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GAYEST & GREATEST AWARDS

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OCT. '19

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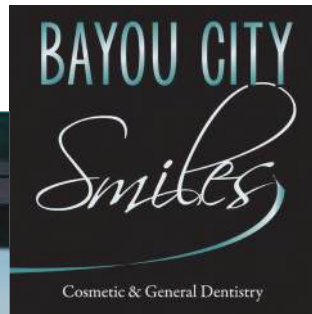
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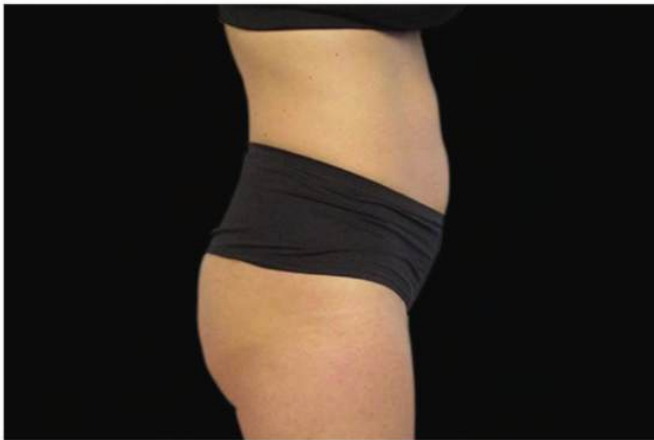


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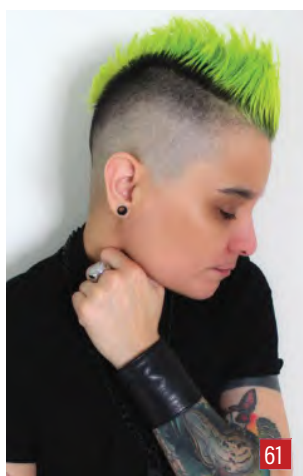


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ON THE COVER



Legendary trans entertainer

TOMMIE ROSS wins this year's
LGBTQ Community Vision Award. Pg. 56

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Great Design is a Way of Life

The first Monday of this month marks the beginning of the 2019–2020 Supreme Court term. On the next day, SCOTUS hears three separate cases that will decide whether Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects LGBTQ people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Tuesday, October 8, promises to be one of the most important days in LGBTQ legal history, so pay careful attention to those opening hearings. As columnist Monica Roberts notes in her October column, “No matter which way the cases go, they will undoubtedly be a hot issue during the 2020 elections.”

Fortunately, as we head into the 2020 elections, the Democratic presidential hopefuls seem eager to discuss LGBTQ concerns. In this issue, writer Lisa Keen recaps the first national presidential forum devoted to LGBTQ issues, and previews a similar forum that takes place on October 10.

At the local level, there are several outspoken leaders stepping up to represent their communities in public office. In this

October edition of OUTSMART's Out for Change series, we introduce you to six openly LGBTQ candidates vying for Houston City Council positions for the first time.

In another hopeful sign of progress, Fort Bend County unanimously approved LGBTQ employee protections last month, writer Lourdes Zavaleta reports. But that progress won't continue unless we vote! This year's voter registration deadline is Monday, October 7, and you can vote early at any polling location October 23–November 2, or in your neighborhood precinct on Election Day, November 5.

Writer Brandon Wolf looks at the Montrose Center's role in building LGBTQ Houston organizations. The Center also hosts its annual Out for Good dinner on October 11, where our fabulous cover star Tommie Ross will be presented with this year's LGBTQ Community Vision Award.

If you're searching for entertainment, look no further than the Houston Grand Opera's *Saul*. Writer Don Maines previews this gay biblical gay drama depicting the love story between Jonathan and David. Maines also

chats with bisexual actor Blake Jackson, who plays Hänschen in Theatre Under The Stars' *Spring Awakening*. And Bill Arning depicts the unique stylings of out artist Mark Ponder, while writer Sam Byrd gives us a sneak peek at Arning's provocative new art exhibit, *No Trigger Warnings*.

Finally, check out our 2019 Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Award winners, and join OUTSMART at our awards ceremony on Tuesday, October 22, from 6 to 9 p.m. at ReBar, located at 202 Tuam St.

We hope to see you there!

Greg Jeu and the staff of OUTSMART



Greg Jeu
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Supreme Court Preview: 'The stakes could not be higher.'

Current cases could have the most profound consequences yet on LGBTQ civil rights.

By LISA KEEN

Here's the blunt reality: the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings on three cases it will hear arguments about this month could have the most profound consequences yet on LGBTQ people. Why?

The three cases ask whether an existing federal law that prohibits discrimination in employment "because of sex" applies where discrimination is motivated by an employee's sexual orientation or transgender status.

The existing law in question is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That law states: "It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer [of 15 or more people] to . . . discriminate against any individual . . . because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."

LGBTQ legal activists say that discriminating against an employee because his or her spouse or sexual partner is of the same sex constitutes discrimination "because of sex." They say discrimination against an employee whose gender identity differs from the sex attributes ascribed to them at birth constitutes discrimination "because of sex."

Attorneys on the other side, which includes the Trump administration, say Congress did not intend to include sexual orientation and gender identity under "because of sex," and sex discrimination is when "members of one sex are exposed to disadvantageous terms to which members of the other sex are not exposed."

Both sides believe an explicit reading of the law favors them.

"If the Court reads the Title VII statute properly—and simply applies the literal words on the page—we will win," said Jenny Pizer, senior counsel to Lambda Legal, who has submitted friend-of-the-court briefs on behalf of the gay and transgender employees in the three cases. "Having the Supreme Court confirm that understanding will have enormous, pow-



ISTOCK IMAGES

LGBTQ legal activists say that discriminating against an employee because his or her spouse or sexual partner is of the same sex, or whose gender identity differs from the sex attributes ascribed to them at birth, constitutes discrimination "because of sex."

erful deterrent and remedial effects." And because similar language is used in federal laws covering housing, education, credit, and health care, said Pizer, a win in these Title VII cases "will be tremendous precedents for future litigation in those areas."

"The stakes for our community could not be higher," said Jon Davidson, chief counsel to Freedom for All Americans and former national legal director for Lambda Legal. Davidson characterized the three cases before the court as "the most consequential cases for LGBTQ people since the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality, and the most important cases about transgender people ever heard by the high court."

The Alliance Defending Freedom, a group that has spearheaded numerous lawsuits to diminish equal protection for LGBTQ people, has also been sending out emails telling its sup-

porters that the decisions will have enormous consequences. ADF says that if the court allows "sex" to include "gender identity," the result could "undermine equal opportunities for women and girls" in athletics, force women's shelters to accept men, and force schools to "open locker rooms, restrooms, and showers to men who claim a female identity."

Many Supreme Court observers expect the trio of Title VII cases to be the most-watched cases of the 2019–20 term, which begins on October 7.

So, what are some of the most important things LGBTQ people need to know about these upcoming cases?

The Court's Timeline

Oral argument will begin at 10 a.m. ET on Tuesday, October 8, at the U.S. Supreme Court. The first hour will be spent on two cases in-

volving sexual orientation discrimination; the second hour will be spent on transgender discrimination. People who live in the Washington D.C. area can spend many hours waiting in line and maybe get into the court chambers to see and hear a few minutes (seats reserved for visitors are rotated). The proceedings are not televised, so the next-best bet is to read a transcript of the arguments, which will be made available at supremecourt.gov later in the day. Audio recordings are available at the same site later in the week.

Basic Facts of the Three Cases

There are three cases, all involving Title VII. Two ask whether Title VII covers sexual orientation discrimination. They are *Altitude Express v. Zarda*, from New York and the Second Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, and *Bostock v. Clayton County*, from Georgia and the Eleventh Circuit. Arguments in these two cases have been consolidated and will be discussed in the first hour.

The *Zarda* lawsuit began in 2010, when a Long Island skydiving company called Altitude Express fired one of its instructors, Daniel Zarda. The company said it fired Zarda over a customer service problem; Zarda said it fired him because he disclosed to a jumper that he was gay. Zarda filed a lawsuit and, though he died in a skydiving accident in 2014, his estate carried on the litigation with the help of Lambda Legal. They won at the Second Circuit, but the employer has appealed to the Supreme Court.

The *Bostock* lawsuit began in 2013 when the Clayton County Juvenile System in Georgia fired a longtime employee, Gerald Bostock, after he openly acknowledged joining a gay softball team. The county said it fired him for “conduct unbecoming a county employee;” Bostock said it fired him because he is gay. The Eleventh Circuit dismissed his lawsuit, noting it had previously ruled sexual orientation is not covered until Title VII. Bostock appealed to the Supreme Court.

The third case, which will be argued in the second hour, involves discrimination based on transgender status. *Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC* originated in 2014 when funeral home director and embalmer Aimee Stephens filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Stephens said the Harris Funeral Homes fired her after seven years on the job, two weeks after she informed the employer she would be transitioning from male to female. The funeral home said it fired Stephens because Stephens refused to abide by the company’s dress code requiring that male employees wear a company-furnished men’s business suit. The EEOC found Harris Funeral Homes in violation of Title VII, and the Sixth Circuit agreed. Harris Funeral Homes appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Prospects for Victory

To win at case at the Supreme Court, one must have the support of at least five justices. In the past, LGBTQ people could pretty much rely on getting that majority from the court’s four generally liberal justices (Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan) and the moderate Justice, Anthony Kennedy. Kennedy, in fact, became legendary for providing the critical fifth vote on marriage equality, and for striking down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). He also led 6-3 majorities in striking down sodomy laws and laws seeking to gut nondiscrimination ordinances.

But Kennedy retired last year, and with the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, the new court has a solid five-person majority of very conservative justices. The new justices include Brett Kavanaugh, whose answers around LGBTQ issues during his confirmation hearing were alarmingly evasive to LGBTQ activists. They also include Neil Gorsuch, who wrote an article criticizing “liberals” for filing lawsuits on “everything from gay marriage to assisted suicide” to achieve their “social agenda.”

Hence, the prospects for victory have diminished in the past year, to say the least.

Precedent Favors a Pro-LGBT Outcome

One thing leaning in favor of the LGBTQ parties in these cases is precedent—the previous

Supreme Court rulings in two cases.

In one case, decided in 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that discrimination based on sex included discrimination based on gender-based stereotypes. The case was *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, in which a female employee at the accounting giant Price Waterhouse was rejected for partnership because some the top officials at the firm considered her too masculine. The Supreme Court plurality said the employer’s refusal to promote the woman was “motivated by stereotypical notions about women’s proper deportment” and that it constituted a violation of Title VII unless the employer could prove “by clear and convincing evidence” that it would have refused the promotion regardless of the employee’s gender.

In the second case, decided in 1998, the Supreme Court, led by conservative Justice Antonin Scalia, said Title VII’s prohibition against sex discrimination, including a prohibition against sexual harassment, could be used to protect an employee from sexual harassment by an employee of the same sex. The case was *Oncale v. Sundowner*.

The caveat: while lower courts must abide by U.S. Supreme Court precedent, the Supreme Court itself does not. The court has famously reversed precedent in cases involving segregation, interracial marriage, and, corporate

SUPREME COURT CONTINUED ON PAGE 110



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Important Facts About DOVATO

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

What is the Most Important Information I Should Know about DOVATO?

If you have both human immunodeficiency virus-1 (HIV-1) and hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection, DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- **Resistant HBV infection.** Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV infection before you start treatment with DOVATO. If you have HIV-1 and hepatitis B, the hepatitis B virus can change (mutate) during your treatment with DOVATO and become harder to treat (resistant). It is not known if DOVATO is safe and effective in people who have HIV-1 and HBV infection.
- **Worsening of HBV infection.** If you have HIV-1 and HBV infection, your HBV may get worse (flare-up) if you stop taking DOVATO. A “flare-up” is when your HBV infection suddenly returns in a worse way than before. Worsening liver disease can be serious and may lead to death.
 - Do not run out of DOVATO. Refill your prescription or talk to your healthcare provider before your DOVATO is all gone.
 - **Do not stop DOVATO without first talking to your healthcare provider.** If you stop taking DOVATO, your healthcare provider will need to check your health often and do blood tests regularly for several months to check your liver.

What is DOVATO?

DOVATO is a prescription medicine that is used without other antiretroviral medicines to treat HIV-1 infection in adults: who have not received antiretroviral medicines in the past, **and** without known resistance to the medicines dolutegravir or lamivudine. HIV-1 is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It is not known if DOVATO is safe and effective in children.

Who should not take DOVATO?

Do Not Take DOVATO if You:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine that contains dolutegravir or lamivudine.
- take dofetilide.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before using DOVATO?

Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have kidney problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. One of the medicines in DOVATO (dolutegravir) may harm your unborn baby.
 - **You should not take DOVATO if you are planning to become pregnant or during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.** Your healthcare provider may prescribe a different medicine if you are planning to become pregnant or become pregnant during treatment with DOVATO.
 - If you can become pregnant, your healthcare provider will perform a pregnancy test before you start treatment with DOVATO.
 - If you can become pregnant, you should consistently use effective birth control (contraception) during treatment with DOVATO.
 - Tell your healthcare provider right away if you are planning to become pregnant, you become pregnant, or think you may be pregnant during treatment with DOVATO.

Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you: (cont'd)

- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take DOVATO.**
 - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
 - One of the medicines in DOVATO (lamivudine) passes into your breastmilk.
 - 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, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

Some medicines interact with DOVATO. 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 DOVATO.
- **Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider.** Your healthcare provider can tell you if it is safe to take DOVATO with other medicines.

What are Possible Side Effects of DOVATO?

DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- Those in the “What is the Most Important Information I Should Know about DOVATO?” section.
- **Allergic reactions. Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with DOVATO. Stop taking DOVATO 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 may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during treatment with DOVATO. Liver problems, including liver failure, have also happened in people without a history of liver disease or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver.
Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get 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; and/or pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area.
- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Lactic acidosis is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death. **Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms that could be signs of lactic acidosis:** feel very weak or tired; unusual (not normal) muscle pain; trouble breathing; stomach pain with nausea and vomiting; feel cold, especially in your arms and legs; feel dizzy or lightheaded; and/or a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Lactic acidosis can also lead to severe liver problems,** which can lead to death. Your liver may become large (hepatomegaly) and you may develop fat in your liver (steatosis). **Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the signs or symptoms of liver problems which are listed above under “Liver problems.” You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or severe liver problems if you are female or very overweight (obese).**



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[†]As compared with 3-drug regimens.



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Living with HIV

What are Possible Side Effects of DOVATO (cont'd)?

- **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 new symptoms after you start taking DOVATO.
- **The most common side effects of DOVATO include:** headache; diarrhea; nausea; trouble sleeping; and tiredness.

These are not all the possible side effects of DOVATO. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. 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.

Where Can I Find More Information?

- Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
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The LGBTQ Presidential Debates

Democratic candidates are grilled on their voting records.

By LISA KEEN

Several Democratic presidential candidates seemed to throw President Obama under the metaphorical bus recently as they sought to illustrate how they didn't take as long as other Democrats to "evolve" on LGBTQ issues. Former Vice President Joe Biden was taken to task for having characterized Vice President Mike Pence as a "decent guy." And U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris were grilled over their early opposition to gender transition surgery for prison inmates. But nobody asked South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg about his recent attack on "LGBT media" which he claimed criticizes him for being either too gay or not gay enough.

Such was the first national presidential forum devoted to LGBTQ issues for the 2020 presidential campaign. The forum was livestreamed from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and sponsored by the statewide LGBTQ group One Iowa, the national LGBTQ media group GLAAD, *The Advocate* LGBTQ newsmagazine, and the local *Cedar Rapids Gazette* newspaper.

Transgender actress and businesswoman Angelica Ross emceed the event which gave 10 Democratic presidential candidates, including four of the top five polling candidates, 10 minutes each on stage. During that time, they were each asked to say what they would do on LGBTQ issues during their first 100 days as president, and then answer two to three additional questions from a representative of one of the event's sponsors: *Gazette* columnist Lyz Lenz, One Iowa policy director Keenan Crow, and *The Advocate's* editor-in-chief Zach Stafford.

Three of the top-polling Democratic candidates did not show up: Senator Bernie Sanders, former U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke, and businessman Andrew Yang. Sanders was in the middle of a four-day tour of college campuses in the Carolinas and spent Friday evening at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Erica Barz, communications director for One Iowa, said O'Rourke and Yang did not give any specific reason when they declined to participate.

Openly gay presidential hopeful Pete



The next national LGBTQ forum for presidential candidates will be broadcast live by CNN. The forum, co-sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign, will take place on Thursday, October 10, at 7 p.m.

Buttigieg got a loud and prolonged standing ovation when he was called to the stage, seventh in the line of 10 candidates. Buttigieg's appearance at the LGBTQ forum came just two days after he told a SiriusXM host, "I can't even read the LGBT media anymore, because it's all 'He's too gay, not gay enough, wrong kind of gay.'" Buttigieg did not specify which LGBTQ media outlets he believed expressed such criticism, and many LGBTQ media outlets were quick to point out that it has been mainstream media that have questioned Buttigieg's expression of being gay. Most notorious of the mainstream media articles was one published by the *New Republic* magazine. The article, which has since been taken down from the magazine's website, was a commentary by gay writer Dale Peck that referred to Buttigieg as "Mary Pete" and said the only difference between Buttigieg and all the other white men running for president is "what he does with his dick (and possibly his ass)."

During his opening remark, Buttigieg criticized U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson for referring to transgender women as "big hairy men" trying to get into homeless shelters for women. Buttigieg said that if anyone in his administration spoke the way Carson did about transgender people, they would be fired.

The Advocate's Stafford asked Buttigieg how he would feel as president knowing he could still not make a blood donation because of the Food and Drug Administration's re-

strictions on gay men giving blood. Buttigieg lamented that the FDA policy is not "medically informed." Stafford also asked Buttigieg how he would handle religious exemptions from non-discrimination laws. Buttigieg said he thinks it is an "insult to religion" when such exemptions are sought.

The second-strongest applause from the live audience came in a boisterous standing ovation for Senator Warren, who was slated ninth out of the 10 candidates. Warren ignored the directive to say what she would do in her first 100 days as president. Instead, with her voice sounding gripped with emotion, she read the names of 18 transgender women of color who have been victims of hate crimes in 2019.

"Equality is far off for many people in this country," said Warren, "but the cost of inequality for transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, is now a moment of crisis."

Warren, who has become well-known for having articulated "a plan" to fix many of the nation's problems, said President Trump has a plan, too—to turn "people against people, white against black, turn straight against gay and trans, turn Christian against Muslim." His strategy, she said, was to have these conflicts distract the nation so people "won't notice that Donald Trump and his buddies are robbing the rest of this country of its wealth and its dignity."

Gazette columnist Lyz Lenz noted that in 2012, Warren didn't support transition surgery

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



EXPLORE

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for inmates but that she had changed her mind this year. She asked how to get others on board. Warren replied, “Fight for it.”

When Lenz asked Warren to discuss what being “moral” means to her, Warren cited a biblical passage from Matthew 25, in which giving food and solace to a stranger is equated with giving solace to the Lord. The story, she said, illustrated two things for her: “There is God, or goodness, or power in every single human being,” said Warren. “And we are not called on to [only] have a good heart and smile and open mind. We are called on to act, and that is what we will do.”

Asked what she would do if the U.S. Supreme Court rules against including LGBTQ people from the protections of Title VII of the federal civil-rights law, Warren said, “We have a Congress we can hold accountable and Congress can decide we all are equal. That is the fight I am ready to lead.”

The Candidates’ Records

Applause for little-known candidate Joe Sestak, a former admiral and U.S. representative, was light, as it was for long-shot candidates Marianne Williamson and U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard. While Gabbard reminded the audience she earned a 100 percent positive voting

record in Congress from the Human Rights Campaign during the most recent session, she was gently prodded to address the fact that, in the early 2000s, she worked against marriage equality in Hawaii. A question submitted by an audience member asked Gabbard “How can LGBTQ people trust you?”

Gabbard said her record in Congress “speaks for itself.” She noted that, when she served in the military, she served alongside LGBTQ Americans, “got to know them in the most extreme circumstances. We had each other’s backs.”

In addition to Warren and Gabbard, others had to account for their past votes against LGBTQ interests.

The *Gazette’s* Lenz asked Senator Harris how transgender people could trust her, given that as California’s Attorney General she submitted a brief in support of denying transgender surgery to prison inmates. Harris said that as attorney general, she had to represent the state agencies. But she said that later, “when I learned what they were doing behind the scenes, I had them change the policies.”

Lenz went after Biden, too, noting that, as a senator in the 1990s, he voted for the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy banning LGBTQ people from the military, and the Defense of Marriage Act that barred federal recognition of marriages between same-sex couples. She noted he later voted

to repeal both those laws, but he recently referred to Vice President Pence as a “decent guy.”

“You’re a lovely person,” quipped Biden, who seemed thrown off balance by the questions.

“I’m just asking the questions people want to know,” said Lenz.

“Fire away,” said Biden.

Lenz continued, saying that Pence has a well-established reputation of being opposed to equal rights for LGBTQ people.

“How can [LGBTQ people] trust you won’t compromise on issues that put them at risk in order to compromise with people like Pence?”

Biden reminded the audience that he “didn’t have to go through any period of adjustment” to support marriage equality for same-sex couples.

“I didn’t have to evolve,” he said.

The word “evolve” became a politically loaded term during the early years of the Obama administration as then President Obama was initially reluctant to support marriage equality. By the start of his second term, Obama expressed support for allowing same-sex couples to marry. His widely publicized statement came just days after Biden gave an interview saying he was “absolutely comfortable” with marriage equality.

Biden said his reference to Pence as “decent” was “just a way to speak” when you have to work with someone, but he added, “I don’t think Trump is all that decent.”



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U.S. Senator Cory Booker was quick to point out that he supported LGBTQ equality from the start of his political career “before a lot of national leaders had evolved.” He demonstrated a deep familiarity with LGBTQ institutions and history, referring to the work of the Hetrick-Martin Institute in New York that helps LGBT youth; referring by name to Ja’leyah-Jamar, a black transgender woman in Kansas City who became the 18th transgender woman of color to be killed by a hate crime this year; and noting that 30 percent of LGBTQ youth report missing school out of fear for their safety. He also noted that he stood up for marriage equality at a time when few others in public office had. As mayor of Newark, for instance, he refused to preside over male-female marriage ceremonies until same-sex marriages could also marry.

Booker said he was “a lifelong ally on these issues” and, as president, would have a “comprehensive agenda on Day One.”

U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, who, like Booker, has been polling in the low single digits, seemed to make a warm impression on the audience, even though her initial comments were interrupted by someone shouting from the back of the audience. When a member of the audience who had been in Orlando’s Pulse nightclub when a gunman killed 49 people asked about gun control, Klobuchar beckoned him to the stage and gave him a hug.

“I’m proud of how the LGBT community has stood with other groups to get gun legislation passed,” said Klobuchar. And she said she “would not fold” to the National Rifle Association in her efforts to pass gun control.

Former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro, the last of the 10 candidates heard at the forum, said he found Carson’s remark “disgusting” and said he should “step down” from the position.

At one point during the forum, one of the moderators announced that the event was trending at the top of social media. They did not identify which media. According to Twitter, #LGBTQforum got 31,200 Twitter posts, putting it in fourth place behind the #StormingArea51, a hashtag for people interested in a mass-trespassing event at a Nevada Air Force testing range associated with reports of UFO activity. That issue drew 73,000 posts.

The next national LGBTQ forum for presidential candidates will be broadcast live by CNN. The forum, co-sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign, will take place on Thursday, October 10, at 7 p.m. Nine candidates have confirmed participation so far: Biden, Booker, Buttigieg, Castro, Harris, Klobuchar, O’Rourke, businessman Tom Steyer, and Warren. CNN reports that both Sanders and Yang have said scheduling conflicts prevent them from participating. Moderators will include Anderson Cooper, Don Lemon, Dana Bash, and Chris Cuomo.

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QUEER THINGS to DO



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Fabulous Event

Intersex advocates Koomah (l) and Mo Cortez keynote day two of the 2019 Gender Infinity Conference, which coincides with Intersex Awareness Day on October 26. *Inset:* Transgender advocate and model Jessica Zyrie keynotes day one of the event.

COMMUNITY

October 25-26

Gender Infinity Conference

Every October, we commemorate LGBTQ History Month as well as six other queer holidays. This time around, Space City is home to an abundance of celebrations that uplift our community. From Coming Out Day parties to a Latino HIV/AIDS Awareness Day festival, both the LGBTQ and wider Houston communities will be

reminded of the important roles queer folks have played in creating the world we live in today.

Space City's annual Gender Infinity Conference—which coincidentally lands on Intersex Awareness Day—is just one of these fabulous events. The two-day 2019 conference takes place at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, and features over

50 workshops discussing gender, faith, medical transitions, and more. Join friends, families, allies, and healthcare providers alike and take in speeches by this year's keynote speakers: transgender model and advocate Jessica Zyrie, and the creators of The Houston Intersex Society, Koomah and Mo Cortez.

tinyurl.com/y5rollcn

NIGHTLIFE

OCTOBER 12

Pearl Bar's Sixth Anniversary

Pearl Bar turns six this year, and the lesbian club will celebrate with an on-site party. Owned by LGBTQ activist Julie Mabry, Pearl Bar debuted in 2014 as a safe space for queer women to drink, dance, and mingle. Mabry's creation, along with her activist work, has been recognized by several queer Houston organizations. In 2018, Mabry was named a Pride Houston honorary grand marshal, and in 2019 she received the Human Rights Campaign's Community Equality Award. More information on Pearl Bar's sixth-anniversary celebration will be featured in next month's edition of OutSmart magazine.





