. "They thought the coffee was great. It's definitely a viable alternative to alcohol."

Planning a special out-of-town event? Not a problem—Weinstein will take Nova on the road. As a way to differentiate Nova from its competitors, she is willing to make the journey to cater events all across Texas—from Corpus Christi to San Antonio to Austin. In addition to offering customizable add-ons like teas, fruit smoothies, and pastries, Nova also works with clients on a one-on-one basis to ensure fair and favorable pricing. "I will absolutely come up with something that will make the client happy," she says.

As Nova continues to grow, Weinstein has some big plans to expand her business venture. Although she is adamant about keeping the company independently owned, she hopes to add a food truck (and eventually a brick-and-mortar coffee shop) into the mix.

Weinstein—who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin and speaks fluent English, Spanish, and Portuguese—also plans to eventually source her own coffee by traveling to Central and Latin America to work directly with the region's coffee farmers. "I don't want to go through people who jack up the prices, don't really know what they're doing, or don't treat their farmers fairly," she says. "I want to be able to go there myself and pick out what I want."

An out lesbian, Weinstein is not only looking forward to catering LGBT clients' special events, but to giving back to the community. "Growing up in the suburbs, it was really difficult to know that being gay was okay and what I was feeling was okay," she says. "So I really think there needs to be more resources for LGBT youth out there, and I want to be a part of that." Nova is tentatively scheduled to cater the Montrose Center's Hatch Youth Prom this June, she adds.

"I think coffee should be special," Weinstein concludes. "It's always been special for me, so I want it to be special for other people, too."

Nova Coffee Company can currently cater events up to 150 people. To book Nova's services for an event, or for more information, visit novacoffeetexas.com. ■

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Need a Favor?

There's an app for that

by Marene Gustin

Remember that time when you were under the weather and it was raining and you really wanted mee-krob from that Thai place down the street? But if you were to venture out at all, it would be to get some NyQuil and Kleenex.

And if you had a friend who owed you a favor, you would so call them and ask them to deliver food and meds. But you didn't.

No worries—there's an app for that now.

Favor, an iPhone app developed in 2013 by Austinites Zac Maurais and Ben Doherty, just might be your new best friend. With a few finger strokes, you can order whatever you need from restaurants, grocery stores, and more. They'll even pick up your dry cleaning.

"We would always see friends and neighbors at the local store and think it would be so much easier if we could consolidate the hassle of picking stuff up," says Maurais. "Our initial goal was to create a more connected community to get anything you want delivered. Ben and I delivered pizza together in high school and thought people would be excited to get other things outside of the traditional pizza and Chinese food delivery model brought to them."

They started in Austin, but have since expanded to select neighborhoods in Boston, Dallas, and, since January, Houston. During South by Southwest, the company announced a \$13 million Series A financing in order to expand into San Diego and San Antonio.

"Texas is a really important market for us," Maurais says. "A lot of consumer startups seem to think you need to be based out of San Francisco to succeed. We're a high-growth company from Austin, Texas, so we like to think we turn that stereotype on its head somewhat. We see Houston as the next step in our own backyard. Since we launched in Houston in January, we've seen the effect of the local network. Everyone has a friend in Austin, Dallas, and Houston. Word of mouth is a huge driving force for Favor."

"We see Houston as the next step in our own backyard."



Sit and wait: Ben Doherty (l) and Zac Maurais are the creators of Favor, an iPhone app from which you can order whatever you need from restaurants, grocery stores, and more . . . pretty much everything but alcohol.

Think of Favor as the Uber of delivery services, letting you hire local "runners" who act as personal assistants to fetch whatever you need and bring it to you. (Everything but alcohol, that is.) Currently, the Houston service area includes the inner 610 Loop north of 59. Once you place an order on the app, Favor assigns a runner who picks up what you need. Then the app tells you the charge, you pay on your phone with a credit or debit card (including a 5 percent fee,

a \$6 charge, and a tip for the runner) and the next thing you know, the goods arrive at your doorstep.

Yes, there are other delivery services like Grub Hub, but few that will deliver almost anything from almost anywhere.

"Houston has some awesome food options, but there is no delivery-service culture, unlike New York or San Francisco and now Austin," Maurais says. "We're trying to change that with Favor, by making the ordering and delivery process as easy and as seamless as possible. The fact that we'll deliver from any restaurant or food truck within our delivery zone is huge for our customers. Now you don't have to leave your couch to get your favorite tacos or barbecue delivered right to your door."

Maurais says that so far the most popular requests are for delivery from Torch's, Jus' Mac, Niko Niko's, Bite Macarons, Starbucks, and Sprinkles Cupcakes. But Favor runners can also pick up groceries, prescriptions, dry cleaning, and more.

Currently, the Houston service operates from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week and takes about 35 minutes to deliver—depending on traffic, of course. Maurais says they expect to expand to other areas of Houston in the future. So next time you don't want to (or can't) leave the house or office, just grab this handy app.

Do yourself a favor and visit their website, favordelivery.com. Use promotional code "OUTSMART" to receive \$6 off your first order.

Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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Food, Friends, and Cocktails . . .

Who could ask for anything more? Brunch of Gays hosts monthly meals

by **Bradley Donalson**

Photos by David Guerra

Established in 2013, the Brunch of Gays fills a deep longing for many LGBT Houstonians: enjoying good food with

good people. Brunch is many things—a mash-up of breakfast and lunch, a typically weekend event, and perhaps the gayest meal ever to grace the calendar. Brunch is a tradition dating back to 1895 and Guy Beringer's essay "Brunch: A Plea," in which he described brunch as "cheerful, sociable, and inciting. It is talk-compelling. It makes you satisfied with yourself and your fellow beings."

Upholding this longstanding tradition is the Brunch of Gays, a local organization that dedicates itself to bringing together LGBT individuals. Larry Wilkins, the first vice-president of the organization, says that one of the goals of the organization is "coming together as a community under the umbrella of having a meal." The brunches are held at different restaurants in Houston, usually in the Montrose or Heights areas. The restaurants chosen have included Baba Yega, Berryhill Baja Grill, Shade,

and Canopy. The board gets together to choose the restaurant, selecting gay-friendly or LGBT-owned businesses. The group brunch is always held on the third Sunday of each month at 11:30 a.m., and the locations are posted on the group's Facebook page about a month in advance.

The group is about inclusiveness, concentrating on the social and community aspects of coming together for a meal.



It's not just about the food: Brunch of Gays at last year's Pride Parade included (l-r) Rob Goodwin (president), Larry Wilkins (1st VP), Rob Risley (treasurer), Steve Juaneau (in cowboy hat), Humberto Cantu (in purple shirt), Julio Arredondo (in maroon tank), Amy Milberger, Jesse Martinez, Lety Valasquez, and Helga Gladik. *INSET* (clockwise from top left): Jackie Ritter, Alexandra Santos, Larry Wilkins, and Samir Joza at Baba Yega Cafe.

On average, a diverse group of about 25 people attends the Brunch of Gays event each month. Wilkins boasts that the brunches attract "gay men, lesbians, transgender people, [and] drag queens in full regalia." Some couples even bring their children, while others use the event as a professional networking opportunity. Some of the people who come to brunch are in their 50s or 60s, while others are in their 20s. The group is about inclusiveness, concentrating on the social and community aspects of coming together for a meal.

But if you think this group is all about cocktails and carbs, you'd be mistaken. The Brunch of Gays is proud to give back to the community in more ways than just providing a safe space to eat. Every November, they get together to host a canned-food drive that benefits the Houston Food Bank. And every other month, the group partners with Guava Lamp to put on the Brunch of Gays

Art Show. The group connects with artists in the community and offers them a free space to show up to six pieces of their work. In addition to providing the space, Brunch of Gays also offers hors d'oeuvres and light refreshments for the event, and cocktails can be purchased at the bar.

The group provides a service to the community, Wilkins says, by offering a place for those who want to socialize beyond the bar or club scene. "There's a lot of potential with this type of group," he says. "We're constantly looking ahead to what we can do for the gay community."

And the socializing often extends beyond the brunch itself. Many people who attend walk away with new friends . . . sometimes walking toward the bar to continue the fun!

More information about the Brunch of Gays can be found on their Facebook page at facebook.com/pages/Brunch-Of-Gays/439810899441487?ref=br_tf. ■

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Mix Together 5 Lesbians . . .

Add a quiche, and season with humor

by Donalevan Maines

Photo by Ruth S. McCleskey

This one's for the ladies: remember the first time you ate, uh, quiche? If so, you understand the anticipation, the exhilaration, and indescribable joy that the "widows" in the play *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* feel as they await the unveiling of a prizewinning quiche at a 1950s breakfast meeting of, yes, The Susan B. Anthony Society for the Sisters of Gertrude Stein.

Or are these women not widows, but (gasp) *lesbians*?

I mean, have you noticed that president Lulie Stanwyck pronounces apricot "APE-ricot"?!

When Veronica "Vern" Schultz sketches nudes, she leaves the socks on!

Dale Prist thinks mascara is a country in Africa, and chairwoman Wren Robin keeps jars of sawdust around her house like pot-pourri!

Clearly, there is something curious about the title of the show, which Boiling Point Players presents April 30–May 9 at Spring Street Studios.

But point of order: this meeting is a bit tardy.

Boiling Point co-founder Ruth S. McCleskey, the show's director, admits, "We didn't choose it for our first season last year because [it's a 1950s] period piece and required some set pieces we were not quite prepared to address. But going into our second season, *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* was a front-runner and then, after a hilarious table read, it was the clear winner.

"It's the perfect piece for us to do now,



One of the five lesbians eating a quiche: Autumn Clack (co-founder of Boiling Point Players), though not a lesbian in real life, plays one on stage. Is she about to make love to a quiche?

as we are still establishing our identity," McCleskey adds. "We think this production will help us grow artistically, work on new technical things, and is right in line with our mission statement: 'To bring authenticity, fun, and females to the stage.'"

5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche won "Best Overall Production" at the 2012 New York City International Fringe Festival.

"We think this production is right in line with our mission statement: 'To bring authenticity, fun, and females to the stage.'"

None of the group's co-founders—neither McCleskey nor Autumn Clack nor Melanie Martin—is a lesbian, but the jury is still out on the other three actresses being cast in the show. (The stage manager and assistant stage manager are part of Houston's LGBT community.)

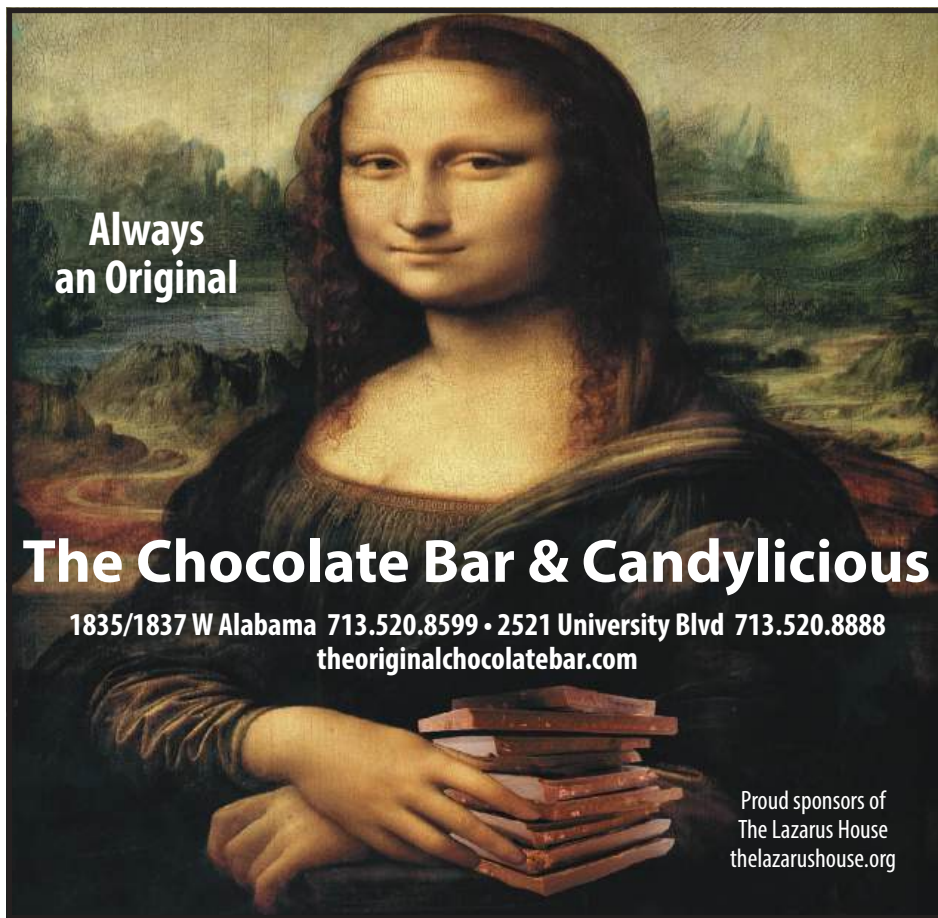
Clack and Martin will portray two of the five lesbians, but which ones they'll play will be up to the director, explains Martin. Similarly, actress Thea Lux has played both the Susan B. Anthony Society's secretary, Ginny, and Vern, the buildings and grounds chairwoman who pledges to ensure that in case of a Soviet invasion, the group's meeting room

is "the safest place in America." (It's 1956 and our "widows" are in the throes of the Cold War. In fact, nuclear war is just one of the catastrophes that may occur before the evening is out.)

Upon entering the theater, everyone in the audience receives a nametag with a popular pre-1950s woman's name (no Takeisha or Brittany, for example), per "playwrights' notes" by authors Andrew Hopgood and Evan Linder.

In fact, their script even requires that "each performance will feature a male audience member who is preselected (without their knowing it) to play [one of the characters]. He should receive [that character's] nametag and be seated in the audience where he is most visible to the audience. No one loves [this character]." →

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What: 5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche, presented by Boiling Point Players
When: April 30–May 9
Where: Studio 101, Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring Street
Details: boilingpointplayers.com.

eat, little, well, and often!

Mix Together 5 Lesbians continued from previous page

I nominate Bryan Maynard, a Spring Branch playwright who's had two (count 'em: two!) pieces performed by Boiling Point Players in competitions that selected skits for the trio's cabaret shows this year at Rudyard's British Pub in Montrose.

Maynard summarized his clever short play *Next!*, which Boiling Point performed in January, as follows: "All the world's a stage, and one woman has decided that it's time to recast her part." He imagined the woman, Daphne, auditioning new versions of herself after a heartbreak that leaves her adrift.

For the group's Fight Night evening in February, Maynard wrote *She Said, She Said* about a lesbian couple. Martin, who played the dominant figure, Sadie, said, "It was a group-therapy session whose whole point was to have a fight with your significant other that was not really a fight, but then it became really a fight." Portraying a lesbian, said Martin, "was like being in love with someone. It was feeling like you needed to fight with someone and they wouldn't fight. Aside from being a great script, it was a story about real people—a real couple."

The written caution in the script for *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* seemed to speak directly to the Boiling Point Players: "As a satire on the melodramatic fears during Cold War America and Today, there will be a temptation to play *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* as a campy comment on society, complete with knowing winks to the audience. Avoid this trap at all costs! The script, when delivered simply and with honest emotion, will take care of the satire on its own."

Moreover, the authors say, "While it is easy for the outside world to look at fundamentalists and see their beliefs and traditions as absurd and outrageous, fundamentalists themselves see only the absolute truth and majesty of their mission."

The playwrights assert, "These five women do not in any way find the events of the play funny."

