

LGBTQ HISTORY MONTH: GULF COAST ARCHIVE EMBRACES LOCAL LEATHER HISTORY Pg. 22

OCT. '24

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

OutSmart

➡ SEE ALL THE WINNERS & FINALISTS!
Pg. 33

2024
READERS'
CHOICE
AWARDS

&

Out & After

Most Valuable
Nonbinary Volunteer

AMANDA ROSE

Pg. 46

Most Prominent
Youth LGBTQ Activist

HAYDEN COHEN

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Favorite Male
Local Politician

MARIO CASTILLO

Pg. 40

Favorite Local
LGBTQ Influencer

BRIAN DUHON

Pg. 54





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WINNER!

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LGBTQ HISTORY MONTH: GULF COAST ARCHIVE EMBRACES LOCAL LEATHER HISTORY

OutSmart
HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

SEE ALL THE WINNERS & FINALISTS!

Gayest & Greatest
2024 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

Most Valuable Nonbinary Volunteer: **BARBIE MONROE**
Most Prominent Youth LGBTQ Activist: **PUP NARANJA**
Favorite Male Local Politician: **TAMMI WALLACE**
Favorite Local LGBTQ Influencer: **JEREMY A. TEEL**

ON the COVER

GAYEST & GREATEST 2024 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

In the photo, clockwise from the top: Barbie Monroe, Pup Naranja, Tammi Wallace, Jeremy A. Teel, and Austin Abernathy

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OutSmart Media Company

Publishers of OutSmart Magazine
3406 Audubon Place • Houston, TX 77006
713.520.7237 • 713.522.3275 Fax

Subscriptions: \$36/12 Issues, \$58/24 Issues

E-mail: editor@outsmartmagazine.com

Website: OutSmartMagazine.com

OUTSMART is published monthly. Estimated readership in Houston and surrounding areas is 60,000. OutSmart Media Company is not responsible for claims and practices of advertisers. The opinions and views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the staff or management of OutSmart. Inclusion in OutSmart does not imply sexual orientation. ©2024 by OutSmart Media Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part without permission of the publisher is strictly prohibited. Unsolicited material is accepted. No manuscript returned without SASE.

Financial support provided by



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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.

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- ▶ Have any other health problems.
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- ▶ **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.
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HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

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This October issue features the winners and finalists in our 27th annual Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards. After tallying thousands of votes cast by our loyal readers, we are proud to profile 12 of these winning individuals and businesses from the LGBTQ community, starting on page 33. This year's lineup includes not only a few of Houston's well-known leaders in politics and business, but also an impressive sampling of young artists and activists who are making a difference. Thanks to *OutSmart* writers David Clarke and Connor Behrens for highlighting these Gayest & Greatest winners. We hope to see you at this year's Gayest & Greatest Awards party at South Beach on October 23, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. You'll be able to enjoy drink specials and entertainment with emcee Derrick Shore as you mingle with many of this year's winners and finalists. Thanks to our event sponsors Bayou City Smiles, Legacy Community Health, Premier Wireless, Silver Eagle Houston, Senior Medicare Patrol, and South Beach Houston for making this year's celebration a success.

October is also LGBTQ History Month, so we asked veteran writer and historian Brandon Wolf to catch up with Judy Reeves, longtime

curator of the Gulf Coast Archive and Museum of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender History (GCAM). That local institution is in the midst of reorganizing and expanding their mission to preserve the archives and memorabilia of Houston's leather community.

Our October entertainment feature spotlights Cyndi Lauper ahead of her farewell tour that includes a stop in Houston next month. Writer Gregg Shapiro spoke with Lauper about her fond memories from four decades of recording and touring. She also revealed her passion for political activism that has inspired many of her LGBTQ fans to become informed voters.

I would like to thank the Montrose Center for honoring me this month with their 2024 LGBTQIA+ Community Vision Award. For 31 years now, my vision for empowering Houston's LGBTQ community through a monthly magazine has guided *OutSmart*'s entire editorial staff. As we now face a social-media environment that threatens the very existence of local journalism, we are asking for your support to help us thrive in the digital age.

A tax-deductible gift to the OutSmart Foundation for LGBTQ News and Media is a great way to keep independent local LGBTQ

journalism alive and well in Houston.

Please consider becoming a sustaining member of the Foundation with a gift of just \$6 a month. This type of recurring donation will help fund a thriving LGBTQ community newsroom that can make an impact in our great city.

Greg Jeu
Publisher




Don't miss the glitz and glam of our annual awards party at South Beach, where you can mingle with winners and finalists while enjoying performances and drink specials.

Oct. 23, 2024
South Beach

For more info and to RSVP, scan here!




OutSmart Foundation
for LGBTQ News and Media

Your Support Transforms LGBTQ Stories into Change

Why are we asking you to donate to the OutSmart Foundation?

Your support empowers the LGBTQ community through essential journalism, helping OutSmart Media thrive in a rapidly evolving media landscape. Your tax-deductible contribution expands our newsroom, compensates dedicated journalists, and invests in the latest media technology. It also funds internships for future writers committed to social justice.

By supporting the OutSmart Foundation, you invest in a platform that amplifies underrepresented voices and promotes equality through storytelling. You help produce journalism that confronts prejudice and embraces diversity.

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STAGE

October 8

ORVILLE PECK

Queer superstar Orville Peck's *Stampede* tour album merges country with alternative rock, showcasing his signature masked persona. He comes to Houston's House of Blues this month.

tinyurl.com/3wk3f5nz



COMMUNITY

October 11-13

GLUE WEEKEND 2024

Misfits Houston, the city's premier leather/Levi social club, brings you the most electrifying fetish event of the year—complete with workshops, parties, and social mixers.

tinyurl.com/bdewrksb

COMMUNITY

October 11

THE COUNCIL 2024 LUNCHEON

This year's event features speaker Mike 'The Situation' Sorrentino, who will share his journey through addiction, loss, and redemption.

tinyurl.com/ywzre2r8



COMMUNITY

October 11

LGBTQ+ HOMECOMING DANCE

Tony's Place hosts their inaugural Homecoming Dance. The free event is open to youth ages 14–20.

tinyurl.com/425k2mtk



COMMUNITY

Oct 12

THE WOODLANDS PRIDE 2024

The Woodlands Pride's sixth annual festival celebrates the LGBTQ community while promoting equality and unity in The Woodlands and beyond.

tinyurl.com/4kyzmr56

COMMUNITY

October 12

PRIDE COMMUNITY CENTER'S OUTOBERFEST

The first-ever Brazos Valley Pride festival in downtown Bryan features an artisan market, food and drink vendors, local community resources, performances, and more.

tinyurl.com/pfh2j44a



STAGE

October 19

PRIDE CHORUS HOUSTON: HOME

Join Pride Chorus Houston for an evening of heartfelt songs and personal stories. Music from Brandi Carlile, Rina Sawayama, and more. Experience the joy of belonging!

tinyurl.com/4zd2jp5j



COMMUNITY

October 19

KATY PRIDE CELEBRATION

First Christian Church Katy hosts their second annual celebration that aims to empower Katy's LGBTQ community with inclusive events and advocacy.

tinyurl.com/384vxt3f

COMMUNITY

October 20

THIRD COAST PRIDEFEST

Third Coast PrideFest launches its second annual Pride Parade in downtown Galveston. This year's theme is "Galveston Is a Safe Space."

tinyurl.com/s798yej9



COMMUNITY

October 23

2024 GAYEST & GREATEST AWARDS PARTY

Get ready for the party of the year! OutSmart is thrilled to celebrate the winners of the 27th annual Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards at South Beach Houston. Mingle with the winners, finalists, and friends who come together for this vibrant celebration.

tinyurl.com/652hxfv

STAGE

October 25

HOUSTON SYMPHONY'S FRIDAY NIGHT FRIGHTS

A spooky screening of two silent-film classics: *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* with a live theater-organ accompaniment.

tinyurl.com/mwav9jf8

STAGE

October 26

HOUSTON SYMPHONY'S ROCKY HORROR

Houston Symphony presents a screening of the beloved camp classic *Rocky Horror Picture Show* with a live orchestra accompaniment.

tinyurl.com/pkc4s7fm



COMMUNITY

October 31

QUEER HALLOWEEN IN HOUSTON

Check out our weekly newsletter, 'Queer Things to Do in Houston,' for all the Halloween happenings at bars, clubs, and private events around the city.

tinyurl.com/yc7pnnsf

HOUSTON SYMPHONY



FRIDAY NIGHT FRIGHTS: HALLOWEEN SILENT FILM DOUBLE FEATURE

Friday, October 25
7 p.m. • Jones Hall

Cozy up for two spine-tingling silent films—*The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*—shown on a giant screen with live organ accompaniment. **Halloween costumes are encouraged!**



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

QUEER THINGS to DO SAVE the DATES

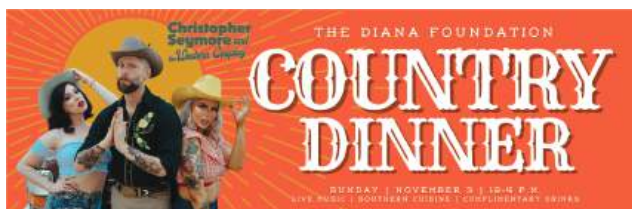
COMMUNITY

November 2

HOPE FOR HOUSTON BALL

Join Allies in Hope for a night of elegance, celebration, and community, all in support of a great cause. The evening's emcee is Carmen Contreras from 93.7FM's The Beat.

tinyurl.com/y3kwp7j



November 3

DIANA COUNTRY DINNER

The Diana Foundation presents its 61st annual Country Dinner, with proceeds supporting local charities through The Diana Foundation Charitable Fund. This year, the event will benefit Out for Education and feature live entertainment by Christopher Seymore & The Western Cosplay. tinyurl.com/5pbnxjs



STAGE

November 16

CYNDI LAUPER IN CONCERT

Singer-songwriter Cyndi Lauper's farewell tour, Girls Just Wanna Have Fun, comes to Houston's Toyota Center. The Grammy, Emmy, and Tony-winning artist celebrates over 40 years of advocacy, artistry, and timeless hits. Her special Houston guests are Aly & AJ!

tinyurl.com/ystebc74



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ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

Saturday, October 26
7:30 p.m. • Jones Hall

It's astounding! Kick off Halloween week with this interactive film screening featuring a live shadow cast and a special appearance by the original 'Magenta,' Patricia Quinn.

PLUS: Stay late for a **FREE** after party—costumes are encouraged (and yes, there will be a contest.)



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SCENE OUT

Photos by
DALTON DEHART AND CREW



The Diana Foundation partnered with The Normal Anomaly Initiative for the Sept 2024 First Wednesday Happy Hour on Sept 4. Pictured: **Ian L. Haddock, Gianna Ramirez, Carrie Rai, and Tanner Williams.**



On Sept. 8, the Montrose Center hosted the Kindred Spirits Dance at the Ballroom at Bayou Place. Pictured: **Avery Belyeu, Lisa Scarborough, and Meleah Jones.**



The Houston LGBTQ Political Caucus held its Equality Brunch 2024 at the Post Oak Hotel on Sept 8. Pictured: **Austin Davis Ruiz and Kennedy Loftin.**



On Sept. 11, 2024, the Harris County Democratic Lawyers Association held its CLE event featuring speaker Stephanie Haechen, Senior Community Outreach Coordinator for the Mayor's Office of Disabilities. Pictured are **Stephanie Haechen and Ross Miller.**



The Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce hosted its Workplace Alliance Summit on Sept. 12, 2024. Pictured are **Laif Afseth, Tammi Wallace, April Love, Tiffanie McDonald, Aaron Slessinger, Jayzen Patria, and Ryan Wilson.**



On September 12, 2024, the Houston Ballet presented Out at the Ballet for *The Little Mermaid* at the Wortham Theater Center. Pictured are number of those who were in attendance.



Viet Culture Fest 2024, presented by the Vietnamese Cultural & Science Center Association, took place at NRG Center on Sept. 13, 2024. Pictured are participants and attendees.



On Sept. 17, 2024, EPAH hosted its September 2024 Dinner Meeting at Gloria's Latin Cuisine. Pictured are **Rock Edwards, Cindy Cuellar, and Todd Shell.**



The Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber hosted Breakfast meeting on Sept. 19, 2024. Pictured are **Laura Thompson, Dr. Roy Rivera, Jr., Joy Partain, Rae Sanchez, Katie Jackman, Brandi Lira, Chelsea Sargent, Derek Livingston, Tammi Wallace, Armando Uridiales, Lane Roebuck, and Jessica Gonzalez.**



On Sept. 21, 2024, the Judge Fran Watson for Probate Court 5 kickoff fundraiser was held at the home of Rob Icsenzen and Alia Vinson. Pictured are **Justice David Medina, Judge Fran Watson, Judge Pamela Medina, and Judge Jerry Simoneaux.**



The Houston Transgender Unity Banquet was held at Hilton Houston Westchase on September 21, 2024. Pictured are some of the attendees.



On Sept. 25, 2024, the Greater Houston LGBTQ Chamber held the U.S. Business Action to End HIV Inaugural Convening. Pictured are **Ryan Wilson, Tammi Wallace, Caroline Jackson, Mario Harper, and Council Member Mario Castillo.**



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Preserving Houston's Leather History

As the Gulf Coast Archive and Museum turns 25, it transitions into the nonprofit **Heart of Leather Foundation**.

By **BRANDON WOLF**

Gulf Coast Archive and Museum of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender History, Inc. (GCAM) is celebrating its 25th anniversary this month. As part of the celebration, GCAM has announced that it will transform into a new entity named Heart of Leather Foundation. GCAM will then become a sub-collection of non-leather holdings within the new organization.

Judy Reeves, who has been GCAM's curator during those 25 years, will now be the curator of both the GCAM and the leather collections. However, GCAM will no longer be accepting items into its collection, so Reeves will guide potential donors to other options in the Houston area. Leather items will be accepted into the Heart of Leather collection.

Loyd Powell, who is coordinating the transformation, says, "The heart of leather is its history, and the Foundation's mission is to keep that history safe and alive. We will tell the stories of leather history through our extensive digital and actual archives, displays of leather of historical value, and an active leather education program with the goal of providing a welcoming space for all to gather, research, and learn."

Beginning the Transformation

At 74, Reeves is preparing to retire from actively curating GCAM collections, so now is a good time to set these goals into motion. During the next two years, Reeves will be looking for a new home or homes for GCAM holdings at other organizations that have a mission of preserving Houston's LGBTQ history. Meanwhile, the Foundation will be searching for a new curator to take over the leather holdings so Reeves can pass along her collected wisdom.

Reeves emphasizes that not a single GCAM item will be thrown out or left behind. Powell assures that every item given to GCAM was precious to someone, and he intends to respect that.

Continuing discussions will be held to determine where individual current holdings



ELVIN MORIARTY

Judy Reeves, curator of GCAM

will be moved to. The Foundation collection will include some items which are non-leather, but have meaning to the leather community—such as the drag queens who held countless fundraisers during the AIDS crisis to help so many in the leather community who were battling the disease.

Gulf Coast Archive and Museum, a nonprofit organization, has been officially renamed Heart of Leather Foundation, and other legal papers are in process. Currently, Powell and his partner of 39 years, Robert Conn, are part of a five-member work group, two of whom are women. They are looking for more people to join them as they put together a diverse group that will include younger generations.

The work group has new ideas about fundraising. Powell says that putting together a board will be about putting the right people in the right place. People are needed who have a knowledge of Houston's leather history and who also understand good business

practices. Powell can dream big, and he hopes that one day the Heart of Leather Foundation can open a physical museum.

Gulf Coast Leather History

The Houston area has a rich history of leather. The first known beginnings are motorcycle clubs in the early 1970s, which found a home at the iconic Mary's bar. The first Pride parades were led by members of these clubs.

Leather and denim social clubs then began to spring up, including the National Leather Association-Houston, the Misfits, and the Colt 45's. Houston is the only city to ever have had a Council of Clubs, which kept communications going between the social clubs and offered a way to easily coordinate leather events.

One such event for years was the annual Let Us Entertain You (LUEY) weekend. LUEY was held the weekend after the end of Mardi Gras in New Orleans, which →

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always ended on a Wednesday. Party-goers were invited to Houston for a weekend of socials at several participating bars. Leather and denim clubs sponsored tables offering cocktail-party punch. At the end of the weekend, a huge show was held at Rich's bar.

Leather and denim bars proliferated throughout the Montrose area: Different Drum, Montrose Mining Company, Silver Bullet, Mary's, Brazos River Bottom, Ripcord, and more. Leather-oriented businesses also sprang up: Leather by Boots and Black Hawk Leather.

Perhaps the most visible element of the leather community was the iconic Mary's mural on the outside of their east wall, illustrating leather men and their friends partying inside. The mural shocked some people and was treasured by others. It sent a message to gay bashers that Montrose belonged to the gay community.

The late Scott Swoveland, who created the mural, noted that it represented three important messages: always be yourself, treasure your friends, and have a good time even when the going gets tough.

Leather contests and bar shows also became popular. Contestants vied to win the title of Mr. Prime Choice, Daddy of Montrose, or Boy of Montrose. Bar shows were well attended—especially those organized by Don Gill Productions, which produced diverse and entertaining shows such as the annual Nights in Black Leather.

Some people mistake leather for kink, says Powell. They are two different things, and not all people in leather are into kink. The heart of leather is brotherhood, he

says, also pointing out that each leather vest is a story of the owner's life, whether it be a personal vest or a title vest. The back patch tells what club they belonged to or what title they had held. The other pins on the vest are from friends or events/runs they attended.

GCAM and the Leather Community

Over the past two and a half decades, GCAM has become more and more involved with Houston's leather community, and their leather holdings have become sizable. Reeves remembers a Mardi Gras fundraising show by GCAM held in the early 2000s at the former EJ's bar. Many of the guests were in leather, and Reeves was surprised that she knew so many of them, but had never realized they were part of the leather community.

In 2006, Don Gill gave GCAM a beautiful shadow box that had been built to honor the late Marvin Davis, aka Lady Victoria Lust. Davis was one of the best fundraisers in the Houston community. Don Gill Productions presented the shadow box at one of their shows at the Briar Patch bar.

Reeves eventually went to a LUEY planning meeting and asked if GCAM could sponsor a cocktail-party punch table. The request was granted and GCAM returned year after year. Reeves began to realize that the leather community was now giving GCAM more and more attention, offering help in a variety of ways.

Reeves eventually became an auxiliary member of both the Houston Area Bears (which later became Houston Bears), and a member of the Colt 45's and NLA-Houston. When the Colt 45's closed down their club in 2009, GCAM received everything that was in their office above the Brazos River Bottom

bar: vests, awards, paperwork, and the entire contents of the huge glass awards case in the bar's entryway.

As GCAM inventoried the Colt 45's holdings, they realized the leather items required special care. They turned to NLA-Houston and Misfits, who helped them clean and restore many of the items, since leather can become brittle and crack without proper care.

Misfits supported GCAM with one of their annual Misfits Balls. After the death of Creath Robinson—the leader behind LUEY Weekend and the annual Wigs on Fire event—GCAM was given many items belonging to him.

In 2009, Doug Decker moved from Houston, leaving GCAM with a large collection of items including banners and posters. Reeves said two SUV-loads of materials were picked up by GCAM.

That same year, Mary's closed and GCAM recovered the bar tops from the inside bar and the patio bar. The bartops contain photographs taken at Mary's, covered by an acrylic sealer.

Members of the leather community have supported GCAM for decades, with donations and bar fundraising shows. Each year, Scott and Falcon Fuhr-Kenyon organize a "pie in the face" fundraiser on the Ripcord patio. Guests can put a pie in the face of volunteers who are often royalty and title holders. Reeves has been one of those volunteers, and the pie in her face was the most expensive, bringing in a \$50 donation.

Over the years, some of GCAM's leather holdings have been featured in historical exhibits in the larger Houston community, including Contemporary Arts Museum-Houston, the Health Museum, Houston Historical Society, NASA, and Zilkha Hall at the Hobby Center. After discussions between the Holocaust Museum and GCAM's Bruce Reeves, GCAM also participated in the museum's 2004 exhibit titled *Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals, 1933–1945*.

About three years ago, Reeves began to realize the need for a Houston leather archive. Although GCAM has a vast assortment of pictures from the leather community, few of them identify who is in the photos or the events where they were taken. There is little documented history of the community; mostly it is stories and memories that people share.

