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34



72



52



48



54

34 COVER STORY

WOMEN WHO MEAN BUSINESS

Inspiring Houston entrepreneurs

44

TOO BOOTYLICIOUS FOR YOU, BABE

Catastrophic Theatre serves up the sweet and sassy *Bootycandy*

48

THE GAYEST SHOW ON EARTH?

Varla Jean Merman brings *Under A Big Top* to Houston

52

FLESH & BLOOD

Alley Theatre premieres *The Humans*

54

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LENGTHENING SHADOWS

Core Dance explores loss in *As the Shadows Grow Longer*

56

GOING SOUTH WITH DORIAN ELECTRA

Nonbinary pop star headlines a queer spring-break party at Pearl Bar

60

VROOM TO MOVE

Car trends for 2019

66

A CONVERSATION

With Lynn Beckwith of Beckwith's Car Care

69

TEXAS CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE UNITE

Nation's first statewide coalition of LGBTQ-owned and ally businesses

71

SERVED IN SILENCE

Mark David Gibson's story or service

72

GET YOUR REAR IN GEAR

It's Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

76

GROWING FOR GOOD HEALTH

Avenue 360 Health & Wellness

81

A 54-YEAR ROMANCE

Prominent artist and pediatrician first met at University of Houston in 1946

88

AMAZING GRACE

Nadia Bolz-Weber's radical new Christianity

91

'MORE POEMS ABOUT BUILDINGS AND FOOD'

Poems by Gregg Shapiro

95

WEDDING GUIDE

Nickie Gullahorn and Sharla Weissinger's Hill Country romance

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DEPARTMENTS

NEWS & COMMENT

12 NEWS & COMMUNITY

24 LEFTOUT

Taylor, made: what goes around comes around

26 UNAPOLOGETICALLY TRANS

To Austin and back (and back and back): reflecting on 20 years of lobbying

29 MONEYSMART

How to get out—and stay out—of debt: early loan repayment is one of many winning strategies

32 TIMEOUT

OUTSMART's readers and recommendations

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

90 READOUT

Growing Up Queer: many youth know early in their lives that they are not heteronormal

92 GROOVEOUT

Queers for your ears: John Grant, Troye Sivan, Calum Scott, Morgxn, Corey TuT, and more

100 QUEER QUOTES

Billy Porter, Amandla Stenberg, Martin Short, Jeff Whitty, and Wanda Sykes & Donald Trump

OUT & ABOUT

103 OUTTHERE

106 BAR/CLUB GUIDE

112 SIGNOUT

114 SCENEOUT

ADVERTISERS INDEX

108 ADVERTISERS

110 CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

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WOMEN WHO MEAN BUSINESS

Inspiring Houston entrepreneurs

Tinisha Cox,
Vanessa Barrow,
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Pg. 34

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

March is Women's History Month, and we are celebrating! In this issue, Jenny Block and Marene Gustin profile three fascinating business women, all savvy entrepreneurs from Houston's LGBTQ community. We hope you find their stories inspiring.

Also in this issue, Brandon Wolf writes about a lesbian relationship from the 1940s. It's a beautiful love story documented in the couple's personal papers that they donated to the University of Houston's LGBT History Research Collection.

Lourdes Zavaleta interviews Dorian Electra, a gender-fluid entertainer who straddles both sides of the gender equation.

March is also Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and we're doing our part to bring attention to this serious disease by featuring Paula Chambers, a CRC survivor who is a testament to the importance of getting tested early.

Don Maines chats with Jeffery Roberson Loe, better known by his drag persona Varla Jean Merman. Loe previews his bawdy March 9 drag performance at MATCH that will feature "jaw-dropping videos, awe-inspiring songs, and death-defying wigs."

We also catch up with Catastrophic Theatre actor Xzavien Hollins, who talks about his portrayal of a young gay man growing up in a homophobic household in *Bootycandy*, another MATCH production getting some well-deserved buzz since it debuted last month.

And a third man of the stage, openly gay director Brandon Weinbrenner, is directing a play by the also-gay playwright Stephan Karam. The Tony-winning hit will mark Weinbrenner's first main-stage production at the Alley Theatre.

Finally, Neil Ellis Orts profiles choreographer D. Patton White, who discusses how grief gave way to greatness with his beautiful ballet of loss, *As the Shadows Grow Longer*.

We Houstonians are fortunate to have

many people in our community with stories worth telling. Do you know someone who is doing extraordinary things? Log on to OutSmartMagazine.com and pitch us a story idea. We always appreciate your input, support, and encouragement.

Enjoy our March issue, and honor the favorite women in your life this month!

Greg Jeu
PUBLISHER



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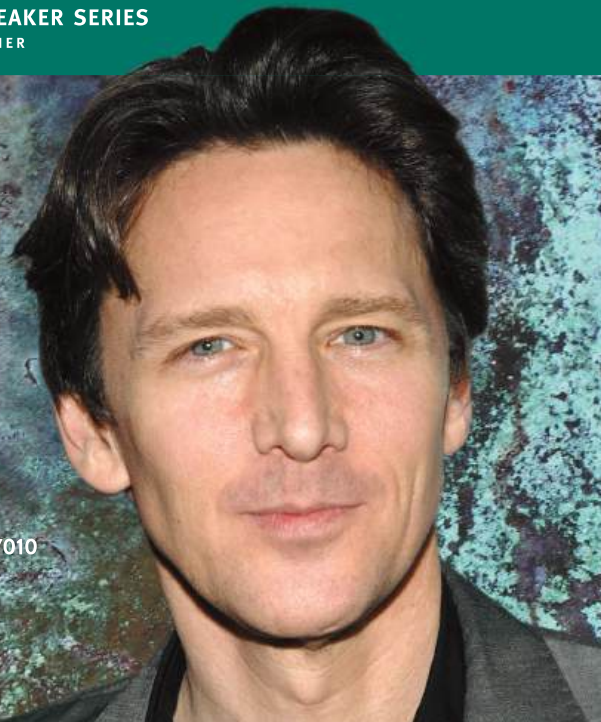
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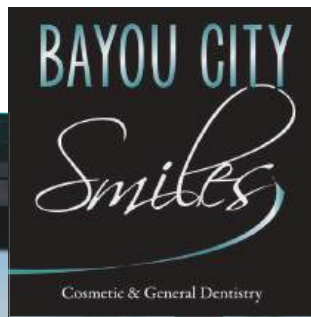
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#BanTheBible Tries to Spread Irrational Fear

Democratic lawmakers shut down the lie and vow to continue fighting for the protections of LGBTQ Texans.

By RYAN M. LEACH

Anti-LGBTQ groups are pushing a new hashtag this legislative session: #BantheBible. The campaign, which is run by the anti-LGBTQ hate group Texas Values, seeks to warn Texans that passing legislation to protect LGBTQ civil rights would in essence be “Banning the Bible” and thereby discriminating against Christianity.

The religious advocacy organization launched a website, promoted the metadata tag #BantheBible, and began flooding social media and the press in February with allegations that pro-LGBTQ laws force Christians to violate their faith.

“‘Ban the Bible’ doesn’t have to mean confiscating physical Bibles. LGBT activists aren’t that obvious with their intentions (yet),” Texas Values communications associate James Wesolek wrote in *The Federalist*. “But it does mean something even worse. Stripping Texans of their right to practice biblical teachings in their day to day lives.”

Although the #BantheBible campaign is new to Texas, a virtually identical campaign was used in California last year, in response to a bill to ban harmful and debunked “conversion therapy.” This campaign is being driven by a small, closely connected group of political donors—the same folks who drove the “bathroom bill” issue in 2017.



Progressive Power Players

Rep. Mary Gonzalez (center), chair of Texas’ first LGBTQ Caucus, stood before the group to lead its first press conference at the Capitol in early February. The caucus seeks to create awareness and advocate for queer Texans by backing pro-equality legislation and eradicating anti-LGBTQ propaganda.

Queer Texans and their allies say that #BanTheBible is intended to scare voters and stir the pot in Austin. Rep. Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) believes Texas Values, a group involved in pushing the fear-mongering slogan “No Men in Women’s Bathrooms,” is again selling a “false narrative.”

“These policies aren’t about banning the Bible,” Gonzalez, chair of the LGBTQ Caucus, said in an interview. “These policies are about not supporting discrimination. Texas Values knows that.”

Religious liberty is already guaranteed by the First Amendment, the Texas Constitution, and numerous other federal and state laws. None of the bills proposed by Democrats would alter the

status quo in any way. In fact, these proposed nondiscrimination bills actually protect people of all faiths from unfair discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. And several of the laws being erroneously framed as “Ban the Bible” bills actually exempt religiously affiliated entities like churches and religious schools entirely.

Most of these bills seek to update existing statewide nondiscrimination laws to include LGBTQ people. One bill would simplify the process that transgender Texans must follow to change their gender markers. Another would remove language from a statute that compels HIV-education programs to convey the outdated and false claim

that “homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense.” A third would allow voters to decide whether to repeal the Texas constitutional amendment that defines marriage as being between one man and one woman. That provision was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2015.

In almost every prior session, Democrats have filed similar bills, and none of them would restrict a citizen’s religious beliefs or practices in any way. What is different this session is that for the first time in decades, Democrats have started winning in Texas.

During the 2018 election, state Democrats took several seats previously held by Repub-



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Methodist Congregation Will Continue to Embrace Diversity

The United Methodist Church votes to condemn homosexuality, but Houston's Bering UMC doubles down on its inclusive mission.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

Members of Bering Memorial United Methodist Church packed their bags and headed to St. Louis on February 22, hopeful that the 2019 United Methodist General Conference would call for the denomination to finally become LGBTQ-affirming.

On the bus ride north, the Houston-based group sang hymns, prayed, and prepared to advocate for marginalized folks within the United Methodist Church. Bering, a congregation that has embraced queer people since the early '80s, was among several groups at the conference pushing for the United Methodist Church to allow same-sex marriages and ordain LGBTQ pastors.

Rev. Diane McGehee, Bering's pastor, recorded live videos on social media to update members who were following the conference proceedings. When she arrived at the meeting, McGehee went online to address her church back home. Nearly 70 percent of Bering's 500 members identify as as LGBTQ.

"I love you all and I know that God is with us," McGehee shared on Bering's Facebook page. "We're going to trust God that no matter what happens, God is going to honor our stance of love for all people."

Throughout the conference,



Rainbow Riders

Bering members hit the road for the United Methodist Church's General Conference in St. Louis on Feb. 22. The group attended the meeting to urge church leaders to vote for full LGBTQ inclusion in the church.

Bering's timeline displayed videos of McGehee praying, worship services, and testimonials from LGBTQ and other leaders in the United Methodist Church.

"I support this motion to put this before the judicial council, so that we together can make a decision for the church," openly gay New York delegate JJ Warren stated, "hopefully one that ensures wherever we are, the United Methodist Church continues and allows people to feel their calling that God has put on their heart, no matter whom they love."

However, there were several higher-ups who spoke against the move toward LGBTQ-inclusion—with the global church's African delegation being nearly unanimous in its opposition.

"If we bring this virus into our church, it will bring illness to us all," countered Rev. Thomas Berlin of Virginia.

On February 24, the conference took a turn in opposition of LGBTQ folks by voting against the proposed One Church Plan, which would have allowed individual churches to decide how they handle issues of same-sex weddings and the sexuality of their clergy. On February 26, the church finally decided to pass the Traditional Plan and retain existing church policy stating that "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

"Will Bering stop being a safe place for LGBTQ folks?" and "Will it stop being accepting of the entire community?" are

some of the questions that Bering members asked McGehee.

A split within the United Methodist Church is now looming. McGehee says that regardless of the decision, Bering will continue to support and serve LGBTQ individuals.

"I do not yet know what the future of Bering is, or what it will look like in terms of structure or affiliation to the United Methodist Church," McGehee told OutSmart. "I can say that Bering will continue to be fully inclusive and celebratory of all folks—and in this moment, particularly the LGBTQIA+ community."

Bering was established in 1848 by German-speaking immigrants who were not welcomed in other places of worship. The church was

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licans in both the House and the Senate. Although those victories didn't grant legislative control to the Democrats, it appears that the GOP losses did manage to scare the conservative groups who are generally fighting to make the state more dangerous for LGBTQ people, through legislation like bathroom bills and so-called "religious freedom" laws.

Texas is a state run almost entirely by Republicans, and is one of 28 states where there are no explicit statewide laws protecting people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, housing, and public accommodations. However, there is a significant cadre of progressive lawmakers in Austin that proffer pro-LGBTQ legislation session after session.

"It's shocking to realize that in 2019 our state laws prohibiting unfair discrimination still don't include LGBTQ Texans. The time is now to protect all Texans equally. Updating our laws to help end unfair discrimination is long overdue," Gonzalez said.

The new report released by Equality Texas shows that discrimination still shapes the lives of many LGBTQ people and their families. A recent study found that a quarter of LGBTQ adults experienced some form of discrimination in the last year. And even

those who had not experienced discrimination reported that the risk of discrimination affected major life decisions like where to live or whether to apply for a new job.

On the bright side, data released by national polling organization Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) shows that 64 percent of Texas voters also support laws to protect LGBTQ Texans from discrimination. A majority of every major demographic group, including white evangelicals, supports nondiscrimination laws.

Senator Jose Rodriguez (D-El Paso), author of the comprehensive non-discrimination Senate Bill 151, which would prohibit discrimination against folks based on their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, says that despite the push against pro-LGBTQ legislation, he will continue to file bills to ensure that all Texans are afforded their constitutional rights.

"Texas is diminished when it sanctions the denial of housing or employment for LGBTQ Texans, or fights to keep unconstitutional and unenforceable laws on the books," Rodriguez said. "Simply put, gay and trans Texans have the same values as anyone: to be secure in their livelihoods and to live a life of purpose, free from public discrimination."

originally situated at Milam and McKinney streets in downtown Houston, before moving to Montrose in 1926.

After many LGBTQ Houstonians moved to Montrose in the 1960s and '70s, the church's administrative board decided that everyone would be welcomed without discrimination or prejudice. In 1991, Bering's membership voted to become a part of the Reconciling Ministries Network, a Methodist group that seeks justice for LGBTQ people.

Anti-LGBTQ regulations were added into the United Methodist Book of Discipline in 1972. In 2016, a debate to remove those rules dominated the church's General Conference, which occurs every four years. And in St. Louis last month, church leaders ultimately chose to continue to exclude queer folks from full participation in the church.

"As a United Methodist clergy person, I ask forgiveness from the LGBTQIA+ community for the harm that we have caused," McGehee says. "Bering is with you, and if there is anything that we can do to support you, we are here."

For more information about Bering, visit beringumc.org.

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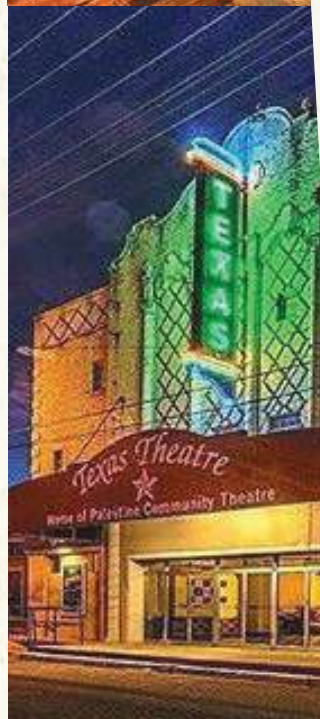
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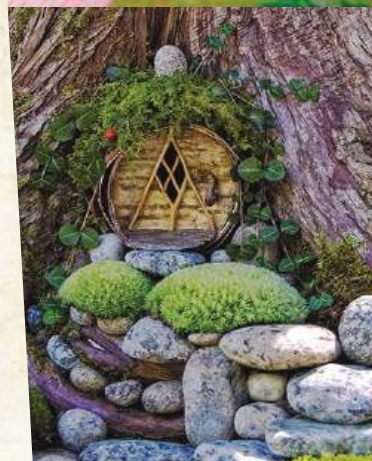
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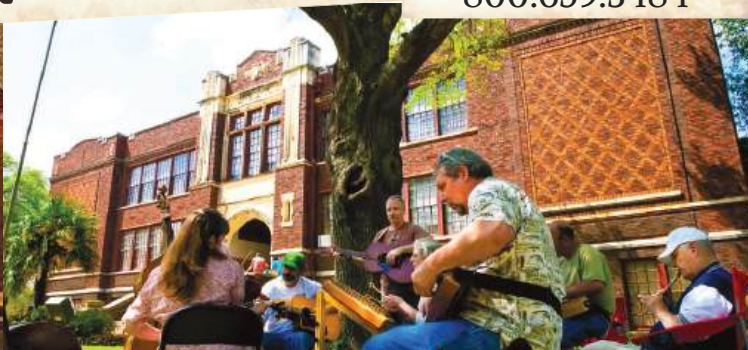
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A conversation with Reproductive Endocrinologist and Fertility Specialist Dr. Heather Hoff

Dr. Heather Hoff is a native South Dakotan, and she graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in biology and chemistry from the University of South Dakota. She obtained her medical degree and completed the Research Distinction Track at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine. Her residency training in Obstetrics and Gynecology was completed at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where she received numerous teaching and research awards. Dr. Hoff then ventured south for her Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility fellowship at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Dr. Hoff enjoys all aspects of Reproductive Endocrinology, with special interest in infertility, same-sex couple fertility support, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and elective fertility preservation.



Dr. Heather Hoff
LGBT Specialist

What inspired you to become a physician?

My fascination with medicine began as child on a small dairy farm in South Dakota. I was certain I wanted to be a veterinarian because loved caring for the animals on the farm, especially the young calves I helped deliver and feed. That was my plan until I had emergency surgery as a teenager. I was blown away by how my surgeon treated me so compassionately and skillfully. Once in medical school, though, it became obvious that my passion lies in helping people on their journey to become parents.

Does being a lesbian affect the way you care for and treat the LGBTQ patients?

As a lesbian, I know that going to the doctor can be intimidating. Sometimes, even being a physician myself, I am unsure what and how much to share. I don't know what assumptions my physician has made, how comfortable they are with LGBT patients, or even their education regarding issues specific healthcare within our LGBT community. I provide an open, safe, supportive, and encouraging environment that I believe is palpable.

My partner and I have also been through the process on the other side as fertility patients and have undergone ovarian stimulation and egg retrieval. Undergoing this adventure from the patient side has been extraordinarily valuable in increasing my understanding and empathy for all of my patients, but in particular has allowed me to personally experience the anxiety, unique challenges, and excitement of a gay patient on the path to parenthood.

What is one thing you want every LGBTQ person to know about their fertility options?

The fertility journey for LGBTQ patients can be confusing and overwhelming. I am here to offer you education and guidance for your reproductive options based on your specific history and goals. My aim is to provide you with a compassionate and personalized treatment plan. I know this process can be anxiety provoking, but I am committed to helping you feel at ease and to achieving a successful outcome.

What are you most passionate about professionally?

I believe that every person has a right to pursue their reproductive goals, and I am passionate about making access to reproductive healthcare a reality.

What do you and your family like to do for fun?

Cooking is one of my favorite hobbies because it allows me to be creative, spend time with the ones I love, and share a delicious meal.

What are you passionate about outside of work?

I love to explore different cultures. Here in Houston, I am fortunate to be able to experience various traditions in food and festivals, and I also enjoy the opportunity to travel both nationally and internationally to immerse myself in other ways of life.

LGBT Services

- Ovulation induction with intrauterine insemination (IUI) using donor sperm
- In vitro fertilization (IVF) cycles including the use of donor eggs, donor sperm and/or a gestational carrier (surrogate)
- Reciprocal IVF cycles using eggs of one partner and the uterus of the other partner, giving lesbian couples the opportunity to physically and genetically share in the pregnancy
- Egg and sperm freezing for fertility preservation for the transgender community



HoustonFertilityInstitute.com
281-357-1881

By STEVEN FOSTER

QUEER THINGS to DO



Resolve to stay involved with the help of our weekly planner. Visit OutSmartMagazine.com



Verde Good Cause

Brian Tapia-Sacum (l) and Marco Tapia sport the color of the season at last year's event.

COMMUNITY

March 15

BRINGIN' IN THE GREEN

Everyone turns Irish 'round this time of year, and we can't think of a better place to wear—and put—your green than Bringin' in the Green, the Montrose Center's annual benefit. Of course there will be plenty of munchies and drinks for you to nosh and sip, but as you're doing that, make sure to bid on the silent auction. This year is

heavy on the luxury items like weekend getaways, staycations, and night-on-the-town packages priced for a steal. (We hear it's a great spot to rub elbows with the movers and shakers, too!) Thanks to the generous underwriting of Glenn and Justin Dickson, all ticket sales and sponsorships support Hatch Youth Services' collaborative to end local LGBTQ youth homelessness through

rapid rehousing, case management, a drop-in center, and street outreach. Oh, the dress is business/business casual, and don't forget to wear something green. Don't miss one of LGBTQ Houston's favorite and longest-running events. Friday, March 15, 5–8 pm at 2346 Wroxtton, the home of Glenn and Justin Dickson. Tickets are \$35 at the door (\$30 for seniors) or you can get them at montrosceneter.org.



SHOP

March 29–31

Bayou City Art Festival

This thing just gets bigger every year, and while we miss some of the perks the place once offered—those walking plant people!—we still like the festival to find some bargains on works by some pretty great artists. And don't forget, this is the spring one, so it's held in Memorial Park.

artcolonyassociation.org



COMMUNITY

March 23

TUTS' 50th Anniversary Gala

Idina Menzel—one-time witch and celebrated Tony winner of stage, screen, and music—joins TUTS for their biggest event in decades. Menzel knows how to entertain a crowd, so expect her trademark talent to be on full display.

tuts.com

COMMUNITY

March 23

The 66th Annual Diana Awards

One of Houston's favorite comedic black-tie events of the year is back for their 66th. This roast of Houston's finest throws all of its proceeds to help local charities, so know that you're making fun of people for a good cause. Fun fact: the Diana Foundation is recognized as the oldest continuously active gay organization in the U.S. thedianafoundation.org



Featured Entertainment

PDA is a high-energy band that covers anything from the classic boy-band era—The Jackson 5, The Temptations, The Four Tops—to the '90s era—Boyz II Men, N'Sync, Backstreet Boys—to today—Justin Timberlake, Justin Bieber, Bruno Mars. Inset: hosts Sister Helen Holy and Blackberri.