In contrast, the women of Boiling Point Players promise audiences a night of hilarity, and they're especially eager to make fans of lesbian theatergoers, whose favor they crave.

What: 5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche, presented by Boiling Point Players

When: April 30–May 9

Where: Studio 101, Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring Street

Details: boilingpointplayers.com.

Donalevan Maines wrote about Brian Golub—who plays the ringleader to the band of brothers in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat—in the March issue of *OUTSMART* magazine.

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Texas Wins

A new campaign seeks to bring nondiscrimination ordinances to all Texas cities

by Christina Canales Gorczynski

If you're reading this, you probably already get it. But now more than ever, we need everyone to get it.

"It" is the need to end discrimination, once and for all, against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Texans. Most people are shocked to learn it's still perfectly legal to fire a gay or transgender person, or deny them housing or a table at a restaurant—not because of anything they did, but simply for who they are. While that's troubling in and of itself, a few vocal politicians have actually begun to consider expanding discrimination based on race, veteran status, and pregnancy.

Although polling continues to show strong majorities of Texans think gay and transgender people experience discrimination, a few legislators—unrepresentative of mainstream Texans—have proposed constitutional amendments that would allow some to claim that their religion gives them the right to ignore civil-rights laws.

I'm not joking. It's jaw-dropping and completely against our values as Texans and Americans. That's why Texas cities need nondiscrimination ordinances like the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) to protect all kinds of people from those who really do seem to want more discrimination in their city.

There are tens of thousands of LGBT people living and working in Houston—our family members, friends, and co-workers who just want the same (and not special) rights when it comes to basic equality. Most employers want to do the right thing. So it's hard to understand why a small and vocal group of opponents are so strongly against providing protections and recourse from employers and businesses when good judgment breaks down. This is

Texas Wins will ensure that all Texans are protected from discrimination.



Real Texas values: Texas Wins, a new statewide campaign, aims to ensure that all Texans are protected from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

what the HERO does, explicitly, by calling for "an environment that is free of any type of discrimination based on sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity, or pregnancy."

Sometimes our laws lead the way. Other times, our laws need to catch up. Corporate America is way ahead of local and state government when it comes to adopting LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination policies for its workers. Texas' largest employers—AT&T, Texas Instruments, American Airlines, Dell, BP, and Chevron—have been on record for a while in their support of workplace equality for all employees, including gay and transgender employees. They believe in judging employees on job performance—nothing more, nothing less.

Houston has more Fortune 500 company headquarters than any other city in America, except for New York. Major businesses in the city and tons of Fortune 500 companies nationally have their own nondiscrimination policies. The Greater Houston Partnership, which is comprised of more than 1,200 member companies that collaborate to influence Houston's business sector, strongly supported



HERO. They see the problem and have provided a solution. They value hiring and retaining top talent in a highly competitive marketplace, and they believe inclusion is good for business.



Happily (and legally) married: Austin couple Suzanne Bryant (l) and Sarah Goodfriend—who became the first same-sex couple to be legally married in Texas in February—attended the Texas Wins launch party held at the Equality Texas Capitol Club on March 3.

According to census data, our city is the most racially and ethnically diverse major metropolitan area in America. With museums, universities, and great cuisine, everyone should be able to experience all aspects of a great city like ours. As a native Houstonian, I love my hometown, and I believe in Houston's promise of being a city of freedom and opportunity for all people. But as an openly gay woman, I haven't always felt comfortable here.

When I moved back to Houston in →



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Texas Wins

continued from previous page

2005 to attend law school, I was reluctant to return to a place that I remembered being unfriendly to LGBT people. And just as I was returning in 2005, the divisive and discriminatory Proposition 2 campaign to ban marriage for same-sex couples in Texas was being put to a vote.

As one of the few openly gay members of my law school class, some of my peers approached me simply to boast about their vote in favor of Proposition 2, trying their best to make me feel unwelcome in my home state of Texas. I was being told that I did not fit in. Facing people who celebrated discrimination against me—and the ultimate success of Proposition 2—was demoralizing. The only reason I stayed was because I found a few like-minded friends and allies who encouraged me—and because I knew, in my heart of hearts, that I belonged here in Houston.

Now, 10 years later, Supreme Court observers are expecting marriage equality to become legal nationwide this summer. While that victory will include the great state of Texas, for too long our state's anti-equality forces have had the run of the field, and that must end now. We must continue the conversation beyond marriage equality. As a community, we must shift our focus to the lived equality of all members of our community.

All hardworking Houstonians should be able to put food on the table and a roof over their heads. So it's shocking that gay and transgender Houstonians can still be fired from their jobs or denied housing simply because of who they are. And, just as bad, our state legislature might soon be voting to potentially expand such discriminatory policies beyond the LGBT community to include veterans, single moms, people of faith, and many others. This is a can of worms we don't want to open. Discrimination of any kind is not in line with our values.

That's why I am honored to be the campaign director of a new campaign called Texas Wins. This new initiative will demonstrate—and illustrate—true Texan values of opportunity, freedom, and treating everyone as we wish to be treated. The statewide campaign will give voice to the majority of fair-minded Texans who do not support discrimination.

Texas Wins will ensure that all Texans—including those who are LGBT—are protected from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations. So far, the coalition includes Equality Texas, Texas Freedom Network, Texas Research Institute, ACLU of Texas, Athlete Ally, Faith in Public Life, Resource Center Dallas, Transgender Education Network of Texas, Black Transmen Inc., and the Human Rights Campaign. Through our outreach to businesses, strategic communications, advertising, opposition

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research, and grassroots mobilization, the campaign will amplify the values of opportunity and fairness shared by a majority of Texans. Mark McKinnon, who was previously George W. Bush's media advisor, will serve as chair of Texas Wins.

From Abilene to Houston, Harlingen to Austin, in every community across our beloved Texas, all Texans should be able to work hard and provide for their families without fear of being fired, denied housing, or refused service simply because of who they are or whom they love. Texas is a beacon for business and should follow corporate America's lead on this one.

We need Texans from all walks of life joining together under the core principles of freedom and fairness that define who we are as a state. Help kick off this campaign by sharing why you support nondiscrimination protections for LGBT Texans at txwins.org.

There is much work to be done to advance protections for gay and transgender people—and with Texas Wins, I have no doubt that together we can make Texas a place that all people will be proud to call home.

Christina Canales Gorczynski is campaign director for Texas Wins (txwins.org). Texas Wins ensures all Texans, including those who are gay and transgender, are protected from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

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Animated Avatar

Houston's Lou Weaver is the premier character in Transfigure8, a new app that offers support for the trans community

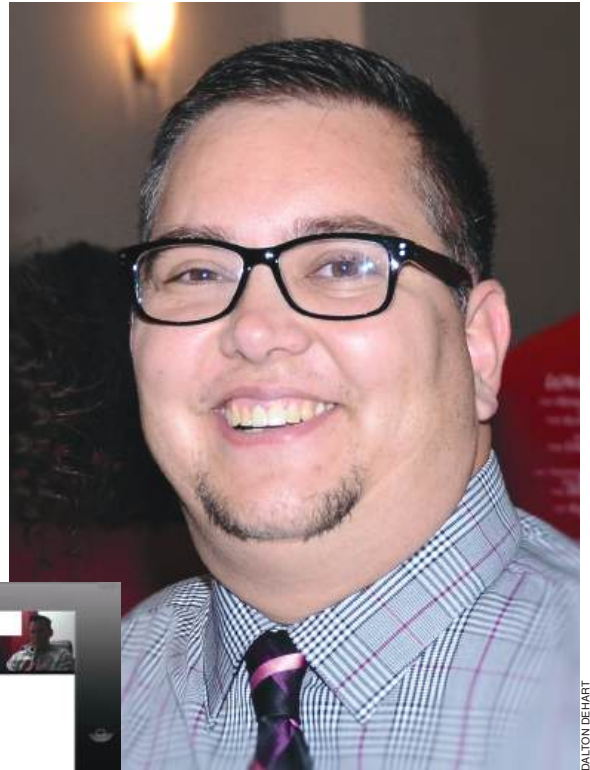
by David Goldberg

Nobody can deny that the LGBT community has had a stake in the smartphone app world since the beginning. After all, Grindr was created for us, by us, in 2009. Apps and robots are fast integrating into daily life, changing our conceptions of identity, the self, and gender. In 2010, Martine Rothblatt—the highest-paid female CEO in the United States and a transwoman—commissioned a robot counterpart to be designed after her wife, Bina. Now, in 2015, Brad Henry, an app developer in Columbus, Ohio, has gathered a team to use artificial intelligence to support and educate trans and questioning individuals, their allies, and their families.

Transfigure8, Henry's app-in-development, doesn't seek to create new sentient beings, but rather to replicate chosen trans leaders as animated avatars, or "agents," who can answer a user's questions based on voice recognition software. While still in the fundraising and development phase, Transfigure8 now has one prototype "agent"—Houstonian LGBT activist and transman Lou Weaver. Ideally, anyone could download the free app and engage in a dialogue with an animated talking-head version of Weaver—and in the future, other agents—who would give answers in his voice and his script, totally unedited. Weaver based his agent's platform off of "elevator speeches," as he calls them, along with trainings and curriculum that he has developed for his consulting firm, Lou

"Who would think that you can sit in the comfort of your own home and hide somewhere and talk to a little cartoon about what it means to be trans?"

A friendly face: people who are questioning their gender identity or are interested in learning more about the transgender experience can interact with an animated version of Houston transman Lou Weaver (pictured) on the Transfigure8 app. INSET: Weaver's avatar on Transfigure8.



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"It's in their words," Brad Henry says in an interview with OUTSMART. "We don't edit the script, so what they say is what goes in the app. That's very purposeful: I'm not here to edit their voice; they own their voice, it's not mine. From my perspective, it would be

wrong to make those types of changes. I want it to be as realistic as possible."

Weaver's on-screen agent appears soft and rather inoffensive, like a

character from the *Despicable Me* movies. That Weaver was a strong choice as the app's initial avatar is obvious: since moving to Houston in his mid-30s and beginning his transition in 2008, he has become a community sensation, with terms as president of the Transgender Foundation of America and on the boards of Houston GLBT Political Caucus and Montrose Grace Place. He was also a co-chair for last year's Creating Change

conference in Houston, among many other accomplishments in local politics.

"Lou really is the catalyst behind all of this," Henry says. The two met in 2014, when Henry was in Houston to give a presentation of his own, and happened to see Weaver speak. "Lou and I connected immediately. He is an extraordinary individual."

For Weaver, it was a no-brainer of an opportunity—not just to immortalize his likeness, but to provide information to people in regions of the country who may otherwise have limited or no access to trans education. "Who would think that you can sit in the comfort of your own home and hide somewhere and talk to a little cartoon about what it means to be trans?," Weaver tells OUTSMART.

Henry conceptualized the app after his own coming-out experience in his mid-20s. "It wasn't just about me coming →

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Animated Avatar continued from previous page

out [as a gay man]," Henry says. "Dealing with family and friends' feelings went on for years. It took me a while to realize that it wasn't just my coming out, but a process for the individuals around me. So I'm concerned about their perspective. This app was designed for anyone and everyone that wants to explore the topic and wants to be able to have an open dialogue without fear of repercussions or reprisals after saying the wrong thing."

Henry himself has been reminded of the need for Transfigure8 multiple times while interacting with the trans community about the app. Current and correct terminology changes fast for the trans community, especially as the larger surrounding culture becomes more aware of it. Henry says he is aware that he will make mistakes in the process, but that he is thankful to learn. "When we started working on the application, I used the word 'transgendered' and got smacked around for that," he says. "The first prototype agent we used was a drag queen, and I got corrected for that. Every day I learn something new, which is absolutely extraordinary."

But that's one of the main challenges of this venture: how do you stay perfectly up-to-date with a movement that is *by definition* transient? "Language around being trans changes so quickly," Weaver says. "Things I said a year ago are not even close to being socially accepted in most circles right now. Sometimes, as a trans person in this community, I can be behind the times or say something incorrectly because I can be unaware that we've changed." For now, Transfigure8 will focus on answering the basics, and serving as a bridge to resources like The Trevor Project and local community services.

Besides an ever-shifting lexicon, the other puzzle—and miracle—of creating representational trans agents is the vast diversity of backgrounds, religions, races, and gender identities that comprise a fast-evolving culture. Henry and his team hope to construct 50 agents in the next five years that will be able to best accommodate a wide matrix of intersectionality—for example, an agent with the experiences and understanding of living as an African-American transwoman, or an agent who could empathize with a Muslim mother whose son is intersex.

Until then, the team clearly maintains that Weaver is no paragon, but rather one of many helpful voices. "My story is representative of me and what it is like to grow up like me," Weaver says, "but there are so many other ways to grow up, or be trans, or whatever label someone might want or not want. This is not the only story by any means." What's more, Weaver's script avoids moralistic language and follows WPATH (World

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Professional Association for Transgender Health) standards. Any question that his app agent cannot yet answer will be used to help the app expand and learn.

The Transfigure8 team must raise \$50,000 to complete their prototype, at which time they'll approach LGBT and allied foundations to help sustain and expand the project. They face an uphill battle, as the app is not meant to be profitable. In the incipient crowdsourcing phase, Transfigure8 has received some criticism, but Henry maintains that it can't fulfill every need for everyone. It's only one tool.

"This app is meant to be supportive," he says. "It's just technology. It can't give you a hug. It can't tell you that tomorrow's going to be a better day." But for questioning individuals who feel stranded, it could provide essential insight into the biggest change of their lives.

For Weaver, that's a massive step forward. "When I was growing up, there wasn't a Google search for 'Why do I feel different?' Transgender wasn't a word in the vocabulary," he says. "This will be so valuable for people who don't necessarily have access to other people. We're only vulnerable when we feel all alone."

For more information, visit transfigure8.org.

David Goldberg is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.



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APRIL 18 - Kiki Dion Van Wales,
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Kara Dion



Kymber DeVine

APRIL 17 -

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McKnight Capri
and Violet S'Arbleu



Symphony
McKnight Capri



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APRIL 25 -

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We Were There, Too

103 years later, *OUTSMART* dives into the lives of LGBT passengers aboard the *Titanic*

by Barrett White

At 11:45 p.m. on April 14, 1912, the largest and most opulent ship of its era began to sink in the North Atlantic Ocean, leaving some 1,500 souls to drown or freeze in the frigid waters while 700 others in lifeboats looked on in horror.

We know this story all too well, thanks to James Cameron's 1997 blockbuster hit, *Titanic*, which scored 11 Academy Awards including Best Picture. That same year, *Titanic: A New Musical* opened on Broadway, bringing home five Tony Awards including Best Musical. (Except for the title, the movie and musical productions were entirely unrelated.)

It is clear that the story of the *Titanic* and her passengers is one that has captivated audiences for generations—beginning as early as May 1912 with a movie featuring Dorothy Gibson, a *Titanic* first-class passenger and actress who wore the same dress in the movie that she had worn aboard the ship just 29 days earlier.

Though the stories of Gibson and many other first-class passengers are well known, the faces and voices of the second- and third-class passengers have largely been forgotten.

Jonathan Ned Katz, co-director of OutHistory.org, has spent a lot of time researching the subject of gays and lesbians aboard the *Titanic*. Among them, notably, is

“In this era, no homosexual-heterosexual divide told people they had to be either gay or straight.”

Frank Millet, a painter who was openly in love with writer Charles Warren Stoddard. Though Stoddard passed away in 1909,

many of Millet's personal letters recovered by historians speak very prominently about Millet's feelings for Stoddard.

