

OutSmart

JULY '21

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

QUEER IN GALVESTON

The Island's must-know people and places

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BUILDING BROTHERHOOD

Heavy Hitters Pride celebrates larger men of color

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POP-CULTURE EXTRAVAGANZA

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THE NUMBERS NARRATIVE

Filmmaker **Marcus Pontello** documents the vibrant history of the legendary gayborhood venue

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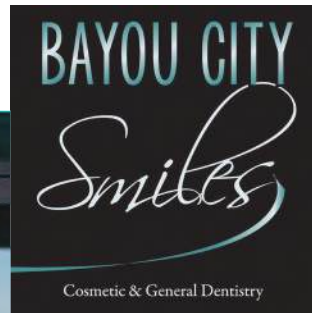


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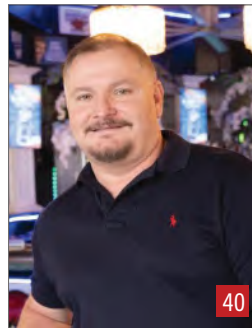


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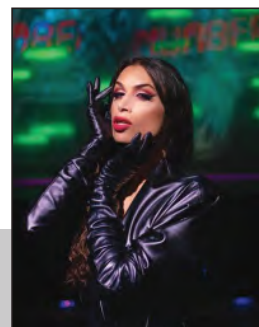
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THE NUMBERS NARRATIVE

Filmmaker Marcus Pontello documents the vibrant
history of the legendary gayborhood venue.

Photography by Gavin Calais

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For over 40 years, Numbers Nightclub in Montrose has served as a safe haven for people from all walks of life. Since its debut in 1976, the dance spot, concert venue, and gayborhood hangout has garnered a large and eclectic audience reflective of the true diversity of Houston.

Captivated by this unique nightlife mecca from an early age, one local gender-nonconforming artist set out to capture the full story of this legendary nightclub on film. Marcus Pontello's *Friday I'm In Love* documentary, which was nine years in the making, will screen in its entirety on July 31 and August 1 at Numbers.

OUTSMART is highlighting Pontello and their remarkable film with a cover feature in this

July edition. Writer Sam Byrd chats with the filmmaker about the documentary, and also digs into the history of Numbers by sitting down with some of the club's former and current owners and DJs.

We then feature another group of active community leaders, beginning with the philanthropy-minded winners of this year's Miss and Mr. Lone Star Houston pageants. Writer Ryan Leach introduces us to these two pageant veterans, while writer Zach McKenzie talks to Heavy Hitters Pride founder Jovaun P. Hicks about his sixth annual three-day convention for LGBTQ men of color and larger size.

Meanwhile, other community members like lesbian artist Kiki Neumann are embarking on new ventures to empower queer locals.

Writer David Webb interviews Neumann to learn more about her colorful political yard signs, which she hopes will help turn out the vote for the 2022 midterm elections.

Elsewhere in this annual Galveston summer issue, we highlight a few of the people and places that make the Island so special. David Webb speaks to Rumors Bar & Grill owner Todd Slaughter, while writer Jenny Block chats with Texas United Charities' Galveston chapter president Sheila Morton. Writer Lillian Hoang sits down with nonbinary creatives Ian Gerson and Everest Pipkin, whose works are on display at the Galveston Artist Residency through July 17. Then writer Marene Gustin takes you on a trip back in time to the Galveston Railroad Museum, and

I highlight ten ways to experience the best of LGBTQ life on the Island.

Finally, get ready for OUTSMART's 25th annual Gayest & Greatest Reader's Choice Awards. Send us your nominations from July 15 to July 25, and then vote for your favorites beginning July 26 through September 1. Go to outsmartmagazine.com to nominate your favorite community members, businesses, and services.

See you next month!

Lourdes Zavaleta
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LGBTQ Athletes Make History

Carl Nassib, Sha'Carri Richardson, and Laurel Hubbard each broke glass ceilings last month.

By RYAN M. LEACH



Pride is about LGBTQ visibility. The more we see out individuals in the world, the more we are able to recognize the important contributions that queer people are making to society. In recent days, three notable LGBTQ athletes have made history, and the hopes are that there are more to come.

One of the most covered June Pride stories was the coming out of Las Vegas Raiders defensive lineman Carl Nassib. The 28-year-old took to his Instagram to announce to followers and the world that he is gay. In doing so, he became the first active player in NFL history to identify publicly as a gay man. He also announced a \$100,000 donation to The Trevor Project, an L.A.-based organization that focuses on suicide-prevention efforts among LGBTQ youth.

"Right now, I am sitting in a moment of gratitude and relief. Sadly, I have agonized over this moment for the last 15 years. Only until recently, thanks to my family and friends... did it seem possible for me to say publicly and proudly that I'm gay," said Nassib on his Instagram.

Sha'Carri Richardson, 21, also made headlines when she trounced the competition during her Olympic track and field trials by delivering an astonishing 10.86 in the 100-meter dash, falling just shy of Florence Griffith Joyner's world record by 0.24. If Richardson were to take gold at the Tokyo Olympics, she would become the first American female to do so in that event in 25 years.

The Dallas native and former LSU student is so fast that you could easily miss her if not for her signature fiery-orange hair. Although her athletic prowess is so much more important than her hair color, she used that styling detail to allow the world into her personal life by crediting her girlfriend for the idea.

"My girlfriend actually picked my [hair] color. She said it spoke to her—the fact that it was just so loud and vibrant, and that's who I am." Richardson told NBC News after setting the internet afire with her outstanding performance.

Richardson, who has not otherwise come



"RIGHT NOW, I AM SITTING IN A MOMENT OF GRATITUDE AND RELIEF. SADLY, I HAVE AGONIZED OVER THIS MOMENT FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS. ONLY UNTIL RECENTLY, THANKS TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS... DID IT SEEM POSSIBLE FOR ME TO SAY PUBLICLY AND PROUDLY THAT I'M GAY."

—Carl Nassib

out as LGBTQ identifying, tweeted a rainbow emoji after her big moment, which is being interpreted as her acknowledgement of Pride Month. However, she is more focused on the job she has to do at the Olympics.

"I just want the world to know I'm *that* girl," she said. "If you've been doing this and I step on the scene, I'm letting you know I respect you for putting on for our sport, but at the end of the day, when we get on this line, what you've been doing, you have to do that against me."

New Zealand is home to another notable new Olympian. Laurel Hubbard, 43, became the first openly transgender woman to qualify

for the Olympics. The weight lifter qualified to compete in the over-87 kg (192 lbs) category.

"I am grateful and humbled by the kindness and support that has been given to me by so many New Zealanders," Hubbard said in a statement on June 21. "When I broke my arm at the Commonwealth Games three years ago, I was advised that my sporting career had likely reached its end. But your support, your encouragement, and your aroha [love] carried me through the darkness."

Hubbard's accomplishment, though history-making, is not without controversy.

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A debate is taking place around the world regarding the participation of trans athletes (and women, in particular) in sports. In the U.S., many states (including Texas) have passed or tried to pass legislation that would bar trans athletes from participating in the sport category that coordinates with their gender. The argument against the inclusion of trans women athletes is that going through male puberty gives them a particular athletic advantage.

The International Olympic Committee created guidelines for trans athletes in 2004. Trans men may compete without any restrictions, whereas trans women must identify as female (for sports purposes) for at least four years and have a testosterone level below 10 nanomoles per liter. Hubbard, having transitioned eight years ago, has met all of these requirements.

As time goes on, it's possible that even more Olympians (or other athletes) will make LGBTQ history. What these three outstanding athletes have shown us is that representation is important. They stand on the shoulders of others who took the brave step to live authentically. Nassib mentioned in his statement that he hopes coming out won't have to be as stressful in the future as it was for him.

If the community continues to live "out and proud," that day may come.

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Houston's New Police Chief Is a Loyal LGBTQ Ally

Troy Finner discusses his queer-affirming policies.

By MARENE GUSTIN



One of the first actions that new Houston Police Department (HPD) Chief Troy Finner took after being sworn in on April 5 will have a major impact on the

LGBTQ community.

"We approved a full-time resource officer to handle police reports at the Montrose Center," Finner says, noting that Houston's LGBTQ resource center had been advocating for a pathway to report crimes in a community-affirming location since 2013.

"[Officer Jackie Boniby] will be here daily, in plain clothes and no police car parked outside," says Kennedy Loftin, chief development officer at the Montrose Center. We're hopeful that this can turn the tide on unreported crimes and better protect our community."

"So many times, LGBTQ people don't feel comfortable reporting a crime to police," says Officer Josephine "Jo" Jones, the department's LGBTQ community liaison since 2020. Her sister Ethel Joseph, the department's first LGBTQ liaison, was asked to take the post by then-executive assistant HPD chief Finner in 2014. Having an officer on duty at the Montrose Center was an idea that Officer Jones brought to Finner, who was very supportive.

"It makes me feel good that the chief supports our community and the whole city," Jones says. "He's a very real person, and he believes in equality. I don't want my community to think they don't matter, because we're all just really one community—a community of love."

Finner, a native Houstonian from the Fifth Ward, is a 31-year veteran of the department. He graduated from Madison High School in 1985 and earned his bachelor of science degree in criminal justice from Sam Houston State University. He also has a master's degree in criminal justice from the University of Houston at Clear Lake. The married father of five children was unanimously confirmed by Houston City Council to become the first Houston-born African American officer to lead HPD. (The first



"I HAVE SUCH LOVE AND RESPECT FOR THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY. THEY ARE GREAT PEOPLE; THEY ARE OUR COMMUNITY. WE NEED TO LET THEM KNOW THEY MATTER TO US."

—Troy Finner,
Houston Police Chief

Black HPD chief was Lee P. Brown, who served from 1982 to 1990 before becoming Houston's mayor in 1998. He instituted "neighborhood-oriented policing" and the HPD community liaison program.)

"I have family members and close friends in the LGBTQ community," Finner says. "I think

we are doing a great job to support them, but there's always room for improvement. I support any training we can give."

Since 2018, the Montrose Center and Equality Texas have been training HPD officers on appropriate terminology for interacting with the LGBTQ community to eliminate misunderstandings while reporting crimes—particularly domestic violence among same-sex couples and hate crimes against trans persons.

The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce posted a note on its Facebook page congratulating Finner on his appointment. "The Chamber recognizes the critical importance of public safety in terms of our economic success as a city," explains Chamber co-founder, CEO, and president Tammi Wallace. "Ensuring public safety requires strong leadership, and as a longtime HPD officer, Finner brings extensive experience and passion to lead in this role. We appreciate his commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion, both within the department and in terms of community engagement, and we look forward to working with him."

"I have such love and respect for the LGBTQ community," Finner says. "They are great people; they are our community. We need to let them know they matter to us."

Besides the designated LGBTQ liaison and officer training, HPD also has an off-duty bicycle patrol that has been patrolling the bar area around Pacific Street on Thursday through Sunday nights for more than a decade. With 5,300 employees, the department also sponsors the LGTBQ employee group L.E.A.P. (Law Enforcement Alliance of Pride) that plans social events for members and organizes a contingent of officers to march in the annual Pride parades.

Finner is pleased that HPD is so affirming and inclusive when it comes to the LGBTQ presence both in the community and within its own ranks.

"It's the spirit of our great city—the spirit of inclusiveness," he notes. "And I'm very proud of that."

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They've Got Pride

The Mahogany Project's virtual celebration series aims to educate and empower.

By LILLIAN HOANG



Members of The Mahogany Project, Inc. (courtesy photo).



To uplift TQLGB+ communities of color, The Mahogany Project Inc. (TMP, Inc.) has organized a series of inspiring livestreamed panels, interviews, and conversations that audiences can join and learn from. The "We Got Pride" virtual series runs through July 15 on TMP's Facebook Live.

TMP, Inc. was founded in 2017 by activist Verniss McFarland III after the death of Chyna Gibson, a Black woman of trans experience and a cherished local performer. McFarland III made the group to reduce social isolation, stigma, and social injustice in TQLGB+ communities of color.

To further that mission, the local nonprofit has created virtual spaces where healthy and positive community dialogue can occur.

Event coordinator Darrien Dyrell, who uses they/them pronouns, says, "Online, queer individuals face so many negative conversations. This was our way of creating healthy conversations surrounding the LGBTQIA+ community in the digital space."

During the "Player 1: Gaymer" event on July 1, people can learn from and contribute to dialogue with queer people in the gaming community, which often ignores the perspectives and needs of LGBTQIA+ gamers.

TMP, Inc.'s "We Got Each Other" event on July 6 will allow people to discuss the prevalence of addiction in the LGBTQIA+ community. "We wanted to make sure we had a safe space to invite people to open up about addiction and sobriety," Dyrell says.

continued on page 25

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By Adriana Salazar

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COMMUNITY

July 25

Pride Houston Theme Kick-Off + Theme Reveal Party

Pride Month might be over, but Pride Houston's festivities are still going strong! The organization will kick off its 2021 LGBTQ celebration with a theme-reveal party at the local lesbian bar Pearl Bar Houston. Pride Houston also intends to announce the date and other details for this year's festival and parade.

After the COVID-19 pandemic canceled all of Pride Houston's in-person events last summer, leaders decided that the 2021 celebration would honor both years' grand marshals. The recipients

of this accolade are individuals or organizations who have made significant contributions to the wider LGBTQ community through their activism or charity work.

Pride Houston's July 25 kickoff event will include live performances and news of upcoming Pride events. Registration is required, and a \$5 donation is suggested for admission. Those who cannot attend the event in person can watch a livestream on Pride Houston's Facebook Live. tinyurl.com/uvjbkb58



NIGHTLIFE

July 1

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE ALL STARS SEASON 6 WATCH PARTY WITH JIGGLY CALIENTE

ReBar presents a *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars Season 6* "Dine N Drag" watch party. Hosted by local artists Blackberri and Hu'nee B, the show features a special appearance by *Drag Race* star Jiggly Caliente and performances by ONDI, Lexus Chandelier, and Edna Anderson. Following the show, there will be a meet and greet with Jiggly Caliente.

tinyurl.com/4xwcy2h



COMMUNITY

July 4

KEITH & DEXTER PRESENT: THE FREEDOM PARTY

Go to Belvedere for The Freedom Party presented by gay Houston couple Keith Clark and Dexter Williams. The Fourth of July extravaganza will feature music by DJ Sean "Panda" Royal, and food by Chef Kesha Bland. tinyurl.com/nxbye6r6



COMMUNITY

July 9

Meet and Eat!

The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce presents Meet and Eat at BUDDY'S. Members and guests are invited to mingle and network at this informal lunch gathering while also supporting Chamber businesses. tinyurl.com/58f23bda

COMMUNITY

July 10

AssistHers Volunteer Training

Join AssistHers and the Montrose Center for a virtual volunteer training held each month for people who are interested in helping LGBTQ+ women and nonbinary individuals with chronic disabilities. This training is required to volunteer with AssistHers. For more information, email LGBTQHealth@montrosecenter.org. tinyurl.com/s4xh7jd9

FILM

July 16

'Can You Bring It: Bill T. Jones and D-Man in the Waters'

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston premieres *Can You Bring It: Bill T. Jones and D-Man in the Waters* as a part of their virtual film series. The documentary follows choreographer Bill T. Jones (who also created the film) and the Arnie Zane Dance Company in 1989 as they performed *D-Man in the Waters*, a physical manifestation of the AIDS pandemic. mfah.org/Films

COMMUNITY

July 17-18

Comicpalooza

Comicpalooza is back at the George R. Brown Convention Center for two days. This pop-culture festival features celebrities, shopping, and activities that will keep you entertained. Tickets available on the Comicpalooza website. tinyurl.com/48sb4wa2

COMMUNITY

July 18

Pride Galveston Benefit Brunch and Show

Help raise funds for this year's Pride Galveston celebration by attending a benefit brunch and show at Robert's Lafitte, sponsored by Out4Brunch. \$10 Mexican food plates will be available as well as raffles and prizes, all benefiting Pride Galveston's festivities in September. tinyurl.com/4j9ssbte

SOCIAL

July 25

Brunchcade

The Houston Gaymers celebrate Sunday Funday at Cidercade, an arcade and bar located in EaDo near downtown Houston. Admission is \$10 and includes access to over 275 games and a bar with 24 different ciders, seltzers, and wines. tinyurl.com/yk28v2m3

NIGHTLIFE

July 6, 13, 20, 27

Trivia Tuesday

BUDDY'S presents its weekly Trivia Tuesday, a game night hosted by local drag artists Dessie Love Blake and Muffy Vanderbilt. The event consists of seven rounds of trivia in a variety of formats and prizes for the winners. tinyurl.com/66sauwu7

SOCIAL

July 7

First Wednesday Happy Hour

Join the Diana Foundation at JR's Bar & Grill for the group's monthly First Wednesday Happy Hour. The event is open to the public and includes announcements, drink specials, and entertainment. tinyurl.com/2hbbrjs9

STAGE

July 16

FLY Dance Company

Miller Outdoor Theatre presents FLY Dance Company, a "theatrical hip hop" event that fuses classical music and street dance. Tickets are available online. tinyurl.com/u3f3rvpk

NIGHTLIFE

July 18

Gottmik at ReBar

RuPaul's Drag Race Season 13 finalist Gottmik—the first trans man to ever compete on the show—visits ReBar for a night of show-stopping performances. tinyurl.com/4mxmj4j8



COMMUNITY

July 30

Heavy Hitters Pride

The Hilton Houston Westchase hosts the sixth annual Heavy Hitters Pride convention, which provides safe spaces for urban gay men, their admirers, and allies. The two-day event features networking, bonding, and a wide range of activities. tinyurl.com/kraxp8rs