STAGE
OCTOBER 25

AC2: Anderson Cooper and Andy Cohen

Come and watch gay superstars Anderson Cooper (far left) and Andy Cohen spend an “intimate evening” in Houston. This is the second installment of Cooper and Cohen’s national buddy tour. Two years ago, the television hosts spoke to fans in Houston about their friendship, their careers, and breaking news. This year’s Houston visit takes place at the Smart Financial Centre at Sugar Land, and this time around Cooper and Cohen promise “deeper talks and shallower tales.”
tinyurl.com/yxus72yy

SOCIAL
October 10
PEARL RUNNERS SOCIAL RUN
This month, Pearl Bar Houston encourages fitness and community through a series of social runs beginning at the Washington Avenue bar. All levels of runners are welcome, and the event is followed by beer and conversation at Pearl.
tinyurl.com/y5z845q3

FESTIVAL
October 12
LADIES ON THE LAKE
Grab your girl crew and head over to Magnolia Garden Park for a Lesbians of Color music festival. An abundance of female artists will join together for this one-of-a-kind show and DJ competition. Vendor opportunities are available for this family-friendly event, which is open to all LGBTQ allies.
tinyurl.com/y2ojvtuu

COMMUNITY
October 12
COMING OUT WEEKEND
Celebrate National Coming Out Day at Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon. There will be entertainment, auctions, and dancing, with proceeds to benefit OutReach United’s 2019 beneficiaries: The Montrose Center, the Dalton DeHart Photographic Foundation, Out for Education, Combined Arms LGBTQ Veterans Group, and M.E.N. Incorporated.
tinyurl.com/y3o25t5y

COMMUNITY
October 13
DRAG QUEEN STORY HOUR
Drag Queen Story Hour of Galveston Island, a program that features drag queens reading LGBTQ-affirming picture books to children, takes place at Galveston’s Own Farmers Market. Enjoy stories by drag queens Kymber Devine and Athena Sapphire, as well as the free book giveaways every hour.
tinyurl.com/y2tl63mz

October 11 is Coming Out Day

COMMUNITY
October 15-19
JUNTOS: A LATINX CELEBRATION
Impulse Group Houston, an international organization dedicated to promoting healthier lifestyles among LGBTQ men, celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month with Juntos, Houston’s first Queer Latinx festival. The group hosts different events daily, including live figure drawing, queer loteria, and more.
tinyurl.com/y6yght3

October 15 is National Latino HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

COMMUNITY
October 19
TROPICAL COUNTRY: A TRAIL RIDE TO THE ISLAND
The Texas Gay Rodeo Association hosts a fundraiser at 23rd Street Station in Galveston. The event features live entertainment, prizes, live auctions, raffles, and more.
tinyurl.com/y533m53s

October 19 is National LGBT Center Awareness Day

ART
October 20
BAYOU CITY BE ALL
DiverseWorks presents this Evening of Performance, Fashion, and Music Beyond the Gender Binary at Sharespace. The one-of-a-kind experience is a community-driven project that surveys queer and gender-nonconforming traditions across Houston, and features works by performance artists Black TM, Tania Breton, Junior Fernandez, iPOCA Collective, Jazmin Jett, and more.
tinyurl.com/y48wsx7m

October 20 is Spirit Day

COMMUNITY
October 25-27
INTERSEX AWARENESS
The Houston Intersex Society (THIS) hosts several events for Intersex Awareness Day, an international holiday celebrated on October 26. On the 25th, the organization will be honored as Houston City Hall is illuminated in the colors of the Intersex Pride flag. THIS founders Koomah and Mo Cortez will keynote the Gender Infinity Conference on the 25th and 26th. Then the group presents an Intersex Awareness Day show at 14 Pews on the 27th.
tinyurl.com/yxn2awmc

SOCIAL
October 26
CORPORATIONS COME OUT
Companies and their employees show support for the LGBTQ community at the Montrose Center. The annual event is an opportunity to learn about the community and network with LGBTQ and ally professionals.
tinyurl.com/y6pyqlac

October 26 is Intersex Awareness Day

SOCIAL
October 26
HALLOWEEN STREET PARTY
From Friday through Sunday nights, Stanford Street will be closed for Eagle Houston’s annual Halloween street party. The event features a DJ, drag performances, and a cash prize for the winner of Saturday night’s costume party.
tinyurl.com/y37m94g8



COMMUNITY
October 29
ADAM RIPPON
Olympic figure-skater Adam Rippon, the first openly gay U.S. male athlete to win a medal in a Winter Olympics, discusses his new memoir, *Beautiful on the Outside*, at the Montrose Center. The event features commentary by transgender activist and model Jessica Zyrie, and tickets include a meet-and-greet with Rippon and a pre-signed copy of his book.
tinyurl.com/y64mubuu

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

QUEER THINGS to DO

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COMMUNITY

November 2

Houston Gaymers Extra Life 2019

Texas' largest LGBTQ gaming group hosts a fundraiser Coral Sword. Houston Gaymers, who recently celebrated their 10th anniversary, conduct a 24-hour gaming marathon benefitting Texas Children's Hospital. The \$20 entry fee includes games from every major console, and water is provided by the venue. During last year's Extra Life event, the group raised \$5,700, and they hope to surpass that amount this year.

tinyurl.com/y6obpmfu

COMEDY

November 8

It's Jester Joke

RuPaul's Drag
Race star Bianca

Del Rio brings her new 40-show U.S. tour, *It's Jester Joke*, to the University of Houston's Cullen Performance Hall. The self-proclaimed "clown in a gown" will share tales of her worldwide adventures and life in her comical "tell it like it is" voice. Del Rio's show will cover topics ranging from politics to travel, family, and social media.

tinyurl.com/y47uecao



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November 28

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tinyurl.com/y4of2vfa



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Fort Bend County Adds Protections for LGBTQ Workers

Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression now listed in its equal employment opportunity policy.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA



Fort Bend County added LGBTQ employee protections on September 10. Commissioner Ken DeMerchant (center) revised the county's Equal Employment Opportunity policy with the help of advocates.

Fort Bend County, one of the most diverse counties in the nation, now has a worker non-discrimination policy that ensures protections for all employees and applicants.

In a unanimous vote on September 10, the Fort Bend Commissioners Court approved revisions to explicitly add LGBTQ protections—including sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression—in addition to at least 10 other characteristics to its Equal Employment Opportunity policy. County judge KP George (D), along with commissioners Vincent Morales (R), Grady Prestage (D), Andy Meyers (R), and Ken DeMerchant (D), all voted in favor of the pro-equality measure.

DeMerchant, who was elected last November to Fort Bend's racially diverse county of over 750,000 (24.7 percent of the population is Hispanic, 21.1 percent is African American, 20.8 percent is Asian, and 32.5 percent is white non-Hispanic, according to the U.S. Census Bureau), first proposed revisions to the county's human resources policy.

"This is a huge step in the right direction," DeMerchant said in a statement. "I hope this will trickle down and be a model for the great State of Texas, because a more inclusive Fort Bend County is a stronger Fort Bend County."

DeMerchant took to Facebook to credit attorney Fran Watson and GLBT Political Caucus president Mike Webb for their work in helping DeMerchant propose the revisions.

Watson thanked DeMerchant and Webb, along with Pride Houston president Lo Roberts and several other LGBTQ activists for helping the measure pass in Fort Bend.

In a GLBT Political caucus statement, Webb said Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis—who recently helped Harris County add LGBTQ employee protections—provided the model for the policy revisions.

"Houston and the metro area is truly progressive, welcoming, and inclusive of all our communities," Webb said. "The fact that this was a unanimous vote proves that equality is a non-partisan issue."

Section 103 of Fort Bend's employee information manual now reads: "Fort Bend County applies positive employment practices designed to ensure the full realization of equal employment opportunities (EEO) to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion or creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy status (including childbirth and related medical conditions), national origin, ethnicity, citizenship status, age (40 and over), physical or mental disability, genetic information, protected military and veteran status, political affiliation or beliefs, or any other classification protected by state, federal and local laws unless such classification is a bona fide occupational qualification."

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BIKTARVY does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS. HIV-1 is the virus that causes AIDS.

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

- ▶ dofetilide
- ▶ rifampin
- ▶ any other medicines to treat HIV-1

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Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- ▶ Have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis infection.
- ▶ Have any other health 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 while taking BIKTARVY.
- ▶ Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed. HIV-1 can be passed to the baby in breast milk.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

- ▶ Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, antacids, laxatives, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
- ▶ BIKTARVY and other medicines may affect each other. Ask your healthcare provider and pharmacist about medicines that interact with BIKTARVY, and ask if it is safe to take BIKTARVY with all your other medicines.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- ▶ Those in the “Most Important Information About BIKTARVY” section.
- ▶ **Changes in your immune system.** Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any new symptoms after you start taking BIKTARVY.
- ▶ **Kidney problems, including kidney failure.** Your healthcare provider should do blood and urine tests to check your kidneys. If you develop new or worse kidney problems, they may tell you to stop taking BIKTARVY.
- ▶ **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis),** which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- ▶ **The most common side effects of BIKTARVY** in clinical studies were diarrhea (6%), nausea (6%), and headache (5%).

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

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.

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

HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- ▶ Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5.
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Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and visit [BIKTARVY.com](https://www.biktarvy.com).



Should You Co-sign a Loan or Lend Money?

How to help someone out financially without damaging your own credit.

Many of us have friends or relatives in our lives who are struggling financially. Perhaps they've made some poor financial decisions in the past, lost their job, went "all in" on a failed business opportunity, or they're simply not earning enough to pay their living expenses and other obligations like student-loan balances. And there may come a time when they ask you for help.

Lending money or co-signing on a loan can be a risky endeavor for you, though. First and foremost, there is the risk that you won't be paid back (or that the payments on a loan that you co-signed won't be made). Not only can this result in a loss of the funds you loaned (and damage your credit score), it can make things awkward between you and the friend or relative you're helping.

So how can you best go about co-signing on a loan or lending money to a friend or loved one in a way that increases the chances of actually getting paid back?

The Pros and Cons

of Lending Money Outright

Seeing a loved one in a difficult financial situation can be hard, and many people end up letting their emotions take over and do whatever they can to help. But that isn't always the best solution.

Although loaning the needed funds could enable the borrower to purchase a new business, avoid late fees on their bills, learn fiscal responsibility, or obtain a home or apartment, there can also be several drawbacks to consider, such as:

- Resentment or hard feelings if the person does not pay you back (or even if they're consistently late with their payments).
- Overextension of your own financial situation. For instance, if you have an emergency, you may not have enough money available for your needs.

"BEING A CO-SIGNER COULD MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO OBTAIN A LOAN IN THE FUTURE."

How Co-signing a Loan Can Impact Your Credit

Even if you don't actually lend money to your friend or family member, they could still ask you to co-sign on a loan that they are getting somewhere else. You need to be careful here, though, because doing so could have an impact on your own credit score.

For instance, being a co-signer in and of itself won't necessarily harm your credit. But, if the borrower is late with their payments, or misses payments altogether, you could see your credit score go down.

In fact, even if the loan payments are made on time, being a co-signer could still affect your amount of credit utilization, and in turn make it more difficult for you to obtain a loan in the future.

Graciously Saying No

If you are unable or unwilling to lend money or co-sign on a loan, it is important that you politely tell the potential borrower no as soon as

you can. That can help to relieve any pressure on you, as well as to let the other person find a better fit for obtaining the funds they need.

Being concise, yet firm, is usually the best route to take. For example, you could tell them, "I would love to help you, but as a general rule, I do not lend money." While this may be disappointing to the other individual, it is much better to decline the request than to move forward with an unpleasant situation or to make promises that you cannot keep.

Depending on the situation, you may be able to help out in ways other than loaning money. For instance, you could assist your friend or family member with earning additional income by writing a letter of recommendation to potential employers or referring them to companies that you know are hiring. Likewise, you could help them to find and list unneeded items on eBay or craigslist to earn some quick extra cash.

How to Safely Lend a Helping Hand

While many financial professionals advise

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



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Money Smart | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

against loaning money to friends and family, the reality is that you could make the loan because you don't want to see them struggle. With that in mind, here are some important safeguards to consider:

- **Interest** – Although most people are happy to help a loved one and would consider doing so for free, it is important that you charge interest on the loan. One reason for this is because you're losing out on other potential interest-generating financial opportunities. In addition, the IRS requires that at least some amount of interest be charged, even on private loans. This is known as the Applicable Federal Rate, or AFR. Each month the IRS publishes a set of interest rates that it considers to be the minimum market rate for loans. You need to be sure that the interest rate you charge is equal to or more than the AFR rate. (Charging any less than the AFR rate could cause you to incur taxes on the interest income you receive). You can find more information on the Applicable Federal Rates by going to <https://apps.irs.gov/app/picklist/list/federalRates.html>.

- **Collateral** – One way to help ensure that you are repaid is to ask the borrower for some collateral. This could include something of value, such as a family heirloom, that you retain until the loan has been paid in full. If the borrower ends up defaulting, you are protected financially by selling the item. Make sure you have your agreement in writing by getting it notarized and filed where necessary.

- **Legal Documentation** – As with any contract such as a car loan or an apartment lease, you need to document the loan in writing. This includes the amount of the loan and the interest rate, the monthly payment, and how many payments in total are required to pay off the loan. You should also consider adding the amount of a late fee due if the monthly payments are not made on time. Both you and the borrower should sign the paperwork and retain a copy for reference.

Having the guidance of a legal and financial advisor can help ensure that you are properly going about the process and not leaving anything out. These professionals may also be able to guide the loved one you are helping, so that person can make good financial decisions going forward.

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 Group LLC in Houston and was recognized as a "Five-Star Wealth Manager" in the September 2017 issue of Texas Monthly. Yung can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com.

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By MONICA ROBERTS

SCOTUS

The most important Supreme Court cases of our lifetime.



During my 57 years on this planet, I have read and heard about many of the major U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) cases that have been either huge wins or setbacks for our TBLGQ community.

The *Bowers v. Hardwick* case was the one in 1986 that upheld U.S. sodomy laws in a 5–4 decision. It held that consenting adults don’t have a constitutional right to homosexual acts in private.

That was followed a decade later by the 6–3 decision striking down the odious Colorado Amendment 2 that sought to deny gays and lesbians protection against discrimination in the 1996 *Romer v. Evans* case.

Just four years later, in 2000, the community was handed another loss when the SCOTUS ruled in a 5–4 *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale* decision that the Boy Scouts could ban gays from their organization.

The 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* case grew out of the arrest of a local gay couple. The 5–4

decision in that case overturned the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision and struck down all of the nation’s remaining sodomy laws—even though the Texas Legislature still refuses to remove the invalidated anti-sodomy language from the Texas Penal Code.

Ten years later, in the 2013 *United States v. Windsor* case, by the same 5–4 margin, Justice Anthony Kennedy joined the liberals on the Supreme Court to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). This was the first marriage-equality case heard by the SCOTUS,

and the majority held that DOMA violated the rights of gays and lesbians.

That same year, the *Hollingsworth v. Perry* case was decided by a 5–4 margin. It stated that marriage-equality opponents didn’t have

standing to appeal the lower-court ruling that overturned California’s Prop 8. That ruling allowed California to resume same-sex marriages in the state.

Then there’s the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* case that legalized marriage equality across the U.S. in a 5–4 decision. As a result of this

landmark ruling, states must provide marriage licenses to same-sex couples and also recognize same-sex marriages that were legally licensed and performed in other states.

So why am I recapping all these TBLGQ SCOTUS cases? Because with the flipping of the calendar page to October, we see that the first Monday of this month marks the beginning of the 2019–2020 Supreme Court term. After the SCOTUS justices take their ceremonial photo on Monday, they go to work on October 8.

On the agenda that day will be three landmark TBLGQ workplace-discrimination cases that will have a profound impact on all TBLGQ+ persons in the United States. Those three cases will decide whether TBLGQ people are covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Two of the three cases, *Zarda v. Altitude Express* and *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* have been consolidated, and will determine whether antigay discrimination is a form of illegal sex discrimination. The ACLU is arguing the Zarda SCOTUS cases, while an Atlanta-area legal firm is arguing the Bostock SCOTUS case.

“I’M CONCERNED THAT WITH CONSERVATIVE JUSTICES GORSUCH AND KAVANAUGH ON THE COURT, THESE CASES WON’T BE DECIDED IN OUR FAVOR.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 112

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October 12: "Coming Out Party" Hosted by OutReach United, benefiting multiple local LGBTQ beneficiaries. info: OutReachUnited.org

October 12 & 13: Bayou City Art Festival Downtown
INFO: artcolonyassociation.org

October 12: The Houston Walk for Mental Health Awareness
at Stude Park. INFO: thehoustonwalk.org

October 17: Out@TUTS Night presents *Spring Awakening*. After the curtain goes down, the party continues. Mingle with members of the cast and crew and sing a few show tunes. All are welcome! INFO tuts.com/out

October 25-26: The Annual Gender Infinity Conference
INFO: genderinfinityconference.org

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OUT THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR



Saturday, September 21

The Houston Transgender Unity Committee (HTUC) hosted its annual **Houston Transgender Unity Banquet** at the Sheraton North Houston hotel. Emceed by drag entertainer Lana Blake, the annual event featured speeches by Carmen Carrera, Jon Rosenthal, Vica Papp, Dylan Forbis, Sharon Stuart, and Cassandro. Proceeds from the banquet raised money for scholarships, Houston Pride activities, Transgender Day of Remembrance events, recognition awards, and grants.



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OUT THERE

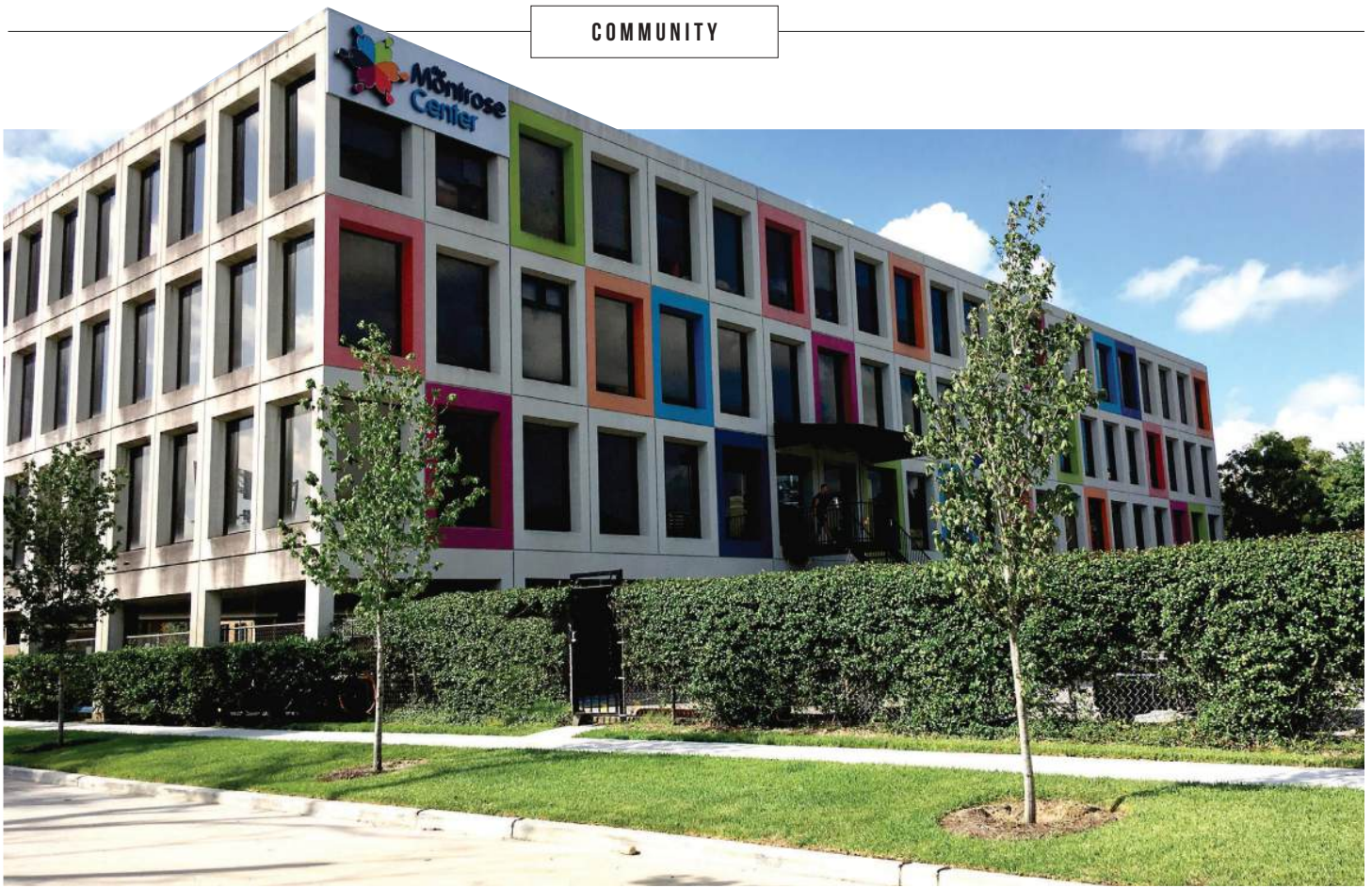
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Sunday, September 8

Pride Houston, Inc. celebrated becoming a candidate to host WorldPride 2023 with a party at Pearl Bar Houston. During the event, attendees were interviewed and filmed to be part of the LGBTQ Houston organizations' bid, which will be presented to the WorldPride membership in Athens, Greece, during October.





From the Ground Up

Since 2004, the Montrose Center has nurtured more than 452 new LGBTQ organizations.

By **BRANDON WOLF**

The Montrose Center's most-utilized service—helping local LGBTQ organizations develop and flourish—is also its least known, says Kennedy Loftin, chief development officer for the Center. Last year 49,238 people attended a total of 1,910 events sponsored by more than 100 organizations seeking to advocate, educate, and raise funds.

The Montrose Center has six major areas of service: counseling and addiction recovery, youth, seniors, HIV, women, and its “community center” program. That program now includes a nonprofit incubator to help organizations in three ways: free meeting and office space, discounted rental space for more

established groups, and acting as the nonprofit “fiscal agent” for new groups seeking a 501(c)(3) non-profit tax status.

“The Center provided \$26,000 worth of free meeting space to 76 organizations last year,” Loftin says. “There was a special focus on underserved communities of color and the transgender community.” Among those organizations are Black Transgender Leaders & Affirming Black Pastors, Gender Infinity, Impulse Group, Iftikhar, Mahogany Project, Men Inc., and Save Our Sisters United.

The Center also provided \$87,000 in reduced rental fees, utilities, and free meeting rooms to eight organizations including Equality Texas, Houston GLBT Political Caucus, Living Mosaic Inclusive Church, Young Invin-

cibles, and Pride Houston.

Organizations receiving fiscal agency and accounting services, fundraising support, and free meeting rooms included the HIV & Aging Coalition, Mayor Turner's LGBTQ Advisory Board, the Normalcy Project, Lesbian Health Initiative, the oH Project, and Texas Queer Muslims.

Creating a Nonprofit Incubator

Loftin says the community-center program evolved organically over the years, and is the only program without a coordinator and dedicated staff. However, the recent award of a John Steven Kellett Foundation grant to the program will change that.

The grant will formally establish a non-



BRUCE TURNER

COMMUNITY BUILDING

The Montrose Center provides meeting space for numerous social events sponsored by LGBTQ nonprofit groups throughout the year.

profit incubator, to be named in honor of Kellett. “I researched John Kellett, and this is so in line with what he wanted to do—support smaller organizations [in a way] that will have exponential impact. More and more, the community is indicating what it needs,” Loftin notes.

The incubator is now in its pilot phase. The Kellett grant will allow the Center to conduct research and development, leading to a formal launch planned for next summer. The Center is identifying which services are needed by organizations, and what the new incubator can effectively provide. Upgraded signage and meeting rooms are already in the planning stages.

“There is a lot we don’t know, but we will provide resources to organizations that do know how to reach communities that we haven’t always reached,” Loftin says. “We become stronger as a community with these new organizations.”

The incubator is hoping to offer several additional services to new organizations, including assistance with establishing 501(c)(3) status, development consulting, board training, researching new grant opportunities, grant writing assistance, grant report tracking, media and marketing assistance, graphic design support, resources linkage, event

ticketing services, volunteer assistance, and various training opportunities.

Keeping a Focus on the Mission

The incubator allows new organizations to start working right away, without worrying about finding money to pay for meeting or office space to meet and organize, or navigating the complex process of obtaining 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

To qualify, an organization must be aligned with the Montrose Center’s mission of serving their two target populations: the local LGBTQ community and people living with AIDS.

Some organizations have been in the incubator for several years now, such as the oH Project, which produces oral histories of the AIDS crisis. The project was self-sufficient, except for its lack of nonprofit tax status. After the incubator provided assistance in establishing nonprofit status, the Montrose Center was able to handle the group’s banking and accounting needs, including audits, receiving donor contributions, and sending out thank-you notes to each donor.

Loftin says that a few new organizations in the incubator may eventually be incorporated into the Montrose Center, but the general

intent is for the organizations to become independent and separate. The incubator sees each new organization as having unique needs and their own timelines for success.

Loftin says he is actively hunting for an LGBTQ nonprofit incubator in another city to serve as a model, but he hasn’t found one yet. “There are lots of incubators in the environmental space, and they are very popular for technology companies. Twitter and Uber were built on them.” The Kellett incubator will probably be the first such program in the U.S. for hatching and nurturing new LGBTQ organizations.

Saving Our Sisters United

Transgender activist Atlantis Narcisse says she founded the Saving Our Sisters United organization in 2016 after realizing that her Facebook inbox was getting so many of the same questions about the process of transitioning. She put together a team of other like-minded transgender women of color to develop a safe space for helping trans women navigate their transition process.

“Society is still trying to understand the transgender issue,” says Narcisse. “When you add intersections of race and socio-economic status, it becomes even more difficult.”

Their first meetings were usually held in homes. After the organization was accepted into the incubator in 2018, the group was able to grow and offer a variety of services related to hormone replacement therapy, trans healthcare, name and gender-marker changes, and financial assistance. They have also organized wellness fairs, mixers, social debriefings, and panel discussions. “The Montrose Center took the financial burden off our shoulders,” Narcisse says.

With the financial burden lifted, Saving Our Sisters United can focus on their core issues. “We want to move people easily through the services so that their experience is one of affirmation, not trauma,” Narcisse says. “The Montrose Center has been a great source of comfort.”

The Normal Anomaly / “Outcry” Docu-Series

Ian Haddock started a blog called The Normal Anomaly in 2016 to show that “people on the intersection of black and gay are no different than their white queer counterparts or heterosexual blacks.” By 2018, Haddock wanted to do something more creative. He dreamed of producing a docu-series using the stories and dialogue of LGBTQ people of color, to reduce stigmas surrounding sexuality, race, HIV, and mental health.

Haddock quickly realized that in order to submit a filmmaking grant, he would need a fiscal agent to establish his non-profit tax status. He reached out to several nonprofit organizations, but the efforts became mired in board meetings. →

Then Haddock found a business card that he had once received from Loftin. Haddock contacted Loftin asking about fiscal agency, and within hours Haddock was sitting in Loftin's office talking about his dream.

Both parties were excited at the possibilities. The Center's board approved the agency request in October 2018. A memorandum of understanding was drawn up, stating what the Center would provide and what they would require from Normal Anomaly. "The incubator was absolutely life-changing," Haddock says.

By November 2018, Haddock learned that his project had won an AIDS United grant, which provided seed money to show what could be done using raw footage. Haddon invited people to the Center to preview that video, and over 192 people attended.

With the awarding of two additional grants, Normal Anomaly has been able to put together a five-part documentary series focused on the following areas: mental-health trauma, HIV and the church, rape and substance abuse, transitioning and the church, and healing in the church.

Normal Anomaly is now working to convince an online streaming service to pick

up the series. Haddon says "This all happened because the Center gave me a chance, and I am immensely grateful for that. The Center treats me like family. When I need help, it is no more than a phone call away."

Haddon says the Center keeps him in the loop, takes him to other Center fundraisers, and helps him meet other people to use in his series. He is now working with other Center teams to learn how to build infrastructure, write grants, and apply for his own nonprofit status.

HIV & Aging Coalition

Bruce Turner first began an effort to establish a local organization dedicated to seniors living with HIV in 2013, after taking part in an HIV & Aging program at the Center that featured HIV-positive seniors from New York City. The program encouraged participants to begin a local organization. Turner was 64 at the time, and felt this was something that needed to be done.

"There was no program in Houston," Turner says. "People who were aging needed connections to the organizations that were supposed to be helping us. Age hits from one side, and stigma from the other side. We

wanted to educate fellow HIV-positive people about matters that could help them, like how to navigate through the Ryan White Act agencies and Medicare.

Turner says that after people turn 50, they become less willing to socialize. Age has slowed them to a degree, but they also don't want to be "that person with HIV." Isolation easily sets in.

"The Center has been very good to us," Turner continues. "For a small group to obtain a tax-exempt status is a major obstacle. By using the Center as our fiscal agent, we have been able to focus our efforts on the purpose of the coalition instead of the extraneous things."

The group sponsors a social hour on the first and third Mondays, and an educational program on the second Monday of each month. The Center provides free space for meetings and socials. The group's holiday party has gone from 65 guests to 150 last year. At their 2017 holiday party following Hurricane Harvey, several guests came up to Turner and said that the dinner served that night was the first hot food they had eaten since the flooding.

Turner says that without the Center's incubator, "the HIV & Aging program would not be what it is today." ▼



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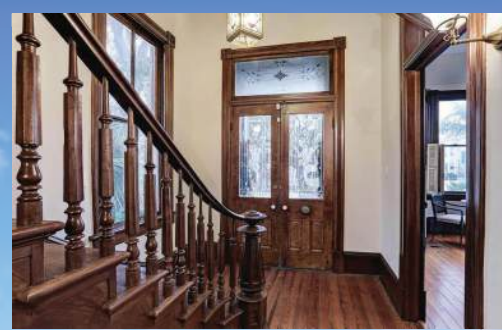
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OUT-THERE

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Saturday, September 21

Combined Arms hosted its second annual **LGBTQ Veterans and Allies Military Ball** at the Julia Ideson Library. The event featured guest speakers, a color guard, an open bar, and dancing.



