MAY '18

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

OutSmart

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BREAKING DOWN BORDERS

GINA ORTIZ JONES ON HER HISTORIC CAMPAIGN

Pg.38

PLUS

MONTROSE CENTER

MARKS 40 YEARS

Pg.42

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It is not known if JULUCA is safe and effective in children.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Do not take JULUCA if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine that contains dolutegravir or rilpivirine.
- are taking any of the following medicines: dofetilide; carbamazepine; oxcarbazepine; phenobarbital; phenytoin; rifampin; rifapentine; proton pump inhibitors (including esomeprazole, lansoprazole, omeprazole, pantoprazole sodium, rabeprazole); St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*); or more than 1 dose of the steroid medicine dexamethasone or dexamethasone sodium phosphate.

What are the possible side effects of JULUCA?

JULUCA can cause serious side effects including:

- **Severe skin rash and allergic reactions.** Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with JULUCA. **Stop taking JULUCA and get medical help right away if you develop a rash with any of the following signs or symptoms:** fever; generally ill feeling; tiredness; muscle or joint aches; blisters or sores in mouth; blisters or peeling of the skin; redness or swelling of the eyes; swelling of the mouth, face, lips or tongue; problems breathing.
- **Liver problems.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus who have certain liver function test changes may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during treatment with JULUCA. Liver problems, including liver failure, have also happened in people without history of liver disease or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver function. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop any of the following signs or symptoms of liver problems:** your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice); dark or "tea-colored" urine; light-colored stools (bowel movements); nausea or vomiting; loss of appetite; pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area.
- **Depression or mood changes. Tell your healthcare provider right away or get medical help if you have any of the following symptoms:** feeling sad or hopeless; feeling anxious or restless; have thoughts of hurting yourself (suicide) or have tried to hurt yourself.
- **The most common side effects of JULUCA include:** diarrhea and headache.

These are not all the possible side effects of JULUCA. For more information, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking JULUCA.

Before you take JULUCA, tell your healthcare provider if you:

- have ever had a severe skin rash or an allergic reaction to medicines that contain dolutegravir or rilpivirine.
- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have ever had a mental health problem.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if JULUCA will harm your unborn baby.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take JULUCA.** You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby. It is not known if JULUCA can pass to your baby in your breast milk.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Some medicines interact with JULUCA. Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.

- You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a list of medicines that interact with JULUCA.
- Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can tell you if it is safe to take JULUCA with other medicines.

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.

Important Safety Information **continued** on next page.

Please see **Important Facts about JULUCA on the following page.**

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If you don't have prescription coverage and can't afford your medicines visit **ViiVConnect.com** or call **1-844-588-3288** to speak with a live ViiVConnect access coordinator.

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Warren†
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How to take JULUCA?

- Take JULUCA 1 time a day exactly as your healthcare provider tells you.
- Always take JULUCA with a meal. A protein drink alone does not replace a meal.

†Real patient diagnosed with HIV-1. Individual compensated for his time by ViiV Healthcare.

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IMPORTANT FACTS

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

ABOUT JULUCA

- JULUCA is a prescription medicine that is used without other antiretroviral medicines to treat Human Immunodeficiency Virus-1 (HIV-1) infection in adults to replace their current anti-HIV-1 medicines when their healthcare provider determines that they meet certain requirements.
- HIV-1 is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
- It is not known if JULUCA is safe and effective in children.

HOW TO TAKE JULUCA

- **Take JULUCA 1 time a day exactly as your healthcare provider tells you.**
- **Always take JULUCA with a meal.** A protein drink alone does not replace a meal.

DO NOT TAKE JULUCA IF YOU

- have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine that contains dolutegravir or rilpivirine.
- are taking any of the following medicines: dofetilide; carbamazepine; oxcarbazepine; phenobarbital; phenytoin; rifampin; rifapentine; proton pump inhibitors (including esomeprazole, lansoprazole, omeprazole, pantoprazole sodium, rabeprazole); St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*); or more than 1 dose of the steroid medicine dexamethasone or dexamethasone sodium phosphate.

BEFORE TAKING JULUCA

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- have ever had a severe skin rash or an allergic reaction to medicines that contain dolutegravir or rilpivirine.
- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have ever had a mental health problem.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if JULUCA will harm your unborn baby.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take JULUCA.** You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby. It is not known if JULUCA can pass to your baby in your breast milk. Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed 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 JULUCA.
- Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF JULUCA

JULUCA can cause serious side effects, including:

- **Severe skin rash and allergic reactions.** Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with JULUCA. **Stop taking JULUCA and get medical help right away if you develop a rash with any of the following signs or symptoms:** fever; generally ill feeling; tiredness; muscle or joint aches; blisters or sores in mouth; blisters or peeling of the skin; redness or swelling of the eyes; swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue; problems breathing.
- **Liver problems.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus who have certain liver function test changes may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during treatment with JULUCA. Liver problems, including liver failure, have also happened in people without history of liver disease or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver function. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop any of the following signs or symptoms of liver problems:** your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice); dark or "tea-colored" urine; light-colored stools (bowel movements); nausea or vomiting; loss of appetite; pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area.
- **Depression or mood changes. Tell your healthcare provider right away or get medical help if you have any of the following symptoms:** feeling sad or hopeless; feeling anxious or restless; have thoughts of hurting yourself (suicide) or have tried to hurt yourself.

The most common side effects of JULUCA include: diarrhea and headache.

These are not all the possible side effects of JULUCA. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking JULUCA. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- This is only a brief summary of important information about JULUCA. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- Go to JULUCA.com or call 1-877-844-8872, where you can also get FDA-approved labeling.

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It's an exciting time to be part of OUTSMART.

Last month, several hundred people gathered at McGovern Centennial Gardens for our 25th Anniversary Party. Notable attendees included former Houston mayor Annise Parker, Harris County district attorney Kim Ogg, and current Houston mayor Sylvester Turner, to name a few.

"We've made some tremendous progress since [1994], but we still have a ways to go," Turner told the crowd. "We still have to fight every single day to be more inclusive, and until everyone is recognized—whether they are gay, lesbian, transgender, you name it—and not discriminated against because of who they are or who they love, we are still not yet where we need to be. I want to make sure we continue to move forward in a very positive, progressive fashion, and that will take place as long as we have magazines like OUTSMART."

Two days later, I stood on the stage at Pride Houston's 40th Anniversary Kickoff at Pearl Bar as president and CEO Lo Roberts announced a new partnership between the organization and OUTSMART. For the first time in recent memory, OUTSMART will publish Pride Houston's official program in our June issue, which is shaping up to be extra-special.

Meanwhile, on the cover of this May issue, we feature Gina Ortiz Jones, who is vying to become the first openly LGBTQ Texan elected to Congress. Writer Marene Gustin profiles Jones, a Democrat who hopes to recapture one of Texas' few swing districts in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Jones' race is among several key contests on the May 22 primary-runoff ballot. Writer Brandon Wolf reports that other candidates who face runoffs include Houston's Fran Watson, gubernatorial candidates Andrew White and Lupe Valdez, and Houston's 7th Congressional District hopefuls Lizzie Pannill Fletcher and Laura Moser.

Elsewhere in this issue, Gustin recounts the history of the Montrose Center, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2018 with festivities planned for this month. Gustin also previews the University of Houston LGBTQ Alumni Association's Red Dinner III, which will feature Cougar alum Stephanie Rice, a former contestant on NBC's *The Voice*.

Finally, May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, which we mark with features on local activists Carl Han and Ching-In Chen (Gina Ortiz Jones also happens to be Asian-American). And, with the gun-control debate raging nationally, writer Kim Hogstrom takes a look at two LGBTQ groups that are on opposing sides of the issue.

Enjoy!

—John Wright



25 YEARS Out-Smart

ON THE COVER

BREAKING DOWN BORDERS

Gina Ortiz Jones on her historic campaign.

(See page 38.)

Photo by Ana Isabel

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Senator Tammy Baldwin is appearing at this event only as a featured speaker. Senator Tammy Baldwin is not asking for funds or donations.

LGBTQ Candidates Head to Runoffs

Lupe Valdez, Fran Watson among out hopefuls on May 22 ballot.

By Brandon Wolf

Seven LGBTQ candidates across Texas, including Houston's Fran Watson, will vie for Democratic Party nominations in primary runoffs on May 22.

Early voting begins May 14.

In addition to the LGBTQ candidates, the runoffs include some key races involving allies—most notably a showdown in Houston's 7th Congressional District between Lizzie Pannill Fletcher and Laura Moser.

At the top of the ballot will be the Texas governor's race, in which out lesbian and former Dallas County sheriff Lupe Valdez outpaced Houston businessman Andrew White, 43 percent to 27 percent, in a nine-candidate primary field.

The Houston GLBT Political Caucus endorsed White, while both Equality Texas' political action committee and the LGBTQ Victory Fund are backing Valdez. The winner will face anti-LGBTQ incumbent Republican Greg Abbott in November.

The LGBTQ Victory Fund, which backs out candidates nationwide, lists Valdez among its potential "game changers" in 2018.

"We have endorsed Lupe in three successful races for Dallas County sheriff," said Sean Meloy, the Victory Fund's political director. "She is right on the issues of women, equality, health care, and education.

"She is viable," Meloy added. "She has proven she can win in male-dominated fields. She has put together an effective team, engaging people all around the state, and has the advantage of veteran, Latinx, and Dallas voters."

Mark Jones, a political scientist at Rice University's Baker Institute, said he believes Valdez is the strong favorite heading into the runoff.

While voter turnout historically drops by about half in runoffs, Jones expects that it will be down by only a third this year. "Democrats have the advantages of party enthusiasm and a strong dislike for President Trump," Jones said.

Watson, meanwhile, faces an uphill battle in her bid to become the Democratic nominee in Texas Senate District 17. Rita Lucido was the top vote-getter in the three-candidate primary field, with 49 percent, while Watson finished second with 35 percent. The winner of their runoff will face anti-LGBTQ incumbent senator Joan Huffman (R-Houston).

"With a 90 percent volunteer-based organization, we were able to gain 35 percent of the vote," said Watson, who hopes to become the first openly LGBTQ person, and only the third black woman, elected to the Texas Senate.

Watson said education and healthcare are the key issues among voters in the district. "The plan for the runoff is to enhance what we've already been doing—hitting the doors, phone-banking, and digital," Watson said. "We are also implementing targeted strategies."

The other five LGBTQ candidates in the May 22 runoffs are Lorie Burch in the 3rd Congressional District, Mary Wilson in the 21st Congressional District, Gina Ortiz Jones in the 23rd Congressional District (see story, page 38), Eric Holguin in the 27th Congressional District, and Sandra Moore in Texas House District 133.



Back on the Ballot
Candidates in the May 22 runoffs include (clockwise from top left) Fran Watson, Andrew White, Lupe Valdez, Lizzie Pannill Fletcher, and Laura Moser.

In the hotly contested race to replace anti-LGBTQ incumbent representative John Culberson (R-Houston) in the 7th Congressional District, Fletcher was the top vote-getter in the seven-candidate primary field, with 29 percent, followed by Moser with 24 percent.

The Houston GLBT Political Caucus made no endorsement in the 7th District race prior to the primary, but is backing Fletcher in the runoff.

"Voters understand that this campaign is about the issues that affect all of us, like recovering from Hurricane Harvey and preparing for future storms, access to affordable, non-discriminatory healthcare, and keeping our families safe from gun violence," said Erin Mincberg, Fletcher's campaign manager. "Lizzie will stand up and fight back in Washington against the dangerous agenda of Donald Trump and John Culberson."

"Laura's authenticity, transparency, and fierce advocacy on the issues has inspired not only consistent Democratic voters, but new voters who have been looking for a candidate they can believe in, and relate to, for a long time," said Ali Lozano, Moser's outreach director.

The 2018 election cycle has produced a record 51 openly LGBTQ candidates in Texas. Thirteen were eliminated in the primary, while seven advanced to primary runoffs, and 28 are already headed to the November general election.

Three more LGBTQ candidates are in May 5 municipal elections around the state, including the first transgender elected official in Texas, New Hope mayor Jess Herbst.

For polling times and locations, visit HarrisVotes.org.

Brandon Wolf is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



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What is the most important information I should know about BIKTARVY?

BIKTARVY can cause serious side effects, including:

- **Worsening of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection. If you have an HBV infection and take BIKTARVY, your HBV may get worse (flare-up) if you stop taking BIKTARVY. A "flare-up" is when your HBV infection suddenly returns in a worse way than before.**
  - Do not run out of BIKTARVY. Refill your prescription or talk to your healthcare provider before your BIKTARVY is all gone.
  - Do not stop taking BIKTARVY without first talking to your healthcare provider. If you stop taking BIKTARVY, your healthcare provider will need to check your health often and do blood tests regularly for several months to check your HBV infection. Tell your healthcare provider about any new or unusual symptoms you may have after you stop taking BIKTARVY.

For more information about side effects, see "What are the possible side effects of BIKTARVY?"

What is BIKTARVY?

BIKTARVY is a prescription medicine that is used without other anti-HIV-1 medicines to treat Human Immunodeficiency Virus-1 (HIV-1) in adults:

- who have not received anti-HIV-1 medicines in the past, **or**
- to replace their current anti-HIV-1 medicines for people whose healthcare provider determines that they meet certain requirements.

HIV-1 is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

BIKTARVY contains the prescription medicines bictegravir, emtricitabine, and tenofovir alafenamide.

It is not known if BIKTARVY is safe and effective in children under 18 years of age.

Do not take BIKTARVY if you also take a medicine that contains:

- dofetilide
- rifampin

What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking BIKTARVY?

Before taking BIKTARVY, tell your healthcare provider about all your medical conditions, including if you:

- have liver problems, including hepatitis B virus infection
- have kidney problems
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if BIKTARVY can harm your unborn baby. Tell your healthcare provider if you become pregnant during treatment with BIKTARVY.

  Pregnancy Registry: There is a pregnancy registry for women who take antiviral medicines during pregnancy. The purpose of this registry is to collect information about the health of you and your baby. Talk with your healthcare provider about how you can take part in this registry.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed if you take BIKTARVY.
  - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
  - At least one of the medicines in BIKTARVY can pass to your baby in your breast milk. It is not known if the other medicines in BIKTARVY can pass into your breast milk.

  Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, antacids, laxatives, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Some medicines may interact with BIKTARVY. Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.

- You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a list of medicines that interact with BIKTARVY.
- **Do not start a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider.** Your healthcare provider can tell you if it is safe to take BIKTARVY with other medicines.

Continued on next page.

Continued from previous page.

How should I take BIKTARVY?

- Take BIKTARVY exactly as your healthcare provider tells you to take it. BIKTARVY is taken by itself (not with other HIV-1 medicines) to treat HIV-1 infection.
- Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.
- Do not change your dose or stop taking BIKTARVY without first talking with your healthcare provider. Stay under a healthcare provider's care during treatment with BIKTARVY.
- If you take antacids that contain aluminum, magnesium, or calcium, take BIKTARVY on an empty stomach 2 hours before you take these antacids.
- If you take supplements that contain iron or calcium, take these supplements with food at the same time that you take BIKTARVY.
- Do not miss a dose of BIKTARVY.
- If you take too much BIKTARVY, call your healthcare provider or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.
- When your BIKTARVY supply starts to run low, get more from your healthcare provider or pharmacy. This is very important because the amount of virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time. The virus may develop resistance to BIKTARVY and become harder to treat.

What are the possible side effects of BIKTARVY?

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- **See "What is the most important information I should know about BIKTARVY?"**
- **Changes in your immune system (Immune Reconstitution Syndrome)** can happen when you start taking HIV-1 medicines. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that have been hidden in your body for a long time. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you start having any new symptoms after starting your HIV-1 medicine.
- **New or worse kidney problems, including kidney failure.** Your healthcare provider should do blood and urine tests to check your kidneys when starting and during treatment with BIKTARVY. Your healthcare provider may tell you to stop taking BIKTARVY if you develop new or worse kidney problems.

What are the possible side effects of BIKTARVY? (continued)

- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Too much lactic acid 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.** In rare cases, severe liver problems can happen that 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 effects of BIKTARVY are diarrhea (6%), nausea (5%), and headache (5%).

These are not all the possible side effects of BIKTARVY.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

General information about the safe and effective use of BIKTARVY.

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a Patient Information leaflet. Do not use BIKTARVY for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give BIKTARVY to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

This Brief Summary summarizes the most important information about BIKTARVY. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for information about BIKTARVY that is written for health professionals. For more information, call **1-800-445-3235** or go to **www.BIKTARVY.com**.

Keep BIKTARVY and all medicines out of reach of children.

Issued: February 2018

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BVYC0004 02/18

 continued from page 14

Houston LGBTQ Community Mourns Chris Kerr

Beloved activist served as Montrose Center's clinical director.

By Brandon Wolf

Chris Kerr, a longtime leader in Houston's LGBTQ community who served as clinical director for the Montrose Center, died April 6 after suffering a stroke earlier this year. He was 65.

"Words fail me. Chris was an integral part of the Center and my life for the past 20 years. I am [heartbroken]," longtime Montrose Center executive director Ann Robison said following Kerr's death.

Robison's grief was echoed throughout Houston's LGBTQ community.

Condolences appeared by the dozens on the Facebook page of Kerr's widower, Michael Goh Kerr, who responded: "I will certainly miss him, my rock."

Activist John Coulter wrote that he knew Kerr through the Montrose Center's board of directors. "His devotion and dedication touched more lives than he'll ever know," Coulter said.

Following the stroke, Kerr underwent surgery and had been recovering with rehabilitation therapy. But unexpected bleeding reportedly began in his brain.

Chris and Michael Goh Kerr would have celebrated their 20th anniversary as a couple on May 8. They were married in San Diego in 2013.

Kerr spent 14 years in social services before going back to school in 1996 to earn his master's degree in counseling psychology at the University of Houston. In 1998, he joined what was then the Montrose Counseling Center, with facilities at 701 Richmond.

During Kerr's two-decade tenure, the Montrose Center's budget grew from $2 million to $7 million, and the number of people the organization serves annually went from 10,000 to 50,000.

A passionate and eloquent spokesman for the organization, Kerr coordinated an ever-expanding group of Montrose Center programs, including LIFE (Living Insightfully for Empowerment), SPRY (Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years), and Hatch Youth.

He was also instrumental in improving the relationship between the LGBTQ community and local law-enforcement agencies. He worked with the Houston Police Department, the Harris County Sheriff's Office, and the Houston Mayor's Office to develop an educational bus tour of Montrose that helps familiarize law-enforcement officers with the LGBTQ community. And he was closely involved with the Center's planned $24 million senior housing project, which is scheduled to break ground this year.



Chris Kerr

Brittany Burch met Kerr when she interviewed for a staff position at the Center in 2009.

"I found Chris very mild-mannered and professional," recalls Burch, who eventually took over the LIFE program. "He had an open-door policy. If I had an important question, I could always ask for a few minutes of his undivided attention. I felt comfortable that he had my back, and never feared repercussions. He trusted his staff. When they needed guidance, he gave it in a direct but supportive way.

"Chris went the extra mile," Burch added. "During hurricanes Ike and Harvey, he was at the Center coordinating cleanup or organizing pantries. On ice days, he showed up just to be sure everyone was safe. He was not loud or dominating—[just] steady and reliable."

Hatch Youth's Deb Murphy met Kerr in 2002 when the Center absorbed that program.

"I liked him right off. He was very clear about what he wanted—and I could see he was kind and gentle," Murphy said. "He loved to try new things, and wasn't afraid of them not working out. We will feel the effect of this loss in ways we don't yet imagine."

Burch said although Kerr was a tireless LGBTQ advocate, he also understood the importance of work/life balance.

"His marriage, his family, and his dogs were all very important to him," Burch said. "He was an early-bird at work [so he could leave the office] on time to be with those he loved most."

Kerr's best friend, Carl Han, treasures their 30-year relationship. When they met, Kerr was a Catholic Franciscan priest. He left the priesthood when he became interested in the Kolbe Project, a local organization that bought and sold artwork, donating the proceeds directly to HIV/AIDS causes.

When Kerr organized the project's first big art fundraiser, Hahn volunteered to provide food. Hahn continued to volunteer his time and efforts to Kerr's projects over the years, including the annual Love Party that raises funds for Hatch Youth's high-school prom.

Hahn says he and Kerr loved to go dancing at Rich's or Heaven, and enjoyed hanging out on Galveston's beaches. Kerr met his husband at a meeting of Asian & Friends that was hosted by Han in 1998.

Asked what his friend would want for those he left behind, Han replied: "For Michael to be happy. And for everyone to be kind and to love each other."

A celebration of Kerr's life was held April 28 at Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church.

Brandon Wolf is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

Community

continued from page 19

Photos by Dalton DeHart and Edgardo Aguilar



On March 27, Tony's Corner Pocket hosted a birthday celebration for Tony Vacarro. Pictured are **Tony Vacarro** and the staff.



