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ANNUAL

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AWARDS

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Jeff Watters,
Tiffany Scales,
and more

Pg.55

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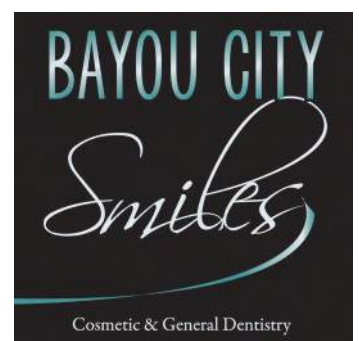
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BEST DRESSED



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GLITZ N' GLAM

Fan-favorite performers Stoo, Queen Persephone, and DJ Athenz sparkle in this year's spotlight
 Photography by Frank Hernandez



James Walker



Eric Kirkpatrick

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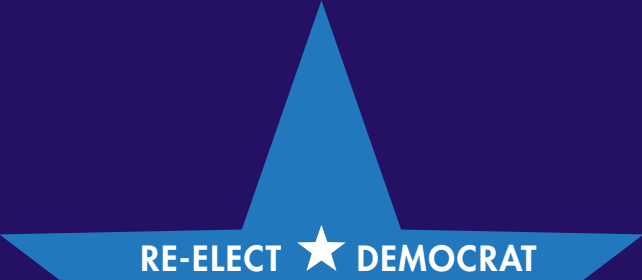


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Copy Editor Howard Maple

Web Editor Lourdes Zavaleta

Staff Reporter Lillian Hoang

Contributing Writers

Olivia Flores Alvarez, Rich Arenschioldt, Bill Arning, Susan Bankston, Connor Behrens, Jenny Block, Sam Byrd, Blase DiStefano, Andrew Edmonson, Ste7en Foster, Alys Garcia Carrera, Martin Giron, Sarah Gish, DL Groover, Marene Gustin, Kim Hogstrom, James Hurst, Lisa Keen, Ryan M. Leach, Don Maines, Zachary McKenzie, David Odyssey, Joanna O'Leary, Lilly Roddy, Adriana Salazar, Terri Schlichenmeyer, Gregg Shapiro, Janice Stensrude, Henry V. Thiel, Terrance Turner, Megan Wadding, Brandon Wolf, Grace S. Yung

Photographers/Illustrators

Edgardo Aguilar, John-Paul Arreaga, Dalton DeHart, Yvonne Feece, Frank Hernandez, Ashkan Roayae, Alex Rosa

Interns

Brandon Norvell

Marketing Department

Jack Berger, Alyssa Jordan, Gene Mikulanka, Adriana Salazar

National Advertising Representative

Rivendell Media - 212.242.6863

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OUTSMART readers are a force to be reckoned with. They're fiercely loyal, intelligent, and always

have their finger on the pulse of the latest trends in Houston.

Every October, our dedicated audience fills us in on the hottest local LGBTQ and ally people and places. This year's Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards issue celebrates their recommendations in over 200 categories, and shines an additional spotlight on 14 of their top picks.

Three of our readers' favorite Space City entertainers, photographed by the fabulous Frank Hernandez at his local studio, are featured on this month's cover. Writers Zach McKenzie, Sam

Byrd, and Jenny Block introduce you to nonbinary actor Stoo, drag artist Queen Persephone, and musician DJ Athenz, respectively.

Elsewhere in this issue, we celebrate LGBTQ History Month by featuring queer pioneers who have made their mark on Houston. Writer Brandon Wolf interviews Arthur Cordova, who helped lay the path for the first local Latin Pride events, while writer Kim Hogstrom sits down with 1970s racquetball champion Jan Paster-nack, and writer Marene Gustin chats with artist/collector couple Barbara Levine and Paige Ramey about their historic photo archive that now resides at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Catastrophic Theatre and Mister McKinney's Historic

Houston are also teaming up this month to honor Houston's queer past by organizing a "mature" tour of the city's lively gayborhood. Sam Byrd previews the tour by interviewing its host, gay actor and longtime Montrose resident Walt Zipprian.

Writer Jenny Block also talks to local history-makers Victor Wimberly Jr. and Tony Tuckwiller III. The duo recently became the first same-sex couple to be married at Bering Church in its 173-year history.

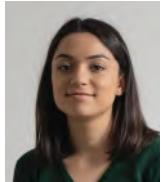
On the arts scene, the Alley Theatre is celebrating its 75th anniversary, so Sam Byrd interviews Brandon Weinbrenner, Alley's associate producer and casting director, about their new season lineup. And writer Jenny

Block chats with Bayou City Art Festival's Jeremy Smith about this month's downtown event and their ongoing support for art education in Houston.

Finally, don't forget to join us for a special evening as we show our 2021 Gayest & Greatest winners the love at ReBar on October 20. For more information, visit facebook.com/outsmartmagazine

See you next month!

Lourdes Zavaleta
Managing Editor



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By Adriana Salazar

QUEER THINGS to DO



MUSIC
October 30

FLAS Presents: Calavera con Calavera

Fundación Latino Americana de Acción Social (FLAS) presents Calavera con Calavera at Miller Outdoor Theatre. The performance celebrates the Latinx holiday Día de Los Muertos, or Day of the Dead.

FLAS, an organization that works to create a healthier environment for members of the Latinx community, was founded by LGBTQ activist Elia Chino in 1994 to educate folks about HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases.

The organization is partnering with Grupo de Teatro Índigo, a local group of diverse actors, to perform a play about a family and their Día de Los Muertos festivi-

ties. Set in Hacienda Calvario, Venezuela, the Burgos family celebrates the holiday as they reflect on its history and significance. The characters ask themselves the same question: "Where do we go after we die?" As the story progresses, La Catrina (death) roams around and reminds the family of the beauty of life, and that they should take advantage of it.

Tickets to the show are available beginning October 27 at 9 a.m., and there is a limit of four tickets per person. A limited number of tickets will be available on the night of the performance, and masks are highly encouraged. tinyurl.com/yemw9k8k



STAGE

October 1

LGBTQ+ DODGEBALL

The Varsity Gay League starts its fall season this month. People 21+ at all skill levels are encouraged to participate. The fall season, played at Main Street Indoor Soccer, lasts six weeks. tinyurl.com/7vcnujnt



COMMUNITY

October 9

MONTROSE BLOCK PARTY

Pride Houston is scaling down this year's LGBTQ Pride celebration due to COVID-19 concerns. Instead of the annual festival and parade, the organization's Montrose Block Party will be a day filled with concerts, entertainment, vendors, and more. The event is for those 21 and up, and tickets are on sale now. tinyurl.com/2afhc3yc

For a weekly
roundup
of LGBTQ
happenings, visit
www.OutSmart-Magazine.com

NIGHTLIFE

October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

BOHEME'S FAVORITE DRAG BRUNCH

Head over to Bar Boheme every Sunday for its legendary Sunday Funday Drag Brunch with performances by local drag artists Cyn City, Chloe C. Ross, and Angelina DM Trailz, and tunes by DJ Athenz. tinyurl.com/uwbz7yr4

STAGE

October 5

BIG FREEDIA

Big Freedia brings her Big Diva Energy tour to White Oak Music Hall. Dubbed the Queen of Bounce, Freedia is a well-known LGBTQ hip-hop pioneer. Tickets at bit.ly/3aoydV2.



NIGHTLIFE

October 8

BEARADISE

Bears with beards will take over BUDDY'S for a night of go-go dancers and drink specials. The event is free, and includes free parking. tinyurl.com/y2fu8yre

COMMUNITY

October 9

PRIDE BIKE RIDE TO GALVESTON

Pride Bike Ride Houston hosts a long-distance bike ride from Eagle Houston to Rumors Beach Bar in Galveston. Unlike other Pride Ride events, this is a marathon that riders need to be prepared for. tinyurl.com/2xcjzdc3



NIGHTLIFE

October 11

QUEER KOTURE FASHION SHOW

Head downtown to the Ballroom at Bayou Place for the Queer Koture Fashion Show. The National Coming Out Day event will be hosted by Legendary Season 2 star **Gillette Oricci**, and will feature local designers, drag queens, and models. Proceeds benefit local LGBTQ nonprofits. tinyurl.com/wxmkkeym

COMMUNITY

October 15

LGBTQ+ COVID VACCINATION DRIVE

Houston's LGBTQ bars, businesses, and organizations come together to host recurring COVID-19 vaccination events. The October event occurs at Tony's, where attendees will be given free Moderna or Pfizer shots. tinyurl.com/45t4ys46



COMMUNITY

October 30

THE WOODLANDS PRIDE FESTIVAL 2021

The Woodlands Pride's annual LGBTQ celebration at Town Green Park features performances, vendor tents, and more. Masks and vaccines are encouraged for all attendees. tinyurl.com/ywk7rncw

COMMUNITY

October 30

12TH ANNUAL EQUALITY BRUNCH

The Houston LGBTQ Caucus hosts its twelfth annual Equality Brunch presented by Mayor Sylvester Turner at The Houston Club. Because the pandemic is still ongoing, this year's theme is 'Maskquerade' and guests are encouraged to wear outfits with matching masks. Tickets at thecaucus.org/event/equality-brunch



October 9
Pride Bike Ride
to Galveston

More QUEER THINGS TO DO →

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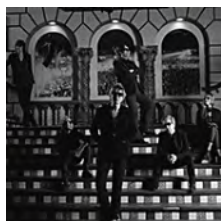
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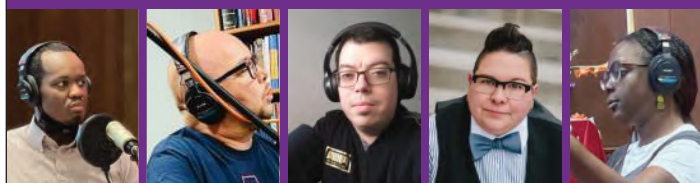
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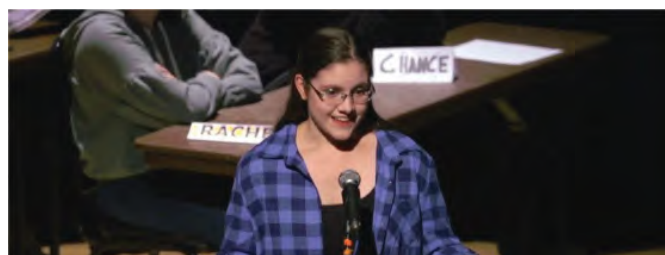


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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

QUEER THINGS to DO

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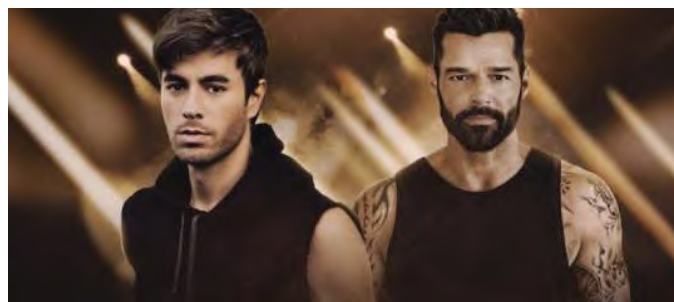


COMMUNITY

November 4

COMING OUT MONOLOGUES

The UH LGBTQ Resource Center is hosting the Coming Out Monologues, a chance for LGBTQ students to share their own stories and experiences. The submission deadline is October 3 for the November 4 performance. tinyurl.com/3fy5srts



STAGE

November 5

ENRIQUE IGLESIAS AND RICKY MARTIN

Enrique Iglesias and Ricky Martin are live in concert at the Toyota Center, with special guest Sebastián Yatra. Ricky Martin, a gay artist, came out in 2010. tinyurl.com/j8baecyv



COMMUNITY

November 23

ANNUAL TGIVING DRIVE-THRU CELEBRATION

The Montrose Center presents its annual TGiving Drive-Thru Celebration. The drive-thru potluck provides transgender community members with a chance to celebrate Thanksgiving during COVID-19 in a safe way. Attendees will be given pre-packaged meals, fun care bags, handwritten holiday cards, and more. tinyurl.com/22uy2dxf

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Zachari Logan, *Thistles*, from *Eunuch Tapestries*, 2016. Pastel on black paper, 59 x 95 inches.

Zachari Logan Come Eat My Pleasant Fruits

Drawings and ceramics by this master artist and poet, based in Canada and exhibited world wide, evolving a visual language that explores intersections between identity, memory and place. Engaging empirical explorations of landscape, figuration, and overlapping art-historic motifs, Logan re-wilds his body as an expression of queerness.

Stop the Hate. Be Heard.

The FBI has started prioritizing hate-crimes reporting.

By MARENE GUSTIN

According to a recent FBI report from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, 2020 was the worst year for hate crimes in the U.S. since 2008. The agency reported 7,759 hate crimes last year, and roughly 20 percent of the victims were targeted for their sexual orientation, compared to about 17 percent in the previous year.

It was also one of the deadliest years ever for transgender people, who now account for one out of every 1,000 murders in the U.S. Texas saw 18 trans murders, which was second only to Florida's 20 trans murders. There was also an increase in hate crimes against Asian American Pacific Islanders, and more Black people were the victims of police brutality.

But that may not even be the entire picture. "Because the UCR Program is voluntary, it's hard to get the whole picture," says Torrence White, a Supervisory Special Agent (SSA) in Houston's FBI office. "Sometimes an assault may just be reported as an assault, and not a hate crime."

The U.S. has a complex patchwork of state and federal hate-crime laws, which leads to inconsistent law-enforcement training and reporting on the scope of the problem, according to the Movement Advancement Project (MAP), an organization that tracks the progress of pro-LGBTQ policies nationwide.

Only around half of U.S. states require law enforcement to collect and analyze hate-crime data, while four states and Washington, DC track the data but aren't required to report it, MAP found.

The FBI has been tracking and investigating hate crimes since Congress passed the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 in an effort to provide information to local law enforcement and the media, and to let victims of hate crimes know they are not alone. Hate-crime bias categories now include both sexual orientation and gender identity.

"The 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act gave us more leeway and the ability to protect people's civil rights from hate crimes, as well as more training for law enforcement and education



for the public," says Special Agent White. He also notes that the UCR is reporting more hate crimes because people are more open about their sexual orientation today, and are more willing to come forward.

The FBI, for its part, is also becoming more inclusive, as evidenced by the Pride flag that flew at its headquarters during June Pride Month this year.

"Hate crimes are the top priority within the FBI's civil-rights program, due to the devastating impact these types of crimes have on communities. One act can terrorize entire communities and groups of people," says FBI Associate Deputy Director Jeffrey Sallet. During June Pride Month, Sallet announced the nationwide effort to build public awareness of hate crimes and encourage reporting to law enforcement. "There's simply no place in this country for hate and intolerance. We in the FBI stand ready to use all the tools at our disposal to reduce the threat of hate crimes and fulfill our mission to protect every American."

The FBI is the lead investigative agency for criminal violations of federal civil-rights statutes. The Bureau works closely with its local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement partners in many of these cases, even when federal charges are not pursued. The FBI also

works to detect and prevent incidents through law enforcement training, public outreach, and partnerships with community groups.

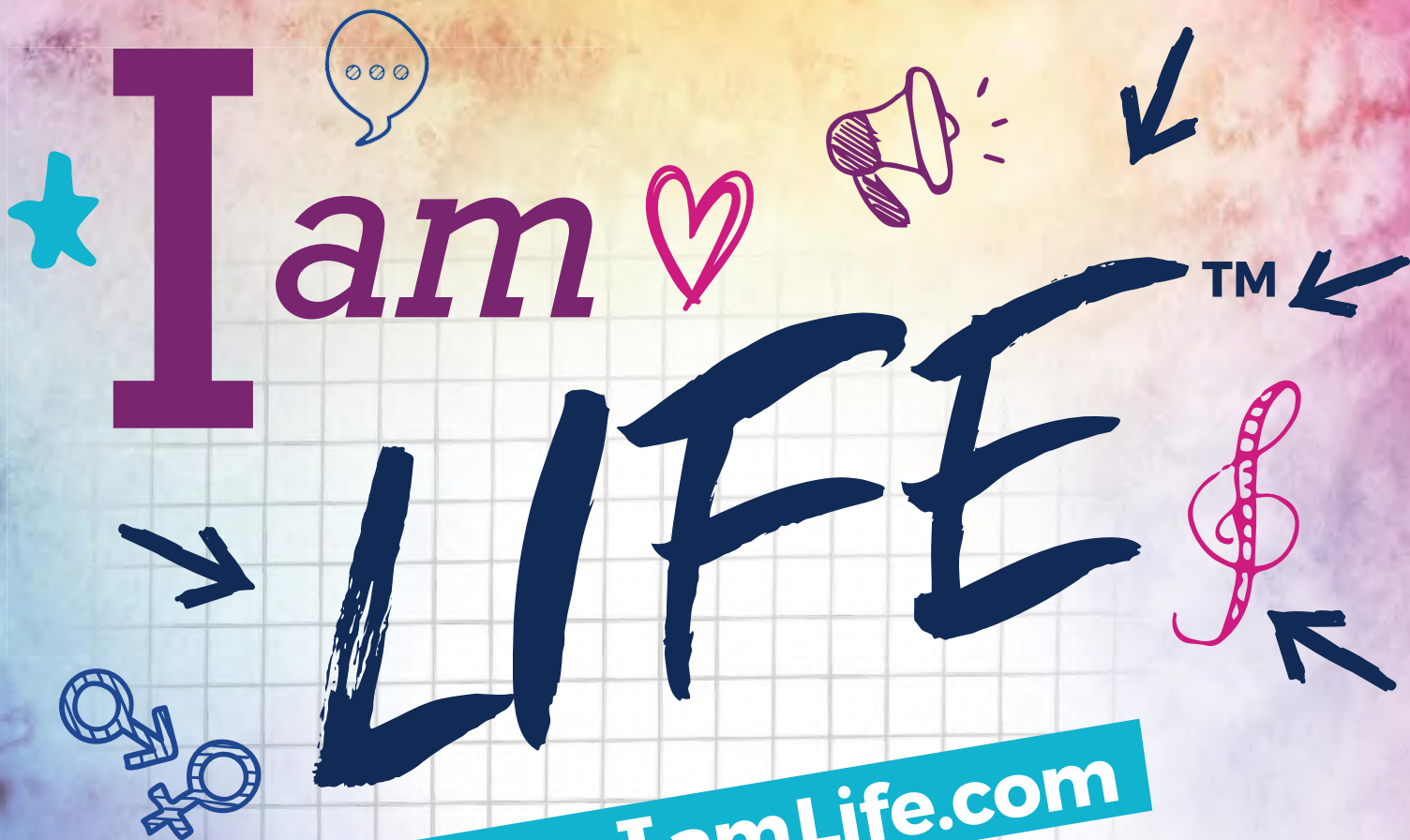
The FBI defines a hate crime as "a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity." But to prove a hate crime, officials must prove that the crime was motivated by that bias. Because witnesses are often hesitant to come forward, the Bureau has made its new public campaign a priority this year, according to White. "We are investing a lot of resources to reach out with the Stop the Hate, Be Heard campaign."

For the LGBTQ community, that means seeing ads (like the one in this publication) and getting involved in the FBI's work with local LGBTQ organizations on educational programs.

"We still need to educate the community and our own people," White emphasizes. "Everyone needs to know that we are here, and that they can bring these crimes to our attention."



If you believe you have been a victim of (or a witness to) a hate crime, report it to the FBI by calling 1-800-CALL-FBI or submitting a tip at tips.fbi.gov. You may remain anonymous.



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Major Support

Lil Nas X is using his debut album to raise funds for two local LGBTQ organizations.

By STAFF REPORTERS

The openly gay rapper Lil Nas X dropped *Montero* on September 17. In advance of the album's release, he sported a controversial pregnancy belly on social media and launched a "baby registry" that encouraged fans to donate directly to over a dozen human-rights nonprofits—including Houston's The Normal Anomaly Initiative and the Organización Latina de Trans en Texas (OLTT).

"Me and my team have set up a 'baby registry' for many charities if you guys would like to donate," he tweeted on September 7.

The artist's registry features the titles of his album's 15 songs, each paired with one or two organizations to support. The songs are now available for streaming on YouTube, where listeners can also find links to each of his matched charities.

Lil Nas X's song "One of Me ft. Elton John" was paired with OLTT, an organization that provides resources and support to transgender people in Houston and beyond. "Life After Salem" highlights The Normal Anomaly Initiative, a local nonprofit that helps Black LGBTQ people "overcome barriers, end stigma and problematic narratives to actualize a new normal."

"We are so excited and truly humbled," Normal Anomaly leaders wrote on Facebook. "What are y'all getting on the Montero baby registry?"

TMZ reports that Lil Nas X's *Montero* album has already raised over \$100,000 for charity.



For more information on each organization or to donate, visit welcometomontero.com/babyregistry.

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The Saga Continues

Our broken electrical grid follows us into another cold winter.



Winter is coming. I promise. Soon you'll be able to get pumpkin-spiced tire rotations at the Jiffy Lube.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that Texas does not have enough electricity for it to get cold and keep you warm. Last winter, after we froze in the dark for days, Governor Abbott promised to fix ERCOT. So when he was asked if he would finally fix our electrical grid during the Texas Legislature's *third* special session this year, he basically said "No, but I can ban abortion!"

