

21ST READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

OutSmart

NOVEMBER 2017



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WOMEN'S
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ANDY COHEN

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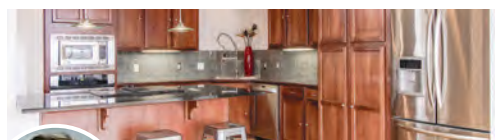
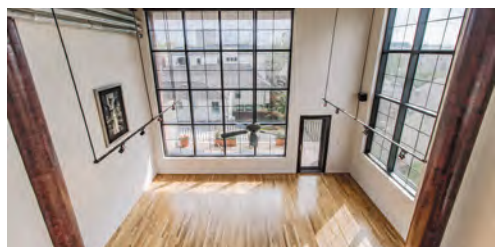


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**ONLINE
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Pride Houston Inc. has filed a lawsuit against its former president and CEO, Frankie Quijano (pictured), alleging that he has refused to relinquish the organization's assets since being replaced on October 1. For ongoing coverage of the case, visit OutSmartMagazine.com.



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The greatest thing about our Gayest & Greatest Awards issue is that it gives us a chance to tell the remarkable stories of everyday people in Houston's LGBTQ community.

Take Dr. Stewart Zuckerbrod, voted Best Male Eye Doctor in our 21st annual Readers' Choice Awards. Zuckerbrod was also one of the first gay men in Houston to become a father through surrogacy, and he's currently raising his two teenage daughters as a single dad.

Then there's Felicia Flores, voted Best Female Insurance Agent. Flores is a former Ms. Texas Gay Rodeo Association and a longtime Selena Quintanilla impersonator who's finally found her professional calling.

Zuckerbrod, Flores, and other Gayest & Greatest winners may not make headlines throughout the year, but they represent the very fabric of Houston's LGBTQ community. We hope you enjoy reading about them here.

Elsewhere in this November issue, we highlight two important upcoming days—the Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) on

November 20, and World AIDS Day on December 1.

In advance of TDOR, writer Lourdes Zavaleta takes a look at two local groups serving women of color who've been disproportionately affected by the ongoing epidemic of anti-trans violence. Previewing World AIDS Day, writer Rich Arenschieldt interviews gay sports icon Greg Louganis, who will keynote AIDS Foundation Houston's annual luncheon, and writer Andrew Edmonson profiles pioneering activist Tori Williams.

Speaking of pioneering activists, don't miss Edmonson's piece marking the 40th anniversary of the groundbreaking National Women's Conference in Houston in 1977, which included the likes of Annise Parker, Phyllis Frye, Pokey Anderson, and other notable Houstonians.

On the entertainment front, writer Ryan Leach interviews Andy Cohen, who brings his two-man show with Anderson Cooper to Sugar Land's Smart Financial Centre in December. And writer Don Maines talks to Solomon Georgio, a rising-star comedian who'll be in Houston this month.

Finally, it's November, which means elections and Thanksgiving. Congressional midterms are 12 short months away, and writer Cameron Wallace previews one key local race—the battle to unseat U.S. Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas). Meanwhile, food writer Joanna O'Leary runs down Houston's best Turkey Day takeout, while columnist Susan Bankston lists a few clever ways to deliberately offend your Trump-supporting relatives this holiday season.

Gobble gobble!

—John Wright



ON THE COVER

21st Readers' Choice Awards Gayest & Greatest 2017
(See page 36.)



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Culberson Under Fire over Anti-LGBTQ Record

Seven Democrats join race to unseat Houston GOP congressman.

By Cameron Wallace

Seven Democrats have lined up to challenge nine-term Houston Republican congressman John Culberson in the November 2018 election, and LGBTQ issues could be front and center in the race.

“Congressman Culberson does not share the same values as most people in this community in terms of making sure that Houston continues to be a welcoming area,” Democratic candidate Alex Triantaphyllis told OUTSMART recently. “We see that with respect to the way that he has rarely, if ever, taken a stand for the LGBT community.”

Culberson, who has held the seat since 2001, received a zero (the lowest possible score) on the Human Rights Campaign’s most recent Congressional Scorecard. His western-Harris County district covers several areas with significant LGBTQ populations, including Uptown, River Oaks, West University Place, and Bellaire.

In June 2015, Culberson issued a statement condemning the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in favor of nationwide marriage equality.

“I’m disappointed that the Court chose to override the will of Texans who define marriage as being between a man and a woman,” Culberson said. “The 10th Amendment guarantees states the primary responsibility of providing for public safety, public health, and public morality. Chief Justice Roberts correctly stated that marriage ‘has formed the basis of human society for millennia’ and it is my firm belief that states—not the federal government—have the constitutional right to define marriage.”

In April, Culberson was keynote speaker at the annual dinner of Log Cabin Republicans Houston, but he didn’t mention LGBTQ issues. Instead, he focused on the importance of avoiding another Democratic sweep of Harris County in 2018. For example, Culberson said the County needs to reelect GOP clerk Stan Stanart, who oversees elections, because if a Democrat wins the office, it will result in voter fraud.

After his speech, Culberson told OUTSMART he didn’t touch on LGBTQ issues because



Houston, We Have a Problem

U.S. Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas), shown with Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway at the inauguration in January, has voted in line with the president’s positions 100 percent of the time in the current Congress, according to FiveThirtyEight.com.

they should be left up to states. He declined to answer follow-up questions, waving his hand dismissively before walking away from a reporter. Marco Roberts, president of Log Cabin Republicans Houston, maintains that Culberson has “evolved” on LGBTQ issues.

“I think the fact that he was willing not only to come to our organization, but to headline an event, speaks to his decision that it was the better choice to openly side with a gay-rights activist Republican group than not,” Roberts said.

The 7th District has been represented by a Republican since former president George H.W. Bush won the seat in 1967. But the Democratic Party is targeting the district in 2018 after presidential nominee Hillary Clinton carried it by 1 percentage point in 2016, while James Cargas captured over 43 percent of the vote in his race against Culberson.

As of October, the seven Democrats who will

vie for the party’s nomination in the March primary had raised a combined total of more than \$2 million. Culberson, who is also facing a GOP primary challenger, Houston businessman David Balat, had raised \$649,813.

The Democratic District 7 candidates’ impressive fundraising totals appeared to reflect a surge in activism and grassroots organizing in response to Donald Trump’s presidency. According to the statistics-based website FiveThirtyEight.com, Culberson has voted in line with Trump’s positions 100 percent of the time in the current Congress.

“This is a very wealthy district, but 117,000 people out of 700,000 already do not have healthcare, and that’s lower than it was before the Affordable Care Act,” said Democratic District 7 candidate Laura Moser. “This is life-and-death for a lot of people living in this district.”

News continued on page 21

WHAT IS GENVOYA®?

GENVOYA is a 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in people 12 years and older who weigh at least 77 pounds. It can either be used in people who are starting HIV-1 treatment and have never taken HIV-1 medicines before, or people who are replacing their current HIV-1 medicines and whose healthcare provider determines they meet certain requirements. These include having an undetectable viral load (less than 50 copies/mL) for 6 months or more on their current HIV-1 treatment. GENVOYA combines 4 medicines into 1 pill taken once a day with food. GENVOYA is a complete HIV-1 treatment and should not be used with other HIV-1 medicines.

GENVOYA does not cure HIV-1 infection or AIDS.

To control HIV-1 infection and decrease HIV-related illnesses, you must keep taking GENVOYA. Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions about how to reduce the risk of passing HIV-1 to others. Always practice safer sex and use condoms to lower the chance of sexual contact with body fluids. Never reuse or share needles or other items that have body fluids on them.

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Who should not take GENVOYA?

Do not take GENVOYA if you take:

- **Certain prescription medicines for other conditions.** It is important to ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines that should not be taken with GENVOYA. Do not start a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider.
- **The herbal supplement** St. John's wort.
- **Any other medicines to treat HIV-1 infection.**

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- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis),** which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.

The most common side effect of GENVOYA is nausea. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effects that bother you or don't go away.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking GENVOYA?

- **All your health problems.** Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if you have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis virus infection.
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ABOUT GENVOYA

- GENVOYA is a prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in people 12 years of age and older who weigh at least 77 pounds and have never taken HIV-1 medicines before. GENVOYA can also be used to replace current HIV-1 medicines for some people who have an undetectable viral load (less than 50 copies/mL of virus in their blood), and have been on the same HIV-1 medicines for at least 6 months and have never failed HIV-1 treatment, and whose healthcare provider determines that they meet certain other requirements.
- **GENVOYA does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS.** Ask your healthcare provider about how to prevent passing HIV-1 to others.

Do NOT take GENVOYA if you:

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- Take the herbal supplement St. John's wort.
- Take any other HIV-1 medicines at the same time.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- This is only a brief summary of important information about GENVOYA. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- Go to GENVOYA.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
- If you need help paying for your medicine, visit GENVOYA.com for program information.

IMPORTANT FACTS

This is only a brief summary of important information about GENVOYA® and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF GENVOYA

GENVOYA can cause serious side effects, including:

- Those in the "Most Important Information About GENVOYA" section.
- Changes in your immune system.
- New or worse kidney problems, including kidney failure.
- Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- Severe liver problems, which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.

The most common side effect of GENVOYA is nausea.

These are not all the possible side effects of GENVOYA. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking GENVOYA.

Your healthcare provider will need to do tests to monitor your health before and during treatment with GENVOYA.

BEFORE TAKING GENVOYA

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- Have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis infection.
- Have any other medical condition.
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

- Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
- Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines that should not be taken with GENVOYA.

HOW TO TAKE GENVOYA

- GENVOYA is a complete one pill, once a day HIV-1 medicine.
- Take GENVOYA with food.

In the wake of Trump's victory, Moser founded Daily Action, a text-message-based service with more than 300,000 subscribers that assigns people one progressive political task each day.

Daily Action is the type of grassroots mobilization tool that could be critical in 2018. With Democrats gunning to take back House and Senate majorities—and many moderate Republicans disillusioned with the party's direction under Trump—voter turnout is expected to be key.

"A lot of people who are usually not engaged in politics are suddenly realizing how important it is to go out and vote, and that's great," said Cargas, who is again seeking the Democratic nomination in District 7. "It's possible [that we will] see presidential turnout levels in a mid-term election."

Other major issues in the District 7 race are likely to be climate change, immigration, and ethics.

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence, Culberson has said he does not believe in man-made climate change. In the wake of Tropical Storm Harvey in August, this issue is especially salient for Houston, which is especially vulnerable to severe weather.

On immigration, Culberson supports Trump's

border wall, and he has led a zealous fight to end so-called "sanctuary cities" by withholding federal funding from any localities that receive the designation.

"This is an issue that affects the safety of our entire community, because we're all less safe if

Times article about the company. He also said multiple sclerosis is a cause that resonates with him personally because of the death of a close friend from the disease.

The controversy heated up over the summer when Culberson sold his shares two weeks

prior to the failure of the company's only drug in a clinical trial, which caused the value of the stock to plummet by more than 90 percent.

"What [Culberson] may have done is criminal," said Cargas, a City of Houston assistant attorney. "Unfortunately, this is a case where we may never get a full trial. Even if there's no attorney general going after him, though, it's important to let the voters know what kind of person they have [representing them]."

The other four Democrats seeking the party's nomination in District 7 are attorney Lizzie Pannill Fletcher; Dr. Jason Westin, a researcher at MD Anderson Cancer Center; Joshua Butler, an administrator at the University of Texas Health Science Center; and Debra Kerner, an educator who served on the board of the Harris County Department of Education.

Cameron Wallace is a frequent contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

"Congressman Culberson does not share the same values as most people in this community in terms of making sure that Houston continues to be a welcoming area."

—Democratic candidate Alex Triantaphyllis

people aren't reporting crimes because they're worried their friend or family member might be deported simply because they called the police," said Triantaphyllis, an executive at the community-development nonprofit BakerRipley.

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, Culberson has been at the center of an insider-trading scandal that began in January, when he purchased about \$14,000 worth of stock in the little-known biotech company Innate Immunotherapeutics, which was developing a drug to treat multiple sclerosis. Culberson bought the stock on the Australian Exchange just one day after a price spike that triggered a formal inquiry from Australian regulators and an independent stockholder challenge.

In a statement, Culberson argued that he purchased the stock in response to a *New York*

COMMUNITY

Photos by Dalton DeHart and Edgardo Aguilar



On September 30, the **Lone Star Volleyball Association** held its Miss LSVa—Houston Strong fundraiser, benefitting the Montrose Center's Hurricane Harvey LGBTQ Relief Fund, at South Beach Nightclub. Pictured are LSVa members and supporters.

On October 1, **Bunnies on the Bayou** hosted Bunnies in Heat at Henderson Heights. Pictured are Bunnies members and friends.



On October 14, the **Gender Infinity 2017** conference was held at the University of Houston Student Center. Pictured are presenters, volunteers, and attendees.



On October 7, Winter Street Studios hosted the Bi-Annual Arts Stroll. Pictured are **Taft McWorther**, **Matt Wood**, **Eryn Garriga**, and **Mario Tacchi**.

MORE COMMUNITY on next page



On October 7, the **Houston Walk for Mental Health Awareness** was held at Stude Park. Pictured are walkers with congresswoman **Sheila Jackson Lee** (D-Houston).



On September 28, the **Greater Houston LGBT Chamber** hosted a ribbon-cutting for Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon. Pictured are chamber representatives, and Neon Boots owners and staff members.



On October 18, Legacy Community Health hosted its 11th Annual Luncheon at the home of **Elizabeth and Gary Petersen**. Pictured are **Shannon Hall, Katy Caldwell**, the Petersens, **Chree Boydstun**, and **Marcus Hall**.



On October 11, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce hosted Brewing Up Business and a Ribbon-Cutting for Signature Care Emergency Center. Pictured are Signature Care staff and representatives from the chamber.



On October 3, the **Houston Hurricanes** held a Gay Bowl Sendoff Party at Griff's Irish Pub. Pictured are members of the soccer team and their supporters.



On October 7, the Diana Foundation hosted its 2017 Country Dinner Weekend at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon. Pictured are **Dan Maxwell, Steven Bretthauer, Michael Kemper, Michael Liebbert, Thom Guthrie, John Heinzerling, Frank Staggs, Nathan Wright, Tanner Williams, Leslie Jackson**, and **Travis Deshotel**.



On October 14, OutReach United hosted its 2017 Coming Out Party at the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum. Pictured are **Al Farb, DJ Aracely, Bryan Cotton, Judson Dunn, Tony Martinez, Arturo Rodriguez, Lady Bunny**, and **Gary Wood**.



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Calendar of Events

Compiled by Marene Gustin

'MAJOR!'

A new documentary film you can't miss



You'll want to see this documentary as it's shown for the first time in Houston at the University of Houston. From queer filmmakers Annalise Ophelian and StormMiguel Florez, this is the story of Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, a transgender elder and pioneering activist.

If you don't know her story, you should. From incarceration to sex worker to leader of the community, she is one amazing human being who was at the Stonewall Riots. The film records her history, told by herself and 20 other trans women of color whose

lives she's touched. Told with love and humor by those who lived it, this is a living, breathing history of a community that still faces struggles today. —

Marene Gustin

- **MAJOR!**
- **November 20**
- **University of Houston**
- **transformhouston.org**

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

1

Hedwig and the Angry Inch 📺
thru 18 Obsidian Theatre and Rich's nightclub present *Hedwig* live onstage, similar to where *Hedwig* began. richsnightclub.com and info@obsidiantheater.org

2

Dash Fall Market + The Design-Art-Style-Home Market for all your holiday buys. dashhouston.com
Voice for the Silenced + Raising awareness about criminal justice reform. rothkochapel.org

3

Charlie Robinson ★ Rockin' road-house swagger and jaunty Tex-Mex to epic border ballads and gut-wrenching closing-time confessionals. A don't-miss Texas song fest. thearmadillopalace.com

4

Landscapes of the Goddess Within 📺
thru 30 Artist Becky Soria has spent years being mindful of her thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, and she puts it all into this show. archwaygallery.com

5

Community Bike Safety Course +
Houston traffic can be cruel to bikers, but you can learn how to handle it with this course. eventbrite.com/e/bike-safety-course-tickets-38094842700



7

Conversations on 'Journey of the Universe' ★ thru Dec 7 Discuss the Emmy Award-winning documentary of the 14-billion-year history of the universe. Tuesdays and Thursdays. ctkelc.org/journey-of-the-universe

8

The Glamour and Romance of Oscar de la Renta 📺 thru Jan 28, 2018 Celebrates the illustrious life and career of the renowned fashion designer. The exhibition showcases nearly 70 ensembles. mfah.org

9

21st Annual Art on the Avenue 📅 Buy local. winterstreetstudios.info
Writers in the Schools Gala + WITS fundraiser. witshouston.org
Houston Ballet Nutcracker Market + nutcrackermarket.com

10

Dixie's Tupperware Party ★
 Rescheduled after Harvey, Dixie finally makes it back. thegrand.com
2017 Houston Cinema Arts Festival 📅 thru 13 Films, video installation, multimedia, and more. hcaf17.org

11

Baile 2017 + A fun fundraiser for the Latino LGBTQ Pride Organization. orgullohouston.org
On Repeat 📅 thru Dec 14 A collection of textile art from 14 artists. clarkessoc.com

12

Human Plus: Real Lives + Real Engineering 📅 thru Jan 1
 A traveling exhibit at the Health Museum. thehealthmuseum.org

13

2017 Festival of Lights + thru Jan 7
 Lights, ice skating, Santa, and more at Moody Gardens. moodygardens.com



15

OUTSMART Gayest & Greatest 2017 Readers' Choice Awards + Join us at Rich's for the awards and to see who the winner is for Best Philanthropic Organization. facebook.com/outsmartmagazine

16

All In for Adoption Texas Hold'em Tournament + Benefit for Arms Wide Open Adoption Services. Shuffle up and deal! armswide.org

17

A Christmas Carol—A Ghost Story of Christmas 📅 thru Dec 30
 Family holiday fair from the Alley. alleytheatre.org

18

Via Colori + & 19 Annual street painting downtown festival. centerhearingandspeech.org

19

Bestowing Beauty: Masterpieces from Persian Lands 📅 thru Feb 11
 An exhibition of more than 100 works drawn from one of the most significant collections of Persian art held in private hands. mfah.org

20

Concierge Classic Golf Tournament + A Houston Concierge Assoc. event. houstonconciergeassn.org
MAJOR! Houston premiere of this documentary. (See opposite page, top) transformhouston.org

22

Everybody Talks about the Weather 📅 thru Jan 7
 Solo exhibit by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz. camh.org

23

HAPPY THANKSGIVING! +
 See the parade downtown at 9 a.m. houstontx.gov

24

For Hire: Contemporary Sign Painting in America 📅 thru Jan 7, 2018 The exhibition showcases a range of contemporary sign painters. crafthouston.org

25

The Beginning of Everything 📅 thru Feb 2018 Drawings from the Janie C. Lee, Louisa Stude Sarofim, and David Whitney collections. menil.org

26

A Lady & Her Pen + Meet best-selling female authors while supporting a good cause. aladyandherpen.com
Zoo Lights + thru Jan 15 More than 2 million holiday lights light up the zoo. houstonzoo.org/zoolights

27

Seagull II Harbor Tour and Dolphin Watch + All aboard for a Galveston tour to spot the dolphins. galveston.com

28

A Tribute to George Barris 📅 thru Dec 31 An exhibit paying tribute to the King of Kustomizing, you can see a replica of Barris' 1966 Batmobile and more. nmfh.org

30

Save the Date

Dickens Champagne Reception +
 Join the kickoff to Dickens on The Strand and drink up. galvestonhistory.org

April 8, 2018 An Evening with Sophia Loren ★
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More CALENDAR →

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Calendar of Events

continued from previous page

Dixie's Tupperware Party

November 10

10

Rescheduled after Harvey, Dixie Longate finally makes it back to the island with her hilarious show. This one-person show is filled with hilarious stories, heartfelt accounts of its importance to women, free giveaways, outrageous audience participation, and the most fabulous assortment of Tupperware ever sold on a theater stage. This is too funny to miss, and you might just find a new use for that plasticware.

thegrand.com

Baile 2017

November 11

11

A fun fundraiser for the Latino LGBTQ Pride Organization. Come dance the night away. Food and drinks included! Robert Gallegos, Linda Morales, and Ana Andrea Molina will be recognized for their contributions to the local Latino LGBTQ community. Tickets are \$125 for individuals, but you can also get VIP tickets and tables. See the nonprofit's website for more information.

orgullohouston.org

Via Colori

November 18 & 19

18 & 19

This annual street painting downtown festival is a giant outdoor art gallery. Bring the kids (children under 18 get in free) and all your friends to downtown's 12th annual festival that includes live music, food and drink vendors, and award-winning street painters from around the world. This event has raised more than \$3 million for Houston's Center for Hearing and Speech, a nonprofit that aids local children with mild to profound hearing loss.

centerhearingandspeech.org

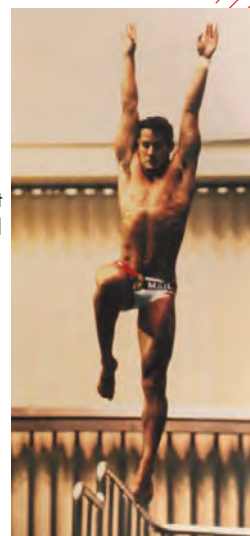
World AIDS Day Luncheon

December 1

Dec. 1

Get your tickets now for this annual event that this year benefits AIDS Foundation Houston and Avenue 360 Health and Wellness. This year's keynote speaker is former Olympic diver Greg Louganis. Forty-one years ago he won his first Olympic medal. He was diagnosed with HIV in 1988, but he continued to compete and only came out as gay afterward. Today he is a speaker, actor, and activist, and has inspired millions.

aidshep.org ■



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How to Broil a Trump Turkey

Carving up your alt-right relatives on Thanksgiving.

You know, if Oklahoma sucked just a little bit more, it could vacuum Denton County out of Texas and we could stop fretting about which damn fool that area's voters elect. Right now, they're represented in the Texas House by Republican veterinarian Lynn Stucky, who talks about Jesus so often that I count the silver when he leaves a dinner party and would not trust him to be alone with my sheep. Hell, even the pope doesn't talk about Jesus as much as this guy does.

You'd think the Republicans would have trouble finding someone more conservative than Stucky to run against him in the 2018 primary. They absolutely did not have any trouble at all.

Please meet Mark Roy, the Denton County Republican Party's vice chair of veterans' affairs, who's challenging Stucky in House District 64. Roy has written on Facebook that Charlottesville was staged, Arizona senator John McCain is a traitor to the country, and that the FDA is putting sex hormones into canned foods in an attempt to turn Americans gay.

So you're not born gay, you just eat yourself that way?

And by gawd, if anybody knows about vegetable conspiracies, it's the Republican vice chair of veterans' affairs in Denton County, Texas.

On the other hand, I'm certain that I am not the only one who has noticed that Del Monte canned string beans have been vigorously getting larger and much, much lengthier. And, come to think of it, I did open a can of really sexy green peas last week. And you know how it is when you get a piece of corn stuck in your teeth? You can wear out your tongue that way.

Not to change the subject, but here we are in November. Good things did not happen last November, so everybody please do whatever superstitious thing you do to ward off accidentally electing a chubby, draft-dodging, Kremlin-approved con man who brags that he grabs women "by the pussy" and decides that transgender Americans are not fit to serve in the military.



COLLAGE: BLAISE DISTEFANO

Why Is This Man Smiling?

Mark Roy, a Republican candidate for Texas House, claims the FDA is putting sex hormones in canned foods in an attempt to turn Americans gay (watch out for what you eat on Thanksgiving). We decided to honor Roy by putting him in a T-shirt from columnist Susan Bankston's list of ways to piss off your Trump-supporting relatives.

What do the president and a Halloween jack-o'-lantern have in common? They're both orange, hollow, seedy, and should be thrown out in November.