“A fascinating aspect of Millet's devotion to Stoddard is that just eight months after he realizes that Stoddard will never settle down with him in a domestic relationship, Millet is writing friends about his love for and impending marriage to Lily Merrill,” Katz says. “In this era, no homosexual-heterosexual divide told people they had to be either gay or straight, and Millet is a good example of that era's erotic fluidity.”

Millet traveled aboard the *Titanic* with

someone who may be quite familiar to those who have brushed up on their *Titanic* trivia—Major Archibald “Archie” Butt. Although the Titanic Historical Society maintains that after years of extensive research it has been concluded that Butt himself was not gay, some historians tend to report otherwise.

In the sinking, both Major Butt and Frank Millet perished. Some survivors went on to claim that Millet was last seen helping women and children into lifeboats before going down with the ship. →



A few of the other passengers: Marie Grice Young (l) and Ella Holmes White survived the *Titanic* disaster. Frank Millet (far right), who died in the sinking, was openly in love with writer Charles Warren Stoddard (center), who died in 1909.

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We Were There, Too continued from previous page

His body was recovered by the *Mackay-Bennett* and buried in Massachusetts.

OutHistory also speculates on the 30-year relationship between "brash" and "outspoken" Ella Holmes White and the reserved music teacher Marie Grice Young. The pair traveled together and shared a home for three decades before White's death, at which time most of her estate was left to Marie. Both women survived the sinking, but their manservant was lost at sea. White, having sustained an injury to her ankle when boarding the ship just days earlier, reportedly used her cane in an attempt to signal the rescue ship *Carthage*, as that cane had an electric light in the tip.

The Titanic Historical Society, the pre-eminent source for all information relating to the *Titanic*, upheld that there was an LGBT presence aboard the ship, but did not desire to divulge details. Clearly, societal norms and attitudes toward LGBT people in 1912 were drastically different from those today, but as research surrounding that fateful night continues, it only further proves that *we were there, too*.

Barrett White wrote about the online news platform Pizel in the March issue of OUTSMART magazine.



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Taking Flight

An interview with 'Blackbird' filmmaker Patrik-Ian Polk

by Gregg Shapiro

If you've ever seen any of Patrik-Ian Polk's films, you know one thing for certain: he's a master of the ensemble cast. Beginning with *Punks* and continuing through *Noah's Arc* (both the movie and the TV series), as well as *The Skinny*, Polk has a knack for creating characters who are smart, sincere, sensitive, and exceptionally sexy.

With *Blackbird* (Hicks Media), Polk steps out of his comfort zone as a screenwriter and adapts (with the aid of Rikki Beadle Blair) the titular Larry Duplechan gay-lit classic for the big screen. A difficult and emotional tale of a confused high school student named Randy who is struggling to come to terms with his sexual identity, *Blackbird* touches on topics that include coming out, religious fanaticism, manhood, madness, family relationships, and relationships with chosen families—all guided by Polk's deft hand.

Gregg Shapiro: When I interviewed you a couple of years ago about *The Skinny*, you were already in pre-production on *Blackbird*. Why did you choose Larry Duplechan's gay-lit classic *Blackbird* to be your first adapted work for film?

Patrik-Ian Polk: I first read Larry Duplechan's book when I was a teenager in college in Boston. It was the first contemporary gay coming-of-age novel told from a black character's perspective, so I related to it. And Duplechan's storytelling is so magical; I knew I wanted to turn it into a film someday. I think I wrote my first draft of the script back in 1991, in film school. I kept that proj-



Coming out: Claire (Mo'Nique) comforts her son, who is struggling with his sexuality, in *Blackbird*. Patrik-Ian Polk (pictured on the set of the film, left) is the director.

ect on the shelf, knowing one day it would happen. Twenty-five years later, here we are, and the story is still just as relevant. We've seen gay white coming-out stories told every possible way—there are literally dozens of these films. I thought it was about time we saw that story told from a black gay man's perspective.

Has Larry seen the film, and if so, what does he think of it?

Larry has seen the film. He was at our world premiere this February at Los Angeles'

Pan African Film Festival, where we won the Founder's Award for Best Feature. He liked it. He was aware that I'd made a bit of a departure from the book—par for the course when you're adapting a novel into a film—but he seemed genuinely excited. And I'm just glad the film's release will strike up more interest in his books, because the story he starts in *Blackbird* continues across several more novels.

***Blackbird* is also notable in that it is a collaboration with gay actor/writer/filmmaker**

Rikki Beadle Blair. How did that come to be?

After living with my screenplay adaptation for several years, I decided it needed an injection of something different. Rikki and I had become friends and collaborated on my series *Noah's Arc*. Rikki, who is British, served as a story editor and wrote several episodes. I asked him to take a stab at rewriting the script, and he did a fantastic job. I literally told him that I wanted the role of Claire, the lead character's mother, to be the kind of meaty part that attracts Oscar-caliber actresses. Little did I expect that we would end up getting an Oscar-winner [Mo'Nique]. So obviously, bringing Rikki on board was a smart decision. He continues to make major waves in the British theater and independent film scene.

I'm so glad you mentioned Mo'Nique, who plays Randy's mother, Claire. →



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Taking Flight continued from previous page

What was the experience of working with Mo'Nique like for you?

Mo'Nique is a consummate professional. I was pinching myself when she told me she wanted to not only star in *Blackbird*, but executive-produce it with her husband, Sidney Hicks. As you can imagine, we don't get a lot of rehearsal time on independent films, but Mo'Nique didn't need any. She came to the set ready to play, and she made magic with every take. I am in awe of her. That Oscar was no fluke, let me tell you!

At the opposite end of the experience spectrum is newcomer Julian Walker, who plays lead character Randy. Why was he chosen for the role?

As usual when casting my gay black films, I encountered difficulties when approaching Hollywood actors. There's always silly trepidation about playing gay black characters. But I just trusted that the universe would send me who I was supposed to have in that role. And then young Julian Walker sent in an audition tape. He's a sophomore at the University of Southern Mississippi—the college in my hometown, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where we filmed the movie. Julian was a novice, and it showed. But I saw a natural talent, an X-factor that told me he was the one. After a few in-person auditions and coaching sessions, he nailed it. And it didn't hurt that he sings like an angel as well. Music plays a big part in *Blackbird*, as the lead character is a star of his church choir. And I love the fact that Julian is openly gay. It's so refreshing and indicative of how much farther the next generation is going in terms of fearless expression of their sexuality.

I'm so glad you mentioned the way music plays a prominent role in *Blackbird*. In some ways it feels like a nontraditional movie musical. Please say something about the way music is incorporated into the movie.

The lead character in the film is a singer in the church choir. He sings at school in the chorus and in theater productions, and he's genuinely devoted to his Christian faith. And all this takes place in a small town in Mississippi. It was important to me that the music reflects all these characteristics: traditional Southern gospel, Mississippi-roots music, bluegrass, country, soul. So I picked an array of traditional gospel hymns, which I re-worked to reflect a teenager in 2014. And I wrote some country-pop songs for him to sing as well. I even sing a couple of songs on the soundtrack. And we found an amazing local band, the Rooster Blues, who provided all the great country/bluegrass tunes. It's a nicely eclectic mix of music that perfectly fits the movie and its locale.

Blackbird also makes comments about religion, as well as other hot-button social topics, including being gay, coming out, teen pregnancy, and abortion. Can you say something about the relevance of social commentary in your work?

As far as I think we've come in my home state, Mississippi is still very conservative when it comes to politics and legislation. It's one of the leading states in terms of abortion restrictions, and they recently signed a bill into law allowing businesses to discriminate or refuse services based on religious beliefs. Meanwhile, the state is last on many key issues in terms of education, healthcare, teen pregnancy, and poverty rates. Since we have a teen pregnancy in the film, it was the perfect opportunity to reflect the struggles we are having there with access to abortion and keeping it safe and legal and accessible. There's only one clinic in the entire state, and many women are having to travel across state lines to access these services. It's shameful.

Prior to opening in theaters, *Blackbird* made the rounds on the film-festival circuit. How was that experience for you?

The film festivals have always been an invaluable resource for independent filmmakers, but especially for a filmmaker like me. There's no one out there doing gay black films right now. I'm the only one. Mainstream Hollywood still largely ignores us as a demographic and as a subject matter. If it were not for these film festivals, both gay and straight, my work would not have reached half the people it has. It would be very difficult to do what I do without the existence of the film festival circuit.

Have you started thinking about or working on your next project?

I am fortunate enough to have a little space and time to choose what's next. I'm reading scripts that other producers and companies are submitting. And I'm writing an array of projects, trying to decide what I want to focus on. I'm also allowing the universe to talk to me and guide me to whatever makes the most sense. I spend my work-days writing for about four hours in the morning, then a little exercise, followed by about four hours of songwriting and producing music demos. I'm a storyteller, whether it be in films or music. So I feel pretty lucky to be able to do what I do professionally. But whatever I do next, it's going to be bolder than anything you've seen so far. And you won't expect it—I can promise you that.

Blackbird is scheduled for release on April 24.

Gregg Shapiro also writes the *GrooveOut* column in this issue of *OUTSMART* magazine.



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A Winning Team

Theater LaB Houston celebrates its 22nd anniversary with *'Vanities, the Musical'*

by Donalevan Maines

Jimmy F. Phillips helps Theater LaB Houston celebrate its 22nd anniversary this month by holding up a mirror to three Texas women in *Vanities, the Musical*.

"What a ride and adventure it has been," says TLH's out producing director, Gerald LaBita. "This marks Jimmy's 21st production with TLH. "He is the musical comedy's director, choreographer, and designer."

If Phillips were a character in the show, he would almost certainly be Kathy, the head cheerleader who organizes meetings, pep rallies, proms, sorority bashes, and reunions that involve Kathy and BFFs Mary and Joanne.

"Jimmy has so many talents. He has a great and unique gift as a theater professional because he can work across all mediums—directing, choreographing, designing, and acting in dramas, comedies, and musicals," says LaBita. "Jimmy is a true Renaissance man in the Houston theater community."

"I was born in Houston and grew up on the Houston-Pasadena border," says Phillips, who graduated from South Houston High School in 1973—10 years after the first scene of *Vanities*.

Heifner wrote *Vanities* as a play in 1976, and he also wrote the script (or book) for the 2009 off-Broadway musical version that Phillips says includes a coda to three of the play's scenes that were set in a rural gymnasium in 1963, a college sorority house in 1968, and a New York City apartment in 1974.

"I think he wanted to bring [the characters] up-to-date," says Phillips, explaining that the musical reunites the women in 1990. "The book is [Heifner's], and I'm sure he had a huge part in the score, although both the music and lyrics are completely credited to David Kirshenbaum."



We're number one: (l-r) Joanne (Shelby Bray), Kathy (Danica Johnston), and Mary (Robin Van Zandt) cheer it up in Theater LaB's *Vanities, the Musical*. INSET: director/choreographer Jimmy Phillips.

Some representative songs from the score include "An Organized Life," "Friendship Isn't What It Used to Be," and "Letting Go."

The play seemed to be performed everywhere back in the late 1970s and early '80s, along with *The Texas Trilogy* by Preston Jones, which included *Lu Ann Hampton Laverty Overlander* (another drama

must not make a statement. It should be incidental."

Like the play it's based on, Phillips says *Vanities, the Musical* "takes place at a period of time when the whole fabric of America was changing—that whole era of naiveté. America was at a turning point.

"How drastically America changed is shown through these three women," he explains. "They begin as girls with nothing on their minds but cheerleading and boys and having parties."

Kathy is planning a football dance with the theme of "Over the Rainbow." "We could make a huge rainbow out of chicken wire from one end of the gym to the other," she says, "and stuff the chicken wire with colored Kleenex."

Mary is worried because she keeps letting her boyfriend pet a little further →

"There was never any question in my mind about my sexuality—I always knew I was gay."

about a Texas cheerleader whose life doesn't turn out the way she assumes it will).

Heifner was specific in how *Vanities* is to be staged; his script even specifies the pre-show music to be played as the audience enters, with the three actresses already sitting onstage at makeup mirrors.

"The mirrors face the audience," wrote Heifner. "All costume changes are made onstage in front of the audience. The purpose for this is that the audience should see the physical changes with the passage of time."

Moreover, his script states, "The actresses do not leave the stage during the play. These transitions must not be rushed. They should be covered with music, but the music



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A Winning Team continued from previous page

each time he gives her a present. “He’s got more gifts lined up than I’ve got parts to give,” she says.

Joanne envies her friends for knowing what they will major in at college. “I want to go to college,” she says, “but I sure don’t care to learn anything.”

Phillips began studying theater at San Jacinto College in Pasadena, but a full scholarship to Stephens College (a girls’ school in Columbia, Missouri) lured him away for his junior and senior years.

“They auditioned young men from across the country and only had four openings per year,” he explains. “The school had a professional faculty of actors and would use young men to play juvenile parts.”

At Stephens College, Phillips says he appeared in the musicals *Camelot*, *Li’l Abner*, and *South Pacific*, and the plays *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *King Lear*, and *The Royal Family*.

Recalling his return to the Houston area in 1978 with a bachelor’s degree in theater and dance, Phillips says, “It wasn’t until after I got out of college that I had a real boyfriend. It was never a big concern of mine. There was never any question in my mind about my sexuality—I always knew I was gay. But this was the late ’70s and early ’80s—there was no AIDS around, and the kind of fun we had, like going to drag shows at the Copa—it was a great, naïve time.”

In 1983, Phillips moved to New York City and worked for Gay Men’s Health Crisis, the AIDS service organization whose genesis is portrayed in Larry Kramer’s drama, *The Normal Heart*. “I was as involved in that as I could possibly be,” says Phillips. “We watched so many talented people in the theater community succumb to that disease.”

Twenty-two years ago, Phillips was back home when he met his partner, Steven Jones, who is the musical director for *Vanities*, *the Musical*. They live in the Heights. “We met at Houston Ballet, where I was taking a class and he was the accompanist,” recalls Phillips. “I said, ‘The accompanist is cute,’ but somebody told me he was in a relationship with a dancer in the company. But he asked me out, and I don’t know what happened. We just sort of hit it off.”

In 1994, Phillips auditioned for the Stephen Sondheim musical *Assassins* at the fledgling TLH in the Heights and was cast in the ensemble, as well as winning the part of former President Gerald Ford, who survived an assassination attempt by lesbian Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme. “Jimmy did a bang-up job,” says TLH director LaBita. “During the time that followed, he proved himself to be a great friend and asset to TLH.”

“One never knows how long a theater company will last,” says Phillips. “I am very

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proud of my association with Jerry LaBita, who is very forward-thinking. He brings shows to Houston that normally wouldn't be presented here. That's his mission—to spotlight cutting-edge theater that's contemporary and new."

For the past 18 years, Phillips has taught middle-school theater at Annunciation Orthodox School in Montrose while playing roles such as MacMillan in *Big, the Musical* and Mushnick in *Little Shop of Horrors* for Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS); Major Bouvier in *Grey Gardens* and Peter in *Company* at Stages Repertory Theatre; and Cladwell in *Urinetown* and Wolf/Cinderella's Prince in *Into the Woods* at Main Street Theater. He has directed plays such as *The Little Dog Laughed*, *True Love Lies*, and *Barrymore*, and has both directed and choreographed revues and musicals such as *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, *A New Brain*, and *Pageant*.

What: *Vanities, the Musical*

When: April 8–May 3

Where: Obsidian Art Space, 3522 White Oak

Details: Tickets (\$30 & \$35); thelabhou.org or 713.868.7516.

Donalevan Maines also writes about 5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche in this issue of OUTSMART magazine.