Ya know, that's not working for me.

Early last month, we had a baby hurricane. Baby Nicholas glanced off the south side of Houston, and 400,000 homes and businesses lost electricity.

Wait a minute. Wait just a damn minute. We call ourselves "The Energy Capital," but large swaths of the area were without electricity for days because a weak hurricane skirted by us?

The scariest four words in Texas: "We're gonna have weather."

I guess we could all move to Oklahoma, where they have plenty of infrastructure that survives in cold weather. The downside is that we'd be living in Oklahoma. There's only a slight difference between dying in Texas and living in Oklahoma.

If we don't act quickly, we may have to give up the name Energy Capital, because that's just a bouquet of manure unless we can do something about our whoopee-pillow lack of reliable energy.

To help out our clueless government officials, I've come up with some ways to save energy for a good cause. Not just electricity, but any damn type of energy. Remember: we all have to sacrifice.

- Learn to love cold Tex-Mex food.
- Whenever the Astros are ten runs ahead, we call the game, make everybody go home, and turn out the lights.
- Forget the Alamo.
- Wear a 7-gallon hat instead of a 10-gallon one.



- Don't Mess with Texas thermostats.
- Four words: Windmill-powered Halloween costumes.
- Limit two-stepping to only one step.
- Limit disco fever to disco with a normal temperature.
- Set all barbeque grills to 78 degrees max.
- Turn off bedroom AC, sleep with both legs hanging out.
- Put beans in your chili.
- Feed politicians jalapeños so their bullshit comes out hot.

If you're like me, you are pretty damn pissed off at people who won't get a vaccine or wear a mask. They are the only thing keeping us locked up right now, where we are suffering from glittering, catastrophic ennui.

Since the QAnon people are always telling us to "do your research," I finally did mine. What I discovered is that a surefire way to

die from COVID is to be a loony radio talk-show host or politician who preaches against the vaccine. It's kinda like Justice and Karma getting married and having a baby.

The latest unfortunate death was a classic. (It seems like every day there's a new one, especially in Florida.) A political fundraising group was started in Florida to support candidates who oppose vaccines. Because they are a political group, they have to file reports with the Federal Elections Commission on who donated to them and how they doled out the money. But they couldn't do that last month because their treasurer died. Of COVID.

Get your damn shot.

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

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

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

(bik-TAR-vee)

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.

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

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

BEFORE TAKING BIKTARVY

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- ▶ Have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis infection.
- ▶ Have any other health problems.
- ▶ Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if BIKTARVY can harm your unborn baby. Tell your healthcare provider if you become pregnant while taking BIKTARVY.
- ▶ Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed. HIV-1 can be passed to the baby in breast milk.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

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

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

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

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

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

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

HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- ▶ Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
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See Hugo's story at [BIKTARVY.com](https://www.biktarvy.com).

Featured patient compensated by Gilead.

Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and visit [BIKTARVY.com](https://www.biktarvy.com).



From Awareness to Action

How to create change after acknowledging the importance of mental health.

October is Mental Health Awareness Month—an opportunity to have some focused conversations about mental-health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and substance-use disorders. Ultimately, these conversations should inspire us to work toward breaking down silence and dismantling the shame and stigma that keep so many from seeking mental-health care.

But while promoting *awareness* of mental health is certainly an important step, actually creating wellness is impossible without meaningful action.

Mindful Minds Are Happier Minds

Mental health isn't only about engaging in therapy or taking an antidepressant medication. Although these can certainly be vital components of an active mental health and wellness strategy, they work even better when combined with a lifestyle that includes mindful reflection and attention to healthy habits.

Although your electronic devices can sometimes be an unwelcome and unhealthy distraction, that technology can also help you reconnect with yourself. Apps like Headspace or Calm teach the skills and practice of meditation in the quiet of your own home. Smart watches can prompt you to take a minute to simply breathe. If you don't have a smartphone or watch, don't worry—a good old-fashioned alarm clock works just as well to remind you to take a moment and pause during your busy day. Use your lunch hour or break times to eat *and* to recharge—it can help make the afternoon go by much more smoothly.

Sleep Hygiene 101

If insomnia is an issue, practicing good sleep hygiene can help you to fall and stay asleep. For starters, using your bedroom for activities other than slumber and sex can inadvertently train the brain to stop associating your bed with sleep. Avoid eating, reading, or watching television in bed to start breaking out of your



old sleep patterns.

Establish a consistent sleep schedule and bedtime routine. Even though it might be hard at first, setting a consistent bedtime will help ensure adequate rest. As part of your bedtime routine, consider a cup of hot decaf tea before brushing your teeth. Limit your time on electronic devices, since the blue light from your phone or tablet can disrupt your circadian rhythm.

If these strategies aren't helpful, google 'sleep meditation' to find videos or podcasts that can help calm your mind as you wind down. There are literally hundreds of videos that serve as sleep aids. Maybe the sound of a babbling brook or ocean waves works best for you. If the sounds of nature aren't your thing, then try guided meditation that focuses on your breath, or scans the body for areas of

tension to release. While it may take some trial and error to find the right combination of sleep aids that help you to relax into sleep, the payoff can definitely be worth it. Also, if waking up in the middle of the night is your challenge, having one of those podcasts queued up and ready to play can mean the difference between being up for 20 minutes or 2 hours.

Choosing Healthy Habits

In some circles, COVID-19 has come to refer to the amount of weight gained during several months of pandemic living. We've also seen dramatic increases in alcohol and drug use as temporary escapes during this period. With our decreased feelings of safety and comfort in navigating public spaces, we've become reluctant to return to the gym or to our group workouts.

Stress-eating has become a feel-good distraction in these uncertain times. Choosing a healthier diet and increasing activities like walking can reduce overall stress levels. Alcohol can worsen depression and anxiety, so monitoring your intake—and the impact it has on your mood—could be an important first step in determining if your drinking is a problem.

And don't forget to seek out and try hobbies, both old and new. These times of pause are opportunities to discover activities that can improve your sense of self and create connections with others. What activity can you try this month?

Seeking Help

If you have tried some of these simple strategies and they just don't seem to be doing the trick, seeking professional help is the next logical step. Developing a solid working relationship with a therapist or psychiatrist could be the best way to move from mental-health awareness to action this month.

"WHILE PROMOTING AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH IS CERTAINLY AN IMPORTANT STEP, ACTUALLY CREATING WELLNESS IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT MEANINGFUL ACTION."

Frankly, you don't have to wait until a time of crisis in your life to seek mental-health treatment. Some of the most important work you can do with a therapist or counselor takes place during times of relative calm, since your mental energy can be devoted to reflection and deeper work. Plus, it's a good practice to be in therapy consistently so that when times of crisis do occur (as they will for all of us), you won't have to wait one to three months to get in to see a provider.

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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- Easton Santos

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Financial Planning for Singles

Achieving your savings goals may be easier than you think.



You may be surprised to learn that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 50 percent of U.S. adults are single. In fact, there is even a National Singles Day celebrated each year in September. Regardless of whether you're single by choice or by circumstance—such as divorce or death of a spouse or partner—planning your finances will be primarily up to you, so now is the time to get started.

Last month in this column, I discussed how to protect yourself by managing risks. This month, I will discuss various ways to fund yourself. The good news is that finding the proper financial tools and strategies could be easier than you may think, provided that you obtain the right advice. Because everyone's goals are different, though, there isn't just one method that will work to pursue your short- and long-term objectives.

Strategies to Consider

Maxing Out Employer-Sponsored Retirement Plan(s) – One strategy for giving your savings a boost is to participate in and to contribute the maximum annual amount to your workplace retirement plan, where possible. Employer-sponsored retirement plans in many cases offer an employer match. This is “free” money.

Your employer's retirement savings plan may offer two IRA options: traditional and Roth. With a traditional plan, the contributions will typically go into the account on a pre-tax basis. This means that you'll be taxed on a lower amount of income for the years when you contribute, as your contributions will lower your taxable income. The earnings that take place in a traditional retirement account grow tax-deferred, meaning that there is no tax due on the gains until the time of withdrawal. This can provide the opportunity to compound the returns, especially in comparison to a fully taxable account (with all other factors being equal).

Even though you'll have the tax-related incentives during the “accumulation” phase of a traditional IRA account, Uncle Sam will eventually want his money. So know that 100 percent of your future withdrawals will be taxed at your then-current income-tax rate (on the pre-tax contributions and growth), and you must begin taking distributions at age 72.

Roth IRA accounts work a bit differently. In this case, the contributions go in after-tax. But the growth that takes place in the account, as



well as the future withdrawals, are all tax-free. This can provide you with more net spendable income down the road. There are also no required minimum distribution rules associated with Roth retirement accounts.

In some cases, investors may not be eligible to open a Roth IRA due to the income limits. However, by working with a financial professional who is well-versed in IRA strategies, there are methods that could be used for participating in a Roth account.

Participating in a Deferred Compensation Plan – If you have access to a deferred compensation plan through your workplace, this can also help you put away more funds for the future. Deferred compensation plans withhold a portion of an employee's pay until a specific date, such as retirement.

Funding and Maintaining an Emergency Account – Being single means that if you run into an expensive emergency—like a leaky roof or a fender bender—the cost to repair or replace will oftentimes fall solely on you. That's why setting up an emergency fund is essential. This can avoid having to put these unexpected expenses on a high-interest credit card, and/or dipping into accounts that are earmarked for other things, like retirement. Many financial-

planning professionals recommend that you keep between three and six months of living expenses in your emergency fund, and that you keep the money in a “safe” liquid savings or money-market account where it won't be affected by stock-market volatility.

Setting Up Target Accounts for Certain Goals – If you are saving for a specific big-ticket item, such as the down payment on a home, setting up a “target” account can help. Here, too, you will usually want to keep these funds in a lower-volatility account like a savings or money-market account, particularly if these funds are intended for shorter-term goals. If you are saving for a house, you could fund this account with an amount that would match your future mortgage payment. This will help you “practice” being a homeowner as you figure out if this cash flow will be comfortable for you.

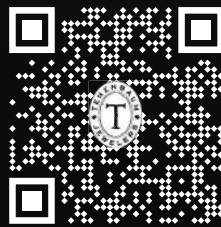
Opening a Life Insurance Retirement Plan (LIRP) – A LIRP, or Life Insurance Retirement Plan, is becoming a popular way for people to access funds in the future on a tax-free basis. Using a certain type of permanent life-insurance policy, the cash value from a LIRP

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



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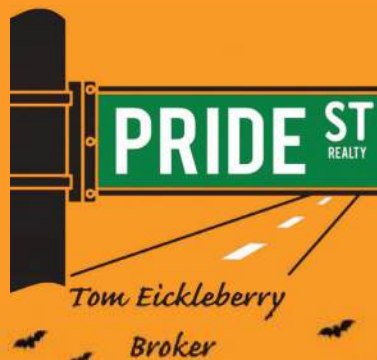
MONEYSMART | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

may be accessed via a tax-free loan rather than a taxable withdrawal. This loan can then be “repaid” using the death-benefit proceeds in the future. Life-insurance retirement plans can have several “moving parts,” though, so it is best to discuss your specific goals with a professional who is well versed in insurance strategies and can help design the right plan for you.

Planning for the Future

As a single person, having a secure financial plan is a major component in attaining and maintaining a fabulous singles lifestyle, so it's important to work with a qualified, experienced financial-planning professional—and ideally one who focuses on planning for the LGBTQ community.

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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Dr. Jonatan Gioia

The queer Latinx HIV researcher and activist fills us in on his latest work.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

What was your journey to becoming a researcher and activist?

Since I was a little kid, I always knew I wanted to change the world. Once I embraced my queer identity, I understood that one of my missions in life was helping other folks be able to be themselves. My mantra is 'Be yourself, embrace who you are, and let's make the world a better place together.'

Tell me about the projects you're currently involved with, and the roles you play in them.

I always say I wear many hats. Between 8 and 5, I'm an HIV clinical program manager for the Houston HIV/AIDS Research Team at UT Health, [where] I oversee the implementation of HIV prevention research. I'm also the president of Latinx Outreach and Understanding Division (LOUD), an affinity group for the AIDS Healthcare Foundation. Our mission is to motivate, advocate, and educate the Latinx community by hosting events and supporting other [groups that are doing their own] community events. I'm also a member of the HIV Latino Task Force.

What is the HPTN 091 'I Am' study, and how can people get involved?

It's an intervention that tries to enhance health care for transgender women. We want to prove that it's better to be able to provide diverse healthcare services (such as gender-affirming hormone therapy and HIV prevention medicine) in one place, rather than having those services scattered around the city. This intervention also connects trans women to other trans women who work as peer navigators to help them get linked to other resources that they may need for employment, housing, and mental health.

HIV prevention focuses not only on new medications, but also on new strategies. The fact that we are able to build these great safe spaces for trans women, and also hire them to be the voice of this study, is amazing. People can [learn more] by visiting iamstudy.org and reach out to us at iamstudy@uth.tmc.edu.

Tell me about the HPTN 094 study, also



FRANK HERNANDEZ

known as Project Integra.

This study aims to help people who inject drugs, and specifically opiates such as heroin or fentanyl. We are testing the ability to provide them with HIV prevention and treatment services, plus treatment for Opioid Use Disorder, in the setting of a mobile research unit. The mobile unit goes into "hot spots" in the city where we know there are many opiate overdoses, and we provide people with free treatment and linkage to care. [UTHealth] is the only site in the South for both the HPTN 091 and 094 trials, so it's important to us to be able to put Houston at the forefront of HIV prevention research. People can contact our hotline directly at 832-422-6604 or email integrahouston@uth.tmc.edu.

What is your LOUD outreach group currently working on?

LOUD has had an amazing year. We started the Houston chapter in 2020, [and even though] we were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, we were still able to help a lot of organizations in

the community. This year we were able to have our first [in-person] community mixer. We also hosted a back-to-school backpack and school supplies drive, provided HIV testing while partnering with local Loteria events, distributed pantry items in the community, and helped some people who were released by ICE at the border. We did a graphic campaign to raise COVID-19 vaccination awareness among the Spanish-speaking community, themed "Y tu, ¿por quien te vacunas?" (Who do you get vaccinated for?).

Hopefully, by the end of the year we'll be able to bring back Juntxs, a queer Latin festival that started back in 2019 while I was part of Impulse Group Houston. We're planning a big celebration of life for World AIDS Day. There's a lot coming, and we're always looking for people who want to volunteer and have a positive impact on the Latinx community. For more info, visit linktr.ee/SomosLOUD or reach out directly to me.

Outside of your activist work, what do you like to do for fun?

Biking. I enjoy putting on my headphones and listening to some Kylie Minogue while rolling around the city. I also love going to the Menil park with a good book, and exploring new breweries in the city.

Where are some of your favorite spots to hang out?

West Alabama Ice House and the amazing taco shop next to it—Tacos Tierra Caliente, which has some of the best tacos in town. I love going to the Buffalo Bayou Brewery to get some beer and see the view of the skyline. I also have a fascination with Kura Revolving Sushi Bar, the Menil Museum's park, and the Museum of Natural Science.

Finally, where can people keep up with you?

The best way to find me is to slide in my DMs. If you need PrEP, want info about clinical trials, or are interested in volunteering, reach out to me on Instagram @jonatangio or via e-mail to Jonatan.E.Gioia@uth.tmc.edu. I'm always happy to support my community!



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An Island Adventure

Pride Bike Ride sets out for Galveston.

By CONNOR BEHRENS

When all is said and done, a group of LGBTQ cyclists will have traveled more than 50 miles on an hours-long trek from downtown Houston to Galveston Island.

The journey, scheduled to start at 7 a.m. on October 9 at Eagle Houston, is just the latest event from Pride Bike Ride Houston, a social bike-riding organization that began in 2018.

The idea for Pride Bike Ride Houston started after organizer David Loredo saw no LGBTQ representation in any of the biking groups downtown.

“Cycling is so big in Houston now,” he says. “There are so many different groups, but there was no representation for us. I wanted to create a safe, judgment-free zone for the LGBTQ+ community.”

Loredo, who has been a cyclist for about 10 years, was surprised at the amount of interest when he started the group.

“We started off with just five people in the first six months,” he says. “We are now averaging 50 to 75 bikers when we do our rides. When we have our big events, we usually see 200-plus. I have been so humbled by the response I have gotten. I am so thankful for our members, my friends and family for all of their support. This group would not exist without their love and support.”

Loredo believes the interest in cycling comes from the sense of freedom it gives people. “That is definitely a big part of it. When you are riding outside, you are invigorated. You feel empowered. It creates a great sense of joy.”

He hopes that the positive motivation will continue when the group makes their biggest trek yet by traveling all the way to Galveston.

“This is a big deal,” he says. “We need this kind of representation as part of the LGBTQ+ community. I want the world to know that our community is as strong as anybody else’s. I want the world to know that we can do this trip.”

Loredo would love for his cyclists to gain that badge of honor by participating in this milestone event. “I want them to get the most



out of this. I want them to feel great, confident, healthy—just overall motivated. And when we do it again, I want them to bring their friends who think they can’t do it, and show them that they can do it, too.”

And beyond their regular cycling events, the group has also helped local nonprofits and small businesses by donating and raising money to shine a spotlight on worthy causes.

“During the pandemic, we were jokingly calling ourselves the Pride Bike Ride Stimulus Package because we were going to mom-and-pop shops to help with their revenue,” he says. “I felt in my heart that was the least we could do. Why not open the door and get involved with our local community?”

Likewise, the support that businesses have shown his group has made Loredo incredibly grateful. “For example, Eagle Houston has been amazing to us. They have allowed us to make their bar our home base for each ride. The management and staff have been overwhelmingly supportive of our group. I am just so grateful for them.”

When it comes to the future, Loredo has his eyes set on growing the group and bringing on

anyone who is willing to ride. “I want everyone to come out, bring their friends, bring their allies, bring their loved ones, and get a taste of Houston with us at a Pride Bike Ride. I am very excited for the future. We are definitely a force to be reckoned with. People know who we are now, and they embrace us and support us.”

For those who are nervous about riding with a large group of people during the pandemic, Loredo notes that the group is being cautious. “Before COVID-19, we would ride every Tuesday. Now we do rides every other week. That way, if anyone gets sick or exposed, it gives people ample time to respond to the virus and make sure they are safe.”

Given how freeing cycling can be, Loredo wants to keep this group going for as long as he can.

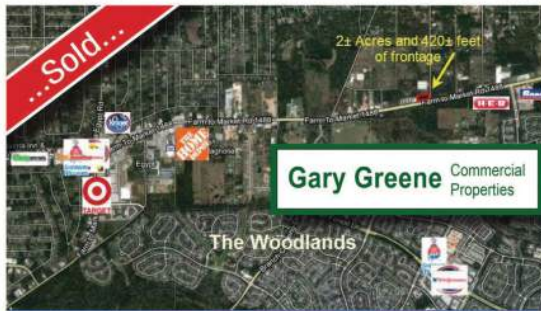
“This is a very good, positive movement,” he says. “Being the creator of the group and knowing I am spreading this kind of happiness and freedom and enjoyment, why not keep on doing it and keep on growing it?”



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Important Facts About DOVATO

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

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

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

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

For more information about side effects, see “What are possible side effects of DOVATO?”

What is DOVATO?

DOVATO is a prescription medicine that is used without other HIV-1 medicines to treat human immunodeficiency virus-1 (HIV-1) infection in adults: who have not received HIV-1 medicines in the past, or to replace their current HIV-1 medicines when their healthcare provider determines that they meet certain requirements. HIV-1 is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It is not known if DOVATO is safe and effective in children.

Who should not take DOVATO?

Do not take DOVATO if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine that contains dolutegravir or lamivudine.
- take dofetilide. Taking DOVATO and dofetilide can cause side effects that may be serious or life-threatening.

What should I tell my healthcare provider before using DOVATO?

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

- have or have had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have kidney problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. One of the medicines in DOVATO (dolutegravir) may harm your unborn baby.
 - Your healthcare provider may prescribe a different medicine than DOVATO if you are planning to become pregnant or if pregnancy is confirmed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
 - If you can become pregnant, your healthcare provider may perform a pregnancy test before you start treatment with DOVATO.
 - If you can become pregnant, you and your healthcare provider should talk about the use of effective birth control (contraception) during treatment with DOVATO.
 - Tell your healthcare provider right away if you are planning to become pregnant, you become pregnant, or think you may be pregnant during treatment with DOVATO.

- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take DOVATO.**
 - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
 - One of the medicines in DOVATO (lamivudine) passes into your breastmilk.
 - Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

Some medicines interact with DOVATO. Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.

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

What are possible side effects of DOVATO?