On April 17, the Montrose Center hosted a Celebration of Life for Joe Watts. Pictured are (standing) **David Barron**, **Taavi Mark**, **Josephine Johns**, **Randall Jobe**, **Christy Rehbein-Chambers**, **Dan Robert**, and **Brett Cullum**, and **Buzz Bellmont**, and (kneeling) **Natalie Maisel** and **Steve Bullitt**.



On March 30, the Art Showroom hosted Made in Houston, a closing party for Sebastien "Mr. D" Boileau. Pictured are (back row) **Sebastien "Mr. D" Boileau**, **Neiman Catley**, and **Ulrich G. Von Dran IV**; and (front row) **Lisa Madry**, and **Tom Jackobs**.



From March 29–31, the Lone Star Volleyball Association's Lone Star Classic. Pictured are **Travis Grossmann-Ochoa**, **Jack Adams**, **Don Gill**, and **Brian Crumby**.



On April 21, the Bering Support Network hosted Oodles of Noodles at Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. Pictured are **Sarah Tompkins Gutierrez** and **Larry Leutwyler**.



On April 1, **Bunnies on the Bayou 39** was held at Buffalo Water Works Park. Pictured are hosts.



On April 1, JR's Houston hosted the Guyz in Style 2018 Fashion Show. Pictured are **Murtaza Saleem** and models.



On April 15, Rec Room hosted Story Hole: Let's Fight. Pictured are **Eric Edward Schell**, **Crimson Jordan**, **Ryan Leach**, **Stephen Flores**, **Brian Redmond**, **Jenny Block**, **Melanie Pang**, **Blackberri**, **Kathryn Way**, and **Hoja Lopez**.

Taking care of hearts while taking care of business

Trey Yates is a Board Certified Family Law Attorney by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Since 1986, he has served the residents of Greater Houston Metropolitan Market in the areas of divorce, complex marital property division, child custody disputes, will contests and guardianship litigation, as well as marital property and estate planning.

Yates is a Certified Attorney Mediator and is trained in Collaborative Law, which helps divorcing couples reach settlement agreements without involving the Court.

In 2011, Yates created the now popular, educational seminar series called *The Guide to Good Divorce*. The program is designed to help women effectively proceed through the divorce process toward a fuller, happier life.

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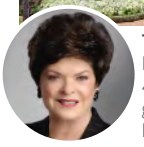
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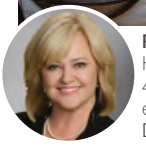
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W Rivercrest Drive | $16.5mil
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4-5/5.5 - ±5,982 sf
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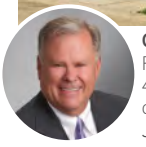
HEIGHTS
W 9th Street | $830s
3/2.5 - ±2,267 sf
fenced yard | hardwoods | formals
Debbie Callan | 713.851.5100





MONTROSE
Fargo Street | $790s
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GALVESTON
Porch Street | $670s
4/3 - ±2,685 sf
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Jim Rosenfeld | 713.854.1303





MONTROSE
Harold Street | $630s
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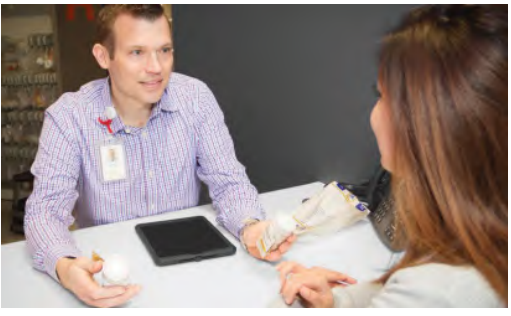


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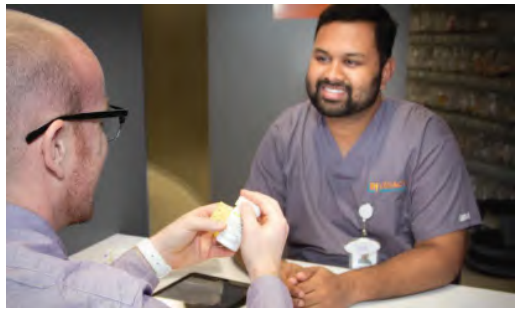
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Calendar of Events

5/18

Compiled by Marene Gustin





It is time for one of Art League Houston's most exciting events, the Montrose Art Party, or MARTY, which supports the Healing Arts program. Each year, the event has a special theme. This year's MARTY, Neon Marty Dance Party, is co-chaired by Bobby Bass and Zachary Gresham and will be a glow party that takes you back to the raves of the '90s. Admission to this event is free, but there is a cash bar, and you know you'll want to donate to the cause.

Come join the Neon Marty Dance Party for bites, booze, live music, and a silent auction, as well as an exhibition of Art League Houston's Healing Arts Students work. The program offers free art classes to individuals with long-term disabilities and chronic illnesses. There will also be an exhibition of artwork and writing by over 100 second- and third-grade Artbound! students from Wharton Dual Language Academy.

—Marene Gustin

Neon Marty Dance Party
- **May 18**
- **artleaguehouston.org**

Radio ★ **Performing Arts** **Art & Photography** + **Other Things** **Save The Date**

1

Chrysalis Awards Luncheon +
Author Ron Powers headlines.
hopeandhealingevents.org/events

2

Biorhythm: Music & The Body ★
thru July 31 Make music with your body.
thehealthmuseum.org

3

Trauma-Sensitive Yoga + *thru July 5*
Yoga for adult women who have suffered trauma. **207.322.2153**
Eye on Houston: High School Documentary Photography *thru June 24*
Student photographs. **mfah.org**

4

Eat, Drink & Be Murdered ★ *thru 19*
An Old West Melodrama.
oldwestmelodrama.com
Houston Polish Festival + *thru 6*
The biggest party in the Southwest.
houstonpolishfestival.com

5

Cinco de Mayo at Picos +
Party time! **picos.net**
Cabaret: Dad Musical ★ *last day*
Willkommen to the Kit Kat Club.
obsidiantheater.org

6

West Side Story ★ *last day*
The opera version.
houstongrandopera.org

7

Color Bursting Hermann Park
all month You've never seen tree skirts like these! **artuniti.com/color-bursting-hermann-park**

8

50th Anniversary Celebration
Michael Wood's Celebrating Akbar's Vision: Creating an Indian Empire of Justice.
houstonarchaeology.info

For ongoing events, visit outsmartmagazine.com

9

A Cask of Amontillado ✚ Sherry tastings with dinner by Justin Wu. **mfah.org**
DIY Cut Paper Artwork Release your inner artist. **recroomhtx.com**

10

Bucky Miller: Two Raccoons *thru Mar 31, 2019* Part of the Art on the Lawn series. **camh.org**

11

Michelangelo and the Vatican *thru June 10* Masterworks from the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte. **mfah.org**

12

Tonight, Tonight Won't Be Just Any Night ★ Concert with Jamie Bernstein. **houstonchamberchoir.org**
Shemikia ★ Powerful blues singer. **theheightstheater.com**

13

Happy Mother's Day!

14

Carry Liebowitz: Museum Show *thru Aug 26* Works of texts. **camh.org**

15

First Day of Ramadan

16

The Great American Trailer Park Musical ★ *thru July 22* A stripper on the run hides in a trailer park. **stagestheatre.com**

17

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom ★ *thru June 3* A play about the blues. **ensemblehouston.com**

18

Mercury Gala ✚ An evening of dining and music. **mercuryhouston.org**
The Barber of Seville ★ *& 19* Houston Grand Opera presents free performances. **milleroutdoortheatre.com**

19

A Day with Marie Antoinette ★ An Early Music concert. **arslyricahouston.org**

20

Beatles vs. Stones ★ A musical showdown! **beatles-vs-stones.com**
Hamilton ★ *last day* One of the greatest musicals ever comes to Houston! **hamiltonmusical.com**

21

Ambiente Amor *thru Aug 24* An exhibition by Felix Lopez. **clarkeassoc.com**

22

Houston's Taste of the Nationi ✚ A tasty tasting event for No Kid Hungry. **nokidhungry.org**

23

Justin Timberlake and the Shadowboxers ★ With songs from his new album. **houstontoyotacenter.com**

24

Houston Ballet Academy Spring Showcase ★ Tomorrow's stars today. **houstonballet.org**

25

Ballet Hispánico ✚ Deadline to register for the summer intensive that starts June 4. **spahouston.org**

26

LGBTQ YA Author Readings ✚ With Mark Oshiro and Caleb Roehrig. **murderbooks.com**
Reception for Artist Kaci Vigil An afternoon of art, music, and eats. **feasturbaneats.com**

27

Comicpalooza ✚ *last day* Last chance to LARP. **comicpalooza.com**

28

Memorial Day!

29

Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India *thru Aug 19* The history of India's extraordinarily vibrant culture through some 250 objects. **mfah.org**

30

Moving Myths: Story Telling through Dance A free performance from METdance. **milleroutdoortheatre.com**

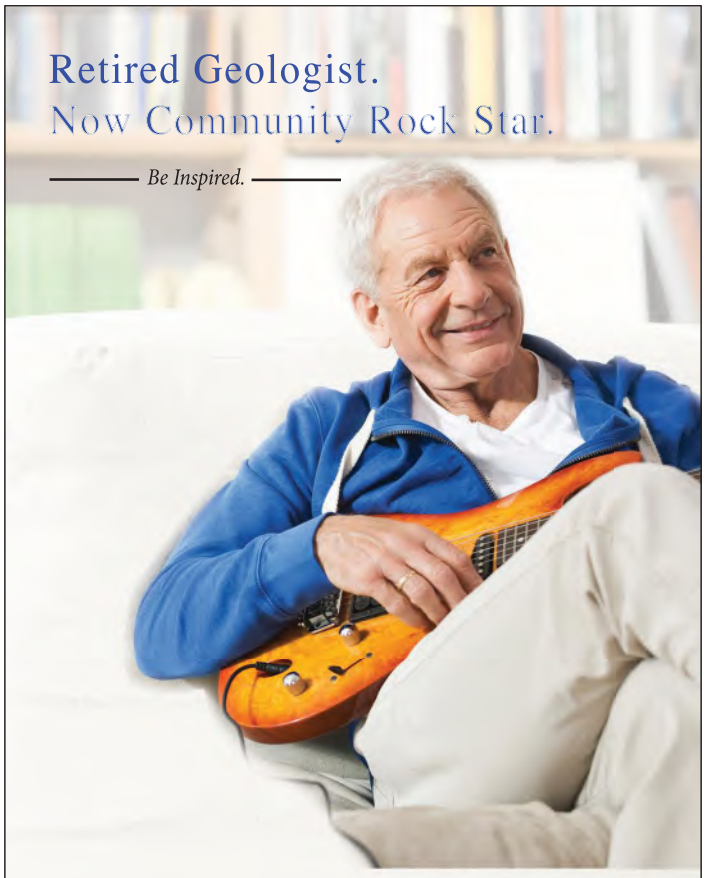
31

The Graduate ★ *thru June 7* Are you trying to seduce me, Mrs. Robinson? **dirtdogstheatre.com**

Save the Date

June 8
Houston Ballet: Play
Houston Ballet's second mixed-repertoire *Play*, reimagined and specially choreographed. **houstonballet.org**

More Calendar →



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Calendar of Events

continued from previous page

Fiesta
May 5
5

–

Support Lazarus House's wellness programs by enjoying margaritas, Mexican food, and music at this Cinco de Mayo fundraiser. Noon to 2:30 p.m., tickets are $30 online and $35 at the door.
thelazarushouse.org

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
May 10–June 3
10–June 3

–

August Wilson's play about a legendary blues singer and her band in a Chicago recording studio results in conversations and stories about race, art, and the exploitation of black recording artists by white music producers. Set in the 1920s, this drama, written in 1982 by Wilson, feels just as relevant today. The title refers to a song about the Black Bottom dance originated by African-Americans in the South. This one has some strong language, so teens and adults only.
ensemblehouston.com

Last of the Red Hot Lovers
May 11–26
11–26

–

Come to the island to see Neil Simon's comedy about a middle-aged married man trying to join the sexual revolution. Sadly, and hilariously, Barney Cashman fails miserably in three seduction scenes. He brings each woman to his mother's apartment, which is empty one day a week, but things never go as planned. After his third failed attempt to consummate, he gives up and decides he'd rather just spend a romantic afternoon with his wife. Based on today's headlines, it was probably the right choice for Barney.
islandetc.org

Lambda Ladies & Lambda Nextgen Events
May 14 & 22
14 & 22

–

Join the Lambda Ladies for an evening hike through the Arboretum on the 14th. Bring water and bug spray, and wear comfortable clothes and sturdy shoes. Then, on the 22nd, join Lambda Nextgen for the monthly happy hour. The nonprofit is dedicated to connecting Houston's LGBTQ young professionals through fun events and networking socials.
lambdanextgen.com

Dancin' in the Street . . . Motown & More Revue
May 24–27
24–27

–

The annual revue of soul-music hits covered by some of Houston's favorite entertainers. This year there is a Stevie Wonder tribute, as well as Motown faves. The event is free.
milleroutdoortheatre.com ■

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6/14 **Pride SuperStar® Finale**
10-12PM at Rich's Houston

6/15 **Jumper Maybach: The Pride Collection**
6PM at Jumper Maybach Fine Art Gallery

6/16 **Salvation: Pride Pool Party**
2-8PM at Clé Houston

6/16 **Pride in the Country**
10PM at Neon Boots

6/19 **Dine with Pride**
All Day at Houston Area Chipotles

6/20 **Rock the Runway**
7-10PM

6/21 **Unleashed**
9PM at Eagle Houston

6/22 **Rainbow on the Green**
7PM at Discovery Green

6/22 **Pride in the Park: Houston Dash**
7:30PM at Dynamo Stadium

6/22 **Eden**
9PM at Pearl Bar Houston

6/23 **2018 Houston LGBT Pride Celebration®**
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Houston Pride Festival® 12PM
Houston Pride Parade® 8PM

6/23 **Official Afterparty**
10PM at Rich's Houston

6/24 **Hot Tea Dance**
5PM at Rich's Houston

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By Susan Bankston

Trump, Boehner, and Other 'Crimes Against Nature'

Irony runs amok as Republicans confront pot, same-sex marriage, and bestiality.



COLLAGE - BLASE DISTEFANO; ORIGINAL PHOTO OF BOEHNER - J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Stinking Up the Joint
Former House speaker John Boehner, who was vehemently anti-pot during his tenure, now works as a lobbyist for a company that produces marijuana.

I'm not sure how many problems I have (because I know that math is one of them), but I know damn well that irony is near the top of my list. Irony is all around me, growing wildly and unconstrained like crabgrass and Baptists.

Here, try this on: former House speaker John Boehner up and quit Congress for no apparent reason at all. Okay, so you know many reasons why a Republican would quit Congress right now, and all of them start with the word *Trump*.

Most retiring congressmen immediately go to work as lobbyists so they can get as rich as the dickens. However, at least in Boehner's case, he won't be rich enough to buy back his past. Boehner picked his lobbying job at a company that should cause severe eye-roll fatigue. He has gone to work for Acreage Holdings, a company that produces marijuana sold in states where it is legal. That's right, weed—and lots of it.

Boehner, who was vehemently anti-pot during his tenure as speaker, says he has "evolved" on the issue. Yeah, wave a few hundred thousand dollars in his face, and he evolves into a greedy bastard with no core beliefs. (Okay, I will admit that's not fair—he's always been a greedy bastard with no core beliefs, but now it's officially, scientifically diagnosed.)

While Boehner was in Congress, nearly 600,000 people a year were arrested for marijuana possession. That's more than one marijuana arrest every minute. There were 19,000 people put in prison for possession. And the Republican speaker, third in line for the presidency, did not have one single problem with that.

I do not trust John Boehner even now that he's all Woodstock with his weed, his late-night trips to Whataburger, and his mild paranoia. I know he's got a corporate weed deal in the works that will make it seem like your current dealer is doing charity work.

Ironic Attack #2: the Religious Right is vehemently against same-sex marriage because they feel it threatens the institution of marriage. Those are the same people who voted for and still support Donald Trump, who is the institution of marriage's Lex Luther.

Look, if you're gay, I bet you've never hired hookers to pee on each other. (Okay, so maybe you did, but if you did it in the presidential suite of a Russian hotel while you were a presidential candidate, then we need to have a chat—honey, that would be a nopefish swimming in the choppy current of You Better Not Go There River, located in Screw-that-istan.)

And now Donald Trump Jr. is getting a divorce, as has become the custom where a famine of the brains is hereditary.

Irony #3: okay, if you ever drive through Louisiana, I need to let you know that you should not take any of your household pets with you.

The Louisiana State Legislature has reaffirmed part of an old law that makes sex with animals illegal. Their old "crimes against nature" law had banned "the unnatural carnal copulation by a human being with another of the same sex or opposite sex, or with an animal." The new law, which passed 25 to 10, leaves out the "human beings with other human beings" part, but keeps the prohibition on animal sex.

That's right—up until last month, Louisiana was known as the state where men are men and sheep are afraid.

So who are those 10 legislators who voted against banning sex with animals, you ask? Well aren't you lucky, because nosing into stuff that is none of my damn business is what I do for a living. All 10 are Republicans, including the president of the Louisiana Senate.

By the way, reading that old law aloud passed for foreplay in most Louisiana Republican households.

So now, instead of saying "I don't support sodomy," the Democratic opponents of these 10 Republicans can point at them and announce, "My opponent supports sex with animals." I'm heading over to Louisiana during the next campaign season just to watch.

Irony #4: Last month, Trump was giving an interview about his promised attack on Syria. He said (and I am quoting him exactly), ". . . it could be very soon, or not so soon at all." It could also be mid-soon, soonish, soonly, semi-soon, Soon River, wider than a mile, half past soon, High Soon at the O.K. Corral . . .

One good thing about Trump: you're not hearing so much about making English our official language anymore.

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

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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:

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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.

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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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Mytesi comes from the *Croton lechleri* tree harvested in South America.



By Grace S. Yung, CFP

Recovering from the Loss of a Spouse

Same-sex survivors are now entitled to additional benefits.



Facing the loss of a spouse or partner is never easy. Unfortunately, in addition to the emotional devastation, there is the financial challenge of having to move forward—often with the same monthly expenses but reduced household income.

It is important that widows and widowers not rush into major financial decisions, such as selling their homes or making large purchases, during their time of grief. And it is also essential for them to make sure their ongoing living expenses can be covered. In this case, there are several potential sources of income that a surviving spouse may be able to rely on.

Over the last few years, a lot has changed regarding same-sex spousal benefits such as Social Security. Today, the Social Security Administration recognizes same-sex couples' marriages (as well as non-marital legal relationships like civil unions and domestic partnerships) in all 50 states. Additionally, in Texas, common-law marriages are recognized, provided that certain criteria are met.

If you are the widow or widower of an eligible worker, you can receive full benefits at your full retirement age, or reduced benefits as early as age 60.

If you qualify for Social Security benefits based on your own work record, and they are higher than those you would receive as a survivor, you can switch over to your own benefit amount as early as age 62. Conversely, if you are collecting your own benefit that is lower, you can "step up" to your spouse's higher monthly benefit amount at the time of their passing.

The decisions you make with regard to Social Security can make a big difference when it comes to your current and future cash flow.

For example, Mary is not yet 62. Her spouse, Christine, who had not yet started collecting Social Security retirement benefits, passed away at 65.

Some may think Mary should immediately start collecting widow's benefits. However, because she is below full retirement age, doing so would actually result in a reduced benefit amount—one that would remain lower than normal for the rest of her life.

A better alternative for Mary would be to begin collecting her own reduced Social Security at 62, then switch over to an unreduced widow's benefit at full retirement age.

There are other ways to collect benefits from Social Security, too. For instance, if you and your spouse were living in the same household, you may be entitled to a one-time lump-sum death benefit of $255.

If your spouse was entitled to a pension outside of the U.S., the Windfall Elimination provision requires you to notify the Social Security Administration. However, survivor's benefits will not be negatively impacted.

In addition to Social Security, your spouse or partner may have named you as the beneficiary on a life insurance policy or retirement account. In the case of life insurance, a beneficiary designation is extremely important in ensuring that the proceeds from the policy go to the intended recipient.

As the beneficiary of a life insurance policy, you can receive the proceeds tax-free. You can also typically avoid going through probate, which can be a time-consuming and costly process.

If your spouse contributed to an employer-sponsored retirement plan or an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), you may also be able to claim financial resources from these assets.

For example, same-sex spouses can roll over inherited retirement-plan assets to their own IRAs and defer the required minimum distributions until age 70½.

Typically, however, a non-spouse who inherits an IRA must either begin to take required minimum distributions no later than December 31 of the year after the owner died, or withdraw the entire balance within five years.

Unless a specific person (or persons) is designated as the beneficiary on life insurance, retirement accounts, and/or bank accounts, the recipients of these assets could be decided by a probate court—and the result may not be what the deceased person intended.

If you have recently lost your significant other, it can be a scary and lonely time. But it doesn't mean you have to suffer financial consequences.