THEATER

March 1-24

'THE HUMANS'

On Thanksgiving, three generations of the Blake family gather at the youngest daughter and her boyfriend's apartment. Tensions rise and secrets are divulged. The hopes and fears of each generation are revealed in this Tony Award-winning Best Play that the *New York Times* said was at times "blistering funny" and "the best play of the year."

alleytheatre.org

ART

March 7

HeART & HARMONY

The 6th annual HeART & Harmony features an art auction with pieces by well-known Houston-based artists, and food by celebrated chefs Monica Pope and Brandi Key (LMN Hospitality). It is a fun, interactive event—a "non-gala, gala"—that brings the Houston community together in support of combating homelessness and helping those in need.

homeless-healthcare.org

PARTY

March 8

GOING SOUTH: A QUEER HTX SXSW PARTY

Billed as the greatest—well, it's definitely the earliest—Spring Break party, it will be hosted at Pearl Bar. The \$10 cover gets you in the door and able to hear from queer pop acts like Dorian Electra, Umrü, Space Kiddettes, FAGedelics, ST00, Wade in the Sonic Joy, and Dori Delafuente, aka Street Queer.

pearlhouston.com

THEATER

March 9

VARLA JEAN MERMAN: UNDER THE BIG TOP

Step right up and prepare to be amazed, dazzled, and possibly disturbed. Drag superstar and erstwhile carny Varla Jean Merman is coming to town with a three-ring circus, and all she's looking for is the titular Big Top. This "Freakiest Show on Earth" will showcase jaw-dropping videos, awe-inspiring songs, and death-defying wigs.

matchouston.org

COMMUNITY

March 10

PRIDE GALVESTON OUT4BRUNCH

Out4brunch and 23rd Street Station are holding a fundraiser for Pride Galveston. There will be burger plates for a \$10 donation, raffles, a drag show, and superb drink specials like \$1 mimosas, \$2 Bloody Marys, and \$3 Kiki shots.

23rdstreetstation.com

DANCE

March 14-16

'AS THE SHADOWS GROW LONGER'

D. Patton White's *As the Shadows Grow Longer* has become a meditation on the notion that our lives have meaning because of the relationships we form over the course of a lifetime. What started out as an expression of grief has unfolded into a piece that investigates the full range of interpersonal relationships.

coredance.org



COMMUNITY

March 16

MARCH FOR BLACK WOMEN

Join black women, as well as cis, trans, diverse identities, and their allies for the 2nd Annual March for Black Women Houston. This year's march is a celebration of the power, resilience, strength, and beauty that is black women.

m4bwhou.com

COMMUNITY

March 16

'LIVE' 2019

Venerable fundraiser Don Gill vowed three years ago to stop what he was excellent at: fundraising. Well, three years later it's lucky for charity that he didn't make good on that promise. This year, Don Gill Productions has chosen Pride Charities Benevolence Fund as their recipient. Show starts at 5, with a social at 4. Broadway tunes, duets, trios, and live dancing. So swing by Tony's Corner Pocket.

resurrectionmcc.org

THEATER

March 17

PUDDLES PITTY PARTY

The infamous crying clown with incredible pipes will serenade Stafford on March 17. The famously silent crooner packed them in when he last played Houston in the downstairs theater at the Alley. Look for the golden-voiced funnyman—or is that sadman?—to sing all his hits, including that cover of Lorde's "Royals," which went viral to the tune of 24½ million views.

staffordcentre.com

COMMUNITY

March 26

LAMBDA NEXTGEN HAPPY HOUR

Here's your chance to meet other LGBTQ professionals in a nice, relaxed setting. The event is sponsored by Colina Homes and Deep Eddy Vodka. Members get in free. For others, there's a \$10 ticket fee. Membership can be purchased at lambdanextgen.com and includes free entry to all sponsored events in 2019.

lambdanextgen.com

COMMUNITY

March 31

MUSCLES & MUTTS 2ND ANNUAL ADOPTION DAY

All you have to do is go to your local SPCA and you'll see that Houston has a pooch problem. Be a part of the solution with this winning combo of men and mastiffs—and boxers and beagles, etc. It's the second round for this event, so if you've never picked up anyone at the Eagle, now's your chance to take home a little cutie.

facebook.com/musclesandmutts

MORE QUEER THINGS TO DO →

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

QUEER THINGS to DO

THEATER

Thru March 10

'Bootycandy' by Robert O'Hara

Bootycandy tells the story of Sutter, a young gay black man on an outrageous odyssey through his childhood home, his church, dive bars, motel rooms, and his grandmother's nursing home. *Bootycandy* won the 2015 Lambda Literary Award for Best LGBT Drama, and the original off-Broadway production was a *New York Times* Critic's Pick. The *Times* review praised the script for being "as raw in its language and raucous in spirit as it is smart and provocative." The show is at MATCH.

catastrophictheatre.com

DANCE

March 31

The HIVE

HIVE is bringing in the new year with more dance! Dance Source Houston (DSH) and Houston Ballet are pleased to announce three additional dates for the HIVE Spring 2019. A collaboration between DSH and Houston Ballet, the HIVE offers local choreographers time and space at the Center for Dance to explore and experiment with movement. The program gathers a group of up to 25 dancers—through an open call—to participate in the choreography lab. The March 31 event features choreography by Gaby Luna.

houstonballet.org

SAVE the DATES

COMMUNITY

April 6

The Gay 10k

This is the third time for the annual run. Join your fellow athletes at their certified race course at MacGregor Park. thegay10k.com

COMMUNITY

April 27

Montrose Center Super Gayla

Help the Montrose Center end LGBTQ youth homelessness by joining hundreds of community leaders and friends for cocktails, wine and champagne, a delicious dinner with an inspiring program, and international and local talent on stage. Wear your best super-

hero or sexy cocktail attire ... costumes and drag encouraged! All event proceeds support the Hatch Youth Rapid Rehousing Program.

montrosecenter.org



Submit your events at calendar@outsmartmagazine.com

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By SUSAN BANKSTON
Illustration by BLASE DISTEFANO

Thank you,
sweet
Karma Fairy!



Taylor, Made

What goes around comes around.

Okay, I'm fixin' to make your day. There's this woman in West Virginia who got fired from her county job in 2016 for making a racist comment about Michelle Obama.

Pamela Taylor, who is 57 years old, took to her Facebook page and called Michelle Obama "a ape in heels." Yes, she said "a ape." It appears that you can either be a hater or have good grammar, but apparently just one or the other.

Not only did Pam lose her job, but that Facebook post also cost the local mayor *her* job when she responded, "Just made my day, Pam."

As we have learned lately, racism makes everybody's day in both of the Virginias. But for a while there, West Virginia was the better of the two Virginias. Then Pam just flat evened the scales. "The Virginias: Where tacky never takes a vacation."

The story was in all the newspapers, and even on the teevee. The teevee news mentioned a fistfight during a city-council meeting, and that Pam had been removed from her job before. I kinda think she's the Sarah Palin of the east.

So, around the same time Pam's world became practically syndicated, she was making secret strategic plans to support herself during her unemployment. Pam is a woman with plans, by gawd.

Which brings us to last month's news flash: "Pamela Taylor, 57, admitted she took more than \$18,000 in flood-relief benefits [by] falsely registering for FEMA [aid] after the June

2016 floods that killed more than 20 West Virginians and destroyed numerous homes along the Elk River and elsewhere."

It seems Pam claimed that her property was damaged in the flood, and that she was staying at a rental property. That wasn't true, and she now admits it. Her property was not damaged in the flood, but she had been taking your tax dollars while complaining about the government. At the same damn time.

You can give some people a bar of soap and a Brillo pad, but they just won't clean up.

Another newspaper quote: "In her plea agreement, Taylor agreed to pay restitution of \$18,149.04. She faces up to 30 years in prison and a fine of up to \$500,000 when she is sentenced on May 30 by U.S. District Judge Irene C. Berger."

Smile now. Yes, Judge Berger is African-American. She was appointed by president Barack Obama, Michelle Obama's less-well-known husband. I'm pretty sure Judge Berger also wears high heels.

Everybody open a window and holler, "Thank you, sweet Karma Fairy!"

I think that makes Pam a snake in high heels. Or a typical Republican.

Which brings me to a conversation I had with my last remaining Republican friend. He told me it was terribly unfair for me to compare him to Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell, Roger Stone, Mike Pence, Paul Manafort, Ted Cruz, Sarah Sanders, Rush Limbaugh, and—oh hell, every damn unrepentant soul in the GOP.

He says that even though he's a Republican, he doesn't always agree with them so I

shouldn't assume that he's like them.

That's caca del toro.

Look, I'm saying that you might find yourself the object of scorn for attending the annual "Puppy Kickers Conference and Jambo-ree," regardless of whether or not you support kicking puppies. But there you are at the Puppy Kickers Conference and Jamboree with popcorn in one hand and a Donald Trump bobble-head doll in the other. You can say you're not currently proud to be there, but there you are, looking sheepishly like you're fixin' to chant Lock her up! and then trying to explain to me that some confessed Nazis are "good people."

And of course, most Republicans claim there's only a few rotten apples in the Republican barrel. It's tough to pretend the entire Republican factory isn't gearing up to sell rotten apples, or that cruelty and a racial Cold War aren't the headliner acts of the current GOP.

Honey, when you lay down with dogs, you get up with fleas.

My lone Republican friend sighed and told me, "It really doesn't matter, because Trump is going to be impeached." Honey, first sign that in diamonds and then hand me my tap shoes.

Hope your March is warm and filled with sunshine. Beware the Ides of March and St. Patrick's Day—both can be dangerous to your health.

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

FEATURED PROPERTIES

MONTROSE

Yupon Street | \$1.7+mil
4/4.5 - ±4,630 sf

Another fine home built and designed by Hampton Lane Builders. Located in sought after Cherryhurst Park, the spectacular dwelling is now complete. Country-French inspired and sits on an oversized lot. White-oak planked hardwood floors, elevator ready, wood burning fireplace and custom metal spiral staircase.

Wade Knight
713.582.0264



HEIGHTS

W 9th Street | \$780s
3/2.5 - ±2,267 sf

This charming Craftsman-style bungalow home/office has hardwoods, marble, tile and carpet flooring. Outdoor spaces are totally fenced with a pedestrian entrance and an automatic wrought iron driveway gate. There is a front covered porch, two-car detached garage, sprinkler system plus backyard deck with green space.

Debbie Callan
713.851.5100



MONTROSE

Westheimer Road | \$510s
3/3.5 - ±2,636 sf

Fabulous townhome in small gated complex, stucco wall, patterned drive and gas lanterns. Kitchen with stainless steel appliances, granite counters plus plantation shutters. Back and side courtyards. Large master bedroom with balcony. Elevator to all three floors.

Judy Cohen
832.755.9654



MEYERLAND

Loch Lomond Drive | \$320s
3/2 - ±3,159 sf

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Jim Rosenfeld
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By MONICA ROBERTS
 Roberts photo by ERIC EDWARD SCHELL



Lobby Hobby

Monica Roberts in the Committee Hearing Room in the State Capitol building.

To Austin and Back (and Back and Back)

Reflecting on 20 years of lobbying.

The Texas Legislature has been in session since January. March is usually the time when we get an idea about which filed bills will be good or bad for the Texas TBLGQ community. We also start making plans to lobby our representatives in Austin.

For those of us in Houston who make that nearly two-hour drive to Austin, it also means stopping by Hruska's along the way to get a few of their amazing kolaches.

Trans Texans have been making trips to Austin since 1993 to lobby for and against bills that affect our community, in large part because (unlike Colorado, New Hampshire, and Virginia) Texas does not yet have a trans person sitting in the Legislature repping their district and our community.

Under the auspices of the Trans Education Network of Texas (TENT), trans Texans will be gathering in Austin on March 7 to exercise our constitutional right to petition our lawmakers for laws that can make our lives better.

While this year's gathering will mark the 20th anniversary of my first lobbying trip to Austin, I will be wandering the halls of our State Capitol building with a heavy heart. Last

month, we lost one of our trailblazing leaders in Sarah DePalma, who valiantly battled Parkinson's disease for over a decade. Sarah founded and was the executive director of It's Time Texas, which, by the time I'd begun lobbying in 1999, had become the Texas Gender Advocacy Information Network (TGAIN) and later TENT.

She was one of our radio voices on KPFT-FM and one of my activist mentors. I loved her take-no-crap mentality and her willingness to fight hard for us, until she started feeling the early effects of Parkinson's in 2006.

This Aggie alum tirelessly worked to rep our community in the '90s and early 2000s. She made sure that Texas state legislators and equality organizations knew we existed and weren't going away. DePalma helped organize those lobby trips, and she conducted the training when we arrived early in Austin to get ready to hit the Pink Dome the next day as informed citizen advocates.

When I participated in my first TGAIN Lobby Day in 1999, we had a total of 20 trans people, with the bulk of us being from Houston. There were also a few from Austin and nearby San Antonio joining us to augment

our numbers.

What we lacked in numbers, we made up for with hard work and determination. Using then-Rep. Debra Danburg's office as our home base, we split up into teams with a goal of hitting all 31 Senate offices and all 150 House offices. By the end of the day we were tired, but we had achieved our goal.

One of my fondest memories of that maiden Lobby Day experience was working with Phyllis Frye and seeing how it was done as we visited the office of Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas).

I went back for the 2001 session, and made a return trip to the ATX in April to testify at a committee hearing in favor of the TGAIN name-change bill that would streamline the name-change process for trans Texans.

Yep, we're still trying to get that bill passed.

A few months after my committee testimony, I moved to Kentucky in September 2001 and became a Texan-in-exile until returning home in May 2010. It wasn't until the 2015 session that I returned to Austin to participate in an Equality Texas-sponsored Trans Lobby Day.

Unlike my 1999 and 2001 Lobby Day forays

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51

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How to Get Out—and Stay Out—of Debt

Early loan repayment is one of many winning strategies.

One of the biggest obstacles to building up your savings is debt. Most people have at least a few regular repayment obligations such as a home mortgage, car payment, student loan, or credit-card balances. But every dollar that goes toward paying off your creditors is one less dollar that could be building up your savings and investment portfolio.

So how, exactly, do you turn yourself around if you find that most (or all) of your paycheck is going toward your financial liabilities?

The first step is to create a plan that outlines the total amount of debt that you owe, and which debts you decide to whittle away first. This includes setting up a budget for yourself. The next step is to stick with it until you are debt-free.

Which Debts Should You Pay Off First?

While paying off debt may be easier said than done, by following some simple steps you can start to chip away at your obligations and begin to see progress. If you have more than one debt balance, determine which of those debts are “costing” you the most in terms of added interest fees. For example, if you have a car payment and a large credit-card balance, it is likely that the interest rate on the credit-card balance is much higher than the auto-loan balance.

In terms of deciding which debts to pay off first, there are actually a couple of methods to choose from. One is commonly referred to as the “debt snowball” strategy. This entails focusing on paying off the smallest debt first while continuing to make the minimum payment on all of your other debts.

Once you have completely paid off the smallest debt, move on to focusing on the next-

smallest balance, and so on. While the debt-snowball strategy will oftentimes mean that you aren’t focusing on eliminating the most “expensive” debt first, it can be very motivating to see progress when you completely wipe away a balance.

Another debt-elimination strategy is referred to as the “debt avalanche.” With this process, you focus on paying off the balance with the highest interest rate first. In doing so, you make a large payment on your most costly debt and continue to make the minimum payment on the others. Once you have paid off the most expensive balance, move on to the one with the next-highest interest rate. Repeat until all of your debts have been paid off.

Tackling Credit-Card Balances

When you’re tackling your credit-card balances, there are different ways to reduce the amount that you owe. For example, you could contact your credit card company and request a lower interest rate. Depending on the total balance that you owe, even just a small rate reduction can be beneficial.

Also, you may be able to transfer your credit card balances to a different card that offers a zero-percent interest rate. If you go this route, though, be sure that you read all of the card’s fine print, since those low “teaser” rates will usually expire after a certain amount of time. But if you can pay off the entire balance within that time frame, this can be a viable strategy.

Smart Solutions for Student-Loan Debt

One of the most common financial burdens to carry, especially for Millennials, is student-loan debt. Nearly 70 percent of 2018 college graduates have private or federal student debt, with an average balance of \$29,800. The average monthly payment on student loans is just under \$400 per month, with an average payoff

time of 21 years!

If you are carrying student-loan debt, one way to pay it off sooner is to pay more each month than you actually owe. For instance, by paying just an additional \$50 or \$100 per month, you can significantly reduce your interest cost and get your loan paid off sooner.

If you have more than one student loan, it may make sense to consolidate them so you can focus on making just one payment, rather than several, each month.

Depending on your occupation, you might even be able to have your student-loan debt forgiven. For example, if you work for a qualifying 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for at least 30 hours per week, after 10 years your student-loan debt can be wiped away. (It is important to note that you will still need to make your monthly student-loan payments in full, and on time, through an “Income-Based Student Loan Repayment Plan” over the 10-year period.)

In other situations, such as filing for bankruptcy, you may or may not be allowed to eliminate your student-loan debt. This can depend on the type of bankruptcy that is filed. With a Chapter 13 bankruptcy, student loans are considered “non-priority unsecured debt,” meaning that you won’t be required to pay the full amount of this debt through the bankruptcy repayment plan. In the case of a Chapter 7 bankruptcy, though, in order to have your student-loan debt discharged, you may need to file a Complaint to Determine Dischargeability. But this can be a long and tedious process that typically requires you to prove you are unable to maintain a minimal standard of living, based on your financial situation.

The Ticket to Eliminating Your Car Loan

Similar to your student loan, you can also pay

CONTINUED ON PAGE 99

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

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

(bik-TAR-vee)

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

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ABOUT BIKTARVY

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

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

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

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Tell your healthcare provider if you:

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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.
- ▶ **The most common side effects of BIKTARVY** in clinical studies were diarrhea (6%), nausea (6%), and headache (5%).

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with the Tony Award-winning play, *The Humans*. INFO: alleytheatre.org

March 15: Bringin' In the Green

The annual fundraiser for the Montrose Center. INFO: montrosecenter.org

March 23: 66th Annual Diana Awards

The annual black-tie roast fundraiser for charity organizations. INFO: montrosecenter.org

April 12: The Council on Recovery

36th Annual Spring Luncheon with Andrew McCarthy. INFO: councilonrecovery.org

April 17: Out@TUTS Night

presents *Ragtime*. Get your seats for the first Wednesday-night production. After the curtain goes down, the party continues. Mingle with the cast and crew members, and sing a few show tunes. All are welcome! INFO: tuts.com/out

April 21: Bunnies On The Bayou 40,

benefitting local charities. INFO: bunniesonthebayou.org

April 25: AIDS Foundation Houston's

Dining Out For Life fundraiser. INFO: AIDSHelp.org

April 27: The Montrose Center

Super Gayla INFO: montrosecenter.org

May 17: Victory Fund Houston

Champagne Brunch INFO: victoryfund.org

SAVE THE DATE

April 6: Bering United Methodist

Church's *Oodles of Noodles*, the all-you-can-eat pasta dinner benefitting Bering Connect (formerly the Bering Support Network). INFO: beringsupportnetwork.org

April 6: 22nd Annual Human Rights

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Women WHO MEAN business

In honor of Women's History Month, we're taking a look at three women who have their eyes placed squarely on the future. We have **Dylan Carnes**, who was only 24 when she founded Sinfull Bakery, her renowned vegan sweet shop. Now, she's at the top of the food chain. We'd also like to introduce you to **Tinisha Cox**, the brains (and hands) behind The Hot Towel TX, a self-described "barbbershop" right here in Houston. Finally, there's **Vanessa Barrow**. Dr. Barrow is the woman responsible for Sole Aesthetic, a new state-of-the-art podiatry practice in Bellaire. These women exemplify the spirit of entrepreneurship so alive in many of today's businesswomen. Each one has a story guaranteed to inspire, uplift, and encourage you. And if you're hungry for more, be sure to check out our online version of these articles that describes each woman even further. We think you'll find that while all of these women bring an element of fun to their work, each one means serious business.

Photos by **ASHKAN ROAYAEE**



Vanessa Barrow (l),
Dylan Carnes, and
Tinisha Cox

Gone are the days when you fixed broken toes and planar warts with duct tape. Today's top podiatrists in New York and Los Angeles have new-age treatments for foot and ankle problems—everything from Botox injections to plasma therapy. And now those treatments are coming to Houston. At the forefront of these new-age advances is Dr. Vanessa Barrow of Sole Aesthetic in Bellaire.

"I focus on regenerative medicine and aesthetic medicine," says Dr. Barrow, 41. "It's the future of medicine."

