

OutSmart

JULY '22

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

**QUEER IN
GALVESTON**
Personalities
Who Shape
the Island
Pg.30

Jalil "Jacx"
Cantarero,
Winger

IT'S GAME TIME!

**SPACE CITY RUGBY HEADS TO CANADA
FOR A WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TOURNAMENT** Pg.46

**WERQ
THE WORLD**
The Official
RuPaul's Drag
Race Tour
Returns
Pg.60

ROE V. WADE
The SCOTUS
Decision's
Impact on
LGBTQ Rights
Pg.16

THE BEAT GOES ON

P R I D E I N H O U S T O N

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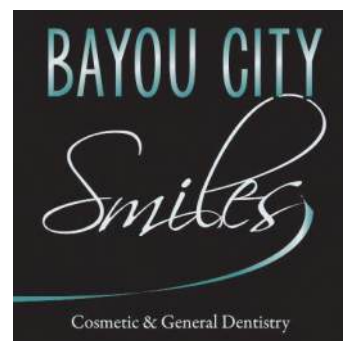
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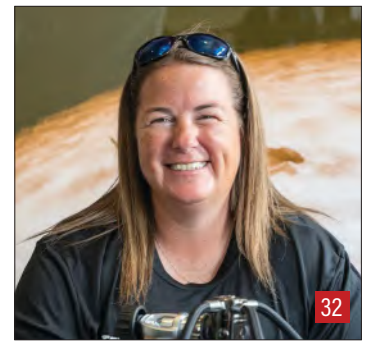




46



34



32



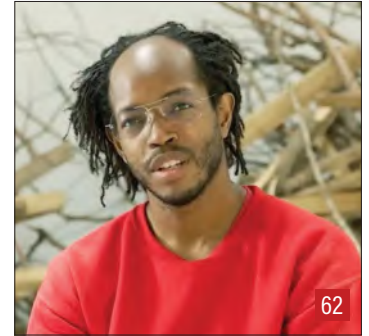
30



38



65



62

OS FEATURES JULY 2022

46 COVER STORY

SPACE CITY RUGBY

Houston's LGBTQ home team heads to Canada for a world championship tournament

51 HEALING THROUGH STORYTELLING

Pacifica Sauer's documentary film spotlights sexual abuse in the military

55 A COLLABORATIVE VISION

Justin McKee brings his creative expertise to Houston Public Media

60 HELLO, JORGEIOUS!

The *RuPaul's Drag Race* star returns to Texas for the *Werq the World* tour

62 HAUNTED BY 'BOOGY MEN'

Hugh Hayden's provocative art exhibition comes to Houston

65 TEXAS TRAILBLAZER

Alok Vaid-Menon promotes trans empowerment in a new comedy tour

30 QUEER IN GALVESTON

Island leaders who make the city a special place

30 Todd MacKenzie

32 Kristen Maples

34 Steven J. Baines

36 Ezra Bordelon

38 Mitchell Bage and Luis Santiago

43 Andrew Clarke

68 DINING WITH DIVAS

Check out Houston's weekend drag-brunch options

82 WIGGING OUT

Symphony McKnight Capri enchants audiences near and far



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DEPARTMENTS

NEWS & COMMENT

16 NEWS

Justice Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion in the *Roe v. Wade* ruling threatens the court's previous pro-LGBTQ decisions;
Local Log Cabin Republicans denounce the State Party's anti-LGBTQ 2022 platform

20 SMART HEALTH

22 MONEY SMART

24 LEFT OUT

58 NIGHTLIFE

South Beach reopens on Pacific Street after four years of remodeling work

OUT & ABOUT

12 CALENDAR

27 SCENE OUT

70 OUT THERE

72 WEDDING GUIDE

75 BAR GUIDE

80 SIGN OUT

ADVERTISERS INDEX

77 CLASSIFIEDS MARKETPLACE

78 ADVERTISERS

ON the COVER

IT'S GAME TIME!

Space City Rugby heads to Canada for a world championship tournament (Pg.46)
Model: Jalil "Jacx" Cantarero, Winger
Photography by Victor Contreras
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On June 24, the US Supreme Court's conservative majority overturned *Roe v. Wade* and rolled

back 50 years of abortion rights. The decision puts the lives of all people with uteruses at risk, and the ruling may have other significant repercussions for LGBTQ people. In a concurring opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas urged the court to "reconsider all of this Court's substantive due-process precedents, including *Griswold*, *Lawrence*, and *Obergefell*." *Lawrence* struck down state bans on same-sex sexual relations, *Obergefell* removed state bans on same-sex marriage, and *Griswold* removed bans on contraceptives.

Days before the landmark decision was made, the Texas Republican Party held its 2022 convention and approved a new platform that calls homosexuality "an abnormal lifestyle choice," advocates a ban on gender-affirming care for trans teenagers,

and opposes "all efforts to validate transgender ideology."

The attacks on our community by far-right politicians have been constant, but we cannot give up hope as we continue to rally, contact our elected representatives, and mark our calendars to vote on November 8—or during early voting beginning October 24.

Those who would like to donate to local groups providing information on reproductive rights, or those in need of assistance, should contact the Afiya Center, Avow Texas, Know Your Rights Camp, The Lilith Fund, Plan C Pills, and Planned Parenthood.

In the midst of these uncertain times, our OUTSMART team hopes that this July 2022 issue inspires you with its stories of local LGBTQ leaders who keep pushing our community forward. Houston's own Space City Rugby, an all-inclusive team heading to Canada next month for a world-championship tournament, is featured on our July cover. Don't miss

writer Sam Byrd's interview with team members as they prepare to represent our city.

Our annual Galveston edition also spotlights a few of the many queer folks who make the Island a special place. Writer Connor Behrens chats with Todd MacKenzie about his inclusive Galveston piano bar, while writer Ryan Leach sits down with Kristen Maples to learn about the Island's scuba-diving scene. Writer Jenny Block speaks to interior designers Mitchell Bage and Luis Santiago about their new business, while writer Marene Gustin catches up with restaurant owners Lena Pyles and Victoria Newsome. Writer Zach McKenzie speaks to Island activist Steven J. Baines and church musician Ezra Bordelon.

Elsewhere in this issue, we spotlight two out local media personalities who use their platforms to educate Houstonians. Writer Lillian Hoang interviews KHOU's Pacifica Sauer about her latest documentary, while Jenny

Block speaks to Justin McKee about his creative leadership at Houston Public Media.

Finally, if you're looking for a festive weekend dining experience, check out one of the popular drag brunches recommended by writer Joanna O'Leary. Also on our July radar is artist Hugh Hayden's latest exhibition at the Blaffer Art Museum and the official *RuPaul's Drag Race* *Werq the World* tour coming to Sugar Land's Smart Financial Centre on July 16.

See you next month!

Lourdes Zavaleta
Managing
Editor



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QUEER THINGS to DO



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FUNDRAISER

July 16

Werq the World

You betta Werq! The official *RuPaul's Drag Race* Werq the World tour is coming to Smart Financial Centre with an all-new production for 2022. Brought to you by Voss Events, the show features *Drag Race* stars Kameron Michaels, Rose, Vanessa Vanjie, Yvie Oddly, and all finalists from Season 14.

Created by Brandon Voss and World of Wonder, Werq the World is known for its large-scale productions with a concert-style feel. The first Houston tour was set for October 2017, but rescheduled due to Hurricane Harvey. When it came back around for a make-up performance the following

year, the queens donated to the Montrose Center's LGBTQ Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund.

Now back in the US for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, the latest Werq the World tour features unforgettable new moments that include a performance by Season 14 lip-sync star Jorgeous. The Texas native tells OUTSMART that fans can expect to see her signature style on stage. "The audience will be getting a whole lot of Latina flair, sexy choreo, body, you know what I mean? The full dancing-diva Jorgeous experience!" (see page 60)

tinyurl.com/3kdukcbe



COMMUNITY

July 28-31

Heavy Hitters Pride

Heavy Hitters Pride hosts its seventh annual convention throughout Houston. The two-day event provides safe spaces for urban gay men, their admirers, and allies with networking and activities.

tinyurl.com/4e2bn2hs

COMMUNITY

July 1

First Friday Meet & Eat

The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce hosts its monthly lunch mixer at Momma's at Senglemann. The casual event is open to all who are interested in networking and learning more about the Chamber. tinyurl.com/3dms9we8



NIGHTLIFE

July 1

Denali at ReBar

RuPaul's Drag Race star Denali performs at ReBar. Hosted by ONDI, the event features performances by Blackberri, Adriana LaRue, Petty, and Denali. tinyurl.com/y36we8uu

NIGHTLIFE

July 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

Slay All Day

Social Beer Garden's weekly drag show Slay All Day is hosted by Luna of the Lilies and features beats by GNDRBNDR and performances by Annalee Naylor. tinyurl.com/2u42k73r



COMMUNITY

July 8

Bearadise

At 10 p.m., Bears with beards will take over BUDDY'S for a night of go-go dancers and drink specials. tinyurl.com/596t5m5a



COMMUNITY

July 10

A Colorful Experience

A Dream to Remember presents an LGBTQ wedding showcase at Enchanted Cypress Ballroom. The event features photo booths, cake designers, choreographers, event planners, and more. tinyurl.com/5n8xfejn



COMMUNITY

July 11

Gaymers Movie Night – Thor: Love & Thunder
Join the Houston Gaymers for Movie Night at the Regal Edwards Houston Marq'E Theater. The LGBTQ gaming group will screen *Thor: Love & Thunder* in a private theater with seating limited to 20. tinyurl.com/586faauc

COMMUNITY

July 14

Lazarus House 20th Anniversary

Lazarus House, a wellness center that serves cancer, stroke, HIV, and other patients, celebrates its 20th anniversary at BUDDY'S. tinyurl.com/yckrdy6m

COMMUNITY

July 15

Transparent Closet Fashion and Drag Show

First Christian Church Katy celebrates its new Transparent Closet with a fashion and drag show. Featuring performances by Kiki Dion Van Wales, Vivica Perry, and DJ Jamie Waymire, the event supports Transparent Closet, a free clothing boutique for trans and questioning teens and young adults. tinyurl.com/3hd68899



COMMUNITY

July 15–17

Comicpalooza

Comicpalooza is back at the George R. Brown Convention Center for two days. This pop-culture festival features celebrities, shopping, and activities that will keep you entertained. tinyurl.com/2wevf9mh

COMMUNITY

July 20

Monthly LGBTQ Legal Clinic

Join the Earl Carl Institute for a free legal and social policy clinic at the Montrose Center. Come and get advice in estate planning, securing official documents, criminal issues, and more. tinyurl.com/4ju3k8ka

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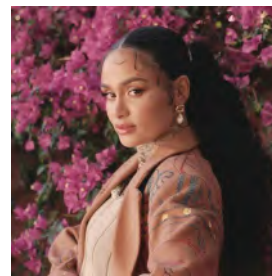
QUEER THINGS to DO SAVE the DATES

STAGE

August 13

Queer Improv Jam

Station Improv & Sketch Comedy Theatre hosts a Queer Improv Jam. LGBTQ comedians of all experience levels can practice onstage and bond with fellow performers. tinyurl.com/4y4xbtkw



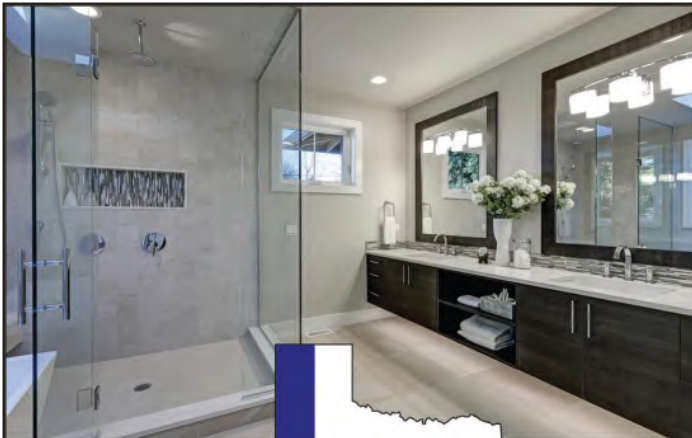
STAGE

August 30

Kehlani: Blue Water Road Trip

Kehlani brings her new music to Bayou Music Center. The nonbinary lesbian singer-songwriter released her third studio album, *Blue Water Road Trip*, in April 2022.

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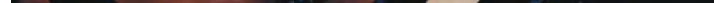
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STAGE

September 13

Lady Gaga: The Chromatica Ball

Lady Gaga brings her Chromatica Ball tour to Minute Maid Park. Proceeds from each ticket sold benefit Gaga's Born This Way Foundation, a nonprofit that supports the wellness of young people by working with them "to make the world kinder and braver." tinyurl.com/52mtt8yh



STAGE

October 11

Lil Nas X:

Long Live Montero

Lil Nas X performs at 713 Music Hall. The tour features tunes from the gay rapper and singer's new album, *Montero*.

tinyurl.com/2bwu66yj



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SCOTUS Overturns Roe v. Wade

Justice Thomas' concurring opinion urges the court to also reconsider pro-LGBTQ decisions.

By LISA KEEN, KEEN NEWS SERVICE



In a ruling that is expected to have significant repercussions for LGBTQ people, the US Supreme Court ruled 6-to-3 on June 24 that the US Constitution “does not prohibit” states

from banning abortion.

Underscoring that concern, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote a concurring opinion that urges the court to “reconsider all of this Court’s substantive due-process precedents, including *Griswold*, *Lawrence*, and *Obergefell*.” *Lawrence* struck down state bans on same-sex sexual relations, *Obergefell* removed state bans on same-sex marriage, and *Griswold* removed bans on contraceptives.

However, Justice Samuel Alito downplayed the concern for how the decision will impact other rights, including the right of same-sex couples to marry, the right to have same-sex relations, and the right to obtain contraception.”

“These attempts to justify abortion through appeals to a broader right to autonomy and to define one’s ‘concept of existence’ prove too much,” wrote Alito, who was joined on the majority opinion by Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett. Chief Justice John Roberts did not sign on to Alito’s decision but issued his own opinion, concurring in the judgment.

Alito offers thin reassurance that the decision will not impact these other rights.

He said the majority has “stated unequivocally that ‘[n]othing in this opinion should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion,’” adding that abortion involves taking a “potential life,” while the decisions in the other cases do not. Then he adds this:



“Each precedent is subject to its own *stare decisis* analysis, and the factors that our doctrine instructs us to consider, like reliance and workability, are different for these cases than for our abortion jurisprudence,” said Alito. Given that the *Dobbs* decision analysis of *stare decisis* (respect for precedent) overturns the 50-year-old *Roe v. Wade* decision, this reassurance falls empty. *Obergefell v. Hodges*, striking state bans on same-sex marriage, was issued only seven years ago. *Lawrence v. Texas*, striking state bans on consensual sex between same-sex adults, was issued only 19 years ago.

Adding to that concern, Justice Clarence Thomas, in a concurring opinion, urges the court to “reconsider all of this Court’s substantive due process precedents, including *Griswold*, *Lawrence*, and *Obergefell*. He said the

court has “a duty to ‘correct the error’ established in those precedents....”

The 6-to-3 decision came in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, a case in which an abortion clinic challenged a new law in Mississippi that banned abortion at any time after 15 weeks unless there is a medical emergency or severe fetal abnormality.

In an unprecedented development, a draft of a majority opinion was leaked to the press on May 2, seeming to indicate that the court was poised to overturn its longstanding decisions protecting the right to abortion. LGBTQ legal activists were alarmed at the language of that draft, written by Justice Samuel Alito, saying it laid the groundwork to overturn landmark decisions in support of rights for LGBTQ people.

Roe v. Wade, in 1973, said the Constitution implies that citizens have a right to privacy and liberty, and that those rights cover the right to choose an abortion. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, in 1992, said states could regulate abortion once a fetus becomes viable as long as the regulations did not create an undue burden on women who seek an abortion.