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STAGE

August 21

Kesha Live with Special Guest Betty Who

Kesha and Betty Who, two openly bisexual musicians, visit Houston for a performance at the Bayou Music Center. Kesha will be touring for her newest album *High Road*, which was released in January 2020. Tickets are on sale now. tinyurl.com/tcfff6kd



SOCIAL

August 28

Baewatch x Salvation

Pride Houston and Lesbians of Color (LOC) Nation Entertainment present Baewatch x Salvation, an official Pride Houston pool party. The event is 21+ and pool attire is strongly encouraged. tinyurl.com/km76cn67

STAGE

September 23

Brothers Osborne

Country duo Brothers Osborne visits Houston's White Oak Music Hall for their *We're Not for Everyone* tour. After coming out as gay in January, the band's lead vocalist T.J. Osborne became the first out musician signed to a major country-music record label.

tinyurl.com/sytc6p8k



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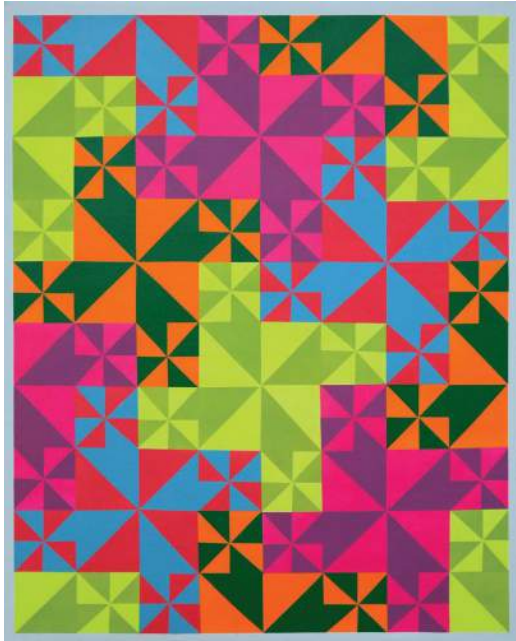


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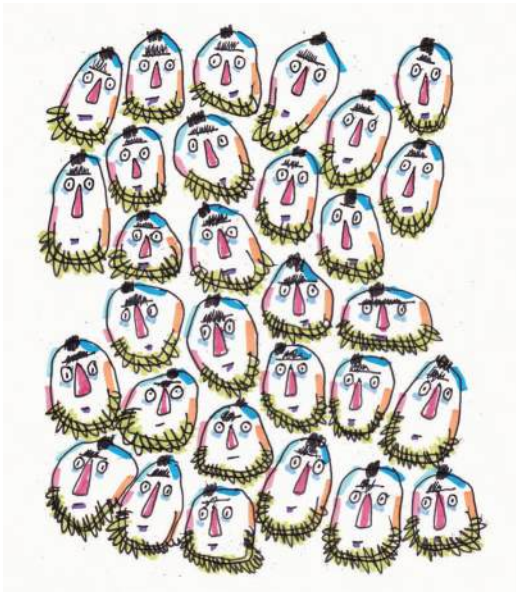
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Chris Cascio, Untitled (Neon Painted Primitives), acrylic aerosol on canvas, 20 1/2 x 16 1/2 inches.



Russell Etchen, Exactly Thirty People, ink on paper, 6 x 8 inches.



Christopher Cascio

Russell Etchen



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Cancel This!

Are your beliefs
“sincere and deeply held”?



Steven Hotze is Houston's perennial anti-LGBTQ activist who thinks about gay sex more than most gay people do. These days, he is heading into court once again to at-

tack the civil rights of gay people.

This time around, Hotze says that discriminatory laws against gay people are both constitutional and hunky-dory—just so long as those laws are “applied equally to both sexes.” The problem is, there are more than two genders and far, far more than two sexes. In Hotze's world, the two sexes are the missionary position in the dark, and the far more kinky missionary position with the lights on.

This time, Hotze has applied his legal-eagle wizardry to include something new: he wants the court to allow an employer to discriminate against gay people if that employer holds “sincere and deeply held religious beliefs” that marriage must be restricted to a man and a woman, that must be reserved for marriage, and that men and women must dress and behave in accordance with distinct, God-ordained, biological sexual identity.

Dress? Behave? Seriously?

Darlin', when I heard about this, it pissed me off so badly that I could piss standing up for a whole week—which I think kinda speaks to the futility of Hotze's plan.

Mr. Hotze can make me do a lot of things (vomit being one of them), but he cannot make me give up my fishing hat for a Minnie Mouse bow in my hair. Dammit, that's where I draw the line.

So, I guess we already know which gender gets to fart.

And speaking of gaseous emissions fouling the air, Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz is still yakking. He re-tweeted a video that compared a Russian military ad (featuring muscle-bound men shooting rifles) and a U.S. Army ad (which features a female American soldier who was raised by two moms).

“Holy crap,” Cruz tweeted, “perhaps a woke, emasculated military is not the best idea.” Then the next day (after everybody had told him “Yes, Ted, that tweet *does* make your

butt look bigger”) he wrote that the ad makes United States soldiers look like “pansies.”

Does this man own a mirror?

Look, I'm a nice person, so I'm not going to say that Ted Cruz looks like any kind of flower. But dirt, maybe? Yeah, I'll go with “mud fence.”

By the way, hurricane season is upon us. And since all the right-wing preachers blame every hurricane on “the gays,” I think it's only fair that a committee of drag queens should be in charge of the annual hurricane names list. My friend Windy Trix (who frequently reminds me that “if being gay was a choice, I'd choose to be gayer”) is hard at work on her 2021 list. So far, she's come up with Anita Wash, Darcy Blows, Tidal Surge, Windsor Blowen, Kata Gory Five, Sheila Killya, and Rhoda Tuhell.

Watch for my friend Windy at political events—she has decided to run for the Texas Legislature on the platform that all iced-coffee drinks should be free during Pride month. She's gonna win, y'all.

And how 'bout the Republicans' latest fixation on “cancel culture,” which should earn them the 2021 Glass Houses Award for shameless hypocrisy. While screaming about liberals who “cancel” anyone who strays from the liberal party line, Republicans have:

- cancelled Liz Cheney,
- cancelled everyone trying to investigate



the domestic terrorism of January 6,

- attempted to cancel the certified November 2020 election results in Arizona,
- cancelled a woman's right to choose in several states,
- cancelled anyone who thinks people standing for hours in a voting line might need water,
- cancelled certain citizens' right to vote by doing wholesale purges of local voter rolls,
- cancelled Republican moderate Mitt Romney,
- and cancelled Nikole Hannah Jones for The 1619 Project, which dares to examine the consequences of slavery 400 years after the first ship full of African captives arrived on our shores.

In return, I would like to suggest that we cancel the Republicans' annual Wear a Red Hat to the Capitol Day.

Until next month, call Governor Abbott and tell him that instead of spending our tax dollars to build our own wall at the Mexican border, we'd rather have reliable electricity.

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

The third-to-last event, "This Is Us" on July 8, sets the stage for conversations with people who are sexually attracted to trans people—for example, straight men who are attracted to trans women. Dyrell says this conversation was created to educate and end stigma.

Folks can attend "Guy Chat: Queer Men Edition" on July 13 to better understand and express what it means to be both a man and a member of the TQLGB+ community.

The virtual series will finish with a variety show designed to highlight local queer creatives such as poets, rappers, and makeup artists. The event will also present the Rising Phoenix Award to a young person who has contributed to and made their mark in the LGBTQIA+ community.

Dyrell hopes people recognize the amount of effort that TMP, Inc. has put into creating "We Got Pride." They also hope attendees leave the series with a better understanding of issues in TQLGB+ communities of color. "We are very intentional about all the work that we put out into this world, and we are striving toward a safe place for the LGBTQIA+ community."

For more information, visit themahoganyproject.org/ and www.facebook.com/TMPHTX.



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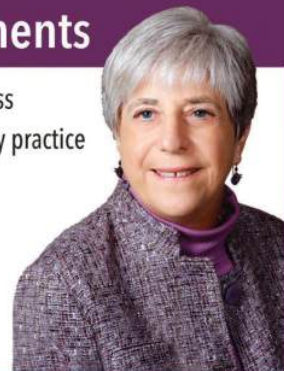
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Putting Yourself Out There

Dating advice for the post-pandemic limbo.



So you made it to the other side of the pandemic, but your relationship didn't. All of that working from home and getting either too much or too

little time with your significant other revealed some problem areas in your relationship. As a result, you've decided to part ways, and now the two of you are a pair of singles.

The pandemic didn't only impact couples, though. If you're single, the prolonged period of social isolation may have caused you to rethink your relationship status and resolve to change things up. Determined to never again go through a quarantine alone, more singles than ever before are looking seriously at partnering up.

Regardless of whether you're just looking for some fun or something more serious, this summer promises to be an interesting time to get back out there. Approaching this pandemic pivot with a renewed sense of curiosity and openness might increase your odds for an extra-hot summer.

COVID Dating

How, exactly, does one date in this new COVID era? With a little more than half of Harris County still unvaccinated, and with global concerns mounting regarding the Delta variant, some caution is still warranted. Following CDC guidelines and recommendations can be helpful in determining your relative level of risk. If you are vaccinated, resuming normal activities seems to be mostly safe. In those cases, dealing with the anxiety of being in crowds again may be the most challenging part of a new courtship.

If you are unvaccinated, it's essential to continue limiting your activities in public places, especially since studies have found that adults with positive COVID-19 test results were twice as likely to have dined at a restaurant than those with negative test results. Meeting in outdoor settings or on a restaurant patio might be a safer bet, and will allow you a chance to get to know someone without the added stress of worrying about COVID exposure.

It's also a good idea to clarify your own



COVID stance before engaging with potential dates. What level of risk are you willing to take, in terms of group activities and crowded indoor spaces? How important is it to you that anyone you date be fully vaccinated? When is it appropriate to ask or answer questions about COVID vaccinations? There is bound to be some trial and error in figuring out what feels most comfortable and natural, but thinking about these kinds of things ahead of time can save you from having to scramble if confronted with abrupt questions or decision-making.

Toss the List of Requirements

It can be difficult to have clear standards for potential partners without creating a laundry list of requirements. Judging a person based on their educational level or job, the type of car they drive, or where they live could significantly reduce your potential dating pool and cut out people who would be a good match.

Fair and reasonable expectations for a

partner center around how they treat you and respect your emotional boundaries. Unfortunately, those are sometimes challenging standards to enforce. Check in with yourself while you are on a date and consider: How does this person make me feel? Do I feel safe and respected? Do they follow through with what they tell me?

Judge Not...

Just like we learned in kindergarten, it's true that we can't really judge a book by its cover. In fact, attraction can grow (or diminish) as you learn more about a person. Have you ever had the experience of getting to know someone who was really hot, but their attitude was a turn-off?

The challenging part is really getting to know someone with today's app-based dating and casually swiping left and right. Of course the physical is important, but the key is to develop your sense of what matters most to you in a date or a partner.

Perhaps her sense of humor is really what you appreciate most. Or maybe it's the way he confidently moves through a room. Keeping in mind that someone's brain can be just as sexy as their biceps will help you take a fresh look at the people who enter your romantic field of vision.

So you might try going out with someone who doesn't look like "your type." Or perhaps you could spend a bit more time chatting and texting with someone in order to get to know their personality. This can provide you with the information you need to make a more informed decision about whether or not they're a good match.

People Are Not Like Buses...

Another frequent dating pitfall is the unconscious belief that someone better will always come along. Sure, there is always a smarter or richer person out there, but will they necessarily care for you in the right way? If you plan to make a relationship stick, remaining present-focused and developing an appreciation for the qualities in the person sitting across from you is essential.

Date Your Spouse!

If you're still in a relationship, perhaps what the pandemic was meant to show you is just how much your current partner means to you. Single people aren't the only ones who can use this summer as a time to connect. Date your partner! What activities can you find to enjoy together? Are there new opportunities for recreation or volunteering that might be fun and help to further cement your bond?

Looking Inward

The last year has shown us the importance of healthy relationships, so the renewed focus on dating isn't a bad thing. In fact, it may even add a little extra heat and excitement to the summer months. Just remember, though, to continue examining and working on your relationship with yourself. When you're in a good place, not only are you more attractive to others, but you can also feel confident about taking your best version of you into a partnership, and thus setting it up for success.

Daryl Shorter, MD, is a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and is board certified in both general and addiction psychiatry. His clinical practice focuses on veteran care, and he lectures widely on LGBTQ mental health.

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MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- ▶ **Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection.** Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV. If you have both HIV-1 and HBV, your HBV may suddenly get worse if you stop taking BIKTARVY. Do not stop taking BIKTARVY without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check your health regularly for several months, and may give you HBV medicine.

ABOUT BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in adults and children who weigh at least 55 pounds. It can either be used in people who have never taken HIV-1 medicines before, or people who are replacing their current HIV-1 medicines and whose healthcare provider determines they meet certain requirements.

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

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

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- ▶ 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.

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BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- ▶ Those in the “Most Important Information About BIKTARVY” section.
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- ▶ **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.

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HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

GET MORE INFORMATION

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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).



Get Your Guard Up

How to protect yourself against identity theft and cyberattacks.



Over the past decade or so, identity theft and cyberattacks have become common threats for individuals and businesses. Nearly every day there are news stories about

companies being “hacked,” which of course can have an impact on their customers as well.

Traditionally, cybercriminals typically focused on acquiring their victims’ private information for the purpose of financial gain. But as these thieves have become more sophisticated, they are now able to inflict much more serious financial and even physical damage. This type of crime could even change your life as you struggle to restore your credit and bank accounts, your medical records, and possibly even your personal reputation.

The good news is that as this type of crime has grown, so have the ways you can go about protecting yourself. Putting some precautions in place could make a world of difference in your personal and financial life.

Common Online Threats

It is estimated that roughly 49 million consumers lost \$56 billion to identity-theft fraud in 2020. Approximately \$13 billion in losses were due to “traditional” identity fraud, which consists of criminals stealing personal information for their own gain.

Beyond the usual identity theft and unauthorized use of credit cards, some of the more common online threats include:

Falsified Tax Returns – Tax-related identity theft occurs when someone uses a victim’s stolen personal information—including their Social Security number—to file a tax return and claim a fraudulent refund.

Medical Identity Theft – Identity thieves use someone else’s personal information and medical records to obtain health care. Because the victim’s medical history would then be compromised with the criminal’s own medical records, it could become life-threatening if the victim later needs medical care and is given the wrong treatment and/or medication.

House Stealing or Deed Theft – Criminals can steal someone’s identity and then forge deed or title documents in order to “sell” the victim’s home to unsuspecting buyers, or to borrow against the equity that has been built up in the property.



The Long-Term Impact of Cybercrimes

If you become a victim of ID theft or other type of cybercrime, it can affect you in a number of ways. As an example, in addition to the time and effort it can take to restore your credit and finances—with no guarantee that you will ever be able to get back to square one—this type of situation can impact you mentally and emotionally.

For many victims of identity theft, missed workdays are also common, and in turn, your income (and possibly even your job) could suffer as a result of the time you must set aside to recover lost funds, rectify your credit report, and ensure that your information is intact going forward. Likewise, personal relationships may also be affected.

Taking Steps to Better Protect Yourself

Although there is no guarantee that you will never become a victim of identity theft or a cyberattack, there are steps you can take to reduce the odds:

- Create strong email and account passwords, and change them regularly.
- Have a two-step login or authentication process on your email and online financial

accounts.

- Do not save credit card information online for future transactions.
- Pay bills online (physical checks are easy for thieves to steal).
- Regularly update the software on your internet router and your other devices.
- Run anti-virus software.
- Do not open emails and/or links unless you know who they are from.
- Never provide personal or financial information in response to potential “phishing” emails (i.e., emails that appear to come from a reputable source that trick you into revealing personal or financial details).
- Make sure that you back up the data on all of your devices on a physical external hard drive, and via a cloud backup service.
- Ensure that you have strong privacy settings on your social-media accounts, and do not post personal details such as your home address or phone number.
- If you go online while you are in a public place, install strong privacy programs on your laptop, tablet, and/or smartphone.
- Use a separate email address for conducting

- banking and financial transactions.
- Put a security “freeze” on your credit files maintained by the three major credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion).
 - Set up automatic updates on your smartphone apps and computer programs.
 - Purchase identity theft and/or cybersecurity insurance coverage.
 - Know what steps to take immediately if you become the victim of a cybercrime.

Protecting yourself from a cyberattack can take some time, but it can be well worth it to reduce your chances of becoming a victim. Your financial-planning professional can tell you more about how to keep your investment and retirement accounts safer, and also implement these types of precautions as part of your overall financial plan.

Grace S. Yung, CFP®, is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER practitioner with experience in helping LGBTQ individuals, domestic partners, and families plan and manage their finances since 1994. She is the managing director at Midtown Financial Group, LLC, in Houston. Yung can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com. Visit letsmakeaplan.org or midtownfg.com/lgbtqplus.10.htm.

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Jessica Fox

**Miss Lone Star
Houston 2021** will reign
with a focus on philanthropy.

By RYAN M. LEACH

What is your new title, and what do you plan to accomplish during your reign?

I am Miss Lone Star Houston 2021. My plan is to aggressively raise funds and awareness for Pet Patrol and [the Montrose Center's] Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years (SPRY) program.

Tell me a little about the pageant. What is your favorite part about it?

The Mr. and Miss Lone Star Houston pageant helps raise funds for Pet Patrol and SPRY. It consists of five categories: presentation, western-style presentation, onstage question-and-answer, formal wear, and talent. I really enjoyed the western-style presentation because it allowed for freedom of creative expression beyond traditional western style, allowing me to incorporate a contemporary western flair.

What is the most challenging part?

Anytime there's a microphone in my hands can be challenging, but the more I get those opportunities for public speaking, the easier it becomes.