And since this is November, please let me remind you that the holidays mean family time—which is sometimes as much fun as detention hall in hell.

I've prepared myself for holiday dinners this year by coming up with a Top Ten List of things to stimulate conversation among Trump-supporting relatives. Please feel free to use as many of these as you need to really hack off your family—and if you have a video camera handy, become the star of the newest viral YouTube video:

10. "If the brussels sprouts seem a little too crispy, it's because Uncle Bubba roasted them over a tiki torch from that white-supremacist rally."
9. "Did anyone else notice that Trump added the words 'under God' in 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game'?"
8. "Aunt Thelma, how's that wall with Mexico going? Have those Mexicans been on time paying for it?"
7. "You know, this squash was picked by an undocumented worker that we brought here to

vote Democratic. While smoking weed. While having an abortion. While taking a knee. While watching Jimmy Kimmel. Enjoy!"

6. "Uncle Henry, did I see you grab that turkey by the pussy?"

5. "Just so you know, I'm taking a swig of vodka every time Grandpa says 'Trump was sent from God to save golf and the NFL, but not them foreigners in Puerto Rico.' Please be warned that in a vodka stupor, I am apt to stick a candle in his ear and a feather in his butt and turn him into a damn centerpiece."

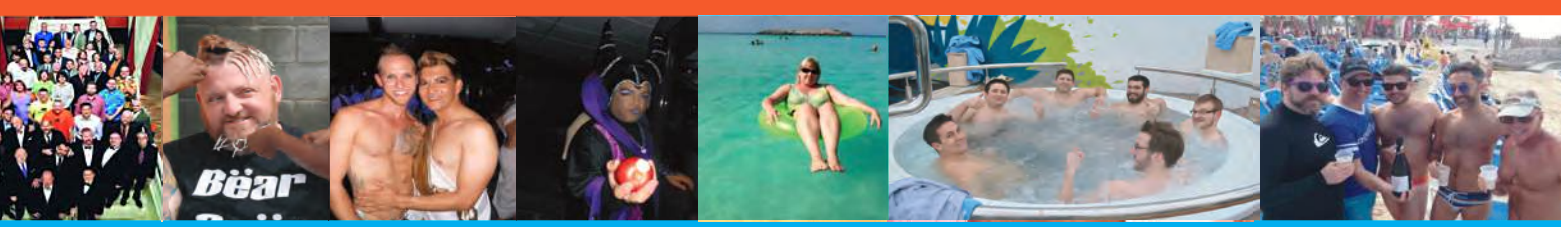
4. "The crunchy things in the sweet potatoes are brought to you by the National Rifle Association."

3. "The arc of history is long, and it eagerly bends toward screwing Nazis."

2. Jump on the table and in your best Ethel Merman voice, sing, "I'm gay, gay, gay!" Even if you're not, not, not.

1. Say nothing. Just wear your "Russians for Democrats in 2018" T-shirt, and smile knowingly all day.

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



7 Nights – 17th Annual Halloween Cruise

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Never Too Safe with Identity Theft

Recent data breaches underscore the importance of protecting yourself.

It would be difficult not to notice the growing number of data breaches affecting seemingly “secure” entities, including Anthem, Yahoo, JP Morgan Chase, and even the IRS.

While all data breaches are alarming, the recent Equifax hack—with almost half of the U.S. population affected—means the chances are good that criminals have at least some of your sensitive information.

When it comes to identity theft, one of the first questions people ask is whether they’ll be responsible for fraudulent charges.

Federal law caps your liability at \$50 for unauthorized credit-card charges—and, depending on your card issuer, you may not be responsible for anything.

For debit/ATM cards, the amount of liability depends on how quickly you report the theft. If you report the card being lost or stolen within the first two days, you may only be responsible for \$50. However, if you wait up to 60 days, you could find yourself responsible for \$500—and if you wait more than 60 days, there is no limit to your liability. With that in mind, be sure to check your credit- and debit-card statements and report any evidence of fraud immediately.

After reporting suspected fraud, it is also important to place a fraud alert on your credit reports by contacting one of the three major bureaus—Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion. This is basically a “red flag” notifying creditors and lenders that they need to take additional steps to verify your identity before extending any credit. An initial fraud alert is free, and will remain in place for 90 days.

If your Social Security number has been compromised, be sure to contact the Social Security Administration. Even if the perpetrators haven’t moved forward with any activity, they could be planning to file a fraudulent tax return in the future.

Finally, if you become a victim of identity theft, you should file a report at your local police station.

In terms of proactive measures, identity-theft insurance can be a good way to monitor your



credit and accounts, as well to restore your identity and mitigate financial damage if you become a victim. With most plans, the legal fees and other expenses directly associated with reclaiming your identity will be covered. Other common coverage includes lost wages due to time taken off from work to deal with identity theft.

The main carriers of identity-theft coverage include LifeLock, Privacy Guard, ID Shield (an affiliate of Legal Shield), ProtectMyID, and ironically, Equifax. Because coverage varies greatly, it’s recommended that you look at several options.

Although there is no way to guarantee protection from identity theft, there are several other steps you can take to prevent it, including:

- Changing your email and account passwords frequently;
- Having a two-step login/authentication on your email and other online accounts;
- Creating passcodes and adding emergency contact info to your mobile devices;
- Having a special email account for banking and other financial information;
- Changing the default settings on your Internet router;
- Installing a virtual private network (VPN) on your tablet, laptop, and/or other devices that you use in public places;
- Running anti-virus software on all devices;
- Not opening emails or clicking on links unless

you recognize the sender;

- Having email and/or text alerts set up for your financial and credit-card transactions;
- Maintaining strong privacy settings on social-media accounts, and not posting your home address or information about when you are on vacation;
- Making sure that you back up all data on your devices in two places—a physical, external hard drive, and in the cloud;
- Putting a security freeze on your credit files with the three major credit bureaus;
- Regularly checking your children’s Social Security numbers to ensure no one is using them;
- Setting up automatic updates for your online programs and apps.

To learn more about protecting yourself from the growing threat of identity theft, talk with a professional who can provide you with guidance and resources. It can be well worth it to put protective measures in place, because when it comes to your personal information, you can never be “too safe.”

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. Yung can be reached at grace.yung@jpl.com.

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FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Check out these fabulous events co-sponsored by OutSmart and our marketing partners.

November 4:
**25th Houston Transgender
Unity Banquet** unitybanquet.com



November 15:
**21st Annual OutSmart
Magazine 2017 Gayest &
Greatest Readers' Choice
Awards** reception at Rich's.
tinyurl.com/gayestandgreatest2017

November 23-26:
**Houston Round-up, LGBTQ
Recovery Conference.**
houstonroundup.org

SAVE THE DATE

December 1:
World AIDS Day Events

December 2:
**HIV & Aging Coalition
2017 Holiday Party**
Montrose Center, no RSVP required.
montrosecenter.org

December 16:
Houston Pride Band presents
Under the Mistletoe, benefitting
Houston Pride Band.
houstonprideband.org

TimeOut in Monaco



📍 **Chris Aehlinger** took OutSmart to Monaco.

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from left Barbara Larrow, Marc Archuleta, Jamie Dominguez, Chris Cazares,
Noel Phillips, Kelly Ivy & Melissa Hull



Business Development Team

from left Terry Pasternak, Erin Parker &
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At long last, here they are . . .

In the wake of Tropical Storm Harvey, we chose to postpone our Gayest & Greatest issue, instead devoting the October magazine to saluting the LGBTQ heroes of the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.

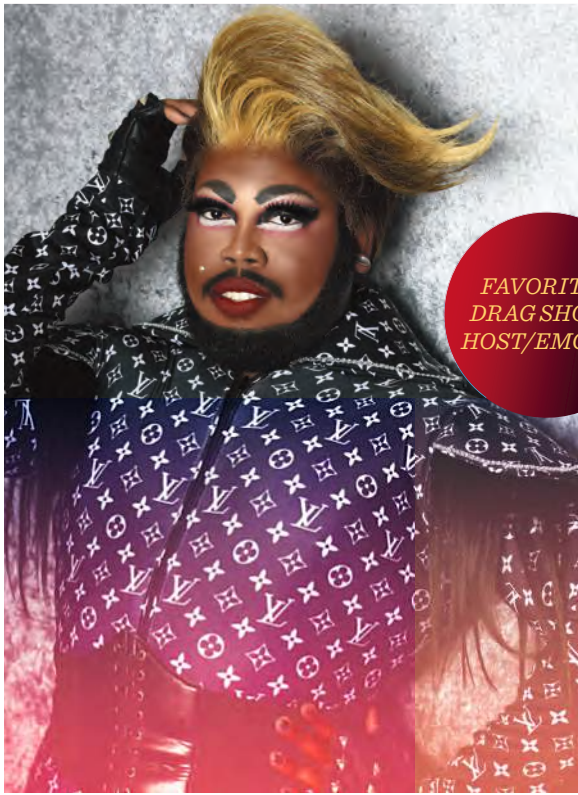
Our 21st annual Readers' Choice Awards have been record-setting, with more than 850 nominees and 222,000 votes cast in 15 categories and 214 subcategories.

On the following pages, we spotlight 14 G&G winners, in addition to listing all first-place finishers and runners-up.



2017

The reception for our Readers' Choice Awards, where we'll present certificates and announce this year's Favorite Philanthropic Organization, is set for November 15 from 5:30 to 9 p.m. at Rich's. The event is free, and will include entertainment as well as complimentary hors d'oeuvres. To RSVP, visit tinyurl.com/gayestandgreatest2017.



FAVORITE
DRAG SHOW
HOST/EMCEE

Bearded Wonder

Blackberri brings Drag Queen Storytime to Houston libraries.

Darius Vallier says he “was horrible on the microphone” when he debuted his own show at Michael’s Outpost last December—his prize for winning Season 8 of Dessie’s Drag Race. “I guess I was just so nervous, so I took it as a challenge,” Vallier says. “By the third or fourth week, I felt more comfortable. I started to enjoy it, having my own platform like that.”

Soon, Vallier left behind his job as a bartender to devote himself to a career performing as Blackberri, his bearded-lady drag persona. “I saw a lot of entertainers and felt there was a need for something new,” Vallier says, referring to the beard. “Most people don’t know I do drag. If you see me out and about, you wouldn’t know unless I have some leftover eyelash glue. I might have glitter on my face the next day.

“I am beyond surprised that it’s actually my full-time job,” Vallier adds. “I’ve only been doing it a nanosecond, but it pays my rent and everything.”

In June, the host with the most introduced Houston children to his drag character when Brazos Bookstore invited Vallier to star in its LGBTQ Pride Month attraction, Drag Queen Story Hour. “This was a really huge, happy event,”

says the bookstore’s marketing director, Sara Balabanlilar. “Everyone crowded around to hear Blackberri read *Red: A Crayon’s Story* by Michael Hall.”

In the award-winning 2015 children’s book, a blue crayon that’s mistakenly labeled red overcomes its identity crisis to discover the unrecognized power of its true inner self.

The event was such a hit that the Houston Public Library hired Vallier to launch its new program, Drag Queen Storytime, this fall. “I was surprised, but very happy,” says Vallier, who grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana. “Texas is not the most progressive state, but Houston is very progressive.”

The city’s next Drag Queen Storytime is planned for Saturday, November 25, at the Freed-Montrose Neighborhood Library. Mean-

while, Blackberri regales gay fans at three regular weekly gigs in addition to bookings at other venues.

“You can catch me at ‘C U Next Tuesday’ every week at Michael’s Outpost,” Vallier says. “I host and perform, and I am the show director. I do a lot of old divas like Patti LaBelle and Aretha Franklin. I do some cartwheels and splits.”

On Wednesday nights, Blackberri emcees Gayme Night at The Room Bar and Lounge in Spring. “We play ‘gaymes’ like ‘adult’ Twister—the kind of games you play at a baby shower.”

On Saturdays, he’s back at Michael’s Outpost for Eye Cons, a professional celebrity-illusion review. “I just host,” he says, “and I do joke illusions.”

The 27-year-old bachelor studied musical theater for two years in college before enrolling in fashion design at the Art Institute of Houston. “After two years there, I took a break to work,” he says. “I felt like I had learned everything I needed to learn in school for the path I wanted to take.”

Vallier credits—who else?—Bob the Drag Queen, winner of the eighth season of RuPaul’s Drag Race in 2016, for luring him into female impersonation. “He is definitely one of the reasons I started doing drag, along with Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*,” he says.

—Don Maines

BEST DRAG SHOW BAR Hamburger Mary’s

Finalists: JR’s Bar & Grill, Michael’s Outpost, TC’s Premier Showbar

FAVORITE BAR TO SHOOT POOL

George’s Sports Bar

Finalists: Eagle Houston, Michael’s OutPost, Neon Boots, Tony’s Corner Pocket

FAVORITE BAR TO TWO STEP

Neon Boots

Finalists: Ranch Hill Saloon, The Room Bar

FAVORITE CLUB AFTER 2 A.M.

Rich’s

Finalists: Club 2020, Neon Boots, South Beach

FAVORITE CLUB FOR DANCING

Rich’s

Finalists: Bayou City Bar & Grill, Eagle Houston, Neon Boots, South Beach

FAVORITE CLUB IF YOU’RE UNDER 21

South Beach

Finalists: Blur Bar, Club 2020, Rich’s

FAVORITE COMMUNITY BAR

Eagle Houston

Finalists: Bayou City Bar & Grill, Guava Lamp, JR’s, Pearl Bar

FAVORITE DRAG KING

Richard Long

Finalists: Zambi McZee, Roman Syder Ross, Ian Syder-Blake

FAVORITE DRAG SHOW HOST/EMCEE

Blackberri

Finalists: Kofi Cakes, Alexyus Paris, Lady Shamu

FAVORITE FEMALE BARTENDER

Sarah Thompkins-Gutierrez/JR’s

Finalists: Jessica Eve, Raci Farris, Kristina Prats, Rey “La Reyna” Rodriguez

FAVORITE MALE BARTENDER

Matthew Friar/ Eagle Houston

Finalists: David Cunningham, Neal Garza, Adam Hancock, Christopher Tyer

FAVORITE FEMALE DJ

Melle Mel

Finalists: Athenz, Aracely, Tina

FAVORITE MALE DJ

JD Arnold

Finalists: Eddie E, Panda, Joe Ross

FAVORITE MEN’S BAR

Eagle Houston

Finalists: JR’s, Neon Boots, Rich’s, Tony’s Corner Pocket

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG) FEMALE ENTERTAINER

Wendy Taylor

Finalists: Roofie Dubois, Nina Lombardo, Morena Roas





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G&G17

continued from page 37

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG) MALE ENTERTAINER

Ty Frazier

Finalists: Marty Adamson, Sebastian Gutierrez,
Bubba McNeely, Gio Wzhitney

FAVORITE LOCAL BAND Houston Pride Band

Finalists: The Band Hennessey, Dirty Disco,
Fluff The Kat, Space Kiddettes

FAVORITE PLACE TO SHOW OFF YOUR LEATHER Eagle Houston

Finalist: Ripcord

FAVORITE PLACE TO WATCH MALE DANCERS Tony's Corner Pocket

Finalists: Eagle Houston, JR's Bar & Grill, Rich's

FAVORITE STRAIGHT BAR

Barbarella (tie) Bar Boheme (tie)

Finalists: Dan Electros, Rudyard's, Spire

FAVORITE WOMEN'S BAR

Pearl Bar

Finalists: Neon Boots, Ranch Hill Saloon

MOST DIVINE DRAG QUEEN Violet S'Arbleu

Finalists: Kara Dion, Chloe Knox,
Dessie Love-Blake, Alexyus Paris, Lady Shamu



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Radio-Activism

Gay DJ and radio host 'Special K' lends talents to LGBTQ causes.

What's so special about Kevin "Special K" England? Pretty much everything. KRBE 104.1 FM listeners love his personality and his on-air prank phone calls, and the LGBTQ community loves the way he gives back. And we assume his boyfriend of 16 years, Brian, appreciates his humor and his boyish good looks. England has been wowing his fans on the air in Houston since the late '90s, and before then he was known throughout the gay clubs for his DJ skills.

"I still like to spin once in a while," says England, who occasionally DJs on weekends. "But it wasn't really stable work. I wanted to stay in music somehow, and I'd met some radio people who told me to go for it. KRBE liked me, and now I get to play music live for millions of people every day. And I get to be gay on the air!"

"I think I'm about the only [openly gay host] on the radio," he adds. "It's frustrating to see those who still aren't out." His station encourages him to be out and proud, and he thinks

it's the best job anyone could have.

Originally from Delaware, England once worked as a Merchant Marine. Now, he loves to play music that makes people want to get up and dance. As a regular on KRBE's Roula & Ryan morning show (the duo that gave him his Special K moniker), he plays retro music, and on Fridays he does prank calls. You can email him at specialk@104krbe.com and request that he prank your friends (or frenemies). The results are often hilarious.

On the serious side, Special K frequently volunteers his time and talents in the LGBTQ community and beyond. He's hosted the AIDS Walk, works with the Human Rights Campaign, frequently helps out at local animal shelters, and is working on an April Red Dinner gala that will raise funds to help LGBTQ youth to stay in college. "It can be very difficult for LGBT youth to get an education when they don't have the support of their families, so this is really important."

"Volunteering is my church," he adds. "It's just as fulfilling as sitting in a building listening to a sermon. If you can give back in your free time, you should."

Funny, fabulous, and a real hero in the community, England is a repeat winner in this category. —*Marene Gustin*

FAVORITE
MALE RADIO
PERSONALITY

BEST FEMALE LGBTQ BUSINESS PERSON

Tammi Wallace

Finalists: Sandy Bubbert, Caryn Craig, Kathy Hubbard, Julie Mabry, Cristina Martinez

BEST MALE LGBTQ BUSINESS PERSON

Mark DeLange

Finalists: Charles Armstrong, Bruce Smith, DDS, Grey Stephens, Gary Wood

FAVORITE FEMALE (COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY

Sarah Pepper, Mix 96.5

Finalists: Roula Christie, 104 KRBE; Lauren Kelly, Mix 96.5; Erica Rico, 93Q

FAVORITE MALE (COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY

Special K, 104 KRBE

Finalists: Al Farb, 93Q

FAVORITE FEMALE (COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY

Judy Reeves



FAVORITE MALE (COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY

JD Doyle

Finalists: Chris Arasin, Bryan Hlavinka, Jack Valinski

FAVORITE FEMALE COMMUNITY HERO

Annie Parker

Finalists: Melanie Pang, Monica Roberts, Fran Watson, Carol Wyatt-Woodell

FAVORITE MALE COMMUNITY HERO

Ray Hill

Finalists: Blake Ellis, Dalton DeHart, Ryan Leach, Lou Weaver, Ashton P. Woods

FAVORITE FEMALE COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHER

Yvonne Feece

Finalists: Gianna Marie Navarro, Judy Woods

FAVORITE MALE COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHER

Dalton DeHart

Finalists: John Cox, Eric Edward Schell, Steven Tilotta

FAVORITE FEMALE LOCAL POLITICIAN

Ellen Cohen (tie)

Kim Ogg (tie)

Finalists: Sylvia Garcia, Annie Parker



FAVORITE MALE LOCAL POLITICIAN

Sylvester Turner

Finalists: Garnet Coleman, Robert Gallegos, Steven Kirkland, Mike Laster

FAVORITE FEMALE TV PERSONALITY

Dominique Sachse

Finalists: Carmen Maria Montiel Avila, Ellen Degeneres, Deborah Duncan, Stephanie Gerry

FAVORITE (COMMUNITY) TV PERSONALITY

Ernie Manouse



FAVORITE MALE TV PERSONALITY

Frank Billingsley

Finalists: Andy Cerota, Ryan Korsgard, Derrick Shore

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ BLOGGER/VLOGGER

AJ Mistretta

Finalists: Joey Guerra, Monica Roberts, Travis Webb, Ashton P. Woods

FAVORITE LGBTQ TEACHER/EDUCATOR

Charles Swan

Finalists: Blake Ellis, Bryant Johnson-Wood, Dr. Colt Keo-Meier, Brian Riedel

FAVORITE LGBTQ TWEETER

Joey Guerra

Finalists: Shelby Jeffcoat-del Busto, Brad Pritchett, Fran Watson

FAVORITE NATIONAL BLOGGER/VLOGGER

Rich Lux

Finalists: Perez Hilton, Joe Jervis, Randy Rainbow

LEADING FUNDRAISER

Lady Shamu

Finalists: Ivan Cupcake, Angela Mercy, Violet S'Arbleu

LEADING FEMALE FUNDRAISER

Carol Wyatt-Woodell

(tie)

Sallie Wyatt-Woodell

(tie)

Finalists: Cristina Martinez, Margarita Perez, Ana Sanchez

LEADING MALE FUNDRAISER

Gary Wood

Finalists: Don Gill, David Goldberg, Kennedy Loftin, Tanner Williams →

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What Is Mytesi?

Mytesi is a prescription medicine used to improve symptoms of noninfectious diarrhea (diarrhea not caused by a bacterial, viral, or parasitic infection) in adults living with HIV/AIDS on ART.

Do Not Take Mytesi if you have diarrhea caused by an infection. Before you start Mytesi, your doctor and you should make sure your diarrhea is not caused by an infection (such as bacteria, virus, or parasite).

Possible Side Effects of Mytesi Include:

- Upper respiratory tract infection (sinus, nose, and throat infection)
- Bronchitis (swelling in the tubes that carry air to and from your lungs)
- Cough
- Flatulence (gas)
- Increased bilirubin (a waste product when red blood cells break down)

For a full list of side effects, please talk to your doctor. Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or does not go away.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Should I Take Mytesi if I Am:

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- Studies in animals show that Mytesi could harm an unborn baby or affect the ability to become pregnant
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- This drug should only be used during pregnancy if clearly needed

A Nursing Mother?

- It is not known whether Mytesi is passed through human breast milk
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- Your doctor will help you to decide whether to stop nursing or to stop taking Mytesi

Under 18 or Over 65 Years of Age?

- Mytesi has not been studied in children under 18 years of age
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What Should I Know About Taking Mytesi With Other Medicines?

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What If I Have More Questions About Mytesi?

For more information, please see the full Prescribing Information at Mytesi.com or speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

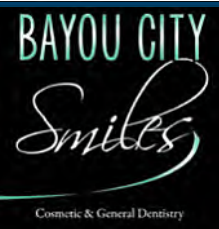
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G&G17
continued from page 40

MOST PROMINENT FEMALE LGBTQ ACTIVIST
Fran Watson
Finalists: Januari Leo, Melanie Pang, Monica Roberts

MOST PROMINENT MALE LGBTQ ACTIVIST
Lou Weaver
Finalists: Blake Ellis, Ryan Leach, Brad Pritchett, Ashton P. Woods

MOST SUPPORTIVE LOCAL BUSINESS OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY
Hamburger Mary's
Finalists: Crocker Bar, Guava Lamp, Jenni's Noodle House, Neon Boots, Pearl Bar, Silver Eagle Distributors

MOST SUPPORTIVE NATIONAL BUSINESS OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY
Target (tie)
Wells Fargo (tie)
Finalists: Apple, Bud Light, Macy's, Southwest Airlines

MOST VALUABLE FEMALE VOLUNTEER
Fran Watson
Finalists: Sarah Tompkins Gutierrez, Kim Townsend, Melissa Vivianco, Tammi Wallace

MOST VALUABLE MALE VOLUNTEER
Jack Berger
Finalists: Jacques Bourgeois, Brad Pritchett, Lou Weaver, Tanner Williams, Gary Wood



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‘The Homes Are My Stage’

Former musician Jeremy Fain knows how to put on a show.