Reeves met with Powell and Conn, and over the last year their discussions of a leather archive became more and more serious, with the two men agreeing to spearhead a movement to create a leather archive. Reeves says "I think this is one of the greatest things to happen in our community in decades."



Colt 45's member vest and leathermen vests



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Finding Faith Beyond Fundamentalism

Michael Gott's spiritual journey to leading one of the nation's largest New Thought congregations.

By BRANDON WOLF

Unity of Houston is one of the largest New Thought congregations in the nation. Their progressive attitudes are perfectly demonstrated by the fact that their pastor, Michael Gott, is openly gay. Gott has been senior pastor since 2017.

Gott sees Unity as a place where people can begin new spiritual journeys and see religion in a whole different light. Coming from a fundamentalist religious background, he knows personally about such a journey. A former lounge singer who struggled with alcohol addiction and found recovery, he is now the beloved pastor of a faith community that welcomes all and embraces diversity.

The New Thought Movement

Gott explains that the Unity denomination takes its name from their belief that everything and everyone are connected, and the presence of the divine is in all of us. By focusing on the good in life, we can grow to create that goodness in our own lives. Dating back to 1889, Unity is part of the New Thought movement, which looks to the teachings of many other religions with a definite focus on Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The movement does not accept the Christian Bible as literal. "It's a great collection of spiritual writings. It has great wisdom. But we do not accept it as the inherent word of God," Gott explains.

The movement also does not accept the concepts of a devil or hell. Rather than seeing Jesus as a "savior," it believes that the historical Jesus was a great spiritual teacher who fully realized his potential and preached kindness and compassion.

Gott says that a lot of people come to Unity from fundamentalist backgrounds and find a great relief in Unity philosophies. The denomination places a high value on human rights and has a great appeal to members of minority groups. "Transphobia today is out of control," Gott says. "We honor all paths that lead to God, but we don't honor some of the things that certain religions do."



Pastor Michael Gott

COURTESY

Unity has a wide array of programs. One of the Sunday morning services is devoted to their Spanish-speaking ministry. A millennial group is growing, and several men's and women's groups are available. There are study groups focusing on gender diversity, but the LGBTQ community has been very well integrated into the congregation and its board.

Unity has several 12-step recovery programs, classes in spiritual education, and the extremely popular *Course in Miracles*. Unity has hosted such nationally known speakers as Deepak Chopra and Marianne Williamson.

During the 1980s, a *Houston Chronicle*

article noted that then-mayor Kathy Whitmire often attended Unity of Houston. Just recently, Gott was asked to give the invocation at the mayoral inauguration of Kathy Whitmire's brother-in-law John Whitmire.

A Country Boy Who Was Different

Gott was born in 1966 and grew up in a small rural town near Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was the middle of three sons, and his mother was a homemaker while his father worked in a local wax factory. "They had strong work ethics," he says.

Throughout his childhood, Gott always →



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knew he was different. He recalls watching *Barney Miller* one night on television. The plot of the episode included two rather flamboyant men, and he heard the word “gay” mentioned. His father asked him if he understood what that meant, and then explained it to him.

By the time Gott hit puberty, his sexuality was undeniable. He had strong feelings of attraction to men, but he had been raised in a Pentecostal family and couldn’t talk about it.

In school, he involved himself in anything musical. He studied theory, composition, piano, and voice. He played tuba in the band and sang in one of the choirs.

Although he was offered scholarships at a variety of colleges, he chose the nearby Oral Roberts University, a Pentecostal school. He had to hide his sexuality because he would have been expelled if that fact had become known. He stayed in the closet successfully, encouraged to do so by a supportive piano teacher. He graduated in 1988 with a major in music.

Gott came out to his family at age 19. His father was supportive, but his mother struggled with it. He says he was willing to change if he could, but reality told him differently. He discovered that one of his uncles was gay and had come out in 1940 and moved to San Francisco. The two became close friends.

A Musician’s Life in Dallas

Gott moved to Dallas to attend graduate school in nearby Denton, although he eventually dropped out. “At the time, I had a girlfriend who knew I was gay. Today she is

married to a woman,” he says, noting the irony. He began exclusively dating men. He also began singing at local gay bars in Dallas—John L’s, Bill’s Hideaway, and Michael’s Piano Bar.

Gott supported himself as a full-time waiter and musician. For 13 years he performed regularly in the Mansion Bar at Turtle Creek. “I provided whatever the room needed, including requests. At the peak of those years, I had memorized over 400 songs.”

During those years, Gott became addicted to alcohol. Looking back, he feels that at the core of his addiction was an inability to accept being gay. His sexuality was so strong, and yet he still had a sincere belief in the religion of his childhood. “The pain went away when I drank,” he admits. Eventually, he found recovery and has been sober for 25 years.

Finding a New Spirituality

One night when Gott was entertaining at Michael’s Piano Bar, a man asked to talk with him during his break. “He asked me to sing at his church, the Center for Spiritual Living.” Gott took him up on the invitation and soon got a job at the church.

Gott wasn’t greatly interested in that

“TRANSPHOBIA TODAY IS OUT OF CONTROL. WE HONOR ALL PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD, BUT WE DON’T HONOR SOME OF THE THINGS CERTAIN RELIGIONS DO.”

— Michael Gott

church at first. “It was very different from what I grew up in, and I wondered if it was a cult,” he recalls. He did like the fact that the church was gay-affirming. He had been looking for a spiritual community and was ready for something new in his life. Within a year, he had tuned in to the church’s core beliefs.

When the minister of the church suggested that Gott go to seminary, he felt conflicted. Eventually, he devoted three years to earning a master’s degree through the Holmes Institute of Consciousness Studies. At the end of his second year, when Gott still wasn’t sure of his choice, he was asked to conduct a memorial service. “I felt something shift. I realized there is a great need for someone to do these kinds of things,” he says—a realization that led to accepting an associate music director position in Reno, Nevada.

For several years during that period, he provided the music for a Montana spiritual retreat. That’s where he met Howard Caesar, the pastor of Unity of Houston. Caesar invited Gott to visit Unity and perform. During that first visit to Houston, Gott was amazed as he looked out at the congregation while he was singing and realized how diverse the membership is.

Gott happily accepted the offer of a music minister position at Unity of Houston. Then in 2017, Caesar retired after 34 years of ministry in Houston and named Gott as his replacement. Gott’s amazing spiritual journey, from guilt-ridden conservative Christian to belief in the universal presence of the divine, has led him to the position of ministering to the flagship congregation of the New Thought movement.

Endless Possibilities

Trey Yates has been a member of Unity for the past 23 years and served on the board for seven years. “If I had had an openly gay minister growing up, my life would have been so different,” he says.

Yates considers Gott to be a good friend, and sometimes on Saturdays they walk and talk together in Memorial Park. “Michael has such an open soul,” Yates says.

Mike Wick, who has been a Unity member for 38 years, says, “Like a lot of folks, I grew up with an image of God that talked about judgment and sin. I was in a particularly low point in my life, and Unity was exactly what I needed. I was introduced to a God that was loving and compassionate. It was like a breath of fresh air,” he says. “The possibilities of life are endless, just like the universe that we are blessed to be a part of. I can’t wait to see what the rest of the journey brings.”



The Unity of Houston campus in West Houston



For more info, visit unityhouston.org.

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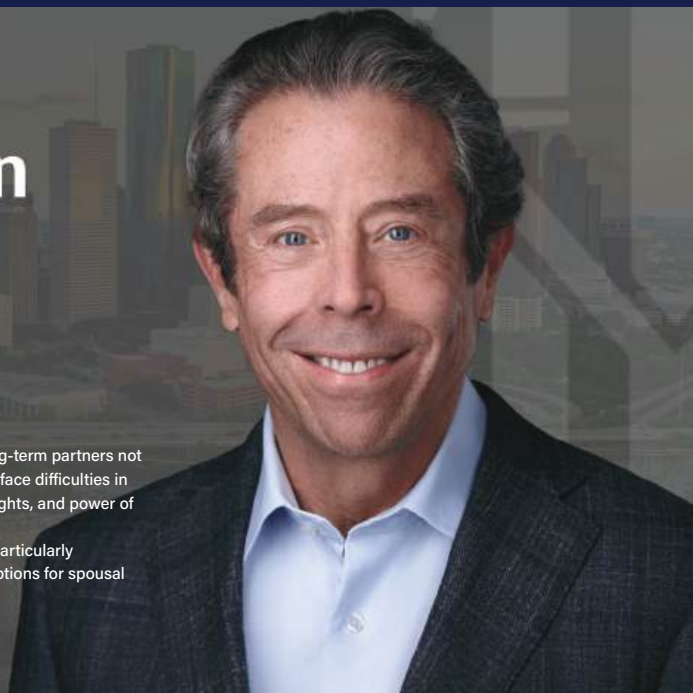
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Guerra, Kris Winters, and Daniel Williams, who shared insights on queer politics and advocacy. Emceed by Brandon Mack and Dylan Forbis, the evening celebrated Houston's transgender community and its ongoing fight for equality and empowerment.

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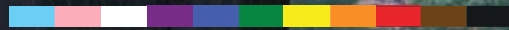


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OutSmart magazine's Gayest and Greatest Readers' Choice Awards once again recognize outstanding individuals and businesses that readers have chosen as their favorites with nearly 100,000 votes. Read on for the complete awards list, as well as profiles on 12 of this year's winning individuals and businesses.

OutSmart GAYEST & GREATEST



2024 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

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Up-and-comer Barbie Monroe was voted Houston's Best New Drag Queen, and youth advocate Hayden Cohen was honored as the co-founder and Texas State Policy Director of SEAT. Tammi Wallace, co-founder

and CEO of the Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, is a tireless champion of queer-owned businesses in Houston, while City Council Member Mario Castillo advocates for public health initiatives in District H.

Volunteers like Austin Abernathy and

entertainers like Pup Naranja exemplify a dedication to community service, and Amanda Rose fosters greater acceptance and inclusion in suburban Katy. Cameron Stodghill, recognized as Best Nonbinary Massage Therapist, creates safe spaces for trans and queer individuals.

Artists like Jeremy A. Teel uplift the community with their transformative work, and business leader Lane Lewis takes pride in the essential services he provides. Andrew and Sarah Degar are being honored for fostering community connections with their Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu self-defense classes.

Barbie Monroe

The queen who turned
heartbreak into stardom

By DAVID CLARKE
Photo by FRANK XAVIER



Barbie Monroe (she/her) is absolutely delighted and surprised to be voted as Houston's Best New Drag Queen in this year's OutSmart Gayest & Greatest

Awards. "The people I was up against, they were in drag for at least a year to two years," she explains. "I probably did a total of four shows, and then people nominated me. It was so crazy, but I loved it. It just shows me I actually have a purpose to do drag. If people are noticing it right now, I want to make it a career."

Interestingly, the nightlife scene was not a prominent part of Monroe's life before she started doing drag. "When I graduated high school, I entered corporate America," she says. But a major breakup shook up her life, leading her to go out and enjoy Houston's vibrant and diverse nighttime offerings. "I started to discover drag shows, and I really fell in love with it because it offered me an escape, while also feeling connected with the community," Monroe says. "I felt like drag allowed me to express myself more and connect with different people."

"Honestly, winning this is solidifying. After my breakup and just feeling alone from that, I know I am actually loved in my community. It's a beautiful thing," she says. "Also, I would have not been successful without the help of my drag mother, Edna Anderson."

Monroe believes winning this award will have a positive impact on her career. "I feel like it's going to really help me because, as a trans woman living every single day, it opens a door for us trans women. It says that it is okay for us to be in drag. There's no discrimination whatsoever. So if I can do it, they can do it, as well."

To appreciate the power of that, recall that *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which has made drag extremely accessible and mainstream as it beams into living rooms across the nation and globe, didn't have its first openly trans woman compete until 2017, when Peppermint entered the competition for Season 9.

Each of these Gayest & Greatest awards is a testament to how a recipient has positively impacted Houston, and it makes others wonder how their own impact could be recognized. "Always just be authentically yourself, first and foremost. That's really what people will notice the most," Monroe advises. "Drag is an alternative personality for yourself. However, you cannot lose yourself in your drag. That's something I'm learning as I make Barbie my own version of myself."

As a newer drag queen, Barbie doesn't have many bookings yet. But there are multiple opportunities to see her this month. "I am

doing a competition in October with Queen Persephone at South Beach," she says. "It's a four-week competition where the community can come out and support me." The competition, "Persephone's Race to the Moon," will be held at 10 p.m. on Sundays, October 6, 20, and 27, with the finale on November 3. Notably, there will be no eliminations in this competition, so Barbie will perform at each show.

Follow Barbie Munroe on

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BEST BAR FOOD

Rich's

Finalists: JR's Bar & Grill, Eagle Eats, Los Robles

BEST DANCE PARTY

South Beach

Finalists: DNVRMX, Club Shugga, Evolution

BEST DRAG SHOW BAR

South Beach

Finalists: Michael's Outpost, Barcode,
Rich's Houston, JR's Bar & Grill

BEST DRAG SHOW IN TOWN

Millennial Dolls

Finalists: Laugh Track, Drag Brunch at Winnies,
Press Play, Eyecons

BEST LOCAL LIVE MUSIC VENUE

Michael's Outpost

Finalists: Stereo Live, Rudyards

BEST NEW DRAG KING

Casper Cain

Finalists: Kian Kismet, Juice Kota, Zestial Celestial

BEST NEW DRAG QUEEN

Barbie Monroe

Finalists: Artemis Hunter, Kristy Kremes,
Glitter Lxve, Jackie All Trades

BEST PAGEANT KING

Ladarius Mirage Jackson

Finalists: Ángel OXL, Ian Syder Blake

BEST PAGEANT QUEEN

Chloe Knox

Finalists: Sinema LaRue, Dessie Love Blake,
Alexis Nicole Whitney

BEST PROMOTER

Barbie Monroe

Finalists: Anthony Uncensored, DNVRMX,
Mike Vargas - Evolution

FAVORITE ADULT FILM PERFORMER

Silver Steele

Finalists: John Thomas, Dominique Zhee

FAVORITE ALLY BAR

Piggy's HTX

Finalists: Numbers, 8 Row Flint East, Boheme

FAVORITE BAR FOR A HAPPY HOUR

JR's Bar & Grill

Finalists: Michael's Outpost, Ripcord,
Houston Eagle, Barcode

FAVORITE BAR TO SHOOT POOL

George Country Sports Bar

Finalists: JR's Bar & Grill, Ripcord, Barcode, Neon Boots

FAVORITE BAR TO TWO STEP

Neon Boots

Finalists: Los Robles, George Country Sports Bar, Catbirds →

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Hayden Cohen

The SEAT co-founder empowers youth and fights censorship.

By **DAVID CLARKE**
Photo by **NORA DAYTON**

**MOST
PROMINENT
YOUTH LGBTQ
ACTIVIST**



Hayden Cohen (they/them)—co-founder and State Policy Director at Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT)—is an active member of the LGBTQ+ Political Caucus

and a self-proclaimed local politics nerd. An accomplished community organizer despite their young age, Cohen got into all of this after joining the Young Democrats Club at their high school, which then snowballed into serving as president of the high school's Gay Straight Alliance and being a Student Fellow for the Beto for Texas campaign. More recently, Cohen has been tirelessly working to help people get registered to vote for the 2024 election, helping SEAT's preparations for interim hearings at the Texas Legislature, and more.

"One of the things I'm always doing, no matter when, is voter registration and education. I love going to schools, registering a bunch of high schoolers, chatting with them about the importance of voting and the stuff that they care about," says Cohen. "Also, SEAT is putting together a boot camp for folks wanting to get involved. It's two or three weeks of intensive training in how Texas politics work, how the legislature works, how Texas mobilization and advocacy works, and then matching these students up with actual jobs working for representatives or certain organizations."

Cohen is also currently engaged in combating Texas House Bill 18. "It's this major internet filter censorship law that passed in the Lege," they explain. "So we're saying, 'No, this makes it impossible for us to do our work as a student

organization.'"

Cohen also recently fought against the fallout from Governor Greg Abbott's federal judge-approved refusal to adopt the US Department of Education's April 2024 Final Rule amending the regulations implementing Title IX. "All these school districts started to come up with these votes and said, 'Oh yes, we're not adopting these guidelines.' SEAT wrote a letter that we sent to every single superintendent in the state. We got a huge amount of sign-on from Pride organizations, Title IX organizations, and Keshet. We also had the ACLU and Texas Freedom Network oversee editing the letter, as well as the Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT)."

Winning a 2024 Gayest & Greatest award will further legitimize their efforts, Cohen feels, because the award was earned through community votes. "This person is well known by their community. This person has done some good work. It's a really cool thing to have," Cohen adds. "In the world of politics, that means you have a large network, and that means that you have more reach to get more positive work done. It means I have won an award for fighting back against bullshit bills in

the Texas Legislature."

For others who want to make an impact in Houston, Cohen thinks people need to look beyond news headlines. "Something that's always great is to actually look into the bills themselves, look into the penal codes, look at the agendas of upcoming meetings at City Hall or in the County Commissioners Court, and then start finding folks to speak to. Start finding communities that can help you make a difference. I couldn't do all that I've done alone just because I wanted to be loud. Making change really comes from a place of working with certain people."

"You can volunteer with places like the League of Women Voters of Houston if you want to register voters. If you're looking to do more trans-rights stuff, you can volunteer with TENT. And by volunteering, by giving up a bit of your time, you get to meet some incredible folks. And that is how you're going to be able to make change," Cohen emphasizes.



Follow Hayden Cohen on Instagram
@hccohen5642

FAVORITE CLUB FOR DANCING

South Beach Houston

Finalists: Numbers, Club 2.0, Pearl Bar

FAVORITE DRAG KING

Barry Mii Dandy

Finalists: Kian Kismet, Casper Cain, Preston Steamed, Hugh Dandy

FAVORITE DRAG QUEEN

Adriana LaRue

Finalists: Queen Persephone, Rachel Bitchface, Carmina Vavra, Blackberri, Hanna Santanna, Reign LaRue, Lana Blake, Violet S'Arbleu

FAVORITE DRAG SHOW HOST/EMCEE

Queen Persephone

Finalists: Reign LaRue, Carmina Vavra, Rachel Bitchface, Blackberri

FAVORITE KARAOKE NIGHT AT A BAR

JR's Bar & Grill

Finalists: Michael's Outpost, Barcode, Koryoke, Tony's Corner Pocket Manic Mondays

FAVORITE LGBTQ BAR

Ripcord

Finalists: JR's Bar & Grill, Michael's Outpost, Pearl Bar, South Beach Houston

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG)

FEMALE ENTERTAINER

Rosie the Riveting

Finalists: Angie Moon Mercy, Belle Be Damned, JustacurvyNerdYaya

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG)

MALE ENTERTAINER

Eddie Divas

Finalists: Ángel OXL, L'darius Mirage Jackson, Jerry Atwood, Dustin Rouge Whitney

FAVORITE LOCAL (NON-DRAG)

NONBINARY ENTERTAINER

Miss Majors

Finalists: DJ Aracely Manterola, Mak Fontina, Jay Atari

FAVORITE LOCAL MUSICIAN/BAND

Houston Pride Band

Finalists: Ben Chavez, Isaac Niaz, Jerry Atwood, Uncle Tino

FAVORITE FEMALE DJ

DJ Rosez

Finalists: DJ Athenz, DJ Amarji King, DJ Crazy V, DJ London

FAVORITE MALE DJ

DJ Atreyu Frausto

Finalists: DJ Joe Ross, DJ Panda, DJ GNDRBNDR

FAVORITE NONBINARY DJ

DJ Aracely Manterola

Finalists: DJ Purrie

FAVORITE MUSIC PRODUCERS

DirtSoul

Finalists: DJ Athenz, DJ Dirty Disco, DJ Stephen Jusko →

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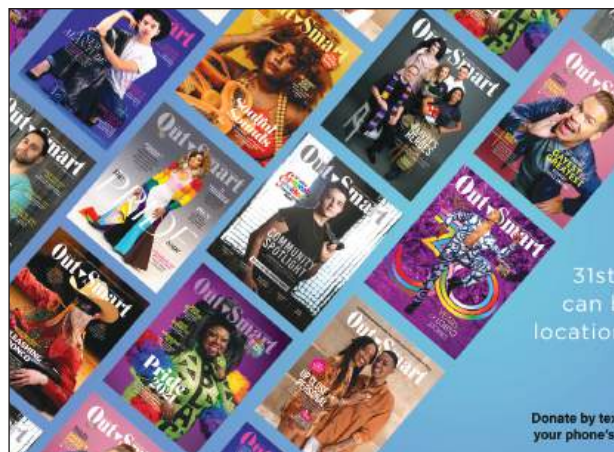
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Tammi Wallace

Inspiring empowerment
and economic growth
for LGBTQ Texans.

