

JUNE '19

HOUSTON'S LGBTQ MAGAZINE

OutSmart



GRAND MARSHALS
MAKE DIVERSITY
HISTORY

THE FRESH FACES OF PRIDE

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SHANNON BALDWIN, and ALAN ROSEN

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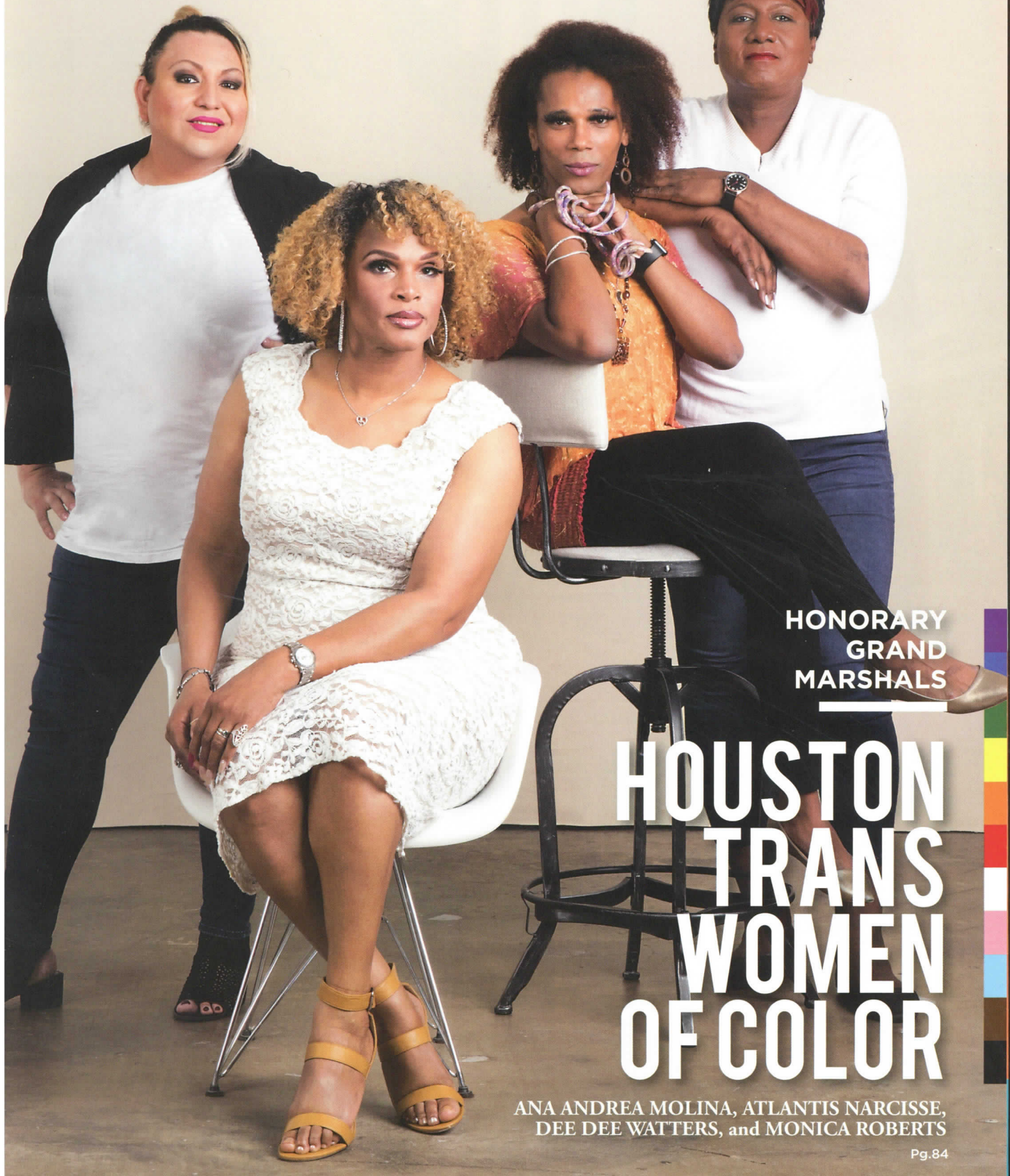
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Pride Houston's 2019 Female Grand Marshal

SHANNON BALDWIN

Harris County's first openly lesbian African-American judge.

By BRANDON WOLF

Photo by ASHKAN ROAYEE

Shannon Baldwin, 49, is Houston's 2019 Female Pride Grand Marshal. After pursuing career opportunities in Atlanta for years, the native Houstonian eventually returned to her hometown.

"Nothing is better than being in your hometown—and being celebrated in your hometown," she says. Part of the reason she moved away was a feeling of not belonging. But that has all changed.

Growing Up in Houston

Baldwin and two younger siblings were raised in the '70s by a single mother who worked for the local phone company. "My mother ran the gamut. She began as an operator, worked installing phones and climbing poles, and eventually moved into management." Her father, who worked in the chemical-engineering field, became a part of her life again after college.

Baldwin attended Berry Elementary School, Kirby and Cunningham middle schools, and began high school at North Shore before transferring to Barbara Jordan High School.

At North Shore, Baldwin had played basketball, volleyball, and ran track. Although the Barbara Jordan magnet school had no sports and was entirely academic, Baldwin did join the school's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) drill team for three years.

"I had a teacher who was very instrumental in steering me toward political science. She saw my potential, and took an interest and encouraged me."

Gaining a Law Degree

After high school, Baldwin went into the Army

Reserves, reporting for basic training at the Fort Dix Army post in New Jersey. Baldwin liked serving her country, as well as the military discipline and the traditions surrounding military uniforms.

At Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, Baldwin majored in law enforcement and police science, and eventually took a part-time job as a prison security guard. "I never felt so small in my life. I can still see [those hallways filled with prisoners in their cells]. I felt so helpless in such a big system."

Baldwin's college ROTC involvement consumed most of her extracurricular activity, but she did join the Delta Sigma Theta sorority that was founded in 1913 at Howard University. Upon graduation, she was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army.

But Baldwin knew she really wanted to go to law school, so she enrolled at the John Marshall Law School in Atlanta, graduating with honors three years later.

During her third year of law school, Baldwin began serving as a prosecutor in a district misdemeanor court. She continued to serve there for another year after graduation before opening her own law firm that specialized in criminal, family, and entertainment law.

Back Home to Houston

In 1999, Baldwin moved to Taylor, Texas, near Abilene, to work in the district attorney's office as a prosecutor. "It was a small town, and I went into culture shock. I was the only African-American in the courthouse," she says. A year later, she returned to big-city life in Houston and set up her own law firm that practiced criminal and family law. Houston also made it easier to practice her Islamic faith as part of the city's large Muslim population.

Baldwin came out in 1995. "It was traumatic," she says. "In hindsight, I knew I was gay but didn't start to accept it until my late 30s." Although her family took the news well, "Parents always have to have a grieving period for the life they had hoped for us."

Baldwin now has a foster daughter named Miracle, whom she plans to adopt. "She has lived with me since she was six days old. She is now 21 months."

The Harris County Courts' Blue Wave

In 2016, Baldwin made the decision to run for office as a judge in the Harris County Criminal Courts at Law, after several people urged her to run. "I hadn't quite considered it. I was trying to grow a practice and brand myself here." But Baldwin had become frustrated with the Republican judges that were then in the majority. "I knew I could be a better judge—and be fair. It was a really big decision to make, and you have to speak truth and be all in. If you lose, there is a target on your back at the courthouse. I had to have the mindset that I would win."

On November 6, 2016, the Harris County judicial system was swept by the Democrats. All 55 Republican candidates lost, and Harris County now had a majority-blue court system. "It was very surreal. It's one thing to run, and another to win. It was like a dream," Baldwin says.

Baldwin and several other judicial candidates held their election watch-party at The Address. "Every time results were posted, people were clapping. The numbers were huge. Harris County really came out in numbers, screaming for change."

By the end of the evening, the Democrats completely controlled the county courthouse, ending decades of Republican domination. →

BEAUFORT PARK THE HOUSE



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"I was floating through the party that night, trying to grasp the enormity of it."

During the campaign, Baldwin became one of the "Houston 19" group of female African-American judicial candidates. "We didn't realize at first that we were all running, until we kept running into each other at candidate meetings. But we knew that there was an African-American female voting trend across the U.S."

"Black women reached out to their mothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins. We never had a lot of money, but we had growing support." After taking note of a group picture showing all of the black female judges running in Atlanta, the Houston women pitched the "Houston 19" photo idea to Harris County Democratic Party chairperson Lillie Schechter, who then hired an aide to work exclusively with African-American women.

The now-iconic photo was taken on a Saturday morning in the Thurgood Marshall School of Law building at Texas Southern University. Everyone was told to wear black-and-white wardrobe accessories. "It took about two hours to get everyone together and posed." The

photo became a huge hit on Twitter, with the hashtag #Houston19. When all 19 women won, the photo trended even higher.

"The first day of work, I walked around a lot just to see all the other women in their courtrooms. And then I noticed they were looking in *my* window, or coming in to sit for a while. It was *so much* to take in."

"When my name is announced as I enter the courtroom, I always smile," Baldwin admits. After 20 years on the other side of the bench, she is in her element in the judge's seat. Baldwin has a staff of five, whom she loves. "They all reflect the openness and understanding that we want to project. There is a 'new normal' in the Harris County Courts these days."

The court system's new Democratic majority ended a lawsuit begun by their Republican predecessors to prevent the bail-bond system from being reformed. "Poor people were in jail for excessive amounts of time, awaiting trial. They lost their jobs, houses, and families. Now, most people are released on personal recognition for lower-level misdemeanors."

Baldwin says that she watches the faces of the defendants who appear before her.

"African-American women definitely look more relaxed when they see me. And quite often, they come up during a recess and tell me how proud they feel, seeing me on the bench."

Becoming a Houston Pride Marshal

Baldwin says that when she agreed to let a friend nominate her for this year's female Pride marshal, she only knew that it was an "important" LGBTQ community tradition. "My supporters told me what to do—when and where to show up."

This year's marshal announcement event occurred on Baldwin's birthday. Since she had to travel out of town and miss the announcement, she made a video that could be shown to the crowd in case she won.

Baldwin followed the announcement event on Facebook Live, and admits that it was yet another surreal moment when she won. "It was really the icing on the cake," she says. Commenting on all of the other African-American marshals who were elected this year, Baldwin says, "I never realized the true impact of diversity until that night. It's a great sense of not being alone and actually belonging." ▼



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**Dates subject to change. Certain restrictions apply.

Pride Houston's 2019 Male Grand Marshal

HARRISON GUY

LGBTQ activist takes pride in his role as a community bridge-builder.

By BRANDON WOLF | Photo by ASHKAN ROAYEE

Harrison Guy, Houston Pride's 2019 Male Grand Marshal, has lived a life built around community involvement. "I was raised to give back to my community, and to take on leadership roles. Community has been the cornerstone of my life," he says.