DOVATO can cause serious side effects, including:

- See “What is the most important information I should know about DOVATO?”
- **Allergic reactions.** Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with DOVATO. Stop taking DOVATO and get medical help right away if you develop a rash with any of the following signs or symptoms: fever; generally ill feeling; tiredness; muscle or joint aches; blisters or sores in mouth; blisters or peeling of the skin; redness or swelling of the eyes; swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue; problems breathing.
- **Liver problems.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during treatment with DOVATO. Liver problems, including liver failure, have also happened in people without a history of liver disease or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following signs or symptoms of liver problems: your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice); dark or “tea-colored” urine; light-colored stools (bowel movements); nausea or vomiting; loss of appetite; and/or pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area.
- **Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Too much lactic acid is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms that could be signs of lactic acidosis: feel very weak or tired; unusual (not normal) muscle pain; trouble breathing; stomach pain with nausea and vomiting; feel cold, especially in your arms and legs; feel dizzy or lightheaded; and/or a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Lactic acidosis can also lead to severe liver problems,** which can lead to death. Your liver may become large (hepatomegaly) and you may develop fat in your liver (steatosis). Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the signs or symptoms of liver problems which are listed above under “Liver problems.”
- **You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or severe liver problems if you are female or very overweight (obese).**
- **Changes in your immune system (Immune Reconstitution Syndrome)** can happen when you start taking HIV-1 medicines. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that have been hidden in your body for a long time. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you start having new symptoms after you start taking DOVATO.

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DLLADV210014 March 2021
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DOVATO is a complete prescription regimen to treat HIV-1 in adults who have not received HIV-1 medicines in the past or to replace their current HIV-1 medicines when their doctor determines they meet certain requirements.

*As compared with 3- or 4-drug regimens.

Taking DOVATO

Compensated by ViiV Healthcare



What are possible side effects of DOVATO? (cont'd)

- **The most common side effects of DOVATO include:** headache; nausea; diarrhea; trouble sleeping; tiredness; and anxiety.

These are not all the possible side effects of DOVATO. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Where can I find more information?

- Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- Go to DOVATO.com or call 1-877-844-8872, where you can also get FDA-approved labeling.

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March 2021 DVT:6PIL

New to treatment? Considering a switch?
Ask your doctor about DOVATO.



A Trip Down Montrose Memory Lane

Walt Zipprian's bus tour recounts the gayborhood's notorious past.

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



When you see a strange open-air bus rolling through the streets of Midtown and Montrose on the weekends this month, playing music and causing a scene, it won't be a gang of boozed-up revelers hell-bent on disrupting the neighborhood. Instead, it will be the Houston History Bus filled with engaged sightseers retracing Montrose's colorful days of yore.

The tour bus is made possible thanks to community-outreach grant money awarded to Catastrophic Theatre co-founder Tamarie Cooper. The theater company is collaborating with Mister McKinney's Historic Houston and gay actor Walt Zipprian, who has deep connections with Montrose and has appeared in several Catastrophic Theatre productions.

Titled *Uncle Walt's X-rated Montrose Ramble and Historical Bus Tour: A Musical*,

the edgy tour for mature audiences will feature Zipprian's personal stories about various locations on the route that are all a part of Houston's LGBTQ history.

"I was one of those old-school gay guys who would hang out at Mary's, Venture-N, and Ripcord. I'd tell these incredibly raunchy stories of my experiences at these bars to freak everyone out, but they were true stories. Tamarie thought my stories were really interesting, which was the inspiration for this production," he explains. "Here's an older gay guy, and the younger gays don't know what it was like growing up during his era. Let's have Walt do these performances."

Of course, the key to this idea was having an open-air vehicle to take audiences to the many locations while minimizing the COVID-19 risk. That's where Mister McKinney and his Houston History Bus fits in by providing a performance-art-on-wheels experience.

Mister McKinney is a Houston historian

who has turned his passion for uncovering the city's past into engaging bus tours that detail the unique character of Houston's historic neighborhoods—and sometimes getting granular with stories particular to each neighborhood or block.

Mister McKinney notes that his funky Houston History Bus has been used for several offbeat tours over the years. "We've had flamenco dancers and mariachis. We've partnered with individual artists before, but this is the first time Mister McKinney's Historic Houston and my Houston History Bus have partnered with a theatrical company. We're hoping more will come from this."

The tour will combine Zipprian's storytelling with live music written by Anthony Barilla, another Catastrophic Theatre regular. Zipprian's personal anecdotes will take priority on the tour, with historical details being presented as sidenotes.

"It's not a traditional bus tour where we

drive by historical landmarks and talk about significant events that happened there. Instead, I talk about my personal stories that happened at these places. It's presented in a weird way—we may sing, or there may be people on the side of the road who interact with us. It will definitely be a different theater experience,” Zipprian explains.

Mister McKinney adds, “I’ve gone on a dress rehearsal, and we ran the route. It’s a lot of fun, and a gift to the LGBTQ community. Walt is bringing to light a fun part of Houston’s history from his perspective, from 1986 onward when he first came to Houston. People will learn a lot about Houston’s past and LG-BTQ history that isn’t often talked about.”

Zipprian, after all, represents a segment of the LGBTQ community that has seen the area evolve through the decades. And with the theater being his “home away from home” for the past 30 years, combining art and history is not a stretch for him. “I was a little gay kid who always acted things out. Theater is a good way to express yourself when you can’t express yourself in your private life. You can do so much as a character. I’ve always been attracted to being someone else, and I’m very dramatic,” he says.

Zipprian mentions a few details about the tour locations, including the site of the old Venture-N on Main Street and the Midtown Spa, just past the site of Clark Gable’s former house. “I used to live near that house, where a bunch of dildos ended up in the gutter,” he adds. The tour also includes more somber notes, like surviving the wave of AIDS cases in the ‘80s and ‘90s. “I’m almost 60. There’s a huge gap [in my group of friends], because most of us died.” Zipprian adds, emphasizing the importance of sharing his experiences.

“I really enjoy telling these stories. It’s a good opportunity for me to get them out to the public and remind people that we old gays are still around. It’s good to be working with my friends again and have those creative juices flowing [after being] so restricted by CO-VID-19. It means a lot to get out and to be doing something again,” he says.

“*Uncle Walt’s X-rated Montrose Ramble and Historical Bus Tour: A Musical* is a nice little perverted piece of Montrose history,” Zipprian concludes. “Find out what Montrose was like before it was gentrified. It used to have a lot more freaks, and it was a lot of fun.”

What: *Uncle Walt’s X-rated Montrose Ramble and Historical Bus Tour: A Musical*

When: October 16, 17, 23 and 24
at 6:00 and 8:00 p.m.

Where: Departs from Sabine Street Bridge,
105 Sabine Street.

Tickets: catastrophictheatre.com

Uncle Walt’s Bus Tour Preview:

Venture-N

“I came here in the late ‘80s on a whim, and because it was on my bus route. I ended up coming to terms with coming out of the closet here. The men I met here taught me that being gay isn’t something to ‘come to terms with,’ or to ‘accept.’ It’s something to *celebrate*, and to take pride in, because it made me special, beautiful, and unique. It made me one of them. This place has a special place in my heart.”



Midtowne Spa

“For me, the sadness was palpable—the desperation, the loneliness. It smelled like poppers and jockstraps. But where the other bathhouses felt like ‘the joy of sex,’ this one felt like the disappointment of a furtive grasping for a connection. Even the orgasms were a letdown.”

Lazy J

“As I was doing my laundry across the street, I thought to myself, ‘That looks like a bar that sells Schlitz beer. If they sell Schlitz, I’m gonna hang out there. They sold Schlitz. They also had drag shows for queens over 50. I saw Wendy Chicago for the first time at this bar.’”

Pacific Street

“Sometimes this was like a county fair to me. When [it was packed] on some nights and all the drag queens and leather queens and drunken queens mingled, it felt like a carnival midway—and all the men were potential rides.”

Ripcord

“They did not like women. Did not like drag queens. Did not like effeminate men. Smelled like pee-pee.”



HOUSTON LGBTQ HISTORY

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Couple Collaborative

Barbara Levine and Paige Ramey's MFAH collection
includes over a century's worth of LGBTQ images.

By **MARENE GUSTIN** | Photo by **DANIELA EDBURG**

Vernacular photography, defined as functional photography (as opposed to fine-art photography), is a term first coined in 1964 by John Szarkowski, director of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art. It can include anything from personal snapshots to mass-produced souvenirs, mugshots, and everything in between.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) is home to an excellent collection of vintage vernacular photographs that includes a significant number of LGBTQ images.

"We acquired an incredible collection of vernacular photographs formed over the course of 30 years by Barbara Levine and Paige Ramey," says Lisa Volpe, MFAH's associate curator of photography. "The collection they built, which MFAH now owns, is spectacular and unique. As lesbians, they felt strongly about including rarely seen images of women, and collected hundreds of images of LGBTQ life. Many of these images were made long before coming out was commonplace. They demonstrate the freedom many people felt in front of the camera that they did not feel out in the world. This perspective makes their collection entirely unique in the world of photography."

Levine and Ramey are a married couple who live and work in both Houston and in the charming Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende. Both are artists and collectors who were introduced by mutual friends three decades ago. Levine considers her collecting to be her art form, but both she and Ramey are also collage artists and have published books such as *Finding Frida Kalho* and *People Kissing: A Century of Photographs*. They also organize art exhibits for Cherryhurst House, the private Montrose home of Dallas McNamara that functions as an art salon hosting exhibitions, performances, and artists in residence. Their collaborative art and curatorial projects can be seen on their website at projectb.com.

The couple spent decades roaming through junk shops and antique stores to find pho-

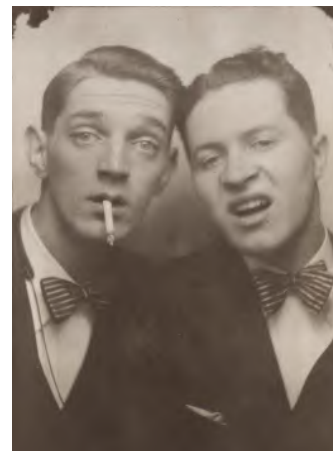


Paige Ramey (l) and Barbara Levine

tographic pieces ranging from postcards to family photos from the 1880s to the 1970s. The MFAH bought the 5,000-piece collection with funds from the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund, and highlighted the photographs in a 2020 exhibit entitled *Photo-Mania: The Levine Ramey Collection of Vernacular Photography*.

"We are fascinated with photography and the significance of it in our daily lives," says Levine. "The photographs and objects in the collection are inspired by our ongoing interest in the intersections of fine art, vernacular imagery, social history, women's history, queer and popular culture—with the unavoidable telling of personal stories."

MFAH describes the collection as encompassing more than just vintage photos of LGBTQ life: "Its major themes [include] African American studio portraits; Mexico and the border; altered and manipulated images; gun culture; science and industry; and sideshow stars and superheroes. Although many items in



Unknown photographer, [Two Men, One with Cigarette], 1940s-1960s, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Barbara Levine and Paige Ramey Collection, museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund



Unknown photographer, [Women Smoking and Drinking Surrounded by Alligators], 1900s-1910s, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Barbara Levine and Paige Ramey Collection, museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund

the collection were originally mass-produced for the public, they have become extremely scarce over time and cannot be found in any other private or public collection. Without vernacular photography and diligent collectors like Levine and Ramey, the story of the history of photography would be incomplete.”

The Phot-Mania exhibit includes a fasci-

nating gelatin silver print from the late 1800s showing suffragettes drinking and smoking with alligators. The viewer can't help but wonder what their lives were like. Also featured is an early 19th-century photo of one of P. T. Barnum's "Circassian" harem girls, Zoe Zobedia, a moss-haired snake charmer.

“We are thrilled the collection has found its

permanent home at the MFAH,” says Levine. “The museum shares our commitment to telling an inclusive history of photography. Images and objects from our collection will be side-by-side with great examples of fine-art photography, inviting the public into a visual dialogue intended to tell the layered story of photography’s history.”

Photos from the collection can always be viewed at the museum, or you can view the collection in full online at emuseum.mfah.org/groups/levine-ramey-collection/results.

“We always include examples from the collection in our second-floor Kinder Gallery,” says Volpe. “Currently, there are more than 20 works from the Levine Ramey Collection on our Portrait Wall. Our next rotation will feature items from throughout the collection. And our Anne Wilkes Tucker Photography Study Center is open to anyone! In that space, visitors can request to see anything from the collection that is not currently on view, including the Levine Ramey Collection. Advance appointments are encouraged, so that we can pull things safely for our guests.”

This is a must-see photographic history of queer life that you won't want to miss.



For more info, visit mfah.org.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART

Paving the Path

Arthur Cordova helped lay the foundation for Latino Pride events in Houston.

By **BRANDON WOLF**

There were many challenges that LGBTQ Latinos faced during the late 20th century, according to Houston native Arthur Cordova. The gay Hispanic man, who worked as an activist from the 1970s through the '90s, remembers dealing with cultural stigma and racism in addition to the usual difficulties of coming out.

"One of our biggest challenges was being accepted," says Cordova, who grew up in a religious household in Houston's East End. "We didn't feel comfortable around our families or in our neighborhoods. So we went out to the bars [in Montrose] to feel welcomed."

But Cordova recalls that Houston's gay bars weren't always a safe space, either. Even as Latino men socialized with other LGBTQ folks, queer people of color experienced segregation and discrimination.

The number of out Latinos was steadily growing during those years, but they lacked a unified voice. Committed leaders like Cordova began to step up during the late 1970s to lay the foundation for Latino Pride events and organizations in Houston.

At that time, Hispanics participated in Houston's LGBTQ community events, but not as an organized group. Cordova remembers attending the 1977 Anita Bryant protest march with his partner, his lesbian sister, and her

partner. "It was a family event," he remembers of the historic protest that started at the Depository II bar, converged on the Hyatt Regency Hotel where Bryant was performing, and ended with a rally in front of the public library.

Later that year, the Hispanic community was outraged over the death of Joe Campos Torres at the hands of HPD officers. Activists Lee Harrington, Steve Shifflet, and Larry Bagneris—all involved in the early days of the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus—began to encourage Hispanic members of the Caucus to organize as a political force.

In 1978, after the announcement of the groundbreaking Town Meeting event at the Astroarena, Bagneris, Cordova, and brothers Ramiro and Gil Marin began to think seriously about forming such a group to participate in the Town Meeting and present the issues that concerned the gay Hispanic community.

Bagneris remembers that the Gay Chicano Caucus was founded in his living room, and he was elected vice president of the new group. Cordova was one of the founding members. The group drafted amendments reflecting Hispanic concerns and presented them at the Town Meeting. Cordova recalls that the only group protesting the meeting was an organization of Hispanic police officers who gathered outside the Astroarena.

In 1978, during the No on Six weekend that raised money to battle California's Proposition Six, the Gay Chicano Caucus sponsored a Gay Chicano Brunch to honor the national leaders who had come to Houston.

In 1979, about a dozen Caucus members attended the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Among them were Cordova and his partner, Richard Orozco, along with Bagneris. "It was life-changing," Cordova says. "We were welcomed and embraced by the larger community."

That same year, Houston's first Pride parade was held. Bagneris headed that first parade committee, and he is being recognized this year as an Honorary Grand Marshal for his work as the father of Houston's Pride parades. →

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Jessica is a high-stakes personal injury attorney with the respected legal team of Sorrels Law. She is proudly one of the few LGBTQ+ personal injury attorneys in Texas, and dedicates her free time to advancing LGBTQ+ legal issues and the community. Jessica is a founding member of the Houston Bar Association's LGBTQ+ and AIDS Outreach committees, Sam Houston State University's Alumni Board of Directors, and SHSU's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Group. Her goal is to change the face of the legal field and eradicate the bias LGBTQ+ victims often face in the judicial system. Jessica prides

herself in being the feared advocate her clients need when the unthinkable happens. She represents families who have lost a loved one or those injured by catastrophic accidents, plant explosions, police brutality, drunk drivers, sexual assault, 18-wheelers, defective products, and medical negligence. She's fluent in Spanish, and you'll often find her on both English and Spanish-speaking news stations advocating for her clients. Congratulations on being voted best female attorney, Jessica! When you need representation without prejudice and with first-hand understanding, call Jessica.

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The Gay Chicano Caucus entered a float in the first parade, which Cordova recalls as having an Aztec theme featuring a large pyramid and an Aztec warrior and princess. He also remembers bottles being thrown at the float as it was being driven down West Gray to the staging area. "That was just part of being out and active," Cordova admits. "It made me feel bad, but participating in the parade and being accepted [there] just made it worthwhile."

Dennis Medina, an early Caucus member, recalls the main issues they addressed were police harassment and discrimination within the community. Hispanics were being unfairly carded at several local gay bars. The organization also screened and endorsed political candidates for office.

The group changed its name to the Gay Hispanic Caucus as it grew larger. Later, it changed names once again to become the Gay & Lesbian Hispanics Unidos.

In the late 1980s, Brad Veloz was elected president of the organization. He had moved to Houston from Washington, DC, and remembered the group from the 1979 March on Washington. During his time in office, the group focused heavily on the AIDS epidemic, dealing with such issues as treatment and housing. The Hispanic AIDS organization, AVES, began as a committee of the Caucus and later

"THE DANCE WAS A CELEBRATION OF BEING ACCEPTED, COMING OUT, AND ACCEPTING ONESELF."

—Arthur Cordova

branched off as a separate entity.

Members were also vocal about the Texas sodomy law. Many of them went to Austin to testify against it, including Linda Morales, whose *Morales v. Texas* lawsuit was challenging the law.

The organization continued to operate through 1995, when it was finally disbanded.

Beginning in the first year of the Gay Chicano Caucus' existence, Cordova was put in charge of organizing an annual fundraiser. For the first three years, a fiesta was held in the Montrose backyard of activist Bill Bridges.

In the fourth year, a decision was made to make the event a dance. Cordova rented a Noche y Dia Ballroom on North Main Street

for the party, but then discovered that no Latin band would play for a gay event. Cordova personally appealed to Rudy Treviño, head of the Texas Tejano Musicians Association, who convinced the Latin Express Band to play for Cordova's first Baile event.

Baile continued to grow, and became the largest indoor Houston Pride event at the time. In addition to the dance, a Mr. and Ms. Baile pageant was held. The event became so popular that the Sheraton ballroom at Astro Village was eventually booked as the venue. Attendance at the pageants averaged 2,000 guests.

"The dance was a celebration of being accepted, coming out, and accepting oneself," Cordova explains. The unique Hispanic event even attracted international guests.

At the 1988 Baile, Cordova was presented with a lifetime-achievement award for his decade of work on behalf of the highly successful fundraising event.

"It was such a surprise," Cordova says, noting that many other activists played a role in nurturing Houston's Latino LGBTQ movement. "There's too many people to acknowledge and say 'thank you' to."

Cordova currently resides in Houston's East End, leading a contented life while keeping in touch with many of the advocates who once worked alongside him.



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Over 30 years in industry experience including multiple board memberships; attest to his capacity to serve an organization. He is also extremely engaged in the local community and continually finding ways to give back. Brooks Ballard sits on the Board of Directors for Combined Arms, and the Houston International Chamber of Commerce. As well as an alumni of Leadership Houston.

In addition, he is a Rotarian, the Chairman of a Military Ball, and has been awarded the EV National Award for Service and Philanthropy. In his free time Brooks Ballard is an avid polo player and member of the Houston Polo Club; He loves his Dobermann, Arian, and his horse Alexander.



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The Queen of Racket Sports

Former racquetball champion
Jan Pasternack's legacy continues.

By **KIM HOGSTROM**
Photo by **ALEX ROSA**

When Jan Pasternack speaks, people listen. While gracious and soft-spoken, her words carry considerable weight from the moment she begins speaking. Somehow, she radiates a strength and charisma befitting her reputation as the queen of American racket sports.

"When I was about eight years old, my dad started taking me with him every Sunday when he played racquetball at Houston's Jewish Community Center," Pasternack recalls. "I would watch him, and then I started knocking balls around. Eventually, a few of the guys noticed me and challenged me on the racquetball court. Then they realized I really could play. I think it surprised them."

Not only was Pasternack still a child when she started, but she was a *female* child. In the early 1970s, there were very few women playing racket sports. Then in 1973, the world shifted on its axis.

Houston's Astrodome hosted the highly publicized "Battle of the Sexes" tennis match between top women's player Billie Jean King, 29, and Bobby Riggs, 55, a former top-ranked men's player. The match was viewed by 60 million people globally, and the groundbreaking King won handily. It was a joyous moment. King, who came out as a lesbian in 1981, remains a "shero" to women everywhere.

Soon after that tennis match, hopeful female athletes entered all manner of sports. Still, Pasternack remained an anomaly. "The women playing racquetball at this time had a different style than mine. For example, they did not utilize the ceiling in shots, but I did. I played a more aggressive game, and it unnerved them. I played 'like a guy.' I have never played for blood, but I've always played to win," she says.



"THE WOMEN PLAYING RACQUETBALL AT THIS TIME HAD A DIFFERENT STYLE THAN MINE. I PLAYED A MORE AGGRESSIVE GAME, AND IT UNNERVED THEM."

—Jan Pasternack

Over the next few years, the Houston native rose to the top in national competitions. By 1980, Pasternack had been playing from coast to coast. She was in her 20s when she put her racket down, but not before securing the title of national two-time Women's Racquetball Singles Champion.

In 1981, the athlete became an entrepreneur and launched her own business called Pack n Send, Inc., a full-service, packing, moving, crating, and shipping company. As one would expect, Pasternack mastered the daunting challenges of specialized shipping worldwide, and the company continues to grow today.

Then a wonderful thing happened. She and some friends were sitting around bemoaning their single status when they had an idea. They threw a party called "The Meet Market" to encourage everyone to find friends and partners. "We weren't sure what would happen. I had a big house so I hosted it, and it turned out to be quite a success. We bought 300 name tags and ran out of them early," she recalls with a smile.