How did you prepare for the pageant?

I rediscovered my passion for sewing during COVID-19, and decided to create all of my four looks for the event. I had fantastic mentorship from a legend, friend, and drag angel—Darrell Cantu, also known as Lauren Taylor. My backstage dresser Raul Pardo [also] kept me calm and collected as we prepared for each category.

What is the history of the pageant?

Miss Lone Star Houston was founded as a fundraiser by Jody Travis while he was Mr. Texas Gay Rodeo Association 2012. Five years later, the fundraiser became part of E.R.S.I.C.S.S. (The Empire of the Royal Sovereign and Imperial Court of the Single Star).

How did you get involved in the pageant, and why was it important to you?

My friend (and the promoter of the First Lady of Montrose pageant) Jason Smith, also known as Amanda Anne Houston, suggested this would be an excellent opportunity to further my passion for fundraising and giving back to the community. After looking at the great work that E.R.S.I.C.S.S. does, I knew I had to be part of it.

"MY PLAN IS TO AGGRESSIVELY RAISE FUNDS AND AWARENESS FOR PET PATROL AND THE MONTROSE CENTER'S SENIORS PREPARING FOR RAINBOW YEARS PROGRAM."

—Jessica Fox

How long have you been a part of the Houston community?

I was born in Houston at Jefferson Davis Hospital, which is no longer standing. I lived with my family in Pasadena and graduated from Sam Rayburn High School. Along the way, I spent many summers and vacations with my grandparents in Matamoros, Mexico. I currently live in Spring.

What do you like to do for fun?

Play softball! I've been a member of the Montrose Softball League Association since 2008, and I absolutely love it. I also love sewing, rhinestoning, and running (to support my love

for ice cream).

What advice would you give to aspiring contestants?

Number one is to have fun and enjoy the event and the people in attendance. You can participate in a pageant and actually enjoy it if you have taken the time to prepare and you have the right team in your corner.

What other titles are you aspiring to?

Miss Gay Pride Houston.

When you're not reigning, what's your day job?

I'm in the hospitality industry, and have been since 2003. I currently travel to hotel assignments to help catering, sales, and events departments when they're short-staffed.

How will you carry on the legacy of Miss Lone Star Houston 2021?

I will carry on the legacy with the utmost respect, professionalism, and community involvement to help inspire others to get involved and become part of the legacy.



Keep up with Jessica Fox on Facebook at tinyurl.com/zxf5hay7



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CONCIERGE TRAVEL

Landon J. Fatale

Mr. Lone Star Houston 2021 promises a reign that benefits the community.

By RYAN M. LEACH

What is your new title, and what do you plan to accomplish during your reign?

My new title is Mr. Lone Star Houston 2021. With this title I plan to host events to raise awareness for Pet Patrol, Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years (SPRY), the Kimberly Anne O'Neil Scholarship, and the Jonathan Smith Emergency Fund—as well as giving back to our community alongside Miss Lone Star Houston 2021, Jessica Fox.

How long have you been a part of the Houston community?

I am originally from El Paso. I was born and raised there, but moved to Houston in 2016 for a job opportunity as an autopsy assistant for Harris County.

How did you get involved in the pageant, and why is it important to you?

I have wanted to run for this since 2019 after my partner, Kian Alexander Fatale, captured the title. I am also a part of a nonprofit organization called The Empire of the Royal Sovereign Imperial Court of the Single Star, Inc. (E.R.S.I.C.S.S.). My involvement with that group inspired me to give back to the community as an individual, which I plan to do as Mr. Lone Star Houston.

What is the history of the pageant, and how will you carry on its legacy?

The Mr. and Miss Lone Star Houston pageant was founded by Jody Travis (a former member of the E.R.S.I.C.S.S. court) and has been going strong for many years, with countless contributions to charities benefiting our community. I plan on educating people about the title, as well as bringing in new up-and-coming entertainers who want to uplift the community by helping people make meaningful connections and create positive change.



What do you like to do for fun?

I love to host parties at my house, whether it be cookouts by the pool or just ordering pizza and hanging out with good company! I grew up with a family that always had something planned on the weekends, and were always together. Since I am miles away from them now, it's nice to be able to do the same thing with friends and chosen family, because they always put a smile on my face.

How did you prepare for the pageant?

I started preparing for this pageant by familiarizing myself with the organizations involved with this title. I also made sure that I knew each and every category. I also started practicing my talent (a lyrical color-guard routine) as much as I could after work. I would even go through the motions at work in my down time. I wanted to make sure that everything I presented was authentically me and that I felt comfortable in what I wore and how I presented myself, because I wanted to put my best foot forward.

What is your favorite part of participating in pageants?

My favorite part about the pageant is the talent portion, because I am able to express myself through my talents. I come up with a

"MY INVOLVEMENT WITH E.R.S.I.C.S.S. INSPIRED ME TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY AS AN INDIVIDUAL, AND I PLAN TO DO THAT AS MR. LONE STAR HOUSTON."

—Landon J. Fatele

message or an emotion that I want to convey to the audience and I explain it to my partner, Kian, who helps me bring my ideas to life. I love being able to share practices with him. We bounce ideas off each other, and I really believe that it's his guidance and training that helps me to be able to perform the way I do onstage. For that, I am very thankful!

What is the most challenging part?

The most challenging part, hands down, is controlling my nerves. As it is, I am a very nervous person and I stress about anything and everything. Sometimes I let my nerves get the best of me and I may not perform the way I intend to. I have learned that I have to separate myself from everything that is going on backstage, just so I can keep a calm mind. Because of the amount of time that I spend

practicing, once the music starts and I can settle into my routine, the nerves become a non-issue.

What advice would you give to aspiring contestants?

Don't give up, and have faith in yourself! Anything can happen in pageantry, and if there is a title that you know you want to hold, keep trying and trying until it's yours. Everything happens when it's supposed to, and perseverance will enable you to achieve your goals.

What other titles are you aspiring to?

In the past, I have captured the titles of Mr. So You Think You Can Drag 2018 and Mr. Gay Central Texas 2019. After winning Mr. Lone Star Houston 2021, I don't see myself entering another contest for a little while. There is one other position in the community that I am interested in, but I don't want to say anything until I know in my heart that I'm ready for all the responsibility. Keep an eye out, because when I feel that it's the right time, I'll take the leap of faith and go for it.



Keep up with Landon J. Fatele on Facebook at facebook.com/landon.ross.986. Learn more about the work of E.R.S.I.C.S.S. at ersicss.org.

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QUEER in GALVESTON



Galveston Island, with its rich history, culture, and tourist amenities, is also home to a vibrant LGBTQ community. This July issue of OUTSMART highlights a few of the people and must-visit places that make the Island so special.

First, we introduce you to Rumors Bar & Grill owner **Todd Slaughter**, whose seaside establishment is celebrating five years. Then meet **Sheila Morton**, president of the Galveston branch of Texas United Charities, which raises funds for

LGBTQ locals in need. Next, get to know nonbinary creatives **Ian Gerson** and **Everest Pipkin**, whose works are now on display at the Galveston Artist Residency.

Also in this special section, we take you on a trip back in time by spotlighting the **Galveston Railroad Museum**, a historic LGBTQ-friendly day-trip destination. And if you need other ideas for ways to spend your time during your next visit to the Island, don't miss our Ten Things to Do in Galveston list.

DINING OUT FOR LIFE HOUSTON

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DINING OUT FOR LIFE HOUSTON is back in person for 2021 from July 24–July 31. We are so excited to continue this 30-year tradition, supporting the mission of AIDS Foundation Houston and the wonderful culinary community in the Houston Area. For a complete list of participating restaurants, go to ***DiningOutHouston.org***

DiningOutHouston.org

BENEFITING 

Fabulous Philanthropist

Sheila Morton's Island charity gives back to LGBTQ people in need.

By JENNY BLOCK

For Galveston resident Sheila Morton, serving her community is as natural as breathing. Along with her day job as a property manager, Morton serves as the president of the Galveston chapter of Texas United Charities (GTUC), a statewide organization with an impressive mission statement: "Texas United Charities is committed to raising funds that will support the initiatives within the gay and lesbian community, all with a spirit of passion and enjoyment that helps put the *fun* back in *fundraising*. Our areas of focus are raising money for the LGBTQ community, building awareness for our beneficiaries, and having *fun* while working together for our community."

The Galveston chapter has a very special secret weapon to stay true to that mission—an emergency fund called the Jerry Eubank Angel Fund. "It's named after a lovely lady in our community that has always supported our Galveston LGBTQ community," Morton says. Eubank passed away several years ago, and when she did, the group wanted to honor her. The fund offers "urgent financial assistance to those in immediate need on an individual basis for those who qualify and can show a need for emergency funds."

Those wanting to apply can fill out the short form found on the GTUC website. Applications are reviewed immediately. Rent, utilities, medicine, groceries, and even burial expenses are all needs that this fund is available to help out with.

"This fund was needed more than ever when COVID-19 began and businesses started to close their doors. So many of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters found themselves without jobs, not able to pay basic living expenses," Morton says.

Since the pandemic began, the fund has been able to assist 32 applicants with expenses exceeding \$34,000. "When you tell someone

you are able to help them, their reaction, their expressed relief, and sometimes their tears of joy are so humbling. We consider it an honor to serve our community," Morton says. It's just the kind of community care and service that our world could use a lot more of.

Morton, a 60-year-old Alvin native, received a bachelor of business administration degree from Sam Houston State University and worked in Houston for 32 years before moving to Galveston.

While in Houston, Morton joined Texas United Charities' Houston chapter and fell in love with fundraising while serving as a volunteer.

"WE ARE HERE AND READY TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF OUR LGBTQ GALVESTON COMMUNITY, WHETHER IT IS THROUGH A FUNDRAISER OR HELPING INDIVIDUALS FACING AN URGENT FINANCIAL CRISIS."

—Sheila Morton

Within the first couple of years, she was asked to work on that group's board of directors as the director of gifts, and then as the treasurer. "When I moved to Galveston in 2015, I was encouraged by former chapter president Melissa Flories to start a new chapter in Galveston. She has been involved in fundraising for decades, and she was my mentor," Morton says.

She took Flories' advice and began a Galveston chapter without hesitation. Doing so was possible, Morton says, "with the help

and involvement of some wonderful locals that were passionate in giving back to the LGBTQ community of Galveston. I do have to mention the dedicated Galveston board of directors. They are all so talented, and strive to make our chapter and our community better every day. Tim Dudley is our vice president, James Heyland is our treasurer, Travis Newman is our secretary, and Jim Greaser is our director of memberships."

GTUC and organizations like it are crucial, especially for places like Galveston, Morton says. Too many people are suffering, and wind up feeling very alone. But with GTUC, they don't have to. "Before we opened the Galveston chapter, we discovered there was no organization like it on the Island, [so GTUC was] much needed. We filled a need that was missing for the LGBTQ Galveston community," she says.

The work Morton and the GTUC do is both affirming and life-changing, and it's vital to her that people know that. "We are here and ready to serve the needs of our LGBTQ Galveston community. Whether it is through a fundraiser or helping individuals facing an urgent financial crisis."

With the state of the world today, and with so many people suffering, Morton and GTUC are a light in what can seem to those in need like a world of darkness.

Anyone willing to help can join the GTUC, Morton adds. "All members pay membership dues, and we welcome individual donations as well. When we have a fundraiser, 100 percent of the monies raised are distributed to the beneficiary," she notes.

A devoted membership and their financial support is what allows GTUC to really make a difference in the lives of people who need it the most—the kind of work that makes Morton's heart sing.



For more information, visit txtuc.org or contact Sheila Morton directly at morton.sheila@yahoo.com.



Sheila Morton poses in front of the rainbow mural at Galveston's 23rd Street Station piano bar.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART



Rumors Bar & Grill
owner Todd Slaughter

Rumors Has It

Todd Slaughter's Galveston club celebrates five years in business.

By DAVID WEBB

Galveston's dazzling show club Rumors is a gay bar, but at the same time it really isn't, according to owner Todd Slaughter. He prefers to call the popular Seawall venue at 31st Street "everyone's bar."

"We have a very diverse crowd. Everybody is accepting. It's inclusive, and we're open to everyone," the ambitious club owner emphasizes.

Some nights will see more LGTBQ customers than other patrons, but on weekends Rumors lures in people from all backgrounds who might be out on the Seawall for a bachelorette party, a birthday, or an anniversary celebration. The five-year-old bar boasts a new 2,000-square-foot deck built as a pandemic-compliant option for outdoor dining, drag shows, band appearances, karaoke, people-watching, and just hanging out. The non-smoking venue—with its views of the nearby Pleasure Pier, a jetty, and boats on the water—make a scenic backdrop for Island fun. "It is the best location on the Seawall, and we took advantage of the outdoor space," Slaughter says.

The Tennessee native, who was working as an interior decorator when he arrived in Houston in 1994, got into the bar business in 2016 after being drawn to Rumors' unique Seawall location. The former convenience store had been transformed into a gay bar in the early 2000s, when it was home to Splash, Sandbox, Starz, Third Coast, Undercurrent, and Boulevard—all before Slaughter noticed the space was once again available.

Slaughter set about creating his new Galveston business by putting his interior-

decorating skills to good use. When he asked a group of friends socializing at another local bar to help him decide on a name, the majority of them wrote "Rumors" on a piece of paper. Slaughter thought it was a fun reference to the kind of chatter that goes on in all gay bars. When Rumors first opened, its recurring drag show was named "Gossip Girls" as a play on the venue's name.

"WE'RE THE BAR THAT'S BEEN AT THIS SITE THE LONGEST. THAT'S KIND OF AN ACHIEVEMENT."

—Todd Slaughter

Slaughter had been in Houston for several years before he ever visited Galveston. "I knew Galveston was here, but I didn't know *what* was here. Once I saw it, I was hooked." After he moved to Galveston, his new friends and business contacts helped him turn Rumors into a success. "It started off very well. Galveston took to it, folks from Houston came down, and people from Dallas and the rest of Texas and Louisiana also started coming. It's been five years now. It seems to be working."

Galveston's open and accepting environment has played a big role in Rumors' success, even at a time when gay bars are no longer the social hubs they once were. "We're the bar that

has been at this site the longest," Slaughter adds. "That's kind of an achievement."

At one point, Slaughter operated two other bars in Texas that were also called Rumors, but they did not survive the pandemic. He continues working as an interior decorator when he is not tending to his Galveston bar, which he says is an exhaustive undertaking. Rumors' manager, Kymber Divine, is also one of the drag-queen stars, and a staff of a dozen more bartenders, barbacks, and other key personnel assist Slaughter with day-to-day operations.

Slaughter says his drag-show talent is top-notch, with performers coming in from across Texas and other states. The drag shows on Friday and Saturday nights are always sold out, and the bar has begun producing two shows on Saturday nights (at 8:30 and 11 p.m.) to accommodate the demand.

With the pandemic restrictions easing around the country, Galveston is "busting at the seams," Slaughter says. The hotels, bed-and-breakfast sites, and RV parks are full, and people obviously want to have fun again after a year of abstaining. He is anticipating a record number of people visiting Rumors this summer. And when it rains, he notes that they have plenty of entertainment options inside the bar, including pool tables.

Slaughter attributes the success of Rumors, in addition to its aesthetic appeal, to customer appreciation and the bar's open-door policy to all. "With any business, customer service is the key to getting them here and keeping them here. It would be nice if all bars were [like this one], where *everybody* goes."



For more information, visit rumorsbars.com.

Imaginative Installations

Galveston Artist Residency spotlights the work of nonbinary artists **Ian Gerson** and **Everest Pipkin** this month.

By LILLIAN HOANG



Ian Gerson



Everest Pipkin



Every year, Galveston Artist Residency (GAR) awards three individuals 24/7 access to an art studio, a nearby apartment, and a monthly stipend of \$1,000 from October through July.

“My primary hope for the residency is that by supporting creativity for its own sake, we create an environment that fosters new ways of looking at the world and new ways of problem solving,” says GAR Director Eric Schnell.

For the 2020–2021 residency year, GAR selected nonbinary artists Ian Gerson and Everest Pipkin to participate in the program. Their artwork will be on view in the gallery through July 17. GAR Gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Schnell says Gerson was selected for many reasons. Schnell explains, “Ian’s work stood out to the selection panel as an interesting mix of sculptural environment combining with an exploration of personal history, past, present, and future.”

Born in Houston, Gerson, a transgender and queer multidisciplinary artist who uses he/him and they/them pronouns, transports audiences to other worlds with large-scale installations, drawings, collages, paintings, and more.

“In my practice, I create worlds. It’s been an element of escape to try to create from my imagination, to find a place for myself,” Gerson says.

A 2015 site-specific installation titled *Fu-*

ture Floor captures their mission as an artist. In a New York artist-run space, they created an otherworldly vessel with wood, cardboard, acrylic, poster paper, black lights, water, and found beach plastics. During the exhibition, visitors got to enter a 10-foot-tall spacecraft, explore a control room made of bright neon lights, and envision another realm.

“I feel like we are so limited in what we think is possible,” Gerson says. “This idea of seeing and knowing that more possibilities exist, that really resonates with my own experience as coming to understand myself as trans [and] as queer.”

The 36-year-old has a bachelor’s degree in studio art from the University of Texas at Austin, and a master’s degree in sculpture and

extended media from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Gerson applied for the Galveston program to reconnect with Texas, a region they hadn't lived in for over a decade. As part of their fellowship, they walked around the Galveston coastline at low tide to gather materials, which they used in their installation titled *Return*. The piece represents the parallels between Texas and Gerson's self-journey.

"I've been thinking a lot about a place that constantly gets hit by hurricanes and needs to rebuild. I've also been thinking how that could parallel my own journey of rebuilding myself and my personal identity."