During oral argument on December 1, the Supreme Court justices discussed the implications for the *Dobbs* decision on two major LGBTQ decisions: *Lawrence v. Texas* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*. *Lawrence* ruled that states could not ban sexual relations between same-sex couples, while *Obergefell* ruled that states could not prohibit same-sex couples from marrying.

Generally, judges and justices are expected to keep preconceived ideas of how a case might be decided to themselves. But Justice Brett Kavanaugh appears to have abandoned that protocol, too. In his concurring opinion, he includes a footnote (page 8) that says *Obergefell*

“overruled” *Baker v. Nelson*.

“Much of American society was built around the traditional view of marriage that was upheld in *Baker v. Nelson*, and that was reflected in laws ranging from tax laws to estate laws to family laws. In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Court nonetheless overruled *Baker*.



Justice Clarence Thomas

The court did not “overrule” *Baker v. Nelson*. That was a 1972 appeal case in which the Supreme Court did not issue an opinion. Instead, it summarily dismissed a gay couple’s appeal to recognize same-sex marriage.

“This is the most shockingly activist Court we have seen in any of our lifetimes,” said Jenny Pizer, senior legal counsel for Lambda Legal. “The arrogantly selective reading of history and disdain for generations of jurisprudence would be bizarre if it weren’t so terrifying.”

In the *Dobbs* majority abortion opinion on June 24, the court does overturn two major precedents: *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parent-*

hood v. Casey.

In his opinion concurring in the judgment of the majority, Chief Justice John Roberts says he sees “no sound basis for questioning the adequacy” of 15 weeks for a woman to obtain an abortion. He chose not to sign onto Alito’s opinion, apparently because, as Alito said, “its dramatic and consequential ruling is unnecessary to decide the case before us.

“The Court’s decision to overrule *Roe* and *Casey* is a serious jolt to the legal system—regardless of how you view those cases,” Roberts wrote. “A narrower decision rejecting the misguided viability line would be markedly less unsettling, and nothing more is needed to decide this case.”

“Seeing this carte blanche invitation to [state] legislatures to eliminate the freedom to make one’s own decisions about one’s own body and life, especially following yesterday’s absurd decision elevating gun rights over public safety,” said Lambda’s Pizer, “offers a picture of American society potentially transformed in a horrifying direction.”

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Texas GOP Declares Homosexuality an 'Abnormal Lifestyle Choice'

Local Log Cabin Republicans denounce the anti-LGBTQ platform.

By MARENE GUSTIN



The Texas Republican Party held its 2022 convention in Houston June 16–18, their first in-person convention since the pandemic began. The 40-page plat-

form they adopted leaves no doubt that Texas Republicans are still in the party of Trump.

The approved GOP platform declares Joe Biden's 2020 election is illegitimate, rebukes the ten Senate Republicans involved in bipartisan talks on gun legislation, requires students to "learn about the humanity of the preborn child," and calls homosexuality "an abnormal lifestyle choice."

The Log Cabin Republicans (LCR), a conservative LGBTQ group, was again barred from setting up a booth at the convention, but it did have delegates in attendance. And for local LCR Houston members, the anti-LGBTQ language provoked an immediate response.

"The efforts of a vocal and organized minority saw inflammatory, hurtful, and unnecessary language added to our Party's platform, the addition of which neither proclaims policy intentions nor helps build diverse coalitions; its only aim is to satisfy the zealotry of a few. The further unwillingness of many state Party leaders, including Chairman Matt Rinaldi, to seek understanding of Log Cabin Republicans' values and principles is infuriating," LCR Houston said in a June 20 statement. "Despite the intolerance shown to us, Log Cabin Republican members attending the convention as delegates represented LCR with honor and dignity. This weekend and every day we demonstrate our commitment to individual liberty, limited government, fiscal responsibility, a strong national defense, and other foundational principles held by the Republican Party. We have long shown our dedication to electing Republicans at all levels by hosting events for candidates, volunteering for campaigns, and swaying the hearts and minds of those fed up with the relentless and intentional Democratic destruction of our country. The two events the local and state chapters of LCR held at the



Texas GOP Convention were well attended, and passionate support was relayed to us from delegates and elected officials from rural and urban counties alike."

LCR Houston told OUTSMART it stands by its statement and declined to further comment.

At the 2018 Texas GOP State Convention, the Houston LCR chapter led a successful effort, with the support of other Republican allies and fellow LCR chapters across the state, to change the official party platform by removing all blanket condemnations of people simply for being gay. As a result of that success, the Houston chapter and the LCR Texas Board were recognized by the national organization of Log Cabin Republicans with an award at their annual Spirit of Lincoln Dinner held in Washington, DC in October of 2018.

It's not clear if any effort was made this year to challenge the anti-LGBTQ language in the Texas GOP's 2022 platform.

Despite LCR Texas' mission to represent LGBTQ and ally Republicans who "support equality under the law for all," the statewide chapter has been vocal in supporting Texas' anti-trans bills aimed at denying medical care and school sports participation for trans youth.

During the 2021 Texas legislative session, the *Dallas Voice* reported that members of LCR Texas testified in support of House Bill 4042, which would ban trans students from partici-

pating in sports that align with their gender identities. The organization also issued a statement in support of HB 4042 and its companion bill, SB 29.

"Log Cabin Republicans of Texas supports House Bill 4042 and its companion Bill 29. While we may have reservations about the bills' lack of nuance allowing schools latitude to address very unique situations, and about the issues it leaves unresolved that will certainly arise if this bill becomes law, we nonetheless believe this law takes a necessary step in protecting interscholastic athletic activities that are currently segregated by biological sex for the benefit and safety of both boys and girls."

The 2022 Texas Republican Party platform also calls for a ban on gender-affirming care, the distribution of puberty blockers or hormone-suppressing therapies, and gender-affirming surgeries for anyone under the age of 21. It then went even further by opposing "all efforts to validate transgender identity."

In April, LCR Texas said Governor Greg Abbott was right to "halt the administration of puberty blockers, hormone therapy treatment, and other treatments" for minors experiencing gender dysphoria, according to the *Dallas Morning News*.

LCR Texas describes trans people as "a small number of human beings, who in the past have been subject to harsh ostracization and unfair treatment." The group's board added that trans youth "deserve compassion and non-judgmental support, and all the available counseling and medical help available, short of irreversible medical procedures."

In an interview with NBC news, Ricardo Martinez, the CEO of Equality Texas, a statewide LGBTQ advocacy group, called the Texas Republican Party's platform "extreme, but not necessarily new."

"I'm glad that they're being really explicit in their words, because these words now match their actions," Martinez said. "This is not surprising, but it certainly is painful for LGBTQ people who live here in Texas."



James Walker



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Living Life with Fewer Regrets

Stop allowing anxiety and fear to dominate your journey.



Of all the innumerable platitudes and wellness posts littering our social-media feeds, “Live life. No regrets.” is one of the most problematic in its alluring simplicity.

Why do internet wellness gurus stress the importance of living life “to the fullest” (whatever *that* means) and having no regrets? Is that even a reasonable or realistic goal?

What, Exactly, Is Regret?

The emotional experience of regret is complex. It’s a feeling of disappointment, sadness, or remorse that can be caused by things we have done either to ourselves or to others. For example, you might say or do something hurtful to a friend or loved one, and the sorrow you feel in the aftermath would be called regret.

Guilt, by contrast, shifts the focus toward “I am a bad person because I did this,” while regret holds fast to the feeling of sadness and carries the risk of tipping over into sorrow or despair.

Regret, in particular, is an emotion that physically resides in our bodies and is often felt as a heaviness in the chest or a sinking feeling in the gut. Interestingly, the intent behind your regretful action has little impact on the intensity of the emotions you feel. You can have significant regrets about something done accidentally, just as you may hold very little regret for an intentional act.

Generally, most of our feelings are a response to an action or relationship. Regret distinguishes itself in that it can also be triggered by thinking about or reflecting on things we have not even done yet. People can regret not having a difficult but important conversation, or not taking a trip, or not participating in a potentially meaningful event.



Psychologically Useful Regret

Experiencing regret is natural, and it’s all but impossible to make it through life without having regrets. So why do we place so much emphasis on avoiding it? Perhaps it’s because we don’t consider how feelings of regret can help propel us into action.

Emotions serve as an internal road map, guiding our behavior and helping us realize when something feels right. As with other complex emotions, we can use our experiences of regret to guide both our thoughts and our behavior.

Feelings of regret about our past actions can direct us into an improved way of behaving and treating others as well as ourselves. Regretting a harsh statement can cause us to choose our words more carefully in the future. Our regrets engender a sense of empathy and allow us to place ourselves in the other person’s shoes, imagining how our actions might impact others.

Without regret, we would continue placing ourselves in potentially harmful or dangerous situations without realizing that we should be

making changes. For example, when I eat an entire \$3.99 bag of potato chips in one sitting, my stomach hurts and I regret that decision. As a result of that regret, I decide I am not going to engage in that behavior again. Of course, after a sufficient amount of time has passed (and my feelings of regret have subsided), I might buy more potato chips. But this time, instead of eating the entire bag, I eat only half.

Even if regret does not entirely eliminate particular behaviors, it can at least help us reduce the potential for harm. Regret lingers as a reminder to make sure that the lessons we learn are not forgotten.

When does regret become too much of a bad thing? Remaining in a space of continual regret by mentally replaying our past failings can contribute to feelings of guilt, shame, and depression. If the experience and intensity of regret is so great that it begins to negatively impact the way we see ourselves or the world, then speaking with a counselor or therapist might be a good way to make sense of the regret and find ways to create a more positive frame of mind.

It is unrealistic to suggest that living a life without regret is possible. As much as we may try to avoid feelings of regret, there will be times when we hurt someone else's feelings, make a mistake in a relationship, or stay too long in a situation that is not serving us. And when that happens, regret actually becomes useful. It is regret that serves as a reminder to not make the same mistakes over and over.

Regret as a Call to Action

Perhaps a better way of understanding the phrase "No regrets" is to think of it as a reminder to not allow anxiety and fear to dominate your journey. Regret can serve as a welcome challenge to do the things that scare you. We sometimes miss out on things that are rewarding because we allow our fears to prevent us from taking action. Perhaps there is an area in your life where you are holding back. Are you setting yourself up to experience regret?

Is there something you can do today to rectify a situation that makes you feel regretful? If so, you are using regret in a positive way to spark a move toward closure or to heal a damaged relationship.

Regret is the feeling that lets us know when we are not happy with our own behavior. Perhaps that's the hardest part about experiencing regret. As we force ourselves to look at where we have behaved regretfully, we don't always like what we see.

But remember that seeing who we were does not mean we must always be that way. The experience of regret is what helps us make and sustain these types of changes.

So the next time you find yourself wallowing in a sea of regrets, allow the life preservers of change and new possibilities to envelop you. If having excessive feelings of regret is a challenge, ask yourself what you've learned from those experiences, and what you can do differently in the future. And if you wish to avoid experiencing regret in the future, are there places in your life where fear and anxiety is impeding your progress?

What's your biggest regret? Or better yet, what are you gonna do about it?

Daryl Shorter, MD, is a Diplomat 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. Dr. Shorter can be reached at dr.darylshorter@gmail.com.



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Social Security for Same-Sex Couples

Navigating the benefits that you may (or may not) qualify for.



If someone asked you what your largest asset is, you might reply that it is your home or the balance in your retirement savings account.

But for many people, their

most valuable “asset” is their Social Security retirement-income benefits. I say this because when we look at the income that Social Security will generate, it’s important to realize what the equivalent asset base would have to be in order to generate the same kind of income that Social Security would pay.

Additionally, marital status is important when it comes to collecting Social Security benefits. One reason for this is because a married couple can strategize to possibly get more total income.

With that in mind, knowing what you are eligible for—as well as how to maximize these benefits from Social Security—can be a crucial component of your overall retirement-income planning.

How Much Will You Receive?

According to the Social Security Administration, an average wage earner replaces ap-

proximately 40 percent of their pre-retirement earnings with Social Security retirement income. So it is important to understand what you’re eligible for, and how it may coordinate with other future income sources that you and/or your spouse or partner may have.

As an example, if you generate an average of \$2,000 per month from Social Security, and you collect these benefits for 20 years, the total received would equal \$480,000! If your spouse or partner also generates that much, this “asset” alone could be worth just shy of \$1 million in lifetime income. That is why Social Security is usually your largest asset.

When you compare this to using a strategy of drawing income from an investment portfolio, there are no guarantees and stock-market volatility adds additional risk.

When Should I Start Receiving Benefits?

If you’re qualified to receive Social Security retirement benefits, you can file for them as early as age 62. But if you start to collect before your “full retirement age” of 65, 66, or 67 (depending on when you were born), the dollar amount of your monthly benefit will be reduced for the remainder of your life.

While it may make sense to file for Social Security early, it is important to first do the math so that you know just how much it could “cost” you. In this case, if your full retirement age is 66 and you file for Social Security at age 62, your benefit would be reduced by 25 percent.

Conversely, if you wait to file for Social Security until after your full retirement age, you can *increase* the dollar amount of your monthly benefit. In this case, the “delayed retirement credit” raises benefits by approximately 8 percent for every year that you hold off filing until age 70.

For instance, if your full retirement age is 66, and claiming benefits at that time would bring you \$2,000 per month, you could wait until age 67 to file, and the amount would be raised by 8 percent to \$2,160. And this doesn’t even include the annual cost-of-living adjustment from Social Security that you receive each year to help this income keep pace with inflation.

Spousal, Ex-Spouse, and Widow(er) Benefits

Spouses of eligible Social Security recipients may also be eligible for benefits even if they have never worked. So if you and your partner are married, it may be possible for you both to generate income from this source. This is an avenue that was not possible for same-sex couples until the overturning of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2015.

Depending on your particular situation, it may be possible to collect Social Security benefits based on an ex-spouse’s work record and/or as a “surviving spouse.” For instance, if your marriage lasted 10 years or longer and you are divorced, you could receive Social Security benefits—even if your ex is remarried—if you are age 62 or older, not currently married, your ex is eligible for Social Security benefits (even if they have not yet filed for them), and their benefit is larger than your own would be.

Survivor’s benefits are another component of Social Security. These are paid to widows, widowers, and dependents of eligible Social Security recipients. Continued income for a surviving spouse is an extremely important part of your overall retirement plan, as some (or possibly even all) income sources may stop when one spouse or partner passes away. This could leave the survivor in a difficult financial situation.

As a surviving spouse, you may be eligible for these benefits if:

- You were married for at least 9 months and living together at the time of death;
- You are age 60 or older (or age 50 or older and disabled);

- You are any age and caring for your deceased spouse's child who is under age 16 or has a disability and is receiving benefits;
- You are divorced from your deceased spouse (under certain circumstances).

Yet, even though Social Security now recognizes same-sex married couples in all US states for benefits-qualification purposes—as well as some civil unions and domestic partnerships—those benefits could disappear if marriage equality is repealed in the future.

For this reason, it is a good idea to have other retirement income sources in place. Working with a financial-planning professional can be helpful in determining additional income generators, as well as how much you may receive from them.

Maximizing Social Security Income

There are several potential strategies that allow you to maximize your Social Security retirement benefits. In addition to taking advantage of the 8 percent yearly benefits increase when you delay receiving Social Security, married couples could start receiving one spouse's Social Security while delaying the other's benefit to capture the 8 percent delayed-income credit. Given today's interest-rate environment and the potential for losses in the market, a guaranteed 8 percent annual increase can be very attractive.

Will Your Future Income Be Enough?

When making decisions about retirement income, it is necessary to consider the current facts. And because everyone's objectives, time frame, risk tolerance, and family situation will differ, there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all strategy. There are also many items that are out of your control, such as the possibility of same-sex spousal benefits from Social Security being repealed in the future.

This is why it is recommended that you work with a financial-planning professional before making any type of commitment to a retirement-income plan. Planning professionals who are well-versed in the issues of the LGBTQ community can be even more beneficial, as they are more familiar with specific financial issues that you may face both now and in the future.