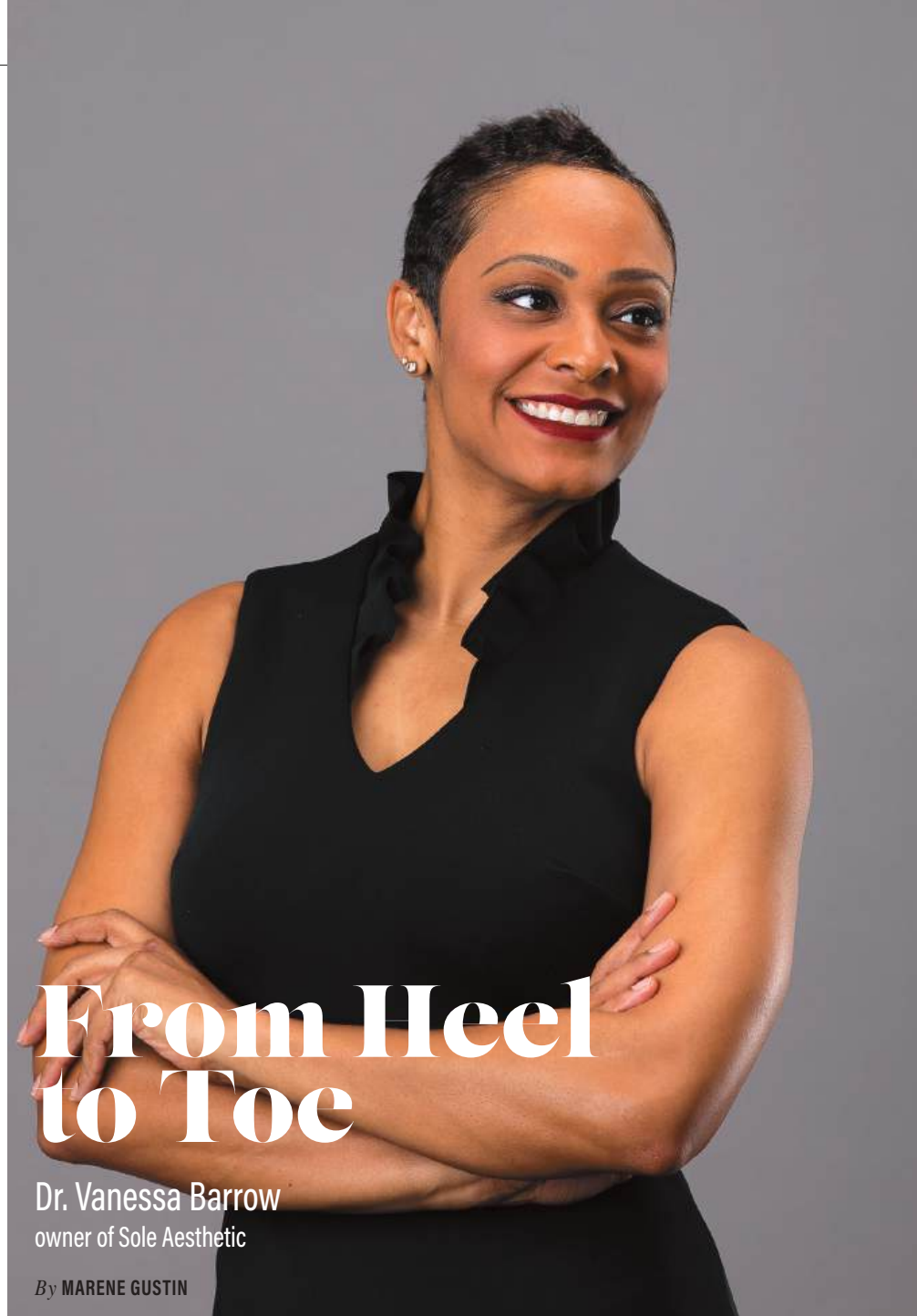
That her treatments are state-of-the-art is evident from the moment you walk into Sole Aesthetic.

And then there's the stylish doctor herself. "I know I don't look like other podiatrists," she laughs as she glances at her four-inch stiletto heels. "Most are older men in sneakers. But my practice is about fitness and fashion. As long as you take care of your feet, there's no reason you can't wear high heels."

If you want to keep dancing into your golden years, here are some of Dr. Barrow's tips to keep your feet happy and healthy.

"First of all," she says, "pain is not normal. Too often people think, 'Oh, it's just old age or I exercised too much.' No, you need to go to a podiatrist and find out what's causing the pain. We can probably stop it, and hopefully without surgery."

"Keeping the skin and nails of your feet clean and in good condition is so important," Dr. Barrow explains. She urges regular nail maintenance, but adds that



From Heel to Toe

Dr. Vanessa Barrow
owner of Sole Aesthetic

By MARENE GUSTIN

if you go to a salon for a pedicure you should bring your own instruments and make sure they use tub liners. "And here in Houston, sunscreen is important during the summers. Come flip-flop weather, we'll see sunburned feet. I once caught a stage-4 melanoma on a patient's foot. He lost the toe, but he's still alive."

She also recommends exercising your feet to keep them flexible and strong. And finally, she advises a preventive visit to a foot doctor.

"Even before you have trouble, you should see a podiatrist," Dr. Barrow says. "You may not be aware of a problem, or you may just be

shrugging it off. Your primary-care physician doesn't look at your feet when you see him once a year. People just put a sock on it or think it's normal for feet to smell. But it's not, and Botox injections can fix that."

Dr. Barrow, a runner and gymnast herself, has a background in sports medicine and treatments. She really believes in biologic therapies and treatments for foot and ankle injuries.

"Steroid injections are so old-school. And yes, I do surgeries. But that's a last resort. I prefer treatments where we get the body to heal itself. That's the future of podiatry and medicine." —soleaesthetictx.com



Sweet Success

Dylan Carnes
owner of Sinfull Bakery

By JENNY BLOCK

Dylan Carnes was only 24 when she founded Sinfull Bakery in October of 2009. “I had a DBA, two full journals of recipes, a few dollars in my pocket, my last amount of money on my food-stamp card, and two parents willing to let their daughter use their kitchen for 24 hours a day nonstop, which is exactly what I did.” Within six months of living in Houston, she became the proud parent of the first commercial vegan kolache to hit the market, getting her baby into the grocery mecca Whole Foods.

The H-town native, who now lives in the Third Ward just minutes from Sinfull Bakery in Midtown, graduated from Texas State University with a degree in psychology and interpersonal communication. “I wanted to be a transpersonal psychologist specializing in wilderness therapy,” she says. But in her time off, she caught the baking bug. “I loved the science between baking and the feeding-people aspect.”

Because Carnes is vegan, so are all of her Sinfull Bakery recipes. “I feel if you are going to indulge in the sinfulness of delicious sweet food, it should be made with organic and wholesome ingredients so your body doesn’t have to process more than it needs to just to enjoy the food.”

Sinfull Bakery now sells to over 120 stores in seven different states. “We are famous for our two-pound Texas-sized cinnamon rolls.” Two of their other most popular items are the Everything Bars and the Coconut Dream Bars, which can be found all across Houston. “And they are our main products sold in other states as well,” Carnes says. Still to this day, though, kolaches are Carnes’ favorite thing to bake because she gets to experiment and create new savory recipes every week.

Carnes says her favorite thing about being an entrepreneur is having the chance to create opportunities for other people in her life. “I also love that I get to choose the path I want my business to take.”

Over the years, Carnes has been committed to giving back and sharing her success. She has donated (mostly baked goods, naturally) to different LGBTQ events and various charities. One of Carnes’ goals for 2019 is to be more involved. “I would love for more LGBT organizations to reach out to Sinfull Bakery for donations.” She also hopes to partner more with Julie Mabry at Pearl Bar. “She inspires me daily to do more for our community.”

So is the rocky road to entrepreneurial success worth traveling? Carnes certainly thinks so. “Running a business is no easy feat, but I don’t imagine my life any other way.” Her advice to those considering taking the entrepreneurial leap is simple: “Don’t give up. You’ve got this!” —sinfullbakery.com



Hair Apparent

TINISHA COX
owner of The Hot Towel TX

By JENNY BLOCK

Sometimes when things are looking bad, it leads to something really good. West Coast native Tinisha Cox (or Nish, as her friends call her) had been working as an accounts-payable clerk for years when she started feeling like her job wasn't so secure anymore. "As destiny would have it, I used to cut my friends' and family's hair for fun," Cox says. So in 2001, she enrolled in barber school at Jay's Technical Institute on the southwest side of Houston. Fast-forward to 2017, when the Katy resident opened The Hot Towel TX, her very own "barbershop" in the Galleria area.

When Cox was in school, she found herself really focusing on hot-towel grooming. But over time, she says she strayed away from hot towels because she became such a busy barber. "Once I decided to open a shop, I said, 'Why not go back to what made you?'" Hence the name The Hot Towel TX.

Hot-towel service, of course, is just some

of what Cox offers. They also do haircuts, facials, color services, shampoo services, hair restoration, weaves, locks and lock maintenance, as well as scalp manipulations. Women, men, and children are all welcome.

Cox says the response to The Hot Towel TX has been amazing, including top marks on Google and Yelp. "I have an awesome team of lady 'barbers,'" Cox says.

Cox has a large LGBTQ client base and loves to volunteer inside and outside the community. "I've done charity work around Houston and parts of Nevada. During Hurricane Katrina, I spent two days at the George R. Brown Convention Center giving free haircuts to Katrina survivors." For five years, she offered free haircuts to men and children in a special-needs group home, and now she's partnering with the Houston Public Library's Groomed for Literacy program, where she encourages literacy to the kids who sit in her chair.

"For two consecutive years," Cox adds, "I've done back-to-school haircuts for several Alief schools. I've also partnered with a group to create Barbers and Blankets, where we go out during the Christmas holidays to pass out blankets to the homeless population in Houston. I believe in giving back to anyone in need."

The best part about being an entrepreneur is controlling your own destiny, Cox explains. For others who want to do the same, Cox says the key is to stick to your dreams. "Don't let others' opinions deter you from your purpose. Most importantly, don't get discouraged. You'll get a lot of doors closed in your face. But if you stay consistent, you'll be exactly where you're destined to be." —*thetoweltx.com*

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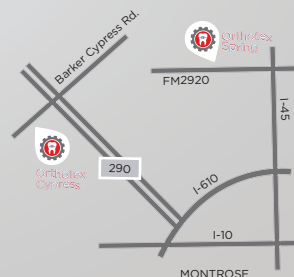
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COMMUNITY

Photos by
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On February 25, the **Greater Houston LGBT Chamber** held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Regions Bank, a new corporate partner. Pictured are Roy Alvarez Jr., Dave Leonard, Deborah Lawson, Christopher Goldman, Tammi Wallace, Luis Jaramillo, Juan Polanco, Iris Lopez, and Corey Allen.



On January 25, **OUT at The Ensemble Theatre** was held before the *Too Heavy for Your Pocket* performance. Pictured are Brandon Mack, Joy Hawkins, Randall Whitmore, Tiffany Nicole Scales, Jasos Blackmon, Tiffany Sagers, Thomas Jolley, Jennell Minor, Woodja Flanigan, and Robert Ross.



OutReach UNITED held its kickoff party at the home of Gary Wood and Bryant Johnson-Wood on January 27. Pictured are Carol Wyatt-Woodell, Sallie Wyatt-Woodell, Michael Reeves, Tim Stokes, Bob Briddick, Bryant Johnson-Wood, and Gary Wood.



The **HGLBT Political Caucus** held its "Politics Doesn't Have to Be a Drag" event at Rich's on February 17. Pictured are Brandon Mack, Maria Trevino-Rodriguez, and Melissa Allala.

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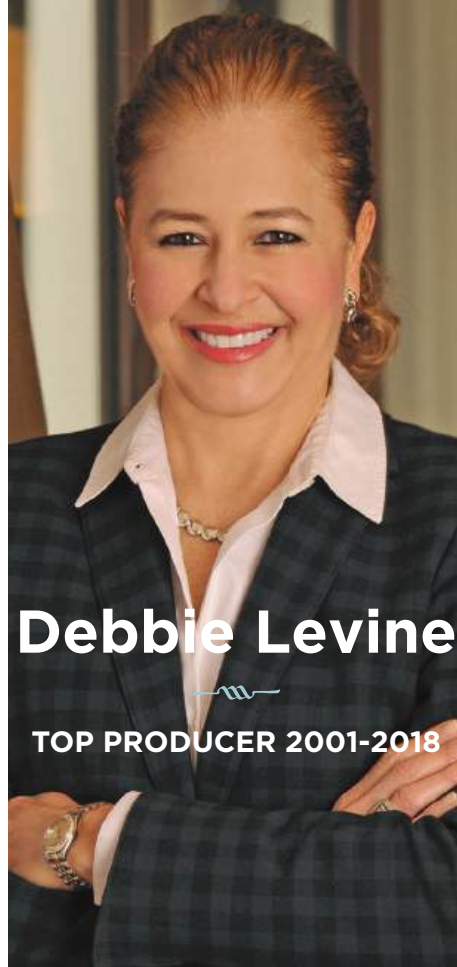
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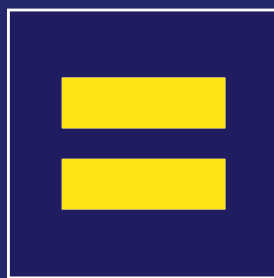
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THEATER

Too Bootylicious for You, Babe

Catastrophic serves up the sweet and sassy *Bootycandy*.

By DON MAINES

Photo by ANTHONY RATHBUN

It's funny that *Bootycandy*, which Catastrophic Theatre performs through March 10 at The MATCH, portrays a gay black teenager whose homophobic parents are upset that their son is being cast as the Scarecrow in *The Wiz*.

It's funny, period, but especially because last fall, Robert O'Hara, who wrote *Bootycandy*, directed *The Wiz* in a Theatre Under the Stars production that has been called "the gayest, blackest *The Wiz* ever."

OUTSMART previewed that production in an interview with O'Hara in the October 2018 issue.

Bootycandy, which opened February 15, follows the character of Sutter (played by Xzavien Hollins) from a youngster in his underwear, through adolescence, to an out man in his twenties who has become a writer.

"The play starts in the 1970s, and it's about things that happen to a lot of gay men today, and for centuries before, but hopefully they won't keep happening so much," said Hollins, who is openly gay. "It is a show that is for everybody. Everybody will see themselves in it. A lot of people in this world are made to wonder 'Are you enough?' [because of the] people who are meant to love you unconditionally, like family and peers."

The off-Broadway comedy, which won a 2014 Lambda Literary Award for LGBT Drama, might be especially hilarious for audiences who get tickled by characters' names that include Intafada, Eudarrrie, and Genitalia Lakeitha Shalama Abdul.

Some titles of the show's sketch-like scenes include "Dreamin in Church," "Drinks and Desire," and "Last Gay Play."



Robert O'Hara

FULL MEDIA JACKET



Brief Encounter

Xzavien Hollins and
Brittney Bush in
a scene from
Bootycandy.

"The author drew from a lot of things in his own life in the African-American community," says Hollins.

In fact, O'Hara told OUTSMART that he played the Scarecrow in a high school production of *The Wiz*. What made that especially sweet is that O'Hara's childhood idol, Michael Jackson, played the role in the 1978 movie version of the musical.

However, in *Bootycandy*, sensing that her son's performing in a musical is another sign that he's gay, Sutter's mother responds, "You are not going to be in no damn *Wiz* . . . I don't care if Michael Jackson's *mama* played the



Scarecrow!”

Hollins was born in Orange County, California, where his father was based as a U.S. Marine. He and his family moved around “a little bit” before settling in suburban Houston.

“The majority of the time, I went to Alief Hastings, but I graduated from George Bush High School in Richmond in 2005,” he says.

At Bush High, Hollins starred as Ben, the black hero of *Night of the Living Dead*, a stage adaptation and “comedic tribute” to George A. Romero’s 1968 classic horror movie of the same name.

Hollins won a scholarship to Stephen F.

Austin University, where he earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in theater performance. Among his roles at SFA were Boy Willie in August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* and Pato Dooley (with an Irish accent) in Martin McDonagh’s *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*.

He worked extensively at Milwaukee Repertory Theater before returning to Houston, where he’s appeared in a number of shows at Catastrophic, as well as at Classical Theatre Company and others.

Next up is a role in *Toast*, conceived and directed by Brian Jucha, which runs from April 12 to May 5.

However, Hollins might not be long for Houston.

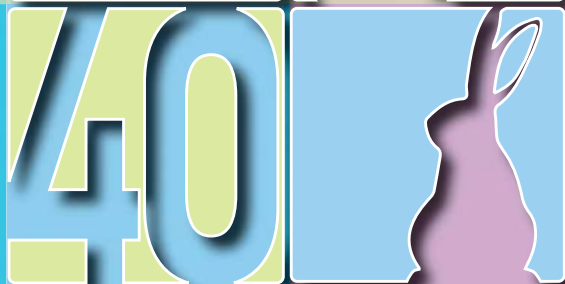
“I will probably leave the city at some point,” says the actor, who also works in retail. “Theater is a hobby. It is very hard to make a living here; it rarely happens. I am 32 and on the fence, like a lot of people in this world. I have to decide, ‘Am I going to just be a money-hunter?’”

What: *Bootycandy*

When: Feb. 15–March 10

Where: MATCH, 3400 Main St.

Info: catastrophictheatre.com



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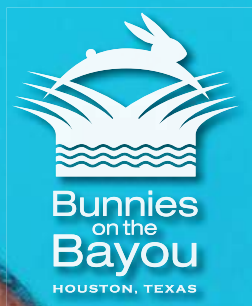
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The Gayest Show On Earth?

Varla Jean Merman brings *Under A Big Top* to Houston.

By DON MAINES

Ieffery Roberson Loe plays all the parts, including his drag persona, Varla Jean Merman, in the circus-inspired howlfest *Under A Big Top* March 9 at the MATCH.

But if Varla Jean has run away to join the circus, at least this tour brings Loe through his hometown, where he was born in 1969 at Hermann Hospital.

"I was only in Houston for a few months," the actor explained by phone from a beach in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. "Then my father got stationed in San Diego. My parents are from Arkansas and Louisiana. I'm a Southern boy."

And a hairy Southern boy at that.

"I used to shave (to do drag), but now I'm 'a woman of a certain age' so I cover up," he says.

Loe created the character of Varla Jean while living in New Orleans.

"I have always had the same drag name," he says. "I read Ethel Merman's autobiography and got to the chapter 'My Marriage to Ernest Borgnine.' You turn the page and it's blank!" (The union lasted just 32 days, or 40 days less than Kim Kardashian's marriage to Kris Humphries.) The Merman-Borgnine nuptials inspired Loe to imagine: what if they had a long-lost love child who was sent to live in an orphanage? He named her Varla Jean Merman.

Loe says that his "John Waters-inspired" short videos, which he filmed in New Orleans, helped make his name in drag when he moved to New York City. His videos ended up being shown at bars around the country, so Loe was surprised when he saw them playing at a gay club in the Big Apple. He revealed that he was "that girl," Varla Jean Merman, and his drag career was revived.

"I did one drag pageant," he says. "I came in dead-last in evening gown, but first in talent. I sang 'Fever' live—I never lip-synched."

Dressed as a lion, Loe sings Ted Nugent's rock classic "Cat Scratch Fever" in *Under A Big Top*. As the bearded lady of the circus, he croons a song about a hairy woman. He also plays a magician. Then, in clown drag, there's "Send In the Clowns" by Judy Collins, as well as Cole Porter's "Be a Clown," which Judy Garland and Gene Kelly sang in the 1948 movie *The Pirate*.

Other songs range from "Carousel" from *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* to "Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic" by The Police, and "This Is Me" from *The Greatest Showman*.

The show also features "jaw-dropping videos, awe-inspiring songs, and death-defying wigs."

It might sound like good clean family fun, but not in Loe's hands.

The *Boston Globe* warns that the comedian has "a taste for raunch that would leave the most jaded of libertines sputtering."

Loe adds, "Step right up and prepare yourself to be amazed, dazzled, and possibly disturbed!"

Portraying Varla Jean, he says, "has noth-



Just Wild About Hairy

Varla Jean Merman's alter ego, Jeffery Roberson Loe

ing to do with sexuality at all," noting that many drag queens are tops in bed.

"I remember back in the day, in the '80s and '90s, nobody wanted to date a drag queen," he says. "I would meet a guy and call my roommate so he could de-drag my room before I brought the guy home, so I wouldn't have to talk about it."

He feels the social stigma of doing drag has faded, thanks mainly to the success of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

"I just got married!" says Loe, "I was performing on a cruise and I met him in the gym. I did three shows on that ship, and he

had no idea it was me."

In 2011, Loe starred opposite Leslie Jordan in the off-Broadway musical *Lucky Guy*. A critic at the *New York Times* wrote, "If Carol Burnett and Harvey Korman had stood in front of the right pair of funhouse mirrors, they might have resembled Ms. Merman and Mr. Jordan in stature as well as comedic talent."

MATCH executive director Chuck Still says, "We are thrilled to welcome an other-worldly talent like Varla."

What: Varla Jean Merman's *Under A Big Top*

When: Saturday, March 9 • 8pm

Where: MATCH, 3400 Main St.

Info: MATCH.org



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—Varla Jean Merman

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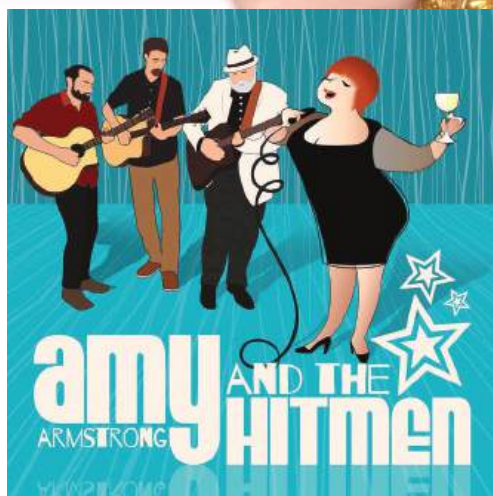
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(in which we had a split legislative control situation with the Dems controlling the House and the GOP the Senate), control of the entire legislature—thanks to the 2003 Delay-mandering and voter-suppression laws—was now solidly in Republican hands.

I was there to help kill four unjust bills—HB 2081, 2082, 1747, and 1748—sponsored by Reps. Debbie Riddle (R-Tomball) and Gilbert Pena (R-Pasadena) that messed with trans Texans. Two of Riddle's bills (2081 and 2082) were aimed at trans adults, and Pena's twin bills (1747 and 1748) were aimed at Texas trans schoolkids.

Those bills eventually died, and Riddle and Pena paid a political price for messing with Texas trans peeps by losing their seats in the 2016 election cycle.

The 2017 session was definitely an all-hands-on-deck affair after the shocking election of Trump and the determination of lieutenant governor Dan Patrick to oppress Texas trans people with the introduction of SB 6. I made a total of eight trips to Austin that year to help kill that bill.

I was proud to be part of the record trans contingent of over 100 people and allies from across the state. I waited 10 hours to testify against SB 6 during a Senate State Affairs Committee hearing, and made a subsequent trip to let members of the Texas House State Affairs Committee know that SB 6 must die and that we wanted no hate in the Lone Star State.

One of my 2017 ATX lobby trips was on Easter weekend, to go on the offensive and lobby in favor of HB 121, a pro-TBLGQ bill written by Rep. Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio). If it had become law, it would have added sexual-orientation and gender-identity language to an existing Texas housing nondiscrimination law.

And what will I be doing on my 2019 lobbying trips to Austin? In addition to combatting some bad bills and hopefully helping to pass some good ones, I will have the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and meet new fellow trans people and allies from around the state.

This year's ATX trips will give me a chance to help pass down some history, knowledge, and tips to the rookie citizen-lobbyists in the same position I was in 20 years ago—calming their nerves and letting them know they can do this.

It'll also be another opportunity to drink some Slurpees while I'm in the ATX.

Monica Roberts, a native Houstonian, is the founding editor of the GLAAD award-winning blog TransGriot. Her ongoing mission is to educate people on the lives of transgender people and fight for everyone's human rights.

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Flesh & Blood

Alley Theatre premieres
The Humans.