By DAVID CLARKE



Tammi Wallace (she/her), co-founder, president, and CEO of the Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, has a reputation for being one of the hardest-working advocates in Houston. Her award-winning strategic thinking, work ethic, and ability to comprehend Harris County's power structure is impressive, and the result is a more equitable and prosperous future for LGBTQ Texans.

"Working with small businesses, large companies, and their employee resource groups in supplier diversity, as well as the 35+ nonprofits that we have in the Chamber, is the work that literally gets me up every day," says Wallace. "Leading the Chamber and really working every day to be a strong voice and advocate for LGBTQ+ and ally-owned businesses is literally what fuels me."

Wallace rejects the familiar Jack-of-all-trades label in favor of "Jill-of-many-trades" due to her varied professional experiences. "I spent about 14 years in financial services and then had the good fortune to start my journey in terms of advocacy by working on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community in some volunteer roles. I've been involved with the LGBTQ+ community for over two decades and volunteered on some early campaigns, including Annise Parker's, and got the political bug," Wallace explains.

This led her to work on Ellen Cohen's campaign when Cohen ran for the Texas House of Representatives, serving as Cohen's chief of staff for her 2008 and 2010 House campaigns. Then in 2011, Wallace began working as the chief growth officer for KIPP Public Charter Schools in Houston, but was laid off due to the Texas State Legislature slashing the education budget by \$5.4 billion. This prompted her to start her own business in 2012 and create a space where she could combine her skills in government, community engagement, project management, and more.



Wallace delivers remarks at one of the Chamber's signature events, Pride In Business.



MONICA KRESSMAN

"In 2015, I read an article in reference to the 2017 Super Bowl in the *Houston Chronicle* that said you could get certified as an LGBTQ-owned business," Wallace recalls. Famously, the NFL made a commitment to support diverse-owned businesses in the markets where they were bringing the Super Bowl, commencing that initiative in San Francisco in 2016 and in Houston in 2017.

"I figured out that if you're a member of your local affiliate LGBTQ+ Chamber, then your certification fee would be waived," Wallace says. However, there was a major problem: Houston didn't have an LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce. "So that led me on the path to co-founding the Chamber along with Gary Wood.

And I will tell you this has been almost 10 years of my life now. It is what I see as my "mission match"—this intersection of business and community. It truly is pulling in education, political policy, business, and all the work that I've done in various aspects of my career."

Wallace's work has earned her other awards, but being recognized with a 2024 Gayest & Greatest award offers her something unique. "These are the awards that mean so much to me because they are coming directly from the community," Wallace notes. "People are taking the time to cast their vote, and they're checking your name. It is an acknowledgement of the work that I'm doing. It's incredibly, incredibly powerful to know that people recognize that."

She also appreciates the validation this award offers the Chamber itself. "It's like a stamp when people see this, both inside and outside of the community," says Wallace. "It will cause people to go, 'Oh, wow, the Chamber is doing the work. Maybe I should check them out.' So it helps us increase the visibility for the work that we're doing."

"Thank you to *OutSmart* for continuing these awards year after year and highlighting remarkable people in our community that are doing great things, are supportive of the community, or who have inclusive businesses," Wallace concludes.



For more info, visit [linkedin.com/in/tammiwallace](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tammiwallace).

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Mario Castillo

The only openly LGBTQ City Council member creates opportunities for marginalized citizens.

By DAVID CLARKE



HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT H



Mario Castillo (he/him), a dedicated Houston City Council member for District H, is proud to serve his native city. Having graduated from Houston's High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Castillo studied political science at Texas A&M University with his sights set on attending law school. But then he discovered this path wasn't for him. "So I went to Wisconsin to work on Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, and that's when I decided—from my experience there—that public health was what I wanted to focus on—and particularly healthcare policy and management," he explains.

This realization laid the groundwork for both Castillo's master's degree in public health and his current political career. "My first job out of grad school was working with a nonprofit called Enroll America, and they helped folks get Affordable Care Act coverage as the law was rolling out," he says. "I got to see firsthand how legislation could positively impact a large number of people, and that got me interested more in the political side of it. From there, I became a chief of staff at City Hall and District H, and then went on to the Health Department before starting my own nonprofit, Your Houston, which was focused on quality of life and public health issues."

"I saw the benefits of being involved politically and how decisions that were being made by city councils, state houses, and Congress impacted folks. So I wanted to be a part of that, too," Castillo adds. "I decided that District H was ripe for opportunity in terms of bringing in those types of resources and helping to be an advocate on the public-health side and the quality-of-life side. I decided to run, and here we are."

Castillo's City Council term began last January, and he has been working hard for his district and for minority populations across the



entire city. "One program that I'm particularly proud of is the District H Horizons Internship Program," Castillo notes. "It was a priority for me to launch it, and I'm proud to say it was launched in June, with our first intern starting shortly after." This program offers participants a paid six-month internship in Castillo's office that he hopes will be a springboard toward forming a professional network while gaining firsthand knowledge of how local politics work.

"You have to live, work, or study in District H to apply, and I really encourage folks from the LGBTQ+ community and from other minority communities to apply because we have a lack of representation in those areas in local government. I'm the only member of City Council that's openly LGBTQ+," Castillo adds. "It's important for me to help give others from those communities opportunities."

Castillo is hopeful that this trajectory-changing program will expand to other political offices across the city, as well. "I want to recruit more folks who are dedicated to certain departments," he says. "It doesn't have to be my

office, but maybe a young planning student can go spend six months in the City Planning Department and learn what that's like, or if they're in transportation, then they can go to Metro for six months."

As for being voted as Houston's Favorite Male Local Politician, Castillo is grateful and humbled. "I'm almost 10 months into my career as a City Council member, and I think it speaks to the power of representation and having folks that are from your community in these positions," he admits. "To be at one of the decision-making bodies, to have the perspectives I have, and to be a voice for the community, it's an honor. I don't take it for granted whatsoever."

For others who want to make a positive impact in their communities, Castillo offers this advice: "Take a chance. Don't talk yourself out of it, because a lot of times I think we lose when people have this great idea or want to take action, but then you let yourself get the best of you."

But most importantly, Castillo urges everyone to participate in the upcoming election. "I want to encourage everyone to check their voter registration status before the October 7 deadline, because a lot of folks have been removed or suspended, and you may not know it unless you check your status," he warns. "Then, vote in November—up and down the ballot. There are so many important races beyond the president and Senate that have a direct impact on your day-to-day lives. It's so critically important and vital. So if you're reading this, go check your voter registration status and vote early."



Follow Mario Castillo on Instagram
@MarioForHouston

FAVORITE MEN'S BAR

Ripcord

Finalists: JR's Bar & Grill, Michaels Outpost, Eagle Houston, Crocker Bar, Tony's Corner Pocket, South Beach Houston, Blur Bar, Barcode, George, Los Robles de La Granja

FAVORITE WOMEN'S BAR

Pearl Bar

Finalists: JR's Bar & Grill, Ripcord, Eagle Houston, Side Peace

FAVORITE NONBINARY DRAG ENTERTAINER

Malevolent The Psycho Ghoul

Finalists: Ophelia Terran Flesh, Allure Gic, Tera Bytz J. Love-La'Sha

FAVORITE PLACE TO SHOW OFF YOUR LEATHER

Ripcord

Finalists: Houston Eagle, JR's Bar & Grill

FAVORITE PLACE TO WATCH DRAG

South Beach Houston

Finalists: Michael's Outpost, Rich's, Barcode, Katy Vibes

FAVORITE PLACE TO WATCH MALE DANCERS

Tony's Corner Pocket

Finalists: South Beach Houston, JR's Bar & Grill, Eagle Houston, Room Bar

FAVORITE TRIVIA NIGHT AT A BAR

Ripcord

Finalists: Tiny Champions, JR's Bar & Grill, Michael's Outpost, Frost Town Brewing

FAVORITE VETERAN DRAG KING

Hugh Dandy

Finalists: Preston Steamed, Ian Syder-Blake

FAVORITE VETERAN DRAG QUEEN

Kofi

Finalists: Blackberri, Lana Blake, Laisha LaRue, Marsha Mellow

PEOPLE

BEST FEMALE LGBTQ BUSINESS PERSON

Tammi Wallace

Finalists: Meg Ellis, Marlen Mendoza, Alexandria Gomez-Maxey, Sarah Thompson

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Jay Michaels

Finalists: JD Doyle, First Christian Church Katy, Legacy Community Health

BEST MALE LGBTQ BUSINESS PERSON

Charles Armstrong

Finalists: John Donato, Christopher Cerda, Mark DeLange

BEST NONBINARY LGBTQ BUSINESS PERSON

Han Schaible

Finalist: Filan Jaboudi

FAVORITE FEMALE COMMERCIAL-RADIO PERSONALITY

Jessie Watt 96.5

Finalists: Roula, Karah Leigh



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Best Female Physician Finalist

Austin Abernathy

Giving back and moving forward
inspires the founder of VolunQueer.

By CONNOR BEHRENS



"I believe that doing selfless acts to better our community is what we need more of in the world," declares Austin Abernathy. Though his journey into volunteering may have begun later in life, Abernathy's passion for service has quickly become a defining characteristic of his identity. Honored as the Most Valuable Male Volunteer in *OutSmart's* 2024 Gayest & Greatest Awards, this honor not only showcases his dedication to giving back, but also celebrates the spirit of volunteerism thriving within Houston's LGBTQ community.

Abernathy's dedication was amplified when he won the title of Mr. Firedancer 2024, a leather competition that emphasizes community service, fundraising, and volunteer work. With this title, he gained a platform to expand his initiatives and drive positive change.

"I love knowing that I am making a difference in the world, and I would love to inspire others to lead with their heart to do the same," says the man whose generosity fuels extensive volunteer work. Regular shifts at the Houston Food Bank, hosting voter registration drives, assisting the Trans Legal Aid Clinic of Texas, and collecting supplies for local charities are just a few examples of his contributions. He has also started a Facebook group called VolunQueer to motivate others to join in and contribute to significant community change.

Abernathy finds being named Most Valuable Male Volunteer a humbling experience, and he hopes it encourages more people to consider volunteer work.

"Everyone in this category is striving to make a positive change, and it serves as a reminder that there are good people in the world," he says. "There are plenty of causes that are desperate for help, and I am thankful for this recognition that gives me a space to share my message. This acknowledgment reminds me to keep moving forward. I've just started on this journey, and I can only grow and improve in finding ways to give back."

For those looking to make a positive impact in Houston, Abernathy advises doing your research and finding local organizations that speak to you.

"Whether it's by researching the nearest food bank or finding out when Montrose Grace Place accepts donations, just start today," he says. "Together, one step at a time, we can build up our communities and help those around us. Volunteering can make you feel proud and bring a genuine smile to your face when you see the impact of your efforts. Every little bit helps, and the impact we make can truly save lives."



Follow Austin Abernathy on
[Instagram@anotherabernathy](https://www.instagram.com/anotherabernathy).

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Best Pharmacy

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR FINALISTS

Best LGBTQ Social Media Presence

AmistadesHTX by Legacy

Best Male Nurse Practitioner

Alec Lacey, NP

Best Male Physician

James Carroll, MD

Best Men's Health Clinic

Wellness Bar by Legacy

Best Mental Health Practice

Legacy Community Health

Best Pharmacist

Reeka Hazenstab, PharmD

Favorite LGBTQ Benefit Event of the Year

Mint Julep

Favorite LGBTQ Philanthropic Organization

Legacy Community Health

Favorite LGBTQ Social Group

AmistadesHTX by Legacy

Favorite Local LGBTQ Community Organization

AmistadesHTX by Legacy

Favorite Local LGBTQ Community Org.

Legacy Community Health

Favorite Local LGBTQ Facebook/Instagram

AmistadesHTX by Legacy

Favorite Local LGBTQ Influencer

Miguel Jacquez

Favorite Male Community Hero

Miguel Jacquez

Favorite Male Community Photographer

Miguel Jacquez



LEADING
NONBINARY
ENTERTAINER
FUNDRAISER

LEADING
NONBINARY
FUNDRAISER

Pup Naranja

The nonbinary entertainer takes center stage to raise funds for vital causes.

By **CONNOR BEHRENS**

Photo by **RON COMSTOCK**



Many nights, you can likely find performer Pup Naranja under the glittering stage lights, embodying joy and resilience as he performs

for charities and fundraisers. Naranja, whose real name is Mario Jimenez, was recently awarded Leading Nonbinary Fundraiser and Leading Nonbinary Entertainer Fundraiser in *OutSmart's* 2024 Gayest & Greatest Awards.

"It feels amazing," he says. "I wasn't expecting this, and I'm truly honored. I'm out of words."

Born and raised in Eagle Pass, Texas, Naranja's journey into performance and advocacy began with a desire to bring visibility and Pride to his hometown. And he wanted to continue that work as he moved to Houston four years ago.

His move to Space City opened doors for him to join various LGBTQ organizations, including the Bayou City Pups, Houston Bears, and the Empire of the Royal Sovereign and Imperial Court of the Single Star, Inc.

Naranja is also a founding member of Eagle Pass SAFE, a local initiative aimed at promoting safety and support within the community. His work in Houston has allowed him to volunteer extensively and perform at numerous charity events, making a tangible difference in the lives of others.

Naranja's passion for charity work and performance is deeply personal. "It comes from my partner, who also performs. He pushed me to perform, and that's where I got the passion."

His dedication to charity is driven by a core belief in helping others.

"I believe in helping family and friends," he says. "It's what I love to do."

Through his performances, Pup Naranja has raised funds for various causes, providing support for those in need and fostering a sense of community among his audience. Receiving this recognition has further fueled his commitment to his work.

"I'm motivated to continue building more confidence and working hard for the community," he says, emphasizing the importance of perseverance. "Never give up on the future and your hopes and dreams.

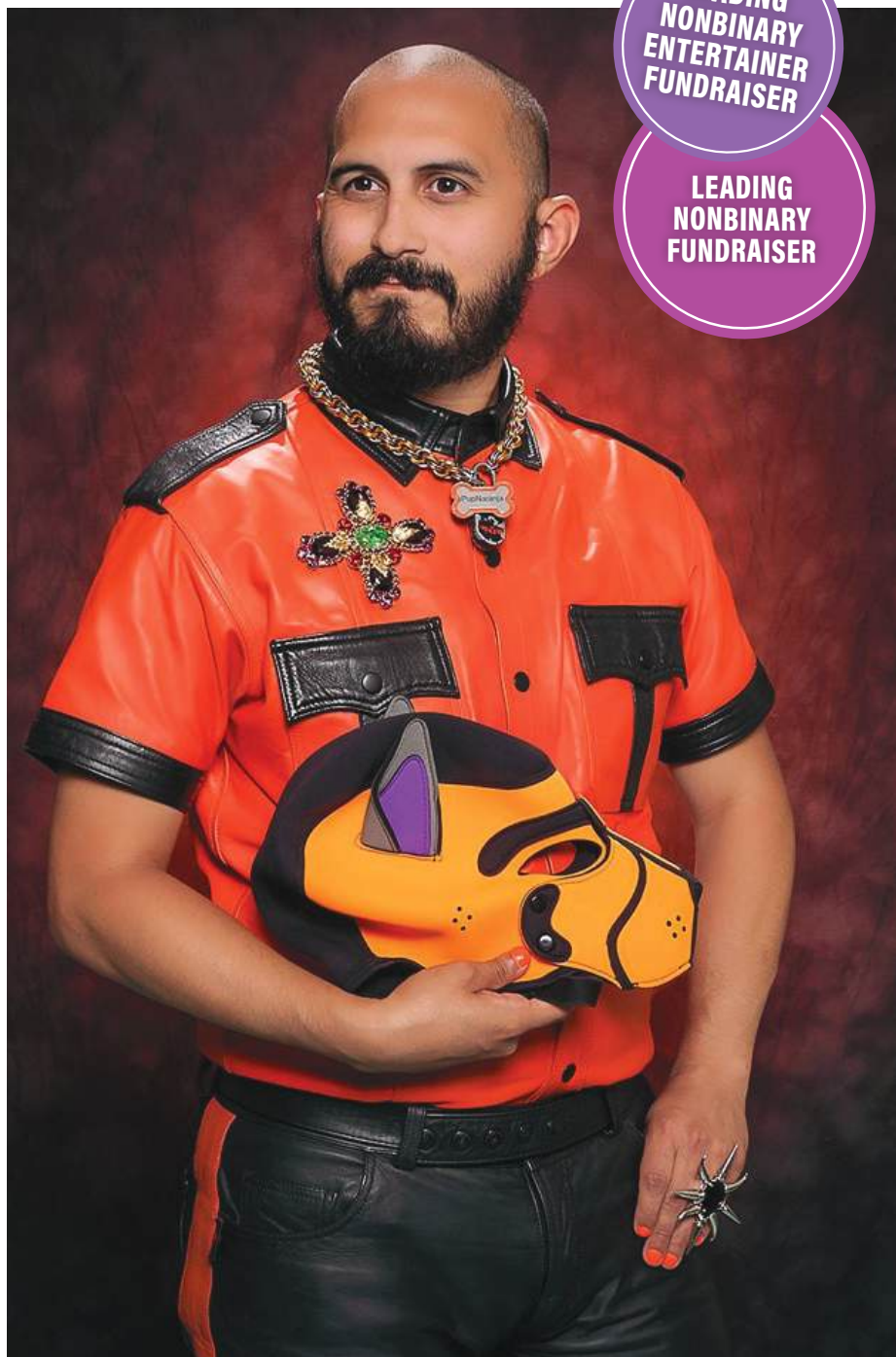
Continue to do your best for our community. Push yourself to do more."

Naranja says he hopes his message resonates with others and inspires them to embrace their true selves and contribute positively to the world around them.

"Continue what you do for the community," he says. "Make more creative ways and ideas. Be yourself."



Keep up with Pup Naranja on Facebook @eagle.jimenez.



FAVORITE FEMALE COMMUNITY-RADIO PERSONALITY
Deborah Moncrief Bell

FAVORITE MALE COMMERCIAL-RADIO PERSONALITY
Jay Michaels, 96.5 (tie)
Special K, 104 (tie)
Finalist: Ahmad - The Roula and Ryan Show, 104

FAVORITE MALE COMMUNITY-RADIO PERSONALITY
Bryan Hlavinka
Finalists: Brett Cullum, Eddie Robinson, Easton Santos

FAVORITE MALE COMMUNITY-TV PERSONALITY
Ernie Manouse

FAVORITE FEMALE COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHER
Nora Dayton
Finalists: Wendy Taylor, Chandrayee Soneja,
Nikki Darby, Yvonne Arizpe

FAVORITE FEMALE LGBTQ COMMUNITY HERO
Tammi Wallace
Finalists: Rev. Heather Tolleson, Ana Sanchez,
Atlantis Narcisse, Joelle Espeut

FAVORITE FEMALE LOCAL POLITICIAN
Molly Cook
Finalists: Fransheneka "Fran" Watson, Lauren Ashley
Simmons, Lesley Briones, Abbie Kamin, Lina Hidalgo,
Lizzie Fletcher

FAVORITE MALE LOCAL POLITICIAN
Mario Castillo
Finalists: John Whitmire, Brandon Mack,
Jon Rosenthal

FAVORITE FEMALE TV PERSONALITY
Pooja Lodhia
Finalists: Caroline Collins Fox, Lauren Kelly,
Cathy Hernandez

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ FACEBOOK PAGE
First Christian Church Katy
Finalists: JD Doyle, AmistadesHTX by Legacy,
Jose Vazquez, Jay Michaels

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ INFLUENCER
Brian Duhon
Finalists: Jay Michaels, Miguel Jacquez,
Rev. David Greene, Connor Dunwoodie

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT
Brian Duhon
Finalists: Jay Michaels, AmistadesHTX by Legacy,
Parents of Trans Youth, JD Doyle

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ JOURNALIST/PRODUCER
Stuart Boslow

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ JOURNALIST
Sam Byrd
Finalists: Zach McKenzie, Patrick McGee, Scott Damon,
Gwen Howerton, Brandon Wolf

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ TWITTER/X ACCOUNT
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Finalists: @pupharlow, @SimonJamesIII →

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Amanda Rose

The co-founder of Katy Pride leads the charge for inclusion.