The 42-year-old is being honored this month for his involvement in Houston's LGBTQ community. Guy is now the first black male grand marshal in the 41-year history of Houston's Pride celebrations.

Early Years

Guy was born in La Marque, Texas, in 1976. He has two sisters and two brothers, and his young mother's parents adopted and raised Guy and his older sister. "They were incredible parents," Guy says. "I wouldn't change a thing."

Guy attended La Marque public schools from kindergarten through his senior year. "School, for me, was about creative things. I was involved in numerous performance activities— theater, choir, marching band," he recalls. He played the trumpet and tuba in the band, and admits that he would love to join Houston's Pride Band. "But I'm so busy as it is."

Guy says that he knew he was gay early on—and so did others, so he never really had to "come out." "My family was very supportive. They didn't make me feel different," he says, giving credit to his grandmother. "She was a strong woman and a great humanitarian—always looking out for other people."

Guy says his relationship with his birth mother and his other two siblings was a good one. "Mother wasn't always present, but she was always there emotionally." His maternal grandfather worked in the Houston shipyards, and his grandmother was a cook and domestic worker. "I grew up in a very communal environment. We were taught to see the good in everyone," he says.

Guy can claim another "first" besides his 2019 Houston Pride title. As his high school's class president during his senior year, he convinced the school that they should add a homecoming-king election to the annual fall event. He was then elected as the first homecoming king, and that contest is now a tradition at the school.

A more sobering tradition at La Marque High School was the segregated senior dances—one for whites and one for blacks. Guy worked to combine the two events into one. "We'd been in school together for 12 years, and for one night of our senior year they were separating us," he remembers. Changing this long-standing racist custom taught Guy how one person's voice can make a difference.

Wider Horizons

Guy enrolled at Prairie View A&M in 1995, majoring in music with the goal of becoming a band teacher. Since he was already showing a talent for modern dance, his college mentor suggested he go to New York City to study dance. Following that, he continued his dance studies in Chicago and Dallas.

Guy finally decided to settle down in Houston in 2001, teaching dance in various Houston Independent School District schools. He is a founding member of the Exclamation Dance Company, where he danced for five years. He also danced with Dance Fusion before starting his Urban Souls Dance Company in 2004. He now teaches dance at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Guy enjoyed going to Houston's popular black gay clubs Uptown/Downtown, Rascals, and Bartini. "Some black clubs were only open on Saturdays, so I partied there but went to mainstream bars on the other days." He recalls that some of those mainstream clubs still had racist edges, even in the new millennium. "We could get past the door, but sometimes the service was bad for blacks. When it became really

obvious, we had to call out some bartenders."

Becoming an Activist

Guy entered the Houston LGBTQ activist scene in 2005 as an analyst and program developer for an HIV-prevention agency that did outreach work among black gay men. The project was headed by Joseph Gathe, a doctor whose work with Houston's LGBTQ community goes back to the worst days of the AIDS epidemic.

When that project closed down due to a funding loss, Guy went to work with Splash, the Houston black gay-pride celebration. "Blacks didn't feel recognized or included in the celebration by the larger community, so Splash emerged to fill the gap. It will be 24 years old this year," he says.

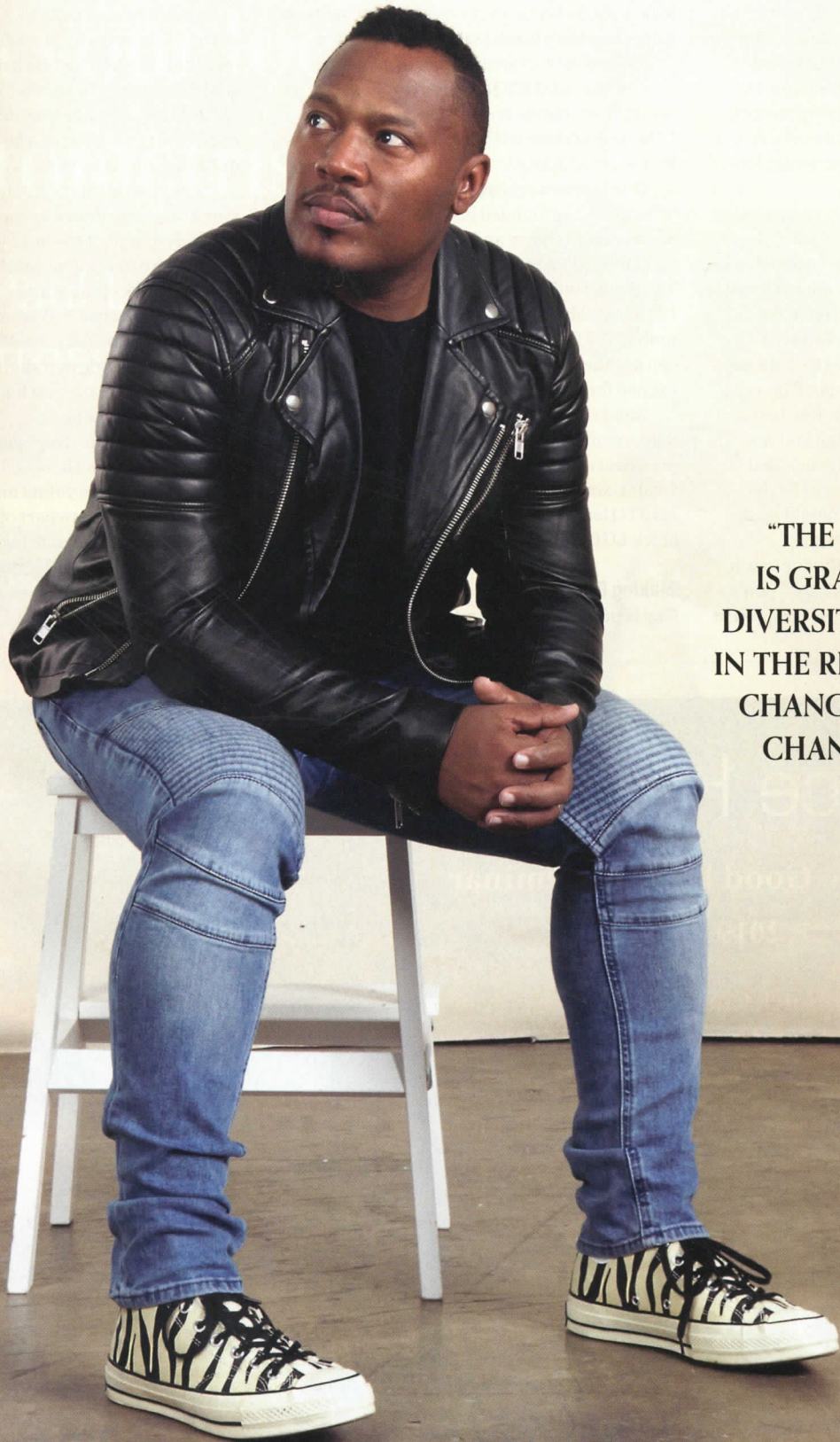
In 2005, Guy joined the Houston chapter of Delta Phi Upsilon, a fraternity for black males. The following year he met Adrian Homer, a special-education teacher, through the fraternity. They became engaged in 2016 and were married in the University of Houston campus chapel.