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Houston's LGBTQ Magazine

OUT THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR



Sunday, September 22

Bunnies on the Bayou hosted Bunnies in Heat, the first official event of the group's 41st season, at Bar Boheme. Proceeds from the event benefited **Bunnies on the Bayou**, a nonprofit that funds local LGBTQ charities.



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The GOLDEN DREAM

Trans icon and this year's LGBTQ Community Vision Award winner **TOMMIE ROSS** reflects on her Houston upbringing.

By **DON MAINES** | Photos by **MICHAEL ANDREW VOIGHT**

The winner of this year's Community Vision Award, transgender entertainer Tommie Ross, never saw it coming.

"She's such a legend, but she's so humble that it's been hard to honor her," says Kennedy "Kent"

Loftin, the chief development officer for the Montrose Center. "We had to really convince her that she's a trailblazer in the LGBTQ community."

The center has previously honored six high-profile activists and public servants at its annual Out for Good dinner on National Coming Out Day. "About 600 guests enjoy a fabulous dinner as well as a program of heartwarming testimonials. We hope guests will leave with a better understanding of how the center can serve their needs and be inspired to do more to serve their community," says Loftin.

This year's soiree will be held at The Ballroom at Bayou Place in downtown Houston, with Deborah Duncan as host. The Center promises a performance by the event's honoree, who is famous for her legendary impersonation of gay icon and namesake Diana Ross.

"Diana is all I did at the beginning of my career. My stage name was Ross," she explains. "It wasn't until I entered pageants that somebody told me I needed a first name, so I added the name I grew up with and became Tommie Ross."

The honoree remembers getting disciplined as a child for being too feminine. "I as-

sumed that I was gay," she says, like her cousin and best friend with whom she "stumbled upon" a gay disco, The Cove, while still in high school. "We went in a side door. I saw my first drag show at The Cove; Donna Day was a special guest, but she was a regular at The Copa. We went the following Sunday to The Copa and saw Tasha Kohl, Donna Day, Naomi Sims, Hot Chocolate, and Mr. Tiffany Jones." Those drag masters taught and inspired Ross as a member of the audience, but she mainly relied on her own instincts to create her drag persona.

"That comes from being an only child," says Ross. "I'm really thankful because I wasn't listening to people trying to coach me and tell me how to do it their way."

Ross was working as a clerk at an insurance company on Montrose Boulevard when her mother died from a massive heart attack. "I kept working, but I was functioning in a depressed state, going through the motions, depressed on the inside," she says. "One day, a new manager said something to me and I just quit."

Drag shows became a way for Ross to work through her grief, and pageants became both an outlet for creativity and her path to stardom. At the 1986 Miss Gay USofA pageant at The Copa, Ross wowed the audience with a huge, jungle-themed production number to "Eaten Alive" by Diana Ross. The crowd beat the walls when Ross made the Top 5, but many fans booed when she was only awarded second runner-up. →

“IT shook me up for a minute, so I took the runner-up plaque and held it in front of my face,” the entertainer recalls. “When I realized they were booing *for* me, I let it down and smiled to thank them and let them know I was OK.”

Many of her black fans thought Ross was robbed by a panel of racist judges, as both the winner, Michael Andrews, and the first runner-up, Tandi Andrews, were white. But during a recent appearance at Hamburger Mary’s (where Ross is a recurring cast member), Ross says “I met an older white couple who said they were there that night, and their group was chanting and booing, too.”

Ross and her dancers reprised “Eaten Alive” at the 1987 Miss Gay USofA pageant, which was

held in Columbia, South Carolina. “I was second runner-up again, but I was relieved to get a placement; the winner was Diana Hutton, who did live impressions. The audience lost their minds over her,” says Ross.

On the path to her first major title, Ross won the 1988 Miss Gay Texas USofA pageant, then tweaked “Eaten Alive” for the national contest, which boasted more than 70 contestants. “The first two times I did it in heels, but then I went to Payless and got some winter half-boots and put some ‘jungle’ feathers and rhinestones on them, which allowed me to dance better and be grounded,” she says. Ross swept the talent, sportswear, and evening-gown categories and won Miss Gay USofA at the Indiana Roof Ballroom in Indianapolis.



“DIANA IS ALL I DID AT THE BEGINNING OF MY CAREER. MY STAGE NAME WAS ROSS. IT WASN’T UNTIL I ENTERED PAGEANTS THAT SOMEBODY TOLD ME I NEEDED A FIRST NAME, SO I ADDED THE NAME I GREW UP WITH, AND BECAME TOMMIE ROSS.”

—Tommie Ross

The news of her victory reached Houston before Ross and her troupe returned. “It was in the Bible Belt, so there were people picketing the pageant outside on finals night. It was a big thing; my friends saw it on the 5 o’clock world news back in Houston.”

Ross has also won Miss Gay Houston America, Miss Black America, and practically every major title in dragdom, including Miss Continental

1999, which includes a swimsuit competition. “It is a different type of prestigious title,” she explains. “It’s an event. People come from all around on Labor Day weekend at the Baton Show Lounge in Chicago. People think it is a pageant for transgender people, but it’s really for anyone. Michelle Dupree, who crowned me, is a boy.”

Ross identifies as a transgender woman. →

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A TRAILBLAZER
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COMMUNITY.”**

—Kennedy “Kent” Loftin,
Montrose Center

“I was a sheltered child, and it wasn’t until 1989 or 1990 that I started seeing and reading things about transgender people,” she recalls. “I never dated, per se, gay boys. I count the number of relationships I’ve had on one hand, and the men I’ve dated never associated with being gay. Some have had a sister or a friend who is gay. They’re always a guy who sees me as a woman. I approach things from the neck up. I like a guy who’s really intelligent. After we exchange phone numbers, we just talk on the phone—that is the courtship. That also comes from me being extremely shy.”

In the 1980s, Ross saw her community hit hard by AIDS, and she responded by volunteering at shows and benefits to raise money for PWAs. She also worked behind the scenes to raise awareness about HIV, particularly in the black community. However, as Loftin noted, Ross often seems unaware of the influence she’s had throughout the LGBTQ community until someone expresses that sentiment to her in person.

Not long ago, she says, “a little, skinny person” approached her at a Miss Gay USofA pageant and told the drag superstar they were “thinking about transitioning.” Ross advised, “Take your time and don’t rush it.” A year later, the fan returned as transgender performer Giselle Jones, complete with a tattoo on her arm that reads “Take your time and don’t rush it.”

“That is the most eye-opening thing that has happened to me in the community,” says Ross. ▼

OutSmart

2019 READERS'
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GAYEST AND GREATEST

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS IMPRESS AND INSPIRE.

This year's Readers' Choice Awards are our most diverse yet, thanks to our readers' suggestions for many new award categories. Don't miss the spotlight profiles on a few of our winners, including 11 Houston locals who inspire and impress. First, LGBTQ activist and Rice University professor Brian Riedel makes waves in and out of the classroom. Then Legacy Community Health CEO Katy Caldwell discusses the clinic's work that has earned the LGBTQ community's trust. Next, Judge Fran Watson rules for equality in her Houston municipal courtrooms. Alexis Nicole

Whitney uses her drag talents to collect funds for LGBTQ charities, and Realtor Tina Burgos recounts the winding path she took to becoming a leading real-estate agent. Emmett Schelling leads the Transgender Education Network of Texas with an intersectional approach, and DJ Melle Mel chats about being one of Space City's leading record-spinners. Then actress Tamarie Cooper impacts Houston's theater scene, and businesswoman and dedicated volunteer Heather J. Taylor excels in each of her passions. Last but not least, caterer David Alcorta goes above and beyond with his culinary and event-planning savvy.

And please join us for a fun evening as we show our 2019 Gayest & Greatest Awards winners love at our awards ceremony on Tuesday, October 22, 6–9 p.m. at ReBar, located at 202 Tuam St.



FABULOUS FUNDRAISER

Alexis Nicole Whitney uses drag to collect cash for LGBTQ Houston charities.

Houston's favorite trans female fundraiser is a popular entertainer who was just named this year's Girl of Montrose.

With her new title, Alexis Nicole Whitney will be onstage at 4 p.m. October 13 raising funds for PWA Holiday Charities in a Halloween benefit at Michael's Outpost. Joining her will be other members of the gayborhood's "First Family" contest winners.

It was on Halloween of Whitney's senior year of high school in San Antonio that she discovered how "sickening" she looks in an evening gown. "I never went back," she said, finding an audience for her beauty and talent at drag shows, where she met transgender woman Maya Douglas, who was Miss Gay USofA 1995.

"A lot of people mentored me, but Maya Douglas was one of the girls who inspired me," said Whitney, who

began competing in the Miss Gay USofA pageant system in 1996 and started taking hormones in 2001.

On October 7, 2008, Whitney was diagnosed with brain and spinal meningitis, which left her vision-impaired. She's often aided and accompanied at her performances by her "drag son," singer Mykey Whitney. Also, he's the deejay for her weekly "Wepa Wednesdays" shows at Tony's Corner Pocket. The best way to translate "wepa" for gringos might be "Hurray!"

Last year, Whitney performed in some 25 benefits for PWA Holiday Charities, to which the LGBTQ community contributed almost \$90,000

at drag shows. The Whitney crowd craves callbacks for her renditions of tunes by Gloria Estefan, Selena, and Celine Dion, whose thunderous power-ballad "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" is a guaranteed money-maker. —Don Maines →

LEADING
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BEST DRAG SHOW BAR

Hamburger Mary's

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Michael's Outpost, Rich's Houston

FAVORITE BAR TO SHOOT POOL

George Country Sports Bar

Finalists: Houston Eagle, JR's Bar & Grill,
RIPCORDER, Tony's Corner Pocket

FAVORITE BAR TO TWO STEP

Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon

Finalist: Ranch Hill Saloon

FAVORITE CLUB AFTER 2 AM

Viviana's

Finalists: Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon,
Privilege, Rich's Houston

FAVORITE CLUB FOR DANCING

Houston Eagle

Finalists: Blur Bar, Neon Boots Dancehall
& Saloon, Numbers, Rich's Houston

FAVORITE CLUB IF YOU'RE UNDER 21

Hamburger Mary's

Finalists: Numbers, Rich's Houston

FAVORITE COMMUNITY BAR

Houston Eagle

Finalists: George Your Country Sports Bar, JR's Bar
& Grill, Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, Pearl Bar

FAVORITE DRAG KING

Richard Long

Finalist: Ian Syder-Blake

FAVORITE DRAG SHOW HOST/EMCEE

Alexye'us Paris (tie)

Kara Dion (tie)

Finalists: Blackberri, Kofi, Lady Shamu

FAVORITE FEMALE DJ

DJ Melle Mel

Finalists: DJ Aracely, DJ Athenz, DJ Krazzy Kris

FAVORITE MALE DJ

JD Arnold (tie)

DJ Panda (tie)

Finalists: DJ Eddie E, Joe Ross

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON DRAG)

FEMALE ENTERTAINER

Wendy Taylor

Finalists: Nina Lombardo, Amanda Marie Parker,
Morena Roas

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON DRAG)

MALE ENTERTAINER

Steven Tilotta

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Finalist: Space Kiddettes

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Houston Eagle

Finalists: George Your Country Sports Bar,
RIPCORD, Tony's Corner Pocket

FAVORITE PLACE TO SHOW OFF YOUR LEATHER

Houston Eagle

Finalist: RIPCORD

FAVORITE PLACE TO WATCH MALE DANCERS

Tony's Corner Pocket

Finalists: Houston Eagle, JR's Bar & Grill

FAVORITE STRAIGHT BAR

Boheme

Finalists: Barbarella, Darwin's Pub

FAVORITE WOMEN'S BAR

Pearl Bar Houston

Finalists: Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon,
Ranch Hill Saloon

FAVORITE LIVE MUSIC VENUE

House of Blues

Finalists: Numbers, Revention Music Center,
White Oak Music Hall

MOST DIVINE DRAG QUEEN

Alexye'us Paris (tie) Dessie Love-Blake (tie)

Finalists: Chloe Crawford-Ross, Chloe Knox,
Persephone, Violet S'Arbleu

PEOPLE

BEST FEMALE LGBTQ BUSINESSPERSON

Tammi Wallace

Finalists: Caryn Craig, Julie Mabry, Heather J. Taylor

BEST MALE LGBTQ BUSINESSPERSON

Mark DeLange

Finalists: Charles Armstrong, Bill Baldwin,
John Donato, Tony Vacarro

**BEST LGBTQ
SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT**

JD Doyle

Finalists: Shelby Jeffcoat-del Busto,
Steven Tilotta Transform Houston

**FAVORITE FEMALE
(COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY**

Sarah Pepper

Finalists: Roula Christie, Carmen Contreras,
Lauren Kelly, Erica Rico

**FAVORITE MALE
(COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY**

Kevin "Special K" England

**FAVORITE FEMALE
(COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY**

Judy Reeves

Finalist: Jenifer Rene Pool

**FAVORITE MALE
(COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY**

Bryan Hlavinka

Finalists: JD Doyle, Jack Valinski

**FAVORITE FEMALE
COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHER**

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Finalist: Trish Badger

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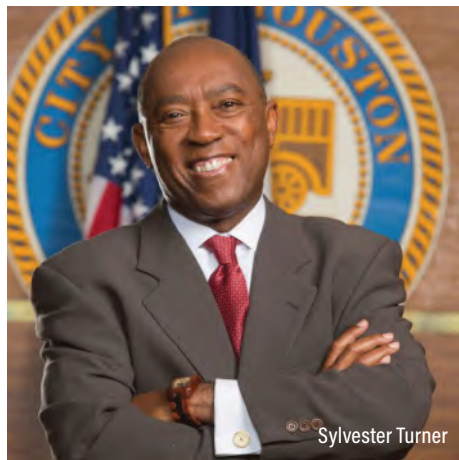
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Finalists: Eric Edward Schell, Steven Tilotta,
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**FAVORITE FEMALE
LOCAL POLITICIAN**

Ellen Cohen

Finalists: Amanda Edwards,
Lizzie Fletcher, Shelley Kennedy



Sylvester Turner

**FAVORITE MALE
LOCAL POLITICIAN**

Sylvester Turner

Finalists: Garnet Coleman,
Rodney Ellis, John Whitmire

**FAVORITE FEMALE
TV PERSONALITY**

Deborah Duncan

Finalists: Melanie Lawson,
Dominique Sachse, Miya Shay

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Kevin Nguyen is a man on the move. This year's G&G Favorite Male Volunteer has lived in a lot of places—Clear Lake,

Katy, Galveston, Houston proper, San Antonio, and New Jersey, all before graduating from Houston's Spring Woods High School, attending Baylor University in Waco, and then earning a master's degree in California. After he completed his studies, he spent a year working in Thailand and then eventually made his way back to H-town when he was offered a job as an academic advisor for the University of Houston.

Because he's relocated so many times, he never got to experience Houston in his early 20s. Since he felt a little disconnected from Houston after living in so many places, he decided to reestablish himself within the city by volunteering to find out more about the offerings around town.

"I wanted to get more ingrained in the community. I got to experience gayborhoods in other states, but not in Houston. I got involved in UH and started seeing other opportunities [around the city], and went from there," he says.

Opportunities came knocking after a friend nudged him to join him as a host for Bunnies on the Bayou.

"I loved it. There are a lot of outlets in the LGBTQ community. It snowballed from there," he said. "Volunteering is cool because you can be a representative for the community and be engaged without getting too much into the politics of it. All these organizations are doing something to benefit Houston and the LGBT community."

Other organizations that have depended on his stewardship are Mayor Turner's LGBTQ Advisory Board, Pride Houston, The Victory Fund, Houston GLBT Political Caucus, and the Human Rights Campaign. Health causes also play an important role for this first-generation college student and biology major who had once considered medical school.

"I have a nephew who's epileptic, so children's issues and health issues are big for me, too. My sister works at Texas Children's Hospital, so I have a soft spot for children," he explains.

Nguyen advises that anyone can donate to a cause, and it's not just their dollars and cents that count.

"There are plenty of [areas around town] where people need help. A lot of organizations look for donations of money, but they look for [people who can donate] time, as well. A volunteer's time is a valuable resource that

can [allow] the organization to focus on bigger and better projects. That's why I volunteer," he says. "Everyone's heart is in the right place, and [everyone has] a talent that can be tapped into to make the organization better."

This busy worker usually goes to bed around midnight and wakes up at 6:15 in the morning. In between racking up volunteer hours and assisting UH college students, he likes to unwind with friends.

"Through volunteering, I've made a lot of friends, and we hang out a lot," he adds. "It's good to have a support system so that it doesn't feel as draining or exhausting. I'm able to survive with these encouraging and genuine friends."

Houston may be the fourth-largest city, but its gay community still has a friendly small-town feel. Volunteering throughout the city has given Nguyen the chance to lend a helping hand, attend tony events, and make lasting friendships. —Sam Byrd



TIME WELL SPENT

Houston nonprofits can count on volunteer **Kevin Nguyen**.

MOST VALUABLE
Male Volunteer

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Professor **Brian Riedel** makes waves in and out of the classroom.



FAVORITE
Educator/
Teacher

FACEBOOK

Teaching this semester's methods course for Rice University's Seminar and Practicum in Engaged Research is Dr. Brian Riedel, an openly gay man who is helping bridge the gap between the academic world and the larger Houston community.

"Rice hired me to start the [seminar practicum] to partner undergraduates with community nonprofits and collaboratively define a research project benefiting the organization's clients," Riedel says. "Part of what I do is help that [partnership] happen, connecting the students with the different nonprofits that we've come to work with over the last 12 years."

Riedel first initiated the program when he began working at Rice University's Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality (CSWGS) in 2008. Before that, Riedel worked as a health-education coordinator at Houston's Montrose Center after earning his doctoral degree in anthropology from Rice. His experiences at these centers have built the foundation of Riedel's research with Houston's LGBTQ community.

"Working within the community constantly pushes me to learn something new," Riedel says. "There are so many questions that I just wouldn't be able to ask without these students and community members."

Riedel is currently working on three projects studying male crossdressers' life satisfaction, the history of over 400 queer businesses in Montrose, and the structural racism embedded in Houston's historic red-light district. He cites the Houston Area Rainbow Collective History (ARCH) project, an archive of LGBTQ history founded with the help of other local activists, as his proudest collaboration in the city.

"Of all the things I have gotten to be a part of in Houston, ARCH is one of the ones that makes me proudest of what a community can do when it comes together, despite all of our varied obligations," Riedel says. "That's the kind of work universities are best positioned to do."

When asked about what his dream class to teach would be, Riedel says he's already taught it—just last year. The class was Rice's first-ever transgender studies course that Riedel had pushed for.

"We got a bit of funding to bring in guest speakers from the community and offer

them an honorarium for talking and reading student work," Riedel says, again showing his aptitude for bridging the academic and local communities. "Learning from others' real-life experiences has helped me become a better human, and if I can help connect other people to that gift, that's what makes me happiest."

In his spare time, Riedel enjoys attending Neon Boots' country western dance lessons, watching a show at the Miller Outdoor Theatre, and watching *Pose*. "My husband and I cry in some capacity almost every episode," he says. "I didn't realize I'd get emotional right now, but I never thought I'd see a show like it."

While Riedel says he is flattered to be named OUTSMART's Favorite Educator/Teacher, he points out that his motivation for teaching comes from his students. Throughout his career, his favorite moments stem from watching students come into their own as they share their thoughts with others.

"There's very little I do to create a space, except to just be myself and encourage others to do the same," Riedel says. "So when someone gets to try something new and share something that might change what other people think, do, or believe in that space, that's the kind of moment I live for." —*Martin Gonzalez* →



**FAVORITE MALE
(COMMERCIAL) TV PERSONALITY**

Frank Billingsley

Finalists: Eric Barajas,
Osvaldo Corral, Derrick Shore

**FAVORITE MALE
(COMMUNITY) TV PERSONALITY**

Ernie Manouse

**FAVORITE LGBTQ
EDUCATOR/TEACHER**

Brian Riedel

Finalists: Brandon Hevey,
Bryant Johnson-Wood

**FAVORITE LOCAL
LGBTQ BLOGGER**

Joey Guerra

Ian Haddock, Monica Roberts

**FAVORITE FEMALE
COMMUNITY HERO**

Fran Watson

Finalists: Donna Junker, Sandy Stacy,
Kendra Walker, Tammi Wallace

**FAVORITE MALE
COMMUNITY HERO**

Dalton DeHart

Finalists: JD Doyle, Harrison Guy,
Craig Sanford

**FAVORITE TRANS MALE
COMMUNITY HERO**

Emmett Schelling

Finalists: Ian Syder-Blake, Lou Weaver

**FAVORITE TRANS FEMALE
COMMUNITY HERO**

Monica Roberts

Finalists: Phyllis Frye, Atlantis Narcisse,
Dee Dee Watters

**FAVORITE NATIONAL
LGBTQ BLOGGER/VLOGGER**

Monica Roberts

Finalists: It Gets Better Project,
Randy Rainbow

LEADING FEMALE FUNDRAISER

Annie Parker

Finalists: Melissa Flories,
Donna Junker, Sallie Woodell

PEOPLE

LEADING MALE FUNDRAISER

Kennedy Loftin (tie)

Craig Sanford (tie)

Finalists: Don Gill, David Goldberg,
Tim Stokes, Tanner Williams

**LEADING TRANS FEMALE
FUNDRAISER**

Alexis Nicole Whitney

Finalist: Kymber Devine

**LEADING TRANS MALE
FUNDRAISER**

Ian Syder-Blake

Finalist: Sebastian Gutierrez

**LEADING GENDER NON-CONFORMING
FUNDRAISER**

Mike Webb

**LEADING FEMALE
(ENTERTAINER) FUNDRAISER**

Lady Shamu

Finalists: Regina Dane, An'Marie Gill

**LEADING MALE
(ENTERTAINER) FUNDRAISER**

Domenic Cusano

Finalists: Michael G. Clayton,
Craig Sanford, Travis Webb



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Lisa Madry

**MOST PROMINENT
FEMALE LGBTQ ACTIVIST**

Lisa Madry (tie)

Fran Watson (tie)

Finalists: Monica Roberts, Kandace Webber

**MOST PROMINENT
MALE LGBTQ ACTIVIST**

Brad Pritchett

Finalists: Harrison Guy, Vince Pryor, Ashton P. Woods

**MOST PROMINENT
TRANS FEMALE ACTIVIST**

Monica Roberts

Finalist: Dee Dee Watters

MOST PROMINENT TRANS MALE ACTIVIST

Emmett Schelling

Finalist: Ian Syder-Blake

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SEASONED REALTOR

Tina Burgos has sold properties in Houston and Hawaii since 1994.



Tina Burgos, 50, has one of the hottest realty firms in town, and a history of selling residential properties and land in Houston since 1994. But that wasn't always the case.

Burgos, who is of Filipino descent, was born in Chicago and moved to Houston with her family when she was 11. She was raised in Alief, where she attended public school, and then graduated from Houston Baptist University in 1990 with a double major in biology and psychology. She also spent four years as a medical tech researching HIV in the Texas Medical Center. When her grant ended, she decided to take some real-estate classes for fun—and discovered that she liked it.

"I worked for several agencies in the '90s, when you could do no wrong in the market," Burgos says. "The market just kept going up." In 2006, she set out on her own with Inverness Realty Group and hasn't looked back since.

"I like making people happy, fulfill-

ing their dreams of home ownership," she says. "I also like the flexibility of the job." Many of her clients are friends from sports, and most of her new clients quickly become friends.

When her wife's environmental career took them to Hawaii for four-and-a-half years, Burgos opened another division of Inverness there. She maintains clients on the island to this day, which allows the couple to visit the tropical paradise often.

She is an avid outdoors woman who runs marathons, off-road triathlons, and participates in outrigger and dragon-boat races. She also plays on the Montrose Softball League, and she met her wife, Lisa, playing soccer. They have been together for 20 years, and were finally married earlier this year.

"It was very impromptu," Burgos explains. "A friend said she should marry us for our anniversary, and we just said okay. We just happened to both have blue linen shirts and white pants and 'slippahs' (the Hawaiian slang for flip-flops). So we got dressed alike, went to

**BEST FEMALE
Real Estate Agent**

Fly High Little Bunny, and bought rings. When the woman who sold them to us [found out that] we didn't have a wedding photographer, she volunteered to join us and take photos!"

They all set off for the new rooftop terrace at the Glassell School of Art and got married—all very spur-of-the-moment.

Today the couple shares a home with their two cats, and are blessed with 11 nieces and nephews whom they dote on. Both are active in sports and love Mexican food and ribs. "Hawaiians think they have a diverse food scene, but it's all variations of Asian food," Burgos explains. "I missed Houston's food diversity when we lived there. Here you can get everything from Asian to Italian, Mexican, and more."

Her advice to her real-estate clients for the coming year is to research every property, in light of Houston's periodic flooding events.

"It helps if you're well-versed in topography. And, given the recent floods, buy flood insurance whether you are required to or not," she says. Good advice. —*Marene Gustin* →

PEOPLE

MOST VALUABLE FEMALE VOLUNTEER

Heather J. Taylor

Finalists: Sara Fernandez, Donna Junker, Jordan Mills, Lo Roberts, Sallie Woodell

MOST VALUABLE MALE VOLUNTEER

Kevin Nguyen

Finalists: Jesse Crochet, Domenic Cusano, Jeremy Fain, Denis Kelly, Craig Sanford



Jessica Zyrie

MOST VALUABLE TRANS FEMALE VOLUNTEER

Jessica Zyrie

Finalist: Kymber DeVine

MOST VALUABLE TRANS MALE VOLUNTEER

Ian Syder-Blake

Finalist: Richard Long

MOST VALUABLE GENDER NON-CONFORMING VOLUNTEER

Koomah

Finalist: Nashauba Patel

REAL ESTATE

BEST FEMALE REAL ESTATE AGENT

Tina Burgos

Finalists: Karen Derr, Debbie Levine, Lynette Lew

BEST MALE REAL ESTATE AGENT

Brooks Ballard

Finalists: George Burch, Jeremy Fain, Clayton Katz, Ashton Martini, Anthony Matthews, Thomas Phillips, Andy Weber

BEST HOME BUILDER

Colina Homes

Finalist: Sandcastle Homes

BEST HOME REMODELING COMPANY

Luria Construction

Finalists: C House Renovations, Heels 2 Hammers LLC, Noble Construction

BEST MORTGAGE COMPANY

Republic State Mortgage Co

Finalist: Academy Mortgage

BEST TITLE COMPANY

Chicago Title Innerloop

Finalists: StarTex Title, Stewart Title Houston

FAVORITE RENTAL COMMUNITY

Elan Memorial Park

Finalists: High Point Uptown, Latitude Med Center, Skyhouse Houston

COMMUNITY

BEST HOUSTON CORPORATE LGBTQ DIVERSITY GROUP

Exxon Mobil

Finalists: Amegy Bank, BASF, BHP Petroleum, Chevron, Comcast, Dow Chemical, Shell

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ WEBSITE

OutSmart Magazine

Finalists: LGBT Marriage Club, My Gay Houston

BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ WEBSITE

JD Doyle Archives

Finalists: Huffington Post, QUEERTY

BEST POLITICAL ADVOCACY GROUP

Houston GLBT Political Caucus

Finalists: Equality Texas, Human Rights Campaign, LGBTQ Victory Fund

FAVORITE HIV/AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

AIDS Foundation Houston

Finalists: AIDS Healthcare Foundation, City of Houston/HIV Services, The Montrose Center, PWA Holiday Charities



DALTON DEHART

FAVORITE LGBTQ BENEFIT EVENT OF THE YEAR

Bunnies on the Bayou

Finalists: ERSICSS Coronation, Krewe of Olympus Ball, Mint Julep, Transgender Unity Banquet

FAVORITE LGBTQ PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATION

The Montrose Center

Finalists: Diana Foundation, ERSICSS, Krewe of Olympus, Out for Education

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COMMUNITY

FAVORITE LGBTQ SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Diana Foundation

Finalists: ERSICSS, Executive & Professional Association Houston (EPAH), Krew of Olympus, Lambda NextGen, LGBT Marriage Club

FAVORITE LGBTQ SPORTS CLUB

Montrose Softball League Association

Finalists: FrontRunners Houston, Houston Tennis Club, Lone Star Volleyball

FAVORITE LOCAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

University of Houston

Finalists: Houston Community College, Rice University, Texas Southern University



DALTON DEHART

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

PRIDE Houston

Finalists: Krew of Olympus, LGBT Marriage Club, TGRA Houston, The Truth Project

FAVORITE NATIONAL LGBTQ ORGANIZATION

Human Rights Campaign

Finalists: LGBTQ Victory Fund, National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce

FAVORITE PLACE TO TAKE YOUR OUT-OF-TOWN VISITORS

Houston Eagle

Finalists: Houston Galleria, The Menil Collection, Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon

FAVORITE PLACE TO WORSHIP

Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church

Finalists: Bering Memorial UMC, Congregation Or Ami, Living Mosaic Montrose Church, St. Paul's UMC, Unity of Houston

FAVORITE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAM

Houston Astros

Finalists: Houston Dash, Houston Dynamo, Houston Rockets, Houston SaberCats, Houston Texans

LOCAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Hamburger Mary's

Finalists: Amegy Bank, Central Houston Cadillac, Jenni's Noodle House, Silver Eagle Distributors



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Hard to believe this fabulous eatery in The Heights has been around since late 2014, and it still packs them in for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch.