A bright, charming female educator named Renee Tappe attended that Meet Market party and met the host. The two women have now been inseparable for 27 years, and in 2014 they

tied the knot.

A wonderful complement to Pasternack, Tappe shares her wife's sense of humor, gracious manner, and appetite for life. She is also a sports fan, but she does not share Pasternack's fiercely competitive spirit. "I am not now, nor will I ever be, on her level," she admits, laughing.

Tappe points out that when Pasternack stepped away from the court, she did not actually leave sports. Today, at 68, she is an avid biker, swimmer, "and she still works out six days a week."

In 2010, Pasternack fell head over heels for another racket sport—Pickleball. It's the fastest-growing sport in the world and, as one might guess, Pasternack excels at it.

Pickleball is a combination of ping-pong, tennis, and badminton. It is played on a badminton-size court with a paddle that's a little larger than a ping-pong paddle. The fun part is the ball, which has holes in it like a wiffleball and moves through the air with the same hesitant grace.

It did not take long for Pasternack's athletic skills to garner attention on the Pickleball court, and she became the unofficial ambassador of the sport. As the game caught on

globally, she traveled to Japan to share it with the Japanese by playing exposition games throughout the country.

"It made sense. The Japanese care deeply about their elderly, and Pickleball is wonderful exercise and encourages socialization for seniors. In fact, it is great for everyone. We went from town to town in Japan teaching it to people, and they loved it," Tappe proudly notes.

Then in 2018, the couple packed their bags again. This time they went to Spain so Pasternack could compete in the Spanish Open Pickleball Championship in Madrid. Did she place? Do you even need to ask? She secured the gold that year.

There are too many medals in Pasternack's collection to list, but there is one award she holds dear. In 1995, her racquetball fame earned her an induction into the inaugural class of the local Ronnie Arrow Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

"It was a very humbling honor. I'm not sure I deserve it," Pasternack admits. "I'm just honored to be there. Out of all my awards, it's the one I cherish most."



For more info on Jan Pasternack's business, visit pack-n-send.com

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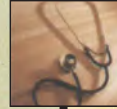
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First, meet **Queen Persephone**, who rules the local drag circuit. **DJ Athenz** loves dance music and knows how to get a crowd going. Radio host **Amir Diamond** shares his unique perspectives on the local airwaves. PE teacher **Pam Straker** empowers kids to live healthy lives, while activist **Tammi Wallace** reflects on five years of nurturing Houston's LGBTQ business owners. If you're looking for a romantic date-night spot, **Brennan's** has got you covered. And check out the Happy Hour at **BUDDY'S** with fan-favorite bartender **Matthew Friar**. The **Houston Gaymers** group

has been keeping queer locals entertained throughout the pandemic, mental-health therapist **Nikita Bowman** helps people tackle tough emotions, and personal trainer **Gian Quiteno** inspires clients to meet their fitness goals. Attorney **Jeff Watters** has doubled down on his commitment to fighting for civil rights. Actor-activist **Stoo** talks trans and nonbinary representation in theater, while **OG 713's** creative owners offer high-quality Houston-themed apparel. Last but not least, wedding officiant **Tiffany Seales** helps engaged couples from all backgrounds tie the knot.



A Goddess for All Seasons

Queen Persephone reigns the local drag scene.

By **SAM BYRD**
Photo by **FRANK HERNANDEZ**



In Greek mythology, Persephone is queen of the underworld. And here in Houston, we have Queen Persephone, who rules the drag circuit as this year's Most Divine

Drag Queen.

Although Queen Persephone has been performing for just over four years, the 27-year-old says that she's been interested in drag for most of her life.

"I feel like I've always been interested in drag. I remember many summers when I would stay at home while my parents were gone to work. I'd put on my mom's dresses and her shoes. I'd jam out to Britney Spears, Janet Jackson, Mariah Carey, and Shania Twain. That was my way of expressing myself as a young gay boy," she says.

That interest in performing has continued to grow ever since, but it took a shakeup in her personal life to prompt the leap into the public spotlight.

"The first time I considered doing drag was after a breakup. I texted a drag queen to see what I would look like with makeup. I went to her house, and she did my makeup. It was beautiful," she recalls. "I felt like myself. I've always been an effeminate man, but being able to express myself in that mirror in that room, I felt a fire inside of me. I held onto that. I never let it go."

Queen Persephone kept her drag alter ego hidden in the closet for a few years, even though she worked at bars like South Beach, JR's Bar & Grill, and Boheme—all places where drag shows are often scheduled. It wasn't until she started working at Hamburger Mary's, a drag-queen-themed restaurant, that she first stepped out on the stage in heels.

"In August 2017, the restaurant held a turn-

about show, and it was for all the employees who had never done drag before. There were 12 of us who competed. I am very competitive, and I took it very seriously," she recalls. "I made a deal with myself that if I won, I would pursue a drag career. If I lost, I would let it go. Well, I won. It was a sold-out house. My whole family was there—my mom and stepdad, my grandmother, brother, sister, nieces, their friends. They were very supportive."

After that emotional rush of commanding the crowd during a burlesque number she had rehearsed for weeks, there was no stopping her. "That was one of the best nights of my life. Standing on the stage, seeing everyone applaud for you. It's a high you can't get anywhere else," she adds.

Since then, the blossoming queen was hired by Rice University and the University of Houston to host charity events, and she's been booked at various pop-up events and parties. She has also worked in Austin and as a host for The Woodlands Pride during its first two years.

When she's not busy dazzling crowds, Queen Persephone has her eyes set on earning a college degree. "Being young and pretty isn't going to last forever," she quips. She is currently a student at Houston Community College, and has plans to transfer to UH's College of Technology in the spring.



Follow Queen Persephone on Instagram at [PersephoneQueenXO](https://www.instagram.com/PersephoneQueenXO).



**MOST
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DRAG
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FAVORITE WINE BAR

Max's Wine Dive

Finalists: 13 Celsius, Bar Boheme, Postino Montrose

BEST DRAG-SHOW BAR

Hamburger Mary's (tie)

ReBar (tie)

Finalists: JR's Bar & Grill, Michael's Outpost,

Pearl Bar, Rumors Beach Bar

FAVORITE BAR TO SHOOT POOL

George

Finalists: Barcode Houston, BUDDY'S,

Ripcord, Tony's Corner Pocket

FAVORITE BAR TO TWO-STEP

Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon

FAVORITE CLUB FOR DANCING

Numbers Night Club

Finalists: Eagle Houston,

Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, Pearl Bar, ReBar

FAVORITE COMMUNITY BAR

BUDDY'S

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

Pearl Bar, Tony's Corner Pocket

FAVORITE MEN'S BAR

Eagle Houston

Finalists: BUDDY'S, George, JR's Bar & Grill,

Michael's Outpost, Tony's Corner Pocket

FAVORITE WOMEN'S BAR

Pearl Bar Houston

Finalists: Buddy's, Neon Boots Dancehall & Saloon, ReBar

FAVORITE STRAIGHT BAR

Bar Boheme

Finalists: Belle Station, Griff's, Max's Wine Dive, The Flat

FAVORITE PLACE TO SHOW OFF YOUR LEATHER

RIPCORD

Finalists: BUDDY'S, Eagle Houston

FAVORITE PLACE TO WATCH MALE DANCERS

Tony's Corner Pocket

Finalists: Eagle Houston, Papi's

FAVORITE LIVE-MUSIC VENUE

White Oak Music Hall

Finalists: Dan Electro's Bar, House of Blues,

Numbers Night Club, Warehouse Live

MOST DIVINE DRAG QUEEN

Queen Persephone

Finalists: Blackberri, Chloe Crawford-Ross,

Angelina DM Trailz, Nyx Laraye, Dessie Love-Blake,

Alexy'eus Paris, Violet S'Arbleu

FAVORITE DRAG KING

Hugh Dandy

Finalists: Damien, Preston Steamed, Ian Syder-Blake →

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BEST NEW RISING-STAR DRAG KING OR QUEEN

Brixlee Coven

Finalists: Kale A'Lily, Sir Debon Aire, Jewel, Preston Steamed

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG) FEMALE ENTERTAINER

Wendy Taylor

Finalists: Brie Kinsey, Morena Roas, Lauren Salazar, Christina Wells

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG) MALE ENTERTAINER

Wesley Whitson

Finalists: Michael Chiavone, Ty Frazier, Sebastian Gutierrez, Travis Webb

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG) NONBINARY ENTERTAINER

Nina Lombardo

Finalists: Attxla, Stoo

FAVORITE LOCAL BAND/MUSIC PRODUCERS

Dirty Disco

Finalists: Attxla, Gndrbndr, Morena Roas, Space Kiddettes

FAVORITE MALE DJ

Jimmy Skinner

Finalists: DJ Eddie E, GNDRBNDR, DJ Joe Ross, DJ Easton Santos, DJ Alex T

FAVORITE FEMALE DJ

DJ Athenz

Finalists: DJ Drea, DJ Krazzy Kris, DJ Tina

FAVORITE DRAG QUEEN DJ

DJ Aracely

Finalist: Lady Bunny

FAVORITE NONBINARY DJ

DJ Melle Mel

Finalist: Hustle Cry

PEOPLE

FAVORITE FEMALE LOCAL POLITICIAN

Lina Hidalgo

Finalists: Ann Johnson, Abbie Kamin, Kim Ogg

FAVORITE MALE LOCAL POLITICIAN

Sylvester Turner

Finalists: Garnet Coleman, Alan Rosen, John Whitmire, Gene Wu

BEST FEMALE LGBTQ BUSINESS PERSON

Julie Mabry

Finalists: Kym Adams, Caryn Craig, Heather J. Taylor, Tammi Wallace →

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Travis Webb

Finalists: Sam Byrd, Joelle Bayya Uzuri

FAVORITE NATIONAL LGBTQ BLOGGER/VLOGGER

Barrett White

Finalists: Sam Byrd, Charlotte Clymer,
Joelle Bayaa Uzuri

FAVORITE MALE (COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY

Amir Diamond

Finalist: Kevin "Special K" England

FAVORITE FEMALE (COMMERCIAL) RADIO PERSONALITY

Sarah Pepper

Finalists: Karah Leigh, Roula

FAVORITE MALE (COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY

Easton Santos

Finalists: Bryan Hlavinka, Jack Valinski

FAVORITE MALE (COMMUNITY) TV PERSONALITY

Ernie Manouse

FAVORITE FEMALE (COMMUNITY) RADIO PERSONALITY

Tiffany Scales

Finalists: Judy Reeves, Chelsea Lerner

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Frank Billingsley

Finalists: Eric Barajas, Blake Matthews, Derrick Shore

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Courtney Zavala

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Pam Straker (tie)

Samantha Pisarski-May (tie)

Finalists: Kay Crayton, Michelle Palmer →



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Music Maker

DJ Athenz's tunes draw in a wide variety of listeners.

By **JENNY BLOCK**

Photo by **FRANK HERNANDEZ**



DJ Athenz has the ultimate job for anyone who loves music and loves to get a crowd going. She is a full-time DJ and producer known in the Houston

area and beyond for her ability to get the party started.

Athenz, 32, is a native Houstonian who attended the University of Houston, majoring in media production with a minor in studio art. "Not to mention, I graduated with honors," she adds.

When she was growing up, she wanted to be an architect, a professional skater, and a rock star. Those big dreams and her big imagination paid off, although becoming a DJ certainly wasn't at the top of her list. "I never looked twice at DJing, as I was so heavily into playing guitar."

But when she realized during her college years that she wasn't really the party type, she decided to be the one who played the music at all of her friends' parties. "It went from me playing my friends' parties to playing warehouse parties to playing small lounges and bars," Athenz recalls. "That's when I knew I had something solid going on, because it just flowed effortlessly."

The award-winning DJ has worked nationally with some pretty heavy-hitting brands, including Vans, Victoria's Secret, Ralph Lauren, Armani, and BMW. Locally, she's a well-loved regular at Pearl Bar and at Pride Houston events. Listeners can enjoy her latest dance mixes on her weekly podcast *Pure Stimulation*. Her repertoire is known for being eclectic and appealing to a wide variety of listeners.

DJ Athenz does not take her success for granted. She considers herself extremely blessed when it comes to her career, and is truly thankful for the opportunities that have come her way.

"From being a radio DJ on Houston's biggest stations to touring with Truth on the final Vans Warped Tour to DJing for the U.S. men's and women's soccer teams, I would say the biggest thing right now in my career is becoming the official DJ for the Houston Texans. As far as what I have coming up, I update my schedule monthly on my website to reflect where I am spinning next, as well as my latest releases," Athenz says.

Her first club gig was in the LGBTQ com-

munity in 2013. "And it instantly felt like home." Every year since then, she has made sure to stay in the loop with her community, "attending and performing at Pride events, clubs, and fundraisers. It gives me great joy to bring light and love through the power of music."

Athenz' favorite part of being a DJ is "connecting souls through the power of music. With everything going on in the world, I feel like for that moment on the dance floor, we are all one. I believe, as a DJ and entertainer, that I have the power to raise people's frequencies and make them feel something."



For more info, visit athenzmedia.com.



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Radio Personality

Amir Diamond connects through the airwaves.

By ZACH MCKENZIE



In spite of doing all he could to resist following in his parents' footsteps and entering the radio business, Amir Diamond eventually landed behind the mic. And

now, nearly 10 years later, his passion for connecting with the community as a visible Black gay radio host has made him one of Houston's favorite radio voices. OUTSMART readers voted him this year's Gayest & Greatest Favorite Male (Commercial) Radio Personality.

"Radio wasn't my first choice; I kinda stumbled into it," explains Diamond, who hosts *The Afternoon Hustle* on KTSU's The Vibe channel. "I went to the University of Houston and majored in English education, but it wasn't for me. Then I decided to try out theater education, and that didn't work. Both of my parents are in radio, and since radio is essentially the theater of the mind, I decided to give it a try. It came natural for me. I have a passion for music and can talk about it for hours," Diamond says.

As the natural entertainer made his moves to rise in the radio world, he knew he was on the right path after Queen B herself gave him a shout-out. As part of a college assignment, Diamond was conducting interviews at an awards ceremony for Beyoncé's mom, Tina Knowles. Diamond spotted Beyoncé and made a "beeline" for the singer. "Everyone was asking for pictures, but I decided to ask for audio. She was like, 'Oh, you a hustler, huh?' She did a drop for me that said, 'You're listening to Amir Diamond—The Hustler.' When Beyoncé called me 'The Hustler,' that let me know I was doing something right."

But the radio business is not always glitz and glam, and Diamond prefers it that way. "My favorite part is getting to learn about other peoples' lives—not just celebrities," he explains. "I have more fun interviewing and



COURTESY

talking to everyday people. I love having callers on my show and talking about something fun—or getting to connect with them if they're having a hard day."

His influence transcends the airwaves and impacts the hearts and minds of his listeners. "Growing up, I felt lost. I had suicidal thoughts and there was nobody that I could look up to as a Black, queer role model. I always wished there were more people in entertainment that were more open with themselves," he admits. "That's always been my dream. I wanted to be that for somebody else. I have parents that message me and tell me that I've helped them be more accepting of LGBT folks. Or their chil-

dren have come out to them and [the parents say] I've helped them to understand the LGBT+ community. It makes me feel good when [queer] kids, teens, and even grown people tell me I'm an inspiration, and that they feel comfortable with their sexuality."

As for the next generation of radio personalities, Diamond encourages them to make moves and be authentically themselves, just like he did. "My advice for someone getting into the industry would be to do things your own way. Don't wait on people to give you the opportunity."



For more info, visit vibehouston.com.

**FAVORITE MALE
COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHER**

Dalton DeHart

Finalists: Gavin Calais, Sebastian Gutierrez,
Steven Tilotta

**FAVORITE FEMALE
COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHER**

Wendy Taylor

Finalists: Andrea Simonton, Yvonne Tran

FAVORITE FEMALE COMMUNITY HERO

Tammi Wallace

Finalists: Katharine Ligon, Julie Mabry, Toni Mascione,
Heather J. Taylor, Fran Watson

FAVORITE MALE COMMUNITY HERO

JD Doyle

Finalists: Christopher Barry, Kennedy Loftin,
Brandon Mack, Jason Rocha, Jovon Alfon B. Tyler

FAVORITE NONBINARY COMMUNITY HERO

Verniss McFarland

Finalist: Mike Webb

FAVORITE TRANS MALE COMMUNITY HERO

Emmett Schelling

Finalists: Dylan Forbis, Sebastian Gutierrez,
Landon Richie, Lou Weaver

FAVORITE TRANS FEMALE COMMUNITY HERO

Dee Dee Watters

Finalists: Kymber Devine, Phyllis Frye,
Atlantis Narcisse, Alexis Nicole Whitney

LEADING FEMALE FUNDRAISER

Chree Boydston

Finalists: Lisa Madry, Sarah Tompkins-Gutierrez,
Sallie Woodell

LEADING TRANS FEMALE FUNDRAISER

Atlantis Narcisse

LEADING MALE FUNDRAISER

Derrick Brown (tie)

Kennedy Loftin (tie)

Finalists: Mario Castillo, Don Gill, Sebastian Gutierrez

LEADING TRANS MALE FUNDRAISER

Emmett Schelling

Finalists: Sebastian Gutierrez, Ian Syder-Blake

LEADING FEMALE ENTERTAINER FUNDRAISER

An' Marie Gill

Finalists: Jessica Fox, Violet S'Arbleu

LEADING MALE ENTERTAINER FUNDRAISER

Sebastian Gutierrez

Finalists: Michael Clayton, Travis Webb

MOST PROMINENT FEMALE ACTIVIST

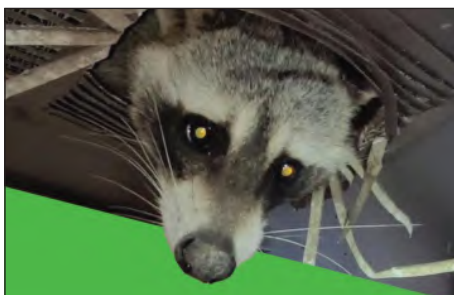
Tammi Wallace

Finalists: Katharine Ligon, Julie Mabry,
Lisa Madry, Fran Watson

MOST PROMINENT TRANS FEMALE ACTIVIST

Dee Dee Watters

Finalists: Joelle Bayaa Uzuri, Atlantis Narcisse →



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MOST PROMINENT NONBINARY ACTIVIST

Mike Webb

Finalists: Joelle Bayaa Uzuri, Verniss McFarland

MOST PROMINENT MALE ACTIVIST

Brad Pritchett

Finalists: Randall Hance, Brandon Mack,
Ashton P. Woods

MOST PROMINENT TRANS MALE ACTIVIST

Landon Richie

Finalists: Dylan Forbis, Emmett Schelling

MOST VALUABLE FEMALE VOLUNTEER

Januari Fox

Finalists: Augie Cahee, Donna Junker,
Christyna Lewis, Angie Tate, Heather J. Taylor

MOST VALUABLE MALE VOLUNTEER

Jim Taylor

Finalists: Don Gill, Randall Hance,
Tom Seymour, Tim Tate

MOST VALUABLE TRANS VOLUNTEER

Landon Richie

Finalist: Emmett Schelling

MOST VALUABLE NONBINARY VOLUNTEER

Kevin Nguyen

Finalist: Darrien Dyrell

REAL ESTATE

BEST MALE REAL-ESTATE AGENT

Brooks Ballard

Finalists: Bryan Cotton, Jeremy Fain, Thomas Phillips,
Danny Pleaseon, Chris Schmidt, Colby Wulf

BEST FEMALE REAL-ESTATE AGENT

Karen Derr (tie)

Debbie Levine (tie)

Finalists: Melissa Murray, LaToya Phillips, Shan Randle

BEST MORTGAGE COMPANY

AmCap Home Loans (Cari Middaugh)

Finalists: Amegy Mortgage, John Frels, Cody Grizzoffi

BEST TITLE COMPANY

Alamo Title Co. (Lyn Sullivan)

Finalists: Chicago Title Inner Loop, Texas American Title

BEST HOME BUILDER

Sabo Custom Builders

Finalists: Jose Ocque, Sandcastle Homes,
ROC Homes, Loyd Russel Homes

BEST HOME REMODELING COMPANY

Heels 2 Hammer

Finalists: Juancho Jimenez, Luria Construction,
Odd Job Fence Co.

FAVORITE RENTAL COMMUNITY

Durham Heights

Finalists: Elan Heights, Elan Memorial Park,
Law Harrington Senior Living Center →



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Let's Get Physical

Pam Straker is a state-recognized PE teacher.

By OLIVIA FLORES ALVAREZ

Photo by CORY MICHAEL FRASIER/CMF STUDIOS

FAVORITE
FEMALE
LGBTQ
EDUCATOR/
TEACHER



It's been a good year for Pam Straker, a PE teacher at Red Bluff Elementary School in Pasadena. Before winning this year's Gayest & Greatest Favorite Female

LGBTQ Educator/Teacher award, she won the 2021 Texas Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance (TAHPERD)'s Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year award.