From 2008 to 2016, Guy managed the business office at Houston Baptist University. He then joined the University of Houston's administrative staff, working in finance.

Taking on Leadership Roles

"I was working the black gay activist space, but when Houston City Council member Jolanda Jones came to speak to our fraternity, we asked her how we could do more. She suggested joining the Houston GLBT Political Caucus—she felt it was the perfect place to learn politics. We all joined."

In 2016, Guy was nominated to be a member of Mayor Turner's LGBTQ Advisory Board. The board was created as a response to the Pulse nightclub massacre, and has 49 members (signifying the number of lives lost in the Orlando tragedy). Guy had been learning about electoral politics in the GLBT Political Caucus.



**"THE COMMUNITY
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— Harrison Guy

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and now he was able to learn about a wide range of community issues. He first served as chairperson of the board's communications committee, and then co-chaired the board with Melanie Pang. This year he became the board's chairperson. "It's a pretty big commitment," he says. "But it's the most diverse group of people I've ever worked with, so we get lots of great ideas put forth."

In 2016, Guy spoke at the first-anniversary rally to commemorate the Pulse nightclub tragedy. Activist Brian Riedel approached him afterwards and asked if he knew about Charles Law, a black gay activist in Houston in the 1970s and '80s. Riedel mentioned an archive recording of Law speaking at the 1979 March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights, and told Guy that he sounded a lot like Law.

Guy found the recording online and was "blown away" by Law's rousing speech that touched on racism and classism within the LGBTQ community. "He was so far ahead of his time, and so truthful," Guy says.

The speech prompted Guy to honor Law's memory by founding the Charles Law Community Archive at the Gregory School. The project

will document Houston's black LGBTQ history, and has begun to receive historic material from Houston's black LGBTQ community.

"When stories are unspoken, people are invisible. Black LGBTQs have always been in the community, but no one sees them," Guy says. "The new archive will be a bridge of awareness for the community."

Guy is now working through Gatekeepers (a nonprofit he founded last year as "a hub for black social activity and activism") to establish an LGBTQ historical marker in Montrose. The plaque will describe the importance of the 1920s neighborhood to the evolution of Houston's LGBTQ community. He is grateful that he can use the mayor's advisory board as a launching pad for such community heritage projects.

Most recently, Guy facilitated a panel discussion with Pete Buttigieg when the gay presidential candidate was in town for a public fundraising event. Buttigieg met with black LGBTQ leaders to discuss issues that concern black LGBTQ voters.

Making Pride History

Guy is proud to be the first black male elected

as a Houston Pride grand marshal. "When Fran Watson won in 2016, I did some research on how many black females had been a marshal. I looked for black male marshals, and could find none. I thought I had to be missing something." After he was nominated, people confirmed that he would be the first black male marshal if he won.

Guy says he was truly surprised when his name was announced as the winner. "I was so pleased that all the hard work of so many people in so many communities—even the straight black community—paid off." As usual, he is looking to use this honor to build bridges.

Of the strong African-American showing in this year's Pride marshals lineup, Guy notes that "it's a signal of what happens when we allow diversity to happen."

Looking ahead, Guy says he wants to see young people being honored as Pride marshals. "We've never had a young marshal, and they feel left out. They are part of our community, too. Intergenerational bridges are important. The community is grappling with diversity and moving in the right direction. Change is hard, but change is good." ▼

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Pride Houston's 2019 Ally Grand Marshal

ALAN ROSEN

Constable Rosen is a longtime supporter of Houston's LGBTQ community.

By BRANDON WOLF | Photo by ASHKAN ROAYEE

Alan Rosen, Houston's 2019 Ally Pride Marshal, says he is an optimist. "I wake up happy in the morning with a purpose in life. I try to find the best in people, and I am a believer in second chances. Yes, I've had setbacks in life, but they have made me who I am," Rosen says. He thinks people need to laugh more every day.