By DAVID CLARKE



Amanda Rose (they/them), co-founder and president of Katy Pride and a board moderator at First Christian Church Katy (FCC Katy), is a dedicated advocate for LGBTQ rights and equity.

At the forefront of the fight for inclusion and acceptance in the Houston suburb, Rose is no stranger to attending Katy ISD school board meetings to fight against discrimination of trans students and book banning—just one of the many ways they express their advocacy.

“First Christian Church Katy is the first and only queer-affirming church in Katy, and we’re very proud of that. “There are some great things that the church has done to have the LGBTQ+ community be noticed and heard in Katy. A prime example is FCC Katy’s community-supported Transparent Closet, a free clothing boutique for youth, teens, and young adults who are transitioning or gender exploring.”

The need for spaces where people can feel like their authentic selves is what motivated Rose to co-found Katy Pride in partnership with FCC Katy. Additionally, their advocacy in this realm is also part of their professional responsibilities. “I have the duty and the honor of going around to schools in Texas to train leaders on culture, belonging, and how we can create communities and spaces for staff to feel like they can be their authentic selves and belong. We know if the staff is feeling that way, it trickles down to the students,” explains Rose. “I don’t work directly with students. We do not violate any of the laws that have been put in place. But we talk about why it’s important and how culture impacts experience.”

“I love to care for people,” adds Rose. “I love to care for and support people. I hurt when I see others hurting and being marginalized.”

Being honored with a Gayest & Greatest award is a surprise for Rose. “I think that all the people that were nominated are really amazing individuals that are doing great work in the Houston community. It’s humbling.



**MOST VALUABLE
NONBINARY
COMMUNITY
VOLUNTEER**

It makes me emotional that people saw me, because I don’t do what I do for honor. I really don’t. I do it because I genuinely believe this work needs to be done.”

Rose’s shock at winning the award is compounded by the fact that it took them some time to recognize their nonbinary identity. “That is more recent, in the past couple of years. But I know that’s truly who I am,” Rose states. “I automatically was against gender constructs from a very young age, but there are societal impressions and norms. I see that already with my kids, who are young. But when I got to a different place as an adult, I recognized that none of that fit me.

“I don’t see myself as being put in a box, that I’m only this or I’m only that, or that I’m ever this or I’m ever that. So knowing that I was voted on to receive this recognition, it’s amazing,” Rose says. “I have days I don’t love myself. I think we all have those. But I know that claiming being nonbinary is who I authentically am, and that’s so wonderful.”

For others looking to have an impact on their communities, Rose suggests creating a robust network. “Find those spaces and groups where you can be with like-minded people, but also individuals that are going to help you develop who you are. Get engaged in activities

that speak to you, show up, be present, and take an active role. You can’t just sit back and expect people to come to you,” they advise. “You have to be willing to collaborate with others and support other organizations in their endeavors. If you’re a part of an organization and you have individuals, agencies, or nonprofits coming to support you, be intentional in supporting them when they’re having events and celebrations. You really have to have a holistic approach, and people will see who you are authentically, and the genuineness you have for the work that you’re doing.”

Katy Pride’s 2024 celebration will be held on Saturday, October 19, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at FCC Katy. “We’re really excited for what Katy Pride has been able to do in the Katy community, which historically has been conservative,” Rose explains. “People have been a little more resistant to be authentically who they are because they haven’t felt comfortable in the space.” Rose also invites readers to explore the monthly Katy Pride Social, as well as the Espresso Yourself events.



Follow Amanda Rose on Instagram
@KatyPrideLGBTQ and @FCCKaty

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Jeremy A. Teel

This visual artist redefines creativity by encouraging personal storytelling.

By CONNOR BEHRENS



In a multi-faceted city where arts and entertainment events are plentiful, Jeremy A. Teel stands out as an artist wanting to give back to the community he loves. Crowned the Favorite

Local Visual Artist in this year's Gayest & Greatest Awards, Teel's artistry transcends traditional boundaries as it intertwines visual expression with community activism.

Teel describes his work as "a fusion of art and community activism," based on the stories of marginalized communities. His project "I, Too, Am Kink" debuted in 2023 and shone a light on the often-overlooked beauty and complexity of people of color within the BDSM and kink communities. "Houston has been a key part of that journey," he says, emphasizing the city's role in shaping his artistic vision.

With the establishment of 2 Light Studio, his first photography studio, Teel created a space dedicated to personal storytelling within the Houston community through portraiture. "This studio allows me to blend art and activism, offering portraits and storytelling opportunities that are deeply personal and transformative," he says.

Being recognized as a top vote-getter in OutSmart's annual awards is a humbling experience for Teel.

"It's such an honor," he says. "To know that so many believed in my work is deeply humbling. It feels like a celebration of not only my personal journey but also the collective creativity and resilience of our community."

Teel believes this recognition will further inspire his brand and the mission of 2 Light Studio. As a consultant in creative engagement, he aims to help others enhance their storytelling and community connections.



**FAVORITE
LOCAL VISUAL
ARTIST**

"This award brings more visibility to both my studio and my consulting work." He's eager to extend his reach and offer creative solutions that bridge art, activism, and community engagement.

Looking ahead, Teel sees this award as an opportunity to open new doors and foster more profound connections, adding that it is so important as an artist to have a sense of authenticity and to be unapologetically yourself.

"Focus on making genuine connections and building relationships. Your impact will come not from chasing recognition but from being present and contributing meaningfully."

As he continues his artistic pursuits and inspires others with his work, Teel believes his journey serves as a testament to the transformative power of art grounded in community. He adds that he wants nothing more than for people to come together, share their stories, and celebrate the beauty of our diverse identities.

"Community is the ultimate resource. Lean into it," he emphasizes.



Follow Jeremy A. Teel on
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Cameron Stodghill

A healing touch that empowers marginalized communities.

By CONNOR BEHRENS



In a time when many in the world overlook the diverse needs of marginalized communities, Cameron Stodghill is an example of inclusivity and empowerment.

Recently awarded the title of Best Nonbinary Massage Therapist in *OutSmart*'s 2024 Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards, Stodghill's journey is one of passion, purpose, and fierce dedication to creating safe spaces for the trans and queer communities.

Stodghill has been a licensed massage therapist since 2022, specializing in therapeutic bodywork. From the beginning, their mission has been clear: to establish a sanctuary where clients can feel truly seen and understood.

"Trans people are typically ignored in the very binary field of massage due to lack of exposure, understanding, and training," Stodghill says.

This commitment to safety and inclusivity extends to Stodghill's role as a certified massage therapy instructor at a local school. On the first day of each new semester, Stodghill takes the opportunity to come out as transgender to the students.

"I want them to see that it's not just cisgender people getting bodywork done; it's everyone, including trans people," they say.

Winning the title of Best Nonbinary Massage Therapist for the second consecutive year is a testament to Stodghill's impact within the community.

"It's truly an honor to be recognized for this category again," they say, reflecting on the growth of their practice and the deep connections forged with clients. "Massage isn't just a luxury service; it's health care. Our community needs more LGBTQ+ massage therapists."

Stodghill's journey has not been without its challenges.

"Being a massage therapist was always in the back of my mind since I graduated high school in 2011, but it took several years and some life changes for that dream to happen."

Transitioning played a pivotal role in Stodghill's personal and professional growth. "If I hadn't transitioned, I wouldn't be where I am today."

Stodghill's advice for others in the field is simple: "Just go for it. Whatever service you provide, put your heart and soul into it, and the rest will follow."

Receiving recognition from peers in the LGBTQ community is incredibly meaningful for Stodghill. "It's beyond humbling, and I am forever thankful to this community for supporting me."



Follow Cameron Stodghill on Instagram @cams_hands_lmt/

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Lane Lewis

Decades of LGBTQ advocacy inform his dedication to customer service.

By DAVID CLARKE



COURTESY



Lane Lewis (he/him) is a storied LGBTQ activist who played an integral role in bringing 2003's landmark *Lawrence v. Texas* case to the Supreme Court of the

United States. He is a former Harris County Democratic Party chairman who runs his own insurance agency and also serves on the board of The Diana Foundation, America's oldest continuously active LGBTQ organization. He is also an active member of the Executive and Professional Association of Houston (EPAH), the Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, and the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus.

Because of his political and advocacy

background, winning Best Insurance Agent in this year's Gayest & Greatest awards is a huge compliment for Lewis. "For me, it validates our customer service, my marketing, and my reputation," he explains. "I want, specifically, to provide a high-quality service for the LGBTQ+ community. Personally, this award tells me that I'm hitting that mark."

"We are a very high-touch agency. We do a lot of hand-holding," Lewis elaborates. "We try to provide a good service, and we have an agenda of providing good service to the queer community. We do it with a smile and to the best of our ability."

As Houston is still in peak hurricane season, Lewis advises folks to review what their insurance policies actually cover. "People need

to go over their coverages, find out what they've got, and get it interpreted," he advises. "One thing people can look up is whether their home policy is an 'open peril' policy or a 'named peril' policy." This is crucial for people to understand, as a named-peril policy will only cover events that are listed on the policy, while an open-peril policy will cover everything—minus the specific exceptions listed on the policy.

"Deductibles—they also need to keep an eye on deductibles," Lewis adds. "Deductibles are being increased across the industry, especially on the home side. I'm hearing rumors that folks in Dallas are about to get hit with a 5% mandatory wind-and-hail deductible." If one owns a \$300,000 home, a 5% deductible would mean the homeowner would have to cover \$15,000 out of pocket before their insurance company would start paying for damages. "Unless your whole roof is taken to Kansas, you're probably not going to meet 5%," he states.

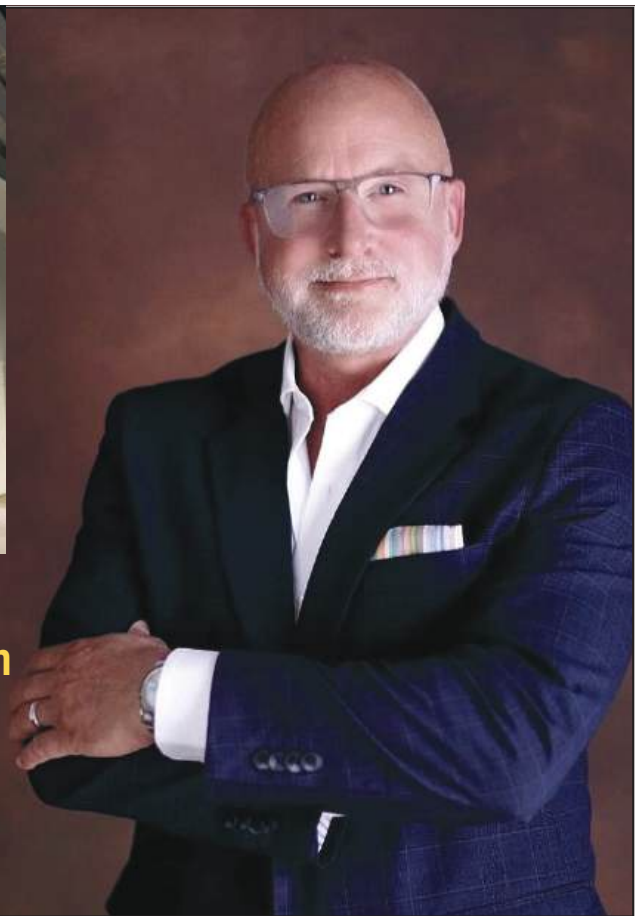
Lewis' agency is specifically designed to be inclusive of all LGBTQ people. His forms allow his customers to select the pronouns they prefer, and he has policies that include same-sex spouses and more. "Years ago, when people with HIV and AIDS were having trouble getting life insurance policies, Farmers found a means to provide that for them, which I think says a lot about the company in general," Lewis notes. "Farmers is my preferred vendor, but particularly on the home side, we've got a dozen or so other companies that we work with." Working with products from multiple vendors allows Lewis to provide his clients with options and opportunities that can be customized to meet all of their needs.

For others who want to make positive impacts in their community, Lane offers this advice: "Find your passion and focus on that." Beyond that, he emphasizes expanding your network and making yourself known to the community. "Word of mouth has always been and remains the best advertisement," Lewis says. This is why he feels it is so crucial to always do your best when working with others. "That is my attitude. Send me the coverage you've got. If I can't find something better, or if I think what you've got is outstanding, I will tell you, because you're going to feel better at the end of the conversation, no matter what."

Lastly, for the October ghouls and goblins reading this, Lewis will be hosting Houston's 43rd annual Halloween Fantasy Ball, and he hopes to see everyone there.



Follow Lane Lewis on
 Instagram @LaneLewisAgency.



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COURTESY

Brian Duhon

The award-winning bartender mixes joy and advocacy with every pour.

By CONNOR BEHRENS



In a city that celebrates diversity and creativity, Brian Duhon stands out as a vibrant beacon of LGBTQ community spirit.

Duhon was recently crowned Favorite Male Bartender, Favorite Local LGBTQ Instagram Account, and Favorite Local LGBTQ Influencer in *OutSmart's* 2024 Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards. For Duhon, who bartends at South Beach, the recognition is more than just accolades; it represents a long, sometimes difficult journey toward self-love.

"My 20s were challenging, but now I've found stability, love, and acceptance in this amazing community," he says. "We lift each other up. I love my friends and this city so much!"

Duhon's evenings at South Beach consist of more than just cocktail shakers and thirsty patrons; they are filled with laughter, entertainment, and connection. Duhon has made a name for himself not only behind the bar, but also online where he shares "artistic, goofy, and risqué content" with his followers. It's this blend of fun and authenticity that has garnered a loyal audience.

"Whether I'm bartending or online, my goal is always to ensure everyone has an amazing experience," he says. "I'll keep doing what I love and bringing good vibes your way. It's something that I truly enjoy!"

Duhon's philosophy extends beyond the bar and the smartphone screen, however.

"You should love and uplift yourself, and share that same love with others," he says.

"Have responsible fun and don't take things too seriously. Remember, hurt people hurt people, but whole people heal people."

The award acknowledgment from the LGBTQ community is deeply significant for Duhon, particularly as a bi/pansexual man.

"It's incredibly empowering to be in a community where my talents are recognized. Many places, both in and out of Montrose, wouldn't give me a chance."

He credits friends like Dan Alvarez, Robbie Ortega, and Charles Armstrong for helping boost his confidence.

"I can't thank all my friends enough for the amazing support," he says. "They really believe in me as a bartender and my questionable dance moves."

Looking ahead, Duhon hopes to inspire others to seek recognition and make a positive impact in the community.

"*OutSmart* magazine is a great way to keep up-to-date with the community," he says. "Find ways to be active and bring a positive impact into the community. Remember to be authentic and passionate about your work."



Follow Brian Duhon on Instagram @Briankduhon.

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FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ WRITER

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Finalists: JD Doyle, Sam Byrd, Zach McKenzie, Ian L. Haddock, Lee Ingalls, David Clarke

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Dalton DeHart

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Hazael Sanchez

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Brian Riedel

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FAVORITE FEMALE LGBTQ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EDUCATOR/TEACHER

Samantha Pisarski-May

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Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu

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An inclusive community resource for self-defense training

By CONNOR BEHRENS

Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu's monthly "LGBTQ+ Only" class with their instructors



In the heart of Houston's Third Ward, Andrew and Sarah Degar, founders of Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu, have created a welcoming space that offers affordable self-defense classes specifically designed for the LGBTQ community. Tied for Best Gym in OutSmart's Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards, their vision is clear: to foster safety, inclusivity, and community through the art of jiu-jitsu.

Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu is both a gym and a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing self-defense training in an environment where everyone feels safe and supported. The gym features a recurring LGBTQ Only class and regularly invites guest LGBTQ jiu-jitsu athletes from across the nation to teach, enriching the experience and diversifying leadership within the community. Those guest teachers

were made possible by a grant from Better Fight Fellowship.

"We serve hundreds in our LGBTQ+ Only class, and knowing that people vote for us and believe in our mission feels so great," they say. "It is incredibly validating."

Andrew and Sarah saw a great opportunity to connect with people who may have previously felt excluded from martial arts due to safety concerns or lack of representation. "We know many people are interested in learning jiu-jitsu or self-defense but have ruled it out based on concerns of safety and inclusion. We want everyone to know we're here for them."

This award is particularly important to the duo because it shines a spotlight on the essential need for accessible self-defense resources in Houston.

"It shows we are a trusted resource for the community," they say. "Our mission is being recognized as a need within Houston."

Andrew and Sarah are aware of the importance of continuous improvement in fostering inclusivity, and that includes partnering with neighboring businesses and organizations.

"We provide specific programs to improve inclusivity and implement new ideas regularly. We're also out supporting the missions of our partners so that our network extends beyond our physical space."

As Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu continues to grow, Andrew and Sarah's vision remains focused on empowering individuals through martial arts.

"It's an ongoing process to be better for the community, but we're up for the challenge. We hope to connect with community members who haven't heard of us."

 Follow Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu on Instagram @thirdwardbjj

In Memorium:
MICHAEL PHILIP SHALLIS

June 5, 1986 – September 17, 2024

Michael Philip Shallis passed away on September 17, 2024, at the age of 38 at his home in Houston, Texas. Born on June 5, 1986, Michael was known for his friendly demeanor, humorous spirit, and athletic skill.

Michael attended Ed White Elementary School, Seabrook, Texas and Clear Lake High School in Houston, Texas, before earning a marketing degree from Texas State University in San Marcos. His career was marked by a dedication to sales and entrepreneurship. He worked in sales at OutSmart magazine and also Gillman Honda, where he received the Silver Sales Achievement award last April. Michael was also the proud sole proprietor of Body Evolution.

In his free time, Michael was deeply involved in local sports leagues. He played



a significant role in the Houston Flag Football League, serving as League V.P. and helping bring the league's Super Bowl event to Houston one year. He also took part in the MSLA Softball League, playing for teams The Wild, The Bears and The Revolution, and coaching the Silver Balls

team to a fifth-place finish in the MSLA World Series in Kansas City. His coaching prowess earned him the title of Coach of the Year. Beyond sports, Michael loved dogs, especially his rescue pup, Sadie, who preceded him in death.

Michael is survived by his mother, Faith Panter; stepfather, William Panter, Sr.; sister, Adriane Youngblood; brother-in-law, Rikki Youngblood; niece, Asha Youngblood; nephew, Rohan Youngblood; and his life partner, William Dunseth. He was preceded in death by his father, Michael Shallis.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to Forgotten Coast Animal Rescue at forgottencoastanimalrescue.org. Michael's legacy of kindness, humor, and community involvement will be cherished and remembered by all who knew him.