To make the most of your current situation, as well as to plan for the future, it can be beneficial to meet with a financial professional who focuses on the LGBTQ community.

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@lpl.com.*

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FOR YOUR CALENDAR

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

May 6: **Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund Houston Champagne Brunch**, benefitting future LGBTQ Leaders. INFO: Victoryfund.org/Houston

May 12: The Montrose Center's 40 Years of Service to LGBTQ Houston celebration– **Time Warp 40th Anniversary Celebration.** INFO: montrosecenter.org

May13: **Sunday Brunch with Sister Helen Holy** benefitting LGBTQ Homeless Youth Services. INFO: montrosecenter.org/sundaybrunch

SAVE THE DATE

June 3: **HIV & Aging BBQ / Mimosa Brunch**, Honoring & Celebrating the Lives of Long Term HIV Survivors. INFO: HLTSAD.org

June 9: **Houston Pride Band** presents the *Bon Voyage* Concert. INFO: Houstonprideband.org

June 22: **Rainbow On The Green** is a free citywide celebration and dance party under the stars at Houston's own downtown Discovery Green park. INFO: discoverygreen.com/rainbow

June 23: **Pride Houston Festival & Parade Celebration** Festival to be held around City Hall, Hermann Square, and Tranquility Park, noon-7, and the parade begins at the intersection of Milam and Walker streets at 8:30 p.m. INFO: pridehouston.org

TimeOut in Costa Rica



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IRIS RODRIGUEZ

For over 2 decades, Iris has been on the front lines as a decorated firefighter, a soldier in the U.S. Army Reserves, and an advocate for many women's and LGBTQ organizations.

For more information on where Iris likes to hang out, check out **www.mygayhouston/discover**

"IN 2017, I WATCHED THE HOUSTON ASTROS BRING ON THE HEAT!"

– Iris Rodriguez

My Gay HOUSTON



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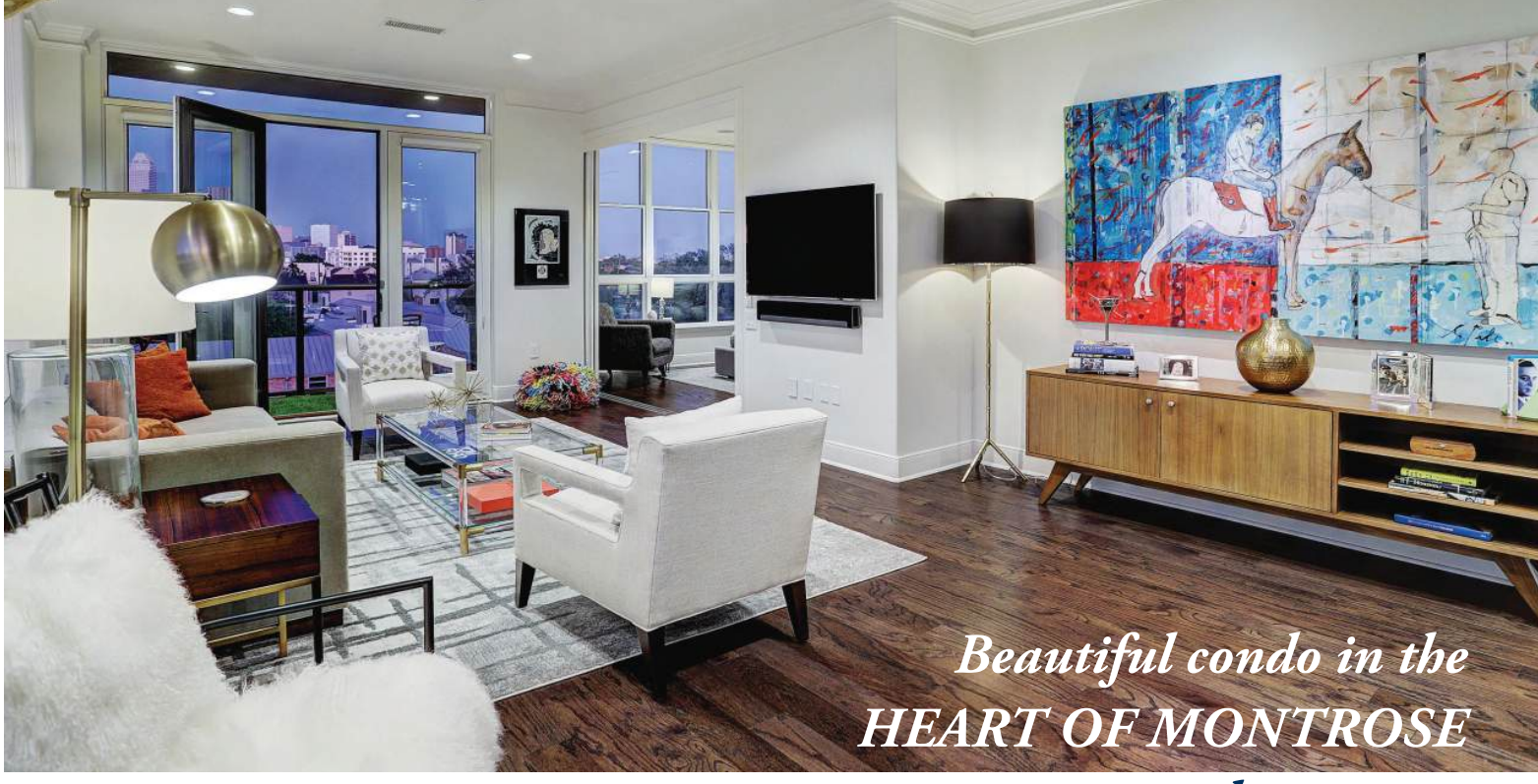
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OUT FOR CHANGE

BREAKING DOWN BORDERS

Gina Ortiz Jones would be first openly LGBTQ Texan elected to Congress.

By Marene Gustin
Photo by Ana Isabel

The contest for Texas' 23rd Congressional District, which stretches from El Paso to San Antonio and includes hundreds of miles of the Texas-Mexico border, could be one of the most-watched races in the nation.

The district, which has alternated between Democratic and Republican control five times since the early 1990s, could flip again this November, from red to blue. And if it does, Texas could send its first openly LGBTQ representative to Congress.

Gina Ortiz Jones would also be the third openly LGBTQ woman, and the second openly LGBTQ person of color, elected to Congress.

She does, however, face a Democratic runoff on May 22, although she outpaced her opponent, Rick Trevino, by almost 11,000 votes in the March 6 primary.

"We're excited about the momentum of the campaign," Ortiz Jones told OutSmart recently from her home in San Antonio. "We have to start now if we're going to beat incumbent Will Hurd in November."

Jones, a first-generation American born to a Filipino mother, knows firsthand the opportunities that help those in need achieve their dreams in this country. She graduated from John Jay High School in San Antonio and attended Boston University on a four-year Air Force ROTC scholarship. Having served in the Air Force under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," she is an Iraq War veteran with 12 years of service as an intelligence officer. After her active-duty career, she continued her service as an advisor on military operations that supported South Sudan's independence referendum, and she also served in the Libya Crisis Intelligence Cell. During her last 16 months as a civil servant, Jones worked at the intersection of economic and national-security issues. Detailed from the intelligence community, she served as the senior advisor for trade →

Editor's Note: *This article is part of "Out for Change in 2018," a monthly series on LGBTQ candidates in Texas, who were the subject of our January issue. For more, visit tinyurl.com/outforchange2018.*



continued from previous page



enforcement, a position that President Obama created by executive order in 2012.

"I always knew I wanted to serve my country," she says. "My younger sister is in the Navy, and my mom has been a school teacher for 39 years. We were just raised that way."

Jones also spent almost five months working for the Trump administration, which is what led to her congressional bid.

"The foreign and domestic policies just seemed to be detrimental to the long-term benefit of our country," she says. So she left and returned home to Texas and began her campaign in the 23rd District.

Ortiz Jones' sexual orientation has not yet become an issue in the campaign, except for one odd interaction during a candidate forum in February.

One of Ortiz Jones' primary opponents, Angie Villescaz, attacked her for the support she has received from the LGBTQ community. Villescaz called on Ortiz Jones to divulge her sexual orientation in campaign literature, alleging that she could become vulnerable to GOP attacks in the general election, particularly among Catholic voters.

"Because we should all routinely remind people of our sexuality, right?" Jones laughs. "But I think that was just her personal bias. It really wasn't an issue on the campaign trail. The voters want to hear about the issues, not who you are in love with."

And the issues in the 23rd District are fairly basic ones: access to health care, gun control, and protection for Dreamers, the undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children. A majority of voters there are opposed to the border wall.

"THE VOTERS WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THE ISSUES, NOT WHO YOU ARE IN LOVE WITH."

—Gina Ortiz Jones

"I think protecting the Dreamers is very important," she says. "We made a promise to them, and I personally know what it's like to work hard for something and then be afraid it could be taken away from you at any time. Every day at school, I was afraid I could lose my Air Force scholarship if my sexual identity came out. And then I was an officer in the U.S. Air Force under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.' I know how it feels."

As for Hurd, she finds his voting record astonishing, given the needs and wants of the district. She notes that his silence on Trump "speaks volumes."

"There are not a lot of consistently competitive races in Texas," Jones says. "This is one, and it's going to garner a lot of national attention and money this year." She estimates she'll need around $2.5 million for the general election. She already has the support of Emily's List, Vote Vets, Serve America, ASPIRE, LPAC, the Asian American Action Fund, and the Texas Equity PAC, among others.

"And I would be remiss by not mentioning the wonderful guidance and support I've received from Annise Parker and the Victory Fund," she says. Parker, a former Houston mayor, is now president and CEO of the Victory Fund.

"She's really been amazing," Jones adds.

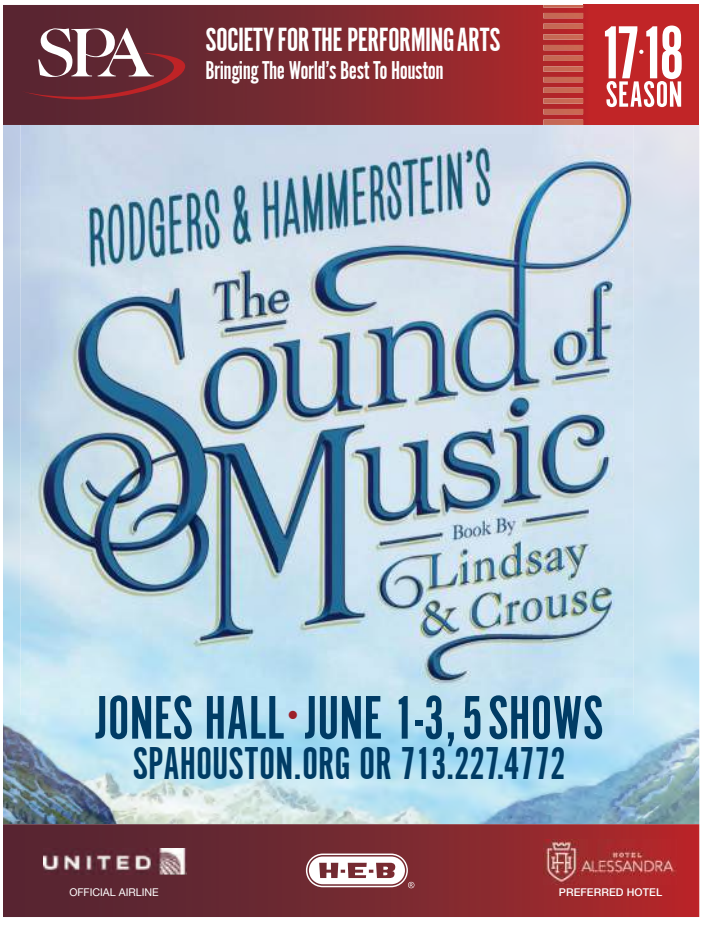
As for what she's had to give up while campaigning, Jones says she misses reading for pleasure, and her girlfriend reminds her that she doesn't go running as often.

"I'm doing a lot of running around," she says. "I just don't have time to go running."

Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.


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Living Legend
Executive Director Ann Robison has been with the Montrose Center for 30 of its 40 years.

Shared Birthday

Montrose Center's 40th anniversary is a milestone for the entire community.

By Marene Gustin

On June 25, 1978, near the close of Houston's first Pride Month, LGBTQ advocates held Town Meeting I in the Astro Arena to chart the course of the community's needs.

According to the *Houston Chronicle*, it was the first politically oriented homosexual meeting in the United States.

"We didn't know that then," says former mayor Annise Parker, who attended the meeting and serves as president and CEO of the LGBTQ Victory Fund. "We always thought the East Coast and West Coast were so much ahead of us."

Reports on attendance vary, but the crowd was likely in the thousands, and it included other notables such as Ray Hill, Phyllis Frye, Steve Shiflett, and many more. Former state representative and gubernatorial candidate Frances "Sissy" Farenthold gave the keynote speech, which helped generate media interest around the state.

"It was really a huge event," Parker recalls. "People forget how different it was in the '70s. To rent an arena and fill it with gay people was a huge thing." And to do so in broad daylight with media attention was a first. "But I don't remember any protesters," says Parker. "If there were, they certainly didn't make an impression on me."

Emerging from that Town Meeting I were resolutions that would shape the LGBTQ community and lay the groundwork for support structures and protections for decades to come, including creation of the Montrose Counseling Center (now the Montrose Center), the Montrose Clinic (now Legacy Community Health), the Montrose Activity Center, the Hispanic Caucus, and the Montrose Sports Association.

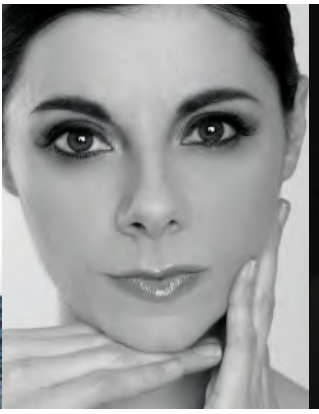
"So it's not just the 40th anniversary of the Montrose Center," says Kent Loftin, the Center's chief development officer. "It's the 40th anniversary of our entire community."

The Center will celebrate four decades of service to the LGBTQ community with a "Time Warp" party on May 12 at the Houston Room at the University of Houston. The event will feature drag sensation Miss Conception, vocalist and songwriter Eric Michael Krop, pop artist Abigail Zsiga, and the musical duo Amy and Freddy. All proceeds will benefit the Center's homeless youth services. Then on May 13, the Center will host a Mother's Day Brunch featuring Sister Helen Holy (see story on page 44).

Within months of Town Meeting I, the Montrose Counseling Center opened its doors in a two-room office at 900 Lovett Boulevard. Sharing the space on a part-time basis were four psychotherapists and psychiatrist John O'Donnell, who provided valuable clinical supervision and psychiatric backup. O'Donnell then became the clinic's first clinical director, and Bill Scott served as administrative director.


Miss Conception


Eric Michael Krop


Abigail Zsiga


Freddy and Amy

"It was revolutionary," Loftin says. "Offering real mental-health therapy to gays. At that time, there was 'gay conversion therapy,' but hardly anyone was treating the real needs of the community."

In August 1979, the Montrose Counseling Center was listed for the first time in the directories of the Department of Health and Human Services, Harris County's mental-health department, Traveler's AID, and the United Way.

The Center's first fundraiser was in 1979 at the old Shamrock Hilton Hotel. The Stella Scott Award was presented to recognize individuals in the community for their outstanding services to the Montrose Counseling Center.

The following year, the Center's budget grew from $9,000 to $25,000 before doubling to $50,000 the next year as more staff and services were added. By the early '80s, expanded programs included an alcohol treatment program and HIV/AIDS testing and education. Ann J. Robison was hired as executive director in December 1988, and the Center created an endowment to promote long-term financial stability for the agency and its programs.The budget that year was $355,743. During Dr. Robison's 30-year tenure, the budget has grown to just over $6 million.

"I answered a blind ad in the *Chronicle*," Robison recalls. "I kind of knew it was for the Montrose Counseling Center, the way it was described." But what she didn't know was that she'd be there three decades.

"I'm 61 now, so someday I will retire, but I have no plans to right now," she says.

With a doctorate from the University of Texas School of Public Health, Robison has led the nonprofit through two moves and a major expansion of both staff and services. Also during her tenure, the Montrose Counseling Center rescued two struggling organizations—a 24-hour crisis hotline (the LGBT Switchboard) and the oldest LGBT youth organization in Texas (Hatch Youth)—by bringing them under the Center's wing and providing the infrastructure needed for them to thrive.

"We became a leader in HIV outreach, not just in Houston but in Texas," Robison says. In 1994, the Center added Texas' first domestic violence/sexual assault/hate crimes/trafficking services specifically for LGBTQ survivors.

"OUR STABILITY AND THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF OUR SERVICES AMAZES ME."

—Ann Robison, executive director, Montrose Center

"We had a client come in who had been set on fire," she says. "It seemed important that we provide case management and counseling services for LGBTQ victims, most of whom had nowhere else to go." The Center continues to offer limited temporary housing for victims of domestic violence.

In 2005, Robison started yet another new program after securing a grant for LGBTQ seniors.

"So many seniors were being priced out of their homes in Montrose," she says. "And if they had to give up driving and weren't familiar with the public transportation services, they just became isolated. We wanted to supply mental-health and support services and a meal program." And last year, the Center kicked off its campaign, known as There's No Place Like Home, to build the first LGBTQ-affirming senior housing project in the South that will incorporate all of the Center's senior programs. Also last year, the Center created a Hurricane Harvey LGBTQ Disaster Relief fund that garnered national headlines.

In 2015, the Center shortened its name to the Montrose Center to convey that it does more than just counseling. Today the agency resides at 401 Branard Street in a two-story office structure that houses its main programs, plus several other nonprofits and community-meeting rental space. There's even a café, the Equal Grounds Café and Snacketeria.

"We put it in about two years ago," Robison says. "Our reception area is on the second floor with our offices, but we wanted something on the ground level where volunteers could greet people. It breaks even."

Currently, Robison and the Center are working on a social-services program for veterans. The center just received its first grant for LGBTQ veterans, many of whom aren't qualified to be treated at the VA Hospital or simply don't feel comfortable there.

Understandably, Robison is proud.

"Our stability and the breadth and depth of our services amazes me," she says. "We have people come from all over, because there just aren't services like this for LGBTQ people in most of the South."

What: The Montrose Center's Time Warp 40th Anniversary Celebration
When: VIP reception at 6:30 p.m., show begins at 7 p.m. on Saturday, May 12
Where: The Houston Room at the University of Houston
Tickets and more info: tinyurl.com/montroseenter40

Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

Holy Troller

Sister Helen Holy previews her Mother's Day sermon.

By Don Maines

Put on your Sunday best—and don't forget your hat.

Sister Helen Holy is coming back to Houston for Sunday brunch and sermonizing.

On the menu is Sunday roast, as in "The library is open."

"Sister Helen is a 50-ish church woman who likes to think she is a better Christian than you are, and she delights in pointing out your foibles," says Dallas performer Paul J. Williams. "She usually wears a simple pink box suit, always with a hat and cat-eye glasses. What makes Helen especially funny is these old, old orthopedic shoes."

Williams' pharisaical character was such a hit during the Montrose Center's Mother's Day fundraiser for its seniors housing project in 2017 that, before he left the dais, he was asked to mark his calendar for the organization's 40th-anniversary celebration this year.

In March, Sister Helen's surprise appearance at the 65th annual Diana Awards also nabbed her a gig at the Father's Day Sunday brunch at Hamburger Mary's in June, Williams adds.

The Montrose Center bills Sister Helen as "a snooty, judgmental Baptist lady with a shaming Bible verse for every occasion."

"It's gotten to where I can think as her," says Williams, a 1983 graduate of Baylor University who was performing singing telegrams when someone asked him if he could imitate Dana Carvey's pious, prudish Church Lady from *Saturday Night Live*.

"I thought, 'Well, I guess,'" recalls Williams. "For a couple of years, I was intentionally doing Church Lady, [reciting] his lines like, 'Well, isn't that *spe*-cial?!' But after a while, I stopped. I thought, 'I don't want to steal from Dana Carvey. This is his baby.' I made Sister Helen part of my standup act, where I would talk about my upbringing in the Southern Baptist Church."

Williams grew up in San Antonio, where he graduated from Robert E. Lee High School in 1979. "I was a triple-crown queer—I was in band, choir, and drama. Principally, I was a band nerd; my instrument was French horn. My senior year, I joined the choir and made All-State. We did *The Sound of Music* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which was my favorite" (He played Rolf in the musical and King Kaspar in the popular one-act Christmas opera.)

At Baylor, Williams majored in marketing while playing in the band and choir. "I also studied German. I got fascinated by the language."

From Waco, Williams moved to the Dallas gayborhood of Oak Lawn "to start my career in retail," he says. But by 1986, after the Texas economy had tanked, "I thought, 'Dang it, if I'm going to be unemployed, I'm going to do what makes me happy.'"

After Dallas, the actor, singer, and comedian's career included six "moderately successful" years in New York City. "I played every comedy club in New York, but I never got a Broadway show," he says.