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Dance from the Heart

Local dance studio teaches female empowerment, acceptance, and more

by Bradley Donalson



A dance family: the Dance from the Heart company remembers one of their most popular shows, *Domari*, as they celebrate their 10th anniversary.

Nestled on the eastern edge of the Heights is a gathering space for people who use their bodies as art. The Dance from the Heart (DFTH) studio on Houston Avenue provides a home for the DFTH belly dance company (also called Middle Eastern dance), as well as the many classes that teach a number of dance styles, fitness programs, and music lessons.

Dance from the Heart got its start a decade ago when a group of dancers came together for a benefit to help tsunami victims in Southeast Asia. They organized and gained nonprofit status in 2007 and began donating to a multitude of causes, including Lighthouse Houston, the Alzheimer's Association, and Amazing Place. Now, the group focuses their donations toward the Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorder Center. Dance from the Heart will also be a sponsor of the 2015 Houston Oriental & Folklore Dance Festival this coming May.

DFTH provides classes, workshops, and artist-in-residence programs for anyone who might be interested in dance, experienced or not. Classes range from different types of yoga to ballet to fusion belly dance. You

can take belly dance courses with Anne Caruthers (president and creative director), Jade Gibson, Kimberly Larkspur (artistic director), Jenny Trimmer, or Clara Ortiz. Or, you can take ballet with Joe Modlin. Multiple types of yoga are offered by Madison McBurney, Jonathan Stein, Jenny Trimmer, and Zymirrah.

The Dance from the Heart studio is filled with bright, lively people who combine artistic expression and a

great workout into a unique and utterly enjoyable experience. Their close relationships show not only in how they work together to create beautiful movement, but also in the way they interact with one another. Rehearsals are a mix of laughter, playful banter, and an almost military-like seriousness when there's work to be done. Larkspur can go from a playful quip about getting a peek at Modlin's underwear before every class to an intense focus on her movements in about as much time as it takes to pull back her shining river of hair. Justin Piwetz will make a pun and chuckle with the group before starting to pound out a rhythm for the dancers—or just so he can hear it himself!

Of course, when the drums start going, it seems like it would take a Herculean effort to keep this company from dancing. And standing over all of it is Caruthers, sometimes watching the antics like an indulgent mother and sometimes joining in just for the joy of it. The atmosphere exudes a sense of dedication, comfort, and home. It's a place where hard work produces astounding beauty, and where you can be yourself without reservation. When asked about the company's relationship with the LGBT community, Caruthers responds, "I've never really thought about it that way. I've got friends and family who are gay, and it's not some kind of special relationship. It's just a part of life."

While the instructors at DFTH are open to teaching anyone the intricacies of their art, they acknowledge and celebrate the history of Middle Eastern dance as a primarily feminine form. What is commonly known as belly dance has roots that trace back into the mists of time. One thing that most belly-dance scholars agree on is that in ancient cultures it was primarily a dance done by women, for women—usually in the privacy of their

homes or at social gatherings like weddings. And when the men danced, it was traditionally for other men. Caruthers

A place where hard work produces astounding beauty, and you can be yourself without reservation.

says it's a little different at DFTH. "Primarily, it's a woman's dance from a cultural perspective, but we are not gender-specific. At its root, it's a folk dance. Here, we don't have that same restriction."

Some popular theories about the origins or inspirations surrounding belly dance include divine inspiration, →

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fertility rites, and just plain fun. Caruthers thinks belly dancing developed organically. "Women were preparing for childbirth, and my personal belief is that is the root." Caruthers goes on to talk about how the movements in Middle Eastern dance use the same muscles that are required in childbirth. These thoughts are echoed by Karol Harding, "The Joyful Dancer," who has written that Middle Eastern women find it amusing that the famous Lamaze birthing classes teach the same movements as belly dance.

Middle Eastern dance is not wildly popular in the U.S., and Caruthers thinks that this may have something to do with Western audiences not caring enough to look up the dance's history, and DFTH is trying to change that.

Whether you are looking for a way to express yourself, to learn more about the movement and music of other cultures, to exercise, or to fill a weekday evening with a fun and energetic class, Dance from the Heart is more than willing to help you. Their instructors are open and accepting of people for who they are, and everyone who wants to come and experience dancing is welcome.

More information about Dance from the Heart and their class schedule can be found at dfth.org. ■

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Charity Begins at Home

Favorite Charities of Real-Estate Professionals

Compiled by Marene Gustin

OUTSMART's real-estate professionals provide more than just expertise in assisting their clients with buying or selling homes. Many of them are seasoned professionals who volunteer their time and resources to charitable organizations. We asked them about their passion for the business and the community. Here's what they had to say, along with a few amusing stories thrown in.

Bryan K. Cotton

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Charity: Out for Education



Bryan Cotton loves selling homes, but he also loves Out for Education. "Once you meet the students we help, it's hard not to feel passionate about Out for Education," he says. "They are really the motivating force behind what we do,

and every student leaves an impact on you." Besides being the current president of the organization that provides scholarships for Houston's LGBT youth, Cotton has been selling homes for 17 years and just loves working with people. He likens himself to a temporary therapist to help guide them through the home-buying process. But things don't always go as planned when showing homes.

"Nothing quite tops the time I walked into a home, with my clients next to me, to find a young college couple participating in the mating dance on the entry hall floor," he laughs. "It was his parents' home and he had just arrived from college with his girlfriend without his parents' knowledge. My clients and I received quite a different showing than we were expecting!"

Jeremy Fain

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Charity: Bering Omega Community Services



Jeremy Fain

Jeremy Fain volunteers with several charities and organizations including the Human Rights Campaign and the Houston Tennis Club, but it's Bering Omega Community Services (where he is president of the Young Professionals Board) where he feels he

does the most good for the community.

"How could I not be passionate about these organizations and what they provide?" he asks. "Every aspect of these groups and every dollar that is donated is done so from a selfless place."

He gets a thrill helping people find their homes—and a few chuckles. He recently helped a former partner sell a home and buy a new one. His entire office saw the client satisfaction survey that the man sent in.

"One of the questions on the survey asks how you came to work with the agent who represented you," he recalls. "His answer was 'The Realtor is my ex-lover.' If you know who I'm talking about, you know how his sense of humor is cut, dry, and to the point. I just happened to walk by the office of the company owner the day his particular survey came through and she yelled... 'JEREMY! Get in here! Read this. It's about time we got some spice in this office!'"

Lynette Lew

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Lynette Lew

was just recognized at our national convention with the Community Involvement Award.

"Triumph Over Kid Cancer raises money to help find a cure for cancers that attack children and teenagers," she explains. "They have seen first-hand how cancer affects both the patients and their families. More importantly, they have seen that a simple thing like hope can raise you from all lows, and that hope is in the collaborative research for new treatments. M.D. Anderson

Cancer Center has agreed to match dollar for dollar all funds raised by TOKC for research in pediatric cancer.

"The Sunshine Kids is a nonprofit organization dedicated to children with cancer. They are committed to providing positive group activities and emotional support for young cancer patients. The Sunshine Kids provides a variety of programs and events, free of charge, for kids who are receiving cancer treatments in hospitals across North America."

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Gary Greene is recognized as one of the top fundraising companies for The Sunshine Kids.

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for a decade, and I believe in her vision and passion for their very special program."

Being of service was strongly instilled in him growing up. Besides his charity work, he feels extremely lucky to have found a career where he can be of service.

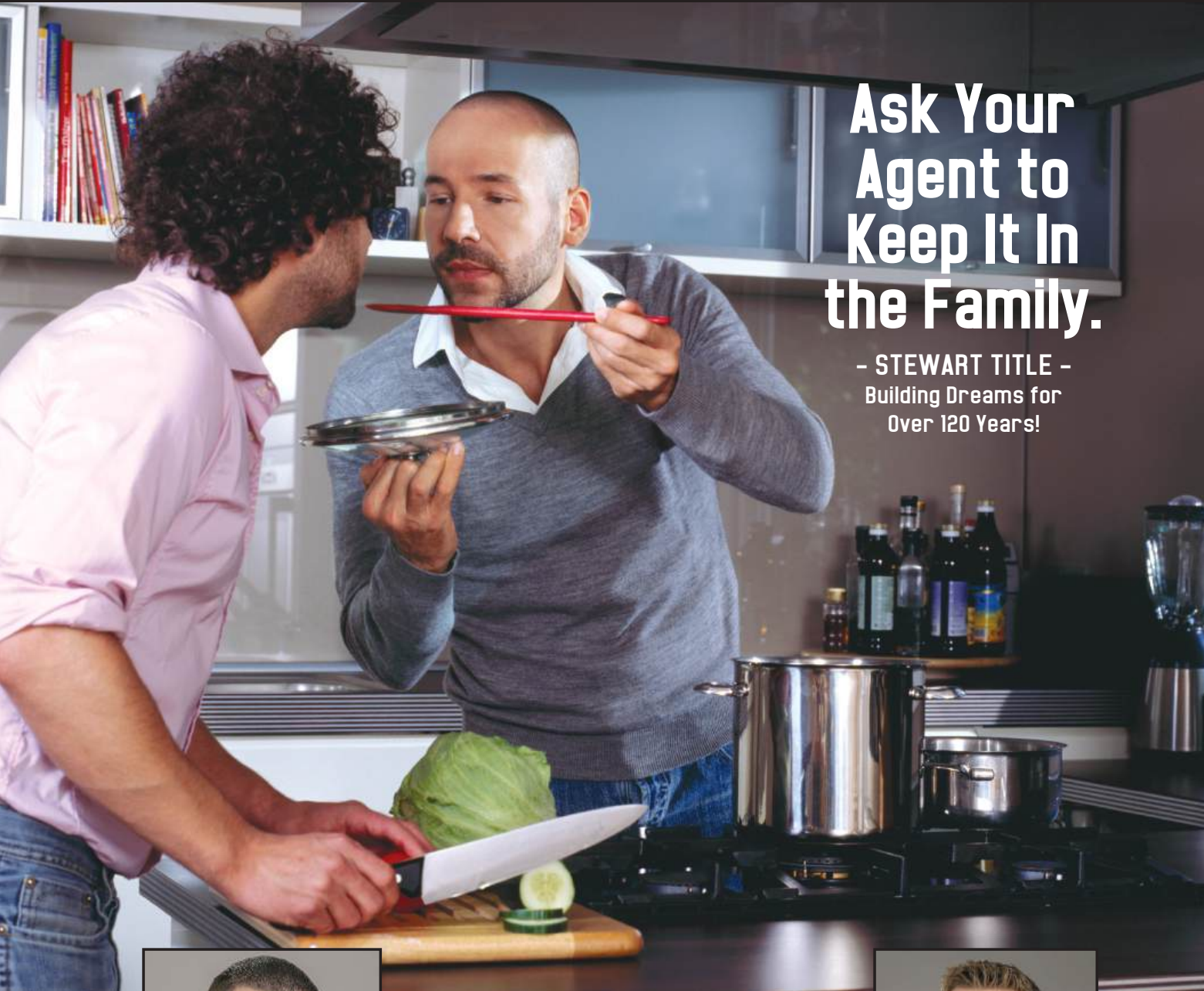
"I take my clients' needs personally, and it pays off when I know I was able to make buying or selling a really enjoyable experience," he says. Although there was that one time he was showing a home and he and the client stumbled across a dancer's pole in the middle of the living room.

"Luckily, my client had a sense of humor, and we had a big laugh at that one!"

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Charity Begins at Home

continued from page 63

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Realtor Karen Derr loves neighborhoods; that's why she supports the Garden Oaks Home and Garden Tour as well as Houston Heights Association charity auctions, S.N.A.P., and Houston Tomorrow.

"Neighborhoods are the building blocks of our city, and nothing can positively

impact a neighborhood more than an organized and connected H.O.A. or civic association," Derr says. "Even if the neighbors just meet monthly for a social event, that connectivity and those lines of communication will serve the community well when challenges do arise."

She loves helping clients see the potential beauty in homes, as well as advising sellers about ways to make homes more attractive to buyers.

"When I owned a larger real-estate brokerage firm, I accompanied one of our young agents to

an important meeting with a builder," she says. "The builder had salvaged wood he wanted to use as trim in a project he would be listing with us, and he wanted to know our opinion as to what style trim might be popular with buyers. My nervous associate piped up that his favorite style was missionary style. I blushed and quickly suggested the builder go with a Craftsman-style trim."

Richard Hill

Keller Williams Realty
713.863.9494 • richardhill@kw.com

Charity: Out for Education



Richard Hill

Richard Hill was president of Out for Education for two years, helping provide scholarships for LGBT youth. "I strongly believe in this organization for many reasons," Hill says. "To many, scholarships are the only means some have to an education. You never know someone's story—they may have been kicked out of their home for being who they are, and even disenfranchised by their families. No one should ever be denied an education for those reasons."

He finds true joy in aiding people with finding their dream home. "Being able to be a part of one of the biggest decisions of someone's life is a rewarding feeling," Hill says. "Getting to wit-

ness their true excitement and happiness is what keeps me passionate."

Ryan Norris

iMortgage
832.489-8044 • ryan.norris@imortgage.com

Charity: Multiple Charities



Ryan Norris

"The cornerstone of the American dream is home ownership, and I get to help make that possible," says Ryan Norris of his job at iMortgage. He knows it's important for LGBT people to have real-estate professionals who understand their particular situation

and its uniqueness, especially when purchasing a home with a partner in a state like Texas that doesn't recognize gay marriage.

He also knows it's important to give back to the community.

"Houston Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity, Lambda NextGen Houston, Human Rights Campaign, Texas A&M Association of Former Students," he mentions the organizations he's involved with. "My participation in these is varied between financial contributions and time commitments, and the organizations represent local, regional, and national interests. These organizations benefit not only my local community, but →



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Charity Begins at Home

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also my university and the greater LGBT community in the country. As a Texas A&M alumnus, it is especially important for me to give back to the university that provided so much experience and education for me."

Richard Ray

John Daugherty Realtors

713.351.4674 • richardray@johndaugherty.com

Charity: AIDS Foundation Houston



Richard Ray

Richard Ray loves helping people. "There is no greater thrill than helping others purchase the home of their dreams or helping folks sell one of the largest and most important assets that they may ever own," he says of his work. "How cool is that?"

But he is also very passionate about his work with

AIDS Foundation Houston.

"AIDS Foundation Houston, Inc., provides prevention, support, and housing services to people who have the highest risk of being infected or affected by HIV/AIDS," Ray explains. "The core of our work is to decrease the impact of HIV/AIDS in

an individual's life and in our community. I have been serving on the board of AIDS Foundation Houston for the past couple of years, and I am currently the board chair for 2014 and 2015.

"AFH is the only community organization in Houston whose sole focus is to prevent HIV and to serve the HIV community."

Michael Caballero

Stewart Title

713.401.1850 • mcaballero@stewart.com

Charity: Homeless LGBT youth in Houston



Michael Caballero

Michael Caballero works in The Heights where home sales are exploding. "Every day is a new adventure, and I continue to learn," he says. "Researching property history and reading the old deeds while preparing for a closing is like being a detective. Then sharing the excitement of the first-time homebuyer or the couple moving from their first home, and the lucky ones who are downsizing as they prepare to retire."

He recently attended a meeting to discuss the issues and concerns of homeless LGBT youth in Houston. The meeting was both heartbreaking and uplifting. Heartbreaking, he says, to hear the stories and see the statistics, knowing that

each number was actually a child in need. Uplifting because of all the men and women who attended and pledged their time and effort to solve this growing issue.

"I think few people had the perfect childhood while growing up," Caballero says. "With that said, I had amazing parents who loved and encouraged me. According to the numbers provided at the initial meeting, over 40 percent of the children on the street were put out of their home. These children need to be given a chance to become our future."