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Lou Weaver

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MOST PROMINENT NONBINARY LGBTQ ACTIVIST

Juliann Losey

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Odyssey Oakengrove

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Finalists: Lola Owen, Joelle Espeut, Alexis Nicole Whitney, Yvonne Arizpe

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Meghan Fairbanks

Finalists: Dawn Whitney, Sarah Thompson, Porscha Brown, Augie Cahee, Joelle Espeut, Andrea Simonton

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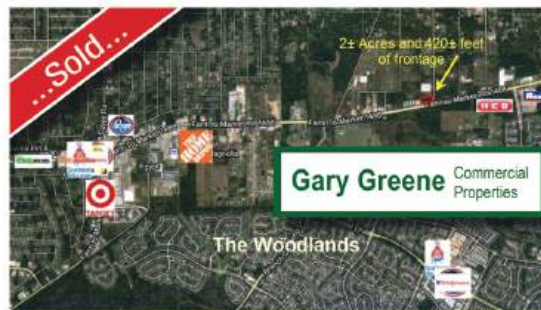
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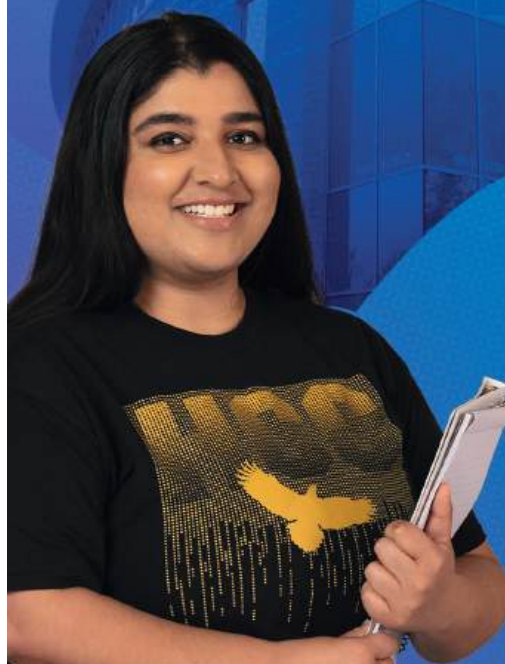
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Finalists: Pup Naranja, Odyssey Oakengrove,
Filan Jaboodi, Sarah Moessner

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Edward Craft

Finalists: Fred Reninger, Dina Jacobs,
Larry Castillo, Mark Breaux

REAL ESTATE

BEST FEMALE REAL ESTATE AGENT

Monica Branch

Finalists: Wynden Tess Lester, Karen Derr,
Aubrie Layne, Sabrina Calvillo, Shelley Einarsson

BEST MALE REAL ESTATE AGENT

Christopher Cerda (tie)

Richard Ray (tie)

Finalists: Victor Sanabria, David Batagower,
Gregg Lindsay, Brian Ortiz

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Hudson Holmes

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Cary White, Tom Schwenk

BEST HOME BUILDER

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Blue Vintage Construction, Loyd Russel Homes,
Vencino Homes

BEST HOME REMODELING COMPANY

Heels 2 Hammers

Finalists: Noble Contractor Solutions,
Blue Vintage Construction

BEST MORTGAGE PROFESSIONAL

Cody Grizzoffi

Finalists: Riaz Pooran, Paul Vincent

BEST HOUSTON REAL ESTATE WEBSITE

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Finalists: Sothebysrealty.com,
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BEST GALVESTON REAL ESTATE WEBSITE

Joe Tramonte Realty

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Toms Galveston Real Estate

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Finalists: Amegy Bank LGBTQ+ BRG & Allies, HP Houston Pride BIN

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ NEWS SOURCE

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Finalists: Simon Houston, Houston Landing

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ ONLINE RESOURCE

OutSmart

Finalists: First Christian Church Katy, JD Doyle Archives

BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ NEWS SOURCE

The Advocate

Finalists: OUT Magazine, Queerty

BEST NATIONAL LGBTQ ONLINE RESOURCE

Lambda Legal

Finalist: ONE

BEST POLITICAL ADVOCACY GROUP

Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus

Finalists: Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, Equality Texas

BEST SENIOR ADVOCACY GROUP

Texas Senior Medicare Patrol

Finalist: Fort Bend County West Lions Club

FAVORITE HIV/AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

Legacy Community Health

Finalists: Somos LOUD, PWA Holiday Charities, Allies in Hope, Avenue 360, The Normal Anomaly

FAVORITE LGBTQ BENEFIT EVENT OF THE YEAR

Krewe of Olympus Ball

Finalists: Bunnies on the Bayou, FCC Katy Drag Bingo, Mint Julep, Montrose Center Out For Good

FAVORITE LGBTQ PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATION

The Diana Foundation

Finalists: Katy Pride, Human Rights Campaign, Houston's New Faces of Pride, Legacy Community Health

FAVORITE LGBTQ SOCIAL GROUP

Krewe of Olympus

Finalists: First Christian Church Katy, Bliss Sundays, NLA, AmistadesHTX by Legacy

FAVORITE LGBTQ SPORTS CLUB OR LEAGUE

Montrose Softball League Association

Finalists: Pride Sports Houston, Pride Bike Ride Houston

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Krewe of Olympus

Finalists: First Christian Church Katy, The Montrose Center, Tony's Place, Legacy Community Health

FAVORITE NATIONAL LGBTQ ORGANIZATION

NLA

Finalists: Human Rights Campaign, Lambda Legal, GLAAD

FAVORITE PLACE TO WORSHIP

First Christian Church Katy

Finalists: Bering Memorial United Church of Christ, Westbury United Methodist Church, St. Peter United, Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, Unity of Houston

FAVORITE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAM

Houston Astros

Finalists: Houston Dash, Savannah Bananas

FAVORITE TRANS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

Transparent Closet-First Christian Church Katy

Finalists: Trans Men Empowerment, Parents of Trans Youth, Trans Legal Aid Clinic, Save Our Sisters United, TENT

LOCAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Pearl

Finalists: Ripcord, Star Sailor

NATIONAL BUSINESS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

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DINING OUT

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

Ema HTX (tie)

Rich's Houston (tie)

Finalists: Salt & Sugar, Fusion Eats

BEST 24-HOUR RESTAURANT

Katz's Deli

Finalists: House of Pies, Bellaire Coffee Shop

BEST BAKERY

Dessert Gallery

Finalists: Common Bond, Fluff Bake Bar Heights, Leona's Bakeshop, La Sicilia, Three Brothers Bakery

BEST BARBECUE

Goode Company BBQ

Finalists: The Pit Room, Demeris Bar-B-Q, Pinkerton's

BEST BREAKFAST

Baby Barnaby's

Finalists: Ema HTX, Harry's, Avalon Diner

BEST BRITISH

Red Lion British Pub

BEST BRUNCH

The Phoenix (tie)

Gloria's Latin Cuisine (tie)

Finalists: Rich's Houston, Ema HTX

BEST CAJUN

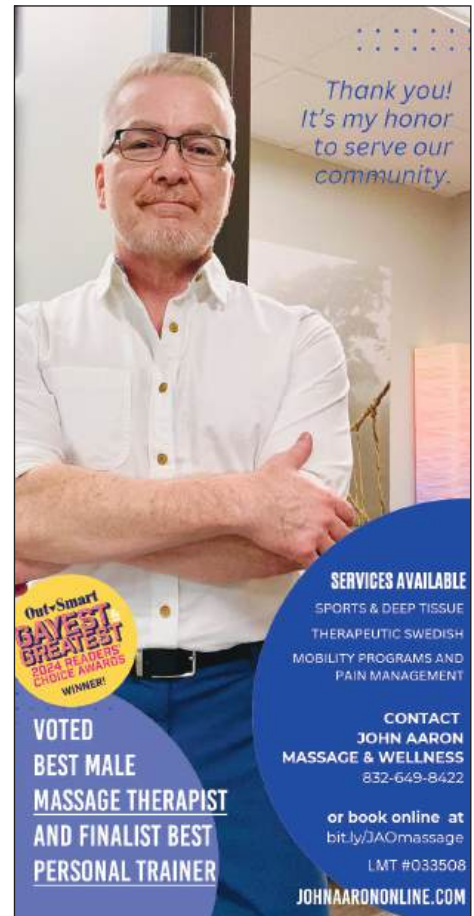
BB's Tex-Orleans

Finalists: The Boot, Crawfish Cafe

BEST CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN

Gloria's Latin Cuisine

Finalist: Churrascos →



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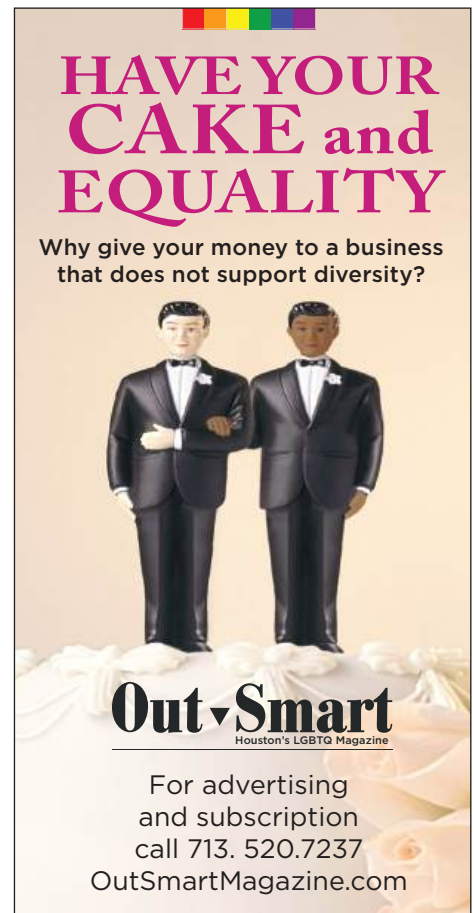
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BEST COOKING CLASS

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Finalist: Sur La Table

BEST CUBAN

El Rey

Finalist: Cafe Piquet

BEST DELI

Kenny & Ziggy's

Finalists: Nielsen's Deli, Antones

BEST DESSERT

Dessert Gallery

Finalists: Fluff Bake Bar, Leona's Bakeshop, The Bake Happening, Nobie's

BEST DUMPLINGS

Dumpling Dudez

Finalists: The Dumpling House, Wanna Bao, Dough Zone

BEST FOOD TRUCK

Eagle Eats

Finalist: Best Street Tacos

BEST GREEK

Niko Niko's

Finalist: The Olive Oil Restaurant

BEST HAMBURGER

Burger Joint Montrose

Finalists: Barnaby's, Burger Bodega, Lankford Grocery

BEST HOT DOG

Burger Joint

Finalists: Umbrella Fellas, Yoyo's, Good Dog

BEST INDIAN

Kiran's

Finalists: Tarka Indian Kitchen, Aga's, Govinda's

BEST ITALIAN

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino

Finalists: Riva's Italian Restaurant

BEST JAPANESE

Osaka

Finalists: Kata Robata, Oishii

BEST LGBTQ CATERER

210 Fusion Cuisine

Finalists: Chef Adam Travis, Legacy Events Catering

BEST LOCAL LGBTQ CHEF

Natosha Barber

Finalists: Chef Adam Travis, Chef Michele Free, Miranda Quintanilla

BEST LUNCH SPOT

Barnaby's Cafe

Finalists: Ema HTX, Alma Latina Heights

BEST MEXICAN

Chapultepec

Finalists: Tacos Doña Lena, El Tiempo, Alma Latina Heights, Ema HTX

BEST MIDDLE EASTERN/MEDITERRANEAN

Aladdin

Finalists: Niko Niko's, AL Quick Stop

BEST PIZZA

Bambolino's

Finalists: Star Pizza, Pizaro's Pizza Napoletana, Southern Yankee Crafthouse, Pizza Birra Vino

BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino

Finalists: The Post, Southern Yankee Crafthouse

BEST RESTAURANT FOR A FOOD HAPPY HOUR

Rich's

Finalists: McCormick & Schmicks, Empire Cafe, Bar Boheme, Gristworkz

BEST RESTAURANT FOR AFFORDABLE EATS

Riva's (tie)

Giacomo's Cibo e Vino (tie)

Finalists: Barnaby's, Southern Yankee Crafthouse, McHugh Tea Room

BEST RESTAURANT FOR ELEGANT DINING

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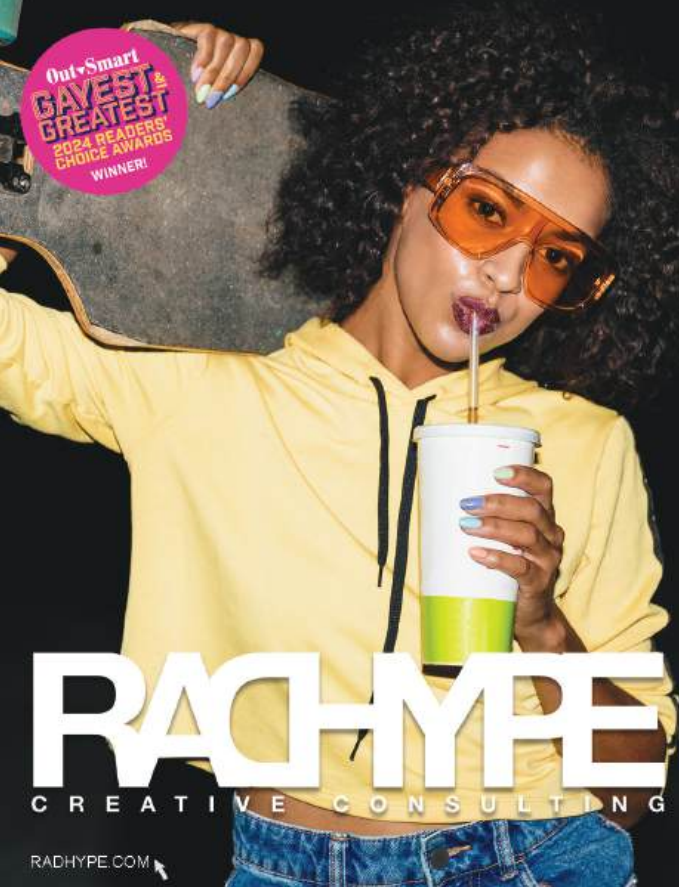
Finalists: BCN, Bludorn



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Piggy's
Finalists: Giacomo's Cibo e Vino,
Southern Yankee Crafthouse

BEST SEAFOOD

Christie's Seafood
Finalists: Clark's Oyster Bar, Mambos, Eugene's

BEST STEAK HOUSE

B&B Butchers
Finalists: Saltgrass Steak House, Steak 48

BEST STEAK NIGHT AT A BAR

JR's
Finalists: Free Grillin at George, Pearl Bar

BEST SUSHI

Uchi
Finalists: Oishii, Osaka

BEST TEA

McHugh Tea Room
Finalist: Kung Fu Tea

BEST THAI

Street to Kitchen
Finalists: Thai Bistro, Kin Dee, Rim Tanon, Niddha Thai

BEST VEGETARIAN/VEGAN

Korny Vibes
Finalists: Mo Better Brews, Doshi House

BEST VIETNAMESE

Pho Saigon
Finalist: Pho 21

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ-OWNED RESTAURANT

Barnaby's Cafe
Finalists: Star Sailor, Ema HTX, Rich's Houston,
Bistro Menil, Salt & Sugar

FRIENDLIEST RESTAURANT STAFF

Barnaby's
Finalists: Star Sailor, Riva's, Rich's Houston,
Southern Yankee Crafthouse

DRINKS & SPIRITS

BEST COCKTAIL

South Beach
Finalists: Ripcord, Michael's Outpost,
Southern Yankee Crafthouse

BEST HAPPY HOUR

JR's Bar & Grill
Finalists: Ripcord, Michael's Outpost, South Beach

BEST MARGARITA

Ripcord
Finalists: South Beach, El Tiempo, JR's Bar & Grill,
Alma Latina Heights, Gloria's Latin Cuisine

BEST MOCKTAILS

JRs Bar & Grill
Finalists: South Beach, Pearl Bar, Ripcord, Rich's Houston

FAVORITE WINE BAR

JR's Bar & Grill
Finalists: Postino, Barcelona Wine Bar, 13 Celcius

FAVORITE BRAND OF LIQUOR

Tito's
Finalists: Absolut, Jeppson's Malört, Fireball

FAVORITE LOCAL BREWERY

Frost Town Brewing
Finalists: Bad Astronaut, Eureka Heights, Gristworkz

FAVORITE LOCAL CRAFT BEER, CIDER OR SELTZER

Frost Town Brewing
Finalists: Cidercade Houston, Bad Astronaut,
Eureka Heights

FAVORITE NATIONAL BRAND OF BEER, CIDER OR SELTZER

NUTRL
Finalists: White Claw, Hoop Tea, Nectar, Gay Water

FAVORITE FEMALE BARTENDER

Mary O'Neal
Finalists: Kayla Davidson, Estephania Perez, Kristina Prats

FAVORITE MALE BARTENDER

Brian Duhon
Finalists: Daniel Banda, Thomas at Ripcord, Mauricio Wright



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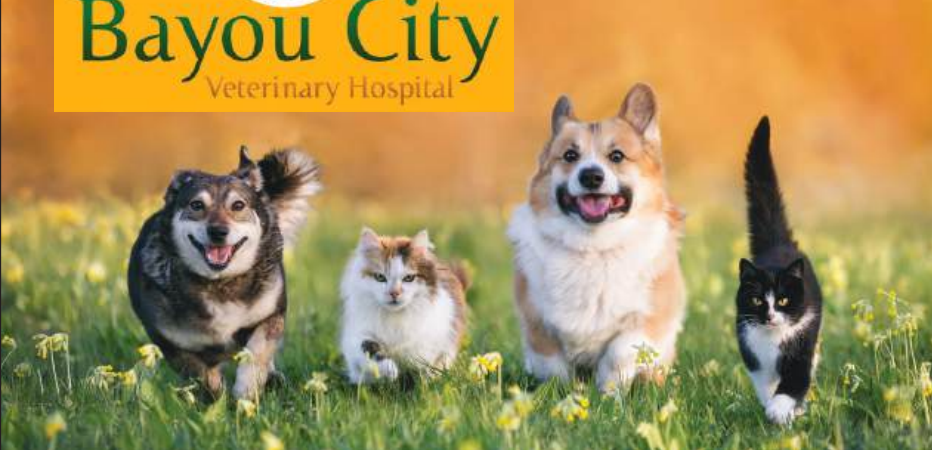
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Hayden Burger, Romeo Najera

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Ripcord

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

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BEST AESTHETIC PHYSICIAN

Patrick McNamara

Finalists: George Washington, Francisco Bueso, Paul Fortes

BEST BARBER

Geno O'Quinn

Finalists: Electa Hazenstab, Marc Velasquez

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Fernando Franco

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Finalists: George Washington, Sanaz Harirchian

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RYDE

Finalists: Soul Cycle, Cycle Bar Houston Heights

BEST FEMALE EYE DOCTOR

Nancy Lo

Finalists: Sheena Garner, Juliette Farmer,
Sheryl Pickering

BEST FEMALE HAIR STYLIST

Dana Wendell

Finalists: Hannah Grider @ The Upper Hand Salon,
Lana Blake, Allison Reed

BEST FEMALE MASSAGE THERAPIST

Kasie Tedrick

Finalists: Veronica Triplett of Core Body Lab,
Kim Stacy of Integrated Massage, Toni Tyler

BEST FEMALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

Angelica Ramos

Finalists: Jessica Eiseman, Rebecca Rosalez,
Alyssa Mineo

BEST FEMALE NURSE PRACTITIONER

Maggie White

Finalists: Hermeyone Bell, Mary Shepard,
Chichy Nwachukwu, Molly Cook

BEST FEMALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Amanda Garza

Finalists: Kasie Tedrick, Shelby Summers

BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT (PA)

Arbelia Roman

Finalist: Nadia Asadi

BEST FOOT DOCTOR

Vanessa Barrow

Finalists: Robert Moore, Jared Shipp,
Robert Leisten

BEST GYM

Third Ward Jiu-Jitsu (tie)

Body3 Personal Fitness (tie)

Finalist: Tellepsen Downtown YMCA

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Cynthia Corral

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BEST MALE DENTIST

Sam Carrell (tie)

Marcus De Guzman (tie)

Finalists: Tyler Henthorn, Austin Faulk, Jeff Tollett, Cory Logan, Robert Hines

BEST MALE EYE DOCTOR

Paul Lovero

Finalists: Stewart Zuckerbrod, Gary Nguyen

BEST MALE HAIR STYLIST

Geno O'Quinn (tie)

Timothy Silmon (tie)

Finalists: Glam by Servando, Marc Velasquez

BEST MALE MASSAGE THERAPIST

Dean Daugherty (tie)

John Aaron Villarreal (tie)

Finalists: Dalton Holdge, Oscar Gutierrez, Sergio Sanchez

BEST MALE MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

Ty David Lerman Counseling (TDLC)

Finalists: Justin Bustamante, ks Stanley, Jose G Romero, Matt Trietsch, Shane Hennesey

BEST FEMALE NURSE

Kay McCunis

Finalists: Erica Barnes, Joy Jasmin Piad, Nina Saltzman

BEST MALE NURSE

Bert Zumaya

Finalists: Aj Sarabia, Jumer Adalin, Keenan Williams, Quincy Jennings

FAVORITE NONBINARY NURSE

Adam Sirico

BEST MALE NURSE PRACTITIONER

Derek Smith

Finalists: Paul Simmons, Kendrick Clack, Alec Lacey

BEST MALE PERSONAL TRAINER

Andrew Diaz

Finalists: Andrew Hayes, Apollo (Hisdragun), John Aaron Villarreal

BEST FEMALE PHYSICIAN

Julia Kovacs

Finalists: Natalie Vanek, Sandra Scurria

BEST MALE PHYSICIAN

Gordon Crofoot

Finalists: James Carroll, Rolando Maldonado, Owen McCormack, Abel Flores, Octavio Barrios

BEST MALE PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT (PA)