By DON MAINES

Photo by MELISSA TAYLOR

Brandon Weinbrenner “graduates” this month as director of the March 1–24 production of out author Stephan Karam’s 2016 Tony Award-winning tragicomedy, *The Humans*, on the Alley Theatre’s upstairs Hubbard Stage.

Weinbrenner previously directed *Venus in Fur*, a two-character show by David Ives, on Alley’s smaller downstairs Neuhaus Theatre stage. After helping with more than 25 productions as the theater’s resident assistant director since 2013, directing *The Humans* will be Weinbrenner’s debut as *the* guy upstairs.

“It feels like graduating,” says Weinbrenner. Now called the Alley’s artistic associate, he adds, “I am feeling absolute joy. I love this play and this cast. The Alley has been my home for six years. I have grown up here as an artist.”

The Humans is a 90-minute “real-time” presentation of a family Thanksgiving dinner hosted by Brigid Blake, age 26, and her boyfriend, Richard Saad, age 38, in their problem-prone duplex apartment in New York City’s Chinatown. Did I mention the view includes an interior courtyard? “What? It’s an alley full of cigarette butts,” says Brigid’s mother, Deirdre. “Why are there bars on the window? Is the neighborhood dangerous?”

“With this very accessible family get-together, Stephan Karam has written a play about big ideas and the fear and anxiety of post-9/11 America,” says Weinbrenner. “The characters grapple with fears of poverty, fears about dying, and fears of illness.”

When Richard tells the guests how he got to “reboot” his life by addressing his depression, Brigid’s father replies, “I dunno. Doing life twice sounds like the only thing worse than doing it once.”

Richard can afford to feel optimistic. In two years, his trust fund will kick in. The



Director Brandon Weinbrenner
in rehearsal for *The Humans*.

other characters dread what might be lurking ahead—especially Brigid’s lesbian sister, Aimee, who will soon undergo surgery for ulcerative colitis.

“I’m gonna be pooping out of a hole in my abdomen. Who’s gonna date me?” she despairs.

“If they rerouted your colon to your ears, I’d still marry you,” says Brigid.

Weinbrenner, who is 34, says that of the play’s six characters, he most identifies with Brigid. “I connect with her so much—how she interacts with her parents and her siblings. I watch her and it’s like looking back on my 26-year-old self. Even when she makes a comment that sounds not so considerate, I think maybe she is just immature. She means to be empathetic.”

The director entrusted “the most difficult role” of Momo, Erik’s wheelchair-bound mother who has severe dementia, to gay fave Annalee Jefferies, an LGBTQ ally in Houston since her days as an Alley Resident Company member (1986–2007), when she starred as Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Harper Pitt in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*.

“Annalee is an absolute dream,” says Weinbrenner. “She is the consummate actress. When you cast this play, you are casting a family. You are casting good actors and good human beings, so they make it easy to do your absolute best work.”

Karam also wrote the gay-centric *Speech &*

Debate, which out director Kenn McLaughlin directed at Stages Repertory Theatre in April 2010. Karam hails from Scranton, Pennsylvania, where the parents live in *The Humans*.

Meanwhile, sister Aimee lives and works as an attorney in Philadelphia, so Weinbrenner surmises that she has “identified with an LGBTQ community, surrounded herself with progressive friends, and lives completely at ease as a lesbian.”

When *The Humans* was performed on Broadway in 2016, it was nominated for six Tony Awards and won for Best Play, Best Featured Actor in a Play (Reed Birney as Brigid’s father, Erik), Best Featured Actress in a Play (Jayne Houdyshell as Deirdre), and Best Scenic Design in a Play.

The *New York Times* wrote, “Mr. Karam’s plays aren’t tearful, but they are often about loss—of love, of health, of innocence—and the messy, haphazard, necessary ways we get on with our lives afterward. He isn’t big on happy endings, but several of his plays offer at least some hope that human connection and resilience will help the characters through. And if that fails, they’ll probably find some other way to keep going.”

What: *The Humans*

When: March 1–March 24

ActOut Night: March 7

Where: Alley Theatre, 615 Texas Avenue

Info: alleytheatre.org



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DANCE

Relationships in the Shadows

Core Dance explores loss in *As the Shadows Grow Longer*.

By NEIL ELLIS ORTS

Photos by SIMON GENTRY

Two brothers, three years apart in age, close playmates in games of make-believe, grew up in a small town in Colorado. Decades later, the younger died suddenly from the consequences of an alcoholism that everyone close to him had thought was under control.

This relationship sits at the center of *As the Shadows Grow Longer*, a new dance work to be presented by Core Dance, March 14–16 at the MATCH (Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston). D. Patton White, the older brother who choreographed the piece, focused

not so much on the shock and grief over the death of his younger brother, Claiborne, but on the relationship they shared.

The Story

That small-town environment, lacking in diversity of any sort, was not kind to any perceived difference. Patton was different—effeminate, bookish, and uninterested in team sports. Not yet able to call himself gay—that would come in college—Patton nonetheless endured teasing and bullying in high school. When Claiborne entered high school, he re-



Choreographer
D. Patton White

ceived some of the same treatment because Patton was his brother. Claiborne was much affected by this.

While still in high school, Claiborne was caught up in the turmoil of his parents' marriage ending, spilling over into conflict between them and him. He left Colorado and moved in with an aunt and uncle in Texas, where both of his parents had grown up. Claiborne finished high school there, and when his paternal grandfather died, Claiborne moved in with his grandmother, becoming her companion and caretaker. When his grandmother died, Claiborne was left a bit anchorless. "When she died in '91, I think that was a very traumatic experience for him," Patton said. "He'd had a purpose in life, and then he didn't."

Their father owned a condo in Colorado, and offered it to Claiborne in an effort to give him a home base. That is where Claiborne began his journey into alcoholism and depression. Eventually the drinking became bad enough that their father checked Claiborne into the Betty Ford Clinic.

During all this time, Patton had moved to Atlanta, where he attended Emory University and began his career in dance as a performer, choreographer, and educator. He lived as an openly gay man in supportive communities. The brothers' childhood bond endured both the geographical distance and the family turmoil.

After his stay at the Betty Ford Clinic, Claiborne returned to Texas to live with their mother, who had returned there herself some time earlier. Claiborne entered into counseling, where he first admitted that he, like his brother, was gay. For years, Claiborne had lived in oppressive environments where he feared getting treated as he'd seen Patton treated in high school. This had pushed him deeply into the closet and, he felt, contributed to his troubles with alcohol and depression.

Patton, as a big brother and occasional parental figure, said he was surprised by the news. In retrospect, the signs were there—no serious relationship, for example—but Patton felt he'd somehow failed Claiborne. Like many a parent who reacts badly to their children coming out, Patton had his own version of the "Where did I go wrong?" questions.

Claiborne eventually moved to Atlanta, where he developed a long-term relationship with a man who had become the legal guard-

ian of his sister's children. Patton saw Claiborne happy in a relationship that also allowed him to fulfill a desire to be a parent. One gets the feeling that these were Claiborne's golden years.

As the kids grew up and their mother reentered the picture, the kids began to drift away and leave the household. This left Claiborne once again without a clear purpose in life. Secretly, Claiborne began drinking again.

Retrospect, again, reveals signs, but Patton says that at that point in their relationship, he was trying to be less of a substitute parent by not monitoring everything his baby brother did. Even their mother, who had moved to Atlanta and was temporarily living with Claiborne while her home was having work done, had missed signs of the drinking. "In terms of his physical change, I could have asked more questions," Patton said. "Whether he would have felt free to be honest with me, I don't know."

Then one July evening in 2016, in a sudden crisis around 10:00 p.m., Claiborne called an

ambulance. His liver had been irreparably damaged, and his body started shutting down. By 5:00 p.m. the next day, he was gone.

The Dance

Creating a dance out of the experience was not Patton's idea.

Enter Jeffrey Clark, Patton's longtime college friend. He observed Patton's grieving, and it reminded Clark of his own grief after losing a partner to HIV-related illness. Jeffrey went not to Patton, but to Core Dance co-founder and artistic director Sue Schroeder. He came to her with a piece of music and an idea for exploring such deep loss through dance. Schroeder, in turn, took the idea to Patton and asked him if he'd develop the project.

The music Clark brought—the third movement of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Symphony No. 5 in D Major*—was not to Patton's usual tastes, but he began working on it with Core's company of dance artists. Besides the music, he asked them questions like, "Think of a person who has been meaningful in your life. What is a particularly memorable moment with that person?" He asked them to write and draw pictures in response to both the music and his questions, in addition to moving to them. As the company engaged with the emerging stories, Patton began to shape their dance movements until it was crafted into the final choreography.

Patton describes himself as a curator of the dance artists' movements. "The movement itself is all very much devised by the dancers," he said. "Coming from their bodies, it lives in their bodies."

The living aspect is perhaps the most important part of *As the Shadows Grow Longer*. Talking to Patton, one gets the impression that the show, while rooted in grief and loss, is more about the lives shared—including all of the relationships that the dancers brought with them to the dance studio.

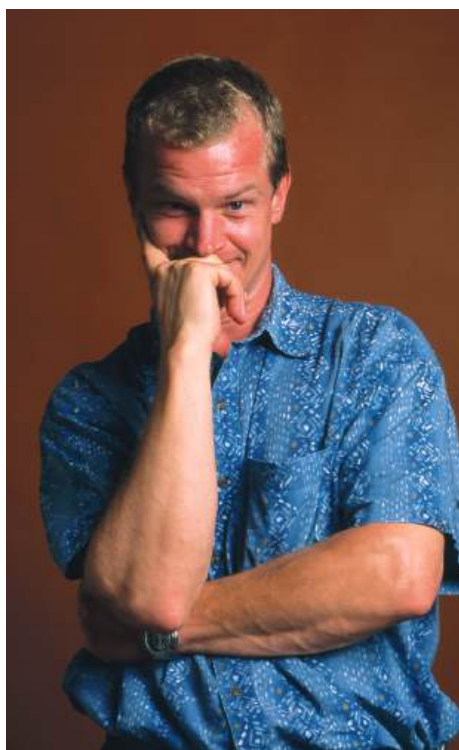
Patton said he hopes the performance conveys a feeling of appreciation for the people in our lives. "Recognize the most important thing in your life is how you are filling it with the various relationships you have, and that they are fragile and will at some point end," Patton said. "Be there and appreciate them, and [realize] how ephemeral they are."

What: *As the Shadows Grow Longer*

When: March 14–16

Where: MATCH, 3400 Main St.

Info: coredance.org



The late Claiborne DuVal White, whose life inspired the Core Dance production.

MARK TEASLE

Going South with Houston Native Dorian Electra

Nonbinary pop star headlines a queer spring-break party at Pearl Bar.

By **LOURDES ZAVALETA**

Photo by **CHARLOTTE RUTHERFORD**

Queer pop stars are on the rise. Gay phenom Troye Sivan is dominating the charts, unapologetically out Hayley Kiyoko has been dubbed our “lesbian Jesus,” and transgender superstar Kim Petras is thriving in the mainstream.

Joining the collective of openly LGBTQ artists leading this industry revolution is Dorian Electra, a gender-fluid singer-songwriter known for unique vocals and a non-conforming appearance. From Electra’s clean-cut suit-and-tie look in the “Career Boy” music video to rocking purple hair and a drawn-on mustache in “Man to Man,” the singer’s modern take on ’80s new wave is fresh and captivating.

Electra’s collaboration with singer Charli XCX in the song “Femmebot” on *Pop 2* put Electra on the map last year. That partnership also led to the queer concert series Femmebot Fantasy, a six-show U.S. tour featuring both artists that stopped in Houston—Electra’s home town—last September.

While they currently live and work in L.A., Electra heads back to Space City to headline Going South, a South by Southwest (SXSW) kickoff party for queer Houstonians at Pearl Bar on Friday, March 8. Hosted by Houston’s bearded beauty Blackberri, and with DJ Kirby spinning the tunes, the spring-break-themed show features a lineup of national and local LGBTQ pop stars including umru, the Fagedelics, STOO, Wade in the Sonic Joy, Street Queer, and the Houston-based duo Space Kiddettes.

OutSMART spoke with Electra in advance

of their highly anticipated homecoming for the Going South event.

Lourdes Zavaleta: Dorian, when and why did you decide to embrace your queer identity?

Dorian Electra: I’m super-lucky to have come from a really open family who always supported me and my friends from a young age [when we would] perform dressed in drag. I definitely felt pretty androgynous as a kid, and didn’t face a ton of pressure to conform to traditional gender expectations, so I was able to feel pretty comfortable in my skin most of the time growing up. I knew I had always felt fluid in my sexual orientation, but it wasn’t really until after college that I learned more about gender-fluidity as an identity, and I started realizing how much that really resonated with me. I was really lucky to be welcomed into the queer and drag community in Chicago and L.A.—I learned so much from all of those folks, and they helped make me feel super at home and comfortable with myself.

Does gender fluidity play a role in your work?

It influences so much of my work—the way I choose to express myself through fashion, visuals, and even down to the way I use my voice in my songs. I naturally oscillate between hyper masculine- and hyper feminine-sounding vocals, both in my performance and in the production.

Why is LGBTQ representation in pop music so important?

Queer culture has always influenced pop music



“IT’S SUPER-AWESOME TO LIVE IN A TIME WHEN MORE AND MORE OPENLY QUEER, TRANS, AND GENDER-NONCONFORMING ARTISTS ARE BEING CELEBRATED AND ABLE TO SHOWCASE THEIR WORK ON INCREASINGLY MAINSTREAM PLATFORMS.”

—Dorian Electra



Songs in the Key of G-F
The gender-fluid entertainer Dorian Electra.

and culture, and it's super-awesome to live in a time when more and more openly queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming artists are being celebrated and able to showcase their work on increasingly mainstream platforms.

Do you have any goals as an openly queer artist? If so, what are they?

I just hope to continue to be myself and share my work with people who enjoy it, and also help support more and more queer and QTPOC artists. I hope that the influence of queer artists can continue to work its way more and more into the mainstream, and help other queer artists be rewarded for the culture and art they create.

Whose idea was it to put *Going South* together?

Trent from Space Kiddettes reached out to me about doing a show, and the lineup sounded

amazing—including umru from New York City (who I've played a lot with and who has produced some of my upcoming music), Fagedelics (an LGBTQ rap duo from Dallas who I met on Instagram and played with before), and other awesome Texas-based queer acts that I'm super-excited to meet.

Pearl Bar has been the venue for a few of your Houston shows. Why was this spot chosen again for *Going South*?

Julie Mabry at Pearl Bar is a longtime family friend. I've known her since I was I was about 7. She used to date my mom, actually. [Julie] is so amazing, and doing so much to make Pearl Bar a space for not only the lesbian community, but for the broader queer community. Julie and all of her staff have so much great energy, and it's awesome to reconnect with her and collaborate on events.

Is there one thing about your homecoming that you are most looking forward to?

Seeing my family, pets, Houston friends, and eating at Little Pappasitos. You just can't get the same kind of Tex-Mex anywhere else in the world.

Besides performing, what's your favorite thing to do when you're in Houston?

Watching movies with my mom. Sleeping in. [Laughs] And thrifting.

What can your fans expect from *Going South*?

A really great time!

What: *Going South: A Queer HTX*

SXSW Party featuring Dorian Electra

When: Friday, March 8, at 8 p.m.

Where: Pearl Bar Houston

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Our love for the SUV continues at the expense of the traditional four-door sedan, with more and more automakers stopping production of that traditional American icon.

New SUV models for 2019 include the redesigned Lincoln Aviator, Chevrolet Blazer, Toyota RAV4, and the all-new Subaru Ascent. SUVs range in size from four cylinders to potent new V6 twin-turbocharged engines. This trend is expected to continue, with trucks being the top sellers. The Dodge Ram 1500 and Chevrolet Silverado have been completely redesigned as Ford continues to update their F-150 line while introducing their new midsize Ranger.

Hybrid vehicles continue to be introduced by many automakers, with the exciting Jaguar I-Pace leading the pack for 2019. Cars and trucks are benefitting from the rapid development of battery technology. Along with the new technology is a focus on safety, from collision-avoidance sensors to alarms that warn parents if a child is left inside a locked car. Look for this trend to continue as the car becomes an extension of both your office and your home. Here are some of the impressive 2019 models that we found especially interesting.

SUV love is the big news for 2019.

By JAMES T. HURST

2020 Lincoln Aviator Black Label

In case you haven't noticed, Lincoln has been doing their homework and successfully raising the bar on the luxury experience. Returning for the 2020 model year will be the all-new midsize SUV Lincoln Aviator Black Label. It will go on sale in the summer of 2019 and is slotted between the full-size Navigator and the two-row midsize Nautilus.

The Black Label theme is designed to further elevate cabin ambiance by using supple leathers and brushed circles replicating aviation instrument panels. Unique theme options known as Flight, Chalet, and Destination have specific colors, appointments, and design elements that define the three Aviator trim levels.

The accentuated linear forms of the Aviator follow Lincoln's design architecture to produce an elegant three-row midsize sport utility vehicle. Lincoln claims that their design inspiration was the tapered profile of an airplane wing, starting at the vehicle's sloping roofline and going down to the rocker panels.



The 2020 Aviator will be offered with a twin-turbocharged 3.0-liter V6 engine producing 400 horsepower and 400 pound-feet of torque. It is matched to a 10-speed automatic transmission that offers five drive modes. A plug-in

hybrid version will also be available with 450 horsepower and 600 pound-feet of torque. The all-new Aviator will offer loads of technology and a broad range of trim levels. Base price for the luxury SUV will be \$52,195.

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2020 Toyota Supra



Expected in late summer of 2019, the iconic, all-new Toyota GR Supra is a collaboration of BMW and Toyota that was announced in 2012. Thus, the Toyota Supra and BMW Z4 share the same platform, while the Supra will be offered as a sport coupe that shares a lot of major components with the Z4, although tuning work will be done separately.

The all-new Supra GR can be described as Toyota's purest expression of performance, designed to allow the driver and the road to become one. The bodywork is a combination of sensuality and athleticism, with the engine moved back as far and as low as possible. The rear-wheel drive platform will have a twin-scroll turbocharged inline six producing 335 horsepower and 365 pound-feet of torque mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission. Weight distribution will be 50/50 at 3,397 pounds, with a top speed of 155 mph and 4.1 seconds from 0 to 60.

THE ALL-NEW SUPRA GR CAN BE DESCRIBED AS TOYOTA'S PUREST EXPRESSION OF PERFORMANCE, DESIGNED TO ALLOW THE DRIVER AND THE ROAD TO BECOME ONE.

Cadillac XT4

For 2019, Cadillac introduces the XT4, an all-new compact luxury crossover. The new platform offers Cadillac's bold design with sculpted body panels, chiseled hood, extensive lighting, and an oversized grille, adding up to a very attractive product. The 109-inch wheelbase is powered exclusively by a new 2.0-liter twin-scroll turbocharged engine producing 237 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque.



It is mated to a nine-speed automatic transmission with cylinder deactivation to maximize gas mileage. The XT4 is offered in either front-wheel drive or four-wheel drive, depending on the trim level. Inside the cabin, there is 22.5 cubic feet of space behind the rear seats (or 48.9 cubic feet with seats folded). Three trim levels are offered, with the base trim level starting at just under \$36,000.

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Hyundai Kona EV

The new 2019 Hyundai Kona Electric Vehicle offers an impressive 258-mile range on a single full charge. This Korean-made SUV (along with its gas-powered variants) was named one of *Car and Driver* magazine's 10 Best Trucks and SUVs for 2019. The Kona EV has a 201-horsepower electric motor that drives the front wheels, allowing it to produce 290 pound-feet of torque. This efficient SUV, powered by a 64.0-kWh battery pack, is loaded with technology such as a Heads-Up Display, navigation system, and Apple CarPlay—which are all accessible through the 8-inch touch screen. The Kona is offered in three trim levels; starting price is \$37,495 for the base trim, and rises to \$44,000 for the Ultimate model.

THIS KOREAN-MADE SUV (ALONG WITH ITS GAS-POWERED VARIANTS) WAS NAMED ONE OF *CAR AND DRIVER* MAGAZINE'S 10 BEST TRUCKS AND SUVs FOR 2019.

Jaguar I-Pace

For 2019, Jaguar introduces the next pure Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) known as the I-Pace. This innovative vehicle with 234 miles of electric range is specifically designed to compete with Tesla. Described by Jaguar as the world's smartest five-seat sports car, the I-Pace's pricing begins at around \$70,000. The vehicle is powered by a 90-kWh battery producing up to 394 horsepower and 512 pound-feet of torque through its all-wheel drivetrain. Top speed is reported to be 124 mph, with a 0 to 60 mph rating of 4.5 seconds. Three trim levels are offered, and the array of technology includes an interactive driver display, traffic-sign recognition, and smartphone connectivity. Jaguar joins Tesla in leading the ever-increasing number of manufacturers introducing new battery-powered vehicles. The competition is going to get very interesting as more electric vehicles are introduced and we say goodbye to gasoline and diesel engines. ▼



THE COMPETITION IS GOING TO GET VERY INTERESTING AS MORE ELECTRIC VEHICLES ARE INTRODUCED AND WE SAY GOODBYE TO GASOLINE AND DIESEL ENGINES.



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A conversation with Lynn Beckwith

By MARENE GUSTIN



From tires to tune-ups, Lynn Beckwith has probably forgotten more about car care than you'll ever know. She owns Humble's 30-year-old Beckwith's Car Care, is a host for the radio and online talk show *AutoMojo*, and has a blog called—you guessed it—*That Car Lady*. During her three decades in a male-dominated business, she's won multiple awards for service and has been a charity fundraising powerhouse in both Humble and Houston.

Marene Gustin: Even today, there are few female auto-repair owners. It must have been unheard of 30 years ago. How did you get into this business?

I've always been interested in cars. When I was young, my dad pulled a 1947 International Harvester pickup truck out of a Virginia swamp (it had critters crawling out of it!) and he brought it home to repair it. He worked for Borden's Dairy and we moved a lot, but we always took that truck with us. Then in college at Sam Houston State University, I worked on my own cars—I had to if I wanted to drive, since my budget didn't include new cars or professional repairs. I spent a lot of time in auto-parts stores asking questions. Of course, back then you could just pop the hood and look around. Now you need computers and special training just to diagnose the problem.