Tim Anthony and Calvin Upton

Anthony Upton Properties

832.722.690 • tim@timanthony.com

Charity: Bunnies on the Bayou



Calvin Upton

"We first sponsored Bunnies on the Bayou (BOTB) in 2014, and we are both proud and excited to be sponsoring them for a second consecutive year," writes Tim Anthony. "We were very familiar with their successful 36 years of operation before coming on board as sponsors, and

are even more excited to have the opportunity to work with them again this year. We see our partnership with BOTB as an asset, as their →

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GAY HOMES HOUSTON

To our proud OutSmart readers, my name is Chyna Gragg, Realtor with Champions Real Estate Group. I relocated to Houston from Atlanta and spent a lot of time on the East Coast including NYC. In my spare time I enjoy church, reading, socializing, movies, and dancing. I am also a volunteer donor for the MD Anderson Cancer Center.

My greatest asset is that I genuinely love people and helping others. Every day my goal is to do something nice for someone else whether it's giving a compliment, holding open a door, giving advice, or showing appreciation for someone's hard work.

One of the strengths I most admire about the LGBT community is the cohesiveness. The group is strong and united all over the world. I often wonder, What if other communities, races, or nations were united like the LGBT community. We would clearly live in a better world.

Just imagine if we all shared the same looks, dress, education, style, and personalities. We would live in a very boring world. We all are unique which makes each of us very special.

I personally was a victim of discrimination many times in my life and even after purchasing a nice home, I was told that I did not belong in that "particular" neighborhood and to "get out". I am a very strong believer that everyone should be treated with dignity, respect, and equality. There is NO human superior over another.

Lastly, the LGBT community is vibrant and as colorful as the Pride flag itself. I personally am so proud to be an ally and to serve the community, which I sincerely adore.




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Charity Begins at Home

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Tim Anthony

work in community education and LGBT awareness efforts closely aligns with our commitment to creating an inclusive Houston."

Besides being involved with multiple LGBT charities, Anthony is passionate about real estate.

"One of the most rewarding aspects of seeing real estate is seeing a happy client and strengthening the community that we live in and call home," he adds. "Nothing defines success better than watching an individual or family start the next chapter of their lives in their new home."

V.J. Tramonte

Joe Tramonte Realty
409-765-9837 • vj@tramonterealty.com
Charity: Multiple Charities



V.J. Tramonte

V.J. Tramonte, well known on Galveston Island, has many civic projects, including the Galveston Rotary Club, contributor to the AIDS Coalition of Coastal Texas, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, and Galveston Meals on Wheels.

"We have all been affected by AIDS, cancer, heart attacks, and hunger in Galveston and elsewhere," he says. "I just try to help where I can."

Somehow he finds time to work at his passion as well. "I love meeting all kinds of people and showing the variety of lifestyles that Galveston has to offer—beach, canal, historic, new construction, mid-century, condominiums—we have it all!"

He remembers showing two gay clients condos, and they all got stuck in an elevator for two hours. "We became very good friends!" he says.

Jaden Nguyen

Coldwell Banker United, Realtors
713.304.7749 • jorjaden@gmail.com
Charity: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



Jaden Nguyen

"Growing up, my parents allowed me to be immersed in art by enrolling me in an art school. MFAH provides many art programs to children that inspire them to explore their creative expressions," says Jaden Nguyen. "Art affects so many aspects

of our lives, and MFAH preserves the history of art and inspires new visions of art from the new generations."

He says he's passionate about real estate

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because he views every home as a piece of art that shows the artistry and personality of its owner. "My appreciation of the beauty of each home helps me do my job well when I represent the seller or the buyer," he says.

And then there was that time a seller sent him a list of upgrades she had done on her luxury home. "There was an item listed as 'Wood shutters.' I told her that I'm not familiar with that feature, but it sounds like it requires a lot of maintenance. She laughed and said she meant to say 'Wood shutters.' Her house sold quickly. I told her it was because of those beautiful 'Wood shutters.' I can sell a house with that feature all day long!"

Tim Surratt

Greenwood King
713.320.5881 • timsurratt@yahoo.com

Charity: DePelchin Children's Center and SEARCH Homeless Shelter



Tim Surratt

"As the proud father of two adopted kids, I like to help any organization for kids," says Tim Surratt, who is also heavily involved with the Houston Association of Realtors. "I have homeless family members and believe in the mission of SEARCH," Surratt says,

"which helps stabilize, educate, and employ Houston's homeless population."

And he loves his work. "I absolutely love Houston because it is such a great city," he says. "That makes it easy for me to be an ambassador and help people settle into our wonderful city by finding them a new home."

As for any funny stories about his work, he's coy. "Yes . . . but what happens in showings, stays in showings!"

Tom Schwenk

The House Company
713.857.2309 • tom@thehousecompany.com

Charity: Multiple Charities



Tom Schwenk

Tom Schwenk is a very busy man when it comes to Galveston charities. He is currently a board member of the Downtown Partnership, the Galveston Sustainable Communities Alliance, president of the Galveston Association of Realtors, a past

president and treasurer of the San Jac Neighborhood Association, Islander by Choice Beach Revue, a major sponsor of the Chamber of Commerce, a Landmarks commissioner, past president and board member of the Galveston Historic Foundation, and House Chair for the GHF Annual Homes tour.

"They are all about making our community a better place to live," Schwenk says. "I'm involved with all aspects of our city, from kids to pets to →

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Charity Begins at Home

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houses! Next up: becoming a mentor at Ball High.”

As for work, he has a fascinating story. “Last year I was the listing agent for identical houses on one lot that were sold to identical twins,” he says. “It ended up on an episode of *House Hunters*. Galveston is a diverse, accepting community, and when my husband Jack and I got married last year for our 30th anniversary, past homebuyers held a reception for us that was a heck of a lot of fun!”

Rance Helton

Keller Williams

832.316.4896 • rance.helton@kw.com

Charity: The Wounded Warriors Project



Rance Helton

Rance Helton works in The Woodlands and loves real estate because “I love helping people achieve the dream of home ownership.” And he loves meeting people, plain and simple.

“I am passionate about supporting The Wounded Warriors Project,” Helton says. “I am a veteran of the U.S. Navy, and I also like to support Homes for Heroes because a lot of the everyday people in America are heroes on a daily basis. I am passionate about helping those who have given so much to have a home for their families.”

Donna Lafont

Georgetown Mortgage

832.381.8410 • donna.lafont@georgetownmtg.com

Charity: Montgomery County Chapter Women's Council of Realtors, and Homes for Texas Heroes



Donna Lafont

Donna Lafont has this to say about her charity passions: “I am a member of and volunteer with the Montgomery County Chapter Women's Council of Realtors. We are a network of successful Realtors and real-estate professionals, advancing women as professionals and leaders in business, the industry,

and the communities we serve. I also participate in the Homes for Texas Heroes program that helps provide downpayment assistance to firefighters, emergency medical technicians, veterans, law enforcement, teachers, and healthcare workers when buying, selling, renting, or refinancing a home.”

She loves helping people fulfill the dream of owning their own home, whether they are personal clients or clients at the Homes for Texas Heroes program. “The program allows me to provide the extra help that our heroes need to make their dream come true,” she says.

Robert M. Spiegel

Republic State Mortgage
713.961.5363 • robert@rmspiegel.com

Charity: Multiple Charities

Robert Spiegel is very passionate about his work. "I get to help people buy their largest investment—a very fulfilling job, as a home is usually the center of our lives, filled with memories and good times. Because my background is in finance, I also make sure my clients make smart decisions when it comes to buying and financing a home. My strategies help my clients increase their net worth, decrease debt, and prepare for retirement.



Robert M. Spiegel

"GLBT clients, specifically same-sex couples, have different issues that need to be addressed when they are buying a home. I get to educate people about these differences. This is very fulfilling, as I hear regularly that my strategies saved clients from making mistakes that would have penalized them. As we all know, our state is not friendly to same-sex couples, and we are treated differently than opposite-sex marriages. This applies to our real-estate transactions, so we have to address the differences upfront. It is my honor to help our community navigate this process."

Tim and Gail Schorre

Morningside Architects
713.529.2630 • info@morningsidearchitects.com
Charity: SEARCH Homeless Services

SEARCH Homeless Services is just one of the charities Tim and Gail Schorre support. "We see so many people on the streets, and want to support an organization that can actually help them more than a handout on the street corner," says Gail Schorre. The couple also supports the American Festival for the Arts (an organization that helps young area musicians connect and perform together, providing classes and camps during the summer) and the Houston Zen Center.



Tim and Gail Schorre

Schorre says the common element that these organizations have is that they're addressing what is human about those they help.

The couple is also very avid about their business. "We are passionate about our work because, in a way, we try to do that same thing," she says. "We address what is human about our clients and work to make buildings that can enhance those qualities."

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Out in the Burbs

Houston gay couples choose suburban homes over inner-loop life

by Karen Derr

In February of this year, it became apparent that home sales in Houston were starting to slow. However, prices have not gone down significantly, and in fact have risen in some segments. That has real-estate pundits wondering if the slowing is a result of decreased demand or merely the continued low inventory of listings. With few homes to choose from and buyers broadening their search criteria, why shouldn't LGBT buyers also venture outside of the urban centers that are seen as the last bastions of progressivism in Texas? Why should conservatives and religious zealots get all the quiet cul-de-sacs and fresh air? OUTSMART checked in with three gay couples who have chosen the suburban life around Houston.

In the fall of 2014, Tom Baker, owner and president of CruiseCenter, and his partner, marketing professional Marc Garcia, sold their home in the Houston Heights and moved to Inwood Forest, which is about 20 minutes outside the loop, just off Antoine near West Little York. Inwood Forest has had its ups and downs, but the reasonably priced homes built in the 1970s and '80s are tempting to buyers who crave lots of green space (on the former Inwood Country Club golf course) and big square footage. "While we loved living in the Heights, we wanted to have a bigger yard and a pool. Inner-loop pricing almost made that prohibitive for us, so we looked elsewhere but did not want to be too far from our favorite restaurants, shopping, and friends," explains Baker. The couple got over 3,500 square feet in their new home, not including a large apartment over a three-car garage, plus a gazebo and a pool. Homes have been recently offered in Inwood Forest from the \$100,000s to the low \$300,000s. Some renovation to their new home was necessary, but the couple was up for the challenge and actually relished customizing the interior to complement their large art collection. Baker says, "We absolutely love it here, and so do our dogs!"

Garcia says neighbors are now stopping by to see the renovation. "I must



In the lap of luxury: by trading their Houston Heights home for one in Inwood Forest, couple Tom Baker and Marc Garcia were able to get over 3,500 square feet of living space, plus a large garage apartment, gazebo, and pool.

add that we are shocked to learn how many of our LGBT friends live in and around our new neighborhood."

Cody Grizzoffi and David Lulloff also took the plunge and moved with their young son and daughter to Fall Creek in the Humble school district, near Beltway 8 and highway 59 north. "While living inside the loop was great, a three-story home is not exactly kid-friendly, and we did want a bigger house with a yard," explains Grizzoffi, a senior loan officer with Academy Mortgage who has helped LGBT clients get into homes in Pearland, Kingwood, Katy, and Sugarland.

Grizzoffi says they love their home that they built new. "We were able to build it the way we wanted and have everything we need in the house. After living inside the



Family friendly: couple Cody Grizzoffi (l) and David Lulloff moved with son, Kaden, and daughter, Kaley, to Fall Creek in Humble after living inside the loop for 15 years.

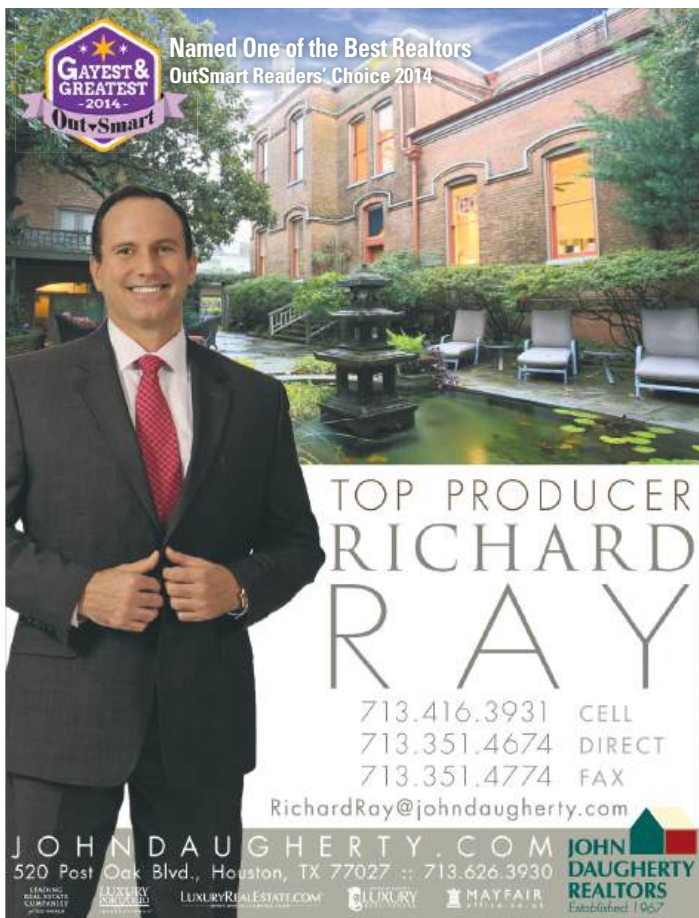
loop for 15 years, it was a culture shock at first, because we did not know what to expect or how people would react to us and our family. Surprisingly, everyone has been very friendly and welcoming. Our neighbors are great, and we get together with them for dinners, drinks, etc., just like anyone else would with neighbors they like." Most of the couple's new friends in the neighborhood are straight.

"We do get the occasional 'look' from people at times, but it does not bother us." Grizzoffi goes on to say that his life now centers mostly around their children, although they are still involved with Montrose Softball. "We have actually had people come up to us and say, 'What a beautiful family.' We always have older people come up to us and say, 'These are the most well-behaved children.' This, to us, is the highest compliment because it lets us know we are doing something right."

Rance Helton and Brian Jeppson moved to The Woodlands area in 2013 from East Texas without even considering living in the inner city. Imperial Oaks, just outside The Woodlands, offers a wide range of prices (100s to 500s) and ages (1980s to brand new). Helton says, "We purchased a home in the Imperial Oaks subdivision and we love it. There are a lot of children in the neighborhood, and it is great when my children are here to visit. I have a boy who is 12 and a daughter who is 10. The neighbors are great, and we are not treated any →

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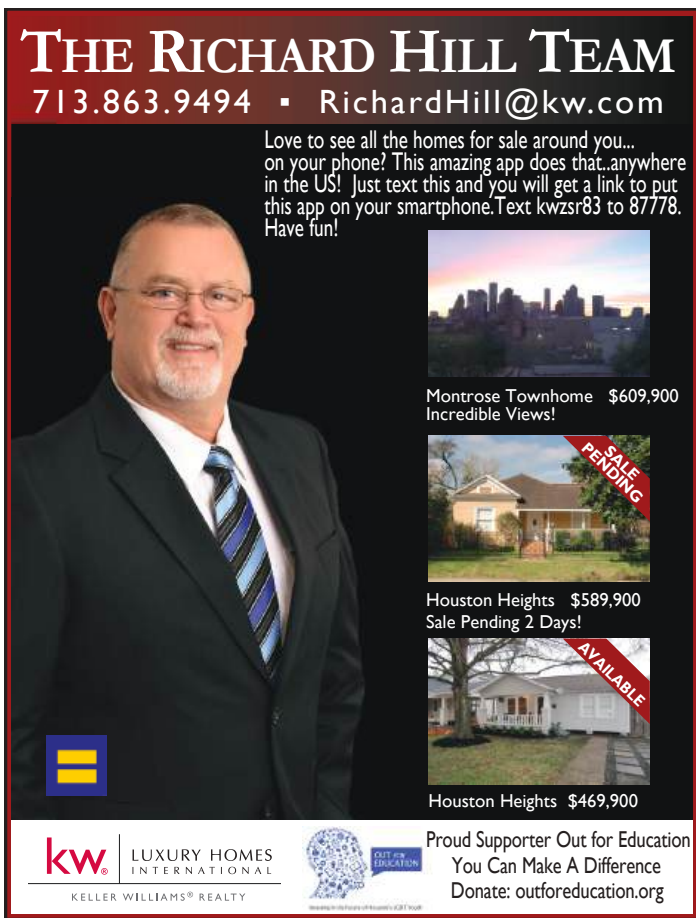
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Out in the Burbs

continued from page 72

differently than any other couple on our street. Our home has the large, open floor plan, and that works well for entertaining and for our two dogs—one of those being a Great Dane."