Williams also performed six years with a Dallas comedy/improv group called "Less Miserable," along with a continuing run as a featured entertainer on cruises for RSVP Vacations.

As Sister Helen Holy, he's a weekly contributor to www.hesaidmag.com with a column, "The 701 Club," that voices Sister Helen's "Christian perspective on the news." For example, Sister recently praised Dick's Sporting Goods for refusing to sell assault-style weapons—and the sale of *any* gun to persons under the age of 21. "I praise God for Dicks," she wrote. "I know that many of you have enjoyed Dicks over the years, and now I find myself on my knees for Dicks in an attitude of thanksgiving."

At Aspen Gay Ski Week events, Williams has appeared as Sister Helen alongside several performers from *RuPaul's Drag Race*, but he considers Sister Helen a comedic character rather than a drag queen. "I think it's drag-lite," Williams says. "I use base, blush, and lipstick, but it's a comedy part."

Sister Helen will be joined by "a gaggle of other queens" who will entertain at the Montrose Center's Mother's Day brunch. There will be a champagne and cocktail open bar, plus games and magnum prizes.

What: Sunday Brunch with Sister Helen Holy
When: VIP reception at 11 a.m., main event from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., May 13
Where: Buffalo Soldiers Museum, 3816 Caroline St.
Tickets and more info: tinyurl.com/MontroseCenterBrunch

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.





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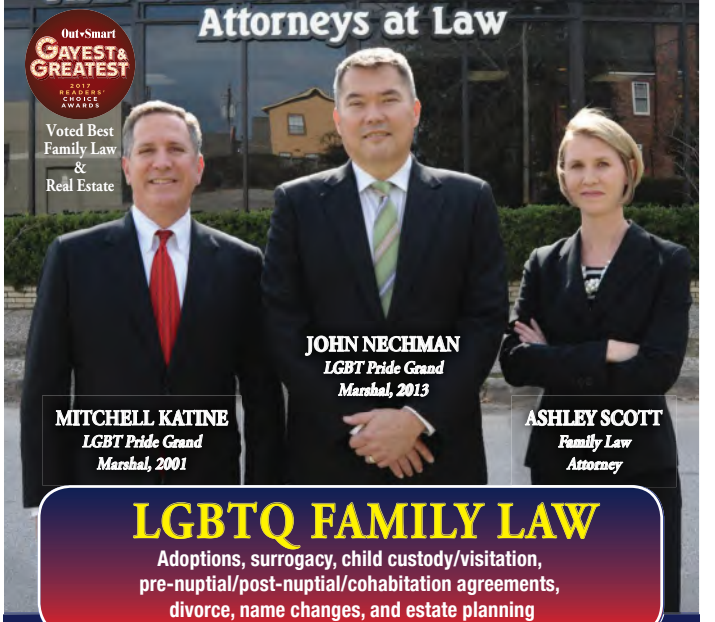
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Shooting It Out

Two LGBTQ groups—Gays Against Guns and Pink Pistols—face off over gun control.

By Kim Hogstrom



Outgunned? Gays Against Guns, shown at the Women's March in New York City in January, currently has no chapters in Texas, while the pro-gun group Pink Pistols has four.

After Valentine's Day, the conversation about guns in America shifted.

On February 14, there was another mass shooting at the high school of a well-to-do South Florida suburb called Parkland. This time, blood ran through the halls of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, which serves 3,158 students. When the smoke cleared and the SWAT teams gained control, authorities found 17 people dead and 17 wounded.

Within days, students in Parkland, some as young as 10, organized a movement called "Never Again" to demand changes to the nation's gun policies, and many across the nation have joined their chorus of protest. Few would argue that the reaction to this scene of gun violence felt different from the hundreds before it. But will anything really change this time?

Given that LGBTQ individuals are among the most frequently targeted victims of violence and hate crimes, OutSmart reached out to representatives from two LGBTQ groups on opposite sides of the gun-control debate.

Gays Against Guns is a national nonprofit dedicated to promoting stronger regulation of firearms. GAGers, as they call themselves, take the position that "fewer guns equal fewer deaths," and statistics largely bear that out.

A second group, called Pink Pistols, is an international LGBTQ nonprofit made up of people who meet monthly at firing ranges to support one another and advance their marksmanship skills. Pink Pistols members believe that the statistics are stacked against people who don't own a gun. "Get a gun and give yourselves a fighting chance," they say.

Both organizations offer compelling arguments.

'The Opposite of Common Sense'

GAG members believe that gun violence is a public-health issue that disproportionately affects people of color, religious minorities, and LGBTQ Americans. The group has active chapters in New York, Los Angeles, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Washington DC. There are no chapters in Texas, but GAG would welcome one.

"I will never forget waking up to the horrifying news of the Pulse Nightclub massacre," says Kevin Gotkin, a member of GAG's New York chapter, referring to the 2016 shooting at an Orlando gay bar that left 49 people dead. "Since then, I have been advocating for common-sense gun laws that would stop shooters who have hate in their hearts. America's gun laws are the opposite of common sense."

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Shooting It Out

continued from previous page

supporters is Emma Gonzalez, the Parkland shooting survivor who identifies as bisexual and has emerged as a leading figure in the Never Again movement.

Jake Tolan, another member of GAG's New York chapter, notes that 33,000 people die from gun violence in the U.S. each year—one-third of those due to homicide and two-thirds due to suicide.

"LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth, and 92 percent of transgender adults have attempted suicide by age 25," Tolan says. "Suicide attempts with guns are overwhelmingly more lethal than other efforts. With the risk of suicide so much higher for us, why in the world would we want more guns in our community?"

GAG members lobby candidates and elected officials for common-sense gun-control laws. They produce social-media video campaigns to educate and promote their position. GAG even has an online store selling "GAG swag," and their protests are the stuff of legend.

"There's a lot of chanting, and we carry a shitload of amazing banners and signs—because we're artsy," Tolan says. "We have a lot of fun, and we tend to get a lot of press.

GAG demonstrations often include "Hu-



man Beings," silent protesters veiled in white who bring a somber energy as they memorialize those lost to gun violence.

"Each Human Being represents a victim of gun violence," Tolan says. "Most of us have been a Human Being at least once. It's a very moving experience, and a haunting sight to behold. It's powerful."

According to GAG, gun control is an LGBTQ-specific public-health issue. They point out that violence claims the lives of LGBTQ people at a disproportionate rate—especially people of color, trans women, and gay men. The organization believes the LGBTQ community should band together to support stronger state and federal gun control.

'Guns Are Not Living Things'

Eighteen years after *Newsweek* published an article about "a new pro-gun, pro-gay political action group," Pink Pistols has 50 chapters across the U.S. and several in Canada and South Africa. According to its website, the group has four chapters in Texas, including one in Houston. The group also experienced rapid growth in the wake of the Pulse massacre. In fact, five days after the attack, Pink Pistols reported that its membership had tripled.

Pink Pistols defines itself as an "international organization dedicated to the legal, safe, and responsible use of firearms for self-defense of the sexual-minority community." Although Pink Pistols exists to serve LGBTQ people, it is not composed solely of LGBTQ members.

Gwendolyn Patton, a longtime leader and spokesperson for the organization, believes that guns are not the problem: "No matter what kinds of weapons an assailant uses—no matter the caliber of bullets, the style, or the design—the guns had no choice," Patton says. "Guns are not living things. A gun cannot choose to refuse to fire if the action is illegal. People die because of the actions of a human being. What I pray for is that we learn why the assailant did it, so we can prevent others from feeling the same way in the future."

Wes Simmons, a member of the Houston chapter of Pink Pistols, says he views the group as "a resource."

"We help educate the LGBTQ community on guns and their proper use," Simmons says. "We help people take the fear out of firearms, so they can successfully protect themselves.

"Things in the world today are pretty scary," Simmons adds. "There are a lot of people who don't like our community. I grew up gay in the rural woods of East Texas. I lived in fear every day, so I understand fear. I want to help people learn they don't have to live that way. We know that many people would like the world to be different. Pink Pistols offers a way to deal with the world the way it is."

Kim Hogstrom is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



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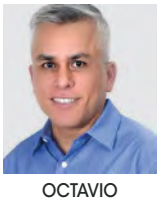
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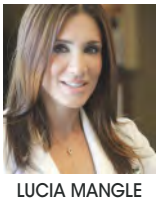
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Lady in Red

UH alum Stephanie Rice is a poster child for the Red Dinner.

By Marene Gustin

Texas gal Stephanie Rice has had a wild time since her stint on *The Voice* in 2017, when she wowed judge Alicia Keys and viewers with her powerful voice and soulful coming-out story.

Since then, Rice and fiancée Janet Gonzalez moved to Los Angeles. She also released a single last year, and is now working on an album. At some point, the couple plans to finally get around to that destination wedding on a beach that they've been planning.

"I mean, I say we live in LA, but I've been on tour so much, I'm hardly there," says Rice, who received praise for her 2017 single, an emotional ballad called "Let Me Go."

As viewers of *The Voice* know, Rice's life hasn't always been so happily successful. Growing up in rural Texas in a strict religious household as the daughter of a local pastor, things quickly headed south after Rice was caught dating another teenage girl.

Rice's father sent her to "conversion therapy" and wouldn't let her give the salutatorian speech at her high-school graduation or accept any of the scholastic awards she had received. He also barred her from attending college and accepting the basketball scholarship she had been offered. When Rice's parents realized they could not change her sexual orientation, they dumped her on the side of a road—literally—and she hasn't spoken to them since. She has no idea if they know about her *Voice* appearance or her musical success.

On a happier note, Rice will be back in Houston to perform at the University of Houston's LGBTQ Alumni Association's Red Dinner III gala on May 19.

"They reached out to me after seeing me on *The Voice*," says Rice, a UH graduate. "I gave a shout-out to Cougars on the show."

The alumni association raises funds for LGBTQ student scholarships and provides financial stability to at-risk LGBTQ students—a very real need, and one that Rice can identify with.

"This is special to me," Rice says, "because I received financial aid to go to UH and it changed my life."

Unfortunately, the LGBTQ Alumni Association wasn't around back then.

"I had to go through an appeal process with financial aid because I was under 24," she recalls. "And that meant my application would have to include my parents' financial information."

Needless to say, she was unable to provide it.

"They wouldn't even speak to me, let alone allow me to use them and their income to apply for financial aid to go to college," she says of her parents. "It was very hard, but I finally got the aid after having people testify that my family had abandoned me and I was totally on my own. The fact that there is help now, specifically for LGBTQ students who have been abandoned by their families, is just a really beautiful thing."

Today, UH also has an LGBTQ Resource Center and advisory board.

After securing financial aid, Rice attended the university—not for a music degree, but for one in science.

"I've always loved science," she says. "It really interested me." After graduating, Rice conducted medical research at Baylor College of Medicine while Gonzalez was working at St. Luke's Hospital. But she knew she wanted to do more with her music, and being on *The Voice* made that possible.

"I do miss the technical aspects of science," Rice admits. "But I feel I am able to give back more with my music. One day, I'd like to think that I could marry both interests."

And there has been another change since her time on *The Voice*. "Let Me Go" and her upcoming album are under the name Stephanie Rice, not Colonial Blue, the band she formed with drummer Corey Chierighino during her time at UH.

"It's just a name change, not a personnel change," Rice says. "It's still the same group recording and touring, but after the television show, it just made more sense to capitalize on my name recognition."

What: Red Dinner III
When: 6 p.m. on May 19
Where: Athletics and Alumni Center, 3100 Cullen Blvd.
Tickets and more info: Reddinner.org

Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

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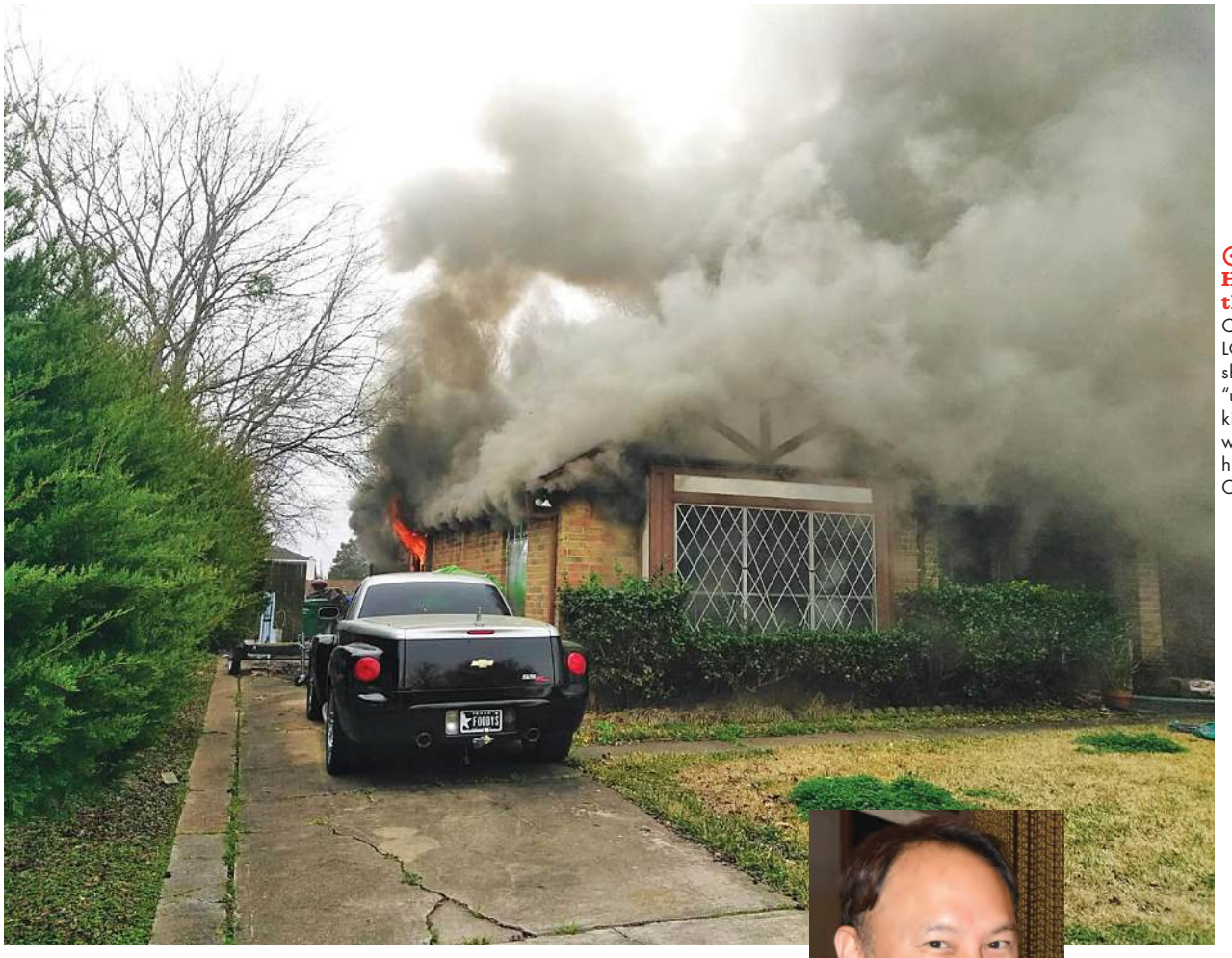
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Blooming from the Ashes

Despite catastrophic fire, 'Diva Lotus Blossum' says Love Party must go on.

By Don Maines



Helping the Helper
Carl Han says the LGBTQ community showed him "unbelievable kindness" in the wake of a fire at his home in Fort Bend County.

Carl Han feels the love. The gay humanitarian, who is a Vietnamese immigrant, says an outpouring of kindness from Houstonians (both LGBTQ and otherwise) followed a catastrophic house fire in February.

A Fort Bend County duplex shared by Han and his roommate, "Big Papa" Gary A. Giddings, burned to the ground. Fire and water damage destroyed practically all of their possessions, and two beloved cats died.

"Word spread quickly because Gary was posting pictures online of the fire while it was happening," says Han, who is widely known in Houston for his fundraising for LGBTQ youth, including his annual Love Party benefitting Hatch Youth and the Montrose Center.

"Immediately, friends got on Facebook and started to talk about holding fundraisers for me," he says. "I said, 'No, it's okay, it's okay.' Finally, some people said, 'I'm going to start one anyway.'"

Hundreds of people throughout Houston have donated money, clothes, food, and other supplies to help Han and Giddings get back on their feet. "It has been unbelievable kindness," Han says. "The community has shown me love I didn't know I had."

While the poster for last year's 13th annual Love Party featured the national flower of Vietnam, in homage to Han's alter ego Diva Lotus Blossom, he says he will wear a T-shirt with flames jumping from petals at this year's Love Party. "My new nickname is Diva Lotus Blossom Inferno," he says. →

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Blooming from the Ashes

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The May 5 fundraiser, Carl Han's 2018 Love Party: The Love Must Go On, will be from 7 to 9:30 p.m. at its grandest venue ever, Rich's Houston, 2401 San Jacinto.

In the wake of the fire, Han admits wondering if he should continue organizing the Love Party. He also entertained the idea of not holding this year's event after his mother passed away in January from a stroke.

On the morning of the fire, Han was cooking vegan food for an event at his late mother's temple. It's a Vietnamese tradition for a family's eldest son to cook for weeks after a matriarch's death. "I forgot to turn off the fire on a giant pan of oil," Han says. "I stepped into the other room for just a moment, and the kitchen went up in flames. By the time I realized it, it was too late. We lived in a duplex, so first I had to get the lady next door out, and her five dogs. Gary and I made it out, but we didn't even have on our shoes."

Left with nothing but the clothes on their backs, Han and Giddings were fortunate that they could move into the home of one of Han's sisters about three miles away. "We are living in my late mother's bedroom," he says.

Both men are self-employed, so they had to go back to work as quickly as possible. Giddings drives for Uber, while Han is a professional interpreter for Vietnamese-speaking parties in the Harris County courts. "I canceled my job on Monday, but I was back to work on Tuesday," Han says. "On Monday, I went to thrift stores, Ross, and TJ Maxx and got two sets of work clothes."

Han was taking things a day at a time when he suffered another blow in early April—the sudden death of Chris Kerr, who was the clinical director at the Montrose Center. "I started the Love Party in 2005 in honor of my friendship with Chris Kerr," Han says.

The Love Party, with a suggested donation of $20, raises funds for Hatch Youth's annual prom, which will be from 6 to 11 p.m. on June 3 at Numbers, 300 Westheimer. There will also be a VIP reception from 6:30 to 8 p.m. for adults.

What: Carl Han's 2018 Love Party: The Love Must Go On
When: May 5
Where: Rich's Houston, 2401 San Jacinto
Tickets: $20 suggested donation at the door. All money raised will go to the Montrose Center's Hatch Youth program.
More info: tinyurl.com/loveparty2018

Don Maines is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

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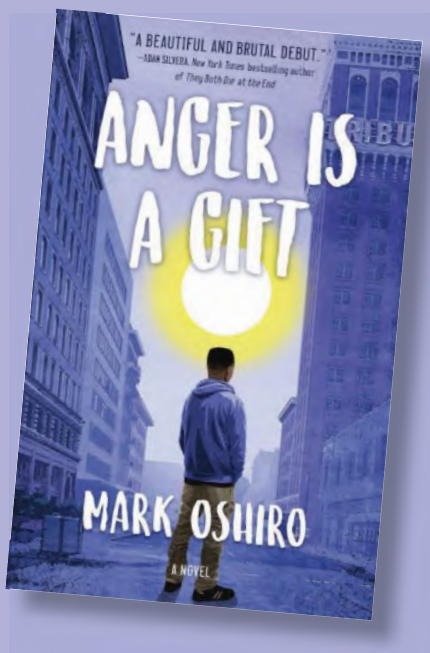
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Mark Oshiro

RAKEEM CUNNINGHAM







Caleb Roehrig

LGBTQYA

Queering young-adult fiction.

By Marene Gustin

The stars and heroes of young-adult (YA) fiction have been vampires, werewolves, dystopian teens, junior detectives, and boy wizards. What they haven't been, until fairly recently, were LGBTQ youth.

"I'm always surprised, as an adult reader, how touched I am by LGBT representation in YA fiction," says John Kwiatkowski of Murder By The Book. "They're books I wish I had while I was growing up, and getting to read them now is a little bit of wish fulfillment."

Kwiatkowski serves as event coordinator at the Houston mystery bookstore, which is one of the oldest and largest in the country. And he has scheduled a double dose of LGBTQ YA fiction for May 26, with readings and signings by acclaimed authors Mark Oshiro and Caleb Roehrig.

"I'm really proud that Murder By The Book gets to host this event," he says, "and that we're giving LGBT teens a chance to not only see themselves in fiction, but to see two queer authors discuss their work."

Oshiro, known for his nonfiction and his online Mark Does Stuff universe, will be reading from his first novel, *Anger Is a Gift*.