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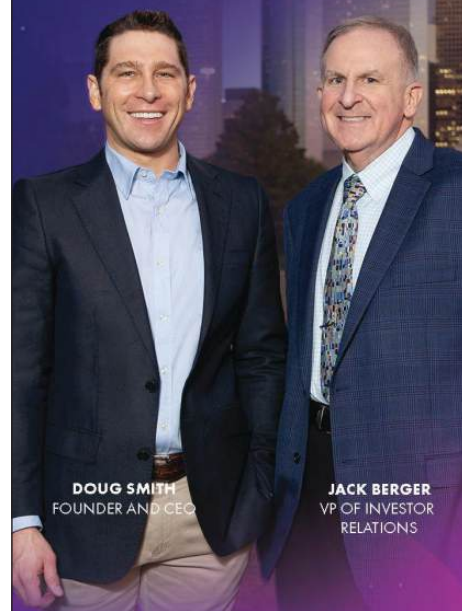


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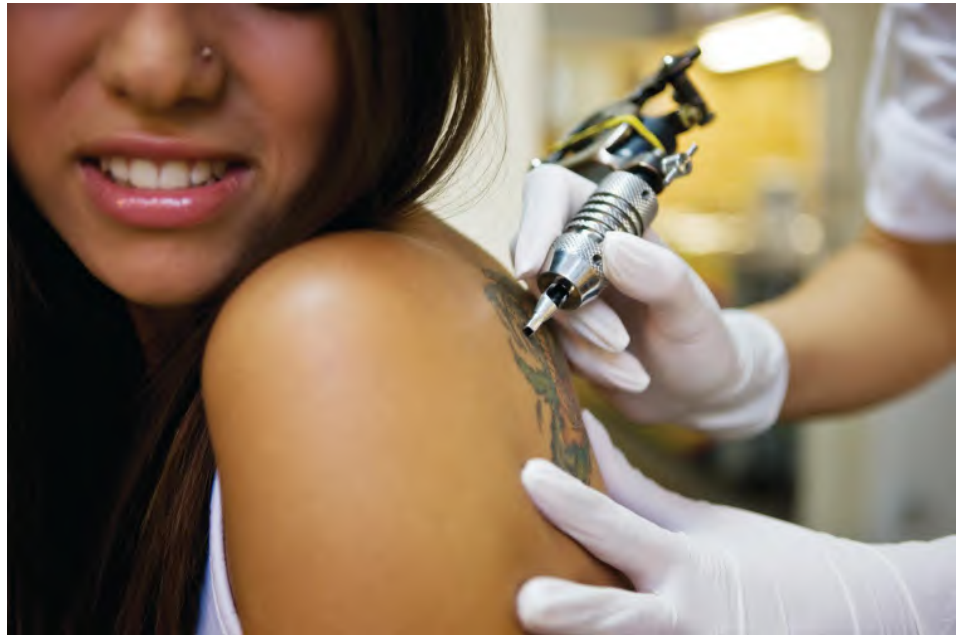
Now that July is here and we are all displaying as much skin as possible (because it's hot enough to make hell look like an ice skating rink), it's time to consider my little summer fashion secret: If you can't hide it, decorate it.

If you can't hang an ornament on it or claim that it's an official world record, then get it tattooed. (Warning: this is a decision that lasts a lifetime. Think of all the old people you know who still have Milli Vanilli tattoos from 1990.)

But here's the important part: you gotta choose your tattoo artists carefully. I've gone ahead and compiled this list to help you find the perfect tattoo shop.

How to Know It's Time to Find a Better Tattoo Artist

- The flash tattoos hanging on the shop wall look suspiciously like pages from a SpongeBob SquarePants coloring book.
- He doesn't believe in coloring within the lines.
- You and she disagree about what the color blue looks like.
- You ask how he sterilizes the machines and he points at some kind of bucket.
- You ask if she can give you a lobster tattoo and she refuses because she's allergic to shellfish.
- His most recent award: 2nd-grade spelling bee finalist.
- You request a tramp stamp and she asks if you want the 42-cent kind or the new Forever stamp.
- You request a PRIDE tattoo but end up with PRUDE emblazoned across your chest.
- The name of the shop is Tattooz & Tirez.



You may have heard that Turkey (the country) has changed its name. The reason, according to a press release, is that Turkish officials object to Google search results that always display the large bird whenever someone enters the word *Turkey*.

I can understand that. When my friend Dick googles his own name down at the library, a stern-looking woman comes over to his computer and whispers through clenched teeth, "That is not allowed in a public library, sir."

Turkey's new name is Türkiye. It is pronounced tur-key-yea. I'm serious.

Here's the other official explanation given by Türkiye officials: "One of the definitions of *turkey* was something that fails badly, or a stupid or silly person." Well see, in Texas that wouldn't be a problem since we have other names for such people. Greg Abbott and Ted Cruz come immediately to mind.



Remember when Republican Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy got himself all worked up in a fit of righteousness and declared that Donald Trump was personally responsible for the January

6 attack on the Capitol? Then Donald Trump called McCarthy a poopie-face (or something like that), so now McCarthy has clarified who he actually thinks was responsible for ransacking the Capitol: "I think everyone in the country was responsible."

Oh, really? Let me just remind Congress-varmint McCarthy that it wasn't me. I wasn't even there, and the only reason I even saw it was because Aunt Erleen called me up and hollered, "Honey, go turn on the teevee. Republicans are getting ass-nekkid and wearing feathers and fur and shit. And that's the *men*—the same ones who complain about drag queens! The nerve!"

So that's all I had to do with it, Congress-varmint Kevin. I am not responsible for any of that sedition stuff, beyond being stone-cold mortified about the whole thing.

Until next month, I've come up with a new trick for surviving this Texas summer heat. All ya do about it, Honey, is put a straw in your wine bottle so you can suck it up.

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

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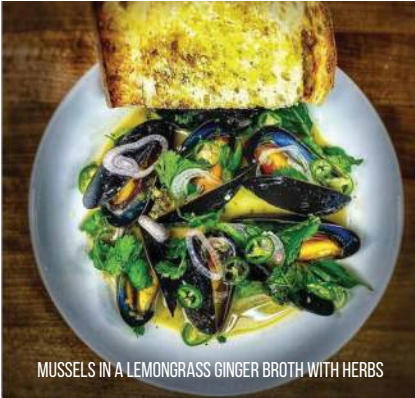
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SCENE OUT

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On June 4, 2022, YellowKorner hosted the Montrose Center Pride Kickoff Benefit at River Oaks District. Pictured are **Omar Contreras, Rossana Robledo, Raphael Dos Santos, Mickey Ochoa, Fernando Maria Solis, Ren LaValley, and Armando Ortiz.**



On June 4, 2022, The Stella Link Seville Mr. & Miss Gay Pride Houston 2022 Pageant was held at JR'S Bar & Grill. Pictured are **Heidi T. Iman and Shawn Michaels.**



ROADwomen celebrated its 25th anniversary at Bar-M-Barbecue on June 4, 2022. Pictured are **Dulce Toledo, Kat Clemons, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Carli Mosier, Dalia Stokes, Robin Fulford, Martha Huebel, Mary Anne Friedrich, and Rufi Natarajan.**



On June 5, 2022, Pride Houston 365 held its Pride Market at Karbach Brewing Company. Pictured are **Kendra Walker, Kristina Fortunato, and Thasia Madison.**



OUT Professionals launched its OutPro Lounge Houston at ReBar on June 9, 2022. Pictured are **Jacques Bourgeois, Major Sylvester Turner, Charlie Conard, and Pete Beausoleil.**



On June 10, 2020, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber visited with Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher at Michael's Cookie Jar. Pictured are **Thomas Lopez, Kristi Marchand, Tiffany Tosh, Judge Jerry Simoneaux, Tammi Wallace, Jack Berger, Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher, and Michael Savino.**



On June 18, 2020, Pride Chorus Houston presented its Pride concert at Emery Wiener School. Pictured are **Artistic Director Matt Jones (r)** and chorus members.



Legacy Community Health held its 2022 Mint Julep kickoff party at the home of Richard Werner and Tony Bravo on June 12, 2022. Pictured are **Dr. Bobby Hilliard, Greg Gown, Chree Boydston, Tony Bravo, Richard Werner, Cyndy Garza Roberts, Thomas Roberts, Ray Purser, and Ed Finger.**



On June 12, 2022, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber and the Houston Dash celebrated Pride Night while taking on the Portland Thorns. Pictured are **Meredith Meade, Britt Perez, Jack Berger, Nathan Maxey, Shenice Brown, David Perez, Thomas Lopez, and Tammi Wallace.**



The Alley Theatre hosted ActOUT at the Alley prior to their production of *Noir* on June 16, 2022. Pictured are **Stacey Eckert, Patrick Godal, Rachel Applegate, John Munn, Lauren Pelletier, Derek Moore, Tina Berry, Jason Clayden, and Brian Dupnick.**



On June 16, 2022, Pride Houston 365 held their official grand marshals reception at Avant Garden. Pictured are former and current grand marshals.



The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber presented Pride in Business 2022 at the Downtown Aquarium on June 22, 2022. Pictured are **Chamber president & CEO Tammi Wallace (r)** with the award recipients.

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.

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MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

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

ABOUT BIKTARVY

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

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

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

- ▶ dofetilide
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- ▶ 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.
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Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

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

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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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Inclusivity on the Island

Todd MacKenzie's piano bar welcomes all.

By CONNOR BEHRENS

While many may consider 23rd Street Station to be a gay piano bar, owner Todd MacKenzie sees it more as a safe space for people from all walks of life.

"I want everyone to feel welcomed, feel respected, feel appreciated, and feel safe when they step into the bar," he says. "I don't care who you are, what race you are, what religion you are, what you do for a living, how much money you have or don't have. I want you to come in and escape the world."

This Galveston bar, which features piano sing-alongs and other live entertainment, has been MacKenzie's passion project for the last few years. He owns the bar with his lifelong partner, Tom, and has been interested in operating bars ever since he moved to the Island in 2003.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART

After opening several bars, including the popular Lucky Lounge, MacKenzie jumped at the chance to take over the 23rd Street venue more than four years ago. “Tom and I went over and looked at it,” he recalls. “While we loved the bar itself, we [wanted to add live] piano music. We are in our late 60s and we like that kind of entertainment, so we decided to turn it into a piano bar. In the last few years, we’ve made it into what it is today.”

MacKenzie also wanted to create a casual, easygoing mood for his guests by adding speakers and TV monitors to the outside patio.

“We cater to everybody because everyone likes good entertainment,” he says. “It’s live music, and 23rd Street has been really blessed in that regard. We probably have 30 to 50 different performers over 12 months. They are so talented, and we feel so grateful that they come to our bar. It’s a very intimate space to work. There’s probably about 75 or so seats in our main bar area. The performers truly love how intimate the bar feels.”

The bar doesn’t open its doors to just pianists, however. “We have a jazz trio, a violinist, we do dueling pianos, and we’ve had a saxophone,” MacKenzie notes. “We also have

comedy nights when local comedians come in. It’s probably 90 percent piano music, but between all the other options there’s always something for everyone.”

And because music can bring people from all walks of life together, MacKenzie has made a conscious effort to create an inclusive environment that caters to groups beyond the gay community.

“I really didn’t want to label any bar I owned as a gay bar,” he says. “While it is certainly gay-friendly, everybody is welcomed. I want everyone to stop by and feel included—tourists, locals, anyone. To me, that’s what a bar is all about.”

After opening several bars on the Island, MacKenzie was taken aback by the camaraderie of the Galveston bar community.

“Because the Island is very small, everybody knows everybody,” he explains. “There are a lot of bars on the Island, and almost every bar owner knows every other bar owner. The community has been great. We really try to give back to the community all the time. We are very good sponsors of organizations such as Access Care of Coastal Texas. We do all kinds of fundraising.

“Both bars that we own cater to locals. While I love people from out of town, in order to survive on this Island you have to really be a part of the local community. That’s the great thing about Galveston businesses: each neighborhood on the Island has its own vibe.”

Going forward, MacKenzie plans to reopen Lucky Lounge near the Seawall later this summer. (He was forced to close the popular establishment after 17 years because he lost his lease.) While the new bar won’t offer piano music, it will provide patrons with the same welcoming atmosphere as 23rd Street.

“Any business that I own, I want it to be viewed as welcoming,” he says. “That’s what bars are all about, in my mind. There are so many bars on the Island that offer so many different types of atmosphere, so I want people who choose my businesses to feel that it was worth every penny. I hope they feel appreciated and remember the good time they had—and come back!”



For more on 23rd Street Station, go to 23rdstreetstation.com.





Dive into the Gulf

Kristen Maples' scuba shop creates unique underwater experiences.

By RYAN M. LEACH

Somewhere off the coast of Galveston, out in the Gulf of Mexico, there is a whole new world waiting for you under the sea. Just a short boat ride will take you out to a place with 100-foot visibility underwater. There you will find brightly colored Caribbean fish, sea turtles, manta rays and, very likely, the owner of Texas Scuba Adventures, Kristen Maples.

Maples, 42, has co-owned and operated Texas Scuba Adventures with business partner Craig Shannon since they opened their Galveston shop in 2019. Maples, who identifies as lesbian, is not a native to Galveston but got there as soon as she could after living all over the world—both above and below the ocean's surface.

"I am from all over the place! I've lived in Houston, Austin, Australia, North Carolina, New Orleans, Albuquerque, and along the Oregon coast. Each place has a unique meaning to me. However, I moved to Galveston in 2004 and it has been a place that I definitely refer to as home. I have always loved the water, ever since flipping through my first Jacques Cousteau book at around 5 or 6. Galveston gives me a home near the water within a beautiful community," she says.

Maples received her first diving certification at the age of 14. From there, she was in the water every chance she got.

"As I spent more and more time in the water, diving started to pique my curiosity even more, and I started wondering about taking additional certification courses," she explains.

"After that, I worked as a fishery biologist for years. I completed monitoring dives along the Oregon coast, the Colorado River, and worked in a large shark exhibit in an aquarium. It was during this career that I started seeing the value of experiential education, and this led me to pursue my dive-instructor certification."

Prior to opening Texas Scuba Adventures, Maples and Shannon worked together for five years focusing on private scuba instruction and a dive/science program that they developed for Space Center Houston and other local schools. Then one day, while enjoying some adult beverages, the two thought it would be a great idea to open up their own school on the Island.

"We both share a love for Gulf diving, sharing our passion with others, and teaching. We realized the Island was missing a dive shop. We decided to start looking for a storefront, and two months later we were opening our doors. The shop has grown exponentially, and we could not be happier. We have a fantastic team! We teach all levels of scuba certification, offer retail, rentals, equipment servicing, charters, international trips and, of course, still focus on our dive/science program for youth," says Maples.

Teaching others brings her an enormous amount of joy, and is one of her favorite things about diving. She says there is nothing better than seeing the excitement on someone's face after they have tried diving.

Another favorite thing about diving for Maples is being able to do it alongside her wife, Lauren, 32.

"She is a professional diver as well. Just to brag on her, she dives for NASA's Neutral

Buoyancy Laboratory, and if we aren't diving for work then we are traveling and diving. We have made some amazing memories, all due to places we have [visited in order] to get underwater," says Maples.

Texas Scuba Adventures trains divers of all skill levels, and has some advice for beginners who may be nervous about going below the surface. "Every diver you meet, including your instructor, was new and nervous at one point in their dive journey. Talk to us, and I can guarantee we can tell you a funny story about something we were nervous about. Diving isn't instantly natural, but certification classes teach you how to dive safely, which helps calm the nerves over time. You learn how to take care of yourself and a buddy underwater."

Maples says that she and the team at Texas Scuba Adventures are always there to help acclimate and encourage new divers. They also host group dives like this month's Women's Dive Day on July 16. For folks who have already gotten their feet wet, they host international trips and dive with the attendees.

"The more bubbles you blow, the more comfortable you will be. We aren't just here for the class, we are a constant contact for anyone who wants to reach out," says Maples. "It's never too late or too early to try diving. We have certified divers from as young as 10 to as young as 87! We're happy to answer questions, provide more info, and help with anything you need."

What: Texas Scuba Adventures,
2315 Mechanic Street in
downtown Galveston

Info: 409-363-9641 or
texasscubaadventures.com



Texas Scuba Adventures takes divers exploring off of the coast of Galveston.