At 51 years of age, Rosen's optimism is still strong. He administers one of the largest and most diverse constable precincts in the nation, and works to make his office reflect the nearly one million citizens he serves in Harris County's Constable Precinct 1. That precinct includes Houston's LGBTQ community, which he has long been an advocate for.

A Native Houstonian

Rosen was born in 1968 at Methodist Hospital. He has an older brother and younger sister, and his father died at the age of 38 from leukemia when Rosen was only 9. He says it was traumatic, but "I had a strong mother, and it shaped me into who I am today." Rosen has always had a diverse group of friends, many of whom are still his closest confidantes.

His maternal grandfather owned 46 toy stores throughout Texas, operating under the names Playhouse Toys, Toy Maker, and Game Player. "I had a Lionel train set that was over the top—it took up nearly a whole room."

The toy stores were a family affair, and at age 14 Rosen started working summers loading trucks in the warehouse before advancing through inventory, buying, and sales. "It was a good idea for me to buy, since I knew what kids my age wanted." The business was eventually sold in the mid-1980s.

After the sale, Rosen's mother started a beauty-supply company. "I began to meet a lot of LGBTQ [clients] through her business," he remembers.

Growing up, Rosen attended Kolter Elementary and Fondren Middle School. He then started at Bellaire High School, but graduated from Westbury High.

Rosen played high-school sports with a passion—football, baseball, swimming, golf, and racquetball. "If there was a sport, I played it," he says. "My mom had a lot of games to go to!"

Rosen enrolled at the University of Houston and graduated with a criminal-justice degree. "I thought I wanted to be a lawyer, and felt that understanding law enforcement should be a part of that education." In his youth, he had always had a lot of older friends who were law-enforcement officers.

In 1990, Rosen began working as a deputy in the Galveston County Sheriff's Office, in charge of maintaining peace and order in the county jail.

When Houston banker Paul Broussard was murdered in 1991 while walking back to his car from a Montrose nightclub, Rosen volunteered to patrol that area to help prevent another tragedy.

In 1992, Rosen began what would be a series of businesses that included a reverse-osmosis water-processing venture, several real-estate holdings, and a specialty chemical company. Rosen also joined the local law-enforcement reserves part-time and was commissioned by the State of Texas, serving without remuneration.

In 1995, Rosen married a girl he had known since he was 13. They now have three children—a 20-year-old daughter studying at the University of Alabama, and 17-year-old twins.

Thriving on Diversity

In 2012, Rosen's predecessor, Precinct 1 constable Jack Abercia, retired from his position. It was a natural fit for Rosen to run for office since he had always been connected to law enforcement and politics. His father-in-law, Richard Schechter, served as the U.S. ambas-

sador to the Bahamas under President Clinton. His wife's cousin, Lillie Schechter, currently chairs the Harris County Democratic Party.

"I ran against eight other candidates," Rosen says. "I had a good story and business experience. I have the compassion, and I love to interact with people in different communities." Rosen was able to communicate that message, and voters found him to be the best choice.

Rosen says his watch-party on election night was a very happy event. "All kinds of people came together from all walks of life, religious faiths, races, and sexual orientations." In 2016, Rosen won re-election for another four years. He will run again in 2020.

Rosen oversees the nation's second-largest constable's office. "It's the most diverse constable precinct in Harris County—from River Oaks mansions to the most impoverished areas, and all in between. It's a melting pot that makes Houston so great." The precinct runs from Bellaire in the south up to West University and River Oaks, then farther north through Spring Branch and almost up to Intercontinental Airport, over to Kashmere Gardens on the east, and including all of downtown and Midtown.

The Precinct 1 office services more than 850,00 people, and Rosen manages 563 employees. "I brought a diverse group of people into the office, and it mirrors the community it serves." The office has jurisdiction both in Houston and in Harris County's unincorporated areas. They handle robberies, DWI arrests, assaults, sexual assaults and serving mental-health and juvenile warrants.

Rosen's office also provides bailiffs for Justice of the Peace courts, and is responsible for security in the downtown courthouses. Additionally, the office handles environmental investigations, animal-cruelty reports, Internet crimes against children, and human trafficking. →

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**"I BROUGHT A DIVERSE
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INTO THE OFFICE,
AND IT MIRRORS THE
COMMUNITY IT SERVES."**

— Alan Rosen

The work fascinates Rosen. “I have a very compassionate side,” he says. “I like to study people and the human condition.”

Rosen especially enjoys the community-outreach part of his job. He sponsors an annual teen leadership summit for 900 at-risk juveniles. “We want to keep them from falling into the juvenile or criminal systems,” he says. The teens tell Rosen first-hand what they don’t like about law enforcement. They ask questions, and he provides straight answers. “If we don’t change the narrative with kids, they will continue disliking law enforcement and not bonding with us. We want to break down barriers.”

The office is constantly working on new programs, such as the new rape-prevention classes that teach women—and men—how to defend themselves. One such class for the LGBTQ community is now offered at the Montrose Center.

A Sea-Change in Law Enforcement

Rosen has seen an amazing evolution in Houston law enforcement agencies since he was a teenager. “The kind of stuff that could occur

back then would not be even close to tolerated today. There is a whole new crop of police, across the board.” He credits better education of law-enforcement personnel with the changes. In order to work in his office, recruits must complete a minimum of 32 hours of law-enforcement classroom work.

Precinct 1 was the first to deploy body cameras on all officers. Supervisors also audit officers to see how they are relating to the community, and Rosen requires his officers to have at least two interactions with the public per hour.

Rosen has many openly LGBTQ employees, and his office was the first to have a Latino assistant chief and a female African-American lieutenant. “It’s sad that we still have to have firsts,” he says, but he is determined to make his group truly reflective of the communities it serves.