Chosen from more than 3,000 educators statewide, TAHPERD acknowledged Straker's dedication and leadership, both in the classroom and in the community. The award surprised Straker, who says she sometimes feels like a newcomer to the field even though she's been teaching for more than eight years.

Like all educators, Straker spent the last several months adjusting to online teaching during the pandemic. Working with pre-K to 4th-grade students, Straker found herself having to utilize new tools to reach her kids.

"I jumped in head-first to learn virtual

tools and platforms to reach our students at home," she says. That included conducting workouts via Zoom, starting a PE Facebook group, and taping videos for a YouTube channel. The activities were designed to keep her students active, and to give their families accurate health information.

"My job is to ensure learning in my students through developmental skills, social-emotional learning, and a lifelong love of health and wellness. I try to teach my students that we aren't just here to play a game, but rather that we are learning skills for a lifetime," Straker emphasizes.

And all of that is on top of the challenge of meeting the complex educational and emotional needs of elementary students.

"Our school is in a low-socioeconomic area, and our families struggle in ways that some people may not ever be witness to," she says. "But our school family is fantastic at reaching our students' needs and trying to bridge the gaps that our students face. I consider myself lucky to be a part of such a great school and district."

Working with such young students doesn't give Straker the chance to directly address gender identity or sexual orientation in the classroom. Even if she were open about her sexuality at work, Straker would not welcome being known as "the gay teacher" to either her students or co-workers.

"Being gay isn't my identifier, it's just part of who I am as a whole person. I want people to see me as a good person who cares for others and is funny and cheerful and positive. I can't really say I'm a lesbian or gay or queer or nonbinary, because at times I am all of those or none of those. I'm just a person."

Nevertheless, Straker is happy for her OUTSMART G&G win. "Being recognized as a gay educator in OUTSMART gives both of those words—*gay* and *educator*—a chance to shine together. It allows LGBTQ+ individuals to see that there are teachers who provide a safe place for our students. And it gives teachers courage to be who they are in a place that is, at times, hard-pressed to change."



For more info, visit tahperd.org.

COMMUNITY

BEST POLITICAL ADVOCACY GROUP

Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus

Finalists: Equality Texas, Greater Houston
LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Human Rights Campaign,
Transgender Education Network

FAVORITE LGBTQ PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATION

The Montrose Center

Finalists: Bunnies on the Bayou, Out for Education,
Save Our Sisters

FAVORITE LGBTQ BENEFIT EVENT OF THE YEAR

AIDS Walk Houston

Finalists: Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus Equality Brunch,
Houston Transgender Unity Banquet,
Mint Julep, Out for Good

FAVORITE LGBTQ SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Houston Gaymers

Finalists: Diana Foundation,
Executive & Professional Association of Houston (EPAH),
Hatch Youth, The LGBT Marriage Club

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce

Finalists: Pride Houston, Pride Pantry,
Trans Ally Collective

BEST LOCAL CORPORATE LGBTQ

DIVERSITY GROUP

Chevron PRIDE

Finalists: Accenture, Amegy Bank, MD Anderson, Shell

FAVORITE LGBTQ SPORTS CLUB

Montrose Softball League Association

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

FAVORITE HIV/AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

AIDS Foundation Houston

Finalists: Avenue 360 Health & Wellness,
Legacy Community Health, The Montrose Center,
PWA Holiday Charities, Positive Women's Network

FAVORITE NATIONAL LGBTQ ORGANIZATION

Lambda Legal

Finalists: Human Rights Campaign,
National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce,
Victory Fund

FAVORITE LOCAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

University of Houston

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

FAVORITE PLACE TO TAKE YOUR

OUT-OF-TOWN VISITORS

The Menil Collection

Finalists: Discovery Green, Eagle Houston,
The Galleria, Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo

FAVORITE PLACE TO WORSHIP

Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church

Finalists: Bering Church, St. John's UMC,
St. Peter United UCC, Unity of Houston →

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FAVORITE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAM

Houston Astros (tie)

Houston Rockets (tie)

Finalists: Houston Dash, Houston Dynamo, Houston Texans

LOCAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

BUDDY'S

Finalists: Amegy Bank, Eagle Houston, Mad Hat Maven, Pearl Bar, Silver Eagle Distributors, Tony's Corner Pocket

NATIONAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Target

Finalists: Anheuser-Busch, Chevron, Zions Bancorporation

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ WEBSITE

JD Doyle Archives

Finalists: The Mahogany Project, OutSmart Magazine

BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ WEBSITE

JD Doyle Archives

Finalists: Huffington Post, Queerty, TransGriot

DINING OUT

BEST NEW RESTAURANT OR FOOD CONCEPT

ACME Oyster House

Finalists: Eighteen36, King Ranch Texas

BEST 24-HOUR RESTAURANT

Chapultepec Lupita

Finalists: House of Pies, Whataburger

BEST BAKERY

Dessert Gallery

Finalists: Common Bond, Leona's Bakeshop, Three Brothers Bakery

BEST BARBECUE

The Pit Room

Finalists: Goode Co., Killen's, Spring Creek, Truth BBQ

BEST DELI

Katz's Deli (tie)

Kenny & Ziggy's (tie)

Finalists: Nielsen's, Urban Eats

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Eagle Eats

Finalists: Fusion Taco, Tasty Arepa, The Waffle Bus

BEST DUMPLINGS

Dumpling Dudez

Finalist: Auntie Chang's

BEST HAMBURGER

The Burger Joint

Finalists: Barnaby's Cafe, Goode Co., Harold's in the Heights, Lankford's

BEST HOT DOG

Good Dog Houston

Finalists: JCI, Minute Maid Park, Love Dog →



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Community Champion

Tammi Wallace empowers Houston's LGBTQ-owned businesses.

By **MARENE GUSTIN**



Tammi Wallace is the co-founder, president, and CEO of the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce. But that wasn't what she started out to do.

She grew up in a small town in Mississippi with a very religious Pentecostal family. "I actually came to Houston to go to Bible school," says Wallace. "I thought I was going to be a preacher's wife. We know how that turned out!" she adds with a laugh.

But she liked Houston so much that she decided to stay, studying business management at the University of Houston-Downtown. After coming out at age 25, Wallace worked in financial services and education before spending time in Austin as Representative Ellen Cohen's chief of staff.

A little over five years ago, she got together with Gary Wood and created the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce, which launched on February 24, 2016.

"I found out about the LGBT Business Enterprise (LGBTBE) certification program, and that led me to the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce," she says. "And I immediately saw a gap. There was no voice for LGBT businesses in Houston and the surrounding region. I didn't want the Houston LGBT Chamber to be just a networking chamber—I wanted to make impact work."

Besides helping members become certified as LGBTQ-owned businesses through the NLGBTCC, the local chapter also works with Mayor Sylvester Turner and the City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity to recognize LGBTQ-owned businesses for City contracting and procurement. Houston was the first city in Texas to do so.

Recently, the Chamber helped promote

**MOST
PROMINENT
FEMALE
ACTIVIST**

the LGBTQ COVID Vaccine Drive held at local bars. During the pandemic, the Chamber has also made a lot of their member benefits available online.

"People are impressed with all we do," says Wallace. "They can't believe we're only five years old. I'm thrilled we have been able to grow the Chamber every year, even in a pandemic year. Our growth and reputation set the foundation for our success and that of our members."

The question Wallace gets asked most often is if members have to identify as LGBTQ. "No, no—absolutely not," she says. "About a third of our members are allies. We're about doing business with anyone who supports the community."

Members don't have to be business owners, either. There are memberships for individuals

and for those who want to be a friend and supporter of the LGBTQ business community.

At home, Wallace and her wife of six years, Mercedes Leal, live with their six rescue pets—three dogs and three cats. Their Montrose home is just a few blocks from Niko Niko's Greek Cafe. "Within walking distance, and within smelling distance when the wind is right," Wallace notes.

In her down time, her passion is photography. "It's my happy place. I've been doing it since I was a teenager," she says. "I've been doing a black-and-white series during the pandemic. Each day I post a photo with the number of deaths from COVID. It's how I've dealt with it all."



For more info, visit houstonlgbtchamber.com.



COURTESY

BEST PIZZA

Pizza Birra Vino

Finalists: Bollo, BUDDY'S, Pepperoni's, Star Pizza

BEST SEAFOOD

ACME Oyster House

Finalists: Eugene's, M&S, The Rouxpour, Truluck's

BEST STEAK HOUSE

B&B Butchers & Restaurant

Finalists: Morton's Steakhouse, Perry's Steakhouse, Steak 48

BEST STEAK NIGHT AT A BAR

Free Grillin' at George

Finalists: BUDDY'S, Pearl Bar

BEST SUSHI

AKA Sushi

Finalists: Oishii, Osaka

BEST VEGETARIAN/VEGAN

Verdine

Finalists: Korny Vibes, Soul Food Vegan, Sinfull Bakery

BEST BREAKFAST

Baby Barnaby's

Finalists: Breakfast Klub, Chilosos Taco House, Lankford's, Snooze a.m.

BEST BRUNCH

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalists: Bar Boheme, Eighteen36, Piggy's Kitchen, Traveler's Table

BEST LUNCH SPOT

Urban Eats

Finalists: Barnaby's Cafe, Gloria's, Tacos Doña Lena

BEST DESSERT

Dessert Gallery

Finalists: Chocolate Bar, Leona's Bakeshop, Urban Eats

BEST BRITISH

Red Lion Pub

BEST CAJUN

BB's Tex-Orleans

Finalists: Acme Oyster House, Ragin' Cajun

BEST CENTRAL/ SOUTH AMERICAN

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalist: Casa do Brasil

BEST CUBAN

El Rey

Finalist: Cafe Piquet

BEST CHINESE

Cafe Ginger

Finalists: Ambassador, China Garden, P. King

BEST JAPANESE

Roka Akor

Finalists: Aka Sushi House, Osaka, Nippon, Uchi

BEST THAI

Nidda Thai Cuisine

Finalists: Khun Kay, Thai Spice, Thai Village

BEST VIETNAMESE

PHO 518 of Silverlake

Finalists: Kim Son, Mai's, Pho Saigon

BEST GREEK

Niko Niko's

Finalists: Eighteen36, Helen Greek Food and Wine

BEST INDIAN

Tarka Indian Kitchen

Finalists: Himalaya, Pondicheri, Surya India

BEST ITALIAN

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino (tie)

Riva's (tie)
Finalists: Maggiano's, North Italia

BEST MEDITERRANEAN/

MIDDLE EASTERN

Fadi's

Finalists: Aladdin, Zoë's Kitchen

BEST MEXICAN

Tacos Doña Lena

Finalists: El Tiempo Cantina, Gloria's, Hugo's, Teotihuacan

BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE

Brennan's

Finalists: Bludorn, Giacomo's Cibo e Vino, Traveler's Table

BEST COOKING EXPERIENCE

(VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON)

Dumpling Dudez

Finalist: 210 Fusion (Chef NaTosha Barber)

BEST RESTAURANT

FOR CHEAP EATS

Jenni's Noodle House

Finalists: Barnaby's, La Tapatia, Raising Cane's, Tacos Doña Lena

BEST RESTAURANT

FOR ELEGANT DINING

Truluck's

Finalists: B&B Butchers & Restaurant, Brennan's, Eddie V's, Morton's, Traveler's Table →



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Delectable Dining

Brennan's is the perfect spot for a romantic night out.

By **MARENE GUSTIN**
Photo by **KIMBERLY PARK**



When you want a great place for a dinner date or to celebrate a special occasion, why not check out Brennan's? As the sister restaurant to New Orleans' famous Commander's Palace, this gorgeous Houston landmark has been delighting diners for more than 50 years. With its Southern Creole menu, superb service, and luscious décor, it is *the* place for an elegant meal, whether in the dining room or outside in the lush courtyard.

"I think it begins with our unique 1920s John Staub building and Parisian gas lamps, but it comes to life through our wonderful servers and their tradition of Southern hospitality," says proprietor Alex Brennan-Martin, the son of Commander's Palace grand dame Ella Brennan.

Brennan-Martin grew up in the industry, traveling along the same culinary road as family members before him. But then he took a multi-year detour to train at La Varrene, a prestigious culinary-arts and hospitality school in Paris. Then he moved to New York to work at Maxwell's Plum and the Four Seasons restaurant—first in the kitchen, and later at the front of the house.

While he was sharpening his skills in New York, his family was busy adding several restaurants to their restaurant dynasty, including Brennan's of Houston. Brennan-Martin eventually made his way south to Houston, where he found that the Bayou City shared many similarities with New Orleans, including a passion for exquisite food and memorable dining experiences. He has been at the helm of Brennan's of Houston for the last 20-some odd years.

"Several of our tenured captains have shared with me over the years that the romance happens at the table between our

guests. Our job is to help them make a great memory, but stay out of the way," he notes.

Start with the famous snapper turtle soup and oysters on the half shell. Then move on to entrées such as the Gulf fish Pontchartrain or the boudin stuffed quail. And if you have a sweet tooth, you can't go wrong with the soufflé or the bananas Foster (which includes a flaming tableside presentation).

Brennan's of Houston has an award-winning wine program arranged by the staff "wine guys" Rich Carter and Jason Durham. They feature more than 2,000 bottles from around the world, and offer over 40 selections by the glass. Their "drink what you like" philosophy centers around the belief that ordering great wine should always be fun and approachable,

so the wine program presents a user-friendly list with something for everyone, from classic icons to rock-off-the-map gems.

But Brennan's is also known for a very specific cocktail—the martini. "Part of the history we're told is that Miss Adelaide Brennan enjoyed her martinis, and we've tried to always follow her two simple requirements: good liquor, and very, very cold," Brennan-Martin explains. "Her portrait is in the bar, so in a way she's keeping an eye on us still."

Brennan's is open for lunch Tuesday through Friday, brunch Saturday and Sunday, and dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

 For more info visit brennanshouston.com.



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DATE**

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Booming Bartender

Matthew Friar mixes it up at BUDDY'S.

By RYAN M. LEACH

**FAVORITE
MALE
BARTENDER**



Happy Hours have never been happier at Buddy's in Montrose since Matthew Friar started serving up drinks there last August. This is the third time

Friar, who is gay, has been recognized by OUT-SMART readers for his behind-the-bar talents.

This year's Gayest & Greatest Favorite Male Bartender insists that mixing with the customers while mixing drinks is his favorite part of the job. "I typically work Happy Hours Monday through Friday, from 4 to 9. Happy Hours are a little calmer. I like the middle-of-the-day regulars and the post-work crowd. I like to get to know them and ask them how their families are doing, and having those relationships."

Recently Friar started picking up shifts on Saturday nights, when he can enjoy helping

people come in and celebrate and keep the party going. His specialty shot/drink is the Liquid Marijuana—which, of course, he makes with only legally sanctioned ingredients.

"It's equal parts Captain Morgan, Malibu, and Midori topped off with pineapple, sweet and sour, and a splash of Blue Curacao. It's a sweet rum drink, but it goes over nicely on hot days," says Friar.

The Georgia native has lived a majority of his life in Dallas, Houston, and even Puerto Rico. He did a work-from-home job on the island before moving to Houston in 2014.

"Waking up on the beach is great for a while, but I missed being social. I wanted to be able to go out with friends and see the town. I missed interacting with people on a regular basis," he admits.

COVID-19 was particularly challenging for

the service industry, and Friar had a difficult time interacting with guests in the way that he was accustomed to. "Learning how to be friendly while having to be socially distant and respectful was difficult," he notes. "We used to hug and kiss on the cheek, so I had to figure out how to portray my personality and love without overstepping those boundaries."

With the emergence of the delta variant, Buddy's has proactively reimposed some of those COVID protocols while the world continues to deal with the pandemic. But Friar has easily jumped back into those old safety routines. "I always try to put on a happy face and be a good bartender for my clients. I am glad that my customers appreciate it, and have given me this OUTSMART honor," says Friar.



For more info, visit buddys.bar.

BEST RESTAURANT FOR OUTDOOR DINING

Candente

Finalists: Backstreet Café, Eighteen36,
Postino Heights

FAVORITE FOOD DELIVERY

DoorDash

Finalists: Favor, Uber Eats

FRIENDLIEST RESTAURANT STAFF

Barnaby's Cafe

Finalists: Gloria's, Tacos Doña Lena,
Urban Eats

DRINKS & SPIRITS

CLUB OR RESTAURANT WITH THE BEST HAPPY HOUR

Eagle Houston

Finalists: BUDDY'S, JR's Bar & Grill,
Max's Wine Dive, ReBar

CLUB OR RESTAURANT WITH THE BEST MARGARITA

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalists: El Tiempo Cantina, Eagle Houston, La Tapatia

CLUB OR RESTAURANT WITH THE BEST MARTINI

Brennan's

Finalists: BUDDY'S, Eagle Houston, JR's Bar & Grill,
Michael's Outpost, ReBar

FAVORITE LOCAL BRAND OF CRAFT BEER, CIDER, OR SELTZER

Eureka Heights

Finalists: Houston Cider Co., Karbach Brewing,
St. Arnold's Brewing Co.

FAVORITE NATIONAL BRAND OF BEER, CIDER, OR SELTZER

Bud Light

Finalists: Dos Equis, Guinness, Heineken,
Miller Lite, Modelo

FAVORITE FEMALE BARTENDER

Sarah Tompkins-Gutierrez

Finalists: Kristina Prats, Lareyna Rodriguez

FAVORITE MALE BARTENDER

Matthew Friar

Finalists: Michael Booth, Eric Ervin, Charles Garibay,
Bryan Wade, Travis Webb

FAVORITE NONBINARY BARTENDER

Crystal Murley

Finalists: Piero Arevalo, Andrew Nagler,
Charlotte Shottgun

FAVORITE BRAND OF LIQUOR

FIX Vodka

Finalists: Buffalo Trace, Deep Eddy Vodka,
Dripping Springs Vodka, NEFT Vodka, Tito's Vodka →

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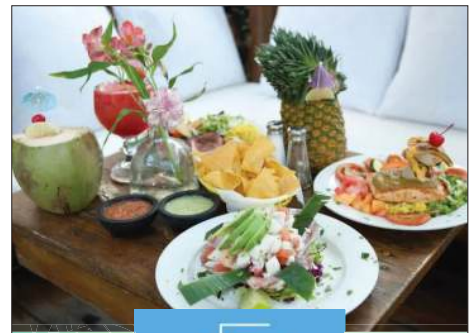
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BEST CHIROPRACTOR

Alexia McClerkin

Finalist: Airrosti Washington

BEST COSMETIC SKIN-CARE CENTER

SkinCeuticals SkinLab at West Ave.

Finalists: Skin Renaissance, Skin Renewal Center

BEST MALE AESTHETIC PHYSICIAN

Patrick McNamara

BEST COSMETIC SURGEON

Forrest S. Roth

Finalists: Fred Aguilar, Franklin Rose, Scott Yarish

BEST FEMALE DENTIST

Cynthia Corral

Finalist: Daniella Farias

BEST MALE DENTIST

Sam Carrell (tie)

Marcus de Guzman (tie)

Finalists: Alex Barrera, Austin Faulk, Cory Logan, Randy Mitchmore

BEST FEMALE EYE DOCTOR

Nancy Lo

Finalists: Juliet Farmer, Michelle Hung, Christine Tyler

BEST MALE EYE DOCTOR

Paul Lovero

Finalists: Bimal Patel, Scott Sawyer, Stewart Zuckerbrod

BEST COMMUNITY HEALTH-SERVICES PROVIDER

Legacy Community Health

Finalist: Avenue 360 Health & Wellness, St. Hope Foundation

BEST FERTILITY CLINIC

Aspire Fertility

Finalist: Houston Fertility Institute

BEST FOOT DOCTOR

Vanessa Barrow

Finalist: Neda Mehmandoost

BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN

M. Sandra Scurria

Finalists: Jennifer Feldman, Julia Kovacs, Natalie Vanek

BEST MALE PHYSICIAN

Gordon Crofoot

Finalists: James Carroll, Abel Flores, R. Todd O'Neal

BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT/ NURSE PRACTITIONER

Maggie White

Finalist: Christine Wysonog

BEST MALE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT/ NURSE PRACTITIONER

Derek Smith

Finalist: Donnie Harvey

FAVORITE FEMALE NURSE

Christina Wells

Finalist: Kandice Webber

FAVORITE MALE NURSE

Adam Sirico

Finalists: AJ Sarabia, Robert Vasquez

BEST MALE PSYCHIATRIST

Daniel Garza

Finalists: Barry Gritz, Chad Lemaire, Jim Simon, ks Stanley

BEST MALE MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST

Ty David Lerman

Finalists: Tony Aucoin, Daniel Garces, Jeffrey Myles, Ryan Viviano

BEST NONBINARY MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST

Nakita Bowman

Finalist: Thomas Oswley

BEST FEMALE MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST

Tara Bates (tie)

Denise O'Doherty (tie)

Finalists: Jessica Eisaman, Megan Mooney

BEST MALE MENTAL-HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST

Denis "Woodja" Flanigan

BEST FEMALE MASSAGE THERAPIST

Robin Mack

Finalist: Veronica Triplett

BEST MALE MASSAGE THERAPIST

Ryan Fugate

Finalists: Tom Zeppelin, John Aaron Villareal

BEST FEMALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Danielle Sampey

Finalists: Melanie Jackson, Felicia Lee-Sexton

BEST MALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Gian Quiteno

Finalists: Andrew Hayes, Cody Soutar →



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Gayme On

Houston Gaymers looks forward to resuming in-person events.