"I wrote a book I wish I had as a kid," he says of the somewhat biographical novel. "One where my parents were supportive, where I had the kind of queer-friends group that Moss has in the book, and where I could have experimented with actually dating in high school. My hope is that other kids of color, particularly those of the LGBTQ spectrum, can see themselves in the book, to feel validated and named."

Roehrig also wishes there had been LGBTQ youth in fiction when he was growing up.

"I didn't even know the genre was possible until around 2014 and I started seeing queer YA novels on bookshelves," he says.

Roehrig, a former actor and producer (yes, you probably missed his appearance in *Scarecrow Gone Wild*) got married in 2011 and moved to Europe with his husband. That's when he says he made writing his full-time job. He finished a couple of novels (none of which sold) before he decided to write the LGBTQ YA fiction book *Last Seen Leaving*.

"It sold right away," he laughs. And it also won several literary awards in 2016. This year he's released his second novel, *White Rabbit*, a thriller. The tagline reads: "Now, with no one to trust but the boy he wants to hate yet can't stop loving, Rufus has one night to prove his sister's innocence. . . or die trying."

"I've always been a thriller reader from way back," Roehrig says. "Anything with a body count!"

And while his Houston stop is just one leg on a national tour to promote *White Rabbit*, Roehrig is already at work on his third book, *Death Prefers Blondes*.

"It's sort of an action-adventure retelling of *Hamlet*," he says. "Where Hamlet is like Paris Hilton, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are kickboxing drag queens."

Oshiro, who is now working on his second novel, says that with the recent success of the wide-release movie *Love, Simon*—as well as that of authors like Malinda Lo, Adam Silvera, Mackenzie Lee, Anna-Marie McLemore, and others—queer YA can no longer be considered a "niche market."

"It certainly seemed that way back in my early 20s, when I discovered that David Levithan was writing gay YA," says Oshiro, who is now working on another queer YA fantasy thriller about migration and monsters. "But it's growing. I don't think *Anger* could have been published a decade ago; it would have been labeled too specific and too difficult to sell."

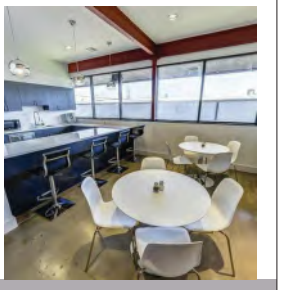
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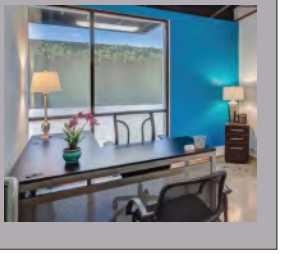


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Youth to Power

Fort Bend students fight for LGBTQ protections.

By Kim Hogstrom



Gender Benders
Members of the Sexuality and Gender Alliance at Dulles High School are leading the effort, with support from the ACLU.

Transgender teen Landon Richie says that, for the most part, teachers and administrators at Dulles High School in Sugar Land are sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ students.

But there have been exceptions.

Landon recalls a "fun, funny" school survey in which people were asked to vote on things like which student had the biggest feet or bushiest eyebrows. The survey divided students according to sex, and one of Landon's trans male classmates, who has not yet had his gender-marker changed, appeared on the list of girls.

"I have not had any bad experiences," Landon says of his time at the school. "However, they sometimes act out of ignorance. Mostly, LGBTQ students receive phenomenal support from principals and staff, but that doesn't diminish the fact that there are members and teachers who don't understand the needs of queer students."

"I have been called names, harassed, viewed as a freak, and left out of activities for identifying as other than straight."

It's just one example of why students in Dulles High's Sexuality and Gender Alliance (SAGA) are calling on the Fort Bend Independent School District to add LGBTQ protections to the district's nondiscrimination policy.

"We know that Fort Bend's trustees do not condone the discrimination students face, but to actually prevent it will require their action," Landon says. "Our objective is to have FBISD put a policy on the books to protect LGBTQ students and employees. We are hoping to sway the board with the overwhelming support we are seeing from the community at large."

The campaign for LGBTQ protections, called the Fort Gender Benders, has garnered 630 signatures on a petition from students, teachers, employees, parents, and alumni representing eight schools. The petition was initiated by parents of LGBTQ students under the guidance of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"As one of the most diverse school districts in Texas, Fort Bend ISD has a duty to celebrate, value, and protect diversity of all kinds," the petition states. "Every child should feel seen, heard, and affirmed at school, and every teacher/administrator should feel supported at work. LGBTQ students and teachers contribute to the dynamic diversity and rich culture of our school district, and we deserve equal rights and a learning environment free of discrimination."

In addition to launching a website that hosts the petition, the Fort Gender Benders have been block-walking to gather signatures and change hearts and minds. But thus far they have been unsuccessful in convincing the district's top administrator, superintendent Charles Dupre, that LGBTQ protections are needed.

Dupre told OutSmart he believes the district's current nondiscrimination policy—which covers race, religion, color, age, national origin, sex, and disability—is sufficient.

"In FBISD, we value all our 75,000 students, and we are dedicated to protecting the safety and the rights of each one," Dupre says. "I believe our [current] policy is written in a way that offers protections for all, and that our current policies are effectively serving our students."

Neither state nor federal law explicitly protects LGBTQ students or employees against discrimination in public schools. However, several larger Texas districts, including Houston, Austin, and Dallas, have adopted LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policies.

A 2013 report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that half of LGBTQ students have experienced discrimination at school. Twenty-eight percent reported being disciplined for public displays of affection; 17 percent were prohibited from discussing LGBTQ subjects, and nine percent reported being disciplined for →

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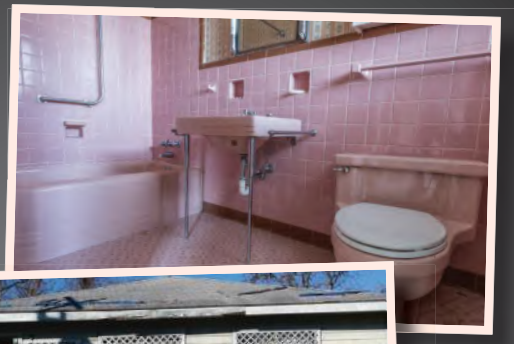
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continued from page 63

simply identifying as LGBTQ.

The GLSEN study also found that LGBTQ students have lower GPAs, higher rates of absenteeism, and are more likely to suffer from depression than their non-LGBTQ counterparts.

SAGA vice president Maya Leo, 15, says she has experienced discrimination firsthand.

"I have been called names, harassed, viewed as a freak, and left out of activities for identifying as other than straight," says Leo, who is pansexual. "Our anti-bullying policy helped, but the anti-discrimination protections would cover more people and issues."

Due to her work with the ACLU on the Fort Gender Benders campaign, Maya says she intends to study law and eventually go to work for the organization. Along with Landon and SAGA co-president Danielle Jaffe, Maya has also been accepted into the ACLU's prestigious intern program this summer.

Danielle, who also identifies as pansexual, says she experienced discrimination from another student who called her names and taunted her. Although Jaffie was able to resolve the matter on her own, she says a nondiscrimination policy would have helped. She also says she is grateful to have had a safe space in which to discuss the problem.

"We enjoy, love, and support one other," Jaffie says of SAGA. "We have all kinds of students in the group—all ethnicities, allies, and every gender identity or expression. And we all want the same thing—the right to be who we are. The addition of a policy protecting LGBTQ people would go a long way to granting that."

Maya's mother, longtime LGBTQ ally Januari Leo, is among the founding parents behind the Fort Gender Benders. In addition to working with the ACLU, Leo has met with Dupre and lobbied individual school-board members.

"The ACLU really has our backs, but it's the kids who are driving this," Leo says. "First, we reached out to the superintendent. He suggested we get the board of trustees behind it, so we are meeting with them individually. They have been receptive; there have been no closed doors.

"Fort Bend County is a fantastic place," Leo says. "It is so diverse and welcoming. We are made up of all sorts of wonderful people, including LGBTQ kids. It makes sense that the county would value and protect them, too."

For more info or to sign the petition, visit FortGenderBenders.org.

Kim Hogstrom is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.





Protest Poet

Genderqueer SHSU professor Ching-In Chen merges art and activism.

By Kim Hogstrom

As a child of Chinese immigrants, Ching-In Chen was the only Asian-American in an elementary school in Massachusetts.

"The other students in school could never remember my name," Chen says. "They called me things such as 'Chicken Wings,' 'Chop Sticks,' or 'Chop Suey,' so when I was in second grade, I asked my parents if I could change my name as my birthday gift. My mother and father agreed, and I chose Elizabeth. I remained Elizabeth until my early 20s.

"As for writing, I had always told myself stories to help me get through the day, to get me to the last school bell of the day," Chen adds. "I didn't realize these were the seeds of a writer sprouting, I just thought I was a weird, lonely kid."

Today, Chen is a 39-year-old professor of creative writing at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville.

Chen, who identifies as pansexual and genderqueer, is also a multi-talented artist and author with a long résumé of community activism and an indomitably forward-looking vision.

Chen, who goes by the pronouns "they, them, and theirs," is the author of several books of poetry, including *The Heart's Traffic* and *recombinant*, as well as academic studies such as "The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence within Activist Communities."

Chen's "moment of transformation" as a writer came during a poetry workshop.

"In the workshop, I voiced my self-doubt, confessing that I thought my poems were worthless. The instructor immediately kicked me out of class for saying that," Chen says.

"Then the instructor came after me," Chen adds. "In the hallway, she told me that I could never again say that my writing didn't have value. Then the instructor changed the workshop format. Instead of having me present my poems and asking my peers to critique them, she asked me to read them, then go around the room and ask each person what each got out of them. Everyone said something different, but the one common word shared was *love*."

After graduating from Tufts University in Boston, Chen earned a master's degree in creative writing and writing for the performing arts from the University of California, Riverside, and then a doctorate in creative writing from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

In college, Chen found an organizer's passion and has since amassed a stunning portfolio through work in the Asian-American communities of San Francisco, Oakland, Riverside, Boston, and Milwaukee, with a concentration on immigrant rights and racial justice. Chen has expertise in coalition-building with communities of color, as well as anti-war organizing and, significantly, LGBTQ activism.

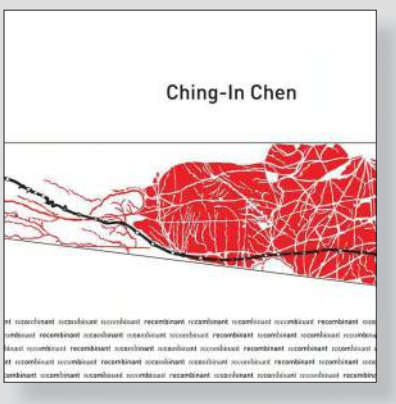
"Even as a community organizer, I always practiced the arts on the side," Chen explains.



Tenacious Bearkat
Ching-In Chen started an LGBTQ Faculty and Staff Network at Sam Houston State University, and hopes to organize a Pride celebration at the school in October.

A Natural History of My White Girl
By Ching-In Chen
(Reprinted with permission from Poets.org)

When I was a white girl, I had no mother.
I drank whiskey, lived in a house with no walls.
Girls visited and marveled at my room to breathe.
When it was sunny, they let down their hair,
drank fresh orange juice.
We drank all morning, didn't go to class.
I knew which words to carry in the arsenal,
which memory to disarm the most resilient bully.
Nobody bothered us or asked why we were missing.
I never doubted this was me. I knew how to pull up
short, how to light my name under their skin.
There was no need for mirrors. No need to get free.



"At one time, I was organizing in California full-time when I discovered I could write poems on the train while commuting to and from work. Normally, poetry includes a lot of different voices, but there were very few queer women's voices coming to the table then. We wanted to change that, and it seems to have worked. Recently, there has been an explosion of genderqueer voices in poetry. It's wonderful."

Chen, who lives in Houston, serves as poetry editor of *The Texas Review* and committee chair for SHSU's LGBTQ Faculty and Staff Network.

Chen and a partner of five years had been living in Wisconsin when Chen was offered the position at SHSU.

"When we first arrived, there was no group at Sam Houston advocating for LGBTQ faculty and staff, so I asked the president for permission to launch one," Chen says. "The president agreed. Now we have a big, active group.

"My plan is to organize an [SHSU] Pride Month in October of this year in conjunction with National Coming Out Day," Chen adds. "It's taking some effort, but I think we'll get it done."

For more info, visit chinginchen.com.

Kim Hogstrom is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



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Trans Homeless Shelter Fights to Stay Open

Houston's Casa Anandrea serves undocumented women.

By Lourdes Zavaleta

No other Houston shelter will be prepared to take in and protect homeless, undocumented transgender people if Casa Anandrea closes, according to its director, Ana Andrea Molina.

"If the shelter gets shut down, our dependents will have nowhere else to go," says Molina, an undocumented trans woman from Tamaulipas, Mexico.



"We are the city's only refuge specifically for undocumented trans, queer, and non-binary people. In fact, other LGBTQ shelters refer undocumented people to me when they cannot take them in."

Molina runs the east-downtown shelter that she opened in partnership with the Organización Latina Trans en Texas (OLTT) in 2017.

In April, Casa Anandrea's lease payment increased by $300 per month. When Molina realized that OLTT could not afford the rent without help from the community, she created a GoFundMe campaign and took to social media to ask her friends and followers for donations.

"The space you know as Casa Anandrea-OLTT might have to close. This place has been in operation for one year, providing housing for more than 30 people as an emergency bed and permanent home. Today it might have to close at the end of this month. We need $30,000 to renew our rental agreement," Molina wrote on her GoFundMe page.

As of April 25, the page had raised only $615. Molina said she has also reached out to OLTT's sponsors and asked for an extension on the lease payment, but she was still waiting for a response. To ensure that the shelter survives, Molina's last resort would be to sell her land and other possessions in Mexico.

"I would exhaust all of my personal resources before I let Casa Andrea close," Molina said. "We are an inclusive, diverse, and

safe space for Houston's LGBTQ population. Closing the shelter is not an option."

In January 2015, a group of trans Latinas came together to create OLTT after being banned from a public restroom and told that they were not women at a Latino event in Houston. Molina and her co-founders, all trans women, founded the group to protect, support, and advocate for trans Latinx people in Texas.

Since then, OLTT has helped trans people with issues such as immigration, name- and gender-marker changes on government-issued IDs, HIV prevention, and English classes. In addition to these resources, Molina opened Casa Anandrea on May 3, 2017.

In its first year, Casa Anandrea has housed 30 trans people, including clients who were recently released from ICE detention centers, had fled violent relationships, or were afraid to go to other shelters.

All who stay at Casa Anandrea have had access to OLTT's other programs.

The shelter has helped 12 people change their names and gender markers on state IDs, and after Harvey hit, it provided meals to 50 people for two weeks.



Trans-forming Lives
In addition to its shelter, the Organización Latina Trans en Texas assists clients with issues such as immigration, name- and gender-marker changes on government-issued IDs, and HIV prevention.

Casa Anandrea is funded entirely by donations and out of Molina's own pocket. At the end of the month, she will know whether the shelter can remain in operation.

"There are many difficulties that homeless trans women face," Molina says. "They are not taken into account, much less offered resources. This abandonment puts them in vulnerable situations. I hope that those who have more than these women have can give so that we can keep Casa Anandrea alive."

To donate to OLTT's GoFundMe campaign, go to GoFundMe.com/4w1jpiw. For more info, visit latinatranstexas.org or email Molina at andream.tslatina@gmail.com.

Lourdes Zavaleta is a regular contributor to OutSmart *magazine.*

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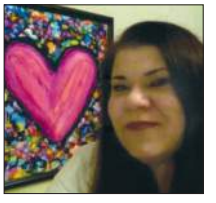
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Lez Dance!

Second-chance prom offers safe space for queer women.

By Lourdes Zavaleta



Pretty in Pink
Just like its predecessor in Austin (shown), Houston's first Lez Prom will include a crowning of royalty.

Three years ago, queer event producer Faye Fearless stopped going to her favorite Austin nightclubs because some male patrons did not respect her boundaries.

"I felt uncomfortable, targeted, and unsafe going out," recalls Fearless, who identifies as a gay woman. "This motivated me to create a safe space where I felt like dancing again."

Fearless' negative experiences, along with community interest in a formal dance event explicitly for queer women and non-binary folks, inspired her to debut Austin's Lez Prom in 2015.

The formal gala, featuring dancing, entertainment, and community bonding, now takes place annually in Austin. On May 19, Fearless is bringing Lez Prom to Houston for the first time. She hopes the Rockefeller Hall event on Washington Avenue will be a "second chance" for those who felt out of place at high-school dances.

"I decided to put together Lez Prom because there was a need for my community to have a new prom experience," says Fearless, who now lives in College Station with her partner. "It would provide a do-over for queer women and non-binary folks who didn't feel like their authentic selves at their proms."

"No one has to worry about being gawked at or mocked at this prom. Its atmosphere is accepting and inclusive. We have security at all of our events to ensure this."

Christina Wilson, a 31-year-old who identifies as lesbian, is among those who plan to attend the first Houston Lez Prom.

"When I was younger, I showed up to my prom with my best friend and we were treated badly, and I cried the whole night," Wilson says. "Lez Prom will show our community that we can come together and have a great time."

After moving to Austin from Maine in 2011, Fearless joined a Facebook group called Austin Lesbians Unite. She says several members of the group shared that they chose not to attend their high-school proms because they were afraid to take their partners or wear masculine attire.

The first Lez Prom, held on Valentine's Day, drew nearly 200 attendees ages 18 to 65, including lesbians, bisexuals, asexuals, drag kings, as well as transgender and nonbinary people.

Fearless says the Houston event will include performances by entertainers, a crowning of royalty, and other perks for both singles and couples.

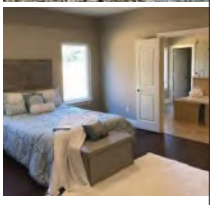
"A misconception that people have about prom is that it's just for couples, but singles are very welcome," Fearless says. "Couples shouldn't expect to only engage with each other, either. The event is very social."

A section of Rockefeller's will be dedicated to mingling among singles. There will also be prize giveaways provided by LGBTQ organizations, including tickets to Plezzure Island, a four-day women-only retreat.

Although formal wear is recommended, the policy will not be strictly enforced and everyone can present as they please. There will also be a zero-tolerance bullying policy, and all restrooms will be labeled gender-neutral.

"No one has to worry about being gawked at or mocked at this prom," Fearless says. "Its atmosphere is accepting and inclusive. We →





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Lez Dance!

continued from page 71

have security at all of our events to ensure this."

There have been two other LGBTQ groups hosting proms in Houston. Each June, the Montrose Center's Hatch Youth program puts on a prom for queer youth ages 13 through 20. And in July 2017, Party Houston hosted Gay Prom for LGBTQ people 18 and up.

Fearless says she is limiting the Lez Prom event to people who do not identify as men in order to strengthen her community, and for safety reasons.

"Some women who really like dancing don't like being approached by men," Fearless says. "Limiting our guests to the people that the event is created for creates safety inherently.

"Lez Prom is a great place to be if you're queer and love to dance," Fearless adds. "Its main purpose is to provide guests with a safe space to do that."

What: Lez Prom Houston
When: 9 p.m. on May 19
Where: Rockefeller's, 2620 Washington Ave.
Tickets: tinyurl.com/LezProm

Lourdes Zavaleta is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.



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Houston's Best Tacos

From traditional to exotic, here's where to find them.

By Joanna O'Leary

As she wept over her taco, wrote no one, ever.

What is it about a great taco that can bring light to even our darkest hours? It could be the contents (whether simple or complex), the crunch of the hard shell, or the yielding, soft dough of the tortilla. In any case, tacos are perfect for any time of day, as Houstonians well know—given our propensity to consume them at all hours. For aficionados looking for noteworthy traditional tacos, and for those up to seeking out something more adventurous, here is a sampling of the most distinctive versions on offer at H-Town restaurants, taquerias, and food trucks.

Sometimes a giant menu can be a warning sign that a restaurant is a jack of all trades and master of none. One exception is the **El Tiempo** outpost on Navigation that manages to turn out dozens of Tex-Mex dishes *par excellence*, so the choices can easily paralyze the indecisive diner. The solution? Order the tacos amante diablos, a divine porcine-meets-prawn collaboration in the form of three corn tacos loaded with bacon-wrapped shrimp, spicy chipotle mayo, and crisp shredded cabbage. Nose-to-tail enthusiasts will appreciate the beef sweetbread tacos garnished with peppers, onions, and tomatoes, whose mild heat readily complements the gamey undertones of the organ meat.

Continue your taco crawl by heading just across the street to **The Original Ninfa's**, where a large mounted portrait of Mama Ninfa bestows blessings on all who enter to binge on one of her many signature dishes. The tacos al carbon includes your choice of marinated strips of fajita chicken or beef, pico de gallo, and chili con queso—all ensconced in oversized thick white flour tortillas that are hand-rolled in front of you as you wait for your table. Head chef Alex Padilla can execute not only the crowd-pleasers, but also less mainstream regional Mexican foodstuffs. (For example, his rabbit adobo features nutty, smoky hare flesh that is well-matched with accompaniments of garbanzo bean puree and guajillo sauce made bold via blistered ancho peppers.)