Gerson wants to create another small site-specific installation with materials found in Galveston. They hope the creation inspires audiences to see potential in every material they come across—even the flotsam and jetsam found on the beaches.

They will also organize a self-guided tour of Galveston by creating a map leading participants to several under-recognized destinations that are significant to either Gerson or other Galvestonians. The tour will include a phone number people can call to learn more about each destination.

"I want to bring to the surface or make people more aware of history that is intentionally not told," Gerson says. "I'm interested in African American history and gay, queer stories in Galveston."

Like Gerson, Pipkin, a drawing and software artist who uses they/them pronouns, has spent their fellowship creating several pieces. They are currently working on a game that takes place in a post-apocalyptic landscape. Their game will highlight how the "ends of the world" is happening all the time, rather than being caused by a singular event. Pipkin

believes these ongoing events can unite communities, instead of fueling the individualistic fantasies often found in movies and video games.

"I have to believe, going forward, that the end of the world isn't a total loss—that when you have devastation, a community comes together with care and builds something meaningful," Pipkin explains. "It has been very useful for me to be in a community like Galveston that has gone through that cycle. It is a hopeful vision of what the end of the world will look like."

As part of their GAR fellowship, Pipkin also crafted several pieces about landscapes and architectures through which information and people pass.

"Everest's work stood out as an artist who truly engages with new technology in inventive and necessary ways," says Schnell.

For the gallery, Pipkin created *Object 1 for Corsicana Sky*, one of five small sculptures capable of tracking airplanes overhead and translating encoded airplane radio transmissions into sound and text in real time.

They also created *Open Captions for a Translucent Building*, an endless, generative poem commissioned for St. Göran's Gymnasium in Stockholm, Sweden. The software captures the Swedish building's history and uses. The artwork also highlights how many lives can intersect in one structure.

Originally from Bee Cave, Texas, Pipkin received a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Texas at Austin and a master of fine arts degree from Carnegie Mellon University. The 30-year-old decided to pursue a studio practice because the medium allowed them to work and approach research through aesthetic, scientific, technical, or emotional lenses.

"It felt like a place that could include scientific practices as well as my own political, personal, and aesthetic convictions," Pipkin says.

Although Pipkin works with many disciplines such as games, drawing, and writing, their work shares a common interest: data, ranging from information found on Wikipedia to conversations with a neighbor about the types of roses they grow.

Their work deals with themes of communication, community, and information. They create to transform digital spaces into sites where people can come together and build, whether that is in corporate networks or on community-built platforms.

While Pipkin's work covers topics such as mass surveillance and discriminatory algorithms, they believe that their art should not be used as a substitute for activism, but rather as one repository of research and experience among many.

"Looking at or experiencing artwork is not the same as getting involved in your community or being there for your neighbors," they explain.

Pipkin encourages people to view the exhibition in person for an unforgettable experience.

"I cannot overestimate how special a space GAR is, and how rare it is for something like this to exist. It is a world-class institution," Pipkin says. "It is more than worthy of keeping in your sights."

 To learn more about the Galveston Artist Residency, visit galvestonartistresidency.org. Follow Ian Gerson on Instagram at [instagram.com/ianmilesgerson](https://www.instagram.com/ianmilesgerson) and Everest Pipkin at [instagram.com/everestpipkin](https://www.instagram.com/everestpipkin).



Ian Gerson's *Return*



Everest Pipkin's *Object 1 for Corsicana Sky*

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Queer Island Connections

10 ways to experience the best of LGBTQ Galveston.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

Summer is here, and the beach is calling. If you're headed to Galveston, you should know that while the Island is known for its sandy shore, the LGBTQ locals are doing far more than sunbathing along the Seawall. With so many great options to choose from, let OUTSMART's Queer Things to Do in Galveston roundup be your guide to connecting with life on the Island.

FIND COMMUNITY ONLINE

The best way to start planning your itinerary is to research where the Island's LGBTQ movers and shakers hang out. The local queer community has a Facebook group for that: the **Galveston Island Rainbow Lesbian Society (GIRLS)** is an online space where queer folks can make friends, plan meetups, and ask questions about where to spend quality time on the Island. *For more info, visit tinyurl.com/2whknfze.*



DINE ON THE BEACHFRONT

The Gulf Coast is known for its gracious grub, and since you'll be right on the shoreline, you won't want to miss out on Galveston's best seafood. Our restaurant recommendation is Daya Meyers Hurt's **Fish Company Taco**, located at 1914 23rd St. This lesbian chef's highly regarded Island establishment is well known for Asian fusian-style fish, shrimp, and veggie tacos. *For more info, visit fishcotaco.com.*



TAKE IN THE ART

Galveston's thriving downtown art scene has been designated as an official Cultural Arts District by the Texas Commission on the Arts. This recognition should come as no surprise, since the city seems to offer creative options at every turn. The work of several LGBTQ artists, including gay multimedia artist Heyd Fontenot, is currently being showcased at some of the Island's top galleries. View Fontenot's *Sacred Order of Eternal Wounds* at the

Galveston Arts Center through July 11. *For more info, visit galvestonartscenter.org.*

SHOP ON THE STRAND

The Strand, a lively strip in the heart of historic Galveston, features an abundance of specialty shops. One can't-miss stop is lesbian artist Alecia Boles' **Pardon My French** boutique. The hip store is filled with clothing and goodies adorned with pithy sayings. *For more info, visit pardonmyfrenchonthestrand.com.*



EXPLORE THE NIGHTLIFE

From dancing to drag shows and live music performances, your LGBTQ Island clubbing options are endless at spots like **Rumors Bar & Grill** and **23rd Street Station Piano Bar**. And if you're a queer-history buff, be sure to visit **Robert's Lafitte**, the oldest gay bar in Texas. Still owned and operated by its original proprietor, Robert Manor, the bar is celebrating its 52nd year in business. *For more info, visit robertslafitte.weebly.com.*

HIT THE BEACH



Galveston Island boasts 30 miles of Gulf beaches, and each of them has something different to offer. Those looking for entertainment should head over to Galveston's **East Beach**, also known as "the party beach." The area is the site of numerous live-entertainment events, and features amenities such as concession stands, showers, restrooms, and beach-chair rentals. And, unlike many other local beaches, alcohol is permitted at East Beach. *For more info, visit galvestonparkboard.org.*

DELVE INTO ISLAND HISTORY

If you haven't already noticed, many of the



Island's attractions are deeply rooted in the 19th century, back when Galveston was the largest city in Texas. You can learn more about the Island's prosperous past by participating in walking and bus tours of its famous Victorian architecture, natural amenities, and "haunted" venues. There are also a bevy of museums to visit, including the nostalgia-filled and queer-friendly **Galveston Railroad Museum**. *For more info on that museum, visit galvestonrrmuseum.org.*

PREPARE FOR PRIDE

Galveston's LGBTQ Pride celebration is set to occur this September, and organizers are gearing up by raising funds for the event on July 18. You can help the cause by attending a benefit brunch and show at Robert's Lafitte, sponsored by **Out4Brunch**. *For more info, visit facebook.com/pridegalveston.*

WORSHIP IN A SAFE SPACE

Religious institutions have the power to spiritually uplift people, and Galveston's Westminster Presbyterian Church seeks to nurture all who walk through its doors—regardless of one's gender identity, sexuality, age, or background. Openly gay pastor Todd Starnes-Williams leads the LGBTQ-affirming congregation. *For more info, visit westminster-prez.com.*

ATTEND A POP-UP BOOK FAIR

Bbaravado Inc.—a collective of Black, Brown, and Asian revolutionaries, artists, visionaries, and advocates for diaspora justice and opportunity—are hosting their first pop-up book fair at the Proletariat Gallery & Public House on July 27. The event will feature poetry readings, author signings, writing workshops, and an open mic. *For more info, visit facebook.com/bbaravadoink.*

A Trip Back in Time

The Galveston Railroad Museum is a unique events venue and day-trip destination.

By MARENE GUSTIN



Who doesn't love a vintage passenger train? The romance of riding the rails, the simplicity of a time before travel meant long lines and security checks, the idea of falling

asleep to the sound of wheels going clickity-clack on the tracks.

Local nostalgia lovers are in luck, because one of the coolest railroad museums in the country is right down the road on Galveston Island. With everything from train rides and an outdoor garden to model-railroad displays and a gift shop, the museum is fun, it's educational, and sometimes it's very romantic.

"We have very diverse patrons," says Galveston Railroad Museum Executive Director David Robertson. "We had a gay wedding here [last month] on the Bonnie Brook, and the couple spent the night."

The Bonnie Brook is a luxury private train car from 1949 that sports two-and-a-half bedrooms, a galley kitchen, a bathroom with a shower, and an observation lounge that seats 20. Jackie Gleason, notorious for his fear of flying, used the Bonnie Brook to travel between his Miami home and New York City, where he shot *The Jackie Gleason Show* in the 1950s and '60s. The museum acquired Gleason's car last year just before the pandemic, so unveiling it to the public had to wait until this June. Robertson says the Bonnie Brook's overnight bookings on Airbnb have really taken off.

But there's plenty more to the museum that's housed in the 10,000-square-foot Art Deco train station built to serve as the starting point of the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway. The five-acre property that anchors one end of The Strand houses locomotives and rail cars, a garden area with a gazebo, a 1911 steam tractor, and palm trees that provide a backdrop for weddings, corporate events, and parties.

But special events are not the only attraction. Houstonian Jennifer Olin recently discovered that the Galveston Railroad Museum makes for a perfect summer day trip. "Even though we have a house in Galveston, I didn't know about the museum until a friend came in from out of town with her twins. They are in love with trains and couldn't wait to go. We had a blast from the minute we stepped into the old train station! There are these benches with



plaster statues dressed in the style of the old era. It's just so much fun. We rode the train out and back, looked at all the memorabilia, took pictures of old engines and different kinds of cars. It's just a great, wholesome way to spend the afternoon."

Those 31 plaster "ghost statues" in the station's waiting area were created by Ivan and Elliot Schwartz in 1981 using live models in period clothing to guide them. The museum hosts school field trips, a Railroad Merit Badge class for scouts, and free Blue Bell ice cream for kids during the summer.

But you don't have to be young to enjoy the railroad museum. "My favorite thing to do is ride the Harborside Express," says Robertson. "I love riding that train—even grown-ups get excited like little kids." The Express is an open-air caboose that travels one mile down Harborside Drive and back on weekends, weather permitting.

"And The Strand is right out in front of the museum," says Robertson. "So you can go shopping and eat at the restaurants there, and just stay all day." There's also a café inside the depot, as well as a gift shop where Robertson sees both children and adults leaving with

armloads of model trains.

Although sanitation stations and deep cleaning are still used, the museum does not require masks and social distancing at this time. They do recommend masks for the indoor exhibits, however.

And after being cancelled last year because of the pandemic, the Polar Express Train Ride will return for the 2021 holiday season. Based on the children's book and the popular Tom Hanks holiday movie, the experience includes a two-mile train ride with Santa Claus, hot chocolate, and a visit to a Christmas village. The event is so popular that tickets sold out within hours in 2019. (Hint: you get early access to tickets with a museum membership.)

Museum entrance is \$12 for adults, \$9 for seniors, and \$6 for children. Train ride tickets are an additional \$6. You can buy tickets online in advance of your trip.

"We want everyone to feel welcome at the Galveston Railroad Museum," Robertson emphasizes. "We just love having people come. Every day is a party around here!"



For more information, visit galvestonrrmuseum.org.

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Building Brotherhood

Heavy Hitters Pride creates community for LGBTQ men of color and larger size.

By ZACH MCKENZIE

Photo by Pisces310



Jovaun P. Hicks (center) surrounded by members of his Heavy Hitters Pride group.

Jovaun P. Hicks was dissatisfied by the lack of representation for LGBTQ men of color and larger size in media, public-health advertisements, and Pride celebrations. Instead of forcing his way into these spaces, Hicks took what he had learned from various “big-boy events” and helped create Heavy Hitters Pride. The unique three-day celebration is gearing up for another life-changing weekend, July 30 through August 1 at Hilton Houston Westchase—and Hicks and his team already have dreams for expansion.

Hicks explains that organizing Heavy Hitters Pride events was not the original mission of the group. “In 2014, Heavy Hitters came about as a discussion group [at] the mSSociety, a drop-in center located in Montrose at Legacy Community Health. We had an area where you could meet, have conversations, and watch TV,” the out gay leader recalls. “I met with one of the directors and told them I had an idea for a group for men of size, allies, and admirers to meet and have conversations about things that plague us. The men-of-size community is overlooked, and I wanted to create a safe space where we could meet and chat.”

After Hicks laid this foundation for the group, they gained the attention of someone who nudged him to take the next step. “My friend Terry and I were traveling to other events that were deemed ‘big boy’ events. A friend approached me and said he had attended the discussion groups, and he asked if we were interested in hosting an event like those we had attended,” Hicks says. “I initially declined because I knew it was a big undertaking, but eventually I agreed to be a part of it. We developed Heavy Hitters Pride, and we had our first event in 2015.

“When we were going to Pride events, there wasn’t a ton of representation for big guys. You’d see the muscle boys and the twinks, and we thought, ‘Where are the big dudes in these advertisements? Where is the representation?’” the public-health professional reflects. Speaking to what makes Heavy Hitters special,

Hicks focuses on the inclusive nature of the safe spaces he creates. "Attending anything that is Heavy Hitters-related is an opportunity to have an empowering and allowing experience. We are creating experiences for men of size to be free, inclusive, recognized, empowered, acknowledged. All events are geared toward men of size, but we are open to anyone that wants to party with us."

As they prepare to celebrate their sixth year, Hicks notes that Heavy Hitters' unique gatherings can give his community lifelong confidence and, well, pride. "We have empowerment sessions, informative sessions, and a luncheon on Sunday that embraces our guests. We have a brunch that has spoken-word performers and other entertainers. And our pool party is so dope to me! I was never comfortable taking my shirt off, but at my events and other big-boy events, I saw big guys walking around the pool with their shirts off and having a good time. It's an opportunity to be free," he says.

"One thing I love about the weekend, even if it's just three days, is that it's centered around [letting people experience] a reality of how life should be. You should feel free to be this empowered every day."

Events like this are especially important for those who are working on self-esteem

"ATTENDING ANYTHING THAT IS HEAVY HITTERS-RELATED IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE AN EMPOWERING AND ALLOWING EXPERIENCE. WE ARE CREATING EXPERIENCES FOR MEN OF SIZE TO BE FREE, INCLUSIVE, RECOGNIZED, EMPOWERED, ACKNOWLEDGED."

—Jovaun P. Hicks

issues, but Hicks explains that even the most confident person can gain something from a Heavy Hitters event. "It's an unfortunate reality, but sometimes the first thing a man of size thinks of is, 'How is my day going to be?' I have to put this armor up because I'm a little larger than the typical person. Smaller individuals don't have that barrier. That's not to say others aren't struggling, but as a larger guy, I have to second-guess so much just to avoid being stared at, or the butt of someone's joke. We aim

to create an environment where people feel like they don't have to put on."

It's an exciting time for the group as in-person events once again become possible. Hicks explains this year's theme is a celebration of making it out to the other side of COVID.

"Our standard motto is, 'Heavy Hitters Pride, where every pound has a story,'" Hicks says proudly. "Every person that participates has a story. Unfortunately, we didn't get to do a 2020 event, so our 2021 theme of 'Through It All, Still Here' [is a reflection on how] 2020 was a hard time for so many people. We've endured COVID, the winter storm, got a new political administration, and so on—and we are all still here."

While Hicks' 2021 empowerment conference is sure to offer a beacon of hope and safety for attendees, he is looking forward to even better events in the years to come. "In the future, the goal is to be able to have our own physical location. I would love to have an area to host meetings [with enough space] so people can gather to have conversations. I want them to be empowered to [take a good look] at why individuals are who they are."

➡ For more information, visit heavyhitterspride.com.

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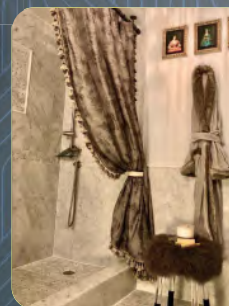
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Creating for Change

Out artist **Kiki Neumann**'s political yard signs inspire Texans to vote.

By **DAVID WEBB**

Houston folk artist Kiki Neumann's passions are forever fluid, and their most recent evolution has embraced politics—an activity that has consumed almost as much of her life as art has. This fall, expect to see her craft on display in unique get-out-the-vote signs at homes and businesses throughout the city, and maybe beyond.

"After years of creating all kinds of art, I would like to focus on creating things to inspire others to get involved for change," Neumann says. "That's more important than monetary pursuits. I am at that wonderful stage in life where I can give in a creative way."

The native Houstonian's creative path took her from Lamar High School, where she first realized her artistic ambitions, to the University of New Mexico for a liberal-arts degree—along with stops at the University of Houston to study archeology, Austin Community College to learn offset printing, and the University of Texas at Austin for even more art study.

Politics caught the fledgling artist's attention in 1972 when she worked for Texas Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby. She met several Texas female political legends like Sarah Weddington, Sissy Farenthold, and Barbara Jordan at rallies and marches in Houston and Austin. Even as they inspired her to get more involved in politics, Neumann knew that art would continue to be her medium of expression as she supported LGBTQ political and cultural groups by producing their fliers, tickets, calendars, and other advertising.

For 17 years, Neumann held a corporate job as a sales representative for Houston's largest commercial paper distributor, Unisource. Although that position gave her financial stability, she decided to leave that profession and turn her full-time attention to her art. She bought a warehouse near downtown Houston and created a unique recycled-art studio, using cast-off wood from construction and demolition sites for her creations. She embellished tables, chairs, and other found objects, and



even used 2,000 yardsticks to fabricate unique mirrors and tabletops. Her home and garden items were sold in retail stores and art shows.