The only nightclubs Rosen allows his officers to work are the LGBTQ clubs. They are visible outside the clubs during peak hours in order to ward off potential anti-gay assaults.

During the annual Pride parade, Rosen brings out two high-water rescue vehicles that

the crowds love. In addition, scores of his supporters march with the Precinct 1 group. “We have lots of fun celebrating equality,” he says. Rosen also opens his house once each year for a political fundraiser benefiting the Houston GLBT Political Caucus.

The Honor of Being an Ally Marshal

Rosen says he felt very excited when he won—not so much for himself, but for the statement it will make. “I want people to know that law enforcement stands with the Houston LGBTQ community and that they have an ally in me, personally and professionally. I purposely wanted to be there at the announcement party in my uniform. Precinct 1 is determined to help change the image of local law enforcement.”

And with Rosen, what you see is what you get. “I’m exactly who I am. The community can turn to me with any problem, and I will do everything I can to solve it,” he says.

Rosen is the second law-enforcement officer to be elected a Houston Pride ally grand marshal. Jack Abercia, his predecessor as Harris County’s Precinct 1 constable, was named a Pride marshal in 1996. ▼



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WOODFIRED PIZZA

Pride Houston's 2019 Gender Non-Binary Grand Marshal

MIKE WEBB

Their life of perseverance pays off.

By BRANDON WOLF | Photo by ASHKAN ROAYEE

Mike Webb has seen a lot in just 32 years of living—the trauma of domestic abuse, the loneliness of alienation, and the sting of racism. But these

challenges have also been the catalyst for self-examination, discovery, and empowerment.

As the first recipient of Pride Houston's new Gender Non-Binary Grand Marshal award, Webb contemplates this honor with a laugh: "I'm a queer freaking out."

Growing Up in Houston

Webb was born in Houston in 1987 to young parents—a mother who was 19 and a father who was 20. They had met at Yates High School in the Third Ward, and both went on to join the military before divorcing when Webb was in the first grade. Although Webb's father didn't complete high school, Webb's mother went on to earn two master's degrees in liberal arts and psychology.

Webb recalls a father who was "well-meaning, but he had to face a ton of challenges including an addiction to alcohol and drugs." Webb has a younger brother, and they were often forced to see their mother abused physically and emotionally.

Webb's mother always had "at least two full-time jobs" in order to ensure the boys could attend a private school, "because she knew the systemic obstacles we would have to overcome in order to be successful." Webb remembers how they would catch the bus after school to spend time with their grandmother until Mom could pick them up, usually after 10 p.m. "For the most part, my brother and I knew we had to take care of each other, no matter what."

Mike Webb uses the gender non-binary pronouns they, their, and them.

Webb first attended St. Mary's Catholic School in the Third Ward. Then came Key Middle School for two years. When Webb wrote a love letter to another 7th-grade male student, word got around and Webb was jumped and pushed down a stairway. "I got to a point where I was scared every day, and knew I had to transfer out."

Key Middle's instructors felt there wasn't enough challenge for Webb, and suggested they apply to Chinquapin Preparatory School near the Houston Ship Channel in Highlands. The school provides high-quality college-preparatory education to able and motivated youth from underserved families.

Webb attended grades 8 through 12 there, living with other male students in the campus dorm. "I was a weird kid, skipping physical education and hiding under a desk to read Harry Potter," Webb remembers.

While at Chinquapin, Webb was editor of the school newspaper, a student government representative, and eventually a dorm captain for the middle-school students, supervising their daily routine and resolving any conflicts that arose.

Webb was especially interested in social movements, observing that "politics can help people who don't have a voice." After coming out to close friends and the school administration, Webb wrote an op-ed for the school paper, using anonymous quotes from LGBTQ students who described the anti-gay encounters they had endured at the school. The article prompted officials to investigate their policies and make changes. Webb saw how that effort had created change, which sparked a deep interest in becoming a political activist.

Moving Out West

Webb chose to leave Houston and attend Reed College in Portland, Oregon. "I didn't grow up in an accepting family. At church, I would routinely hear anti-gay rhetoric. Going to college outside Houston made me independent from that. Reed was a safe place for LGBTQ students. I'd been fighting intolerance all my life, so I wanted to be somewhere that I didn't have to [do that anymore]. Everyone at Reed seemed to know I was gay when I arrived. Word got around, and that made it so easy to be out." Webb earned a degree in political science, feeling that government is the primary way to change lives. "Reed had genderless bathrooms in 2005—but my blackness was not equally accepted," they remember.

Webb's faculty mentor suggested a transfer to the historically black Howard University in Washington D.C. "He felt I needed to be reminded of my strengths." Webb fell in love with Washington, "and with myself as a black person."

Webb secured a part-time internship with Houston congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, worked in the Howard bookstore, and had a full-time student course load. Webb then returned to Reed for their senior year and graduated.

Gravitating to Public Service

Webb moved back to Washington after college to begin working as a legal aide at a boutique law firm focusing on family law. They stayed on in D.C. for three more years, hoping to get a job on the Hill. Although that opportunity never materialized, Webb was able to begin building a professional network.

Then in 2010, a job opened in Mayor Annise Parker's administration for a VISTA volunteer. "I was very motivated, because I wanted to →



“MANY PEOPLE FEEL STRONGLY CONNECTED TO ONE GENDER, BUT I’M NOT CONNECTED TO EITHER. BEING NON-BINARY CAN TRANSLATE INTO DIFFERENT THINGS FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE.”