Husband-and-husband team of Eric Munoz and Levi Lucky Rollins (Lucky is a family name, not a nickname) commute from their suburban home seven days a week, so you'll always find them here in this two-story former auto-repair shop cum bistro, craft bar, and marketplace.

Although Rollins, 44, comes from a line of restaurant owners and both of his grandmothers had eateries, he was working as vice president of sales at Laura Mercier when he got the idea to start a little bistro.

"I was traveling all the time," Rollins says, "and I wanted to spend more time at home and have something Eric and I could do together. But the bistro idea morphed into an eatery with a bar and a marketplace. Urban Eats was a much bigger baby at birth than we thought!"

The couple has been married for a little over 14 years. They have two rescue cats, Molly and JoJo, but their real baby is Urban Eats. Downstairs you'll find a casual spot for breakfast, along with the to-go market filled with the scent of fresh-baked pastries and grandma's chewy ginger snaps. Many of Rollins' recipes come from his family, and his mother and nonagenarian grandma come from California to visit several times a year.

Upstairs you'll find a dining room and bar, and above that is a rooftop patio with a charming view of the neighborhood. The artwork featured in the space is by local artists (you'll find Ernesto Guerra's gorgeous paintings on display through December), and if you're looking for unique



Eric Munoz (l) and Levi Lucky Rollins

DALTON DEHART

UNIQUE EATERY

Husbands Eric Munoz and Levi Lucky Rollins offer tasty treats with a side of art at **Urban Eats Bistro + Bar + Market.**

holiday gifts, you can buy artwork and house-made foodstuffs here that will dazzle your friends.

But shoppers will also want to hang out here for the Sunday brunch. Grab a cocktail and settle in for some pancakes, waffles or French toast, or go for the chicken fried steak slider topped with a fried egg, or the Duck Fat Camper's Hash.

"These are nice, well-rounded comfort dishes," Rollins says, "but we do have some healthier choices! We have nine salads, including a very popular garden salad with goat cheese crostini and shaved grilled chicken."

But Rollins' go-to favorite is the fried green tomato BLT: a tart, fried green tomato

FAVORITE
Lunch Spot
Brunch & Cheap Eats
(Runner Up)

with thick-sliced hickory-smoked bacon, cumin chili aioli, and peach pepper jam on a pretzel bun. The two sliders with fries are just \$15—a real deal for the taste buds.

"It's very popular," Rollins says. "If I'm taking a slider home, that's the one I take."

Don't pass up the fluffy pull-apart monkey bread with garlic, rosemary, and sea salt. Or for a sweet treat, try the lemon meringue tartlet.

But more than just food, Urban Eats is about people. "What keeps us going every day is the people," Rollins says. "Most of our staff has been with us since the beginning. We wouldn't have made it five years without them—and our wonderful customers." — *Marene Gustin* →

COMMUNITY

NATIONAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBT COMMUNITY

Target

Finalists: Anheuser-Busch, Dow Chemical, Starbucks

DINING OUT

BEST 24-HOUR RESTAURANT

House of Pies

Finalists: Katz's Deli, Midtown Bar and Grill, Spanish Flowers

BEST BAKERY

Acadian Bakery (tie)

Dessert Gallery (tie)

Finalists: La Sicilia, Michael's Cookie Jar



The Pit Room

BEST BARBECUE

The Pit Room

Finalists: Brookstreet BBQ, Goode Company, Pappas Bar-B-Q, Pinkerton's Barbecue

BEST BREAKFAST

Baby Barnaby's

Finalists: Breakfast Klub, Lankford's Grocery & Market, Snooze-An A.M. Eatery

BEST BRITISH

Red Lion Pub

Finalists: Black Labrador Pub, McGonigle's Mucky Duck

BEST BRUNCH

Gloria's Latin Cuisine (tie)

Hamburger Mary's (tie)

Finalists: The Classic, Urban Eats

BEST CAFE

Barnaby's Cafe

Finalists: Brasil, Common Bond Café & Bakery

BEST CAJUN

BB's Tex-Orleans

Finalist: Ragin' Cajun Restaurant

BEST CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalist: Tasty Arepa



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DINING OUT

BEST CHINESE

P. King Chinese Food

Finalists: Ambassador, China Garden,
Three Six Nine (3-6-9)

BEST CUBAN

El Rey

Finalist: Cafe Piquet

BEST DELI

Katz's Deli

Finalists: Kenny & Ziggy's, New York Deli & Coffee Shop

BEST DESSERT

Acadian Bakers (tie)

Dessert Gallery (tie)

Finalists: La Sicilia, Rita's Italian Ice

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Taqueria Adrian

Finalists: Bernie's Burger Bus, The Waffle Bus

BEST FRENCH

Bistro Le Cep

Finalist: La Table

BEST GREEK

Niko Niko's

Finalist: Theo's



Hamburger Mary's

BEST HAMBURGER

Hamburger Mary's

Finalists: Acadian Bakery, Burger Joint,
Lankford's Grocery & Market

BEST HOT DOG

Good Dog Houston-Montrose

Finalist: JCI Grill

BEST INDIAN

Khyber

Finalists: Indika, Kiran's

BEST ITALIAN

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino (tie)

Riva's (tie)

Finalist: Maggiano's Little Italy

BEST JAPANESE

Uchi

Finalists: Oishii, Roka Akor

BEST LUNCH SPOT

Jenni's Noodle House (tie)

Urban Eats (tie)

Finalists: Barnaby's Café, Maggiano's Little Italy



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Kanpi Women's Collaborative: Marinka Baker, Teresa Baker, Kani Tunkin, Pitjantjatjara language group, *Minyma Tjutangkku Kunpu Kanyini*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 59 1/16 x 118 1/8 in. (150 x 300 cm). © Kanpi Women's Collaborative / Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland.

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TRANS MAN WITH A PLAN

Emmett Schelling leads Texas nonprofit with an intersectional approach.



DALTON DEHART



Prominent Trans Male Activist. Gracious to a fault, this unrelenting trans advocate has earned every accolade coming his way.

As a fierce promoter of equal rights, Schelling first served as the president of the San Antonio Gender Association (SAGA). For the past two years, he has served as the executive director for the Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT), the largest statewide organization serving Texas' transgender/nonbinary/gender-diverse (or "gender-fluid") community.

As a non-profit organization, TENT advocates for inclusive transgender/nonbinary/gender-fluid policies across Texas on both the municipal and statewide levels. TENT also works to empower trans, nonbinary, and gender-diverse Texans through an array of educational programming—including panels, workshops, and public-speaking events. These programs help community members and allies deepen their own understanding of the trans community as

UTSMART readers have chosen Emmett Schelling as this year's Most

they become aware of the barriers to full access and inclusion faced by trans individuals.

As the tip of TENT's activist spear, Schelling's professional life is demanding. On any given day he can be found speaking with political leaders, medical professionals, lawyers, social workers, or students and their parents. He's been featured in numerous Texas media outlets, and in national publications such as *Newsweek*, *The Hill*, *Slate*, and the *Huffington Post*.

Is Schelling's work making a difference? "In the two years Emmett has been the executive director of TENT, he has made great strides in advancing our mission of furthering gender-diverse equality in Texas. We are happy to have him," states Erika Richie, TENT board member, popular activist, and model Mama Bear.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Schelling was adopted as a toddler and grew up in a conservative and deeply religious middle-class family in the Midwest. But that predictably safe path to adulthood had a slight detour as Schelling began his journey to become the proudly out trans man he is today.

"My first memory as a child is launching into a [very atypical] tantrum at the age of three or four when my mother tried to make me wear a dress," Schelling laughs. "As I grew into childhood, I refused to wear a shirt. That did

**FAVORITE
TRANS MALE**
Community Hero

**MOST
PROMINENT**
Trans Male Activist

not go over well with my family, so we found a compromise: bib overalls."

Schilling's transition was not a "ta-da!" moment, he says, since he had always been masculine, and often chose the company of other male kids. "My sister said after I officially came out to her, everything

made so much more sense about who I was," he explained.

As TENT's first executive director who is also non-white, Schelling realizes there is disproportionate danger for trans, nonbinary, gender-diverse people of color. He and TENT are tackling this head-on.

"People of color, particularly black trans women of color, face obstacles that their white counterparts do not. This is why TENT has committed to do all of its programming through a racial-justice lens, with an emphasis on an intersectional approach," Schelling says. "We need to educate people about the trans community as a whole, and who we really are. It's a sad day when we need to 'humanize' any group to help them live free of discrimination and harm. There's an aggressive push now to erase people from society just because we don't know or don't understand their journey," Schelling notes. "Our mission at TENT is to change all this." — Kim Hogstrom →

DINING OUT

BEST MEDITERRANEAN

Fadi's

Finalists: Aladdin, DiMassi's

BEST MEXICAN

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalists: El Real, El Tiempo

BEST MIDDLE EASTERN

Fadi's

Finalist: Aladdin

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Bisou

Finalists: BCN Taste & Tradition, Nobie's

BEST PIZZA

Bollo

Finalists: Pepperoni's, Pi Pizza, Star Pizza

BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE

Rainbow Lodge

Finalists: Eddie V's, Giacomo's Cibo e Vino, La Table

BEST PLACE TO CELEBRATE

Hamburger Mary's

Finalists: Boheme, Pearl Bar

BEST RESTAURANT

FOR CHEAP EATS

Jenni's Noodle House

Finalists: Barnaby's, Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers, Urban Eats, Whataburger

BEST RESTAURANT FOR ELEGANT DINING

Rainbow Lodge

Finalists: La Table, State of Grace, Tony's

BEST RESTAURANT

FOR OUTDOOR DINING

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Finalists: Backstreet Cafe, Harold's Restaurant & Tap Room

BEST SEAFOOD

Truluck's

Finalists: Goode Company Seafood, McCormick & Schmick's, Pappadeaux

BEST STEAK HOUSE

Perry's Steakhouse

Finalists: B&B Butchers, Morton's Steak House, Ritual

BEST STEAK NIGHT AT A BAR

Free Grillin' at George

Finalists: Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, Pearl Bar

BEST SUSHI

Roka Akor

Finalists: Kata Robata, Oishii

BEST THAI

Khun Kay Thai

Finalists: Naam Khao Thai Kitchen, Rim Tanon

BEST VEGETARIAN/VEGAN

Field of Greens

Finalists: Govinda's, Tarka Indian Kitchen



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

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Finalists: Kashmir Cortave, Mya Ross,
Reyna Rodriguez

FAVORITE MALE BARTENDER

Matthew Friar

Finalists: Colton Gaul, David Truong,
Anthony Uncensored, Travis Webb

FAVORITE WINE BAR

Bacco

Finalists: Boheme, Postino

HEALTH & BEAUTY

BEST COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES PROVIDER

Avenue 360 (tie)

Legacy Community Health (tie)

Finalist: City of Houston HIV Services

BEST COSMETIC SKIN CARE CENTER

The Skin Renewal Center

Finalists: Share Wellness & MediSpa,
Skin Renaissance, West Ave. Plastic Surgery

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Angela Sturm

BEST MALE AESTHETIC PHYSICIAN

Patrick McNamara

Finalists: Herb De Souza, Russell Kridel

BEST FOOT DOCTOR

Vanessa Barrow

Finalist: Jim Jacobs

BEST DAY SPA

Alira Boutique Spa & Salon

BEST FEMALE DENTIST

Cynthia Corral

Finalists: Melicia Tjoa, Dianna Wilde



Sam Carrell

BEST MALE DENTIST

Sam Carrell

Finalists: Marcus De Guzman,
Austin Faulk, Cory Logan,
Randy Mitchmore, Bruce Smith

BEST FEMALE EYE DOCTOR

Michelle Hung

Finalists: Juliet Farmer, Christine Tyler

BEST MALE EYE DOCTOR

Stewart Zuckerbrod

Finalists: Paul Lovero, Charlie Nguyen

BEST FEMALE HAIR STYLIST

Celina Gonzalez

Finalists: Lana Blake, Patty Gooch

BEST MALE HAIR STYLIST

Joel Quinones

Finalists: Reza Nouri, Anthony Skoogie,
Randall Valentino

BEST FEMALE

MASSAGE THERAPIST

Rose Carle

BEST MALE

MASSAGE THERAPIST

Ryan Fugate

Finalists: Joel Quezada,
Adam Skidmore, Tom Zeppelin

BEST FEMALE

MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

Denise O'Doherty

Finalists: Tara Bates, Yvonne Champion,
Blythe Twosisters

BEST MALE

MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

Ty David Lerman (tie)

Robert Snellgrove (tie)

Finalist: Tony Aucoin

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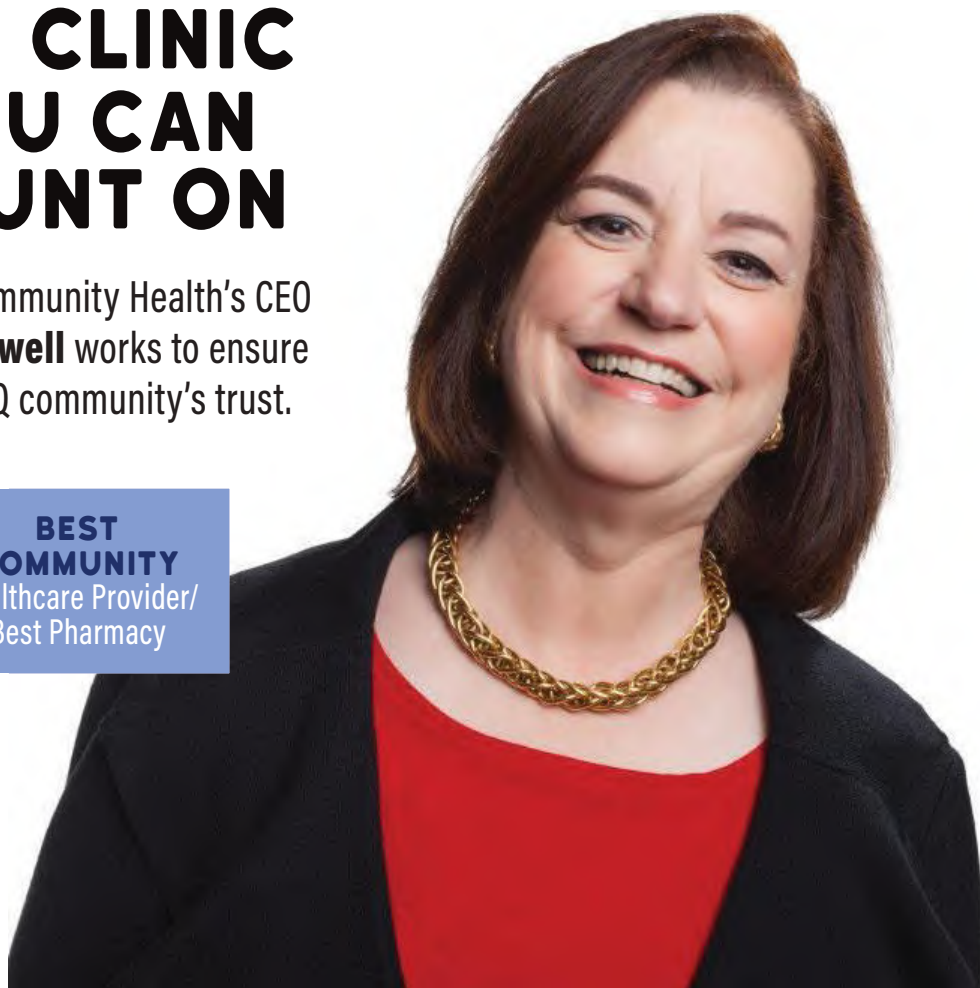
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THE CLINIC YOU CAN COUNT ON

Legacy Community Health's CEO **Katy Caldwell** works to ensure the LGBTQ community's trust.

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After Katy Caldwell's close friend was diagnosed with HIV in the late 1980s, she became a Montrose Clinic volunteer to help others affected by the virus.

"Many people were dying," Caldwell recalls. "Giving someone an HIV diagnosis was basically handing them their death sentence. As a volunteer, there were days when I had to give multiple people HIV-positive results. That was tough."

Caldwell again stepped up for folks affected by HIV and AIDS in 1996, when she accepted a job as executive director of the Montrose Clinic. Just as she took over the clinic, there was an HIV/AIDS medication breakthrough that allowed clinics across America to create a practical system of holistic HIV care. When Montrose Clinic morphed into Legacy Community Health in 2005, it became a place where anyone could receive health-related services—physical

and mental health, social services, dental and eye care, and medication management.

Twenty-three years later, and under Caldwell's leadership, Legacy Community Health has full-service clinics in 36 locations throughout Houston, offering comprehensive care to over 189,000 people, regardless of their ability to pay.

"Offering people affordable healthcare is important, because Texas has the highest number of uninsured people in the nation and Houston has the highest number in the state," Caldwell notes, referencing data released by the U.S. Census Bureau. "Legacy's mission is to drive healthy change in our communities, and the only way we can do that is to provide affordable access to healthcare services."

It is in Legacy Community Health's DNA to be LGBTQ-affirming, Caldwell says, but it hasn't been easy to get everyone on the same page as the Trump administration rolls back healthcare protections for LGBTQ—and specifically transgender—people.

"We're fighting the administration's at-

tacks on trans people in every way that we can," Caldwell says, adding that Legacy is working with lobbyists in Washington to defeat anti-LGBTQ healthcare proposals. "We're one voice in a large collective of voices (including our sister clinics across the country and the larger medical community) who believe in equal treatment for the trans community."

Legacy Community Health will always be a place that provides affirming and affordable healthcare to trans people, Caldwell says. Everyone who is hired to work for the clinics must be LGBTQ-friendly, and employees are given trainings on how to best work with LGBTQ patients.

Commenting on Legacy Community Health winning OUTSMART's Gayest & Greatest 2019 awards for Best Community Healthcare Provider and Best Pharmacy, Caldwell says: "It's one of the best compliments we could ever get that the community feels this way about our organization. I'm incredibly humbled and flattered. Legacy will continue to work every day for your trust." —*Lourdes Zavaleta* →

HEALTH & BEAUTY

BEST MALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST

Denis "Woodja" Flanigan

BEST MALE PSYCHIATRIST

Daniel Garza

Finalist: Barry Gritz

BEST FEMALE

PERSONAL TRAINER

Danielle Sampey

Finalist: Shana Ross

BEST MALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Michael Shallis

Finalist: Tony Hood, David Muniz

BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN

M. Sandra Scurria

Finalists: Julia Kovacs, Jennifer Meyer

BEST MALE PHYSICIAN

Gordon Crofoot

Finalists: Octavio Barrios,
Colt Keo-Maier, Ted Voloyiannis



Aspire Fertility

BEST FERTILITY CLINIC

Aspire Fertility

Finalist: Houston Fertility Institute

BEST GYM/PLACE TO WORK OUT

FIT Athletic Club

Finalists: Club Houston, Houston Gym,
Skyline CrossFit

BEST CHIROPRACTOR

Sherman Yeager

Finalist: Byron Menard

BEST PHARMACY

Avita Pharmacy (tie)

Legacy Pharmacy (tie)

Finalists: Kroger Montrose, Walgreen's

BEST PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Roy Rivera Jr.

Finalist: Ariel Harlev

BEST TATTOO PARLOR

Electric Chair

Finalists: Corazones Tattoo, Red Eye Gallery

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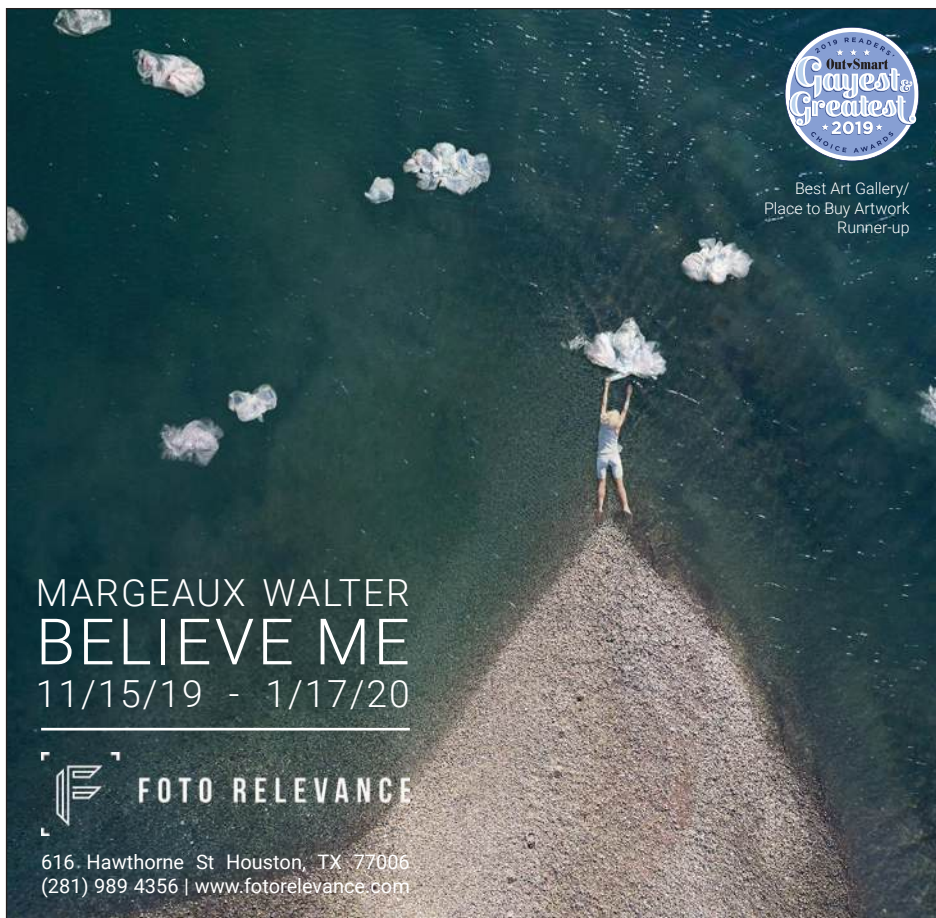
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Finalist: Felicia Gulihur

BEST MALE INSURANCE AGENT

Lane Lewis
Finalist: Patrick Torma

BEST FLORIST

Ronnie Siebert



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Finalists: Cantoni, Design Within Reach

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Finalists: Buchanan's Native Plants, Fountains and Statuary, Wabash Feed & Garden Store

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BEST INTERIOR DESIGNER

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Finalist: Dreams by MJS Interiors

BEST LANDSCAPING COMPANY

Windswept Landscape Studios

BEST MOVERS

All My Sons Movers

Finalists: 3 Men Movers, Max Movers

BEST PEST CONTROL COMPANY

Andy's All Star Pest Control

BEST AIR CONDITIONING & HEATING COMPANY

Newport Air Conditioning & Heating

Finalist: Construct Air & Heat

BEST PLUMBER

Village Plumbing & Air

Finalist: Nick's Plumbing

BEST POOL COMPANY

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Finalist: Houston Cool Pools

LEGAL & FINANCIAL

BEST BANK/CREDIT UNION

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Finalists: East West Bank,
People's Trust Federal Credit Union,
Regions Bank, Wells Fargo

BEST FEMALE ACCOUNTANT/BOOKKEEPER

Kathy Hubbard

BEST MALE ACCOUNTANT/BOOKKEEPER

Gary Gritz

BEST FEMALE ATTORNEY

deborah lawson

Finalists: Phyllis Frye, Fran Watson

BEST MALE ATTORNEY

Raed Gonzalez (tie)

Mitchell Katine (tie)

Finalists: John Nechman, Dwane Todd

BEST FEMALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Grace Yung

Finalists: Felicia Gulihur, Christyna Lewis

BEST MALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Bryan K. Cotton (tie)

Richard Dickson (tie)

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Finalists: Houston Bark Park & Daycare,
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Judge Fran Watson
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When Fran Watson was a child, she was often chosen to be the judge when she and her friends would play court.

"We would play while riding the METRO bus, and being judge was always my role," Watson, now 44, recalls. "Later in life, my college professors nicknamed me Judge Watson. I had no idea my life would ever actually be headed in that direction."

Watson, an attorney and LGBTQ activist, was appointed associate municipal judge for the City of Houston by Mayor Sylvester Turner in July. Her new position, a two-year term with the opportunity to seek reappointment, is her latest act of public service.

"My goal is to do right by the people of Houston," Watson says. "I want to ensure that everyone who comes through the courtroom is treated with respect and is being heard."

Watson and her younger brother were born and raised in Houston by her mother and her grandparents. She excelled at school, loved to read, and enjoyed playing the bass clarinet.

Her life took a sudden turn when she was 13 and her mother died of a drug overdose. During Watson's sophomore year of high school, her grandfather became ill and she frequently had to accompany him to the doctor. The following year, Watson was expelled from school for having too many absences.

After working in fast food for several years, Watson decided to take the GED exam at the University of Houston Downtown (UHD) so she could become a manager at Luther's BBQ. Instead, a counselor

at the school told Watson that her high scores on the GED were enough to win a scholarship. Watson began attending UHD on that scholarship, earning her bachelor's degree in psychology in 2005.

Following her graduation, Watson applied to Texas Southern University's law school and was admitted for the 2006 school year. In 2009, she passed the test to be admitted to the Texas State Bar. Eventually, Watson opened up a private practice in her home, doing LGBTQ estate planning.

In 2011, Watson fell two-and-a-half stories while rock climbing in Austin. She broke both of her legs and was housebound for weeks. "I decided that once I could walk again, I would do more for my community," she recalls.

Watson became heavily involved in LGBTQ organizations such as the Stonewall Law Association of Greater Houston, where she became friends with Jerry Simoneaux—her former law partner and now a fellow Houston judge—who encouraged her to join the Houston

**FAVORITE
FEMALE**
Community Hero

**MOST
PROMINENT
FEMALE**
LGBTQ Activist

GLBT Political Caucus. In 2016, Watson made history by becoming the Caucus' first black female president. She also served in leadership positions for the Democratic National Convention, Creating Change, and Montrose Grace Place (where she is currently a board member).

Watson ran for a Texas Senate seat in 2018, but ultimately lost in the Democratic primary runoff against Rita Lucido, who was later defeated by anti-LGBTQ Republican

Senator Joan Huffman. As to whether she will ever run for the Senate again, Watson says, "As long as there are injustices being done against people, I will always consider a run. I want to make sure that Texas has effective leadership."

Watson is married to Kim Watson, her partner of 15 years, whom she loves to travel with. Watson says her dream trip is to Africa. "That's my next spot," Watson says. "It's a 19-hour flight, so I'm mentally preparing for it. I'm hoping to make it happen by 2021."