Her interest in unique signage projects began when she repurposed a stockpile of old signs to create signage for 15 buildings across Houston, including the Houston Green Building Center.

As Neumann started collecting old license plates, she discovered they were an easy me-

dium to cut and shape into useful items such as clipboards, angel wings, and magnets. Then she began photographing the license plates to create funky graphic images for greeting cards, banners, and yard signs. She has tens of thousands of old license plates stored in her studio warehouse for use in her designs. "I have made thousands of items in my 25 years of work, and they are as diverse as this wonderfully diverse LGBTQ community I live in."



Kiki Neumann displays one of her colorful new Vote With Pride signs in her home garden.

Her license-plate images have morphed into a full line of greeting cards that are now carried in stores throughout Texas. Eight years of success with original note cards is especially impressive in an age when traditional mailed greeting cards are losing ground to online messages.

Neumann came out as a lesbian 50 years ago, so her work as an artist has always run in parallel with her activism. She marched in Houston's first mass-protest rally against singer and anti-gay activist Anita Bryant in 1977, and she demonstrated to demand better health care for local gay men (many of whom were her friends) during the early days of the AIDS epidemic. She also served on the board of Lesbians in Business. "I worked to get the vote out, and I was part of almost every gay group in this city that staged musical, political, and cultural events."

As a breast-cancer survivor, Neumann enjoys donating art to fundraisers for the Lesbian Health Initiative. An early free mammogram she received from that group alerted her to a

life-threatening health condition. "That group saved my life with their outreach to the community."

The artist's latest creative tangent with political signs arose from her 2020 efforts to encourage a strong voter turnout in the face of a raging pandemic. She contacted her City Council representative Karla Cisneros and volunteered to create yard signs that simply said *Vote*. "I knew we needed to get out the vote in many parts of Houston where people are not registered. Together, we got a few thousand yard signs into folks' yards before the 2020 presidential election. I think it was a huge success, as I still see them up in yards."

Now, Neumann is hoping her sign project will help turn out the vote for the 2022 mid-term elections. She is offering two designs to motivate people to action: *Vote* and *Vote With Pride*. The colorful signs echo her signature technique with recycled license plates to spell out messages. Her Facebook page "Vote With Pride Yard Signs" is letting her new and old fans know when the eye-catching signs will be

available at local events for a small donation. "They are good for any election, as they are bright and cheerfully remind people to get out there and register to vote."

Neumann's sign project grew out of her deep desire to help create a better world, and she is funding it herself until she can find an angel investor. Like all creative people, she is protective of her work, but she believes the need for change in the world is more important than profit. "Other people are welcome to use my designs if they wish. This is one kind of original creation that I would be glad and honored if people copied it."

Although it's too early to know if her yard-sign art will help qualified candidates get elected next year, Neumann is pleased that all of her projects reflect her passion for promoting social justice and the good of the community. "It's always behind everything I do."

 For more information on Kiki Neumann's political yard signs, visit tinyurl.com/pb4ka3j7.

Fierce Filmmaker

Marcus Pontello documents the rich history of Numbers Nightclub.

By **SAM BYRD** | Photo by **GAVIN CALAIS**



Heaven is a place on Earth, and it has a name: Numbers Nightclub. People have traveled around the world in search of a comparison, and the result is the same every time: There is no other place that matches a Friday night at 300 Westheimer.

That feeling is what inspired Marcus Pontello to create a film about the notorious establishment titled *Friday I'm In Love*. It will be screened in its entirety on Saturday, July 31, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, August 1, at 7:30 p.m. at Numbers.

The film blends personal stories with those of iconic musicians who have played at the club. *Friday I'm in Love* celebrates the people who ignited and sustained Numbers' musical legacy of acceptance for all, amidst the backdrop of cultural intolerance. Pontello pays tribute to former owners Bruce Godwin, a flamboyant DJ extraordinaire, and Robert Burtenshaw, an introverted British video artist—two industry insiders who were best friends when they decided to buy the venue in 1987.

A supporting cast of staff, patrons, and bands such as Erasure and Ministry also share heartwarming and personal stories that reveal the evolution of the venue, while also exposing some of the difficulties Numbers and Montrose have endured over the years. LGBTQ conflicts with the police, the AIDS epidemic, and legal issues with City Hall have all been a part of the club's legacy.

As the title implies, the film honors one of the dance club's most active evenings.

"Friday is the big night for Numbers," Pontello explains. "They've been doing '80s nights [now called Classic Numbers] since 1991. A lot of people's first time at Numbers is on a Friday night. Since I didn't grow up in the '80s, that music was all new. It was like discovering an amazing world of music that was from the generation before me. Numbers really was the unique melting pot of Houston, and it was the feeling of freedom that sucked me in. That's what draws a lot of people in."

Growing up in Pearland but attending the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA) in Montrose, Pontello naturally felt the allure of the alternative club scene as a gender-nonconforming artist.

"My love for the club originated at age 15, [when I would] go there on Friday nights for Classic Numbers. Being a student at HSPVA, Numbers was in my backyard. It was natural that I discovered it. I fell in love with it my first Friday night there. The music and people completely blew my mind," Pontello recalls.

"It's hard to describe. When you're in there on a Friday night, it's truly a melting pot of all generations, all genders, races—every subculture you can think of. For lack of a better word, it's the closest thing to Utopia I've ever experienced. I've interviewed well over 150 people for this documentary, and every single person mentions this incredible experience of freedom and acceptance that they feel in relationship to Numbers. It's a consistent through-line. It's the people and the bold, emphatic feeling of freedom. 'Come as you are, and you will not be judged.' It's the soul of Montrose. It's

the core of what Montrose stands for. Numbers is the surviving beat of what the neighborhood stands for," they add.

Once the idea to create a documentary about the history of Numbers had been planted, there was no turning back. Pontello spent the next nine years collecting interviews, photographs, videos, and every other bit of recordable history to stitch the film together.

"Word-of-mouth and Facebook were a large part of the research. Asking about one person led me to more connections, which led to more connections. Plus, going there every Friday night helped. It was a domino effect. Interesting organizations in town became part of my research, too," Pontello notes.

They utilized the Gulf Coast Archive and Museum (GCAM), which houses an archive of Houston and Texas LGBTQ history that includes a trove of original *This Week in Texas* magazines. Another huge help was the Botts Collection, a local archive that catalogues LGBTQ artifacts from the Houston area. Pontello also gained access to the belongings of longtime club owner Burtenshaw, who created custom music videos for the Classic Numbers nights throughout the '90s.

As more and more time was spent collecting material for the documentary, the necessity for funding also increased. Pontello created a Kickstarter in 2015 to finance the film, which raised close to \$50,000. Personal donations also rolled in, and Pontello recently started applying for grants. Even as Pontello plans the initial screenings for the film, additional funding is still needed. →



"I'VE INTERVIEWED WELL
OVER 150 PEOPLE FOR
THIS DOCUMENTARY,
AND EVERY SINGLE
PERSON MENTIONS THIS
INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCE
OF FREEDOM AND
ACCEPTANCE THAT THEY
FEEL IN RELATIONSHIP
TO NUMBERS."

—Marcus Pontello

Montrose Magic

For 40 years and counting, **Numbers Nightclub** has kept the party going.

By **SAM BYRD**
Photos by **GAVIN CALAIS**



Is there a more storied bar and dance club in Montrose than Numbers? Despite all the colorful competition in the gayborhood, it's doubtful that anyone will find one as eclectic and uni-

versally adored as the one at 300 Westheimer. Now approaching its 43rd year of operation, Numbers has endured through various owners, a few name changes, the disco craze, an unfortunate try at a Country & Western Night, and the most infamous '80s Night in the city.

The club began its life in 1976 as a dinner theater under owner Beverly Wren. Its name, The Million Dollar City Dump, was a reference to the princely sum it cost her to open the business. That history explains why there's a large stage in the venue, which featured Las Vegas-style shows. But the format didn't work well, and by 1978 Wren's pricey property was looking for a new business model.

Wren was approached by another club owner who proposed transforming her building into a gay disco named Numbers, which lasted for a few years. Following that brief success, the club was renamed Babylon in 1980, which lasted until 1981. The club experienced some ups and downs (and closures) over the next several years before a new team of operators entered the picture and shaped the club into what it is today, starting with previous owner Bruce Godwin. Godwin's music-industry connections helped the club thrive, and his influence still reverberates today.

"I was working at The Record Rack off South Shepherd. At that time, there were no big chain stores and the DJs were getting their music from me. Every week, I'd give them the latest music, talk about what songs were going to be popular, and give them remixes. In 1980, disco was dying off and new-wave, alternative, electronic, and punk rock gained a following. One of the DJs came to the record store and asked if I'd be interested in working at Num-



DJ Wes Wallace



DJ Lane Lewis

bers on a Thursday night and playing alternative music," Godwin recalls.

After establishing himself as a weekly DJ, Godwin started to branch out. He had connections with Pace Concerts, and he used those relationships to bring live entertainment to the club. Godwin says well more than 100 Grammy Award winners and thousands of acts have graced the Numbers stage throughout the years. The club's first act was The Village People, and the list of LGBTQ royalty who played the venue includes acts like Grace Jones, Erasure, Divine, The Pointer Sisters, Sylvester, Melissa Etheridge, and many more.

In spite of the openings and closings throughout the '70s and '80s, the venue etched

its place in Houston culture, prompting the owners to rebrand Numbers as Numbers 2 in the early '90s. That's when it became more than just a live-music venue as people from all walks of life turned out to enjoy the Hakuna Matata vibe embraced by the establishment.

DJ Lane Lewis, who works the turntables on Thursday nights and is launching a new high-energy, retro-modern music show starting July 8, describes the Numbers 2 crowd he often saw. "Within a few feet, there was a middle-aged white accountant dancing by himself, an older Black gentleman dancing by himself, two trans women dancing together, what looked like a college ball player surrounded by three college girls fawning over him, and

a Native American guy with his girlfriend. This was a microcosm of the world. Nobody is bickering, fighting, or pointing fingers and judging. I challenge anyone to go to any nightclub in this country and try to find a more diverse, eclectic, and accepting place.”

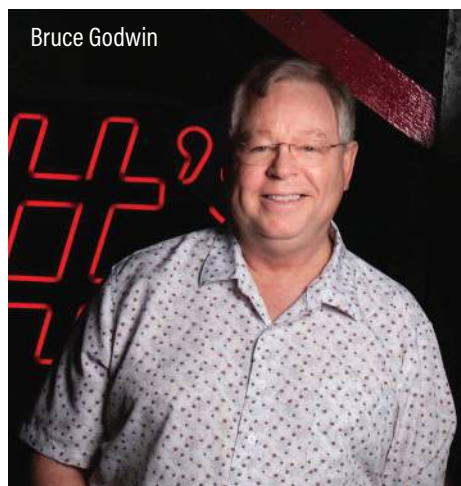
Believe it or not, Numbers 2 is also a “family” club—of sorts.

“I was in my late teens, and my family and I weren’t getting along very well at that point,” DJ Lewis recalls. “I was coming out in full force, and there were all those familiar conflicts. My mother hated Numbers. She felt it was the home of Satan, and nothing good ever came out of Numbers. [Living with my parents was so tense that] I ended up living with a British family in Southwest Houston. Numbers closed in the mid ’80s and reopened in 1987. For the grand re-opening, my mom picked me up, drove me to the Galleria, and bought me a new suit to wear to the event. That was a big deal to me. Numbers helped me reconnect with my mother, in a way.”

Current Numbers owner Rudi Bunch remembers other stories of families connecting through the club. “For a while, we were getting the same people who had been coming for 10, 15, 20 years. Maybe they met their spouse at the club. Now they have children, and they’re bringing their kids with them to Numbers.”



Rudi Bunch



Bruce Godwin

like it might turn ugly for whatever group was being targeted. People have known that, appreciated it, and come to expect that attitude at Numbers. That’s something that will never change,” Bunch emphasizes.

The city’s affection for the venerable Lower Westheimer dance club has only grown stronger over the years. Its Friday nights are dedicated to ’80s music, which is lovingly marketed as “Classic Numbers.” Longtime record-spinner DJ Wes Wallace still presides on Fridays, which are by far the club’s most popular nights. The venue will host a celebration for the 30th anniversary of Classic Numbers on Friday, July 16.

“I haven’t missed a Friday except for one during Hurricane Ike and, of course, the entire pandemic. When I first started DJing on Fridays, it was just the late-’80s classics and remix videos. But it slowly changed into more early-’80s new wave and other different genres, and I eventually started peppering in new music that fit the night. It’s a different vibe every Friday, and it’s always packed, fun, and never a dull moment. People wait all week for it,” Wallace notes.

Classic Numbers earned the attention of one local fan who has created a film about the

venue. That documentary, *Friday I’m In Love*, will be shown at the club on the weekend of July 31. (Read more on page 52)

Indeed, it has been the community’s loyalty that has carried the club through even the hardest of times, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Bunch says business is roaring back now that people feel more comfortable being in close proximity to others.

“We were closed for 14 straight months. We realized we couldn’t reopen a dance venue until there was a vaccine, so we stuck to our guns and waited to reopen. I’m optimistic about our future. People were ready for us to be back open,” Bunch says, adding that his club has become a must-see for the uninitiated. “Numbers is considered by a lot of people to be a Houston institution. If they’re entertaining out-of-town guests, it’s on their must-do list. There are people who travel all around the world, and they say they’ve never found a place like this anywhere else. It’s like a second home. We appreciate that loyalty.”



Numbers is located at 300 Westheimer. For information about special events and the live-entertainment schedule, call 713-521-1121 or visit numbersnightclub.com

The Numbers experience is still making an impact on people, all these years after its opening. Bunch says the tried-and-true patrons have been dancing the night away since the ’80s, but the younger generations have started to discover the club, too. The typical age, he says, ranges anywhere from 18 to 60 years old.

Perhaps the teens and 20-somethings are finding the same magic that made Numbers such a compelling draw in days of yore. “Our unofficial slogan is ‘No valet. No cocktail waitresses. No attitude.’ It’s ‘Come as you are’ and discrimination is not permitted. We’ve always tamped down any situation that looked



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS CREESE

Immersive Art

Heyd Fontenot's exhibit at Galveston Arts Center challenges traditional gender norms.

By JENNY BLOCK



He grew up on a farm. He grew up Catholic. But most importantly, he grew up curious.

Ever since he was a kid, Heyd Fontenot has had an insatiable desire to understand, to question, and to create. Now, at 57, he is an insightful and highly successful artist known for his stylized and delicate nude portraits.

His current show, *Sacred Order of Eternal Wounds*, can be seen at the Galveston Arts Center through July 11. It's an immersive environment on a scale that is designed to overwhelm your scale, Fontenot explains.

The show “delves into the myth of American identity to explore the politicized topics of gender, sexuality, queer identity, and what the artist calls “the false promise of ‘comfort in conformity.’”

The theory of gender is a common thread that runs through much of Fontenot's work. He explains that although he firmly identifies as male, he has a great deal of empathy for and is highly supportive of those who do not conform to gender norms.

Fontenot, a San Antonio resident who earned a BFA from Louisiana Tech University in graphic design, didn't always know he would become an artist. Because he grew up

on a farm, he figured he would be a farmer like his father. His mother, however, encouraged him to become a priest. “I believe [this is] what Catholics do with their queer sons and daughters to encourage them into a celibate and acceptable lifestyle,” Fontenot says.

“In my early life, I experienced gender as very limiting,” he recalls. “I felt like a lot of things I was interested in were restrictively gender-oriented. Arts and crafts were relegated to females. [However,] my father was able to be somewhat creative with metalwork and welding. Perhaps because the dangerous or dirty nature of it was acceptable,” he explains.

Sewing, on the other hand, would have

been off-limits. “That sort of thing is really arbitrary and frustrating, and something that we wrestle with as a culture.

“It’s such a useless and neurotic endeavor to uphold these types of restrictions, even unwittingly or unconsciously. But so many [gender-based restrictions] seem to be really funny when you examine them. And it’s all a construct—none of it is natural,” he adds.

How one defines art is a convoluted and often-debated topic. “Yes... Is it art?” is the big question. “I don’t know if you will have the space to publish my answer,” he jokes. “I think it has to do with intention and care and nuances. You could have a bronze that weighs 5,000 pounds and it could be utterly useless and without aesthetic merit or meaning. You could have a cocktail napkin with a doodle on it that takes your breath away.

**“I’M NOT REFERENCING
ANYTHING BEYOND
THEIR UNDERSTANDING.
I MADE THIS ART FOR
THEM. IT’S A BIT LIKE A
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE.
I’M ATTEMPTING TO
COMMUNICATE.”**

—Heyd Fontenot

“It would be difficult to create a template for defining what is powerful ‘Art’ with a capital A. [But that’s what] actually keeps it alive. It has to be approached on a case-by-case basis, and it has to do with external elements outside of the object—environmental, temporal, and political—that affect the way we perceive the art,” he explains.

Fontenot knows that art is undeniably his calling—which, he adds, can be hard to explain to anyone who might not have discovered their own *raison d’être*. “I did not have much formal training in my early years, and did not know any working career artists, but I did understand instinctively that this was where I needed to be: the act of making art, and problem-solving in a visual medium, struck a major chord with me. There was a resonance.”

Art is vital, perhaps more now than ever, Fontenot says, “It’s human expression encapsulated in a consumable form. It helps the makers and it helps the viewers. We use

art to process all of these tremendous feelings, including anxiety, sadness, grief, and terror.

“Societies are judged and defined by the culture they create, so it’s really sad to see people dismiss the power of song, poetry, fashion, and architecture. All of these things affect our daily lives tremendously.”