Commanding the Coast

Steven J. Baines is an asset to his local community.

By ZACH MCKENZIE



A devotion to service, community support, and being a source of visibility for the Black queer community has created several

professional and personal milestones and opportunities for Steven J. Baines. Today, the 56-year-old image consultant, trainer, and executive coach serves as an advocate and resource at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston. With an already stacked calendar of events, Baines still keeps an eye out for the next opportunity to show up and show out on the Island.

“My role at UTMB is senior consultant in talent and organizational development, which is a part of human resources,” Baines explains. “My core function is leadership development. I help train and develop leaders and their teams throughout the organization. That can look like facilitating courses, doing personality assessments, coaching executives, and being an advisor to a lot of the leaders.”

Having obtained an undergraduate degree in communications with a minor in marketing from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Baines went on to earn his master’s degree in intercultural and international management with a concentration in human resources from the School for International Training in Vermont.

The community leader notes that his service projects have landed him some of his most valuable opportunities. “A lot of things have happened for me thanks to volunteering, which is very important to me,” he stresses. “I attribute my development to volunteering and networking and relationship building, and my ability to build relationships and volunteer in various ways.”

People are the cornerstone of all of those things.

"A lot of this started when I was in the Peace Corps in Bolivia," Baines recalls. "From there, I went to grad school and then to Malawi for three years. While I was in Southern Africa, I worked for Catholic Relief Services as a program manager for an HIV/AIDS program we had there."

After returning back home, Baines met Dr. Ian Barrett at a black-tie gala. "Ian was an associate vice president for Cincinnati Children's Medical Center, and he also happened to be Black and gay. We became fast friends, and I told him about this job I applied for in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) training. He said he had a job opening at his hospital, so I applied and got the job."

After Dr. Barrett was recruited to UTMB, he worked tirelessly to convince Baines to join him down on the Island, and was eventually successful in his efforts. "I've been in Galveston seven-and-a-half years; I moved here in January of 2015," Baines notes. He hit the ground running, and his devotion to service landed him on the UTMB President's Cabinet. "I am currently a member of the Selections Committee. We give money to programs that wouldn't otherwise get funding, and I play a role in choosing those programs."

**"I BELIEVE WHEREVER
YOU LIVE, EVERYBODY
CAN ADD SOMETHING.
I WANT TO MAKE
GALVESTON THE
BEST VERSION OF
A WELCOMING AND
INCLUSIVE PLACE
FOR EVERYONE."**

—Steven J. Baines

Outside of work and volunteering, Baines became a fixture at Galveston's Own Farmers Market. He was soon brought on to serve as a volunteer and was eventually persuaded to join their board of directors. "I was told it was only a couple of hours every month, and I agreed because I could handle that scope of work," he says with a hint of foreshadowing. "I was ultimately elected president."

At the farmers market, Baines and his team foster a sense of community and inclusion. "We want everyone to feel welcome when they

visit. Drag Queen Story Time is just one way that we do that.

"We've heard people refer to the Market as their church. We have vendors of all races, ages, and cultural backgrounds. We have music every Sunday and a variety of artists that play for the crowd." The Access Coastal Care of Texas, one of the Market's rotating community partners, even offers free HIV and syphilis testing to the community. "We always try to offer things that show the market is an inclusive place to be."

Having served on various other committees and boards, including Leadership Galveston and ANICO Toastmasters, Baines is committed to making the world a little better for everyone. He operates on the principle that everyone has something to offer their community.

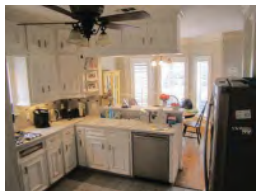
"I believe wherever you live, everybody can add something. I want to make Galveston the best version of a welcoming and inclusive place for everyone," he concludes. "Representation matters. I don't want to be the only Black guy in the room. I want others to see me and realize they can do anything they set their minds to, as well."



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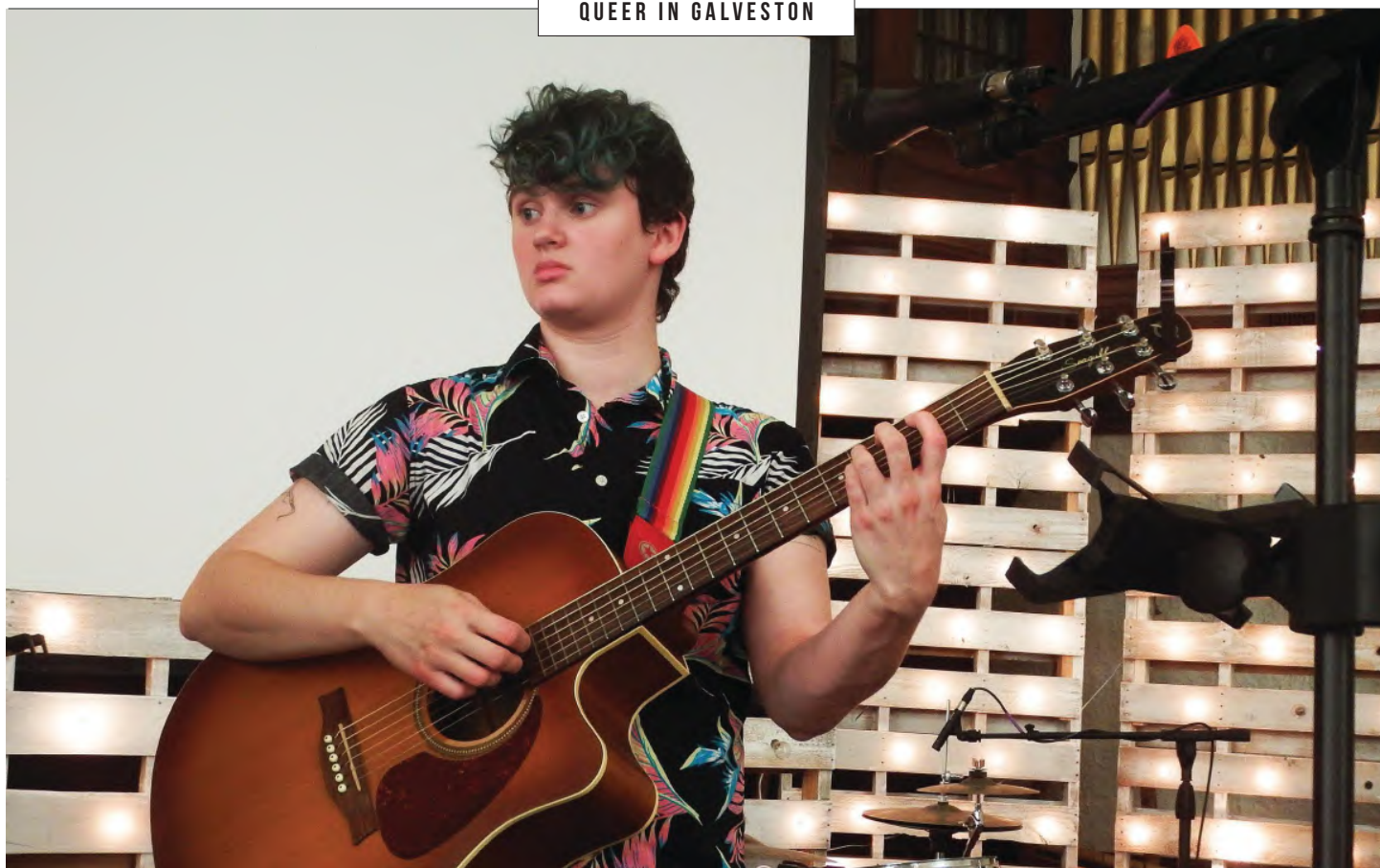


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COURTESY

Sounds of the Seaside

Ezra Bordelon leads worship at an LGBTQ-affirming church on the Island.

By ZACH MCKENZIE

When queer people name the places where they've felt a sense of acceptance, belonging, and healing, "church" is typically at the bottom of the list—if it even makes the cut.

But for Ezra Bordelon, a transmasculine nonbinary musician, Galveston Central Church has become his spiritual oasis. Bordelon serves as the church's musician and worship leader, and he describes that faith community as a glimpse into the kingdom of heaven.

The soft-spoken church leader recalls his childhood days in the church as a positive experience. "My parents are very sweet, and protected me for a long time from the nasty church politics they were dealing with as adults," he explains. His parents discovered he was queer when his mom found a video

recording of a song he posted online. "In that post I mentioned being gender fluid, which was my label in high school. She was really hurt for a minute, wondering why I wouldn't trust her and my dad with this. I told her she had to understand that I was scared to tell them [because of their Christian faith]."

Fear may have kept Bordelon from living authentically, with the impact of a church upbringing still lingering as he discovered who he was. "When I was a teenager, I felt a lot of that old fear while I was slowly coming out to people and getting mixed reactions, because a lot of people I know are from churches," he recalls. "I didn't figure out I was queer until I was an adult, but the church stuff sticks with you as you become an adult. I wrestled with my identity, but I never believed it was wrong, I just wasn't sure how the people I cared about would feel."

Music served as a creative outlet for

Bordelon from an early age. "I started learning guitar when I was six, through one of the young adults at my church in Seabrook. I picked up piano somewhere along the way and played a lot in the church I grew up in. I've always had a lot of opportunities to play and get experience through church gigs."

After conquering his intense stage fright at the age of 13, he went on to earn an associate degree in music at San Jacinto College. "I was nervous about singing as a kid, but I've been singing for a while. I have some classical training through my degree."

Today, churchgoers at Galveston Central are treated to Bordelon's musical and leadership gifts. "For almost five years I have been the worship leader in charge of music. I sing, play guitar or piano, and coordinate my little band of volunteers who play different instruments. We have a contemporary service without a traditional organ or songs."



Galveston Central's entire pastoral team, now headed by Rev. Michael Gienger, has been a blessing for Bordelon. "I feel incredibly lucky to have this place. I got the job when I was 21 and still figuring things out. I wasn't super out to people. I was presenting as super hyper-feminine and not sure what I wanted," he recalls. "I came out while I was working here. I told the staff and my pastor first, and soon after we started a small group specifically for LGBTQ people. I was in charge of that group for a while, and I still attend today."

Bordelon now leads an LGBTQ youth group

church story, top of middle column replace quote: "Our youth director is also out, and we started the group together. Someone asked my pastor how we were qualified, and rather than saying 'They're very gay!' he asked us if we could tell people our qualifications as queer persons. The fact that they asked us was so affirming."

Galveston Central is indeed a haven where Bordelon and other church members have been affirmed in their identity and faith practice.

"It's been a long process figuring out who I want to be and how I want to present myself

and my pronouns. I remember asking people to use they/them pronouns about three years ago, and they agreed and tried really hard. This church is a little bubble of affirmation within the United Methodist Church where I feel incredibly affirmed and welcomed."

Galveston Central is part of the United Methodist Church's LGBTQ-affirming Reconciling Ministries Network—local churches that commit to an open-door policy to people of all sexual identities. While many churches are not the most welcoming places for queer people, Bordelon says there's always a seat for members of the LGBTQ community at his church.

"I think many churches have done an incredible amount of damage for a million different reasons, and not just to our queer community. [I would say to queer people specifically that] we see you, you can be Christian and have faith, and nobody should be able to take that away from you. I'm really sorry that [so many people] have been hurt, but if they ever want to come to Galveston, they are absolutely welcome at Galveston Central!"



For more information, visit galvestoncentralchurch.com.

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—Luis Santiago

**Mitchell Bage (I)
and Luis Santiago**

Coastal Creativity

Mitchell Bage and Luis Santiago blend their design and real-estate passions to beautify the Island.

By JENNY BLOCK

Growing up, Mitchell Bage, 40, had dreams of being an architect—a path he likely would have followed had he not launched a successful career as an analyst for a NASA aerospace consulting firm when he was just 17 years old.

The Sante Fe, Texas, native decided to skip college and begin an internship that went full-time the following year. At that point, his true passions—art, architecture, and interior design—ended up on the back burner.

His husband, Luis Santiago, 39, dreamed of working in a museum or art gallery, as he loved history and the humanities. Born and raised in Ponce, Puerto Rico, he ended up earning a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Puerto Rico and working in a variety of oil and gas roles beginning in the mid-2000s.

But all of that is behind them now.

After meeting in 2013 and marrying in 2016, the Galveston couple's new life and love is Maison de Campagne (MDC), their design and real-estate business on the Island.

"Mitchell has an innate talent and incredible taste, and throughout most of his adult life (and throughout our relationship) he's been involved in assisting colleagues, friends, and family in achieving their dreams of living in stunning homes," Santiago says.

In the summer of 2018, the couple stumbled upon the home-staging industry and immediately knew it was something they would

be great at doing. "I knew that I could use my business mindset and Mitchell's talent to create a business that would truly allow us to flourish. We use our creativity and passion for real estate and interior design to add true value and create beautiful spaces on a regular basis," Santiago continues.

MDC was specifically inspired by the couple's passion for the French countryside aesthetic, "a mix of rustic elements and refined details that result in a show-stopping, simple, and elegant home. We pride ourselves on the ability to merge a more traditional style with a modern look by layering a mix of materials onto a classic foundation," Santiago explains. "It truly brings us so much joy to be able to explore our creativity, show our talent and passions, and express ourselves in ways that we had never done before."

The greatest thing about interior design, the couple says, is that there are truly no "rules" that must always be followed. "[An interior space] is a form of art. Therefore, it should create an emotion for the ones dwelling within it."

Bage, as the co-owner and creative director, is the lead designer and face of the company. "He interacts directly with our clients and helps curate their spaces. He also plans and executes every single staging job so that each one is unique and has the most impact," Santiago says.

As co-owner and managing director, Santiago handles finances, logistics planning, and marketing strategies. "Not to mention keeping our client database and company policies, contracts, and procedures up to date so that our operations keep running smoothly," he adds.

Of course, getting Maison de Campagne to where it is now has been anything but an easy ride. Both Santiago and Bage were on entirely different career paths when they began their journey together. "[It's very difficult to] create something that's entirely ours and fully dependent on our blood, sweat and tears—and I mean that literally. We had steady, high-paying jobs and lived a comfortable life, so starting our own business, and the uncertainty behind that, was not an easy decision to make. There was much to lose if we had failed," Santiago says.

Starting a new business comes with a steep learning curve, and most business founders experience their share of ups and downs, Santiago notes. "In the beginning, we both maintained full-time jobs and took on clients and projects during the evenings and on weekends, so there was quite a bit of sacrificing of our personal time and time with family. But everything worth having requires some sort of sacrifice, and we pushed through it."

The couple admits that the experience took a toll on their relationship. "But we both knew that this was something special, and so much more rewarding than typical day jobs. As we got busier, Mitchell was able to leave his analyst work and focus on our company full-time, while I balanced both of my jobs a little longer," Santiago says. "2020 was very challenging (for the obvious reasons), but at the same time [the pandemic] helped put things into perspective even more and solidified our resolve to push forward and stay on our chosen path."

As for the future, their plan has always been to get more involved in philanthropy, and especially in LGBTQ initiatives, as Maison de Campagne becomes more successful. "We have just joined our local Chamber of Commerce and plan to focus more on networking, education, and being part of our community," Santiago says. "We support our LGBTQ community in the arts, and work with other LGBTQ-owned businesses and business owners on the Island. We look forward to doing more as our business becomes more established."

Queer causes are especially important to the couple because both come from very conservative backgrounds and were late to come out, Santiago emphasizes. "So it is important to us to be visible and proud of our accomplishments, and use our voice and platform to support the LGBTQ+ community."



One of Maison de Campagne's interior projects for a Galveston beachfront home.



For more on Maison de Campagne, visit mdcfineliving.com.



Victoria Newsome (l), Lena Pyles, and their daughter, Presley Pyles (center)

Beachy Bites

Lena Pyles and Victoria Newsome run an eclectic coastal eatery.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Photo by KATIE HAUKEBO PHOTOGRAPHY

Eighteen years ago, chef Lena Pyles and her former partner Victoria Newsome came to Galveston for a three-month stay to unwind and soak up the laid-back Island atmosphere. Today, while they are no longer a couple, the pair co-parents their teenage daughter Presley and runs EATcetera, an eclectic lunch-and-brunch spot specializing in fresh, seasonal ingredients and vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free meals.