John Chapman

Finalist: Brian Seabolt

BEST MEN'S HEALTH CLINIC

Crofoot MD Clinic and Research Center

Finalists: Wellness Bar by Legacy, Ronald Buescher

BEST MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE

Southwest Psychotherapy Associates (SWPA)

Finalists: Legacy Community Health, Vada Counseling, Ajana Therapy and Clinical Services, Martin Counseling, Montrose Counseling Center

BEST MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHIATRIST

Daniel Garza

Finalists: Shetal Amin, Alyssa Mineo

BEST MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST

Megan Mooney

Finalist: ks Stanley

BEST NAIL SALON

Milano Heights

Finalists: Hair by St. Rose, M. Vince - Regent Square, GiGi Nail Spa

BEST NAIL TECHNICIAN

Chelsea Garcia

Finalist: Summerthenailtech

BEST PHARMACIST

Shane Goulas

Finalists: Gulnar Shahid, Reeka Hazenstab, Joey Garza

BEST PHARMACY

Legacy Community Health

Finalists: Walgreens at Crofoot MD, HEB Montrose, Avita Pharmacy, Scott Reid Pharmacy



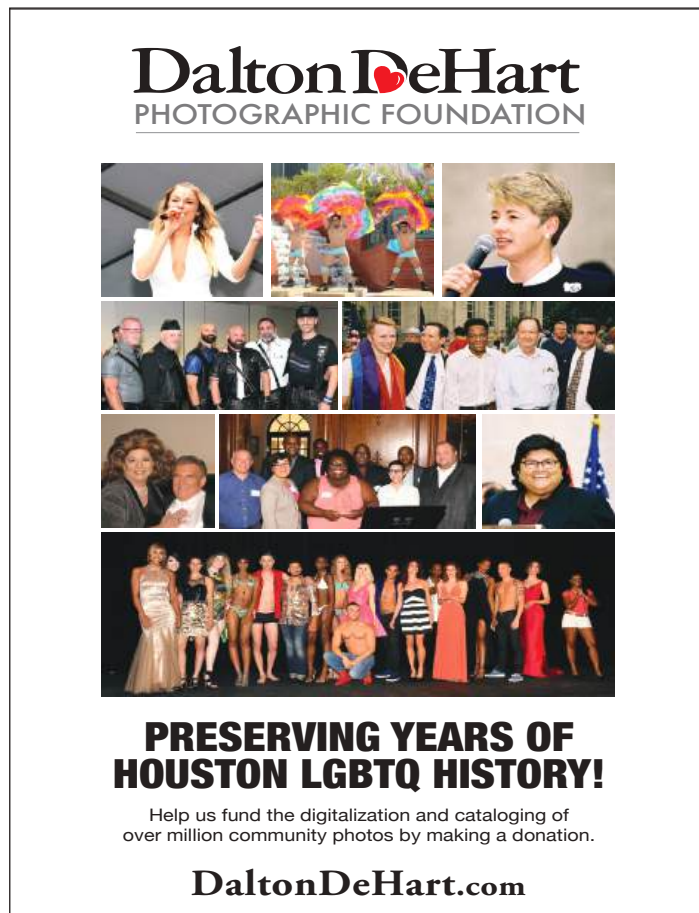
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BEST NONBINARY HAIR STYLIST

Katie Roome

Finalists: J. Bookie, Alecia Farrar

BEST NONBINARY MASSAGE THERAPIST

Cameron Stodghill

Finalist: Cameron Page

BEST NONBINARY MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

ks Stanley

Finalist: Candice Holloway

BEST NONBINARY PERSONAL TRAINER

Exy-Fable Mars

BEST OB/GYN

Olga Swanson

Finalists: Legacy Community Health,
Rachel Robinson-Scott

BEST PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Huzefa Tayabali (tie)

Roy Rivera (tie)

Finalist: Patrick Lucas

BEST URGENT OR EMERGENCY CARE CENTER

HCA Montrose

BEST WOMEN'S HEALTH CLINIC

Legacy Community Health

BEST YOGA STUDIO

Black Swan

Finalist: BIG Power Yoga-Montrose

BEST TATTOO ARTIST

Art by Megs

Finalists: Julian Solis, Wesche Tattoo,
Chino Feliciano

FAVORITE FEMALE DENTAL HYGIENIST

Jacqueline Clemmer

Finalists: Chriselda Luna, Magda Valeriano,
Kate McGraw, Melissa Baez

FAVORITE MALE DENTAL HYGIENIST

Tu Tuu

HOUSE & HOME

BEST FEMALE INSURANCE AGENT

Amy Powell

BEST FLOOR COVERING COMPANY

Floor Coverings International (tie)

Shane Frederick (tie)

Finalist: Floor & Granite Zone (Moe)

BEST FLORIST

In Bloom

Finalists: Andrew Liebig Designs,
Robert Shipman Florist

BEST FURNITURE STORE

Alabama Furniture (tie)

Crate and Barrel (tie)

Finalist: Hilton Furniture

BEST FURNITURE STORE ON A BUDGET

IKEA

Finalist: Hilton Furniture

BEST GARDENING/NURSERY SUPPLY

Joshua's Native Plants & Garden Antiques

Finalists: Buchanans, Another Place in Time,
Fountains & Statuary

BEST HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING COMPANY

Gaitz HVAC & Refrigeration

Finalist: Maxela

BEST HOME FURNISHINGS STORE

Eclectic Home (tie)

Eklektik Interiors (tie)

BEST HOME SECURITY COMPANY

Smith Thompson



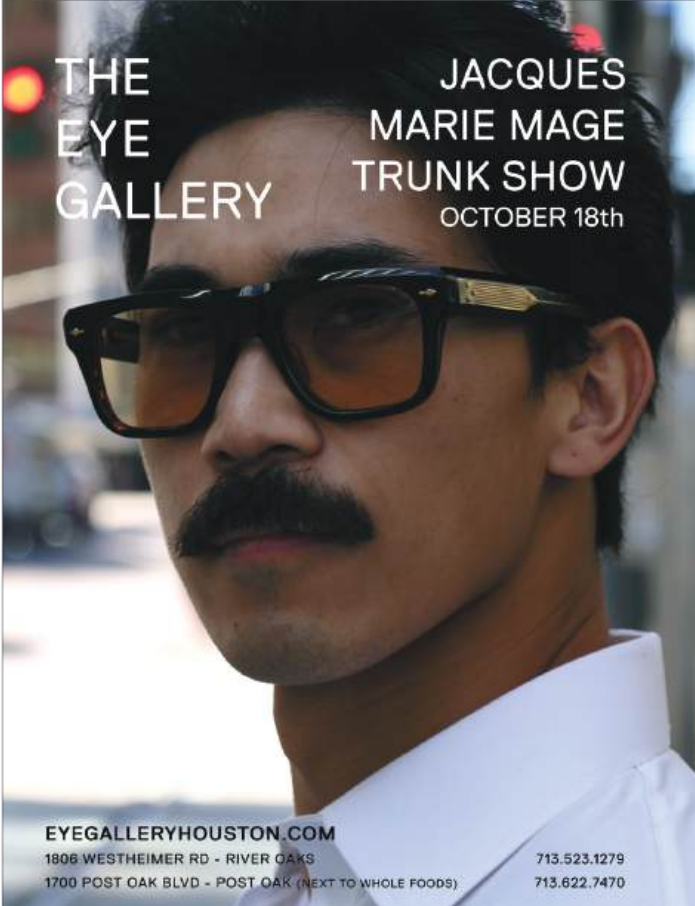
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Joel Kalmin
Finalists: Christopher Ainsworth-Ainscourt Designs,
Dax Design Studio, Emmanuel Leventis Design

BEST FEMALE INTERIOR DESIGNER

Eklektik Interiors-Kathy Anderson
Finalist: Danielle Montgomery

BEST LANDSCAPING COMPANY/LANDSCAPER

Fire + Flora Landscape Design (Will Skinner)
Finalists: Houston Green Landscaping,
AJ's, David Morello

BEST MALE INSURANCE AGENT

Lane Lewis
Finalists: Jason Palermo, Jeremy Henry,
Modern Risk Management

BEST PLUMBER

Metro Plumbing and Backflow
Finalist: In The Loop Plumbing

BEST POOL COMPANY

Hidden Cove Outdoors (tie)
Venture Pool Company (tie)

LEGAL & FINANCIAL

BEST BANK

Truist
Finalists: Bank of America, Amegy Bank,
Frost Bank

BEST BUSINESS ATTORNEY

Julie M. Maxey
Finalist: Cameron Rivers

BEST CREDIT UNION

Houston Federal Credit Union
Finalists: PrimeWay Federal Credit Union,
Cy-Fair Federal Credit Union, US Employees CU

BEST MALE ESTATE PLANNING ATTORNEY

John Suarez

BEST FEMALE ESTATE PLANNING ATTORNEY

deborah lawson

BEST MALE FAMILY ATTORNEY

John Suarez

BEST FEMALE FAMILY ATTORNEY

deborah lawson

BEST FEMALE BOOKKEEPER

BKBY-Bookkeeping & Beyond
Finalist: Annette Clarabut-Tidy Bookkeeper

BEST FEMALE FINANCIAL PLANNER/ADVISOR

Grace Yung
Finalists: Britt Kornmann, Christyna Lewis

BEST HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY

Brian Klosterboer
Finalists: Mitchell Katine, Luis Ruiz

BEST FEMALE IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

Schwartz Immigration Law

BEST MALE IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

Luis Ruiz
Finalists: Gonzalez Olivieri, Michael Roman

BEST IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

Brenner Legal
Finalist: Galveston Houston Immigrant
Representation Project

BEST MALE BOOKKEEPER

Joseph Werle-Crunch Consulting

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Jessica Rodriguez-Wahlquist

BEST MALE PERSONAL INJURY ATTORNEY

Lionel Sims (tie)
Eric Kirkpatrick (tie)
Finalist: David Miller, Jim Walker

BEST PERSONAL INJURY PRACTICE

Pusch & Nguyen

BEST FEMALE PROBATE ATTORNEY

deborah lawson

BEST MALE PROBATE ATTORNEY

Jeff Watters
Finalists: John Suarez, Coleton W. Mayo

PETS

BEST PET PARK

Johnny Steele Dog Park
Finalist: Trebly Park

BEST DOGGIE DAY CARE

Dogtopia
Finalists: Wag N World, Houndstown Houston Heights,
Best Little Doghouse in Texas, Molly's Mutt House,
Demi's Dog House, Rover Oaks

BEST FEMALE VETERINARIAN

Susan Dugat
Finalists: Kristen Olson, Leslie Jenkins,
Danielle Rosser, Caroline Oeben, Sarah Lane

BEST MALE VETERINARIAN

Richard Clive
Finalist: Eric Cagle

BEST PET EMERGENCY CARE CENTER

Vergi
Finalist: Veterinary Emergency Group-Lower Heights

BEST PET FOOD OR TREATS

Patsy's Pet Market
Finalists: Cesar, Blue Buffalo

BEST PET GROOMING SERVICE

Pet Bar Heights
Finalists: Patsy's Pet Market, Demi's,
Heights Pet Grooming,
Aussie Mobile Pet

BEST PET WALKING AND PET SITTING SERVICE

Pawsome Adventures-Heights
Finalists: WAGS Dog Walking + Pet Sitting,
Pet Nanny's Pet Sitting

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C.A.P.
Finalists: Friends For Life, Harris County Pets, Houston SPCA

BEST PLACE TO BOARD YOUR PET

Dogtopia
Finalists: Houndstown Houston Heights,
The Fritz Kennel, Yale Street Dog House, You Lucky Dog

BEST PLACE TO BUY PET SUPPLIES

Patsy's Pet Market
Finalists: PetSmart, Costco, B.O.M. Reptiles, Hollywood Feed

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The Montrose Vet Clinic
Finalists: The Cat Doctor, Rockin Pets Rollin Vets,
West Alabama Animal Clinic, The Urban Vet,
Greenway Animal Clinic, Central Houston
Animal Hospital, Bayou City Veterinary Hospital,
Creature Comfort Animal Hospital,
Midtown Animal Hospital

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BEST ART CENTER MATCH

Finalists: RobinWood Art Studio, Sawyer Yards

BEST ART GALLERY RobinWood Art Studio

Finalists: Erick Sandlin Art, Archway Gallery, Hardy and Nance

BEST COMMUNITY THEATER Catastrophic Theatre

Finalists: Stages, The DeLuxe Theater, Theatre Suburbia, Pronoia

BEST DANCE COMPANY

Project 3 Dance Productions
Finalists: Frame Dance, Houston Contemporary Dance Company, Tribble School for the Performing Arts, Open Dance Project

BEST LOCAL EQUITY THEATER COMPANY Stages

Finalists: Alley Theatre, Queensbury Theatre, Mildred's Umbrella, Houston Shakespeare Festival, Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS)

BEST COMMUNITY PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATION Pride Chorus Houston

Finalist: Houston Pride Band

BEST PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATION

Catastrophic Theatre

Finalists: Alley Theatre, Stages, The Garden Theatre, DACAMERA

FAVORITE LOCAL DANCER

Gavin LeMaire

Finalists: Austin Colburn, Adam Castaneda, Gilbert Saldivar

FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE ACTOR

Mai Le

Finalists: Tamarie Cooper, Sarah Sachi, Deborah Hope

FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE COMEDIAN

Timely Rain

FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE FINE ARTIST

Afsaneh Aayani

Finalists: Katharine Ligon, Stephanie Gonzalez, Lola Stardust

FAVORITE LOCAL LGBTQ MUSICIAN

Kenny Herrera

Finalists: Jonathan Craft, Ben Chavez, Jerry Atwood, Isaac Niaz

FAVORITE LOCAL MALE ACTOR

Abraham Zapata

Finalists: Austin Colburn, Mark Ivy, Kyle Sturdivant

FAVORITE LOCAL MALE COMEDIAN

Michael Paras

Finalist: Dayton Faulker Vavra

FAVORITE LOCAL MALE FINE ARTIST

Robin Baker

Finalists: Christian Navarette, Steven Tilotta

FAVORITE LOCAL MUSEUM

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH)

Finalists: The Menil Collection, Houston Museum of Natural Science, Holocaust Museum Houston, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

FAVORITE LOCAL NOBINARY ACTOR

Clarity Welch

Finalists: Ricardo Pérez Dávila, T Lavois Thiebaud

FAVORITE LOCAL NONBINARY COMEDIAN

Allure Gic

FAVORITE LOCAL NONBINARY FINE ARTIST

T Lavois Thiebaud

Finalist: Crystal Murley

FAVORITE LOCAL FEMALE PAINTER

Katharine Ligon

Finalist: Stephanie Gonzales

FAVORITE LOCAL MALE PAINTER

Wood Anthony

Finalist: Joseph Culotta



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Stephen Schwei

Finalists: T Lavois Thiebaud, Ebony Stewart, Lola Stardust

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Sunday Scott

FAVORITE LOCAL VISUAL ARTIST

Jeremy A. Teel

Finalists: Moon Papas, Robin Baker, Stephanie Gonzalez

FAVORITE REGIONAL EQUITY THEATER

Alley Theatre

Finalists: Stages, Queensbury Theatre

FAVORITE REGIONAL MUSICAL THEATER COMPANY

Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS)

AUTO

BEST AUTO BODY SHOP

Manriquez Collision & Mechanic Shop (tie)

Ryan Automotive (tie)

Finalist: Planet Lincoln

BEST AUTO MECHANIC

Active Auto

Finalist: Ronnie Jackson

BEST CAR SALESPERSON

Tony McClelland/Central Houston Cadillac

Finalists: John Dvorak, Eddie Fullen

BEST CAR WASH/AUTO DETAILING

Mister Car Wash

Finalist: Aqua

BEST DOMESTIC AUTO DEALERSHIP

Central Houston Cadillac (tie)

Planet Lincoln (tie)

BEST IMPORT AUTO DEALERSHIP

Fred Haas Toyota World

Finalists: Audi Central, Gillman Subaru-North

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Finalist: Kevin Casey

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Dalton DeHart

Finalist: Victor Contreras/Close Your Eyes Photo

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Dignity (tie)

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Finalists: Jewelry Depot Houston, Zadok,
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Finalists: EROS1207, Amazon

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Meg Ellis

Finalists: Natali Uribe, Lana Blake

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Finalists: Total Wine, Spec's Galveston

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Pride Threads - Mell Gamboa

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Out of the Closet

Finalists: Bering Second Blessings,
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King Underwear

Finalists: Pride Threads-Mell Gamboa,
ManBuns, Stylesbear, Hollywood Super
Center, Burly Bottom Designs

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Finalists: Electric Love,
Sir Rat Leather & Gear, Adam & Eve

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Finalists: Eye Elegance, Eyebars

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Pride Threads- Mell Gamboa

Finalist: Electric Love

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Finalists: City View Catering,
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BEST WEDDING/EVENT DJ

DJ Crazy V

Finalists: DJ London, DJ Krazzy Kris, Val,
Patrick Ukemi

BEST WEDDING/EVENT FLORIST

Andrew Liebig Designs

Finalists: Robert Shipman Florist,
In Bloom, Alex T

BEST WEDDING/EVENT LIVE MUSICIAN/BAND

Teacake & Rock Steady

Finalists: DJ Crazy V,
Jukebox Trainwreck

BEST WEDDING/EVENT PHOTOGRAPHER

Jamie Hardin Photography

Finalists: Photography Studios,
Dalton DeHart Photography,
Davis Mendoza Darusman,
Manuel Ayala Photography

BEST WEDDING/EVENT PLANNER

Shaun Gray Events

Finalists: Alexander Wyatt, Lee Capetillo,
Thistle Wynd Productions

BEST WEDDING/EVENT VENUE

First Christian Church Katy

Finalists: Magnolia Hotel, Bering Memorial
United Church of Christ, Forever 5 Events

BEST WEDDING/EVENT VIDEOGRAPHER

Houston Unscripted Productions

TRAVEL & VACATIONS

BEST AIRLINE

United

Finalists: Southwest, Spirit, Qatar, Delta

BEST HONEYMOON DESTINATION

Bangkok

Finalists: London, Sydney,
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Atlantis

Finalists: VACAYA, Arno's Bear Cruises,
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Finalist: Z on 23

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Finalists: 100% Taquito, Color Factory

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Drawing on the Past

Artist **Wardell Milan**'s work honors the Pulse nightclub tragedy with a powerful collage at the Menil Drawing Institute.

By **SAM BYRD**

Photo by **LUCAS MICHAEL**



The Menil Collection recently opened a provocative exhibit entitled *Fragments of Memory*, curated by Kelly Montana, Associate Curator, Menil Drawing

Institute. Available to view through January, the exhibition explores how 20th- and 21st-century artists have placed pieces of personal experiences and historic events at the heart of their work.

"The exhibition brings together drawings from our collections that think about how [the past informs] present experiences," Montana

says. "It looks to the letters, the memoria, the scrapbooks, and stuff of everyday life. Artists bring these into their work to think about the past, to think about historical memory, and to imagine new possibilities and new futures."

Part of what makes the exhibition unique is that it is drawn exclusively from works in the museum's permanent collection.

"These are works that the Menil proudly owns, stewards, and makes available to our public," she adds. "It's a really interesting dialogue that's happening between the artists in the show. There are some names that will be very familiar to our audiences—people like

Cy Twombly. And then there are also rising rock stars of art today like Wardell Milan."

Milan's work is one of the centerpieces of the Institute's programming surrounding the collection. He will offer an artist's talk that spotlights how his identity as a member of the LGBTQ community has influenced his art, specifically his work titled *Pulse*. The event takes place Thursday, November 14, 7–8 p.m. at the Menil.

Milan's website biography provides insight into his artistic process:



Artist Wardell Milan

"THE EXHIBITION BRINGS TOGETHER DRAWINGS THAT REFLECT HOW THE PAST INFORMS PRESENT EXPERIENCES, USING EVERYDAY ITEMS TO THINK ABOUT HISTORICAL MEMORY AND IMAGINE NEW FUTURES."

— Kelly Montana

"Through cut-paper and collage techniques, he constructs striking human subjects with reclaimed photographic elements, contending with the medium's visual lineage and its claims to representation. These composite, fragmented figures inhabit ambiguous landscapes of painted abstraction, navigating themselves through recontextualized historical and contemporary environments."