Fontenot wishes that everyone realized they could have an intimate “experience” with art. “It’s like a mirror. If you sat with the art, it would reflect back to you, and you could experience something profound. In this time of image-binging (and I am guilty of this myself, with things like Tumblr and Instagram), with the proper attention, you could have a profound experience with yourself, with art as your mirror. A spiritual, psychological, and intellectual revelation awaits,” Fontenot says.

If there’s one thing that this visionary artist wants viewers to know about his work,

it’s that it’s accessible. “I’m not referencing anything that is beyond their understanding. I made this for them. It’s a bit like a message in a bottle. I’m attempting to communicate.”

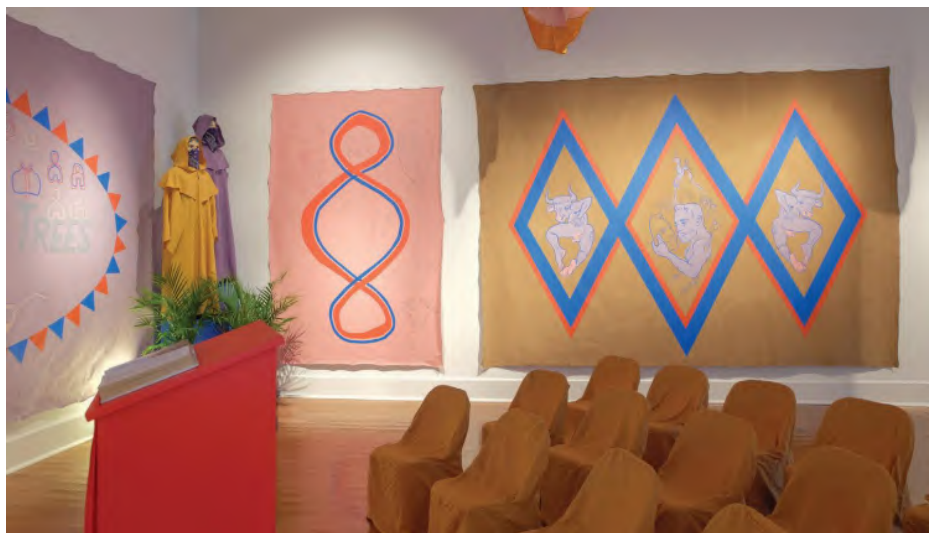
Fontenot emphasizes that the intention of his *Sacred Order of Eternal Wounds* show is to make the viewer think. “I don’t want to throttle you or traumatize you. I want to get you just off-balance enough to have an experience. They’re big pictures, bouncing information all over the gallery. I’m not giving you the answers. The answer is not in the painting. The answer is in you.”

What: Heyd Fontenot’s *Sacred Order of Eternal Wounds*

When: Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5 p.m. through July 11

Where: Galveston Arts Center

Info: galvestonartscenter.org/heyd-fontenot



Heyd Fontenot’s *Sacred Order of Eternal Wounds* explores what the artist calls “the false-promise of comfort-in-conformity.”

A 'Superhero' Return

Queer locals embrace their inner geek at this year's **Comicpalooza**.

By SAM BYRD



CARMINA VAVRA
as Shego

Nerds, unite! After a year off, Comicpalooza is returning to Houston on July 17 and 18. The event serves as the largest annual multi-genre comic-book, science fiction, anime, gaming, and pop-culture convention in the Southern United States.

This is the time of year to put those finishing touches on cosplay costumes (don't forget the face covering) and be transported into a pop-culture extravaganza. From panels discussing an array of fan topics to an exhibition floor featuring unique art and handcrafted goods from artists, #starstruck moments with celebrity lineups, and a thrilling cosplay competition, there is never a dull moment at Comicpalooza.

The correlation between the LGBTQ community and Comicpalooza attendees is exceptionally strong, so OUTSMART magazine decided to interview a few fans to get their take on what the event will mean for them.



For more information or to purchase tickets to Comicpalooza, visit comicpalooza.com.

Vavra is unquestionably a fan of comics. To her, the characters embody people she wanted to emulate while growing up.

"For me, growing up as a really gay, really nerdy kid, I got to see characters in *X-Men* that were allegories to queer people and people of color. It was great seeing those everyday hardships that we face represented in print media, movies, and cartoons."

Vavra has an especially soft spot for one character.

"My number-one favorite is Wonder Woman. I'm a huge fan of DC Comics, and Wonder Woman looks like my mother, who is Greek and a personal trainer. I loved seeing this really powerful Greek woman doing everything Superman could do, but doing it better and flashier, with a

sense of justice and diplomacy, and shouting Greek things like 'Hera, give me strength!' and who had long, flowing dark hair," Vavra comments. "She is my number-one everything, and still is. It made me realize I wanted to be a drag queen because I wanted to be Wonder Woman."

As Houston's nerdiest drag queen, Vavra also hopes to see more integration of queer programming into future Comicpalooza events.

"Drag and cosplay go so well together, and there are so many people who want to do drag cosplay. I hope they bring back those panels and the cosplay contest and *crossplay* (which is cosplay in drag). I feel it would appeal to a lot of the queer patrons who need to see more programming that reflects them," Vavra adds.



DAVID CARTER
as Static

Carter has been to comic conventions in other cities, but this year will be his first one in Houston. He works with the Houston Public Library, which will set up a booth at the event aimed at attracting more children to the library's programming. He'll dress up as Static from the show *Static Shock* to help attract people to the booth. *Static Shock* revolves around Virgil Hawkins, an African American boy who uses his secret identity as Static after being exposed to a mutagen gas during a gang fight, which gave him electromagnetic powers. The show's debut was the first time an African American superhero served as the titular character of their own broadcast animation series.

Carter sees cosplay as a way to encourage representation among minority groups.

"One of the reasons I do cosplay is the lack of representation of people of color in the comic-book universe and at cosplay events. I read an article a few years ago about people who dress as white or 'white passing,' even though they have [other diverse] origins," Carter adds. "One year, I went trick-or-treating, and I was dressed as one of the characters from *Batman Beyond*. One kid saw me and loved seeing a Black man as Batman because that's not what you see in the comic books or movies. That was heartwarming for me, and made me want to continue doing that."

Catering to people's love of comics and games has become Theo Thourson's full-time job. The school psychologist now runs a YouTube channel named *The Gallant Goblin* that focuses on a *Dungeons & Dragons* theme.

His favorite memories from attending cosplay conventions are meeting the celebrities who participate.

"One thing I decided to do a couple of years ago is spend an exorbitant amount of money on getting pictures with celebrities who mean something to me. I've always treasured those photos. I have a whole wall in my house with photos I've taken with these celebrities, and it makes me happy," Thourson adds.

He also mentions that the costumes are a huge draw.

"It's a huge art form these days. Just like illustration, song, or writing, it's become an art form that people can express themselves with. They get to use their own body as a canvas, and a lot of time it's tied into the geek culture. When you're a big fan of something, being able to show your fandom is rewarding for some folks. It combines the ability to make art and show it off on your own body, and show off your endeavor. It culminates in a way that is amazing," he comments.

All three agreed that there is a welcoming feeling that permeates the Comicpalooza events, which is perhaps why it has such an appeal to the LGBTQ community. "It's a different world. It's fun to see people go to a place where they can be themselves," Carter summarizes. "They can dress up as characters and not be judged for being their 'weird' selves."



THEO THOURSON
as a gothic steampunk
adventurer



Courageous Journeys

New documentary celebrates transgender paddler **Veiga Grétarsdóttir**'s Icelandic odyssey.

By **ANDREW EDMONSON**

*"The untold want by life
and land ne'er granted,
Now voyager sail thou
forth to seek and find."*

—*The Untold Want* by Walt Whitman

Veiga Grétarsdóttir kayaking around the coast of Iceland.



as the first woman to achieve this perilous feat, which had claimed the lives of several others who had previously attempted the same voyage.

Three years prior, at the age of 38, she had undertaken an even more arduous psychological journey: leaving her wife and marriage, undergoing gender-confirmation surgery, and finally embracing her identity as a transgender woman after years of anguished resistance.

Icelandic film director Óskar Páll Sveinsson vividly chronicles both journeys in the moving new documentary *Against the Cur-*

rent, which is streaming during July as part of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Virtual Cinema series.

The film was spurred by a chance encounter. "A few years ago, I bumped into Veiga, the main character in the film, at a gas station in her home village in the westfjords of Iceland," says director Sveinsson. "I spoke to her for a while, and quickly realized that here was a woman with a highly unusual, brave, and interesting story to tell.

"I hope this film will raise awareness that some of us have to go to great lengths to find happiness and our true self, and also remind us not to judge too quickly, because everyone is unique in their own way."

The film traces Grétarsdóttir's childhood in a fishing village on the far west coast of Iceland, where she was a boisterous child who began kayaking early as a way to escape.

Her teenage years brought another period of rebellion.

In 2010, she met her ex-wife, Helga Snaedal, and their passion for biking, hiking, skiing, and travel resulted in an immediate and close bond. They each had children already, and they went on to have a child together after they married. In the film, Snaedal speaks with remarkable empathy about her former partner's transitioning journey, despite the painful dissolution of their marriage.

Interspersed throughout the documentary are dispatches from Grétarsdóttir's 103-day journey around the coast of Iceland. As weather conditions worsen, the trip becomes a grim, grueling ritual of physical endurance. At one point, she falls ill for a week. Demoralized and physically gutted, she contemplates giving up.

"She is an extremely powerful woman,"



says Gudni Pall Viktorsson, a veteran sea kayaker who served as Grétarsdóttir's main advisor. "She is independent, very determined, and stubborn. And that is what got her through this."

A second leading character emerges in the drama: Iceland's rugged coastline, whose stark grandeur is revealed through Óskar Páll Sveinsson's majestic cinematography.

While Grétarsdóttir's story will inspire LGBTQ people across the globe, it has special resonance for Iceland's transgender commu-

nity, says Óttar Guðmundsson, a psychiatrist and member of the transgender transition team at Iceland's national hospital. "It is monumental for her to do what she has done," he observes. "It is so important for those who have not come out, and for those who have come out but don't dare go all the way."

After Grétarsdóttir completes her trek around the Icelandic coast, her friends and family notice a transformation: she's more confident, serene, and comfortable in her own skin. "Unfortunately, I think she did not care

enough about herself throughout her life," a friend notes toward the end of the film. "As soon as she started to love herself, she became able to love those around her more."

▶ Watch a trailer for *Against the Current* here: vimeo.com/557773246

What: MFAH streams *Against the Current* documentary by Óskar Páll Sveinsson

When: Through July

Info: mfah.org/films



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Saved by a Songwriter

Singer **Mary Gauthier** previews her new book in advance of her Houston appearance.

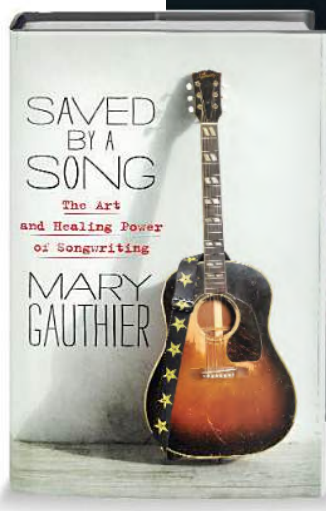
By GREGG SHAPIRO

Anyone familiar with the brilliant songs of lesbian singer/songwriter Mary Gauthier won't be at all surprised to learn that she also has an undeniable gift for writing prose. Her first book, *Saved By a Song: The Art and Healing Power of Songwriting* (St. Martin's Press, 2021), which I would describe as both a memoir and a how-to manual, is as personal and revealing as her music. Over the course of 13 songs (11 originals and two by others—John Prine's "Sam Stone" and John Lennon's "Mother"), Gauthier takes the reader behind the scenes with stories about how the songs came to be, while also delving into the process itself. It's a fascinating read for both songwriters and fans.

Gauthier was kind enough to talk to OUTSMART prior to her Houston shows at McGonigal's Mucky Duck on July 23 and 24.

Gregg Shapiro: Mary, your book *Saved By a Song: The Art and Healing Power of Songwriting*, is a memoir and gentle-songwriting-manual hybrid. Was that the intention all along, or did it begin as one or the other?

Mary Gauthier: This was a six- or seven-year process. I wrote a book before this for Yale University Press. They wanted a straight-up book on songwriting. Then the guy who signed me to Yale left the press. He moved to Berkeley and is running a beautiful nonprofit press out there called Heyday. When he left Yale, the book kind of got shelved. So, that book went away. I had that manuscript, which I'd spent years on, and then I connected with St. Martin's Press. They wanted to see that manuscript. They liked it, but they wanted something more interesting to people who are not songwriters [while still appealing to] songwriters. It was their idea, and I love it, to pick stories from my life that [provided] inspiration for songs or deepened my understanding of songwriting. I think it's a better book, actually, because straight-up instruction books on songwriting kind of don't give you a context for where all these lessons come from. What I'm trying to teach and show



Mary Gauthier's new book is now available online at us.macmillan.com.

students is that they come from your life. Where else could they come from?

You wrote that your hope is “to encourage courage” when it comes to songwriting, but you also don’t hesitate to write about your own songwriting frustrations. Would it be fair to say the book is as instructional as it is cautionary?

Maybe not cautionary, but just letting songwriters know that if you ever think this is going to get easy, forget about it! This is hard. What we're trying to do with a song is what a novelist tries to do in 700 pages. We've got three minutes. If Leonard Cohen was still alive, he'd be the first one to tell you this is hard. “Hallelujah” took something like seven years and 50 verses to get to the song that we know and love today. The only songwriter who makes it look

easy is Bob Dylan, and there's [only one of him] in all of history. I think it's not necessarily cautionary, but more like, “Hey, don't expect it to get easy. In fact, the further you go, the more you're going to see that this is always about roaming around in the darkness trying to find the light.”

In chapter 2 you say, “To sound like myself, I had to reveal myself.” I think that is reflected in the way you have spoken and written honestly about your path to recovery, which includes 30 years of sobriety. What would it mean to you to have your book embraced as recommended reading for the recovery community? That would be tremendous. I think that's what I'm getting at, that I wouldn't be a songwriter if I hadn't gotten sober. And I wouldn't have got-

ten sober if I hadn't gotten arrested. I figured that was as good enough a place as any to start the book: in the car, drunk, with sirens behind you. Very, very scary. [Laughs]

My heart was also racing when I was reading that part. Also notable is the way you address queerness in your life and your music—from the Indigo Girls concert you attended to your songs “Goddamn HIV” and “Drag Queens in Limousines.” In the years since you’ve been writing and recording music, what do you think of the way that LGBTQ+ musicians have been embraced by audiences from all walks of life?

That’s a great question! I was telling my partner, Jaimee, that this is the year of the warm embrace. We’ve hit a critical mass this year. I get requests from the Americana Music Association—“Please send us a quote about your story, Americana music, and Gay Pride Month, directed to people who are on our Instagram.”

We spoke in early 2020, right before the Grammys (for which you were a nominee) and right before the COVID-19 shutdown. At the time, you mentioned that you were working on *Saved by a Song*. As unfortu-

nate as the situation was, did the isolation provide you with the time to focus on the book?

Well, it helped me finish. I was able to really get in there and do the editing necessary. I had to chop away a lot—reduce, reduce, reduce. As Guy Clark used to say, “Let go of some of your darlings.” It did give me that time. The first 90 days of the pandemic were all book for me. We finished it up with the help of a great editor, and a willingness to remove some of the stories (which I thought were really well told, and I’d worked on for years) that just didn’t belong in this book. It also gave me time to slow down and heal. After the Grammy nomination, it felt like a rocket ship. I was working 160, 170 shows a year. I just wasn’t home. To go from being always gone to full brakes, I was getting whiplash. But I needed it.

Did you find other creative ways to pass the time during the pandemic, such as performing livestreaming sets?

Yes. We’ve done a livestream every Sunday since early April 2020. We still are doing them, although I think as we pick up the touring, there’s going to be fewer and fewer because we’re traveling every Sunday. I brought a guest on every week, and that’s been a lot of fun and

a way to see my friends. Have them as my guest and we get to hang out. Also, doing things around the house has been great. I got my second garden going back there. We’re dealing now with zucchini, which is awesome. Most everyone I brought in to livestream has been saying it’s incredible to be in one place for an extended period of time, because none of us had been doing that in such a long time.

Now that the book is finished, have you started thinking about or working on your next album?

Yes. I’m going to record it in December. What we’ve got right now is a vinyl shortage situation. Record companies have had to put the brakes on, because the vinyl companies are under water. But I’m just about ready to go—I’m maybe two songs shy of a new record. But the business end is nowhere near ready. They said do it in December and we’ll put it out in late spring and hope that vinyl will be somewhat caught up by then. We’ll see. But I’m close!

What: An Evening of Stories and Songs with Mary Gauthier

When: 7 p.m. on July 23 and 24

Where: McGonigal’s Mucky Duck, 2425 Norfolk St.

Tickets: mcgonigals.com

TRADE PARTNER VIRTUAL MEET & GREET

Please join us for a Virtual Meet & Greet regarding bid opportunities associated with the HCA Texas Orthopedic Hospital project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Interior renovation work: (all work is alteration Level 2 work U.N.O. on G01 Series Plans)
Level 02: 1792 SF of existing locker rooms and lounge renovation; 1492 SF of renovation to convert existing operating rooms to storage
Level 03: 3265 SF of renovation to convert existing observation rooms to storage minor renovation (alteration Level 1) to convert patient rooms to observation rooms.
Level 04: 30823 SF of renovation to infill an existing shell space into a new surgery department
Level 05: 153 SF of existing patient floor renovation to create new mechanical shafts required for the surgery department below

PROJECT DETAILS:

Bid date: August 11, 2021 @ 2:00 PM
For more information on prequalification, drawings, or other information regarding this project, please contact Carolyn Scheel at 346-352-3017 or email at hubopportunities@odonnellsnider.com.