—*Lourdes Zavaleta*



ASHKAN ROZVAEE

PETS

BEST FEMALE VETERINARIAN

Kristy Kyle (tie)
Danielle Rosser (tie)
 Finalist: Catherine Lang

BEST MALE VETERINARIAN

Richard Clive
 Finalists: Doug Hendrix, Larry White

BEST PET EMERGENCY CARE CENTER

Gulf Coast Veterinary Specialists
 Finalists: Sunset Animal Hospital, Urban Animal Veterinary Hospital

BEST PET GROOMING SERVICE

Aussie Pet Mobile - River Oaks (tie)
The Dog House Pet Salon (tie)
 Finalist: Molly's Mutt House

BEST PET FOOD

NULO
 Finalists: Blue Buffalo, Royal Canin

BEST PET WALKING AND PET SITTING SERVICE

George's Pampered Paws
 Finalist: Sit & Stay Awhile

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 Finalists: BARC Animal Shelter and Adoptions, Friends For Life

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Natural Pawz
 Finalists: Kriser's Natural Pet, PetSmart

ARTS

BEST ART GALLERY/PLACE TO BUY ARTWORK

Archway Gallery
 Finalists: Foto Relevance, Hardy & Nance Studios, Jumper Maybach Art

BEST COMMUNITY DANCE COMPANY

Urban Souls Dance Company
 Finalists: Hope Stone Inc., Pilot Dance Project

BEST COMMUNITY THEATRE

Stages Repertory Theatre
 Finalists: Catastrophic Theatre, Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston (MATCH)

BEST LOCAL EQUITY THEATRE

Alley Theatre (tie)
Theatre Under The Stars (tie)

BEST PERFORMING ARTS COMPANY

Theatre Under The Stars
 Finalists: Alley Theatre, Society for the Performing Arts

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DJ

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DJ Melle Mel has spun records since 2007.

Mel Frausto was born in the small town of Weslaco, Texas, but grew up mainly in Houston. A graduate of the College of Alameda in Alameda, California, Frausto is now a full-time DJ. How Frausto landed in that career is not a typical story.

Frausto, who identifies as nonbi-

nary and gender-fluid, uses plural pronouns. "I have truly embraced both my masculine and feminine traits," they explain. Ask them just what kind of DJ they are, and Frausto will tell you, "A good specialist DJ [for bars and clubs], spinning tracks that I enjoy and my audience enjoys."

While at the College of Alameda, Frausto was studying to become a certified auto techni-

cian, following in their father's footsteps. But while working in a repair shop as part of their studies, Frausto sustained a severe injury that meant they would no longer be able to lift anything over 10 pounds. Not long after, they got a call that their father had been diagnosed with Stage 5 cancer.

"I immediately said goodbye to California and moved back home to Houston. Sadly, I lost my father to cancer." Frausto knew they needed a new career. Having worked as a DJ for private events in California, Frausto thought, "Why not do it until I can find something permanent? That was in 2007, and to this day that has been my career. That twist of fate changed my life forever."

It's no wonder that being a DJ ultimately become Frausto's career. Ever since Frausto was young, they would turn to music as an escape or as therapy. "Music is so powerful. I was addicted, and it was effortless when I was a beginner DJ. I was born to do this!"

At age 8, Frausto discovered their parents' LP and 8-track tape collection. "I found myself hooked on learning lyrics and melodies—and the rest, as you say, is history. I've been DJing for twelve years now, and loving every moment I have standing behind the decks."

Frausto finds music, and everything it can do for a person, incredibly inspiring. "Music has been around as long as man. Throughout the years, people have revelled in the joy of songs. It makes us move. It plays with our heartstrings. It transcends place and time, and it connects us."

But it's not only music's power to inspire that so thrills Frausto. It is also its power to unite their audiences. "It provides a unique experience, bringing all cultures together. No matter where you come from, we are all equal."

Those audiences are about to grow, too. Frausto will be starting at a new venue in the coming weeks, and there may even be "some traveling to different surrounding cities," Frausto adds.

Although music is close to Frausto's heart, charity is right there with it. They are committed to giving back to the community and donating time for nonprofit events such as Bunnies on the Bayou and the Montrose Softball League Association (MSLA).

More than anything, Frausto says they don't want to be known as a "female or lesbian" DJ—but rather as one who just "plays from the heart and is full of love for every single soul in the audience. So the next time you see me, feel free to shout out 'DJ Melle Mel!'"

— *Jenny Block*

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Iconic actress **Tamarie Cooper** impacts Houston's theater scene.

Tamarie Cooper would like to thank the Academy...oops, I mean Houston's LGBTQ community.

"I have been very fortunate to win some other 'Best of' awards, but this one just has a special meaning. It gives me the warm fuzzies," she says. "This is a community that I love and for which I am an ally. Growing up in ballet, I was always surrounded by gay people; my mother's best friends were gay men and a lesbian couple, and I saw no difference between them and anyone else. It was a rude awakening when I discovered that so many people are treated differently for being gay."

Cooper, who was born in Chicago but

"moved all around" as a child, landed in Houston at age 14 and made lifelong friends among her fellow students at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA), where she began dabbling in theater. She clocked more than 200 hours in college, but dropped out "for the last time" when she helped found the Infernal Bride-groom company with longtime collaborator Jason Nodler in 1993.

Now the co-artistic director of Catastrophic Theatre, which houses at the Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston (MATCH), Cooper's LGBTQ followers might know her best as the creator of *The Tamarie Cooper Show*, a dizzyingly original, full-scale musical ex-

FAVORITE LOCAL Female Actor

travaganza that will return in its 22nd installment next summer. However, Cooper says, "I'm not only *The Tamarie Cooper Show*." She's also a bona fide director of other plays, including Will Eno's *Tragedy: A Tragedy*, which runs through October 20. Then

she'll portray Carol in *Baby Screams Miracle* by Clare Barron, November 22–December 15 at Catastrophic. "It's a wild, crazy script that is really funny and strange and intense," she says.

But back to *Tamarie 20/20*, which Cooper is currently writing. The superstar hyphenate teases that maybe, just maybe, she's penning a special role for gay fave Walt Zipprian. "He will probably appear as Barbara Walters," she says. —Don Maines →

ARTS

FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE ACTOR

Tamarie Cooper

Finalists: Holland Vavra, Teresa Zimmerman

FAVORITE LOCAL MALE ACTOR

Colton Berry

Finalists: Dylan Goodwin, Mark Ivy



Crystal Murley

FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE FINE ARTIST

Crystal Murley

Finalists: Nesreen Alawami,
Jan Golden, Heather Gordy

FAVORITE LOCAL MALE FINE ARTIST

Hugo Perez

Finalists: Robin Baker, John Palmer, Steven Tilotta

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JILL OF ALL TRADES

Heather J. Taylor excels as a businesswoman, a volunteer, and in brand development.

Heather Taylor, 50, wears many hats, so her multiple G&G category awards are no surprise.

"I'm very busy with my company and all my volunteer and political work," Taylor says. "That's pretty much all I do."

The Army brat was living in Houston in the '90s when she came out. That's also about the time she read Julia Cameron's self-help book *The Artist's Way*, which deals with creative development.

"It asks you to list five things you want to be when you grow up," she explains. "I think I put down CEO and basketball player." One out of two isn't bad.

Taylor left Houston around 2002 to spend ten years in Los Angeles as a creative consultant. She came back here in 2012 and continued to work as a freelance consultant, but it wasn't until last year that she felt the need to expand.

"I just outgrew myself," she says. "So I decided to start Mad Hat Maven

creative agency, and it just skyrocketed." Today she has more than a dozen employees, all of whom wear multiple hats. Which means that a client may want a writer, but they'll also get someone who is a creative director, brand consultant, and video editor. Although the company has worked for some major oil and gas interests and large companies, they will also work on smaller accounts.

"We work with mom-and-pops and businesses just starting out," Taylor says. "We can do brand development, set up a website, put together a marketing plan, and then teach them how to continue on their own."

Despite that busy schedule, Taylor also makes time for volunteer work in the community. Her company did the creative in-kind work for the Victory Fund this year, and also sponsored the Victory Brunch. She is also cochair of the Human Rights Campaign and is involved in politics.

"When I woke up on that fateful November morning in 2016, I made a pact with the universe that I was going to do everything

I could to stop this," she says of the Trump election.

Taylor also has a background in theater, with a drama degree from London's Regent's College and The Poor School of Acting. She certainly has a flair to her, but also a sense of duty—which explains why her favorite film is *Roman Holiday*, where a young Audrey Hepburn plays a princess who flees her structured life for a wild fling in Rome.

"She has the courage to take a risk," Taylor says, "but she also knows she has to go back to her duty."

Taylor likes hanging out with friends, travel, and monthly trips to Waco to visit her mother—whom she calls her best friend. Otherwise, she's content living with her two rescues (a transgender Chihuahua and a terrier mix) and the occasional evening at Eddie V's for some old-school service and live jazz. Of course, she's also a big Madonna fan, as her tastes in music reflect her numerous talents.

—Marene Gustin

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BROOKS BALLARD

David Alcorta's parents told him he had to have a real job to fall back on, so the Laredo native got a degree and went into accounting.

"I worked as an accountant for years before becoming a baker," he says. The last eight years he worked for a non-profit in Laredo before following his passion and moving to Houston in 2007 to attend the Art Institute of Houston, where he graduated from the Baking & Pastry program. Six years ago, he opened his own company, David Alcorta Catering, and today the 47-year-old is one of the most sought-after caterers and specialty cake bakers in the city. His wedding, quinceañera, and birthday cakes are drool-worthy fantasy creations that are Instagram-ready. He is a master of frosting and fondant who can create everything from whimsical cartoon cakes to gorgeous multi-tiered masterpieces. (He can even make cakes that look like meat and mashed potatoes!) And speaking of menu favorites, Alcorta also caters all manner of big and small parties and events, supplying food, managers, servers, bartenders, and bussers. Planning every little detail of these events is his passion.

"I do a lot of custom menus," he adds. "I can make whatever they want. I have a lot of repeat business, so I try to give them something different every time. But sometimes they really want something they've had before, so I'll always make their favorites, too.

"My husband says I'm so successful because I stress out so much," Alcorta laughs. "But when I get going, I make lists so it's all on paper and out of my head."

And when it comes time to bake, he relaxes by going to his commercial kitchen at five or six in the morning and slipping on headphones. "Listening to music and baking when I'm all alone in the kitchen is very relaxing," he says. Besides his desserts, he also plans the entire menu, from crab-stuffed mushrooms to chicken cordon bleu and pretty much anything in between.

But Alcorta rarely cooks at home for his husband of seven years, Craig



COMPASSIONATE CATERING

David Alcorta takes care of every last detail while event planning.

Felderhoff—and he didn't even cater their wedding. "Unless I bring something home from work," Alcorta says, "we will eat out." They much prefer to dine at Houston's Mexican restaurants. "He's Anglo, but we both love Mexican food, especially beef fajitas. We also like pizza!"

The couple has a puppy dog, but no children of their own, although they are hosting an 18-year-old Hungarian foreign-exchange stu-

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dent this school year. "He's our son until the end of the school year," Alcorta says.

"As for the catering business, it's very competitive," he notes. "But Houston is a big and diverse city. There's room for all of us."

Satisfied customers are Alcorta's favorite thing about his work. "Just seeing

their faces when they see my creations is worth all the work!" he says. "And then when they taste it, oh boy!" — *Marene Gustin* →

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A QUEER LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

MSLA hits a homer with local sports fans.

Circling the bases for its 40th anniversary, Montrose Softball League Association (MSLA) is equal parts sports, social activities, and philanthropy—a winning combination that has made them this year’s Gayest & Gayest Favorite LGBTQ Sports Group.

MSLA is dedicated to the promotion of amateur softball for anyone who is age 18 and older, regardless of race, creed, religion, sex, or national origin, with special emphasis placed on the participation of Greater Houston’s LGBTQ community.

The organization’s more than 30 teams and 750 players meet for two seasons each year. The fall season runs five weeks while the spring season lasts eleven weeks, and both seasons have a place for players of all skill levels. No one gets turned down.

“We have recruitment days twice a year. New players come out, and we host some drills, learn their skills, and then we find a good fit for them in the organization,” said Corbin Strong, MSLA public-relations coordinator.

With four divisions, there’s plenty of room for players to find a place to play ball.

As a member of the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance,

the league is invited to send select teams to the yearly Gay Softball World Series. MSLA teams have won four championships so far, and it provides a constant incentive to keep practicing and improving each year in hopes of winning another title.

MSLA’s goal is to provide a sports outlet for individuals to meet and interact with like-minded people in the spirit of friendly competition, in an environment that promotes good health and fitness. And beyond that, the league is a good way to make friends.

“We’re all family. You form a tight bond with your teammates. Although we’re all under the same sports organization, each team has its own camaraderie. It’s a great social activity,” Strong said.

He added that the organization depends on sponsorships, and many gay bars have become sponsors. As a way of continuing that supportive relationship, the teams host weekly events at sponsoring bars to bring business back to the vendors. It’s also a good way for members to socialize after each game day.

Through all the fun, MSLA doesn’t forget the organization’s core value of giving back to the community. MSLA created the Jerry Award (named after founding members Jerry Chaffin, Jerry DeSale, and Jerry Kauffman) to spotlight members who have provided outstanding service over the course of several years, and contributed greatly to the



DALTON DEHART

growth and success of the league. Strong describes it as the Hall of Fame for the organization, and it stands as the highest honor bestowed on its members.

MSLA also hosts highly anticipated annual events to raise money for charity partners, including Jocks in Dresses, the Miss MSLA Pageant, and the Lone Star Classic. The first two have a festive drag motif, and the latter is a softball tournament.

MSLA raises approximately \$20,000 each year, and this year’s recipients are the UH LGBTQ Alumni Association, Child Advocates, Adopt A Rescued Friend, Inc., and the Montrose Center. The organization is currently accepting applications for next season’s donation recipients, which will be announced in March.

From swinging for the fences to ringing in money for the community, MSLA has hit a home run with Houston’s queer athletes.

For more information or to get involved with Montrose Softball League Association, visit houstonmsla.org.

– Sam Byrd

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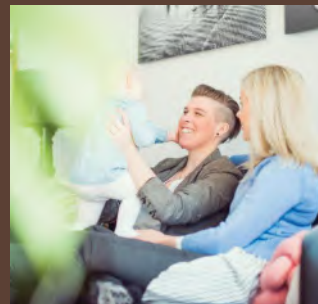
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COMMUNITY

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AHF President Michael Weinstein and Director Bret Camp were in Houston for the grand opening and ribbon-cutting for the newest Out of the Closet Thrift Store on August 24. Pictured are the AHF owner and staff.



On August 24, Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon celebrated their sixth anniversary. Pictured are Ron McLeroy, Debbie Storrs, Jim Gerhold, Fernando Garcia, and Jim Daily.



On August 31, the IBL Billiards League celebrated their 25th anniversary at Ripcord. Pictured are Mark Sherron, Gilbert Vargas, Janie Anders, Corey Collins, and Richard Chew.



On September 1, Neon Boots was the host for Daddy Dan Dowden's Dynamic Dog Days of Summer Extravaganza. Pictured are (standing) Jim Gerhold, Aurora Briar, Viola Degradable, Dion Debris, David Barron, Michael Clayton, Domenic Cusano, Angela Mercy, Bobby Birchmire, (seated) Richard Watson, Ann Struve Tuttle, Shannon Olsteen, and Don Gill.

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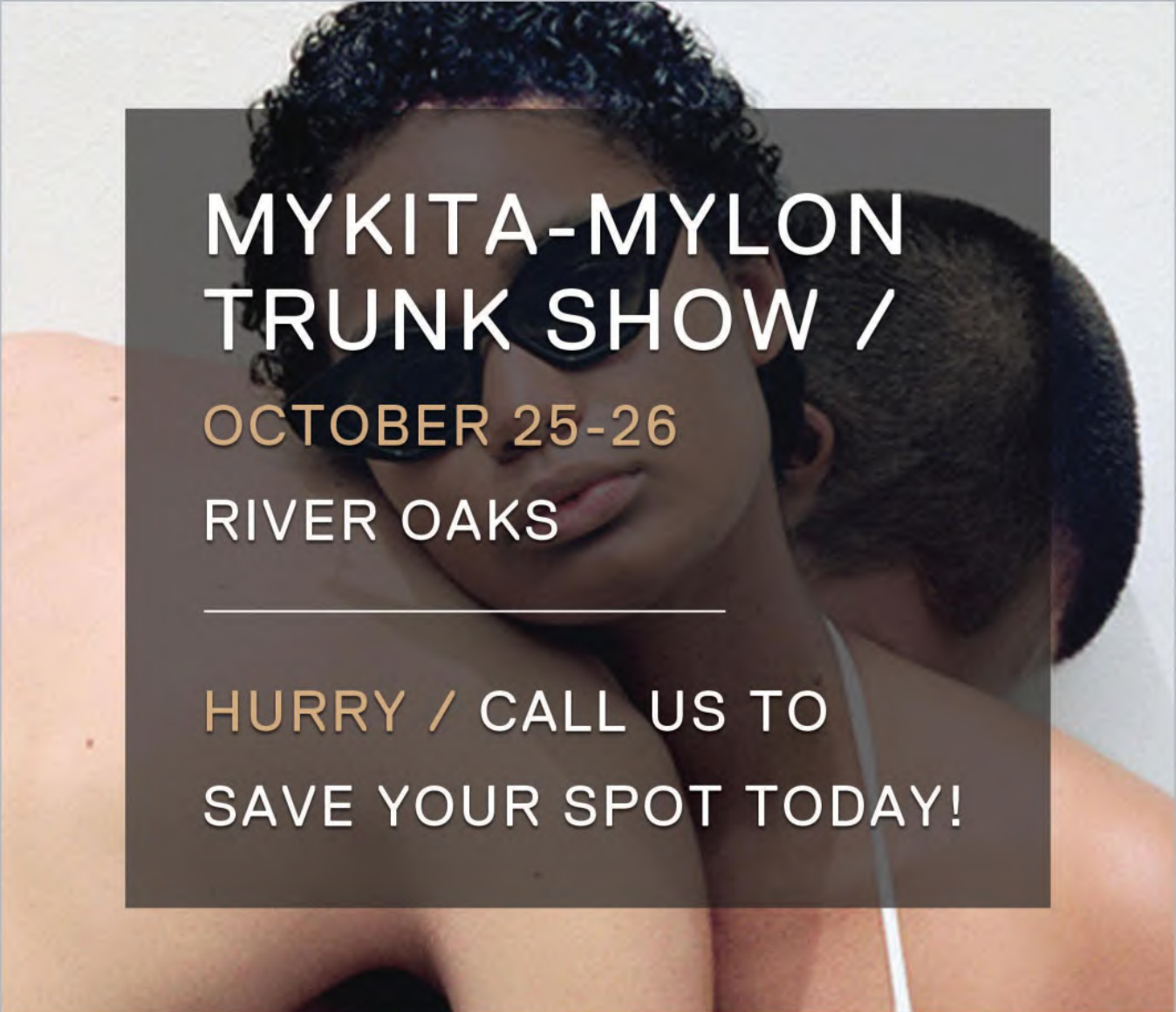
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On August 31, the IBL Billiards League celebrated their 25th anniversary at Ripcord. Pictured IBL members and guests.



On September 3, OutSmart Gayest & Greatest Favorite TV Personality winner Ernie Manouse celebrated his birthday at Niko Niko's. Pictured are his mother, Adele Manouse, Ernie, and Jerry Jaggers.



The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce held an education series event on September 5, sponsored and hosted by Amegy Bank. Pictured are Jill Maxwell, Robert Hahn, Tressa Sagullo, Craig Wessels, Tammi Wallace, Clay Melder, Patria Wortham, Ryan Bates, and speaker Tom Jackobs.



On September 11, the Bayou Blue Democrats met with Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Pictured are (back) Greg Fleischaker, Rob Hallenbeck, (front) Ruffi Natarajan, Lina Hidalgo, Aliza Geretz, Ingrid Bond, and David Feldwisch.

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Pearl Bar hosted an OUTSMART magazine signing party on September 11 for the September Drag Kings cover. Pictured (l to r) are Adriana Larue, Ryder Moore, La'Darius Jackson, Richard Long, Nyx Laraye, Hugh Dandy, and Ian Syder-Blake.



On September 12, supporters of the Democratic candidates gathered at several locations around Houston to watch the Democratic Presidential Debates.



The Houston Tejano Democrats held their endorsement meeting for the 2019 November elections on September 14 at the IBEW Local 176 Union Hall. Pictured are the endorsed candidates and organization members.



On September 17, EPAH held its monthly dinner meeting at Urban Eats. Pictured are Roy Alvarez Jr., Cindy Cuellar, Jack Berger, Levi Rollins, and James Spear.



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SUPREME COURT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

financing in elections. Most relevant here, of course, is that in 2003, the Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas*, reversed its 1986 ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick* which had upheld state bans on same-sex sexual relations.

Complications and Consequences

Relatively speaking, the Supreme Court moves slowly and prefers to leave the driving to Congress. It took 17 years for the Supreme Court to acknowledge that *Hardwick* was “not correct” and strike down sodomy laws with *Lawrence*. It took 17 years for the court to strike down the federal Defense of Marriage Act after it was enacted. And it took 43 years for the high court to rectify its dismissal of a marriage-equality case in 1972 by striking down state bans on same-sex marriage in 2015.

But while this very large and slow-moving judiciary seemed to complete a full turn towards LGBTQ equality in 2015’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, a headwind seemed to develop last year with the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* decision. The majority sent the case back to Colorado, saying the state’s human rights commission had expressed “hostility” toward the religious beliefs expressed by a wedding cake baker who refused to make a wedding cake for a gay couple. Some LGBTQ activists felt that gave “dangerous encouragement” to business owners who might want to circumvent laws prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination simply by claiming religious motivation. Similar cases have since multiplied and will, no doubt, be before the Supreme Court soon.

But the consequences of a ruling about Title VII and sexual orientation and transgender status are even greater. Currently, only 21 states and the District of Columbia prohibit both sexual orientation and transgender discrimination in the workplace.

“If we win,” explained Davidson, “all LGBTQ people will be protected no matter where they live.”

A victory would “also be a resounding confirmatory statement that anti-LGBTQ discrimination is wrong,” said Pizer.

“It’s impossible to overstate the ameliorative influence of such statements,” she said. “Witness the profound changes in social attitudes post-marriage equality.”

But there’s an equally enormous consequence and message if the LGBTQ community loses.

“If we lose either the sexual orientation cases or the gender identity/transgender status case,” said Pizer, “the consequences will be intensely dire in multiple ways. There will be a message that it’s perfectly legal to fire or refuse to hire [or] otherwise to abuse LGBTQ people at work.”

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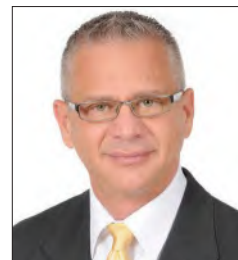
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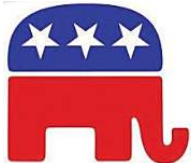


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At Large Position 3:

Michael Kubosh

At Large Position 4:

Anthony Dolcefino

At Large Position 5:

Sonia Rivera

District A: Amy Peck

District C:

Both Greg Meyers &
Daphne Scarbrough

District G:

Greg Travis

The candidates above were determined to be those most able to lead our city in a better direction, and reflective of the values of the members of the Log Cabin Republicans of Houston, although many in several races were found to be candidates that the Log Cabin Republicans of Houston could support.

The Log Cabin Republicans of Houston conducted a transparent, impartial endorsement process with questions and interviews open to any candidate. The majority of candidates in the races above responded, including the leading candi-

dates for mayor. No funds nor group paid memberships were accepted from any candidate during the months-long vetting process, nor were any offered or promised.

The Log Cabin Republicans of Houston strives to be an advocate for legal and political equality for all Houstonians, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or status, under the framework of the conservative principles of limited government, individual liberty, and personal responsibility.

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Unapologetically Trans | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

In the Zarda case, the late Donald Zarda filed suit against Altitude Express after the skydiving instructor was terminated by them in 2010 for being gay. Zarda died a few years later as the result of a BASE jumping accident in Switzerland, and his family elected to continue pursuing justice for him in this case.

Gerald Bostock filed suit against Clayton County after he was terminated from his management job by Clayton County in 2013 after he revealed to coworkers that he'd joined a gay softball league.

The ACLU is also arguing the third trans-specific case, *Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC*, which will determine whether anti-trans discrimination is a form of sex discrimination. Aimee Stephens was fired by a Detroit-area funeral home she worked at in 2014 after informing her employer she was beginning her transition.

The Sixth Circuit already has favorable case law from multiple trans-discrimination cases that buttress the argument that anti-trans discrimination is a form of sex discrimination. The funeral home and the Trump administration are arguing otherwise.

Gee, why am I not surprised about that revolting development?

While all these cases are being argued on the basis of whether Title VII applies to anti-TBLGQ discrimination, these landmark cases will affect all federal laws banning discrimination on the basis of sex, including Title X of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Fair Housing Act.

If we get an adverse ruling in these cases, it won't just negatively affect the TBLGQ+ community. If you are a cis hetero person who is perceived to be a member of our community, you will also be at risk for job termination, so you may wish to stand with us to see that justice is done.

I'm also concerned that with conservative justices Gorsuch and Kavanaugh on the court, these cases won't be decided in our favor. Then again, they could shock me and it could go our way with a 5-4 decision.

We'll find out for certain at the end of the SCOTUS 2019-2020 term in June, when we will either be celebrating a landmark win or a legal setback that will greatly prolong our civil-rights battle. No matter which way these cases go, they will undoubtedly be a hot issue during the 2020 elections.

I'm hoping and praying for another landmark win.

Monica Roberts, a native Houstonian, is the founding editor of the GLAAD award-winning blog TransGriot. Her ongoing mission is to educate people on the lives of transgender people and fight for everyone's human rights.

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With the November municipal elections right around the corner, it is important to know where the candidates stand on the issues that matter to us most. Fortunately for LGBTQ Houstonians, there is an array of contenders who understand our diverse LGBTQ communities—people of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, places of origin, and more. In this latest edition of OutSMART's Out for Change series, we introduce you to six openly queer candidates vying for Houston City Council positions for the first time: **Isabelle "Texas" Longoria**, the talented millennial running to represent District H; **Ashton P. Woods**, cofounder of Black Lives Matter Houston; high-profile Realtor **Bill Baldwin**; **Nelvin Adriatico**, a native of the Philippines who vows to advocate for marginalized communities; **Nick Hellyar**, who has garnered support from prominent political figures; and finally, longtime LGBTQ activist **Shelley Kennedy**.

DON'T FORGET

This year's voter-registration deadline is Monday, October 7.
You can vote early at any polling location October 23–November 2,
or at your neighborhood polling location on Election Day, November 5.



Superwoman of District C

Shelley Kennedy is the LGBTQ hero running for Houston City Council.

By MARENE GUSTIN

You might call Shelley Kennedy, 61, the Superwoman of District C, the central-Houston district she's running to represent on City Council this year. Last year, she received a heroism proclamation from the mayor after she pulled a crash victim from a burning car. And after Hurricane Harvey, she helped a nonprofit rebuild a family's home and life.

She also describes herself as an accidental activist. "I don't know if it was my church upbringing," she says, "but I always wanted to help people. As a teen, I dressed up as a clown—before clowns were mass-murderers—and went to a low-income housing project to hand out candy and talk to families about going to church." But it was in the '90s when she really became active.

"I lost so many friends to AIDS in the '80s and '90s," Kennedy says. "I witnessed firsthand how homophobia made the crisis worse. I felt like I had to do something."

She attended the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation in 1993, along with almost one million other protesters. After returning home, she helped put together the first Houston Black Tie Dinner that raised funds for AIDS Foundation Houston and several other LGBTQ nonprofits. She served two terms on the Human Rights

Campaign (HRC) Board of Governors, working to build a coalition of support to convince HRC that transgender individuals should be acknowledged and included under the protective umbrella of the organization.

"After that," Kennedy says, "people saw I was a fundraiser. Everyone started asking me to be on boards and work on party politics. When you are in that leadership level and you're out, you can change people's minds about who we are."

Shelley is married to Debra Denny. They have four children and six grandchildren that they love spending time with doing outdoor activities. Kennedy is also an avid cyclist who enjoys participating in the annual Texas MS150 event.