“We have always had vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free options, but the volume of customers with these preferences discovering us for lunch and all-day brunch is increas-

ing,” Pyles notes. “We have a growing number of customers who have food sensitivities or allergies. Our staff serves specialized-diet customers at probably 50 percent of our tables, and many customers are pleased that each diner can enjoy a meal they prefer—whether they are meat-eaters, plant-based, or have a sensitivity. All our desserts are vegan and gluten-free, with dessert sales doubling in the past year.”

Newsome, who comes from a long line of bakers, has been a vegetarian since 1984. Health issues made her experiment with allergen-free recipes. “I understand how important it is for EATcetera’s clients to enjoy tasty cuisine that is also safe to eat,” she says. “Particularly desserts, because everyone

deserves to have a birthday cake.”

Pyles began cooking at 16, and after high school followed her big brother—Stephan Pyles, one of the founding fathers of Southwestern cuisine—to Dallas. She became an executive chef by age 25 and worked at restaurants in Dallas, Atlanta, Las Vegas, Austin, and Houston before settling in Galveston to run a private-chef business.

“I always liked EATcetera as a customer,” she says. “When the founding owner was thinking about retiring, she mentioned to some friends that she was looking for someone to take over. I heard about it, gave her a call, and within two weeks we had the completed paperwork signed. It never even made it to market.”

EATcetera reopened in 2018, and the following year they opened EATcetera at the Whistle Stop Café in the Galveston Railroad Museum.

“The Whistle Stop menu is a subset of the restaurant menu, including vegan options for sandwiches and burgers plus more traditional fair foods,” Pyles says. “Customers can eat at the café without purchasing museum admission, but they must remain in the café area.”

Besides offering great health food, Pyles also serves up community service for the Island’s youth. “One of the prouder moments for EATcetera is the Polar Express Recycling Program,” she says. “The first year we participated in Polar Express at the Galveston Railroad Museum, we saw over 5,000 cans and bottles going to landfills. The museum did not →



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have the staff or budget to provide recycling, so with the permission of the Galveston Railroad Museum director, we started the Polar Express Recycling Program. EATcetera organizes the effort and provides supplies and identifying T-shirts to volunteers. The Ball High School Honor Society members volunteer to change the recycling liners nightly, and last year Republic Services provided the dumpster. Instead of 5,000 items going to landfill, EATcetera coordinated seven large dumpsters of bottles, cans, and cardboard that went to recycling.”

At both locations, you can also feast your eyes on some local artwork.

“EATcetera started the EATcetera Youth

Arts Program in 2019,” Pyles notes. “This program provides free exhibit space to [local] youth during ArtWalk evenings, which occur on a semi-regular basis in Galveston. The artists’ works are available for sale, and they generally stay at the restaurant for a month after an exhibit. Many of the permanent pieces at the restaurant were provided by some of the young artists.

“While we were organizing exhibits for the Youth Arts Program, we found ourselves attracting the interest of youth groups that had a desire to have public exhibits that far exceeded our restaurant space. As we have [the café] at the Galveston Railroad Museum, we asked them if they would be willing to allow us

to use their open-air patio space during Art-Walk evenings. They agreed, and this year we launched EATcetera Kids Zone at the Galveston Railroad Museum, where larger groups exhibit. This July 16, the Galveston and Harris County Boys & Girls Clubs will be exhibiting 50 to 75 works created by youth artists in the greater metro area. Unless otherwise noted on an individual piece, all of these pieces will be available for sale, with proceeds going to the individual artists.”

EATcetera’s strong community-service commitment to youth and education also led to their participation in Eat Out for Education Day, as well as donating gift certificates to a variety of youth-related organizations.

Whether they’re carnivores, herbivores, or omnivores, everyone can find something delectable on the EATcetera menu—including some of Chef Pyle’s Asian fusion creations. “My favorite is the peanut ponzu soba noodles,” she says. And don’t forget to check out her chef’s specials and the soup of the week whenever you visit EATcetera.



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Andrew Clarke (l), CEO of francesca's, partnered with Grace Place to bring new life to its clothing distribution project for homeless youth.

Creating a Company of Inclusion

Andrew Clarke is transforming francesca's from the inside out.

By ZACH MCKENZIE

Queer folks growing up in the LGBTQ community typically look to pop culture to seek out representation and out-and-proud heroes. Andrew Clarke, the passionate and innovative CEO of the women's-wear boutique francesca's, proves that role models are all around us. Clarke is evidence of what it looks like to simultaneously excel in your career, uplift your community, and fight for a seat at every single table.

Clarke, who hails from the UK and has lived in four different countries, explains that

his ability to support struggling retailers set him on a path to become a CEO. "Since I've been in the US, I've developed a reputation as a bit of a turnaround leader," he says of his work strategizing and helping retailers succeed. "I came to the US in 2014 and lived in San Francisco before moving to Columbus, Ohio. I worked at Justice, a tween-girl store, before running and overseeing a turnaround of the women's-wear brand Loft."

With a reputation that preceded him in helping clothing retailers thrive, the Bayou City came calling. "In late 2019, I received a call about this women's-wear retailer based in

Houston called francesca's," Clarke recalls. "I told my husband, Gerhard, and he suggested we visit Houston first since we lived in New York City. We quickly realized that Houston has something for everybody and decided to make it our home right before the lockdown in March 2020."

As the retail world experienced unprecedented challenges during the pandemic, Clarke made it his mission to survive and thrive in a market where the odds were stacked against him. "I signed up for a turnaround job, and it became a fight for survival. The pandemic was not kind to retail," he emphasizes. "I spent my first year as CEO growing the business and making sure we would survive. My number-one objective was to save as many jobs as possible. We ended 2020 as a strengthened brand with about 460 stores, down from 700, and we launched franki by francesca's for tween girls. You know what they say—in the face of adversity, a crisis can be the mother of all ingenuity."

"When I took the francesca's role, I was a first-time CEO at a public company, and proudly out," Clarke says. "I inherited a company in trouble, and it was my job to focus on what we do as a business—and *how* we do it." He set out to transform how the retailer was perceived by the public, and how internal operations were conducted. "I wanted to create a company of →

inclusion—one I would have wanted to work for as a younger gay man facing homophobia early in my career. Diversity, equity, and inclusion at our company is a fundamental value that we hold ourselves to. That starts at the top, and that's me."

A drive to support his community led to Clarke connecting with Grace Place, a local organization and drop-in program that welcomes and supports youth of all sexualities and gender identities experiencing homelessness. That partnership recently celebrated a major milestone. "We've been involved with Grace Place a little over a year now," the proud dog dad says. "I've been struck by how, at a local level, Grace Place steps in to provide a service for the most vulnerable in our LGBTQ community."

With keen self-awareness and a desire to do more, Clarke rallied his team to complete a major project for the organization. "It's not lost on me that I'm a privileged member of the LGBTQ community. When we learned the story of Tracy and the circumstances of her murder in 2019, we knew we had to do something," he says.

Tracy was a Black trans youth who regularly attended Grace Place events. To memorialize her, Grace Place named its clothing distribution project after her. "We knew we



francesca's helps keeps Tracy's Closet stocked with both masculine and feminine inventory.

could bring new life to Tracy's Closet, stock it, and organize it with the clothing and hygienic donations Grace Place receives." Clarke and his crew committed to personally donating items to make sure the closet is always stocked with both masculine and feminine inventory. "I'm so proud of what my team was able to do. Seeing the faces of the youth—we don't need any more motivation than that."

Clarke reflects on the impact of his role and purpose as a CEO. "Representation matters, and I think it matters a lot right now," he says, referencing the current political climate.

"I certainly feel a duty in my position to be visible for the LGBTQ community." Clarke speaks directly to queer folks and encourages them to have the audacity to dream big. "As you rise through your career, try to do something better than you imagined for yourself. I've experienced setbacks, but I persevered and continued to advance to senior roles. I hope to continue to make things easier for those following in my footsteps."



For more information, visit francescas.com.



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**AUSTIN
BERG**

27, He/Him

*Utility (wherever they
want me to play)*

RUCK N' ROLL

Space City Rugby heads to Canada for a world championship tournament.

By SAM BYRD
Photos by
VICTOR CONTRERAS



Question: What involves a hooker, the number eight, and a lock? If you guessed rugby, you'd be correct. Rugby might not be as well known in the United States as it is in other

countries, but it is steadily gaining popularity, including in the Lone Star State. Houston is home to an LGBTQ team known as Space City Rugby, and they're gaining steam as the new game in town.

The team's head coach, Butch Compton, explains that once people get involved in rugby, they find a lot more than just a sport. "I hear this from the new players all the time. They've never played in a sport or have never been involved with something where the camaraderie and the brotherhood was so good that everybody supported each other. Even if you're on opposing teams and you may have tried to rip each other's heads off during a match, when you come off the pitch, everybody is happy and having fun."

Compton describes the sport as a mix of rules that resemble American football and soccer.

Two teams of 15 players have 80 minutes to advance the ball past their opponents' side of the pitch (the playing field) and touch it to the ground for a score worth 5 points (named a "try"). Participants may only pass the ball backwards or sideways with no blocking

allowed, and teams use a variety of lineouts, mauls, rucks, and scrums to retain possession during play. Rugby is unique in that play is continuous, even after players are tackled on the field. Kicking the ball or running while holding it are the only two ways to move the ball forward.

After each try, worth 5 points, the scoring team is allowed an opportunity to kick the ball through the posts for an additional 2-point "conversion." Certain penalties also earn the non-offending team a kick through the posts, worth a 3-point "penalty" if made. At the conclusion of the match, the team with the most points wins.

Space City Rugby has been in existence since 2018, but like many organizations, COVID-19 necessitated a pause. The league has now reengaged and is looking to get back into fighting mode. Compton estimates they compete in eight competitions per year, with the Bingham Cup being among the most prestigious.

The Bingham Cup is a biennial world championship for gay and inclusive rugby named in memory of Mark Bingham, who died in the September 11 attacks. He was one of the



passengers who fought back against hijackers on board United Flight 93.

As a gay man and regular rugby player, Bingham played for the San Francisco Fog and also helped establish New York City's Gotham Knights league. The tournament has become the largest amateur rugby union event in the world. This year's cup will be held in Ottawa in August.

For LGBTQ Houstonians interested in the sport,

Space City Rugby welcomes all genders and skill levels to join their practices as it gears up for another season. Practices are held on Thursdays from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon at Lawrence Park, 725 Lawrence Street. The only equipment requirements are a pair of cleats and a mouth guard.

"The biggest thing I want interested players to know is to not be scared of it. Come out, it's fun!" Compton says. "We teach all the fundamentals of how not to get hurt. It's a great, fun sport, and it allows you to travel and meet new people from all over the world."



For more info on Space City Rugby, visit spacecityrugby.com.



Members of Space City Rugby

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JALIL "JACK" CANTARERO

29, He/They

Winger



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35, He/Him

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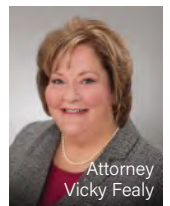
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Healing Through Storytelling

Navy veteran **Pacifica Sauer's** 2021 film reveals the traumatic violence faced by women in the military.

By LILLIAN HOANG

Production editor Pacifica J. Sauer, a three-time Emmy winner, uses her platform at KHOU-TV to give marginalized people the chance to tell their stories.

"Privileged people get to tell their stories all the time. The everyday people and the little-known middlemen, these are the people that we need to be telling stories of," says Sauer, an out lesbian.

At KHOU, she oversees community programming, commercials, sales, documentaries, and more. She recently helped the station produce a documentary on Houston's Pride parade and grand marshals, highlighting Space City's contributions to the fight for LGBTQ rights.

Sauer has always loved storytelling. Growing up, she remembers pleading with the people in her life to tell her a story. "I just loved to hear stories. The way people told them, the way they changed their voices, how they went back to things and explained it—all of that was important to me," she recalls.

And now, storytelling is helping her heal from a trauma she experienced while in the Navy. Her 2021 award-winning film, *The Invisible Project*, exposes the adversities women in the military face.

An Army brat, Sauer was raised around the world, from Alabama to Germany. She left high school to join the Navy at age 17, and she served for eight years, from 1996 to 2004. Recruiters promised her that she would discover herself, see the world, and receive the funds she needed for a better education. "It was true, but all that came at a personal price," she says.

She was assaulted by her supervisor at age 19 and was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

"When you talk about your traumatic events, a lot of people talk about their 'death date.' That is the day of their incident. They mourn the loss of the person they were before all that, [but] I didn't have all that," she says. "I didn't have an identity before the assault. I still don't know who I am."



Issued in 1993 and repealed in 2011, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" shaped Sauer's time in the Navy. That policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against closeted LGBTQ service members, but barred people who were out from military service. It negatively impacted the lives of many soldiers, especially women.

"As a woman in the military, especially if you're enlisted, [according to the men] you're either a 'bitch' or a 'slut,' and if you're not sleeping with everybody, they kind of have it figured out," she explains. "If you want things to be easy for you, you have to pretty much sell your body, and that's unfortunate."

Years later, Sauer still suffers from delusions, paranoia, and overwhelming anxiety. Before she was diagnosed, she would swear that pedestrians on the street were following her, and that colleagues were conspiring to ruin her projects. Sauer says her disorder made her unstable.

"When I first started having hard-core PTSD symptoms, I had no idea what this was," she admits. "I thought I was having a psychotic breakdown."

After her assault, she received an ROTC scholarship and attended a university in Vermont, but failed every course. She's lost 20 jobs due to her illness, and she once had a fight with colleagues that ended with her slamming doors shut. She's also lost many friends and loved ones over the years.

"PTSD ripped through my life; it ripped it to shreds. It ripped my family life apart, it ripped friendships apart, it ripped school apart. It was essentially a life sentence," she admits.

One in three women and one in 50 men have experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST), according to a report by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sauer wanted to highlight the struggles faced by women in the military, and she knew she could do that as a storyteller. As she →

pursued a career in animation, and later in production, her healing journey began.

“Being a production editor really helped fix a lot of the holes in me. Where I saw a lot of uncompleted things in my life, I could fill the holes with completed projects that changed minds, gave people ideas, and inspired humanity to do better.”

At KHOU, she was assigned several projects involving veterans. As she worked with people who had also experienced MST, she found much-needed camaraderie. After collaborating with and hearing the stories of many veterans, in 2021 she produced *The Invisible Project*, her own film about female military personnel and their struggles. KHOU aired the film on July 4, 2021.

Creating *The Invisible Project* forced her to confront her trauma and work toward healing. “You can live and die this way, or you can do something with it. I chose to do something, and that’s what became *The Invisible Project*.”

Sauer still wrestles with PTSD. Even while working on *The Invisible Project*, she suffered from delusions, fearing a colleague was plotting to upend her project after she received an email in all-capital letters.

**“BEING A PRODUCTION
EDITOR REALLY HELPED FIX
A LOT OF THE HOLES IN ME.
I COULD FILL THE HOLES
WITH COMPLETED PROJECTS
THAT CHANGED MINDS, GAVE
PEOPLE IDEAS, AND INSPIRED
HUMANITY TO DO BETTER.”**

—Pacifica Sauer

But she now has a better grasp on her disease. She wants to kick-start more conversations on mental health and inspire more compassion for those suffering from mental illness. She works toward this goal as a storyteller with the help of her partner of 10 years, an elementary school principal.

When Sauer told her partner that she was an MST survivor, she worried that she would be thrown out of their house. But her partner embraced her, and the therapist they found is helping her to live in her truth.