Wardell Milan, *Pulse*, 2019. Charcoal, graphite, pastel, oil pastel, acrylic paint, and paper collage on hand-dyed paper, 169.9 × 212.1 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston, purchased with funds provided by the William F. Stern Acquisition Fund and Bridget and Patrick Wade. © Wardell Milan. Photo: Adam Neese

The title, *Pulse*, is a direct reference to the deadly mass shooting at an Orlando nightclub that targeted the city's queer and Latin American communities. The incident occurred in the early morning hours of June 12, 2016, and left 49 people dead and more than 50 wounded. It was the deadliest mass shooting in US history up to that time.

One particularly striking decision made by the artist in *Pulse* was to depict the nightclub's patrons dancing, rather than the aftermath of the evening's devastation, which is sure to spark thought and conversation during Milan's event in Houston.

The Fragments of Memory exhibit also underscores the overarching mission of the Menil Drawing Institute.

"It's to show how important drawing is to artists," Montana says. "It's to show the diversity of drawing practice and also to connect drawing and paper and the materials that artists use for us to see that they're really different ways of looking at the world around us."

Other artists featured in the exhibit are Houston artist James Lee Byars, Sari Dienes, Jacob El Hanani, Joe Goode, Jasper Johns, Mark Lombardi, Jim Love, Gael Stack, Walter Tandy Murch, Denyse Thomasos, Luc Tuymans, and Danh Vo.

"I hope what people take away from the exhibition is that there are so many of us who want to know more about the past, to understand it, and to see if there's something new that we can learn from it," says Montana. "Artists feel that way, too, and this is diverse group of artists that are also looking at the past, looking at history, looking at their memories and trying to bring them forth in ways that are relevant to us today."

WHAT: Fragments of Memory art exhibit
WHEN: September 20, 2024–Jan 26, 2025
WHERE: Menil Drawing Institute
INFO: tinyurl.com/m2hr9drk

In the Summers Scores a Win at Sundance

Alessandra Lacorazza's film exploring queer identity opens at the River Oaks Theater.

By MICHAEL ROBINSON

Earlier this year, *In the Summers* premiered at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Grand Jury Prize, and its director, Alessandra Lacorazza (she/they), won Best Director. Spanning four summer breaks, the film follows siblings Eva and Violeta as they visit their alcoholic father, Vicente, in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Each visit becomes increasingly strained as the siblings discover themselves outside of their dad's approval, and their dad contends with his own mistakes in their lives, including a traumatic accident.

The idea for the film, which mirrors the director's own life, came naturally following a conversation with her sister as the two reminisced on the summers they both spent visiting their father. "It struck me that that was a really interesting structure for a film," Lacorazza says, "to see this father, in these brief moments of time, through the eyes of his daughters. The idea grew from that."

While the script has certainly shifted since the first iteration, it maintains the feeling of late-night stories told by a close friend. It's less concerned with cinematic spectacle than in depicting a reality steeped in remembrance, sculpted with moments of joy and pain. It also serves as a mirror to many aspects of Lacorazza's life that are rarely seen on screen. "For me, being queer and being Latin, I wanted to tell a story that reflected my life in a way that I haven't seen," she says, "something that was about this complicated relationship within this family. It was Latin and it was queer, but it wasn't hinging on that. It was just a human story."

In what might be considered a rare move, the team decided to shoot on location in Las Cruces instead of using a stand-in location. "Las Cruces was beautiful, and we had a great local team, but there were difficulties," Lacorazza admits. "We lost a lot of locations when they found out this film had queer characters. Sometimes they would pull out at the last minute and we were left scrambling. But that's not specific to Las Cruces, that could have happened anywhere."

Part of the difficulty in making representative media within the context of their set environment is the process of contending



ALESSANDRA LACORAZZA

Director Alessandra Lacorazza, winner of the Sundance festival's 2024 Best Director award.

with some of the similar adversities that the fictional characters face. Although both the filmic history of the American Southwest and the contemporary reality includes instances of homophobia, the region also offers incredible communities that thrive exactly because of these tribulations.

"We had people with all sorts of different views that were supportive. I had someone who would say, 'I watch Fox News.' In New York, you might not talk to people with different views," says Lacorazza, "because you can kind of live in this microcosm. But that doesn't happen in Las Cruces. We received so much love from people all across the political spectrum. And that, to me, is powerful."

Violeta, Lacorazza's cinematic stand-in, comes to their own queer realization as the film progresses. Moments are littered throughout that engage with, and sometimes supplant, storied queer signifiers found in

other media. They lock themselves in the bathroom to cut off their hair, they wear baggy masculine clothing, and they dodge commentary on their sexuality at a party. Each new film scene depicts a new era for the siblings alongside new actors to portray them. Most notable, though, may be the casting of trans actor Lio Mehiel (Mutt) to portray Violeta as an adult.

"The character was written as queer, but not explicitly as trans," Lacorazza reveals. "But then I had this incredible, lovely chat with Lio about the character's resonance, and they were very open. They're like, 'I'm trans. I'm gender-nonbinary. How does that fit into the story?' I was like, 'It actually fits in very organically with Violeta.' I think it adds a lot of depth."

The film's portrayal of Violeta's queer and trans identity feels almost revelatory, starting off as more obvious while slip-



Allison Salinas, René "Residente" Pérez Joglar, and KimayaThais Limon in a scene from *In the Summers*

ping into subtle moments, paralleling the unspoken and occasionally awkward facts that go unsaid in many Latin households.

In one scene, Violeta prepares to go into the pool but decides to leave their shirt on. Whereas other films may play this moment as the big (trans)gender reveal to the audience, Lacorazza chooses a more subtle play.

She cares more about what Violeta would do in that instance than any presupposition from the viewer. "For Violeta," Lacorazza says, "it's not a pain point. Being who they are is a point of power, just like their queerness has always been a point of power in their life. It's not trauma-filled."

As much as the film follows the viewpoint

of both siblings, it never loses focus or offers a prescriptive view on the father. "People come with really varied reactions to Vicente. I think that's powerful," contends Lacorazza. "I like to live in the gray, and that sometimes means seeing their ugly sides as well. I want people to be able to see and accept both sides of Vicente."

The film is a testament to the understanding Lacorazza extends to her father, both in fiction and in real life. "When he first died, I had so much anger towards him. I think I actually developed more empathy through writing this." The film embraces the messy entanglements of family dynamics through fraught reflections on the reverberations trauma sends throughout a family.

While the film is just hitting theaters, Lacorazza is busy working on her next project.

"I'm still in the early process of writing, but [the next film is] a military story," she says. "It has queer themes, but it's not specifically queer itself. Maybe one day I'll make something that has no queer themes, but I don't see that for myself."

➡ In the *Summers* opened at River Oaks Theater (as part of their grand re-opening) on October 3.

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Laugh Your Jingle Bells Off

Jinkx Monsoon and BenDeLaCreme bring their holiday show to Houston.

By DAVID CLARKE
Photo by JACOB RITTS



Holiday Drag Extravaganza

Jinkx Monsoon(I) and BenDeLaCreme will light up Houston.

Beloved drag queens Jinkx Monsoon and BenDeLaCreme are taking their iconic holiday confection, *The Jinkx & DeLa Holiday Show*, on the road for the seventh consecutive year. Of course, one could be a Scrooge and stay home to (re)watch their show from 2020, but that would deprive you of all the new material this duo has created. So come all ye faithful and rejoice

because this year's tour includes, for the first time, stops across the American South and multiple cities in Texas.

Jinkx and DeLa conceive of and write their holiday show each year, and then DeLa directs and produces the extravaganza with producers Kevin Heard, Gus Lanza, and associate producer Jin Moon of BenDeLaCreme Presents. "Because I'm a Virgo and DeLa's a Virgo-Libra cusp, that's how we pull it off," Jinkx says with a grin and a wink. "From the

beginning, we always deeply cared about putting on the best possible show for our audience."

With the platform that *Ru Paul's Drag Race* gifted the pair, they always knew they could easily slap a few numbers and witty banter together, rehearse, and keep their fans fully entertained. "But we chose, seven years ago, to build a show that is as inspired as it is entertaining," adds Jinkx.

"It is entertainment with a message and with heart in it. It's an entertaining show that houses our core beliefs of community, togetherness, and protecting each other when we face adversity."

"We love our jobs as comedy writers, and we actually spend as much time developing this work as we do touring it," explains DeLa. Both of these talented queens set aside two months to write, develop, and rehearse a gut-busting comedy show that gets a limited two-month tour.

"That really comes from a place of passion, and I think it's really reflected in the work," states DeLa. "Comedy is the tool that we both have identified we have to bring joy and make a difference. It's at a time where we're all looking for what we can do to make the world better, even if it just feels like it's just making some people laugh."

The holidays can be especially hard for members of our community, which is another reason Jinkx and DeLa are committed to keeping this tradition of merriment alive. "When I reached double digits and adolescence, I started to really see the cracks in my family unit and the way that people were coming together and performing togetherness," DeLa recalls. "So I really grew up hating Christmas, and I started making holiday shows in 2007 because I wanted an excuse to not go home for Christmas. Saying 'I have to work on Christmas Eve' was a really great way to do that."

"I didn't really realize that my grandma was already practicing 'chosen family' with her Christmas Eve party. That was when all of our misfit friends and all of our friends who didn't have other family at that time of year, for whatever reason, would gather together." It's that spirit of celebrating chosen family that makes this holiday tradition a must-see experience. "This show allows me to take those feelings that I had as a kid, and not only remember the really bright spots of my childhood, but share that feeling with our audiences," adds Jinkx.

"We get to reclaim homecoming, however that is. And what we strive to do is make that home space for people, even if our show doesn't fall on the actual holiday," DeLa adds. "That message from these shows has always been just as much for me as it is for the audience. We get to build our own family at a time of year when we're inundated with images and words about homecoming, family togetherness, and tradition."

Bringing the show to Texas, and espe-

SANTIAGO FELIPE



BenDeLaCreme and Jinkx Monsoon lead a festive cast in their Houston holiday spectacular.

cially Houston, is no happy accident. "DeLa and the production team put an emphasis on making sure we make it to the South and Texas because those are the areas that are being affected the most by this wave of political BS we've experienced," says Jinkx. "Those are the people that need this show the most, and we need to see them and be there with them."

"We want to go where this energy is the most needed, and where we can provide the most solidarity, comfort, and joyous distraction," DeLa notes.

Performing in large venues across the nation allows the queens to pack their annual holiday tour with high production values. "We have an incredible crew of dancers. We have fabulously designed costumes. It's all the fun visuals you want," DeLa says. "We do original music. We do song parodies. And we're real storytellers. So it's all of the aspects of really fun, camp drag, and it's wall-to-wall comedy."

"We've been vetted. We've been tested," Jinkx adds. "DeLa is an acclaimed television writer. She's directed, co-written, and helped work on many live performances that you probably don't even know about yet. Then I've been working on Broadway and Off Broadway. We're not just a couple of nobodies off the street putting on a holiday show."

As co-founding members of Drag PAC, Jinkx and DeLa would like to remind everyone to get involved in the 2024 election before attending their November 18 show. "We have

to really, really band together. It is so easy to feel like this system isn't representing you, it won't work in your favor, and your voice doesn't matter. That has been true," DeLa emphasizes. "We owe it to the generations to come and the generations who did the work for us to carry on. So even if you don't feel like you need to do it for yourself, do it for the community. Do it for the vulnerable people you care about."

"We're both old enough to remember the times before marriage equality, and the times before zero tolerance for homophobia and transphobia in some schools," states Jinkx. "That happens because of unified efforts. So it feels like it's a small thing, but together we make huge changes, and we cannot go backwards."

"If people feel like they resonate with that, but voting specifically doesn't feel like the way to do that, we can come at this from all angles," DeLa adds. "You don't have to choose. You can be in the streets, you can be speaking up in all the ways you want to, and you can vote. It is important that queers are everywhere. We don't just have to be in one place raising our voices. So don't let it deter you. Let's try everything."

WHAT: The Jinkx & DeLa Holiday Show

WHEN: November 18

WHERE: Bayou Music Center

INFO: jinkxanddela.com

A LEGEND'S FAREWELL

Cyndi Lauper reflects on four decades of music and LGBTQ advocacy.

By GREGG SHAPIRO

Photo by TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS

When I did a tally, I realized that, including this interview, I've had the pleasure of speaking with Cyndi Lauper nine times since 1997. Of course, that doesn't match the number of times I've been fortunate to see her perform live—that would be 12, beginning in 1984. And now, as I prepare to see her for a 13th time, it's with a touch of sadness as Lauper embarks on her farewell tour.

One of the best friends the LGBTQ community has ever had, Lauper's multi-artist True Colors tours (which ran from 2007 to 2010 and raised funds for the Matthew Shepard Foundation, PFLAG, and HRC) and the subsequent founding of True Colors United in 2008 (which continues to help homeless LGBTQ youth) are just a couple examples of her activism.

Lauper is a lifetime musical trendsetter. She recorded a duet with the late Tony Bennett more than 10 years before Lady Gaga's Bennett collaboration, and she also released dance-oriented and country-music albums 14 and 8 years, respectively, before Beyoncé. When it comes to her legendary personal style, social-media fashion critic Nicky Campbell recently declared Lauper an icon in his review of the 2024 VMA fashions.

Now, as Lauper prepares to say farewell to the concert-tour circuit, she generously made time for an interview with *OutSmart* before hitting the road.

Gregg Shapiro: In preparing for this interview ahead of your farewell tour, I pulled out my 12 ticket stubs from your concerts I've attended since 1984, beginning with two that year in Boston. Do you remember what that first headlining tour as a solo artist felt like for you?

Cyndi Lauper: I just wanted to make sure I had places to go. I wanted the sound to be really great. I don't know if I accomplished that, but I did have those big speakers that I used to run

up on. That's me! I loved that. Because I saw all those wonderful English groups, the ska bands...

You mean Madness and The English Beat and The Specials?

The Specials! I thought they were extraordinary. The singer, Neville Staple, I don't know where his family was from. I guess he could have been Jamaican English. He was so fierce, singing so great, and he climbed up on top of the speaker and put up his fist and he's singing his guts out. I'm thinking, "It's Mighty Mouse!" When I was a kid that was kind of my favorite show, I don't know why [laughs]. But it always influenced me, and I remember in '84, '85, I was still free. When '86 came, then I became a prisoner of the system.

Being on a major record label, and all that.

I wasn't allowed to touch anybody. I wasn't allowed to go out to the audience or have them come to me. It was totally different, and I totally hated it.

Did you ever imagine that 40 years later you would be embarking on a farewell tour?

Well, at some point, sure. I think that for me this is the perfect time, because it's a kind of bucket list of what I always wanted to do. In the beginning, it was roughneck style. Whatever I could jimmy-rig, I did, when I got to a certain point. Like we were doing the live "Money Changes Everything" video. I had fantasies of a cherry-picker. Because of our budget, everyone said, "Well, you can't get a cherry-picker but we'll give you a garbage pail and a pulley system." I thought to myself, "Oh no, like Oscar the Grouch?" I had a friend who was a great interviewer, and she used to interview everybody from a garbage pail. So, of course, that's what my people gave me to go up in the crowd. I thought it was a pulley system. The pulley system was actually 10 men with rope

holding it. When I started to shake while I was singing, I started to slip out of their hands. They brought me right in. That could have been the reason that the lawyer made me sign my will before I left.

Are you planning to sing songs from each of your albums?

I'm really trying. I didn't get anything from the blues album in there—2010's *Memphis Blues*—because there's too many songs. I usually get to the point where I say, "Hey, guys, if the visuals look good for this, can we switch the songs?" What I did was I wanted to do visuals on the tour. I wanted to do performance art. That means you have to be on a click. Like when I went out on the Rod Stewart tour and we used the lyric video of "Sally's Pigeons." You can't do that and not be on a click, because the guy running visuals has to be on the click. If nobody's together, it's like, "Hey, what the hell—now the words are there, now they're not."

It's like a badly dubbed movie.

Yeah. But this time I got this wonderful visual director, Brian Burke, who worked for years with the creative director of Cirque Du Soleil. In the beginning of all that, that was my fantasy! I wanted to fly through the air, and all I got was a cherry-picker. Not a cherry-picker, but a garbage pail. It wasn't going to happen for me. Now, I'm 71! I'm not gonna go flying through the air. It's a mixture of collabs with artists and art. Art and music. The whole thing is an artist collective, any time you go out on tour. It's not just you. You're with other dance artists if you're a dancer, or you're with musicians. Or you're with lighting designers—that's art, too. We did these collabs and I'm excited to present a show like this because it's something I always wanted to do. Fingers



"YOU HAVE TO VOTE. YOU HAVE TO BE INFORMED. EVERY TIME YOU HAVE TO VOTE, YOU VOTE! DON'T SAY, 'OH, IT DOESN'T MATTER FOR THIS ONE. IT MATTERS!'"

— Cyndi Lauper

crossed that it all works out. I'm even going to do costume changes this time, which you know I've never done because it's so bothersome. But I can do it in a way now that I'm comfortable with. I just want to be able to do this as a gift to all the people that followed me through all my crazy twists and turns. I did all those twists and turns because I kept hitting brick walls. You keep hitting the gatekeeper, so you gotta find your way around that gatekeeper.

Earlier this year, *Let the Canary Sing*, Alison Ellwood's documentary about you, received a theatrical release. After having your memoir published in 2012, did it feel to you like the documentary was the next logical step—a continuation of sorts? Well, not for me. I didn't want to have a documentary. It was the pandemic, and

everyone was saying, "Everybody's doing documentaries now, Cyn! Come on, what are you doing?" I was like, "I'm not dead!" Then I started watching documentaries on the streaming services and I saw *Laurel Canyon*. I felt it was an extraordinarily captivating documentary for me because it was the history of music. All of the people and players in that story were very much influential for me as a growing artist, especially in the '70s. I looked and saw who directed it...

Alison Ellwood!

When they came at me again, I said, "I want a film, not a TV special. So, how about Alison Ellwood? She makes films." She wanted to do it! I think she did a good job. It's not your typical story. I don't think anybody's story is typical, right? We think we know people but I guess we don't. You think, "It's typical! You start a band." Which is always my theory! If something's wrong, start a band, start playing

out, you'll feel a lot better! [*Laughs*] It doesn't always go that way.

With the end of touring in sight, is there a possibility that you might do more film work for a potential Oscar to earn your EGOT status?

Listen, I happen to love independent films. For that, I would write. I wrote "Unhook The Stars" for...

The Gena Rowlands movie.

Right! Usually, I like an independent movie because then you get to talk to the director and then you have to understand what their vision is. That's interesting, because each director is a different personality and a different kind of artist. You have to listen and see what story they're trying to tell and then have a couple of different suggestions. When we first wrote "Who Let In the Rain," I wrote it with Allee Willis. →

Oh, the late Allee Willis.

Allee Willis was a great songwriter.

Did you see that documentary?

No, I wish I had because I miss her so much. I guess I was talking to the director, and we didn't have a band, so I just sang "They fall like rain," and in between, her dog, Orbit, would bark. I was like, "OK, the dog is musical," and everyone laughed. Then I described it to the director as "Chinese Motown." That would scare most people. To me, I hear influences of every culture in American music. That's how I make my music, with different influences. Like cooking, like spices. I feel grateful that I was brought up in New York City because I was exposed to so many different cultures.

On a final serious note, when I saw you perform in Boca Raton in 2016 in support of your *Detour* album, you asked for a moment of silence to honor Christina Grimmie, who had been shot and killed in Orlando the night before. The next morning, after your concert, many of us woke up to the news of the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. With those tragedies in mind, and this upcoming election

which is so terribly important, especially for women and LGBTQ folks, is there anything you'd like to say to your fans?

Absolutely! There is an organization called Vote411.org. Taylor Swift finally put that up recently. You go online and you find out all the questions and all the people that are running and what they voted for so that you can make an intelligent decision on who is going to represent you, not them. This war against women has been going on since the '60s. It's just been going and going, and we need to stop it because we are half the population. As far as the LG-BTQ people, you have to vote. You have to be informed. Every time you have to vote, you vote! Don't say, "Oh, it doesn't matter for this one." It matters! Because they put laws in there. There are community people that represent you, and you need to start on a community level, a grass-roots level to ensure that there are people that are going to speak for you as a human being. We are all human beings here. As I said, women are half the population and LGBTQ people, I venture to bet, are a pretty large part, too.