Her résumé of activism and work with the local and state Democratic Party (including the state party's executive committee) is lengthy and well-known. But she surprised even herself when she decided to run for public office.

"I'm running because I couldn't wait any more," Kennedy says. "Some are using Council seats as a stepping-stone to run for higher office. Not me. I want to give back to Houston, to my neighborhood. I want to stop the racism, the transgender murders, and help the homeless and veterans."

District C is one of 16 Council seats in Houston, and is an open race without an incumbent this year, making it attractive to candidates. At press time, 13 candidates had



filed for the seat. The election is November 5, with a likely runoff set for December 14.

But Kennedy isn't daunted. "I've been working in the neighborhood for so long," she says. "I know so many people and so many organizations, from Democrats to veterans and LGBTQ groups."

Former mayor Annise Parker is among those who have endorsed Kennedy's run. "I am proud to endorse Shelley Kennedy for Houston City Council District C. I know firsthand Shelley's commitment to equality and improving the lives of all Houstonians. She has a long record of service to the city, and has worked for causes and communities throughout the area. Integrity and experience matter on City Council," Parker notes.

The Victory Fund also endorsed Kennedy's campaign in September.

A self-described policy and budget geek, Kennedy has a broad and well-researched list of issues for District C—everything from flooding and development to traffic, homelessness, and stray animals. She wants to have a committee of neighborhood ambassadors who can speak to issues facing each area of the district, as well as an open-door policy at her



Shelley Kennedy (left) with former Houston mayor Annise Parker. Parker is among those who have endorsed Kennedy's run.

office. (She even lists her personal cell phone on her campaign website, and encourages people to contact her.) She is currently serving a second term on the Independent Police Oversight Board, appointed by Mayor Turner.

"I believe there are two heavy lifts facing our community, and the next council member

needs to be able to fight to get them done," Kennedy says. "HERO 2.0 (the second shot at a Houston equal-rights ordinance) and adding an LGBT Business Enterprise (LGBTBE) designation to the City's Office of Business Opportunity." She also wants to add an LGBTQ member to every City advisory board and commission.

She is also concerned with climate change and Houston traffic, two things that can go hand-in-hand.

"We need to do something about flooding and traffic. I am part of the Make I-45 Better Coalition," Kennedy says, referring to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) plan to expand I-45 through downtown. "I am not really happy about the 387 businesses that will close, or the 4,000 individuals who will lose their homes. Not to mention the poor air quality for schools caused by adding up to 18 lanes of traffic within 500 feet of children and schools. It's time for more community involvement in the planning process. TxDOT tends to just build concrete. We need better."



For more information about Shelley Kennedy: www.shelleykennedy.org/

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Political Activist

Black Lives Matter Houston co-founder
Ashton P. Woods runs for Houston City
Council At Large Position 5 seat.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Ashton P. Woods, 34, unapologetically describes himself as black, same-gender loving, HIV-positive, and an atheist. He is well-known locally as an activist and blogger on social issues, and as a co-founder of Black Lives Matter Houston.

And now, he's running for Houston City Council's At Large Position 5 seat.

"I'm a full-time activist," he says. "And I've done political consulting to help people I believe in get into office." But he says he got tired of cultivating others to run to get the things done that he felt he could do himself. "Now I'm just going to do it myself."

Woods was born and raised in New Or-

leans, where he came out at 14 and, with four friends, created the first gay-straight student alliance in New Orleans. In 2015 he came to Houston for work, although he still lived mostly in New Orleans.

"Then Hurricane Katrina came, and I lost everything I owned—everything but the few clothes I had with me in Houston," he recalls. That made him decide to stay in Houston full-time and become active in the city's politics and social-justice efforts.

Woods is passionate about justice and equality for all, saying, "Even if you don't look like me, if I see someone mess with you, I'll do something about it."

As of press time, he was facing seven op-

ponents in his citywide nonpartisan race. This year, the mayor, controller, and all 16 City Council seats are up for grabs. The election is scheduled for November 5, with a runoff on December 14. The field is particularly crowded this year, following a 2015 vote that changed council members' terms from three two-year terms to two four-year terms. Previously, opponents might wait for incumbents to be term-limited, whereas now they are more eager to jump into a race, even against an incumbent.

Woods' strategy for winning is simple. He says he's doing everything he would tell a client candidate to do, mostly focusing on what politicians call GOTV, or Get Out The Vote. That means a ground war of knocking on →



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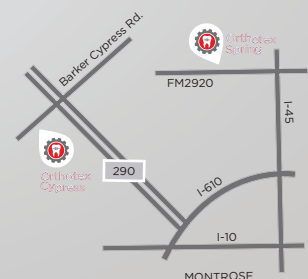
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doors and attending neighborhood events to meet the public and encourage them to vote—hopefully for him. As an activist, he says he's used to getting out among the people and speaking.

Woods currently has a small campaign staff drawn mostly from the LGBTQ community. Among his key issues in the campaign are equality and justice for all, public safety and security, and healthcare.

"In New Orleans, we say it's the city that care forgot," Woods says, referring to that city's easy-going, carefree attitude. "But sometimes, cities forget to care. We can't just rely on the county, state, and feds for access to healthcare." The Houston Health Department currently focuses on tracking diseases, birth and death records, and outdoor air quality. It has only four health-care clinics for a population of more than two million. The rest of the local sliding-scale health centers are run by the County, or by nonprofits that receive some federal funding.

"We need to work with partners, within reason," he says, "to put City clinics in every neighborhood to immunize children and provide HIV and mental-health care."

One hot-button issue in this year's municipal election is Proposition B. In a referendum last November, voters approved Prop. B to

"I WILL SUPPORT ALL OF THE PEOPLE, AND I WILL WORK FOR THEM. BUT I AM STILL AN ACTIVIST AND I WILL CONTINUE TO BE ONE IF ELECTED. IT WILL JUST LOOK A LITTLE DIFFERENT."

—Ashton P. Woods

raise firefighter pay and pensions to to be equal with police benefits. This year, the issue went back and forth through the courts and City Council, with various proposals to fund the firefighters' raises without bankrupting the City. Prop. B is now going through a court-ordered mediation process.

"I supported Prop. B," Woods says, "but I always thought there should be a budget in place to fund it. The firefighters deserve their raises."

He also notes that the Houston Police Department's current Meet and Confer Agreement, signed last year, has too many restrictions on transparency. Currently, the firefighter's union has no such contract.

He calls District K, just outside the Third Ward, his home, saying it reminds him of his old neighborhood in New Orleans with its friendly, multi-cultural flavor. He says he's not single (but doesn't elaborate), and admits to being a voracious reader and a lover of superhero movies and gaming. And although he loves Houston's restaurant scene, he also likes cooking for himself at home.

"I love New Orleans food," Woods says. "Nobody cooks like someone from New Orleans. You have to use filé powder—and no okra! There's no okra in gumbo!"

Woods promises an open-door policy (even for okra lovers) at his City Council office. "I will support all of the people, and I will work for them."

"But I am still an activist," he emphasizes, "and I will continue to be one if elected. It will just look a little different."



For more information, visit ashtonpwoodsforhouston.com

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The Right Time

Bill Baldwin decided to seize his moment and enter the race for City Council At Large Position 4.

By MARENE GUSTIN

One day after the Houston GLBT Political Caucus declined to endorse a candidate in the Houston City Council At-Large Position 4 race, Bill Baldwin, 54, announced he would run for the seat.

"If there was an overwhelming candidate, they would have endorsed," Baldwin says. "I've been asked to run for office before, but it just wasn't the right time. I was building my business." He owns a real-estate company, Boulevard Realty, that is one of the largest gay-owned businesses in the county.

"But when Amanda Edwards jumped to the U.S. Senate race, the council seat became open and I thought, why not? If I wait four more years, I'll be 58."

At press time, there were five candidates in the citywide race, and he admits there are some very nice people running. But Baldwin says his vision is unique. This year the mayor, controller, and all 16 council seats are up for grabs, with the election scheduled for November 5 and the runoff for December 14.

Although Baldwin calls Houston home, he was born in Athens, Texas, and considers Huntsville his hometown. That's where he went to high school and graduated from Sam Houston State University. He was married and has two grown children who are also Sam Houston alumni. He has maintained good relations with his family after he came out in 1997.



"I left my career, my family, and moved to Houston to start over," Baldwin says. In 1998 he went to work at Karen Derr Realtors, then bought the boutique company in 2008 and renamed it Boulevard Realty. He recently opened their new headquarters office in the Heights—one that he helped design.

"It's more of an open concept, with the office on the second floor," Baldwin explains. "The first floor is called YourSpace—like a community center where people can stop in for coffee or a glass of wine. There's Wi-Fi and a copy machine, so they can work there instead of going to Starbucks."

There are also yoga classes and art shows, most of which are completely free. He says it's

about connectivity and building a community, which is how you build a business—or a campaign.

"My first decade here," says Baldwin, "I was all about getting people elected who shared my vision of Houston." Under Mayor Annise Parker, he worked to strengthen the city's historic-preservation policies, and under Mayor Sylvester Turner he co-chaired Turner's Quality of Life Transition Committee. Baldwin was then appointed a City of Houston Planning Commissioner. He has also served on the Walkable Places Committee and the North Houston Highway Improvement Project Steering Committee. He also works for and fund-raises for various nonprofits, includ-

ing Houston Relief Hub, which he founded as a hub for donations, relief, and volunteer opportunities after Hurricane Harvey. It stayed open for three months after the hurricane, and then transitioned into the City of Houston's official delegation to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

Baldwin's historic home in Woodland Heights was famous as a venue for fundraising events for politicians and nonprofits alike. Baldwin made real-estate headlines last year when he sold the property in three days, for just shy of \$3 million.

Currently, Baldwin lives in a townhome near Riverside Terrace with his partner of four years, Fady Armanious, who is the creative director of Tootsies. But the couple also bought land in their beloved Heights, and they plan to build a dream home there. They enjoy entertaining, and attend multiple events almost every evening. Baldwin also enjoys running, cycling, and reading.

"What I love about Houston is the quality of life here," Baldwin says. "[With] more people moving here, there is going to be more traffic and development. We need to figure out how to accomplish that without losing that quality of life. If you want somewhere to walk to—a

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—Bill Baldwin

restaurant, a store—get ready for somebody to park in front of your house. That's the reality. In the Heights, I used to get in my car and drive to Montrose to eat. Now I can walk to great eateries, but that means more traffic."

One of Baldwin's priorities, if elected, will be HERO 2.0, after the effort to pass the first Houston Equal Rights Ordinance was roundly defeated in 2015.

"I'm all the way in for that," Baldwin says. "We are a world-class city; we need to do it. I think Mayor Turner should bring it back again." Another hot-button issue in this year's election is firefighter pay raises. After the controversy over Prop. B, a voter-approved pay-parity proposition, erupted in court battles, threatened layoffs, and failed mediation, the matter could cost Mayor Turner the race this year. In fact, the firefighter's union endorsed one of his opponents, Council Member Dwight Boykins, in the mayor's race.

"I was against Prop. B," Baldwin says. "Do the firefighters deserve a raise? Absolutely. But the proposition wasn't sustainable."

Before he had announced his council run, a recent article in one of the city magazines called Baldwin a "future mayoral candidate." Does he have higher aspirations?

"Not at this moment," he laughs. "I'll entertain it, but let's see if I win this first." ▼



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An Asset to the Community

Nelvin Adriatico vows to advocate for marginalized people if elected to the City Council in District H seat.

By MARENE GUSTIN

At first glance, Nelvin Joseph Adriatico, 45, has quite a varied biography: CEO and broker of Core Realty, devoted husband to Avinash Thadhani, father of University of Houston poli/sci sophomore A.J., and executive producer and talk show host of Chit Chat Houston on KUBE57.

But on a closer look, these threads are all connected.

“I’m a community advocate,” Adriatico says passionately. The Sharpstown-area resident is

involved in numerous nonprofits and professional organizations, including chairman of La Rosa Multicultural Family Services, chairman of the Filipino American Caucus for Empowerment (FACE), board member of the HISD Asian Advisory Council, president of the Asian Pacific American Heritage Association (APAHA) and the Houston Royal Oaks Lions Club Foundation (HROLCF), and president-elect of Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs (APAPA).

“I really love my community, and want all

of the residents to succeed,” he says. “That’s why I do what I do. And yes, I’ve been asked to run for public office before, and I said no. But with what’s happening now with immigrants, I thought it was time to step up. I want to be the voice, to speak up for them.”

Adriatico, who was born in the Philippines, is running for Houston’s District J City Council seat. District J was drawn in 2011 as a Hispanic opportunity district. The area is 61 percent Hispanic, with a large black and Asian population as well.

The term-limited Mike Laster was the first (and so far the only) representative of the new district. He is neither an immigrant nor Hispanic, but he is the first openly gay man to serve on Houston City Council. So being openly gay should not be a problem for Adriatico.

"I put it out there," he says. "There hasn't been a problem yet, but I know it will come. I'm ready. It just so happens I'm a gay Asian, but that isn't all that I am."

Adriatico, who attended the Victory Institute's Candidate & Campaign Training here last spring, says that District J is home to so many immigrants that its 180,000 residents speak around 80 languages. "My slogan is the acronym RISE," Adriatico says. "It stands for redevelopment, integration, safety, and education. What we need to do is reshape the economic and social landscape of our neighborhoods, integrate our diverse backgrounds to fight hate and discrimination, improve the safety of our neighborhoods, and educate future generations on behavior, character, and habits outside of regular school hours."

He talks about improving the public infrastructure and putting more police on the streets, as well as fire safety. Due to the

"I REALLY LOVE MY COMMUNITY, AND WANT ALL OF THE RESIDENTS TO SUCCEED. THAT'S WHY I DO WHAT I DO."

—Nelson Adriatico

high number of apartment complexes in the area, mostly inhabited by immigrants and minimum-wage workers, apartment fires frequently crop up in the local headlines.

"So many times, I have been to these apartments after a fire to see what help the residents need, and they had no fire extinguishers," Adriatico says. The Houston Fire Code requires a small fire extinguisher in every non-sprinklered apartment unit in the city, but a lot of renters and even apartment-building owners don't know that.

"These people need a voice, they need someone to advocate for them," he says. "If you keep silent, nothing is going to change."

Besides his passion for his community, Adriatico is also ardent about sports, cooking Filipino food, singing (his campaign held a karaoke fundraiser), and animals. The couple has a rescue dog named Bella.

"My husband found her on the streets," he says. "She had been hit by a car. He's an even bigger animal lover than I am—he won't even kill a mosquito! So, he brought her home and my son said, 'Let's keep her'—and we did."

Adriatico believes that with the right leadership, the district can become a destination spot for the entire city due to its diverse culture and food.

"There is such a vibrant mix of people here," he says. "Mostly because of the immigrant population. I came to this country with 20 dollars in my pocket. Immigrants are not a liability—we want to pay rent, we want to work, and we want to give back to this country. We are assets to our communities." ▼



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Impressive Endorsements

Nick Hellyar's run for City Council At Large Position 4 gains support from prominent political figures.

By MARENE GUSTIN

In 2007, when James Rodriguez asked Nick Hellyar to run his first campaign for City Council District I—an older area that is 77 percent Hispanic—Hellyar responded with, “You want a gay white guy running your campaign?” Rodriguez told Hellyar he did, and it proved to be a wise move for both. Rodriguez won the seat, and Hellyar became one of his staff members at City Hall.

Now Hellyar, 35, is running for Houston City Council's At Large 4 seat. It will be his first run, but certainly not his first rodeo.

Hellyar was born in London, but was barely six months old when his father's oil and gas firm transferred the family to Houston.

“Dad got here and said, ‘You can wear shorts all year? I’m never going back!’” laughs

Hellyar. The young man went to public schools and graduated from Lamar High School before attending the University of Houston, originally studying engineering before switching to a political-science path. One of his professors was Richard Murray, a well-known figure in local politics.

“I asked him how to get started in politics, and he told me to volunteer at a campaign and don’t leave until they turn the lights off,” says Hellyar. Interestingly, Murray’s son, Keir Murray, a political consultant, is now running Hellyar’s City Council campaign.

Houston municipal elections are nonpartisan. This year’s ballot is crowded, with the mayor, controller, and all 16 Council seats up for grabs. (Before a 2015 vote that changed the rules, opponents might wait for an incum-

bent to be forced out of office after six years. Challengers are now more eager to jump into a race, even against an incumbent who is limited to two four-year terms.) The election is scheduled for November 5, and the runoff for December 14.

Hellyar had previously worked on several municipal, state, and federal campaigns, including Annise Parker’s first mayoral run in 2009. When she won, he also worked for Parker at City Hall before leaving to start his own real-estate business, The Hellyar Group.

“When you are in your 20s, you can pay the bills with good deeds,” he says, “but as I got older, I needed to make more money and I wanted to set my own hours. On a campaign, you work 60 to 70 hours a week, and I just needed a break.”

But that didn't mean he didn't stay involved. He is a former president and board member of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, and he never gave up his love of municipal politics. Now he's back in the game, not as a consultant but as a candidate.

"I just think now is a unique time in our city," he says, "with unique problems like flooding and budgeting. I want to leave this city better than I found it. I want to make a difference."

So far, he has racked up some impressive endorsements: former City Council members James Rodriguez and Robb Todd; state representative Ana Hernandez; and the LGBTQ Victory Fund and its president, CEO, and former Houston mayor Annise Parker. Many are impressed with Hellyar's level of municipal knowledge, noting that he can start to work on day one without needing a learning curve.

"Because the joke at City Hall is that it takes you two years [just] to learn where the bathrooms are," he laughs.

"Seriously, my first priority, when elected, will be flood mitigation with [the state funds dedicated to] Harvey relief. Secondly, I want to make sure there are no more budget shortfalls.

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—Nick Hellyar

And then there is the HERO (the referendum for the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance that was defeated in 2015). We are the only top-twenty American city that does not have a nondiscrimination ordinance. There are major events that will not come to Houston because of that, and it is costing the city money."

Hellyar has a home in Upper Kirby, and a Galveston beach house that he hasn't seen since the campaign started. He likes sports and has season tickets to the Astros, but as for a significant other, he claims to be married to the City of Houston, at least for now. Although he would love a dog, he says he doesn't have the time for one right now. But he does have a white rescue cat with blue eyes called Rhys, in homage to his Welsh roots. His favorite restaurants are any of chef Chris Shepherd's spots (Georgia James, One/Fifth, The Hay Merchant, and UB Preserv).

"Of course I can't afford to eat out every night, so I try to cook at home a lot," he says. "It's important to eat healthy on a campaign and not succumb to junk food."

Hellyar knows from experience that he's in for a long few months of 70-hour work weeks, trying to stay healthy as much as he can by taking care of himself. But he says it will be worth it.

"I would be the first LGBTQ candidate to win a city-wide race since Mayor Parker." ▼



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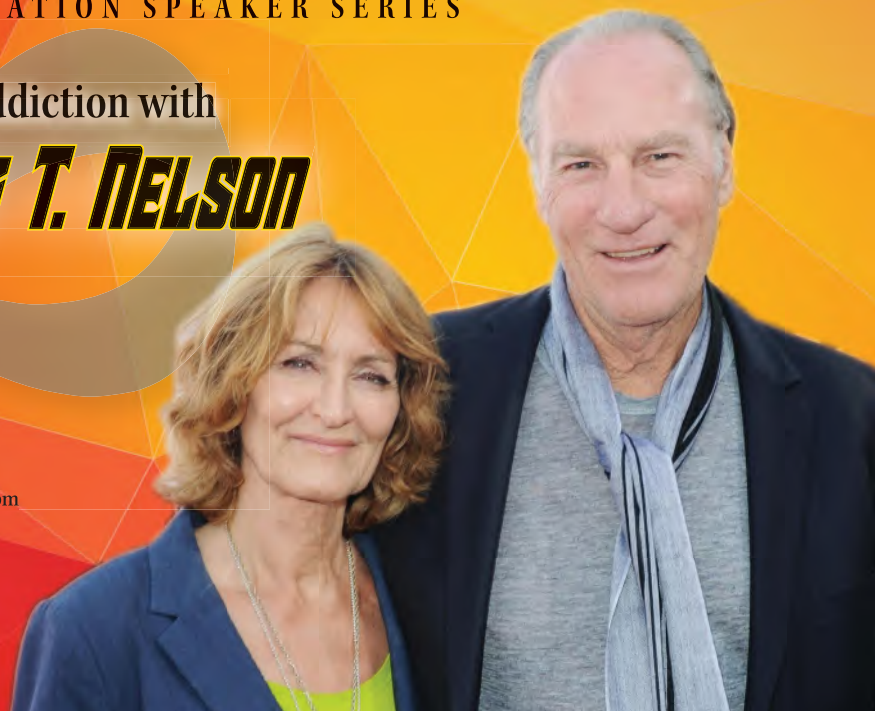
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Connected to Her Community

Houston City Council District H candidate
Isabelle "Texas" Longoria understands
her constituents' issues.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Born and raised in Houston, Isabel Longoria, 31, once wore a cowboy hat to an eighth-grade dance at The Rice School. After that, the moniker "Texas," or sometimes just "Tex," followed her everywhere.

"There are still people today that call me that," laughs Longoria. A longtime campaigner, staffer, and self-described policy wonk, Longoria is making her first run for office this year by throwing her hat into Houston's City Council District H race.

In November of this year, Houstonians will vote on the mayor, controller, and all 16 City Council seats. While many of the Council seats are open, the District H incumbent, Karla Cisneros, is seeking her second four-year term.

"There were actually some civic-club lead-

ers that approached me," says Longoria. "They said Karla is nice, but they wanted someone a little more proactive in the seat.

"District H is my community; almost my whole public career has been in the district. I'm a grassroots community person. Running at-large, or for a county seat, was too far removed from helping people one-on-one. I don't want to sit on the sidelines."

Longoria earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Trinity University in San Antonio in 2010, and then a master's degree in public affairs from the University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs in Austin. She has worked on political campaigns and in the staff offices of such politicians as former State Senator Sylvia R. Garcia and State Representative Jessica Farrar. She has trained

volunteers in block-walking and phone-banking, with an emphasis on reaching Latino and LGBTQ groups.

She also volunteered on Wendy Davis' campaign for governor in 2014, and on the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) campaign in 2015. Although that proposition failed, she would support a city-wide equality ordinance again.

"Of course I support it," Longoria says. "But there are other things we need as well. The City doesn't even have an LGBTQ support office for City employees right now."

But her first priority, if elected, would be to focus on affordable housing and development issues. District H, mostly north and east of downtown, is 76 percent Hispanic with a slightly older population, which means that

it has some of the fastest-gentrifying neighborhoods in the city. She currently sits on the Houston Planning Commission, an appointed board tasked with creating sustainable growth and development across Houston.

"We need to make some changes to avoid flooding and pricing people out of their neighborhoods," Longoria says. "At the Planning Commission, we aren't allowed to ask developers how their projects will impact affordability and flooding in the neighborhood."

Longoria also wants to work on social-justice and equality issues (which is where a reboot of HERO comes in), as well as fair wages and mandatory paid sick leave. She would also concentrate on community outreach and engagement.

"Why can't elected officials block-walk all year long?" she asks. "Why can't we hold community office hours at bars and parks where the people are? Not everyone can get downtown, find parking, and get through security to visit their representative at City Hall. I try to look at the bigger picture. We have a real problem with stray dogs in District H. I'm all for saving puppies on the side of the road, but there's also a public-health issue here—people being bitten by strays and such."

"DISTRICT H IS MY COMMUNITY. ALMOST MY WHOLE PUBLIC CAREER HAS BEEN IN THE DISTRICT. I'M A GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY PERSON.."

—Isabelle Longoria

Longoria worked as the associate state director of advocacy and outreach for AARP from 2015 until this summer, when she resigned to campaign full-time.

"I saved up my money so I could support myself for six months," Longoria says. "I couldn't work full-time and run a campaign. I think that's one thing that keeps younger people out of politics. Luckily, I can afford to

do this. It was either buy a house or run for office, and here I am. On the plus side, I can dedicate myself to the campaign every hour of the day now."

Another issue about running for office is juggling a relationship. Longoria recently started dating someone, and says it's been "interesting" trying to balance both. She really doesn't have much downtime right now, but she tries to relax at her rental home in Woodland Heights where she enjoys gardening and researching fun facts about anything and everything.

"I love to garden," Longoria says. "Not well, but I love it!" She admits that part of its charm is that it makes her focus on the yard and forget about campaigning for a bit. Also, she likes it because it's environmentally friendly. "It's better to grow vegetables in your yard, rather than just grass. Plus, I love cooking with what I grow."

"At one point I actually wanted to be an organic farmer," she recalls. "But then I realized I needed to grow something bigger." Like a community.



For more information about Isabelle Longoria, visit IsabelleLongoria.com.

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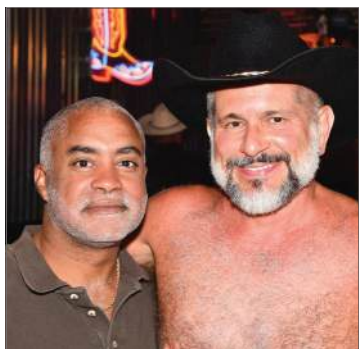
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Runway Houston honors Neal Hamil
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By DON MAINES



FACEBOOK

Fans of Neal Hamil (who wait breathlessly for the witty, out Houstonian to write a tell-all about his globetrotting adventures in the world of supermodels) can get a peek into Hamil's rock-star history on November 2 when he accepts the first Lifetime Achievement Award from Runway Houston.

"I will sit on a stool for about 40 minutes and tell some funny stories," he says. Are your ears burning, Mick Jagger? Gloria Steinem? Naomi Campbell? The former mannequin and top modeling agent was a French-horn player

at Robert E. Lee High School in Baytown when a fellow student talked him into applying at the Ben Shaw Agency in Houston. "I said, 'I'll go if you'll go,'" says Hamil, who was signed immediately.

His first modeling job was on local TV's *Good Morning, Houston* with hosts Don Nelson and the late Jan Glenn. His first fashion show was at Neiman Marcus, where Texas legend Dallas Hill told Hamil as he stepped off the runway, "Honey, you're gonna be a star!"

But Hamil never liked modeling. "I was more focused on what the agents were doing," he says. "I would think, 'That has got to be

the coolest job.'" It's a sentiment that Nelson Mandela confirmed years later when Hamil escorted his superstar client Naomi Campbell to South Africa. "Mandela turned to me and said, 'I have decided that you have the best job in the world.' It kind of was! There were lots of really entertaining moments. Mind-blowing ones, like going to dinner with Madonna," Hamil recalls.

Hamil met his mentor, the late Eileen Ford, when she judged model search contests at the modeling agency he opened in Houston. She convinced him to sell the company and move to New York City, where Ford held an elaborate luncheon to anoint him as her compadre in front of "all the people that really mattered" in the beauty industry.

"It was a full-court press," says Hamil. "Eileen started me off at the top of the food chain. It was like being at the right hand of Louie B. Mayer at a movie studio." Ford also invited Hamil into her inner circle of friends, hosting him every Saturday or Sunday at her country home where they would rub shoulders and "get a little drunk" with the rich and famous at lunch, and then retire to her "magnificent library" for best-buddy time.

"She would curl up and tuck her legs underneath her, and purr like a kitten, 'Isn't this wonderful?'" says Hamil. In contrast, he recalls, "She was a lion who never stopped roaring during the week."

During his 26 years in the Big Apple, wheeling and dealing at Ford Models and Elite Model Management, Hamil traveled the world many times over. Returning to Houston about five years ago, he settled happily into a job that doesn't require travel. As president of Carnan Properties, Hamil is a Realtor in Houston's high-end luxury real-estate market, and he gets to spend quality time with his labradoodle, Oliver.

As far as his romantic life, he says, "It was never the most important thing to me. I was always so busy; I was always traveling. Most of my early life, I usually had a boyfriend who I

dated for five or six years, or even ten.”