Rarefied Wraps
Any grand tour of Space City's taco terrain should include the barbecue tacos at Coreanos, clockwise from top, the "Space Cowboy" at TacoDeli, the tacos al carbon at Ninfa's, the taquita de langosta at Hugo's, and the tacos amante diablos at El Tiempo.

At **Tacos A Go Go**, I go gaga over fusion creations like the chicken tikka masala tacos— naan bread (instead of tortillas) holding pieces of juicy roasted white meat chicken bathed in a tomato curry, and drizzled with crème fraiche. The chicken-fried oyster tacos dressed in buttermilk ranch, celery root slaw, frank's red hot—a piquant, briney hat-tip to →

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Houston's Best Tacos

continued from page 75

the Southern classic.

Liberty Tacos also boasts some unorthodox but popular internationally inflected options such as the "Thai Basil" stir-fried chicken in the eponymous sauce, red cabbage, and rooster crema. Roosters of a different sort gravitate toward their extremely solid breakfast tacos—Texas brisket with egg and cheese, the antidote to any hangover or ample fuel for a long morning.

Award-winning chef Hugo Ortega's **Xochi** is well-known for its moles, tacos de cabrito (braised goat so tender it dissolves in your mouth), salsa verde, and avocado purée encased in blue corn tortillas, all of which embody the perfect intersection of simple ingredients and sophisticated preparation. Head over to Ortega's original restaurant, **Hugo's**, for the dainty, delicious taquita de langosta, a mignon house-made tortilla stack with buttery tail-and-claw meat, a refreshing chunky tomato salsa, and sliced avocado.

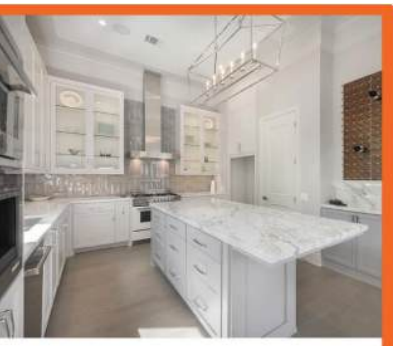
There are dozens of taco trucks in Houston, but at the end of the day (and night, most often), it just comes down to **Tacos Tierra Caliente**, an institution that is beloved for its cheap, no-frills pork, chicken, barbacoa, and beef fajita soft tacos smothered with as much red or green salsa as you can handle. The truck is most often parked adjacent to the Alabama Ice House, making it the perfect nosh for an evening of kibbitzing over multiple rounds of St. Arnold's.

For another terrific moveable taco feast, track down **Coreanos**, one of the pioneers of the Korean taco in Houston. Its competitors' numerous copycat versions can't hold a candle to Coreanos' standard barbecue tacos stuffed with your choice of bulgogi, halal chicken, or tofu. Mandatory optional ingredients (oxymoron intentional) include kimchi, a fried egg, and cheese.

Even at **TacoDeli**, where arguably most every taco is mighty fine, there's a hierarchy. Highly ranked is the "Delibelly," which will have you going "Mmm, mmm, mmm" all the way home, so supremely delicious are its fillings of unctuous pork belly, honey tomatillo-serrano salsa, cilantro, tangy onion, and supple slices of avocado. But if it's a Meatless Monday, never fear, for the "Space Cowboy" taco is here. Its stuffing of smoky roasted portobello mushrooms, sweet caramelized onions, peppers, queso fresco, guacamole, and earthy grilled corn will distract even the most devout carnivores.

With this guide in hand, all you'll need are some napkins (usually provided, natch) to make your grand tour of Houston's taco terrain.

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



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Making History at Louisiana's Plantations

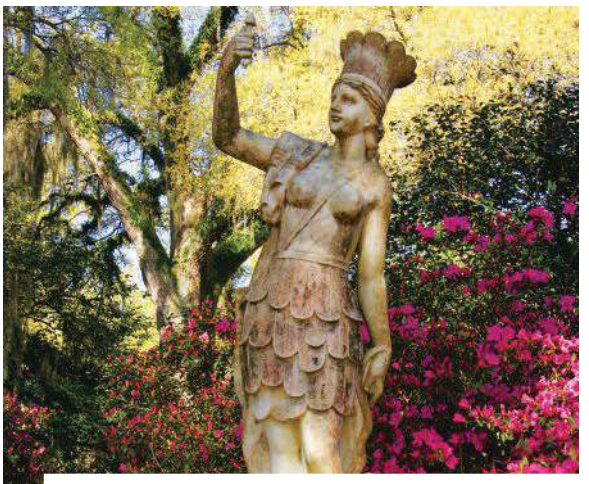
Dozens of plantations throughout Louisiana are open to visitors, and each has a unique story to tell.

By Mark Sanders





PHOTOS: (this page, clockwise from top left) Evergreen Plantation; Shadows-on-the-Teche; Oak Alley Plantation; Houmas House Plantation & Gardens *©Huber Images/eStock Photo*; (opposite page) Sculpture in Rosedown Plantation gardens *©Valerie Everett*; Nottoway Plantation interior *©Robin Castaldi*; San Francisco Plantation.







See life in rural Louisiana as it was more than 200 years ago by touring an authentic sugar or cotton plantation. You'll learn of fortunes made and lost, and the stories of men and women behind some of the South's most spectacular homes.

Start your journey at Louisiana's oldest plantation. Founded in 1787, Destrehan Plantation (in Destrehan) has this distinction, and like many other of these historic homes, it is located on River Road, an approximately 70-mile stretch of highways that hug the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

On River Road you'll also find Nottoway Plantation, a White Castle mansion with 64 rooms and 53,000 total square feet. Nottoway reigns as the largest antebellum mansion in the South.

Another architectural standout: San Francisco Plantation in Garyville. Its gingerbread house-style architecture and elaborate hand-painted ceilings make it one of the most scenic and distinctive homes on River Road.

Houmas House Plantation & Gardens in Darrow gives visitors a chance to tour an opulent big house and enchanting gardens, and to relax at numerous on-site restaurants and historic water cisterns that have been converted into wine cellars. On the opposite side of the Mississippi River in Vacherie, Oak Alley Plantation serves up mint juleps and jaw-dropping views—the quarter-mile-long front walkway of enormous oak trees might be the most photographed of all River Road plantations. >

SWEET RETREATS

Sleep in style at these plantation homes that also welcome overnight guests

- Butler Greenwood Plantation, *St. Francisville*
- Madewood Plantation, *Napoleonville*
- The Myrtles Plantation, *St. Francisville*
- Loyd Hall Plantation Bed & Breakfast, *Cheneyville*
- Twelve Oaks Plantation Bed & Breakfast, *Houma*
- Woodland Plantation, *West Pointe a la Hache*

Making History at Louisiana's Plantations



The Whitney Plantation offers a wholly different experience. As you walk the grounds of this Wallace attraction, you'll learn the many stories of resistance—and resilience—of enslaved people who worked in its sugarcane fields. Laura Plantation: Louisiana's Créole Heritage Site in Vacherie tells lesser-told stories of day-to-day life in the house and fields. Namesake resident Laura Locoul's diary accounts for nearly 100 years of life there, and forms the basis of guided walks through the plantation.

More plantation museums are clustered in picturesque St. Francisville, north of Baton Rouge. Rosedown Plantation State Historic Site is notable for its "pleasure gardens," 18 acres of formal landscaping that was owner Martha Turnbull's passion until her death in 1896. Nearby Afton Villa Gardens is no longer a plantation per se, but an awe-inspiring collection of gardens that were built among the ruins of the big house that burned to the ground in 1963.

Did you know plantations developed along the bayous of Cajun Country as well? In the Houma area you will find Southdown Plantation/ Terrebonne Museum, a beauty of antebellum architecture. The Victorian Gothic architecture of Ardoyne Plantation is a surprise for many cultural travelers and its story of a plantation built after the Civil War adds to its intrigue.



PHOTOS: Laura Plantation *©Maggie Bowles;* Sculptures at Whitney Plantation *©Mike Greenberg;* (below) Historic Donaldsonville Lemann Building.

TIMELESS TRAVELS

Revisit the past at these off-the-beaten-path historic districts, state historic sites, one-of-a-kind buildings and archaeological sites.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS



• Donaldsonville Historic District, Donaldsonville
Find an enormous variety of architectural styles among the 640-plus buildings of this historic district.

• Longfellow-Evangeline State Historic Site, St. Martinville
This site tells the stories of Cajuns, Spaniards, Frenchmen and American Indians of the Bayou Teche region.

• Natchitoches Historic District, Natchitoches
Explore 33 blocks of homes in Louisiana's oldest city.

• Spanish Town Historic District, Baton Rouge
One of Baton Rouge's most photogenic neighborhoods is also its oldest, founded in 1805.

• Charpentier Historic District, Lake Charles
The 40-block Charpentier (French for "carpenter") Historic District honors the expert carpenter-architects who freely designed as they built,

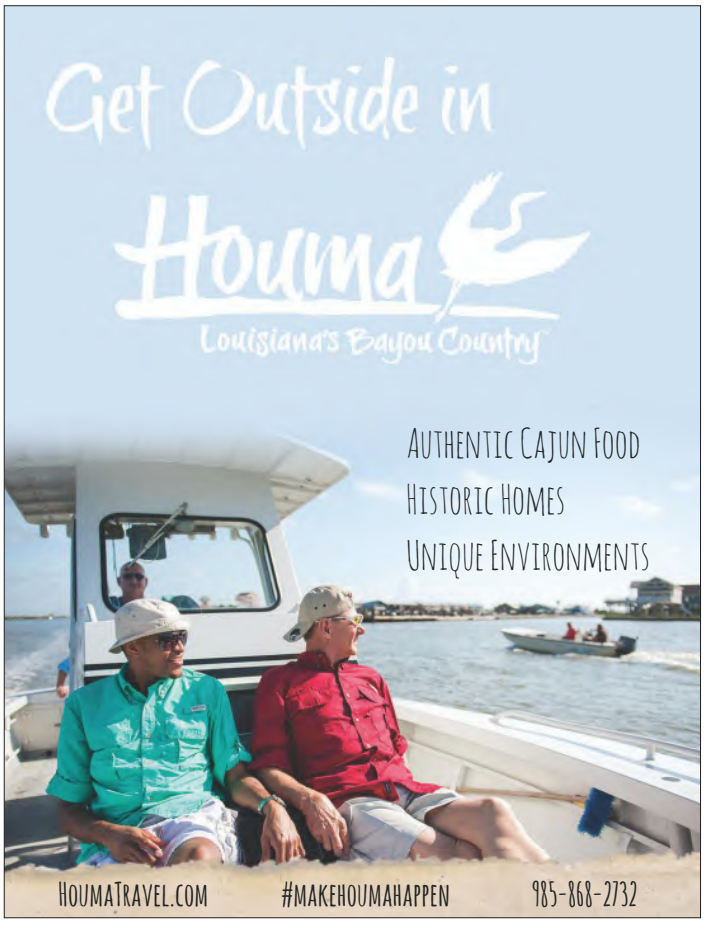
creating a unique Lake Charles style.

- **Historic Downtown Houma, Houma**
  Stroll through turn-of-the-century architecture and 100-year-old oak trees as you explore the boutiques, restaurants and museums of Houma's quaint downtown.
- **Opelousas Historic District, Opelousas**
  Get a feel for old-time Prairie Cajun life in the heart of Opelousas.
- **Vermilionville Historic Village, Lafayette**
  This living history museum tells of Cajun, Creole and American Indian life dating to 1765.
- **Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame & Northwest Louisiana History Museum, Natchitoches**
  Discover 3,000 years of regional history at this Louisiana State Museum-run site, which also houses sports-related artifacts from prominent Louisianans.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

- **Northwest Louisiana Mounds Trail**
  American Indian earthworks dot the landscape of northwest Louisiana.
- **Marksville State Historic Site, Marksville**
  Walk the grounds of this prominent ancient American Indian site.
- **Poverty Point World Heritage Site, near Pioneer**
  This UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of the few in the South, is a cluster of mysterious, monumental American Indian earthworks.

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2018 Prague & Danube River Cruise – *Amadeus Silver II*	*WAITLIST*	Aug 10 - 19, 2018
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2019 Enchanting Ireland	*NEW*	Sep 1 - 12, 2019
Splendors of India & Ganges River – *RV Ganges Voyager*		Sep 30 - Oct 12, 2019

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Lucky in Love

Robin Brown and Jenny Block met on New Year's, and tied the knot on St. Patrick's Day.



#BSquared
Jenny Block, left, and Robin Brown were married at The Astorian on March 17, in a celebration that had its own hashtag.

By Ryan M. Leach
Photo by Lisa House Photography

For Robin Brown and Jenny Block, St. Patrick's Day 2018 was particularly lucky. It was their wedding day.

But there was not a leprechaun or four-leaf clover to be found at the couple's wedding venue, The Astorian. And their invitation website even discouraged "leprechaun wear."

Guests were welcomed with glasses of champagne. The ceremony room was decorated with flowing cream-colored organza and beautifully fragrant roses cascading down the magnificent chuppa, which looked like it had been plucked out of a fairy tale. As the sun began to set, the early evening light filtered in, providing the perfect ambiance for a celebration of Brown and Block's love. It was as if St. Patrick himself had blessed the brides with one of those gorgeous evenings that remind people why they live in Houston. Lucky indeed.

The two women met on New Year's Day, another holiday known for celebration and good wishes for the future. They had both "swiped right" on the Tinder dating app to express their interest in each other.

"Robin was driving home from Dallas after going to the Cotton Bowl to see Michigan State lose, and checking the Tinder scene in Dallas on New Year's Eve," Block recalls. "I was at a party eating black-eyed peas the next day. I swiped right, and it was a match."

Brown, 55, was born in Detroit and raised in Novi, Michigan. She studied hotel management at Michigan State University, and currently works as an alignment executive at Cerner Corporation. Little did Brown know that decades after graduating from Michigan State, her alma mater would play a part in finding her future wife. Brown moved to Houston in 1988, and then to Lake Livingston in 2015.

I think it was the fact that she made me nervous, and I don't get nervous. When we first met, our eyes locked and never unlocked for the entire first date.

Block, 47, was born in Boston and raised in Bel Air, Maryland. After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees from Virginia Commonwealth University, she became a writer and moved to Dallas in 2005. Block is currently a regular contributor to OutSmart.

Although the two women were both in Texas when they met, some 200 miles separate Lake Livingston and Dallas. But nothing, it seems, could get in the way of their destiny. "We texted like crazy for a week before Robin insisted that we talk on the phone, despite my strong distaste for talking on the phone," Block says. "One week later, Robin took me on a Cinderella-style dream date in Dallas."

Brown recalls being "intrigued" on that first date. "I think it was the fact that she made me nervous, and I don't get nervous," Brown admits. "When she talked to me, we never lost eye contact. When we first met, our eyes locked and never unlocked for the entire first date."

Their second date was a country-western wedding, complete with line dancing. Their third date was a bit grander: a week-long Olivia cruise followed by five days in Isla Mujeres. "We figured if we still liked each after that much time together in close proximity, we just might be onto something—and we were," Block says.

At first, the two tried to pace themselves. Their connection was so intense and so strong that they pledged to let at least four seasons →



continued from previous page

pass before discussing marriage. Brown, known for her certainty, proposed after six months, and Block said yes.

The proposal came during Block's surprise birthday trip to Mackinac Island, a place Brown loved and wanted to share with her soon-to-be fiancée. Brown got down on one knee on the porch of the Grand Hotel, during another perfect sunset, and asked for Block's hand in marriage.

Robin, a consummate rule-follower, recalled that beautiful evening. "I was so happy she said yes," Brown recalls. "I just remember looking into her eyes and saying, 'There is no one else in the world with whom I would rather spend the rest of my life.' I knew it was right because I was breaking all of my own rules."

"Our engagement was pretty damn romantic," Block says. "[Robin] does so many romantic things all the time. Little things. Sweet things. Like bringing me coffee in the morning and taking care of me when I get a migraine, and loving and taking care of my daughter, Hannah, and my dog, Walter."

Fast-forward to the perfect sunset at the Astorian on St. Patrick's Day. Block's father, Rabbi Kenneth Block, served as officiant for a ceremony that had many traditional Jewish customs. Rabbi Block was charismatic as he performed the service, and guests could easily discern where Block inherited her keen sense of humor and candor.

The couple chose the dramatic Astorian as the venue because most of their guests were from the Houston area. However, they also had friends and family fly in from all over the world—a testament to how important they are to so many people. The brides recalled their favorite moment of the wedding.

"The first look," Block says. "We got to see each other right before the ceremony with no one there. It was the most beautiful, intense, lovely, romantic, happy moment."

"Hearing the music—the theme to *Somewhere in Time*, which was filmed at the Grand Hotel where we got engaged—that was what made me cry," Brown says.

As the lovely evening transitioned into an equally lovely night, the brides and their guests danced to disco and country music. Everyone mingled and dined on an assortment of delicious foods, and drank well from the fully stocked open bar.

Brown and Block's evening wedding celebration, which even had its own hashtag, #BSquared, did indeed benefit from a little bit of Irish good luck—but mostly from a great deal of love.

Ryan Leach is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine. If you were recently married and would like to be featured in our Wedding Guide, email editor@outsmartmagazine.com.



Modern Romance

After falling in love on Facebook, John Merullo and George Zemanek had a traditional church wedding—but with two grooms.

By Henry V. Thiel

Photos by Dalton DeHart

Goin' to the Chapel
John Merullo, left, and George Zemanek were only the fourth same-sex couple married at Trinity Episcopal Church in Midtown.

John Merullo and George Zemanek met at a mutual friend's birthday party in October 2010, when they sat next to each other in the Pope Room at Buca di Beppo on Buffalo Speedway.

Zemanek's initial thought was that Merullo was both cute and weird. Merullo just thought Zemanek was cute. They immediately became Facebook friends.

Fast-forward two years. When Zemanek mentioned that he was leaving for an out-of-state internship, Merullo invited him to lunch at the Hobbit Café. They spent several hours chatting and catching up, and then they hugged before parting. Two days before Zemanek left, he asked Merullo to lunch again. "It's hard to explain why we went out for a second date," Zemanek says. "It just felt right."

While Zemanek was away, they chatted on Facebook every evening throughout the summer, sometimes for hours. When Zemanek returned, they were a couple.

"Facebook was so central to our becoming a couple and developing our relationship that John joked about inviting Mark Zuckerberg to the wedding," Zemanek says.

Merullo, 48, is a librarian and serves as manager of business services at Houston Public Library's downtown location. Zemanek, 38, is an occupational therapist.

He says one of the couple's first dates involved "an amazing picnic" that Merullo planned. "John is very good at making special romantic meals," Zemanek says. "He somehow managed to get an array of cheeses, fruits, olives, and bread—along with real plates and glasses—in a tiny basket."

"We pretty much knew right away that we were 'end game,'" Merullo says. "Neither of us had really been in a long-term relationship before, and both of us had made peace with the idea of always being single. When we found each other, we knew it was right."

Zemanek proposed on April 29, 2016, at Michael's Outpost, where pianist Jerry Atwood played Elvis Presley's "Can't Help Falling in Love" while a slideshow of the couple's photos was displayed on a screen. The gay nightclub's owner and a bartender even recruited patrons to sing along. The final image in the slide show said, "John Merullo, will you marry me?" The bartender came out with champagne, and Zemanek gave Merullo an onion ring as his engagement ring. Unbeknownst to Merullo, the entire thing was live-streamed on Facebook so all of their friends could watch.

They decided to marry at Trinity Episcopal Church in Midtown on April 29, 2017, exactly one year after the proposal. They chose Trinity because Merullo has been a member and chorister at the church since 2002, and he currently serves on the vestry. At the time, they

were the fourth gay couple that had been married at Trinity.

Trinity's associate rector, Rev. Rich Houser, officiated at the marriage, while the church's rector, Rev. Hannah Atkins, celebrated the Eucharist. Zemanek's pastor, Rev. Marvin Havard of Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, preached. Merullo's friends and parents assisted during the ceremony.



The wedding began with the processional hymn "All My Hope on God Is Founded." The procession included the choir, acolytes, and clergy, followed by their wedding parties. During the fanfare before the hymn's final verse, the grooms were escorted up the aisle by their mothers.

Other than the fact that there were two grooms, the couple had a very traditional church wedding. It started with a prelude of four choir anthems, ending with their friend Stephanie Dory singing the Bach/Gounod setting of "Ave Maria." The service included several of their favorite hymns, representing both the Anglican/Episcopal and Lutheran church traditions. They both insisted on the communion rite being part of the service, and they used the Episcopal Church's new wedding liturgy that has language appropriate for either same-gender or different-gender couples.

At the reception in the adjacent fellowship hall, the grooms had a special treat for their guests: a first dance choreographed to "Last Night of the World" from *Miss Saigon*. It took them four months to put it together. Zemanek has a dance background, but Merullo does not. "Learning how to move together through dance brought us closer together as a couple," Merullo says.