**BEST MALE
REAL ESTATE
AGENT**

Jeremy Fain is a high-performing associate with Greenwood King, but he was a professional musician before he entered the real-estate business. The bassoonist was a professor of music at Lone Star College–Montgomery, the University of Texas at Tyler, and Stephen F. Austin State University. So how did he go from the bassoon to helping homebuyers?

“There was just a point in my life when I had to decide if I wanted to continue with music or try something different,” he says. “And the real estate just fell into place.”

But that doesn’t mean he has forgotten his previous life.

“I teach a class for new Realtors,” he explains. “And I use my music-education background to teach how to deliver on the spot, as you do in orchestra auditions. It’s all about learning what works and how to relate to people. My whole life was sitting on a stage performing. Now it’s about showing homes. The homes are my stage now, because it’s the same as putting on a show.”

He specializes in inner-loop properties—downtown, EaDo, Midtown, Rice

Military, Montrose, The Heights, River Oaks, Upper Kirby, West University, Memorial Park, as well as Tanglewood and the Memorial Villages. As for his own home, he lives alone in a contemporary loft outside of downtown. “The upper level is very industrial, but the lower floor has a Southern-plantation style to it,” he says.

As for living alone he says: “Yes, it’s just me. Real estate is my other half!”

In the LGBTQ community, Fain is very active. He serves on the boards of Pride Houston and Avenue 360 Health & Wellness—the joint organization created in 2016 by Houston Area Community Services and Bering Omega, two nonprofits that merged to become a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

He’s also on the board of the Houston Tennis Club and likes to wield a racket as much as he still likes to play his bassoon at home. If you’re looking to buy a new home in Houston’s inner loop, you can contact him at Greenwood King. But if you just want to meet him socially, your best bet might be the 13 Celsius Wine Bar & Cafe in Midtown.

“I’m there a lot,” he says. “It’s my Cheers.” —*Marlene Gustin*

BEST FEMALE REAL-ESTATE AGENT

Karen Derr (tie)
Debbie Levine (tie)

Finalists: Terre Coffman,
Dana Gray, Lynette Lew,
Dina Salazar

BEST MALE REAL-ESTATE AGENT

Jeremy Fain

Finalists: Brooks Ballard, Eric
Bradley, Ron Kerr, Tim Surratt,
Luke Volz, Andy Weber

BEST HOME BUILDER

**Heels 2 Hammer
Construction**

Finalists: Farb Homes, Loyd Russel
Homes, ROC Homes,
Woodstone Builders

BEST REMODELING COMPANY

**Heels 2 Hammer
Construction** (tie)
Luria Construction (tie) →

Finalists: C House Renovations,
Terri Robinson—Construction
& Design, Unique Builders



BEST MORTGAGE COMPANY

**Cody Grizzoffi—
Interlinc Mortgage**

Finalists: John Frels,
Robert Spiegel—Republic State
Mortgage, Wells Fargo

BEST TITLE COMPANY

**Michael Caballero—
Stewart Title Heights**

Finalists: Charter Title,
Chicago Title Inner Loop



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Concierge Tends to Its Guests —and LGBTQ Charities

Owners of boutique agency forego salaries to support local nonprofits.



DALTON DEHART



Concierge Travel consistently captures the OUTSMART Readers' Choice Award. This year, the company won in two categories—and it's no wonder why.

Concierge Travel was founded in 1997 by Kim Gustavsson and his partner, Charles Caliva, as a boutique, gay-owned travel agency and tour operator. In 2009, the agency began offering its own small-ship cruise charters, and today it bills itself as the largest RSVP-vacation agency in the world.

But it isn't just the gay cruises to exotic locales that the LGBTQ community loves; it's also all the good that Concierge Travel does by donating to equality-related causes.

"We both have other careers," says Gustavsson, who works as a leadership consultant. "So neither of us has drawn a salary from the travel agency for 10 years. We donate it all to charity. We give something to pretty much anyone who comes to our door, but our main focus right now is the Montrose Center. We donated

\$30,000 for the No Place Like Home gala that raised \$325,000 for the planned LGBTQ-friendly seniors housing project. It's not just about writing a check. It's about the leverage a nonprofit can do with that donation."

In the past, Concierge Travel has donated to the Houston Pride Band, the Human Rights Campaign, and Legacy Community Health. The agency has also contributed to national and international LGBTQ organizations, but Gustavsson says that in light of the Trump administration's negative actions against the LGBTQ community, they have decided to focus on local efforts. They plan to make sponsoring the Montrose Center's No Place Like Home event an annual effort.

Gustavsson is busy working on a Puerto Vallarta trip that the agency has set for February. "It's going to be a relaxing and fun-filled week at a private villa," he says. "It's on a private beach, and the accommodations are beautiful—the Villa Verano and Puerto Vallarta Beach Club—and we'll have private chefs and

bartenders on site." Tours for the rest of this year are sold out, but you can book the Puerto Vallarta week and other 2018 trips at conciergetravel.cc. "And we are really excited about some of the tours we're planning now for 2019."

As you would expect, the couple travels extensively, with Puerto Vallarta being a favorite spot. Gustavsson has been to 86 countries and has studied seven languages. One of his favorite destinations is Amsterdam, but he says you can't beat Peru for the food.

Unfortunately, it hasn't been all galas and gay cruises this year.

"We lost about 95 percent of everything—our house, our office—during Harvey," Gustavsson says. "It just wiped us out. Luckily, we have a great staff, and within seven days, we were back up and running out of our manager's house. As for our home in Bellaire, we had two-and-a-half feet of water inside. We're just going to tear it down and rebuild. I had been wanting a redo anyway."

—*Marene Gustin*

BEST AIRLINE

Southwest Airlines

Finalists: American, United Airlines

BEST LGBTQ CRUISE OR TOUR COMPANY

Aquafest (tie)
Concierge Travel (tie)

Finalists: Gay Galveston Cruises,
JJ's Out and About Travel



BEST HONEYMOON DESTINATION

← **Puerto Vallarta**

Finalists: Belize, Hawaii

BEST LGBTQ TRAVEL DESTINATION

Puerto Vallarta

Finalists: Costa Rica, Key West,
New Orleans, New York City

BEST LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

Uber

Finalists: Houston BCycle, Lyft,
Metro Houston

BEST LOCAL TRAVEL AGENCY

Concierge Travel

Finalists: Aquafest, Vanguard Travel



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Putting the 'Bar' in Barbecue

Chef Michele Free lights up Guava Lamp on Tuesdays.

Guava Lamp has long been a favorite watering hole for Houston's LGBTQ community. Now, thanks to resident chef Michele Free, the bar has become a veritable dining destination. As the culinary force behind Guava Lamp's Tuesday Steak Nights, Free has transformed what can often be a pedestrian pub-menu staple into a consumption experience verging on the gourmet.

Born and raised in Houston, Free says she always enjoyed cooking, but didn't immediately gravitate toward it as a profession. She did, however, always have a penchant for grilling—thanks to her father, a skilled barbecue chef. After amassing sufficient resources, Free entered culinary school in 2013 and was soon helping area bars develop their own steak nights.

Shortly after Labor Day in 2016, Free began focusing her attention on elevating the steak nights at Guava Lamp. "My philosophy," explains Free, "is to make the customer happy by offering the cleanest and best steak night in the city."

Admitting that her pet peeve is "disarray," Free made both major alterations and smaller tweaks such as offering patrons personal servings of condiments so they don't have to share. Steak nights at Guava Lamp are now about much more than steak, for Free has ex-

panded the menu to include pork chops, salmon, and occasionally lamb chops, as well as three cuts of beef (ribeyes, strips, and filets).

Using her own homemade rubs, she carefully primes her proteins before cooking them to order. And, unlike at many other venues, Free's ability to work within a 10-degree heat range enables her to offer customers precise variations of "doneness," such as "rare plus."

All cuts are finished with a healthy garnish of clarified or infused butters, such as black truffle and pink peppercorn (for filets) or goat cheese and rosemary (for lamb chops). Accompanying your choice of meat is Free's special potato amalgam, which she describes as a "baked potato in mashed potato form," which almost everyone agrees is a most delicious invention.

Loaded with plenty of butter and sour cream ("a near-perfect food," according to Free) and crowned with melted cheddar cheese, the massive spuds easily hold their own against the steak with regards to flavor factor. Those

**BEST
STEAK
NIGHT**



looking to up the ante even further can elect to add shrimp or grilled asparagus to the already monstrous platters.

Although it's obvious that Free (who is also the founder and owner of Free Grillin catering company) loves fired meat, she readily admits that on her nights off, she often steps away from the flames to indulge in Middle Eastern or Asian food. She ardently strives to eat local and support Houston businesses whenever possible, and counts Thai Gourmet and Ibiza as favorite haunts.

The icing on the cake (or, rather, the truffle butter on the ribeye) is that Free's sophisticated Guava Lamp fare can be had in a friendly environment that is anything but stiff. That combination has attracted weekly business from regulars as well as new devotees, expanding and diversifying Guava Lamp's community.

—Joanna O'Leary

BEST 24-HOUR RESTAURANT

House of Pies

Finalists: Katz's Deli & Bar, Midtown Bar & Grill

BEST BAKERY

The Acadian Bakers

Finalists: Dessert Gallery, Mister French's Gourmet Bakery, Three Brothers Bakery

BEST BARBECUE

The Pit Room

Finalists: Brookstreet, Demeris

BEST BREAKFAST

Baby Barnaby's

Finalists: Lankford Grocery, Snooze, Urban Eats

BEST BRITISH

Red Lion Pub

Finalists: Black Lab, Queen Vic

BEST BRUNCH

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalists: Baba Yega, Hamburger Mary's, Riva's, Urban Eats

BEST CAFÉ

Barnaby's

Finalists: Brasil Houston, Empire Café, Hamburger Mary's

BEST CAJUN

BB's Cajun

Finalists: Ragin' Cajun, Treebeard's

BEST CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalists: Ande's Café, Churrasco's, El Pueblito

BEST CHINESE

Ginger and Fork

Finalists: Ambassador, Kim Son, Pepper Twins

BEST CUBAN

El Rey

Finalists: Café Piquet, El Meson

BEST DELI

Kenny & Ziggy's

Finalists: Katz's Deli & Bar, Nielsen's Deli

BEST DESSERT

Dessert Gallery (tie) The Chocolate Bar (tie)

Finalists: The Acadian Bakers, Rita's of Houston

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Fusion Taco

Finalists: Big Judy's, Rita's Italian Ice, Waffle Bus

BEST FRENCH

Brasserie 19

Finalists: Café Rabelais, Etoile Cuisine et Bar, L'Olivier

BEST GREEK

Niko Niko's

Finalists: Helen Greek Food & Wine Theo's, Yia Yia Mary's

BEST HAMBURGER

Hamburger Mary's

Finalists: Barnaby's, Bernie's Burger Bus, The Acadian Bakers, The Burger Joint

BEST HOTDOG

Good Dog

Finalists: Happy Fatz, Love Dogs Hotdogs

BEST INDIAN

Pondicheri

Finalists: Kiran's, Khyber Grill

BEST ITALIAN

Riva's

Giacomo's (tie)

Finalists: Bollo, Carraba's

BEST JAPANESE

Uchi

Finalists: Jinya Ramen Bar, Kata Robata, Osaka

BEST LUNCH SPOT

Urban Eats

Finalists: Barnaby's, Gloria's Latin Cuisine, Hamburger Mary's, Lankford Grocery

BEST MEDITERRANEAN

Aladdin

Finalists: Fadi's, Halal Guys, Niko Niko's



BEST MEXICAN ↑

El Tiempo

Finalists: Chapultepec, Gloria's Latin Cuisine, La Mexicana, Teotihuacan



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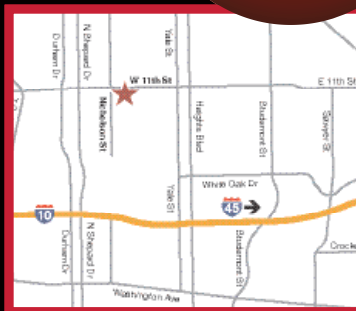


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BEST MIDDLE EASTERN

Fadi's

Finalists: Aladdin, Garson, Kasra Persian Grill

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Hamburger Mary's

Finalists: The Ivy & James, Pinch, Snooze, South Bank Seafood, Star Fish

BEST PIZZA

Bollo Woodfired Pizza (tie)

Star Pizza (tie)

Finalists: Pink's Pizza, Pi Pizza, Pizza L'Vino, Pizzeria Solario

BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE

Rainbow Lodge

Finalists: B&B Butchers, Giacomo's, Pappas Steakhouse

BEST PLACE TO CELEBRATE

Riva's

Finalists: Churrasco's, El Tiempo, Gloria's Latin Cuisine, Hamburger Mary's

BEST RESTAURANT FOR CHEAP EATS

Barnaby's

Finalists: Hamburger Mary's, Les Givral, Tacos A Go-Go

BEST RESTAURANT FOR ELEGANT DINING

Rainbow Lodge

Finalists: Churrasco's, Da Marco, Season's 52

BEST RESTAURANT FOR OUTDOOR DINING

Baba Yega

Finalists: The Barking Pig, Rainbow Lodge, Tiny Boxwoods

BEST SEAFOOD

Danton's

Finalists: Goode Company Seafood, Rainbow Lodge, Salt Air Seafood Kitchen

BEST STEAK HOUSE

Pappas Bros. Steakhouse

Finalists: Fleming's, Rainbow Lodge, Vic & Anthony's

BEST STEAK NIGHT AT A BAR

Guava Lamp with Chef Michele Free

Finalists: The Barking Pig, Griff's, Pearl Bar

SUSHI

Kata Robata →

Finalists: Oishi, Osaka, Uchi



BEST THAI

Thai Spice

Finalists: Asia Market Restaurant, Nidda, Nit Noi

BEST VEGETARIAN/VEGAN

Bellagreen

Finalists: Field of Greens, Green Vegetarian Cuisine, The Hobbit Café

BEST VIETNAMESE

Mai's Restaurant

Finalists: Les Ba'get, Huynh Restaurant, Jenni's Noodle House

FRIENDLIEST RESTAURANT STAFF

Barnaby's

Finalists: Paulie's, Riva's



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Top of the Class

Out For Education among the nation's largest funders of LGBTQ scholarships.

**FAVORITE
LOCAL LGBTQ
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION**

As the saying goes, “The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago.” The problem is, few of us had the vision to do so.

In 1998, two Houston organizations, PFLAG and HATCH, began working together to provide scholarships to LGBTQ youth. Then in 2013, the PFLAG/HATCH Youth Scholarship Foundation became known as Out for Education, which today is one of the largest funders of LGBTQ scholarships in the U.S.

Board president Sallie Wyatt-Woodell explains that the group’s previous name was a mouthful, and Out for Education captures its essence more effectively. “Simply stated, we are out. We are for education. We are ‘Out for Education,’” says Wyatt-Woodell, who served as female grand marshal of Houston Pride in 2017.

Out for Education provides financial assistance to LGBTQ youth from the Houston and Harris County area and to non-local youth who are attending colleges or universities in Houston. Although it’s still a relatively young agency, it has managed to grant more than \$1.4 million to date.

Board member Jordan Mills attended the

University of Houston and, thanks to Out for Education, was able to study pre-law. “I would not have been able to afford college without the help,” Mills says. “Not only that, but Out for Education provided me with emotional support, and lots of friends. They nurtured my confidence, and I consider myself very blessed to have been a part of them. My way of giving back is to sit on the board and help others in the same way.”

Out for Education has awarded scholarships to students from 68 high schools, who’ve attended 58 colleges and universities in 16 states. Scholarship recipients most commonly attend the University of Houston, the University of Texas, Houston Community College, and Lone Star College. How does the agency raise the funds it distributes? “Every year, we apply to various nonprofit agencies and for-profit corporations,” Wyatt-Woodell says. “If chosen, Out for Education receives money raised by the organizations at their fundraisers. In return, Out for Education volunteers at their events, and promotes and attends them as well. Some of our past benefactors include OutReach United,

Frost Foundation, Hollyfield Foundation, Bunnies on the Bayou, New York Life, the Diana Foundation, OUTSMART magazine, and many others. We also receive generous help from individuals who donate every year, or through endowed scholarships.”

Out for Education is remarkable in many ways. The agency is 100 percent volunteer-based. No one on the board receives a salary, and 99.99 percent of all money raised goes directly to student scholarships.

“We are all passionate about this organization, and we love watching the students thrive and grow,” Wyatt-Woodell says. “Our board members are very connected to Houston’s LGBTQ community. We network, use social media to reach out, and we encourage past and current scholarship recipients to do the same. Our success has been astounding and humbling. The Houston community has been so generous, and these kids are certainly worth it,” Wyatt-Woodell concludes.

Out for Education is planting trees every day through education, making the future of Houston’s LGBTQ landscape considerably more vital. —Kim Hogstrom

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ WEBSITE **OutSmartMagazine.com**

Finalists: HoustonLGBTHistory.org, montrosecenter, mygayhouston.com

BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ WEBSITE **HRC.org**

(Human Rights Campaign)
Finalists: HuffingtonPost.com, NGLCC.com (National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce)

FAVORITE POLITICAL ADVOCACY GROUP **Houston GLBT Caucus**

Finalists: Equality Texas, Human Rights Campaign, Transform Houston

FAVORITE LGBTQ BENEFIT EVENT OF THE YEAR **Bunnies on the Bayou**

Finalists: The Diana Awards, Krewe of Olympus Ball, The Transgender Unity Banquet

FAVORITE LGBTQ PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATION **Winner to be announced at**

Gayest & Greatest reception on November 15
Finalists: Bunnies on the Bayou, The Diana Foundation, Krewe of Olympus, Montrose Center



FAVORITE LGBTQ SOCIAL ORGANIZATION **The Diana Foundation**

Finalists: EPAH, Houston Gaymers, Krewe of Olympus, Lambda NextGen, Montrose Softball League

FAVORITE LOCAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY **University of Houston (tie) Houston Community College (tie)**

Finalists: Rice University, Texas A&M University, Texas Southern

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION **Out For Education**

Finalists: Bunnies on the Bayou, The Diana Foundation, Gay 10K, Houston Gaymers, Krewe of Olympus

FAVORITE NATIONAL LGBTQ ORGANIZATION **Human Rights Campaign**

Finalists: National Center for Transgender Unity, NGLCC, Victory Fund

FAVORITE PLACE TOTAKE YOUR OUT-OF-TOWN VISITORS **Discovery Green**

Finalists: Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, The Menil Collection, Museum of Natural Science

FAVORITE PLACE TO WORSHIP **Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church**

Finalists: Bering Memorial UMC, Congregation Emanu El, Living Mosaic Church, St. John’s UMC, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church

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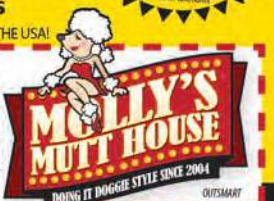
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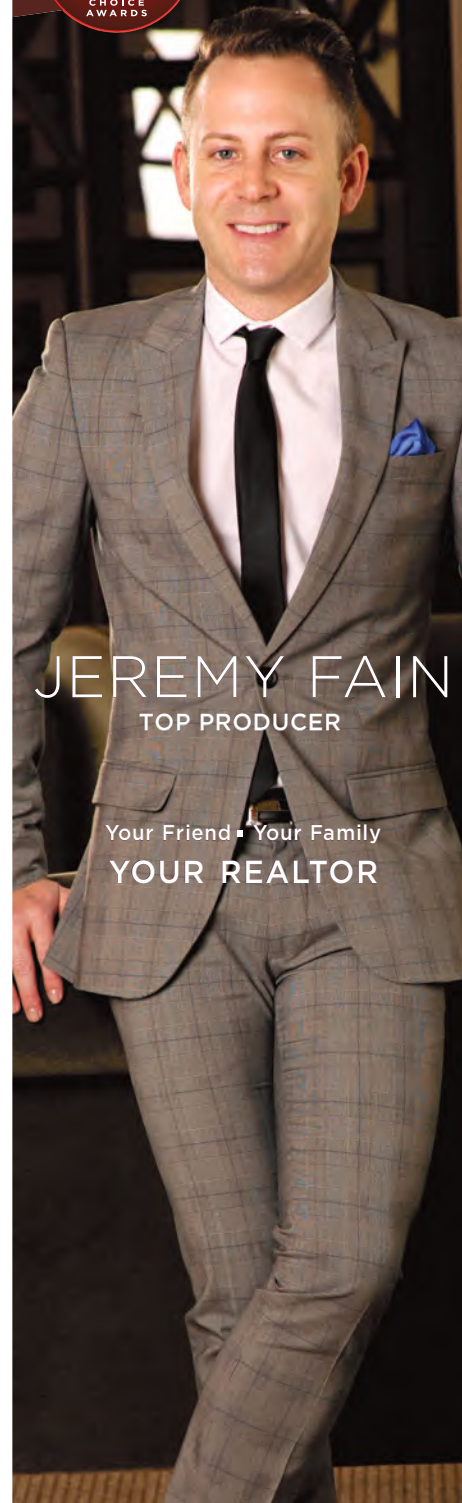


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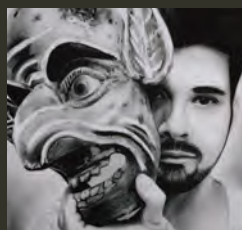
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Doctor Dad

Stewart Zuckerbrod was among the first in Houston to become a father through surrogacy.

In need of an eye doctor? Look no further than Houston Eye Associates' Dr. Stewart Zuckerbrod, a well-known Houston ophthalmologist. Zuckerbrod holds multiple degrees and has won several awards for his medical prowess. He's taught at the Baylor College of Medicine and UT Health Science Center-Houston. But there is much more to Dr. Zuckerbrod than his work.

Born in Germany as an Army brat, he became a double-major in biology and German literature at the State University of New York at Binghamton. He would go on to lecture in Germany about his ophthalmology research. Beyond that, he loves gardening, photography, and theater.

"I've always maintained a connection with the arts," Zuckerbrod says. "I started singing in my 40s, and for many years I sang with the Gay Men's Chorus of Houston." He was recently the cantor at a Clear Lake synagogue, singing for the high holy days of Yom Kippur and

Rosh Hashanah.

"It took four to five months to prepare for that," he says. "But it was wonderful."

He has also written two plays that were performed on stage. His collaboration with Deborah Boily, *Songs I Was Born to Sing* (a gay-musical take on the classical Greek comedy *Lysistrata*), premiered at Stages Repertory Theatre in 2006. He has served on the board of Stages as well.

But his real love has been his children. He loved being a stepparent in a previous relationship, and after that relationship ended he explored the idea of adopting a child of his own. He finally decided to use a surrogate in 2000, and became one of the first gay men in Houston to do so. Today, his twin girls, Samara and Frances, are juniors at Bellaire High School.

"They are smart kids, so they have a lot of ex-

tra classes and homework," he says. "Basically, we spend time at home doing homework. I try to have a family dinner every night, but they also have extra activities. One is into modeling, and one has a boyfriend, so we are all very busy."