It was man’s best friend that changed his whole perspective on life and love. “I bought this sweet Schnauzer puppy, who I named Greta, and she was like a person. She relied on me completely, and she changed how I think. I used to look at cows and I saw steak, but then I looked into her eyes and I said, ‘There’s someone in there.’ It turned me into an animal activist.”

Greta lived for 13 years, and when she passed away it was amidst the deaths of the “key people” in Hamil’s life—“the posts that hold you up,” including Eileen Ford, his parents, and the switchboard operator at Elite Model Management. “She was from a poor black family and it surprised her when I asked her if I could take her to lunch. She thought, ‘Look at you, white boy from Texas,’ but that day began an incredible friendship. See, I was not raised around racism. Race was never, ever an issue with me; it never occurred to me. She thought I was going to turn out to be something else, but she turned out exactly the way I thought she would be—someone who was really awesome.”

Growing up in Baytown, he says it was

DURING HIS 26 YEARS IN THE BIG APPLE, WHEELING AND DEALING AT FORD MODELS AND ELITE MODEL MANAGEMENT, HAMIL TRAVELED THE WORLD MANY TIMES OVER.

much more likely that somebody would beat you up for being gay than for being black. “On the playground at school, I learned to keep my head down; I learned to watch myself. There was another part of our psyche that we had to develop. I am conflicted still with ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ because I think it reinforced that people in the military had to stay hidden. To me, that is very, very unhealthy. It drives people to alcoholism and drug addiction and

self-harm.”

Hamil emerged as something of a sage elder-statesman in the LGBTQ community, with humor obviously among his coping strategies. Among his favorite “funny stories” is how Zsa Zsa Gabor shook off the embarrassment of being caught nude sunbathing while she was in Houston to perform at a dinner theater.

“She told me this story in person, and I about died laughing,” says Hamil. “The producer had rented her a house with a pool (which was in her contract), and she was sunning nude, thinking that no one could see her. But there was a guy on a utility pole who she didn’t see for the longest. As he was coming down, he said, ‘Oh my God, you’re Zsa Zsa Gabor!’ Without missing a beat, she said, ‘No, no, no, dahling. I’m her sister Eva.’”

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OUT▼THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR



Tuesday, September 17

The **Executive & Professional Association of Houston (EPAH)**, an organization of LGBTQ business owners and professionals, hosted its monthly dinner meeting at Urban Eats in the Heights.



Sunday, August 25

The **Houston Theater District** hosted its annual open house, where guests could visit for free, see performances, tour facilities, enjoy family activities, and get deals on season tickets.



OUT THERE

Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR



Saturday, September 14
Houston Gay Kickball,
an LGBTQ community and ally-based sports league, commenced its fall 2019 season with a tournament at Lawrence Park.



Queering the Old Testament

HGO's production of *Saul* recounts the biblical gay romance of Jonathan and David.

By DON MAINES | Photos by BILL COOPER



40-PERSON CHORUS

A scene from Houston Grand Opera's *Saul*, which runs at the Wortham Music Center from October 25–November 8.

Jonathan and David's biblical gay romance sparks the bonkers breakdown of the Old Testament's King Saul in Houston Grand Opera's October 25–November 8 production of Handel's *Saul*.

"It's a soap opera!" says HGO's out chorus master Richard Bado, who traveled last year to the Glyndebourne Festival, an hour from London, to see the production that inspired HGO's. "It's a knockout that brings the work blazingly alive and transforms bewigged pieties into high human drama," raved critic Rupert Christiansen, writing for *The Daily Telegraph*, a London newspaper.

Before the dramatic oratorio begins, we already know the Sunday School story of David, a poor shepherd boy who killed the Philistine giant Goliath with a slingshot. As the curtain rises on the opera, David arrives at Saul's court as a conquering hero, with the king offering David his daughter Michal—in exchange for a bride purse of 100 foreskins of Philistine soldiers.

"But David falls in love with Saul's son, Jonathan," says Bado. "You see their romance onstage. It's clear, although not graphic."

Christiansen's *Daily Telegraph* review called Jonathan "sweetly demure" and noted the couple's "smackingly sexual kiss." While bemoaning the Glyndebourne production's

lack of passionate love scenes, the critic cried "bravissimi" for the "stupendous" 40-person chorus in the show at Glyndebourne, which was directed by out Australian maverick Barrie Kosky.

In Houston, Bado's job is to prepare the HGO Chorus for *Saul*.

"We have the same number in the chorus and the same number of costumes," he says. "It is a huge chorus piece with a lot of music to learn, memorize, and perform stylistically. It is a very wild, fun production with a lot of dance. The music is sublimely exciting; it's not stuffy at all."

Bado hails from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he started taking piano lessons at age 6



IT'S A SOAP OPERA

Out chorus master Richard Bado promises "high human drama" in HGO's *Saul*.

when he was in the first grade. In high school, he played the piano for choirs and learned the clarinet and saxophone for concert and jazz orchestras. "I even played the tuba in marching band," he says.

Bado earned music degrees from West Virginia University and the Eastman School of Music, where opera great Renée Fleming

was his classmate. Bado often conducts Fleming in concerts.

After graduating from Eastman, Bado spent less than half a year in New York City before accepting what he thought would be a "short-term position" at HGO. That was in the mid-1980s, so he witnessed how AIDS ravaged Houston's gay community. In 2013, he received

HGO's Silver Rose Award in honor of his 25th anniversary as chorus master.

"I have an equal number of gay and straight friends," Bado notes. "It is not a defining part of my life."

When Tropical Storm Allison flooded his townhouse in 2001, Bado moved to the 17th floor of a highrise in the Museum District. "I like it very much," he says. "I can walk to Miller Outdoor Theatre and see a show."

In addition to his chorus duties at HGO, Bado sometimes conducts shows, including eight upcoming performances of Houston Ballet's *The Nutcracker* at the Wortham Center. He also conducted future Oscar winner J.K. Simmons as Jigger in HGO's 1990 revival of the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic *Carousel*.

"He was a great team player," says Bado. "He was easygoing and low-key, but great, actually."

What: Houston Grand Opera's *Saul*

When: October 25–November 8

Where: Wortham Music Center

Tickets: houstongrandopera.org/saul

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Out in the 1800s

Bisexual actor Blake Jackson plays Hänschen in TUTS' *Spring Awakening*.

By DON MAINES

Blake Jackson plays Hänschen, a gayest-and-greatest sort of character in *Spring Awakening*, when Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS) performs the Tony Award-winning rock musical October 8–20 at the Hobby Center.

The show follows a group of sexually confused, frustrated adolescents in late 19th-century Germany as they mount their wobbly climb into puberty.

“Out of all the students, Hänschen is the most sure of himself,” says Jackson, a Montrose resident who identifies as bisexual. Almost from the start, the audience sees that Hänschen is out (in the 1800s!) when he drools that another boy “looks so nasty in those khakis.”

“I wouldn’t say that Hänschen is a leader, but he’s figured out what works for him,” explains Jackson. His shy, sweet classmate Ernst Röbel listens in awe as Hänschen explains how to navigate life like “a pail of whole milk”: don’t fret and spill the milk, just skim off the cream. “Come, cream away the bliss,” he sings to Ernst.



All teenagers think they invented sex, but perhaps this group especially because their parents still talked to them about storks bringing babies. The boys' pent-up hormonal energies come to a head in a raucous rocker called "The Bitch of Living."

"I remember the first time I heard it," says Jackson, who is 25. "My freshman year [at Tomball High School], I walked into the theater room and the music was blasting. It was unlike any musical I had ever heard. It wasn't Rodgers and Hammerstein that you can play on the piano; it was almost like Green Day. It blew my mind. I loved it."

Jackson grew up in Tomball identifying as a heterosexual cisgender male. "I was more like Ernst than Hänschen. I was always pretty quiet and meek," he says. "I have been fortunate to play a number of gender-nonconforming roles that have made me more comfortable about exploring my internal sense of self."

At Sam Houston State University, where he graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree in musical theater in 2017, Jackson was cast as Dr. Frank-N-Furter, the sweet transvestite from transsexual Transylvania. "Playing a part outside my wheelhouse, I got to step away from myself and examine how much weight you should give to different aspects of



FINDING HIMSELF

Blake Jackson, who plays sexually-confused Hänschen, says he learned to understand his own sexuality through portraying various LGBTQ characters.

ZACHARY MCKENZIE

your identity."

His senior year of college, Jackson played transgender punk-rocker Hedwig in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* at Obsidian Theatre in the Heights. The next summer, he reprised the role when the production moved to Rich's nightclub for several weekends.

"That is the most important show I've ever

done," he says. "There were still pieces of my puzzle that I didn't know were there, and I realized there was more to examine about myself to become fully formed. I know so many people who, because of religion or because their family is very conservative or whatever, know nothing about the hallmarks of healthy physical and mental sexuality. The building blocks are just not there."

A role that Jackson hasn't played, but would like to, is Charlie Price in the Broadway musical *Kinky Boots*; he's a cisgender male who reluctantly teams with a drag queen to save his late father's shoe factory, Price & Son, in working-class Northamptonshire, England.

Jackson, who is making his TUTS debut as Hänschen, has played Orin in *Little Shop of Horrors*, "Hand Some" in *Panto Star Force*, Don Price in *Big Fish*, and several roles in *Who Am I This Time? And Other Conundrums of Love* at Stages Repertory Theatre. He also portrayed Frank Gardner in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* at Classical Theatre Company. ▼

What: *Spring Awakening* presented by Theatre Under The Stars

When: October 8–20

Where: Hobby Center

Tickets: tuts.com/boxoffice

2020 Queer Art Wall Calendar

by Blase DiStefano



"Queer Love"



"Transgender Swirl"

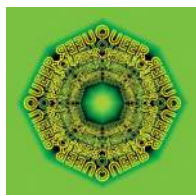


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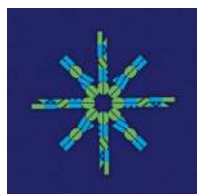
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"Come Out, Come Out"



"4 LGBTQs in 16 Blocks"



"4 Faggots in Space"

A Night Out with Anderson Cooper and Andy Cohen

Gay media moguls bring their two-man talk show to Houston.

By KIM HOGSTROM
Photo by GLENN KULBAKOH

Longtime friends Anderson Cooper and Andy Cohen are magic together, with a harmony and alchemy that radiates between these two handsome gay New Yorkers. While often cloaked in good-natured teasing with virtually nothing off-limits, theirs is a relationship clearly grounded in mutual regard. It's a thing of beauty to behold.

"I think the chemistry between Anderson and myself stems from a genuine love for one another," Cohen told *OUTSMART* recently. "We have known each other for years, before either of us had any national notoriety. It's a relationship that is heartfelt, based on shared experiences and authentic affection. Observers see that and respond to it well, I think."

Now Houstonians can witness this magic for themselves when Cooper and Cohen bring their highly successful two-man talk show back to the Smart Financial Centre in Sugar Land on October 28. In its third year of touring, the show is called AC2—Deeper Talks & More Shallow Tales. The format is mostly ad-lib as the two "ACs" take to the stage to swap gossip, talk pop culture, answer audience questions, and try to embarrass one another as only old friends can. AC2 is officially promoted as "unscripted, uncensored, and unforgettable." It's sure to be a rewarding evening of entertainment.

"Attending AC2 is kind of like going out for a beer with Anderson and me," Cohen explains. "The show is intimate, insightful, unpredictable, and often very funny. Our audiences are a part of the experience, and it all makes for a great night out. It's been three years since we launched AC2, and we are still on the road

**"ATTENDING AC²
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INSIGHTFUL,
UNPREDICTABLE,
AND OFTEN VERY
FUNNY."**

—Andy Cohen

with it. Something is working," he notes with a smile.

Anderson Cooper is a well-known figure in the American media landscape. The handsome, soft-spoken journalist is CNN's leading news anchor, with *Anderson Cooper 360* on five nights a week. He also co-hosts CNN's *New Year's Eve Live* in Times Square. Kathy Griffin was his co-host before she was drummed off the air after being photographed holding a cartoonish likeness of Donald Trump's severed head. It was a joke, but Americans weren't laughing. In a pinch, Cohen was asked to step into the co-hosting spot with Cooper on *NYEL*. Griffin's high heels were not easy to fill, but by most measures, he has done it with aplomb.

Anyone who knows Cohen is not surprised

by his success with *New Year's Eve Live*. This cornucopia of talent is a television talk-show host and producer, a live-radio host, and the author of three books, all of which appeared on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list. Currently, he hosts and produces Bravo's talk show *Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen*, which enjoys a very dedicated audience.

Additionally, Cohen served as Bravo's executive vice president of development and was charged with creating content, developing formats, and identifying fresh talent. He was the executive producer of the popular series *Top Chef* and continues to serve as executive producer of the entire *Real Housewives* franchise.

However, Cohen's favorite professional position is hosting *Radio Andy*, his live two-hour pop-culture channel on SiriusXM Radio.

"The art of radio is so much fun," Cohen states, laughing. "It's challenging, and I have to think on my feet. The format is uncensored entertainment spanning everything in pop culture, including celebrity interviews. Each show is different and unpredictable, but it's all fun and I love doing it."

This busy New Yorker recently turned his world upside down after deciding that his "paternal clock was ticking" and realizing it was time to father a child with a surrogate. His son, Ben, was born in February, and Cohen is raising the little boy by himself in his townhome in New York City's West Village.

"I always wanted to be a parent," Cohen says, his voice softening. "I knew I was not getting younger, and it seemed like the time had come. It's sort of a late-in-life adventure for me. Raising a child is really exciting, and there



BUDDY TOUR

This is the second installment of Cooper and Cohen's national excursion. Two years ago, the television hosts spoke to fans in Houston about their friendship, their careers, and breaking news.

is a lot to it—more than I knew. But Ben is the highlight of my life.”

And as a New Yorker, was Cohen expecting Houston to be oil wells, tumbleweeds, and cowboys riding their horses to work, like so many others do?

“I have been there before and I love Houston,” Cohen says. “It’s so big and open and welcoming, and has a great vibe. The people are warm, friendly, and they are very funny.

There are no others like them anywhere, and I can’t wait to experience it all again. I am looking forward to it. I can’t wait!”

Right about now, you may be wondering if Cooper and Cohen are, or ever were, “an item.” What kind of love is it that is so alive between them?

“When we were much younger, we were supposed to meet and go out on a blind date in New York,” Cohen explains. “Well, that never

came about, but we did become friends and we have remained that way for 20-something years. It has worked well for both of us,” he concludes with a smile.

What: AC2—Deeper Talks & More Shallow Tales

When: October 28 at 8 p.m.

Where: Smart Financial Centre, Sugar Land

Info: smartfinancialcentre.net/event/ac2-2019

Pondering Life's Journey

Houston artist Mark Ponder uses his art to connect with others.

By **BILL ARNING**

Photo by **MARK S. MCCRAY** | Makeup by **DANIEL E. ZAMORA**

Mark Ponder remains unique among Texas art makers, with his intensive draftsman's sensibility that looks like no other artist working here in Houston. While Ponder's sure-handed drawing technique has always captivated viewers, over the past few years he's been jumping into other disciplines—from an oversized jockstrap painting to comic self-help videos to slightly psychotic arrangements of gift-wrapped objects arranged around a fireplace mantel.

Having visited his studio regularly, I am not surprised when, with his almost childlike sense of wonder, he asks, “Since artists have the all-powerful gift of creation, why don’t more of them start their own religions?” After hearing him insist that he could have been as successful as another L. Ron Hubbard, it becomes clear that we are dealing with an artist who doesn’t take any aspect of reality for granted.

At his April 6 opening for his last solo show at the G Spot Gallery in the Heights, the rooms were filled with what appeared to be every handsome, bearish, bearded arts-oriented gentleman in Texas. Ponder’s somewhat delayed coming-out process was enacted and depicted through his work, so these men formed the community he found via art as well as gay softball. While he has since settled down in a serious relationship, all who met him during his attempts to find his gay Houston tribe remain fiercely loyal to him. More than one gallery attendee joked that whether they had encountered him as a member of the CubCakes softball team or in one of the classes he teaches at the Glassell School of Art, they remain proud members of the Ponder fan club.

This confident, unique maker is a far cry from the shy, mousey artist I met with visionary curator Dennis Nance (then at Lawndale Art Center) at a Polyphonic Spree show at Fitzgerald’s. I told Ponder I was an old punk-rocker and was fond of rock-and-roll energy, so he gave me the finger and walked away

laughing. That was when I fell for his impish bad-boy humor.

Ponder is from the classic small town of Groves, Texas, population 10,000. While the nearby bigger city of Port Arthur produced both Robert Rauschenberg and Janis Joplin, the whole area was economically depressed during Ponder’s childhood. When asked if he saw any visual art growing up, he responded with an emphatic “Hell no!” Neither were there any gays in Groves, as far as he knew. Although he saw art as an undergrad at Lamar University in Beaumont, his first meaningful exposure was a semester abroad in Italy.

Still, making his living in art never occurred to him, and he started channeling his passion for the visual into graphic design in grad school in Carbondale, Illinois. But after starting work at a design firm, he found that using his visual talents merely to satisfy his clients’ aims was an unpleasant experience. He was drawn to highly graphic artists who were emotionally direct and unguarded, and he started realizing that he could connect with others through his ability to draw something. But what?

Ponder’s painfully slow process of coming out proved to be his chosen topic. He grew up in a household where sex was considered “bad,” so his cure for that involved a self-portrait depicting himself ejaculating glitter while wearing a party hat, and another portrait in which he wore nothing but clown shoes. He also produced a brilliant series of drawings in which oh-so-gay rainbows served as synecdoches for male bodies, with piles of exhausted rainbows cuddling after their three-way rainbow orgies—quite an absurdist commentary on queer brotherhood.

These drawings followed a rather creepy Cult of Ponder self-help video and a series of works about the institution of death, including an infamous video of women lying in their coffins, seemingly dancing to Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies.” (Since when are we all alone when we pass over?)

Another death-obsessed performance-art project involved a balloon that Ponder kept with him even while sleeping and taking showers. He enjoyed introducing his balloon to passing strangers, including a motorcycle club in Dallas (luckily they were amused and not offended). This continued until the balloon “died,” and was then shown deceased on a pedestal—an absurdist act of mourning.

After Ponder was included in the Texas Biennial in Austin, he was promptly showing at every alternative venue in Houston, including Lawndale Arts Center, the Alabama Song arts space, and Gallery Homeland. Then just as suddenly, he seemed to vanish, and everyone was asking what had happened to Mark Ponder. He realizes now that he used his art to find the family he never thought he deserved, and having found his crew, he has different goals for his art.

Now that Ponder has found himself living with Paul Davis, who chairs the theater department at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, he no longer wants to be the wacky personality that Houston’s art world knew and loved. He went underground from 2016 to 2019 while he allowed his work to deepen and become more mystical and private.

The drawings he produces today are puzzles, mazes, and confounding landscapes that clearly refer to our journeys in life. Not used to being happy, he sees his history of depression and sexual addiction in the empty, infinite landscapes he creates. He has experimented with drawing while watching TV and smoking pot, sketching holes, portals, and windows with his hands always moving.

And every once in a while, a concrete, meaningful symbol appears. Taking a bath one evening, Ponder looked up and saw his and Paul’s electric toothbrushes standing next to each other. He thought, “This is what a relationship looks like.” The next day he made a drawing of their toothbrushes as a perfect celebratory representation of his artistic and life yearnings that have become reality. ▼



Art without Warnings

Bill Arning's latest show is guaranteed to shock and enlighten.

By **SAM BYRD**
Photo by **MARK S. MCCRAY**

Art walks a fine line between tasteful expression and unwavering truth. Bill Arning's upcoming exhibit, *No Trigger Warnings*, tap-dances on both sides of that line, ultimately calling the viewer to ask if art should be dangerous and shocking.

On show at Flatland Gallery, 1709 Westheimer Road, the exhibit will provide a collection of unforgettable artworks that will provoke all types of reactions. Arning hopes one of those reactions is offense.

"I come from a punk-rock background where offense was always part of the aesthetic. So many artists want things to be risky and problematic, and they're not scared of trying to make everything not kid-friendly," he says.





Steve Locke
Untitled (GOD IS LOVE/you little faggot), 2018,
jacquard tapestry in cotton and rayon



Dylan Hurwitz
the pill (Truvada), 2019, oil on canvas

Each piece involves some amount of risk, and a quick glance at the art reveals nothing that viewers will find boring: erotic paintings of the Popeye cartoon character Bluto, ceramic sculptures of people taking nude photos, dildos inscribed with messages, childhood photos with competing phrases from religion and sexuality, images of Elizabeth Taylor being beaten or screaming vulgarities, depictions of people taking Truvada (or is it birth control?).

The artists behind these conversation-starter works are Kathe Burkhart, Max Colby,

Jayne County, Thedra Cullar-Ledford, Alton DeLaney, Skylar Fein, Mark Flood, Erik Hanson, Wes Holloway, Dylan Hurwitz, Scooter LaForge, Steve Locke, Colin Radcliffe, Annie Sprinkle, and Beth Stephens.

Arning says the exhibit is his response to today's climate of what he feels is too much self-censoring. He predicts that every piece in the show will offend at least one person.

"It's definitely reflecting what I see as life today. I do think it is deliberately out of sync with the type of censorship that is occurring in schools [that avoid] teaching material or novels that have disturbing verbiage. It's a fear of upsetting people. But culture doesn't move forward if you don't disturb anyone," Arning explains.

Throughout the exhibit's run, special events are planned as a continuation of the theme. Highlights include a film about eco-sexualism titled *Water Gets Us Wet*, a gay-shame parade, and a shock-comedy entertainer.

If, perchance, you want to buy any of the art, pieces are available for purchase. Prices range from \$200 to \$40,000.

What: No Trigger Warnings art exhibit

When: Oct. 9–28, 12–6 p.m. Thur.–Sun.

Opening reception Oct. 9, 6–9 p.m.

Where: Flatland Gallery

Info: brasilcafehouston.com/flatland-gallery

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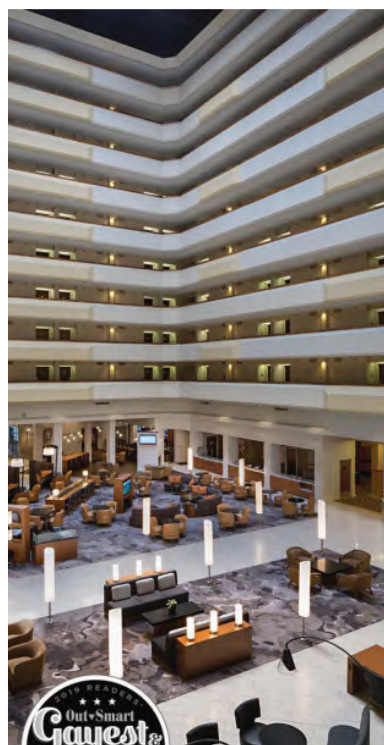
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WEDDING GUIDE

By RYAN M. LEACH | Photos by KRISTÍN MARÍA

FIRE AND ICELAND

Tim and Shaun Young's Nordic nuptials

TIM AND SHAUN YOUNG'S LOVE STORY CANNOT BE TOLD IN ONE PLACE. WHETHER YOU START THE STORY IN LOS ANGELES (WHERE THEY MET), NEW YORK CITY (WHERE THEY WERE ENGAGED), OR ICELAND (WHERE THEY WERE WED), THEIR LOVE IS OF GLOBAL PROPORTIONS. →

Tim Gonzalez (l)
and Shaun Young

A West Coast Meeting

"We met at the GLAAD fundraising event in L.A., and there was an instant attraction, but not much was said. I met Shaun again with friends for after-brunch drinks at the rooftop of Perch, where we actually had a chance to talk. He offered to give me a tour of *his* Los Angeles. The rest is history," Tim recalls.

Tim (formerly Gonzalez), 45, was raised in Houston, where he attended the Glassell School of Art. Shaun, 42, was born in California and was living in Los Angeles when he met Tim that day at Perch.

"I saw Tim walk in and was struck instantly," says Shaun of their first meeting. "I was pretty much smitten from the moment I laid eyes on Tim, but as we got to know one another, I fell hard. I was attracted to his creativity, his authenticity, his intelligence, and his world views."

Both men describe themselves and their respective lifestyles as being "nomadic." This is due in large part to their careers in creative industries related to filmmaking. Although they now consider Los Angeles as their home base, both relate to the fact that home is usually wherever work takes them and where they are together.

An East Coast Engagement

In 2017, the couple found themselves in New York City where Tim had planned a surprise engagement with a few traditional touches—and an abrupt change of plans.

"I proposed in New York at the Hotel Americano," Tim explains. "Originally it was supposed to be on the rooftop, but Mother Nature decided otherwise and baptized us with a torrential downpour. We ended up in their restaurant, which happened to be closed but they served us anyway. I was so nervous I don't quite remember what I said. I stumbled with anecdotes of us meeting and seeing a future with him. I know I opened the ring box and felt like *Forrest Gump* with a speech impediment. Shaun said yes, and had the biggest, sexiest smile on his face. Maybe he thought I was having a stroke and felt sorry for me—who knows. After the rain stopped, we enjoyed a short sunset walk to the McKittrick Hotel. Once we went



up the elevator to the rooftop, Shaun was surprised to see his bigger-than-life Long Island family welcome both of us with hugs and sloppy kisses. It was the happiest of beginnings."

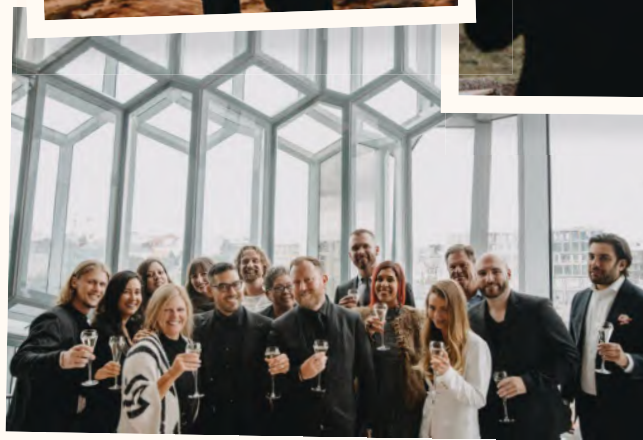
Shaun says the engagement was one of the most romantic moments in their cross-country romance, and he appreciated Tim's attention to his family.

"Tim had called my dad and asked permis-

sion to marry me. It was so gentlemanly and traditional—I loved it," says Shaun. "The moment he pulled out the ring box, my stomach dropped. I started to sweat. I knew what was coming! But I wasn't nervous about his asking. I was anxious because he threw a wrench in my plans—I had been planning a proposal of my own! But he beat me to the punch, and I wouldn't change a thing."



WANT TO TELL YOUR STORY? Email us at letters@outsmartmagazine.com



A Nordic Elopement

Initially, the couple was planning on a wedding in New Orleans. However, as the planning intensified, they both realized that a large-scale event wasn't really their style.

"Several of our closest friends had recently married, and I asked them for their advice," Shaun recalls. "Each of them said *Elope!*"

And elope is exactly what they did. In true fashion, the couple decided on an even more exotic location—Reykjanes, Iceland. Their officiant was a Nordic chieftain named Hilmar Örn Himarsson, who asked them to say "I do" on a cliffside peninsula on August 2, 2018.

"Our connection to Icelandic music—particularly Björk, Gus Gus, and Sigur Rós—is what brought us to Iceland. Shaun had been

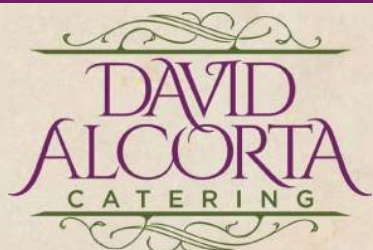
**"TIM HAD CALLED
MY DAD AND ASKED
PERMISSION TO
MARRY ME. IT WAS SO
GENTLEMANLY AND
TRADITIONAL—
I LOVED IT."**

—Shaun Young

there once before for the Airwaves Festival. Knowing that Iceland was on my bucket list, we went for New Year's and I immediately fell in love. The people there are welcoming and liberal. It immediately felt like home," says Tim.