Sauer and her partner now live with their

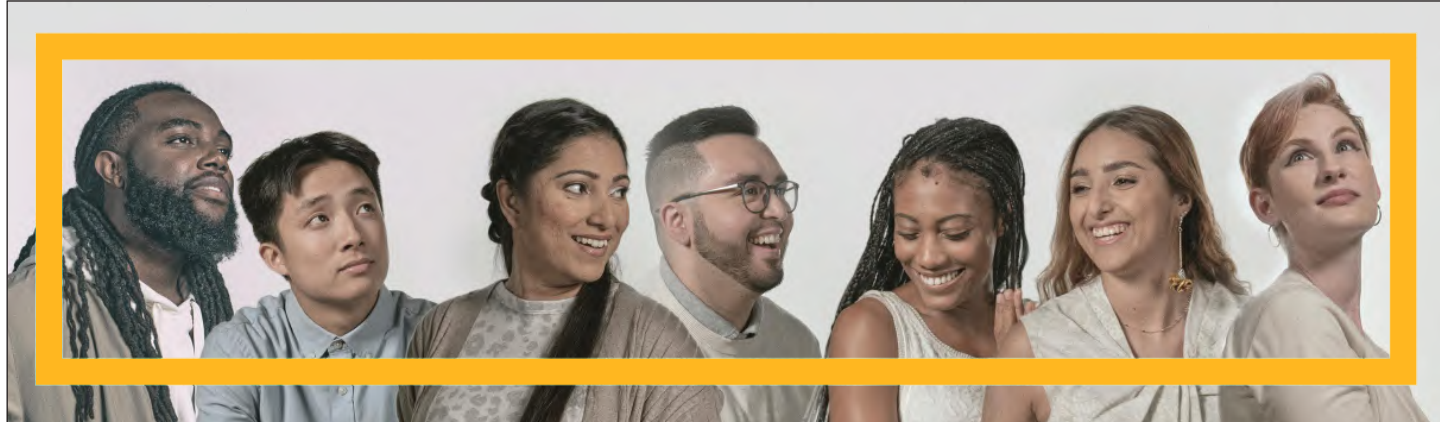
three dogs, Peanut, Bella, and Lucy. “We work to educate people and to change minds,” she says.

She urges aspiring creatives to never give up. “Keep trying, and be nice to everybody—even the receptionists.”

To veterans suffering from MST, Sauer adds, “There’s the veteran’s club, and then there’s [the MST club that’s] not one you want to be a part of, but you find yourself in it. There’s more of us [there] than we care to admit, and when you start to really find out about people, you find out you’re not alone in your problems, and that MST is very common, and it’s OK. It’s OK.”



For more information on *The Invisible Project*, visit theinvisibleprojectfilm.com. The 24-hour National Sexual Assault Hotline can be reached at 1-800-656-4673. The 24-hour Texas Military Department (TMD) Sexual Harassment/Assault Prevention and Response (SHARP/SAPR) survivor support line is 512-565-4410. For more information on TMDR and SHARP/SAPR, visit tmd.texas.gov/tmd-sapr.



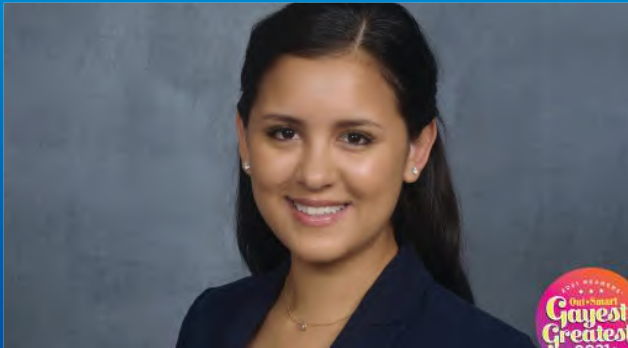
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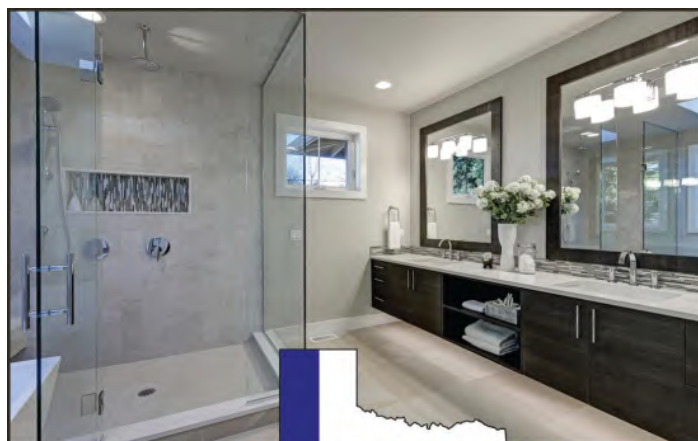
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A Collaborative Vision

Justin McKee brings his expertise in creative services to Houston Public Media.

By JENNY BLOCK

Justin McKee has always been interested in how movies are made. It's the magic of how it all comes together that he finds particularly inspiring. "The roles of all the [cast and crew, with] so many different voices and fields of expertise—it's a marvel to me that any movie or TV show actually gets made."

McKee had always dreamed of being a movie director himself, even though in high school he loved acting in the school plays. "But given the choice, I felt that I would enjoy the top behind-the-scenes role the most—executing a collaborative vision, leading and inspiring people, organizing complex processes to achieve a common goal. While I may not have realized it then, that's what a director does. But at the time, I just wanted to make things that people thought looked cool."

McKee is currently working his behind-the-scenes creative magic as the director of creative services for Houston Public Media on the University of Houston campus. "My team's ultimate responsibility is building, maintaining, and promoting the visual brand of Houston Public Media and its products and platforms,

including promotion and marketing."

Houston Public Media is the city's PBS and NPR affiliate that has become a large digital- and broadcast-media platform encompassing social media as well. It's also a member of The Texas Newsroom, a National Public Radio journalism collaboration. Every year, more than three million people engage with Houston Public Media, which is a service of the University of Houston made possible by donors, foundations, legacy gifts, and sponsors. Their mission is "to inform and inspire—transform-

ing ourselves, our community and our world."

McKee, 39, holds a bachelor's degree in radio and television from Sam Houston State University, which he completed after his freshman year at the University of Texas in Austin. During those college years, he also worked as a master control operator at KBTX-TV in Bryan/College Station. The Bryan native then moved on to newscast production before eventually becoming the station's primary newscast director. In 2009, he moved to Houston for a technical-director position at KHOU-TV. →

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX ROSA FOR OUTSMART



“Eventually, I became the director of their morning talk show, *Great Day Houston*,” McKee says.

All the while, he was also freelancing for a music production company called XI Media Productions. “I mostly served as director for the livestreams.”

In 2013, he moved to New York City to continue directing live music in addition to working on various reality shows, including National Geographic’s *Drugs, Inc.* But Houston called him back to Texas in 2014, when he started at Houston Public Media as a senior producer in the creative-services department. He became that team’s manager in 2018, before moving up to his current position last year.

McKee loves the expression, communication, understanding, freedom, and discovery that working in a creative profession brings. He also loves uncovering art in the most unexpected formats. He always felt like there was something different about him as a teen. “But I didn’t realize it was because I was gay until a close friend of mine came out to me my senior year. Then everything just clicked. Turns out that my obsession with Rocky in *3 Ninjas* was because I had a crush on him,” he recalls.

“MY TEAM’S ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY IS BUILDING, MAINTAINING, AND PROMOTING THE VISUAL BRAND OF HOUSTON PUBLIC MEDIA AND ITS PRODUCTS AND PLATFORMS.”

—Justin McKee

Last year, Houston Public Media launched a Pride Month website page highlighting their national and local programming that focuses on important LGBTQ issues. “Our three talk shows, *Houston Matters with Craig Cohen*, *Town Square with Ernie Manouse*, and *I SEE U with Eddie Robinson*, regularly cover these issues and invite diverse voices from the LGBTQ+ community,” he says. “Pride, to me,

means the freedom to express yourself any way you want. It means you can be your authentic self, free from judgment or persecution. There is no right or wrong way to celebrate Pride.”

Because Houston is one of the most diverse cities in America, McKee hopes that we as a city continue to reach out to all of our communities and find new and better ways to highlight the issues that affect them. “I’d love to see us active and present in those communities [by doing things] like remote broadcasts for our daily talk shows,” he says.

Although McKee is quite comfortable leading a team and speaking to large groups, people might be surprised to learn that he’s actually an introvert. “Alone time playing video games, or going on a walk while listening to a podcast, is where I find my energy.” He’s also a certified CrossFit trainer and coaches a few classes each week at Texas Athletic Club in Montrose.

McKee sums up his love for Houston by describing it as “a sprawling, diverse collection of communities with amazing food and friendly people.”



Keep up with Justin McKee at houston-publicmedia.org/staff/justin-mckee.

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South Beach Is Back!

After COVID and four years of remodeling, the premier Montrose dance spot returns.

By MARENE GUSTIN | Photo by ALLISON WILKINS / EVEN THAYER STUDIOS

South Beach, the gayborhood's longtime home to late-night dance parties, sexy staffers, drag queens, and laser lights is reopening after four years.

"I'm also excited for a new generation of [LGBTQ youth] to discover the South Beach experience," says club owner Charles

Armstrong.

South Beach was built on the ashes of Heaven, the former nightclub in the same building. Armstrong spent \$2 million to rebuild and turn the Pacific Street anchor into South Beach. Opened in 2001, it became the go-to spot for the LGBTQ community in Montrose.

In February 2018, Armstrong announced he was shuttering South Beach for extensive remodeling. The club was on the brink of relaunching with a completely new look and feel early in 2020, just when the pandemic was forcing everything to shut down.

"The club's renovation was already 80 percent complete when the global pandemic brought the whole world to a stop," says Armstrong, CEO of Charles Armstrong Investments, which also owns JR's Bar & Grill. "We've remained closed since that time as we waited for more of the population to become vaccinated for protection against the coronavirus. Two years ago, we were in uncharted territory and I had a moral problem packing a dance floor full of people in the middle of a health crisis."

The renovated dance palace is inspired by the modern residential living style similar to all the luxury high-rise and mid-rise apartments that have sprouted up inside the loop since South Beach first opened in 2001. Armstrong wanted to change South Beach from a hard masculine, industrial look into a warm



Charles Armstrong

residential feel to create the ultimate house party.

To bring his vision to life, he enlisted the consulting talents of award-winning interior designer John T. Robinson, of Houston-based Robinson & Associates. His attention to textures in his condo designs had previously earned him a top prize in the ASID Interior Design Awards competition. Robinson has worked as an interior-design consultant to Armstrong for decades, including their million-dollar makeover of Meteor that earned him an ASID win in a commercial renovations category. The newly remodeled South Beach pays homage to Meteor by prominently displaying the former club's sign on the 1,500-square-foot patio.

"We brought back some of the design elements from Meteor like Austin chalk-white limestone, but on a bigger scale, with the intention of creating a nightclub with a lounge-like feel," Armstrong explains. "We took it from a hard, masculine aesthetic [created with] steel, concrete, and exposed electric to a soft, contemporary residential feel."

To reinvent the 10,000-square-foot interior, they chose rich mahogany wall sections, Carrara marble for the front bar, and black granite throughout. But the pièce de résistance is, without question, the two Restoration Hardware quartz-crystal chandeliers hanging in the main entrance and above the dance floor, the latter version weighing 450 pounds and rotating along with the twirling bodies it illuminates on the dance floor. There's also a new state-of-the-art sound system with its own special effects. "A whole universe of LED lighting has come forth in the last 15 years, so we've done a lot with lighting and fixtures," Armstrong notes.

"Technology may have changed the way people do things, but the human desire for togetherness and life-affirming celebrations remains the same. I want to build and maintain a village that's a safe haven for the gay, lesbian, and transgender community, and I want to keep contributing a whole lot of money to organizations and politicians so they know we're here, we're queer, and we're paying attention to what's happening in the world."

South Beach's original interiors had previously won several awards from local design publications, and Armstrong predicts its current evolution will be equally impressive. "If I were to ever get a tattoo, it would say 'Evolve or Die!'"

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Hello, Jorgeous!

The *RuPaul's Drag Race* star returns to Texas for *Werq the World's* 2022 tour.

By RYAN M. LEACH
Photo by VOSS EVENTS

Season 14 of *RuPaul's Drag Race* introduced the world to one of the most memorable queens in herstory. Jorgeous, the deadliest lip-sync assassin to ever grace the main stage, sent many competing queens home and gagged the rest with her sassy spirit, her killer mug, and an uncanny ability to make any song hers. And now, she's headed back home to Texas on July 16 with the 2022 *Werq the World* tour at the Smart Financial Center.

"Honestly, although I was in the bottom a lot, every time I got to lip-sync I was low-key living. That is what I do!" Jorgeous says. "I do six numbers a night and they all have to be different. When I was lip-syncing, I was in my element and I felt unstoppable at that point. Being known as a lip-sync assassin is validation to everything that I work for in my drag career."

Jorgeous is originally from San Antonio, where she started performing in drag at age 16 before moving to Nashville with her family. The self-taught dancer was too young to spend time in the clubs outside of her performances, so she would have her older brother go to clubs and tape the performances for her to study at home and develop her own numbers. This dedication eventually led to her being featured on *Drag Race*. She might have been the most petite doll, but her talent certainly loomed large. She sent five queens packing before being eliminated in the second-to-last recorded episode alongside Deja Skye.

"Honestly, I think the Jorgeous-versus-Jasmine lip-sync was the hardest for me. I was nervous because that bitch be doing dips and splits. When we performed 'Something's Got a Hold on Me' by Etta James, we were both having a lot of fun, but it was a battle," Jorgeous says.

That lip-sync resulted in a draw, and both contestants remained in the competition. Luckily, *Werq the World* doesn't eliminate any of its queens, although the roster does change from city to city. The Houston leg will feature Jorgeous along with Rosé (a Season 13 finalist and native Houstonian) and Season 12 winner and All-Stars 7 contestant Jaida Essence Hall.

"Oh my God, I feel like the girls I have bonded with the most on this tour are Jaida



Jorgeous



and Vanessa “Miss Vanjie” Matteo. They are like big sisters and have really been there for me the whole tour. They have taken me under their wing. Those are my girls,” says Jorgeous.

Being a Texas native, Jorgeous has drag roots deep in the heart of the Lone Star State. She is now considered one of the elite Dancing Divas of Texas, a moniker earned by the likes of drag and *Drag Race* royalty Alyssa Edwards, Kennedy Davenport, and Asia O’Hara, among others.

Jorgeous notes two Texas queens that helped develop her into the burgeoning star

she has become. “Sweet Savage, may she rest in peace, is a Texas legend. I really related to how she moved, with her high kicks and splits. Also my drag mother, Toni Andrews, taught me a lot. She was one of the queens my brother would record at the club, and I was like, ‘This is exactly the type of queen I want to be,’” she says.

The Werq the World tour is Jorgeous’ first since leaving the *Drag Race* work room, and it has taken her all over the globe. The most recent leg brought her to Spain, where the tireless queen instantly connected with the people

and the food while performing in Barcelona and Madrid.

“I think the place I dreamed about going to for a long time was Spain. I love Spain. The people were amazing and beautiful. I felt like I was at home. They showed me so much love, and the food is bomb,” Jorgeous recalls.

However wonderful Spain may be, there is no place like home. When she returned to her home bar in Nashville, known for its drag divas like Kameron Michaels, Jorgeous was met with a warm welcome from a crowd filled with familiar and new faces cheering her on, despite the airing of her elimination episode that same night.

“The amount of love I got from people was so insane. They saw me grow up. When I moved there, I was 18. The support has been so amazing,” she says.

Jorgeous promises to bring her own style to the stage. “The audience will be getting a whole lot of Latina flair, sexy choreo, body, you know what I mean? The full dancing-diva Jorgeous experience!”

What: Werq the World Tour

When: July 16 at 7:30 p.m.

Where: Smart Financial Centre, Sugar Land

Tickets: vosevents.com/werq-the-world-tour

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Hugh Hayden, *Nude*, 2021. Bald cypress, plywood, and aluminum. From the exhibition Hugh Hayden: Boogey Men at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, Nov. 30, 2021–Apr. 17, 2022



Houston carries its weight in the American art world these days, and the Blaffer Art Museum on the University of Houston campus is proving it. The museum is presenting a major exhibition titled Hugh Hayden: Boogey Men, now through September 4, featuring a suite of amazing pieces guaranteed to haunt. Thanks to the artist's talent across various media, visitors will experience anthropomorphic forms that explore our relationship with the natural world. It is soft, sensual, and unyielding—and it's a must-see.