PROJECT BID PACKAGES

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|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audio/Visual• Acoustical• Automatic Doors• Carpet• Ceilings• Ceramic/Stone• Concrete• Data Cabling• Demolition | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doors• Drywall• Electrical• Elevator• Fire Alarm• Fire Sprinkler• Fire Proofing• Glass• Graphic Signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HVAC• Lead Shielding• Lockers• Medical Equipment• Mill work• Nurse call• Paint• Plumbing• Specialties | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stairs• Structural Steel• Toilet Accessories• Window Coverings• Wall Coverings• X-ray Services |
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VIRTUAL MEET & GREET INFORMATION:

July 20, 2021 @ 12:00 PM

OPTIONS FOR PARTICIPATING:

REQUEST THE MICROSOFT TEAMS VIRTUAL MEETING LINK:
hubopportunities@odonnellsnider.com

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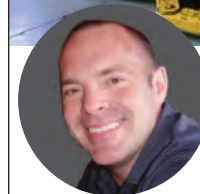


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Tackling Trauma

Brian Broome's journey to becoming a gay Black man was anything but smooth.

By TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER



Little kids have it so easy. Somebody feeds them when they're hungry, buys them toys, and plays with them. Somebody escorts them everywhere, and if they're small

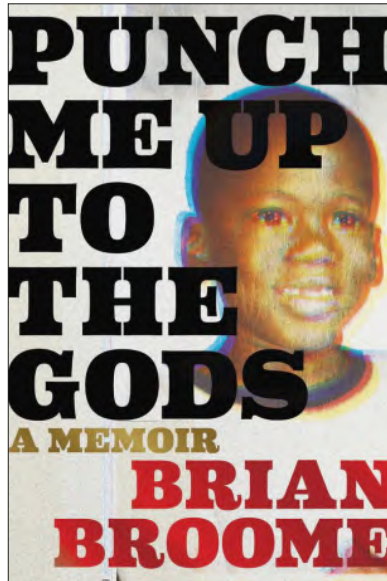
enough they even get carried. Yep, life is good—except when it's not, as in the new memoir *Punch Me Up to the Gods* by Brian Broome.

He called Corey his “best friend,” but Corey was no friend to 10-year-old Broome. Sure, things were sympatico at first, but it didn't take long for Corey to sense Broome's insecurities and start humiliating him. Broome's father hoped that Corey's abuse might be “a form of therapy” for a boy who played with girls too much. Broome endured the abuse and didn't complain to the adults because he was a little in love with Corey. Broome's dad also beat Brian, for a multitude of reasons ranging from a pink shirt to his own frustration over brutal racism. (He admitted that he'd rather kill his children himself than let a white person do it.) Brian, in fact, often wished that he was white like the people on TV, since white parents really seemed to love their kids.

Broome dreamed of moving far away from the tiny working-class Ohio town of his birth to a larger city where he believed he could avoid the bullying and teasing. He did leave once, for college, but he was deeply humiliated by the racism and homophobia of his roommates. He soon asked his mother to come and take him out of college.

Being a man isn't easy. Being a Black man in America can be brutal. Being a gay Black man led Broome to drugs, alcohol, and away from his family. “Yes, I was loved. Just not in ways that I could understand,” the author admits.

Be prepared to be messed with here. Your emotions may never be the same. There's a



tightly-coiled, ready-to-strike fist wrapped in melancholy and a miles-long people-watching incident in this book, both giving aptness to its title.

Happily, Broome also gives us a few moments of humor as he recalls things that occurred in his youth, or maybe just a few years ago. He surprises readers with similes that are sobering, in the middle of our laughter. He'll step back, pick at something else, turn it over twice to examine it, and pull it into his tale.

You won't regret picking up this wonderfully companionable, startlingly gracious and compelling memoir. *Punch Me Up to the Gods* is a don't-miss, and devouring it is easy.



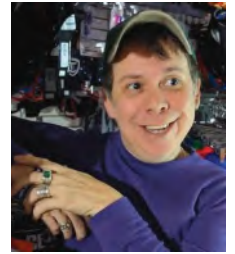
Brian Broome's Punch Me Up to the Gods: A Memoir is now available online at hnhbooks.com.

IN MEMORIAM

James O'Rourke

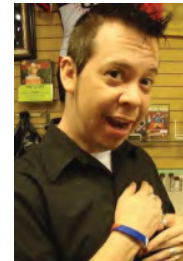
James Andrew Ragazinsky (O'Rourke), age 49, of Houston, Texas, passed away on Monday June 7, 2021 and went on to meet with his little fur baby (Satine Martini Lovitz) at the rainbow bridge. James

was a warm-hearted charismatic gift to all those that knew him. He is survived by his husband of 14 years, Ryan James Clark. Mother Jeannie Marie Besenhardt (Barron), sister



Jeanne Guadalupe Barron, nephews and nieces Seth Andrew Barron, Alana Marie Perez, Isaac Rene Barron, Abigail Clementine Barron and Alexander James Barron. He is also survived by mother-in-law Lori Ann Clark, father-in-law and step mother-in-law Kevin James and Michelle Clark, sister-in-law Tanya Mae Black, brother-in-law Travon Erroll Black, nephew and niece Travon Erroll Black II and Tatyana Marie Black.

James began his illustrious 22-year retail journey working at many different stores in Memorial City Mall and Katy Mills Mall, before starting a 15-year



career with Hollywood Super Center where he worked his way to General/Property Manager. He loved both of his bosses Jeff and Danny and his work. James liked to take things apart and put them back together to see how they functioned. He enjoyed puzzles and

to cook and clean. He was a practical joker that loved to pick on his little sister. He had a thirst for adventure, music, movies and traveling. James and Ryan liked to travel to California where they would visit family and good friends or go to Rodeo Drive to shop and Napa Valley to enjoy the scenery and drink. He loved the Renaissance Festival and James and Ryan would go multiple times every year. He was an amazing Uncle that loved to take his nephews and nieces camping and to Six Flags to make precious memories that will never be forgotten. James was a son, a brother, a loving husband, a friend, a mentor, and a confidant. He was very supportive and always had a lot of love to give. His fun-loving optimistic nature allowed him to draw in people from all walks of life making them feel welcome and accepted. The world is a better place because James was a part of it. James's love overflowed in all that knew him. We will carry his love on in our thoughts and memories. James would say do not mourn me my loved ones and friends, for I am not gone. I am forever by your side; my body is merely resting. My love goes on and we will meet again. Until then carry me with you and know that I am still around ;)



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"The need for funding isn't ending just because I'm showing the film. I still don't have all the music rights. That's one aspect of the film that will change. Right now, there are 80 pieces of published music, and there's no way I'm going to get all of that legally cleared. That will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. That aspect of the film will evolve over time [as I can purchase more rights]. The story and the structure of the film won't change—just the music. There will be an opportunity for donations during both screenings," Pontello emphasizes.

Once the film shows at the end of the month, Pontello hopes *Friday I'm In Love* will have a future at film festivals and beyond.

"Fall is film-festival submission time, and I really want to officially premiere this at South by Southwest in 2022. Of all the film festivals, that's the one I'd love to be at the most. It makes the most sense for the project. There are other smaller festivals in Texas and in the southern United States. It would be great to take the film to Los Angeles, since [most of] the music has a connection there. I'd like to do a year of

film-festival screenings," Pontello says.

"Because there is so much history, it might make sense to go to Houston archivists and LGBTQ archivists [and arrange for other local screenings]. Aside from that, after showing the documentary to the point of exhaus-



tion in Houston, I would love for it to one day be online on Netflix or Hulu."

Even though the film started off as a personal love letter to the famous Montrose venue, Pontello hopes everyone can find something in the film that speaks to them.

"The film is a little bit personal, because I'm telling a little bit of who I was as a teenager and why Numbers means so much. I've decided to tell a story which relates to being queer and growing up in the suburbs and feeling like a complete outsider. It's personal, but a great deal of the film is historical. It celebrates Numbers, Montrose, and Houston. It's an important story for the city. Montrose is so much a part of the city, and what went down in Montrose in the '70s and '80s is significant and special. I hope the film will resonate for years to come."



Friday I'm In Love will screen in its entirety Friday, July 31, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, August 1, at 7:30 p.m. at Numbers Nightclub, 300 Westheimer. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit NumbersDocumentary.com.

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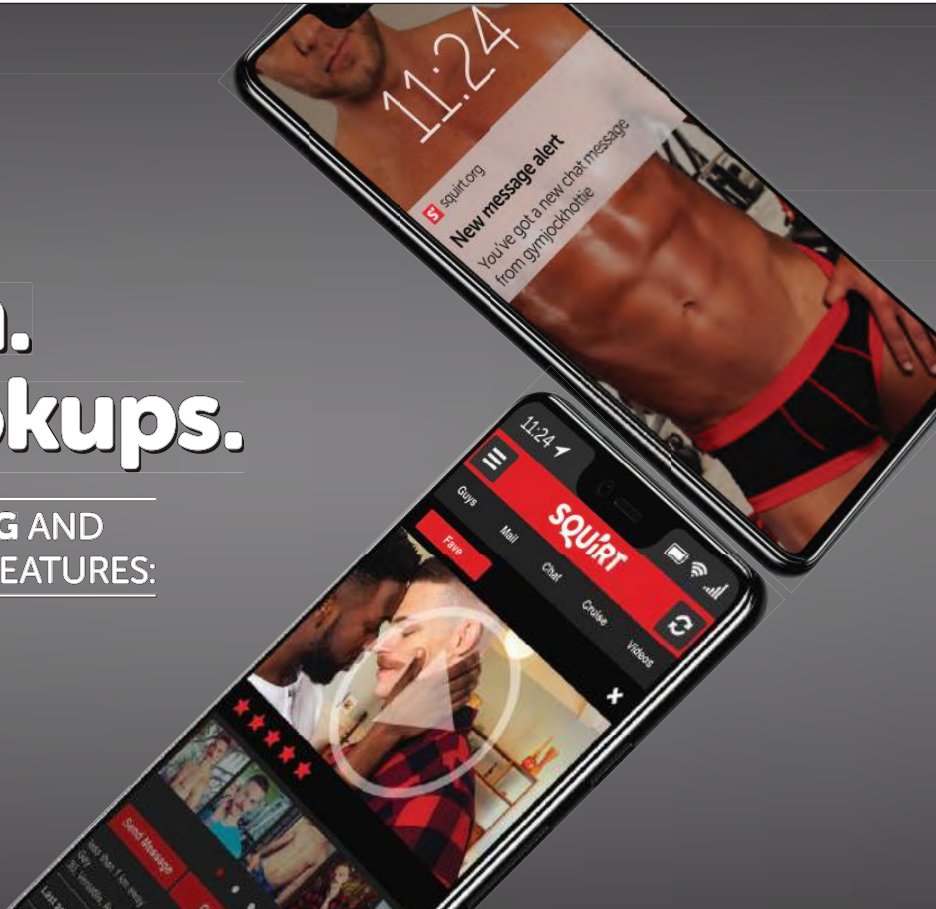
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High Style on The Strand

LGBTQ-friendly theme bars **Mob, Maze, and Mango's** make a splash in Galveston.

By MARENE GUSTIN



"What's different about it," says Terry Fuller-Waymire, who with his husband, Jamie, runs Pride Galveston, "is that it's three nightclubs in one."

He's referring to Galveston's newest hot spot, The Texas Bar Group, which occupies a large building near The Strand, across from the Galveston Railroad Museum. Inside the building is Mob Bar—a 1920s speakeasy featuring a Prohibition cocktail menu, Sinatra music and smooth jazz, and gangster movies playing on the flat screen—as well as the sprawling Maze nightclub.

"Maze is more of a dance club," says Fuller-Waymire, who performs a drag show there. There are five rooms in Maze: the Main Room features an oval-shaped bar with a dance floor, disco ball, laser lights, and a DJ. The Electricity Room has another dance floor, strobe lights, and a wall of video screens. Two VIP rooms have plush leather couch sections for bottle service, and there's a trippy Alien Room. Outside, in the Island sunshine, is a third concept: Mango's Beach Club.

"I like variety," says Fuller-Waymire. "So I love being able to just go from bar to bar. I'm a beach person, so I love Mango's. But when the summer heat gets too hot, it's nice to pop into a dark indoor bar."

Mango's does have umbrellas and an awning to provide a little shade, as well as day beds, bottle service, tropical drinks, Miami music, drag brunches, and cornhole and basketball games. It's also dog friendly, with free bowls of water and doggie treats for your four-legged kids.

This triple-threat concept is the brainchild of Texas Bar Group CEO Brian "BO\$\$" Cohen, a veteran of nightclubs and venues across the U.S. He opened his first Mob Bar in Los Angeles in a building with secret basement tunnels and bullet holes in the walls. Unfortunately, he opened it in February 2020 and had to close the following month for a prolonged COVID lockdown. This year, he decided to open Mob Bars in other cities, starting with Cedar Falls, Iowa, and now Galveston.

"I never thought the Mob Bar would work in Iowa or Texas," Cohen says. "But they are business-friendly states, and I found several properties that I decided would work."



COURTESY

And Galveston turned out to be a perfect fit. Mob, Maze, and Mango's reside in a 9,000-square-foot building known for its former brothel and a notorious murder.

"During my research, I found out that Galveston has a long history with the mob," Cohen says. Indeed, the Island was home to Rosario "Rose" and Sam Maceo—who for three decades ran speakeasies, gambling dens, and bootlegging operations. They owned The Balinese Room, which hosted acts like Frank Sinatra in the front of the house and gambling in the back. Located on a pier at 21st Street, the historic structure was lost to Hurricane Ike in 2008.

"I've always been a fan of the 1920s era and gangster movies," Cohen says, "so I just thought the Mob Bar would be a cool concept. And it's a perfect fit for Galveston, with its history." The bar even features two cocktails named for the infamous Maceo brothers.

Besides being in the hospitality business for two decades, Cohen also runs a baseball memorabilia company that deals with buyers and sellers of sports cards.

"I've been dealing in sports cards since I

was ten," says Cohen. "I pick maybe 20 players a year that I follow and know will be on the rise. So I buy their cards early, at maybe \$7 a piece, and sell them at \$75. If you buy 100 or more, it's a great investment if you know what you are doing. But everything I do—hospitality and sports—isn't just for the money. I am very passionate about everything I do."

While Cohen plans to open more Mob Bars throughout the country, Galveston seems to be a very apt fit. He has seen good-sized crowds following his June opening, and he expects it to be even busier as the cruise ships return to the island. He plans to bring in big-name bands, DJs, burlesque shows, and he's already booking a lot of local and Texas acts.

"We have some great LGBTQ performers here," Cohen says—including drag queens like Fuller-Waymire. "We are friendly to everyone—all races and orientations. We invite everyone to come out and enjoy the bars. When I'm here, I'm always on the floor shaking hands and pouring shots. So come on by!"



For more information on Mob, Maze, and Mangos, visit texasbargroup.com.

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What is your favorite shot to make? To drink?

Favorite to make: Fireball shots.
Favorite to drink: The Fireball shot I just made.

Where is your favorite place to drink when not on duty?

Right here at Rumors.

What is a current bar trend you'd like to see end?

I guess the one that just ended: wearing a mask in a bar!

Biggest tip from one customer?

\$100

What are you best known for?

I'm best known for saying "It's what we do!" No thank-you necessary, it's what we do!

What is the best and worst holiday to work? Why?

The best holiday has to be Pride, when everyone is in a great mood. The worst holiday to work would be New Year's Eve. It's like amateur night!

Who are the hardest customers to please?

The ones who have no idea what they want. And this usually happens when we're the busiest!

If you weren't a bartender, what career would you choose?

When I am not bartending, I am a communications tech at UTMB—an emergency dispatcher in the ER.

Do you have any pets?

No pets currently, due to time constraints.



What is the best part about working at this bar?

By far, it's the family vibe here at Rumors. We may fight, but we love each other!

Favorite Food?

Mac & Cheese

Favorite Restaurant?

Nick's

Favorite Travel Spot?

Cancún

Dream vacation?

Rome

Any advice for a wannabe bartender in an LGBTQ bar?

Get ready for the drama, then let it all slide off of you.

Your superpower?

I have an amazing poker face.

Theme Song?

Let's go with "Poker Face" again.

BAR GUIDE

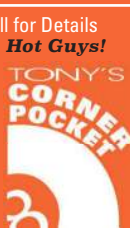
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By LILLY RODDY

Time for Decision-Making

Review your schedule, then forge ahead.



This is going to be a busy and active month after all of the delays from the June Mercury retrograde. This is a month for decision-making, and during the first half of the month,

a time for getting things done. The latter half of the month involves further changes and transitions. We'll be upgrading our plans and looking to move past COVID and 2020.

The sun begins the month in Cancer, and eventually enters Leo on the 22nd. Mercury is moving right along, starting in Gemini and entering Cancer on the 12th and then Leo on the 27th. Venus starts the month in Leo, but eventually enters Virgo on the 21st. Mars continues plowing his way through Leo until July 29, when he enters Virgo. And finally, Jupiter retrogrades back into Aquarius on the 28th. The rest of the planets—Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto—are happy where they are! Because of all the planetary activity at the end of the month, we are going to be reviewing our schedules and exploring new avenues.

ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

Home, children, and family activities will keep your July calendar filled. Despite the “new normal” that COVID created, you are working hard to maintain your financial and emotional security. You are in a more creative and playful mood throughout July. If you have children, this can be a more meaningful time to be with them. With your career, it's an excellent time to reconnect with old clients, previous employers, and business organizations to expand your networking and outreach. The latter half of the month is better for reinstating your fitness and work routines. You are investigating ways to improve your resource base through investments or a retirement program. It's also easier for you to act with your own best interests in mind.

TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

You continue to be pulled in two different directions: one toward reinventing yourself and your career, and the other toward remaining stable and relevant in your current career. You will be trying to find a better

CANCER (June 22–July 22)

Happy birthday to all the Moon Kids. This is your personal yearly cycle in which we review our past and look ahead with high hopes for the upcoming year. Particularly in the first half of July, it's a great time for health checkups, realigning your partnership goals, and making sure you please yourself! You are exploring new ways to bring in income that relies on a more modern approach to business. Both your personal and business partnerships need some attention. This is a very good month to make sure you and

career balance through the rest of the year. That impulse was very strong last month, and it continues this month. In the first half of July, you are getting your thoughts organized while being less patient with existing conditions. This same energy can also weigh heavily on relationships that are too demanding or inflexible. By midmonth, your focus shifts to your home, family, and emotional roots. Boundaries will be a key issue for you through the latter half of July. Make sure you put yourself first in all your choices!

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

You have finally emerged from the stressful month of June. You may still feel a bit shell-shocked through the New Moon on the 9th. You are in a much more action-oriented time. Your primary focus is on your finances, generating more income, and increasing your visibility. The eclipses should have generated some new contacts for both your business and personal interests. You have been trying to find a project or a career path this year that satisfies your need for both internal stability and external success. You are more confident about your choices as mid-July approaches. Home and family comforts come into play as well. You may be looking to do some relocation or remodeling.



JOHN-PAUL AREAGA

your partner plan some fun activities together, besides the obvious responsibilities. Finances and resource management are big topics in the last half of the month. This can be a very good time to address any fiduciary difficulties that prevent you from feeling free. You are looking for a permanent solution to those problems.

Limits and restrictions will irritate you more toward the end of the month. You will need more freedom!

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

Normally, this is more of a rest-and-retreat time for you, but with active Mars traveling through your sign during the entire month, you are ready to spread your wings and fly! You have more confidence than usual, which can be good for exploring new career options and possibly starting something on your own. You are looking for a career that excites your passion and can be shared with your partner and your friends. You will also be taking life more personally, and having a greater awareness of your physical surroundings. This may interfere with your sleep patterns. This is a great time to focus on health and self-care. Your energy level is even stronger by midmonth. Relationship issues are more significant, and it may be a great time for you and your partner to get reacquainted. Watch your impulse-spending at the end of the month!

VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22)

As the month begins, you are slowly moving into a clearer space. You are not as overwhelmed by the psychic energies that had you isolating more than

necessary during COVID. You needed a break from the demands you've placed on yourself. You will feel much better after July 9, as you are ready to re-enter the public arena. This is a very good time for relationships, whether or not you are involved, particularly after midmonth. You may be looking for a new career path, or altering your current path to align with the drastic shifts in the way business is now being done. You are more confident, and ready to act on what you think is best. The last half of the month is a much better time to reconnect to your fitness and work routines!

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

You are more professionally and socially active in July. This is a great month to take on a leadership role, look into a promotion, or move to a more lucrative position. Friends and business organizations can be very helpful and supportive. This is also a great time for you to take a strong role in your community's development and future direction. For those of you with children, they will want to take on more responsibility. It may seem like they are growing up too fast! Financial restraints and debt should be addressed as soon as possible. It's definitely keeping you from expressing your own creative energies, and it could possibly lock you into a job that has you feeling trapped. You will need some rest-and-retreat time by the end of the month.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

You are considering expanding your career and possibly starting something on your own! This is a good month to get your ideas out there. Publishing energies remain strong through the end of the year. You are looking to take on more of a leadership role, no matter what your current position is. Relationship energies are very active. If you are involved in a relationship that feels restrictive, you may be looking for greener pastures. If you are happily involved, you are renewing your bonds and looking forward to more fun and excitement. If you are single, you'll be very selective this month as you search for someone who is unique and electrifying. You may be doing some home repairs, or even consider moving at this time!

SAGITTARIUS (Nov.22-Dec.21)

Your world may have seemed upside down over the last couple of weeks. The larger theme for you is about connecting to an inner purpose that gives your life more meaning. You will be ready to make some decisions after the 9th. You are setting a new direction for your career, or you are looking to take on a leadership role where you are. Social media will be the best path to expand your reach. You are re-examining your views about relationships and looking for more balance and equality in your partnerships, so you don't always have to take the lead role. You are also considering relocating, or redecorating your home. You are wanting a retreat spot that shuts out all of the everyday noise. Career activity really picks up near the end of the month!

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Relationships are one of your main interests this month. If you are involved, this is a good time to reestablish those bonds. If you are single, this is a good month to look for potential partners. You are looking for something that has a future. The activity that has been driving the COVID crisis was also clearly focused on your sign. This has definitely made you rethink your career from the ground up. You may have lost your drive or passion as you look for a career direction that satisfies you—instead of one where you are always satisfying others. For some, this can be a time of retiring and totally switching directions! With so many options, you are trying to narrow down your choices. You may feel stymied or stuck, but by the end of the month, you will feel free to act on those choices. It may help to evaluate your finances so you know how to proceed.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

You are working on finishing old tasks, getting rid of stuff that doesn't have a purpose in your life, and contemplating new ambitions. You will want to get yourself into better physical shape and set better personal boundaries that limits your time with people who don't appreciate you. This is a very active career period that will be operating through the entire year. You will make some clear decisions about where you are going, especially at the end of this month and in early August. Relationships can be more demanding this month, which will trigger your need for better boundaries. Are you giving more to your partner than you are getting back? This is a good time to renew that connection, as long as you benefit from the process. You may need to communicate your desires more clearly. Just because *you* are intuitive doesn't mean your partner is!

PISCES (Feb. 19-Mar. 20)

It's been a very active and disjointed period for you over the last few weeks. This energy finally subsides after the 9th as you begin to feel more grounded. There are opportunities opening up for you, career-wise. These may be more suited to your sensitive nature, and allow you to let your natural talents shine. The eclipses will repeat again in late November and early December of this year, so that will be another time for new opportunities. This month is good for expanding your personal presence via social media and public venues. People are drawn to your energies, which can be very good for your job or other self-promotion. But that extra attention could also make you feel overwhelmed. This is a great month to pay attention to your health habits and concerns. Co-workers are more edgy and dramatic this month. You may want to avoid being drawn into their theatrics. Relationships will be more active by the end of the month!



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WEDDING GUIDE



Stephen Miranda (l)
and Blake Mudd

A SYMBOLIC CELEBRATION

Stephen Miranda and Blake Mudd married
on the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.

By JENNY BLOCK

Photos by BIANCA RODRIGUEZ



Houston couple Stephen Michael Miranda, 27, and Blake Stevens Mudd, 25, may have met virtually, but their connection could not be any more real.

Stephen, a Space City native who was raised by lesbian parents, is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma and works as a private-client advisor and vice president of investments at J.P. Morgan. Blake, from Lake Charles, graduated from the University of Houston and is now a lecturer at both his alma mater and Houston Community College. His interest in fashion led him to open the Hyphen Boutique online store, and also to become the operations manager at Pomp and Circumstance Boutique. The duo lives in an East End neighborhood near downtown Houston.

"In true millennial fashion, we initially

met on Tinder," Blake says. It was July of 2017. Their first date was at Hops Meets Barley on Alabama Street. "I don't remember much about that day," Stephen says. "It was the first time I'd really felt an instant connection with someone."

Stephen says marriage was never on his radar because for most of his life, same-sex marriage wasn't legal. But then, after falling in love, planning a future, and buying a home together, he admits that something still felt incomplete. "It seemed like we were in something much more serious than just a 'dating relationship,' and marriage felt like the natural next step. So about a month after we'd moved in, I bought a ring."

It was Stephen who proposed to Blake at a pre-Pride pool party in 2019 that he was hosting with a friend. After the hosts got everyone's

attention with a "Thank you for coming" speech, Stephen got down on one knee and popped the question in front of 75 guests.

Blake recalls thinking that it seemed odd when Stephen insisted he come forward to join the two party hosts, but he didn't question it. "Suddenly, a speech about love occurred, Stephen got on one knee, a Tiffany & Co. box appeared, and the rest is, well, history," Blake says. Naturally, he said yes.

In hindsight, Stephen wishes they had planned to wear better outfits for their proposal photos (instead of the tank tops and swim trunks they ended up in), but he says, "Ultimately, it was very 'us.'"

With the pandemic looming, the couple felt that getting married was an imperative. "We didn't even have wills. I feared that with nothing legally binding us, one of us could have been



cut completely off from the other. The best way to show we loved each other during these scary times was to tie the knot—and every other legal loose end,” Stephen says.

The couple had originally planned on having an elaborate wedding with over 200 guests as a fundraiser for the Montrose Center’s LGBTQ-affirming Law Harrington Senior Living Center. “We had to pare down our guest list to near nothing, as reports of COVID clusters from weddings were sprouting up daily,” Stephen recalls.

Instead, they got married on June 28, 2020—the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall Riots—in the place most special to them: their home. Stephen’s cousin Birdie Rodriguez, who is also gay, officiated, and no family or friends were physically present. “It was just our little quarantine pod, but we did have a good crowd on Zoom,” Stephen says. Cousin Birdie’s daughter Bianca served as their photographer, videographer, Zoom tech, and witness. “We all [went to get] Luby’s takeout for dinner afterwards. It wasn’t the wedding we initially wanted, but once again, it was very ‘us.’”

“Marriage is not about the wedding day,” Blake adds. “Marriage is about the union of two people who love each other. Our wedding day may not have been what we originally intended, but being married every day to Stephen is my equivalent of that fairy-tale moment. Also, champagne and to-go Luby’s for our wedding meal was cool, too.”

With the help of the couple’s friend and local LGBTQ historian JD Doyle, Stephen and Blake created a video featuring archival footage showing the landmark political events that ultimately made marriage equality possible. An excerpt from President Obama’s speech following the 2009 Supreme Court marriage-equality ruling played in the background after Zoom viewers logged in to the couple’s wedding ceremony.

“Gay marriage is still an act of protest against the many people in power across this country who would have us quietly return to

the discarded corners of society,” Stephen says. “Through our love, we’ve committed to continuing their fight to make this a more equal place for all of us, and to never take our foot off the gas.”

The pandemic made getting a marriage certificate in Harris County tricky, so they got one in Galveston County instead. “Our Galveston marriage certificate looks like a kids’ birthday party invitation with a *Pirates of the Caribbean* theme,” Stephen laughs. “We definitely skipped framing that one.”

From buying a house together before they got married to getting married in their own living room, Blake notes that almost everything about their relationship has been non-traditional—including their honeymoon plans.

“Every future trip or vacation we go on together will be counted as our honeymoon,” he proudly explains.

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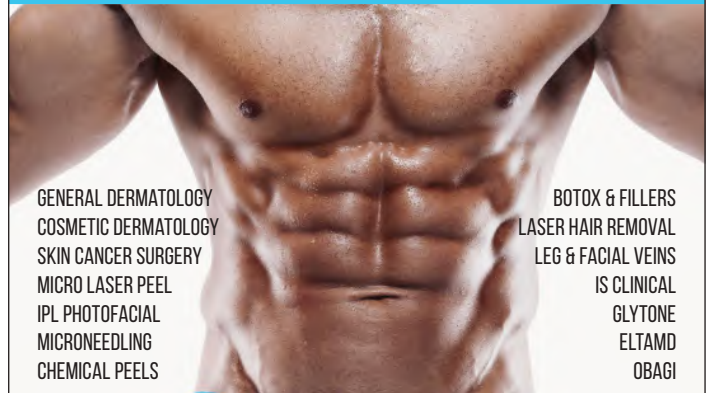
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On June 1, 2021, the GLBT Political Caucus held its Summer Fling. Pictured are the Fab Five Judges: **Shannon Baldwin, Jim Kovach, Jason Cox, Beau Miller, and Jerry Simoneaux** with **April Ayers, Judge Daryl Moore, Jeff Watters, Jovon Tyler, Judge Steven Kirkland, and former Mayor Annise Parker.**



Bering Memorial United Methodist Church leaders signed documents to become Bering Memorial United Church of Christ on June 2, 2021. Pictured are (standing): Attorney **Reesa Hedricks, David Schulz, Scott Loree, Rev. Diane McGehee, Rick Renshaw, Ken Gregg** and (seated) Church Council Chair, **Ken Malone.**



On June 9, 2021, Discovery Green celebrated 10 years of Rainbow on the Green. Pictured are **Joey Guerra, Ada Vox, Tye Blue, Angelina DM Trailz, and Barry Mandel.**



The "F" Friday fundraiser for the Montrose Center was held at Hamburger Mary's on June 11, 2021. Pictured are **Tony Fernandez, Blackberri, Kennedy Loftin, and the president of LGBT Council on Aging Tracee Seals.**



The Montrose Softball League held the season play-offs on June 13, 2021, at Houston Sportsplex. Pictured are members of MSLA Chaos, end of season playoff winners of D Division.



The Classic Chassis Car Club displayed their cars at the Law Harrington Senior Living Center on June 12, 2021. Pictured are members of the Classic Chassis Car Club.



On June 12, 2021, Pride Houston presented Night Out at the Movies - A Reel Pride Pop-up at the Montrose Center. Pictured are **Ryan Tyler Ash, Natasha James, An Hoang, Kendra Walker, Jasmine Young, Byron Canady, Thasia Madison, Michael Robinson, and Lo Roberts.**



Congressman Al Green met with members of the LGBTQ Community on June 12, 2021, at Harold's in the Heights to discuss his upcoming congressional resolution honoring LGBTQ Pride History and to discuss how to address discrimination in the LGBTQ community.



The Four Seasons social group held a mixer at La Granja y Cantina on June 6, 2021. Pictured are **John Starratt, Donna Junker, Jorge Mora, and Venny Jmora.**



Pride Night with the Houston Astros was held June 16, 2021, at Minute Maid Park. Pictured are **Hon. Phyllis Frye** and the former executive director of Pride Houston **Lo Roberts.**



On June 19, 2021, the Stella Link Seville Mr. & Miss Gay Pride Houston Pageant was held at Barcode. Pictured are Mr. Gay Pride Houston 2019-20 **Ivan Hyde Cupcake**, Mr. Gay Pride Houston 2021 **Seany Smiles**, Miss Gay Pride Houston 2021 **Kofi**, and Miss Gay Pride Houston 2019-20 **Roxanne Collins.**



The Daddy of Montrose 2021 Contest was held at Michael's Outpost on June 20, 2021. Pictured are Daddy of Montrose 2019-2020 **David James Barron** and Daddy of Montrose 2021 **Joey Dinello.**

Island Showgirl

Kymber DeVine makes waves across Galveston.

By **SAM BYRD**
Photo by **ALEX ROSA**



Who better to give us the scoop on Galveston Island than the ocean goddess herself, Kymber DeVine? Statuesque, sultry, and sassy, she's like Venus rising from the sea—Botticelli's painting come to life. She's as invigorating as the salt air, and as carefree as the wind in her hair. **OUTSMART** dove right in to find out what makes this gal from Galveston a show-stopping diva.

Drag birthdate?
October 12, 1991

Pronouns?
She/Her

Hometown?
Belle Chasse, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans.

Inner avatar:
A mix of all three original Charlie's Angels: the brains of Sabrina (Kate Jackson) by day, girl-next-door Kelly (Jaclyn Smith), and by night, the beauty and glamour of Jill (Farrah Fawcett).

How did you first get into drag?
Like most [of us from Louisiana], it was a Halloween party in New Orleans. I immediately knew I wanted to be a part of the drag scene.

What makes Galveston so special?
Galveston became home for me 10 years ago. I left New Orleans to find peace after 20 years of working on Bourbon Street as an exotic dancer. Galveston gave me a sense of New Orleans, with its history and uptown New Orleans feel. Add in the beach, and I've found my home.

If you had only one day to show a guest around the Island, where would you take them and what would you do?
I'd start at the Pyramids, with a walk through the Rainforest Pyramid, Moody Gardens, and the Discovery Pyramid. Then a quick lunch

at my favorite seafood restaurant, Bennos, before heading to the Pleasure Pier for some fun amusement rides and games. I would end the afternoon with a stroll through downtown Galveston's Strand for some light shopping, then we'd end the night at Galveston's premiere dance and show bar, Rumors, for a few drinks and to watch one of the amazing shows!

How would you describe life on the Island, versus life in Houston?

Life on the Island is a lot more laid back compared to Houston, especially during the touristy off-season.

Advice to your younger self?

Don't do drugs, further your education, and save your money!

Drag idols?

Victoria West, Teryl-Lynn Fox, Erica Andrews, Mimi Marks, and Monica Monroe.

Advice for up-and-coming performers?
Take care of your physical and mental health.

Have you found love?

I have truly found my soulmate for life in a wonderful transgender man, Grayson Chandler. We have been married now for six years.

"When in doubt, ..."

...take a deep breath and trust God will make a way.

Life mantra?

It's never too late to live out a dream.

Any competition titles?

Reigning Texas National Showgirl Supreme, former Miss Texas USofA Classic, Miss Texas Continental Elite, Miss Trans Georgia USA, and the former Miss Gay Louisiana Universe—to name a few.

What's on the horizon for Kymber?

I'm currently working hard preparing to be the next National Showgirl Supreme, which takes place in Florida this month, as well as settling into my new job as manager of Rumors Bar & Grill. Some day in the future, I would also like to open a floral design shop.

Where can people see you perform regularly?

I am a regular cast member at Rumors Bar & Grill, Hamburger Mary's, Davenport Clear Lake, Kemah Shot Bar and Wine Revue, and I have a new show starting at Twisted Parrot in Kemah. ▼



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