"I called to tell my dad of our plans, and he said, 'You can do what you want, just know I'm going to crash the party.' With that, our elopement became a very small, intimate wedding with our nearest and dearest—those who had supported us from the beginning," says Shaun.

The couple still resides in Los Angeles, but their lives continue to take them on the road. While they may spend much of their time catching planes to distant places, they don't have to worry about catching each other any longer. ▼



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Can You Hear the '80s?

The Flaming Lips, Bad Religion, Mudhoney, and more.

The **Flaming Lips** may have been around since the mid-1980s, but it wasn't until 2002's *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* (featuring the hit single "Do You Realize?") that it officially achieved mainstream recognition. The band had been steadily building a following via albums such as *In a Priest Driven Ambulance*, *Transmissions from the Satellite Heart*, *Clouds Taste Metallic*, and *The Soft Bulletin*. And following its early 21st-century commercial breakthrough, the group has continued to be prolific. The subtly psychedelic **King's Mouth: Music and Songs** (Warner), The Flaming Lips' first album since 2017's electro-oriented *Oczy Mlody*, retains some of that album's electronic influences. As just one component of a project that also features an art installation as well as a book, *King's Mouth* has a soundtrack feel to it, but also functions as a stand-alone album. Mick Jones (yes, that Mick Jones, from The Clash) provides narration, making the listening experience feel like a theatrical event.

When it comes to electronic music, **Howard Jones** has been at it since 1984 when he released his debut album *Human Lib*, featuring the hit singles "New Song" and "What Is Love?" A sort of musical pop-psychologist, Jones' songs, including "Things Can Only Get Better," "No One Is to Blame," and "Everlasting Love," tended to have uplifting messages—something that came in handy during the depressing Reagan/Bush era. The same applies to his new album *Transform* (BFD), on which Jones continues to pair up persuasive electronic beats and synths with "Beating Mr. Neg," "Take Us Higher," "Hero in Your Eyes," and "Tin Man Song." Electronic musician BT teams up with Jones on three songs, and if "Eagle Will Fly

Again" sounds familiar, it's because you may have heard it in the Taron Egerton movie *Edie the Eagle*.

Also hailing from Southern California, hardcore punk act **Bad Religion**, known for its melodic, intelligent, and politically oriented songs, is back with *Age of Unreason* (Epitaph), its first studio album in six years. As you well know, a lot has happened in the world in the last few years, so Bad Religion makes the most of *Age of Unreason* to catch up on current events via songs such as "The Approach," "End of History," "Lose Your Head," "Do the Paranoid Style," "Old Regime," "Faces of Grief," and the CD bonus track "The Profane Rights of Man."

Representing the Seattle faction since the late 1980s, influential band **Mudhoney** gets political on its social-commentary-oriented album *Digital Garbage* (Sub Pop). Loudly raging against the machine, Mudhoney displays a seriously politically aware and furious side on the unforgettable "21st Century Pharisees," "Please Mr. Gunman," "Paranoid Core," "Prosperity Gospel," "Next Mass Extinction," "Messiah's Lament," and "Hey Neanderf-k." Righteous indignation has never sounded so raw or so good.

North Carolina's **The dB's** were college rock pioneers. The band's first two albums, *Stand for Decibels* (1981) and *Repercussions* (1982), both recorded when Chris Stamey was still a member, are considered to be masterworks of the genre. Stamey, who left shortly thereafter, went on to have a respectable career as a solo artist (you must hear 1987's *It's Alright* and 1991's *Fireworks*), as well as a music producer (Stamey produced Pylon's amazing *Chomp*, as well as albums

by queer bands Le Tigre and The Butchies). Sounding like a cross between Pink Martini and The Magnetic Fields, and written and arranged "under the influence" of Great American Songbook composers such as Bernstein, Porter, Berlin, and the Gershwins, the sophisticated double disc *New Songs for the 20th Century* (Omnivore) features 26 Stamey compositions performed by an array of artists including Nnenna Freelon, Caitlin Cary, Marshall Crenshaw, and Don Dixon, to mention a few.

Here's something to consider: there



would be no modern country-music sound, including alt-country and the dreck currently spilling out of Nashville (that means you, Blake Shelton), without **Steve Earle**. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Earle, along with Dwight Yoakam and Rosanne Cash, laid the groundwork for what we hear today. Since that time, Earle has evolved personally, politically, and professionally to become one of the most lauded and respected artists in the genre. *Guy* (New West), by Steve Earle & The Dukes, is Earle's homage to Texas troubadour Guy Clark, and a kind of sequel to 2009's *Townes*, on which Earle paid tribute to Townes Van Zandt.

Australian musician **Mick Harvey** is



probably best known for his various musical collaborations with Nick Cave, including his membership in the band The Bad Seeds beginning in the 1980s.

Harvey's latest, *The Fall and Rise of Edgar Boucher and the Horrors of War* (Mute), is a collaborative concept album created with poet **Christopher Richard Barker** and performed by Harvey and guest vocalists Jade Imagine, J.P. Shilo, and Alain Johannes.

Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.

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QUEER QUOTES

Compiled by **BLASE DISTEFANO**

Matthew Lopez

(playwright, *The Inheritance*)

(*The New Yorker*, 9/9/19, Rebecca Mead)

Re: his alcoholism.

One night in 2010 [Matthew Lopez] stumbled home at four in the morning: “I was maybe 18 or 20 drinks in, and Brandon [Clarke, Lopez’s husband] said, ‘That’s it—I’m done. One of us is moving out of this apartment.’” Lopez started calling friends, desperate to talk to someone, and eventually reached his younger brother, in Florida. “Later, [my brother] told me he thought Brandon had died, I was sobbing so much,” Lopez recalled. “My brother was the first person to whom I said the words ‘I’m an alcoholic.’ I was sitting on the kitchen floor, spilling Johnnie Walker Blue all over myself—going out in style.”

Lopez didn’t enter rehab. Instead, he shakily embarked on a life of sobriety; he hasn’t had a drink in nearly nine years. “There was no going back after that scene,” he said. “Once you’ve played Lady Macbeth, you can never play Juliet again.”



Shakespearian?

Matthew Lopez (seen here at The Paley Honors: A Gala Tribute to the LGBTQ Community): is he Lady Macbeth or Juliet or both?

Uneven Hips?

And what about her feet, her legs, and her shoulders?



Common

(The Clay Cane Show, 8/19/19, SiriusXM)

Clay Cane: So back in 2007, you apologized for some homophobic lyrics in your songs. You evolved, right? I know some folks who are not evolving on a lot of issues, but I'm curious to know what made you evolve on that issue. Was it a particular person? Was it an experience?

Common: It was an experience. Two guys who were gay came to me after a show, and they said, "Common, man, we love your music, your music touches us, but the fact that you're using the word 'fag' ... that hurts us." It just was like an awakening, because it humanized everything that I was saying, and I was only using the word 'cause it was part of a culture that I grew up in. This is what we said. I didn't even think about what the word meant and how it was affecting other people.

And I had to grow into the courage and the strength within myself to be like, man, I don't care what my homies saying. I don't care what these cats in hip-hop saying, this is where I am with it. I'm not homophobic. I embrace people who are gay, who are Christian, Muslim, Jewish. I'm open to human beings and life.

So, that being said, that was a real pivotal moment for me in changing my perspective. And I went on to do a song called "Between Me, You and Liberation" [where] I just created this story of how one of my friends told me he was gay and how I dealt with it, and, no matter what, I still loved him as my friend, and I felt that was all part of that conversation I had with those gentlemen.

Evolved?

Common: can he reconcile with gays?

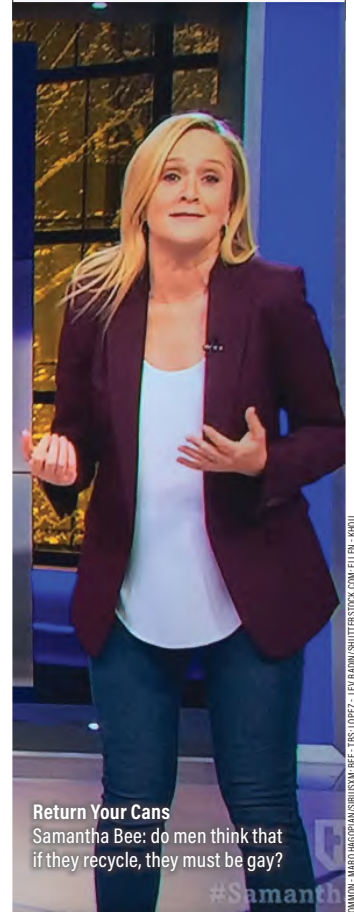


Samantha Bee

(Full Frontal, 9/25/19, TBS)

Preserving a livable planet has somehow become a threat to the entitlements of masculine primacy. According to a recent study, men may be even less likely to recycle, just because they are worried people will think they're gay.

Look, the only way people will think you're gay for recycling is if you return cans on a date with your partner who is a man and who is also gay.



Ellen DeGeneres

(The Ellen DeGeneres Show, 9/24/19, NBC)

Re: hurting her neck.

So I went to the chiropractor. I love him, I do, but he told me everything that I was doing wrong. He said my feet don't point in the right direction, one leg is longer than the other, my shoulders are humped, my hips are uneven. Basically, he said nothing about me is straight.



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'Bosom Friends'

The intimate world of James Buchanan & William Rufus King.

Tethered by a cord. That's what people think when they see you and your closest pal: that you're tethered by some sort of invisible cord. You think alike, talk alike, you sometimes mirror each other's actions. Where there's one, there's the other—even when, as in the new book *Bosom Friends* by Thomas J. Balcerski, you're often poles apart.

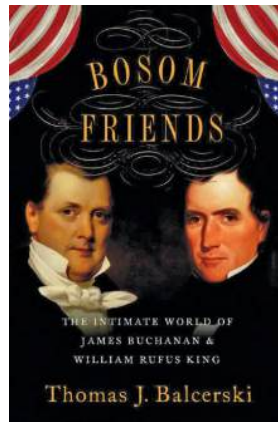
In the years prior to the Civil War, our nation's capital was "very much a work in progress." Roads were little more than mud, neighborhoods were far apart, and Washington D.C. was indeed a swamp into which most congressmen had to travel. Since nearly all were landowners elsewhere, few elected officials brought their families to the city with them; those who came solo needed places to live, so boardinghouses—called "messes"—sprung up to house the politicians.

It was at one such "mess" that William King met James Buchanan.

King was born to be a politician: educated at the University of North Carolina, he almost immediately went into politics after graduation. He was a social man, and very charming, but he never married, blaming it on a broken heart over a princess who was angered by a perceived insult. Balcerski hints that the prince story was a convenient ruse.

Buchanan was also educated and politically minded, but his personal life differed: he was engaged to be married, but a misunderstanding caused his fiancée to call off the nuptials. Before Buchanan could patch things up, she fell ill and died. For the rest of his life, he, too, claimed that a broken heart kept him from marrying.

At that time in history, says Balcerski, homosexuality was strictly forbidden, but deeply "intimate friendships" between men were common and even encouraged. It seems likely that King and Buchanan formed one of these while living at the "mess," partaking in debates together and working at the Capitol. Their "bosom friendship," however, appeared exceptionally close: tongues wagged, and oth-



Bosom Friends: The Intimate World of James Buchanan & William Rufus King
• by Thomas J. Balcerski
• 2019
• Oxford University Press
• 337 pages
• \$34.95/higher in Canada

ers publicly teased the politicians about their particular bond.

But were they lovers, as rumors have claimed for over 170 years?

It's inconclusive, as you'll see in *Bosom Friends*. There are many reasons to think either way; although author Balcerski says they weren't, evidence to the contrary is tantalizing.

To get there, though, will take some rock-climbing.

To understand the lives of King and Buchanan, one must inherently understand politics, of which much of this book consists. This is necessary, since it also shows divisions between the two men (ultimately both physically and emotionally), their scrappy political competition, and an untraversable gulf of disagreement—facets that, individually and together, are fascinating. Readers will clearly see the affection between the two men here, though we'll never completely know the true nature of it. (Written communication between the two, which might have proved conclusive, disappeared shortly after the Civil War.)

That sets up a delicious double-mystery that leaves you to make up your own mind: letters lost or tossed? Bosom friends, or more than that? If you're curious to know, this book will keep you tethered to your chair.

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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Who are the hardest customers to please?

The customers that just don't know what they want!

If you weren't a bartender...what career would you choose?

I'm in nursing school now. But I have also served six years in the military and have been a paramedic and a personal trainer.

Do you have any pets?

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TexasLegalPlanning.com.....281/464-LAWS (5297)
Charles Hunter/Hayes Hunter PC
.....281/768-4731
Gonzalez Olivieri LLC
gonzalezolivieriilc.com.....713/481-3040
Katine & Nechman LLP
1834 Southmore.....713/808-1001
Dwane Todd Law Firm
405 Main St., Ste 602.....713/965-0658

AUTOMOTIVE REPAIRS

Ryan Automotive
716 Fairview.....713/522-3602
Tech Auto Maintenance
37 Waugh Dr.....713/863-8244

AUTOMOTIVE SALES

Central Houston Cadillac/Tony McClelland
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Fred Haas Toyota World/ Jim Wilkinson
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Knapp Chevrolet/Ben Webster
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davidalcorta.net.....832/439-0224
Dessert Gallery
DessertGallery.com.....713-522-9999

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davidalcorta.net.....832/439-0224
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1601 Sunset.....713/526-8125
Living Mosaic Church
401 Branard St.....832/971-0364
Resurrection MCC
2025 W 11th.....713/861-9149
St Paul's United Methodist Church
5501 Main.....713/528-0527
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
1805 W. Alabama.....ststephenshouston.org

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.....832/252-1961

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.....aarp.org/pride
AIDS Healthcare Foundation/Out of the Closet
1435 Westheimer.....outofthecloset.org
Bering Connect
.....713-526-1017, ext.20
Diana Foundation
.....TheDianaFoundation.org
EPAH
.....EPAH.org
Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce
HoustonLGBTChamber.com.....832-510-3002
Harris County Sheriff's Office
.....hcsjobs.com
Houston GLBT Political Caucus
.....thecaucus.org
KPFT Radio
kpft.org.....713-526-4000
Lesbian Health Initiative (LHI)
401 Branard.....lhihouston.org
Lesbians Over Age Fifty (L.O.A.F.)
lesbiansoverage50.org.....713/907-5378
MyGayHouston.com
.....MyGayHouston.com/discover
Pet Patrol
.....ThePetPatrol.org
Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast
.....ppgulfcoast.org/lgbtq
Ryan White Planning Council
rwpcHouston.org.....713-572-3724

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Alley Theatre
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Ticketmaster.com.....800/745-3000
Galveston Island Convention
.....galveston.com
George Country Sports Bar
617 Fairview.....713/528-8102

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611 Hyde Park.....HoustonEagle.com
JR's/Santa Fe
808 Pacific.....713/521-2519
La Granja Disco Y Cantina
5505 Pinemont Dr.....713/518-6753
Lake Charles
VisitLakeCharles.org/greattimes... 800/456-7952
Midtown Houston
.....Midtownhouston.com

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MillerOutdoorTheatre.com.....281/373-3386
Pearl Bar
4216 Washington.....PearlHouston.com

Rainbow on the Green
.....discoverygreen.com/rainbow
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248 Jaster Rd.....979/249-3129
Society For The Performing Arts
SPAHouston.org.....713/227-4772
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Theatre Southwest
Theatresouthwest.org.....713/661-9505
Theatre Under The Stars
800 Bagby, Suite 200.....tuts.com/out
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ChampionCounseling.com.....832/6543-5168
Denise O'Doherty, LPC, LMFT, LCDC, RN
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230 Westcott, Ste 210.....713/869-7400
Dr. Daniel Garza, MD
3131 Eastside St, Ste 4.....15281/610-8190
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Orthotexsmiles.com.....281/937-2540
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2055 Westheimer.....713/520-6600
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1700 Post Oak Blvd, Ste 110.....713/622-7470
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Abel Flores, MD/Crofoot MD
3701 Kirby, Ste.1230.....713/526-0005
M. Sandra Scurria, MD
6565 West Loop South, Ste 300..281/661-5901

Derek Smith, AGCNP-BC/Crofoot MD
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3701 Kirby Dr., Ste.1230 713/526-0005

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RyanMassageWorks.com..... 713/269-7926

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5917 Richmond.....TheDogHousePS.com
Midtown Veterinary Hospital
MidtownVetHospital.com..... 713-528-4900
Natural Pawz
208 Westheimer..... naturalpawz.com
Pet Patrol
.....ThePetPatrol.org

Spay-Neuter Assistance Program
Snaps.org..... 713/862-3863
The Ruff - House Cage Free Daycare & Boarding
712 Fairview..... 713/521-7877
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2030 W. Alabama..... 713/528-0818

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AnthonyUptonProperties.com... 713/528-0050

Brooks Ballard/Engel & Volkers

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David Bowers/The House Company/Galveston
David@DavidBowers.com..... 409/763-2800

Tina Burgos/Inverness Realty Group
TinaSellsHouston.com..... 713/562-3149

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Jeremy Fain/Greenwood King Properties
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Karen Derr/Karen Derr Realty
karenderr.com..... 713/875-7050

Clayton Katz/Compass
Compass.com..... 832/512-2180

Ed Melchor/Sotheby's
edmelchor.com..... 713/851-0912

Martha Turner Properties
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Thomas Phillips/KW Memorial
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Alexander Webb/Coldwell Banker
2 Greenway Plaza, Ste 150..... 832/306-7078

Debbie Levine/Greenwood King Properties
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Lynette Lew/Better Homes and Gardens
LynetteLew.com..... 713/582-2202

Ashton Martini/Compass
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Danny Pleason/Martha Turner
Dannypleson.com..... 832/661-1502

Tom Schwenk/Tom's Galveston Real Estate
Tomsgalvestonrealestate.com.... 713-857-2309

VJ Tramonte/Joe Tramonte Realty
1802 Broadway/Galveston..... 409/765-9837

B. Kent Turner/Coldwell Banker
..... 479/363-6586

Calvin Upton/Anthony Upton Properties
AnthonyUptonProperties.com... 713/528-0050

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Free Grillin'/Chef Michele
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2027 Post Oak Blvd 713/621-4200

3773 Richmond..... 713/714-8258

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616 Westheimer Rd..... katzsneverkloses.com

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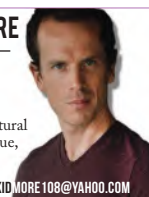


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become outspoken about the "right" path to take. In the latter part of the month, you will be able to connect with others and find common goals to make your journey better. Toward the very end of the month, reconnecting with old business partners, former lovers, and old friends can be very helpful to you. Make the most of this opportunity!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Expanding your education and knowledge base are priorities this month. You may feel more social and want to get out and share your views with others. This is a good time to promote your services or talents. Writing, teaching, and continuing your education are enhanced this month. You have a message to get out, and you want to share it with others. Toward the end of last month you began to look more closely at your long-term career and security goals. This idea gets a big boost toward the middle of this month, and will only get stronger over the next few months. You are expecting more from yourself, and you may feel limited by your current environment. Mercury retrograde impacts your career sector at the end of the month. Be ready to take a look back

at where you have been, and at any possible errors that were made. Mercury retrograde allows us to correct our problems, so take advantage of that energy.

PISCES (Feb. 19-Mar. 20)

October brings some peace and less activity to the Mermaids and Mermen. Last month had you feeling overwhelmed, so this month you are very selective about the people you allow into your life. You will purposely be avoiding negative types and naysayers, since your tolerance for these folks continues to be very low. This is a very good month to spend time with your partner and reestablish the emotional commitment you've both made. If you are single, you will need some companionship, even if that is with a close friend. Toward the end of the month you are more open about your views and ideas. If you are a writer, this is a great time to get your work published. You will be more ready to get back into the day-to-day aspects of reality. There are some new opportunities developing to make new friends or connect with community projects. You may be drawn to more of that by the end of the month.

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By LILLY RODDY
Illustration by JANIEWHATEVA

Get Projects Started Now

You can focus on unfinished projects later.



Mercury goes retrograde on October 26, and will remain in retrograde until November 25. Get your projects started before that time, or you may experience delays and blocks later. We are more aware of who we should trust, as well as our resources and the loyalty and commitment from those around us. During the retrograde, focus on unfinished projects and on reconnecting with friends and clients from your past. • Good days this month are October 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, and 25. Days to stay in bed are October 1, 3, 7, 12, 27, 28, and 31.

ARIES (Mar. 21-Apr. 19)

Relationships, commitments, and investments are very active in your life this month. This is a good month to talk about future goals, renewing your bonds, and rooting out problems. If you are single, this is also a good time to meet new folk if you are interested. Your career sector is very active. If you are unhappy with where you are, you are looking for new hunting grounds. For some, this can be a time to start something new or retire from what you have been doing. This career energy continues to get stronger through February 2020. You are ready to act on your impulses this month!

TAURUS (Apr. 20-May 20)

As the month begins, you are improving both your surroundings at work and your workplace relationships. If you are having difficulties, you are bringing them to the surface so they can be dealt with. This month is an especially good time to pay attention to your health and your fitness regimen. By midmonth, your focus shifts to partnerships. You are open to creating new relationships, both business and personal, but you have little or no tolerance for game-players or people who want you all to themselves. This is also a good month for travel, expanding your educational base, journaling, and looking at new investments. At the end of the month, it's a good time to connect with old friends!

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

The first half of October is a creative and playful time. This can be a good period for a vacation, spending more time with your children, or improving your creative skills. Relationships are continuing to improve. If you are single, this is a good time to look for potential partners. If you are involved, this is a great time to reconfirm your commitment. Your current career direction is not as satisfying, and you are looking for something that fits you better. In the latter half of the month, you are back to your normal work and life routines. Details are much more important in the latter half of the month. There could be some office renovations happening at the end of the month!

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

This is a busy time for the Crabs, with all sorts of activities taking place at home and with your family! You may be called to a family reunion or to referee a fight between relatives. You may also be working on your home and making it a better place to live. You will be very protective of your family and home this month. The latter half of the month will be a creative and lively time for you. This is a much better time to enjoy a getaway, or just reconnect to your inner child and have more fun. Overall, you are still reworking your career path and your relationship commitments. If they are working for you, you are fixing them; otherwise, you are eliminating them. Your personal boundaries are being emphasized.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

Your daily chores and activities are being emphasized this month. You may feel that you just have to get these projects completed. Your communications are clear, even if your message is not always a friendly one. This is a good time to reconnect with siblings or friends from your early life. You are continuing to work on improving your health and your work environment. There could be big changes going on at work, possibly with your current office or business location being relocated. In the latter part of the month, you are making sure your home is a more comfortable place. This is a good month

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

Happy Birthday to the Librans—the relationship artists, the diplomats, and the peacekeepers. This is your yearly review of activities, as well as the time to set new goals and directions for yourself. With relationships, this is a time to renew bonds and make sure both of you are pulling in the same direction. Home and family can be very demanding this month. You may have to make some hard decisions. This is a good month for home repairs or getting new furnishings. You are careful in your choices and want to get your money's worth. In the latter part of the month, finances and self-worth will become the issues you focus on. This is an innovative part of the month—a time for you to take a leadership role at work or even start your own business. You are looking for renewal in this area of your life.

to entertain at home, or just to enjoy your family connections. Career becomes more important as we proceed through the month.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Your finances are under the spotlight this month as you examine where you spend your money and look at ways to improve your current circumstances. There is a strong impulse to spend this month, but try to be practical about it! Partnerships take on a greater meaning, and you may be reviewing the conditions of your commitments. Your energy levels remain strong through the entire month. You are feeling more confident and ready to address some of the projects you have been avoiding. In the latter half of the month, you are more open and direct about your point of view. This is a better time to communicate your needs, goals, and expectations. Your passion and commitment will show!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

As the month opens, you are in a period of rest and retreat. You are connecting to your spiritual life and asking questions about the meaning and purpose of life. Early October is ideal for a spa retreat, a week at the lake or beach, or curling up with a good book and enhancing your fantasy life. You are more sensitive to your environment, and you should be careful about who you let in. Crowded settings will make you want to run in the other direction. Your energy does shift by mid-month, when you'll be a bit more prepared to face the world again. This will become

self-evident by the end of the month. Mercury, our communicator and organizer, is going retrograde in your sign. Use that retrograde period to finish up those old projects and connect with old friends, colleagues, and existing clients.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Your activity level and the demands on your time slow down some this month. Last month, you probably found yourself overcommitted and needing some time and space to yourself. You are more guarded about that this month. This continues to be a strong social time, but you will want to connect that energy to your business or career development. Friends and business associates can be very supportive and helpful with your projects and goals. Relationships are still very positive, whether you are involved or single. Toward the end of the month, you are ready for some rest and retreat as you become more connected to your spiritual side. This is a better time for yoga, meditation, and expanding your views about the universe. Under all of this, your career drive continues to strengthen.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Like last month, this month is an especially active time for the Old Sea Goats. Career and long-term security are tops on your list. For some, this is a time of starting your own business, revamping the one you are in, or possibly retiring to do something totally different. You are looking for a deeper meaning and purpose to your life. You are ready to take on a leadership role as you

CONTINUED ON PAGE 161

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On August 19, an investiture for Judge Lesley Briones for the Harris County Civil Court At Law No. 4 was held at the County Courthouse. Pictured are Ben Montalbano, Judge Lesley Briones, and Judge Jim Kovach.



On August 21, Natural Pawz in Montrose held their "Night of Bliss" event. Pictured are staff members with attendees.



On August 24, the Texas Chiropractic College held a graduation ceremony. Pictured are (l-r) Ashley Landof, Laken Stamps, Jaymee Broussard, and Chad Cherry.



On September 9, a preview of Michael Collins' "The Reliquaries Series" was held at the Collins Compound. Pictured are Alton Delaney, Kirk Baxter, Alden Clark, Gayle and Michael Collins, Deborah Melanson, and Brandon Brown.



On September 9, Pride Houston held its WorldPride 2023 party at Pearl Bar, celebrating Houston becoming an official 2023 candidate city. Pictured are Jojo Martinez, Dani Alzate, Paige Pitonyak, and Kayla Curran.



The "20, 30, 40 and More" GCam fundraiser hosted by Bear Buck was held at Tony's Corner Pocket. Pictured are (standing) Bruce Reeves, Loyd Powell, Regina Dane, Viola DeGradable Dion-Debris, Alton Howard, Wesley Hess; (sitting) Michael G. Clayton, Tootsie Zeis, and Judy Reeves.



On September 11, the Houston LGBT Chamber honored first-responders with HPD Chief Art Aceveda at Houston Media Source. Pictured are Roy Alvarez Jr., Officer Ann Waltman, Sergeant Yadira Estrada, Officer Ricardo Salas, Tammi Wallace, former Assistant Chief Debra Schmidt, Roger Palomino, Officer April Palatino, and Sergeant Alexandra Magnan.



A Democratic Presidential Debate Watch Party was held at Chapman & Kirby on September 12. Pictured are guest speaker District Attorney Kim Ogg and Annise Parker with Democratic supporters.



On September 12, a screening of the *Outcry* docu-series episode four, "In Transition," was held at the River Oaks Theatre. Pictured are Kimberly Thomas, Ian Haddock, Mia Ryan, Kennedy Loftin, and Nathan Maxey.



On September 13, the Harris County Democratic Lawyers Association held a continuing-education event at Univision, with professor Warren Binford of the Willamette University College of Law discussing the Mexican border crisis. Pictured are Professor Binford with presenters and attendees.



On September 14, Latinas Rising hosted a "Queer Latinx 2019" panel discussion at the Montrose Center. Pictured are Iris Rodriguez, Ella Chino, Maria Treviño-Rodriguez, Edna Mojica, Andrea Segovia, Melissa Allala, Ali Lozano, Frances Valdez, and Sol Thomas.



On September 24, Lambda NextGen hosted their monthly Happy Hour at Archway Gallery. Pictured are (front) James Spear, Chris Cantu, Erika Richie, Elizabeth England, Marcia Barnett, (back) Nicholas Guidry, Mia Mundy, Avery Belyeu, and Dan Knechtges.

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