And although he enjoys cooking, he says preparing dinner for the girls is a little difficult. "They have very different tastes, so it can be a challenge. Actually, our housekeeper does a lot of the meal preparation." —*Marene Gustin*



BEST CHIROPRACTOR

Ken Lester

Finalists: Tony Branker, Jackie St. Cyr, Fernando Franco, Richard Silver

BEST COSMETIC SKIN CARE CENTER

The Skin Renewal Center

Finalists: Alira Boutique Spa, BEN Aesthetic, ReNew You MD Wellness, Skin Renaissance Center

BEST COSMETIC SURGEON CENTER

Facial Plastic Surgery Associates/Angela Sturm

Finalists: Eugenio Aguilar, American Institute of Plastic Surgery, ReNew You Center

BEST DAY SPA

Alira Boutique Spa

Finalists: Deer Lake Lodge & Resort, Skin Day Spa

BEST FEMALE AESTHETIC PHYSICIAN

Angela Sturm/

Facial Plastic Surgery Associates

Finalists: Jessica Hill, Regina Rodman

BEST MALE AESTHETIC PHYSICIAN

Patrick McNamara/

Skin Renewal Center
Finalists: Octavio Barrios, Russell Kridel, Scott Yarish



BEST FEMALE DENTIST ↑

Cynthia Corral/

Bayou City Smiles
Finalists: Elizabeth Hunsaker, Mary Riley, Dianna Wilde

BEST MALE DENTIST

Bruce Smith/

Dr. Bruce Smith Dentistry
Finalists: Samuel Carrell, Marcus De Guzman, Cory Logan, Randy Mitchmore

BEST FEMALE EYE DOCTOR

Lisa Woo/Eye To Eye

Finalists: Juliet Farmer, Mary Green, Christine Tyler

BEST MALE EYE DOCTOR

Scott Sawyer/Legacy

Community Health (tie)
Stewart Zuckerbrod/
Houston Eye Associates (tie)
Finalists: Paul Lovero/Montrose Eye Care, Bimal Patel/Focus Eye Care, Marc Sanders

BEST FEMALE HAIR STYLIST

Lana Blake

Finalists: Celina Arzola, Cara Crafton, Stacey Daniels, Patti Gooch

BEST MALE HAIR STYLIST

Reza Nouri

Finalists: Jim Bagley, Don Gill, Cabe Nowlen, Joel Quinones, Jeremiah Sammons, Anthony Skoogi

BEST FEMALE MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST

Denise O'Doherty

Finalists: Kristen Anderson, Renee Armstrong, Brittany Burch

BEST MALE MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST

Robert Snellgrove

Finalists: Tony Aucoin, Ty David Lerman, Jeffrey Myles

BEST MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHIATRIST

Daniel Garza

Finalists: Barry Gritz, Chad Lemaire

BEST MALE MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST

Woodja Flanigan

Finalists: Mike Harrison, Colt Keo-Meier, Kaden Stanley

BEST FEMALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Shana Ross

Finalists: Laura Flagg, Karen Peden, Gilly Rosen, Cherisse Traylor

BEST MALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Larry Durham

Finalists: Andrew Hayes, David Muniz, Rene Quintanar, Michael Shallis

BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN

Julia Kovacs

Finalists: Jennifer Meyer, Patricia Salvato

BEST MALE PHYSICIAN

Gordon Crofoot

Finalists: Octavio Barrios, James Carroll, Roland Maldonado, Rudy Marin

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Ryan Fugate

Finalists: Joel Leal, Robin Mack, Jeremiah Sammons, Tom Zeppelin

BEST FEMALE MASSAGE THERAPIST

Robin Mack

Finalists: Crysti Sherwood/The Petite Retreat

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Making Her Mark

Shannon Baldwin wants to be Houston's first out African-American judge.

“Go into it for the passion, not the money,” Shannon Baldwin says of criminal law. “You will never earn as much money as the time you put into it. But your passion will sustain you.”

Baldwin's passion has not only sustained her—it has also earned her OUTSMART's Gayest & Greatest Award for Best Attorney this year. Baldwin, who's raising a foster daughter with her wife, says she's honored, and that being recognized by her own community is the highest compliment.

She recalls that she decided to become an attorney during her junior year of high school, after a government teacher took her class to see the Harris County courts through a program called Houston Open. As Baldwin sat in a jury box, one of the judges told the students that the courthouse was a place “for the people,” and that by working in the judicial system, one could change lives.

Baldwin was overwhelmed. Her teacher took an interest in her and helped her believe she could do whatever she wanted. “Make your mark, Shannon!” the teacher wrote in Baldwin's senior yearbook.

In 1995, Baldwin began her studies at the John Marshall Law School in Atlanta. Unlike in high school, everyone there was a good student. She soon realized that if she was going to survive, she needed to step it up. “I took some knocks, but picked myself back up and graduated *cum laude*,” she says.

From the beginning, Baldwin was drawn to

BEST FEMALE ATTORNEY
(tie)



criminal law. “It's a field where we really serve people,” she says. “No matter how bad the offense, everyone is still entitled to have their rights protected. They are innocent unless proven guilty. It's also a service to the victim. If I give the best defense possible, that means the defendant won't be able to appeal easily if found guilty.”

It's not always a popular job, but Baldwin knows she's making a difference. Recently, she defended a man charged with aggravated sexual assault. It was difficult to accept the case, but she worked hard, and as the trial moved forward the prosecution's case began to fall apart. The wrongfully accused young defendant was saved from a jail term.

“The most important quality of a good attorney is empathy,” Baldwin says. “That takes you

a long way. It's a huge responsibility, but you also get the chance to change lives.”

After practicing criminal law for two decades, Baldwin says she's ready to become a judge, and she's running as a Democrat for the Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 4 seat in 2018.

“We have a broken criminal-justice system,” Baldwin says. “A good judge follows the law and ensures that nothing happens in a court that violates anyone's rights. But [the Harris County Courthouse] has not been a good place for defendants.”

Baldwin believes that Harris County's current criminal-justice system is one of intimidation, and she wants to help transform this environment. She is ready to make her mark.

—Brandon Wolf

BEST BANK/CREDIT UNION

Wells Fargo

Finalists: Amegy Bank, Bank of America, Capital One, JP Morgan Chase

BEST FEMALE ATTORNEY

Shannon Baldwin (tie)

Phyllis Frye (tie)

Finalists: Patricia Cantu, Debra Hunt, Fran Watson, Clyde Williams

BEST MALE ATTORNEY

Raed Gonzalez (tie)

Mitchell Katine (tie)

Finalists: SK Alexander, John Nechman, Dwane Todd, Jim Walker

BEST FEMALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Grace Yung

Finalists: Felicia Flores, Janet Friedman, Britt Kornman



BEST MALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Bryan Cotton (tie)

Rick Dickson (tie)

Finalists: Shawn Kuehn, Mike Ryan, Travis Smith

BEST FEMALE ACCOUNTANT/BOOKKEEPER

Kathy Hubbard

Finalist: Pam Moore

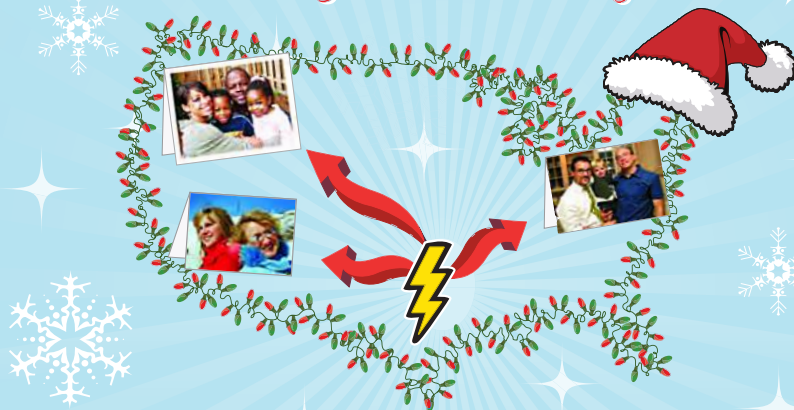
BEST MALE ACCOUNTANT/BOOKKEEPER

Jason Doney (tie)

Gary Gritz (tie)

Finalists: Greg Ault, Merlin Cavallin

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Insurance Rider

Former Miss Gay Texas Rodeo Felicia Flores finds her calling.

Growing up, Felicia Flores had dreams of being the next Selena Quintanilla. Now, in her 19th-floor office, the former Ms. Texas Gay Rodeo says she's found her true calling. "My biggest passion is taking care of people," Flores says. "Being an insurance agent has been the most rewarding thing that I've ever done."

After earning a degree in hotel and restaurant management from Texas Tech University, Flores oversaw two Houston eateries for seven years. At the Café Adobe on Westheimer, she met her wife, Ms. Texas Gay Rodeo 2012, who was a regular customer.

When Flores grew weary of long restaurant hours, she went to work in elder healthcare. At Sava Senior Care and Touchstone Communities, she became close to senior patients and their families.

Her days off were spent fundraising for LG-BTQ nonprofits. Known for her Selena impersonation, she traveled around Texas recreating the Tejano singer's most popular hits, and singing other country songs to raise money for charities such as AssistHers, LHI Care, Legacy, Body Positive, and more.

"I may have been Selena in rhinestones and a bustier, but the reason I did that, and everything that I have done since, was to help people in need," Flores says.

Flores joined the Texas Gay Rodeo Association (TGRA) in 2010, and began competing in pageants the following year. After winning Miss Brazos River Bottom 2011 and Miss Lone Star Houston 2012, Flores took home the Ms.

Texas Gay Rodeo crown in 2013.

During her reign, Flores did charity events four nights a week. Although she no longer competes in pageants, she still sings and raises money for TGRA, and is a candidate to become TGRA's state board vice president in 2018.

Today, Flores is also an insurance agent at New York Life. Her career took a turn at Touchstone when a partner at New York Life asked her to interview for an agent position. Because she worked with elderly patients who passed away, Flores decided she wanted to help their families be financially secure prior to any emergencies.

"I take care of entire families," Flores says, recalling how she recently delivered a check to a widow. "She asked me, 'Are my kids and I going to be OK?' And I wholeheartedly said, 'Yes.'"

"My goal isn't to make a sale; my goal is to get

to know someone and learn about their needs," Flores says. "When someone invites me into their world, they're going to be a part of my life, too." —*Lourdes Zavaleta*



BEST ARCHITECT
Morningside Architects

BEST FEMALE INSURANCE AGENT
Felicia Flores

Finalists: Candace Dolan, Pam Ellis, Cristina Martinez

BEST MALE INSURANCE AGENT
Lane Lewis

Finalists: Jeffrey Bules, Stephen Miranda, Patrick Torma

BEST FLORIST
Ronnie Seibert

Finalists: A Different Bloom, Blooms, David Brown, Downtown Blooms

BEST FURNITURE STORE
Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams

Finalists: Alabama Furniture, Cantoni, IKEA, Noël Luxury Living

BEST FURNITURE STORE ON A BUDGET
IKEA

Finalists: Alabama Furniture, HomeGoods, Katy Furniture

BEST GARDENING/ NURSERY SUPPLY
Joshua's Native Plants & Garden Antiques

Finalists: Buchanan's Nursery, Fountains & Statuary, Wabash Feed & Garden

BEST HOME REMODELING COMPANY
Unique Builders & Development

Finalist: C House Renovations

BEST INTERIOR DESIGNER
Kevin Hamby

Finalists: Mark Brown, Christopher Evans, Ben Johnston, Grant Rachal

BEST LANDSCAPING COMPANY
Windswept Landscaping and Design

Finalists: AJ's Landscaping, McDugald Steele

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Finalists: Dylan Fobis, Nick's Plumbing

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A Spirited History

Eagle Houston traces roots to early LGBTQ movement.

**BEST
MARTINI &
BEST HAPPY
HOUR**



DALTON DEHART

As a winner in the Best Martini and Best Happy Hour categories in OUTSMART's 2017 Gayest & Greatest Awards, Eagle Houston is (for those who don't already know) a great place to get a "shaken not stirred" beverage that won't break the bank.

But that description fails to address why and how Eagle Houston has become very important to generations of LGBTQ Houstonians.

For starters, the former corner-grocery building is a historic landmark and a fine example of the inroads our community has made in establishing safe entertainment spaces in H-Town. Eagle Houston traces its roots to the original New York City location that opened in the early 1970s as the LGBTQ civil-rights movement began to gain momentum. The Houston branch initially began as a weekly theme party in another area nightclub, and its popularity

led to a series of relocations, expansions, and renovations that culminated in the opening of the current Montrose property in June 2014. And despite a few setbacks, including a fire in January 2016, Eagle Houston has proven phoenix-like in its ability to rise from the ashes and consistently impress customers.

Even if you aren't an LGBTQ history buff, Eagle Houston will quickly become a favorite gathering spot. The crowd, entertainment, and deals are slightly different each night, but always enjoyable. On Saturdays, for example, "MEN:ERGY" fills the air as DJ JD Arnold (Best DJ in the 2017 Gayest & Greatest Awards) turns the tables for Houston's hottest men's dance party, while on Whiskey Wednesdays, a well-heeled set crowds the bar for \$4 Crown Royal and \$3 Fireball shots before ditching the button-downs and grooving to DJ Phelan. Football fans can get their pigskin fix

via the bar's big screens broadcasting NFL games, and the affable clientele almost guarantees you will be watching the game among friends.

Recent second-story renovations have added a wrap-around deck perfect for al fresco alcohol consumption, and the upstairs Phoenix Room has its own bar surrounded by large murals paying tribute to Houston's LGBTQ history.

Eagle Houston is also the site of the Mr. Texas Eagle contest, in which leather enthusiasts vie to advance to the national Mr. Leather competition in Chicago.

You can cap off your visit by visiting the Eagle Trading Co. boutique that vends goods from brands such as Mr. S Leather, Tribal Son, and Ox Balls, and offers leather tailoring and repair. Pick up some toys or jewelry for your mister, or show your love by scoring some Eagle Houston swag to wear (or take off!) around town.

But leather couture, mean martinis, and creative beats aren't what brings 'em back to Eagle Houston night after night. The people—from the lively regulars to the quick-witted drink-slingers behind the bar—are what make the atmosphere at Eagle Houston so addictive.

—Joanna O'Leary

CLUB OR RESTAURANT WITH BEST HAPPY HOUR

Eagle Houston

Finalists: Bayou City Bar and Grill, George's Country Sports Bar, Guava Lamp, JR's Bar & Grill

CLUB OR RESTAURANT WITH THE BEST MARGARITA

El Tiempo Cantina

Finalists: Bayou City Bar and Grill, Gloria's Latin Cuisine, Guava Lamp

CLUB OR RESTAURANT WITH THE BEST MARTINI

Guava Lamp

Finalists: Anvil, Eagle Houston, JR's, Riva's, Eagle Houston

FAVORITE BRAND OF BEER

Bud Light

Finalists: 8th Wonder, Karbach, St. Arnold, Stella Artois



FAVORITE BRAND OF LIQUOR

Tito's Handmade Vodka

Finalists: Crown Royal, Dripping Springs Vodka, Maker's Mark

FAVORITE WINE BAR

Bar Boheme

Finalists: 13 Celsius, Guava Lamp, Max's Wine Dive



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Abstract Beauty

For mixed-media painter
Crystal Murley, life imitates art.

Cancer cells are irregularly shaped, obscure, disorganized, and they grow out of control. They are also abstract, like Crystal Murley's mixed-media creations. Her upcoming glass series is inspired by images of these deadly organisms under a microscope. "Something so awful can be beautiful, too," Murley says. "When I saw the cells on a slide, they were stunning."

Though she makes abstract art, Murley says every piece she creates is based on life experiences.

Murley's grandmother died at 84 from kidney cancer in June 2016. In the four months preceding her death, Murley made daily trips from Houston to her grandmother's home in Cypress to look after her for up to 15 hours at a time. "The past few years have been life-changing," Murley says. "Taking care of my grandmother gave me the momentum to keep doing what I have always wanted to do. I keep pushing forward."

Murley was interested in art as soon as she could pick up something to write with. As a child, she used pens, pencils, and paint on paper to create her artwork. She now uses watercolors, acrylics, oils, thread and latex on boards, canvas, and glass to create pieces ranging from 4-by-4-foot paintings to customized belt buckles.

The artist is currently pursuing a master's degree in fine art at Houston Baptist University. Her end goal is to teach college-level art classes.

**FAVORITE
LOCAL
FEMALE
ARTIST
(tie)**



In 2006, Murley graduated from the University of Houston with a bachelor's degree in painting. She started bartending in 2001 to put herself through undergraduate school, and she currently works at F Bar two nights a week to fund her art supplies and studio. "A lot of people know me as just a bartender," Murley says. "They're always surprised when they find out that I'm an artist."

Although she considers herself introverted and reclusive, Murley has made her share of friends. Regular customers have followed her to various bars over the years because they enjoy her drinks.

Murley began showcasing and selling her

artwork in 2006. Once or twice a year, she hosts open studios at her Crystal Murley Art gallery, where she displays her work and the work of other artists at what she calls "big art parties" for her friends.

All of Murley's events have benefited LGBTQ nonprofits, including the Rainbow Foundation, the Diana Foundation, Wonka Soiree, and more—with up to 20 percent of her commission income and some of her art going to the charities. "I believe in donating. It is something that I feel strongly about," Murley says. "I'm glad that I can use my art to give back and pay it forward." —*Lourdes Zavaleta*



**FAVORITE LOCAL
FEMALE ACTRESS**

Tamarie Cooper

Finalists: Holland Vavra, Pamela Vogel, Teresa Zimmermann

**FAVORITE LOCAL
FEMALE FINE ARTIST**

Crystal Murley (tie)
Kiki Neumann (tie)

Finalists: Nancy Adams, Stephanie Gonzalez

**FAVORITE LOCAL
MALE ACTOR**

Kyle Sturdivant

Finalists: Austin Abernathy, Nathan Cruz, Mark Ivy



**FAVORITE LOCAL MALE
FINE ARTIST**

Wood Fancher (tie)
Ryan Fugate (tie)

Finalists: J. Antonio Farfan, Jumper Maybach, John Palmer

**FAVORITE HOUSTON
MUSEUM**

**Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston**

Finalists: Buffalo Soldier's Museum, Menil Collection, Holocaust Museum Houston, Houston Museum of Natural Science

**BEST LOCAL EQUITY
THEATER**

**Stages Repertory
Theatre**

Finalists: Alley Theatre, The Catastrophic Theatre, Obsidian Art Space, Rec Room

**BEST PERFORMING
ARTS COMPANY**

Alley Theatre

Finalists: Houston Grand Opera, Stages Repertory Theatre, Theatre Under The Stars

**BEST ART GALLERY/
PLACE TO BUY ARTWORK**

Archway Gallery

Finalists: Elder Street Artist Lofts, Space Montrose, John Palmer Art Gallery & Studio, Jumper Maybach Fine Art



**BEST COMMUNITY
DANCE COMPANY**

Houston Ballet

Finalists: Pilot Dance Project, The T.R.U.T.H. Project

**BEST REGIONAL EQUITY
THEATRE COMPANY**

Alley Theatre

Finalist: Theatre Under The Stars



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— Frank Billingsley



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of the Friends For Life animal shelter, and knows more about pet care than many vets. She and her team of volunteers cared for all the pets at the George R. Brown Convention Center when it was turned into a city-wide shelter for Harvey survivors and their beloved animals. Almost 700 animals arrived in the first 24 hours, and another 1,500 were processed after that.

As anyone who has used the services of Gulf Coast Veterinary Specialists (GCVS) knows, they are as good as it gets in pet medicine. Because the hospital is open 24 hours, many of Houston's animal emergencies land on their doorstep. And it's no wonder this remarkable team of professionals—people who save pets' lives around the clock—took first place in OUTSMART's Gayest & Greatest Awards for Pet Emergency Care in Houston.

Situated near the Galleria, the hospital suffered severe flooding during Tropical Storm Harvey, so that location remains closed. Most of the hospital's services are now available at 3800 Southwest Freeway, near Lakewood Church.

GCVS is one of the largest veterinary hospitals in the U.S. The spectrum of special-

ties practiced here is breathtaking, with 14 different departments including cardiology, dermatology, neurology, and oncology. There are 58 doctors under its umbrella, including 27 board-certified specialists, and more than 175 caring support staff.

The mission is simple: to help families and their pets through the application of the highest-quality, most comprehensive care available for companion animals.

The professionals at this clinic also understand how deeply we love our animals. Especially in the LGBTQ community, we often view them as family members or children. We suffer terribly when they become ill. GCVS moves mountains with their medical expertise as well as their kindness toward clients. This kind of compassionate service can make a world of difference at a difficult time.

Salise Shuttlesworth is the executive director

Like other veterinarians in Houston, many GCVS staff members volunteered to help following Harvey. One who worked with Shuttlesworth's army at the downtown shelter left the team speechless.

"Dr. Katie Hedrick, with GCVS, was one of our volunteer vets, and one night she was presented with a very ill kitten. The kitten was dehydrated, malnourished and barely clinging to life.

"Dr. H. inserted a catheter directly into the kitten's bone to save her," Shuttlesworth adds. "It is a difficult catheter placement in the best of circumstances. Dr. H. was cool, collected and—by the light of a cellphone on a folding table—made it happen on the first try. It was beautiful."

Did it save the kitten? Today she is happy, playful, and healthy. The shelter team named her Oreo. She is pictured above and available for adoption at Friends for Life.

—Kim Hogstrom

BEST DOGGIE DAY CARE

Molly's Mutt House

Finalists: John Andrews, The Best Little Dog House, Dogtopia, The Pet Spa

BEST PLACE TO ADOPT A PET

Houston SPCA

Finalists: BARC, Citizens for Animal Protection, Friends For Life



BEST FEMALE VETERINARIAN

Hilary Granson/

Urban Animal Veterinary Hospital (tie)
Danielle Rosser/West Alabama Animal Clinic (tie)
Finalists: Christie Cornelius, Catherine Powell

BEST MALE VETERINARIAN

Richard Clive/

Midtown Animal Clinic
Finalists: David Campbell, Douglas S. Dawson, Larry White

BEST PLACE TO BUY PET SUPPLIES

PetSmart

Finalists: Amazon, Molly's Mutt House, PetCo

BEST PET GROOMING SERVICE

Molly's Mutt House

Finalists: Best Little Dog House in Texas, Heights Grooming, John Andrews The Pet Spa

BEST PET EMERGENCY CARE CENTER

Gulf Coast Animal Emergency Hospital

Finalists: Urban Animal Veterinary Hospital, VERGI Houston

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Finalists: Shelby Kibodeaux, Wag!

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Lasting Pleasures

Hollywood Super Center marks 15 years in an ever-changing market.

The most interesting question I got today was, ‘Does that go in your butt?’” says James O’Rourke, owner of Hollywood Super Center.

And it’s a fair question, really. The gay-owned establishment, situated at 2409 Grant St. in Montrose, has been servicing—or rather, serving—the LGBTQ community for over 15 years.

After opening as a cafe in 2002, the store evolved into a more clothing-centric establishment. Today, Hollywood Super Center is focused primarily on erotic playthings—from vanilla to kink, and every flavor in between.

“We offer a wide selection of supplements, lubricants, swimwear, underwear, and activewear, too,” O’Rourke says.

That’s all pretty standard fare for a sex shop in a queer neighborhood. But there are also plenty of options for more advanced tastes.

“We offer home items such as shower bidets, play sheets for the boudoir—even swing stands,” O’Rourke says. “My favorite is our 14-gauge steel-frame stand.”

If you’re confused about the nature of some of those items, the staff at Hollywood Super Center is ready to help.

“Our staff is friendly, informative, and assisting,” O’Rourke says. “We allow our guests



DALTON DEHART

to navigate the store at their own comfort. If you’re seeking assistance in areas you’re uncomfortable with, we’ll do our best to be helpful.”

Once upon a time, Montrose contained more erotic-themed stores per capita than any other Houston neighborhood. However, as the area started to gentrify, many of those businesses closed.

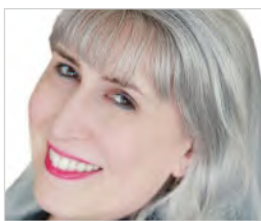
James says retailers that focus on erotic playthings still face stiff competition (no pun intended), but Hollywood Super Center has evolved with the times.

“We opened as a cafe/bookshop [at] 2409 Grant,” he says. “From there, we expanded and relocated the shop to 807 Fairview. At Fairview, we focused on toys, books, and DVDs. We explored the clothing market at that location, and again we grew.

“From Fairview, we relocated back to 2409 Grant,” he adds. “We occupied the space nearest Converse with an expanded clothing selection. [But by that time, we] noticed that the community’s needs had changed. DVDs, books, magazines, and Pride novelty items became less desired. We have since downsized as demand shifted. We now occupy a center space at the same shopping center.”