Artist Hugh Hayden was born in Texas but lives and works in New York City today. The talented Texan's creations can be found in the collections of New York's Whitney Museum of American Art; the Princeton University Art Museum; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

Hayden, Black Texan, was born in Dallas in 1983. "I am from all along the Gulf Coast, and my mother is from Louisiana. I think that is one of the reasons I use a lot of bald

cypress from the Gulf swamps in my artwork. It's a wood that holds significance for me," he revealed in an interview with the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami.

"Another of the reasons I gravitate to cypress is because it lends itself to the human form—skeletons, nerves, and circulatory systems. The bald cypress tree also has a place in American history and lore. It's the mystery of the deep Southern swamp, where they grow.

Some people have even suggested they played a role in lynchings," Hayden concluded quietly.

His Blaffer exhibition features new sculptures that reflect the significance and timeliness of Hayden's voice and view of history. In works that range in scale from modest to monumental, the artist explores how we project human vices and ambitions onto worlds both natural and unnatural.

Haunted by 'Boogey Men'

New York artist Hugh Hayden tests boundaries in his new Houston exhibition.

By KIM HOGSTROM

Exhibit photos by ZACHARY BALBER

Boogey Men also explores the theme of camouflage—evincing Hayden’s continued interest in how humans use materials to blend in, obscure, and imagine. The result is fascinating, enlightening, and even haunting.

Formally trained as an architect, Hayden employs laborious processes—woodcarving, metalwork, industrial fabrication—that result in dynamic points of view. He is renowned for his ability to take disparate pieces of wood and manipulate them to reveal complex meanings.

The Boogey Men exhibition is spread among multiple galleries that hint at suburban residential interiors and exteriors, highlighting the artist’s interest in socially produced spaces as well as the fraught issues surrounding “The American Dream” and notions of idealism, culture, wealth, agency, and success.

“A lot of my work investigates the concept of the American Dream,” Hayden explained in an interview for an Art Basel event. “I mean, the American Dream is a desirable place to be, but at the same time it is difficult to inhabit. For example, I might be making an ordinary ladder with sensual wood, and it will be covered in a soft, seductive material. But it will also be protected by thorns, making it almost impossible to use.”

At the center of his Houston exhibit sits its namesake sculpture: *Boogey Man*. This ominous yet cartoonish work is nearly the size of a Ford Crown Victoria—a car marketed to police departments for 20 years—which underscores its real-life reference. The silhouette of *Boogey Man* projects a shrouded police car with a pair of cut-outs for eyes. Here, Hayden evokes a child’s Halloween ghost costume created by cutting holes out of a bedsheet, as well as the more terrifying image of a hooded Klansman. The image drifts between malice and make-believe, inflicting terror on its subjects.



YOUTUBE

**“A LOT OF MY WORK
INVESTIGATES THE
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PLACE TO BE, BUT AT
THE SAME TIME IT IS
DIFFICULT TO INHABIT.”**

—Hugh Hayden

Tyler Blackwell, the Blaffer Museum’s associate curator, believes that the work of Hugh Hayden should be on every art lover’s radar. “I have been following Hugh’s work for a number of years, and it felt important to bring an exhibition to our campus and Houston audiences,” Blackwell explains. “His work explores the pursuit of the American Dream as well as what it means to grow up as a Black boy in Texas. Hugh’s meticulously crafted sculptures expertly navigate and intertwine complex ideas about American history, culture, and ambition with personal experience. We are lucky to show his work as his career rapidly ascends!”

What: Hugh Hayden: Boogey Men

When: Through Sept. 4

Where: Blaffer Art Museum, 4173 Elgin St.

Info: blafferartmuseum.org



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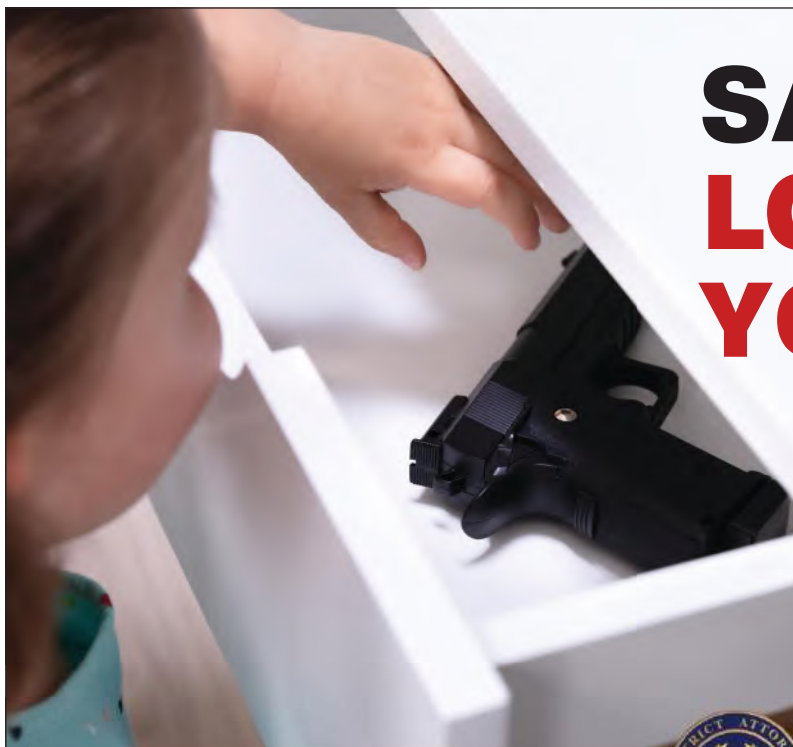


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Since the debut of Laverne Cox on *Orange Is the New Black* in 2013, the avenues of expression for trans and nonbinary artists have expanded kaleidoscopically year by year. Elliot Page holds sway over Netflix audiences; Kim Petras forges her own pop iconography; Janelle Monáe shapes the music of the future; and, on comedy stages, runways, and salons, the comedian and poet Alok Vaid-Menon blasts the conversation of gender politics into the 22nd century.

Outfitted exuberantly and commanding a cogent and immediate language that is perfectly suited for a social-media audience with no attention span, Vaid-Menon transmutes academic Aquarian philosophies of freedom to young generations ready for change.

Many know Vaid-Menon from viral clips of speeches, dialogues, and podcast appearances in which they speak profoundly on the human toll of gender oppression. But true fans also enjoy the spirited, saucy comedian as someone who is delighted to poke fun at the current world order as a means of bringing it down.

Last month, Vaid-Menon performed at Houston's Secret Group as part of a summer tour with opener Whatever Mike. Vaid-Menon, who was born and raised in College Station, returned to Texas just as abortion rights (and even drag performers) are being threatened by State officials.

OUTSMART spoke with Vaid-Menon about the inspirations for their comedy, the new tour, and the impact of returning to Texas.

David Odyssey: You grew up in Texas. What is it like to return?

Alok Vaid-Menon: It feels wonderful. Growing up, I felt like everything I was—brown, queer, trans, not Christian—didn't belong in Texas. But now as an adult, I'm able to connect with so many people and communities like me across Texas. It's healing for me, and feels like I'm re-integrating so many parts of myself that I thought were incompatible. Sharing my work in Texas means the world to me, perhaps more than anywhere else I get to share it, because this place gave birth to me. It's such a deep and integral part of me. And with all of the rampant discrimination against trans and gender-nonconforming people in Texas right now, I feel a deep sense of duty to show up, share my story, and advocate for change.

In 2019, you hosted a Pride celebration in College Station, where you grew up. How did it surprise you? Do you feel like the world you grew up in has changed?

That Pride party will go down in history as my



Texas Trailblazer

Alok Vaid-Menon promotes trans empowerment in their home state.

By DAVID ODYSSEY

favorite Pride ever. It was the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, and I wanted to bring the movement home. People drove in from across Texas, and for a few hours we made College Station a little queer utopia. I was surprised by the interest and the demand for these kinds of spaces. It was a reminder that there are queer people everywhere yearning for places to be free.

I actually went back and lived in College Station for almost a year during the pandemic, and it was remarkable how much has changed since I grew up there. I was at the doctor's office wearing a shirt that said *Call Me They*, and a nonbinary person came up to me and said that they also used they/them pronouns. We just bonded right there on the spot. I never would have thought something like that could have happened when I was younger. I'm just so proud of the strides that trans and gender-nonconforming people have made all over, and about the space that we have claimed. I grew up thinking that we were impossible, that people

like me didn't exist. And now we are more visible than ever.

How would you describe your live audiences?

They really vary across venues and across locations, but some common threads are the empathaths and creatives. People with big hearts and ideas. And bigger laughter. People committed to doing internal work to make a better world on the outside. People who believe in love.

Many people know you as an activist and public speaker. How would you describe your comedian side? How does it challenge the "serious" image people may have of you?

Anyone familiar with my work knows that I am deeply opposed to binaries. I hate how we're expected to compromise levity in order to establish gravity; sacrifice joy for the →

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sake of urgency. In my shows I weave between talking about some of the most important issues of our times and being flippant about fake eyelashes. All of it is essential because all of it is honest talk about what it means to be alive. My comedic style is informed by the history of queer and trans performance—camp, darling! [Queer performers have] always found ways to make political commentary while still being entertaining. It's about saying, "You think I'm funny because of what I look like, but how about what you act like!"

As always, it feels like a very fraught, depressing time, especially in Texas. Where do you find the inspiration to let humor break through the grimness?

I suppose I find inspiration precisely *in* the bleakness. That's how I've always survived. When things are hard, I crack jokes to loosen their stranglehold on me. Humor has always been a survival strategy for me—a way of assuming control, of staving off collapse, of sustaining my spirit. In my own life I've seen how humor has kept me afloat, and I hope to model that for others in my shows.

What has been the ethos of this tour? And what have been the biggest surprises?

This tour is all about affirming trans and non-binary joy. Creating space for people to feel the full spectrum of their emotions, from sorrow to delight.

Phillip Pullman has this quote that I love: "Poetry is not a fancy way of giving you information; it's an incantation. It is actually a magic spell. It changes things; it changes you." I really do believe in the power of oral tradition. Speaking words changes lives. I want to create a glimpse of the world I'm fighting for right here in the now. I want to show people what freedom feels like.

It's become de rigueur to feel pessimistic or cynical about Pride Month. How do you deal with that, or work through that?

I've done a lot of work in myself to stave off cynicism and choose hope. I'm really inspired by the work of Rebecca Solnit, who says that both optimism and pessimism require a presumption of what the future holds. She has hope because she doesn't know what the future holds, so she chooses to be hopeful. That makes a lot of sense to me—finding possibility in the unknowability of it all. Also, reading history continually gives me hope. We often feel like what we are going through is unprecedented, but it rarely is. I know that people in the past have felt the same pain and suspicion and sense of fatigue as me. And so I study how they crafted lives anyway. And that makes me feel less lonely in it all.

 Keep up with Alok Vaid-Menon on Instagram @alokvmenon



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Dining with Divas

Five must-visit drag brunches in Houston.

By JOANNA O'LEARY

Thank goodness for brunch, that glorious hybrid feast! Where else can you indulge in both the sweet and the savory, and day-drinking is encouraged if not required? When you pair this with some raucous drag performances, boisterous musical accompaniments, and engaged, lively audiences, you have an outing that satisfies the soul as well as the stomach. Here are five of our favorite drag brunches around town.

ReBar

202 Tuam St.



Once on Saturdays at 12 p.m. and twice on Sundays at noon and 2 p.m., ReBar is home to a spirited drag brunch starring a rotating group of performers that includes contestants from *RuPaul's Drag Race*. While watching the gorgeous cast of ladies dressed to the nines, nosh on bountiful platters of Southern specialties such as shrimp and grits, chicken and waffles, and jambalaya balls. All of ReBar's cocktails are solid, but not to be missed are the frozen mimosas, available by the glass (if you're moderate) or the pitcher (if you're human).

Hamburger Mary's

1008 Prairie St.

Although the H-Town outpost of this national chain hosts memorable drag shows every day, the brunch fetes on Saturdays at noon and 3 p.m. and Sundays at 1 and 4 p.m. are something special with their feisty performer-to-audience repartee. Hamburger Mary's numerous playful appetizers, entrées, and desserts all deserve sampling. Start with the Loaded Tatas, your choice of fries or tater tots (go for the latter) crowned with melted cheese, sour cream, scallions, and tomatoes. Then move



on to the Miguel the Pool Boy migas (a sassy combination of scrambled eggs, tortilla strips, pico de gallo, and black beans) before ending with the Fried Twinks, a deep-fried version of the aforementioned snack cake smothered in raspberry sauce, strawberries, and whipped cream.

Bar Boheme

307 Fairview St.



Your Sunday Funday itinerary should include a stop at Bar Boheme's drag brunch at 11:30 a.m. or 2:30 p.m., where charismatic live DJs and gregarious drag divas keep the atmosphere fun and festive. Although such entertainment might keep you glued to your seat, take a break to enjoy Bar Boheme's bountiful brunch buffet, with tantalizing options including scrambled eggs with mushrooms and goat cheese, french toast, Filipino biscuits and gravy, Thai chicken, ham and cheese croissants, Bombay spinach dip, and churros. Wash it all down with one of Boheme's artful cocktails, such as the fragrant and refreshing Bird of Paradise (Appleton Rum, ginger beer, simple syrup, lime juice) or the potent, designed-to-be-shared Boheme Fish Bowl.

Social Beer Garden

3101 San Jacinto St.

Every Saturday at 2 p.m. is Slay All Day at SBG, a show performed by transgender artists on the stage of its sprawling campus, which also

features a cocktail bar, food-truck park, pool tables, and a garden flanked by comfy bean bags and colorful Adirondack chairs. Drag



queens and kings also provide entertainment on weekends, while the Sunday brunches often focus on celebrity-themed tributes. Take advantage of the drink specials (\$20 bottomless mimosas, anyone?) and grab some takeout treats from the mobile food carts.

Electric FeelGood

2416 Brazos St.



On one Sunday each month at noon, the Electric FeelGood's monthly hour-long drag brunches feature high-energy dancers grooving to the beats of the DJ, as well as appearances by resident queens Muffy Vanderbilt, Dessie Love-Blake, Lexus Chandelier, and Rachel Bitchface. And while walk-ins are welcome, call ahead and reserve a table for the best views of these regal gals. When it comes to libations, Electric FeelGood is all about the bubbles—\$30 buckets of Vizzy mimosas and \$40 buckets of Chandon champagne splits. Those still suffering from the prior evening's shenanigans can soothe their stomachs with a Hangover Burger dressed with bacon, Bloody Mary aioli, and a sunnyside-up egg, or perhaps a hearty stack of s'mores pancakes.

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HOUSTON LGBTQ PRIDE CELEBRATION June 25, 2022

Pride Houston 365's celebration returned to downtown Houston with an afternoon festival and evening parade in front of City Hall. Themed "The Beat Goes On," this year's Pride saw tens of thousands of visitors and featured a performance by headliner Coi Leray.

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WEDDING GUIDE



Chris Anthony Lujan (l) and Jose Zertuche

A BEACHSIDE PROPOSAL

Chris Anthony Lujan and Jose Zertuche got engaged in the same spot where they started dating.

By **JENNY BLOCK** | Photos by **KEN MAURICE STUDIOS**



Chris Anthony Lujan knew that Jose Zertuche was the man he wanted to marry the very moment Jose said “Te amo.”

“It was about eight months into our relationship. We would say “te quiero” instead of “te amo” because it has a lighter meaning, and we weren’t sure if we wanted to say it yet. Not because we didn’t know if we [loved each other], but because once you do, it makes it real and we didn’t want to jinx anything,” Chris explains. “We were at a party one night and I was a few drinks in, but still very aware. I was completely in awe of him, and without even thinking I said, ‘Te amo.’ We both froze and ran upstairs and actually had the conversation. And yes, he did say it back!”