This country was founded on the separation of church and state. Separation! I don't want anybody to have ownership over my body. They say they want local communities in charge but

yet they have SCOTUS making federal laws about what you do in your bedroom and what you do with your body and who you are, and nullifying families. Oh, I have a lot to say about that. You need to vote! You vote on every occasion you can vote. You can't just lie down and get rolled over. This is our country, too. And always share your stories. Because people who work with you, that you're friends with, sometimes they don't understand. They don't know. What's really interesting now, from when we started with True Colors United, I think that people do not understand gender identity, which is a whole different thing. If you want people to listen to you, you've got to listen to them. Just because they're different from you, doesn't mean that you have to be like them. You have to learn about both sides of the fence. Knock the fence down, because we're all human beings. Everybody's different, that's all.

WHAT: Cyndi Lauper farewell tour

WHEN: November 16

WHERE: Toyota Center in Houston

INFO: tinyurl.com/5n9arae5

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LGBTQ POLITICAL CAUCUS EQUALITY BRUNCH SEPTEMBER 8, 2024

The Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus hosted its 15th Annual Equality Brunch at the Post Oak Hotel, bringing together community members to raise funds for pro-equality candidates in upcoming elections throughout the country.

Jeffrey Kummerlen (l) and
Bryan Lavery

A Blossoming Weekend Romance

Bryan Lavery and Jeffrey Kummerlen's long-distance dating confirmed their love for each other.

By DAVID CLARKE
Photos by EDER ACEVEDO



Bryan Lavery, 36, originally hailing from central New York state, and Jeffrey Kummerlen, 41, originally from Cleveland, Ohio, will celebrate ten years together this month. The two share a home in Houston's Independence Heights, and met while Bryan was living in Tampa and traveling with the city's gay softball league to compete in the Buckeye Classic.

"On the final night of the tournament, I was out with my team and bumped into Jeffrey in a bar," Bryan says. "I passively knew the bartender, and I saw Jeffrey talking to him. When he walked away to the restroom, I asked the bartender who he was, he said, 'Oh, that's Jeffrey. If you buy him a shot of Jäger, he'll just love you forever.'"

Drawn to Jeffrey's bald head and broad shoulders, Bryan bought a shot of Jägermeister and waited for him to return to his spot at the bar so he could introduce himself.

But the question of who really made the first move is a point of contention.

"When he walked over, he stood right next to me, but we didn't acknowledge each other,"

explains Jeffrey. "I grabbed his butt, and my roommate also grabbed his butt right after I did. Bryan flipped around and said something to my roommate, and I thought, 'Okay, he's hitting it off with him,' so I just backed off a little bit."

"So I guess he made the first move," Bryan admits with a grin, "but it wasn't a strong enough move to be noticed."

During the evening, the handsome duo chit-chatted, but because Bryan had to fly back home the following morning, their first date wouldn't be until five days later when Bryan flew back to Cleveland. "He met me at the airport, and we did a weekend-long date together," Bryan adds. "It was the typical visit—these are my places, and these are my friends."

The charming pair made a long-distance relationship work across the next nine months by flying to see each other for weekends once every two weeks. That level of commitment helped both of them begin to think that they had found "the one."

"We were dating long-distance, and we were both thinking 'Something has to happen.

We're not going to continue doing this,'" Jeffrey reveals. "Really, I was going to move. He wasn't going to move to Columbus, Ohio. That was when I first knew he was the one, and that I'd have to make a massive life decision."

Bryan first knew Jeffrey was the one after the first time Jeffrey said "I love you" to him. Imagine a bustling, noisy departure lane outside the Cleveland airport. Bryan gives Jeffrey a hug goodbye and starts to walk away when he thinks he hears Jeffrey say "I love you."

"I said, 'I love you, too.' It was so easy to say it back, and it caught me off guard," Bryan explains. "That made me realize he was the one."

The couple agrees that their favorite thing about the other is their differences. "My favorite thing is that we are totally opposite personalities," Jeffrey says. "That makes it work because we could never be with ourselves."

"We don't have a lot that we directly share in common," adds Bryan. "We're very much yin and yang. I'm very type A. He's



very type Z, if there is one of those. As much as I get frustrated at times that he is so opposite, and he doesn't have that sense of urgency that I have, it is very grounding and provides a very good balance and home base for me."

When it came to popping the question, Jeffrey proposed during a vacation in Costa Rica. "We took a horseback ride for two hours into the middle of the wilderness to see a waterfall. That's where I popped the question," Jeffrey says. "But the funny thing is, after it happened, I reminded Bryan that when I kneeled, I didn't say anything. And then he didn't say anything either, but just nodded. So the question was never actually really asked out loud because we were both just in the moment."

"I was star-struck," Bryan adds. "We were walking out on this rock, and then I realized he was kind of far behind me. Well, come to find out, he was getting the ring out of his shoe, and I didn't realize it. But as I stepped up on this rock, it all hit me. I turned around, he had caught up, and he was kneeling. I cried and shook my head. Yes. He never asked. I never said

yes. It was a lot of nothings, but also a lot of something."

The couple were married by their close friends Stephanie and Russell Logan on May 3 at the Hotel Playa Fiesta in Puerto Vallarta. "It was better than I think we could have imagined. We ended up with 130 guests for a five-day destination wedding," Bryan recalls. "It was great because you rent the whole resort."

They were already familiar with the location because their friends Beaux Broach and Aaron Wallace were married there. "Because we went to our friends' wedding, we knew what to expect," Jeffrey adds. "The venue is great because they help plan everything out, and then they facilitate it for you."

For Jeffrey, his favorite part of their wedding was the ceremony itself. "I didn't want it to take too long. I wanted everybody to have fun and party," he says. "But then when we got to that part, that was absolutely my favorite part."

Bryan's favorite part was the love he felt from their guests. "I really enjoyed the speeches. We had one speech per night," explains Bryan. "Jeffrey's best man gave a speech that

was probably my favorite part." That speech included the pair receiving a clock stopped at the time they shared their first kiss after saying "I do."

Bryan and Jeffrey offer sincere praise for Lindsay Burgess at Hotel Playa Fiesta. "You can tell that she loves her job. You see her there the entire weekend of your wedding, and she's checking in and mingling with the guests," says Bryan.

The couple also point to their officiants as superstars. "They came from a very conservative religious lifestyle," explains Bryan. Despite their upbringings, they have created an inclusive family with children that identify as gay, straight, and nonbinary. "We chose them because we want our relationship to be like theirs. Forget what everyone else says is supposed to be and what's not supposed to be. They've been together 20 years, they found what works for them, they're evolving, they're adapting, and they're making it work. That's what we want to emulate."

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By LILLY RODDY



Balance, Tension, and New Beginnings

Initiate new partnerships in **Libra** and prepare for challenges ahead with Mars in **Cancer**.

October is a busy time with the solar eclipse in **Libra** on the 2nd. This is a time of initiating new partnerships, improving the ones you have, and being clearer about what you want in relationships. You question the idea of fairness, harmony, and balance.

There will be a long series of retrogrades starting at the end of November. It's important to start your projects now so the retrogrades won't impact you as much.

Mars, planet of self-defense, war-like activity, and anger, is in the sign of **Cancer**. With our nation birthed under the sign of **Cancer**, we may feel more threatened by other countries, and there can be more local violence. Mars is having a strong impact on the cardinal signs of **Aries**, **Libra**, **Cancer**, and **Capricorn**. Be careful out there!

Days of harmony this month are the 8th, 15th, 17th, 24th, and the 31st. Days with some tension are the 4th, 6th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 19th, 20th, 22nd, 27th, and the 30th.

ARIES (Mar. 21-Apr. 19)

Relationships are playing a big role in your life this month. You will be more aware of those who need some support, those who give you support, and those that are too costly. Family demands are much stronger this month. This can be a good time for some remodeling, family reunions, or addressing issues that others are ignoring. Your patience with all of these issues is very short! In the latter part of the month, you are paying more attention to your finances and investments. Trust and intimacy in partnerships become more important in the latter part of the month, as well. You also are needing time for yourself and reflection about your current career path. Putting yourself first makes you less resentful when you compromise to help others!

TAURUS (Apr. 20-May 20)

Career and long-term decisions become more important as the month progresses. For some, this can be a time of starting your own path, changing your current direction, or potentially cutting back on the time you commit to this part of your life. As the month begins, you are working on habits and routines associated with your health and your work patterns. You want a more peaceful environment, and you are more likely to be clear and direct in your opinions. This will be very strong at the end of the month. In the latter part of the month, partnerships become more important. This is a good time to renew those bonds, and if you are single, this is a very good time to meet some new folks. The latter part of the month is also good for travel or just stepping away from your responsibilities.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

You continue to be busy while you are trying to set goals and personal boundaries in all areas of your life. With your career, this can be a time to step up and take on a leadership role. You will want more options and choices, rather than following a particular path. This

can feel like a push-me-pull-you! Money is easier to spend this month as you are satisfying your desires. Relationships, both business and personal, become more important toward the middle of the month. This can be a great time to get away with your partner for some rest and retreat. If you are single, this is a very good time to meet new people. We are more playful in the first half of the month, and we are paying more attention to our responsibilities in the latter half.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

It's a busy and active time for the Moon Kids! You are ready to take care of business, start something new and fun, and push forward with your ideas and dreams. This continues to be a good time to improve exercise and diet routines. You may also have a harder time sleeping, and exercise can really help there. You are definitely not as patient with just about everything in your life. You are seeking more peace and relaxation at home, as that is your escape. The solar eclipse on the 2nd really brings this idea home. There could be changes in the family power structure as your relatives get older. In the latter part of the month, you are more creative and may spend more time with your children.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

Your theme this month is communications. You are not only listening, but also making sure that you are heard. Although you may try hard to be patient, you will take life a lot more personally. You are more sensitive to your environment and may need more time to yourself, or at least move farther away from the noise. In the second half of the month, home and family issues become your main driver. You will want to make your home more comfortable, possibly do some remodeling, or even moving. You continue to work on improving your investments and getting rid of debt. This is also a very good month to expand your social connections. This may help you both professionally and with new

friendships. You are careful about how much time you invest here, as you expect some return on your investment. The end of the month can be quite tense. Avoid making pressured decisions!

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

You are experiencing a sense of expansion, particularly with career and your limits. You need to set better boundaries so that you don't take on too much! Finances are a big focus this month, as you work hard to maintain a balance between your home and work life. With your career, you are looking to expand, change, or choose another direction. This can be a very good time to change jobs, particularly if you are feeling stuck or unappreciated. With partnerships, this is a time to set new boundaries, recommit, set new goals, or find a final solution to a difficult partnership. This is very strong at the end of the month! In the latter part of the month, you are speaking your mind and will need some space and freedom.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

This month is your personal yearly cycle when you consider the past year and set new goals for the next year. This is the best time of the year to focus more on yourself. Normally, you are the one making connections and making sure others are comfortable. This month, the focus is you! Career activity is very busy. This can be a time when you are looking for a promotion, a new position, starting something on your own, or finding a better way to use your time. Your family, and your views about family issues, have been changing. There continue to be major changes and shifts in the family hierarchy. In the latter part of the month, you are more interested in finances, your sense of self-worth, and how to make sure your financial future more stable by asking for a raise or increasing your fees.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24–Nov. 21)

As the month begins, you are in a rest-and-retreat mode, as you need more personal space and self-care. You are also more interested in your spiritual destiny and what your role is. This is a much better month to take some mental-health days. You are wanting to indulge in some creative activity and hobbies that you are considering taking to the next level. This is a good month to take a few short trips to increase the time you set aside for yourself. In the latter part of the month, you are feeling more energized. Partnerships improve because of enhanced communications. This part of the month is very good for making sure that you are both on the same page. The end of the month has you starting a brand-new project that should be related to your career.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22–Dec. 21)

The beginning of the month is a socially interactive time that is good for career team-building with business organizations and others. You are feeling somewhat restless, and you don't mind taking the lead here. You are continuing to do some long-term planning around your career, giving thought to when you might cut back or possibly retire. There also could be major shifts with your family that make you rethink your long-term plans. Older relatives seem more vulnerable and may need

your help! Toward the end of the month, you are more sensitive to your environment and will need more personal time. You will be pondering the big life questions about why we are here and what our real purpose is. The end of the month can be quite tense. Take your time in all pursuits.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22–Jan. 19)

You are quite busy this month trying to divide your time between yourself, your work, and your partnerships. Everybody wants and needs your attention. This is a good month to start a new project at work or to take on a new challenge. Your work or business could be expanding and demanding more of your time and commitment. On the 2nd, the solar eclipse will be activating your career sector as well. This may open some doors and offer new opportunities. Personal relationships really need some of your time and attention. You may need a weekend getaway with your partner. If not, your partner may be more sensitive and angrier. In the latter part of the month, you are ready to connect with friends and have a little more fun in your life.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20–Feb. 18)

You have a lot of activity in your horoscope this month. As the month starts, you are ready for a vacation and a time to stretch your mind. You may be more interested in expanding your education or seeing far-away places! You are trying to create more freedom in your

life by releasing old beliefs and expectations. There could be shifts with your family and a change in the hierarchy. You are reviewing your sense of self-worth and are not allowing others to take advantage of you. You are setting some boundaries there. In the latter part of the month, your long-term goals and career energies are more active. This is a better time to take a leadership role at work or seek a new position. Relationships will need more attention at the end of the month!

PISCES (Feb. 19–Mar. 20)

You continue to review your life choices, career path, relationship, and family responsibilities to determine where your responsibilities lie and where they don't. This will determine what you will focus on next year. In relationships, you are looking for more shared goals and to have a deeper sense of trust. With finances, you are looking to release yourself from debt so you don't feel as burdened. You may also be looking to move to a more relaxed place that fits your temperament. In the latter part of the month, you may want to take a road trip to get away from your routines. You are trying to balance your need to grow and your need to be reasonable. The end of the month can be very tense. Take your time in all decisions.

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Bursting with the 'It' factor

Miss Majors captures her audiences' attention—and a few awards.

By SAM BYRD



While still only a few years into the drag scene, Miss Majors has made an indelible impact. She has gone from a first-time performer three years ago to this year's Favorite Local

Non-drag Nonbinary Entertainer in *OutSmart* magazine's Gayest & Greatest Awards. She is made for the stage with high energy, fun, and the desire to show everyone a good time. Find out more below about this show-stopping performer.

Pronouns?

She/Her in drag. Out of drag, call me whatever you want as long as you say it with respect. And if you call me a bitch, make sure you say "That bitch!"

Inner avatar?

A koala. They are so fun and cute and cuddly, just like me. And they love to give hugs.

Hometown?

I was born and raised in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and moved to Houston in 2020 in the middle of the pandemic.

Drag birthday?

August 19, 2021

What got you interested in drag?

I was a fan of *RuPaul's Drag Race* growing up, and when I came to watch my first open stage night at JR's Houston for "So You Think You Can Drag," I said, "I can do that!" Then a few weeks later, I was oiled up and on that stage.

Thoughts about the legislation restricting drag performances?

I think it is very ridiculous! Drag is nothing but art and self-expression. What really confuses me is how people will think it is fine to take their children to places like Hooters, which is known for exploiting women to make money, but they have a problem when it comes to bringing kids to drag shows. We are just here to entertain, just like any other artist.



Do you have a drag family?

I am one of the many from the Jackson Dynasty. My drag father is La'Darius Mirage Jackson. He took me under his wing during my second year of drag and has taught me so much! Our family might be a little crazy, but the love we share is like no other. I appreciate every single one of them.

Must-have clothing accessory or prop?

Earrings. If I'm not wearing earrings, I feel like something is missing. And when I didn't pad, I had to have my oil. Can't hit the stage without glistening legs!

Favorite bad word?

In the words of the great Kamala Harris, "I can't say it. It starts with an *M* and ends with an *uh*!" Go vote!

Any Halloween plans?

The only Halloween-related plans that I do have is competing for Persephone's Race to the Moon. It's a month-long competition starting in October that will be held every Sunday at South Beach.

Who is your favorite drag character from media? And why?

My favorite drag character in media would have to be the one and only Rodger the Alien. They are just so versatile. They know their audience when they are in drag and it's just amazing, honestly. I aspire to be as versatile as Rodger.

What have you learned from drag that you use in your everyday life?

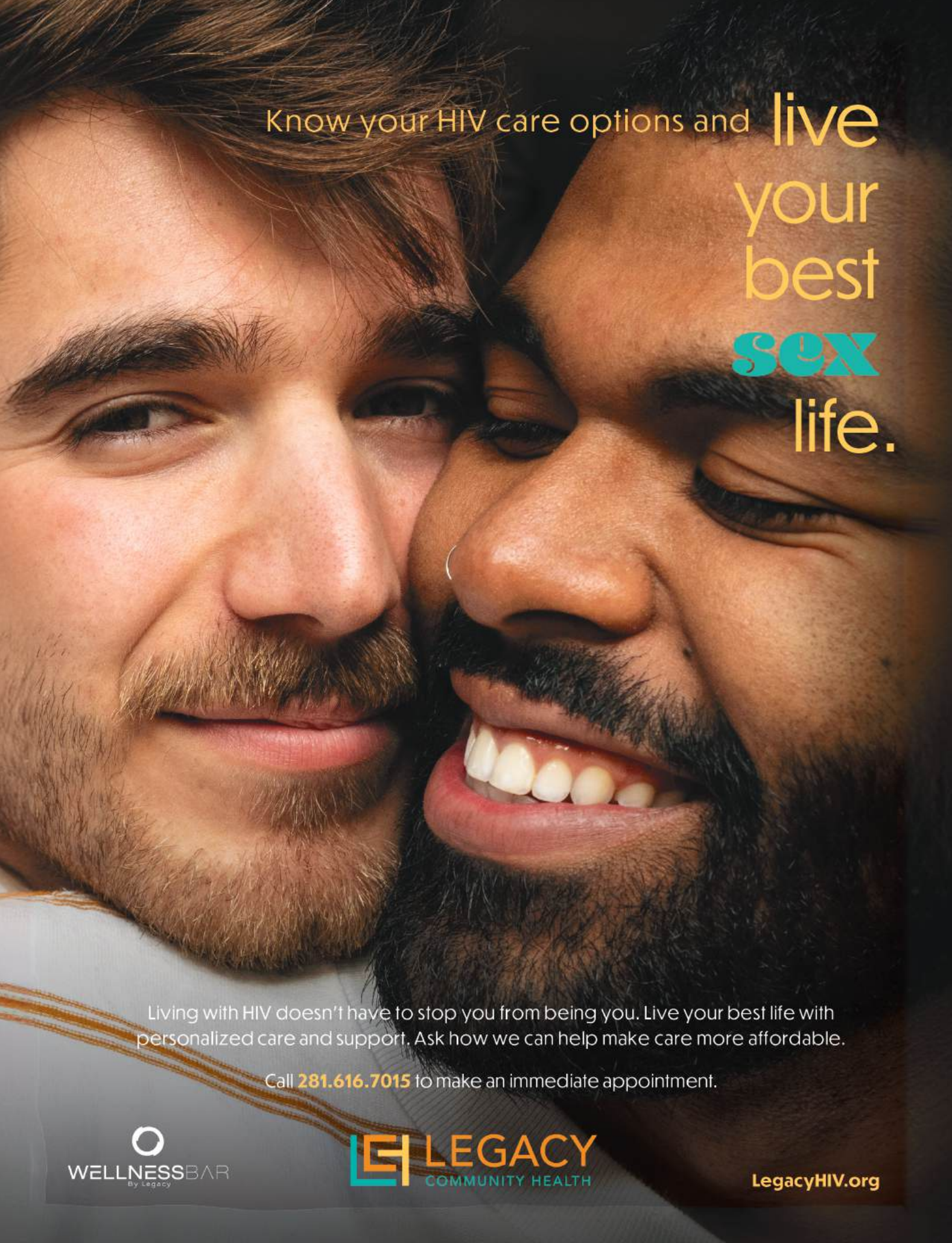
No matter what, the show must go on! Life keeps moving and going, even through hard times. You must keep going and pushing because the show ain't ending, baby!

Where can fans see you perform?

You can definitely find me at South Beach just about every Thursday for "So You Think You Can Drag" as your reigning Miss SYTYCD. Other than that, I pop around here and there in Montrose. You'd definitely have to follow my socials to catch exactly when and where I'll be.



Follow Miss Majors on Instagram at @_miss.majors

A close-up photograph of two men's faces. The man on the left has light brown hair and a beard, looking slightly to the side with a gentle smile. The man on the right has dark hair and a beard, smiling broadly with his teeth showing. They are positioned very close together, with their faces nearly touching.

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