Helton, who is a Realtor with Keller Williams Realty Woodlands, says he feels the suburbs are often unjustly characterized. "The Woodlands is a great example because of the mixture of such diverse individuals, whether it's race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. We have *never* felt uncomfortable or had bad experiences in The Woodlands."

The couple is involved with showing horses, so the suburban location affords them quick access to the country and stables. However, they still venture into Montrose for the nightlife. Helton is quick to add, "We also enjoy the amenities that The Woodlands has to offer. There is a great little neighborhood bar, The Ranch Hill Saloon, that we enjoy going to."

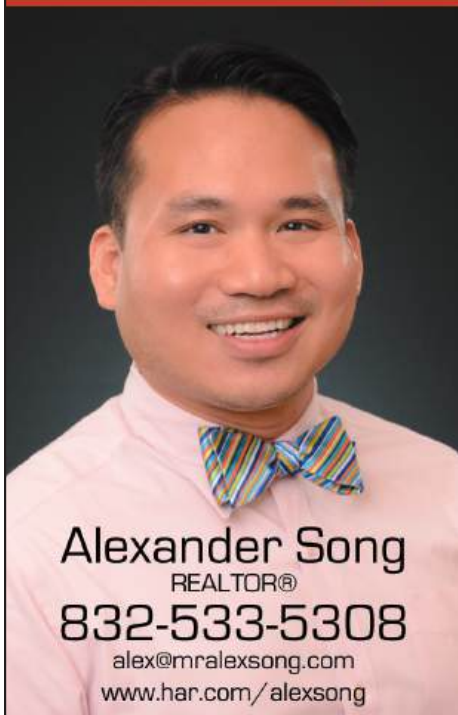
Karen Derr is a Houston-area Realtor and the founder of Karen Derr Realty and Town and Country Properties. She writes and speaks about home and small-business topics.

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Loving life: partners Rance Helton (l) and Brian Jeppson say their home in Imperial Oaks has plenty of space for their two dogs, including Great Dane Maddie.

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It's Time to Sell Your Home

So get it together!

by Jeremy Fain

Thinking about moving? A quick tour of your happy home might curdle that dream before it gets beyond the planning stages. If your décor's style is Early Desperation and you can't remember the original color of the carpeting, it's time to roll up your sleeves and blackmail someone to help get your home ready to sell. If you absolutely can't coerce an acquaintance to show up in stained overalls (or our personal favorite, Jackson Pollock jeans), here are some ways you can do the vital (and unavoidable) work of improving the look of your home. Do it sooner rather than later, before a potential buyer enters the premises, screams like a little girl, and runs full-bore in the opposite direction. Trust us, we've been there.

Find Your Papers

Before you run yourself ragged getting the crayon marks off the walls, find all the important papers you'll need to entice a buyer—things like the operating manuals and warranties for your appliances and HVAC system, and the paint color brand names you used on your walls. That will show your listing agent (*me?*) that you have things under control, even if you don't. While you're at it, pull out utility bills for the last 12 months. You're probably still in denial about the money you're wasting on water coming out of a leaky tap, but work through the pain and you'll be A-OK. Those seasonal totals might even make your home look more appealing than the one down the street.

Straighten the Mail Box

If your house is the one with the mailbox that looks like a diseased tooth, you're probably cringing right now. Straighten it up! Curb appeal is your friend! You want potential buyers to pass by and think someone else's home (and not yours) is the eyesore. If you're planning on listing your home, you have to lure people inside. To do that, you need to eliminate telltale signs that the property might be owned by a Stepford family.

De-clutter

Now is the time to go through your belongings and discover that there isn't anything worth keeping. It's a sad but liberating moment, and an annual purge is actually quite glorious. If most of your stuff is granny cast-



Under control: simple improvements such as de-cluttering your space, touching up landscaping, and dusting nooks and crannies can ease the home-selling process.

offs from the 1970s, de-cluttering your home will be easy. Things that you decide not to keep might be graciously accepted by a local charity. If a few big items are actually worth the cost of a moving van, rescue them from the general chaos and get rid of the rest. Ideally, your rooms should look open and somewhat empty (I say "spacious"). If they look more like a packed rent-a-space unit, you've got your work cut out for you.

Clean

Accept it. You're never going to be able to successfully list your house without cleaning it first. Even a maid will probably take a pass on heavy-duty cleanup chores unless you make some inroads before passing the baton. If it has been a decade since you've washed the blinds, expect the process to be painful. Actually, dirt, dust, and grime may not be the worst part of tidying up. The worst part could be just getting to the places that need cleaning. Sure, it's easy to recognize that you should pull the stove and the fridge out and clean behind them every couple of months, but bench-pressing your own weight may not be one of your many talents. Simple solution: bake a cake. The smell is bound to attract a somewhat willing laborer with upper body strength. Serving ice cream after you've finished is a nice touch, too.

Detail the Landscaping

You know when your honey spends all weekend detailing the car? Well, start doing that with your landscaping before you try to sell your home. Removing dead branches from trees, pulling weeds, painting fences, and fixing driveway cracks will keep your home from giving the impression that it's gone native. Don't risk having a house that looks like it

belongs in one of those apocalypse horror movies where the only people left alive are eating dog food right out of the can.

Hide the Pets

Animals shouldn't live in houses—at least according to the mantra of the real-estate industry. Do you own one of those slobbering, hairy pests that loves you unconditionally, protects you vigilantly, amuses you with its absurdities, and never judges you for your failings? Hide it. That way, you won't have to explain how you managed to get the pet hair out of the air conditioning ducts (because you didn't) or suck the pet dander out of the carpeting (never happened).

Take a Deep Breath—and Some Pictures

Yes, with some hard work and a little luck, you may be able to end up in the home of your dreams. Take some pictures before you do a major cleanup, though. Life's passages can be so fleeting. Just when your kids are getting ready to move out for good, you'll think back on the old house, with its clutter and tiny windows, and wish you'd kept a few pictures to remind you of what those unpredictable, implausible, frustrating, and totally extraordinary early years were all about.

Jeremy Fain is an accredited luxury home specialist with Greenwood Properties, as well as a member of the Houston Association of Realtors, Texas Association of Realtors, and the Luxury Home Council.



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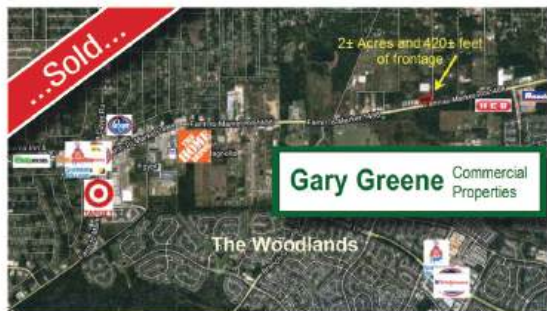
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Mo'Nique

(The Huffington Post, 3/6/15, Matthew Jacobs)

In the new film Blackbird, Mo'Nique plays a devout mother who flies into a fit after discovering her teenage son is gay.

Matthew Jacobs: Your character struggles with her teenage son's sexuality. Would there have been a breaking point where you might say you'd rather not depict such prejudices?

Mo'Nique: No, because it's hard to see yourself until you see it elsewhere. There are those parents that still exist that don't ever accept it. Sometimes you don't see yourself and it takes you watching it to say, "Oh, my God, that's me. Am I damaging my child like that? Am I letting my baby go to bed every night feeling like she's unloved?" Sometimes we have to see it to understand, "Is that what it is that I'm doing?" So when you say, "Would I have still done it?" Yes! And I would have tried to do it to the best of my ability to say to those people, "Look! Look at what's happening when you act this way."

EDITOR'S NOTE: See an interview with Blackbird's director, Patrik-Ian Polk, on page 51. Blackbird opens April 24.



It's only an act: Mo'Nique struggles with her son's sexuality in Blackbird.

Nasir Fleming

(The Huffington Post, 3/11/15)

As a boy who was always described as being a bit more effeminate than others, I have dealt with my share of ridicule from this gender-obsessed society in which we live. Many of my conversations in middle school, high school, and even now, often follow this format:

Them: "Why do you act like that?"

Me: "I don't completely understand—act like what?"

Them: "Like a girl! Why do you feel the need to prance around like a fairy and have an irritating, feminine voice?"

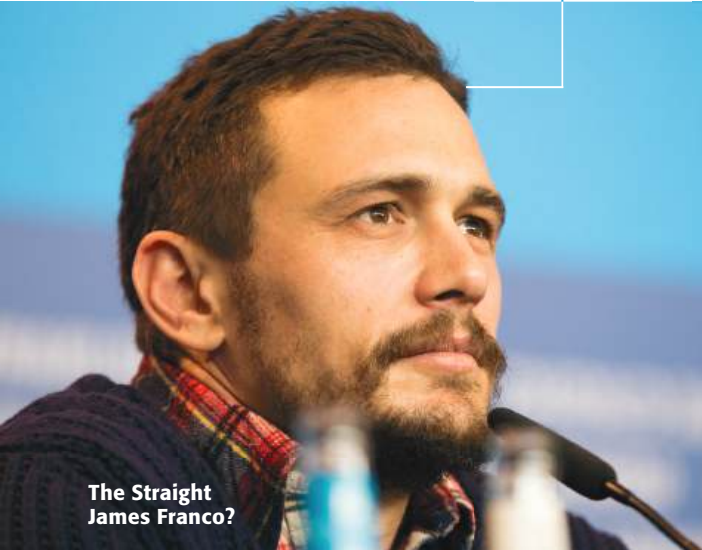
Initially, I wouldn't know how to respond.

Now I know better; I simply call them out on their ignorance, then have a quick educational chat that goes something like:

"Why is it that having a soft-spoken voice and very expressive body motions are considered to be 'girly'? Another question is how come being 'girly' is a negative trait? If anything, it should be a compliment; women are amazingly talented and manage to thrive in this patriarchal society that tries to terminate them with every chance it gets!"

James Franco

(FourTwoNine, 3/15)



The Straight
James Franco?



The Gay
James Franco?

Dot429 asked James Franco to interview himself, so the straight James Franco talks to the gay James Franco:

Straight James: Let's get substantial: are you f--king gay or what?

Gay James: Well, I like to think that I'm gay in my art and straight in my life. Although, I'm also gay in my life up to the point of intercourse, and then you could say I'm straight. So I guess it depends on how you define *gay*. If it means whom you have sex with, I guess I'm straight. . . .

Gay James: What do you say to people who criticize you for appropriating gay culture for your work?

Straight James: I say *f--k off*, but I say it gently. This is such a fraught issue, and I am sensitive to all its aspects. But first of all, I was not the one who pulled my public persona into the gay world; that was the straight gossip press and the gay press speculating about me. I really don't care what people think about my sexuality, and it's also none of their business. So I really don't choose to identify with my public persona. I am not interested in most straight male-bonding rituals, but I am also kept from being fully embraced by the gay community because I don't think anyone truly believes I have gay sex.

Gay James: Oh, some do, believe me.

Straight James: Well, good, I like that.

Gay James: Why?

Straight James: Because it means that I can be a figure for change. I am a figure who can show the straight community that many of their definitions are outdated and boring. And I can also show the gay community that many of the things about themselves that they are giving up to join the straight community are actually valuable and beautiful.

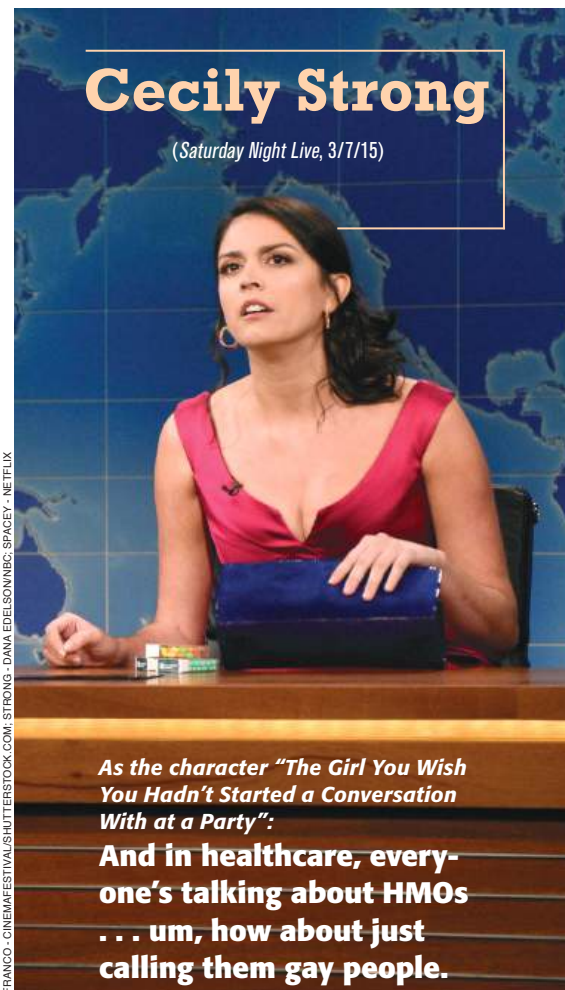
EDITOR'S NOTE: For the complete interview, visit dot429.com.

House of Cards' Frank Underwood

(The Huffington Post, 3/6/15, Erin Whitney)

Beau Willimon (House of Cards creator) on the sexuality of Kevin Spacey's character, Frank Underwood:

He's a man with a large appetite; he's a man who does not allow himself to be placed in any sort of milieu or with one definition. I think he's incredibly guarded with who he lets get close to him, whether that's platonic or whether that's sexual. And when he does, it's not necessarily a gender or preference—it really has to do with trust. There's very few people in this world that we've created that he can trust. We try to approach Frank the way he approaches himself, which is not to sort of pin him down.



Cecily Strong

(Saturday Night Live, 3/7/15)

As the character "The Girl You Wish You Hadn't Started a Conversation With at a Party":

And in healthcare, everyone's talking about HMOs . . . um, how about just calling them gay people.



by
Bradley
Donalson

DVD Shorts

The Way He Looks



The Way He Looks is about Leo, a blind teenager, and his navigating the world around him. With his best

friend Giovana, Leo deals with bullies and overprotective parents and is contemplating an exchange program to escape. Enter Gabriel. The handsome transfer becomes a favorite with the girls, but forms a bond with Leo. Leo must learn to incorporate his desire for independence with the feelings his new friend engenders. In this slow-paced, gentle telling of a modern boy coming into his sexuality, the scenes are relaxed and the action is realistic. There's no evil enemy, just an ignorant bully. There's no proclamation of love, just an awkward teenage relationship. With relatable dialogue in a slightly idealized setting, the film brings back the uncertainty of a first crush and its emotional tension. It is a story filled with sweetness in a realistic world of burgeoning sexuality and puppy love. Strand Releasing (strandreleasing.com). —Bradley Donalson

More DVD Shorts at
OUTSMARTMAGAZINE.COM.