Anyway, I had a marketing degree and went to work at an advertising agency in Humble, where my family had stayed. One day, my younger brother Phil called me at work and asked if I still wanted to open my own business, because the auto-repair shop next to his body shop had gone out of business. At the time I was married to a mechanic, so I thought it sounded perfect. As a woman, it was very hard to get funding.

I went to 15 banks and finally wound up just maxing out all of my credit cards to buy it.

That must have been hard at first, but you've done well.

[Laughs] That first garage was a real mud hole. Seriously, a man dropped his car off once and said he left his wife at the corner because she didn't want to walk through the mud! But we did okay, and by 1991 we had built the new building where we are now. My husband and I wound up getting divorced. It took a few years, but I bought him out of the business so I am now the sole owner.

Why do you think you're successful?

My father always taught me to surround myself with people who are the best at what they do. At Beckwith's Car Care, it's always about integrity and ethics. We want to know our customers personally and treat them like friends. I also insist on training and keeping up with the latest automobile trends. But first and foremost, it is hiring the best people. You can teach someone auto repair; you can't teach ethics and honor.

Why is it important for you to give back to your community?

I was fortunate to be raised in a fam-

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ily where community service was so important. So, my company has always been involved with different charities and events. Humble is like a small town, and we do parades and festivals. We always have a float in a parade. One year for the Christmas parade we had a float with a 15-foot snowman made from chicken wire and tissues! What's really great is to see a lot of my young hires give up their day off to volunteer. You know they aren't happy about that, but they know when I hire them that they are expected to join in. But by the time the event is over, they are all smiles and can't wait for the next event. And we have one charity that we donate auto repairs for all of their vehicles.

But the charity closest to my heart is CureFest. My brother Phil, the one who started me in this career, died from glioblastoma multiforme, a devastating brain cancer. Instead of 14 months, he lived almost six years because of an experimental trial at M.D. Anderson. Unfortunately, the funding for the trial had run out and Phil was the last person to receive the treatment. Phil and his wife, Misty Baumann, and I decided to start CureFest to raise money to keep the brain-cancer research going. Phil passed away, but Misty continues to raise funds through music festivals and fishing tournaments for CureFest.

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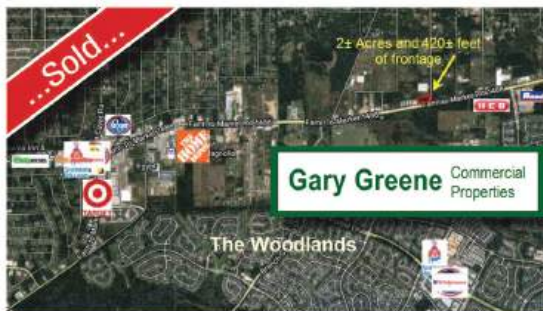
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Texas LGBTQ Chambers of Commerce Unite

Partnership represents the nation's first-ever statewide coalition of LGBTQ-owned and ally businesses.

By LOURDES ZAVALETA

The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce has partnered with three other Texas chambers to form a statewide coalition that advocates for LGBTQ issues.

The Texas LGBT Chambers of Commerce—launched in January by the Houston, Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio chambers—is the first of its kind in the nation and represents over 1,000 LGBTQ-owned and ally businesses, according to Tammi Wallace, co-founder and chair of the Greater Houston chamber.

“This coalition ensures that we now have a voice at the state level,” Wallace says. “For the first time, LGBTQ- and ally-owned businesses across Texas are being represented, including many [owners] who may not even be out because of the potential repercussions they may face.”

Texas’ lack of protections for LGBTQ people inspired the Texas chamber’s formation. In 2018, the Lone Star State received the lowest rating in the Human Rights Campaign’s 2018 State Equality Index. The report, which assesses how well states protect LGBTQ people from discrimination, categorized Texas as “High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality” because it does not have a non-discrimination ordinance.

However, a new poll from the Public Religion Research Institute shows that a majority of Texans support anti discrimination laws. Wallace says the Texas LGBT Chambers of Commerce believes it is time for lawmakers to pass pro-equality legislation that would erase the risk of folks



being fired, evicted, or denied services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

“Enacting basic protections for LGBT Texans is not only the right thing to do from the perspective of equality, but it’s also the right thing to do to ensure Texas continues to attract and retain equality-minded workers and employers,” Wallace says.

The new coalition’s first plan of action was its inaugural Advocacy Day at the Capitol on February 20. Several chamber members and leaders spoke with lawmakers about the new coalition, its legislative agenda, and how to support Texas’ LGBTQ community.

Although the chamber has not taken any positions on specific bills, the group is watching for preemption bills that would permit LGBTQ discrimination. The organization is currently monitoring two bills, SB 85 and 444, which would allow businesses to refuse service to

LGBTQ customers based on the owners’ religious beliefs.

The coalition also backs legislation that promotes economic vitality, Wallace says. A legislative agenda (available online at texaslgbtchambers.com) describes the chamber’s position on regulations that impact education, healthcare, transportation, local government, and public safety.

Along with Wallace in Houston, Texas LGBTQ chamber founders include Chase Kincannon, board chair of the Austin chamber, Tony Vedda, CEO of the Dallas chamber, and Renee Garvens, board chair of the San Antonio chamber.

Vedda was heavily involved in helping Wallace and cofounder Corey Allen launch the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce in 2016. The group celebrated its third anniversary at a mixer in February.

The Greater Houston LGBT Chamber’s next socials include

Business Equality

Members of the historic LGBTQ Texas Chambers of Commerce gathered at the Capitol on Feb. 20 to remind lawmakers about the benefits of LGBTQ-affirming legislation.

a Brewing Up Business event on March 13 and a happy hour on March 28.

Wallace hopes the new Texas LGBT Chambers of Commerce will encourage lawmakers to see things through an LGBTQ business lens.

“There is a group within the LGBTQ community who are business owners,” Wallace says. “[The larger LGBTQ community] is typically thought of as an activist community, or a voting bloc, but we are more than that. Not all legislators are aware of our work or our challenges. This is what the coalition is aiming to change.”



For more information about the Texas LGBT Chambers of Commerce, visit texaslgbtchambers.com.

For more information about the Greater Houston chamber, visit houstonlgbtchamber.com.

Houston Judge Tosses Out Same-Sex Marriage Benefits Challenge

Plaintiffs pledge to appeal.

By EMMA PLATOFF



TAMIR KALIFA / TEXAS TRIBUNE

Court Rules for Equality

A newly elected Democratic judge tossed a long-running lawsuit challenging City of Houston spousal benefits for same-sex couples. But the plaintiffs vow to appeal, and think the case could go to the U.S. Supreme Court.

A Houston judge has thrown out the six-year-old lawsuit a pair of Houston taxpayers filed to keep the City from paying spousal benefits to the same-sex spouses of municipal employees. But the long-running legal saga is long from over, according to the side that was handed a loss this week.

The lawsuit dates back to 2013, when pastor Jack Pidgeon and accountant Larry Hicks sued the City to end the policy. In 2015, after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the landmark *Obergefell* ruling that opened up marriage rights to same-sex couples in all states, Pidgeon and Hicks continued to pursue the lawsuit, arguing that the decision did not extend to the right to City spousal benefits.

In June 2017, the Texas Supreme Court agreed, ruling unanimously that while same-sex marriage had been made legal, there is still room for state courts to explore the “reach and ramifications” of the landmark *Obergefell* ruling. The all-Republican high court sent the case back to a Houston trial court for further consideration.

Nearly two years later, Judge Sonya Heath in February threw out the case, ruling for Houston in what the City has touted as a major win.

“This is a victory for equality, the law of our nation, and human rights,” Houston mayor Sylvester Turner said in a statement.

“I thank our Legal Department for its diligent work defending common sense and fairness, and I’m glad we get to continue the policy established by the City six years ago.”

Still, that win won’t go unchallenged. Jared Woodfill, the lawyer who represents Pidgeon and Hicks, said that his clients will appeal the ruling. He expects the case to again land before the Texas Supreme Court, and eventually be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The case is one of the earliest headline rulings from a Houston judiciary that saw a major Republican rout in the 2018 elections. Heath, a Democrat, was elected as part of that sweep—a fact Woodfill highlighted, noting that under a Republican trial judge, his clients’ arguments had won more favor.

But other changes to the country’s judiciary may work to his clients’ advantage, Woodfill suggested, referring to president Donald Trump’s two appointees to the nation’s highest court.

“Just like the trial court has changed in the interim, the U.S. Supreme Court has changed—now we have [Justice] Gorsuch [and Justice] Kavanaugh on the court,” he noted. “It’s going to be interesting.”

This article originally appeared in The Texas Tribune at texastribune.org



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Served in Silence

Mark David Gibson's story of service.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Mark David Gibson, who has turned “nifty fifty” and recently married his longtime boyfriend Aaron Borrelli (whom he calls Mr. Wonderful), first came to Houston three years ago. As head of the U.S. Small Business Administration’s LGBT-outreach program, Gibson brought the LGBT Business Builder to Houston. That plan was recognized by the White House and became the gold standard for increasing LGBT-business inclusion in federal government contracting.

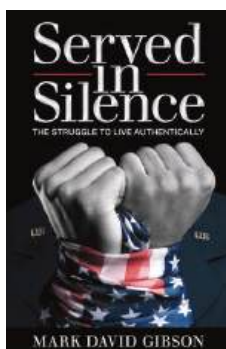
When Gibson returned to Houston recently, it was to promote his memoir *Served in Silence: The Struggle to Live Authentically*. It is his brutally honest life story that is both terribly tragic and occasionally comic. Not even halfway into the book, you’ll wonder how he ever managed to become the professionally and personally successful man he is today.

The title refers to serving in the military as a gay man during the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell era. Gibson spent 20 years in the U.S. Air Force before retiring.

“Not only were you not allowed or encouraged to be gay—it was illegal,” he says. “I chose the title before I wrote the book, and before I had heard of Cammermeyer.” Margaret Cammermeyer was a Vietnam-era U.S. Army colonel who was discharged in 1989 after admitting to being lesbian. Her 1995 book, *Serving in Silence*, became a made-for-TV movie starring Glenn Close.

“I started writing the memoir in 2007 during my first deployment to Afghanistan,” he says. “Writing a memoir is hard. It was ten years of sticky notes and bar napkins!”

The book begins with Gibson’s childhood in rural upstate New York, in what can best be described as a dysfunctional family. He was able to overlook past transgressions to maintain a semi-healthy relationship with both parents and a sometimes-absent brother. Physical punishment, a period of fundamentalist religious indoctrination, and bullying at school (plus his parents’ messy divorce) made him long to get away. He bolted to the Air Force at age 17.



Military Memoir

Gibson's book describes the shameful “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” era.

He found that the military gave him the structure his energetic personality needed, and he liked the comradery. But having to hide his true self soon led him to begin drinking heavily. At 19 he decided to marry a young woman, which just made things worse. They finally divorced in a horrid fashion after Gibson found out his gay lover was also his wife’s lover.

Things got better at other Air Force bases, where he found a “military gay underground” with weekend parties and hookups off base. But there was always heavy drinking. After ten years, Gibson’s career took off when he took a two-year sabbatical from the military to earn both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in communication. He earned an officer commission and went back into the Air Force as a public-affairs officer. He achieved the rank of captain, but by his second deployment to Afghanistan things began to unravel. PTSD and depression, not to mention the breakup of a relationship with yet another bad boyfriend, led to a downward spiral.

He writes: “We were fighting in a country to allow the Afghani people more rights than I, as a gay military man, [could have] in my own country.”

All of this led to an ill-advised email battle with a superior that resulted in his retirement after 20 years in the military. But that wasn’t the end of his problems. Gibson tried several jobs, traveled, and eventually just gave up and moved to Costa Rica, where he nearly drank himself to death. He eventually tried a controversial alcohol cure using iboga root that worked for him.

It’s hard to believe he not only survived, but now thrives.

“If I were on tour,” he laughs, “I would call it the Looks-Like-We-Made-It tour.”

Besides his work with the Small Business Administration, a new husband, and a worldwide book tour combined with a honeymoon, Gibson is also a gourmet cook, triathlete, and runner. The couple lives in Atlanta and vacations at Lake Oconee and Savannah, Georgia. He is currently working on an audio version of his memoir.

“If there is a takeaway from this book,” Gibson says, “I want it to serve as a roadmap to others. “Being authentic doesn’t have to mean [simply being open about] your sexuality. It could be about your career or anything you’re not being true to yourself about. Once you get in touch with your authenticity, a lot of other things in your life will start to click.”



Paula (l) and Lara Chambers

HEALTH

Get Your Rear in Gear

It's Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

By **KIM HOGSTROM**

Photos by **DANIEL MARTINEZ**

In 2014, Paula Chambers and her partner of three decades traveled to New York City, where they exchanged legal marriage vows.

During the ceremony, Chambers expressed and heard two beautiful (and formerly forbidden) words that she never thought she would hear: “I do.”

The couple’s honeymoon did not last long. Only one day after the wedding, Chambers fell ill. Three months later, she laid in a hospital bed in Houston while her now-wife, Lara Chambers, held her hand. The newlyweds were waiting for the diagnosing physician.

Then Paula Chambers heard three more words that she never dreamed she would hear: “You have cancer,” the doctor stated, his eyes lowered to the ground.

“I heard the word ‘cancer,’ and that’s the last thing I remember,” Chambers explained. “I was looking at the faces in the room and their mouths were moving, but I went deaf. I looked over at Lara and she looked like she was melting. I am so grateful she was there to hear the rest, because I sure wasn’t,” Chambers stated, laughing at her own reaction.

Chambers’ diagnosis is one that plays itself out daily in hospital rooms all over America.



March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness month, so OutSmart decided to help spread the word. We searched Houston’s LGBTQ community to find people with insightful or uplifting stories regarding their journey with the disease, and we didn’t have to look far. Thousands are in treatment for, or survivors of, this common—and curable—cancer. Here are just a few.

Colorectal cancer, or CRC, is the third most common cancer identified in both men and women. It is the second most fatal cancer diagnosis, exceeded only by lung cancer.

Just how common is it? In 2019, the American Cancer Society predicts that the U.S. will see 101,420 new colon-cancer cases and 44,180 new rectal-cancer cases, for a total of 145,600 under the colorectal umbrella. That's about 400 new cases every day.

The term "colorectal" refers to two types of cancer, determined by where the cancerous tissue first appears. The colon (also known as the large intestine) is about five to six feet long and ends with the anus. The last five to ten inches of the colon are called the rectum.

Cancer located in the rectum is called rectal cancer, and cancer located in the rest of the colon is colon cancer. About 72 percent of new CRCs appear in the colon, and the remaining 28 percent appear in the rectum. While they are similar, treatment often varies between the two.

Statistics regarding CRCs vary by sex and ethnicity. Diagnoses are about 35 percent higher in men than in women, and 15 percent higher in African-Americans than in whites. Alarming, the mortality rate for African-Americans is 40 percent higher, due to a multitude of reasons including cancers being discovered at a more advanced stage.

Is there *any* good news regarding this common killer? There is! About 60 percent of CRCs can be treated and even cured if they are caught early enough. Timely detection is absolutely the best defense.

"In 1998, I went to my doctor for a routine visit," said Dalton DeHart, a professional photographer who is known throughout Houston's LGBTQ community. "My doctor did a cursory examination and discovered a few polyps in my colon, so he suggested I have a colonoscopy and get the polyps treated."

A week later, DeHart had his first colonoscopy exam. He was woozy from the medications, but conscious for the procedure. As the exam progressed, he remembers the doctor expressing concern. The physician found some troubling tissue, gathered a sample, and sent it to a lab for a biopsy.

"The following Monday, the doctor, who is also a dear friend of mine, called," DeHart remembers. "My friend said, 'This is the most difficult phone call of my life.'"

Typical of DeHart, his first reaction was to spare his friend from having to say anything. The photographer was prepared for the results. While he had absolutely no cancer symptoms

and was not in the high-risk age range, there is an extensive history of cancers in the DeHart family.

"You don't have to tell me; I know already," DeHart told his doctor friend. "I have colon cancer."

Today, professionals recommend exams starting at age 50 (rather than at 60) because CRC is appearing in younger and younger



Victorious

Early detection is the key to surviving CRC.

populations. As rectal cancer in younger patients continue to rise, several cancer societies now recommend having the first colonoscopy by the age of 45.

These guidelines are great for average-risk patients, but there is an exception to the rule. The American Cancer Society strongly encourages people with a first-degree relative (mom, dad, sister, or brother) who had colon cancer to start exams at age 40, or 10 years

before the age of the family member who was diagnosed.

Paula Chambers has no cancer in her family, but had been suffering with all the classic systems of CRC at the time of her diagnosis. For about two years prior, she had visited a parade of general practitioners regarding her recurring digestive issues—diarrhea, constipation, pain in her abdomen, anemia, weight loss and, significantly, blood in her stool. But the vital, energetic Chambers was in her early 40s at the time, and the typical GP's diagnosis was "bad food," or a "stomach flu."

"I was prescribed a truckload of antibiotics," she recalls, laughing. "They just were not considering colorectal cancer due to my young age."

On the day of Chambers' diagnosis, doctors identified a baseball-sized tumor in the 44-year-old's colon. "Today, I tell everyone who is under 50 and looking for answers to keep pushing. Find a doctor who is willing to look beyond common disorders. Get checked out! Medical professionals just won't think of colorectal cancer for people who are young, but younger people are getting it too. I have a friend who is 28 with colorectal cancer!" Chambers exclaimed.

Is there anything we can do to prevent this? The answer is yes, says Dr. Ted Voloyiannis. This fine doctor is one of Houston's leading board-certified colon and rectal surgeons, and practices with Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists. Dr. Voloyiannis operates clinics in both the Texas Medical Center and Clear Lake-Webster due to the demand for his skills. According to this expert, there are common-sense steps we can take to protect ourselves.

"Making smart lifestyle choices is a good place to start," Dr. Voloyiannis said. "Choose a healthy diet, low in fat and processed foods. Avoid a sedentary life by staying active, maintain a healthy body weight, minimize alcohol consumption, and don't smoke. Still, the best prevention of CRC and anal-canal cancer is early detection with a colonoscopy. We recommend one every five years for average-risk patients. It is the single most effective way to fight this very, very curable disease," Dr. Voloyiannis stated firmly.

So are the risks any higher for the LGBTQ community? We asked Dr. Voloyiannis (who is also a member of the community), fully expecting the answer to be no. We were wrong.

"There are a higher number of anal-canal cancers identified in gay and bisexual men, due to the transmission of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) during sexual activity," the →



doctor explained. “HPV is a virus that has many types, and while some are harmless, several develop as genital-anal warts that often stay unnoticed for years, but eventually become cancerous,” the doctor continued.

“The HPV can be found at high rates in HIV-negative patients (about 50 percent), and in about 90 percent of HIV-positive patients. We recommend an anal-canal exam every two years to detect HPV for the high-risk, sexually active LGBTQ population. Now there’s a vaccine offered for the most aggressive HPVs for those individuals who have not yet been exposed to the virus. Almost all the CRCs are very treatable, but they must be caught early. As we say, catch it before it catches you,” Dr. Voloyiannis concluded.

How did the cancer treatments go for Dalton DeHart and Paula Chambers? DeHart’s doctor chose six months of chemotherapy, and the first few weeks of chemo went well for him. But then he slowly started losing weight. Normally a very energetic man, DeHart eventually found it hard to get out of bed. The chemo was killing his cancer, but it was taking him with it.

“My doctor decided to terminate the chemo at three months,” Dehart remembers. “The second three months are preventative, and my doctor determined the cancer was gone. He decided the toll chemo was taking on me was too great. About five percent of patients can’t

**“WE RECOMMEND AN
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LGBTQ POPULATION...
ALMOST ALL THE CRCs
ARE VERY TREATABLE,
BUT THEY MUST BE
CAUGHT EARLY. AS WE
SAY, CATCH IT BEFORE
IT CATCHES YOU,”**

—Dr. Voloyiannis

tolerate chemotherapy, and I guess I was one of them,” DeHart concluded.

That was more than 20 years ago. Today, DeHart can be found photographing events of all kinds, as his many LGBTQ friends know. Not only is he still with us, he’s back to being everywhere with his camera. Dehart’s early detection saved his life.



In Recovery

Paula Chambers resting after her CRC surgery.

While Paula Chambers is also doing very well, she is only in her fourth year post-diagnosis, and her recovery was a long slog. First, doctors surgically removed the tumor in her colon (as well as 36 lymph nodes) to see if the cancer had metastasized. Remarkably, her tumor was fully contained, and her lymph nodes were clear. Then the courageous women entered a series of radiation treatments.

Chambers views her journey as the gift of life, and her gratitude is limitless. She has become an official ambassador for Fight CRC, the country’s leading nonprofit advocacy organization focused on colorectal cancer policy and research.

Throughout March, Chambers will be one of 29 people featured in a public-service announcement video shown in New York’s Times Square for CRC Awareness Month.

“Today, I am happy—even thriving—but I could not have done it alone. I was grateful to find mentors and support from Fight CRC. My Fight CRC family has helped me move forward and guide me through this. Now I feel compelled to help others to thrive. But it all starts with ‘getting your rear in gear.’ Get checked out!” Chambers concluded with a smile. ▼



To learn more about colorectal cancer, its prevention, and much more, go to www.FightCRC.org



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Growing for Good Health

Avenue 360 Health & Wellness

By MARENE GUSTIN

When President Trump called for the elimination of HIV transmission in America by 2030 in his State of the Union address last month, it seemed odd coming on the heels of his administration's previous funding cuts for HIV/AIDS programs. But even without the administration's promise of more funding, ending HIV transmission in a decade could be a very realistic goal.

"We are making tremendous progress toward that goal," says Joe Fuentes, CEO of Avenue 360 Health & Wellness. "HIV/AIDS funding has always been up and down, and we've continued to make great progress."

In 1998, Fuentes founded the nonprofit Houston Area Community Services to provide healthcare for those living with HIV/AIDS. The group's mission was soon extended to include anyone in need who was living with chronic illness. In November of 2016, the organization merged with Bering Omega to create Avenue 360 Health & Wellness, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). The organization has been growing by leaps and bounds since then. FQHCs receive funding from Medicare, Medicaid, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as well as from donations raised by the local community.

Today, Avenue 360 Health & Wellness has an annual operating budget of \$34 million and a staff of some 200 employees. There are six locations, with a seventh opening in southwest Houston this month and an eighth location opening in May at 2920 Fannin. That Midtown location will offer primary care, dental and behavioral-health services, a pharmacy, and activities for adults during the day.