By **BRANDON NORVELL**



Up, down, left, right, double tap—these are the key movements to use when playing video games. One local gaming group has also been ‘double-tapping’ on

queer locals, who voted the Houston Gaymers this year’s Gayest & Greatest Favorite LGBTQ Social Organization.

“We are ecstatic,” says Jeffery Huynh, the organization’s vice president. “We have been around for a long time, and have members who have been with us since the beginning. Each year our membership keeps increasing, [so] we have a tendency to just hop from one event to the next [without] taking time to think about our impact on the community. We do everything for our members, and this really helps put into perspective how much we help our community.”

Founded by Eric Husley in 2009, Houston Gaymers has become a common ground where queer introverts and nerds can gather and socialize. It’s a setting that allows gamers to mix and mingle by exploring common interests.

“The main appeal to the people that come to our events is to socialize. It’s not just games; there are plenty of other activities to be passionate about,” Huynh says. “We create a safe space where the LGBT community can mix and socialize while enjoying video games.”

While gaming is a key part of the organization, Houston Gaymers also believes in giving back to the community. Project Blue Shell, the group’s official charitable operation, sends custom boxes containing a Nintendo 2DS, a copy of *Mario Kart*, and one other video game to children’s hospitals, nursing homes, women’s shelters, veterans organizations, and more.

Huynh says the group will soon expand their outreach efforts with a new community-focused gathering called Project Level Up. The quarterly events will offer resources to folks through workshops and seminars.



Jeffery Huynh

**FAVORITE
LGBTQ
SOCIAL
ORGANIZATION**



Members of the Houston Gaymers

“The first one we conducted was about preparing for a job,” Huynh explains. “We taught how to build a résumé, provided headshots, had mock interviews available, and had human-resource professionals give advice on how to elevate your résumé. Our next one will be held in November, when we will be talking about mental health.”

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Houston Gaymers hosted three or four in-person events per month. The festivities included intimate game nights at restaurants, movie screenings, drag contests, mixers, and charity events. As the group’s name suggests, video games were usually part of the mix. The Gaymers are currently only hosting outdoor

and online events until COVID-19 infection levels drop enough for indoor events to safely resume.

Huynh says his experience being a part of the Houston Gaymers has been “life changing.”

“Before I joined the organization, my husband and I didn’t know anyone in Houston,” he remembers. “A friend recommended [attending] an event. Everyone was really inviting; I had people coming up that introduced me to others and let me try different games. It was different from anything I had ever experienced. It was life-changing for me.”



For more info, visit houstongaymers.com.

**BEST MALE
PHYSICAL THERAPIST**
Roy Rivera Jr.

BEST GYM/PLACE TO WORK OUT
FIT Athletic
Finalists: Body E Fitness, Club Houston,
LA Fitness, Lifetime Fitness

BEST YOGA STUDIO
BIG Power Yoga
Finalist: Black Swan Yoga

**BEST EMERGENCY OR
URGENT-CARE CENTER**
SignatureCare Emergency Center
Finalists: Montrose ER 24-Hour,
UTMB Health Urgent Care

BEST PHARMACY
Avita Pharmacy (tie)
Legacy Pharmacy (tie)
Finalists: Scott Read Pharmacy,
Walgreens Pharmacy at CrofootMD,
Walgreens

BEST FEMALE HAIR STYLIST
Celina Arzola (tie)
Jacky Madrid (tie)
Finalists: Darcy Eaves, Patty Gooch,
Alanna Hardcastle

BEST MALE HAIR STYLIST
Reza Nouri
Finalists: Mikey Nold, Cabe Nowlan,
Adrian Santos, Anthony Skoogie,
Christopher Michael Stribling

BEST TATTOO PARLOR
Electric Chair
Finalists: Arts by Meg,
Corazones Tattoo, Scorpion

HOUSE & HOME

**BEST FEMALE
INSURANCE AGENT**
Shenice Brown
Finalist: Jennifer Majors Baca

BEST MALE INSURANCE AGENT
Lane Lewis
Finalists: Dustin Harwell, Jeremy Henry,
Jason Rocha, Patrick Torman

**BEST AIR CONDITIONING
& HEATING COMPANY**
Village Plumbing & Air
Finalist: Newport Air Conditioning
& Heating

**BEST ARCHITECTURAL
DESIGN FIRM**
Morningside Architects

BEST FLORIST
Perfect Petals by Geo
Finalists: Gaye Jackson,
Webwood Flowers

BEST FURNITURE STORE
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Finalists: Cantoni,
Donna's Home Furnishings, Nadeau

**BEST FURNITURE STORE
ON A BUDGET**
Alabama Furniture
Finalist: Gallery Furniture, IKEA

**BEST GARDENING/
NURSERY SUPPLY**
**Joshua's Native Plants
& Garden Antiques**
Finalists: Another Place in Time,
Buchanan's Native Plants,
Fountains and Statuary

BEST INTERIOR DESIGNER
Jacob Medina (tie)
Jean Quila (tie)
Finalist: Donna Dorrell

BEST ARCHITECT
Morningside Architects

BEST LANDSCAPING COMPANY
AJ's Landscaping
Finalist: Suzanne Longley

BEST PEST-CONTROL COMPANY
Natural Care Pest Control
Finalists: Amrid Pest Control,
Bulwark Exterminating

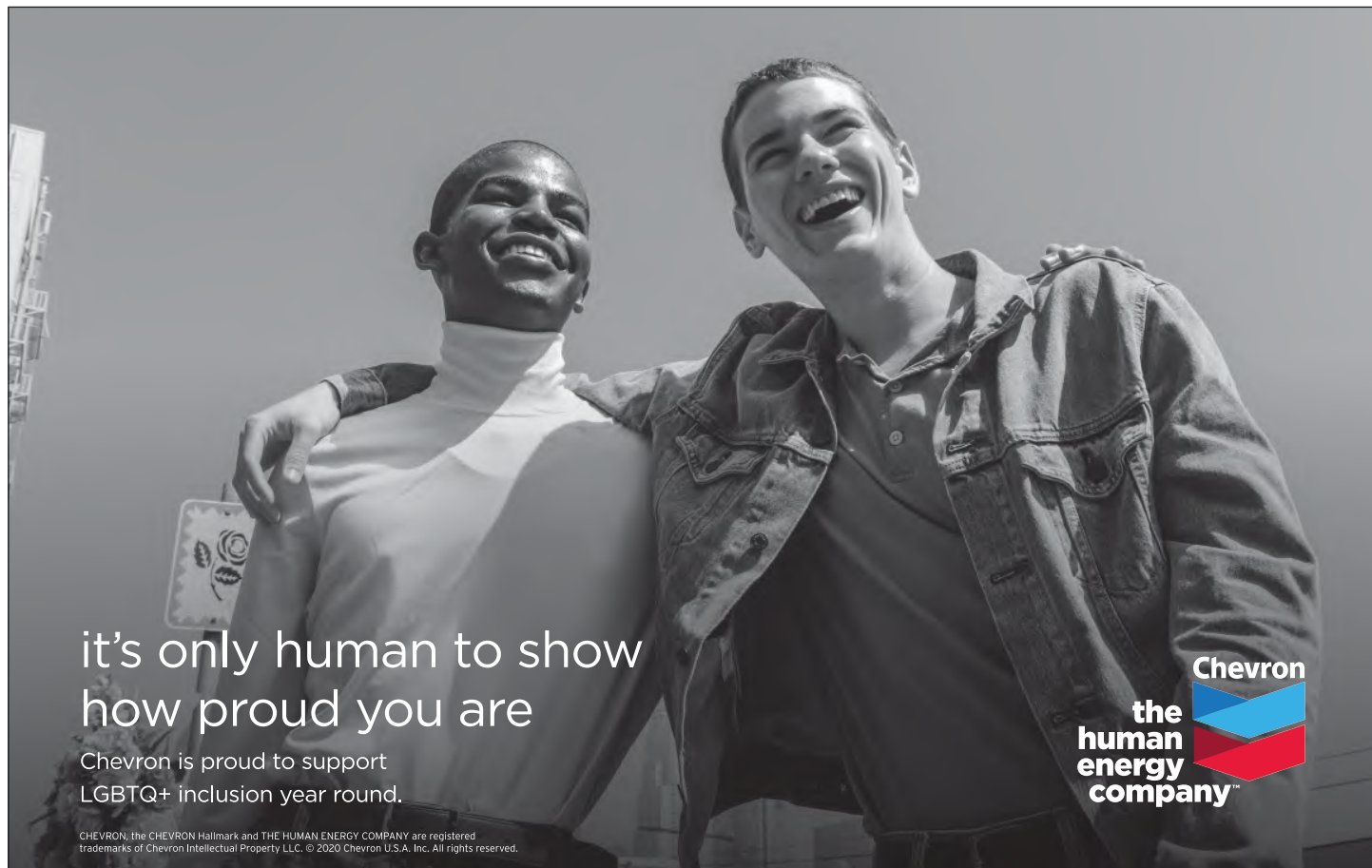
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In the Loop Plumbing
Finalist: Village Plumbing

BEST POOL COMPANY
Venture Pool Co.
Finalist: Ultima Pool Service

BEST HOME SECURITY COMPANY
Fortress Shield Security
Finalists: Alert 360, ADT

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Finalists: BB&T, Regions Bank, Wells Fargo →



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BEST CREDIT UNION

Houston Federal Credit Union
Finalist: People's Trust Federal Credit Union

BEST MALE ACCOUNTANT/BOOKKEEPER

Joseph Werle (Crunch Consulting)
Finalists: Gary Gritz, Brian Kapchinskier, Donald Simon

BEST FEMALE ATTORNEY

Deborah Lawson (tie)
Jessica Rodriguez-Wahlquist (tie)
Finalists: Joanne Ericksen, Lena Laurenzo, Dawn Renken

BEST MALE ATTORNEY

Raed Gonzalez (tie)
John Nechman (tie)
Jeff Watters (tie)
Finalists: Mitchell Katine, Adam Miller

BEST FEMALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Grace Yung
Finalists: Berkely Arrents, Britt Kormann, Christyna Lewis, Lona McManus

BEST MALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Richard Dickson
Finalists: Elias Contreras, Shane Theriot

BEST LGBTQ FUND MANAGER

Doug Smith (Hawthorne Capital)

PETS

BEST FEMALE VETERINARIAN

Kristy Kyle
Finalists: Daniele Rosser, Abigail Watkins

BEST MALE VETERINARIAN

Eric Cagle
Finalists: Jeff Chalkey, Richard Clive, James Longoria

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Wag'n World
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BEST PET EMERGENCY-CARE CENTER

Gulf Coast Veterinary Specialists
Finalists: Urban Animal Veterinary Hospital, Vergi 24/7

BEST PET GROOMING SERVICE

Aussie Pet Mobile
Finalists: Dog House Pet Salon, Table of Love, Wag'n World

BEST PET WALKING AND PET SITTING SERVICE

Erin Kidwell
Finalists: Robert Carrasco, Over to Rovers

BEST PET FOOD

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BEST PET TREATS

BakedBones
Finalist: Three Dog Bakery

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Finalists: PetSmart, Quality Feed & Garden

ARTS

BEST ART GALLERY/ PLACE TO BUY ARTWORK

Archway Gallery
Finalists: Bill Arning Exhibitions, Hardy & Nance Studios, John Palmer Art

BEST COMMUNITY DANCE COMPANY

Houston Ballet
Finalists: Hope Stone Inc., Pilot Dance Program

BEST REGIONAL EQUITY THEATER

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

BEST COMMUNITY THEATER

Catastrophic Theatre
Finalists: Art Factory, Ensemble Theatre, Main Street Theatre

BEST LOCAL EQUITY THEATER

Stages Repertory Theatre

BEST PERFORMING-ARTS COMPANY

Houston Ballet
Finalists: Catastrophic Theatre, Houston Grand Opera, Houston Symphony, Pilot Dance Project, Theatre Under The Stars

FAVORITE HOUSTON MUSEUM

The Menil Collection (tie)
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (tie)
Finalists: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Holocaust Museum Houston, Houston Museum of Natural Science, National Museum of Funeral History →

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WE WELCOME DRIPS

Here to Help

Nakita Bowman's
mental-health practice
empowers queer people of color.

By NEIL ELLIS ORTS
Photo by KB OF EMPORIUM HOUSE



**BEST
NONBINARY
MENTAL-HEALTH
THERAPIST**



Do you know any nonbinary therapists who have performed as a drag king, studied mechanical engineering, and once had a career in professional women's football—playing and winning national championship games?

Let us introduce you to Nakita Bowman—this year's Gayest & Greatest Best Nonbinary Mental-Health Therapist.

Bowman (also known as local drag performer Sir Debon Aire) officially began their therapy practice two years ago, but had been doing paraprofessional counseling with young people since 2009 through the Tackle Your Dreams Youth Foundation. As a full-fledged therapist, their current clientele ranges in age from 17 to 65, mostly from Hispanic or African diaspora backgrounds, and primarily from queer communities.

With a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, Bowman brings an analytical mind to their practice by finding a process that works and then fine-tuning it. "With my clients who have social anxiety, I utilize the scientific method to form a hypothesis about what's going to happen in the future, and then [we] test that hypothesis out. From there, we figure out what happened. Then we come back and test it again to see how we can better the process. It limits their anxiety over time."

Companionship is a part of what Bowman offers as a therapist. "I walk with you to determine what needs to go, what needs to stay, what relationships, habits, and behaviors are serving you, and what behaviors are no longer serving you. I work to empower you to make those decisions for yourself. Sometimes clients have to borrow my faith as I help them to develop their own [faith] in themselves, and in their ability to make decisions."

In the course of the counseling sessions,

Bowman might engage pop-culture references, drawing from shared experiences in TV, movies, or music. "I call myself a Pop Culture Mental Counselor, or PCMC."

When asked about their pronouns, Bowman responds, "All of them. I like the journey of people figuring out who they're talking to, and what energy they're receiving from me."

Bowman wants to be visible as a nonbinary Black therapist. "Diversity matters. The courage I get on days when I don't want to do anything—I have my own depression and anxiety I'm dealing with—I know that just showing up means the world to another person. I hope that in showing up I inspire someone else to show up as well. Their existence is important to the world's population. I hope to make my brothers and sisters proud with the way that I've been showing up. I really appreciate the opportunity to serve the community."



For more info, visit tackleurdreams.com.

**FAVORITE LOCAL
FEMALE ACTOR**

Tamarie Cooper

Finalists: Lydia Meadows, Amanda Marie Parker,
Holland Vavra, Christina Wells

**FAVORITE LOCAL
MALE ACTOR**

Mark Ivy

Finalists: Kyle Sturdivant,
Don Jeans, Wesley Whitson

**FAVORITE LOCAL
NONBINARY ACTOR**

Stoo

**FAVORITE LOCAL
FEMALE FINE ARTIST**

Katharine Ligon

Finalists: Liz Castellanos, Sherry Tseng Hill,
Kiki Neumann, Heather J. Taylor

**FAVORITE LOCAL
MALE FINE ARTIST**

Robin Baker

Finalists: Ryan Fugate, Joe Hale Haden,
Edgar Medina, John Palmer,
Hugo Perez, John Slaby

**FAVORITE LOCAL
NONBINARY FINE ARTIST**

Crystal Murley

Finalist: L'Quesha K. Monet

AUTO

BEST AUTO BODY SHOP

RMS Auto Care

Finalist: Ryan Automotive

BEST AUTO MECHANIC

Tech Auto Maintenance

Finalists: RMS Auto Care,
Ryan Automotive

**BEST CAR WASH/
AUTO DETAILING**

Car Spa

Finalists: Aqua Hand Car Wash,
CARisma Wash, Soap Hand Car Wash

**BEST DOMESTIC
AUTO DEALERSHIP**

Central Houston Cadillac

Finalists: Planet Ford, Planet Lincoln,
Tommie Vaughn Ford

**BEST IMPORT
AUTO DEALERSHIP**

Team Gillman Subaru (tie)

Fred Haas Toyota World (tie)

Finalists: Advantage BMW,
Mercedes Benz of Houston

SHOPPING & SERVICES

BEST ASTROLOGER

Lilly Roddy

Finalists: Kevin Casey, Varina Rush

BEST WOMEN'S CLOTHING STORE

Donna's Boutique

Finalists: Macy's, Tootsie's

BEST MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

OG 713

Finalists: King Underwear, Macy's

BEST ONLINE CLOTHING STORE

Hyphen

Finalists: King Underwear, OG 713

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BEST PLACE TO BUY EROTIC PLAYTHINGS

The Montrose Forge

Finalists: Discount Video, Eagle Trading Co.,
Erotic Cabaret, Megaflxxx

BEST PLACE TO BUY EYEWEAR

The Eye Gallery

Finalists: Eye Contact, Eye to Eye,
Montrose Eye Care, Spectacles On Montrose

BEST FACE-MASK DESIGNS

Davis Duo Design

Finalist: OG 713

BEST SPECIALTY FOOD STORE

Phoenicia Specialty Foods

Finalists: Central Market, Spec's, Trader Joe's

BEST GROCERY STORE

H-E-B

Finalists: Central Market, Kroger, Whole Foods

BEST PLACE TO BUY/RENT A COSTUME

CostumeWorx

Finalist: Erotic Cabaret

BEST JEWELRY STORE

Tenenbaum Jewelers

Finalists: Diamonds Direct,
Silverluxe, Zadok Jewelers

BEST LIQUOR STORE

Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods

Finalist: Total Wine & More

BEST CREATIVE AGENCY

Mad Hat Maven Creative

Finalists: Connect the Dots,
Refuge Marketing

BEST FUNERAL PROFESSIONAL

Jovon Alfon B. Tyler

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Fitness Fanatic

Gian Quiteno helps clients achieve their health goals.

By **RYAN M. LEACH**
Photo by **ALEX ROSA**



Gian Quiteno is a gay Houstonian to watch out for. In addition to being selected by OUTSMART readers as Best Male Personal Trainer for 2021, Gian also owns a small business, King Underwear, which caters to clients who are looking to spice things up under their clothes. With his help, they can get a great body and some great skivvies to match.

“What I love most [about being a personal trainer] is being able to incorporate fitness into people’s lifestyles—make it something that they *want* to keep doing, even if we are no longer training together. Something about seeing your body change, and feeling better and stronger, makes you want to keep that commitment to yourself,” says Quiteno.

Part of the joy he experiences in training clients is seeing how they transform themselves. He has clients who have never stepped foot in a gym and are now able to perform all types of exercises for the first time ever. That gives Quiteno what he calls “a proud trainer moment.”

But sometimes his commitment to clients can get in the way of his own progress. “A challenge I have is finding time to train myself. I find myself putting more energy into helping others achieve their goals, and I forget to focus on my own fitness goals sometimes. I joke to my clients that I let them drain me of my fitness powers so they can have a better body. And I’m OK with that!”

After earning his National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) certificate three years ago, Quiteno has built up his client base while at the same time building a business. King Underwear, which he started with his



partner, Donald Simon, was this year’s OUTSMART finalist for Best Men’s Clothing Store and Best Online Clothing Store.

“We started King Underwear in November 2020. It’s a little COVID project we decided to work on together. We both appreciate a great pair of underwear, and we figured why not create our own? We named it after our dog, King!” says Quiteno.

Their clientele is not limited to only men, however.

“We have had everyone buy our underwear. Cis and transgender men and women have all told us how much they love the feel, fit, and style,” Quiteno notes. “Our goal is for everyone to feel like a king when they wear our underwear.”



Contact Quiteno on Instagram @GNQFIT or email gianqfit@outlook.com for more information on personal training and King Underwear.

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It's always easy to identify people who are comfortable in their own humanity. They tend to be spontaneous, creative, intuitive, and are destined to make the world a better place.

Take Jeff Watters, for example. This year's Favorite Male Attorney graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2005 with a dual major in business administration and political science. "The business degree was a concession to my parents," Watters admits. "Law was in my heart, even as a child. I was always the kid on the playground who knew the rules of the game, and could negotiate the solution to a challenge."

Watters was a natural choice to be a "youth attorney" in his elementary school's "court" for kids who had committed minor offenses. He argued fervently on behalf of his friends who were being disciplined. "It was enormously rewarding to help them arrive at reasonable outcomes. Ninety percent of the kids never re-offended!" he recalls.

Watters received his law degree at Baylor University School of Law, where he graduated magna cum laude and also acted as executive editor of the *Baylor Law Review*. After a stint at the prestigious Baker Botts law firm, he is now an estate and probate litigator at Gray Reed & McGraw LLP. "Clients appreciate my ability to empathize during a highly emotional time in their lives. It's never just about money for them. I focus on getting to the bottom of complex [family inheritance] issues and finding creative solutions that will achieve the end results my clients deserve. That is a very rewarding experience for me," he concludes.

Watters' has also had a serious impact on Houston's LGBTQ community through his volunteer work. "Jeff is always willing to roll up his sleeves," says Brad Pritchett, field director for Equality Texas, an LGBTQ political advocacy organization. "Through his involvement with the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus, he has stepped up to help screen candidates who are asking for the support of our community."