— Mike Webb

Color Wheel Umbrella by Streamline Imagined at the Contemporary Arts Museum store

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have an impact and felt I could. This was right at the time I learned I was living with HIV, and it made me very serious about doing something meaningful. I helped 200 kids to better prepare for college—something that never would have happened without the program.”

Webb found returning to Houston exciting. “When I left Houston I was not empowered, but it was exciting to return and re-experience my life.” After the year with VISTA, Legacy Community Health offered Webb a job in its public-health group. “It’s the longest job I’ve ever held—five years. I loved the culture there, and seeing lives changed in front of my eyes.”

In 2016, Webb went to work as an aide to Texas state senator Sylvia Garcia. The job was based in Houston, but Webb lived in Austin during the legislative session and traveled home to serve on the board of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus.

When Garcia became a U.S. congresswoman, Webb began working for Harris County commissioner Rodney Ellis. In 2018, Webb became president of the Caucus, and won a second term this year.

Accepting a Non-Binary Identity

Coming to grips with being non-binary took

time for Webb. “It was a part of myself I never accepted. Mentally and emotionally, I wasn’t a man. To simplify, I don’t identify with any gender in binary (male and female) terms. I am somewhere on that spectrum. Many people feel strongly connected to one [gender, but] I’m not connected to either. Being non-binary can translate into different things for different people.”

At first, Webb sort of shrugged off their feelings about gender, thinking “I’m just weird.” But that changed when they listened to Landon Richie, a young trans man, testify against the Texas bathroom bill two years ago. “He was so powerful and inspirational. Being non-binary was a part of myself I never accepted. But I thought if Landon can fight for his targeted community, I need to accept myself. I already have so many layers that I have to fight for—why add one more?” But after self-reflection, and being around people who were fighting to allow transgender people to be who they are, Webb felt that “I need to be an advocate for myself.”

Webb says that even if people don’t understand the non-binary concept, they can still be respectful. “I feel more free when I’m not referred to as male or female. Pronouns are important—it’s like coming out of the closet

again. I just ask that people remember the moment they finally learned to love themselves as LGBTQ. That’s how it feels for me to be non-binary. It’s a final step of freedom.”

History in the Making

Webb is aware that being Houston’s first gender non-binary Pride marshal is historic. Just hearing that Pride Houston was considering a new non-binary marshal category nearly brought Webb to tears. “One of largest LGBTQ organizations in the South is recognizing non-binaries. How powerful is that!”

Webb felt very validated when they won this year’s new marshal title. “I like to think of the intersectional coalition that voted for me. It pierced right through the progressive bubbles we operate in.” Webb also thanks Becca Colt-Meier (also a 2019 non-binary nominee) for paving the way.

Webb is happy to be part of “a great team of marshals,” and is also impressed by this year’s African-American representation. Webb has not always felt accepted and loved within many of the community’s sub-groups. “This is first time in my life I feel accepted. It appears that the tide is turning.” ▼

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PRIDE 2019

Local Trans Women
of Color are 2019's

HONORARY GRAND MARSHALS

Their selection honors
the 50th anniversary of
the Stonewall Rebellion.

By BRANDON WOLF
Photos by ASHKAN ROAYEE

This year's honorary Pride marshals are four Houston trans women of color who have been making a difference in the lives of other local trans women of color: Ana Andrea Molina, Atlantis Narcisse, Dee Dee Watters, and Monica Roberts. By choosing to honor these four Houstonians, the committee of former Pride marshals pays tribute to the trans women of color who are credited with initiating the Stonewall Inn civil-rights rebellion in 1969: Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Stormé DeLarverie. This year's "Summer of '69" Pride theme looks back 50 years to three seminal events from the 1960s—Stonewall, the NASA moon landing, and Woodstock. →



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HONORING THE TRANS WOMEN OF STONEWALL

Houston trans women of color Monica Roberts, Ana Andrea Molina, Atlantis Narcisse, and Dee Dee Watters.



Ana Andrea Molina

Ana Andrea Molina remembers feeling different by age 5, relating more to feminine personality traits. She especially enjoyed imitating the great Latina singers who made her feel the intensity of their passion. One day, Molina's mother discovered that Molina was dressed in her sister's clothes, and hit her. Molina went to church every Sunday to ask God for forgiveness.

Then at age 18, after two suicide attempts, Molina left the closet. She had given up asking God to change her, and wondered if there was a pill that could do the job. Talking with her mother did not resolve the issue, so Molina left home.

Molina says that she grew up thinking of trans women as sex workers. Alone and without a job, she learned how to work the streets. "Life was very hard, and that is why many of us talk about the [desperate situations] from which we came," she says. But neither the danger nor the violence could stop her, now that she had found her true self.

In 2015, tired of racism and transphobia, she organized, Organización Latina de Trans en Texas (OLTT), a non-profit empowerment and leadership group for Latinas. She expected 15 women at the first meeting, but 50 showed up.

In 2017, Molina traveled to Austin to fight against SB6 (the "bathroom bill") and SB4 (the bill banning sanctuary cities in Texas). She introduced herself to the legislators as "an undocumented transgender immigrant woman."

Also that year, Molina secured funding to

establish Casa Anandrea, the first safe-space for trans, queer, and intersex people of color. "It is a shelter for homeless people who would otherwise be on the streets or living with domestic violence—regardless of immigration status, race, language, or HIV status. It is an inclusive space, receiving those who need it." The refuge is still open, and although Molina says that resources are running low, she refuses to accept "closed" as an option.

Molina says, "This house has served refugees emigrating from their countries who are released from Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers." She has helped 21 trans women of color coming out of the detention centers, and has worked with 16 others to legally change their name and gender markers, all at no cost to them.