Although most merchandise at Hollywood Super Center is geared toward men—such as its selection of underwear, swimsuits, and jockstraps—the store has items to satisfy every need. And if you’re nervous about shopping in person, you can browse the selection online at HollywoodSuperCenter.com. Whether it goes on your body or in it, you’re sure to find something that brings you pleasure.

—Ryan Leach



BEST ASTROLOGER ↑
Lilly Roddy
Finalist: Kevin Casey

BEST COPY/PRINT SHOP
Copy.com
Finalists: 2 Day Post Cards

BEST GROCERY STORE
HEB
Finalists: Central Market, Kroger, Trader Joe’s, Whole Foods

BEST JEWELRY STORE
Silverlust
Finalists: Select Jewelers, Tenenbaum Jewelers, Zadok Jewelers

BEST LIQUOR STORE
Spec’s Wine, Spirits, and Finer Foods
Finalists: Economy Liquor, Goody Goody Liquor, Total Wine & More

BEST MEN’S CLOTHING STORE
Jos. A. Bank
Finalists: Balani Custom Clothiers, The Ivy League, Lucho

BEST WOMEN’S CLOTHING STORE
Tootsies
Finalists: Anthropologie, Saks Fifth Ave.

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Hollywood Super Center
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Harmony Strings features top-notch musicians—and they love gay weddings.

Melody Kelly, who co-founded Harmony Strings with other professional, degreed musicians in 2002, says she's noticed something different about same-sex weddings. "They are more free, happy, and joyous," she says. "At gay weddings, the couples seem to be more present. They seem grateful for the experience, and they're changing up the norms—for example, who walks down the aisle."

Harmony Strings is an all-female string quartet that had been performing together for more than a decade when Joyce Tipton and Lucy Moyer booked them following the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 2015 ruling that legalized same-sex marriage throughout the country.

"It was memorable because they planned this wedding the day the Supreme Court decision was made," recalls Kelley. "It was a wish come true for them, and our string quartet was so honored to be a part of their joyous wedding celebration."

The wedding service in the backyard of the couple's home in Fulshear, Texas, included the following lines from the concluding paragraph of Justice Anthony Kennedy's 28-page majority opinion: "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In

**BEST
WEDDING/
EVENT LIVE
MUSIC**

forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were."

Harmony Strings can perform for weddings as a duo (violin and cello), trio (violin, viola, and cello), or a quartet (two violins, viola, and cello).

"I explain that a string quartet gives you the fullest sounds, similar to a choir with the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass lines for each song, or piece," says Kelley.

The group's repertoire as a duo or trio is strictly classical, but the quartet also performs music by solo artists such as John Legend, Beyoncé, Bruno Mars, Ellie Goulding, and Adele; bands including U2, Coldplay, and Queen; the Broadway musicals *Hamilton*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and others; themes from TV shows such as *Game of Thrones*, *Friends*, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; and movie music that includes *Up*, *Stars Wars*, and *Beauty*

and the Beast.

With three months' notice, the group will learn a new song at no extra cost.

"We love learning new music," says Kelley.

Harmony Strings also performs for other events, from a Scotch-tasting to private parties and the annual Houston SPCA gala.

"However, our passion and specialty will always be weddings," says Kelley.

"When it comes to weddings, we are experts at tailoring the music to the moment," she adds. "We've all heard horror stories of live music suddenly screeching to a halt, disrupting an otherwise beautiful wedding ceremony. With Harmony Strings, you can rest assured that your wedding music will flow seamlessly from one song to the next, and it will sound as if each song was composed for just that moment in time."—Don Maines

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Water's Edge (tie)
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BEST WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER
Dalton DeHart (tie)
Vyonne Feece (tie)
Finalist: Jenna Routh Photography

BEST WEDDING/EVENT PLANNER

Lauren Burnham, EventSmith
Finalists: Claudia de Velasco/A Day To Remember, David Alcorta Catering, Jerred Bridges, Jim Benton of Houston, Taylor DeMartino/Live! Event Design

BEST WEDDING CAKE BAKERY
Who Made the Cake
Finalists: The Acadian Bakers, David Alcorta, Catering, Dessert Gallery



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JD Arnold
Finalists: Bradley David Janacek, LG Entertainment, PB & DJ Events

BEST WEDDING/EVENT FLORIST

Dream Bouquet
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Olympic Mettle

Greg Louganis takes the podium
at Houston World AIDS Day Luncheon.

By Rich Arenschioldt

When Greg Louganis, the openly gay four-time Olympic gold medalist, was diagnosed with HIV in 1988, there was only one highly toxic drug treatment available: Zidovudine, known as AZT. “I expected to live three years,” Louganis tells OUTSMART. “Thank goodness I didn’t read all the possible side effects; I probably wouldn’t be here.”

Louganis will keynote the AIDS Foundation Houston’s annual World AIDS Day luncheon at the Hilton Post Oak on December 1.

With five world championships in addition to his four Olympic golds (and one silver), the 57-year-old Louganis is among the most decorated male divers in history. However, his career has been punctuated by the type of secrecy and revelation that were emblematic of the early years of the AIDS epidemic. His 1995 best-selling book, *Breaking the Surface*, provided a brutally honest platform from which he exposed his struggles related to personal insecurities, relationships, addiction, and the disclosure of his HIV status.

Louganis’ ability to focus amid adversity (a skill he perfected while competing in three Olympics beginning in 1976, at the age of 16) was crucial to his survival, enabling him to cope

with his diagnosis and fame.

As painfully detailed in *Breaking the Surface*, the years following the 1988 Seoul Olympics were hellish. An abusive partner, drug usage, crippling self-doubt combined with the possibility of a vastly shortened lifespan, and financial difficulties debilitated one of the world’s most famous athletes. “The future looked so bleak that I sold my life insurance policy, discovering later that it was accompanied by a physician’s statement giving me just six months to live,” says Louganis, who also

held a “final birthday party” for family and friends in 1993.

While many praised Louganis’ courage in the book (and during a subsequent Barbara Walters interview), America wasn’t ready to come to terms with an Olympic superstar who was also an HIV-positive gay man. As others garnered endorsements, Louganis (with the exception of his longtime sponsor, Speedo) remained a pariah. “Even with my first gold medals [in 1984], my corporate sponsors and public-relations people told me to ‘tone down the gay stuff,’” he says.

In 2014, HBO produced the Emmy-nominated documentary *Back on Board*, and Louganis resurfaced. Thirty years after his first Olympic gold medal, America proved that it did, in fact, love Louganis. The honors and engagements began to flow in, and largely due to a 43,000-signature petition, General Mills belatedly bestowed Louganis with his own Wheaties cereal box in 2016.

Louganis also credits an expanded social-media presence with enhancing his popularity. “I got on Facebook while I was traveling around the country in a 40-foot RV,” he says. “It was a great way to let my friends know where I was and what was happening →



Finding New Platforms

Gay sports icon Greg Louganis, shown with president Barack Obama in 2015, staged a “final birthday party” in 1993 because he expected to die from AIDS. Today, he is as influential as ever, thanks in part to his large social-media following.



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OLYMPIC METTLE

continued from previous page

in my life.”

Louganis has also embraced Instagram and Twitter, and with the help of his manager, he has developed significant followings. Additionally, Louganis’ mentorship of openly gay British diver Tom Daley has helped him connect with people who weren’t even alive when he was an Olympian. “I’ve known Tom for years,” Louganis says. “Seeing him grow and develop has been wonderful. He’s extremely talented and very dear to me. I was especially touched that,



during the Rio Olympics, he called me during the competition. He just needed to talk to someone who understood his situation.”

As the dean of gay Olympians, Louganis advises other divers to stay off social media. “This is difficult for younger competitors to do—they are accustomed to interacting with people in a very public way,” he says. “I also tell them not to read what others are writing or saying. None of that matters. At this level of competition, you have a job to accomplish. Do your work. You are at the Olympic games; you must focus.”

Utilizing his considerable fame, Louganis now champions inclusion and recognition of all LGBTQ people. “I know a lot about the ‘G’ and the ‘L,’” Louganis says. However, the rest of the LGBTQ community’s many identities has required him to seek out information from friends, colleagues, artists, and other athletes. “It has been a tremendous discovery process for me in learning about the bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex communities,” he says, noting that he appeared in Larry Kramer’s play, *Just Say No*, with Alexandra Billings, a trans actor best known for starring in Amazon’s *Transparent* series.

“During the play’s run, Alexandra, Larry, and I spent a lot of time together,” he says. “We discussed everything. Larry is brilliant and completely open about his HIV status, and Alexandra is married to a woman—something that made conversations very interesting. Getting to know her and discover her story was

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revelatory to me.”

Louganis says he has “learned an entirely new language that dignifies and respects the concerns of those confronting a variety of issues. “The fluidity with which young people approach and comprehend gender, sex, orientation, and self-identification is fascinating,” he says.



Plunging Ahead

Louganis, who was recently named sports director for the Red Bull Cliff-Diving World Series, also has a clothing line and a full-length biopic in the works.

In addition to working with younger people, Louganis’ celebrity status has granted him access to corporate America, where he advocates for best practices that promote LGBTQ workplace inclusion. “There are no [current] male American Olympians open about their homosexuality,” Louganis says.

“Corporations, through their sponsorships [of LGBTQ athletes], need to allow people to be their authentic selves.”

In addition to his other engagements, Louganis was recently named sports director for the Red Bull Cliff-Diving World Series, and he’s preparing to launch a clothing line. “That is something I’ve wanted to do for a long time,” he says. “Even at 57, I go to the gym and do yoga—both activities I consider just as important as taking my daily medication.”

Other pending projects include a feature-length biopic. Asked who he would choose to portray him, Louganis chuckles: “Well, I just saw *American Assassin*. Dylan O’Brien wouldn’t be a bad choice.”

A line from Louganis’ book encapsulates his philosophy: “I may cry easily, but I never give up.”

“I’m an empath; I absorb everyone’s energy, good or bad,” Louganis says. “However, rather than living ‘in a problem,’ life has taught me to move forward on the platform, focus, and take steps toward a solution.”

What: AIDS Foundation Houston

World AIDS Day Luncheon

When: Champagne reception at 11:30 a.m., luncheon at noon on December 1

Where: Hilton Post Oak, 2001 Post Oak Blvd.

Tickets: AIDSHelp.org

Rich Arenschieldt is a frequent contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



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Capturing a Crisis



Pioneering activist Tori Williams is now working to document Houston AIDS history.

By Andrew Edmonson

When Tori Williams moved to Houston in 1982, she wondered if she'd made a mistake. Watching TV while unpacking, she saw local news reports of the Ku Klux Klan marching on Houston City Hall in protest after mayor Kathy Whitmire appointed Lee Brown as the city's first African-American police chief. On talk radio, Williams heard male callers saying that they wouldn't allow African-American officers to pull over their wives.

"My first thought was, 'What the heck have I done?'" she recalls.

Fortunately, she persisted, and Houston's LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS communities are much richer for her presence. Over the last four decades, Williams has been a quiet but formidable leader, founding three thriving nonprofits, inspiring and mentoring people with HIV to become activists, and providing tireless service to people living with—and dying from—AIDS.

'An Extremely Clear Vision'

In 1986, at the height of the AIDS crisis, Williams launched Pet Patrol, a nonprofit group that still enables low-income individuals challenged by significant illness to keep their companion pets.

A decade later, she took what she had learned from managing volunteer AIDS care teams and co-founded AssistHers with Renee Tappe. The organization's mission is to provide a network of support to lesbian women struggling with chronic or disabling illness.

And in 2015, she and Sarah Canby Jackson, archivist for Harris County, co-founded The Oral History Project to collect, preserve, and make available the painful, heroic, and inspiring experiences of people impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Houston.

In her day job for the last 18 years, Williams



Archiving the Epidemic

Tori Williams (r) co-founded The Oral History Project with Sarah Canby Jackson. They are pictured with Lee Pecht of the Woodson Research Center, which is housing the project's materials.

has served as director of the Office of Support for the Houston Ryan White Planning Council, helping to disburse federal monies for HIV/AIDS care. In this capacity, she has run Project L.E.A.P., the most comprehensive advocacy training program in the nation for HIV-positive individuals.

"I am fortunate to have Tori's presence in my life," says AIDS activist Steven Vargas, a graduate of Project L.E.A.P. who went on to serve as chair of both the Ryan White Planning Council and the Latino HIV Task Force. "I give the majority of my thanks for the work and instruction she has carefully planned over the last two decades."

In recognition of her service to the LGBTQ community, Williams was named grand marshal of Houston's Pride parade in 2000. Her girlish charm and low-key charisma belie a laser-like focus and an ability to execute projects swiftly and efficiently.

"Tori always has an extremely clear vision of what she wants, where she wants to go, and how she wants to get there," says Tappe,

co-founder of AssistHers. "When something comes along that might be considered a speed bump, she works around it."

"She is a professional's professional, making sure i's are dotted and t's are crossed," says Houston immigration attorney Ann Pinchak, who serves on the board of The Oral History Project. "She keeps people excited about our great work."

Finding Her Voice

Born in 1954 in Connecticut, she attended the fabled Miss Porter's School, whose alumna include Gloria Vanderbilt and Lilly Pulitzer. She lived in a room at the school that was previously occupied by one of its most famous graduates, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis. "The reason that I knew [it was Jackie's room] is that she scratched her initials on the window," Williams recalls.

Many might assume that an elite finishing school simply prepares a woman to marry well and raise a family. "What happens in an all-girls school is that girls learn to speak up →

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CAPTURING A CRISIS

continued from previous page

and speak out. They learn to do math and science," recalls Williams. "It's an environment where women thrive.

"So I graduated from there and went to college at Lawrence University in the Midwest. I was shocked that my Lawrence roommate wouldn't ask a question in class," she adds. "I think that I was shocked by them, and they were shocked by me. I realized how lucky I had been to be in an environment where women were treated as smart and purposeful."

Launching Pet Patrol

After finishing her master's degree in social work at the University of Wisconsin in 1981, she decamped to Texas to work for Lutheran Refugee Services.

In Houston, she volunteered at a women's production company specializing in lesbian-themed music, and got to know a wide circle of people. She developed friends in both the feminist movement and the sanctuary movement for Central American refugees.

When gay men in her apartment complex began dying in the mid-1980s, she volunteered for AIDS Foundation Houston, conducting intake interviews to assess patients' needs. She discovered that if people with AIDS had pets, their top priorities consistently included making sure their animals were taken care of if they became incapacitated.

"So I thought, 'Well, I can take care of pets.' I started leaving my phone number and said, 'If you go into the hospital and need help with your pet, call me.' And they did.

"Pretty soon, I had lots of calls," Williams adds. "I started reaching out to my friends—mostly my lesbian friends—and they started taking in lots of cats and dogs."

One of her friends began referring to the group as the "pet patrol," and Williams launched a nonprofit using that name and a grant from a local dog-show organization.

"We have one of the biggest dog shows in the world here," she says. "They had a big dinner, and they raised the money."

The Pet Patrol included 17 veterinarians who donated time and resources, as well as hundreds of volunteers and, at one point, 400 active clients.

"In Pet Patrol, I went into people's homes," Williams says. "That made you understand HIV really fast. I went into homes where you could push the clients over with a feather—where this dog or cat was the longest relationship that they'd had in their lives. They were desperate. The people with AIDS became very isolated and very lonely, and these pets were their lifeline."

Williams recalls how the first Pet Patrol volunteers often signed up because they didn't know anyone with HIV, but realized how much their own pets meant to them. "Six months



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later, these same volunteers would be rabid advocates for their client, whom they now considered to be a valued friend,” she says.

Preserving history

In 2015, the American Academy of HIV Medicine published a report warning that 32 percent of the nation’s HIV clinicians would retire over the next decade. A search of university libraries in the Houston area revealed that they contained no oral histories or theses on the history of AIDS in Harris County.

Realizing that the history of the AIDS crisis in Southeast Texas could easily vanish if it was not soon captured, Williams joined forces with Jackson to found The Oral History Project. They set an ambitious goal: to capture 100 oral histories of physicians, activists, political and religious leaders, and others.

Jackson brought Rice University’s prestigious Woodson Research Center to the table so that Rice could serve as the repository for the oral histories, make them available to academics doing research, and feature them online. Williams recruited a cadre of passionate volunteers, and lined up sponsors including Legacy Community Health, the John Steven Kellett Foundation, Gayle and Corvin Alstot, and the Montrose Center (which serves as the fiscal agent for the project).

“My hope for The Oral History Project is that this collection of oral histories will bring understanding and possibly healing in response to what happened, especially during the early years of the AIDS crisis,” Williams says.

“Many of us changed bed linens in the public hospitals, fed patients, and even made sure that people didn’t die alone,” she says. “We have to capture that time to remember, honor those people who went before us, and learn from it. What we learn from the interviews may help us respond more effectively, and more humanely, to a future crisis.”

The Oral History Project is off to a flying start. In early 2017, it was honored by the *Houston Press* with its prestigious MasterMind Award for its “unique and impressive contributions” to the community.

When she is not volunteering, Williams can be found spending time with a close-knit circle of friends, or curled up in her Heights home watching TV, surrounded by her two cats and two big dogs—all of them rescue animals.

Thirty-five years after her arrival in Texas, her attitude toward the Bayou City has evolved. “I really love Houston, and there’s no other place that I would want to live, ever,” she says. “It’s such an interesting mix of everything and everyone. It’s such a rich place for ideas and people.”

Andrew Edmonson won the Award of Special Merit from the Texas Chapter of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. He serves as a board member for The Oral History Project.



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Mothers of a Movement

Participants reflect on the groundbreaking 1977 women's conference in Houston.

By Andrew Edmonson

Photo by Glynda Robbins

It was a landmark event for both the women's and LGBTQ movements in America. Forty years ago this month, 20,000 women descended on downtown Houston to formulate a plan for advancing gender equality at the National Women's Conference (NWC). It remains the only national women's convention to be sponsored by the federal government, and it addressed a dizzying 26 topics ranging from combating domestic violence and improving access to credit, to child care and issues impacting minorities and the elderly.

The four-day November 1977 conference is among three of the most significant feminist gatherings in American history, along with the 1848 convention in Seneca Falls, New York, and the Women's March of January 21, 2017, when Trump's inauguration brought millions to the streets throughout the world.

"You could just feel the room and the reaction, and just how powerful the message [was with all of those] women coming together," state senator Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston) says of the 1977 conference. "It was the first time we had ever done it—or at least in our lifetimes."

Despite daunting odds, delegates to the National Women's Conference approved a plank calling for "legislation to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexual preference and repeal state laws restricting private sexual behavior between consenting adults."

"It felt as if you were part of one of those moments where you could feel the world changing just a little bit," says former Houston mayor Annise Parker, who was then a 21-year-old student at Rice University. "The kinds of gains that we've achieved since 1977 are the reason that I was able to become mayor."

The NWC was indeed a turning point in the culture wars that continue today, drawing



Flying High
Trailblazing Houston activist Pokey Anderson is shown with balloons that would be released after delegates to the National Women's Conference of 1977 approved a controversial gay-rights plank.

bright lines around what would become two of the most polarizing issues in American public life: the right of women to access safe and legal abortion, and the struggle for LGBTQ equality. Smithsonian.com has referred to the event as "The 1977 Conference on Women's Rights that Split America in Two."

'The Lavender Menace'

The 1970s was a heady decade for the American women's movement. In 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment passed Congress overwhelmingly with bipartisan support. President Richard Nixon immediately endorsed the bill.

Inspired by a U.N. conference in Mexico City in 1975 celebrating the International

Year of the Woman, Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, established a 35-member commission to make recommendations on promoting gender equality.

In 1977, president Jimmy Carter tapped a commission to organize a national women's conference, with a series of pre-conferences in all 50 states and several territories, open to all women over the age of 16, to elect delegates to the NWC. The conference's recommendations for achieving gender equality would be submitted to the president and Congress.

Congress allocated \$5 million in support of the project. Houston was selected as the site of the NWC because mayor Fred Hofheinz had established a Women's Advocate office, one →

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MOTHERS OF A MOVEMENT

continued from previous page

of the first such entities in the nation. Nikki Van Hightower was the first person to hold this position, and served as the City's liaison for the conference.

But some women still felt like second-class citizens in the American feminist movement. In the late 1960s, Betty Friedan, president of the National Organization of Women (NOW), infamously maligned lesbians as "the lavender menace," characterizing them as a threat to the success of the women's movement.

Pokey Anderson was a trailblazing 28-year-old Houston activist who played an extraordinary leadership role. In March 1977, she was a member of the first gay delegation invited to the White House. In June of that year, she was elected co-chairperson of the National Gay Task Force.

Anderson still cringes when she looks back on Friedan's hostile rhetoric. "Betty Friedan just couldn't stop talking about why feminism didn't include lesbians," Anderson recalls, noting that American novelist Rita Mae Brown had been kicked out of a NOW chapter for being a lesbian.

Parker remembers a fear among some women that their movement would get bogged down in minority issues. "One side of the debate said, 'Let's focus on a small number of issues that we can make progress on,'" Parker says. "Others said, 'No, [minority] issues are fundamental. You can't pick and choose which rights are important.'"

Out-flanking the Right

Beginning months before the NWC, Anderson and others worked tirelessly to get lesbians elected as delegates, to lay the groundwork for passage of a plank calling for LGBTQ equality, and to raise gay visibility in general. Anderson says Jean O'Leary, founder of Lesbian Feminist Liberation, and Charlotte Bunch, another member of the National Gay Task Force, also played key roles in getting the community organized. "There was no Facebook then, so we used the 'Lesbian Underground Communication Network,'" she says. "Between Charlotte and Jean, [even Army] generals would be in awe of their prowess."

Importantly, Anderson says the lesbian community was able to organize without right-wing conservatives taking notice. "The right wing found themselves out-organized, so they set up their own event at the Astro Arena, calling it 'the real women's conference,'" she recalls. "They had a big ad in the daily paper talking about how the women at the NWC were going to pervert their children. It was the time

of Anita Bryant calling gays 'human garbage.' Any hint of acceptance of gay people reeked to the right wing, and they fought back."

'The Place Was Pandemonium'

The NWC event opened with a spectacular flourish of pageantry. In the run-up to the convention, a torch was carried by a team of relay runners from Seneca Falls (the site of the first women's-rights conference) to Houston. Poet Maya Angelou penned *A Declaration of Sentiment*, which was signed by thousands and presented to first lady Rosalynn Carter and former first ladies Betty Ford and Lady Bird

THE SPIRIT OF HOUSTON

The First National Women's Conference



An Official Report to the President, the Congress and the People of the United States

Johnson. The late Barbara Jordan, a daughter of Houston's Fifth Ward and the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from the South, opened the convention with a rousing keynote address. (Although Jordan was a member of the LGBTQ community, she was not out publicly at the time.)

The array of powerful American women from all walks of life attending the conference included such figures as Friedan, Coretta Scott King, Gloria Steinem, Ann Richards, civil-rights pioneer Carmen Delgado Votaw, actress Jean Stapleton, Lyndon Johnson aide Liz Carpenter, tennis legend Billie Jean King, and Sarah Weddington, the attorney from *Roe v. Wade*. PBS broadcast the conference nationally, and the documentary *Sisters of '77* was later produced for PBS by Independent Lens.

"I met Bella Abzug, and got to see Gloria Steinem," Houston transgender activist Phyllis Frye recalls, almost giddy. "It was very empowering. They covered so many different areas."

Journalist Gabrielle Cosgriff, who covered

the conference as a writer and an editor for the feminist publication *Breakthrough*, says the gay-rights plank was the most contentious, and received a great deal of media attention. "It could also have been a sign of the times," Cosgriff says. "To my knowledge, that was one area that had not been openly discussed by much of the public before then."

Frye says it was "a big fight," recalling that a lot of the women at the conference were "lesbian friendly."