'Salvation Army'

Growing up gay in Morocco



"He loves me, he loves me not": written and directed by Abdellah Taïa, this semi-autobiographical film tells the story of being a gay youth in an Arab country and taking charge of one's sexuality and autonomy.

Salvation Army shows us the life of a gay boy growing up in Morocco and his journey to accept himself and find freedom. According to the *New York Times*, Abdellah Taïa's film has given the Arab world "its first on-screen gay protagonist," and he unapologetically reveals a world that is unknown to many Westerners. Taïa came out in a 2007 interview with a French-Arab journal, and as of 2014, he remains the only openly gay Moroccan intellectual.

The film begins abruptly, in the sense that it drops you head-first into the world of protagonist Abdellah with very little introductory information. After the audience is shown a boy who breaks into his brother's room with an obvious sense of longing, the next scene shows him being taken by a predatory older man into a construction site and being told to "get hard" and "open your ass"—all before Abdellah even utters his first line.

Taïa has chosen raw simplicity for his film. The cinematography

often lingers on the drab and mundane elements of a setting before cutting to the next scene. It is as if he is trying to highlight the commonality of the settings, which could have been filmed in any city on any day.

Throughout the course of the film, Abdellah must come to terms with his feelings for men. We see him going from being picked up off the street to being the instigator of an encounter. But one of the interesting things about this is that there is very little dialogue during these incidents, and nobody talks about their sexuality.

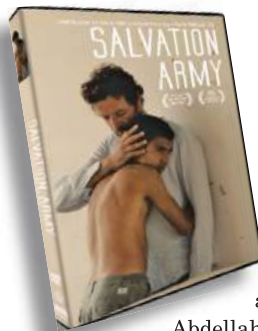
Abdellah's father catches him in the standard childhood "he loves me, he loves me not" game, and sends him to bed without commenting on it.

The entire film is filled with moments like this, where it almost appears as if homosexuality is tacitly accepted as long as it is never discussed. The one scene where this isn't true comes when Abdellah is older. He is living with an older Swiss professor and they go on a boat ride. The boat's oarsman comments on Abdellah being "kept" by the older man and congratulates him on finding a rich one

before blackmailing him for triple his normal fee—all done in Arabic, so the Swiss man remains blithely unaware.

The film seems to lack a consistent driving force, making it different from the standard American movie. Instead, Taïa chooses strained silences and gritty realism in order to show a world in which a young gay man must navigate dangerous territory to come to terms with who he is. While making himself "hard" and staying silent to survive, his longing for home still shows even after he's gotten his freedom.

Director Abdellah Taïa made his debut with *Salvation Army*, a film based on his somewhat-autobiographical novel of the same title. *Salvation Army* debuted in 2013 at film festivals in Venice and Toronto, made its way to other festivals in 2014, and is now out on DVD from Strand Releasing (strandreleasing.com). ■



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Rachel Garlin
Wink at July

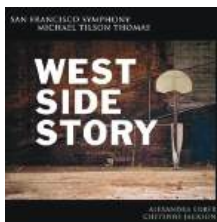


Folksy and bluegrass without being too country, *Wink at July* (April 21) shows off both Rachel Garlin's superb songwriting and her rich, warm voice. Garlin lives in San Francisco with her wife and two sons, and her commitment to community and family shows in the vivid pictures she paints in songs like "Gwendolyn Said" and "Stranded." Like poetry set to music, Garlin's comforting voice speaks through her work. Details at rachelgarlin.com. —Bradley Donalson

More GrooveOut Shorts
at OUTSMARTMAGAZINE.COM.

Here's the best part about listening to the two-disc deluxe edition soundtrack for Disney's *Into the Woods* (Walt Disney Records): you don't have to watch the abysmal movie connected to it. Meryl Streep's wasted Oscar nomination aside, *Into the Woods* received two tech noms, which says more about Rob Marshall's misguided movie than anything else. That said, Stephen Sondheim's songs (those that made it from stage to screen—there are a number of songs missing) survive unscathed, which is probably the saving grace of the soundtrack. Classic numbers such as "Children Will Listen," "Stay with Me," "Agony" (a shining moment for Chris Pine as Prince Charming), "No One Is Alone," and "On the Steps of the Palace" (featuring a sparkling Anna Kendrick as Cinderella), to mention a few, all retain their dignity.

How versatile is gay actor Ben Wishaw? His performance as a gay man mourning the loss of his partner in the LGBT film-fest fave *Lilting*, now available on DVD, is breathtaking, to say the least. The multi-talented



Wishaw also provided the voice for the beloved children's-lit bear Paddington. You don't actually get to hear Wishaw on *Paddington: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (Decca). What you do get is Nick Urata's score, four songs performed by D. Lime featuring Tabagao Crusoe, as well as classic tunes by James Brown and Steppenwolf.

Oscar-winning film score composer and indie/industrial-rock legend Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails) teams up once again with musical collaborator Atticus Ross and filmmaker David Fincher for *Gone Girl: Soundtrack from the Motion Picture* (Columbia). Spread out over the course of two CDs,

the subtly throbbing and overtly haunting score is a suitable fit for the moody, suspenseful, and violent film. The score's breadth is best exemplified in the dark beauty of "Just Like You" and "Like Home"—a nice contrast to the eerie sonic style of "The Way He Looks at Me" and "Consummation."

One of the most beloved musicals of all time (how could it not be, with all the gay men involved in its creation—Jerome Robbins, Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, and, of course, Stephen Sondheim?), *West Side Story* (SFSMedia) is celebrated in a new double-disc recording performed by the San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. Gay actor and

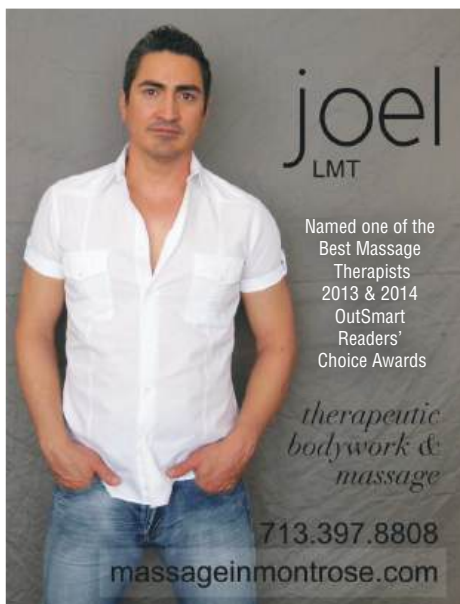
singer Cheyenne Jackson performs the role of Tony, and opera singer Alexandra Silber can be heard as Maria.

As with its predecessors, *Music from the HBO Original Series Boardwalk Empire: Volume Three* (ABKCO) features Prohibition-era tunes performed by a stellar array of artists adding their distinctive touch to songs that will be familiar to some and a whole new experience for others. Regina Spektor, Elvis Costello, David Johansen, Angel McCluskey, Marshall Crenshaw, Nora Jones, and Loudon Wainwright III are among the artists singing on the soundtrack.

Do yourself a favor and read director Jean-Marc Vallée's informative liner notes for *Wild: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (Legacy). He has a fascinating description of the process of selecting songs for this various-artists compilation, including songs by Simon & Garfunkel, Bruce Springsteen, Leonard Cohen, Wings, Portishead, and Lucinda Williams, among others. The soundtrack is also worth possessing for First Aid Kit's exceptional cover of R.E.M.'s "Walk Unafraid" that plays at the film's end.

Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

For the complete article, including Andrew Bergman and Jason Robert Brown's Honeymoon in Vegas soundtrack, log on to OUTSMARTMAGAZINE.COM.



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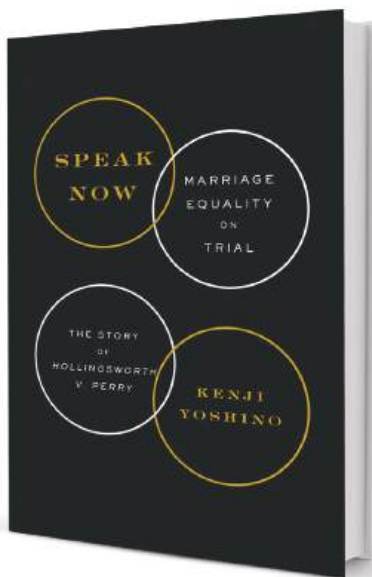
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ReadOut Shorts

Splinters of Light
by Rachael Herron



Rachael Herron explores the relationships between women in her new novel *Splinters of Light*. When Nora Glass is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, she begins to worry about how the disease will affect her daughter, Ellie, and she has to connect with her twin sister, Marianna, in order to discover how they will make it through. A childless lesbian, Herron writes a story about a family that is true to life. Penguin (penguin.com). —Bradley Donalson

Straight-Face
by Brandon Wallace



Growing up in the conservative south, Brandon Wallace knew that he was attracted to other boys and that he wanted to go into Christian ministry. *Straight-Face* is Wallace's story about how he hid his sexuality in order to become a youth minister with the Southern Baptist church and the road he took to coming out and reconciling his sexuality and his faith. More at thegaychristian.com. —Bradley Donalson

Third finger, left hand. If you're wearing a ring there, chances are that it means more than a bit of metal around your digit—one that is undoubtedly more precious than the sum of its parts. It means a commitment of marriage—if indeed you *can* get married, because some still cannot. And in the new book *Speak Now: Marriage Equality on Trial* by Kenji Yoshino, you'll read about a federal trial that impacted many an engagement.

Just before Kenji Yoshino married his husband, Ron, in 2009, the officiant pulled the couple aside and reminded them that, though they were really no different than any other two people in love, he could not marry them under federal law because of DOMA. As they said their vows in Connecticut, another legal drama on the other side of the country was just beginning.

Only four states recognized same-sex marriage in 2009, and California wasn't one of them. In 2008, California voters had passed Proposition 8, effectively amending its constitution to allow legal marriage only between opposite-sex

couples. A legal challenge to Prop 8 was filed in California in May of 2009, which ultimately opened the doors for an unlikely pair of lawyers to take the issue to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Attorney Ted Olson was famous for helping to put George Bush in office in 2000, and had worked in Ronald Reagan's Justice Department. Though Olson was known for his conservative stance, he was a friend of David Boies, a renowned, more liberal litigator. They seized the opportunity to argue this important case together, and began laying the foundation for it.

But their teamwork wasn't the only unusual twist in *Hollingsworth v. Perry*: the judge assigned to the case was known to be gay. Lead counsel for the defense of Prop 8 had once flirted with a career in professional baseball. Both sides tried to keep direct mentions of sex out of the courtroom. In the end, children played a large part in the arguments. And, though neither side wanted it, the case went to trial.

That last point, says author Kenji Yoshino, came as the biggest surprise. Issues such as same-sex marriage very seldom go to trial; both parties usually try to avoid it long before things ever get that far.

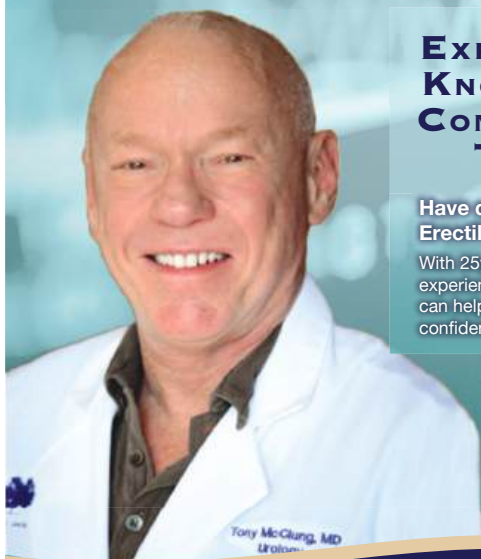
But Yoshino's fascination—and the in-depth examination he offers about *Hollingsworth v. Perry*—becomes a mixed bag

in *Speak Now*. On one hand, there are heartfelt examples of people who would most benefit from the defeat of Prop 8, as told from the exciting perspective of a major courtroom drama; on the other hand, there's a lot of legalese here that is only partially explained in layman's terms. We're treated to detailed, sometimes happy human-interest stories (including the author's own), followed by information that will send many readers scrambling for a legal dictionary. Oy.

Still, despite that near-obstacle, I think this book is worthwhile—if for no other reason than the significance of the case it highlights. Read carefully, don't rush yourself, have a legal reference source handy, and *Speak Now* will be a book you won't want to leave on the shelf.

Terri Schlichenmeyer has been reading since she was three years old, and she lives on a hill in Wisconsin with two dogs and 11,000 books.

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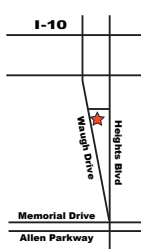
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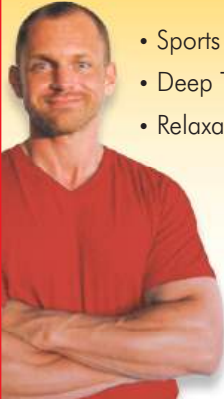
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Bar & Club Guide

Houston

13 ENTERTAINMENT

This comfortable club located in the Heights is a convenient alternate to inner-Montrose haunts. Patrons journey past the comfy seating and romantic lighting to find a spacious patio where they sometimes fire up the barbecue grill. 1537 N. Shepherd • 713.426.1313.

BAYOU CITY BAR & GRILL

This cozy bar is the home for the famous Breakfast Club (which dates back to 1986), opens at 7am, and continues throughout the day with a full kitchen and menu along with late-night dancing! Known for Drag Bingo on Tues., Steak Night on Wed., and Wing Night Thurs. Djs nightly. 7 days a week. 2409 Grant St. • bayoucitybar.com.

BLUR

This multi-level dance club features a patio upstairs lounge and balconies that overlook Pacific St. Ladies enjoy Wet and Wild Wed., 18-year-olds are welcome on Thurs., resident DJ Lorenzo spins Wed.-Sat. nights, DJ Pollo spins Karumba Latin night on Sun. Happy hour 8-10pm; free cover before 11pm. 710 Pacific St. • blurbar.com.

CLUB 2020

Located downtown, this urban club features Clubbers Friday with male and female dancers. Its 6,400 square feet also offers theater-sized viewing screens and VIP rooms. 2020 Leeland • 713.227.9667 • club2020houston.com.

CLUB CRYSTAL

If you miss the now-closed Inergy, you'll find many of its former staff, management, and décor at this two-room Latin/hip-hop club. Sunday evening drag shows rule the roost. 6680 Southwest Frwy, next to Colorado • 713.278.2582 • crystaltheclub.com.

CROCKER BAR

Resident DJ Johnny spins on Fri. and Sat. nights at this comfortably remodeled Montrose nightspot that also offers karaoke on Tuesdays and Thursdays and extended happy-hour prices throughout the week. 2312 Crocker • 713.529.3355.

THE EAGLE

The Eagle has landed at its new location in the heart of Montrose, and it looks great. Sexy bartenders, lots of outdoor deck space, and even a gift shop to check out. Mon.-Sat., 4pm-2am; Sun, noon-2am. 611 Hyde Park • eagle houston.com.