Last year, Watters was appointed co-chair



FACEBOOK

Ambitious Attorney

Jeff Watters is a civil rights advocate.

By KIM HOGSTROM

of the leadership council at Lambda Legal Houston, a local chapter of the oldest and largest national organization in the country with the mission to advance the civil rights of LGBTQ people through high-impact litigation, education, and public-policy work. (It was Lambda Legal that won the landmark U.S. Supreme Court *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling that struck down the nation's sodomy laws in 2003.) "We are very grateful for Jeff's leadership,"

says Avery Belyeu, regional director for the South Central Office of Lambda Legal. "He brings a can-do attitude to everything he does. His commitment to civil rights and equality is hard to match, and we are very lucky to work alongside him in this fight."



For more on Lambda Legal, visit lambdalegal.org; for more on Equality Texas, visit equalitytexas.org.

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Powerful Performer

Stoo is an outspoken actor and activist.

By **ZACH MCKENZIE**
Photo by **FRANK HERNANDEZ**



Artists have always been a force for change, and this tradition certainly continued throughout the past year as racial injustice, health disparities, and politics all came to a head. Artists were often seen on the front lines calling for change.

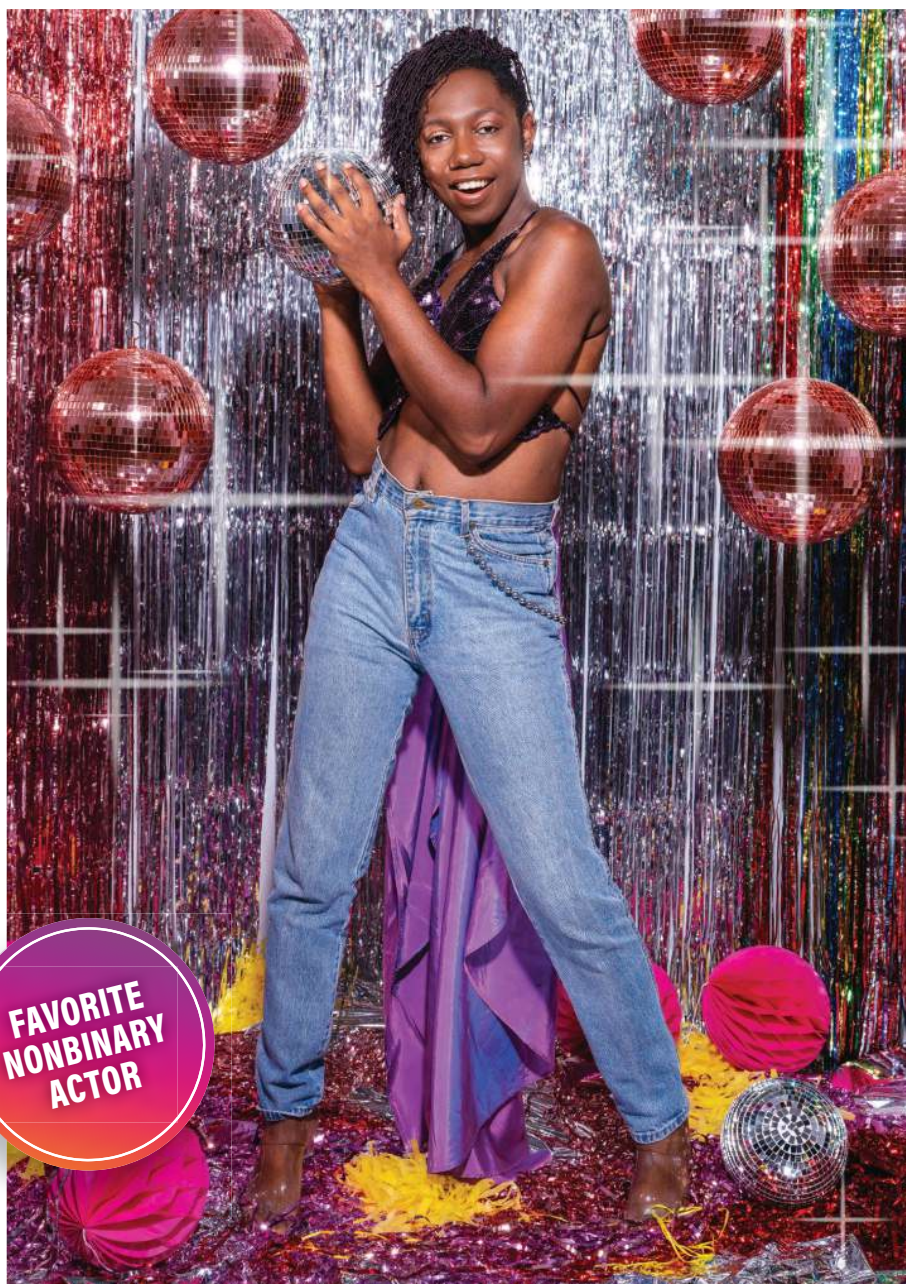
This year's Favorite Nonbinary Actor, Stoo, is hopeful that the energy behind the calls for a more inclusive theater community will come to fruition as live theater returns to Houston. "I love musical theater, because my biggest inspiration is Barbra Streisand," the trans-feminine nonbinary artist says with glee. "When I really discovered her music when I was in college, I knew I needed to do musical theater."

The actor was originally enrolled as a fashion merchandising major at Sam Houston State University, but made the pivot to musical theater at the age of 19. "I always wanted to act, and luckily enough, I was accepted and decided to pursue this career." Stoo dreams of having their name in lights in New York City. "Broadway is the end-all, be-all. It's a huge goal of mine. I want to be a leading 'they-dy.' That's the dream."

It was Houston's Stages Repertory Theatre that hosted Stoo's first professional gig. "I've done a lot of shows at Stages Repertory Theatre, which was my first post-college job." As theaters shut down during the pandemic, Stoo returned to a familiar outlet. "I've always wanted to make pop music. I met some cool cats in Houston and asked them if they wanted to make music, and they were down. I've been focused on that for three or four years," the solo act explains.

When the chance to return to acting presented itself, Stoo jumped at the opportunity. "I was fortunate enough to get back into musical theater with *Godspell*, which was a Moore Vision Entertainment production here in Houston. The director was Sloane Teagle, and we performed it at the DeLuxe Theater. That show allowed me to fully express myself."

In response to Broadway producer Cameron Mackintosh's recent statement that



the casting of transgender artists in classical musicals is a "gimmick," Stoo offers a positive message: "Lately, there has been a call for more trans bodies on stage because people don't think we can handle lead roles. *Godspell* let me fully embrace being a trans and nonbinary artist, and represent the community through my art." The experience was affirming in more ways than one. "I felt so free and open to be myself," they recall. "I got to sing and act like myself. It was a refreshing moment. I'm always going to be learning and growing and getting to my full purpose in life, because it's always transforming."

With the house lights in theaters across the country slowly coming back up, Stoo hopes the activist momentum from the past

year continues. "I'm excited to see how much the theater world is going to change, because we've gone through so much with social issues during the pandemic—everything from casting to showcasing different people of the world onstage."

OUTSMART's 2021 Favorite Nonbinary Actor is more energized than ever for a successful return to the stage. "I'm just one person representing the community. Receiving this honor is affirming, and I'm hoping to represent the community as best I can as an actor on stage. This is such a nice welcome back to the theater."



Keep up with Stoo on
Instagram @stooizm.



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Out of the Closet

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WEDDINGS & EVENTS

BEST PLACE TO POP THE QUESTION

Discovery Green

Finalists: Avant Garden, Gerald D. Hines Water Wall

BEST PLACE TO RENT/BUY FORMAL WEAR

Men's Wearhouse

Finalist: Al's Formal Wear

BEST WEDDING OFFICIANT

Tiffany Scales

Finalists: Robert Hahn, Johnny Peden, Wendy Taylor

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Finalists: Cake Fine Pastry, Leona's Bakeshop, Who Made The Cake!

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BEST WEDDING/EVENT DJ

Darker Side DJs

Finalists: B&B Entertainment, Peyton Dolan, PB&DJ Productions

BEST WEDDING/EVENT FLORIST

Rexberry Luxury Events

Finalists: Scott Michael Designs, Alex Torres

BEST WEDDING/EVENT LIVE-MUSIC STRING QUARTETS & BANDS

Harmony Strings

Finalist: Divisi Strings

BEST WEDDING/EVENT PHOTOGRAPHER

Sebastian Gutierrez

Finalists: David Troung, D. Jones Photography, His & Hers Photographers

BEST WEDDING/EVENT PLANNER

Rexberry Luxury Events

Finalists: A Day to Remember, Lauren Burnham, Wedding Bliss Events

BEST WEDDING/EVENT VENUE

The Ballroom at Bayou Place

Finalists: Avant Garden, Bell Tower on 34th, Crystal Ballroom at the Rice Hotel, The Parador

BEST WEDDING/EVENT VIDEOGRAPHER

J&D Productions

Finalists: Jay Clarke Films, Kirk Surber Photography

TRAVEL & VACATIONS

BEST AIRLINE

Southwest Airlines

Finalists: JSX, Spirit, United Airlines

BEST LGBTQ

CRUISE OR TOUR COMPANY

Aquaquest Cruises

Finalists: Concierge Travel, Olivia Cruises, Vacaya

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ TRAVEL AGENCY

Concierge Travel (tie)

Cruise Planners (Peter & John) (tie)

BEST LGBTQ HONEYMOON DESTINATION

Puerto Vallarta

Finalists: Las Vegas, New Orleans

BEST LGBTQ TRAVEL DESTINATION

Puerto Vallarta

Finalists: Costa Rica, Palm Springs, Provincetown

BEST LOCAL HOTEL

Le Méridien Downtown

Finalists: Hotel ZaZa, Hyatt Regency, Sam Houston Hotel

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Alan Lett (l) and Anthony Ferrell

Hot Under the Collar

OG 713 makes high-quality, Houston-themed apparel.

By **KIM HOGSTROM**
Photo by **ALAN LETT**



Married couple Anthony Ferrell, 37, and Alan Lett, 38, recognized that COVID-19 had caused a fundamental shift in how the American workforce dresses. With the rise of the home office, casually elegant, comfortable, quality apparel is the new 9-to-5 standard—with extra points for sexy or unusual.

So it makes perfect sense that the casual creations offered at Ferrell and Lett's OG 713 won the Gayest & Greatest Best Men's Clothing Store award this year.

This Houston couple met ten years ago on the Fourth of July. "There really were fireworks on that Fourth," Farrell says with a laugh. In 2016 they tied the knot, and they now bring their unique but complementary talents to their professional enterprise.

The inspired OG 713 T-shirts are made

from premium ring-spun cotton from American brands such as Bella+Canvas and Next Level. An OG 713 tee would be a great choice with shorts at an Astros game, or with jeans at a brunch. The value of these shirts is not limited to how they are made. All the tees and accessories (hats, hoodies, etc.) are printed with original illustrations from local artists. Shoppers will find stylish interpretations of local landmarks such as Astroworld, the "Be Someone" freeway bridge, and the Rothko Chapel's *Broken Obelisk* sculpture.

"When Alan and I decided to launch OG 713, quality was first on our list. We wanted to make apparel that we would be proud to wear. All aspects of production fell under this objective. In addition to the finest cotton, we use a direct-to-garment printer with manufacturer-certified inks, allowing excellent reproduc-

tions of the designs," explains Ferrell, who has 12 years of experience at Microsoft.

Most of the illustrations are the work of OG 713 creative director Lett. He has a background in design, and it serves him well. The illustrations are stunning—even sexy. "When I create a design, I do a lot of research first. It's important to know the history of an icon or landmark before committing it to illustration. I want it to be as accurate as possible. I think people appreciate that," Lett notes.

OG 713 retail booths can be found in the HTX Markets and at breweries, empty retail spaces, and other hot spots. "We will also have a permanent setup at the beautiful new Railway Heights Market at I-10 and Washington Avenue in the Heights," Farrell adds with a smile. "We can't wait to see what will happen there!"

Marketing and communications guru Austin Staton was visiting a local market when he noticed a few OG 713 designs. He wound up ordering T-shirts and hoodies for his clients, over and over again.

"As a native Houstonian, the Houston-centric designs initially caught my eye," Staton says. "After learning more about OG 713, it's clear that Anthony and Alan understand our city and culture. And their knowledge and passion for our diverse community is truly embodied in all of the work they do."



For more info, visit og713.com.



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Dominique Sachse
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Derrick Shore
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Courtney Zavala
Runner Up

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2021 Favorite Television Personality

Affirming Officiant

Tiffany Scales helps
couples from all
backgrounds get married.

By NEIL ELLIS ORTS
Photo by ALEX ROSA



"I've always been a person of service."

Variations on this theme come up over and over when you talk to Tiffany Scales. Whatever she's doing, she's

doing it to help someone.

Take Mærry Us Tiffany, which is her business that helps couples get married. She saw an approaching need, and she started preparing.

Years before marriage equality became the law of the land, Scales participated in marches to City Hall in the company of local supportive clergy who were advocating for same-sex marriage. In 2014, she got the feeling that marriage equality was close at hand, so she set out to become an ordained minister. She performed her first wedding in November 2015 for two lesbian friends of hers. From there, word spread that she was available for wedding officiant duties. She has married cis, trans, and nonbinary couples in locations both traditional (such as chapels) and creative (such as in front of the West Gray Barnes & Noble).

Scales is also a poet, and one of her poems begins with the line "Love is the religion I practice." She sees her wedding-officiant service as a way of practicing that belief. Her services are available couples of any religious background, or no religious background. "I understand there is such a thing as 'church hurt,' and people have different [life experi-

ences]," she says. "That doesn't change [our desire] to unite people who choose to love and have peace."

Beyond simply conducting marriage rites and signing marriage licenses, Scales also does couples counseling. She wants people who choose love to remain in love, so one of the services she offers through Mærry Us Tiffany is a couple's assessment. The goal is to make sure couples know how to communicate and navigate their emotions so they can avoid serious conflicts that lead to breakups.

Besides being voted Best Wedding Officiant, Scales was also voted Favorite Female (Community) Radio Personality. Her radio show, *Long Live the Arts* (on The New Amazing 102.5 FM), discusses art and music, and how it connects to broader life. As a graduate of Texas

Southern University, the show allows Scales to use her degree in entertainment and recording-industry management. In addition to her show, she serves as the radio station's liaison to Houston's queer community.

On top of these two endeavors, she also runs two nonprofit organizations—The Arts Advocate (an organization that helps people work through personal issues like grief and develop social skills) and Toiletries for Families (which provides families in crisis with the basic hygiene supplies needed to maintain personal dignity).

"I'm a very busy woman," Scales says, laughing. "But it's fun. Everything I do, I do with passion."



For more info, visit tiffanyscales.com.



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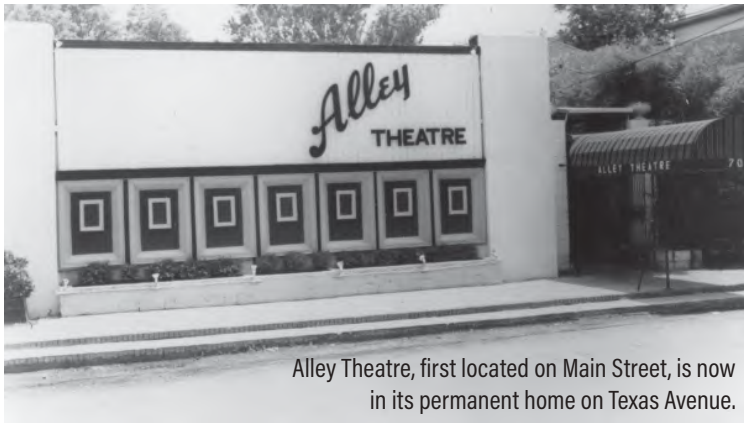
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A Dramatic Anniversary

The Alley Theatre remains as vital as ever at 75.

By SAM BYRD



In 1947, the Alley Theatre's founder, Nina Vance, sent out 214 penny postcards with the message "It's beginning! Houston, this is your Theatre." As it celebrates its

75th anniversary during the 2021-'22 season, the Alley is continuing its commitment to operating as a theater for all Houstonians while recognizing the long road it has traveled over the years.

The Alley's first home was a single large room at 3617 Main Street, almost hidden at the end of a long alleyway and sandwiched between two retail stores. It featured minimal seating for its theater-in-the-round stage, and a sycamore tree protruded through the roof. However, big things were in store for this little company.

Its first production, *A Sound of Hunting*, opened on November 18, 1947, and by the next day, the *Houston Post's* critic wrote, "The city has brought forth another interesting and hopeful theater experience."

The critic's words would live on as an understatement, as the Alley would go on to become a tour de force in both the local and national arts scene. Since its creation, the theater has received the Special Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, produced a play that received a Pulitzer Prize, and at one time was known as "the most significant professional theater outside of New York."

Now in its permanent home—a contempo-



Founder Nina Vance



Brandon Weinbrenner

rary multi-turreted concrete building at 615 Texas Avenue, the Alley stays true to Vance's words with its significant investment in Houston's cultural landscape.

"We live by what Nina instilled in the beginning, in that we are dedicated to creating each season so that we have a resident acting company fully on staff," explains Brandon Weinbrenner, Alley's associate producer and casting director. "We curate our season so that our audiences can get to know these folks who also live in Houston. The actors get to stretch themselves and inhabit characters that are more interesting because we also know the actors as people [outside the theater]," the out thespian adds.

Alley's programming continues to be equitable, inclusive, and just as diverse as the city

around it. For example, its El Zócalo program is a place-making initiative to celebrate, grow, and interact with Houston's diverse Latin culture and artistic community. In its school programming, students learn theater, the humanities, and STEM through arts integration. Further showing its commitment to inclusion, it produced last year's *A Christmas Carol* with Spanish and Vietnamese translations.

The LGBTQ community is also an important part of the Alley's audiences and staff. "Not surprising to anyone, members of the LGBTQ community have always been attracted to the creative arts. We have staff members who are LGBTQ. We produce plays by LGBTQ playwrights about LGBTQ things. We have LGBTQ designers and craft people and carpenters. We are committed to being an inclusive theater,

and that includes the LGBTQ community,” Weinbrenner says.

Creative partnerships have been key to the Alley’s success, like the one it maintains with the University of Houston. “We set up at UH when we needed additional space due to our renovations caused by Hurricane Harvey. This season, we have UH dramaturges working on every production as part of their curriculum,” he notes. UH faculty members and playwrights Theresa Rebeck and Edward Albee also collaborated on Alley world-premiere productions.

New works and playwright commissions continue to be highlighted via the Alley All New festivals. “It’s the umbrella for our new [productions] as well as for workshops,” Weinbrenner mentions. “We like to nourish and foster plays that are just getting on their legs—giving them their first chance to be seen by the public.” Of course, people also know the Alley for its wide-ranging repertoire and innovative productions of classics and neglected contemporary plays.

To celebrate the return of live theater during its 2021–’22 season, three world-premiere plays, a world-premiere musical, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning play will be featured. Audiences will be required to bring proof of a



Alley Theatre’s first production, *A Sound of Hunting*

COVID-19 vaccination or a recent negative test, and masks must be worn in the theater. “We’re making theater accessible by keeping it safe for everybody,” Weinbrenner emphasizes.

Originally from the Dallas area, Weinbrenner has his own story of falling in love *with* the Alley and *at* the Alley. “I moved to Houston as a single man, and through working at the Alley Theatre I was able to meet my husband, who is also in the theater arts. We met while working on *A Christmas Carol* eight years ago, and now we own a house, have a dog, and continue to work as a happily married theater couple,” he shares.

Looking forward to the next 75 years,

Weinbrenner believes Alley Artistic Director Rob Melrose’s vision will be guiding the organization. “When I look toward the future, I look at the mission and focus Rob has put in place, which is a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion onstage, in our staff, in the art we produce, and in how we carry ourselves in the industry,” he concludes. “I look at the Alley’s mission to produce innovative and essential work for the city of Houston, and that’s the future.”

 Alley Theatre is located at 615 Texas Avenue. For more info and tickets: 713-220-5700 or alleytheatre.org.

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An Inspiring Experience

Artist manager **Jeremy Smith** previews this year's Bayou City Art Festival.

By **JENNY BLOCK**



It's almost time again for one of Houston's most iconic and fun art outings in Houston—the Bayou City Art Festival. This year's festivities will take place downtown on Saturday,

October 9, and Sunday, October 10, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The festival is put on by the nonprofit Art Colony Association (ACA), which was established in 1972 to produce high-quality art festivals and events that provide financial support to local nonprofit organizations. Over the past 49 years, they have raised over three million dollars with their festivals. They are funded in part by grants from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance.

One of the key players in this year's festival is ACA's new artist relations manager, Jeremy Smith. Originally from Alaska, the 44-year-old has lived in Houston for more than 12 years. Smith explains that the festival is “an outdoor, juried fine-art festival. It is one of the largest and most prestigious fine-art festivals in the nation. The event offers patrons the opportunity to meet with more than 200 exhibiting artists, in 19 different mediums, from all over North America. Patrons will be able to purchase world-class art, prints, jewelry, textiles, sculptures, and more—at prices for everyone.”