"And there were some women who were like, 'There's no way we're going to pass anything to do with lesbians,'" Frye says. "Betty Friedan led the anti-lesbian crowd."

The most dramatic moment came during floor debate on the gay-rights plank, according to Anderson. "People like Jean O'Leary and Charlotte Bunch had talked about who should speak on the floor, and who we should have on our side speak," she recalls. "People were pinpointed, and it was agreed who should be at the mic to be able to speak."

"At that time, Betty Friedan got up to speak," Anderson adds. "My heart sank. I thought, 'How did Betty Friedan get a place at the mic to speak? We're going to lose.' What I didn't know was that she had agreed that it was time to put this division behind us. Some friend of hers had taken her aside. They'd had a good conversation, and she was okay."

The tape of Friedan's speech still gives Anderson chills when she hears it. "Here is one of our most high-profile opponents in our own feminist movement, and she comes over to our side," she says.

Cosgriff says after seeing the "enormous spectrum" of conference attendees, "it was obvious to all that our goal was not to exclude any woman from realizing her potential." The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of a plan that included the gay-rights plank, according to Anderson.

"The place went up in cheers and applause," Anderson says. "There were thousands of women in the hall. The chair kept having to say, 'Order! We need order!' The place was pandemonium. Women were crying. Women were dancing on the chairs."

Balloons declaring "We are everywhere" were released, floating up to the rafters.

The Pace of Progress

Memories of the conference are bittersweet for some attendees.

Katy Caldwell, CEO of Legacy Community Health, had volunteered as a 21-year-old student at the University of Houston. "I think it galvanized a lot of people around women's rights. Looking back, the platform was incredibly progressive," Caldwell says. "It galvanized a lot of people, both for and against the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA]."

In assessing the event, she sees obvious victories for women that sprang directly from the 26-point plan approved by delegates.

"We have more minority- and women-owned businesses because of what happened at the conference. We have greater representation of women in federal arts and humanities programs," Caldwell says. "It got more women to run for office than had ever run before. We've come a long way in dealing with victims of domestic violence—although there's still work to be done."

But there were also defeats that sting to this day. "We didn't pass the Equal Rights Amendment," Caldwell says. "While women have more access to government contracts and business, we still struggle with *Roe v. Wade*. We still don't have equal pay."

It's a "depressing" reality, Caldwell says, and many women her age have grown weary of the fight. "I remember apologizing to my niece at the Women's March [last January], saying, 'I'm sorry that you're still having to do this. I cannot believe that you all have to be here,'" she says.

Commemorating History

For Parker, the impact of the 1977 conference came full-circle a few years ago when she attended a luncheon with Gloria Steinem, who was in Houston for the first time since the NWC. "I told her that I had been a volunteer, and it had been a great experience for me," Parker says. "She said, 'Is there anything that commemorates it?'"

When Parker told Steinem that the old convention center where the conference was held is now a downtown entertainment complex, she responded, "That's a shame. There ought to be something to designate what happened there."

"I said to her, 'As mayor, I can take care of that,'" Parker says, adding that she had a historical marker commissioned and installed at the site of the NWC event, across from City Hall. "I sent her a nice little note thanking her for saying something," Parker says. "Before I left office, I wanted to make sure that we acknowledged it."

Andrew Edmonson has served as chairman of the Houston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and on the board of the Houston chapter of the American Marketing Association.

This article drew significantly on the research done by LGBT historian JD Doyle and the website HoustonLGBTHistory.org, which he curates.

The University of Houston will host a symposium November 6 and 7 commemorating the 1977 National Women's Conference. The event, titled "The National Women's Conference: Taking 1977 into the 21st Century," is free and open to the public. For more info, visit UH.edu/Class/77womensconf.

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Celebrity Bromance

Gay superstars Andy Cohen and Anderson Cooper spend 'An Intimate Evening' in Houston.

By Ryan Leach

Photos by Glenn Kulbako

Andy Cohen has been to Houston just twice. The first time was in 2010, when he served as the celebrity grand marshal at Houston Pride. "I had a great time. The spirit of the city was great, and I was surprised at how huge the Pride parade was," Cohen tells OUTSMART.

Cohen's second visit to Houston was for the birth of his goddaughter. And it's somewhat surprising he hasn't been to Space City more often, considering that Bravo (the channel that's synonymous with his celebrity status) has produced at least two shows set in the Lone Star State:

The Real Housewives of Dallas and *Married to Medicine: Houston*.

When asked which of the rival Texas cities he prefers, Cohen deftly navigates the inquiry like the savvy star he's become: "I honestly haven't spent too much time in either one, so I will have to tell you after our shows there," he says.

Well played, Cohen.

The shows to which he's referring are part of Cohen's national tour with longtime pal Anderson Cooper. AC²—*An Intimate Evening with Anderson Cooper and Andy* →



Ⓢ
AC Also Stands for 'Awkward Chemistry'
Andy Cohen's outlandish personality is the perfect foil for Anderson Cooper's buttoned-up demeanor.

ANDY
COHEN
TALES

CELEBRITY BROMANCE

continued from previous page

Cohen comes to Sugar Land's Smart Financial Centre on December 2.

"It is really a fun show," Cohen says. "We have video clips we share, and stories that we tell about our friendship and lives. There is a question-and-answer portion with the audience that is fun. Then, of course, if there is some big story or event that happens—like if Anderson interviews Trump—we incorporate talking about that. The show is not political, though. It's an entertaining evening."

In October, CNN announced that Cohen will replace comedian Kathy Griffin as Cooper's sidekick on the network's New Year's Eve show.

Cohen and Cooper have been friends for most of their adult careers. They met in the '90s when they were set up on a blind date. "He thought I was too enthusiastic over the phone," Cohen admits. "He said I gesticulated too much, and he wasn't interested."

But they eventually struck up a friendship. "We had a mutual friend [and] wound up going on vacation with [him], [so we became] travel buddies. Our friendship sort of grew from that."

Both have enviable careers. Cooper is one of the most respected journalists on TV, appearing on both *60 Minutes* and his own CNN show, *Anderson Cooper 360°*. The journalist, who turned 50 in June, has been out publicly since 2012 and is among the nation's most prominent gay personalities.

Cooper's journalism career began after he graduated from Yale University in 1989. Although he's the son of New York socialite Gloria Vanderbilt, he didn't rest on his laurels. After college, he spent several years as a field journalist in war-torn regions throughout the world, including Rwanda. And he still covers CNN's major stories on location.

"The only time we had to cancel one of our shows—because Anderson got pulled away for a major breaking news story—was back in 2015, during the Paris [terrorist] attacks," Cohen says.

Cohen's equally impressive career and outlandish personality seems the perfect foil to Cooper's more serious tone and buttoned-up demeanor. Perhaps that's the formula that creates the chemistry for a successful nationwide tour.

"[Anderson] was interviewing me for my second book a few years ago, and someone suggested that we go on tour, similar to what Bill O'Reilly and Dennis Miller had been doing for years," Cohen says. "That is how we got the idea."

Cohen, 49, was born in St. Louis and graduated from Boston University. After college, he went on to work at CBS as a producer. In 2004, he rose to prominence at Bravo, winning several awards as producer of *Top Chef* and *Project Runway*. But he's probably best known

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for Bravo's popular *Real Housewives* franchise, for which he still serves as executive producer.

While Cohen was head of development at Bravo, he assumed the on-camera role of "reunion moderator" back in the early days of his myriad hit shows. This evolved into his own nightly series, *Watch What Happens Live!*, where he currently serves as the only openly gay late-night talk-show host on TV.

Unlike Cooper, Cohen (who enjoyed the benefit of an early career behind the camera) says he has always been out at work. "[Being out] was never even a question for me. It was part of who I was. I was just always myself, and my mother always told me to be who I was."

Both Cooper and Cohen wear many hats in their professional lives. Cohen has a radio show, in addition to having authored three memoirs. Recently, he developed his own publishing branch that will produce works by other authors. "There will be an announcement coming out very soon about our first book. But it is nonfiction. I look for books that are basically [about] anything that would interest me."

Cooper is an author in his own right, and recently published *A Mother's Story* with Vanderbilt. The book chronicles their relationship and the tragic suicide of his brother in 1988.

AC² focuses on Cohen and Cooper's professional and personal lives. Although they have a rough idea of the topics they'll cover and the stories they'll share, each show has a wildcard element arising from audience questions. "One time, an audience member asked me how big my dick is," Cohen says. "That was probably one of the most surprising moments. I answered, but Anderson did not."

"You can ask me how big my dick is," Cohen adds. "The answer is the same thing I told [the audience]—I am very happy with it, and I have had zero complaints."

It's comments like these that highlight the dramatic contrast between the two men. Cohen is a bombastic extrovert, and that's reflected in his social media posts. He's always ready with a quip or opinion, even if it's political.

"[Anderson] is a journalist. I am not. We have a completely different approach to things," Cohen says.

You can catch the awkward but palpable chemistry between the two out powerhouses when they come to Sugar Land—Houston's far-flung suburb that prompted Cohen to ask, "How far away is that from downtown?"

What: *AC²—An Intimate Evening with Anderson Cooper and Andy Cohen*

When: 8 p.m. on December 2

Where: Smart Financial Centre, 18111 Lexington Blvd., Sugar Land

Tickets: AC2Live.com

Ryan Leach is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.



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Saving Their Sisters

Houston groups offer much-needed support to black trans women.

By Lourdes Zavaleta

When Dee Dee Watters came out as transgender as a teenager, her mother threw her belongings into the street and kicked her out of her family's north-Houston home.

Watters was turned away from some homeless shelters, while others would not let her shower or told her that if she wanted to stay, she would have to remove her nail polish and put on jeans and a T-shirt. "While on the streets, I was robbed, beaten up, and attacked by cops," says Watters, now 32.

According to a 2015 survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality, 30 percent of trans people have been homeless at some point in their lives, compared to 17 percent of the general population. Meanwhile, 48 percent of trans people reported being denied equal treatment, verbally harassed, and/or physically abused because of their gender identity.

For trans women of color, like Watters, the stakes are higher. As *The Advocate* put it in 2016, "Trans women of color suffer from the effects of compounded institutional barriers, including not only transphobia and racism but also xenophobia, poverty, and homelessness."

The threat of violence that trans people face—and particularly trans women of color—is not new. Since the first anniversary of Rita Hester's murder in 1998, the LGBTQ community has gathered annually on November 20 to mourn trans victims of violence on the Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR).

Since 2010, the number of trans murder victims in the U.S. has increased each year. In 2015, 21 trans murders were reported. In 2016, the number rose to 27. As of mid-October, 23 transgender people have been killed this year—18 people of color, 15 of whom were black women.



Leading the Fight for Survival

Dee Dee Watters (l) founded Women of Color United for Change in 2000. Atlantis Narcisse (far right), who launched Save Our Sisters in 2016, received the Houston GLBT Political Caucus' President's Award in October.

Two of these 2017 murders occurred in Texas. The body of Kenne McFadden, a 27-year-old trans woman, was found in the San Antonio River on April 9. On August 13, 26-year-old Gwenevere River Song was fatally shot in Waxahachie. Although no trans people are known to have been murdered locally this year, 34-year-old Shante Thompson was beaten and fatally shot in Houston on April 11, 2016.

In October 2000, Watters founded Transgender Woman of Color United for Change (TWCUC). Until last year, TWCUC was the only Houston organization that provided safe spaces specifically for trans women of color. In February 2016, Atlantis Narcisse founded Save Our Sisters (SOS), another support group for trans women of color.

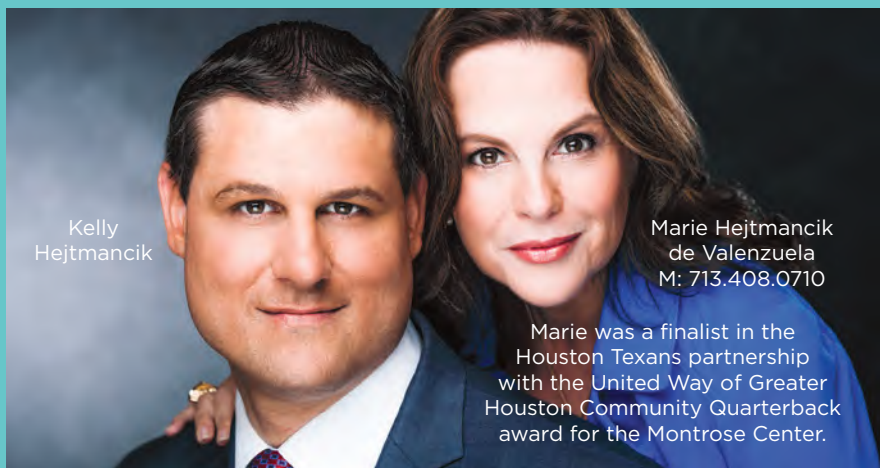
The 45-year-old Narcisse, who received the Houston GLBT Political Caucus' Presi-

dent's Award in October, has been involved in the community for several years, serving on advisory boards and participating in panel discussions for the Montrose Center, Legacy Community Health, and the City of Houston. She says people would often ask for her phone number or email address so they could follow up with questions about hormone therapy and transitioning.

Though she enjoys assisting people one-on-one, Narcisse was frustrated that so many of them did not already have access to this information, or a place to meet other transgender women of color. "Every time someone pulled me to the side, I would think, 'Why haven't these women been taught about themselves yet?'" Narcisse says. "And why isn't there a space for them to congregate?"

Narcisse says being openly trans in the black community is full of stigma because →

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SAVING THEIR SISTERS

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of the emphasis on religion and masculinity. She wants black trans women to know that SOS will give them a safe space where they can be open, and equip them with any answers that they need.

SOS, which was recently mentioned in the *New York Times*, meets at M Society (a branch of Legacy Community Health) and at the Montrose Center. The group is open to both trans and cisgender women of color. Narcisse says she wants to bridge gaps among all women. "In the African-American community, there's a stereotype that black cis women and black trans women can't be in the same room together," Narcisse says. "That is just not the case."

The group meets in a circle. Conversations are organic, and there are no established group leaders. Narcisse says SOS members are very diverse. "Young trans women come in. So do homeless women, women who work, women who can't work, women who are HIV-positive, women with mental-health issues, and women that struggle with thoughts of suicide," Narcisse says. "There is so much diversity in being a trans person. No one's situation is the same."

Narcisse believes the future of SOS is unlimited and hopes to see it grow into a space that will include representation from other trans communities. Women of color who are interested in attending SOS meetings can reach out to the group through Facebook.

Both SOS and TWCUC will be involved in the Day of Remembrance events this month.

"Every time I walk out of my house, I know that I might not return, or I might come back to news that another trans person has been killed," Narcisse says. "That's why every day is a Trans Day of Remembrance to me."

Lourdes Zavaleta is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



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Transgender Day of Remembrance Events

The Progressive Open Door Christian Center will host a TDOR memorial from 7 to 9 p.m. on November 15. Transgender Woman of Color United for Change will host a Transgender Day of Resources and Healthy Living from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on November 18 at the Montrose Center. TWCUC will also host the I Am She and She Was Me! Awards Gala, to honor transgender and intersex people and allies, from 6 to 9 p.m. on November 18 at the Montrose Center. Tickets are available at eventbrite.com. Transform Houston and HOUEquality will premier *Major!*, a documentary about the life of Major Griffin-Gracy, a 75-year-old trans activist, at 6 p.m. on November 20 at the University of Houston's Agnes Arnold Hall.

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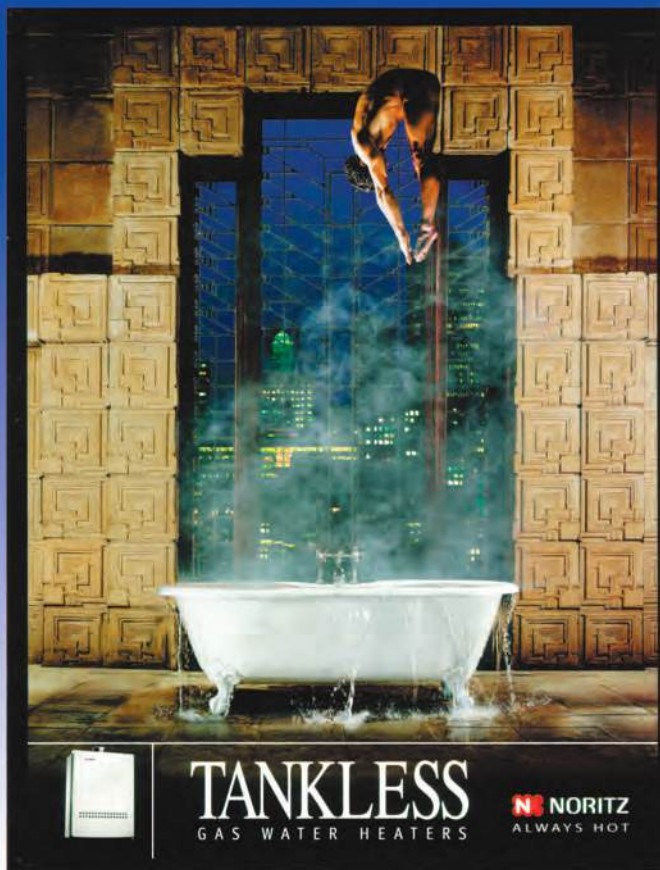
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Political Theater

Out director Jerry Mitchell
rips Trump as 'On Your
Feet' comes to Houston.

By Don Maines

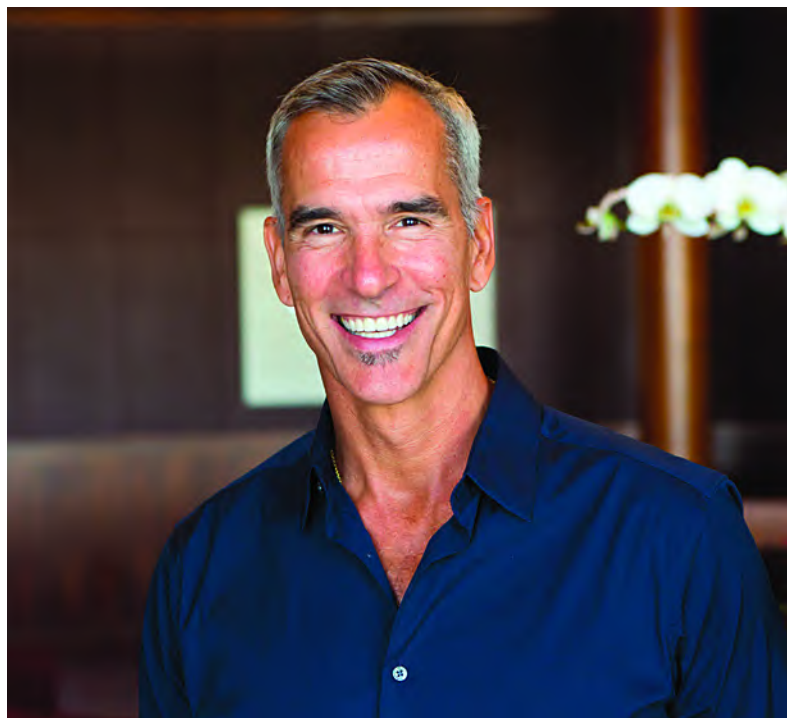
Photo by Christopher DeVargas

Openly gay director Jerry Mitchell's favorite line in *On Your Feet!*—the Broadway musical that congas its way to Houston November 21–26—comes when a Cuban-American immigrant tells a Hollywood record-studio executive, “This is what an American looks like.”

That memorable moment is part of a scene in which Gloria Estefan and her husband, producer-musician Emilio Estefan of Miami Sound Machine, were fighting to get their “ethnic” sound played on American radio stations. “They were told that their music wouldn’t make it in America,” says Mitchell. “I think they won the battle. These are Cuban immigrants who came to our country, and through their artistry and talent, I think, made us a greater country.”

On Your Feet! boasts an original book by Academy Award-winner Alexander Dinelaris (*Birdman* and *The Bodyguard Musical*) and the Estefans’ songbook of hits such as “Rhythm Is Gonna Get You,” “Conga,” “1-2-3,” “Get On Your Feet,” “Mi Tierra,” “Don’t Want to Lose You Now,” and “Reach.”

After 780 performances, *On Your Feet!* closed August 20 in New York, but its first



Ⓢ Staging Resistance

Tony Award-winning director Jerry Mitchell says he’s hung out with president Donald Trump and gotten to know him personally. “He’s not a president,” Mitchell says.

national tour continues to keep Mitchell in the national debate over social issues that include immigration. “The gay community is faced with the same resistance as immigrants,” says Mitchell. “Both groups are saying, ‘We are equal to every other person, and we have the same rights and deserve the same recognition of our rights.’”

Mitchell relishes the opportunity to tell publications covering the show what he thinks of President Trump, who kicked off his campaign for the White House by promising to build a “great, great wall” to keep out immi-

grants from Mexico.

“I do have that platform,” says Mitchell, who danced on Broadway with Trump’s second wife, Marla Maples, in *The Will Rogers Follies*, which Tommy Tune directed and choreographed in 1991. “I hung out with Donald Trump. I got to know him on a personal level,” says Mitchell. “He’s not a president.”

Mitchell grew up in Paw Paw, Michigan, which is also the setting for the 2008 off-Broadway show *Dear Edwina*, about 13-year-old wiseacre Edwina Spoonapple directing her siblings in a weekly mini-musical that’s performed in their garage.

In contrast, young Jerry Mitchell began as part of “the boy’s band” in a production of *The Music Man* at his local community theater, the Paw Paw Village Players. He continued performing there until graduating from high school and accepting a scholarship to study acting, dance, and voice at the prestigious Conservatory of Theatre Arts of Webster College (now Webster University) in St. Louis.

In 1980, Mitchell arrived in New York City shortly before the AIDS epidemic “just about devastated” the Broadway community.

His early career as a six-foot-four-inch hoofer included dancing for legendary choreographer Agnes DeMille in *Brigadoon* and →



Ⓢ Making America Greater

On Your Feet! recounts the struggle of Cuban immigrants Emilio and Gloria Estefan to get their “ethnic” sound played on U.S. radio stations.



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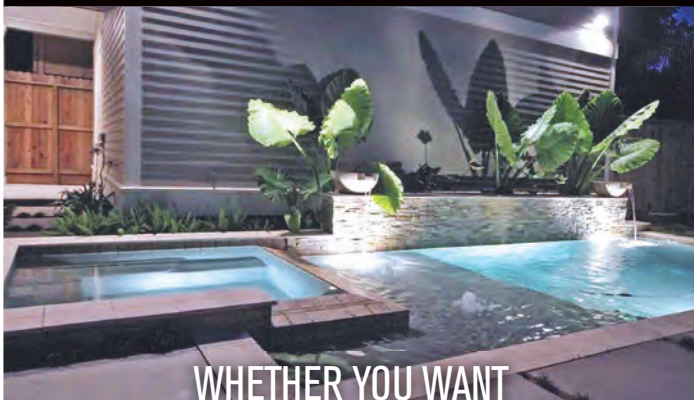
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POLITICAL THEATER

continued from page 93

Donald Saddler in *On Your Toes*, which won the 1983 Tony Award for Best Revival.

In 1992, Mitchell conceived and created *Broadway Bares*, a comedy burlesque show performed annually for the charity Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. "My first show made \$8,000," he says, compared to \$1.6 million for its 25th-anniversary production. Through the years, the group has paid out almost \$17 million, including a donation to AIDS Foundation Houston.

Broadway Bares also introduced Mitchell's choreography skills to New York's theater community.

In 1998, he made his Broadway debut as a choreographer with *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, which won Tony Awards for Kristen Chenoweth as Sally and Roger Bart as Snoopy.

Tony nominations followed for Mitchell's work on *The Full Monty*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, *Hairspray*, *Never Gonna Dance*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, and *Legally Blonde*, which he also directed.