"Of course, I would like to see universal health care," says Fuentes. "It would reduce our administrative costs and educate more people about services they can access."

Avenue 360 Health & Wellness is also rolling out a new sexual-health project to promote healthy relationships, focusing on sexual-health concerns relating to body integrity and sexual safety, eroticism, gender, emotional attachment, and reproduction. Memorial Hermann Health System, The Council on Recovery, the Council on Domestic Violence, and Community Health Choice are partners in this new project.

"Reducing maternal mortality is very important," says Fuentes. According to a recent study in the medical journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, the rate of maternal mortality in Texas has increased from 18.6 deaths per 100,000 live births

in 2010 to over 30 in 2014. In the U.S., maternal deaths have jumped 27 percent from 2000 to 2014. "Getting mothers into prenatal care is important, and even after a successful birth the mother and baby need care," he adds. "Often, the focus after birth is on the baby and not the mother."



FACEBOOK

Until the country does something about guaranteed healthcare for all, FQHCs like Avenue 360 Health & Wellness (as well as Legacy Community Health and a few others in the Houston area) must fill the gap for many uninsured and underinsured patients. "Reaching those in need of healthcare is about access and affordability," says Fuentes. "We need to go outside our walls to reach people." Besides the new campus, the organization is in the process of getting a mobile healthcare unit to extend their outreach efforts.

Avenue 360 offers sliding-scale fees and some free services, as well as help with transportation to appointments by providing bus tokens and Uber Health fares.

 To learn more, visit avenue360.org

To Your Health

Avenue 360's Joe Fuentes

SIX THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT AVENUE 360

- The CEO of Avenue 360 is an openly gay, Latinx male.
- Avenue 360 helps run SMART Cougars, a program at the University of Houston that promotes a healthy campus sexual environment. Free HIV testing and condoms are provided during business hours.
- Avenue 360 is the result of the consolidation of Houston Area Community Services and Bering Omega Community Services, expanding its service offerings throughout the City of Houston and Harris County.
- Avenue 360 was the first agency in Houston to offer HIV counseling and testing to couples.
- Avenue 360 is part of Healthy Women Houston, a community-based system to support women's health and well-being during their pregnancies and throughout their lives.
- People of color make up over 85% of Avenue 360's staff.

COMMUNITY

Photos by
DALTON DEHART and EDGARDO AGUILAR



On January 27, **Art Launch** hosted its Escapist Initiation Ceremony at John Palmer Art with special speaker Adrian Garcia, a Harris County commissioner. Pictured are John Ross Palmer, Ryan Lindsay, Cynthia Miller, MoNique LeRoux, Matthew Conway, Lindsay Burck, and commissioner Adrian Garcia.



The **Houston Bears** held their check presentation event, benefitting the HIV & Aging Coalition, at Theo's on February 13. Pictured are Albert Delgado, Brent Pennington, Tony Fernandez, Denis Kelly, Steve Cochran, Bruce Turner, Gene Glaeser Jr., and Frank Davis



The **Super Bowl LII 13th Annual Chili Cookoff**, hosted by Glenn and Justin Dickson, was held on February 3. Pictured are Tony Shelton, Glenn Dickson, Justin Dickson, and Ross Smith.



On February 10, **The Civility Project** was co-sponsored the Anti-Defamation League with LAMBDDA NextGen and the Houston Area Urban League Young Professionals. Pictured are participants from Lambda NextGen, the ADL, and Houston Area Urban League Young Professionals.



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COMMUNITY

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There was an AIDS Walk kickoff at **Lazarus House** on January 30. Pictured are members of the Lazarus House AIDS Walk team.



On January 31, the **Greater Houston LGBT Chamber**, **EPAH** and **East West Bank** held their Lunar New Year Spring Mixer at East West Bank. Pictured are Gary Wood, Jill Maxwell, Deborah Lawson, Tammi Wallace, Kham Vargas, Ken Ng, Anne Le, Jack Berger, and Alex Chang.



On January 31, **ActOUT at the Alley Theatre** was held before the performance of *The Carpenter*. Pictured are Kevin Avery, Suzanne Perry, Dana Applegate, Brooke Kahlich, Stephanie Patrisso, Sandra Cortez, and Keli Brooks. Seated are Lauren Pelletier, Joseph Roberts, and Tina Berry.



On February 2, **Ginger & Fork** welcomed the Year of the Golden Pig, its third Chinese New Year celebration. Pictured are Tammie Tse, Mary Li, and Donnie Roy with the Seven Star Dragon Team.

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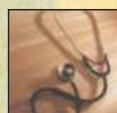
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Smokin'

Mignon Weisinger(l) and Pat Gustavson

HISTORY

A 54-Year Romance

Prominent artist and pediatrician
first met at University of Houston in 1946.

By **BRANDON WOLF**

When friends and relatives speak of Pat Gustavson and her partner, Mignon Weisinger, they describe the lesbian couple as self-sufficient, talented, outgoing, compassionate, and generous. The two professional women, who were deeply attached to each other, enjoyed a 54-year relationship that ran from 1946 until 2001.

Gustavson was a skilled pediatrician who specialized in premature babies, and Weisinger was a talented artist. They both spent much of their adult lives as teachers—Gustavson at

the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, and Weisinger at schools in Houston and Galveston.

Their long relationship ended when Weisinger died from cancer in 2001. Gustavson lived until 2016. After their estate was settled, three boxes of their personal papers were donated to the LGBT History Research Collection that is part of the University of Houston (UH) Libraries. Those boxes provide us with a unique look into lesbian life in the 1940s and onward. Beyond the typical photo albums, journals, and important correspondence, what makes this collection unique is that in 2002,

Gustavson wrote short sketches describing the couple's years together—a first-person account of the highlights of their five-decade relationship.

The Early Years

Not much is known of the women's early lives. Weisinger was born on March 22, 1925, in Texas City; Gustavson was born on September 25, 1928, at the original Methodist Hospital in Houston. Weisinger attended Houston's Austin Senior High School, while Gustavson attended Montrose Elementary, Lanier Junior High, and Lamar High School. →

But the pace picks up starting in the summer of 1946, when Gustavson was 18 and Weisinger was 21. The two were enrolled in the same freshman chemistry class at the University of Houston. Weisinger was completing her junior year studying psychology and art, and Gustavson was finishing her freshman year of architectural engineering.

Gustavson wrote: "I had the habit of sitting in the third row left of the amphitheater. She was sitting front row center. She wore a white camp shirt, navy blue pleated skirt, brown penny loafers, white socks, rimless glasses and a hint of lipstick. Her thick dark hair was pulled into a bun at the nape of her neck. As I stared at the back of her neck she turned and gave me a brief quizzical smile. Our eyes met and something happened.

"The following day, the seat next to her was vacant. When I asked if I could sit next to her, she replied, 'It's a free country—sit there if you like.' At the end of the lecture I asked if she would ride the bus. She said no, that she was walking. I walked her home. Her job at the Almeda Theatre was to start the following day. But that particular happy day, we could take our time. And so, our courtship began."

September 6, 1946, is the date they celebrated as their anniversary.

Professional Careers Develop

Weisinger's parents attempted to separate the two by insisting that Weisinger transfer to Texas State College for Women in Denton. Gustavson remembers: "But we knew. And we mated. And she went off. The letters came and went every day. I took her to the state fair in October. I visited her in Denton in March."

In 1947, Weisinger finished her bachelor's program. Her parents moved away from Houston, but she stayed on with Gustavson and her family. She worked for the Houston Independent School District that summer, administering psychological testing. Gustavson worked for her father, doing common labor and rough carpentry.

Gustavson recalls those days in her memoir: "We led ordinary lives. We shopped. We cooked. We cleaned. We worked and went to school. We saved our money. We planned. We made love. We listened to college football on Saturday afternoons. On occasion, we walked over to Elgin and Main to Rettig's ice cream parlor and got double-double dip cones for seventeen cents each."

They celebrated their first anniversary in September 1947 on the beaches of Galveston. Gustavson remembers slipping a gold band on



Mignon Weisinger



Weisinger at work on a sculpture



Isolated Retreat

The small house on the bayou designed by Gustavson, 1951

Weisinger's finger. "She wore that ring on a chain around her neck until sometime in our third year when we scraped enough money together for a diamond solitaire, and then she put it away. She wore the solitaire for the rest of her life."

Soon the couple moved into a place of their own on Richmond Avenue near Hazard. Gustavson recalls that Weisinger's parents were horrified. "It was old and dilapidated and made of single-wall box construction. It had no insulation and a non-functioning water heater. But it was over four garages and it was ours for 28 dollars a month. Mignon took old twin-bed sheets and painted broad candy stripes on them for draperies in the dinette. Everything else was Washington Avenue used."

Weisinger began work as a probation officer. Gustavson finished the architectural engineering program at UH in 1950 and went to work as a draftsman for a dollar an hour. They were now making \$360 a month combined. The two finally traded in their Model A Ford and paid \$400 for a 1941 Plymouth Club Coupe.

In 1951, the couple moved from their garage

apartment into a small house that Gustavson designed on land near a bayou. "I set about to design a little house to perch on the bank, anchored by a huge water oak through the front porch and a lovely fireplace. No matter where you looked there were trees. It was a retreat. And we retreated. I dealt with the world every day. She clearly liked living in isolation from it."

They decided Weisinger should stay home to keep house and work on art. Gustavson entered the graduate engineering program at UH and finished in 1955. She then worked a variety of architectural jobs. Weisinger earned a graduate degree in art in 1957, and then taught art at Edison Junior High School. In 1959, Gustavson decided to become a medical doctor and entered the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB). She graduated in 1963.

Gustavson's future lay ahead in Galveston, and she would complete a pediatric residency, a fellowship in pediatric hematology, and a year of post-doctoral study in coagulation theory.

She eventually joined the UTMB faculty, running the hematology lab, researching hereditary blood disorders and childhood cancers, treating patients, and teaching students.

They found a home in Galveston at 818 Church Street. Gustavson describes that 1880 two-story as a “graceful old house with eleven-foot ceilings near the medical school, with two large door dormers and a six-column gallery across the front.” The couple took the large upstairs bedroom as theirs and fitted out another room as a study, complete with a blackboard.

Weisinger began a long career teaching art at Ball High School in Galveston. She was eventually promoted to chair of the art department, and built a substantial preparatory art program with a faculty of seven teachers, each concentrating on a different area of art.

They bought a vacant commercial building overlooking the Gulf of Mexico (between 7th and 8th streets on Avenue K) and renovated it into a first-rate art studio complete with a heavy wedging board, electric kiln, layout tables, and two electric wheels.

They continued their careers for two more decades in Galveston. They enjoyed small dinner parties, mentored countless students, and had pets. They traveled frequently. They were highly respected employees and beloved friends. Although they never talked

with others about their relationship, as early as 1975 they sent art prints as holiday cards that were signed by both of them.

Weisinger’s nephew Richard remembers spending two wonderful summers with his two aunts. He gravitated to Gustavson, who was very detail-oriented. He walked her to UTMB in the morning, and then spent the rest of the day with Weisinger in her studio.

In 1980, the couple bought a farm in New Braunfels and began to spend time there on weekends. Weisinger retired in 1981, and they moved back to Houston after Gustavson retired in 1984.

Retirement Years in Houston

Weisinger had purchased a charming Montrose bungalow in 1968 and used it for rental income, so the newly retired couple decided to settle in that house at 715 Kipling. Reflecting on their new life in Houston, Gustavson wrote, “I think we not so much retired as changed gears. And directions.”

The couple, now in their 60s, took numerous art classes at the Glassell School of Art and went to everything free at the Museum of Fine Arts. Gustavson started tinkering in jewelry making while Weisinger devoted herself to her twin passions—pottery and sculpture.

They lived a bohemian lifestyle in their bungalow for another 10 years, with several dogs and cats and other abandoned wildlife. They were often visited by people they had

mentored. One close friend says that because they were not able to have children of their own, they channeled their love into other people and animals. They adopted or fostered countless pets left behind by those who had died in the early years of the AIDS crisis.

Then in 1995, Weisinger faced her own health crisis after being diagnosed with breast cancer. After years of being in remission, the cancer returned in 2000. On Christmas Day of that year, they spent the day listening to soprano Jessye Norman’s recordings. By New Year’s Day, Weisinger was mostly sleeping, and on January 16, 2001, she succumbed.

Gustavson wrote about her partner’s final days in poetry:

*I would not sleep.
I sat by her bed, and cleaned away the crud
But she aspirated anyway as her somnolence
deepened
Into unconsciousness.
In one blinding moment of clarity
She looked at me and said
“You let go of me”
And we spoke no more.*

Gustavson continued living in Montrose for several years, crippled with grief but determined to move forward. She could not bear to live with the memories in their Kipling bungalow, so she moved in to the house next door. She lived to the age of 88, passing away on November 16, 2016, in an assisted-living facility. Friends say she never recovered from the loss of Weisinger, and often spoke of the love of her life.

Their Legacy

Although Weisinger had requested that there be no memorial service, Gustavson asked that there be a joint service for both women. The service was filled with friends and countless people they had mentored.

One of those people was Jesse Sifuentes, who says he had no idea what to do with his life until the women helped him. He is now an adjunct professor at Texas Southern University (TSU). Another was Sharon Smith, who teaches pottery at Austin Community College.

Weisinger’s large bronze sculpture entitled *The Earth Mother* stands in the garden of the Children’s Hospital at UTMB. A similar sculpture and other Weisinger pieces can be found on the TSU campus. The couple’s Galveston home at 818 Church Street was renovated in the early 2000s and was featured in the 2016 Galveston Historic Homes Tour.

After Gustavson’s death, her ashes were mixed with Weisinger’s into one urn, and they were given a final resting place at Forest Park-Lawndale Cemetery in Houston. ▼



Making Herstory

Gustavson receiving her medical degree from UTMB, 1963



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The Houston Bears held their check presentation event, benefitting GCAM and the HIV & Aging Coalition, at Theo's on February 13. Pictured are Albert Delgado, Brent Pennington, Tony Fernandez, Judy Reeves, Gene Glaeser Jr., Orlin Cullever, Steve Cochran, and Frank Davis.



The Collective Self Exploration art opening was held at G Spot Gallery on February 2. Pictured are Aveda Adara, Larry Johnson, Jesse Treviño, Frank Hernandez, Sebastian Gomez De La Torre, Hugo Perez, and Philip Karjeker.



On February 16, there was an artist reception for **Ronnie Queenan** at Urban Eats. Pictured are Ismael Garza, Steve Janda, Tricia Preston, Levi Rollins, Ronnie Queenan, Eric Munoz, Hazel Queenan, and Kermit Queenan.



Executive & Professional Association of Houston (EPAH) had its February dinner meeting at House of Blues on February 19. Pictured are Jimmy Moreland, Roy Alvarez Jr., Jason Rocha, Heather Haworth, Brooks Ballard, and EPAH president Jack Berger.

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dreams! Your focus shifts to relationships as we get closer to the end of the month.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 21)

There is a big shift in your commitment sector this month as you try to free yourself from some of the demands you have placed on yourself over the years. Personal relationships are being revised, and difficult or problematic ones will be eliminated. Positive relationships get a boost, and you are more excited about what lies ahead. You will want some time for yourself this month. This can be a great time to get away from your daily demands and clear your mind. You want to be more playful and have a better time. You are clearer than ever about your boundaries and expectations, and are much more mentally active as you seek a path to reignite a sense of passion in your life.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

You continue to be in a time of growth and expansion in relationships, business, and personal confidence. This energy will be with you until November of this year. That energy is being focused this month on your family and making your home a more fabulous place to live. With Mercury retrograde in the area of home and family, you will hear from relatives and family that you have not heard from in a while. This can be a time of family healing and releasing negative obstacles from the past. You will also need some time for yourself, so be careful that you don't overload your agenda. You will be ready for an adventure as relationships take the spotlight at the end of the month. You will want to put more fun into your life!

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

With the Mercury retrograde throughout March, you will need more time to yourself. Meditation or yoga can really be helpful through this month as Saturn and Pluto line up in your sign. Saturn represents shifting priorities, while Pluto wants to clear out past fears and unhealthy personal motivations. This shift is going on worldwide, but is having a personal impact on your sign. There may be forces larger than you that are affecting your personal life, relationships, and career directions. The intensity increases by the end of the month, and that continues through May. Be sure to get some rest, and recharge your batteries this month so you will be ready to make whatever decisions are necessary.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

You are reassessing your resources this month. You are feeling the urge to let go of past responsibilities and limiting choices. This is a time of renewal when you are making sure that what you want is number one on your list. With your home, you may be looking to update or possibly relocate. Old problems will irritate you more, and you will be motivated to get those things fixed. You are careful about where you are putting your resources, energy, and efforts, and you expect to get something back from your investments. This is also a good time to take care of any old financial problems so you aren't trapped by them. Work with what you have this month, and be ready to take action on new enterprises at the end of the month.

For more astro-insight, visit lillyroddy.com.



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RELIGION

More Prince, Less Shame

Nadia Bolz-Weber advocates for reformation.

By SHIRLEY KNIGHT
Photo by COURTNEY PERRY

Nadia Bolz-Weber produces an unusual sight these days—a packed church. She is selling out venues on her current book tour and drawing fans and followers from every age bracket. In Houston, over 600 people gathered on a rainy Tuesday to see her in a downtown church. Her audience looked like a cross between a PFLAG convention and a women's-lib celebration.

After she's introduced as a "public theologian" and a "prophetic leader," Bolz-Weber bounds onto the stage wearing dark clothing, a large belt buckle, bright blue boots, and dark red lipstick. Her low-cut V-neck shirt reveals her tattoo necklace. In her opening mantra, she invites everyone to "exhale the bullshit."

Bolz-Weber is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a denomination that she says "ordains the ladies and the gays." After she went through an amicable divorce in 2016 and experienced "profound healing" in an intimate relationship, she began to research how the Church's teachings about sex have affected people. The result is her third *New York Times* best-seller, a book titled *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation*.

To heal some of the harm done in the name of religion, Bolz-Weber advocates that pastors "start with reality—start with what people are actually experiencing, and not with some doctrine." She is also an advocate for compassion, because "it allows me to access my own humanity. We're in more danger of harming people when we think we're being virtuous," she explains. "Compassion makes the needle move."

One of her goals is to "help create a brave space where people are emboldened to tell their stories." She creates brave space by sharing her experiences, listening with empathy devoid of criticism, and conveying her love for wounded people. "Shame doesn't come from God," she says. "It comes from people [who think they're] speaking for God. God saves us *in* our bodies, not *from* our bodies," she emphasizes.

Bolz-Weber has gained a faithful following with talks such as "Returning to God with All

Our Hearts—Even the Super-Crappy Parts.” In her first book, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*, she chronicled her journey from her Christian upbringing in Denver, Colorado, to dropping out of college and becoming a stand-up comic. In those days, she says she decorated her bedroom floor “with my empty vodka bottles, which were endlessly being kicked over by my roommates and their boyfriends and girlfriends—whom I would ‘accidentally’ sleep with.”

There was a time when Bolz-Weber didn’t think she’d live to see her 30th birthday. She sobered up in 1991, and after that returned to college, graduated from seminary, and founded a Denver church called House for All Sinners and Saints. She talks about her ministry in her second book, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*.

With her humor, striking looks, raw story, artistry, and dedication, Bolz-Weber has become an international speaker, a bellwether heralding change, and an inspiration for those who’ve lost faith or never had it, but who are still seeking community. “Authenticity and vulnerability are invitational,” she says. “If I admit something difficult about myself, then that creates space that others can step into to consider and speak that truth about themselves.”

One of her themes is that people can release being tormented by thoughts of falling short of an ideal. “Our flaws, our sins, our broken parts, are all entry points for grace, so I don’t feel any shame about them,” she says. She founded her Denver church because she felt called to minister to “urban, post-modern” people like herself. She says that for her, today’s typical church services “are a combination of embarrassing and boring.”

In 2014, Bolz-Weber produced a video for a Lutheran conference about homosexuality in which LGBTQ members of her congregation talked about why they go to church. They emphasized that they don’t see themselves as an “issue.” The video is titled *I Am the Church*.

“I spent 10 years having nothing to do with Christianity because of being hurt by the Church,” she says. “If you don’t want to be there

because you’ve been hurt, I understand that 100 percent. But also what I’ve experienced in my life, and in the life of my congregation, is that sometimes our healing happens very close to the place where the hurt came from. People have felt healed from the hurt [that a church caused] by being in a church where they don’t have to check part of themselves at the door—where what’s really encouraged is their integration, sexually, psychologically, and spiritually.”

Many in the LGBTQ community have been hurt by church leaders who misuse the Bible by quoting passages out of context. “They open this big book,” she says, “they blow the dust off, and then they say, ‘Hold on, let me read a 4,000-year-old Levitical code from a nomadic people in the Near East, and that will be God’s answer to your question.’ That’s insane, and yet that’s the approach so many of us were raised with. To me, that’s not what the Bible is for.”

The spiritual community she fosters is open and welcoming to all, whatever their faith or orientation. She says, “I feel like labels are becoming less useful, or they just mean less.” She provides an example of a young man who has a transgender boyfriend, “a female-to-male trans boy. Is he gay?” she asks. She talks about baptizing the child of an asexual couple, a man and a woman who met in a community of asexual people who want to have families. “Where do you put that?” she continues. “That’s why I just like the term ‘queer,’ honestly, because that makes so much more sense to me than all these other categories.”

“Things that are uncategorizable are holy to me,” she explains. “Anytime we can get away from dualistic, categorical thinking, we’re in a holy place. Our queerness is a gift the Church needs,” she continues. “We need you to show us what we can’t see.”

Bolz-Weber’s compassion toward those outside the mainstream of society is evident in a benediction she uses: “Blessed are they who

doubt—those who aren’t sure, who can still be surprised. Blessed are those who still aren’t over it yet. Blessed are those who no one else notices—the kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables, the laundry guys at the

hospital, the night-shift street sweepers.”

“Suffering digs something out from inside of us that joy can fill more deeply,” she says. “Our capacity to hold suffering really affects our capacity to experience joy.” When she was pastoring the church she founded, she says “there was absolute belly-laughing in our congregation. We laughed all the time, and part of that is because we are unafraid of suffering. People who have suffered are just more interesting,” she adds.