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F BAR

Award-winning DJs spin nightly at this "boutique nightclub" that offers elegance without arrogance and features a stage, dance floor, VIP area, glass-encased quiet bar, and attractive patio. Tues. and Sun. drag shows feature frequent special guests. 202 Tuam St. • fbarhouston.com • 713.522.3227.

GEORGE

Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar, just like most other neighborhood sports bars in town. But George's occasional benefit drag show makes it a wonderful, campy alternative. Sports Saturdays start at 3pm with dart and pool tournaments; Steak Night is Sun., 3–7pm. 617 Fairview • 713.528.8102.

GUAVA LAMP

This trendy and friendly video and cruise bar gets busy during happy hour and stays busy 'til closing. Karaoke on Wed. and Sun., sometimes offering prizes, always packs the place. 570 Waugh Dr. • 713.524.3359 • guavalamphouston.com.

JR'S BAR & GRILL

With house emcee Kofi, OutSMART's Gayest and Greatest reigning drag champion, this Montrose standard offers drag and strip shows throughout the week, karaoke Thurs. and Sun., plus pool tables, male dancers, and award-winning cocktails. 808 Pacific St. • jrbarandgrill.com • 713.521.2519.

METEOR

The men of Manwatch and Muscles in Action rinse down in the "Meteor Shower" stall in this posh but comfy lounge on the downtown edge of Montrose, accompanied by DJ Chris on Friday and award-winning DJ Eddie E on Saturday. Open Thurs.–Sat. 2306 Genesee St. • meteorhouston.com • 713.521.0123.

MICHAEL'S OUTPOST

Jerry Atwood, Clay Howell, Neil Massey, Steve Wheaton, and Roger Woest take turns at the keys at this comfortable neighborhood piano bar. 1419 Richmond Ave. • 713.520.8446.

MONTROSE MINING COMPANY

Studly male dancers bump and grind every night at this leather/denim spot, offering Montrose's lowest vodka drinks with Trash Disco Sundays. The two-tier back patio bar provides a perch for viewing the Pacific Street scenery. 805 Pacific St. • theminehouston.com • 713.529.7488.

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON

Houston's only LGBT country dancehall is located in the historic Esquire Ballroom and opens Wednesday–Sunday. The new outside patio and stage are open. Wednesday features Steak Night and Bingo. Free dance classes on Thursdays and Karaoke. Saturday night the dance floor fills with the best C&W . . . check their website for all specials, events and times. 11410 Hempstead Hwy • neonbootsclub.com • 713.677.0828.

PEARL LOUNGE

This LGBT-friendly lounge is open under "familiar" management in the Washington corridor. Daily highlights range from open mic night to steak night to appearances by DJ Kittie and DJ Ben Phoenix from KRBE. Drink specials and more. 4216 Washington.

THE RIPCORD

This well-kept, multi-roomed leather bar for men and their friends boasts a busy patio, especially on the weekends. The Black Hawk Leather shop is located inside the club, providing BDSM essentials. 715 Fairview Ave. • 713.521.2792 • theripcord.com.

RUDYARD'S

The eclectic British pub is known for its craft beers as well as for the burgers. Most weekends you'll find up-and-coming local bands rocking the house. 2010 Waugh Dr. • rudyardspub.com • 713.521.0521.

SOUTH BEACH

This mega-dance club is a frequent winner of OutSMART's Gayest and Greatest awards, with DJ Eddie E spinning on Fri., and DJ Joe Ross playing pop & dance music videos on Sat. No cover before 11pm. 810 Pacific St. • sobehouston.com • 713.529.SOBEE.

TC'S SHOWBAR

With the longest daily happy hours in Montrose (8am–10pm), it's no wonder this neighborhood watering hole is so popular. Owner Tim Pugh says TC's has built quite a reputation as the perfect spot to celebrate special occasions. Other big draws are the drag shows Wednesday–Sunday and karaoke Monday & Wednesday. 817 Fairview • 713.526.2625 • tcshowbar.com.

TONY'S CORNER POCKET

This comfortable club located close to downtown has one of the friendliest bar staffs in town, both inside & outside at its patio bar. The raised stage where local charities perform also features an amateur dance contest each Thurs., Fri., & Sat. at 11pm. Opens daily at noon. 817 W. Dallas • 713.571.7870 • tonyscornerpocketbar.com.

VIVIANA'S

This club, in a new location, appeals to fans of Latino music and drag alike. 4624 Dacoma • 713.681.4104.

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The only LGBT dance club in Bryan/College station, this sleek spot is open Thurs.–Sat. Smack in the middle of Aggieland, "our venue is always packed with the hotties," the owners promise. 121 North Main • 979.823.6174 • halobcs.com.

Galveston

23RD ST. STATION

A new face on the Island bar scene is here. The bar features a neighborhood-bar feel with octane. Drink specials daily and the weekend is filled with pulsing music, hot dancers, drag shows, and a Sunday Tea Dance. 1706 23rd St. • 409.621.1808.

KRAVE GALVESTON

Galveston's hottest, most modern nightclub and video bar (formerly 3rd Coast Downtown) is heating up the island's nightlife. Thursday–Saturday is a big draw for College Night, Tuesday is Trivia/Karaoke Night with Timothy Branstetter, Sunday & Wednesday is Karaoke Night with David P, and the weekend drag shows hosted by Kara Dion are fabulous! 4216 Postoffice St. • 409/765-6911.

ROBERT'S LAFITTE

A neighborhood bar, the Island institution attracts a colorful crowd of regulars and travelers. The private patio includes a swimming pool. On Sat. and Sun. nights, the Ladies of Lafitte show takes the stage. 2501 Avenue Q (at 25th) • 409.765.9092.

SPLASH BAR GALVESTON

Galveston's only gay bar on the beach is making a huge splash on the island. The club's Happy Hour and entertainment line-up sizzles with Hot Fridays and Saturdays featuring its "Splash Divas" drag shows, amateur strip contests, and the area's hottest DJs spinning your favorite tunes. Sunday's Tea Dance features Happy Hour noon–8pm, and count on lively entertainment every weekday. 3102 Seawall Blvd. • 409.974.4176 • splashbargalveston.com.

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THE ROOM BAR AND LOUNGE

One of only two LGBT hangouts in North Houston/Spring, this bar and video lounge has an extremely laidback atmosphere where everyone is welcome and everyone is friendly to each other. The Room Bar and Lounge offers something for everyone, including daily drink specials, karaoke, free pool, drag shows, and live DJs several nights a week. 4915 FM 2920 • roombarspring.com • 281.907.6866. ■

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by
Lilly
Roddy

A Lunar Eclipse and a Full Moon

This event highlights equality and relationships

We start the month off with both a lunar eclipse and a Full Moon on April 4. This unique event highlights equality and relationships, and we will notice a lot of things out of balance. Relationships are especially sensitive to this energy. Keep your options open during the first full week of April—it could be bumpy! We'll want to get more done this month, and we may not be as patient as usual. Mars begins the month in Taurus, a sign of consistency and durability. Mercury travels from Aries into Taurus on the 14th, and the sun enters Taurus on the 20th. Venus (having led the pack into Taurus) enters versatile Gemini on the 11th. Jupiter goes direct in Leo on the 8th, and Pluto goes retrograde on the 16th.

TAURUS (April 20–May 20). With Mars (planet of action and anger) moving through your sign for the next 45 days, this is a great time to initiate new projects or health regimens. You certainly won't be as patient as usual. Make sure you have some quiet time to get away this month, because that urge will be as strong as your need to take some action. You get busier as we get closer to mid month. You are feeling the need to reconnect with family, so this could be a great time for a trip home. You are much more confident and clear-headed by the end of the month.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21). You are feeling more open and social this month. This is a good time to market your talents or connect to community organizations and projects. You are just beginning to develop a long-term plan for your future security. This is a good time to be looking into extra training or education. Relationships are more important toward the end of the month. You are also adding new goals to your relationship so you and your partner can develop greater stability for the future.

CANCER (June 22–July 22) You seem to be in the public eye this month. Everybody will want to know you—or even to be you! The lunar eclipse is activating a lot of focus on career this month. You may find yourself starting something new or receiving unexpected recognition. You are especially unsettled in the first week of the month. You can easily take things way too personally, so make sure it's really about you before you launch a defense. You are having a better time and are not as edgy as your improved social life continues through the rest of the month.

LEO (July 23–August 22). We are feeling especially strong and active in April, with Jupiter (planet of travel, education, and mind expansion) accelerating her journey in mid month. This will certainly give us more hope and optimism about any outcomes. In the first half of the

month you are more playful and less concerned about responsibility. After mid month, you get back in the saddle and begin to take a much more directed path. Career energies are very favorable for doing something on your own or trying to move up the company ladder. Look for friends to be especially supportive at the end of the month.

VIRGO (August 23–September 22). You are feeling the push to get your finances in order this month. You have been working hard to get the burden of debt off your back for a while. Your romantic partner will need some reassurance this month, and spending time with that person will be a very positive bonding experience. You are currently going through a time of review where you are looking at the viability of almost everything and everyone in your life. This is helping you develop a better sense of priorities. Career energies are very strong right now as you put a lot of focus on that through the rest of 2015. You are a bit more laid-back toward the end of the month.

LIBRA (September 23–October 23). Relationships are highlighted this month as your sign is in a period emphasizing partnerships, both good and bad. You are having to act on the partnerships you are in—reconfirming some and eliminating others. You are not the same person, and people are seeing your “real” side rather than the people-pleaser they saw in the past. This continues to be a good time for home repairs—or even family repairs. You will need a break from all of this toward the end of the month. Social organizations will be very beneficial for you.

SCORPIO (October 24–November 21). Relationships are very stimulating this month. If you are in a partnership, this is a great month to renew those vows. If you are single, this is also a good time to be out looking for your next partner. Relationships that aren't doing so well may be brought to a head this month. This is also a good month for you to get your office or business location organized and cleaned up. It could be the perfect time for a new laptop or smartphone. Don't overthink your finances. You are trying to plan for the future, but don't let that drive you crazy. Career opportunities continue to increase!

SAGITTARIUS (November 22–December 21). With Saturn (planet of career, long-term safety, and overthinking) moving through your sign, you have really begun to



ILLUSTRATION: DAVID EDUARDO FLORES PEREZ

ARIES (March 21–April 19). Happy birthday to the Arians! This is your yearly cycle of taking time to look at the past year and set new goals for the coming year. With the lunar eclipse in your sign, you are ready to take action and make some decisions. You could be very, very restless in the first week, and perhaps not sleeping well. Expect your tolerance levels to be especially low. You are not as satisfied with your present work situation, so this can be a time to look for alternatives or even to start something on your own.

work too much during this time—there are some core problems there that need to be addressed as well. Life is a bit more laid-back after mid month. You may do your best negotiating during that time.

AQUARIUS (January 20–February 18). Relationship energies are getting better again this month. This will help to improve existing relationships and bring new people into your life for fun or potential romance. You are more verbal than usual this month—you have a lot to say and you want to be heard. This is a great time to start your book, blog, or social media page. Home projects become more important over the next couple of months. You will be thinking more about your family this month. This is a good time to visit them—as long as you keep your visits short. Friends may seem in short supply this month. Make some contacts and renew those connections.

PISCES (February 19–March 20). Over the last several years, you mermaids and mermen have been retreating down into the sea to take care of yourselves. But now, you are ready to step up and get the recognition that you so deserve. You are working on getting your life together this month, and you are more serious than ever. You continue to improve your finances so you can free yourself from that burden. The middle part of the month is a good time for communications, so let us know what you really believe! Toward the very end of the month, you are ready for a retreat.

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OUT IN HOUSTON



On February 28, **Live Consortium** held its AIDS Walk Team Dodgeball Tournament at Wakefield CrowBar. Pictured are the tournament's participants.



Members of the Royal Court pose at **The Empire of the Royal Sovereign and Imperial Court of the Single Star's** 2015 Investiture held on February 28 at Meteor.



Planning committee members **Richard Holt, Clark Caperton, Ron Goines, Ryan Lindsay, Jonathan Mitchell, Tammi Wallace, Mike Holloman, Matthew Shailer, Bryan Hlavinka, and Christopher Bown** at the Victory Fund's 2015 Houston Champagne Brunch on March 1 at The Corinthian.



On March 1, Neon Boots hosted "Hee Haw," a comedy auction and fundraiser for the Texas Gay Rodeo Association Houston, PWA Holiday Charities, and the Royal Court of Houston. Pictured are **Craig Sanford** and the owners of Neon Boots with the **Babst Women** from Austin.



On March 2, CM **Mike Laster** (c) proclaimed March as Diana Foundation month during the organization's 2015 Jazz Happy Hour held at FBar. Pictured are **Bob Briddick, Frank Staggs, John Heinzerling, Laster, Diana president Tanner Williams, Michael Leibbert, and Michael Kemper.**



Tony Carroll and Bruce Smith hosted "Cocktails and Conversation about Helping Houston's Gay (LGBT) Kids" on March 6. Pictured are (back) **Jeff Hoffman, Michael Migura, Smith, Bill McDugald, TS Williams,** (front) **Sara Fernandez, Carroll, Thomas Chappell, Al Amado, and Justin Haynes.**



On March 7, the Lone Star Volleyball Association held its Miss LSA 2015 "Red Carpet Divas" pageant at South Beach. Pictured are **Ruby RoXXX, Tyra Bankarupt, Sharon Needles, Summer Clearance, Ireeka Phish, Morgan Sparkles, Lady Byrd, and Misty May Tranny.**



Mayor **Annis Parker** visited the Montrose Center's Senior Diner on March 9. Pictured are **Judy Woods, Michele Leal, Francis Bueno, Ann Robison, Fred Reninger** (back), Mayor Parker, **Tammi Wallace, and Michelle Hildreth.**



On March 9, SNAP held a reception for new executive director, Dr. **Kate Lawler**, at its clinic. Pictured are **Carolyn Pratt, Francisco Sanchez, Linne Girourard, JR Valdez, Sonia Soto, Lawler, Pam Harris, Neil Sackheim, Jason Luong, and Kate Smargiasso.**



The National Leather Association Houston held its Spirit of Leather Awards on March 14 at the Montrose Center. Pictured are **Wes Lavergne, Susan Hayes, Chip Ware, Gene Landry, Pup Tank, Bob Houghton, Judy Reeves, Sam Bass, Wendy Michelle, Robert Conn, Loyd Powell, and** (front) **Pup Sparky.**



Bayou City Performing Arts held its Crescendo Society Reception on March 15 at the Cripps residence. Pictured are (back) **David Cripps, Jacobi Montgomery, Kenneth Clayborne, Tyler Ruberg,** (front) **Laura Kurtz, Melinda Anderson, and Jenny Cripps.**

Our Houston is vibrant.



Location: Biscuit Paint Wall, Montrose. Photo Credit: Spencer Harrison.

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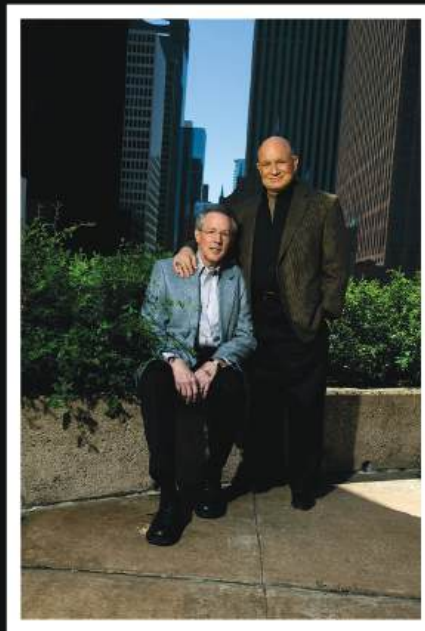
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