Mitchell won Tony Awards for Best Choreography for *La Cage aux Folles* (2005) and *Kinky Boots* (2013), along with a Best Direction of a Musical nomination for *Kinky Boots*.

He also choreographed both the Off-Broadway productions and films of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Jeffrey*. "I don't look to tell only gay stories," says Mitchell, "but I have told some great gay stories."

His next story might be a musical adaptation of Terry Ronald's 2012 coming-of-age novel *Becoming Nancy*. "It's a beautiful story, set in east London, about a 16-year-old boy who gets cast as Nancy in a school production of *Oliver!* because none of the girls can sing," says Mitchell. "He starts to have feelings for the head footballer who plays Bill Sykes."

The plan is to premiere the show in London's West End theater district, where "Ruby Strippers," the eighth edition of *West End Bares*, was performed in October. The satellite production of *Broadway Bares* benefitted projects that raise awareness, educate, and provide care and support in the United Kingdom and parts of Africa.

What: *On Your Feet!* presented by BBVA Compass Broadway

When: 7:30 p.m. November 21, 22, 23 and 24; 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. November 25; 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. November 26

Where: The Hobby Center, 800 Bagby

Tickets: Available by phone at 800.982.2787, online at thehobbycenter.org or broadwayatthehobbycenter.com, and in person at the Hobby Center box office and all Ticketmaster outlets.

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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Ethiopian Jokes

Comedian Solomon Georgio is killing the whole gay-black-immigrant thing.

By Don Maines

Don't be fooled by Solomon Georgio's drag cover shot for *Homonégro Superior* on Comedy Central Records.

There is a reason he was photographed in androgynous makeup only from the chest up. "High heels give me vertigo. I respect drag as a high art, but I would rather kiss a wasp than duct-tape my genitals," says the 35-year-old "overnight success," whose calling card is that he's a wryly philosophical, gay Ethiopian immigrant with an Italian name.

For the photo shoot, Georgio says he "said 'Grace Jones' three times and hoped for the best."

But when he performs November 17 at the Heights Theater, and November 18–19 at Houston's Come and Take It comedy festival, Georgio says, "I will look like my regular self."

To quote Houston Astros star José Altuve, that will be "pretty good," according to what Georgio told a crowd recently in Portland, Oregon. He began humbly, saying, "I want to start off, first, by obviously apologizing to everyone in the room—sincerely apologizing, because I did my best to look decent tonight, and I ended up looking amazing. I look like a mannequin that came to life; it's perfect."

Offstage, Georgio speaks so rapidly that this writer had to ask him to slow down so he could be understood.

Onstage, he speaks at a more deliberate pace. "It's intentional," he explains, endearingly. "I need to take my time onstage because I'm a little nervous, and the real me can pop in and take over."

When Georgio debuted on the TBS talk show *Conan* on February 10, 2015, he slowly but surely told the audience, "I just want to let you know that I am openly gay. Well, most of



Superior Wit

Solomon Georgio, whose new special is called *Homonégro Superior*, says he's openly gay—except on Martin Luther King Day, when he wants to be just black.

the time. Just took a break on Martin Luther King Day. Sometimes, I just want to be *black*, and nothing else—you know?"

Georgio's first comedy album dropped as a digital release on October 20, the same night he starred in the half-hour *Comedy Central Stand-Up Presents*. "I am in shock and disbelief. I have been an avid fan of those half-hours since they started airing in the '90s," he says.

Growing up with two sisters (one of whom is a lesbian) and four brothers, Georgio recalls that the TV was always on. "We watched standup comedy, comedy movies, sitcoms. Comedy was always a thing."

At 17, he moved from Seattle to Los Angeles as a runaway. "I wanted to get famous. I hopped a Greyhound bus, and I stayed five months—one month in a hostel until my money ran out, then four months in shelters until I reconciled with my parents."

Georgio returned to Los Angeles at 24, "but two months in, I got mugged," he says. "They took everything. I returned to Seattle penniless, but I became fully focused on becoming a

standup comedian."

He says he's always been a fan of the smart comedy he's becoming known for. "My first love was George Carlin. He was a mix of absurd and very intelligent comedy," says Georgio. "I watched *Eddie Murphy Raw* again and again. Margaret Cho, I fell in love with her—just the way she presented herself and told really strong stories. I related to her as an immigrant child, raised by immigrants."

Georgio also admires Maria Bamford, the self-deprecating star of *Lady Dynamite* on Netflix who will also appear at the Come and Take It comedy festival.

He says he honed his standup skills in Seattle before moving for the third time to Los Angeles six years ago. "I think it likes me now," he says of L.A. "Not until a year ago was I actually a full-time comedian. Unfortunately, to become a gay comedian, you have to work a little harder. I worked my ass off, so now comedy is what I do."

What: Solomon Georgio with Deer Tick

When: November 17, 8–11 p.m.

Where: The Heights Theater, 339 W. 19th St.

Tickets: <http://theheightstheater.com>

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



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It's All Gravy!

Houston's best places to dine out or take out on Thanksgiving.

By Joanna O'Leary

Maybe last year you burned the turkey, your gravy was full of lumps, and your stuffing lacked flavor. Maybe just the thought of timing the preparation of traditional sides and the bird brings on a panic attack. Or maybe it's been a really rough month, and the only thing you have energy left for is stuffing your face and slipping into a post-prandial, tryptophan-induced nap.

If any of the aforementioned apply to you, treat yourself and your loved ones to Thanksgiving takeout, or just dine out on Turkey Day. "Nothing will be open," your mother-in-law may crow. But you can give thanks that she is very wrong, for Houston has multiple options for those not up to cooking. Remember to check with restaurants regarding order deadlines, seating times, and reservations.

In addition to selling whole roasted turkeys, **Rainbow Lodge** is offering an extensive array of side dishes for takeout—green beans with shallots, cornbread dressing, mashed potatoes, roasted root vegetables, as well as their famous croissant bread pudding with bourbon sauce. Those looking for a protein alternative to turkey should consider ordering a whole roasted suckling pig, duck, or goose. Rainbow Lodge will also be serving a three-course prix-fixe menu on Thanksgiving Day with traditional items (turkey, cranberry sauce, dressing) as well as less-customary mains such as sea scallops and rainbow trout.

Ousie's Table may not be open on Thanksgiving Day, but they still want to feed you. The restaurant's Turkey Day takeout menu gives patrons a choice of garlic-and-pepper-crusted prime rib (accompanied by aioli, tarragon mustard, and horseradish cream sauces), honey-glazed ham, and roasted turkey with gravy, all of which comes with two sides and a dessert. I recommend eschewing the standard sides in favor of the lobster mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, or stilton salad, and indulging in the apple streudel with caramel sauce for dessert. And if Thanksgiving is one of a handful



Hassle-Free Holiday

Those who don't want to cook this Thanksgiving might opt for an assortment of to-go sides from Ousie's (top), the roasted turkey from Mandola's (bottom left), or the prime rib at Laurenzo's.



of days in the year when you break from your carb-phobic diet, pick up a dozen of Ousie's gingerbread or spicy cayenne biscuits.

Laurenzo's is keeping it simple for you this Thanksgiving by assembling to-go packages with prime rib or ham, two sides (creamed corn, macaroni and cheese, butter peas, or garlic mashed potatoes), and a whole loaf of bread. Packages are priced according to the size of your dinner party, and customers can elect to also buy a whole key lime pie or some appetizers and snacks in the form of chile con queso or guacamole.

One of the few places in H-Town where you can get a whole Cajun fried turkey for Thanksgiving, **Mandola's** has assembled a takeaway meal comprised of the aforementioned plus three sides (standouts of which include the creamed-spinach casserole, parmesan potatoes, and fresh cranberry sauce), as well as dessert (banana key lime pie, bread pudding, or pumpkin pie).

For a French-inflected Thanksgiving, you can head to **Bistro Provence**, whose Thanksgiving lunch spans three courses comprising options including pumpkin soup, ribeye with

Bordelaise sauce and cauliflower puree, turkey breast with sage and corn stuffing, sweet potatoes, and ginger cranberry relish, pumpkin pie, and cinnamon-bread pudding. And bring the kids—the Bistro is also offering a special discounted children's menu. Francophiles should also consider Brasserie du Parc, whose dine-in Turkey Day dinner menu features a brie tart with shaved pear, turkey with mushrooms and cognac gravy, risotto with fall vegetables and truffle oil, and caramelized apple crepe. The Brasserie is also accepting to-go orders for many of its à la carte items, as well as turkey with all the fixin's priced per person.

Finally, if you're unable to reunite with your Jewish grandmother this weekend, an admirable substitute for her cooking can be found in **Kenny & Ziggy's** massive selection of dozens of yenta-approved noshes for takeout, such as mini sweet-potato pancakes; spinach, onion, and leek kugel; carrot soufflé; chocolate bobka bread pudding; as well as (natch) a 20-pound bird, carved at your request.

Joanna O'Leary is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



‘A Southern Coronation of Love’

Adrian Homer and Harrison Guy tied the knot on their 10th anniversary.

Their Extra-Special Day

At the wedding of Adrian Homer (l) and Harrison Guy, Houston mayor Sylvester Turner read a proclamation declaring it “Homer-Guy Day.” Guy serves as cochair of the City of Houston LGBTQ Advisory Board.



By Henry V. Thiel

Harrison Guy and Adrian Homer met at Prairie View A&M University through Delta Phi Epsilon, a fraternity for gay men of color.

Guy, who now serves as cochair of the City of Houston LGBTQ Advisory Board, was assigned to be Adrian's big brother. While the fraternity has a policy against romantic interactions between big brothers and pledges, they established a great friendship that Guy knew would last a lifetime.

Immediately after Homer's six-week pledge process and initiation ceremony, he sent Guy a text saying he was interested in being more than just friends.

"I was flattered and surprised," Guy says. "We are both from small towns, and very 'country' at heart and spirit. So our first date was at Wing Stop, because the only thing Adrian loves more than me is wings—although

"We are both from small towns, and very 'country' at heart and spirit. So our first date was at Wing Stop, because the only thing Adrian loves more than me is wings."

I joked about the fact that he eats wings in a very prim and proper way. After enjoying our wings, we talked for hours about nothing and everything. And 10 years later, we are still enjoying wings together and I still joke about the fact that he doesn't eat them right."

Their inside joke is that eating out has

become their hobby since they go out so often. During their college years, they were regulars at The Pit in Prairie View for barbecue and baked potatoes, and at the Cheesecake Factory.

Their decade-long relationship has been mostly clear sailing, although it did take some work to overcome their age difference. "I am nine years older than Adrian, and when we met, he was just graduating," says the now-40-year-old Guy. "So I got to watch him really grow up and take his place as a man in the world. Watching your partner make →

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WEDDING GUIDE

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mistakes in life is brutal. It was incredibly difficult for me to balance giving him advice as his big brother in the fraternity and allowing him to carve out his own path as his partner. For us, the age difference was a major opportunity for us to grow, which we did, and it stretched us in ways that we had not imagined. My biggest takeaway from this experience is that in love and partnership, you have to allow your partner the space to explore their individual journey.”

Homer is a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the State of Texas, while Guy is the founder and creative director of Urban Souls Dance Company. Homer moved in with Guy after graduating, although marriage wasn’t on his mind. “After all, in most places, including Texas, the LGBTQ community barely had any rights at all, let alone marriage equality,” Homer says. “I figured it would never happen.”

But Guy had hope.

“By our seventh anniversary, marriage equality was becoming much more of a reality,” Guy says. So he decided to surprise Homer with a proposal during their anniversary date in downtown Houston, which began with dinner and drinks at Sambuca followed by a horse-drawn carriage ride to the gazebo at the Wortham Center.

When they pulled up near the gazebo, there were rose petals scattered on their pathway. All of their closest friends were there, but they thought it was only to celebrate the couple’s anniversary. Two performers from Guy’s studio danced in the distance while Amir Bel-Ami, one of Homer’s favorite singers, belted out one of their favorite songs. Then Guy took a knee and presented Adrian with a ring.

Three years later, the couple said “I do” at their wedding ceremony.

First, they hired celebrity wedding planner Darryl Wilson Jr. of D’Concierge to create a stunning black-and-white décor for the reception. They chose to exchange vows in matching merlot tuxedos at the University of Houston’s A.D. Bruce Religion Center in front of 250 guests on April 15, 2017—their 10th anniversary as a couple. They picked the UH chapel because of its beauty and its reputation as an inclusive religious environment that welcomes all expressions of love. The Reverend Shon Stewart officiated.

“A very special moment during our wedding, for me, was when mayor [Sylvester] Turner read a proclamation from the City of Houston, which declared April 15, 2017, as ‘Homer-Guy Day’ in the City of Houston,” Guy recalls.

The ceremony also included a special rose tribute to Chyna Gibson, a transgender woman from New Orleans who was murdered in Feb-

ruary. Gibson was originally scheduled to be in the couple’s wedding.

The grooms say walking down the aisle on the arms of their mothers was equally emotional. But then Guy brought the house down during his vows, when he whipped out a cookie that he had saved from one of their first dates. “If this fragile cookie could survive 10 years, then our love can last forever,” Guy said.

The ceremony, which they called “A Southern Coronation of Love,” ended with the grooms placing crowns on each other’s heads. At the reception, guests dined on chef Javani King’s “sexy soul food”—deviled eggs, fried catfish, and collard greens. Baker extraordinaire Tammy Allen created their wedding cake based on one that Guy had seen on Instagram. Guests were on the dance floor from the minute they entered the reception at the Ensemble Theatre until the wee hours.

“The absolutely best part of our wedding was having our families present and supportive,” Homer says. “And marrying the man of my dreams.”

The newlyweds honeymooned in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, where they spent two weeks on the beach. They currently reside in Houston.

Henry V. Thiel is a frequent contributor to OutSMART magazine. He loves the beach.

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Love and Charity

A donation drive brought Melanie Pang and Kendall Toarmina together.

By Henry V. Thiel

With Owl Their Hearts

Melanie Pang and Kendall Toarmina met on the Rice University campus, and were both married and engaged in the school's chapel.

Melanie Pang and Kendall Toarmina met in 2009 at Willy's Pub on the Rice University campus. They spoke briefly, and added each other as friends on Facebook.

After a year-and-a-half of little interaction, they reconnected when Pang started a donation drive and promoted it on social media. Seeing an opportunity for them to get to know each other better, Kendall messaged Pang and said she had some items to contribute.

"Since I didn't know her well, I thought it would be a quick stop," says Pang, a University of Houston graduate who grew up in Missouri City. "That 'quick stop' ended up being a two-hour laugh-fest while Kendall baked sweet-potato fries."

Pang, who now serves as cochair of the City of Houston LGBTQ Advisory Board, says "laughter and donations" are the way to her heart, but adds that "the fries didn't hurt, either."

"Our relationship didn't start for another six months after that," says Toarmina, a Rice graduate who's originally from Nashville. "It was around April 2011. We know now that we can weather just about any storm together, because our relationship started during a very tumultuous time. I had just arrived in South America to teach English as part of my Ful-

bright Scholarship commitment for the next year."

"We actually made conscious efforts to try to give each other space," Pang says, "but there was a gravitational pull so strong that at a certain point we realized it didn't make sense for us to continue living our lives as though we weren't extremely important to one another. The relationship was revealed to us more than we chose it."

"I realized I wanted to marry her after she

"We know now that we can weather just about any storm together, because our relationship started during a very tumultuous time."

supported me and stayed with me after an emotionally challenging time, when I was looking for gainful employment," Pang adds. "I learned that she would stay beside me, even when I was struggling and not at my best, and if she could love me through that time, we could love each other forever."

Unbeknownst to Pang, Toarmina had been planning to propose ever since purchasing rings right after the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2015 *Obergefell* decision. The proposal finally happened on a random Monday in May.

Toarmina told Pang she was receiving an award from Rice, which was the perfect cover.

Pang knew to dress nicely and be on time. When Pang arrived at the Rice Memorial Chapel, she discovered Toarmina standing by the altar with rose petals in the shape of a heart at her feet. Toarmina had also lit five candles, one for each year of their relationship. "She was giggling nonstop," Pang recalls. "I cried, of course. By the time she got down on one knee, I was so nervous that I got down on one knee, too, and just said, 'Please?'"

Their good friend and former roommate,

Kasia, captured every moment—from Pang's confusion to the couple's pure joy. They were married on May 28, 2017, in the Rice chapel, with Isabel "Texas" Longoria officiating.

Pang's favorite moment from the wedding ceremony was when Toarmina realized she had forgotten to bring her vows to the altar and immediately told Longoria, who replied, "Well, I guess you will have to wing it."

Never one to improvise something so important, Toarmina asked her trooper of a bridesmaid, Chelsey, to go find them. Chelsey ran back and forth searching everywhere while the ceremony proceeded, but to no avail. Eventually, they had to let the cat out of the bag, and Toarmina went to look for the vows herself in the dressing room.

"You could hear the rustling while she →

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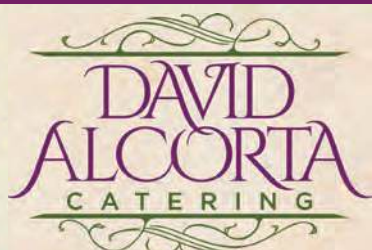
looked around," Pang says. "Then she swung the door open and said to everyone in attendance: 'Okay, somewhere there's a little white purse with my vows in it. Look under your seats.' It felt like an Oprah giveaway, and I loved it!"

One of their guests in the last pew held up the purse, and it was as if someone scored a touchdown. Toarmina ran halfway down the aisle in her beautiful long-train dress, then back up to the altar, launching into her vows as if nothing had happened. After she began with "Melanie—," Pang and the audience burst out laughing. The formality of the wedding had dissipated.

"Having that moment to laugh with my family and friends was priceless, and changed the whole tone of the wedding to something more like 'us,'" Pang says. "I couldn't have planned for a better way for us to engage with our guests and have fun during a typically serious ceremony. It was an authentic and imperfectly perfect, wonderful experience. Not everything goes as you plan, but sometimes it's even better than you could have hoped."

The couple, who refer to themselves as Melanie and Kendall Toarmina Pang, decided to delay their honeymoon and instead do a weekend "mini-moon" in Galveston so they could decompress. Unlike their typical elaborate trips (they went to Europe to celebrate their engagement), this time they got a room by the beach, had breakfast at IHOP, ate ice cream bars on the seawall, and enjoyed each other's company. They will do a full honeymoon soon, but neither would trade their Galveston "mini-moon" for anything.

Henry V. Thiel is a frequent contributor to OutSmart magazine. He loves weddings.



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▼ Jimmy Fallon

(The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, 9.28.17, NBC)

A musical based on Cher's life will come to Broadway next year. But I dunno—what are the chances you're gonna find people who like both Cher and Broadway musicals? (Good luck with that!)



© **Cher Comes to Broadway**
What does Jimmy Fallon have to say about that?

▼ Jessie Ware

(Out, 11/17, Mike Berlin)

Mike Berlin: Are you excited to tour? The gays are waiting.

Jessie Ware: My gay fans have been so loyal. I adore playing for them. It also means I have a room full of potential suitors for my single brother.

Glad he can benefit!

He's a nice Jewish doctor.

We'll put the word out.

Please do!



© **Jessie Ware on Tour**

Will she be pimping for her brother?

FOUNTAINS & STATUARY

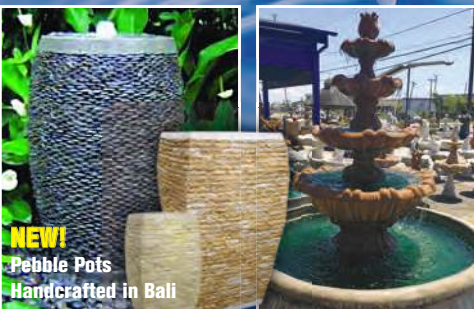


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Sam Smith ▶

(The Huffington Post, 10.23.17, Curtis M. Wong)

"There was one moment in my life where I didn't own a piece of male clothing, really," he told *The Sunday Times*.

"I would wear full makeup every day in school, eyelashes, leggings with Dr. Martens and huge fur coats, for 2.5 years.

"I don't know what [my label] would be," he added, "but I feel just as much woman as I am man."

He's just as fond of exploring gender these days as he was years ago, too.

"I love a heel," he said, a point he emphasized with a cheeky Instagram post [right]. "I've got loads of heels at home."



🕒 **Friend of Dorothy**
Sam Smith is head over high heels.



🕒 **Ally**
Is Patricia Arquette gonna be silenced?

◀ Patricia Arquette (The Huffington Post, 9.29.17, Pollo Del Mar)

Of particular interest to Arquette, of course, are issues relating to the queer community. Younger sister Alexis Arquette came out first as gay, then transitioned in the public eye before tragically passing away in 2016 as the result of complications of AIDS.

During an often raw 45-minute interview [on Party Foul Radio with Pollo & Pearl], Arquette seamlessly moved from laughter one moment to tear-inducing recollections of her younger sister's life the next.

Though she is certain she "would still have empathy" for the queer experience, her long-standing interest in and commitment to the community would have been different without Alexis, Arquette admits. "It's different when it's someone you love," she said.

"It's one thing when you read about a 'political agenda,'" Arquette admitted. "But when you're hearing

about someone being discriminated against by a nurse or a doctor or trying to get a cup of coffee?"

During her sister's life, Arquette says she either witnessed first-hand or heard of "thousands" of such experiences Alexis faced. It opened her eyes in ways which would have been otherwise impossible. "All of these whittling-away, dehumanizing experiences you see your loved one go through really educate you to how it is to be LGBTQ in America—or how it has been," she stated.

"I think it is changing for the better, but every time you turn around, there's some new governmental push to take away basic human civil rights for the LGBTQ community and silence them," Arquette acknowledged.

To that end, Arquette feels an obligation to continue to use her celebrity to shine the spotlight on causes of significance.

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Different Drummer

An interview with
gay front man Jonny Pierce
of The Drums.

When we look back at 2017, one of the trends that will surely stand out is the increasing visibility (and audibility) of gay male musicians. There are still plenty of queer women making music with crossover appeal (see Palehound, Hurray for the Riff Raff, Romy Madley Croft of The xx, and Ruthie Foster, among others). But now the gay men are finally coming forward in increasing numbers.

Jonny Pierce, of The Drums, is one of these gay musicians. On their new album *"Abysmal Thoughts"* (Anti-), The Drums maintain much of the dance energy of previous releases, especially on "Blood Under My Belt," "Your Tenderness," "I'll Fight for Your Life," and "Heart Basel." But this album also has some particularly devastating moments, including "Head of the Horse" and "If All We Share (Means Nothing)." I spoke with Pierce about *"Abysmal Thoughts,"* including its eye-catching cover art, during the summer of 2017.

Gregg Shapiro: You were the primary songwriter when you were with Elkland, releasing one album, *Golden*, in 2005. I detected the influences of New Order and The Cure on *Golden*. Would you agree, and are there any other influences I missed?

Jonny Pierce: You're spot-on as far as New Order. I guess I was listening to The Cure, but I wasn't as crazy about The Cure as I was about New Order. It's funny, when I was in the studio making *Golden*, I remember my producer Dave Trumfo [from The Pulsars] saying, "There's a lot of The Cure stuff happening, even some of the stuff you're doing with your vocals." For me, that was more of an introduction to The Cure. I think I started listening to The Cure while I was making that album because Dave was talking about it so much. That's happened to me a few times in my life. I'll release an album or a song, and it's compared to another artist. Someone will say, "Oh, he must be a fan



Not Abysmal
Jonny Pierce, of The Drums, is one of an increasing number of gay men finally coming forward with increasing visibility.

of Orange Juice or something." [Laughs] Then I'll go and check them out and think, "We must be like-minded." That does happen. But New Order was huge for me as a teenager—probably my biggest influence.

You reemerged a few years later as the front man of The Drums. The Drums' eponymous debut album reinforced a commitment to dance music.