"It was so rewarding to create something beautiful to share with our friends and family," Zemanek adds.

Capturing every moment was the one and only Dalton DeHart. "Dalton was the first vendor we hired," Merullo says. "We knew that Dalton was the only person we would want to photograph our wedding." Graham Gemoets of Butter & Company catered the reception.

For their honeymoon, they decided to add to their growing collection of selfies in front of state capitol buildings, which already included Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. They traveled to Merullo's native New England and visited all six states, plus New York. It was a chance for Merullo to show Zemanek around Boston and introduce his husband to his friends and relatives.

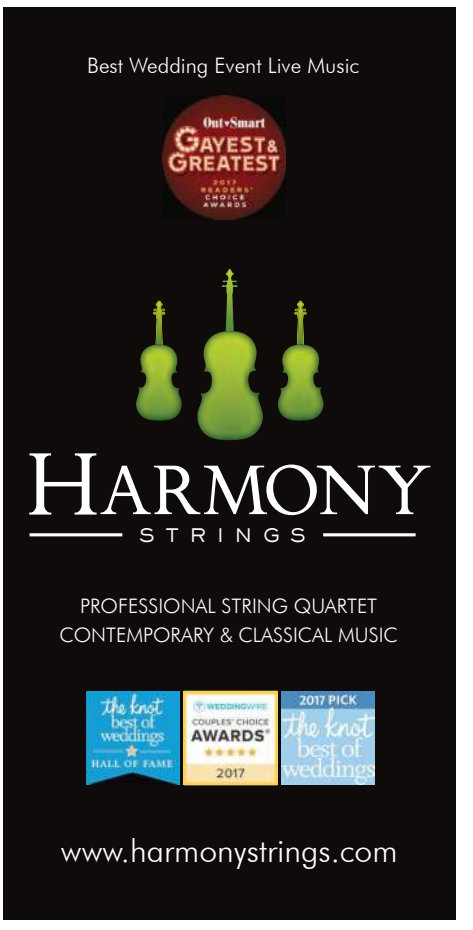
Zemanek and Merullo say they would advise other couples considering getting married to first participate in some type of counseling or an engaged-couples retreat. They participated in six sessions of premarital counseling that Trinity Church requires. "This was very beneficial in learning how to communicate better, especially in the first year of marriage," Merullo says. "Definitely do it. It will be worth the time."

Zemanek and Merullo also recommend that couples give themselves a timeline and stay organized when planning their wedding. They had a binder with every important document and all of their planning notes. This not only kept them on track, but also helped divide duties.

"On our wedding day, everything went very smoothly and we were both very calm and relaxed—something not many married couples can boast," Zemanek says.

Henry Thiel is regular contributor to OutSmart *magazine. He loves weddings. If you were recently married and would like to be featured in our Wedding Guide, email editor@outsmartmagazine.com.*







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Ellen DeGeneres

(*The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, 4.12.18)

If I was gonna open a store for cross-dressers, I'd call it Let Me Be Frank.





Queer Eye for the Straight Guy cast (l–r): Bobby Berk, Karamo Brown, Antoni Porowski, Jonathan Van Ness, and Tan France.

Antoni Porowski

(*Gay Times*, 5.18, Lewis Corner)

"I've always considered myself a little more fluid along the spectrum," he tells *Gay Times*. "So even being called bisexual. . . I remember in my early 20s I was like, 'But bisexual means I can only like girls and guys, what if I like something else?'

"Maybe it's just my rebellious nature. I'm me, I'm Antoni, and I'm all these things. Some people want to define themselves, and they should as it's part of their identity.

"For me personally, I've never really had a label for myself. Today I'm gay, I'm in a gay relationship, and that's where I am. That's good enough for me."

Queer Quotes

Compiled by Blase DiStefano



Janelle Monáe

(The Huffington Post, 4.26.18, Curtis M. Wong)

"Being a queer black woman in America—someone who has been in relationships with both men and women—I consider myself to be a free-ass motherf--ker," Monáe said in [an interview in the May issue of *Rolling Stone*]. She said she initially identified as bisexual, but added: "Later I read about pansexuality and was like, 'Oh, these are things that I identify with, too.'"



MONAE - KATHY HUTCHINS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; BANG - INSTAGRAM; DEGENERES - SCREEN GRAB; POROWSKI - GAVIN BOND/NETFLIX

Marshall Bang (openly gay Christian K-pop superstar)

(Queerty.com, 4.24.18, Malcolm Rhodes)

There isn't a lot of material out there for Koreans about what being gay is. And there definitely isn't anything within the Korean Christian community on LGBTQ stuff. . . .

If being gay is a sin, I don't understand why being gay is so much more worse than lying and cheating and all these other things that people readily accept in Christianity.



By Gregg Shapiro

Queer Sisterhood Is Powerful

Meshell Ndegeocello, Mary Gauthier, Tave Lo, Michelle Malone, and more.

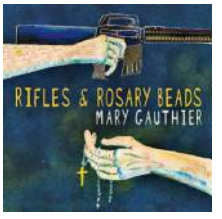
Co-produced by Allison Zatarain and legendary songwriter/producer Richard Gottehrer, the 10-song vinyl LP ***Instant Love Volume 1*** (Instant Records) is intended to celebrate "the power of love between women, mothers, sisters, friends, and lovers." A reimagining of classic love songs by musical acts such as Billy Joel ("She's Got a Way," sung by Lolo Zouai), The Beach Boys ("Don't Worry Baby," done by Rachel Fannan), and The Kinks ("You Really Got Me," covered by Cavale). Highlights include Erika Spring (of Au Revoir Simone) performing "Colours" by Donovan, Holly Miranda's reading of Leonard Cohen's "I'm Your Man," Irma Thomas' rendition of "Crazy Love" by Van Morrison, Nicole Atkins singing "Amy" by Ryan Adams, and jazz vocalist Karen Souza's version of Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine." Looking forward to volume 2 and others to follow.



While we're on the subject of cover tunes, the always-brilliant lesbian singer/songwriter and bassist extraordinaire **Meshell Ndegeocello** (who paid tribute to Nina Simone on 2012's *Pour Une Âme Souveraine* and has been including covers on more recent albums) has just put out the cleverly titled ***Ventriloquism*** (All Points/Believe). Ndegeocello reimagines 11 songs, originally released between 1982 and 1994, in her own distinctive style, and the results are breathtaking. Some renditions stick closer to the originals than others—as in the case of Ndegeocello's readings of Prince's "Sometimes It Snows in April" (from 1986), Lisa Lisa & The Cult Jam featuring Full Force's "I Wonder If I Take You Home," and Al B. Sure's "Nite and Day" (both from 1988)—yet she manages to maintain her distinctive style. Some of the most exciting moments occur on deconstructed versions of George Clinton's "Atomic Dog" (from 1982), Ralph Tresvant's "Sensitivity" (from 1990), Sade's "Smooth Operator" (from 1984), Janet Jackson's "Funny How Time Flies (When You're Having Fun)," and Force MD's "Tender Love." Brava, diva!



Is it too early in the year to begin assembling a "best of" list? If not, the Ndegeocello disc certainly qualifies—as does the devastating ***Rifles & Rosary Beads*** (In the Black/Thirty Tigers) by lesbian singer/songwriter **Mary Gauthier**, which is a product of Gauthier's association with Darden Smith's nonprofit organization SongwritingWith:Soldiers, in which soldiers are teamed up with professional songwriters. For Gauthier's album, she collaborated with both male and female soldiers for a majority of the tracks. Two of the songs, including the devastating "The War after the War," were written by military wives whose soldier-husbands returned from the battlefield wounded. Gauthier, who is a sort of queer Lucinda Williams, has a history of bringing listeners to tears (check out 2010's *The Foundling*), but *Rifles & Rosary Beads* takes that ability to a whole new level. [*Editor's note:* Mary Gauthier performs at McGonigel's Mucky Duck in Houston on June 1.]



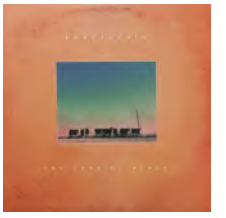
Certain to earn queer musician **Joan As Police Woman** (aka Joan Wasser) a larger devoted following, her smoky and soulful new album ***Damned Devotion*** (PIAS) is the latest from an artist who follows her own inviting path. Arresting numbers such as the title cut, "Steed (for Jean Genet)," "Tell Me," "Wandering Bell," "What Was It Like," "Rely On," "Silly Me," and "I Don't Mind" don't sound like anyone or anything else. Joan As Police makes indescribably delicious music, and she doesn't need to flash her badge to do it.



No one could ever accuse Swedish pop goddess **Tove Lo** of slacking off. Two years may have passed between 2014's *Queen of the Clouds* and 2016's *Lady Wood*, but 2017's ***BLUE LIPS (Lady Wood Phase II)*** arrived a year later, and continues the frank (bi) sexuality of its predecessor. How frank? Just listen to "shivering gold" and "bitches" as a couple of examples.



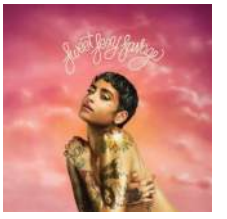
Featuring lesbian bass player Laura Lee, the trio **Khruangbin** touches down with its second album ***Con Todo El Mundo*** (Dead Oceans/Night Time Stories). A mostly instrumental affair that sounds as timeless as it does of the moment, *Con Todo El Mundo* could be the soundtrack to a night of passionate lovemaking, a hipster loft party, or a dinner with old friends. Seriously, can't you just picture your friends dancing in their brightly colored stocking feet to "Maria También," "Evan Finds the Third Room," or "Como Me Quieres"?



It might seem hard to believe, but Atlanta-based lesbian singer/songwriter **Michelle Malone** has been putting out albums for 30 (!) years. Her latest, ***Slings & Arrows*** (SBS Records), finds her getting political on "Love Yourself" and "Just Getting Started." For someone who's been at it as long as Malone has, it's nice that she's still able to surprise and thrill us—as she does with her cover of Otis Redding's "I've Been Loving You Too Long," a duet with Shawn ("Lullaby") Mullins.



On ***SweetSexySavage*** (Atlantic), the debut disc by queer R&B artist **Kehlani**, listeners go on a grand tour of the various styles of contemporary black music, including hip-hop-influenced modern soul. It's a strong and memorable first album whose highlights are the songs "Thank You," "Advice," "Hold Me by the Heart," "Get Like," and "Too Much."

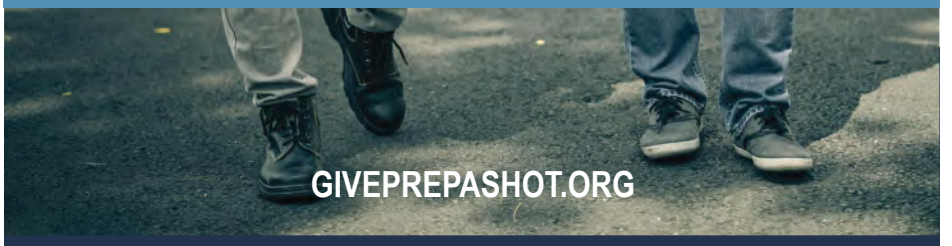


The song "Shameful Feeling," described as being about "the journey of coming out of hiding, rising above painful adolescent memories, and learning to shut out fears and self-doubt" within a "queer context," is a powerful track →



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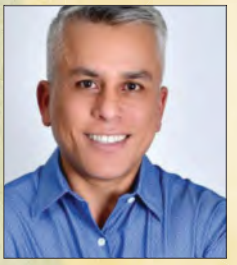


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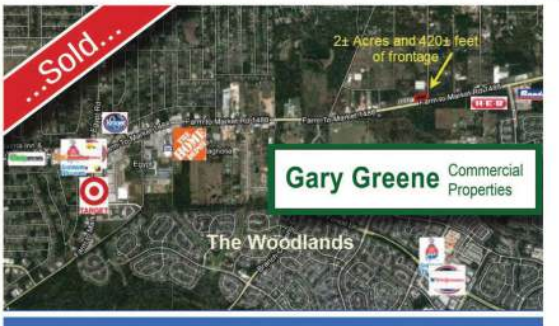
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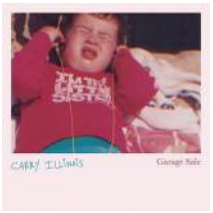


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GrooveOut

continued from page 90



near the center of the six-song EP ***Garage Sale*** (carryillinois-band.com) by **Carry Illinois**, led by lesbian singer/songwriter Lizzy Lehman. "Goodnight," the album's heart-tugging closing track, deals with the suicide of original band member John Winsor, and is a stunning tribute.

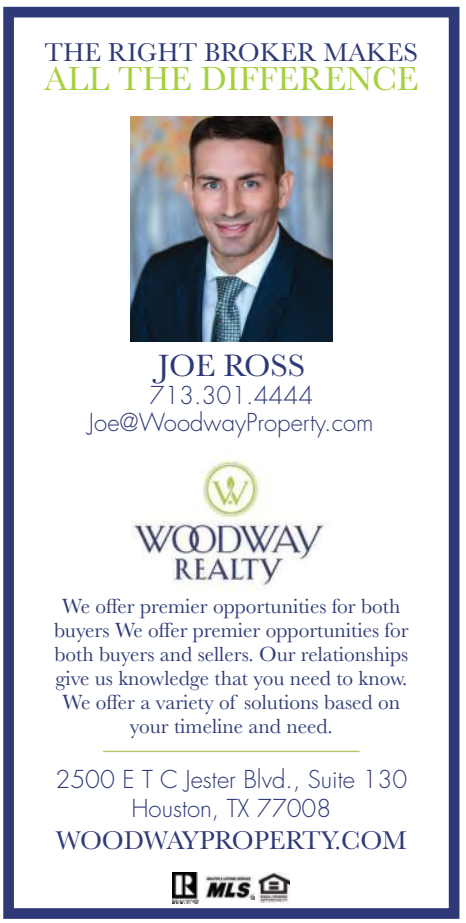
The five-song EP ***Freedom Girl*** (livlombardi.com) is the latest release by genderqueer singer/songwriter **Liv Lombardi**, who divides her time between NYC and Santa Fe. The all-female punk-blues quintet **Jane Lee Hooker** features two queer band members. The 10 tracks on its new album, ***Spiritus*** (Ruf), are loud and proud.





Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.







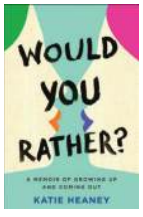
By Terri Schlichenmeyer



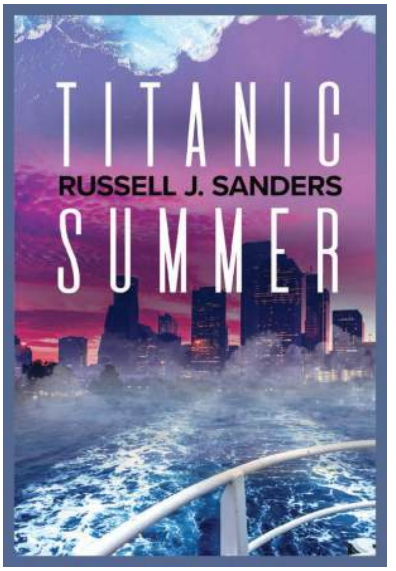
'Titanic Summer'

Like father, like son?

Would You Rather? A Memoir of Growing Up and Coming Out
Katie Heaney



Where do you go when you're looking for love? For Katie Heaney, it was pretty much anywhere. She'd always wanted a boyfriend and she'd had lots of crushes in her life, but she was never meaningfully kissed. At age 21, she went to Madrid for a semester in hopes of meeting a man, but after binge-streaming *The L Word* and falling for Shane, Heaney began to think that maybe she might be a lesbian. After she met a woman who was, no question, lesbian, she decided to shake herself out of her complacency by visiting New York and then moving there. But Heaney remained frustratingly dateless. Eventually her "attraction to men was just gone," and shortly thereafter, Heaney met Lydia online. Her almost-30-year dating desert became an oasis as she not only imagined herself with a woman, but *was* with a woman. Nothing felt more right. Author Katie Heaney writes of her journey with a charming awkwardness that endears her to any reader who's ever felt as though the different drummer they're marching to is actually playing the bongos: same beat, different crowd. This book is worthy for its unique coming-out POV. In that regard, *Would You Rather?* is perfect for memoir-lovers, Heaney fans, and those who bloom late. • Ballantine Books (randomhousebooks.com). —*Terri Schlichenmeyer*



Titanic Summer
- by Russell J. Sanders
- 2018
- Harmony Ink Press (harmonyinkpress.com)
- 250 pages
- $16.99

Parents can be so weird. Take your dad, for instance: he's got hobbies that defy logic, and he's obsessed with them. And your mom? Well, let's not go there, except to say that if you became her mini-me, she'd be fine with that. Irritating, yes, but what are you gonna do? As in the new book, *Titanic Summer* by Russell J. Sanders, whatever floats their boats.

"Your mom and I have some news."

Those are words that no 12-year-old boy wants to hear, but Jake Hardy heard them along with everything else: his parents were getting a divorce.

That was four years ago, and Jake survived, more or less. He wasn't happy when his dad moved from Houston to Philly. He also wasn't happy that his mom got all churchy, but he knew that his parents both loved him. He wasn't sure, though, how they'd feel if they knew that he was gay.

Jake had, in fact, just come to that realization himself in the past year or so, but he wasn't sure where to go with it. His conservative Christian school prohibited homosexuality, so Jake couldn't risk being thrown off the basketball team by revealing his physical desires. He now had the whole summer to think about everything and make some decisions.

Fortunately, he'd do that while hanging out with his dad in Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, his dad had other plans: he was a history buff who was seriously obsessed with the *Titanic*. He'd watched the movie hundreds of times and, to Jake's dismay, had scheduled a 10-day father-son trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where some of the *Titanic*'s dead were buried.

That's also where gay-boy Jake learned that his dad was also gay.

Which was just *great*, because it would have helped Jake a great deal if Dad had been less secretive. But no . . . instead, Jake got secrets and omissions from both his parents (which made him angry), and his bestie offered no sympathy. He found a new friend, but even that was awful. Was pretending not to be gay the easiest way to live?

Though it tends to be somewhat overly-long and overwrought, *Titanic Summer* is overall a better-than-average read.

Part of that may be because author Russell J. Sanders puts authentic teen language into the mouth of his main character. Sanders' Jake speaks in the style and manner you'd expect from an attitudinal 16-year-old boy who's trying to please everyone; that he fails, and sometimes becomes unlikeable, only enhances his realism.

Such authenticity would be nice, but the plot is too long and contains inconsequential details, as if every second of the titular summer needs recording. A few editorial snips would have kept the book from taking on water.

Even so, that's a minor complaint in light of the waves of enjoyment you'll get from this story, whether you're a 13- to 17-year-old or an adult who's well past those years. Readers craving a nice gay coming-of-age novel will find *Titanic Summer* to be a boatload of goodness.