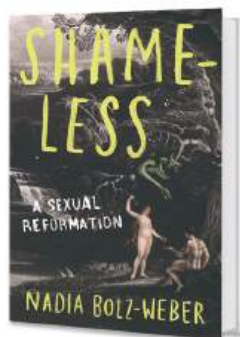
Bolz-Weber says she sees herself as more of a pastoral preacher than a political preacher, meaning she wants to “pay attention to the dynamics of people’s actual lives and what affects them.” Many of her followers are activists and people who work in nonprofit organizations, so she doesn’t feel the need to “preach some ‘Listen, bitches’ sermon trying to get them right with some issue. They’ve spent the week holding the world’s most broken realities together with Scotch tape,” she says. “They want good news. They want to be the thing that’s broken for an hour, and gets put back together.”

Her goal is “a community really rooted in its radical reorientation of the human heart—this breaking open by hearing the truth of who we are. I find that when that is the center of a community, people very naturally feel free to address the suffering in the world,” she says, “free to love the neighbor as an act of freedom. Confronting injustice [should not be just something you work on] in order to be worthy.”

On her book tour, Bolz-Weber includes a segment she calls “Q&O,” because she has a lot of opinions but no real answers. She passes out a list of resources for ongoing support, and she asks people to complete this sentence: “I’m ready to be shameless about...” She reads some wide-ranging responses to that question, and offers encouragement. Finally, she invites everyone to get up and dance to the Prince song “Kiss.” She explains that “Prince was extraordinary because he was so fully in his body, and he had this gender-queerness that was so sexy for everyone witnessing it. He was so unapologetically his own thing, and you can tell in his music that he was deeply connected to his own sexuality. What a wonder he was.”

And that’s what she wants for all of us. She wants us to be comfortable, connected, and expressive. In a word, shameless.

Rev. Shirley Knight is an associate minister at Unity of Houston.






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READ OUT

By TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

'Growing Up Queer'

Many youth know early in their lives that they are not heteronormal.

Growing up is hard. Most sentient adults would agree and decline a chance to “teen again”—between changing bodies, *Mean Girls*, bullies, and facing adulthood, it's enough to have endured it once. But for kids who are “different” on top of all that, there's hope, as Mary Robertson says in *Growing Up Queer*.

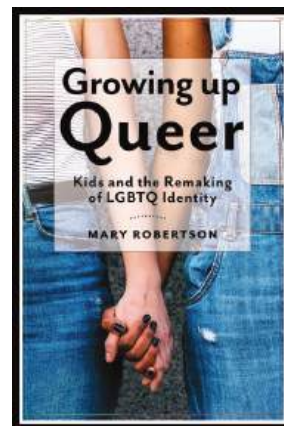
In the early years of the Obama administration, after the repeal of DADT and after three states made same-sex marriage legal, Robertson began volunteering at her local LGBT Resource Center, specifically in the basement teen hang-out called Spectrum. She was working on research and she hoped, over time, to interview Spectrum's teen clientele. But she was nervous: as a cisgender straight woman, what would the kids tell her?

Plenty, as it turned out.

While there were gay, lesbian, and transgender teens at Spectrum, the majority of the youth Robertson studied called themselves “queer,” a wider sexuality- and gender-encompassing identity specifically separate from “gay” or “lesbian.” As one young man indicated, identifying as queer was easier than repeatedly resetting his self-identity as he learned more about himself and the people he might be attracted to.

Many of her interviewees told Robertson that they knew early in their lives that they were not heteronormal. Many teens told stories of recognizing their own interest in same-sex actors and performers when they were young, and of precocious self-acknowledgment of same-sex leanings. One claimed innocence that compelled him to ask for clarification on slurs, thus learning negativity about his feelings long before he knew his feelings “had a name.”

Robertson says that suicide rates for LGBTQ students are inflated, and that today's queer teens have access to an abundance of support. Her subjects often noted family attitudes that have shifted with the times, and there seems to be more acceptance from peers. Gay-Straight Alliances weren't widely known



Growing Up Queer
 • by Mary Robertson
 • 2019
 • NYU Press
 (nyupress.org)
 • 224 pages
 • \$26

in high schools until the 1990s, but today most larger schools have a GSA, and nearly every state in the U.S. has at least one LGBT center. For her queer subjects, this is good news, says Robertson.

On the future, she says, “This is what gives it so much promise.”

As eye-opening and reassuring as it is, this book may be a challenge.

Growing Up Queer can sometimes read like a thesis paper made of cardboard, perhaps due to its original intent for research. When the narrative dips like that, it feels a lot like when your newly-PhD'd brother expounds on his favorite subject: it grows complicated, often unnecessary, and sometimes redundant.

Thankfully, author Mary Robertson gets out of the way enough to make a reader want to forgive such transgressions and just enjoy the teens she meets. They have life in them, deep introspection and philosophical thought, as well as acceptance covered slightly with the scabs of perseverance. Their voices are real and need no explaining.

Indeed, they do offer hope.

That makes this book accessible, but academics may get more from it than will casual readers. Tackle *Growing Up Queer* if you wish, but a full understanding may come hard.

Terri Schlichenmeyer has been reading since she was three years old, and she lives on a hill in Wisconsin with two dogs and 11,000 books.

More Poems about Buildings and Food

A poetry reading at the Montrose Center.

By MARENE GUSTIN

Sleeps through breakfast, too busy for lunch, too tired to cook dinner, he eats time.

That's a line from the poem "You Can't Force Feed a Starving Man" from Gregg Shapiro's new poetry chapbook *More Poems about Buildings and Food*. The title is an homage to the Talking Heads' second album, *More Songs about Buildings and Food*. And, yes, some of the beautiful poems are about buildings and some are about food. Some are even about spiders—two, in fact.

As for the food poems, many are about eating disorders.

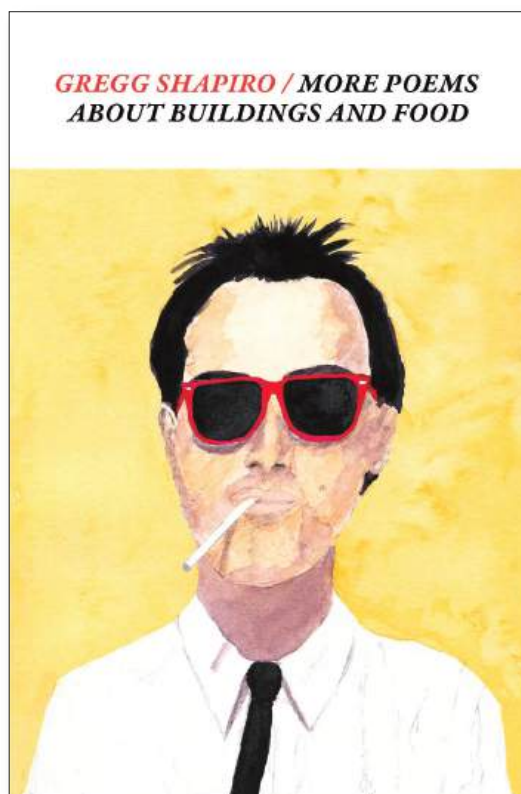
"Yes, I experienced that," Shapiro says. "Right before I moved to Boston. I can tell you, as a gay man, living at home and coming out at college is a bad idea."

Shapiro was born and raised in Chicago, where he started college as a theater major before he realized he was more interested in writing.

"I was a reader from an early age," he says. "And, like a lot of teens who don't fit in, I started writing poetry."

He dropped out of college for a year and a half before moving to Boston, enrolling at Emerson College, and getting a degree in poetry. He then tried going for an MFA in poetry before dropping out and taking day jobs so he could write at night. He's been published in literary magazines, and now has six books out—four poetry collections and two that feature short stories. And he has another poetry chapbook due out in August.

If you haven't read Shapiro's poems, his name may be familiar from his entertainment reporting. In 1992 he met Rick Karlin, an editor at a gay paper in Boston, who encouraged him to try journalism. The pair is now married and living in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with their Yorkipoo, Coco. Shapiro is starting a book tour for *More Poems about Buildings and Food* this spring that will take him to New Orleans, Austin,



Gregg Shapiro

and then to Houston on April 4. He says the inspiration for the current poetry collection comes both from his personal life ("You Can't Force Feed a Starving Man") and from things he observes ("Waitresses on Heroin," his wry observations of working waitresses).

Now, about those spiders . . .

*... in my grandparents' bathroom.
I see it out of the corner of my eye, as
I comb my hair in the mirror. Big, fat,
well-fed, the spider gives no indication
that it is aware of my presence as it dis-
appears into a crack in the tiled wall.*

Shapiro laughs about that passage from "I Don't Kill the Spider." "In Chicago you don't see a lot of nature. Here in southern Florida, I take long walks in the evening and there's a lot of nature to see. Lizards of all sizes and birds and, yes, spiders. I'm not a fan of spiders. I know that they do a lot of good, so I don't want them to leave, I just want them to leave me alone!"

If that's true, then "Spider Mouth" is a dark fantasy. The poem ends with this stanza:

*Dotted with crickets, beetles, moths,
bees. Imagine the web-spinner big as a
Winnebago. In a dream, I put on rubber
gloves, disassemble the webs, detach
their contents. Delicately place the in-
gredients into a crock pot, add two cups
of boiling water for cream of spider soup.*

You can find *More Poems about Buildings and Food* on Amazon.com for \$12.

What: *More Poems about Buildings and Food*

A reading by Gregg Shapiro

When: Thursday, April 4 • 7:00 pm

Where: The Montrose Center,
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Info: montrosecenter.org

Queers for Your Ears

John Grant, Troye Sivan, Calum Scott, Morgxn, Corey TuT, Logan Lynn, and more.

Queer male musical acts such as Perfume Genius, Car Seat Headrest, Mnek, Shamir, and **John Grant** are boldly proving that there's more to gay men's listening habits than disco and show tunes. A founding member of the highly regarded '90s/early '00s band The Czars, Grant's solo output is alternately challenging and approachable. His latest, ***Love Is Magic*** (Partisan), falls somewhere between the

accessibility of 2013's *Pale Green Ghosts* and 2015's slightly difficult *Grey Tickles, Black Pressure*. Grant is known for his lengthy and varied songs, and he doesn't disappoint here. "Metamorphosis" shifts gears like a car on an inclining road. The title cut, in which Sade gets name-checked, casts a spell on the listener. "Tempest" suggests a queer arcade game, and the sexy electronics of "Preppy Boy" deserves to be a standard at tea-dance, while "He's Got His Mother's Hips" adds some serious funk to the mix. "Touch and Go" is the most beautiful song Grant has recorded since "GMF."

Gay singer/songwriter/actor **Troye Sivan** made an indelible impression with his 2015 debut album *Blue Neighbourhood*. Likewise, his second album ***Bloom*** (Capitol), was not only worth the wait, but effortlessly delivers on the promise of the first. Sivan and his producers employ an assortment of studio wizardry, but the good news is that the songs, all co-written by Sivan, are solid enough not to be overpowered. Opener "Seventeen" will speak to any LGBTQ folks who knew they were queer from an early age. The aptly titled "My My My!" and "Dance to This" (featuring Ariana Grande) are sexy dance numbers. "What a Heavenly Way to Die" and the title cut are also worth mentioning.

Talent show competitor **Calum Scott**'s



exquisite reimagining of Robyn's "Dancing on My Own" as a ballad hinted at his great taste in music. That song, as well as a reading of Bob Dylan's "Not Dark Yet" can both be found on Scott's full-

length debut album ***Only Human*** (Capitol), newly reissued in an expanded special edition including five bonus tracks. In addition to being indicative of his interpretation skills, they also demonstrate his vocal abilities—the guy can sing! The original songs (co-written by Scott and a team of collaborators), including the Leona Lewis duet "You Are the Reason" and the rhythmic "Give Me Something," tend to be in the Sam Smith category, and Scott more than distinguishes himself in that realm. Among the new tunes, the breathtaking coming-out number "No Matter What" is nothing less than stunning.

On ***Vital*** (Wanderlust/Hollywood), gay



pop singer/songwriter **Morgxn** sounds like he wants to be the state-side version of Troye Sivan and Calum Scott, more than he wants to be John Grant. However, his cover of The Cure's

"Boys Don't Cry," which closes the album, does show an interesting and unexpected side to the artist. Morgxn gets our pulse racing with dance-oriented cuts such as opening track "Translucent," "XX," and "Harpoon (How Does It Feel)." Songs such as "Me Without You" and "Carry the Weight" incorporate some of the tech that is popular these days.

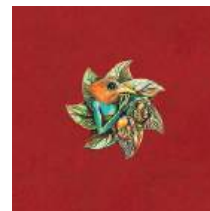
The **Corey TuT** of 2018's ***Into the Light*** (coreytut.com) is a far cry from the Corey TuT of 2013's *Chasing Down the Bedlam*. TuT has set aside his edgy rock sound and traded it for a musical style geared toward the dance-music scene. The clubby title cut gets things moving on an energetic level. You can hear the influence of Madonna's recent output on "Automatic," and "Remedy" is good for what



ails you. "Hey There Superman" elevates things, while "Everything & Nothing" and "Too Much" have a kind of retro disposition. The six bonus tracks, including the luminous "Sparks" and "Hands" (featuring gay basketball player and musician Will Sheridan), keep the party going into the late hours.

Nine albums into his recording career, **Logan Lynn's *My Movie Star*** is easily his most ambitious project to date. The oversized package consists of the 10-song album on the first disc and a second disc of remixes, as well as other artists covering a few songs from *My Movie Star*. With the exception of the title cut, the songs, co-produced by Lynn and Jay Mohr (yes, *that* Jay Mohr!), were co-written by Lynn and piano sensation Glasys. In other words, this album is a new and unexpected direction for Lynn, who is perhaps best known for his electronic music stylings. Among the cover versions on the second disc, the rendition of "Big City Now" by Tiffany (yes, *that* Tiffany!), is a must.

Like Logan Lynn, queer "psychedelic progressive gothic rock" artist **Phideaux** has returned with his ninth album, ***Infernal*** (Bloodfish), the third and final installment in his "Big Brother authoritarianism and ecological crisis" trilogy. The 19-track, double-disc set features a broad array of musicians performing Phideaux, as well as artwork by Molly Ruttan. If this kind of prog-pop is your cup of kombucha, you might also want to check out *Amethyst Journey* (PEG), by Alaska + Jeremy (Alaska Thunderfuck, *RuPaul's Drag Race* season two champ, and chosen creative family member Jeremy Mikush).



Gay crooner **Spencer Day** is sort of our



very own queer Michael Bubl . Backed by the 20-member Budman-Levy orchestra, Day goes for a film noir vibe on his new album, the Los Angeles song cycle **Angel City** (spencerday.com). It's a good fit for Day, who co-wrote all of the songs, including standouts such as the title tune, "The California Yes," "Ghost of the Chateau Marmont," "I Wish I Didn't Care," and "Somewhere There's a City."

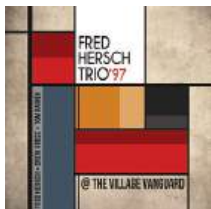
If Spencer Day is our gay Michael Bubl ,



out singer/songwriter **Mike Maimone** is our Tom Waits. **The High Hat Club** (mike-maimone.com) is a five-song EP, that, like most good EPs, leaves us wanting more. Maim-

one's piano-playing is mind-blowing, his vocals exude enough warmth to start a blaze, and his wordplay, especially on "Hey Now" and "Clear Black Night," is as admirable as it is unforgettable. "Through the Changes" is a full-fledged heartstring-tugger. If the bear crowd doesn't gobble Maimone up with a spoon, then we are all doomed.

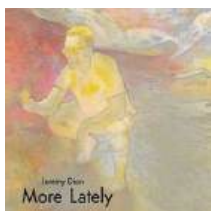
But wait, there's more! Prolific, Grammy-



nominated gay jazz pianist **Fred Hersch** has released **Fred Hersch Trio '97 @ The Village Vanguard** (fredhersch.com), featuring two originals and six covers

performed by Hersch, Drew Gress (on bass) and Tom Rainey (on drums).

"Forty-four years old, parenting a 12-year-



old daughter, in a committed partnership, and feeling more myself lately," licensed therapist and singer/songwriter **Jeremy Dion** delivers the six-song EP **More Late-**

ly (jeremydion.com) featuring the excellent anti-Trump track "Alternative Facts."

A variety of musical genres, including dance (in songs such as "Lost in Light," "Down the Garden Path," and "Trippin' on a High Horse"), are represented on gay Canadian musician **Curtis Newart's** **Rock the Chandeliers** (Immaculate).



Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to *OUTSMART* magazine.

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— Frank Billingsley



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WEDDING GUIDE

A HILL-COUNTRY ROMANCE

By HENRY V. THIEL

Photos by MICHAEL BUSH

Nickie Gullahorn, 37, was introduced to Sharla Weissinger, 31, at the 2005 Dallas Gay Pride Parade by Gullahorn's two moms, Judy and Linda Riggi, who met Weissinger through mutual friends as they rode their motorcycles side-by-side in the parade. Gullahorn, who doesn't ride, met them at the end of the parade route. →

Nickie (l) and Sharla Gullahorn were married under century-old oak trees in Dripping Springs, Texas.

Weissinger, a Conroe native, was a little scared of Gullahorn when they first met, because of how young she was. “She was just 18,” Weissinger exclaimed. “But when I saw her smile, I was truly excited! She was not like most people I had met.”

Gullahorn, who is originally from Bedford, Texas, remembers thinking, “Wow, this is going to be fun!”

Their first date was at Starbucks, where they sat for more than six hours, even after they closed, just talking and getting to know each other. “I loved how Sharla was a dreamer,” smiled Gullahorn. Weissinger loved how Gullahorn was mature beyond her years, and that she had her life goals set.

“We have had a great relationship from the beginning,” shared Weissinger. “We learned early on to put the other first, and that communication is very important, as is honesty. We also try to remember every day why we fell in love.”

“It’s not about you,” stated Gullahorn. “It’s about giving 100% to the other—not 50/50! And it’s hard not to stay madly in love if you’re always striving to get your spouse to fall in love with you over and over again.”

“Romance is also important when it comes to relationships,” added Gullahorn. “I surprised Sharla with a trip to Key West for Valentine’s Day, and Nickie surprised me with a bubble bath complete with lit candles, fresh fruits, cheese, and wine, to just relax after a day of chaos.”

After being together for nine years, and way before gay marriage was legal in Texas, Weissinger changed her last name to Gullahorn. “I just had to have her last name,” she said.

Gullahorn says she knew she wanted to marry Weissinger for years, but it wasn’t until they started visiting her niece, Callie, in the hospital that Gullahorn decided to make it official. (Her niece was born with a congenital heart defect and spent five months in the NICU.)

“When I saw the bond between Callie and Sharla, I knew it was time. The fact that Callie was named after Sharla was great validation! (Callie Shay Harper and Sharla’s nickname is Shay Shay.)

Gullahorn never thought that gay marriage would be legal in her lifetime, or that a piece of paper or an official ceremony could ever define their love.

**“IT’S HARD
NOT TO
STAY MADLY
IN LOVE
IF YOU’RE
ALWAYS
STRIVING TO
GET YOUR
SPOUSE TO
FALL IN LOVE
WITH YOU
OVER AND
OVER AGAIN.”**

—Nickie Gullahorn



Weissinger felt the same way until she met Nickie and her mom, sister, and grandmother.

Gullahorn proposed to Weissinger on her birthday. She started the day by making Weissinger think that they were just going to lunch with friends. Instead, Gullahorn took her to a local airport where Weissinger had her very first flying lesson. The plane landed at another airport, and they were taken to a vineyard where she thought they were going to do tastings, but instead she was surprised by a large gathering of her friends and family. While they walked around, a photographer was taking their pictures. They were on a really pretty bridge when it started to drizzle and Gullahorn got down on one knee.

They were married on October 4, 2018, at Camp Lucy in Dripping Springs, Texas, under an arbor of century-old live oak trees they had fallen in love with on their first visit. The officiant was Sharla’s grandmother, Barbara Roberts, who was truly honored to marry them.



"The moment that really stood out to us was seeing each other at the ceremony for the first time!" said Gullahorn.

"It felt like *no one* else was there. It was just us!" added Weissinger.

The brides declined to share their vows because they were "way too personal and embarrassing—meant only for each other and the wedding party," stated Gullahorn.

The brides included a "heritage table" at the reception, with empty seats to represent all of their loved ones who have passed.

The brides chose to honeymoon in Cabo, Mexico, at an all-inclusive hotel that they had earned as a performance bonus from their employer, THRIVE, a network marketing company selling the only wearable nutritional supplement.

Ms. and Mr. Gullahorn live in Dallas.

Henry V. Thiel is a frequent contributor to OutSmart magazine. He loves weddings.

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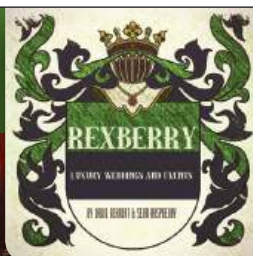
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off your auto loan more quickly and reduce your overall interest charges by making an additional payment each month. Even just “rounding up” can be beneficial. For instance, if your monthly payment is \$281, you can round it up and pay \$300.

Another method is to pay half of your monthly car payment every two weeks, as opposed to just one payment per month. Although this may sound a bit strange, by going this route your 26 “half” payments will equate to 13 full payments per year, rather than just 12.

While this strategy may only save you a small amount of interest, you will still repay the loan much faster so you can use the money that you would have earmarked for auto payments to increase your savings instead!

Making Your Home Truly Yours by Getting Rid of Your Mortgage

For most people, a home is the largest purchase they will make in their lifetime—and one that usually requires taking on a mortgage. But even though paying off a five- or six-figure mortgage may seem daunting, there are ways that you can accomplish this.

Similar to with your car loan, you could make your mortgage payments every two weeks rather once per month. This will essentially mean that you’ve made one additional

monthly payment for the year, substantially reducing both your overall balance and the amount of interest that you pay. (Mortgage interest usually makes up more than half of your total loan repayment.)

You could also put any “extra” money you receive toward paying off your home mortgage. For example, if you receive a bonus at work or you get a nice tax refund, use those funds for making an additional principal payment on your mortgage balance. Before going this route, though, you should consider putting this extra money toward “bad debt” first, such as high-interest credit cards. That’s because your home can increase in value over time, and could even become an income generator for you if you decide to convert it to a rental property. This isn’t the case with credit-card debt and other types of unsecured debt balances.

How to Stay Out of Debt

Once you’ve paid down your debt, it may be tempting to go out and make big purchases again. But that’s actually one of the worst things you can do, since it could put you right back in the red.