The Drums was its own weird animal. I was in a different place than I was with Elkland. I was much more seasoned—just as a living, breathing person living in the real world. When I wrote those songs for Elkland, I was living at my parents' house in this weird, sheltered, home-schooled space. By the time I started The Drums, I'd been living in New York City for a few years. I went down to Florida to start The Drums, because New York was a little too distracting for me to get anything done creatively.

When I went to live with Jacob [Graham, my gay bandmate] in Florida, we almost imme-

diately started this concept of The Drums. Jacob had been falling for the Sarah Records and C86 bands like Blueboy and early Factory Records bands like The Wake. A bit more fragile, glimmering, sad guitar pop music, essentially. True independent music [from] bands that used off-brand guitars and weird synthesizers. But the songs were beautiful and vulnerable and genuine. He was introducing me to a lot of

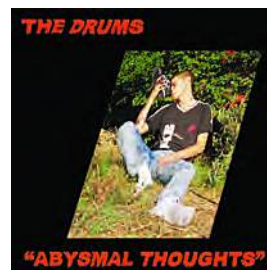
that stuff. At the same time, I was into this Swedish band The Tough Alliance. They had these big, go-for-it choruses.

That was always the push and pull with Jacob and me. He wanted things to be linear and sweet and delicate, and I always wanted big hooks. These two different ideas of what a good song should be melded together.

It was truly a meeting of the minds.

Is there any significance in you going from "Jon" in Elkland to "Jonny" in The Drums?

I never liked "Jon." Maybe because when I was



growing up, everyone called me Jonny. I think when I left that place, which was a dark, abusive place for me, I think I wanted to not hear that name anymore. People started calling me Jon or Jonathan in New York City. I think I went by Jonathan for the first Drums EP. When we were going to release the first album, it was a much bigger deal. We were on Island Records and Downtown Records. As we were going to submit the artwork, at the very last second I shot an email to Jacob (who was in charge of the artwork) saying, "Put my name as Jonny." It's an interesting question. I've never really dissected why that was important to me. Part of it was that we were going for that 1950s/1960s Americana. In my mind, "Jonny" plays that part more than Jon or Jonathan. Now everyone knows me as Jonny, so I guess that stuck. [Laughs]

The "Abysmal Thoughts" cover photo, which is credited to you, may do more to introduce the queer foot-fetish community to cool music than anything that came before.

Yeah! One thing I'll say about Jacob is that he never wanted to grow up. He wanted this band to always have this air of innocence. You can hear that when you listen to the cute and sweet love songs on the *Summertime* EP. The first album has songs about hope, as well as sadness, but there's nothing really too descriptive—saying something that might push some boundaries.

I remember writing a song called "Instruct Me" for the first album, about the first time I'd ever had sex. I remember showing it to Jacob, and he said, "I don't really want that to be on there. It's about sex." I thought, "Are we homeschooling again? In that Christian household we both grew up in? What's this about?" Jacob told me he didn't ever want to read a newspaper. He was literally afraid of facing reality.

I always felt a bit handicapped artistically, like I had one hand tied behind my back. I was unable to say what I wanted to say or do what I wanted to do. When Jacob left the band, I had about 30 seconds of fear and shock, but that quickly subsided.

Jacob and I remain friends to this day. I have to be honest and say that this newfound joy and bliss washed over me. On *"Abysmal Thoughts"* I would be able to be myself. I was ready to say a lot. So this idea of my boyfriend, Keon, smelling a sneaker on the cover of the album, that's stuff I'd been wanting to do and had never been able to. It wasn't just me—for years I've had to represent other people, other voices. Now it's just my voice. So yeah, there is a boy smelling his gym shoe [laughs] on the cover. There is that ugly, drippy orange font. There are songs about being entirely depressed and feeling like total shit. And there are songs about being transparent and descriptive about my life and how I'm feeling. →



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GROOVEOUT

continued from previous page

“Abysmal Thoughts” features some breathtaking moments, beginning with “Head of the Horse.” Have the people you sing about in the song heard it, and if so, what do they think of it?

I don't know if they've heard it. The last time that I had confirmation that anyone in my family heard my music was the first [Drums] album. I haven't had any feedback at all. I don't really have a relationship with my family in the way that most people have a relationship with theirs. I've gone years with no contact, and then suddenly there'll be some communication, and that feels a little scary. I pull back because I'm afraid of being hurt. It's a dynamic that I'm trying to feel out every day. I try to be open, but I also want to protect myself. There are days when I wake up thinking, “I don't ever need to speak to them again.” Then there are days when I wake up and there's a primal longing to be close to them. It's this balance that isn't so balanced all the time. I would assume, with the Internet and all of that, at some point they're going to hear the song.

“If All We Share (Means Nothing)” and “Are You F--ked” are some of the rawest, most emotional songs I've ever heard.

Would you say that those songs, and others on this album, resulted in a beneficial catharsis?

Writing this record was more healing for me than any therapy session I've ever been in [laughs]—and I've been in a few [laughs]. Each of these songs was like sitting down with the greatest listener of all time. I was sitting there pouring my heart and thoughts out and committing them to these songs. As soon as these songs were finished, I just felt lighter. I felt like I had gained a new sense of who I was, or who I'm becoming. People always ask me what they can expect from the upcoming tour. I always think, “Expect to watch a man who's finally starting to find himself.”

Last year and this year are turning out to be amazing times for queer musicians, especially for gay male acts (in addition to The Drums) such as Car Seat Headrest, Perfume Genius, Frank Ocean, Arca, Xiu Xiu, and The Magnetic Fields, as well as Erasure and Bob Mould, to mention a few. What do you think of the current state of gay male performers?

It's such a fascinating study, isn't it? You mentioned Erasure. I actually toured with Erasure when I was in Elkland. We were the opening act for one of their U.S. tours. It was full of weird and funny experiences. I was talking about Erasure the other day in the context of what you're talking about—being gay and being accepted and respected as a musician. We're in a time now where if you're not queer, you have

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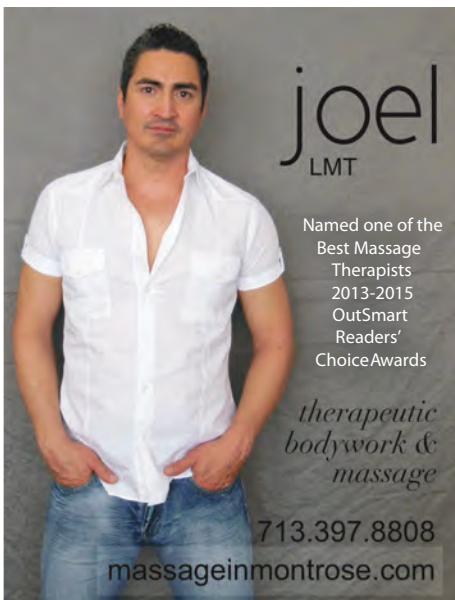
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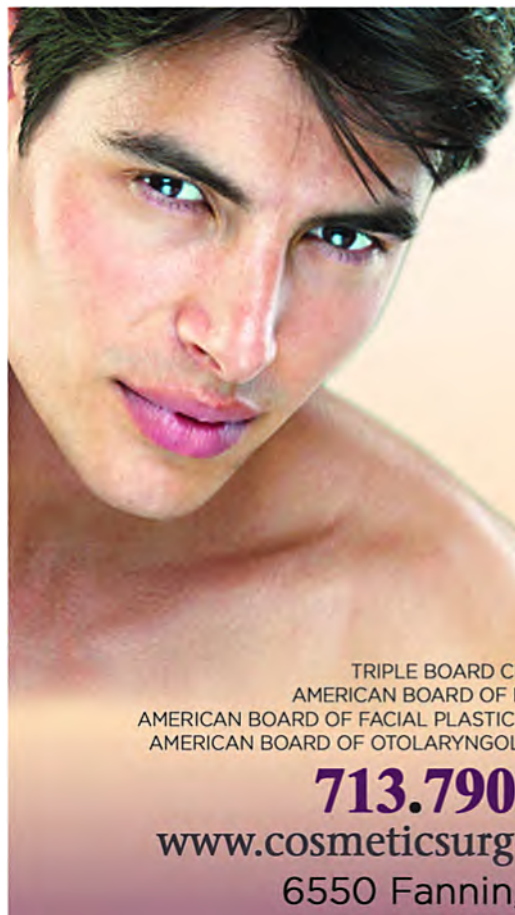
to work extra-hard to get people to care about you. [Laughs] The tables have turned, almost. Who knows how long this phase will last? I certainly appreciate this new excitement for these different points of view. I think it's really beautiful. I don't consider myself over the top or extravagant or anything like that. But back in the '80s, you almost had to be...

You had to be Boy George.

Yes! You had to almost be clownish or queeny for people to say, "Okay, I can deal with that." The scariest thing was for a normal guy to say, "Hey, I like dick." That could be your brother or your uncle. You could be gay, as long as you literally looked like a rainbow. Then everything was fine. Now we're more like, "I play guitar and I like c*ck." [Laughs] That's a real scary thing to a lot of people. It's taken decades for people to say, "I'm not going to die if my uncle's gay. I'm not going to die if this person who makes music I love happens to sleep with men at the end of the day." I'm thankful for how far we've come. By no means are we done with this battle.

The Drums perform on December 6 at White Oak Music Hall Downstairs in Houston, and December 9 at Emo's in Austin.

Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



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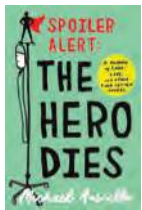


'Mask of Shadows'

Falling in love with someone forbidden.

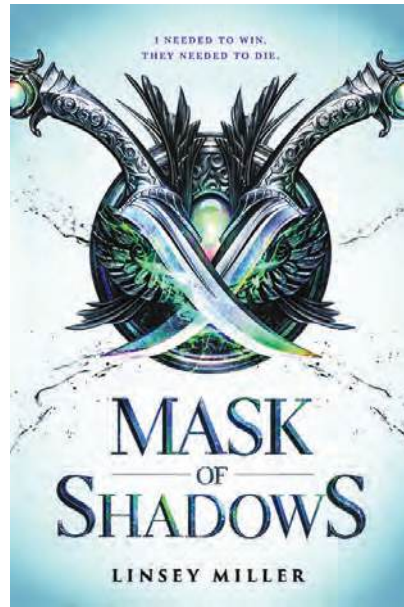
Spoiler Alert: The Hero Dies

Michael Ausiello



Just like in the movies, you and your partner planned to grow old together. You'd be the couple everyone smiled at: two wrinkled beings, holding hands, fussing good-naturedly at one another. But then, as

in Michael Ausiello's new memoir, the plot thickens. When Ausiello spotted Christopher "Kit" Cowan at a New York event for gay athletes, it was lust at first sight. At six-foot-something tall, Kit was geeky-sexy—just Ausiello's type. But their first date was near-disastrous. They were different in so many ways: Ausiello thought Kit had amazing style; Kit could barely get past Ausiello's Smurf collection. As time passed, they adopted a cat along with endearing nicknames. They moved in together, conquered relationship crises, moved out together, and sought counseling. They wanted things to work. But then, just over a decade into their relationship, a doctor told Kit that he had a year to live. So how do you make every minute count? How do you watch someone you love suffer? How do you say goodbye? Ausiello jumps right in with humor on page one of his story, and that carries the sad tale throughout. Yes, you will cry—but no, you shouldn't pass this one up. Atria Books (simonandschuster.com). —Terri Schlichenmeyer



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JOHNNY BLANCO

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At first, Sallot Leon thought the scrap of paper might be money.

The Erland nobles had been making money ever since the war, when Nacea was obliterated. But no, this bit of paper was worth more than money: it was an open call to find a replacement member for the Queen's Left Hand, an elite group of assassin-guards. Come by invitation or by skill, the poster said.

Sal had the skill, for sure.

Since the age of eight, Sal worked as a street fighter and could climb anything. There was nothing Sal couldn't steal, no lock that couldn't be picked. Those were skills the Queen needed.

And so, to get into the audition, Sal committed the first murder.

That, as it turned out, was the easy part: after passing the first interview, Sal was accepted and given a mask to wear at all times—the last mask awarded. Twenty-three people were in the competition, for which the rules were simple: kill your competitors without being seen or getting caught, but don't hurt anyone who was not competing.

Nine competitors were killed the first night.

As the other wannabes fell almost hourly, Sal had to rely on past experience and new skills to stay alive. Core-strength training helped to dodge spears and arrows from other competitors. Tutoring eliminated illiteracy. Medical training kept Sal from death by poisoning. But there was no way to avoid falling in love with someone forbidden, or to escape the aftermath that was sure to come.

Though it starts out a little on the clunky side, and it may take a minute to get your bearings, *Mask of Shadows* quickly becomes a pretty good novel.

And a unique one, too: it's rare to find a gender-fluid person cast as the lead character, but that's where author Linsey Miller places Sal. And though it's an unusual plot twist, gender fluidity isn't the driving force behind this story. In fact, we don't find out that Sal does not identify with only one gender until later in the novel. That's uncommon, too.

As for character development, that's where Miller shines. Sal starts out a bit feral—a street-wise petty thief, uncivilized but with hungry focus. There's a lot of selfishness early on, but as Sal matures into a trained assassin, egotism is replaced by allegiance and a much finer character. Add in a cast that could be killed one-by-one at any minute and, well, you'll be hooked.

For fans of *Hunger Games*-type fiction, *Mask of Shadows* is gonna be too appealing to pass up. So don't deny yourself—for readers age 15 and up, this is gonna be a dream book.

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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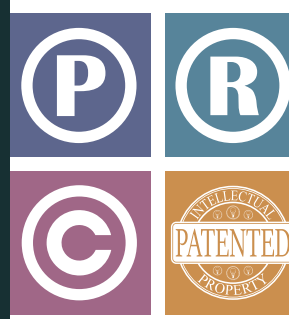
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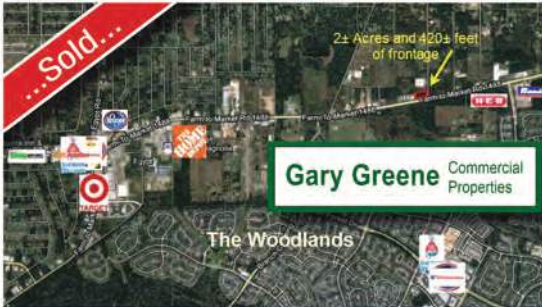
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continued from page 128

have the Mercury retrograde period to review those choices before you put them into action. After that, you are moving forward.

CAPRICORN (December 22–January 19). November continues what has been a very busy time for you. Your career energies are very active, and you should be taking a leadership role wherever you can. You may be looking for a promotion, or perhaps you've already started your own new business. Friends and business associations can be especially helpful to you this month, and November is especially good for building alliances. Near the end of the month, you will be ready for some rest and retreat. In December, Saturn, your ruler, enters Capricorn for a 28-month visit! Enjoy your down time, as there won't be much of that in 2018.

AQUARIUS (January 20–February 18). There is a lot of improvement in your career area this month. You are ready to take on a

leadership position, or even start your own business. This is a great time for self-promotion. You may want to teach, travel, write, or go back to school. However, you are expecting the people around you to act like adults. You will not have patience for people who aren't responsible. The holidays will put you back in touch with people you haven't heard from in a while. Your energy level remains strong through the holidays.

PISCES (February 19–March 20). Over the last couple of weeks you have been able to get yourself back on track, so you're feeling a lot less stuck. You are thinking a lot about your future and the direction that you want to take. Writing, travel, and educational prospects open up for you throughout the month. By the middle of November, you are very busy! You may feel some pressure to make decisions, but the Mercury retrograde will slow down that process until the end of December. This will be a nostalgic holiday period for you!

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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

Find many of Inergy's former staff 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

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Make Holiday Plans Early!

Mercury goes retrograde in Sagittarius, the sign of travel.

November's big news is that Mercury is going retrograde from the 27th through December 25. Mercury will be retrograde in Sagittarius, the sign of travel, so be sure to get your holiday plans made early! With Mercury retrograde during the holidays, it is best to stick with your traditional plans rather than striking out on something new. • Neptune (the mystic, the musician, and the addict) goes direct on the 22nd. Neptune rules flood events, and has been affecting the local and national charts since November 2016. We will see more heavy rain and possible flooding through 2018. • Mars, the initiator and activator, is moving through Libra and will have the most impact on the cardinal signs—Aries, Libra, Cancer, and Capricorn. This can give you the courage to act on your impulses and express your anger more easily. It could also be harder to sleep as restfully. • Good days this month are the 3rd, 4th, 9th, 11th, 16th, 17th, 21st, and 25th. Days to stay in bed are the 12th, 13th, 18th, 19th, 22nd, and 28th. • The sun begins the month in Scorpio and enters Sagittarius on the 21st. Mercury starts in Scorpio, but quickly enters Sagittarius on the 5th. Mars is traveling through Libra for the entire month. Jupiter has just begun her yearlong stay in Scorpio. Saturn is in Sagittarius and about to enter Capricorn on December 19. Uranus remains in Aries, Neptune in Pisces, and Pluto in Capricorn.

ARIES (March 21–April 19). Relationships are definitely the focus this month, especially if you are starting or renewing a partnership, or addressing any problematic issues that come up. The need to reinvent yourself remains strong this month, especially on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 18th, and 19th. You won't have much patience for people who get in your way. Career focus becomes stronger and stronger, dovetailing with your need for reinvention. This focus may even give you a whole new path to follow.

TAURUS (April 20–May 20). Improving your personal health, work habits, and relationships are the main items for you this month. Last month you entered a much more optimistic time frame that will last through November 2018. This will be a busy and resourceful year. Current relationships are improving, and if you are single, this is a super time to get out and meet someone new. Career options improve, and this is a good

month to ask for a raise or apply for a new position. This is also a super month to start any sort of exercise or diet program!

GEMINI (May 21–June 21). You're continuing to work on moving forward with your career and relationships. Improving boundaries is high on your list. This month, you are trying to improve your work conditions. It's easy for you to take more of a leadership role at work or in your community. November is a good time to apply for a new position—but get that started before November 27! The push to improve your health regimen becomes stronger as we get past midmonth. Your creative juices are active all month! The Mercury retrograde will affect you personally, so pay attention.

CANCER (June 22–July 22). Home, family, relationships, and career are all active this month. You are continuing the theme you started last month. You will want to make your nest a more comfortable place. You could be moving, remodeling, or changing your interiors. You are attempting to make some plans to push your career forward, and that theme will be strong through 2018. You are also focusing on reviewing goals for existing relationships, as well as getting rid of those partnerships that don't serve your best interests. Be sure and take some time for yourself. November and December are busy months for you.

LEO (July 23–August 22). You are looking for some fun social activities in your life, so you might even decide to host the holiday parties for the whole season! You may be looking for a new home, or remodeling your current home. You are communicating clearly, even though you don't have a lot of patience. There are some big career changes in the air. You could be looking at starting your own business or stepping into a new position. By the end of the month, your children (or childish adults) will really be getting on your nerves. Put your boundaries in place.

VIRGO (August 23–September 22). You are working on ways to improve your resource base, either by new marketing, improving or adding new skills, or starting a whole new venture. With Mercury, your ruler, retrograde at the end of November, you will have the chance

to review any decisions before acting on them. You are finally feeling more confident about stabilizing your career. Although you have been somewhat of a recluse, you are finally starting to get out and interact with other humans. Family and holidays are the main attraction at the end of the month.

LIBRA (September 23–October 23). November is an active month with Mars (planet of action, reaction, fireworks, and passion) traveling through Libra. This can show up as being more courageous, more willing to take a risk, or speaking up more on your own behalf. For relationships, this can be a time of spontaneity and passion. If there are problems, they will show up with bells on! The focus is on you this month, and it's time for others to do the compromising rather than you. Watch your spending over the holidays—you will see a lot of things you like!

SCORPIO (October 24–November 21).



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Happy Birthday to the Phoenixes, Eagles, and Scorpions! This is your personal yearly cycle of reviewing the past year and setting new directions for the upcoming one.

This is a special year for the Scorpions as Jupiter (planet of fortunate luck, growth, optimism, and travel) visits your sign until next November. You will want to enjoy your life more. This is a very good month for relationships and business partnerships. You will still need some time to yourself, but that feeling lessens as the month ends. Finances are slowly starting to improve. Pace yourself, as it will be easy to overcommit to activities as well.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22–December 21). You need some time to yourself for rest and retreat, so you're ready to pull back from all the social activity you've been involved with. With the upcoming Mercury retrograde in your sign, you will have a very nostalgic holiday as you connect with people and experiences from your past. You have been working on setting some new long-term goals for yourself, and you'll

continued on page 124



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Photos by Dalton DeHart
and Edgardo Aguilar



On September 28, KPRC-TV chief meteorologist **Frank Billingsley** joined *OUTSMART* at Urban Eats to sign copies of his book, *Swabbed & Found*. Pictured are Billingsley, **Eric Munoz**, **Levi Rollins**, and **Kevin Gilliard**.



On September 30, Ovarions Night Club hosted "The Singing Chef" with **Glynda McGinnis**, accompanied by **Jerry Atwood**. Pictured are Atwood, McGinnis, and **Adrian Anthony**.



On October 1, the Houston GLBT Political Caucus hosted its ninth annual Equality Brunch at Hotel ZaZa. Pictured are **Vincent Pryor**, **Colt Keo-Meier**, **Kris Banks**, **Becca Keo-Meier**, **Atlantis Narcisse**, Texas state senator **Sylvia Garcia** (D-Houston), **Kevin Anderson**, **Frances Valdez**, and **Alan Detlaff**.



On October 4, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber hosted "Cyber Attack" at HCC's West Loop Campus. Pictured are **Gary Wood**, **Stan McDonald**, **Maya Durnovo**, and **Roy Alvarez**.



On October 5, Discovery Green hosted "Show Your Pride Night" featuring **Ty Herndon** and the Band Hennessy. Pictured are **Barry Mandel**, Herndon, and **Candy Sigust**.



On October 5, Rec Room hosted Story Hole 2 - Holidays and Hurricanes. Pictured are **Ryan Leach**, **Kathryn Way**, **Russell Etherton**, **AJ Mistretta**, **Ryan Bellinghausen**, **Ryan Lindsay**, **Jessica Zyrie**, and **Hoja Lopez**.



On September 16, the River Oaks District hosted Fashion X Houston 2017. Pictured are **Karen Morry**, **Char Franey Goodyear**, **Kayla Franey Stewart**, and twin models **Mila** and **Suri Goodyear** from the Porcelain Teacup.



On October 11, HRC Houston staged its 21st annual Gala Kick-Off Celebration at Design Within Reach. Pictured are **Gary Wilson**, **Brielle Rouse**, **Terry Hamman**, **Crystal Gilliam**, **Rey Ocanas**, **Despina Giannakis**, and **Josh Beasley**.



On October 11, the Montrose Center hosted Houston's premier annual LGBTQ dinner, Out For Good, at the Ballroom at Bayou Place. Pictured are **Karen Carlson**, **Rep. Garnet Coleman**, **Ann Robison**, **Annise Parker**, **Evelyn Carlson**, and **Daryl Shorter**.



On October 12, the Houston premiere of *A Very Sordid Wedding* was held at River Oaks Theater, with a VIP reception at Guava Lamp. Pictured are **Del Shores**, **Ann Walker**, and **Emerson Collins**.



On October 21, the Houston Grand Opera's Overture 2017 season kickoff was held at the home of **Bruce Smith**. Pictured are **David Krohn**, **Paul Hopper**, **David Daniels**, **Anthony Roth Costanzo**, **Smith**, and **Patrick Summers**.



On October 22, the Diana Foundation held its kickoff fundraising dinner, "Literally Be a Part of History," at the home of **John Heinzerling** and **Ciro Flores**. Pictured are **Mike Leibbert**, **Dan Maxwell**, **Heinzerling**, and **Tanner Williams**.



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