Molina believes that local law-enforcement officers contribute to the system of oppression that criminalizes and deports undocumented persons. "The community should not forget that the system of oppression works in many ways, including [against] members of our community."

Of her selection as an honorary marshal, Molina says, "I feel proud and privileged that after 50 years, trans women of color are back in front of the march for pride! I am continuing to follow their legacy."

Molina's message to trans youth of color: "History continues to be written, so be a part of it and write the chapter that corresponds to your history. Do not be afraid—you have nothing to lose, and much to win. Do not be afraid of success. If Sylvia and Marsha and Ana Andrea could do it, then you can also do it."

**"TO CELEBRATE THE
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TRULY MEASURE."**

— Atlantis Narcisse



Atlantis Narcisse

"I didn't know for the longest time that I was trans," Atlantis Narcisse admits. "I knew merely that I was a woman. During my upbringing, trans was not a word that was used throughout my community—we were women. As persons of color and trans, we conformed and blended into society as much as we could, because of stigma and for safety."

Coming out as trans was a bit different for Narcisse. "I was also raising a son, and I didn't want anything about me to subject my child to being bullied or teased." Then one day her son asked her, "When are you going to be happy?" During that conversation, we agreed that once he had graduated from high school, I would transition into my life."

Narcisse is a mentor to countless trans people. She works at the Montrose Center, helping trans people navigate available resources and services and learn how to advocate for themselves. She has a personal mission to help trans people get their legal names and gender markers changed. She has formed Save Our Sisters United to provide a safe space for trans women of color and assist them without stigma or judgment.

Reflecting on her selection as an honorary marshal, Narcisse says, "It's kind of surreal, but I think it is exactly what is needed in society, as well as throughout our diverse LGBTQ+ communities. I am sure it will hit me more when the parade occurs, but to celebrate the trans pioneers that played major parts in the whole gay movement, [beginning] at Stonewall, sends a bigger message than we could ever truly measure." →

Her message to trans youth of color is: “You alone own your visibility, and should never feel bad about simply wanting to live and enjoy life.”



Dee Dee Watters

Dee Dee Watters knew she was trans at a young age, but didn’t know what to call it. When she finally heard the word “trans” in high school, it made sense to her. She came out at 16.

Watters has been very involved in Houston’s LGBTQ community. She has participated in the annual Transgender Day of Resources and Healthy Living, and on multiple conference discussion panels. She also works to create more spaces for trans women of color.

Regarding her selection as an honorary, Pride marshal, Watters says, “It’s absolutely amazing. I never thought I’d have the honor of being an honorary grand marshal. I’m pleased and excited—just wait until you see me at the parade!”

Watters has this message for trans youth of color: “As you navigate through life, be true to yourself and know that sometimes in life you have to go through something in order to get somewhere! The important thing is knowing where you’re going.”

Monica Roberts

Monica Roberts says that by age 5 she realized she was “different,” but didn’t attach a name to it until the much-publicized sex change of tennis player Renée Richards in 1976.

In April 1994, Roberts transitioned. She was working as a Continental Airlines gate

agent at the time, and after preliminary counseling at the Rosenberg Clinic in Galveston, she came to work presenting as a female for the first time. Roberts recalls the drama that ensued during that first week: “It took years to pass. And right-wing women tried to get me banned from the women’s bathroom, but failed.” Two more airline employees transitioned after seeing her lead the way.

Roberts says she had no intention of becoming an activist until a local organization published a series of articles about 100 out and proud trans people in 1997. Frustrated that the series failed to include a single African-American trans female, Roberts went to the next Gender Pac Lobby Day in June 1998 and quickly become involved in trans advocacy with the help of activists Phyllis Frye and Sarah de Palma, who mentored and inspired her. In 1999, she had her name changed and also worked to include trans people in the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

**“I NEVER THOUGHT
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GRAND MARSHAL.
I’M PLEASED AND
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UNTIL YOU SEE ME
AT THE PARADE!”**

— Dee Dee Watters

For most of the 2000s, Roberts lived in Louisville, Kentucky, working with their local equality campaign and serving on the board of Southern Comfort, the largest trans conference in the country. She returned to Houston in 2010, and within a week was attending the Texas Transgender Nondiscrimination Summit at Rice University.

Roberts formed a national coalition to take on the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in the days before that group officially advocated for including trans people in the (still unpassed) federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act

(ENDA). In 2007, she was part of a trans lobbying day at the Capitol in Washington D.C. that included a meeting with then-senator Barack Obama. “I believe that is why he was



able to understand trans issues so well,” she says.

Roberts co-chaired the Creating Change Conference held in Houston in 2014, which is still the group’s best-attended conference. Roberts recalls receiving a shout-out from trans actress Laverne Cox during her keynote speech.

Roberts says her proudest moment was helping pass HERO (the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance) in 2015. She was also asked to join Mayor Turner’s LGBTQ Advisory Board that year.

In 2006, Roberts founded the popular web blog TransGriot, which she is proud to say has been active for “13 years and counting.” She is the winner of the 2018 GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) media award for Outstanding Blog after being nominated four times for the award.

She is also the recipient of numerous local and national human-rights awards. As for her selection as one of the four honorary Pride marshals, Roberts says, “I feel honored to be selected. The four of us combined are doing a lot of work in different lanes.”

Roberts would like to tell trans youth of color that “black trans people are also black people. You don’t turn in your black card when you identify as trans. Know that you are loved, wanted, needed, and necessary. We need people to speak truth to power on a wide range of issues. Lobby and educate—make clear that we are part of the diverse mosaic of life, and that you will be respected.” ▼