For Jose, falling in love was almost im-

mediate. “I think I always kind of knew he’s the one I wanted to spend my life with. Throughout our relationship, it’s always been so much fun being with him and learning new things from him. But if I have to think of a specific time, it was one night when I got dropped off at his apartment after my friend’s birthday party. It was really late, and he asked if I was hungry. He started cooking a meal for me—I’m sure it was eggs, potatoes, and bacon. I was just sitting there looking at him cooking for me, and I felt something I’ve never felt before. It just felt right and perfect. I knew it was love, and that I wanted to be with him forever.”

Chris, 24, from Galveston, and Jose, 21, from Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, are both bartenders and servers at the Pointe West Beach Club in Galveston. They actually met in 2018,

a year before they began dating, when a friend introduced them. “Beginning in the summer of 2019, we both secretly sought each other out through that same friend, and met up on a night out,” Jose explains. Before long, there was no doubt that they were headed to the altar. In fact, Chris says, “We were planning the wedding way before the official engagement.”

When it came to proposing, it was Chris who got down on one knee on July 6, 2021. Jose had known that Chris was going to propose, but he had no idea when or how. “I took him back to the spot on the beach where I had asked him out [during] a beach picnic. I set up Tiki torches and timed it perfectly with the sunset. I was so nervous because it was a rainy and gloomy day, but it ended up being the most perfect one.”



Despite knowing that it was coming, Jose says he was still completely taken aback. “I was still very surprised, and I was extremely happy that it was at the same place he had asked me out. He even used the same blanket. I was very nervous. But as soon as I talked to him and hugged him, I felt so much happiness and all the nerves went away,” Jose recalls.

Chris doesn’t even remember what he said to Jose when he proposed. “I’m sure it was along the lines of spending the rest of our lives together, and I know I called him “baby boy” because that’s what I’ve always called him.” And as sure as he was that Jose would say yes, he still was nervous about what the reply would be.

The couple was married on February 12, 2022, in Houston, and one of Chris’ best friends, Melissa Villalobos, officiated. “She’s been a friend for years, and having her really made the moment so much more special because we had a friend there, which was amazing and felt so good,” Chris says.

The whole affair went just as the couple had hoped, and the most moving moment of the

night for Chris was simply seeing Jose walk into the room. “He just looked so handsome, and I was completely just happy. I broke.”

For Jose, the best part came after the ceremony. “I think my favorite part of the wedding was dinner—having a nice meal and having a conversation with my handsome husband was amazing,” Jose says. “All the nerves were long gone, and I was enjoying the moment. I was ready to party with my husband.”

The couple now lives in Texas City and could not be happier—which Chris attributes to “how much of an amazing man Jose is, from his kind heart to everything in between. I’m truly so happy and honored that I snagged him before anyone else could.”

For Jose, it’s all about the happiness that Chris brings along wherever he goes. “[People should know] what a free spirit Chris is, and how much happiness he brings to the world. Especially to my world!”

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Blur Bar

This multi-level dance club features an upstairs lounge and balconies, with weekly events including Travesura Thursdays and Latin Saturdays.
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Club Crystal

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[6680 Southwest Freeway, Houston TX 77036](#)

Crocker Bar

This comfortably remodeled Montrose nightspot offers karaoke on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and extended Happy Hour prices throughout the week.
[2312 Crocker, Houston TX 77006](#)

Houston Eagle

As part of the worldwide Eagle family, Eagle Houston is the definitive home of the man's man. Leather, bear, or jock, you'll find them all here. This neighborhood bar has multiple levels and outdoor decks, and regularly features

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[611 Hyde Blvd., Houston TX 77006](#)

George Country Sports Bar

Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar with dart boards and pool tables. Sports fans can watch games on televisions (inside as well as outside on the newly renovated patio), and Steak Night with chef Michele Free is on Thursday nights.
[617 Fairview St, Houston TX 77006](#)

Hamburger Mary's Houston

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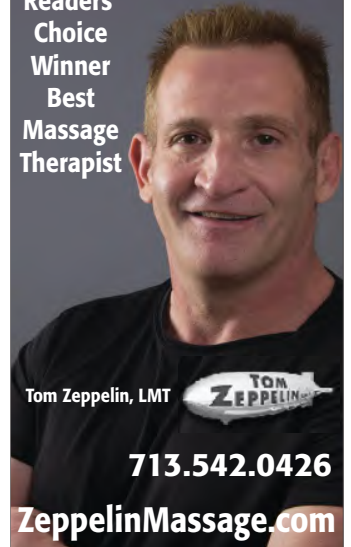


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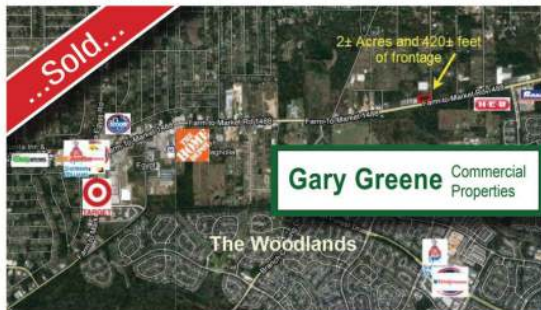
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General Information: July is always a busy month with all the Fourth of July activity that affects the nation's chart. Most of the outer planets (Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, and Pluto) go retrograde this summer—a trend that's been going on for the last three decades. We are focusing on projects that will improve our lot or allow us to release the past. Jupiter goes retrograde on July 28, which should increase the internal focus on getting things done. We will come out of this from October through December.

The sun travels through Cancer until July 22 and then enters Leo. Mercury, our messenger, begins the month in Gemini but then travels through Cancer and Leo. Venus travels through Gemini and Cancer. Mars has been in Aries, its ruling sign, but soon enters Taurus for the next 40 days or so. Jupiter remains in Aries, Saturn in Aquarius, Uranus in Taurus, Neptune in Pisces, and Pluto in Capricorn. Our next Mercury retrograde is September 1, so plan ahead!

ARIES (Mar. 21–Apr. 19)

This continues to be an active time for you. The overall energy will be positive through March of 2023. You are feeling more confident and less patient. This continues to be a good time to start new projects or to push yourself forward in your career or achieving your goals. Your home life is also very active, and you may want to do some home improvements. You are managing your daily activities much better, and by midmonth you are ready to have some fun. If you have children, this is a better time to be around them! Spending money becomes easier after July 5. Relationship energies are still positive for both singles and couples!

TAURUS (Apr. 20–May 20)

July will be a very active month for you, and the energy continues through mid-August. You will be more willing to take risks that benefit you directly. You will also be less patient with people you normally ignore. This is a great time to get in shape, improve your diet, and just take better care of yourself. Your career drive continues to push you forward to reach your goals or even do something on your own. Home and family become more important in the latter half of the month. You will want to make some home improvements, both inside and out. By the end of the month, you will want more freedom to make choices in your life. Restrictive elements can be very triggering since your patience may be at an all-time low! Take a step back, develop a plan, and then act!

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

You are more active this month and feeling the energy flowing. Relationships and any negotiations are greatly improved this month. If you are involved, this is a great time for some reconnecting. If you are single, you are more

magnetic and likely to attract some new people into your life. Finances are highlighted this month. You are looking at long-term plans, investments, and expanding your services to increase your income. Career energies come and go, but it's a very good time for those who like what they do. If you're searching for something that really energizes you, your goal may be in sight. You communicate more clearly in the latter half of the month. Friends can be very supportive this month!

CANCER (June 22–July 22)

Happy Birthday to the Moon Kids! This is your yearly personal cycle of endings and renewals. Prior to your birthday, you are more introspective and may need more time to yourself. After your birthday, you are ready to set new goals and explore new paths. Your career area continues to be very active, as you could be looking for a better position and improving your social-media presence. Friends, social groups, and professional networks are very positive for you this month. People are more open to your ideas and points of view, and more willing to support your work. In the latter half of the month, you are feeling more grounded and wanting to create a more secure income stream. You are also more likely to spend money impulsively, so think before you spend! Your view of relationships continues to change. This is a good time to make sure that you and your partner are pulling in the same direction!

LEO (July 23–Aug. 22)

In the beginning of the month, you are more laid back and may need time for self-care and meditation, despite the fact that your career energies are extremely active this month. This is a better time to plan and mend your nets. You may want to take a leadership role because you feel

your solutions can improve efficiency. You may also just be fed up and looking to start something on your own. Your confidence level is very strong, and you are willing to grab hold of something new and challenging. Relationships are still in a period of review and renewal. By the end of the month, you are feeling more in control. Career energies are very edgy toward the end of the month. Your tolerance will be very low, so surround yourself with supportive people!

VIRGO (Aug. 23–Sept. 22)

Career energies are getting back in alignment after a period when you were questioning your decisions. You should have cleaned out a lot of the past so you can set up a plan to move you forward. Business and community organizations can be very beneficial to you this month and next. You may want to take a leadership role there to promote your narrative. You are in a more creative time for writing and crafting a larger version of yourself on social media. You may want to explore podcasts, vlogs, or TikTok! You may also be having some internet interruptions, so it could be time to find a new provider. Relationships can be very comforting if you are able to allow others to help you! By the end of the month, you are ready to take a break and spend some time alone.

LIBRA (Sept. 23–Oct. 23)

It's normal for Librans to want to partner with people, and you like the idea of sharing and having someone to be a sounding board. The relationship energies now are very positive. If you are involved, this is a time of renewal and enjoying those connec-

tions. If you are single, this is a time when you can attract potential partners. If you are having problems, it's a good time to address those problems so your relationship will make you happy. You are communicating very well this month, and that is also having an impact on your career. You are more willing to stand up and be counted, so this is the month to promote your services on social media or with other platforms. In the latter half of the month, you are more ready to work with a team to achieve common goals. You continue to make an extra effort to pull yourself out of debt!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)

This is going to be an active month for you—a great time for advertising, teaching, and writing in early July. Later in the month, your career energies are very strong, so you will want to make decisions and take some action. Relationships can be very interesting this month, as they will need some TLC! If all is well, this is a great time to renew those bonds. If you are having problems, they will come to the surface so you can figure out what to do. This is a good time for therapy that helps you establish boundaries. The end of the month is especially edgy for relationships! You are likely to be very direct and to the point. There are power shifts happening within your family that need your attention. You are being given a choice as to how much influence and responsibility you want to have. Make sure you are the first to benefit from your choices!

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22–Dec. 21)

You have been focusing on your finances as the month opens. You are exploring investments and looking into

generating a budget to cut back on needless expenses. Relationship energies are much more positive, which can help even the most difficult relationship. This is a better time for negotiations since people are more receptive. Health becomes a much more important issue over the next 40 days or so. This would be a super time to improve exercise and eating habits and get a checkup at the doctor. By mid-July, you are ready for a break. This is actually a great time for a vacation or a short weekend getaway. You are clearer with your communications, so it's a good month for writing, blogging, and tweeting. Take some time to have fun this month!

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)

Your relationship sector is very active in July. This can be a good time for discussions or making commitments. If you are having problems here, this could be the time for a "friendly" breakup if you aren't able to achieve some resolution. You are improving your nest at home, or even considering a relocation. You want more wide-open spaces! Family members can be cantankerous, and may need your guiding hand. If you have children, they will be wanting more freedom and independence. You may need to find some boundaries that you can all live with. We all want more space to be ourselves without limits and judgment. You will want to break free from your agendas, especially at the end of the month! You are still occupied with creating financial freedom by being more cautious with your money and investments this year.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)

You are continuing to get your ducks in a row this month—

as you've been doing for the last two years. You are developing better personal boundaries so when you say "no" or "yes," you really mean it. Health has been a big concern for you since last month. You are exploring better eating and exercise habits. In the latter part of the month, your relationship arena is more active. Your partner needs more time and attention. This can be true for business partners as well as good friends. Home and family matters can be very active, and potentially very disruptive. You may feel the need to protect your home, so you'll be on the lookout for activities that negatively impact your neighborhood. Choose your battles wisely, especially toward the end of the month. This is a good month to take action and move forward.

PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)

This is a better month to have fun and connect with your "inner child," making sure she has plenty of cookies! This is also a more creative time for artistic endeavors, writing, or doing some acting. It's been easier to spend money since last month, and your desire to get what you want is very strong. This is a great time to consider investments and even seek out a broker. You should have some cash that you can invest into making your life feel safer in the future. You are very guarded with your time and reluctant to make long-term commitments. You are also speaking more directly. Toward the end of the month, you are more concerned with diet and exercise. Your tolerance for drama at work could be zero by late July, so make sure you find some time and space to be alone!

➡ For more astro-insight, lillyroddyshow.com.

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By SAM BYRD

The Eyes of Galveston

Symphony McKnight Capri enchants audiences near and far.



Jeepers creepers, who's got the most captivating peepers?

The answer is Symphony McKnight Capri. Just one look at

her exuberant facial expressions and expressive eyes will convince you that she can entrance an audience like a snake hypnotizes its prey. This Galveston-born beauty has spent most of her life on the Island, but her fame has spread far and wide. She is regularly booked in the Greater Houston area, Dallas, Amarillo, and even Las Vegas. Read on for more about this Galveston gal.

Pronouns?

She, Her, Mrs., and Miss

Drag birthdate?

August 26, 2001

How did you get your start in drag?

I lost a bet against Poppa and DaVar Oz, and I've been doing it ever since.

Describe your drag persona.

Classy and big. As they say, everything is bigger in Texas.

What kind of music do you enjoy performing the most?

Old-school R&B.

Who are your drag idols?

LaWanda Jackson, Layla Larue, Kelexus Davenport, and Tommie Ross.

Do you perform any illusions?

Jill Scott, Phyllis Hyman, Tamela Mann, and Lizzo.

Talk about your pageant experience.

I have many titles, and am currently the reigning Miss Gay Texas USofA Classic, Miss Gay Houston USofA Classic, and Miss Texas Big & Beautiful.

Are you part of a drag family?

I became part of the Oz Family in Galveston, and the House of Capri (a.k.a. H.O.X) after I relocated to Houston. The House of Capri is under my beautiful mother Atlantis Capri, who helps transwomen by serving on the board of Save Our Sisters United, Inc.



What is your ultimate goal as a drag performer?

To leave a legacy or track record that will forever be remembered.

What do you hope people will take away from your performances?

The love and passion I have for the art form, and to want to come back for more after an amazing experience.

Talk about your tattoos and piercings.

Each tattoo has a special meaning [connected with a special] love or a past hurt.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

I'm very introverted, prefer to be left alone, and I date nothing but studs.

Any advice for up-and-coming performers?

Stay true to yourself, know your words, and wash your drag.

What's on your bucket list?

Traveling the world with my sisters Chevelle Brooks, Kennedy Davenport, and Jazelle Barbie Royale.

Any thoughts on the Houston-area LGBTQ scene?

There's no reason for anyone not to receive any help they need, because some doors that once were closed are now open. People are willing to help if you just reach out. I love how Barcode opened a pantry to feed folks in need during COVID-19.

Any thoughts on the Houston-area drag scene?

It is expanding so fast with so many fabulous opportunities for new and upcoming girls, due to Alexye'us Paris and Dessie Love Blake.

Anything else?

Thanks to all my fans and family who have supported me throughout 20-plus years of drag. Also, a big thank-you to K3 productions. Stay tuned for more from your current reigning Miss Gay Texas USofA Classic!



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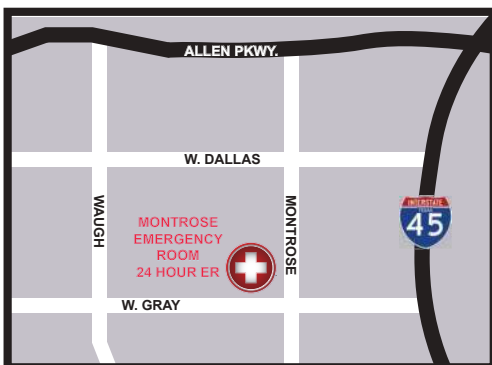
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