One of the best ways to help yourself stay out of debt, then, is to train yourself to become more disciplined when it comes to spending. This can include:

- Only allowing yourself to use a credit card in

case of emergency

- Sticking to your monthly budget
- Setting up an automatic savings plan (or “paying yourself first”) so that a certain amount of money goes into an account each month.

Getting on the Right Financial Path

While paying off debt can be somewhat challenging, it can also be extremely rewarding to get out from under financial obligations that are keeping you from building up your future savings. While there are some well-defined strategies for getting out of debt, though, everyone’s situation is different.

With that in mind, it can be beneficial to meet with a financial professional who can help you design a debt-elimination plan as well as a savings and investment plan that is right for you. Doing so can give you a step-by-step guide to follow that can help you stay on track and get your debt obligations paid off much more quickly.

Grace S. Yung, CFP, is a certified financial planner practitioner with experience in helping domestic partners plan their finances since 1994. She is a principal at Midtown Financial Group LLC in Houston and was recognized as a “Five-Star Wealth Manager” in the September 2017 issue of Texas Monthly. Yung can be reached at grace.yung@lpl.com.

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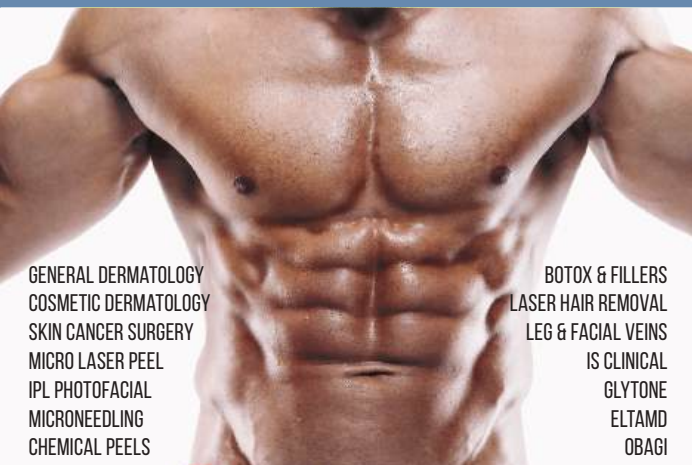



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QUEER QUOTES

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Jeff Whitty

(co-writer *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*)



The Characters Just Happen to Be Gay

Melissa McCarthy (as Lee Israel) and Richard E. Grant (as Jack Hock) in *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* The film was co-written by Jeff Whitty (openly gay Tony-winning book writer of *Avenue Q*) and filmmaker Nicole Holofcener.

(Deadline.com, 1/12/19, Matt Grobar)

In *Can You Ever Forgive Me?*, Lee Israel and fellow con Jack Hock are presented as they were—as gay individuals—with very little fanfare or emphasis on that fact, which was important to [Whitty]. . .

“I loved the idea of writing gay rascals, because I was starting to get a little annoyed. It’s like, ‘The gay representation is great, it’s wonderful. But why are we always either doing drag or helping straight people?’ It’s very limiting,” he says. “Now, let’s get to the really fun ones. The ones you want to sit next to at the party.”



Billy Porter

(actor *Pose*, *Kinky Boots*)

(63rd Annual Academy Awards, 2/24/19, ABC)

Re: when walking the red carpet at the Oscars, Porter was asked how he felt about being the best look of the night in a tux dress designed by Christian Siriano.

I t made me feel free. It made me feel beautiful. It made me feel open. And it made me feel unapologetically masculine.

Queer Activist

Billy Porter (seen here at the recent Oscars ceremony) wanted to get a conversation going about what it means to be masculine, feminine, and everything and anything in between. Success!

Martin & Mike
Martin Short
(seen here hosting
the *Movies for
Grownups Awards*):
a drag bar and
Mike Pence?!



Martin Short

(*Movies for Grownups Awards*, 2/15/19, PBS)

FYI: a synopsis of the film Bird Box (from IMDb)—"In the wake of an unknown global terror, a mother must find the strength to flee with her children down a treacherous river in search of safety. Due to unseen deadly forces, the perilous journey must be made blindly."

In *A Star Is Born* Bradley Cooper discovers Lady Gaga singing in a drag bar. According to Mike Pence, that scene was way scarier than anything in *Bird Box*.

Amandla Stenberg

(actress *The Hate U Give*, *Hunger Games*)

(*Vanity Fair*, Hollywood 2019, Krista Smith)

I want people to feel less alone, I want them to feel represented, I want to make something that will ground us in our humanity. I have gone through periods of feeling alienated and isolated and wished there was representation for people who walk similar experiences to mine, whether that's queer people or people of color. I can speak up about the things that I understand, and I have been gifted this platform through acting.

Another Queer Activist

Amandla Stenberg (seen here walking the red carpet at the premiere of *The Hate U Give*)—whose breakout role was in the first installment of *The Hunger Games* films—doesn't self-label as an activist, because "it feels kind of presumptuous to take on that label [since] I'm not out there on the front lines."



PORTER: RICK ROWELL/ABC; SHORT: SCREEN GRAB FROM PBS; STENBERG: JOHN PHILLIPS/GETTY IMAGES FOR BR; MCCARTHY/GRANT; MARY O'BRIEN/FOX SEARCHLIGHT; TRUMP/5KYS; TWITTER

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Ryan White Planning Council

February 14	May 9	August 8	November 14
March 14	June 13	September 12	December 12
April 11	July 11	October 10	

Meetings are open to the general public and although only Council members are allowed to vote, public comment is welcome at the beginning of every meeting. The Council meets on the 2nd Thursday of each month at noon at our offices located between Westheimer and San Felipe in the Galleria area (near METRO bus route 82 on Westheimer and 32 on San Felipe).

You are also welcome to attend committee meetings. Committees include Affected Community, Comprehensive HIV Planning, Priority and Allocations and Quality Improvement. Public comment is welcomed at the beginning of each committee meeting.

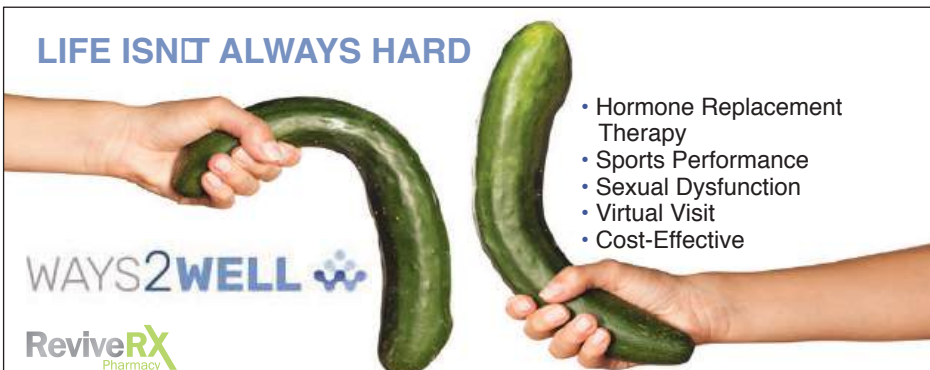
Call the office for the date/location of meetings, to request a calendar, membership application or more information -- or check our online calendar. Meeting materials are posted on the calendar about one week prior to each meeting.

✂ Attend a Meeting ✂ Apply for Membership ✂ Be a Participant ✂

The calendar of all Council and Committee meetings and a wealth of other information is available on our website: www.rwpcHouston.org. Check the calendar regularly for topics of specific interest to you. We hope to see you soon!

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Photos by DALTON DEHART & EDGARDO AGUILAR

Tuesday, February 19

EPAH held their dinner meeting at House of Blues on February 19. Ribs, chicken, and salmon were on the menu and, of course, libations. Gotta grease those wheels.



Wednesday, February 20

OUT@TUTS was held on February 20, after a showing of the popular Broadway hit *Mamma Mia!* It was hosted by TUTS and OUTSMART magazine.



OUT THERE

Saturday, February 9

Everybody was all smiles at **OutReach UNITED's "Red Hot Party."** The event, held at Neon Boots, featured performers in burlesque dress and one very realistic cowboy—with... count 'em!...four nipples!



Saturday, February 9

The Krewe of Olympus XLIX held their bash at NRG Center. The night, dedicated to "Houston's Gay Past," brought out everyone in their black-tie or beaded best.



For more event photos, please visit TinyURL.com/OSMPhotos



Friday, January 31

ActOUT at the Alley Theatre was the evening of January 31. The play was a world premiere by Robert Askins' entitled *The Carpenter*. And though the "world" didn't show up, the place was packed with eager theatergoers.



Saturday, February 2

Various artists strutted their stuff at the **Collective Self Exploration Art Opening** on February 2. The event was held at G Spot Gallery and had eye-fuls of artwork to be enjoyed. We were especially taken with the Nancy Reagan - Anita Bryant - whipped cream pie slice art panels.



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BAR & CLUB GUIDE

HOUSTON

BARCODE

Houston's newest bar with happy hours from 11am to 8pm daily, this new neighborhood watering hole is a great place to see drag shows and strippers Tuesdays–Saturdays and karaoke Sundays & Mondays. 817 Fairview St. 713.526.2625 • barcodehouston.net

BLUR

Multi-level dance club featuring an upstairs lounge and balconies. Ladies enjoy Wet and Wild Wed., 18-year-olds welcome Thurs., Latin night on Sun. Happy hour 8–10pm; free cover before 11pm. 710 Pacific St. • blurbar.com.

CLUB CRYSTAL

Find many of Inergy's former staff and décor at this two-room Latin/hip-hop club. Sunday evening drag shows rule the roost. 6680 Southwest Frwy, next to Colorado 713.278.2582 • crystaltheclub.com.

CROCKER BAR

This comfortably remodeled Montrose nightspot also offers karaoke on Tuesdays and Thursdays and extended happy-hour prices throughout the week. 2312 Crocker • 713.529.3355.

GEORGE

Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar. Sports Saturdays and Sundays start at 3pm with dart and pool tournaments. 617 Fairview • 713.528.8102.

GUAVA LAMP

This trendy and friendly video and cruise bar gets busy during happy hour and stays busy 'til closing. Karaoke on Wed. and Sun. 570 Waugh Dr. • 713.524.3359
guavalamphouston.com.

HAMBURGER MARY'S

Since 1972, Mary has served up amazing food and stellar shows! With the best drag talent in the city, it's been voted "Best Drag Show Bar," "Most Supportive of the LGBTQ Community," "Best Hamburger," "Best Brunch," "Friendliest Staff," and "Best Place to Celebrate" by our readers. Be sure to try the famous Mac & Cheese Balls, or grab a leg glass (as seen on RuPaul's Drag Race)! *Reservations recommended for shows. 2409 Grant St., 713.677.0674, hamburgermarys.com

EAGLE

Part of the Eagle worldwide family, it's the definitive home to the man's man. Leather, Bear or Jock, you'll find them here. Voted "Best Community Bar," "Best Men's Bar," "Best Place to Show Your Leather," "Best Happy Hour," and "Best Place to Buy Erotic Playthings" by our readers. Eagle has multiple levels and patios, along with DJs and male dancers—and it's the place to watch sports. Noon–2am every day, 611 Hyde Park Blvd., 713.523.8182 • houstoneagle.com

JR'S BAR & GRILL

This Montrose standard offers drag and strip shows throughout the week, karaoke Thurs. and Sun., plus pool tables and male dancers. 808 Pacific St. • 713.521.2519
jrsbarandgrill.com.

LA GRANJA DISCO Y CANTINA

Houston's newest gay disco. Great drink prices, house DJs nightly. Open at 3pm until 4am on Fridays and Saturdays. Closed Mondays. 5505 Pinemont • 713.518.6753
lagranjadisco.com

MICHAEL'S OUTPOST

Jerry Atwood, Clay Howell, Neil Massey, Steve Wheaton, and Roger Woest take turns at the keys at this comfortable neighborhood piano bar. 1419 Richmond Ave. • 713.520.8446.

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON

Houston's only LGBTQ country dancehall opens Wednesday–Sunday. Wednesday features Steak Night and Bingo. Free dance classes on Thursdays, and karaoke. 11410 Hempstead Hwy 713.677.0828 • neonbootsclub.com.

PEARL BAR

This LGBT-friendly lounge in the Washington corridor features daily highlights like open mic night, steak night, and drink specials. 4216 Washington • pearlhouston.com.

RICH'S HOUSTON

Houston's most iconic and largest LGBTQ dance club, with multiple levels featuring a video/show bar and a private VIP lounge. No cover before 10:30 p.m. 2401 San Jacinto • 281.846.668 • richsnightclub.com.

THE RIPCORD

This multi-roomed leather bar boasts a busy patio, especially on the weekends. The Forge shop located inside the club. Saturday nights with DJ Tad Dvorak. 715 Fairview Ave • 713.521.2792.

RUDYARD'S

The eclectic British pub is known for its craft beers as well as for the burgers. Most weekends you'll find up-and-coming local bands rocking the house. 2010 Waugh Dr. • 713.521.0521 • rudyardspub.com.

TONY'S CORNER POCKET

This comfortable club has one of the friendliest bar staffs in town. Amateur dance contest each Thurs., Fri., & Sat. at 11pm. Opens daily at noon. 817 W. Dallas • 713.571.7870
tonyscornerpocketbar.com.

VIVIANA'S

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BEHIND THE BAR



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GALVESTON

23RD ST. STATION

The bar features daily drink specials and the weekend is filled with pulsing music, hot dancers, drag shows, and a Sunday Tea Dance. 1706 23rd St. • 409.621.1808.

ROBERT'S LAFITTE

The Island institution features a private patio with swimming pool. On Sat. and Sun. nights, the Ladies of Lafitte show takes the stage. 2501 Avenue Q (at 25th) • 409.765.9092.

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By LILLY RODDY
Illustration by JANIEWHATEVA

That's a Wrap, People!

With Mercury retrograde, it's time to finish up those projects . . . and prepare.

As the month opens, Mercury is about to go retrograde until April 2. Best not to start any new projects until after April 2. A Mercury retrograde is always a good period to finish up old projects, reconnect with your existing client base, and to clean out closets and file cabinets. • This year we are having two planets, Saturn and Pluto, aligning with each other. They have been building in strength since the end of last year, and that alignment will be with us through March of 2020. When these two meet, there is always a worldwide shift in governments, economics, and increased international power struggles. This is very likely to keep the stock market very unsettled, with some possible major corrections toward the end of this year. We are all likely to feel the need to restructure aspects of ourselves, our work, and our beliefs about money. • Good days this month are the 9th, 10th, 13th, 16th, and 20th. Difficult days are the 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 21st, 24th, 27th, 28th, and 29th. Focus on the plans that you are already working on, and this Mercury retrograde should go smoothly.

ARIES (March 21–April 19)

Although your career activity is still very strong this month, you are in a rest-and-retreat mode until after the 21st. People will have a stronger impact on you, both positive and negative. Choose your social contacts and clients carefully this month. It would be very beneficial to you if you could take some time off in March. Even a weekend getaway would help to get your thoughts in order. Your boundaries will be tested over the next two months. Don't take on projects just to make others happier with you, especially at work!

TAURUS (April 20–May 20)

You are connecting with friends and colleagues from the past this month! This can be a great month to clear up any past problems with business associates. Business organizations will be more appealing to you, but they must have more than just a social purpose. You are more reactive and living in the moment with Uranus, planet of reinvention, visiting your sign for the next seven years. This can make it easier to speak your mind and push forward with needed changes in all areas of your life. Relationships could be adversely affected, and you may see how they are limiting your personal growth.



PISCES (February 19–March 20)

With Mercury (planet of communication, organizations, and brain pathways) retrograde in your sign for this entire month, it's the perfect time to look back at past decisions and relationship choices. This month you are focused on you and your needs. You will be able to communicate those ideas, even if you have to repeat them several times. You will need to find some balance between your busy work agenda and the part of you that needs to recharge. Don't put any new ideas into action until next month. April will be very busy, so you will be glad you took some time for yourself!

GEMINI (May 21–June 21)

With your ruler, Mercury, retrograde in your career sector this month, you are reviewing and revising that area of your life. Existing problems must be dealt with if you are planning on moving forward with your long-term goals. You will not be very patient as you try to get these problems cleared up right away. Personal and business relationships are still improving, and this month can be a great time to make sure that you and your partners are striving for the same outcome, even during the Mercury retrograde. You get a big burst of energy at the very end of the month!

CANCER (June 22–July 22)

You are in a mentally creative month, so you'll be drawn to writing, revising old previous projects, and looking for calm places to think! This contin-

ues to be a demanding year for you on all fronts. With Mercury retrograde this month, you will have time to re-examine your priorities and make sure your commitments are not just benefitting others. Your relationships are going through a change of status in your life as you try to revitalize them and explore new ways to regenerate emotional intimacy. You may be eliminating those partnerships that no longer function. Career activity is stimulated at the end of the month. Get ready!

LEO (July 23–August 22)

You are choosing your activities with care this month. You are restructuring your work routines and relationships with coworkers, while re-examining your deeper spiritual beliefs about relationships and intimacy. This can be a time when information previously hidden from you is revealed. You will want to be closer to your partners and close friends, and remove any doubts or mistrust. Your career sector is going through a modernization. Some of you are considering starting your own business, while others are looking to escape from the routine demands of daily life. You will be more focused on what's best for you this month!

VIRGO (August 23–September 22)

With your ruler, Mercury, retrograde in your relationship sector, you are reviewing past and present commitments. This is a good month to reconsider your past actions and decisions to see if you can improve upon them. Old relationship problems will resurface so you can make improvements there as well. You continue trying to give form to your creative urges. You might even be inspired to improve your company's efficiency as part of that creative impulse. Even with artistic endeavors, you will want to manifest them rather than just imagine them. When Mercury is direct at the end of the month, it will be a good time to showcase your new ideas and solutions!

LIBRA (September 23–October 23)

A desire to review your work environment is being activated with Mercury retrograde this month. You will be making changes in your routines, habits, and patterns, as well as re-examining your diet and health regimen so you can get back on track. Home and family are still demanding a lot of your time and energy. You may be doing some remodeling, or considering relocating. Wait until next month (after Mercury is direct) to begin any new venture. This is also a time when you are exploring your career and directions for the future. This can be a time of retirement for some, while others will be putting their best foot forward to pursue their

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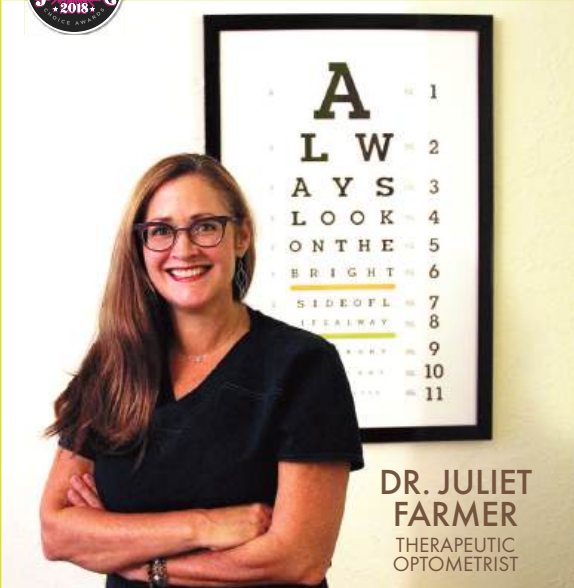
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SCENEOUT

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On January 26, Lina Hidalgo held a New Year's fundraiser with special guest senator Sylvia R. Garcia at Poltin. Pictured are **Nelvin Joseph Adriatico** and **Lina Hidalgo**.



On January 28, there was an investiture and celebration for judge Beau Miller in the Harris County 290th Judicial District Court. Pictured are the honorable **Ricardo H. Hinojosa** and judge **Beau Miller**.



On January 29, LAMBDA NextGen held a Happy Hour at Revelry on Richmond. Pictured are **Andrea Abreu**, **Nicholas Guidry**, **Mia Mundy**, **Alan Prewitt**, **Ryan MacMillan**, and **Chris Cant**.



On February 1, there was an investiture and celebration at the First District Court of Appeals for justice Richard Hightower. Pictured are **Bret Hightower**, justice **Richard Hightower**, and judge **T. John Ward**.



On January 25, an investiture and celebration was held in the Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 2 for judge Jim Kovach. Pictured are **Ben Montalbano**, **Deanna Kovach**, judge **Jim F. Kovach**, **Paul Kovach**, **Candy Churchwell**, and judge **David Patronella**.



On February 9, OutReach United held its Red-Hot Party at Neon Boots. Pictured are **Carol Wyatt-Woodell**, **Tim Stokes**, **Corey Heier**, and **Gary Wood**.



The HGLBT Political Caucus held its "Politics Doesn't Have to Be a Drag" event at Rich's on February 17. Pictured are **Shelley Kennedy**, judge **Jim Kovach**, **Gaylynn Sanders**, **Deb Denny**, and **Shaun Smith**.



The HCDLA held its February 2019 luncheon with Mustafa Tameez at Churrascos on February 12. Pictured are **Mustafa Tameez**, **Judy Dougherty**, **Kent Rutter**, **Michelle Mullin**, **Steven Duble**, **Mike Doyle**, and **Zohair Alam**.



On February 23, the Greater Houston LGBT Chamber held its "Brewing Up Business" event at SignatureCare Emergency Center in the Heights. Pictured are **Dr. Billy Miller**, **Brittanie Waldon**, **Corey Allen**, **Deborah Lawson**, **Tammi Wallace**, **Gary Wood**, and **Corrie Rhabby Domingo**.



The Krewe of Olympus held its Krewe Ball 49 "Houston's Gay Past" at NRG Center on February 9. Pictured are King Olympus XLIX **David Gandy** and Queen Olympus XLIX **Bill Jones-Walters**.



On February 2, the United Spinal Association of Houston held its Opening Arts and Minds grand-opening celebration. Pictured are **Yesenia Hernandez**, **Gabrila Hernandez**, **Kathryn Nowlin**, **Gianalfredo Rossi**, **Sirley Marin**, **Amy Ngo**, **Rafferty Laredo**, **Candice Quino**, and **Dylan Cooper**.



On February 18, there was a Houston City Council kickoff at Mongoose Versus Cobra for District C candidate Nick Hellyar. Pictured are **Jim Henley**, former Houston City Council member (District I) Hon. **James Rodriguez**, **Nick Hellyar**, and **Chris Bell**, a former City Council member and congressman.

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