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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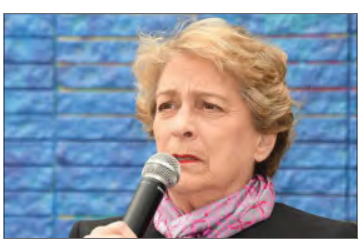
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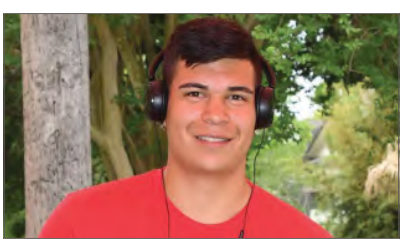
















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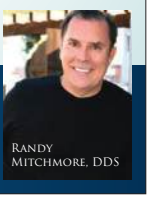
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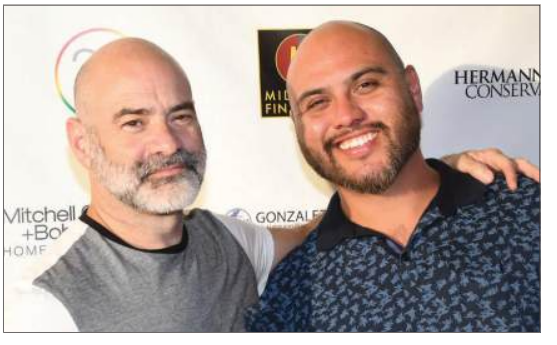


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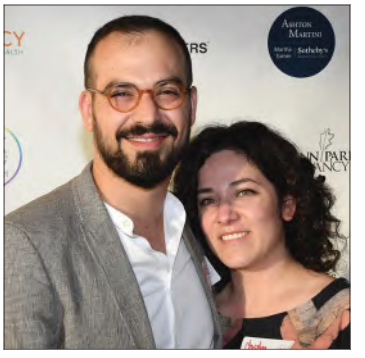

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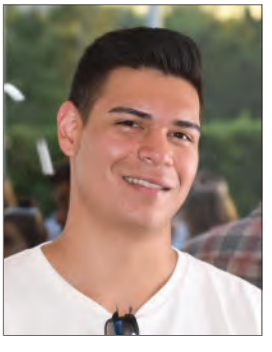













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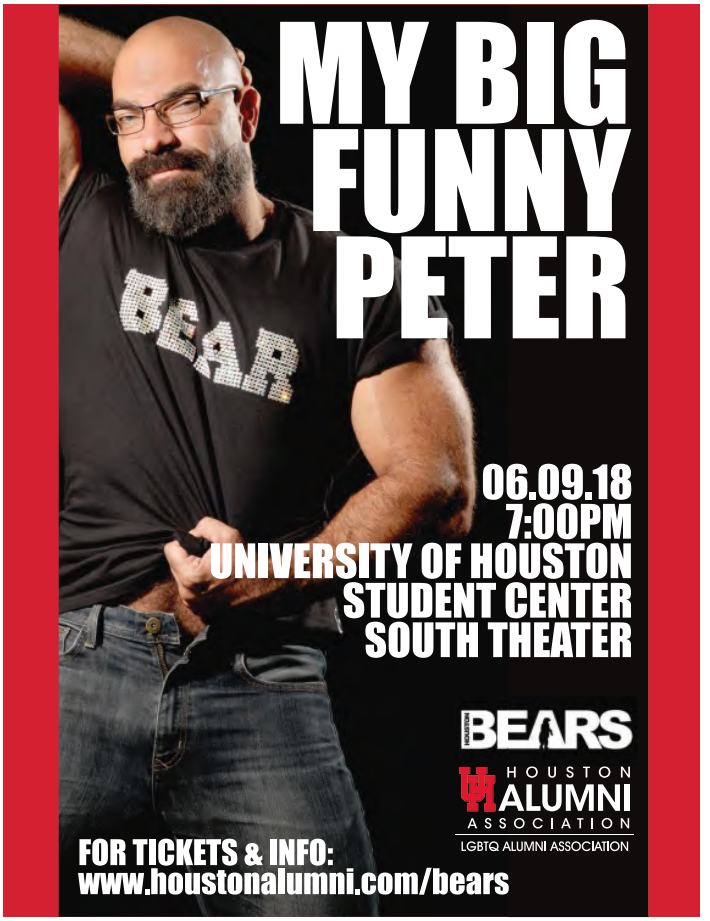
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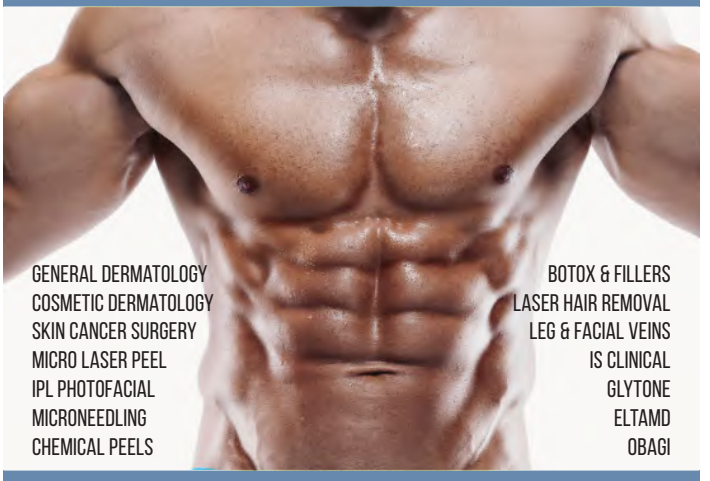
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HOUSTON PRIDE RIDERS

A new LGBT motorcycle riding group is being put together for those in the Houston area who like to get out and ride! I'd love to have group rides/social gatherings every month, possible fund raiser rides for the community, etc.. All motorcycle types welcome - From Harley's to Hayabusa's, crotch rockets and cruisers - all are welcome. All rider experiences welcome! Please contact jasonmwilson@sbcglobal.net or look for Houston Pride Riders on Facebook.

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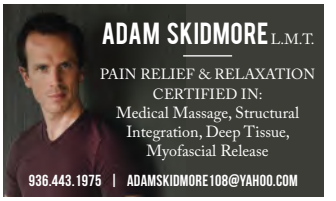
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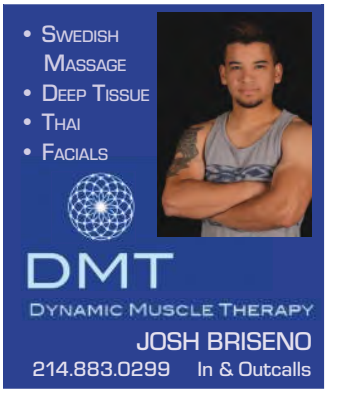
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SignOut

continued from page 112

month, and that may have also interfered with your sleep. All of this shifts toward the end of the month. Relationships take more of your time after midmonth, and you are wanting to play and have more fun! Make sure you schedule some fun, or you may not take the time to do it! By midmonth, you are getting your workplace in order. And finally, watch your impulse spending, particularly after midmonth. However, this is a good time to look at making new investments.

AQUARIUS (January 20–February 18). You have been extra-busy taking care of tons of small jobs—things you haven't had the time to get to. You have been especially focused on projects at home or with your family. You are looking at your daily routine and reorganizing both what you do and how you do it. Family takes on a bigger role in your life after midmonth. You are freeing yourself from your sense of obligation about the "family myth" as you focus on you and not what you can do for everyone else. You also get a big boost of energy as Mars, planet of action and firearms, enters your sign for an especially long stay. Mars will be active in your sign through the end of December, instead of the usual 40 days and 40 nights. You will be more direct, less patient, and ready to defend your point of view and take action on things that bring you real pleasure.

PISCES (February 19–March 20). Money and resources have been a problem for you over the last couple of months, but you are breaking free from that in May. This month is an especially good time for you to consider new investments, new job positions, or starting something on your own. Friends can be helpful, but you will have to ask them for help! You appear to have your act together, so others won't always know that you need some rescuing (since you are normally the one who rescues others). This continues to be a good time for publishing, writing, or exhibiting your art! By midmonth, you are more communicative and life moves along more easily. Near the end of May, you will need some time to yourself or just a break from people who make demands on you. Relationships are also more fun this month. If you are involved, this is a good month to renew those bonds. If you are single, you are in a playful and charismatic mood that should draw people to you!

For more astro-insight, log on to lillyroddy.com.

















Bar & Club Guide

HOUSTON

BLUR
Multi-level dance club featuring an upstairs lounge and balconies. Ladies enjoy Wet and Wild Wed., 18-year-olds welcome Thurs., Latin night on Sun. Happy hour 8–10pm; free cover before 11pm. 710 Pacific St. • blurbar.com.

CLUB 2020
Located downtown, this urban club features Clubbers Friday with male and female dancers. Its 6,400 square feet also offers theater-sized viewing screens and VIP rooms. 2020 Leeland • 713.227. 9667 club2020houston.com.

CLUB CRYSTAL
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
This comfortably remodeled Montrose nightspot also offers karaoke on Tuesdays and Thursdays and extended happy-hour prices throughout the week. 2312 Crocker • 713.529.3355.

GEORGE
Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar. Sports Saturdays and Sundays start at 3pm with dart and pool tournaments. 617 Fairview • 713.528.8102.

GUAVA LAMP
This trendy and friendly video and cruise bar gets busy during happy hour and stays busy 'til closing. Karaoke on Wed. and Sun. 570 Waugh Dr. • 713.524.3359 guavalamphouston.com.

HAMBURGER MARY'S
Tuesday & Wednesday 4p-10p, Thursday & Friday 4p-2a, Saturday & Sunday 11a-2a

EAGLE
Part of the Eagle worldwide family, it's the definitive home to the man's man - leather, bear, jock or muscle, you'll find them here! DJs every night, multiple patios and a leather/accessories shop inside the bar. Noon-2am every day, 611 Hyde Park, 713.523.BIRD

JR'S BAR & GRILL
This Montrose standard offers drag and strip shows throughout the week, karaoke Thurs. and Sun., plus pool tables and male dancers. 808 Pacific St. • 713.521.2519 jrsbarandgrill.com.

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

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON
Houston's only LGBTQ country dancehall opens Wednesday–Sunday. Wednesday features Steak Night and Bingo. Free dance classes on Thursdays and Karaoke. 11410 Hempstead Hwy 713.677.0828 • neonbootsclub.com.

PEARL BAR
This LGBT-friendly lounge in the Washington corridor features daily highlights like open mic night, steak night, and drink specials. 4216 Washington • pearlhouston.com.

RICH'S HOUSTON
Houston's most iconic and largest LGBT dance club, with multiple levels featuring a video/show bar and a private VIP lounge. No cover before 10:30 p.m. 2401 San Jacinto • 281.846.6685 richsnightclub.com.

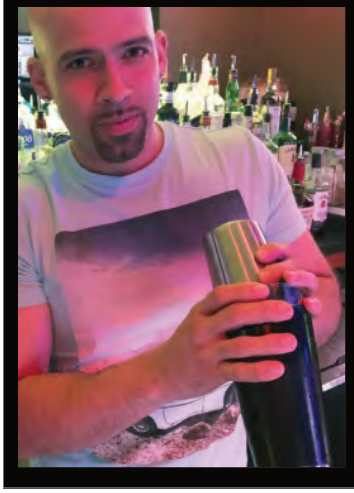
THE RIPCORD
This multi-roomed leather bar boasts a busy patio, especially on the weekends. The Forge shop located inside the club. Saturday nights with DJ Tad Dvorak 715 Fairview Ave • 713.521.2792.





BEHIND the BAR

with KENNY TUCKER
Guava Lamp, 570 Waugh Drive
Wednesday and Saturday nights



What is your favorite shot to make?
I love making a salted pretzel shot (Whipped vodka and Frangelico served in a salted rimmed glass).

Where is your favorite place to drink when not on duty?
My house, because I don't get in trouble for taking off my clothes there.

Who are the hardest customers to please?
It's a mix between the recently 21-year-olds and the above-55-year-olds that feel entitled.

If you weren't a bartender... what career would you choose?
Either a stripper or a naked baker that goes around town doing private baking lessons.

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

SOUTH BEACH
Closed for remodeling.

BARCODE
With the longest daily happy hours in Montrose (8am–10pm), this neighborhood watering hole is very popular. Drag shows Wednesday–Sunday. Karaoke Monday & Wednesday. 817 Fairview • 713.526.2625 • tcsshowbar.com.

TONY'S CORNER POCKET
This comfortable club has one of the friendliest bar staffs in town. Amateur dance contest each Thurs., Fri., & Sat. at 11pm. Opens daily at noon. 817 W. Dallas • 713.571.7870 tonyscornerpocketbar.com.

VIVIANA'S
Happening weekend-only gay dance club with Latin DJs, singers, talent shows & Sunday strippers. 4624 Dacoma • 713.681.4104.

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BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION

HALO VIDEO BAR
The only LGBT dance club in Bryan/College station, this sleek spot is open Thurs.–Sat. smack in the middle of Aggieland. 121 North Main • 979.823.6174 • halobcs.com.

GALVESTON

23RD ST. STATION
The bar features daily drink specials and the weekend is filled with pulsing music, hot dancers, drag shows, and a Sunday Tea Dance. 1706 23rd St. • 409.621.1808.

ROBERT'S LAFITTE
The Island institution features a private patio with swimming pool. On Sat. and Sun. nights, the Ladies of Lafitte show takes the stage. 2501 Avenue Q (at 25th) • 409.765.9092.

RUMORS BEACH BAR
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RANCH HILL SALOON
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THE ROOM BAR AND LOUNGE
This bar and video lounge has a laid-back atmosphere including daily drink specials, karaoke, free pool, drag shows, and live DJs several nights a week. 4915 FM 2920 • 281.907.6866 • roombarspring.com.



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By Lilly Roddy

Mars Goes Retrograde

Put your plans in action.

May is the month to put as many of your plans into action as you can. This is because Mars, planet of action, will be going retrograde from June 1 through September 30. The upcoming Mars retrograde is not good for scheduling surgery, starting new projects, pushing yourself too hard on your gym workouts, contacting new clients, or opening new areas for sales. While Mars is retrograde, reconnect with all of the people you've made contact with during May to make good use of that four-month retrograde.

ARIES (March 21–April 19). Career and long-term security continues to be at the top of your list. This is a very good month to look for a better position, start your own business, or, if you are older, to consider retiring. You are more direct than usual this month, especially around the 11th, 12th, and 13th. Relationships can also be more tense, as you are opening up and expressing your feelings about the future of your partnership. You are looking for change and improvement. In the last part of the month, you are drawn to social groups and business associations. Don't be afraid to take a leadership role there! Finances are the other major theme this month. You are definitely looking for new ways to free yourself from economic oppression.

TAURUS (April 20–May 20). Happy Birthday to the Bulls and Cows. This is your personal yearly cycle of review and renewal! This is also a big month for you, Taureans, as Uranus (the planet of feeling trapped and bored and needing to reinvent yourself) enters your sign on the 15th for an approximately seven-year visit. The last time Uranus was in Taurus was about 83 years ago! However, you had some contact with Uranus about 20 years ago when you made some major changes. You will again make some changes over the next few years, as you may feel restless, bored, and not well-rested while this planet is in your sign. By midmonth, you are more focused on your career and getting ahead.



GEMINI (May 21–June 21). As this month opens, you are trying to find some time to get away for a quiet retreat. While your social activities will keep you busy in the early part of the month, you should be able to find some quiet time after the 13th. You are continuing to get your financial affairs in order, as well as paying more attention to your health, diet, and exercise regimen. Relationships, both business and personal, require some serious attention. You are dealing with trust issues. We all know communication is the key, but opening up about yourself and your fears is not easy for you. A neutral party such as a therapist, minister, or good friend could act as your referee and help open those lines of communication. Act in your own best self-interest, and it will be easy to know what to do!

CANCER (June 22–July 22). Career and relationships are the main topics for May. Last month, Mercury was retrograde in your career sector and you were able to look back and assess where you have been. May is the month to put those new ideas and plans into action. Part of that new plan is to be more open to those who want to help and support you in business and personal relationships. For many of you, this is a good month to put some time into renewing those emotional bonds by getting away for a weekend or adding a date night to your relationship routine. You are putting lots of pressure on yourself to perform at your best. Take a step back and make sure that you are doing what you want to do, and not just what is expected of you. In the latter half of the month you are ready to take a step back and find some peace and solitude. That will help your creative processes and renew interest in your work!

LEO (July 23–August 22). May is a busy month for you, with lots of activity in your life in multiple areas. You are paying much more attention to your career and where you are headed. That gets a huge boost after midmonth, when you may be starting your own business. You are definitely looking for something to spark your interest! You are still in an excellent time for communications, travel, writing, or just hanging out with your friends. By midmonth, relationships are in the spotlight. If you are single or just bored, this is a good time to put yourself out there. If you are involved, you will need to put some energy into renewing your intimacy and sexual desires. If you are unhappy, this energy could easily push that relationship to an end. By midmonth, you are more involved with social organizations and with your friends.

VIRGO (August 23–September 22). You are getting back into your routines this month. You continue to work on getting your finances in order, while taking care of things you have been putting off for a while. Relationships also demand more from you. You should be improving your intimate bonds by making sure you are doing more things as a couple. Your creative factor is very strong, and actually gets better as we get into mid-May. You may also want to do some teaching, book publishing, or expanding your presence on social media. Near the end of the month, you are more focused on your career. Get all of your new projects started before June 1. Finally, you will be paying a lot more attention to your health, starting this month and continuing through the end of December. This is a great time for exercise or diet changes!

LIBRA (September 23–October 23). There has been so much relationship focus going on with you over the last two months, and that continues in May. Mercury was retrograde in your relationship sector until the end of last month, making you look at past events in all of your partnerships. But now is the time to move forward on making commitments, or ending the ones that have outlived their usefulness. Home and family are also keeping you on your toes this month. This is really a great month to do some spring cleaning, home repairs, or possibly even relocating. You may need to assert yourself with your family in order to be heard and acknowledged. By midmonth, you are a bit calmer. The end of the month is much smoother, and you are ready for some relaxation. The pressure to keep up the pace is still there, but you need to breathe!

SCORPIO (October 24–November 21). Relationships are a big part of the agenda for this month. If you are single and interested, this is a great month for you to get out there and meet someone! If you are involved, this same energy helps to improve your ongoing associations. This is also a very good time for business partnerships! You are still reworking your home and work environment, working extra-hard to get everything in order. This is a super month for you to work on an improved exercise or diet program. You are being very careful in all of your communications. You have some very strong feelings, and you want to express yourself fully. However, you are keeping a lid on your volatility by letting it out a little at a time! By the end of the month, you are paying more attention to getting your finances in order.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22–December 21). You are in a big period of reassessing how you use your talents and skills. For some, this is a time to look for another job or even a totally different career path. You are being frugal with your money! Improving your health is going to take on much more urgency after mid-May. You will not want to be trapped by bad habits or old routines. This is a good month to join a gym, or just add more effort to your workouts. Your tolerance for lazy coworkers is especially low, and you will be speaking out about this! Near the end of the month, relationships become the main focus—a good time to meet someone new or reinvest in your ongoing relationship. Watch your driving this month, because you will not be very patient!

CAPRICORN (December 22–January 19). With home and family driving your agenda over the last couple of months, you are finally ready to pay more attention to yourself, rather than to the obligations you feel toward others. This is a very good month to invest in you! Your career drive is very strong with Saturn, your ruler, in your sign for the next 18 months. This is a great time to start your own business or look for a better position that provides you with more upward mobility. You have not been very patient this

continued on page 109



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Photos by Dalton DeHart and Edgardo Aguilar



On March 24, **Don Gill** presented "LIVE" 2018 at Tony's Corner Pocket. Pictured are **An' Marie Gill, Mark C. Brown, Deborah Duncan, Andy Cerota,** and Gill.



On April 5, Pride Portraits unveiled the "Be Visible" Houston Pride Wall at Jenni's Noodle House in the Heights. Pictured are **Jenni Tranweaver, Mayor pro-tem Ellen Cohen, Jim Obergefell, Eric Edward Schell, Crimson Jordan,** and **Hugo Perez.**



On April 7, the Gay 10K was held at MacGregor Park. Pictured are **Stephanie Warren, Christi Murphy,** and **Donna Early** with two of the runners.



On April 7, the Human Rights Campaign hosted its RISE! Houston Gala at the Marriott Marquis Hotel. Pictured are **Jussie Smollett** and **Karamo Brown.**



On April 11, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce hosted Brewing Up Business at Combined Arms. Pictured are **Luu Vo, Joshua Wathen, Kevin Doffing, Natasha Lee Martin, Gary Wood, Jessica Gibson, Mike Sehzue, Scott French, Roy Alvarez, Jr.,** and **Shawn Kuehn.**



On Apirl 11, Equality Texas and the Houston Police Department hosted a news conference on LGBTQ issues. Pictured are **Jessica Zyrie, Lou Weaver, E.J. Joseph, Ed Michel, Chuck Smith,** and police chief **Art Acevedo.**



On April 11, the University of Houston's Graduate College of Social Work hosted "Living the Vision with Laverne Cox." Pictured are **Alan Dettlaff, Renu Khator, mayor Sylvester Turner, Vince Pryor,** and **Ashley Turner.**



On April 18, the Diana Foundation hosted its April meeting at Ginger & Fork. Pictured are **Gary Baumann, Nathan Wright, Diana Lovelace, Corbin Young, Dan Maxwell,** and **Josh Snellgrove**



On April 19, the Alley Theatre hosted ActOut featuring *Cleo*. Pictured are (back row) Jim Benton, **Damon Price**, and **Tina Berry**, and (front row) **Robert McMillan**, and **Lauren Peletier**.



On April 21, the Bering Support Network hosted Oodles of Noodles at Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. Pictured are **Laura Wiggs, Howard Kanelakos, Rev. Diane McGehee, Larry Leutwyler,** and **Mary Parker.**



On April 21, the Houston Gaymers hosted its Annual Drag Show at Rich's. Pictured are performers.



On April 22, M.E.N. Incorporated 2018 hosted its 17th Annual Crawfish Boil at Christia Adair Park. Pictured are (back row) **DeAndre Hargrove, Ben Aderholt, Daniel Charles, Desmond Bertrannd-Pitts, Jonah Baker, Pappa Widdon, and Justin Bertrand-Pits;** and (front row) **Trevor Martin, Wonnetta McNair,** and **Clayborne Crockett.**

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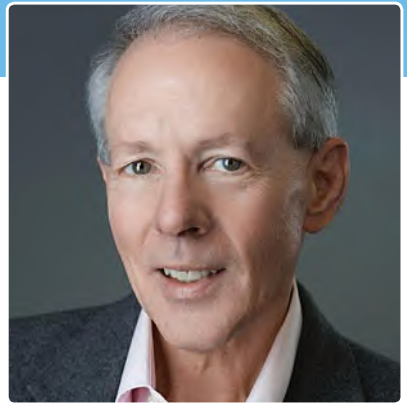
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