Due to COVID-19, ACA intentionally planned a slightly smaller festival for this year, since it's the first major festival to return to Houston since the pandemic began. “We will only have 210 exhibiting artists, as opposed to the usual 300. We are installing hand-sanitizing stations all over the festival site. We



Artist Joel Anderson next to his painting *H-Town Skyline*

JOEL ANDERSON

are encouraging social distancing as much as possible. We are making this festival a cashless event and giving individual artists the discretion to require masks inside their own booths.”

Art has the capacity to heal, Smith emphasizes. “Art brings people together. It brings communities together. Bayou City Art Festival is going into its 50th year of supporting access to art and art education in the Houston community. We provide a space for artists from all over the world to introduce their work to the people of Houston, and we've seen the positive impact and influence that art continues to have in this city.”

Artists must apply to participate in the festival, and a panel of jurors reviews the applications anonymously. “Meaning that the jury does not receive any demographic information about the artists. They only review images of the work submitted,” Smith says. “We typically receive 1,200 to 1,500 artist applications for each event.”

Smith wants every patron to feel inspired by the world-class art they see and purchase, and also to enjoy the incredible food, amazing music, and performance art.

One of the artists showing in this year's festival is Iowa native Joel Anderson, 62, who

earned his bachelor's degree in computer engineering from Iowa State University. When he was growing up, he was leaning toward being a doctor until he saw a man's limb being amputated. That's when he opted to pursue information technology as a career.

When he retired, he wanted to do something completely different with his time. "Going from a secure paycheck to a self-employed person is the adventure I was looking for," Anderson says. He had a "vague sense" that perhaps he'd do some woodworking, "but things finally clicked when I stumbled on encaustic painting, and found a way to bridge my information-technology background with painting."

As an encaustic painter, Anderson's primary medium is beeswax mixed with resin. "My style combines clear imagery with a slight abstraction, and then a reassignment of color values. This results in something a little different, yet still familiar. Skyscrapers and trees are my signature themes," he says.

With life so unpredictable and often frightening these days, Anderson believes art can provide solace as well as outrage. "It can set the mood, from calming trees to a stern portrait of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. It can put a

smile on your face or light a fire under your butt. What else can do that?"

When it comes to people understanding his art, he says with a laugh, "Each piece I create has some significance for me—a story, a reason for making it. You're welcome to ask me, but you might not get the answer you were expecting!"

Being a part of the Bayou City Art Festival is important to Anderson for so many reasons.

"It's wonderful to see the enthusiasm and support for the arts from the crowds at Bayou City, and also reconnecting with fellow artists, art-loving friends, and former co-workers. People [from previous years even come back and] remind me, 'Oh, I have one of your pieces!'"

 Festival tickets are only available online and cannot be purchased at the gate. Purchase tickets at artcolonyassociation.org.



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WEDDING GUIDE



Victor Wimberly Jr. (l) and Tony Tuckwiller III

WORTH THE WAIT

Victor Wimberly Jr. and Tony Tuckwiller III spent over 30 years together before they could get married at their church.

By JENNY BLOCK | Photos by MICHAEL GLAZNER



Howard “Victor” Wimberly Jr. and Eugene Anthony “Tony” Tuckwiller III were the first gay couple to be married at Bering Church in Montrose following the church’s recent separation from the United Methodist Church. That denomination’s anti-LGBTQ stance included a ban on same-sex weddings.

Victor and Tony are longtime Bering members who have been together for over 30 years, but they didn’t want to marry until they could have their ceremony at Bering Church, which was founded 173 years ago by German immigrants.

Victor, 76, from Sulphur, Louisiana, earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Louisiana at Monroe. He was the vice president of Life-Tech International, a local medical-instrument company, for thirty years until he retired in 2008.

Lewisburg, West Virginia native Tony, 66, earned his bachelor’s degree in music from West Virginia University and his master’s degree from Southern Methodist University, which is what brought him to Texas. He taught for 24 years in Pasadena schools before retiring in 2008.

The couple currently lives in Sharpstown’s Country Club Estates neighborhood in South-west Houston.

They met at Snuffy’s Saloon in San Antonio

in February of 1983. Tony was teaching in Boerne at the time, and Victor was in town for a meeting. Because being married was not even a remote possibility at the time, there never was an actual proposal. They have always just considered themselves “partners.”

“We actually dated for a year, and in 1984 stopped by the side of I-10 and pledged our hearts to each other in a field of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush. Vic traveled internationally, and had bought matching lapis lazuli rings in Amsterdam, which we exchanged in that field,” Tony says.

But times have changed, and over the last few years many of their friends had gotten married. “[So there was] the inevitable question of when we would. We discussed it and



decided that we would like to be married in our church, so we were waiting on the Methodist Church to join the 21st century and allow us to marry," Tony explains.

Unfortunately, that didn't seem to be happening, so Bering Church disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church and joined the United Church of Christ, which fully embraces the LGBTQ community.

The couple was wed on Saturday, September 4, and became the first members of the congregation to be married in the historic building in a quarter century. (To protest the United Methodist ban on same-sex marriage, Bering had halted all church weddings in the 1990s).

Rev. Diane McGehee, Bering's current pastor, officiated at the landmark ceremony. "Since the church just changed affiliations in June, we put this wedding together fairly quickly, as we know that others would also like to be married at Bering," Tony says. Being the first gay wedding in the church made it incredibly special, of course. "And to be surrounded by loving friends and family on that day, even with COVID restrictions, made it even better," he adds.

As a musician, Tony chose songs that had personal meaning to him. "I chose to have an octet sing for the wedding, accompanied by Divisi Strings, a string quartet. We also wanted to have communion for the two of us as part of the ceremony, so that was special. Vic made the communion bread—just one more unique element. And we exchanged the same [lapis lazuli rings from that bluebonnet field] during our ceremony," Tony says.

All of the planning, livestreaming, flowers, and photography were handled through the

church. Planning for the wedding was a little bit tricky because they had traveled to West Virginia during July and August.

"My family has a farm in West Virginia," Tony says. "Vic and I own some land, and our niece and nephew bought 50 acres about 10 minutes away during the pandemic. We stayed with them and helped them get the property in shape—developing garden beds, cutting firewood, and cleaning up the property."

Amber Tuckwiller, the couple's niece, and Deborah Hirsch served as their "best women." "Our best men, both straight, were coming from Rome for a convention the next week, and had permission to come early for the wedding. But the convention was made virtual, which canceled their business visa, so we kept them 'in absentia,'" Tony says.

The couple hopes to be traveling again soon, particularly to Italy next spring. But since they've been on a 38-year honeymoon and have traveled a lot over the years, they're in no rush to take an official honeymoon trip.

The love and admiration the couple has for one another is palpable. "Vic is one of the most thoughtful people I know," Tony says. "He's always available to help those around him. He is very strong-willed, but is also the most loving person I know."

And the feeling is mutual, according to Victor. "Tony is so kind and considerate. He volunteers at many school gardens and parks, and is willing to help anyone. He is the love of my life."

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What is your favorite shot to make? To drink?

Favorite to make: Vegas Bombs
Favorite to drink: Smirnoff Spicy
Tamarind shots

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

Honestly, I still come to Papi's to watch the drag shows on my nights off.

What are you best known for?

My customer service. I have been bartending for 10 years, and a lot of my Viviana's customers are coming to Papi's as well.

What are the best and worst holidays to work? Why?

Best holiday: Fourth of July, when people come out and really enjoy themselves.

Worst holiday: Christmas, when most people are with their families.

Biggest tip from one customer?

\$200

Who are the hardest customers to please?

I don't have any problem with customers—I can figure out how to keep them happy!

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

Definitely real estate.

Favorite food?

Tacos

Favorite restaurant?

Teotihuacan



JACK BERGER

Tito Garcia (l) and Luis Lopez

Favorite travel spot?

Las Vegas

Dream vacation?

Italy

Best advice to a wannabe bartender in an LGBTQ bar?

Be friendly. Be patient. Have fun.

Desired super-power?

To be able to eat anything and not gain weight!

Theme song?

Maria José's "Prefiero Ser Tu Amante!" (I'd Rather Be Your Lover)

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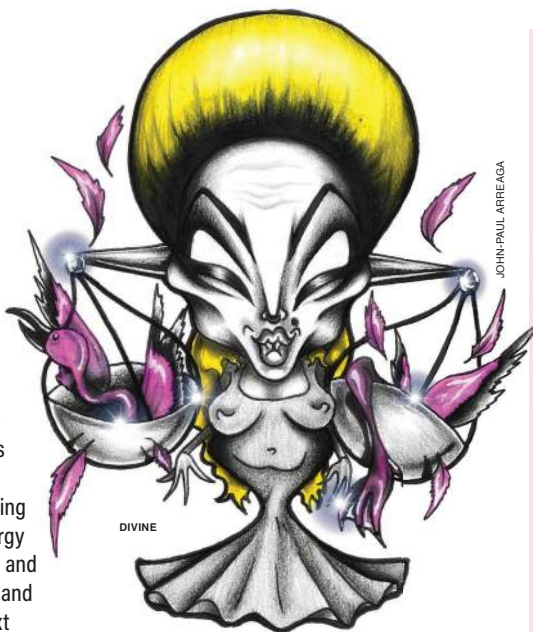
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By LILLY RODDY

Hurry Up and Wait

Patience and flexibility are needed this month.



October is going to be a very busy month. We start with Mercury retrograde until October 23. All new plans and projects should begin after that date. We also have Jupiter, Saturn, and Pluto all going direct this month. That will give a big boost of energy primarily to the fixed signs—Taurus, Leo, Aquarius, and Scorpio. The cardinal signs of Aries, Cancer, Libra, and Capricorn will also be impacted. Generally, the next couple of months (through the middle of February 2022) will be sluggish. Prepare to be more patient. Flexibility is key this month, so keep your options open.

Good days this month are October 2, 3, 15, 16, and 28. Days to stay in bed are October 1, 5, 6, 17, 22, 26, and 30.

ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

Relationships are the big topic for you this month. For those in healthy relationships, this is a time to renew bonds and connections. If your partnership is having problems, those problems will come to the surface so they can be resolved, one way or another. Partners will be less patient with many things in their own lives. Your career is still changing to fit evolving business models. For some, this is a time to start your own business or possibly retire. Support groups, either social or professional, can be very helpful this month for providing alternative points of view. This is a very good time to renew your exercise and health program. You will need to find a good outlet to de-stress about your lack of patience, especially during the end of the third week of October. Speak your truth!

TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

Your progressive momentum had slowed in September, and you may have felt like you were waiting for something! You will begin to get your energy back this month. You have been working on your career, reinventing yourself, and exploring plans for the future. You are trying to get your routines back in place to gain more order and stability in your life. Co-workers may be grumpier and hard to get along with. This is a good month to get back into healthier habits. Toward the end of the month, you are more focused on relationships. If you are involved, you will need to put energy into making the relationship more significant in your life. If you are single, that applies to close

friendships or business associates. The end of the month is a very good time to make decisions, particularly about career and long-term security plans.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

With your ruling planet, Mercury, retrograde this month, it's all about your past interactions, particularly over the last four months. This is a creative month, so the activities that you started earlier will return to importance. You continue to be open to new ideas—going back to school, working on your podcast, and improving relationships with your children. Career opportunities begin to pick up by midmonth, but wait until Mercury goes direct on the 23rd to move forward. By the end of the month, you are ready to act on your plans. Partnership energy gets stronger throughout the month, affecting your partners and close friends. You may feel the need to act on these feelings through November.

CANCER (June 22–July 22)

Home and family take the spotlight this month. And with Mercury retrograde through that sector, you will be having stronger thoughts about your family and making your nest a safer and more beautiful place. This can be a time to consider repairs or possibly moving, but there will be delays with Mercury retrograde, so wait until after the 23rd to make decisions so they flow more smoothly. If you haven't heard from your family in a while, this may be a great time for a family reunion or just reconnecting with childhood friends. You continue to work on reducing your debt and creating more freedom and options in your life. By the end of the month, you are ready to be more playful and creative. This is a good time to interact with your

LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)

This is your birthday month—your personal new year when you look back at what you've accomplished while also looking forward to what the coming year will bring. And with Mercury retrograde in Libra, the desire to look back will be stronger than usual. This is a very good time to go back and connect with old friends, lost family members, and even old romantic partners. Your energy levels remain strong, which may prompt you to start a healthier exercise and diet program. Finances, and ridding yourself of debt, are the focus at the end of the month as you seek to gain more control over that part of your life.

children—or anyone who lightens your heart.

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

Life's pace had slowed somewhat in September, but we see a reversal of that energy beginning in the middle of October. Wait until after the 23rd to act on the plans you've had in mind for a while. Relationships are going to be especially important from midmonth on. For some, this is a time to take your partnership to the next level. This could mean marriage, a recommitment ceremony, or finally buying that RV. If you are in a difficult partnership, you will want to bring some resolution to your problems. You are certainly speaking your mind and letting others know exactly what you think. At the end of the month, your attention shifts to family, home, and emotional safety and security.

VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22) Money, personal resources, and your skill set are all being activated this month. With Mercury, your ruling planet, retrograde, this is an excellent time to review what works and what doesn't. You may want to expand your client base or improve the availability of your product, but you should wait until after the 23rd before you put any new plans into action. It's much easier to respond to your immediate needs this month and spend money more freely. You may also use some of this energy to explore ways to improve your income and investments. You are continuing to improve your health with a better diet and exercise program. You will find it easier to commit to those things after midmonth. Toward the end of the month you are more vocal about your views, even if it causes others to be unsettled. Relationships are improving, and if you are single, more opportunities await you in November.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)

As the month begins, you are in a time of rest and retreat. Your psychic sensitives are turned up, and things that you might normally excuse become very irritating. This is a great time for a spiritual retreat, a trip to the beach, or just turning off the phone and other electronics. You have used a lot of energy this year dealing with family issues, which has pulled you right back to your childhood. Even with Mercury retrograde, you should see some positive changes and resolutions with family issues. Some choices have been made for you, but there are others that need your input. By the end of the month, you will have a big boost of energy over the next 40 days to push forward on any new projects or personal goals. Self-care becomes more important during that time.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22–Dec. 21)

Friendships and business relationships can be very helpful to you this month. With friendships, you could hear from people you may not have heard from in years. This is a very good month to connect with them! You are still in a time of considering which plans to pursue. You are keeping all your options open, but you will be more ready to move forward by the end of the month. Relationships become more important this month, but you'll be much more selective about the company you keep toward the end of the month. That's a better time for self-care and connect-

ing more to your spiritual calling. The need to make some private time for yourself dominates this month.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)

This is a very interesting month for you, with Mercury retrograde occurring in your career sector. If you have been thinking about working somewhere else, the retrograde will push that thought to the forefront. If there are problems at work, you can also be the agent of change needed to move the agenda forward. This is a great time to discuss new ideas, but it's important to wait until after the 23rd to put them into play. You are paying a lot of attention to your finances, especially this month. You may explore new investment plans or a better way to utilize your talents and increase your income. You are more careful about how you spend your money. Toward the end of the month, friends and business associates will be more cooperative in helping you reach your goals.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)

This continues to be a significant year for you to review your career agenda and figure out how to express that agenda in ways more suited to the changing times. Career and personal security are super-important this month, as you are on the edge of some decisions that are likely to occur near the end of the month. For some, this can be a time to retire, while

for others it's a time to commit to a plan that creates more long-term security. In relationships, it's time to renew and deepen your original commitment. This is also a great time for writing, teaching, attending a class, or exploring ways to express yourself. Late October is a much better time to move forward with your ideas. You'll be taking things more personally through the end of November.

PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)

This has been a year of moving forward, but then stepping back to review where you came from and make sure you are still headed in the right direction. This month you are concentrating your energy on getting rid of debt, exploring old resources, and looking for ways to add more intimacy to your life. Your partnerships will need some renewal after this month. This Mercury retrograde is the perfect time to reconnect with people from your past. At the end of October, Jupiter (the planet of growth, expansion, and travel) starts its journey to open up your life to new ideas and adventures. The last time Jupiter was in your sign was 12 years ago. Jupiter officially enters Pisces on December 28, but you will feel this positive energy by mid-October. You are ready to act on your plans and ideas by the end of this month.

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



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SCENE OUT

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On August 27, 2021, EPAH had a professional mixer with Houston Equality Dental Network at the home of Ken Ng and Charles McFerren. Pictured are EPAH members and Houston Equality Dental Network members with guests.



Pride Houston presented Baewatch X Salvation, the official Pride pool party at Cle Houston on August 28, 2021. Pictured are **Jasmine Young, Kendra Walker, and Thasia Madison.**



On September 10, 2021, Hamburger Mary's hosted an LGBT Council on Aging fundraiser and retro costume contest. Pictured are **Jake Paulhamus and Justin Anderson.**



Bunnies on the Bayou presented its Brunch with the Bunnies volunteer-recruitment event at the Montrose Center on September 11, 2021. Pictured are the Bunnies hosts.



On September 11, 2021, members of EPAH held their progressive dinner at various locations. Pictured are **Michele Laprade, Jody Morris, and Jackie and Richard Howard.**



A group toured the LGBTQ+ Collective Exhibition at the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives at Texas A&M University on September 17, 2021. Pictured are **Dalton DeHart, Arden Eversmeyer, Francesca Marini, Don Kelly, Rebecca Hankins, Bill Brown, Sara Fernandez, JD Doyle, and Brian Hlavinka.**



Pride Sports Houston Kickball held an open-play event at Memorial Park. Pictured is **Herby Attagain Pouland.**



The Diana Foundation held a Splash Pool Party at the home of Mark Wade Brown on September 19, 2021. Pictured are **Jane Warren, Howard Huffstutler, and John Heinzerling.**



EPAH held its September dinner meeting at Max's Wine Dive Montrose on September 21, 2021. Pictured are **Kennedy Loftin, Todd Shell, Jack Berger, and Zhander P'ng.**



Members of QFest gathered for lunch at the Heights Bier Garten on September 26, 2021. Pictured are **Stephanie Saint Sanchez, Andrew Edmonson, Mary Lampe, Kristian Salinas, Marian Luntz, Ernie Manouse, and Sarah Gish.**



On September 25, Pride Sports Houston Kickball played their Week 3 game at Memorial Park. Pictured are members of the Scoregasms (pink) and the Xela (blue) teams.



On September 25, 2021, John Ross Palmer held a Collector's Night at Braemar in the Heights, featuring a special selection of his artwork. Pictured are **Frank Munos, AVM Hawkins, John Ross Palmer, Gabriel Sanchez, Tommy Calais, and Raymond Valdes Jr.**

Going Goth

By SAM BYRD
Photo by ALEX ROSA

Tisha Flowers loves the dark side of drag.

Tisha Flowers isn't evil—she just looks that way. Her drag persona is the gothic queen she always wanted to be as a youngster. As someone who loves the macabre and horror, she embraces all things dark and has made it her signature style—even when it comes to her name. “I always wanted to be Morticia Addams when I grew up. I thought she was so beautiful and elegant, so when picking a drag name, I naturally thought of her,” she recalls. Read on to discover what makes her Houston's Dark Lady.

Pronouns?

He/him out of drag; she/her in drag.

Hometown?

Vidor, just outside of Beaumont.

Inner avatar?

A strong, dark, independent warrior!

Drag birthday?

December 5, 2007

How did you get interested in drag?

I originally started drag because at the bar I was going to in Beaumont, [drag shows didn't use] rock or even pop-type music. It was all old-school gown numbers, and stuff that queens had been doing for years. I wanted to shake things up a bit for my friends—and I think I have!

Plans for Halloween?

I will co-host and perform at a block party in San Antonio put on by Pegasus nightclub.

Favorite past Halloween costume?

I must have dressed as Dracula for seven or eight years in a row as a kid, and of course I wore that cape year-round.

Does October have any special meaning to you?

Not only does it hold the best memories from my childhood, but my favorite holiday is Samhain.

Describe your drag style.

It varies, depending on what club or event I'm working and the audience. I love being able to perform hard-rock and metal music, but that

isn't for everyone. So most of the time, I try to bring a mix of '90s pop, Top 40, and sometimes a little comedy to my gigs. I try to always bring a crowd-pleasing show, no matter what.

Favorite artists to perform?

A few are Marilyn Manson, Lady Gaga, In This Moment, and Pink.

“When in doubt...”

“...freak 'em out!”

Drag icons?

Divine, The Boulet Brothers, Vander Van Odd, Loris, Dahli, Landen Cider, and Amanda Lepore.

What do you do when you're not performing?

I live and breathe drag, so when I'm not performing I'm usually at home working on a new costume or wig.

Any pets?

A pit bull, Sookie, and a black lab, Smoky.

Favorite drag character from the movies, TV, or literature?

Albert Goldman, from *The Birdcage*.

Most embarrassing moment in drag?

I can't think of a time that I was really embarrassed in drag. More than once something has “gone wrong” or “not according to plan,” but I always just laugh it off and go on.

Ultimate goal for Tisha?

Get back to doing drag full-time and fully supporting myself with my shows.

Must-haves for your purse?

Black lipstick, black sage, and a Baphomet rosary.

Where can fans see you perform?

On occasion at Barcode, Hamburger Mary's, Rumors Bar & Grill in Galveston, Pegasus in San Antonio, and sometimes at Scotty's Pub on the Bay in League City. ▼

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